Ibn ʿAsākir names many persons from whom he acquired information for the *TMD*. What can our data tell us about them?

For what follows, we also consulted Ibn ʿAsākir’s *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*, as well as two major biographical works containing entries for the period: Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī’s biographical dictionary *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ* and al-Dhahabī’s *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*.

The Pareto distribution

Ibn ʿAsākir cites many people as his direct informants – hundreds or possibly thousands. The number of Ibn ʿAsākir’s direct informants far exceeds that of al-Ṭabarī’s. However, like al-Ṭabarī, he relies extensively on a much smaller number of people, with twenty or fewer persons responsible for over 60% of all information and 100 people responsible for 88%. He cites these persons repeatedly across the *TMD*, and he also provides biographies for many of them in the *TMD* and includes entries for them in his *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Number of names** | **% of all citations** |
| 1 | 11 |
| 2 | 18 |
| 3 | 22 |
| 4 | 27 |
| 5 | 31 |
| 6 | 34 |
| 7 | 38 |
| 8 | 41 |
| 9 | 43 |
| 10 | 46 |
| 20 | 61 |
| 30 | 70 |
| 40 | 76 |
| 50 | 79 |
| 60 | 82 |
| 70 | 84 |
| 80 | 85 |
| 90 | 87 |
| 100 | 88 |

Table 3.1: The percentage of Ibn ʿAsākir’s citations accounted for by his most commonly cited direct informants, at various sample sizes.

These figures are estimates because the many unnormalised names complicate our counting. But if anything, they overstate the number of people upon whom Ibn ʿAsākir relied. That is because we have done considerable work to disambiguate the twenty most commonly cited names, but we have done much less for the next eighty names, which often appear in multiple lists (in different combinations and orders). Many of the latter names have not been normalised, and they may thus in reality refer to a smaller number of people than it appears.

In any case, it is clear that a small number of people are responsible for most of Ibn ʿAsākir’s citations. By the numbers, this pattern seems to resemble the so-called Pareto distribution (or ‘power law’), which is more typically associated with the areas of science, engineering and finance.[[1]](#footnote-1) However, the percentages in our data are not actually Pareto-like. In fact, the distribution is far more unequal. Whether we consider the top twenty, eighty or even one hundred most frequently cited individuals, these people represent less than 5% of Ibn ʿAsākir’s informants yet contribute the vast majority of his quotations. The figure of 5% is based on a conservative estimate that would put the total number of people he cites in the 2,000–3,000 range. That exceeds the number of shaykhs he lists in *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* and a separate work on his female teachers (according to al-Dhahabī, *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* mentions 1,636 teachers and the work on women adds another eighty-odd names). But it is still less than the 7,637 names and combinations of names that appear in our data set as direct informants, most occurring only once or twice.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Although Ibn ʿAsākir does cite many people in the *TMD*, the sheer number of variant surface forms for direct informants’ names vastly inflates our sense of the size of his informant pool. Typically, he is not trying to communicate his efficiency in gathering information; he is simply referring to persons he knew well using terms that came immediately to mind. One of his uncles (d. 537/1142), for example, is mentioned in the ways listed in Table 3.2, all of which are normalised in our data to Abu Ma'ali Muhammad b. Yahya.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Normalisation** | **Arabic Surface Form** |
| Abu al-Ma'ali Muhammad b. Yahya | القاضي أبو المعالي محمد بن يحيى |
| Abu al-Ma'ali Muhammad b. Yahya | خالي أبو المعالي القاضي |
| Abu al-Ma'ali Muhammad b. Yahya | خالي أبو المعالي محمد بن يحيى |
| Abu al-Ma'ali Muhammad b. Yahya | خالي أبو المعالي محمد بن يحيى القاضي |
| Abu al-Ma'ali Muhammad b. Yahya | خالي أبو المعالي محمد بن يحيى بن علي القاضي |
| Abu al-Ma'ali Muhammad b. Yahya | خالي القاضي أبو المعالي محمد بن يحيى |
| Abu al-Ma'ali Muhammad b. Yahya | خالي القاضي أبو المعالي محمد بن يحيى القرشي |
| Abu al-Ma'ali Muhammad b. Yahya | خالي القاضي أبو المعالي محمد بن يحيى بن علي |
| Abu al-Ma'ali Muhammad b. Yahya | خالي القاضي أبو المعالي محمد بن يحيى بن علي القرشي |

Table 3.2: The various ways in which Ibn ʿAsākir refers to Abu Ma'ali Muhammad b. Yahya in the *TMD*.

Many relatives are identified in similarly varying ways, with the result that until the names have been normalised, the pool of direct informants appears artificially large. Ibn ʿAsākir’s most frequently quoted direct informant, Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi, is described in dozens of different ways, including as the son of another man’s daughter. There are also many references to ‘the *qāḍī* so-and-so’, and to individuals identified as ‘the jurist’ (*faqīh*), the Qurashī, the Anṣārī, the Dimashqī or the like alongside a proper name. Similarly, that a person was the companion or student (*ṣāḥib*) of another person is occasionally mentioned. Ironically, such efforts at disambiguation by Ibn ʿAsākir himself are the cause of difficulties in pinning down his informants’ identities.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In addition, Ibn ʿAsākir sometimes mentions where he heard a piece of information, and the inclusion of place names with personal names requires some work to separate the two. The examples in Tables 3.3 and 3.4 illustrate another difficulty – that caused by Ibn ʿAsākir’s use of very different-looking names for one and the same individual.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Abu Muhammad al-Sulami | عبد الكريم بن حمزة |
| Abu Muhammad al-Sulami | أبي محمد بن السلمي |
| Abu Muhammad al-Sulami | أبي محمد بن حمزة السلمي |
| Abu Muhammad al-Sulami | أبي محمد عبد الكريم السلمي |
| Abu Muhammad al-Sulami | أبي محمد عبد الكريم بن حمزة السلمي |

Table 3.3: Variant surface forms referring to Abu Muhammad al-Sulami.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Abu al-Qasim al-Mustamli | أبو القاسم الشحامي |
| Abu al-Qasim al-Mustamli | أبو القاسم زاهر |
| Abu al-Qasim al-Mustamli | أبو القاسم زاهر بن طاهر الشحامي |
| Abu al-Qasim al-Mustamli | أبو القاسم زاهر بن طاهر ا المستملي |

Table 3.4: Variant surface forms referring to Abu al-Qasim al-Mustamli. Since Ibn ʿAsākir cites many Abu al-Qasims, this table probably does not capture all the ways in which this individual is cited, and more work could be done to disambiguate the Abu al-Qasims in general.

All these features of Ibn ʿAsākir’s citations challenged our identification of distinct informants and our ability to trace the routes through which information was passed down.

Regardless of the variations and consequent uncertainty, the big picture is clear: Ibn ʿAsākir cites a relatively small number of people very often, and a large number of people infrequently.

If we think in human terms, this makes utter sense. There was inevitably a limit to the number of persons whom Ibn ʿAsākir or any author could consult to produce a work as long as the *TMD*. He was efficient and got much out of a small number of people. Working primarily with quotations from his core pool of direct informants gave him time to collect also the rare *isnād*s and the material from his many only occasionally cited informants. This approach allowed him to compile what is the largest pre-1500 work in our corpus.

To understand Ibn ʿAsākir’s overall transmission methods, we need to focus on the people he cites most often. This is because in the transfer of information, the frequently cited direct informants are the highways, whereas those rarely cited are the country lanes.

Ibn ʿAsākir’s youthful information gathering

When we examine the biographies of the people Ibn ʿAsākir cites most often, one detail jumps out. Given their death dates, he would have to have been very young to have acquired information personally from them.

Ibn ʿAsākir was born in the month of Muharram in the year 499/September or October 1105 and died on the 11th day of the month of Rajab in the year 571/31 January 1176, at the age of 72 (Hijri) or 70 (Gregorian).[[4]](#footnote-4) Many of his top informants died before he began writing the *TMD* in 529/1134–5, and all of them were long dead by the time he completed it in 559/1164. At least three died when he was still very young. As we argued in the parallel case of al-Ṭabarī, this situation raises questions of access and storage. How did Ibn ʿAsākir gain access to the words of these informants, and in what form did he have them to hand when he composed his book?

Table 3.5 lists the twenty individuals whom Ibn ʿAsākir cites most often in the *TMD*. Quotations from them account for more than 60% of all *isnād*s in our data set.[[5]](#footnote-5)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Died** | **Number of citations** |
| Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi | 536/1142 | 8,858 |
| Abu Ghalib | 527/1133 | 4,871 |
| Abu al-Barakat | 538/1143 | 3,449 |
| Abu Muhammad al-Akfani | 524/1129 | 3,380 |
| Abu Muhammad al-Sulami | 526/1132 | 3,224 |
| Abu 'Abd Allah | 531/1136 | 2,835 |
| Abu al-Qasim al-Mustamli | 533/1138 | 2,687 |
| Abu al-Qasim al-'Alawi | 508/1114 | 2,069 |
| Abu 'Ali al-Haddad | 515/1121 | 1,950 |
| Abu Bakr Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Baqi | 535/1140 | 1,899 |
| Abu al-Qasim b. al-Husayn | 525/1131 | 1,577 |
| Abu 'Abd Allah al-Furawi | 530/1136 | 1,341 |
| Abu al-Ghana'im | 510/1116 | 1,259 |
| Abu 'Abd Allah al-Khallal | 532/1137 | 1,245 |
| Abu al-Muzaffar | 532/1138 | 1,209 |
| Abu Ghalib al-Mawardi | 525/1130 | 1,120 |
| Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Shuja' | 533/1138 | 1,077 |
| Abu al-Fadl b. Nasir | 550/1155 | 1,011 |
| Abu al-Hasan al-Faradi | 533/1139 | 949 |
| Abu al-Qasim | ? | 866 |

Table 3.5: The top twenty direct informants in the *TMD*, each with death date and number of *isnād*s started.

Ibn ʿAsākir’s biographers make much of his youthful learning, but how did the material transmitted by these persons really wind up on his pages? What does it mean when he quotes Abu al-Qasim al-'Alawi, who died when Ibn ʿAsākir was 9 years old, or Abu al-Ghana'im, at whose death Ibn ʿAsākir was 11 years old? He mentions dates in *isnād*s on only a few occasions, but although these dates all relate to his early life, none we have seen record the date on which he obtained information from his top informants. Nor does he explain how he stored the information he cites.[[6]](#footnote-6) His older brother Hibat Allāh reportedly transmitted material to him through audition (*sammaʿahu*) from the year 505/1111–12 onwards; perhaps he was an intermediary between Ibn ʿAsākir and those of Ibn ʿAsākir’s sources who greatly predeceased him?[[7]](#footnote-7) Possible intermediaries such as Ibn ʿAsākir’s brother are not indicated in individual citations within the *TMD*.

Another possibility is that Ibn ʿAsākir obtained the written lectures of these informants and felt able to quote them because he had been present when the informants had lectured on the relevant topics, even if the notes were not his own or he acquired them later. Given how young he must have been on many of these occasions, this theory seems plausible in at least some cases.

These and similar scenarios were discussed in detail less than a century after Ibn ʿAsākir’s lifetime by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d. 643/1245) in his *Kitāb Maʿrifat anwāʿ ʿilm al-ḥadīth*. According to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, scholars disagreed over the age at which a child could reasonably be assumed to benefit from hearing Hadith. He reports that a Hadith expert was asked, ‘When should a boy (*ṣabī*) hear Hadith?’ The expert replied, ‘When he becomes able to distinguish between a cow and a riding animal’ or, according to another version of this answer, ‘between a cow and a donkey’. After summarising various views on the issue, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ notes that five years is the age ‘on which the practice of the modern scholars of the Hadith has settled’.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The scenarios that Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ presents in his book illustrate the variety of transmission methods in his day – and in that of Ibn ʿAsākir. They show that one could gain access to and transmit the words of direct informants in many different ways, and that some of these ways enabled knowledge transfer even to children such as Ibn ʿAsākir would have been at the time of some of his transmissions.

For example, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ says that the terms *anbaʾanā* and *nabbaʾanā* (‘he communicated to us’) are rarely used to introduce material heard in spoken form from a teacher.[[9]](#footnote-9) Readers today might assume that the phrases ‘to us’ and ‘to me’ indicate in-person communication (unless they are followed by a phrase such as *fī kitābihi*, ‘in his writing’), but according to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ that was not the case in his day.

When Ibn ʿAsākir cites Abu 'Ali al-Haddad, he uses *anbaʾanā* 75% of the time (in 1,458 out of 1,950 *isnād*s). Abu 'Ali al-Haddad died when Ibn ʿAsākir was about 16 years old. Similarly, when Ibn ʿAsākir cites Abu al-Ghana'im, whom he met when very young, he uses *anbaʾanā* 80% of the time (in 1,011 out of 1,259 *isnād*s).

Perhaps *anbāʿnā*, for Ibn ʿAsākir, marks a mode of transmission suited to the circumstances of a young person acquiring information from a direct informant via intermediaries and their notes. This possibility is supported by the description of this practice given by al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1014) before Ibn ʿAsākir’s lifetime. He writes in his *Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth* (‘Knowing the disciplines of Hadith’) that ‘the phrase “he communicated to me” (*anbaʾanī*) is employed when someone shows their written material to a transmitter of Hadith (*ʿaraḍa ʿalā al-muḥaddith*) and is given an *ijāza* (i.e. a licence to transmit) orally (*shifāhan*).’[[10]](#footnote-10) Perhaps the young Ibn ʿAsākir obtained such authorisations from his much older informants after presenting transcripts of their material written down by and acquired from other scholars serving as intermediaries.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ also outlines other ways in which a very young person could acquire reports. For example, in the method of transmission that he calls ‘recitation to the teacher’ (*al-qirāʾa ʿalā al-shaykh*), the reciter recites a Hadith to the teacher, allowing the latter to correct any errors. But it ‘makes no difference whether you are the reciter or someone else recites while you listen’.[[12]](#footnote-12) Therefore, a young child present on such an occasion could subsequently transmit the report in question. In his *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*, Ibn ʿAsākir frequently uses phrases that seem to suggest that he himself recited materials back to a shaykh (*bi-qirāʾatī ʿalayhi*). But perhaps this formula also accommodates situations in which he was simply present at a recitation.

Elsewhere, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ deals with licences issued by a shaykh for transmitting a written text (*ijāza*s). He quotes al-Khatib (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī), who held the opinion that it is permissible to give an *ijāza* to a young child – even one who was not actually present at an audition session. According to al-Khatib, ‘we saw all of our teachers licensing children who were absent, without inquiring about their age and level of discrimination. We never saw them under any circumstance license anyone who was not yet born.’

Explaining al-Khatib’s stance, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ writes:

It seems that they regarded a child fit for this way of receiving Hadith so that he could validly transmit on the basis of it after he had attained the qualifications necessary for transmitting. This arose from their desire to expand the means of perpetuating the *isnād* – which has been granted to this Community alone – and to bring the child closer to the Messenger of God (Peace be upon him). God knows best.[[13]](#footnote-13)

These ideas, which continued to circulate in Ibn ʿAsākir’s day and beyond, suggest that we need to consider critically the terms Ibn ʿAsākir uses to describe transmission – including the phrases that supplement opening expressions in *isnād*s, such as *akhbaranā* and *ḥaddathanā*.

We might expect to find clarification on Ibn ʿAsākir’s methods of accessing and storing information in his *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*. But the terminology in this book does not generally match his citations in the *TMD*. A search for the term *anbaʾanā*, for example, turns up zero matches.

Still, the reports for both Abu 'Ali al-Haddad and Abu al-Ghana'im in the *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* indicate that he acquired the information he quotes from them via a written source. For Abu 'Ali al-Haddad, the sample *isnād* refers specifically to a written work: Ibn ʿAsākir writes, ‘Al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad b. al-Hasan b. Mihra Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥaddād al-Muqriʾ al-Iṣbahānī [Abu 'Ali al-Haddad] informed us (*akhbaranā*) more than once in his writing (*kitābihi*) …’[[14]](#footnote-14) For Abu al-Ghana'im, the sample *isnād* reads, ‘Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Maymūn Abū al-Ghanāʾim al-Kūfī al-Narsī, known as Abū al-Ḥāfiẓ [Abu al-Ghana'im], informed us via an *ijāza*…’[[15]](#footnote-15)

Top five transmitters

What do we learn about the people from whom Ibn ʿAsākir quotes most often and Ibn ʿAsākir’s transmission generally, when we delve more deeply into our data?

1. Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Born | 444/1052–3 |
| Died | 536/1142 |
| Where he met Ibn ʿAsākir per *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* | Baghdad |
| Total # of his *isnād*s in *TMD* | 8,858 |
| Percentage of all *isnād*s in data set | 11% |
| Transmission term used in *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*’s example | *akhbaranā/bi-qirāʾatī ʿalayhi* |
| Most common transmission term in *TMD* | *akhbaranā* |
| # of his *isnād*s using this term in *TMD* | 7,609 |
| Percentage of his *isnād*s using this term in *TMD* | 86% |
| Name as given in *TMD* bio | إسماعيل بن أحمد بن عمر بن أبي الأشعث أبو القاسم بن أبي بكر السمرقندي |
| Name as given in *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* | إسماعيل بن أحمد بن عمر بن أبي الأشعث أبو القاسم بن أبي بكر السمرقندي الحافظ |
| Name as given in al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* | ابن السمرقندي إسماعيل بن أحمد بن عمر الشيخ الإمام المحدث المفيد المسند أبو القاسم إسماعيل بن أحمد بن عمر بن أبي الأشعث السمرقندي الدمشقي المولد البغدادي الوطن صاحب المجالس الكثيرة |
| Minimum # of surface forms of his name in *TMD* | 36 |
| Sample surface forms | أبو القاسم بن السمرقندي |
|  | أبو القاسم اسماعيل بن أحمد |
|  | أبو القاسم إسماعيل بن أحمد بن عمر بن السمرقندي |
|  | أبو القاسم الدلال |
| Most common surface form | أبو القاسم بن السمرقندي |
| # of his *isnād*s using most common surface form | 6,955 |
| Percentage of his *isnād*s using most common surface form | 79% |
| Minimum # of times named alongside other direct informants in *TMD* by most common surface form | 454 |
| Minimum # of times cited as direct informant along with others | 352 |
| # of *isnād*s citing him as direct informant that contain an author’s name | 2,831 |
| Percentage of *isnād*s citing him as direct informant that contain an author’s name | 32% |
| # of distinct author names in *isnād*s that cite him | 74 |
| Author names in these *isnād*s (normalised) | Abd Allah b. Ahmad, 'Abd Allah b. Wahb, 'Abd al-Rahman b. Ibrahim al-Dimashqi, 'Abd al-Razzaq, Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Muhammad, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Balkhi, Abu 'Aruba al-Harrani, Abu 'Awwana, Abu 'Ubayd al-Qasim b. Sallam, Abu Bakr b. Abi Dawud, Abu Bakr b. Abi Dunya, Abu Bakr b. Ziyad, Abu Bishr al-Dulabi, Abu Dawud, Abu Hudhayfa, Abu Ishaq al-Fazari, Abu Khaythama, Abu Muhammad al-Akfani, Abu Muhammad b. Abi Nasr, Abu Nu'aym, Abu Ya'la, Abu Zur'a, Abu al-Aswad, Abu al-Hasan 'Ali b. Muhammad b. Ahmad, Abu al-Qasim al-Sahmi, Ahmad b. Hanbal, Hisham b. 'Ammar, Ibn 'Adi, Ibn Abi Dawud, Ibn Abi Shayba, Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Ma'in, Ibn Makula, Ibn Mujahid, Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Sallam, Ibn al-Mubarak, Ibn al-Munadi, Ishaq b. Bishr al-Bukhari, Khalifa, Muhammad b. Harun, Muhammad b. Jarir, Muhammad b. Muhammad, Musa b. 'Uqba, Muslim, Sayf, Sufyan b. 'Uyayna, Surayj b. Yunus, Waki', Ya'qub b. Sufyan, Yahya b. Muhammad b. Sa'id, Yunus b. Bukayr, al-Asma'i, al-Baghawi, al-Bayhaqi, al-Bukhari, al-Daraqutni, al-Faryabi, al-Harith b. Abi Usama, al-Hasan b. Sufyan, al-Humaydi, al-Khara'iti, al-Khatib, al-Kilabi, al-Mada'ini, al-Nasa'i, al-Qati'i, al-Shafi'i, al-Shirazi, al-Suli, al-Tabarani, al-Walid b. Muslim, al-Zubayr b. Bakkar, al-Zuhri |

Table 3.6: The informant profile of Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi, the person whom Ibn ʿAsākir cites most often as a direct informant.

Ibn ʿAsākir cites Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi 8,858 times in the *TMD*, and 11% of all *isnād*s name him as the direct informant (see Table 3.6). Overwhelmingly, Ibn ʿAsākir uses the term *akhbaranā*, ‘he informed us’, to describe how he obtained information from this informant. In the *Muʿjam shuyūkh*, he uses the same phrase in his example citation of a Hadith from Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi, although he also notes personal presence on the occasion of transmission: ‘via my reading back to him’ (*bi-qirāʾatī ʿalayhi*).[[16]](#footnote-16) The *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* also records the place where he received the sample Hadith: Baghdad. In our data set, Ibn ʿAsākir’s *isnād*s sometimes likewise note that Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi passed on information to him in Baghdad.[[17]](#footnote-17) One *isnād* starts thus: ‘Abū al-Qāsim al-Samarqandī [Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi] informed us (*akhbaranā*) in Baghdad, saying: Abū Bakr al-Khaṭīb [al-Khatib] told us (*ḥaddathanā*) in Damascus in the month of Rabīʿ al-Ākhar in the year 458 [March or April 1066] that Abū al-Hasan Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. Hārūn b. Ṣalt …’[[18]](#footnote-18) Interestingly, Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi had been born in Damascus and started his learning there, studying, among others, with al-Khatib, but according to Ibn ʿAsākir’s biography of him in the *TMD*, he subsequently moved to Baghdad. Perhaps Ibn ʿAsākir relished the geography of this report, as it involves him, a Damascene, learning in Baghdad and al-Khatib, a Baghdadi, transmitting in Damascus.

Two centuries later, al-Dhahabī tells us that Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi hosted many study sessions (*ṣāḥib al-majālis al-kathīra*), and when he lists the scholars from whom Abu al-Qasim received material through audition, he names al-Khatib first.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The details about Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi and other top informants also help us understand how and when the names of authors appear within Ibn ʿAsākir’s *isnād*s. We identified names as authorial on the basis of the attributions of Scheiner, Mourad and al-Daʿjānī (see Post 2 under ‘Author names and titles of works’).

About a third of the *isnād*s passing through Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi as the direct informant contain author names. What is remarkable is that Ibn ʿAsākir seems to cite such a large number of different authors – seventy-four of them – on this informant’s authority. Many of their names occur only rarely, and it is possible our search has misidentified some of them. But in many cases the names are so specific that it is highly likely our identification is correct.

Some of the authors in question are cited hundreds of times; see Table 3.7.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Author** | **Died** | **# of times cited via Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi** |
| Abu al-Qasim al-Sahmi | 428/1036 | 773 |
| Ya'qub b. Sufyan | n.d. | 448 |
| al-Baghawi | 317/929 | 193 |
| Abu Bishr al-Dulabi | 310/923 | 178 |
| Abu Bakr b. Abi Dunya | 281/894 | 174 |
| Yunus b. Bukayr | 199/815 | 159 |
| Sayf | 180/796 | 154 |

Table 3.7: The authors whose names appear most frequently in *isnād*s in which Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi is the direct informant.

When scholars have considered Ibn ʿAsākir’s working methods, these sorts of citations have posed puzzles. How are we to imagine he acquired the text passages he seems to be quoting in these instances? Were they derived from well-known books, or perhaps obtained in reading sessions?

With our *isnād* data set, we tested statements made by modern scholars about premodern book transmission as exemplified in the *TMD*. As discussed in Post 5, these scholars do not typically spell out the bases of their conclusions, so their statements may reflect data other than *isnād*s, such as other citations within the *TMD* (including serendipitous discoveries); inferences of various sorts, including from the mere mention of a name in connection with a topic on which the named person wrote a book; and statements in other, later sources.

For example, Mourad says that Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi gave Ibn ʿAsākir a certificate in Baghdad to transmit four works: the *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Shām* of Isḥāq b. Bishr al-Bukhārī (d. 206/821, normalised as Ishaq b. Bishr al-Bukhari); the *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-shuʿarāʾ* *al-jāhiliyyīn* of Muḥammad b. Sallām al-Jumaḥī (d. c. 232/846, normalised as Ibn Sallam); the *Kitāb Tārīkh Jurjān* of al-Jurjānī (d. 427/1036, normalised as Abu al-Qasim al-Sahmi); and the *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahāʾ* of Abū Isḥāq al-Shīrāzī (d. 476/1083, normalised as al-Shirazi).[[20]](#footnote-20) In our data set, *isnād*s with Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi as the direct informant cite Ishaq b. Bishr al-Bukhari three times. They also cite Ibn Sallam (fifteen times), Abu al-Qasim al-Sahmi (773 times) and al-Shirazi (six times). Within these citations, none referring to Ishaq b. Bishr al-Bukhari mentions the *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Shām* and none referring to Ibn Sallam mentions his *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-shuʿarāʾ* *al-jāhiliyyīn*. Fifteen of Abu al-Qasim al-Sahmi’s 773 citations refer explicitly to his *Tārīkh Jurjān*, and all six citations of al-Shirazi refer to his*Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahāʾ*.[[21]](#footnote-21)

We propose as a general explanation that Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi shared with Ibn ʿAsākir whatever pieces of existing written works he had to hand in what form he had them (perhaps at Ibn ʿAsākir’s request). In some cases, this may have involved the granting of rights to transmit entire works, as Mourad indicates. The repeated quotations from al-Shirazi’s book point in that direction. In each instance, Ibn ʿAsākir appears to specify the part of the book that he is citing, variously appending to the book’s title, *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahāʾ*,the phrases *min aṣḥāb Abī Ḥanīfa* (once), *min al-Shāfiʿiyyīn* (three times), *min aṣḥāb al-Shāfiʿī* (once) and *min aṣḥāb Mālik* (once).[[22]](#footnote-22) For example, Ibn ʿAsākir writes: ‘Abū al-Qāsim b. al-Samarqandī [Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi] informed us, saying that Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī al-Shīrāzī [al-Shirazi] in *Kitāb* *Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahāʾ min al-Shāfiʿiyyīn* said: Among them is Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Muḥammad b. ʿUmar …’[[23]](#footnote-23) This passage can be traced directly to al-Shirazi’s *Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahāʾ* as preserved today in the OpenITI corpus.[[24]](#footnote-24)

That said, it is noteworthy that Ibn ʿAsākir generally quotes Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi using terms that do not point to books or even written transmission (we discuss such terms in later posts). Moreover, the quotations can only occasionally be traced to passages in extant written works. In other words, the evidence indicates that more often than not, Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi passed on information in a piecemeal fashion, sharing individual reports or sections of text (including passages from books) with Ibn ʿAsākir. Like Ibn ʿAsākir himself, he seems to have been a collector of bits of material that Ibn ʿAsākir subsequently drew on, just as later scholars who gained transmitted material from the *TMD* might have been chiefly interested in particular parts treating the history or topography of Damascus or the biographies of specific individuals. Ibn ʿAsākir also cites Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi in his other works. He presumably possessed a collection of quotations from Abu al-Qasim, and when he began to write the *TMD*, he tapped into that collection.

A major question in interpreting *isnād*s is what Ibn ʿAsākir means when he cites several people together as direct informants for a single report – something he does frequently, including with Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi. Since not all names in the *TMD* have been normalised, we cannot know precisely how common such citations are. We employed two ways of estimating the number of joint citations of Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi, and although both are prone to undercounting, they can yield a rough idea. First, we selected the most common surface form of his name and counted how many times it appeared with other names (478 times). And second, we counted instances in which a verified reference to Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi accompanied a reference to a second direct informant (at least 352 cases). One possible explanation for these citations is that Ibn ʿAsākir possessed multiple parallel *isnād*s for the quoted material, each through a different direct informant – but see below for further discussion of how we might interpret these *isnād*s.

1. Abu Ghalib

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Born | ? |
| Died | 527/1133 |
| Where he met Ibn ʿAsākir per *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* | Baghdad |
| Total # of his *isnād*s in *TMD* | 4,871 |
| Percentage of all *isnād*s in data set | 6% |
| Transmission term used in *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*’s example | *akhbaranā/bi-qirāʾatī ʿalayhi* |
| Most common transmission term in *TMD* | *akhbaranā* |
| # of his *isnād*s using this term in *TMD* | 3,312 |
| Percentage of his *isnād*s using this term in *TMD* | 68% |
| Name as given in *TMD* bio | N/A |
| Name as given in *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* | أحمد بن الحسن بن أحمد بن عبد الله بن البناء أبو غالب بن أبي علي الحريري |
| Name as given in al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* | أبو غالب بن البناء أحمد بن الحسن بن أحمد الشيخ الصالح الثقة مسند بغداد أبو غالب أحمد ابن الإمام أبي علي الحسن بن أحمد بن عبد الله بن البناء البغدادي الحنبلي |
| Minimum # of surface forms of his name in *TMD* | 58 |
| Sample surface forms | أبو غالب |
|  | أبو غالب أحمد بن الحسن |
|  | أبو غالب أحمد بن الحسن بن البنا |
|  | أبو غالب بن البنا |
| Most common surface form | أبو غالب بن البنا |
| # of his *isnād*s using most common surface form | 1,218 |
| Percentage of his *isnād*s using most common surface form | 25% |
| Minimum # of times named alongside other direct informants in *TMD* by most common surface form | 30 |
| Minimum # of times cited as direct informant along with others | 1,915 |
| # of *isnād*s citing him as direct informant that also contain an author’s name | 2,635 |
| Percentage of *isnād*s citing him as direct informant that contain an author’s name | 54% |
| # of distinct author names in *isnād*s that cite him | 46 |
| Author names in these *isnād*s (normalised) | Abd Allah b. Ahmad, 'Abd al-Razzaq, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Balkhi, Abu 'Aruba al-Harrani, Abu Bakr b. Abi Dawud, Abu Bakr b. Abi Dunya, Abu Dawud, Abu Muhammad b. Abi Nasr, Abu Nu'aym, Abu al-Ghana'im, Abu al-Hasan b. Sumay', Abu al-Qasim al-Sahmi, Hisham b. 'Ammar, Ibn Abi Dawud, Ibn Abi Khaythama, Ibn Abi Shayba, Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Jusa, Ibn Ma'in, Ibn Makula, Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Sallam, Ibn al-Kalbi, Ibn al-Mubarak, Khalifa, Muhammad b. Jarir, Muhammad b. Muhammad, Sufyan b. 'Uyayna, Surayj b. Yunus, Waki', Yahya b. Muhammad b. Sa'id, al-Baghawi, al-Daraqutni, al-Faryabi, al-Harith b. Abi Usama, al-Humaydi, al-Khatib, al-Khutabi, al-Kilabi, al-Mada'ini, al-Qati'i, al-Suli, al-Tusi, al-Walid b. Muslim, al-Zubayr b. Bakkar, al-Zuhri |

Table 3.8: The informant profile of Abu Ghalib.

Ibn ʿAsākir himself followed the Shāfiʿī legal tradition, but his informants included adherents of other rites. Abu Ghalib followed the Ḥanbalī *madhhab*.

Ibn ʿAsākir places Abu Ghalib in Baghdad when he says in his *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* that he recited material back to him there. But he provides no entry for Abu Ghalib in the *TMD*, suggesting that the latter had never travelled to Damascus to justify his inclusion.

Most often (68% of the time), Ibn ʿAsākir says in his reporting that Abu Ghalib ‘informed us’ (*akhbaranā*), but he also uses other phrases, most notably variations of ‘I read back to’ (*qaraʾtu ʿalā*). He uses *qaraʾtu ʿalā* 1,231 times, or 25% of the time.

Al-Dhahabī describes Abu Ghalib as *musnid Baghdād*, an honorific that suggests his role as something of an *isnād* nexus. As explained by Devin Stewart, the term denotes someone ‘who provides a *sanad* or *isnād*’; the person is an ‘“anchor” or pivotal “support” who provides an important link for an entire generation of scholars in the chain back to earlier Muslim authorities’. The title indicates that the person ‘plays a crucial role in the transmission of authoritative religious knowledge in general, probably as one of the last living direct links to the leading scholars of a bygone generation’.[[25]](#footnote-25) Whereas Ibn ʿAsākir uses this term only rarely in the *TMD* for anyone,[[26]](#footnote-26) al-Dhahabī identifies several people as *musnid*s, as we discuss below (he does not use the term for Ibn ʿAsākir himself).[[27]](#footnote-27)

When Ibn ʿAsākir cites Abu Ghalib jointly with another person, the other informant is most often Abu Ghalib’s brother, Abu 'Abd Allah.

Ibn ʿAsākir quotes at least forty-six authors on Abu Ghalib’s authority. The most frequently mentioned of these authors is al-Zubayr b. Bakkar (d. 256/870, cited 653 times), followed by Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845, 627 times). The other forty-four authors he cites appear less frequently, and together, citations of these authors make up only about half of all of his author references.

1. Abu al-Barakat

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Born | 462/1069–70 |
| Died | 538/1143 |
| Where he met Ibn ʿAsākir per *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* | Baghdad |
| Total # if his *isnād*s in *TMD* | 3,449 |
| Percentage of all *isnād*s in data set | 4% |
| Transmission term used in *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*’s example | *akhbaranā/bi-qirāʾatī ʿalayhi* |
| Most common transmission term in *TMD* | *akhbaranā* |
| # of his *isnād*s using this term in *TMD* | 3,312 |
| Percentage of his *isnād*s using this term in *TMD* | 96% |
| Name as given in *TMD* bio | NA |
| Name as given in *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* | عبد الوهاب بن المبارك بن أحمد بن الحسن بن بندار أبو البركات الأنماطي الحافظ |
| Name as given in al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* | الأنماطي عبد الوهاب بن المبارك بن أحمد الشيخ الإمام الحافظ المفيد الثقة المسند بقية السلف أبو البركات عبد الوهاب بن المبارك بن أحمد بن الحسن بن بندار البغدادي الأنماطي |
| Minimum # of surface forms of his name in *TMD* | 43 |
| Sample surface forms | أبو البركات |
|  | أبو البركات الآنماطي |
|  | أبو البركات ابن المبارك |
|  | أبو البركات الأنماطي ابن المبارك |
| Most common surface form | أبو البركات الأنماطي |
| # of his *isnād*s using most common surface form | 2,108 |
| Percentage of his *isnād*s using most common surface form | 61% |
| Minimum # of times named alongside other direct informants in *TMD* by most common surface form | 619 |
| Minimum # of times cited as direct informant along with others | 395 |
| # of *isnād*s citing him as direct informant that also contain an author’s name | 1,211 |
| Percentage of *isnād*s citing him as direct informant that contain an author’s name | 35% |
| # of distinct author names in *isnād*s that cite him | 35 |
| Author names in these *isnād*s (normalised) | Abd Allah b. Ahmad, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Balkhi, Abu 'Ubayd al-Qasim b. Sallam, Abu Bakr al-Nisaburi, Abu Bakr al-Wasiti, Abu Bishr al-Dulabi, Abu Dawud, Abu Muhammad b. Abi Nasr, Abu Nu'aym, Abu al-Ghana'im, Ahmad b. Hanbal, al-Haytham b. 'Adi, Harun b. Hatam, Ibn Abi Shayba, Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Ma'in, Ibn Manda, Ibn Sa'd, Khalifa, Ma'mar b. Rashid, Muhammad b. Harun, Muhammad b. Jarir, Muhammad b. Muhammad, Waki', Ya'qub b. Sufyan, Yahya b. Muhammad b. Sa'id, al-'Uqayli, al-Baghawi, al-Bayhaqi, al-Bukhari, al-Faryabi, al-Harith b. Abi Usama, al-Tabarani, al-Waqidi, al-Zuhri |

Table 3.9: The informant profile of Abu al-Barakat.

Ibn ʿAsākir cites Abu al-Barakat consistently in about 3,312 *isnād*s with the phrase ‘he informed us’ *(akhbaranā*). In the *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*, Ibn ʿAsākir places him in Baghdad and reports having recited material back to Abu al-Barakat.

Al-Dhahabī refers also to Abu al-Barakat as a *musnid*. He quotes Ibn ʿAsākir’s contemporary al-Samʿānī (d. 562/1166), the author of *Kitāb al-ansāb*, as saying of Abu al-Barakat:

He was a *ḥāfiẓ*, trustworthy, precise and with a vast number of authorised transmissions (*wāsiʿ al-riwāya*). He was constant, quick to weep and good company. He produced histories and gathered together narratives on uncovered topics. He was occupied with disseminating Hadith. I read a great deal back to him.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The term *ḥāfiẓ* here does not mean someone who has memorised the Quran but rather is used as an honorific for a Hadith expert who has memorised a large amount of material.[[29]](#footnote-29) A *riwāya* is a citation chain that grants those included in it authority to transmit a work onward (see Post 5 for further discussion of this term and its interpretation).

Al-Samʿānī goes on to say, as quoted by al-Dhahabī:

It might even be said that there was no volume that he had not read and obtained a copy of. He copied the great works, such as the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Saʿd [Ibn Sa'd] and the *Tārīkh* of al-Khaṭīb [al-Khatib]. He was devoted to *riwāya*s and would not permit an *ijāza* to follow after an *ijāza*. He composed something on that. I read to him *al-Jaʿdiyyāt*, the *Taʿrīkh al-Fasawī* and the *Selections by al-Baqqāl from al-Mukhalliṣ* (*Intiqāʾ al-Baqqāl ʿalā al-Mukhalliṣ*).[[30]](#footnote-30)

Ibn ʿAsākir mentions several authors in *isnād*s for which Abu al-Barakat is the direct informant; they include Ibn Sa'd, but not al-Khatib. The author whose name appears most often Abu al-Barakat’s *isnād*s (388 times) is Ibn Abi Shayba. But none of these citations refers to a work by him.

1. Abu Muhammad al-Akfani

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Born | 444 |
| Died | 524/1129 |
| Where he met Ibn ʿAsākir per *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* | Damascus |
| Total # of his *isnād*s in *TMD* | 3,380 |
| Percentage of all *isnād*s in data set | 4% |
| Transmission term used in *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*’s example | *akhbaranā/bi-qirāʾatī ʿalayhi* |
| Most common transmission term in *TMD* | *akhbaranā* |
| # of his *isnād*s using this term in *TMD* | 2,686 |
| Percentage of his *isnād*s using this term in *TMD* | 79% |
| Name as given in *TMD* bio | هبة الله بن أحمد بن محمد ابن هبة الله بن علي بن فارس أبو محمد بن أبي الحسين ابن أبي الفضل الأنصاري المعروف بابن الأكفاني |
| Name as given in *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* | هبة الله بن أحمد بن محمد بن هبة الله بن علي بن فارس أبو محمد بن أبي الحسين بن أبي الفضل بن الأكفاني الأنصاري المزكي |
| Name as given in al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* | ابن الأكفاني أبو محمد هبة الله بن أحمد بن محمد الدمشقي المعدل المعروف بابن الأكفاني |
| Minimum # of surface forms of his name in *TMD* | 38 |
| Sample surface forms | أبو محمد ألاكفاني |
|  | أبا محمد بن الأكفاني |
|  | أبو محمد ابن الأكفاني |
|  | أبو محمد هبة الله بن أحمد بن الأكفاني |
| Most common surface form | أبو محمد بن الأكفاني |
| # of his *isnād*s using most common surface form | 2,581 |
| Percentage of his *isnād*s using most common surface form | 76% |
| Minimum # of times named alongside other direct informants in *TMD* by most common surface form | 93 |
| Minimum # of times cited as direct informant along with others | 162 |
| # of *isnād*s citing him as direct informant that also contain an author’s name | N/A |
| Percentage of *isnād*s citing him as direct informant that contain an author’s name | N/A |
| # of distinct author names in *isnād*s that cite him | N/A |
| Author names in these *isnād*s (normalised) | N/A |

Table 3.10: The informant profile of Abu Muhammad al-Akfani.

In his biographical entry on Abu Muhammad al-Akfani, al-Dhahabī says that he began participating in audition sessions (*samiʿa*) at the age of 9. Al-Dhahabī lists eleven people from whom Abu Muhammad al-Akfani received material through audition, beginning with Abu Muhammad’s father, and then adds, ‘a large number of people’ (*wa-khalq kathīr*). The list also includes al-Khatib. However, it contains no mention of what Abu Muhammad al-Akfani heard from these individuals.[[31]](#footnote-31)

We have already mentioned that Ibn ʿAsākir’s older brother Hibat Allāh reportedly transmitted material to him via audition (*sammaʿahu*) from the year 505/1111–12 onwards. Yāqūt adds that Ibn ʿAsākir received independent auditions from his father and from Abu Muhammad al-Akfani (*samiʿa huwa bi-nafsihi min wālidihi wa-Abī Muḥammad al-Akfānī*).[[32]](#footnote-32) This seems to suggest that Abu Muhammad al-Akfani held pride of place as a direct informant for Ibn ʿAsākir in the latter’s youth.

Our *isnād* data set also contains a specific and immediate reference by Ibn ʿAsākir to Abu Muhammad al-Akfani:

Abū Muḥammad Hibat Allāh b. al-Akfānī [Abu Muhammad al-Akfani] informed me orally (*shifāhan*) and I transmit it from his handwriting that he said that Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan b. Ṭalḥa b. al-Naḥḥās al-Tinnīsī (may God be pleased with him) told him via an *ijāza* that Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Salām …[[33]](#footnote-33)

Indeed, Ibn ʿAsākir emphasises having listened to Abu Muhammad al-Akfani personally on other occasions in the *TMD*, where he says repeatedly, using variations of the term *shifāhan*, that Abu Muhammad al-Akfani informed him of things orally.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Our data model assumes that whichever author mentioned in an *isnād* as the closest in time to Ibn ʿAsākir is the author on whose work he draws for the material transmitted through that *isnād*. A subset of our *isnād* data set collects the chains that run back to individuals identified as authors. We have not recorded *isnād*s going through him to other authors in this subset.

This case illustrates the complexities of authorship in the period in question and the challenge these pose for our data collection. Scheiner classifies Abu Muhammad al-Akfani as an author on the basis of a work ascribed to him entitled *Tasmiyat quḍāt Dimashq*. However, as we discuss in Post 6, the term *tasmiya* is used widely in the *TMD* for written collations that often do not fit the model of a composed book (separate pieces but also sections of larger works). If authorship of a *tasmiya* makes an individual an author, the *TMD* contains far more authors than hitherto reckoned. Looking closely at the data set, we find that Abu Muhammad al-Akfani passed on quotations from several (other) authors on our list, including al-Khatib (in 309 *isnād*s). Ibn ʿAsākir’s frequent use of *tasmiya*s suggests that these works mediated his access to the materials conveyed in them.

1. Abu Muhammad al-Sulami

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Born | ? |
| Died | 526/1132 |
| Where he met Ibn ʿAsākir per *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* | Damascus |
| Total # of his *isnād*s in *TMD* | 3,224 |
| Percentage of all *isnād*s in data set | 4% |
| Transmission term used in *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*s example | *akhbaranā/bi-qirāʾatī ʿalayhi* |
| Most common transmission term in *TMD* | *qaraʾtu ʿalā* |
| # of his *isnād*s using this term in *TMD* | 1,913 |
| Percentage of his *isnād*s using this term in *TMD* | 59% |
| Name as given in *TMD* bio | عبد الكريم بن حمزة بن الخضر بن العباس أبو محمد السلمي الحداد أخو سليمان وكيل المقربين |
| Name as given in *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* | عبد الكريم بن حمزة بن الخضر بن العباس أبو محمد السلمي الحداد الوكيل المعروف بأخي سلمان |
| Name as given in al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* | عبد الكريم بن حمزة بن الخضر بن العباس الشيخ الثقة المسند أبو محمد السلمي الدمشقي الحداد وكيل المقرئين |
| Minimum # of surface forms of his name in *TMD* | 54 |
| Sample surface forms | عبد الكريم بن حمزة |
|  | أبي محمد بن السلمي |
|  | أبي محمد بن حمزة السلمي |
|  | أبي محمد عبد الكريم السلمي |
|  | أبي محمد عبد الكريم بن حمزة السلمي |
| Most common surface form | أبي محمد السلمي |
| # of his *isnād*s using most common surface form | 1,341 |
| Percentage of his *isnād*s using most common surface form | 42% |
| Minimum # of times named alongside other direct informants in *TMD* by most common surface form | 0 |
| Minimum # of times cited as direct informant along with others | 96 |
| # of *isnād*s citing him as direct informant that also contain an author’s name | 1,466 |
| Percentage of *isnād*s citing him as direct informant that contain an author’s name | 45% |
| # of distinct author names in *isnād*s that cite him | 36 |
| Author names in these *isnād*s (normalised) | Abd al-Razzaq, Abu 'Aruba al-Harrani, Abu 'Ubayd al-Qasim b. Sallam, Abu Hudhayfa, Abu Muhammad al-Akfani, Abu Muhammad b. Abi Nasr, Abu Nu'aym, Abu Zur'a, Ahmad b. al-Ma'ali, Al-Haytham b. 'Adi, Hisham b. 'Ammar, Ibn Abi Khaythama, Ibn Ma'in, Ibn Makula, Ibn Manda, Ibn Sa'd, Ibn al-A'rabi, Ibn al-Mubarak, Muhammad b. 'A'idh, Muhammad b. Harun, Muhammad b. Jarir, Muhammad b. Muhammad, Waki', Ya'qub b. Sufyan, al-Baghawi, al-Bukhari, al-Daraqutni, al-Kalbi, al-Khara'iti, al-Khatib, al-Kilabi, al-Mada'ini, al-Tahawi, al-Walid b. Muslim, al-Waqidi, al-Zuhri |

Table 3.11: The informant profile of Abu Muhammad al-Sulami.

Ibn ʿAsākir cites Abu Muhammad al-Sulami in a variety of ways, but most often he uses the phrase *qaraʿtu ʿalā*, indicating that he read the transmitted material back to his informant. This mode of transmission is not common among Ibn ʿAsākir’s top five informants, but it constitutes a dominant pattern in the *TMD* generally, as we discuss in Post 4.

Al-Dhahabī calls Abu Muhammad al-Sulami a *musnid*, like Abu Ghalib and Abu al-Barakat, and he quotes Ibn ʿAsākir as saying that he read many items back to him (*qaraʾtu ʿalayhi al-kathīr*).[[35]](#footnote-35)

Forty-five percent of Abu Muhammad al-Sulami’s citations in the data set contain the name of an author – a relatively high percentage. One might hypothesise a connection with his mode of citation: perhaps the transmission term *qaraʾtu ʿalā* goes back to an author-informant more often than do other modes of citation. When we surveyed all *isnād*s that cite authors, we did not find this to be generally the case. *Isnād*s that include authors do not begin with *qaraʾtu ʿalā* more often than other *isnād*s do. However, in the specific case of Abu Muhammad al-Sulami, there does seem to be a correlation between the term *qaraʿtu ʿalā* and material obtained from an author. Of Abu Muhammad’s *isnād*s that feature authors, 57% begin with *qaraʾtu ʿalā* (831 out of 1,466 *isnād*s). In 539 *isnād*s, Abu Muhammad al-Sulami is preceded in the chain by Ibn Makula (d. 485/1092), who is credited with authoring books, and all but nine of these start with the formula *qaraʾtu ʿalā*.

A few more observations about the top five informants

Each of the five persons whom Ibn ʿAsākir cites most frequently as his direct sources represents a unique case, but they enable some general observations.

In terms of geography, Ibn ʿAsākir occasionally gives geographical information about his direct informants in *isnād*s. He mentions receiving information in Damascus but more often refers to locations beyond Damascus. It is hard to know how much of the *TMD* comes from sources outside of Damascus. The *TMD* connects to Damascus many people who merely passed through it or lived there briefly. His direct informants likewise often hail from elsewhere, which makes sense if we assume that he relied on notes from his youthful study trips when composing the *TMD*. Moreover, given Baghdad’s important role both historically and in his own day, it might be natural that he would seek to cite Baghdadi sources in particular.

Al-Dhahabī labels four of Ibn ʿAsākir’s top five transmitters *musnid*s. Ibn ʿAsākir might well have valued these direct informants especially highly because of the access they brought to important *isnād*s. Ibn ʿAsākir’s reliance on these direct informants in particular supports the possibility that transmission itself was a key focus of the *TMD*.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Although the term *musnid* does appear at least once in the *TMD*, it is not one that Ibn ʿAsākir generally employs. (Yāqūt does not use the term either, at least as far as we have been able to establish through searching.) Al-Dhahabī uses the label *musnid* throughout the *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*. For example, he says of one ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿUmayr b. Suwayd that he ‘became the *musnid* for the people of Kufa’.[[37]](#footnote-37) A search of the *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* yields references to such *isnād* specialists in many (or even most) centres of Islamic learning in the centuries up to al-Dhahabī’s own day. He names *musnid*s for al-Andalus, the Maghrib, Cairo/Egypt (*Miṣr* and *al-diyār al-miṣriyya*), the Ḥijāz, Palestine (*ahl Filistīn*), Syria (*al-Shām* and *ahl al-Shām fī zamānihi*), Iraq, Jurjān, Khurāsān and Transoxania as well as various cities and other locations, including Baghdad, Basra, Cordoba, Marrakech, Alexandria, Mecca, the Ḥaram (i.e. the Temple Mount/Jerusalem), Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, Kufa, Wāsiṭ, Dīnawar, Hamadhān, Isfahan, Nishapur, Samarqand, Herat, Bukhara and Merv. There are also many vague references to individuals as the *musnid*s of their times (*musnid waqtihi*), eras (*musnid ʿaṣrihi*), regions (*musnid tilka al-diyār fī zamānihi*) and the world generally (*musnid al-āfāq* and *musnid al-dunyā*). Al-Dhahabī also mentions a specialist in *isnād*s as the leader of Quran reciters and Hadith specialists (*musnid al-qurrāʾ wa-l-muḥaddithīn*).[[38]](#footnote-38) And there are references to especially long-lived (*al-muʿammar*) *isnād* specialists, a feature that is significant if one is seeks transmission chains that are as short as possible. Al-Dhahabī appears to have appreciated the special role of these specialists in ‘carrying on the tradition’.[[39]](#footnote-39)

In his *isnād*s, Ibn ʿAsākir’s most commonly uses the expression *akhbaranā*, ‘he informed us’, to explain how he acquired information. With four of his five top direct informants, Ibn ʿAsākir typically says that he received the material as part of a group. This wording is common throughout the *TMD*, as we discuss in Post 4.

Each of the five informants transmits reports that contain authors’ names, but only in the cases of Abu Ghalib and Abu Muhammad al-Sulami do such author-containing *isnād*s represent a significant percentage of the informant’s total *isnād*s. It may be significant that with Abu Muhammad al-Sulami specifically Ibn ʿAsākir favours a term indicating that he read the material back to him.

In general, the data set yields a complex picture of citation. We accept Ibn ʿAsākir’s implicit insistence that the *isnād*s are signifiers, but decoding them is not straightforward.

Citing people jointly

Ibn ʿAsākir repeatedly asserts that he acquired material while in a group. He employs a variety of transmission terms to indicate that an informant relayed information to ‘us’. In our data, he rarely says that a direct informant provided information to him alone (‘to me’), unless an explicitly written method of transmission is involved.

This tendency to refer to collectivities also occurs in another, distinct sense within the *TMD*. Ibn ʿAsākir frequently credits two, three or more people together, at the start of an *isnād*, for the same information. For example, consider the following *isnād*:

وأخبرنا أبو غالب وأبو عبد الله ابنا البنا قالا أنا أبو الحسين بن الآبنوسي أنا أبو الحسن الدارقطني إجازة

Abū Ghālib [Abu Ghalib] and Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Abu 'Abd Allah], the two sons of al-Bannāʾ, both informed us, saying that Abū al-Ḥusayn b. al-Abnūsī told them that Abū al-Ḥasan al-Dāraquṭnī told them via an *ijāza* (*ijāzatan*) that …

By our very rough estimates – each calculated in a different way – more than 12% of the *isnād*s in our data set feature more than one direct informant.[[40]](#footnote-40) Abu Ghalib and Abu 'Abd Allah, the Bannāʾ brothers, appear together in various ways at least 1,132 times.[[41]](#footnote-41)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Names** | **Count** |
| Abu Ghalib, Abu 'Abd Allah | 1,132 |
| Abu al-Husayn, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Khallal | 487 |
| Abu al-Husayn b. al-Farra', Abu Ghalib, Abu 'Abd Allah | 384 |
| Abu al-Husayn, Abu 'Abd Allah | 246 |
| Abu Sa'd al-Mutriz, Abu 'Ali al-Haddad | 233 |
| Abu 'Abd Allah al-Furawi, Abu al-Muzaffar | 225 |
| Ibn al-Mubarak, Abu al-'Izz Thabit b. Mansur | 219 |
| Abu al-Barakat, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Balkhi | 181 |
| Abu al-Husayn al-Abraquhi, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Khallal | 171 |
| Abu 'Abd Allah, Abu Ghalib | 155 |
| Abu al-Qasim al-'Alawi, Abu al-Wahsh | 153 |
| Abu al-Barakat, Abu al-'Izz Thabit b. Mansur | 126 |
| Abu Talib, Abu Nasr | 121 |
| Abu al-Hasan b. Qubays, Abu Mansur b. Khayrun | 120 |
| Abu 'Ali, Jama'a | 98 |
| Abu al-Qasim al-'Alawi, Abu al-Hasan 'Ali b. Ahmad | 73 |
| Abu 'Abd Allah, Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi | 62 |
| Abu al-Husayn Hibat Allah b. al-Hasan, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Husayn b. 'Abd al-Malik | 61 |
| Abu al-Hasan al-Faradi, Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi | 53 |
| Abu al-Muzaffar, Abu al-Qasim al-Mustamli | 53 |

Table 3.12: Sets of informants who are often cited together.

Table 3.12 offers only a sample of informants who are frequently cited together, and the counts are inevitably incomplete. They reflect a search for surface forms referring to the twenty most-cited informants amidst *isnād*s that cite more than one person in the first position in the *isnād*. Careful readers will note that the order in which names appear, within this position, matters, so that the same set may be counted several times if the individuals in it are listed in a different order. This situation is not ideal for getting a real handle on citations, and tackling it will require further work on the names and their normalisation.

What exactly does it mean when Ibn ʿAsākir cites people together?

The Bannāʾ brothers could plausibly have transmitted information to their audience together, but in many cases of joint citation there is no reason to think that they delivered the information in the same place and at the same moment in time. The combinations of names are too numerous and varied, and the known geography of many informants makes joint delivery even more unlikely. Furthermore, the Bannāʾ brothers are often listed alongside other people.

Bearing in mind that 39% of the *TMD* is made up of *isnād*s, we should expect that several different models of collation are at play. For example, the repeated citation of the same individuals in the same sequence within the first position within an *isnād*, using the same surface forms for their names, suggests that all the information may have come from the same notebook. In other cases, Ibn ʿAsākir may have started with a single-informant *isnād* for a particular report, but when he received corroboration for it from another direct informant, he may have added the additional source or sources to his *isnād* in the first position.

So far, we have been unable to directly link the contents and organisation of the *TMD* to Ibn ʿAsākir’s sources. It does not seem to be the case, for example, that he relied on specific notebooks containing information from certain sets of informants for particular sections of the work. Another project, distinct from ours, will consider the co-occurrence of certain names (including their various surface forms and orderings) alongside the reports that they accompany to determine whether the informant sets are defined by thematic or other principles. This project will also take into account the informants’ geography and the placement of the citations within the *TMD*. It will thus involve much more advanced work on pattern recognition, and it can illuminate how authors such as Ibn ʿAsākir collated their materials to produce their books.

1. The distribution is named after the Italian polymath Vilfredo Federico Damaso Pareto (d. 1923). Pareto’s original point pertained to income distribution – that a substantial portion of Italy’s wealth belonged to a relatively small percentage of the population (Pareto’s idea gained traction with the Fascists, as a picture of stable inequality suggested the pointlessness of efforts to change it). Pareto’s findings were based on tax tables from 1880 to 1890 from Prussia and Saxony, as well as Swiss and Italian cities; as Thomas Picketty notes, the information was ‘scanty [and] covered a decade at most’. Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014), 462–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As noted in post 1, our edition of the *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh* contains 1,621 shaykhs, slightly fewer than in al-Dhahabī’s count. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 20:556, ms. 6648. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As nicely summarized by Lorenz Nigst in a personal communication on 10 May 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 4:1698, entry 743, ms. 1199. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. We exclude Abu Ghalib and Abu 'Abd Allah’s shared *isnād*s from this figure, since the two transmitters’ individual counts include cases in which they are listed with other people. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For a report according to which Ibn ʿAsākir was present at the recitation of one Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. 'Ali, see [Savant and Seydi, ‘Ibn ʿAsākir and His History of Damascus’](https://zenodo.org/record/8233103), ‘Isnads’, table ‘TransmissionChains\_Normalised’, ID 62784, ms. 21493. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 4:1698, entry 743, ms. 1199; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 20:554, ms. 6647. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, *Muqaddimat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Maʿāṣir, 1397/1977), 129, 06430643IbnSalahShahrazuri.MuqaddimatCulumHadith.JK000537, ms. 054–5; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, *An Introduction to the Science of the Ḥadīth (Kitāb Maʿrifat anwāʿ ʿilm al-ḥadīth)*, trans. Eerik Dickinson (Reading: Garnet, 2005), 96–7. We mostly use Dickinson’s translation for our quotations, but with slight modifications. For his translation, Dickinson relied on an earlier version (Damascus 1387/1966) of the edition cited here and secondarily on the edition of ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (2nd ed., Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1989); ʿAbd al-Raḥmān’s edition in the OpenITI corpus is 0643IbnSalahShahrazuri.MuqaddimatCulumHadith.Shamela0029878BK1. Dickinson explains his edition in Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Introduction*, xxv. In these blog posts we cite ʿItr’s 1397/1977 edition. See also Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 32–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Introduction*, 99; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 134, ms. 056. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1977), 261, 0405HakimNaysaburi.MacrifatCulumHadith.Shia002093, ms. 240. See also J. Robson, ‘Ḥadīth’, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\_islam\_COM\_0248. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. It may be relevant that he cites Abu al-Ghana'im alone, not alongside other persons (as is his frequent practice with other direct informants). He does cite others alongside Abu 'Ali al-Haddad, however. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Introduction*, 100; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 137, ms. 057–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Introduction*, 114–15; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 160, ms. 069. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*, 236, entry 268, ms. 119. As Devin Stewart notes, this could mean that he sent him an *ijāza* in a letter. Personal communication, 15 July 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*, 1001, entry 1283, ms. 516. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*, 161, entry 177, ms. 081.His brother was ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. ʿUmar b. Abī al-Ashʿath Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr al-Samarqandī: Ibn ʿAsākir, *Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*, 460, entry 553, ms. 230. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 20:28–31, ms. 6398–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See, for example, Savant and Seydi, ‘Ibn ʿAsākir and His History of Damascus’, ‘Isnads’, table ‘TransmissionChains\_Normalised’, ID 89, ms. 00039; ID 7249, ms. 02835; ID 15037, ms. 05607; and ID 49896, ms. 17054. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Savant and Seydi, ‘Ibn ʿAsākir and His History of Damascus’, ‘Isnads’, table ‘TransmissionChains\_Normalised’, ID 7249, ms. 02835. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 20:28, ms. 6398. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Mourad, *Ibn ‘Asakir of Damascus*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. As we prepared to publish these posts, we found three additional citations of al-Shirazi’s book through Abu al-Qasim al-Samarqandi that we missed through our search. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Savant and Seydi, ‘Ibn ʿAsākir and His History of Damascus’, ‘Isnads’, table ‘TransmissionChains\_Normalised’, ID 3756, ms. 01529; ID 4157, ms. 01669; ID 61666, ms. 21047; ID 61909, ms. 21148; ID 62238, ms. 21277; and ID 62238, ms. 21277. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibn ʿAsākir, *TMD*, 54:159; Savant and Seydi, ‘Ibn ʿAsākir and His History of Damascus’, ‘Isnads’, table ‘TransmissionChains\_Normalised’, ID 62238, ms. 21277. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Abū Isḥāq al-Shīrāzī, *Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahāʾ*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Rāʾid al-ʿArabī, 1970), 128, 0476AbuIshaqShirazi.TabaqatFuqaha.Shamela0001031-ara1.mARkdown, ms. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Devin Stewart, ‘Women’s Biographies in Islamic Societies: Mīrzā ʿAbd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī’s *Riyāḍ al-ʿUlamāʾ*’, in Louise Marlow (ed.), *The Rhetoric of Biography: Narrating Lives in Persianate Societies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 113–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. For this sense in the *TMD*, see Ibn ʿAsākir, *TMD*, 5:104, ms. 1455. Ibn ʿAsākir here describes someone as a *musnid* among the shaykhs of Basra. Searching for the term *musnid* requires distinguishing it from the orthographically identical *musnad* (a Hadith collection organized by transmitter) and *musnid* in the literal sense of ‘reclining’ or ‘leaning’, which is also attested in the *TMD*. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Abū Anas Waqīʿ Allāh al-Marwatī’s analysis of the term *musnid*, quoting al-Suyūṭī and others, in <https://www.alukah.net/sharia/0/123404/إطلاق-كلمة-المسند-في-مصطلح-الحديث/>. Al-Suyūṭī ranks a *musnid* behind a *muḥaddith* and a *ḥāfiẓ*: al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī fī sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawāwī*, ed. Abū Qutayba Naẓar Muḥammad al-Fārayābī, 2 vols ([Beirut: Dār al-Kalim al-Ṭayyib], [1996]), 1:29–30, 0911Suyuti.TadribRawi.Shamela0009329, ms. 4–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 20:135, ms. 6446. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 20:554, ms. 6646. Ibn ʿAsākir himself is called a *ḥāfiẓ* in this sense by his son, as quoted by Yāqūt (al-Dhahabī likewise uses the term for him). Yāqūt’s text also declares Ibn ʿAsākir one of the imams of Hadith (al-Dhahabī, for his part, calls Ibn ʿAsākir *muḥaddith al-Shām*). Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 4:1697, entry 743, ms. 1199. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 20:135–6, ms. 6446–7. He may be referring to Abū al-Qāsim al-Baghawī’s (d. 317/929) collection of Hadith from ʿAlī b. Jaʿd (d. 230/844–5), published as *al-Jaʿdiyyāt*, and to Ibn Sufyān al-Fasawī’s (d. 277/890) *Maʿrifa wa-l-tārīkh*. The third work is selections (*intiqāʾ*) by Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿUmar b. al-Baqqāl (d. 489/1096)from a work by Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-ʿAbbās (d. 393/1003). The earlier work is called the *Mukhalliṣiyyāt*. See also Abū Ṭāḥir al-Mukhalliṣ, *al-Mukhalliṣiyyāt wa-ajzāʾ ukhrā li-Abī Ṭāhir al-Mukhalliṣ*, ed. Nabīl Saʿd al-Dīn Jarrār, 4 vols ([Doha]: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shuʾūn al-Islamiyya li-Dawlat Qaṭar, 1429/2008) and al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 16:478–9, ms. 5484–5. We capitalise ‘Selections’ to reflect what sounds like a fixed work. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 19:576–8, ms. 6361. Al-Dhahabī quotes Ibn ʿAsākir in his entry on Abu Muhammad al-Akfani. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 4:1698, entry 743, ms. 1199. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Savant and Seydi, ‘Ibn ʿAsākir and His History of Damascus’, ‘Isnads’, table ‘TransmissionChains\_Normalised’, ID 40053, ms. 13726. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See within our *isnād* data set the subset ‘Isnads\_with\_Search\_Terms’, table ‘TC\_Shifahan’. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 19:600, ms. 6371. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Following Davidson, *Carrying On the Tradition*. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 5:439, ms. 2360. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 19:593, ms. 6368. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See also Devin Stewart’s definition of this term in Stewart, ‘Women’s Biographies’, 113–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. One of the methods we used for these estimates involved searching for indications of multiple entities in the first position in *isnād*s (when the names were normalised, such indications might include a comma). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. They are often cited together with additional persons. We have not disambiguated all of the names that appear in conjunction with the brothers. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)