

The Social Network of Ibn Abī Ishāq
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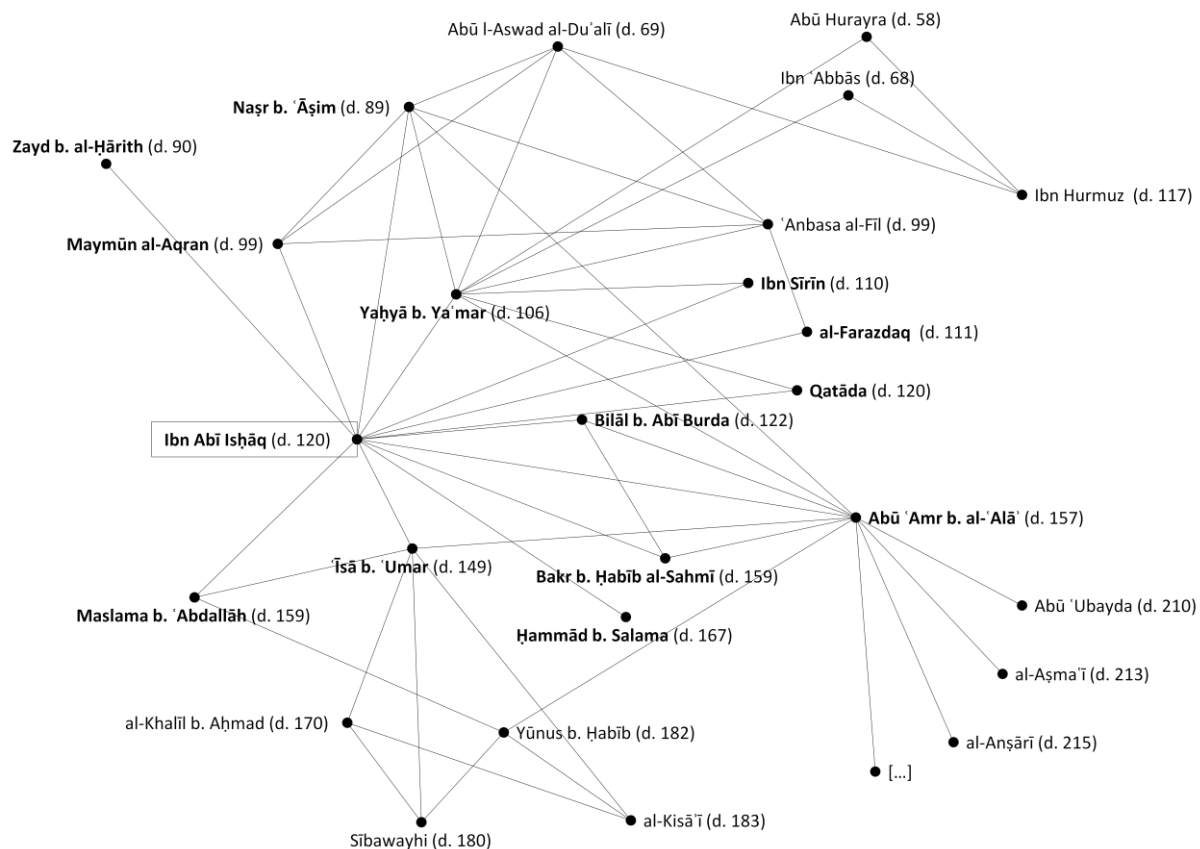
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The relations of a scholar with his teachers and pupils, as well as *their* teachers and pupils, together constitute a network of scholarly activities at a certain moment in time. This paper uses the method of Social Network Analysis to identify and further clarify the relations within the network of one particular scholar — the grammarian Ibn Abī Ishāq who died around the year 120/738. Ibn Abī Ishāq belongs to a group of early grammarians who can be identified as pioneers in the field of Arabic linguistics. Western studies have taken Ibn Abī Ishāq to be the first “real grammarian” of Arabic. Ibn Abī Ishāq was furthermore part of a social and intellectual environment that offered opportunities to contribute to the development of scholarly activities. Consequently, studying the network in which Ibn Abī Ishāq functioned may shed light on the early development of the Islamic sciences and the field of Arabic grammar.

The method for studying relations within social groupings is called Social Network Analysis. Basic to the method is the portrayal of a network in a diagram that depicts the people as points — the nodes of the network — which are connected by lines representing the relations between the people. Such a diagram is called a “sociogram.” The number of nodes and the frequency of lines which connect the nodes in a sociogram delineate the fabric of the group.

In social network analysis several measures can be used for analyzing the various aspects of a network. From patterns in the configuration of the nodes and the connecting lines, one can detect, for instance, “isolation” versus “centrality”. Isolation is a situation in which one node is connected to one other node while that other node is firmly embedded in the network. Centrality is indicated when one node has a central position and is connected to several other nodes which may or may not be directly related to each other. However, when many nodes that are connected to one node in a central position are interrelated, we then speak of a “block”. “Paths”, yet another facet of a network, indirectly connect nodes to each other through a distinct sequence of lines within the network.

To delineate Ibn Abī Ishāq's network I have identified the following groupings: (a) his teachers and pupils; (b) the other pupils of his teachers; (c) the other teachers of his pupils; and, to further canvass the network, I have identified (d) his contacts outside grammatical circles. I then mapped the network in a sociogram. All Ibn Abī Ishāq's direct contacts are in a bold font in the sociogram, additional indirect relations, that is, relations of relations, are in normal font.



From an inspection of the sociogram it is evident that Ibn Abī Ishāq is firmly embedded in a fairly large network. His position is a position of centrality and it has links to three different blocks in which the positions of Yaḥyā b. Ya'mar, 'Isā b. 'Umar, and Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā' show centrality as well. Only two out of the thirteen lines directly linked to Ibn Abī Ishāq end in a single node, showing isolation: the nodes of Zayd b. al-Ḥārith and Ḥammād b. Salama.

At the top of the sociogram we find three celebrated figures: Abū l-Aswad al-Du'alī, Abū Hurayra, and Ibn 'Abbās. These three men personify the basics of the Islamic sciences-to-be: linguistics, ḥadīth, and Koranic studies. They have two pupils in common: The first one being the fairly isolated Ibn Hurmuz; their second common pupil is Yaḥyā b. Ya'mar who is firmly embedded in the network of Abū l-Aswad's other pupils: 'Anbasa al-Fīl, Maymūn al-Aqran and Naṣr b. 'Āṣim. Apart from Ibn Hurmuz and 'Anbasa, they were teachers of Ibn Abī Ishāq. This results in a rather dense block of nodes and connecting lines in the top half of the sociogram.

Ibn Abī Ishāq transmitted *ḥadīth* from his father, Zayd b. al-Ḥārith and had connections with Ibn Sīrīn and Qatāda. He studied *qirā'a* under Yaḥyā b. Ya'mar and Naṣr b. 'Āṣim. The five remaining lines connect Ibn Abī Ishāq with his five pupils. Ḥammād b. Salama, Bakr b. Ḥabīb al-Sahmī, and Maslama b. 'Abdallāh, are the lesser known among them. 'Isā b. 'Umar and Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā', on the other hand, both hold positions of centrality in the sociogram — they were Ibn Abī Ishāq's famous students who each in their own manner greatly

contributed to the further development of Arabic linguistics. 'Īsā b. 'Umar's connecting lines go to famous and influential grammarians who need no further introduction: al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, Yūnus b. Ḥabīb, Sībawayhi, and al-Kisā'ī. Abū 'Amr constitutes a bridge to the further development of *adab*, philology in the broadest sense of the word: We see connecting lines to famous *udabā'* like Abū 'Ubayda, al-Aṣma'ī, al-Anṣārī, and many others.

Summarizing, Ibn Abī Ishāq held a central position in a network that was furthermore characterized by the existence of several blocks. This indicates a tightly interrelated network and lively social surroundings. Moreover, we were able to identify two important paths leading from Ibn Abī Ishāq: One goes through 'Īsā b. 'Umar and al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad to Sībawayhi who firmly consolidated Arabic grammar in his *Kitāb*, and the other to Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā' as a bridge to the further development of philological studies.