

LITERATUR

Sebastian Günther: Quellenuntersuchungen zu den "Maqātil at-Ṭālibiyyīn" des Abū l-Farağ al-Iṣbahānī (gest. 356/967). Ein Beitrag zur Problematik der mündlichen und schriftlichen Überlieferung in der mittelalterlichen arabischen Literatur. Hildesheim & c., Georg Olms Verlag, 1991. (= Arabistische Texte und Studien, 4). 249 pp. br. DM 44,80.

In terms of scholarly method, Abū l-Farağ al-Iṣbahānī was a conservative. He used the *isnād* (chain of authorities) consistently in his historical work, the *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, his comprehensive survey of musical, literary and social life, the *Ağānī*, and even his much more modest book about slave-poetesses, *Al-imā' al-šawā'ir*; this is in marked contrast to, for instance, his contemporary al-Mas'ūdī. Al-Iṣbahānī's attachment to the *isnād* makes his books ideal material for research into the use of sources and the way they have been transmitted—quite apart from any intrinsic importance the books themselves may have.

Sebastian Günther's study of the sources of Shi'ite martyrology *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn* is a slightly revised version of a Halle dissertation. It consists of four chapters. The first two set out the book's aims and sketch al-Iṣbahānī's life and the character of the *Maqātil*. The third discusses the problems posed by the analysis of sources in medieval Arabic literature; it describes the nature of the educational system and attitudes to oral and written transmission of knowledge, it presents the technical terms indicating the different kinds of transmission, and it traces the development of historical and in particular biographical writing. Finally it addresses the central question of source analysis and proposes a list of terms, each designating a different type of transmitter or source. After explaining the technical aspects of employing a computer to analyse *isnāds*, the author, in the final chapter, sets out his conclusions about al-Iṣbahānī's method of quoting his sources and then provides a list of the authorities the *Maqātil* draws on. This list takes up a little more than half the book.

It is the last part of chapter three and the whole of chapter four where the contribution of this book lies. The list of terms to be applied to transmitters and sources includes a number of new and important distinctions. Thus, *people* are classified (i) according to their function in the process of transmission (transmitter; various categories of informant); (ii) according to their significance for the genesis of the work (authority, main, original etc. authority); (iii) according to their involvement in the consolidation of transmitted material and the recording of it in writing; while *sources* are classified (i) according to their formal position in the transmission process (e.g. direct, final source); (ii) according to their importance for the compilation as a whole (main, essential, original source); (iii) by nature, that is, oral or written (where gradation exists from sources indicated by name to sources which may have been in writing). As the author points out, most of these categories are not mutually exclusive, and it is possible, thanks to them, to acquire more insight into the com-

plexity of the processes lying behind the compilations which have come down to us, and a more accurate appreciation of the role of given individuals and textual units.

The list of informants includes all those who furnished al-Iṣbahānī directly with material, as well as those whose material can be identified as a written or important essential source of the *Maqātil*. It mentions how often the individual occurs, characterises him according to the criteria referred to above, and establishes his relationship to the compiler and other names in the *isnāds*. It also indicates when he transmitted written material. A table gives the places where the informant is mentioned and the way in which his material is introduced.

This directory of the sources of the *Maqātil* is indispensable for anyone concerned with this text or with others which contain related material. It is also required reading for all those working on problems of transmission. As the author observes, further investigations have not only to take account of external source criticism, as he has done, but also to undertake the analysis of the transmitted texts. For there is a limit to what the *isnāds* can say, and with this book that limit has probably been reached.

Curiously, in this exhaustive study of sources, there is one category which has been overlooked—the anonymous ones, introduced by *dukira* or some such term. In most cases the compiler will have been unable to trace them, but it is conceivable that he was unwilling to name them (cf. Günther's comment on al-Iṣbahānī's silence about al-Ṭabarī, p. 195), or even that they might have preferred to remain anonymous. In any case a full picture of sources cannot overlook the unnamed ones, although their significance will vary from work to work.

If other similar analyses of sources are undertaken, it would be helpful to include a list of the sources which can be shown to have been in writing. It is slightly surprising that the author did not provide one; after all, there is one in Fleischhammer's *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb al-ağānī* (Habilitationsschrift, Halle 1965; still unfortunately unpublished) which represents an earlier stage of the same type of analysis. Another useful list would include simply the names of those people who occur in the *isnāds* but are otherwise insignificant, the advantage being that a reader would know that they have not been neglected through an oversight. For oversights can occur; surely Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Musayyab (*Maqātil*, 700) and al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Quṭrubullī (*ibid.* 703) should have been listed, but I could not find them. Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥamza's entry should have added to it pp. 705–715 of the *Maqātil*, since al-Iṣbahānī evidently drew on his records of contemporary history for the names of 'Alids who had met a violent end not long before. Despite the obvious advantages which computers offer, they cannot prevent small puzzles cropping up, for instance on p. 128 of this book, where Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd is given as transmitting material from Muḥammad ibn Maṣṣūr al-Murādī 13 times, whereas Muḥammad ibn Maṣṣūr is Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd's source on 12 occasions on p. 208.

These, and other minor criticisms which could be made, do not detract from the overall value of this book. Not the least of its virtues is that it directs attention to the need for accompanying internal source criticism. Only half the problems connected with sources could be tackled here; it is to be hoped that Dr. Günther will address himself to the others as well.

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