THE AUTHORSHIP
OF TWO TWELFTH CENTURY TRANSOXANIAN
BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARIES

BY

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MANUSCRIPTS of two related twelfth century biographical dictionaries, the Kitab al-qand fi ma’rifat ‘ulamā’ Samarqand by Abū Hafs ‘Umar ibn Muhammad al-Nasafi (d.537/1142) and the Muntahhab kitāb al-qand fi ma’rifat ‘ulamā’ Samarqand by al-Nasafi’s pupil Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Galil al-Samarqandi, are located respectively in the Kütophanesi Süleymaniye, Istanbul and in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. In the 17th century Kâtib Çelebi mentioned the title of the work of al-Nasafi and noted the abridgement of it made by al-Samarqandi, but when modern scholars read this account they assumed that it referred to a history rather than a biographical dictionary. This


3 I have been unable to find any biographical information on al-Samarqandi.


5 Kâtib Çelebi, Lexicon Bibliographicum et Encyclopaedicum..., ed. G. Flügel (Leipzig, 1835-1858), IV, 571 gives the title as Qand fi ta’rīh Samarqand and Ibn Hājar al-‘Asqalānī, Lisān al-mizān 2nd ed. (Hyderabad, 1329-1331: reprint Beirut, 1971) IV, 327 has it Kitāb al-qand min ‘ulamā’ Samarqand. Because he was closest in time to al-Nasafi, I have chosen to follow al-Sam‘ānī who in his Kîtāb al-ansāb, ed. D. S. Margoliouth, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, Vol. XX (London, 1912), f. 337a gives the title as Kitāb al-qand fi ma’rifat ‘ulamā’ Samarqand.

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initial misunderstanding was compounded by the existence of a Persian city chronicle for Samarqand which was taken erroneously to be a translation of the work of al-Nasafi. Consequently, those who have examined the Paris and Istanbul manuscripts have tended to look to others as the authors. The purpose of this paper is to correct the misidentification of these manuscripts, to establish the authorship of al-Nasafi and al-Samarqandi, and to describe properly the physical state of the manuscripts and the nature of their contents. Some attention also will be given to the relationship of al-Samarqandi's work to that of al-Nasafi, as well as to the place of both within their literary lineage.

The persistent difficulty in correctly identifying the authors of the manuscripts has resulted in part from the absence of any adequate description of the manuscripts themselves, a deficiency due largely to their defective state. It will be useful, then, to describe the texts briefly before reviewing the unsuccessful attempts to identify their authors. Both manuscripts lack title page and colophon. The Paris manuscript is seventy-five folios long and has continuous pagination in a European hand beginning with the first folio, but the manuscript is defective at both the beginning and the end, and there are several hiatuses throughout the body of the work. The Istanbul manuscript has no hiatuses, but it is clearly missing a large number of the initial folios. The pagination begins with folio 2a, and although it is in a Middle Eastern hand, this was added after the completion of the manuscript. On folio la the text opens in the middle of a biography which belongs to the section of the name Ḥālid. This represents a considerable loss since a number of popular Muslim names, such as Ahmad, Ibrāhīm, Bakr, Ġa'far and the like, are thus omitted. If the name Muḥammad were listed out of alphabetical order, as is often true in biographical dictionaries, then the missing portion would be still more substantial.

The Istanbul manuscript also may be defective at its end, but the defect is not immediately clear. The manuscript concludes on folio 198b in the middle of the page with the completion of an entry in the section on the name Karīm. Since the last entry is complete with no indication that anything is omitted, and since the manuscript ends in the middle of the page, no subsequent entry or page can be inferred, but the conclusion of the manuscript with the letter kāf leaves another ample portion of the alphabet unrepresented. It may be that a continuation volume once existed or that the manuscript was copied from a defective exemplar. Either case would explain the manuscript's abrupt ending.

Having described the two manuscripts, it is possible to turn now to the