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The Editorial Office of the *IRCICA Journal* is based at the headquarters of the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) in İstanbul.

*IRCICA Journal* publishes articles on all aspects of Islamic civilisation, such as the history of culture, art, science, philosophy, literature, traditional handicrafts and archaeology. *IRCICA Journal* aims to preserve the tangible and intangible heritage of Islamic civilisation, comprising of its written, architectural, cultural and artistic forms.

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## Editorial

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It gives us great pleasure to welcome our readers, scholars and academic community to the fourth issue of *IRCICA Journal* which has established itself as a respected venue for interdisciplinary studies on Islamic history, art and civilization over the course of last two years. The launch of this journal as an international platform for discussion and studies on various manifestations of Islamic civilization was a truly inspiring as well as challenging initiative for IRCICA in its capacity as the cultural subsidiary of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. While we complete its second volume thanks to the publication of this fourth issue, we are glad to see that *IRCICA Journal* has accomplished its mission and galvanized its position as a prestigious and respected academic platform on which leading international experts could present their studies on tangible and intangible aspects of Islamic heritage to the attention of global scholarly community.

Just as the first three issues, scholarly articles in Arabic and English are included in this issue reflecting our broad geographical scope which include the Balkans, Central Asia, Caucasia, Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. As ever, our wide thematical range including various reflections of Islamic civilization such as the history of arts, sciences, literature, architecture and handicrafts is carefully maintained. Accordingly, the fourth issue of *IRCICA Journal* includes one article in English and four articles in Arabic, all written by renowned authors distinguished in their fields.

The first article of the journal, entitled *The Mamluks and the Intellectual Life*, is prepared by Associate Professor Cengiz Tomar, from Marmara University, İstanbul. It underlines the Arab medieval and modern historians' negative attitudes towards the Mamluk period (1250-1517), an attitude which was widely spread in the Arab World. This period is indeed described as a period of disorder and injustice punctuated by rebellions and struggles for power, a period marking the decline of the Arabic literature and Islamic sciences. However, the author explains that

these negative attitudes expressed towards the Mamluk period are more due to the ideological approach of historians rather than to reality itself. That is why he tries in this research to set the record straight by examining the intellectual life of the period, mainly on the basis of the Mamluk Ameer's biographies recorded in the biographical dictionaries which, on the contrary, show that the Mamluks and their descendants played an active and important role in the culture of the territories they ruled as foreigners.

The second article of the journal is prepared by Professor Muhittin Serin, from İstanbul 29 Mayıs University. It deals with the subject of The Sun of Calligraphy Ahmed Şemseddin Karahisari and his Mushaf. The Author began his article by talking about the evolution of the mushafs scripts starting from the era of the Prophet (peace be upon him) until the Ottoman period through the Rashidun Caliphs era, the Umayyad era and the Abbasid era. He explained that the Ottoman period was the era in which scripts of mushafs (scripts of copies of the Holy Quran) experienced a stage of maturity marked by the emergence of thousands of Ottoman calligraphers who devoted their lives to writing the Quran and improving its scripts such as Sheikh Hamdullah al-Amâsi (d. 926 AH / 1520 AD) who innovated the naskh script and set aesthetic rules for the Ottoman calligraphy in the six calligraphic styles and Sheikh Ahmet Şemseddin Karahisari (d. 963 AH / 1556 AD), known as the Sun of Calligraphy and who is the subject of this article. The author also referred in his research to Sheikh Ahmet Karahisari's mushaf kept in Topkapı Palace Museum library, and explained that he was requested to write it by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent and that it represents a wonderful masterpiece that reflects the apogee of the Islamic arts under the Ottoman civilization. The writer gave detailed information on the characteristics of this mushaf in terms of its calligraphy, gilding and decoration.

The third article of the issue, by Dr. Mohammed Saeed al-Mallah, from the United Arab Emirates, deals with The First Latin Translation of the Meanings of the Holy Quran. The author explained that this translation entitled Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete (False Prophet Mohammed's Law) which started

in Toledo in 1143 with the beginning of the Reconquista was not aimed at introducing the reader to the Holy Quran but it was rather an act of hostility with the aim of making him hate it. The translation team included four translators from England, Germany, Spain and France, respectively, Robert Ketton from Chester, Hermann from Dalmatia, Peter from Toledo and Pierre from Poitiers. The writer notes that these translators had a good command of both Arabic and Latin languages together with a long experience in translating books on medicine, engineering, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, botany and other fields from Arabic to Latin. Thus if their purpose was loyalty and accuracy, they would have made an excellent Latin translation of the Holy Quran quite in accordance with its meaning. Besides, the church was not at all tolerant with full translations from Arabic, that is to say from the Quran itself, but used to turn a blind eye to partial translations and translations based on the first Latin translation given its hostile position towards Islam.

The forth article by Prof. Fazıl Bayat, from OIC Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, deals with the subject under the title (The spread of Islam in Anatolia: historical study). It addresses one of the environments which was proud to greet Islam, that is Anatolia (Asia Minor). Actually, the subject has not been until now fully studied by the Arab researchers. The study focuses on the general situation that prevailed in Anatolia before it came under Islamic rule, that is the Byzantine era; the first Islamic and Arab attempts to spread Islam in Anatolia; the status after the Muslim Arabs conquered the Levant; the conquest of Anatolia by the Seljuk and the spread of Muslims in it after the glorious battle of Manzikert; the Islamic expansion in Anatolia to the detriment of the Byzantine State and the Islamic successive governments in it; the attitude of the Muslim rulers towards the population; the role of the Ottomans in completing the conquests; the coexistence between the Muslims and the non-Muslim population in Anatolia; and the role of Muslim Turks' migrations, Sufi orders and the preachers in promoting the Islamic presence in Anatolia.

HALİT EREN

It is crystal clear from the summaries of the elaborate articles presented so far that this issue of *IRCICA Journal*, as the previous issues, is very likely to trigger new debates and pave the way for novel research on Islamic history and civilization. We are glad to observe the maintenance of high international standards and publication of original research that shed a light on the historical development of cultural issues in the Islamic World in every new issue. Therefore, it is with great pride and satisfaction that IRCICA presents the fourth issue of *IRCICA Journal* to the kind attention of global scholarly community.

Halit Eren, Assoc. Prof.  
Director General, IRCICA

# Intellectual Life and the Mamluks

Cengiz Tomar\*

The Mamluk period (1250-1517) has been characterized both by medieval Arabic and modern historians as a period of disorder and injustice punctuated by power struggles and rebellions. In cultural terms, the era has been dismissed by historians of Arabic literature as a period, which witnessed the decline of Arabic language and culture. These negative attitudes to the Mamluk period may be to some extent justified, but we believe that it represents more the ideological approach of Arab historians rather than the reality of the situation. This article will examine the reasons, underlying the negative approach which gained wide currency throughout the Arab World and will attempt to set the record straight by examining the intellectual life of the period based mainly on the biographies of Mamluk Ameeris recorded in the biographical dictionaries (the *wafayat* books).

One of the most important aspects of Mamluk administration is that the sultanate was not based on dynastic rule. Because of that, the death or deposition of a mamluk sultan was generally attended by a power struggle. To avoid this most sultans appointed their sons as heirs in the hope that the succession could be a smooth transition of power from father to son, but this rarely became a reality as they became puppet sultans in the hands of

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powerful mamluk *Ameers* (generals)<sup>1</sup> who would usually dispose of them and begin ruling in their own name.

One of the most important impediments to the smooth functioning of a hereditary system in the Mamluk State is to be found in the Mamluk concept of sultanate. Having been brought from Caucasia or Central Asia in his childhood and sold in the slave markets, the Sultan was respected only as *primus inter pares* among his fellow Mamluks. The *Ameers* saw the Sultan as one of their friends (*hushdash*)<sup>2</sup>, rather than as a lord and master. This attitude to the sultanate was to bedevil almost all elections of a new Sultan, which were usually attended by rebellions on the part of unsuccessful candidates. In particular, the *Ameers* who were appointed as governors of Syria often felt that they had been deprived of the top position and frequently rose in revolt against the Sultan.

One of the most common criticisms of the Mamluk government is that it hastened the decline of Arabic culture and language, which they subjected to foreign influences. Accordingly, it has been claimed that although the Mamluk period was productive in literature, most of the works were derivative and did not represent genuine contributions to the Arabic literary corpus. Penetration of foreign and colloquial words into Arabic in this period has also been severely criticized.<sup>3</sup>

This critique of Mamluk government and cultural activity

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<sup>1</sup> P. M. Holt, "Memlük Sultanlığında Devlet Yapısı", (Turkish tr. S. Kortantamer), *Bellekten*, vol. LII (1988), pp. 229-230.

<sup>2</sup> A. Levanoni, "The Mamluk Conception of the Sultanate", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. XXVI (1994), pp. 373-392; P. M. Holt, "The Position and Power of the Mamluk Sultan", *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. XXXVIII/2 (1975), pp. 237-249; "Succession in the Early Mamluk Sultanate", *ZDMG*, vol. XVI 20 (1985), pp. 144-148.

<sup>3</sup> H. al-Fâhûrî, *al-Câmi' fi-târih al-adab al-Arabî, -adab al-kadîm-*, Beirut 1968, pp. 1024-1030; J. Zaydan, *Târih al-Adab al-Arabî*, Beirut 1983, vol. III, pp. 116-121; Ö. Farruh, *Târih al-Adab al-Arabî*, Beirut 1989, vol. III, 614; S. Kortantamer, "Memlük Tarihciliğine Genel Bir Bakış", *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, vol. I (1983), pp. 33.

mirrors the viewpoint of the contemporary *ulama*<sup>4</sup> who held a dominant position in the literary world. At a time when the eastern (*mashriq*) Islamic dominions were either under Mongol domination or threatened by the Crusaders, they viewed the Mamluks as one more alien hegemony over an Islamic community. As for the modern Arab scholar, he tends to view the role of this foreign-born elite as a form of early colonialism (*isti'mar*) in accordance with modern Arab historical ideology.<sup>5</sup> Historical accounts tended to paint a picture of a society in continual turmoil, whereas the reality was that common man was rarely affected, if aware of the internecine activities of his rulers, which were often confined to the barracks and the citadels.<sup>6</sup>

We should bear in mind the fact that although foreign-born, the Mamluks did learn to read and write in Arabic and undertook religious education in the *tibaqs* (barracks) before they went on to military training. However the aim of sultans was not to raise scholars in the classical Islamic mode, but to train the Mamluks as soldiers in order to consolidate their power against rival Mamluk Ameers and foreign enemies. That is not to say that the Mamluks were totally indifferent to the culture of the dominions over which they ruled; many Mamluks, who are described as religious (*dayyinan*) in biographical dictionaries, not only constructed mosques, *madrasas* (religious schools) and convents (*zawiyas*) in which the local *ulama* and students studied the Islamic religious sciences, but also donated generous endowments which provided the salaries of *ulama* as well as scholarships for students.<sup>7</sup> As a

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<sup>4</sup> See A. Mâcid, "Mawkıf al-Misriyyîn min hukm al-Mamâlîk fi al-usûr al-vustâ", *Hawliyyât al-Kulliyat al-Adâb bi-Câmi'at 'Ayi Şams*, XII (1969) pp. 49-58; U. Haarmann, "Ideology and History, Identity and Alterity: The Arab Image of the Turk from the Abbasids to Modern Egypt", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, XX (1988), pp. 181-183

<sup>5</sup> B. Lewis, *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented*, Princeton 1975, p. 81

<sup>6</sup> T. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, Cambridge 1994, xii.

<sup>7</sup> M. M. Amîn, *al-Awkaf wa al-hayât al-ijtimâ'iyya fi-Misr*, 648-923/1250-1517,

result, many scholars from Turkey, Iran and Iraq, now under Mongol rule, immigrated to the Mamluk lands. Today, most historical sites (such as mosques, *madrastas* and convents etc.) in the important centres such as Cairo, Alexandria, Damascus, Aleppo and Jerusalem date back to Mamluk times.<sup>8</sup>

Bearing in mind the negative approach of the local *ulama* towards the mamluks,<sup>9</sup> it is not surprising to see that the biographers of the mamluk Ameers in the biographical dictionaries often refer to him as a "fool", "illiterate" or observe that "he knows neither Arabic nor Turkish".<sup>10</sup> However, some of Mamluk Ameers and their sons definitely contributed to the intellectual life of the period positively, but they are scarcely recorded by the non-Mamluk *ulama*, who having held a monopoly over the religious sciences, tended to jealously guard their own position in the system and minimize alien Mamluk contributions to their civilization. In fact there were numerous contributions made by *ulama* of Mamluk extraction, of which some few examples are given below. These have been drawn from the more than 1,000 Mamluk biographies recorded by al-Safavi's *al-Waḥī bi al-Wafāyat*, Ibn Taghriberdī's *al-*

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Cairo 1980, pp. 70-99; J. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, Princeton 1992, pp. 130-146;

<sup>8</sup> In this period 50 *madrastas* and 20 *zawīyas* were constructed only in Jerusalem. Most of them are still called with Mamluk names for instance Jālikiyya, Dawādāriyya, and Jaharkasiyya. See for details K. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, vol. II, New York 1978; L. Burgoyne, *Jerusalem under the Mamluks*, London 1987; M. Meinecke, *Die Mamlukische Architektur in Ägypten und Syrien*, vol. I-II, Glückstadt 1992.

<sup>9</sup> U. Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria", *Journal of Semitic Studies*, vol. XXXIII/1 (1988), pp. 1-4

<sup>10</sup> For some examples see Ibn Taghriberdī, *al-Manhal al-sāfi wa al-mustawfi ba'd al-wāfi* (*al-Manhal al-sāfi*), Cairo 1984-1993, vol. II, 329, 347, 485-486, III, 89-91, 105-106, IV, 21-22, 91-93; Ibn Hajar al-Askalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina fi-'ayān al-miat' al-sāmīna* (*al-Durar al-kāmina*), Haydarābād 1348-1350, vol. I, 411; al-Sahāvī, *al-Dav' al-lāmi' li-ahli al-karn al-tāsi'* (*al-Dav' al-lāmi'*), Cairo 1353-1355, vol. II, 268, 270-272.

*Manhal al-Safi*, Ibn Hajar's *al-Durar al-Kamina* and al-Sakhavi's *al-Daw al-Lami'*, and they may shed some light on the Mamluk contributions to the intellectual life of the period.

Two of the most popular branches of religious science to which the Mamluks took particular interest in were *fiqh* and *hadith*, the most popular branches of the Islamic scholarship in all periods. Sanjar al-Dawadari al-Türki (d.699/1300), one of the distinguished scholars among the Mamluk Ameer's of the Bahri period (1250-1382), is described as both "*faqih* and *muhaddith*" in the biographical dictionaries. He was born after 1223 and brought to Egypt from "the Turkish land" in 1242. Having been bought by al-Zahir Baybars (1260-1277) he resided in Damascus before becoming *Ameer al-mia wa muqaddam al-alf* (general), the highest rank in the Mamluk military system. Besides his very important military and administrative duties, Sanjar continued to attend *ilm halaqas* (scholarly meetings). He had been praised not only for his striking knowledge of *fiqh* and *hadith*, but also for his writing. His pupil al-Mizzi (d.1341), one of the prominent *muhaddith* of the Fourteenth century, collected his *riwayat* (*ali isnad*) in two volumes. Another famous *muhaddith* and also Sanjar's student was al-Birzali (d.1339) who arranged a fourteen-volume *mu'jam al-shuyukh* for him. He both received and transmitted *hadith* in all of the *centres* of learning such as Cairo, Alexandria, Damascus, Aleppo, and Jerusalem etc. before teaching in *madrasas* in Cairo and Damascus.<sup>11</sup>

Another prominent *muhaddith* among the Mamluk Ameer's was Tankiz (d.741/1340), the deputy of Sham, who had been brought from Anatolia by the slave trader (*tajir al-mamalik*) Khoja Alaaddin Sivasi. It is very likely that he had been brought from Sivas because of trader's *nisba* is al-Sivasi. Sultan Lachin (1296-1299) had first bought him, but on his death the new Sultan al-

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<sup>11</sup> Safadî, *al-Vâfi bi al-vafayât (al-Vâfi)*, (ed.H.Ritter and others) Weisbaden 1962-, vol. XV, 479-482.

Nasir Muhammad (1293-1294, 1299-1309, 1309-1341), chose to have Tankiz transferred to his own barracks. Tankiz, thanks to his talents, managed to be promoted to the new sultan's *khasakiyyas* (elite officers). He then went on to fight the Mongols in Syria with great effect. As a reward he was appointed *naib al-Sham* (deputy of Syria), and he carried on in this post from 712 onwards. While deputy for what was an exceptionally long period he endowed several buildings and took an active interest in scholarship regularly attending *ilm halaqa* session. Fortunately, we know some titles of the books he studied: the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih al-Muslim* and *Maani al-Asar* of Tahavi (d.933) the famous Egyptian Hanafi *faqih*, as recorded in the sources. Two of his teachers Isa b. el-Mutim and Abubakr b. Abd al-Dayim, were also well known.<sup>12</sup>

We have more information about Taghribermish (d.852/1448), a Hanafi *faqih* and *muhaddith*, brought from Anatolia to the Aleppo slave market in 808/1405. When he was seven years old, Taghribermish was bought by the *Ameer* Çakmak, who was later become Sultan with the title of al-Zahir (1438-1453), during a visit to the city. When his second master sultan al-Nasir Faraj (1399-1412) died, he was attached to Sultan al-Shaykh al-Mahmudi (1412-1421) who manumitted him. If we are to believe our sources, his father was Muslim. In theory, a Muslim's son could not take his place in the Mamluk system, so the slave traders may have changed his name in order to be able to sell him. A very interesting anecdote about Taghribermish is given in our sources. According to the anecdote, when *Ameer* Çakmak met sultan al-Muayyad al-Shaykh, he wished to reclaim him on the grounds that the original sale had been illegal. But al-Muayyad refused to return Taghribermish to Çakmak because of his talent in Quran recitation and his knowledge of *fiqh* and in his place the Sultan gave Çakmak some money by way of compensation and another

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<sup>12</sup> *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, IV, 156-167; *al-Durar al-kâmina*, vol. I, 520-528.

Mamluk. Taghribermish's talents were in high demand and this was to cause disputes between the Mamluk Sultans and the Ameers. Taghribermish was to remain *jamadar* (the officer was in charge of sultan's wardrobe) and *khasaki* for a while before being appointed deputy of the Cairo Citadel with the rank of *Ameer al-ashara*, one of the first ranks in the Mamluk hierarchy. He was an authority on *fiqh*, *hadith*, history and literature. His Arabic was excellent as well as his Turkish and he wrote poems in both languages. Luckily, the historian, Ibn Tagriberdi, recorded his academic curriculum vitae:

"He read the *Sahih al-Bukhari* with Muhib al-Din Ahmad b. Nasr Allah al-Hanbali al-Baghdadi, the chief qadi of Egypt; read the *Sahih al-Muslim* with the Zayn al-Din Abd al-Rahman b. Muhammad al-Zarkashi; read the *Sunan al-Sughra* of al-Nasai with Shihab al-din Ahmad al-Kalutati; read the *Sunan of Ibn Maja* with Shams al-Din Muhammad al-Misri and read part of the *Sunan of al-Darimi* with the qadi Nasir al-Din Muhammad b. Hasan al-Faqusi; read with the chief qadi, shaykh al-Islam Shihab al-Din Ahmad b. Ali b. Hajar Sunan of Abu Dawud al-Sijistani; and He also read with Umm al-Fadl Aisha, *Fawaid* of Abu Bakr al-Shafi, known as *Ghaylaniyyat*. He was also thought *Mujam al-Saghir* of al-Tabarani by Taqi al-Din Abd al-Rahman al-Qalqashandi in the presence of Umm al-Fadl Aisha. He was thought Sunan of Abu Dawud in the presence by qadi Shams al-Din Muhammad b. Mahmud al-Balisi".<sup>13</sup>

Such an academic biography as that of Taghribermish is exceptional in that it is very detailed. More typical is that of the *Ameer al-mia* Burunlu (d.699/1300), who is credited with having studied under 260 teachers, being both a muhaddith as faqih and having fine handwriting which he had acquired in the chancery

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<sup>13</sup> *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, IV, 68-74. For Taghribermish life and scholarship also see, J. Berkey, "Silver Threads among the Coal: A Well Educated Mamluk of the Ninth/Fifteenth Century", *Studia Islamica*, vol. LXXIII (1991), 109-125.

where he served for a considerable period.<sup>14</sup>

One of the Mamluk Ameers also known as faqih was Sanjar al-Jawli (d.745/1345), who founded a madrasa outside Cairo and also built number of buildings and endowments during his period as deputy in Gazza, Jerusalem and Hama. He studied Shafi *fiqh* and was given the authority to issue legal opinions (*fatwas*). His commentary on Shafi's *Musnad* (a collection of hadiths extracted from his *Mabsut*) shows him to be very competent exponent of *fiqh*.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the Mamluks who were renowned as scholars, the names of mamluks who built madrasas or attended class or consorted with scholars there frequently crops up in the biographies. Passages such as "He attends scholarly classes" or "He liked to be with scholars" are met with commonly in the Mamluk biographies. A very remarkable anecdote about Asandamur al-Gurji (d.711/1311), a deputy of Hama and Aleppo in the period of an-Nasir, is recorded by al-Safadi:

"Asandamur asked whether a saint, a martyr, a prophet or an angel is superior to others, while he was in an *ilm majlis*. Thereupon Ibn al-Wakil (d.716/1317) and Ibn al-Zamlakani (d.727/1327), who were in the *majlis* too, wrote treatises to answer Asandamur's question".<sup>16</sup>

Among the prominent Mamluks, Argunshah al-Nasiri, bought

<sup>14</sup> *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. II, 68-72.

<sup>15</sup> *al-Vâfi*, vol. XV, 479-483; *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. VI, 74-76; *al-Durar al-kâmina*, vol. I, 172; The manuscripts of Sanjar's Commentary, recorded also by Khaji Khalifa (*Kasf al-Zunun*, Beirut 1982, vol. II, 1683) reached us, see, J. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, Princeton 1992, p. 148 footnote.

<sup>16</sup> *Al-Vâfi*, vol. IX, 248-249; *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. II, 443-445; *al-Durar al-kâmina*, vol. I. 388. Ibn al-Wakil's treatise is *Kitâb al-Fark bayna al-malak wa al-nabi wa al-şahid wa al-walî wa al-âlim*, see, B. Aybakan, "İbnü'l-Vekil", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. XXI, pp. 237-238; Ibn al-Zamlakânî's two treatises are *Ujalat al-râkib fi zikri al-Sharaf al-manâkib* (ed. Hayrullah al-Sharif, Damascus 1993) and *Fadl al-malak ala al-başar* also known as *Tahqiq al-avlâ min ahli al-rafik al-a'lâ fi tafâdili ahli al-ulûm wa al-alâ*. See, H. M. Günay, "İbnü'z-Zemlekânî", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. XXI, 242-243.

by Qalawun (1279-1290) and brought up with his son al-Nasir Muhammad, was not only *naib al-saltana* in the period al-Nasir, but also a very famous scholar with authority (*ijadha*) to teach fiqh and give legal opinions. Argunshah, was also a good calligrapher, studied the *Sahih al-Buhari* under the guidance of Asir al-Din b. Hayyan and made a copy of the text. Having received *ijadha* in Shafi fiqh, he taught two years in the madrasa that he had built in Mecca.<sup>17</sup> Ibn Hajar al-Askalani claimed that nobody among the Mamluks collected hadith as much as Argunshah.<sup>18</sup> Such information as noted above is rarely met with. Most biographies merely mention that the subject was a muhaddith or faqih, often both. Examples of these are: Tamur al-Shihabi (d.798/1396)<sup>19</sup>, Sudun al-Faqih al-Zahir (d.830/1427), praised by Ibn Tagriberdi as "one of the best in Hanafi *fiqh*"<sup>20</sup>, and Sayf al-Din Inal (d.853/1450).<sup>21</sup>

As has been noted, historians of Arabic literature typified the Mamluk era as "the period of decline" the local *ulama*, monopolizing religious sciences, not only did their best to keep Mamluks out of academic life,<sup>22</sup> but also accused them of being illiterate. This characterisation may be true to some degree, but that would be to ignore the fact that having learned Arabic extremely well, some Mamluk Ameers went on to write excellent poems. For instance, the poet Bashkird al-Nasiri (d.702/1302) praised both by Birzali (d. /1339) and Zahabi (d.1348) for being competent in prose as well as poetry, but criticised by Ibn al-Zamlakani for challenging the rules of versification. Bashkird, also transmitted hadith and claimed that he had not spoken Turkish for twenty years in order

<sup>17</sup> *Al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. II, 306-308;

<sup>18</sup> *al-Durar al-kâmina*, vol. I, 351-352.

<sup>19</sup> *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. IV, 102-103.

<sup>20</sup> *Op.cit.*, IV, 164-165.

<sup>21</sup> *Op.cit.*, III, 213-215.

<sup>22</sup> U. Haarmann, "Ideology and History, Identity and Alterity: The Arab Image of the Turk from the Abbasids to Modern Egypt", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. XX (1988), p. 183.

to be the more perfect in Arabic.<sup>23</sup>

Another poet Mamluk Aydamur al-Gurji (d.707/1307) was particularly famous with his *madhs* (eulogies).<sup>24</sup> Like his master Sanjar al-Jawli, mentioned above, Ameer Altunbugha al-Jawli (d.744/1343), was known as a Shafi *faqih* and poet, celebrated for his odes (*kasidas*).<sup>25</sup> Ozdamur al-Kashif, another Mamluk poet, produced a versification of Ibn Hajib's (d.1249) *al-Kafya*, on Arabic grammar, and also composed an *al-Alfiyya*.<sup>26</sup>

As has been noted, when the Mamluks were brought from Caucasia to Egypt and Syria as slaves, they were first trained as soldiers after receiving religious and basic education.<sup>27</sup> Some of these Mamluks, termed *kuttabi* (non-freed mamluk) in the Sultan's barracks were employed as calligraphers in copying books for their masters.<sup>28</sup> Being competent in calligraphy, a number of *kuttabis* were appointed as *dawadars* (scribes) later. Passages like "he was a calligrapher" or "his writing was excellent" are very common in the Mamluk biographies. One of them Hajib Ayas al-Salihi, also transmitted hadith in Cairo and wrote the correspondence of the Mamluk Sultan to foreign rulers.<sup>29</sup> Mamluk Ameers such as Arslan al-Dawadar (d.717/1317),<sup>30</sup> Tashbugha (d.752/1351)<sup>31</sup> and Barsbugha (d.820/1417)<sup>32</sup> are some of the Mamluks described

<sup>23</sup> *al-Durar al-kâmina*, vol. I, 471

<sup>24</sup> *al-Vâfi*, vol. X, 15-17; *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. III, 179-180; *al-Durar al-kâmina*, vol. I, 471.

<sup>25</sup> *al-Durar al-kâmina*, vol. I, 408; *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. III, 71-76.

<sup>26</sup> *al-Durar al-kâmine*, vol. I, 355-356.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Makrîzî, *al-Mawaiz wa'l-I'tibar bi-zikr al-hitat wa al-âsâr*, Beirut nd. (Dâru Sâdir), vol. II, 213.

<sup>28</sup> B. Fleming, "Literary Activities in Mamluk Halls and Barracks", *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, (ed.M.Rosen-Ayalon), Jerusalem 1977, pp. 256-259.

<sup>29</sup> *al-Vâfi*, vol. IX, 358; *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. III, 121-122.

<sup>30</sup> *al-Vâfi*, vol. VIII, 346-347; *al-Durar al-kâmine*, vol. I, 349-350.

<sup>31</sup> *al-Vâfi*, vol. XVI, 436-437; *al-Durar al-kâmine*, vol. II, 219.

<sup>32</sup> *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. III, 283-284.

as calligraphers. Another Mamluk Ameer with the epithet of "calligrapher" is Ameer al-Kabir Sanjar al-Shujai, brought up by an old woman in Damascus before joining Qalawun's mamluks. He held the vizierate and *niaba* of Damascus.<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note that Sultan Baybars bought Baylik al-Zahiri (d.676/1277) expensively, due to his skill in calligraphy and poetry.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most celebrated branches of literature during the Mamluk period was the writing of history. This period witnessed the composition of weighty historical chronicles and massive biographical dictionaries.<sup>35</sup> Particularly prolific in the field of history writing were the *awlad al-nas* who were the sons of high-ranking mamluks. Unable to join the high ranks of the mamluks themselves they were able to acquire an extremely good education, which allowed them to write scholarly treatises. Having the luxury of wealth in the family they could devote themselves to writing whatever they wanted and because of the connections of their families with the ruling elite they were privy to all sorts of information denied to the rest of the *ulama*. Ibn Aybak al-Dawadari (d.after 1336) the writer of the well-known mamluk history *Kanz al-Durar* and Ibn Taghriberdi (d.1470), the composer of very detailed Islamic history *al-Nujum al-zahira* and important biographical dictionary especially on the mamluks, *al-Manhal al-Safi*, are the two of the most famous historians from among the *awlad al-nas*.

However, a first generation Mamluk Ameer, Baybars al-Mansuri (d.725/1325), is one of the exceptional historians among the mamluks. Being Qalawun's mamluk, Baybars was brought up with the sultan's own sons. He held the *dawadariyya* before being appointed *naib al-saltana* (deputy of the sultan), the second most

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<sup>33</sup> *al-Vâfi*, vol. XV, 475-478.

<sup>34</sup> *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. III, 512-514; *al-Vâfi*, vol. X, 365-367.

<sup>35</sup> S. Mustapha, who wrote a four-volume study on Islamic historiography, recorded that just in Mamluk Period more than 2,500 different history books were written. *Târih al-Arabî wa al-muarrihûn*, Beirut 1990, vol. III, p. 15.

important position in the Mamluk Sultanate. His *Zubda al-fikra* is one of the most original histories of the early mamluk period. His opponents have criticized him for his use of secretaries (*katibs*) while he was composing the *Zubda*, the implication being that they had a ghost written the history for him. However, as a slave-soldier from a background alien to the culture of this society, his great achievement in writing of this history cannot be overlooked.<sup>36</sup>

Some Mamluk Ameers, on the other hand, have been praised for their language skills or bilingualism. Ameer Aytamish (d.736/1336), one of al-Nasir's *naibs*, was noted for his linguistic skills. Having a strong command of the Mongolian language, law and usages, he was able to make decisions on the application of Mongol law (the Chengisid *Yasa*), which had been adopted by the mamluks.<sup>37</sup> He also wrote letters to the Ilkhanid ruler, Abu Said in Mongolian. Furthermore Aytamish went to the Ilkhanid capital as delegate on more than one occasion and signed a peace treaty between the two countries.<sup>38</sup> Because of his competence in Persian, Ameer Argunshah al-BaydAmeeri (d.802/1400) is also mentioned by our sources.<sup>39</sup>

A further dimension of the mamluks' cultural activities was the energy invested in the production of books. The sultans' interest in collecting books encouraged the scholarly production and copying of texts. Sultan Çakmak (1438-1453), Qayitbay (1468-1495) and Qansu Gawri (1501-1516) are well known for their book collections, which are mostly preserved in Topkapı Palace Library

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<sup>36</sup> *al-Vâfi*, vol. X, 352; *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. III, 477-748; *al-Durar al-kâmine*, vol. I, 509-510.

<sup>37</sup> For applications of Cengiz Han in Mamluk State see, A. N. Poliak, "The Influence of Chingiz-Khan's *Yasa* upon the General Organization of the Mamluk Sultanate", *Bulletin School of Oriental African Studies*, vol. X (1939-1942), pp. 862-876; D. Ayalon, "The Great *Yasa* of Chingiz Khan A Reexamination" *Studia Islamica*, vol. XXXIV(1972) pp. 113-158; vol. XXXVIII (1973), pp. 106-156.

<sup>38</sup> *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. II, p. 112-113, 291-293; *al-Durar al-kâmina*, vol. I, 424.

<sup>39</sup> *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. II, 303-304; *al-Dav' al-lâmi'*, vol. II, 26.

today. In imitation of the Sultans, the Mamluk Ameer also adopted the habit of collecting and copying particularly valuable books. The biographical dictionaries record several mamluks, famous for their book collections. Among them is Sultan al-Ashraf al-Halil's (1290-1293) *naib* (deputy), Baydara al-Mansuri (d.1293) who was the owner of a priceless book collection, which was famous throughout religious and scientific circles.<sup>40</sup> In addition, Dawadar Oljay al-Nasiri (d.732/1332)<sup>41</sup> and Kijlis al-Silahdar<sup>42</sup>'s valuable s book collections have been noted.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the Mamluks, introduced to an unfamiliar culture as slaves, not only embraced the culture of their adopted sociality but also positively contributed to the intellectual life of the period. A number of factors tend to minimise the importance of the Mamluk contribution to the cultural activities of Egypt and Syria. Firstly the Mamluks were identified as one of the alien warlords that had taken control of Arab societies and had been directly instrumented in the decline of Arabic literature and the Islamic sciences. It was therefore inappropriate to allow them too great a role as exponents of these sciences. There was also the prejudice whereby the Mamluks were seen as the members of the warrior class and not scholars, that role belonging to the native Arab Muslims. However the biographical dictionaries show that the facts were not that simple: we have numerous examples of Mamluks and their descendants playing an active and important role in the culture of the territories they ruled as foreigners.

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<sup>40</sup> *al-Vâfi*, vol. X, 360-361; *al-Manhal al-sâfi*, vol. III, 493-495; *al-Durar al-kâmina*, vol. I, 405.

<sup>41</sup> *al-Durar al-kâmine*, vol. I, 481-482.

<sup>42</sup> *Op.cit.*, III, 216.

