

JOHN L. MELOY
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

The Merits of Economic History: Re-Reading al-Maqrīzī's *Ighāthah* and *Shudhūr*

Historians have long recognized the importance of economic issues in al-Maqrīzī's writings and the value of his historical works as sources for economic data. Clearly economic matters figure largely within his legacy. His two short books in particular, *Ighāthah al-Ummah bi-Kashf al-Ghummah* (Saving the community by examining its distress) and *Shudhūr al-'Uqūd fī Dhikr al-Nuqūd* (Pearls of the divine ordinances concerning money), have been used ever since the days of A. I. Silvestre de Sacy at the end of the eighteenth century as key sources for the economic history of Mamluk Egypt. The *Ighāthah* and the *Shudhūr* have traditionally been characterized as histories of economic phenomena or, more recently, as critiques of the economic policy of the Mamluk regime. However, the importance of these two books lies not in their value as economic histories or in their criticism of the sultanate but rather in the insight they give on al-Maqrīzī's approach to economics and his use of knowledge of the past. Clarifying al-Maqrīzī's intentions in writing these works is a necessary first step toward assessing his views on the economy and its role in history.

As Adel Allouche has noted, the *Ighāthah* has been known as an account of famines in Egypt since the early nineteenth century. In the introduction to his translation of al-Maqrīzī's *Kitāb al-Sulūk*, Étienne Quatremère summarized the contents of the *Ighāthah* and referred to it as "The Treatise on Famines," although he also admitted that the manuscript he read did not include the title.¹ Decades before Quatremère, Silvestre de Sacy had encountered the title of the *Ighāthah*, which is mentioned in al-Maqrīzī's *Shudhūr*, but had not read the text itself, translating it as "Remède offert au public contre le chagrin." Towards the end of the nineteenth century, H. Sauvaire relied heavily on data in the *Ighāthah* and the *Shudhūr* to produce his extended study of Islamic numismatics and metrology.² Sauvaire used manuscript versions of both texts from the Bibliothèque Nationale, but was also familiar with the translations of both texts and retained the translated titles in referring to the works. It was, however, Quatremère's version of the title

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¹Étienne Quatremère, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks de l'Égypte* (Paris, 1845), 1:xv.

²For the articles on numismatics, see: H. Sauvaire, "Matériaux pour servir à l'histoire de la numismatique et de la métrologie musulmanes," *Journal asiatique* (7th ser.) 14 (1879): 455–533; 15 (1880): 228–77, 421–78; 18 (1881): 499–516; 19 (1882): 23–77, 97–163, 281–327.



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that stuck, no doubt in great measure because in 1940, the editors of the standard edition of the treatise, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah and Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shayyāl, stated categorically in their introduction that the *Ighāthah* "deals with the history of famines which descended on Egypt from most ancient times to the year 808 H."³ No doubt this view further confirmed in the mind of Gaston Wiet that Quatremère's title had "the advantage of clearly defining its subject," and he went on to express the opinion that the "Treatise on famines is rather more explicit than the translation from Arabic of the actual title."⁴

Adel Allouche was the first scholar to challenge this long-standing interpretation of the work and he duly warned readers of his English translation and study of the text, published under the title *Mamluk Economics*, that Wiet's understanding—expressed in his title and in his French translation—"fails to account for the essence and scope of the work."⁵ In contrast to Wiet's reading of the text, Allouche concluded that it was "a critique, if not an outright indictment, of the Circassian administration's economic and monetary policy."⁶ Allouche's approach will be discussed further below, but it is important here to note that his contribution effectively transformed the modern conception of the text from a straightforward economic historical narrative to a more abstract argument, based on the term "inflation" as a more accurate reading of the operative concept in the work, *ghalā'*. Allouche's reading thus re-conceptualized the text from a history of famines to an attack on the economic policies of the Mamluk Sultanate.

The reading of *Shudhūr al-'Uqūd* has had a less complicated history although it has followed a similar trajectory. Since the end of the eighteenth century, the text has been regarded as a straightforward treatise on money. Silvestre de Sacy published his French translation under the title *Traité des monnoies musulmanes*, using also the literal translation of the short Arabic title, "Les perles des colliers." His translation was undertaken in part as a corrective to the errors contained in O. G. Tychsen's edition and Latin translation, published in the same year under the title *Historia monetae Arabicae*.⁷ Indeed, Silvestre de Sacy expressed his admiration

³Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah al-Ummah bi-Kashf al-Ghummah*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah and Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shayyāl (Cairo, 1940/1359), page *alif*.

⁴Gaston Wiet, "Le traité des famines de Maqrīzī," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 5 (1962): 1; Adel Allouche, *Mamluk Economics: A Translation and Study of al-Maqrīzī's Ighāthah* (Salt Lake City, 1994), 5.

⁵Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 5.

⁶*Ibid.*, 13.

⁷A. I. Silvestre de Sacy, "Traité des monnoies musulmanes," originally published in *Magasin Encyclopédique*, 1796, IIe année, 6:472–507, and IIIe année, 1:38–89. I have used the edition published in *Bibliothèque des Arabisants Français* (1st ser.), vol. 1 (Cairo, 1905). O. G. Tychsen,



for the text, noting that “al-Maqrīzī’s ideas [were] more true to real monetary principles than many writers of our century.” He also noted that, although “[t]his short treatise on Arab money is not as complete as one would have hoped since it contains a number of inaccuracies,” it is of “great use” to the study of Islamic numismatics.⁸ Later scholars also treated the text as a treatise on the history of money. As mentioned above, Sauvaire used it in his series of articles on numismatics, referring to it as “Traité des monnaies,” and citing the Arabic title of the manuscript as “Faṣl fī al-Nuqūd al-Qadīmah,” a title used in some manuscripts of the text to refer to a particular section within it.⁹ Anastase-Marie de Saint-Elie published an edition of the text under the title *Al-Nuqūd al-‘Arabīyah wa-‘Ilm al-Nummīyāt*.¹⁰ L. A. Mayer published a facsimile of a Leiden manuscript—an autograph containing also his marginal notes and corrections—of the text, referring to it in a typescript note at the end of the text as “al-Maqrīzī’s treatise on coins.” In this brief note, Mayer stated that the second and third installments of his publication would consist of a translation with “copious notes” followed by a final recension of the text.¹¹ Daniel Eustache published his edition and French translation of *Shudhūr al-‘Uqūd* in a two-part article, “Études de numismatique et de métrologie musulmanes,” which appeared in *Hespéris-Tamuda* in 1969. The first part discussed money in al-Balādhurī’s ninth-century chronicle, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, while the second part contained his edition, translation, and notes on the *Shudhūr*, in which he followed Silvestre de Sacy’s title: “Les perles des colliers, ou Traité des Monnaies.” Eustache, like his predecessors, read the text as a scholarly treatise on money and weights, “reproduced, with obvious modifications, from the treatise of al-Maqrīzī on famines.”¹² Muḥammad al-Sayyid ‘Alī Baḥr al-‘Ulūm, in his edition and study of the *Shudhūr*, also read the work as a study of Islamic numismatics and used the text as the principal part of his volume on Islamic money entitled *Al-Nuqūd al-Islāmīyah*.¹³ As with the *Ighāthah*, Adel Allouche characterized the *Shudhūr* as an “indictment of the monetary policy of the Circassians.”¹⁴ The negative reading

Historia monetarum Arabicae (Rostock, 1797).

⁸“Traité des monnaies musulmanes,” 9; my thanks to Dr. Robert Irwin for bringing to my attention Silvestre de Sacy’s appreciation of this technical aspect of the text.

⁹Sauvaire, “Matériaux,” 14 (1879): 486–87, n. 2.

¹⁰Anastase-Marie de Saint-Elie, *Al-Nuqūd al-‘Arabīyah wa-‘Ilm al-Nummīyāt* (Cairo, 1939), 21–73, based on manuscripts from Baghdad and Cairo.

¹¹L. A. Mayer, *Shudhūr al-‘Uqūd fī Dhikr al-Nuqūd*, facsimile Leiden MS Or. 560 Warn. (n.d.).

¹²Daniel Eustache, “Études de numismatique et de métrologie musulmanes (II),” *Hespéris-Tamuda* 10, fasc. 1–2 (1969): 95–190; the quotation is from p. 144, n. 1.

¹³Muḥammad al-Sayyid ‘Alī Baḥr al-‘Ulūm, *Al-Nuqūd al-Islāmīyah al-Musammá bi-Shudhūr al-‘Uqūd fī Dhikr al-Nuqūd* (Najaf, 1387/1967); note his discussion on pp. 37–38.

¹⁴Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 20.



of the *Shudhūr* and the *Ighāthah* has been further enhanced by Warren Schultz's brief reference to them as "screeds."¹⁵

The conclusion that the texts are fundamentally critiques seems to have arisen because he wrote them, including their scathing accusations, in response to particular episodes. The conclusion that these texts were written chiefly as histories has of course followed from the dominating presence of their historical information. Modern scholars who have used these texts have largely been interested in economic and monetary history. Consequently, the collective desire of scholars to gather data on Islamic economic history has led them to interpret the essence and scope of these works according to their empirical needs. The result has been that al-Maqrīzī has not been read on his own terms. Of course, the accounts can be used for the information they contain, but it is nevertheless important to appreciate that these data are part of an argument concerning particular economic situations and do not necessarily represent the comprehensive view of the past that Silvestre de Sacy, for one, had hoped to find.

While one cannot deny the historical approach and negative tone of these two texts, emphasis on these characterizations obscures "the essence and scope" of both works. To be sure, in these texts al-Maqrīzī excoriates Mamluk officials and sultans and chronicles economic phenomena. However, both texts share a number of features that indicate that his broader aim was to make prescriptions for the management of monetary affairs. First, they both concern specific episodes in Mamluk monetary policy—al-Maqrīzī discussed the episode of 806 (July 1403–July 1404) in the *Ighāthah* and that of 818 (March 1415–March 1416) in the *Shudhūr*. al-Maqrīzī believed these episodes were especially significant because they directly related to issues that struck at the heart of his understanding of the monetary economy.

Furthermore, while large portions of both texts contain accounts of economic and monetary history, these narratives are part of broader arguments about the implementation of economic policy, which al-Maqrīzī believed could be addressed by means of monetary policy. Accordingly, al-Maqrīzī concluded the argument of each text with his recommendations for how the Mamluk regime should conduct Egypt's monetary affairs. In writing these texts, he was following the Islamic literary tradition of *nasīhat al-mulūk*, advice for rulers, as much as the tradition of *tārīkh*, history proper. In *Ighāthah al-Ummah*, he offered this advice in an attempt to save the community from a difficult economic situation, while in *Shudhūr*

¹⁵Warren Schultz, "Mamluk Monetary History: A Review Essay," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 193. Schultz gives an earlier assessment in his "Mahmūd ibn 'Alī and the 'New Fulūs': Late Fourteenth Century Mamluk Egyptian Copper Coinage Reconsidered," *American Journal of Numismatics* (2nd series) 10 (1998): 130.



al-'Uqūd he offered the Mamluk sultan religiously sound advice concerning the management of money. *'Uqūd* is read in the sense of ordinances—obligatory bonds imposed by God, rather than necklaces: Quran 5:1: "O believers, fulfill the bonds" (*al-'uqūd*).¹⁶ In either case, al-Maqrīzī presented the collective knowledge in these texts as strings of pearls of divinely inspired wisdom concerning the economy and money. In the *Ighāthah* and the *Shudhūr*, he hoped to bring the conduct of the regime into line with religious teaching.

Like so many of his contemporaries whose writings constitute our access to the Mamluk past, al-Maqrīzī was a scholar trained in the religious sciences. After an upbringing influenced by his Hanafi grandfather, he followed his father as a Shafi'i, although he later fell under the influence of the Zahirī legal tradition.¹⁷ And like many of the ulama of his time, he also served the state in a variety of offices until his career was cut short and he devoted his life to writing¹⁸—on a tremendous variety of topics. Given his scholarly training and religious background, he quite naturally based his recommendations on principles presented as religiously prescribed economic practice. Consequently, al-Maqrīzī based his arguments in the *Ighāthah* and the *Shudhūr* on the prescribed practice of the religious tradition, a monetary *sunnah*, or on historically based meritorious behavior, a monetary *faḍā'il*—overlapping categories but both of which rely on a knowledge of received history and law. His primary objective in writing these texts was to ensure that the management of monetary affairs conformed to Islamic precedent and practice as he presented them in his texts. Thus his argument for monetary reform, using the idiom of religious scholarship, was grounded in knowledge of the past—a past expressed in terms of the prescribed practice of the Muslim community. Amalia Levanoni, in discussing the transition to Circassian rule, has described al-Maqrīzī's historiographical approach as "history in the service of faith."¹⁹ Consideration of his *Ighāthah* and *Shudhūr* shows that his economic history was not only in the

¹⁶Arberry's translation; other translations: "obligations" (Ahmed Ali), "indentures" (Marmaduke Pickthall).

¹⁷For details on al-Maqrīzī's background, see Franz Rosenthal, "al-Maqrīzī," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 6:193–94. I thank Prof. Nasser Rabbat for clarifying the significance of al-Maqrīzī's Zahirism during the conference. Al-Maqrīzī's Zahirī tendencies are briefly mentioned by Rosenthal and by R. Strothmann, "Zāhirīya," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st ed., 4:1192.

¹⁸On his career, see Anne F. 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): 85–108.

¹⁹Amalia Levanoni, "Al-Maqrīzī's Account of the Transition from Turkish to Circassian Mamluk Sultanate: History in the Service of Faith," in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950–1800)*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (Leiden, 2001), 93–105. This book arrived at AUB in the months after the conference and I was pleased to discover that my ideas and those of Professor Levanoni follow similar tracks.



service of the faith and the state, but was also guided by his faith. Examination of these texts in tandem—as expressions of his economic thought over the course of a decade—allows us to understand more fully his approach to and the development of his thought on economic matters, providing a more nuanced picture of an intellectual figure struggling with important affairs of his time.

806 AND *IGHĀTHAT AL-UMMAH*: ECONOMIC HISTORY AS *SUNNAH*

Al-Maqrīzī understood the crisis of 806 to be the result of a string of economic problems, culminating with actions undertaken during the administration of Sultan al-Nāṣir Faraj ibn Barqūq (r. 801–8, 808–15/1399–1405, 1405–12). In the *Ighāthah* and his other writings, al-Maqrīzī held Sultan Barqūq responsible for the monetary ruin of Egypt because of his appointment of the Ustādār, Maḥmūd ibn ‘Alī, who allegedly mismanaged the treasury and the minting of copper money in particular. The episode has attracted considerable scholarly attention and the discussion to a great extent has revolved around the plausibility of al-Maqrīzī’s explanation—could one man have actually caused that amount of damage or was Egypt’s economic crisis the product of larger economic forces?²⁰ There are still issues to be examined but most recently Warren Schultz has demonstrated, based on careful study of the numismatic and textual evidence, that “modern scholars should not be so quick to dismiss the accounts of Maḥmūd ibn ‘Alī.”²¹ The concern here is not with the matter of plausibility, and in any case, the story of Maḥmūd and Sultan Faraj is a part of the broader argument that al-Maqrīzī was making about money; rather the concern here is al-Maqrīzī’s larger purpose in writing the *Ighāthah*.

Al-Maqrīzī’s excoriation of Sultans Barqūq and Faraj and the Ustādār Maḥmūd in the *Ighāthah* may read like an indictment, but it is by no means the central feature of the text. The work as a whole consists of a carefully structured argument made explicit with clearly marked headings for its various sections. After a brief prologue, al-Maqrīzī started with “A Logical Premise.”²² In this section he presented his thesis that conditions in Egypt in 806 were exceptional in the sense that crises in the past were far worse, the evidence for which conclusion he supplied in his

²⁰See Eliyahu Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1976), 305; Jere L. Bacharach, “A Study of the Correlation between Textual Sources and Numismatic Evidence for Mamluk Egypt and Syria, A.H. 784–872/1382–1468,” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1967, 243–45.

²¹Schultz, “Maḥmūd ibn ‘Alī,” 144.

²²I have cited both the edition by Ziyādah and al-Shayyāl as well as Allouche’s translation. Quotations in English are generally taken from Allouche’s translation although in some cases I have provided my own translation; the title here translated in full reads: “A section stating the logical introduction that comprises the whole work” (*qā’idah kullīyah*).



section entitled "The [Years of] *Ghalā'* in Egypt."²³ The exceptionalism of 806, the discussion of which is contained in a section entitled "Current Prices and Present Ordeals," is also based on the notion that the conditions of the crisis were not an act of God, as were all previous crises, but were caused by human action and thus could be remedied by the adherence to legal practice concerning the management of money—a kind of "monetary *sunnah*." The basis for this monetary practice he provided in a section entitled "The Causes of Our Ordeals." Sound economics then was based fundamentally on religiously prescribed monetary practice; therefore, one can look to legitimate precedent as a guide.

Al-Maqrīzī advocated the return to a monetary system in which gold and silver were used as the basis on which to measure the value of economic transactions, a call for reform that Allouche mentioned but did not emphasize. Al-Maqrīzī's argument was based on the Shafi'i doctrine that only gold and silver are valid metals for currency and that to use others would be to contravene the law and to cheat people of what they are due.²⁴ His argument, made all the more urgent by the desperate economic crisis of 806, was directed, as the title implies, at saving the community from the affliction of this crisis, and was based on, as Allouche noted, a thorough understanding of the etiology of the crisis. Al-Maqrīzī's etiological approach is significant because he thought of the crisis as a disease that afflicted Egypt—the symptoms were known to all; nevertheless the cause was not obvious. Furthermore, the text, a description and analysis of the economic problem, culminated with his prescription—a section entitled "The Means to Eradicate the Disease." For al-Maqrīzī, the etiology was understood by means of a historical understanding of the past. Such an understanding required first an account of the history of *ghalā'*—what Wiet translated as famine and what Allouche translated as inflation—and second an account of the history of money.

Before discussing the substance of al-Maqrīzī's recommendation, it is important to address the question, who would apply the remedy? While the substance of the text appears to be a fairly dry and impersonal discussion of economic matters, one nevertheless gets the impression that he was not addressing the general readership of a treatise but rather that he was advising the more particular readership of a policy recommendation. Each major section of the work begins with an invocation for the assistance of God to help the reader—who is addressed directly—understand the argument, lending a rather personal quality to the work as a piece of deliberately argued advice: the first begins "Know—May God support you with His mercy and

²³The title translated in full, "A section setting forth what occurred in Egypt in times of dearth and anecdotes from those years."

²⁴Robert Brunschwig, "Conceptions monétaires chez les jurists musulmans (VIIIe–XIIIe siècles)," *Arabica* 14 (1967): 139–40; it is interesting to note Brunschwig's observation that the Zahiri stance on the issue was not particularly rigid, p. 140.



guide you to comprehend him—that bygone events, however difficult experiencing them was, are engaging when recounted”; the second, “Know—May God guard your prosperity and protect you—that since the day God created mankind dearth has alternated with plenty . . . ”; the third, “Know—May God protect and guide you, and not deprive you of His bounty and divine providence—that from reports that have reached us . . . ” And so on.²⁵

Clearly al-Maqrīzī was addressing someone whom he thought could rectify Egypt’s economic condition by means of the reformation of its monetary policy and, in particular, the reformation of innovations introduced under the reign of Sultan Faraj. The colophon of the work dates the text to Muḥarram 808 (June–July 1405) but Allouche convincingly argues, on the basis of internal evidence, that the text could not have been composed before Jumādā I (October–November) of that year.²⁶ While Allouche notes that a reference in the *Kitāb al-Sulūk* indicates that a final draft may have been produced in Muḥarram 809 (June–July 1406),²⁷ the hypothesis is nevertheless worth considering that al-Maqrīzī may have taken advantage of the interregnum of al-Malik al-Manṣūr ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Barqūq, who reigned from Rabī‘ I until Jumādā II (August–December 1405), to submit his recommendations to be put into practice. One can speculate as well that he may have wanted to obtain for himself a position in the administration yet again—by that time he had been out of government service as *muḥtasib* of Cairo since Dhū al-Qa‘dah 807 (May 1405), at least his third term of service in that capacity since 801 (September 1398–September 1399).²⁸

A more detailed recap of the recommendation’s argument, including al-Maqrīzī’s view of the crisis, shows how he used historical information on *ghalā’* and money to convince his reader of the efficacy of the prescription and it provides also the basis for understanding his analysis of the episode of 818. In his discussion, “The Causes of Our Ordeals,” he observed that although the Nile failed to reach plenitude

²⁵The others: the fourth, “Know—May God grant you toward every good and easy path, and on every grace a sign and a guide—”; the fifth, “Know—May God guard you with His sleepless eye and His fearsome might—”; the sixth, “Know—May God grant you eternal happiness and felicity—”; the seventh, “Know—May God guide you to your own righteousness and inspire you to follow the straight paths of your fellow humans—”; the eighth, “Know—May God embellish you with virtues, and protect you from the disgraces of vices—.”

²⁶Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 6–7.

²⁷Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma‘rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ ‘Āshūr (Cairo, 1972), 4:28.

²⁸Rosenthal, “Maqrīzī,” 193; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 3, 120, n. 12. On the extraordinary turnover in the position of *muḥtasib* during this period, see Allouche, 4, and Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Rāziq, “Le *ḥisba* et le *muḥtasib* en Égypte au temps des Mamluks,” *Annales islamologiques* 13 (1977): 115–78.



in 796 and then excessively flooded the land the following year causing prices to rise, by 798 prices had returned to their pre-796 level. The price increase was a result of a shortage of seed while the supply of grain was especially low since a smaller quantity of land was cultivated in 796. By no means was this unusual: "This is characteristic of Egypt since ancient times," he wrote, "whenever the Nile delays in flooding, prices continue to increase for two years."²⁹

In 806, however, when the Nile again failed to reach plenitude, one would have expected the situation to have improved within two years. But the ensuing grain shortage resulted in unusually high prices. This period of exceptional inflation was due, first, to officials intentionally maintaining high prices by withholding foodstuffs. al-Maqrīzī closed this section with the account of the Ustādār Maḥmūd ibn 'Alī who increased the production of copper currency and stopped the production of silver currency. But it was not until his discussion entitled "Current Prices and Present Ordeals" that he explained that the inflation of 806 also resulted from the proliferation of *fulūs* and the disappearance of dirhams:

[*Fulūs*] are used in exchange for all sorts of edibles, all types of drinks, and other common goods. They are accepted for payment of land taxes, the tithe on the profits of merchants, and other imposts due the sultan. They are used to estimate labor costs for all works, whether significant or insignificant. Indeed, the people of Egypt have no currency other than the *fulūs*, with which their wealth is measured. . . . This is an innovation (*bid'ah*) and a calamity of recent origin. There is no basis for it among the community of believers and there is no foundation for it in legal practice (*ṭarīqah shar'īyah*).³⁰

Thus al-Maqrīzī presented the uncanonical management of the monetary system as the fundamental cause of the crisis. It comes as no surprise, then, that the rectification of this unlawful innovation was the principal feature of his recommendation.

His argument that the inflation of 806 required special consideration, then, was founded on his history of "*Ghalā'* in Egypt," and his history of money in Egypt. The latter history, included in his second major section after the "Logical Premise," entitled "The Causes of Our Ordeals" (but which Allouche broke into a separate section entitled "Currency"), was a chronological compilation of didactic reports prescribing models for proper monetary management. His account may be

²⁹Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 42; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 51.

³⁰Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 76; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 77; the last sentence is my translation.



divided into two parts: currency of the caliphs up until the ninth century followed by an account of currency in Egypt. His discussion on currency starts with his appeal to the reader to "Know . . . that the currency that has been used to determine prices of goods and costs of labor consists only of gold and silver."³¹ The rest of the account, what has been construed as a history of money, runs in a similar vein. He constantly reminded the reader that gold and silver alone have always been recognized as the only legal tender. The account then comes across as a chronologically ordered compilation of "monetary hadith," starting with Adam: "In fact, it is said that the first to mint the dinar and the dirham was Adam, who said that life is not enjoyable without these two currencies. This was related by al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1176) in his *Tārīkh Dimashq*."³² Al-Maqrīzī offered reports, assessed in terms of hadith scholarship, from the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods to argue for the exclusivity of gold and silver: "According to all reports, either valid or invalid (*fī khabar saḥīḥ wa-la-saqīm*), no nation or group of people is ever known to have paid for goods or remunerated for works in ancient or recent times in a currency other than gold and silver."³³

After stating this thesis about money, al-Maqrīzī explained:

I shall narrate to you some reports in this regard to illustrate the veracity of what I have pointed out. I say—seeking the help of God my Lord, indeed He is the only Protector—know—may God increase your knowledge and grant you intelligence and comprehension—that the dirham was, and still is, the currency of mankind at all times, so that it is said that the first to mint dinars and dirhams and make jewelry out of gold and silver was Fāligh son of Ghābir son of Shālīkh son of Arfakhshad son of Sām son of Noah, since whose time people have [always] used currency.³⁴

Of course, it was the lack of dirhams that was precisely the problem in 806 and it was by means of such reports that al-Maqrīzī hoped to convince his reader that he should follow the practice of his illustrious predecessors like the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān by re-issuing dirhams:

The dirhams struck by 'Abd al-Malik had three merits (*faḍā'il*): first, they [conformed to the rule] that the weight of seven *mithqāls*

³¹Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 47; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 55.

³²Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 47; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 55–56.

³³Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 47; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 55.

³⁴Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 48; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 56.



equaled that of ten dirhams. Second, ‘Abd al-Malik made the weight uniform: the dirham came to weigh six *dānaqs* instead of having large and small dirhams. Third, these [dirhams] were in conformity with the practice of the Messenger of God with regard to the obligation of [paying] *zakāt* without loss or excess. Thus, the Prophet’s tradition was followed and the Islamic community agreed on [the new dirham].³⁵

His account of Islamic coinage ends with the ninth century Abbasid caliphs, and the entry of Turkish interlopers into high politics, where he found a convenient opportunity to foreshadow the problem he addressed at the beginning of the fifteenth century: “Precepts of the divine law and religious prescriptions changed when the Turks innovated and invented ways that God did not allow, among which was the adulteration of dirhams.”³⁶ Al-Maqrīzī’s account of money in Egypt begins with the statement that gold has traditionally been used in Egypt and to support this he cited Abū Hurayrah, the companion of the Prophet and narrator of his traditions. It was in this section that he finally explained the introduction of copper money—he had to account for it at some point—attributing it to the reign of the Ayyubid sultan al-Kāmil (r. 615–35/1218–38). But he justified the use of copper for the purchase of “goods of insignificant value,” and stated that al-Kāmil’s innovation was legally sanctioned with the approval of one Abū al-Ṭāhir al-Maḥallī.³⁷ His failure to explain its existence prior to that time conformed to the widespread conviction that it was not worthy of discussion. For example, in the *Muqaddimah* Ibn Khaldūn consistently disregarded copper in his discussions of money, as do al-Maqrīzī’s sources in the *Ighāthah* such as Abū Yūsuf’s *Kitāb al-Kharāj*. It would seem that rather than deliberately ignoring the existence of pre-Ayyubid *fulūs*, al-Maqrīzī was not able to state that any legal authority had permitted it until the time of al-Kāmil. After all, its legality was his main concern.

In his account of *ghalā’*, al-Maqrīzī traced the history of “all kinds of catastrophes and ordeals” in Egypt starting with the ancient king Afraws son of Manāwash and ending with Sultan al-Ashraf Sha‘bān (r. 764–78/1363–76). His point here was that these ordeals have been caused by “natural catastrophes sent by God” but that the ordeal of 806 “differs from the aforementioned disasters”³⁸ and may be explained by human corruption: the acquisition of positions by means of bribery, the artificially

³⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 56; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 61.

³⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 61; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 65.

³⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 62–63, 66–67; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 66, 68–69.

³⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 41; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 50.



imposed high cost of land, and the deliberate overproduction of *fulūs*.³⁹ The thrust of this argument is sharpened when we consider that al-Maqrīzī was making an argument about the concept of *ghalā'*, a notion that is weakened in Allouche's otherwise effective translation since he uses a variety of terms—inflation, rise in prices, dearth, etc.—to denote a central feature of al-Maqrīzī's argument.⁴⁰ If we use one of Allouche's terms, "dearth," which connotes a rise in prices as well as a scarcity, the latter of which does not necessarily occur with inflation, we see more clearly that al-Maqrīzī was in fact using all of these episodes as a single phenomenon of analysis to demonstrate that dearth, historically caused by the natural order, could in fact be a disease with an entirely different etiology—similar symptoms, different cause. His point was that the dearth of 806 was fundamentally different from previous episodes, as Allouche himself observed,⁴¹ and that it was theoretically monetarily treatable because it was an inflationary event caused simply by the overproduction of copper money and the resulting replacement of silver as a legal tender with copper—which could never be a legal tender according to religious teaching. Accordingly, the crisis could only be alleviated by human action guided by religiously prescribed economics. The histories of *ghalā'* on the one hand and money on the other, thus, converged in 806 to make the year unique in Egypt's history.

With the influx of copper currency in the Egyptian economy it became standard practice to measure value, not in terms of gold and silver as had previously been practiced, but rather in a money of account known as the *dirham min al-fulūs*—that is to say, a silver dirham's worth of copper money.⁴² With the cessation of the minting of silver, dirhams became so rare that they were available, he claimed, only through auction. But people were accustomed to thinking in terms of dirhams and in effect it came to exist only as an abstract quantity of value used to measure copper coins. This practice led to the widespread use of *dirham fulūs* to measure values of goods and labor costs—a legally untenable situation that was unacceptable from al-Maqrīzī's point of view. The dirham of account came to be unreliable in its value—he claimed that in Cairo the *mithqāl* equaled 150 dirhams of account while in Alexandria the *mithqāl* equaled 300 dirhams of account. "This caused a catastrophe that rendered money useless and foodstuffs scarce; at the same time, necessary goods became unavailable because of the variety of currencies. It is

³⁹Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 43–46, 47 ff; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 52–54, 55 ff.

⁴⁰Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*: "dearth" (pp. 27, 33, 46, 50); "a period of inflation" (pp. 31, 36); "famine" (pp. 27, 28, 29, 37, 40, 41, 47, 49); "grain shortage" (pp. 29, 40, 48); and "high prices"/"prices increased" (pp. 29, 40, 44, 51).

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 13.

⁴²Schultz, "Mamluk Monetary History," 188.



feared that if this should continue the population of this country will be in an unbearable situation."⁴³ And this "unbearable situation" leads us to the heart of the problem.

The inflation of 806 was most obviously exceptional because of its differential effect on the populace. Natural disasters affected everyone, but not the inflation of 806. After a lengthy disquisition on prices, al-Maqrīzī concluded, "Anyone who considers these prices in light of the rate of gold and silver will realize that they have increased only slightly, but if he considers them in relation to the abundance of *fulūs* that has afflicted the people, he will find this is a frightening abomination that is too odious to mention."⁴⁴ Perhaps he should have said "too odious to mention *again*," since in fact he mentioned the abomination earlier in the text in his "Description of the Population,"⁴⁵ in which he argued that the inflation of 806 affected different categories of society in different ways. Those who were in a position to negotiate their income generally did pretty well. Merchants "content themselves only with larger profits, even though a few hours later they will spend the amount they have gained on necessities."⁴⁶ Those dependent on fixed incomes, like *waqf* employees—a group, of course, near and dear to al-Maqrīzī's heart—did poorly.⁴⁷ If this had been a normal period of *ghalā'*, everyone would have been affected.

Al-Maqrīzī's solution here was simple—to re-introduce a silver currency so that values would be based on gold and silver rather than arbitrary values of copper. As mentioned above, the text culminates with a section entitled "The Means to Eradicate the Disease,"⁴⁸ in which al-Maqrīzī outlined his recommendation: "Whenever God guides the person who is entrusted with the destiny of His subjects to the right path, he should respect the gold-silver ratio when striking silver currency. This will lead to an end to this general decay and to a return of prices and costs of labor to the level that existed prior to these ordeals."⁴⁹ This view is based on the conviction that:

⁴³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 72; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 72.

⁴⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 79; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 79.

⁴⁵ The full title translated: "A section stating the division and categories of the population (*al-nās*) and an explanation of all their conditions and characteristics."

⁴⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 74; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 75.

⁴⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 75; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 75.

⁴⁸ The full title translated reads, "A section on eradicating this disease from mankind and setting out a remedy for the disease of the era."

⁴⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 81; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 81.



the currencies that are legally, logically, and customarily acceptable are only those of gold and silver, and that any other [metal] is unsuitable as a currency. By the same token, the situation of the people cannot be sound unless they are obliged to follow the natural and legal course in this regard [i.e., the currency], namely, that they should deal exclusively with gold and silver for pricing goods and estimating labor costs.⁵⁰

The solution was directed at relieving the community of the unfair and difficult conditions produced by the inflation of 806. He concluded his recommendation in "A section explaining the benefits of this plan (*tadbīr*), the gain of which will help the populace":

If God would guide those whom He has entrusted with the welfare of His servants to reinstate gold as the exclusive basis for transactions as it was previously—to link the value of goods and of all [types of] work either to the dinar or to minted silver that would later be adopted as currency and thereby reinstate the silver dirham as [the unit] for measuring the price of goods and the cost of labor—this would lead to the succor of the community, the amelioration of the [general] situation, and the checking of the decay that heralds destruction.⁵¹

Not only was this solution simple, but it was also doomed to fail, as al-Maqrīzī later recognized. But the gist of his argument was that the use of copper as a currency, that is, as a primary means of measuring and storing value and as a means of exchange—distinct from a means to facilitate a transaction by simply making change—was anathema not so much because corrupt officials were making money off of it, but rather because it contravened the law and "monetary *sunnah*." In *Ighāthah al-Ummah*, al-Maqrīzī's concluding advice is presented in his guise as a *muhtasib* of the monetary economy of Egypt, "commanding right and forbidding

⁵⁰Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 80; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 80. This attitude about the exclusivity of gold and silver was by no means unusual. Among his contemporaries, Ibn Khaldūn advocated an exclusive status for gold and silver; *Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (New York, 1958), 3:277: "It was God's wise plan that gold and silver, being rare, should be the standard of value by which the profits and capital accumulation of human beings are measured"; also see 1:168; 2:313. The reluctance of a central authority to administer base coinage is by no means unusual; for example, Queen Elizabeth I declined to undertake such a project; John Craig, *The Mint: A History of the London Mint from A.D. 287 to 1948* (Cambridge, 1953), 248.

⁵¹Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 82–83; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 83.



wrong" (*al-amr bi-al-ma'rūf wa-al-nahy 'an al-munkar*). In this regard he was acting in a long Shafī'i tradition.⁵²

Subsequent events, however, afforded al-Maqrīzī the opportunity to test his solution and to modify his views on money—which brings us to 818 and his *Shudhūr al-'Uqūd fī-Dhikr al-Nuqūd*.

818 AND *SHUDHŪR AL-'UQŪD*: MONETARY HISTORY AS *FADĀ'IL*

As mentioned above, *Shudhūr al-'Uqūd* has typically been read as a source on the history of Islamic money, an approach that has largely obscured al-Maqrīzī's intention in writing it. al-Maqrīzī wrote the *Shudhūr* in response to a directive to write "a refined précis on Islamic monetary matters" (*nabdhah laṭīfah fī umūr al-nuqūd al-islāmīyah*).⁵³ Scholars since Silvestre de Sacy have concluded that it was the Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (r. 815–24/1412–21) who made this request, and the substance of the text, as will be discussed below, bears this conclusion out. Thus the *Shudhūr* may be dated to the years 818–24, although al-Maqrīzī corrected an autograph manuscript in 841.⁵⁴ The request may have been for a treatise on money, or even a history, but as in the *Ighāthah*, al-Maqrīzī used the monetary situation of a particular point in time, which we may take as 818, to support an appeal for action.

Al-Maqrīzī, however, chose not to present his prescription in terms of rectifying *bid'ah* by means of adherence to economic *sunnah*; after all, his reliance on legitimate monetary practice in the *Ighāthah* failed to remedy the crisis of 806. Clearly, by 818 some adjustment was needed, and adjusting the *sunnah* would, of course, have been inappropriate. However, once again, he relied on history to address an economic issue using an approach that he alluded to in his earlier recommendation. By viewing the past in terms of the merits (*faḍā'il*; sg. *faḍīlah*) of monetary precedent, he could sufficiently modify his conclusions in the *Ighāthah* from ten years before in order to produce an effective prescription. For al-Maqrīzī, sound economics then was based on the excellences of predecessors, which required a review of previous monetary exempla. By using the notion of such *faḍā'il* to present his case, al-Maqrīzī in effect composed in the *Shudhūr* a monetary mirror

⁵²Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, 2000), 354.

⁵³Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, ed. Baḥr al-'Ulūm, 2; ed. Eustache, 97.

⁵⁴Note that some of the manuscripts of the *Shudhūr* include the name of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh: "Inspire our master the sultan [al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh] with the . . .," while others simply state "the sultan." But there is an ambiguity to the imperative appeals to "Our master the sultan," which suggests that perhaps al-Maqrīzī's corrections to the text in Ramaḍān 841 (February–March 1438) eliminated these so that the text could be used as an appeal to Barsbāy's successor. Barsbāy fell ill in Sha'bān 841 and died by the end of the year.



for princes. As with the other branches of Islamic statecraft, such knowledge required a grounding in the excellent examples of predecessors. History in the *Shudhūr* comes across clearly as a didactic subject and its role here was to provide advice for sound economic policy. The first part of the lesson may be summed up in the hadith he cited of Musaddad ibn Mirhad that "The dinar and the dirham sundered corruption forever."⁵⁵ But statecraft required addressing new circumstances, and al-Maqrīzī's recommendation to abolish the *dirham al-fulūs* was an attempt to ensure the continuation of meritorious rule.

It has been noted that the *Shudhūr* is largely taken from the section on money in the *Ighāthah* but al-Maqrīzī re-structured the information to suit his particular needs in this context. After prefatory remarks, he began the body of the text with a straightforward history of money organized into "A Section on Ancient Money," "A Section on Islamic Money," and "A Section on the Money of Egypt." Unlike the version in the *Ighāthah*, he ended the latter section with the episode in economic history that al-Maqrīzī wishes to address. Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh came to power in 815, supported by his allies and a pile of silver. In 817 he began minting, and in 818 officially announced, a silver dirham that became known as the Mu'ayyadīyah,⁵⁶ an event that answered al-Maqrīzī's call in the *Ighāthah* for a properly minted silver coinage to accompany the dinar. However, the production of silver did not initially have the effect that al-Maqrīzī had expected in 808, although he recognized later in the *Kitāb al-Sulūk* that the economic situation had indeed improved:

[Shaykh] struck dirhams known as Mu'ayyadīyahs. People exchanged them by count (i.e., not by weight) during his time and the situation of the people improved so the currencies of Egypt become copper, gold in various forms and Mu'ayyadī silver. However, the currency circulating was *fulūs* and the value of labor and the price of goods were calculated in [*fulūs*] as stated earlier.⁵⁷

Consequently he found it necessary in the *Shudhūr al-'Uqūd* to address more directly the issue of the *dirham min al-fulūs*.

The relationship of precious metal and base metal coinages is a central issue in the administration of money. It was a problem that plagued medieval monetary systems on both sides of the Mediterranean and which was not solved in a practical manner until the beginning of the nineteenth century. The requirements are simple:

⁵⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, ed. Baḥr al-'Ulūm, 32; ed. Eustache, 133.

⁵⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, ed. Baḥr al-'Ulūm, 32; ed. Eustache, 133.

⁵⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk*, 3:943; this observation was recorded in his account of Sha'bān 838.



These coins should be tokens—the commodity value should be less than the monetary value, which thus requires that the state authorities should monopolize the issue of base metal coinage and guarantee its exchange with precious metal coins. Finally, the quantity of coins in circulation should be limited to the needs of the economy—determining this need was the most difficult problem to solve.⁵⁸ That al-Maqrīzī did not resolve the issue is not the concern here; rather, it is his effort to marshal the foundation for an economic prescription that warrants our attention.

Al-Maqrīzī organized the *Shudhūr* in such a way as to bring together two moments in Islamic monetary history for comparison of their respective *faḍā'il*. The bulk of the “monetary hadith” discussed in the *Ighāthah*’s section on money are found also in the *Shudhūr*. However, the central section of the *Shudhūr*, given the heading *Waṣl*, connects his historical account to his last section (*Faṣl*) where he makes his recommendations concerning copper money (*wa-ammā al-fulūs . . .*).⁵⁹ The two moments are the issue of the dirhams issued by the Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān and their three merits, which he had cited in the *Ighāthah*, but where, unlike his discussion in the *Ighāthah*, his history of Islamic coinage begins, and the issue of dirhams by the Sultan al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh and their *six* merits, where his account of Egyptian money ends. He managed to present the merits of Shaykh’s silver so as to double those of ‘Abd al-Malik by being slightly redundant: first, they conform to the *sunnah* of the Prophet; second, they follow the way of the believers in following the example of the Rāshidūn caliphs; third, they do not follow the way of the corrupt; fourth, they avoid the avarice of this world; fifth, they put an end to cheating; and sixth, they conform to the counsel of God and the Prophet.⁶⁰ For al-Maqrīzī, Shaykh’s minting of silver coins in 818 was the culmination of his discussion of money in Egypt since they provided a legally prescribed basis for the regime’s monetary system. Gold was not an issue; rather the issue was the presence of an illegal tender that was displacing the rightful role of silver.

In the *Ighāthah*, al-Maqrīzī had simply assumed that, given the proper supply of silver, people would naturally measure value according to gold and silver. In the *Shudhūr*, he explained his revised view:

My astonishment was great that these Mu’ayyadī dirhams, which had the importance and merit that we have previously described,

⁵⁸Carlo Cipolla, “The Big Problem of the Petty Coins,” in *Money, Prices, and Civilization in the Mediterranean World* (Princeton, 1956), 27, 31.

⁵⁹Eustache translates *waṣl* as *transition*; p. 132.

⁶⁰Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, ed. Baḥr al-‘Ulūm, 33–34; ed. Eustache, 133, 135.



and our master the sultan having the power and the glory well-known to all, nevertheless, [simply] supplemented [the *fulūs*] and were counted according to the *fulūs* which God most high never made legal tender.⁶¹

He ended this statement by concluding that "The [coinage that] should supplement (i.e., copper) was supplemented [by silver]." In other words, the legally prescribed status of silver was perverted; what should have been a foundation of the monetary system became simply an accessory to the system. Mu'ayyadī dirhams, counted in terms of *fulūs*, were thus relegated to a subsidiary coinage. By expressing his astonishment, al-Maqrīzī acknowledged that the mere re-introduction of a silver coinage into circulation was an inadequate measure in itself to solve the monetary situation.

To remedy this unacceptable state of affairs, he made the plea: "O God! Inspire our master the sultan with the beneficence of the noble mission to scorn that his currency should supplement others and [rather] that his currency should make other currencies supplement it."⁶² Al-Maqrīzī had recommended in the *Ighāthah* "to link the value of goods and of all [types of] work either to the dinar or to minted silver."⁶³ In the *Shudhūr*, al-Maqrīzī made his recommendation to the sultan more explicit: "to issue a whole decree to our masters the chief judges—God strengthen their religion—that they require the notaries to write land registers, building contracts, marriage contracts, and loan documents only in dirhams." He also recommended that the judges be directed to require that the *muḥtasib* enforce market transactions in dirhams and that government finances be counted in terms of silver currency.⁶⁴

What to do about the copper coinage? In his account of the events of 806 in the *Ighāthah*, he associates the importation of copper with Maḥmūd ibn 'Alī's greed for profits. In the *Shudhūr*, aside from his remarks about Maḥmūd ibn 'Alī, he also observed that:

the Franks undertook the transport of copper wanting to profit from it. The striking of *fulūs* continued for a number of years and the Franks took the dirhams of Egypt to their lands and the people here melted down the copper in demand for profit until it increased in price so that it was on the verge of being a legally valid [money].

⁶¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, ed. Baḥr al-'Ulūm, 34; ed. Eustache, 135.

⁶² Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, ed. Baḥr al-'Ulūm, 35; ed. Eustache, 135.

⁶³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthah*, 82–83; Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 83.

⁶⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, ed. Baḥr al-'Ulūm, 35–36; ed. Eustache, 135, 137.



The *fulūs* circulated to the degree that all goods were valued in it. It came to be said that the dinar was worth so many *fulūs*.⁶⁵

In the *Shudhūr* he justified the importation of copper, the matter that had troubled him so much in the *Ighāthah*. His uncertainty betrays some hesitance in the matter but it would seem that, in principle, the importation of copper did not pose a danger: "It is hoped that God would eliminate this [period of] destitution with the beneficence of the noble mission (of minting silver coins) and," he continued,

I hope—God willing—that the state of affairs would be alleviated [because] if one considers the disks of red copper imported from the land of the Franks, the price of a *qinṭār* of it, and the price of the *qinṭār* is added to the sum of what one spends on it at the mint until it becomes copper money. If that is known, one knows how much one spends for each dinar of copper coinage and if one knows how much each dinar of it is, one knows how much each Mu'ayyadī dirham is. And in this there is an honorable transaction (*shay' sharīf*)⁶⁶ . . . if this copper coinage is struck it becomes the currency of the people which is the Mu'ayyadī silver dirham and the Mu'ayyadī copper *fulūs*.⁶⁷

Al-Maqrīzī seems not to have been aware of the importance of regulating the quantity of copper money in circulation. To be sure, he had observed that the excess production of copper in the 790s led to the crisis of 806 but for him the greater problem was the loss of silver coinage. The implication of his hope, quoted above, was that if the minting was carried out at cost—without taking a profit—then all would be well. That is to say that normal demand would be sufficient to allow the authorities "to control the quantity of petty coins in circulation."⁶⁸ Thus the re-institution of silver coinage in 818 was the first part of the solution, what was required then was its use as a measure of value. What he did not fully grasp was the relationship between the two. His assumption that silver would "absorb," or be supplemented by, copper, becoming the primary means of monetary measure, was a view that was not tenable.

Was al-Maqrīzī's advice heeded? This is a difficult problem to address since official wages and prices might not be measured in the same units of value. Wage

⁶⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, ed. Baḥr al-'Ulūm, 39; ed. Eustache, 141.

⁶⁶ Some manuscript versions read *sirr sharīf*; ed. Baḥr al-'Ulūm, 40; ed. Eustache, 141, n. 260.

⁶⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Shudhūr*, ed. Baḥr al-'Ulūm, 40; ed. Eustache, 141.

⁶⁸ Cipolla, "Big Problem," 33.



data from *waqfiyāt* from the reign of Shaykh are sparse, but indicate that up until 818 values were measured in *dirham fulūs* while those after, and until the succeeding reign (al-Muẓaffar Aḥmad II ibn Shaykh [824/1421]), were measured in half dirhams (*niṣf dirham*). This aspect of the problem requires further examination.⁶⁹

CONCLUSION: AL-MAQRĪZĪ'S ECONOMIC HISTORY

To the extent that the *Ighāthah* and the *Shudhūr* were written for particular authorities, the essence of the two works lies in their function as advice literature to ensure the legal conduct of monetary affairs in 808 and a decade or so later. al-Maqrīzī expressed his reasoning and recommendations in terms of the discourse of hadith and *faḍīlah*. Correct economic, and particularly monetary, policy rested on sound religious teaching. However, the scope of these two works, historical in approach but not histories per se, is far wider. The question arises, what was the impact of his economic views—historically grounded as they were—on his ideas about history?

Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid has pointed out the significance of 806 in his introduction to the *musawwadah* of al-Maqrīzī's *Khīṭaṭ*.⁷⁰ The crisis of 806 manifested itself in a number of ways—the collapse of markets, religious institutions, and other urban features—all of these, al-Maqrīzī wrote, were due to the economic crisis. Indeed, the *Khīṭaṭ* was to include, according to the Būlāq edition's introduction (which I believe is not precisely datable), a chapter on the causes of the ruin of Egypt, which if it followed the approach taken in other parts of the *Khīṭaṭ*, would have associated signs of economic hard times with the monetary crisis of 806. The finality of the crisis of 806 as depicted in parts of the *Khīṭaṭ* is matched by its depiction in the *Ighāthah*. Sayyid has suggested that the *Ighāthah* may be taken as the fulfillment of the intention he expressed in the introduction to the *Khīṭaṭ*.⁷¹

However, in the *Shudhūr*, Egypt's problem was not economic ruination. Historians of Cairo, most recently André Raymond in his history of the city, have noted Cairo's re-growth from the teens of the fifteenth century, both in the center as well as in Būlāq—perhaps not to previous levels, but growth nevertheless.⁷² Al-Maqrīzī's implicit recognition of these developments, reported in the *Kitāb al-Sulūk* as well as the *Khīṭaṭ*, might suggest why he never completed the *Khīṭaṭ*'s chapter on ruin. It would then seem likely that al-Maqrīzī advocated this explanation

⁶⁹This data comes from one source. See Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge, 2000), 131.

⁷⁰Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid, "Muqaddimah," in *Musawwadat Kitāb Mawā'iz wa-al-I'tibār fī Dhikr al-Khīṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār*, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid (London, 1995/1416), 65–66.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²André Raymond, *Cairo*, trans. Willard Wood (Cambridge, 2000), 171–88.



for Egypt's ruin in the years between the writing of the *Ighāthah* in 808 and his recognition of a rather more stable economic situation in Egypt after Shaykh's minting of silver coin in 818. By the end of Shaykh's rule the economic history of Egypt must have appeared to him to be more complex than it had appeared in 806, involving instead the waning and waxing of economic fortune. In this light, these two texts may be read as an attempt to achieve a conceptual framework—a kind of economic *Muqaddimah*—for the history of Egypt. Of course, although the two books do not achieve the grand vision of Ibn Khaldūn's masterpiece, they nevertheless represent an attempt to understand the role of the economy in Egypt's history.

At a broader level, while in these two books al-Maqrīzī has provided us with insight into his views of the economy and of the state's role in managing the economy, the *Ighāthah* and the *Shudhūr* also provide us with considerably more insight into his views on the practice of history. History was a means to remedy the ills of the age, whether by means of the exhortation of the market inspector to save the community or the pearls of instruction offered by the princely advisor. In either case, by no means was al-Maqrīzī an impartial observer of the economic past; these two books make arguments about issues of immediate concern. What about his other, longer historical works? The *Khiṭaṭ*, it would seem, made an argument that was never completed. But this characteristic—the lack of impartiality—should not be considered so much a personal foible rather than a salient feature of the historiography of the age. Tarif Khalidi has argued that this era was dominated by a historiography of politics. Moreover, history was no longer written as entertainment, but rather “as a moral sermon.”⁷³ Even after al-Maqrīzī's retreat from public service, he continued to act as *muḥtasib*, offering advice by means of his historical work. After all, history properly understood should always provide the lessons for correct action. Consequently, the boundaries between advice and history become blurred. Al-Maqrīzī, like his contemporaries, was at root captivated by political power and saw his role as a historian to engage in the field of power, not with the weapons of war as the Mamluks were trained to do, but rather with the ultimately more durable weapons of religious learning and knowledge of the community's past.

⁷³Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Age* (Cambridge, 1994), chap. 5, “History and *Siyasa*,” 216.

