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Professional Mobility in Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s Fifteenth-Century Panegyric Dedicated to Sultan al-Zāhir Jaqmaq

Introduction

Those familiar with the name of the fifteenth-century rhetorician, litterateur, and belletrist-historian Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Arabshāh (791–854/1389–1450) recall him readily as the trenchant biographer of the Central Asian warlord and conqueror, Amir Temūr (r. 771–807/1370–1405), Tīmūr, or Tamerlane. Scholarly interest in Ibn ‘Arabshāh concerns primarily his authorship of the *‘Ajā’ib al-maqdūr fī nawā’ib Tīmūr* (The Wonders of destiny in the calamities wrought by Tīmūr) and his relationship to Timurid historiography. Seldom is Ibn ‘Arabshāh himself approached as a participant in and product of the socio-political landscapes of fifteenth-century Syria (Bilād al-Shām) and Egypt in the context of the late medieval sultanate of Cairo. Through the cultural practice of historical writing Ibn ‘Arabshāh, like many of his peers, sought to take advantage of new opportunities presented by the emerging political order during the successive sultanates of al-Ashraf Barsbāy (r. 825–41/1422–38) and al-Zāhir Jaqmaq (r. 842–57/1438–53) to acquire a patronage position either at the court of the new sultan or elsewhere in the religio-political networks of the time.¹

The current article, building on the previous life sketch of Ibn ‘Arabshāh and his works established by Robert McChesney,² adds a more nuanced layer to the picture by historicizing the author’s panegyric for the sultan al-Zāhir Jaqmaq (d.

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¹Konrad Hirschler points out that one need not necessarily sell oneself to a ruler; rather it was feasible to “attain a stable social position in the courtly world through a variety of relationships with different individuals.” See: *Medieval Arabic Historiography: Authors as Actors* (London, 2006), 28.

²Robert D. McChesney, “A Note on the Life and Works of Ibn ‘Arabshāh,” in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn (Wiesbaden, 2006), 205–49. McChesney updated and condensed the



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857/1453), *Al-Ta'lif al-tāhir fī shiyam al-Malik al-Zāhir al-qā'im bi-nuṣrat al-ḥaqq Abī Sa'īd Jaqmaq* (The Pure composition on the character of the King al-Zāhir the supporter of divine truth Abī Sa'īd Jaqmaq).³ Analysis of the latter text in relation to *The Wonders of Destiny* will demonstrate ways in which the author may have sought to instrumentalize the *Pure Composition* during a precise moment of political transformation. Examining the *Pure Composition* in the context of its creation helps identify and reconstruct some details of the social world in which Ibn 'Arabshāh operated and provides a window into the author's attempts to expand and define his key relationships in the hope of securing a new patron or better position.

The Homecoming of a Native Son

To understand the specific context of the *Pure Composition*, it is important to first comprehend the wider context of its social world. Some details of Ibn 'Arabshāh's life and travels thus concern us insofar as they reveal insights into the text.

Born in Damascus in late 791/1389, Ibn 'Arabshāh spent his childhood in the city until Temür's conquest in 803/1401, after which the victorious forces relocated him along with his female family members to Samarqand.⁴ As a young man in Temür's capital he embarked on a lifelong career of studying both religious jurisprudence and literary (*adab*) sciences, including philology, rhetoric, logic, dialectics, and linguistics, with numerous scholars likewise held captive by Temür.⁵ Af-

essay in 2018 for inclusion as the introduction to a republication of J. H. Sanders's translation of the *'Ajā'ib al-maqdūr, Tamerlane: The Life of the Great Amir* (London, 2018), xvi–xxxiv.

³While this paper is based primarily on British Museum MS Or. 3026, there is a second manuscript in the Topkapı palace collection which I have not consulted. It is attributed to Raḍī al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Ghazzī and titled "Sīrat al-Sultān al-Shahīd al-Malik al-Zāhir Jaqmaq" (Sultanahmet Kütüphanesi MS Ahmet III A. 2992). I wish to thank Marlis Saleh and Gowaart Van Den Bossche for providing me with reproductions of the British manuscript. I am equally grateful to Jo Van Steenberg for sharing his notes on the physical copy. I also thank Manhal Makhoul for digitizing the manuscript. Two 2019 editions and studies of the text have recently been published by Muḥammad Sha'bān Ayyūb as *Sīrat al-sultān al-Mamlūki al-Zāhir Sayf al-Dīn Jaqmaq: Al-Ta'lif al-tāhir fī shiyam al-Malik al-Zāhir Abī Sa'īd Jaqmaq* (Cairo, 2019) and by Torki Fahad Al-Saud as *Al-Najm al-zāhir fī shiyam al-Malik al-Zāhir al-qā'im bi-nuṣrat al-ḥaqq Abī Sa'īd Jaqmaq* (Beirut, 2019).

⁴Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīdah fī tarājim al-aʿyān al-mufīdah*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Jalīlī (Beirut, 2002), 1:287–88, Yūsuf ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-zāhirah fī mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Beirut, 1992), 15:272; idem, *Al-Manhal al-ṣāfi wa-al-mustawfā ba'da al-wāfi*, ed. Muḥammad M. Amīn and Sa'īd 'Āshūr (Cairo, 1984–93), 1:140; Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Daw' al-lāmi' li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi'* (Beirut, 2003), 1:111.

⁵For a list of his teachers see Ibn Taghribirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 2:140–43; al-Sakhāwī, *Daw' al-lāmi'*, 1:111; McChesney, "Life and Works," 215–29.



ter leaving Samarqand in 811/1408–9, Ibn ‘Arabshāh, having achieved fluency in Persian and the Chaghatay Turkish language, floated around the various courts of Muslim West Asia in pursuit of further training and livelihood in al-Khitā, Khwārizm, the Dasht-i Qipchaq (Sarāy and Hājji Tarkhān), and Crimea, rarely spending more than three to five years in each place. After the conclusion of the Ottoman civil war in 816/1413, accompanied by his wife and young children, Ibn ‘Arabshāh relocated to the newly established court of Meḥmed Çelebi (r. 816–24/1413–21) in Edirne. When the Ottoman sultan died in 824/1421, Ibn ‘Arabshāh chose once again to move on.

Thus, Ibn ‘Arabshāh, at approximately 33 years of age, journeyed back to the territories of Bilād al-Shām, arriving first in Aleppo for several months before settling in Damascus in Rabī‘ II 825/April 1422.⁶ As McChesney points out, however, it may have been a challenge for him to translate any acquired social or cultural capital from the Ottoman context into the new political reality rapidly taking shape in Cairo under the new sultan Barsbāy.⁷ Without local connections to power or influence Ibn ‘Arabshāh failed to benefit from any opportunities that the uncertainty may have presented to better-placed peers. The fierce competition for lucrative stipendiary positions (*manṣab*, pl. *manāṣib*) that provided officeholders with social prestige and material advantages has been well-established by modern studies.⁸

Perhaps unable to find a suitable entry point, Ibn ‘Arabshāh remained in Damascus, scraping together a living through meager sales of his existing works and trying to compose new ones that would strengthen his profile. In the autobiographical *ijāzah* document he penned for his later student Abū al-Maḥāsin Yūsuf ibn Taghrībirdī (812–74/1409–70), Ibn ‘Arabshāh suggests that during this period he had been unable to find anyone suitable with whom to train.⁹ As he set about the task of networking with new contacts in Damascus and its suburban environs, Ibn ‘Arabshāh also took on the realities of supporting his family through work as a notary (*shāhid*) in the courtyard of the Qaṣab Mosque outside Damascus.¹⁰ At the same time, he continued to seek out important local scholars capable of helping him navigate the field of social relationships necessary to lo-

⁶Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 2:143.

⁷McChesney, “Life and Works,” 234.

⁸Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, 1994), 90–93, 153–54; Alexander Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, 1999), 57; Anne Broadbridge, “Academic Rivalry and the Patronage System in Fifteenth-Century Egypt: al-‘Aynī, al-Maqrīzī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 85–107.

⁹Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 2:143.

¹⁰Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, 1:112.



cate opportunities relevant to his expertise as a courtly administrator, chancery scribe, and junior religious scholar.

Who Was Ibn 'Arabshāh?

As Azfar Moin has illustrated, in the decades following his death in the early fifteenth century, the memory of Temür continued to inspire awe and held a powerful grip on the cultural imagination of the time. Nevertheless, social and cultural memories of Temür developed along different lines when compared between the former lands of Temür's empire and the Syro-Egyptian sultanate of Cairo. For some later fifteenth-century rulers of Muslim West Asia (including also the sixteenth-century Ottomans and Moghuls), Temür inspired acts of mimesis as kingship continued to develop, firmly rooted in his mythical memory as a "dominant symbol of sovereignty."¹¹ In the lands of the Cairo Sultanate, however, particularly in Syria, which had tasted the full brunt of Temür's wrath, cultural attitudes toward his memory reflected horror, hatred, and a fear of civilizational catastrophe brought about from the east.¹²

In many ways, the fashioning of Ibn 'Arabshāh's textual identity statements may be read as a response to the cultural memory of Temür which had been cultivated in the major cities of the sultanate.¹³ From his texts and the autobiographical *ijāzah* he composed for Ibn Taghribirdī, it seems clear that Ibn 'Arabshāh's most profoundly altering life experience had been his kidnapping and relocation to Samarqand, where he spent nearly eight years learning from some of the best eastern Islamic scholars of the age.¹⁴ The way he later wrote about Temür reflected his own traumatic experience and seems to have been composed for a largely contemporary (or near contemporary) audience that had likewise suffered

¹¹ Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York, 2012), 23–26. Although the Ottomans suffered equal if not greater destruction after Temür's invasion, many Ottoman historians and intellectuals remembered Temür and his legacy far differently. See Christopher Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty* (Cambridge, 2019), 151, 154–91; Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541–1600)* (Princeton, 1986), 276, 284–87.

¹² Elias Muhanna, *The World in a Book: Al-Nuwayri and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition* (Princeton, 2018), 16–19; Anne Broadbridge, "Royal Authority, Justice, and Order in Society: The Influence of Ibn Khaldūn on the Writings of al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghribirdī," *MSR* 7, no. 2 (2003): 232–33 (also n. 11).

¹³ In their coverage of Barsbāy's 836/1433 campaign against Āmid, some contemporary historians compared its impact on Syria negatively with the effects of Temür's conquest of the region. Cf. Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 14:203–4.

¹⁴ Aḥmad ibn 'Arabshāh, *'Ajā'ib al-maḥdūr fī nawā'ib Timūr*, ed. Aḥmad Fāyiz al-Ḥimṣī (Beirut, 1986), 283–99; Ibn Taghribirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 2:140–41; McChesney, "Life and Works," 214–21.



Temür's invasion and that was interested in information about the conqueror consistent with living memory.

Modern scholars have tried to uncover Ibn 'Arabshāh's reasons for producing a biography of Temür in medieval Damascus nearly thirty-five years after the death of his subject. It is likely, especially in the early years following his return to Syria in 824–25/1422, that upon forging new acquaintances and establishing a new network of peers in the social circles of greater Damascus and Cairo, Ibn 'Arabshāh, in order to explain his reemergence in Syria and later Egypt, would have related some kind of explanatory personal narrative about his capture to curious listeners.¹⁵ Expanding such an identity statement into a lengthy text chronicling the career of Temür was, in some ways, Ibn 'Arabshāh's attempt to interpret the past and connect it to the present in a meaningful way. By demonstrating his expertise on Temür in particular, Ibn 'Arabshāh instrumentalized that which distinguished him from his colleagues, thereby emphasizing the importance of the messages he wished to convey to his contemporaries.

If indeed Ibn 'Arabshāh intended to forge relationships of mutually-beneficial patronage in the major cities of the sultanate, what messages was he transmitting about himself in his texts? His identity "calling card," the story of his abduction by Temür and its later ramifications, was rife with meanings that comprised an important layer of his identity. It shaped how others interpreted and understood him in the social world with which he interacted. He surely related his autobiography personally to peers like Kamāl al-Bārīzī, al-Maqrīzī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, and later (with subtle changes) to his own younger students (and biographers), such as Ibn Taghrībirdī and al-Sakhāwī.¹⁶ Even in abbreviated form, his story must have inspired listeners' sympathy while simultaneously transmitting socially beneficial messages that established him as: (1) an unparalleled living authority on the Timurids; (2) a highly accomplished, cosmopolitan scholar with links to urban civilian networks all over Muslim West Asia; (3) an unattached agent for hire; and (4) a homegrown product of Arabic cultural norms and sensibilities, who, by dint of his experiences, was simultaneously an "eastern" polyglot.

Ibn 'Arabshāh may have likewise felt pressure to prove his quality among the contemporary Arabophone scholars and literati of Damascus and Cairo by demonstrating a high proficiency of literary Arabic while also displaying his aestheticism and fluency in other tongues as an asset to scholastic or courtly service. He apparently lacked local connections in Syria who could offer support at a time in his career when it was still required and was at pains to demonstrate who he was to other scholars. Having retained the experiences of his past lives, he arrived

¹⁵McChesney suggests that Ibn 'Arabshāh may have had some kernel of an idea to compose such a text at least as early as his re-entry into Syria. See "Life and Works," 237.

¹⁶Ibid., 234.



in Syria as a professionally evolving figure, though one, as McChesney rightly argues, who, in his thirties, was still in need of a local master to whom he could attach himself.

While the current article is not the place for the intense scrutiny and analysis warranted by Ibn 'Arabshāh's complex transregional network, to understand the *Pure Composition* it is nevertheless important to engage with four key contacts among his later Syro-Egyptian network of teachers and peers from approximately 836/1432 to 844/1440: 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Bukhārī, Kamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Bārizī, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, and Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī. Ibn 'Arabshāh's relationships with these scholars presents some insight into who he was at this point in his life, between the *Wonders of Destiny* (finalized between 840/1436 and 843/1440) and the *Pure Composition* (completed or abandoned before 845/1442).

'Alā' al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Bukhārī (779–841/1379–1438)

In his autobiographical *ijāzah*, Ibn 'Arabshāh recounted 832/1428–29 as a significant year for its commencement of his patronage relationship with the Central Asian scholar 'Alā' al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Bukhārī, who had arrived in Damascus that year and stayed until his death. Ibn 'Arabshāh concedes that he had been able to accomplish little during his six years in Damascus until his world collided with that of al-Bukhārī.¹⁷ Although McChesney described al-Bukhārī as “better known to his contemporaries than to posterity,” there is rather a large amount of information on al-Bukhārī's life to be found in fifteenth-century Arabic historiographical sources.¹⁸ For Ibn 'Arabshāh, al-Bukhārī combined everything he might have hoped for in an influential patron: a prestigious Hanafi-Māturīdī scholar and Sufi master from the east with expertise in *adab*, dialectics, rhetoric, and a common background that included pursuing teachers around the courts of Central Asia until he established himself with great religious authority in the courts of medieval Gulbarga in India, Mecca, Cairo, and ultimately Damascus.¹⁹ During al-Bukhārī's stay in Cairo during the late 820/1420s and early 830/1430s, many of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh's and Barsbāy's religious elite sought his advice and drew

¹⁷Ibn Taghribirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 2:143–44; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 2:128.

¹⁸Cf. al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 3:126–27; Ibn Taghribirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 11:84–85; Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 15:214–15; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 9:255–59; Badr al-Dīn al-'Aynī, *ʿIqd al-jumān fī tārikh ahl al-zamān: Ḥawādith wa-tarājim*, ed. 'Abd al-Rāziq al-Ṭanṭāwī al-Qarmūt (Cairo, 1989), 505.

¹⁹Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-ghumr bi-anbā' al-'umr fī al-tārikh* (Beirut, 1986), 9:29–30; Ibn Taghribirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 11:84–85; idem, *Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 14:367–68; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 9:256–57. The length of al-Bukhārī's stay in Cairo is unclear. Ibn 'Arabshāh places him there during the reign of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh, though most biographical sources suggest he was there for at least two years during the reign of Barsbāy.



on his prestige. In describing al-Bukhārī's influence in the city, Ibn Taghribirdī writes:

Most scholars of our time from every *madhhab* studied with him, and everyone benefitted from his knowledge, reputation, and wealth. His authority grew (*‘azama amruhu*) in Cairo and from the time of his arrival until his departure, he never had recourse to a single member of the notables of the government (*a‘yān al-dawlah*)—not even to the sultan—while all the notables of Egypt, from the sultan to his subordinates, went to him.²⁰

Known for his pious abstemiousness (*zuhd*) and austere acts of worship, al-Bukhārī's attitude toward relationships formed between members of the ulama and the government was complicated at best. He opposed scholars who took wealth or positions from the ruling class.²¹ Nevertheless, his bluntness and candidly harsh observations were said to have endeared him to Sultan Barsbāy and his entourage.²² He offered them valued counsel while remaining aloof and able to rebuff their attempts to influence him, and he expected no less from those in his own orbit. The surviving image of al-Bukhārī created in the sources is of a man invested with enough social capital in his network to sway other scholars, equalize members of the political elite, and even humble the sultan. Al-Bukhārī's undoing in Cairo, however, had come from the ongoing discourse on the “Islamic standing” of the thirteenth-century mystical philosopher Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī (560–638/1165–1240). A staunch critic of the latter and his supporters, al-Bukhārī in 831/1427 violently confronted the chief Maliki qadi, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Bisāṭī (d. 842/1438), over his support for Ibn al-‘Arabī's doctrine of the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujūd*). The incident famously ended with al-Bukhārī screaming an ultimatum that Barsbāy must expel al-Bisāṭī from his post or else he would leave Cairo.²³ Learning of the matter some time later, Barsbāy shrewdly left it in the hands of his chief Shafī‘ī qadi, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, who, while aligned with al-Bukhārī in principle, nevertheless allowed al-Bisāṭī to remain in office after he condemned the followers of Ibn al-‘Arabī. Disgusted and humiliated, al-Bukhārī left Cairo, and after making the pilgrimage arrived in

²⁰ Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 14:368. Al-Bukhārī allegedly held private counseling sessions with the four chief qadis of Cairo which the sultan was not permitted to attend (Ibn Taghribirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 11:85).

²¹ Ibn Taghribirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 11:84; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 9:258.

²² Ibn Hajar, *Inbā‘ al-ghumr*, 8:207–8; Ibn Taghribirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 11:85.

²³ Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 9:256.



Damascus with the returning hajj caravan in 832/1429.²⁴ Seizing on the chance to sit at the feet of a renowned master, Ibn 'Arabshāh swiftly established a place for himself in al-Bukhārī's new ring of disciples (*murīdūn*) and for nearly nine years "accompanied [al-Bukhārī] and became attached to his service (*lāzamtū khidmatu*) until he died."²⁵

When not immersed in pious retreats from society, al-Bukhārī sat with his Damascene students, including Ibn 'Arabshāh and his son Tāj al-Dīn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (813–901/1411–95), as well as other local scholars such as 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī al-Qābūnī, Khidr al-Kurdī, Ibrāhīm ibn Maylaq, Abū Bakr ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, and Kamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Bārīzī. Not long after his arrival in Damascus, al-Bukhārī received a large cash gift from his former patron, the Bahmanī ruler of Gulbarga. Although he refused to keep any of the money for himself, al-Bukhārī distributed part of the wealth to his students, clients, and dependents to help them pay off debts and defer living costs, and even treated some of them to a feast.²⁶ Remaining consistent with his lifestyle of pious *zuhd*, al-Bukhārī meanwhile continued to impart his negative views on paid government service to his circle of disciples. A biography written by his son claims that the Shafī'i scholar Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah (779–851/1377–1448) was actively discouraged by al-Bukhārī from service as a qadi.²⁷ Likewise, Kamāl al-Dīn al-Bārīzī (d. 856/1452), despite his family's well-known and longstanding history of official government service, still felt compelled to keep mum about his appointment as *kātib al-sirr* while attending al-Bukhārī's circle.²⁸ The sources imply that if and when al-Bukhārī had access to wealth, he kept nothing for himself while providing dependents (perhaps such as Ibn 'Arabshāh) with financial assistance to help supplement other sources of income.²⁹

Al-Bukhārī continued to stir controversy from Damascus in the 830/1430s by writing a polemic against Ibn Taymīyah, calling for him to be stripped of his posthumous reputational status as "*shaykh al-islām*" and arguing that he was in

²⁴Ibid., 9:256–57; Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi*, 204–9; Th. Emil Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn Al-Fārīd, His Verse, and His Shrine, Studies in Comparative Religion* (Columbia, SC, 1994), 59–60; Éric Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Egypte et en Syrie sous les derniers Mamelouks et les premiers Ottomans: orientations spirituelles et enjeux culturels* (Damascus, 1995), 353.

²⁵Ibn Taghribirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 2:143; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 1:112, 9:258.

²⁶Ibn Taghribirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 11:84; idem, *Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 14:367.

²⁷Muḥammad ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, "Taqī al-Dīn Abū Bakr ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah bi-qalam ibnihi al-Badr Muḥammad ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah," ed. 'Adnān Darwīsh, in *Majallat majma' al-lughah al-'Arabīyah bi-Dimashq* 58 (1983): 470. I thank Tarek Sabraa for sharing this reference.

²⁸Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 9:258. On the al-Bārīzī family of scholars and administrators, see Konrad Hirschler, "The Formation of the Civilian Elite in the Syrian Province: The Case of Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Ḥamāh," *MSR* 12, no. 2 (2008): 106–8, 124–29; Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils et l'administration*, 249–66.

²⁹Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 9:257.



fact an infidel—an act which fomented outrage in the scholarly circles of the Syrian cities as well as Cairo.³⁰ Despite al-Bukhārī's controversial pronouncements of excommunication against polarizing (and diametrically opposed) figures such as Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn Taymīyah, his reputation with the sultan Barsbāy remained lofty and untarnished.³¹

In Ramaḍān 836/April 1433, in the context of Barsbāy's campaign against the Aqquyunlu Turkmen in Āmid, the sultan's entire court, including most of the military and religious officials, mobilized to demonstrate his might. After the conclusion of hostilities in 837/1433 Barsbāy, *en route* to Cairo, stopped in Damascus and, according to Ibn Taghrībirdī, went out of his way to visit al-Bukhārī in an unprecedented display of respect:

Whenever the sultan had visited [al-Bukhārī while he lived in Cairo] he became in his assembly just like one of the amirs, from the time he sat until the time he got up to leave. Shaykh ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn would speak to [Barsbāy] about the welfare of the Muslims and in words free from embellishment (*ghayr munammaq*) admonish him beyond normal bounds while the sultan listened to him obediently. Likewise, when the sultan went to Āmid, as soon as he entered Damascus he rode to visit and greet [al-Bukhārī] which is something we have never seen happen to a single scholar of our time.³²

From 832–41/1429–38, Ibn ʿArabshāh's life, thanks to his status as a client and disciple of al-Bukhārī, involved the composition of several texts of *adab*, rhetoric, linguistics, and historiography. Al-Bukhārī provided advice and his own personal recollections for Ibn ʿArabshāh's most important works in this period, including his versified literary opus *The Mirror of Literature (Mirʾat al-adab)*,³³ and an earlier version of what would become his biography of Temür, known in its earlier stages as *Umūr Timūr*.³⁴ Ibn ʿArabshāh even paraphrased al-Bukhārī's *Risālah al-Malḥamah*, a Sufi work of *ʿaqidah*, which he versified, dedicated to the sultan,

³⁰The title of the text in question is "Muljimat al-Mujassimah." See al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 3:127; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr*, 8:273, 277; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, 9:257. See also: Caterina Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya (14th to 17th Century): Transregional Spaces of Reading and Reception." *Muslim World* 108, no. 1 (2018): 97–99; Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi*, 205–6; Geoffroy, *Soufisme*, 312, 357–58.

³¹Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 11:85; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, 9:258.

³²Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 14:368.

³³The text itself has not survived in manuscript form, although fragments of it have been preserved in the biographies of Ibn ʿArabshāh written by Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 2:134–36, and al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, 1:112–13. Ibn ʿArabshāh also preserves a single *bayt* in his biography of Temür. See *ʿAjāʾib al-maḥdūr*, 94.

³⁴Ibn ʿArabshāh, "Taʿlif," BM MS Or. 3026, fol. 6r; idem, *ʿAjāʾib al-maḥdūr*, 49, 455; al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 1:288; McChesney, "Life and Works," 240.



and renamed *Al-Iqd al-farīd fī al-tawhīd*.³⁵ Demonstrating proximity to al-Bukhārī would therefore be something Ibn 'Arabshāh strove to demonstrate in the *Pure Composition*.

Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Bārīzī (796–856/1394–1452)

Another slightly younger contemporary and notable member of Ibn 'Arabshāh's Syro-Egyptian network was a scion of the illustrious Banū al-Bārīzī, a notable Shafī'i family from Ḥamāh that successfully dominated the *dīwāns* and judiciary of the sultanate for nearly 120 years, and expanded its influence into Cairo during the reign of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (r. 815–24/1412–21).³⁶ Kamāl ibn al-Bārīzī, following in the footsteps of his father Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad (769–823/1368–1420), accepted chief chancery and judicial positions in Damascus and Cairo.

Based on Ibn al-Bārīzī's family reputation, Barsbāy appointed him *kātib al-sirr* and chief Shafī'i qadi in Damascus in 831/1427. As a holder of both positions, Ibn al-Bārīzī enjoyed an esteemed reputation and was supported by many in the city. Even al-Bukhārī, according to Ibn Taghribirdī, had ultimately been forced to adjust his famous stance in order to accommodate the rising star of his pupil in 835/1431–32:

The very learned 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Bukhārī, whenever one of his students was appointed qadi or market inspector, would become angry at him and then prevent him from attending his lessons. But when he learned of the appointment of qadi Kamāl al-Dīn he rejoiced and said, "Now men will be safe in their property and lives." This is all you need to know about any man of whom Shaykh 'Alā' al-Dīn has said this!³⁷

The next year Barsbāy summoned Ibn al-Bārīzī to Cairo to serve as *kātib al-sirr* in Rabī' II 836/1432 shortly before his Āmid campaign. Ibn al-Bārīzī retained the position in Cairo until 839/1436, when he lost it and returned to Damascus as chief Shafī'i qadi and orator of the Umayyad mosque beginning in 840/1437. He

³⁵Ibn 'Arabshāh, "Ta'lif," fol. 67r.

³⁶Hirschler, "The Formation of the Civilian Elite," 106–13; Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils et l'administration*, 249–66. Carl Petry describes them as "the most famous and influential civilian politicians in Cairo during the fifteenth century" (*The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* [Princeton, 1981], 207–8). Indeed, periods of stability allowed administrators like the Banū al-Bārīzī and the Banū Muzhir to dominate the *dīwāns* and accumulate family fortunes. The sultans tolerated their influence but also expected them to purchase their positions the way other elites did. See Jean-Claude Garcin, "The Regime of the Circassian Mamlūks," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge, 1998), 307.

³⁷Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 15:291–92.



ultimately remained in Damascus for another two years until he was summoned to Cairo to begin service as *kātib al-sirr* for Jaqmaq on 17 Rabīʿ II 842/September 1438, a position he kept until his death in 856/1452.³⁸ Adding a familial relationship to the patron-scholar tie he already had with Jaqmaq, al-Bārīzī also became the sultan's brother-in-law after the latter's marriage to his sister Mughul bint al-Bārīzī (d. 876/1472). This important tie increased the social standing of al-Bārīzī, and made him a key contact for Ibn ʿArabshāh.

Ibn ʿArabshāh, who had returned from abroad to reside in the cities of Bilād al-Shām since 824/1422, knew Kamāl ibn al-Bārīzī from al-Bukhārī's circle in Damascus during the 830s and must have been aware of his youth, family reputation, and literary and scribal abilities. When Ibn al-Bārīzī moved to Cairo to take up his position in Jaqmaq's court, Ibn ʿArabshāh, beginning in 840/1437, likewise began making more trips to the city to build his own network and presumably went to some lengths to maintain his important contact with Ibn al-Bārīzī. Ibn al-Bārīzī was in Jaqmaq's service when the revolts of the Syrian deputy amirs broke out in 841–42/1438–39 in Aleppo and Damascus while Ibn ʿArabshāh was frequently traveling between Syria and Egypt. Although there are no explicit patronage ties connecting the pair in the biographical literature, several passages of the *Pure Composition* afford Ibn ʿArabshāh the opportunity to cast light on their relationship.

In Gaza in Ramaḍān 842/1439, *en route* to Cairo as the revolts of the amirs Taghrī Birmish and Īnāl al-Jakamī unfolded in Aleppo and Damascus, Ibn ʿArabshāh heard reports from Ṣafād stating that the governor of the city, Īnāl al-Ajrūd (later Sultan al-Ashraf Īnāl, r. 857–65/1453–61), had stated his intention to resist the rebellions and remain loyal to Jaqmaq in Cairo. Learning of the “good news” Ibn ʿArabshāh planned to arrange a meeting with “*makhdūminā* al-Muqarr al-Kamālī ibn al-Bārīzī” in which he would also tell him about a group of survivors of the recent troubles in Syria who had approached him and asked him to carry news to Cairo about local suffering at the hands of military men now in open revolt against the sultan. Ibn ʿArabshāh hastened to Cairo and after arranging a rendezvous with Ibn al-Bārīzī, spoke to him at length about those topics and many other things besides, particularly the state of politics in the region and the many threats to Jaqmaq in Cairo and Bilād al-Shām.³⁹

While there is little information on the relationship between Ibn ʿArabshāh and Ibn al-Bārīzī, the al-Bārīzī family maintained influence in their home city

³⁸ Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad M. Amīn and Saʿīd ʿĀshūr (Cairo, 1956–73), 4:1084, 1098. Ibn ʿArabshāh also makes note of the appointment; see “Taʿlīf,” fols. 84r, 90v.

³⁹ Ibn ʿArabshāh, “Taʿlīf,” fols. 98r, 102r.



of Ḥamāh, where Ibn 'Arabshāh was later said to have worked as a qadi.⁴⁰ We may hypothesize here that any position he potentially held in the city—however briefly—may have been facilitated by his links to the Banū al-Bārizī. McChesney similarly speculated that Ibn 'Arabshāh's trips to Cairo after 840 were, in part, related to petitioning the sultan for office in Syria. Kamāl ibn al-Bārizī, an old friend from Damascus and family member of the sultan, was thus an influential contact for Ibn 'Arabshāh to have the ear of.⁴¹

Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (773–852/1372–1449)

Ibn Ḥajar, the notable Cairo-based hadith scholar and chief qadi—in the prime of his career at the time of his 836/1433 journey to Āmid in the sultan's retinue—also occasionally sojourned in Damascus. While the sultan's forces continued into the Anatolian frontier zone,⁴² many religious elites stayed behind in Syria. Ibn Ḥajar, with his well-known links to the political elite and access to *manṣab* positions, could and did serve as a broker to many young scholars (such as Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī and al-Sakhāwī) and helped them acquire official postings. While waiting for the sultan's forces to complete their mission, Ibn Ḥajar was said to have invited local scholars to visit him outside the city in the small village of al-Qābūn al-Taḥṭānī.⁴³ Residing in Damascus at the time, Ibn 'Arabshāh used the occasion

⁴⁰Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 15:549; Hirschler, "The Formation of the Civilian Elite," 112–13 (also n. 88).

⁴¹There is some evidence that Ibn 'Arabshāh maintained his effort to remain close to the family. In 850/1446, perhaps as a gesture of enduring respect for the Banū al-Bārizī clan, Ibn 'Arabshāh visited the home of Kamāl ibn al-Bārizī in 850/1446 in order to pray and compose consolation poetry for his wife and other female Bārizī family members stricken by the plague. Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 1:115. See also McChesney, "Life and Works," 244–45.

⁴²On the complex political situation and Barsbāy's aims and outcomes there, see Patrick Wing, "Submission, Defiance, and the Rules of Politics on the Mamluk Sultanate's Anatolian Frontier," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Third Series) (2015): 5–10; Jo Van Steenberghe and Stijn Van Nieuwenhuysse, "Truth and Politics in Late Medieval Arabic Historiography: The Formation of Sultan Barsbāy's State (1422–1438) and the Narratives of the Amir Qurqumās al-Sha'bānī (d. 1438)," *Der Islam* 95, no. 1 (2018): 178–81.

⁴³It is somewhat difficult to pinpoint Ibn Ḥajar's precise movements in this period. As Broadbridge points out, Ibn Ḥajar stayed at the home of al-'Aynī in Aleppo in 836; see "Academic Rivalry," 99. However, he seems to have resided in *both* Aleppo and Damascus throughout the time of the campaign. According to Ibn Ḥajar's own account, he traveled through Damascus in Sha'bān, before arriving in Aleppo in Ramaān, where he spent *īd al-fiṭr* with al-'Aynī and also attended sessions with Barsbāy before the latter continued on with the army to Āmid. When the army later returned to Damascus on the way home to Cairo, Ibn Ḥajar stayed behind in the city and mentions the *majlis* he attended near Damascus. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā' al-ghumr*, 8:274–78;



to introduce himself and recite portions of his *Mirʿat al-adab* to Ibn Ḥajar’s circle. According to al-Sakhāwī’s later description of the encounter, Ibn Ḥajar was profoundly impressed with Ibn ʿArabshāh’s talent and the pair indulged in a lengthy and jovial literary discussion. Ibn Ḥajar later returned to Cairo with high praise for the author and encouraged his own students to seek out this promising scholar who had lived in Temür’s capital and survived to tell the tale.⁴⁴

Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī (766–845/1365–1442)

Ibn ʿArabshāh appears to have had ambitions to make a name for himself in Cairo, perhaps encouraged by the strong praise he received from Ibn Ḥajar. It is difficult to know how often he left Damascus to visit Cairo during the first half of Barsbāy’s reign. According to the historian Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī (766–845/1365–1442), however, Ibn ʿArabshāh began visiting him frequently during the years after 840/1436.⁴⁵ Ibn ʿArabshāh sought al-Maqrīzī’s opinion on his biography of Temür, which, by 839/1435, was nearly complete.⁴⁶ Al-Maqrīzī acknowledges reading the text under its working title *Umūr Timūr*.⁴⁷ Ibn ʿArabshāh repeated his earlier pattern with Ibn Ḥajar by reciting poetry to al-Maqrīzī and demonstrating his knowledge of jurisprudence and Arabic linguistics. Al-Maqrīzī seems to have quickly recognized the value of Ibn ʿArabshāh’s personal story and poetic insights into Temür, which he then converted into straightforward historiographical data for his own

R. Kevin Jaques, *Ibn Hajar* (Oxford, 2009), 113–15. Later sources written by Ibn Ḥajar’s students al-Biqāʿī and al-Sakhāwī also make note of Ibn Ḥajar’s stop in Damascus and its suburbs. See Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Biqāʿī, *Unwān al-zamān fī tarājim al-shuyūkh wa-al-aqrān*, ed. Hasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 2009–14), 2:62; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḥawāshī wa-al-durar fī tarjamat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Ḥajar*, ed. Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Majīd (Beirut, 1999), 182. Although he wrote years later, al-Sakhāwī was a very close companion and disciple of Ibn Ḥajar and the source of the information comes from his lengthy biography of Ibn Ḥajar. If al-Sakhāwī was not a participant in the events, he was very likely told first-hand by Ibn Ḥajar himself.

⁴⁴Al-Sakhāwī, *Dawʿ al-lāmiʿ*, 1:112–13; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḥawāshī*, 182. It was Ibn Ḥajar’s high praise for Ibn ʿArabshāh that likely led the younger al-Sakhāwī to seek him out later in Cairo and write about him favorably. During his lifetime, Ibn Ḥajar maintained contact and corresponded with Ibn ʿArabshāh’s son Tāj al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb; see *Inbāʿ al-ghumr*, 9:30. Ibn Ḥajar himself appears in the text of Ibn ʿArabshāh’s *Pure Composition*. The author mentions meeting a young student from Samarqand who came west to Cairo to study Islamic sciences at the Baybarsiyah and become a master of hadith in order to return to his homeland and disseminate his learning. According to Ibn ʿArabshāh, there was no contemporary teacher or scholar of the same stature as Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī. See “Taʿlif,” fol. 54r.

⁴⁵Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 1:287.

⁴⁶One Dār al-Kutub MS of the *ʿAjāʾib al-maḥdūr* was completed in 841/1437 and the latest in 843/1439–40. Thus Ibn ʿArabshāh appears to have been heavily revising and supplementing his draft in 839–40. See Takao Ito, “Al-Maqrīzī’s Biography of Timūr,” *Arabica* 62 (2015): 314.

⁴⁷Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 1:287.



biographical dictionary of contemporaries, the *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīdah fī tarājim al-aʿyān al-mufīdah*, acknowledging his source at the end.⁴⁸ Apparently impressed with an accomplished first-hand historian of Temür's reign, al-Maqrīzī devoted an entry to Ibn 'Arabshāh in his biographical dictionary of notable contemporaries.⁴⁹ Ibn 'Arabshāh likewise, during his several meetings with al-Maqrīzī particularly in 842–43, consulted the latter's then unfinished *Kitāb al-sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk* to write the historiographical portion of his *Pure Composition*, which covers the Syrian revolts against the new sultanate of Jaqmaq after Rabiʿ I 842/August 1438.⁵⁰

We can only speculate about the precise nature and length of Ibn 'Arabshāh's meetings with al-Maqrīzī, which appear to have been consultative. It is worth pointing out that Ibn 'Arabshāh sought out al-Maqrīzī at a time when the latter likewise held no official posting. Several modern studies have demonstrated that al-Maqrīzī had difficulty attracting patrons among the elites after 1413.⁵¹ Al-Maqrīzī similarly found the traditional roads of social advancement narrowing and after a sojourn in Mecca (834–40/1431–36) had returned to Cairo to finalize a number of his shorter *risālahs* and organize his legacy. It was at this time that

⁴⁸At least two modern studies have attempted to gauge al-Maqrīzī's indebtedness to Ibn 'Arabshāh's *Wonders of Destiny* as a source for his biographical writings about Temür. Takao Ito argues that several subsequent historians, including Ibn 'Arabshāh's student Ibn Taghribirdī, appear to have used al-Maqrīzī's paraphrased biography of Temür rather than Ibn 'Arabshāh's text. See: Ito, "Al-Maqrīzī's Biography of Timūr," 321–22; Joseph Drory, "Maqrīzī in *Durar al-ʿUqūd* with Regard to Timur Leng," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, Vol. 7, *Proceedings of the 16th, 17th and 18th International Colloquium organized at Ghent University in May 2007, 2008 and 2009*, eds. Urbain Vermeulen, Kristof D'hulster, and Jo Van Steenbergen (Leuven, 2013), 393–401. Among the authors who read Ibn 'Arabshāh's biography directly was the Damascene scholar and historian Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah. It is difficult to gauge Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah's opinion of Ibn 'Arabshāh as a contemporary in Damascus, though both may have spent time in al-Bukhārī's circle. David Reisman also found a marginal note in Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah's "Dhayl" (Chester Beatty MS 5527) demonstrating his reliance on Ibn 'Arabshāh's announcement of Temür's death in 807/1405. See review of *Tārīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah*, vol. 4, ed. Adnan Darwich, *MSR* 5 (2001): 176. Another clue about Ibn 'Arabshāh's social standing in Damascus appears to come from one of Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah's manuscript notes, which, while corroborating Ibn 'Arabshāh's time as a notary, also takes a dismissive tone toward the author. After naming a series of scholars with full names and titles of dignity, Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah identifies him only as "ʿArabshāh the Ḥanafī." I thank Tarek Sabraa for pointing this out.

⁴⁹Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 1:287–88.

⁵⁰At the start of Ibn 'Arabshāh's annal for 841, he writes: "I communicate [from] the history of the learned shaykh and imam Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī—may Allāh Most High preserve him—in Egypt on 1 Shaʿbān 842...." See Ibn 'Arabshāh, "Taʿlīf," fol. 111v.

⁵¹Broadbridge, "Academic Rivalry," 105; Jo Van Steenbergen, *Caliphate and Kingship in a Fifteenth-Century Literary History of Muslim Leadership and Pilgrimage: al-D̲ahab al-Masbūk fī d̲ikr man ḥaḡḡa min al-ḥulafāʾ wa-l-mulūk* (Leiden, 2016), 35, 38–39.



Ibn ‘Arabshāh, likely aware of al-Maqrīzī’s reputation and unfinished historical work (the *Kitāb al-sulūk*, which, according to its author, was known even to the Timurids of Herat as early as 833/1429),⁵² began seeking him out in Cairo and perhaps sensing in him a kindred spirit—isolated and frustrated, looking for new strategies for advancement in the same fiercely competitive social world. Both men were engaged in similar projects—finalizing important works for authentic transmission—as the socio-political world underwent major changes and realignments.⁵³

During this period of visits with al-Maqrīzī, two important deaths occurred in 841/1438: in Damascus, Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s main patron, al-Bukhārī, and in Cairo, the sultan Barsbāy. Perhaps encouraged by the circumstances and inspired by his exchange of historical texts with al-Maqrīzī, Ibn ‘Arabshāh thus chose to embark on his *Pure Composition* to offer practical insights and a legitimizing narrative for the court of the new sultan.⁵⁴

Toward a Nuanced Understanding of the Text: Introducing Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s *Pure Composition*

As a text seemingly intended for Jaqmaq and composed early in his reign, the *Pure Composition* is a rich blend of *adab*, rhetoric, *Fürstenspiegel*, kingly lore, and historiography. The surviving text is rather curious for a variety of reasons. None of Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s biographers mentioned it among his works, most likely because it had remained unfinished and unknown at the time of his death in 854/1450. One manuscript, now housed in the British Museum Library (Or. 3026), is a later presentation copy prepared close to the time of Jaqmaq’s death in 857/1453 in the hand of one Muḥammad al-Matbūlī al-Anṣārī. The first folio of the manuscript acknowledges the death of Ibn ‘Arabshāh (*raḥimahu Allāh*)⁵⁵ and includes a brief obituary of the author in the annal of the lunar year 854.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the

⁵²Van Steenbergen, *Caliphate and Kingship*, 40, 51–52.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 51–52.

⁵⁴This was not an uncommon proposition for a premodern Arabic panegyric. For a fourteenth-century example, see Jo Van Steenbergen, “Qalāwūnid Discourse, Elite Communication and the Mamluk Cultural Matrix: Interpreting a 14th-Century Panegyric,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012): 1–2.

⁵⁵Ibn ‘Arabshāh, “Ta’lif,” fol. 1r.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, fols. 126r–v. The brief text of the obituary, which appears to have phrasing similar to Ibn Taghrībirdī’s *Nujūm al-zāhirah* obituary, is as follows: “In [854] died the shaykh and learned imam Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ibrāhīm the Damascene Hanafi known as Ibn ‘Arabshāh, far from his family and homeland at the Sa’id al-Su’adā’ *khānqāh* on 15 Rajab. He had gone to the lands of Rūm [following] the attack of Tīmūr Lenk and [later] frequented Cairo. He became qadi of Ḥamāh and held a number of positions. He was a skilled leader



author's many first-person intrusions into the text to announce his proximity to the events, actors, and text itself, indicate that the majority of the work, barring perhaps the several annals included at the end (mostly comprised of obituaries), were indeed the work of Ibn 'Arabshāh.

Based on the heavy coverage of the events of 841–42, the British orientalist Sanford Arthur Strong (1863–1904), who edited the first twelve folios of the text, hypothesized that Ibn 'Arabshāh most likely completed his portion of the original text in 843–44.⁵⁷ A contemporary reference to al-Maqrīzī (who was still alive at the time of writing)⁵⁸ suggests that the text was abandoned, or at least left in its final state, before his death in 845/1442. The main body of the text likewise lists no date past Dhū al-Ḥijjah 843, which suggests this as a possible *terminus post quem*.⁵⁹ It is a remark made by Ibn 'Arabshāh himself at the end of his chapter on the virtue of justice (*faṣl fī 'adl wa-faḍlihi*) that implies that a large part of the text may have been composed in 843 during an invited stay at the citadel of Cairo:

What I have mentioned in this brief exposition (*al-mukhtaṣar*) is but a drop of ocean and an atom's weight of mountain. For I had naught but the honor of kissing the ground and appearing before the honorable positions (*al-mawāqif al-sharīfah*) [of the sultan's court] for the easy period of about thirty days, in Rajab and blessed Sha'bān of the year 843 [approximately 22 December 1439–21 January 1440] and they proved the happiest of days. The noble decree had arrived necessitating my honored presence while I was in Egypt, so I complied with that, seizing upon this happiness so that I might witness the honorable morals, good characteristics, and high-minded ambitions of the sultan.⁶⁰

The most likely scenario thus appears that Ibn 'Arabshāh, during an honorary residency in Jaqmaq's citadel (perhaps secured through his connection with Kamāl al-Bārizī), drafted much of the text in Rajab and Sha'bān 843 while—eager to curry favor at the new court—he reflected on the recent events of Jaqmaq's consolidation of power the previous year. The composition of the new text coincided

in many sciences: well-versed in *fiqh*, Arabic, rhetoric, grammar, dialectics, *adab*, and history. He was well-spoken, humble, and composed verse in three languages: Arabic, Persian, and Turkish." Cf. Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 15:272.

⁵⁷See: Ibn 'Arabshāh, "Panegyric on Sultan Jaqmaq," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 39, no. 2 (April 1907): 395–96.

⁵⁸See note 50 above.

⁵⁹This date is also the last mentioned in the *Wonders of Destiny*, suggesting that it too may have reached its final state at this time.

⁶⁰Ibn 'Arabshāh, "Ta'lif," fol. 73v.



with Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s visits to the home of al-Maqrizī, where he was able to read the latest additions to the *Sulūk*, which chronicled the recent death of Barsbāy, the investiture of his son ‘Azīz Yūsuf, and the advent of Jaqmaq. Perhaps even with his own copy of the latter work to peruse in his citadel chambers, Ibn ‘Arabshāh set to work creating a new text to present alongside his renowned biography of Temür. He then continued to work on the text for much of 844, before ultimately abandoning it sometime the next year.

The *Pure Composition* is comprised of two distinct parts. The first (folios 1v–83v) is a somewhat meandering, rhetorical discussion of mankind, Sufi cosmology, and kingship, culminating in the author’s presentation of the early years of Jaqmaq’s life intertwined with a eulogy for al-Bukhārī. The first section contains fourteen small chapters covering the praiseworthy characteristics (*al-awsāf al-mahmūdīyah*) the author believed resided in the new sultan, including soul, intellect, good character, knowledge, humility, forbearance, gratitude, generosity, tenacity, reliance on God, prudence, and justice. Each chapter typically begins with verses from the Quran, hadith attributed to the Prophet, stories of famous Iranian or Muslim kings (often drawn from al-Qushayrī’s famous epistle on Sufism, or Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s own translation of Sadīd al-Dīn al-‘Awfī’s thirteenth-century *Jawāmi‘ al-ḥikāyāt*⁶¹), and then a brief statement affirming that Jaqmaq himself, through his piety, bears the quality.

Ibn ‘Arabshāh begins the text by praising God’s creation of mankind and subsequent division of the world among them. The author elevates mankind among created beings, locating analogies between human physiology and geological as well as astrological forms. To transition into his discourse on ideal kingship via Sufi cosmology, Ibn ‘Arabshāh begins with al-Bukhārī’s explanation of a hadith attributed to the Prophet likening people to minerals of silver and gold, in which he advocates separating mankind between good and bad, with some hearts interpreted as jewels of prophethood, sainthood (*wilāyah*), general knowledge (*‘ilm*), or mystical knowledge of God (*ma‘rifat Allāh*), and that they should be organized by degrees of perfection.⁶² The author thus posits that mankind inhabits a crossroads between the testamentary world (*‘ālam al-mulk* or *‘ālam al-shahādah*) and the invisible realm (*‘ālam al-malkūt* or *‘ālam al-ghayb*) of which man is ignorant “if he knows neither himself nor his lord.”⁶³

The author next observes that after the Prophet Muḥammad, the highest level of mankind was comprised of other prophets and disciples who called people to

⁶¹On Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s translation of Sadīd al-Dīn al-‘Awfī’s *Jawāmi‘ al-ḥikāyāt* from Persian to Turkish for the Ottoman sultan, see: Muḥammad Nizāmu’-d-Dīn, *Introduction to the Jawāmi‘ u’l-ḥikāyāt wa lawāmi ‘u’rriwāyāt of Sadīdu’-d-Dīn Muḥammad al-‘Awfī* (London, 1929), 31.

⁶²Ibn ‘Arabshāh, “Ta’lif,” fols. 1v–3r.

⁶³Ibid., fol. 3r.



Islamic monotheism (*tawhīd*) and guidance, followed by kings and sultans who supported the law and acted in concert with religious authorities to enact the Sunnah of the Prophet.⁶⁴ Perhaps reflecting his own anxieties for securing livelihood for his family in uncertain socio-political contexts, Ibn 'Arabshāh, drawing on the so-called "circle of justice,"⁶⁵ writes that the livelihoods of men are linked to a strong sultan who can ensure order and perpetuation in society.⁶⁶

Intertextuality and the Dichotomy of Good/Bad Rule

It is in this discourse that Ibn 'Arabshāh plants his version of sultan Barsbāy's meeting with al-Bukhārī after the Āmid campaign. Ibn 'Arabshāh's narrative spells out his master's advice for the ruler and emphasizes the choice between good and evil that al-Bukhārī placed before Barsbāy:

The sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Abū al-Naṣr Barsbāy (Allāh Most High have mercy on him) went toward Diyār Bakr in the year 836 [1432–33]. When he returned at the end of the year, our late shaykh the divine doer, everlasting scholar, *axis mundi*, and *walī al-mulk*, the complete giver of all, Shaykh 'Alā' al-Millah wa-al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Bukhārī ... went to visit him. He was, in those days, living in al-Shiblīyah in Sālīḥīyah, Damascus. When [the sultan] came to him he genuflected before [al-Bukhārī] and listened to that which he said to him: "O Barsbāy! Know that dominion of the world, before you, had been among those greater than you in *dawlah*, fiercer in force, and traversing a greater expanse. Among them are David and Solomon (peace and blessings be upon them), Dhū al-Qarnayn, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, and those who followed them on their path. Also among them [i.e., on an alternate path] are Pharaoh, Nimrod, Shaddād, Nebuchadnezzar, and others who followed them in their way.⁶⁷ All of them left [this life] and passed to their fate in which they had not an atom's weight of power. They went to what [their deeds] had brought forth and have no power over what they did. Now, you have the power and for you is a share (*ḥaṣṣah*) of what had

⁶⁴Ibid., fols. 4v–5r.

⁶⁵The circle of justice is alluded to elsewhere in Ibn 'Arabshāh's later work, the *Fākihāt al-khulafā' wa-mufākahāt al-zurafā'*, ed. Muḥammad Rajab al-Najjār (Kuwait, 1997), 478–79.

⁶⁶Ibn 'Arabshāh, "Ta'lif," fol. 6r.

⁶⁷Ibn 'Arabshāh reports elsewhere that Temür himself had taken issue with being compared (unfavorably in his opinion) to Nebuchadnezzar during his meeting with Ibn Khaldūn and demanded an explanation. See Ibn 'Arabshāh, *'Ajā'ib al-maqdūr*, 453–54.



been for them. Before you, the path of both parties has emerged, and the good and the bad of them made clear to you, for you must choose among the comportment of any path you wish and follow any group of them you want. [...There is] only the path of David and Solomon (blessings and peace be upon them) so be gathered with them. This much speech is sufficient for you; the best speech is brief and beneficial.⁶⁸

Waxing further on the dichotomy between good and evil, the tone having been set by al-Bukhārī's advice for Barsbāy, Ibn 'Arabshāh observes that the length of Temür's reign had matched the combined "forty-year" reign of Nūr al-Dīn Zangī (541–69/1147–74) and Saladin (564–89/1169–93) though he had filled his time in power with the precise opposite of what they did: subjugation, horror, and ruin. Returning to the theme of the choices that beset a ruler, Ibn 'Arabshāh hints that Jaqmaq likewise has a number of paths before him.

The social and political events unfolding around its initial creation, combined with the author's station as a client in search of a patron, led Ibn 'Arabshāh, as will be argued later, to taking on the act of writing the text as a distinct intellectual project stemming from his biography of Temür. Ibn 'Arabshāh's possible decision to abandon the *Pure Composition* presents complications for the exploration of its social function, agency, reception, and afterlife. Nevertheless, the work springs from a precise moment in the life of its author during a month-long residency in the Citadel of Cairo in 843/1439–40 and seems unlikely, as one theory contends, to have been penned as a plea for mercy during the author's later imprisonment by Jaqmaq shortly before the end of his life in 854/1450.⁶⁹

The discourse of the *Pure Composition* engages closely with dichotomies of good and evil, praiseworthy and blameworthy. The meaning Ibn 'Arabshāh wishes to convey to Jaqmaq concerns a ruler's influence over the livelihoods of all men and thus he demonstrates the choices before the sultan to follow either the footsteps of the great (Solomon, David, Nūr al-Dīn Zangī, and Saladin) or the evil (Nimrod, Nebuchadnezzar, and Temür). Ibn 'Arabshāh, like al-Bukhārī, is adamant that there is no "third path." In linking the past to the present on the macro level, Ibn 'Arabshāh implies that the *dawlah* of Jaqmaq can right the wrongs of Temür and get history back on track, just as the author, on the micro level, wished to use

⁶⁸Ibn 'Arabshāh, "Ta'lif," fols. 4r–v.

⁶⁹Robert Irwin, "Mamluk Literature," *MSR* 7, no. 1 (2003): 2, 15. According to al-Sakhāwī, in his final months, Ibn 'Arabshāh, perhaps in the pursuit of a lucrative position, fell afoul of other better-connected competitors who complained to the sultan about him. After imprisonment and mistreatment, it seems highly unlikely that Ibn 'Arabshāh would have still seriously considered patronage by the sultan or someone close to him a possibility. See: al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 1:115; McChesney, "Life and Works," 243–44.



his *Pure Composition* to seek expiation of the “sins” committed by his *Wonders of Destiny* (see below).

To historicize the *Pure Composition* as a communicative agent of the author's elite identity, it is necessary to examine its chronological and ideological proximity to the *Wonders of Destiny*. Ibn ʿArabshāh likely began work on his biography of Temür not long after returning to Syria and worked on it sporadically during the reign of Barsbāy. He interviewed scholars that had been close to Temür, and even travelled to Anatolia in 839/1435–36 to complete research for the book before heading to Cairo to finalize and publicize it the next year.⁷⁰

Ibn ʿArabshāh's reasons for writing Temür's biography were no doubt manifold and personal. He may have wanted to expunge painful memories of his family's captivity and the text reads as a powerful catharsis of anger and mourning for the victims of Temür's ambitions.⁷¹ The author also may have seen it as a means of displaying his literary skills as a master of Arabic *sajʿ* prose in a way that might help hasten his reestablishment in the lands of his birth, where a morbid fascination fueled by hatred and the social memory of Temür's destruction of Damascus and Aleppo were part of the social fabric.⁷² McChesney was ultimately unable to find a satisfactory answer as to *why* Ibn ʿArabshāh composed such an emotionally raw biography of Temür, yet in the early folios of the *Pure Composition*, Ibn ʿArabshāh lays bare his reasons:

Before this felicitous composition, I compiled a history and called it *The Wonders of Destiny in the Calamities Wrought by Tīmūr* and mentioned in it some of the circumstances of Tīmūr the lame, than whom there has never been one more violent or recalcitrant in existence. [By doing so] I only intended to mention what happened to the worshippers and lands by that arrogant tyrant so that the governors of religion and the kings of Islam and Muslims may learn from it, because every life story has lessons, and every lesson has stories which are not devoid of ethical details, Arabic witticisms, stylistic marvels, astonishing constructions, and so on. Then, when I saw this just *dawlah* and brilliant, virtuous reign [of al-Zāhir Jaqmaq], and that with which Allāh has blessed Islam and the Muslims through it, and how the twins of kingship and religion were rejoined after their separation [by Temür], I took blame upon myself for what I had let slip in my compilation of that book, and

⁷⁰Ibn ʿArabshāh, *ʿAjāʾib al-maqdūr*, 227; McChesney, “Life and Works,” 237.

⁷¹McChesney, “Life and Works,” 206–7.

⁷²On lingering fear and resentment toward Temür and his descendants in the Cairo Sultanate during the later fifteenth century, see: Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 13:193, 15:364.



found no way to erase those [potentially] bad deeds and thence correct the errors, except by writing a book containing the traces (*āthār*) of this felicitous *dawlah* and the establishment of some of its praiseworthy and righteous descriptions, thereby mentioning some small story of what Allāh Blessed and Most High permitted our master the sultan (may Allāh make his banners everlasting) and raising over the astral conjunctions his banners of good purpose, sincere inner intentions, and compassion for the flock and ... with these praiseworthy characteristics ... how he was distinguished over other kings and sultans.... The purpose in this is to teach the observer that our master the sultan is among the noblest type of mankind (apparent or hidden) and to let he who is hopeful know the power of this blessing so that he may always renew thankfulness to Allāh Most High and pray for its perpetuation and the elongation of its endurance. There are differences between the two compositions and humiliation between the two compositions, for Tīmūr the rebel was left alone to rule the world for about 40 years.⁷³

In this rather remarkable passage, Ibn ‘Arabshāh demonstrates cognizance of the potential agency residing in his own historical works and their ability to wield influence in the wider world around him. Fearing that the blameworthy examples set forth in his earlier book about Temūr might in fact bring about *negative* change, he wishes to atone for any such possibility by offering a new text to the new ruler. Perhaps feeling as though he was in need of a fresh strategy for his time in Cairo,⁷⁴ the text of the *Pure Composition* appears to do an about-face on the very *raison d’être* of his most important (and increasingly acclaimed) work to date. Weighing questions about his own complicity in the divorce of kingship from religion in the wake of Temūr, the author claims that there is no way to erase the bad without chronicling all of the inherent good promised at the ascent of Jaqmaq. It is thus that Ibn ‘Arabshāh demonstrates concern and consciousness for the texts he produces and apprehension over who will consume them and how.

The *Pure Composition* therefore, according to its author, serves as an opposition to be juxtaposed against what he claims is the instructive narrative of Temūr’s

⁷³Ibn ‘Arabshāh, “Ta’lif,” fols. 5v–6r.

⁷⁴Although Ibn ‘Arabshāh did not formally move to Cairo, he undertook lengthy trips to the city and lodged at the Sa’id al-Su’adā’ *khānqāh*. As his family resided in Damascus, he only made extended trips to Cairo and commuted between the two regional capitals, though our sources fail to divulge how often, for how long, or exactly when.



career in the *Wonders of Destiny*.⁷⁵ However, it is also in many ways a continuation, engaging with discourses of power, kingship, and the relationship between rulers and the ruled. Medieval Arabic authors of historiographical works like Ibn 'Arabshāh often endeavored to demonstrate immediate moral/didactic (or *'ibar*) meanings from historical narratives to “provide a moral service and also entertain,” all while underscoring God’s authority and Islam’s veracity before the political elites as well as the community at large.⁷⁶ In his criticism of Temür, Ibn 'Arabshāh presents the features of a terrible ruler, while in his panegyric for Jaqmaq, he offers, by way of antidote, the characteristics of a great one. The first provides lessons that ought *not* be followed (such as Temür’s excessive anger with subordinates⁷⁷), while the second offers the traits of an ideal Muslim sovereign. It is necessary to point out that following his harsh presentation of Temür, the *Wonders of Destiny* includes a closing chapter which recognizes a number of concessions to its subject’s cunning prudence, *realpolitik*, and sagacious decision making.⁷⁸ While demonstrating his ability to praise a good ruler and defame a bad one, Ibn 'Arabshāh simultaneously positioned himself as an astute and objective judge of the princely character of rulers by dint of his first-hand experience.

Constructing the Early Career of Jaqmaq

Ibn 'Arabshāh describes the era before Jaqmaq as one of frequent disputes in which God withdrew mercy, favor, and the existence of a just *dawlah* capable of pouring forth safety and security. For the author, it was only the current age that God had blessed through the felicitous reign of Jaqmaq.⁷⁹ After a lengthy list of honorific titles for Jaqmaq, Ibn 'Arabshāh writes that sultans are God’s servants and the helpers of his *awliyā*’.

Acknowledging that the *dawlah* of the new sovereign is still in its “easy period” after the subjugation of rivals, Ibn 'Arabshāh presents it as a foregone conclu-

⁷⁵Ibn 'Arabshāh, *'Ajā'ib al-maqdūr*, 37–38.

⁷⁶Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (New York, 1994), 191–92; Robert Irwin, *Ibn Khaldūn: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton, 2018), 4–6; Konrad Hirschler, “Islam: The Arabic and Persian Traditions, Eleventh–Fifteenth Centuries,” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 2: 400–1400*, eds. Sarah Foot and Chase Robinson (Oxford, 2012), 276–78. For discussions of how some medieval Arabic historiographical works can be read as advice literature, see Van Steenberg, *Caliphate and Kingship*, 82, 103–4; Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography*, 109–11.

⁷⁷Ibn 'Arabshāh twice makes use of the tale of Temür’s outrageous punishment of his advisor Muḥammad Kāwjin. See: *'Ajā'ib al-maqdūr*, 460–62; Ibn 'Arabshāh, *Fākihāt al-khulafā*, 492–93.

⁷⁸Ibn 'Arabshāh, *'Ajā'ib al-maqdūr*, 450–87.

⁷⁹Ibn 'Arabshāh, “Ta'lif,” fol. 5v.



sion that Jaqmaq's reign will bring good.⁸⁰ The author continues his well wishes for Jaqmaq and congratulates his victory, mentioning candidly that he himself had wandered the lands of Islam and Anatolia (*al-mamālik al-islāmīyah wa-abwāb al-Rūm*) and elsewhere, implying that no lands approached the ideal represented by Jaqmaq's *dawlah*.⁸¹

The author, emphasizing the new sultan's piety, argues that Jaqmaq had successfully vanquished his political enemies in a very short time in a significant departure from recent kings and sultans, including al-Zāhir Barqūq (784–801/1382–99), al-Nāṣir Faraj (801–15/1399–1412), al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (815–24/1412–21), and al-Ashraf Barsbāy (825–41/1422–38), all of whom had faced protracted periods of threats to their political order and endured difficulty eliminating rivals during their reigns. Sweeping away convoluted political processes, Ibn 'Arabshāh thus connects Jaqmaq to a continuous version of history and political order while suggesting the paradox that while he had emerged from what came before, he was also superior to it by virtue of his swift efficiency in dealing with rebels and in his unique connection to God and the pious.⁸²

The author expands further on these themes in his chapter devoted to the period of Jaqmaq's youth until he became a "just imam."⁸³ Having come to the throne in his sixties as the result of complex processes of integration which involved the recycling of elites into new political contexts, Jaqmaq had already acquired a rich life story full of socio-political experience prior to the initiation of his sultanate.⁸⁴ Since in 843–44/1439–40 little could have been written retrospectively about the *entire reign* of Jaqmaq, one wonders about Ibn 'Arabshāh's sources on the origins and coming of age of the sultan (if not a combination of what he had been told by al-Bukhārī, read in al-Maqrīzī, or learned from other elites and courtiers).

According to the author, Jaqmaq, in early life, had balanced his time between playing war games, training for jihad, and practicing archery and horsemanship (*furūsiyah*) while at the same time remaining steadfast in prayers at the Almās mosque in Cairo, participating in Quranic recitation that was sonorous and pleasing to mendicant Sufis, and inclining toward spending time with the pious.⁸⁵

⁸⁰Ibid., fol. 7r.

⁸¹Ibid., fol. 7v.

⁸²Ibid., fol. 8r.

⁸³Ibid., fols. 8r–11v.

⁸⁴Jo Van Steenberg, "Appearances of *dawla* and Political Order in Late Medieval Syro-Egypt: The State, Social Theory, and the Political History of the Cairo Sultanate (Thirteenth–Sixteenth Centuries)," in *History and Society during the Mamluk Period (1250–1517): Studies of the Annemarie Schimmel Institute for Advanced Study II*, ed. Stephan Conermann (Göttingen, 2016), 79–80. See also Garcin, "The Regime of the Circassian Mamluks," 293.

⁸⁵Ibn 'Arabshāh, "Ta'lif," fol. 10r.



Ibn 'Arabshāh's narrative then jumps forward to a scene from the troubled reign of the sultan al-Nāṣir Faraj (who the author acknowledges was cruelly assassinated along with his supporters), when a younger Jaqmaq, along with a group of amirs that opposed the sultan, was arrested. Faraj executed the conspirators one by one but granted Jaqmaq a reprieve as he paused for a night's sleep. Faraj had a troubling dream in which an ominous voice warned him not to harm Jaqmaq. Waking in a cold sweat, he freed the captive future sultan. Ibn 'Arabshāh ties the anecdote to the observation that God always creates an exit from trouble for the faithful.⁸⁶

Following a brief detour in which the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd is likewise thwarted in his attempts to kill a pious enemy, Ibn 'Arabshāh returns to his narrative of Jaqmaq's early adulthood, stating that he became chief chamberlain (*ḥājib al-ḥujjāb*) in Egypt and continued taking on positions of honor under sultans Shaykh, Ṭaṭar, and, finally, Barsbāy, until the latter's journey to Āmid with his entire court, during which Jaqmaq served as supervisor of the royal stables (*amīr akhūr*).⁸⁷ It is here that Ibn 'Arabshāh revisits the Āmid campaign following which Barsbāy's army alighted in Barza, Syria, and many local religious scholars showed their respect and jockeyed for favor among prominent men in the sultan's retinue. According to Ibn 'Arabshāh, as an amir Jaqmaq had been preceded by his reputation for generosity and distributing gifts. Thus many, including the author himself, went to see him in hopes of benefitting from his largesse.

Ibn 'Arabshāh claims at this point that al-Bukhārī was among those who used to praise Jaqmaq. Having re-introduced his late master into the narrative, the author takes the occasion to insert brief biographical details of his shaykh, which have some overlap with Jaqmaq's early career and demonstrate to the reader that al-Bukhārī had often been privy to (and had perhaps even spiritually overseen) key moments of promotion or status change in Jaqmaq's career.

With the completion of the first part of the text, Ibn 'Arabshāh then embarks on a historical narrative complimentary toward the new political formation established by Jaqmaq and his supporters. The second historiographical portion of the text, titled "Chapter (*fasl*) on the Beginning of the Accession (*wilāyah*) of Our Master the Sultan and Mention of the Events of his Time ...," is presented as a literary history of Jaqmaq's reign broken into thematic subject headings (84r–111v) followed by annals from 841–42 to 857 (111v–129v). Although the manuscript gives the outward appearance of being a history of Jaqmaq's sultanate, Ibn 'Arabshāh, who preceded Jaqmaq in death by three years, only covers the first year of his reign. The main historiographical focus of the second portion appears to be the revolts of a number of amirs closely tied to the previous socio-political order es-

⁸⁶Ibid., fol. 9r.

⁸⁷Ibid., fol. 9v.



tablished by Barsbāy who were suddenly alienated by Jaqmaq's ascent in Rabī' I 842/August 1438 and who sought to oppose him directly or otherwise strike out independently in Syria with new polities of their own.⁸⁸ Ibn 'Arabshāh devotes several sections to what he describes as the "disobedience" (*iṣyān*) of the amirs Qurqumās al-Sha'bānī (d. 842/1438), Īnāl al-Jakamī (d. 842/1439), and Taghrī Birmish (d. 842/1439). In Ramaḍān 841/February 1438, he may have been on hand in al-Mazza, Damascus, easing al-Bukhārī into his final journey, though it was his son Tāj al-Dīn 'Abd al-Wahhāb who wrote to Ibn Ḥajar notifying him of the shaykh's death.⁸⁹ If Ibn 'Arabshāh had been in Damascus for the funerary rites, he must have returned to Cairo shortly thereafter to observe the political fallout following the death of Barsbāy and perhaps go in search of official positions in the new political order. Ibn 'Arabshāh places himself in Gaza in Ramaḍān 842/1439 and arrives in Cairo to meet with Ibn al-Bārīzī well before his 30-day residency in the citadel in Rajab and Sha'bān of 843/1439–40.⁹⁰ The subsequent annals from 843 to 857 consist of brief necrologies of scholars and political figures rather than historical facts.

Al-Bukhārī: Axis Mundi (*Quṭb al-Aqtāb*)

Ibn 'Arabshāh's placement of 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Bukhārī in Cairo as early as the reign of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh allowed al-Bukhārī to cross paths with a younger version of Jaqmaq in the narrative.⁹¹ Ibn 'Arabshāh eventually halts the progression of Jaqmaq's career altogether to focus on al-Bukhārī's reinvention of a number of sciences, his strict reliance on Islamic texts rather than interpretation, his reputation among students, and importantly, the report from another Damascene colleague, Shaykh 'Alā' al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Qābūnī, who dreamed that al-Bukhārī had ascended to the rank of *quṭb* of the age.⁹²

After a brief digression about al-Bukhārī's uncanny ability to read minds and intuitively become aware of answers to unasked questions as a true Sufi *'arif*, Ibn 'Arabshāh directly takes on his master's famous stance on paid government service. Mentioning an 843 encounter in Damascus with Yaḥyá ibn al-'Aṭṭār, a former student of al-Bukhārī during his time in Cairo and a current client of Kamāl ibn al-Bārīzī, Ibn 'Arabshāh recounts the story of how Ibn al-'Aṭṭār in 824/1421

⁸⁸On Qurqumās al-Sha'bānī, one of the amirs in question as a case in point, see Van Steenberg and Van Nieuwenhuysse, "Truth and Politics."

⁸⁹Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā' al-ghumr*, 9:30.

⁹⁰Ibn 'Arabshāh, "Ta'lif," fol. 98r.

⁹¹The precise length of al-Bukhārī's sojourn in Cairo is difficult to pinpoint. Al-Sakhāwī claims he stayed in the city for only two years (*Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 9:256).

⁹²Ibn 'Arabshāh, "Ta'lif," fols. 9v–11r.



caught the eye of the amir Jaqmaq (at that time a *khazindār*), who invited him into service as an inkwell bearer (*dawādār*).⁹³ Apparently content with his patron-client (*mulāzamah*) arrangement with al-Bukhārī, Ibn al-ʿAṭṭār declined the offer and went to tell his master what had happened. Al-Bukhārī, upon weighing the situation, told his apprentice that it was indeed favorable to forsake such a position, though he emphasized one's personal choice in such a perilous matter because a prominent amir such as Jaqmaq was no doubt destined for the sultanate or another lofty position of greatness—with the unwritten subtext that spurning such favor might come back to haunt Ibn al-ʿAṭṭār later. Ibn ʿArabshāh, quoting the latter, confirms that al-Bukhārī had been in the habit of imparting such advice to many others over the years.⁹⁴

Although the anecdote seems peculiar in place and tone, it accomplishes two discursive goals in the author's narrative. It establishes some elasticity (derived from necessity) in al-Bukhārī's (perhaps inconvenient) opinion and thus affords Ibn ʿArabshāh room to maneuver if he ever finds himself in circumstances similar to those of Ibn al-ʿAṭṭār or Kamāl ibn al-Bārīzī. In other words, if Ibn ʿArabshāh formally sought public positions in the 840s, he was not deviating from the legacy of his late teacher. At the same time, the anecdote announces that Jaqmaq was very much on al-Bukhārī's radar as a dominant political figure at least two decades before his sultanate began.

Although al-Bukhārī features heavily in the early part of the text, it was not the intention of Ibn ʿArabshāh (who did not overtly wade into the controversies ignited by al-Bukhārī in his own texts) to “defend” his master from enemies or apologize for past polemical storms.⁹⁵ Instead the author sets him forth as a paragon of spiritual greatness who had the ear of influential men and respected them behind closed doors.⁹⁶ With the death of his benefactor, Ibn ʿArabshāh needed to attach himself to a source of cultural capital powerful enough to bring him to the

⁹³On the immediate social and material benefits of entering an amiral household, see Clément Onimus, *Les maîtres du jeu: Pouvoir et violence politique à l'aube du sultanat mamlouk circassien (784–815/1382–1412)* (Paris, 2019), 98–99; Mathieu Eychenne, “Le bayt à l'époque mamloque: Une entité sociale à revisiter,” *Annales islamologiques* 42 (2008): 275–95.

⁹⁴Ibn ʿArabshāh, “Taʿlif,” fols. 10v–11r. Although Ibn ʿArabshāh does not mention the episode concerning Kamāl ibn al-Bārīzī reported by Ibn Taghribirdī in 835/1431–32, he nevertheless must have been privy to it.

⁹⁵Ibn ʿArabshāh glosses over the controversies by merely observing that when his master was in Egypt “things happened there with the ulama.” It is an interesting point to consider the strikingly reverse strategies of establishing credibility used (negatively) by al-Bukhārī in challenging contemporary understandings of what Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn Taymīyah represented by pronouncing *takfīr* on them—compounded by Ibn ʿArabshāh's subsequent (positive) choice of attaching to this legacy via his expression of association with and acclaim for al-Bukhārī.

⁹⁶Ibn ʿArabshāh, “Taʿlif,” fols. 9v–11r.



attention of his next potential patron. Read positively, Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s chapter on the early life of Jaqmaq appears as an act of sincere loyalty to al-Bukhārī that called attention to the socio-religious contributions of his master. Perhaps tellingly, Ibn ‘Arabshāh himself seems aware that these intrusions into his own narrative may be awkward, as he tries to explain them: “My only purpose in mentioning the shaykh in the book is to praise him, because with mention of the righteous, mercy (*rahmah*) descends.”⁹⁷ Thus, by evoking al-Bukhārī, Ibn ‘Arabshāh seems to suggest divine sanction for his project, thereby channeling the late shaykh’s *barakah* into his work.

Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s experiences, interactions, and changing environments made him part of a complex and multi-layered “life-world” which left traces in his texts.⁹⁸ Far more than just an *evolving* scholar, however, it is useful to consider Ibn ‘Arabshāh as equally mutable or protean. His own writings and the writings of his biographers leave us with the image of one willing to change his outlook or actions in order to achieve his objectives. While he was not simply an “operator” looking to advance by manipulating others (or manipulating memories), being *changeable* in order to achieve objectives no doubt made a certain amount of sense in light of his background and the traumatic circumstances of his early life. At age 11 he and his mother and sisters had been taken, against their will, a third of the way across Asia at the mercy of Temür’s victorious army.⁹⁹ This, in part, may have produced in him some malleability and openness to social possibilities. He does not appear to have shared al-Bukhārī’s aversion to paid public service, and was aware of the realities of social hierarchy, the competitive nature of *manṣab* positions, and what one had to do to realize professional aspirations. This is not to impugn the sincerity with which he undoubtedly wrote about al-Bukhārī’s legacy and argue that he only used it calculatingly for mobility.

On the one hand, worldly concerns indeed motivated the actions and practices of aspiring courtiers and *manṣab*-holders; on the other, authentic conviction and religious sincerity served as guiding lights. These approaches were not necessarily mutually exclusive when a social actor such as Ibn ‘Arabshāh completed cultural and ideological work in tandem with his sincere beliefs. If indeed he shared al-Qābūnī’s view that al-Bukhārī was the *quṭb* or *axis mundi*, the true Sufi saint that had attained the highest level, then his enduring allegiance and fidelity to him as a faithful *murīd* was likely rooted in that belief.¹⁰⁰ However, according to al-Bukhārī’s own arch-nemesis Ibn al-‘Arabī, the notion of the *quṭb* (pole) went

⁹⁷Ibid., fol. 9v.

⁹⁸Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago, 2000), 12.

⁹⁹McChesney, “Life and Works,” 214.

¹⁰⁰Al-Bukhārī’s titles of respect in the final text of *The Wonders of Destiny* include “*quṭb al-zamān*.” See: *‘Ajā’ib al-maḡdūr*, 49.



far deeper than a grand rank in Sufism. Rather the *quṭb* was the true head of the community of his time (*sayyid al-jamā'ah fī zamānihi*), akin to a caliph (that had both religious and political authority) and held a far grander position of spiritual sovereignty for which more mundane and corporeal holders of power, such as the sultan, were merely substitutes.¹⁰¹

Thus, the fundamental question remains one of context: why is hagiographic material about al-Bukhārī being wrapped up in a panegyric for the sultan? How did it function in an apparently didactic work? Ibn 'Arabshāh's choice to give al-Bukhārī a central place early in the text implies that the latter's reputation continued to resonate in the ruling circles of the Cairo Sultanate. As a result, Jaqmaq may well have harbored an enduring respect for the name of al-Bukhārī, especially having appointed former students of the shaykh like Kamāl al-Dīn al-Bārīzī.

Ibn 'Arabshāh's anecdotes and stories about al-Bukhārī were written at a later time, after Jaqmaq had become sultan. They appear to reflect alternate and balanced hierarchies of power: Jaqmaq and his circle atop one, and al-Bukhārī and his students atop another. Thus for the intended audience of the *Pure Composition*—most likely the social and political elites of the new *dawlah*—Ibn 'Arabshāh may have been positioning al-Bukhārī on equal terms with Jaqmaq as a leader in his own right. By recounting stories of al-Bukhārī in Syria, Ibn 'Arabshāh was reproducing the moral landscape and points of reference he believed and operated in. He wanted to have an impact on the new sultan by writing him into the moral framework which spoke to Ibn 'Arabshāh's clear vision of what it meant to be a good Muslim ruler.

One essential question posed by this material concerns the processes of meaning-making that occur in the author's story of Jaqmaq's rise. On the surface level, al-Bukhārī seems to have had little to do with the ostensible purpose of the text, which was to praise and congratulate Jaqmaq on his reign, suggesting that the true purpose of mentioning al-Bukhārī was for Ibn 'Arabshāh to strengthen his own reputation and improve his chances of finding a new patron in Jaqmaq or someone close to his court, such as Kamāl ibn al-Bārīzī. Like all works of literature, the *Pure Composition* manifests an act of communication,¹⁰² so what was Ibn 'Arabshāh trying to communicate? To appreciate the interwoven meanings thus imbued in the early part of the text, it is first necessary to unravel the anecdotes in the context of a text praising Jaqmaq early in his reign. The implied relation-

¹⁰¹Michel Chodkiewicz, "The Esoteric Foundations of Political Legitimacy in Ibn 'Arabi," in *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi: A Commemorative Volume*, eds. Stephen Hirtenstein and Michael Tiernan (Shaftesbury, 1993), 194.

¹⁰²Thomas Bauer, "Mamluk Literature as a Means of Communication," in *Ubi Sumus? Quo Vademus?: Mamluk Studies, State of the Art*, ed. Stephan Conermann (Göttingen, 2013), 23–24, 29.



ships outlined in the *Pure Composition* chapter on Jaqmaq's youth are compelling and require tracing the constellation that includes al-Bukhārī, Barsbāy, Jaqmaq (as the presumed addressee), Ibn al-Bārīzī, and Ibn 'Arabshāh, whose own presence in the text is sometimes as observer, sometimes as participant.

While Ibn 'Arabshāh presents a seemingly innocuous retracing of Jaqmaq's career during the reigns of Faraj, Shaykh, and Barsbāy, the true purpose is to anchor al-Bukhārī's legacy to the ascendant star of the new sultan. Ibn 'Arabshāh uses the early part of the *Pure Composition* to establish himself as an important participant in al-Bukhārī's social and intellectual network while simultaneously creating an image of himself as one able to serve Jaqmaq with perspective on good and bad kingship.

Preliminary Conclusions

What are the expectations, circumstances, settings, and purposes that endow actions with their meanings? Given his work's placement in broader cultural patterns of authors praising rulers and commenting on society in advisory texts, Ibn 'Arabshāh sought to mirror social reality in a text that he imagined using to transform the socio-political order and also to help him find his own place within it.¹⁰³ In the *Pure Composition*, Ibn 'Arabshāh therefore presents the historical world in a way in which kings, necessarily good or evil, guide history through their actions and choices. The moment of inscription, when the author began ascribing meaning to the actors of his own time, is the 34-year period between the death of Temür and the start of Jaqmaq's reign as sultan.¹⁰⁴ For Ibn 'Arabshāh, who began a series of extended stays in Cairo from the 840/1440s until his death in 854/1450, this represents the moment of choice, decision, and action that creates the "social reality" of his text, which, as Gabrielle Spiegel suggests, exists inside and outside the particular performance he incorporated into the work.¹⁰⁵

The cultural practice of composing a genre-straddling work like the *Pure Composition* as both a didactic and historically informative text was the product of Ibn 'Arabshāh's personal context as well as what he perceived as his specific reality and the most pressing needs of the broader "post-Temür" age. Although he had spent at least three decades absent from the region of his birth, he had nevertheless been privy to similar upheaval and transformation affecting the Muslim

¹⁰³Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore, 1997), 24.

¹⁰⁴In the lands of the Cairo Sultanate, this period (roughly 807–41/1405–38) coincides with an intense era of transformation and socio-political change accompanied by profuse textual production.

¹⁰⁵Spiegel, *Past as Text*, 26.



societies of Transoxiana and Western and Central Asia in the wake of Temür.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps unlike other Cairo-based contemporaries like Ibn Ḥajar and Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-ʿAynī—both of whom benefitted from frequently shifting political alignments in their pursuit of the patronage and intellectual impact that helped them reassert themselves into new socio-political orders—Ibn 'Arabshāh's struggle, over many years, to reemerge among the elite seems to have been slower and slightly more uphill. In the context of a new political formation taking shape between 841–43/1438–40, Ibn 'Arabshāh tried to articulate his versatility, convey his impressive background, skills, and connections, and demonstrate his past proximity to sources of political power and religious authority. The second act of his life, which unfolded in his “old homeland” (*al-waṭan al-qadīm*) of medieval Bilād al-Shām, was a time of frequent travel between Damascus and Cairo, as he tried to stoke interest in his growing body of literary and historiographical works to attract the attention of a new benefactor.¹⁰⁷ After leaving the citadel of Cairo in early 1440, Ibn 'Arabshāh seems to disappear from the historical record until about 1446,¹⁰⁸ and it remains unclear whether he was successful in finding patronage or salaried religious positions between Cairo and the Syrian cities. He later told Ibn Taghrībirdī that he had held a variety of religious positions including a qadiship in Ḥamāh, though this cannot be confirmed in any other historical source and was later dismissed outright by al-Sakhāwī.¹⁰⁹

The death of 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Bukhārī in Syria coincided with the formation of Jaqmaq's state at a key moment when Ibn 'Arabshāh endeavored to demonstrate that he had evolved from a learned disciple into an independent scholar. It may be that the reputational boost he received from two well-established peers of his generation—Ibn Ḥajar and al-Maqrīzī—combined with the death of his mentor may have finally transformed him, in terms of his social status, from a student seeking instruction to a master in his own right.¹¹⁰

It was thus Ibn 'Arabshāh's intention in the *Pure Composition*, which he may have envisioned as a formal application to enter service in Cairo, to establish his own literary credentials, instrumentalize his expertise on Temür, and remind readers of his proximity to leading political and religious figures locally and across Muslim West Asia, while also textually strengthening the legacy of al-Bukhārī. At the same time, forces loyal to Jaqmaq had recently defeated politi-

¹⁰⁶Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 21.

¹⁰⁷Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 2:143–44.

¹⁰⁸McChesney, “Life and Works,” 241.

¹⁰⁹Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 1:115.

¹¹⁰McChesney, “Life and Works,” 232. This is further confirmed in McChesney's observation that in the years after 850/1446, Ibn 'Arabshāh was sought out by younger scholars such as Ibn Taghrībirdī and al-Sakhāwī.



cal opponents in Cairo, Aleppo, and Damascus. Ibn ‘Arabshāh combined these threads in the early rhetorical section of his text before tackling the latter events directly in his historical writing.

Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s *Pure Composition*, as a text reflecting the complexities of its era, appears to have been intended to make changes in the social reality by emphasizing to Jaqmaq and his court the choices available to them.¹¹¹ Despite expressing his concerns in the *Pure Composition* that the subject matter of the *Wonders of Destiny* might have a negative impact in the world, the author ultimately chose to allow the latter to go forth and “live its life,” while possibly suppressing or abandoning the former. It may, however, not have been entirely *his* choice, as one (the biography of Temür) succeeded in helping him to acquire social capital while the other (the panegyric for Jaqmaq) evidently failed to secure him an entry at court.

While attempting to avoid characterizing Ibn ‘Arabshāh and his texts as merely reactive to outside socio-political forces, it is difficult to comment on any influence he or his texts were able to exert. The final agency of the text may have rested in the hands of someone like Muḥammad al-Matbūlī, who may have completed the text and helped deliver a “finished” version of it to us so that it did not disappear in obscurity. Engaging with Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s original text, in whatever final form it took, al-Matbūlī, with his own interests in the text, copied and presented it to its final patron (most likely not the library of Jaqmaq), thereby adding his own layers of meaning. By contextualizing the *Pure Composition* in the politics and historical chronology of Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s life, we identify the early part of the text as a product inhabiting a specific reality and representing a unique moment in the author’s life.

¹¹¹Bauer, “Mamluk Literature,” 32.

