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al-Madā'inī

Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Abī Sayf al-Qurashī l-Madā'inī (d. c.228/843) was an important Arabic *akhbārī*, composer, and collector of historical and literary traditions, who lived in early 'Abbāsīd Iraq.

1. LIFE

No date relating to al-Madā'inī's life is known with certainty. The date found in the sources for his birth is 135/752–3 (al-Marzubānī, *Nūr*, 184). We can treat this as his approximate year of birth. More certain is that he was born in Basra. For the entirety of his life he seems to have remained within Iraq, albeit in different cities.

Al-Madā'inī came from a family of Iranian descent. They were *mawlās* of 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Samura b. Ḥabīb al-Qurashī (d. 50/670 or 51/671), a commander for the early Muslim armies who fought in the region of Sijistān, Khurāsān, Kābul, and Zābulistān (Ibn 'Adī, 5:1855; Rotter, 104). This connection to 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Samura gave al-Madā'inī his second *nisba*, al-Qurashī. Reports

attributed to him indicate that he knew Persian.

It is rather well established that al-Madā'inī lived at some point in al-Kūfa, studying Mu'tazilī theology, *ḥadīth*, historical traditions, and other subjects (Ibn al-Nadīm, 1:100; Ibn al-Murtaḍā, 15; Sezgin, 946). He also stayed in al-Madā'in, from which he received his *nisba*, before moving to Baghdad (al-Khaṭīb, 12:54–5; Ibn Ḥamdūn, 3:84). Al-Madā'inī is quoted as narrating that he was in Basra in the year 153/770–1 (al-Jāhīz, 2:93), so perhaps his relocation to Baghdad was after that—but how much after cannot be said.

In Baghdad, al-Madā'inī was sponsored by the singer and poet Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (d. 235/849–50) (al-Khaṭīb, 12:55), who, in turn, enjoyed a friendly relationship with the 'Abbāsīd caliphs. It is probably through Ishāq that al-Madā'inī himself was able to access the court of the caliphs. Two literary anecdotes recount his meeting the caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198–218/813–33) (al-Marzubānī, *Mukhtār*, 410–1; Yāqūt, 5:311).

According to the sources, al-Madā'inī died in Ishāq's house in Baghdad (Ibn al-Nadīm, 1:101). Of the dates given for