

Slave Traders and Kārimī Merchants during the Mamluk Period: A Comparative Study

Both slave traders (*nakhkhās*, *jallāb*) and Kārimī merchants played important economic and social roles in Mamluk Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz. As Ira M. Lapidus has stated, slave traders were regarded on religious grounds as disreputable, like brokers, town criers, and money changers, but nevertheless were employed in the slave trade for the army of the Mamluk sultanate and became important figures in Mamluk circles.¹ David Ayalon was the first historian to provide a brief overview of the characteristics of slave traders.² In an investigation of mamluk names, titles and *nisbahs*, he also discovered the personal ties that existed between slave traders and ex-mamluks, that is, the sultans and amirs sold by them.³ On the other hand, Subhi Y. Labib's voluminous book on commercial activities in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt presents only a brief description of the slave trade during the Mamluk period.⁴ Eliyahu Ashtor and Andrew Ehrenkreutz have also touched upon military slaves supplied by the Genoese from the end of the thirteenth century on; however, both failed to refer to Muslim slave traders during that period.⁵ Al-Sayyid al-Bāz al-'Arīnī, in his book entitled *Al-Mamālīk*, explained the title *khwājā*, which was held mostly by slave traders, and their transactions in military slaves, through case studies of several merchants during the Mamluk period.⁶

As for the Kārimī merchants, more research has been accomplished than in the case of slave traders. S. D. Goitein, in a study on the origins of the Kārimī merchants based on the Geniza documents, refers to their close relationship with

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¹Ira. M. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 82, 122–23.

²David Ayalon, *L'esclavage du Mamelouk* (Jerusalem, 1951), 1–4.

³David Ayalon, "Names, Titles and 'Nisbas' of the Mamluks," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975): 189–232.

⁴Subhi. Y. Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Ägyptens im Spätmittelalter 1171–1517* (Wiesbaden, 1965), 259, 490.

⁵Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1983), 11, 28, 36, 47, 127, 333; Andrew Ehrenkreutz, "Strategic Implications of the Slave Trade between Genoa and Mamluk Egypt in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century," in *The Islamic Middle East, 700–1900*, ed. A. L. Udovitch (Princeton, 1981), 335–45.

⁶Al-Sayyid al-Bāz al-'Arīnī, *Al-Mamālīk* (Beirut, 1979), 73–77.



the merchants active on the west coast of India.⁷ Walter J. Fischel, following up on the pioneering study by Gaston Wiet,⁸ states that the Kārimī merchants formed a strong association and played an important role in Mamluk fiscal administration through their participation in the profitable spice trade between Egypt and Yemen.⁹ By adding new Arabic sources, Ashtor criticized Fischel's views, stating that (1) the Kārimīs were a loosely-organized group of merchants dealing not only in spices but also slaves and agricultural products between Egypt and Yemen, including Syria, and (2) contrary to Fischel's belief that the Kārimīs were an exclusively Muslim group of merchants, there is no reason why the Kārimīs should not have admitted Christians and Jews into their ranks.¹⁰ Based on plentiful Arabic and non-Arabic sources, Labib systematically describes their activities from the Fatimid to the Mamluk period.¹¹ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Ashqar has furthered the historical study of the spice trade during the Mamluk period with a book entitled *Tujjār al-Tawābil fī Miṣr fī al-'Aṣr al-Mamlūkī*,¹² which provides a very useful list of 201 Kārimī merchants containing their full names, personal information, and related historical sources.

As mentioned above, slave traders and Kārimī merchants have been studied mainly in the context of the social and economic history of Mamluk Egypt and Syria. Given that my interest lies in the similarities and differences between these two groups of merchants, this article will attempt to compare them during the Mamluk period, in terms of their fields of commercial activity, commodities, relationships with Mamluk sultans, and religious and cultural activities, based on the cases of two famous slave traders and one leading family from among the Kārimī merchants as depicted in the contemporary Arabic sources.

⁷Shlomo D. Goitein, "The Beginning of the Kārim Merchants and the Character of their Organization," in *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), 351–60; idem, "New Light on the Beginnings of the Kārim Merchants," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 1 (1958): 175–84.

⁸Gaston Wiet, "Les Marchands d'Épices sous les Sultans Mamlouks," *Cahiers d'Histoire Egyptienne* 7 (1955): 81–147.

⁹Walter J. Fischel, "Über die Gruppe der Kārimī-Kaufleute," *Analecta Orientalia* 14 (1937): 67–82. The revised version of this article in English is "The Spice Trade in Mamluk Egypt," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 1 (1958): 157–74.

¹⁰Eliyahu Ashtor, "The Kārimī Merchants," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1956): 54–56. See also idem, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1976), 241–42, 300–1, 320–21; idem, *Levant Trade*, 218, 270 f.

¹¹Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Ägyptens*, 60–63, 112–21, 402–5. See also idem, "Egyptian Commercial Policy in the Middle Ages," in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, ed. M. A. Cook (London, 1970), 63–77.

¹²Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Ashqar, *Tujjār al-Tawābil fī Miṣr fī al-'Aṣr al-Mamlūkī* (Cairo, 1999).



TWO SLAVE TRADERS

The activities of Khawājā Majd al-Dīn Ismā‘īl ibn Muḥammad ibn Yāqūt al-Sallāmī (671–743/1272–1342) and Khawājā Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Uthmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Ayyūb ibn Musāfir al-As‘ardī (d. 783/1381) are described in the Arabic chronicles and biographical dictionaries, allowing one to obtain a general grasp of their origins, spheres of activity, commodities, types of activity, relationships with the Mamluk sultans, and religious and cultural activities.

ORIGINS

Majd al-Dīn al-Sallāmī was born in the village of al-Sallāmīyah near Mosul in al-Jazīrah in the year 671/1272.¹³ According to Yāqūt (574 or 575–626/1179–1229), al-Sallāmīyah was a large village located on the east bank of the upper Tigris.¹⁴ Al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) says that he came to Egypt as a merchant and was granted the much-coveted title of *khawājā* during the reigns of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 693–94/1293–94, 698–708/1299–1309, 709–741/1310–41).¹⁵ *Khawājā* (Arabic corruption of *hoja*) was a title (*laqab*) bestowed upon wealthy merchants operating in official service from outside the Mamluk domain in places like al-Jazīrah, Fars, etc.¹⁶ Al-Ṣafadī (696–764/1297–1363) states that he was a significant figure, intelligent, friendly, and an excellent mediator between local rulers.¹⁷

Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Uthmān al-As‘ardī was from As‘ard, a town to the south of Āmid in al-Jazīrah.¹⁸ He was granted the title of *khawājā* for his distinguished service in transporting Barqūq (future sultan 784–91/1382–89, 792–801/1390–99), then his father and his brothers to Cairo in 782/1381.¹⁹ According to *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, Fakhr al-Dīn was thought of as brave, intelligent, and dignified.²⁰

As to language ability, both Majd al-Dīn and Fakhr al-Dīn should have spoken

¹³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Mawā‘iz wa-al-I’tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār* (Bulaq, 1270/1853; repr. Baghdad, 1970), 2:43; idem, *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-Kabīr* (Beirut, 1991), 2:181. *Al-Muqaffā* confuses Majd al-Dīn with Najm al-Dīn.

¹⁴ Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-Buldān* (Beirut, 1955–57), 3:234.

¹⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Muqaffā*, 2:181.

¹⁶ Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A‘shā fī Ṣinā‘at al-Inshā’* (Cairo, 1963), 6:13; Ayalon, *L’esclavage*, 3–4; Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 122–23, 127–29; Muḥammad Qandīl al-Baqlī, *Al-Ta‘rīf bi-Muṣṭalahāt Ṣubḥ al-A‘shā* (Cairo, 1984), 124. Ashtor states mistakenly that the honorific title *khawadjā* or *khawadjaki* which was bestowed upon them is not mentioned in the great manual of state administration compiled by al-Qalqashandī (*A Social and Economic History*, 321).

¹⁷ Al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt* (Wiesbaden, 1949–), 9:220.

¹⁸ Abū al-Fidā’, *Taqwīm al-Buldān* (Paris, 1840), 289.

¹⁹ Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh Ibn Qādī Shuhbah* (Damascus, 1977), 1:3:38, 70.

²⁰ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1963), 11:220.



Arabic fluently since they were from al-Jazīrah. However, Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470) states that Fakhr al-Dīn could speak Turkish, but not Arabic.²¹ Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah (779–851/1377–1448) gives his name as Fakhr al-Dīn al-‘Ajamī (al-aṣl) al-Miṣrī,²² which indicates that he was originally not an Arab, but later lived in Cairo. As al-‘Arīnī concludes, judging from their names, most of the slave traders during the Mamluk period were non-Arabs.²³

SPHERES OF ACTIVITY

Al-Maqrīzī (766–845/1364–1442) states in *Kitāb al-Sulūk* that Majd al-Dīn traveled often between Cairo and Tabriz using post (*barīd*) horses,²⁴ which were formally for official business. Tabriz at the beginning of the fourteenth century was not only the capital city of the Ilkhans but also an emporium of international trade.²⁵ Al-Maqrīzī states in *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, “Majd al-Dīn used to go in the countries of Ṭaṭar, trade there and return with slaves (sing. *raqīq*) and other goods.”²⁶ It is related that when he visited the court (*urudū*) of the Ilkhanids, he would stay there for two or three years.²⁷

As in the case of Barqūq, who was from Charkas,²⁸ Fakhr al-Dīn was involved in the trade between Cairo and the province of Charkas to the north of Tabriz. Fakhr al-Dīn also constructed a splendid trading center (*qaysāriyah*) in Damascus, which indicates that his activities encompassed both Egypt and Syria.²⁹ According to al-Maqrīzī,

Sultan al-Nāṣir increased the number of male slaves (sing. *mamlūk*) and female slaves (sing. *jāriyah*) to be purchased. He summoned the slave traders and gave them money to purchase male and female slaves. When the traders returned from Uzbek, Tabriz, Rūm and

²¹Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi wa-al-Mustawfā ba’d al-Wāfi* (Cairo, 1980–), 3:286; idem, *Al-Nujūm*, 11:224.

²²Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 1:3:73.

²³Al-‘Arīnī, *Al-Mamālīk*, 76.

²⁴Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma’rifat Duwal al-Mulūk* (Cairo, 1938–73), 2:209, 246.

²⁵Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History*, 264.

²⁶Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 2:43.

²⁷Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah fī A’yān al-Mi’ah al-Thāminah* (Cairo, 1966–67), 1:407.

²⁸Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 2:241; idem, *Al-Sulūk*, 3:476, 943; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm*, 11:223.

²⁹Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-Ghumr bi-Anbā’ al-‘Umr* (Cairo, 1969–72), 1:247; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 1:3:73.



Baghdad [to Cairo] with mamluks, the sultan would bestow precious goods upon them.³⁰

The spheres of activity of Majd al-Dīn and Fakhr al-Dīn—Tabriz and the province of Charkas—were included in the districts for purchasing slaves as mentioned by al-Maqrīzī.

COMMODITIES

Majd al-Dīn was known as a mamluk trader for the sultan (*tājir al-khāṣṣ*) during the reign of al-Malik al-Nāṣir. He often traveled to the Tatar provinces and returned with mamluk and *jāriyah* slaves (sing. *raqīq*) and other goods.³¹ The Arabic sources do not describe the “other goods”; however, Majd al-Dīn might have purchased such products in the Tatar provinces as furs, silk goods, and silver.

Fakhr al-Dīn was a “mamluk merchant” (*tājir fī al-mamālīk*),³² widely known as the trader (*jālib*) who brought al-Atābak Barqūq from the Charkas provinces to Cairo around 764/1363.³³ According to Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Fakhr al-Dīn was a “merchant of the sultan” (*tājir al-sulṭān*) bringing mamluks and *jāriyahs* from the Turkish provinces (*Bilād al-Turk*).³⁴ However, it is not related whether or not he traded other goods besides slaves.

TYPES OF ACTIVITY

According to the Arabic sources, the slave traders of the Mamluk period were engaged in commerce on an individual basis, not forming any trade organizations. According to al-Maqrīzī, Majd al-Dīn al-Sallāmī was a person of high intelligence, a skillful manager, who had gathered information on the character and manners of local rulers, and a man of gentle character, moderate speech, and handsome appearance.³⁵ These talents and knowledge enabled him to form a personal bond of trust with Sultan al-Nāṣir. Al-Ṣafadī relates that Majd al-Dīn earned the trust (*wajāhah zā'idah*) of both Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir and the Mughuls (the Ilkhanid court) due to his outstanding conduct.³⁶

³⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:524. We find another account that in 737/1336–37 Sultan al-Nāṣir ordered khawājā ‘Umar to go to Uzbek to purchase mamluks and *jāriyahs* (al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāzīr fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir* [Beirut, 1986], 379).

³¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 2:43; idem, *Al-Muqaffá*, 2:181.

³² Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā’*, 1:247.

³³ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm*, 11:223.

³⁴ Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 1:3:73.

³⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Muqaffá*, 2:182; idem, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 2:43.

³⁶ Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi*, 9:220. See also Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar*, 1:407.



On the other hand, Ibn Taghrībirdī remarks in the obituary notice for Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Uthmān that he achieved salvation (*sa‘ādah*) for his personal contribution in bringing Barqūq to Egypt.³⁷ Because Barqūq was also grateful to Fakhr al-Dīn for services that had opened his opportunity for advancement in Egypt, the sultan would stand up from afar whenever he saw Fakhr al-Dīn and pay his respects.³⁸ Thus Fakhr al-Dīn, like Majd al-Dīn, developed his trading business based on a personal relationship with the sultan. However, we do not find any account that their descendants inherited their slave-trading businesses following their deaths.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MAMLUK SULTANS

From the time of the establishment of the Ilkhanid dynasty in 654/1256, hostile relations continued between the Mamluks and the Ilkhanids until the end of Ghazan Khan’s reign (694–713/1295–1304). Since Majd al-Dīn had the confidence of both Sultan al-Nāṣir and Ghazan’s nephew, Abū Sa‘īd (716–36/1316–35), he attempted to mediate between them. Majd al-Dīn traveled to Tabriz several times for the sultan carrying letters and gifts (sing. *hadīyah*) he himself chose for the notables at the Ilkhanid court.³⁹ In 722/1322 Amir Aytamish al-Muḥammadī was eventually sent to Abū Sa‘īd to conclude a peace treaty (*ṣulḥ*). The treaty, which was effective for ten years and ten days,⁴⁰ guaranteed that roads between the two countries would be open, enabling all merchants to travel freely and a caravan to travel from Iraq to al-Hijāz every year with a decorated palanquin (*maḥmil*) and the flags (*sanjaq*) of both countries.⁴¹

Due to his contribution to the peace treaty, Majd al-Dīn confirmed his position with Sultan al-Nāṣir and gained even greater esteem and favor than before.⁴² Consequently, Majd al-Dīn obtained various privileges from the Mamluk government: the sultan assigned *iqṭā’*s of the *ḥalqah* to his mamluks, and granted him meat, bread, white unleavened bread (*kumāj*), barley, sugar, sugar candy, etc., worth one hundred and fifty dirhams a day. Furthermore, the sultan allotted him the village of Arrāq in Ba‘labakk, which yielded ten thousand dirhams annually.⁴³

³⁷ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm*, 11:220.

³⁸ Ibid. Sultan Barqūq named himself Barqūq al-‘Uthmānī after the slave merchant Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Uthmān (Ayalon, “Names,” 221).

³⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 2:43; idem, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:175; idem, *Al-Muqaffá*, 2:181; Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar*, 1:407; al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi*, 9:220; Ibn Baṭṭūṭah, *Tuḥfat al-Nuẓẓār fī Gharā’ib al-Amsār* (Paris, 1854; repr. 1969), 1:171–72.

⁴⁰ Ibn Aybak al-Dawādārī, *Al-Durr al-Fākhir fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir* (Cairo, 1960), 312–13.

⁴¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:209–10.

⁴² Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Muqaffá*, 2:181; idem, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 2:43.

⁴³ Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi*, 9:220–21. See also al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Muqaffá*, 2:181–82; idem, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 2:43.



In addition, according to al-Maqrīzī, Majd al-Dīn was granted another fifty thousand dirhams and received a 50% tax exemption on his goods.⁴⁴

It is widely known that Barqūq named himself Barqūq al-‘Uthmānī because he greatly respected Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Uthmān. When Fakhr al-Dīn died in 783/1381, just before Barqūq ascended the throne, he prayed to God and wailed much for him.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (773–852/1372–1449) relates that Fakhr al-Dīn personally requested the abolition of the pomegranate tax (*maks al-rummān*) in Damascus and his request was eventually granted by the sultan.⁴⁶ It is interesting to find that both Majd al-Dīn and Fakhr al-Dīn were exempted from taxation due to their personal relationships with the sultans.

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

As to the public works sponsored by slave traders, we do not find any information on such activities except Fakhr al-Dīn’s trading center (*qaysārīyah*) in Damascus. Research to date documents only a few religious and cultural activities conducted by slave traders during the Mamluk period.⁴⁷

THE KĀRIMĪ MERCHANTS

From the end of the Fatimid period on, the Kārimī merchants cultivated commercial relations with Yemen, India, Southeast Asia, and China. During the Mamluk period there were such influential families among the Kārimīs as al-Maḥallī, al-Kharrūbī, Ibn Kuwayk, and Ibn Musallam. Here I will take up al-Kharrūbī as an example of an upstart wealthy Kārimī merchant to be compared with the slave traders discussed above.

Since “kharrūb” in Arabic means carob, the family ancestor, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Miṣrī al-Kharrūbī, might have been a carob retailer. According to Ibn Ḥajar, the Kharrūbīs originated from Kharrūb square in Fuṣṭāṭ⁴⁸ where carob was usually sold.⁴⁹ In any case, the family’s activities as Kārimī merchants lasted for seven generations from Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī (mid-thirteenth century) to Fakhr al-Dīn

⁴⁴Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:246.

⁴⁵Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā’*, 1:247.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar*, 2:141. Al-Ḥusayn ibn Dāwūd al-Khawājā ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Sallāmī was a merchant who constructed a madrasah known as “al-Sallāmīyah.”

⁴⁸Ibid., 1:481.

⁴⁹Ibn Duqmāq, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār li-Wāsiyat ‘Iqd al-Amṣār* (Cairo, 1893), 1:35. According to this account, the square was originally called “Raḥbat Dār al-Malik,” then it came to be named “Raḥbat Kharrūb” because carob was usually sold there.



Sulaymān (d. 864/1460), who was imprisoned due to his large debt.⁵⁰

ORIGINS

It was after the time of the two brothers, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad (d. 769/1368) and Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad (d. 762/1361), that concrete descriptions of the Kharrūbīs appear in the Arabic chronicles and biographical dictionaries. Their activities were centered around Fuṣṭāṭ, where they were probably born as Arab Muslims. Among the Kharrūbī merchants, only Sirāj al-Dīn or Badr al-Dīn ibn Abī ‘Umar ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn⁵¹ and Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Aḥmad (d. 802/1400)⁵² were granted the title of *khawājā*.

SPHERE OF ACTIVITY

Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad constructed al-Madrasah al-Kharrūbīyah on the outskirts of Fuṣṭāṭ and his brother Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Aḥmad built a large tomb (*turbah*) in al-Qarāfah.⁵³ Khawājā Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī, who was a manly (*murūwah*) and benevolent (*khayr*) person, came to be one of the most notable merchants in Egypt and went to Mecca several times, probably both for pilgrimages and trade.⁵⁴ He was also the owner of a school (*ṣāhib al-madrasah*) near the bank of the Nile in Fuṣṭāṭ.⁵⁵

Zakī al-Dīn Abū Bakr ibn ‘Alī al-Kharrūbī (d. 787/1385) was brought up as a Sufi (*faqīr*), because his father, who yearned for the ascetic life, built a monastery (*zāwīyah*) for his son at al-Jīzah. After he returned from Yemen via ‘Aydḥāb with a small amount of goods, Zakī al-Dīn inherited a large fortune from his brother Badr al-Dīn, which provided him with the opportunity for success.⁵⁶ Ibn Ḥajar relates in *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*,

[In Mecca] I was under the patronage of Zakī al-Dīn like his slave (*raqīq*) because my father had requested him to take care of me due to my young age. In 786/1384 I returned [to Cairo] with him and Zakī al-Dīn still retained the title of leadership (*ri’ āsah*).⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍaw’ al-Lāmi’ li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi’* (Beirut, 1934–36), 3:267.

⁵¹ Ibid., 3:267, 8:246.

⁵² Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā’*, 2:123; Ibn Iyās relates that Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī died in 803/1401 (*Badā’ i’ al-Zuhūr fī Waqā’ i’ al-Duhūr* [Wiesbaden, 1961–75], 1:2:636).

⁵³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Maqrīzī, Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 2:369.

⁵⁴ Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā’*, 1:123.

⁵⁵ Ibn Iyās, *Badā’ i’*, 1:2:636.

⁵⁶ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar*, 1:481–82.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 482. See also al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 3:539; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 1:3:167–68. Since Ibn Ḥajar was born in 773/1372, he was thirteen years old when he returned to Cairo with Zakī



When Zakī al-Dīn died in 787/1385, Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Maḥallī took the title of leadership (*ri'āsat al-tujjār*) exclusively until he died in 806/1403.⁵⁸ Al-Maqrīzī relates that Burhān al-Dīn al-Maḥallī was a large-scale Kārimī merchant who traveled to Syria and Yemen many times.⁵⁹

According to the above accounts, the sphere of activity of the Kārimī merchants, particularly those of the Kharrūbī family, were Fustāt, Cairo, Mecca, Yemen, and Syria. We know that there was a not-insignificant number of Kārimīs who unlike the Kharrūbīs traveled to India and as far as China.⁶⁰

COMMODITIES

The research to date informs us that the Kārimīs traded spices (*bahār*), lumber, textiles, precious stones (*jawāhir*), wheat (*qamḥ*), sugar (*sukkar*), pottery (*fakḥkhār*), slaves (sing. *raqīq*), etc.⁶¹ Al-Qalqashandī (756–821/1355–1418) states that “the office of spice and al-Kārimī” (*naẓar al-bahār wa-al-Kārimī*) supervised the various spices (*bahār*) and other goods the Kārimī merchants brought from Yemen,⁶² so there is no doubt that the Kārimīs specifically brought spices from Aden to Cairo, Alexandria, and Damascus.

However, as I have already mentioned in another article,⁶³ we find an interesting account in Ibn Duqmāq’s (d. 809/1406) *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*, which relates that among the 65 sugar refineries (*maṭbakh al-sukkar*) located at Fustāt, 7 were owned by the sultan, 21 by amirs, and 13 by merchants (sing. *tājir*). Among the 13 refineries owned by merchants, 4 were managed by *sukkarīs* (probably Muslim and Jewish sugar merchants) and another 4 by the Kārimī merchants. Among the 4 refineries owned by the Kārimīs, 2 were managed by Kharrūbī family members: Maṭbakh Sirāj al-Dīn ibn [Abī ‘Umar] al-Kharrūbī and Maṭbakh Nūr al-Dīn [‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz] al-Kharrūbī.⁶⁴ Sirāj al-Dīn ibn Abī ‘Umar was the family’s fourth-

al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī. See Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah, *Al-Mu’arrikhūn fī Miṣr fī al-Qarn al-Khāmīs ‘Asharah al-Milādī* (Cairo, 1954), 18.

⁵⁸Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar*, 1:482.

⁵⁹Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Muqaffā*, 1:246. Concerning Burhān al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, see also Ashtor, “The Kārimī Merchants,” 48.

⁶⁰Al-Ashqar, *Tujjār al-Tawābil*, 467–539.

⁶¹Ashtor, “The Kārimī Merchants,” 55–56; Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 125; Sato Tsugitaka, *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam: Sultans, Muqta’s and Fallahun* (Leiden, 1997), 215; al-Ashqar, *Tujjār al-Tawābil*, 76.

⁶²Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 4:32. Labib inscribes “der nāẓir al-buhār und al-Kārimī” (*Handelsgeschichte*, 165). However, not “al-buhār” but “al-bahār” is correct.

⁶³Sato Tsugitaka, “Sugar in the Economic Life of Mamluk Egypt,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 8, no. 2 (2004): 99.

⁶⁴Ibn Duqmāq, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*, 1:41–46.



generation merchant prior to Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī, who died in 802/1400.⁶⁵ This indicates that the Kharrūbīs had already begun managing sugar refineries during the latter half of the thirteenth century. Accordingly, we need to correct Ashtor’s view that the first generation was represented by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad (d. 769/1368).⁶⁶

Among the Kharrūbīs, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad (d. 762/1361) was particularly well known as a “sugar refinery merchant” (*tājir fī maṭābikh al-sukkar*) at Fuṣṭāṭ.⁶⁷ In 751/1350 Sultan Ḥasan (748–52/1347–51) ordered the Kharrūbīs to provide sugar for his grant of the commodity during the month of Muḥarram.⁶⁸ The above accounts show that the Kharrūbīs profited not only from the spice trade but also from sugar refining and sale. Al-Maqrīzī says, “When the water of the Nile flows into the Alexandria Canal during Misrā (25 July–23 August), ships (sing. *markab*) loaded with various kinds of goods, like crops (*ghallah*), spices (*bahār*), and sugar (*sukkar*), would set sail.”⁶⁹ Sugar during the Mamluk period was thought to have been one of the most important exports to Europe as well as a luxury good consumed by sultans and amirs at their private residences or during public festivals.⁷⁰

TYPES OF ACTIVITY

It is widely known that the Kārimīs formed a loose confederation of merchants bound together by professional interest and that they constructed hostelryes (sing. *funduq*) on various occasions for common purposes.⁷¹ According to Lapidus, Kārimī merchants themselves were headed by *ra’īs*es, who acted as liaisons between them and the state for the purpose of discipline, diplomacy, banking, and other services.⁷² However, Ashtor emphasizes the fact that such titles as “chief of the Kārimīs” found in Arabic chronicles and biographical dictionaries should not be taken too literally.⁷³

In the case of Zakī al-Dīn Abū Bakr al-Kharrūbī, who held the title of *ra’īs al-tujjār*, Ibn Ḥajar relates that after he obtained the title, the influential merchants

⁶⁵Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i*, 1:2:636.

⁶⁶Ashtor, “The Kārimī Merchants,” 50.

⁶⁷Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 2:369. See also Sato, “Sugar in the Economic Life,” 99.

⁶⁸Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:829.

⁶⁹Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 1:273. See also Sato, “Sugar in the Economic Life,” 98.

⁷⁰Sato, *State and Rural Society*, 215.

⁷¹Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History*, 300–1; idem, “The Kārimī Merchants,” 51, 55–56; Goitein, “The Beginnings,” 351.

⁷²Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 125.

⁷³Ashtor, “The Kārimī Merchants,” 51.



came to be subject to him.⁷⁴ Arabic sources do not state distinctly what sort of authority he held over the Kārimī merchants, but it is clear that the title was closely related to the Mamluk government. This will be discussed in the following section.

Though the Kārimīs formed a loose confederation, there was, at the same time, a strong business rivalry among several of them. For example, when a dispute arose between Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Kharrūbī and Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Musallam (d. 776/1374), Ibn Musallam said to Badr al-Dīn, "Buy sacks for all your money and bring them to me. Then I will fill them for you with my coins."⁷⁵ However, interestingly enough, Ibn Musallam gave his daughter in marriage to Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 825/1422), a Kharrūbī merchant, in order to strengthen ties between the two families.⁷⁶

Another example of the rivalry that existed among the Kārimī merchants can be found in Ibn Ḥajar's *Inbā' al-Ghumr*, already noted by Labib.⁷⁷ In 786/1384, when trouble arose between Zakī al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Fāriqī, an influential merchant from Yemen, they were both tried before Sultan Barqūq. In answer to al-Fāriqī's accusations, Zakī al-Dīn quoted a letter written by al-Fāriqī and addressed to the lord of Yemen, which read, "At present Egypt is in a state of corruption (*fasād*). Since there is no credible lord (*ṣāhib*), you need not send any gifts from here on. The present lord [sultan] is the lowest and the most despicable among the mamluks." After reading this, Barqūq ordered al-Fāriqī seized and his tongue cut out. Then the sultan bestowed on Zakī al-Dīn a fine robe (*khil'ah*) and granted him the title of "great merchant" (*kabīr al-tujjār*).⁷⁸

RELATIONSHIPS TO THE MAMLUK SULTANS

The account of the Zakī al-Dīn/Shihāb al-Dīn dispute tells us that Zakī al-Dīn was granted the title of great merchant or chief merchant (*ra'īs al-tujjār*) in 786/1384. In *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, Ibn Ḥajar states, "Zakī al-Dīn approached the state (*dawlah*) and gained the title of leadership (*ri'āṣah*), thus surpassing his equals,"⁷⁹ showing distinctly that Zakī al-Dīn petitioned Sultan Barqūq to bestow

⁷⁴Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar*, 1:482; idem, *Inbā'*, 1:306. Zakī al-Dīn was also called "*kabīr al-tujjār*" (a leading figure of merchants) (al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 3:539).

⁷⁵Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā'*, 1:99–100.

⁷⁶Al-Sakhāwī, *Kitāb al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī Dhayl al-Sulūk* (Bulaq, 1896; repr. Cairo, 1974), 107; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā'*, 3:289.

⁷⁷Labib, *Handelsgeschichte*, 228. See also S. Labib, "Kārimī," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 4:640–43.

⁷⁸Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā'*, 1:288.

⁷⁹Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar*, 1:482.



upon him the title of *ri'āsah*. Since he died in 787/1385 at Fustāṭ,⁸⁰ Zakī al-Dīn held that title for about two years. Ibn Ḥajar relates that after he gained the title, Zakī al-Dīn's status (*qadr*) in the government improved, and he became preeminent among the Kārimī merchants.⁸¹

Before that, in 781/1379, Kamāl al-Dīn, a grandson of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Kharrūbī, was arrested and whipped by amir Barqūq because he attempted to obtain the rank of vizier with a bribe of 100,000 dinars. Following that incident, Kamāl al-Dīn was exiled to Qūṣ in Upper Egypt, where he was ordered to reside until his death.⁸² Consequently, Kamāl al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī was not summoned with three other influential Kārimī merchants—Burhān al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Musallam, and Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī ibn al-Kharrūbī—to supply Sultan Barqūq with 1,000,000 dirhams for the war against Timur when the latter attempted to invade Syria in 796/1394.⁸³ The above three Kārimī merchants' share thus amounted to ten percent of the 10,000,000 dirhams expended for Barqūq's royal mamluks just prior to the war.⁸⁴

According to al-Ashqar, the Kārimīs during the Mamluk period were supported and administered by "the office of spices and the Kārimī," which issued passports (sing. *jawāz*) to them and imposed taxes (2.5 percent) on their trade goods.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Lapidus argues that the Kārimī merchants became officials because of their close association with the government.⁸⁶ However, Zakī al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī, for example, though he gained the title of *ra'īs al-tujjār* and had authority over his Kārimī colleagues, was never regarded as a state official.

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Compared to the slave traders, we find many more instances of religious and cultural activities conducted by the Kārimīs. As mentioned above, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Kharrūbī (d. 762/1361), who was known as a "sugar refinery merchant," constructed a school (*madrāsah*, later called "al-Madrāsah al-Kharrūbīyah) to which he appointed Shaykh Bahā' al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Uqayl

⁸⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 3:539; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm*, 11:305; Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar*, 1:482. It is related that when he died, Zakī al-Dīn left a will stating that he provide Sultan Barqūq with 30,000 dinars (Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 1:3:168).

⁸¹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā'*, 1:306.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 195–96.

⁸³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 3:811; Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh al-Duwal wa-al-Mulūk* (Beirut, 1936–42), 9:378–79. Incidentally, Ibn al-Furāt describes each of these three merchants with the title of qadi. See also Fischel, "The Spice Trade," 171; Ashtor, "The Kārimī Merchants," 53.

⁸⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 3:803.

⁸⁵ Al-Ashqar, *Tujjār al-Tawābil*, 105–7, 112–13.

⁸⁶ Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 128.



“professor of law” (*mudarris fiqh*) and Shaykh Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Umar al-Bulqīnī assistant (*mu‘īd*).⁸⁷ It is said that Badr al-Dīn set down the condition that non-Arabs not be appointed to its faculty.⁸⁸ His brother, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Aḥmad (d. 769/1368), built a large tomb (*turbah*) at Qarāfah, which his grandson, Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī (d. 802/1400), repaired and to which he later added a fine washroom (*maṭharah*).⁸⁹ According to Ibn Ḥajar, ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 776/1374) was the owner of a fine madrasah adjacent to his house.⁹⁰ Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Kharrūbī (d. 785/1383) built a large house on the bank of the Nile and converted it into a madrasah, to which he donated a *waqf* and appointed a professor of tradition (*mudarris ḥadīth*).⁹¹ Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s son, ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 776/1374), also built a madrasah in the suburbs of Fustāṭ, which was larger than that of his uncle Badr al-Dīn, but he died before its completion.⁹² According to Ibn Iyās (852–ca. 930/1448–ca. 1524), Khawājā Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī al-Kharrūbī (d. 802/1400) was also the owner of a madrasah in Fustāṭ near the Nile.⁹³

After he returned from Mecca in 786/1384, Zakī al-Dīn (*ra’īs al-tujjār*) invited Najm al-Dīn Ibn Razīn to learn *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* from him. It is said that he was a person of decency (*hishmah*), esprit de corps (*‘aṣabīyah*), and manliness (*murūwah*), donating generously to scholars and poets.⁹⁴ Al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) relates that Badr al-Dīn ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Kharrūbī (d. 825/1422), who had yearned to hear the Quran, listened to his reading many times and died heavily in debt.⁹⁵ Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī, who was a pious Sufi (*mutaṣawwif*), donated 100,000 dirhams for the reconstruction of al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf in Mecca.⁹⁶ Although Nūr al-Dīn was called “the last of the Kharrūbī merchants (*ākhir tujjār Miṣr min al-Kharāribah*),”⁹⁷ actually he was not the last merchant to come out of the Kharrūbī family, for his nephews, ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar (d. 842/1438), Badr

⁸⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 2:369. Badr al-Dīn also built *rab*’s (living quarters) near the school (ibid.).

⁸⁸ Ibid., 369–70.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 369.

⁹⁰ Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā’*, 1:86–87.

⁹¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 2:368.

⁹² Ibid., 370.

⁹³ Ibn Iyās, *Badā’ i’*, 1:2:636.

⁹⁴ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar*, 1:482. We also find al-Khānqāh al-Kharrūbīyah in al-Maqrīzī’s *Khiṭaṭ* (2:426–27). However, Zakī al-Dīn Abū Bakr al-Kharrūbī originally constructed this as a private house for his family. In 822/1419 the house was converted into a *khānqāh* in accordance with the wishes of Sultan al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh.

⁹⁵ Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Daw’ al-Lāmi’*, 6:92.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 5:240.

⁹⁷ Ibid.



al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar (d. 833/1430), and Fakhr al-Dīn Sulaymān ibn ‘Umar (d. 864/1460), etc., still continued to be active in trade. Fakhr al-Dīn, who had spent a luxurious life reading the Quran, suffered misfortune, fell deeply into debt, and was consequently imprisoned,⁹⁸ no doubt as the result of the spice and sugar monopoly policies attempted by Sultan Barsbāy (825–41/1422–38).⁹⁹

In conclusion, the above comparison between several slave traders and the Kharrūbī family of Kārimī merchants during the Mamluk period can be summarized in the following six points.

(1) Most of the leading slave traders who were from outside the Mamluk domain were given the title of “*khawājā*,” while only two merchants were granted the title of “*khawājā*” among the Kharrūbīs, who were based in Fuṣṭāṭ.

(2) Slave traders traveled from Cairo or Damascus to Tabriz and the province of Charkas along the northern routes, while the Kharrūbīs traded between Fuṣṭāṭ, Cairo, Mecca, and Yemen along the southern routes, but not as far as India, Southeast Asia, or China.

(3) Slave traders returned from Tabriz and the Tatar provinces with male and female slaves and other goods, while the Kārimīs traded goods such as spices, sugar, lumber, textiles, precious stones, wheat, pottery, and slaves. The Kharrūbīs, in particular, earned large profits not only from the spice trade but also from sugar refining and sale.

(4) While slave traders engaged in business on an individual basis, the Kārimīs formed a loose confederation headed by chief merchants (*ra’īs al-tujjār*), which title sultans bestowed upon several wealthy merchants.

(5) Since slave traders were favored and relied upon by both the Mamluk sultans and the Mongol khans, they played an active part as diplomats using their knowledge of the characters and manners of the local eastern rulers. They were often exempted from taxation due to their personal relationships with sultans. The Kārimī merchants also enjoyed the protection of sultans in return for their contribution to the spice trade and contribution to military expenditures. However, the Kharrūbīs were never regarded as state officials, despite their close association with the Mamluk sultans and influential amirs.

(6) As to the public works of slave traders, we find little positive information

⁹⁸Ibid., 3:267.

⁹⁹Concerning the monopoly policies of Sultan Barsbāy, see the following works: Aḥmad Darrāj, *L’Égypte sous le règne de Barsbay* (Damascus, 1961); Labib, *Handelsgeschichte*, 94 f.; idem, “Egyptian Commercial Policy,” 63–77; E. Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History*, 321; idem, *Levant Trade*, 278 f.; al-Ashqar, *Tujjār al-Tawābil*, 439 f; John L. Meloy, “Imperial Strategy and Political Exigency: The Red Sea Spice Trade and the Mamluk Sultanate in the Fifteenth Century,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123, no. 1 (2003): 1–19.



on their activities. In contrast to this, there are many accounts of the religious and cultural activities conducted by the Kharrūbīs, like the construction of schools in Fuṣṭāṭ, appointment of professors to those schools, and donations for the reconstruction of al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf in Mecca. Accordingly, it seems that the Kārimī merchants, most of whom were Arab Muslims from Egypt, Yemen, and Syria, made attempts to return part of their wealth to society through such public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*)-oriented religious and cultural works.

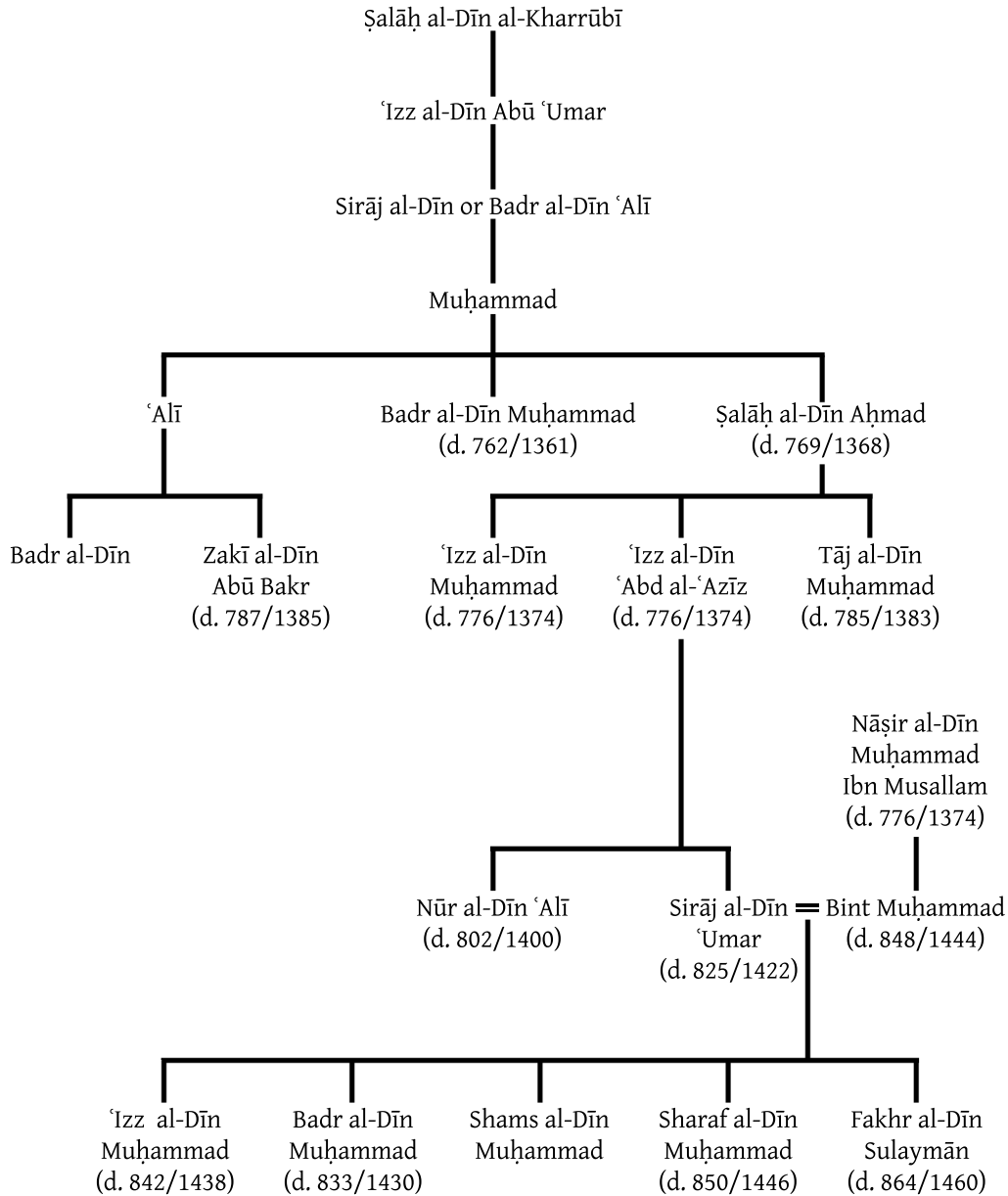


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GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF THE KHARRŪBĪS¹⁰⁰



¹⁰⁰Revised and enlarged genealogy based on the table by E. Ashtor (1956).

