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Al-Nawfalī's Lost *History*: The Issue of a Ninth-Century Shiʿite Source Used by Al-Ṭabarī and Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī

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Dedicated to Professor Wadad Kadi (University of Chicago), on the occasion of her 65th birthday, 23 November 2008.

ABSTRACT   *The vast number of compilations by Muslim scholars of the ninth to the eleventh centuries is clear evidence of the 'knowledge society' that characterised Islamic civilisation in classical times. Then, as today, these often voluminous Arabic compendia intrigued readers with their wealth of information and sophisticated structure, as well as their complex and, at times, ambiguous nature in terms of the age and historicity of the materials they preserved. Thus, the question as to the 'sources' Muslim scholars used in composing these compendia is key to understanding Islamic society and academic culture in medieval times. This article traces just such an early source: namely, a collection of historical accounts by ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī, an Imami-Shiʿite scholar from the ninth-century CE. His compendium has only been preserved in quotations found in certain later compilations, especially in those by the celebrated Muslim scholars al-Ṭabarī and Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī. These passages and the context of al-Nawfalī's scholarly activities are the focus of our source-critical inquiry, which is intended to shed light on some of the mechanisms at work in medieval Islamic historiography*

The universal *History of Prophets and Kings* (Arabic: *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*) by the historian and Quranic commentator Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (died 310 AH/923 CE in Baghdad) is a source of fundamental importance for the history of Islamic culture and civilisation.[1] This is true for the

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[1] This article is the substantially expanded version of a paper submitted in 1995 for publication in the proceedings of the conference, *Al-Ṭabarī: The Historian and His Work*, organised by Professor Hugh Kennedy at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. The original paper was conceived as a case study within the proceedings' larger thematic framework of examining al-Ṭabarī's scholarship, and the current article needs to be understood in this context. However, since this conference volume has not been published, I have decided to publish the results of my research elsewhere, even though this means that it is impossible to update all the references in terms of more recent, relevant secondary literature. I would like, however, to take this opportunity to thank Hugh Kennedy for convening the intellectually stimulating and memorable 1995 Ṭabarī symposium.

All translations in this article are my own, except for the quotations from al-Tabarī's *Tārīkh*, xxix, which are taken from Hugh Kennedy, *Al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī (A.D. 763–786/A.H. 146–169)*, vol. xxix, translated and annotated by Hugh Kennedy (New York: State University Press, 1990). Proper names (such as Baghdad, Basra, Kufa) and other Arabic terms frequently used in English (such as Sunnite, Shiʿite, Shiʿa, Imami, Quran) have not been transliterated.

first three centuries of Islam in general, but also for the rise and early development of the Alid and Shiʿite movements. One of the issues encountered in this regard, however, is that many of the original written records on Shiʿite history from the time prior to al-Ṭabarī have not been preserved. Although writing material—papyrus and later paper—had been relatively plentiful, medieval Muslim scholars seem not to have confined themselves to copying and retaining these earliest collections and monographs. Rather, they apparently viewed these documents as dispensable as soon as they had been incorporated into larger, more systematic and, in some ways, more easily accessible compilations which emerged in the ninth to eleventh-centuries CE.[2]

Al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* is an example *par excellence* of this new type of a 'grand opus'. It is not surprising, therefore, that his *Tārīkh* became a standard reference work and a starting point for later generations of medieval Muslim historians. For modern scholars, as Claude Cahen stated, 'it is obvious that al-Ṭabarī affords the basis of all research for the three centuries reviewed by him'. Naturally, this view does not negate the very fact that al-Ṭabarī's chronicle ' . . . needs to be supplemented by all that can be discovered in authors who are wholly or partly independent of him'.[3]

Al-Ṭabarī and his younger contemporary Abū 1-Faraj

Given these premises, there is a strong rationale to assume that also Abū 1-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī—a slightly younger contemporary and student of al-Ṭabarī—relied heavily on al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* when composing his own and later famous book, *The Violent Deaths of the Ṭālibids* (Arabic: *Kitāb Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*).[4] Abū l-Faraj wrote this

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[2] For the fundamental significance which 'compiling' and the production of compilations holds for medieval Islamic historiography, and for a very useful survey of nineteenth century and contemporary Western scholarship on this issue, see Kurt Franz, *Kompilation in arabischen Chroniken: Die Überlieferung vom Aufstand der Zanǧ zwischen Geschichtlichkeit und Intertextualität vom 9. bis ins 15. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 3–22 and my article, Sebastian Günther, 'Assessing the Sources of Classical Arabic Compilations: The Issue of Categories and Methodologies', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 32 (1) (2005), pp. 75–99. The latter study also addresses the question of the proportion of oral and written components in the transmission of a text in early perisods of Islam and the various meanings of terms used by Muslim scholars in this regard. For the general controversy regarding the issue of when the Muslims began to write down historical information, and when the first books on Islamic history were written, see Amikam Elad, 'The Beginnings of Historical Writing by the Arabs: The Earliest Syrian Writers on the Arab Conquests', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 28 (2003), pp. 65–152.

[3] Claude Cahen, 'History and Historians: From the beginnings to the time of al-Tabarī', *Religion, Learning and Science in the ʿAbbasid Period: The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 188–233. For the complex question as to why only a small number of ninth century works survived into later periods, including a discussion of the material circumstances at this crucial time for the development of historical writing in medieval Islam, see now Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 30–32. For the significance of al-Ṭabarī's work vis-à-vis later generations of Muslim historians, see R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.72; Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 73–82 ('Tabari, the 'imam' of *Hadtih* historiography'); Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginning of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1998), p. 292 and Tarif Khalidi, 'A World Historian and his Vision: al-Tabarī, the Qurʾân and History', *Al-Abḥāth* (Beirut) 55 (2007–2008), pp. 41–52, stimulating discussion Al-Ṭabarī's intellectual biography. I thank Professor Khalidi for providing me with an advance copy of his article.

[4] ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muhammad ibn Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥaytham al-Umawī al-Iṣfahānī (or al-Iṣbahānī) was a celebrated man of letters, historian with sociological interests, musicologist and poet. He is best known for his great 'Book of Songs', the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, one of the most important works of classical Arabic literature. He was born in 284 AH/897 CE, probably in Baghdad, Iraq. Traditionally, he was thought to have died there in 356/967, but recent research suggests his death should be dated to the early 360s (shortly after 971). Although Abū l-Faraj was a direct descendant of the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān ibn Muḥammad, he was a Zaydi Shiʿite. See Sebastian Günther 'Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī', *EI³ – Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd edn, Everett Rowson *et al.* (eds) (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming), pp. 51–55.

unique encyclopaedia of historical-biographical information on the Shiʿites of the first three centuries of Islam in 313/925 at the age of only 28. A number of indications seem to suggest a close link between Abū l-Faraj's *Maqātil* and al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*:

1. Thematically speaking, there is a clear overlap between the contents of Abū l-Faraj's *Maqātil* and several parts of al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*. While the *Maqātil* focuses on events and figures in early Islamic history who are particularly, but not exclusively, important to Shiʿsm,[5] al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*—although much larger in size and more ambitious in scope and framework—gives similar credence to events and themes involving the wider family of the Prophet and their political-religious advocates.
2. Academically, one notes that Abū l-Faraj not only personally knew al-Ṭabarī, but was even one of al-Ṭabarī's direct students; a fact that Abū l-Faraj expressly confirms in the *Maqātil*. Abū l-Faraj attended al-Ṭabarī's lectures probably at some point shortly after the year 299/911-2.[6]
3. Chronologically, there is proof that al-Ṭabarī finished his *Tārīkh* in about 302/915.[7] In contrast, in the preface to the *Maqātil*, Abū l-Faraj gives Jumādā al-ūlā 313/July 925 as the book's date of completion.[8] In other words, when drafting his Shiʿite martyrology, al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* was already complete and must have been available to Abū l-Faraj in one way or the other.
4. Historically, source-critical research has demonstrated that al-Ṭabarī was an important source of information for Abū l-Faraj's magnum opus, the *Great Book of Songs* (*Kitāb al-Aghānī*).[9] Thus, there is good reason to assume that this was also the case for the *Maqātil*.

Considerations of this kind gain further support by explicit textual evidence resulting from Abū l-Faraj's working techniques. Abū l-Faraj—like al-Ṭabarī— consistently used *isnād*s or chains of transmitters to authenticate individual pieces

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[5] Abū l-Faraj's *Maqātil* is devoted to the 'violent deaths' (*maqātil*) of more than two hundred descendants of the Prophet Muhammad in the line of his uncle Abū Ṭālib (thus called Ṭālibids), i.e. from Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib (who was, like his more prominent brother ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, one of the first Muslims) to the seventy Ṭālibids who died during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 908–932 CE). Abū l-Faraj expressly states in the preface that he dedicated this martyrology to those Ṭālibids who were tracked down and poisoned, feared the government (*sulṭān*), escaped and died in hiding, or were imprisoned (for political reasons) and kept there until they died. Yet only the stories of Ṭālibids who had shown laudable manners and behaviour, followed the legitimate way of life and faith, had not departed from that or from the path of their predecessors, and had not caused any disturbance or damage to the community were included. See *Maqātil*, ed. Ṣaqr, pp. 4–5; and Günther, Sebastian, '... *nor have I learned it from any book of theirs. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī: A Medieval Arabic Author at Work*', in R. Brunner *et al.* (eds) *Islamstudien ohne Ende. Festschrift für den Islamwissenschaftler Werner Ende* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2002), pp. 139–153.

[6] For a discussion of the information given in the sources about Abū l-Faraj having studied with al-Ṭabarī, see Franz Rosenthal (1989), *General introduction and From the creation to the flood*, vol. i, translated and annotated by Franz Rosenthal, Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, i, p. 35 (introduction).

[7] Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, i, p. 133.

[8] Abū l-Faraj *Maqātil – Kitāb Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn,* al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr (ed.) (Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1368/1949), *Maqātil*, p. 721; Sebastian Günther, *Quellenuntersuchungen zu den* 'Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn' *des Abū l-Faraǧ al-Isfahānī (gest. 356/967)* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1991).

[9] In the *Aghānī*, Abū l-Faraj quotes his informant and teacher, al-Ṭabarī, 89 times. Abū l-Faraj, in his turn, refers in the *Aghānī* to 21 guarantors/teachers. As M. Fleischhammer's analysis has demonstrated, the majority of these passages were indeed drawn from al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*, mostly from those parts in which al-Ṭabarī relied on the *Biography of the Prophet* by Ibn Ibn Isḥāq. These quotations in the *Aghānī* differ only insignificantly from the Leiden edition of al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*; cf. Manfred Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen des Kitāb al-Aġānī* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), *Quellen*, p. 58 (no. 119) and pp. 126–127 (no. 68).

of information. At the beginning of the *Maqātil* (in the section on the assassination of Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib), for example, Abū 1-Faraj states:

> (1)   I read to Muḥammad ibn Jarīr **al-Ṭabarī** [the following text] from *The Book of* [*the Prophet Muḥammad's*] *Military Expeditions* by **Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq** (d. 150/767), whereupon he confirmed it.
>
>   I said [to him]: Muḥammad ibn Ḥumayd al-Rāzī (d. 248/863)[10] related [it] to you by saying: Salama related [it] to us on the authority of Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq.

> (2)   He (i.e. Abū l-Faraj) stated [also]:

> I was present when it (the information in the following section) was read to Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Jaʿd **al-Washshāʾ** (d. 301/913). It was said: **Isḥāq al-Musayyibī** (d. 236/850-l) related to you what **Muḥammad ibn Fulayḥ** (197/812)[11] had told him — on the authority of **Mūsā ibn ʿUqba** (d. 141/758),[12] and he on the authority of **Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī** (d.124/742)[13]—[that is, several] accounts (*bi-aḥādīth*) regarding the news of Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib[14] and his return from Ethiopia together with those who had emigrated to this land, and of [how he] had returned to be with the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family.

> The contents of some of these accounts overlap [and differ from each other].[15] I have mentioned the gist of them in an account (*riwāya*) that I will relate [later] at [the appropriate] place. (*Maqātil*, pp. 10–11)

Abū l-Faraj's acknowledgement of having read to al-Ṭabarī a text he had studied with him, along with the observations that were offered above, would leave little doubt that, in writing the *Maqātil*, Abū l-Faraj relied largely on al-Ṭabarī's work.

However, the larger picture of Abū l-Faraj's sources for the *Maqātil* is rather complex, as we demonstrated elsewhere.[16] In fact, when extending the examination of Abū l-Faraj's assumed dependence on al-Ṭabarī to the whole text of the *Maqātil*, a very different picture emerges. This becomes clear already a few pages after Abū l-Faraj's first explicit reference to al-Ṭabarī. In the chapter devoted to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, cousin and son-in-law of the

[10] Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn Ḥumayd al-Rāzī was one of al-Ṭabarī's most prominent teachers at al-Rayy. Al-Ṭabarī studied with him in about 850 CE when Ibn Ḥumayd already was in his seventies. The general editors of the English translation of al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* point out that it 'is significant that the instruction which Ṭabarī received from Ibn Ḥumayd extended to the historical works of Ibn Isḥāq . . . ', and that these studies of Ibn Isḥāq's work seem to have laid the ground for al-Ṭabarī's *History*. It is, therefore, not surprising that Ibn Ḥumayd is one of al-Ṭabarī's most frequently quoted authorities. See al-Ṭabarī, *History* i, pp. 17–18.

[11] Muḥammad ibn Fulayḥ is known for having transmitted Ibn ʿUqba's *Maghāzī*. See *GAS* – see Fuat Sezgin *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. i: *Qurʾānwissenschaft, Ḥadīt, Geschichte, Fiqh, Dogmatik, Mystik bis ca. 430 H* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), p. 287.

[12] Abū Muḥammad Mūsā ibn ʿUqba ibn Abī ʿAyyāsh al-Asadī was a scholar with historical interests. He lived in Medina and was one of al-Zuhrī's students. See *GAS* (1967), i, pp. 286–287.

[13] Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Muslim ibn ʿUbaydallāh Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī was a prolific scholar of prophetic traditions and an important early Muslim historian. He is the author of several books. See *GAS* (1967), i, pp. 280–283.

[14] That is, the third son of Abū Ṭālib and the first of the Ṭalibids killed under Muslim rule (*awwal qatīl fī l-Islām*). See Abū l-Faraj, *Maqātil*, p. 6.

[15] The expression *dakhala baʿḍuhā* (i.e. *al-aḥādīth*) *fī bāʿḍ* is regularly used by Abū l-Faraj to introduce—and justify—his own, synthesising portrayal of events.

[16] See my *Quellenuntersuchungen* (1991) and the article (2002), ' . . . *nor have I learned it from any book of theirs*', pp. 139–153.

Prophet Muḥammad, as well as the fourth caliph, Abū 1-Faraj informs his readers that he relied here on a remarkable variety of sources. Abū 1-Faraj states:

(1) Aḥmad ibn ʿĪsā **al-ʿIjlī** al-ʿAṭṭār[17] related it (the news of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's assassination) to me [via several transmitters] … from **Abū Mikhnaf** (d. 157/775),[18] who relied on the authority of Sulaymān ibn Abī Rāshid …[19]

(2) Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn **al-Ushnānī**[20] (315/927) also told me about it, relying on [several older authorities] …

(3) Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Dallān **al-Khayshī** (d. ca. 300/912),[21]
Aḥmad Ibn al-Jaʿd **al-Washshāʾ** (d. 301/913),[22]
Muḥammad ibn Jarīr **al-Ṭabarī** (d. 310/923), and
a group of other scholars [also] related some of it to us. They said: Abū Hishām **al-Rifāʿī** (d. 248/862),[23] related to us [via several earlier transmitters] … an account (*ḥadīth*) in which his (ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's) assassination was mentioned. So I included some information from this account in the appropriate places throughout the course of the narrative. However, most of the wording in this regard is from Abū Mikhnaf; except for that on which there might be disagreement, which I will then point out [and clarify]. (*Maqātil*, pp. 28–29).

Abū 1-Faraj explicitly acknowledges here having compared and used materials he received from more than five scholars, the first two of whom represent circles of higher learning in Kufa, while the others represent Baghdad scholarship. We are also informed that al-Ṭabarī was one of Abū Faraj's three teachers who relied on a common earlier transmitter: the Baghdad scholar Abū Hishām al-Rifāʿī who related to them an account about ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's death. Finally, Abū 1-Faraj states that much of his own, synthesising portrayal of the events in question is based on a report by Abū Mikhnaf. He received this crucial material from al-ʿIjlī, the informant whom Abū 1-Faraj placed at the top of his list of references. Al-Ṭabarī was only one of several scholars whom Abū 1-Faraj consulted for the information presented in this particular passage. In other words, al-Ṭabarī was not Abū 1-Faraj's exclusive nor even his main source of information on two crucial events in early Islamic history, i.e. the killing of Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

[17] Aḥmad ibn ʿĪsā ibn Abī Mūsā Al-ʿIjlī al-Kūfī al-ʿAṭṭār was still alive in the first half of the fourth/tenth century. As Abū l-Faraj himself stated, he studied with al-ʿIjlī in Kufa. See *QU* (1991), pp. 123–124 and Fleischhammer (2004), *Quellen*, p. 35 (no. 32). Furthermore, see *GAS* (1967), i, p. 309; and Ursula Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf: Ein Beitrag zur Historiographie der umaiyadischen Zeit* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), pp. 60–61.

[18] Abū Mikhnaf was an important Shiʿite historian and author from Kufa; see U. Sezgin's (1971) monograph on *Abū Miḥnaf*; *GAS* (1967), i, pp. 308–309; and *QU* (1991), pp. 181–184.

[19] Eyewitness and reporter of events in the 60–70s A.H. and frequent guarantor of Abū Mikhnaf's. See U. Sezgin (1971), *Abū Miḥnaf*, p. 56 passim, and p. 217.

[20] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḥafs ibn ʿUmar al-Khathʿamī al-Ushnānī was a teacher of Abū l-Faraj's from Kufa who later lived in Baghdad. See *QU* (1991), pp. 197–198; Fleischhammer (2004), *Quellen*, p. 61 (no. 124); and *GAS* (1967), i, p. 317.

[21] Al-Khayshī was a Baghdad scholar and teacher of Abū l-Faraj's for the *Maqātil*. He is not mentioned in the *Aghānī*. See *QU* (1991), p. 125.

[22] Abū Bakr Aḥmad [ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz] ibn Jaʿd al-Washshāʾ was a fellow-student of al-Khayshī's. See *QU* (1991), p. 126; and Fleischhammer (2004), *Quellen*, pp. 35 (no. 33), 80, 100.

[23] Abū Hishām Muḥammad ibn Yazīd ibn Muḥammad ibn Kathīr al-Rifāʿī al-ʿIjlī was a scholar interested in history who lived and died in Baghdad. See *QU* (1991), p. 195.

Moreover, further analysis of the *Maqātil* reveals that Abū 1-Faraj explicitly refers to his teacher al-Ṭabarī only five times throughout his book, with all of these references occurring in the first pages of this work. Since Abū l-Faraj usually indicates his sources accurately, such a small number of direct references to a respected scholar such as al-Ṭabarī is somewhat surprising. (Let us not forget that al-Ṭabarī was already famous during his lifetime.) Of course, the possibility of Abū 1-Faraj's having made further use of al-Ṭabarī's work without expressly acknowledging it cannot be ruled out, although this is nothing more than speculation at this point.[24]

Another more promising and important issue to pursue is the question of whether Abū 1-Faraj and al-Ṭabarī accessed the same earlier sources independently of each other. If this could be verified, one would then also have to identify what these 'common sources' were and what the different channels through which al-Ṭabarī and Abū l-Faraj obtained these materials were.

One way of shedding light on these problems is to examine a writer and early authority of Islamic history (a) whose name frequently appears in the *isnād*s of both al-Ṭabarī's and Abū l-Faraj's works, and (b) whose materials appear in these works as lengthy quotations that were apparently copied from a piece of writing. I have identified ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī (hereafter referred to as 'al-Nawfalī') as an early Muslim scholar who fulfils these and several additional criteria. This finding justifies an examination of his historiographical activities and the materials he transmitted in order to trace a possible common sources used both by al-Ṭabarī and Abū l-Faraj. To be sure, the focus of this study is on these two scholars and relevant passages in their works; the goal, therefore, is not to 'reconstruct' al-Nawfalī's entire literary oeuvre or his 'lost history' as such from the various Sunni and Shiʿite sources available to us (whether in print or electronically). Thus, the decision to carry out such a case study rests on the following observations:

First, both al-Ṭabarī and Abū 1-Faraj indicate in their compendia on Islamic history that they (a) used a considerable—though for this study manageable—amount of information from al-Nawfalī; and (b) directly copied these passages from written sources. In addition, (c) Abū l-Faraj explicitly mentions a 'book' (*kitāb*) of al-Nawfalī.

Second, al-Nawfalī appears to have been an active scholar and historian at around the beginning and during the first half of the third/ninth century, i.e. at a time when Islamic society experienced a very dynamic socio-economic and cultural upswing, as well as an increase in political unrest and sectarian upheaval. Consequently, these socio-economic and political developments affected the way Muslim scholars viewed Islamic history and how they wrote about it.[25]

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[24] As will be shown later in this article, al-Tabarī does not indicate in any way that he used information from al-Nawfalī through an intermediary source, and the pieces of information he quotes from al-Nawfalī have no isnāds attached to them. Hence, it is not possible to find out whether Abū l-Faraj used al-Tarabī's *Tārīkh* without acknowledging it, simply by comparing the isnāds given by Abū l-Faraj in the *Maqātil* with the isnāds in al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* for passage he quotes from al-Nawfalī, since the latter do not have isnāds. Furthermore, the few explicit references to al-Tabarī in the *Maqātil* constitute insufficient textual evidence for a synoptic comparison of the quotations from al-Tabarī in Abū 1-Faraj *Maqātil* with their possible counterparts in al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*.

[25] For example, see Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti 'Von der staatenlosen Gesellschaft zum islamischen Staat: Die ersten drei Jahrhunderte der Hiğra', in Annemarie Schimmel (ed.) *Der Islam III* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990), pp. 103–122; and Tilman Nagel, 'Das Kalifat der Abbasiden', in Ulrich Haarmann (ed.) *Geschichte der arabischen Welt* (München: Beck, 1987), pp. 100–165.

Finally, the fact that—apart from his special interest in Shiʿite history—very little is known of al-Nawfalī's life and scholarship constitutes an additional challenge and stimulus for our source-critical endeavour.

Al-Nawfalī: once a well-known historian and author?

What do we know about al-Nawfalī? Biographical data on Abū 1-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī is practically non-existent. Al-Nawfalī is not listed in the *Fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 377/987) or in other medieval bio-bibliographical works. However, the littérateur al-Tānūkhī (d. 384/994), a slightly younger Basran contemporary of al-Nawfalī's, mentions al-Nawfalī's full name as Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Nawfal.[26] This genealogy shows that al-Nawfalī was a member of an aristocratic family that belonged to the clan of Nawfal ibn ʿAbd Manāf. This information has been expressly confirmed by a note of Abū l-Faraj's in the *Aghānī*.[27]

The Banū Nawfal were a clan of the Meccan tribe of Quraysh.[28] Their ancestor, Nawfal, is said to have been the brother of Hāshim ibn ʿAbd Manāf, the Prophet Muḥammad's great grandfather.[29] Several members of al-Nawfalī's family—in particular his father, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, and his uncle, ʿIsā ibn Sulaymān—seem to have gained some importance during the late second and early third centuries of Islam as transmitters of historical information (*akhbār*).[30]

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[26] Al-Tānūkhī (1978), *al-Faraj baʿda l-shidda*, ii, p. 175; iv, p. 116; see also i, p. 311 and iv, p. 113.

[27] Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī* – Abū l-Faraj ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 24 vols (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya and al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-taʾlīf wa-l-nashr, 1345–1394/ 1927–1974) *Aghānī*, xiv, p. 170; Fleischhhammer (2004), *Quellen*, p. 82. For the genealogy of the Nawfal clan, see Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat* – Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Jamharat ansāb al-ʿArab*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1962), p. 14 (the descendants of ʿAbd Manāf ibn Quṣayy). For al-Nawfalī, see esp. Pellat, Charles, 'Al-Nawfalī', *EI*² – *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn,13 vols. H.A.R. Gibb *et al.* (eds) (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 1045–1046; Watt, 'Nawfal', *EI*², vii, p. 1045; and id. (1971), 'Hāshim ibn ʿAbd Manāf', *EI*², iii, p. 260. Furthermore, see Rosenthal, Franz, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1952), p. 427; *GAS* (1967), i, p. 312; Fleischhammer (2004), *Quellen*, p. 82 (no. 25) and pp. 32, 38; and *QU* (1991), pp. 151–152 (al-Nawfalī's date of death needs to be corrected here). An online search of the electronic database Alwaraq confirmed the earlier established conclusion that almost no information on al-Nawfalī's life and scholarship has been preserved in the medieval sources available to us so far.

[28] The clan of Nawfal had joined with most of the Quraysh in boycotting the clan of Hāshim when their leader, Abū Ṭālib, refused to stop the Prophet Muḥammad preaching or withdraw clan protection from him. The leader of the Nawfal clan, al-Muṭʿim ibn ʿAdī, was one of the few men who helped to end the boycott. He is also said to have granted tribal protection to Muḥammad after Abū Ṭālib died and was succeeded by Abū Lahab who refused to continue Muḥammad's protection against much of the rest of the Quraysh. See W. Montgomery Watt, 'Nawfal, Banū', *EI*², vii, p. vii, pp. 1045–1046.

[29] Al-Ṭabarī occasionally calls ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad 'al-Hāshimī' (who is reporting also in these instances from his father, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān); cf. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, iii, p. 415; *History*, xxix, p. 118. Only in *Tārīkh*, iii, p. 563, *History*, xxx, p. 32—that is, after the passages discussed in this present study—does al-Ṭabarī mention a ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān ibn ʿAbdallāh (!) ibn Nawfāl ibn al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib who, in his turn, relies on a certain Yūsuf al-Barm, a *mawlā* of the Ḥusayn family; see also *History*, xxx, pp. 32–33, no. 135.

[30] For ʿIsā [ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Nawfalī], see *Maqātil*, p. 155. For the distinction between *akhbār* and *āthār*, T. Khalidi states: 'The nucleus of historiography was made up of *akhbār*, while the nucleus of *ḥadīth* [i.e. the literature of Prophetic traditions] was made up of *āthār*. *Akhbār* are historical events pure and simple. *Āthār*, on the other hand, are traces and patterns of moral conduct of Muḥammad and the pious ancestors. It is more religiously urgent to determine the reliability of *āthār* than the reliability of *akhbār*. Thus, *āthār* need to be pruned and made uniform before they can be served up to the believers; *akhbār*, however, could be left to stand in their contradictory state in cases where any version of an event was as possible (*jāʾiz*) as any other. In this sense, divergent historical reports were somewhat like divergent *qirāʾāt*: the believer could pick and choose from among the alternatives on offer'. See Khalidi (2007–2008) 'A World Historian', pp. 41–52.
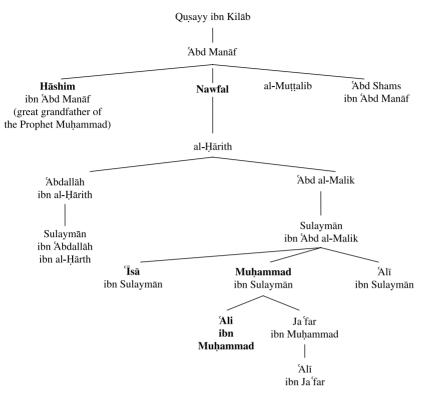
Figure 1. Genealogy of ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī

It is also safe to state that ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī lived in Iraq, probably in Basra (as his father had, since the family had a house in the Quraysh quarter),[31] and that he was an Imami Shiʿite. Furthermore, the content of the reports which al-Nawfalī relates from his father, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, points to the fact that Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān had an intimate knowledge of business affairs at the Abbasid court. Moreover, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān had the privilege of repeated visits to the caliphs al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī, and of attending certain sessions of the *mazālim* (that is, 'the court of appeal' which was under direct caliphal jurisdiction).[32] These facts suggest that al-Nawfalī's father had a position in the higher administration of the Abbasid court.[33]

Al-Nawfalī himself was known in medieval times as a historian and author. The Baghdad historian and geographer al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), for example, makes it

[31] Caliph al-Mahdī is said to have been the only caliph who passed through *Sikkat Quraysh* when visiting Basra. Governors never used to go along this street when they arrived in Basra. It was believed to be an evil omen to do so; most governors who passed through it lost their positions shortly afterwards. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, iii, p. 543, *History*, xxix, p. 263.

[32] For the *mazālim*, see al-Ṭabari, *History*, xxix, p. 119 (no. 377); Otto Spies, 'Klassisches Islamisches Recht', in B. Spuler (ed.) *Handbuch der Orientalistik* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), p. 236; and J.S. Nielsen, 'Maẓālim', in *EI* ² vi, pp. 933–935.

[33] Van Ess proposes this also for al-Nawfalī himself and views ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī as a 'Hofbeamten mit šīʿitischen Neigungen;' see Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991–1997), ii, p. 474. His suggestion, however, that the historian ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān was a grandson of ʿAbdallah ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Nawfal (*Theologie*, ii, p. 159 (1992); and iv (1997), p. 750) would seem to make reference to another person of the same name, but of different ancestry; see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, iii, p. 563, *History*, xxx, p. 32; and note 29 of the present article.

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explicit in his *Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems* (*Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar*) that al-Nawfalī was one of the prominent early scholars known for having 'authored books on history and historical accounts (*allafa … kutuban fī l-tārīkh wa-l-akhbār*)' and that he wrote a book 'on historical accounts (*fī l-akhbār*)'.[34] Lengthy passages quoted from al-Nawfalī are found, as was already mentioned, in al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*, Abū l-Faraj's *Maqātil*, and in almost every volume of Abū l-Faraj's *Book of Songs* (*Kitāb al-Aghānī*).[35] Other medieval sources which quote al-Nawfalī include *The Embellished* [*Account*] *of the Scholars' Critique of the Poets* (*al-Muwashshaḥ fī maʾākhidh al-ʿulamāʾ ʿalā l-shuʿarāʾ*) by the Baghdad scholar al-Marzubānī (d. 384/994),[36] the *Book of Luminaries* (*Kitāb al-Maṣābīḥ*) by Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Ḥasanī al-Ṭālibī, a Zaydi scholar from Dailam on the Caspian Sea (d. 352/964),[37] and, as we will discuss later, certain works of medieval Andalusian historians such as Abū ʿUbayd al-Bakrī (d. in 487/1094), then, two centuries later, Ibn Abbār (d. 658/1260) and, above all, Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī (d. ca. 695/1295).[38]

F. Sezgin in his *History of Arabic Scholarly Writing* noted that al-Nawfalī was a contemporary of Hishām ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204/819 or 206/821).[39] Sezgin's remark has been repeated by several modern scholars, including S.M. Prozorov in his invaluable *History of Shiʿite Historiography* and, more

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[34] Interestingly, al-Masʿūdī includes ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Nawfalī's name in a long list of very prominent early Muslim historians and writers. This list begins with Wahb ibn Munabbī, Abū Mikhnaf, al-Wāqidī, and al-Kalbī, continues with Haytham ibn ʿAdī, al-Jāḥiz, and ʿUmar ibn Shabba, soon followed by our al-Nawfalī, then Zubayr ibn Bakkār, al-Riyāshi and many other well-known medieval Muslim scholars. See al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj* – ʿAlī ibn al-Husayn al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab: Les prairies d'or. Texte et traduction par C. Barbier de Meynard et Pavet de Courteille* (Paris: Impr. Impériale, 1861–1877), pp. 10–11. See also v, pp. 4, 41, 177, 178, 183–185, 187–188, vi, p. 36. Except for v, p. 4 (where it reads *wajadtu fī Kitāb al-akhbār li-Abī l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Nawfalī*), in all other places al-Masʿūdī uses expression such as *kitāb ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Nawfalī fī l-akhbār*, or *ḥaddatha al-Nawfalī fī kitābihi fi-l-akhbār* and alike, which simply means that al-Nawfalī was known to have composed 'a book 'on' (or 'consisting of') historical accounts'. In other words, it is not at all clear that these references actually indicate a book 'title'. See also *GAS* (1967), i, p. 312.

[35] For the *Aghānī*, see Fleischhammer (2004), *Quellen*, p. 82 (no. 25) and pp. 32, 37–38.

[36] al-Marzubānī, *al-Muwashshah* – Abū ʿUbaydallāh Muhammad ibn ʿImrān al-Marzubānī, *al-Muwashshah fī maʾākhidh al-ʿulamʾā ʿalā l-shuʿarā* (Cairo: al-Matbaʿa al-Salafiyya, 1343/1924–1925), pp. 214, 247 and 252.

[37] An excerpt from the *Kitāb al-Maṣābīḥ* by Abū l-ʿAbbās Ahmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥasanī al-Ṭālibī was publish by in the appendix to another book, that is, *The Battle of Fakhkh* (*Kitāb Akhbār Fakhkh*) by Ahmad ibn Sahl al-Rāzī al-Rāzī, Ahmad ibn Sahl, *Kitāb Akhbār Fakhkh wa-khabar Yahyā ibn ʿAbdallāh [wa-khabar akhihi Idrīs ibn ʿAbdallāh]: The Battle of Fakhkh, its Aftermath, and the Spread of the Zaydite Movement in Yemen, North Africa and Northwest Iran*, by Ahmad ibn Sahl al-Rāzī, Maher Jarrar (ed.) (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islamī, 1995) (d. in first quarter of the fourth/tenth century). For an analytical study of the sources of al-Rāzī's book, see M. Jarrar (1993), 'Some Light on an Early Zaydite Manuscript', *Asiatische Studien*, 47, pp. 279–297.
For the passages in the *Kitāb al-Maṣābīḥ* quoted from Abū l-Ḥasan al-Nawfalī, see al-Rāzī (1995), *Akhbār Fakhkh*, p. 287 (al-Nawfalī transmits here from Muhammad ibn ʿAbbād al-Bishrī), p. 289 (from his father), pp. 290, 296, 298 (from his father and a Shiʿite shaykh), p. 300 (from Yaʿqūb ibn Isrāʾīl, a *mawlā* of al-Manṣūr, from al-Talḥī), p. 306 (from his father), p. 307 (from Ahmad ibn Sulaymān), p. 313 (from Zayd ibn Mūsā), p. 316 (from his father 'and others'). These quotations are part of Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Ḥasanī's 'Report on the Emigration of [Abu ʿAbdallāh] al-Husayn ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Tālib al-Fakhkhī from Medina and his death' near Mecca in 169/786 in the battle at Fakhkh against the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Hādī. For the genealogy of Abu ʿAbdallāh al-Husayn ibn ʿAlī al-Fakhkhī, see Abū l-Faraj, *Maqātil*, pp. 431–432.

[38] See also notes 91–95.

[39] *GAS* (1997), i, p. 312. Ibn al-Kalbī was a multi-talented scholar and historian. His 'immense oeuvre', as W. Atallah observed, 'was incorporated, to a great extent, in the works of his direct and indirect disciples: Muhammad ibn Habīb, Ibn Durayd, al-Ṭabarī, Abū l-Faraj al-Isfahānī, and many others who borrowed a great

recently, by F.M. Donner in his *Narratives of Islamic Origins*.[40] Although Sezgin's dating appears not to be incorrect, it is somewhat misleading in that it seems to suggest that ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī and Ibn al-Kalbī belonged to the same generation. In other words, one could get the impression that ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī belonged mainly to the eighth rather than the ninth century. This view, however, is unwarranted for several reasons. One of these is related to explicit evidence in the *Maqātil*, according to which al-Nawfalī—when reporting on the pro-Alid revolts of Abū l-Sarāyā al-Sārī in 200/815—refers to his father as a witness to the events and as his main informant.[41] Thus, al-Nawfalī's father, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, was alive and active as a scholar during Ibn al-Kalbī's lifetime. Stated differently, Sezgin's reference to Ibn Kalbī would be more precise if it had identified al-Nawfalī's father, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, as a contemporary of Ibn al-Kalbī.

Several additional pieces of evidence may be addressed in support of our view that al-Nawfalī died during the middle—rather than at the beginning—of the third/ninth century. One is that al-Tānūkhī in his *al-Faraj baʿda l-shidda* (*Relief after Distress*) quotes Abū l-Ḥasan al-Nawfalī as stating, 'I learned (*ḥuddithtu*)' about a certain order given by Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim (d. 277/842). Another is that al-Nawfalī reportedly transmitted from and briefly commented on a legal statement made by Imam ʿAlī al-Hādī, the tenth Imam of the Twelver Shiʿa (d. 254/868), as observed by R. Gleave.[42] In other words, al-Nawfalī was still alive and active as a scholar during Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim's reign (r. 833–842 CE) and during or after Imam ʿAlī al-Hādī's (d. 254/868 CE) imamate.[43] Importantly enough, this view is supported by two explicit statements in the *Dictations* (*Amālī*) of the prolific Shiʿite traditionist and theologian Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), according to which al-Nawfalī was active as a scholar in the years 245 and 250 A.H. (= 859 and 864 CE).[44] However, there are several more pieces of information regarding

Footnote 39 continued

deal from him without much concern for acknowledgement and often with over-vague references to the master's work'. See W. Atallah, 'Al-Kalbī', *EI*[2], iv, p. 494.

[40] Prozorov, Stanislav Mikhailovich, *Arabskaya Istoricheskaya Literatura v Irake, Irane i Srednej Azii v VII – seredine X veka: Shiitskaya istoriografia* [*Arabic Historical Writing in Iraq, Iran and Centra Asia in the 7th to the mid-10th centuries: Shiʿite Historiography*] (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), p. 181; Donner, *Narratives*, p. 306. See also note 97 in this article.

[41] Abū l-Faraj, *Maqātil*, p. 518.

[42] Robert Gleave, 'Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh: The "Canonical" Imāmī Collections of Akhbār', *Islamic Law and Society*, 8(3) (2001), pp. 350–382.

[43] Al-Tānūkhī, *al-Faraj*, i, pp. 175–176. For al-Nawfalī's comment on the *tayammum* ritual, quoted in Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī's (d. 328/939 or 329/940) 'canonical' Shiʿite *ḥadīth* collection, see Gleave, 'Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh', p. 358.

It is also noteworthy that ʿAlī al-Nawfalī's father, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, is mentioned in *Ikhtiyār Maʿrifat al-rijāl al-maʿrūf bi-Rijāl al-Kashshī*, [selected and abridged] by Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-Ṭūsī, ed. by Ḥasan al-Muṣṭafawī (Mashhad: Chāpkhāna-i Dānishgāh, 1348/1969), pp. 258–263. Similarly, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān is referred to in Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥāʾirī Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Māzandarānī's (d. 1216/1801) biographical book, *Muntahā al-maqāl fī aḥwāl al-rijāl*, 7 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyāʾ al-Turath, 1419/1998), vi, p. 64 (no. 2667). A brief entry for ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī is found in the Imami biographical lexicon of Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Ardabilī (d. ca. 1100/1688), *Jāmiʿ al-ruwāt*, 2 vols. ([Qom: Manshūrāt Maktabat Āyatollah al-ʿUẓmā al-Marʿashī al-Najafī, 1403/1983]), i, p. 598. The entry does not contain biographical information on al-Nawfalī. However, it lists the *isnād*s and references for four Imami *ḥadīth*s in which al-Nawfalī appears as a transmitter. Finally, both ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī and his father are quoted with historical information in Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī's *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt fī faḍāʾil Āl Muḥammad*, 2 vols., ed. M. H. al-Muʿallim (Beirut: Dār Jawād al-Aʾimma, 2007), i, pp. 104, 413. Future research on al-Nawfalī, which will set out to 'reconstruct' al-Nawfalī's entire literary oeuvre, would also need to examine the multi-volume theological encyclopaedia *Biḥār al-anwār* by the influential Twelver Shiʿite scholar Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1698) and other Shiʿite collections from later times, in which quotations from al-Nawfalī can be identidied.

[44] Al-Ṭūsī, *Amālī* (1414/1993), pp. 463 and 574.

al-Nawfalī's date of death that will be presented later on in our discussion of the different sources used by al-Ṭabarī and Abū l-Faraj alongside the materials from al-Nawfalī.

Al-Nawfalī, his students, and Abū l-Faraj

In his source-critical examination of Abū l-Faraj's *Book of Songs* (*Kitāb al-Aghānī*), M. Fleischhammer offers further insights into al-Nawfalī's life and scholarship. With respect to al-Nawfalī's scholarly work, Fleischhammer maintains that Abū l-Faraj—like al-Masʿūdī—probably used a *Kitāb al-Akhbār* by al-Nawfalī (which in the medieval sources is, in fact, more frequently referred to as 'al-Nawfalī's *Kitāb fī l-akhbār*' or simply as 'his *Kitāb*').[45] As for al-Nawfalī's educational activities, his father, Muḥammad, appears in the *Aghānī* as his most important teacher and his most frequent source of information. (This view can be confirmed for the *Maqātil* and for al-Ṭābarī's *Tārīkh* as well.)

Of al-Nawfalī's students, the following scholars are most frequently mentioned in the *Aghānī*, with the first scholar listed here being the most significant of them:

1. Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn ʿUbaydallāh ibn Muḥammad **Ibn ʿAmmār** al-Thaqafī (d. ca. 314/936), known also as *al-Kātib*, 'the Secretary', apparently a reference to his position as secretary to several Abbasid viziers. Ibn ʿAmmār was a Shiʿite and the author of several *akhbār* works, including a lost book entitled *The Violent Deaths of the Ṭālibids* (*Kitāb Maqātil al-Ṭalibiyyīn*). Furthermore, Ibn ʿAmmār was a student of the prominent Shiʿite historian and author ʿUmar ibn Shabba al-Numayrī (d. 263/876), whose books he extensively used for his own works.[46]
2. Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz **al-Jawharī** lived at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century. He also was a student of ʿUmar ibn Shabba's, whose works he extensively used.[47]
3. Abū ʿAlī Ḥabīb (ibn ʿAws) ibn Naṣr **al-Muhallabī** (d. after 307/919), yet another student of ʿUmar ibn Shabba's, who was likewise known to have consulted his teacher's books for his own works.[48]
4. ʿĪsā ibn al-Ḥusayn **al-Warrāq**, 'the paper dealer' (or 'copyist'), was still alive at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century. He was a student of al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār al-Qurashī (d. 256/870), a noted Arab genealogist, historian, and author of several *akhbār* works.[49]

These four of al-Nawfalī's students became scholars and teachers in their own right. Abū l-Faraj, then, was one of their students and acquired from them information he used for the *Maqātil* and for the *Aghānī*.

Upon closer examination of these pieces of information, one fact stands out: according to the *Aghānī*, these four early-tenth century scholars regularly mention al-Nawfalī as the source of their information alongside two quite prominent mid-ninth century Muslim historians and writers: ʿUmar ibn Shabba and al-Zubayr

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[45] Fleischhammer (2004), *Quellen*, p. 82. For the question as to whether or not the occational references to al-Nawfalī's *Kitāb al-Akhbār* actually indicate a book 'title', see note 34.
[46] Fleischhammer (2004), *Quellen*, pp. 37–38 (no. 42); *QU* (1991), pp. 133–135, 151.
[47] Fleischhammer (2004), *Quellen*, pp. 32–33 (no. 22); *QU* (1991), p. 117.
[48] Fleischhammer (2004), *Quellen*, p. 44 (no. 67); *QU* (1991), p. 163.
[49] Fleischhammer (2004), *Quellen*, pp. 52–53 (no. 99); *QU* (1991), pp. 229–230.

ibn Bakkār. This finding makes al-Nawfalī appear to have been a scholar who was more reputable—with his work circulating much more widely during and shortly after his lifetime—than is usually assumed today.

Quotations from al-Nawfalī in the Maqātil

Let us now turn our attention to the *Maqātil* and the materials Abū l-Faraj incorporated there from al-Nawfalī. As in the *Aghānī*, al-Nawfalī is found to be in the *Maqātil* a frequent 'older guarantor' of Abū l-Faraj's; he is quoted about 20 times.[50] We note also that Abū l-Faraj was introduced to al-Nawfalī's materials by three teachers:[51]

1. **Ibn ʿAmmār** al-Thaqafī (see above), to whom Abū l-Faraj refers in connection with al-Nawfalī about 13 times;[52]
2. ʿĪsā ibn al-Ḥusayn **al-Warrāq** (see above), to whom Abū l-Faraj refers three times; and
3. **Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-ʿAlawī** (d. 287/900), a historian and writer from Baghdad who is known to have also written a book of *The Violent Deaths of the Ṭālibids* (*Kitāb Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*). This book was given to Abū l-Faraj by Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-ʿAlawī's nephew. Abū l-Faraj refers to Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-ʿAlawī only once in this context.[53]

As in the *Aghānī*, the terms of transmission attest that Abū l-Faraj copied the al-Nawfalī-quotations from certain documents. For example, Abū l-Faraj often indicates such direct quotations from al-Nawfalī by 'he said' (*qāla*) or 'he stated' (*dhakara*).[54] Moreover, a few lengthy quotations from al-Nawfalī are called al-Nawfalī's 'account' (*riwāya*) or 'narrative' (*ḥadīth*).[55] Abū 1-Faraj also regularly records when the contents of reports by al-Nawfalī differ from those of other, evidently written sources, although he does not always specify what these difference are.[56] In contrast to al-Ṭabarī, however, Abū 1-Faraj tends more frequently to incorporate information from al-Nawfalī in his own account of events by paraphrasing rather than quoting them.

[50] Abū l-Faraj, *Maqātil*, pp. 85, 155, 162, 163, 165, 338, 406, 419, 442, 465, 482, 489, 493, 500, 518, 519, 541, 620, 620.

[51] *QU* (1991), pp. 151–152.

[52] Ibn ʿAmmār is quoted in the *Maqātil* about 50 times. Interestingly, Ibn ʿAmmār is also said to have compiled a (now lost) *Kitāb Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*. In some medieval sources, this book is called *The 'White' or Fair Copy* (or: *Final Draft*) *of the Collection of Historical Accounts on the Alids* (*Kitāb [al-Mubayyaḍa] fī Akhbār Āl Abī Ṭālib*); see, for example, al-Tānūkhī, *al-Faraj* ii, p. 175, where it is expressly stated that Ibn ʿAmmār's *Kitāb al-Mubayyaḍa* was used in a lecture taking place at Basra in Muḥarram 345/April 956. In the *Maqātil*, however, Abū l-Faraj does not expressly mention Ibn ʿAmmār's written work. Nor does he otherwise indicate access to the final, edited and published writing of his slightly younger teacher and colleague. We must assume, therefore, that Abū l-Faraj attended Ibn ʿAmmār al-Thaqafī's lectures and wrote his *Maqātil* encyclopaedia before Ibn ʿAmmār completed and published his own work on the same topic. See *QU* (1991), pp. 133–135; and Prozorov (1989), *Arabskaya*, pp. 34, 180.

[53] Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥamza al-ʿAlawī. See *QU* (1991), pp. 190–191.

[54] For the technical terms used in source-criticism, see my article (2005) 'Assessing the Sources of Classical Arabic Compilations', pp. 75–99.

[55] The documents from which Abū l-Faraj drew these passages may have been copies of his teacher's works, but they may also have been notebooks that Abū l-Faraj himself prepared when he was a student.

[56] For example, Abū l-Faraj, *Maqātil*, pp. 423, 489.

The context of al-Nawfalī's accounts in the Maqātil

What other sources did Abū 1-Faraj consult alongside al-Nawfalī's collection of *akhbār*? Based on Abū 1-Faraj's own identification of the 'older sources' he used together with al-Nawfalī's work, the following can be named:

1. Several 'recensions' (or versions)[57] of works by **ʿUmar ibn Shabba** (d. 263/879);[58]
2. *The Book* [*of Those Who Were Killed From Among the Descendants of Abū Ṭālib*] (*Kitāb* [*Man qutila min al-Ṭālibiyyīn*]) by Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥārith **al-Kharrāz** (d. 258/872), a Shiʿite historian and man of letters from Kufa;[59]
3. *The Book of the Violent Deaths of the Ṭālibids* (*Kitāb Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*) by **Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-ʿAlawī** (d. 287/900), a Shiʿite scholar from Baghdad (see above);[60] and
4. An unspecified work by **ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-ʿAlawī** (d. in the early fourth/tenth century), another noted historian and writer from Kufa.[61]

The latter three scholars were students of two renowned contemporaries of al-Nawfalī's: the historians and authors Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī (d. 212/827)[62] and ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Madāʾinī (d. ca. 235/850), whose writings on Alid and Shiʿite history these three scholars extensively consulted for their own books.[63]

Topics of al-Nawfalī's accounts in the Maqātil

Only a few of al-Nawfalī's accounts in the *Maqātil* concern the Umayyad period. One consists of a note about a mother who publicly lamented the deaths of her four sons. Her sons were half-brothers of al-Ḥusayn, the Prophet's grandson, and had died at his side in the Battle of Karbalāʾ in 61/680 during the caliphate of Yazīd ibn Marwān (r. 680–683 CE) (*Maqātil*, p. 85).

Another piece of information—reported by al-Nawfalī, transmitting via his father from his uncle ʿĪsā—is a digression from the main account on the death of **Yaḥyā ibn Zayd**, a great-grandson of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who lived during the caliphates of Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 724–743) and al-Walīd II ibn Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 743–744). It reports on the activities of some devout Shiʿites who had bought, at great expense, the iron chains that had been used to bind Yaḥyā ibn Zayd when he was in prison. These Shiʿites purchased the chains from the blacksmith who had freed Yaḥyā ibn Zayd, and then made pieces of jewellery from the metal, which they set into their rings as a talisman and a blessing (*Maqātil*, p. 155).

Furthermore, there is the report of certain 'heretics' (*zanādiqa*) who became loyal fellows of **ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya**, a great grandson of Jaʿfar ibn ʿAlī

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[57] The term 'recension' is taken to mean a written text established by a scholar as the result of more or less critically revising the work of an earlier scholar, and sometimes publishing it under his own name. This practice was not uncommon in early Muslim scholarship.

[58] *QU* (1991), pp. 220–225.

[59] *QU* (1991), p. 118.

[60] *QU* (1991), pp. 190–191.

[61] ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-ʿAlawī mostly refers to his guarantors from the generation of al-Nawfalī by 'so-and-so wrote to me (*kataba lī fulān*)'. See *QU* (1991), pp. 141–144.

[62] *QU* (1991), pp. 212–214.

[63] *QU* (1991), pp. 147–148.

ibn Abī Ṭālib, who lived during the caliphate of al-Walīd II ibn Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (*Maqātil*, p. 162). Later on in this account, al-Nawafī's uncle, ʿĪsā ibn Sulaymān, is quoted with information on ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya's character. He describes ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya as cruel and 'the most hard-hearted creature on earth' (*aqsā khalq Allāh qalban*). He also says that once he was in ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya's house in Isfahan, sitting with him in the same room, when ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya got so angry at a young servant that he ordered the boy to be thrown out of the window. When the boy held on to the balustrade of the window, ʿAbdallāh ordered his hand to be cut off. The boy fell to his death. Despite his cruelty, it is said that ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya was a witty person and a poet (*Maqātil*, p. 163). Relying on the authority of his father and his father's teachers (*ʿan abīhi wa-mashāyikhihi*), al-Nawfalī relates ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya's attempts to seek support from the Kufans for a revolt against the Umayyad Caliph Yazīd III ibn al-Walīd I ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 744) (*Maqātil*, p. 165).

The majority of the accounts presented in the *Maqātil* on al-Nawfalī's authority, however, deal with Shiʿite events during Abbasid rule, up to and including the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809). In most cases, Abū l-Faraj acknowledges in 'collective *isnāds*' that al-Nawfalī's material was among the various written sources—often with conflicting accounts—which he consulted to write his own, synthesising narrative.[64] Let us provide a few more examples so as to illustrate the diversity of themes and patterns in Abū l-Faraj's quotations from al-Nawfalī.

For instance, in the chapter on **Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAbdallāh**, a great-grandson of al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who died during the caliphate of al-Manṣūr (r. 745–775), al-Nawfalī transmits from his father the story of al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (d. ca. 168/784-5), an Arab philologist of the Kufan school and a Zaydi.[65] It is said that al-Mufaḍḍal had asked Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAbdallāh to lend him some of his Arabic poetry books to study and that he, after Ibrāhīm died, claimed some of the poetry from these books as his own (*Maqātil*, p. 338).

In the chapter on **ʿĪsā ibn Zayd**, a grandson of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, al-Nawfalī transmits from his father that ʿĪsā ibn Zayd and his brother al-Ḥusayn were known as great fighters, with vision and understanding of how to conduct war, and that Caliph Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr was, therefore, surprised when they decided to fight against him (*Maqātil* 406). It is also reported that ʿĪsā ibn Zayd had to flee and lived in hiding for some time before he died during the caliphate of al-Mahdī (r. 775–785). After ʿĪsā ibn Zayd's death, some of his followers looked after his two sons and hid them from the authorities (*Maqātil*, p. 419).

Abū l-Faraj's portrayal of the events in 169/786 leading to the Battle of Fakhkh, a location near Mecca, is based again on different written sources. Abū l-Faraj states that one of the documents he consulted quotes material compiled by al-Nawfalī (mainly from his father), and that he combined it with other sources to construct his own narrative about al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥasan, known as **Ṣāḥib Fakhkh**.[66] Abū

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[64] For example, *Maqātil*, p. 620. See now also the section 'Problems in Transmission' in Donner's *Narratives*, pp. 263–266.

[65] *EI*² vii, p. 305.

[66] Al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī led the Alid revolt at Medina and was killed in the Battle at Fakhkh in 169/786. See L. Veccia Vaglieri (1979), 'Fakhkh', *EI*², ii, pp. 744–745; and id. (1971), 'Al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, Ṣāḥib Fakhkh', *EI*², iii, pp. 615–617.

l-Faraj's narrative provides a specifically Shiʿite perspective of the situation in Medina, where the deputy governor of the city is said to have tried to control the pilgrims from the wider family of the Prophet, the Alids.[67] The governor's deputy reportedly imposed humiliating treatment and even punishment on some of them. Non-Shiʿite sources say the reason for the punishment was that three Ṭālibids were found drinking wine, but Abū l-Faraj maintains that this was a calumny spread by the deputy to serve as justification for his persecution.[68] The situation escalated to an open revolt and the killing of about a hundred Alids and their partisans at Fakhkh (*Maqātil.* p. 442).[69] The events took place during the caliphate of Mūsā al-Hādī (r. 785–786), who became known for having widened 'through the massacre of Fakhkh . . . the gulf between the ʿAbbāsids and the ʿAlids'.[70]

Later on, Abū l-Faraj quotes al-Nawfalī's report pertaining to **Yaḥyā ibn ʿAbdallāh**, a great-grandson of al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who had escaped death at Fakhkh and managed to reach Daylam. The new caliph, Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809), ordered some troops to follow him (*Maqātil*, p. 465). In contrast to other sources, al-Nawfalī claims that Yaḥyā ibn ʿAbdallāh did not die from hunger in prison but was strangled or poisoned on Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd's order (*Maqātil.* p. 482).

Al-Nawfalī's account of **Idrīs I** ibn ʿAbdallāh, a great grandson of al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the founder of the Idrisid dynasty in the Maghreb, also differs from other sources, as Abū l-Faraj expressly notes. Moreover, it is stressed that al-Nawfalī claims that Idrīs was poisoned by somebody sent to the Maghreb on the order of Hārūn al-Rashīd's vizier. (*Maqātil*, p. 489).

ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ḥasan, a great-great-grandson of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, survived the battle at Fakhkh but was later put under house arrest. In contrast to other sources, al-Nawfalī reports that one of Hārūn al-Rashīd's officials killed this Alid with a sword. However, in this case al-Nawfalī—relying on his father's authority—insists that the killing was not ordered by the caliph. Instead, it is said that the caliph's official was acting on his own and was punished for it later on (*Maqātil*, p. 493).

Being one of several sources for Abū l-Faraj's narrative on **Mūsā ibn Jaʿfar**, a great-great-grandson of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, al-Nawfalī relates a report about the incident wherein Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd had Mūsā ibn Jaʿfar detained in Baghdad and then killed and his body displayed in public. Al-Nawfalī relies again on his father for this report (*Maqātil*, p. 500).

Regarding the Talibid revolt in Mecca, led by **Muhammad ibn Jaʿfar**, a member of the Husaynid line of the Prophet's family, it is said that ʿAlī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (d. in 203/818), the eighth Imam of the Twelver Shia, was sent to convince Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar to surrender. Abū l-Faraj concludes his narrative with a special reference to al-Nawfalī who reports—from his father—that Muḥammad

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[67] For the constant threat to the Abbasid dynasty arising from the claim of the Alid family to be the only rightful successors to the caliphate, see the insightful article by Ira M. Lapidus (1975), 'The Separation of State and Religion in the Early Development of Islamic Society', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6, pp. 363–385, esp. p. 368.

[68] *EI*[2], iii, p. 616.

[69] L. Veccia Vaglieri has drawn attention to the problem that Abū l-Faraj passes over some important details regarding the events in Medina prior to the Battle at Fakhkh that could shed an unfavourable light on the participating Ṭālibids. For example, Abū l-Faraj does not mention their active and passive resistance at Mecca or certain other actions that shocked other Muslims when they learned of them. These pieces of information, however, are included in al-Ṭabarī's portrayal of the events. See *EI*[2], iii, p. 616.

[70] D. Sourdel 'al-Hādī ilā l-Ḥakk', *EI*[2], iii, p. 222.

ibn Jaʿfar surrendered after a long siege and later died a natural death (*Maqātil*, pp. 540, 541).

Lastly, Abū l-Faraj also refers specifically to al-Nawfalī—who, in his turn, relied on his father's authority—for the news about **Aḥmad ibn ʿĪsā**, a scholar and member of the wider family of the Prophet. It is said that somebody had carried false news about Aḥmad ibn ʿĪsā to Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, who then ordered Aḥmad ibn ʿĪsā and several members of this family detained and brought from the Hijaz to Baghdad. Then, as al-Nawfalī reports, Aḥmad ibn ʿĪsā and his family gave the guards a drink that put them to sleep so that these Alids were able to escape. Abū l-Faraj concludes this account by stating that Aḥmad ibn ʿĪsā had to live in hiding from the Abbasid authorities for some time, but he died of natural causes during the caliphate of al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861) (*Maqātil*, p. 620).

Abū l-Faraj on al-Nawfalī's religious-political stances

Interestingly, towards the end of the *Maqātil* Abū l-Faraj, provides an explicit 'source-critical' comment on al-Nawfalī. Abū l-Faraj, himself being Zaydi Shiʿite,[71] disapproves of al-Nawfalī's (in his view, extreme) religious-political convictions and propaganda for the Imamate. He indirectly alerts his readers that history related by people who allow ideology and immoderate religious beliefs to influence their academic judgement cannot be trusted—a statement suitable to shed light on Abū l-Faraj's own work ethics and his trustworthiness as a historian. Abū l-Faraj makes this comment at the beginning of a chapter devoted to Abū 1-Sarāyā, the Shiʿite who in 200/815 openly revolted in Kufa against the ʿAbbāsids but was defeated by the governor and later executed. Abū l-Faraj states:

(1) ʿAlī ibn Abī Qurba **al-ʿIjlī**[72] wrote to me, stating:

> **Yaḥyā ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kātib**[73] said to us: **Nāṣr ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī** (d. 212/827) related to us of what he witnessed [i.e. of the events leading to Abū l-Sarāyā's escape from Kufa]. What he did not witness, he related from those who were present; so he related it to me [as well]. [However,] Yaḥyā ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān also related to me bits of his (Abū l-Sarāyā's) news on the authority of individuals other than Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim.

(2) Ahmad ibn ʿUbaydallāh **Ibn ʿAmmār** [al-Thaqafī] reported his (Abū 1-Sarāyā's) news to me on the authority of ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān **al-Nawfalī**.

> Perhaps, I should mention just a little of it and [give only] the explanation it needs, because ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad [al-Nawfalī] used to believe in [and propagate belief in] the Imamate. [But] his obdurate adherence to his beliefs (*al-taʿaṣṣub fī madhhabihi*) caused him to be biased in what he transmitted, and to attribute ugly deeds to those who reported his (Abū 1-Sarāyā's) news from amongst the followers of this sect.
> Most of al-Nawfalī's narrative (*ḥikāya*)—in fact, all of it—is based on and limited to his father's transmission. His father was then living in Basra and learned about the events [in which Abū 1-Sarāyā was involved] only from rumours and false stories current among the people.

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[71] Günther, Sebastian, 'Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī', *EI³*, iii (2007), pp. 51–55.

[72] ʿAlī [ibn Aḥmad] ibn Abī Qurba al-ʿIjlī was an early fourth/tenth century scholar and informant of Abū l-Faraj's. It seems that the piece of writing which Abū l-Faraj received from al-ʿIjlī was a copy of (or an excerpt from) a recension which Yaḥyā ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān had prepared of a work by the prominent scholar Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim. See *QU* (1991), pp. 138–139.

[73] A mid-ninth century (probably Shiʿite) writer and compiler of *akhbār*. See also Abū l-Faraj, *Maqātil*, p. 556.

> So he (Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Nawfalī) wrote it down in his book (*fa-yusaṭṭiruhū fī kitābihi*) without any [real] knowledge, in an effort to dishonour and defame people [who supported Abū Sarāyā].

> Therefore, I rely [in the following] on the narrative (*riwāya*) of those who stayed away from his (al-Nawfalī's) doings [with respect to his reports on this event]; that is, [I rely] on the narrative of Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim. He was trustworthy in his narration and transmission (*al-ḥadīth wa-l-naql*) and it seems that he is one of those who transmitted the news of Abū 1-Sarāyā from (Abū Sarāyā) himself (*samiʿa khabar Abī Sarāyā ʿanhu*). (*Maqātil*, p. 518)

Apart from the firsthand insights into the political and sectarian turmoil at the time and, importantly enough, the competing perceptions of these events by medieval Muslim scholars, three more points need to be highlighted. First, Abū 1-Faraj acknowledged the use of two major sources for this passage, that is:

(a) a piece of writing from his (probably Kufan) informant ʿAlī ibn [Aḥmad ibn] Abī Qurba al-ʿIjlī, which contained a credible report from Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī and bits of news from a few other trustworthy people who—like Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim—witnessed the events relating to Abū 1-Sarāyā; and
(b) the lectures, or a piece of writing, by his teacher Ibn ʿAmmār al-Thaqafī in Baghdad who provided Abū l-Faraj with information from—or access to—a 'book' (*kitāb*) authored by al-Nawfalī.[74]

Second, it is noteworthy that al-Nawfalī, in his turn, learned of the events relating to Abū l-Sarāyā's revolt in Kufa only through his father. His father, however, although he was a contemporary of these events, lived in Basra at that time. He did not witness any of these events (as Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim did) and reported about them only based on hearsay. Furthermore, Abū l-Faraj's remark about al-Nawfalī writing down 'in his book' information on the revolt of Abū l-Sarāyā in 200/815 is specific only in the sense that al-Nawfalī's father was a contemporary—though not a witness—of these events. This note does not definitely determine the time when al-Nawfalī was informed by his father about these events, nor when he included this data in his compendium or when he finished writing it.

Third, Abū l-Faraj saw al-Nawfalī as an Imamite whose biased beliefs made him unjustly portray the events involving Abū l-Sarāyā. As M. Jarrar emphasised, 'the term 'Imamite' in this context means that al-Nawfalī was an adherent of the sixth, seventh, and eighth Imams—Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. ca. 183/799), and ʿAlī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818)'. One may add here that, if al-Nawfalī, as we would argue, were still alive by the middle of the third/ninth century, he would also have adhered to the ninth and the tenth Imams, Muḥammad al-Taqī (d. 220/835) and ʿAlī al-Naqī (d. 254/868). Thus, al-Nawfalī belonged, as Jarrār suggests, 'to those Shiʿites who believed that the line of the Imams started off from a clear [divinely-guaranteed and explicit] designation (*naṣṣ*) from the Prophet Muḥammad to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and that each Imam expressly designates (*nasaqa*) his successor'.[75] These ideas become central creeds for those Muslims who came to be known as Imami or Twelver Shiʿites. The nascent Imamiyya thus combined, to use W. Madelung words, radical Shiʿite religious dogma with political quietism. Abū l-Faraj's Zaydiyya, by contrast, was moderate

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[74] Passages from al-Nawfalī reporting on Ṭālibids in the context of Abū l-Sarāyā's revolt are also quoted by al-Tānūkhī, *al-Faraj*, iv, pp. 113–115.
[75] Jarrar (1995), *Akhbār Fakhkh*, pp. 33–34.

in its Shi'ite doctrine and deviation from the religious views of Sunnism, but politically militant.[76]

Al-Nawfalī and al-Ṭabarī

With a clearer picture of Abū l-Faraj's use of al-Nawfalī's materials and of al-Nawfalī religious-political outlook, we shall now return to al-Ṭabarī and direct our attention to al-Ṭabarī's use of al-Nawfalī's accounts.

In the *Tārīkh*, al-Ṭabarī relied on al-Nawfalī's authority about 40 times, significantly more frequently than Abū l-Faraj. Most of the longer passages that al-Ṭabarī quotes from al-Nawfalī are eyewitness reports that al-Nawfalī transmits from his father. They deal with events that occurred during or were related to the reign of the Abbasid caliphs al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī.

Topics of al-Nawfalī's accounts in the Tārīkh

One of al-Nawfalī's account that appears in the *Tārīkh*, for example, deals with the death (*mahlak*) of 'Abdallāh ibn 'Alī ibn 'Abbās, a paternal uncle of the Abbasid Caliph al-Manṣūr, in 147/764. The historical background shows that as early as 137/754 'Abdallāh ibn 'Alī ibn 'Abbās had made an attempt to challenge al-Manṣūr's rule militarily. Al-Manṣūr had the revolt quelled, 'Abdallāh fell out of favour, and from then on he was under permanent caliphal surveillance. In his portrayal of these happenings, al-Ṭabarī states that opinions differ as to the cause and circumstances of 'Abdallāh's death, and that 'some follow 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī, reporting from his father'. According to one source, 'Abdallāh would have died in prison at the age of 52. Al-Ṭabarī notes this in just one sentence. On the other hand, according to al-Nawfalī's much more expanded version, 'Abdallāh would have died in very strange way. Admittedly, what al-Nawfalī relates in this regard sounds quite bizarre. Yet the entire matter appears to be less unrealistic if one recalls that the methods of torture and execution under the Abbasids were often rather 'extraordinary'. So, it is said that 'Abdallāh was taken to a house built on salty ground (*asāsuhū milḥ*). After he was imprisoned therein, the foundations of the building were flooded (so that the salt dissolved), causing the construction to collapse, and burying 'Abdallāh underneath. (*Tārīkh*, iii, p. 330; *History*, xxix, p. 15).

Other accounts by al-Nawfalī deal with the fatal disease of Caliph al-Manṣūr and with his funeral. For these accounts, al-Nawfalī again relies on his father, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, who witnessed these events and relates very intimate details about al-Manṣūr's problems of digestion, and the attempts of various doctors to help the caliph by advising him to eat less and to use digestives. But the illness would recur and intensify until the caliph died in 158/775. (*Tārīkh*, iii, pp. 387–388, 390; *History*, xxix, pp. 89, 91).

Generally, al-Nawfalī's father, who belonged to a noble Qurayshite family, appears to have had a rather close relationship with certain Abbasids, in particular Caliph al-Manṣūr. This observation is supported by the fact that al-Nawfalī's father, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, is also quoted giving a few firsthand impressions of the architecture of the caliphal palace. These details are part of a

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[76] Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 'Shi'a', *EI*[2], ix, p. 420.

report that Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān provided after his first visit to al-Manṣūr in 158/775. Interestingly, the reader is told here that Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān went to see the caliph because he wanted to ask the ruler about the effects of a certain medicine which the caliph had taken that winter (*Tārīkh*, iii, p. 415; *History*, xxix, pp. 118–119). As it seems likely that al-Ṭabarī had a specific, perhaps religiously motivated interest in medicine, the reason for the inclusion of this kind of information from al-Nawfalī in the *Tārīkh* is obvious.[77]

Quoting his father, al-Nawfalī also reports about Caliph al-Manṣūr's clever practice of allowing senior employees of the government to retire from office only after they had 'donated' a certain amount of money or valuable goods to the treasury of the Baghdad *maẓālim*. Al-Manṣūr bequeathed these 'donations' to his son, al-Mahdī. He instructed al-Mahdī to hand them back to their former owners after the caliph's death, thus securing for his son and successor the loyalty and support of former chief administrators (*Tārīkh*, iii, p. 415; *History*, xxix, p. 119. This story is continued in *Tārīkh*, iii, p. 534; *History*, xxix, p. 253 with an anecdote about al-Mahdī presiding over the *maẓālim*).

Furthermore, al-Nawfalī relates from his father the story of a man who, during the time of the the Umayyad governor Asad ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Qaṣrī (r. 734–737 in Khorasan), preached extremely heterodox ideas, including the transmigration of the soul of Jesus to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and then to the Imams, and also propagated the view that the Imams were gods. It is said that this person had called people to the sect of the Rāwandiyya. Although the governor had him and most of his followers crucified, their ideas and indecent social practices are said to have continued among followers of the Rāwandiyya until al-Nawfalī's very own day (*Tārīkh*, iii, pp. 418–419; *History*, xxix, p. 122).[78]

Another, lengthy account deals with the caliphate of al-Hādī (r. 785–786). Al-Nawfalī again relies on an eyewitness report of his father's for a personal description of the events prior to and during the oath of allegiance taken to al-Mahdī as caliph when al-Mahdī's father, Caliph al-Manṣūr, died on his way to Mecca (*Tārīkh*, iii, pp. 451–455; *History*, xxix, pp. 161–165).

A multi-page, well-developed and complex narrative, for which al-Nawfalī is al-Ṭabarī's main authority, deals with the rise and fall of the **vizier Yaʿqūb ibn Dāwūd** during the caliphate of al-Mahdī (r. 775–785). Al-Nawfalī reports from his father about Yaʿqūb ibn Dāwūd's considerate attitude towards the Alids and the negotiations he conducted between them and the caliph until Yaʿqūb fell out of favour as a result of intrigues directed against him. As a result, al-Mahdī 'ordered that Yaʿqūb's men be deposed from offices in [the] east and west and ordered that his family be arrested and imprisoned'. Yaʿqūb was also imprisoned

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[77] Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, i, pp. 50–51 (introduction).
[78] The Arabic term used here, *ghuluww*, refers to religious ideas that were scandalous not only for Sunnites, but also for Imami Shiʿite. These included, for example, the beliefs in incarnation and transmigration of the soul, but also such practices as sharing personal property and women. See Amoretti, 'Von der staatenlosen Gesellschaft'. p. 110 with further references; Heinz Halm, *Die Islamische Gnosis, Die Extreme Schia und die ʿAlawiten* (München: Artemis, 1982), pp. 23–26; and Wadad al-Qādī, 'The Development of the term *Ghulāt* in Muslim literature with special reference to the Kaysāniyya', in Etan Kohlberg (ed.), *Shīʿism* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 169–193. For a detailed discussion of the Rāwandiyya, see van Ess (1992), *Theologie*, iii, pp. 10–17.

and remained there until Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd released him (al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, iii, pp. 506–517; *History*, xxix, pp. 224–234).[79]

A major point of this story is that Yaʿqūb ibn Dāwūd, when he became vizier and was entrusted with the affairs of the caliphate, is said to have 'sent for the [adherents of the] Zaydiyya, ... [and that] they were brought to him from all sides [of the empire ... He] gave them charge of the affairs of the caliphate in [the] east and west and every great matter and precious work, and [so] the whole world was in [Yaʿqūb ibn Dāwūd's] hands'.[80] Recalling what Abū l-Faraj viewed as al-Nawfalī's 'bias' when reporting about certain Shiʿite events, one would need to be particularly careful in relying on al-Nawfalī's potentially tendentious accounts for historical research, as M. Jarrar correctly pointed out.[81]

Remarkably, however, there are two more characteristics of al-Nawfalī's aforementioned account that serve to illustrate the complexity of early Islamic narratives. One relates to the subtle presentation of the politics of the time. For example, a family of secretaries in the service of several governors in Khorasan reportedly had passed on secret information from the caliphal offices to certain Alids, warning them of the governor's plans against them. When the next generation of this family 'emerged as people of culture and knowledge' both of Arab history and the Arab intellectual heritage, it is said they 'found that they had no status with the Banū l-ʿAbbās, and they did not aspire to their service. ... [Instead,] they adopted the faith of the Zaydiyya and approached the family of al-Ḥusayn'.[82] With respect to the Abbasids, the implications of this rather unfavourable description are self-evident. Perhaps, therefore, the very next paragraph in al-Nawfalī's account softens the picture. Here it is stressed that one of the political figures of that time, Isḥāq ibn al-Faḍl ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān[83] (who was of both Alid and Abbasid descent), 'was of the opinion that the caliphate had passed to the righteous of the Banū Hāshim, and ... that after the Prophet the imamate had not been secure except with the Banū Hāshim and that it was not secure at this time except with them'.[84]

A second, no less important characteristic relates to the wide range of literary and cultural insights, including psychological information about the caliphs, which one finds encapsulated in al-Nawfalī's historical accounts. Some examples of these are al-Nawfalī's reports of a number of his father's anecdotes that portray al-Mahdī's character, as well as other accounts which include poetry, details about singers, etc. However, this kind of information can only be mentioned here in brief.[85]

Having reviewed this spectrum of quotations from al-Nawfalī, it should be highlighted that al-Nawfalī's accounts in the *Tārīkh* are—as in the

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[79] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, iii, p. 516; *History*, xxix, p. 233.

[80] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, iii, p. 508; *History*, xxix, p. 226.

[81] Jarrar (1995), *Akhbār Fakhkh*, pp. 33–34.

[82] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, iii, p. 507; *History*, xxix, p. 224.

[83] Isḥāq ibn al-Faḍl was a paternal cousin of al-Mahdī; see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, iii, p. 509; *History*, xxix, pp. 227 and 225 (no. 729).

[84] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, iii, p. 507; *History*, xxix, p. 225.

[85] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, iii, pp. 531, 534, 535, 536, 541, 542, and 543; *History*, xxix, pp. 250, 253, 254, 255, 256, 261, 262 and 263.

Maqātil—lengthy and relatively well-structured composites of information. Several of these quotations exceed one page in print. Al-Ṭabarī does not indicate in any way that there was a teacher other than al-Nawfalī or a mediator who transmitted these reports to him. Al-Ṭabarī always quotes al-Nawfalī directly. Often he introduces these quotations by formulas such as 'al-Nawfalī stated' (*wa-dhakara al-Nawfalī*) or 'he said (*qāla*)'. Infrequently, he quotes al-Nawfalī by saying, 'it was stated on al-Nawfalī's authority' (*wa-dhukira ʿan al-Nawfalī*), or 'some authorities said what al-Nawfalī stated' (*fa-qāla baʿḍuhum mā dhakara al-Nawfalī*).

As for the nature of al-Nawfalī's accounts in the *Tārīkh*, we have already noticed that almost all of them are eyewitness reports by al-Nawfalī's father (the same applies to Abū 1-Faraj's *Maqātil*). However, the fact that ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī—and not his father Muḥammad—was the 'author' of the compilation that al-Ṭabarī used is suggested by such statements of al-Nawfalī's as: 'I heard my father say (*samiʿtu abī yaqūlu*)', and—apparently in al-Ṭabarī's voice—'ʿAlī stated that his father had related it to him (*wa-dhakara ʿAlī... anna abāhu ḥaddathahu*)'. In addition, there is evidence that al-Nawfalī relied a few times in his work on transmitters other than his father. Indeed, in a few instances he is quoted without reference to an earlier transmitter at all.

The Context of al-Nawfalī's Accounts in the *Tārīkh*

The collective *isnāds* are indicative of the sources which al-Ṭabarī used *in parallel* with al-Nawfalī's materials. They tell us in particular that al-Ṭabarī—like Abū 1-Faraj—copied those other passages from writings of such well-known contemporaries of al-Nawfalī's as: ʿUmar ibn Shabba (d. 263/876),[86] Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204/819),[87] al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256/850),[88] al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823),[89] al-Haytham ibn ʿAdī (d. 206/822),[90] and Isḥāq al-Mawṣilī (d. 235/849).[91]

This evidence clearly suggests that al-Ṭabarī—like Abū 1-Faraj—saw in al-Nawfalī a scholar who was credible enough to be mentioned alongside reputable early Muslim historians. It is, therefore, not surprising that certain later medieval Muslim scholars, such as the aforementioned Abū ʿUbayd al-Bakrī (d. in 487/1094),

[86] Author of several *akhbār* works. See *GAS* (1997), i, p. 345; *QU* (1991), pp. 220–225. In the *Tārīkh*, al-Ṭabarī makes a rare, specific reference to a book title by mentioning ʿUmar ibn Shabba's *History of the Basrans* (*Kitāb Akhbār ahl al-Baṣra*); see al-Ṭabarī, *History*, i, p. 53 (introduction).

[87] Author of several history books. See *GAS* (1967), i, pp. 268–279.

[88] Author of a well-known *Kitāb Nasab Quraysh*. See *GAS* (1967), i, p. 317.

[89] Historian from Medina who spent most of his active time in Baghdad. He was known as one of the best scholars of ancient Arab history, as a compiler of large amounts of information, and someone who arranged this historical information in chronological order. See *GAS* (1997), i, pp. 294–297.

[90] Author of a chronological *History* (see Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, annotated and edited by Gustav Flügel, 2 vols (Leipzig: Vogel, 1871), p. 100, which, like his other works, has been preserved only in quotations included in later compendia. See *GAS* (1967), i, p. 272; and Stefan Leder, *Das Korpus al-Haitam ibn ʿAdč (st. 207/822): Herkunft, Überlieferung, Gestalt früher Texte der aḥbār Literatur* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1991), esp. pp. 3, 157, and chapters 6.2.1. and 6.6. See also my review (1993) of Leder's exhaustive study in *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, L 1/2, pp. 262–265.

[91] Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī was an important source of information for the compilation of the *Aghānī*. See *GAS* (1997), i, p. 371; and Fleischhammer (2004), *Quellen*, pp. 89–91 (no. 43).

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probably the most significant geographer of the Maghreb and al-Andalus,[92] along with Ibn Abbār (d. 658/1260)[93] and Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī (d. ca. 695/1295),[94] would simply call al-Nawfalī 'one of the historians' (*min al-muʾarrikhīn*). Moreover, Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī (d. ca. 695/1295),[95] for example, directly quotes al-Nawfalī (i.e. without providing an *isnād*) and credits him with reports on Idrīs I (r. 789–793), the founder of the Idrīsid dynasty in the Maghreb and of the city of Fez.[96] These accounts, which are included in medieval sources from the Islamic West, complement some of al-Nawfalī's information given in the *Maqātil*, where he reports on the events relating to the Battle of Fakhkh. As mentioned earlier, Idrīs had fought at the side of his nephew and Alid leader, al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥasan, until al-Ḥusayn was killed. Idrīs escaped the massacre, hid in Egypt for some time, and eventually managed to flee to the Maghreb.

Conclusion

The diversity of the material on al-Nawfalī emerging from al-Ṭabarī's and Abū l-Faraj's works may at first look like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Properly put together, however, they provide a reasonably clear picture of al-Nawfalī's scholarly activities and religious-political stance. At the same time, they help advance our knowledge of al-Ṭabarī's and Abū 1-Faraj's scholarship and working techniques, including, in particular, their use of earlier historical sources such as al-Nawfalī's compilation. Let us summarise our findings so far and situate them in the context of previous research.

First, in his *Tārīkh*, al-Ṭabarī quotes historical accounts compiled by ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī in a number of places. Al-Ṭabarī clearly indicates that he copied these often lengthy passages directly—that is, without an intermediary source—from one or more documents, belonging either to al-Nawfalī or to al-Ṭabarī himself. Al-Ṭabarī does not indicate, however, whether

[92] For al-Bakrī's quotations from al-Nawfalī, see al-Bakrī, *Description* – Abū ʿUbayd ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Bakrī, [*Kitāb al-Maghrib: Fī Dhikr bilād Ifrīqiyā wa-l-Maghrib, wa-huwa juzʾ min ajzāʾ al-kitāb al-maʿrūf bi-l-Masālik wa-l-mamālik taʾlīf . . . Abī ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Bakrī*], *Description de l'Afrique Septentrionale*, translated by Mac Guckin de Slane (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1965), pp. 232, 237, 238, 239, 244, 255; [and in the Arabic text:] p. 118 (*wa-dhakara Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Nawfalī — ʿan abīhi — ʿan ghayrihi fī khurūj Idrīs ila ard al-Maghrib . . .*), p. 237 (*wa-dhakara Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥārith ibn ʿUbayd al-Yamānī naḥw riwāyat al-Nawfalī*), p. 122 (*qāla al-Nawfalī* and *qāla ʿAlī al-Nawfalī—akhbaranī ʿIsā ibn Jannūn*), p. 125 (*qāla al-Nawfalī*), p. 131 (*qāla al-Nawfalī*). Al-Bakrī wrote his work on the Maghrib ca. in 460/1066; cf. Wilferd Madelung (1976), 'Some Notes on Non-Ismāʿīlī Shiism in the Maghreb', in *Studia Islamica*, 44, pp. 87–97, esp. pp. 88–89. Not much else is known about al-Bakrī's life and work; see *EI*[2], i, p. 155.

[93] Ibn Abbār was a famous Andalusian historian and man of letters. See *GAL* (1943), i, p. 416; suppl. (1937), i, p. 580; and Ziriklī (1989), *al-Aʿlām*, vi, p. 233. Ibn al-Abbār, *al-Ḥulla* – Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Abī Bakr al-Qudāʿī, *al-Ḥulla al-siyarāʾ*, ed. Ḥusayn Muʾnis (Cairo: al-Sharika al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-n-Nashr, 1963), i, pp. 53–54 (*qāla Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī*).

[94] Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī was an Andalusian historian of Moroccan origin (see Ziriklī (1989), *al-Aʿlām*, vii, p. 95). His work is a crucial source for the history of North Africa and Spain under Muslim rule. See Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān* – Muḥammad ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib fī [ikhtiṣār] akhbār [mulūk] al-Andalus wa-l-Maghrib*, new edn by G.S. Colin and E. Lévi-Provençal (Leiden: Brill, 1948–1951), i, p. 83 (. . . *wa-kāna sabab wusūl Idrīs ilā l-Maghrib ʿalā mā dhakarahu al-Raqīq wa-l-Nawfalī fī l-majmū' al-muftariq wa-ghayruhumā min al-muʾarrikhīn*).

[95] Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī was an Andalusian historian of Moroccan origin (see Ziriklī (1989), *al-Aʿlām*, vii, p. 95). His work is a crucial source for the history of North Africa and Spain under Muslim rule. See Ibn ʿIdhārī (1948), *al-Bayān*, i, p. 83 (. . . *wa-kāna sabab wusūl Idrīs ilā l-Maghrib ʿalā mā dhakarahu al-Raqīq wa-l-Nawfalī fī l-majmū' al-muftariq wa-ghayruhumā min al-muʾarrikhīn*).

[96] Evariste Lévi-Provençal, *Islam d'Occident. Etudes d'Histoire Médiévale* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve, 1948), p. 15.

he drew these passages from a copy representing a 'real' book by al-Nawfalī (that is, a piece of writing definitively edited and published by al-Nawfalī himself) or from one of his own notebooks. Previous research has shown that 'al-Ṭabarī often referred to someone with whom he undoubtedly had some personal contact, but [that] later, he used the source that was transmitted to him by that individual in its written (published) form and quoted from it while pretending all the time to rely upon oral transmission'.[97] We know as well that in some other cases '[al-Ṭabarī] relied on written (but presumably unpublished) 'books' when transmitting information that had been preserved as the heirloom of a particular family . . . ;' and that 'like other students and scholars, al-Ṭabarī kept his notebooks and occasionally made reference to them'.[98] Therefore, it can well be assumed that al-Ṭabarī drew the quotations in question from a manuscript that he kept in his own library. Indeed, this could even have been a copy of al-Nawfalī's *Kitāb* [*fī l-akhbār*] (or *Kitāb al-Akhbār*) which was known at the time and is expressly referred to in the medieval sources. Al-Ṭabarī could have purchased a copy of this book when studying and doing research at various centres of learning in Iraq. Yet, it is also very much possible that he personally met and studied with al-Nawfalī and, thus, prepared a copy of al-Nawfalī's collections of historical reports himself. This could have happened in or around 241/855 when al-Ṭabarī—who by then was not yet 17 years old—stayed in Baghdad for one year, or later when he was continuing his studies for about two years in the great cities south of Baghdad: Basra and Kufa, including a visit to Wāsiṭ on the way. Moreover, it is important to recall here that the scholars whose classes al-Ṭabarī verifiably attended on these trips—mostly men at least in their seventies—all belong to one and the same generation. The death dates of these authorities are between 246/860 and 256/870.[99]

Second, these insights, along with the detailed information presented in this article about al-Nawfalī's scholarship, cast a new light on the question of the time of al-Nawfalī's date of death. Three points shall be made in this regard.

(a) Al-Ṭabarī's direct quotations from al-Nawfalī make it likely that he met with al-Nawfalī and, thus, that al-Nawfalī was still alive in the late fifties or during the sixties of the ninth century CE. Additional evidence strongly supports this view.

(b) The biographical information available about some of al-Nawfalī's direct students attests that these scholars were still alive and teaching at the beginning of the tenth century CE. We find amongst them the names of Ibn ʿAmmār al-Thaqafī and Abū ʿAlī al-Muhallabī, as well as al-Jawharī and ʿĪsā ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Warrāq. The latter two were still alive at the beginning of the tenth century CE, although the exact dates of their deaths are not known. We note, furthermore, that al-Ṭabarī belongs to the same generation as the aforementioned scholars who, verifiably, were al-Nawfalī's students. Finally, if we accept the view offered in a saying attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad and advanced by the great historian

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[97] Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, i, pp. 6 and 52 (introduction).

[98] *Ibid.*

[99] One of al-Ṭabarī's important teachers from Kufa, Hannād ibn al-Sarī, who provided him with a great deal of information for his *Tafsīr*, is said to have died in 243/957 as a man in his nineties. See al-Ṭabarī, *History*, i, pp. 16, 19–21.

and sociologist, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), that the life span of medieval Muslims was known to have been 'between sixty and seventy years' or more,[100] it is reasonable to assume that al-Nawfalī was still alive and teaching during the middle of the ninth century, with the aforementioned students attending his lectures when they were in their late teens and early twenties. This is particularly feasible since some of al-Nawfalī's students also studied with other historians from the same generation, including 'Umar ibn Shabba (d. 263/876) and al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256/870). They often quote them in their works alongside al-Nawfalī as their direct source of information.

(c) A similar piece of evidence arises from the wider context of the passages in which al-Ṭabarī and Abū l-Faraj mention al-Nawfalī. In the *Maqātil*, for example, al-Nawfalī's name is found next to those of 'Umar ibn Shabba, Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥārith al-Kharrāz, and Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-'Alawī. In al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*, the same mention is made of 'Umar ibn Shabba, al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, and Isḥāq al-Mawṣilī and others, including slightly older historians such as al-Wāqidī, al-Haytham ibn 'Adī, and Ibn al-Kalbī. These facts, along with the information in al-Ṭūsī's *Amālī*, according to which al-Nawfalī was still active in 250/864, and Abū l-Faraj's explicit statement that Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī was a contemporary of al-Nawfalī's father—and that al-Nawfalī's father was a witness of the events in 200/815—suggest that 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī died in the second half of the ninth century CE, probably about 256/870 CE.[101]

Third, the fact speaks for itself that al-Nawfalī's materials were a frequently consulted source of information for al-Ṭabarī—a scholar whose academic honesty and solid attitude towards scholarship are generally recognised. Moreover, al-Ṭabarī's use of al-Nawfalī's materials indicates that he saw in him an academically acceptable and reliable source of information who merited being quoted alongside other prominent early Muslim historians.

Likewise, Abū l-Faraj relied extensively and directly on a large variety of written source materials for his own books. Among these documents were several books dealing specifically with Shi'ite history, which contained lengthy quotations from al-Nawfalī. For the *Maqātil*, the most significant of these particular sources was a copy of a work (probably the copy of a lecture) on *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn* by Ibn 'Ammār al-Thaqafī. As we have already noted, Ibn 'Ammār was one of Abū l-Faraj's most important Shi'ite teachers in Baghdad, and he was—like al-Ṭabarī—a late ninth- and early tenth-century scholar who apparently knew al-Nawfalī personally and studied with him. The terms of transmission (as recorded in Abū l-Faraj's *Maqātil*) clearly attest that Ibn 'Ammār—like al-Ṭabarī—had copied information directly from a work by al-Nawfalī. Ibn 'Ammār did this regularly, as he copied from other written sources as well.

[100] Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Sunan*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir, no. 2331 ('*umr ummatī min sittīna sanatan ilā sab'īna sanatan*), and Ibn Māja, *al-Sunan*, ed. 'Abd al-Bāqī, no. 4236 (*a'mār ummatī mā bayna al-sittīna ilā al-sab'īna*); see also Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, translated and introduced by Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 136–137.
[101] Basing himself on Sezgin's dating, Donner mentions 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī's *Kitāb al-Akhbār* last in his *Chronological List of Early Texts* on Islamic history, giving the year 200 AH (=815 CE) as a possible date for it; see *GAS* (1967), i, p. 312; and Donner (1998), *Narratives*, p. 306. In light of the materials discussed in this article (esp. al-Nawfalī's relying on his father for the report on Abū l-Sarāyā's revolts in 200 AH, and al-Tānūkhī's quotation of al-Nawfalī with historical information about Caliph al-Mutawakkil), this date may need to be corrected to a few decades later.

Fourth, the frequent and lengthy quotations from al-Nawfalī's compilation in the works of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn ʿAmmār, Abū l-Faraj, and several later medieval Muslim scholars (both Sunnite and Shiʿite, and from both the Islamic East and West) are unequivocal proof of al-Nawfalī's acclaim as an authority for Alid family history. Al-Nawfalī's materials were seen by these scholars as a legitimate source, complementary to other ninth century historical sources. Al-Nawfalī's work was especially useful in this regard as it offered, as both al-Ṭabarī and Abū l-Faraj state more than once, views that were alternative to or different from other sources. However, while al-Ṭabarī appears to have directly copied passages from a document representing a series of lectures or a compendium on Islamic history by al-Nawfalī, Abū l-Faraj, being slightly younger than al-Ṭabarī, learned this information via intermediaries, and especially through three of al-Nawfalī's students whose lectures on Shiʿite history he attended and whose writings on the topic he consulted. Furthermore, our analysis has also confirmed that Abū l-Faraj indeed did not make any significant use of al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* when drafting his *Maqātil*.

Fifth, let us recall that al-Nawfalī was from a family related to the family of the Prophet Muḥammad. It is, therefore, not surprising that Alid and Shiʿite history was the thematic focus of al-Nawfalī's work. The indications in certain sources that al-Nawfalī was an opponent of the extreme ideas of the Rāwandiyya on the one hand, and an enthusiastic supporter of the Imamate on the other, add to our knowledge of his personality and politico-religious stance.[102] Abū l-Faraj's characterisation of al-Nawfalī as a 'biased' historian is indicative in this context as well, although, as S. Prozorov correctly stated, it expresses a view that is 'not entirely free of subjectivism' itself and that would need to be understood this way.[103] For the Zaydi Shiʿite scholar Abū l-Faraj, however, this alleged bias of the Imami Shiʿite al-Nawfalī was sufficient reason not to quote him more than necessary in his encyclopaedia of early Shiʿite history. Rather, it made Abū l-Faraj decide to present, above all, al-Nawfalī's accounts and anecdotes which he could not find elsewhere, or which he saw useful in order to contrast or counterbalance other sources.[104]

Finally, it should be mentioned again that al-Nawfalī primarily related eyewitness reports from his father and his uncle. These accounts on events during the eighth and at the beginning of the ninth century were recorded and edited by al-Nawfalī and, thus, did not pass through a long process of transmission with various stages of editorial change. Therefore, they can be expected to contain a relatively high degree of reliable information and, indeed, of historical accuracy.[105]

These insights lead us to see ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī as a true representative of the dynamic time of transition from the second period (ca. 730–830 CE) to the third period (ca. 830–925 CE) in the development of Islamic historiography. On the one hand, there is al-Nawfalī's chief concern with collecting, organising, and publishing earlier accounts. We note also that the majority of the reports he recounted relate to Alid history and related events from

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[102] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, iii, pp. 418–419, *History*, xxix, p. 122; and Abū l-Faraj, *Maqātil*, p. 620.

[103] Prozorov, *Arabskaya*, pp. 180–181.

[104] Al-Ṭabarī is known for his life-long efforts to protect himself from animosity and allegations (especially from the Ḥanbalites) that he was a Shiʿite. His constant efforts to remain neutral and to distance himself from the events he reported may be one reason why the accounts he quoted from al-Nawfalī do not touch on anything that could be viewed as theologically problematic by mainstream Sunni or Shiʿite Muslims.

[105] A. Noth identified the length of the process of transmission of early Islamic texts, and thus the degree of editorial change, as a main criterion in assessing the historical truth contained therein. See Albrecht Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition. A Source-critical Study*, 2nd edn, in collaboration with Lawrence I. Conrad, translated by Michael Bonner (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994), pp. 7 and 173 *passim*.

the time of the rise of the Abbasids and the momentous first decades of their rule, with much of the transmitted news circulating in al-Nawfalī's own family. On the other hand, assembling and passing on personal memories preserved in eyewitness reports and other incidental or contextual information were not the only matters of importance to al-Nawfalī. Rather, he appears to have gone beyond that by constructing, in writing, some kind of a larger narrative framework for these individual bits of historical data.[106] Al-Nawfalī's compilation of *akhbār* must, therefore, be seen in the context of the immense effort of eighth and especially ninth century Muslim scholarship to systematise historical knowledge, document it in written form, and produce new knowledge—knowledge that would help Muslim intellectuals to deal with issues of legitimacy of political power, and to formulate and validate an emerging, distinctly Islamic identity for civilisation and society during early Abbasid times.[107]

Al-Nawfalī's original *Kitāb* [*fī l-akhbār*] has not survived. It has this attribute in common with many other writings of eighth- and ninth-century Muslim scholars. Yet, the numerous quotations from his lost *History* in later works, along with the analytical data presented in our study, clearly demonstrate that al-Nawfalī shared with other early Muslim scholars a passion for history and inquiry, and a talent for relating (and contextualising) events in narrative form. It was these intellectual qualities of early medieval Muslim historians, combined with a good deal of creativity and an eagerness to experiment (as is evident, for instance, in al-Nawfalī's interest in contemporary history), which accelerated the development of Islamic historiography during the second half of the eighth and in the first half of the ninth century. Moreover, the activities of assembling and systematically arranging selected *akhbār* in edited and published writings, now bearing the stamp of an identifiable 'author', gave rise to a range of new forms and types of historical literature in Arabic, thus providing fertile ground for the often voluminous classical Arabic compilations of the ninth to the eleventh century, including those of al-Ṭabarī and Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī.

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[106] See also Donner (1998), *Narratives*, p. 276.

[107] See Robinson (2003), *Islamic Historiography*, Ch. 2, esp. pp. 24–30. Considering the significance of 'biography' and 'prosopography' in early Islamic scholarship, Robinson specifies that biography 'is about exemplary or otherwise distinctive individuals'. Prosopography, by contrast, 'compiles and organises those items of biographical data that mark an individual's belonging to a group. Biographies accentuate the individuals; prosopographies make individuals members'. See id. 66. It is, therefore, noteworthy that al-Nawfalī was recognised in medieval times as a credible source of information for such 'classics' of Muslim scholarship as al-Ṭabarī's chronographic history, the *Tārīkh*, and Abū l-Faraj's prosopographic martyrology, the *Maqātil*.