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Pride in Turkish Heritage? The Attitude of *Awlād al-Nās*-Historians to the Mamluks

INTRODUCTION

It is accepted among scholars that the attitude of contemporary historians of the Mamluk period toward the members of the Mamluk military elite, usually termed by them “Turks” (*atrāk*), is, in general, condescending and critical. Local Arab historians tended to depict the Mamluks as brutal foreign warriors, sometimes barbarians, with no deep Islamic or Arabic scholarly interests, who exploited the local population and pursued a defective policy that devastated the land.¹ The contemptuous attitude of Arab authors toward the “Turks”—except for their merits as brave warriors and horsemen—goes back as early as third/ninth century Arab authors like al-Jāhiz.²

The condescending attitude is reflected mainly in generally negative stereotypical comments that the local ulama-historians integrate into their historiographical works concerning the Mamluks. Al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), for instance, remarks that the Mamluks are “more lustful than monkeys, more ravenous than rats, more destructive than wolves.”³ The Syrian historian and Quran exegete Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) refers to “the sinful people (*fasaqah*) among the Turks

¹For references to several important studies on this matter, see Christian Mauder, “The Development of Arabo-Islamic Education among Members of the Mamluk Military,” in *Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam: Religious Learning between Continuity and Change*, ed. Sebastian Günther (Leiden, 2020), 2:963, n. 2. See also: Ulrich Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33, no. 1 (1988): 81–114, esp. 83; Eliyahu Ashtor (Strauss), *The History of the Jews in Egypt and Syria under Mamluk Rule* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1944–51), 2:59–60. For the ulama-historians’ reservations concerning the Turks’ level of understanding of Islamic studies, see: Jonathan Berkey, “Mamluks and the World of Higher Education in Medieval Cairo 1250–1517,” in *Modes de transmission de la culture religieuse en Islam*, ed. Hassan Elbadoudrari (Cairo, 1993), 105–6; idem, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, 1992), 143.

²Ulrich Haarmann, “Ideology and History, Identity and Alterity: The Arab Image of the Turk from the Abbasids to Modern Egypt,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 2 (1988): 179–80; idem, “Arabic in Speech,” 82, n. 1.

³Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawā‘iz wa-al-‘itibār bi-dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-al-āthār fi Miṣr wa-al-Qāhira* (Būlāq, 1854), 2:214; Mauder, “Development,” 963. See more on al-Maqrīzī’s condescending attitude towards the Mamluks: Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 87–88; al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 2:213–14.



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and other ignoramus.”⁴ Another Syrian historian, al-Jazarī (d. 739/1338), praised a Mamluk amir who was especially religious by mentioning his non-typical-Turkish characteristics: “he has never accepted a bribe, drunk wine, or coveted a Mamluk.”⁵ The Egyptian Islamic scholar and historian Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) makes clear the dichotomous distinction between the erudite *fuqahā’* and uncouth *atrāk*.⁶ In case a Mamluk had some knowledge in Arabic or Islamic literature, Ibn Ḥajar (as well as other historians) mentions this as a great achievement, often adding the remark “he was a rare exception in his own race.”⁷ Moreover, the Egyptian hadith scholar al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497), who compiled a biographical dictionary dedicated mainly to religious scholars, especially hadith scholars (*Al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi’*), does not hide his contempt for not only Turkish Mamluks but also for scholars from among the Mamluks’ descendants, such as Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470). Al-Sakhāwī labelled Ibn Taghrībirdī, clearly with derogatory intent, as a Turk, excoriated him for his failings as a historian and an Arabist, and remarks in reference to him, “what else can be expected from a Turk?”⁸ A similar opinion of Ibn Taghrībirdī is demonstrated by al-Ṣayrafī (d. 900/1495).⁹ Other chronicles also put down Ibn Taghrībirdī as both ignorant and a commoner (*‘āmm*), who was prejudiced in favor of the Turks or even the Copts.¹⁰ In addition, in general, the biographical entries of Mamluks mentioned by the local historians focus on the Mamluks’ military and political careers. The historians note in passing—almost as a side note or appendix—any scholarly activity or interests of Mamluks.¹¹

⁴ Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*, ed. ‘Alī Shīrī (Beirut, 1993), 14:15.

⁵ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh ḥawādith al-zamān wa-anbā’ihi wa-wafayāt al-akābir wa-al-‘ayān min abnā’ihi*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 2006), 1:77.

⁶ Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Al-Durar al-kāminah fī ‘ayān al-mī’ah al-thāminah*, ed. Muḥammad S. Jād al-Ḥaqq (Cairo, 1966), 1:6; Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 95, 97.

⁷ Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 97.

⁸ Rihab Ben Othmen, “A Tale of Hybrid Identities: Notes on Ibn Taghrībirdī’s Textual and Authorial ‘Self-Fashioning,’” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 23 (2020): 170; William Popper, “Sakhāwī’s Criticism of Ibn Taghrī Birdī,” *Studi Orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi della Vida* (Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, 1956), 2:378. Popper claims that al-Sakhāwī’s criticism of Ibn Taghrībirdī derived from racial motives; see *ibid.*, 377–78. See also: Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 112, 113; Donald P. Little, “Historiography of the Ayyubid and Mamluk Epochs,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, *Islamic Egypt, 640–1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge, 1998), 440.

⁹ Ben Othmen, “A Tale,” 170–71.

¹⁰ Nasser Rabbat, “Representing the Mamluks in Mamluk Historical Writing,” in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt, c. 950–1800*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (Leiden, 2000), 83.

¹¹ Christian Mauder, “Education and Learning among Members of the Mamluk Army: Results of a Quantitative Analysis of Mamluk Biographies,” in *History and Society during the Mamluk Period*



Nevertheless, contemporary historians do not hide the literary or intellectual activities of Mamluks, and usually mention them as among a Mamluk's merits. Thus, some studies point out that a distinct portion of the Mamluks did express some interest in literary, scholarly, or intellectual activities, whether in Islamic and Arabic studies, the sciences, or Turkish language and literature. Prosopographical studies analyzing the biographical data mentioned in Mamluk historiography reveal that the phenomenon of erudite Mamluks was not trivial. Haarmann stressed the existence of dozens of Mamluks who were interested in Islamic studies as well as in literature and other fields.¹² A similar methodology was used by Berkey in order to show that erudite Mamluks were common.¹³ A recent quantitative analysis of several hundred biographies of Mamluks in biographical dictionaries shows that about every eighth Mamluk possessed a noteworthy level of learning.¹⁴ Furthermore, several studies based on *non-historiographical evidence* strengthen this notion, pointing at the common phenomenon of private libraries among Mamluk amirs.¹⁵

Thus, it seems that the general attitude of Muslim historians to the Mamluks is somewhat deceptive. This attitude tends to *diminish* the genuine intellectual interests of “the Turks,” though in reality a certain level of erudition and even literary activity were very common among Mamluk soldiers and amirs. This attitude seems to stem from the frustration of the ulama, which escalated during the Mamluk period. It is true that Turks have been portrayed negatively by Muslim authors, especially concerning intellectual aspects, since the third/ninth

(1250–1517), Studies of the Annemarie Schimmel Institute for Advanced Study III, ed. Bethany J. Walker and Abdelkader Al Ghouz (Göttingen, 2021), 69; Rabbat, “Representing,” 68.

¹²Haarmann discusses Mamluks from the seventh/fourteenth century who expressed interest in Arabic or Turkish/Mongol poetry and language, book collection, calligraphy, and Islamic studies; see: Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 81–103.

¹³Berkey, “Mamluks and the World of Higher Education,” 103–6, 109–16; idem, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 144–60; idem, “The Mamluks as Muslims,” in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Ulrich Haarmann (Cambridge, 1998), 163–73; idem, “‘Silver Threads among the Coal’: A Well-Educated Mamluk of the Ninth/Fifteenth Century,” *Studia Islamica* 73 (1991): 110–11. See also: Robert Irwin, “Mamluk Literature,” *MSR* 7 (2003): 1–6, 27–28.

¹⁴Mauder, “Education,” 62–68, esp. 62, 69, 79; idem, “Development,” esp. 968–73, which stresses the erudition of the Mamluks particularly in the Bahri period.

¹⁵Barbara Flemming and recently Elise Franssen discuss the phenomenon of ninth/fifteenth century manuscripts copied as an exercise by young Mamluks that became part of their masters' libraries; see: Barbara Flemming, “Literary Activities in Mamluk Halls and Barracks,” in *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, ed. Miriam Rosen-Ayalon (Jerusalem, 1977), 249–60; Elise Franssen, “What Was There in a Mamlūk Amīr’s Library? Evidence From a 15th-Century Manuscript,” in *Developing Perspectives in Mamluk History: Essays in Honor of Amalia Levanoni*, ed. Yuval Ben-Bassat (Leiden, 2017), 311–32. See more on Mamluk amirs' libraries: Irwin, “Mamluk Literature,” 1–2; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *The Book in Mamluk Egypt and Syria (1250–1517)* (Leiden, 2018).



century. However, during the Mamluk period a clear distinction emerged between the Mamluk ruling elite and the ulama, since the latter were deprived of any executive positions. This situation, as Nasser Rabbat puts it, brought about “an attitude of uneasy acquiescence laced with jealousy and an affected haughtiness, that found their way into all genres of writing of the time, but especially historical/biographical texts.”¹⁶

Against the depicted dichotomy between the “barbarian” Mamluks and the “civilized” local ulama, I would like to trace the attitude of some of the most erudite scholars among the *awlād al-nās*, i.e., historians who were themselves sons or descendants of Mamluk amirs. The *awlād al-nās*-historians were educated in an Arabo-Islamic environment but still shared Mamluk identity and origin and were knowledgeable in Turkish language and culture. Do these *awlād al-nās*-historians follow the conventions of the “pure” Arab ulama-historians, such as al-Dhahabī, Ibn Ḥajar, al-Maqrīzī, or al-Sakhāwī? Or, rather, can one identify an attempt to break out of the accepted historiographical paradigms concerning the Turks? In what follows, alongside prominent studies, I will discuss new information, argumentation, methods, and findings that refine and strengthen—but also contradict—the views of some prominent scholars concerning the nature of the Mamluk descendants’ historiography.

The attitude of *awlād al-nās* to their Turkish background versus Arabo-Islamic culture has been addressed by several scholars. Haarmann, for instance, asserts that “in order to be fully integrated into the surrounding society, the *awlād al-nās* felt compelled to take sides and to opt for one of the two heterogeneous traditions in which they participated.”¹⁷ Nasser Rabbat concluded that the historians among the *awlād al-nās* took the side of the local Arab ulama. According to him, the *awlād al-nās*-historians generally ignore their Turkish or Mamluk background.¹⁸ In this paper I will briefly examine the *awlād al-nās* historiographical attitude to “Turks,” by first tracing subjective stereotypical comments about “the Mamluks” or “the Turks” from the pens of *awlād al-nās* authors on the one hand, and local ulama-historians on the other, and, second, comparing biographical information mentioned about erudite Mamluks as reported by the two groups of historians. Due to the limited scope of this article, I will focus on three prominent historians: Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470), and ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ al-Malaṭī (d. 920/1514). The three historians in question are a representative case study in relation to their approach to the Turks/Mamluks due to the diversity of the periods in which they lived, their genealogical connections with their amir ancestors, and their degrees of prox-

¹⁶Rabbat, “Representing,” esp. 67. See a similar opinion: Ashtor, *The History*, 2:59–60.

¹⁷Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 110.

¹⁸Rabbat, “Representing,” 62–63.



imity to the military elite. Al-Şafadī was a fourteenth-century historian and bureaucrat, the son of an apparently low-ranking amir, devoid of any military background. Ibn Taghrībirdī was a fifteenth-century historian and the son of a very senior amir, who had strong ties with the military elite and had knowledge of the martial arts. Al-Malaṭī was a historian from the very end of the Mamluk period, son and grandson of middle-ranking amirs, and more closely related to the ulama class—apparently more so than Ibn Taghrībirdī.

KHALĪL IBN AYBAK AL-ŞAFADĪ (D. 764/1363)

Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Şafadī, the son of an apparently low-ranking amir, made his living as an important state bureaucrat (*kātib*) in the cities of Safed, Damascus, Cairo, Aleppo, and al-Raḥbah. He was educated in Islamic and Arabic studies, and studied literature and hadith under the most eminent teachers of his time, among them al-Dhahabī and Ibn Ḥajar, during his stays in the cities mentioned above and elsewhere.¹⁹ Thus, his affiliation with the circle of the local ulama and the literati bureaucrats is clear.

Due to al-Şafadī's social and professional background, Haarmann's view—according to which al-Şafadī inclined to the local Arab culture, betrayed his Turkish background, and “presents himself as wholly assimilated to the standards of the local ‘ulamā’”²⁰—is understandable. Similar to the condescending comments of local Arab ulama, Mamluks who reveal interest in scholarship are termed by al-Şafadī as “rare among their race.”²¹ Indeed, a thorough reading of al-Şafadī's biographical dictionaries shows that he often cites negative tropes about the Turks. For instance, in the *tarjamah* (biographical entry) of Shams al-Dīn Lu'lu', the governor of Syria in the late Ayyubid period, al-Şafadī praises him mainly as a brave warrior, but adds, copying from al-Dhahabī with no change or “censorship,” “but he had a Turkish mind.”²² In the obituary of the erudite Mamluk scholar Sanjar al-Dawādārī (d. 699/1300), al-Şafadī comments, again following al-Dhahabī, that “hardly any Turk equaled him in excellence.”²³

¹⁹Donald P. Little, “Al-Şafadī as Biographer of His Contemporaries,” in *Essays on Islamic Civilization Presented to Niyazi Berkes*, ed. Donald P. Little (Leiden, 1976), 206–10.

²⁰Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 112.

²¹*Ibid.*, 93–96.

²²*Illā anna fīhi 'aql al-turk*; see Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Şafadī, *Al-Wāfi bi-al-wafayāt*, various editors (Beirut, 2008–13), 24:407; see also: Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 1987–2004), 55:400.

²³*Wa-qalla man anjaba min al-turk mithluhu*; see: al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 60:410; idem, *Mu'jam al-shuyūkh al-kabīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb al-Hīlah (al-Tā'if, 1998), 1:273; al-Şafadī, *Wāfi*, 15:480; idem, *A'yān al-aşr wa-a'wān al-naşr*, ed. 'Alī Abū Zayd (Beirut and Damascus, 1998), 2:462; Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 97–98.



Even more surprising are negative stereotypical comments against “Turks” that are not copied from local Arab historians but originate from al-Şafadī’s own pen. For instance, in order to praise Muḥammad ibn Janaklī, an amir from the *awlād al-nās* and a close friend of al-Şafadī, he comments in his *A’yān al-‘aşr* that “he preferred to sit with the ulama rather than sitting with the amirs and the Turks.”²⁴ In al-Şafadī’s multi-volume biographical dictionary *Al-Wāfi bi-al-wafayāt*, on the same individual, he says: “he used to sit with the virtuous (*fuḍalā*) and the pious Sufis (*fuqarā*) and preferred to converse with them rather than sitting with the amirs and the Turks.”²⁵ Thus, like the ulama-historians, al-Şafadī creates a clear dichotomy between the cultured ulama and the “barbaric Turks.” In other cases, he uses the disparaging term *ghutumī* (inarticulate or dumb) when describing Mamluk amirs.²⁶

It should be noted that, like the local Arab historians, al-Şafadī does mention some individual Mamluks’ intellectual interests. However, he almost never includes Mamluks primarily because of their scholarly merits. The Mamluks who aroused the interest of al-Şafadī—like that of other local historians, such as al-Maqrīzī—were noteworthy for their political, military, or economic successes, or even for their cruelty or their bravery.²⁷

Along with the condescending attitude to “Turks,” al-Şafadī’s dictionary is loaded with Arabic and Islamic literary references. Following the patterns of medieval historiographical writings, it seems that al-Şafadī was also striving to boast about how knowledgeable he was in Arabic and Islamic classical culture. The integration of vast material from the classical Arabic heritage demonstrates his admiration for this culture and his total identification with it. As a more *adab*-inclined work, Arabic poetry—composed by him and others—fills the better part of his biographical dictionaries. Inter alia, he integrates *jāhili* and Muslim poets in his entries, sometimes juggling puns with virtuosity. Among these poets are ‘Antarah, al-Nābighah, Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, and al-Mutanabbī.²⁸ In addition, al-Şafadī relates biographical material to formative historical events

²⁴ *Wa-yuḥayyir mujālasat ahl al-‘ilm ‘alā mujālasat al-umarā’ wa-al-atrāk* (al-Şafadī, *A’yān*, 4:381).

²⁵ *Wa-kāna fihi ithār wa-barr li-ahl al-‘ilm wa-lā yazāl yujālis al-fuḍalā’ wa-al-fuqarā’ wa-yuḥayyir muḥādathatahum ‘alā mujālasat al-umarā’ wa-al-atrāk* (al-Şafadī, *Wāfi*, 2:31).

²⁶ Al-Şafadī, *A’yān*, 1:618, 2:563; Rabbat, “Representing,” 70.

²⁷ Mauder, “Education,” 69.

²⁸ See for instance: al-Nābighah’s poetry from the *Mu‘allaqāt* (Al-Şafadī, *A’yān*, 5:130; idem, *Wāfi*, 17:226–67); ‘Amr ibn al-Iṭnābah (*A’yān*, 2:73); al-Ḥaṭī’ah (*Wāfi*, 24:180–81); *Dīwān Majnūn Laylā* (*A’yān*, 1:506); Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (*A’yān*, 1:55), al-Mutanabbī (*A’yān*, 4:150).



in Islam, prototypical Muslim figures, Arab proverbs, and Quran verses—all mentioned in the right biographical contexts.²⁹

Are there any “Turkish” elements mentioned in al-Ṣafadī’s works? In his biographical dictionaries, al-Ṣafadī barely refers to the Turkish language. He does mention Turkish dialogues (or alleged dialogues) between amirs, but renders them, according to Nasser Rabbat, in a street vernacular Arabic, in order “to signify the uncouth and uncultivated Mamluks.”³⁰ It might be, however, that al-Ṣafadī intended to boast of his knowledge of Turkish by integrating these dialogues. In this respect, it is noteworthy that in an unpublished *tadhkirah*, al-Ṣafadī discusses the linguistic rules of Turkish.³¹

ABŪ AL-MAḤĀSIN JAMĀL AL-DĪN YŪSUF IBN TAGHRĪBIRDĪ (D. 874/1470)

As opposed to al-Ṣafadī, Ibn Taghrībirdī was the son of a high-ranking amir—an *atābak al-ʿasākīr*, chief executive of the *dawlah*, who owned numerous mamluks. Moreover, Ibn Taghrībirdī maintained intimate familiarity with Mamluk sultans, military society, and the Mamluk army and possessed martial skills.³² Ibn Taghrībirdī is thus viewed by modern scholars as a *walad al-nās*-historian who

²⁹For the integration of classical Arab proverbs or prototypical heroes, see for instance: Ibn Taymiyah is said to be more generous than Ḥātim al-Ṭāʿī and more courageous than ʿAntarah (ʿAʿyān, 1:236); the primordial prototype Sufi Ibrāhīm ibn Adham is mentioned as the ideal of *zuhd* (asceticism) (ʿAʿyān, 5:143), as well as other Sufi heroes such as Abū Bakr Dulaf ibn Shibli and Maʿrūf ibn Fayrūz (ʿAʿyān, 3:287). See also: ʿAʿyān, 1:146. For Quran verses, see for instance: ʿAʿyān 1:56, 644, 2:506, 4:65. Interestingly, the chronicles of the Mamluk amir Baybars al-Manṣūrī also follow the contemporary historiographical conventions. Baybars, who probably was assisted by local Arab scribes, includes the same classical Arabo-Islamic motifs common in the works of the local historians. For instance, he makes references to the Quranic family reunion of Joseph and Jacob (Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-fikrah fī tārikh al-hijrah*, ed. Donald S. Richards [Beirut and Berlin, 1998], 385[; Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s *hilm* is compared with that of the early Islamic heroes, the general al-Aḥnaf and the caliph Muʿāwiyah Ibn Abī Sufyān (idem, *Kitāb al-tuḥfah al-mulūkiyah fī al-dawlah al-Turkiyah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Ṣāliḥ Ḥamdān [Cairo, 1987], 182[. For quotations from al-Mutanabbī, see: *ibid*).

³⁰Rabbat, “Representing,” 71–74.

³¹Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 112.

³²See on Ibn Taghrībirdī’s family, life, and relations in court: Hani Hamza, “Aspects of the Economic and Social Life of Ibn Taghrībirdī,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12, no. 1 (2008): 146ff; Donald P. Little, *An Introduction to Mamluk Historiography: An Analysis of Arabic Annalistic and Biographical Sources for the Reign of an-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāʿūn* (Wiesbaden, 1970), 87; Popper, “Sakhāwī’s Criticism,” 378–79.



was proud of his Mamluk roots. Donald Little even asserts that he “belonged more to the *ahl al-sayf* than to *ahl al-qalam*.”³³

Due to his social background, Ibn Taghrībirdī’s works are often perceived in modern scholarship as sympathetic to Mamluk or Turkish heritage. His chronicle *Al-Nujūm al-zāhirah fī mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* is usually considered court literature, “a work by a courtier for courtiers,” intended to glorify the reign of Sultan Jaqmaq (842–57/1438–53), with whom Ibn Taghrībirdī enjoyed a close friendship.³⁴ The uniqueness of this work is illustrated also by its format, which differs from Ayyubid and other Mamluk histories in that it is arranged by reigns of individual rulers rather than a strict annalistic chronology.³⁵ On the other hand, Ibn Taghrībirdī’s biographical dictionary *Al-Manhal al-ṣāfi wa-al-mustawfā ba’d al-wāfi* aimed to follow in the footsteps of al-Ṣafadī’s *Al-Wāfi bi-al-wafayāt*. However, in this work Ibn Taghrībirdī was highly critical of al-Ṣafadī. For instance, he berates him “as a provincial Syrian litterateur who could not keep track of dates or affairs of state in the capital in Egypt.”³⁶

Can we say that Ibn Taghrībirdī’s social background and somewhat innovative historiographical characteristics left their marks on his attitude toward Mamluks or “Turks”? At first glance, the answer seems to be positive. Unlike al-Ṣafadī’s, Ibn Taghrībirdī’s writings include several Mamluk or “Turkish” elements, which are also mentioned by the few historians who were Mamluks themselves, such as Baybars al-Manṣūrī, al-Shujā’ī, or the anonymous author of the chronicle published by Zetterstéen. Ibn Taghrībirdī gives reports about the world of the Turks and Mongols³⁷ and frequently alludes to military arts and practices of warfare (while emphasizing his own proficiency in archery, a typically Mamluk art, in which he was apparently trained by a group of his father’s Mamluks).³⁸ Another significant feature is Ibn Taghrībirdī’s translation of Turk-

³³Little, *Introduction*, 87; Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 110.

³⁴Little, “Historiography,” 439. See a summary of modern research on Ibn Taghrībirdī as a “court historian” in Ben Othmen, “A Tale,” esp. 172–74; Little, *Introduction*, 87. Irmeli Perho strengthens Little’s view in a recent study, concluding that *Nujūm*’s “primary audience was the Mamluk court and there are elements in his stories that made them suitable for oral presentation, for reading aloud.” See: Irmeli Perho, “Ibn Taghrībirdī’s Stories,” in *Mamluk Historiography Revisited: Narratological Perspectives*, ed. Stephan Conermann (Göttingen, 2018), esp. 150.

³⁵Little, “Historiography,” 439; idem, *Introduction*, 87.

³⁶Little, *Introduction*, 108; idem, “Historiography,” 442.

³⁷Ben Othmen, “A Tale,” 188; for Baybars al-Manṣūrī’s reports on this topic, see, for instance, Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 101.

³⁸Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 111; Little, “Historiography,” 439; Ben Othmen, “A Tale,” 187–89.



ish names and terms into Arabic for his readers who knew no Turkish. In this respect, he often criticizes the local Arab historians.³⁹

However, one should not overestimate Ibn Taghrībirdī's "pro-Turkish" attitude, at least concerning his general perception and depiction of the Mamluks. On the contrary: Ibn Taghrībirdī followed the literary patterns of the Arab chroniclers concerning *al-atrāk*. In this respect, one should bear in mind that Ibn Taghrībirdī received a good Arabo-Islamic education. As a free-born Muslim, he was not educated in a military school and did not go through the Mamluk training system, but rather was reared by two of his in-laws—a Hanafi judge and a Shafi'i judge. He was educated in the Islamic sciences, including the study of history under al-Maqrīzī and al-ʿAynī.⁴⁰ As a result, similarly to the ulama-historians, Ibn Taghrībirdī integrates Arabic poetry, Quranic verses, and references to hadith in his compilations.⁴¹

It is much more instructive to discover that even Ibn Taghrībirdī depicts Turkish Mamluks with the typical condescending stereotypes used by the local ulama. Like Ibn Ḥajar and al-Ṣafadī, Ibn Taghrībirdī makes a clear, dichotomous distinction between the barbaric *atrāk* and the erudite and pious *fuqahāʾ* and ulama. A case in point is his depiction of Sayf al-Dīn Lājīn al-Jarkasī (d. 804/1402), of whom he said, "he promised the people that when he became sultan he would abolish the *awqāf* of the mosques, burn the *fiqh* books, punish the *fuqahāʾ*, and appoint only one qadi from the Hanafi rite, *who is one of the Turks not the fuqahāʾ*."⁴² In

³⁹Rabbat, "Representing," 62–63; Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech," 112. For Ibn Taghrībirdī's interpretation of Mamluk names, see for instance: Tughrāy (Abū al-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Manhal al-ṣāfi wa-al-mustawfā ba'd al-wāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Amin and Nabīl Muḥammad 'Abd al-ʿAzīz [Cairo, 1984–2009], 6:380); Baysarī (idem, *Al-Nujūm al-zāhirah fī mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah*, ed. Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt et al. [Cairo, 1929–72], 8:186–87); Dalanjī (ibid., 10:249); Ughuzlū (ibid., 9:281; *Manhal*, 2:462); Kujkūn (*Manhal*, 9:121); al-Jālliq (*Nujūm*, 8:227). See more instances in: Ben Othmen, "A Tale," 185, n. 87; and see more on Ibn Taghrībirdī's interest in Turkish languages as reflected in his works, ibid., 185–87.

⁴⁰Little, "Historiography," 439; Berkey, "Silver Threads," 112.

⁴¹For Ibn Taghrībirdī's interspersing his writings with hadith quotations and other Islamic narratological elements, see: Ben Othmen, "A Tale," 181–82. For poetry: ibid., 190–91; Sami G. Massoud, *The Chronicles and Annalistic Sources of the Early Mamluk Circassian Period* (Leiden, 2007), 64. For Ibn Taghrībirdī's poetry quotations from, for instance, al-Mutanabbī, Muḥammad's grandfather 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, 'Antarah, and al-Iṣfahānī—all in the appropriate biographical contexts—see: *Nujūm*, 8:86, 69.

⁴²*Nujūm*, 13:27. See another instance in the *tarjamah* of Taghrī Birmish discussed below, in which Ibn Taghrībirdī distinguishes between warlike *furūsiyah* exercises (*funūn al-atrāk*) and the intellectual knowledge of the *fuqahāʾ* (*ʿulūm al-fuqahāʾ*) (*Nujūm*, 15:531). Ibn Taghrībirdī mentions another stereotypical expression in relation to the learned amir: "And in general he was among the most extraordinary of his time among the people of his race." (*Manhal*, 4:71; *Nujūm*, 15:531).



another instance, Ibn Taghrībirdī mentions “the Turks whose ability to perceive the meaning of an expression is restricted.”⁴³ The same historian depicts amir Baybughā al-Muẓaffarī (d. 833/1430) as brave and awe-inspiring and adds that “he used obscene words, without impudence, as is customary by the Turks.”⁴⁴ Especially condescending and generalizing is Ibn Taghrībirdī’s comment concerning the ignorance and stupidity of the “Turkish jurists” (*fuqahā’ al-Turk*).⁴⁵

Other condescending comments concern individual Mamluks, such as the scholar Sanjar al-Dawādārī, of whom, copying from al-Dhahabī, he notes, “Hardly any Turk equaled him in excellence.”⁴⁶ In a *tarjamah* of amir Sudūn al-Zāhirī, the historian comments, “although he studied jurisprudence assiduously, he wasted his time in doing so because of his limited understanding and lack of imagination.”⁴⁷ Ibn Taghrībirdī mentions Sultan Īnāl’s inability to write his name properly in Arabic, his mispronunciation of even the *Fātiḥah*, and his neglect of the basic commandments of Islam.⁴⁸ Indeed, Ibn Taghrībirdī—compared to Arab historians like al-Maqrīzī, *awlād al-nās*-historians such as al-Ṣafadī, and even Mamluk historians like Baybars al-Manṣūrī—minimizes discussion of intellectual aspects of individual Mamluks and their academic achievements, but rather elaborates and stresses their martial skills and military merits as horsemen and warriors.⁴⁹

We may conclude that despite Ibn Taghrībirdī’s family origin and his close relations with the Mamluk elite, he nevertheless shared the cultural values of the local scholars and to a large extent adopted the ulama’s perception regarding the Turks or Mamluks. Ibn Taghrībirdī’s attitude to the Turks is in harmony with the historiographical character of his writings, which in general follow the literary conventions of the ulama. As shown in a recent study, in the prologues of both *Al-Manhal* and *Al-Nujūm*, Ibn Taghrībirdī reproduces common patterns used by ulama-historians, such as topoi concerning Sunni Islamic piety.⁵⁰ Moreover, Ibn Taghrībirdī made references to legal norms and practices, attempting to share the orthodox stance and values of Sunni ulama. A case in point is his fierce condemnation of the appointment of *dhimmi*s to high offices—a common trope in the historiographical writings of ulama-historians.⁵¹

⁴³ *Al-atrāk alladhīna yuqṣar fahmuhum ‘an idrāk al-ma‘ānī* (*Nujūm*, 14:113).

⁴⁴ *Min ghayr safah ‘alā ‘adat jins al-atrāk* (*Nujūm*, 15:161).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 14:20–21.

⁴⁶ See above, n. 23; *Manhal*, 6:69; Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 97–98.

⁴⁷ *Nujūm*, 15:479; Berkey, “The World of Higher Education,” 105.

⁴⁸ Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 112.

⁴⁹ Mauder, “Development,” 970.

⁵⁰ Ben Othmen, “A Tale,” 175.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 181–84.



‘ABD AL-BĀSIṬ AL-MALAṬĪ (844–920/1440–1514)

‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ ibn Khalīl ibn Shāhīn al-Malaṭī was the son of a high-ranking officer, himself a son of a Mamluk amir. Born in 844/1440 in Turkish Malatya during the time that his father acted as its governor, he was fluent in the Turkish language.

Thanks to autobiographical notes in his chronicle *Al-Rawḍ al-bāsim fī ḥawādith al-‘umr wa-al-tarājim*, we can reconstruct the general outline of his life, education, and social milieu. In general, ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ travelled the Muslim world for *ṭalab al-‘ilm*. He studied with the famous ulama of the cities he visited, from his youth in Tripoli in Lebanon, and later in Damascus, Cairo, and the Maghrib (Tripoli in Libya, Tunis, Algeria, and Spain). He finally settled in the Shaykhūniyah *khānqāh* in Cairo. Besides *fiqh*, *tafsīr*, *naḥw* (grammar), hadith, and other religious studies, he expressed interest in poetry and medicine. In addition to his chronicles, he compiled two works of *tafsīr*.⁵² Among his teachers, we may count al-Sakhāwī, who dedicated a praise-filled entry to his student.⁵³ Al-Malaṭī’s father, Ghars al-Dīn Khalīl (813–73/1410–68), wrote a well-known book titled *Zubdat kashf al-Mamālik* and also obtained an *ijāzah* in hadith from Ibn Ḥajar.⁵⁴ Thus, though affiliated with both Mamluk and scholarly circles, al-Malaṭī was much more closely related to the ulama class, and apparently more so than Ibn Taghrībirdī.

Therefore, al-Malaṭī’s historiographical writings clearly followed in the footsteps of the ulama-historians. Furthermore, in his introduction to *Al-Rawḍ*, al-Malaṭī states that his historical work aims to function as a “continuation (*dḥayl*) to the great and useful famous history books written before: the two great history books by Chief Qadi Badr al-Dīn al-‘Aynī, a history book by Shaykh al-Islām Hāfiẓ al-‘Aṣr Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqālānī, a history book by al-Taḳī al-Maqrīzī, and many other great history books written by many masters.”⁵⁵ Indeed, al-Malaṭī based himself on all these historians, being influenced especially by Ibn Ḥajar and his own teacher al-Sakhāwī. For instance, he chose to start his book in the

⁵² See al-Malaṭī’s broad religious education as reflected in his autobiographical notes, as well as the various fields of his studies, his teachers, students, poetry, and literary works—as surveyed by ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī in his introduction to al-Malaṭī’s chronicle: ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ ibn Khalīl ibn Shāhīn al-Malaṭī, *Al-Rawḍ al-bāsim fī ḥawādith al-‘umr wa-al-tarājim*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Sidon, 2014), 5–78; Kikuchi Tadayoshi, “An Analysis of ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ al-Ḥanafī al-Malaṭī’s Description of the Year 848: On the Process of Writing History in the Late Fifteenth Century,” *MSR* 10, no. 1 (2006): 29–30. See also al-Malaṭī’s biographical entry penned by his teacher al-Sakhāwī: Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi’* (Cairo, 1935–36), 4:27.

⁵³ Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw’*, 4:27; Tadayoshi, “Analysis,” 48.

⁵⁴ Tadayoshi, “Analysis,” 29.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 32; According to Massoud, al-Malaṭī also followed in the footsteps of al-Dhahabī; see: Massoud, *The Chronicles*, 67–69.



year he was born exactly as Ibn Ḥajar (who began his book in 773/1371, the year of his birth) had done.⁵⁶ Another prominent feature of his writing—widespread in classical biographical dictionaries—is the mention of the ulama relationships between teacher and student.⁵⁷ Adhering to the historiographical characteristics of the local ulama, al-Malaṭī also integrates into his chronicles Quranic verses, hadith, and poetry.⁵⁸

Like al-Ṣafadī and Ibn Taghrībirdī, al-Malaṭī conveys the ulama’s attitude to the Mamluks by means of occasional comments against the “Turks.” An instructive example is his comment which stresses the innate “barbaric” nature of the “Turks,” according to which “most of those Turks (*al-atrāk*) externalize their chastity, whereas secretly they act in the opposite way.”⁵⁹ Another instance concerns a case in which the chief *ḥājib* cruelly punished a man who tried to receive legal protection from the Hanafī qadi. Al-Malaṭī comments that “it was among the most indecent events which humiliated the Islamic religious authorities, and which demonstrated the eager desire of the tyrannical Turks (*ṭamʿ al-turk al-ḡalamah*) for judgeship, and that they did with the law as they pleased. May God revenge them.”⁶⁰

Al-Malaṭī’s bias against the Turks may also be seen in the biographical entries of individual Mamluks. A case in point is Iyās al-Muḥammadī al-Nāṣirī, the governor of Tripoli in 863/1459. Al-Malaṭī depicts this amir entirely according to negative stereotypes of Turks: he is said to have been highly corrupt, acted with extreme violence toward the people and stolen their money, drunk wine, practiced homosexuality, and despised the Islamic religion to the extent of coming to the congregational prayer in the mosque on Friday after drinking wine.⁶¹

Alongside the accepted patterns of the ulama-historians, al-Malaṭī’s chronicles include “Turkish” elements similar to those mentioned in connection with Ibn Taghrībirdī, such as the interpretation of Turkish names. In fact, al-Malaṭī was enthusiastic, almost obsessive, about translating Mamluk names, where he

⁵⁶Tadayoshi, “Analysis,” esp. 33. The practice of beginning a biographical dictionary in the author’s birth year was probably a common phenomenon in medieval historiography, since al-Ṣafadī also started his *A’yān* in the year he was born, 696/1297, as he mentions in the introduction to his book. See: Little, “Al-Ṣafadī as Biographer,” 197.

⁵⁷Tadayoshi, “Analysis,” 47.

⁵⁸For al-Malaṭī’s integration of Quranic verses, hadith, and poetry, see the indexes in *Al-Rawḍ*, 4:253–62.

⁵⁹*Idh al-ʿiffah min ghālib hāʾulāʾi al-atrāk wa-in ḡaharat fa-al-ghālib fī-al-bāṭin bi-khilāfihā* (al-Malaṭī, *Rawḍ*, 2:115).

⁶⁰ʿAbd al-Bāsiṭ al-Malaṭī, *Nayl al-amal fī dhayl al-duwal*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Sidon, 2002), 2:157.

⁶¹This depiction is in al-Malaṭī’s unfinished treatise, *Al-Majmaʿ al-mufannan bi-al-muʿjam al-muʿanwan*; see Tadmurī’s introduction to *Rawḍ*, 1:13.



often sharply criticized and corrected Ibn Taghrībirdī's faulty translations.⁶² In addition, al-Malaṭī mentions those Mamluks and others who were eloquent in Turkish and wrote poetry in that language. In several cases he proudly notes that he heard some of this poetry. In the same positive manner he mentions Mamluks who excelled in *furūsiyah*. Sometimes, he mentions a Mamluk's knowledge of Turkish alongside his interest in Arabic and *fiqh*.⁶³

It is, however, doubtful that the integration of such elements should be perceived as al-Malaṭī's "pride" in his Turkish origin, exactly as it is questionable whether Ibn Taghrībirdī's historiographical writing aimed to be a "bridge" between Arab and Turkish cultures. It seems reasonable to assume that al-Malaṭī, just like Ibn Taghrībirdī,⁶⁴ integrates "Turkish" themes to show off his knowledge of Turkish language, literature, and culture mainly to boast of his unique intellectual superiority over most other historians. In this context we should also understand his sharp critique of Ibn Taghrībirdī—especially concerning his ignorance of the correct interpretation of Turkish names or terms.⁶⁵ In addition, it should be noted that references to matters such as excellency in *furūsiyah* or literary activity in the Turkish language are by no means unique to al-Malaṭī, Ibn Taghrībirdī, or other *awlād al-nās*-historians. These tropes are also mentioned as positive features of individual Mamluks by local ulama-historians. Al-Sakhāwī, for instance, despite his clearly condescending attitude toward the "Turks," finds "Turkish affairs" suitable to mention. In certain matters he even consulted "knowledgeable experts among the Turks."⁶⁶

EXAMINATION OF A SAMPLE OF BIOGRAPHICAL ENTRIES

The evidence for our evaluation of the attitudes of the historians from the *awlād al-nās* toward the Turks is strengthened if we examine a sample of thirteen biographical entries of especially learned Mamluks. Of course, this is a limited sample, and further research based on this method is warranted. In addition, it should be borne in mind that each essay has its own priorities or agenda. Al-Sakhāwī's *Al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, for example, is concerned with hadith and its transmitters; Ibn Taghrībirdī's *Al-Nujūm*, as mentioned above, is a composition of court literature while his *Al-Manhal* follows in the footsteps of al-Ṣafadī's *Al-*

⁶² See all interpretations of Turkish names by al-Malaṭī, as they appear in his *Rawḍ*, 4:271–75.

⁶³ Al-Malaṭī, *Nayl*, 7:124, 158.

⁶⁴ See above, n. 39.

⁶⁵ For instance, *Rawḍ*, 1:233–34. For other instances of name interpretation, see: *Rawḍ*, 1:234, 238, 307, 320, 347, 350–51, and n. 62 above. For critiques of Ibn Taghrībirdī's historical observations: *ibid.*, 1:235, 257, 327; Ben Othmen, "A Tale," 171.

⁶⁶ Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw'*, 10:38; Ben Othmen, "A Tale," 170.



Wāfi bi-al-wafayāt. However, the findings certainly reinforce the impression that it would be a mistake to state that *awlād al-nās* authors mention more erudite Mamluks than the ulama do or that they tend to place more emphasis on the intellectual competence of these Mamluks. To a large extent the opposite is true. It is instructive to reveal that in two cases ulama authors include in their works entries on learned Mamluks that are not mentioned at all in the works of *awlād al-nās* authors. These are the entries of **Sanjar al-Iftikhārī** (d. 741/1340) and **Ghulbek al-Turkī** (d. 741/1341), both of whom are mentioned only by Ibn Ḥajar.⁶⁷

Moreover, in about half of the remaining cases, it is the ulama authors who expand on the intellectual interests of the Mamluks. Al-Sakhāwī elaborates much more on **Yashbak al-faqīh's** (d. 876/1471) erudition than al-Malaṭī does. While al-Malaṭī briefly mentions Yashbak's knowledge of the Quran, the *qirā'āt* (variant readings of the Quran), and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), in addition to his "love for the ulama" and his good temper, al-Sakhāwī expands on Yashbak's scholarship in *fiqh*, *qirā'āt*, and hadith. He names Yashbak's *qirā'āt* teachers and the material he learned from them and Yashbak's learning of the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. In addition, al-Sakhāwī stresses the fact that Yashbak was his (al-Sakhāwī's) student and names the works Yashbak learned from him. Moreover, al-Sakhāwī praises Yashbak's religiosity and humble personality, and, interestingly enough, praises Yashbak's skills in *furūsiyah*, something al-Malaṭī ignores.⁶⁸ Another instance is **Tanam al-faqīh** (d. 882/1477–78). While al-Malaṭī mentions only his knowledge in *fiqh*, al-Sakhāwī adds information about Tanam's affiliation with the Hanafi rite, the teachers from whom he learned Arabic syntax, morphology (*ṣarf*), and other sciences, his teaching of many "Turks" and others, and the fact that al-Sakhāwī himself learned from one of Tanam's students.⁶⁹ Both al-Ṣafadī and Ibn Ḥajar mention that **Balabān al-Ghulmashī** (d. 709/1309) was a *muḥaddith*, and name two of his teachers in Damascus. However, Ibn Ḥajar, despite the laconic nature of his dictionary, adds more details on al-Ghulmashī's activity, such as that he was also a *muḥaddith* in Cairo and other cities. Ibn Ḥajar also praises al-Ghulmashī for his reverence for the hadith.⁷⁰ Al-Dhahabī and his student al-Ṣafadī mention the same details concerning the religious studies of **Aqqūsh al-Iftikhārī** (d. 699/1299–1300). However, al-Dhahabī adds that he himself learned

⁶⁷ Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 2:270, 3:298.

⁶⁸ Cf. al-Malaṭī, *Nayl*, 7:75; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʿ*, 10:271–72.

⁶⁹ Cf. al-Malaṭī, *Nayl*, 7:154; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʿ*, 3:45.

⁷⁰ Cf. al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 2:46; Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 2:24–25. Al-Maqrīzī dedicated an entry to Balabān as well, though he does not elaborate on his activity as *muḥaddith* as Ibn Ḥajar does: al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-muqaffā al-kabīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ya'lawī (Beirut, 1991), 2:489.



an important book concerning the study of the Quran from this amir.⁷¹ As for the high ranking amir **Sanjar al-Jāwulī** (d. 745/1345), Ibn Ḥajar provides the most detailed account of Sanjar's activity as *muḥaddith*, especially his commentary on *Musnad al-Shāfi'ī* and his prominent teacher and students. On the other hand, al-Ṣafadī and Ibn Taghrībirdī mention scant information about Sanjar's Islamic erudition while expanding on his political activities. Al-Malaṭī mentions a few details about Sanjar's Islamic expertise, but in a much shorter entry. However, the last three all stress the fact that Sanjar was a Shafi'ī jurist, a fact that is only hinted at by Ibn Ḥajar.⁷²

In three cases, *awlād al-nās* authors mention neither more nor less information than ulama—the information about the scholarship of the Mamluk is “balanced” by both kinds of authors. Both Ibn Taghrībirdī and al-Sakhāwī note **Taghrībirdī al-Bakalmushī's** (d. 845/1442) handwriting and significant knowledge in jurisprudence and history. Ibn Taghrībirdī also mentions his knowledge of *furūsiyah*.⁷³ Al-Malaṭī and Ibn Ḥajar mention his eloquence in Arabic.⁷⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, on the one hand, and Ibn Taghrībirdī and al-Malaṭī on the other, note that **Sarghitmish al-Nāṣirī** (d. 759/1358) was a scholar of various religious sciences such as the Quran, Arabic language, and Hanafi jurisprudence. However, all three also emphasize his cruel temperament. Interestingly, each of the historians provides a unique detail regarding Sarghitmish's education and religious inclination. Al-Maqrīzī adds his knowledge of grammar, Ibn Taghrībirdī mentions his love for the ulama, and al-Malaṭī remarks on his good handwriting.⁷⁵ Ibn Ḥajar dedicates to Sarghitmish a rather long entry that revolves around his career, briefly noting his proficiency in various sciences and his zeal for the Hanafi school.⁷⁶ As for amir **Baktūt al-Gharazī al-‘Azīzī al-Nāṣirī** (d. 699/1299), both al-Dhahabī and al-Ṣafadī indicate from whom he and his children heard hadith. Al-Dhahabī describes him as “from the men of the religion and the holy

⁷¹This book is *Kitāb al-i'tibār fī al-nāsikh wa-al-mansūkh min al-āthār* by Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Ḥāzimī. Cf. al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 1:560; idem, *Wāfī*, 9:325, al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 52:385. Al-Dhahabī mentions Aqqūsh al-Iftikhārī also in his *Muḥjam al-shuyūkh al-kabīr*, 1:183.

⁷²Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 2:267–68; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī*, 15:483–84; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 10:110; al-Malaṭī, *Nayl*, 1:102.

⁷³Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 4:56; in *Nujūm*, 15:497, Ibn Taghrībirdī mentions his handwriting. Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw'*, 3:27–28. See also Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 149.

⁷⁴Al-Malaṭī, *Nayl*, 5:163; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Imbā' al-ghumr bi-abnā' al-‘umr*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1969), 4:202.

⁷⁵Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 2:405; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 10:328; al-Malaṭī, *Nayl*, 1:309.

⁷⁶Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 2:306



war” (*min ahl al-dīn wa-al-jihād*), while al-Ṣafadī expands a little on his religious devotion.⁷⁷

Only in two distinct cases do we find the *awlād al-nās*-historians elaborating more on the intellectual skills of individual Mamluks. While Ibn Ḥajar indicates the good poetry of **Alṭunbughā al-Jāwūlī** (d. 744/1343) and his love for (religious) studies and the ulama, al-Ṣafadī, followed by Ibn Taghrībirdī, notes, in addition to mentioning Alṭunbughā’s good poetry, that he was knowledgeable in jurisprudence according to the Shafī’i school. In *Nujūm* Ibn Taghrībirdī describes him as an *adīb* and notes that Alṭunbughā was one of the “champions of poetry” among the Turks (*wa-huwa aḥad fuḥul al-shu‘arā’ min al-atrāk*). Indeed, his “Turkishness” in the context of Arabic poetry is not ignored by the *walad al-nās* author. Imitating the ulama’s remarks regarding Turks, Ibn Taghrībirdī notes: “I do not know anyone of his race who reaches his level in composing poetry” (*lā a‘lam aḥad[an] min abnā’ jinsihi fī rutbatihī fī naẓm al-qarīḍ*). The two authors also mention Alṭunbughā’s excellence in *furūsīyah*, as well as in games like chess and backgammon (*shaṭarānj* and *nard*).⁷⁸ As for **Ṭaybars ibn ‘Abd Allāh** (d. 749/1349), al-Ṣafadī, Ibn Ḥajar, and Ibn ‘Imād mention his scholarly skills in jurisprudence, his excellence in Arabic language and literature, his poetry, and his religious piety. Moreover, they all mention the grammar book that Ṭaybars composed, *Kitāb al-turfah*, in which he summarized Ibn Mālīk’s *Alfīyah* and Ibn al-Ḥājjib’s *Muqaddimah*. Al-Ṣafadī, followed by Ibn al-‘Imād, adds that Ṭaybars had knowledge in grammar, lexicography, metrics, and the fundamentals of religion and jurisprudence (*al-aṣlayn*), that he composed a commentary on his *Kitāb al-turfah*, and that he read a lot and prayed a lot at night. Both al-Ṣafadī and Ibn Ḥajar also quote from his poetry. However, al-Ṣafadī adds unique details according to which Ṭaybars was affiliated with the Hanafi school, that he was knowledgeable in the study of religious duties, and that he taught his grammar treatise to a group of scholars.⁷⁹

Last, but not least, the case of the very erudite amir **Taghrī Birmish al-faqīh** (d. 852/1448) is particularly interesting. All the historians in question mention that he was a great scholar who specialized in a variety of fields such as hadīth, *fiqh*, *tārīkh* (history), *adab*, and poetry, in addition to his mastery of *furūsīyah*. The most detailed *tarjamah* is provided by Ibn Taghrībirdī—an acquaintance of Taghrī Birmish—in his *Al-Manhal al-ṣāfi*. This historian details first-hand both the political-military career of this amir and his extensive scholarship, includ-

⁷⁷ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 52:432; al-Ṣafadī, *A’yān*, 1:717.

⁷⁸ Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 1:435–36; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, 9:366–67; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 3:72–73; idem, *Nujūm*, 10:105–6.

⁷⁹ Al-Ṣafadī, *A’yān*, 2:625; Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 2:330; Ibn al-‘Imād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahab*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Arnā’ūṭ (Damascus, 1992), 6:161.



ing mentions of his many teachers and the works he learned from them. Al-Malaṭī, on the other hand, provides a rather laconic description of his scholarship, not only in comparison with that of Ibn Taghrībirdī but even with that of al-Sakhāwī. Al-Malaṭī, for instance, does not mention Taghrī Birmish's rare talent in composing poetry in the Turkish language, a detail mentioned by al-Sakhāwī (and, of course, by Ibn Taghrībirdī). Based on his revered teacher, Ibn Ḥajar, al-Sakhāwī also notes various details about Taghrī Birmish's scholarship that are not mentioned by Ibn Taghrībirdī, such as the year he studied the canonical hadith collection *Sunan Ibn Mājah* and his teachers in Syria and Aleppo. In addition, he quotes Ibn Ḥajar as referring to Taghrī Birmish as “our companion, the outstanding *muḥaddith*” and as acknowledging that this amir deserved the epithet “*al-ḥāfiẓ*.”⁸⁰ However, his description of Taghrī Birmish's scholarship (but indeed also of his military-political career) is shorter than that of Ibn Taghrībirdī. Al-Sakhāwī—intentionally or not—notes that this amir “claimed” (*yazʿam*) that his father was a Muslim, while the other historians report it as a fact mentioned by Taghrī Birmish himself. In addition, he does not mention the amir's familiarity with *mansūb* calligraphy.⁸¹ In this case, then, we see that while the information given by Ibn Taghrībirdī is the most detailed regarding Taghrī Birmish's erudition, another *walad al-nās* historian, al-Malaṭī, skimps on the details in this regard. It is the local historian al-Sakhāwī who provides a richer and more sympathetic biographical entry.

CONCLUSIONS

The examination of the historiographical attitude of three prominent historians from among the *awlād al-nās* concerning the Turks and the Mamluk military elite reveals their clear adoption of the patterns of local Arab historians. The reason for this attitude might be, as suggested by Rabbat, their desire, as “literary newcomers, to identify with their local scholarly masters by adopting their dominant strategies of interpretation” and to adjust their writings to their audience, who were Arabic in speech and culture.⁸² By “omitting their Mamluk outlook from their writings,” they made it difficult to learn much about their *real* and perhaps complex inclinations regarding their Turkish and Arab identities.

The traditional Arabo-Islamic patterns adopted by *awlād al-nās*-historians include, mostly, condescending and disparaging comments depicting the *atrāk* as

⁸⁰On these terms in this context, see: Berkey, “Silver Threads,” 120–21.

⁸¹See: Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 4:58–65 (and shorter version in his *Nujūm*, 15:530–32); al-Malaṭī, *Nayl*, 5:264; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʿ*, 3:33–34; Berkey, “Silver Threads,” esp. 116–25.

⁸²Rabbat, “Representing,” 63.



uncouth barbarians, tyrannical exploiters of the local population, lacking intellectual abilities or respect for Islam, and lusting after young boys. Alongside that, *awlād al-nās*-historians usually play down the discussion of the intellectual or scholarly activities of individual Mamluks, though they do mention these activities as merits in some cases. In this respect, however, they continue to follow the patterns of Arab authors, who do not ignore the scholarly activities of some individual Mamluks. Moreover, an examination of several representative entries on learned Mamluks reveals that *awlād al-nās*-historians do not mention *more* intellectually inclined individual Mamluks than ulama-historians do, nor do they stress these abilities more than local Arab authors.

The “Turkish” themes discussed by the *awlād al-nās*-historians do not necessarily indicate their pride in their cultural heritage. The case study of Ibn Taghrībirdī and al-Malaṭī gives the impression that these themes should be understood in the context of the contemporary inter-historiographical discourse, as part of demonstrating a unique intellectual advantage of *awlād al-nās*-historians over Arab historians.

The above tentative conclusions are valid, however, for these three *awlād al-nās*-historians. Other historians affiliated with this group but more closely connected to military circles, such as Ibn al-Dawādārī (d. 713/1313), may convey different attitudes. As we saw, al-Ṣafadī’s complete affiliation with the ulama and bureaucrats’ circle, in addition to his father’s low-ranking amirate, might explain his total ignorance of any Turkish matters in his dictionaries. Thus, despite the clear tendency to adopt the patterns of local historians concerning the Turks, the familial, social, and professional milieu to which the *awlād al-nās*-historian was affiliated still played a factor in the characteristics of his historiographical writing as far as Turkish versus Arab issues are concerned.

