In the fifteenth century, scholars writing in Arabic and Persian debated the nature of historical inquiry and its place among the sciences. While the motivations and perspectives of the various scholars differed, the terms and parameters of the debate remained remarkably fixed and focused, even as it unfolded across a vast geographic space between Herat, Cairo, and Constantinople. This article examines the contours of this debate and the relationships between five historians working on these issues. Although the scholars who considered these questions frequently arrived at different conclusions, they all firmly agreed, in contrast to previous doubt regarding the status of history, that historical inquiry did indeed constitute a distinct science requiring its own particular method. Accordingly, the debate and its conclusions helped cement the place of history within the broader pantheon of the sciences as conceived by scholars in the Ottoman Empire from the sixteenth century onwards.
Title:

History as Science: The Fifteenth-Century Debate in Arabic and Persian

Abstract:

In the fifteenth century, scholars writing in Arabic and Persian debated the nature of historical inquiry and its place among the sciences. While the motivations and perspectives of the various scholars differed, the terms and parameters of the debate remained remarkably fixed and focused, even as it unfolded across a vast geographic space between Herat, Cairo, and Constantinople. This article examines the contours of this debate and the relationships between five historians working on these issues. Although the scholars who considered these questions frequently arrived at different conclusions, they all firmly agreed, in contrast to previous doubt regarding the status of history, that historical inquiry did indeed constitute a distinct science requiring its own particular method. Accordingly, the debate and its conclusions helped cement the place of history within the broader pantheon of the sciences as conceived by scholars in the Ottoman Empire from the sixteenth century onwards.

Keywords:

historiography, fifteenth century, Ottoman Empire, Mamluk Sultanate, Timurid Iran

Introduction

Between 1397/800 and 1513/919, five Muslim scholars writing in Arabic and Persian presented their ideas on the nature of historical inquiry and its place within the larger pantheon of the sciences as conceived by Islamic learning. In contrast to the disparate and often independently conceived remarks of Arab and Persian historians before the fifteenth century, the
terms and parameters of these scholars’ discourses remained remarkably fixed and focused: what
is history? How should it be defined linguistically and practically? Is history a science? If so,
what kind of a science is it? How should its aims, problems, and proper spheres of inquiry be
deﬁned? Although the scholars who considered these questions frequently came to varying and
even contradictory conclusions, they all ﬁrmly agreed, in contrast with the doubt of previous
generations on the status of history, that historical inquiry did indeed constitute a distinct science
requiring its own particular method.

Despite the existence of this ﬁfteenth-century debate on history, contemporary
scholarship has largely overlooked the multilingual aspect and geographically wide-ranging
extent of this major development within the Islamic historiographical tradition. The oversight
stems, in part, from two separate tendencies within modern approaches to Islamic historiography.
First, modern scholarship continues to operate in some measure under the residual inﬂuence of
twentieth-century scholarly inclinations to emphasize the signiﬁcance of earlier periods of
Islamic history and marginalize later developments. Second, as a consequence of the mass of
historical literature produced by Muslim scholars over centuries and across continents, modern
historians understandably tend to delimit and synthesize Islamic historical thought within
individual linguistic traditions, most frequently Arabic, Persian, or Turkish.

The tendency to favor earlier periods is largely a consequence of the development of the
ﬁeld in the twentieth century. Whether with respect to literature, the religious traditions, or the
cultural implications of travel, scholars in the twentieth century framed discussions of Islamic
intellectual phenomena through a search for ‘origins’ and the demarcation of a ‘classical period’
ending, at the latest, in the mid-thirteenth century, during which the various cultural traditions
purportedly originated, developed, and matured.² As Nile Green has noted in criticism of certain
approaches to Sufism, historical process in this mold was viewed primarily “as a set of “inheritances” and “influences” that acted on and were received by each passing generation so as to give cumulative shape to their thoughts, actions, and creations.” In contrast, he has noted the need to recognize the significance of historical context and view the past as a set of continuously negotiated cultural references. He is not alone in his criticism of this earlier approach; indeed, recent scholarship in a number of sub-fields within Islamic intellectual and cultural history has rejected the earlier approach and sought to redress the imbalance through detailed studies of the period after the mid-thirteenth century. More often than not, such studies uncover and explore rich developments in the intellectual and cultural life of Islamic societies up to and over the course of the great transmutations initiated by the modern age. In this sense, contemporary historians generally reject the basic premises of the various decline paradigms that appeared to exercise such influence on much of twentieth-century scholarship.

Despite the explicit, resounding rejection of any decline paradigm, the effects of twentieth-century scholarship still exert an unintentional residual influence on certain aspects of the main narratives of Islamic intellectual history. Indeed, recent publications continue to acknowledge the lasting, undesirable consequences of twentieth-century historiographical paradigms of decline. In his study of scholarly currents within seventeenth-century Ottoman domains, Khaled El-Rouayheb notes the persistent deleterious effects of three distinct paradigms of decline on contemporary considerations of the intellectual history of this period. Significantly, the lingering consequences of this attitude have obstructed observation of major, far-reaching scholarly developments after the middle of the sixteenth century. Specifically, El-Rouayheb demonstrates that the many glosses, commentaries, and super-commentaries on dialectical disputation (ādāb al-baḥth)—citation of which in previous decades was marshalled to
uphold notions of intellectual stagnation—in fact, underscore the dynamism and vitality of largely novel approaches to dialectical argumentation and logic. Vestiges of the dominant narratives described by El-Rouayheb persist in other surprising and unexpected places. In an otherwise engaging work that argues effectively for continued large-scale and diverse cultural production in Arabic after the twelfth century, Muhsin al-Musawi’s *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction* nonetheless opens by embracing “the postclassical era” as a suitable and unproblematic term to describe the period between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries.

The vestigial effects of earlier academic agendas and outlooks are perhaps equally observable with respect to the study of Islamic historical thought. As in other sub-fields, in the twentieth century, most scholars of Islamic historiography characterized historical writing after the thirteenth century as a reflection of a more general societal decadence that undermined the value of historiography as a rigorous area of intellectual inquiry. Even twentieth-century scholars who actively engaged historical writing in later periods upheld observations of stagnation and decline. For instance, Franz Rosenthal, who first brought some of the fifteenth-century historians examined in this article to widespread scholarly attention, nevertheless concluded his study of Muslim historiography with the turn of the sixteenth century, as the subsequent period was, in his estimation, consciously or unconsciously exposed to occidental influence. Since Muslim historical production continued to flourish “without hardly any changes in its forms of expression,” he concluded that its inclusion “would have shed no additional light upon the contours and substance of the great cultural phenomenon of Muslim historiography.”

By the end of the century, historians roundly dismissed such a characterization by emphasizing the evolving and varied nature of the enterprise, and, to be sure, the field has benefited from a
great number of specialized studies that consider aspects of Islamic historiography after the fifteenth century. Unfortunately, in some instances, the new approach is not reflected in the broader synthesizing narratives of Islamic historiography. Indeed, such narratives, especially in their periodization, still implicitly reconfirm the impression of stagnation and decadence in a so-called ‘postclassical’ period, however demarcated. To wit, Tarif Khalidi’s *Arabic Thought in the Classical Period* presents a more nuanced approach to Islamic historiography by examining the tradition as the product of the immediate cultural climates that informed its development diachronically. Premised on the notion that historical writing in all cultures and at all times is “peculiarly susceptible to surrounding climates of ideas and beliefs,” Khalidi identifies four major points of view that informed the development of Arabic historiography between the eighth and fourteenth centuries. However, because he associates the last stage with the rise of the politically-minded court historian, who seemed to abandon the philosophical underpinnings of his craft in favor of a sycophantic catalog of rulers’ great deeds, Khalidi’s approach implicitly confirms earlier scholars’ impressions of later centuries as essentially decadent. Even if other contemporary historians disavow themselves of this conclusion, recent syntheses, like Khalidi’s work, frequently continue to neglect historiographical developments past the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. While it is certainly the case that such syntheses often do not present the latest research in any detail, the persistent absence in some cases of any consideration of historical writing between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries in the very least suggests a lack of willingness to integrate specialized scholarship into a broader framework.

Beyond these narrative tendencies, monolingual approaches to Islamic historiography further obscure the full extent of the fifteenth-century discourse on history. The tendency to divide Islamic historiography between its Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish expressions...
reinforces an understanding of the historical tradition as separate, linguistically delineated dialectics. Moreover, while considerations of Ottoman historical writing generally acknowledge its relationship to Arabic and especially Persian historiography, the interrelationship between the three remains only superficially acknowledged. Yet many scholars from this period, including several of the historians discussed below, were completely fluent readers and writers of both Arabic and Persian. For instance, the sixteenth-century Ottoman historian Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī authored thirty-eight works in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish and cites 130 chronicles in Arabic and Persian as sources for his world history in Turkish, Künhûʾl-āhbār (The Essence of Histories). Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī’s method still seems sensible; the wide-ranging interaction between Arabic and Persian historical thought since the tenth century—and Turkish historiography, as well, beginning in the fifteenth century—constituted a fundamental aspect of the development of Islamic historiography as a vibrant cultural tradition until the rise of national historiographies in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, the salient cultural features of the fifteenth century would appear to underscore meaningful scholarly interaction across Islamic lands, irrespective of language. As in earlier centuries, Muslim scholars and other producers of cultural and literary material maintained a relatively high level of social and cultural cohesion during this period. Such cohesion, which modern historians have variously identified as a common Islamicate social pattern or Islamic world-system, facilitated the relatively free movement of people and ideas across political, ethnic, and vernacular boundaries. The politically volatile and fragmented terrain of the fifteenth century frequently afforded and occasionally necessitated the movement of scholars and their works from one land to another and in this manner helped facilitate a novel and lively debate on the place and meaning of historical inquiry.
Background to the Debate

In fact, the fifteenth century witnessed a veritable renaissance of rigorous considerations of the nature and purpose of the historian’s craft on the part of Muslim scholars. Beginning in the late fourteenth century, historians writing in Arabic, Persian, and occasionally Turkish regularly included formal discourses on the purpose and benefits of history within the prefatory sections of their chronicles. Yet, for the most part, such remarks remained disparate and disconnected from any unified discourse. For example, in the late fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldūn’s (d. 1406/808) introduction to his universal history failed to elicit any thorough and sustained reaction from most contemporary and subsequent historians either in Mamluk Egypt or further afield. Similar circumstances prevailed in Persian lands. In the introduction to his history of Tīmūr, Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī (d. 1454/858) postulated the etymological origins of history (taʾrīkh) in Syriac, defended its study as an honorable branch of knowledge as substantiated by Quranic revelation, pointed to some of its worldly and otherworldly benefits, and compared various dating systems. One generation later, Mīr Khwānd (d. 1498/903), a historian working in the Herat of the late Timurid Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Bayqara (d. 1506/911), offered a lengthy discussion on the benefits of history in the introduction to his universal history. A few years later, Fażlullāh Khunjī-Iṣfahānī (d. 1521/927), working for the Aqquyunlu court of Yaʿqūb (r. 1478-1490), offered an apologia for history, detailed its benefits and aims, and specified his own contributions to the tradition in the introduction to his chronicle on the reign of his Aqquyunlu patron. At the turn of the sixteenth century, the Egyptian polymath Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505/911) likewise contributed to the burgeoning yet dissociated discourse through his own treatise on the subject.
Even in the nascent Ottoman historiographical context, historians occasionally sought to elaborate the benefits of history in limited ways. During the reign of Sultan Bāyezīd II (r. 1481-1512), Neṣrī (d. ca. 1520/926) suggested the fundamental importance of knowledge of history for kings in the introduction to the volume of his universal history devoted to the Ottoman dynasty.27 Although such discussions frequently shared common features—and may therefore be a reflection of the sort of climate of ideas suggested by Khalidi—the variegated remarks of these historians do not necessarily imply direct knowledge of parallel historiographical developments.

Concurrent with these reflections, a more limited and focused discourse about the meaning and purpose of history unfolded in the work of five Arabophone and Persophone scholars. These men, most of whom shared scholarly connections or had access to one another’s work, developed a formal approach to locating and defining history within the classification of the sciences (taqsīm al-ʿulūm). Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Ījī (fl. 1397/800), a student of the great fourteenth-century theologian ʿAḍud al-Dīn Ījī (d. 756/1355) and scion of the Fālī-Sīrāfī family of Shiraz, established this rigorous approach to defining his subject in several chapters that he included in a larger historical work in Arabic dedicated to Tīmūr in October 1397/Muḥarram 800.28 Half a generation later, Ḥāfiẓ Abrū, boon companion of Tīmūr and historian at the court of the conqueror’s son and ultimate heir Shāhrukh, borrowed Ījī’s approach in discussions that he included in two of his Persian historical works written between 1414/817 and his death in 1430/833.29 In the 1460s, Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Kāfiyajī (d. 1474/879), an émigré from western Anatolia who rose to scholarly prominence in Cairo, followed in the intellectual footsteps of these two Persian scholars and situated history among the religious sciences in a short monograph entitled al-Mukhtaṣar al-mufīd fī ʿilm al-taʾrīkh (The Useful Digest on the Science of History).30 A few years later, one of al-Kāfiyajī’s colleagues, the prominent Egyptian scholar of
ḥadīth (traditions of the prophet Muḥammad) Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497/902), composed his own monograph on the subject, entitled Iʿlān biʾl-tawbīkh li-man dhamma al-taʾrīkh (The Pronouncement of Reproach for Those Who Defame History), in which he sought to defend the suitability of history for study against theologians for whom its necessity as a religiously sanctioned body of knowledge remained dubious. Lastly, in the second decade of the sixteenth century, Idrīs Bidlīsī (d. 1520/926), scholar and chancery official of the Aqquyunlu and Ottoman courts, included a lengthy discussion of history as science along the lines of his predecessors in the introduction to his massive Persian dynastic chronicle of the Ottoman house.

Even as their particular audiences varied, their analogous formal approaches to discussing history addressed a similar concern for examining the epistemological underpinnings of their subject. Although Muslim scholars had written history since the first centuries of Islam, widespread disagreement remained regarding its nature as a body of knowledge and true relationship to the other sciences. The disagreement stemmed largely from the classification system of the sciences that had been worked out over the centuries. The earliest such systems, namely those advanced by al-Fārābī (d. 950/339) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037/428), adapted the Aristotelian system of knowledge and insisted upon human reason (al-ʿaql) as the fundamental basis for elaborating the definitions, precepts, and problems of any science. In this way, they both agreed with the Hellenistic tradition that history is not a science, since it deals with individual occurrences in time and precludes the possibility of any universal judgment. Yet the emphasis on human reason as the source of theoretical and practical knowledge posed a challenge to Muslim scholars, as it failed to incorporate the well-developed Islamic traditions of learning that were derived from and concerned with the prophet Muḥammad’s revelation. To
resolve this problem, scholars developed a bifurcated system of knowledge that differentiated between rational and revealed/transmitted sciences.\(^{35}\) Along these lines, at the end of the tenth century, al-Khwārazmī, in his *Keys of the Sciences* (*Mafātīḥ al-ʿulūm*), divided knowledge between “the sciences of religious tradition and what is joined to them from among the Arabic sciences, and secondly the sciences of the foreign lands of the Greeks and other peoples.”\(^{36}\)

Although cast in terms of an anthropological distinction between indigenous and foreign learning, the system articulated by al-Khwārazmī largely corresponded to the basic division between rational (*ʿaqlī/hikmī*) and transmitted or revealed (*naqlī/ghayr ḥikmī*) sciences as expounded by most subsequent scholars, including Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 1210/606), Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 1311/710), and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406/808).\(^{37}\)

Consequently, the rigorous considerations of history’s place in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries addressed a fundamental concern for historians to legitimize their craft within the wider context of Islamic learning. Such considerations also benefited from a more general reappraisal of the classification system that gathered steam first among scholars working within the religious sciences. Increasingly, these scholars applied Aristotelian principles and terminology to the precise definition of religious bodies of knowledge. Specifically, they accepted the philosophers’ assertion that science is differentiated from knowledge through demonstrable proof (*burhān*). Moreover, they concurred that any particular science (*ʿilm*) investigates a single specified and clearly defined subject matter (*mawḍūʿ*) and that it endeavors to reach conclusions within that subject matter in a systematic manner.\(^{38}\)

Increasingly in the fourteenth century, religious scholars applied this philosophically oriented approach to defining and investigating the traditional Islamic religious sciences; scholars such as ʿAḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī recast theology (*kalām*) in this mold in the middle of the century,\(^{39}\) while many others worked
contemporaneously to redefine the orientation of theoretical jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) along these lines.⁴⁰

Concurrent with these developments—and perhaps in some measure as a consequence of them—Muslim scholars began to produce encyclopedias on the sciences with renewed energy.⁴¹ Some of these enormous projects produced detailed information on specific branches of knowledge, such as Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī’s (d. 1418/821) fourteen-volume work on epistolography entitled ُṣubḥ al-aʿshā (*Dawn for the Blind*) or Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Damīrī’s (d. 1405/808) zoological survey, *Hayāt al-ḥayawān* (*Life of Animals*).⁴² Others, such as Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī’s *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab* (*The Ultimate Ambition in the Branches of Erudition*) sought to survey the widest range of literary arts in a comprehensive and pleasing manner.⁴³ More radically, certain strains within the encyclopedism movement argued for a complete restructuring of the metaphysical underpinnings of Islamic learning as conceived by philosophers, jurists, and Sufis. In this way, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bišṭāmī’s (d. 1454/858) *al-Fawāʾiḥ al-miskiyya fī al-fāwāṭiḥ al-makkīya* (*The Musky Perfumes in the Meccan Openings*) and Sāʾīn al-Dīn Turka’s (d. 1432/835) treatises on the science of letters presented an occult challenge both to the traditional division of the sciences, as well as to its metaphysical presuppositions.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, in this climate of encyclopedism—both traditional and radical—historians examined the epistemological underpinnings of their craft with renewed rigor and vitality.

**History as Science in the Fifteenth Century**
Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Ījī’s application of the same method to history should come as little surprise. His training tied him to some of the great intellectual luminaries of mid-fourteenth-century Shiraz. At an early age, Ījī, known as Shihāb in his lifetime, studied under his grandfather, Najm al-Dīn Ismāʿīl, patriarch of the Fālī-Sīrāfī family, long-time judge of the province of Fars, and a man whom the great Persian poet Ḥāfiz identified as one of the five most important notables of the Shiraz of his day. Perhaps more importantly, Ījī spent years studying under ʿAḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī, whose Kitāb al-mawāqif fī ʿilm al-kalām argued for the Aristotelian-infused approach to theology and became one of the most fundamental texts for its study in subsequent centuries.

Despite such an intellectually auspicious youth, Ījī’s fortunes declined with those of his family after the establishment of Muzaffarid rule in Shiraz in 1353/754; little is known after the mid-fourteenth century about his life and the circumstances of the other members of his once great family. By the late 1390s, he had entered the courtly orbit of Tīmūr, who invested heavily in Samarqand both through the construction of monumental architectural projects and through the resettlement and patronage of learned men. Ījī was eager to secure such patronage, for in 1397/800 he gathered a number of works that he had written—some of which he penned in the mid-1380s before Tīmūr’s conquest of Fars—and presented the compendium to the conqueror as a single monograph on history entitled Tuḥfat al-faqīr ilā ṣāḥib al-sarīr (The Gift of the Poor One to the Master of the Throne), the explicit purpose of which was to elicit Tīmūr’s notice of its author, who had been dismissed from office and wallowed away in solitude.

Yet the opportunistic tone of Ījī’s dedication and petition is no indication of intellectual vapidity. On the contrary, Ījī applied the precise and exacting vocabulary deployed by his teacher with respect to theology in his effort to define the science of history (ʿilm al-taʾrīḵ).
Accordingly, his work offers a definition of history as science through clear statements of its subject matter (mawḍūʿ), purpose (gharaḍ), benefits (fawāʾid), and underlying principles (mabādiʾ). The science of history is “knowledge of what was transmitted concerning the occurrences of the world fixed to particular times, from which a historical report originates.”

Elsewhere in the work, Ījī defines history, or more properly dating (taʾrīkh) in a strict linguistic sense as an indication of time, and in a practical sense as the designation of time for the purpose of defining the relative position between two occurrences. Its subject matter is created things, especially humankind, and the effects of their activities in the world, while its purpose is study of the conditions of outstanding individuals (aʿyān). The adaptation of this technical approach was directed toward locating history within the classification of the sciences, for in the first chapter of the work, Ījī identifies history as a subsidiary branch of the literary sciences (al-ʿulūm al-adabīya), one of Ījī’s trifold epistemological divisions of knowledge along with the religious sciences (al-ʿulūm al-sharʿīya) and the philosophical sciences (al-ʿulūm al-ḥikmīya).

Specifically, history is a subset of the science of historical information (ʿilm al-akhbār) and is distinguished from this broader category through its concern with fixing past occurrences with dates.

Whereas Ījī’s historical thinking bore the imprint of the scholarly circles from which he emerged as a young man, the historical writing of a younger contemporary, Ḥāfiẓ Abrū, the renowned Timurid historian, focused more thoroughly on the centrality of rule in the recounting of past events. Even so, Ḥāfiẓ Abrū clearly drew on Ījī’s discursive method, for like his fellow Timurid courtier, he preserved much of the terminology and many of the same definitions presented in Tuhfat al-faqīr in the prefatory sections of several of his universal historical projects in Persian. Like Ījī, he distinguishes between history, or more properly dating (taʾrīkh), and the
science of history. In a nod to his predecessor, he defines history/dating in a strict linguistic sense (
\textit{dar lughat}) as the expression of time (\textit{ta’rīf-i vaqt}) and in a broader practical sense (\textit{dar ištīlāh}) as the fixed designation of time periods to events.\(^{58}\) His discussion of the science of history likewise was indebted to Ījī, but with minor modifications. He begins by asserting that all sciences are defined through establishment of their quiddity (\textit{māhiyyat}), purpose (\textit{ghāyat}), and subject matter (\textit{mawḍūʿ}). As this is the case, he asserts that history’s subject consists of “the events of the realm of generation and decay through investigation of which one discovers in what regard and at what time they occurred.”\(^{59}\) Its quiddity, that is to say its distinguishing feature as a science, is knowledge (\textit{maʿrifat}) of those past events—whether they concern social or natural phenomena—that occurred in the realm of generation and decay.\(^{60}\) Yet such a definition of history’s quiddity precluded the possibility that it could offer its investigator any universal judgment. For this reason, the purpose of history was consideration and reflection (\textit{iʿtibār va istibṣār}) upon that knowledge, through which a historian could discern the appropriate course of future action.\(^{61}\) The relationship between historical phenomena, reflection, and future action was a frequently lauded benefit of history at least since the historian Miskawayh (d. 1030/421) asserted in the eleventh century that knowledge of history offered an alternative type of experience of worldly matters.\(^{62}\) Yet Ḥāfīz Abrū’s assertion that this possibility constituted the fundamental purpose of history lent historical inquiry a heightened level of rigor. In fact, this conception of history’s purpose closely resembles the purpose of Ibn Khaldūn’s self-proclaimed new science of culture (\textit{ʿilm al-ʿumrān}) as he outlined it in the \textit{Muqaddima}.\(^{63}\) Whereas Ibn Khaldūn sought to move beyond history to establish a science that would uncover the underlying forces that informed historical developments through rational consideration of past occurrences, Ḥāfīz Abrū, a contemporary of Ibn Khaldūn, independently arrived at the same conclusion, but
maintained that such an objective was in fact the proper purpose of history. In other words, Ibn Khaldūn’s science of culture remained for Ḥāfīz Abrū the appropriate conception of history as a scientific enterprise.

This formal approach of Ījī and Ḥāfīz Abrū to defining history in linguistic and practical terms and identifying its purpose and subject as a body of knowledge remained a basic feature of the subsequent considerations of history in the fifteenth century. However, whereas Ḥāfīz Abrū sought to define history as a science, the benefits of which primarily accrued to kings seeking counsel, the reflections of al-Kāfiyajī and al-Sakhāwī in the middle of the fifteenth century tended toward Ījī’s emphasis and stressed the necessity of history for the religious sciences. Such emphasis reflected the more immediate scholarly milieu of the two men in fifteenth-century Cairo. Al-Kāfiyajī had immigrated to Cairo from his place of birth in Bergama (Pergamon) to continue his studies. He stayed on in the city and held teaching positions at several prestigious institutions in the Mamluk capital. Over the course of his career, al-Kāfiyajī, perhaps following the earlier impulse of religious scholars to define their subjects in exacting philosophical terms, penned a number of short treatises that took up consideration of individual disciplines. Some of these were well recognized, if poorly defined, bodies of knowledge, such as history, while others, such as the science of the legal school (‘ilm al-madhhab), seemed, in the critical tone of his colleague al-Sakhāwī, to be fanciful inventions of their author. Yet even if al-Sakhāwī criticized al-Kāfiyajī for overenthusiasm in some areas, he clearly agreed with his impulse with respect to history, for a few years after al-Kāfiyajī completed his short monograph on the science of history, al-Sakhāwī presented his own thinking on the subject in a work entitled I’lān bi ’l-tawbīkh li-man dhamma al-ta’rīkh (The Pronouncement of Reproach to Those Who Defame History).
Both of these Egyptian scholars undertook their considerations of history in an effort to remedy their forebears’ exclusion of historiography from the necessary branches of religious learning. Al-Kāfiyajī writes that although the ancients were able to dispense with a codification of history, this neglect does not suggest that it should be excluded from the classification of the sciences. Rather, he writes, “it is a science just like the other codified sciences, such as jurisprudence, grammar, style, and the like. It is, therefore, needed just like the other branches of learning.” Similarly, al-Sakhāwī defended history against those religious scholars (ʿulamāʾ) who found fault with history and historians by showing its proven instructiveness and proclaiming its status among the fundamental branches of learning. While a defense of history’s status as science constituted the primary objective of al-Kāfiyajī and al-Sakhāwī’s discourse, like Ījī and Ḥāfīẓ Abrū, the two Egyptian scholars initiated their discussion of history through an exploration of the concept in its linguistic and practical senses. Because they sought to defend history’s status as science, they also codified the study of history through a definition of its subject and problems (masāʾil). All four scholars agreed that history’s subject concerned past events in the realm of generation and decay, yet unlike Ḥāfīẓ Abrū, neither of the Egyptian historians attributed to the science of history an ability to elucidate underlying causes for events as they unfolded in time. For al-Kāfiyajī, history’s subject was remarkable events, while al-Sakhāwī identified its subject as man and time. However, even as they denied history an ability to pronounce universal judgments, they argued for its basic necessity within the framework of Islamic learning. In particular, al-Kāfiyajī went so far as to argue for history’s status as a joint obligation of the Islamic community (fard al-kifāya). Similarly, al-Sakhāwī argued for the obligatory nature of some aspects of history and acknowledged the fact that some scholars—a reference perhaps to his colleague al-Kāfiyajī—categorized history as a communal obligation.
Accordingly, both men couched their considerations of history’s benefits in terms of its necessity in confirming the basic facts upon which the conclusions of jurisprudence and other religious sciences were based.

Idrīs Bidlīsī, the last author in this discourse, was in some ways heir to both the scholarly approach of Ījī and the Egyptian scholars and the courtly approach of Ḥāfīẓ Abrū. His early life was spent in study under the tutelage of his father, Ḥusām al-Dīn ‘Alī (d. 909/1503), whose association with the great scholars of mid-fifteenth-century Iran afforded Bidlīsī opportunities to meet leading luminaries such as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492/898) and Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 1502/908). Despite his adolescent commitment to study and follow a Sufi path, in his early adulthood, Bidlīsī entered the service of the Aqquyunlu court through employment in the chancery. Over the remainder of his professional life Bidlīsī worked for the Aqquyunlu and later Ottoman sultanates. He produced a massive Persian chronicle of the Ottoman dynasty entitled Hasht bihisht (The Eight Paradises), the poor reception of which—in Bidlīsī’s assessment—prompted him to recommit to a pious life through a pilgrimage to Mecca. These travels brought him to Cairo, where he enjoyed the patronage of the Mamluk sultan and met with the leading scholars of the city, many of whom were the students of al-Kāfiyajī and al-Sakhāwī. Upon the accession of Selīm to the Ottoman throne in 1512/918, Bidlīsī returned to Ottoman lands where he presented a revised version of his chronicle.73

Perhaps then as a consequence of these varied experiences, when Bidlīsī sat down to write the introduction to Hasht bihisht while residing in Mecca in 1512/918, he included a discussion of the meaning and epistemological place of history that engaged the works of the four earlier scholars in several respects. Like his immediate forebears, Bidlīsī sought to dignify history by locating it within the broad classification of the sciences. Although he departed from
the rigorous formal efforts to define history’s problem, purpose, and subject, he reproduced aspects of these definitions in an altered format. Bidlīsī organized his discussion of history in three subsections of his introduction that defined history, located it among the sciences, and defended its status as a necessary and desirable branch of learning for both courtly audiences and religious scholars.74

In the introduction, Bidlīsī offers an abbreviated discussion of history’s definition in both its linguistic and practical senses and establishes its relationship to other bodies of knowledge that are concerned with temporal occurrences.75 As with all of his predecessors, he defines history linguistically as the expression of time (taʿrīf-i vaqt). However, he departs from these scholars, insofar as his characterization of the practical definition (ism-i rasmī) of history focuses on developing an understanding of the science of history (as opposed to a practical definition of the term generally). Here, Bidlīsī inclines towards the more modest claims of Ījī and the two Egyptian scholars and concludes that the science of history is “a science through knowledge (maʿrifat) of which the conditions of temporal occurrences are obtained.”76 By focusing on history as knowledge, Bidlīsī deemphasized Ḥāfiẓ Abrū’s strong assertion that history contained the possibility for insight into the underlying forces that inform events. While in later discourses Bidlīsī acknowledges this aspect of history,77 his primary definition of the science reproduces a more traditional understanding.

Even if this more traditional understanding of history seems to limit its claim as a veritable science, Bidlīsī distinguishes history by characterizing it as the loftiest branch of the Arabic sciences (ʿulūm-i ‘arabīya), by which name he referred to the literary sciences enumerated by Ījī. He places history within the broader category of rhetorical sciences (ʿulūm-i muḥāżarāt), which he defines as the apex of the twelve Arabic sciences.78 The lower Arabic
sciences concern basic aspects of language: knowledge of speech, conjugation, etymology, grammar, syntax (maʿnā), and stylistics (bayān). These basic linguistic building blocks constitute the basis upon which the more advanced literary sciences are elaborated: poetry, prose writing, prosody, rhyme, epistolography (inshāʾ), and finally the rhetorical sciences. For Bidlīsī, rhetoric was primarily concerned with investigating the modes of discourse and dialog within the polite gatherings of refined notables. It constitutes the summation of the literary sciences, because, by their varied nature, conversations taken up at such gatherings require a refined handling of a vast array of subjects. Within this scheme, Bidlīsī asserts history’s status as the most complete application of the rhetorical sciences, presumably since it draws upon the widest array of literary sciences to create historical narratives.⁷⁹

Bidlīsī’s historical writing fully reflects this conception of his craft. In Hasht bihisht, Bidlīsī rejected the more common practice of the Ottoman chronicles of his own day, which most frequently offered simple accounts of the great deeds of the Ottoman sultans. Instead, Bidlīsī’s chronicle drew upon the most varied epistemological traditions—Quranic, poetic, esoteric, astrological, philosophical, and theosophical—to create a narrative that also substantiated his overarching claim for the cosmically ordained and divinely sanctioned rule of the Ottoman house in his own age.⁸⁰ The result was a massive work that in volume, scope, and stated ambition easily surpassed all previous historical projects supported by the Ottoman house. Although the work elicited considerable criticism for a number of reasons from several quarters—including for its proximity⁸¹—Bidlīsī continued work to impose his vision on the nascent Ottoman historiographical landscape until his death in 1520/926.

Later in life, some years after the completion of Hasht bihisht, he reflected on his motivation for undertaking the project and wrote that before completion of his history “there had
been absolutely no deserving and worthy work in the canon of accustomed historical writing (qānūn-ī taʿrīkh-ī muʿtād).” By this, he likely meant that his chronicle was the first work of Ottoman history to produce historical narratives with a clear conception of history’s proper subject, purpose, and basic principles. To be sure, Bidlīsī had his own particular ideas about this conception, yet in a more general sense his thinking was conditioned by the century-long discussion by historians on their subject.

Parallels, Connections, and Contributions

The differences between the positions taken by the five historians largely derived from the varying audiences that the authors had in mind as they framed their remarks on the science of history. While all five of the scholars recognized the alternate positions of the others as valid, they emphasized certain aspects of history in accordance with their particular intellectual and professional affiliations. As such, Ḥāfiz Abrū and Idrīs Bidlīsī, both of whom wrote chronicles for a powerful sovereign, stressed those aspects of history that would accrue to the benefit of kings. For Ḥāfiz Abrū, history was the science par excellence for formulating political counsel and deciding future policy. For Bidlīsī, it was an ideal medium for advancing complex ideological positions. Alternatively, the other three scholars’ immersion in the scholarly scenes of their day motivated them to frame their remarks on history in religious and jurisprudential terms.

Despite such differences, their structural approaches to defining history remained similar. All of the historians defended history as a science. Moreover, such apologia unfolded through the adaptation of Aristotelian terminology previously pioneered by religious scholars working in
theoretical jurisprudence and theology. All of the historians analyzed the definition of history in discrete linguistic and practical terms. Most of them—with the exception of Bidlīsī—sought to define history as a science in terms of its subject (mawḍūʿ) and purpose (gharaḍ or ghāyat).

Beyond these structural similarities, the five historians shared certain personal and intellectual connections with one another that bound them together across time and space. In several instances, the opportunities for patronage and study offered by princely and sultanic courts created the intellectually rich environment in which such connections were established. More often than not, this patronage was part of a ruler’s conscious effort to attract talented men and augment his prestige. Tīmūr famously failed to resettle Ibn Khaldūn in Samarqand after their meeting outside the walls of Damascus in 1401/803, yet he managed to settle a number of other prominent scholars and historians, including al-Jazarī (1429/833), Sayyid al-Shārīf al-Jūrjānī (d. 1413/816), and Saʿd al-Dīn Masʿūd al-Taftazānī (d. 1390/793). Both Ījī and Ḥāfiz Abrū were affiliated with Tīmūr’s court during the last years of the fourteenth century, and it is likely as a consequence of this connection that Ḥāfiz Abrū drew inspiration for his discourse from the earlier work of Ījī.

Certainly, the two Egyptian scholars, al-Kāfiyajī and al-Sakhāwī, enjoyed the more traditional scholarly relationship that thrived largely independently of the activities of royal patronage. Al-Sakhāwī, in his treatise on history, acknowledges al-Kāfiyajī’s pioneering effort and cites a lengthy passage from his predecessor. Connections with their eastern near contemporaries are considerably less direct. Al-Kāfiyajī, who was born and first educated in Ottoman lands, studied with a number of Persian émigré scholars or with learned men who themselves had studied previously in Iran. Moreover, in his early adulthood, his studies took him to Iran before he turned westward toward Mamluk lands. Possibly as a consequence of
these travels and studies, he had some familiarity with the Aristotelian approach to defining scientific subjects, as advocated in the work of Persian scholars, such as ʿAḍud al-Dīn Ījī with respect to theology, and Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Ījī and Ḥāfīz Abrū with respect to history.

Moreover, al-Kāfiyajī, despite the jurisprudential focus of his historical discourse, also maintained important ties with sultanic courts, which subsequently contributed to the spread of his work to Ottoman lands. Al-Kāfiyajī freely associated with the Mamluk political establishment of his adopted home. He accepted teaching positions from several Mamluk sultans at institutions in Cairo, and, upon his death in 1474/879, the reigning sultan Qāyitbāy attended his funeral. One of his students, the historian ʿAlī ibn Dawūd al-Jawharī al-Ṣayrafī (d. 1495/900) mentions that Mamluk court officials used to frequent al-Kāfiyajī’s home and that his teacher, on at least one occasion, endorsed a favorable religious opinion when the sultan, in the face of opposition, asked whether it was licit to remove a miḥrāb (wall niche indicating the direction of Mecca) from an unused mosque in one of the Mamluk barracks. In reference perhaps to these mutually beneficial relationships, al-Sakhāwī, rather disparagingly, remarks that his colleague “aggrandized kings.” He adds that such aggrandizement was especially directed toward the Ottoman sultan, with whom he regularly corresponded and presented great gifts. As a consequence of this correspondence, within one year of al-Kāfiyajī’s completion of his treatise on history, he asked one of his students, Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad al-Damīsī, to prepare a copy of the work for Maḥmūd Pasha, the powerful grand vizier of Mehmed II. In 1464/868, the copy was completed, sent to the Ottoman court, and incorporated into the royal library after Maḥmūd Pasha’s execution in 1474/879. Around the same time that al-Damīsī prepared this copy for the Ottoman chief advisor, he prepared another copy for the future Mamluk sultan Qāyitbāy. By the turn of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman court had added another copy of the treatise, so
that when Bidlīṣī arrived in Ottoman lands and took up his first major historical project, he had access to at least two copies of al-Kāfiyātī’s work.\textsuperscript{94}

In addition to these copies of \textit{al-Mukhtāṣar al-mufīd}, the royal library of Bayezid II also contained a copy of Ījī’s \textit{Tuḥfat al-faqīr}.\textsuperscript{95} More generally, by the turn of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman court had assembled a massive library of more than 7,000 titles in 5,600 volumes ranging from traditional religious subjects, such as traditions of the prophet, jurisprudence, and theology, to Sufism, medicine, geography, history, astronomy, and the esoteric sciences, among many others. The section on history was considerable and included hundreds of titles in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.\textsuperscript{96} As Emine Fetvacı has shown for a slightly later period, the palace library was a lending library of sorts for court officials and scholars affiliated with the dynasty.\textsuperscript{97} In this way, the Ottoman court—and Islamic princely courts more generally—became a major site for scholarship as its wide-ranging collection frequently supplemented the private collections of scholars and the public holdings of mosques and formal teaching institutions. Through patronage of works, such as Bidlīṣī’s \textit{Hasht bihisht} in an Ottoman context or \textit{Tuḥfat al-faqīr} in a Timurid one, the princely court stood not only as a repository of learning, but also a promoter of its advancement. Rather than a signal of intellectual decay, courtly patronage was also, therefore, a great spur for scholarly activity, which, in the instances of these fifteenth-century considerations on history, constituted something of the cutting edge of Islamic scholarship during this period. Supported by courtly environments, yet informed by the religious scholarly circles that were concurrently arguing for a reappraisal of knowledge, these five scholars insisted successfully upon the place of history within the wider framework of knowledge.

The effects of these historical discourses of the fifteenth century were widely registered in the general views of scholars of later generations. Increasingly, in the wake of this fifteenth-
century discourse, scholars came to accept history’s place within the pantheon of the sciences. The two most popular sixteenth-century Ottoman classifications of the sciences—Taşköprüzade’s *Miftāḥ al-saʿāda* and Nevʿī Efendi’s *Netāyicū’l-ʿulūm*—both included history in their catalogs and adopted the formal approach to defining the subject as worked out in the fifteenth-century discourses on the matter.\(^9^8\) In the seventeenth century, the great Ottoman polymath Katib Çelebi similarly accepted the fifteenth-century definitions and included them in his massive bio-bibliographical work.\(^9^9\) The widespread and lasting acceptance of the fifteenth-century discourses and their incorporation into the main strands of Ottoman historical thought therefore underscore the extent to which Ottoman developments were intimately bound to the broader currents of Islamic intellectual history. In the example of Bidlisi’s *Hasht bihisht*, we may register clearly how basic ideas about the meaning of history—first developed in Iran, then adopted in Egypt—became the standard approach in Ottoman lands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To be sure, the Ottomans developed a distinct tradition of historical writing, especially through the cultivation of a hyper-literate, high-register Turkish idiom, yet in many fundamental respects Ottoman intellectual culture remained intimately tied to the historical legacies and contemporary currents of a broader Islamic ecumene. In an academic age in which it has become standard practice to define Ottoman early modernity primarily in relation to the Mediterranean or contemporaneous European developments, we should remain mindful of just how significant continuing ties with other geographies could be.

\(^1\) Transliteration of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish words conforms to guidelines established by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Specific dates are given in Common Era and Hijri calendars. Date ranges are given only with reference to the Common Era.

\(^2\) Surprisingly, this attitude persists in the twenty-first century. For instance, Houari Touati explicitly embraced this approach with respect to exploring the contours of travel as an intellectual endeavor within Islam. He concludes that after the twelfth century “the construction of Islam became definitively fixed in structures and representations that it retained up to the
period of colonial conquest. To the extent that there was nothing left to elaborate or construct, the voyage—as a literary practice—lost the efficacy with which it had been credited in the formative period, making it one of Islam’s major intellectual acts. It is understandable that, under these conditions, the founders of Islamic knowledge should have traveled more than their later counterparts. Having almost nothing left to invent, the latter progressively abandoned the voyage,” Houari Touati, Islam and Travel in the Middle Ages (Chicago, 2010), 265–266.

3 Nile Green, Sufism: A Global History (Chichester, West Sussex, 2012), 17.

4 For example, with respect to Arabic literature, see Thomas Bauer, “In Search of ‘Post-Classical Literature’: A Review Article,” Mamluk Studies Review 11:2 (2007): 137–167; with respect to scholarship on hadith (traditions of the prophet Muhammad), see Garrett Davidson, “Carrying on the Tradition: An Intellectual and Social History of Post-Canonical Hadith Transmission” (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 2014); for a synthesis of literary and cultural history during this later period, see Muhsin J. al-Musawi, The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction (South Bend, Indiana, 2015). For a general consideration of Islam with particular focus on the period after the thirteenth century, see Shahab Ahmed, What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic (Princeton, 2016).


6 See especially Part I, El-Rouayheb, Islamic Intellectual History.


10 Rosenthal, Muslim Historiography, 7–8.


13 Khalidi, Arabic Historical Thought, 232.

14 For instance, in his assessment of the general disposition of the historian of this period, Khalidi writes, “As in earlier ages the historians were in their majority drawn from the ranks of religious scholars and the senior bureaucracy. Nor was there anything new in the self-importance felt by the ‘ulama’ or their elevated opinion of their role in history. What was new was the high profile that these classes had acquired or been given: as propagandists for the state, as regular recipients
of state largesse or beneficiaries of private endowments, as frequent employees on state business, as public preachers,” Khalidi, Arabic Historical Thought, 200.


20 On the movement of scholars and their works, see İlker Evrim Binbas, Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran.

21 Historians and scholars in earlier periods occasionally included discussions of history in their introductions. These frequently included enumerations of the benefits of history or discussions of its etymological origins. See for example, ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn al-Thir, al-Kāmil fi al-tāʾirikh, 1st ed. (Beirut, 1997), 1:9–11; Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl al-Ṣafadī, Kitāb al-wāfī bi l-wafayāt, (Leipzig, 1931), 1:1–46.


Rosenthal, Muslim Historiography, 245–262.

Rosenthal, Muslim Historiography, 263–529.

The earliest copy of Hashīṣ biḥisṭ’s introduction is contained in an autographed copy produced while Bidlīsī was on pilgrimage in Mecca in 1512/918, Idrīs Bidlīsī, Hasht biḥisht, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi (Istanbul) Ayasofya 3541, 1b-14a. For details of the production history of the introduction, see Christopher Markiewicz, “The Crisis of Rule in Late Medieval Islam: A Study of Idrīs Bidlīsī (861-926/1457-1520) and Kingship at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 2015), 183-185.

Fārābī, Ḥisâr al-ʿulum, ed. ‘Uthmān Amīn (Cairo, 1968); Ibn Sīna, Tīs’ rasāʾīl fī al-ḥikmah wa-al-ṭabīʿīyat (Cairo, 1908).


For a discussion of the development and harmonization of this bifurcated system, see Gerhard Endress and Abdou Filali-Ansary, Organizing Knowledge: Encyclopaedic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006).


Abdurrahman Aṭçıl, “Greco-Islamic Philosophy and Islamic Jurisprudence in the Ottoman Empire (1300-1600): Aristotle’s Theory of Sciences in Works of Uṣūl al-Fiqh,” Osmanlı Araştırmaları/The Journal of Ottoman Studies 41 (2013): 35. Such an understanding of science may not have stood up to the scrutiny of Aristotelian philosophers or post-Enlightenment thinkers, yet it fairly represents the greater rigor (in an Aristotelian mold) with which these scholars went about defining and demarcating the boundaries of particular bodies of knowledge. Insofar as such an exercise demanded that they identify the purpose of bodies of knowledge, these scholars were articulating sciences (clearly defined modes of knowledge production). For a thorough discussion of the merits of a broader understanding of science, see David Pingree, “Hellenophilia versus the History of Science,” ISIS 83 (1992): 554-563.


Ījī, Tuhfat al-faqīr, 67b-68a.

John W. Limbert, Shiraz in the Age of Hafez: The Glory of a Medieval Persian City (Seattle, 2004), 80.

Ījī, Tuhfat al-faqīr, 66a.

Limbert, Shiraz in the Age of Hafez, 82.

Ījī, Tuhfat al-faqīr, 79b.

Ījī, Tuhfat al-faqīr, 295a/b.

Ījī cites his teacher’s Mawāqif directly as a source for his historical work, Ījī, Tuhfat al-faqīr, 70b.

ījī, Tuhfat al-faqīr, 12b.

ījī, Tuhfat al-faqīr, 17a.

ījī, Tuhfat al-faqīr, 12b-13a.

ījī, Tuhfat al-faqīr, 13a-17a.

ījī, Tuhfat al-faqīr, 16b.

On the various works of Ḥāfiz Abrū that contain his discourse on history and their most important manuscript copies, see Felix Tauer, “Ḥāfiz Abrū sur l’historiographie;” on the relationship of these works to one another, see Felix Tauer Cinq Opuscules de Ḥāfiz-i Abrū concernant l’histoire de l’Iran au temps de Tamerlan (Prague, 1959), xi. One of these works is Jughrāfiya-yi Ḥāfiz Abrū, the published edition of which I have used in this article.

59 Hāfiz Abrū, Jughrāfiyā, 76.

60 Hāfiz Abrū, Jughrāfiyā, 76.

61 Hāfiz Abrū, Jughrāfiyā, 76.


66 Abdurrahman Atçıl, “The Formation of the Ottoman Learned Class and Legal Scholarship, 1300-1600” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 2010), 218.

67 Al-Sakhāwī praises al-Kāfiyajī for his mastery of a wide array of sciences, but adds that “he perhaps concocted a few sciences (rubbamā ikhtara’a ba’ḍ al-‘ulūm),” al-Sakhāwī, al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’, 7:261.


70 al-Kāfiyajī, al-Mukhtaṣar, 65; Sakhāwī, al-I`lān, 7.

71 He writes: “knowledge of [history] is necessary as a community duty (ʿalā sabīl al-kifāya), like the necessity of the other sciences, for it establishes the chronology of the whole course of the universe in the best possible manner,” Kāfiyajī, al-Mukhtaṣar, 66–67.

72 al-Sakhāwī, al-I`lān, 47, 263.

73 For a detailed study of Bidlīsī’s life and scholarly work, see Christopher Markiewicz, “The Crisis of Rule in Late Medieval Islam.”

74 Bidlīsī, Hasht bihisht, Nuruosmaniye Kütüphanesi (Istanbul), nr. 3209, 11a-14b.

75 Bidlīsī, Hasht bihisht, 11b.

76 Bidlīsī, Hasht bihisht, 11b.

77 Bidlīsī, Hasht bihisht, 13b.

78 Bidlīsī, Hasht bihisht, 11b.

79 Bidlīsī, Hasht bihisht, 12a.


81 Bidlīsī alludes to some of this criticism in a private letter of complaint to Sultan Bayezid II, Topkapı Sarayi Müzesi Arşivi (İstanbul), E. 5675. In his conclusion to Hasht bihisht, presented in the second version of the chronicle, Bidlīsī included further details about the specific criticisms, one of which included prolixity (iṭnāb), Bidlīsī, Hasht bihisht, 633a.

82 Idrīs Bidlīsī, Salımshāhnāma, Topkapı Sarayi Müzesi Kütüphanesi (İstanbul), Emanet Hazinesi 1423, 19b.


Al-Suyūṭī reports that al-Kāfiyajī’s teachers included the prominent scholar of fifteenth-century Ottoman lands, Mollā Shams al-Dīn Fenārī (d.1431/834), who had studied under many of the late fourteenth-century scholarly luminaries of Iran, as well as two Persian émigrés, Burhān al-Dīn Ḥaydar Haravī and ʿAbd al-Vājid ibn Muḥammad, al-Suyūṭī, *Bugḥyat al-wuʿā*, 1:117.


The manuscript is preserved in the Ayasofya collection of the Süleymaniye Library. For mention of its preparation for Maḥmūd Pasha, see al-Kāfiyajī, *al-Mukhtasar al-mufīd fi ʿilm al-taʾrīkh*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi (Istanbul), Ayasofya 3403, 1a; for details of its copy date and evidence of its inclusion in the royal library, see the colophon and seal of Bāyezīd II on 59a. Aside from this codex, some portion of the grand vizier’s personal library was incorporated into the collection of the madrasa that he endowed, Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: the Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović* (1453-1474) (Leiden, 2001), 307–310.


The royal library inventory of Bāyezīd II was compiled in 1503/909. The inventory mentions two copies of al-Kāfiyajī’s work, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Budapest), Török F 59, 94a, 95a.

Török F 59, 93b.

On the historical sections of this inventory, see Miklós Maróth, “The Library of Sultan Bayazid II,” in *Irano-Turkic Cultural Contacts in the 11th-17th Centuries*. (Pilicscabas, Hungary, 2003), 111-132.

Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court* (Bloomington, IN, 2013), 29–30, 35.


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History as Science: The Fifteenth-Century Debate in Arabic and Persian

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