

# Muslim Historians

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## MUSLIM HISTORIANS

Dr. Salah Zaimeche

A strong regard for history has existed throughout a great many centuries up to the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him – pbuh) and beyond. From accounts relating to the Prophet (pbuh) and later Khulafa (leaders after the Prophet pbuh) we also learn of knowledgeable individuals who were held in high regard for their expertise in history.<sup>1</sup> For example, an-Nadr b. al-Harith was famed for his expertise on heroic Persian sagas, while Makhrama b. Nawfai az-Zuhri and Aqil b. Abi Talib (the brother of Ali b. Abi Talib) were commissioned by Umar b. Al-Khattab to register all known Arab tribes. Later still, Daghfal an-Nassaba excelled as a Genealogist in the time of Mu'awiya.<sup>2</sup>

The historiography of the Muslims is characterised by a continuous narrative in which each event is set out in the words of contemporaries and eye-witnesses.<sup>3</sup> Memorisation was the most popular and honoured style of learning prevalent at the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and prior still. Learned people were those who had committed knowledge to memory and would then impart their knowledge through recitation to the audiences. This however meant that in effect there was very little critical analysis, as is the norm of much western education. On the other hand, remitters were of course able to exercise the right of selection in choosing their authorities.<sup>4</sup> On more complex issues such as resolving somewhat undecided points within the teachings of the Prophet (pbuh), schools were established to provide for this, the earliest being in Medina. Within such schools, memorisation was complimented with minimal jottings such as those of Hasan al-Basri (d. A.D. 728). Oral traditions, however, remained paramount both in practice and prestige.

However, in the second century, from A.D. 719 to 816, books, as we understand them, began to appear; production received a definite impetus by the practice of studying genealogy, particularly in relationship to the Prophet (pbuh). It is from this point that we have the beginnings of written Muslim history from which it is possible to arrive at an authentic narrative of events.<sup>5</sup> This is but one of many examples demonstrating the birth of another Islamic science; a birth that has a direct relationship to the Islamic faith, in particular the life of the Prophet (pbuh).

### **Ibn Ishaq (d.768) and Ibn Hisham (d. 218/833)**

Early Muslim historical writing was primarily concerned with the biography of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) (*Sirat Rasul Allah*) and the first wars of Islam (*Al-Maghazi*). Muhammad Ibn Ishaq related the first known biography (*Sira*) of the Prophet (pbuh). This work no longer exists in its original form, but has been preserved in at least two recensions, one of these recensions being authored by Ibn Hisham, thus Ibn Hisham's work represents one of the best existing authorities on the life of the Prophet (pbuh).<sup>6</sup> The Arabic text was published at Gottingen in three volumes by F. Wustenfeld, 1858-60, and a German translation by

<sup>1</sup> D. M. Dunlop: *Arab Civilisation to 1500*; Longman; 1971; p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> F. Wustenfeld: *Die Geschichtschreiber der Araber v. ihre Werke*, Gottingen, 1882, 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> D. Campbell: *Arabian Medicine, and its influence on the Middle Ages*; Philo Press; Amsterdam; 1926; reprinted 1974; p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> D. Campbell: *Arabian Medicine*, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> D. Campbell: *Arabian medicine*, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> D. M. Dunlop: *Arab Civilisation*; op cit; p. 72.

G. Weil, *The Historian of the Caliphate*, appeared at Stuttgart in 1864. It is this latter work which is perhaps better known in the West, and is now more conveniently read in the English translation of the late A. Guillaume.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 1.** An artistic impression of Muhammad Ibn Ishaq (Image from [www.faithfreedom.org](http://www.faithfreedom.org))

Alfred Guillaume also provided an English translation of an attempted reconstruction of Ibn Ishaq's work. This was produced largely by translating what Ibn Hisham reports from Ibn Ishaq, adding quotations from the latter that are included by al-Tabari (mainly the material that Ibn Hisham omitted) and placing Ibn Hisham's comments on Ibn Ishaq's work at the end of the translation in a section called "Ibn Hisham's Notes" (pp. 691-798).<sup>8</sup> The page numbers suggest that Ibn Hisham's comments constitute about 15% of his recessions of Ibn Ishaq's work.<sup>9</sup>

Ibn Hisham's (d.833) work contains information concerning the creation of the world, Biblical Prophets, and the advent of Islam.<sup>10</sup> The actions and deeds of the Prophet (pbuh) are meticulously noted, and his battles described in great detail.<sup>11</sup> Ibn Hisham's *Sirat Muhammad rasul Allah* is considered by Dunlop as one of the best existing authorities on the life of the Prophet (pbuh).<sup>12</sup>

## Ibn Sa'ad (d.845)

With Ibn Sa'ad, a pupil and secretary of Ibn al-Waqidi, begins a new genre which initiates biographies of *Tabaqats* (classes). His treatise *Kitab al-tabaqat al-Kabir* (the great book of classes) deals with the biographies of the Prophet (pbuh) and his companions and later dignitaries of Islam till 845.<sup>13</sup> Ibn Sa'ad elaborates on the qualities of the Prophet (pbuh), and the main traits of his mission. It is the first major example of religious biography, universal in scope, trying to include all the religiously relevant persons of Islamic history, comprising 4,250 entries, 600 of them women.<sup>14</sup> Ibn Sa'ad died in Baghdad in 230/845, and

<sup>7</sup> A. Guillaume: *The Life of Muhammad*, London, 1955.

<sup>8</sup> F. Buhl; A.T. Welch: Muhammad; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*; op cit; vol 7; pp. 360-77; at p. 361.

<sup>9</sup> F. Buhl-Welch; p. 361.

<sup>10</sup> C. Bouamrane-L. Gardet: *Panorama de la Pensee Islamique*, Sindbad; Paris; 1984. pp 252-66; p.252.

<sup>11</sup> C. Bouamrane-L. Gardet: *Panorama*; p.252.

<sup>12</sup> D.M. Dunlop: *Arab Civilization to AD 1500*, Longman, London, 1971, p.72.

<sup>13</sup> D.M. Dunlop: *Arab Civilisation*; op cit; p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> R. S. Humphreys: *Muslim Historiography*, *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, Charles Scribners and Sons, New York, vol 6, pp 250-5. p. 253

with his work ends the series of early, or at least comparatively early, native Arabic texts on which, for the most part, we depend for information regarding the life of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) and the beginnings of his mission. Ibn Sa'ad's work can be found in a Sachau edition and in others.<sup>15</sup>

### Al-Azraqi (d. 219/834)

Around this time others focussed their efforts on describing and detailing the histories of towns and cities. One of the earliest examples of such work is that of al-Azraqi<sup>16</sup> in his *Akhbar Makka al-M'usharrafah* (Chronicles of Mecca the Glorious). A generation or two later there appeared the *Ta'rikh Baghdad* (History of Baghdad) of Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, a voluminous writer (d.280/893). Most of his works however are lost. Book 6 of the *History of Baghdad*, dealing with a part of the Caliphate of al-Mamun, was edited and translated into German by H Keller,<sup>17</sup> and also translated into English by Kate Chambers Seelye.<sup>18</sup>

### Ibn Qutayba's (d.276/889)

Ibn Qutayba's *Kitab al-Ma'arif* or 'Handbook of History' as it was entitled by its nineteenth-century editor, deserves mention, as it is one of the oldest surviving purely historical works of the Arabs.<sup>19</sup> It deals with the pre-Islamic as well as Islamic history of the Arabs, and is still useful as a reference book, for genealogical and biographical matters in particular.<sup>20</sup> Another point of interest that can be drawn from this work concerns the sets of issues that the widely esteemed and highly orthodox author deems important or relevant enough to mention, and perhaps equally important, the issues that the author omits (of course this is in the context of a comparatively short book; 330 pages of Arabic text in Wustenfeld's edition).<sup>21</sup>

### Abu Hanifa ad-Dinawari

Abu Hanifa ad-Dinawari (better known in botany, see relevant chapter) was also a historian, and well known for his *Kitab al-Akhbar at-Tiwal* (Book of Long Narratives). This work deals in principle, as the title suggests, with selected episodes which interested the author, chiefly from Islamic history, but also the pre-Islamic period is not completely disregarded. In this latter regard ad-Dinawari provides accounts of Alexander the Great, and detailed information regarding the Sasanid Kings down to Yazdagird, the last of the Sasanids.<sup>22</sup> His account of the Muslim conquest of Iraq is picturesque, and includes many interesting and apparently reliable details, notably for the battle of al-Qadisiyya.<sup>23</sup> Another interesting section recounts the later days of Umayyad rule in Khurasan and the defeat and death of Marwan II, the last Umayyad Caliph.<sup>24</sup> The narrative is brought down to the death of al-Mu'tasim in 227/842, i.e. it continues to the author's own times.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Leyden, Brill, 9 vols, 1904-28.

<sup>16</sup> Ed. F. Wustenfeld: *Geschichte und Beschreibung der Stadt Mekka von el Azraqi*, Leipzig, 1858.

<sup>17</sup> Leipzig, 2 vols, 1908.

<sup>18</sup> Columbia University Oriental Series, xvi, 1920.

<sup>19</sup> Ed. Wustenfeld; Gottingen; 1850; IV.

<sup>20</sup> D.M. Dunlop: Arab Civilisation; op cit; p. 88.

<sup>21</sup> D.M. Dunlop: Arab Civilisation; p. 88.

<sup>22</sup> D. M. Dunlop: Arab Civilisation; p. 88.

<sup>23</sup> *Kitab al-Akhbar at-Tiwal*; ed. V. Guirgass; Leiden; 1888; pp. 116-47.

<sup>24</sup> *Kitab al-Akhbar at-Tiwal*; pp. 337-65.

## Al-Tabari (d.923)

According Ibn Khalikan (see entry on Damascus at Muslimheritage.com), the History produced by at-Tabari, the work which Europeans usually refer to as the Annals of Al-Tabari and of which the original title was *Ta'rikh ar-Rusul wa'l-Muluk* (history of the Apostles and Kings), was the soundest and most reliable work of its kind.<sup>26</sup>

Al-Tabari was born at Amul, north of the Elburz range in the coastal lowlands of the Caspian Sea then called Tabaristan, and died in Baghdad. He was a precocious student who was, as he himself states, a hafiz (a person who has successfully memorised the entire Qur'an) by the age of seven, qualified as an Imam or leader of the Muslim worship aged eight and studied the Prophetic traditions aged nine (it seems well-authenticated that he left home aged twelve).<sup>27</sup> After several years spent as a poor wandering scholar in Arabia, Syria, and Egypt, he settled down as a jurist in Baghdad.<sup>28</sup> He was now able to follow a multiplicity of branches in search of expanding his knowledge. His acquisition of knowledge was to embrace not only history, Qur'an exegesis, Hadith and Fiqh, but he also possibly wrote in the field of ethics and had an educated person's interest in Arabic poetry.<sup>29</sup> In *Ta'rikh ar-Rusul wa'l-Muluk*, (a work to which the Europeans refer to as *The Annals*)<sup>30</sup> a work that took forty years to complete, Al Tabari looks at Antiquity and the Islamic period up to 915. As an objective historian, he hardly expresses any judgment, and keeps a global vision of history.<sup>31</sup> What survives fills fifteen large volumes; we are told that the original was ten times as long.<sup>32</sup> His method is chronological, describing events year by year, and usually traditional-tracing the narratives through one or more chains of Hadith to an eyewitness or contemporary of the incident, and his method has the virtue of stating sources carefully.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, his principal authorities for history are not, in general, any of the books, but chains of tradition going back wherever possible to eye-witnesses of the various occurrences.<sup>34</sup> This was the method already employed in Al-Tabari's time by the experts in the science of Hadith. The method was applied with rigour by the best of these experts (muhaddithun), who had employed strict criteria for estimating the value of the different traditions, with which Al-Tabari as a distinguished student of the religious sciences was perfectly familiar (his *Tafsir or Qur'an Commentary*<sup>35</sup> has been as highly regarded by Muslims as his History, as well as his extensive work *Tahdhib al-Athar* on Hadith). The application of this method on the widest scale might seem to give an almost irrefragable guarantee of truth to a historical narrative. This was no doubt a paramount reason for its adoption by Al-Tabari.<sup>36</sup> On the whole, according to Dunlop, with the exception of Ibn al-Athir (whose great work *Al-kamil*, had not been translated in its entirety by the time Dunlop was writing, i.e. in the early 1970s into any Western language)<sup>37</sup> the Annals of al-Tabari is the best work in Arabic for information concerning the historical development of Islam and the Caliphate.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>25</sup> D.M. Dunlop: Arab Civilisation; p. 88.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Khalikan: *Wafayat al-Ayyan*; ed. De Slane; I; p. 640.

<sup>27</sup> C. E. Bosworth: Al-Tabari; Encyclopaedia of Islam; op cit; vol 10; pp. 11-5; at p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> W. Durant: The Age of Faith; op cit; p. 238.

<sup>29</sup> C. Bosworth: Al-Tabari; op cit; p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Edit Cairo, 10 Vols; Fr tr, reedited Sindbad, Paris, 1979-1984, 6 vols.

<sup>31</sup> C. Bouamrane-L.Gardet: Panorama, op cit, p 255.

<sup>32</sup> W. Durant: The Age; op cit; p. 238.

<sup>33</sup> W. Durant: The Age; p. 238.

<sup>34</sup> D. M. Dunlop: Arab Civilisation; op cit; p. 89.

<sup>35</sup> *Jami al-Bayan fi Tafsir (tawil) al-Qur'an*; 30 vols; Cairo; 1903; and 1904-12.

<sup>36</sup> D.M. Dunlop: Arab Civilisation; op cit; p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> By the time Dunlop was making such a statement, a UNESCO project was under way to produce a complete English translation of the work.





**Figure 2.** Bal'ami's 14th century Persian version of Universal History by al-Tabari (Image from [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))

His comfortable, if not luxurious, financial and economic circumstances were curbed by his habit of eating temperately, dressing modestly and generally to avoiding excess in all things.<sup>39</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that he never accepted any official employment (such as that of judge, for which he would have been abundantly equipped), although his post as tutor to the son of a vizier would doubtless have given him the entrée to such a career had he wished.<sup>40</sup> These stories stress his high moral standards and his great probity, with a reluctance to accept costly gifts in return for services which he did not feel he had earned or for which he could not give equally valuable presents in return.<sup>41</sup>

### **As-Sûli (Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Yahya – d.335/946 or 356)**

As-Sûli a skilled chess player and a descendant or at least a great-nephew of the Turkish Prince, Sul Tigin of Jurjin, is a figure of some importance. He authored a literary history, *Kitab al-Awraq fi Akbar Ahl al-Abbas wa sha'rihim* (Book of Pages on the History of the Abbasids and their Poetry), was a courtier of the Caliphs al-Muktafi and al-Muqtadir, and later enjoyed a great deal of court favour.<sup>42</sup> His *Kitab al-Awraq* appears to have been divided originally into five or six parts, of which four have survived. J. Heyworth Dunne edited the last of these in 1934 under the title *Kitab al-Awrak*, a section on Contemporary Poets.<sup>43</sup> An edition of the whole work was planned and has perhaps been carried out in Haidarabad. Another portion of his work was also edited by Dunne, the *Akhbar ar-Radi wa'l-Muttaqi bi'llah* (History of the Caliphs ar-Radi

<sup>38</sup> D.M. Dunlop: Arab Civilization, op cit, p.92.

<sup>39</sup> C. E. Bosworth; Al-Tabari; op cit; p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> Bosworth; p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Bosworth; p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> D.M. Dunlop: Arab Civilization; op cit; p. 92-3.

<sup>43</sup> Cairo, As-Sawi Press; and London Luzac. Title Page: Kitab al-Awrak.

and al-Muttaqi)<sup>44</sup> and later translated by M. Canard.<sup>45</sup> This is a good history on the court and the capital. Al-Suli's forte no doubt, as Canard indicates is politico-literary biography.<sup>46</sup>

### Abdus al-Jahshiyari (d. 942)

Abdus al-Jahshiyari authored *Kitab al-Wuzara' wa'l-Kuttab* (Book of the Viziers and Secretaries), an extensive work which began in pre-Islamic times, and gave an account of the secretaries of the Prophet (pbuh) and the secretaries of his successors down to the end of the Umayyad Caliphate. The narrative constitutes a history of the administration of the Islamic land until the advent of the 'Abbasids. What survives of the work is estimated at about one-third. The importance of the *Kitab al-Wuzara* was first shown, as was appropriate and natural, by an Austrian Orientalist, A. von Kremer in his paper *Ueber das Budget der Einnahmen unter der Regierung des Harun alrasid*, and contributed to the proceedings of the 7th International Congress of Orientalists.<sup>47</sup> It can be read with profit for a view of the finances of the Abbasids in Harun's time.

Most recently Michael Awad has published a useful little work, *Lost Fragments of Kitab al-Wuzara*,<sup>48</sup> compiled from manuscripts and printed sources. Though quite short (118 pages), this publication forms a useful supplement to the editions.<sup>49</sup>

### Ibn Khaldun

A later historian of Islam is Ibn Khaldun (d.1406). Entries under his name exist in every encyclopaedia or dictionary, some of them quite original as in the case of the universal biography published in French.<sup>50</sup> Ibn Khaldun's major work: *The Muqquadimma*<sup>51</sup> (The Introduction) is a gigantic endeavour, being a discourse on universal history in six chapters. There is already plenty on Ibn Khaldun in the entry on Tunis in MuslimHeritage.com to warrant more space here, except the point he makes in relation to truth. The criterion of truth is correspondence—i.e. with what actually happens. Therefore it is necessary to examine if the alleged fact is possible. This is more important and comes before justifying the transmitters.<sup>52</sup> The conclusion follows:

"If this is so, then the rule or criterion in distinguishing truth from falsehood in historical narratives on the basis of possibility and absurdity is that we should consider the society of mankind which is civilisation, and distinguish which conditions belong to [civilisation] essentially and in conformity with its nature, and which are accidental and need not be reckoned with, and which cannot possibly happen in it (*lit*, for it). When we have done that, we have a canon or criterion for distinguishing the true from the false, truth from lies, by a demonstrative method which does not admit of doubt. So then when we have heard of any case of the conditions occurring in civilisation, we know what we are to judge worthy of acceptance, what worthy of

<sup>44</sup> London, 1935.

<sup>45</sup> *As Histoire de la Dynastie Abbaside de 322 a 333/933*; 2 vols; Algiers; 1946; 1950.

<sup>46</sup> M. Canard: *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii, ii, Brussels, 1950, p. 28.

<sup>47</sup> *Berichte des VII. internationalen Orientalisten-Congresses*, Vienna, 1889; 1-17.

<sup>48</sup> Beirut, 1965.

<sup>49</sup> D.M. Dunlop: *Arab Civilisation*; op cit; p. 96.

<sup>50</sup> *Biographie Universelle*: New Edition, published under the direction of M. Michaud, Paris, 1857. Vol, XX, pp. 268-70.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Khaldun: *The Muqquadimah*, tr. F. Rosenthal; 3 vols. New York, 1958.

<sup>52</sup> *Muqadimah*; I; 76 (K.al-'ibar, i. 61).

rejection as false. We have thus a true touchstone (*mi'yar*), by which historians may pursue the path of truth and right in what they report. This is the aim of this first hook (i.e. the *Muqaddima*) of our work."<sup>53</sup>



**Figure 3.** An artistic impression of Ibn Khaldun (Image from [www.muslimheritage.com](http://www.muslimheritage.com)).

## Al-Makrizi

Al-Makrizi (d.1442) is the most famed of medieval Egyptian historians. A man of the law, and teacher in Cairo, he collected his material, much of which absolutely unique, to compile his major work: *Kitab al-Khitat*.<sup>54</sup> *Al-Khitat* deals with topography and archaeology as much as history. Its full title is *Kitab al-Mawaiz wa'l-Itibar fi Dhikr al-Khitat wa'l-Athar* (Book of Exhortations and Consideration, or Mention, of the Settlements and Monuments).<sup>55</sup> It is concerned with Egypt in general and al-Fustat and Cairo in particular. The interest in the first settlements of the Muslims in Egypt is even more prominent. Al-Maqrizi clearly cast his net widely: it was shown a long time ago by the Hungarian Arabist Ignas Goldziher that he had, for example, made use of one of the works of the Spaniard Ibn Hazm, which were undoubtedly little known in the East.<sup>56</sup> The *Khitat* remained for a long time available only in a two-volume edition printed at Bulaq in 1270/1853, but there is now a modern edition from a Lebanese press, not critical, but which at least presents something like al-Maqrizi's original text.<sup>57</sup>

Al-Maqrizi also compiled *Kitab al-Suluk li Ma'rifat Duwal al Muluk* (Book of Entrance to the Knowledge of the Dynasties of the Kings), of which the Frenchman Quatremere made a translation of a large portion, and also an edition of the Arabic version up to 1354.<sup>58</sup> It is a history of Egypt from the accession of Salah al-Din

<sup>53</sup> Muqadimah; I; 77 (K.al-'ibar, i. 61-2).

<sup>54</sup> Al-Maqrizi, Ahmad Ibn Ali: *Al-Mawaiz wa Alitibar fi dhikr al-Khitat wa-Al-athar*. Edited by Ahmed Ali al-Mulaiji. 3 Vols. Beirut: Dar al Urfan. 1959. Al-Maqrizi: *Kitab al-Khitat*, ed. Bulaq; partial French tr. by U. Bouriant and P. Casanova, Description topographique et Historique de l'Egypte, Paris, 1895-1900; Cairo, 1906-20.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Maqrizi, Ahmad Ibn Ali: *Al-Mawaiz wa Alitibar fi dhikr al-Khitat wa-Al-athar*. Edited by Ahmed Ali al-Mulaiji. 3 Vols. Beirut: Dar al Urfan. 1959. Al-Maqrizi: *Kitab al-Khitat*, ed. Bulaq.

<sup>56</sup> The work of Ibn Hazm is the *Kitab al-Milal wa'n-Nihal* (Book of Religions and Sects) otherwise called *Kitab al-Fasl fi'l-Milal wa'IAhwa' wa'n-Nihal* (Book of the Distinction in the Religions, Heresies and Sects). See I. Goldziher, *Die Zahiriten*, Leipzig, 1884, reprinted Hildesheim, 1967; 201 ff.

<sup>57</sup> *Al-Khitat al-Maqriziyya*, 3 vols, ash-Shiyah Lebanon, n.d.

<sup>58</sup> Cairo, 1956-8, 6 vols, .



in 564/1169, with some introductory remarks on pre-Islamic times, to the Prophet, then the first four rightly guided Caliphs, then the Umayyads, 'Abbasids, Buwayhids and Seljuqs, becoming regular annals from about 568/1172 and ending in 844/1440-1, after which it is continued by Ibn Taghribirdi (see following). It is thus in effect a complete history of two Egyptian dynasties, the Ayyubids (i.e. Salah Al-din and his successors) and the Bahri Mamluks, and a partial history of a third, the Burji Mamluks (mostly Circassians). A considerable portion of this was translated into French by Quatremère, and the Arabic text is now available as far as the end of 755/1354 (i.e. well down in the Bahri Mamluk period), in a well-printed critical edition by Mubammad M. Ziyada.<sup>59</sup>

Al-Maqrizi says in his introduction to the *Suluk*<sup>60</sup> that he has already completed two works, the *'Iqd Jawahir al-Asfat min Akhbar Madinat al-Fustat* (Necklace of Jewels of the Caskets from the History of the City of al-Fustat) and the *Kitab Ittiaz' al-Hunafa' bi-Akhbar al-Khulafa'* (Book of the Admonition of True Believers on the History of the Caliphs), which between them cover the period from the first conquest of Egypt by the Muslims to the end of Fatimid rule. In his most current book (the *Suluk*) he brings the history of Egypt down to his own time, in fact until shortly before his death in 845/1442.

In his book *an-Niza wa'l Takhasum fima bayna Umayya wa Bani Hashim*,<sup>61</sup> the Abbasids are not spared his vindictive, such as Al-Mansur introducing the obnoxious practice of prostration before the ruler.

Al-Maqrizi's other works include the *Kitab ighathat al-Umma bi-Kashf al-G'humma* (Book of Help to the Nation in Disclosing the Distress), which deals with the famines which have occurred in Egypt from the earliest times down to the year 1405, the date of composition.<sup>62</sup> The author draws not only on his knowledge of Muslim history but gives several pages on periods of scarcity in more ancient times, derived from the *Kitab Akhhar Misr* (History of Egypt) of the Ustaadh Ibrahim b. Waif Shah. Al-Maqrizi's limitations in this matter are evident from the praise which he gives to such a book (cf. pp.110 ff). His own is a great deal better. It has already been pointed out by Muhammad Enan that in the *Ighathat al-Umma* al-Maqrizi was influenced by Ibn Khaldun, the older man, who was his teacher in Egypt,<sup>63</sup> and this is accepted by the Cairo editors, who also note that the similarity of treatment here and in the *Muqqadima* of Ibn Khaldun extends even to such a purely stylistic matter as the termination of sections by a verse or verses of the Qur'an.<sup>64</sup>

The occasion of the composition of the *Ighatat al-Umma* was the intermittent famine in Egypt between the years 1394 and 1405 during which his only daughter died perhaps of the plague. We learn, for instance, that in places such as Mahalla, the effect of the plague was so severe that the prefect could find no one to come to complain to him, whilst the qadi, when approached by people to validate their wills, could, because of their small number, find no witnesses except after a great exertion. In the countryside, there was almost no one left to cultivate the land or collect the harvests.<sup>65</sup> Al-Maqrizi himself was appointed *muhtasib* (*Inspector of the markets*) in Cairo in 1398-9, and as the editors remark his special experience in this post

<sup>59</sup> Cairo, 1956-8; 6 vols, 1; parts 1-3; ii; parts 1-3.

<sup>60</sup> Ed. Ziyada, i, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Ed G. Vos; Leiden; 1888.

<sup>62</sup> Ed. Muhammad Ziyada and Jamal ad-Din ash-Shayyal, Cairo, 1359/1940.

<sup>63</sup> M.A. Enan: *Ibn Khaldun; His Life and Work*, Lahore; 1946; 73 ff.

<sup>64</sup> *Ighatat al-Umma*; Ed cairo; Introd; p.d

<sup>65</sup> R. Lopez, H. Miskimin, A. Udovitch: England to Egypt, 1350-1500: Long term trends and long distance trade. In *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*; Edited by M.A.Cook; Oxford University Press; 1970. pp. 93-128; p.119

no doubt helped in dealing with the subject matter of the book.<sup>66</sup> This leads him to give a short account of the history of currency in Islam, which before or afterwards he made the subject of a separate treatise.<sup>67</sup> In all this we seem to have traces of the influence of Ibn Khaldun on al-Maqrizi,<sup>68</sup> for clearly he is here concerned with facts of economics and sociology, and al-Maqrizi's perception of which was no doubt shaped by contact with Ibn Khaldun.

Incidentally, we get some idea of his rapidity of work, when we learn that the *Kitab Ighathat al-Umma* was put in order and revised in a single night.<sup>69</sup>

Another work of al-Maqrizi deals with bees. The date of composition and the purpose of the book are not known. The title is *Kitab Nahl 'Ibar an-Nahl* (Book of the Present from the Examples of the Bee).<sup>70</sup> He first speaks of the nature and habits of bees and then, true to his prepossessions as a follower of Ibn Khaldun, goes on to speak of the important products, honey—"the noblest of foods"<sup>71</sup> and wax, which is derived from them. At the close his overriding historical interest is shown in accounts of famous occasions, at the court of Mas'ud or Mahmud of Ghazna, at the marriage of a daughter of Khumarawayh of Egypt to the Caliph al-Mutadid, etc., when great numbers of wax-candles were used. This whole section raises the question of illumination in public and private in Islam. We have a picture of al-Mansur going to the mosque accompanied by an attendant carrying an oil-lamp, or again of the same Caliph reading and writing by the light of a single wax-candle in a candlestick which was removed when he had finished.<sup>72</sup> The Umayyads, al-Maqrizi tells us, used oil-lamps for illumination and tall wax-candles in processions, and we get the impression that the use of lamps is the older practice, while very extensive employment of candles is an indication of later luxury.

What is perhaps most remarkable in the book, very original in its subject and perhaps unique in Arabic,<sup>73</sup> is that al-Maqrizi depends scarcely at all on personal observations of bees, but on passages in earlier literature where bees, honey, honeycomb, etc. are mentioned.

Al-Maqrizi also wrote two works of general history, the *Kitab Imta al-Asma' fima li'n-Nabi' min al-Anba' wa'l-Ahwal wa'l-Hafada wa'l-Mata* (Book of the Delight of the Ears in the Prophet Muhammad's News and Conditions and Descendants and Household Goods), and the *Kitab al-Khabar an al-Bashar*, (History of Mankind) also called *Kitab al-Madkhal* (Book of Introduction), which began with the Creation, dealt with world-geography and the early history of the Arabs and Persians, and was intended as an introduction to the *Kitab Imta al-Asma* just mentioned. Neither of these books seems to have been the object of any special attention, which they would probably repay. The same applies also to his *Durar al-Uqad al-Farida fi Tarajim al-Ayan al-Mufida* (Pearls of the Precious Necklaces in the Biographies of Important Personages), which dealt with contemporaries.<sup>74</sup> His short works, apart from those which have been mentioned, cover a wide range of subjects.

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<sup>66</sup> *Ighathat al-Umma*; Ed. Cairo; Introd; pp. d-h.

<sup>67</sup> *Ighathat al-Umma*; pp. 43-62.

<sup>68</sup> M.A. Enan: Ibn Khaldun; His Life and Work, op cit; 73 ff.

<sup>69</sup> This seems to be the meaning of the words in the Colophon (ed. Cairo, 86) *Tayassara li tartib hadhil-maqala wa-tahdhibuha fi layla wahida*, cf. the closing words of Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddima, ed. Beirut, i, 1169.

<sup>70</sup> Ed. J. Ash-Shayyal; Cairo; 1946; The title varies in different Mss.

<sup>71</sup> Ed. Cairo; p. 45.

<sup>72</sup> Ed. Cairo; pp. 79-80.

<sup>73</sup> C.f. The editor's introduction; pp. k-1.

## Ibn Taghribirdi

The history of Egypt is also handled by Ibn Taghribirdi (d.1469) who wrote *an-Nujum az-Zahira fi Muluk Misr wal-Qahira* (the Brilliant Stars in the Kings of Misr and Cairo).<sup>75</sup> It gives excellent accounts of events from the time of the Muslim arrival until 1468; that is to the eve of the author's death.<sup>76</sup> It is divided into seven volumes. The first part of this to the year 365/976 was edited at Leiden by Juynboll and Matthes in 1855-61. Later the study of Ibn Taghribirdi became a large part of the life-work of W. Popper,<sup>77</sup> who began publishing the remaining years (from 366/976) in 1909, and by 1963 had completed an Arabic text of much of the *Nujum az-Zahira* and an English translation, carefully annotated, of the years dealing with the Circassian Mamluks of Egypt, 784/1382 to 872/1468,<sup>78</sup> where as already mentioned the work ends. Popper also contributed an edition in four volumes of Ibn Taghribirdi's *Hawadith ad-Duhür* (Happenings of the Times)<sup>79</sup> which, written on a more elaborate scale than the other work, was intended by its author as a continuation of the *Kitab as-Suluk* of al-Maqrizi, and, beginning where al-Maqrizi's book ended, but included the years 1441-1469, that is to say it came down rather more than a year further than the *Nujum az-Zahira*, till shortly before Ibn Taghribirdi's death.<sup>80</sup> His Mamluk descent and friendships alone do not account for Ibn Taghribirdi's status as historian at the Mamluk court, for the excellence of his scholarship was recognised by his peers, including al-'Aini, and is still acknowledged to the extent that he probably ranks second only to al-Maqrizi as historian of medieval Egypt.<sup>81</sup>

## Al-Maqqari

From North Africa, but belonging to a later era, was Al-Maqqari (d.1632), born in Telemesen, Western Algeria. He compiled a whole literary and historical encyclopaedia of Muslim Spain entitled: *Nafh al-Tib*,<sup>82</sup> (Aroma of Perfume) which De Gayangos translated into English in large measure.<sup>83</sup> Ahmedl Al-Maqqari At-Telemсени descended from an ancient and illustrious family established at Makkarah, a village not far from (today's Algeria). He was known in the East by the honorific surnames of *Al-hafedh A1-Maghrebi* (the western traditionist), and *Shehabu-d-din* (bright star of religion). De Gayangos, who made the widely used partial translation of al-Maqqari's main work says:

Al-Maqqari having lived in times comparatively modern, it was long before I could meet with any Arabic work giving an account of his life and writings. Háji Khalifah, who mentions him occasionally,<sup>84</sup> gives only the year of his death, and the titles of some of his works. Having perused in vain many biographical dictionaries, I was on the eve of giving up my task in despair, when my excellent and learned friend, the Rev. J. Renouard, of Swanscombe, was kind enough to point out to me a very full notice of Al-Maqqari, occurring in a Biographical Dictionary of learned men who flourished at Damascus during the eleventh

<sup>74</sup> For details of the existing MSS of these works see Brockelmann, GAL; ii; 39 ff.

<sup>75</sup> R. S. Humphreys: Muslim Historiography, *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, Charles Scribners and Sons, New York, vol 6, pp 250-5. at p. 251.

<sup>76</sup> For Biographical details, see G. Wiet: l'Historien Abul Mahasin; *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Egypte*; XII; 1929-30; pp. 89-105.

<sup>77</sup> W. Popper: *History of Egypt; 1382-1469*; Translated from the Arabic *Annals of Abu'l Mahasin Ibn Taghri Birdi*; 5 vols; University of California Publications in Semitic Philology; vols XIII-IV; XVII-XIX; Berkeley, Los Angeles; 1954-60; I; Xv-XVIII.

<sup>78</sup> University of California Publications in Semitic Philology, 1959-1963.

<sup>79</sup> University of California Publications in Semitic Philology, 1930 and subsequently.

<sup>80</sup> D.M. Dunlop: Arab Civilisation; op cit; p. 131.

<sup>81</sup> D.P. Little: A Introduction to Mamluk Historiography; op cit; p. 87.

<sup>82</sup> Al-Maqqari: *Nafh al-Tib*, ed. Muhammad M. Abd al-Hamid. 10 vols, Cairo, 1949.

<sup>83</sup> P.De Gayangos: *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain (extracted from Nifh Al-Tib by al-Maqqari)*; 2 vols; The Oriental Translation Fund; London, 1840-3.

<sup>84</sup> Voc Tarikhu-l-Andalus, azhar, fath, Nafhu-t-tib, Mukaddamat Ibn Khaldun; &c.

century of the Hijra, entitled 'The best part of fresh butter on the illustrious men of the eleventh century,' by Amin Jelebi. From this work, of which that gentleman possesses a handsome transcript, executed H 1171 (1757-8), by Ismail Ibn 'Abd-I-kerim Al-Jerai, the above notice of A1-Maqqari is abridged.<sup>85</sup>

Ahmed al-Maqqari was born at , where he passed the first years of his life; learning the Koran and the traditions under his uncle, who then held the office of Mufti in that city. Under the tuition of this learned man, who was himself the author of many important works on various topics, al-Maqqari early imbibed that love of science, and acquired that taste for literature, by which he was so much distinguished in later-life. Having completed his education, he left his native place in 1600-1, and travelled to Fez, where he sought and frequented the society of the learned men of the day, with many of whom he formed a strong friendship. He then returned to , only to again leave for Fez. After a stay of fourteen years, wholly spent in literary pursuits and in the society of the learned, al-Maqqari left Fez towards the end of Ramadhan 1618, and soon after sailed for Alexandria, intent upon a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. He arrived at Alexandria early and having made a short stay at Cairo, started for Arabia in the month of Rajab of the same year. After duly fulfilling all and every one of the sacred duties incumbent upon a good Muslim on such occasions, he returned in Muharram, H. 1029, to Cairo, where he took a wife and settled. In the month of Rabi'al-Awwal of the ensuing year he visited Jerusalem and returned to Cairo, whence he generally started every year on a pilgrimage to Mecca; so that in 1037 he had already visited that place five times, and Medina seven. He returned to Cairo in Safar, 1627, and left immediately for Jerusalem, where he arrived in Rajab of the same year (Feb. 1628). After a stay of twenty-five days, he proceeded to Damascus, which he entered at the beginning of Sha'ban (March, 1628). Immediately after his arrival, Ahmed Ibn Shāhin Ash-Shahini, a rich and influential person, and a liberal patron of literature, which he himself cultivated with success, gave al-Maqqari suitable rooms in the college of Jakmak, of which he was the director, and conferred upon him several other distinctions. At the persuasion of this individual, al-Maqqari afterwards wrote the historical work of which the present is a translation. While at Damascus, where he stayed only forty days, al-Maqqari occupied his time in various literary pursuits. Everyday after sunrise he would sit under the dome of the eagle in the great mosque, and there deliver eloquent lectures on the *Sahih* of Al-Bukhari. However as his audience grew it was no longer contained within that narrow space, thus he moved to the spacious court of the mosque. These lectures, which generally lasted several hours, from sunrise to near noon, were attended by the principal citizens, as well as by all the scholars and theologians of Damascus; the number of people thus assembled amounting to several thousands. Al-Maqqari left Damascus on the 5th day of Shawwāl, 1037, and returned to Cairo. He again visited that city towards the end of Sha'ban, 1040, being received by Ahmed Ibn Shahin and his other friends as kindly as on the former occasion. He was preparing for another journey to Damascus, where he had determined to settle for the remainder of his days, when he was attacked by a violent fever, which caused his death in the month of Jumáda II; AH 1041 (1632 Ad).<sup>86</sup>

Ahmed Al-Maqqari wrote the following works:

- Blooming Buds and Flowers of the Gardens on the History of the Kád'i 'Iyádh.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> The following can be found in De Gayangos' preface; pp. XXX ff.

<sup>86</sup> De Gayangos' preface; op cit; on the Life of the author.

<sup>87</sup> Library at Paris (No. 1377, ancien fond). Abi-I-fadhI 'Ivádh Ibn Musa Al-Yahsebi, better known as the Kádi 'Iyadh, was a celebrated theologian, native of Ceuta, but who resided most of his life at Granada. He was born in A.H. 476, and died at Morocco in 544. His life is in Ibn Khallikán (Tyd. Ind., No. 522). See also Casiri, Bib. Ar. Hisp. Esc. vol. ii. p. 112, et passim. He wrote a history of his native city, and a life of the Prophet Mohammed, entitled *Efficient means to ensure the knowledge of the true history of the elected*, which is in the library of

- The Dissipation of Obscurity on the Religious Duties of a Sunni Muslim.
- *Arf An'Nashk fi Akhbar Dimashk* (Sweet Odour of the Flowers on the History of Damascus).
- The Lean and the Fat, the Threadbare and the Costly.
- The Garden of the Sweet-smelling Myrtles, or an Account of those Learned Men Whom I Met During My Stay at Morocco and Fez.
- Valuable Pearls on the Names of Allah, our Guide and our Trust, and Marginal Notes for a Commentary on the Qur'an.
- A Bunch of Grapes Symmetrically Arranged on Abridged History.
- The Gifts of Al-Maqqari towards the Completion of the Lesser Commentary (upon the Qur'an).
- The Beginning and the Growth (a work written entirely in elegant prose or verse).
- An Epistle on the Final Point with *Five* Dots to it, but Without Having Any in the Middle.
- The Eminent Victory or a Description of the Slippers of the Prophet.

Besides the above works, Al-Maqqari appears to have written, according to Hajji Khalifah,<sup>88</sup> a commentary upon the historical prolegomena of Ibn Khaldun. De Gayangos found (fo. 647) that he entertained an idea of writing a life of the Prophet Mohammed; Al Maqqari, indeed, holds:

‘And I once had in mind to write on this special subject a work, which I was to have entitled ‘The Garden of Instruction on the Act of Invoking God’s Favours (*salat*) and His Salutation (*taslim*) upon the Prophet,’ treating of the sublime conceptions of his mind, and the eloquence of speech with which the Almighty endowed him.”<sup>89</sup>

Al-Maqqari also began but did not complete a Biographical Dictionary of illustrious men born at his own native place, Telemesen, under this title, “The time of *Nisan* on the Eminent Men of Telemesen.”<sup>90</sup>

Al-Maqqari transmits the extracts and fragments taken from other works, in most instances giving the titles as well as the names of their authors, thus presenting the original text of ancient historians whose writings were most probably lost.<sup>91</sup>

## Al-Jabarti

A later historian of top stature is Al-Jabarti sometimes refer to as al-Djabarti. He was witness to one of the major events of Egyptian history that is the French invasion of Egypt, which took place in 1798.<sup>92</sup> The most interesting aspect from the narration of al-Djabarti is his catching the colonial nature of the Islamic land, the colonial power seemingly entering the Islamic land to free it of its despots and to bring it progress and prosperity, but ending in destroying every foundation of Islamic life, besides oppressing and slaughtering the populations on account of their resistance to such a mission.<sup>93</sup> Extracts of such French exactions in Cairo, and their defiling of al-Azhar can be found detailed in the entry on Cairo at Muslimheritage.com. Here

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the British Museum, No. 9513.

<sup>88</sup> voc. Tarikh Ibn Kha1dun, Mukaddamat, &c.

<sup>89</sup> In De gayangos preface; p. xxxiv; note 13.

<sup>90</sup> De Gayangos' preface; op cit; p. xxxiv.

<sup>91</sup> P. De Gayangos; preface, p.xv.

<sup>92</sup> Al-Jabarti: *Al-Jabarti's Chronicle of the first seven months of the French occupation of Egypt*. Ed and tr by S. Moreh; Leiden, 1975.

<sup>93</sup> Al-Jabarti: Al-Jabarti's Chronicle. Pp. 39-47; and G. Hanotaux: (vol 5 written by H. Deherain): *Histoire de la Nation Egyptienne*; Paris; Librairie Plon; 1931. p. 387.



focus is on Al-Djabarti's opening pages of his *Ajaib al-Athar fi Tarajim wa'l Akhbar* (History of Egypt), to understand the nature of the writer, and the content of his work.<sup>94</sup> Al-Jabarti begins his work the following which we include between{ }:

### { In the Name of God the Compassionate the Merciful

Praise be to God, the Eternal and the First, Whose dominion neither passes away nor changes, the Creator of all creation, Who knows even the atoms of reality, the Destroyer of nations, and the Resurrector of the dead the Restorer of bounty and the One who abolishes disasters, the Revealer of obscurities, and Possessor of graciousness and generosity. "There is no God but He. All things perish except His Face. His is the Judgment, and unto Him you shall be returned," {Quran 28:88}.

The humble Abd al-Rahman ibn Hasan al-Jabarti al-Hanafi, may God forgive him and his parents, and may He favour them and him, says: I have written some pages concerning the events which occurred in the latter part of the 12th century (1688-1785) and thereafter, and the first part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (1785-1882), in which we are now. Some of the events assembled in these pages are recorded in a general manner, while others are investigated in detail. Most of the events are tribulations which we have experienced and matters which we have witnessed. I have spoken incidentally in the work about earlier events of which I heard and which I learned from other people I have also included some biographies of famous '*ulamā*' and notable Amirs. I have mentioned some of their exploits and history in addition to information relating to their dates of birth and death. I desired to assemble these and record them in a well-arranged chronological order, so that it might be easy for the attentive student to go over them and obtain the benefit he desires. He who reads them will learn a lesson from past calamities, will be consoled in whatever misfortune befalls him, and will remember the lesson. "Only men possessed of minds remember" {Quran13:19}.

Since these are events of an unusual kind, and varied in their peculiarity I have entitled the work '*Ajaib al-athar fi'l-tarajim wal akhbar* (Remarkable Remnants of Lives and Events). I hope that whoever reads it and finds it useful will not forget to remember us in his pious prayers and will overlook whatever mistakes he may find in it...

The first person in Islam to establish (a system of dating events) was Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab- may God be pleased with him. This occurred when Abu Musā al-Ashari wrote to Omar, saying:

"We have received letters from the Commander of the Faithful, but we do not know upon which of them to act, for we have read a bill due in the month of Shaaban, but we do not know which of the two Shaabans is meant. Is it the past Shaaban, or the coming Shaaban? Another report is that a bill due in Shaaban was presented to Omar, who asked, "Which Shaaban? Is it the one in which we are now, or is it the coming Shaaban? Then he gathered the prominent companions of the Prophet — may God be pleased with them — and said to them, "The revenues have multiplied, and that which we have apportioned is not dated. How can we find a way to organise the matter?..."

So Umar said to them, "Establish for the people a system of dating which they will use in their dealings, so that the appointed times in handling their business may be exact...."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti's History of Egypt*; edited by T. Philip and M. Perlmann; 2 vols; Verlag; 1994.

After praising the merits of history, as we can read in the conclusion further on, Al-Jabarti informs us of the very important following point, outlining Islamic history:

“There are very many books compiled on history. The author of *Miftah alsa'dda* mentioned 1,300 such books in his classification of the sciences. This number was according to the extent of his knowledge and research; but there are more, for on no subject have as many books been written as on history. Human nature is attracted to this kind of book, and is interested in discovering the unknown. Rulers, too, have a great desire to acquaint themselves with the biographies, circumstances, and policies of the Kings who preceded them.”

Among the books written on this subject is the multi-volumed *Ta'rikh* of Ibn Kathir. He is the author of the following verse:

“Days pass us by in succession; we are led to our destiny with open eyes. Youth's pleasures, once gone, will never return; and these disquieting grey hairs will never disappear.”

Among these books are the *Ta'rikh* of al-Tabari, namely Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, who died in the year 310 (922-23 CE) in Baghdad; the history of Ibn al-Athir al-Jazari, entitled *al-Kāmil*, which starts with the beginning of time and ends with the year 628 (1230-31CE). Ibn al-Athir also wrote *Akhbar al-sahaba*, in six volumes. Also to be mentioned are the *Ta'rikh* of Ibn al-Jawzi, who also authored also wrote *al-Muntazam fi tawarikh al-umam*; Sibte ibn al-Jawzi's *Mir'at al-zaman*, in 40 volumes; and the history of Ibn Khallikan, whose title is *Wafayat al-ayan wa-anba' abna' al-zaman*. The histories of al-Masu'di are *Akhbar al-zaman*, *al-Awsat*, and *Muruj al-dhahab*. Among the most splendid histories are those written by al-Dhahabi, which include a great history, an intermediate work entitled [I, 6] *al-'Ibar*, and a short work entitled *Duwal al-islam*. The histories of al-Sam'ani include *Dhayl ta'rikh Baghdad*- a supplement to the work of Abu Bakr ibn al-Khatib- in about 15 volumes; *Ta'rikh Marw*, which exceeds 20 volumes; and *al-Ansab*, in about eight volumes.

Other books on history include: the histories of the very learned Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani; al-Safadi's *Ta'rikh*; the histories by al-Suyuti; the history by Ibn Asakir in 57 volumes; the history by al-Yafi'i, *Bustan al-tawarikh*, in six volumes; the histories of Baghdad; the histories of Aleppo; the histories of Isfahan by Abu Nu'aym; the history of Balkh; the history of Andalus; *al-Ihata fi akhbar Gharnata*; the history of Yemen; the history of Mecca; the histories of Damascus; the history of Medina; the histories of al-Maqrizi, which include the great history *al-Muqaffa*, *al-Suluk fi duwal al-muluk*, *al-Mawa'iz wa'itibarar fi-khitat wa'l-athar*, etc. In his works, this author mentioned several books of history whose names we have never encountered except in his books, such as those by Ibn Abi Tayy, by al-Musabbihi, by Ibn al-Ma'mun, by Ibn Zulaq, and by al-Quda'i. Other books include: the history of al-Ayni, in 40 volumes, some of which I have seen in his own handwriting. They are huge volumes and in the style of Ibn al-Athir's *al-Kamil*. There are also the history of al-Sakhawi, and his *al-Daw' al-lami fi ahl al-qarn al-tasi'*, which he arranged alphabetically in several volumes; the history by Ibn Khaldun in eight huge volumes, and his *Muqaddima*, to which he devoted a separate volume. Whoever reads it will find that it is an extensive sea of learning and full of jewels of articulate speech and understanding. There is also the history of Ibn Duqmaq.

<sup>95</sup> Al-Jabarti's history of Egypt; op cit; p. 1-2.

Books of history are too numerous to count. Al-Masudi noted a great number of them, even though his history ended in the year 333 (944-45CE). How numerous, then, must the books of history written since that time be? These books, however, have become mere names, for I have not seen any of them except scattered volumes which have been preserved in some *waqf* libraries in schools, (the remaining volumes) having been circulated by book dealers and sold by middlemen, storekeepers, and supervisors (of the *waqf* libraries), or transferred to the Maghrib and the Sudan. The few that remained were destroyed in revolutions and wars. The French took away to their country whatever they found.<sup>96</sup>

When I decided to gather together my notes, I desired to link them to preceding events. I searched and investigated, but could find nothing except a few booklets written by some common soldiers. These were poorly expressed and confused in composition and order. They were marred with defects in places in the narration of events. However, I succeeded in obtaining one such history written on the whole in a simple and natural style by a person named Ahmad Chelebi ibn Abd al-Ghani. It begins with the capture of Egypt by the Ottomans and ends, like the others which I have mentioned, in 1150 (1737CE). Then a certain friend borrowed the book and failed to return it; so it is as good as lost. From that date to the present, no one has recorded or written anything of use in the field. I have therefore had recourse to transmitting the words of elderly people, to documents from the registers of clerks and custodians, and to inscriptions on tombstones from the beginning of the century up to the year 1170 (1756CE). What follows, up to the year 1190 (1776CE), are events which we ourselves witnessed but partly forgot and partly remembered. From the latter date to the present there are events which we have considered, evaluated and written down, until we achieved our goal, such as it was — namely, to narrate this in an orderly arrangement from our time to that period. God willing, we will mention the events which we experience, as far as is possible, and as far as we are free from hindrances, until death overtakes us. “Surely we belong to God, and to him we return,” {Quran 2:151}.

In collecting this work, I did not aim at serving any prominent person of high rank or at obeying any vizier or amir. I did not, to satisfy an emotional inclination or a material purpose, flatter any regime with hypocrisy, or lavish praise or blame contrary to good character. I seek God’s forgiveness if I have described a path I myself did not follow, or traded with capital I did not own:

Like a cameleer who chants without having a camel,

like a shepherd who has no herd;

Like someone who offers you coffee, but his coffee is imaginary;

like someone who extends an invitation to you, while he has no food to offer.

Moreover, I admit my shortcomings and my lack of ability in the rules of Arabic rhetoric and in the mastery of Arabic prosody.

I am as far from attaining what I have undertaken as the fly is from (carrying off) the food of the phoenix.

I bewail my failure; it bewails its humiliation. Great is the difference between its weeping and mine.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> The French scholars accompanying Napoleon, who invaded Egypt in 1798, eagerly collected Muslim manuscripts.

<sup>97</sup> Al-Jabarti’s History of Egypt; op cit; pp. 1-9.

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