

Donald P. Little

McGill University

The Use of Documents for the Study of Mamluk History*

I would like to thank Bruce Craig and the staff of the *Mamluk Studies Review*, the Mamluk Studies Workshop, and the Center for Middle Eastern Studies of the University of Chicago for inviting me to give the First Annual *Mamluk Studies Review* Lecture. Being first is always, of course, an honor which I embrace with gratitude but not without wondering, I must confess, why it has been conferred on me, and this puzzlement has led me to a bit of autobiographical retrospection and speculation which I am afraid will mark much of this lecture. In justification I can only say that when Bruce Craig first invited me he stressed the informality of the occasion; in a later conversation, however, he mentioned in passing that the talk would be published in the *Mamluk Studies Review*, and still later he asked, quite casually, whether I could deliver a final draft upon arrival in Chicago. This query led me to believe that the occasion would not be so informal after all. In any case, my remarks are going to be what might be characterized as semi-formal, partly autobiographical and, I hope, mildly amusing (as an anonymous student once damned me with faint praise in a course evaluation), and partly scientific. In this respect I should warn you that an English reviewer of my catalogue of the Ḥaram documents has characterized some of my work as "nonsensical," while another, more charitable, has stated that my articles on the Ḥaram papers "demonstrate, rather convincingly, that documentary studies need not necessarily be dull."¹ These two criticisms need not necessarily be regarded as incompatible, of course, but while I shall certainly strive to be not necessarily dull, I shall also try to avoid the nonsensical. And if the editors of the *Review* insist on publishing my talk, I will trust fully their discretion to delete any comments they deem to be insufficiently serious for publication in a maiden scholarly journal.

Let me spend a few minutes, then, in discussing why and how I became first what might be called, to coin a term, a Mamlukist or a Mamlukologist, if you prefer, and later a Mamluk papyrologist. Not because this story is of any great significance, not enough at any rate to be included in either of the two recent books devoted to the careers of leading contemporary historians of the Middle East,² but because it may interest an audience largely composed of graduate students in Middle Eastern and Islamic history, who, if they are typical of my own generation of what used to be called Orientalists before that term was

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¹D. S. Richards, review of *A Catalogue of the Islamic Documents from al-Ḥaram aš-Šarīf in Jerusalem*, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50 (1987): 362-364; D. O. Morgan, review of *History and Historiography of the Mamluks*, *BSOAS* 51 (1988): 403.

²Thomas Naff, ed., *Paths to the Middle East: Ten Scholars Look Back* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Nancy Elizabeth Gallagher, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Middle East: Interviews with Leading Middle East Historians* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1994).



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degraded and fell out of fashion, are both curious about the strange and wonderful professional and personal lives of their professors but also at times discouraged, disgruntled, and disillusioned by the occasionally dreary and relentless grind of the academic mills which produce Ph.D.'s in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. To you I bring from my own experience a message of hope.

Reminiscing about my own career has jolted me with the electrifying realization that I am probably the oldest surviving continuing practitioner of Mamluk studies in North America today. Older, certainly, than Stephen Humphreys, who will be next year's lecturer, and his peers, Carl Petry and Jere Bacharach. Although I am younger than William Brinner, one of my early teachers, Brinner, after an auspicious start as editor and translator of a Mamluk historical manuscript,³ apparently decided, as he announced in an unpublished paper given at the 1977 conference of the American Oriental Society in Toronto, that the Mamluks were gangsters, a veritable medieval Muslim Mafia, and presumably unworthy, therefore, of further attention. Ira Lapidus, somewhat younger than I, after a spectacular debut as a Mamlukist, also abandoned the field some years ago.⁴ In any event, I suspect that my longevity as a North American Mamlukist accounts to a great extent for my being invited as inaugural lecturer today. But there is another reason to invoke Professor Brinner's name in the context of my own career. After I left Berkeley, at Brinner's suggestion, after a single year of study there, and moved to UCLA because it had a much larger staff in Middle Eastern Studies than Berkeley did, and a much broader range of seminars and courses, I had the good fortune of studying Arabic for a year with the late Professor Wilhelm Hoenerbach, to whom I once confided, on a social occasion, that I had not the remotest idea about a feasible topic for a doctoral dissertation. Given my academic background in English literature, with an M.A. thesis on Colley Cibber(!), it is not surprising that two years at Berkeley and UCLA were not sufficient to immerse me in the arcane field of Islamic Studies as presided over by the late Professor G. E. von Grunebaum in the early sixties. In fact, the only solid preparation I had had for this discipline was an intensive course in Arabic at the Army Language School in Monterey, California, where for a year, five days a week, six hours a day, I made endless small talk in Iraqi Arabic with six other GIs, one of whom was a WAC, which made it possible for us to practice using the second-person feminine verb forms. The only reason I studied Arabic rather than Chinese or Korean, two other options offered to me, was that in the aftermath of the Korean War I had no desire to make myself eligible for military service in the Far Eastern sector. Believe it or not, Iraq seemed to be a haven of peace and calm in those days, relatively speaking. Two more years in the military which I spent in the Washington area reading Arabic backwards in transliteration gave me a reasonable facility for coping with what is today called Modern Standard Arabic. All this, typically, was irrelevant to the advice that Hoenerbach gave me about selecting a dissertation topic. Since I was a Californian, he mused (actually I was a Tennessean, but never mind), why not join what he characterized as a California tradition in scholarship on Middle Eastern history, namely Mamluk studies? At this point he mentioned the names and work of William Popper, editor and translator of the chronicles of the famous fifteenth century Mamluk historian Ibn

³*A Chronicle of Damascus, 1389-1397*, by Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṣaṣrā, 2 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963).

⁴Author of *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967; student edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).



Taghrībirdī;⁵ Walter J. Fischel, also at Berkeley, author of several works on Ibn Khaldūn;⁶ and Brinner, editor and translator of a fragmentary history of Mamluk Damascus.⁷ Being ignorant, as I said, and desperate, I adopted Hoenerbach's suggestion with alacrity, though it is clear in retrospect that neither he nor I really knew what this decision would entail. But before we leave him, it should be mentioned that although his primary field of interest, besides a secret passion for Arabic erotica, was the Arabic literature of al-Andalus, he was also an expert on Spanish-Islamic documents, and his *Spanisch-Islamische Urkunden aus der Zeit der Naṣriden und Moriscos*⁸ (contemporaries of the Mamluks) is one of the great books on medieval Islamic documents. Unfortunately, Hoenerbach was not interested in imparting his knowledge of this exotic subject to his students, so that I had no instruction in Arabic diplomatic from him or from anyone else for that matter. Having chosen the Mamluks as my field of specialization, I was now forced to learn something about them through reading secondary scholarship in order to define a dissertation topic that would satisfy the exacting, but also tolerant, expectations of von Grunebaum and also the criteria for fellowships awarded by the American Research Center in Egypt, for I was determined to study and live in Cairo, the heart of both the Mamluk Sultanate and the contemporary Arab world. For reasons which I cannot recall, after falling under the spell of David Ayalon's exquisite studies on Mamluk history and institutions,⁹ I drafted a proposal on Mamluk relations with the Mongols which satisfied both von Grunebaum and ARCE, so that in October, 1962, I found myself in Cairo with a topic about which I had done very little preliminary research and with a command of Iraqi Arabic that Egyptians found hilarious but which unfortunately did not enable me to understand much of what they were saying to and about me. At this juncture I was helped by still another scholar, an old Cairo hand (in the sense that he had spent a few years in Cairo)—Professor George Scanlon. Scanlon helped me by lending me his copy of Hans Robert Roemer's edition of volume 9 of Ibn al-Dawādārī's universal chronicle, recently published by the German Archaeological Institute in Cairo, which was devoted to the reign of the great Mamluk sultan, al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad,¹⁰ in whose reign Mamluk confrontations with the Mongols loomed large. But soon I realized that what really engaged my attention was not so much the topic itself (fascinating though it was and is—in fact, Reuven Amitai-Preiss recently published his dissertation on aspects of this topic)¹¹ as the historical sources in light of Roemer's brief allusions to the relationship of Ibn al-Dawādārī's work to other histories of al-Nāṣir's reign. Here began a three-year comparative study of these sources, many of which existed only in manuscripts found in Cairo and European libraries. This fact, along with the

⁵*Al-Nujūm al-Zāhira by Ibn Taghrī Birdī*, 5 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1909-36); *History of Egypt, 1382-1469, Translated from the Arabic Annals of Ibn Taghrī Birdī*, 5 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954-60).

⁶E.g., *Ibn Khaldūn and Tamerlane: Their Historic Meeting in Damascus, 1401 A.D. (803 A.H.): A Study Based on Arabic Manuscripts of Ibn Khaldūn's "Autobiography"* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952).

⁷See note 3 above.

⁸(Bonn: Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Bonn, 1965).

⁹*L'esclavage du Mamelouk* (Jerusalem: The Israel Oriental Society, 1951); *Studies on the Mamluks of Egypt (1250-1517)* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1977).

¹⁰*Die Chronik des Ibn ad-Dawādārī*, vol. 9 (Cairo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1960).

¹¹*Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānid War, 1260-1281* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).



benevolence of the Center, enabled me to spend not just one year but three years in Cairo, broken only by a honeymoon in London, Paris, Berlin, and Istanbul, cities chosen not only for their romantic associations but as the repositories of Mamluk manuscripts.

To make this long story somewhat shorter, the result of my research was not a history of Mamluk-Mongol relations but a dissertation entitled "An Analysis of Arabic Annalistic and Biographical Sources for the Reign of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalā'ūn,"¹² in which I tried to straighten out the relationships among two dozen Mamluk histories one to the other and to determine the originality, if any, of each. Much to my surprise and delight, my nominal but benign supervisor von Grunebaum offered to recommend it for publication by the University of California Press. The Press, of course, submitted it to an external anonymous reader; this person, after a year of not reading it, finally did and delivered himself of the devastating verdict that my dissertation was utterly and completely worthless and that I should never have been encouraged or allowed to embark upon it. Needless to say, as a recent recipient of a Ph.D., I found this contemptuous judgment somewhat daunting, even though von Grunebaum hinted that it had been given by a political scientist at the University of Chicago who neither knew nor cared anything about the Mamluks. But the story grows curiouser and curiouser. By chance our Islamics librarian at McGill, Professor Michel Mazzaoui, happened soon thereafter to visit Professor Roemer at his *Orientalisches Seminar* in Freiburg, Germany, and told him about my work. As the editor of *Ibn al-Dawādārī*, Roemer was interested, especially, he declared, since he just happened to have a graduate student of his own, Ulrich Haarmann by name, who was writing a dissertation on virtually the same topic—the sources for the reign of al-Nāṣir—that I had recently completed. As all graduate students know, one of their worst nightmares besides comprehensive exams is that their supervisor will move or pass away before they complete their dissertations; another is that another graduate student, somewhere out there, is working on the same topic and will finish it first. I must confess that this latter *cauchemar* never haunted me, because I was serenely confident that no one else would ever embark on such an obscure scholarly quest. Whether Ulrich Haarmann lost any sleep I don't know, but I do know that he, and Roemer, acted with utmost courtesy and generosity, for not only did Haarmann revise and adapt his research and dissertation in light of mine, but Roemer accepted it for publication in his "Freiburger Islamstudien" series. In this format, along with Haarmann's published dissertation,¹³ it was used extensively in several dissertations by students in Freiburg.¹⁴ I am also proud, perversely, perhaps, that my book, or the first part of it, was translated and published, errors and all, into Arabic, without any acknowledgment to me, by an Egyptian scholar. This was not the only time this happened to me. But as the oldest surviving

¹²Submitted to the University of California at Los Angeles, 1966.

¹³Mine was published as *An Introduction to Mamluk Historiography* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag; Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1970); Haarmann's as *Quellenstudien zur frühen Mamlukenzeit* (Freiburg: D. Robischon, 1969).

¹⁴E.g., Samira Kortantamer, *Ägypten und Syrien zwischen 1317 und 1341 in der Chronik des Mufaḍḍal b. Abī l-Faḍā'il* (Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1973); Antranig Melkonian, *Die Jahre 1287-1291 in der Chronik al-Yūnīnīs* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Becksmann, 1975); Shah Morad Elham, *Kitbugā und Lāḡīn* (Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz Verlag 1977). For more recent work along the same lines, see Li Guo, "The Middle Baḥrī Mamluks in Medieval Syrian Historiography: The Years 1297-1302 in the *Dhayl Mir'āt al-Zamān* Attributed to Quṭb al-Dīn Mūsā al-Yūnīnī: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Annotated Translation, and Source Criticism" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1994).



continuing practitioner of Mamluk studies in North America today, I can afford to be forbearing and admit that I am somewhat flattered by the close attention that two Arab scholars have given to my work.

In this autobiographical section of my lecture, it remains for me to explain how I was converted from a specialist in Mamluk chronicles and biographical dictionaries into a papyrologist, a term I use in the sense defined by Gladys Frantz-Murphy, known to some of you, I am sure, as a former associate at the University of Chicago. "In its larger sense," she has written, "papyrology is the use of documentary sources for the study of civilization. To limit the definition of Arabic papyrology by the medium on which documents are written would be to ignore the possibility of millennia-long historical investigation."¹⁵ In our context a papyrologist, then, is a student of documentary sources, or, more simply, documents, for the study of Mamluk history. As I have already intimated, Islamic documents were not expected to be in the province of graduate students' knowledge at the universities of California in the early sixties. The one professor that knew anything about documents, Hoenerbach, kept his knowledge to himself while he was in California. Although S. D. Goitein's monumental work based on the documents of the Cairo Geniza was published by the University of California Press, it did not begin to appear until 1967,¹⁶ long after I had taken my Ph.D. comprehensive examinations. If I read the first volume of the venerable Nabia Abbott's *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*,¹⁷ I do not recall it. But I am sure that I considered Adolf Grohmann's work on the Egyptian papyri as too abstruse and technical for my comprehensives reading list.¹⁸ While it is true that the seminal articles of Bernard Lewis and Stanford Shaw on the Ottoman archives had begun to appear in the fifties, Ottoman studies were not within my purview.¹⁹ The point is that as far as the training of Middle East historians is concerned in the sixties, and still to a great extent today, unless a student is an aspiring Ottomanist with a special interest in archival research, not much training is offered in how to use documents as historical sources.

So I became a papyrologist through happenstance. In 1976 a Ph.D. student of mine at McGill traveled from Cairo to Jerusalem in search of materials for a dissertation on the Mamluk sultan Qalāwūn. In Jerusalem she, Linda Northrup, became a friend of a young Palestinian woman who had been appointed director of the Islamic Museum within the walls of al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf, the sacred enclosure of al-Aqṣá Mosque and the Dome of the Rock; the director, Amal Abul-Hajj, had recently discovered hundreds of obviously old documents stuffed into a locked cabinet in the museum. By a cursory examination of the dates and names it was realized that these were documents from the period of Mamluk rule in Jerusalem, mainly from the late fourteenth century. Overwhelmed by the magnitude of the discovery, her lack of professional training in the preservation and restoration of

¹⁵"Arabic Papyrology and Middle Eastern Studies," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 19 (July 1985): 34.

¹⁶*A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, vol. 1: *Economic Foundations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967).

¹⁷Vol. 1: *Historical Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

¹⁸E.g., *Einführung und Chrestomathie zur arabischen Papyruskunde*, vol. 1 (Prague: Czechoslovak Oriental Institute, 1955).

¹⁹E.g., Lewis, "The Ottoman Archives as a Source for the History of the Arab Lands," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1951): 139-155; Shaw, "Cairo's Archives and the History of Ottoman Egypt," *Report on Current Research, Spring 1956* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute, 1956), 59-72.



documents, and the need to classify and catalog them without recourse to Israeli scholars, Abul-Hajj was led to ask for assistance from various Western scholars. With pronounced reluctance I allowed myself to be convinced that it was my duty to lend a hand. With generous financial assistance from McGill University I headed a group of three from McGill to sort out, temporarily restore, and photograph some nine hundred documents. In highly unusual, even risky, perhaps foolhardy, circumstances, photographs were taken and sent to Montreal via New Hampshire. At this point the question arose as to what to do with them, since I was completely unable to decipher the cursive scripts and technical language in which they were written. Here I can offer some advice to those of you who aspire to teaching careers. When in doubt about your qualifications to teach a subject which may be assigned to you, teach it, preferably in the form of a seminar or a workshop with students who by sharing the labor can help to train you and each other. In my case this method worked very well, for at the end of four months, working with a group of four students, I had managed not only to survey the scholarly literature on Islamic diplomatic but to gain some facility in reading the scripts, classifying the documents, and assessing their significance as sources for the history of the Mamluks and their institutions.²⁰ This was seventeen years ago. I still regard myself to be in training as a papyrologist.

Now I would like to move, as promised, from the personal and anecdotal, to the objective and scientific part of my remarks. Here I would like, one, to bring to your attention the documentary resources which are so far available to students of the Mamluks; I emphasize *so far* because I am confident that more documents will be discovered and that those that have already been discovered and await a buyer will be bought and made available to scholars. Two, I will allude to some of the challenges and opportunities that using these sources poses to scholars. And, three, I shall briefly review the work of a few representative scholars who have used Mamluk documents to illuminate Mamluk history. Since my purpose is to encourage students to use documents in their own research, I shall try to avoid letting these observations degenerate into a list of the names of scholars, libraries, and archives.

First, the places in which documents can be found. These can be divided into two types, namely copies contained in literary sources, and originals that have been preserved and have turned up in various places. As far as literary sources are concerned, again there are two types: histories, be they chronicles or biographical dictionaries, and manuals, prepared either for chancery scribes or notaries. Several Mamluk historians liked to transcribe documents that were at their disposal into their histories. This should come as no surprise in the case of at least two of the biographers of the first great Mamluk sultans, Baybars and Qalāwūn, for Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir was both confidential secretary (*kātib al-sirr*) and chief of chancery (*ṣāhib dīwān al-inshā’*) under these sultans, and his nephew, Shāfi‘ ibn ‘Alī, was his assistant in the chancery. Both, then, were professional drafters of documents, with ready access to them, especially those they had drafted themselves, and did not hesitate to lend authenticity and color to their biographies by including copies in their texts.²¹ Several of these are diplomatic documents, treaties, for example, concluded

²⁰This seminar was the basis of my article, "The Significance of the Ḥaram Documents for the Study of Medieval Islamic History," *Der Islam* 57 (1980): 165-181; reprinted in my *History and Historiography of the Mamluks* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1986).

²¹See Little, "The Fall of ‘Akkā in 690/1291: The Muslim Version," in *Studies in Islamic Civilization in Honour of Professor David Ayalon*, ed. M. Sharon (Jerusalem: Cana; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 162, 165-



with Crusaders; but there are also internal documents, such as *khuṭbahs* recited by the caliph on the occasion of Baybars's investiture, or, more interesting from a historian's point of view, memos drawn up by Qalāwūn advising his son, al-Ṣāliḥ, on how to conduct the affairs of state during his, the sultan's, absence.²² Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, the author of two voluminous biographical dictionaries, was also employed in Mamluk chanceries, both in Egypt and in Syria, where he drafted or copied many documents that he inserted into biographies. Many of these are diplomas of appointment to offices in the Mamluk state, both administrative and military.²³ Baybars al-Manṣūrī, though not a bureaucrat but a high-ranking military officer, saw fit to enliven his chronicle, *Zubdat al-Fikrah*, with documents, mostly of a diplomatic nature.²⁴ The already-mentioned Ibn al-Dawādārī was the son of a minor Mamluk and probably did not have easy access to official documents, but this did not deter him from copying the copies contained in the works of his contemporaries, both Egyptians and Syrians, so that his *Kanz al-Durar* contains documents issued during the Mongols' occupation of Damascus in 699/1299-1300 and a decree condemning those Muslims who espoused the beliefs of the famous Ḥanbalī jurist, Ibn Taymīyah.²⁵ Later chroniclers, such as Ibn al-Furāt and al-'Aynī, obviously deemed these documents to be sufficiently important to copy and incorporate into their texts adapted from earlier historians.²⁶

Chancery manuals, most notably al-Qalqashandī's fourteen-volume encyclopedia of essential and trivial knowledge for clerks employed by the vast Mamluk bureaucracy, contain dozens of copies of original documents to serve as models for employees of the chancery and other government offices. These samples of thirty different categories range from royal decrees and diplomas of appointment to peace treaties and safe conducts, official letters, and reports.²⁷ Although the exemplary documents that al-Qalqashandī transcribes are by no means limited to the Mamluk period, many, if not most, are derived from that era. But the very fact that al-Qalqashandī compares Mamluk chancery practice with that of the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods makes it possible to undertake comparative studies. Notarial manuals—*kutub al-shurūṭ*—constitute a related genre. Designed for the use of clerks associated with Islamic courts, these manuals are similar to the chancery handbooks in that they provide exemplars of many types of documents, legal and judicial in this case. But whereas al-Qalqashandī reproduces transcriptions, sometimes edited, of actual documents, the notarial manuals tend to shun real documents in favor of ideal models, forms, if you

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²²E.g., Shāfi' ibn 'Alī, *Ḥusn al-Manāqib al-Sirrīyah al-Muntaza'ah min al-Sīrah al-Zāhirīyah*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Khuwayṭir (Riyadh: Maṭābi' al-Quwwāt al-Musallahah al-Sa'ūdīyah, 1976), 51-55; idem, *al-Faḍl al-Ma'thūr min Sīrat al-Sultān al-Malik al-Manṣūr*, Oxford Bodleian MS Marsh 424, fols. 82v.-89r.; Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, *al-Rawḍ al-Zāhir fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Zāhir*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Khuwayṭir (Riyadh: n.p., 1976), 143-148.

²³E.g., *al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*, ed. Dorothea Krawulsky (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982), 17:91-98.

²⁴E.g., *Zubdat al-Fikrah fī Ta'rīkh al-Hijrah*, vol. 9, British Museum MS Add. 23325, as transcribed by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah in his edition of al-Maqrīzī's *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa-al-Nashr, 1939), 1:974-977.

²⁵*Chronik*, 9:20-29, 139-142.

²⁶E.g., Ibn al-Furāt, *Ta'rīkh Ibn al-Furāt*, ed. Q. Zurayq and N. 'Izz al-Dīn (Beirut: American University Press, 1939), 8:194-195; al-'Aynī, *Iqd al-Jumān fī Ta'rīkh Ahl al-Zamān*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣrīyah al-'Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 1992), 4:39-43.

²⁷*Ṣubḥ al-A'shā fī Ṣinā'at al-Inshā'*, 14 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Amīriyah, 1913-1919).



like, of an astonishing variety, with names and dates omitted. These models are similar to the standard printed forms of leases and wills that one can buy in Quebec; they are couched in foolproof legal jargon, and one need only fill in the names, dates, and special conditions that apply. By far the most valuable Mamluk manual of this type is the work entitled *Jawāhir al-‘Uqūd wa-Mu‘īn al-Quḍāh wa-al-Muwaqqi‘īn wa-al-Shuhūd* (Essential Contracts and Helper to Judges, Notaries, and Legal Witnesses) by Shams al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, a notary who practiced in Egypt and Syria toward the end of the Mamluk period.²⁸ This work contains hundreds of models, ranging from marriage contracts, bills of divorce and sale to court records, proxies, and oaths.

Finally, just for fun, I should mention that documents show up in unlikely literary sources. In a hagiographical work devoted to the career of Ibn Taymīyah, the author, Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, has transcribed a poignant letter written by Ibn Taymīyah from Cairo to his mother in Damascus.²⁹ As trivial as this may sound—and the letter is mundane, of the “Dear mom, I miss you and wish I could be at home with you, but important business keeps me here” type, it is of considerable interest both to students of this intellectual giant of the Mamluk era and to students of medieval Islamic epistolary, few though we may be.

What are some of the challenges posed by these documents found in literary sources? Obviously, because of their random selection by historians and compilers they are no substitute for archives, by which I mean systematic collections of records kept more or less intact, which can be exploited for a consecutive span of time. Instead, the discontinuity and isolation of literary documents restrict the historian either to discrete events or to comparative studies. For example, if one happens to be interested in Mamluk-Mongol relations during the reign of Qalāwūn, one can find the texts of his diplomatic exchange with the Īlkhān Aḥmad Tegüder preserved in the manuscript of Baybars al-Manṣūrī’s *Zubdat al-Fikrah*, as yet unpublished but also in the published work of a later historian, Ibn Abī al-Faḍā’il, who obviously copied it from the former or an intermediary.³⁰ It has also been reprinted as an appendix to Ziyādah’s edition of al-Maqrīzī and was translated by Quatremère.³¹ Moreover, since there are other specimens of Mamluk-Mongol correspondence preserved, one could make a comparative study of their diplomatic contacts over a given period of time. This would be tricky, of course, because historians would like to have a complete, or nearly complete, set of such documents, but complete records are exceptional for medieval Islamic history. Nevertheless, on a positive note, one of the main virtues of Mamluk literary documents is their accessibility. Many are available in published form and have accordingly been transcribed and sometimes translated, so that scholars need not take the trouble or waste time in obtaining microfilm copies, or traveling to distant libraries to study the original, or in struggling with difficult hand-written scripts. On the other hand, one must stress that in addition to being transcriptions of original documents, these are by definition editions of originals, in the sense that the historians have often

²⁸Ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadīyah, 1955).

²⁹Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *al-‘Uqūd al-Durrīyah min Manāqib Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Ḥijāzī, 1938).

³⁰*Zubdah*, 9:131 ff.; Mufaḍḍal ibn Abī al-Faḍā’il, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, ed. E. Blochet (Paris: Fermin-Didot et Cie, 1919-1928), 335ff.

³¹*Kitāb al-Sulūk*, 2:977-984; E. Quatremère, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks de l’Égypte* (Paris: Oriental Translation Fund, 1845), 2:158-166.



deliberately or inadvertently changed the texts. This we know from documents preserved in more than one literary source.

Be that as it may, the potential for the study of Mamluk foreign relations through documents is great, as reference to the section on "Foreign Relations" in your own *Mamluk Studies: A Bibliography* will show you.³² As examples, I would mention only the recent works of two scholars, one senior and one junior. In his *Early Mamluk Diplomacy (1260-1290): Treaties of Baybars and Qalāwūn with Christian Rulers*,³³ Peter Holt has translated, annotated, and analyzed the texts of eleven Mamluk-Crusader treaties drawn from the literary sources discussed above, both histories and manuals. As Holt declares in the "Preface," these deserve study because

[t]hey reveal some of the realities of the contacts between the medieval Muslim and Christian communities, particularly on that Syro-Palestinian border where the powerful realm of the early Mamluk sultans confronted the diminished Crusader states in the last decades of their existence. They show in detail how, even in this prolonged crisis, life went on with provision for merchants to go about their business by land and sea, and for local authorities to collaborate in the policing of the frontier. The treaties exemplify the sophisticated efficiency of the sultan's chancery—that was to be expected—but they also indicate a diplomatic procedure with respect for legality and precedent, sometimes, admittedly, practised with a degree of finesse.³⁴

The junior, but very accomplished, scholar is Reuven Amitai-Preiss. He, like Holt, has also produced a detailed study of specific documents, in the form of an article entitled "An Exchange of Letters in Arabic between Abaya Īlkhān and Sultan Baybars" in which he analyzes correspondence already transcribed and translated by the Saudi scholar 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Khuwaytir.³⁵ But this article was probably a by-product of the research for his dissertation and book, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānid War, 1260-1281*,³⁶ where this exchange and others are not studied independently but woven into the fabric of historical narrative based on the literary sources. In contrast to diplomatic documents related to foreign affairs that have received considerable, but by no means exhaustive, study, documents related to the internal workings of the Mamluk state have received little attention. Although certificates of appointment to various offices in the bureaucracies are not as exciting as correspondence between the superpowers of the medieval Muslim world, the former do afford opportunities for richer understanding of the workings of the Mamluk bureaucracy and state.

Original documents or remnants of archives are exceedingly important. These can be divided into two groups: documents preserved by non-Muslim institutions and those found in Muslim venues. Of the former the best known are those found in St. Catherine's

³²Ed. John L. Meloy (Chicago: The Middle East Documentation Center, 1995), 75-94.

³³(Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

³⁴Ibid., vii-viii.

³⁵*Central Asiatic Journal* 38 (1994): 11-33.

³⁶(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).



Monastery in Sinai, one of the earliest monasteries in the world. In 1950 much of the priceless manuscript collection of the monastery was photographed by an American-Egyptian team, including approximately 1100 scrolls written in Arabic.³⁷ Most of these date from the Ottoman period, but about two hundred can be attributed to the Mamluk era. They consist of royal decrees issued by Mamluk sultans to the monks of the monastery but also deeds of conveyance for properties belonging to it at one time or another. A similar collection is held by the Franciscan Monastery of Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. Here I must confess to my ignorance; I hope that one of you may rectify it by further study. There is a catalogue of 2644 Arabic and Turkish decrees and legal documents concerning the sanctuaries, properties, and rights of the *Custodia di Terra Franca* in Jerusalem, but I have not seen it.³⁸ In extenuation, however, I have seen and own a publication which is one of my favorite books because it has no title page, meaning that the author, title, date, and place of publication are not identified. It contains photographs, transcriptions, Italian translations of and commentaries on twenty-eight Mamluk decrees and court records from the Burjī period. This book is so obscure that it has not even found its way into the Mamluk Studies bibliography, so that if this lecture serves no other purpose it will add another entry to that estimable work. It is usually referred to as *Documenti e Firmani* by Noberto Risciani and Eutimio Castellani and was published in 1936 by the Press of the Franciscan Fathers in Jerusalem.³⁹ I am well aware that there are other scattered Mamluk documents from other non-Muslim institutions, including the Cairo Geniza, but I will mention only those of various Italian archives. Some of these, a handful, have been made available by none other than John Wansbrough. Now famous for his studies of the sources for early Islamic history, Wansbrough wrote his dissertation on "Documents for the History of Commercial Relations between Egypt and Venice, 1442-1512."⁴⁰ Obviously the main value of documents dealing with non-Muslims, as studied most notably by Hans Ernst in his 1960 published dissertation *Die mamlukischen Sultansurkunden des Sinaiklosters*,⁴¹ Samuel Stern, and others,⁴² is the information they provide on Mamluk policies toward Christian institutions such as the two monasteries in question and the Italian city-states studied by Wansbrough. Many of these documents are accessible either in published form, or, in the case of the St. Catherine's papers, in microfilms available from the Library of Congress and other institutions. Most of these, it should be emphasized, have not yet been studied.

³⁷See A. S. Atiya, *The Arabic Manuscripts of Mount Sinai* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1955); Kenneth W. Clark, *Checklist of Manuscripts in St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1952).

³⁸Eutimio Castellani, *Catalogo dei Firmani ed altri Documenti Legali . . . conservati nell' Archivio della stessa Custodia in Gerusalemme* (Jerusalem: Tipografia dei pp. Francescani, 1922).

³⁹See Martiniano Pellegrino Roncaglia, *Essai bibliographique de diplomatie islamique (Arabe-Persane-Ottomane)* (Beirut: Université Arabe de Beyrouth, 1979), 1:250.

⁴⁰University of London, 1961. See also his articles, e.g., "Venice and Florence in the Mamluk Commercial Privileges," *BSOAS* 28 (1965): 483-523; "The Safe Conduct in Muslim Chancery Practice," *BSOAS* 34 (1971): 20-35.

⁴¹(Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1960).

⁴²Stern, "Petitions from the Mamluk Period (Notes on the Mamluk Documents from Sinai)," *BSOAS* 29 (1966): 233-276; reprinted in his *Coins and Documents from the Medieval Middle East* (London: Variorum, 1986); and, e.g., D. S. Richards, "Documents from Sinai Concerning Mainly Cairene Property," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 28 (1985): 225-293.



Documents emanating from Muslim institutions dealing with Muslim transactions and affairs are of great significance. These are the least accessible because most of them must be consulted either *in situ*, in Cairo or Jerusalem, or on microfilm if these can be obtained. In the case of the Ḥaram documents, copies are now available in Jerusalem at the Ḥaram Library, in Jordan at the University of Amman and the National Archives, in Canada at McGill and Toronto Universities, in Paris at the Bibliothèque Nationale, and, finally, I hope, now at the University of Chicago. I do not know whether complete microfilm copies of the Cairo Mamluk documents kept at the National Archives (Dār al-Wathā'iq al-Qawmīyah) and the Ministry of Pious Endowments (Wizārat al-Awqāf) are available or not. In any case, they consist of 888 documents, including many endowment deeds (*waqfiyāt*), bills of conveyance, and other legal deeds; these have been catalogued, and a few samples published by Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn.⁴³ This collection has been studied and used by several scholars, both Arabs and Americans. Since many of the endowment deeds were drawn up for public buildings endowed by sultans and amirs, they have naturally been exploited by students of Islamic architecture. Two examples are Leonor Fernandes, whose published dissertation, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamluk Egypt: The Khanqah*,⁴⁴ and several articles rely heavily on *waqfiyahs*, and the Lebanese scholar Saleh Lamei Mostafa, assisted by Felicitas Jaritz, has also used *waqfiyahs* for studies of the buildings of Sultan Barqūq and his son.⁴⁵ Carl Petry, in his recent work focusing on the reigns of Sultans Ghawrī and Qāyrbāy, has used the same type of documents to supplement material in the narrative histories to reconstruct the fiscal policies of these two sultans and their appropriation of state properties into their personal trust reserves.⁴⁶ Jonathan Berkey's book, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*,⁴⁷ also draws on the Cairo papers as primary sources for the development of educational institutions in Mamluk Cairo. But the fullest and most detailed exploitation by a historian of the Cairo records is Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn's *al-Awqāf wa-al-Ḥayāh al-Ijtimā'īyah fī Miṣr*.⁴⁸ Because it is written in Arabic it has been used by only a few Western scholars, but it deserves the attention of every Islamic medievalist as a comprehensive, richly documented study of Mamluk cultural, religious, social, political, and economic life under the Mamluks, based on documents containing endowments established by Mamluk statesmen.

Finally, the Ḥaram documents. About the same in number as the Cairo documents, the Jerusalem papers are very different in character, being, I believe, remnants from the

⁴³*Fihrist Wathā'iq al-Qāhirah ḥattā Nihāyat 'Aṣr al-Mamālīk (239-922 H./853-1516 M.)* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 1981). The bibliography in this book contains references to other documents published by Amīn elsewhere.

⁴⁴(Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1988). See also her articles, such as "Three Ṣūfī Foundations in a 15th Century Waqfiyya," *Annales islamologiques* 17 (1981): 141-156; "Notes on a New Source for the Study of Religious Architecture during the Mamluk Period: The Waqfiya," *al-Abḥāth* 33 (1985): 3-12.

⁴⁵E.g., *Madrasa, Ḥānqāh und Mausoleum des Barqūq in Kairo*, mit einem Beitrag von Felicitas Jaritz (Glückstadt: Verlag J. J. Augustin, 1982).

⁴⁶*Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamluk Sultans al-Ashraf Qāyrbāy and Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī in Egypt* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993); *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamluk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

⁴⁷(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Cf. Ulrich Haarmann, "Mamluk Endowment Deeds as a Source for the History of Education in Late Medieval Egypt," *al-Abḥāth* 28 (1980): 31-47.

⁴⁸(Cairo: Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabīyah, 1980).



archives of a late fourteenth century Shāfi‘ī judge. As such, they constitute a variegated sampling of judicial and notarial documents, including court records, marriage contracts, wills, and financial records of various kinds. By far the most numerous type is estate, or probate, inventories. There are lists of the possessions of persons already dead or on the verge of dying in Jerusalem, compiled by representatives of the Shāfi‘ī court in order to insure that those entitled to a share of an estate, including the government, would indeed get it. These four hundred-plus inventories have been studied extensively by my student, Huda Lutfi, for her dissertation and book: *al-Quds al-Mamlukiyya: A History of Mamluk Jerusalem Based on the Ḥaram Documents*.⁴⁹ In this book, using these very limited sources, Lutfi was able to synthesize a wealth of data relating to the administration and organization of Jerusalem under the Mamluks not available in narrative sources, as well as plentiful detail about the economy of the city and the material and social life of its inhabitants. In my own publications I have treated specific problems that can be illuminated by the documents, specifically domestic slavery, intercommunal relations between Muslims, Christians, and Jews, relations between Jerusalem and Cairo, and, most recently, the highly organized but extremely complex manner in which the courts intervened in the settlement of estates in a provincial town in the Mamluk Empire.⁵⁰ But the main focus of my inquiries has been the relationship of these documents to the manuals of Islamic law, the *shurūṭ* models formulated by jurists. Whether *fiqh* is a strictly isolated, theoretical enterprise, divorced from the practice of Islamic law, has been a question which has long exercised Orientalists, and the comparison of real documents with the models, I believe, affords us the opportunity to compare theory and practice on an empirical basis.

But here I will stop, almost, for I do want to conclude by mentioning some of the challenges and opportunities raised by Mamluk documents of both literary and archival provenance. As far as challenges are concerned, one must cultivate something which Professor Roemer told me was indispensable for papyrologists. One need not be very intelligent, he said, as long as one has *Sitzleder*, a term you might not find in dictionaries, because it’s slightly rude, meaning a rear end calloused into leather by years of sitting in an attempt to decipher the scrawls in Arabic penned by notaries, to translate the legal jargon imposed by the jurists or chancery officials, and to interpret it in accordance with the historical context in which the documents were written and the legal procedures that prevailed. In other words, documents are extremely difficult to use, especially those that have not yet been edited, and this includes most. The first opportunity that they afford to young scholars is to edit and publish some of them and to analyze them as documents, in order to make the task of interpreting them easier for other scholars. A related task is to compare those of the Mamluk era with those of preceding and succeeding periods. Despite recent advances, the study of Muslim diplomatic is still in a rudimentary stage and needs many scholars in search not so much of material rewards as of an intellectual adventure of finding, understanding, and publishing documents. But if this demanding task lacks appeal for you, the Mamluk documents also constitute a rich and indispensable ancillary source for historians who rely on narrative and biographical materials. Here I will leave the last word

⁴⁹(Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1985).

⁵⁰“Documents Related to the Estates of a Merchant and His Wife in Late Fourteenth Century Jerusalem,” forthcoming in *Manuscripts of the Middle East*.



to next year's lecturer, Steve Humphreys, in his exemplary book, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*:

In medieval Islamic history we are poor in archives but rich in documents. For the most part we have only begun to identify and study these, let alone integrate them into the main stream of historical research, which still depends overwhelmingly on narrative and literary sources. But documentary materials are quickly moving from the periphery to the center of historical thinking in the Islamic field, and a serious historian can no longer avoid the hard job of learning how to use them effectively.⁵¹

⁵¹(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 40.

