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THE LIFE AND DEEDS OF 'ALĪ B. MUHAMMAD AL-MADĀ'INĪ*

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Early life

Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Abī Sayf al-Qurashī al-Madā'inī was a major early collector and composer of literary and historical traditions. He is referred to in the sources by his *kunya*, *ism*¹ or *nisba*. Of al-Madā'inī's life quite a few facts are known, and thanks to Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, we have a list of over two hundred works attributed to him. The thousands of *khbars* ascribed to him in later works help to reconstruct a picture of his literary activities and interests.

Al-Madā'inī was born in al-Baṣra, possibly in the year 135/752–3² – but the years of birth are suspect in the Medieval era and can only be deemed approximate. However, 'Awāna b. al-Ḥakam, who may have

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¹ The name 'Alī b. Muḥammad is sometimes confusing, since we know another historian by that name, namely 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Nawfalī al-Hāshimī (*floruit* somewhat later than al-Madā'inī), who is quoted, albeit more rarely, on the same kind of subjects that al-Madā'inī was interested in. Incidentally, al-Nawfalī's *kunya* is also identical with al-Madā'inī's, that is, Abū l-Ḥasan. The problem is somewhat mitigated by the fact that al-Nawfalī often quotes his father, whereas al-Madā'inī never seems to quote his. I do not know whether this can be categorically supposed, since for instance in al-Azdi, *Ta'rikh*: 34, al-Madā'inī appears to be citing his father. Of course, this can be a misidentification on al-Azdi's part and, instead, 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Nawfalī should be read. On al-Nawfalī, see Günther 2008 and 2009.

² Al-Marzubānī, *Nūr al-Qabas*: 184. Interestingly, in al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*: X, 401, his year of birth is given as 132. All the other sources repeat the year 135, so we can discard the year 132 as a copyist's slip.

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