A QUANTITATIVE APPROACH TO MEDIEVAL MUSLIM BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARIES

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to explore a method of working with medieval Islamic biographical dictionaries which I believe holds great promise for the social and economic historian. The basis of this method is the structure and manner of composition of the dictionaries. Of course, these works differ tremendously one from the other. They differ in their basic subjects. Some list companions of the Prophet; some list scholars resident in a given city or belonging to a particular religious group; some list all important people who die in a given century, and so forth. They differ in organization. Some are strictly alphabetical; some are divided into chronological periods; some are divided into chronologically based but essentially subjective classes called tabaga (pl. tabaqāt). And they differ still more in the standard contents of individual biographies. The only quality that almost all of them share in this last respect is that they very rarely include biographical information of what is generally considered to be "historical" interest.

Nevertheless, there are certain qualities common to the genre as a whole that make it potentially of great value to the historian. The two important qualities of this sort are sheer volume of relatively standardized biographical information and a degree of randomness in the selection of individuals included. No effort is required to substantiate the former point. A brief look at Brockelmann's Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur is sufficient to convince anyone that the number of individual biographies extant must run into the hundreds of thousands and most likely into the millions. The latter point is less obvious, however. For the time being, it need only be said that whereas in many respects the selection of biographies is by no means random, such as in social stratum, in others it is almost certainly random, such as in the incidence of first names. Various dictionaries, naturally, would differ a great deal in the ways in which they exhibit random selection. What all of these qualities point to, of course, is some kind of quantitative or statistical handling; and it is to the exploration of this line of approach that this article is directed.

Hitherto, relatively little has been published along these lines. Scholars have customarily used biographical dictionaries as they were intended to be used by the author, as reference books. And the reason for this is not far to seek. If it appears that only the exceptional and rare biography contains information of historical interest, then it is equally apparent that there is little to be learned from a quantitative treatment of the whole mass of unexceptional biographies. Thus, the problem is posed of how to make meaningful use of this genre of literature which is potentially so useful. At the present stage of exploration of this quantitative approach, any efforts are liable to be heavily laden with assumptions and therefore somewhat speculative. In the realms of social and economic history corroborative information appears so rarely in medieval Islamic sources that it is very difficult to verify independently the results arrived at by quantitative means, hence these results must remain tentative until techniques have been more fully developed. Still, a start must be made in the utilization of what is, to my mind, the greatest untapped source of information on the medieval Middle East.
Two biographical dictionaries have been used in preparing this article. They are the Ta‘rikh Naisābūr by Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Bayyi‘ an-Naisābūrī (d. 405), known as al-Ḥākim an-Naisābūrī, and the as-Siyāq li Ta‘rikh Naisābūr by ‘Abd al-Ghāfīr b. Ismā‘īl al-Fārisī (d. 529). The manuscripts of the extant versions of these two works have been published in facsimile in the volume The Histories of Nishapur edited by R. N. Frye. There is one manuscript of the former work which amounts to little more than an index to the original multi-volume dictionary. In the overwhelming majority of biographies no information is included except the name. The latter work exists in two manuscripts each of which includes biographies not included in the other. It appears, however, that these two manuscripts contain between them all but a few of the biographies contained in the original. The latter work was written as a continuation of the former. Thus, two principles essential to the quantitative method are directly involved in any examination of these two works. First, the skeletal format of the manuscript of al-Ḥākim an-Naisābūrī provides an acid test for the notion that there is useful information to be derived from mere lists of names. And second, the use of two works on the same subject but covering different time periods tests the degree of comparability between different dictionaries. This is not to say that there is any reason to believe that in any general sense medieval biographical dictionaries may be considered comparable for quantitative treatment; the implication is simply that selected dictionaries may well be usefully compared in limited ways.

Before moving on to the exploration of quantitative method which constitutes the core of this article, the underlying basis of comparability within and between these two dictionaries must be established. The overriding criteria for inclusion in these works are that the individual must have lived in or visited the city of Nishapur in the north-eastern Iranian province of Khurasan and that he must have enjoyed some prominence within the “religious class”, that is, that segment of the population primarily concerned with administering, preserving, expanding, and elucidating the Islamic religion. It is obvious that these criteria imply a great deal about the general social and economic status of the individual, and much can be done quantitatively to make a more precise delineation of this status or range of stati. Here, however, the presumption that these people, generally speaking, belong to a relatively wealthy and prestigious class is all that need be made.

Having roughed in the geographical and social limits of the dictionaries, the most important remaining task is to determine the chronological scheme. Both works are arranged alphabetically by first names (ism), but they are also arranged by chronological classes or tabaqāt. In the manuscript of al-Ḥākim an-Naisābūrī, each class appears as a unit and is alphabetized internally. In that of ‘Abd al-Ghāfīr al-Fārisī, on the other hand, each group of like names is divided internally into classes; and it is occasionally ambiguous which class an individual belongs in. Altogether there are eleven classes, eight in al-Ḥākim an-Naisābūrī and three in ‘Abd al-Ghāfīr al-Fārisī. Unfortunately, the principle at work in determining the terminal dates of each class remains a mystery. The theoretical principle of generations after the Prophet Muḥammad can be applied only to the first two classes of al-Ḥākim an-Naisābūrī. After that the classes vary widely in duration and seem to bear no relation to generations. The only class that seems to be related to something specific is the
shortest one, class eight of al-Ḥākim an-Naisābūrī. This class seems to be composed of the contemporaries and personal friends of the author; and it displays so many idiosyncrasies because of the very subjective way in which it was compiled, which differed markedly from the manner of compilation of the other classes, that it must be excluded from most quantitative work.

Even though the principle governing the chronological division into classes is obscure, however, there can be no doubt that the divisions are in fact chronological. By accumulating all of the death dates provided in the individual biographies, it can easily be determined that the earliest death date of each class is the same as or subsequent to the latest death date of the previous class. This confirms that the classes are chronological by death date, and it also establishes at least the approximate terminal dates for each class. The following table gives the results of this determination for the eleven classes contained in the two dictionaries. It also shows the number of biographies in each class (approximately for the classes of ʿAbd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisi because of the occasional ambiguity as to the class of individual biographies) and, dividing the time span of the class into the number of biographies, the average number of biographies per year.

Table I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Terminal Dates</th>
<th>Period of Class</th>
<th>Number in Class</th>
<th>Average per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Taʾrikh Naisābūr of al-Ḥākim an-Naisābūrī)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>?-ca. 75 A.H.</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>ca. 75-ca. 110</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>ca. 110-ca. 200</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>ca. 200-ca. 270</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>ca. 270-ca. 314</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>ca. 314-335</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>335-388</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>388-405</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(as-Siyāq li Taʾrikh Naisābūr of ʿAbd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisi)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>405-425</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>213 approx.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>425-ca. 460</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>533 approx.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>ca. 460-525</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>953 approx.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Certainly the most striking feature of this table is the column of average number of biographies per year. Disregarding the first three classes, lost in the dim reaches of Nishapur's early history and prior to the full elaboration of Muslim scholarly technique and educational apparatus, and the eighth class discussed above, there is a period of some three centuries during which the average number of biographies per year remains of the same order of magnitude. Over this entire period the average number of biographies per year is thirteen. Surely, what this testifies to is a tremendous regularity in the accumulation of individual biographies. And there is a strong argument to be made that this regularity is even greater than is immediately apparent, for the fluctuations in the averages follow the hypothetical curve of the growth and
decline of Nishapur's population which can be deduced from independent sources, such as geographers. That is to say, the population of the city, and therefore the size of the religious class, was greater during the Sāmānid period of class seven when the average number of biographies per year was eighteen than it was either before, when Nishapur was first rising as a great city under Tāhirid aegis, or after, when Khurasan was unsettled by the influx of the Turks and the establishment of the Saljūq empire. Hence, the number of biographies per year per equivalent religious class may well be even steadier than the table indicates.

Thus, over a period much longer than the lifetimes of the two authors and over two separate biographical dictionaries there is evidence of surprising regularity. The reason for this certainly lies in the nature of the Muslim scholarly and educational establishment. Briefly, a scholar would compile a book containing biographical notices of everyone under whom he had studied or from whom he had heard something of religious import. These compilations, called mashāyikb (sing. mashyakba), eventually found their way into the libraries commonly associated with religious and educational establishments in medieval Muslim cities. Then, someday, a man like al-Ḥakīm an-Nāṣībī or Ābd al-Ǧāfīr al-Fārisī would read through these mashyikb and other earlier biographical dictionaries, select the biographies he wished to retain according to the criteria of the work he was writing, collate the resulting mass of notices to remove duplicates, and compile a biographical dictionary. As a result, the work of initial selection was only rarely done by the author of the final dictionary. Each dictionary is actually the product of a very large number of individual efforts; and it is this that accounts for the regularity noted above and that guarantees that the subjectivity of the final compiler does not determine to any great extent the contents of his work. It is this that reinforces the notion that in many ways what is being dealt with is a genuinely random sample of the religious class reliable over a long period of time.

With the nature and structure of the biographical dictionaries in question thus somewhat clarified, it is now possible to go on with a demonstration of the quantitative approach.

II

Most names in the medieval Middle East consisted of several parts. Any individual might be generally known by only one part of his name; but on the whole, the biographical dictionaries include as much of the man's name as was known. Aside from those kinds of name that virtually everyone had, the ism and the kunya, the most universal type of name is the nisba. A nisba is basically a noun with the suffix /i/ which transforms it into an adjective of relationship. The noun can designate almost anything. It can be the name of a tribe, such as Kalb; a person with the name Kalbi would be a member of, descendant of, client of, or in some other way related to that tribe. Likewise, it can be a placename. A Baghdādi is a man in some way connected with Baghdad, a Nāṣībūrī a man in some way connected with Nishapur, and so forth. Similarly, a nisba can refer to occupation, physical defect, religious affiliation, a famous ancestor, a particular virtue, etc.

The particular type of nisba concerned here is the nisba related to a specific city. The argument to be made is that the relative frequency of geographical nisbas in different chronological periods directly reflects road traffic during those periods and indirectly reflects the relative level of trade and prosperity. Numberous objections
to this argument come to mind at once and can be divided into two categories: objections to the implication that a nisba signifies that a person moved from the place referred to by the nisba to Nishapur, and objections to the inference that volume of nisbas is in any way related to volume of traffic, not to mention trade.

The primary objection in the first category is that a nisba might well be a family name reflecting a physical connection with the city referred to by the nisba which occurred long before when some ancestor migrated from one place to another. Undoubtedly, this is a possibility; but judging from some two hundred genealogical charts reconstructed from the biographies given by ‘Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisi, such nisbas were used only rarely as family names in Nishapur. Many nisbas do appear as family names, being borne by every member of a family over several generations. Most nisbas of this sort, however, refer to Arab tribes, occupations, or prominent ancestors. Geographical nisbas, except for those relating to local villages or quarters where the family continues to reside, tend to drop after a couple of generations. Even in cases where both a father and a son bear the same nisba, it is quite probable that both men originated in the city of the nisba and migrated or travelled to Nishapur together.

The other objection of this type arises in the infrequent case where a single individual bears two or even three nisbas, thus making his place of origin ambiguous. Cases of multiple geographical nisbas are usually easy to unravel, however. Most often one nisba refers to a city and the other one refers to a village near the city or to a quarter in the city. But in other cases it is clear that the individual actually resided in the several places referred to in his nisbas and adopted a new nisba whenever he changed his place of residence. Thus, in general, speaking of the entire body of geographical nisbas, the evidence strongly suggests that if a man bears a name referring to a particular place, the probability is very great that at some time in his life he was in that place.

There are two major objections in the second category. The first is that what is represented by the number of geographical nisbas in Nishapur at a given time is nothing more than the relative number of scholars travelling in search of learning; it bears no relation to other forms of road traffic. There are numerous indications, however, that this is not the case. In the first place, as S. D. Goitein has pointed out 1) and as is corroborated in a large number of biographies contained in the dictionaries in question, men rarely travelled alone. The highways were too insecure. The normal procedure would be for an individual to join some sort of caravan in going from place to place. The likelihood of his doing this is further enhanced by the fact that many if not most scholars mixed study with business. As merchants they would travel about on business and occupy themselves with scholarly pursuits during their more or less protracted stays in various towns. Finally, it is obvious that a city of the size and importance of Nishapur was a magnet for both scholar and merchant; and the factors affecting the travel of one type of person, such as road insecurity or political friction, would affect other types of travellers in the same fashion. These generalizations of course cannot be applied to all cities since some cities, such as pilgrimage centers, would not necessarily attract trade as would a metropolis like Nishapur.

This still leaves the question, however, of whether a man’s name, even if it does

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in the majority of cases indicate where he actually came from, can be considered as indicating the route by which he travelled, which is essential to the argument that follows. A man named Baghdādī, for example, could travel from Baghdad to Basra, sail from Basra to India, and then arrive in Nishapur from the east on his way back to Baghdad. The method which has been adopted here, however, of grouping together geographical nīsbas lying along the various highways leading to Nishapur does much to alleviate this problem. While a man from Isfahan might come to Nishapur via Baghdad and vice versa, only in very rare instances, such as the one mentioned above of a man sailing to India, would a man from either city, or from any other city situated along the famous Khurasan highway or its feeder routes, reach Nishapur from the east. And the other routes, as well, have been selected according to the obviousness of the highway by which one would reach Nishapur. Thus, the intent in the selection of which nīsbas to use and in the determination of how to group them together has always been to maximize the likelihood that the individuals involved did actually move at some point in their lives by a specific route from the city referred to in their names to Nishapur.

Finally, there is one more point that must be made before entering into a discussion of the results of this approach. As mentioned earlier, the chronological limits of the classes are determined by death dates. Since what is being examined here is the migration of individuals, however, the chronological periods that should be used are those determined by the average age at the time of migration. Unfortunately, this age is exceedingly difficult to determine with any precision. Some men migrated as little children with their fathers while others never left home until middle age. At best an educated guess can be made, and that guess is that the average age of migration is 30. The question now is what number of years must be deducted from the chronological class limits set by death dates in order to approximate the chronological class limits set by average age of migration. The answer to this question depends on the average lifespan of the medieval scholar, and there is sufficient information in ʿAbd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī to determine that figure. On the basis of one hundred and fifty biographies in which both birth and death dates are supplied, it can be affirmed that the average lifespan of the individuals in these two works was 78 years. As these are lunar years, however, a correction must be made for solar reckoning; and this correction yields an average lifespan of 75 solar years. And this, in fact, is what would be expected of a group of men all of whom survived infancy and childhood and who did not have to cope with cigarette smoking, air pollution, military service, and nervous tension born of modern life. Thus, to delimit the classes by average age of migration it is necessary to deduct 45 years from all of the dates given in Table I, and to delimit the classes by date of birth, it is necessary to deduct 75 years. This produces the following figures in Table II.

This rather longwinded discussion fills in enough underlying assumptions and comes to grips with enough a priori objections to make possible a relatively straightforward presentation and interpretation of the results obtained. The procedure followed was this: All of the nīsbas contained in the biographies were extracted and ranged by class (excluding classes I, II, III, VIII). Then, insofar as was possible, the meaning of every nīsba was ascertained and the geographical nīsbas separated from the rest. Next, all of the nīsbas referring to Nishapur itself or to quarters within the city were deleted. The remaining body of nīsbas was divided into those referring to places within an arbitrarily chosen 100 mile radius of Nishapur and those referring
to places further away. The first group was labelled “local traffic” and the latter group “long distance traffic”. Then the long distance *nisbas* were grouped according to four highways leading to Nishapur: 1) a northeastern route leading to Nishapur from China by way of Samarqand, Bukhara, Marv, and Sarakhs; 2) a southeastern route leading from the lowlands north and south of the Hindu Kush mountains and covering such cities as Herat, Marv ar-Rud and Balkh; 3) the Khurasan highway leading from Baghdad through Hamadan, Rayy, and Damghan to Nishapur and its western feeder routes leading to Qazvin, Isfahan, and Basra; 4) a route lying along the Caspian lowlands and coming to Nishapur through the Jurjan plain. It should be noted that even though routes 1 and 4 and also 2 and 3 parallel each other in a general way, they are separated from each other by significant mountain ranges and are, in fact, quite discrete routes.

In order to show the relative share of traffic entering Nishapur from each of these routes in each time period, the accumulated *nisbas* of cities lying along each route were graphed as a percentage of the total number of *nisbas* from all four routes. This is shown in Graph I. This graph only indicates the relative proportion of traffic along the four routes, however, and is thus very difficult to interpret alone because the total volume of traffic during each period remains unknown. Presumably, a twenty percent share of the traffic during one period could represent as much or more actual traffic than a sixty percent share during some other period if there had also been a substantial change in the total volume of traffic.

Graph II is intended to give some notion of the fluctuations is total volume of traffic. On it the total number of *nisbas* from all four routes is indicated as a percentage of the total number of *nisbas* of all kinds in each class. (The only *nisba* excluded from this calculation is Naisaburi because since a person actually living in Nishapur would be no more individuated by the name Naisaburi than any of his fellow citizens, the assigning of this *nisba* by the compilers of the two dictionaries was done...
Graph I

I) Dotted line—northeast route from Samarqand, Bukhara, and Marv.
II) Broken line—southeast route from Balkh and Herat.
III) Solid line—Khurasan highway from Baghdad, Isfahan, and Rayy.
IV) Crossed line—Caspian area route from Astarabad and Jurjan.

Time scale (A.H.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VII</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>ca. 155-ca. 225</td>
<td>ca. 225-ca. 269</td>
<td>ca. 269-290</td>
<td>290-343</td>
<td>360-380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>ca. 380-ca. 415</td>
<td>ca. 415-480</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to indicate residency rather than because it was an actual part of the person’s name. This is evident from the fact that very few people in al-Ḥākim an-Naisābūrī’s work have no nisba, and a very large number bears only the nisba Naisābūrī; while in ‘Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisi’s work a relatively large number of people has no nisba, and very few have only the nisba Naisābūrī. Evidently, the style of the compiler is the operative variable, and the appearance of this nisba must be disregarded for quantitative work.)

Undeniably, this is a risky procedure. Since the columns of the graph do not sum to 100%, the fluctuations in the curve may well be the product of other fluctuations occurring among the residual non-geographical nisbas. That is to say, a particularly great incidence of long distance geographical nisbas might be caused not by growth of traffic to Nishapur during that particular time period but by a spectacular decline in, say, the number of people bearing nisbas related to Arab tribes, which might be the product of ethnic change in the composition of the religious class. This is

Graph II

Solid line represents nisbas deriving from long distance traffic as a percentage of the total number of nisbas (excluding Naisābūrī) in each class.

*This is not the total number of nisbas in class IV but the number of individuals bearing any nisba at all (excluding Naisābūrī). Plural nisbas borne by a single individual would doubtless make the total number of nisbas slightly larger thus reducing the percentage somewhat.
not at all necessarily the case, however; for the present situation is not that of a zero sum game. There is no absolute number of nisbas involved; individuals can have no nisba or several nisbas. Hence, a decrease in the number of nisbas in one category does not call for a corresponding rise in the number of nisbas in another category in order to keep the total the same.

This being the case, the only thing to do is to compare the long distance traffic curve on Graph II with the curves of other identifiable groups of nisbas. In Graph III, curve A represents the frequency in each class of some 30 nisbas drawn from within the 100 mile local traffic radius as a percentage of the total number of nisbas in the class. The curve is fairly level and has a maximum variation of six percentage points. Curve B shows the percentages of nisbas drawn from Arab tribes and from the names of famous ancestors. This, too, is a fairly level curve; were it not for class V covering an early period when the number of Arabs in the religious class was fairly high, the maximum variation would be only three percentage points.

The difference between these two curves and the long distance traffic curve (curve C on Graph III) is striking. With a maximum variation of twelve percentage points and a pronounced peak in class VII, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that something special sets apart the time period of class VII from the periods just before and just after it. Furthermore, the relative evenness of the curve of local traffic in comparison with the curve of long distance traffic testifies to the validity of the premise underlying this entire examination, namely, that the frequency of long distance nisbas reflects important changes in the level of trade. Regardless of economic or political conditions, local traffic is likely to remain fairly stable. Foodstuffs must always be brought into the city, and the city will always exert a magnetic attraction on its hinterland, especially in religious and educational matters. On the other hand, economic and political conditions can heavily influence long distance traffic since the luxury products to which most long distance trade was devoted are non-essential and since there are other cities which can act as magnets for scholars.

Thus the argument stands, founded on a number of assumptions which can be argued pro and con. Ideally, parallel calculations from independent statistics should be offered to substantiate or contest its validity. Such statistics, unfortunately, are not available. Two other methods of testing are available, however, one immediately and the other, hopefully, sometime in the future. The latter would take the form of comparable calculations for other cities made from other biographical dictionaries. A method that claims to offer meaningful results in one situation should do so in other situations, as well. The former is the standard historian's method: How well does this theory correspond to known historical facts? In other words, how are the curves to be interpreted?

Interpretation, needless to say, is never obvious and clearcut. But in the present instance the correspondence of the major features of the highway curves of Graph I and the long distance traffic curve of Graph II with historical events seems incontestable.

Class IV (ca. 155-ca.225)

The major features of this period are a high level of overall long distance traffic with a particularly high proportion of that traffic coming from the northeast from route number 1 and the second highest from the southeast road, number 2.
Graph III (Number in each class same as in Graph II)

A) Broken line—*nisbas* derived from localities within a 100 mile radius of Nishapur.
B) Dotted line—*nisbas* derived from the names of Arab tribes and from the names of distinguished ancestors.
C) Solid line—same as in Graph II.

*Data on *nisbas* derived from Arab tribes, famous ancestors, and local traffic was not compiled for class IV.

This was the period of Abbasid greatness. It begins in the reign of al-Manṣūr and extends into the beginning of the Samarra period. Balkh was the capital of Khurasan. The previous capital, prior to 118, was Marv, which during this period was still the major city of Arab central Asia. Baghdad was the undisputed metropolis of the Islamic empire. Nishapur, until very late in the period when Tāhir made it his capital, was a minor city on the road to Transoxiana and further east. Thus, the high volume of traffic and its direction, from east to west, becomes understandable. It was transit traffic and reflects the flow of men and goods from Central Asia and Khurasan to the metropolis of Baghdad. The men who stopped for longer or shorter periods in Nishapur were easterners on their way to or from the Abbasid capital. In particular, they were men from Marv and Balkh, which between them account for 42% of all the long distance traffic. (A very small sample indicates that during the previous period, class III, ca. 65-ca. 155, in which the capital of Khurasan was switched from Marv to Balkh, the combined percentage of these two cities was precisely the same, 42%.)
Khurasan was very different during this period. The rise of the Tahirids at the beginning of the third century marked the start of a long period of Persian political resurgence which saw eastern Iran and Transoxiana become increasingly independent of Baghdad both politically and culturally. The Tahirids made Nishapur their capital and started it on its way to becoming a great city. They were thrown out of their capital in 261 by the Saffarids, another Persian dynasty from southern Iran; but this change of government probably did not affect the city much. In the meantime, a third Persian dynasty, the Sāmānid, was rising in Bukhara in Transoxiana; and the Abbasid central government was undergoing dark days of Turkish praetorian
insighting in Samarra and then, after the return to Baghdad, more dark days fighting the Zanj rebellion. On the graphs, these events are not particularly evident. Assuming that budding Nishapur was still mainly a city of transit, the direction of travel is still predominantly from east to west with Marv and Balkh still accounting for fully 40% of it.

**Class VI (ca. 269-290)**

One event symbolizes the changes that took place during this period. In 287 the Sāmānid ruler Ḥasan b. Ahmad defeated the Šaffārid Ṭ ‘Amr b. al-Laith and thus became the amīr of Khurasan with his capital in Bukhara. Nishapur received a Sāmānid governor. The ramifications of the Sāmānid rise and the alteration in the structure of power are clearly shown on the graphs. There is a striking increase in traffic from the northeast, already heavy due to the importance of Marv and now more so due to the new prominence of Bukhara, toward which Nishapur now faced as a satellite. Graph IV depicting the percentage of long distance nības referring to Marv and Bukhara demonstrates how clearly such gradual phenomena as the decline of Marv as the major city of Khurasan and the rise of Bukhara can be perceived by this method. Balkh, too, was declining at the expense of Bukhara. The combined percentage of Marv and Balkh during this period is 33%. Furthermore, the new alignment is reflected in a noticeable dip in the volume of traffic in general. The East was now a separate entity from the Abbasid empire centered on Baghdad. No longer was Baghdad the sole magnet. The transit trade through Nishapur decreased as Khurasan became increasingly oriented toward Bukhara.

**Class VII (290-343)**

Politically, few major developments took place during this period; but the graphs show that the effects of earlier developments became fully realized at this time. The caliphate in Baghdad continued its deterioration while the Sāmānid state flourished. Nishapur, too, flourished under the aegis of the Šimjūrīds, a dynasty of governors appointed by the Sāmānid ruler but having its roots in the Nishapur area. Judging from the dramatic rise in the volume of long distance traffic, these must have been the most prosperous days in Nishapur's history; and this period also saw the first development in the city of the Ashʿarī theological school which was later to produce Nishapur's greatest thinkers, Imām al-Ha-[1961]ramain al-Juwaini, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushairi, and al-Ghazzāli. The first great Nishapuri exponent of this doctrine, Abū Sahl as-Ṣ[u]dūkī, died in 369.

The analysis of this boom period by highways is illuminating. The proportion of traffic from the northeast decreased; but as indicated on Graph IV, the decrease was mainly caused by the further decline of Marv as a major city. Bukhara's share of traffic rose substantially. Similarly traffic from the southeast diminished, largely due to the decline of Balkh at the expense of burgeoning Bukhara and Nishapur. The combined share of traffic emanating from Marv and Balkh is now only 13% compared with 16% for Bukhara alone. Most striking of all, however, is the reversal of the east-west balance. For the first time the proportion of traffic coming from the west is greater than the proportion of traffic coming from the east (54% vs. 46%). Nishapur and Bukhara as the centers of a vigorous Persian political and cultural revival emerge as magnets whose attractive force is every bit as great as that of Baghdad. Traffic from the Caspian area increased, but this increase is put in the shade.
by the tremendous increase in eastward flowing traffic along the Khurasan highway. Moreover, no single city can account for this rise; for as Graph V indicates, Rayy, Baghdad, and Isfahan show similar peaks in class VII when the number of nisbas from those cities are graphed as a percentage of the long distance total. In short, the heyday of the Sāmānid dynasty appears to have been a tremendous boom period in the East during which Nishapur prospered greatly and had the foundations laid for its later cultural flowering.

**Class A (360–380)**

Looking at the graphs after a twenty year gap caused by the deletion of anomalous class VIII, it seems as if a reel has been skipped in a movie. The level of long distance traffic has suddenly sunk to a new low, which it maintains until the end of the time span covered by the dictionaries; the east-west balance has shifted again so that only 42% of the traffic comes from the west; and the level of traffic on the Khurasan highway has plummeted from its high peak with the decline being shared by all three major cities shown on Graph V. Only the Caspian area seems to be unaffected. What happened to the great Sāmānid prosperity? Do the graphs truly reflect important economic and political changes?
In fact, the suggestive curves of the graph are fully borne out by an examination of historical events. These events concern three dynasties. First, the previously splintered Būyid dynasty in western Iran and Iraq reached its apex of prosperity and power under ‘Aṣṣud ad-Dawla, who enjoyed his maximum power from the early 360’s until his death in 372. Second, the Sāmānīd dynasty began during this period to sink into a morass of court intrigue and Turkish praetorian domination. Furthermore, there was great enmity between the Būyids and the Sāmānīds because of religious differences which, combined with the attraction of the Būyid court, accounts for the marked decline in traffic on the Khurasan highway. The falling off of traffic on this great through road in turn surely contributed, along with the disorder at the heart of the Sāmānīd state, to the general decline of prosperity which is indicated by the fall in the overall volume of long distance traffic. Third, the Caspian region during this period was fairly cohesive under the rule of the Ziyārid dynasty, whose jurisdiction had become confined to this area. This small dynasty was never terribly secure in power, but the establishment of Jurjān as a capital and the fact that the Ziyārids were allies of the Sāmānīds against the Būyids easily account for the indicated rise in traffic on this route. Thus, although Nishapur certainly shared in the economic decline of the Sāmānīd state, it is imperial politics more than anything peculiar to the city that explains the interesting traffic pattern of this period.

Class B (380-ca. 411)

This was the period of the famous Mahmūd of Ghazna. He became governor of Nishapur in 384, succeeded as head of the Ghaznavid dynasty shortly after the death of his father, Sabuktakīn, in 387, and ruled until his own death in 421. This was also a period of great cultural growth in Nishapur. Although the bloom was still off the rose economically, the city was thriving intellectually. The great Ashʿarī theological school was flourishing under Abū at-Tāyyib aṣ-Ṣuʿlāki (d. 398), Ibn Fūrak (d. 406), al-Hākim an-Naṣībūrī (d. 405), and Abū Ishāq al-Isfārāʿīnī (d. 418). Likewise, the Ḥanāfi Muʿtazī faction was prospering under Ghaznavid patronage. Mahmūd’s brother founded the Ṣāʿīdi madrasa in Nishapur for this faction, and this madrasa was probably the pattern for the later Nizāmīya. These two phenomena account for the configurations on the graphs for this period.

The most striking feature is certainly the high peak in the level of traffic coming to Nishapur along the Khurasan highway. The breakdown on Graph V showing the curves from Isfahan and Rayy peaking together indicates that this increase in traffic was general along the whole highway, while the continuing slump in the Baghdad curve reflects the disorders that progressively afflicted that city during the later Būyid period. In part this increase may stem from the accession of a vigorous new dynasty, but this is not likely as will be shown later. Mainly the increase must be attributed to the effervescence of Nishapur and to its emergence as an intellectual center as attractive as any.

As for the other highways, the decline in the share of traffic from the Caspian area probably reflects the decline of the Ziyārid dynasty and the working out of unwise policies pursued by Qābūs b. Washmīr after his return to Jurjān in 388.2)

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Jesho XIII
The great slump in the share of traffic coming from the northeast is even more explicable. As the Sāmānids weakened and finally fell, the dike that had been holding back the Turkish tribes of Central Asia was removed; and Transoxiana, where the Ghaznavids never wielded much power, reverted to a more pastoral way of life. Graph IV shows specifically what happened to traffic from Marv and Bukhara. Finally, the appreciable rise in the share of traffic emanating from the southeast, the direction of the Ghaznavid capital, is attributable to the advent of the new dynasty. In particular, the city of Herat, standing as the most important city between Nishapur and Ghazna, emerges as a major point of origin for traffic to Nishapur with an 18% share of the total.

The major question that comes to mind, however, is why such a vigorous new dynasty did not produce an increase in the overall volume of traffic, which has been construed here to reflect the general level of trade and prosperity. The answer to this is distance. Ghazna, the seat of the state, was separated from Nishapur by some 850 miles of desert while only 475 more congenial miles away in the opposite direction lay Lahore and the riches of unconquered India. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Mahmūd chose to turn his attention eastward and launch campaign after campaign into India. And in this situation Nishapur became merely a western outpost, far removed from the trade caravans and booty trains that moved from India to Ghazna. At a slightly later period this isolation does much to explain the easy capitulation of Nishapur before the Saljūq Turks.

Class C (ca. 415-480)

In 428 the Saljūq Turks occupied Nishapur for the first time; and after being dislodged briefly, they came to stay in 431. The period of Saljūq greatness is delimited by the reigns of the first three sultans, Tughril Beg, Alp Arslān, and Malikshāh. The last of these three died in 485 which makes the time span under consideration here almost coincide with the period of Saljūq greatness. The effect of this change of regimes on the economy of Nishapur does not seem to have been salutary, however. The northeast was increasingly a preserve for Turkish tribesmen while the southeastern highway led into the country of the Ghaznavids, who were the enemies of the Saljūqs. Traffic along both of the eastern roads fell. Marv, Bukhara, Herat, Balkh, all declined. The share of traffic from this direction fell to 37%, the lowest ever. Traffic from the west declined, too, as shown on Graph V. Only the proportion of traffic coming from the Caspian region shows a marked increase, and this is certainly only an apparent increase caused by the decline of the other routes. Individually, Jurjan and Astarabad, the two main components of the curve from this area, remained about as they had been in the previous period. Overall, the volume of traffic fell to its lowest point in the entire 325 year period covered by the graphs.

It is not, of course, that Nishapur itself became an insignificant town. It was certainly larger and wealthier than it was during the first three periods described above. But the curves indicating traffic flow do not relate simply to one city. They reflect both traffic which had Nishapur as its terminus and through traffic for which Nishapur was just a point on the road. All along, as Nishapur was growing, political

1) The date of Nishapur's first capitulation is given in literary sources as 429, but the American Numismatic Society has in its collection a dinar of Tughril Beg minted in Nishapur in 428.
events were conspiring to bring low the other great eastern cities. Finally, during this period when Nishapur was at its intellectual peak and was probably the most culturally creative city in the Islamic world, the development that had been in train since the Abbasids began to decline came to full realization. East and West were split. Khurasan ceased to be a crossroads and became instead an eastern frontier extremity withering on the vine. The bridgehead established by the Arabs and the Persians in Transoxiana had crumbled, and Afghanistan had turned toward India. This new orientation has never been changed since that time. Thus, despite the flourishing intellectual climate of Nishapur itself, traffic through the city dried up. The economic seeds of the destruction of the city were sown.

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NOTE SUR L’ESCLAVAGE MUSULMAN ET LE DEVSHIRME OTTOMAN,
À PROPOS DE TRAVAUX RÉCENTS

Le devshirme est, on le sait, cette levée d’enfants de leurs sujets chrétiens qu’ont effectuée pendant quelque quatre siècles les Ottomans afin de les convertir à l’islam et de recruter parmi eux des agents de leur service civil ou militaire, en particulier le fameux corps des janissaires. Le caractère spécial de cette institution, dont on ne connait nullement d’exact équivalent, a depuis longtemps préoccupé les savants, sans parler des réactions sentimentales qui se sont naturellement fait jour pendant longtemps dans les milieux chrétiens touchés. Il n’y a pas cependant très longtemps qu’on s’est résolument attaqué au problème des origines et de l’explication du devshirme. On ne peut dire que des résultats décisifs aient encore été atteints: néanmoins des faits et des réflexions valables ont été introduits dans le débat, qui n’excluent pas, cependant, me semble-t-il, quelques possibilités de confusion. C’est pour cette raison qu’on me permettra de soumettre ici à mon tour les réflexions d’un islamisant qui ne prétend pas être un ottomanisant.

Depuis l’article initiateur de Palmer (1953) 1), on a dans l’ensemble surtout cherché à rattacher de quelque façon le devshirme à un passé musulman, soit que l’on découvrit dans l’interprétation shafi’ite de la Loi une disposition qui pouvait autoriser la levée d’enfants non-musulmans parmi les sujets de l’Empire, contrairement à la garantie générale de leur liberté personnelle et cultuelle accordée par l’islam 2); soit qu’on replacât le devshirme dans la ligne et la tradition du rôle


2) Paul Wittek, Devshirme and Shari’ā, in BSOAS XVII/1955. Malgré le respect qu’inspire l’émént savant, je ne pense pas que son hypothèse soit à retenir fondamentalement; les premiers Ottomans n’avaient pas une connaissance suffisante des subtilités juridiques que les spécialistes n’avaient nullement soulignées, à la rigueur on pourrait penser que l’interprétation de textes du genre de ceux que signale Wittek a pu plus tard aider les juristes à s’accommoder d’une pratique établie; mais cela même paraît peu vraisemblable, parce que les Turcs étaient pratiquement tous hanéfites et se préoccupaient peu des docteurs shafi’ites.