PHILOLOGICAL ENCOUNTERS 7 (2022) 334–362
Philological | Encounters
BRILL
brill.com/phen

Poetry as History: An Examination of the Role of Poetry in al-Murādī's Biographical Dictionary of the Twelfth/Eighteenth Century

Basil Salem | ORCID: 0000-0002-1172-7876
Harper-Schmidt Society of Fellows, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, USA
bsalem@uchicago.edu

Abstract

This article approaches early-modern biographical literature, in particular the centenary biographical dictionary of Muḥammad Khalīl al-Murādī, titled *Silk al-durar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-thānī ʿashar* as an integrated source. The article argues that as a biographer, al-Murādī relied heavily on poetry, not simply for its literary value, but as a historical tool, a primary source, whose contents provided the reader with direct access to the historical figures in question. This approach to the *Silk* allows the biographical dictionary to serve not simply as a historical reference, as it often does, but as a reflection of the cultural moment it emerged from. The poetry within the *Silk*, when read as a historical source, affords insight into the history of the self, of self-fashioning, and of the mentality of the learned community of eighteenth-century Ottoman Syria, and Damascus in particular.

Keywords

biographical dictionaries – Arabic poetry – Ottoman Syria – historiography – Muḥammad Khalīl al-Murādī

Introduction

Shortly before his death in 1206/1791, the Damascene scholar and historian Muḥammad Khalīl al-Murādī completed a biographical compilation of immense proportions. Titled *Silk al-durar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-thānī ʿashar*

(*The String of Pearls Among the Notables of the Twelfth/Eighteenth Century*), al-Murādī's biographical compilation, or dictionary, contained over seven hundred biographical accounts of the most eminent individuals of the twelfth/eighteenth century.[1] For historians investigating the history of notables in eighteenth-century Ottoman Syria, al-Murādī's dictionary has served as an invaluable reference for a variety of inquiries. It has been mined extensively for the statistical and prosopographic information it affords and has facilitated historians' ability to draw the coordinates of individuals' social and intellectual networks, their careers, their travels, and their status in the community. Indeed, al-Murādī's *Silk* has become a mainstay of the available literature on the scholars of eighteenth-century Ottoman Syria.[2]

Despite the great reliance on the work, the *Silk* has not been used as a primary source in and of itself. Instead, it has served as an auxiliary source, used mostly in its capacity as a reference. This is largely because the *Silk* does not readily lend itself for use in any other fashion. Particularly in its treatment of the learned community, the biographical dictionary often provides short descriptions that are repetitive in style and consist of no more than a few phrases that provide the reader with basic information on a scholar's birthplace, education, travels, career, and social connections. It is therefore not surprising that historians have relied on the work as a reference rather than as a source worthy of its own investigation.

Treating the dictionary as a reference, however, has reduced the image of Damascene notables, particularly the learned elite among them, to the few pieces of information available in their biographical account. Our image of eighteenth-century Damascene intellectuals is thus based mostly on their careers and, in some cases, their intellectual production. What is absent is a serious consideration of the temperament and self-perception of members of this learned community.[3]

1 Muḥammad Khalīl al-Murādī, *Silk al-durar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-thānī ʿashar*, 4 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997).

2 See, for instance, Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Guy Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: The Ḥanafī School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Linda Schilcher, *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag-Wiesbaden, 1985); John Voll, "The Non-Wahhabi Hanbalis of Eighteenth-Century Syria," *Der Islam* 49 (1972): 277–291; Abdul-Karim Rafeq, "Relations Between the Syrian 'Ulamā' and the Ottoman State in the Eighteenth Century," *Oriente Moderno* 79 (1999): 67–95.

3 In recent years, several scholars have challenged this strictly functional approach when treating the early-modern Damascene individual. See Dana Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau*

In this article, I approach al-Murādī's biographical dictionary not as a reference but as a primary source.[4] While the *Silk* includes the biographies of a wide variety of individuals, it is written from the point of view of a scholar, al-Murādī, who himself relied on sources, the majority of which were written by scholars. My reading of the *Silk*, I argue, allows the biographical dictionary to serve as a reflection of the scholarly community it emerged from. When read as a historical text, the *Silk* emerges as a source for a cultural history of scholars; it affords a history of self-perception, and a first step for an investigation of the worldview of the scholars of eighteenth-century Ottoman Syria, and Damascus in particular.[5]

To do this, my focus in this article will fall not on the narrative biographical accounts, but rather on the large body of poetry that the work contains. In fact, the poetic verses of the *Silk* occupy at least as much space as the prose. Despite its ubiquity in the work, however, the poetic content of the *Silk* has largely been neglected. This neglect stems perhaps from a modern assumption that poetry has a strictly literary function. Its inclusion in a biographical account is assumed to be a means of illustrating a person's linguistic ability. While al-Murādī's inclusion of poems may have stemmed from a desire to showcase the literary output of certain individuals, its main function in the text, I argue, is historical. For al-Murādī, much of the poetry functioned as a primary source; it was a source that allowed the reader direct access to the figure being described. In other words, poetry acted as a medium through which al-Murādī intended to convey a deeper historical layer and a more direct connection to the historical figure he was describing.

Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Steve Tamari, "Biography, Autobiography, and Identity in Early Modern Damascus," in *Auto/Biography and the Construction of Identity and Community in the Middle East*, ed. Mary Ann Fay (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2001), 37–49; Barbara Rosenow von Schlegell, "Sufism in the Ottoman Arab World: Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d. 1143/1731)" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1997).

4 For historical studies that treat works of compilation as historical and/or literary texts, see Elias Muhanna, *The World in a Book: Al-Nuwayri and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Bilal Orfali, *The Anthologist's Art: Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī and His Yatīmat al-Dahr* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Asli Niyazioglu, *Dreams and Lives in Ottoman Istanbul: A Seventeenth-Century Biographer's Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2017).

5 For a similar approach to biographical dictionaries in the medieval period, see Chamberlain's seminal work on the accumulation of social and cultural capital among the elite of medieval Damascus. Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

With the exception of Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī's (d. 1699/1111) *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar*, poetry was not a central feature in any of the previous centenary biographical dictionaries.[6] For instance, Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī's (d. 1651/1061) centenary biographical dictionary *al-Kawākib al-sāʾira bi-aʿyān al-miʾa al-ʿāshira* rarely includes poetry in its biographical entries. In cases where poetry is included, it often consists of no more than two to four verses. Out of the 1552 biographical entries, only 164, or 10.5% of the total, include verse. In al-Muradī's *Silk*, poetry features much more heavily. Out of 767 entries, 251 contain verses, around 33% of the total. But even this significant increase in the frequency of poetic verses does not capture how much more the *Silk* relies on poetry. Not only are there more entries that include poetic verses, the length of the poems that al-Murādī includes greatly exceeds that of those included in al-Ghazzi's dictionary. Verses included in al-Muradi's *Silk* very often run for a few pages and frequently exceed the prose portion of the biographical entry.

While at this early stage in the research it is difficult to ascertain with any confidence what accounts for this increased reliance on poetry in centenary biographical dictionaries, recent studies on changes in the literary world of the eighteenth-century Ottoman world can provide some hints. For instance, as Dana Sajdi has convincingly shown, learned scholars no longer had a "hegemony over the production of historical knowledge." Particularly in the writing of chronicles, writers from relatively humble backgrounds were participating in the production of this knowledge. These "commoners," as Sajdi calls them, were using "varied 'registers' of Arabic, including 'colloquial Arabic,'" which provided these literary newcomers with "a degree of freedom … [and] distance from … learned culture."[7] Sajdi's observation about the entrance of this new type of author on the literary scene might help explain the reason why someone like al-Murādī chose to distinguish his dictionary with poetry—that is, as a way to separate his work from this rising class of writers who relied heavily on colloquial language.

6 See Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī, *al-Kawākib al-sāʾira bi-aʿyān al-miʾa al-ʿāshira*, ed. Jibrāʾīl Sulaymān Jabbūr (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīrkānīyya, 1945); Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar* (Beirut: Maktabat Khayyāṭ, 1966); Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina fī aʿyān al-miʾa al-thāmina*, 5 vols, ed. Muḥammmad Sayyid Jād al-Ḥaqq, (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthiyya, 1966); Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ li ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ*, 12 vols (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayā, 1966).

7 Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 77.

Poetry as History

In the *Silk*, poetry often functions either as the voice of the biographee in question, or as the voice of others about the individual being described in the biography. It is used as a descriptor and as such is a tool that adds a historical dimension. While the use of poetry in many of the biographical entries can to some degree be an attempt to showcase an individual's linguistic ability or their social status (often through panegyric poetry), the purpose of the majority of poetic verses in the dictionary was to provide more authentic and immediate insight into the life of the figure being described.

Perhaps the most instructive example of the use of poetry as a historical source, or more precisely, as a conduit to the biographee in question, is in biographical entries on individuals whom al-Murādī deemed to have been afflicted with melancholia (*al-sawdā'*).[8] In such cases, al-Murādī includes poetry that centers the voice and temperament of the biographee. We see this, for instance, in the entry on Muṣṭafā al-Safarjalānī (d. 1766/1179), a Damascene scholar who moved to Istanbul and was able to secure an appointment as a teacher there. According to our biographer, al-Safarjalānī was a very intelligent and sharp scholar who was fluent in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. But he was also an individual who was more "knowledgeable than he was religious" (*'ilmuhu kāna akthara min diyānatihi*). This, al-Muradī infers, allowed "melancholy to take over him" (*tamakkanat minhu al-sawdā'*).[9] While the prose section provides some context to help describe this temperament, it remains brief. We are told that al-Safarjalānī was very well respected by the notables of the city but often criticized them. He was also consistently consuming opium. This is the extent of our access to al-Safarjalānī's melancholia from the prose section of the biography. To further our insight, al-Murādī includes the following verses from al-Safarjalānī's poetic oeuvre:

يا نعمة قد أصبحت نقمة مذ نالها الكلب على خسته

يظن أن الناس حساده من يحسد الكلب على نعمته

8 See Sarah Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Josef W. Meri and Jere L. Bacharach, *Medieval Islamic Civilization: L-Z, Index* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 496.

9 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 4:219.

O how the blessing has become punishment | When even the dog with all its wretchedness receives it
He may think that people are jealous of him | But who envies a favor bestowed on a dog?

These verses appear suddenly and almost out of context as al-Murādī lists different examples of poetry produced by al-Safarjalānī. A first read may determine that such verses are included simply as examples of this biographee's poetic oeuvre. But for the reader of the time, one who was aware of the competitive and exclusionary atmosphere of the learned community in Istanbul, these verses provided access to an al-Safarjalanī that the prose section was unable to deliver. In these verses we witness al-Safarjalānī's vulnerability and resentment. Al-Safarjalānī is directing his bitter speech at a person who seems to have been proud of a "favor" he had received, perhaps in the form of an appointment or a gift of some sort, perhaps a gift that was supposed to go to al-Safarjalānī. This gift was clearly given to an individual that he did not deem worthy. The context remains unclear, but that is precisely the point. For al-Murādī, it is not the context in which the verses were uttered that matters, rather it is the verses as the voice of the biographee, the verses as direct access to his vulnerability and scathing attitude towards others. What we see here is an example of al-Murādī allowing the biographee to speak for himself, which, in turn, allows al-Murādī to maintain a degree of objectivity.

Like the verses discussed above, the vast majority of poetry in the dictionary appears without context and is rarely part of a narrative. This makes it difficult to see the poetry in the dictionary as part of a diachronic, horizontal narrative. Rather, the poetry was intended, as mentioned above, as a synchronic description, a way for the reader to dive vertically into the world of the biographee. This means that if we then take a bird's-eye view of the dictionary, the poetry, which was easy to narrowly classify as a sample of literary accomplishments of each biographee, now emerges as a central part of the text.

Such a reading allows us to read the *Silk* not simply as a biographical dictionary, but rather as a collection of voices of a learned community as presented and curated by al-Murādī. Seen in this way, we can even venture to view the poetry as a contiguous source within the dictionary, one that is worthy of an analysis separate from the context of any single biographical entry. Indeed, when read as a contiguous historical source, the poetry provides us with an insight into the emotional and mental world of the learned community al-Murādī described.

Poetry as Communication

Before we proceed, it is important to note that poetry played a very important role in the everyday lives of individuals at the time. Walter Andrews has shown how themes used in Ottoman poetry, particularly among Turkish speaking poets, ranged "from love to the most profound search for spiritual truth … to impassioned pleas for employment or largesse."[10] Andrews also points out the central role of the *majlis* (pl. *majālis*), a gathering in which poets met to exchange verses and prove or strengthen their social capital. Some of these gatherings were exclusive and held in private gardens, while others, especially with the proliferation of coffee shops, were somewhat more open: any aspiring poet could try to impress a general audience or elicit the favor of a certain affluent individual.[11]

The place of poetry in eighteenth-century Ottoman-Damascus was no different. Poetry was both a public and a private form of expression.[12] The dictionary provides some clues that can help us situate the place and function of this poetic expression. In one example, Fatḥ Allāh al-Dādīkhī, a figure of some prominence, asked one of Damascus' most famous litterateurs of the time, Aḥmad al-Manīnī, to write him a chronogram in verse (*ta'rīkh*), dating the re-opening of the school he had commissioned to be renovated. When the verse was shown to the city's chief mufti (jurisconsult), he expressed his approval and insisted that a festive meal be prepared to honor the writer of the verse. Al-Dādīkhī, the school renovator, promised to invite both the mufti and al-Manīnī to such a meal, but failed to fulfill the promise. Sometime later during a gathering at the mufti's residence, one of al-Manīnī's students, Aḥmad al-Kurdī, lampooned al-Dādīkhī, who was present, and questioned whether he was even worthy of his esteemed position in society. The ensuing slurs exchanged by the two were apparently so caustic that the two confronted each other again in the Umayyad Mosque a few days before the start of Ramadan. The second encounter so angered al-Kurdī that he wrote a long lampoon poem of

10 Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 13, 14.

11 Walter G. Andrews, *Poetry's Voice, Society's Song: Ottoman Lyric Poetry* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 143–174. See also Ralph Hattox, *Coffee and Coffee Houses: The Origin of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press: 1996); Nelly Hanna, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo's Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Syracuse [NY]: Syracuse University Press 2003).

12 For a thorough discussion of the role of poetry in everyday life in the Mamluk Empire, see Bauer's seminal article: Thomas Bauer, "Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches," *Mamluk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 105–132.

al-Dādīkhī. Al-Murādī relates that when he showed the draft of the poem to his teacher and mentor Aḥmad al-Manīnī, he (al-Manīnī) tore it up exclaiming, "what you have already said of [al-Dādīkhī] will remain until the end of time and what he has said of you will not even remain in our thoughts." The implication of such logic is that accusations about a person's character, if made with enough vigor, and delivered in memorable, pithy verses, can irrecoverably tarnish one's image as an individual whose character traits are unchangeable.[13]

In their interaction with one another, members of the literary community, whether scholars, poets, or bureaucrats, often communicated through verse. In one instance, one individual wrote a note to his friend urging him not to forget a promise he had made him.

يا ابن الأولى يا جيد أرباب العلا يا من به روض المفاخر قد زها
لا تنس ما أوعدت في إنجازه لا زلت بحر المكرمات وكنزها

O son of the worthy, the first among the masters of esteem | O you, in whom the garden of pride has blossomed,
Do not forget what you have promised to deliver | You are still the sea and the treasure of generosity

The friend replied,

إني بما أوعدت لست بمخلف حاشى لمن رب الفضائل حازها
والعفو عما قد أتيت سجية منكم وإني مسرع إنجازها

I have not forgotten what I have promised | Especially not to someone who is so deserving
It is in your nature to forgive my lateness | And I will endeavor to fulfill the promise in haste[14]

Such exchanges, which are frequently recorded in the dictionary, provide further proof that poetry was more than simply a means of showcasing one's

13 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 2:49–50.
14 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:29.

literary prowess. It was at its heart a means of communication and self-expression whose contents were just as valuable as its form.

Finally, poetry contained an intrinsic and almost tangible value for both writers and readers of poetry. We see the value people ascribed to poetry in their relationship to panegyric poems. Verses of praise are so common in the dictionary that it is easy to dismiss them in their entirety as a function of a system of patronage that required the constant production of praise. Indeed, the eighteenth century was an age in which certain families, particularly in Damascus, accumulated great wealth and became de facto political notables in the city, acquiring in the process many followers seeking their favor.[15] Naturally then, poems of praise were often written by poets in the service of notables or by poets and scholars seeking their favor. But that should not lead us to view them simply as products of a desire for reciprocation. The words within these seemingly formulaic verses were not always read as tired formulas for the receipt of favor. They were valued in and of themselves.

In one instance, al-Murādī's father received a poem of praise that made such an impression on him that he ordered it inscribed on the wall of a room he was building in his house. The verses of the poem were written in gold and decorated with precious stones. In one of the verses, the poet tells al-Murādī's father that the praises he had heard of him were so mesmerizing that he desired to have them accompany him, the poet, to the afterlife. However, instead of writing "my death," i.e., that of the poet, the inscriber mistakenly wrote "your death." Al-Murādī then explains how after noticing this mistake, his father became despondent and died that same year.[16]

Indeed, poetry was cherished, and it had its vehement defenders whenever it was criticized. Al-Murādī himself made sure to convey this relationship when he cited several instances of literary figures defending the composition of poetry. In one, the verse ridicules whoever criticizes poetry as someone who is simply unable to partake in the practice.

أنظم الشعر وجانب قول من حذر منه

لا يعيب الشعر الا كل من يعجز عنه

15 For more on the notables of Damascus, see Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century*, eds. William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1968); Abdul-Karim Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus, 1723–1783* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966); James Gelvin, "The Politics of Notables Forty Years After," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 40, no. 1 (2006): 19–29.

16 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 2:144.

Write poetry and avoid those | Who have warned against it
No one criticizes poetry except | Those who can't compose it

In the other instance, the value of poetry as a medium through which important information might be transmitted is emphasized.

أنظم الشعر ولا تصغ الى قول جهول حبذا شيء أتى فيه حديث عن رسول

Compose poetry and do not heed the words of the ignorant | For you may even find in it a saying of the Prophet[17]

Al-Murādī was thus a member of a society for whom poetry was a medium through which a deeper form of expression can occur. The following pages will therefore show how the dictionary's poetry, when read as a source, conveys the general mood of society as seen by one of its scholars. For al-Murādī, as we shall see below, public image on the one hand and questions of the self and its existential struggles on the other were a central concern for the community at large.

Poetry and Image

In reading the poetry as a contiguous source, we find that public image is one of the most repeated concerns implied in a great majority of the verses. As we shall see, it is at the heart of expressions of both praise and critique. The following pages outline the specific ways in which the idea of public image and the concern with one's legacy appear in the poetry.

Praise of the individual occurred through a variety of descriptions. The most common among them are descriptions of nobility (lineage), status (political or intellectual), and generosity. In the following verses concerning lineage, ability, and generosity, what is clear is a comparative concern that is constantly and implicitly comparing the praised individual with the rest of society. The concern for lineage, ability, and generosity, is not simply a vapid function of patronage, but rather a declaration of status against other similar declarations of status. The number of descriptive poems dedicated to praising a certain individual alludes to a mood in which social hierarchy was both a matter of serious concern and perhaps even contention.

17 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:41.

Description of one's lineage appears time and again in these poems and appears to be a point that both the reader and the writer understood would elicit a favorable emotion. The topic is often introduced to show that the position one has earned is similar to those of past members of one's family.

الخير فيك وفي رجالك والدهر يفخر في مثالك
وكذا يروى عن أبيك وجدك السامي وخالك

The best qualities are in you and your men | And time is proud of your likes.
Such is the case of your father | And your glorious grandfather and your uncle[18]

This sentiment, where a person is praised for their lineage, abounds in the dictionary. In the above example, lineage is used to explain how the figure in question acquired such status. Lineage is in a sense a justification of status, a public declaration on the part of the poet, but also on the part of the recipient who accepts these verses, placing the recipient among those whose lineage facilitates ascendancy.

We see this justificatory tone stated clearly in the following verse as well:

ولا عجب إذ أنت في الفضل سيد كجدك ذي التحقيق في الشرق والغرب

No wonder you are a master in virtue in the east and west | Like your grandfather, known for his verification[19]

Lineage, therefore, not only justifies one's social position, but also one's erudition and scholarly excellence.

أيا زهرة الآداب يا نجل سادة بهم حسنت أوصاف ذي الرأي والمجد
لقد نلت ألطافًا وحزت معارفًا وفهت بأبيات كما الدر في العقد

18 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:195.
19 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 3:141.

O blossom of civility, o son of leaders in whom | The qualities of men of opinion and of nobility have been beautified
You have acquired politeness and obtained knowledge | And have uttered verses like a pearl in a necklace[20]

Here the recipient of the poem is being told that, like a pearl in a necklace, he belonged to a tradition of people of excellent qualities which he has inherited and as such, it is no surprise that he is able to produce quality himself.

This emphasis on lineage did, however, have its detractors.

إن لم يكن لي أجداد أسود بهم ولم تثبت بنو الشهباء لي شرفا
ولم أنل من ملوك العصر منزلة لكان فخري في ذا العلم منه كفا

If I do not have the lineage of leaders among men | And the people of Aleppo refuse to believe in my nobility
And if I do not receive high station from the rulers of the age | My knowledge of my (lofty) lineage would suffice in giving me pride[21]

Lineage is here subordinated to knowledge as a way of ensuring that the individual's character is intrinsically worthy even without access to noble ancestry. Yet even in its rejection of lineage, the poem reveals the socially accepted importance of it. Indeed, lineage was not the only characteristic through which one could claim a position in the implicit hierarchy created by these highly comparative poems. Along with lineage, intellectual ability and generosity were also invoked as characteristics that proved one's position in society. Here they are spoken of in the same breath:

قطب له الفضلاء في وقت الدروس غدت فرائس
تعس الذي أضحى له في الجود والإقدام قائس
هذا الذي واسى وقد عز المواسي والموانس
بحر السماح ومن تهلل وجهه والجو عابس

20 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 4:9.
21 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:177.

The pole who turns the keenest minds | Into his prey when he teaches
Miserable are those who try | To measure their generosity to his
For he is the one who consoles and has comforted | Those who are themselves consolers
He is a sea of kindness whose face smiles | Even when the weather is frowning[22]

This individual is a man before whom intellectual contenders become prey-like creatures, and to whom is ascribed a generosity so unequalled that it shames anyone who would even attempt to measure up to it. Achievement of such status was therefore not solely based on lineage.

ونلت بالعزم بل بالحزم ما قصرت عنه الصدور فأنت الأوحد البطل
لله درك يا نجل العلى لقد نظمت شمل الدراري بعدما أفلوا
فاسلم ودم ببقاء الدهر مرتقيا تحيي مآثر ما قد شاده الأول

You have acquired with determination nay with prudence | What notables have failed to acquire, for you alone are courageous
How great are your deeds! o son of eminence, | You have strung the stars together after they have fallen
May you be in peace and may you remain elevated | As you revive what was built by those before you[23]

Here lineage is coupled with ability, and 'the son of eminence' is not receiving his status passively but through determination and prudence.

What the aggregation of these verses allows us to do is to peer ever so slightly into the general moral and aesthetic orientations of the community as seen by al-Murādī. What appears from the verses above is not simply an admiration of lineage, generosity, and ability, but also an indication of a feeling of constant key comparison between one person and the other. Praise is by its very nature comparative. In aggregating these poems, we begin to see the atmosphere of constant comparison in which these individuals lived. Hierarchy along with the justification of one's position were a constant concern of members of the learned community, one they expressed in verse.

22 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 3:40.
23 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 3:43.

Parallel to these praise poems lie the many critical and lampoon verses that al-Murādī cites throughout the dictionary. Like praise poems, these critical and lampoon poems point to a concern with one's public image. In the great majority of these verses the expression is either critical, where an attack is made about a person's character, or defensive, where the person writing the verses attempts to defend against another's blame. In some cases, the attacks are explicit:

قالوا أعلام تركت جامع جلق شهر الصيام وليس ذاك بسائغ
قلت المبيح بي لترك جماعة برد الشتاء ورؤية ابن الصائغ

They say that scholars have left Damascus' mosque | During the month of the fast and that such action is forbidden
But I say that avoiding communal prayer there is permitted | If the weather is cold and if Ibn al-Ṣā'igh is present[24]

The poet in the above verses defends the scholars who were absent from the mosque and who were being implicitly accused of abandoning piety, by saying that it is permissible to do so if a certain person, one Ibn al-Ṣā'igh, a student who according to al-Murādī was of a particularly crude nature, was present. We see here the public nature of animosity, and the casual accusatory tone in poetry. We do not know how the verse was received by Ibn al-Ṣā'igh, whether it compelled him to reply or to perhaps retreat. But what is clear is that such expressions, and their inscription into the memory of the community that is already oriented to versification, were born of a desire to publicly shame an individual and to attach a certain characteristic to his image in the community.

Even when the name of the figure under attack is not mentioned, the poetry is clear in its criticism. The criticism in the following verses is directed at a certain individual's attire:

جاءنا الشيخ لابسا للعمامة ينجلي تحتها شبيه الغمامة
وهو في نفسه كبير عظيم ليس في فعله يرى من ملامة
يا لعمري وانه شيخ سوء جل افعاله مح الندامة

24 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:93.

Here comes the *shaykh* donning the turban | Appearing under it like a cloud
Indeed, he thinks very highly of himself | As if there is no wrong in what he does
By God he is immoral and his deeds | Are in their entirety a cause for regret[25]

The person in the poem is being mocked for the size of his turban, a topic of discussion that appears in other places as well. The criticism is not strictly sartorial but is in fact directed at the person's character. This person who attempts to appear as pious, is here seen as immoral. The poem is again concerned with image. Here the poet is unveiling the truth about this "immoral" *shaykh* whose "deeds are in their entirety a cause for regret."

This concern for image in the eyes of the community appears not only in instances of attack and critique, but also in instances where the poet is defending himself. When one individual was accused of having abandoned piety by neglecting to attend his classes, he writes:

قال لي اللائم الجهول لماذا | قد هجرت الدروس والاستفادة
وخللت الإيناس واغتضت | بالايحاش عنه وصار ذلك عادة
واعتزلت الأنام قلت لأمر | فاعتزال الأنام نصف العبادة

The ignorant admonisher asked me: Why | have you abandoned learning
And have forsaken friendship | For solitude and made that a habit?
I replied that I have avoided people altogether | Because isolation is half of all worship[26]

The public nature of such verses is palpable. Even if they were not uttered in public and only written in private missives, or collected in poetry collections posthumously, there is a clear dialogical element to these poems that shows how they could mirror actual conversation. Here the poet is dialoging with his accuser by responding to him with a verse that discredits the original accusation and absolves the poet from the image that the accusation had potentially

25 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 2:48.
26 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 2:224.

attached to him. In isolating himself and abandoning classes, he claims, he was not abandoning piety but in fact partaking in a higher form of it.

This desire to defend oneself can also be seen as an attempt to distance oneself altogether from one's detractors.

ثنيت عناني عن فتية يرون من العار علمي وكتبي
وكانوا أصحابي على زعمهم وكلهم قد تهيأ لحربي
فأعرضت عنهم لهم قاليا ولم آل جهدا بشتم وسب
واذ ذاك لو هتفوا بي هلم لما كنت يا صاح ممن يلبي

I pulled my reins to avoid those | Who see shame in my knowledge and my work
They were once my friend or so they claimed, | But now all are prepared to attack me
So, I hatefully avoided them, | But I did not hesitate in insulting them
And if they end up confronting me, | Come to my aid, o friend who does not betray![27]

While image is still at the center of the verses' concern, here it is not piety that is being questioned but intellectual ability. The writer of the verses laments the attack he has endured from individuals he had thought friends, but who had turned on him. The concern with one's image in the last two examples becomes clear when we consider the fact that the writers of the verses did not simply criticize their attackers, but actually reproduced the accusations that their detractors had made. Such reproductions assume an audience whose members are being asked to take a side. In the last verse of the poem above, the author explicitly calls on his friend to join him should another attack/accusation be made.

In an atmosphere where public accusation and shaming among members of the learned community was imminent, such exchanges could reach a high level of fervor. In the next verse, we see how one individual wishes the death of another as he publicly rids himself of this person and his machinations:

27 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:212.

دعوني من مكائدكم دعوني فما نظرت مثالكم عيوني
فيا تيسا تعمم بالقرون تقول أنا الكبير فعظموني
...
جهلتم سائر الأشياء جمعا وفيكم صار جل اللوم طبعا
فيا أردى الورى جوزيت صنعا إذا كان الصغير أعم نفعا

Let me be and spare me your machinations! | For my eyes have not witnessed anything like you before
O goat, who has made a turban of his horns | You say "I am great so you must glorify me"
...
You are ignorant in all matters combined, | And blaming others has become your nature
O most wicked of all, you will get what you deserve | Even those lesser than you bring forth more benefit[28]

In the above verses, the writer of the verses is not only critiquing this apparently mischievous and politicking individual, but he is also making a claim that higher station is not necessarily an indication of virtue. The critique is no longer personal but is in fact an attack on established hierarchy in general.

Not all reactions were filled with such vitriol. When one individual admonished another telling him to refrain from promiscuity, the response he received was cordial:

دع الخلاعة في حب الحسان ودم أسير علم وأمعن في مطالعته
ولازم الدرس والكراس مجتهدًا وأسهر العين ليلاً في مشاهدته

Abandon promiscuity in your pursuit of the beautiful ones | Remain a prisoner to knowledge and be keen in your pursuit of it
Attend your lessons and cling to your books with eagerness | And stay awake at night studying them

28 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:196.

To this admonition the admonished responds,

إن الخلاعة في حب الحسان هدى وما على العاشق الولهان من باس

Promiscuity in pursuit of beauty is the right path | And the confused lover has no cause for sadness[29]

Unlike in earlier examples of reactions to admonition and accusations regarding one's piety, the response here is subdued, and written in a matter-of-fact fashion in which the writer of the verse simply disagrees with his admonisher about the pursuit of beauty.

Such non-confrontational language was not uncommon. In the following verses we see an individual's disappointment at the unexpected disrespect he endured from a friend.

وصاحب هزني شوق لرؤيته ولم تزل ناجيات الوجد تحملن
حتى إذا الدهر يومًا حط راحلتي بقربه وانتهزنا فرصة الزمن
جاورت منزله كيما أنال به أنسا يزيل صدا الأكدار والحزن
فلم يزدني علي دعوى الطعام كما يدعى على سغب ذو الفقر والاحن
لم يقض حقي فما لبيت دعوته وما بذلك عار عند ذي الفطن

Longing led me to go see a friend | As I was riding on love's back
Until one day I found myself disembarking | Close to him so I seized the opportunity [to see him]
I stayed next to his home awaiting to reap the benefits | Of a friendship that might help me forget my anxieties and misery
But his invitation was for a mere meal | Like a forced invitation made for a hungry soul
I declined his invitation for it did not befit me | And the keen of mind understands that there is no shame in my refusal[30]

29 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 3:24.
30 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:144.

The insult that the writer of the above verses felt was not caused by an attack on character but by a more indirect attack on self-worth caused by the failure of a person he thought his friend to treat him, the writer of the verse, with the respect he deserved.

From caustic responses to slight rebukes, members of the community engaged in an exchange of words at the heart of which was a concern over one's image in society. By versifying their dialogue, real or imagined, they were making their now memorable exchanges public.

As we saw in the examples above, in interacting with others, and in moments of concern for one's public image, members of the learned community often ascribed negative attributes to their interlocutors, accusers, and attackers. It is not surprising then to see that in some cases these negative attributes were even compared to terminal and incurable illnesses.

من المحال علاج المرء أربعة إن صاحبت أربعا قد جاء في أثر
الفقر مع كسل والسقم مع هرم البغض مع حسد والشح مع كبر

Four conditions are impossible to treat in a person | If they are joined with another four
Poverty with laziness, and ailment with old age | Hatred with jealousy, and avarice with haughtiness[31]

In the first hemistich of the second verse, the poet sets up the logic for his claim that some conditions are incurable. Laziness renders poverty insurmountable, and old age prevents one from recovering from illness. Following this logic, the final hemistich declares that those who harbor jealousy will never escape feelings of hatred, while those who are arrogant can never abandon greed. This sentiment in the final hemistich helps explain the often caustic atmosphere in the many exchanges encountered above, by showing us how in attacking one another, there was often a sense of the inevitability of one's inherent temperament, a sense that character is unchangeable.

31 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 4:173.

Poetry and Time

Another very frequent theme in the dictionary's poetry revolves around concept of the self and its temporality. While the 'self' as a concept is never explicitly identified, the verses that we encounter below share a concern for the self's struggle with time and mortality. Unlike in earlier poems, the concern here is no longer about one's image in society, but about the struggles of the self as it exists in an ever-progressing temporal space. Expressions of suffering range from the mild to the severe with mild expressions belonging to descriptions about quotidian matters and the more severe belonging to the deeper and more abstract world of existence. Time is a central factor in both these expressions of daily struggle and existential angst. In matters of everyday frustration and inconvenience, time is addressed, at least implicitly, as the inevitable cycle of routine, and by extension, as the tedium and struggle that govern one's everyday life. For the sake of clarity this will be referred to here as cyclical time. Conversely, in matters of existential angst, of fear of the afterlife, time is addressed as the inevitable linear progression towards death. In some cases, it is even explicitly referred to as *dahr* and/or *zamān*, but for the sake of clarity, we will refer to it here as existential time. In both temporal scales the central figure of concern is the self.

We see expressions of struggle and frustration with cyclical time very clearly, for instance, in one cluster of poems cited by the al-Murādī, where the topic revolves around the difficulty of fasting during Ramadan.

ولرب يومٍ صمته فكأنه يومُ المعاد وليس منه مهرب

وقفت به شمس النهار ولم تغب فكأنما قد سد عنها المغرب

What a day it was that I have fasted, it seemed like | The day of judgement from which there is no escape.
In its midst the sun was planted and did not set | As if it has been denied the sunset[32]

Al-Murādī couples this verse with another in which a poet writes,

أرى الشمس في الصومِ تأبى المسير إلى الليل تخشى الهجومَ عليه

32 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 4:10.

حكت فيه حسناء زفت إلى خصي وبالكره سيقت إليه

During the fast I see the sun refusing to move | Towards the nightfall that she fears
Just like a beauty who has been betrothed | And dragged unwillingly to a eunuch[33]

The difficulty of fasting in the summer is then further elaborated by another verse:

أرى الأيام في الإفطار تمضي كلمع البرق أو سقط الدراري
وفي شهر الصيام تطول حتى كأن الليل ضم إلى النهار

Outside of the fast I see the days pass | Like the flash of lightning or a shooting star
But in the month of the fast days are prolonged | And the night seems to be joined with the day[34]

The voices of these eighteenth-century individuals are then joined with the voice of the Abbasid poet Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 896/283):

شهر الصيام مبارك ما لم يكن في شهر آب
الليل فيه لمحة ونهاره يوم الحساب
خفت العذاب فصمته فوقعت في عين العذاب

The month of the fast is blessed | Unless it occurs in August.
When the night is but an instant | And the day is like the day of judgement
I fear divine punishment and so I fast | And have therefore been punished nonetheless[35]

33 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 4:11.
34 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 4:11.
35 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 4:11. (While this poem is attributed to Ibn al-Rūmī, I was not able to find it in his published *dīwān*.)

All this is then presented with a response wherein the verses state

شهر شريف به الخيرات مشتبكة حتى على الناس فيه تنزل البركة
من قال شهر ثقيل عنه فهو يرى ذنوبه أثقلته فهو في اللبكة

A noble month in which abundance is plenty | A time during which blessing descends on the people
Whoever feels heaviness in the month | Knows that his sins have weighed him down into panic[36]

The expressions here are not simply an indication that Ramadan was seen as a difficult month by eighteenth-century members of the learned community. Indeed, the inclusion of the Abbasid poet's verses is proof that such sentiments existed much earlier. The community's reaction to Ramadan should be seen as a larger concern with tedium and the slow but inevitable expiration of patience in the face of time in its repetitive and cyclical capacity. It is an expression of the self's struggle with everyday endeavors. In their struggle with the length of the day, the writers of the verses above choose to describe the oppressive heat of the sun, its seeming immobility, as if, in one case, it is fearing the night, like a bride fears being betrothed to a eunuch. The cluster of poems and the images they contain should not only be read for their literary qualities, but also for the emotive expression of facing the everyday with difficulty, here expressed repeatedly by a variety of individuals. The expressions of difficulty are then met with the words of an admonisher who declares that the days of Ramadan are only hard on those whose sins weigh on them. In a sense, the emotive element beneath the admonishing exterior of these verses states that time, in its cyclical capacity, is conquerable if one has the right disposition, in this case, a pious disposition.

This concern for tedium and everyday struggle is not necessarily always religious in nature. In the following verses we encounter an individual's struggle with the difficulty of the winter months:

للشمس هل تعلمون من خبر أم هل وقفتم لها على أثر
ضلت طريق المسير أم غرقت في البحر أم أقعدت من الكبر

36 Al-Murādī, 4:11.

أم أسد النجم رام يقنصها | فاستترت بالغمام من حذر
أم حسبتها السماء شمس طلا | فارتشفتها على سنا القمر
فلا تراها الدوام صاحية | وقد حست من مدامها العطر
يا لهف نفسي لفقد نيرة | كانت سراج العشي والبكر
فالأفق يشكو لطول غيبتها | والجو يبكي بأدمع المطر
ويا شقائي بذا الثناء وهذا | الوحل قد حل عقد مصطبري

Have you heard from the sun | Or found her trace?
Has she lost her way or drowned in the sea? | Or has age rendered her crippled?
Did Leo [constellation] try to hunt her | Causing her to hide carefully behind the clouds?
Perhaps the sky has thought her wine | And sipped her under the moon-light
The waves have not seen the sky clear | And have drunk its fragrant rain
O how my soul yearns for the flame | The lamp of the evening and the morn
The horizon complains about its prolonged absence | And the weather cries with its rain-tears
O how miserable I am this winter | Its mud has unstrung the knot of my patience[37]

From a temporal perspective, winter is like Ramadan; it has a temporary effect that will pass, but it will surely return. It causes this poet to yearn for the heat of the sun, "the flame, lamp of the evening and the morn." Like in Ramadan, suffering here will end, but it will surely return, and is, as such, cause for lament. Unlike the previous verses, there is no underlying question of piety here. But like the previous verses, the writer of these verses is not only lamenting the loss of the sun but also whether or not his patience, as the final verse shows, can withstand his awareness of the slow passage of time.

It is this awareness of patience, or its absence, in the face of monotony, that the community discussed regularly in their verses. Even when patience and

37 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:94.

tedium are not explicitly addressed, they can certainly be read into many of the other verses in which the poet mourns his physical or mental health.

جس نبضي الطبيب لما رآني ذا نحول وقال داء عضال
ألم حل في سويدا فؤادي ليس يرجي يا صياح منه نصال
قلت حقق مما اعتراني فنادى أنت أدرى مما اعتراك الهزال
قلت صرح فإنني ذو ذهول لست أدري فقال هذا محال
كيف ينسى ما خامر القلب واللب ب وفي الفكر دائبًا لا يزال

The doctor felt my pulse when he saw me emaciated | He said I have a chronic illness
It was a pain that rested in the depth of my heart, | Do not moan for there is no escape
When I asked the doctor to ascertain what had befallen me | He replied: you know better how emaciation has befallen you
So, I said I do not know, do explain for I am in a stupor | I do not know! He replied that that is impossible
For how can one forget what the heart and the chest have encountered | When the mind remains alert?[38]

These poems show a desire to articulate everyday struggle in manner that was dialogical, a desire to articulate one's suffering, even in the most mundane matters, to the public, where these sentiments can be exchanged and echoed. These sentiments about difficulties with everyday endeavors were indeed echoed by many individuals as is evident by the amount of poetry available to al-Murādī to choose from and cluster. This concern and articulation of frustration with the everyday should in a sense be seen as the first level of time-related anxiety that has much deeper roots. In the following verses, we will indeed see a shift towards more existential concerns but the topics of discussion, while noticeably different, should be understood as belonging to the same time-related anxiety.

38 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:192.

ثمانون عامًا فما فوقها مضت بالعمري بلا فائده
قضت ولم أك أشعر بها كأني بها ساعة واحدة
أيا ضيعة العمر حيث انقضى بآراء سامجة فاسدة

Eighty years and more | Have passed, oh God, with no benefit
It passed and I did not feel it, | As if it were one hour
O how age has been lost to | Hateful and corrupt opinions[39]

Such verses take us into the existential world of the community al-Murādī was describing. Here we see a fear of death's imminence, of having wasted eighty years on matters of a petty nature. An entire life, we are told, passed as if in one hour. And as such the temporal concern moves from the mundane to the existential, from the cyclical to the progressive, where we see the eyes of the community, perhaps the older contingent among them, contemplating the past in light of the impending future. In this level of temporal angst, time is no longer simply a cause for frustration. Time is now personified and is to be actively feared.

لا تأمن الدهر ان الدهر خوان يعطي ولكن عطايا الدهر حرمان
ولا تخل ان عين الدهر نائمة الدهر يقظان والانسان وسنان
لا تحسبن المنايا عنك غافلة لها إليك وإن لم تدر إمعان
كل ابن انثى فان الموت يصرعه قد استوى فيه أشياخ وشبان

39 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:132. It is not unlikely that poetic reference is being made to the famous verse by the pre-Islamic poet Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā:

سئمت تكاليف الحياة ومن يعش ثمانين حولاً لا أبا لك يسأم

"I have grown tired of life's hardships/Whoever lives for eighty years will undoubtedly grow weary."

Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, *Dīwān Zuhayr bin Abī Sulmā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya: 1988), 110.

Do not trust time for it betrays | It may provide you, but its provisions are deprivations
Do not think that the eye of time is asleep; | Time is awake and man is drowsy
Do not assume that death does not notice you | It has you in its stare even if you do not realize it
All creatures are finite, and death does not | Discriminate between the old and the young[40]

Time is not to be trusted for it may betray. Moreover, one cannot be vigilant enough for time/death can strike at any moment, indiscriminately. This sense of inevitability is what defines this level of relationship to time.

The extent of this fear can be seen in the many supplication poems for the Prophet containing emphatic pleas for salvation and protection from time's indiscriminate and impending attacks.

إليك التجاءنا يا مغيث فكن لنا مغيثا إذا ما الهم فينا قد اشتدا
عسى لمحة من نور هديك نستقي بها كوثرا يوم الزحام غدا وردا

In you we seek refuge, oh savior | Be our relief when misery strikes us
A glimpse of your guiding light will be | An abundant source of salvation on the day of judgement[41]

The Prophet appears time and again as the source of refuge in matters of existential concerns and as a source of intercession in the afterlife. People wrote to the Prophet precisely in order to articulate a desire to receive this intercession. They wrote in supplication so that they would ensure his intercession:

وأنال في الآخرة شفا عتك التي تمحو الكبائر
فلأنت أكرم شافع حيث القلوب لدى الحناجر
فاقبل ضراعة عاجز حين الشدائد غير صابر

40 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:181.
41 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 2:17.

[I pray to you] so that I may receive your intercession in the afterlife | Which erases the most heinous sins
For you are the most generous interceder | Especially when fear strikes, and the hearts rise to the throats
So, accept the plea of an invalid | Who lacks patience in times of struggle[42]

The ode to the Prophet is an age-old genre whose popularity in Ottoman Syria in the early modern period is worthy of a separate investigation.[43] What interests us here, is how these verses appear almost as direct responses to the time-related anxieties shown previously. They present a vacillation between fear of the afterlife, the lamenting of time's inevitable progress, and the counteractive seeking of prophetic refuge and intercession. The frequency of this contrast draws our attention- and renders noticeable a general concern for the meaning of one's existence in the world. If image and self-fashioning were a central concern, then so was a deeper sense of self, in this case tied to time, both cyclical and existential. In other words, these verses are our guides into how this community experienced notions of frustration, pain, and existential angst.

Conclusion

This article aimed at illustrating the role of poetry in al-Murādī's *Silk* and his use of verse as a medium through which a deeper layer of historical reality can be conveyed. By analyzing recurring themes in the poetry, we were also able to gain some insight into the mood of the community as imagined by al-Murādī. This community is of course limited to that included in the dictionary. Nonetheless, it is these verses, these shared concerns and interests, that allow us to speak of a learned community of individuals who while variegated in their intellectual and professional interests and expertise, were in a state of constant discourse through a shared affective idiom.

42 Al-Murādī, *Silk*, 1:115.

43 See Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010); Geert van Gelder, "Badī'iyya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Dennis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

References

Andrews, Walter G. *Poetry's Voice, Society's Song: Ottoman Lyric Poetry*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985.

Andrews, Walter G., Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaklı. *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997.

Al-ʿAsqalānī, Ibn Ḥajar. *Al-Durar al-kāmina fī aʿyān al-miʾa al-thāmina*, edited by Muḥammmad Sayyid Jād al-Ḥaqq, 5 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthiyya, 1966.

Bauer, Thomas. "Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches." *Mamluk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 105–132.

Burak, Guy. *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: The Hanafi School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Chamberlain, Michael. *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

El-Rouayheb, Khaled. *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Gelvin, James. "The Politics of Notables Forty Years After." *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 40, no. 1 (2006): 19–29.

Al-Ghazzī, Najm al-Dīn. *Al-Kawākib al-sāʾira bi-aʿyān al-miʾa al-ʿāshira*, edited by Jibrāʾīl Sulaymān Jabbūr. Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīrkānīyya, 1945.

Hanna, Nelly. *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo's Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*. Syracuse [NY]: Syracuse University Press, 2003.

Hattox, Ralph. *Coffee and Coffee Houses: The Origin of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996.

Hourani, Albert. "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables." In *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century*, edited by William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Ibn Abī Sulmā, Zuhayr. *Diwān Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1988.

Meri, Josef W. and Jere L. Bacharach. *Medieval Islamic Civilization: L-Z, Index*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Muhanna, Elias. *The World in a Book: Al-Nuwayri and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Al-Muḥibbī, Muḥammad Amīn. *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar*. Beirut: Maktabat Khayyāṭ, 1966.

Al-Murādī, Muḥammad Khalīl. *Silk al-durar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-thānī ʿashar*, 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997.

Niyazioglu, Asli. *Dreams and Lives in Ottoman Istanbul: A Seventeenth-Century Biographer's Perspective*. London: Routledge, 2017.

Orfali, Bilal. *The Anthologist's Art: Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī and His Yatīmat al-Dahr*. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Rafeq, Abdul-Karim. "Relations Between the Syrian ʿUlamāʾ and the Ottoman State in the Eighteenth Century." *Oriente Moderno* 79 (1999): 67–95.

Rafeq, Abdul-Karim. *The Province of Damascus, 1723–1783*. Beirut: Khayats, 1966.

Al-Sakhāwī, Shams al-Dīn. *Al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ li ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ*, 12 vols. Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayā, 1966.

Sajdi, Dana. *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.

Scalenghe, Sarah. *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Schilcher, Linda. *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag Wiesbaden, 1985.

von Schlegell, Barbara R. "Sufism in the Ottoman Arab World: Shaykh 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d. 1143/1731)." PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1997.

Stetkevych, Suzanne. *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010.

Tamari, Steve. "Biography, Autobiography, and Identity in Early Modern Damascus." In *Auto/Biography and the Construction of Identity and Community in the Middle East*, edited by Mary Ann Fay, 37–49. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2001.

Van Gelder, Geert. "Badīʿiyya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Dennis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Voll, John. "The Non-Wahhabi Hanbalis of Eighteenth-Century Syria." *Der Islam* 49 (1972): 277–291.