The institutions and courtly protocols that supported the Mamluk sultan and legitimized and projected his power have been investigated in previous scholarship. Such work emphasizes the formalities of relations between the sultan and his amirs and with society at large. Royal etiquette guided the sultan’s manners while he was at court as well as during travel, and was designed to distance him from his peers. According to the protocols of the day, for example, only the highest ranking amirs were allowed to enter the central hall (dīhlīz). Upon approaching the sultan they were instructed to prostrate themselves in front of him (kharr). Social distance was maintained not only in physical terms but also in the realm of political prerogatives. Mamluk political philosophy recognized three domains in which the sultan’s name was publicly proclaimed: his title (laqab sultānī), being mentioned by name at Friday noon prayer (khutba), and minting coins (sikkah).

When the sultan nominated viceroys, the royal chancellery issued letters of appointment that were accompanied by symbolic gifts, which articulated the relationship between the ruler and his appointee. The sultan customarily awarded symbolic role of gift exchanges and their function in facilitating relations between parties has been studied by Marcel Mauss, The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies, trans. Ian Cunnison (London, 1966).
the viceroys a robe of honor (khil’ah), a horse-blanket (kanbash) made of silk embroidered with gold and silver (zarkash), saddles (surūj), and furs. Additionally, the sultan and his viceroys exchanged presents and governors bestowed riding animals, linens (qumāsh), garments (thiyāb), and other textiles, in addition to cash.

However, to consolidate his position, the sultan had to address a wider circle than his military intimates. Syrian sources of the period attest to the energy and resources sultans devoted to propaganda and projecting their royal persona among the civil population. Considerable sums were dedicated to public relations. Poets, musicians, and preachers were paid to cultivate and promote the sultan’s public image.

Yet, the interaction between the Mamluk sultans and their subjects was not restricted to verbal exchanges. Literary and archeological sources demonstrate the considerable resources the sultan and ruling elite allocated for the construction of public and private buildings. By these projects they hoped to promote several agendas: 1) to make their presence known; 2) to fashion an environment that would reflect their desired images; 3) to establish communication with their subjects. Needless to say, this policy demanded heavy taxation. The willingness of the Mamluk administrators to risk public backlash against harsh levies demonstrates

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10 The idea of political legitimacy was not foreign to the sultans. Rebelling amirs claimed al-Malik al-Sa‘īd ibn Baybars was unfit to rule. They told him: “A king should not spend time in vigorous pursuit of games or amusements. These are not appropriate entertainments.” (Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr, Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah [Beirut, 2001], 13:288.)


the importance they assigned to construction projects. In the following my aim is to broadly outline the Mamluk policy for shaping the public sphere in Syria by focusing on documented examples from Damascus and other Syrian cities, relying on a broad range of local sources of the period.

**CREATING PUBLIC SPACE IN BILĀD AL-SHAḤM**

The Mamluk elite constructed numerous and varied public structures in Syria: mosques, tombs, schools, Sufi lodges, hospitals, caravanserais, gates, canals, public fountains, bridges, and walls. Moreover, the Mamluk patrons did not limit their investments to new edifices; they also devoted considerable

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13 Ibdk., 2:331.
14 *Repertoire chronologique d'épigraphie Arabe* (Cairo, 1931–91) (hereafter *RCEA*), 12:176 (no. 4662 Hims 671/1272–73); 13:205 (no. 5100) and 263 (no. 5190); 14:266 (no. 5587 Gaza 730/1329); 15:24–25 (no. 5637 Aleppo). Heinz Gaube, *Arabische Inscriften aus Syrien* (Beirut, 1978), 26 (no. 35) and 45 (no. 76).
15 *RCEA*, 12:75 (no. 4504), 176 (no. 4663), and 182 (no. 4673); 13:75 (no. 4909) and 186 (no. 5065 Tripoli 698/1298); 14:24 (no. 5636), 33 (no. 5251), 113 (no. 5777), 165 (no. 5449 Damascus 721/1321), 181 (no. 5473 Damascus 722/1322), 193 (no. 5486 Damascus 723/1323), and 194 (no. 5487 Hamah 723/1323); 15:201 (no. 5926 Safad 741/1341) and 199 (no. 6290 Jerusalem 759/1359); 16:85 (no. 6119), 121 (no. 6181), and 215–16 (no. 6324 Tripoli 760/1359); 18:129 (no. 792007), 127 (no. 792005), 170 (no. 795007), 200 (no. 797009), and 202 (no. 797012). Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 13:280; Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Ibn Sāsār, *Al-Durrah al-Mud‘ah fi al-Dawlah al-Zahiriyah* (Berkeley, 1963), 172; Muḥammad ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, ‘Uyun al-Tawārikh al-Sanawāt 688–699 A.H., ed. Nabilah ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Dāwuq (Baghdad, 1991), 129; Anne-Marie Eddé, *La principauté Ayyoubide d’Alep: (579/1183–658/1260)* (Stuttgart, 1999), 448–49.
17 *RCEA*, 13:163–64 (no. 5033) and 15:200 (no. 5924 the Ṣalāḥiyah in Jerusalem in 741/1341).
21 *RCEA*, 12:140 (no. 4611); 13:250 (no. 5171); 14:148 (no. 5427 Jerusalem); 15:74 (no. 5708); 16:12 (no. 6015 Aleppo 746/1345) and 123 (no. 6185). Gaube, *Arabische Inschriften*, 17 (no. 11: a sabīl built in 915/1508 by Khā‘ir Bek, the governor of Aleppo); Ibn Ṣaṣār, *Al-Durrah al-Mud‘ah*, 188.
22 *RCEA*, 12:174–75 (no. 4660, 4661); 15:48 (no. 5670).
23 Ibid., 13:204 (no. 5099 Majdal 700/1300).
24 Ibid., 12:68 (no. 4530 Gaza); 18:197 (no. 797004 Gaza).
efforts to refurbishing citadels\textsuperscript{26} and sacred shrines,\textsuperscript{27} including renovations of the Great Mosque of Damascus. Since Mamluk governors were fully aware of the role such structures played in public image-making, it is not surprising to come across reports of orders to demolish standing structures,\textsuperscript{28} an act that was aimed at obliterating the memory of their adversaries and reshaping the environment to their own benefit.\textsuperscript{29}

The sheer volume of references in Syrian sources to urban projects strongly supports the view that the Mamluks focused their building initiatives in the cities. Three criteria set urban centers apart from rural communities, dictating appropriate types of investment by the state and its officials:

1) Urban communities were complex societies composed of a range of occupations and economic-cultural strata.

2) Cities were economic hubs. In order to house merchants and artisans, commercial and handicrafts complexes (wakālah; qaysāriyah), as well as markets, were built.\textsuperscript{30}

3) Urban residents paid taxes on private properties, and their urban plots were not classified as iqtā’ land, although they kept gardens.

In addition to these economic, legal, and social criteria, architectural features distinguished the Mamluk cities. As in Egypt, communal buildings, such as cathedral mosques (jāmi’),\textsuperscript{31} hospitals, and schools, influenced the layout of neighborhoods and streets in Syrian cities. From time to time the Mamluks made efforts to enforce “Islamic” values and norms on the city dwellers. The inspector of the markets was instructed to impose bans on alcohol, prostitution, and other forbidden activities. These policies were often aimed at women.\textsuperscript{32}

As administrative centers, cities also served as residences of amirs and civilian officials, and where amirs met regularly with bureaucrats and religious dignitaries.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., 18:30 (no. 786006 Aleppo 786/1385).

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., 18:3 (no. 784004 a mosque in Damascus). Ibn al-Jazarī, Tārīkh, 2:318–19.

\textsuperscript{28}On one occasion (in 690/1291) the viceroy of Damascus ordered the destruction of houses, shops, and workshops. Ibn al-Jazarī, Tārīkh, 1:60.

\textsuperscript{29}Upon regaining control of Damascus in 1398, Barquq had structures demolished that the rebel Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ǧalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sūfī had built. Ibn Ṣārāb, Al-Durrah al-Mudīrī, 74/104.

\textsuperscript{30}Al-Maqrīzī, Al-Sulāk, 4:620.

\textsuperscript{31}Jalāl al-Dīn al-Sūfī, Kawkab al-Rawḍah fī Tārīkh al-Nīl wa-Jazīrat al-Rawḍah, ed. Muḥammad al-Shishtawī (Cairo, 2002), 104.


The ruling elite strove to construct an urban environment that would be commensurate with their status and image and would facilitate their daily activities. The Green Hippodrome (al-Maydān al-Akhdar) in Damascus, built to serve the ruling Mamluk army, and the construction of a small market (suwayqah) nearby, are only a couple of examples of this concern for image and utility.

The inauguration of new projects was lavishly celebrated. Food was served in great quantities; gifts and awards were bestowed on officials and builders (mi‘mariyyah). At the completion of a canal in Aleppo in 731/1330–31, the viceroy called for a public celebration. The Syrian historian al-Birza‘l (1267–1339) described the gathering of army commanders, notables, and commoners, stressing that the puritanical governor banned musicians (mutribūn) from participating in the event.

The following panegyric by Badr al-Dīn al-Hasan ibn ‘Alī al-Kātib captures one part of public reaction to Mamluk construction activity:

We prostrate ourselves and kiss the ground. Our master’s realm is the best (ghurrah) amongst the nations, almighty God made it shine. . . . Our sultan’s generosity directed him to construct mosques and places of prayer, to build mausolea and shrines. Roads were paved to help travelers arriving and departing. After falling into disrepair, canals were renovated. The great mosque of Damascus was refurbished and regained its splendor, its decorations and marbles restored. The candelabra were multiplied. Many places acquired new looks, and the worshipers’ hearts became full of joy.

Yet, it should be emphasized that Mamluk amirs did not refrain from building mosques in the countryside, where the vast majority of the sultanate’s subjects dwelled and labored on the iqtā’ lands. Mamluk mosques are still visible in Syrian villages today.

The policy of construction promoted by the Mamluks also aimed at strengthening the hold of Islam on a territory believed to be under constant threat. While illusory threats of imminent invasions by Franks and Mongols haunted the Muslim

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33 RCEA, 18:203 and 204 (nos. 797013, 797014).
36 Ibn Duqmāq, Al-Nafhah al-Miskiyyah, 123, 244; Ibn al-Jazarī, Tārīkh, 2:258–59.
38 Ibid., 389–90. For the formula of kissing the white hand, see ibid., 441.

population, the building initiative provided society with a sense of security and stability. Sultans and governors invested considerable resources in developing Muslim shrines and other holy sites that attracted large numbers of visitors. These edifices amplified the ruler’s image and defined the structure and borders of Mamluk sacred topography. Tombs of biblical prophets such as Noah, Moses, and Abraham were renovated or enlarged, as were the tombs of the Prophet Muhammad’s close companions. Baybars started this policy by erecting a sanctuary east of the Jordan River, said to be the burial ground (mazār) of Abū 'Ubaydah. In southern Palestine a Roman structure was identified as Abū Ḥurayrah’s tomb. Not far away from this location is the shrine (mashhad) of Salma‘n al-Fārisī. In central Syria the shrine of Khālid ibn al-Walid was renovated. In Aleppo builders constructed the shrine of Sa‘d ibn Ayyūb al-Anṣārī. Another area of investment was the renewal of Latin (Crusader) and Ayyūbid fortifications, which delineated the Mamluks’ political domain. Inscriptions from Shawbak in southwestern Jordan to Ḥisn al-Akrād (Krak des Chevaliers) in central Syria attest to this initiative.

Conspicuously sacred and military structures as these often bore inscriptions appropriate to Syria’s role as imperial frontier and holy land. As “public text” they name the founder and announce his self-asserted achievements and titles. Baybars’

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41 RCEA, 12:142 (no. 4612).
42 Ibid., 13:51–53 (nos. 4876–77); and later renovations: 13:95–96 and 194 (no. 4943, 5079); 18:179 (no. 796001).
43 Ibid., 12:208–9 (no. 4714); 13:70 (no. 4901).
44 Ibid., 12:191 (no. 4686); 13:115 (no. 4965).
46 Ibid., 12:104–5 (no. 4556, 4557) and 128–29 (no. 4593); although some Muslim authors doubt this identification. Al-Khaznadārī, Tārīkh Majmū‘ al-Nawādir, 277–79.
47 Gaube, Arabische Inschriften, 23–25; Eddé, Alep, 431.
49 Epigraphic data constitute historical sources, generally contemporary with the construction of the buildings. RCEA, 12:124 (no. 4588 Baybars in Ramla 666/1268), 125 (no. 4589 Ṣafād), and 210 (no. 4715 Damascus); 13:41–42 (no. 4859, 4860 Aleppo 684/1284); 14:58 (no. 5291 Damascus 711/1311), 59–60 (nos. 5292–94 Aleppo 711/1311); 77 (no. 5323 Jerusalem 713/1314), 88 (no. 5339 Gaza 714/1315), 89–90 (nos. 5340–42 Ramla 714/1314), 101 (no. 5358 Tripoli 715/1315), 105–6 (no. 4956 Khalil in Hims 691/1292), 118–19 (no. 5386 Baalbek 717/1317), 127 (no. 5400 Gaza 718/1318), 128 (no. 5401 Ramla 718/1318), and 129 (no. 5403 Aleppo 718/1318); 15:4–5 (nos. 5606–7 Jerusalem al-Aqṣa mosque); 16:7–8 (nos. 6009–10 Jerusalem al-Aqṣa mosque.

name, for example, is accompanied by a long list of royal titles: “our sultan, the victorious king, judicious, righteous, warrior, master of kings and sultans, ruler of the two qiblahs [Mecca and Jerusalem], servant of the holy places, partner of the caliph, the commander of the faithful, Alexander of our days.” Qalāwūn’s titulature included additional titles, such as: “the greatest sultan, king of kings (shāhanshāh al-mu’āẓẓam), the monarch who holds the nations by their necks, the king supported by heaven (mu‘ayyad).” In addition to insignia and regalia, inscriptions are informative about financial investments and assert the role of religious endowment (waqf) in building or maintaining a specific institution. In other instances architectural inscriptions were believed to have a protective quality, shielding property from mismanagement or seizure. In addition, inscriptions occasionally document the abolition of taxes and limitations on tariffs.

The development of the public sphere was not restricted to stone and marble. To capture the viewers’ attention the governing elite shaped the urban space by staging events. Cities were decorated to celebrate military victories, investitures of sultans, proclamations of royal births, recovery of the sultan’s health, or the accession of a new governor. In a manner resembling an outdoor performance,
the rulers staged parades, public ceremonies, and festivities. Cavalry and infantry marched, drums were beaten, jugglers preformed, and emblems of state were put on display. Streets and squares were also decorated with textiles, colors, and lights. On the occasion of the sultan’s recovery from illness, the people of Damascus were ordered to decorate the streets with ornaments and pieces of brocade embroidered with gold and silver. The drums played loudly in the citadel and palaces, and the viceroy put on the royal robe of honor in a public ceremony. When Altunbugha reentered Damascus and took up his post as viceroy, candles were lit and the imam of the Great Mosque invoked blessings for the sultan.

The decoration and lighting of the streets was only one element in the staging of these political performances. With lights came sounds. Bands of drummers (tablkhānāh) played to publicly announce important events. The rhythm of drums on these occasions differed from the music played by tambourines or the beating of the drums during fighting. The account of the victorious return of Sultan Barquq to the throne in 792/1390 preserves the joyful scene at the welcoming reception:

At dawn al-Malik al-Zāhir Sayf al-Islām Abū Sa‘īd Barquq arrived at Raydānīyah. A mission from Cairo proceeded to meet him: the descendants of the Prophet, the Sufis carrying banners (sanājiq), army battalions dressed for combat and armed with weapons, Jews carrying candelabra and the Torah, Christians holding candles and

64 Ibn Ǧāṣrā, Al-Durrah al-Mudī‘ah, 63.
65 Al-‘Umarī, Al-Ta‘rīf, 103; Ibn Tağhrībirdī, Al-Nujūm, 10:22.
66 The beating of drums also proclaimed the end of fasting during the month of Ramadān (Ibn al-Jazarī, Tārikh, 2:77).
Bibles, and the masses. They chanted blessings, and the women trilled.  

The decorated streets and buildings were intended by the ruling Mamluk elite as a backdrop to their striking costumes and to gain the admiration of the viewing public (washshaha al-madinah ba’da an zuyunat).  

Official parades and ceremonies marked particularly important events in great splendor (fī ubbahah ‘ażīnah).  

On the arrival of al-Malik al-Sa’īd ibn Baybars to Damascus in 677/1279 the city was decorated. Domed pavilions (qibāb) were erected, and people packed the streets. On the day of the Great Feast (‘Id al-Nahr) they prayed together at the hippodrome with the sultan. This mass gathering was followed by a more modest event inside the citadel, where a welcoming reception took place. On another occasion, in 741/1341, an ailing sultan ordered the release of all prisoners. In reaction to this gratifying news people came out carrying burning candles, beating drums, and holding Bibles (Jews) and Gospels (Christians) in their hands.  

Victory parades were staged to arouse hopes for stability and peace, in addition to demonstrating authority and strength. Riding in front of their troops army commanders entered the cities’ gates and led processions along crowded streets. Returning victorious from a battle against the Mongols, Qalāwūn ceremoniously crossed Damascus with his soldiers and twelve wagons full of prisoners of war. Several days after Qalāwūn’s defeat of the Franks and his capture of Tripoli, a carrier pigeon landed in the Damascus citadel and brought the news. The garrison force played drums, and the streets were decorated.  

A similar event was staged following the conquest of Acre by al-Ashraf Khalīl.
in 1291. Damascus was elaborately adorned (wa-zuyinat ajmal zinah). Riding ahead of his cavalry, the sultan resembled "the full moon surrounded by shining stars" (ka-al-badr bayna kawkabihii). Comparable was the reaction to al-Ashraf Khalil’s victory over the Armenians and the capture of Qal’at al-Rum. Damascus was decorated, the citadel, streets, and palaces festooned. Leading his soldiers, the victorious sultan rode through the city’s streets. In the course of the military parade Armenian captives were exhibited. The chronicles report on the joyful audience crowding the squares.

Other occasions for public celebration included the inauguration of a new sultan or viceroy. For these events the audience cheered and blessed the new leader, as was the case for the coronation of al-Malik al-Afdal, the ruler of al-Hamah. Upon the investiture of the minor prince al-Malik al-Nasr Faraj ibn Barquq in 801/1399, a long black cloak (franjiyah) embroidered with gold thread was draped over the child’s shoulders and a golden turban (‘imamah) placed on his head. The royal procession in Cairo crossed the city and ascended to the citadel, where the new sultan sat on the throne (dast). Similar performances marked political insurgencies in the provinces. During the revolt of al-Malik al-Kamil al-Ashqar Sanqar against Qalawun, the rebel declared the severing of contact between Damascus and Cairo. This declaration was echoed by a parade joined by cavalry, men of religion, and notables. Leading his forces, Sanqar descended from the citadel and rode towards Damascus’ hippodrome. There he inspected the forces and honored their commander with robes of honor.

These events provided an entertaining spectacle for the public. Many accounts of celebrations (yawm mashhur) depict large crowds flooding the streets carrying candles and joining the procession, as if they were actors in a play. On one occasion the merchants of Damascus were ordered to stand outside the city wall when al-Ashraf Khalil was entering the city. Joining them were artisans led by their master (‘arif); all were holding candles. As the sultan’s convoy drew closer

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78 Ibn al-Jazarî, Târîkh, 1:110. Another example is the report on the arrival of Barquq to Damascus and his meeting with the viceroy Yâlughâ al-Nâsîrî in 793/1391 (al-Kutubi, ‘Uyûn al-Tawârîkh, 131).
81 Ibn al-Jazarî, Târîkh, 2:519.
to the gate they lit their candles. The majestic entourage advanced along an illuminated route from Bāb al-Naṣr to al-Qadim mosque.85 On another occasion, as the troops fighting Minṭāṣh advanced towards Damascus, many Damascenes came out of the city holding candles and listening to singers accompanied by tambourines.86

When Sultan Barqūq entered Damascus in 793/1391, the official ceremony was said to be “according to the fashion of the kings.” The governor Yālbughā al-Nāṣīr bore the royal parasol (al-qubbah wa-al-ṭayr) over his head, candles were lit, and girls sang. The people spread pieces of cloth along the streets that the sultan passed on his way to the citadel. Men called out blessings to the sultan, and women gave shrill cries. The citadel’s commander had rebuilt, whitewashed, and furnished most of the citadel’s structures. Sitting high on his horse Barqūq reviewed the dismounted cavalry. This gesture reflected the distance between royal authority and subordinates. The ceremony ended with the sultan bestowing robes of honor on the amirs “as was the custom of the kings.”87 These were not low-cost events, and the local population was occasionally asked to bear the financial burden of hosting them.88 No wonder, then, that public reaction was sometimes hostile.89

Parades were used by the authorities to display (ashhara) those who were declared enemies of the public order. In order to humiliate them, they were exhibited to the public, occasionally tied back-to-back on a beast of burden, sometimes fastened with nails to a board (tasmīr). In one instance the sultan ordered rebellious soldiers to be put on display. As the camels were led along the streets, the soldiers’ wives, their faces unveiled and exposed, dashed around them.90 A similar situation was reported in Damascus in 792/1390. The guards beat drums as Ibn Hanash was brought to the city. Soldiers with drawn swords in their hands marched at the column’s head, while the prisoners, tied to the backs of beasts of burden, were shown to the public.91 For three days the heads of two executed amirs were hung in Cairo, first at the citadel gate, then at the town gate. During these days the

84Ibn al-Jazarī, Mukhtār Ḥawādīth al-Zamān, 353.
88Ibn al-Jazarī, Mukhtār Ḥawādīth al-Zamān, 391; idem, Tārīkh, 1:46 and 52. On one occasion an encampment of twelve tents was erected.
89Ibn Ṭūlūn, I’lām al-Warā, 204 and 218.
military bands continuously beat small drums.  

Dār al-Saʿādah palace in Damascus served as a place of assembly where the influential men (ahl al-hall wa-al-ʿaqd) congregated to pay homage (bayʿah) to the new viceroy nominated by the sultan. The first stage in the formal procedure was the reading of the letter of appointment by the light of candles. This was accompanied with the bestowal of a robe of honor. From Dār al-Saʿādah the incoming viceroy proceeded to the citadel, where the second stage of the ceremony took place. Arriving there the viceroy bowed and kissed the gate’s doorstep (ʿatabah) and entered the hall. With this he commenced his term of office. Other ceremonies marked the end of service and the departure of officials. They also included the exchange of gifts.

Outside of political functions, the streets of Mamluk cities were also used for religious ceremonies. All strata of society celebrated communal feasts together and participated in mass gatherings. The chronicles report on the departure and return of the hajj caravan and on religious festivals to commemorate Muslim holidays. Worshipers commemorated other occasions, such as the completion of the recital of the entire Quran (khatmah) or the end of a yearly cycle of hadith recitation. The nomination of Ibn Khallikān, the well-known jurist and historian, to a teaching position at the Zahiriyah madrasah in Damascus in 677/1278 was celebrated by a gathering of political and religious dignitaries. On his visit to Damascus in 696/1296, Sultan Kitbughā followed the pilgrims’ steps. He paid a visit to the Umayyad Mosque and inspected a precious manuscript said to be the Quran of ʿUthmān. He then proceeded to the mosque’s southern wall and prayed at the tomb of Nabī Hūd. At Friday prayer he invited members of the congregation to write him and personally collected their petitions (qiṣṣah).

Public ceremonies and rituals did not always take place outdoors. Some were held within the walls of religious or governmental buildings. Mosques and shrines served as common loci for public encounters with the rulers. During Friday noon prayers the preacher blessed the sultan, a transparently political gesture. When Barquq succeeded in taking control of Damascus, a celebratory ritual took place

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92Ibn al-Ṣayraḥ, Nuzhat al-Nuṭūs, 2:56.
95Ibn ʿIyās, Badāʾiʿ, 4:88; Ibn al-Jazārī, Mukhtar Ḥawādith al-Zamān, 388.
97Ibn al-Jazārī, Tārīkh, 1:291 and 292; idem, Mukhtar Ḥawādith al-Zamān, 380.
in the Umayyad Mosque. Candles were lit, and the preacher, standing on the top step of the pulpit, invoked blessings for the sultan, who stood on a lower step. Following the recovery of Badr al-Din Baydarah from an illness, a communal gathering took place in Damascus’ Grand Mosque. Candles illuminated the building, as was the practice on mid-Sha'bân nights. Readers recited short chapters from the Quran, and Baydarah distributed considerable sums of alms (sadaqah). After the dismissal of Tankiz, the powerful viceroy of Damascus, in 741/1340, the new governor prayed at the rulers’ stall (maqsûrah) in the Grand Mosque. In order to denigrate his predecessor, the new governor listed Tankiz’s faults and promised to introduce reforms in taxation and administration.

The audiences at these events were not passive spectators. They participated in, and reacted to, the public displays and performances. They crowded the streets, their rising voices heard from every corner of the city. Occasionally they carried candles and even copies of the Quran. At least during one occasion of alms distribution, in ‘Āshūrā’ 912/1506, several people were crushed as the crowd forced its way toward the sultan, who was throwing coins to the poor from horseback. Crowded conditions are plainly illustrated by a report from Damascus. When a procession with an elephant reached a bridge, the poor animal became so terrified that he tumbled over the side of the bridge and died.

It is appropriate to mention here that streets and squares were not used only for prayers and parades. Sultans and commanders used such public spaces for their private rites of passage and invited rich and poor to participate. During ceremonies such as weddings (zaffah) and circumcisions (khitan) participants dined, listened to bands and poets, and exchanged gifts, as was the case in Damascus for an event sponsored by the local governor in 801/1399. To accommodate the numerous guests, tents were erected, and eleven bowls of sugar were cooked. The governor’s son was seated on a horse and accompanied by guests and musicians to the palace where his circumcision took place. At a party given by the sultan in 837/1434, forty boys were circumcised alongside the royal prince. He was presented

98 Ibn Ṣaṣrā, Al-Durrah al-Mudī’ah, 63.
99 Ibn al-Jazarī, Tārīkh, 1:11.
100 Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārīkh, 1:123.
101 Ibn Ṣaṣrā, Al-Durrah al-Mudī’ah, 68, 69, 74, 75, 101, 126, and 133.
102 Ibn Iyās, Badā’i’, 4:94.
103 Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārīkh, 4:264.
with gifts, jewelry, and sweets. Food and drinks were served to all.\textsuperscript{106}

Funerals were another opportunity for public relations. An inscription on the wall of the Zahiriyah madrasah in Damascus reads: "our master Sultan Muhammad Berke ordered the construction of this blessed mausoleum and the two schools. He had built it to inter his father and himself; one day he will join him. Hence this tomb will contain two mighty kings, al-Malik al-Zahir and al-Malik al-Sa’id."\textsuperscript{107}

The coffin of Ibrâhîm ibn Aybak was transferred in 645/1247–48 from Cairo to the tomb that he had built for himself in Damascus.\textsuperscript{108} Citizens were summoned from the minarets to take part in funeral processions that traversed the city. Shops were closed, and women exposed their hair as a sign of mourning.\textsuperscript{109} In 730/1330 the body of Sayf al-Dîn Bahdar was taken first to the Great Mosque in Damascus. From there the funeral procession (jana'âzah) proceeded to the cemetery. Notables, heads of local government, and the religious establishment participated in the ceremony. All the mourners walked on foot; not a single person was seen on horseback.\textsuperscript{110} In the services commemorating the end of the first year after the death of Qalâwûn, a customary meal (simât) was served in Cairo and Damascus. The population of Damascus gathered at the Green Hippodrome, north of the old city. Its gates were unlocked. From midday until midnight Quranic verses were recited, and preachers (wu‘a‘z) related stories from the sultan’s life.\textsuperscript{111}

The manipulation of the urban topography of the city and its public spaces for official image-making by the Mamluks was as true for Damascus, and cities of Bilâd al-Shâm, as it was for Cairo. Building projects, the inscriptions that covered those buildings, and the public performances staged inside and outside their walls combined to fortify and to disseminate the image of Mamluk sultans and viceroys as unquestioned rulers. Various actors participated in those performances, engaging both representatives of the state and the civilian urban population. It was in these urban, public spaces that sultans, commanders, jurists, Sufis, civil servants, merchants, and the masses ('ammanah) encountered one another and participated together in the construction of official imagery. Occasionally during these events gifts and awards were bestowed. The exchange of gifts, the distribution of alms,

\textsuperscript{106}Anonymous [mu’arrikh šami majhûl], Hawliyyat Dimashqiyyah 834–839/1430–35, ed. Hasan Habashi (Cairo, 1968), 98.

\textsuperscript{107}RCEA, 13:57 (no. 4884 Damascus).

\textsuperscript{108}Al-Yûnînî, Dhayl Mir‘ât al Zamân, 1:16.


\textsuperscript{110}Ibn al-Jazarî, Târîkh, 2:410.

\textsuperscript{111}Ibn Iyâs, Badâ‘i’, 4:29; Ibn al-Jazarî, Mukhtâr Ḥâwâdîth al-Zamân, 342; idem, Târîkh, 1:58.
communal prayer, and the blessings of the governors merged in an inspiring political ritual.