



A Study of Historical Biographical Dictionaries with an Emphasis on Motives, Methods and References for Writing Them

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ABSTRACT

One type of Islamic historiography is through historical biographical dictionaries. The rise and development of this type of historiography in the seventh century AH, coincided with the establishment of the Mamluk Sultanate (648-922 AH). Although it was Yāqūt al-Hamawī (626 AH), the author of *Mu'jam al-udabā'*, who wrote the first of these sources in the Islamic history, Ibn Khallikan (681 AH), through writing most renowned work *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, entered biographical dictionary writing in a new phase as a profession and elevated it. In fact, subsequent biographical dictionaries like *al-Wafī Belwafiat* by al-Safdi, *Fawat al-Fawayat* by Ibn Shaker, *Al-Manhal al-Safī* by Ibn Taghribirdi complement *Wafayāt al-A'yān*. Historical dictionaries enjoy a high status and importance in Islamic historical studies especially in the realm of the Islamic culture and civilization such that without referring to them, research in this realm as well as other realms is impossible. In addition to having a brief look at the status of historiographies during this sultanate and how biographical dictionaries were formed, this study aims to review and analyze the resources, methods and motives for such historical works.

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Introduction

Compiling biographical dictionaries roughly began with the establishment of the Mamluk Sultanate (648-922 AH) in their territory Syria and Egypt. Although the first so-called biographical dictionary which was limited to covering a few number of the Islamic World's celebrities, i.e., the learned men, was compiled by Yaqut al-Hamawi, the author of *Mu'jam al-udabā'*, Ibn Khallikan's (681 AH) *Wafayāt al-a'yān* is regarded as the first biographical dictionary due to its accuracy in recording notable men's deaths, wide and critical coverage of biographical evaluations, and its great literary style. Nevertheless, Ibn Khallikan entered biographical dictionary writing in a new phase as a profession and elevated it. In fact, other biographical dictionaries like *al-Wafī Belwafiat* by al-Safdi, *Fawat al-Fawayat* by Ibn Shaker al-Kutubi, *Al-Manhal al-Safdi* by Ibn Taghribirdi complement *Wafayāt al-a'yān*.

This form of historiography, because of containing the biographical evaluation of notable men and celebrities like Muslim scholars and scientists, enjoys a high status and importance in the process of Islamic historical studies especially in the realm of the Islamic culture and civilization such that without referring to them research in this realm as well as other realms is impossible.

In the present research, we seek to answer these questions:

1. What was the motive of biographical dictionaries' authors for writing such works?
2. What methods did biographical dictionaries' authors utilized in their historiography?
3. What were the sources of such historical works?

This research is based on the assumption that the main motivation of biographical dictionary writers was mainly *teaching lessons* and *preserving and celebrating their contemporary* notable men. They used three methods, i.e., narrative, analytical, and combined (narrative-analytical) in their

biographical notes. They also utilized different written and oral sources for preparing their biographical notes.

Review of the literature

A scrutiny of the available research indicates that no study similar to the present paper has so far been conducted. Works like "*Wafayāt al-A'yān: the First Biographical Dictionary*" by Morteza Asadi, "*The Literature of Biography Writing*" by Hamilton Gibb, "*Safdi: Biography Writer of His Contemporaries*" by Donald Little, "*Al-Tārīkh al-Arabī va al-Muwarekhūn*" by Mustafa Shaker, and "*Al-Tarajim fi taras al-Arabī*" by Abdul Sattar al-Halujī have only referred to motives, methodology, and the resources of historical dictionaries briefly, because they have dealt with many areas than just focusing on the topic of their titles. Naturally, attempting to analyze these issues covers a little part of their work. Moreover, all biographical dictionaries have not been covered in these works and they lack a critical look on such dictionaries.

By utilizing the strong points in the past researches and referring to the biographical dictionaries compiled during the Mamluk Sultanate, the present study tries to scrutinize them technically and thoroughly.

Definition, Evolution, and Development Historical Dictionaries

Definition of Historical Dictionaries and Their Relationship with the History

Biographical dictionaries, like Yaqut al-Hamawī's *Mu'jam al-udabā'* and Ibn Khallikan's *Wafayāt al-A'yān* are, are books containing alphabetical lists of people's names followed by historical information (Sajadi and Alamzadeh, 1996; Abdulqani Hasan, nd). Such a definition excludes all biographical books compiled on the basis of an annals system. Accordingly, many of the works such as *Nuzhat al-ibba'* by Kamāl al-Din Abu al-Barakāt al-Anbārī (577 AH) which seems to be the first general biographical dictionary, *Tarājim Rijāl al-Qarnayn al-Sādis wa-al-Sābi'* by Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Shāma (665 AH), *Inba' al-*

Ghumar by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalāni, Shadharāt al-Dhahab by Ibn 'Imād al-Hanbali (1089 AH) and similar works like these cannot be regarded as biographical dictionaries. Readers and researchers encounter lots of problems when reading these works because for finding a given biographical note they should know the exact demise date of the person they are looking for.

Attending to the biography of notable men and celebrities in various political, scientific and cultural arenas is one of the most prominent and important aspects of the history of science. By the definition Rosenthal (1956) provides for history¹, he considers biography writing as a part of the history and writes that all Muslims truly believed that all policies had been in the hands of people and in the light of the virtues and their personal experiences we can understand them (Also see Honey, 1981; Khazar, 2010). From his view point, for many Muslims history is almost synonymous with biography. Al-Sakhawi the author of a major historical biographical dictionary believed that history as a technical term should firstly deal with the lives and biographies of the great and notable men and then deal with the events and incidences (Gibb, nd). On the importance of writing the biography of the great and notable men, al-Sakhawi, in his *al-alan bi-al-tawbikh*, writes that authoring the biography of a Muslim is like making him alive; and one who reads that biography, it is like making a pilgrimage to see that Muslim; and one who makes someone alive, it is like reviving all people (Al-Sakhawi 1413 AH, p. 56). There is a great and close relationship between the history and science of biography writing. Because it is people who ignite the engine of the history and influence it; as a result, historians cannot ignore people's biographies. So in addition to general history books, especially the general history books from the 6th century AH onward, they may write biographies in the form of independent books or in the form of historical biographical dictionaries. Here, it should be noted that the biographical notes within historical biographical dictionaries are not void of political and historical events, especially if those notes belong to caliphs, sultans, ministers, and commanders, etc. Al-Haluji (2008), a contemporary Egyptian historian and a biographical dictionaries specialist, regards history and biography writing as the two faces of the same coin, the former dealing with events through people, and the latter regarding the history as people themselves and their influence on the history.

A proof for the close relationship between biographies and history books are the interpretations that authors used for their dictionaries. Al-Bukhari (256 AH) entitled his biographical dictionary of companions and apostles *Tārīkh Kabīr* "The Great History". Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (463 AH) entitled his book which was about the biography of the affluent of Baghdad *Tārīkh Baghdād* "The History of Baghdad". Ibn 'Asākir (571 AH) and Ibn al-Adīm (660 AH) entitled their works *Tārīkh Dimashiq* "History of Damascus" and *Tārīkhoalab* "The History of Aleppo" respectively. Ibn Khallikan entitled his *Wafayāt A'yān Tārīkh Mukhtasar* "A Short History". Al-Safdi entitled his voluminous biographical dictionary *Tārīkh Kabīr* "The Great History". Al-Safdi and his contemporary Ibn Shaker al-Kutubi strongly believed in the relationship between the history and biography (Khalidi, 1973). Al-Sakhawi, in his *al-'Alan bi-al-tawbikh*, and Tāshkubrī'zādah, in his *Miftāh al Sa'ādah*, have regarded biographical books and dictionaries as books for the science of history. There are some who do not regard biographical books and dictionaries as books for the science of

history, but they have regarded them as important sources for the history of Islam.

Evolution and Development of Biographical Dictionary Writing

It is noteworthy that Muslims themselves devised this kind of historiography; and biographical dictionary writing is a merely Muslim innovation and it not at all has been adapted from other nations. Furthermore, Zaydan (1993) believes that no one had ever compiled historical biographical dictionaries like the ones by Muslims. In the introduction of *al-Kawākib as-sāira* by Najm al-Din al-Ghazzi (1061 AH), on Muslim's concerns about writing the biography of their affluent Dr. Jabbour (nd) says "I do not think that the historians of any nation like the Muslim historians have attended to biography writing". Similarly, Al-Haluji (2008) believes that biography dictionary writing trend became so widespread among Muslims that we cannot find its counterpart in other nations neither in the past nor the present.

Attending to the Prophet's biography as "an excellent pattern" is advised by the Quran². This biography, however, is regarded as the second source in Sharia Law. Therefore, from the second century AH onward certain books were written about Muhammad's lifestyle, and biography writing became the prime task of Muhammad's lifestyle relators, i.e., companions and apostles. This trend was then extended to recording biography of hadith narrators, because it was necessary to ensure that hadith narrators' status, background and reliability is well known. So, the first books on apostles' classes which belonged to the biography of hadith narrators i.e., companions, apostles and the apostles of apostles, were written by Ma'mar ibn ul-Muthanna the author of *as-Sahabah*, Al-Waqidi and his student Ibn Sa'd al-Baghdadi (230 AH), the author of *Kitab Tabaqat Al-Kubra*³; Al-Bukhari, (256 AH) the author of *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*; Abu Na'im Isfahani (430 AH), the author of *Ma'rifat al-Sahabah* and other scholars. After some time, writing within this framework extended to other fields (al-Haluji, 2008; Hassan, 1983). From the third century AH onward, we can witness the emergence of biographical books about poets, the Quran reciters, faqihs and interpreters. For instance, we can refer to Muhammad Ibn Salam al-Jumahi (236 AH), who dealt with writing the biographies people other than hadith narrators, companions and apostles. In his book, *Tabaqat al-Shu'ara*, he included the biography of the Era of Ignorance (Hassan, 1983) poets. In this regards, Annan (1947), the contemporary Egyptian historian, says "In the second century AH, attending to certain biographies with writing books about the Prophet (PBH) and his companions by narrators and Muslim historians resulted in writing the biographies of caliphs and rulers in those eras. However, biography writing soon spread to other classes like scholars, ministers, poets, writers, etc. and set the scene for the emergence of biographical dictionaries.

Writing different kinds of biographies in the Muslim world under the title of *Tabaqāt* "classes" like *Tabaqāt al-Sahābeh* "the class of companions", *Tabaqāt al-Mufasirīn* "the class of interpreters", *Tabaqāt al-shu'arā* "the class of poets", *Tabaqāt al-atibā* "the class of doctors" etc. was very common throughout

² There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern (Surat Al-'Ahzāb/21)

³ Gibb (1954) believes that compiling *Kitab Tabaqat Al-Kubra* by Ibn Sa'd al-Baghdadi indicates a new development in the realm of historiography and a strong relationship between history hadith science because this book in fact is for criticizing hadiths and their narrators

¹ History is the literary description of any sustained human activity either of groups or individuals which is reflected in or influenced upon the development of given group or individual.

the sixth century AH. From this century onward, however, we can witness the emergence of *Tabaqāt* "classes" books in the form of Virtues Writing like *Sīrat al-Shāfiʿī*. In the seventh century AH, compiling biographies in an alphabetical order was replaced with hierarchical biographies and this gave rise to the advent historical biographical dictionaries (Asadi, 1993). Some believe that the extensive development *Tabaqāt* books throughout different centuries motivated dexterous historians to extract biographical notes from *Tabaqāt* books and compile them in an alphabetical order (Zaydan, 1994; Halabi, 2003). Besides these reasons, it seems that the dispersion of Muslim celebrities and notable men's biographies motivated Muslim writers and historians to accumulate them in one comprehensive alphabetical work so that access to them is facilitated for readers and researchers. Under the rule of the Mamluk Sultanate, Syrian Historiography School is the birthplace of the first and most important historical biographical dictionaries like al-Hamawī's *Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ*, Ibn Khallikan's *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, al-Safdi's *al-Wafī Belwafiat* and Ibn Shaker's *Fawat al-Fawayat*. Al-Hamawī wrote the first historical biographical dictionary entitled *Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ* during the Ayyubid Dynasty⁴. Although *Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ* should be considered a biographical dictionary, it cannot, however, be regarded as a historical biographical dictionary in the general sense because, as its title suggests, it is limited to the biographies of some poets and literati and it lacks covering the biography of companions, caliphs, sultans, ministers, commanders and others (Jalali et al, 1990). Probably this is why Gibb believes that no effort had been made for including all outstanding figures in all fields of human activity from around all parts of the Muslim World in biographical dictionaries before the advent of Ibn Khallikan's dictionary (Khalidi, 1973). Anyhow, biographical dictionary writing in this manner appeared in the seventh century AH. According to some, Ibn Khallikan was the first Muslim historian who made biography writing a specific profession and compiled a book in the form of general biographical dictionaries (Annan, 1974; Nicholson, nd, quoted from Hassan, nd).

The Motives of Historical Biographical Dictionary Writers

Here two questions arise as what prompted these writers to write their historical biographical dictionaries and in their opinion what the relationship is between biographies and history.

In *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, the first biographical dictionary from this era which was a model for subsequent ones, Ibn Khallikan stated his motives as concern and interest in knowing about the lives of people from the past generations (Ibn Khallikan, nd), and he referred to his work as "a brief introduction on the science of history" (ibid). His words indicate a strong relationship between biography writing and history. From what he says it seems that Ibn Khallikan's motive had been his audience entertainment through reading the book not moral and religious edification.

Al-Safdi (764 AH), the author of the most voluminous biographical dictionary of this era *al-Wafī Belwafiat* which, as its title suggests, complements *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, stated his motives for compiling that work as to "learn lessons" from the past generations and believed that history is the mirror of time.

Such a motive, that is, learning lessons from history, is the strongest motive among different motives for biographical dictionary writing. Al-Safdi forthrightly introduced his dictionary as *Tarikh al-Kabir*, "the Great History". This title reflects the attitudes toward and the importance of biography writing knowledge among Muslim historians like him.

In the prelude to his work, *Fawat al-Fawayat*, Ibn Shaker al-Kutubi (764 AH) declares his motives for compiling that book, as suggested by its title, as complementing and contributing to Ibn Khallikan's *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*. He wrote: "I read Ibn Khallikan's book and found it very good, but finding that he has not incorporated the biographies of caliphs, companions and some others in it, I was motivated to include them as an appendage to the book" (Ibn Shaker, nd.). Ibn Shaker, however, has confused issues in his here because Ibn Khallikan himself had reiterated that there is no need to include the biography of some notable men like caliphs and the companions since there are sufficient number of books about them (Ibn Khallikan, Nd). As long as there may be several motives in writing a book, Ibn Shaker stated his other motive for compiling this work as to "learn lessons" from the past generations because he believed that history is the mirror of time; for those who contemplate, history gives off light that thoughtful, and wise people benefit from it (Ibn Shaker, Nd.). Throughout his book, Ibn Shaker's emphasis is on pragmatism rather than religious values.

The motive of al-Maqrizi (845 AH), the author of *al-Muqaffa al-kabir*, is not clear because the introduction and conclusion of his book is missing. But, regarding the title of the book and his interest in Egypt about which he wrote many of his works, his motive has probably been patriotism and ethnic bias, very similar to the motives of local history writers (see Al-Yaʿlawi, 1986).

In his other biographical dictionary, *Durar Al-ʿUqūd*, Al-Maqrizi states his motive as commemorating his contemporary notable men. In this regard he wrote: "the grief of losing friends made me sad. Finding myself deprived of seeing them anymore, for my consolation I decided to write about their lives" (see Iza al-Din, 1993).

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalāni the author of *al-Durar al-Kamina* did not state his motive in the brief introduction of his book. But it could be understood that he believed in preserving the memory and honor of all those who in different political, educational, economic, military, literary ways contributed to the spread of Islamic culture and civilization. Since Ibn Hajar basically was rather a hadith narrator, and the majority of his book was dedicated to the biography of hadith narrators, sheikhs, scholars and his colleagues, he wants to keep their memories alive.

Ibn Taghribirdi, the author of *al-Manhal al-safi wa-l-mustawfi ba'd al-wafi* which contains 3000 biographical notes, stated his motive for writing this book, as suggested by its title, as completing al-Safdi's *al-Wafī Belwafiat* and his own sake; reiterating that he had not written his book upon the request of any friend, elite or ruler⁵. His motive for writing his other biographical dictionary, *Dalil al-shafi*, had been summarizing *al-Manhal al-safi* (ibid). As discussed so far, complementing and appending other works as well as summarizing and refining

⁴ Although Hassan (1983) regards al-Anbārī's (577) *Nuzhat al-aliba' fi tabaqat al-udaba'* which contains biographies about the writers contemporaries and people before him as the first general biographical dictionary, it cannot be regarded as a historical biographical dictionary because its order of entries is annual not alphabetical.

⁵ In the introduction of his book *Nujum al-zahira* he claims that he has written the book upon the request of nobody, but in the conclusion of the book he confesses that he has written it for the sake of his friend Amir Muhammad Sultan Juqmaq. (Shaker, Mustaf, nd)

them which are the features of historiographies from the Mamluk Sultanate is one of the features of the authors of such historical sources.

Al-Sakhawi, the author of *al-Daw' al-lami'*, states his motive for writing this book as continuing his teacher's work, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalāni. In this regard, he said "I wrote this book as an appendage to and complement and appendage of my teacher's book which covered the notable men of the eighth century AH and mine covering the notable men of the ninth century" (Al-Sakhawi, Nd). Also we can think of Al-Sakhawi's aim for writing this book as his interest in hadith and history because he is both a hadith narrator and historian. Al-sakhawi's duty was to distinguish between trusted and reliable narrators from untrusted and unreliable narrators and defending the history in the same way suggested by the title of his book *al-'Alan bi-al-tawbikh li man thamma ahl al-tarikh*. Al-sakhawi's nasty manner in dealing with many of the Egypt's notable men inspires the idea that his other motive, although not his main one, for writing this book has been sort of personal retaliation (al-Haluj, 2008).

Al-Suyuti did not explicitly state his motive for writing *Nazm al-'iqyān*, but as long as he followed al-Safdi and agreed with him in reviving the past, his intention for writing this book has been learning from its biographical notes (Khalidi, 1973).

Ibn al-Adīm (660 AH) the author of *Tārīkh Halab* "The History of Aleppo" did not state his motive in writing his book. However, as long as the writers of these works belong to the city they write about, it seems that his purpose for writing this book was showing the role of his city and its notable men in enhancing the Islamic culture and civilization. According to the Italian orientalist, Francesco Gabriele, Ibn al-Adīm's intention was to relieve this important political and cultural region, which had witnessed the emergence of many outstanding poets, rulers, hadith narrators, etc., from lack of receiving proper attention (Gabrieli, 1973). Bias and patriotism to the motherland among hadith narrators were their main motive for writing such works and other works like Khatib al-Baghdadi's *Tārīkh Baghdād* "The History of Baghdad", and Ibn 'Asākir's *Tārīkh Dimashiq* "History of Damascus".

Methods of historiography in biographical dictionaries

Actually, all the three method, that is, narrative, analytical, and combined (narrative-analytical) were utilized by the writers of biographical dictionaries from this period. Since the majority of these dictionaries' writers were hadith narrators, they were necessarily influenced by the science of hadith in their judgments, especially in their judgments about hadith narrators, faqihs, interpreters, etc. Jarh wa Ta'dil is a branch of jurisprudence which deals with the trustworthiness of hadith narrators or, in other words, criticizing their biographies. Of course, there are some writers who did not attend to criticizing and analyzing information in compiling biographical dictionaries and just sufficed to recording them. They only resorted to quotes from other writings such that most sentences were often identical and similar (Hassan, 1981).

Ibn Khallikan was meticulous in stating critical biographies and when facing different accounts about this person, he compared them with each other and decided on those which were the most appropriate. He has highlighted this issue in the introduction of his book (Ibn Khallikan, Nd). For example, in his first biographical dictionary, on the biography of Ibrahim Nakha'ee, he writes:

"He died in 96 AH and some say in 95 AH; some say he was 49 years old at death and some say he was 58 years old, but I think the first account is correct" (ibid).

In biography writing, al-Safdi brought the person's social status into consideration and explained his position among his contemporaries and friends for us. He asserted that he had a critical view on the biography of people. His criticisms on the poems of poets are the major advantages of his book (Abu Zayd, 1997). His critical views about history, literature and poetry are needed by every historian, men of letters and critical poet.

In *Fawat al-Fawayat*, Ibn Shaker has the approach as al-Safdi followed in *al-Wafi Belwafiat*. As we said earlier, Ibn Shaker copied that book from al-Safdi's work and just added some poems to it.

Al-Maqrizi was an analytical historian because hadith and history which are associated with Jarh wa Ta'dil and the researchers are obliged to discover the truth and correct narrations. In the course of writing many of his biographies, Al-Maqrizi criticized the behavior and works of his homeland sultans and compared them with sultans in other parts of the Muslim world, also criticizing the ugly habits in his society. About al-Tanboqa, a Mamluk era figure, he writes:

"He was evil and seditious and he caused the biggest sedition between Nasser and Shaikh Sultanates which lead to the murder of Nasser and consequently the collapse of Nasser Sultanate".

Al-Maqrizi reflected his viewpoints through comparing his contemporary Mamluk sultans with contemporary rulers in other countries. For example, by praising the ruler of *Karbalka area(in India) Abaalmaghazi* he writes:

"He had an intellectual life style, nice attributes and moral behavior. We would not believe it if he were not renowned for these, especially in our time when these issues are not common among our sultans".

Al-Sakhawi's *al-Daw' al-lami'* enjoys a critical nature in depicting biographical notes. However, his inclination in censuring others led to desecration in many cases. Regardless of this issue, his book is unique in methodology, style and approach. Al-Sakhawi enjoyed creativity and a sense of analysis in presenting biographies. Abdullah Anan, the Egyptian contemporary historian, introduces this book as a work enjoying detailed analyses and beautiful depictions, but he believes that in many cases the author is overcome by his desire for humiliating others. Anan continues with regarding al-Sakhawi as someone having literary a special criticism in his era and a literary critic of the Egyptian literature (Annan, 1999).

Al-Suyuti' *Nazm al-'iqyān* lacks any analyses of its own. Al-Suyuti compiled his book by copying from others and attributed it to himself (Hitti, 1999).

The References of Historical Biographical Dictionaries

Biographical dictionary authors referred to given sources in their books. Such information comes from the author's contact with students, teachers or acquaintances, and sometimes through hearing it from his contemporaries and in most cases from past written sources, especially books, the books about classes or general and local histories. Some authors have referred to their sources in the introduction of their books and some in the main body of their books, and some in both the introduction and the body. However, the authors' sources were varied; they were sometimes verbal, and sometimes written and sometimes both.

Ibn Khallikan implicitly has said that he had referred to books related to this realm and he had asked whatever he could not find from experts of the field (Ibn Khallikan, Nd). Hence, his sources can be divided into three categories: 1) sources that were available before him, and he read them. 2) Sources obtained from his teachers and elders 3) Sources he himself

witnessed or was in touch with. All these sources can be observed in *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamām*.

Al-Safdi referred to all more than one hundred books he had used. He took the information in his other book *A'yan al-'asr* from his own observations and from what heard from others. Expressions like "He told me...", "He informed me..." and "He said it to me that ..." indicate that most of al-Safdi's sources had been oral (Little, 1986). Undeniably, he also has some written sources that he highlights them. They include: 1) al-Wafi Belwafiat. This is one of the most important written references of *A'yan al-'asr*. Many of this book's sentences are quoted from this reference. 2) al-Badr al-safir and *Tarikh al-Said* by al-'Adfūwī (748 AH) is about the biography of the notable men from the Upper Egypt and Said City. 3) *Tarikh al-Misr* by Qutb al-Din al-Halabi (735 AH). 4) al-Birzali's *Mu'jam al-Kabir* which contains 3000 biographical notes of scholars (Abu Zayd, 1997; Little, 1986).

Ibn Shaker has not enumerated any of his references in details but within the text of some biographies he had mentioned some of them like al-Bukhari's *al-Tarikh al-Kabir*, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, *Tārīkh Dimashiq*, *Mu'jam Al-Buldān*, etc. As mentioned earlier, since he wrote his book through copying and selecting from the biographical notes of books like as-Safdi's *al-Wafi Belwafiat*, Ibn Shaker's the main source is this very book (Maqwaz, 2000). Ihsan Abbas (nd), the researcher of this book says: "I think the Ibn Shaker has put as-Safdi's *al-Wafi Belwafiat* in front of himself and has managed to write a four-volume book by selecting and copying from its biographical notes."

The references used by Al-Maqrizi in writing *al-Muqaffa al-kabir* are not clear because the introduction of the book is missing. Besides the oral references, however, he logically should have also utilized written references typically through his contemporary biographical dictionaries. Quoting from books which are no longer available like *al-Jam' wa al-Bayan fi akhbar al-Qayrawan* by Ibn al-Shaddad al-Sanhaji and *al-Tawarikh al-Raqiq* as well as people like Ibn al-Jazzar, Al-Qadi al-Nu'man, etc. is a proof for this. (See Al-Ya'lawi, 1986).

Al-Maqrizi, however, have utilized 4 sets of sources in writing the biographical dictionary of his contemporaries *Durar al-'uqūd*: 1- Observation and participation. This means that he knew the person. 2- Interviewing. This means he spoke face to face with people he wanted to write their biographies (Iz al-Din Ali, 1992). 3- Permissions and handwriting. Al-Maqrizi used manuscripts and handwritten works of his teachers in writing biographies (ibid, p. 66). 4- Books and references from the past like *Tarikh al-Misr* by Qutb al-Din al-Halabi, *al-Wafi Belwafiat*, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyah* by Isnawī, *Kitdb al-Ubar* by Ibn Khaldun (ibid, p. 70). By enumerating the four abovementioned references, Iz al-Din Ali (1992) believes that Al-Maqrizi has adopted many of his biographical notes from sources belonging to the past, referring to some and probably ignoring others (idem, p. 434).

Ibn Hajar, as a habit, used to write his references in the introduction of his books. He writes:

I utilized al-Safdi's *A'yan al-'asr*, Abū Hayyān, Majani al-'asr, Fazlullah Al-'umari's *Dahbiyat al-'Asr*, Abu Hayyan' al-majani al-'Asr, al-Dahbi's *Siyar al-'lam al-nubala'*, etc (Zaryab, 1998). Some parts of the sources have also been oral because Ibn Hajar says: I have included the biography of everyone that I found such as many of my teachers as well as those whom I met face to face or about whom I had heard something.

Ibn Taghribirdi does not enumerate his references explicitly, but implicitly he says "I have read given biographical

books about this topic". According to Abdul Fatah Ashur (1977), a contemporary historian, Ibn Taghribirdi had reviewed the well-known biographical dictionaries written before his time like *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, *Durar al-'uqūd*, *al-Wafi Belwafiat*, etc. as well as general histories. As long as Ibn Taghribirdi's book is an appendage and complement of *al-Wafi Belwafiat*, it seems that *al-Wafi Belwafiat* had been one of the main sources of this book. Many of Al-Manhal al-Safi's biographical notes were adapted *al-Wafi Belwafiat* (Little, 1986).

A good number of al-Manhal's biographies are about Ibn Taghribirdi's contemporary rulers, commanders, and political and administrative officials. Ibn Taghribirdi's father was one of the great military and political figures of the Mamluks, having the same ethnicity as them. Thanks to this, he had had close relations with many of the Mamluk sultans, rulers and officials; and Sultan Nasir Faraj was his sister's husband (Ashur, 1977). This is why oral information constitutes an important part of his biographies' sources.

Al-Sakhawi's references can be divided into oral and written sources. One of his written sources is his teacher Ibn Hajar's *Inba' al-Ghumar bi Abna' al-'Umr*. *Durar al-'uqūd* is also one of books al-Sakhawi has utilized in his biographies. For instance in an appendage to the biography of al-Juhari, (biographical note number 154) he writes: "al-Maqrizi has praised al-Juhari in *Durar al-'uqūd* and has narrated several anecdotes about him" (Al-Sakhawi, nd).

Al-Sakhawi's many trips to Egypt, Syria and Hejaz and his meetings with the literati and scholars of these regions have extremely influenced the preparation of his biographical dictionaries and he wrote the biographies of many notable men through socializing with them during his trips to Mecca. Many of those whose biographies were written by al-Sakhawi were his students some time. For example, in an appendage to the biography of Ahmad Ibn Abd al-Tahir he writes: "He was my student for some time in Cairo". This suggests many of al-Daw' al-lami' li ahli al-Qarni al-Tasi's sources were obtained from verbal information.

Since al-Suyuti's *Nazm al-'iqyān* is similar to its contemporary counterparts, it had enjoyed oral resources. In his introduction on this book, Hitti (1927) has said that al-Suyuti was contemporary and had lived with many whose biographies were written by him. Al-Safdi's *al-Wafi Belwafiat* was one of his written sources. He entirely quoted *al-Wafi Belwafiat*'s introduction. Perhaps *al-Mu'jam al-Baqi* had been al-Suyuti's the most important written source because, it is referred to for at least 9 times in the book (Hitti, 1927).

Ibn al-Adīm utilized both Arabic and non-Arabic references. It seems that he had sought help from others in understanding non-Arabic references (Honey, 1981). In his book, he utilized numerous written and oral sources, including a large number hand-written books named very carefully in his book. He himself was the reference of his biographical notes. And sometimes he obtained information from informed sources (Kennedy, 2002). Salem (1981), a contemporary historian, has enumerated some of Ibn al-Adīm's most important written sources as follows: The books by Ibn al-Sam'ani, Ibn al-Dobathi, Ibn-al-Najjār, Yaqut al-Hamawi, al-Qusi, al-Mondari, etc. Undoubtedly *Tārīkh Baghdād* and *Tārīkh Dimashiq* were his model so Kennedy (2000) has referred to these books as to of his important written sources.

Conclusion

All in all, it must be said that the main motive biographical dictionary writers by authoring such works were "learning lessons" or "preserving and commemorating the memory of

their contemporary notable men". Complementing the past biographical dictionaries and appendage writing to them was their motives, as well.

Biographical dictionary writers used three methods, i.e., narrative, analytical, and combined (narrative-analytical) in their biographical notes. People like al-Safdi, Ibn Khallikan, al-Maqrizi and al-Sakhawi, who themselves were hadith narrators, utilized Jarh wa Ta'dil (which in fact is the same as criticism) as a critical tool in writing his biographical notes about scientists and scholars.

But, people like Ibn Shaker al-Kutubi and al-Suyuti used a narrative method in their biographical notes and ignored the analytical method, the reason of which perhaps was the fact that they only resorted to the writings by the people in the past.

About the authors of these works, however, we can conclude that they mainly utilized written sources from the past in compiling general and local biographical dictionaries and for writing the biographies of their contemporaries they utilized oral sources. But in biographical dictionaries about their contemporaries which included the biographical notes about notable men contemporary with them, oral sources were used most while written sources were used less, logically because of the nature of the work. However, the sources of biographical dictionaries were sometimes written, sometimes oral, and sometimes both.

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