

Turkish Historiography in Syria

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TACKING the subject of Syria's Turkish historiography is problematic, as Syria -understood as a separate territorial and political entity- is of relatively recent creation, a byproduct of the territorial division imposed on geographic Syria by the victorious imperialist powers of France and Great Britain following the end of World War I. It is also problematic due to the fact that the whole of geographic Syria, organized in accordance with Ottoman administrative practices into *vilayets*, for about a full four centuries had been an integral part of a Turkic entity - the historic Ottoman Empire. Given this state of affairs, it is both natural and to be expected that writings on that great imperial state should have appeared in both Damascus and Aleppo, penned by individuals who did not, however, perceive themselves as 'Syrian' or the Ottoman Empire as 'Turkic,' except perhaps in the closing decades of the 19th century and the opening years of the following century. Understood as the product of authors belonging to Syria in its manifestation as a recent territorial, sovereign and distinct political entity, Turkish historiography is both sporadic and selective, though increasing in volume. In contrast, writing about the Ottoman Empire, particularly the Syrian *vilayets within* the Ottoman Empire, was ongoing during the period in which those *vilayets* were ruled from Istanbul. But whether written during the earlier or later period, the volume of what was produced was either elicited by or in reaction to moments of real or presumed rupture. For purposes of analysis, this presentation will be organized into three distinct segments. The first will survey the 'Syrian' historiography of the Ottoman Empire as written by natives of either Damascus or Aleppo during the course of the first three centuries of Ottoman rule. The second will focus on the historiography facilitated by what is now referred to as the Print Revolution; from roughly the mid-19th century through to the outbreak of World War I. The third will examine Syrian historiography of Turkey as it developed following the rise of the two successor states of Syria and Turkey.

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**'Turkish' historiography in the Syrian vilayets of the Ottoman Empire:
The early years**

Thanks to the investigative work undertaken by a number of contemporary Syrian historians as well as others, we now know that several Arab and non-Arab libraries possess a considerable number of manuscript collections bearing on the history of the Syrian *vilayets* under Ottoman control. Some, like the anonymous *Dhikr man tawall Dimashq min al-Biklirbakiyya al-'idham fi dawlat bani 'uthman*, remain unpublished, but as the title in this instance suggests, are likely to have focused on the careers of those individuals sent directly from Istanbul to govern either the *vilayet* of Damascus or Aleppo; in this respect, they yield material historical relevance to things Turkic. Other manuscript resources have been published and figure prominently in the literature, largely owing to the dedicated efforts of later Syrian historians. Among these must be counted Salah al-Din al-Munajjid, a Syrian who devoted much of his scholarly work to gathering, editing and publishing the historical and literary legacy of his own city of Damascus, particularly as these related to the Ottoman epoch. Of great importance is his edition of Ibn Tulun's *Qudat Dimashq*, the latter himself a witness and recorder of a major rupture occurring in his time - the collapse of the Mamluk Empire in Syria and the Ottoman takeover led by the great Selim I. Ibn Tulun's equally important *A'lam al-wara bi man waliya na'iban min al-atrak bi-dimashq* has also been edited and published in Damascus, but this time by Muhammad Ahmad Dahman, who, like al-Munajjid, played a major role in producing and publishing critical editions of existing manuscripts relating to the Ottoman epoch of Syria's past. Beside his work on Ibn Tulun, al-Munajjid also produced critical editions of excerpts attributed to Ibn Jum'a and Ibn al-Qari. Consisting essentially of biographical material on the Turkic governors who were at the apex of the governing institution the Ottomans installed in their Arab provinces, al-Munajjid incorporated the excerpts into a single text bearing the title *Wulat dimashq fi al-'ahd al-'uthmani*. But there were other Syrian chroniclers who at times ventured beyond the local scene, focusing instead on subjects with an imperial dimension. One such example is that of Ibn Sinan al-Qaramani al-Dimashqi, who in his book *Akhbar al-duwal wa athar al-uwal*, devoted an entire biographical section to the lives of Ottoman sultans. That section of the manuscript was recently edited by Syrian scholar Bassam 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Jabi and published as *Tarikh salatin al-'uthman*.

There is a broad consensus among present-day practicing historians that biographical dictionaries constituted the main segment of literary production in the two Syrian *vilayets* in question. Although not always indicated by their titles, such great biographical dictionaries - authored by, for example, al-Ansari al-Shafi'i (*Nuzhat al-khater*), al-Burini (*Tarajim al-'ayan*), al-Ghazzi (*Lutf al-samar*), al-Muhibi (*Khulasat al-athar*) and al-Muradi (*Silk al-durar*) - do in fact include numerous notices relating to Turkic personalities who served as civil administrators (*bashat*) in Damascus, as judges (*qudat*) in courts of law, and as chiefs (*aghawat*) or as ordinary soldiers (*'asakir*) in the military garrisons. Of course, the same can be said of al-Ghazzi's great work dedicated to the history of Aleppo, *Nahr al-dhahab*. It is probable that none of the authors just mentioned traveled widely in the Ottoman Empire or even visited the imperial capital, but even a cursory look at their literary products will testify to the fact that they had a

keen sense of belonging to a great Muslim Empire and that they recognized and recorded the achievements, and at times failures, of the numerous Turkic officials who represented that empire locally; on that account, they can be regarded as the precursors of the tradition of Turkish historiography in modern-day Syria.

'Turkish' historiography in the Syrian vilayets of the Ottoman Empire: The Print Revolution

By the sixth decade of the 19th century, the consequences of the Print Revolution were beginning to make themselves felt in geographic Syria as a whole and, more particularly, in the two Syrian *vilayets* which concern us. Printing presses were introduced, and in time were in operation both in the large and even the small towns that dotted the area covered by these two Syrian *vilayets* as well as by other *vilayets* - such as that of Beirut, or *mutasarrifiyyas*, like those of Lebanon and Jerusalem. That revolution was accompanied by and was perhaps a major stimulus for the development of a literary renaissance, known in Arabic as *al-nahda*, which in the long run fundamentally affected the evolution of a more tractable form of written Arabic as a medium of communication and assisted in the reorientation of Arab culture as a whole. A direct product of that Print Revolution was a remarkable multiplication of books in circulation as well as the proliferation of newspapers and magazines. Books relating to the Ottoman Empire, and its constituent Arab provinces, appeared in greater numbers and more regularly. The growth in the numbers of articles dealing with the same subject grew exponentially. Much of what was written was not by penned by historians, a professional category that was not recognized locally and did not come into being until as late as the first decades of the 20th century. Nevertheless, much of what written was intended as history or had a historical dimension, and therefore merits consideration as constituting part of the historiography dealing with the Ottoman Empire and its regional manifestations. It should, of course, be noted that as in the preceding generations, so too in this epoch of enhanced literary productivity did the impetus to write arise from what were regarded as ruptures in the natural order of things, or significant detours in the political life of the Ottoman Empire, either at the regional level or in the imperial capital.

Occurring as the Print Revolution was beginning to take root, the impact of massacres that engulfed Damascus in 1860, as they had done in Mount Lebanon earlier, was much felt beyond their point of local origin, instigating active foreign intervention in the region and eventually compelling the central government to introduce dramatic alterations to age-old administrative configurations. That sanguine rupture, apart from resonating in the daily press, still in its tender years, also elicited a body of contemporary discursive literature that can be regarded as a form of Turkish historiography written from the edge of the empire. Among these must figure Mikhail Mishaqa's *Mashhad al-ayan bi-hawadith Suriyya wa Lubnan*, a moving account of the tragedy that befell his native city, the inability or unwillingness of the governor Ahmad Pasha to contain the onslaught against the native Christians, and the summary justice meted out by Fuad Pasha, the personal emissary of the sultan delegated to look into the matter and restore order in Damascus as well as in Lebanon. Belonging to the same genre of literature was the work of Chahine Makarius, a *shami* (hence Syrian) living in Egypt. Carrying the

title *Hasr al-litham 'an nakabat al-sham*, the book was printed in Cairo in 1895 and like that of his predecessor, was firmly embedded in Syria's Ottoman context. A Muslim account, appearing in print only as late as the middle decades of the 20th century, was penned by al-Sayyid Muhammad Abul Su'ud al-Hasibi. He blamed the Muslim rabble for their savagery, the Christians for provoking them with their arrogance, and the Ottoman authorities for imputing a large measure of responsibility onto the notables of the city and for sending many of them to the gallows. Yet he seemed to understand that the strains to which civil society in Damascus was exposed at the time were the consequence of the reforms (*Tanzimat-i Khayriyya*) that were ongoing both in Syria as well as other parts of the Ottoman Empire. Without doubt, the *Tanzimat* represented a significant turning point in the history of the late Ottoman Empire and has been treated as such in the modern historiography devoted to it. But there is not much on this topic in the contemporary literature emanating from either *vilayet*. Mishaqa's *al-Jawab 'ala iqtirah al-ahbab*, apart from a few excerpts still largely in manuscript form, contains some material related to the early introduction of reform measures in Damascus; there is also a book translated from Turkish by Syrian Muhammad Tawfiq Jana, printed in Beirut in 1911 under the title *Waqi'at al-sultan 'Abd al-'Aziz*.

Much of the text, we are told, extols the reform program and achievements of Midhat Pasha, both in his capacity as the father of the first Ottoman constitution as well as his governorship of the *vilayet* of Damascus for a brief spell beginning in 1878. Later Syrian historians, who will be noted in due course, have devoted much attention to Midhat and his effort to reform Ottoman governance in that *vilayet*. Yet it should be noted that he earned contemporary recognition as well both in the burgeoning periodical press -represented, for example, by Butrus al-Bustani's great *al-Jinan*- and in books dedicated to his life and career. Significant in this context is *Tarikh Midhat Pasha*, a book published in 1910 in Alexandria and written by a Jew, Ezra Sassoon, who before migrating to Egypt had been Aleppo's publications inspector as well as a teacher in government schools.

Midhat's nemesis, namely Abdulhamid II, both in his time and later, correctly received greater attention -for apart from his longevity as Sultan, he bestowed, suspended and, under duress, restored the Ottoman Empire's single constitution, as well as reorienting the empire's self-identity. In his lifetime as sultan and caliph, Abdulhamid had a large following and ardent supporters among his Arab and Muslim subjects, many of whom can be described as Syrian. The leading figure in this respect was the sultan's confidant and advisor, Abu al-Huda al-Sayyadi. In all his writings, as for example in the introduction to his *Tanwir al-absar*, he never failed to extol his benefactor. But the zenith of his glorification occurs in his *Da'i al-rashad li sabil al-ittihad wal-inqiyad*, published in Istanbul. In that short text, al-Sayyadi links the fate of a beleaguered Islam to the endurance of the rule of Abdulhamid II, to the need for the *umma* to regain its unity under his rule and extend to him unconditional obedience. Similar sentiments can be found in the works of Yusuf al-Nabahani, a member of Abu al-Huda's coterie equally committed to the perpetuation of Ottoman rule under Abdulhamid, as even a cursory reading of his *Al-Ahadith al-arba'in fi wujub ta'at amir al-mu'minin* will reveal. But apart from counseling submission, al-Nabahani also pointed to the remarkable achieve-

ments of the sultan in the course of his long reign. Such was the gist of his *Khulasat al-bayan fi ba'd ma'athir mawlana al-sultan 'Abdulhamid al-thani*. This was also, at least in part, the message contained in Muhammad 'Arif al-Husayni's *Al-Sa'adah al-namiya al-abadiyya fi al-sikka al-hijaziyya al-hadidiyya*. Unpublished before 1971, this work by a Damascene dignitary was in a way an exercise in propaganda for the line that would carry pilgrims to the two holy sites of Medina and Mecca; it was also a testament to the lingering support Abdulhamid continued to elicit even on the eve of his overthrow. In fact, some anti-Hamidian literature (by implication if not directly) was penned by 'Syrians' even in the hey-day of the Sultan's progressively growing autocratic rule. Such, certainly, was the case of al-Kawakibi's *Tabai' al-istibdad* as well as his *Umm al-qura*.

The restoration of the constitution in 1908 and the eventual overthrow of Abdulhamid in the following year occasioned, at least in some quarters of the Arab provinces, great rejoicing both in the popular press as well as in more general works produced specifically to mark this significant rupture in the political history of the Ottoman Empire and the dawn in it of a new kind of regional politics. Much though by no means all of what was written in the press was reproduced in a book compiled by Abd al-Masih Antaki, judging by his surname a man of Syrian origin who, it appears, had immigrated to Egypt. Published in Cairo in 1909, the work bore the title *Nayl al-amani fi al-dustur al-'uthmani* and comprised articles published in Arabic, Turkish and European papers hailing the dawn of a new era. Books dedicated to the coup executed by the Young Turks included that of Jurgi Zaydan, a Syrian émigrés to Egypt and founder of the renowned *al-Hilal* periodical, entitled *Al-Inqilab al-'uthmani*. In fact, it was in the same periodical that another leading Arab intellectual, hailing from what at the time was regarded as southern Syria, wrote along the same lines; the articles of Ruhi al-Khalidi were subsequently gathered into a book bearing the title *al-Inqilab al-'uthmani wa turkiyya al-fata*. The few years separating the Young Turk takeover and the outbreak of World War I were for the Syrian *vilayets* pregnant with political developments. For one thing, a semblance of representative government, based on a regular election process, was not only introduced, but also more or less implemented. Elections were held in 1908, 1912 and in 1914 that sent Arab parliamentarians to *Majlis al-mab'u than* in Istanbul. Attempts on the part of some Syrian delegates, like Shukri al-'Asali, Shafiq Mu'ayyad al-'Azm and Abdulhamid al-Zaharawi, to chart for themselves a regional policy at variance with that of the Committee of Union and Progress, generated great tension and ultimately led to a virtual rift between them and the CUP. This descent into disagreement was clearly reflected in Zaharawi's Istanbul-based *al-Hadara*. The various articles he wrote as member of the *mab'u than* have recently reappeared in his five-volume *al-A'mal al-Kamila*, edited by several hands but issued on behalf of the Syrian Ministry of Culture. The CUP's successful attempt to foreclose upon the re-election of dissident Arab parliamentarians, mostly by foul means, generated much anger, as is evidenced in the book of Haqqi al-'Azm, scion of a rich Syrian family, entitled *Haqa'iq 'an al-intikhabat fi al-'Iraq wa Filastin wa Suriyya*. There are some indications that the aforementioned Abd al-Masih Antaki had something to say about the same matter, as illustrated by a book attributed to him entitled *Harb al-*

intikhabat fi al-dawla al-'aliyya al-'uthmaniyya. We now know that the controversy surrounding the 1912 elections was just one episode in the deepening struggle that raged between the CUP, in pursuit of a centralizing imperial program, and various Arab individuals and groups agitating for a greater measure of Arab provincial autonomy. In the public sphere, that struggle was mostly fought over the pages of the daily press, which is not here our concern. One book did appear, however, which contained ample material related to the issue; it bore the title *al-Mu'tamar al-'arabi al-awwal*, and was published in Cairo in 1913. Its 'Syrian' connection derives from the fact that its publication was at the behest of the Higher Committee of the Ottoman Decentralization Party, formed by Syrian émigrés including, among others, Rafiq al-'Azm, head of the party's Higher Committee. He in fact forcefully expressed his opinion on the matter in a book published in Cairo under the title *al-Jami'a al-'uthmaniyya wa al-'asabiyya al-turkiyya*.

The heated controversy between the two wings of the Ottoman Empire -the centralizing Committee of Union and Progress on the one hand and the Arab and non-Arab decentralists on the other- was overtaken by the outbreak of World War I, an event that was to change the face of the region for all time. During the span in which the war was being fought, little was being written about the Ottoman Empire in its Arab provinces. But at least two works were published in Damascus, probably edited by an important Syrian intellectual who, despite his earlier Arabist stance, remained loyal to the dying Ottoman Empire until the very end. The intellectual in question was none other than prominent Damascene journalist and litterateur Muhammad Kurd 'Ali. In the early phases of the war, he authored an account of Enver Pasha's inspection tour of the Hijaz and Syria and called it *al-Rihla al-anwariyya ila al-asqa' al-hijaziyya wa al-shamiyya*. Sometime later on in the war, he led a Syrian delegation to Gallipoli and then to the capital Istanbul to commemorate the heroic performance of Ottoman men and arms in repulsing Allied efforts to land troops in that peninsula, and also so that he could reiterate Arab loyalty to the historic Ottoman Empire. Edited by himself and some others, the resulting book was entitled *al-Bi'tha al-'ilmiyya ila dar al-khilafa al-islamiyya*. In all likelihood, these were the last two books authored by a Syrian during the actual years of war. It should be pointed out, however, that two Turkish books dealing specifically with the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war and its conduct in Syria were translated into Arabic by Syrian Fu'ad al-Midani: *Kayfa dakhalat Turkiyya al-harb al-'alamiyya* and *Suriyya wa Lubnan fi al-harb al-'alamiyya*. Another Syrian, Najib al-Armanazi, translated from Turkish a book that he titled *Kayf ghazawna Misr*.

'Turkish' historiography in the successor state of Syria

In pursuit of their imperial ambitions, the allied powers created successor states in several of the Arab provinces that once belonged to the now-defunct Ottoman Empire, placing them under direct control as mandated territories. Thus it was that what eventually became known as the Syrian state came into being. In that new political configuration, the historic Ottoman Empire was, necessarily, a receding memory. Nevertheless, a few Syrians continued to recall the pre-war Ottoman epoch; some others commented on Turkey's latest manifestation as a new revolutionary and republican order, while a later

generation, mostly of academicians, wrote more extensively about the Ottoman Empire as an object of historical investigation.

One publication, a kind fan eyewitness account that recalled the closing epoch of the Ottoman Empire in Syria, is Muhammad Kurd 'Ali's *Al-Mudhakkirat*, parts of which have been translated into English. Most of the first volume of the said work, which first appeared in 1948, conveys a vivid description of the entangled, at times treacherous politics that prevailed in the Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire on the eve of and during World War I. Here one can encounter the gyrations of the politics of the Committee of Union and Progress and its representatives, including the notorious Jamal Pasha, and how such politics were interpreted by the local Arab population, or to be more precise, the intellectuals among them. A second multi-volume publication, intended as memoirs recalling in part the author's experiences, was penned by a Syrian who served for many years in the Ottoman judicial system. Beginning in 1964, Yusuf al-Hakim issued two books in which the Ottoman Empire loomed large: *Suriyya wa al-'ahd al-'uthmani* and *Bayrut wa Lubnan fi 'ahd al-'uthman*. Both books are noteworthy in that they provide the reader not only with an overview of the professional career of a high civil servant and a vivid evocation of the various Arab locations to which his employment took him, but also an insider's view of the organization and function of Ottoman administrative systems as they existed immediately before the demise of the empire itself. Recollections of Ottoman days past also characterize the memoirs written by Faris al-Khuri, a prominent Syrian personality who commenced a distinguished political career as a representative in the Ottoman Parliament following the final election for that body in the year 1914. His book first appeared in 1935 and bore the title *Awraq Faris al-Khuri*; it is of particular importance for recording the perils inherent in being close to an imperial authority at the brink of collapse.

The rise of a republican regime in Turkey, leading to the dual abolition of the historic Ottoman Sultanate and the venerable institution of the Caliphate, provoked both worldwide Muslim anxiety and equally much comment. But surprisingly, it did not elicit a considerable body of contemporary writing, at least from the Syria that had been recently reconfigured. The heroic role played by Kemal Ataturk in repulsing colonial attacks on the Turkish heartland was lauded and upheld as an example to be emulated by equally beleaguered Arabs. But this occurred mainly in the daily or periodical press, whose circulation at the time was limited and probably left no lasting imprint. The Turkish memoirs of Kemal al-Din Pasha, for example, were translated by the indefatigable Fu'ad al-Midani and given the subtitle *Min al-saltana al-'uthmaniyya ila al-Jumhuriyya*. But even these memoirs had initially appeared in the Lebanese press. This does not mean that the experiment being conducted in Turkey was entirely overlooked; witness, for example, the article written in 1934 by then prominent Syrian politician Abdul Rahman Shahbandar in the Egypt-based *al-Muqtataf*, entitled "The Turkish Kemalist Renaissance: or, Life after Death." Still, it should be noted that the abrupt scrapping of the sultanate and the more scandalous abolition of the Caliphate did not, as happened elsewhere in Muslim lands, stir much feeling or great opposition in Syria. A more sustained academic and more popular concern with these matters, as bibliographic surveys testify, only developed at a later point in time.

As an expression of popular concern, reference must first be made to a unique publication that, in illustrated serial form comprising 15 parts in its entirety, chronicled the long reign of Abdulhamid II from his ascension to the throne through to his eventual deposition. Begun in 1939, that publication bore the title '*Asr al-sultan 'Abd al-Hamid wa atharuhu fi al-aqtar al-'arabiyya, 1876-1909*'. In many ways it represented a popular farewell tinged with nostalgia for an age gone by that was in every way dramatically different from the French mandatory system which now governed Syria or the Westernizing regime ensconced in Ankara.

It is perhaps not unfair to say that the publication which inaugurated the treatment of the Ottoman Empire and its republican rebirth as an object of serious historical investigation, was Muhammad Kurd 'Ali's *Khitat al-Sham*. Notwithstanding the traditional resonance of the title, this six-volume work was a model of modern historical scholarship in terms of both its methodology and overall conception, covering the political, social and cultural history of Syria from early Muslim times right up to the establishment of the French mandate. At least two of its volumes address in detail the Ottoman era as an integral constituent of Syria's past that decisively impacted every aspect of its political, socio-economic and intellectual life. In a way, the *Khitat* charted, or at least anticipated, the course which modern historical writing about Syria's long Ottoman past was to take. It can be argued that the practice of modern historical writing in relationship to that past was a product of the development of modern education in mandatory Syria and the establishment in the country of a growing number of universities, beginning under the French mandate but continuing at a quicker tempo after the achievement of Syrian independence. Thus it was that in the last few decades -inspired to a great degree by the teaching of Nur al-Din Hattum- Syrian graduates of these universities or of sister universities in neighboring Arab countries produced a considerable body of literature worthy of re-examination, often relying on Ottoman archives. Among these Syrian historians of note must be reckoned 'Abd al-Karim Gharaybi, whose book *Al-'Arab wa al-Atrak*, published in Damascus in 1961, traced the evolution of Arab-Turkish relations during the course, as he put it, of a thousand years. Published a year later, his book *Suriyya fi al-qarn al-tasi* '*ashar* had a great deal to say about the Ottoman Empire and the way in which, under the leadership of Midhat Pasha, it tried to modernize itself and along with this the Syrian provinces under its control. More important, perhaps, has been the work of Abd al-Karim Rafeq. His landmark English publication, appearing in 1966 under the title *The Province of Damascus, 1723-1783*, in effect inaugurated a kind of historical reorientation, directing historians to intensively mine Ottoman source materials in order to contextualize Syrian history within its Ottoman habitat, one that had endured for no less than four centuries. Notwithstanding his massive utilization of primary Arabic sources, in particular those pertaining to law court registers, his most important contribution lay in underlining the importance of Ottoman source materials in properly understanding of Syria's historical evolution. This was stated both explicitly and in the manner in which he conducted his research, in his two Arabic books bearing the titles *Al-'Arab wa al-'uthmaniyyun* and *Bilad al-Sham wa Misr min al-fath al-'uthmani ila hamlet Nabulion Bonabart* (which he penned earlier). Rafeq was also a pioneer, as perhaps one of the earliest Syrian historians to investigate

Syrian-Turkish relations following the final retreat of Ottoman imperial power from the region; his article “Al-‘Alaqa al-suriyya al-turkiyya, 1918-1922” testifies to that fact. Writing at a later date, another Syrian historian, associated with the University of Aleppo rather than that of Damascus, as in the two preceding cases, expressed his views on Arab-Turkish relations as they unraveled in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of World War I and as it was being fought – again, relying heavily on Ottoman archival material in addition to the Arabic daily press. Tawfiq Biru’s two books were entitled, respectively, *Al-‘Arab wa al-turk fi al- ‘ahd al-dusturi al- ‘uthmani, 1908-1914* and *Al-Qadiyya al- ‘arabiyya fi al-harb al-‘alamiyya al-ula, 1918-1914*. To a limited degree, both publications reflect a nationalist strain in favor of the Arab cause that, he argued, the Turks could not tolerate and the Allied powers betrayed. In the near past, a Committee for the Writing of Arab History, housed in the University of Damascus, pioneered the publication of a scholarly, refereed periodical bearing the title *Dirasat Tarikhiyya*. From the very start, the periodical devoted much space to the region’s Ottoman past; it continues to do through to the present day, in terms of space occupied and number of articles included attributing disproportionate attention to that epoch of Syrian history. Significant, however, has been the recent attempt on the part of some Syrian historians to study Ottoman civilization in and of itself rather than as a mere political backdrop to Syrian history. Such, for instance, is what Muhammad Harb tried to do in his *Al-‘Uthmaniyyun fi al-tarikh wa al-hadara*, a book that was published in Damascus as early as 1989. This is equally true of the work of both Ali Hassun and Muhammad Ali ‘Amir. In 1980, the former published a general history of the empire’s foreign relations entitled *Tarikh al-dawla al-‘uthmaniyya wa ‘alaqataha al-kharijiyya*, while in 2001, the latter wrote about *Al-Dawla al-‘uthmaniyya: traikh wa watha’iq*. Without much mention of the empire’s Arab provinces, the second author focuses on the establishment of the empire, its military and administrative structures as well as the mode of operation of the central government in Istanbul.

A survey of the modern Syrian literature devoted to the pre-war Ottoman period and its successor Turkish republic suggests that a number of Turkish personalities appear to have captured the Syrian imagination and elicited a continuous body of writing. Prominent among these is Sultan Abdulhamid II. In the closing year of the 20th century, 1999, the same Muhammad Harb published in Damascus a book entitled *Al-Sultan Abdulhamid al-thani: akhir al-salatin al-‘uthmaniyyin al-kibar*. In contrast with the earlier Syrian condemnatory accounts of his reign, alluded to above, this work is both revisionary and generally laudatory. This revisionary stance also characterizes the book published in Damascus in 2004 by Muhammad al-Hilali, *Al-Sultan Abdulhamid al-thani bayn al-insaf wa al-juhud*. As the title implies, this work represents an attempt to convey a more balanced and more favorable estimation of that sultan’s long reign, particularly his negative reaction to Zionist designs. A second but later Ottoman politician who cast a long shadow in what can be described as Arab-Turkish relations is Jamal Pasha. But unlike the case of the sultan whom he helped overthrow, current Syrian historical literature continues to be deprecatory for reasons having to do with his brutal conduct toward Arab representatives during World War I as well as his presumed culpability in the atrocities committed against the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire.

Certainly this is the gist of Naim al-Yafi's book entitled *Jamal Basha al-safah: dirasa fi al-shaksiyya wa al-tarikh*. In the same vein, but in even chiller tones, is the book *Al-Mashaniq al- 'arabiyya wa al-majazir al-armaniyya*. Published in 1992 in Damascus, this book represents a translation by A. Kishishian of the trial of the remnants of the Central Committee of Union and Progress during 1919-1920 and reproduced in the official *Takvimi Wekai*. The historian mentioned above, Tawfiq Biru, in 1992 translated into Arabic a work attributed to Mulan Zadeh Rif'at bearing the title *Al-wajh al-khafi lil-inqilab al-turki*, in which the policies of the Committee of Union and Progress vis-à-vis Arabs and Armenians are disclosed, very much to the former's discredit.

The same survey of Syrian historical literature shows the endurance of interest in the Ottoman Turkic legacy. But in a way, recent studies are somewhat more focused, departing from the tendency to merely recount political developments in different words and concentrating instead on subjects or topics of cultural import. Such a class of books includes Naim al-Yafi's *Surat al-turki fi al-shi'r al-'arabi al-hadith*, which surveys the image of the Turk as was represented in local Arabic and mahjari literature and covers the period of 1870-1920. Another example of this refinement of focus and variation of subject occurs in Lutfi Lutfi's *Al-tarikh al-'umrani li-Dimashq khilal al-hukm al-'uthmani*. It traces Damascus's urban evolution and the role of Ottoman structural and architectural styles in decisively influencing that expansion. A complement to Lutfi's work is Khariyya Qasimiyya's *Hayat Dimashq al-ijtim'iyya* as it was depicted by contemporaries in the closing years of the Ottoman era. The two-volume work of Yusuf Nu'aisa portrays Damascene society at a somewhat earlier period. Published in 1986, it bears the title *Mujtama' madinat Dimashq, 1772-1840*. Even the little hamlet of Idlib and its surrounding region in northern Syria has now been the object of serious study; Abdulhamid Mashlah published a work in 2004 entitled *Idlib wa mantiqatuha fi al-'ahd al-'uthmani: dirasa ijtim'iyya, iqtisadiyya, idariyya*. The print revolution, the press that it engendered and the influence it exercised has too received scholarly attention. Recently, in 2009, Suhayl al-Maladhi published *Al-Sahafa al-shamiyya al-muhajira wa 'alamuha fi al-'ahd al-'uthmani*.

Notwithstanding the new methodological departures delineated above, concern with the political history of Syria under the Ottomans and the history of Turkey as an independent state has not completely abetted. Amal Bashshur, herself of Syrian extraction, has again visited the implementation of the *Tanzimat* in Syria and Lebanon, in a book entitled *Siriyya wa Lubnan fi 'asr al-islam al-'uthmani*. Contemporary political developments in Turkey, the policies it pursues and the perils it has to endure also receive Syrian attention. In 1997, sometime before the latest Turkish opening to its Arab neighborhood, Sulayman al-Madani published a book entitled *Turkiyya al-yahudiyya*, accusing various Turkish regimes of being complicit with Israel in a joint effort to enfeeble Syria and the Arabs by extension. But he saw some possibility of relief from that joint onslaught in the rise of the Turkish Refah Party to political prominence. In 2001, Muhammad Taha al-Jasir treated the same subject but with a different slant, suggesting that present-day Turkey -in his opinion the arena for the struggle between East and West- had to be rescued from a triple conspiracy executed by the West, Zionism and

free masonry. Like al-Madani before him, he too adhered to the view that the emerging, religiously inclined Turkish parties had a major role to play in this mighty struggle. Entitled *Turkiyya midan al-sira' bayn al-sharq wa al-gharb*, the book was published in 2001. One imagines that many books hawking the same line of thought are likely to appear before long.

This survey of the literature is proof that writing about Turkey, as an Ottoman Empire encompassing the Arab East and as a Turkish Republic reconnecting with its Arab and Muslim surroundings, is an ongoing activity in Syria; all indications are that this body of writing is likely to grow even more in the years to come.

Turkish Historiography in Syria

Samir SEIKALY

Abstract

The Syrian historiographical tradition of writing about Turkey, in its Imperial manifestation and subsequent Republican configuration, has a long and continuing genealogy, beginning with Syria's incorporation into the Empire at the time of the great Sultan Selim and continuing up to the present day. Though the process of writing was more or less continuous, the tempo tended to change, usually gathering speed at significant moments of rupture or dramatic change as, for instance, at the moment of incorporation into the Empire, the introduction of reform within it, the inauguration of parliamentary rule and, ultimately, the establishment of a Republican regime. The analysis and portrayal of this rich and varied historiography is divided into three principal segments; the first one relating to the early years of the Syrian vilayets under Ottoman control, the second to Syrian historical production during what is known as the Print Revolution, and, finally, the development of what is described as the Syrian successor state.

The body of historical literature produced in Syria pertaining to Turkey as an Empire and a Republic allows insights into the local workings of the Ottoman Empire at its periphery, into the nature of the socio-cultural and political contacts between imperial center and distant provinces as well as the vagaries of changing political relations between two republican successor states as all were perceived from the local vantage points of Damascus and Aleppo.

Keywords: Historiography, Ibn Tulun, al-Ghazzi, Salah al-Din al-Munajjid, the Print Revolution, Tanzimat-i Khayriyya, 'Abdulhamid II, Young Turk Revolution, Republican Regime.