

Ibn Taghrībirdī's portrayal of the first Mamluk rulers¹

Introduction

In studies of Mamluk historiography we are not any more content to treat the chronicles as sources for finding out "what really happened." Instead, we are increasingly seeing them as literary products, where the chroniclers present their interpretation of the events and persons involved.² The chroniclers did not write their texts to any unspecified future generations but had more often than not a contemporary audience as their primary target. Ibn Taghrībirdī (ca. 812/1409-10–874/1470) is a case to point as the author explicitly mentioned that he started to write his chronicle *al-Nujūm* for Sulṭān Jaqmaq's son Muḥammad. He was inspired by Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī who had acted as the companion of various sulṭāns and whose sessions with Sulṭān al-Ashraf Barsbāy (ruled 825/1422–841/1438) Ibn Taghrībirdī had himself witnessed. He reported how the Sulṭān expressed his appreciation of al-ʿAynī by pointing out that it was al-ʿAynī who had taught him about ruling and about being a good Muslim.³ Obviously, Ibn Taghrībirdī's intention was to be the mentor of Muḥammad ibn Jaqmaq and play a similar role in his future court.⁴

1 The article develops the ideas expressed in my article "Ibn Taghrībirdī's voice" (Perho 2013) and in the lecture "Ibn Taghrībirdī's Voice. His Evaluation of the First Mamluk Rulers" (Ulrich Haarmann Memorial Lecture) that I gave in Bonn in March 2013. In the discussion that followed my lecture, Amalia Levanoni suggested that I should also look into Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī's description of the events. I have taken the opportunity to do so in the present article.

2 A discussion of this shift towards narratives and authors is recently provided by Konrad Hirschler (2013) 159–186.

3 Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm*, 15:110-111.

4 Muḥammad ibn Jaqmaq died before his father and never became sulṭān. In his obituary of Muḥammad ibn Jaqmaq Ibn Taghrībirdī mentions their close friendship and

In the present article I will examine Ibn Taghribirdī's description of three rulers: Shajar al-Durr (ruled 648/1250), Aybak (ruled 648/1250–655/1257) and Qutuz (ruled 657/1259–658/1260). I will compare his portrayals to those of his two teachers, al-Maqrizī (766/1364–845/1422) and Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī (762/1360–855/1451). I have chosen to focus on the period of the transition from Ayyubid to Mamluk rule as it took place more than a century before the lifetimes of the three historians. Consequently they all had to select from earlier sources the details that they presented in their chronicles. My aim is to clarify through comparison the choices Ibn Taghribirdī made in presenting the three rulers and to determine what was the picture he wanted to draw in describing them.

Three historians and their chronicles

Ibn Taghribirdī was one of the *awlād al-nās*, i.e. sons of high ranking Mamluks. He received a good education and was well-connected with both the military and civilian elites. Ibn Taghribirdī had good relationships with the court and high officials but he seems to have been economically independent⁵ and thus did not need patrons to provide him with salaried appointments. His major historical work, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fi mulūk Miṣr al-qāhira*,⁶ differs from most chronicles in that it is organised according to reigns of the various rulers starting with the accession and concluding with remarks that function as an assessment of the ruler's characteristics.

In contrast to Ibn Taghribirdī, both Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and al-Maqrizī were members of long-standing scholarly families. They enjoyed the patronage of *amīrs* and *sultāns* who granted them various

Muḥammad's more than positive reaction to Ibn Taghribirdī's plans for writing about history (Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-Nujūm*, 15:504).

5 Popper (1956), 379–381. Hamza (2008), 146–149.

6 The events referred to in the present article are recorded in vols 6 and 7 in the edition Dār al-kutub al-miṣriya:Cairo 1936-1938.

bureaucratic positions. Al-ʿAynī's public career was successful and lasted to his old age, whereas al-Maqrīzī's career stalled already in 810/1408 and he failed to secure himself further appointments.⁷ The two historians' chronicles are more clearly annals than Ibn Taghribirdī's *al-Nujūm*. Al-Maqrīzī's *al-Sulūk li-maʿrifat al-mulūk*⁸ proceeds chronologically and is at times a day-by-day account of events. Also al-ʿAynī's *ʿIqd al-jumān fi tārikh ahl al-zamān*⁹ has a similar arrangement and the main difference, at least in connection to the events referred to in this article, is that al-ʿAynī was more meticulous in naming the earlier historians whose works he quoted, whereas al-Maqrīzī did not reveal his sources.

Shajar al-Durr

The Ayyubid Sulṭān al-Šāliḥ died in 647/1249 in al-Manṣūra where the Mamluk army was fighting against Frankish crusaders who had landed in Egypt earlier the same year. His death was kept secret until his son Tūrān Shāh reached from Mesopotamia to Egypt to take the reigns of power. Tūrān Shāh brought with him his own Mamluks intending to replace his father's Mamluks. This led to a conflict that quickly escalated when

7 Broadbridge (1999), 91–96.

8 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk li-maʿrifat al-mulūk*. Vol. 1. Ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Ziyāda. Dār al-kutub al-miṣriya: Cairo 1936.

9 A partial edition of the years 624/1226–673/1274-5 can be found in *Recueil des Historiens Croisades. Historiens Orientaux*. Tome 2, 181–250. The edition is based on one manuscript (Bibliothèque Nationale no 757 supplement arabe and no 1543 du nouveau catalogue) and is titled "Muntakhabāt min kitāb ʿIqd al-jumān li-Badr al-Din al-ʿAynī." The editors have focused on selecting those passages of al-ʿAynī's text that relate to the Crusades and thus many of the passages relevant to the present article are not included. Therefore, I have used the edition that is available at www.al-mostafa.com and can be downloaded as a pdf. The edition covers the years 648–707 H but unfortunately the document does not give any details on the manuscript(s) or the editor(s). The passages that are present both in *Recueil* and in *al-mostafa.com* appear identical except that the latter has no editorial notes. Another electronic edition is available at www.shamela.ws but also here no information is given on the manuscript(s) or editor(s). The edition covers the same period as *al-mostafa.com* edition and also otherwise the two editions seem to be identical. If not otherwise indicated my references are to *al-mostafa.com* edition and the page references are to their pdf.

The 15th century historian Ibn Taghrībirdī was one of the sons of Mamluks who succeeded in building a scholarly career. His knowledge of the language, customs and values of the Mamluk court allowed him to present the actions of the ruling elite in a manner that often differed from the reports of his scholarly colleagues. The present article examines the picture that Ibn Taghrībirdī painted of the rulers Shajar al-Durr, Aybak and Qūṭuz. His presentation is contrasted to the portrayals provided by his two teachers Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and al-Maqrīzī.

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