

Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur

(820 – 15 August 893)

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- WORKS: *Kitab al-manthur wa al-manzum* (Book of Prose and Poetry);
Kitab al-mu'allifin (Book of Authors), also known as *Akhbar al-mu'allifin* (Accounts Concerning Authors);
Kitab Baghdad (Book of Baghdad), also known as *Tarikh Baghdad* (History of Baghdad), *Akhbar Baghdad* (Accounts Concerning Baghdad), *Tarikh akhbar al-khulafa'* (Chronicle of Accounts Concerning the Caliphs), and *Akhbar al-khulafa'* (Accounts Concerning the Caliphs);
Akhbar al-muluk (Accounts Concerning Rulers);
Kitab al-hujjab (Book of Chamberlains);
Kitab tarbiyat [or *marthiyat*, or *martabat*] *Hurmuz ibn Kisra Anushirwan* (The Education [or Elegy, or High Rank] of Hurmuz ibn Kisra Anushirwan);
Kitab khabar al-malik al-'ali [or *'ani*] *fi tadbir al-mamlakah wa al-siyasah* (The Story of the Great [or Distressed] King and the Management of the Kingdom and Administration);
Kitab al-malik al-muslih wa al-wazir al-mu'in ([The Story of] the Virtuous King and the Supportive Vizier); **[Q1: Brackets at the beginning necessary?]**
Kitab al-malik al-Babili wa al-malik al-Misri al-baghiyayn wa al-malik al-hakim [or *al-halim*] *al-Rumi* ([The Story of] the Two Tyrannical Babylonian and Egyptian Kings and the Wise [or Gentle] Byzantine King);
Kitab fadl al-'Arab 'ala al-'Ajam (Book on the Superiority of the Arabs over the Persians);
Kitab mufakharat al-ward wa al-narjis (Boasting-match between the Rose and the Narcissus), also known as *Kitab fada'il al-ward 'ala al-narjis* (Book on the Superiority of the Rose to the Narcissus);
Kitab al-hadaya (Book of Gifts);
Kitab al-jawahir (Book of Jewels);
Kitab al-muwashsha (The Adorned [or Embroidered]);
Kitab al-Ghullah wa al-ghalil (Book of Burning Thirst and Ardent Desire), or *Kitab al-'illah wa al-'alil* (Book of Affliction and the Afflicted), or *al-Hila* [or *al-Huliy*, or *al-Hal*] *wa al-hulal* (Ornament and Raiment);

- Kitab akhbar al-mutazarrifat* (Accounts of Women Displaying/Affecting **[Q2: Is one a more accurate translation than the other?]** Wit and Elegance);
- Kitab al-mughramin* (Book of the Infatuated);
- Kitab al-mu'nis* (Book of Amusement);
- Kitab al-muzah* [or *mizaj*] *wa al-mu'atabat* (Book of (Love-)Play [or Temperament] and Reproaches);
- Kitab lisan al-'uyun* (The Language of the Eyes);
- Kitab qalaq al-mushtaq* (The Disquiet of the Yearning);
- Kitab al-mushtaq* (The Derivative);
- Kitab al-mukhtalif min al-mu'talif* (Book of the Differences between Similar [Names]);
- Kitab al-ma'rufin* [or *al-mu'riqin*] *min al-anbiya'* (Book about the Known [or Noble] Prophets);
- Kitab jamharat Bani Hashim* (Book of Collected [Genealogies] of the Hashim Tribe);
- Kitab al-khayl, kabir* (The Book of Horses, Unabridged);
- Kitab al-tard* (Book of the Hunt);
- Kitab maqatil al-fursan* (Book of Fallen Heroes);
- Kitab maqatil al-shu'ara'* (Book of Slain Poets);
- Kitab asma' al-shu'ara' al-awa'il* (Book of Names of the First Poets);
- Kitab alqab al-shu'ara' wa man 'urifa bi al-kuna wa man 'urifa bi al-ism* (The Book of Poet's **[Q3: Poets'?)** Nicknames, and of Those Known by Their Agnomens, and of Those Known by Their Given Names);
- Kitab al-jami' fi al-shu'ara' wa akhbarihim* (The Compendium on Poets and Accounts about Them);
- Kitab sariqat al-shu'ara'* (Book of the Plagiarisms of the Poets);
- Kitab sariqat Abi Tammam* (Book of the Plagiarisms of Abu Tammam);
- Kitab sariqat al-Buhturi min Abi Tammam* (Book of the Plagiarisms of al-Buhturi from Abu Tammam);
- Kitab [fi] ikhtiyar* [or *ikhtiyara*] *ash'ar al-shu'ara'* ([Book of] Selection [or, Selections] of Poetry by [Various] Poets);
- Kitab ikhtiyar shi'r Imra' al-Qays* (A Selection of the Poetry of Imru' al-Qays);
- Kitab ikhtiyar shi'r al-rajaz* (A Selection of *Rajaz*-meter Poetry);
- Kitab ikhtiyar shi'r Bakr ibn al-Nattah* (A Selection of the Poetry of Bakr ibn Nattah);
- Kitab ikhtiyar shi'r al-'Attabi* (A Selection of the Poetry of al-'Attabi);
- Kitab ikhtiyar shi'r Mansur al-Namari* (A Selection of the Poetry of Mansur al-Namari);
- Ikhtiyar shi'r Abi al-'Atahiyah* (A Selection of the Poetry of Abu al-'Atahiyah);
- Kitab ikhtiyar shi'r Muslim* (A Selection of the Poetry of Muslim);
- Kitab ikhtiyar shi'r Di'bil* (A Selection of the Poetry of Di'bil);

- Akhbar Bashshar wa ikhtiyar shi'rihi* (Accounts about Bashshar and a Selection of His Poetry), also known as *Kitab ikhtiyar shi'r Bashshar* (A Selection of the Poetry of Bashshar), and *Bashshar wa al-ikhtiyar min shi'rihi* (Bashshar and a Selection of His Poetry);
- Kitab akhbar Marwan wa Al Marwan wa ikhtiyar ash'arihim* (Accounts about Marwan and the House of Marwan and Selections from Their Poetry), also known as *Marwan wa al-ikhtiyar min shi'rihi wa akhbar Al Marwan* (Marwan, Selections from His Poetry, and Accounts about the House of Marwan);
- Akhbar Ibn Harmah wa mukhtar shi'rihi* (Accounts about Ibn Harmah and Selected Poetry);
- Akhbar wa shi'r 'Ubaydallah Ibn Qays al-Ruqayyat* (Accounts and Poetry of 'Ubaydallah Ibn Qays al-Ruqayyat);
- Kitab akhbar Ibn Mayyadah* (Accounts about Ibn Mayyadah);
- Kitab akhbar Ibn Munadhir* (Accounts about Ibn Munadhir);
- Akhbar Ibn al-Dumaynah* (Accounts about Ibn al-Dumaynah);
- Kitab akhbar Abi al-'Ayna'* (Accounts about Abu al-'Ayna');
- Kitab man anshada shi'ran wa ujiba bi kalam* (Book of Those Who Recited Poetry and Were Answered in Words);
- Kitab al-mu'tadhirin* (Book of Those Who Make Apologies in Verse);
- Kitab I'tidhar Wahb min dartatihi [or habqatih]* (Book of the Apology of Wahb on Breaking Wind [or, Farting]);
- al-Risalah fi al-nahy 'an al-shahawat* (Epistle on the Restraining of Lusts);
- Risalah ila Ibrahim ibn al-Mudabbir* (Epistle Addressed to Ibrahim ibn al-Mudabbir);
- Risalah ila 'Ali ibn Yahya [I]* (Epistle Addressed to 'Ali ibn Yahya);
- Risalah ila 'Ali ib nYahya [II]* (Epistle Addressed to 'Ali ibn Yahya);
- Risalah fi dhamm Ibn Thawabah* (Epistle in Censure of Ibn Thawabah);
- Risalah ila Abi 'Ali al-Basir fi hija' Ibn Mukarram wa thalbihi* (Epistle Addressed to Abu 'Ali al-Basir, in Satire of Ibn Mukarram);
- Diwan (?)* (Collected poems).

Editio princeps: *Das Kitâb Bagdâd von Abu al-Fadl Ahmad Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur: Folio 1–26*, edited by Hans Keller (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1898); **[Q4: WorldCat gives “Drugulin” as the publisher for this. Your source?]** *Sechster Band des Kitâb*

- Bagdād von Ahmad Ibn Abi Tāhir Taifūr*, 2 volumes, edited by Keller (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1908);_
- Balaghat al-nisa' wa tara'if kalamihinna wa mulah nawadiri-hinna wa akhbar dhawat al-ra'y minhunna wa ash'arunna fi al-Jahiliyyah wa al-Islam*, [Q5: **What is this work? In WorldCat, its subject heading is "Arabic Women Poets—Early Works to 1800." It's not among the works by Ibn Abi Tahir listed above, and it's not mentioned in the text. Does it have something to do with Kitab al-manthur wa al-manzum? Perhaps add a reference in the text explaining what it is?**] edited by Ahmad al-Alfi (Cairo: Press of the Walidat al-'Abbas al-Awwal School, 1908); [Q6: **"Matba'at Madrasat Waliday 'Abbas al-Awwal"—more consistent with other articles?**]
- al-Manthur wa al-manzum: al-Qasa'id al-mufradat al-latti la mithla* [Q7: **Or "mathal," as in WorldCat?**] *laha*, edited by Muhsin Ghayyad (Beirut & Paris: Turath 'Uwaydat, 1977)._

Editions: *Kitab Baghdad*, edited by Muhammad al-Kawthari (Cairo: Maktab [Q8: **"Maktabat"?**] Nashr al-Thaqafah al-Islamiyyah, 1949);_ republished as *Baghdad fi tarikh al-khilafat al-'Abasiyyah* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthanna / Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma'arif, 1968); [Q9: **Can't confirm this one. WorldCat does have another work, edited by al-Kawthari and published by the same two publishers, titled al-Tanbih wa-al-radd 'ala ahl al-ahwa' wa-al-bida'. Is this a different work?**]

- Balaghat al-nisa' wa tara'if kalamihinna wa mulah nawadiri-hinna wa akhbar dhawat al-ra'y minhunna wa ash'arunna fi al-Jahiliyyah wa al-Islam* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Haydariyyah, 1942); [Q10: **Only 1942 edition I can find on WorldCat is Najaf: Maktabah al-Murtadawiyah. Source for your information?**]
- Kitab Balaghat al-nisa'* (Beirut: Dar al-Nahdah al-Hadithah, 1972); [Q11: **Confirm title?**]
- Balaghat al-nisa'*, edited by Muhammad Tahir al-Zayn (Kuwait: [Q12: **Meaning Kuwait City?**] Maktabat al-Sundus, 1993);
- Balaghat al-nisa' wa tara'if kalamihinna wa mulah nawadiri-hinna wa akhbar dhawat al-ra'y minhunna wa ash'arunna fi al-Jahiliyyah wa al-Islam*, edited by 'Abd al-Hamid Hindawi (Cairo: Dar al-Fadilah, 1998);_
- Balaghat al-nisa'*, edited by Yusuf al-Biq'a'i (Beirut: Dar al-Ahwal, 1999);_
- Balaghat al-nisa' wa tara'if kalamihinna wa mulah nawadiri-hinna wa akhbar dhawat al-ra'y minhunna wa ash'arunna fi al-Jahiliyyah wa al-Islam*, edited by Barakat Yusuf Habbud (Sayda & Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Asriyyah, 2000);_

Selected prose passages from *Kitab al-manthur wa al-manzum* in *Jamharat rasa'il al'Arab*, 4 volumes, edited by A. Z. Safwat (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi wa Awladuh, 1937); *Rasa'il al-bulagha'*, edited by M. Kurd 'Ali, 4th ed. (Cairo: Matba'at Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr, 1954).

Translation: Nancy J. Roberts, "Voice and Gender in Classical Arabic *Adab*: Three Passages from Ahmad Tayfur's 'Instances of the Eloquence of Women,'" *al-'Arabiyya*, 25 (1992): 51–72.

The caliph Harun al-Rashid (reigned 786–809) had decreed that upon his death his empire—that is, the lands that were under the control of the Abbasid caliphate—should be divided into two halves. The western part was to include the capital, Baghdad, and be ruled by his son al-Amin, and the eastern provinces were to be ruled by his son al-Ma'mun. Al-Ma'mun soon tired of this arrangement and consequently sought allies in the eastern fringes of the empire as well as within Baghdad itself. By 816 al-Ma'mun's name was officially being mentioned in Friday sermons in Baghdad, implying recognition of his authority. In 817 the Sunni al-Ma'mun created a rapprochement with the Shiites by naming their spiritual leader, 'Ali al-Rida, the so-called eighth Imam, his own successor to the caliphate (though 'Ali died soon after). On 11 August 819, a Saturday, al-Ma'mun, having secured Baghdad, arrived triumphantly in the capital. According to the chronicler al-Tabari, the sun was high and the members of al-Ma'mun's retinue were dressed in green Persian coats and tall caps and carried green lances adorned with green pennants. On that same day, according to 'Ali Khaqani in his *Shu'ara' Baghdad min ta'sisiha hatta al-yawm* (1382), **[Q13: Translation of title?]** and certainly that year, Abu al-Fadl Ahmad ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur al-Marwarrudhi was born. Sources are not explicit, but Ibn Abi Tahir was likely born in northwest Baghdad, in Bab al-Sham (Syrian Gate) or in the neighboring Harbiyyah suburb, perhaps in the Marawizah Quarter, an area inhabited by people from Marw. Two later anecdotes locate Ibn Abi Tahir's adult home in Bab al-Sham. Ibn Abi Tahir became an important cultural historian, literary critic, anthologist, and author, as his works and cited pronouncements attest.

The bio-bibliographer Ibn al-Nadim, whose *Kitab al-Fihrist* (1391) **[Q14: Addition OK here? Translation of title?]** is an important source of information about Ibn Abi Tahir, notes that "he was descended from a princely family." Huart **[Q15: Who is this? First reference; not included in bibliography.]** may be right in suggesting that Ibn Abi Tahir's father's name, Tayfur,

comes from the Pahlavi *taka-puthra*, [Q16: **Translation?**] thereby corresponding to Ibn al-Nadim's characterization, which would also help explain why Ibn Abi Tahir was also widely known as Ibn Tayfur. Ibn Abi Tahir's *nisbah* (ethnic or relator name), al-Marwarrudhi, identifies his place of origin as Marw al-Rudh, a town in Khurasan, the ruins of which are in modern-day Bala Murghab in Afghanistan.

The first thirteen years of Ibn Abi Tahir's life, from 819 to 833, span al-Ma'mun's caliphate. These are also the years described in the one surviving volume, volume 6, of his famous history, *Kitab Baghdad* (Book of Baghdad). The events are not described from memory but rather collected from oral and written accounts, all carefully attributed. From about the year 825 on, Ibn Abi Tahir likely attended elementary school (*maktab*, or *kuttab*), the preparatory institution where the seeds of his training as a writer were planted.

As with many figures from the early ninth century, it is difficult to date his works or produce a chronology, but it is likely that his move to the Bookmen's Market provided him with time and materials to produce his works. In his works Ibn Abi Tahir identifies his teachers, who constitute a who's who of the intellectual and literary world of Baghdad in the early ninth century. Shawkat M. Toorawa, in his *Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur and Arabic Writerly Culture: Being a Bookman in Ninth-Century Baghdad* (2004), has also argued for autodidacticism as a component of his education. Al-Maqqari quotes al-Shaybani (died 911) referring to Ibn Abi Tahir as a chancery secretary, and such employment would explain his access to the letters he anthologizes in *Kitab al-manthur wa al-manzum* (Book of Prose and Poetry), some of which are preserved there alone and others of which are recorded first in that collection. There is, however, no explicit statement in the sources about official employment, Jorge Luis Borges's reference to him in the short story "El tintorero enmascarado Hakim de Merv" (1935; The Masked Dyer, Hakim of Merv) as "the official Abbasid historian" notwithstanding.

In a passage difficult to decipher precisely, Ibn al-Nadim writes "Ibn Abi Tahir was a common school-teacher. He then specialized and established himself in the Bookmen's Market in East Baghdad." Ibn Abi Tahir was probably much as Makdisi, in *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West: With Special Reference to Scholasticism* (1990), characterized the medieval Arabic tutor:

He taught humanistic subjects, dictated, acted as private tutor and taught publicly. He tutored the children of one or more wealthy families privately and, publicly, the children of the common people; he taught in the

residences of his students; he specialized in teaching the children of one particular family; he taught publicly in schools devoted to the upper classes, the children of the notables of the city, of the higher officials of government, the sons of caliphs, sultans, princes and merchants.

Ibn Abi Tahir first taught in a regular public school. There he may have begun the process of collecting the material—*shi'r* (verse) and related *akhbar* (anecdotes)—for his many anthologies, possibly for use in his teaching. Into this category fall such collections as *Kitab ikhtiyar shi'r Imra' al-Qays* (A Selection of the poetry of Imru' al-Qays). Imru' al-Qays is the great poet of the pre-Islamic period, whose poetry, Ibn Abi Tahir indicates, was taught in the elementary schools. None of Ibn Abi Tahir's fifteen anthologies of individual poets or poet families survives. Extant is one volume of the *Kitab Baghdad* and three volumes, out of fourteen, of the *Kitab al-manthur wa al-manzum*: one anthologizing instances of women's eloquence, one anthologizing poetry he deemed of peerless quality, and one anthologizing exemplary prose. The contents of the remaining volumes are not known. Indeed, the individual poet anthologies may have formed part of, or were later collected by him into, larger anthologies such as the *Kitab al-manthur wa al-manzum*, or even such works as *Kitab al-jami' fi al-shu'ara' wa akhbarihim* (The Compendium on Poets and Accounts about Them) or *Kitab [fi] ikhtiyar [or ikhtiyara] ash'ar al-shu'ara'* ([Book of] Selection [or, Selections] of Poetry by [Various] Poets). The introduction of the *Kitab al-manthur wa al-manzum* does not survive, but traces of Ibn Abi Tahir's thinking are scattered throughout surviving works and quoted passages, his view, for instance, that many of the instances of women's eloquence outshine the eloquence of men. Of his literary critical works, Said Boustany, in *Ibn ar-Rumi: Sa vie et son oeuvre* (1967; Ibn ar-Rumi: His Life and His Works), writes: "Di'bil, Abu Tammam and al-Buhturi were content just to compose poetic anthologies. Others, such as Ibrahim ibn al-Mudabbir, Ahmad Ibn Abi Tahir or Ibn al-Mu'tazz, illustrated the ideal which al-Hamadhani would extol in the following century, by endeavoring to show their mastery not only in the composition of poetry, but also by writing works in prose treating of *adab*, history, and literary criticism."

Ibn Abi Tahir no doubt produced the majority of his antiquarian and philological works while he was a schoolteacher or shortly after his move to the Bookmen's Market, such as the *Kitab al-mushtaq* (The Derivative), a work on lexicography; *Kitab al-mukhtalif min al-mu'talif* (Differences between Similar [Names]); *Kitab jamharat Bani Hashim* (Book of Collected [Genealogies] of the Hashim Tribe); and *Kitab alqab al-shu'ara' wa man*

'urifa bi al-kuna wa man 'urifa bi al-ism (The book of Poet's Nicknames, and of Those Known by Their Agnomens, and of Those Known by Their Given Names).

Ibn Abi Tahir's move to the Bookmen's Market, probably around 850, meant that he was immersed in its bookish and writerly milieu and in contact with scribes, secretaries, and bibliophiles. He is a writer illustrative of the shift from dependence of oral and aural modes toward a reliance on books and writing. From this time may date some of his thematic works, such as *Kitab al-hadaya* (Book of Gifts) and *Kitab al-jawahir* (Book of Jewels); works on contemporaries, such as *Kitab ikhtiyar shi'r Di'bil* (A Selection of the Poetry of Di'bil); and in particular works that reveal his interest in matters writerly, such as *Kitab sariqat Abi Tammam* (Book of the Plagiarisms of Abu Tammam), about his own teacher, the modernist court poet; and *Kitab sariqat al-Buhturi min Abi Tammam* (Book of the Plagiarisms of al-Buhturi from Abu Tammam), about the neo-classical al-Buhturi's peccadilloes. The latter explains the following characterization of Ibn Abi Tahir by al-Buhturi (as reported by Ibn al-Nadim): "I have never seen anyone as famous as he because of the books he composed and because of the poetry he recited whose speech was more corrupt, whose mind was more slow-witted, and whose language was more ungrammatical. He recited some poetry to me about Ishaq ibn Ayyub and made grammatical errors in it in more than ten places. What is more, no-one plagiarized more than he did, half a line, or even a third of a line."

Much poetry by Ibn Abi Tahir survives scattered in later anthologies; it is cataloged by Azartash Azarnush in *Da'irat al-ma'arif-i buzur-i Islami* (1367) [Q17: **Translation of title?**] and has been collected by Toorawa in his "Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur (d. 280/893): Merchant of the Written Word" (1998). The poetry gives lie to al-Buhturi's accusations—yet, Ibn Abi Tahir was not a professional poet. Only one medieval source, al-Mas'udi, in his *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawhar*, [Q18: **Date? Translation of title?**] refers to Ibn Abi Tahir as a poet by profession, a characterization taken up by several modern scholars (for example Shawqi Dayf and R. A. Kimber). In fact, al-Mas'udi is also the source of the only Ibn Abi Tahir poem preserved in toto, an elegy composed in 864, under the caliphate of al-Musta'in (died 866), on the executed Shi'ite activist Yahya ibn 'Umar. In this poem Ibn Abi Tahir attacks the Sunni caliphal family for its blatant usurpation of the rights of the descendants of 'Ali, the Prophet's successor. Later literary critics also widely quote Ibn Abi Tahir's verse and his pronouncements on poetry as a transmitter. As Albert Arazi, in "De la voix au calame et la naissance du classicisme en poésie" (1997), [Q19: **Translation of title? Can't find the**

French word “calame” in any online dictionaries.]

notes about him, “Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur can be considered to be the *rawiyah* [transmitter] who, more than any other, defined the elements constitutive of a classical approach, one of the most important stimuli of the massive movement of written redaction. He is part of the third generation of transmitters, the generation after al-Asma’i, one of poetic codification and of the appearance of theoretical works.”

To the 860s can likely be dated Ibn Abi Tahir’s works on love, refinement, and fashion, such as *Kitab al-muwashsha* (The Adorned [or Embroidered]); *Kitab akhbar al-mutazarrifat* (Accounts of Women Displaying/affecting Wit and Elegance); *al-Mughramin* (Book of the Infatuated); *Kitab al-muzah* [or *miza*] *wa al-mu’atabat* (Book of (Love-)Play [or Temperament] and Reproaches); *Kitab lisan al-’yun* (The Language of the Eyes); and *Kitab qalaq al-mushtaq* (The Disquiet of the Yearful), which Yaqut al-Hamawi, in *Irshad al-arib li-ma’rifat al-adib* (1400), [Q20: Translation of title?] quotes the great philologist Ibn Durayd as saying that it was one of the four best books ever written. To this period too must perhaps be dated Ibn Abi Tahir’s storytelling, which accounts for such works as *Kitab khabar al-malik al-’ali fi tadbir al-mamlakah wa al-siyasah* (The Story of the Great King and the Management of the Kingdom and Administration) and *Kitab al-malik al-muslih wa al-wazir al-mu’in* ([The Story of] the Virtuous King and the Supportive Vizier).

Toorawa, in “Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur (d. 280/893): Merchant of the Written Word,” argues that for figures such as Ibn Abi Tahir who were immersed in the writerly milieu of Baghdad, doctrinal affiliation and partisanship became less important; and Ibn al-Rumi famously observed that poets often affected a “Shiism of poets.” Ibn Abi Tahir’s elegy to Yahya ibn ‘Umar may, however, have been interpreted as sympathetic to Shiism, and his two works in the precedence genre—the *Kitab fadl al-’Arab ‘ala al-’Ajam* (Book on the Superiority of the Arabs over the Persians) and the *Kitab mufakharat al-ward wa al-narjis* (Boasting-match between the Rose and the Narcissus), where the rose may have signified the (Arab) caliph and the narcissus the (Persian) courtier—may then have been composed as a rejoinder to such an allegation. Certainly, one of Ibn Abi Tahir’s close associates, the secretary Sa’id ibn Humayd, was centrally implicated in the controversy surrounding the Shu’ubiyah, the movement that argued the parity of non-Arabs (in particular Persians) with Arabs. Fragments of another debate over the relative merits of boys versus girls as sexual partners are reported by Franz Rosenthal in his essay “Male and Female: Described and Compared” (1997).

In spite of the importance of his anthologies, the work for which Ibn Abi Tahir became best known was *Kitab Baghdad*. The topographical introduction was used as a model as far afield as Spain for a history of Cordoba, and as late as the eleventh century by the great historian of Baghdad, al-Khatib al-Baghdadi. The surviving volume is a repository of valuable historical, cultural, and literary information not available elsewhere—including anecdotes about such figures as the Persophile al-'Attabi, about whom Ibn Abi Tahir also composed *Kitab ikhtiyar shi'r al-'Attabi* (A Selection of the Poetry of al-'Attabi).**[Q21: Changes OK here?]** Given that al-Ma'mun is the seventh caliph, and that al-Hadi ruled only a year, a reasonable assumption is that the first five volumes cover the first six caliphs. Biographers report that Ibn Abi Tahir's son 'Ubaydallah**[Q22: Any further information available about Ibn Abi Tahir's wife or children?]** continued his father's history from al-Mu 'tamid (reigned 870–892) onward. This**[Q23: Not clear what "this" refers to here. Explain further?]** suggests that Ibn Abi Tahir's history of Baghdad and the Abbasid caliphs may have included another seven or eight later volumes. Why he stopped at al-Mu 'tamid is unclear. Perhaps, well into his fifties, he decided to occupy his time in the company of his friends, Abu al-'Ayna' for instance, about whom he composed the *Kitab Akhbar Abi al-'Ayna'* (Accounts of Abu al-'Ayna'), or the literary patron 'Ali ibn Yahya al-Munajjim, to whom he addressed several epistles and at whose soirees he was always in attendance.

The only evidence that Ibn Abi Tahir left Baghdad—other than jaunts to the nearby royal capital Samarra, possibly to recite poetry for money (as Dayf and Kimber speculate) but more likely simply to accompany the likes of the court poets Abu Nuwas and Abu 'Ali al-Basir—is a trip to Basra in 890 to visit the poet al-Madara'i, as reported by al-Suli. Two years later he died. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi cites 'Ubaydallah for his father's date of death: the night of Tuesday, 28 Jumadā I 280 (15 August 893). He was buried among other notables in the Bab al-Sham Cemetery.

Ibn Abi Tahir has begun to receive increasing attention as an anthologist, critic, and cultural historian. In 1908 Hans Keller drew attention to the *Kitab Baghdad*.**[Q24: By "drew attention to" do you mean he published them?]** and in 1969 M. J. Kister, in his**[Q25: Or her?]** article "The Seven Golden Odes," plumbed the then still unpublished *Kitab al-manthur wa al-manzum* for literary-critical remarks. With the more recent work of Seeger A. Bonebakker, Arazi, and Toorawa, the focus turned to Ibn Abi Tahir's role as a pivotal figure in the transformation of Arabic writerly culture.

References:

- Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, 3 volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957–1967); **[Q26: 1957–1972, according to HOLLIS. Confirm your source?]**
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