Making the Great Book of Songs

Compilation and the Author's Craft in Abû l-Faraj al-Iṣbahânî's *Kitâb al-aghânî*

Hilary Kilpatrick

MAKING THE GREAT BOOK OF SONGS

This is the first systematic literary study of one of the masterpieces of classical Arabic literature, the tenth century *Kitāb al-aghānī* (The Book of Songs) by Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī. Until now, the 24 volume *Book of Songs* has been regarded as a rather chaotic but priceless mine of information about classical Arabic music, literature and culture. This book approaches it as a work of literature in its own right, with its own internal logic and coherence. The study also consistently integrates the musical component into the analysis and proposes a reading of the work in which individual anecdotes and poems are related to the wider context, enhancing their meaning.

Hilary Kilpatrick studied Arabic at Oxford. She has taught at the universities of St Andrews, Nijmegen (The Netherlands) and Berne (Switzerland), and now works as an independent scholar in Lausanne. She is one of the editors of *Middle Eastern Literatures*, and has published on modern Arabic fiction and classical Arabic *belles-lettres.* She has also made some translations from modern Arabic literature.

ROUTLEDGECURZON STUDIES IN ARABIC AND MIDDLE EASTERN LITERATURE

RoutledgeCurzon Studies in Arabic and Middle Eastern Literature is a monograph series devoted to aspects of the literatures of the Near and Middle East and North Africa both modern and pre-modern. It is hoped that the provision of such a forum will lead to a greater emphasis on the comparative study of the literatures of this area, although studies devoted to one literary or linguistic region are warmly encouraged. It is the editors' objective to foster the comparative and multi-disciplinary investigation of the written and oral literary products of this area.

SHEHERAZADE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS
Eva Sallis

THE PALESTINIAN NOVEL
Ibrahim Taha

OF DISHES AND DISCOURSE
Geert Jan van Gelder

MEDIEVAL ARABIC PRAISE POETRY
Beatrice Gruendler

MAKING THE GREAT BOOK OF SONGS
Hilary Kilpatrick

MAKING THE GREAT BOOK OF SONGS

Compilation and the author's craft in Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's *Kitāb al-aghānī*

Hilary Kilpatrick

RoutledgeCurzon
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2003
by RoutledgeCurzon
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by RoutledgeCurzon
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

RoutledgeCurzon is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

"To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk."

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-203-22061-7 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-7007-1701-3(Print Edition)

CONTENTS

PREFACE

Around 1990 Syrian State Television screened a series entitled "*Al-mughannūn*" (The Singers). The scripts were based on the accounts of Umayyad and 'Abbāsid singers in Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's* *Kitāb al-aghānī* (Book of Songs), a fourth/tenth century monument of Arabic literature. The script writers did not have to decipher manuscripts or ferret in archives; the *Kitāb al-aghānī* is available today in at least five different printed editions, not to speak of nine or more abridgements. It has not suddenly come into vogue in this century, as the manuscript tradition and the frequent abridgements in the pre-modern period show. From the time of its composition until now, the *Aghānī* has been both popular and generally recognised as one of the masterpieces of Arabic literature.

The paucity of studies of the *Aghānī* as a literary work (rather than as a source for social history, musical life, poetic criticism, diglossia and a number of other topics) is all the more surprising. I believe there are three main reasons for this. First, it is a large book, running to some two dozen volumes in modern editions. Its size is off-putting. Second, it disconcerts the modern reader in a number of ways. It mixes prose and poetry. It includes a great variety of genres, such as bald statements of information, anecdotes of all kinds, jokes, heroic tales, excerpts from histories, and controversies on poetic and musical matters. (This mixture of genres is a characteristic of mediaeval Arabic compilations of *belles-lettres*.) And with all this it consistently employs the scholarly techniques of the time. Third, the *Aghānī*'s *raison d'être*, the songs, have fallen silent; the absence of notation in the period when the book was written and subsequent changes in Arabic music mean that the melodies cannot be reconstructed.

Serious research into older Arabic literature cannot merely ignore books as important as the *Aghānī*. It presents a challenge which scholars have to take up. And a better understanding of this book is bound to increase insight into the corpus of *adab* (*belles-lettres*) texts, one of the main branches of mediaeval Arabic literature. The present study is intended as a contribution to research on the *Aghānī* and more generally on mediaeval Arabic *belles-lettres*.

* Both "al-Iṣbahānī" and "al-Iṣfahānī" are found. The oldest biographical sources and *Aghānī* MSS have the former, and I have followed their usage, except when quoting.

The study begins with a survey of the research carried out up till now on the *Aghānī* in the Arab world, Europe and North America, as far as it has been accessible to me. There follows a concise presentation of Abū l-Faraj's life, times and works, focussed on aspects relevant for the understanding of the *Aghānī*. From the study of the other extant works, it becomes clear that the *Aghānī*'s title has to be taken seriously; Abū l-Faraj was not given to choosing fancy names for his books, and the designations he gives correspond to the contents. Like it or not, the modern researcher is dealing with a Book of Songs Fallen Silent, but a Book of Songs all the same.

One way to approach a book far removed from modern aesthetic expectations is to examine what the author himself says about it. The student of the *Aghānī* is well provided for in this respect; there are hundreds of observations by Abū l-Faraj, covering all kinds of topics, scattered through the book. In the first of the two main parts of this study I have collected his asides and discussed them under the headings of remarks bearing on songs and singers, remarks about poetry and poets, and remarks about prose and the selection and arrangement of material. (I have worked his rare allusions to his own times and contemporaries into the section on his life.) The discussion of the asides throws much light on questions such as how the compiler worked, what attitude he had to his material, and to what extent he conceived of the book as a whole.

Any book as large as the *Aghānī* will be organised on various levels. Between the Book of Songs as a whole and the individual *akhbār* (reports or anecdotes) there are two intermediate levels. There is a division into three parts according to which songs are used to introduce the material – song collections, songs by royal musicians, or Abū l-Faraj's own choice. But much more prominent is the organisation of material into sections, or "articles", as I shall term them, devoted usually to a poet or a singer, but sometimes to a historical event, a relationship between two people, or a song and its history. It is possible to read the *Aghānī* simply as an enormous collection of discrete anecdotes and quotations of poetry. But Abū l-Faraj's consistent division of the material into articles shows that he attached great importance to this intermediate level of organisation. The second major aim of this study is to examine the ways in which articles are organised, taking account of the kind of material available (and the quantity of it, as far as can be judged), and the main topics treated. First the articles with a narrow thematic focus, those on songs, relationships and events, are discussed. The insights thus gained into Abū l-Faraj's approach to compilation are drawn on in the subsequent investigation of the much larger and more diverse category of articles on poets and singers.

A further chapter focusses on elements frequently encountered throughout the book. They include songs and poems which are often quoted, major figures of Arabic culture and early Islamic history who reappear as principal or secondary characters, recurrent motifs, issues such as the permissibility of listening to music, and themes, for instance the inevitability of death and the immortality of poetry and music. These elements, drawn from a common fund of material about pre- and early Islamic culture, create connections between the different articles and

contribute a certain unity to the book. In the final chapter the framework of songs and the ordering of the articles are examined. First the three main parts of the book are indicated, based on the song collections, the list of royal musicians and the compiler's own choice of songs. Then smaller groups of articles, devoted, for instance, to different members of a family or a literary circle, are distinguished, as is the phenomenon of articles close to each other both treating the same subject or linked through some other unusual feature. And lastly some reasons are advanced for the fact that what starts as a book of songs should turn out to cover so many different aspects of early Arabic culture. The epilogue points to areas for further research.

When I embarked on this research, it was not only with a sense of duty and of responding to a challenge, but also with the knowledge that the *Aghānī* is a fantastic read. It is said that when Pope Paul VI asked Louis Armstrong and his wife, who were attending a Vatican reception, if they had any children, the musician replied, "No, but we had a lot of fun trying." I do not know how this study will be judged, but I have certainly had a lot of fun doing the research for it. And I hope at least to have suggested to the reader some ways of approaching mediaeval Arabic compilations and to have conveyed a little of the riches and the fascination of this treasure of Arabic and world literature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I first read passages from the *Kitāb al-aghānī* in St Andrews in 1973, I was fascinated by it. It took me many years, however, to develop an approach to studying it, and more years to get to know it well enough to write about it. In the course of the nearly three decades leading up to completing this book I have incurred many debts of gratitude, of which only the most important can be mentioned here.

The Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung gave me a research grant to spend the year 1975–1976 at the University of Munich, where I learned the basic principles of classical Arabic philology under the careful and friendly guidance of Professor Anton Spitaler. From 1989 to 1993 the Swiss National Fund for Scientific Research supported my research project on the *Aghānī* with two grants, and it was then that I got to know the text thoroughly. These two periods were crucial for the preparation of this study.

I read parts of the *Aghānī* with students of Arabic literature at the Institute for Languages and Cultures of the Middle East in the University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands, where I taught from 1977–1987. Their comments and questions were very useful and their generally enthusiastic attitude encouraging. Several of the chapters of this book are based on papers I gave at conferences, mostly of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants, and I benefitted greatly from the response, both positive and negative, of the participants.

I was fortunate enough to consult a variety of libraries during my research: at the universities of Leiden and Nijmegen, the American University of Beirut, the University of Texas at Austin and Harvard University; at the Institut für die Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften and the Orientalisches Seminar of the University of Frankfurt, the Oriental Institute in Oxford, the Institut Français d'Etudes Arabes in Damascus, the Islamwissenschaftliches Institut of the University of Bern, and the Institut du monde arabe in Paris; and also the Bodleian Library in Oxford and the Maktabat al-Asad in Damascus. The rare, perhaps unique, catalogue of articles in Arabic periodicals at the Institut de Belles Lettres Arabes in Tunis deserves a special mention, for it was there that I discovered many of the studies in Arabic which I have referred to. I do not remember having experienced from the staff of these institutions anything but willingness to help and courteous patience with my enquiries, and I express my heartfelt thanks to them.

I am also grateful to the British Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale for supplying me with microfilms.

Over the years many friends and colleagues have encouraged me in what sometimes seemed an impossible task. I can only name some of those who played a special part: Gregor Schoeler, who gave significant support at an early stage; Julia Ashtiany Bray, James Montgomery, Roger Allen and Shawkat Toorawa, who commented on drafts of parts of the text; Mondher Kilani, Renate Jacobi, Claude Gilliot and Christine Pirinoli who contributed in different ways in the final stages of preparation of this book; and Geert Jan van Gelder, who advised me on some thorny problems of interpretation of Arabic poetry and painstakingly read through the while manuscript, picking out many slips. I also recall fruitful discussions with As'ad Khairallah, Stefan Leder, George Sawa, and A. B. Khalidov, who generously shared with me their knowledge of different aspects of the *Aghānī* and the literary and musical traditions in which it stands. I owe a particular debt to Eckhard Neubauer of the Institut für die Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften in Frankfurt and one of the very few specialists in mediaeval Arabic music. As a non-musicologist I was ill-equipped to work on a text in which singing plays such an important part, and without his advice and support I would not have been able to carry out this project.

My consultation of several of the libraries I have used would have been impossible if I had not been able to rely on the hospitality of friends. Rianne Tamis and Muhammad 'Abd al-Hadi in Cairo, Stefan and Faiza Leder in Damascus and Tarek and Eliane Mitri in Beirut all provided me with temporary lodgings and the good company of attentive hosts.

As luck would have it, my husband was a fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin while I was preparing this manuscript for publication. The Wissenschaftskolleg's policy is to put its services at the disposal of fellows' partners when they are engaged in research, and its team of keen young IT pros solved some knotty computer problems for me, while the library staff cheerfully scoured the different institutions in and around Berlin for more or less obscure titles. I am grateful to them all, and I hope that the Wissenschaftkolleg's enlightened example will be followed in other academic institutions.

I would also like to thank James Montgomery and Roger Allen for including this book in the "Curzon Studies in Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures", and the staff of RoutledgeCurzon Publishers (London) and Newgen Imaging Systems (Chennai), especially my project manager, Vincent Antony, for helping it to see the light of day.

My husband, Jacques Waardenburg, has accompanied this project from the beginning. He has consistently believed in it and encouraged me to complete it. And since my grant from the Swiss National Fund came to an end he has provided the material conditions for me to continue my research. In appreciation of this and much else I am happy to dedicate this book to him.

1

MODERN RESEARCH ON THE *KITĀB AL-AGHĀNĪ*

Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's *Kitāb al-aghānī* has attracted the interest of scholars for close on two hundred years now. This interest arose after what is now the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris acquired some *Aghānī* manuscripts which had been brought to France by a member of Napoleon's expeditionary force to Egypt.[1]

It first took the form of **translations**, and attention focussed on the *Aghānī*'s pre-Islamic material. In 1816 Silvestre de Sacy published a French version of the *Aghānī* article on Labīd.[2] Three years later Kosegarten brought out a Latin translation of the article on 'Amr ibn Kulthūm, accompanied by an edition of the text based on the Paris manuscripts of the *Aghānī*.[3] In the 1830s Quatremère planned to make an abridged translation of the entire work, but only the Preface, the account of the Hundred and then the Three Songs, and the articles on Abū Qaṭīfa, 'Adī ibn Zayd and the two poets named al-Muraqqish saw the light.[4] De Slane accompanied his edition of Imru' al-Qays's *Dīwān* with the *Aghānī* article on the poet.[5] As the second part of his article on the history of the pre-Islamic Arabs in the Hijaz and Yemen, Perron published the section on Uḥayḥa,[6] and another French scholar, Fresnel, included the account of Muḍāḍ ibn 'Amr in his survey of pre-Islamic Arabic history.[7]

A new focus of interest appears in some subsequent translations in the nineteenth century. The first students of the history of Arabic music realised that the *Aghānī* was a unique source for their subject, and they proceeded to make sections on singers accessible to the wider scholarly public.[8]

At the same time researchers into early Arabic literature continued to translate articles devoted to major poets, such as 'Antara.[9] It would be hard to draw up a complete list of the translations that have been made of different parts of the *Aghānī* for scholarly ends up till now,[10] although probably the sections on poets have consistently attracted the most attention. But interests other than poetic are also reflected in the choice of translated articles; for instance the English version of Abū l-Faraj's presentation of the Medinan singer and entertainer Ash'ab forms the basis for Rosenthal's *Humour in Early Islam*.[11] On the whole these translations of articles aim to make information about a given individual or subject accessible; in other words, they consider the *Aghānī* as an important source for the history of poetry, culture or music. One cannot help wondering, however, whether the frequency

with which foreign scholars resort to translating excerpts from the *Aghānī* is not also partly due to qualities which they seldom mention, the variety and liveliness of its information and its readability – the very qualities which have inspired many mediaeval and modern men of letters to undertake abridgements of the texts.

To return to the nineteenth century, the *Aghānī* soon attracted the notice not only of translators but also of editors.[12] The first to embark on the task was Kosegarten, who in 1840 published the first volume of a projected **edition** and Latin translation, based on the Paris MSS, with additional information on the theory of Arabic music, drawn in large part from al-Fārābī.[13] He did not succeed in bringing out any more of the text before his death ten years later. The first printing of the (reasonably) complete text occurred at the Maṭba'a al-Amīrīya in Būlāq in 1285/1868. This Būlāq edition in 20 volumes is still reprinted and widely used and quoted, although, as is well known, it has no critical apparatus and lacks several articles.[14] The Cairo MSS on which the Būlāq text was based were incomplete, and in 1888 Rudolf Brünnow brought out a further volume, containing articles he had found in MSS in Munich.[15]

After the Būlāq edition became unobtainable, al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Effendī al-Sāsī took upon himself to reprint the *Aghānī*. This edition, often known by al-Sāsī's name, came out in 1323/1905 at the Maṭba'at al-taqaddum. It contains the Būlāq text with revisions by Aḥmad al-Shinqīṭī and also Brünnow's 21st volume; it represents an advance on the original Būlāq text. It was further improved when Muḥammad al-Shinqīṭī's corrections to the Būlāq edition, based on his knowledge of Arabic language and literature, were published under the title *Taṣḥīḥ kitāb al-aghānī*.[16] But it is only with the Dār al-kutub *Aghānī*, of which the first volume appeared in 1927, that something approaching a scholarly edition of the text became available. The Dār al-kutub edition is based on the various Cairo MSS, to which manuscripts from Munich and Tübingen were added in the course of the work.[17] The editors were originally sceptical about whether the articles from Brünnow's 21st volume belonged to the *Aghānī*,[18] but one, on Ḥāritha b. Badr, was published later by Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī as a supplement to volume VIII.[19] The Dār al-kutub edition does not provide a detailed critical apparatus, but it gives some variants and has useful notes on people and places and explanations of some obscure words. It also makes sensible comments based on internal comparisons in the text. It has indices to poets, singers, transmitters of *akhbār* and melodies, other named individuals, tribes, places, poetry, *ayyām*, proverbs, titles mentioned in the text and sources referred to in the notes. In the margin it gives the pagination of the Būlāq edition.

The Dār al-kutub edition proceeded apace to begin with, and by 1938 eleven volumes had appeared. But the Second World War and its aftermath interrupted this rhythm, parts 12 and 13 coming out only in 1950. The reorganisation of the National Library under the republican government brought about another pause, and parts 14 and 15 were published only at the end of the 1950s. Part 16, the last for many years, appeared in 1961. In the meantime scholars impatient with the slow pace of publishing the Cairo edition took the initiative to bring out the complete

text in Beirut. The Dār al-thaqāfa text is essentially a reprint of the first 14 volumes of Dār al-kutub, followed by ʿAbd al-Sattār Aḥmad Farrāj's edition of the rest of the *Aghānī*.[20] At the end he has appended the *Akhbār Abī Nuwās* of Ibn Wāṣil, as a substitute for the "missing" article on the ʿAbbāsid poet in the *Aghānī* itself.[21] The Beirut edition, in 25 volumes, includes the Top Hundred songs in its cumulative indices, which take up the last two parts. In other respects, however, it is less satisfactory than the Dār al-kutub edition. There are more printing errors, the notes are less extensive, and the indications of subjects given in the margins of the Dār al-kutub edition have been placed in the body of the text, thus giving the impression that they belong to the original *Aghānī*.[22]

Back in Egypt the decision was taken to complete the Dār al-kutub edition, and in 1964, as a first step, the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance had the existing 16 volumes reprinted by offset, although they took the inexplicable step of tacitly omitting the indices. But when volume XVII appeared some years later, it was presented as part of a new project, namely to bring out a new edition of the whole work under the auspices of a supervisory committee (or Lajna). This new edition was to consist both in the publication of the remaining text with indices according to the original Dār al-kutub system, and in the revision of the first 16 volumes, so that at last the *Aghānī* would be available in a scholarly edition.[23]

Between 1970 and 1974 volumes XVIII–XXIV were brought out according to the plan set out in volume XVII.[24] They incorporated the articles from Brünnow's volume according to their place in the original text, as this can be determined from the extant manuscripts. At the same time the committee embarked on the revision of the Dār al-kutub edition. Volume I of this edition, which is presented as revised, lists MSS from Russia, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Patna and the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana in Milan, microfilms of which the editors consulted in the Arab League's Institute of Manuscripts in Cairo.[25] Volume II appeared in the same year. Both these volumes have the same range of indices as the original Dār al-kutub edition and the Lajna's volumes XVII–XXIV. But although one or two more volumes came out around the same time, the Lajna has fallen far short of its intention to bring out the whole of the *Aghānī* in a thoroughly scholarly edition.

Nor is the Lajna's failure simply a matter of not having published the complete text. Much more serious is that its work in no sense represents an advance on that of the Dār al-kutub editors. Anyone who uses the Dār al-kutub's volumes I–XVI and the Lajna's XVII–XXIV cannot fail to notice the decline in quality of the notes, comments and cross-references and the decrease in variants given after volume XVI. In view of this, it comes as no surprise that the so-called "revised" edition started in 1970 shows no significant advance on what Dār al-kutub published in 1927. The text is the same, the footnotes are almost identical, and there has been no attempt to incorporate the microfilms of the MSS supposedly consulted in the Arab League's Institute into the lists of variants.[26] All that can be said is that the Lajna's volumes are fully indexed. The Lajna's failure to complete its project has meant that in practice scholars who rely on the Cairo edition are in fact using a combination of Dār al-kutub's[27] and the Lajna's work.[28]

A further edition of the complete *Aghānī* was undertaken by Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī,[29] and published by Dār al-sha'b.[30] It runs to 33 volumes and has continuous pagination. For volumes I–XIV it follows the Dār al-kutub division, but afterwards the parts become smaller. The article on al-Mutalammis, which concludes the work and is incomplete in the Dār edition, has been supplemented from an unnamed source, and the *Akhbār Abī Nuwās* added. Curiously, the articles from Brünnow's 21st volume have all been placed at the end of the text, even that on Ḥāritha ibn Badr, which, as al-Abyārī admits, belongs after Jamīla's biography in volume VIII.[31] The indices at the end list the contents of the articles, the subjects in alphabetical order, poets, transmitters, singers and transmitters of songs. Although it was produced cheaply for a wide public, the notes are more scholarly than those of the Lajna; they give more variants, frequently include parallels to individual passages (though without stating the editions used) and indicate other sources for the subjects of articles. They are also less inclined to explain the meaning of words; the Dār al-sha'b's readership is assumed to have a better grasp of Arabic than the Lajna's. In fact the Dār al-sha'b approach represents the continuation of the Dār al-kutub tradition.[32]

The size of the *Aghānī* has prompted various attempts to compile **indices** to it. The best known of these is that undertaken by the Italian scholar Ignazio Guidi, who together with eight colleagues from various countries drew up the *Tables alphabétiques du Kitāb al-aġānī*, comprising indices of poets, rhymes, personalities, tribes and events and place-names. Although there is no subject index, the entries on personalities usually indicate the contexts in which they play an important part. Guidi and his team based themselves on the Būlāq edition, Brünnow's 21st volume and the fragment published by Wellhausen in the *ZDMG*.[33]

Later on frustration with the omission of the indices in the Dār al-kutub reprint led the Syrian scholar 'Abd al-Mu'īn al-Mallūḥī to draw up his own indices to the articles in the complete Dār/Lajna edition; they list the titles of the articles volume by volume, and then the subjects of articles alphabetically.[34] The fairly obvious step to bring together the indices from the old Dār al-kutub and the Lajna volumes was taken by a Beirut publishing house, Dār iḥyā' al-turāth al-'arabī, in 1985.[35] Unfortunately, however, these *Fahāris* fall short of their model, for not only do they not indicate the line on a page where the item is found, which is understandable, but they do not reproduce all the page numbers in the original indices. A complete index to the Dār/Lajna edition has therefore yet to appear.

A specialised index to the words glossed by Abū l-Faraj in the *Aghānī* was compiled by Ḥasan Muḥsin.[36] These glosses concern obscure items in poetry, and foreign, especially Persian, words among other things.

Another kind of access to the *Aghānī*'s contents is to be found in *Shakhṣīyāt Kitāb al-aġhānī*.[37] This book is somewhere between an index and an abridgement. It consists in a presentation of the personalities who are the subject of articles, arranged according to period (pre-Islamic, *mukhaḍram* (straddling the pre-Islamic and earliest Islamic periods), Umayyad, *mukhaḍram al-dawlatayn* (straddling the Umayyad and 'Abbāsid periods) and 'Abbāsid) and alphabetically within each group. Poets

precede singers, the latter also being divided up according to sex. Each entry consists simply in a quotation of the basic information on the person which the *Aghānī* gives; there is no summary of the articles' contents. The book concludes with a short index of cultural themes (*fihris ḥaḍārī*). It is a useful guide as far as it goes, in particular because it facilitates an assessment of the relative importance Abū l-Faraj accords to different periods of Arabic poetry in the *Aghānī*. A similar work on a much smaller scale is Muḥammad Qindīl's *Shakhṣīyāt ḥayya min al-Aghānī*, which contains sections on 29 personalities or events in chronological order.[38]

Abridgements proper of the *Aghānī* have existed since the Middle Ages.[39] The first printed one was made by Father Anṭūn Ṣālḥānī; it bears the title *Rannāt al-mathālith wa-l-mathānī fī riwāyāt Kitāb al-aghānī*.[40] It is divided into two parts, one containing accounts of poets and singers, the other accounts of historical events. As is clear from his preface, Ṣālḥānī is sensitive not only to the *Aghānī*'s value as a source of information, but also to its aesthetic qualities, and in particular its style. Indeed, his aim in publishing the *Rannāt* (and the choice of title reflects well his approach to the book) is to acquaint his contemporaries with the resources of the Arabic language and in particular its capacity to express emotional states and mental processes in different communicative situations. Books like the *Aghānī*, he points out, prove that contemporary writers' complaints about the poverty of Arabic are quite unfounded. Moreover, Abū l-Faraj's style[41] is exemplary in its concision, concentration and unaffectedness. It is not easy to imitate, contrary to what one may think, but the assiduous reader of the *Aghānī* will indeed find that he becomes capable of expressing himself in a similarly effective fashion. In accordance with his concentration on the *Aghānī*'s linguistic and stylistic qualities, Ṣālḥānī omits *isnāds* and alternative versions of the same event; he seeks, as he puts it, to extract the pearls of the *Aghānī* from their oyster-shells.[42]

A later abridgement was that of Muḥammad al-Khuḍarī, who dropped the *isnāds* and the obscene or objectionable passages. He quoted poems as they had been composed, not as the singers modified or shortened them. He divided the material into two parts, one on poets and the other on singers, classifying the poets chronologically as pre-Islamic, Islamic or Modern and according to their tribal allegiance. The poets take up six volumes, the singers one, and the eighth and final volume includes indices and notes.[43]

Arab scholars continued to seek to present the *Aghānī* in a manageable form for modern readers. Karam al-Bustānī's *Quṭūf al-aghānī*[44] and Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn Āl Kāshif al-ghiṭā''s *Mukhtār min shu'arā' al-aghānī*[45] are two such attempts. Another is Aḥmad Kamāl Zakī's *Mukhtārāt min Kitāb al-aghānī*. Zakī observes how difficult it is for the modern reader to follow the old texts, with their *isnāds* (chains of transmitters of information) and their reports which contradict each other, do not keep to the point and are not arranged chronologically; in short, they resemble a trackless waste in which the reader soon loses his way. He has therefore omitted the *isnāds* and organised his selection in a chronological order: the Hundred Songs, caliphal compositions, and then 33 poets according to historical period, pre-Islamic, *mukhaḍram*, Umayyad, *mukhaḍram al-dawlatayn*, 'Abbāsid.[46]

Khalīl al-Hindāwī's *Al-muntakhab min al-aghānī* illustrates another approach to abridging this work. He has selected fine stories, wise sayings, unusual biographies, critical statements in good taste and acccessible poetry, with young people and students in mind. The *Muntakhab* roughly follows the order of the material in the *Aghānī*, but since it only includes individual *akhbār* and poems, it does not give any sense of the book's organisation into articles.[47]

Another abridgement is *Aghānī al-aghānī*, compiled by Father Yūsuf ʻAwn.[48] Its three volumes contain around half the *Aghānī* articles, but as the introduction states, they exclude *isnāds*, trivial stories, uninspired poetry, uninteresting subjects and obscenities. The articles follow the *Aghānī* order, but where reports about a personality are found in more than one place in the original, the compiler has brought them all together in the main article, sometimes rearranging them into chronological order. Like Ṣālḥānī, ʻAwn is intensely aware of the *Aghānī*'s value as a model of style; in addition, like other abridgers, he argues that because of the speed of modern life young people cannot find the time to read al-Iṣbahānī's work.[49]

A further selection from the *Aghānī* was made by ʻUmar al-Nuṣṣ.[50] According to the list given here, which is probably not complete, the *Aghānī* has been abridged eight times in 100 years. It is eloquent proof of continuing interest in the work, but also of the problems of aesthetics with which a mediaeval text of this kind confronts the modern reader.

The *Aghānī* has also provided texts for a reader designed for Persian colleges and secondary schools. Here the *isnāds* have been omitted, and notes in Persian provided on the persons named.[51] In Arabic a selection for a youthful public was published in the Maktabat al-usra series in connection with the Festival of Reading for All in 1996; it contains excerpts from the articles on Jarīr, al-Akhṭal, al-Farazdaq and al-Rāʻī.[52]

The urge to make the *Aghānī* accessible to a wider public has also led some foreign scholars to undertake **translations** from it. There appears to have been a project to render the entire work, or at least large parts of it, into Persian, but only one volume appeared.[53] European scholars have worked on a smaller canvas. Their aims naturally differ somewhat from those of Arab abridgers; they seek to convey an impression both of the book itself and of the pre- and early Islamic culture about which it is so informative. Inevitably they are less concerned with the quality of the work's language and style which their Arab colleagues attach so much importance to, and they face enormous problems in translating the poetry.

The first such abridgement-cum-translation appeared in German in 1977. *Und der Kalif beschenkte ihn reichlich* contains 13 articles on representative figures from pre-Islamic to ʻAbbāsid times, arranged chronologically. The *isnāds* have been abbreviated but not eliminated, since the translator regards them as characteristic of the form of both the work and classical Arabic literature in general. The introduction presents al-Iṣbahānī's life and times, the *Aghānī*, and the principles followed for the choice and translation of the material. It also justifies the omission of the musical indications following so many quotations of poetry. The choice of title

imposes a certain interpretation on the material, as do the characterisations which accompany the headings of the individual sections, for instance "Antara, Halbblut und Heros" or "Al-Ardschī, Nachfolger des Omar" (sc. ibn Abī Rabī'a).[54]

The Russian translation of 1980 leaves the reader more freedom of interpretation. Simply entitled *Kniga pesen* (The Book of Songs), it precedes the 20 articles it contains with al-Iṣbahānī's preface and the account of the Top Hundred songs. The translator's introduction[55] not only gives a thoughtful account of Abū l-Faraj's life, the fate of his book and the literary world of his time, it also points out the *Aghānī*'s originality in showing the connection between music and poetry in classical Arabic culture and remarks that Abū l-Faraj's role sometimes went beyond that of a mere compiler. In making their abridgement, the Russian translators were influenced by the practice of their mediaeval predecessors; like them, they have omitted the musical indications and the *isnāds*, except for the original narrator of a report.[56] Like *Und der Kalif beschenkte ihn reichlich*, the *Kniga pesen* also arranges its articles chronologically; interestingly, both selections include 'Adī ibn Zayd, 'Antara, Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī and Abū l-'Atāhiya.

In 1996 Jacques Berque's translation of pages from the *Aghānī* was published posthumously, under the evocative title *Musiques sur le fleuve*.[57] Berque's translation moves away from the arrangement of the material in articles, which is one of the salient characteristics of the *Aghānī*, and which other translations retain. He arranges his material according to six main subjects: pre-Islamic life and cutoms; rulers and princes; the art of music and singers; poetry and poets; adventures in love; norms and deviations. Each subject is then sub-divided into various sections. While such a thematic reading of the book is a valid approach, it is practised here in isolation from the biographical orientation which is such a marked feature of the *Aghānī*. One may also question whether the six subject headings Berque has selected are necessarily the most appropriate ones. In other words, the translator has gone further in imposing his own interpretation here than in the German and Russian versions. In his introduction to *Musiques sur le fleuve*, Berque provides a survey of research on the *Aghānī*, with useful bibliographical references.

The compiler of such an intriguing work as the *Aghānī* has naturally attracted scholarly attention. Four **biographies** of him in book form have been published in Arabic. That by al-Aṣma'ī is a careful, though at times repetitive, compilation of what the mediaeval sources have to say about Abū l-Faraj, his teachers, pupils, milieu, morals, writings, and the opinions of mediaeval and modern scholars about him. The final chapter is devoted to the *Aghānī*'s portrayal of aspects of society and literary and musical life in the pre- and early Islamic periods.[58] Al-Aṣma'ī does not face the problems connected with the biography; by contrast, he draws one or two interesting parallels between Abū l-Faraj and modern *literati*.[59] A briefer, similarly uncritical biography is that of Shafīq Jabrī.[60]

The first critical contribution to the understanding of Abū l-Faraj's life is to be found in Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalafallāh's *Ṣāḥib al-Aghānī Abū l-Faraj al-rāwiya*.[61] Khalafallāh identifies the points on which the sources do not agree and proposes

solutions to the problems they raise. Thanks to his wide reading he provides information about subjects which the mediaeval biographical entries ignore.

But Khalafallāh's book is not without its problems. He does not hide the fact that he finds Abū l-Faraj's personal traits, and in particular his bohemian way of life and sexual preferences, distasteful. Some of his theses are far-fetched. Above all, he sees his subject as a transmitter par excellence, hence the epithet he uses for him in the title, *al-rāwiya*; Abū l-Faraj's achievements as a poet and writer do not enter his field of vision. Against the evidence of the mediaeval sources, he maintains that the *Aghānī* only acquired its place as a major work of Arabic literature after many other books had been lost. Nevertheless, his book is a landmark, and it is a great pity that it has remained virtually unknown outside the Arab world.[62]

A more objective account of Abū l-Faraj's life and times, based on a careful and intelligent reading of the sources, is to be found in Moustafa Mandour's *Abū l-Faraǧ al-Iṣfahānī. Sa vie et son "Livre des Chansons" (Kitāb al-aġānī)*. Among other things, Mandour establishes the chronological order in which information about Abū l-Faraj's life appears in the biographical sources. Unfortunately, however, it seems that this study, presented as a doctoral thesis in Paris, was never published either as a book or in the form of articles and has been completely ignored.[63] The most recent addition to biographies of Abū l-Faraj, by Ḥusayn ʿĀṣī, cannot be said to be an advance on the previous ones.[64]

The Moroccan scholar Muḥammad Khayr al-Shaykh Mūsā, in an article, has criticised and corrected some of Khalafallāh's conclusions.[65] He has also tried to restore Abū l-Faraj's reputation by arguing that the reports of his disagreeable personal habits were calumnies put about by someone with whom he had quarrelled. And he takes issue with Abū l-Faraj being described as a Shīʿī; he appears not to appreciate that in the fourth/tenth century there was a wide variety of Shīʿī opinion, and that the Zaydīya, to which Abū l-Faraj belonged, was at the opposite end of the spectrum from the *ghulāt* ("extremists"). He ignores the evidence of al-Ṭūsī's *Fihrist kutub al-shīʿa*, a relatively early source (fifth/eleventh century), appearing to believe that the earliest reference to Abū l-Faraj's convictions, that in the *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, is an aberration which was picked up by later writers.

The most recent presentation in Arabic of both Abū l-Faraj and his works, Ṭāniyūs Fransīs's popularising *Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, 283–362/897–972. Adīb shahharahu kitāb*, does not add anything to previous accounts of the life. It is unusual, however, in including in the anthology of the writer's oeuvre passages from the *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn*, the *Adab al-ghurabā'*, the *Imā' al-shawāʿir* and even the *Qiyān*, as well as the *Aghānī*. It thus draws attention for the first time to a wide spectrum of Abū l-Faraj's literary activity.[66]

Accounts of Abū l-Faraj's life in standard reference works in European languages reflect the later mediaeval sources. The articles in both editions of the *EI* (by Brockelmann and Maria Nallino) report essentially the information given there, and even though Sezgin mentions Khalafallāh's study in the bibliography on Abū l-Faraj, he does not appear to have integrated its findings into his presentation of the writer.

Al-Shaykh Mūsā, whose study of Abū l-Faraj's life has been mentioned, has also drawn up the first attempt in print at a critical **bibliography** of Abū l-Faraj's writings.[67] Useful as it is, it is already in need of revision, for it came out in the same year as the publication of a fourth text by the *Aghānī*'s author, the *Imā' al-shawā'ir*, which had been thought lost, and two collections of fragments of other works of his have appeared subsequently. And although it takes note of Brockelmann's entry on Abū l-Faraj in *GAL*, it does not refer to Farmer's bibliography of Arabic writings on music, an important source in this context. Most seriously, while the introduction mentions the confusion over the designation of some works by alternative titles in different sources, the list itself hardly reflects the critical approach which might have cleared up some of the difficulties. A far more scholarly bibliographical study, but limited to the *Aghānī*, is the article by Aḥmad Ṭālib already referred to.[68]

Both Arab and foreign scholars are conscious of the difficulty modern readers have in approaching the *Aghānī*. This is a point made in the introductions to many of the abridgements as one of the motives for abbreviating the work. As for foreigners, their discomfort was summed up by Quatremère in the 1830s as follows: "la manière dont l'ouvrage est rédigé est bien peu en harmonie avec le goût des Européens et avec les qualités que nous nous croyons en droit d'exiger d'un historien".[69]

The first to respond to this difficulty was Shafiq Jabrī. In his *Dirāsat al-Aghānī*[70] he suggests that the work should be read as a portrayal of a period of Arab culture very different from the present, and most of his book illustrates this idea.[71] Initially, however, he points out that it is important to study Abū l-Faraj's **method of working** from the observations he makes in the course of the book, and he gives some examples of how this could be done. He also considers Abū l-Faraj as having a distinct style, though in practice he does not always distinguish between the compiler's statements and those of his sources.

The idea of studying Abū l-Faraj's own remarks is taken further by Dāwūd Sallūm in *Dirāsat Kitāb al-aghānī wa-manhaj mu'allifih*.[72] Sallūm regards the *Aghānī* as a book of criticism,[73] and its author as a critic with his own principles, derived from al-Jāḥiẓ and others. He argues from the preface that Abū l-Faraj had an evident methodological consciousness, and goes on to collect and analyse his remarks about the nature and quality of his sources, whether and how he has combined them, and where he has placed material in the *Aghānī*. He concludes, among other things, that Abū l-Faraj's own remarks, which are spread throughout the *Aghānī*, reflect his control of the enormous mass of material he was using and his continual awareness of how it should be arranged, and also that he compiled different parts of the work at different times and then put them together. His book is probably the single most important contribution to the study of the *Āghānī* as literature,[74] and it forms the starting-point for the examination of Abū l-Faraj's interventions in this study.

Another scholar who has shown interest in Abū l-Faraj's manner of working is Muṣṭafā al-Shak'a. He includes the *Aghānī* in his study of methods of composition

in *adab* works, *Manāhij al-ta'līf 'inda l-'ulamā' al-'arab. Qism al-adab*, and recognises the importance of the songs as a structuring element in the work as a whole. He does not, however, go beyond that to examine the internal organisation of the individual articles.[75]

Sallūm also devotes a chapter to the **textual problems** connected with the *Aghānī*, the MSS of which diverge considerably from each other. *Dirāsat Kitāb al-aghānī wa-manhaj mu'allifih* is probably the single most stimulating contribution to *Aghānī* studies, at least from the non-musicologist's point of view. The issue of textual corruption which Sallūm mentions is also discussed in an article by al-Shaykh Mūsā, who concentrates on the passages where Abū l-Faraj announces that he will include, or has included, material which cannot be found in the present editions of the *Aghānī*.[76]

Foreign scholars, apart from musicologists, have generally seen the *Aghānī* as a historical work,[77] and more precisely as an invaluable source for pre- and early Islamic poetry, culture and social history. Expecting from it the order which they are accustomed to in histories, they have generally found it a frustrating book,[78] all the more so because the information it includes is so rich. Blachère is sensitive to the aesthetic quality of the poetry and anecdotes Abū l-Faraj includes,[79] but he does not regard him as anything more than a compiler, whose own contribution is limited to links between the articles and headings to them. He denies him an individual style, a point convincingly refuted by Jabrī in a later article; the Syrian scholar adduces the *Aghānī*'s preface, the compiler's lengthy discussions of some controversial poets and singers, and the many cases where he has combined several reports into one, told in his own words.[80]

Scholars who classify the *Aghānī* as history, however unsatisfactory, approach it rather like a site for archaeological excavations; they search it for information about the pre- and early Islamic past and earlier stages of Arabic literature. Blachère raised the issue of identifying its **sources**, an obvious question since Abū l-Faraj goes to such lengths to mention the *isnāds* of his reports, and indicated some of the authorities he relies on most often.[81] Zolondek took this idea further, arguing that the concept of "source" needed to be defined more precisely, the important point being to discover not the individuals who served as direct links to Abū l-Faraj, but those who first showed an interest in collecting the reports about a given poet or singer, the "collector sources", as he terms them.[82] By correlating these collector sources, who can be dated, with themes in the *akhbār*, he shows that it is possible to trace how the portrayal of subjects of *Aghānī* articles developed. Zolondek's method enables the elaboration of the "life story" of many actors in early Arabic culture to be followed.[83]

Another approach to the sources of the *Aghānī* was put forward by Fleischhammer, who was concerned to gain insight into its author's manner of working as well as identifying what oral and written material he used.[84] He lists Abū l-Faraj's direct informants, authorities who are frequently named in the *isnāds*, and sources explicitly described as being in writing, all historically situated as far as possible. He also gives schematic analyses of the sources of some articles. His painstaking sifting of the *isnāds* shows that the compiler drew most of his material

from a limited number of informers and establishes who they were; likewise it indicates which were the main written works he quoted from. This and the index of names of transmitters make the *Quellenuntersuchungen* an invaluable tool for anyone researching into the *Aghānī*.[85] Sezgin also addressed the question of the sources of the *Aghānī* in the context of his investigation into the history of early Arabic literature, his main interest being to discover new authors. While agreeing substantially with Fleischhammer about the number of authorities Abū l-Faraj had direct access to, he argues that it was almost always written texts he was using.[86]

The investigations into the *Aghānī*'s sources and Abū l-Faraj's treatment of his material are necessary background information for scholars interested in the work's **poetics**. A very early essay in the direction of a study of the poetics of the *Aghānī* anecdotes is a study by Frank Dyer Chester of two *akhbār* about Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, of which variants also exist in *Alf layla wa-layla* and al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*.[87] Later this approach was taken up again; a pioneering example is Hartmut Fähndrich's comparative study of Abū Dulāma anecdotes in the *Aghānī*, the *Ta'rīkh Baghdād* and the *Wafayāt al-a'yān*.[88] When treating the subject of narrative poetics critics naturally have to take account of the transmission of the material they analyse; some subtle and penetrating observations on this question can be found in Waḍḍāḥ Sharāra's commentary on the *Aghānī* article about al-Majnūn.[89] What happens when scholars ignore it is illustrated in a recent article on the aesthetics of the narrative form in the *Aghānī* stories.[90] The author seeks to prove that Abū l-Faraj was a story-teller of genius, and maintains that he was dealing entirely with oral material, which he shaped and moulded as he thought fit. While some of the observations on individual *akhbār* and narrative in the *Aghānī* deserve to be taken seriously, the author's ignorance of the true nature of the literary conventions of classical Arabic prose compilations, and indeed of the literary culture of the time, combined with his enthusiasm for modern theories, leads him to some wild conclusions.

Another aspect of *Aghānī* poetics which has attracted attention is Abū l-Faraj's method of compilation. This subject, referred to by Sallūm, was first investigated by Khairallah in his study of the development of the Majnūn figure.[91] Whereas in the issue of narration it may not be possible to distinguish Abū l-Faraj's contribution from that of his source, compilation is a matter where his individual approach can be more easily discerned because he indicates where he changes from informant to informant. But it is essential not to impose expectations of chronological organisation on the material and to accept that a coherent whole may be constructed from scattered fragments.[92]

As a book of songs, the *Aghānī* has consistently attracted the attention of musicologists, both as a source of information about musical life in the early Islamic period, and for the enigmatic song captions it includes. Its importance for the **history of Arabic music** has been universally recognised. Farmer's judgement of Abū l-Faraj's achievement is worth quoting: "… the vast erudition displayed, to say nothing of the enormous industry and patience which it engendered, leaves one abashed at the productions which pass as 'musical literature' today". Neubauer's

concise description of the *Aghānī* runs "great in every respect".[93] More recently, Abū l-Faraj has been called a "true prophet of modern ethnomusicology".[94]

The fundamental **musicological** problem for modern readers of the *Aghānī*, as it was for later mediaeval ones,[95] has been to understand the performance indications which follow the song texts. Farmer's article on the subject,[96] which was translated into Arabic,[97] has been followed by other studies.[98] In this respect Sawa's study, which uses insights derived from the analysis of al-Fārābī's theoretical writings to interpret the terms used by Abū l-Faraj, represents an important step forward.[99]

This survey of research on the *Kitāb al-aghānī* and its author does not pretend to be complete. In particular I have not discussed the myriad studies, by Arab and foreign scholars, which draw to a greater or lesser extent on the information the book provides for discussions of social history, individual poets, music, the phonology and morphology of women's names and diglossia, to name but a few subjects. Nor have I mentioned discussions of methodological issues relevant for the study of 'Abbāsid prose and *adab* compilations in general. My intention has simply been to present the editions, translations and major contributions to the study of the *Aghānī*, as a prelude to the subsequent chapters in this book.

Research on the *Aghānī*: a balance-sheet

Before proceeding, however, I would like to offer a comment on the picture of research on the *Aghānī* sketched in this chapter. The above survey shows that in most domains of *Aghānī* studies the major part of the work has been carried out by Arab scholars. This holds good for text editions, biographies of the author, and investigations of his method of working. Foreign scholars have contributed most to the identification of the *Aghānī*'s sources and of methods of transmission of the material. As far as I can judge, it is specifically in the field of musicology that Arabs and foreigners have concerned themselves with the same problems.

While knowledge of all aspects of this text has advanced greatly since the Second World War, three obstacles have prevented it progressing even further. The first is the gulf which appears to separate research carried out in the Arab world and that carried out elsewhere. Khalafallāh's and Sallūm's books are hardly ever quoted in foreign studies, while Zolondek's approach to sources is unknown in the Arab world. (Since Fleischhammer's work is unpublished, it has been virtually ignored everywhere.) There are some practical reasons for this. Arab scholars publish in periodicals in the Arab world which few foreign libraries acquire, while foreign scholars publish in periodicals in Europe and North America which are often inaccessible in the Arab world because of their cost. Moreover, foreigners hardly ever publish in Arabic, so that Arab scholars have to learn a number of European languages to keep abreast with research abroad. The situation is made worse by the fact that even within the Arab world, circulation of scholarly periodicals between countries is by no means the rule.

A second obstacle concerns the work done by Arab scholars. Although their studies of the *Aghānī* and of Abū l-Faraj's life are extremely useful, both Sallūm and

al-Shaykh Mūsā betray striking misconceptions of the social and intellectual history of the period in which the *Aghānī* was written. Sallūm speaks of the "fanatical (*muta'aṣṣib*) Muslim milieu" in which Abū l-Faraj lived,[100] while al-Shaykh Mūsā's ignorance of the complexities of Shī'ī movements in the fourth/tenth century has already been noted. Al-Simṭī's study of Abū l-Faraj's narrative techniques betrays an even greater lack of knowledge of the literary culture which produced the *Aghānī*. The detailed research on different aspects of mediaeval Islamic civilisation which has been going on abroad for the last fifty years or so appears scarcely to have penetrated some Arab academic milieus, at least where the study of literature is concerned.

The third obstacle concerns the approach of foreign scholars. It is striking that, apart from the musicologists, they have generally insisted on regarding the *Aghānī* as a historical work (despite Abū l-Faraj's disclaimer in the preface) and Abū l-Faraj as a historian, at least in the first place. And since the *Aghānī* is such an unsatisfactory history, the *only* way to approach it is to discover its sources. While the question of sources cannot be ignored, it can scarcely be regarded as the only, or even the most important, issue, when one is dealing with a book a thousand years old which has always remained close to the heart of its culture, as the manuscript tradition and the fact that it has been abridged eight times in the past hundred years prove. But most scholars from outside the culture have insisted on imposing their own vision on the *Aghānī*, and have thus been unable to understand it. Stendhal's judgement of their nineteenth century predecessors, that "ils ont le coeur desséché par l'étude et les habitudes académiques" may help to explain this persistent misunderstanding.[101] In any case it may now be disappearing, as scholars abroad acquire more insight into the indigenous aesthetic canons of mediaeval Arabic literature.

It is no accident that the musicologists have not suffered from the same misconception. After all, the *Aghānī* is a book of songs, in the first place, and that is what they study it for; in other words, they accept it for what it is. There is no more eloquent illustration of the difference it makes whether a work is understood in its own terms or has a scheme of interpretation imposed on it than to compare Farmer's glowing praise of the *Aghānī* with the judgements of scholars such as Brockelmann or Sezgin. But although the overwhelming importance of the *Aghānī* for our understanding of mediaeval Arabic music may be enough to explain why the musicologists are so much kinder to it, there may be another reason too, as far as non-Arab specialists are concerned. Anyone who studies a musical tradition foreign to him has to distance himself from the aesthetic expectations he has grown up with in his own tradition and acquire new ones. So foreigners studying Arabic music have already lost the habit of imposing their own aesthetic system on the material they work on. Once they have taken this step with respect to music, it will probably not be so difficult for them to accept that a literary work, too, may be the product of an aesthetic system quite different from the ones they knew at home. By contrast, foreign scholars of Arabic literature, at least in the past, have had much less occasion to prepare themselves for developing new expectations of what a literary work may be.

2

ABŪ L-FARAJ'S LIFE, TIMES AND WORKS

The *Kitāb al-aghānī* is the product of a particular cultural milieu, the court of fourth/tenth century Baghdad, with which Abū l-Faraj was closely associated, and of the contemporary scholarly tradition in which he had his education. It is also marked by its author's general approach to writing and compilation, which emerges from other works of his too. The following sketch of Abū l-Faraj's life,[1] times and oeuvre presents the context in which the *Aghānī* took shape, the information being confined to what is relevant for the subsequent discussion of it.

Abū l-Faraj's life and times

Abū l-Faraj ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn al-Haytham al-Umawī al-Iṣbahānī was born in 284/897,[2] probably in Baghdad.[3] He was a direct descendant of the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān ibn Muḥammad. After the collapse of Umayyad rule, some descendants of Marwān managed to escape and fled to Isfahan, and it is from there that Abū l-Faraj's branch of the family moved to Iraq, to take up positions in the administration. Abū l-Faraj's great-uncle, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Aḥmad, was a leading official in Samarra under al-Mutawakkil, and his uncle al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad, who also rose to prominence as a *kātib* in Samarra, was born during that caliph's rule.[4] Al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad is one of the most important sources in both the *Kitāb al-aghānī*[5] and the *Imā' al-shawāʿir*.[6] In the former book Abū l-Faraj also refers to or quotes other members of his family, his father al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad, his great-uncle ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who has already been mentioned, his grandfather Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, and his cousin Abū ʿAbdallāh Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥasan.[7]

The biographical dictionaries usually do not mention the maternal relatives of their subjects, and it is only because Abū l-Faraj is so thorough in indicating his sources in the *Aghānī* that the name of his maternal grandfather is known. He was Abū ʿAlī Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad ibn Thawāba, and he left a book from which his grandson quoted anecdotes about late Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid poets.[8] Although there is no direct proof, it is extremely likely that Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad ibn Thawāba was a brother of two more prominent *kātibs*, Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Thawāba and Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad ibn Thawāba. All three lived

in the second half of the third/ninth century.[9] The Banū Thawāba were a family of humble Christian origin[10] who rose to influential positions in the administration, and several of them had literary leanings.[11]

Abū l-Faraj evidently admired Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad, as is shown by an incident he recounts from his own experience. The head of the department of finances of the eastern part of the empire, al-Bāqiṭānī, reproached by a newly-appointed governor with having started his career as a mere secretary to Abū l-'Abbās, gives an illustration of the latter's competence and integrity in dealings with the vizier Sulaymān ibn Wahb and the caliph al-Muhtadī.[12] This report is unusual in two respects. It shows Abū l-Faraj as an eye-witness to a scene, whereas he is normally a transmitter and sometimes verifier of information. And it gives the only glimpse of him in his professional capacity as a *kātib*, instead of in his usual quality of student, researcher or scholar. Even more than what the incident reports about Abū l-'Abbās's qualities, it is Abū l-Faraj's abandonment of his habitual role which suggests his profound attachment to one of the leading representatives of the Banū Thawāba.[13]

The Banū Thawāba were Shī'īs,[14] and if Abū l-Faraj's mother was indeed a member of this family, his own Shī'ī convictions[15] are easy to explain. Later sources comment on the combination of Umayyad descent and Shī'ī beliefs as something unusual.[16] But such comments ignore the fact that in the century and a half between the 'Abbāsid revolution and Abū l-Faraj's birth relations between 'Alids and descendants of the Umayyads had improved.[17] Furthermore, Shī'ism in its various branches was widespread in the fourth/tenth century, and interaction between Sunnīs and Shī'īs was by no means always hostile, as the example of the coexistence between Būyids and 'Abbāsid caliphs shows. As a Zaydī, Abū l-Faraj belonged to the Shī'ī tendency closest to the Sunnīs.

The indication of Abū l-Faraj's religious confession, while important, illustrates the limitations of the biographical information contained in the mediaeval sources. For one may wonder whether, throughout his long life, the writer retained the same convictions or held them with the same fervour. While his early *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn* is clearly the work of a Zaydī Shī'ī author addressing a like-minded readership, his other extant works including the *Aghānī* have no obvious confessional bias. They are designed to appeal to the cultivated public, whatever its beliefs.[18] The difference between the *Maqātil* and the other books could simply spring from Abū l-Faraj's consciousness that he was writing for two distinct audiences. But it could also reflect an evolution of some kind in his own politico-religious attitude. Such subtleties do not interest the sources, however, and so this is a question which cannot be answered.[19]

Abū l-Faraj studied in two intellectual centres, Kufa and Baghdad. It is almost certain that he had his first schooling in Kufa and its surroundings, since he mentions his tutor (*mu'addib*), Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Kindī, as being the preacher at the Qādisīya mosque.[20] And his first book, the *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn*, bears the mark of Kufan Shī'ī scholarship. But it was not only the city's Shī'ī tradition which influenced him. Kufa had become the centre for the study of

Arabian antiquity, thanks to the genealogists Muḥammad al-Kalbī and his son Hishām and the collector of poetry Ḥammād al-Rāwiya.[21] It had its own grammatical school. And the indigenous Iraqi musical tradition formerly associated with al-Ḥīra lived on there.[22] Abū l-Faraj did not only spend his time gathering serious reports from Kufan scholars,[23] he got to know of local singers whose reputation never extended beyond their home town.[24] And if his books betray little interest in philosophical speculation, rationalist theology and the scientific legacy of Antiquity,[25] that too can be ascribed at least partly to his Kufan education.

When Abū l-Faraj settled in Baghdad is unknown. The only indication that it may have been later than 300/912 is provided by a reference to the poet Abū l-Fayyāḍ Sawwār ibn Abī Shurā'a's coming to the capital after that year and Abū l-Faraj missing seeing him on that occasion.[26]

Two major sources list the scholars from whom Abū l-Faraj acquired information. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, whose concern is with *ḥadīth* transmission, names the authorities from which he acquired *ḥadīths* and also those to whom he handed them on, while Yāqūt gives the literary scholars whom he quoted. What is striking about these two lists is that not more of the names on them occur prominently in the *isnāds* of the *Aghānī* or the *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn*. Of the seven authorities in the *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*'s entry on Abū l-Faraj,[27] only one, Muḥammad ibn al-'Abbās al-Yazīdī, is quoted in both the *Aghānī* and the *Maqātil*, while two others, 'Alī ibn al-'Abbās al-Maqānī'ī and 'Alī ibn Isḥāq ibn Zātiyā al-Mukharrimī, are sources for the *Maqātil* only.[28] Yāqūt's list of five names[29] includes four sources of the *Aghānī*, Ibn Durayd, al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥubāb al-Jumaḥī, Ibn al-Anbārī and 'Alī ibn Sulaymān al-Akhfash, of whom the last also occurs in the *Maqātil*. Among all these scholars, however, the only one who is a major source for the *Aghānī* is al-Yazīdī.[30]

As can be seen, the entries on Abū l-Faraj in the biographical dictionaries do not indicate the formative influences on him.[31] These latter can, however, be inferred from his own comments and indirectly from the intensity with which he quotes from some sources.[32] For instance, of al-Yazīdī he says: "The last surviving scholar of this family [sc. the Yazīdīs] was Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn al-'Abbās. He was outstanding, learned and a reliable transmitter, unique in his truthfulness and extremely prudent in what he related. We and many other students and transmitters learned an enormous amount from him".[33] Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/947) is another scholar to whom the *Aghānī* owes much,[34] and at one point Abū l-Faraj hints at his attachment to the older scholar, now dead: "Al-Ṣūlī, may God have mercy on him, recited to me …"[35] Aḥmad ibn Ja'far Jaḥẓa al-Barmakī (d. 324/936), a virtuoso on the long-necked lute (*ṭunbūr*), compiler of a book on lute-players, and transmitter of one version of the list of a Hundred Songs, was a recourse in matters concerning settings,[36] and Abū l-Faraj also mentions studying with him.[37] Moreover, he collected information about him in a lost *Akhbār Jaḥẓa al-Barmakī*.[38]

Among authorities of the past who influenced Abū l-Faraj, the first place belongs to Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (d. 235/850).[39] The decision to follow Isḥāq's terminology in the naming of rhythmic and tonal modes[40] and the

partisan portrayal of the controversy between Isḥāq and his rival Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī,[41] not to speak of the idea of using Isḥāq's list of the Top Hundred songs as the starting point for the *Aghānī*, all indicate Abū l-Faraj's admiration for this leading third/ninth century musician. He also has a high regard for Ibn al-Mu'tazz[42] (d. 296/309), both because of his knowledge of musical theory and practice, and for his poetic style, which he defends eloquently.[43] He champions Abū Tammām[44] (d. 231/845) against those who criticise him and exaggerate his shortcomings in order to improve their own standing.[45] The singer 'Arīb (d. 277/891)[46] is a leading figure of earlier musical life whom he admires, as his attack on her detractors shows.[47] Finally, although not strictly speaking a figure of the past, for Abū l-Faraj could have seen him in his youth, 'Ubaydallāh ibn 'Abdallāh ibn Ṭāhir[48] (d. 300/913) is portrayed as representing the ideal of the courtier and administrator possessing an all-round culture which included both the Arabian and the Greek sciences, poetic gifts and knowledge of musical theory and practice.[49]

Apart from these personalities who earned his admiration, Abū l-Faraj had a wide circle of teachers and acquaintances in Kufa and above all Baghdad from whom he acquired information. They were mostly specialists in historical and literary reports (*akhbār*), poetry or philology. Some were obscure, like his most frequently named informer in the *Aghānī*, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Khaffāf,[50] others celebrities, like the great historian and Quran commentator Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī.[51] He probably turned to anyone whom he thought might be able to help him on a given point, like the "senior official" (*ba'ḍ mashāyikh al-kuttāb*) he mentions once,[52] or the singers he hoped could tell him about 'Ubaydallāh ibn 'Abdallāh ibn Ṭāhir's settings.[53] Friends of his, like 'Abdallāh ibn al-Rabī' al-Rabī'ī,[54] also contributed information for the *Aghānī*, as did his family's circle of acquaintances. Among them was Muḥammad ibn Khalaf ibn al-Marzubān, and in Abū l-Faraj's recollection of him at the end of the *Aghānī* one catches a glimpse of the atmosphere in which he grew up: "I heard Abū 'Alī Muḥammad ibn al-Marzubān tell this to my father, may God have mercy on him, as part of an exchange of information. There was a long-standing friendship between us and the al-Marzubān family and we were related by marriage".[55]

In the course of his life Abū l-Faraj acquired a quantity of knowledge which even his contemporaries found remarkable. The testimony of al-Tanūkhī[56] is eloquent: "Among the Shī'ī transmitters of information we have seen is Abū l-Faraj 'Alī ibn al-Husayn al-Iṣbahānī. He had committed to memory a quantity of poetry, songs, anecdotes, historical reports, authenticated *ḥadīths* and genealogies such as I have never known anyone else to master. Besides that he was knowledgeable in lexicography, grammar, fantastic stories, life histories and accounts of conquests, and he was widely versed in the subjects courtiers are required to be conversant with, such as birds and animals of the hunt, veterinary science, medicine, astrology and drinks".[57] A possessor of such encyclopaedic knowledge was bound to have his detractors, and the biographical works have preserved some attacks by disapproving contemporaries on his method of work[58] and by later strait-laced scholars on

his morals.[59] But the opinion of most mediaeval writers who mention him is at the very least positive.

About Abū l-Faraj's career in the administration nothing is known. In *isnāds* he refers to Antioch, Ahwaz and Raqqa[60] as places where he acquired certain reports, and he may have visited them as part of his official duties. Other places he mentions having gone to are Mattūth, Daskarat al-Malik, Basra, Ḥiṣn Mahdī, Kūthā and Nahr al-Ubulla,[61] and there too professional reasons may sometimes have been involved. Dealing with an administrative question was presumably the motive for his trip to Bājistrā, a small town between Baghdad and Ḥulwān, where he was forced to spend longer than he expected because of an attack by the Banū Shaybān.[62] That, and the glimpse of him in al-Bāqiṭānī's office mentioned above, are the only likely traces of his professional activity as a *kātib*.

There is thus no indication of when or how he met the man who became his long-standing patron, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad al-Muhallabī.[63] Al-Muhallabī belonged to a family which had started to play a part in Islamic history almost as early as Abū l-Faraj's had.[64] But he himself came from an impoverished background, his fortunes only improving as he approached the centre of power.[65] He is first mentioned in 323/935 as Abū Zakarīyā Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd al-Sūsī's steward in the region of Ahwaz.[66] In 334/945 he negotiatied on Mu'izz al-Dawla's behalf for the removal of the Caliph al-Mustakfī, and in 339/950 he was appointed Mu'izz al-Dawla's secretary, acquiring the title of vizier six years later.[67] He continued to enjoy his master's favour almost uninterruptedly until his death.

In the more than twenty years during which he was influential, al-Muhallabī, a man of refined manners and wide culture, was able to build up a famous intellectual circle. It was attended by *kātibs* like al-Muhallabī's two sons-in-law, Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Anbārī and the later vizier Abū l-Faḍl al-'Abbās ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Shīrāzī, his deputy Abū l-'Alā' Ṣā'id ibn Tābit and the eminent historian and prose stylist Abū Isḥāq al-Ṣābi'; by judges such as the Mu'tazilī Ibn Ma'rūf, Abū l-Qāsim al-Tanūkhī and Ibn Quray'a; by legal scholars such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Marwarrūdhī; by theologians like the Mu'tazilīs Abū l-Ḥasan al-Anṣārī and Abū 'Abdallāh al-Baṣrī; by grammarians and lexicographers such as Abū Sa'īd al-Sīrāfī, Ibn Durustawayh and 'Alī ibn 'Īsā al-Rummānī; by philologists and literary critics such as Abū 'Alī al-Ḥātimī and Hibatallāh ibn al-Munajjim; by poets like Ibn al-Ḥajjāj and Ibn al-Baqqāl; and by specialists of musical theory such as 'Alī ibn Hārūn ibn al-Munajjim or Abū l-Faraj himself.[68] Al-Muhallabī sought to establish and preserve his reputation by generosity and intelligent patronage. He was the first of the remarkable viziers whose encouragement of culture made the Būyid period so important for Arabic intellectual history; to one contemporary the gatherings of his salon recalled the golden age of the Barmakids.[69]

Despite his neglected appearance and personal uncleanliness, Abū l-Faraj fitted into this circle well, and al-Muhallabī, although he was famous for his fastidiousness, bore with his uncouth manners. Qualities such as wit, a sharp tongue and skill in satire, and gifts as a *raconteur* combined with vast culture and multifarious learning evidently made up for Abū l-Faraj's eccentricities. The familiar exchanges

between al-Muhallabī and his *nadīm* (boon companion) were preserved in a series of anecdotes which became part of popular tradition.[70] In a more serious context it was Abū l-Faraj who, as a representative of the Iraqi cultural tradition, confronted al-Mutanabbī on a philological question in al-Muhallabī's presence during the great poet's first visit to Baghdad.[71] Some of the poems which Abū l-Faraj dedicated to his patron have been recorded in the biographical literature. Of his extant works, *Al-imā' al-shawā'ir* was certainly commissioned by al-Muhallabī.[72] There is every reason to believe that the Aghānī was too, although Abū l-Faraj's reference to his patron in the preface is veiled: "The reason why I embarked on writing it [sc. the *Aghānī*] was that one of our chief officers of state(*ra'īs min ru'asā'inā*) asked me to compile it for him …"[73] While little information is extant about musical life in Būyid Baghdad,[74] al-Muhallabī was appreciative of singing and singing girls,[75] and music was an indispensable part of the informal gatherings at which he and his closest companions indulged in witty conversation, poetry and fine wines, abandoning their usual decorum.[76]

Al-Muhallabī was saved from disgrace by dying on campaign near Basra in 352/963, but Mu'izz al-Dawla had all his property seized and his family arrested. Even the humblest of those associated with his household were subject to measures of confiscation.[77] The sources are silent about what happened to Abū l-Faraj at this critical time, but there is no reason to suppose that he was treated any differently from the rest of al-Muhallabī's entourage. Well into his sixties by then, he must have abandoned any hope of finding a new patron.

He could still, however, earn a living by teaching. As usual, the biographical accounts give no indication of which period of a subject's life a given piece of information is relevant to, but from the time when Abū l-Faraj completed his first book, the *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn*,[78] and built up a reputation for an amazing knowledge of historical, literary, and musical reports and poetry, he must have attracted students. He is recorded as transmitting *ḥadīth*, and the names of some of those who read the *Aghānī* with him have been preserved.[79] He also dictated from his vast store of historical reports and anecdotes.[80] And he seems to have furnished the Umayyads of Spain with books, although the biographical sources merely report the fact without going into detail. For this was the time when the scholars and men of letters of Córdoba were engaged in assimilating the learning of the Mashriq.[80a]

There remain two problems in Abū l-Faraj's biography, his putative connection with Sayf al-Dawla and the date of his death. As far as the first issue is concerned, the earliest mention of Abū l-Faraj having any contact with the Hamdanid ruler is the report in Yāqūt's biographical notice of him that he gave the Hamdanid a copy of the *Aghānī*, for which he received a reward of a thousand dinars.[81] The same information is given independently by Ibn Khallikān,[82] and it has been blown up by later mediaeval and modern scholars into the claim that Abū l-Faraj spent time in Aleppo. But there are good reasons for rejecting the latter claim out of hand and treating the former one with much reserve. First, Abū l-Faraj's name does not occur in any mediaeval account of Sayf al-Dawla's literary circle.[83] And there is no other indication of him showing any interest in the Hamdanids. Second, it is

inconceivable that he would have risked angering his patron al-Muhallabī by offering his *magnum opus* to anyone else, and in particular to a ruler with whom the Būyids often had tense relations. The incident could only have taken place in the four years which separated al-Muhallabī's death from Sayf al-Dawla's, but by then the Hamdanid was a sick man and his days of glory were over. Third, unlike al-Muhallabī, Sayf al-Dawla had the reputation of being too occupied with campaigning and affairs of state to spend much time on musical entertainment.[84] It is not certain that he would have found the idea which is the starting point of the *Aghānī* very congenial. Fourth, the report implies, wrongly, that Abū l-Faraj had completed the *Aghānī*.[85] But whatever the explanation for Yāqūt's statement,[86] it is a measure of Sayf al-Dawla's reputation among later generations that the story, once put into circulation, has hardly ever been questioned.

The date of Abū l-Faraj's death is a more complicated matter. The oldest source, Ibn al-Nadīm, who knew Abū l-Faraj,[87] is vague, mentioning "the early 360s".[88] Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī, who saw Abū l-Faraj in Baghdad but failed to attend any of his lectures, gives 357 as the date of his death.[89] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī repeats Abū Nu'aym's date but offers 356 as an alternative, on the authority of Muḥammad ibn Abī l-Fawāris.[90] Later sources have usually followed this third version.

It is, however, contradicted by a passage in the *Adab al-ghurabā'*, as Yāqūt points out.[91] This mentions one of Abū l-Faraj's friends reading a graffito dated 362 on the wall of Mu'izz al-Dawla's abandoned palace at al-Shammāsīya.[92] It supports Ibn al-Nadīm's date, which must therefore be accepted as correct. The discrepancy between the dates can be explained, if it is accepted that after al-Muhallabī's death Abū l-Faraj fell on increasingly hard times and gradually disappeared from circulation; moreover he is said to have had a stroke, and to have suffered from mental confusion in his last years.[93] He would not be the only renowned scholar to have died in obscurity.[93a]

Although Abū l-Faraj spent most of his life among officials, men of letters and eminent scholars, and although his position as companion to al-Muhallabī afforded him a comfortable and agreeable existence, the age in which he lived had its darker side. Especially in the period before the Būyids established their authority in Iraq political life was turbulent and government instable. And as an official of the administration, he must have been well aware of this. An occasional remark in the *Aghānī* betrays his attitude to contemporary events.

When defending Ibn al-Mu'tazz's standing as a poet, he refers to the prince's violent end as a "most horrible murder";[94] he himself was eleven when it happened. Ibn al-Mu'tazz, who was strangled, was not the only member of the 'Abbāsid family to suffer violence in this period; the caliph al-Muqtadir fell in battle against his former general Mu'nis, and al-Qāhir, al-Muttaqī and al-Mustakfī were deposed and blinded. Lesser men fared no better. Viziers and important officials changed frequently as a result of court intrigues and conspiracies. The custom of fining dismissed officials had become established in the previous century,[95] but the use of torture to extract promises of reimbursement of ill-gotten gains became

much more common in this period. In the case of those who died in office, it was their relatives and most trusted assistants who were subjected to such treatment.[96] Apart from al-Muhallabī, Abū l-Faraj must have known a number of those whom this fate befell. As the remark quoted above shows, he was not indifferent to human suffering, and it is hard to imagine that the humiliation, torture and even death of educated and cultured acquaintances always left him unmoved, even when they belonged to an opposing faction.

Another glimpse of how he viewed his own times comes at the end of an anecdote in which ʿĀ'isha bint Abī Bakr recites a line by Labīd:

> Those in whose shadow life was good are gone, and I
> am left behind among their sons
> mange-ridden camels all.

ʿĀ'isha comments: "May God have mercy on Labīd! What would he have said if he had lived to see our contemporaries?" And each subsequent transmitter repeats this, replacing Labīd's name with that of the person from whom he heard the anecdote. When it comes to Abū l-Faraj's turn, however, he does not imitate his sources but says: "I can only ask God for help. For the situation is too terrible to describe."[97]

Historical facts support such an outburst. The first half of the fourth/tenth century was characterised by fighting among army commanders and their troops drawn from different ethnic groups, intrigues round the caliph, financial crises, price rises, riots and a breakdown in urban security leading to attacks on the houses of the wealthy and the less wealthy. More ominous for the future of Iraq, the irrigation system declined steadily from lack of maintenance and suffered serious damage in conflicts between army factions.[98] So profoundly was Baghdad affected by these developments that its built-up area in 345/956 was reduced to a tenth of what it had been under al-Muqtadir (295/908–320/932), according to a judge quoted by al-Tanūkhī;[99] even if this remark is not wholly accurate, it reflects a certain perception which must have been widespread among the elite.

It would also be possible to discern a decline in the humaneness, decorum and intellectual level of court life in the same period. Abū l-Faraj's contemporary al-Masʿūdī, who includes in the *Murūj al-dhahab* accounts of learned or entertaining discussions in front of the caliphs of the time, also refers to the frivolity of al-Muʿtamid, the cruelty of al-Muʿtaḍid, the vizier al-Qāsim ibn ʿUbaydallāh's killing of the caliph al-Muktafī's uncle despite al-Muktafī's belief that he represented no danger, the same vizier's elimination of the great poet Ibn al-Rūmī, and the violence of al-Qāhir.[100] In the *Murūj al-dhahab*, however, these events are inserted into a panorama of the political and cultural developments of each reign. The *Aghānī*, by contrast, in the section covering the period from al-Muʿtaṣim on, focusses almost exclusively on poets, musicians and their connections with colleagues and patrons, and the last caliph to whom it allots much space is al-Mutawakkil; it ignores the political, social and intellectual affairs of the time. The portrait the *Aghānī* paints of al-Mutawakkil is not that of the forceful and effective ruler,

but that of the lover of coarse humour and buffoonery, often combined with humiliation of members of his circle.[101] A rare glimpse of later court life shows the favourite Yūnus ibn Bughā continuing his revelries with al-Muwaffaq, apparently unaffected by either the death of his mother or the killing of his father.[102] There is more than a hint of decadence in these reports; whether it corresponds to historical fact or not, it conveys a certain view of the period. And the same vision is reflected in al-Bāqiṭānī's account, mentioned above, of by-gone officials possessing a competence and integrity which contemporaries cannot match.

Although nostalgia for a more glorious past is a conventional attitude among authors of the period,[103] there is a particular reason why Abū l-Faraj may have been more heartfelt in his regret at the passage of time than some other writers. The *Aghānī* chronicles how music and singing under the Umayyads and early 'Abbāsids became a highly developed art. From al-Mahdī on, the 'Abbasid caliphs had patronised and encouraged music, thus contributing to its age of glory in the third/ninth century. But al-Mu'taḍid (d. 289/902) was the last competent musician among the caliphs,[104] and al-Rāḍī (d. 329/940) the last caliph to leave a *dīwān*; poetry of his was set to music too.[105] His successor changed life at court radically, abolishing the position of *nadīm*.[106]

Thereafter patronage continued to be exercised by viziers and army commanders. While some viziers, like al-Muhallabī, were men of great culture, army commanders did not always understand Arabic[107] – a serious handicap for the appreciation of music which was essentially vocal. It is also possible that the idiom of 'Abbāsid court music was alien to them. At all events, the decline and disappearance of the caliphal court in this period deprived musicians of their most prestigious source of professional stimulus and financial encouragement.

The position of urban musicians and singers deteriorated for another reason too. In the early fourth/tenth century the Ḥanbalīs were gaining ground in Baghdad, not least among the victims of the political and economic crises, and with their hostility to music and singing they included attacks on the quarters where musicians lived and worked and the destruction of musical instruments in some of their riots.[108] The Ḥanbalī leader al-Barbahārī[109] is reported in the *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara* to have ordered his followers to kill a professional mourner famous for her performances of dirges over al-Ḥusayn, even though, according to al-Tanūkhī, she remained within the bounds of Sunnī taste, refraining from attacks on the Companions.[110] In 321/933 the caliph al-Qāhir, seeking to conciliate the Ḥanbalīs, prohibited music, wine and other alcoholic drinks, sent many singers into exile and had singing-girls sold; houses were even broken into and searched for women musicians.[111] When Abū l-Faraj, commenting on Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī's innovations in performance practice and their influence on later singers, emits his gloomy judgement on the current state of music: "[At all events] both the correct style of performance [i.e. Isḥāq al-Mawṣilī's] and the altered one [i.e. Ibrāhīm's] have died out in our time",[112] he may be exaggerating, but developments such as those just mentioned make it very likely that a decline in the art of singing took place.

The establishment of Būyid rule in Baghdad, the return of stability and increased prosperity, and the encouragement by a cultured patron, al-Muhallabī, of a brilliant and varied intellectual circle, must have represented to men such as Abū l-Faraj who had witnessed the preceding decades a halt to decline and the promise of a return to the glorious era of the early 'Abbāsid caliphate. The grandiose conception of the *Kitāb al-aghānī* as a panorama of Arabic music and culture from the pre-Islamic period to the end of the third/ninth century should be seen against this background.

Abū l-Faraj's works

Some thirty titles are ascribed to Abū l-Faraj in the mediaeval sources. Most of them are lost, quotations from a few have survived in later works, and four are extant.[113] The lost works which the sources name are:

1 *Kitāb mā nazala min al-Qur'ān fī amīr al-mu'minīn wa ahl baytih 'alayhim al-salām* (*FṬ*)
2 *Kitāb fih kalām Fāṭima 'alayhā l-salām fī Fadak* (*FṬ*)
3 *Nasab Banī 'Abd Shams* (*FN, -TB, IA, -WA*)
4 *Jamharat al-nasab* (*-TB, -IA, -WA*)
5 *Nasab Banī Shaybān* (*-TB, IA, -WA*)
6 *Nasab al-Mahāliba* (*-TB, IA, -WA*)
7 *Nasab Banī Taghlib* (*-TB, IA, -WA*)
8 *Nasab Banī Kilāb* (*-TB, -WA*)
9 *Ayyām al-'arab* (*-TB, -WA*)
10 *Ṭafḍīl dhī l-ḥijja* (*FN, IA*)
11 *Da'wat al-Najjār* (*YD, IA*) *al-aṭibbā'* (*WA*)
12 *Majmū' al-āthār wa-l-akhbār* (*FN, IA* (reversing the two terms))
13 *Al-akhbār wa-l-nawādir* (*FN, IA*)
14 *Manājīb al-khiṣyān* (*IA*)
15 *Ṣifat Hārūn* (*FN*)
16 *Al-farq wa-l-mi'yār bayn al-awghād wa-l-aḥrār* (*FN, IA*)
17 *Kitāb al-khammārīn wa-l-khammārāt* (*FN, IA*; *TB* and *WA* have *Al-ḥānāt*)
18 *Akhbār al-ṭufaylīyīn* (*FN, IA*)
19 *Akhbār Jaḥẓa al-Barmakī* (*YD, IA*)
20 *Al-mamālīk al-shu'arā'* (*IA*; corresponds to part of *FN*'s *Ash'ār al-mamālīk wa-l-imā'*)
21 *Kitāb al-ghilmān al-mughannīn* (*-TB, IA*)
22 *Adab al-samā'* (*FN, TB, IA*)

Titles 1 and 2 reflect the same kind of politico-religious interests as the *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn*.

The works on genealogy (titles 3 to 8) belong to a group which Abū l-Faraj is said to have sent to the Umayyad rulers of Spain. It is possible that the *Jamharat al-nasab* (Compendium of genealogy) included sections, and these have been interpreted by the sources as separate books. Of the *Jamharat al-nasab* Abū l-Faraj

says: "I have collected in it [the Arabs'] genealogies and historical reports, and I have entitled it *The book of validation and equity* (*Kitāb al-ta'dīl wa-l-intiṣāf*)".[114] *TB*'s mention of *Kitāb al-ta'dīl wa-l-intiṣāf fī ma'āthir al-'arab wa-mathālibihā* besides *Kitāb jamharat al-nasab* would therefore seem to be the result of a confusion. *IA*, too, lists *Kitāb al-ta'dīl wa-l-intiṣāf fī akhbār al-qabā'il wa-ansābihā* separately from the *Jamhara* on the strength of Abū l-Faraj's reference to it in the *Aghānī*, without realising that the two titles most likely designate the selfsame book.

It has been suggested that the *Compendium of Historical Reports and Narratives* (12) is the *"kitāb al-kabīr"* which Abū l-Faraj mentions in the *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn*.[115] One may also wonder whether there was any relationship between the *Majmū'* and the *Battle-days of the Arabs* (9).

There is no conclusive evidence that *The Description of Hārūn* (15) and *The Touchstone for Distinguishing Menials from Those of Noble Birth* (16) are related texts, as has been proposed.[116] It may be correct that the Hārūn of the first title is Abū 'Abdallāh Hārūn ibn 'Alī ibn al-Munajjim, the son of Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Hārūn ibn al-Munajjim. According to *FN*, the second work was a treatise on Hārūn ibn 'Alī, but the same source mentions 'Alī ibn Hārūn as replying to Abū l-Faraj with his own text, *Al-lafẓ al-muḥīṭ bi-naqd mā lafaẓa bih al-laqīṭ* (The complete refutation of the foundling's declaration).[117] Moreover, the beginning of the controversy may well go back to another treatise of 'Alī's, the *Risāla fī l-farq bayn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī wa-Isḥāq al-Mawṣilī fī l-ghinā'* (Treatise on the distinction between Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī and Isḥāq al-Mawṣilī in the matter of singing); the presence of "*farq*" in Abū l-Faraj's title suggests an echo of this sober designation. And given Abū l-Faraj's support for Isḥāq al-Mawṣilī in musical controversies, his engaging in a polemic on this subject is thoroughly in character. The exchange between Abū l-Faraj and Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī could be independent of the *Ṣifat Hārūn* and perhaps predate it.

A recent edition of the *Fihrist* proposes *Kitāb al-Ḥammādīn* instead of *Kitāb al-khammārīn wa-l-khammārāt* (17).[117a] In that case the subject of the book would have been Ḥammād al-Rāwiya, Ḥammād 'Ajrad and Ḥammād al-Zibriqān, three Kufan poets and libertines whose lives straddled the end of the Umayyad and beginning of the 'Abbāsid era, and who were suspected of *zandaqa* (heresy, more specifically Manichaeism).

The preference for *IA*'s *Al-mamālīk al-shu'arā'* (20) over *FN*'s *Ash'ār al-imā' wa-l-mamālīk* arises from the fact that *Al-imā' al-shawā'ir*, which has recently been discovered and published, is an independent book, and so, presumably, was *Al-mamālīk al-shu'arā'*.

Apart from these titles listed in the biographical sources, Abū l-Faraj refers to a treatise of his on the basic rules of the tones:

23 *Risāla fī 'ilal al-nagham*[118]

Fragments from three of Abū l-Faraj's books mentioned in the sources have survived, namely:

24 *Al-qiyān* (*FN, YD, -TB, IA* (as *Akhbār al-qiyān*))

25 *Al-diyārāt* (*FN, YD, TB, IA*)
26 *Mujarrad al-aghānī* (*FN, YD, -TB, IA*)

Recently, texts assumed to belong to *The Singing Girls* (24) and *The Monasteries* (25) have been published. The printed *Al-qiyān* contains sections on thirty-nine singing girls, but in only eight instances does the source from which the material is taken specify that it is quoting from Abū l-Faraj's *Qiyān*.[119] In the printed *Al-diyārāt* the proportion of material expressly drawn from Abū l-Faraj's book is even lower; there is only one reference to it, although a number of passages may reasonably be assumed to be derived from it.[120]

The value of these attempts at reconstruction is, first, that they draw attention to later works which quote from Abū l-Faraj, and thus provide information about the reception of his texts. And, second, from the fragments attributed to these books a few common characteristics emerge. In *Al-qiyān* Abū l-Faraj several times mentions from whom a singing girl learned her art, and this information may have been a standard feature of the presentation of the subjects.[121] Some sections on monasteries in *Al-diyārāt* have a brief indication of the monastery's location, its surroundings or its history, and this, too, may have been a characteristic of the book.[122] But the published *Al-qiyān* and *Al-diyārāt* cannot take the place of the authentic texts, for the sources from which they have been put together only picked and chose what interested them in Abū l-Faraj's works.[123] Moreover, it is almost certain that the later sources omitted performance indications, which could be expected to occur frequently in the *Qiyān* and were not absent from the *Diyārāt*.[124]

A fragment of the *Book of the Songs Only* (26) is designated as such in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's *'Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'*. It consists of a four-line poem by al-Ma'mūn with the following comment: "*qāla Abū l-Faraj: wa-l-shi'ru li-l-Ma'mūni fī Jibrā'īla bni Bakhtīshū'a l-mutaṭabbibi wa-l-ghinā'u li-Mutayyamin khafīfu ramal*" (Abū l-Faraj says that the poetry was composed by al-Ma'mūn about Jibrā'īl ibn Bakhtīshū' the physician, and the setting was by Mutayyam in the light *ramal* rhythm).[125] It may be assumed that the whole book consisted of similar combinations of texts with performance indications.

27 *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn* (*FṬ, FN, TB, IA, WA*)
28 *Al-imā' al-shawā'ir* (*FN* (as *Ash'ār al-imā' wa-l-mamālīk*), *YD, TB, IA, WA*)
29 *Adab al-ghurabā'* (*FN* (as *Adab al-ghurabā' min ahl al-faḍl wa-l-adab*), *TB* (as *Ādāb al-ghurabā'*), *IA* (as *Udabā' al-ghurabā'*), *WA* (as *Ādāb al-ghurabā'*))
30 *Kitāb al-aghānī* (*FṬ, FN, YD, TB, IA, WA*)

These books by Abū l-Faraj are extant and have been published.

The first of them, the *Unnatural Deaths of the Ṭālibids*,[126] may be classified as a Shī'ī martyrology, although one distinguished by a scholarly approach and a generally dispassionate tone. It relates information about those of the descendants of the Prophet's uncle Abū Ṭālib who met an unnatural death in the period starting with the Prophet's lifetime and ending at the time of writing, Jumādā I, 313 (Aug–Sept 925).

It includes not only those who, having risen up against the government, were killed in battle, executed or poisoned, but also those who were kept in prison until they died and those who went underground or fled to distant lands for fear of the authorities and were never able to return to legality. The last few pages of the book list Ṭālibids who met a violent death at the hands of relatives, bedouin, Carmathians or other non-governmental agencies. Altogether over 200 individuals are treated, though in greatly differing detail.[127]

The book is organised chronologically, the entries on each Ṭālibid having a standard format: name, genealogy (including the mother's name, where known), (sometimes) a profile sketch, the events leading up to the death and the death itself. In the case of Ṭālibids who transmitted *ḥadīths*, those from whom and to whom they transmitted are mentioned. Sometimes an elegy rounds off an entry. Where one of the great Shī'ī uprisings is discussed, Abū l-Faraj mentions the personal information about the various Ṭālibid participants one after the other before he embarks on an account of the uprising itself. In such cases names of supporters of the Ṭālibids who also fought may be tacked on haphazardly at the end. Only in the last part of the work is Abū l-Faraj forced by the meagre information at his disposal to abandon this scheme.

The *Maqātil* is constructed round a core of information which is already given, the list of Ṭālibids who met an unnatural death. It is biographically orientated in two ways. In principle, each individual is allotted a separate entry (even if the major uprisings are treated as collective experiences). And in the greater part of the book, which deals with the 'Abbāsid period, the biographical entries are grouped in sections according to the reigns of the caliphs under whom the Ṭālibids came to grief. These sections often begin with a summary of the policy adopted by the caliph concerned towards the family of Abū Ṭālib. As far as techniques of scholarship are concerned, the chain of transmitters (*isnād*) is generally used to introduce material, with reports being combined where appropriate.[128] But genealogies, profile sketches, some historical background information and most of the lists of names of recent Ṭālibid fatalities are given without sources. Abū l-Faraj sometimes comments on the accuracy of information, tells the reader when he has made a selection from material, or justifies the inclusion of a given report or even of a personality who does not possess the moral stature announced in the introduction as a criterion for treatment in the book.[129] Thus, although the *Maqātil* is put together from material Abū l-Faraj collected from older scholars, the reader is regularly reminded that he is the compiler.

The second extant text, *Al-imā' al-shawā'ir* (*The Slave Poetesses*), was long thought to be lost, but has recently been edited from a single MS. in Tunis.[130] It consists of a collection of reports about slave poetesses of the 'Abbāsid period which Abū l-Faraj put together in a few days for al-Muhallabī.[131] A preface explaining the occasion for the book is followed by 31 section devoted to thirty-three women poets, with the *akhbār* in two cases relating to two women together. Many sections begin with Abū l-Faraj's profile of the subject. Most of them are very short, but three, devoted to al-Nāṭifī's slave-girl 'Inān, Faḍl and 'Arīb, include numerous anecdotes

and quotations of poetry. Abū l-Faraj has fulfilled his promise to order the sections chronologically and according to the poetesses' gifts by using each of these leading figures to introduce a group of sections of lesser artists of the same period.[132] Taken together, the short sections build up a general picture of the slave poetess, while the longer ones provide an in-depth treatment of three important aspects of her activity, competition with fellow-poets, *ghazal* and panegyric.

Despite the great difference in subject matter and tone between the *Imā'* and the *Maqātil*, the two books reflect a similiar approach to compilation. They are organised around people chronologically, as far as possible, and they both illustrate a capacity to concentrate on a single theme. Although the material is chiefly drawn from sources named in *isnāds*, Abū l-Faraj often introduces a section with his own thumble-nail sketch of the subject.

The third text, the *Adab al-ghurabā'* (*On Being a Stranger, Illustrated in Prose and Poetry*) was also rediscovered recently.[133] In the preface Abū l-Faraj speaks of the difficulty of enduring a reversal of fortune from prosperity to want and a decline in social standing, and outlines the psychological effects of such trials on those who suffer them. Indirectly, he is describing his own situation, and to distract his thoughts he turns to the contemplation of the deeds and words of men of past times, seeking consolation in them.[134] The book itself consists of over 70 treatments in prose or poetry of *ghurba*, absence from the homeland and loved ones, or an idea called forth by association with it. The attitudes to this predicament vary, so that while a mood of melancholy predominates, there are more light-hearted moments, and the final anecdote strikes an optimistic note, suggesting that Abū l-Faraj's venture into auto-therapy may have succeeded.[134a]

The *Adab al-ghurabā'* was neither commissioned, like *Al-imā' al-shawā'ir* and the *Aghānī*, nor is it a logical outcome of Abū l-Faraj's studies, like the *Maqātil*. It has a personal and informal character which they all lack.[135] It does not draw on the same sources as Abū l-Faraj's other books; indeed much of its material is given with no source at all.[136] It is not organised chronologically or biographically (given that the characters are often nameless strangers, this would be impossible), nor does it start from a core of given information, Ṭālibids who came to a sticky end, slave poetesses of some repute, or songs. But it may well resemble other books by Abū l-Faraj which have not survived, such as *Historical Reports and Entertaining Tales* (13), or even *On Listening to Music* (22), whose title also includes the term "*adab*". And like some *Aghānī* articles it exhibits a method of compilation in which the subject is given an all-round treatment, without the material being organised into clearly defined sections.[137]

The mediaeval scholar Yāqūt pointed out that there are two discrepancies between the *Ghurabā'*'s text and the most commonly accepted facts about Abū l-Faraj's life. The first is the reference to the graffito on Mu'izz al-Dawla's palace dated 362, and the second to the author's passion for the son of an army officer in his youth, in the year that Mu'izz al-Dawla died (356/967).[138] But if the date of death which Ibn al-Nadīm gives for Abū l-Faraj, "a few years after 360", is accepted, the difficulty with the mention of 362 is resolved. Abū l-Faraj speaking

of himself as being in his youth in 356 poses a greater problem. If the text is taken as it stands, however, one biographical source offers an explanation, namely that he suffered from mental confusion in his last years.[139]

Over against this difficulty must be set the two passages where the *Ghurabā'* gives performance indications.[140] These are not the elaborate presentations of settings frequent in the *Aghānī*, but simply indications of the rhythmic mode, such as are also encountered in *Al-imā' al-shawā'ir*.[141] Apart from Abū l-Faraj's books, hardly any mediaeval Arabic texts mention song settings; I know of only the *Mukhtār min kitāb al-lahw wa-l-malāhī* of Ibn Khurdhādhbih, and the *Ash'ār awlād al-khulafā' wa-akhbāruhum* of al-Ṣūlī, both older contemporaries of Abū Faraj, the *Kitāb al-diyārāt* of al-Shābushtī, who probably lived at about the same time, and the *Kitāb al-muḥdath fī al-aghānī* of the fifth/eleventh century Ibn Nāqiyā, passages from which are preserved in the *Masālik al-abṣār* of Ibn Fadlallāh al-'Umarī.[142] To include two performance indications in a book not devoted principally to songs or to poems set to music must be regarded as Abū l-Faraj's stamp on the work.

As has been mentioned, Abū l-Faraj undertook the *Book of Songs* (30) in response to a request from an unnamed high official who had heard that the *Kitāb al-aghānī* attributed to Isḥāq al-Mawṣilī was not genuine – a view with which Abū l-Faraj concurred.[143]

The *Aghānī*, which is chiefly constructed round songs, falls into three parts. In the first (vols I–IX, 249) the core of given information is provided by the Three Choicest Songs and then the other songs making up the Top Hundred which Isḥāq al-Mawṣilī chose for al-Wāthiq, followed by other groups of songs: those that combined ten or eight tones, the three songs in the *ramal* rhythmic mode, Ma'bad's five songs with nicknames, his Seven Cities, and Ibn Surayj's corresponding Seven Songs. In the second part (IX, 250–X, 286) caliphs and their descendants who composed songs form the core, and they are treated in chronological order, the caliphs from 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz to al-Mu'taḍid being followed by princes (and one princess) from Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī to 'Abdallāh ibn al-Mu'tazz. The third part (X, 286–XXIV, 261) is constructed round a core of songs chosen by Abū l-Faraj himself.[143a] Although the *Aghānī* starts out with articles on poets and composers regularly alternating, the fact that there were fewer composers and their lives were less well documented than those of poets means that in the later volumes treatments of musicians are fairly uncommon.

The decision to use lists of songs as the core of the book led to an unusual way of arranging the material. Abū l-Faraj points out in the preface, somewhat defensively, that some readers might have expected him to order the songs according to rhythmic modes (*ṭarā'iq*),[144] the period and rank of the singers or the poets responsible for the lyrics.[145] He counters these suggestions with the following arguments. Since the Hundred Songs chosen for al-Wāthiq were not arranged according to the rank or period of their authors (Abū Qaṭīfa, the composer of the lyrics of the Top Song, is an altogether insignificant poet), classification along these lines was out of the question. As the same poems have been set to different rhythmic modes, ordering poems according to setting would have led to repetitions. And working

through all the settings of verses of a given poet before treating the *akhbār* connected with them would have been monotonous. The aim of the book is to cover both songs and the reports about them, including the information which the reader expects to find, while avoiding redundancy and longwindedness and observing the *adab* principle of regular variations in subject and tone.[146]

Although Abū l-Faraj's detailed justification of his organisation of material in the *Aghānī* suggests that such an arrangement was unfamiliar, he may well have acquired the idea for it from earlier works. Older books of songs (and it is to this genre that the *Aghānī*, through its title, relates itself) have not survived, but so far as can be judged, they consisted simply of the texts of songs with their melodic and rhythmic modes.[147] Isḥāq al-Mawṣilī's *Kitāb al-aghānī* might be thought to have provided a model for Abū l-Faraj's book of the same name, but the references to it in the *Aghānī* and the *Fihrist* indicate that it was organised on different lines. Ibn al-Nadīm describes it as being in ten parts and lists the initial line of poetry in each one; this list bears no relation to the ordering of material in Abū l-Faraj's book. He also quotes the verdict reported by Abū l-Faraj and going back to Ḥammād ibn Isḥāq al-Mawṣilī that the only genuine part of the *Aghānī* circulating under Isḥāq's name is the first one, on the legitimacy of listening to music (*al-rukhṣa*).[148] There is no such section in Abū l-Faraj's book, nor is there any place for it in the scheme he devised, although *akhbār* on the subject are scattered through various articles.[149]

Another book which Isḥāq at least worked on comes somewhat closer to Abū l-Faraj's *Aghānī*, as far as the contents are concerned. It is the one he describes in a letter to 'Alī ibn Hishām:

> And furthermore I am engaged in writing an entertaining, original book which includes the names, genealogies and countries of residence of eminent singers [*al-qawm*], their economic situation and the period in which they lived, the differences between them in their manner of singing and composing, some of the reports about them, and also the accounts of the well-known and memorable singing girls of the Hijaz, Kufa and Basra, the poems which were composed about them, their owners, who bought them, and who their fans were. [I also mention] which legal experts and noble members of the community considered listening to music legitimate.[150]

Between this projected book and Abū l-Faraj's *Aghānī* there is considerable common ground with regard to the subjects treated, but there are also fundamental differences. Isḥāq is concerned exclusively with musicians and music, he does not mention ordering the material in any particular way (though he may have done so), and because he was working about a century before Abū l-Faraj he had less material to draw on and fewer examples of types of compilation before him. This letter may very well have suggested the general idea of a Book of Songs to Abū l-Faraj, but he then evolved a much more sophisticated scheme for it which integrated not only singers and music but also poetry, poets and important historical events into the general frame.

The *Aghānī* ran to some five thousand folios, as Ibn al-Nadīm notes. Its length may not impress the modern reader familiar with encyclopaedic compilations of the later Middle Ages such as the *Nihāyat al-'arab* or the *Ta'rīkh Dimashq*, but to contemporaries it must have seemed immense. It is referred to almost always as "*Kitāb al-aghānī al-kabīr*", the Great Book of Songs.[151]

Because of its size many of those who speak about it seem not to realise that it is unfinished. The Dār al-kutub edition is, however, unequivocal; it ends with "Here al-Iṣbahānī's account breaks off".[152] Moreover, at the end of the book some articles are no more than fragments. For instance, the final article, *Akhbār al-Mutalammis*, treats only the poet's name and his tribal forebears, subjects which normally constitute the introductory section of an article, while the *Akhbār 'Abdallāh ibn Muṣ'ab wa-nasabuh*, after sketching the profile of a man of the early 'Abbāsid period who possessed some political weight as well as poetic gifts, gives some interesting reports and then suddenly stops. It is hard not to feel that there was more to be said about 'Abdallāh, but that Abū l-Faraj did not get round to it.[153] It was perhaps inevitable that he should not finish the *Aghānī*, once he had embarked on the treatment of all the songs he considered worthwhile. For, by departing from finite groups of songs like the Top Hundred and the Songs of the Caliphs and Princes, he found himself confronted with a boundless quantity of material. The conception of the third part of the work implies a book almost without end.

Textual problems in the Aghānī

The unfinished state of the *Aghānī* has to be borne in mind in any discussion of lacunas in the text or other textual problems. Before examining these, I would like to point out two other features of the *Aghānī* text relevant in this connexion. First, surviving *Aghānī* MSS are always in parts, but the number of parts (or volumes) in a MS varies from two to about sixty.[154] A copyist combining parts from two different MSS carelessly could well upset the order of articles, with the risk of portions of text being lost or misplaced. Second, from the biographical sources it is clear that Abū l-Faraj read the *Aghānī* with students. Assuming that he taught it more than once, he would have been working through it several times, so that in the early sections he might well refer to passages coming later as material which had already been mentioned, because he knew that he had included it.

Of the textual problems it is the lacunas which have attracted most attention, and in particular the absence of articles on Abū Nuwās and on Abū l-'Atāhiya and 'Utba after Abū l-Faraj had announced them.[155] Although one cannot exclude the hypothesis that these articles are lost, as scholars have generally assumed, it is quite as likely that Abū l-Faraj never assembled them, even if he had collected material for them. In particular it is improbable that an *Aghānī* article on Abū Nuwās should have been lost, and lost immediately, while so many articles on obscure poets survived.[156]

On the other hand, some passages of the *Aghānī* manifestly have not survived. There are lacunas in poetry, such as the verses by al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī which lack

two half-lines.[157] Some *akhbār* are incomplete; Mutayyam's article ends with her being asked by al-Ma'mūn to cap two lines of poetry, but the reader is left to guess how she does it. The text continues with the introductory song to Jarīr's article.[158] In the article on Ka'b al-Ashqarī a *khabar* in which 'Abd al-Malik wishes poets would do him as proud as Ka'b did al-Muhallab with one of his panegyrics is followed by some lines of *hijā'*; the *khabar* must originally have been rounded off by one or two lines of the panegyric, which is quoted extensively earlier on, and the *hijā'*, part of another *khabar*, introduced by an explanatory text of some kind.[159] One of the *akhbār* about Ash'ab runs the chain of transmitters into the beginning of the story, the first phrases of which are lost.[160] The last two anecdotes about the singer 'Amr ibn Abī l-Kannāt both turn on the exceptional carrying power of his voice; they form a pair with a shared motif. In the first, a eye-witness recounts how at a drinking session 'Amr asks those present whom they would like to invite, they mention a name, and wait until the proposed guest (evidently a man of habit) is accustomed to go down to the market, when he starts to sing. Soon the guest appears, explaining that it was 'Amr's voice which led him to them, a distance of three miles. In the second *khabar*, the narrator is someone who hears 'Amr's voice from afar and follows it until he finds him singing. The text of what 'Amr sings in this second anecdote is the song introducing the next article, whereas he must have sung the same song as in the previous *khabar* or one very like it.[161]

Sometimes it is not easy to decide whether part of the text has been lost, or whether it was never there to begin with. The article on al-Aḍbaṭ ibn Quray' begins with a *khabar* explaining how he got his nickname, but the genealogy which customarily introduces articles on early Arab poets is missing. Has it been lost, or was it never there? Conversely, the article on 'Amr ibn Sa'īd ibn Zayd gives only his genealogy and an explanation of who his father was, before launching into a *khabar* which quotes the introductory song for which he composed the lyrics. Did the *akhbār* about the poet himself ever exist?[162]

Portions of text may be misplaced, as is the case in the section on al-Sulayk ibn al-Sulaka's death. According to one version, while he was under the protection of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Muwaylik al-Khath'amī he raped a Khath'amī girl and was killed by a fellow-tribesman. The *Aghānī* gives some other lines of the poem in which the killer refuses to pay 'Abd al-Malik blood money before the *khabar* where the crucial line referring to al-Sulayk is quoted. Here the version in Ibn Manẓūr's *Mukhtār al-aghānī* is helpful, for it re-establishes the original order of the *akhbār*.[163]

Another problem is posed by four songs labelled as belonging to the Hundred Songs in volume XII, long after the song collections have been exhausted. This question will be treated in connection with the framework of songs in the *Aghānī*.[164]

Abū l-Faraj's use of past and future tenses in his references to material found elsewhere in the *Aghānī* have been observed not always to correspond to the reality of the text; in other words, sometimes he uses a past tense while the *khabar* or poem is to be found later on, or more rarely, he uses a future to indicate material which has already been treated. It is tempting to conclude from this that the order of the text has been disturbed in many places.[165] But, as pointed out above,

Abū l-Faraj's working and reworking of the text could explain these apparently inaccurate expressions.

Finally, the text of the *Aghānī* is not free of standard scribal errors, such as confusion of names in *isnāds* and slips of the pen.[166]

It has not been my intention to discuss the philological problems of the *Aghānī* exhaustively; that would need a book in itself. I considered it important, however, to indicate the existence of these problems. It will not have escaped the reader that the assumption underlying the discussion of them so far is that all resources have been exhausted for producing a better *Aghānī* text. Two objections may be raised to that. Many *Aghānī* MSS were not consulted in the preparation of the printed text.[166a] And, as the preceding remarks will have made clear, the mediaeval abridgements can sometimes be helpful. Yet the editors only took account of two of them.

As far as the *Aghānī* MSS are concerned, judging by the editors' prefaces to the printed editions, a number of the oldest ones, such as the fifth/eleventh century one in the Alexandria Baladīya collection (no. 1229 b) or the sixth/twelfth century British Museum ones (Or. 2075, 2076, 2077 and 2078), have not been exploited. Yet even if it is not practicable to undertake an edition of the *Aghānī* based on all the available manuscripts, at least some of these older ones could be compared with the printed editions and, depending on the results, an improved edition could be produced. The difficulties with the order of some articles might be cleared up. And the beginning of Abū l-Faraj's preface might even come to light; this would be an important discovery.

To see what such an exercise might achieve, I compared part of the printed text of the *Aghānī* with the equivalent passages in Or. 2076 and 2078. These two volumes are part of a copy made for the Fāṭimid caliph al-Ẓāfir (reg. 544/1149–549/1154) in 60 parts bound in 30 volumes.[167] The passages I examined, 200 pages of Dār al-kutub's volume IV and 225 pages of volumes XXI–XXII, produced a number of variants, but scarcely any which would alter the text significantly.[168] Perhaps the most interesting finding was that the MS was generally more accurate in marking the presence of performance indications with the word *ṣawt*, or in not writing *ṣawt* when these indications were absent, and that on one occasion it had more musical information than the printed text, thus clearing up an apparent inconsistency.[169] This greater proficiency in dealing with the musical side of the *Aghānī* is quite understandable, if one bears in mind that Fāṭimid practice was still not far removed from the musical world of Baghdad.

My main aim in undertaking this partial comparison of the printed edition with one old MS was to discover if the asides which occur in the text are the author's or have been added by copyists. For the analysis of the asides forms a large part of this study, and it is essential to establish from whom they originate. Here the edition and the MS agree with each other entirely. In other words, the asides go back to the Fāṭimid period at least. And since similar observations on matters such as the combining of reports or the accuracy of information are found in the *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn* too, it seems reasonable to assume that asides are characteristic of Abū