

Christian Mauder, *In the Sultan's Salon: Learning, Religion, and Rulership at the Mamlūk Court of Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501–1516)* (Leiden: Brill, 2021). 2 vols.

Kristof D'hulster, *Browsing through the Sultan's Bookshelves: Towards a Reconstruction of the Library of the Mamlūk Sultan Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 906–922/1501–1516)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Unipress/Bonn University Press, 2021). Pp. 396.

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The institutional history of the Mamluk state—to use Max Weber's terminology—is illuminated by both chronicles and juridical sources. The state was governed by a military aristocracy (*herrschaftsverband*)¹ and headed by the sultan, who invested considerable efforts in shoring up his legitimacy. As part of his attempt to polish his image, the sultan attempted to present scholarly credentials. This wish can explain, partially at least, the inauguration of the royal library (*khizānah*),² and indeed several sultans collected manuscripts and deposited them on the shelves of their libraries (*bi-rasm al-khizānah*).³ References to book markets elucidate that the acquisition of books was not limited to just the governing elite.⁴

Book production and collection, reading, and audience are the topics of the two studies reviewed here. Both books are fine examples of the remarkable development in Mamluk studies over the last decades, and particularly the shift from political and institutional research to cultural analysis. This shift brings the study of Mamluk history closer to the study of European medieval history.

¹Richard Swedberg and Ola Agevall, eds., *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts* (Stanford, 2016), 238.

²Shams al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bashsharī al-Muqaddasī (completed his book 375–78/985–88), *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rīfat al-aqālīm*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden, 1967), 10; cf. “*amalahu li-khizānat al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad fī ayyām dawlatihi al-mujaddadah*.” Jerusalem National Library of Israel MS Arab 458.

³Shams al-Dīn Abū al-Khayr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Jazarī al-Dimashqī al-Shāfi'ī (751–833/1350–1429), “Al-Ḥiṣn al-ḥaṣīn min kalām sayyid al-mursalīn” (NLI MS Arab Yahuda 298: “*bi-rasm al-khizānah al-sharīfah al-sultānīyah al-malikīyah al-Zāhir Abī Sa'īd Jaqmaq*”). Cf. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dimashqī al-Dhahabī al-Shāfi'ī (673–748/1274–1348), *Al-ʿIbar fī khabar man ghabar*, ed. Abū Hājar Muḥammad al-Sa'īd ibn Basyūnī Zaghlūl (Beirut, 1985), introduction, page s.

⁴Abd al-Bāsiṭ ibn Khalīl ibn Shāhīn ibn al-Wazīr al-Malaṭī al-Zāhirī (844–930/1440–1514), *Al-Majma' al-mufannan bi-al-mu'jam al-mu'anwan*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Kandarī (Beirut, 2011), 41–42.



The first three chapters of Christian Mauder's project serve as a detailed introduction to his book's major theme. Based on three unique works written for the penultimate Mamluk sultan, Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī, and read at his court, Mauder offers an in-depth study of a late middle-period court. He opens his study with a theoretical question: what is an Islamic court? Using extensive comparative studies, combined with a painstaking investigation of primary sources, he gives a clear definition that combines observations on the social structure and spatial aspects of the court and performances held at the castle on the hill. The sultan's court was a complex institution where the public sphere was not a separate realm kept apart from the exclusive indoor sphere, but rather a holistic, unified space, both public and private.⁵

The Mamluk elite, civilian as well as military, communicated in three languages: Arabic, Turkic, and Persian.⁶ Texts in these languages provide the major narrative and documentary sources for this society's history. Ibn Iyās, whose bias against Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī is well-known, blames the sultan for an inclination towards the 'Ajam⁷ and spreads rumors of his heterodox world view (*madhhab al-Nāsimīyah*).⁸

Gatherings at the sultan's court (*majālis/diwan*)⁹ served several functions. In addition to their role in establishing the image of the sultan as the "wise and just king," they provided a venue to debate various issues and to offer responses to challenges faced by the court. Chapter four describes this royal environment in minute detail. Mauder reconstructs the events and topics

⁵Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Boston, 1991), 7.

⁶Christian Mauder, "And They Read in That Night Books of History': Consuming, Discussing, and Producing Texts about the Past in al-Ghawrī's *Majālis* as Social Practices," in *New Readings in Arabic Historiography from Late Medieval Egypt and Syria: Proceedings of the Themed Day of the Fifth Conference of the School of Mamluk Studies*, ed. Jo van Steenberg and Maya Termonia (Leiden, 2021), 401–28.

⁷Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn Iyās al-Ḥanafī (852–930/1448–1524), *Badā'ī' al-zuhūr fī waqā'ī' al-duhūr* [Die Chronik des Ibn Iyas (The Amazing Flowers about the Events of the Times)], ed. M. Muṣṭafá (Cairo, 1429/2008), 5:88.

⁸Kathleen R. F. Burrill, *The Quatrains of Nesimî, Fourteenth-Century Turkic Hurufi With Annotated Translations of the Turkic and Persian Quatrains from the Hekimoğlu Ali Pasa MS* (The Hague, 1972), 26–29, 38–41.

⁹Abd al-Malik ibn Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Shāfi'ī al-Āṣimī (al-Īṣāmī) al-Makkī (1049–1111/1639–99), *Samṭ al-nujūm al-awālī fī anbā' al-awā'il wa-al-tawālī*, ed. 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd and 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwad (Beirut, 1419/1998), 4:62.



that were discussed at these gatherings, providing well-articulated insights on the royal “salons.”¹⁰

Dwelling upon the religious life in the citadel, Mauder defines “religion” as a cultural system. I prefer Talal Asad’s argument “that ‘religion’ is a modern concept, not because it is reified but because it has been linked to its Siamese twin ‘secularism.’”¹¹ Mauder’s definition is followed by a detailed narrative on the function of religion and on Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī’s participation in events and ritual.

The last chapter in this rich book deals with court politics. Mauder casts light on the sultan’s regime and his legitimation in an extremely challenging decade. As in previous chapters, Mauder also ranges widely over different theoretical studies, read together with primary sources and a vast assortment of Mamluk studies. The result is in-depth research.

The second book in this review is Kristof D’hulster’s detailed and fresh investigation of books marked by Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī’s “ex-libris” (*bi-rasm al-khizānah al-sharīfah*). Comparing D’hulster’s achievement with earlier works on the “Arab book”¹² only serves to illuminate the considerable development in the field of cultural and material history of the middle Islamic courts. Rather than an examination of general or isolated episodes, research in recent years has shifted to include a detailed inspection of registers, titles, transmitters, and owners.

Chapter two, “A Library Browsed,” is the backbone of D’hulster’s study. It provides a close inspection of 135 titles that bear the bookplate “*bi-rasm al-khizānah al-sharīfah*,” presumably indicating that most of them were stocked at a royal library. The manuscripts owned by the sultan range from Qurans to poetry, covering a vast array of genres.

This rich bibliographical study is followed by a chapter that delves into the notion of the book and book production during late Mamluk history. Since most of the manuscripts are without a colophon, accurately categorizing these subjects is not an easy task. Fortunately, some manuscripts carry marks—such as the name of the copyist/writer—enabling us to date the manuscript and its ownership history. *Waqf* notations are one example of such a gloss. It is well established that al-Ashraf Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī continued an old

¹⁰ *Majālis and masāmir*, in Muḥammad Sayyid Kilānī, *Al-Adab al-Miṣrī fī zill al-ḥukm al-‘uthmānī: 922–1220 H. =1517–1805 M.* (Cairo, 1965), 147.

¹¹ Talal Asad, “Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith’s ‘The Meaning and End of Religion,’” *History of Religions* 40, no. 3 (2001): 221; and see Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, 2013).

¹² For example, Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book* (Princeton, 1984); Beatrice Gruendler, *The Rise of the Arabic Book* (Boston, 2020).



tradition. Indeed, evidence regarding the collection and depositing of books in a special library is rife and easily traced.¹³ These findings, D’hulster affirms, contribute to a novel approach toward the Mamluk military aristocracy, since learned army officers were recorded among the “men of the sword” (*sayfiyah*).¹⁴ The old view of this echelon as newcomers and barbarians should therefore be revised.

Chapter four raises questions regarding the content of the books that were produced or owned by Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī. What is unique in the list of titles—and the extent to which it reflects the sultan’s intellectual profile—invites further examination. D’hulster highlights the multi-lingual richness of the royal library, which included, in addition to Arabic manuscripts, Turkic and Persian supplications, poetry, and epic writing (*shāhnāmah*). The titles he mentions support his working hypothesis regarding the complex ethnic and linguistic mosaic that constituted Mamluk urban society. In this milieu, supplication in Persian and Turkic would appear to be a common phenomenon.¹⁵

Following the decisive Ottoman victory over the Mamluk army and the conquest of Cairo by Salim the First (1517), sultanic books were targeted as *spolia* and carried away. Chapter five thus addresses the great majority of royal manuscripts that ended up in Istanbul.¹⁶ An Ottoman *defter* (923/1517) lists the books that were found by the victorious sultan in Aleppo’s citadel. It provides what can be termed “a catalogue of a royal Mamluk library.” This is discussed further in an appendix, followed by an edition of the document.

The studies surveyed here provide us with rich and detailed information about the intellectual activity and royal culture in the waning years of the Mamluk sultanate. Mauder’s and D’hulster’s books provide their readers with fresh insights on a Mamluk sultan and his court. Both scholars investigate a vast and multi-lingual corpus of narrative and material sources. They produce a sound base for further studies of intellectual activity in what had previously been considered a military reign of manumitted slave-soldiers; hence

¹³“Kitāb ṣiḍq al-ikhhlāṣ fī tafsīr sūrat al-ikhhlāṣ (Jerusalem, NLI MS Arab Yahuda 297: “*bi-rasm al-maqām al-sharīf al-sultānī al-malikī al-ashrafī Abī al-Naṣr Qāyṭbāy, khalada Allāhu mulkahu wa-sultānatahu. Waqf al-malik al-ashraf Abī al-Naṣr Qāyṭbāy, ‘azz naṣrahu*”); Efraim Wust, *Catalogue of the Arabic, Persian, and Turkish Manuscripts of the Yahuda Collection of the National Library of Israel* (Leiden, 2016), 1:452–53.

¹⁴Christian Mauder, *Geleherte Krieger: Die Mamluken als Träger arabischesprachiger Bildung nach al-Ṣafādī, al-Maqrīzī und weiteren Quellen* (Hildesheim, 2012).

¹⁵Abū Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad Zakariyā al-Anṣārī al-Shāfi‘ī, *Talkhīs al-azhiyah fī aḥkām al-ad‘iyah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Kamālī (Beirut, 1426/2005), 74.

¹⁶‘Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Nasahnī, *‘Uqūd al-jumān fī sharḥ ‘aqīdat al-sultān*, ed. ‘Abd al-Sattār al-Ḥājj Ḥāmid and Ibrāhīm Sha‘bān (Istanbul, 2019).



they provide a highly welcome addition to the developing field of book production and consumption in the late middle period Islamic world. In books of this scope and complexity, occasional factual errors or mistakes are inevitable; we will dispense here with their enumeration.



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DOI: [10.6082/ae64-3j16](https://doi.org/10.6082/ae64-3j16). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/ae64-3j16>)

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