

THE ROLE OF THE BIOGRAPHER IN CONSTRUCTING
IDENTITY AND DOCTRINE: AL-[°]ABBĀDĪ AND HIS
KITĀB ṬABAQĀT AL-FUQAḤĀ[°] AL-SHĀFĪ[°]IYYA

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This paper explores the role of the biographer in compiling a biographical dictionary, focusing on al-[°]Abbādī's (d. 458/1066) work on the Shāfī[°] 'school' of law. The paper argues that al-[°]Abbādī straddles a fine line of faithful transmission of school doctrines and artful arrangement of the materials in order to shape the identity, authority structures, and doctrines of the school according to his vision. To highlight al-[°]Abbādī's role in constructing the identity and authority structures of the school the paper focuses on three areas: first, how al-[°]Abbādī lays out his vision of the school in the entry of the eponym of the school by delineating the areas of law that distinguish al-Shāfī[°] from other founders of schools of law; second, how al-[°]Abbādī deals with contradictory positions held among members of the school; third, how he gives the school of law also a theological identity (Ash[°]arism) by discussing such topics as free will, the createdness of the Qur[°]ān, and the definition of faith (*īmān*). The paper details the author's range of editorial hints and techniques of presentation that guide his audience to the 'correct' Shāfī[°] doctrine. It presents reasons why al-[°]Abbādī takes recourse to these measures and points to the effects of his presentation of school doctrines.

Introduction

A particular feature of Arab-Muslim literature and culture is its vast numbers of biographical dictionaries.¹ Among the earliest of which we

¹ Biographical notes are known by a variety of terms; widely used are the Arabic *ṭabaqa*, pl. *ṭabaqāt*, or *tarjama*, pl. *tarājim*, as well as *sira*, pl. *siyar*. They are found in a variety of literature. Depending on how broadly one defines the genre, biographical information appears in historical narratives that, sometimes more as a side note, elaborate on people who lived during the time period under consideration or list those who died in a particular time span; in works specifically dedicated to a particular group of people; and in those devoted to a particular figure (usually called *manāqib*). For overviews of the breadth and depth of this genre with extensive bibliographical references, see Sir Hamilton Gibb, 'Islamic Biographical Literature,' in *Historians of the Middle East*, eds. B. L. Lewis and P. M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 54–8; Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 2nd revised ed. 1968), 100–6; M. J. L. Young, 'Arabic Biographical Writing,' in *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Religion and Learning in the Abbasid Period*, eds. M. J. L. Young, J. D. Latham