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Scholarly Networks and Intellectual Interests in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Syria: An Analysis Based on *al-Kawakib al-sa'ira**

16. YÜZYIL OSMANLI SURİYESİ'NDE ULEMANIN İLİŞKİ AĞLARI VE ENTELEKTÜEL İLGİLERİ: *EL-KEVÂKİBU'S-SÂ'İRE* ÜZERİNDEN BİR İNCELEME

GÜRZAT KAMİ**

ABSTRACT

Syria (Bilad al-Sham), a long-standing center of learning, came under Ottoman rule in 1516. While scholarship has examined the institutional, administrative, and individual aspects of scholarly life in the region during the first century of Ottoman rule, a prosopographical study offering an overall view of its intellectual landscape remains overdue. I address this lacuna by analyzing the scholarly connections and intellectual orientations of Ottoman Syria through Najm al-Din al-Ghazzi's (d. 1651) *al-Kawakib al-sa'ira,* a biographical dictionary of the sixteenth-century Muslim elite. I examine 557 individuals listed in *al-Kawakib* who originated from Syria and died between 1527 and 1592. Using UCINET and other visualization tools, I map their teacher–student relationships and analyze patterns of textual engagement, including books authored, read, and taught. Allowing for the limitations of the data, I argue that scholarly life in Ottoman Syria was grounded in strong local traditions while remaining open to trans-regional connections. In particular, intellectual ties with Egypt inherited from the Mamluk period continued, whereas connections with the Ottoman core lands developed more slowly. Overall, Syria emerges as a cohesive regional center rather than an isolated or fully reoriented provincial periphery.

Keywords: Ottoman Syria, Mamluk-Ottoman Transition, Al-Ghazzi, Scholars, Prosopography.

ÖZ

İslam tarihinin erken dönemlerinden beri önemli bir ilmî merkez olan Bilâd-ı Şam, 1516'da Memlükler'den Osmanlı hâkimiyetine geçti. Osmanlı idaresinin ilk yüzyılında Bilâd-ı Şam'daki siyasî, kurumsal, ekonomik ve mimarî dönüşümleri inceleyen araştırmalar bulunmakla birlikte, ilmî hayatın bütüncül resmini sunan prosopografik bir çalışma henüz yapılmamıştır. Bu makale, söz konusu ihtiyaçtan hareketle bütüncül perspektifle bölgedeki âlimlerin ilmî ilişki ağlarını ve entelektüel ilgilerini aydınlatmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu çerçevede, Necmeddin el-Gazzi'nin (ö. 1651) *el-Kevâkibu's-sâ'ire* isimli tabakatındaki biyografik veriyi sosyal ağ analizi ve niceliksel analiz yöntemleriyle ele almaktadır. Makalede, 1527–1592 döneminde vefat eden Bilâd-ı Şam menşeli 557 şahsın hoca–talebe ilişkileri ile yazdıkları ve okuyup okuttukları kitaplara dair ilişkisel veri UCINET programı ve diğer görselleştirme araçlarıyla incelenmektedir. Veri kaynağının sınırlılıklarına rağmen, inceleme Osmanlı idaresinin ilk yüzyılında Bilâd-ı Şam'daki ilmî hayatın güçlü yerel gelenekleri sürdürdüğünü ve aynı zamanda bölgelerarası ilişkilere açık olduğunu göstermektedir. Mısır havzasıyla Memlük mirasına dayalı yakın bağlar sürerken, Osmanlı merkez coğrafyasıyla ilişkiler daha sınırlı kalmıştır. Bu bağlamda, Osmanlı idaresinin ilk yüzyılında Bilâd-ı Şam yalıtılmış bir merkez değil, kendi ilmî geleneği içinde emperyal bağlantıları bulunan bölgesel bir merkez konumundadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bilâd-ı Şam, Memlük–Osmanlı Geçişi, El-Gazzî, Ulema, Prosopografi.

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INTRODUCTION

Syria, or Bilad al-Sham, was a dynamic center of scholarly activity from the early centuries of Islam.[1] The construction of educational institutions under Zangid (1127-1233) and Ayyubid (1171-ca. 1250s) rule consolidated this position and gave scholarly life a more institutional character.[2] Despite the disruptions caused by Crusader, Mongol, and Timurid invasions between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, as well as the concurrent rise of Cairo as the Mamluk capital, Syria continued to host a large and diverse scholarly population under Mamluk rule.[3] Pursuing scholarship within a pluralistic judicial and legal system, Syrian scholars were well connected to the wider Islamic world through pilgrimage and trade routes crossing the region.[4] In 1516, Syria was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. This article explores how the scholarly connections and intellectual interests of Syrian scholars evolved during the first century following the Ottoman conquest. Focusing specifically on Najm al-Din al-Ghazzi's (d. 1651) biographical dictionary, *al-Kawakib al-sa'ira*, it analyzes, quantitatively and through the lens of social network analysis, the extensive data this work contains on teacher-student relationships and on the books written and studied before, during, and after Syria's transition to Ottoman rule.[5]

Modern researchers have studied scholars in early Ottoman Syria from different angles.[6] Some have drawn attention to the transformation of the judicial system in major Syrian urban centers from four chief judgeships to a new system presided over by an Ottoman Hanafi judge, and the effects of this transformation on the career prospects of local scholars.[7] Others, in connection with this development, have examined the geographical mobility of Syrian scholars through their travelogues, with particular attention to travels to Istanbul, the new imperial capital, in pursuit of appointments.[8] Other researchers have explored local endowments and

* A note on transliteration: This article employs a simplified version of the İSNAD transliteration chart, without diacritics.

1 R. Stephen Humphreys, "Syria", *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. C. F. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 506-540.

2 Joan E. Gilbert, "Institutionalization of Muslim Scholarship and Professionalization of the Ulema in Medieval Damascus", *Studia Islamica* 52 (1980), 105-134; Harun Yılmaz, *Zengî ve Eyyûbî Dımaşk'ında Ulema ve Medrese (1154-1260)* (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2017).

3 For Mamluk Cairo's rise as a scholarly center, see Muhammet Enes Midilli, "Ulemânın Memlük Coğrafyasına Yönelmesi ve Memlükler Döneminde Kahire İlim Kurumları", *İslam Tetkikleri Dergisi* 10/1 (2020), 389-412. For scholarly activity in contemporary Syria, see Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Esra Atmaca, *Halep'te İlmî Hayat: Memlükler Döneminde (1250-1517)* (Istanbul: Ensar Yayınları, 2016); Muhammet Enes Midilli, *Memlük Kudüs'ünde Âlimler ve Eğitim Kurumları* (Istanbul: İSAM, 2024).

4 For the plurality in Mamluk judicial and legal systems, see Joseph H. Escovitz, "The Establishment of Four Chief Judgeships in the Mamluk Empire", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102/3 (1982), 529-531; Yossef Rapoport, "Legal Diversity in the Age of Taqlīd: The Four Chief Qāḍīs under the Mamluks", *Islamic Law and Society* 10/2 (2003), 210-228; Benjamin Jokisch, "Socio-Political Factors of Qadā' in Eighth/Fourteenth Century Syria", *Al-Qantara* 20/2 (1999), 503-530. For the Hajj routes and their significance, see Abdullah ʿAnkawi, "The Pilgrimage to Mecca in Mamluk Times", *Arabian Studies* 1 (1974), 146-170.

5 Najm al-Din al-Ghazzi, *al-Kawakib al-sa'ira bi-a'yan al-mi'a al-ʿashira, ed. Khalil al-Mansur, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1997). For an earlier edition of the work, see Najm al-Din al-Ghazzi, al-Kawakib al-sa'ira bi-a'yan al-mi'a al-ʿashira, ed. Jabra'il Sulayman* Jabbur, 3 vols. (Beirut: American Press, 1945). Unless otherwise stated, I use the 1997 edition.

6 For a review of this scholarship, see Gürzat Kami, "Memlük-Osmanlı Geçiş Döneminde Mısır ve Suriye'de İlmi Hayat ve Ulema: Bir Literatür Değerlendirmesi", *Memlük Entelektüel Tarihine Giriş-I Literatür Değerlendirmesi*, ed. Büşra Sıdıka Kaya (Istanbul: İLEM Yayınları, 2023), 259-295.

7 Michael Winter, "The Judiciary of Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman Damascus: The Administrative, Social and Cultural Transformation of the System", *History and Society During the Mamluk Period (1250-1517)*, ed. Stephan Conermann (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2014), 193-220.

8 Ralf Elger, *Glaube, Skepsis, Poesie: Arabische Istanbul-Reisende im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2011);

Ottoman investments in Syrian cities, offering insight into the institutional support for scholarship in the region.[9] Still others have examined the scholarly networks and intellectual output of certain prominent figures in the region within diverse frameworks.[10] Despite this rich corpus of scholarship, however, no prosopographic study, to my knowledge, has offered an overall view of scholarly networks and intellectual interests in sixteenth-century Ottoman Syria.[11] As an attempt in this direction, this article asks a central question: to what extent were scholars who were born in, or spent a significant part of their lives in Ottoman Syria connected to Egypt (the former Mamluk center), Anatolia and the Balkans (the core Ottoman lands), and other scholarly centers in the Islamic world? It addresses this question through an analysis of teacher-student relationships and of scholarly works that were written and studied in Syria.

The remainder of the article consists of four main sections. First, I introduce *al-Kawakib al-sa'ira* as an unrivaled and comprehensive source for the study of the sixteenth-century Syrian elite and discuss the reliability and limitations of my dataset. Then, in sections two and three, I analyze the teacher-student connections between scholars from Ottoman Syria and neighboring regions, addressing first teachers and then their students in the two respective sections. Creating a visual map of the network of teacher-student connections via UCINET and NetDraw, two social network analysis software packages, I seek to assess the scope of Syrian scholars' scholarly transmission networks during Ottoman rule.[12] In the fourth section, I investigate regional distribution of the texts authored and studied in this period, as detailed in *al-Kawakib*, and identify the most popular works in Syrian educational circles, as well as the extent to which scholars from other regions were connected to these circles. Finally, in the conclusion, I highlight the methodological and empirical contributions of this preliminary study and offer suggestions for future research.

Mustafa S. Küçükaşçı, "İki Arap Âliminin Gözünden XVI. Yüzyılda İstanbul", *I. Uluslararası Osmanlı İstanbulu Sempozyumu Bildirileri, 29 Mayıs-1 Haziran 2013*, ed. Feridun M. Emecen - Emrah Safa Gürkan (Istanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2013), 71-86; Abdul Rahim Abu Husayn - Tarek Abu Hussein, "On the Road to the Abode of Felicity: Observations of a Damascene Scholar in Anatolia and Istanbul in 1530", *Ostour* 3/6 (2017), 33-44.

9 Richard van Leeuwen, *Waqfs and Urban Structures: The Case of Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, "'In the Image of Rūm': Ottoman Architectural Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Aleppo and Damascus", *Muqarnas* 16 (1999), 70-96; Robert Hillenbrand, *The Architecture of Ottoman Jerusalem: An Introduction* (London: Altajir World of Islam Trust, 2002); Heghnar Z. Watenpaugh, *Image of an Ottoman City: Imperial Architecture and Urban Experience in Aleppo in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

10 For examples of studies focusing on local jurists within a lawmaking framework, see Kenneth M. Cuno, "Was the Land of Ottoman Syria *Miri* or *Milk*? An Examination of Juridical Differences within the Hanafi School", *Studia Islamica* 81 (1995), 121-152; Guy Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: The Hanafī School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For examples of studies problematizing the transition to Ottoman rule, see Elizabeth Sirriyeh, "Whatever Happened to the Banū Jamā'a? The Tail of a Scholarly Family in Ottoman Syria", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28/1 (2001), 55-65; Astrid Meier, "Perceptions of a New Era? Historical Writing in Early Ottoman Damascus", *Arabica* 51/4 (2004), 419-434; Toru Miura, "Transition of the 'Ulama' Families in Sixteenth Century Damascus", *The Mamluk-Ottoman Transition: Continuity and Change in Egypt and Bilād al-Shām in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Stephan Conermann - Gül Şen (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 207-220. For a study examining the encounters between Turkish-speaking Ottoman scholars and Arabic-speaking Damascene scholars through scholarly gatherings (*majalis*), see Helen Pfeifer, *Empire of Salons: Conquest and Community in Early Modern Ottoman Lands* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

11 The only notable exception appears to be a study by Abdul-Karim Rafeq. In an article focusing on scholars in eighteenth-century Palestine, Rafeq bases his observations concerning the sixteenth century on forty-seven scholars selected from *al-Kawakib al-sa'ira and its supplement, Lutf al-samar. Rafeq examines primarily the occupational and madhhab distribution of these scholars.* Abdul-Karim Rafeq, "Relations between the Syrian *'Ulamā'* and the Ottoman State in the Eighteenth Century", *Oriente Moderno* 18 (79)/1 (1999), 67-95. For the supplement, see Najm al-Din al-Ghazzi, *Lutf al-samar wa qatf al-thamar min tarajim a'yan al-tabaqa al-ula min qarn al-hadi al-'ashar*, ed. Mahmud al-Shaykh, 2 vols. (Damascus: Wizarah al-Thaqafah wa-l-Irshad al-Qawmi, 1981).

12 *Ucinet 6 for Windows: Software for Social Network Analysis* (Software, USA: Analytic Technologies, 2002); *Netdraw Network Visualization* (Software, USA: Analytic Technologies, 2002).

Overall, I argue that sixteenth-century Syrian scholarship was both locally grounded and transregionally connected. Syrian scholars had strong internal networks and close interaction with neighboring Arabic-speaking scholarly traditions. Patterns in teaching, study, and authorship point to a particularly durable intellectual alignment with Egypt, suggesting the continued influence of late-Mamluk Cairene authority under Ottoman rule, while ties to the core Ottoman lands remained more limited and selective. Taken together, these findings portray Ottoman Syria as neither intellectually isolated nor fully reoriented toward the imperial center, but rather as a cohesive regional hub.

1. Source of the Data and Datasets

Born in 1570 into a long-established Damascene scholarly family, Najm al-Din al-Ghazzi was a prominent Shafiʿi professor and mufti in seventeenth-century Ottoman Damascus.[13] Modern researchers know him primarily for his biographical dictionary, *al-Kawakib al-saʾira fi aʿyan al-miʾa al-ʿashira* (*the Wandering Stars among the Notables of the Tenth Century*), which records the lives of 1,539 prominent figures who died in the tenth century AH (ca. sixteenth century CE) across regions including Syria, Egypt, Anatolia, Iran, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa.[14] Al-Ghazzi composed this work over several decades, drawing on a wide range of sources such as annals, chronicles, biographical dictionaries, travelogues, and other narrative texts produced in different regions during the sixteenth century.[15] Owing to this rich corpus, *al-Kawakib* has become a frequently consulted narrative source, particularly for the history of sixteenth-century Egyptian and Syrian elites.

Al-Kawakib follows the tradition of alphabetically organized centennial biographical dictionaries.[16] In this respect, it can be regarded as a continuation of the biographical collections of the Cairene authors Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani (d. 1449) and Shams al-Din al-Sakhawi (d. 1497), which respectively cover the lives of those who died during the eighth and ninth centuries AH.[17] Najm al-Din extends this tradition into the tenth century AH, corresponding to 1494-1592 CE. However, he departs significantly from his predecessors by dividing the tenth century into three 33-year subperiods, each called a *tabaqa*, based on the biographees' dates of death: (1) 900-933 AH (1494-1526 CE), (2) 934-966 AH (1527-1558 CE), and (3) 967-1000 AH (1559-1592 CE). Each of these alphabetically organized *tabaqa*s corresponds roughly to one human generation.

Based on this *tabaqa* system, Syrian scholars in *al-Kawakib* can be classified into three groups: scholars of the late Mamluk period, scholars of the transitional period, and scholars

13 For his life, see Cevat İzgi, "Necmeddin el-Gazzî", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 32:497-498 (Istanbul: İSAM, 2006).

14 *Al-Kawakib contains a total of 1,553 biographical entries.* However, for certain individuals whose dates of death are uncertain, the author includes duplicate biographies in different *tabaqas of the work.* Once these duplicates are removed, the total decreases to 1,539. For an example of a duplicate biography, see the entry for Shams al-Din al-ʿAlqami in al-Ghazzi, *al-Kawakib,* 2/40, 3/56-57.

15 For these sources, see the preamble by al-Ghazzi in *al-Kawakib*, ed. Jabbur, 1/5-7.

16 For an overview of biographical writing traditions in the earlier centuries of the Islamic world, see Wadad al-Qadi, "Biographical Dictionaries: Inner Structure and Cultural Significance", *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, ed. George Nicholas Atiyeh (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 93-122.

17 Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani, *al-Durar al-kamina fi aʿyan al-miʾa al-thamina, ed. Muhammad Sayyid Jad al-Haqq, 6 vols.* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha, 1966-67); *Shams al-Din al-Sakhawi, al-Dawʾ al-lamiʿ li-ahl al-qarn al-tasiʿ, 12 vols.* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1992).

of the Ottoman period. The first group—those who died in the first *tabaqa*, that is, between 1494 and 1526—received their education and advanced in their careers under Mamluk rule; they would have experienced Ottoman rule only briefly, if at all.[18] The latter two groups, by contrast, pursued scholarly activity in Ottoman Syria to varying degrees from the second quarter of the sixteenth century through the end of the century. Therefore, I focus in particular on the biographical data from the second and third *tabaqa*s of *al-Kawakib*.[19] It should also be noted that the entire biographical data of *al-Kawakib* has previously been entered into the Ulema Database and is freely accessible online.[20]

Figure 1 shows the geographical and chronological distribution of the 1,539 biographees in the three *tabaqa*s of *al-Kawakib*. In creating this map, I first associated the biographees with the cities in which they were active during their lifetimes.[21] For the small number of highly mobile individuals, I associated them with their place of death or last city of residence.[22] In entries lacking any spatial data, I used the biographee's regional *nisba* to infer their primary geographical association.[23] I then grouped the resulting list of locations into broader regions: Egypt, Bilad al-Rum (referring to the core Ottoman lands in Anatolia and the Balkans), North Africa, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, and Iran.[24] Only Syria was divided into subregions—namely, Damascus, Aleppo, and Jerusalem—in order to capture its internal diversity.[25] The pie charts integrated into the map illustrate the geographical and chronological distribution of the biographees, categorized according to *al-Kawakib*'s three *tabaqa*s.[26]

18 For example, the Aleppine scholar Shams al-Din b. al-Zahabi, whose biography appears as the thirty-ninth entry in *al-Kawakib, received his education in Mamluk Aleppo and Mecca and subsequently taught for long years in Aleppo. He lived under Ottoman rule for only three years before his death in 1519. See his biography in al-Kawakib, 1/26.*

19 I deliberately do not draw a distinction between individuals in the second and third *tabaqas,* instead grouping them under the general heading of "scholars of Ottoman Syria." This choice is motivated by the presence of many individuals with markedly different life spans, which makes a meaningful separation between the two groups analytically problematic. For example, the biography of Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi (d. 1577), the author's father, who died at the age of seventy-eight, appears as the first entry in the third *tabaqa*. Born in 1499, however, Badr al-Din received most of his education during the transitional period. Distinguishing him—and others like him—from the scholars of the second tabaqa would therefore be misleading. See Badr al-Din's biography in *al-Kawakib, 3/3-9.*

20 See the Ulema Database (Access 15 May 2026). For a detailed examination of the Ulema Database's data model and data entry process, see Abdurrahman Atçıl et al., "Building a Digital Tabaqat: Challenges, Opportunities, and Research Prospects", *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 9/2 (2022), 243-266; Abdurrahman Atçıl et al., "Ulema Veri Tabanı: Yaklaşım, Veri Modeli, İmkânlar ve Gelecek Vizyonu", *Dijital Beşerî Bilimler ve Osmanlı Çalışmaları*, ed. Yunus Uğur (Istanbul: VakıfBank Kültür Yayınları, 2023), 95-115.

21 I drew this map via Power BI Desktop. See *Power BI Desktop* 2.157 (Software, USA: Microsoft Corporation, 2026).

22 For example, Qutb al-Din al-Safawi was born in Iran, educated in India, and subsequently visited the Arabian Peninsula, Syrian cities, and Bilad al-Rum. According to his biography, he ultimately resided, and likely died, in Egypt, which is the location I associated him with. For his biography, see *al-Kawakib,* 2/230-232.

23 I am aware that a regional *nisba* often carries meaning primarily when a scholar is outside the region it denotes. For instance, an individual is typically identified as "al-Baghdadi" only when he is no longer in Baghdad; accordingly, using such a nisba to assign him to Iraq may misrepresent the location where he spent the greater part of his scholarly career. For this reason, I relied on nisbas to determine location only as a last resort, specifically when an individual's base of scholarly activity and all other spatial information were missing. Because the present article focuses largely on educational relationships, the use of nisbas in such cases does not pose a significant methodological problem, insofar as they generally indicate the place where an individual spent his early years of study.

24 For the use of "Bilad al-Rum" as a geographical and cultural denotation for the lands in Anatolia and the Balkans, see Cemal Kafadar, "A Rome of One's Own: Reflections on Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum", *Muqarnas* 24 (2007), 7-25.

25 I do not use Damascus, Aleppo, and Jerusalem here merely as city names but as broader, constitutive subregions. That is, I aggregated smaller provinces and towns in Syria into these larger categories based on regional alignment; for example, the major cities of Homs and Hama are subsumed under the broader "Aleppo" category for the purposes of the analysis.

26 Note that for individuals whose biographies appear in multiple *tabaqas of al-Kawakib,* I located them in the last tabaqa in which they appear.

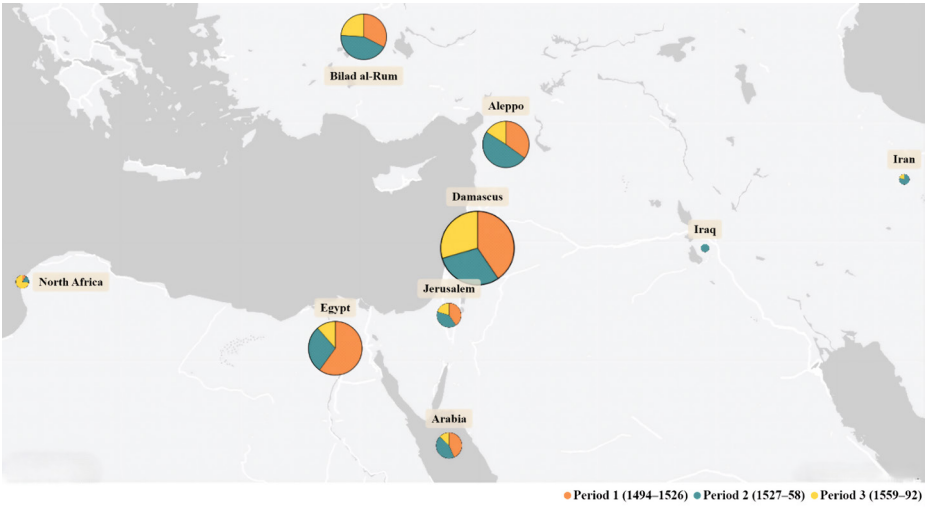

Figure 1. Geographical and Chronological Distribution of the Biographees in *al-Kawakib* (Source: Base map generated using Power BI Desktop; data from the Ulema Database, based on *al-Kawakib*; processed by the author.)

As can be seen on the map, the majority of the biographees in *al-Kawakib* belong to four regions, listed in decreasing order: Syria, Egypt, Bilad al-Rum, and the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, these regions contain a sufficient number of biographees from all three *tabaqa*s of *al-Kawakib* to permit meaningful comparison. Table 1 provides a detailed numerical and percentage breakdown of the data shown in Figure 1.

Table 1. Numerical and Percentage Distribution of the Biographees in *al-Kawakib* by Region and Period (Source: Data from the Ulema Database, based on *al-Kawakib*; processed by the author.)

REGION		THREE *TABAQA*S OF *AL-KAWAKIB*						STUDY GROUP		TOTAL	
		Period 1 (1494–1526)		Period 2 (1527–1558)		Period 3 (1559–1592)		Periods 2 & 3 (1527–1592)			
SYRIA	Aleppo	357 (55%)	80 (12%)	322 (59%)	113 (21%)	235 (69%)	37 (11%)	557 (63%)	150 (17%)	914 (59%)	230 (15%)
	Damascus		255 (39%)		188 (34%)		187 (55%)		375 (42%)		630 (41%)
	Jerusalem		22 (3%)		21 (4%)		11 (3%)		32 (4%)		54 (4%)
Egypt			194 (30%)		93 (17%)		37 (11%)		130 (15%)		324 (21%)
Bilad al-Rum			72 (11%)		96 (18%)		53 (15%)		149 (17%)		221 (14%)
Arabia			27 (4%)		27 (5%)		8 (2%)		35 (4%)		62 (4%)
North Africa			1 (<1%)		2 (<1%)		8 (2%)		10 (1%)		11 (<1%)
Iran			0		4 (<1%)		1 (<1%)		5 (<1%)		5 (<1%)
Iraq			0		2 (<1%)		0		2 (<1%)		2 (<1%)
TOTAL			651 (100%)		546 (100%)		342 (100%)		888 (100%)		1539

As the final column of the table shows, 59 percent of the biographees in *al-Kawakib* are Syrian, and this proportion rises to 63 percent when only the last two *tabaqa*s, which are my focus in this article, are considered. This makes *al-Kawakib* a particularly useful source for the study of Syrian elites in the Ottoman period. Egypt and Bilad al-Rum account for the next largest proportions, at 21 and 15 percent for Egypt, and 14 and 17 percent for Bilad al-Rum respectively. Since the entries contain the types of biographical data typically found in biographical collections—such as kinship relations, educational and patronage ties, patterns of travel, records of works studied and authored, and charitable activities—these proportions underscore *al-Kawakib*'s potential value as a source on the regional and interregional networks of Syrians of the period, whether or not they were scholars.

That said, *al-Kawakib* presents several limitations that must be taken into account. As indicated by the map and the table above, its Syrian-dominated content calls for caution when drawing conclusions about other regions. More importantly, while it is broadly representative of the sixteenth-century Syrian learned milieu, it is not exhaustive; for example, it omits many scholars who were born and educated in the second half of the sixteenth century but died in the early seventeenth century. A more comprehensive assessment would require consulting additional sources across broader geographical and chronological scales, thus exceeding the scope of this preliminary analysis. The findings presented here should therefore be read in light of these constraints. Nevertheless, *al-Kawakib* remains a key source for examining the contours of Syrian scholarly life in the sixteenth century.

From the rich and diverse biographical corpus in *al-Kawakib*, I extracted three datasets: (1) a person-to-person relational dataset capturing the teachers of Syrian scholars in the last two *tabaqa*s, restricted to those who have a separate biographical entry in *al-Kawakib*; (2) a corresponding dataset recording their students according to the same criteria; and (3) a person-to-book relational dataset covering all works studied, taught, or authored by individuals in *al-Kawakib*, including both Syrians and non-Syrians. In the following sections, I examine the first two datasets, respectively to analyze the geographical reach of Syrian scholars' educational networks and to assess the diversity of their students.[27] I then use the third dataset to identify the most popular works authored, studied, and taught in Syria, assess the extent of interest in these works, and evaluate the scale of Syrian scholars' contributions to the existing scholarly tradition through the production of new works.[28]

27 Note that *al-Kawakib,* like other biographical dictionaries, uses various terms to indicate teacher-student relationships, such as *akhadha ʿanhu, darasa minhu, hassala ʿindahu, samiʿa minhu, qaraʾa ʿalayhi, tafaqqaha ʿindahu, and arada ʿalayhi.* These terms refer to relationships that differ in closeness, duration, and disciplinary context. For this preliminary analysis, however, I group them under the neutral, non-hierarchical category of "teacher-student relationship" in order to discuss the broader framework. By this category, I simply mean that there was an intellectual exchange between two individuals that can be understood as an educational interaction. I occasionally note in the footnotes instances in which this simplification may lead to misinterpretation. For an analysis of these terms based on a fifteenth-century biographical work from Damascus, see R. Kevin Jaques, *Authority, Conflict, and the Transmission of Diversity in Medieval Islamic Law (Leiden: Brill, 2006),* 115-148.

28 Here too, as with teacher-student relationships, I use the broad category of "books read or taught." I subsume the different ways in which an individual might engage with a book (e.g., reading it from beginning to end, memorizing it, listening to part of it being read aloud in a mosque, holding an *ijaza* to transmit it, and so forth) under a single, neutral, and non-hierarchical umbrella: a person's relationship with a book in an educational context. My conclusions in the following pages should therefore be read with this qualification in mind.

2. Uncovering Scholarly Connections I: Teachers of Syrian Scholars

The second and third *tabaqa*s of *al-Kawakib* contain biographies of a total of 557 Syrians; however, only 255 of these entries include information about at least one of the biographee's teachers. These 255 entries reveal a total of 666 student-teacher relationships with 204 individual teachers who appear in the three *tabaqa*s of *al-Kawakib*. This latter group—namely, the 204 "teachers of scholars of Ottoman Syria"—includes individuals from various regions, such as Syria, Egypt, Bilad al-Rum, North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Iran. Figure 2 displays this network, representing scholars as nodes and the student-teacher relationships among them as arrows from student to teacher. Node colors indicate the scholars' regions of origin. For the sake of clarity, I employ only five colors: green for Syria, red for Egypt, black for Bilad al-Rum, blue for the Arabian Peninsula, and gray for the remaining regions, namely North Africa, Iran, and Iraq.

Note also that the position of each node in the graph is not set manually but is determined automatically by NetDraw's graph-theoretic layout.[29] This layout computes the shortest paths between pairs of nodes and automatically places nodes with smaller distance values closer together. In other words, strongly connected nodes appear nearer to one another in the graph, such as students of the same scholar. It thus helps to reveal how scholars were connected to one another within educational lineages and to identify leading teachers, clustered learning communities, and marginal scholars in Syria. In addition, to highlight the most prominent teachers in the graph, I calculated the indegree centrality of each node, that is, the number of incoming arrows from other nodes. I then adjusted node size according to indegree scores in NetDraw, with scholars who had more students represented as larger nodes.[30]

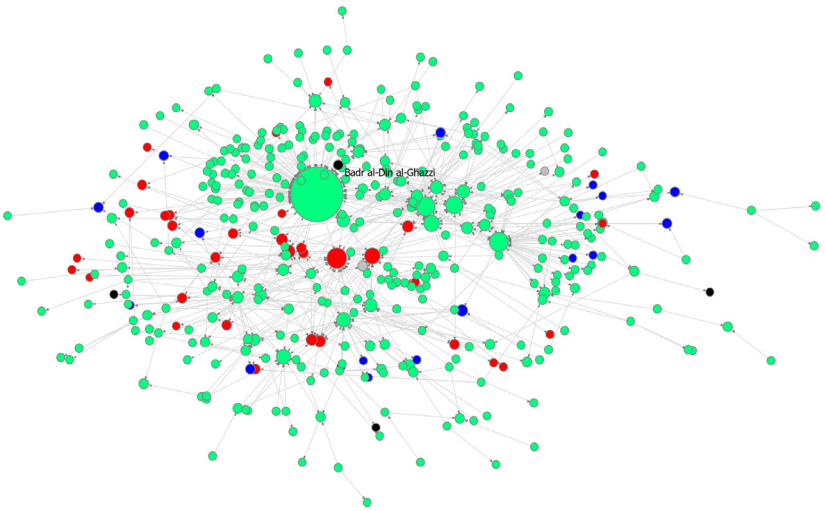

Figure 2. Teachers of Scholars in Ottoman Syria (arrows run from students to teachers; node size is proportional to indegree centrality score) (Source: Data from the Ulema Database, based on *al-Kawakib*; network visualization generated by the author using NetDraw in UCINET).

29 For the graph theoretic layout, see Robert A. Hanneman - Mark Riddle, *Introduction to Social Network Methods* (Riverside, CA: University of California, Riverside, 2005), chap. 4 (Access 15 May 2026).

30 For indegree centrality, see Hanneman - Riddle, *Introduction to Social Network Methods*, chap. 10 (Access 15 May 2026).

A cursory look at Figure 2 offers several insights. Since the network represents the ego-network of Syrian scholars, the numerical and visual predominance of green nodes is unsurprising. Given the importance of geographical proximity—or "propinquity," in the parlance of social network analysis—in the early stages of scholarly development, it makes sense that most Syrian students would initially have studied with local scholars.[31] Therefore, the more important question is rather how non-Syrian actors are positioned within this Syrian-centered network. In this respect, the relatively high visibility and connectivity of scholars from Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula are striking. The repeated appearance of red nodes near the network's core suggests that Egyptian scholars were not peripheral but structurally embedded within Syrian scholarly trajectories. In other words, Egyptian scholars constituted a regular and formative component of Syrian education rather than occasional or external influences. The placement of the blue nodes along the network's periphery, slightly behind the red ones, suggests that scholars from the Arabian Peninsula were less integral to Syrian scholarly communities than their Egyptian counterparts, though still constituing a significant presence. All in all, the graph shows that Syrian scholars did not merely study locally but repeatedly entered neighboring Arabic-speaking teaching lineages, whether within Syria or beyond its borders, and consequently, that many non-Syrian, Arabic speaking scholars became authoritative teachers for Syrians.

This pattern of education can be attributed to several factors. First, many Syrian scholars traveled to the Arabian Peninsula for pilgrimage, often passing through Cairo. Several anecdotes in *al-Kawakib* attest to scholarly interactions between scholars from Syrian cities and their counterparts in Cairo and the Holy Cities during such journeys.[32] There was also a reverse flow of scholars from these centers toward the Ottoman imperial capital, traversing Syria along the way. As a result, many resident Syrian scholars studied with Cairene and Meccan scholars who visited their cities en route to Bilad al-Rum.[33]

In contrast, scholars from Bilad al-Rum are few: only four appear in the entire graph, and three of them are located at its periphery. This peripheral placement suggests that the core Ottoman lands did not constitute a primary center of scholarship for Syrian students, at least during the period under examination. In addition, the absence of clustering among the black nodes—that is, they do not form a tight, self-contained group but instead appear spread out in the graph and connected to different nodes—suggests that Syrians studied with particular Ottoman scholars who may already have possessed recognized authority, rather than engaging in a broader and more coherent way with the scholarly milieu of Bilad al-Rum.

This pattern of interaction with the scholars from Bilad al-Rum may be related to several factors. First, in contrast to the Arabic-speaking scholars of neighboring Arab provinces such as Egypt, the Turkish-speaking scholars from the core Ottoman lands were less homophilic with Syrians.[34] Having developed into a largely self-sufficient center of learning from the

31 For the significance of propinquity in network formation, see Charles Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17-18.

32 For example, see *al-Kawakib, 1/9-11; 2/81-82, 254; 3/161-162. For more on the Hajj routes through Syria under Ottoman rule, see* Suraiya Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans: The Hajj under the Ottomans 1517-1683* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994); Nir Shafir, "In an Ottoman Holy Land: The Hajj and the Road from Damascus, 1500-1800", *History of Religions* 60/1 (2020), 1-36.

33 For example, see *al-Kawakib*, 1/35-37, 272-278; 2/10, 35-36, 95, 118, 125, 146, 152, 168, 196-197; 3/40-43.

34 A central premise of social network analysis is homophily: the tendency of individuals to associate with others who are similar

fourteenth century onward, Bilad al-Rum differed from the Arab lands in both the formation and continuity of its scholarly traditions and its intellectual orientations.[35] Moreover, from the mid-sixteenth century onward, the highly institutionalized and bureaucratized Ottoman scholarly hierarchy seldom accommodated non-Turkish-speaking students seeking education at the imperial center or entry into the learned establishment.[36] Although Arab scholars from Syria and other provinces increasingly traveled to Istanbul, such journeys were typically motivated by the pursuit of patronage and local appointments rather than by education and scholarly training in the imperial capital.[37]

How, then, were scholars from Bilad al-Rum integrated into the student-teacher network of Syrian scholars? An examination of the biographies of the four Ottoman scholars who appear in Figure 2 shows that mobility in the reverse direction, from the core Ottoman lands to the Arab provinces, created alternative venues for interaction between the two groups. For example, Müeyyedzade Abdurrahim (d. 1537), an Ottoman scholar-Sufi, passed through Syria on his return to Istanbul after performing the pilgrimage and taught Radi al-Din al-Ghazzi (d. 1529), the grandfather of *al-Kawakib*'s author, during his stay in Damascus. According to the description in *al-Kawakib*, Müeyyedzade was "distinguished by exceptional merit and intelligence, particularly in the rational sciences (*al-ʿulum al-ʿaqliyya*) and the various branches of philosophical learning (*aqsam al-ʿulum al-hikamiyya*). He also demonstrated complete mastery of the Arabic language and was regarded as a leading authority in Sufism."[38] Monla Bedreddin (d. 1523), a mid-level Ottoman scholar, visited Damascus in the immediate aftermath of the conquest under the patronage of the head of the provincial treasury (*defterdar*). He subsequently received an appointment at a local madrasa, where he taught until his death shortly thereafter.[39]

Another prominent scholar was Molla ʿArab (d. 1531), a transregional figure whose lineage traced back to Transoxiana. Born in Antioch, a frontier city bridging Bilad al-Rum and Syria, he eventually settled in the Ottoman core lands under sultanic patronage and spent the remainder of his life there. During his earlier travels between Tabriz, Cairo, and Istanbul in pursuit of education and patronage, Molla ʿArab also visited Aleppo and stayed

to themselves. This degree of similarity, whether based on status, shared values, or other social attributes, plays a significant role in shaping the structure of social ties. For more on the concept of homophily and its impact on network formation, see Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, 18-20.

35 Abdurrahman Atçıl, "Mobility of Scholars and Formation of a Self-Sustaining Scholarly System in the Lands of Rūm during the Fifteenth Century", *Islamic Literature and Intellectual Life in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Anatolia*, ed. A. C. S. Peacock - Sara Nur Yıldız (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2016), 315-332. For patterns of mobility between Bilad al-Rum and the Arab lands, see Ertuğrul Ökten, "Scholars and Mobility: A Preliminary Assessment from the Perspective of *al-Shaqāyiq al-Nuʿmāniyya*", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 41/41 (2013), 55-70. For early Ottoman intellectual interests, see Murteza Bedir, "Osmanlı Tarihinin Kuruluş Asrında (1389'a Kadar) İlmiye'ye Dair Bir Araştırma: İlk Fakihler", *Türk Hukuk Tarihi Araştırmaları* 1 (2006), 23-39.

36 For the consolidation of the Ottoman scholarly-bureaucratic hierarchy, see Abdurrahman Atçıl, *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), chaps. 7-8. For the aristocratic nature of the system and the exclusion of Arab scholars, see Abdurrahman Atçıl, "The Route to the Top in the Ottoman *İlmiye* Hierarchy of the Sixteenth Century", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72/3 (2009), 489-512; Baki Tezcan, "The Law School of Mehmed II in the Last Quarter of the Sixteenth Century: A Glass Ceiling for the Less Connected Ottoman Ulema", *Ottoman War and Peace: Studies in Honor of Virginia H. Aksan*, ed. Frank Castiglione et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 237-282.

37 See note 8. Also see Abdulsattar Elhajhamed, "Kadı Muhibbüddin el-Hamevî'nin Bevâdi'd-Dumûʿil-ʿAndemiyye bi-vâdi'd-Diyâr'ir-Rûmiyye Adlı Seyahatnamesi Üzerine Bir İnceleme", *Nüsha Şarkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 19/48 (2019), 203-226; Gürzat Kami, "A Damascene Shāfiʿī Professor-Mufti in Istanbul: Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī's Travelogue (1032/1623)", *İslam Tetkikleri Dergisi* 13/1 (2023), 175-201.

38 *Al-Kawakib,* 2/164.

39 *Al-Kawakib,* 1/177.

there on several occasions. *Al-Kawakib* informs us that during one of these stays, which lasted eight years, he taught Quranic exegesis (*tafsir*), hadith, and polemical refutations against the Safavids.[40]

These scholars illustrate three distinct modes of scholarly movement from Bilad al-Rum to Syria: passage through the region along pilgrimage routes, travel in search of education and patronage, and journeys undertaken in the company of a patron. By contrast, Fudayl Çelebi (d. before 1558), another scholar from Bilad al-Rum represented by a black node in Figure 2, points to another conduit of interaction that appears to have gained importance from the second half of the sixteenth century onward: the presence in Syrian urban centers of Ottoman judges appointed by the imperial government in Istanbul. From the mid-sixteenth century onward, judgeships in major Arab cities such as Cairo, Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Mecca, Medina, and Baghdad became key stages in the career trajectories of Ottoman dignitary scholars (*mevali*).[41] Advancement to the chief judgeships required service in these provinces, creating a pattern of career-driven mobility that provided alternative channels of scholarly exchange between Ottoman scholars and local learned communities, including Syrians. As a result, while advancing in their careers, many high-profile Ottoman scholars spent time in Syrian urban centers as appointed judges.[42]

Following his appointment as judge of Baghdad, Fudayl Çelebi passed through Aleppo in late 1553. During this journey, he became acquainted with the renowned Aleppine historian Radi al-Din Ibn al-Hanbali (d. 1563), to whom he granted a scholarly certificate (*ijaza*). Fudayl Çelebi's career subsequently advanced through appointments to the judgeships of Aleppo and, later, Mecca. During his second stay in Aleppo, the relationship between the two scholars continued: Ibn al-Hanbali visited him at his residence, and Fudayl Çelebi presented him with a copy of his treatise on Islamic inheritance law.[43]

Despite the potential of this latter conduit of interaction, the author of *al-Kawakib* says relatively little about the teaching activities of Ottoman scholars among local scholarly circles in Syria. As a result, Fudayl Çelebi appears as an exception in Figure 2, even though one would not expect him to be so.[44] Instead, as will be shown below, *al-Kawakib* places greater emphasis on Ottoman scholars' study under Syrian scholars, noting in the biographies of several prominent Ottoman judges that they had studied under local scholars.

As for node size, which represents the number of students attributed to each scholar, their uneven distribution in Figure 2 indicates a pronounced hierarchy within the network. Only a few nodes are large within the network, and I intentionally made the label of the largest one visible to highlight the figure of "the most popular teacher" in the Syrian scholarly circles. Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi (d. 1577), the father of *al-Kawakib*'s author, appears as the scholar

40 *Al-Kawakib,* 2/53-54.

41 Atçıl, *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, 200-211.

42 See Baki Tezcan, "The Ottoman Imperial Judiciary in the Former Mamluk Lands: A Prosopographical Study on the Chief Judges of Aleppo, Cairo, and Damascus, 1550-1655", *1516: The Year That Changed the Middle East*, ed. Abdulrahim Abu Husayn (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 2021), 163-232.

43 *Al-Kawakib, 2/236.*

44 In fact, the secondary literature offers compelling accounts of the close and lively interactions between Ottoman scholars, particularly judges, and prominent Syrian scholars during the sixteenth century. For good examples drawn from the scholarly gatherings of Damascus, see Pfeifer, *Empire of Salons,* 166-233.

who attracted the highest number of Syrian students. One may speculate that the author of *al-Kawakib* portrayed his father as a more prominent figure than he may in fact have been, or that his greater familiarity with his father's teaching career unconsciously shaped a particularly favorable portrayal. Indeed, this latter possibility is supported by the fact that in several biographical entries the author explicitly notes that he relied on a booklet (*fihrist*) in which his father had recorded his students.[45] This source base may have contributed to the unusually large number of students attributed to Badr al-Din in *al-Kawakib*.

Nevertheless, accepting Badr al-Din's popularity as described by his son is not necessarily misleading. In addition to being one of the leading Shafiʿi muftis of sixteenth-century Damascus, Badr al-Din was a lifelong professor who taught at the city's most prestigious institutions, including the Shamiyya al-Barraniyya and Taqawiyya Madrasas, as well as the Umayyad Mosque.[46] Over the course of his long career, he therefore taught a large number of Syrian students. Historical anecdotes from other sources also attest to his popularity as a teacher even among Ottoman scholars who visited the city in judicial capacities. In this regard, his scholarly exchange with the renowned Ottoman scholar Kınalızade Ali Efendi (d. 1572) and his transmission of hadith to another leading Ottoman figure, Çivizade Mehmed Efendi (d. 1587), are well known.[47] Moreover, he was among the few prominent Arab scholars known in the imperial center. The seventeenth-century Ottoman biographer Nevizade Atayi (d. 1635) mentions him in his biographical dictionary simply by his *nisba*, al-Ghazzi—as if this alone sufficed to identify him among Arab scholars—and notes his controversial versified Quranic exegesis as his magnum opus.[48]

Whether or not Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi was in fact the most popular teacher of Syrian scholars, his exceptionally high indegree score tends to obscure other prominent figures in the network. To make secondary yet influential teachers and their geographical origins more visible, I therefore modified Figure 2 in NetDraw. I first recolored the Syrian scholars to distinguish among them, using green for Damascus, dark green for Aleppo, and orange for Jerusalem. I then removed Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi and all nodes with an indegree of zero—that is, scholars who taught no students—and rescaled node sizes according to indegree scores. Finally, I hid all scholars with an indegree score of less than ten. The resulting Figure 3 therefore includes only those scholars who taught at least ten Syrian students, along with the student-teacher relationships among them.[49] In other words, it displays the "teachers of teachers" within the intellectual genealogy of Syrian scholars and the connections among them.

45 For example, see *al-Kawakib,* 1/98; 2/20, 106, 109, 203; 3/83.

46 See his biography in *al-Kawakib,* 3/3-9.

47 For the scholarly discussion between Kınalızade Ali and Badr al-Din, see Mehmet Eren, "Kınalızâde Ali Efendi ile Bedreddin el-Gazzi Arasında İlmi Bir Tartışma", *Uluslararası Kınalızâde Ailesi Sempozyumu Bildiriler Kitabı* (Isparta: SDÜ İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 2014), 151-162. For an analysis of the certificate Badr al-Din issued to Çivizade, see Helen Pfeifer, "A New Hadith Culture? Arab Scholars and Ottoman Sunnitization in the Sixteenth Century", *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450-c. 1750*, ed. Tijana Krstić - Derin Terzioğlu (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 31-61.

48 "Ve Fāżıl-ı Ġazzī ki manẓūm tefsīr yazmışdur, meşhūr-ı ʿArab ü ʿAcem'dür" (al-Ghazzi, who wrote a versified Quranic exegesis, is famous among both Arabs and Persians). Nevʿizade Atayi, Hada'iku'l-Haka'ik fi Tekmileti'ş-Şaka'ik: Nev'izade Atayi'nin Şaka'ik Zeyli, ed. Suat Donuk, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu, 2017), 1864.

49 Note that since none of the scholars from Jerusalem meet these criteria, Figure 2 contains no orange nodes.

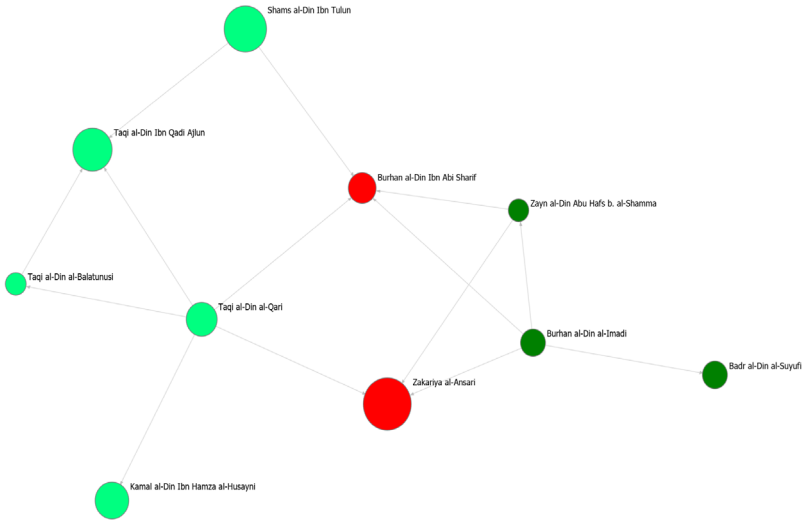

Figure 3. Most Popular Teachers of Scholars in Ottoman Syria, excluding Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi (arrows run from students to teachers; node size is proportional to indegree centrality score) (Source: Data from the Ulema Database, based on *al-Kawakib*; network visualization generated by the author using NetDraw in UCINET).

Figure 3 can be interpreted in several ways. First, its structure is relational rather than radial. Unlike Figure 2, which is dominated by a single center around Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi, Figure 3 highlights multiple teachers linked through shared students or overlapping lineages. This reveals a core teaching elite whose members were connected within a tightly knit scholarly network. Furthermore, the presence of red nodes at the center of these well-connected figures is significant: their persistence after the abovementioned filtering shows that Egyptian scholars were not marginal but belonged to the top tier of teaching authorities for Syrian students. Their position in this network underscores their role as consistent, active scholarly authorities rather than occasional or symbolic teachers. Although scholars from both Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula are dispersed across Figure 2, only the former remain in Figure 3. The absence of the latter suggests that the scholarly communities in the Arabian Peninsula and other Arabic-speaking regions, such as North Africa, exerted less influence on Syrian scholarly circles than did Egypt.

Figure 3 highlights the most prominent teachers of Syrian students. Both Burhan al-Din ibn Abi Sharif (d. 1517) and Zakariya al-Ansari (d. 1520) were late Mamluk Cairene scholars who experienced Ottoman rule only briefly, for a few days and for about three years respectively.[50] Al-Ansari was born and educated in Egypt, and Ibn Abi Sharif, though born and educated in Syria, spent much of his career as a senior scholar in the Mamluk capital. They taught many Syrian students who visited Cairo for various reasons, including education, appointments by the Mamluk sultan, or transit on their way to the pilgrimage to Mecca.

50 For their biographies, see *al-Kawakib, 1/102-105, 198-208. Burhan al-Din died on 20 February 1517, a week after the Ottomans seized Cairo. For the Ottoman entry into Cairo, see* Feridun M. Emecen, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (Istanbul: Yitik Hazine, 2011), 287.

Another notable feature of Figure 3 is that, if the red nodes were removed, it would split into two components, positioned on opposite sides of the network. The first component, on the right, would comprise three scholars from Aleppo—Badr al-Din al-Suyufi (d. 1519), Zayn al-Din Abu Hafs b. al-Shammaʿ (d. 1529), and Burhan al-Din al-ʿImadi (d. 1547)[51]—while the second component, on the left, would include five scholars from Damascus—Taqi al-Din ibn Qadi ʿAjlun (d. 1522), Kamal al-Din ibn Hamza al-Husayni (d. 1527), Taqi al-Din al-Balatunusi (d. 1529), Taqi al-Din al-Qari (d. 1538), and Shams al-Din ibn Tulun (d. 1546).[52] Teacher-student relationships connect the nodes within each potential component to one another, but none cross over to the nodes of the other component, leaving the two components separate, linked only through the bridging role of the two Cairene scholars mentioned above. The network thus illustrates how both the Aleppine and the Damascene scholarly authorities who subsequently educated the next generation of Syrian scholars were themselves students of late Mamluk Cairene teachers.[53]

3. Uncovering Scholarly Connections II: Students of Syrian Scholars

The analysis thus far has focused on the most popular teachers of scholars in Ottoman Syria, including both local and non-local figures, using a dataset that records the relationships from Syrian scholars to their teachers, as documented in *al-Kawakib*. In this section, I draw on a complementary dataset capturing the inverse relationship: the student connections from all biographees to scholars in Ottoman Syria. According to these criteria, the dataset includes 97 Syrian scholars who established 419 teacher-student relationships with 270 distinct individuals.

Figure 4 displays this dataset using NetDraw, applying the same conventions as in the previous analysis: nodes representing scholars are color-coded, and directed ties run from green nodes, which denote Ottoman Syrian scholars, to other nodes, which represent their students. Whereas Figure 3 showed the most prominent teachers of Syrian scholars, Figure 4 displays the most prominent teachers *among* Syrian scholars, as well as the geographical diversity of their students. Node size is scaled according to outdegree centrality, rather than indegree score. Outdegree centrality measures the number of connections that go out from a given node to others, and in Figure 4, it helps identify the most popular Syrian teachers within the network.

51 See their biographies in *al-Kawakib,* 1/180-182; 2/222-224, 81-82.

52 See their biographies in *al-Kawakib,* 1/115-119, 40-45; 2/88-90, 90-91, 51-53.

53 It should be noted that this network only includes scholars with at least ten Syrian students, thereby excluding many teachers who were active in both Aleppo and Damascus simultaneously. The two potential components visible in the graph should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of two separate, disconnected scholarly circles, one centered in Aleppo and the other in Damascus.

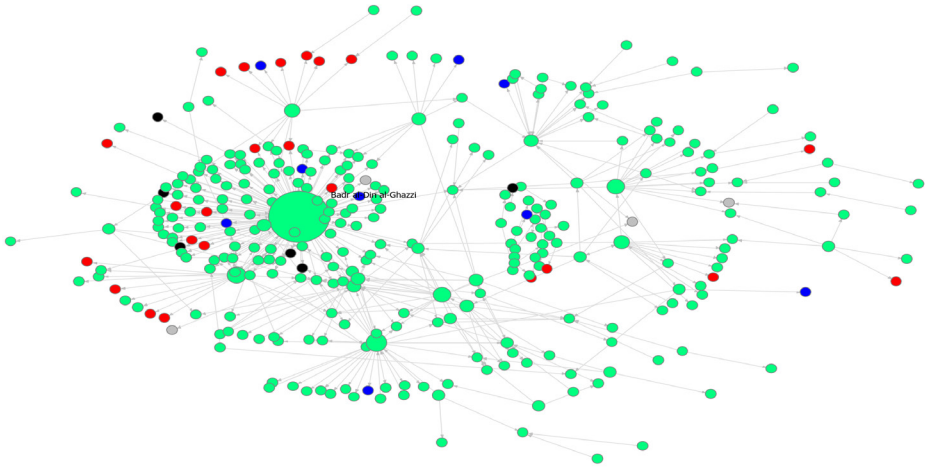

Figure 4. Most Popular Teachers *Among* Scholars in Ottoman Syria (arrows run from teachers to students; node size is proportional to outdegree centrality score) (Source: Data from the Ulema Database, based on *al-Kawakib*; network visualization generated by the author using NetDraw in UCINET).

Figure 4 reveals a strong centralization around a small number of green nodes. The largest green node, with an exceptionally high outdegree score, once again corresponds to Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi, the father of *al-Kawakib*'s author. With 122 students who hail from almost every region represented in the dataset, Badr al-Din occupies a dominant position in the network. Accordingly, observations similar to those made above regarding the reasons for Badr al-Din's central role in *al-Kawakib* apply here as well. Overall, the graph suggests that Badr al-Din and a few other Syrian scholars attracted students from multiple regions, including Egypt (red nodes), the Arabian Peninsula (blue nodes), Bilad al-Rum (black nodes), and other regions (gray nodes). This indicates that Syria was integrated into wider scholarly networks rather than being intellectually insular.

Yet whereas Figure 2 shows fifty-eight non-Syrian individuals as teachers of Syrians, Figure 4 includes only forty-two non-Syrians as students of Syrian scholars. Accepting the limitations of the data in *al-Kawakib*, this comparison nevertheless suggests that Syrians were more inclined to study under scholars from beyond the region than scholars from outside Syria were to study under them. Given that both Egypt and Bilad al-Rum—two neighboring regions from which Syrian scholars might have attracted students—had already been self-sufficient scholarly centers during the period under examination, they appear to have been less dependent on Syrian teachers than Syrian scholars were on them.

Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi again dominates Figure 4, obscuring other less popular yet prominent scholars. To obtain a clearer view of the most significant Syrian teachers and the intellectual lineages connecting them, I modified Figure 4 in several steps. First, as in Figure 3, I recolored the scholars of Damascus, Aleppo, and Jerusalem to distinguish among them, using green, dark green, and orange, respectively. Since I aim to highlight the intellectual lineages and the most significant figures within them, I then rescaled node size according

to betweenness centrality. Betweenness centrality measures the extent to which a node lies on the shortest paths between other nodes in the network and thus captures its potential role in brokerage, mediation, and gatekeeping. In other words, while indegree and outdegree centrality measure popularity within the Syrian student and teacher networks, betweenness centrality reflects a scholar's strategic position between others.[54] Following this, I removed all nodes with a betweenness score of zero—that is, scholars who studied under a Syrian teacher but, according to the dataset, did not themselves teach any other scholars. Finally, I reconfigured the remaining nodes using a graph-theoretic layout based on the shortest-path distances among them. The resulting network is shown in Figure 5. Since the dataset intentionally excludes teacher-student relationships among non-Syrian scholars, they do not appear in the graph. Figure 5 therefore displays the flow of scholarly transmission exclusively among Syrian scholars.[55]



Figure 5. Most Prominent Teachers *Among* Scholars in Ottoman Syria (arrows run from teachers to students; node size is proportional to betweenness centrality) (Source: Data from the Ulema Database, based on *al-Kawakib*; network visualization generated by the author using NetDraw in UCINET).

Based on Figure 5, several observations can be made. First and foremost, the graph consists of a single component, suggesting that the Syrian scholarly community functioned as an interconnected intellectual network rather than as a set of independent and unconnected subcommunities. Second, despite the emphasis in *al-Kawakib* on the unmatched popularity of Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi, the graph reveals other Syrian scholars who rival his prominence within Syrian intellectual lineages. For instance, the largest node, representing the renowned Damascene historian Ibn Tulun, who also stands out in Figure 3, points to his significant

54 For more on betweenness centrality, see John Scott, *Social Network Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2013), 85-98.

55 For an exemplary analysis of teacher-student networks in Taşköprizade Ahmed Efendi's (d. 1561) *al-Shaqa'iq al-Nu'maniyya using betweenness centrality, see* Atçıl et al., "Building a Digital Tabaqat", 260-262.

bridging role between a substantial number of students and the broader scholarly community in Damascus.[56] This suggests that although Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi had a greater number of students overall (as is clear in Figure 3), he did not necessarily serve as the sole channel through which they connected to the wider scholarly network. Likewise, ʿAla al-Din b. Ismail (d. 1563), another well-connected Damascene scholar (and one who had a strained relationship with Badr al-Din), appears to be as central as Badr al-Din in terms of his bridging role within the network.[57] On this basis, we may assume that the tense relationship between Badr al-Din and ʿAla al-Din, as mentioned in *al-Kawakib*, stemmed from scholarly rivalry among peers, as both were prominent figures who attracted large numbers of students. Alongside these dominant figures, Figure 5 reveals several other prominent scholars who served as intermediaries within the Syrian educational landscape, figures whose structural significance remains obscured in the broader view provided by Figure 4.

Figure 5 also reveals three key Aleppine scholars whose removal would divide the graph into two separate components—the Aleppo component on the right and the Damascus component on the left—namely, Taj al-Din al-Halabi (d. 1560), ʿIzz al-Din al-Halabi (d. 1563/64), and Shaykh ʿUlwan al-Hamawi (d. 1530). Taj al-Din was a local pillar of authority, serving as a Shafiʿi mufti in Aleppo and a professor at the city's Grand Mosque.[58] In contrast, ʿIzz al-Din was a more itinerant scholar: after receiving his education in Aleppo and Cairo, he taught students in Aleppo, Damascus, and Cairo before ultimately passing away in Istanbul.[59] As for Shaykh ʿUlwan al-Hamawi (d. 1530), represented by the node with the highest betweenness degree in the Aleppine component, he was both a scholar and a Sufi.[60] He was born in Hama and educated in Hama, Aleppo, and Damascus. *Al-Kawakib* lists eleven teachers and seven students for him from diverse regions, along with several Sufi disciples. The high betweenness centrality of these figures suggests that a small number of high-prestige scholars in Aleppo occupied strategically important intermediary positions linking the Aleppine scholarly circles to Damascus. Rather than forming isolated subcommunities, the Syrian scholarly world thus emerges as a regionally integrated and structurally cohesive network, connected through key figures who mediated scholarly transmission across subregions.

4. Intellectual Interests: Works Authored and Studied

In addition to information on teachers and students, *al-Kawakib* also provides extensive data on the works authored and studied by the biographees. In total, 419 biographees are associated with 904 unique works from a wide variety of disciplines, ranging from the religious

56 Here again, a cautious reading may be warranted, given that both Najm al-Din al-Ghazzi's sources of information and the emphasis he placed on mentioning his father Badr al-Din's personal network may have shaped which figures emerge prominently in Figure 5. For instance, one of Najm al-Din's principal sources of information was Ibn Tulun's works, and this source base may have influenced *al-Kawakib's* data on teacher-student relationships, just as Badr al-Din's aforementioned booklet may have done. For al-Kawakib's sources, see footnote 15. For some of the numerous instances in which al-Kawakib cites Ibn Tulun's works as sources, see al-Kawakib, 1/12, 20, 31, 33, 42, 55, 74, 89. As a reminder, Figure 5 (like the previous graphs) presents teacher-student relationships without capturing their particular qualities or strength: details such as the subject and duration of instruction and the degree of proximity between teacher and student are not encoded as values, and their inclusion might have produced a different visual representation.

57 For his biography and relationship with Badr al-Din, see *al-Kawakib,* 3/162-166; *and Pfeifer, Empire of Salons,* 122-126.

58 See his biography in *al-Kawakib, 3/157.*

59 See his biography in *al-Kawakib,* 3/133-134.

60 See his biography in *al-Kawakib,* 2/204-211.

and rational sciences to literature and the natural sciences.[61] Table 2 illustrates the distribution of these works across different periods and regions, allowing for synchronic and diachronic examination of intellectual and literary activity in Syria vis-à-vis other regions.

Table 2. Geographical and Chronological Distribution of Books Authored and Studied by Biographees in *al-Kawakib* (Duplicates Removed) (Source: Data from the Ulema Database, based on *al-Kawakib*; processed by the author.)

REGION		*TABAQA*S OF *AL-KAWAKIB* STUDY GROUP				TOTAL	
		Period 1 (1494–1526)		Periods 2 and 3 (1527–1592)			
		Authored	Studied	Authored	Studied	Authored	Studied
SYRIA	Aleppo	42	54	86	71	128	108
	Damascus	65	56	104	102	169	133
	Jerusalem	10	4	4	9	14	11
SYRIA (total)		117	98	194	146	311	198
Egypt		93	112	59	71	152	151
Bilad al-Rum		56	7	93	18	149	24
Arabia		18	15	41	19	59	30
North Africa		0	0	3	21	3	21
Iran		0	0	4	1	4	1
Iraq		0	0	0	1	0	1
TOTAL		284	199	394	210	678	314

Table 2 offers several possible interpretations of the intellectual landscape as represented in *al-Kawakib*. As shown in the final two columns, of the 904 unique works in *al-Kawakib*, 678 were authored and 314 were read or taught by biographees.[62] The sum of these two figures is 992, indicating an overlap of 88 works that were both authored and studied.[63] In other words, scholars who died between 1494 and 1592, as recorded in *al-Kawakib*, actively contributed to the accumulation of knowledge through 678 new works, and 88 of them (exceeding 10 percent) circulated among contemporaries. This pattern suggests that the scholars of this era were both producers and consumers of knowledge: while contributing to long-standing intellectual traditions with new works, they remained receptive to contemporary contributions and engaged with newly authored books alongside the canonical texts from earlier centuries.

As in the analysis of student and teacher networks, I focus here on Syrian scholars in the second and third *tabaqa*s of *al-Kawakib*, the study group. What works did these scholars study with the teachers examined above during their formative educational years? Which books did they later choose to teach to their own students, as they advanced in their scholarly careers? And what works did they themselves produce as part of their scholarly activity? Although biographical dictionaries typically mention only the most prominent books of their biographees and the most notable aspects of their education, the rich data in *al-Kawakib*, as shown in Table 2 above, allow us to provide partial answers to these questions.

61 Given that the study of the Qur'an was universal among scholars, I did not treat it as a separate book in the dataset.

62 For what I mean by "reading and teaching a book," see footnote 27.

63 For example, Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi authored *al-Durru'n-nadid fi adabi'l-mufid wa'l-mustafid*, a work on the classification of sciences and pedagogy, which *al-Kawakib* records was later studied by six other scholars.

Among the 557 biographees from Ottoman Syria, 150 have entries that include a reference to at least one book, either studied or authored by the individual concerned. In other words, the author of *al-Kawakib* provides information on educational activity and/or authorship for roughly one out of every four notable Ottoman Syrian scholars. Of these, 47 are identified as the authors of one or more books. These scholars appear to have been remarkably prolific, as evidenced by their extensive contributions to the contemporary corpus in Table 2, where they account for 194 of the 394 of the new works recorded as written during the period. That is, within the *al-Kawakib* corpus, nearly half of the total scholarly output during the Ottoman period was authored by Syrians. These figures once again highlight the central role of Syrian scholars in the scholarly landscape reflected in *al-Kawakib*. The most prolific authors are Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi (36 works), Zayn al-Din Abu Hafs b. al-Shammaʿ (24 works), Radi al-Din al-Ghazzi (17 works), Shaykh ʿUlwan al-Hamawi (11 works), Shahab al-Din al-Tibi (10 works), and Radi al-Din al-Hanbali (8 works). It should also be noted that we encounter several of these names as important figures within the teacher-student relationship networks discussed above. It appears either that scholars who produced a large number of works attracted greater numbers of students, or that *al-Kawakib* was more inclined to mention the works associated with prominent and widely followed teachers.

According to Table 2, more works were produced in Syria in the first period than in either Egypt or Bilad al-Rum (117 versus 93 and 56, respectively). In the subsequent two periods that disparity only grows, with Syria exceeding the combined output of both Egypt and Bilad al-Rum (194 versus 59 and 93, respectively). Of course, these statistics are insufficient to argue for a scholarly decline or growth in Ottoman Egypt or Bilad al-Rum, particularly given the Syro-centric perspective of *al-Kawakib* and its limited focus on areas beyond Syria. They do, however, point to the sustained vitality—and even growth—of intellectual life in Syria from Mamluk to Ottoman rule. A comparison of the data in Table 2 with those in Table 1, which presents the numerical and percentage distribution of biographees in *al-Kawakib* by region and period, provides further support for this interpretation. Focusing on Syria in Table 1, the number of biographees increases from 357 in the first *tabaqa* to 557 in the final two *tabaqa*s, representing a 56 percent rise. By contrast, the number of authored works in Table 2 increases from 117 to 194, representing a 66 percent rise. In other words, the proportional growth in books produced in Syria exceeded the proportional growth of the Syrian scholarly elite from Mamluk to Ottoman rule. These figures, too, may—albeit with considerable caution—be read as suggesting a continued increase in scholarly activity in Ottoman Syria.

The works authored by the scholars of Ottoman Syria display a wide range of disciplinary diversity. The most commonly represented disciplines include jurisprudence and legal theory (around fifty works); Arabic grammar and rhetoric (around thirty works); literary studies, including poetry and commentaries on poetry collections (around thirty works); Sufism (more than fifteen works); and history and biography (more than fifteen works). In addition, many works concern medical sciences, agriculture, arithmetic, astronomy, and logic. This shows the broad and diverse range of intellectual interests among Syrian scholars and thus provides further support for scholarship challenging portrayals of intellectual apathy and stagnation in the Ottoman Arab lands before the modern period.[64]

64 For instance, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, "Opening the Gate of Verification: The Forgotten Arab-Islamic Florescence of the 17th Century", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38/2 (2006), 263-281.

Table 2 also provides insights about the educational curriculum within Syrian scholarly circles. It shows that Ottoman Syrian scholars engaged with 146 distinct scholarly and literary works, with certain works being read and taught by multiple scholars. This large number points to the breadth and diversity of Syrian scholars' intellectual interests at different stages of their lives. It is too large to suggest a single standardized curriculum; rather, it is likely that different subgroups—for example, scholars from the same madhhab or city—centered their education on different books, and that these divergences persisted in later stages of study. Moreover, the number of studied books increased from 98 in the first period to 146 in the subsequent two periods under examination. This increase over time may also be interpreted as an indication of the intellectual vitality of Syria under Ottoman rule.

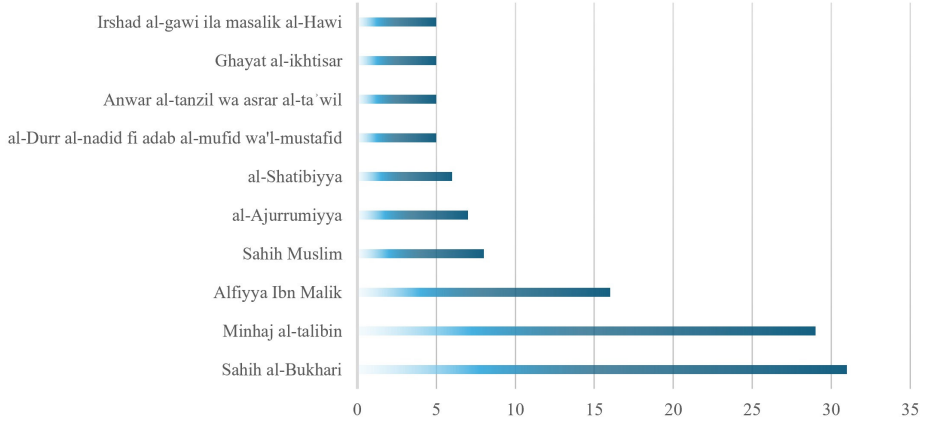

Figure 6. The Works Most Frequently Read and Taught in Ottoman Syrian Scholarly Circles (Data from the Ulema Database, based on *al-Kawakib*; calculated and charted by the author.)

According to Figure 6, which illustrates the works most frequently studied and taught among the 146 works with which Ottoman Syrian scholars engaged, the most frequently studied work in Ottoman Syrian scholarly circles was al-Bukhari's (d. 870) hadith collection, which appears in more than thirty instances of study and teaching. In comparative perspective, *Sahih al-Bukhari* was also among the most frequently studied works in Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula, with fourteen and five instances, respectively. By contrast, among scholars from Bilad al-Rum, there is only a single recorded instance of engagement with this hadith collection. In Syria, al-Bukhari's work is followed by Nawawi's (d. 1277) *Minhaj al-talibin*, a renowned Shafiʿi law manual, which is recorded as the second most frequently studied work in Egyptian scholarly circles as well, with seven recorded instances. By contrast, this work appears in only a single instance in the Arabian Peninsula and none in Bilad al-Rum.

The other most frequently studied works by Syrian scholars include, in descending order, Ibn Malik's (d. 1274) work *al-Alfiyya*, on Arabic grammar; Muslim's (d. 875) hadith collection; Ibn Ajurrum's (d. 1323) work on Arabic grammar; Qasim al-Shatibi's (d. 1194) work on Quranic recitation; Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi's *al-Durr al-nadid*, on the classification of sciences and pedagogy; Qadi Baydawi's (d. 1286) *Anwar al-tanzil*, on Quranic exegesis; Abu Shujaʿ al-Isfahani's (d. after 1107) Shafiʿi law manual *Ghayat al-ikhtisar*; and Ibn al-Muqri's (d. 1433)

Irshad al-gawi, an abridgement of al-Qazwini's (d. 1266) work on Shafiʿi jurisprudence.

Again, we observe that some of these works were studied in Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, and Bilad al-Rum; however, the similarity between the patterns observed in Syria and Egypt appears stronger than that between Syria and the other two regions. For instance, Ibn Malik's *al-Alfiyya* appears sixteen times in the Syrian context and four times in Egypt, but only once in the Arabian Peninsula, and not at all in Bilad al-Rum. Such statistics, although limited in scope, suggest a much stronger intellectual connection between Syria and Egypt than between Syria and the other regions. This may be related to the fact that Syria and Egypt were historically united for centuries under Mamluk rule prior to the Ottoman conquest. This shared intellectual culture seems to have persisted even under Ottoman rule. The data, together with the previously analyzed student and teacher networks, indicate that the scholarly orbit of Syrian scholars continued to gravitate more strongly southward toward Egypt than northward toward Bilad al-Rum. This southward orientation is particularly evident in the less widely studied works among Syrian scholars. For example, three Syrians are known to have engaged with *al-Badr al-taliʿ fi hall Jamʿ al-Jawamiʿ*, a commentary by the Egyptian scholar al-Mahalli (d. 1459) on *Jamʿ al-Jawamiʿ*, a foundational work in Shafiʿi legal theory authored by another Mamluk-era Egyptian scholar, Taj al-Din al-Subki (d. 1370).

According to Figure 6, the curriculum in Ottoman Syria, as reflected in *al-Kawakib*, appears to have been structured largely around three disciplines: Arabic language, hadith, and Shafiʿi jurisprudence. Given that most Syrian scholars were affiliated with the Shafiʿi madhhab, the prominence of Shafiʿi legal texts is unsurprising. Moreover, as indicated by the authors' dates of death, of the most popular works in Syria, excluding Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi's *al-Durr al-nadid*, the most recent had been composed more than a century before the period covered in *al-Kawakib*. In other words, the core educational curriculum in Syria built on works whose scholarly authority had been established over centuries. Nevertheless, as seen in the example of *al-Durr al-nadid*, this curriculum was receptive to recent scholarly contributions as well. Within Ottoman Syria, we encounter thirteen such works in total—works that were both authored and studied by Syrians—which shows that 7 percent of the contemporary scholarly production in Syria (13 out of 194 works) circulated within Syrian scholarly circles.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis has sought to shed light on Syria's position as a long-established and prominent Muslim scholarly center in the sixteenth century, particularly under Ottoman rule. To this end, it focused on Najm al-Din al-Ghazzi's renowned biographical dictionary *al-Kawakib* and has examined the scholarly connections and intellectual engagements of scholars active in Ottoman Syria as reflected in this source. This preliminary analysis inevitably has a number of limitations, some stemming from *al-Kawakib* itself and others from the analytical categories adopted in this article.

Al-Kawakib has long been used by modern scholars as a key source for studying the first century of Ottoman rule in the former Mamluk lands, most often to explore individual scholars through their biographies. Building on this body of scholarship, the present study extends the use of *al-Kawakib* by mobilizing its biographical data for a prosopographical analysis aimed at

offering a broader, synoptic perspective on sixteenth-century Syria. Although the intellectual life of early Ottoman Syria has been studied at both institutional and individual levels, it has not previously been the subject of a prosopographical study of this scale. By undertaking such an analysis, this study has sought to make a contribution in terms not only of scope but also of approach. It has employed social network analysis, visualizations, and computational techniques in place of conventional prosopographical methods in historical studies. The analyses presented here demonstrate how, through the use of this novel methodology, the rich data in *al-Kawakib* can yield new insights. Of course, the data are sufficiently rich to support multiple analytical perspectives, a variety of methodological measures, and alternative forms of visualization; however, given the scope of this article and its central questions, only a limited subset of these possibilities could be explored. The approaches adopted in this article should therefore be understood as one possible reading of the source, one open to refinement, revision, and challenge in future studies.

Once the limitations of *al-Kawakib*, discussed throughout this article, are taken into account, the teacher-student relationships examined here nonetheless reveal both the local grounding and the transregional connectedness of the Syrian scholarly community in the sixteenth century. Although Syrian scholars dominate the network, reflecting patterns of local scholarly formation, they were also closely connected to neighboring Arabic-speaking scholarly traditions. These ties were likely facilitated by long-standing patterns of mobility associated with pilgrimage, patronage, and the movement of scholars between Cairo, the Holy Cities, and Syria for education. By contrast, scholars from Bilad al-Rum appear only marginally in the student-teacher network, suggesting that the Ottoman imperial center was not a primary destination for scholarly training among Syrians. Overall, this analysis presents Ottoman Syria as a cohesive regional hub shaped by strong internal connections and sustained engagement with the late Mamluk Cairene scholarly tradition.

Meanwhile, the evidence from the works authored, studied, and taught by the scholars discussed here shows that Ottoman Syrian scholars were both producers and consumers of knowledge. They continued established intellectual traditions by producing new works. Within the *al-Kawakib* corpus, nearly half of the scholarly and literary works produced during the Ottoman period were authored by Syrians. They also engaged with canonical texts, remaining firmly grounded in long-established pre-Mamluk and early Mamluk traditions, particularly in law, language, and hadith. At the same time, they also engaged with contemporary scholarship, especially works authored in Syria. This suggests that the scholarly landscape of sixteenth-century Syria was shaped by multiple intellectual currents rather than by a single dominant orientation. Nevertheless, patterns of shared study and teaching among Syrian scholars reveal a relatively close intellectual connection with Egypt, suggesting that Cairene scholarly authority continued to influence Syrian learning well into the Ottoman period. Overall, these patterns portray Ottoman Syria as neither an isolated scholarly space nor one fully redirected toward the new imperial center in Istanbul, but instead as oriented primarily southward, combining continuity with a measured openness to new intellectual developments.

Given the scope and methodological limits of the present study, this article has not systematically addressed madhhab-based distinctions among scholars. Yet this omission also

points to a promising direction for future research. A more explicitly madhhab-centered analysis may well reveal patterns that remain obscured in the present framework. One might ask, for example, whether Hanafi scholars in Syria were more closely connected to the Ottoman imperial scholarly milieu than scholars affiliated with other legal schools. Such a line of inquiry would be especially meaningful in light of recent scholarship that emphasizes the Ottomans' promotion of a distinctive Hanafi legal orientation. Exploring these questions through larger datasets and comparative network analysis could significantly deepen our understanding of the relationship between legal affiliation, scholarly mobility, and imperial integration in the early modern Ottoman world.

Likewise, a systematic, side-by-side comparison of the books studied in Syria with those read and taught in Bilad al-Rum during the same period would offer a clearer view of regional diversity. Although this article has taken some steps in this direction, *al-Kawakib*'s Syro-Egyptian focus inevitably limits the scope of the dataset. A comparative analysis between the dataset compiled here and the corpora of works cited in Ottoman-centered biographical dictionaries—such as *al-Shaqaʾiq al-nuʿmaniyya* and its continuation by the above-mentioned Atayi—would therefore allow for a more comprehensive and robust assessment. Such an approach would capture both regional diversity and convergence through an explicitly synchronic lens, making it possible to observe differences and overlaps within the Ottoman scholarly world at a single historical moment and to determine whether Syria and the imperial core lands followed parallel curricular patterns or developed distinct intellectual profiles.

Equally promising would be a diachronic approach that situates the evidence of *al-Kawakib* alongside earlier biographical compilations from the preceding century, such as those of al-Sakhawi, as well as later works, including Muhibbi's (d. 1699) centennial biographical dictionary, *Khulasat al-athar*. Bringing these corpora into dialogue would make it possible to trace longer-term patterns of continuity and change in Syria, shedding light on how scholarly interests, teaching practices, and textual canons evolved across the Mamluk-Ottoman transition and over the subsequent centuries of Ottoman rule. In this way, future research could move beyond institutional or political narratives of transition and instead assess this shift through the lens of intellectual life and everyday scholarly practice.

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