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**Abū ʾl-ʿIbar al-Hāšimī.
Unknown poet, writer and *nadīm* at caliphs' court.**

The purpose of this paper is to shed some new light on the community of Abbasid court companions, their character and their writings. It seems that the study of that problem has been slightly neglected¹, though their literary activity was indeed plentiful. It mirrored literary trends and tendencies of the epoch. Men of letters and of science had gathered at the Abbasid court either through cultural or material affinity or because they had been summoned to it for their work or competence. Among them there had been a group created of three men, one of them was Abū ʾl-ʿIbar al-Hāšimī.

There are three chapters in Ibn an-Nadīm's *Fihrist* which, in particular, deal with those phenomena which are now recognized as literature and components of culture. Chapter four is completely devoted to the poetry, in chapter eight the attention is mainly given to fables, evening stories (*asmār*) and other miraculous narratives. Chapter three, the longest of them, deals with historians, genealogists, biographers, secretaries, administrators, and, of course, their writings. The most important for this study is the third part of chapter three where the accounts about men of letters (*udabāʾ*), court companions (*nudamāʾ*), singers (*muḡanniyūn*), buffoons and clowns (*muraṭazāt*) can be found. Among them there are three who seem to form a special circle of Al-Mutawakkil's court companions and jesters.

The best known among them is Abū ʾl-ʿAnbas aṣ-Ṣaymarī² (d. 275/888,

¹ This subject was studied, among others, by Bencheikh, er E., *Le cénacle poétique du calife al-Mutawakkil*, "Bulletin d'Etudes orientales", 29 (1977), Chejne, A. G., *The Boon Companion in Early 'Abbasid Times*, "Journal of the American Oriental Society", 85 (1965), Pellat, Ch., *Un curieux amuser Baḡdādien: Abū'l-ʿAnbas aṣ-Ṣaymarī*, *Studia Orientalia in Memoriam C. Brockelmann*, Halle 1968.

² Cf. Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist M*, pp. 216-217, *Fihrist DM*, pp. 168-169, *Fihrist ET*, pp. 332-333, [I use two Arabic editions of *Fihrist*, the first is *Kitāb al-fihrist*, Dār al-

Baghdad), native of Al-Kūfa, who was a judge in Aṣ-Ṣaymara³. His interests in knowledge of stars and astrology resulted in several works. He composed some books on general astrological doctrines and horoscopes like *Kitāb radd al-munaḡḡimīn* (Refutation of the Astrologers), *Kitāb aḡkām an-nuḡūm* (Book on Judgments of Stars), *Kitāb al-madḡal fī ṣinā‘at at-tanḡīm*⁴ (Introduction Book to the Art of Astrology). Al-Qifṭī gives only two titles: *Kitāb al-mawālīd* (Book of Nativities), *Kitāb al-madḡal ilā ‘ilm an-nuḡūm* (Introduction Book to the Science of Stars) and the latter is probably identical with *Kitāb madḡal fī ṣinā‘at at-tanḡīm* from Yāqūt’s account. Most of these writings is lost, some preserved in manuscripts⁵.

Ibn an-Nadīm states that caliph Al-Mutawakkil included him in his group of court companions (*adḡalahu Al-Mutawakkil fī ḡumla nuda-mā’ihi*)⁶ and gave him particular attention. As a jester and caliph’s court companion he wrote great number of works, titles of which, in some way, mirror the mood of Al-Mutawakkil’s court and trend in popular literature of that period. Both Yāqūt and Ibn an-Nadīm give long list of his books, among them: *Kitāb faḡdā’il ḡalq al-ra’s* (Book of the Excellencies of the Nature of Head), *Kitāb al-aḡḡadiṭ aṣ-ṣāḡḡa* (Book of the Odd Stories), *Kitāb faḡl as-sullam ‘alā ād-daraḡa* (Book on Preference of the Ladder to the Stairs), *Kitāb as-saḡḡḡāqāt wa-l-baḡayīn* (Book on Lesbians and Prostitutes), *Kitāb al-ḡaḡḡaḡa fī ḡald ‘umayra* (Book on Jolting during Masturbation), *Kitāb masāwī al-‘awwām wa-aḡbār as-safala wa-āl-iḡtāmm* (Book on Shortcomings of the Common People and Traditions of Rogues and Miserables), *Kitāb faḡl as-surm ‘alā āl-fam* (Book of the Superiority of the Rectum over the Mouth)⁷. Abū ‘Anbas aṣ-Ṣaymarī was not isolated in this kind of literary production, even superficial survey of the third part of the chapter three of Ibn an-Nadīm’s *Fihrist* proves that.

Masīra 1988, here marked as *Fihrist DM*, and *Al-Fihrist*, Miṣr 1348 (A H), here marked as *Fihrist M*, and also English translation *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm* (ed. and trans.) Bayard Dodge, New York & London 1970, marked as *Fihrist ET*], Abū āl-Faraḡ al-Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, vol. XVIII, p. 173 on his controversy with the poet Al-Buḡturī. The same mentions Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūḡ*, vol. II, pp. 202-204. Yāqūt, *Irṣād*, vol. VI, pp. 401-406 gives some more details, Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Tā’rīḡ al-ḡukamā’*, p. 410. Pellat, Ch., op.cit., pp. 133-137, Halle 1968, Sezgin, F., *GAS*, VII, pp. 152-153.

³ Ṣaymara—region near Basra, placed by the mouth of Al-Ma‘qal river (cf. Yāqūt, *Mu‘ḡam al-buldān*, vol. III, p. 442.

⁴ Yāqūt, *Irṣād*, vol. VI, pp. 402-403.

⁵ Cf. Sezgin, F., *GAS*, vol. V, p. 262, EI², s.v. Abū’l-‘Anbas al-Ṣaymarī.

⁶ Cf. *Fihrist DM*, p. 168.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

The second and the less known of this Al-Mutawakkil's circle was a mysterious Al-Kutanġi. The only account of him, which was found, is that given by Ibn an-Nadīm⁸. Ibn an-Nadīm mentions that he belonged to the same group of court companions like Abū ʾl-ʿAnbas aṣ-Ṣaymarī and, the hero of this paper, Abū ʾl-ʿIbar al-Hāšimī (huwa ... fī ṭabaqat Abī al-ʿAnbas wa-Abī ʾl-ʿIbar). Al-Kutanġi succeeded the latter after his death. The author of Fihrist quotes a piece of humorous letter which Al-Kutanġi wrote to Sulaymān Ibn Wahb⁹ or to his son. Some titles of his works also preserved in Fihrist and they are: Kitāb ġāmiʿ ʾl-ḥamaqāt wa-aṣl ar-raqāʾāt (Comprehensive Book on Foolish Things and the Origin of Stupidity), Kitāb aṣ-ṣafāʾina (The Clowns), Kitāb al-maḥraqa (The Trickery). Nothing more we know about Al-Kutanġi.

The last of this circle was Abū ʾl-ʿIbar al-Hāšimī. He was the most controversial personage of the circle. Nowadays one can call him a scandalizer. Only few accounts of him have been preserved. In this paper I use mainly those of Yāqūt's, from his Iršād¹⁰, Abū ʾl-Faraġ al-Iṣbahānī's Kitāb al-aġānī¹¹ and, of course, Ibn an-Nadīm's Fihrist¹². The oldest of these accounts is that given by Abū ʾl-Faraġ al-Iṣbahānī, who died in 967 AD. Ibn an-Nadīm completed his work by the year 990 AD¹³. The authors of those three accounts give his full name and agree as to Al-Hāšimī's kunya Abū ʾl-ʿAbbās. Both Ibn an-Nadīm and Yāqūt state that his name was Muḥamad, and father's name Aḥmad, only Al-Iṣbahānī calls him Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad. However, the word 'Ibn' before Muḥammad could be placed here by mistake because Al-Iṣbahānī gives, after name Aḥmad, laqab Ḥamdūn al-Ḥamiḍ. This laqab is confirmed, at first, by Ibn an-Nadīm and then repeated by Yāqūt, who evidently made use of the same sources as the author of Fihrist. But only Yāqūt who states clearly: wa-kāna abūhu Aḥmad yalqabu bi-Ḥamdūn al-Ḥamiḍ¹⁴, names Al-Hāšimī's father, whilst Ibn an-Nadīm omits the name Aḥmad in his statement¹⁵. At the same time

⁸ Cf. Fihrist DM, p. 170, Fihrist M, p. 218, Fihrist ET, p. 336.

⁹ Sulaymān Ibn Wahb (d. about 884), was a vizier of Al-Muʿtamid, his son ʿUbayd Allāh was also a vizier, he died during the reign of Al-Muʿtamid.

¹⁰ Edited as Yāqūt's Dictionary of Learned Men, vol. VI, pp. 271-274.

¹¹ Abū ʾl-Faraġ al-Iṣbahānī, Kitāb al-aġānī, vol. XX, pp. 89-93.

¹² Fihrist DM, p. 169-170, Fihrist M, p. 217-218, Fihrist ET, pp. 334-335 there is also an account given by Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī in his Taʾrīḥ Baġdād.

¹³ Cf. Bayard Dodge, Introduction to his edition of Fihrist, p. XXI.

¹⁴ Yāqūt, op. cit. p. 271.

¹⁵ Cf. Fihrist DM, p. 169, Fihrist M, p. 217.

Yāqūt refers also Al-Marzubānī who testifies that he was Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad.

So his full name was Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Abd aṣ-Ṣamad Ibn ‘Alī Ibn al-‘Abbās, and only Yāqūt adds Ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib in the end of the chain. His nisba was Al-Hāšimī which suggests that he must have come from the noble Bānū Hāšim family. Both Yāqūt and Ibn an-Nadīm agree to his laqab Abū āl-‘Ibar, but Abū āl-Faraġ al-Iṣbahānī gives very interesting information — “His kunya was Abū āl-‘Abbās, but he had changed it into Abū āl-‘Ibar and then, each year until his death, he used to add one letter, so it became Abū āl-‘Ibar ṭ.r.d, ṭ.y.l, ṭ.l.y.ṭ.y, bak, bak bak?”¹⁶. This strange habit is indirectly confirmed by Yāqūt who on the authority of certain Abū ‘Abd Allāh, a poet from Baghdad, gives an anecdote. The narrator calls here al-Hāšimī Abū ‘Ibartaz. The letter zāl instead of rā’ is probably a copyist’s mistake.

His date of birth is not known but it can be approximately appointed according to Al-Iṣbahānī’s testimony as the end of the VIIIth century. Referring to Al-Hāšimī’s father, the author of Al-Aġānī states that he was born after the fifth year of the reign of Hārūn ar-Rašīd, so in 792 or 793. However, at the same time, he writes that Abū āl-‘Ibar was still a young man (ġulām) before al-Mutawakkil’s reign, who was appointed caliph in 847. The same, on the account of Al-Iṣbahānī repeats Yāqūt though not mentioning about his age before Al-Mutawakkil.

He died, according to Ibn an-Nadīm and Yāqūt, in the year 250 AH i.e. 864 AD during the reign of Al-Musta‘īn (862-866). All accounts give the anecdote concerning his death. He was killed by a group of the Šī‘a in Qaṣr Ibn Hubayra¹⁷. The members of that Šī‘a group heard him slandering ‘Alī. Al-Iṣbahānī and after him Yāqūt throw more light on that event giving another version of it. Abū āl-‘Ibar felt strong dislike towards ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, he had composed a satire (hiġā’) against the Alids. One day he left for Al-Kūfa with the company of cross-bow¹⁸

¹⁶ Abū āl-Faraġ al-Iṣbahānī, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁷ Qaṣr Ibn Hubayra was a fortress on the left bank of Euphrates near Al-Kūfa, built by Yazīd Ibn ‘Amr Ibn Hubayra. However, he didn’t finish it. That was done by As-Saffāh, first Abbasid caliph. He also built some buildings, settled there and renamed it al-Hāšimiyya, but local people still called it Qaṣr Ibn Hubayra (cf. Yāqūt, Mu‘ġam al-buldān, vol. IV, p. 123.).

¹⁸ According to Yāqūt’s relation, op. cit., p. 274, ġulāhiq - cross-bow and also rounded things made of clay which one shoots from a cross-bow (cf. Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon, s.v. ġ.l.h.q). In Al-Iṣbahānī’s bunduq, op. cit., p. 93.

shooters from that town, one of them heard him insulting ‘Alī and killed him¹⁹.

Al-Iṣbahānī’s note brings some information, rare in classical Arabic writings, which deals with Al-Hāšimī’s private relations with his father. He alleges, on authority Ğaḥḥa²⁰, that Al-Hāšimī’s father, pious ṣayḥ, didn’t speak with his son, because the latter had ridiculed him in presence of invited guests. There are two anecdotes quoted by Ğaḥḥa, which clearly show son’s insubordination towards his father.

Al-Iṣbahānī and Yāqūt point out that at the beginning of his poetical career Abū ʿĀl-‘Ibar used to compose serious verses (ğidd) for different people; caliphs, viziers etc. but he had gained neither fame nor money. So he decided to turn to joking (hazl) and stupidity (ḥumq). Both authors stressed that thanks to this kind of poetry he made a great fortune and attained glory. They quote some anecdotes to prove that. He attached to Al-Mutawakkil’s court, and though he had changed the type of his poetry he composed for this caliph some panegyrics. He also praised the caliph’s castle, the mosque and other buildings built by him in Sāmarrā’. His conversion from seriousness into joking and stupidity, underlined in both accounts, and the fact that after it he gained the fame and achieved wealth, shed some light on the needs and tastes of court in that epoch. It seems that his ‘new face’ was completely differently taken by the intellectual elite. According to the Az-Zubayr Ibn Bakkār’s testimony, whom Al-Iṣbahānī quotes as an authority, some people were astonished by the Al-Hāšimī’s high position at the court and even asked him if the caliph hadn’t felt disgust to, as it is written, that fool for his stupidity and disgrace. The answer was that he was not so stupid, he simply pretended stupidity to attain different goods, but he was well educated (lahu adaban ṣāliḥan) and was able to compose good poetry²¹. Similar controversial opinions are frequent in both accounts. Usually those people who didn’t know him personally, only from his famous work or from a kind of performances he did at the court, appraised him low, but others appreciated his work. Yāqūt quotes an anecdote where Al-Hāšimī was asked to judge a problem concerning some words used in a poem and he proved his excellence in that

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 93, and also Yāqūt, op. cit., pp. 273-274.

²⁰ Ğaḥḥa, his full name is Abū ʿĀl-Ḥasan Aḥmad Ibn Ğa‘far Ibn Mūsā Ibn Yahyā Ibn Ḥālid Ibn Barmak al-Barmakī, he was a poet and singer as well as court companion, died in 937/8 (more of him cf. Yāqūt, Iršād, vol. I, pp. 383-405, Ibn an-Nadīm, Fihrist M, p. 208).

²¹ Al-Iṣbahānī, op. cit., p. 90.

job. But, on the other hand, there are some anecdotes, where Al-Hāšimī plays main role and his language seems to be very poor and vulgar. So, even nowadays it is difficult to value his activity. He could be appreciated only by that few lines which have been preserved in the accounts used here. Characteristic opinion is given by Al-Iṣbahānī on the account of Yazīd Ibn Muḥammad al-Muḥallabī²² who was asked about him and said: "He was an outstanding man of letters but he also knew that stupidity found easier a ready market, so he pretended it"²³.

Here I call him a scandalizer because it seems that he liked to amaze and shock people. He did a kind of strange performances to astonish and sometimes offend the audience. These performances were not too subtle, rather coarse and boorish. They were undoubtedly one of the reasons of his bad opinion among the scholars and men of letters. Al-Iṣbahānī, whose note on al-Hāšimī is very gaudy, gives some examples of these activity. One, given on Al-Iṣbahānī uncle's authority, tells that one day he saw Al-Hāšimī in bushes near Sāmarrā' with a cross-bow in his left hand and a sparrow hawk in right hand. There was a piece of meat on his head tied on the rope and thin line with a fish-hook on it on his penis. Asked about the reasons of all these things and his unusual state he replied that he was hunting for all kinds of beasts of the chase found in that place and described the employment of the parts of his equipment. There are more anecdotes in Al-Aḡānī which describe his unusual behavior in different situation, but simultaneously he seemed to be surrounded by the people who unless admired him, they admired results of his acting. So, the opinions of his activity both literary and as buffoon or nadīm differed in past. Nowadays it is much more difficult to estimate him because only a few lines of his poetry has been preserved and only some titles of his prose writing. One feature is certain, though many enemies and opponents, his activity found, as he used to say, a ready market at the court. It must have been strong need for this kind of literary production. The titles of his prose works are given by Ibn an-Nadīm and partly repeated by Yāqūt. Among his works they are: Kitāb ar-rasā'il (The Collection of Epistles), Ġāmi' al-ḥamāqāt wa-ma'wā' al-raqā'āt (The Comprehensive [book] of Stupidities and Gathering of Follies²⁴), Kitāb al-

²² Yazīd Ibn Muḥammad al-Muḥallabī was a poet contemporary to Al-Hāšimī, he was also attached to Al-Mutawakkil's court.

²³ Cf. Al-Iṣbahānī, op. cit., p. 92.

²⁴ Dodge translates this title as A Collection of Stupid Women and a gathering together of Foolish ones (cf. Fihrist ET, p. 335).

munādama wa-aḥlāq al-ḥulafā' wa-āl-umarā' (The Book of Court Companionship and the Characters of the Caliphs and Emirs) and the collections of his anecdotes and dictations as well as his traditions and his poetry²⁵. It is rather impossible to judge the contents of these works, even a word has not been survived, but according to the sources their aim was to entertain the reader. All accounts underline that he gave up seriousness (ğidd) for stupidity and joking (hazl). Therefore this kind of writing contained only one (hazl) of two important components (ğidd and hazl) of adab. It also performed only one purpose, was used only to entertain not to educate. Though it comprised anecdotes found before and later in adab works it can't be included in adab.

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²⁵ Cf. Fihrist M, p. 218, Fihrist DM, p. 170, Yāqūt, Iršād, p. 272.