

Ḥanafī Biographical Dictionaries: A Survey¹

Ermin Sinanovic*

Abstract: This paper deals with biographical dictionaries—one of the main genres in Muslim historiography. The first part involves some theoretical considerations related to biographical dictionaries. This includes definition and classification of this type of literature. In addition, this paper dismisses the claim forwarded by some Orientalists that this genre was initiated by Traditionalists so that they could pass themselves off as ‘genuine’ scholars to the exclusion of all others. While the Orientalists’ claim may have some weight, this study contends that biographical dictionaries have been primarily motivated by the Islamic conception of historiography, i.e. the preservation of the memory of previous scholars so that later Muslim generations could emulate their deeds. The second part surveys five Ḥanafī biographical dictionaries within the framework of the questions of motive, method, selectivity, and the issue of factual information and subjective evaluation. The survey confirms the hypothesis that the composition of biographical dictionaries was genuinely inspired by religious considerations. The paper also examines the linkage among these different dictionaries, and derives several important conclusions there from. Lastly, the paper analyzes the content of the surveyed dictionaries and relates it to the theoretical considerations discussed in the first part.

The biographical dictionaries are one of the richest sources of information on the Muslim scholars of the past, and Muslim history in general. Since the earliest times of Muslim history, there has been an organized and systematic effort to preserve details regarding the scholars who had contributed to the development of Islamic sciences.

It has been no different with the Ḥanafī scholars who tried to conserve the reports about the founder of their school, his pupils and their intellectual achievements. This paper is an attempt to shed some

* Ermin Sinanovic is currently pursuing PhD in Political Science at Syracuse University, NY, USA. E-mail: esinanov@maxwell.syr.edu.

light on the history of those efforts that brought to us, from generation to generation, the knowledge about our religious scholars.

This article attempts to define the biographical dictionary literature in general. It also tries to understand the motivation behind such works. With this, it is hoped, a better understanding of the whole genre may be available.

BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARIES

Definition

The word *ṭabaqah* (pl. *ṭabaqāt*) means, “layer,” or “something that covers or encompasses [all] things.”² From this, the naming of *ṭabaqah* as “a generation” has been derived. According to Ibn ‘Abbās (RA), one *ṭabaqah* is twenty years.³ If related to the historiography, it refers to biographical dictionaries of categories of people, usually scholars, who share some common denominators, such as traditionalists (*muḥaddithūn*), readers of the Qur’ān (*qurrā*), poets (*shu‘arā*), jurists (*fuqahā*)—usually within the same school of law (*madhhab*)—and so on.⁴ In the beginning, the categories used to be arranged chronologically, but this categorization has been abandoned later in favor of alphabetical arrangement, generally or within *ṭabaqāt*.⁵ There is no doubt that biographical dictionaries are “genuinely Islamic”⁶ inventions regarding the preservation of reports about people, their lives, interests and academic achievements.

Motivation

According to Gibb, in order to understand the significance of biographical dictionaries, it is necessary to grasp the “questions about the motivation of this literature.”⁷ Here, an attempt is made to present those motives.

Even in pre-Islamic times, Arabs dedicated a considerable attention to genealogies (*ansāb*), especially to what they deemed as noble families (*ashraf*).⁸ After Prophet Muhammad (SAS), this discipline acquired a new religious dimension. For the transmission of religious knowledge, the distinction between *ṣaḥābah*, *ṭābi‘īn*, and others was regarded as necessary. Thus there arose a need to classify the scholars and the transmitters of knowledge accordingly.

Utmost care was given to the issues of credibility, competence and piety. This is a distinguishing characteristic and achievement of Islamic civilization. The Prophetic saying, “Treat the people according to their ranks,”⁹ was surely an additional motivating factor for the

early Muslims in compiling these dictionaries and it definitely gave enough justification for performing such a task. With the development of sciences of *jarḥ* and *taʿdīl*, due attention was paid to the credibility of the chain of transmitters of a ḥadīth. The scholars resorted to the composition of biographical dictionaries in order to distinguish trustworthy transmitters from weak ones, and those who were found to be liars and forgers.¹⁰

However, some Orientalists tried to pursue a different line of argumentation regarding the motivation for developing dictionaries. The most extensive study on the issue has been done by Makdisi.¹¹ It is an excellent study dealing with the problems related to the dictionaries and is particularly valuable for the extensive biographical references it provides. Makdisi would like us to believe that Traditionalists¹² used *ṭabaqāt* so they could exclude all others as reliable transmitters of religious knowledge. Given the fact that the Ḥanafī school of law was considered to be more liberal than the others, and that the Muʿtazilīs—a rationalist school of Islamic thought—were mostly Ḥanafīs, he predicted that Ḥanafī biographical dictionaries would emerge last since the orthodox forces within the legal school needed more time to win over the rationalist tendencies. The ultimate goal of this line of reasoning is to expand that argument to *ṭabaqāt* literature as a whole. However, confronted with the fact that the earliest known biographical dictionary is that of Wāṣil bin ʿAtā (d. 141 AH/748 CE), a Muʿtazilī scholar,¹³ Makdisi was obliged to confine his thesis. Therefore, according to him, the traditionalists' motivation was "*to identify the scholars who had the legitimate authority to determine religious orthodoxy*"¹⁴ [italics in original].

It is not difficult to predict where this thesis would lead. Ultimately, he followed other Orientalists in his claim that "it was said that practically anything could be passed off as a message as long as it was preceded by a chain of transmitters."¹⁵ This is a gross misrepresentation of the sciences of ḥadīth. That scholars used to criticize the texts (*mutūn*) of ḥadīth as well has been well established and carefully documented.¹⁶ However, let me add a qualification that his thesis on motivation of *ṭabaqāt* may have some weight, having in mind the turbulent events that the early Muslim history has witnessed. In spite of this it is not acceptable *in toto* simply because Traditionalists used to accept ḥadīth reports even from Shīʿī or Muʿtazilī scholars under certain conditions. In the end, his assumption

regarding *ṭabaqāt* literature has to be taken into account, but it has to take the second place next to the motives we have already discussed above.

Classification of *Ṭabaqāt* Literature

We do not attempt here to give an exhaustive list of the way in which the scholars classified the biography. For that, one of the biographical references may be consulted.¹⁷ Here, we will give the most common classifications. Regarding the generations that are treated in the dictionaries, the usual classification is *ṭabaqāt al-ṣaḥābah* (generations of Companions) and *ṭabaqāt al-tāb‘īm* (generations of Successors to *ṣaḥābah*). Later generations are not commonly treated separately in this way, except sometimes for generations coming immediately after the Successors, but some authors have followed this type of classification for even later generations. We can find separate dictionaries according to specialization or affiliations with the legal schools: readers of the Qur’ān (*qurrā’*), poets (*shu‘arā’*), jurists (*fuqahā’*), transmitters of ḥadīth (*ruwāt*), Sufi-saints (*awliyā’*), scholars of ḥadīth (*muḥaddithūn*), grammarians (*naḥwiyyūn*), Hanafis, Malikis, Shafī‘is, Hanbalis and so on. There are also general dictionaries that contain all these people in one place, irrespective of their specialization or affiliation with the particular school or law. As regards the place, one can find *ṭabaqāt* of different geographical entities, such as Damascus, Baghdad, Basrah and so on. Finally, with respect to the time lapse, the centennial dictionaries can be found for each century according to the Hijrī calendar, starting with the 8th century AH.¹⁸

ḤANAFĪ BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARIES

The Emergence of Ḥanafī *Ṭabaqāt*

The first thing that any researcher in *ṭabaqāt* literature has to bear in mind is that the bulk of Islamic heritage has been lost, is still undiscovered, or is waiting to be edited and published. Therefore, any judgment pertaining to this type of literature has to be based on the known and published works. This makes any literature listing tentative and susceptible to change as the new discoveries come to light. Some biographical references provide information about books that have subsequently been lost or are yet to be unearthed, or edited. So, we can also form our judgment on the basis of that literature.

The existing information regarding the emergence of Ḥanafī biographical dictionaries is somewhat conflicting. Ḥājī Khalīfah

mentions in his *Kashf al-Zunīm*¹⁹ that “the first who compiled [a book] about it [*Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyyah*] was al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir (d. 775/1373)... the author of *al-Jawāhir al-Muḍīyyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyyah*...” However, a few sentences later, he refers to Najm al-Dīn Ibrāhīm bin Ali al-Ṭarsūsī (d. 758/1356) as the author of *Wafayāt al-a‘yān fī Madhāb al-Nu‘mān*,²⁰ and to Salah al-Dīn ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Muhandis (d. 769/1367)²¹ as the author of yet another such a dictionary, without specifying its name. The difference in the date of their deaths is 17 and 6 years respectively, and it would be difficult to know who was really the first one of the three to write a book, because Ḥajī Khalīfah does not specify the finishing date of their works. However, since the latter two books have not been found and are considered lost (so far), what the writer probably had in mind by saying that *al-Jawāhir* was the first book is that it was the first *known* book of Ḥanafī biographical dictionaries. Following the same information, Makdisi also puts al-Muhandis, or Ibn Abī al Wāfā (the author of *al-Jawāhir*) as the first *ṭabaqāt* work of the Ḥanafī legal guild.²² However, in the endnotes he proceeds to say that the earliest recorded *ṭabaqāt* is that of Maḥmūd ibn Sulaymān al-Kūfī (d. 300/912), entitled *Ṭabaqāt al-Kūfīyyah fī al-Sādāt al-Ḥanafīyyah*.²³ Makdisi tries to find a way out of this problem because the evidence is devastating for the main hypotheses of his article. Hence, he concludes that the title is attributed to the geographical place, rather than to the Ḥanafī school of law as such. This argument is weak from many aspects. Firstly, even though the title is attributed to Kufah, it is nevertheless *still* the book of Ḥanafī *ṭabaqāt* as it was made obvious in its title. Secondly, the author died on the convergence of the 3rd and the 4th century AH. We can safely assume that his book was composed in the latter part of the third century. At that time, the Ḥanafī school was only about 100-150 years old, and surely Kufah, as the scholarly centre of Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150) was also the hub of activities for its scholars. Therefore, the majority of the followers of Abū Ḥanīfah’s *Madhhab* were expected to be found in the place. In addition, we have to trust the information provided in that catalogue, unless otherwise proven. Therefore, if we take this information as correct, Ḥanafī biographical dictionaries would be the first to appear and not the last one as claimed by Makdisi, which disproves his thesis with regard to the motivation behind this genre of literature.

Another work which survived to our day, and is much earlier than those mentioned by Ḥājī Khalīfah or Makdisi, is al-Saymarī's (d. 436) *Akḥbār Abī Hanīfah wa Aṣḥābiḥī*.²⁴ Even though it does not contain the word *ṭabaqāt* in its title, it has all the features of such works.²⁵ It contains biographies of Abū Ḥanīfah, his pupils, and their students until the time of the author. All the data usually found in any *ṭabaqāt* work are there: year of birth, the chronological order according to the generations, scholarly pedigree, some anecdotes about the scholars, opinions of other scholars about them, year of death and so on. These have been transmitted in a strictly traditionalist fashion, i.e through the *sanad* (the chain of transmitters). We shall return to this work later.

In conclusion, we can say that Ḥanafī biographical dictionaries emerged as early as the end of the 3rd century AH. Al-Saymarī's work followed in the 5th century, but only in the second part of the 8th century have these dictionaries become more numerous.

Bibliographical Considerations

Ḥājī Khalīfah mentions 15 authors among those who wrote about the Ḥanafī biographical dictionaries, and he names the works of seven of them.²⁶ Auchterlonie gave only four dictionaries (all of them published), but his work is useful as a general biography on biographical dictionaries.²⁷ Valuable information on the topic can be found in the editorial introductions of printed editions of dictionaries, which is true also for all other types of *ṭabaqāt* literature. Very often, the authors' introduction and opening remarks provide us with the basic facts regarding the nature of the work, its sources, methodology, motives and so on. The centennial dictionaries are also helpful in providing knowledge about the scholars in each particular century.²⁸ In addition, the histories of geographical entities, such as cities or regions, are usually organized around the remarkable people coming from those areas rather than what is presently understood by such histories.²⁹ Accordingly, they should be consulted in order to acquire the reliable data about the scholars. In the end, general works on historiography, biographical dictionaries and bibliographical works may be referred to in order to provide us with the needed facts and guides for further research.³⁰

Survey of Literature

In this part of our research we shall make a brief survey of printed biographical dictionaries that are known and accessible to us. With this, we do not aim to cover every single aspect of those dictionaries,

but rather to give an abridged overview of their main features and an outline of their characteristics. The survey shall follow the chronological line, with the earliest sources coming first, and the later ones at the end. By doing this, we may be able to discover the sources of information for the later *ṭabaqāt* and establish the link among the dictionaries throughout the time span that is covered in the paper.

The methodologies of the authors of these *ṭabaqāt* will also be dealt with and subsequent development exposed. In this task, we shall follow the four main points as outlined by Khālidī, namely “the question of motive, method, selectivity, and the issue of factual information and subjective evaluation.”³¹

1. *Akhbār Abī Ḥanīfah wa Ashḥābih* by al-Ṣaymarī (d. 436)³²

This is the earliest printed Ḥanafī biographical dictionary³³, according to our knowledge. It has been reported that this book was “a thick volume.”³⁴ However, the book that has come down to us is of rather modest size (169 pages), hence there is a probability that it is only an abridged version of the original work.³⁵ It contains 57 entries, besides Abū Ḥanīfah.

More than half of the book (90 pages) is dedicated to Abū Ḥanīfah, sketches from his life, his characteristics and qualities, his knowledge and so on. The actual information provided is much less if we disregard the chains of transmitters. Al-Ṣaymarī here clearly follows the traditionalists’ line, whereby he provides the complete *isnad* for each of his reports. Here we are not concerned with the quality or reliability or al-Ṣaymarī’s chains, but with the information he gives.³⁶ After giving reports about Abū Ḥanīfah, he proceeds to provide information about the latter’s pupils, proving their closeness to the founder of the *madhhab*. Among these, some are considered to be the real affiliates of the school, while others, like ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Mubārak,³⁷ are believed to have shared the same study circle with Abū Ḥanīfah, but are not among the strict followers of the *madhhab*. The longest treatment among the pupils is understandably dedicated to the two most prominent among them, Abū Yūsuf and al-Shaybānī.³⁸ After the pupils, the smallest part of the book (ca. 15 pages) is dedicated to their pupils, including the author himself. With this, the author tries to acquire for himself a valid place in this legal school. This he indubitably deserves, judging by the attestations of his biographers. For example, al-Tamīmī say there was “an unanimous agreement that

he was the unique figure of his time [within the Ḥanafī *Madhhab*].”³⁹ Al-Ṣaymarī was not very concerned with dates, hence we find him occasionally omitting the dates of birth or death.

Going back to the framework we have adopted for this survey, it is clear that the motives behind al-Ṣaymarī’s collection were to prove the validity of his school of law, extol the virtues of people affiliated with it, and acquire for himself justly, as we have seen, the prestige of being the most acquainted with the *ṭabaqāt* of Ḥanafī scholars at his time. An additional purpose may be that, through the use of the *isnad* method, he wanted to dismiss those who question the use of ḥadīth by *Ḥanafīs*. This he strengthens by reporting the good remarks about Abū Hanīfah and his followers by such strict *muhaddithūn* as Yahyā ibn Maʿīn, Shuʿbah ibn al-Hajjāj, Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah, Sufyān al-Thawrī and ʿAbd Allah ibn al-Mubārak.⁴⁰ As for the method, he was strictly following the biographies of Ḥanafī scholars, assuming that all those who belonged to the school or to his chains of learning are trustworthy enough, and knowledge can be transmitted from them. Al-Ṣaymarī’s selectivity was, of course, restricted only to the *Ḥanafīs*, giving prominence to the immediate pupils of the founder of the school, and to those who were along his immediate line of predecessors. Reading the biographies included in his book, one may see that he was primarily concerned to report the *akhbār* that were related to good behaviour (*ḥusn al-khuluq*), piety and the scholars’ mastery over their disciplines, particularly the law (*fiqh*). The author does not mention any books attributed to the scholars whose biographies he had chosen for his work.

In conclusion, despite its relatively modest size, his work is of tremendous importance, particularly because it is the earliest printed biographical dictionary of Ḥanafīs that came to us and it provides us with a bulk of transmitted materials from the early scholars, their anecdotes, sketches and manners.

2. *Al-Jawāhir al-Muḥṭyyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyyah* by Ibn Abī al-Wafāʾ (d. 775)⁴¹

This book is usually considered as the first book on Ḥanafī *ṭabaqāt* as we have already seen. As the author says himself, “... and I have not seen anyone who is taking notice [who collected]⁴² of *ṭabaqāt* of our colleagues [Ḥanafīs]...”⁴³ It is this sentence that was the cause, I think, of the claims about his work as being the earliest one. However, in the

light of the evidence that he used al-Saymari's work as one of his sources, it becomes clear that he did not mean that categorically.⁴⁴ What he probably had in mind is that he did not see anyone *in his time* writing on the subject of *ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyyah*.

Ibn Abī al-Wafā' has also referred to the influences of his teachers, by citing their names and their encouragement to prepare the book of *ṭabaqāt* in the sermon at the beginning of the book (*khuṭbah al-kitāb*).⁴⁵ Then he proceeds to list six values (*al-fawā'id*) of his work. They are: spiritual serenity, value of emulation of scholars, treatment of 'ulamā' according to their ranks, showing respect to them as our teachers, preference (*tarjīh*) of their legal opinions in the case of disagreement among them by giving primacy to those who are more knowledgeable, and the knowledge of their works and their values.⁴⁶ The total number of biographies, according to the enumeration in the available edition, is 2347, out of which 1158 are in the first volume, and the rest 1189 in the second. After the biographies, Ibn Abī al-Wafā' gives *manāqib* of Abū Ḥanīfah, his immediate pupils and their pupils as well.⁴⁷ In this he is following al-Ṣaymari.

The biographies in *al-Jawāhir* are not very long, usually 1/3 of a page, except in the case of very prominent scholars. Care has been taken of reporting the dates of birth, death, and the place of origin for each entry, if available. The biographies usually contain a brief description of the life of a scholar, his travels, teachers and influences. There are also many anecdotes and stories from the lives of 'ulamā', and the special care is given to the testimonies by others regarding their piety, knowledge, asceticism (*zuhd*) and similar qualities. Occasionally, Ibn Abī al-Wafā' cites the chain of learning of a particular 'ālim if it is available to him. Occasionally, he gives poetry that has been composed in the glory of scholars. For instance, in the biography of Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Shaybānī, the pupil of Abū Ḥanīfah, he reproduces the verses composed by al-Shafi'ī about al-Shaybānī, and the epitaph produced in his memory.⁴⁸

So, having in mind the value or benefits (*fawā'id*) that have been attributed to this work, it is obvious that Ibn Abī al-Wafā' just continued the tradition set up by earlier scholars. His motives were clearly Islamic, the preservation of the memory of the scholars, their knowledge, qualities and attributes so that the later generation might emulate their mode. He had full confidence in the earlier scholars, and

all those that are included in his *ṭabaqāt* may somehow be considered by him as trustworthy, especially those from who he borrowed his information.⁴⁹ The characteristics that are favoured by him in his reports are: knowledge (*‘ilm*), asceticism (*zuhd*) and virtue in general (*faḍl*).

3. *Tāj al-Tarājim fī man Ṣannaḥa min al-Ḥanaḥiyyah* by Ibn Quṭlūbaghā (d. 879)⁵⁰

This is, in fact, the edited work of Ibn Quṭlūbaghā's teacher Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī (d. 845), which the latter called *al-Tadhkirah*.⁵¹ Al-Maqrīzī had in mind to name only those Ḥanaḥī scholars who had some book(s) attributed to their names. Ibn Quṭlūbaghā, on the other hand, took his master's work and found it to be too abridged. Therefore, he tried to put some information where he thought was needed, besides making some editorial corrections and clarifications.⁵² The biographies have been arranged in the alphabetical order, and their number is 348. Other than al-Maqrīzī, he relied heavily on *al-Jawāhir* and less on some other books.⁵³

The main general characteristic of the work is that its biographies are very short, with only the most important data attached. Some of them are made up of one short sentence, usually indicating a book written by the scholar.⁵⁴ Those that are longer would contain only basic data about a scholar, such as his birthplace, teachers, working place, position, and other scholars' opinion about him, books and the dates of birth and death if available. Even the longest biographies are not longer than 10 rather short sentences.

Given its small size, it is very easy to find the biography of scholars that are included in *Tāj al-Tarājim*. However, it has been observed that not all Ḥanaḥī scholars that had a book to their name were recorded in this dictionary. This carries its own advantages and weaknesses. Thus, those who look for some more extensive information about the scholars should look elsewhere and not in this dictionary. In spite of that, it is a useful reference and bears the testimony of its time.

From what we have said above, it is clear that the motive for this work was not different from those offered by other scholars. However, having in mind the conciseness of the work, not many facts can be deduced from it. What is for sure is that the selection criteria was to include only those Ḥanaḥī scholars who left behind some written work. Besides that, Ibn Quṭlūbaghā seemed to emphasize only scholarly

remarks about the *‘ulamā’*. For instance, the authentication (*taḍlīl*) by some trustworthy scholars if available was given a prominent spot. On the other hand, he did not seem interested in the reports about the good behaviour (*ḥusn al-khuluq*), piety or related matters.

4. *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Saniyyah fī Tarājim al-Ḥanafīyyah* by al-Tamīmī al-Dārī (d. 1010/1601)⁵⁵

This is by far the most detailed book among all that are treated in our paper. Ḥājī Khalīfah puts the number of its biographies at 2523.⁵⁶ Al-Tamīmī makes it clear that, in writing this book, he was inspired solely by motives that are related to faith. He states that “whoever wants success in both worlds...he should follow the way of guided Imams that preceded him.”⁵⁷ Therefore, in order to preserve the memory of them, he felt a need to write the book that would contain the available information about the scholars of Ḥanafī legal school.⁵⁸ In his foreword, al-Tamīmī clearly declares sources from where he had gathered the data for *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Saniyyah*, and their number comes to 40.⁵⁹ He also dedicated several chapters to the explanations about indispensable things that are needed by any historian. These are mostly related to methodology of writing a history, and the necessary knowledge of grammar and proper writing of Arabic. In these chapters he also offers his definition of history, and clarifies the proper writing of Arabic names. Beside this, some knowledge about the Ḥanafī School of law which, according to the writer, has to be borne in mind is also provided. At the end of this part, instructions regarding the usage of this dictionary have also been given.⁶⁰

In order to give an additional weight to his work, and to state unequivocally his affiliation, al-Tamīmī begins his biographical works with the biographies of the Prophet (SAS) and Imam Abū Ḥanīfah. The Prophet’s biography is rather short (ca. 30 pages), and in it al-Tamīmī emphasizes his good morals (*akhlāq*) and miracles (*mu‘jizāt*) as a proof of the veracity of his message. Abū Ḥanīfah’s biography, on the other hand, is three times longer (96 pages), and it covers practically every aspect of his life, accentuating especially two things: the attestations of his knowledge by other scholars and the refutations of those who had made disparaging remarks about him. The biographies are arranged in alphabetical order, and the author is very particular in giving the full names of the scholars. However, if the full name of the scholar is not known, or he is famous by his nickname or

any other name, then that particular scholar is mentioned in the special sections at the end of the book.⁶¹

The entries of *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Saniyyah* vary greatly in length and, subsequently, in the amount of information given for the scholars. The shortest contain only one or two short sentences,⁶² while some others are more than 10 pages long.⁶³ Al-Tamīmī, like Ibn Qutlūbaghā, relied heavily on *al-Jawāhir*. Very often one can find sentences like; “he [Ibn Abī al-Wafāʾ] said in *al-Jawāhir* (*qāla fī al-Jawāhir*)”,⁶⁴ “like this [has been mentioned] in *al-Jawāhir* (*kadhā fī al-Jawāhir*),”⁶⁵ “he [Ibn Abī al-Wafāʾ] mentioned it in *al-Jawāhir* (*dhakarahu fī al-Jawāhir*)”⁶⁶ and many more similar examples. He also readily acknowledges the data that he transmitted from other sources, and this is a distinctive characteristic of al-Tamīmī as compared to other *ṭabaqāt* in this paper.

As for the biographies, their content depends on the length of the biography. However, some common characteristics can be extracted. The birthplace of scholars is very often given, together with the short note on the cities that were visited by them, or where they worked. The travels in search for knowledge, and the professions and positions taken by scholars were given due concern. In addition, the contacts that they established with other ‘*ulamāʾ*’, or with their teachers and students were mentioned, by giving the name and (usually) the place of the scholar in question. Al-Tamīmī does not omit to mention the sciences in which a particular scholar has achieved excellence, be it *fiqh*, ḥadīth, Arabic language, *tafsīr*, *kalām* or some other sciences. It seems very important for him to quote the masters of science of *jarḥ* and *taʿdīl* if they have something to say regarding the scholars in al-Tamīmī’s dictionary. This shows that he had a great respect for those scholars and accepted their judgment as valid. Among them are al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Ḥibbān, Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn, Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and others. It appears that al-Tamīmī was much more concerned with this than with the moral characteristics of scholars, since these are mentioned only occasionally. Or perhaps, he feels that there is no need to write further about moral excellence of someone who was already declared as trustworthy by the masters of this science.

Besides these features, some short anecdotes are also to be found in this work, the remnant of the *manāqib* works that probably served as a source for al-Tamīmī’s biographical entries. Al-Tamīmī is also fond of quoting poetry (*shīʿr*), sometimes at great length, irrespective of

whether it is composed by the scholar in question or in his glory.⁶⁷ The names of books authored by the scholars whose biographies this book contains are also recorded, depending on the availability of that information to al-Tamīmī.

These are the main characteristics of *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Saniyyah*. The book is a rich source of knowledge not only on *Ḥanafīs*, but other scholars as well. It is a compulsory reference for anyone dealing seriously with the scholars of Islamic law in general, and with the *Ḥanafī madhhab* in particular.

5. *Al-Fawā'id al-Bahiyyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyyah* by al-Lakhnawī (d.1304/1887)⁶⁸

This book is an abridgement of al-Kafawī's (d. 990) book *Katā'ib A'lām al-Akhyār min Fuqahā' Madhhab al-Nu'mān al-Mukhtār*.⁶⁹ The latter work contained many useful lessons in *fiqh* besides the biographies of scholars. Al-Lakhnawī has omitted these lessons (*fawā'id*) but had kept the biographies as they are. Moreover, he has put additional information based on other biographical dictionaries and separated the two by saying "the compiler says (*qāla al-Jāmi*)."⁷⁰ Therefore, what is before these words is taken verbatim from al-Kafawī, while the rest is in al-Lakhnawī's own words. We can also find the footnotes giving the biographies of some scholars mentioned in the main text, or providing the additional explanations (*ta'liqāt*) about them. This is also written by al-Lakhnawī and he entitled this text as *al-Ta'liqāt al-Saniyyah 'alā al-Fawā'id al-Bahiyyah*. The biographies are arranged alphabetically.

The author seems to follow closely Ibn Abī al-Wafā' in so far as the motivation for writing the biographical dictionaries is concerned. In fact, I think that he just restated in his own words what the latter has said about this matter.⁷¹ He also added that he had noticed that many young scholars do not seem to pay any attention to these matters. They were quite ignorant about them, and this had provided him with additional motivation for this compilation.⁷²

As for the biographies themselves, al-Lakhnawī follows the usual pattern of including respective dates of birth and death, origin, place of living and working, rank among the scholars, and the books they wrote. The utmost attention is given towards the issues of *jarḥ* and *ta'dīl*, wherein the author refers to the books of transmitters (*ruwāṭ*) by the prominent masters of this discipline. This has been referred to by

al-Lakhnawī himself.⁷³ The fact itself is not surprising since he belonged to a family of prominent traditionalists in the Indian sub-continent. However, what is amazing is that al-Lakhnawī neither mentions *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Saniyyah*, which is the biggest of all Ḥanafī biographical dictionaries, nor does he give the biography of al-Tamīmī.⁷⁴ I could not find or even speculate on the reason for this omission. Another rather unusual thing I have noticed is that, for instance, he gives the biography of al-Shaybānī in only half a page, while the biographies of other Abū Ḥanīfah's students, such as 'Abd Allah ibn al-Mubārak, Zufar ibn al-Hudhayl and Amīr Kātib al-Amīd, are 3-4 times longer.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, his work is quite useful, with moderate length of biographies, strict emphasis on the *jarḥ* and *ta'dīl*, and occasional remarks about the personal qualities of the scholars.⁷⁶

EVALUATION OF BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARIES

After this survey, we can derive several important points regarding the Ḥanafī biographical dictionaries. In the first place, our research has shown that the first known book of Ḥanafī *ṭabaqāt* was written at the end of the 3rd century AH. That, as far as we can say, has been followed at the beginning of the 5th century by al-Ṣaymarī. We have included his book into the *ṭabaqāt* literature because it shares many common features with the latter, and it clearly follows the division on generations. This is contrary to Makdisi's thesis that the traditionalists started compiling these dictionaries in order to empower themselves. As a matter of fact, by surveying Ḥanafī biographical dictionaries we have seen that all the scholars unequivocally stated that their motives were genuinely inspired by religious considerations, i.e., the preservation of the memory of past scholars in order to portray models to be emulated, and to preserve their heritage.

Furthermore, it was established that the scholars whose books have been included in this survey benefited tremendously from the knowledge of those who came before them, the only exception is al-Laknawī in regards to al-Tamīmī since it appears as if he did not know of the latter's work. However, he used to a large extent the works of other predecessors, even of those whose works were unavailable to us, such as al-Kafāwī. *Al-Jawāhir* has proven to be extremely important, inasmuch as all of the subsequent scholars relied heavily on the knowledge transmitted by Ibn Abī al-Wafā'. Hence, we can call him as the most important link in the transmission of biographies of Ḥanafī scholars.

Besides, the scholars have given attention to the issues of *jarḥ* and *ta'dīl*, but the proportion in which they have done so varies. It probably reveals the degree of their expertise in the field of ḥadīth. Al-Lakḥnawī and al-Tamīmī were the most particular about this point, while Ibn Quṭlūbaghā was on the other side of the spectrum, probably due to the conciseness of his works. Al-Ṣaymarī and Ibn Abī al-Wafā' were moderate in their emphasis on this issue. In accepting the remarks about scholars, they did not shy away from the judgments of the scholars from other schools of law. In fact, the attestation of scholars from different schools about the trustworthiness of Ḥanafī scholars in question gave an additional weight to the argument. The moral qualities of scholars, their good behaviour and their knowledge formed the core of the biography. The sketches from their lives were invoked in order to substantiate these claims. The usage of poetry in biographical entries was limited, except for al-Tamīmī who sometimes even overemphasized the poetry written in honour of certain scholars.

In conclusion, I can say that the paper confirmed the genuineness of biographical dictionaries as purely Islamic. Ḥanafī dictionaries are just a case in point. They have served the affiliates of this legal school by providing them with necessary information about the scholars of the guild, giving them thus a legitimate link among the schools of Islamic law. In addition, they have provided an inspiration for pious Muslims to emulate the works of the past scholars and learn from them.

Notes

1. This paper won ISTAC's Best Paper Award 1999. The author would like to thank the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Kuala Lumpur, Fikret Karcic, and Abdul Rashid Moten for their help and support. As usual, all mistakes are mine.
2. Abū al-Faḍl Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1410/1990), 10: 209.
3. *Ibid.*, 10: 211.
4. For further information see *E.J. Brill's First Encyclopedia of Islam*, 9 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 9: 214-215, s.v "Ṭabaqāt".
5. See George Madkisi, "Ṭabaqāt - Biography: Law and Orthodoxy in Classical Islam," *Islamic Studies* 32 (1993) 4: 371-396; also refer to I.H.

Qureshi, "Historiography," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M.M. Sharif, 2 vols. (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1995), 2:1212-13.

6. Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 93.

7. H.A.R. Gibb, "Islamic Biographical Literature," in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. B. Lewis and P.M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 54.

8. For genealogy as a source of Arab Historiography and its importance see Nisar Ahmed Faruq, *Early Muslims Historiography* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i-Delli, 1979), 49-57; also Qureshi, "Historiography," 2:1207-08.

9. *Sunan Abū Dawūd*, trans. Ahmed Ḥaṣan, 3 vols. (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1984), 3:1352, *Kitāb al-Adab*, Chapter 1731, ḥadīth no. 4824. Al-Albānī did not include it in his *Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Abī Dawūd*, which means that, according to him, it is a weak (*ḍaʿīf*) tradition. However, it has also been reported in other compilations. See, for example, 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī al-Muttaqī ibn Husām al-Dīn al-Sindī al-Burhānfūrī, *Kanz al-Ummāl fī Sunan al-Aqwāl wa al-Af'āl*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1399/1979), 3:109, ḥadīth no. 5717 and 5718; 6:630-631, ḥadīth no. 1746. Anyhow, it has served as a positive inspiration for Muslim historians.

10. For motives that guided scholars in compiling the dictionaries see Tarīf Khalīdī, "Islamic Biographical Dictionaries: A Preliminary Statement," *The Muslim World* 57 (1973) 1:53-65, especially 54-58. This article was somewhat abridged and incorporated into his book *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 204-210. For the review of the book, as well as the interesting notes on the present state of Muslim historiography, see Chase F. Robinson, "The Study of Islamic Historiography: A Progress Report," *Journal of The Royal Asiatic Society* (1997) 2: 199-227.

11. Makḍīsī uses this designation for those scholars who relied primarily on the ḥadīth. The Ḥanafī school, with its extensive reliance on analogical reasoning (*qiyās*)—in addition to the Prophetic traditions—was seen as being more "rationalist" in that sense.

12. Makḍīsī, *Ṭabaqāt*- Biography.

13. His work is *Ṭabaqāt Ahl al-ʿIlm wa al-Jahl*. See Makḍīsī, *Ṭabaqāt* - Biography, 373 and 393, n.9

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 371

16. See Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *al-Manār al-Munīf fī al-Ṣaḥīḥ wa al-Ḍaʿīf*, ed. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah (Aleppo: Maktab al-Maṭbū'āt al-Islāmiyyah, 1390/1970); Nūr al-Dīn 'Aṭr, *Manhaj al-Naqd fī 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, 3rd ed. (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1997); Muḥammad Abū al-Layth al-Khayrabādī, "al-Manhaj al-ʿIlmī 'ind al-Muḥaddithīn fī al-Ta'āmūl ma' Mutūn al-Ḥadīth," *Islamiyyah al-Ma'rifah* (1998) 4: 13-46.

17. Paul Auchterlonie, *Arabic Biographical Dictionaries: A Summary Guide and Bibliography* (Durham: Center for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1987); Ibrahim Hafsi, "Recherches sur le genre 'Ṭabaqāt' dans la littérature arabe," *Arabica* XXIII (1976), 227-265, XXIV (1977), 1-14, 150-186, as quoted in Makdisi, *Ṭabaqāt*-Biography, 392, n.1. Refer also to the endnotes of Makdisi's article. Perhaps the most detailed study on the different classifications of biographical dictionaries is to be found in Wadād al-Qādī, "Biographical Dictionaries: Inner Structure and Cultural Significance," in *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, ed. George N. Atiyeh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 93-122.
18. More on the classification of biographical dictionaries, alongside a discussion on some of the more important works in this genre can be found in Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi, *Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, ed. and revised Abdal Hakim Murad (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 91-106.
19. Mustafā ibn 'Abd Allāh Ḥāji Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Zunūn 'an Asmā' al-Kutub wa al-Funūn*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1941), 2:1097-1099.
20. *Ibid.*, 2:1098, 2019.
21. *Ibid.*, 2: 1099.
22. Makdisi, *Ṭabaqāt* -Biography, 382.
23. Based on *Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Library of Calcutta Madrasah*, by Kamaluddīn Ahmad. See Makdisi, *Ṭabaqāt*-Biography, 395, n.45. He claims that he had not seen the catalogue and asks whether the title is authentic or given by the cataloguer.
24. Abū 'Abd Allāh Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī al-Ṣaymarī (d. 436), *Akhbar Abī Ḥanīfah wa Ashābih*, ed. Abū al-Wafā' al-Afghānī (Haydarabad: Lajnah Ihyā' al-Ma'ārif al-Nu'maniyyah, 1394/1974). For more information about the work see Nurit Tsafir, "Semi-Ḥanafis and Hanafi Biographical Sources," *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996) 2:67-85, especially 74-81.
25. al-Qādī considers "akhbār" works as one of the basic sources for the early biographical dictionaries. al-Qādī, "Biographical Dictionaries," 97.
26. See Ḥāji Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, 2:1097-1099; also 1:269, 616-617; 2:1202, 1657, 1961, 2019.
27. See Auchterlonie, *Arabic Biographical Dictionaries*.
28. *Ibid.*, 8-10.
29. *Ibid.*, 26-37, 43-48.
30. For biographical dictionaries of the Osmanli Devlet see Mehmet Ipsirli, "Ottoman Historiography" [unpublished] (Kuala Lumpur, 1998), especially 7-10. The usage of the term Osmanli Devlet rather than the Ottoman Empire is deliberate. For further reference see Mehmet Maksudoglu, *Osmanli History 1289-1922: Based on Osmanli Sources* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 1999), especially 255-268.

31. Khalidi, "Islamic Biographical Dictionaries," 53-54.
32. See al-Şaymarī, *Akhbār*.
33. This work may also be considered under the *manāqib* literature. However, Ḥājī Khalīfah does not mention it under that entry in his work. See *Kashf al-Zunūn*, 2:1836-1839. And for the reasons already suggested, we have decided to include it in our paper.
34. See al-Şaymarī's biography in Zayn al-Dīn Abū al-ʿAdl Qāsim ibn Quṭlūbaghā, *Tāj al-Tarājīm fī man Sannaḥa min al-Ḥanaḥīyyah*, ed. Ibrāhīm Sāliḥ (Damascus: Dār al-Maʿmūn li al-Turāth, 1992), 93-94. Also Taqīyy al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Tamīmī al-Dārī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Saniyyah fī Tarājīm al-Ḥanaḥīyyah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw, 4 vols. (Riyadh: Dār al-Rifāʿī, 1403/1983), 3:153-154. I have seen only first four volumes of the last work, until biography no.1388. I did not see the rest of it, and do not have any information about the actual number of volumes, but judging by the total number of biographies as given by Ḥājī Khalīfah, there should be eight volumes altogether. The library of the Islamic University of Malaysia, where I consulted this work, lists only four volumes. Catalog of the Library of Congress (URL: <http://catalog.loc.gov/>) gives information on four volumes as well. Could it be that the editor finished only four volumes and did not continue with his work?
35. The same conclusion has been drawn by Tsafirir. See his "Semi-Ḥanafis," 75.
36. An interesting study of these *asānīd* can be found in *Ibid.*, 75-81.
37. al-Şaymarī, *Akhbār*, 134-137.
38. *Ibid.*, 90-102, 120-130.
39. al-Tamīmī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Saniyyah*, 3:153.
40. See al-Şaymarī, *Akhbār*, 29, 31- 35, 46-68, 72-83.
41. ʿAbd al-Qādir ibn Abī Wafāʾ al Qurashī, *al-Jawāhir al-Muḥīyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanaḥīyyah*, 2 vols. (Karachi: Mīr Muḥammad Kutubkhānah, n.d.). Also see Ismāʿīl Bāshā al-Baghdādī, *Hadiyyah al-ʿĀrifīn: Asmāʾ al-Muʾallifīn wa Āthār al-Muḥannifīn min Kashf al-Zunūn*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1402/1982) 3:596-597.
42. Ḥājī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, 2:1097.
43. *al-Jawāhir*, 1:3.
44. Tsafirir, "Semi-Ḥanafis," 74.
45. *al-Jawāhir*, 1:5.
46. *Ibid.*, 1:6
47. See *al-Jawāhir*, 2:450 and after.
48. *Ibid.*, 2:43-44.
49. For Ibn Abī al-Wafāʾ' s sources see Tsafirir, "Semi-Ḥanafis," 74.
50. For Ibn Quṭlūbaghā's biography see *Hadiyyah al-ʿĀrifīn*, 3:830-831; Khayr al-Dīn al-Zaraklī, *al-ʿĀlām*, 7th ed., 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li al-ʿĀlamīn, 1986), 5:180; Abū al-Ḥasanāt Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-

Lakhnawī, *Al-Fawā'id al-Bahiyyah fī Tarājim al-Ḥanafīyyah* (Karachi: Maktabah Khayr Kathīr, n.d.), 99; see also his biography by the editor of the book, 3-26 of the editorial comments.

51. See Ḥājī Khalīfah, *Kash al-Zunūn*, 1: 269.

52. Ibn Quṭlūbaghā, *Tāj al-Tarājim*, 27 (editorial notes).

53. *Ibid.*, 28.

54. See, for instance, biographies no. 40, 45, 52, 56, 57, 58, 105, 298.

55. See n. 34; for al-Tamīmī's biography and additional information about the book refer to al-Baghdādī, *Hadiyyah al-ʿArifīn*, 5:245; al-Zaraklī, *al-ʿAlām*, 2: 85-86; Ḥājī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, 2:1098-1099.

56. Ḥājī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, 1:1098.

57. Al-Tamīmī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Saniyyah*, 1:3.

58. *Ibid.*, 1:4.

59. *Ibid.*, 1:5-7. Among his sources is Ṭashkūprīzādeh's *al-Shaqāʾiq al-Nu'māniyyah fī ʿUlamāʾ al-Dawlah al-ʿUthmāniyyah*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣubḥī Furat (Istanbul: Jāmi'ah İstānbūl, 1405/1985). Even though the official *madhhab* in the Osmanli Devlet was Ḥanafī, and we can assume that all the scholars in this book are Ḥanafis, I have not considered it for this paper because it does not aim to be the dictionary of Ḥanafī scholars. Rather, its primary goal is to record the names of *ʿulamāʾ* in the Devlet. Their qualification as Ḥanafis, therefore, takes the second place. Also, I could not positively identify that the author explicitly states that his aim was to record the biographies of this legal school.

60. See al-Tamīmī, 1:8-39.

61. *Ibid.*, 1:37.

62. See, for instance, biographies no. 34, 60, 128, 129, 327, 439, 440, 698, 786, 1062, 1136 and many others.

63. See the biography of Abbasid Caliph, al-Maʿmūn ibn Hārūn al-Rashīd, 4:241-252, biography no. 1109.

64. *Ibid.*, 1:268, biographies no. 128 and 129.

65. *Ibid.*, 2:140, biography no. 439.

66. *Ibid.*, 2:212, biography no. 536.

67. For instance, see *Ibid.*, 4:241-251, biography no. 1109. One of the biographies with the lengthiest poetical entry is in 3:79-94, biography no. 695, whereby almost all the biography is filled with the verses of poetry.

68. See n. 50; for al-Lakhnawī's biography see al-Zaraklī, *al-ʿAlām*, 6:187. Refer also to the edition of *Al-Fawā'id* that we have used since it comprises his biography in rather detailed fashion, and it is interpolated after the contents of the book. At the end of the biography there is a note about the separate book in Urdu on the lives of al-Lakhnawī and his father, entitled *Rawḍah al-Naʿīm fī Khawāriq Mawlānā ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm*. However, I have not come across it.

69. al-Lakhnawī, *al-Fawā'id*, 3-4; al-Zaraklī, *al-A'lam*, 8:49; al-Tamīmī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Saniyyah*, editor's introduction, "h".
70. al-Lakhnawī, *al-Fawā'id*, 4.
71. *Ibid.*, 2.
72. *Ibid.*, 2-3.
73. *Ibid.*, 5.
74. al-Tamīmī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Saniyyah*, editor's introduction, "w".
75. See al-Lakhnawī, *al-Fawā'id*, 50-52, 75-77, 103-104, 163.
76. There is another, quite recent book containing the biographies of *Hanafī* scholars by Walid al-A'zamī, entitled *Madrasah al-Imām Abī Ḥanīfah: Tārīkhuhā wa Tarājim Shuyūkhīhā wa Mudarrisīhā* (Baghdad: Wizārah al-Awqāf wa al-Shu'ūn al-Dīniyyah, 1404/1983). It contains 128 biographies, starting from the time of establishment of the Abū Ḥanīfah's school in the 5th century AH/11th century CE until the present. However, I have omitted it for the same reason as Ṭashkūprīzādeh's book. It deals with the history of Abū Ḥanīfah's school in Baghdad and its lecturers. For history of that school in English see George Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions of Learning in Eleventh-Century Baghdad," *Bulletin of School of the Oriental and African Studies* 24 (1961) 1:1-56, especially 17-23.