

History as science

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DOI:

[10.1163/15700658-12342525](https://doi.org/10.1163/15700658-12342525)

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Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Markiewicz, C 2017, 'History as science: the fifteenth-century debate in Arabic and Persian', *Journal of Early Modern History*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 216-240. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700658-12342525>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

Eligibility checked 31/05/18

Markiewicz, C., 2017. History as Science: The Fifteenth-Century Debate in Arabic and Persian. *Journal of Early Modern History*, 21(3), pp.216-240.

10.1163/15700658-12342525

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Journal of Early Modern History

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

--Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	JEMH-D-15-00048R1					
Full Title:	History as Science: The Fifteenth-Century Debate in Arabic and Persian					
Short Title:	History as Science					
Article Type:	Full Length Article					
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Corresponding Author's Institution:	University of Oxford					
First Author:	Christopher Markiewicz, Ph.D.					
Order of Authors:	Christopher Markiewicz, Ph.D.					
Manuscript Region of Origin:	UNITED STATES					
Abstract:	<p>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.</p>					
Keywords:	historiography; fifteenth century; Ottoman Empire; Mamluk Sultanate; Timurid Iran					
Funding Information:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>European Research Council (263557 IMPAcT)</td> <td>Not applicable</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fulbright-Hayes DDRA</td> <td>Dr. Christopher Markiewicz</td> </tr> </table>	European Research Council (263557 IMPAcT)	Not applicable	Fulbright-Hayes DDRA	Dr. Christopher Markiewicz	
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Fulbright-Hayes DDRA	Dr. Christopher Markiewicz					

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6 History as Science: The Fifteenth-Century Debate in Arabic and Persian¹
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9
10 *Abstract:*

11 In the fifteenth century, scholars writing in Arabic and Persian debated the nature of historical
12 inquiry and its place among the sciences. While the motivations and perspectives of the various
13 scholars differed, the terms and parameters of the debate remained remarkably fixed and
14 focused, even as it unfolded across a vast geographic space between Herat, Cairo, and
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19 requiring its own particular method. Accordingly, the debate and its conclusions helped cement
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21 Ottoman Empire from the sixteenth century onwards.
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39 *Keywords:*

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41 historiography, fifteenth century, Ottoman Empire, Mamluk Sultanate, Timurid Iran
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46 **Introduction**
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51 Between 1397/800 and 1513/919, five Muslim scholars writing in Arabic and Persian
52 presented their ideas on the nature of historical inquiry and its place within the larger pantheon of
53 the sciences as conceived by Islamic learning. In contrast to the disparate and often
54 independently conceived remarks of Arab and Persian historians before the fifteenth century, the
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4 terms and parameters of these scholars' discourses remained remarkably fixed and focused: what
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6 is history? How should it be defined linguistically and practically? Is history a science? If so,
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8 what kind of a science is it? How should its aims, problems, and proper spheres of inquiry be
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10 defined? Although the scholars who considered these questions frequently came to varying and
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12 even contradictory conclusions, they all firmly agreed, in contrast with the doubt of previous
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14 generations on the status of history, that historical inquiry did indeed constitute a distinct science
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16 requiring its own particular method.
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21 Despite the existence of this fifteenth-century debate on history, contemporary
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23 scholarship has largely overlooked the multilingual aspect and geographically wide-ranging
24
25 extent of this major development within the Islamic historiographical tradition. The oversight
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27 stems, in part, from two separate tendencies within modern approaches to Islamic historiography.
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29 First, modern scholarship continues to operate in some measure under the residual influence of
30
31 twentieth-century scholarly inclinations to emphasize the significance of earlier periods of
32
33 Islamic history and marginalize later developments. Second, as a consequence of the mass of
34
35 historical literature produced by Muslim scholars over centuries and across continents, modern
36
37 historians understandably tend to delimit and synthesize Islamic historical thought within
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39 individual linguistic traditions, most frequently Arabic, Persian, or Turkish.
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45 The tendency to favor earlier periods is largely a consequence of the development of the
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47 field in the twentieth century. Whether with respect to literature, the religious traditions, or the
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49 cultural implications of travel, scholars in the twentieth century framed discussions of Islamic
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51 intellectual phenomena through a search for 'origins' and the demarcation of a 'classical period'
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53 ending, at the latest, in the mid-thirteenth century, during which the various cultural traditions
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55 purportedly originated, developed, and matured.² As Nile Green has noted in criticism of certain
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4 approaches to Sufism, historical process in this mold was viewed primarily “as a set of
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6 “inheritances” and “influences” that acted on and were received by each passing generation so as
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8 to give cumulative shape to their thoughts, actions, and creations.”³ In contrast, he has noted the
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10 need to recognize the significance of historical context and view the past as a set of continuously
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12 negotiated cultural references. He is not alone in his criticism of this earlier approach; indeed,
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14 recent scholarship in a number of sub-fields within Islamic intellectual and cultural history has
15
16 rejected the earlier approach and sought to redress the imbalance through detailed studies of the
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18 period after the mid-thirteenth century.⁴ More often than not, such studies uncover and explore
19
20 rich developments in the intellectual and cultural life of Islamic societies up to and over the
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22 course of the great transmutations initiated by the modern age. In this sense, contemporary
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24 historians generally reject the basic premises of the various decline paradigms that appeared to
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26 exercise such influence on much of twentieth-century scholarship.
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34 Despite the explicit, resounding rejection of any decline paradigm, the effects of
35
36 twentieth-century scholarship still exert an unintentional residual influence on certain aspects of
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38 the main narratives of Islamic intellectual history. Indeed, recent publications continue to
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40 acknowledge the lasting, undesirable consequences of twentieth-century historiographical
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42 paradigms of decline. In his study of scholarly currents within seventeenth-century Ottoman
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44 domains, Khaled El-Rouayheb notes the persistent deleterious effects of three distinct paradigms
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46 of decline on contemporary considerations of the intellectual history of this period.⁵
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48 Significantly, the lingering consequences of this attitude have obstructed observation of major,
49
50 far-reaching scholarly developments after the middle of the sixteenth century. Specifically, El-
51
52 Rouayheb demonstrates that the many glosses, commentaries, and super-commentaries on
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54 dialectical disputation (*ādāb al-baḥth*)—citation of which in previous decades was marshalled to
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4 uphold notions of intellectual stagnation—in fact, underscore the dynamism and vitality of
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6 largely novel approaches to dialectical argumentation and logic.⁶ Vestiges of the dominant
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8 narratives described by El-Rouayheb persist in other surprising and unexpected places. In an
9
10 otherwise engaging work that argues effectively for continued large-scale and diverse cultural
11
12 production in Arabic after the twelfth century, Muhsin al-Musawi’s *The Medieval Islamic*
13
14 *Republic of Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction* nonetheless opens by embracing “the
15
16 postclassical era” as a suitable and unproblematic term to describe the period between the twelfth
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18 and nineteenth centuries.⁷
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24 The vestigial effects of earlier academic agendas and outlooks are perhaps equally
25
26 observable with respect to the study of Islamic historical thought. As in other sub-fields, in the
27
28 twentieth century, most scholars of Islamic historiography characterized historical writing after
29
30 the thirteenth century as a reflection of a more general societal decadence that undermined the
31
32 value of historiography as a rigorous area of intellectual inquiry.⁸ Even twentieth-century
33
34 scholars who actively engaged historical writing in later periods upheld observations of
35
36 stagnation and decline. For instance, Franz Rosenthal, who first brought some of the fifteenth-
37
38 century historians examined in this article to widespread scholarly attention, nevertheless
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40 concluded his study of Muslim historiography with the turn of the sixteenth century, as the
41
42 subsequent period was, in his estimation, consciously or unconsciously exposed to occidental
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44 influence.⁹ Since Muslim historical production continued to flourish “without hardly any changes
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46 in its forms of expression,” he concluded that its inclusion “would have shed no additional light
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48 upon the contours and substance of the great cultural phenomenon of Muslim historiography.”¹⁰
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55 By the end of the century, historians roundly dismissed such a characterization by emphasizing
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57 the evolving and varied nature of the enterprise, and, to be sure, the field has benefited from a
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4 great number of specialized studies that consider aspects of Islamic historiography after the
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6 fifteenth century.¹¹ Unfortunately, in some instances, the new approach is not reflected in the
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8 broader synthesizing narratives of Islamic historiography. Indeed, such narratives, especially in
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10 their periodization, still implicitly reconfirm the impression of stagnation and decadence in a so-
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12 called ‘postclassical’ period, however demarcated. To wit, Tarif Khalidi’s *Arabic Thought in the*
13
14 *Classical Period* presents a more nuanced approach to Islamic historiography by examining the
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16 tradition as the product of the immediate cultural climates that informed its development
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18 diachronically.¹² Premised on the notion that historical writing in all cultures and at all times is
19
20 “peculiarly susceptible to surrounding climates of ideas and beliefs,” Khalidi identifies four
21
22 major points of view that informed the development of Arabic historiography between the eighth
23
24 and fourteenth centuries.¹³ However, because he associates the last stage with the rise of the
25
26 politically-minded court historian, who seemed to abandon the philosophical underpinnings of
27
28 his craft in favor of a sycophantic catalog of rulers’ great deeds, Khalidi’s approach implicitly
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30 confirms earlier scholars’ impressions of later centuries as essentially decadent.¹⁴ Even if other
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32 contemporary historians disavow themselves of this conclusion, recent syntheses, like Khalidi’s
33
34 work, frequently continue to neglect historiographical developments past the fourteenth or
35
36 fifteenth centuries.¹⁵ While it is certainly the case that such syntheses often do not present the
37
38 latest research in any detail, the persistent absence in some cases of any consideration of
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40 historical writing between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries in the very least suggests a lack
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42 of willingness to integrate specialized scholarship into a broader framework.
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53 Beyond these narrative tendencies, monolingual approaches to Islamic historiography
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55 further obscure the full extent of the fifteenth-century discourse on history. The tendency to
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57 divide Islamic historiography between its Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish expressions
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4 reinforces an understanding of the historical tradition as separate, linguistically delineated
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6 dialectics. Moreover, while considerations of Ottoman historical writing generally acknowledge
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8 its relationship to Arabic and especially Persian historiography, the interrelationship between the
9
10 three remains only superficially acknowledged. Yet many scholars from this period, including
11
12 several of the historians discussed below, were completely fluent readers and writers of both
13
14 Arabic and Persian. For instance, the sixteenth-century Ottoman historian Muṣṭafā ‘Ālī authored
15
16 thirty-eight works in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish¹⁶ and cites 130 chronicles in Arabic and
17
18 Persian as sources for his world history in Turkish, *Künhü’l-aḥbār* (*The Essence of Histories*).¹⁷
19
20 Muṣṭafā ‘Ālī’s method still seems sensible; the wide-ranging interaction between Arabic and
21
22 Persian historical thought since the tenth century—and Turkish historiography, as well,
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24 beginning in the fifteenth century—constituted a fundamental aspect of the development of
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26 Islamic historiography as a vibrant cultural tradition until the rise of national historiographies in
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28 the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁸
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36 Indeed, the salient cultural features of the fifteenth century would appear to underscore
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38 meaningful scholarly interaction across Islamic lands, irrespective of language. As in earlier
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40 centuries, Muslim scholars and other producers of cultural and literary material maintained a
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42 relatively high level of social and cultural cohesion during this period. Such cohesion, which
43
44 modern historians have variously identified as a common Islamicate social pattern or Islamic
45
46 world-system, facilitated the relatively free movement of people and ideas across political,
47
48 ethnic, and vernacular boundaries.¹⁹ The politically volatile and fragmented terrain of the
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50 fifteenth century frequently afforded and occasionally necessitated the movement of scholars and
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52 their works from one land to another and in this manner helped facilitate a novel and lively
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54 debate on the place and meaning of historical inquiry.²⁰
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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.²¹ 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.²² Similar circumstances prevailed in Persian lands. In the introduction to his history of Tīmūr, Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī (d. 1454/858) postulated the etymological origins of history (*ta'rikh*) 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.²³ 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.²⁴ A few years later, Fazlullāh Khunjī-Iṣfahānī (d. 1521/927), working for the Aqqyunlu court of Ya'qūb (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 Aqqyunlu patron.²⁵ 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.²⁶

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4 Even in the nascent Ottoman historiographical context, historians occasionally sought to
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6 elaborate the benefits of history in limited ways. During the reign of Sultan Bāyezīd II (r. 1481-
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8 1512), Neşrī (d. ca. 1520/926) suggested the fundamental importance of knowledge of history for
9
10 kings in the introduction to the volume of his universal history devoted to the Ottoman dynasty.²⁷
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12 Although such discussions frequently shared common features—and may therefore be a
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14 reflection of the sort of climate of ideas suggested by Khalidī—the variegated remarks of these
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16 historians do not necessarily imply direct knowledge of parallel historiographical developments.
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21 Concurrent with these reflections, a more limited and focused discourse about the
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23 meaning and purpose of history unfolded in the work of five Arabophone and Persophone
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25 scholars. These men, most of whom shared scholarly connections or had access to one another’s
26
27 work, developed a formal approach to locating and defining history within the classification of
28
29 the sciences (*taqsīm al-‘ulūm*). Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Ījī (fl. 1397/800), a student of the great
30
31 fourteenth-century theologian ‘Aḍud al-Dīn Ījī (d. 756/1355) and scion of the Fālī-Sīrāfī family
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33 of Shiraz, established this rigorous approach to defining his subject in several chapters that he
34
35 included in a larger historical work in Arabic dedicated to Tīmūr in October 1397/Muḥarram
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37 800.²⁸ Half a generation later, Ḥāfiẓ Abrū, boon companion of Tīmūr and historian at the court of
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39 the conqueror’s son and ultimate heir Shāhrukh, borrowed Ījī’s approach in discussions that he
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41 included in two of his Persian historical works written between 1414/817 and his death in
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43 1430/833.²⁹ In the 1460s, Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Kāfiyajī (d. 1474/879), an émigré from western
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45 Anatolia who rose to scholarly prominence in Cairo, followed in the intellectual footsteps of
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47 these two Persian scholars and situated history among the religious sciences in a short
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49 monograph entitled *al-Mukhtaṣar al-mufīd fī ‘ilm al-ta’rīkh* (*The Useful Digest on the Science of*
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51 *History*).³⁰ A few years later, one of al-Kāfiyajī’s colleagues, the prominent Egyptian scholar of
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4 *ḥadīth* (traditions of the prophet Muḥammad) Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī (d.
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6 1497/902), composed his own monograph on the subject, entitled *I'lān bi'l-tawbīkh li-man*
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8 *dhamma al-ta' rīkh* (*The Pronouncement of Reproach for Those Who Defame History*), in which
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10 he sought to defend the suitability of history for study against theologians for whom its necessity
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12 as a religiously sanctioned body of knowledge remained dubious.³¹ Lastly, in the second decade
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14 of the sixteenth century, Idrīs Bidlīsī (d. 1520/926), scholar and chancery official of the
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16 Akquyunlu and Ottoman courts, included a lengthy discussion of history as science along the
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18 lines of his predecessors in the introduction to his massive Persian dynastic chronicle of the
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20 Ottoman house.³²

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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- 'aql*) as the fundamental basis for elaborating the definitions, precepts, and problems of any science.³³ 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.³⁴ 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

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4 resolve this problem, scholars developed a bifurcated system of knowledge that differentiated
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6 between rational and revealed/transmitted sciences.³⁵ Along these lines, at the end of the tenth
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8 century, al-Khwārazmī, in his *Keys of the Sciences (Maḥāṭiḥ al-‘ulūm)*, divided knowledge
9
10 between “the sciences of religious tradition and what is joined to them from among the Arabic
11
12 sciences, and secondly the sciences of the foreign lands of the Greeks and other peoples.”³⁶
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14 Although cast in terms of an anthropological distinction between indigenous and foreign
15
16 learning, the system articulated by al-Khwārazmī largely corresponded to the basic division
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18 between rational (‘*aqlī/ḥikmī*) and transmitted or revealed (*naqlī/ghayr ḥikmī*) sciences as
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20 expounded by most subsequent scholars, including Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 1210/606), Quṭb al-Dīn
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22 Shīrāzī (d. 1311/710), and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406/808).³⁷
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29 Consequently, the rigorous considerations of history’s place in the late fourteenth and
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31 fifteenth centuries addressed a fundamental concern for historians to legitimize their craft within
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33 the wider context of Islamic learning. Such considerations also benefited from a more general
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35 reappraisal of the classification system that gathered steam first among scholars working within
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37 the religious sciences. Increasingly, these scholars applied Aristotelian principles and
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39 terminology to the precise definition of religious bodies of knowledge. Specifically, they
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41 accepted the philosophers’ assertion that science is differentiated from knowledge through
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43 demonstrable proof (*burhān*). Moreover, they concurred that any particular science (‘*ilm*)
44
45 investigates a single specified and clearly defined subject matter (*mawḍū‘*) and that it endeavors
46
47 to reach conclusions within that subject matter in a systematic manner.³⁸ Increasingly in the
48
49 fourteenth century, religious scholars applied this philosophically oriented approach to defining
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51 and investigating the traditional Islamic religious sciences; scholars such as ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī
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53 recast theology (*kalām*) in this mold in the middle of the century,³⁹ while many others worked
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4 contemporaneously to redefine the orientation of theoretical jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) along
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6 these lines.⁴⁰
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9 Concurrent with these developments—and perhaps in some measure as a consequence of
10 them—Muslim scholars began to produce encyclopedias on the sciences with renewed energy.⁴¹
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12 Some of these enormous projects produced detailed information on specific branches of
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14 knowledge, such as Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī’s (d. 1418/821) fourteen-volume work
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16 on epistolography entitled *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā* (*Dawn for the Blind*) or Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-
17
18 Damīrī’s (d. 1405/808) zoological survey, *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān* (*Life of Animals*).⁴² Others, such as
19
20 Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī’s *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab* (*The Ultimate Ambition in the*
21
22 *Branches of Erudition*) sought to survey the widest range of literary arts in a comprehensive and
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24 pleasing manner.⁴³ More radically, certain strains within the encyclopedism movement argued
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26 for a complete restructuring of the metaphysical underpinnings of Islamic learning as conceived
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28 by philosophers, jurists, and Sufīs. In this way, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī’s (d. 1454/858) *al-*
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30 *Fawā’iḥ al-miskīya fī al-fawātiḥ al-makkīya* (*The Musky Perfumes in the Meccan Openings*) and
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32 Sā’ in al-Dīn Turka’s (d. 1432/835) treatises on the science of letters presented an occult
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34 challenge both to the traditional division of the sciences, as well as to its metaphysical
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36 presuppositions.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, in this climate of encyclopedism—both traditional and
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38 radical—historians examined the epistemological underpinnings of their craft with renewed rigor
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40 and vitality.
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53 **History as Science in the Fifteenth Century** 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65

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4 Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Ījī's application of the same method to history should come as
5
6 little surprise. His training tied him to some of the great intellectual luminaries of mid-
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8 fourteenth-century Shiraz. At an early age, Ījī, known as Shihāb in his lifetime, studied under his
9
10 grandfather, Najm al-Dīn Ismā'īl,⁴⁵ patriarch of the Fālī-Sīrāfī family, long-time judge of the
11
12 province of Fars, and a man whom the great Persian poet Ḥāfīz identified as one of the five most
13
14 important notables of the Shiraz of his day.⁴⁶ Perhaps more importantly, Ījī spent years studying
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16 under 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī, whose *Kitāb al-mawāqif fī 'ilm al-kalām* argued for the Aristotelian-
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18 infused approach to theology and became one of the most fundamental texts for its study in
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20 subsequent centuries.⁴⁷

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26 Despite such an intellectually auspicious youth, Ījī's fortunes declined with those of his
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28 family after the establishment of Muzaffarid rule in Shiraz in 1353/754; little is known after the
29
30 mid-fourteenth century about his life and the circumstances of the other members of his once
31
32 great family.⁴⁸ By the late 1390s, he had entered the courtly orbit of Tīmūr, who invested heavily
33
34 in Samarqand both through the construction of monumental architectural projects and through
35
36 the resettlement and patronage of learned men. Ījī was eager to secure such patronage, for in
37
38 1397/800 he gathered a number of works that he had written—some of which he penned in the
39
40 mid-1380s before Tīmūr's conquest of Fars⁴⁹—and presented the compendium to the conqueror
41
42 as a single monograph on history entitled *Tuḥfat al-faqīr ilā ṣāḥib al-sarīr (The Gift of the Poor*
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44 *One to the Master of the Throne)*, the explicit purpose of which was to elicit Tīmūr's notice of its
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46 author, who had been dismissed from office and wallowed away in solitude.⁵⁰

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53 Yet the opportunistic tone of Ījī's dedication and petition is no indication of intellectual
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55 vapidty. On the contrary, Ījī applied the precise and exacting vocabulary deployed by his teacher
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57 with respect to theology in his effort to define the science of history (*'ilm al-ta'rīkh*).⁵¹

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4 Accordingly, his work offers a definition of history as science through clear statements of its
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6 subject matter (*mawḍūʿ*), purpose (*gharaḍ*), benefits (*fawāʿid*), and underlying principles
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8 (*mabādiʿ*). The science of history is “knowledge of what was transmitted concerning the
9
10 occurrences of the world fixed to particular times, from which a historical report originates.”⁵²
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12 Elsewhere in the work, Ījī defines history, or more properly dating (*taʿrīkh*) in a strict linguistic
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14 sense as an indication of time, and in a practical sense as the designation of time for the purpose
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16 of defining the relative position between two occurrences.⁵³ Its subject matter is created things,
17
18 especially humankind, and the effects of their activities in the world, while its purpose is study of
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20 the conditions of outstanding individuals (*aʿyān*).⁵⁴ The adaptation of this technical approach
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22 was directed toward locating history within the classification of the sciences, for in the first
23
24 chapter of the work, Ījī identifies history as a subsidiary branch of the literary sciences (*al-ʿulūm*
25
26 *al-adabīya*), one of Ījī’s trifold epistemological divisions of knowledge along with the religious
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28 sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-sharʿīya*) and the philosophical sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-ḥikmīya*).⁵⁵
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30 Specifically, history is a subset of the science of historical information (*ʿilm al-akḥbār*) and is
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32 distinguished from this broader category through its concern with fixing past occurrences with
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34 dates.⁵⁶
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43 Whereas Ījī’s historical thinking bore the imprint of the scholarly circles from which he
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45 emerged as a young man, the historical writing of a younger contemporary, Ḥāfiẓ Abrū, the
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47 renowned Timurid historian, focused more thoroughly on the centrality of rule in the recounting
48
49 of past events. Even so, Ḥāfiẓ Abrū clearly drew on Ījī’s discursive method, for like his fellow
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51 Timurid courtier, he preserved much of the terminology and many of the same definitions
52
53 presented in *Tuḥfat al-faqīr* in the prefatory sections of several of his universal historical projects
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55 in Persian.⁵⁷ Like Ījī, he distinguishes between history, or more properly dating (*taʿrīkh*), and the
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4 science of history. In a nod to his predecessor, he defines history/dating in a strict linguistic sense
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6 (*dar lughat*) as the expression of time (*ta'rif-i vaqt*) and in a broader practical sense (*dar iştīlāh*)
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8 as the fixed designation of time periods to events.⁵⁸ His discussion of the science of history
9
10 likewise was indebted to Ījī, but with minor modifications. He begins by asserting that all
11
12 sciences are defined through establishment of their quiddity (*māhiyyat*), purpose (*ghāyat*), and
13
14 subject matter (*mawḍūʿ*). As this is the case, he asserts that history's subject consists of “the
15
16 events of the realm of generation and decay through investigation of which one discovers in what
17
18 regard and at what time they occurred.”⁵⁹ Its quiddity, that is to say its distinguishing feature as a
19
20 science, is knowledge (*ma'rifat*) of those past events—whether they concern social or natural
21
22 phenomena—that occurred in the realm of generation and decay.⁶⁰ Yet such a definition of
23
24 history's quiddity precluded the possibility that it could offer its investigator any universal
25
26 judgment. For this reason, the purpose of history was consideration and reflection (*i'tibār va*
27
28 *istibṣār*) upon that knowledge, through which a historian could discern the appropriate course of
29
30 future action.⁶¹ The relationship between historical phenomena, reflection, and future action was
31
32 a frequently lauded benefit of history at least since the historian Miskawayh (d. 1030/421)
33
34 asserted in the eleventh century that knowledge of history offered an alternative type of
35
36 experience of worldly matters.⁶² Yet Ḥāfiẓ Abrū's assertion that this possibility constituted the
37
38 fundamental purpose of history lent historical inquiry a heightened level of rigor. In fact, this
39
40 conception of history's purpose closely resembles the purpose of Ibn Khaldūn's self-proclaimed
41
42 new science of culture (*ʿilm al-ʿumrān*) as he outlined it in the *Muqaddima*.⁶³ Whereas Ibn
43
44 Khaldūn sought to move beyond history to establish a science that would uncover the underlying
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46 forces that informed historical developments through rational consideration of past occurrences,
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48 Ḥāfiẓ Abrū, a contemporary of Ibn Khaldūn, independently arrived at the same conclusion, but
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4 maintained that such an objective was in fact the proper purpose of history.⁶⁴ In other words, Ibn
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6
7 Khaldūn's science of culture remained for Ḥāfiẓ Abrū the appropriate conception of history as a
8
9 scientific enterprise.

10
11 This formal approach of Ījī and Ḥāfiẓ Abrū to defining history in linguistic and practical
12
13 terms and identifying its purpose and subject as a body of knowledge remained a basic feature of
14
15 the subsequent considerations of history in the fifteenth century. However, whereas Ḥāfiẓ Abrū
16
17 sought to define history as a science, the benefits of which primarily accrued to kings seeking
18
19 counsel, the reflections of al-Kāfiyajī and al-Sakhāwī in the middle of the fifteenth century
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21 tended toward Ījī's emphasis and stressed the necessity of history for the religious sciences. Such
22
23 emphasis reflected the more immediate scholarly milieu of the two men in fifteenth-century
24
25 Cairo. Al-Kāfiyajī had immigrated to Cairo from his place of birth in Bergama (Pergamon) to
26
27 continue his studies. He stayed on in the city and held teaching positions at several prestigious
28
29 institutions in the Mamluk capital.⁶⁵ Over the course of his career, al-Kāfiyajī, perhaps following
30
31 the earlier impulse of religious scholars to define their subjects in exacting philosophical terms,
32
33 penned a number of short treatises that took up consideration of individual disciplines. Some of
34
35 these were well recognized, if poorly defined, bodies of knowledge, such as history, while
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37 others, such as the science of the legal school (*'ilm al-madhhab*),⁶⁶ seemed, in the critical tone of
38
39 his colleague al-Sakhāwī, to be fanciful inventions of their author.⁶⁷ Yet even if al-Sakhāwī
40
41 criticized al-Kāfiyajī for overenthusiasm in some areas, he clearly agreed with his impulse with
42
43 respect to history, for a few years after al-Kāfiyajī completed his short monograph on the science
44
45 of history, al-Sakhāwī presented his own thinking on the subject in a work entitled *I'lān bi'l-*
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47 *tawbīkh li-man dhamma al-ta'rīkh* (*The Pronouncement of Reproach to Those Who Defame*
48
49 *History*).

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4 Both of these Egyptian scholars undertook their considerations of history in an effort to
5
6 remedy their forebears' exclusion of historiography from the necessary branches of religious
7
8 learning. Al-Kāfiyājī writes that although the ancients were able to dispense with a codification
9
10 of history, this neglect does not suggest that it should be excluded from the classification of the
11
12 sciences. Rather, he writes, "it is a science just like the other codified sciences, such as
13
14 jurisprudence, grammar, style, and the like. It is, therefore, needed just like the other branches of
15
16 learning."⁶⁸ Similarly, al-Sakhāwī defended history against those religious scholars (*ulamā'*)
17
18 who found fault with history and historians by showing its proven instructiveness and
19
20 proclaiming its status among the fundamental branches of learning.⁶⁹ While a defense of
21
22 history's status as science constituted the primary objective of al-Kāfiyājī and al-Sakhāwī's
23
24 discourse, like ʿĪjī and Ḥāfiẓ Abrū, the two Egyptian scholars initiated their discussion of history
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26 through an exploration of the concept in its linguistic and practical senses. Because they sought
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28 to defend history's status as science, they also codified the study of history through a definition
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30 of its subject and problems (*masā'il*). All four scholars agreed that history's subject concerned
31
32 past events in the realm of generation and decay, yet unlike Ḥāfiẓ Abrū, neither of the Egyptian
33
34 historians attributed to the science of history an ability to elucidate underlying causes for events
35
36 as they unfolded in time. For al-Kāfiyājī, history's subject was remarkable events, while al-
37
38 Sakhāwī identified its subject as man and time.⁷⁰ However, even as they denied history an ability
39
40 to pronounce universal judgments, they argued for its basic necessity within the framework of
41
42 Islamic learning. In particular, al-Kāfiyājī went so far as to argue for history's status as a joint
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44 obligation of the Islamic community (*farḍ al-kifāya*).⁷¹ Similarly, al-Sakhāwī argued for the
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46 obligatory nature of some aspects of history and acknowledged the fact that some scholars—a
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48 reference perhaps to his colleague al-Kāfiyājī—categorized history as a communal obligation.⁷²
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4 Accordingly, both men couched their considerations of history's benefits in terms of its necessity
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6 in confirming the basic facts upon which the conclusions of jurisprudence and other religious
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8 sciences were based.
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11 Idrīs Bidlīsī, the last author in this discourse, was in some ways heir to both the scholarly
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13 approach of Ījī and the Egyptian scholars and the courtly approach of Ḥāfīz Abrū. His early life
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15 was spent in study under the tutelage of his father, Ḥusām al-Dīn 'Alī (d. 909/1503), whose
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17 association with the great scholars of mid-fifteenth-century Iran afforded Bidlīsī opportunities to
18
19 meet leading luminaries such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492/898) and Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d.
20
21 1502/908). Despite his adolescent commitment to study and follow a Sufī path, in his early
22
23 adulthood, Bidlīsī entered the service of the Aqqyunlu court through employment in the
24
25 chancery. Over the remainder of his professional life Bidlīsī worked for the Aqqyunlu and later
26
27 Ottoman sultanates. He produced a massive Persian chronicle of the Ottoman dynasty entitled
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29 *Hasht bihisht* (*The Eight Paradises*), the poor reception of which—in Bidlīsī's assessment—
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31 prompted him to recommit to a pious life through a pilgrimage to Mecca. These travels brought
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33 him to Cairo, where he enjoyed the patronage of the Mamluk sultan and met with the leading
34
35 scholars of the city, many of whom were the students of al-Kāfiyajī and al-Sakhāwī. Upon the
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37 accession of Selīm to the Ottoman throne in 1512/918, Bidlīsī returned to Ottoman lands where
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39 he presented a revised version of his chronicle.⁷³
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48 Perhaps then as a consequence of these varied experiences, when Bidlīsī sat down to
49
50 write the introduction to *Hasht bihisht* while residing in Mecca in 1512/918, he included a
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52 discussion of the meaning and epistemological place of history that engaged the works of the
53
54 four earlier scholars in several respects. Like his immediate forebears, Bidlīsī sought to dignify
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56 history by locating it within the broad classification of the sciences. Although he departed from
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4 the rigorous formal efforts to define history's problem, purpose, and subject, he reproduced
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6 aspects of these definitions in an altered format. Bidlīsī organized his discussion of history in
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8 three subsections of his introduction that defined history, located it among the sciences, and
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10 defended its status as a necessary and desirable branch of learning for both courtly audiences and
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12 religious scholars.⁷⁴
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16 In the introduction, Bidlīsī offers an abbreviated discussion of history's definition in both
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18 its linguistic and practical senses and establishes its relationship to other bodies of knowledge
19
20 that are concerned with temporal occurrences.⁷⁵ As with all of his predecessors, he defines
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22 history linguistically as the expression of time (*ta 'rīf-i vaqt*). However, he departs from these
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24 scholars, insofar as his characterization of the practical definition (*ism-i rasmī*) of history focuses
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26 on developing an understanding of the science of history (as opposed to a practical definition of
27
28 the term generally). Here, Bidlīsī inclines towards the more modest claims of Ījī and the two
29
30 Egyptian scholars and concludes that the science of history is "a science through knowledge
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32 (*ma 'rifat*) of which the conditions of temporal occurrences are obtained."⁷⁶ By focusing on
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34 history as knowledge, Bidlīsī deemphasized Ḥāfiẓ Abrū's strong assertion that history contained
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36 the possibility for insight into the underlying forces that inform events. While in later discourses
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38 Bidlīsī acknowledges this aspect of history,⁷⁷ his primary definition of the science reproduces a
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40 more traditional understanding.
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48 Even if this more traditional understanding of history seems to limit its claim as a
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50 veritable science, Bidlīsī distinguishes history by characterizing it as the loftiest branch of the
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52 Arabic sciences (*'ulūm-i 'arabīya*), by which name he referred to the literary sciences
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54 enumerated by Ījī. He places history within the broader category of rhetorical sciences (*'ulūm-i*
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56 *muhāẓarāt*), which he defines as the apex of the twelve Arabic sciences.⁷⁸ The lower Arabic
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4 sciences concern basic aspects of language: knowledge of speech, conjugation, etymology,
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6 grammar, syntax (*ma' nā*), and stylistics (*bayān*). These basic linguistic building blocks constitute
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8 the basis upon which the more advanced literary sciences are elaborated: poetry, prose writing,
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10 prosody, rhyme, epistolography (*inshā'*), and finally the rhetorical sciences. For Bidlīsī, rhetoric
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12 was primarily concerned with investigating the modes of discourse and dialog within the polite
13
14 gatherings of refined notables. It constitutes the summation of the literary sciences, because, by
15
16 their varied nature, conversations taken up at such gatherings require a refined handling of a vast
17
18 array of subjects. Within this scheme, Bidlīsī asserts history's status as the most complete
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20 application of the rhetorical sciences, presumably since it draws upon the widest array of literary
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22 sciences to create historical narratives.⁷⁹
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28 Bidlīsī's historical writing fully reflects this conception of his craft. In *Hasht bihisht*,
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30 Bidlīsī rejected the more common practice of the Ottoman chronicles of his own day, which most
31
32 frequently offered simple accounts of the great deeds of the Ottoman sultans. Instead, Bidlīsī's
33
34 chronicle drew upon the most varied epistemological traditions—Quranic, poetic, esoteric,
35
36 astrological, philosophical, and theosophical—to create a narrative that also substantiated his
37
38 overarching claim for the cosmically ordained and divinely sanctioned rule of the Ottoman house
39
40 in his own age.⁸⁰ The result was a massive work that in volume, scope, and stated ambition easily
41
42 surpassed all previous historical projects supported by the Ottoman house. Although the work
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44 elicited considerable criticism for a number of reasons from several quarters—including for its
45
46 prolixity⁸¹—Bidlīsī continued work to impose his vision on the nascent Ottoman
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48 historiographical landscape until his death in 1520/926.
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55 Later in life, some years after the completion of *Hasht bihisht*, he reflected on his
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57 motivation for undertaking the project and wrote that before completion of his history “there had
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4 been absolutely no deserving and worthy work in the canon of accustomed historical writing
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6 (*qānūn-i ta'riḵh-i mu'tād*).”⁸² By this, he likely meant that his chronicle was the first work of
7
8 Ottoman history to produce historical narratives with a clear conception of history’s proper
9
10 subject, purpose, and basic principles. To be sure, Bidlīsī had his own particular ideas about this
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12 conception, yet in a more general sense his thinking was conditioned by the century-long
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14 discussion by historians on their subject.
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21 **Parallels, Connections, and Contributions**

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26 The differences between the positions taken by the five historians largely derived from
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28 the varying audiences that the authors had in mind as they framed their remarks on the science of
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30 history. While all five of the scholars recognized the alternate positions of the others as valid,
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32 they emphasized certain aspects of history in accordance with their particular intellectual and
33
34 professional affiliations. As such, Ḥāfīz Abrū and Idrīs Bidlīsī, both of whom wrote chronicles
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36 for a powerful sovereign, stressed those aspects of history that would accrue to the benefit of
37
38 kings. For Ḥāfīz Abrū, history was the science *par excellence* for formulating political counsel
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40 and deciding future policy. For Bidlīsī, it was an ideal medium for advancing complex
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42 ideological positions. Alternatively, the other three scholars’ immersion in the scholarly scenes
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44 of their day motivated them to frame their remarks on history in religious and jurisprudential
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46 terms.
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52 Despite such differences, their structural approaches to defining history remained similar.
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54 All of the historians defended history as a science. Moreover, such apologia unfolded through the
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56 adaptation of Aristotelian terminology previously pioneered by religious scholars working in
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4 theoretical jurisprudence and theology. All of the historians analyzed the definition of history in
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6 discrete linguistic and practical terms. Most of them—with the exception of Bidlīsī—sought to
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8 define history as a science in terms of its subject (*mawḍūʿ*) and purpose (*gharaḍ* or *ghāyat*).
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11 Beyond these structural similarities, the five historians shared certain personal and
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13 intellectual connections with one another that bound them together across time and space. In
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15 several instances, the opportunities for patronage and study offered by princely and sultanic
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17 courts created the intellectually rich environment in which such connections were established.
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19 More often than not, this patronage was part of a ruler's conscious effort to attract talented men
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21 and augment his prestige. Tīmūr famously failed to resettle Ibn Khaldūn in Samarqand after their
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23 meeting outside the walls of Damascus in 1401/803,⁸³ yet he managed to settle a number of other
24
25 prominent scholars and historians, including al-Jazarī (1429/833), Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d.
26
27 1413/816), and Saʿd al-Dīn Masʿūd al-Taftazānī (d. 1390/793). Both Ījī and Ḥāfīz Abrū were
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29 affiliated with Tīmūr's court during the last years of the fourteenth century, and it is likely as a
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31 consequence of this connection that Ḥāfīz Abrū drew inspiration for his discourse from the
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33 earlier work of Ījī.
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37 Certainly, the two Egyptian scholars, al-Kāfiyājī and al-Sakhāwī, enjoyed the more
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39 traditional scholarly relationship that thrived largely independently of the activities of royal
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41 patronage. Al-Sakhāwī, in his treatise on history, acknowledges al-Kāfiyājī's pioneering effort
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43 and cites a lengthy passage from his predecessor.⁸⁴ Connections with their eastern near
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45 contemporaries are considerably less direct. Al-Kāfiyājī, who was born and first educated in
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47 Ottoman lands, studied with a number of Persian émigré scholars or with learned men who
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49 themselves had studied previously in Iran.⁸⁵ Moreover, in his early adulthood, his studies took
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51 him to Iran before he turned westward toward Mamluk lands.⁸⁶ Possibly as a consequence of
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4 these travels and studies, he had some familiarity with the Aristotelian approach to defining
5 scientific subjects, as advocated in the work of Persian scholars, such as ‘Aḍud al-Dīn Ījī with
6 respect to theology, and Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Ījī and Ḥāfiẓ Abrū with respect to history.
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11 Moreover, al-Kāfiyajī, despite the jurisprudential focus of his historical discourse, also
12 maintained important ties with sultanic courts, which subsequently contributed to the spread of
13 his work to Ottoman lands. Al-Kāfiyajī freely associated with the Mamluk political
14 establishment of his adopted home. He accepted teaching positions from several Mamluk sultans
15 at institutions in Cairo, and, upon his death in 1474/879, the reigning sultan Qāyitbāy attended
16 his funeral.⁸⁷ One of his students, the historian ‘Alī ibn Dawūd al-Jawharī al-Ṣayrafī (d.
17 1495/900) mentions that Mamluk court officials used to frequent al-Kāfiyajī’s home⁸⁸ and that
18 his teacher, on at least one occasion, endorsed a favorable religious opinion when the sultan, in
19 the face of opposition, asked whether it was licit to remove a *miḥrāb* (wall niche indicating the
20 direction of Mecca) from an unused mosque in one of the Mamluk barracks.⁸⁹ In reference
21 perhaps to these mutually beneficial relationships, al-Sakhāwī, rather disparagingly, remarks that
22 his colleague “aggrandized kings.”⁹⁰ He adds that such aggrandizement was especially directed
23 toward the Ottoman sultan, with whom he regularly corresponded and presented great gifts.⁹¹ As
24 a consequence of this correspondence, within one year of al- Kāfiyajī’s completion of his treatise
25 on history, he asked one of his students, Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad al-Damīsī, to prepare a copy of
26 the work for Maḥmūd Pasha, the powerful grand vizier of Mehmed II. In 1464/868, the copy was
27 completed, sent to the Ottoman court, and incorporated into the royal library after Maḥmūd
28 Pasha’s execution in 1474/879.⁹² Around the same time that al-Damīsī prepared this copy for the
29 Ottoman chief advisor, he prepared another copy for the future Mamluk sultan Qāyitbāy.⁹³ By
30 the turn of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman court had added another copy of the treatise, so
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4 that when Bidlīsī arrived in Ottoman lands and took up his first major historical project, he had
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6 access to at least two copies of al-Kāfiyājī's work.⁹⁴
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9 In addition to these copies of *al-Mukhtaṣar al-mufīd*, the royal library of Bayezid II also
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11 contained a copy of Ījī's *Tuḥfat al-faqīr*.⁹⁵ More generally, by the turn of the sixteenth century,
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13 the Ottoman court had assembled a massive library of more than 7,000 titles in 5,600 volumes
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15 ranging from traditional religious subjects, such as traditions of the prophet, jurisprudence, and
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17 theology, to Sufism, medicine, geography, history, astronomy, and the esoteric sciences, among
18
19 many others. The section on history was considerable and included hundreds of titles in Arabic,
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21 Persian, and Turkish.⁹⁶ As Emine Fetvacı has shown for a slightly later period, the palace library
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23 was a lending library of sorts for court officials and scholars affiliated with the dynasty.⁹⁷ In this
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25 way, the Ottoman court—and Islamic princely courts more generally—became a major site for
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27 scholarship as its wide-ranging collection frequently supplemented the private collections of
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29 scholars and the public holdings of mosques and formal teaching institutions. Through patronage
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31 of works, such as Bidlīsī's *Hasht bihisht* in an Ottoman context or *Tuḥfat al-faqīr* in a Timurid
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33 one, the princely court stood not only as a repository of learning, but also a promoter of its
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35 advancement. Rather than a signal of intellectual decay, courtly patronage was also, therefore, a
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37 great spur for scholarly activity, which, in the instances of these fifteenth-century considerations
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39 on history, constituted something of the cutting edge of Islamic scholarship during this period.
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41 Supported by courtly environments, yet informed by the religious scholarly circles that were
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43 concurrently arguing for a reappraisal of knowledge, these five scholars insisted successfully
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45 upon the place of history within the wider framework of knowledge.
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55 The effects of these historical discourses of the fifteenth century were widely registered
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57 in the general views of scholars of later generations. Increasingly, in the wake of this fifteenth-
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4 century discourse, scholars came to accept history's place within the pantheon of the sciences.
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6 The two most popular sixteenth-century Ottoman classifications of the sciences—
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8 Taşköprüzade's *Miftāh al-sa'āda* and Nev'ī Efendi's *Netāyicü'l-'ulūm*—both included history in
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10 their catalogs and adopted the formal approach to defining the subject as worked out in the
11
12 fifteenth-century discourses on the matter.⁹⁸ In the seventeenth century, the great Ottoman
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14 polymath Katib Çelebi similarly accepted the fifteenth-century definitions and included them in
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16 his massive bio-bibliographical work.⁹⁹ The widespread and lasting acceptance of the fifteenth-
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18 century discourses and their incorporation into the main strands of Ottoman historical thought
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20 therefore underscore the extent to which Ottoman developments were intimately bound to the
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22 broader currents of Islamic intellectual history. In the example of Bidlisi's *Hasht bihisht*, we may
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24 register clearly how basic ideas about the meaning of history—first developed in Iran, then
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26 adopted in Egypt—became the standard approach in Ottoman lands in the sixteenth and
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28 seventeenth centuries. To be sure, the Ottomans developed a distinct tradition of historical
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30 writing, especially through the cultivation of a hyper-literate, high-register Turkish idiom, yet in
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32 many fundamental respects Ottoman intellectual culture remained intimately tied to the historical
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34 legacies and contemporary currents of a broader Islamic ecumene. In an academic age in which it
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36 has become standard practice to define Ottoman early modernity primarily in relation to the
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38 Mediterranean or contemporaneous European developments, we should remain mindful of just
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40 how significant continuing ties with other geographies could be.
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52 ¹ Transliteration of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish words conforms to guidelines established by the
53 *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Specific dates are given in Common Era and
54 Hijri calendars. Date ranges are given only with reference to the Common Era.

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

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

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

22 ⁵ Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly
23 Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (Cambridge, 2015), 1.

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

25 ⁷ Muhsin J. al-Musawi, *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters*, 1.

26 ⁸ See for example the remarks of H.A.R. Gibb, “Ta’rīkh,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*; and Gustave E.
27 von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: a Study in Cultural Orientation*, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1953), 282–
28 283.

29 ⁹ Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, 2d rev. ed. (Leiden, 1968), 8.

30 ¹⁰ Rosenthal, *Muslim Historiography*, 7-8.

31 ¹¹ Among many such studies, see in the context of Arab lands, Benjamin Lellouche, *Les
32 Ottomans en Égypte: historien et conquérants au XVIe siècle* (Paris, 2006); Dana Sajdi, *The
33 Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant* (Stanford,
34 CA, 2013); for the Persian context, see Sholeh Quinn, *Historical Writing During the Reign of
35 Shah ‘Abbas: Ideology, Imitation, and Legitimacy in Safavid Chronicles* (Salt Lake City, UT
36 2000); İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī and
37 the Islamcate Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, forthcoming 2016); and in the Ottoman context,
38 see Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian
39 Mustafa Âli (1541-1600)* (Princeton, N.J., 1986); Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of
40 Suleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World* (Cambridge, 2013).

41 ¹² Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, Cambridge Studies in
42 Islamic Civilization (New York, 1994); Tarif Khalidi, Prasenjit Duara, and Viren Murthy,
43 “Premodern Arabic/Islamic Historical Writing,” in *Companion to Global Historical Thought*
44 (Malden, MA, 2014), 78–91.

45 ¹³ Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 232.

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

8 ¹⁵ Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (New York, 2003); Julie Scott Meisami, *Persian*
9 *Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh, 1999); a notable exception in this
10 regard is C. P. (Charles Peter) Melville, ed., *Persian Historiography*, vol. 10, A History of
11 Persian Literature (London; New York, 2012).

12 ¹⁶ Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 333–336.

13 ¹⁷ Muṣṭafā ‘Ālī, *Künhü’l-ahbār* (Istanbul, 1277 [1860-1861]), 1:17–19.

14 ¹⁸ On the development of an Arab nationalist historiography, see Alexis Wick, “Modern
15 Historiography - Arab World,” in *Companion to Global Historical Thought*, ed. Prasenjit Duara
16 and Viren Murthy (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 308–320; for the same phenomenon
17 in Iran, see Farzin Vejdani, *Making History in Iran : Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture*
18 (Stanford, California, 2014).

19 ¹⁹ On the Islamicate social pattern, see Marshall G. S Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam:*
20 *Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago, 1974), 2:9; on the Islamic world-
21 system, see John Obert Voll, “Islam as a Community of Discourse and a World-System,” in *The*
22 *SAGE Handbook of Islamic Studies*, ed. Akbar S. Ahmed and Tamara Sonn (London, 2010), 8;
23 aspects of these concepts may be observed in Gagan Sood’s discussion of Islamicate Eurasia in
24 the early modern era, Gagan Sood, “Circulation and Exchange in Islamicate Eurasia: A Regional
25 Approach to the Early Modern World,” *Past & Present* 212:1 (2011): 113-162.

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

28 ²¹ Historians and scholars in earlier periods occasionally included discussions of history in their
29 introductions. These frequently included enumerations of the benefits of history or discussions of
30 its etymological origins. See for example, ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tā’rikh*, 1st ed.
31 (Beirut, 1997), 1:9–11; Ṣalāh al-Dīn Khalīl al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-wāfi bi’l-wafayāt*, (Leipzig,
32 1931), 1:1-46.

33 ²² Such neglect was by no means universal. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī mentions the
34 high regard with which one Egyptian historian, al-Maqrīzī, held Ibn Khaldūn’s *Muqaddima*,
35 Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw’ al-lāmi’ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi’* (Beirut,
36 1966), 4:147. On the reception of Ibn Khaldūn in the fifteenth century, see Stephen Frederic
37 Dale, *The Orange Trees of Marrakesh: Ibn Khaldun and the Science of Man* (Boston, 2015),
38 255-257.

39 ²³ Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī, *Zafarnāma*, ed. Sayyid Sa‘īd Mīr Muḥammad Ṣādiq and ‘Abd al-
40 Ḥusayn Navā’ī, vol. 2 (Tehran, 1387 [2008]), 1:23–24; For analysis of how this discussion fits in
41 Yazdī’s larger historical project, see İlker Evrim Binbaş, “Sharaf Al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi (ca. 770s-
42 858/ca. 1370s-1454): Prophecy, Politics, and Historiography in Late Medieval Islamic History”
43 (Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 2009, 236–242).

44 ²⁴ Muḥammad ibn Khāvandshāh Mīr Khvānd, *Tārīkh-i rawzat al-ṣafā* (Tehran, 1338 [1959-
45 1960]), 1:9–13.

46 ²⁵ Faḏl Allāh ibn Rūzbihān Khunjī-Iṣfahānī, *Tārīkh-i ‘ālam-ārā-yi amīnī*, ed. John E Woods,
47 (London, 1992), 80–96; for an analysis of this section, see Charles Melville, “The Historian at
48 Work,” in *Persian Historiography*, ed. Charles Melville, A History of Persian Literature, vol. X
49 (London; New York, 2012), 64–67.

50 ²⁶ Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī, *al-Ṣamārīkh fī ‘ilm al-ta’rīh: Die Dattelispen über die Wissenschaft der*
51 *Chronologie ...*, ed. Christian Friedrich Seybold (Leiden, 1894).

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²⁷ Neşri, *Cihânnümâ: 6. Kısım: Osmanlı Tarihi (687-890/1288-1485): Giriş, Metin, Kronoloji, Dizin, Tıpkıbasım*, ed. Necdet Öztürk (Istanbul, 2008), 4.

²⁸ The treatise exists as a unique manuscript: Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ījī, *Tuḥfat al-faqīr ilā ṣāhib al-sarīr*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi (Istanbul), Turhan Valide Sultan 231. Zeki Veli Togan first introduced this work to a scholarly audience in 1954, Zeki Veli Togan, “Ortaçağ İslâm Âleminde Tenkidî Tarih Telâkkîsi,” *İslâm Tetkikleri Enstitüsü Dergisi* 1 (1953): 43–49; Franz Rosenthal subsequently incorporated this treatise in the second edition of his work on Islamic historical writing, Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, 201–244.

²⁹ Felix Tauer, working independently of Togan and Rosenthal, introduced Ḥāfīz Abrū’s discussion of history in an article published in 1963: Felix Tauer, “Hâfizi Abrū sur l’historiographie,” in *Mélanges d’orientalisme offerts à Henri Massé ... à l’occasion de son 75ème anniversaire*. (Tehran, 1963), 10–25.

³⁰ Rosenthal, *Muslim Historiography*, 245–262.

³¹ Rosenthal, *Muslim Historiography*, 263–529.

³² The earliest copy of *Hasht bihisht*’s introduction is contained in an autographed copy produced while Bidlīsī was on pilgrimage in Mecca in 1512/918, Idrīs Bidlīsī, *Hasht bihisht*, 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.

³³ Fārābī, *Iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm*, ed. ‘Uthmān Amīn (Cairo, 1968); Ibn Sīna, *Tis ‘rasā’l fī al-ḥikmah wa-al-ṭabī‘īyat* (Cairo, 1908).

³⁴ Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn’s Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture* (London, 1957), 138–139; Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Orange Trees of Marrakesh*, 2.

³⁵ 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).

³⁶ ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Muḥammad al-Khwārazmī, *Mafātīḥ al-‘ulūm*, ed. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Muḥammad ‘Abd (Cairo, 1978), 5.

³⁷ Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar Rāzī, *Jāmi‘ al-‘ulūm, ya, Ḥadāyiq al-anwār fī ḥaqāyiq al-asrār: ma ‘rūf bih Kitāb-i Sittīnī*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tasbīḥī (Tehran, 1346), 3; Shīrāzī, *Durrat al-tāj li-ghurrat al-Dubāj*, ed. Muḥammad Mishkāt (Tehran, 1317), 1:71–72; 1332-1406 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, ed. Étienne Quatremère (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1970), 2:385.

³⁸ Abdurrahman Atçıl, “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.

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³⁹ ‘Aḍud al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Aḥmad Ījī, *Kitāb al-Mawāqif fī ‘ilm al-kalām*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Dasūqī ‘Aṭīyya and Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Ḥanbūlī (Cairo, 1938); A.I. Sabra, "Science and Philosophy in Medieval Islamic Theology: The Evidence from the Fourteenth Century," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabischen-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 9 (1994): 1-43.

⁴⁰ Atçıl, "Greco-Islamic Philosophy," 35.

⁴¹ For a discussion of the efflorescence of encyclopedism in fourteenth-century Mamluk lands, see Elias Muhanna, "Why Was the Fourteenth Century a Century of Arabic Encyclopaedism?" in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Jason König and Grege Woolf (Cambridge; New York, 2013), 343-356.

⁴² Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī Qalqashandī, *Kitāb Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā*, 14 vols. (Cairo, 1331 [1913]); Muḥammad ibn Mūsā Damīrī, *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, al-Ṭab‘ah 1, 4 vols. (Damascus, 2005); for a recent assessment of this encyclopedic impulse, see Maaïke van Berkel, "Opening up a World of Knowledge: Mamluk Encyclopaedias," in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Jason König and Grege Woolf (Cambridge; New York, 2013), 356–375.

⁴³ On al-Nuwayrī’s encyclopedic project, see Elias Ibrahim Muhanna, "Encyclopaedism in the Mamluk Period: The Composition of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī’s (d. 1333) Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab" (Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 2012).

⁴⁴ On al-Biṣṭāmī’s role in this movement, see Cornell H. Fleischer, "Ancient Wisdom and New Science: Prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," in *Falnama: The Book of Omens*, ed. Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı (London, 2009), 232–243, 329–330; on the role of Ṣā’ in al-Dīn Turka, see Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "The Occult Challenge to Messianism and Philosophy in Early Timurid Iran: Ibn Turka’s Lettrism as a New Metaphysics," in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam* (Leiden; Boston, 2014), 247–276.

⁴⁵ Ījī, *Tuḥfat al-faqīr*, 67b-68a.

⁴⁶ John W. Limbert, *Shiraz in the Age of Hafez: The Glory of a Medieval Persian City* (Seattle, 2004), 80.

⁴⁷ Ījī, *Tuḥfat al-faqīr*, 66a.

⁴⁸ Limbert, *Shiraz in the Age of Hafez*, 82.

⁴⁹ Ījī, *Tuḥfat al-faqīr*, 79b.

⁵⁰ Ījī, *Tuḥfat al-faqīr*, 295a/b.

⁵¹ Ījī cites his teacher’s *Mawāqif* directly as a source for his historical work, Ījī, *Tuḥfat al-faqīr*, 70b.

⁵² Ījī, *Tuḥfat al-faqīr*, 12b.

⁵³ Ījī, *Tuḥfat al-faqīr*, 17a.

⁵⁴ Ījī, *Tuḥfat al-faqīr*, 12b-13a.

⁵⁵ Ījī, *Tuḥfat al-faqīr*, 13a-17a.

⁵⁶ Ījī, *Tuḥfat al-faqīr*, 16b.

⁵⁷ On the various works of Ḥāfiẓ Abrū that contain his discourse on history and their most important manuscript copies, see Felix Tauer, "Ḥāfiẓi Abrū sur l’historiographie;" on the relationship of these works to one another, see Felix Tauer *Cinq Opuscules de Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū concernant l’histoire de l’Iran au temps de Tamerlan* (Prague, 1959), xi. One of these works is *Jughrāfiya-yi Ḥāfiẓ Abrū*, the published edition of which I have used in this article.

⁵⁸ Ḥāfiẓ Abrū, *Jughrāfiyā-yi Ḥāfiẓ Abrū: mushtamil bar jughrāfiyā-yi tāriḫī-i diyār-i ‘Arab, Maghrib, Andalus, Miṣr va Shām*, ed. Ṣādiq Sajjādī, 1st ed. (Tehran, 1996), 73.

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- ⁵⁹ Ḥāfīz Abrū, *Jughrāfiyā*, 76.
⁶⁰ Ḥāfīz Abrū, *Jughrāfiyā*, 76.
⁶¹ Ḥāfīz Abrū, *Jughrāfiyā*, 76.
⁶² Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, ed. Leone Caetani (Leiden, 1909), 1–2; Khalidī, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, 170–176.
⁶³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, 60–62.
⁶⁴ Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn’s Philosophy of History*, 288–289; Dale, *The Orange Trees of Marrakesh*, 2–4.
⁶⁵ On al-Kāfiyajī’s biography, see especially the remarks of his contemporaries, al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, 7:259–261; Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-wu’ā fī ṭabaqāt al-lughawīyīn wa-al-nuhā*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Beirut, 1979), 1:117–119.
⁶⁶ Abdurrahman Aṭçıl, “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.
⁶⁸ Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Kāfiyajī, *al-Mukhtaṣar fī ‘ilm al-ta’rīkh*, ed. Muḥammad Kamāl al-Dīn ‘Izz al-Dīn, al-Ṭab‘ah 1 (Beirut, 1990), 66; Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, 252.
⁶⁹ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-I’lān bi’l-tawbīkh li-man dhamma al-ta’rīkh*, ed. Franz Rosenthal (Baghdad, 1963), 6; Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, 270.
⁷⁰ al-Kāfiyajī, *al-Mukhtaṣar*, 65; Sakhāwī, *al-I’lān*, 7.
⁷¹ He writes: “knowledge of [history] is necessary as a community duty (*‘alā 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.
⁸⁰ Markiewicz, “The Crisis of Rule in Late Medieval Islam,” 375-384.
⁸¹ Bidlīsī alludes to some of this criticism in a private letter of complaint to Sultan Bayezid II, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi (Istanbul), 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, *Salīmshāhnāma*, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi (Istanbul), Emanet Hazinesi 1423, 19b.
⁸³ Ibn Khaldūn’s account of this meeting has been translated into English, Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibn Khaldūn and Tamerlane: Their Historic Meeting in Damascus, 1401 A.D. (803 A.H.): A Study Based on Arabic Manuscripts of Ibn Khaldūn’s “Autobiography,”* trans. Walter Joseph Fischel (Berkeley, 1952).
⁸⁴ Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, 318–320.

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- ⁸⁵ 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 ‘Abd al-Vājid ibn Muḥammad, al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-wu‘ā*, 1:117.
- ⁸⁶ al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-wu‘ā*, 1:117.
- ⁸⁷ al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 7:261.
- ⁸⁸ ‘Alī ibn Dāwūd al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbā‘ al-ḥaṣr bi-abnā‘ al-‘aṣr*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1970), 433.
- ⁸⁹ al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbā‘ al-ḥaṣr*, 441.
- ⁹⁰ al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 7:261.
- ⁹¹ al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 7:261.
- ⁹² The manuscript is preserved in the Ayasofya collection of the Süleymaniye Library. For mention of its preparation for Maḥmūd Pasha, see al-Kāfiyajī, *al-Mukhtaṣar al-mufīd fī ‘ilm al-ta’rīkh*, 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 *madrassa* 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.
- ⁹³ al-Kāfiyajī, *al-Mukhtaṣar al-mufīd fī ‘ilm al-ta’rīkh*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi (Istanbul), Ayasofya 3402.
- ⁹⁴ 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.
- ⁹⁵ Török F 59, 93b.
- ⁹⁶ 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*. (Pilis-cabas, Hungary, 2003), 111-132.
- ⁹⁷ Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court* (Bloomington, IN, 2013), 29–30, 35.
- ⁹⁸ Aḥmad ibn Muṣṭafā Taṣkōprüzade, *Miftāḥ al-sa‘āda wa-miṣbāḥ al-siyāda fī mawḍū‘āt al-‘ulūm*, ed. Kāmil Bakrī and ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Abū al-Nūr (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1968), 1:252; Nev’i Efendi, *İlimlerin özü: Netayic el-Fünun*, ed. Ömer Tolgay (Istanbul, 1995), 85.
- ⁹⁹ Kātib Çelebi, *Kashf al-Zunūn* (Istanbul, 1941-1943), 1:271.

Title:

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

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Acknowledgements:

The initial research for this article was made possible by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Award that permitted me to work in the manuscript libraries of Istanbul in 2012-2013. Additional funding for the research and writing of this article was made available from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) / ERC Starting Grant 263557 IMPAcT. In this respect, I would like to thank Judith Pfeiffer, the principal investigator of the IMPAcT project, for the welcoming and stimulating environment that she fostered in Oxford while I wrote this article. Also, I would like to thank Cornell Fleischer, John Woods, and Kaya Şahin, all of whom offered insightful suggestions and advice during the research and writing stages of this work.