

ḤASAN b. MUḤAMMAD al-BŪRĪNĪ
(1556-1615)

LIFE

Ḥ.B. was one of the most prominent scholars of Damascus in his time, renowned for his command of the sciences of the Arabic language as well as his comprehensive knowledge of Arabic literature and history. He was acquainted with a number of high-ranking Ottoman scholars and dignitaries, and a careful observer of the regional politics and local affairs of his time.

Ḥ.B.'s attributive derives from his father's home village of Būrīn, near Nāblus. He was born, however, in his mother's village of Şaffūriyyah in the *sancaq* of Şafad in 963/1556, and started his education there by learning the Qur'an. In the year 973/1565-6, his family moved to Damascus. His father was an upholsterer (*munajjid*) by profession and later a perfumist (*attār*). He rented a room for his son at the °Umariyyah College in the Şaliḥiyyah suburb of Damascus, where Ḥ.B. began to attend classes. By the year 988/1580-81, Ḥ.B. was teaching Shāfi°ī *fiqh* himself at a "spot" (*buq°a*) in the Umayyad mosque. In this capacity, he came to the attention of the retired judge °Abdurrahmān al-Furfūrī (d. 992/1585), who seems to have acted as his patron.

He received his first formal teaching position at the newly established Darwīshiyah mosque in 993/1585. Seven years later, his teacher and father-in-law Aḥmad al-°İtāwī (d. 1025/1616) granted him a license to issue fatwas. By the time of his death (1024/1615), Ḥ.B. had held teaching positions in several colleges in Damascus. Considering the particularly bitter dispute amongst local scholars concerning their distribution, these positions must have been the source for considerable revenue. Ḥ.B.'s income towards the end of his life must therefore have been substantial, and his father is reported to have retired from his profession to live off his son's income. The father's somewhat lowly status was something that his rivals could and sometimes did highlight,¹ and Ḥ.B.'s life is very much an illustration of how a gifted son of a small-town artisan could, by means of his education, rise to social and economic prominence in one of the major cities of the Ottoman Empire.

Though formally a Shāfi°ī mufti, Ḥ.B. was not deemed by contemporary scholars to have been a specialist in Islamic law. Rather, he was renowned for his erudition in the sciences of the Arabic language (i.e., grammar and rhetoric) and his knowledge of poetry and historical anecdotes that allowed him to play a prominent role in the scholarly gatherings of his time. Having learned Persian from a Tabrīzi immigrant to Damascus, Ḥ.B. later also acquired some knowledge of Turkish, though as a later source noted "he was better in Persian".² Ḥ.B.'s literary interests meant that he cultivated the friendship of people outside the class of the ulema, such as poets and scribes, many of whom are included in his biographical dictionary. Indeed Ḥ.B. was himself a poet as

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

well as a scholar, and was allocated an entry in the poetic anthology of his younger Egyptian contemporary Aḥmad al-Khafājī (d. 1059/1659).

WORKS

① *Tarājim al-a'yān min abnā' al-zamān*

Ḥ.B. started writing his biographical dictionary of contemporaries, *Tarājim al-a'yān min abnā' al-zamān* (The Biographies of Notables from the People of the Times) in the year 1009/1601 with the encouragement of Muḥammad Amīn al-°Ajamī (d. 1019/1610), the treasurer (*defterdār*) of Damascus. He seems to have presented a copy of the work to al-°Ajamī, and later another copy to Muḥammad b. Manjak (d. 1032/1623), a prominent military notable of Damascus. However, he was still adding passages to the work in the year of his death, 1024/1615, and there is nothing to suggest that he ever “completed” it.

In the introduction to his work, Ḥ.B. expressed his desire to produce a work of history in the tradition of the great historians of the past, such as Ibn Kaṭīr (d. 774/1373), Ibn al-Aṭīr (d. 620/1223), Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), Ibn Shaddād (d. 632/1235), and Ibn Ḥajar al-°Asqalānī (d. 852/1449). Yet, Ḥ.B.'s work differs significantly from those penned by the aforementioned historians, as it is mainly a biographical dictionary of notables that the author had met personally, and people tend to be included in the dictionary to the extent that they enter into the author's circle of acquaintances. With very few exceptions, the only non-Damascene notables who are accorded entries in the work are those Ḥ.B. met during trips to Tripoli in 1009/1600, Aleppo in 1017/1608, and the Hijāz in 1021/1611. It is thus Ḥ.B. who in a sense holds the work together, and he often appears in it, meeting the protagonists, exchanging poetry with them, teaching them or being taught by them. Accordingly, many passages of the work are in the first-person. Ḥ.B. also relies almost exclusively on oral sources. It is noteworthy that none of the historians mentioned above composed a similar work. The precursors of Ḥ.B.'s conception of a biographical dictionary of contemporaries are rather to be found in the works of the prominent Mamluk belle-lettrist Ṣalāḥuddīn al-Ṣafadī (d. 765/1363) and, closer to Ḥ.B.'s time and place, the Damascene scholar Ibn Ṭulūn (d. 953/1546).³

Ḥ.B.'s work is an important historical source for the political history of Syria in his lifetime. He lived through a period in which Ottoman central authority over the region was weakened and local leaders rose to prominence, often bolstered by roaming mercenaries (*sekbān*) who sold their services to the highest bidder. These local notables often squabbled and fought with each other, and sometimes ignored or defied imperial orders. Ḥ.B. lived through the siege of Damascus and the looting of its extra-mural suburbs in 1015/1606 by the troops of °Alī Jānbulād (d. 1020/1611), the renegade governor of Aleppo, and Fakhruddīn al-Ma°nī (d. 1045/1635), the Druze Emir of Mt. Lebanon. He viewed this development from the standpoint of loyalty to the Ottoman state, though his descriptions tend to be nuanced and balanced rather than merely partisan. He was also often careful to distinguish between mere hear-say

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

and information obtained from what he considered more trustworthy and informed sources. The value of his observations is enhanced by the fact that he “used to frequent the state a lot,” to quote a contemporary source.⁴ Many of his informants include Damascene military notables and Ottoman dignitaries who participated in some capacity in the major political and military events of the time. Ḥ.B.’s close relations with the political-military elite were not to the liking of some of his contemporary scholars who thought close relations with the temporal authorities to be morally corrupting. However, it made him an informed observer of the major political and military events of his time.

Ḥ.B.’s biographical dictionary is also informative on intellectual, cultural and literary life in Damascus in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Despite his stated intention of only mentioning positive attributes of the people he was writing about, he often recorded bitter disputes and rivalries between notables, his own unfavorable impressions of people, the occurrence of inflation and plague, and stories of crimes and sexual misdemeanors. His work also provides information on the lives of (mainly Arab but also some Persian and Turkish) poets, scribes, saints and “holy fools” (*majdhīb*).

The extant manuscripts indicate that Ḥ.B. regularly rewrote, deleted from, and added to his biographical dictionary and this process of revision seems to have gone on until the author’s death. Certain passages have an almost diary-like feel, with passages in the same entry obviously written at different times. Other passages are more polished and written in rhymed prose. On occasion, an entry will read very differently in different extant manuscripts. As such, one cannot hope to edit Ḥ.B.’s work with the assumption that there is an ideal autograph to be reconstructed once scribal “errors,” “omissions,” and “additions” have been peeled away. Given the existence of significant variants in the extant manuscripts with an equal claim to authorial authority, a thorough comparison of manuscripts would offer a fascinating insight into the way in which an Ottoman historian worked.

Almost half a century after Ḥ.B.’s death, the Damascene scholar Faḍlullāh al-Muḥibbī (d. 1082/1671), the father of the more famous historian Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī (d. 1111/1699), prepared an edition of *Tarājim al-a’yān* at the request of the Ottoman scholar and judge Mehmed ‘İzzetī (d. 1092/1681). The edition was completed in 1078/1667-68. Four of the six extant manuscripts today are based on Muḥibbī’s edition (see below ‘Manuscripts’: B, DK, CB, AH), though, puzzlingly, some of these differ substantially amongst themselves. Two other extant manuscripts are independent of Muḥibbī’s recension (see below ‘Manuscripts’: AS, V).

In 1959, the first volume of an edition of Ḥ.B.’s *Tarājim al-a’yān* appeared in print. The editor was Ṣalāḥuddīn al-Munajjid, who introduced the volume with a lengthy and valuable introduction on the life of Ḥ.B., based on a number of then unpublished sources. He also described the four manuscripts available to him at the time, namely, AH, B, DK, and AS. He discounted DK as derivative of AH. He also judged that AH represented a later version of Ḥ.B.’s work, as close as possible to the

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

version of the work when its author died. He therefore made AH the base text of his edition, though he noted variants from B and AS in his apparatus. In 1963, the second volume of the work appeared, covering entries up to and including the letter *fā'*. Sadly, the remaining parts of the work have never been published.

Some of Munajjid's editorial decisions, however, are questionable. One problem is that he simply took at face value the colophons of manuscripts AH and B – which only give the date on which Muhibbī completed his edition and no indication of a date on which they were copied from that edition – and accordingly concluded that both manuscripts were by the hand of Faḍlullāh al-Muhibbī himself (despite the fact that it is highly unlikely that the two manuscripts were completed on the same date). Munajjid also noted the anomaly that the two manuscripts, with the same colophon and, in his opinion, same handwriting, in fact disagreed substantially in entire passages as well as in the ordering of biographical entries. Indeed, manuscript B was adjudged by Munajjid to be closer to manuscript AS, which is independent of Muhibbī's edition, than to manuscript AH. It should also be noted that Ahlwardt, in his magisterial *Verzeichniss* of Arabic manuscripts in Berlin, judged B to have been copied in the 18th century. He thus did *not* simply assume that the colophon meant that the manuscript was by the hand of Muhibbī. Yet another reason to doubt that manuscripts AH and B are actually by Muhibbī is that, as Munajjid noted, the passages of Persian and Turkish poetry in H.B.'s work are corrupt in all three manuscripts that he used, whereas Faḍlullāh al-Muhibbī, who, according to his son Muḥammad Amīn, was knowledgeable in both languages, could hardly have dedicated a copy with such corruptions to an Ottoman-Turkish scholar and judge.

The fact that Munajjid did not make use of manuscripts CB and V is also a drawback. CB is definitely not by the hand of Muhibbī, but may yet be older than both AH and B. Having been based on Muhibbī's autograph edition, it should at the very least be useful in throwing light on the puzzling differences between AH and B. Manuscript V is valuable as one of two extant manuscripts that are independent of Muhibbī's edition. Its text is closer to B and AS than to the apparently anomalous AH that Munajjid chose as his base text.

A revised and complete edition based on all extant manuscripts (minus the derivative DK) is very much a desideratum. Modern text-processing programs should allow for an edition that will reproduce, where necessary, major differences between the manuscripts in parallel columns.

What follows is an outline of the list of biographical entries of the part of the Vienna manuscript covering the letters *qāf* through *yā'*, corresponding to the part that was not published by Munajjid:

Fol. 125r: Kamāluddīn b. Muḥammad b. °Ajlān; Karīmuddīn al-Ṭayrānī. Fol. 126r: Kamāluddīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. Fol. 126v: Luṭfī Çelebī b. Yaḥyā. Fol. 128r: Luṭfī b. Muḥammad b. Yūnus. Fol. 128v: Luṭfullāh al-Balkhī; Muḥammad Efendi b. Burhānuddīn al-Ḥamīdī; Muḥammad b. al-Amīr Manjak. Fol. 129v: Muḥammad Amīn al-Daftarī al-°Ajamī al-

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

Abharī. Fol. 131v: Muḥammad al-Baghdādī. Fol. 132r: Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Dā'ūd al-Muftī al-Maqdisī. Fol. 133r: Muḥammad b. al-Şāliḥī al-Hilālī. Fol. 134r: Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim al-Rūmī. Fol. 134v: Muḥammad b. Fawwāz. Fol. 135v: Muḥammad b. °Alā'uddīn al-Ba°lī. Fol. 136r: Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. °Abdurrahmān. Fol. 136v: Muḥammad al-Sharīf. Fol. 138v: Muḥammad al-°Alamī al-Maqdisī. Fol. 139r: Muḥammad al-°Alamī. Fol. 139v: Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. °Alī al-Ḥarastānī; Muḥammad al-Tannūrī; Muḥammad b. °Ajlān. Fol. 140r: Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Zughbī. Fol. 140v: Muḥammad b. Khalīl b. Qayşar. Fol. 141r: Muḥammad al-Ḥalabī al-Qurashī; Muḥammad b. Jalāluddīn. Fol. 141v: Muḥammad al-Ḥijāzī. Fol. 143r: Muḥibbuddīn al-Ḥamawī. Fol. 144r: Muştafā al-°Akkārī. Fol. 144v: Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad Ibn °Abdulhamīd; Marādīs. Fol. 145r: Mañşūr b. °Abdurrahmān; Mu'min Pāshā. Fol. 145v: Mūsā b. Jamīl al-Sipāhī; Muḥammad al-Ṭarābulusī. Fol. 146r: Nūruddīn al-Bāqānī. Fol. 146v: Najmuddīn b. al-Badr al-Ghazzī. Fol. 147v: Najībuddīn al-Şaydāwī; Nūruddīn °Alī al-Ḥusaynī. Fol. 148r: Nizāmuddīn al-Sindī; Nāhiḍ b. °Abdulqādir al-Ba°lī. Fol. 149r: Wafā' b. Aḥmad al-Ḥawzanī; Wafā' b. Shaykh al-Islām al-Faraḍī; Yūsuf b. Sayfā. Fol. 152v: Yūsuf b. Abīlfath. Fol. 153v: Yūsuf b. Najā' al-Ṭarābulusī. Fol. 154v: Yaḥyā al-Ḥalabī al-Faraḍī; Yaḥyā b. al-Shams b. al-Minqār. Fol. 155r: Yaḥyā b. °Īsā min Karak al-Shawbak.

Apart from the *Tarājim al-a°yān*, the work for which Ḥ.B. became best known in his own day was his commentary on the *Dīwān* of the famous mystical poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235), a commentary that, to the chagrin of the later mystical commentator °Abdulghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), confined itself to the level of exoteric meaning and linguistic analysis.⁵ His *Dīwān* is also extant.

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① *Tarājim al-a°yān min abnā' al-zamān*

Manuscripts: (1) B: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Wetzstein II 29; 189 fols., [TBC]. The colophon states that the editor Faḍlullāh al-Muḥibbī completed his work in “the beginnings of Rajab in the year 1078.” (W. Ahlwardt. *Verzeichniss der arabischen Handschriften der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1887-99), no. 9889). (2) DK: Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Mişriyya, 576 Tārīkh; 198 fols. (or 396 pages), [TBC]. Undated. Copied by the hand of a certain Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Jazā'irī. According to the catalogue (*Fihris al-kutub al-°arabiyyah al-mawjūdah bi'l-dār li-ghāyat shahr December sanat 1928*, vol. 5, 133-134), the manuscript was copied from a manuscript in the Aref Hikmat Library in Medina, i.e., from AH. (3) AS: Calcutta, Library of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, no. D 22 (previously, no. 624); 235 fols., [TBC]. No indication of the copyist or date. Ostensibly made from two autograph drafts (*musawwadatayn*) of Ḥ.B.'s work, prepared for Muḥammad Amīn al-Daftarī and Muḥammad b. Manjak, respectively. (Mirzā Ashraf °Alī. *Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1899), 54). (4) CB: Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, Arabic 3219. Ḥ.B.'s work takes up the first 184 folios of the manuscript, [TBC]. Dated 21 Rajab 1105/18 March 1694 and is ostensibly copied from Faḍlullāh al-Muḥibbī's autograph edition. (A.J. Arberry. *Hand-List*

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Library (Dublin, 1955-66), no. 3219). (5) AH: Medina, Aref Hikmat Library, 42 Tārīkh; approximately 150 unnumbered fols., [TBC]. The colophon matches that of manuscript B, i.e., it states that the editor, Faḍlullāh al-Muḥibbī, completed his work in “the beginnings of Rajab in the year 1078.” (°Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥālah. *Al-Muntakhab min makhṭūṭāt al-Madīna al-Munawwara* (Damascus, 1973), 81). (6) V: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Mxt. 346; 155 fols., 39 lines, nash. Copied in 1185/1771 by the Damascene scholar Muṣṭafā b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Kanjī. (G. Flügel. *Die arabischen, persischen und türkischen Handschriften der kaiserlich-königlichen Hofbibliothek zu Wien* (Vienna, 1865-1867), no. 1190).

Editions: (1) Ṣalāḥuddīn al-Munajjid. *Tarājim al-a°yān min abnā’ al-zamān* (Damascus, 1959-63). [2 vols. only, covering up to and including biographical entries under the letter *fā’*]. (2) °Adnān al-Bakhīt. “Aḥdāt bilād Ṭarābulus al-Shām.” *Majallat Majma° al-Lugha al-°Arabiyya al-Urdunī*, 1 (1978), 191-206. [Reproduces the entry on Yūsuf Sayfā from the Vienna manuscript].

General bibliography

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¹ In the words of a contemporary, Ḥ.B.’s father was a “sheer commoner” (*min quḥḥi’l-°awām*), cf. Najmuddīn Muḥammad al-Ghazzī, *Luṭf al-samar wa qatf al-ṭamar min tarājim a°yān al-ṭabaqah al-ülā min al-qarn al-ḥādī °ashar*, ed. by M. al-Shaykh (Damascus, 1981-82), vol. 1, 359. Muḥibbī (d. 1111/1699) related a story of Ḥ.B.’s enemies trying to embarrass him by inviting his father to join his son at an audience with one of the grandees of Damascus; cf. *Khulāṣat al-aṭar fī tarājim ahl al-qarn al-ḥādī °ashar* (Cairo, 1284/1867-8), vol. 2, 55.

² al-Ghazzī, *Luṭf al-samar*, 357; Muḥibbī, *Khulasat al-aṭar*, vol. 2, 52.

³ The pioneering work in the genre of biographies of contemporaries seems to have been Ṣafadī’s *A°yān al-°aṣr wa a°wān al-naṣr*. See C. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge, 2003). Ibn Ṭulūn’s contributions to the genre include *Dhakhā’ir al-qaṣr bi-tarājim nubalā’ al-°aṣr* and its continuation *al-Tamattu° bi’l-aqrān bayna tarājim al-shuyūkh wa’l-a°yān*. The latter work was abridged by Ḥ.B.’s Aleppine contemporary Aḥmad b. al-Mullā al-Ḥaṣkafī (d. 1004/1596) under the title *Mur°at al-adhhān min al-Tamattu° bi’l-aqrān* and published in two volumes by Dār Ṣādir (Beirut, 1999).

⁴ The phrase is that of, 52.

⁵ Muḥibbī explicitly wrote that this was “his most famous work” (*ashhar ta’alifhi*); cf. *Khulāṣat al-aṭar*, vol. 2, 51.

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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September 2008