
Schippers, A.

Published in:
Bibliotheca Orientalis

DOI:
10.2143/BIOR.63.5.2021774

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (http://dare.uva.nl)
booklet contains various contributions that explain the phenomenon itself and a bibliography of those works that have been found in the project (pp. 159-171). The 2004 booklet includes contributions on the use of Arabic scripts to write Islam-related texts, both within the People's Republic of China, such as modern Uyghur (a Turkic language, spoken by a large non-Han group in western China), Han-Chinese (among whom there are numerous groups) that are of an Islamic persuasion), Salar (a non-Han group in northwestern China), and outside China, such as Spanish, Malay and Punjabi. Taken together these articles provide a good impression of the extent of the use of Arabic script for local languages in the early twentieth century. The illustrations of original Chinese booklets are usually too small and of insufficient quality, to be of much use for the reader.

Sadly, the research seems to have been carried out in isolation of Western scholarship on related phenomena. Thus, there has been published quite recently an excellent study on the late sixteenth century revival of Islamic culture in Arabic and Persian in China proper, in other words not in the traditionally Islamic periphery of the Chinese empire, but among Han-Chinese scholars of Islamic descent in Shandong and the Lower Yangzi region.

This study in its turn refers to recent Chinese scholarship that could also have been fruitfully used. Equally important is the fact that various Western writers already noted the phenomenon many decades ago. A 1925 bibliographical survey by Isaac Mason already had some wonderful depictions of the kind of combined Arabic/Chinese texts which are the object of this project. Similarly I have found no references to the extensive work by Donald Leslie and others on related topics.

Finally, a very real weakness of the book is the lack of anthropological fieldwork to accompany the search for texts. Despite the possible significance of this kind of material for linguistic and historical linguistic purposes, its real importance is as a cultural phenomenon within particular religious as well as political contexts. In the 2003 report a table is included (pp. 46-50) which summarizes the rather non-committal answers of those who sold or otherwise handled such booklets. However, given the extremely sensitive nature of Islam in China today, both for its supposed and highly exaggerated connections to terrorism, and as the religion of several large (and still growing) so-called minority peoples, it is not to be expected that merely polite questioning will yield much interesting information on the usage context of such booklets. This would be true of any ethnographer, but even more so of Japanese scholars speaking excellent Chinese who, certainly to local minorities, must look suspiciously like the Han-Chinese that, from their point of view, suppress them and economically compete with them.

A proper fieldwork project is required in order to supplement this information. Some of those who grew up with such books in the 1930s and 1940s will still be alive and eager to share their memories, once they have come to trust the researchers, something that takes time and is not easily done on the basis of guerilla-fieldwork. Similarly, these books are again being produced and utilized, no doubt in different ways from the past. All of this should be studied in order to improve our understanding of the curious hegemonic inter-relationships between a once powerful cultural center and again powerful politico-economic system (i.e., China Proper) and a highly powerful religious culture (that we usually label Islam, but is as diverse in China today as it is elsewhere).

Leiden University, Department of Humanities, September 2006

B. J. T. E R  H A A R


In the preface the author explains that the present book is an elaborated version of his Habilitationsschrift entitled Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb al-Aghānī, which he presented to the Philosophical Faculty of the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in 1965. He did not publish it at the Saxonian Academy in the 1960s because the remaining volumes of the Cairene Dar al-kutub edition were unobtainable. Publication in the original form was not planned until later, though there was much interest in the typewritten version. The debate about oral and written transmission in the Middle Ages had, of course, moved on since then, but the author did not make any major changes in his present work.

After the Introduction the author turns his attention in Chapter One to structure and order in the Kitāb al-aghānī, the Book of Songs of Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī. He also deals with the problem of sources, methods and identification. As the other chapters in the book is a schematic overview of various aspects of the Aghānī, the discussion of the results and conclusions is presented in this first chapter. Here, he provides a concise survey of the most important results (especially on a statistical level). The results are based on the schemes of Chapters Two to Five, which give an exact idea of the number of informants of Abū l-Faraj, i.e. 150 persons, including two women. This figure is then broken down into 51 informants (34%) who were responsible for 96.1% of the ḡnāds (chains of trustworthy transmitters); 21 informants (14%), each with over 100 quotations, featuring at the top in 83.3 % of the ḡnāds, etc. The writings of the historian al-Ṭabarī (d. 922) are widely quoted in the Aghānī, notably his History of Prophets and Kings with its passages on the maghāzī (raids and battles) in the time of the prophet.

Among the long list of other sources (pp. 23-26) are Ibn al-Mardzubān’s (d. 921) ʿTabaqāt al-shuʿāʿārī (Generations of...
I bought the volumes of the incomplete Dar al-Aghdnl. The secondary literature on the Kitdb al-aghdnl includes a survey and enumeration of articles: 482 articles in 24 books (pp. 135-152); analyses of chosen articles (pp. 152-226); and identification tables (pp. 227-232). In the Appendix to Chapter One the author explains his system of cross references and other practices related to his presentation of the works and the persons (pp. 26-28).

Chapter Two (pp. 29-70) deals with the informants of Abü l-Faraj: 150 are mentioned with references to where they occur in the Kitdb al-aghdnl and one item is devoted to anonymous persons. Chapter Three deals with 76 important and frequently quoted authorities (pp. 71-109). Chapter Four deals with written sources: a total of 99 works are addressed. Item 100 is devoted to anonymous written sources, for instance: 'ba'd al-kutub', "one of the books" (pp. 110-134). Chapter Five concentrates on the articles of the Kitdb al-aghdnl, following the sequence of the book itself, and includes a survey and enumeration of articles: 482 articles in 24 books (pp. 135-152); analyses of chosen articles (pp. 152-226); and identification tables (pp. 227-232). In the Appendix the author presents corrections in the text of the present Aghdnl editions (pp. 233-249). Finally, the book provides a list of abbreviations, a bibliography, and a register of persons and works.

This book could be a useful tool to further develop the interest aroused by the appearance of Hilary Kilpatrick's Making the Great Book of Songs (2003). In a certain sense a cross-fertilization has occurred between the publication of the two books: the fact that scholars such as Hilary Kilpatrick have used Fleischhammer's typewritten dissertation has, without any doubt, contributed to the idea of republishing it. Hopefully, it will not take too long for other unpublished studies on the Aghdnl to see the light of day!

University of Amsterdam, Arie Schippers
May 2006


It was almost forty years ago, during my time as a student, that I first made the acquaintance of the Kitāb al-aghdnl (Book of Songs), the renowned work by Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī. That was also the time when I started reading poetry: pre-Islamic, Umayyad and Abbasid. The secondary sources which I used, such as the Histoire de la littérature arabe by Régis Blanché (Paris 1952) and the first volumes of the second ÉL edition, made prolific reference to the Aghdnl. I bought the volumes of the incomplete Dār al-kutub/Lajna edition with references to the older Būlāq edition in the margin, so that I could use the indices of Ignazio Guidi, which were published by Brill back in 1900, but were still obtainable at the end of the 1960s from Brill's publish-