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MELKITES  
IN THE WRITINGS OF MUSLIM HISTORIANS  
OF *BILĀD AL-ŠĀM*

BY  
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## INTRODUCTION

Islam as the dominant faith of the Syrian population in the early Ottoman period had its own social institutions within which Muslims could live without interacting with non-Muslims<sup>1</sup>. Religious distinction had their basis in strong communal attachments as well as in the law, which imposed on non-Muslims various disabilities placing them in a subordinate social position<sup>2</sup>. The Ottoman state conferred rank, titles, tax exemptions, dress privileges, and various advantages which added other formal marks of privilege. Under such circumstances, for the communities to document their separate histories without reference to the “other” might be predictable. However, the lack of material on Christians –Melkites and others– in the copious Islamic heritage of these centuries remains curious. Granted the role of Christians in a politically predominant Muslim community was marginal; but the total suppression of their history by Muslim historians is unjustified<sup>3</sup>. One can attribute this “silence” to many reasons.

This paper will attempt to shed light on these issues; to try to determine whether this was a deliberate act of malice or chronicling Christian activities was not among the priorities of Muslim historians of that era. During my research, I had the chance to study thirty-seven historical compositions by Muslim scholars in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century *Bilād al-Šām*; these include biographical dictionaries, chronicles, and monographs such as: *taḍkira* (diary), *riḥla* (educational journeys), *ziyārāt* (pilgrimage guide) and *faḍā'il* (merits of cities and locations)<sup>4</sup>. Since historians of these disciplines differ in their approach and perspectives, I will discuss them under their separate fields.

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1) Muslim Historians of this period considered Christians as one community whether Melkites, Maronites or others. While, this paper falls outside the boundaries set for the conference namely the year 1516, it must be emphasized that the end of one state and the beginning of another do not necessarily involve an equivalent break in historical traditions. Muslim historiography did not change radically from the classical framework until probably the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This being the case, whatever conclusions can be drawn from the historical literature of this era, can be interrelated with earlier periods.

2) Abraham MARCUS, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1989), p. 37.

3) Robert HADDAD, *Syrian Christians in Muslim Society* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1970), p. 3.

4) The *ziyārāt* genre originated from the need of the faithful in the Muslim community for manuals describing sanctuaries of prophets and holy men to be visited. *Faḍā'il* type of literary monographs cites quotations from the *Qur'ān*, *ḥadīth* and related sources extensively in praise of individuals or localities. See: Naila Takieddine KAIDBEY, *Historiography of Bilad al-Sham in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ph.D. dissertation, American University of Beirut, 1995), pp. 297-366; 368-382.

## A. BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARIES

In the Arab Islamic community, history was viewed in terms of the actions of individuals and their contributions to the culture. History became the register for the exploits of eminent inhabitants of a city, a region or an era. The commemoration of those virtuous ancestors became the motive for this genre. In selecting the texts to be reviewed in this study I was guided primarily by the understanding of what history meant to, or was defined by, the historians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It seemed to me after reflecting upon these definitions, that the identification of history with *sīrat* (biography) broadened the scope of history. Biography interpenetrated history to the point where terms like *tarāğim* (biography) and *siyar* became synonymous with *tārīh* (history).

Early biographical dictionaries developed in close connection with *Ḥadīth* (Muslim Prophetic tradition) literature, more particularly 'isnād (ascription) criticism<sup>5</sup>. In time the conception of biography broadened, but the communal function of the individual remained the predominant factor for inclusion in biographical dictionaries. History was no more envisioned for the purpose of moral edification alone but for the enjoyment of past wisdom and in the feat of men.

In the exclusive Ottoman system of government, the 'ulamā' (scholars) were the only stable element in the society, whose lives merited documentation and provided, in fact, the history of the 'ummat (nation) itself. Nağm al-Dīn al-Ġazzī, as late as the seventeenth century, reiterated the conviction that the 'ulamā' were the heirs of the prophets and the *nuğūm* (stars) that direct people on the path of righteousness<sup>6</sup>. History is the chronicle of their accomplishments: "Time passes and nothing remains except the account of this *īā'ifat* (class) and its heritage (*'atarihā*)"<sup>7</sup>. While the 'ulamā' remained a majority in the biographies, persons from all professions and all levels of society were included. The justification of historians for this "popular" element was that while some contributed negligibly to scholarship and others were

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5) See Hamilton GIBB, "Islamic Biographical Literature", in Bernard LEWIS and Peter HOLT (eds.), *Historians of the Middle East*, (Oxford University Press, London & New York, 1962), pp. 54-58; Tarif KHALIDI, "Islamic Biographical Dictionaries: A preliminary Assessment", in *Muslim World* 63 (1973), p. 53.

6) For more on the merit of history see: Nağm al-Dīn AL-ĠAZZĪ, *Al-kawākib al-sā'irat fi a'yān al-mi'at al-'āsirat*, edited by Ġubrā'īl ĠABBŪR, vol. I (Dār al-fikr, Beirut, 1979), pp. 3-10 (cité: AL-ĠAZZĪ, *Al-kawākib al-sā'irat*).

7) AL-ĠAZZĪ, *Al-kawākib al-sā'irat*, vol. I, p. 3.

even frivolous, they were all members of the same community. Thus there were the “charitable” best represented by Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn al-Ḥanbalī and the “misanthropes” represented by Nağm al-Dīn al-Ġazzī and Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī; oscillation between the two perceptions was also known<sup>8</sup>.

There are far too many extant biographical dictionaries assembled in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in *Bilād al-Šām* to be examined in this paper. I will limit discussion to a selection of works that can be classified as inclusive namely: *Durr al-ḥabab fī tāriḥ a'yān Ḥalab* by Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn al-Ḥanbalī (d. 1562), *Tarāğim al-a'yān min abnā' al-zamān* by al-Ḥasan al-Būrīnī (d. 1615) and *Tāriḥ 'Abd al-Qādir* by 'Abd al-Qādir Ibn Sulaymān al-Şawwāf (d. 1651)<sup>9</sup>.

### **1. *Durr al-ḥabab fī tāriḥ 'a'yān Ḥalab* by Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn al-Ḥanbalī**

The apparent reason for compiling a biographical dictionary for Raḍī al-Dīn was adulation of his native town, Aleppo. Exaltation of the prominent notables among its inhabitants and its visitors was both an objective and a source of gratification for him<sup>10</sup>. Among the *a'yān* (notables) included were literati, pious Sufīs, *şadiq şiddiq* (loyal friend) an affluent trader and a proficient craftsman. Contemporaries, alive at the time of composition, received equal attention. In addition, the dictionary was embellished with entertaining anecdotes to provide enjoyable digression for the reader. Raḍī al-Dīn combined the meaningful and the trivial in what he designated as *ḥadā al-tāriḥ al-ṭamīn* (this valuable history)<sup>11</sup>. “The outcome”, he continued, “would be estimable for it proposes to inform prominent notables about their asso-

8) For further comments on this issue see Tarif KHALIDI, “Islamic Biographical Dictionaries”, pp. 53-65; AL-ĠAZZĪ, *Al-kawākib al-sā'irat*; Nağm al-Dīn AL-ĠAZZĪ, *Lutf al-samar wa-qatf al-ṭamar min tarāğim a'yān al-qarn al-ḥādī 'aşar*, edited by Maḥmūd AL-ŞAYḤ (Ministry of Culture, Damascus, 1981); Muḥammad Amīn AL-MUḤIBBĪ, *Ḥulāşat al-āṭar fī a'yān al-qarn al-ḥādī 'aşar*, 4 vols (al-Maṭba'at al-wahbiyyat, Cairo, 1867).

9) Raḍī al-Dīn IBN AL-ḤANBALĪ, *Durr al-ḥabab fī tāriḥ a'yān Ḥalab*, edited by Maḥmūd FĀḤŪRĪ and Yaḥyā 'ABĀRAT, 2 vols (Ministry of Culture, Damascus, 1972-1975) (cite: IBN AL-ḤANBALĪ, *Durr al-ḥabab*); AL-Ḥasan bin Muḥammad AL-BŪRĪNĪ, *Tarāğim al-a'yān min abnā' al-zamān*, American University of Beirut MS. N° 346 (cite: AL-BŪRĪNĪ, *Tarāğim al-a'yān*); AL-Ḥasan bin Muḥammad AL-BŪRĪNĪ, *Tarāğim al-a'yān fī abnā' al-zamān*, edited by Şalāḥ al-Dīn AL-MUNAĞĠID, 2 vols (*al-Mağma' al-'ilmī al-'arabī*, Damascus, 1959); 'Abd al-Qādir Ibn Sulaymān AL-ŞAWWĀF, *Tāriḥ 'Abd al-Qādir*, Berlin MS. N° 9729.

10) IBN AL-ḤANBALĪ, *Durr al-ḥabab*, p. 16.

11) IBN AL-ḤANBALĪ, *Durr al-ḥabab*, p. 17.

ciates”<sup>12</sup>. Verses of the Qur’ān and various traditions were quoted to support the preceding argument. As further justification for writing in this discipline, he deliberated in praise of history. “God has a divine arrangement for this world and people are ennobled according to His plan”<sup>13</sup>.

Historical sources describe Aleppo during the sixteenth century as developed to the point of becoming the principal market of the “whole of the Levant”<sup>14</sup>. By the first decade of the seventeenth century various European countries had opened consulates there and established trading offices, which were in fierce competition to obtain local approval and trading facilities. Although the 1580s had witnessed some probing by Christian missionaries, no Jesuit mission made its appearance in Syria until the 1620s<sup>15</sup>. Perhaps such activity was not welcomed by the Islamic milieu. It could even be viewed with suspicion or dangerous for their religious teachings. Moreover, one must also keep in mind the special educational role of the French silk factories in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Syria. Silk produced in those factories was competing with those produced in Damascus much to the vexation of the manufacturers of the city.

On several occasions the *al-ifranġ* (Franks), as Rađī al-Dīn referred to them, were denounced explicitly in the entries of *durr al-ḥabab*. In one instance the author censured what he called: “erroneous decision” of the deputy governor of Aleppo to transfer a *qayşariyyat* (caravansary) from Muslim hands to Frankish consuls. Apparently, he tells us; exorbitant compensation convinced this official to pursue such “malicious desires”. When the structure was decorated with the image of the cross, the author was vociferous in his objection: “May God demolishes the *qayşariyya*”. He laments further: “At this time the Franks began to reside in the *ḥārāt* (quarters) of Aleppo; this was unprecedented. There is no power and no strength save in God”<sup>16</sup>.

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12) IBN AL-ḤANBALĪ, *Durr al-ḥabab*, p. 7.

13) IBN AL-ḤANBALĪ, *Durr al-ḥabab*, p. 7.

14) Rađī al-Dīn was referring either to the Venetians or the French. The Venetians brought their consulate to Aleppo in 1548, the French in 1562 a year before his death. English consuls settled in Aleppo in 1583 and the Dutch in 1613. They all opened trading offices there, which were in fierce competition by the 11<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century. See Jean SAUVAGET, “*Ḥalab*”, in *EI*, New Edition, 11 vols. (Brill, Leiden, 1960-2006), pp. 85-90.

15) About Jesuit missions see Antoine RABBATH (ed.), *Documents Inédits pour Servir à l’Histoire du Christianisme en Orient*, 2 vols. (A. Picard, Paris / Imprimerie Catholique, Beyrouth, 1905-1931), here vol. 1, p. 195.

16) IBN AL-ḤANBALĪ, *Durr al-ḥabab*, pp. 674, 681.

## 2. *Tarāğim al-a'yān min abnā' al-zamān* by *al-Ḥasan al-Būrīnī*

Al-Ḥasan Būrīnī gave the same reason for compiling a biographical dictionary as did his predecessors, namely to exalt the virtues of the notables of his generation. Būrīnī intended to include a wide spectrum of personalities in *Tarāğim al-a'yān*<sup>17</sup>. In addition to the '*ulamā'*' the list covered a variety of individuals who excelled in their vocation. Būrīnī was acclaimed for his literary proficiency, and gave special consideration to his colleagues. In such an "inclusive" dictionary one would expect a single entry dedicated to a Christian notable, literati or even "scoundrel". Ignorance can not be attributed to Būrīnī a renowned scholar of his times. Whatever criteria Būrīnī used, it did not include Christians - Melkites or others.

Biographical dictionaries often contained accounts of *hāriğites* (insurgents) against the sultanate - a horrific offense for Būrīnī. We find that he clearly castigated Faḥr al-Dīn "*al-durzi al-šaḳī al-la'īn*" (execrable defiant Druze) and his associates who in his view "deserved extermination". Successful campaigns against the *Şūf* region were designated as *fath* (conquest) an expression normally preserved for conquests against the Franks<sup>18</sup>. The difference in terminology was apparent between "Sunni rebels" on the one hand and *ḥašarāt* (vermin) of Faḥr al-Dīn on the other<sup>19</sup>. Būrīnī was also disdainful of the *Shī'a* of Persia. The Shah was designated as '*adū al-dīn wa-l-duniā*' (adversary in life and in the faith). In war, the *Şī'a* were labeled *mulḥidīn wa-aşḥāb bid'āt qabīḥat* (schismatic initiators of abhorrent heretical doctrines) as the situation entailed.

What about Christians? Why would Būrīnī give them preferential treatment? Weren't they considered *kuffār* (heretics) as the other sects? Actually, in the *millet* Ottoman system, Christians enjoyed the status of a religiously independent community. Heterodox *Şī'a* and Druzes, on the other hand, were enemies of the faith and deserved God's punishment. Their accounts for Būrīnī and his colleagues pose as '*ibar*' (admonition) for posterity.

## 3. *Tārīḥ 'Abd al-Qādir* by 'Abd-al-Qādir Ibn Sulaymān al-Şawwāf

'Abd al-Qādir al-Şawwāf compiled a secularized dictionary. The author did not demonstrate any particular interest in the '*ulamā'*' despite the laudato-

17) AL-BÜRİNİ, *Tarāğim al-a'yān*, vol. II, pp. 274, 275, 276.

18) AL-BÜRİNİ, *Tarāğim al-a'yān*, folio 151.

19) AL-BÜRİNİ, *Tarāğim al-a'yān*, folio 151.

ry introduction in praise of their merits. Adulation of individuals was not his intention. He was mainly interested in the history of Damascus and its milieu rather than private lives and accomplishments of notables. ‘Abd al-Qādir appreciated qualities that pertained to the demonstration of justice and efficient administration among Ottoman officials. It is apparent from this chronicle that they orchestrated all political events in the region.

Like his predecessors ‘Abd al-Qādir vehemently attacked insurgents against the state. Qur’ānic verse were often cited to emphasize the validity of attacks on the Druze regions<sup>20</sup>. It was God’s vengeance that subjugated the domain of Faḥr al-Dīn. Absolute legitimacy was furnished, by his testimony, to the troops fought against heresy. The rectitude of their motive for killing them and “spilling their blood defiling their women” was insinuated<sup>21</sup>. ‘Abd al-Qādir was similarly disposed towards retribution against *Shi’is*, who were not even included among Muslims; *al-ṭabaqa al-māriqa ‘alā dīn al-‘islām* (defectors from the true faith)<sup>22</sup>. Likewise, he classified *Shi’ism* as a *tuhmat* (charge) that could be invalidated only by the testimony of eminent members of the community<sup>23</sup>. Having so candidly stated his motives for such a composition it is not surprising that as far as ‘Abd al-Qādir was concerned, Christians had no leverage in the affairs of the Damascene community and hence they were totally ignored.

#### 4. Conclusion: Biographical Dictionaries

Biographical entries teemed with information about the social activities and literary aptitude of their generations. The milieus of Damascus and of Aleppo, for instance, were dramatized by biographers to the extent that it becomes feasible to reenact the experiences and attitudes of its inhabitants. The concept of secularization in biographical dictionaries was to find repeated expression in these works. The criterion for authentic or transient inclusion was *lahu naw’ athar* (any measure of distinction) or *lahu mağd aṭīl* (of noble ancestry)<sup>24</sup>. These works contained biographies of virtuous men and “the biographies of those deemed unworthy remain as ‘*ibar*”<sup>25</sup>. Piety and erudition remained as the most acclaimed personality traits in religious scholars, equi-

20) AL-ŠAWWĀF, *Tārīḥ ‘Abd al-Qādir*, folio 50, 129.

21) AL-ŠAWWĀF, *Tārīḥ ‘Abd al-Qādir*, folio 54.

22) AL-ŠAWWĀF, *Tārīḥ ‘Abd al-Qādir*, folio 28, 38, 76, 81, 93.

23) AL-ŠAWWĀF, *Tārīḥ ‘Abd al-Qādir*, folio 76, 78.

24) IBN AL-ḤANBALI, *Durr al-ḥabab*, p. 9.

25) IBN AL-ḤANBALI, *Durr al-ḥabab*, p. 7.



ty and clemency in judges and governors.

Christian notables according to these historians were apparently irrelevant or non-participants in local activities, since they were neither included among the venerated lot nor were they unworthy to be included as moral edification in what they call a “venerated discipline”. On the other hand, *Shī'a* and Druze personages both affiliated to heterodox groups, were cited presumably for *'ibrat* (moral edification). The acquiescent Christians of *Bilād al-Šām* did not present any threat to the local administration or to the Ottoman central authority. Christians of Europe were another story. They were designated as *kuffār* (heretics) when they were the aggressors against the Ottoman state and *našārā* when they were the vanquished<sup>26</sup>.

## B. CHRONICLES

The chronicle form of historical literature was an integral part of the cultural development among the Arabs. Contrary to biographical literature, a few limited chronicles of varying worth and one universal history constitute the legacy of this era. For the purpose of this paper, I will limit my discussion to those chronicles where Christians are explicitly or implicitly mentioned.

### 1. *Mufākahāt al-ḥillān fī ḥawādīṭ al-zamān* by Šams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn

An analysis of the historical literature of this period inevitably begins with reference to Šams al-Dīn 'Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 1529); one of the most prolific scholars of his time<sup>27</sup>. In *Mufākahāt al-ḥillān*, Ibn Ṭūlūn concentrated on occurrences that involved the populace of Damascus or were of any consequence in their lives. The text teems with reports of frequent injustice of the ruling elite against *al-nās* (the people), a recurrent theme among chroniclers. The most distinctive quality of this chronicle, however, is the attitude of the author towards his fellow citizens. He acted as the advocate of *al-nās* not only the *'ulamā'* of whom he was a prominent member. He shared the grievances and joys of his fellow citizens reporting on every conceivable

26) *Našārā* comes from al-Nāširat the birth place of Christ. Christians were known by this name in Arabic literature.

27) Šams al-Dīn Muḥammad IBN ṬŪLŪN, *Mufākahāt al-ḥillān fī ḥawādīṭ al-zamān*, edited by Muḥammad Mušafā, 2 vols (Dār 'iḥyā' al-kutub al-'arabiyyat, Cairo, 1962-1964).

incident that touched their lives<sup>28</sup>.

Ibn Ṭūlūn, a perceptive scholar unable to change or alter the course of events, resorted to the only course available to him - chronicling the offenses of Ottoman officials for posterity. The author was ever present in the text with sarcastic remarks about their performance. While Christians were never mentioned explicitly in *Mufākahāt al-ḥillān*, they most definitely were among *al-nās*. Whatever hardship the people of Damascus endured be it natural calamities, plague, or injustice of the *wālī* did not differentiate between the communities. Granted some Ottoman governors were deliberately and remorselessly causing more anguish to non-Muslims, in most instances inequity was general.

## 2. *Nuzhat al-ḥāṭir wa-bahğat al-nāzir* by Šaraf al-Dīn Ibn Mūsā Ibn 'Ayyūb

The injustice of the ruling elite is a theme shared by most historians in this era. Regardless of the status of the authors, each of them reflected on this issue from a different perspective. Šaraf al-Dīn Ibn Mūsā Ibn 'Ayyūb repeatedly mentioned in *Nuzhat al-ḥāṭir* the injustice that the inhabitants of Damascus were subject to, especially from corrupt *qādis* (judge) and government officials<sup>29</sup>. Government positions were often bought, and bribery was ubiquitous among *qādis*. Ibn Ayyub referred to a number of *qādis* who accepted bribes for services rendered<sup>30</sup>. The practice was so common that the author would often mention among the commendable qualities of a *qādi* the fact that he refused such inducements<sup>31</sup>. As Šāfi'ī *qādi* of Damascus in this mixture of chronicle and memoirs, Ibn Ayyūb gives a very vivid albeit dismal picture of the life of ordinary citizens in the city. Since civil cases were conducted before Muslim judges, corruption at this level would touch the various members of the society be they Muslims or Christians.

## 3. *Aḥbār al-duwal wa-aṭār al-uwal fī al-tārīḥ* by Aḥamd Ibn Sinān al-Qaramānī

Qaramānī had a different approach to history in *Aḥbār al-duwal wa-aṭār*

28) These instances are too many to mention. However these are some examples. See IBN ṬULŪN, *Mufākahāt al-ḥillān*, vol. I, pp. 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 184, 185, 186, 187; vol. II, pp. 219, 351.

29) Šaraf al-Dīn Ibn Mūsā IBN AYYŪB, *Nuzhat al-ḥāṭir wa-bahğat al-nāzir*, American University of Beirut, MS. N° 406 (cité: IBN AYYŪB, *Nuzhat al-ḥāṭir*).

30) IBN AYYŪB, *Nuzhat al-ḥāṭir*, folio 17, 18, 30, 31, 36, 44.

31) IBN AYYŪB, *Nuzhat al-ḥāṭir*, folio 219, 224.

*al-uwal*<sup>32</sup>. History was an endless battle between Ottomans and infidels; a struggle to make this world *dār al-Islām*. He recorded conquests and campaigns against infidels more than achievements in statecraft or culture. The continuous use of the word *ġihād* to describe military activities confirms the above observation. The *ġāzī* was presented as the champion of Islam:

*"A servant of God who purifies the earth from the filth of polytheism [...] the sword of God, the protector and refuge of all believers"*<sup>33</sup>.

It is in the spirit of those introductory lines that Qaramānī treats the whole of human history. The author classified enemies of Islam into three categories: the militant Christians of Europe - were *kuffār* (infidels); *naṣārā* the indigenous Christians. Disparaging vocabulary was used to indicate the enemies of the state. The *Shī'a*, for instance, were designated *kuffār* or *mulhidīn* (heretics or apostates) as the situation entailed. Qaramānī's judgment of the defiant Druze was less charitable. Satan the great heretic, the seducer of the people, as provided in this context, symbolizes the Druze community<sup>34</sup>. A devoted Sunni Ḥanafī judge, Qaramānī's attitude is in conformity with the standpoint of his colleagues. Christians of *Bilād al-Šām* never posed a real threat to the Ottoman state. There no major insurgencies reported in Qaramānī's history, nor did they threaten the caravan routes to deserve castigation.

#### 4. *Tārīḥ al-'Amīr Faḥr al-Dīn al-Ma'nī* by 'Aḥmad al-Ḥālidī al-Šafadī

One would expect a different approach in 'Aḥmad al-Ḥālidī al-Šafadī's *Tārīḥ Faḥr al-Dīn*<sup>35</sup>. Tolerance and cooperation between Christians and Druze during the rule of the Ma'an emirs of Lebanon is well recognized. As heterodox communities, the emirs were the predictable allies of those who, like themselves, stood on the questionable side of Ottoman legality<sup>36</sup>. On rare occasions the names of prominent Maronites of the Ḥāzin family were mentioned in this monograph but only in association with the Ma'an emirs.

32) Ahmad bin Yusuf AL-QARAMANI, *Aḥbār al-duwal wa ātār al-uwal*, 3 vols. edited by Fahmi SA'AD and Aḥmad ḤUṬAYṬ ('ālam al-kutub, Beirut, 1992).

33) Paul WITTEK, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1938, repr. 1965), p. 14.

34) AL-QARAMANĪ, *Kitāb aḥbār al-duwal*, 3/239.

35) Aḥmad al-Ḥālidī AL-ŠAFADĪ, *Tārīḥ al-'Amīr Faḥr al-Dīn al-Ma'nī*, edited by As'ad RUSTUM and Fu'ād Afrām AL-BUSTĀNĪ (Lebanese University, Beirut, 1969).

36) Robert HADDAD, *Syrian Christians in Muslim Society* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1970), p. 27.

The Melkites were never mentioned even when we know from the report of the Melkite historian Miḥā'il Brayk that on one occasion emir Miḥim Ibn Ma'an protected with perfect impunity, the Melkite patriarch Cyril fleeing the wrath of Ottoman governor of Damascus 'Uṭām Abū Ṭawq<sup>37</sup>. At a later stage the same emirs successfully maintained in power a patriarch whose deposition had been confirmed by an imperial edict<sup>38</sup>. This lack of interest in the Melkites was not deliberately Ḥālidī. His account was limited to the span of twelve years which mark the deterioration of the relationship between the emir and the Ottoman authorities.

### C. LESSER FORMS OF HISTORICAL LITERATURE

Ancillary types of historical writing compiled in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries include treatises of the genre of *riḥla*; *kunnash* (scrapbook), petitions, biography of individual Islamic jurists and *ta'līqat* (tract) narrating occurrences in certain towns. Their subject matter was too exclusive to include any Christian notables or localities. As such they fall outside the subject of this paper and will be disregarded.

The more important genre of historical literature, *faḍā'il*, was both a unique product of Islamic culture and a very important part of the historical heritage of that period. It is the type of monograph, which cites quotations from the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth and related sources extensively in praise of individuals or localities. *Faḍā'il* literature originated in the early days following the Prophet's death to denote the distinction of certain individuals or localities. However, I will refrain from further elaboration on this genre for the same reasons cited above.

Unlike *faḍā'il*, *ziyārāt* compositions were not uniquely Islamic. They originated from the need of the faithful in the Muslim community for manuals describing sanctuaries of prophets and holy men to be visited. Other religious communities acclaim holy individuals as prototypes to be imitated and intercessors to be venerated<sup>39</sup>. Manuals that describe pilgrimage routes and

37) Miḥā'il BRAYK, *Tārīḥ al-Šām*, Berlin MS. N° 9786, folio 3r; HADDAD, *Syrian Christians*, p. 29.

38) Miḥā'il BRAYK, *Al-ḥaqā'iq al-wāfiyat fī tāriḥ baṭārikat al-kanīsat al-anṭākiyyat*, edited by Nā'ilat Taqī-al-Dīn QĀ'IDBAYH (al-Nahar, Beirut, 2006), pp. 145-147.

39) For a general review of the veneration of saints in non-Islamic communities see: *Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. "Sainthood", by Robert Cohen, pp. 8033-8038. Khayr al-Dīn AL-ASADĪ, *Mawsū'at Ḥalab al-muqārīna*, 7 vols., edited by Muḥammad Kamāl (Aleppo, 1981), 6/404.

shrines, together with a description of the proper conduct to be observed during visits, are recognized in Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist and Hindu literatures. The cult of saints, while thought by many to be contrary to the early spirit of Islam, was reconciled later by Muslim theologians and jurists. All four schools of jurisprudence recognized the veneration and the miraculous attributes of saints. Adopting the doctrine that the grace of God alone could elevate certain individuals above the mass; it bridged the gap between the human and the divine<sup>40</sup>. Supernatural gifts were attributed to such pious men, and the Qur'anic word *wālī* was extended to them<sup>41</sup>. The general acceptance of the cult of saints and the tolerance of Sufism encouraged the adoption of pre Islamic saints. Biblical figures and old pagan sanctuaries were embraced and Islamized. A mosque was built where once a temple stood; a *zāwiyat* (sufi mosque) would render Islamic a once pagan site.

Historical evidence was never decisive in matters of *ziyārāt*. Popular belief invariably gained the most recognition, and the faithful would gather at the site of the grave of Mūsā without regard to technicalities. Commenting on the conduct of the *Shī'a* inhabitants of Karak, where Noah was allegedly buried, Yāsīn al-Farādī - author of *ziyarat* genre - writes:

*The people of Karak are fanatic rafidites (heretics) who neither recognize the reverence of this nabī (prophet) nor appreciate his merits. They refuse to pray at the mosque where he is buried despite the beauty of its construction and vastness of its size*<sup>42</sup>.

The village Kafrayyā was indicated by the same author as the burial ground of the Virgin Mary. His view ran contrary to common conviction. The majority of *ziyārāt* monographs indicated the cemetery of Bāb al-Faradis as the gravesite of Mary<sup>43</sup>. Similarly, the site of Rabwat where 'Īsā

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40) For a detailed study of the veneration of saints in Islam see: Ignaz GOLDZIEHER, "Veneration of Saints", in Ignaz GOLDZIEHER, *Muslim Studies*, translated by Christa Renate BARBER and Samuel Miklos STERN, vol. 2 (Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago, 1971), pp. 255-341.

41) Muhammad Geyoushi counted 46 times the word *waliy* in the Qur'an and 42 times the word *awliya'*. See Muhammad GEYOUSHI, "Al Tirmidhi's theory of Saints and Saint-hood", in *Islamic Quarterly* 15 (1971), pp. 17, 61.

42) Yāsīn Ibn Muṣṭafā AL-FARADĪ (d. 1684), *Nubḍat laṭīfat fī al-mazārāt al-šarīfat bi-Dimašq*, American University of Beirut MS. N° 297.124, folio 19. For more information about Yāsīn al-Farādī see Naila TAKIEDDINE KAIDBEY, "Historiography of Bilad al-Sham in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" (Ph.D. dissertation, American University of Beirut, 1995), pp. 347-348.

43) *Bāb al-Faradis* is one of the old gates of Damascus. See Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn AL-

(Christ) and his mother presumably found sanctuary was accepted by some; others emphatically denied they had ever set foot in Damascus<sup>44</sup>.

Even when *ziyārāt* literature was directed to an Islamic audience, it is difficult to imagine Muslim visitors alone at these sites. Christians surely visited such graves presumably without objection neither from other visitors nor the authorities. Curiously, it was not the idea of sainthood as such but the *bida'* (heretical doctrines) - offerings, sacrifices or improper practices performed at those locations - that were subject to objection by theologians. Christian clergy were as adamant in refusing such *bida'*. Miḥā'il Brayk at a much later date expresses anger and frustration to wine drinking and frivolity at gravesites<sup>45</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

What conclusions can be drawn from this brief survey of the Muslim historians of *Bilād al-Šām* in the early Ottoman period? Was negligence of Christian compatriots the outcome of prejudice; or was "history" the account of the *ummat* where non-Muslims were considered outsiders?

An appraisal of the historical heritage of this period requires a few reminders about the principles and motives for their compositions. Otherwise there is the tendency to accuse historians of bias, bigotry, ignorance or any other offensive allegation. Under the Ottomans political changes began to affect the "tenor" of life and the composition of urban centers<sup>46</sup>. The tendency for the quarters of the cities to separate themselves along religious or ethnic lines continued<sup>47</sup>. As early as 1535, when the first Capitulations agree-

MUNAĞĠID, *Dimašq al-qadīma: aswāruha, abrāğaha, abwābuha* (muḍiriyyat al-ātār al-qadīma, Damascus, n.d.), pp. 35, 57; Qutayba AL-ŠIHĀBĪ, *Mu'ğam Dimašq al-tārīḫī*, 3 vols, (wizārat al-ṭaqāfa, Damascus, 1999), 1/26.

44) *Al-rabwat* is a site at the foot of Mount *Qasiyun* in the outskirts of old city of Damascus frequented for its natural beauty and for its religious locations. See Qutayba AL-ŠIHĀBĪ, *Mu'ğam Dimašq al-tārīḫī*, 3 vols, (wizārat al-ṭaqāfa, Damascus, 1999), 1/326.

45) Miḥā'il BRAYK, *Tārīḫ al-Šām*, folio 25.

46) Abdul-Karim RAFAQ, *The Province of Damascus 1723-1783* (Khayats, Beirut, 1966), p. 71.

47) Albert HOURANI, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Fiber and Fiber, London, 1991) p. 235. For an informative study on the role of European communities in Syria in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries see Laylā AL-ŠABBĀĞ, *Al-ğāliyyāt al-ūrūbiyyat fī bilād al-Šām fī al-'ahd al-'uṭmānī fī al-qarnayn al-sādis 'ašar wa-l-sābi' 'ašar* (mu'assasat al-risālat li-l-tjibā'at wa-l-našr wa-l-tawzī', Beirut, 1989); RAFAQ, *The Province of Damascus*, pp. 19, 75. The installation of the European merchants was profitable for their customary intermediaries the Jews and

ments were signed, Christian merchants began to take active part in Syria<sup>48</sup>. Affiliations with the West were possibly sought by indigenous Christians on the hope that they would provide a route of escape from the *ḍimmī* position imposed on them. The active role the missionaries played in Aleppo and Damascus, however limited in scope, was not welcomed by the Islamic community. It could even be viewed with suspicion or dangerous for their religious teachings and social status<sup>49</sup>. Such changes or developments undoubtedly intensified awareness among members of each community of their own cultural specificities and their own identities.

Muslim Arab historians were among those who were concerned with reasserting their identities as citizens of *Bilād al-Šām*. Thus, in their historical writings they concentrated on their immediate surroundings, frequently disinterested or unaware of other parts or other communities in the Empire. One might speculate they were unwilling to propagate the privileges that the West might have to offer.

In the exclusive Ottoman system of government, the '*ulamā*' were the only stable element in the society. They were the champions of Islam, protector of the *šarī'at* and directors of the affairs of the faithful. Their lives merited documentation and provided, in fact, the history of the community itself. Embittered by political estrangement, yet conscious of the quality of their learning, indigenous '*ulamā*' focused on their own merit and usefulness against "ignorant" scholars forced upon them by virtue of their Turkish descent<sup>50</sup>. One encounters in their attitude the practical advantage gained from such documentations. It gave 'Abd al-Qādir, for instance, the audacity to reproach the sultan and his agents with fortitude. Similarly, Ibn Ṭūlūn criticized the authorities for succumbing to servile flattery in the distribution of teaching posts. Further, he was infuriated when Sultan Salīm received Frankish consuls while Damascene scholars were refused audience. If we accept the notion that biographical dictionaries were collected for the purpose of de-

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more especially the Christians. The latter acted as dragomans for the consulates and were able to obtain diplomas of immunity See AL-ŠABBĀĠ, *Al-ġāliyyāt al-ūrūbiyyat*, vol. 1, pp. 71-193.

48) See AL-ŠABBĀĠ, *Al-ġāliyyāt al-ūrūbiyyat*, vol. 1, pp. 71-193; André RAYMOND, *Grande ville arabe à l'époque ottomane* (Sindbad, Paris, 1985), p. 82.

49) Abraham MARCUS, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1989), pp. 24-25.

50) The changing role of '*ulamā*' families is discussed in RAYMOND, *Grande ville arabe*, p. 82; John VOLL, "Old '*ulamā*' families and Ottoman Influence in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Damascus", in *American Journal of Arabic Studies* 3 (1975), pp. 48-59.

fending the position of the *'ulamā'* then we can recognize the lack of interest in the "Other".

During the Ottoman history of *Bilād al-Šām* a role for the Syrian Christians in any political or intellectual movement which might be useful in the life of the Muslim community was unlikely. ʿarif Ḥālidī argues that by the early 16<sup>th</sup> century Muslim attitude was still governed in large measure by Islam's historic struggle against Orthodox Byzantium and the Crusades<sup>51</sup>. A role for the Syrian Christians in any political or intellectual movement which might "fructify" in the life of the Muslim community was therefore unlikely. Hence local Christians were viewed with suspicion especially at times of hostilities with remnants of Frankish "infidels" still roaming in the Mediterranean or in close proximity to Istanbul.

While Christians played a part in the public activities, they formed a distinct portion of its society. The city became both a place of meeting and of separation<sup>52</sup>. As non-Muslims they were allowed to practice certain professions but were virtually excluded from others. Various factors set them apart from their Muslims compatriots. At times they were required by law to carry signs of their difference; or wear distinctive dress of a special kind<sup>53</sup>. However, such measures were relaxed or re-enacted in response to different situations - *fatwā* (legal opinion), outside influences, or in response to a crowd of protesting *'ulamā'*<sup>54</sup>. Granted such restrictions were not always uniformly enforced, they still enhanced the feeling of separation. Communities at the time lived in separate quarters *ḥārāt al-naṣārā* (Christian quarters) and *ḥārāt al-yahūd* (Jewish quarters); their paths would cross in the market place but not in the circle of *'ulamā'* to whom Muslim biographers' dictionaries in general were dedicated. However, despite its short coming, the *millet* Ottoman system was more judicious towards Christians than the heterodox *Shi'ites* and Druzes. They were never considered as part of the *'ummat*; on the contrary, their accounts were included in historical annals only as warning or *'ibar* for posterity.

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51) Tarif KHALIDI, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (University Press, Cambridge, 1994), pp. 205-206.

52) This practice was still common under the Ottomans. IBN ṬULŪN, *Mufākahāt al-ḥillān*, vol. 2, p. 66; HOURANI, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, p. 117.

53) The color green in particular. HOURANI, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, p. 117.

54) Isles LICHTENSTADTER, "Distinctive Dress of non-Muslims in Islamic Countries", in *Historia Judaica* 5 (April, 1943), pp. 35-52.



Lastly, compilers were not invariably motivated by pious considerations. At times, monographs contained socio political connotations reflecting apprehension or discontent. In addition to furnishing relevant information, those monographs served to reiterate the merits of *Bilād al-Šām* and its inhabitants; to recapitulate a position eclipsed in favor of the new capital, Istanbul. Christians were not maliciously neglected, but were not among the priorities of Muslim historians.

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