CHAPTER 7

Partisan Readers: Fighting over the Interpretation of History in the Margins of MS BnF, Arabe 1825

Boris Liebrenz

Victors get to write the history books, it is often said, and not always without reason. But just like its common ascription to Winston Churchill, the adage's sentiment itself does not always hold true.

Marginal comments promise to open up an exciting new dimension of the history of individual texts. Not merely showing that a certain book was read, they testify to actual engagement rather than passive consumption. Studying such notes can thus illuminate critical aspects of a work's reception. However, if the intention of such a study were to see opposing thinkers butt heads, intellectual sparks flying, that wish will be disappointed more often than it is fulfilled.

The goal of marginal comments in many cases is simply to provide structure, basic explanation, and context to a text, either for one's own studies, or in the service of other readers. Not surprisingly, one of the most widespread forms of the marginal note is the lexical explanation lifted from some of the standard dictionaries. In this textual environment, disagreements tend to be voiced politely, or even indirectly, by citing conflicting statements without addressing the conflict.

It is therefore a rare occasion when we see the margins of a chronicle become a battling ground for the interpretation of historical events and figures.[1] And yet this is somewhat counterintuitive. After all, so many chroniclers made no secret of their political allegiance to a ruler or dynasty, or their preference for certain regional, military, sectarian, or ethnic groups. They were praising rulers, notables, and patrons not everyone would have liked, condemning others

1 As an example we can cite the authorial marginal note by Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī (762–855/1361–1451), who used this space to cite and refute fellow historian al-Maqrīzī's (d. 845/1442) characterisation of a head secretary (*kātib al-sirr*), Fatḥ Allāh b. Nafīs; see Nakamachi: "al-ʿAynī's Working Method", pp. 296–297. But it is probably instructive that al-ʿAynī did not leave his critical remark in the work of al-Maqrīzī, which he read, but in his own holograph manuscript.

who still had their own partisans. It would have been hard to avoid stepping on anyone's toes. So where are the offended readers?

The marginal notes in Arabic manuscripts are rarely ever studied in detail, and those found in historical works are no exception. Elif Sezer Aydınlı has looked at the emotional reactions of readers of popular historical epics in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Istanbul.[2] Most recently, Frédéric Bauden has analysed in detail the readers of the Mamluk historian al-Maqrīzī's (d. 845/1442) *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā li-Miṣr*. In doing so he also took particular notice of the comments, biographies, and additions appended in the margins by the likes of Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), who often signed his own additions.[3] Still, a thorough general survey of the marginalia of historical works has never been undertaken and can only be highly encouraged. In its absence, this contribution will advance the study of one partisan reader who took issue with the way the Mamluk chronicler Ibn Iyās depicted the Ottoman sultan and the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in his major historiographical work *Badāʾiʿ al-umūr/al-zuhūr*[4] *fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*.

This work has often been the source for, but rarely the subject of, historical inquiry.[5] The little we know about Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Iyās al-Ḥanafī (which does not even include his year of death, which can only be approximated to sometime after 928/1522)[6] we know through his own testimony.[7] According to this, Ibn Iyās' background was that of a member, albeit not an important one, of the Mamluk elite, as one of the descendants of active Mamluks, a group that was known as *awlād al-nās*. On the grounds of his several generations of Mamluk forebears, Ibn Iyās held a military fief which appears to have broadly provided him with financial independence.

This independence might be detected in what became arguably his most famous work, the chronicle *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr*, which does not pander to a specific patron but allocates criticism widely among his contemporaries. Ibn Iyās' chronicle is designed as an all-encompassing account of Islamic Egypt, starting with what the Qur'an had to say about the country and leading all the way up to the author's lifetime. This latter part, although chronologically the shortest, is also the most detailed and original of the work and consequently has

2 Sezer Aydınlı: "Unusual Readers".

3 Bauden: "Maqriziana X".

4 The title with *al-zuhūr*, although apparently rejected by the author at a late stage of his composition, is the one that has been prevalent throughout the centuries.

5 Most recently, though, the compilatory working process of the author has been treated in Kollatz: *Window to the Past?*.

6 We do find the year 930/1524, given without reference, in many modern works.

7 Winter: "Ibn Iyās".

been an indispensable source in any scholarly engagement with the author's lifetime.

The unique feature of Ibn Iyās' work is that he was the only surviving eyewitness Egyptian chronicler to include a historical event of momentous consequences, the Ottoman conquest of the Mamluk lands, into his history. This is contained in the fifth part of the chronicle, covering the years 922 to 928. One of the relatively few volumes to contain Ibn Iyās' account of this conquest is preserved today in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris as MS Arabe 1825.

1 The Margins of MS Arabe 1825

MS Arabe 1825 is a volume of 340 folios that has lost its original binding and title page. Besides the marginal notes, the only surviving information on its erstwhile history comes with the colophon (fol. 340v), which will be analysed below. We will start the analysis of this manuscript with a review of its mostly critical marginal commentaries. All but one have been left by a single writer whose partisanship for the Ottoman camp clearly comes through. As I will argue below, the only signed note among them was written by a second hand. These notes are found throughout the manuscript but only start after the first third of it, when the description of the Ottoman conquest sets in.

1.1 *Fol. 112v*

The first such instance is the following, in which the marginal writer repeats and condenses a series of allegations of illicit activities in the Ottoman sultan's camp which are then summarily denied:

كذّبت ايها المورّخ الجاهل في امور كثيرة منها قولك جعلوا البوزة في ادنان وجفن حشيش وخيمة صبيان مرد حاشا ابن عثمان من ذلك ايها الكذاب

> You lied, ignorant historian, on many things. Among them your words that they made beer in jugs and hashish in bowls and a tent for beardless boys. The son of ʿUthmān (i.e., the Ottoman sultan) is aloof from this, you liar![8]

8 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

1.2 ***Fol. 122r***

When Ibn Iyās relates that Sultan Selim voices his wish to build a madrasa in Istanbul to match the madrasa of the penultimate Mamluk sultan, Qānişawh al-Ghawrī, he comments with "May God not accept this from him" (*fa-lā taqabbala Allāh minhū dhālika*), which prompts another angry marginal reaction:

بل لا تقبل الله منك ايها المورخ الكاذب

No, may God not accept this from you, you lying historian!

1.3 ***Fol. 130v***

In another passage, Selim is said to have been drunk. This was certainly not an unbelievable statement about an Ottoman sultan. And yet, the marginal writer, always thin-skinned on moral subjects, feels the need to protect Selim's reputation:

تكذب ايها المورّخ حاشاه من ذلك

You are lying, historian, he is aloof from that.

1.4 ***Fol. 139v***

Ibn Iyās describes how the Ottoman sultan is busy enjoying his debaucheries, such as – presumably erotic – encounters with beardless youths and wine, and only appears outside of his tent when the spilling of Mamluk blood is on the menu. Given these harsh accusations, the marginal reaction could be described as remarkably constrained:

هذا غرض من المورخ بل اكاذيب عجيبة

This is the historian's bias, or rather strange lies.

1.5 ***Fol. 251r***[9]

By contrast, a much longer, more substantial, yet no less visceral correction is triggered by a point of genealogical enquiry. Ibn Iyās gives a summary of the origin of the Ottoman ruling family. With genealogy being a fundamental task of history writing, this is an opportunity for the marginal writer to not only

9 This corresponds to vol. 5, pp. 364–365, and MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Fatih, 4199, fol. 186v.

denounce Ibn Iyās as a partisan observer of his own time but also an inadequate student of history.

كذبت ايها المورخ الجاهل لان اصل آل عثمان من الترك التراكمة من ماوراء النهر وجاء صحبة والده ارطغرل واجتمع والده بالسلطان علاي الدين السلجوقي واعتنى به ومنه حصل له ما حصل فان لم تعلم ذلك وجهلت به فانظر الى التواريخ التركية الذي يقال [لها] تواريخ ال عثمان [..] تجده مفصلاً وكان جد عثمان يسمى سليمان شاه سلطان مدينة ماهان

You lied, ignorant historian, because the origin of the Ottoman family is from the Turkmen Turks of Transoxania. He [ʿUthmān] came with his father Ertuğrul. His father met with the Seljuq sultan ʿAlāy al-Dīn and cared for him and received from him what he received. And if you did not know about this and were ignorant, then look into the Turkish history books that are called "Histories of the House of ʿUthmān". There you find everything in detail. ʿUthmān's grandfather was called Sulaymān Shāh, the ruler of the city Māhān.

On the same page, there is another intervention by the author of those marginalia, this time an interlinear note reacting to the overall very positive biography of ʿUthmān, the forefather of the Ottomans. Ibn Iyās reports hearsay (*wa-qīla*) that ʿUthmān died a *shahīd* or martyr in a campaign against the Franks. This time our writer objects not to any insult, but to this rather flattering description:

ليس كذلك لانه مات في فراشه

This is not the case, since he died in his bed.

1.6 *Fol. 255r*[10]

A few pages later we encounter the only signed marginal note in this volume. Its writer, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bahūtī al-Ḥanbalī, appears to be clearly distinct from the author of all the other marginalia (see below). Ibn Iyās gives

10 This corresponds to vol. 5, p. 371, and MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Fatih, 4199, fol. 189v (the edition counts this as fol. 194v).

an obituary for Zayn al-Dīn Zakarīyāʾ b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Anṣārī al-Sulaykī al-Shāfiʿī (824–926/1421–1520), the pre-eminent Shafiʿi legal scholar of Egypt. At the end of his biography, he mentions that Zakarīyāʾ had a son from a black slave concubine, but does not name that son. The marginal note elaborates on this point:

اقول نعم الولد الصالح وهو سيدنا ومولانا <وشيخنا صح> العالم العلامة الورع
الزاهد ابو المحاسن يوسف [بن] جمال الدين تغمده الله تعالى برحمته
ورضوانه امين ولما توفي دفن مع والده في فسقيته رحمة الله عليهما
كتبه عبد الرحمن البهوتي الحنبلي غفر الله له امين

I say: What an excellent son this is! He is our lord and master, the pious scholar Abū l-Maḥāsin Yūsuf b. Jamāl al-Dīn, may God Almighty cover him in his mercy and forgiveness, amen. When he died, he was buried with his father in his fountain, God's mercy on both of them.

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bahūtī al-Ḥanbalī wrote this, may God forgive him, amen.

1.7 *Fol. 339v*

As Ibn Iyās decries the oppression of the new Ottoman rulers, the marginal commentator expectedly takes offence and returns the charge. But just when he calls the author an "uneducated Circassian" (*jarkasī ʿāmmī*), he himself commits an interesting act of vernacularism through his rendering of the personal pronoun انت (*anta*, you) as انته (likely *inta*). Might this even have been an intentional mockery of the author's language?

كذبت ايها المورّخ الجاهل المتعصب لأظلم الدُّوَل وهي دولة الجراكسة والحال
لم تكن في الدول السابقة اعدل من دولة العثامنة واقوى اطاعة للشريعة ولكن
انته جركسي عاميّ جاهل فلا ينكر عليك هذ التعصب فلا رحم الله ثراك

You lied, ignorant historian, fanatic partisan for the most oppressive of dynasties, the Circassian dynasty. In fact, there was among the previous dynasties none more just than the Ottoman dynasty, and none more obedient to Islamic law. But you are [merely] an uneducated Circassian and are not to blame for this fanatic partisanship. May God not have mercy on your resting place.

And lastly, on that same page Ibn Iyās exclaims:

ما كنت احسب ان يمتدّ بي زمني حتى ارى دولة الاوغاد والسفل

> I did not expect that my time would be extended so much that I would see a dynasty of scoundrels and low-lifes!

To which his marginal nemesis reacts in the manner we have by now come to be familiar with:

بل انت الدي من الاوغاد والسفل فلا كان الله لك في عون مدّة حياتك ولا نوّر الله عليك قبرك بل جعله حفرة في النار كما تكلمت بالتعصب والكذب

> No, you are from among the scoundrels and low-lifes! May God not be your support during your lifetime and may He not illuminate your grave. Instead, He should make it a pit in the hellfire, as you have spoken with fanaticism and lies.

This is not the first time that these complaints have been noticed and registered. In 1931, Paul Kahle included a discussion of them in his preface to the edition of Ibn Iyās' chronicle that was published in Istanbul and Leipzig.[11] But Kahle's very informative and elaborate preface was not reproduced in the later, emended edition by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, which has recently been reprinted and is the edition usually cited and certainly the more readily available today.[12] Then and now, the question arises: who was the writer of these marginal complaints? For Kahle, the case appears to have been clear: as a partisan of the Ottoman sultans, this man could only have been "a Turk".[13] There are several points that allow for at least some doubt about this verdict (leaving aside the fundamental difficulty of assigning clear-cut ethnic labels to a most heterogeneous populace). For one, the writer, in discussing Ottoman genealogy and "Turkish history books" (*al-tawārīkh al-turkiyya*; fol. 251r), never embraced them as his own. The Arabic, too, shows at least one instance of vernacular usage coming through (fol. 339v), even if this was actually meant

11 The most pejorative marginal notes are transcribed in Paul Kahle: "Einleitung", pp. 10–12.

12 Ibn Iyās al-Ḥanafī: *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr.*

13 Kahle: "Einleitung", p. 10: "Die Handschrift ist im Besitze eines Türken gewesen, der in Fârsî-Schrift da, wo der Verfasser etwas ungünstiges über die Türken aussagt, einen Protest an den Rand geschrieben hat, […]."

as a mockery of the author. Yet, whoever he may have been, this man certainly was a fervent supporter of the Ottoman dynasty. Even more, he seems to have seen the Ottoman rule and its master in moral more than political terms. In this domain, he subscribed to a more puritan image of the Ottoman elite than other contemporary sources. The notion of a drunk sultan was anathema to him, as was imagining Selim pleasuring himself with beardless boys or being a bloodthirsty tyrant.

Only one of the marginal notes in this volume is signed. As noted above, one ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bahūtī al-Ḥanbalī elaborated on the biography of a man that is only identified by Ibn Iyās as the son of the famous shaykh al-islām Zakarīyāʾ al-Anṣārī, but who was to become a teacher to the writer of this marginal comment. This latter could have been ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Yūsuf b. ʿAlī al-Bahūtī al-Ḥanbalī, who was said to have been more than 130 years old when he died sometime after 1040/1630–31 AH.[14] Since Zakarīyāʾs son, named Yūsuf, was a child when his father died in 926/1520, this scenario is entirely plausible. It would also mean that the codex likely originated in and stayed in Egypt, where all of these men lived.

But was ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bahūtī also the writer of the other, anonymous notes? Of course, they are very different in content and tone. More importantly, they are set apart by the differences in the handwriting, most prominently displayed in the pointed and spiky appearance of the anonymous hand, the way that hand always wrote the *kāf* with a rather elongated shaft, or drew the *lām* below the baseline. This and other features indicate that this is a distinctly different writer from al-Bahūtī. Which of the two marginal writers was the first to leave his notes is impossible to tell.

The cataloguers at the Bibliothèque nationale de France as well as other researchers have repeatedly stated that this volume was itself undated but copied from an exemplar dated 934 AH.[15] Yet it is never sufficiently explained, to my understanding at least, why the colophon should be dismissed. It does not exhibit any hint that the date was taken from an exemplar, which scribes usually indicate. Nor do I find the handwriting at odds with the proposed date. Vajda remarks that the scribe's name is followed by a eulogy "réservée aux défunts," which is not true,[16] and which would not make sense if the passage was actually

14 Al-Muḥibbī: *Khulāṣat al-athar*, vol. 2, pp. 393–394, no. 584.

15 The earliest catalogue entry, de Slane: *Catalogue*, p. 331, dates MS Arabe 1825 to the seventeenth century; Kahle: "Einleitung", p. 10, follows this verdict; Vajda: *Notices*, p. 1, calls it "bien plus récente".

16 Vajda: *Notices*, p. 1. The eulogy in question is *taghammadahū Allāh bi-raḥmatihi*, which he probably holds to be the same in meaning as *raḥimahū Allāh*. But while the latter is indeed reserved for the deceased, the former was commonly used for living persons.

copied from the exemplar. The fact is that this volume should be regarded as an authentic copy finished in 27 Dhū al-Ḥijja 934 (2 September 1528), by a scribe who identified himself as Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Zāhid. This is only six years after the author himself finished his holograph copy.

The manuscript's transfer to Paris has not been precisely dated, since it did not belong to one of the known sub-collections of the Royal Library, such as that of Colbert, Ravius, or Vansleben. But it must have happened before 1733, when Joseph Ascari catalogued it as part of his wide-ranging work in the Royal Library.[17] According to Vajda, the volume was bought in Constantinople at the beginning of the eighteenth century.[18]

2 Ottoman Readers of an Anti-Ottoman Work?

Was the infuriated reader right? Was Ibn Iyās a fanatical partisan (*mutaʿaṣṣib*) of what the marginal commentator saw as the "most oppressive of regimes" (*aẓlam dawla*)? When it came to who should rule over Egypt, Ibn Iyās was certainly biased, and he had no qualms about showing his hatred for Selim in particular and the Ottoman conquerors at large, as is shown in numerous passages besides those that scandalised the reader of MS Arabe 1825. But he was not uncritical towards the previous regime and he certainly was not fond of Selim's opponent Qānisawh al-Ghawrī (r. 906–922/1501–1516), whom he portrayed as unjust and greedy.[19] And yet, to Ibn Iyās the Mamluk rule as a whole was fundamentally legitimate, while the Ottomans were usurpers with more than questionable moral and religious authority.

Modern accounts of the last years of the Mamluks and the Ottoman conquest have relied heavily on this work. Understandably so, since Ibn Iyās was in fact the sole eyewitness to and contemporary Egyptian chronicler of some of the decisive events of his lifetime, most importantly the defeat of the Mamluks at the hands of Selim I and Egypt's subjugation under Ottoman rule. But what about contemporary dissemination? Was this a controversial account shunned by one camp, the partisans of the House of ʿUthmān, and espoused by their enemies?

It should be noted that Ibn Iyās was of course not the only author with reservations about the Ottomans. Lellouch argues that the chronicle *Nawādir*

17 Ascari's Latin description is now found, as usual in the old stock of Arabic manuscripts in Paris, on a separate flyleaf at the beginning of the manuscript.

18 Vajda: *Notices*, p. 1.

19 Mauder: "Der Sultan".

al-tawārīkh of ʿAbd al-Ṣamad b. ʿAlī al-Diyārbakrī (d. after 947/1541) is merely an Ottoman Turkish rendering of Ibn Iyās' last volume for the years 923 to 928 and that the anti-Ottoman stance of its author was not problematic for its reception even though the work was written for the Ottoman governor of Egypt.[20] In this context, he also cites the repeated translation into Ottoman Turkish of Ibn Zunbul's later account of the Ottoman conquest of Egypt, a work no less partisan against Selim, at the request of the Ottoman authorities themselves.

Not only do we have a number of copies of the *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr* made through the centuries, several volumes of Ibn Iyās' holograph copy have also survived. For the author who, more than any other, decried the seizure and transfer of Egypt's manuscript heritage to Constantinople by the Ottomans,[21] it is no little irony that these four volumes in Ibn Iyās' own hand ended up at the seat of the dynasty he so openly detested, and are now in Istanbul. Not only did the losers write the history books, the winners even read them! And in this set of four volumes, we actually find one of the few copies that deal with the Ottoman conquest and thus contain the passages that so infuriated the reader of MS Arabe 1825: the volume Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Fatih, 4199 contains the years 922–928 AH and was finished at the end of Dhū al-Ḥijja 928 (19 November 1522).[22] Today, all four of the large volumes are preserved in Istanbul's Süleymaniye Library as part of the Fatih collection, where they were endowed by Sultan Maḥmūd I (r. 1143–1186/1730–1754) sometime between 1155/1742 and this ruler's death.[23] The presence of the seal of Ibn Iyās' nemesis, Selim I, would unduly strain that historical irony just a bit too much. It is indeed found on the title page of Fatih, 4197, but clearly this could not have been one of the books the Ottoman sultan carried away upon the very conquest that is described in it. Instead, the seal of Selim I, very confusingly, had stayed in use for books coming into the palace treasury up until the eighteenth

20 Lellouch: "Le douzième *ǧuzʾ* perdu", p. 95.

21 Ibn Iyās al-Ḥanafī: *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr*, vol. 5, p. 179.

22 Among the thirty-three distinct copies identified by Kahle, the Ottoman conquest is only found in twelve besides the volume in the Bibliothèque nationale de France under discussion here. Four of these volumes are currently held in Istanbul, where the volume in Paris is also said to have been acquired. Most others come from or are still in Egypt. These are (Kahle: "Einleitung", pp. 4–16): MSS London, British Library, Add. 18516 (copied 1117 AH); Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Or. 1465 (Kahle had identified it as a manuscript privately held by Nicholson; undated, but due to an ownership note of Sharaf al-Dīn b. shaykh al-islām [=Ibn Zakarīyāʾ al-Anṣārī], d. 1092/1681, its presence in Egypt can be dated at least to the 17th cent. CE); Cairo, Dār al-Kutub, Tārīkh 545 (dated 1031 AH), Teymour Tārīkh 2337; Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Aşir Efendi II, 232 (copied 1120 AH), Çorlulu Ali Paşa, 349.

23 Erünsal: *Ottoman Libraries*, pp. 55–56.

century CE.[24] At least one of the volumes, namely the one containing the Ottoman conquest, was read, very approvingly and certainly still in Cairo, by the Cairene scholar Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bakrī al-Ṣiddīqī al-Qurashī al-Shāfiʿī al-Ashʿarī (899–952/1493–1545), which appears to have happened while the author was still alive.[25] But other than proof of a short reception span in Egypt before or just after the author's death, this note does not clarify much of the volume's later history. Yet Selim's seal makes clear that the holograph volumes came into the Ottoman palace treasury whence they were taken to be endowed to a public institution by an Ottoman sultan. And this institution was one of the primary libraries of the whole metropolis.

In Constantinople or not, the testimony to acrimonious reading of Ibn Iyās' text as we find it in the margins of MS Arabe 1825 remains singular at this point, even though not all relevant copies could be investigated for this chapter. None of the holograph volumes or early copies display anything remotely like it. In Paris, too, some other and later copies that are also housed in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (MSS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 1822–1824) did not find such critical readers.

3 The Ethics of the Margin

The examples of marginal invective cited and analysed above are not the most eloquent or witty. They appear to be borne out of an honest infuriation and are not a polished and reflected rebuttal. And it is true that this reader might have been caught off guard, not having encountered the name of his rulers tarnished before as he now did in Ibn Iyās' scathing account. Yet, as we have seen, many readers in Istanbul could have had access to this text, and undoubtedly to many others that they might have found just as offensive, without reacting in the same way.

Given the diverse reading public that any text must have faced in the Mamluk and Ottoman realms (and certainly beyond them), and the manifold political, intellectual, philosophical, and sectarian allegiances current in them at any time, is it not rather surprising that we do not find more such examples?

24 Cağman and Tanındı: "Remarks on Some Manuscripts", pp. 134, 146, with reference to İsmail H. Uzunçarşılı: *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Mühürler Seksiyonu Rehberi* (Istanbul, 1959) and İsmail H. Uzunçarşılı: *Osmanlı Devletinin Saray Teşkilatı* (Ankara, 1984), p. 319.

25 He seems to wish for God to grant the author completion of his work (*yatḥafuhū bi-ḥusn al-tatmīm*); MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Fatih, 4199, fol. av. Of course, this could have been prompted by the fact that the colophon announces a twelfth volume to follow this one, which was likely never finished.

Was there an etiquette that ruled the space around a text? And if there was, how universal a phenomenon was such a set of rules and expectations within the vast and diverse book cultures of the Islamicate world There existed a whole genre in Arabic literature that aimed to prescribe an etiquette for textual transmission, learning, and the scribal profession. As in many other cases within the Arabic literary tradition, this specific body of works is highly intertextual, with some authors merely expanding on predecessors, while others blatantly lifted from previous works wholesale and barely changed more than the name of the author.

The latter certainly happened in one such work, *al-Durr al-naḍīd fī adab al-mufīd wa-l-mustafīd*, written by the Damascene scholar Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ghazzī (d. 984/1577) in the early years of Ottoman rule in Syria. It is a near-complete appropriation from an earlier Cairene author, Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamāʿa (d. 733/1333), whose *Tadhkirat al-sāmiʿ wa-l-mutakallim fī adab al-ʿālim wa-l-mutaʿallim* it follows nearly to the letter. These two works are also the only ones I know of that expound to some extent on the ethics of the margin. In both works, the handling of books formed a part of this broader culture of learning and is described in some interesting detail. In al-Ghazzī's words: "It is fine to write marginal commentaries (*ḥawāshī*) and useful notes (*fawāʾid*) and warnings (*tanbīhāt*) about a mistake, or a difference of transmission, or a [different reading in a] manuscript, and the like in the margins of a book that one owns or a book one does not own if one has permission for this."[26] Earlier in his account, al-Ghazzī had warned that writing marginalia in books one does not own would need the approval of their owners.[27]

Al-Ghazzī also prescribed the placing of a sign (*wa-yukharriju*) above the middle of a word that is being commented on, not between two words (because that would instead point to a missing word). Alternatively, a *hindī* numeral could also be employed, to distinguish this from a note that replaced

26 Al-Ghazzī: *Al-Durr al-naḍīd*, p. 464:

لا بأس بكتابة الحواشي والفوائد والتنبيهات على غلط أو اختلاف رواية أو نسخة ونحو ذلك على حواشي كتاب يملكه أو لا يملكه بالإذن.

The passage was lifted verbatim from Ibn Jamāʿa: *Tadhkirat al-sāmiʿ*, pp. 133–134. Ibn Jamāʿa appears to expand the broader discussion of which this passage forms a part from a chapter in the *Ādāb al-ʿālim wa-l-mutaʿallim* by al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), who in turn incorporated abbreviated passages from al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's (d. 463/1071) *al-Jāmiʿ li-akhlāq al-rāwī wa-ādāb al-sāmiʿ*. See al-Nawawī: *Ādāb al-ʿālim*, pp. 53–54; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī: *al-Jāmiʿ li-akhlāq al-rāwī*, vol. 1, pp. 369–382. Neither of these earlier sources, however, includes a discussion of the marginal note.

27 Al-Ghazzī: *Al-Durr al-naḍīd*, p. 424.

a lost word. But he also warned only to write "important notes that relate to the book and the passage, like alerting to an obscure expression, caution, an allusion, a mistake, or things like that".[28] In doing that, the writer should not crowd the margins by citing complicated and long discussions and should not write so many marginal notes that the book itself became obscured or that its central points were lost to the student. He also specifically warned against writing between the lines.

It cannot be said to what extent these voices were representative of a broader culture. The texts that both Ibn Jamāʿa and al-Ghazzī authored were certainly aspirational at least as much as they were the description of a cultural reality. Many manuscripts drowning in marginal notes attest to the reality of a practice that Ibn Jamāʿa and al-Ghazzī ostensibly wanted to be curbed. But this Damascene voice from the time shortly after Ibn Iyās wrote his chronicle and MS Arabe 1825 was copied provides a hint as to why so many readers might have preferred to hold back or subdue their criticism or otherwise failed to subscribe it with their names. The reverberations of the same sentiments in both Egypt and Syria throughout several centuries alert us to the fact that the margin was not an entirely unregulated space. As both authors urged restraint, possibly with an awareness of the futility of such a plea, they also attest to the prevalence of customs they rejected. This is, of course, the rather usual tension between the normative and the practice or between disputing normativities, and as such it is no surprise. Apart from these abstract reflections, such a tension is also reflected in the quite concrete indignation felt by the biographer of al-Muṣṭafā b. Muḥibb al-Dīn (d. 1061/1651), treated elsewhere in this volume,[29] a Damascene scholar who allowed his bold *thuluth* pen to visually dominate many pages even on manuscripts he did not himself own.

Returning to the fact that Ibn Iyās and his attack on the Ottomans were received, and with no apparent objection, of all places at the heart of the dynasty he so vigorously maligned, it is tempting to draw broader conclusions about the nature of the textual culture at work at least in the Ottoman realm. And it feels no less tempting to relate this to an understanding of wider Islamicate cultures as they were painted, probably with too broad a stroke, by Thomas Bauer, as being characterised by a fundamental tolerance of ambiguity.[30]

---

28 Al-Ghazzī: *Al-Durr al-naḍīd*, p. 465.

29 Al-Muḥibbī: *Khulāṣat al-athar*, vol. 4, pp. 355–361, no. 1168. On him and his marginal practice, see also my chapter "Putting Margins in Context" in this volume.

30 See Bauer: *Die Kultur der Ambiguität*. Without denying the important and stimulating contribution that it represents, I cannot agree with some of the book's more polemical arguments nor its handling of the sources.

We may certainly see the presence and even active public presentation of a book filled with anti-Ottoman diatribes in a library endowed by an Ottoman sultan as a sign of a tolerance for textual ambiguity and even antipathy. At the same time, this tolerance was not universal and it was not limitless. Examples can be cited, though they are yet to be systematically collected,[31] of readers who could not contain their anger despite what appears to be a widespread commitment not to show critical stances in marginal commentaries and other manuscript notes. Angry marginal explosions from a number of readers, rare as they are, show that some people and thoughts were not at all to be tolerated. In its most vitriolic forms, the tension could derive from deep sectarian divides. MS Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Ms. orient. A 908 was, as a marginal writer declared, in the hands of a Christian that he duly cursed. That Christian had taken offence to the mention of the prophet Muḥammad and erased all mentions of him before the new Muslim owner restituted them all in the margin.

Historical works might even have sparked more anger than other genres, another topic in need of research. A holograph copy of Ibn Duqmāq's (d. 809/1407) *Naẓm al-jumān*, a biographical dictionary of Hanafi scholars, contains a marginal rant about the author's stupidity, written by Muḥammad Abū Bakr b. ʿUmar b. Muḥammad b. ʿUmar b. Abī Bakr b. al-Naṣībī al-Ḥalabī al-Shāfiʿī, a resident of Cairo (MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 2096, fol. 154r). The unspecified accusation may be due to Hanafi stances that the Shafiʿi reader disagreed with. Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) faces a full three pages of marginal diatribe (MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 5903, fols. 13r–14r) by a furious reader for even mentioning characters in his general history *Mirʾāt al-zamān* that the writer of the marginalia described as "cursed" (*malʿūn*).[32] And a copy of Khvāndamīr's history *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, recently offered for sale at Sotheby's,[33] contains many marginal comments, advertised to be those of the Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān I (r. 1037–1068/1628–1658), that criticise the author harshly for biographical choices, political stances, and the way the family of the Prophet is eulogised.[34]

31 See also my chapter "Putting Margins in Context" in this volume.

32 The scan of the microfilm I consulted was too blurred to identify the whole text and the writer's name, but the note appears to be dated in Rabīʿ I 889 (March–April 1484). Another marginal commentary on fol. 14v also accuses Ibn al-Jawzī, but more politely.

33 Sotheby's, Arts of the Islamic World & India, 27 October 2020, lot 413: https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2020/arts-of-the-islamic-world-india-including-fine-rugs-and-carpets/khwand-amir-d-1534-habib-al-siyar-vol-3-2-a (accessed 7 December 2020).

34 Philip Bockholt, whose recent monograph *Ein Bestseller der islamischen Vormoderne* tackles the rich manuscript transmission of the work, informs me that in the hundreds

The domain of the marginal commentary remains elusive and poorly understood because it remains uncharted and uncatalogued. At this point, conflict and critique seem to be a rare phenomenon and the example of anti- and pro-Ottoman partisanship which this chapter has treated appear to be the exception rather than the rule. Just how many readers were screaming disagreements at the authors of history books? Finding out promises to be one of the more entertaining chapters in the history of Arabic literature.

List of Manuscripts

MS Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Ms. orient. A 908: Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī, ʿAbd al-Salām ibn Aḥmad: *Ḥall al-rumūz wa-mafātīḥ al-kunūz*.

MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Fatih, 4199: Ibn Iyās: *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*.

MSS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 1822–1824: Ibn Iyās: *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*.

MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 1825: Ibn Iyās: *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*.

MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 2096: Ibn Duqmāq, Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad: *Naẓm al-jumān fī ṭabaqāt aṣḥāb imāminā Nuʿmān*.

MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 5903: Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, Yūsuf b. Qiz Ughlī: *Mirʾāt al-zamān fī tārīkh al-aʿyān*.

MS Tonk, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Arabic and Persian Research Institute, 1491: Khvāndemīr, Ghiyāth al-Dīn: *Ḥabīb al-siyar fī aḫbār afrād al-bašar*.

Bibliography

Bauden, Frédéric: "Maqriziana X: al-Maqrīzī and His *al-Tārīḫ al-kabīr al-muqaffā li-Miṣr*; Part 2: The Fortunes of the Work and Its Copies", *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 15 (2020), pp. 194–269.

Bauer, Thomas: *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011).

Bockholt, Philip: *Ein Bestseller der islamischen Vormoderne* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

---

of copies of the work he has surveyed he has encountered only one polemical reader's note about the author (MS Tonk, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Arabic and Persian Research Institute, 1491, fol. 1r). Sotheby's identification of Shāh Jahān's handwriting would certainly be in need of substantiation.

Cağman, Filiz and Zeren Tanındı: "Remarks on Some Manuscripts from the Topkapı Palace Treasury in the Context of Ottoman-Safavid Relations", *Muqarnas* 13 (1996), pp. 132–148.

Erünsal, Ismail: *Ottoman Libraries: A Survey of the History, Development, and Organization of Ottoman Foundation Libraries* (Cambridge, MA: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, Harvard University, 2008).

al-Ghazzī, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad: *Al-Durr al-naḍīd fī adab al-mufīd wa-l-mustafīd*, ed. Abū Yaʿqūb Nashshār b. Kamāl al-Miṣrī (Giza: Maktabat al-Tawʿiyya al-Islāmiyya li-l-Taḥqīq wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Baḥth al-ʿIlmī, 2009).

Ibn Iyās al-Ḥanafī, Muḥammad: *Die Chronik des Ibn Iyās / Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, 5 vols. (Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 1961–1975; reprint 2010).

Ibn Jamāʿa, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad: *Tadhkirat al-sāmiʿ wa-l-mutakallim fī adab al-ʿālim wa-l-mutaʿallim*, ed. Muḥammad b. Mahdī al-ʿAjamī, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 2012).

Kahle, Paul: "Einleitung", *Die Chronik des Ibn Ijās, Vierter Teil: A.H. 906–921 / A.D. 1501–1515*, eds. Paul Kahle and Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Istanbul: Staatsdruckerei; Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1931), pp. 1–29.

al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Thābit: *al-Jāmiʿ li-akhlāq al-rāwī wa-ādāb al-sāmiʿ*, vol. 1, ed. Muḥammad ʿAjāj al-Khaṭīb (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1997).

Kollatz, Anna: *A Window to the Past? Tracing Ibn Iyās's Narrative Ways of Worldmaking* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2022).

Lellouch, Benjamin: "Le douzième *ǧuzʾ* perdu des *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr* d'Ibn Iyās à la lumière d'une chronique turque d'Égypte", *Arabica* 45 (1998), pp. 88–103.

Mauder, Christian: "Der Sultan, sein geschwätziger Barbier und die Sufis: Ibn Iyās über den Fall des Kamāl ad-Dīn b. Šams im Kairo des 16. Jahrhunderts", in *Macht bei Hofe: Narrative Darstellungen in ausgewählten Quellen; Ein interdisziplinärer Reader*, eds. Stephan Conermann and Anna Kollatz (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2020), pp. 79–98.

al-Muḥibbī, Muḥammad Amīn b. Faḍl Allāh: *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan Muḥammad Ḥasan Ismāʿīl, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2006).

Nakamachi, Nobutaka: "al-ʿAynī's Working Method for His Chronicles: Analysis of His Holograph Manuscripts", *In the Author's Hand: Holograph and Authorial Manuscripts in the Islamic Handwritten Tradition*, eds. Frédéric Bauden and Élise Franssen (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 277–299.

al-Nawawī, Yaḥyā b. Sharaf: *Ādāb al-ʿālim wa-l-mutaʿallim* (Ṭanṭā: Maktabat al-Ṣaḥāba, 1987).

Sezer Aydınlı, Elif: "Unusual Readers in Early Modern Istanbul: Manuscript Notes of Janissaries and Other Riff-Raff on Popular Heroic Narratives", *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 9 (2018), pp. 109–131.

de Slane [William MacGuckin]: *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1883–1895).

Vajda, Georges: *Notices de manuscrits arabes: Arabes 1825–1875*, MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 7297–6.

Winter, Michael: "Ibn Iyas", *Historians of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Cemal Kafadar, Hakan Karateke, and Cornell Fleischer (April 2007). https://ottomanhistorians.uchicago.edu/.