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Royal Authority, Justice, and Order in Society: The Influence of Ibn Khaldūn on the Writings of al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrībirdī

Modern historians of the Ottoman Empire have long been familiar with the decline paradigm, which was espoused by Ottoman intellectuals in the late tenth/sixteenth, eleventh/seventeenth, and twelfth/eighteenth centuries. These intellectuals felt that the empire had undergone a societal, financial, and administrative transformation for the worse. This transformation, or more accurately, decline, was often evaluated unfavorably in the context of previous periods of Ottoman history, especially but not exclusively the reigns of Mehmed I (r. 855–86/1451–81), Selim I (918–26/1512–20), or Suleyman the Magnificent (r. 926–74/1520–66).¹ Ottoman decline theorists tended both to describe society's ills, and to offer practical advice for curing them. This they did in the *nasihatnamahs*, a new type of advice manual that was peculiar to the Ottoman literary scene.² Unlike the older and well-established genre of mirrors-for-princes, which tended to proffer general advice on all aspects of royal behavior, the *nasihatnamahs* were unique in that they presented both descriptions of actual societal decline, and pragmatic programs for the reform of society.

Modern historians writing on the Ottoman Empire took over this model of decline, which resulted in the appearance of scholarly works on Ottoman history arranged according to the notions of rise, apogee, decline, and disintegration. More recently, however, it has been argued that the general hand-wringing about the state of the times and the proliferation of advice manuals written by concerned Ottomans points not, as previously suspected, to an actual state of decline and disarray in matters social, financial, and administrative, but rather to the health and vigor of the Ottoman system. Scholars are still discussing the usefulness of

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¹Ottoman nostalgia for times past has been described in modern literature as referring to a "Golden Age." For the complexities both of this nostalgia and the Golden Age model, see Cemal Kafadar, "Ottoman Historical Consciousness in the Post-Sülymânic Age: The Myth of the Golden Age," in *Süleymân the Second and His Time*, ed. Halil İncelik and Cemal Kafadar (Istanbul, 1993), 37–48.

²Cornell Fleischer, "From Şeyhzade Korkud to Mustafa Âli: Cultural Origins of the Ottoman *Nasihatname*," in *Third Congress on the Social and Economic History of Turkey: Princeton University, 24–26 August, 1983*, ed. Heath W. Lowry and Ralph S. Hattox (Istanbul, Washington, and Paris, 1990), 67.



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the decline paradigm as a way to understand Ottoman history, but such a discussion is too broad for the scope of this article, and will not be addressed here.³

More pertinent to the current venue is the question of the intellectual inspiration for Ottoman decline literature. Many sources played a role in the development of the genre, but only the intellectual contributions of one particular figure will concern us here.⁴ The figure in question is the North African scholar Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), whose work served to inspire the *nasihatnamahs* of several important Ottoman decline theorists.⁵ Ibn Khaldūn presented a clear analysis of several crucial ideas: the cyclical theory of history with its assumptions about the rise and fall of dynasties; the related comparison of the state to the body with a life cycle of birth, growth, maturity, old age, and death; and the connections among strong royal authority, justice, and an ordered society, with the consequent assumption that weak royal authority led to the spread of injustice and societal disorder.⁶ Ibn Khaldūn was not unique in presenting these notions, especially that of the relationship between royal authority and order; indeed, although central to his arguments in the *Muqaddimah*, this concept is in fact recognizable as the ancient political theory of the Circle of Justice, which had already entered the Ottoman intellectual scene in the writings of such thinkers as Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) and Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502–3). Like Ibn Khaldūn himself, they drew on the full array of Persian, Greek, and Indian statecraft, all of which helped contribute to the decline genre.⁷ Indeed, Ibn Khaldūn was so popular not because his ideas were unique (although some of them were), but rather because he expressed familiar ideas in a systematic and straightforward way.⁸ Thus probably during the tenth/sixteenth century and certainly by the eleventh/seventeenth, Ibn Khaldūn had developed a following of well-educated Ottoman admirers, many of whom

³See Cemal Kafadar's "The Question of Ottoman Decline," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4 (1998): 30–75; Cornell Fleischer, "Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism and 'Ibn Khaldūnism' in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18 (1983): 198–219. Also see Kafadar, "Golden Age"; Bernard Lewis, "Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline," *Islamic Studies* 1 (1962): 71–87; Klaus Röhrborn, *Untersuchen zur osmanischen Verwaltungsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1973), 6–11; Hans Georg Majer, "Die Kritik an dem Ulema in den osmanischen politischen Traktaten des 16.–18. Jahrhunderts," in *Social and Economic History of Turkey (1071–1920)*, ed. Osman Okyar and Halal İnalçık (Ankara, 1980), 147–55; and Halil İnalçık, "Military and Fiscal Transformation in the Ottoman Empire, 1600–1700," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 6 (1980): 283–84.

⁴See Fleischer, "Nasihatname."

⁵For a discussion of the emergence of Ibn Khaldūn as a major figure in Ottoman reform literature see Fleischer, "Ibn Khaldūnism," 199–203.

⁶Ibid., 199–200.

⁷Ibid., 201.

⁸Ibid., 202.



believed both in the reality of Ottoman decline, and in their own power to suggest reform.⁹

A familiarity with the question of Ottoman decline might prompt historians of the Mamluk Sultanate to investigate the Mamluk case in light of the Ottoman model. Certainly Mamluk Egypt and Syria experienced considerable societal and economic disarray during the ninth/fifteenth and early tenth/sixteenth centuries, if not earlier.¹⁰ And certainly at least two major ninth/fifteenth-century Mamluk-era intellectuals, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) and his student Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470), appear to have felt that they were living in a period of societal decline. Furthermore, of these two men, al-Maqrīzī was unquestionably influenced by the work, theories, and person of Ibn Khaldūn, while Ibn Taghrībirdī appears to have absorbed Ibn Khaldūnian notions indirectly through al-Maqrīzī.

The parallels between the Ottoman and Mamluk cases are certainly far from complete, however, for whereas Ottoman intellectuals responded to the challenge of perceived decline by penning pragmatic programs of renewal, Mamluk authors—with only few exceptions—displayed little interest in writing advice literature at all.¹¹ Furthermore, it has been taken as axiomatic by modern scholars

⁹Ibid., 199–203.

¹⁰For a discussion of the problems in society begun during the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn, see Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History: The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn* (Leiden, 1995).

¹¹Two exceptions to this rule are the *Kitāb Tahrīr al-Aḥkām fī Tadbīr Ahl al-Islām* of Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Jamā‘ah (d. 833/1333), and the *Āthār al-uwal fī Tartīb al-Duwal* of al-Ḥasan Ibn al-‘Abbāsī (fl. 708/1308–9). See Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Jamā‘ah, *Kitāb Tahrīr al-Aḥkām fī Tadbīr Ahl al-Islām*, ed. Hans Kofler as “Handbuch des Islamischen Staats- und Verwaltungsrechtes von Badr al-Dīn Ibn Gamā‘ah,” *Islamica* 6 (1934): 347–414, and Ḥasan Ibn al-‘Abbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal fī Tartīb al-Duwal*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Umayrah (Beirut, 1989). However, both works were composed long before the accepted “decline” phase of Mamluk history began in the ninth/fifteenth century. Predictably, these two works address the greatest concern of early eighth/fourteenth century Mamluk society, the threat of military, cultural, and religious annihilation at the hands of the Ilkhanids. As a result, both works seek to provide advice and moral support to the ruler in the face of this danger. A later example of advice work is the *Fākihāt al-Khulafā’ wa-Mufākahāt al-Zurafā’* by the ninth/fifteenth-century author Ibn ‘Arabshāh (d. 854/1450). This work is a collection of enlightening tales featuring both humans and animals, and also includes snippets of historical narrative. A second advice work attributed to Ibn ‘Arabshāh is the Persian *Marzubān-nāmāh*, but Ibn ‘Arabshāh was merely a translator for this work, not the author. Furthermore, although Ibn ‘Arabshāh began and ended his life in the Mamluk Sultanate, his many years spent in Central Asia and Anatolia make him a unique intellect and voice, and not a product of the Mamluk intellectual milieu. Thus he and his advice works should be considered exceptions to the Mamluk norm. For the best short biography of Ibn ‘Arabshāh to date, see Robert G. Irwin, “What the Partridge told the Eagle: a Neglected Arabic Source on Chinggis Khan and the Early



writing in English that Ibn Khaldūn had little effect on intellectuals writing in Arabic. (The opposite point of view has been taken as axiomatic by modern scholars writing in Arabic.) Regardless, Ibn Khaldūn did serve as an important mentor and teacher to al-Maqrīzī, who, like the Ottoman decline theorists, argued powerfully that his own day and time suffered from societal, administrative, and financial disfunction and disarray. Al-Maqrīzī supported his arguments by defaming his contemporaries, particularly members of the military elite and their civilian advisors. In the later stages of his life, al-Maqrīzī displayed a marked interest in the past, whether that of his own family or of Egypt as a whole, which could be interpreted as nostalgia for an earlier (and better) vanished age.

I myself have argued elsewhere that both al-Maqrīzī's disillusionment with contemporary life and his criticism of the ruling elite can be traced in part to his own personal failures in the competitive world of the Mamluk ulama.¹² Certainly the particulars of al-Maqrīzī's own experience cannot be discounted in understanding the grim vision he brought to some of his writings on contemporary society.¹³ Nevertheless, in view of the effect that Ibn Khaldūn had on Ottoman theorists of decline, it seems sensible to question his effect on al-Maqrīzī. After all, al-Maqrīzī was extremely impressed by Ibn Khaldūn, whom he described as: ". . . the elite that the Age brings only rarely."¹⁴ And al-Maqrīzī not only read Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah*, but praised it highly: ". . . [It is] unlike any other work . . . the essence of knowledge and science, and the product of sound intellect and understanding."¹⁵

Thus if Ibn Khaldūn's work was influential enough in the Ottoman Empire to produce a group of admirers who knew him only through his writing, surely the same compelling ideas might have had some effect on a student like al-Maqrīzī, who knew Ibn Khaldūn personally and was favorably impressed by him. Furthermore, since Ibn Khaldūn's intellectual legacy in Ottoman territory was primarily due to his appealing formulations of the notions of royal authority and justice, the cyclical history of dynasties, and the human metaphor for the body

History of the Mongols," in *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy*, ed. Reuven Amitai-Preiss and David O. Morgan (Leiden, 1999), 5.

¹²Anne F. Broadbridge, "Academic Rivalry and the Patronage System in Fifteenth-Century Egypt: al-'Aynī, al-Maqrīzī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 85–107.

¹³For a more comprehensive view of al-Maqrīzī's life, personality, and peculiarities, see the work of Nasser Rabbat elsewhere in this volume. For a discussion of social class in this context, see Irmeli Perho, "Al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrī Birdī as Historians of Contemporary Events," in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950–1800)*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (London, 2001): 107–20.

¹⁴Maḥmūd al-Jalīlī, "Tarjamat Ibn Khaldūn lil-Maqrīzī," *Majallat al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Irāqī* 13 (1966): 220.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 235.



politic, might not al-Maqrīzī also display signs of having been influenced by some of those inspiring ideas?

Indeed al-Maqrīzī does demonstrate a marked interest in at least one notion dear to Ibn Khaldūn: that of the connections among royal authority, justice, and the maintenance of order in society. In al-Maqrīzī's hands, however, the concept is most frequently shown in reverse as the weakening of royal authority, the proliferation of injustice and the resultant spread of societal disorder. Evidence for al-Maqrīzī's interest can be found in his little treatise *Ighāthah al-Ummah fī Kashf al-Ghummah*, which was written in 808/1405 in response to an economic crisis in Egypt.¹⁶ The crisis in question had begun in 806/1403–4, and was characterized by rapid and unprecedented inflation, especially in the prices of foodstuffs and clothing. The seriousness of the matter is indicated by the behavior of the Royal Mamluks, who rioted early in 806/1403 to force the sultan al-Nāṣir Faraj (r. 801–8/1399–1405; 808–15/1405–12) to give them their pay, clothing allowances, and fodder for their horses.¹⁷ Indeed, the difficulties of the situation were further mirrored by the behavior of Faraj's viziers, three of whom went into hiding in 806/1403–4 because they could not handle the financial demands of the vizierate and the expenses of the Royal household and Royal Mamluks.¹⁸ This crisis at the highest levels of the financial administration was exacerbated throughout society by a poor Nile flood, a spate of bad weather that led to illness and death, and inflation in the price of medicine.¹⁹

The economic trouble of 806/1403–4 was surely worsened by diplomatic tribulations, for it was in this year that Faraj was forced to profess his vassalage to the Turkic warlord Timur (d. 807/1405), who had occupied and devastated Damascus in 803/1400–1. Relations between the two sides were tense for months, beginning in Muḥarram 806/July–August 1403 when ambassadors from Timur arrived and paraded through the streets of Damascus and Cairo, waving Timur's banners from the back of an elephant.²⁰ Worse yet, with this embassy Timur sent an adolescent-

¹⁶Adel Allouche, *Mamluk Economics: A Study and Translation of al-Maqrīzī's Ighāthah* (Salt Lake City, 1994).

¹⁷Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Muluk*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn and Sa'īd 'Āshūr (Cairo, 1956–73), 3:1113.

¹⁸In the previous year there had only been one disappearance; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:1104. For the disappearances in 806/1403–4, see 3:1113, 1116, and 1119.

¹⁹For Nile flood problems, see al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:1115; for bad weather, illness, and death, see 3:1119–20, 1124–25.

²⁰Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:1111; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah mentions their arrival in Damascus in Dhū al-Qa'dah 805/May–June 1403 on the way to Cairo in *Tārīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah*, ed. 'Adnān Darwīsh (Damascus, 1977–97), 4:312; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-Ghumr fī Abnā' al-'Umr*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1389/1969), 2:256.



sized robe of honor to the adolescent sultan.²¹ The flags, the elephant, the robe: all these served as a proclamation of Timur's superiority and a humiliating public indication of Mamluk vassalage. When Timur's ambassadors were finally sent back to Samarqand at the end of the year, they were accompanied by a Mamluk ambassador and an unspecified amount of material goods, which appears to have been meant as tribute.²² Any loss in money and goods to Samarqand may have struck a further financial blow to an administration already in dire straits. Interestingly, however, al-Maqrīzī does not mention these material goods either in the *Kitāb al-Sulūk*, or in the *Ighāthah*. This suggests either that al-Maqrīzī was unaware of the tribute leaving the sultanate for points east, or (like most other Mamluk chroniclers) was too embarrassed to discuss it.²³

At any rate, the focus of the *Ighāthah* is on internal matters, which implies that it was intended for some person of authority within the Mamluk administration. Unfortunately the work does not address any particular individual, thus al-Maqrīzī's specific audience—if he had one—is unknown. The contents of the work indicate that al-Maqrīzī understood Ibn Khaldūn's maxim about the need for strong royal authority to provide justice to a well-ordered state, for in the treatise al-Maqrīzī goes to some trouble to identify the reasons for current financial decline and explain the singular role played in that decline by the injustice of the ruling class. In the text al-Maqrīzī describes a historical series of dearths and famines in Egypt, but takes care to suggest that they were all caused by natural disasters or insufficient Nile floods. When he reaches the economic crisis of the early ninth/fifteenth century, by contrast, al-Maqrīzī attributes it directly to the incompetence and mismanagement of the ruling class, stating: ". . . what has befallen the population is caused solely by the malfeasance of the leaders and

²¹The Mamluk amirs refused to let Faraj put the robe on; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā'*, 2:256.

²²Ibn 'Arabshāh mentions the arrival of a Mamluk ambassador with tribute in Samarqand. See Ibn 'Arabshāh, *'Ajā'ib al-Maqqdūr fī Nawā'ib Tīmūr*, ed. Aḥmad Fā'iz al-Ḥimsī (Beirut, 1407/1987), 380; J. H. Sanders, *Tamerlane: or, Timur, the Great Amir* (Lahore, 1936), 220. Sanders does not appear to have realized the significance of the Arabic technical terms for tribute, *ḥaml* and *taqādum* (sing. *taqdimah*), which he translates merely as "various gifts." Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo also makes a passing reference to a Mamluk ambassador and a collection of "gifts" [tribute?] in *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo to the court of Timour at Samarcand, A.D. 1403–6*, tr. Clements R. Markham, Hakluyt Society Second Series No. 26 (London, 1859), 86–87.

²³The only contemporary Mamluk historians to discuss Timur's ambassadors in humiliating detail are Ibn Ḥajar and Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā'*, 2:256–57, and Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 4:312. The others, al-Maqrīzī included, mention the embassy but omit the embarrassing parts. I cannot believe, however, that they were unaware of them. After all, who could miss banners waving from an elephant that paraded in public in multiple Mamluk cities?



rulers, and their negligence with regard to the public interest.²⁴

Al-Maqrīzī lists three reasons for the current economic disaster, all of which stem from inappropriate and oppressive behavior (i.e., injustice) among the ruling elite. First is the fact that important positions in the civil administration can only be gained or kept through the payment of bribes. He argues that this practice results in oppression by the appointed official on those beneath him, since he needs to make back the investment that gained him the position in the first place.²⁵ Al-Maqrīzī specifically mentions market inspection (*ḥisbah*) as an example of one of these corrupt positions, which may reflect his own loss of that post after an unpleasant struggle with his rival, the historian Badr al-Dīn Mahmūd al-‘Aynī, in 801–3/1399–1400.²⁶

Al-Maqrīzī identifies the second reason for the economic crisis as the increase of taxes and fees collected from estates (*iqṭā‘*s) controlled by members of the military elite. He explains that this increase has taken place solely so that the military elite can squeeze these estates of every last drop of profit, to the detriment both of those working the land, and the land itself.²⁷ Like the changes in the system of civil appointments, this demonstrates not only the greed of the military elite, but the injustice of their behavior as they permit their civilian subordinates to plunder estates and oppress the laborers on them.

The third reason al-Maqrīzī gives for the current economic malaise is the ill-advised and tyrannical decision of the Mamluk administration to circulate copper coins (*fals*, pl. *fulūs*) as currency. This is the main target of al-Maqrīzī's essay.²⁸ When elaborating on this theme, al-Maqrīzī identifies the major villain in the economic ruin of Egypt as one Mahmūd ibn ‘Alī, a civilian from Alexandria who rose in the military hierarchy until he reached the position of the high steward (*ustādār*) under Barqūq in 790/1388, shortly before that sultan was thrown from power in the civil war of 791/1388–89.²⁹ Mahmūd's exemplary loyalty to the sultan during the unrest of 791/1388–89 earned him a stint in prison in chains; this seems to have inspired Barqūq to reinstate Mahmūd shortly after he himself fought his way back to power in Muḥarram 792/December 1389–January 1390. Mahmūd soon reached glorious heights of responsibility, power, and wealth.³⁰

²⁴Allouche, *Ighāthah*, 24.

²⁵Ibid., 52.

²⁶See Broadbridge, "Rivalry," 89–90. In that article I did not address the question of bribery, but the role that bribery played in the struggle between the two men might also be considered.

²⁷Allouche, *Ighāthah*, 53–54.

²⁸Allouche, *Ighāthah*, editor's introduction, 2–4; text, 55–72.

²⁹Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:579.

³⁰See the events of 791/1388–89 in the *Sulūk*, especially 3:621, 624, 627–28, 651, 655, 673, 677;



Indeed, it was only the machinations of his own ambitious protégé, one Ibn Ghurāb, that led to the high steward's downfall, the confiscation of his enormous wealth, and his ultimate imprisonment, torture and death in Rajab 798/April–May 1396.³¹

Although al-Maqrīzī chronicles Mahmūd's rise and precipitous disgrace in detail in the *Kitāb al-Sulūk*, his censure of Mahmūd appears to hinge on a solitary event. This took place in 794/1391–92, when at the height of his power Mahmūd ordered copper coins to be struck in the mint at Alexandria. At that time copper was already in use in Cairo; nevertheless, the creation of additional coins caused al-Maqrīzī great concern, for the new Alexandrian coins were of a lower weight and quality than those circulating in Cairo. Furthermore, Mahmūd stopped the minting of silver dirhams at the same time, with the result that silver coins became rare.³² To make matters worse, al-Maqrīzī claims, the little silver that did remain was melted down into jewelry and thereby removed from circulation.³³ Al-Maqrīzī goes on to outline a program of minting and regulating coins, which would return the currency to a shared gold-silver standard and limit copper coins to a marginal role. In his opinion, such a program would solve the economic difficulties Mamluk society was facing.³⁴

In sum, al-Maqrīzī argues that the financial disarray of the early ninth/fifteenth century is solely a result of the injustice of the ruling class, which results in a corrupt appointment system, excessive taxes, and the promotion of a bad currency. This linking of injustice with societal trouble both echoes Ibn Khaldūn and foreshadows the Ottoman concern with weakened royal authority, the spread of injustice, and the resultant appearance of decline. Like the Ottoman *nasihatnamahs*, the *Ighāthah* appears to have been designed not only to draw attention to the reasons for disarray, but to propose a cure for them, in this case through currency reform, which was to restore society to its proper financial order and arrest the otherwise inevitable weakening of the body politic. It is noteworthy that al-Maqrīzī's criticisms focus on the ruling elite, both its military men and its civilian advisors, since al-Maqrīzī himself aspired to the ranks of the latter. In this way he resembles Ottoman decline authors, who tended to be members of the very ruling apparatus they sought to improve. Interestingly, however, al-Maqrīzī does not offer solutions

for Mahmūd's reinstatement see 3:708 and 713.

³¹For the details of Mahmūd's downfall, as well as Ibn Ghurāb's role in it, see al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:839–40; 850, 851, 854, 855, 856–57, 861, 869, 872, 876, 885.

³²For the lower weight and quality, see al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:774; for the cessation of minting silver, see Allouche, *Ighāthah*, 71.

³³Allouche, *Ighāthah*, 71.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 80–85.



to the problems either of bribery within the civil administration, or of extortion from estates. In fact, he does not challenge the existing political system in any way, but merely suggests his limited currency reform as a panacea for greater problems.

In order to implement his program of reform, al-Maqrīzī would have needed to capture the attention of a highly-placed member of the military elite. But as mentioned above, the intended audience for the work is unknown. It appears unlikely that Faraj was a candidate, since Faraj is never mentioned in the text, and since al-Maqrīzī's relations to the sultan do not appear to have been close at the time he wrote the *Ighāthah*. A second likely choice was the amir Yashbak al-Sha'bānī, who was another of al-Maqrīzī's patrons, but Yashbak was busy rebelling against and reconciling with Faraj in 807–8/1405–6.³⁵ Regardless of the intended audience, al-Maqrīzī's plan of currency reform was never carried out.

After this unpromising beginning, al-Maqrīzī did not immediately compose other advice works. This may have been a result of his own career stagnation, for even as he wrote the *Ighāthah* his distance from those in power was steadily increasing. Later, however, al-Maqrīzī returned to his fledgling reforming notions by taking a chapter of the *Ighāthah* and expanding it into a separate tract, the *Shudhūr al-'Uqūd fī Dhikr al-Nuqūd*. Unlike the *Ighāthah*, the *Shudhūr* had an explicit royal audience, the sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (r. 815–24/1412–21).³⁶ It appears to date from the early years of Shaykh's reign, and was probably written shortly after Shaykh's currency reforms of 817/1414–15 and 818/1415–16, which al-Maqrīzī mentions in the text.³⁷ Al-Maqrīzī himself states that he received a royal order to write about money for the sultan.³⁸

In the *Shudhūr*, al-Maqrīzī returns to his earlier theme of the relationship among weak royal authority, high-level malfeasance, and financial trouble. He also returns to his griping about Barqūq's high steward, Mahmūd ibn 'Alī, and the 794/1391–92 minting of copper in Alexandria. Here al-Maqrīzī refines his argument slightly, dropping his references to the uses of silver as jewelry, and instead focusing on Mahmūd's minting activities as the primary cause of the increase in copper coinage and the eventual near-abandonment of gold and silver for copper. Al-Maqrīzī argues that shortly after Barqūq's death copper became the standard currency: all prices were reckoned and wages paid in *fulūs*, and all other currencies

³⁵ Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi' li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi'* (Cairo, n.d.), 10:278–79.

³⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr al-'Uqūd fī Dhikr al-Nuqūd*, ed. Muḥammad Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Cairo, 1387/1967), [2], n. 1; also see references to Shaykh on 31, 32, 33, 35.

³⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, 33. For a discussion of the dating of the *Shudhūr*, see the work of John Meloy elsewhere in this volume.

³⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, [2].



were linked to copper.³⁹ As in the *Ighāthah*, al-Maqrīzī does not merely identify the reason for financial decline, but proposes a program designed to stop it. This time, he recommends that copper simply be removed from the market, so that all transactions would be undertaken in silver coins. The enforcement of this regulation would be the task of the sultan and his officers, especially the market inspector. The reform would bring about financial resurgence and—perhaps most importantly—the reassertion of proper royal authority.⁴⁰

No source records the reception of al-Maqrīzī's little exhortatory tract at Shaykh's court, even though Shaykh himself commanded that the work be done. This may have been one of al-Maqrīzī's two attempts to gain Shaykh's favor, the other being the composition of a panegyric about the sultan based on a poem written by Ibn Nāhiḍ (d. 841/1438), which also appears to have received no recognition.⁴¹ Any meaningful response to al-Maqrīzī's advice-giving impetus has gone unremarked by history, and indeed al-Maqrīzī himself seems to have soon abandoned his reforming zeal in favor of immersing himself in history and the past.

But if al-Maqrīzī was truly imbued with a desire to improve Mamluk society through practical advice, was his merely a reformer's voice crying in the wilderness? Although ninth/fifteenth century Mamluk historians in general do not display much interest in advice literature, an investigation of the writing of al-Maqrīzī's student Ibn Taghrībirdī does lead to the observance of a peculiar phenomenon. It must be stated outright that Ibn Taghrībirdī produced no advice works whatsoever. Nor was he personally inspired by Ibn Khaldūn and his compelling ideas, as was al-Maqrīzī; indeed Ibn Taghrībirdī did not even know the North African scholar since he was born after Ibn Khaldūn's death. Ibn Taghrībirdī's biography for Ibn Khaldūn—copied from al-Maqrīzī—is ordinary in the extreme, omits al-Maqrīzī's lengthy praise of the North African scholar, and makes no mention whatsoever of the *Muqaddimah*.⁴²

Nevertheless, through al-Maqrīzī Ibn Taghrībirdī may have gained something of Ibn Khaldūn's ideas, especially his concern with royal authority, justice, and society. He may also have gained al-Maqrīzī's predilection for advising rulers, although Ibn Taghrībirdī presented his advice in a form that al-Maqrīzī himself did not use: historical narrative. In fact, Ibn Taghrībirdī appears to have felt that one purpose of historical writing was to function as a didactic tool for the instruction

³⁹Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, 31; also see *Sulūk*, 3:1131–33.

⁴⁰Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, 35–36; 40.

⁴¹Broadbridge, "Rivalry," 92.

⁴²Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi wa-al-Mustawfā ba'da al-Wāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo, 1993), 7:205–9.



of the ruling elite. In an often quoted description of the historian al-‘Aynī, for example, Ibn Taghrībirdī praises al-‘Aynī for his success in transforming Barsbāy into a wise and thoughtful sovereign by reading history aloud to him.⁴³

Ibn Taghrībirdī himself wrote two major histories, the *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah*, and the *Ḥawādith al-Duhūr fī Madá al-Ayyām wa-al-‘Uṣūr*. The *Ḥawādith* was intended as a continuation of al-Maqrīzī’s *Kitāb al-Sulūk*, and does not appear to have been written with any particular patron in mind.⁴⁴ By contrast, the *Nujūm* was penned at least initially for a specific royal personage: Muḥammad, the son of Sultan Jaqmaq (r. 842–57/1438–53). Muḥammad was not only a candidate for the throne, but was also Ibn Taghrībirdī’s friend and the husband of Ibn Taghrībirdī’s niece.⁴⁵

A preliminary examination of the *Nujūm* reveals an awareness of decline as a product of weakened royal authority and injustice. Of course, during Ibn Taghrībirdī’s lifetime the sultanate was undergoing a period of actual societal and financial difficulty, thus Ibn Taghrībirdī’s descriptions of decline must obviously be understood in part as a reflection of existing conditions. Nevertheless, Ibn Taghrībirdī invokes the specter of decline not only to describe actual conditions in the sultanate, but also to make a moral and didactic point about the connection between injustice and decline. In fact, occasionally Ibn Taghrībirdī manipulates his historical narrative in order to draw this connection, and thereby give a moral lesson. Thus if al-Maqrīzī served as a conduit both for Ibn Khaldūn’s idea on royal authority and decline, and for the possibility of correcting decline through advice, Ibn Taghrībirdī seems to have transformed the ideas to motifs decorating a historical work designed to be both entertainment and a didactic tool. Muḥammad ibn Jaqmaq served as an ideal candidate for Ibn Taghrībirdī’s advice, being both a personal friend and a potential sultan.

To give a few examples:

In the section of the *Nujūm* that corresponds roughly to his own lifetime, Ibn Taghrībirdī mentions a number of declining institutions. These institutions were diverse, and included such areas of society as the silk spinning industry, irrigated agricultural land, the vizierate, and the office of the comptroller, to name a few. In general, Ibn Taghrībirdī posits that the breakdown of these institutions can be

⁴³Ibn Taghrībirdī, *History of Egypt, 1382–1469 A.D.*, tr. William Popper (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1958), 4:158.

⁴⁴Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn, *Ibn Taghrībirdī: Mu’arrikh Miṣr fī al-‘Aṣr al-Mamlūkī* (Beirut, 1992), 111–12; also see Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith al-Duhūr fī Madá al-Ayyām wa-al-‘Uṣūr*, ed. Kamāl al-Dīn ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Alī ([Cairo], 1410/1990), editor’s introduction, 1:32–33 and text, 1:51–52.

⁴⁵Shams al-Dīn, *Ibn Taghrībirdī*, 34.



attributed to trouble among the ruling elite, i.e., to weakened ruling authority and injustice.

For example, Ibn Taghrībirdī asserts that the decline of silk spinning in Egypt is the direct result of the tyranny, injustice, and mismanagement of the rulers since the 790s/1390s.⁴⁶ He also describes the glory of the vizierate in “olden days,” then bemoans the present degraded situation: “. . . at the end of the eighth/[fourteenth] century *the rulers of Egypt abased themselves* [emphasis added] and in their days the office was filled by the refuse among men and the lowest type of Coptic scribe, while the functions of the office also were changed. *With these appointments there disappeared the splendor of this great office.*”⁴⁷ Elsewhere he argues that the sultans of his own day no longer made wise decisions in other important military appointments, as had been the case in past ages: “The kings of this time of ours have debased themselves.”⁴⁸ Since Ibn Taghrībirdī actually had good relationships with many of the sultans who were his contemporaries, including Barsbāy (r. 824–41/1422–38) and Jaqmaq, his general comments about misrule and debasement should be understood as fodder for his moral and didactic points about proper rule.⁴⁹ Indeed, in his obituary for Barsbāy, Ibn Taghrībirdī gives both positive and negative moral lessons by condemning Barsbāy’s avariciousness as an example to avoid, but touting the large amount of money Barsbāy left behind, and praising his reign as one of “extreme security and low prices.”⁵⁰

But Ibn Taghrībirdī’s concern with the question of royal behavior also appears in those sections of the *Nujūm* that treat historical periods prior to his own lifetime. One striking example is in his discussion of Timur’s occupation of Damascus in 803/1400–1, where he presents less a straightforward historical narrative than a cautionary tale of the evils that misgovernment can wreak on society. In this passage, Ibn Taghrībirdī identifies the struggle for power among the Mamluk amirs as an example of weak royal authority, and suggests that it was the ultimate reason for Timur’s invasion of Syria and his destruction of the major Syrian cities.

In the passage, Ibn Taghrībirdī focuses on the arrival of ambassadors from the Ottoman Sultan Beyazid (r. 791–804/1389–1402) in Cairo in Dhū al-Ḥijjah 802/July–August 1400, some months before Timur’s armies reached Mamluk territory. The Ottoman envoys asked Sultan Faraj for a military alliance against Timur, but the Mamluk amirs rejected the proposal and scorned Beyazid. At this point, Ibn Taghrībirdī departs from his narrative to opine that such an alliance

⁴⁶Ibn Taghrībirdī, *History*, 4:112.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 6:48.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁹Shams al-Dīn, *Ibn Taghrībirdī*, 33.

⁵⁰Ibn Taghrībirdī, *History*, 4:156.



would have been a good idea, argues that the Mamluk amirs *should have* arranged one, and criticizes them for quarreling and failing to identify the correct course of action. "What Beyazid suggested was one of the best possible courses of action [*min akbar al-maṣāliḥ*]." ⁵¹ If only the Mamluk amirs had behaved properly, Ibn Taghrībirdī moans, Timur would not have been able to defend himself against the combined Ottoman-Mamluk forces: "The common good [*al-maṣlaḥah*] required that a truce be reached with the abovementioned Beyazid ibn 'Uthmān. He would send someone to lead the Egyptian armies, while the Egyptian armies would be sent to Beyazid ibn 'Uthmān to cooperate with his armies. Then Timur would not have been able to withstand them. Indeed, both armies would have been capable of defeating him, if not for what we mentioned [i.e., the amirs' refusal to ally themselves with the Ottoman sultan]." ⁵²

To heighten his portrayal of the stupidity of the Mamluk leadership, Ibn Taghrībirdī quotes the dramatic confidence of a Mamluk amir, one Asanbāy, who had been captured by Timur and escaped years later: "Timur told me that in his lifetime he had met and fought many armies. In all that time he had never seen armies equal to two: the Egyptian army, and the Ottoman army." ⁵³ The impression given is that Timur's dreadful treatment of Damascus only came to pass because the Mamluk amirs refused to stop quarreling and focus on seizing the opportunity presented by the Ottoman ambassadors.

Although poignant, Ibn Taghrībirdī's lament was probably unjustified. In actual fact, Beyazid had already taken over a number of Mamluk forts in Eastern Anatolia by the time this embassy was sent. Beyazid had also annexed the lands of the Mamluks' Anatolian Turkmen vassals, the Dulqadirids. If military cooperation between the Mamluks and the Ottoman ruler had indeed taken place, it might have been just as disastrous for the Mamluks as their eventual abandonment of Damascus to Timur. Most striking about this passage, however, is the moralistic and didactic effect of Ibn Taghrībirdī's commentary. Ibn Taghrībirdī's presentation of the material suggests the dangers of weak royal authority, which is here represented by the shortsighted and bickering amirs, who were filling in for the adolescent sultan. By adding his own critical remarks to the narrative, Ibn Taghrībirdī emphasizes the poor behavior of the Mamluk amirs, connects this behavior to the eventual military disaster, and thereby gives a lesson about proper rule. ⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, 1413/1992), 12:174.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 174–75.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁴ Ibn Taghrībirdī's lament over the campaign of Timur is also colored by his desire to glorify his



Nor is Ibn Taghrībirdī's treatment of the early Mamluk era free of unfavorable comparisons between past and present. A striking example occurs in his obituary for Qalāwūn, where he uses a description of Qalāwūn's strict control of his mamluks as an opportunity to bewail the fallen standards of his own day. He sighs nostalgically about the discipline, military skills, and masterful participation in jihad demonstrated by Qalāwūn's mamluks, then launches into criticism of contemporary mamluks for their small number, physical weakness, and cowardice. He regrets that the only opportunity for jihad in his own century was the advent of Timur, in which Mamluk forces were completely disgraced. Perhaps to deepen the contrast between the good old days and the bad new days, here Ibn Taghrībirdī neglects to mention the three successful naval campaigns Barsbāy sent to Cyprus in the 820s/1420s, although elsewhere the historian celebrates them as a shining example of jihad and one of Barsbāy's greatest achievements.⁵⁵

Ibn Taghrībirdī continues the theme of jihad in Qalāwūn's obituary by waxing eloquent about the martial virtues of such great warriors as the Ayyubids Saladin (d. 589/1193) and al-Malik al-Kāmil (d. 635/1238). While praising them, he neglects to mention that al-Kāmil actually ceded Jerusalem to Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen in 626/1229, although Ibn Taghrībirdī is perfectly well aware of this event, and in fact mentions it in his entry for that year.⁵⁶ In Qalāwūn's obituary, Ibn Taghrībirdī also discusses the general qualities of rulers of yore, whom he characterizes as well-mannered, decorous, modest with elders, kind to juniors, and endowed with kingly honor [*nāmūs*].⁵⁷ The military elite of Ibn Taghrībirdī's own day suffers by comparison, for he describes its members as arrogant, unskilled in the martial arts, greedy, unscrupulous, and unmanly. He even includes a comparison of apparel between Qalāwūn's day and the present, and naturally presents the modest fashions of Qalāwūn's time as superior.⁵⁸ Since elsewhere Ibn Taghrībirdī's opinion of both the contemporary and historical ruling elites is far more balanced, we must understand this comparison more as a moral lesson for a potential ruler (i.e., Muḥammad ibn Jaqmaq) and less as a reflection of reality.

own father, the amir Taghrībirdī, who is presented in a glowing and heroic light as the author of a plan that *would have* saved Damascus if only it had been implemented. Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 12:185.

⁵⁵Ibn Taghrībirdī, *History*, 4:18, 19–21, 24–29, 32–45, especially 33, 38, 40, 43.

⁵⁶Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 6:241.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 7:278–79.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 279–80.



Thus two major and interconnected historians of the Mamluk Sultanate, al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrībirdī, were well aware of the problems endemic in their society. Both appear to have understood at least in part the theoretical connections among weakened royal authority, injustice among the ruling elite, and trouble in society, connections espoused and promulgated by none other than Ibn Khaldūn. Of the two, al-Maqrīzī seems to have been directly and strongly influenced by the North African scholar, while Ibn Taghrībirdī's at best tenuous connection to Ibn Khaldūn must have been made indirectly through al-Maqrīzī. Nevertheless, in the writings of each author, one element foreshadows the full-blown decline paradigm developed under the Ottomans in part as a result of Ibn Khaldūn's formulation of compelling ideas. For al-Maqrīzī, this element is his composition of works that simultaneously describe the causes of financial decline, and propose a pragmatic solution to them. For Ibn Taghrībirdī, this element appears in his manipulation of history to demonstrate a causal link among weakened royal authority, injustice, and decline, which he then uses to suggest a moral lesson about the way to rule. Thus each author in his own way foreshadows the development of Ottoman decline literature. Why then, did Ottoman intellectuals develop an active movement of reform, but Mamluk intellectuals did not?



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