



## AĠĀNĪ, KETĀB AL-

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AL-AĠĀNĪ, KETĀB (“The Book of Songs”), the major work of [Abu’l-Faraġ Eṣfahānī](#) (284-356/897-967). Although thirty-six works are attributed to him (see ‘A. Aṣma’ī, *Abu’l-Faraġ al-Eṣfahānī wa ketāboh al-Aġānī*, Cairo, 1951, pp. 172-75; *EI*<sup>2</sup> I, p. 118), his reputation rests entirely on *al-Aġānī*. In its most recent edition (Cairo, 24 vols., 1927-74), the work runs to over 9,000 pages of text; it thus goes far beyond its original purpose, which was to record 100 songs selected for the caliph Hārūn al-Rašīd, and forms a rich anthology of historical fact, biographical detail, songs, myths, folktales, literary prose and poetry, and criticism. Ebn Kaldūn’s description brings out the essential quality of *al-Aġānī*; he calls it “the *dīvān* of the Arabs and the archive which recorded the dispersed beauties they had created in all branches of the art of poetry” (*al-Moqaddema*, Beirut, 1956, I, p. 1039). The work is a major anthology of both the established poets and the poets of the “counter-culture.” It is also a record of some of the turning points in the history of Arabic literature. It offers many instances of the restrictive attitudes toward poetry in early Islam and creates an impression of an evolutionary process in the poetry of wine, homosexuality, and physical love. It portrays a vivid picture of the caliphal courts, especially during the Omayyad and ‘Abbasid periods. While strongly attacking *šo’ūbīya*, the anti-Arab sentiment in the ‘Abbasid period (XX, p. 77), *al-Aġānī* heightens the role of non-Arabs in Arabic culture by tracing the racial origins of the people he discusses. However, Eṣfahānī records very few concrete instances of Persian influence, either literary or musical. He presents an image of the culture as a melting-pot with contributions from many non-Arabs. Persian and Byzantine musical influences were introduced by a black



slave, Ebn Mosjeḥ (III, p. 276), and a singer of Persian origin, Ebn Moḥrez (I, p. 391), while Ebn Sorayj, of Turkish and *mawālī* origin, introduced the lute into Arabic singing (I, p. 259). Ebn Mosjeḥ's style, perfected by the Persians Ebrāhīm al-Mawṣelī and his son Ešḥāq, formed the classical style until challenged by an Arab modernist, Ebn al-Mahdī (X, p. 69). Ebn Moḥrez was the first singer to set couplets to music and invented the singing style of *ramal*, which a Persian singer in the time of Hārūn al-Rašīd, named Salmak, introduced into Persian singing by transposing a song by Ebn Moḥrez. This raises the interesting question whether such couplets could have influenced the development of the *robā'ī* in Persian, particularly as a considerable number of songs consisting of couplets had the rhyming scheme AABA. Other couplets rhyming AAAA were also popular in the 'Abbasid period (XX, pp. 46, 74, 154 and 7, 144, 155 respectively). While the translation into Arabic of *Kalīla wa Demna* by Ebn al-Moqaffa' seems to have influenced Arabic prose and the whole genre of animal fables, in poetry no specific influences are recorded by Ešfahānī, although many poets were of Persian origin.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The recent Cairo ed. of *al-Aġānī* was begun by the Dār al-Kotob (vols. I-XVI) and completed by al-Hay'at al-'Āmma (XVII-XXIV, 1970-74), which also reissued vols. I-II.

On the earlier ed. of Būlāq and Cairo, see *EI*<sup>2</sup> I, p. 118. See also: Brockelmann, *GAL* I, p. 146; S. I, pp. 225-26.

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