

# MAMLŪK STUDIES REVIEW

XXIV



2021

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MIDDLE EAST DOCUMENTATION CENTER (MEDOC)  
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



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2012: Elias Ibrahim Muhanna, Harvard University, “Encyclopaedism of the Mamluk Period: The composition of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī’s (d. 1333) *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*.”

2014: Noah Gardiner, University of Michigan, “Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture: Aḥmad al-Būnī and His Readers through the Mamlūk Period.”



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## Th. Emil Homerin, 1955–2020

The fields of Religious and Islamic Studies suffered a great loss with the passing of Th. Emil Homerin in Rochester, New York, on December 26, 2020. Those who knew him personally will always remember his generosity, kindness, and insights. To this lucky group, we must also add all those who read and benefited from his sensitive and thoughtful work on Sufi poetry over the years. Taken as a whole, we will all miss his ability to convey some of the most complex and lyrical



aspects of mystical thought through his brilliant translations and analyses. Th. Emil Homerin was truly one of a kind; a humanist to the very core.

Homerin was born in Pekin, Illinois, in 1955. As an undergraduate, he had already developed a passion for the academic study of religion, especially mysticism. At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he completed his B.A. in 1977 and an M.A. the following year, he chose Indo-Iranian mysticism as his area of concentration. He subsequently ventured to the University of Chicago's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, where he focused on medieval Arabic mystical poetry, a subject that remained dear to his heart throughout his scholarly career. In 1987, Homerin was awarded a Ph.D. with Honors for his dissertation "Filled with a Burning

Desire: Ibn al-Fārid—Poet, Mystic, and Saint," which he completed under the supervision of Professor Jaroslav Stetkevych.

Best recognized for his astute renderings of Arabic mystical poetry into English, Emil showed an extraordinary skill for connecting two of the most difficult and personal forms of expression: poetic language and mystical experience. He did so with such ease and sensitivity to both aspects that reading his work trans-



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ports us on a seamless trajectory into the distant and private world of his poets, male and female. From the classical themes and common cultural topoi rendered as the spiritual journey of the thirteenth-century Egyptian poet-saint Ibn al-Fāriḍ to the devotional passion of the sixteenth-century woman mystic ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā’ūniyah, Homerin presented us with equally lyrical and subtly analytical engagements. Only a profound humanist can accomplish that.

Emil’s intellectual interests were wide-ranging. He studied cemeteries and in the University of Rochester’s Department of Religion and Classics he taught courses on the American spaces that commemorate death. He often took his students to the historic and beautiful Mt. Hope cemetery to understand how these spaces of death give life to the individuals and the societies that built them. He used to pepper his stories about cemeteries with examples of posthumous humor and epigraphic thrill, as he discussed their architectural artistry and got his students to admire their natural settings as though they were botanical gardens. Perhaps this interest in cemeteries helped him deal with his own mortality. During his brief illness, he reminded us that life and death are cyclical phases, caught up in a dynamic that should not be feared but accepted as we do day and night and the changing seasons.

Emil joined the faculty at the University of Rochester in 1988, after stints at DePaul University and George William College in Chicago and Temple University in Philadelphia. At the time of his death, Emil was the author of seven books, one edited volume, and numerous articles, book chapters, and encyclopedia entries. In addition, he was an award-winning teacher, astute administrator, and a first-rate colleague.

He also had a passion for many other topics, from comic books to Biblical exegesis to supporting the local arts and music scene in Rochester. In all of his diverse interests, he looked for, and found, connective threads among different people, cultures, and history. For Emil, the pleasure was in detecting links while always acknowledging a right to be different.

Emil’s most passionate interests were found at home, with his life-long partner Nora, whom he married in 1977, and with his two sons, Luke and Elias. During his research and work, Nora was always present as his main support and greatest love. Everyone who knew Emil will fondly remember how his eyes lit up at every mention of Nora. Colleagues and students at the University of Rochester will remember with fondness Emil and Nora’s famous dessert receptions at their house for graduating seniors and their families. Not active on social media, Emil preferred his privacy, writing his own poetry of life at home with Nora, and tending to daily chores and their flower garden with the same passion as he did with obscure Arabic expressions.

Emil has surely brightened up some other world with his arrival and has left ours a bit colder and darker. His memory and his writings remain with us for always.





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## **Michael Hamilton Burgoyne, 1944–2021**

The fields of medieval studies and Jerusalem studies have lost a major scholar this year with the death of Michael Hamilton Burgoyne on 21 September 2021 at the Infirmary of Edinburgh. His monumental book *Mamluk Jerusalem: An Architectural Study* was published by the World of Islam Festival Trust in 1987 to great scholarly acclaim. It followed many years of surveys and architectural analysis he undertook in Jerusalem's Old City, in work supported by the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem (BSAJ). His book has stood the test of time and even today is regarded as one of the most important books ever published on the architecture of medieval Islamic Jerusalem.



Michael Hamilton Burgoyne addressing a conference at Providence College in June 2017 (photo credit: Patricia Krupinski/Providence College).



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Born in 1944 (with a twin brother) at Irvine, Ayrshire, Scotland, to parents who were in the fields of education and medicine, Burgoyne had, from a very early age, a fascination with draughtsmanship. This interest probably eventually led him to study architecture and conservation at the Edinburgh Heriot-Watt University, graduating in 1969. Following his marriage in 1974, Burgoyne moved to Jerusalem to undertake the comprehensive survey of Mamluk buildings there, and he immediately became entranced by the city and its people. He then went to the University of Oxford to complete a D.Phil. thesis (1979) based on his Jerusalem research, and decided to learn Arabic.

Following a brief stint as a Visiting Agha Khan Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1981–82), Burgoyne became a TAVO Research Fellow at the University of Tübingen for a short while (1984) before taking up a position as Lecturer in Islamic Architecture at the Mackintosh School of Architecture in Glasgow University (1986–89). In 1987 he was entrusted with preparing a proposal for the restoration and conservation of the old downtown core of the city of Nablus, work that was sponsored by the British Council. Burgoyne was appointed Senior Architect in Historic Scotland in Edinburgh in 1989, where he worked until his retirement. He was a proud member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) from 1976, and an Associate of the Royal Incorporation of Architects of Scotland (ARIAS) from 1978.

Burgoyne's passion for the architecture of the Near East never ceased: in 1999 he served on the Medieval and Ottoman Survey committee for the Council of British Research in the Levant (CBRL) and in 2006 he became the project architect for the White Monastery Documentation Project of the Yale Egyptological Institute in Egypt. While not a prolific writer, Burgoyne was fastidious about providing the scholarly world with well-documented research, presented with precision and style. Most of his efforts went into *Mamluk Jerusalem*, which he began preparing for publication in 1985, with a contribution of additional historical research provided by D. S. Richards. In 1993 and 1999, Burgoyne published two important papers on the gateways leading to the Ḥaram al-Sharīf (in *Bayt al-Maqdis: 'Abd al Malik's Jerusalem*, Parts 1–2, ed. J. Raby). This was followed by a paper on the east wall of the Ḥaram al-Sharīf, which was published in 2000 (in *Ottoman Jerusalem*, ed. R. Hillenbrand and S. Auld), and a number of other papers dealing with various architectural features from the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. His 2009 paper on the "Smaller Domes in the Haram al-Sharif" made the significant point that the upper platform of the Ḥaram was expanded in the Ayyubid period (in *Ayyubid Jerusalem: The Holy City in Context 1187–1250*, ed. R. Hillenbrand and S. Auld). I am told that Burgoyne's last visit to Jerusalem was in May 2016, when he met with scholars Isam Awwad and Beatrice St. Laurent for a visit to the Ḥaram.



The last time I saw Michael was at “Marking the Sacred: The Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif,” a 2017 conference organized by Joan Branham and Beatrice St. Laurent at Providence College in Rhode Island in the United States. He seemed frail, but at the same time had a smile on his face. After all, the conference was on the subject that he loved the most: Jerusalem and the Ḥaram al-Sharīf.

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## Jean-Claude Garcin, 1934–2021

Jean-Claude Garcin passed away on October 22, 2021. He was 87 years old (October 3, 1934–October 22, 2021).<sup>1</sup>

A historian of medieval Islam (agrégé d'histoire, thesis with Gaston Wiet, then Claude Cahen), lecturer then professor at the University of Provence, he was an outstanding teacher. All those who attended his lectures remember the depth of his historical thought, magnified by a certain theatrical sense. Born in Marseille, he did not deny this southern side which made him refuse all the Parisian positions, notably the succession to Claude Cahen at the Sorbonne. In his short memoirs, *Miettes d'histoire personnelle (Bits of personal history)*, he writes with humor, having heard his voice recorded for a



conference commemorating the millennium of the foundation of Cairo given in the presence of Nasser: “I discovered that I spoke Arabic with a Marseille accent.”

As a teacher, he was an assistant at the University of Tunis (1959–61), then in a high school in Senegal (1961–63), and at the University of Algiers (1967–70), where he taught in Arabic. After his second stay in Cairo, he was appointed lecturer at the University of Provence in 1972 in the Department of History, then professor in the Department of Oriental Languages, where he remained until his retirement in 2000. With his colleagues Claude Audebert, André Roman, and Charles Vial, specialists in the Arabic language, and Gilbert Delanoue, Robert Mantran, and André Raymond, historians of the Near East, he co-founded the Research and

<sup>1</sup>Quotes are from his “Miettes d'histoire personnelle,” *Les Cahiers de Tunisie* 68, 2014 (2018), pp. 167–202, and from the article “Les soufis dans la ville mamelouke d'Égypte: Histoire du soufisme et histoire globale,” in *Le développement du soufisme en Égypte à l'époque mamelouke*, ed. Richard McGregor and Adam Sabra (Cairo: IFAO, 2005), pp. 11–40.





Studies Group on the Near East (GREPO), which later became a component of the Institute for Research and Studies on the Arab and Muslim World (IREMAM).

His research first led him to urban history, conceived as being part of social history, with this considerable work—his second thesis (*thèse d'État*)—on a city in Upper Egypt, *Qūṣ: un centre musulman en Haute-Égypte*, written and published (in 1976 and republished in 2005) at the IFAO, where he was a scientific member for 6 years, in two stays (1963–67 and 1970–72).

While at the IFAO, he participated in archaeological excavations in Nubia, where he was able to witness, with the attention to simple people that characterizes each of his stays abroad, “the descent on boats of the Nubian populations forced to leave their villages and their fields because of the construction of the Aswan High Dam.”

His presence during the archaeological excavations of the IFAO was part of his “service obligations.” In addition to those of Nubia, he participated, on the edge of the Egyptian delta, in those of the Coptic hermitages of the Kellia, which led him to an epistemological reflection that served him many years later: “I don’t think of myself as an archaeologist because of those few months spent on the sites, but I think it was indeed those excavations that gave me the idea of what a ‘stratigraphy’ was, which served me a great deal later in my study of the *Thousand and One Nights*, drawing my attention to the stratigraphy of the texts, which also helps to date them.”

His research on Qūṣ gives us a glimpse of spaces, at different scales (the city, the province, the empire) and to grasp their mutations and changes in polarity, research results that still feed the reflections of current researchers.

His work continued with the publication at the IFAO—with Jacques Revault and other colleagues—of *L’Habitat traditionnel dans les pays musulmans autour de la Méditerranée* in three volumes (in 1989, 1990, and 1991), a reflection on domestic architecture, followed by *Les Palais et maisons du Caire, XIIIe–XVIe siècles* (Cnrs, 1982) with Jacques Revault and Bernard Maury. Later, on the initiative of Claude Nicolet, then director of the École française de Rome, a collective research project on the Mediterranean megacities over the long term was born, and Jean-Claude Garcin led the group of medievalists who, for the problem of large medieval cities, could only be the production of researchers on the Arab world. This work resulted in the collective book *Grandes villes méditerranéennes du monde musulman médiéval* (ÉfR 2000, reedited 2019) and a few articles in *Mégapoles méditerranéennes* (Efr-MMSH, 2000).

In 1986–87, he spent his “sabbatical year” at the Dumbarton Oaks Research Center in Washington, which houses a magnificent library. He writes in his *Miettes*: “It was there that I realized that I could not, by myself, write the book that was to replace Robert Mantran’s manual on the history of the medieval Muslim world.” Thus, he set about writing the three collective volumes, in 1300 pages, of the *Nouvelle Clio: États sociétés et cultures du monde musulmans médiéval, Xe–XVe*



s. (PUF, 1995, 2000, and 2000), which rendered many summer vacations studious. The first volume, *L'évolution politique et sociale*, was intended to present the framework of events. Volume 2, *Société et culture*, presented economic and social data as well as the life of the mind (religious sciences, mysticism, philosophy), literature, and artistic productions. Volume 3, *Problèmes et perspectives de recherche*, is more ambitious and offers in-depth reflections on historical phenomena and raises the question of the reasons for social developments.

His excellent knowledge of the corpus of medieval Cairo authors led him to publish numerous articles on social, intellectual, and economic history. He was also a pioneer in the publication and exploitation, together with the late Mustafa Taher, of archival documents such as the *waqfs*, finding in these new sources for the knowledge of the urban and social history of Cairo.

As early as the 1970s, a time when this approach was the prerogative only of historians of the medieval West, Jean-Claude Garcin used hagiographic materials, jointly exploiting data drawn from al-Sha'rānī (1492–1565), the founder of a Sufi order, and those of the historian al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442) to study the place of Sufis in fifteenth-century Cairo, who represented, according to him, the spiritual armature of society and who were then the guardians of a definite urban space. These religious texts, he said, take on a new political significance when Sufis appear as recourses against an unjust system.

Concerned with the epistemology of history, in “Les soufis dans la ville mamelouke d'Égypte globale,” a chapter published at the IFAO in 2006 in the book *Le Développement du soufisme à l'époque mamelouke*, he uncovered the use that the historian could make of these texts. Questioning his legitimacy as a historian to talk about spiritual masters without having first studied the doctrinal texts and mystical treatises necessary to grasp their inner message, and without even being a Sufi himself, unlike many historians in this field, he nonetheless concludes that the historian's study of this phenomenon is useful: “The evolution of Sufism is thus a revelator, among others, of the changes that affect the city in its monumental framework and in the extension of urbanization, the social groups that live there, the culture that is produced there.”

The research that he carried out in recent years developed towards literary history. He began with *Lectures du Roman de Baybars* (Parenthèses-MMSH, 2003), then continued with a considerable work on the *Thousand and One Nights*, for the production of which he lived a monastic existence: “isolating myself from the world, no longer attending any seminars, no longer giving any lectures, no longer traveling.” He published this work first in a scholarly book: *Pour une lecture historique des Mille et Une Nuits* (Actes Sud, Sindbad, 2013), and then in a book that he wanted to be readable by the general public: *Les Mille et Une Nuits et l'Histoire* (Non Lieu, 2016).



Throughout his life, as Jean-Claude Garcin expresses it in his *Miettes*, his resistance to authority, his distaste for pomp, and his concern for the people whose history he studied have been a guiding thread. Throughout his work, one feels his empathy towards the medieval popular masses struck by immense distress as a result of epidemics, famines, and the rapine of the amirs, which he expressed thus: “It remains that the simply historical approach is not a ‘cold’ approach. Sympathy and respect for people remain necessary conditions for historical work. For my part, the discovery of the Sufis in the *Ṭabaqāt* of Shaʿrānī, when I had not yet begun my research on a more global history of Egypt, and the sympathy that most of them inspired in me, accompanied me thereafter and allowed me to better understand this country.”

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## Mongol Origins in Mamluk Texts: An *Origo Gentis* in Ibn al-Dawādārī's *Durar al-Tijān* and *Kanz al-Durar*

*On the Qarāṭāgh Mountain lived many powerful and vicious wild animals. Therefore, despite the riches of the land, no humans set foot there. At a great distance to this mountain was the land of Tibet. One day, a Tibetan woman had entered the valleys of this land searching for firewood, only to go into labor and give birth to a son. Having nothing to cover him with, she went to find some grass to wrap him in, when an eagle snatched him up and flew away with him. The eagle dropped the newborn at the foot of the Qarāṭāgh, where he fell right into a lioness' den, "as God the Exalted wanted him to." The lioness had just borne her own cubs and nursed and raised the baby boy with her own cubs, as God had filled her with compassion for him.*

So begins the story of the Mongols according to an origin legend as recounted to us by the Mamluk author Ibn al-Dawādārī (d. after 735/1336): this baby boy was to be the ancestor of the great Mongol conqueror Chinggis Khan. Ibn al-Dawādārī included two connected origin stories about the Turks and Mongols in both his surviving works, *Kanz al-durar* and *Durar al-tijān*. Well aware of their singularity within the Arabic historiographical tradition—no parallel versions have been discovered as of yet—Ibn al-Dawādārī states that maybe “no one has mentioned them in their histories because they do not know about them, and because there are things in there that do not agree with the pure religion [i.e., Islam].”<sup>1</sup> This has caused other historians to only relate the story of the Mongols from Chinggis Khan onwards, rather than including the Mongols' full history, he says.<sup>2</sup> It is

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<sup>1</sup>Abū Bakr ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Aybak ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān wa-ghurar tawārīkh al-azmān*, ed. in *Die Epitome der Universalchronik Ibn-Ad-Dawādārīs im Verhältnis zur Langfassung: eine quellenkritische Studie zur Geschichte der Ägyptischen Mamluken*, ed. Grunhild Graf (Berlin, 1990), 51. See also Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmi' al-ghurar*, vol. 7, ed. Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāh 'Āshūr (Cairo, 1972), 217.

<sup>2</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:224.



indeed true that some contemporary scholars had little to offer on this subject. As al-Dimashqī (d. 727/1327) aptly put it, little was known about them, because “they were not mentioned on the tongues of the people” before they began their conquests, due to the vast distance that separated them from the Muslim world.<sup>3</sup> There is more than just its uniqueness, however, that makes the legend presented by Ibn al-Dawādārī fascinating.

Ulrich Haarmann, who edited part of Ibn al-Dawādārī’s *Kanz al-durar*, was the first to study these two stories, or as he calls them, on account of the connection that was forged between them, a “Turco-Mongolian” origin story. In several of his articles he not only provided a summary of this passage, but also analysed its contents in the context of Turkish influences on Mamluk intellectual and literary culture. According to Haarmann, Ibn al-Dawādārī—as well as other *awlād al-nās*—served as a mediator between these two worlds, which is exemplified by the way the author used material of Turkish heritage in his Arabic chronicle, including these origin stories.<sup>4</sup> In this article I want to look at the Mongol origin story in Ibn al-Dawādārī’s text from another angle, namely from the perspective of *origines gentium* (sing. *origo gentis*), the literary genre of myths describing the origin and descent of peoples, with a particular focus on the function this story had for Ibn al-Dawādārī’s contemporaries.

## The Genre of *Origines Gentium*

*Origines gentium* tend to begin in a mythical past. As Walter Pohl and Daniel Mahoney have pointed out, these narratives often, but not always, contain two “divides.” The first is the passage from the divine, supernatural, and mythological to

<sup>3</sup>Shams al-Dīn al-Ansārī al-Dimashqī, *Kitāb nukhbat al-dahr fī ‘ajā’ib al-barr wa-al-baḥr* (St. Petersburg, 1865), 264.

<sup>4</sup>Ulrich Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān und Čingiz Ḥān bei den ägyptischen Mamluken,” *Der Islam: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des Islamischen Orients* 51 (1974): 1–36; idem, “Turkish Legends in the Popular Historiography of Medieval Egypt,” in *Proceedings of the VIth Congress of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Visby 13–16 August, Stockholm 17–19 August, 1972*, ed. Frithiof Rundgren (Stockholm and Leiden, 1975), 97–107; idem, “Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33, no. 1 (1988): 81–114; idem, “‘Großer Vater Mond’ und ‘Schwarzer Löwenjunge’—eine mongolisch-kiptschakische Ursprungssage in arabischer Überlieferung,” in *Die Mongolen in Asien und Europa*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Jan Kusber (Frankfurt am Main, 1997); idem, “Mongols and Mamluks: Forgotten Villains and Heroes of Arab History,” in *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies: Proceedings of the Third Summer Academy of the Working Group Modernity and Islam Held at the Orient Institute of the German Oriental Society in Beirut*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Andreas Pflitsch (Würzburg, 2001), 165–76. See also Haarmann, “Quellen zur Geschichte des islamischen Ägyptens,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 38 (1982): 201–10.



the humans of legend. The second is the move from these legendary narratives to a recognizable past, a history, set in known places, which is where the connection of the contemporary people to this mythical past takes place.<sup>5</sup> These stories appear in a variety of texts, from world histories to administrative texts.<sup>6</sup> Analysis of this genre has so far been focused mostly on medieval Europe,<sup>7</sup> with much less attention having been paid to the uses, circulation, and contents of these stories elsewhere, including in the premodern Islamic world. The recent publication of a special issue of *The Medieval History Journal* titled “Narratives of Ethnic Origins: Eurasian Perspectives” (2018)—in which traditions from various parts of Eurasia are discussed (medieval Europe and the Mediterranean, South Arabia, Tibet, and the Central Asian steppes)—is therefore a very welcome addition to the scholarly corpus. It is a step toward a more inclusive analysis of patterns, parallels in, and functions of, this type of stories, as well as allowing local and periodical trends to come into sharper focus.

It is to this scholarly pursuit that I wish to contribute in this article, by analyzing in detail the Mongol origin story as given by Ibn al-Dawādārī. Where in the past these stories may have been studied primarily in order to reconstruct distant folk traditions or even to try to unearth a people’s “actual” origins and/or historic beliefs, they are now used more and more to reveal their authors’ concerns and those of the societies the authors lived in.<sup>8</sup> Even when these stories seem to contain material from older sources, it is adapted to the authors’ present, purpose, and perspective.<sup>9</sup> This is evident in the way in which medieval European authors frequently used *origines gentium* of their own peoples for political ends, such as the legitimization of rulers or the justification of territorial claims.<sup>10</sup> But origin stories were also told about outsiders—narratives that, more often than not, did

<sup>5</sup>Walter Pohl, “Narratives of Origin and Migration in Early Medieval Europe: Problems of Interpretation,” *The Medieval History Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 206.

<sup>6</sup>Patrick J. Geary, *Women at the Beginning* (Princeton and Oxford, 2006), 18–19.

<sup>7</sup>The works of, and debates between—to name but a few—Walter Pohl, Herwig Wolfram, Walter Goffart, Patrick Geary, Alheydis Plassmann, and Shami Ghosh come to mind.

<sup>8</sup>Geary, *Women at the Beginning*, 19–20. See also, for instance, Pohl, “Narratives,” 198–200.

<sup>9</sup>See for instance the way the role of women develops in medieval *origines gentium*, as described by Geary. Some fascinating examples of such changes in oral cultures can be found in Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (London and Nairobi, 1985), passim, e.g., 118–19, 176–77.

<sup>10</sup>Susan Reynolds, “Medieval Origines Gentium and the Community of the Realm,” *History: The Journal of The Historical Association* 68, no. 224 (1983): 378–90; idem, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984), 258–59; Alan V. Murray, “Ethnic Identity in the Crusader States: The Frankish Race and the Settlement of Outremer,” in *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson, and Alan V. Murray (Leeds, 1995), 66–67; Alheydis Plassmann, *Origo gentis: Identitäts- und Legitimitätsstiftung in früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Herkunftserzählungen* (Berlin, 2006), 17.





not correspond to the stories those peoples themselves related about their origins.<sup>11</sup> Of course, these stories reflect a broader interest in other peoples, their histories, and places in the world. But just like *origines gentium* about one's own people, these too served purposes beyond simply relating a people's mythical history. They frequently show us the images and perceptions their narrators held about their subjects, as well as explanations for, and interpretations of, present-day concerns they had.<sup>12</sup>

As I will show, this particular story about the origin of the Mongols offers explanations for phenomena and interpretations of historical events related to the Mongols (shedding light on medieval Islamic concerns about the Mongols along the way). Not only does it explain the provenance of this previously unknown people that overran the east of the Muslim world in the seventh/thirteenth century, it also accounts for other parts of the Mongols', and their enemies', history—from their methods of warfare to their relationship with the Turks. Contemporary phenomena are thus explained through this *origo gentis* of an outside group. This shows how these stories are flexible and dynamic, which is also reflected in the way that this particular *origo gentis* contains echoes of the Mongols' own interpretation of their history, as well as the versions presented by some of their vassals, underlining the flexibility of these stories to be repurposed for other goals by other authors/narrators. As it is not generally well known and I wish to refer to certain aspects of it in a detailed manner, I will first summarize the story and relate the way Ibn al-Dawādārī claims to have learned the contents of the legend

<sup>11</sup>See for instance the many Greek stories describing foreign peoples as discussed by Elias J. Bickerman, "Origines Gentium," *Classical Philology* 47, no. 2 (1952): 65–81, as well as Herodotus' version of the Scythian origin story (Geary, *Women at the Beginning*, 12–14).

<sup>12</sup>One of the few such stories that has been studied in this light, and which has various elements in common with the Mongols' *origo gentis* in the abovementioned texts, is William of Tyre's (ca. 1130–84/86) origin story for the Turks, which he discussed under the heading "De ortu et prima origine gentis Turcorum" (Concerning the source and the first origin of the Turkish race). Alan V. Murray has shown that William's inclusion of this story was clearly triggered by the military danger posed by the Seljuk military forces in the region. Apart from this, Murray has also shown how this story adheres to the typical features of the European *origo gentis* genre as described by Herwig Wolfram, as well as showing how William of Tyre's use of biblical echoes—the Book of Ezekiel, to be precise—provides a framework for explaining the Turkish military gains *vis-à-vis* the Crusader states. We can thus see how contemporary concerns not only prompted William of Tyre to include this story, but how they also influenced its shape and contents. See Alan V. Murray, "William of Tyre and the Origin of the Turks: Observations on Possible Sources of the *Gesta Orientalium Principum*," in *Dei gesta per Francos: Etudes sur les croisades dédiées à Jean Richard*, ed. Michel Balard, Benjamin Z. Kedar, and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Aldershot, 2001), 217–29. For Wolfram's analysis, see Herwig Wolfram, "Le genre de l'*Origo gentis*," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 68, no. 4 (1990): 800–1. See also idem, "Origo et Religio: Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Early Medieval Texts," *Early Medieval Europe* 3 (1994): 35–36; Plassmann, *Origo gentis*, 360–62.



before turning to my analysis, showing how this *origo gentis* of the Mongols is an excellent example of the explanatory function of these stories, as well as of their adaptability to new contexts and audiences.

### **Ibn al-Dawādārī and the Mongol *Origo Gentis***

Abū Bakr ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aybak al-Dawādārī, known as Ibn al-Dawādārī (686/1289–after 735/1336), wrote several works, of which two survive: the universal chronicle *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmi‘ al-ghurar* (The treasure of pearls and the collection of the finest), which stretches over several volumes, and its abridgement *Durar al-tijān wa-ghurar tawārikh al-azmān* (The pearls of the crowns and the finest of the histories of the ages).<sup>13</sup> For *Durar al-tijān*, Ibn al-Dawādārī began collecting information in 709 (1309–10), he says, and began writing in Ṣafar 731 (November/December 1330), finishing in Rabī‘ II 732 (January 1332).<sup>14</sup> *Kanz al-durar* contains reports until 735/1335, and so was finished later. While much information in *Durar al-tijān* corresponds to that in *Kanz al-durar*, it is more than a summary, as *Durar al-tijān* also contains material that the multi-volume history lacks.<sup>15</sup>

Ibn al-Dawādārī, as one of the *awlād al-nās*, belonged to the country’s elite. His father ‘Abd Allāh had been in the service of the amir Sayf al-Dīn Balbān al-Rūmī al-Dawādār al-Zāhirī al-Bunduqdārī, and he was therefore known by the *nisbah* “al-Dawādārī.”<sup>16</sup> The author’s father and mother were of Turkish descent and he was, consequently, familiar with Turkish tradition. At the same time, however, he was born, raised, and educated in an Arabic cultural environment. His Turkish background, Haarmann has argued, had a significant influence on Ibn al-Dawādārī’s works. Not only did he transcribe and translate Turkish names and terms, he also included Central Asian traditions in his work, leading Haarmann to describe him as a witness to the beginning of the use of Turkish themes, mo-

<sup>13</sup>Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 9–11; Grunhild Graf, *Die Epitome der Universalchronik Ibn-ad-Dawādārīs im Verhältnis zur Langfassung: Eine quellenkritische Studie zur Geschichte der ägyptischen Mamluken* (Berlin, 1990), 11.

<sup>14</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 10.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 96; Haarmann, “Quellen zur Geschichte des islamischen Ägyptens,” 203–4. Page 204 contains a list of the most significant passages that either add to or differ from the corresponding passages in *Kanz al-durar*.

<sup>16</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 9; Hans Robert Roemer, “Einleitung,” in *Kanz al-durar*, vol. 9 (Cairo, 1960), 16–17; Ulrich Haarmann, *Quellenstudien zur frühen Mamlukenzeit* (Freiburg, 1970), 67; idem, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 7–9; idem, “Turkish Legends,” 99; idem, “Arabic in Speech,” 110–11.



tifs, and *topoi* in Arabic historical writing in the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries.<sup>17</sup>

Prime examples of this are the connected origin stories of the Turks and the Mongols, who were widely considered to be ethnically closely related. Ibn al-Dawādārī included them in both *Durar al-tijān*, under the years 615 (abbreviated)<sup>18</sup> and 628 (1230–31),<sup>19</sup> and in *Kanz al-durar*, under the year 618 (1221–22).<sup>20</sup> While, on the one hand, he himself emphasizes the uniqueness of this narrative, as we have seen above, he is at the same time presenting himself as highly knowledgeable about it. As Haarmann pointed out, Ibn al-Dawādārī displays pride in his knowledge of Turkish (“unverkennbarer Eitelkeit”) when transcribing and translating words and phrases<sup>21</sup>—an approach that was clearly a conscious decision, as Ibn al-Dawādārī himself points out that he “left some expressions in Turkish in it.”<sup>22</sup> Another piece of proof the author offers for his familiarity with these traditions is his interpolation of another short Turkish story in *Durar al-tijān*: that of Depe Göz (Dibā Kūz).<sup>23</sup> That story serves, he writes,

so that the reader knows that I am informed about the wealth of the circumstances of these people, and to not deny what I have put down about their affairs and events, and to put that in his [the reader’s] heart and ears.<sup>24</sup>

So, Ibn al-Dawādārī argues, he has the required credentials to inform the reader of the causes of the early circumstances of the Mongols and their “exodus” (*khurūj*). He does so by means of what we could call a triptych consisting of a Turkish origin story, followed by a Mongol origin story, and concluded by a third part connecting the two peoples and describing the rise of Chinggis Khan.<sup>25</sup> The

<sup>17</sup>Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 32–33; idem, “Turkish Legends,” 99–100, 105; idem, “Großer Vater Mond,” 123. On the life of Ibn al-Dawādārī and on his family, see Haarmann, *Quellenstudien*, 61–79.

<sup>18</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 51–53.

<sup>19</sup>The entire story in *Durar al-tijān* runs pp. 54–72.

<sup>20</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:217–37.

<sup>21</sup>Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 32.

<sup>22</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:219.

<sup>23</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 55–56. See also Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 14–16; idem, “Turkish Legends,” 101–2.

<sup>24</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 56.

<sup>25</sup>In *Kanz al-durar*, the beginning of the third part of the story is indicated by a chapter heading that reads “Recollection of the cause of the defeat by the Tatars of the king Alṭun Khān and what there was of war tricks” (*Kanz al-durar*, 7:232). See also Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 131. An English translation of the first, Turkish part of the legend is given in Yehoshua Frenkel, *The Turkic People in Medieval Arabic Writings* (Abingdon and New York, 2015), 60–66.



author relates that he stumbled upon these stories in a book entitled *Ulūkhān Bitikjī* in Turkish (in *Kanz al-durar*) or Mongolian (in *Durar al-tijān*), which he translates as “The Book of the Great Ruling Father.”<sup>26</sup> This book, he says, is held in high esteem by both the Kipchaks and the Mongols.<sup>27</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī learned of this book from one Amīn al-Dīn al-Ḥamawī, who had served as secretary to the important amir Badr al-Dīn Baysarī (d. 697/1298).<sup>28</sup> This Amīn al-Dīn frequented Bilbays, where Ibn al-Dawādārī’s father was serving as governor of the eastern provinces.<sup>29</sup> Both Amīn al-Dīn and Ibn al-Dawādārī were part of a group of intellectuals who convened regularly—a group that also included Ibn Dāniyāl, the well-known ophthalmologist and author of shadow plays. One day in 709 (1309–10), relates Ibn al-Dawādārī, this select party was discussing history and the early days of the Mongols, when the aforementioned Amīn al-Dīn told them about a rare, precious book that had belonged to the late Badr al-Dīn Baysarī and was now in his possession. The next time he called in at Bilbays, he brought the work to the meeting, and Ibn al-Dawādārī had the opportunity to copy from it, the result of which he then used in *Kanz al-durar* and *Durar al-tijān*.<sup>30</sup>

According to Ibn al-Dawādārī, the part containing the Turkish origin story had been translated from Persian into Arabic by the Baghdadi physician Jibrīl ibn Bukhtīshū‘ (d. 212/827) in 211 (826–27). This Persian version was itself a translation by Abū Muslim ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (al-Khurasānī) (d. 137/755) of a Turkish original. Ibn al-Dawādārī relates that Jibrīl ibn Bukhtīshū‘ reports that Abū Muslim claimed that this book originally belonged to the latter’s ancestor Buzurgmihr ibn Bukhtakān (Bozorgmehr-e Bokhtagān), the famous Sassanid vizier.<sup>31</sup> The story

<sup>26</sup>“*bi-lisānihim al-mughulī*,” Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 51–52. The title is rendered somewhat differently elsewhere in *Durar al-tijān*, as “Ulū Khān Aṭā Bitikjī” (ibid., 55), which is also simply described as “in their language,” and in *Kanz al-durar* it says that “it is called in the Turkish language ‘Ulū Ay Aṭam Bitikī’” (Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:218), meaning “the Book of the Great Father.”

<sup>27</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 55.

<sup>28</sup>Haarmann, “Turkish Legends,” 99.

<sup>29</sup>He served in this position from 699/1299–1300 to 710/1310–11, before dying in an accident in 713/1313 (Haarmann, *Quellenstudien*, 69–70).

<sup>30</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 56–58; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:218. Among the others attending these gatherings were Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Zaytūn al-Balālīqī, Maṣṣūr al-Adīb al-‘Abbāsī, and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Samlūṭī. Ibn al-Dawādārī writes that Ibn Dāniyāl was not present at the reading of the Turkish book, which was possibly because he died around that time, in 710/1310 (Safi Mahfouz and Marvin Carlson, trans., *Theatre from Medieval Cairo: The Ibn Dāniyāl Trilogy* [New York, 2013], xx).

<sup>31</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:219. The claim that Abū Muslim al-Khurasānī was a descendant of Bozorgmehr-e Bokhtagān is considered doubtful (Ġ. Ḥ. Yūsufī, “Abū Moslem Ḳorāsānī,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1983, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-moslem-abd-al-rahman-b>). On Jibrīl ibn Bukhtīshū‘ see D. Sourdel, “Buḳ ḥ tiṣ ḥ ū,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Brill Online,



of the Turkish origins, Ibn al-Dawādārī informs us, was followed in the book by an appendix written by a certain Sulaymān ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn al-Bahlawān al-Adharbayjānī, who has not been identified as yet.<sup>32</sup> This appendix was likely composed in the seventh/thirteenth century,<sup>33</sup> and this in itself, again, attests to the flexibility and dynamism of such origin stories, and the way they were adopted and adapted to contemporary concerns.

It is unfortunate that al-Adharbayjānī remains unidentified, for knowledge of his background could provide valuable information on the source of this origin story and the area(s) in which it circulated. For now, we will have to content ourselves with a number of smaller conclusions. First, the story circulated somewhere in the Islamic world, surely to the east of Egypt (where, after all, Ibn al-Dawādārī was among the first to learn it), where the Mongol presence was felt. Second, it resonated with Ibn al-Dawādārī: not only did he feel that his readers would benefit from the information and be interested in it, as he makes clear in his introduction to the story, his occasional personal comments on some of the explanatory elements of the story (see below) show that he understood them and found them useful.

### Summary of the *Origo Gentis* of the Mongols

While the first, Turkish part of the triptych is intriguing—both its contents and Ibn al-Dawādārī’s handling of the aspects of it that contradict Islamic teaching—constraints of space mean I will confine myself to discussing those elements that are relevant to (the interpretation of) the Mongol origin story that follows it. The Turkish origin story relates how Ulū Ay Aṭājī, “Great Father Moon,” came to life in a cave on the Qarāṭāgh Mountain (the Black Mountain), created from the four elements: clay and water were formed into a human being by the sun and wind.<sup>34</sup> This is clearly the mythical past of which Pohl and Mahoney speak. The descen-

2012, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_1514](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1514)); and for Bozorgmehr-e Bokhtagān, see Djalal Khaleghi Motlagh, “Bozorgmehr-e Bokhtagān,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 1989, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bozorgmehr-e-boktagan>.

<sup>32</sup>Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 21–22. At this point in *Kanz al-durar*, Ibn al-Dawādārī states that Jibrīl’s account ends here, and he continues with the story of the Mongols as related by Sulaymān ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn al-Bahlawān al-Adharbayjānī (*Kanz al-durar*, 7:227). In *Durar al-tijān*, however, Jibrīl’s text supposedly continues well into the Mongol story, up to the introduction of Chinggis Khan. There it is taken up by a (there unnamed) narrator of an appendix in “the Turkish book” (*Durar al-tijān*, 66). The division given in *Kanz al-durar* is likely the original one, as the sources given for the Turkish story are all dated to the eighth and ninth centuries C.E. See also Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 21, n. 97.

<sup>33</sup>Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 17, 21–22.

<sup>34</sup>Similar tales of the creation of a man out of clay can be found in Ibn Ṭufayl’s *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* and Ibn al-Nafīs’ *Al-Risālah al-Kāmiliyah*.





dants of Ulū Ay Aṭājī came to rule as the Alṭun Khāns, the Golden Kings, and they made the cave in which their ancestor originated into a temple—the story has now made its first passage, to the humans of legend. At the foot of the Qarāṭāgh is a large lake, on which the magnificent cities of Asharmāq<sup>35</sup> and Aydarmāq lie. Here the Alṭun Khān rules over his people, who live in joy, wealth, and great health, and who do “not have enemies that frighten them.”<sup>36</sup> That remark appears to foreshadow the imminent appearance of just such an enemy: the Mongols. For, as Ibn al-Dawādārī himself interjects here, “fate made them servants after ruling, humiliating them after glory,”<sup>37</sup> at which point the text turns to the story of the origin of the Mongols.

Before I embark on the summary of the Mongol origin story, it must be noted that the two versions in *Durar al-tijān* and *Kanz al-durar* are not exact copies of one another: the phrasing varies, but there are also other elements of difference between them, ranging from genealogies, names, and other details that are somewhat different, to some parts of the story that are present in *Kanz al-durar* but not in *Durar al-tijān*. Given the minimal difference in content, I consider it justified to present the two versions as one narrative in the summary below, while including the sections found only in *Kanz al-durar*. I will indicate variations and discrepancies between the two where relevant.

The Mongol narrative begins with a description of the setting on the Qarāṭāgh Mountain, as we have seen in the introduction. Because of the vicious wildlife, it long remained uninhabited by people, despite its riches. A human first appeared there when the Tibetan woman gave birth, left her son to gather some grass to wrap him in, and an eagle snatched up the baby and dropped him at the foot of the Qarāṭāgh, right into a lioness’ den. She nursed the newborn with her own cubs, and the boy grew up to be an incredibly strong man, killing the lions he was living among with his bare hands and eating their meat. Consequently, the lions were afraid of him and kept clear of him, fleeing whenever they saw him. One day, a group of seven people arrived in the area. The man saw them surrounded by lions and suddenly recognized them as being similar to himself: he felt *jinsīyah* (here probably best translated as “kinship”) and human nature, and went to rescue them from the lions threatening them. Initially, this wild man frightened the group, but they soon came to realize he meant no harm: like themselves, the man

<sup>35</sup>“Kāsharmāq” in *Durar al-tijān*.

<sup>36</sup>The version in *Durar al-tijān* is somewhat short, as Ibn al-Dawādārī states that the story of a spontaneous generation from the elements conflicts with what revelation tells us about creation, from which he therefore “turned away.” In *Kanz al-durar*, however, he apparently had no such qualms and does relate the entire story, although he still criticizes its contents. Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 59–63; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:219–27. Quote in *ibid.*, 7:221.

<sup>37</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 63; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:227.





was human, although his good qualities had been altered by his “savage foster mother” (*al-waḥshīyah al-rabībah*). The man hunted lion meat for them, which they cooked for him—he had always eaten it raw. The wild man learned their language and asked the seven who they were and where they came from. This turns into a folk etymology for the word Tatar, as they answered:

We are Tatars, which means we have fled from our land. A people of our ethnicity (*min jinsinā*) has conquered us and killed us, and driven us from our homes, so we left fleeing, and we do not know where we are headed. So we have come to this land as *tatār*, meaning wanderers (*tāʾihīn*).<sup>38</sup>

“This,” the text adds, “is the origin of the word *al-tatār*.”<sup>39</sup>

The group consisted of three men, three women, and one girl (or three men and four women in *Durar al-tījān*), and this “savage person” (*dhālik al-shakhṣ al-waḥshī*) and the girl had a son together. He was named Tatār Khān, “meaning ‘the wandering king’ [*al-malik al-tāʾih*],” and the wild man was given a name by the Tatars as well: Alb Qarā Arslān Biljikī, meaning “Son of the Black Lion (*farkh al-asad al-aswad*).”<sup>40</sup> The story then continues with a genealogy of the descendants of Alb Qarā Arslān Biljikī, including stories about some of them. The genealogies given in *Durar al-tījān* and *Kanz al-durar* differ slightly (Fig. 1).

Among the descendants of Alb Qarā Arslān Biljikī was the inventor of the Turkish flute called the *şibuṣghū*—Tatār Khān (the eldest) according to *Durar al-tījān*, Tatār Khān Kūçükerī according to *Kanz al-durar*.<sup>41</sup> He used the flute to exactly mimic bird song to lure the birds to him so he could capture as many as he wished.<sup>42</sup> Jikiz/Shikiz Khān, Oghuz Khān,<sup>43</sup> and Aṭun/Alṭun Khān are the ancestors of all Tatars, i.e., the Mongols.<sup>44</sup> In the days of Tatār Khān Bayghū, the Tatars

<sup>38</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:229. See also *Durar al-tījān*, 65.

<sup>39</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:229. See also *Durar al-tījān*, 65–66.

<sup>40</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tījān*, 66; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:230.

<sup>41</sup>The Arabic spells this K-Sh-K-R-Ī; the rendition as *kūçükerī* is taken from Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 129. Cf. modern Turkish *küçük*, meaning “small, little.”

<sup>42</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tījān*, 66; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:230.

<sup>43</sup>Haarmann points out that the presence of the name “Oghuz Khān” in this genealogy is striking, as it is a southwest Turkish name rather than Kipchak. Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 25; idem, “Großer Vater Mond,” 130.

<sup>44</sup>The differentiation between “Mongols” and “Tatars” in Arabic sources remains problematic. Some sources use the two interchangeably; others appear to regard them as distinct in one way or another. I discuss this problem in more depth in the introduction to my dissertation; for now, see, e.g., Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānid War, 1260–1281* (Cambridge, 1995), 108, n. 8.



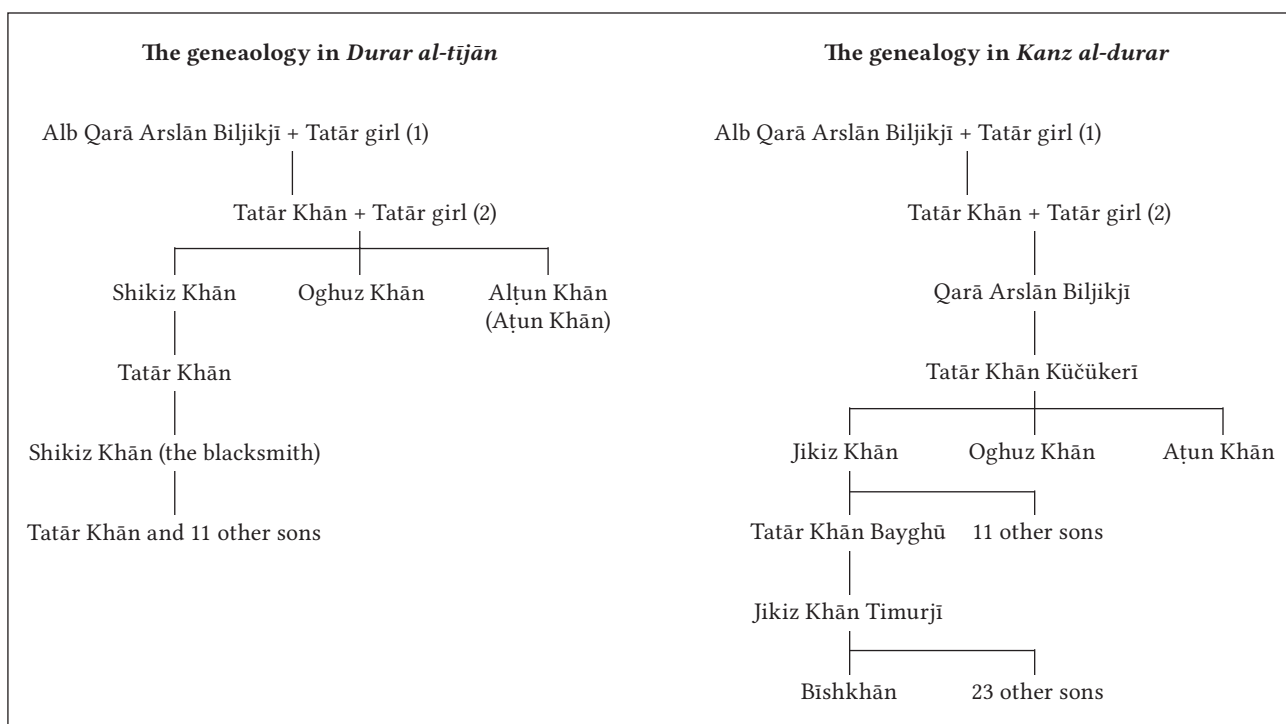


Figure 1. The genealogies as presented in *Durar al-tijān* and *Kanz al-durar*.

submitted to the Turkish Aṭun Khān<sup>45</sup> and this is where the Turkish and Mongol origin stories meet. The Aṭun Khān was gifted rare wild animals by the—still very barbaric—Tatars, upon whom he in turn bestowed favors, giving them horses and livestock.<sup>46</sup>

The story then turns to “the blacksmith,”<sup>47</sup> who is referred to as “Shikiz Khān the blacksmith” in *Durar al-tijān* and “Jikiz Khān Timurjī” in *Kanz al-durar*. This is the Chinggis Khan who conquered vast parts of Asia, and for reasons of clarity I will adhere to this standard spelling of his name. It is here that the legendary setting changes to a more or less recognizable history—albeit a different one than modern historians of the Mongol Empire are used to. In the narrative, Chinggis Khan is called “the blacksmith” because he regularly visited one of the Turkish

<sup>45</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:230; idem, *Durar al-tijān*, 66. The story of Tatār Khān Bayghū is missing from *Durar al-tijān*. Here the Tatars are only ruled by the Aṭun Khān in the days of Chinggis Khan himself. However, given the fact that the rule of the Aṭun Khān seems well-established at that point, the version given in *Kanz al-durar* has a greater likelihood of being the chronology as found in the original copy of the story as read by Ibn al-Dawādārī. Cf. the aforementioned discrepancy in authorship as discussed in n. 35.

<sup>46</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 67; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:230.

<sup>47</sup>See below for a discussion of this etymology.



cities,<sup>48</sup> where he frequented a blacksmith, who taught him how to make arrowheads. Chinggis Khan would bring iron home with him to make arrowheads, which he sold in order to provide for his family.<sup>49</sup> The eldest of his many sons, called Tatār Khān in *Durar al-tijān* and Bīshkhān in *Kanz al-durar* (see the genealogical overview above), had a strong character and was very courageous. Moreover, he was very talented at, and fond of, hunting with birds. Every year, the son of the Alṭun Khān, Kumush Khān, would come to the lands of the Tatars, speak with their leaders—including Chinggis Khan—and go on bird hunts before returning to the Turkish cities.<sup>50</sup>

During one of those hunting trips,<sup>51</sup> Kumush Khan was hunting with Chinggis Khan's eldest son, and their respective hunting birds targeted the same swan. Rather than letting Kumush Khan, his superior, have the prey, Chinggis Khan's son snatched the former's bird off the swan, and let his own hunting bird take it. Kumush Khan left in a rage and returned to the city. Chinggis Khan was informed of the events by his son, whom he then reprimanded: as the Tatars were vassals to the Alṭun Khān, this would inevitably cause trouble. However, Chinggis Khan was not too worried, as he had had a dream that appeared to foretell a Tatar victory: "It was as if I was at the top of the Qarāṭāgh, and I grabbed the sun by its horns, from East to West, and I gave it to you (pl., i.e., his sons). But the western side slipped away from my hand."<sup>52</sup>

Chinggis Khan then gathered the elders and leaders of the clan (*ashīrah*). They turned out to be 360 people in total, a number Chinggis Khan contentedly concluded that was equal to the number of days in a year.<sup>53</sup> At this gathering, Chinggis Khan formed a bundle of 360 arrows and asked the men present to break it. They replied that they could not. He then gave all 360 of them each a single arrow, which they easily broke. He then voiced the lesson learned: united they

<sup>48</sup>This blacksmith is located in Asharmāq in *Durar al-tijān* and in Aydarmāq in *Kanz al-durar*.

<sup>49</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 66–67; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:231.

<sup>50</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 67–68; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:231.

<sup>51</sup>The two versions of the story do not agree on a date for this event. In *Durar al-tijān*, Ibn al-Dawādārī relates that the "Turkish book" has the year as 609 (1212–13; *Durar al-tijān*, 68), while in *Kanz al-durar* he says that Sulaymān 'Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn al-Bahlawān al-Adharbayjānī reports that it was in the 620s (i.e., 1223–32; *Kanz al-durar*, 7:232).

<sup>52</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:232. See also *Durar al-tijān*, 68.

<sup>53</sup>*Durar al-tijān* has 300 (p. 69). The order of the story and the numbers mentioned are a bit different here in *Durar al-tijān*, which describes the messenger with the ensuing massacre first, followed by the *quriltai*. As the version in *Kanz al-durar* is more complete and is likely closer to Ibn al-Dawādārī's source regarding the genealogy and the narrators, I will stick with the order of events and the numbers mentioned as they are presented in *Kanz al-durar*. The gathering described here reflects the Mongol practice of convening a *quriltai* to choose a leader. Haarmann, "Alṭun Ḥān," 28, n. 136.



were invincible, divided they were effortlessly shattered. Chinggis Khan, the text adds, “was the first one to apply this proverb.”<sup>54</sup> He also argued that a leader was needed, and the number of candidates was rapidly brought down to three, among whom was Chinggis Khan himself. The three embarked upon a ritual in which they put a felt doll called Tunkā Khātūn in a tent,<sup>55</sup> an idol served by a shaman called Bakhshī,<sup>56</sup> and each offered it bowls of stew (*tharīd*).<sup>57</sup> That night they heard a voice proclaiming Chinggis Khan’s future rule, and indeed, his sacrificial bowl was found emptied, apart from a small portion on the western side of it.<sup>58</sup>

Though the Tatars were ready to fight, they struggled with a dire shortage of weapons, gear, and horses. For four thousand men they had only three hundred sixty horses, eighty of which, the story in *Kanz al-durar* tells us, descended from the primeval horse that belonged to the Tatars’ ancestor Tatār Khān Bayghū.<sup>59</sup> On one of the islands in the lake near the mountain, he had captured and tamed a primeval horse that struck fire with its hooves—hence its name Aṭ Aṭn, “fire horse.” Aṭ Aṭn could outrun the wind and overtake any other animal. It was said, relates Sulaymān al-Adharbayjānī, the author of the appendix, that this horse talked to and understood its master. The heirs of Tatār Khān now rode the descendants of this horse into battle against the Alṭun Khān.<sup>60</sup>

In order to learn what the Alṭun Khān was planning, Chinggis Khan sent some spies to his old friend the blacksmith and learned that the Alṭun Khān had contrived to send a messenger to summon him and his sons to court. This, however, was a ruse, and they would all be killed there. When the messenger and his retinue arrived, rather than going with them to the Alṭun Khān, the Tatars waited until nightfall and attacked and killed them.<sup>61</sup> Chinggis Khan divided their gear and horses and among his under-equipped troops. The Alṭun Khān answered by sending an army of fifty thousand. As they far outnumbered the Tatars, Chinggis Khan decided to trick them by having the Tatars flee into the wilderness at

<sup>54</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:233.

<sup>55</sup>Haarmann renders it as Tūngā Khātūn (Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 132).

<sup>56</sup>The term *bakhshī* means a Buddhist teacher (Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī‘u’t-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston [Cambridge, 1998], 3:766). We encounter one serving Qubilai (r. 1260–94) in Rashīd al-Dīn (*ibid.*, 1:105).

<sup>57</sup>Haarmann renders it as “broth and meat.” Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 132; *idem*, “Mongols and Mamluks,” 172.

<sup>58</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:233–34. Cf. *Durar al-tijān*, 69–70.

<sup>59</sup>Cf. *Durar al-tijān*, 70, which mentions 1200 horses and omits the story of the primeval horse. The genealogy in this episode is not entirely correct, as a contamination of Tatār Khān Kūcūkerī and Tatār Khān Bayghū occurs (see Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 133).

<sup>60</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:234.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 7:234–35. Cf. *Durar al-tijān*, 68.



the first attack and wait for the Alṭun Khān's troops to settle down for the night and get drunk in celebration of their victory, at which point the Tatars returned and slaughtered them. Following this victory, more people came to join Chinggis Khan's ranks. The Alṭun Khān sent an even larger army, which consisted of the descendants of Ulū Ay Aṭāji, the aforementioned Turkish forebear. As the Tatars were still outnumbered five to one, they dressed sticks in leftover gear from the previously defeated army in order to appear more numerous. Split up into four groups of five thousand soldiers each, the Tatars attacked the Turkish army from four sides and defeated them, then rode into Aydarmāq dressed in the vanquished troops' gear. Chinggis Khan killed the Alṭun Khān and ascended the throne, sending the Turkish subjects into the countryside, making them till the land and pay him tax, and he divided the lands among his sons.<sup>62</sup> Here, Ibn al-Dawādārī says, the story from the "Turkish book" ends. He then turns to the works of Ibn Wāṣil (604–97/1208–98) and Ibn al-Athīr (555–630/1160–1233) to discuss the Mongols' appearance in the Islamic world.

### Foretellings and Explanations

This story on the origin of the Mongols clearly uses a legendary past to explain why and how the Mongols came to power, the causes of their "exodus and the story of their origin."<sup>63</sup> It thus serves in the manner *origines gentium* tend to do: as a way to make sense of their authors' and/or readers' contemporary situation. In this narrative this is clearly visible in its "foreshadowing" of later historical developments and its explanation of events and phenomena regarding the Mongols that would have occupied the audience at the time. The story thus explains not only the later Mongol defeat at 'Ayn Jālūt, but also the nomadic origins of the Mongols, their use of weaponry—the bows and arrows for the use of which they were famous—and other war tactics, and the relationship between the Mongols and the Turks.

### The Mongol Failure to Conquer the West of the Islamic World

The most obvious foreshadowing has already been discussed by Haarmann,<sup>64</sup> but for the sake of completeness I will briefly mention it here as well: the omens of the sun and the bowl, which foretell the Mongol failure to capture the western part of the Islamic world. The omen of the sun appears in Chinggis Khan's dream:

<sup>62</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:235–37; idem, *Durar al-tijān*, 68–72.

<sup>63</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 51.

<sup>64</sup>Haarmann, "Alṭun Ḥān," 27–29, 32; idem, "Arabic in Speech," 111; idem, "Großer Vater Mond," 137; idem, "Mongols and Mamluks," 171–72.





I have seen while sleeping that we will be victorious over them. There is no doubt that we will rule the earth from east to west except for a little bit. Last night [I saw myself] standing on top of this mountain [the Qarāṭāgh] while the sun was rising and I extended my hand and grabbed its horns. When I wanted to embrace it, it slipped from my hands in the direction of the west, and I did not rule it.<sup>65</sup>

Chinggis Khan's sacrificial bowl of stew, which was emptied, "apart from a little bit which was on the western side of the bowl,"<sup>66</sup> foretells the same outcome. As Haarmann pointed out, both occurrences are clear references to the fact that the Mongols did not manage to conquer the west of the Islamic world. The Mamluk armies defeated them at 'Ayn Jālūt in 658/1260, and apart from Eastern Anatolia they never managed to rule the area past the Euphrates for a protracted period of time, despite the fact that they had planned to expand into Syria, Egypt, and likely beyond.<sup>67</sup> The legend thus foretells a historical fact that would take place at a time beyond the temporal boundaries of the story itself, explaining to its audience that the Mamluk victory was always in the stars—or, in this case, in the stew. But was it Ibn al-Dawādārī himself who interpolated this prediction here, or was it his source we are hearing?<sup>68</sup> In any case, as Haarmann states, Ibn al-Dawādārī must have been pleased to pass on this message to his readers from an unexpected perspective.<sup>69</sup> For despite the peace treaty that had been concluded between the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the Ilkhan Abū Sa'īd in 723/1323—less than ten years before Ibn al-Dawādārī wrote *Durar al-tijān*—fear of the Mongols had not yet entirely dissipated. This is evident when Ibn al-Dawādārī states, writing somewhere between 731/1330 and 732/1332, that Chinggis Khan's sons

are the twelve men who rule the world in the east and west, except for Syria, Egypt, and what is behind them in the west. May God the Exalted preserve them from their evil and corruption, and make them *dār al-islām* until Judgment Day.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 68.

<sup>66</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:234. See also *Durar al-tijān*, 70.

<sup>67</sup>On this lasting conflict between the Mamluks and the Ilkhanid Mongols, see for instance Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*; idem, *Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260–1335)* (Turnhout, 2013).

<sup>68</sup>Haarmann, "Alṭun Ḥān," 32.

<sup>69</sup>Haarmann, "Großer Vater Mond," 137.

<sup>70</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 53.





## Etymological Explanations

Scholars of medieval Europe have pointed out that the etymological explanation of ethnic names was an important part of ideas on ethnicity, as they were considered to give knowledge about the ethnic group itself, reflecting on its characteristics. These etymologies thus referred to, for example, myths of descent, geographical features, external characteristics, and character traits.<sup>71</sup> As such, they regularly appear in *origines gentium* as well, where ethnonyms may also be explained as going back to eponymous ancestors.<sup>72</sup> Whether etymological explanations of ethnonyms are a recurring theme in (Eurasian) origin stories is a question that awaits further and more inclusive research, but in such a study this Mongol origin story would provide evidence for a positive answer to that question.<sup>73</sup> Of course, in Islamic tradition in general we also find these etymological explanations of ethnonyms. A well-known one is that the Turks were so named because Alexander the Great left (*taraka*) them behind his barrier wall.<sup>74</sup> Another example is the work of Rashīd al-Dīn, who gives etymological origins for various Turkic tribal names in his *Jamī' al-tawārikh*, stating for instance that the Qanqli tribe was named after the cart (*qanqli*) they used to carry plunder.<sup>75</sup>

In the Mongol origin story, we find such an etymology for the term “Tatar.” Once the young man in the wilderness has mastered the language of the people he rescued, he asks them what they are. As mentioned above, they give the following answer:

We are Tatars, which means we have fled from our land. A people of our ethnicity (*min jinsinā*) has conquered us and killed us, and driven us from our homes, so we left fleeing, and we do not know where we are headed. So we have come to this land as *tatār*, meaning wanderers (*tā'ihīn*).<sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup>Walter Pohl, “Ethnonyms and Early Medieval Ethnicity: Methodological Reflections,” *Hungarian Historical Review* 7, no. 1 (2018): 5–17; Claire Weeda, “Images of Ethnicity in Later Medieval Europe” (Ph.D. diss., University of Amsterdam, 2012), 58–61; 210–17.

<sup>72</sup>Plassmann, *Origo gentis*, 365; Walter Pohl and Daniel Mahoney, “Editorial: Narratives of Ethnic Origins: Eurasian Perspectives,” *The Medieval History Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 188.

<sup>73</sup>See also the *TMHJ* special issue contribution by Peter B. Golden, “The Ethnogenic Tales of the Türks,” *The Medieval History Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 291–327.

<sup>74</sup>See for instance Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyá ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-Absār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Maghribī, vol. 2 (al-ʿAyn, 2008), 116.

<sup>75</sup>Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī' u't-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:30. Other examples can be found elsewhere in the text, but especially on pp. 29–35.

<sup>76</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:229. The quote as given in *Durar al-tijān* reads as follows: “We are from a faraway land and we are Tatars (*tātār*), which means that we are wanderers. We arrived in this land that we do not know, and we have enemies that destroyed our land and killed



While the Tatars reportedly fled their homes, *tā'ihīn* is better translated as “wanderers” or “those who lost their way” than as “refugees.”<sup>77</sup> In this sense, it might well be a reference to the Mongols’ nomadic origins. Arguably, there is also an implicit version of the eponymous ancestor-etymology, seeing as various ancestors of Chinggis Khan are named “Tatār Khān.”

Another etymological explanation given in the story is that of Chinggis Khan’s birthname “Temüjin,” or, as it is rendered in *Kanz al-durar*, “Timurjī.”<sup>78</sup> *Durar al-tijān* does not give the name, but simply states: “[T]hen Tatār Khān had a son, whom he called Chinggis Khan after his grandfather, and this was Chinggis Khan the blacksmith.”<sup>79</sup> According to the Mongols’ own story of their origins as recorded in the thirteenth-century *Secret History of the Mongols*, the newborn Chinggis Khan was named after a Tatar chief that his father Yisügei had captured around the time of his birth.<sup>80</sup> The name Temüjin, however, was rapidly equated with “temürči(n),” the Turco-Mongol word for blacksmith (*temür* meaning “iron”),<sup>81</sup> and so it is in this story. This popular etymology for Chinggis Khan’s birthname was widespread, as is also evidenced by the simple statement made in *Durar al-tijān*: “Chinggis Khan the blacksmith,” in a line of other Chinggis Khans. Apparently, this was sufficient for the audience to identify the great conqueror. The story then explains why he was called “the blacksmith”: it is related that Chinggis Khan was taught by a Turkish blacksmith to make arrowheads and that he would sell these to provide for his family. This conveniently explained Chinggis Khan’s birth name, following the widespread etymology. What is more, the story of Chinggis Khan forging arrow tips also links the Mongols to their use of arrows, making it one of various aspects of Mongol war tactics that are explained in this *origo gentis*.

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our people (*qawm*). So we left and are refugees, and we got lost until we found ourselves here, so we are Tatars (*tātār*) which means ‘the lost’” (p. 65).

<sup>77</sup>The root is also connected to the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert after their exodus from Egypt. Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1863–93, repr. New York [1955–56]), 1:326.

<sup>78</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:231.

<sup>79</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 66.

<sup>80</sup>*The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Igor de Rachewiltz (Leiden, 2004), 1:13. Paul Pelliot points out that this agrees with the Mongol habit of naming children based on recent events or observations soon after the birth of the child (*Notes on Marco Polo* [Paris, 1959], 1:289).

<sup>81</sup>Denis Sinor, “The Legendary Origin of the Türks,” in *Folklorica: Festschrift for Felix J. Oinas*, ed. Egle Victoria Žygas and Peter Voorheis (Bloomington, 1982), 248.



## Mongol War Tactics

Arrowheads were key to the Mongols' military success, as their primary weapon was the composite bow.<sup>82</sup> Archery was a skill that played a key role in the Mongols' military campaigns, and their mastery of it was unmatched. Many sources, both Chinese and Western (like John de Plano Carpini), note how Mongol boys were trained from toddlerhood onwards to ride horses and handle the bow and arrow.<sup>83</sup> They used arrowheads of different types and materials for different purposes.<sup>84</sup> Islamic sources, such as the Syrian historian al-Dhahabī (673–748/1274–1348), also comment on the Mongol use of bow and arrow. Basing himself on the Iraqi physician and polymath Muwaffaq al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Laṭīf ibn Yūsuf al-Baghdādī (557–629/1162–1231),<sup>85</sup> al-Dhahabī relates that “most of their weapons are arrows, and all of them make them. Their arrowheads are of horn, iron, and bone.”<sup>86</sup> Chinggis Khan's making of arrowheads in the story not only served to explain the popular etymology of his birthname, but also connected the Mongols to their famous use of bows and arrows. (Incidentally, the Mongol skill with bow and arrow is also explained in a fourteenth-century Tibetan origin story—the matter apparently drew attention across Eurasia.<sup>87</sup>) Other typical elements of Mongol warfare are also explained in this origin legend.

Apart from learning how to make these arrowheads, Chinggis Khan profited from his teacher in other ways as well. The blacksmith also provided him with precious information on his enemies' moves. The Mongols' intelligence network is famous to us, and this was apparently also the case in the medieval Islamic world:

<sup>82</sup>Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War* (Barnsley, 2007), 50; idem, *The Mongol Conquests in World History* (London, 2012), 130.

<sup>83</sup>May, *The Mongol Art of War*, 42–43.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 51–52.

<sup>85</sup>On him, see N. Peter Joosse, “‘Abd Al-Laṭīf Al-Baghdādī,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three* (Brill Online, 2018), [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_24150](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24150). On al-Dhahabī's use of al-Baghdādī as a source, see Joseph de Somogyi, “Adh-Dhahabi's *Ta'rikh Al-Islam* as an Authority on the Mongol Invasion of the Caliphate,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 68, no. 4 (1936): 595–604.

<sup>86</sup>Shams al-Dīn Abī ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-al-a'lām*, ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma'rūf (Beirut, 2003), 13:19. See also idem, *Siyyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma'rūf and Muḥyi Hilāl al-Sirḥān (Beirut, 1985), 22:227.

<sup>87</sup>In this story, the Tibetans, Chinese, and Mongols are presented as being descended from the same ancestor through three half-brothers. After their father died, the brothers and respective ancestors of these three peoples ritually divided his body. The Mongols received his waist and thumbs, with the latter being tied to their skill in archery. Reinier J. Langelaar, “Chasing the Colours of the Rainbow: Tibetan Ethnogenealogies in Flux,” *The Medieval History Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 347–48.



Ibn al-Dawādārī himself emphasizes this element in the story, stating that “Chinggis Khan was the first after Alexander to send spies.”<sup>88</sup> While that is evidently untrue, the Mongols did indeed attach great value to proper intelligence, and employed their own scouts and spies, as well as engaging merchants to provide them with information,<sup>89</sup> as is reflected in the narrative and Ibn al-Dawādārī’s statement.<sup>90</sup>

Another key element of Mongol military success was their horses. Having been raised in trying environments, they were strong and tough and, moreover, eclipsed their European or Middle Eastern counterparts in endurance, despite their smaller stature. Contemporaries also commented on their thorough training. Mongol soldiers would have had more than one mount on hand while campaigning, with some three to five horses per archer.<sup>91</sup> The importance of horses to the Mongols and their warfare is reflected in Islamic sources from the period. Not only do many contemporary authors mention, based on Ibn al-Athīr, that early Mongols relied on sheep and horses for a living,<sup>92</sup> the Shafi‘i jurist and physician Ibn al-Nafīs (ca. 607–87/1210–88) even commented on Mongols’ large backsides, which was supposedly “caused by their frequent horse-riding from an early age onwards.”<sup>93</sup> The importance of horses to the Mongols is similarly evident in this *origo gentis*. After the episode of Chinggis Khan’s election to leadership, *Kanz al-durar* includes a brief excursion into a separate tale involving one of Chinggis Khan’s forebears (the genealogy in this episode is not entirely consistent with earlier parts of the story). He captured and tamed a primeval horse that struck fire with its hooves, hence its name Aṭ Aṭn, or “fire horse.” It was faster than the wind and could overtake any animal, and some of the horses the Mongols rode into battle against the Aṭun Khān were descendants of this mythical animal. Thus, the story connects the Mongols’ origins to their contemporary use of excellent horses, for which they were famous.

The Mongols did not invent all these elements of warfare, of course, but they had mastered them to such an extent that they were apparently associated with

<sup>88</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 70.

<sup>89</sup>May, *The Mongol Art of War*, 69–70.

<sup>90</sup>Haarmann has also pointed to Chinggis Khan’s fame as a sender of spies in this regard (Haarmann, “Aṭun Ḥān,” 29; idem, “Großer Vater Mond,” 133.).

<sup>91</sup>May, *The Mongol Art of War*, 54–56.

<sup>92</sup>Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 2012), 10:334–35; Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Wāṣil, *Mufarrij al-kurūb fī akhbār Banī Ayyūb*, ed. Ḥasanayn Muḥammad Rabī‘ and Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ ‘Āshūr (Cairo, 1972), 4:36; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 22:237; idem, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 13:290.

<sup>93</sup>Max Meyerhof and Joseph Schacht, eds., *The Theologus Autodidactus of Ibn Al-Nafīs* (Oxford, 1968), .



them. The Mongols were known not only for their mounted archers and intelligence networks, but also for their cunning battle tactics based around their main military strengths: their skilled bowmanship and their mobility (i.e., their horses). These two typical features were incorporated into military maneuvers and augmented with a third essential part of Mongol military strategy: subterfuge. While not necessarily a Mongol innovation, they did perfect this strategy.<sup>94</sup> A frequently used Mongol tactic was a feigned retreat before enemy troops while firing at them using the Parthian shot.<sup>95</sup> Once the pursuing army was drawn out, stretching its ranks over a large distance, the Mongols would turn around at an agreed location and attack their pursuers, while other troops attacked their flanks.<sup>96</sup> Another favorite was surrounding enemies based on the *nerge* hunting practice: hunters would form a circle around prey and gradually close the animals in. Similar tactics were used against enemy armies, encircling them and attacking from several directions at once—this could be successful even when the Mongols were outnumbered by their opponents.<sup>97</sup> In order to trick their opponents into thinking they had greater numbers, they employed various ruses, such as having riders stir up dust with branches tied to the tails of their horses or mounting dummies on spare horses.<sup>98</sup>

Such cunning practices by the Mongols were frequently commented upon by contemporaries. Both the Mongols under Chinggis Khan and the later Ilkhanids were frequently accused of subterfuge and trickery by Mamluk authors,<sup>99</sup> and al-Baghdādī (through al-Dhahabī) again provides us with interesting detail on Mongol behavior during sieges:

A party of them first goes back from the city until its people become greedy and spread out behind them until they are far removed, and this party has fled before them. Then they assault them like nightfall.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 71; May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 130–32.

<sup>95</sup>The Parthian shot is a tactic in which mounted archers retreat, but turn their bodies back towards their enemies and fire at them.

<sup>96</sup>May, *The Mongol Art of War*, 71, 74–75.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 46, 75–77; May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 131–32.

<sup>98</sup>May, *The Mongol Art of War*, 80.

<sup>99</sup>I discuss this in detail in my dissertation. Some examples can be found in Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'il Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah* (Beirut and Riyadh, 1966), 13:83, 226–27; Shāfi' ibn 'Alī Ibn Asākir, *Al-Faḍl al-ma'thūr min sīrat al-Sulṭān al-Malik al-Manṣūr Sayf al-Dunyā wa-al-Dīn Sulṭān al-Islām wa-al-Muslimīn Abī al-Faḥ Qalāwūn khalada Allāh salṭānathu*, ed. Paulina B. Lewicka (Warsaw, 2000), 285; Quṭb al-Dīn Mūsā ibn Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl mir'āt al-zamān fī tārikh al-a'yān* (Hyderabad, 1955), 2:34.

<sup>100</sup>Al-Dhahabī, *Tārikh al-Islām*, 13:19.





Next, he says, the Mongols kill those who have ridden out after them, then enter the city and kill the women and children. Such tactics are reflected in the description of the battles waged by Chinggis Khan against the Alṭun Khān, in the segment Ibn al-Dawādārī aptly titled “The cause of the defeat by the Tatars of the king Alṭun Khān and what there was in war tricks (*ḥiyal al-ḥurūb*).”<sup>101</sup> The narrative relates how Chinggis Khan ordered his troops to flee into the wilderness—feigning a retreat—only to return at night and butcher the Alṭun Khān’s army. Similarly, the Mongols pretend to be more numerous by dressing sticks in leftover gear.<sup>102</sup> We also find the *nerge*-based encircling practice, when Chinggis Khan splits his outnumbered army into four groups of five thousand in order to attack the Alṭun Khān’s hundred thousand troops from different sides. In the story, these tactics are presented as resulting from the Mongols’ dire lack of resources, forcing them to be creative and cunning in order to defeat the Turks. In the historical reality of the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries, the Mongols were known for these tactics, for which the story thus offers an origin.

### Turkish Connection

The last army sent by the Alṭun Khān before his final defeat consisted of his son Kumush Khān and a hundred thousand troops “descended from the great khan Ulū Ay Aṭāji,”<sup>103</sup> the ancestor of the Turks. The Mongols and the “purest” Turks thus face each other on the battlefield, and the latter are definitively beaten. Ulrich Haarmann briefly mentioned the connection between the Turks and the Mongols in this story, stating that when Tatār Khān Bayghū submits himself and his people to the Alṭun Khān “the two themes—Turkish and Mongolian—converge in a deeper sense, reflecting as they do the obscure and complex historical relationship between Mongols and Turks in their Central Asian homelands.”<sup>104</sup> In this way the story indeed refers to a shared history in the Eurasian steppes, but the connection between the Turks and the Mongols in this narrative goes further

<sup>101</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:232.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. the story of the Mongol fight against the Naimans in the *Secret History*, in which each man is ordered to light five fires in different places, in order to confuse the enemy about their real numbers (*Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 1:115–17). Haarmann states that we know this ruse from the *Secret History*, referring to Poucha’s translation. Poucha indeed refers to “puppets,” although de Rachewiltz does not include that in his translation. Poucha also points to Plano Carpini, who reported that the Mongols frequently used puppets to make it seem like they had bigger numbers (Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 30; Pavel Poucha, *Die geheime Geschichte der Mongolen* [Prague, 1956], 130–31).

<sup>103</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 71. See also *Kanz al-durar*, 7:236.

<sup>104</sup> Haarmann, “Turkish Legends,” 104. He makes the same statement in “Alṭun Ḥān,” 105.





than that. The origin stories of these two peoples are inextricably woven together, not only in the presumed original version, where the Turks of the Alṭun Khān play a key part in the Mongols' story, but also by Ibn al-Dawādārī himself, who explicitly connects the two stories by reflecting on the Turks' change of fortune, caused by the Mongols.<sup>105</sup>

Many Islamic authors regarded the Turks and the Mongols as ethnically related. The most obvious example to quote here is the Mamluk annalist Abū Shāmah (599–665/1203–68), who wrote: “The strange thing is that the Mongols were defeated and destroyed by sons of their own people of the Turks” (*wa-min al-‘ajā’ib anna al-tātār kusirū wa-uhlikū bi-abnā’ jinsihim min al-turk*).<sup>106</sup> This statement, as well as the verses following it, has been frequently quoted—by both later Mamluk chroniclers, including Ibn al-Dawādārī,<sup>107</sup> and modern-day historians.

In the story under consideration here, this close relation in origins is reflected in the Turks' and the Mongols' homeland, as both are from the Qarāṭagh Mountain: the Turks were created there, while the Mongols were carried or wandered in. This mountain is initially just the homeland to the Turks, whose ancestor spontaneously came into existence, having been generated from the local clay and other elements—autochthonous in the literal sense of the word. The Turks then rise to great glory and prosperity before the Mongols even appear on the scene, quite literally: their male ancestor is imported from Tibet, whereas their female ancestor is part of the wandering Tatars, who end up in the area after fleeing their homeland.<sup>108</sup> That the Turks come first, then the Mongols, reflects the historical reality that the Turks rose to power in Central Asia well before the Mongols did, but it also reflects al-Dimashqī's problem: that no one had really heard of the Mongols before they took Asia by storm. It might even indicate an ideology that the Mongols had no real right to this area, that it rightfully belonged to the Turks, who were the children of its earth rather than a foreign import. Such an interpretation could be supported by the story of the initial conflict as given in the origin legend: Chinggis Khān's son snatched his Turkish master's

<sup>105</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:227; idem, *Durar al-tijān*, 63. See also Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 128.

<sup>106</sup> Shihāb al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Ismā‘īl Abū Shāmah, *Tarājim rijāl al-qarnayn al-sādis wa-al-sābi‘ al-ma‘rūf bi-al-Dhayl ‘alā al-rawḍatayn* (Cairo, 1947), 208. See also Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī‘u-t-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:24ff.

<sup>107</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, vol. 8, ed. Ulrich Haarmann (Cairo, 1971), 51. See also David Ayalon, “The Great Yāsa of Chingiz Khān: A Reexamination (Part C1), The Position of the Yāsa in the Mamluk Sultanate,” *Studia Islamica* 36 (1972): 121; Haarmann, “Mongols and Mamluks,” 167.

<sup>108</sup> For an interesting analysis of women's roles (and the lack thereof) in medieval origin legends, see Walter Pohl, “Gender and Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge, 2004), 23–43; Geary, *Women at the Beginning*.



hunting bird off the swan and gave it to his own, taking for himself what was his lord's by right.

This episode further serves as an explanation for the continued enmity between the Turks and the Mongols: taking what rightfully belonged to the Turks culminated in a war between the two peoples, which ended in the Mongol takeover of the Turkish throne. That it was specifically the *Turkish* throne they took, and not another, is phrased particularly expressively in *Durar al-tījān*: “Chinggis Khan slit the throat of the Alṭun Khān *on his throne*, and then sat *on his throne*, and wore *his crown*, and ruled *his kingdom*.”<sup>109</sup> This representation of the events in Central Asia in the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century also provides the reader with an explanation for the continued enmity between the Turkish Mamluks and the ethnically closely related Mongols, in addition to the contemporary Mongol threat to Mamluk-held lands. As such, the Turkish and Mongol origin legends aim to explain not only their shared heritage, but also their relations in the time of the Mongol conquests.

Such discussions of interethnic relations are frequently visible in origin stories, especially when triggered by contemporary political circumstances.<sup>110</sup> This function of the story also corresponds to one of the elements Herwig Wolfram has described as typical in the structure of a medieval European *origo gentis*: the so-called primordial event or deed (*fait primordial*). This *fait primordial* is often the crossing of a body of water—medieval European origin stories tend to have a strong element of migration—or waging war against a stronger enemy over whom they triumph (or a combination of those two). In case of war or battle as primordial deed, that enemy remains the people's foremost adversary.<sup>111</sup> We see the same mechanism in this *origo gentis* of the Mongols: the battle against the Turks functions as the Mongols' *fait primordial*, and the enemy they fight at that stage remains their primary adversary in the eyes of their contemporaries.

## Circulating Stories on the Mongols

This *fait primordial* thus explains the basis for the continued enmity between Mongols and Turks. As Haarmann pointed out, the origin stories of the Turks and the Mongols were initially two independent stories that were connected at a later stage, supposedly going back to Jibrīl ibn Bukhtishū' and Sulaymān al-

<sup>109</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tījān*, 71. See also *Kanz al-durar*, 7:237. Emphasis added.

<sup>110</sup>Pohl and Mahoney, “Editorial.”

<sup>111</sup>Herwig Wolfram, “Le genre de l'*Origo gentis*,” *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 68, no. 4 (1990): 800–1. See also idem, “Origo et Religio: Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Early Medieval Texts,” *Early Medieval Europe* 3 (1994): 35–36; Plassmann, *Origo gentis*, 360–62. On the topos of migration stories in medieval European origin narratives, see for instance Pohl, “Narratives,” 194–96, 211–12.



Adharbayjānī respectively. Ibn al-Dawādārī presents the latter story as a continuation of the former in the “Turkish book,” but he also emphasizes the connection, adding among other things that “[f]ate made them servants after ruling, humiliating them after glory.”<sup>112</sup> This underlines the explanatory function that *origines gentium* served for a contemporary public, as well as the ability of such stories to be molded to the purposes and demands of contemporary narrators and audiences. The various foreshadowings of the Mongols’ eventual failure to conquer the west of the Islamic world is another case in point—whether these were added by Ibn al-Dawādārī himself or were already extant in the “Turkish book.”

The flexibility of origin stories and the way they could be (re)used is visible in this story on another level as well. In this *origo gentis* as related by Ibn al-Dawādārī, based on Sulaymān al-Adharbayjānī’s text, traces can be found that suggest elements from other narratives were apparently circulating and somehow became incorporated into this version of the Mongol origin story—wherever in the Islamic world that may have been. Though this story of the Mongol origin appears to be unique, at least in the surviving sources, numerous elements in this narrative echo other accounts of the history of the Mongols, such as that found in the Mongols’ own *Secret History*, as well as those by the famous Persian historians ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Aṭā Malik Juvaynī (d. 681/1283) and Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allāh (d. 718/1318). To mention just a few examples:

- In the folk etymology for the word “Tatar,” the Tatars mention that they had come into conflict with others “of their ethnicity” (*min jinsinā*), by whom they were wiped out, leaving only the seven refugees mentioned in the origin legend. Rashīd al-Dīn relates that some two thousand years earlier, other Turkic tribes (he considers the Mongols to be a Turkic tribe, for which see below) “overcame the Mongol tribes and so slaughtered them that no more than two men and two women survived.”<sup>113</sup> These then fled to a harsh place in the mountains, and from them the Mongol tribes descend.<sup>114</sup>
- In this origin legend, the shaman plays a significant role in the appointment of Chinggis Khan as leader in the episode with the sacrificial stew. A similar role is played by a shaman in Juvaynī’s and Rashīd al-Dīn’s versions of events, who relate how a shaman called Kōkōchu Teb Tenggeri proclaimed him king and gave him the title “Chinggis Khan.”<sup>115</sup>

<sup>112</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 63; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:227. See also Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 128.

<sup>113</sup>Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī‘u’t-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:80.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 1:80, 114.

<sup>115</sup>‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Aṭā Malik Juvaynī, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. J. A. Boyle (Manchester, 1997), 39; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī‘u’t-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:89–90; ibid., 2:289. Teb Tenggeri is conspicuously absent in this episode in the *Secret History*, which



- The episode in which the Alṭun Khān calls Chinggis Khan to his court as a ruse to kill him sounds similar to an episode in Chinggis Khan's relationship with Ong Khan (d. 1203), his former patron and later enemy—like the Alṭun Khān in this narrative. The *Secret History* relates how Chinggis Khan and his son Jochi had planned an exchange of brides between the two families, but this was shot down by Ong Khan's son Senggüm, who continued to manipulate and eventually managed to turn his father against Chinggis Khan. Senggüm and his group of allies then sent word to Chinggis Khan that Ong Khan offered his daughter in marriage to Jochi, as per request, and invited Chinggis Khan to a celebratory banquet. But one of his old friends, in light of the earlier refusal of the proposal, warned Chinggis that it might well be a ploy to kill him. Chinggis Khan decided not to go, and it indeed it turned out to be a plot.<sup>116</sup>

It is hard to immediately determine which of these elements in the legend found in Ibn al-Dawādārī's text are truly an echo of those "official" works (Juvaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn both wrote in the service of the Ilkhanid Mongols) or, rather, a product of stories about the Mongols or other foreign peoples that were circulating more broadly (whether based on retellings of those official works or otherwise), and which ones may be based upon commonplace motifs, for this origin legend is replete with well-known motifs and symbols. Several of these can be found in Stith Thompson's extensive collection of motifs found in folk literature, primarily drawn from Europe, Asia, the Near East, and the Americas.<sup>117</sup> There is the animal nurse of an abandoned child, well-known from the story of Romulus and Remus, but also found in the traditions of India, Ireland, the Arab world, and elsewhere.<sup>118</sup> It is a motif that usually indicates the exceptional status of a child and its being under divine protection.<sup>119</sup> Another example of a worldwide motif

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focuses instead on his later challenge to Chinggis Khan's leadership and his subsequent death (*Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 1:168–74; *ibid.*, 2:761).

<sup>116</sup> *Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 1:84–88. See also Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:184–85.

<sup>117</sup> Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books and Local Legends*, revised and enlarged edition (Bloomington and London, 1975); E. J. Michael Witzel, *The Origins of the World's Mythologies* (Oxford, 2012), 7.

<sup>118</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 52, 64; *idem*, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:228–29. It is motif number B535, "Animal nurse," in Thompson, *Motif-Index*, 448; Sinor, "Legendary Origin," 239; Hasan M. El-Shamy, *Folk Traditions of the Arab World: A Guide to Motif Classification* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1995).

<sup>119</sup> Marc Huys, *The Tale of the Hero Who Was Exposed at Birth in Euripidean Tragedy: A Study of Motifs* (Leuven, 1995), 289.



found in this story is that of the abduction of a person by an animal,<sup>120</sup> as well as various formulaic numbers.<sup>121</sup> There are two features of this *origo gentis*, however, that suggest that elements from the Mongols' own vision of their origins did in fact make their way into this story, which then also makes it more likely that the examples mentioned above originate there. These two features are the use of the expression “*min ‘azm*” and the motif/tale-type of the unbreakable bundle of arrows.

The phrase “*min ‘azm*” (literally “of the bone [of]”) refers to a common descent. In this *origo gentis* it appears several times. For instance, the soldiers sent to fight Chinggis Khan are described as being “of the bone of the great khan Ulū Ay Aṭāji” (*min ‘azm al-qān al-akbar Ulū Ay Aṭāji*).<sup>122</sup> After killing the Alṭun Khan, Chinggis Khan “killed the rest of those who were of his bone” (*wa-qatala sā’ir man kāna min ‘azmihi*).<sup>123</sup> The term *yasu(n)*, “bone,” is an important kinship term in Mongol tradition. It refers to a common patrilineal line of ancestry.<sup>124</sup> In the *Secret History* it shows up in phrases such as *Merkidei ele yasutu gü’ün-ni*, “any men of Merkit stock.”<sup>125</sup> I am not aware of this being an indigenous expression in Arabic, nor in Persian. In the latter it appears as a Mongolian loanword,<sup>126</sup> and as a calque. Rashid al-Dīn used this terminology when relating Mongol history, stating for instance that “Genghis Khan’s two wives ... were of that ‘bone’” (*ostokhan*),<sup>127</sup> and “The Olqunu’ut clan is all from the ‘bone’ (*ostokhan*) of Olqunut.”<sup>128</sup> Rashid al-Dīn, of course, based his history on Mongol sources, both human and textual.<sup>129</sup> Elsewhere too, this expression appears in a Mongol context in Arabic sources.

<sup>120</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 64; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:228. Motif number R13, with the motif of “Person carried off by bird” at R.13.3 (Thompson, *Motif-Index*).

<sup>121</sup> The twelve or twenty-four sons, 360 people, selections of seventy, thirteen, and three, etc. E.g., Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 67, 69–71; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:231–34. Motif number Z71ff, Thompson, *Motif-Index*.

<sup>122</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 71. The corresponding fragment in *Kanz al-durar* reads: “*fa-innahum min ‘azm Ay Aṭām al-kabīr*” (*Kanz al-durar*, 7:236).

<sup>123</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:237. See also *Durar al-tijān*, 71.

<sup>124</sup> *Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 1:249, 429.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:429.

<sup>126</sup> Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen: Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung älterer neupersischer Geschichtsquellen, vor allem der Mongolen- und Timuridenzeit.*, vol. 1, Mongolische Elementen im Neupersischen (Wiesbaden, 1963), 553.

<sup>127</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh*, ed. Muḥammad Rushan and Muṣṭafā Mūsavī (Tehran, 1373 [1994]), 1:86; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘u’t-Tawārīkh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:48.

<sup>128</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh*, 1:162; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘u’t-Tawārīkh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:80.

<sup>129</sup> He used many Mongolian terms in his *Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh*, albeit not always entirely correctly: Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente*, 1:44–48.





Ibn Wāṣil, for instance, reporting on Hulegu in Aleppo writes about Hulegu's orders, including that "anyone who is of a person's bone, meaning that he is a paternal relative, will inherit from him" (*wa-kull man kāna min 'aẓm insān ya'nī min 'uṣḃatihi yarithuhu*).<sup>130</sup> The expression appears to be strongly linked to Mongol history, perhaps in particular to the Mongols' own version of it. It would thus appear that this element of the Mongols' own ideas about history and descent has managed to make its way into this outsiders' version of Mongol origins.<sup>131</sup>

Another element in this *origo gentis* that is strongly connected to the Mongols and the stories of their history is, as mentioned above, the story of the unbreakable bundle of arrows contrasted with the fragility of a single arrow, which aims to show that strength is found in unity. The motif is indicated by Thompson as that of the "quarreling sons and the bundle of twigs."<sup>132</sup> In this form it was well known in Asian and Mediterranean traditions, although, as we shall see below, it did become predominantly associated with the Mongols at a later stage. This origin legend contains a similar arrow-related narrative with the same moral but presented in a different manner than usual.

The general pattern of the story is as follows: a parental figure, often on their deathbed, has a number of quarreling sons. The parent challenges them to break twigs (or arrows). While it is easy to break just the one, it is impossible to break the whole bundle: in unity lies strength.<sup>133</sup> In Western Europe, the story is best known from Aesop's fables, but it is also found in Scythian, Tu-yü-hun, and Seljuq traditions, as well as in the *Secret History*.<sup>134</sup> Naturally, the fable is adapted to its respective contexts, so in the Inner Asian nomadic variants, for instance, arrows take the place of twigs or sticks.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>130</sup>Ibn Wāṣil, *Die Chronik des ibn Wasil: Ġamāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Wāṣil, Mufarriḡ al-Kurūb fī Aḥbār Banī Ayyūb: kritische Edition des letzten Teils (646/1248–659/1261) mit Kommentar: Untergang der Ayyubiden und Beginn der Mamlukenherrschaft*, ed. Mohamed Rahim (Wiesbaden, 2010), 201.

<sup>131</sup>I thank Nicholas Kontovas, Gabrielle van den Berg, and Richard van Leeuwen for their input on the matter discussed in this paragraph.

<sup>132</sup>Motif number J1021, Thompson, *Motif-Index*. As a tale-type—a larger unit than a motif, usually a complete narrative with an independent tradition—it is labelled as 910F by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography: Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis Der Märchentypen* (Helsinki, 1961).

<sup>133</sup>Larry Moses, "The Quarrelling Sons in the Secret History of the Mongols," *The Journal of American Folklore* 100, no. 395 (1987): 63–64; Jonathan Ratcliffe, "Some Comments on the Longevity of the Fable of the Bundled Arrows in Inner Asian Cultures and Its Reception in the West," *Eurasia Studies Society of Great Britain & Europe Journal* 3, no. 2 (2014): 2.

<sup>134</sup>Ratcliffe, "Some Comments," 1–12; *Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 1:262. For the story in Aesop, see for instance Joseph Jacobs, ed., *The Fables of Aesop: Selected, Told Anew and Their History Traced* (London, 1912), 173.

<sup>135</sup>Moses, "Quarrelling Sons," 64; Ratcliffe, "Some Comments," 3–6.





In the *Secret History* the motif is found in the story of Chinggis Khan's female ancestor Alan Qo'a, an important figure in the Mongol historical tradition.<sup>136</sup> She had two sons when her husband, Dobun Mergen, died, but after his death she had three more sons. The two sons she had before widowhood criticized their mother behind her back and suggested that their three brothers were the offspring of a male servant. Alan Qo'a was well aware of their talk, and one day she sat all five of her sons down and handed each of them an arrow. She ordered them to break them, which they did.<sup>137</sup> "Then she tied five arrow-shafts into a bundle and gave it to them saying, 'Break it!' The five sons each took the five bound arrow-shafts in turn, but they were unable to break them."<sup>138</sup> She warned them that the arrow-shafts were like them: if they were to keep to themselves, they would all be easily broken, but "[i]f, like the bound arrow-shafts, you remain together and of one mind, how can anyone deal with you so easily?"<sup>139</sup> This story is then referenced on several occasions by later female actors in the *Secret History*.<sup>140</sup>

Ratcliffe argues that these "bundle of twig" fables are repeatedly placed in the mouths of integral cultural founders in order to encourage the solidarity required in the familial structure of their nomadic political rulership.<sup>141</sup> In this vein, he also points to the motif of biological unity found throughout the *Secret History* in relation to this story, and argues that the "deathbed' element" is also present in this version, as Alan Qo'a's death is related immediately after the telling of this story.<sup>142</sup> The Seljuq version, reconstructed through Persian texts, is something of an anomaly in this regard. Ṭughril Beg gives arrows to his brother rather than his sons, and he is not dying. It is still, however, a matter of biological connection with an emphasis on the importance of solidarity within the family for rulership: the story is told in the context of a peace treaty among Ṭughril Beg, his brothers, and his uncles.<sup>143</sup> Juvaynī included a version of the fable in his Mongol history, which he likely based on Mongol sources that would have been familiar with the story of Alan Qo'a. In his version of the story, however, Chinggis Khan is the one demonstrating the importance of unity to his sons through the parable of the bundled arrows, again in a clearly familial power structure. Juvaynī himself reflects on this moral of familial unity by stating that the Mongols abided by this

<sup>136</sup> *Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 1:244.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:1–4.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:4.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:5.

<sup>140</sup> Moses, "Quarrelling Sons."

<sup>141</sup> Ratcliffe, "Some Comments," 2, 15, 19.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–11.



principle, with one man at the helm but with his relatives all having their share of power and wealth.<sup>144</sup>

In the story that Sulaymān al-Adharbayjānī relates, which has reached us through Ibn al-Dawādārī, the arrows do not represent Chinggis Khan's immediate family but rather the entire clan. Additionally, there is clearly no "deathbed" element present. This might suggest that the version in the story that reached Ibn al-Dawādārī was compiled in an environment distant from the nomads of the Eurasian steppe, one where the substratum of this tale-type was absent. That, in turn, suggests the possibility that it was the arrival of the Mongols that introduced the story to the part of the Islamic world where Sulaymān al-Adharbayjānī put it to paper. More importantly, however, it shows that the story of the bundle of arrows had become intimately connected to the Mongols. Not only did the Mongols themselves employ the fable, it also appears in an altered version in this explanatory story of the rise of the Mongols for a clearly non-Mongol public. In Europe, too, the story had become linked to the Mongols in general and to Chinggis Khan in particular.<sup>145</sup> This perceived connection between the Mongols and this story in the Islamic world is emphasized in Ibn al-Dawādārī's statement, commenting on the story in *Kanz al-durar*, that Chinggis Khan "was the first to use this parable."<sup>146</sup>

The story of the bundle of arrows was an important one to the Mongols themselves: it was included in the *Secret History*, of course, but Ratcliffe argues that its use in Juvaynī illustrates the importance of the fable to Mongol political identity.<sup>147</sup> The presence of the parable of the bundle of arrows in the origin legend at hand is another example of how an existing part of an origin story can be molded into new versions—new stories with new purposes. Parts of the Mongol origin legend were thus first used by the Mongols themselves, and later by others *about* them. Similarly, the use of the term "bone" (*azm*) in this text and elsewhere suggests the influence of a Mongol basis somewhere in the history of the *origo gentis*. This means that the other story elements mentioned above—familiar, albeit in somewhat different forms, from the "official" Mongol histories—may well be similar echoes of stories that were circulating about the Mongols in the Islamic world at this time. From here, they made their way into Sulaymān al-Adharbayjānī's story, which was then used by Ibn al-Dawādārī. For now—at least until we learn more about al-Adharbayjānī, his background and sources—it is hard to pinpoint

<sup>144</sup>Juvaynī, *Genghis Khan*, 41–42. He briefly recalls the story on pp. 593–94. As Ratcliffe also points out, this version of the fable lacks the "deathbed" element (Ratcliffe, "Some Comments," 16–17).

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 18–19.

<sup>146</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:233.

<sup>147</sup>Ratcliffe, "Some Comments," 16.



the exact processes behind the formation of this narrative.<sup>148</sup> It does, however, again demonstrate the flexibility and dynamism of such stories to be reshaped into new versions as required by the demands and purposes of other audiences and authors, which could then serve to explain and interpret contemporary phenomena and events, as this origin legend did for the Mongols.

## Concluding Remarks

The peace treaty concluded by the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the Ilkhan Abū Saʿīd did not immediately result in a dissolution of the fear the Mongols instilled in the inhabitants of the central Islamic lands, let alone in a diminishment of their interest in them. This is evidenced by the attention that Ibn al-Dawādārī paid to them in general, and by his inclusion of this origin story in particular, which the author says he discovered in the aforementioned “Turkish book” and clearly found fascinating. In general, the passages in which this story is contained in his works constitute a rich source of information on various topics, giving insight, for instance, into book culture and reading in the Mamluk sultanate. Similarly, its contents (and Ibn al-Dawādārī’s own interpolations in particular) give a good picture of images of the Mongols that were current in Mamluk Egypt and Syria, on which I focus in my Ph.D. dissertation.

At this point, many questions about this specific origin legend remain open: its sources, its transmission, and its circulation, to name but a few. Nonetheless, the study of this origin legend contributes to a better understanding of the genre of *origines gentium* in general, which has in the past been strongly focused on narratives from Greek and Latin Antiquity and medieval Europe. This particular story served to offer explanations for the Mongols’ origins, the causes of their “exodus,” other historical events such as their defeat at the hands of the Mamluks, and some of their habits and characteristics. Some of these elements are very subtle, others decidedly less so. At the same time, the narrative contains echoes of the Mongols’ own interpretation of their history, and those of their vassals. These stories about the Mongols, such as that of the bundle of arrows, must have circulated within the Islamic world, whence they found their way into this *origo gentis* where they served a purpose of their own. Contemporary concerns are thus reflected in a narrative on the beginnings of a foreign, relatively unknown people. The purpose that *origines gentium* of one’s own people serve—explaining causes and essences, thereby explaining the present and the future through the prism of the past—is the same as that of an *origo gentis* related about an outside group. This origin legend of the Mongols is therefore an excellent case study of the ex-

<sup>148</sup>Oral lore does appear to play a significant role in the spread of some origin stories (Pohl and Mahoney, “Editorial,” 189) which may well have been the case here as well.



planatory function of *origines gentium*, also when it concerns a foreign people, as well as of the dynamism and flexibility of these stories, which allows them to be adapted to new contexts and for this interpretative role in particular.

As mentioned above, relatively little attention has been paid to the genre of *origines gentium* in Islamicate texts. An analysis of the sort that has been done for antique and medieval European stories remains a desideratum for their counterparts circulating in the premodern Islamic world, not only to study the traditions of origin legends in Islamic culture, but also because of the potential insight a comparative perspective has to offer. Some of the recurring elements of European *origines gentium* as described by Wolfram are present in this legend, including the typical *fait primordial* as well as the divine guidance that appears in the election of Chinggis Khan. A thorough comparative study of *origines gentium* from all over—at least—Eurasia might well be very helpful to further analyze the genre, also with regard to common motifs. This way, we may be able to learn not only “the wondrous event and strange thing” that is the story of the Turks and Mongols,<sup>149</sup> or those of other peoples, but shed light on many other aspects of the genre as a whole.

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<sup>149</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:217.



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## Mamluks, Mongols, and Crusaders: Visual Strategies for Representing the Enemy

### Introduction

The Mamluk dynasty came to power in a time of great political turmoil in the Islamic world. This regime seized and consolidated power on the basis of military prowess and dedication to jihad against the unbelievers who surrounded its territory. In the early years of their rule, the Mamluks embarked upon a two-front war against non-Muslims: the Western European Crusaders and the Ilkhanid Mongol Empire. The struggle against these two adversaries was expressed in ideological terms, with textual sources referring to both enemies as infidels and exhorting Mamluk troops to engage in a holy war to conquer (or regain) territory in the name of Islam. Political realities were far more nuanced, however, and Mamluk rulers entered into political and commercial agreements with both Western Europeans and Mongols. The visual manifestations of these relationships likewise reflected the complex political situation of the Mamluks, characterized by military aggression on the one hand and pragmatism and accommodation on the other. The representational strategies employed by Mamluk patrons to depict the enemy were equally multifaceted, consisting of architectural *spolia*, victory inscriptions and monuments, and artistic appropriations that expressed both military triumphalism and cultural appreciation.<sup>1</sup> The visual references to Crusaders and Mongols in Mamluk architecture are usually treated separately in the scholarly literature but this article will argue that they formed part of a unified strategy on the part of Mamluk rulers as they faced both enemies simultaneously in the early years of their empire. The results the Mamluks achieved in visualizing their relationship with the Ilkhan Mongols and Crusader warriors in the Levant varied greatly, however, highlighting the disparate nature of each foe, the complex and fluid nature of their interaction, as well as the distinctive artistic heritage of the cultures the Mamluks encountered in Syria and the Levant in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

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<sup>1</sup>Nasser Rabbat, "In Search of a Triumphant Image: The Experimental Quality of Early Mamluk Art," in *The Arts of the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria: Evolution and Impact*, ed. Doris Behrens-Abouseif (Göttingen, 2012), 21–35, notes the syncretic, vibrant, and fluid repertoire of visual forms that characterized early Mamluk art.



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## Political Encounters and Economic Interaction between Mamluks and Crusaders

In the mid-thirteenth century, the Mamluks were confronted with enemies from both the east and west. Once they had stopped the Mongol advance westward at 'Ayn Jālūt in 1260, they turned their attention to the Crusader strongholds in the Levant. This approach established a pattern seen in the campaigns of both Baybars and Qalāwūn, where the thwarting of a Mongol advance from the east was followed by aggressive strikes against Crusader towns and fortresses. Baybars attacked Nazareth and Mount Tabor in 1263 and then proceeded to conquer Caesarea and Safad.<sup>2</sup> In 1268 he captured Antioch, a city that had been in Frankish hands since 1097. The surrender of Jaffa followed and key castles of the military orders fell in 1271. Qalāwūn achieved a significant victory against the Mongols at Homs in 1281, then undertook a series of campaigns against Crusader possessions in 1285, taking the castle at Margat and towns like Tripoli before turning his attention to the important city of Acre.<sup>3</sup> Qalāwūn began preparations for this campaign but it was his son, al-Ashraf Khalīl, who realized it, capturing the city in 1291. After the fall of Acre, the few remaining Crusader strongholds surrendered, effectively eliminating their presence in the Levant.

These insistent and aggressive attacks on the Crusaders served a number of strategic purposes for the Mamluks. From a military perspective, it gave the Egyptian armies one less enemy to fight, averting a potential two-front war. There also existed the real possibility of an alliance between the Mongols and the Franks, creating a joint force that would have constituted a formidable challenge to the young Mamluk state.<sup>4</sup> The Mamluks were faced with a number of Christian adversaries: a potentially hostile Christian population in their own empire, Latin Crusaders in the Levant, and European territories that looked upon the Mamluks with fear and animosity. An alliance between the Mongols and any one of these

<sup>2</sup>Andrew Jotischky, *Crusading and the Crusader States* (Oxfordshire, 2014), 239–40; Thomas Madden, *The Concise History of the Crusades* (Lanham, MD, 2014), 167–68; Stephen Humphreys, “Ayyubids, Mamluks, and the Latin East in the Thirteenth Century,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 2 (1998): 12; Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (New York, 2000), 227; Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250–1382* (Carbondale, IL, 1986), 47, 56–57.

<sup>3</sup>Jotischky, *Crusading and the Crusader States*, 241–42; Madden, *Concise History of the Crusades*, 174–75; Niall Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders: Christianity's Wars in the Middle East, 1095–1382, from the Islamic Sources* (London, 2014), 102, 108.

<sup>4</sup>Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West* (Harlow, 2005), 165–95; Humphreys, “Ayyubids, Mamluks,” 10, 16; P. M. Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy (1260–1290): Treaties of Baybars and Qalāwūn with Christian Rulers* (Leiden, 1995), 12; Reuven Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260–1335)* (Turnhout, 2013), 16; Kate Raphael, *Muslim Fortresses in the Levant: Between Crusaders and Mongols* (London, 2011), 110.





Christian groups could involve the Mamluks in a multi-front war that would put a significant strain on their resources and personnel. With or without this alliance, crusading zeal continued unabated in Western Europe, and the likelihood of new expeditions remained high; the lack of a naval presence made the Mamluks particularly vulnerable to these maritime offensives.<sup>5</sup> Mamluk campaigns also had economic motivations, as the Crusaders possessed fertile agricultural lands and their ports controlled access to trade with Western Europe. As it was likely that the Italians and Catalans in particular would trade with anyone who possessed the ports, the Mamluks could secure access to strategic materials (wood, iron, pitch) and personnel (slaves) to ensure the prosperity of their empire.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these military and economic considerations, defeat of the Crusaders also possessed a religious and ideological dimension. The Mamluks' greatest adversaries, Mongols and Franks, were non-Muslims and prosecuting war against them was a religious duty, constituting a jihad. Jihad provided a broad conceptual umbrella that was flexible enough to encompass the multiple and varied motivations for military action against both adversaries.<sup>7</sup> As *mujāhidūn*, Mamluk rulers could highlight their legitimacy through military conquest. The Mamluk system of rulership was inherently unstable, with no *de facto* line of succession from one sultan to the next. Military victories and territorial conquest provided a consolidating force in the empire, emphasizing the talents of the Mamluks as a warriors, enhancing their prestige in the eyes of the local population, and uniting rulers and the people they ruled in a struggle against a common enemy.<sup>8</sup> Jihad contained within it the idea of purification as well, cleansing the land defiled by non-believers, and the Mamluks' religious mandate to defend Islam justified the utter annihilation of Crusaders in Palestine and Syria.

Mamluk rulers enhanced their prestige and legitimacy through military victories against foreign enemies and the ruler who established this highly effective political strategy was al-Zāhir Baybars. Baybars was a *mujāhid*, or leader of jihad,

<sup>5</sup>For the possibility of new crusade campaigns, see Raphael, *Muslim Fortresses*, 96; Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 244; Humphreys, "Ayyubids, Mamluks," 5. See Ann Zimo, "Baybars, Naval Power and Mamlūk Psychological Warfare against the Franks," *Al-Masāq* 30, no. 3 (2018): 304–16, for a recent discussion of attempts to form a Mamluk navy, and Albrecht Fuess, "Rotting Ships and Razed Harbors: The Naval Policy of the Mamluks," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 5 (2001): 45–71.

<sup>6</sup>Raphael, *Muslim Fortresses*, 100–2; Jonathan Berkey, "Mamluk Religious Policy," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (2009): 10; Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders*, 109. For strategic materials, see David Jacoby, "The Supply of War Materials to Egypt in the Crusader Period," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 25 (2001): 102–32.

<sup>7</sup>Berkey, "Mamluk Religious Policy," 9–10; Humphreys, "Ayyubids, Mamluks," 4.

<sup>8</sup>Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 226–27, 230, 244; Berkey, "Mamluk Religious Policy," 10.



par excellence, as he led the Mamluk army in the defeat of the Mongols at ‘Ayn Jālūt and engaged in numerous successful military campaigns against Crusader strongholds and cities.<sup>9</sup> Mamluk authors noted Sultan Baybars’ military prowess and couched his victories against both Crusaders and Mongols in ideological terms, with religion as a significant marker of difference. Contemporary texts highlighted Baybars’ zeal in prosecuting jihad, waging war against the Christian “infidels” until “no more Franks remained on the face of the earth.”<sup>10</sup> Honorific inscriptions on public monuments throughout the empire echo this theme and underline the sultan’s commitment to jihad. One text lauds Baybars as: “Lord of kings and sultans, conqueror of great cities, exterminator of Franks and Tatars [and] extirpator of citadels from the infidels...,” while another celebrates his success in exchanging “unbelief for faith, church bell for call to prayer, and the Gospel for the Qur’an.”<sup>11</sup> Baybars’ legitimacy as a ruler was based in part on his success in campaigns against the Franks; as such these religiously-motivated campaigns were significant elements in the political identity formation of this dynasty.

### Visual References to Crusaders in Mamluk Architecture

A visual manifestation of this jihad mentality can be seen in the earliest extant royal mosque of the Mamluk period, the Mosque of al-Zāhir Baybars located on the outskirts of the city of Cairo. Built between 1266 and 1269, Baybars’ mosque is the first Mamluk monument to employ Crusader *spolia*, or appropriated Chris-

<sup>9</sup>Anne Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge, 2008), 30–32; Denise Aigle, “Legitimizing a Low-Born, Regicide Monarch: The Case of the Mamluk Sultan Baybars and the Ilkhans in the Thirteenth Century,” *HAL archives-ouvertes.fr*, 2006, 3, <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00383336/document>.

<sup>10</sup>P. M. Holt, “Three Biographies of al-Zahir Baybars,” in *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds*, ed. David Morgan (London, 1982), 19–29; Madden, *Concise History of the Crusades*, 167–68; Berkey, “Mamluk Religious Policy,” 9–10; Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 232–37; Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (Berkeley, 1969), 307–12.

<sup>11</sup>Jonathan Bloom, “The Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī in Cairo,” *Annales Islamologiques* 18 (1982): 74, 76; Madden, *Concise History of the Crusades*, 167–68; Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 230–31. Hanna Taragan in particular has addressed the propagandistic nature of Baybars’ monumental epigraphy; see Hanna Taragan, “Doors that Open Meanings: Baybars’s Red Mosque at Safed,” in *Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni (Leiden, 2004), 3–20, and idem, “Sign of the Times: Reusing the Past in Baybars’s Architecture in Palestine,” in *Mamluks and Ottomans: Studies in Honour of Michael Winter*, ed. David Wasserstein and Ami Ayalon (London, 2006), 54–66. For the transcriptions of the inscriptions, see Étienne Combe et al., *Répertoire chronologique d’épigraphie arabe*, vol. 12 (Cairo, 1943) [hereafter *RCEA*], nos. 4556 and 4557, 104–6, nos. 4588 and 4589, 123–26, no. 4612, 141–43.



tian architectural elements.<sup>12</sup> Though little remains of this building today, textual sources provide information about the structure's appearance and indicate its significance in light of military conflict with the Crusaders. According to al-Maqrīzī, building materials for the mosque were taken from Crusader structures in Jaffa, a city conquered by the Mamluks in 1268. The Mamluks systematically plundered the captured town for building materials and Baybars ordered that wood from the conquered city be used to construct the *maqṣūrah*, or dome, of the mosque and appropriated marble was to adorn the mihrab or prayer niche.<sup>13</sup> In this early Mamluk religious structure, spoils of war from a Christian citadel were reemployed in the most symbolic areas of the structure, the dome and the mihrab, sending a strong triumphalist message through the appropriation of Crusader building materials. Like the transfer of ownership of important fortresses and the substitution of the call to prayer for the church bell, building materials were reanimated and redefined in their secondary context on a Muslim religious structure.<sup>14</sup> These spoils were thus victory trophies underlining the overwhelming and irrevocable nature of the Mamluks' triumph over the Christians, visualizing the defeat of unbelievers by the defenders of Islamic orthodoxy.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup>For recent discussions of Baybars' mosque, see Bernard O'Kane, *The Mosques of Egypt* (Cairo, 2016), 57–59; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and its Culture* (London, 2007), 119–26; Hanna Taragan, "Mamluk Patronage and Crusader Memories," *Assaph Studies in Art History* 10–11 (2005–2006): 226–27; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Between Quarry and Magic: The Selective Approach to Spolia in the Islamic Monuments of Egypt," in *Dalmatia and the Mediterranean: Portable Archaeology and the Poetics of Influence*, ed. Alina Payne (Leiden, 2014), 415–16. Bloom, "The Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī," provides a monographic study of Baybars' mosque.

<sup>13</sup>Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-mawā'iz wa-al-i'tibār bi-dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-al-āthār, al-ma'rūf bi-al-khiṭaṭ al-Maqrīzīyah, ta'lif Taqī al-Dīn Abī al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī* (Baghdad, 1970), 2:300. See also Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 121; O'Kane, *Mosques of Egypt*, 57; Taragan, "Sign of the Times," 62; Behrens-Abouseif, "Between Quarry and Magic," 415–16; Bloom, "The Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī," 73.

<sup>14</sup>The use of *spolia* in the architecture of the Mediterranean and the Near East is a topic with a vast bibliography. Some representative publications that address the triumphal, pragmatic, and aesthetic motivations for such reuse include: Karen Rose Mathews, *Conflict, Commerce, and an Aesthetic of Appropriation in the Italian Maritime Cities, 1000–1150* (Leiden, 2018); Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney, eds., *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine* (Farnham, 2011); Henry Maguire and Robert Nelson, eds., *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice* (Washington, DC, 2011); Michael Greenhalgh, *Marble Past, Monumental Present: Building with Antiquities in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Leiden, 2009); Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton, 2009).

<sup>15</sup>Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 126; idem, "Mamluk Perceptions of Foreign Arts," in *The Arts of the Mamluks*, ed. Behrens-Abouseif, 310; Karen Rose Mathews, "Mamluks and Crusaders: Architectural Appropriation and Cultural Encounters in Mamluk Monuments," in *Languages*



Like Baybars, Qalāwūn was also a zealous holy warrior, leading numerous campaigns against Crusader cities and garnering titles and accolades for his piety and zeal in prosecuting jihad.<sup>16</sup> One of his most important military expeditions against the Crusaders was the assault on the city of Acre, an offensive planned by Qalāwūn but completed by his son al-Ashraf Khalil. The Mamluk victory against the Crusader city in 1291 dealt the death blow to the Frankish presence in the Levant.<sup>17</sup> Qalāwūn was a highly effective and feared holy warrior but he also signed treaties with Christian rulers and territories in order to facilitate trade while dividing Christian domains and exploiting factionalism among them.<sup>18</sup> The sultan thus had a nuanced understanding of the Christians he encountered in the Levant, differentiating between economic partners and military adversaries. These relations changed over time as well and allies transformed into enemies and vice-versa in this fluid environment. Qalāwūn combined military aggression with pragmatism towards Christians and this flexible and accommodating approach also characterized the use of Christian *spolia* and pseudo-*spolia* on his impressive and highly visible funerary complex on Bayn al-Qaṣrayn.<sup>19</sup>

This monumental architectural commission, built in 1284–85 and consisting of a madrasah, mausoleum, and *bīmāristān* (hospital), occupied a position of great

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*of Love and Hate: Conflict, Communication, and Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. Sarah Lambert and Helen Nicholson (Turnhout, 2012), 183, for this idea of a trophy culture; and Taragan, “Sign of the Times,” 55, 57–58, for Baybars’ victory monuments in Cairo and Palestine.

<sup>16</sup>Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 38; Hillenbrand, *Crusades, Islamic Perspectives*, 230, n. 114, refers to an inscription associated with Qalāwūn whose text is strongly reminiscent of one of Baybars’ epigraphs.

<sup>17</sup>See Donald Little, “The Fall of ‘Akkā in 690/1291: The Muslim Version,” in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of David Ayalon*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Leiden, 1986), 159–82, for a discussion of Muslim sources for this battle; see also Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 241; Muslim historians noted that “the whole of Syria and the coastal zones were purified of the Franks;” see Gabrieli, *Arab Historians*, 346. Linda Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan: The Career of al-Mansur Qalawun and the Consolidation of Mamluk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678–689 A.H./1279–1290 A.D.)* (Stuttgart, 1998), 156, adds that Muslim writers invested the fall of Acre with religious significance, as nothing less than the triumph of Islam over Christianity.

<sup>18</sup>See, for example, Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*, who lists eight treaties between Qalāwūn and various Christian rulers and three treaties between the Franks and al-Zāhir Baybars. See also Madden, *Concise History of the Crusades*, 173; Humphreys, “Ayyubids, Mamluks,” 3, 9.

<sup>19</sup>See most recently Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “The Funerary Complex of Sultan Qalawun (1284–1285): Between Text and Architecture,” in *Tomb-Memory-Space: Concepts of Representation in Pre-modern Christian and Islamic Art*, ed. Francine Giese, Anna Pawlak, and Markus Thome (Berlin, 2018), 114–33. General discussions of the building complex can also be found in Michael Meinel, *Die mamlukische Architektur in Ägypten und Syrien (648/1250 bis 923/1517)* (Glückstadt, 1992), 1:44–46, 2:61; O’Kane, *Mosques of Egypt*, 61–65; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 132–42; Taragan, “Mamluk Patronage,” 227–28.





visibility along the main thoroughfare of medieval Cairo with an extended and elaborate façade facing the street (Fig. 1). Qalāwūn employed an eclectic array of *spolia* in this complex, with a prominent example on the monumental entrance portal.<sup>20</sup> Clearly visible from the street, the window above the doorway displays an iron grille consisting of spiral forms (Fig. 2). Creswell has argued that this window grille was a Crusader spoil that must have been taken as loot during Qalāwūn's Syrian military campaigns.<sup>21</sup> Qalāwūn's use of Crusader *spolia* is thus the earliest visually identifiable case of such appropriation, as we only have textual sources attesting to the use of spoils in al-Zāhir Baybars' mosque.

The sultan also displayed a predilection for Crusader-style decoration, employing a particular window type on the façade of his mausoleum complex that is reminiscent of Gothic architecture (Fig. 3).<sup>22</sup> The window consists of two lancets surmounted by a bull's eye within an arch, a form characteristic of thirteenth-century French architecture in general and Crusader structures in the Levant in particular.<sup>23</sup> Prominently displayed across the entirety of the street façade, the Gothic window form constituted the visual focus for the complex (Fig. 1). This visual reference had no overtones of war and conquest and likely formed part

<sup>20</sup>For the use of *spolia* in Qalāwūn's complex in general, see Iman Abdulfattah, "Theft, Plunder, and Loot: An Examination of the Rich Diversity of Material Reuse in the Complex of Qalāwūn in Cairo," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 20 (2017): 93–132.

<sup>21</sup>K. A. C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, second edition (New York, 1978), 2:191. Creswell also notes that this window grille resembles the iron screen that surrounded the Dome of the Rock when it was transformed into the Christian *Templum Domini* by the Templars in the twelfth century. See also Abdulfattah, "Theft, Plunder, and Loot," 106–7; O'Kane, *Mosques of Egypt*, 64; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "European Arts and Crafts at the Mamluk Court," *Muqarnas* 21 (2004): 45; Viktoria Meinecke-Berg, "Spolien in der mittelalterlichen Architektur von Kairo," in *Ägypten, Dauer und Wandel: Symposium anlässlich des 75 jährigen Bestehens des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo* (Mainz, 1985), 133, n. 18.

<sup>22</sup>Behrens-Abouseif, "Funerary Complex of Sultan Qalawun," 125–26. This form not only appears on Qalāwūn's funerary complex but also on other monuments commissioned by him (the mausoleum of his wife Umm al-Šāliḥ and his son al-Ashraf Khalil) as well as other Mamluk sultans and amirs. In his discussion of the Tomb of Umm al-Šāliḥ, Creswell (*Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 2:182, n. 3) mentions five other buildings that employ this form: the Mausoleum of al-Ashraf Khalil (1288), the *mīda'ah* in the *ṣaḥn* of Ibn Tūlūn (1296), the Mausoleum of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (1303–4), the Mausoleum of Sunqur Sa'dī (1315–21), and the Mosque of Ulmās (1329–1330). See also Abdulfattah, "Theft, Plunder, and Loot," 106; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 135; Mathews, "Mamluks and Crusaders," 185–88.

<sup>23</sup>Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 2:200, mentions the loggia at the fortress of Crac des Chevaliers as one of several possible prototypes. See also Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 138; Taragan, "Mamluk Patronage," 227. The church of Crac des Chevaliers was converted to a mosque when Baybars' son, al-Malik al-Sa'id, seized the fortress from the Hospitallers; therefore, the window form might have been familiar to the Mamluks because they actually possessed the fortress as of 1271.



of the decorative ensemble because of its beauty. Qalāwūn's approach to Christian visual culture thus emulated his political engagement with Christian polities in the Levant. In the time period when Qalāwūn was building this complex, 1284–85, he was not conducting military campaigns against Crusaders but had established truces consistent with his political strategy of extended periods of treaties and alliances punctuated by jihad-inspired attacks.<sup>24</sup> The visual elements of his funerary complex followed the same rhythm, with street front decoration of Gothic architectural forms broken up by an emphatic, triumphal spoil over the main portal. The aesthetic appreciation of the Gothic predominated in Qalāwūn's complex, however, reflecting the political détente that characterized Mamluk-Crusader relations until the push for the conquest of Acre began at the end of the 1280s.

The use of Crusader *spolia* on the madrasah associated with the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad is a bit more nuanced than that seen in the previous examples, as he did not participate in campaigns against Crusader armies and was not the person responsible for procuring the plunder in the first place. By the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (1293–94, 1299–1309) and especially during his third tenure in office (1310–41), military objectives had shifted from the Levant to the Mongol threat in the east. The madrasah completed in 1304 by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad along Bayn al-Qaṣrayn, however, features a Gothic church portal from the city of Acre reused as the entranceway into the sultan's religious school (Fig. 4).<sup>25</sup> The portal was taken as plunder from the campaign led by his half-brother al-Ashraf Khalīl and it passed through a number of hands before it came to grace al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's religious building; in essence, the sultan inherited the portal from his half-brother and appropriated it from his predecessor, Kitbughā.<sup>26</sup> The madrasah, with its distinctive Gothic portal, was located next to Qalāwūn's complex on Bayn al-Qaṣrayn, affording al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's appropriated trophy of war

<sup>24</sup>Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 250; Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders*, 108. See also Raphael, *Muslim Fortresses*, 100, and Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*, for this period of truce between Mamluks and Christians in the Levant.

<sup>25</sup>Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's madrasah and its Crusader spoil are mentioned frequently in the art historical literature on Mamluk architecture; see O'Kane, *Mosques of Egypt*, 67–68; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 152–54; Wolfgang Mayer, "The Madrasa of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad: The Portal," in *A Future for the Past: Restorations in Islamic Cairo 1973–2004*, ed. Wolfgang Mayer and Philipp Speiser (Mainz, 2007), 95–105; Mathews, "Mamluks and Crusaders," 191–95.

<sup>26</sup>For the complicated history of this portal's procurement and use, see Abdulfattah, "Theft, Plunder, and Loot," 95; O'Kane, *Mosques of Egypt*, 67; Taragan, "Mamluk Patronage," 228–30; Jo van Steenberg, "Ritual, Politics, and the City in Mamluk Cairo: The Bayna l-Qaṣrayn as a Dynamic 'Lieu de Memoire', 1250–1382," in *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Alexander Beihammer, Stavroula Constantinou, and Maria Parani (Leiden, 2013), 255–56.





maximum visibility in the city. Though he could not claim any great crusading victories of his own, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad adopted the visual trappings associated with warfare against the Franks that Baybars and Qalāwūn proudly displayed on their Cairene monuments. This Crusader spoil has been interpreted as a victory trophy in a religious and military sense, signaling the Mamluks' resounding conquest of Christian territories and, by association, the triumph of Islam.<sup>27</sup>

Not only did al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and his father Qalāwūn use Christian materials and styles in their architectural structures, they employed actual Christians to construct the buildings in the Mamluk capital.<sup>28</sup> Three hundred prisoners of war worked on Qalāwūn's complex and the amir overseeing the construction even enlisted passersby to carry stones for the buildings. Textual sources indicate that the prisoners were Mongols, captured during Qalāwūn's victory at Homs in 1281, but Christians fought alongside Mongols in that battle and likely formed part of the *corvée*. Continuing his father's practices, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad settled Christian prisoners in Cairo and employed them in his construction works.<sup>29</sup> Regardless of whether these prisoners actually had any artistic expertise, their forced labor served an important ideological purpose: it demonstrated their status as subjugated enemies compelled to construct a victory monument that celebrated their defeat. Qalāwūn's funerary complex and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's madrasah thus conveyed a message of triumph, proclaiming Mamluk military supremacy over the Franks of the Levant through the use of Christian *spolia* on the entrance portals of these buildings.<sup>30</sup>

Such a purely triumphalist interpretation, however, is especially problematic in the historical context of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's reign, when the Crusaders had long ceased to be a military threat. Though a sense of religious superiority is indicated by the reuse of a church portal for a Muslim religious school, there is also a high level of aesthetic appreciation associated with this appropriated doorway, emulating Qalāwūn's multifaceted approach to Christians and their visual culture. In the early fifteenth century, al-Maqrīzī wrote that this was the most beautiful portal in all of Cairo, striking in the high quality of its workmanship and

<sup>27</sup>Taragan, "Mamluk Patronage," 229–30; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 153; Viktoria Meinecke-Berg, "Die Verwendung von Spolien in der mamlukischen Architektur von Kairo," in *XX. Deutscher Orientalistentag: Vorträge*, ed. Wolfgang Voigt (Wiesbaden, 1980), 532.

<sup>28</sup>Julien Loiseau, "Frankish Captives in Mamlūk Cairo," *Al-Masāq* 23, no. 1 (2011): 39; Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 2:205; Meinecke, *Mamlukische Architektur*, 1:44, 2:61.

<sup>29</sup>Christian prisoners of war continued to be a fixture in Cairo well into the fourteenth century and may have played a significant role in the transmission of European artistic vocabulary to their Mamluk counterparts; see Loiseau, "Frankish Captives," 41, 45–48; Behrens-Abouseif, "Mamluk Perceptions of Foreign Arts," 309–12; idem, "Funerary Complex of Sultan Qalawun," 130–31.

<sup>30</sup>Van Steenbergen, "Ritual, Politics, and the City in Mamluk Cairo," 253–56.



materials.<sup>31</sup> Already by the early fourteenth century and certainly by the time of al-Maqrīzī, Crusader artworks were most likely items of fashion, exotica that evoked a distant foreign culture that was no longer a hostile neighbor.<sup>32</sup> An appreciation of Crusader *spolia* devoid of any triumphalist associations can be seen in a number of Mamluk monuments dating to the fourteenth century. Several architectural structures employ slender Crusader columns and floriated capitals in their decoration, or feature copies of these Crusader building elements (Fig. 5).<sup>33</sup> Crusader *spolia* in the century after the fall of Acre no longer alluded to military victory but rather referenced the cultural sophistication of the patron, admiration for the artistry and skill of Christian craftspeople, and Mamluk inclusion in a pan-Mediterranean visual culture. Divorced from any religious significance, these objects circulated in economic and cultural realms as luxury commodities and symbols of Mamluk-European interchange at a time when Mamluk interaction with Mediterranean territories was developing at a rapid pace.<sup>34</sup>

The early decades of the Mamluk Empire were ones where Crusaders constituted a convenient adversary. In their battles against the Christian armies, rulers like Baybars and Qalāwūn could style themselves as defenders of Islam, protecting the faith from infidels and polytheists. Military campaigns galvanized public support and forged a bond between the Mamluk rulers and the people they governed. The expansion of the empire also increased the legitimacy of the sultans, who only a few decades earlier had usurped power from the leaders they served. The Mamluks put their superior military power and dedication to jihad on display while accumulating plunder and glory in their offensives against the Crusaders. The Crusader states, then, appear to have served a significant political purpose for the newly-formed Mamluk dynasty. Their possession of fortified castles and limited landholdings along the eastern Mediterranean coast provided no serious military threat or challenge to the stability of the Mamluk political system; nevertheless, the Mamluk armies waged aggressive, offensive campaigns against Crusader positions because of the military glory and political legitimacy victory over non-believers would confer upon them. The Western Christians, thus, were

<sup>31</sup> Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-ma‘rifat duwal al-mulūk, li-Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah (Cairo, 1934–58) 1:3:951; Behrens-Abouseif, “Mamluk Perceptions,” 310; idem, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 154.

<sup>32</sup> Behrens-Abouseif, “Mamluk Perceptions,” 310.

<sup>33</sup> Viktoria Meinecke-Berg, “Die Spolien,” in *Die Restaurierung der Madrasa des Amīrs Sabīq ad-Dīn Miṭqāl al-Ānūkī und die Sanierung des Darb Qirmiz in Kairo*, ed. Michael Meinecke (Mainz, 1980), 51–52, for the reuse of Crusader columns and capitals.

<sup>34</sup> Behrens-Abouseif, “Between Quarry and Magic,” 418–21; Mathews, “Mamluks and Crusaders,” 197–99.



an effective foil for the Mamluks, presenting a troublesome but not insurmountable obstacle to the expansion of their empire in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>35</sup>

In the built environment of their capital, the Mamluks devised an effective and evocative visual formula for commemorating their victories in the use of Crusader *spolia*. The physical possession of plunder concretized political power by creating permanent memorials to the subjugation of an enemy. This aesthetic played an important role in this dynasty's identity formation at a time when it was being challenged by various political adversaries. The Mamluks used Christian *spolia* in royal architectural commissions to define themselves in reference to a threatening Western military presence. The Mamluks constructed Europeans as a formidable enemy, emphasizing the qualities that made them the most problematic from a religious and political standpoint: their Christian beliefs and military prowess. The *spolia* the Mamluks appropriated from the Crusaders came from religious structures and military fortresses, the buildings that symbolized the strength of these Christian warriors. However, by the early fourteenth century, when the Christian military threat in the Holy Land was a thing of the past, the symbolic charge of Christian spoils of war diminished and these appropriated materials accumulated new, less bellicose significations.

The configuration of a Christian enemy, on the battlefield and in the visual culture of Cairene architecture, presented a satisfying picture of domination and superiority for the Mamluks. The advanced artistic achievements of European Christians, particularly the instantly recognizable visual vocabulary of the Gothic, were easily appropriated and weaponized to depict Mamluk supremacy to an appreciative audience in the capital.<sup>36</sup> The use of Crusader *spolia* allowed Mamluk rulers to make aesthetic and political statements in their architectural commissions, increasing the beauty of their monuments while proclaiming victory for Islam. The Christians, however, were always infidels but not always enemies. The Mamluks fought some Europeans while making treaties and conducting commerce with others. The multivalence of *spolia* could address the visual culture of this heterogeneous group of people from a variety of perspectives simultaneously, increasing the interpretive complexity of European art forms, materials, and techniques.<sup>37</sup> Using a visual tradition that had a long pedigree in Europe, the Mamluks employed appropriated materials to express their ascendant role in Mediterranean politics and culture in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

<sup>35</sup>Christie, *Muslims and Christians*, 110.

<sup>36</sup>For a related example concerning the adoption of the basilica plan in Mamluk architecture, see Rabbat, "In Search of a Triumphant Image," 26–27.

<sup>37</sup>Mathews, *Conflict, Commerce*, 4–23.



## Political Encounters and Cultural Interaction between Mamluks and Mongols

If the Christian Crusaders constituted the most immediate threat to Mamluk territories in terms of their proximity, the Mongols were undeniably more formidable in their military might and political ideology. The Mongols, and more specifically the Ilkhans of Iran, had earned a reputation of great military prowess and ruthlessness, pushing westward as they fulfilled a divine mandate for world domination.<sup>38</sup> Their destruction of the city of Baghdad and assassination of the Abbasid caliph in 1258 was an act that shocked and outraged Muslims throughout the Middle East. Unlike the Crusaders who merely defended the territories in their possession, the Mongols were aggressive and continually on the offensive, threatening the Mamluks' Syrian border at regular intervals with the goal of conquering Egypt and Syria.<sup>39</sup> The Mamluks scored a stunning victory at 'Ayn Jalūt in 1260, with the sultan Baybars playing a leading role in the campaign. Regardless of this resounding defeat, Ilkhanid forces continued to launch raids into Mamluk territories in Syria. Thus, from the 1260s to the signing of a Mamluk-Mongol peace treaty in 1323, hostilities between these two powers persisted, as the Mongols attacked and the Mamluks tirelessly defended their borders. The adversaries exchanged embassies and insults, carrying out a war of words through diplomatic missives. The Mamluks denigrated the Ilkhans as infidels, non-believers who, like the Christians, needed to be eradicated, while styling themselves as defenders of Islam, protecting the faith with their military might.<sup>40</sup> A final factor that contributed to the antagonism between the two powers was the real threat of a Mongol-Christian alliance. The Mongols actively pursued collaboration with European powers, sending missives and envoys to various courts in hopes of encouraging cooperation against a common enemy.

<sup>38</sup>For the Mongol ideology of world domination and its impact on the West, see Reuven Amitai, "Mongol Imperial Ideology and the Ilkhanid War against the Mamluks," in *The Mongols in the Islamic Lands: Studies in the History of the Ilkhanate*, ed. Reuven Amitai (London, 2007), 57–72; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 45–47.

<sup>39</sup>For a general overview of the Mamluk-Mongol war, see Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement*, and idem, "The Resolution of the Mamluk-Mongol War," in Amitai, *Mongols in the Islamic Lands*, 359–90; see also Kelly De Vries, "Meet the Mongols: Dealing with Mamluk Victory and Mongol Defeat in the Middle East in 1260," in *Crusading and Warfare in the Middle Ages: Realities and Representations*, ed. Simon John and Nicholas Morton (Burlington, VT, 2014), 210, 219.

<sup>40</sup>See particularly Anne Broadbridge, "Mamluk Legitimacy and the Mongols: The Reigns of Baybars and Qalāwūn," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 5 (2001): 94–95, 105, 111, who notes the importance of religion for Mamluk legitimacy. See also Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement*, 56, and Denise Aigle, *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality: Studies in Anthropological History* (Leiden, 2014), 226.



The totalizing conception of the Mongols as an intractable enemy of the Mamluk Empire was complicated, however, by a number of factors, the most decisive of which was the conversion of the Ilkhan elite to Islam. Tegüder Aḥmad (r. 1282–84) was the first Ilkhan ruler to convert, but his short reign did not allow the Mamluks to address this change in a concerted manner. Ghazan Khan's conversion to Islam in 1295, however, required a response as the Mongols were transformed from infidels to co-religionists and the Mamluks were faced with the stigma of perpetuating war between Muslims. The Mamluks declared their superiority in the Islamic faith by noting their longer-standing adherence to the faith, questioning the sincerity of the Ilkhans' conversion, and critiquing their connection to dubious religious practices.<sup>41</sup> By cloaking themselves in the mantle of Islamic orthodoxy, the Mamluks attempted to distance themselves from the Mongols, though they too were quite recent converts. The conversion of the Ilkhan rulers, then, negated the Mamluk ideology of war against the infidel and the premises of the ongoing hostilities between the two powers needed to be recalibrated to address new religious realities.

As was the case with the Christians in the Levant, the Mamluks recognized that they could not totalize the Mongols as a monolithic enemy. Mamluk political and military strength was enhanced by a close alliance with other Mongols, the rulers of the Golden Horde, with whom they established a relationship of cooperation and mutual benefit against a shared enemy—the Ilkhans. Both allies wished to check Ilkhan aggression and territorial expansion and used their Muslim faith to establish common ground.<sup>42</sup> Their collaboration was essential for the perpetuation of the Mamluk system, as it was the lands of the Golden Horde that supplied the recruits needed to maintain the empire's army.<sup>43</sup> The ambiguity in defining a Mongol enemy was further complicated by the fact that the Ilkhans and Mamluks were essentially the same people. They both originated in Central Asia and were related ethnically and linguistically. They exchanged embassies and conducted trade with one another; Mongols formed part of the Mamluk army and refugees from Mongol lands took up residence in Cairo.<sup>44</sup> Through intermarriage and cul-

<sup>41</sup>Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion* (New Haven, 2017), 377–78; Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement*, 73; idem, “The Conversion of Tegüder Ahmad to Islam,” in Amitai, *The Mongols in the Islamic Lands*, 20–22; Broadbridge, “Mamluk Legitimacy,” 115.

<sup>42</sup>Broadbridge, “Mamluk Legitimacy,” 96, 98, 105; idem, *Kingship and Ideology*, 39–42.

<sup>43</sup>Jackson, *Mongols and the Islamic World*, 213; Broadbridge, “Mamluk Legitimacy,” 103; Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders*, 109.

<sup>44</sup>Nasser Rabbat, “The Changing Concept of Mamluk in the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt and Syria,” in *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa: A Comparative Study*, ed. Miura Toru and John Edward Philips (London, 2000), 92 (now in Nasser Rabbat, *Mamluk History Through Architecture: Monuments, Culture and Politics in Medieval Egypt and Syria* [London, 2010], 3–11); Jackson, *Mon-*





tural assimilation, Mongols had integrated themselves into the fabric of Mamluk society, playing a role that was cooperative and mutually beneficial rather than merely antagonistic. So, like the Christians, Mongols could be allies *and* enemies, and the visualization of the Mongols needed to manifest a similar multivalence and flexibility in order to represent effectively the complex relationship between the Mamluks and their neighbors to the east.

### Visual References to the Mongols in Mamluk Architecture

The Mamluk visual strategy for representing the enemy, established in the early years of the sultanate, was a powerful propagandistic tool for rulers whose identity centered on military prowess. It was a malleable instrument that could be applied to the Mongols as well. Mamluk rulers combined displays of belligerence and triumphalism with manifestations of cultural appreciation in public artworks that referenced the Mongols, employing the same visual tools as the ones used to represent the Crusaders. Victorious Mamluk sultans took building materials as spoils of war and erected triumphal monuments adorned with inscriptions that celebrated the defeat of Mongol foes. They also demonstrated an affinity towards the cultural products of the Persians, incorporating forms, techniques, and styles from Mongol-controlled lands into their public monuments in Cairo.<sup>45</sup>

In their triumphal mode, the Mamluks seized architectural plunder from the Mongols, displayed propagandistic victory inscriptions through their empire, and created monuments celebrating military conquests. Sultan Baybars engaged in an act of architectural appropriation when he recaptured the city of Aleppo from the Mongols. According to textual sources, Baybars took iron and nails from the Bāb Qinnasrīn and sent them to Damascus and Cairo.<sup>46</sup> No information exists about what happened to these appropriated building materials or whether they were used in another structure. So, unlike the prominent reuse of Gothic architectural elements in the Madrasah of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad or the Complex of Qalāwūn, the metal objects from Aleppo were not installed in a secondary context as part of a Mamluk victory display. The plundered materials from the Mongols were admittedly more generic than the architectural elements taken from Crusader structures and perhaps did not have the symbolic resonance that would have made them central visual elements in a triumphal monument.

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*gols and the Islamic World*, 150, 220, 393, 395–96; Broadbridge, “Mamluk Legitimacy,” 93; Amitai, “Resolution of the Mamluk-Mongol War,” 366, 369–70.

<sup>45</sup>This would be an excellent example of what Rabbat, “In Search of a Triumphant Image,” 23, refers to as the “diverse ... cultural and artistic traditions” that the Mamluks brought together to forge a distinctive style.

<sup>46</sup>See Bloom, “Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī,” 73; Taragan, “Doors That Open Meanings,” 12.



Mongol *spolia* may not have played a significant role in Mamluk architecture, but triumphal inscriptions did, and these celebratory texts decorated buildings throughout the empire as reminders of great battles against non-Muslim adversaries. As was the case with Christian foes, the Mamluks used public inscriptions to proclaim their hostility towards the Mongols, highlighting the role of the sultan in prosecuting jihad. The Mamluk rulers who identified themselves most frequently as *mujāhidūn*—Baybars, Qalāwūn, and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad—all ornamented their public monuments with laudatory, triumphal epigraphs. Baybars identified himself as a fighter against and slayer of infidels and polytheists on monuments in Syria and Palestine.<sup>47</sup> In an inscription on the Maqām Nabī Mūsá (Tomb of Moses), the sultan bears the specific title of “exterminator of Franks and Tatars.” Qalāwūn’s honorifics closely followed those of Baybars; in the foundation text of his funerary complex in Cairo, he too was celebrated as a “slayer of infidels and polytheists.”<sup>48</sup> His son al-Nāṣir Muḥammad used the same titulature multiple times on a Cairene gate, Bāb al-Mudarraǰ, emphasizing his participation in jihad against infidels.<sup>49</sup> All these texts lauded Mamluk rulers as defenders of Muslims and Islam, highlighted their sanction from God, and differentiated them from the infidels and polytheists against whom they fought so valiantly. Though belligerent and propagandistic, these texts were repetitive in form and formulaic in content. Only one inscription refers specifically to the Mongols as “Tatars” while the others employ the generic terms “infidel” and “polytheist,” labels that could refer to both Christians and Mongols simultaneously. After the conversion of Ghazan Khan to Islam in 1295, neither epithet accurately described the Mamluks’ most trenchant adversary. Honorific titles that were appropriate for Baybars and Qalāwūn, then, no longer applied to the political situation of the second and third reigns of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, when the greatest military challenge to the Mamluk empire was posed by the recently-converted Ilkhans.

Mamluk rulers also built victory monuments on or near the sites of great battles to commemorate their triumphs over the Mongols. A year after the Mamluk victory at ‘Ayn Jālūt in 1260, the sultan al-Zāhir Baybars erected a monument (a *mashhad* or *qubbat al-naṣr*) to celebrate the defeat of the Mongol enemy. Located in the vicinity of the battlefield, the building was constructed to thank God for a

<sup>47</sup>RCEA 12:123–26, #4588 (Ramleh) and #4589 (Safed); 141–43, #4612 (Maqām Nabī Mūsá); 104–6, #4556 and 128–30, #4593 (Homs). See also Taragan, “Doors That Open Meanings,” 6; Bloom, “Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī,” 75; Reuven Amitai, “Some Remarks on the Inscription of Baybars at Maqām Nabī Musa,” in *Mamluks and Ottomans*, ed. Wasserstein and Ayalon, 47–48, 50.

<sup>48</sup>The Monumental Inscriptions of Historic Cairo [<https://islamicinscriptions.cultnat.org>], 43.8; Max van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum* (Paris, 1894–1903), 1:126–28; RCEA 13:35–37, #4852.

<sup>49</sup>Monumental Inscriptions 556.4, 556.5, and 556.12; van Berchem, *Matériaux*, 1:87; RCEA 14:75; Taragan, “Mamluk Patronage,” 228.



victory against unbelievers, according to Baybars' biographer Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir.<sup>50</sup> The location of the building also recalled the biblical narrative of David's improbable victory over Goliath (Jālūt), connecting Baybars to great holy warriors of the past.<sup>51</sup> No physical trace of the monument exists and it is attested to in only one documentary source. The memory of the Mamluks' great victory lived on but it was not effectively embodied by this commemorative structure.

Another victory monument potentially associated with a Mamluk victory over the Mongols is the Qubbat al-ʿAṣāfir, located along the road between Damascus and Homs.<sup>52</sup> Built or rebuilt in 1341 by the amir Tankiz, governor of Syria and second in command to the sultan, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, this structure commemorated the victory of the sultan's armies over the Mongols at Marj al-Ṣaffar in 1303 (Fig. 6). The building was a small, square structure with a dome, bearing an inscription that indicated its function as a victory monument.<sup>53</sup> This victory over the Mongols was significant for al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, as it ended Mongol incursions into Mamluk territories and paved the way for the peace treaty signed between the two parties in 1323. It was equally important for Tankiz; he served as a combatant in the battle and by commissioning this monument he could flatter the sultan while recalling his own role in the Mongols' defeat.<sup>54</sup> The battle of Marj al-Ṣaffar, however, took place thirty-eight years before the monument was built, calling into question the effectiveness of this commemorative structure. Like Baybars' *mashhad al-naṣr* at 'Ayn Jālūt, this structure lacked strong symbolic resonance and fell into oblivion as its original commemorative function faded with time. The ambiguous form of Mamluk victory monuments and their lack of

<sup>50</sup>Thomas Leisten, "Mashhad al-Nasr: Monuments of War and Victory in Medieval Islamic Art," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 19–20; Taragan, "Reusing the Past," 57. See Syedah Fatima Sadeque, *Baybars I of Egypt* (Dacca, 1980), 115–16, for the English translation of Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir's text, and 28–29 for the Arabic transcription.

<sup>51</sup>Taragan, "Reusing the Past," 57; Aigle, "Legitimizing a Low-born, Regicide Monarch," 5, 12.

<sup>52</sup>Ellen Kenney, *Power and Patronage in Medieval Syria: The Architecture and Urban Works of Tankiz al-Nāṣirī* (Chicago, 2009), 193–95; Leisten, "Mashhad al-Nasr," 20–21. Jean-Michel Mouton and Bassam Dayoub ("Les Qubbat al-Naṣr de Damas et de ses environs à l'époque Mamlouke," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras, VII*, ed. Urbain Vermeulen, Kristof D'Hulster, and Jo van Steenberghe [Leuven, 2013], 508, 513, 517) argue that this structure was erected to commemorate a victory of an amir over the governor of Syria in 1341.

<sup>53</sup>The inscription is reproduced in English in Kenney, *Power and Patronage*, 193, and in Arabic in *RCEA* 15:203–4, #5929.

<sup>54</sup>For the import of this victory, see Amitai, "Resolution of the Mongol-Mamluk War," 361; see Kenney, *Power and Patronage*, 195, for Tankiz's motivations in constructing the monument.



textual and figural detail meant that they soon lost any connection to the event they were meant to memorialize.<sup>55</sup>

So, though the Mamluks employed the same visual tools to proclaim triumph over the Mongols, they were not successful in formulating an effective, specific, and memorable set of forms to represent their victories.<sup>56</sup> Triumphant *spolia* played no role in visualizing defeated Mongol armies. Victory inscriptions employed the vocabulary of holy war, but the general terms “infidel” and “polytheist” described both Franks and Mongols equally well. Like the formulaic epigraphs, monuments erected to celebrate Mamluk victories over the Mongols were generic in nature with no distinctive visual forms to differentiate them from other, more common commemorative structures like tombs. Their location in the hinterland of Syria also deprived them of visibility and propagandistic force, though victory monuments did not enjoy much popularity in Mamluk Cairo either. In either textual or visual modes, statements of triumph over the Mongols remained ambiguous and ineffective.

Thus, a compelling and emphatic visualization of victory over Mongol adversaries eluded Mamluk rulers. This lack of a recognizable visual vocabulary could be explained in part by the nature of the military conflict between Mamluks and Mongols, one that differed from that of the campaigns against the Crusaders. The Mamluks fought an offensive war against the Latin Christians with the intent of conquering territories and eliminating the Crusader presence in the Levant. The taking of architectural trophies amounted to a symbolic appropriation of the land, marked by the seizure of territory and structures from the enemy. The Mamluk war with the Mongols, in contrast, was a defensive one in which the central concern was the protection and consolidation of the empire’s borders, not the annexation of Mongol lands.<sup>57</sup> The Mamluks were simply safeguarding what they already possessed and did not have as their primary aim an aggressive advance into Mongol territory to seize citadels and strongholds. Symbols of conquered territory therefore did not accurately visualize the nature of the conflict.

In representing Mamluk triumph over the Mongols, textual sources spoke more eloquently than visual materials. Monumental inscriptions, documentary sources, biographies, and historical chronicles all addressed the defeat of the Ilkhans in strident, propagandistic terms, noting the formidable nature of the enemy and the historical importance of stopping the Mongol westward advance. The written

<sup>55</sup> See Leisten, “Mashhad al-Nasr,” 22–23, for a discussion of why these victory monuments did not stand the test of time. See also Mouton and Dayoub, “Les Qubbat al-Nasr,” 515–20; van Steenbergen, “Ritual, Politics, and the City in Mamluk Cairo,” 257.

<sup>56</sup> Rabbat, “In Search of a Triumphant Image,” 23, notes how some Mamluk visual experiments were less effective than others and were quickly discarded.

<sup>57</sup> Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement*, 26.



word effectively conveyed Mamluk attitudes toward their enemy, commemorating victories while emphasizing the significance of jihad. The Mamluks possessed a sophisticated textual vocabulary of military triumph and religious difference but they did not devise an analogous set of visual tools to represent their Mongol adversaries.

In contrast to these limited references to the Mongols as enemies and infidels, the majority of cultural borrowings from Ilkhan lands displayed an appreciation of Persian culture. Appropriated Persian styles, forms, and techniques, combined with the use of craftspeople and materials from Mongol-controlled Persia, argue for an admiration of Persian aesthetics. This positive attitude towards Persian visual culture manifested itself from the beginning of the fourteenth century and persisted regardless of the political situation. So, whether there was active war or détente between the Mamluks and Mongols, the cultural influence of Persia pervaded the Mamluk visual arts. The Qalāwūnid dynasty in particular employed borrowed artistic styles from Mongol lands, perhaps due to the family's close personal ties to the Mongols. The Qalāwūnids had intermarried extensively with the Mongols and some of the rulers' most trusted amirs were of Mongol origin.<sup>58</sup> The ruling family's avid artistic patronage combined with its cultural affinity toward the Mongols made fourteenth-century Cairo a propitious environment for Ilkhan Persian culture to flourish. Al-Maqrīzī mentioned a workshop from Tabriz brought to Cairo to decorate the religious structures commissioned by sultans and amirs.<sup>59</sup> This group of artisans is believed to have been involved in the creation of the distinctive spiral minarets on the mosque of Qawṣūn; it has also been credited with the Iranian-style tilework that adorns a number of monuments in Cairo: the Citadel Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, the Mosque of al-Māridānī, and the Khānqāh of Baybars, to name a few (Figs. 7 and 8).<sup>60</sup> The green faience dome on the Citadel Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, for example, resembles Persian dome decoration in its color, profile, and use of ceramic tiles (Fig. 9). Tile decoration did not form part of a standard Mamluk ornamental repertoire, so artists and patrons

<sup>58</sup>Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 4; Reuven Amitai, "Mamluks of Mongol Origin and Their Role in Early Mamluk Political Life," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12, no. 1 (2008): 135, 137.

<sup>59</sup>Diana Bakhom, "The Foundation of a Tabrizi Workshop in Cairo: A Case Study of Its Influence on the Mosque of Emir Altunbugha al-Maridani," *Muqarnas* 33, no. 1 (2016): 17–18; Chahinda Karim, "The Mosque of Amir Qawsun in Cairo (730/1330)," in *Historians in Cairo: Essays in Honor of George Scanlon*, ed. Jill Edwards (Cairo, 2002), 31; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 172.

<sup>60</sup>Michael Meinecke, "Die Mamlukischen Fayencemosaikdekoration: Eine Werkstätte aus Tabriz in Kairo (1330–1350)," *Kunst des Orients* 11 (1976–77): 86–87, provides a list of monuments with this type of decoration. See also Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 90, 164, 177; O'Kane, *Mosques of Egypt*, 87, 97. Bakhom, "Foundation of a Tabrizi Workshop," 18–22, addresses the mosaic tile decoration on the Mosque of al-Māridānī, while Karim, "Mosque of Qawsun," 43–44, notes Persian influences in the mosque of the influential amir Qawṣūn.





made a conscious choice to employ materials and motifs that were recognizably foreign and specifically associated with Iran.<sup>61</sup> Other examples of borrowings from Persian lands can be seen in the façade of the Madrasah of Sultan Ḥasan that resembles Seljuq monuments in Anatolia and the stucco decoration on the mihrab of the Madrasah of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad that emulates ornamental styles from the city of Tabrīz (Fig. 10).

The Mamluks thus approached Persian culture in a similar way to that of the Europeans they encountered, enthusiastically incorporating Persian materials, styles, and techniques into the decoration of their public monuments. They brought Persian craftspeople to the Mamluk capital to ornament the most prestigious buildings in the city. Like the distinctive Gothic forms used in a number of Mamluk structures, these Persian borrowings were recognizable and easily distinguished from local ornamental styles. The foreign beauty of cultural appropriations served as a marker of distinction, enhancing the monument while demonstrating the sophistication of the patron. European Gothic and Persian art expanded the visual vocabulary and enlivened the often somber appearance of Mamluk architecture. In the case of both cultures, aesthetic appreciation far outweighed and outlived any associations with military conflict and triumph.

In attempting to assess the significance of cultural imports from Mongol lands, a distinction must be made then between Ilkhanid (i.e., Mongol) and Persian culture. Were the Mamluks influenced by artworks from Ilkhanid Persia because they were Mongol or because they were Persian? In the case of the mosaic tilework and stucco decoration, it appears that these media were borrowed because they came from Persia, a land and culture with longstanding artistic traditions admired across the Islamic world for their quality and beauty. There was nothing particularly Mongol about them; in fact, both Mongols and Mamluks availed themselves of the rich visual repertoire developed by Persian artists over centuries. If these borrowings were more cultural than political, referencing the quality and longevity of Persian culture rather than Mongol military aggression, then why did the Mamluks not create any distinctive visual forms with which to represent the Mongol enemy on their architectural monuments? This absence might be explained in part by the eclectic and syncretic nature of Mongol architecture itself. On the one hand, it tended to emulate local styles and decorative traditions, while on the other its popularity paled in comparison to that of small-scale, portable artworks preferred by this predominantly nomadic people. Identifying specifically Mongol architectural forms that could be appropriated presented a formidable challenge for Mamluk builders. The Mongols were syncretic in their artistic influences, incorporating aspects of East Asian and Western European artworks while emphasizing the artistic legacy of Persia. This was particularly

<sup>61</sup>Bakhoum, "Foundation of a Tabrizi Workshop," 19.



true for the Ilkhans, who attempted to demonstrate their legitimacy through associations with illustrious Persian rulers from the past.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the Mongols could not be considered innovators in the artistic realm but excelled rather at fusing indigenous traditions into a new synthesis. The amorphous nature of Mongol artistic traditions impeded the development of a distinctive visual branding like the Gothic for Western Europe.

The most compelling explanation for the lack of appropriation of Mongol artistic forms in Mamluk architecture, however, might be that both Mongols and Mamluks drew inspiration from the same source: the rich visual culture of Persia. Mamluks and Mongols thus employed similar Persian forms and style in their artworks. In their approach to artistic production, then, the Mongols and Mamluks greatly resembled one another. Without strong artistic traditions of their own, the Mamluks avidly borrowed cultural references from the rich visual repertoire of the ancient and medieval Mediterranean and Near East. The Mamluks, however, appropriated actual objects—building materials and spoils of war—and reused them in their artistic commissions, while the Mongols employed artistic styles and motifs in their artworks, a type of borrowing that is more subtle and difficult to define. Both empires were ruled by outsiders who were foreign to the people and traditions in their domains and eager to integrate themselves into the dominant culture. As a result, both synthesized multiple artistic trends from the territories they now controlled while aligning themselves with the political and cultural traditions of Persia. Visually, the Mongols had little to offer that the Mamluks had not already appropriated themselves.

## Conclusion

In confrontations with Crusaders and Mongols in the early decades of their rule, the Mamluks pursued similar political and visual strategies. They waged jihad against non-believers while following a more accommodating approach of diplomatic and economic cooperation. The Mamluks incorporated references to these two adversaries into their visual culture, representing military triumph but also admiration for the artistic traditions of their enemies. Against the Crusaders, the Mamluks waged an aggressive, offensive jihad aimed at eliminating Christian strongholds in the Levant. While they were campaigning against the Mongols, however, the Mamluks were willing to enter into diplomatic truces and commercial agreements with Christian territories. In comparison to the Mongols, the Crusaders were of secondary importance, threatening because of their potential alliance with the Ilkhans and the use of their ports as a landing point for new

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<sup>62</sup>Charles Melville, “The Mongols in Iran,” in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256–1353*, ed. Linda Komaroff and Stefano Carboni (New Haven, 2002), 54–55.



waves of Christian warriors. Mamluk rulers could gain legitimacy as *mujāhidūn* against the Crusaders without confronting a truly formidable adversary. In their visualization of the Christian enemy, the Mamluks employed the readily recognizable vocabulary of the Gothic to express military triumph and aesthetic appreciation. Gothic architectural forms could serve as spoils of war or manifestations of the beauty and refinement of European art and architecture. The Mongols, however, were a different type of enemy, powerful and aggressive in their attacks on the Mamluks' Syrian borders. As was the case with the Crusaders, the Mamluks pursued a two-pronged strategy against the Mongols, allying with the Golden Horde to thwart the Ilkhans while keeping commercial routes open to ensure the availability of slaves for the Mamluk army. The iconography of victory devised to represent Ilkhan enemies consisted of victory monuments and inscriptions, but this visual branding was ineffectual and ephemeral. The Mamluks' use of Persian forms, materials, and techniques, in contrast, had a long-lasting legacy in Mamluk art and architecture, displaying a common Mamluk and Mongol appreciation for the visual culture of Persia.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Mamluks devised an iconography of triumph with which to visualize their relationship with Mongols and Crusaders. Mamluk rulers formulated an effective visual vocabulary for the Christians in the Levant but their time as a significant adversary of the Mamluks was short-lived. The Mongols remained a threat for far longer, but the Mamluks never succeeded in formulating a distinctive symbolism of triumph to characterize them. A more lasting artistic achievement in Mamluk architecture was the incorporation of foreign styles, materials, and influences, as well as the contribution of foreign craftspeople. Early in their reign, the Mamluks devised an aesthetic of cultural inclusion that borrowed freely from the many cultures they encountered through trade, war, and diplomacy. They employed appropriations from adversaries to define a distinct and eclectic visual culture that differentiated them from other polities and conferred legitimacy on a Mamluk state in formation.





Figure 1. Cairo, Qalāwūn Complex, exterior street façade. (Photo by Jorge Lás-car)



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Figure 2. Cairo, Qalāwūn Complex, window grille on façade. (Photo by Mariam Mohamed Kamal)



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Figure 3. Cairo, Qalāwūn Complex, detail of window form. (Photo by the author)



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Figure 4. Cairo, Madrasah of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, entrance portal. (Photo by the author)



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Figure 5. Cairo, Madrasah of Sultan Ḥasan, Crusader columns flanking the mihrab. (Photo by the author)



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Figure 6. Qubbat al-ʿAṣāfir. (Photo by Bassam Dayoub)



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Figure 7. Cairo, Citadel Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, tile decoration on minaret. (Photo by Sailko)



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Figure 8. Cairo, Mosque of al-Māridānī, tile decoration on portal. (Photo by Bernard O’Kane)



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Figure 9. Cairo, Citadel Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, green tile dome. (Photo by Ahmed Younis Sif Saad)



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Figure 10. Cairo, Madrasah of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, stucco decoration on mihrab. (Photo by Ahmed al-Badawy)



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## ***Al-Zij al-Jadīd* as an Instrument for Timekeeping in Fifteenth-Century Cairo: The Materiality of Bodleian MS Arch. Seld. A 30**

### **Introduction**

In this article I discuss an early fifteenth-century manuscript known as Ibn al-Shāṭir's *Kitāb al-zīj al-jadīd* (The new tables for timekeeping).<sup>1</sup> Ibn al-Shāṭir (d. ca. 777/1375) was a fourteenth-century astronomer and *muwaqqit* (Islamic timekeeper) of the Umayyad mosque of Damascus. His “new *zīj*” has always been presented as a typical example of its genre, that is: a work containing the data needed to “solve all the standard problems” in timekeeping, written down by an astronomer.<sup>2</sup> However, I will show that a different perspective on this work, which takes into account its materiality and considers this an aspect which is not at all distinct from its content, provides us with interesting insights into the meaning of the text in early fifteenth-century timekeeping in Cairo.

I will first introduce *Al-zīj al-jadīd* and summarize the way in which the work has previously been presented in academic literature. Thereafter, I will show how such presentation presupposes a strict distinction between the ideal content of the text and its material use and appearance—a view which has led earlier scholars to discuss this work's content without paying attention to its materiality. Then I will question this strict distinction between content and material carrier, drawing on the insights of philosopher Bernd Frohmann and of historian of science Karine Chemla, among others.<sup>3</sup> In the third and last part of this article, I will provide an alternative way to look at this text, by considering it as a discursive artifact of the practice of timekeeping in early fifteenth-century Cairo. Here I will show how this work functioned as an astronomical instrument but also as both a didactical and a social instrument.

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<sup>1</sup>Alī ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Shāṭir, “Kitāb al-zīj al-jadīd,” Bodleian MS Arch. Seld. A 30.

<sup>2</sup>E. S. Kennedy, “A Survey of Islamic Astronomical Tables,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 46, no. 2 (1956): 125.

<sup>3</sup>Bernd Frohmann, *Deflating Information: From Science Studies to Documentation* (Toronto, 2004); Karine Chemla, ed., *History of Science, History of Text*, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science 238 (Dordrecht, 2004).





## Previous Research: *Kitāb al-Zīj al-Jadīd* as a Container of Information

Previous research on Ibn al-Shāṭir's *Kitāb al-zīj al-jadīd* is either part of research on the person of Ibn al-Shāṭir as an astronomer or of research on the genre of the *zīj* in general. A *zīj* consists of several sorts of tables that are either directly or indirectly used in the practice of timekeeping. For instance, this particular *zīj* provides information on the specific dates for holidays and the different calendars used, but also contains a chapter on calculating the sine (*al-jayb*), versed sine (*al-sahm*), and tangent (*al-zill*) for different angles. Furthermore, this text also provides information that would nowadays be categorized as astrological,<sup>4</sup> such as a chapter on the “projection of rays” (*maṭāriḥ al-shu'ā'āt*)<sup>5</sup> by which a planet was considered to influence other planets.<sup>6</sup>

### Studies on *Zījes*

Previous research on the genre of the *zīj*<sup>7</sup> treats *zījes* from the ninth until the sixteenth century in an area ranging from the Iberian peninsula in the West to India in the East as one continuous whole. These studies do not make any substantial mention of the differently structured societies and political systems in which these texts circulated. Instead, they focus on what they consider to be the essential characteristics of the genre. Kennedy describes “the *zīj*” as follows:

A *zīj* consists essentially of the numerical tables and accompanying explanation sufficient to enable the practising astronomer, or astrologer, to solve all the standard problems of his profession, i.e. to measure time and to compute planetary and stellar positions, appearance, and eclipses. ...The tables themselves, as the end results of theory and observation, can be used to reconstruct the

<sup>4</sup>It is problematic to use the astronomy/astrology dichotomy for practices concerning the science of the stars in this period. Both terms do not fully agree with the categories historical actors used. However, because this is not the main issue addressed in this article, I use the terms here for the sake of brevity.

<sup>5</sup>*Maṭrah al-shu'ā'* refers to the doctrine according to which “the Sun, Moon and planets cast seven rays of astrological significance to particular points of the ecliptic, the ‘aspects’ (*nazar*, pl. *anzār*).” Benno Van Dalen, “An Introduction to the Mathematics of Islamic Astronomy and Astrology” (unpublished paper), 1–32. I thank Dr. Van Dalen for sharing this unpublished work with me.

<sup>6</sup>Ibn al-Shāṭir, “*Kitāb al-zīj*,” fol. 134b.

<sup>7</sup>Kennedy, “Survey of Islamic Astronomical Tables,” 123–77; David A. King and Julio Samsó, “Astronomical Handbooks and Tables from the Islamic World (750–1900): An Interim Report,” *Suḥayl: International Journal for the History of the Exact and Natural Sciences in Islamic Civilization* 2 (2001): 9–105.



underlying geometric models as well as the mathematical devices utilized to give numerical expression to the models.<sup>8</sup>

We find more or less the same definition in King and Samso's study, where these authors state that the purpose of a *zīj* was

[t]o provide astronomers with all that they needed in the way of theory and tables for such tasks as calculating the positions (longitudes and latitudes) of the Sun, moon and five naked-eye planets and of the time of day or night from solar or stellar altitudes.<sup>9</sup>

Both the studies of Kennedy and of King and Samso offer an overview of the subjects generally present in *zījes*. In the margins of this overview they acknowledge that there were some differences in content in different areas and different periods, but they do not elaborate on this remark. Neither do they take into account the different intellectual contexts in which these texts were used. In their focus on these *zījes* as one rather static and well delineated genre, they assume that the practice of using a *zīj*, which is the practice of timekeeping and a part of astronomy, is a universal and immutable discipline that consists in a definite quantity of predefined problems that have to be solved in a predefined manner. The values in the tables may shift, but the tables themselves and the problems that can be solved with these tables are considered to be fixed independently of their concrete circumstances. If a specific *zīj* is mentioned in these studies, its tables are not reproduced. Instead, parts of them are converted to contemporary mathematical notation. This translation to contemporary notation can be seen as being motivated by a certain perspective on science. Several levels of abstraction can be seen at work in the writings of these scholars: they abstract from the specific use and function of the manuscript in the period under investigation, they abstract the tables from the rest of the manuscript as being its central content, and finally they abstract from the concrete materiality of the tables as written in the manuscript by translating them into modern notation. In secondary research, the translation of ancient text into present day mathematical notation has been criticized as distorting our understanding of science and mathematics in the past, first in the history of mathematics, and more recently in the history of science.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Kennedy, "Survey of Islamic Astronomical Tables," 123.

<sup>9</sup>King and Samso, "Astronomical Handbooks and Tables," 15.

<sup>10</sup>Writing on the history of mechanics, Bertoloni Meli for example writes that "Over the last few decades, however, historians of mathematics have produced innovative and historically sensitive works that have changed our understanding of the discipline and its methods. Only comparatively recently has the practice of translating seventeenth-century works into modern notation become unacceptable, for example. We are therefore in a much better position than previous historians in having this new and sophisticated literature at our disposal" (Domenico Bertoloni



As I will elaborate further in the second part of this article, the text of *Al-zīj al-jadīd* is presented as a mere container or a conveyor of factual information. Thus the study of *zījes* fits in a wider tradition of the history of science in the Islamicate world where the tendency towards the historical contextualization of scientific practices was not as strong as was the case for the history of science in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, there are some important exceptions to this rule. It would be unfair to neglect important publications like those of A. I. Sabra, which, from the eighties on, questioned the narrative of studying scientific practices without regard to their contexts. In his seminal article “The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Science in Medieval Islam: A Preliminary Statement”<sup>12</sup> Sabra questions what he calls the “kinematic account” of the transmission of science, according to which knowledge can be transmitted from one society or culture to another without being affected by this transmission. Without contextualization, Sabra argues, this account of knowledge transmission leads to reductionism and precursorism. Two later works inspired and influenced by Sabra’s writings are Kaveh Niazi’s *Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī and the Configuration of the Heavens*, in which the author situates the work of astronomer Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī in the Persian tradition of astrology in service of the Ilkhanid leader,<sup>13</sup> and Nahyan Fancy’s *Science and Religion in Mamluk Egypt: Ibn al-Nafis, Pulmonary Transit and Bodily Resurrection*,<sup>14</sup> in which the author places his work in the tradition of Sabra by the title of the first chapter: “Towards a Contextualist Approach.”<sup>15</sup> However impor-

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Meli, *Thinking with Objects: The Transformation of Mechanics in the Seventeenth Century* [Baltimore, 2006], 9). For a general discussion of the problematic nature of translating to contemporary notation in the history of mathematics, and a view of the history of mathematics which has some affinity with the material approach outlined in this paper, see: Jacqueline Stedall, *The History of Mathematics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2012), 32–48; 107–12.

<sup>11</sup>E.g., John Henry, *The Scientific Revolution and the Origins of Modern Science* (London, 2008); Steven Shapin, “Placing the View from Nowhere: Historical and Sociological Problems in the Location of Science,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 1, no. 23 (1998): 5–12; David Livingstone, *Putting Science in Its Place* (Chicago, 2003); Mario Biagioli, *Galileo Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism* (Chicago and London, 1993). These studies, among others, explicitly engage with the internalism-externalism debate in the history of science, favoring the latter over the former in different gradations and for different reasons. These debates were mostly (though not entirely—cf. notes 13, 14, 15, 16, 17) absent in contemporary history of science in Islamicate societies.

<sup>12</sup>A. I. Sabra, “The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Science in Medieval Islam: A Preliminary Statement,” *History of Science* 25 (1987): 223–43.

<sup>13</sup>Kaveh Niazi, *Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī and the Configuration of the Heavens: A Comparison of Texts and Models* (Berkeley, 2014).

<sup>14</sup>Nahyan Fancy, *Science and Religion in Mamluk Egypt: Ibn Al-Nafis, Pulmonary Transit and Bodily Resurrection* (New York, 2013).

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 1–15.



tant such publications are, they are relatively few. Studies on *zījes* still bear witness to a linear vision of progress through history that sees science as a universal project independent of its historical context.<sup>16</sup>

### Studies on Ibn al-Shāṭir

When science is considered to be independent of its context, the authors of scientific texts tend to be presented as geniuses or inventors rather than as human citizens part of society. This is no less true for studies on Ibn al-Shāṭir. The most important study focusing on Ibn al-Shāṭir as a scholar was conducted by Edward Kennedy and Imad Ghanem.<sup>17</sup> In studies on the person of Ibn al-Shāṭir, *Al-zīj al-jadīd* is discussed on the basis of this specific manuscript. However, studies that focus on Ibn al-Shāṭir generally do not consider the *Zīj* to be one of the most interesting texts he wrote. Instead, they consider it to be the practical appendix to his theoretical work on planetary theory. This strict distinction between theory and practice, and the corresponding hierarchy, can be seen as a product of the same kind of idealism that I will argue is at play in the idealist opposition between content and material carrier. I will discuss this further in the next section of this article.

## The Materiality of Texts: Beyond the Content-Carrier Dichotomy

### Earlier Studies: Idealism and the Content-Carrier Dichotomy

#### *Idealism*

By studying this text as just another one of the *zījes* written in the Islamicate world between the ninth and the sixteenth centuries, we downplay its particularities: the people who wrote and used it, the context of the practices in which it was used. In other words, the particular nature of the material manuscript and the context in which it was used is not considered to be of direct relevance for an understanding of the scientific treatise. As such, studies thus bear witness

<sup>16</sup>Sonja Brentjes makes the interesting remark that one of the reasons for this is that most research on the subject was carried out by academics with a background in philology or mathematics who had a supplementary interest or education in oriental studies. They felt, she states, “deeply attached to the style of Otto Neugebauer which concentrated on identifying the scientific contents while ignoring most of its context.” Sonja Brentjes, “Between Doubts and Certainties: On the Place of History of Science in Islamic Societies within the Field of History of Science,” *NTM International Journal of History & Ethics of Natural Sciences, Technology & Medicine* 11 (2003): 65–79.

<sup>17</sup>E. S. Kennedy and Imad Ghanem, eds., *The Life & Work of Ibn al-Shāṭir, an Arab Astronomer of the Fourteenth Century* (Aleppo, 1976).





to a view of science as one universal project untouched by local conditions and their specific material characteristics. In these studies the history of science is framed as essentially a history of the development of abstract theories and concepts. Therefore, I will call this approach an idealist view of scientific knowledge. Such an approach would not be a problem if we accept that scientific knowledge is not affected by the time and place in which it developed. Science is treated as a universal project untouched by local conditions. If scientific knowledge bears the marks of circumstances and if results differ from place to place, this must mean that there is something wrong and that someone has made a mistake. Science is considered to be a collective term for a set of universal ideas that are discovered, an immaterial conceptual field that represents the natural world in its theories. From this point of view, it is no problem that the contextual particularities of the *zījes* have not been covered, because they simply do not matter.

In recent decades, however, this view has been widely questioned in research on the history of science.<sup>18</sup> By studying the concrete historical circumstances in which, and the particular people by whom, science was practiced, several studies have stated that the history of science is not a mere history of theories and concepts but a history of scientists and their practices. These practices are embodied and recreated in the work of real people who are situated in a specific society and whose activities depend on specific instruments and materials. If we acknowledge this, then the idealist view sketched above becomes problematic and can at best provide a very impoverished understanding of scientific practices in the past.<sup>19</sup> Thus stated, the wide generalizations and the absence of contextualization in the works on *zījes* written by Kennedy, King, and Samsó are symptomatic of an idealist view of scientific knowledge.

### *Text: The Content-Carrier Dichotomy*

This idealist view of scientific knowledge is tied to a corresponding dichotomy between scientific knowledge and scientific texts. If scientific knowledge is universal, immaterial, and independent of its context, then scientific texts are particular, material instances of these universal ideas. This is reflected in the divide between the content and carrier of a text, where the content is universal science and the paper and ink are the particular, local carriers of it. Thus, ideas are writ-

<sup>18</sup>Although not as much in the discipline of the history of science in Islamicate societies as it is the case in the history of science in Europe and America. (See also note 11.)

<sup>19</sup>E.g., Henry, *The Scientific Revolution*; Shapin, "Placing the View from Nowhere"; Livingstone, *Putting Science in Its Place*. Or specifically for the Islamicate world: A. I. Sabra, "Situating Arabic Science: Locality versus Essence," *Isis* 87 (1996): 654–70; Sonja Brentjes, "The Prison of Categories: 'Decline' and Its Company," in *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas*, ed. David Reisman and Felicitas Opwis (Leiden, 2011), 131–56.



ten down on material carriers by people in social contexts, but their epistemological content is considered to be clearly distinguishable from the material and social uses of their writers and material carriers. Texts are the dead material that contain ideal content or information.<sup>20</sup> The distinction between the material aspect of a text (“the container”) and its ideal discursive content (“the information”) is not only present in studies of the history of science, it is a dichotomy anchored deeply and firmly in any research on textual sources. In spite of its naturalness to us, this dichotomy leads to a lot of problems, which has led several voices in recent research to reject it and to look at texts in a different way. One of those voices is Karine Chemla, a historian of science who states that the problems with this distinction are manifold. First, a satisfactory, all-embracing, and unique definition of the “content” of a text can never be given. Interpretation always depends on who is reading or writing the text and in which circumstances. The meaning of a text, she states, always depends on its particular use and is not contained in an invariable ideal content. Furthermore, texts are always written in the process of carrying out intellectual activities: writing is a constitutive part of these activities and an essential condition for the research done.<sup>21</sup> As such, texts are “*discursive artifacts*”: documented statements that come from somewhere and have certain agendas rather than being mere containers or conveyors of facts, of epistemic content or propositions. Frohmann states that when we shift our focus from conceiving science as cognitive processes to a view that takes into account labor processes or practices, this reveals scientific work as a construction of localized assemblages of things, persons, devices, social relations, and discursive objects.<sup>22</sup> For similar reasons, Chemla rejects the presupposition that “once concepts, results or theories have been obtained by other ways, in an immaterial space, they are merely transcribed in a textual form that remains indifferent to them.”<sup>23</sup> In contrast to this she argues that texts are artifacts, elaborated in the course of the practice to which they belonged.<sup>24</sup> Thus Chemla’s view of texts corresponds to a tradition of scholars who reject the idea of (scientific) knowledge as an immaterial collection of theories that represent the natural world, and instead argue that it is

<sup>20</sup>Frohmann, *Deflating Information*, 13.

<sup>21</sup>Chemla, *History of Science*, viii–ix.

<sup>22</sup>Frohmann, *Deflating Information*, 100. Frohmann draws on insights from Bruno Latour’s work on actor-network theory. Latour uses the term “assemblages” to denote networks that are held together by a limited amount of heterogeneous forms of ordering (actants or actor-networks) that provisionally assemble, without there being any larger overall order. Latour has a view of knowledge and materiality similar to the studies discussed here. However, I cannot go into the details of how this relates to actor-network theory within the limits of this article. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, 2005), 1–17.

<sup>23</sup>Chemla, *History of Science*, viii.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



always embodied. Knowledge is not something that can be possessed by a human being or a material bearer, but it is rather the process by which human beings interact with material reality.<sup>25</sup> A text is a material tool rather than a container of immaterial ideas.

### Implications of This View on the Study of *Al-Zīj al-Jadīd*

If we acknowledge that texts are more than mere containers of epistemic content and pay attention to the hitherto neglected “complex circuits in which documents travel and their equally complex and varied effects,”<sup>26</sup> then several features of *Al-zīj al-jadīd* need to be studied more thoroughly than has been done in earlier research. In this article, I will use the following two sources to discuss the use of the text. On the one hand I will look at paratextual traces on the manuscript itself, which provide evidence of its use, and on the other hand I will look at biographical dictionaries for information about the scholars among whom this text circulated. Previous studies have not taken these paratexts nor these biographical dictionaries into account because of their focus on the technical content. However, when we acknowledge that a text always acquires meaning within a specific practice, paratextual and intertextual material provides us with crucial information on the meaning of the text. The front page of this *zīj*, for example, contains notes about its writer and copyist as well as the people who possessed and used it. In the biographical dictionary of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497), the author refers to the copyist mentioned on this front page. If we consider texts as parts of the practices in which they were used, then we have to take a look at other genres of texts that were part of those practices in everyday life too. The study of dictionaries that refer to scientific texts and their writers is therefore a prerequisite for the understanding of the practice of timekeeping rather than a gratuitous appendix to the more serious study of the scientific texts. Moreover, as Stephen Humphreys and Michael Chamberlain have argued, biographical dictionaries provide a very interesting source of information if they are not used in a vacuum, as a source for information on one specific individual.<sup>27</sup> Chamberlain even argued that these sources do not merely provide us with a description of the writer’s context and interpretation of history, but enable us to understand what their writers considered “the useful” past, that is “a past that was intended to secure their futures.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Livingstone, *Putting Science in Its Place*, 17–20; Frohmann, *Deflating Information*, 11.

<sup>26</sup>Frohmann, *Deflating Information*, 11.

<sup>27</sup>R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*, rev. ed. (London and New York, 2009), 191–92.

<sup>28</sup>Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge, 2002), 19–20.



In the next section of this article I will show how, when we take both the paratextual and the intertextual source material into account, this text can be seen not just as an astronomical, but also as a didactical and a social instrument in the context of fifteenth-century timekeeping in Cairo.

## Material Approach: *Al-Zīj al-Jadīd* as an Instrument

### The *Zīj* as an Astronomical Instrument

As a work containing tables for timekeeping, the context in which *Al-zīj al-jadīd* circulated was that of Islamic timekeepers/astronomers. Previous studies only reference this by acknowledging Ibn al-Shāṭir as the author of the text. As was mentioned in the first part of this article, his social background has not been studied. Ibn al-Shāṭir is, however, not the only—and maybe not even the most important—scholar connected to this work. On the front page of this text, Ibn al-Shāṭir is indeed mentioned as the author, but he must have already been dead at the time the manuscript was written. Further notes on the front page of the manuscript reveal that this work was actually possessed and used by a certain ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Wafā’ī (d. ca. 875/1471). A first note says “*malaka hādhā al-zīj al-[ms corrupt] ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Wafā’ī al-muwaqqit [ms corrupt]*” (The [...] *muwaqqit* ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Wafā’ī owned this [...] *zīj*). On the first page of the introduction this is repeated in the same handwriting in a marginal note reading “*hādhā khaṭṭ al-Wafā’ī*” (this is the handwriting of al-Wafā’ī), alongside the note “*naqalat hādhihi al-nuskah min musawwadat ‘Alā’ al-Dīn*” (This version is transmitted from the draft text<sup>29</sup> of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn),<sup>30</sup> ‘Alā’ al-Dīn referring to Ibn al-Shāṭir. Al-Wafā’ī was a well-known astronomer and *muwaqqit* who lived in fifteenth-century Cairo shortly after the death of Ibn al-Shāṭir in 777/1375. A more extensive note on the title page of the manuscript tells us more about the scholarly network this scholar and *zīj* were part of:

*Ra’aytu bi-khaṭṭ al-‘alāmah Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-Faṭḥ al-Ṣūfī ‘alā zuhr kitāb ta’līfihī wa-huwa bi-khaṭṭihī mā ṣawwartuhu, nazartu fī zīj li-Ibn al-Shāṭir samāhu Nihāyat al-ghāyāt fī al-‘māl al-falakīyāt wa-wasamahu bi-khidmat al-maqarr al-Sayfī Tankīz kāfil al-mamlakah al-shāmīyah.*<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup>I follow Adam Gacek’s vademecum for Arabic manuscripts in translating *musawwadah* as a draft. A *musawwadah* or draft is a first version of the text that the writer has not yet finished and/or authorized, in contrast to a fair copy or *mubayyadah* that has been authorized by the author. Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden/Boston, 2009), 15, 94.

<sup>30</sup>Ibn al-Shāṭir, “Kitāb al-zīj,” fol. 1b.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., fol. 1a.





(I [i.e., al-Wafāʿī] saw in the handwriting of the very learned Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-Faṭḥ al-Ṣūfī on the back of the book of his own composition, that was in his own handwriting, [a note] that I am copying here: I [i.e., Shams al-Dīn Abī al-Faṭḥ al-Ṣūfī] examined a *zīj* by Ibn al-Shāṭir, which he entitled *Nihāyat al-ghāyāt fī al-aʿmāl al-falakīyāt* and which he marked as in the service of the noble al-Sayfī Tankīz, viceroy of the Syrian realm.)

Thus, the front pages provide us with very straightforward information about the use and circulation of this text. The scholar who used this manuscript was a certain ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Wafāʿī, a *muwaqqit* who lived and worked in Cairo.<sup>32</sup> Al-Wafāʿī relied on the writings of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-Faṭḥ al-Ṣūfī (d. ca. 899/1494), another famous fifteenth-century timekeeper/astronomer, on an earlier *zīj* written by Ibn al-Shāṭir titled *Nihāyat al-ghāyāt fī al-aʿmāl al-falakīyāt*, of which no manuscript is known to have survived. As such, the use and meaning of this text cannot be considered merely as a collection of calculated data resulting from the theoretical works of Ibn al-Shāṭir, as it was not used in the context of fourteenth-century Damascus but rather in fifteenth-century Cairo. (Fig. 1)

The biographical dictionary *Al-dawʿ al-lāmiʿ fī aʿyān al-qarn al-tāsiʿ* of these scholars' contemporary, al-Sakhāwī, who also lived in Cairo, provides us with further information on the names of the timekeepers mentioned here. They were neither unimportant nor unknown among their contemporaries, and their social network can be reconstructed as shown in Figure 2. Shams al-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-Faṭḥ al-Ṣūfī (d. ca. 899/1494) was a timekeeper who was well known among his contemporary scholars. He also wrote a famous *zīj* himself, titled *Zīj al-Ṣūfī*, which is a recension for Egypt of the Timurid *zīj* compiled for Ulugh Beg.<sup>33</sup> ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Wafāʿī was a student of another well-known and important timekeeper, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn Rajab ibn Taybughā Ibn al-Majdī (d. 850/1447). The latter was a student of Sibṭ al-Maridānī, who was in turn a student of Ibn al-Shāṭir himself.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup>David A. King, *In Synchrony with the Heavens: Studies in Astronomical Timekeeping and Instrumentation in Medieval Islamic Civilization*, vol. 1, *The Call of the Muezzin* (Leiden/Boston, 2014), 136; Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, “ʿAbd Al-Azīz ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Wafāʿī al-ʿIzz Abū al-Faḍl wa-Abū al-Fawāʿid,” no. 539, *Al-dawʿ al-lāmiʿ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ* (Beirut, 2004), 2:348.

<sup>33</sup>İhsan Fazlıoğlu, “Ibn Abī al-Faṭḥ al-Ṣūfī: Shams al-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-Faṭḥ al-Ṣūfī,” in *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, ed. Thomas Hockey (New York, 2007), 547.

<sup>34</sup>François Charette, “Ibn al-Majdī: Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad Ibn Rajab Ibn Taybughā al-Majdī al-Shāfiʿī,” in *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, 561–62.



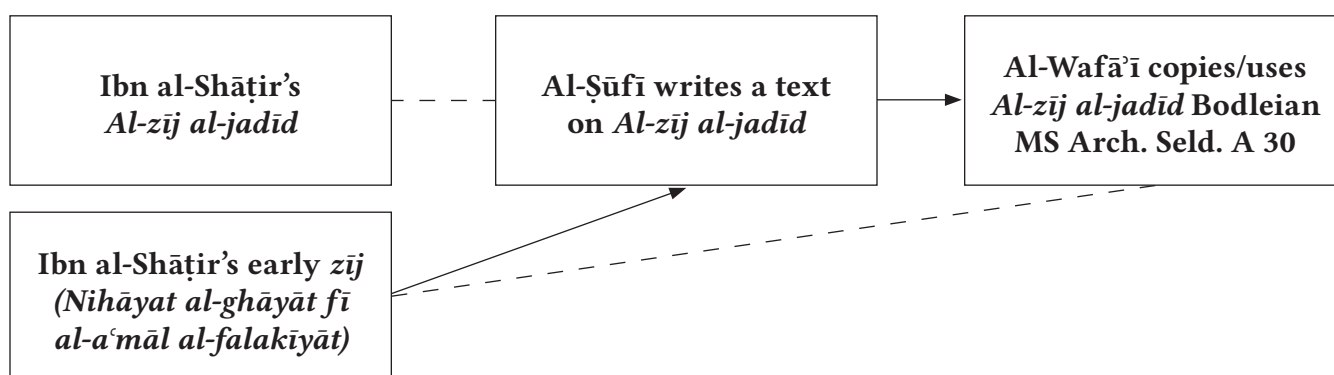


Figure 1. Scholars related to the transmission of this manuscript as mentioned in the marginal notes.

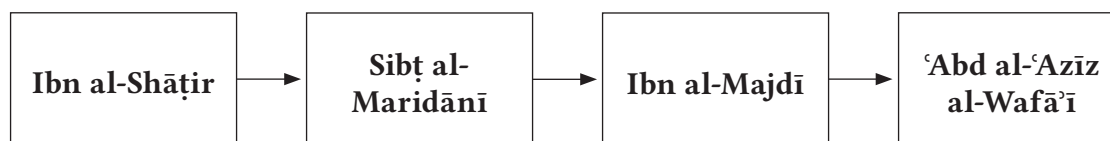


Figure 2. Scholars related to the possessor/user of the manuscript.

Al-Wafāʿī was a *muwaqqit* who manufactured and owned a lot of instruments<sup>35</sup> and who wrote several didactical works on the use of instruments. Al-Sakhāwī mentions the *muwaqqits* Ibn al-Majdī and Nūr al-Dīn al-Naqqāsh (d. ca. mid-ninth/fifteenth century) as the two teachers with whom al-Wafāʿī studied *ʿilm al-mīqāt*. Both of them were also instrument makers.<sup>36</sup> When we consider the *zīj* among those instruments and treatises on instruments, the question arises to what extent these texts can be studied as the discursive counterpart of the astronomical instruments these scholars made. On a related note, all the *muwaqqits* mentioned, including Ibn al-Shāṭir himself, had a background in or close relations to families of craftsmen.<sup>37</sup>

According to al-Sakhāwī, al-Wafāʿī had lodgings in the Muʿayyadīyah mosque, where he worked as a *muwaqqit*.<sup>38</sup> As Michael Chamberlain pointed out in his

<sup>35</sup>We know he owned a lot of instruments because his name was engraved on several surviving instruments and because he wrote texts on the use of these instruments. King, *In Synchrony with the Heavens*, 94–100.

<sup>36</sup>Al-Sakhāwī, “Al-Wafāʿī,” 348. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu and Boris Rosenfeld, *Mathematicians, Astronomers and Other Scholars of Islamic Civilisation and Their Works (7th–19th C.)* (Istanbul, 2003).

<sup>37</sup>Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, “Alāʾ al-Dīn Ibn al-Shāṭir,” no. 270, *Kitāb al-wāfī bi-al-wafāyāt* (Wiesbaden, 1962), 20:301–7. Charette, “Ibn al-Majdī,” 561–62.

<sup>38</sup>Al-Sakhāwī, “Al-Wafāʿī,” 348.



study on Damascus, holding a *manṣab* or an office in a religious institution, thus being paid via the *waqf* system, was a widespread practice that nonetheless suffered a great deal of criticism from certain groups of scholars. In particular, the use of the lodging facilities of such an institution was considered below the standards of a good scholar by several scholarly families.<sup>39</sup> Scholars from wealthy scholarly families generally did not live in religious institutions, even if they worked in them.<sup>40</sup> The indirect support from the political elite was seen as a corrupting influence on their intellectual work. Some scholars working in religious institutions even enjoyed direct support from the political elite, like Ibn al-Majdī, one of al-Wafāʿī's teachers, who was appointed *muwaqqit* and head of the teachers at the Jānibakīyah madrasah directly by Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbāy.<sup>41</sup>

In an earlier study I have linked the ambiguous attitude towards the *manṣab* of the *muwaqqit* in particular to the fact that many of the *muwaqqits* had grown up in artisans' families or at least had several artisans in the networks of people around them.<sup>42</sup> Konrad Hirschler describes how the fourteenth-century Mamluk Sultanate witnessed a growing upward social mobility. I consider the people who held the function of *muwaqqit* and came from families or networks of artisans as exemplary for this process.<sup>43</sup> *Muwaqqits* often built their own instruments and wrote didactical treatises on their use.<sup>44</sup> Al-Wafāʿī fits perfectly into this pattern. While we do not know anything about his social background, it seems reasonable to assume that he was not part of a very wealthy scholarly family, as he used the lodgings of the Muʿayyadīyah. Moreover, none of his family members are mentioned as well-known scholars in al-Sakhāwī's entry on him.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 69–90.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>41</sup>Al-Sakhāwī, "Al-Wafāʿī," 348. Sonja Brentjes, "Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī on *Muwaqqits*, *Muʾadhdhins*, and the Teachers of Various Astronomical Disciplines in Mamluk Cities in the Fifteenth Century," in *A Shared Legacy: Islamic Science East and West*, ed. Emilia Calvo, Merce Comes, and Rius Monica (Barcelona, 2008), 133.

<sup>42</sup>Fien De Block, "De Muwaqqit in 14de Eeuws Syrië En Egypte: Tussen Religieus Geleerde En Wetenschapper?" *De Handelingen* 69 (2016): 210–11.

<sup>43</sup>Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh, 2012), 22–25.

<sup>44</sup>One of these didactical works on instruments is for example studied by François Charette in his work *Mathematical Instrumentation in Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria*. However, a lot of work remains to be done on this topic. All the *muwaqqits* mentioned in this paper have for example also written didactical treatises on instruments. A thorough study of the materiality of these sources and their use in relation to the non-discursive astronomical instruments used in this period would provide us with interesting insights on the practice of timekeeping. François Charette, *Mathematical Instrumentation in Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria* (Leiden, 2003).

<sup>45</sup>Al-Sakhāwī, "Al-Wafāʿī," 348.



## The *Zīj* as a Didactical Instrument

Closely related to this is al-Wafāʾī's role in the educational network of early fifteenth-century Cairo. Al-Sakhāwī mentions that al-Wafāʾī became the *muwaqqit* not only of the Muʾayyadiyah mosque, but also of the mosque of al-Maridānī and of the Azhar mosque.<sup>46</sup> Many of the works al-Wafāʾī wrote are didactical treatises on the use of astronomical instruments. Thus, to fully understand this *zīj*, I argue that we also have to study it as a didactical tool, a sort of exemplar for students of *ʿilm al-mīqāt*. When we look at the work in this way, several interesting features stand out. First, in every chapter al-Wafāʾī explains how to calculate certain unknown values on the basis of every other possible known value. The recurrent structure of his argument is “If you know [this value], then add/multiply [that second value] to/with this to arrive at a third value, but if you know this third value already then subtract/divide the second value from/by this value to arrive at the first one.” Moreover, as Sonja Brentjes has pointed out, biographical dictionaries of these periods reveal that most of the *muwaqqits* in this period also worked as a teacher or *mudarris*.<sup>47</sup>

When we consider this work as a didactical tool, the fact that the values of its tables are calculated for Damascus and not for Cairo in particular could be interpreted as a way of teaching timekeeping students how to recalculate these values for their own locations.<sup>48</sup> The values in the work were calculated for a terrestrial latitude of 33°30', which is equivalent to the latitude of Damascus. The ascension tables (the tables of the rising times) in the work are all calculated on the basis of this value.<sup>49</sup> Whereas it was not unusual that *zīj*es calculated for other latitudes were used in new places, because an astronomer can always recalculate the data for another location, looking at them as didactical tools may help us to get a better understanding of the meaning of these sources.

## The *Zīj* as a Social Instrument

Furthermore, I also argue that this *zīj* was used as a social instrument; that is, as a text with which certain scholars acquainted themselves in order to gain status and authority in society. According to al-Sakhāwī, al-Wafāʾī not only worked in

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Brentjes, “Al-Sakhāwī on *Muwaqqits*,” 129–50.

<sup>48</sup>Kennedy states that the tables in this manuscript “have been computed on the basis of observations taken in Damascus, not in Cairo, as reported in some sources.” Kennedy, “Survey of Islamic Astronomical Tables,” 123–77. This is confirmed by a marginal note on the title page of the manuscript in which it is indicated that the observations for this work have been carried out in Damascus (Ibn al-Shāṭir, “Kitāb al-zīj,” fol. 1a).

<sup>49</sup>Kennedy, “Survey of Islamic Astronomical Tables,” 163.





the Mu'ayyadiyah as a *muwaqqit*, but he also lodged there.<sup>50</sup> Criticism of scholars who were paid via *waqfs* or housed in religious institutions was mentioned above and is relevant in this context as well. The use of the *zīj* as a social instrument can be linked to the process of upward social mobility discussed above.<sup>51</sup> For a scholar from an artisans' background, to have copied and possess a *zīj* may have provided him with social status and authority within the scholarly elite.

Another thing which appears relevant in this context is the extensive line of scholars that are quoted at the beginning of the work as predecessors in the field. In the introduction, several well-known scholars are mentioned, among them al-Majritī, Ibn al-Walīd al-Maghribī, Ibn al-Haytham, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, al-Mu'ayyad al-ʿUrdī, al-Quṭb al-Shīrāzī, and Ibn Shukr al-Maghribī.<sup>52</sup> There is no reference to any of these scholars' works; only their names are mentioned, making Ibn al-Shāṭir the terminus of this chain of knowledge transmission. Al-Wafāʿī, who used the manuscript, is added in the margin as a later inheritor of this text.

In this way the linear transmission of knowledge from one scholar to another, without attention to the different contexts that we find in the studies of Kennedy and King, is instigated by the author of the work himself: he wants to give the reader the impression that this work is part of a great tradition and to benefit from its honor and status to ameliorate his own position and status in society. This must be understood within the context of what we know about educational practices in Mamluk Cairo. Jonathan Berkey's work on this subject has highlighted how education in the Mamluk Sultanate was based on individuals, on a personal relationship between teacher and student, rather than on institutions. By studying with a certain teacher and receiving an *ijāzah* or diploma from him, part of the authority and status of the teacher was transmitted to the scholar.<sup>53</sup> If we look at the scheme of transmission of the manuscript, taking into account this transmission of authority, then the use of a fourteenth-century manual whose writer had already earned his position in society is a logical choice for augmenting one's own authority and status in society.

## Conclusion

In this article I discussed an early fifteenth-century manuscript of Ibn al-Shāṭir's *Kitāb al-zīj al-jadīd*.<sup>54</sup> While this manuscript has always been presented as one of

<sup>50</sup> Al-Sakhāwī, "Al-Wafāʿī," 348.

<sup>51</sup> Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 22–25.

<sup>52</sup> Ibn al-Shāṭir, "Kitāb al-zīj," fol. 2a.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*, Princeton Legacy Library (Princeton, 1992), 20–25.

<sup>54</sup> Ibn al-Shāṭir, "Kitāb al-zīj."



the many extant *zīj*es in the Islamic world and has thus been conceived as a container of data needed to solve standard problems in timekeeping, I have argued that a material approach to this text provides us with interesting insights into its use and meaning. Instead of a collection of data written down by a *muwaqqit* in fourteenth-century Damascus, a material approach reveals the way this text functioned as an important tool in fifteenth-century Cairo, where it was used and transmitted among a network of reputable scholars with a background in artisans' families. If we look at the text as a discursive artifact, with attention to its background, use, and role in specific practices in society, then it proves to have been actively used as an instrument in astronomical but also in didactic and social practices. Looking at the *zīj* in this way makes it clear that the transmission of scientific texts like this consisted of more than the passive reception of the invariable content of a text. It is rather a discursive act, a practice. This is not only the case for this text, but for all scientific texts from this period. Therefore, studying these sources as *actively (re)used* material parts of practices, rather than invariable and passive theoretical standard works *resulting from* practices, will open new avenues for research on timekeeping and allow interesting new insights into not only how a tradition of timekeeping was maintained but also into how it changed throughout this period.



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## Archaeological Excavations of Bāb al-Ghurayb Cemetery: Plague Epidemics and the Ruin of Fourteenth-Century Cairo

### Introduction: Archaeological Excavations in Mamluk Cairo

Today, Greater Cairo is probably the largest city in the Arab and African worlds, a megalopolis with nearly 17 million inhabitants. As the city has few green spaces, in 1998 the Aga Khan Trust for Culture launched a huge project to create a new panoramic park at the edge of historic Cairo. In 2000, a scientific cooperation was established between the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities, the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology (IFAO), and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) to excavate and document the archaeological sites along the al-Azhar Park in Cairo. From 2001 to 2009, our main archaeological site was the Darrāsah parking lot, also called the “Archaeological Triangle.”<sup>1</sup> This site is remarkable especially for its location in the city, less than 350 meters east of the al-Azhar mosque and along the Fatimid and Ayyubid city walls (Figs. 1 and 2). Eight missions were carried out on this site, for a total of 18 months of excavations. Our excavations constituted the first professional field school of Islamic archaeology in Egypt. Between 2007 and 2016, we trained more than 80 Egyptian scholars, including students from Ayn Shams and Cairo Universities and staff from the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities.

For historians, Cairo is one of the best known and most well documented Middle Eastern cities during the medieval period, as it was the capital of several important dynasties of the Muslim world, including the Fatimids, the Ayyubids, and later the Mamluks. A well known event of Mamluk Cairo is the series of epidemics of plagues and the Black Death from the fourteenth until the fifteenth century and later.<sup>2</sup> These plague epidemics were described in detail by historians but have never been observed physically. Our archaeological excavations have revealed this tragic story through a unique source of documentation: the cemetery of Bāb al-Ghurayb.

What we know about Mamluk funerary architecture in Cairo is linked to what we see and is, therefore, mainly the monumental architecture of princes, Sufi shaykhs, and other notables. Until our excavations near Bāb al-Ghurayb, very

<sup>1</sup>Stéphane Pradines et al., “Excavations of the Archaeological Triangle: 10 years of Archaeological Excavations in Fatimid Cairo (2000 to 2009),” *Mishkah* 4 (2009): 177–79; Stefano Bianca and Philip Jodidio, *Cairo: Revitalising a Historic Metropolis* (Geneva, 2007), 69–87.

<sup>2</sup>Doris Behrens-Abouseif, Sylvie Denoix, and Jean-Claude Garcin, “Le Caire,” in *Grandes villes méditerranéennes du monde musulman médiéval*, ed. J. C. Garcin (Rome, 2000), 182–83.



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little information was available about “normal” peoples’ graves and cemeteries in the city. This article presents two important results of our excavations:<sup>3</sup> first, how the Mamluks responded to epidemic crises by changing their Muslim funerary practices; second, how the plague epidemics impacted and deeply changed the urban history of Cairo.

### Archaeological Context of Our Discoveries in Darb al-Aḥmar

It is important to position our archaeological excavations in a chronological context to understand how we dated the Mamluk cemetery described in this article.<sup>4</sup>

The archaeological site is located to the northeast corner of the district called Darb al-Aḥmar, in front of the contemporary hospital of al-Ḥusayn and al-Azhar street. The site was called the Archaeological Triangle by the AKTC, and Darrāsah parking lot by the IFAO as the place was a former car park, also used by booksellers.

The first occupation levels found on the Darrāsah parking lot/Archaeological Triangle are represented by Fatimid layers dating from 980 to 1040. No occupation layer was found before this, and the area was covered by sand and pebbles. The excavated Fatimid structures consisted of a building centered around a courtyard with a fountain and a garden. The building presents strong similarities to the contemporary mausoleums found to the south of Fustat, in Iṣṭabl ‘Antar.<sup>5</sup> The building was constructed outside the original walls of the city demarcated by Jawhar in 971 and was destroyed during the extension of the fortifications by Badr al-Jamālī.

The second Fatimid occupation dates from 1087–92 and is represented by an imposing quadrangular tower made of square mud bricks. The foundations of the

<sup>3</sup>The unpublished results of this article were presented on 13 September 2014, in “Medieval Burial Practices in Europe and the Near East: Challenges, Approaches, Potential,” at the European Association of Archeologists twentieth annual meeting in Istanbul; on 26 October 2015 in a lecture at the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg in Bonn; and, more recently, on 29 May 2020, during an online symposium, “Epidemic Urbanism: Reflections on History,” sponsored by Columbia University.

<sup>4</sup>We dated all our structures according to stratigraphy (relative chronology), architecture, epigraphy, and artifacts collected in close and secure contexts. The first volume of our excavations was the publication of all the ceramics studied by Julie Monchamp: *Céramiques des murailles du Caire (fin Xe–début XVIe siècle)* (Cairo, 2018), 248–78. It is the first comprehensive chrono-typological catalogue of the Mamluk ceramics produced in Egypt (glazed and unglazed productions). The other artifacts will be published in another volume, including the Mamluk coins studied by Professor Frédéric Bauden.

<sup>5</sup>Roland-Pierre Gayraud, “Le Qarāfa al-Kubrā, dernière demeure des Fatimides,” in *L’Égypte fatimide, son art et son histoire*, ed. Marianne Barrucand (Paris, 1999), 443–64; Stéphane Pradines and Sher Rahmat Khan, “Fāṭimid Gardens: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 79 (2016): 1–30.





tower, built by Badr al-Jamālī, cut the previous Fatimid mausoleum. This tower was connected to a curtain wall, also constructed of mud bricks, measuring 15 meters in length. The wall runs northward to join the Fatimid gate known as Bāb al-Tawfīq, on the other side of the contemporary al-Azhar street.<sup>6</sup>

The most monumental architectural element of the Darrāsah parking lot/Archaeological Triangle is undoubtedly the Ayyubid wall, or Saladin's fortifications. This wall can be accurately dated due to the stratigraphy, the ceramic finds, and an inscription found at Bāb al-Qaratīn in 2002 specifying that the construction of this part of Saladin's defensive wall was carried out from 1173 to 1177. The distance between the Ayyubid wall and the Fatimid town wall is just 16 meters. Our excavations also revealed that the first town wall of Saladin rigorously followed the wall of Badr al-Jamālī. It is amazing to see that the Ayyubids did not enlarge the perimeter of the original city and did not destroy the Fatimid fortification.<sup>7</sup>

During our excavations we exhumed two Mamluk streets parallel to Saladin's city wall. These streets and dwellings were built in the thirteenth century and were used at least until the early sixteenth century. Some modest houses were distributed on both sides of the streets and between the Fatimid and Ayyubid fortifications (Fig. 3). One or two large (public?) buildings were built in the area, and the streets covered a complex sewage system with pits and drains. Analysis of the stratigraphic levels confirms that the Ayyubid fortification had stopped being used as a defensive element and houses were constructed on the inner façade of Saladin's defensive wall and over the old Fatimid wall. This phenomenon is explained by the political context in the Near East: the Mamluk sultans had defeated the Mongols and the Franks, and Cairo was not threatened anymore.

Our archaeological discoveries indicate that the Fatimid town wall was still visible in fifteenth-century Cairo, and al-Maqrīzī described this zone located between Bāb al-Barqīyah and Bāb al-Jadīd as the district "between the walls" (*bayn al-sūrayn*), meaning between the Ayyubid and Fatimid walls. As we noticed during the excavations, the Mamluk houses were constructed against and over the Fatimid mud brick wall. In fact, the Mamluks were the main cause of the destruction of the Fatimid town wall. Because the double lines of fortification never served as a defense, it is likely that the mud brick wall, unused, fell into ruin during the thirteenth century and was eventually absorbed by Mamluk urbanization.

<sup>6</sup>Stéphane Pradines, "Identity and Architecture: The Fāṭimid Walls in Cairo," in *Earthen Architecture in Muslim Cultures: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Leiden, 2018), 104–45.

<sup>7</sup>Stéphane Pradines, "Burg al-Zafar, architecture de passage des Fatimides aux Ayyoubides," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras VIII* (Leuven, 2016), 51–119.



## Mamluk Muslim Funerary Practices in Epidemic Context

In 2001–2 and 2008–9, we excavated a large Mamluk cemetery that was built over the abandoned district of Bayn al-Sūrayn and on the previous medieval occupation levels. This cemetery was actively used from the Mamluk period. The stratigraphy—the study of the archaeological layers—allows us to date the cemetery from the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, mainly because the graves were dug over, or sometimes through, previous occupation layers that date from the late tenth to the mid-thirteenth century, from the Fatimid/Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods (Figs. 4 and 5). Between the late thirteenth and the mid-fourteenth century, the eastern district of Bayn al-Sūrayn was abandoned and subsequently fell into ruin. Only one street, parallel to the wall, was still inhabited by poor dwellings. We do not know if the area was abandoned before or due to the plague epidemic. The neglected neighborhood was converted into a cemetery from the mid-fourteenth to the late fifteenth century under the Circassian Mamluks.

In usual Muslim funerary practices, wooden coffins were only used to transport the bodies to the cemetery. The bodies were wrapped in shrouds (*kafan*), one or two pieces of cotton, normally white but sometimes green.<sup>8</sup> In Cairo, the bodies are oriented north-south with the face toward the southeast in the direction of Mecca. The bodies were buried in the ground, in narrow pits 1–1.5 meters deep. One grave always corresponds to one individual. A grave is signaled by a tombstone located above the head of the individual, and another vertical slab is located at the feet. The tombstone sometimes bears a name, a date, and some verses from the *Quran*. Some tombstones are represented by pillars surmounted by turbans for men.

In the cemetery of Bāb al-Ghurayb, the number of individuals we excavated was around 77, but the number of graves identified was much higher—more than 300 just in the area of the Archaeological Triangle (Figs. 6 and 7). For example, in 2001 and 2002 we identified at least 36 graves, but only 14 were excavated. In 2008–9, 71 graves were recorded but only 63 individuals were excavated, including 30 in multiple deposits. The age of the individuals studied is a combination of adults and children. In 2009, we had 23 adults and 23 youths and children, of whom 6 had died perinatally (fetus). All these burials have been documented by field anthropologists Phillipe Blanchard and Diane Laville (Fig. 8).

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<sup>8</sup>Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London, 1860), 513, 522–24; M. Galal, “Essai d’observations sur les rites funéraires en Egypte actuelle relevés dans certaines régions campagnardes,” *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 11, no. 2 (1937): 131–300; Andrew Petersen, “Death and Burial,” *Critical Muslim* 33 (2020): 50–51; Éloïse Brac de la Perrière, “Structures et rites funéraires dans la miniature islamique avant la période moderne: quelques remarques liminaires,” in *Sur les chemins d’Onagre: Hommage à Monik Kervran*, ed. C. Hardy-Guilbert et al. (Oxford, 2018), 15–31.



Most of the excavated burials consisted of simple individual graves and were not epidemic burials. Numerous indications suggest decomposition of corpses in very narrow spaces. Some skeletons that we excavated were literally stuck in the ground due to the narrowness of the funeral pits. The most common position is the right lateral decubitus. To sum up, the body is placed on the right side, head toward the south, and the face always turned toward the southeast facing Mecca (Fig. 9). The lower arms are often placed along the body, slightly bent, the hands resting most often on the pubis, more rarely on the abdomen (Fig. 10). The lower limbs are in the axis of the body extension; sometimes the legs are slightly bent (Fig. 11). Back and prone positions were also recorded but are a minority on the whole site (Figs. 12 and 13). They may betray the presence of a shroud that would have masked the actual position of the body during the funeral process.

Artifact offerings in funerary contexts are extremely rare in Islam. The few objects that we found seemed to correspond to items worn, essentially jewelry: bracelets, rings, and necklaces (Fig. 14). Several graves yielded textile waste, for which the most plausible interpretation is that it is remains of shrouds (Fig. 15). The presence of a tunic (*galābiyah* or *jilbāb*) may not, however, be completely excluded in the absence of complete conservation of these items. As mentioned previously, grave goods have been found occasionally in Islamic contexts;<sup>9</sup> the best examples were found on the peripheries of the Muslim world and very often on trade routes such as the Silk Road. One example in southern Ukraine shows the permeability of Muslim cultures by pre-Islamic traditions of nomadic cultures from the steppes. A Kurgan burial of a Turkic (Qipchaq) prince, dated from the early thirteenth century, contained objects and products indicative of exchanges throughout the Black Sea/Mediterranean littoral, the Middle East, and central and northwest Europe.<sup>10</sup> Another example, a large Swahili necropolis in northeast Madagascar from the fourteenth century, contained many graves with archaeological material, including Chinese ceramics, and metalwork and glass from the Middle East and Egypt. These artifacts and funerary rituals reveal entangled relationships between Muslim Malagasy, Africans, and South Asians in the Indian Ocean.<sup>11</sup>

During our excavations, a number of tombstones were discovered in situ (Fig. 16), including two with some calligraphy (Fig. 17). The inscriptions were translated

<sup>9</sup>St John Simpson, "Death and Burial in the Late Islamic Near East: Some Insights from Archaeology and Ethnography," in *The Archaeology of Death in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Stuart Campbell and Anthony Green (Oxford, 1995), 245–47.

<sup>10</sup>Renata Holod and Yuriy Rassamakin, "Imported and Native Remedies for a Wounded Prince: Grave Goods from the Chungul Kurgan in the Black Sea Steppe of the Thirteenth Century," *Medieval Encounters* 18 (2012): 350–81.

<sup>11</sup>E. Vernier and J. Millot, *Archéologie malgache: Comptoirs musulmans* (Paris, 1971), 17–24.



by Frédéric Bauden and Élise Franssen. On one we can read *al-marḥūm ‘Abd al-Raḥmān*; the other says *hādhā ḍarīḥ* at the beginning of the first sentence. The text refers to a tomb (*ḍarīḥ*), but the rest is impossible to read. According to our colleagues, this type of Naskhī calligraphic style is found in the Mamluk period,<sup>12</sup> but, unfortunately, the inscriptions bear no date.<sup>13</sup> One tombstone was particularly interesting, as the epitaph engraved in the limestone block was covered later by a coat of stucco (Fig. 18). This indicates that the stela from a previous tomb was reused for a new grave. This evidence shows how intensively the cemetery was used during the entire Mamluk period.

The mission in 2008/2009 identified at least 30 grave reductions. These graves were cut by the digging of new funerary pits, as is often the case in extensively used cemeteries. Some secondary deposits (re-inhumations) and numerous human bones were also discovered in the filling of some funerary structures, suggesting a continuous use of the cemetery and a lack of attention to previously buried bodies (Fig. 19).

During the excavations, we recorded some stone blocks and thick ceramics in funerary pits (Fig. 20). These stones are usually placed along the lower limbs to lock the body in a side position. In one case, the body of a child was clearly leaning against the stone block to maintain its lateral position (Fig. 21). One grave was very different from the others, with a young individual buried under three large thick limestone slabs (Fig. 22). These stones were probably placed on the surface of the ground as an indicator of the grave’s position. It is also possible that the stones and ceramics were used during backfilling to warn gravediggers of the presence of a body at that location.

A Mamluk cemetery (from the mid-thirteenth to the early sixteenth century) excavated in central Israel presents similarities with some of our graves. Thick ceramic vessels were used to seal the tombs—mainly sugar pots from eastern Jordan. Our colleagues concluded that the people buried like that were Turcomans because of some characteristics of their anatomy. There is also a correlation with burial customs involving covering tombs with ceramic vessels.<sup>14</sup> We cannot con-

<sup>12</sup>Tawfiq Da‘ādli, “Mamlūk Epitaphs from Māmillā Cemetery,” *Levant* 43, no. 1 (2011): 81–95. The Ottoman epitaphs are very different from the Mamluk ones; see Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, “L’étude des cimetières ottomans: méthodes et perspectives,” in *Cimetières et traditions funéraires dans le monde islamique*, ed. Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Aksel Tibet (Ankara, 1996), 135–57; Edhem Eldem, *Death in Istanbul: Death and Its Rituals in Ottoman-Islamic Culture* (Istanbul, 2005).

<sup>13</sup>Frédéric Bauden, Élise Franssen, personal communications, 2008–9.

<sup>14</sup>Amir Gorzalczany, “A New Type of Cemetery from the Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman Periods from Central Israel,” *Levant* 41, no. 2 (2009): 234–36. Another Mamluk cemetery was excavated in Israel: see Meir Edrey and Yossi Nagar, “A Mamluk Period Cemetery at Beit Dagan,” *Salvage Excavation Reports* 10 (2017): 189–94.





firm that Mamluk Turcomans were buried in the cemetery of Bāb al-Ghurayb, but we did record graves with some similarities in the burial practices.

Undoubtedly, the most interesting part of our excavation was the discovery of collective burials. Some funerary pits contained deposits of multiple individuals laid on top of each other or, in larger pits, in juxtapositions very close to each other (Fig. 23). Some graves contained two to five individuals in the same pit (Figs. 24, 25, and 26). The evidence is clear: the positions of the skeletons that are touching without the bones having been disturbed, coupled with the absence of soil separating the bodies, clearly indicates simultaneous deposition of two (and sometimes more) superimposed individuals. The arguments for contemporaneity and simultaneity of some burials are proved by the contact between individuals without any disturbance and the perfect anatomical connection of each skeleton (i.e., the absence of dislocation) (Fig. 27). As no bone lesions associated with inter-human violence were recorded, we can discard the hypothesis that these were casualties of war.<sup>15</sup> The unusually high number of simultaneous burials is evidence of a mortality crisis, probably an epidemic.<sup>16</sup>

Several graves contained blackish residue in contact with and around the bodies (Fig. 28). As we did not observe any traces of coffins, and as the dry climate of Egypt usually preserves wood, we have rejected the hypothesis of decaying wood. A careful sample study showed the presence of textiles stuck within the blackened substance. The most plausible interpretation is that of a shroud. The substance could have been an application of naphtha on the shroud, especially as some bones presented discoloration showing that they were exposed to fire. Traces of lime have been found in some graves as well, showing that different burning or cleaning processes may have been used.

As mentioned above, the collective graves excavated are evidence of mortality crises, probably epidemics in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Cairo. The plague, or *Yersinia pestis*, was a very severe pandemic that affected most parts of the world,<sup>17</sup> starting in Asia and arriving in Egypt in 1348–49. Our archaeological data overlaps with the writings of famous medieval chroniclers such as Ibn

<sup>15</sup>On military mass graves and battles, see Catherine Rigeade, “Approche archéo-anthropologique des inhumations militaires,” *Socio-anthropologie* 22 (2008): 93–105.

<sup>16</sup>Dominique Castex, Patrice Georges, and Philippe Blanchard, “Complémentarité et discordances entre sources textuelles et sources archéo-anthropologiques en contexte de crises de mortalité par épidémie: Études de cas,” *Revue archéologique du Centre de la France* 47 (2008): 3–5.

<sup>17</sup>Isabelle Séguy and Guido Alfani, “La Peste: Bref état des connaissances actuelles,” *Annales de démographie historique* 2 (2017): 21–23. Dominique Castex and Isabelle Cartron, “Épidémies et crises de mortalité du passé,” in *Trente ans d’archéologie médiévale en France: Un bilan pour un avenir*, ed. Jean Chapelot and François Gentili (Caen, 2010), 3–24.



Duqmāq, al-Maqrizī, and Ibn Iyās.<sup>18</sup> The “Black Death,” *al-wabā’ al-‘amm*, from 1349 to 1365 may have reduced the population of Egypt by a third as around a million people died.<sup>19</sup> Egypt then suffered from repeated plague epidemics from 1469 to 1513.<sup>20</sup> No part of the Egyptian population was spared, from the poor to the rich.<sup>21</sup> Two thousand Royal Mamluks died of the plague in 1477. Outbreaks of the plague occurred regularly from the second half of the fourteenth century to the early sixteenth century<sup>22</sup> (in fact, well into the nineteenth century).

Our archaeological knowledge about Muslim funerary practices in this period is very limited. Determining how representative the graves we have excavated are is problematic: the corpus presented is only a small part of the cemetery excavated, and the cemetery itself is a tiny part of the whole intramuros funerary area extending to the north up to Burj al-Zafar. It is very difficult to draw a general picture of Islamic funerary rituals during the medieval period in Egypt, not to mention the broader Middle East, and we know even less about Muslim funerary practices in times of epidemics. Muslim graves are sometimes found during excavations, but few cemeteries or necropolises have been systematically investigated so far.<sup>23</sup> A second problem is that most of these excavations were done by archaeologists without the presence of physical anthropologists, meaning many details were likely missed during the excavation process. Further, no osteological studies were carried out during post-excavation work. We have, therefore, little information about the causes of death, origins, and ways of life of the individuals.

In Cairo, the most important excavation in a funerary context has been conducted in Iṣṭabl ‘Antar to the southern borders of Fustat and the Qarāfah al-Ku-

<sup>18</sup>Michael Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (Princeton, 1977); Behrens-Abouseif, Denoix, and Garcin, “Le Caire,” 182–83.

<sup>19</sup>Stuart Borsch and Tarek Sabraa, “Refugees of the Black Death: Quantifying Rural Migration for Plague and Other Environmental Disasters,” *Annales de démographie historique* 2 (2017): 73; Dr. Ayman Fouad Sayyid, personal communication, 2009.

<sup>20</sup>Stuart Borsch and Tarek Sabraa, “Plague Mortality in Late Medieval Cairo: Quantifying the Plague Outbreaks of 833/1430 and 864/1460,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 19 (2016): 57–90.

<sup>21</sup>David Ayalon, “The Plague and Its Effects upon the Mamluk Army,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1946): 67–73; idem, “Regarding Population Estimates in the Countries of Medieval Islam,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 28 (1985): 1–19; André Clot, *L’Égypte des Mamelouks: L’empire des esclaves (1250–1517)* (Paris, 1996), 114–19, 137–39, 180.

<sup>22</sup>Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (London, 1969); John Hatcher, *Plague, Population and the English Economy 1348–1530* (London, 1977); Stuart Borsch, *The Black Death in Egypt and England: A Comparative Study* (Austin, 2005); Arien Mack, ed., *In Time of Plague: The History and Social Consequences of Lethal Epidemic Disease*, (New York, 1991).

<sup>23</sup>Jorge Lopez Quiroga and Artemio Manuel Martinez Tejera, *Morir en el Mediterraneo Medieval* (Oxford, 2009); Lloyd Weeks, ed., *Death and Burial in Arabia and Beyond: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Oxford, 2010).



brá. An Abbasid and Fatimid necropolis (ninth to eleventh centuries) was built over the remains of the first settlement from the Arab conquest and the Umayyad periods (seventh to eighth centuries). Family mausoleums were found and excavated, as well as individual graves with wooden coffins.<sup>24</sup> The use of coffins in medieval Islam is not uncommon, and similar graves have been found in Syria at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī in an Ayyubid context<sup>25</sup> and in a cemetery in Bahrain (eighth to sixteenth centuries).<sup>26</sup> Closer to our excavations, the mausoleum of Sultan Īnāl (1456) and the funerary complex of Qurqumās, the great amir and chief of the army of Sultan al-Ghawrī (1506), were part of a conservation project. An excavation was conducted in the crypt of Qurqumās (d. 1510), where more than one hundred skeletons—72 adults and 37 children—were found.<sup>27</sup>

## How a Plague Epidemic Cemetery Illustrates the Ruin of Cairo

The role and the importance of Bāb al-Ghurayb cemetery can only be understood in the context of urbanization, funerary spaces in Cairo, and the boundaries of the city through time.

Only sultans, amirs, prominent religious personalities, and other important figures of the Mamluk Sultanate were buried in mausoleums attached to mosques and madrasahs in the city. Most of them were, like the rest of the population, buried in the desert outside the city. The Nile was always considered a fertile place for life, and the desert was a place for the dead, mainly for sanitary reasons.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Cairene cemeteries were not empty places reserved only for the dead; as in Europe, they were places for the living as well. People used cemeteries as gardens and open spaces, according to al-Maqrīzī writing in 1442, and not only common people but the elite since at least the Fatimid period.<sup>29</sup>

During the medieval period, Cairo had two major necropolises outside the city (Fig. 29). With an area of 1500 hectares and origins in the Umayyad period,

<sup>24</sup>Gayraud, “Qarāfa al-Kubrā,” 443–64.

<sup>25</sup>Denis Genequand, “Nouvelles recherches à Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī: la mosquée ayyoubide et la nécropole,” *Les Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes* 47–48 (2004–5): 279–89.

<sup>26</sup>Monik Kervran, “Cimetières islamiques de Bahrain (VIIIe–XVIe siècles),” in *Cimetières et traditions funéraires dans le monde islamique*, ed. Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Aksel Tibet (Ankara, 1996), 57–78.

<sup>27</sup>T. Dzierzykray-Rogalski, J. Kania, and M. al-Minabbawi, “The Investigations of Burial Crypts in the Mausoleum of Princess Tatar al-Ḥiḡāziyya in Cairo,” *Annales Islamologiques* 23 (1987): 73–86.

<sup>28</sup>Galila El-Kadi and Alain Bonnamy, *La Cité des Morts* (Cairo, 2001), 23.

<sup>29</sup>Tetsuya Ohtoshi, “Cairene Cemeteries as Public Loci in Mamluk Egypt,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (2006): 83–116.



al-Qarāfah al-Kubrā (the great cemetery) was the biggest and oldest necropolis.<sup>30</sup> It is located between the rocky mountains of the Muqaṭṭam<sup>31</sup> and the Ibn Ṭulūn mosque to the north and the lake of ʿAyn al-Šīrah and the Iṣṭabl ʿAntar plateau to the south (Fig. 30). The mosque of Sayyidah Nafīṣah and the mausoleum of the Imām al-Shāfiʿī are two important religious landmarks in the northern part of the necropolis. The Circassian Mamluks opened a new necropolis, al-Qarāfah al-Šuġhrā, east of Islamic Cairo—between the Ayyubid citadel to the south and Jabal Aḥmar to the north—as they needed space to build mausoleums and pious foundations.<sup>32</sup> Six hundred *turbahs* (mausoleums) and more than four thousand tombs were built in the area.<sup>33</sup>

Working on the archaeology of funerary spaces in Cairo forces us to think of urbanization in diachrony and synchrony. For example, burials in the city existed since at least the Abbasid period in Fustat. Later, Fatimid princes liked to be buried in their houses, even if most of these burials were temporary, and secondary reburials were organized a few years later outside the city.<sup>34</sup> Some older, smaller necropolises outside the city were later incorporated in the Mamluk city, such as the Fatimid necropolis in front of Bāb al-Naṣr, north of Ḥusaynīyah.<sup>35</sup> This small necropolis began to expand after the death of Badr al-Jamālī in 1088, but was probably in use before that, as it is extremely common to have graves outside the main gates of the city. A small Fatimid necropolis also existed in front of Bāb Zuwaylah, nowadays under the Mamluk and Ottoman city.

Can we consider the cemetery of Bāb al-Ghurayb as being inside or outside of the city? This question is extremely important, because, *de facto*, the cemetery is located inside the Ayyubid and Fatimid city walls, but on more modern maps, such as the *Description de l’Égypte*, it seems to be situated outside the Ottoman city.

The cemetery of Bāb al-Ghurayb was ideally located close to the Qarāfah al-Šuġhrā, but also on the Darb al-Sulṭānī, the main road going to the north and east of Cairo leading to the main pilgrimage road through the Sinai, used after 1250

<sup>30</sup>Dorothea Russell, “A Note on the Cemetery of the Abbasid Caliphs of Cairo and the Shrine of Saiyida Nafīsa,” *Ars Islamica* 6, no. 2 (1939): 168–74.

<sup>31</sup>Yusuf Ragib, “Le site de Muqaṭṭam,” *Annales Islamologiques* 33 (1999): 159–84.

<sup>32</sup>El-Kadi and Bonnamy, *La Cité*, 23–35.

<sup>33</sup>Tetsuya Ohtoshi, “A Note on the Disregarded Ottoman Cairene Ziyāra Book,” *Mediterranean World* 15 (1998): 81.

<sup>34</sup>Yusuf Ragib, “Morts dans la ville: Les sépultures de Fustāṭ et du Caire jusqu’à la fin des Ayyoubides,” *Annales Islamologiques* 46 (2012): 343–47 and 350–60; idem, “Faux morts et enterrés vifs dans l’espace musulman,” *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983): 5–30.

<sup>35</sup>El-Kadi and Bonnamy, *La Cité*, 129.





and the fall of the Crusader states. The cemetery<sup>36</sup> owes its name to the gate of al-Ghurayb, so designated during the Ottoman period. The original name of the eastern gate was Bāb al-Barqīyah, the name of a *ḥarah* (quarter) of the Fatimid city that was inhabited by Berbers from Barqa to the Libyan-Tunisian borders.<sup>37</sup> In 1087, the vizier Badr al-Jamālī renamed it Bāb al-Tawfiq, but no one used this name. The hills of debris along the eastern walls are also called Tell al-Barqīyah or Kom al-Barqīyah, and those to the south of Bāb al-Barqīyah are generally called Kom al-Darrāsah. The practice of throwing rubbish and debris of all sorts to the east of the city started under the rule of the caliph al-Ḥākim, and the mounds reach a height of 40 meters in some places.

The Bayn al-Sūrayn area illustrates the famous “ruin of Cairo” described by al-Maqrīzī,<sup>38</sup> and is exactly where we conducted our excavations: the area “between the [Fatimid and Ayyubid] walls.” We can see here the profound impact the plague had on Mamluk society and the urban landscape, when entire neighborhoods in eastern Cairo were abandoned.<sup>39</sup> Of course, other factors can explain the abandonment of eastern Cairo, including the great earthquake of 1302 and the economic crises that followed the recurrent plague epidemics. Nevertheless, the cemetery that we excavated was built during the fourteenth century over the twelfth- and thirteenth-century settlement and shows the change in function and use of an urban space during the fourteenth century.

Our work changes our view of the neighborhood. It had been believed that the area became a cemetery during the Ottoman era, but in fact the cemetery of Bāb al-Ghurayb dates from the fourteenth century. It was used extensively under the Circassian Mamluks and was still in use later.<sup>40</sup>

A Venetian map of Cairo shows that the cemetery was in use in the late fifteenth and very early sixteenth century.<sup>41</sup> The map shows the presence of tombs and mausoleums in the eastern area in the ruins from Burj al-Zafar to the northeast to Burj al-Qaratīn (also called Burj al-Maḥrūq) to the southeast (Fig. 31). The cemetery continued to be used during the Ottoman period,<sup>42</sup> as it is mentioned on the map of the *Description de l’Egypte* in 1798–1801 (Fig. 32). By the end of the eighteenth century, the French promulgated sanitary rules in the city to prevent epi-

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>38</sup>Julien Loiseau, *Reconstruire la maison du Sultan* (Cairo, 2010), 452–61.

<sup>39</sup>And never reoccupied during the Ottoman period. André Raymond, “Cairo’s Area and Population in the Early Fifteenth Century,” *Muqarnas* 2 (1984): 21–31.

<sup>40</sup>El-Kadi and Bonnamy, *La Cité*, 31.

<sup>41</sup>Bernard Blanc, Sylvie Denoix, Jean-Claude Garcin, and Romanello Gordiani, “À propos de la carte du Caire de Matheo Pagano,” *Annales Islamologiques* 17 (1981): 272–85.

<sup>42</sup>The last plague epidemics in Cairo date from 1834–35.



demics and after September 1798 it was forbidden to bury the dead in cemeteries in the city of Cairo. People were instructed to use the eastern *qarāfah* outside the city.<sup>43</sup> Later, during Muḥammad ‘Alī’s rule and until the early twentieth century, people reverted to old habits and continued to use the Bāb al-Ghurayb cemetery. It is visible on Pascal Coste’s map in 1825, and in a panoramic view of Cairo drawn from the Darrāsah hills by David Roberts in 1839.<sup>44</sup> The cemetery is still in use in the 1920s, as seen in Cresswell’s photographs (Fig. 33).<sup>45</sup>

During our excavations we found a few isolated Ottoman tombs around the northern walls, between Bāb al-Naṣr and Burj al-Zafar, but all the graves we found in the Darrāsah parking lot were Mamluk. The absence Ottoman tombs in the Bāb al-Ghurayb cemetery can be easily explained by the twentieth-century modernization of the city. When the new al-Azhar street was created in 1923 several Ottoman cemeteries were destroyed or displaced.<sup>46</sup> Later, when the eastern part of Islamic Cairo was re-urbanized during the Nasser and Sadat eras, from the 1950s to 1981, many archaeological levels were again destroyed by the extensive use of bulldozers and other industrial machinery. Houses, petrol stations, fire stations, and hospitals were built in the vicinity of the Bāb al-Ghurayb cemetery. Major urban redevelopment continued during the Mubarak presidency. The Ṣalāḥ Sālīm and al-Naṣr motorways opened in 1985 along the stone quarries and the old railway, and many tombs and graves were displaced. The construction of the al-Azhar tunnel (1998–2001), connecting Islamic Cairo to Ṣalāḥ Sālīm Street, was the last destructive blow to antiquities in the area, when seven to eight meters of modern debris were pushed onto the Archaeological Triangle/Darrāsah parking lot. Paradoxically, this backfill of rubbish protected the old Mamluk cemetery until our excavations.

## Conclusion: Plague Epidemic Factors in Urban and Social Changes

The results of our excavations provide new data for historians, archaeologists, and specialists in Cairo and the Mamluk period in general.

First, Bāb al-Ghurayb is one of the largest Mamluk cemeteries excavated so far in the Middle East, and the only cemetery excavated in Islamic Cairo. It was situated within the walls of the city and delimited by a funerary enclosure wall. Having a cemetery inside the city walls was an unusual practice and corresponds with a rapid reaction to an epidemic crisis. Cairenes had to find quick and prac-

<sup>43</sup> Al-Jabartī in André Raymond, *Le Caire* (Paris, 1993), 294.

<sup>44</sup> Private collection, Fine Art Society, London.

<sup>45</sup> Cresswell’s photographic archives from the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities.

<sup>46</sup> El-Kadi and Bonnamy, *La Cité*, 173.



tical ways to bury their dead, and this cemetery presents serious evidence of the plague epidemics in Egypt during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The anthropological excavations reveal an unusually high number of simultaneous burials, which are evidence of a mortality crisis due to epidemics. Some multiple burials contained several skeletons stacked one on top of the other. They were perfectly oriented with the face turned to Mecca but were placed in the same pit at the same time. These mass graves indicate that groups of people were buried in the same pit and that it was done hastily. Some human bones show evidence of being burned, though the method of burning has yet to be determined; no trace of charcoal was present. These graves are often associated with lime and black deposits that may indicate a flammable liquid such as naphtha was used to burn infected bodies. This funerary practice is unusual in Islam; it might have been permitted in an epidemic crisis. Religious debates and treatments for the pandemic had been discussed for a long time amongst Muslim communities from the Great Plague of 1348–49 to the Ottoman period.<sup>47</sup> Our observations in the field and our interpretations needed to be confirmed by molecular and DNA analyses to identify the type of epidemic and confirm the presence of plague. For this reason, we joined the research programme of Professor Hendrik Poinar of the Ancient DNA Centre at McMaster University, Ontario. This is the first comprehensive project that shifts the focus from Europe to the Muslim world during the second pandemic (the Black Death and its recurrent waves, from approximately the 1340s to the 1840s). Unfortunately, the Egyptian authorities refused to grant permission to conduct the DNA analyses and the skeletons were reburied.

Another important result is a better understanding of the boundaries of medieval Cairo. Cairo, from the Fatimid to the Mamluk periods, was much larger than had been previously described by historians. Our excavations revealed that the Ayyubid wall followed the contours of the previous city wall built by the Fatimids and that the whole eastern part of the city was densely populated, with dwellings and streets parallel to the walls until, in 1348, the Black Death had a deep impact on the urban landscape, pushing people to abandon the whole eastern district of the city. Our archaeological discoveries confirm the historical reports of authors such as al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Iyās. Cairo suffered huge economic crises linked to recurrent plague epidemics and consequently parts of the eastern districts were abandoned for 500 years. By the end of the fifteenth century the plague epidemics had completely transformed the city of Cairo, and these new “no man’s lands”

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<sup>47</sup>Nükhet Varlik, *Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World: The Ottoman Experience, 1347–1600* (Cambridge, 2015), 207–47; Suzanne Gigandet, *La grande peste en Espagne musulmane au XIVe siècle: Le récit d’un témoin: Abū Ġa’far al-Anṣārī* (Damascus, 2010).





were reused as cemeteries by the Ottomans until the British protectorate and the colonial period in the 1920s.

As an epilogue, at the end of our excavations in 2009 the Aga Khan Trust for Culture started a conservation programme to protect and present to the wider public our excavations on the Archaeological Triangle. The archaeological park was completed in 2012. It will become a major gateway between al-Azhar Street and the al-Azhar Park (Fig. 34).

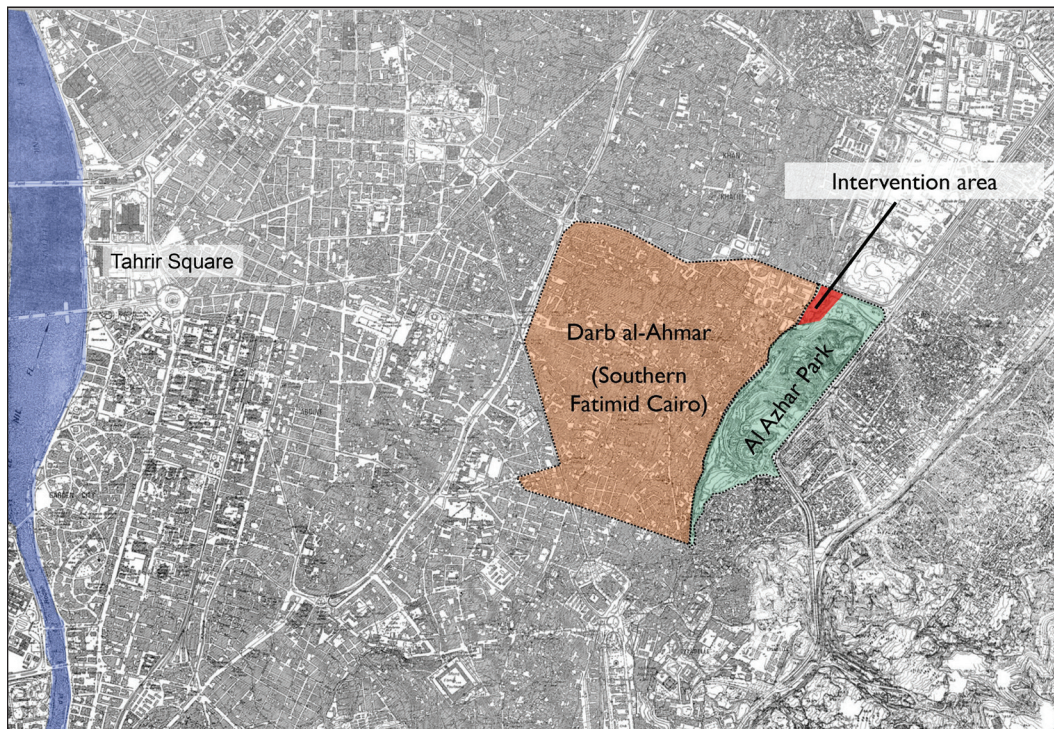


Figure 1: Location of the Darrāsah parking lot or “Archaeological Triangle” in Cairo.







Figure 2: The site of the Bāb al-Ghurayb cemetery, also known as “the Archaeological Triangle.”



Figure 3: Thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Ayyubid-Mamluk streets and dwellings.



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Figure 4: Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century graves dug over ruined large (public?) building from the thirteenth century.



Figure 5: Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century graves dug over a street and an abandoned sewage system and drains from the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.



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Figure 6: Plan of “the Archaeological Triangle” and localization of the graves excavated.



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Figure 7: General view of the excavated part of the Bāb al-Ghurayb cemetery.



Figure 8: Anatomic record and post-excavations study.



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Figure 9a: Usual funerary position, on the right side; the head is always turned toward the southeast and facing Mecca (grave DHF 07).



Figure 9b: Usual funerary position, on the right side; the head is always turned toward the southeast and facing Mecca (grave DHF 17).



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Figure 9c: Usual funerary position, on the right side; the head is always turned toward the southeast and facing Mecca (grave DHF 49).



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Figure 10: Lower arms are placed along the body, the hands resting most often on the pubis, more rarely on the abdomen (grave DHF 52).



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Figure 11a: The lower limbs are straight in the axis of the body extension; sometimes the legs are slightly bent, and the feet are always together (grave DHF 14).



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Figure 11b: The lower limbs are straight in the axis of the body extension; sometimes the legs are slightly bent, and the feet are always together (grave DHF 18).



Figure 11c: The lower limbs are straight in the axis of the body extension; sometimes the legs are slightly bent, and the feet are always together (grave DHF 23).



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Figure 12a: Uncommon back positions, still oriented in the *qiblah* direction (grave 2001 S12).



Figure 12b: Uncommon back positions, still oriented in the *qiblah* direction (grave DHF 52).



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Figure 12c: Uncommon back positions, still oriented in the *qiblah* direction (grave DHF 2002).



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Figure 13a: Uncommon prone positions, still oriented in the *qiblah* direction (grave 2001 S5).



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Figure 13b: Uncommon prone positions, still oriented in the *qiblah* direction (grave 2002 S2).



Figure 13c: Uncommon prone positions, still oriented in the *qiblah* direction (grave DHF 44).



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Figure 14a: Artifacts found in the graves correspond to items worn, essentially jewelry: ring (grave DHF 44).



Figure 14b: Artifacts found in the graves correspond to items worn, essentially jewelry: necklace (grave DHF 58).



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Figure 15a: Several graves yielded textile waste, shrouds, or clothes (grave DHF 16).



Figure 15b: Several graves yielded textile waste, shrouds, or clothes (grave DHF 45).



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Figure 16: Funerary architectures and signaling devices, several tombstones found in situ.



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Figure 17a: Mamluk epigraphy, tombstone 1 with calligraphic inscription.



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Figure 17b: Mamluk epigraphy, tombstone 2 with calligraphic inscription.



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Figure 18: One inscription (2) was covered and this indicates that the tombstone was reused.



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Figure 19a: Secondary deposits (re-inhumation, grave DHF 9).



Figure 19b: Secondary deposits (re-inhumation, grave DHF 41).



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Figure 20a: Stone blocks in funerary pits, on the edges or on the top (grave S3 2001).



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Figure 20b: Stone blocks in funerary pits on the top.



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Figure 20c: Thick ceramics (water pipes) reused on the edges or on top of funerary pits.



Figure 21: Body of a child leaning against stone blocks to maintain its position (grave S2 2002).



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Figure 22: A grave of a young individual covered by three large limestone slabs (grave S4 2001).



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Figure 23: Funerary pits with multiple deposits of individuals laid on top of each other or in juxtapositions very close to each other in larger pits (DHF 59).



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Figure 24: Some collective graves contained 2 to 5 individuals in the same pit (DHF 62).



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Figure 25a: Multiple burials as good indicators of mortality crisis in Cairo (DHF 24).



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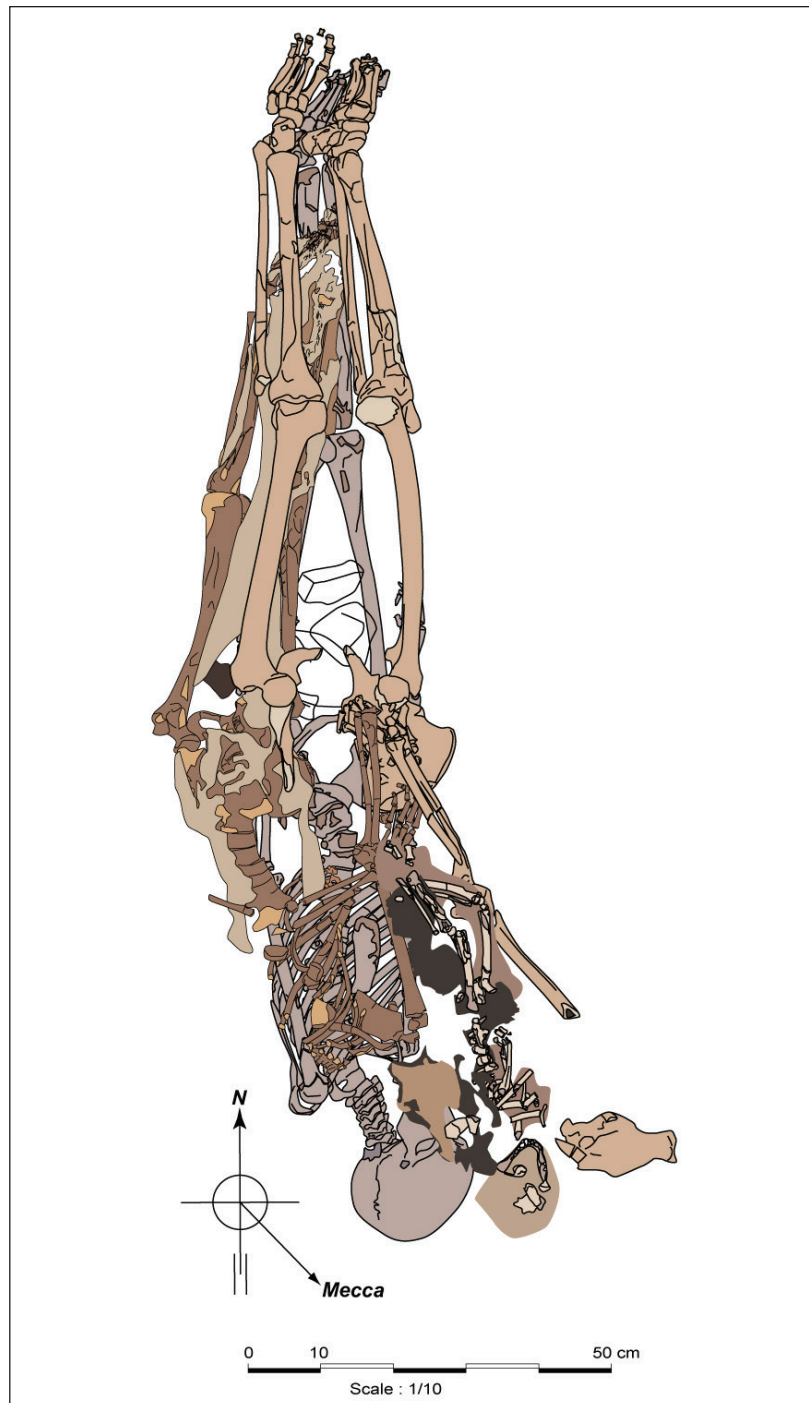


Figure 25b: Multiple burials as good indicators of mortality crisis in Cairo (DHF 24).



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Figure 26a: Collective graves, evidence of mortality crisis in Cairo (DHF 38).



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Figure 26b: Collective graves, evidence of mortality crisis in Cairo (DHF 38).



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Figure 27a: Contemporaneity and simultaneity for some burials proved by the contacts between individuals without any dislocation (grave 2002 S13).



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Figure 27b: Contemporaneity and simultaneity for some burials proved by perfect anatomic connection of each skeleton (grave DHF 23).



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Figure 28a: Several graves contained blackish residue (oil?) in contact with and around the bodies (grave DHF 8).



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Figure 28b: Several graves contained blackish residue (oil?) and some bones showed evidence of being burned (grave DHF 33).



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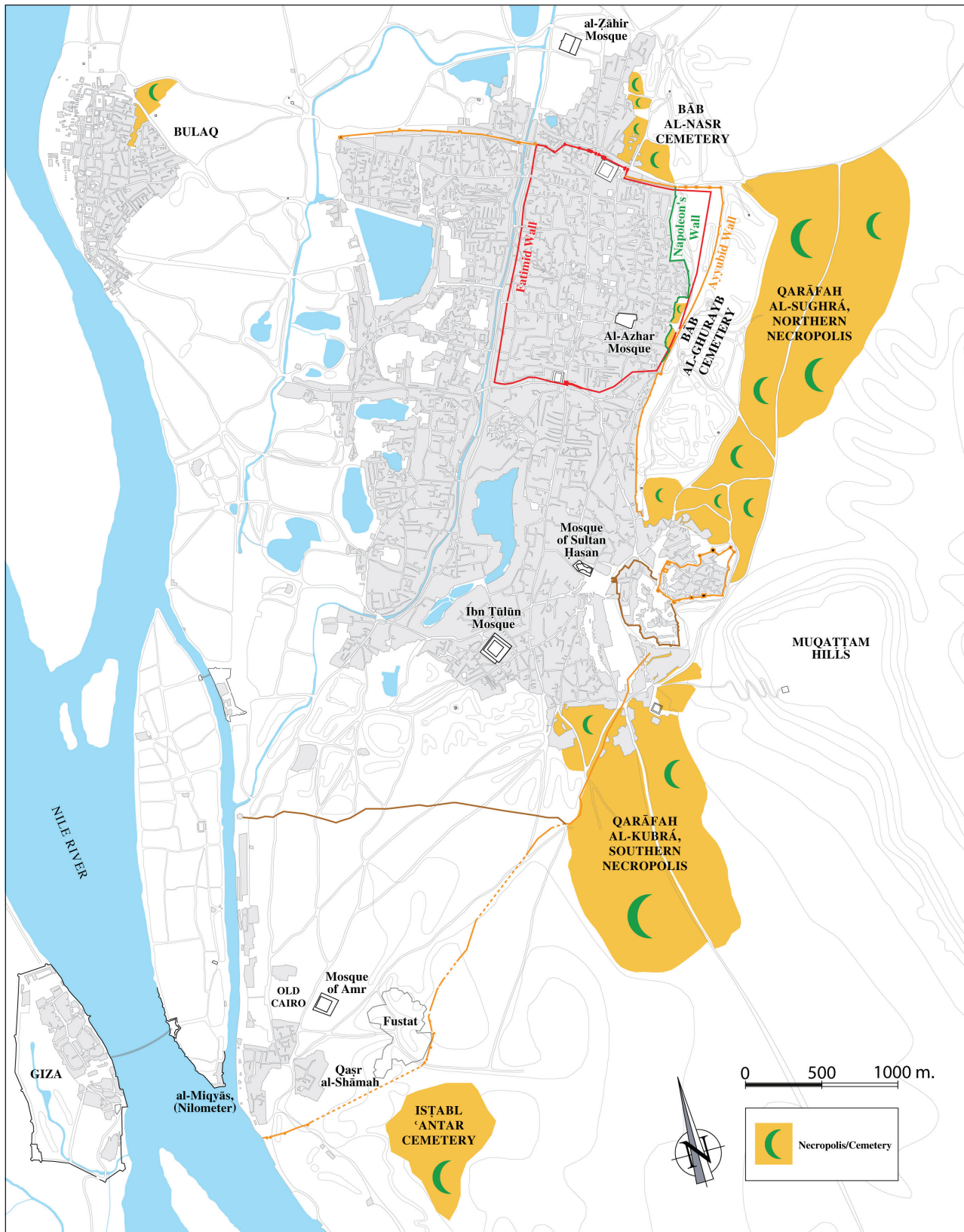


Figure 29: Map of Cairene cemeteries and necropolises.



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Figure 30: View of the al-Qarāfah al-Kubrā near Bāb al-Qarāfah.

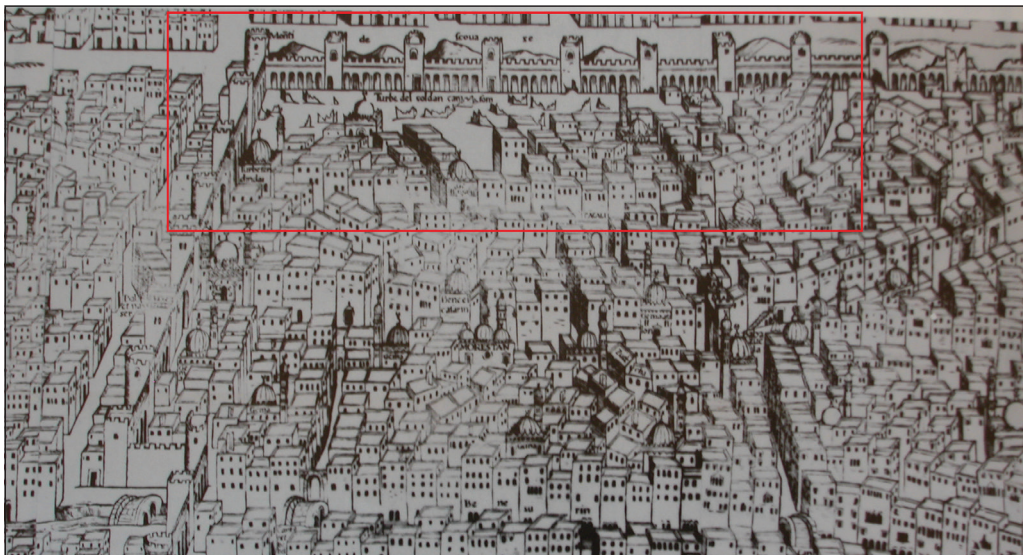


Figure 31: Venetian map of eastern Cairo in the late fifteenth century (Matheo Pagano in *Civitate Orbis Tarrarum* by Braun et Hogenberg, 1572).



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Figure 32: French map of eastern Cairo in the late eighteenth century (in *Description de l’Egypte*, 1798–1801).



Figure 33: Creswell early photographs, 1920s (from the Egyptian Antiquities Service).



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Figure 34: The Aga Khan Trust for Culture archaeological park, completed in 2012.



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TORSTEN WOLLINA

STAATSBIBLIOTHEK ZU BERLIN

## Copper or Silver? The Monetary Situation in Late Mamluk Damascus

The economic history of the medieval Arabic Middle East is a troublesome child. Before the sixteenth century, in particular, systematic documentary evidence is sorely missed on all levels.<sup>1</sup> The current state of the region contributes to this situation, making further archaeological excavations almost impossible. Another main source, namely the many narrative (mostly historiographical) texts, are often inadequate to allow for any statistical approximation without corroborating evidence from other sources.<sup>2</sup> For this purpose, even foreign archives might often be better suited, as Ashtor has shown with regard to the records of Venetian traders to Egypt and the Levant.<sup>3</sup> As Stefan Heidemann has argued, the only feasible trajectory to foster or even rewrite the economic history of the region before the

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This study originated as a paper given at the workshop: “Coinage, Taxation and Economy in the Mamluk Period,” Hamburg University, 9 May 2015. My gratitude goes to Stefan Heidemann for inviting me and to all participants for the insightful discussion, from which this article profited greatly. In addition, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for their incredibly helpful corrections. All remaining mistakes are my own.

<sup>1</sup>Notable exceptions to this rule are, of course, the documents from the Cairo Geniza, the Jerusalem Ḥaram al-Sharif, the Damascene Qubbat al-Khaznah, or those discovered at the old Red Sea port of Quṣayr.

<sup>2</sup>Still, this evidence has been put to good use in studies by Jere Bacharach, Boaz Shoshan, and others. See, e.g., Jere L. Bacharach, “The Dinar Versus the Ducat,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 1 (1973): 77–96; idem, “Circassian Mamluk Historians and Their Quantitative Economic Data,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* (1975): 75–87; idem, “Circassian Monetary Policy: Copper,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* (1976): 32–47; Boaz Shoshan, “Grain Riots and the ‘Moral Economy’: Cairo, 1350–1517,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10, no. 3 (1980): 459–78; idem, “From Silver to Copper: Monetary Changes in Fifteenth-century Egypt,” *Studia Islamica* 52 (1982): 97–116; idem, “Money Supply and Grain Prices in Fifteenth-Century Egypt,” *The Economic History Review* 36, no. 1 (1983): 47–67; Adel Allouche, *Mamluk Economics: A Study and Translation of al-Maqrizi’s Ighathah* (Salt Lake City, 1994); John L. Meloy, “Copper Money in Late Mamluk Cairo: Chaos or Control?” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 44, no. 3 (2001): 293–321.

<sup>3</sup>Eliyahu Ashtor, “Profits From Trade with the Levant in the Fifteenth Century,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38, no. 2 (1975): 250–75; idem, *Studies on the Levantine Trade in the Middle Ages* (London, 1978).



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Ottoman conquests (1516–17) would be to combine narrative, documentary, and numismatic evidence (from within and without the region) in one’s research.<sup>4</sup>

This is, however, beyond the scope of this article (and, frankly, beyond my own abilities). Instead, I propose a thematically more restricted approach. Based on five annalistic texts—two by Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 1546) and one each by Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥimṣī (d. 1528), ‘Alī al-Buṣrawī (d. 1500), and Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq (d. 1509)—I will return to the long-standing debate of whether the so-called “age of copper” indeed came to an end during the fifteenth century or whether it extended into the Ottoman period. This issue has been vividly discussed since the heyday of economic history in our field in the 1970s and 1980s. In the monetary context, we know much more about issues and uses of gold coins—whose use was, however, restricted to small segments of society—than about the relations between silver and copper coinage and their impact on small-scale, everyday transactions, which would have made up the vast majority of the local economy.

As Warren Schultz summarized the debate in 1998, Mamluk Egypt entered an “age of copper” by the beginning of the 1400s, when copper coins “became the dominant currency in the country” and even chief qadis allowed “that prices, contracts, and debts were to be recorded in terms of this copper money.”<sup>5</sup> Although few mints of copper coins are attested after the early 1400s, the measuring by *dirham min al-fulūs*, that is by weight, was retained in the narrative sources “well into the middle of the century.”<sup>6</sup> John Meloy has, however, proven that there was again proof of newly struck “heavy copper coins” well before the time of the Ottoman conquest. According to Meloy, who builds his argument both on his own surveys at the American Numismatic Society and data from Paul Balog’s seminal study *The Coinage of the Mamlūk Sultans of Egypt and Syria* (1964), “there was no shortage of copper” from the reign of Qāyṭbāy (1468–96) onwards and “the numismatic and chronicle evidence of the Late Mamluk period points to the plentiful supply of this metal in Cairo.”<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note that most contributions to this debate have focused on Cairo; Syria has only been regarded as secondary (as so often in Mamluk stud-

<sup>4</sup>Stefan Heidemann, “How to Measure Economic Growth in the Middle East? A Framework of Inquiry for the Middle Islamic Period,” in *Material Evidence and Narrative Sources: Interdisciplinary Studies of the History of the Muslim Middle East*, ed. Daniella Talmon-Heller and Katia Cytryn-Silverman (Leiden, 2015), 30–57.

<sup>5</sup>Warren Schultz, “The Monetary History of Egypt, 642–1517,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, Islamic Egypt, 640–1517, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge, 1998), 337.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 338.

<sup>7</sup>Meloy, “Copper Money in Late Mamluk Cairo,” 298.





ies) and the publication of Syrian sylloge volumes has not come far.<sup>8</sup> This study, on the other hand, adds to this discussion by, first focusing on the late fifteenth century, and, secondly, by focusing on developments in Mamluk Syria. It engages exclusively with Damascene narrative sources, whose authors were immersed in Syrian society and paid—obviously—much more attention to events on their own (figurative) doorstep than to their counterparts in Egypt. Moreover, the study deals with a long neglected period, which spans approximately the later 1480s until the early 1520s. This approach puts Damascus (and other minor Syrian cities) on the map of the economic and monetary history of the Mamluk period. The monetary situation there appears rather different from that in late Mamluk Cairo: no resurgence of copper currency as described by Meloy for Cairo is visible nor did I find any mention of the *dirham min al-fulūs*; in contrast, exchange rates between silver and gold coins show themselves surprisingly stable until at least the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>9</sup> This is supported by numismatic evidence which shows continuous minting of silver coins (mostly *nişf*) throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> The extension of the temporal focus into the early years of Ottoman rule is instrumental in putting the findings for the Mamluk period into context. One reason is that, as Henning Sievert states in a different context, “moments of crisis...allow us to uncover the dynamics at work.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the initial Ottoman policies with regards to currency shed additional light on those of their Mamluk predecessors and on the currency situation more generally.

Devaluation of currencies is one well-known device to create short-term boosts to the sultanate’s treasury, but it was far from the only one. Read conjointly, the narrative sources allow for a revision of the real impact of different measures on local as well as individual household economies. Chroniclers, in Cairo and elsewhere, did not write objectively about the plight of the common people but rather told a tale of the loss of some of their own privileges in the face of the Mamluks’ efforts to centralize as they struggled to transform their state to stave off the

<sup>8</sup>I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this article for pointing me to a host of numismatic materials, including this.

<sup>9</sup>Meloy argues that “the multifarious similar and dissimilar types [of copper coins] point to a succession of renewals of copper money” which were issued “in conjunction with devaluations in terms of money of account [i.e., *dirham min al-fulūs*].” Meloy, “Copper Money in Late Mamluk Cairo,” 298.

<sup>10</sup>Balog lists mints of silver half-dirhams (*nişf*) from Syrian mints for most Mamluk sultans, with some issuing new coins on a yearly basis. Paul Balog, *The Coinage of the Mamlūk Sultans of Egypt and Syria* (New York, 1964): types 675–76; 690–95; 697–98; 714–29; 733; 741–50; 766–72; 782; 792–96; 804; 821–32.

<sup>11</sup>Henning Sievert, “Family, Friend or Foe? Factions, Households and Interpersonal Relations in Mamluk Egypt and Syria,” in *Everything Is on the Move: The Mamluk Empire As a Node in (Trans-) Regional Networks*, ed. Stephan Conermann (Göttingen, 2014), 83–125.



Ottoman (and other) expansionist—and increasingly aggressive—agenda, as well as against resistance from other Mamluk factions and civilian groups. As far as I can say for Damascus, devices such as the setting of prices, state monopolies, the creation of endowments, confiscations, taxing and trafficking of illegal substances (e.g., alcohol), raising duties for military campaigns, and the devaluation of money were used carefully and usually not simultaneously.<sup>12</sup> The economy would still work if one variable was changed, but no one was willing to take the risk that it would not recover from full-scale interventions. Whereas not all points can be addressed, let alone discussed, in this article, it is my conviction that even in the “twilight years” of the Mamluk sultanate<sup>13</sup> the rulers’ economic policies should not be dismissed as purely oppressive but rather as strategic in the face of complex and eventually overwhelming obstacles.<sup>14</sup>

The article proceeds in three sections. The first introduces the sources with regard to their relevance to the present discussion and economic history more generally. For instance, whereas al-Buṣrawī’s chronicle follows price rises for staple foods closely in the earlier part of the period under study, for the latter part I have had to rely almost completely on the evidence provided by Ibn Ṭūlūn. Al-Buṣrawī and Ibn Ṭawq had died by the early 1500s, and Ibn al-Ḥimṣī only infrequently speaks on economic matters, though when he does, he usually offers comprehensive lists that go far beyond the information offered by the other authors. The second section delves into the issue of monetary history and the monetary situation of the time. I will argue that silver coins (*fiḍḍah*, more rarely *niṣf*) are treated as the standard currency in Mamluk Syria, as is corroborated by numismatic evidence. Not only did these coins make up the vast majority of currency used in transactions, but all other coins were usually converted into silver dirhams in contracts and other calculations. The final section addresses the absence of copper money. In this endeavor, I rely mostly on circumstantial evidence which is based on food prices and wages. This section thereby takes a critical position towards the depiction of the monetary situation as the narrative sources draw it.

<sup>12</sup>For some of the measures mentioned here, mostly with a focus on Cairo, see Kristen Stilt, “Price Setting and Hoarding in Mamluk Egypt,” in *The Law Applied: Contextualizing the Islamic Shari’a: A Volume in Honor of Frank E. Vogel*, ed. Peri Bearman, Wolfhart Heinrichs, and Bernard G Weiss (London and New York, 2008), 57–78; idem, *Islamic Law in Action: Authority, Discretion, and Everyday Experiences in Mamluk Egypt* (Oxford, 2011); Carl F. Petry, *The Criminal Underworld in a Medieval Islamic Society: Narratives from Cairo and Damascus under the Mamluks* (Chicago, 2012).

<sup>13</sup>The phrase is borrowed from the title of Carl Petry’s book *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamlūk Sultans al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy and Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī in Egypt* (Seattle, 1993).

<sup>14</sup>On the arguments of social competition over resources and Mamluk pragmatism, see also Torsten Wollina, “Between Beirut, Cairo, and Damascus: *Al-amr bi-al-ma’rūf* and the Sufi/Scholar Dichotomy in the Late Mamluk Period (1480s–1510s),” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 20 (2017): 57–92.



## Who Writes about Money? Four Divergent Damascene Observers

The four authors considered here pay attention to economic processes to varying degrees, concerning different issues, and in starkly divergent frequency. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's chronicle *Ḥawādith al-zamān wa-wafayāt shuyūkh wa-al-aqrān* speaks about economic matters the least.<sup>15</sup> It covers the eight decades from 851 through 930, but during the period of concern here mentions only two instances (in 873/1469 and 922/1516) of economic matters such as price rises. In these entries, however, Ibn al-Ḥimṣī provides the most comprehensive information about how price rises affected foodstuffs other than just grains and meat.

The second source is al-Buṣrawī's chronicle *Al-Nūr al-bāhir fī akhbār al-qarn al-āshir*, better known as *Tārīkh al-Buṣrawī*.<sup>16</sup> Regarding this still mostly unedited account of the years 871 through 904, it has been speculated that the author's lower status among the scholars might be a reason why he paid more attention to fluctuations of market prices and other economic matters. Like his contemporary and colleague Ibn Ṭawq (see below), al-Buṣrawī worked for a time as a notary and thus at the intersection of legal and economic life. Unfortunately, rather large parts of the holograph, the only textual witness, have been rendered unreadable by the passage of time. Yet, al-Buṣrawī's interest in economic matters decreases even before the first larger gaps in the text, which seems to have correlated with his promotion to a Shafi'i deputy judge.<sup>17</sup> In my opinion, he presents economic information within a moralizing framework that blames sinful behavior for food insecurity, but offers at times more detailed information, most importantly during the dearth of 873/1469.<sup>18</sup>

The remaining two authors show themselves more attentive to economic matters in general and to the reissuing of currencies in particular. Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn is perhaps the best-known Damascene observer of the late Mamluk and early Ottoman periods. In modern scholarship, his chronicle *Mufākahat al-khillān fī ḥawādith al-zamān* has had the greatest impact. While this work, which in its

<sup>15</sup> Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, *Ḥawādith al-zamān wa-wafayāt al-shuyūkh wa-al-aqrān*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz Fayyād Ḥarfūsh (Beirut, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī al-Buṣrawī, *Tārīkh al-Buṣrawī: Ṣafahāt majhūlah min tārikh Dimashq fī 'aṣr al-mamālik (min sanat 871 H li-ghāyat 904 H)*, ed. Akram Ḥusayn al-'Ulabī (Damascus, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Ṭūlūn calls him "qadi" already by 885; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahat al-khillān fī ḥawādith al-zamān: Tārīkh Miṣr wa-al-Shām*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Cairo, 1964), 1:17.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Buṣrawī's coverage of food prices is densest during the dearth of 873. Whereas Ibn al-Ḥimṣī treats the connected price rise in only one entry, al-Buṣrawī follows these developments closely. His account takes a salvific turn when two nights of prayer and recitation result in long awaited rains that immediately cause grain prices to decrease by half (from 2000 to 1000 dirhams per *ghirārah*); al-Buṣrawī, *Tārīkh al-Buṣrawī*, 34–37.





original form should have treated the years 885 to 951 (only the part up to 924 is extant), will also be used here, I need to stress that its edition has had as much negative as positive impact on scholarship on the period. It has led to a widespread neglect of Ibn Ṭūlūn's larger corpus even where those works have also been edited and published. The *Mufākahah* has long been treated as the final word on the decades leading up to the Ottoman conquest, although the author himself admits that large parts on those years were copied from other works. Moreover, in another miscellaneous work, Ibn Ṭūlūn proves wrong those who treat the text as a diary. In his bio- and topographical work on the Shaykh Arslān cemetery, he remarks regarding a debate about the demolition of an adjoining wall that "I have mentioned an abridged version in my book *Al-Mufākahah*."<sup>19</sup> This statement seems to apply to most of what he recorded prior to the events directly leading up to the Ottoman conquest (the early 920s/mid-1510s).<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to the works treated so far, the *Mufākahah* thus consists of two distinct parts: for the earlier years, the author collated and abridged excerpts from other works; only for the later parts (much of which is regarded as lost) he relies all but exclusively on his own observations. In a more obscure way, it thus resembles Ibn Ṭūlūn's biographical collection of Damascene governors, *I'lām al-warā bi-man wulliya nā'iban min al-Atrāk bi-Dimashq al-Shām al-kubrā*, which will be used here as well. In the introduction to this latter work, Ibn Ṭūlūn declares openly that its first part consists of an abridgment (*ikhtiṣār*) of a work on governors by al-Zamlakānī, which covers governors of Damascus from the Mamluk expulsion of the Mongols (658/1260) up to the year 863/1458–59, whereas the second part is his own *dhayl* to this work, extending the temporal scope up to the year 943/1536–37.<sup>21</sup> Although the *I'lām* is often more terse even than the *Mufākahah*—and some of their accounts are redundant—it nonetheless offers a different version of the (economic) history of Damascus during the late Mamluk and early Ottoman period.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Ibn Ṭūlūn, "Ghāyat al-bayān fi tarjamat al-shaykh Arslān," Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, MS Esat Effendi 1590, fol. 10b.

<sup>20</sup>See Torsten Wollina, "The Changing Legacy of a Sufi Shaykh: Narrative Constructions in Diaries, Chronicles, and Biographies (15th–17th Centuries)," in *Mamluk Historiography Revisited: Narratological Perspectives*, ed. Stephan Conermann (Göttingen, 2018), 211–34.

<sup>21</sup>Ibn Ṭūlūn, *I'lām al-warā bi-man wulliya nā'iban min al-Atrāk bi-Dimashq al-Shām al-kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Duhmān (Damascus, 1984), 11–12.

<sup>22</sup>Further information on the economic history of—and even beyond—the period can also be gathered from other works by Ibn Ṭūlūn. His collection of historical bon-mots, *Al-Lama'āt al-barqīyah fī al-nukat al-tārīkhīyah*, in particular, betrays an early interest in economic matters. It includes, for instance, a transcript of the *waqfiyah* for the Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyah with the allotted stipends/wages of its beneficiaries (*nuktaḥ* 17); lists of disasters in Damascus (*nuktaḥ* 19, 22, 44); information on urban (and rural) development (*nuktaḥ* 5, 25, 29, 32, 33); and accounts



The final source is the most pertinent for this article. Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq was not a famous scholar in his own time, but the diary he left, covering two decades in almost daily entries, is perhaps the most relevant narrative source for the economic history of the period.<sup>23</sup> Published in four volumes between 2000 and 2007, it has the potential to revolutionize our understanding of economic processes at the time. Ibn Ṭawq was both a notary and involved in agriculture, knowledge of which is reflected in his account: he gives regular information on weather, food prices and availability, payments between debtors and creditors, the income of several occupational groups, his own expenses, and even the physical coins exchanged in legal transactions. In his function as a notary to the Shafi'i chief judge Ibn al-Furfūr (d. 927/1521),<sup>24</sup> Ibn Ṭawq indeed participated in the distribution of reissued coins. Although the legal-administrative context in which he most often relates the exchange of money certainly played a role in his choice of terminology, what stands out is an all but complete absence of a copper currency.

### A Silver Standard in Late Mamluk Damascus?

Mamluk society entertained a highly monetized economy by contemporaneous standards. The Mamluks had inherited or themselves established mints in Cairo and Alexandria for Egypt, and in Damascus, Aleppo, Ḥamāh, and Tripoli, along with some smaller or only temporary mints, in Syria.<sup>25</sup> From (some or all of) these, gold, silver, and copper coins were struck and issued. The golden or *ashrafi* dinar (named after al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy) was used throughout—and beyond—the Mamluk Empire during the period under consideration, but the silver dirham (*fiḍḍah*, *dirham fiḍḍah*, *niṣf*) and the copper dirham of account (*dirham min al-fulūs*), which were measured by weight instead of number of coins, were used rather in the local economy. Furthermore, whereas the status of gold coins seems to have remained unquestioned during the period, the situation of silver and copper coins was much more fluid in the short run, and, due to their wider use in everyday transactions, they were much more vulnerable to supply shortages.

This was, of course, what originally started the “age of copper.” The traditional conception of a bi-metallic standard (gold dinars and silver dirhams) was

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of the implementation and abolition of duties (*mukūs*) and their effect on food prices (*nukṭah* 36, 44). Two editions of this work exist: the edition by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid in *Rasā'il Tārīkhīyah* (Damascus, 1929) used here, and another by Muḥammad Khayr Ramaḍān Yūsuf (Beirut, 1994).

<sup>23</sup>Still, Ibn Ṭawq was certainly considered an *ʿālim* by his contemporaries and his legacy lives on in more sources than his diary. For the identification of some of those, see Torsten Wollina, “Traces of Ibn Ṭawq,” in *Damascus Anecdotes* (<https://thecamel.hypotheses.org/94>).

<sup>24</sup>On Ibn al-Furfūr and his influence in Damascus and beyond, see Miura Toru, “Urban Society in Damascus as the Mamluk Era was Ending,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (2006): 157–93.

<sup>25</sup>Schultz, “The Monetary History of Egypt,” 26 (in particular n. 5).



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put under such stress by the late fourteenth century that the legal establishment saw no alternative to supplanting it with a tri-metallic standard, allowing for the declaration of endowments and contracts in copper coins.<sup>26</sup> In the later fifteenth century, copper came from diverse sources to Egypt and is testified in coin issues of diverse sizes, weights, and quality of striking.<sup>27</sup> Annalistic accounts of the period followed suit and relate prices in copper coins or the *dirham min al-fulūs*.

Chronicles from Damascus present a different image in that they usually give prices in dirhams. This is not the dirham of account but refers to a silver dirham (*niṣf* or *fiḍḍah*) measured by coin, not by weight.<sup>28</sup> Judging by the accounts explored here, silver seems to have regained its former status before the 1480s. This could be ascribed to the impact of the 1429 decree that stipulated a return to declaring sums of money only in gold and/or silver, to the success of Sultan Qāyṭbāy's (r. 1468–96) reforms to reestablish the silver dirham as the standard currency, or, judging by the numismatic evidence, simply to the fact that the silver dirham had never actually lost this status in Syria.<sup>29</sup>

Although coins were a prime medium of a ruler's sovereignty, the Mamluk state did not necessarily have the means to enforce certain values of coins:

Prior to the rise of centralized banking, it should not be assumed without proof that any state or power could adequately control the money circulating within its borders. Without proof of such control, the monetary market place would operate much differently. To give but one example, without the regular withdrawal of older coins from circulation—something that cannot be automatically assumed without evidence—once new coins entered into circulation, they would find their value not by a standard set by the government, but by their relative value vis-à-vis the other coins in circulation. In this case, coins become little more than small ingots, their value determined by weight and purity.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Shoshan, "From Silver to Copper," 104.

<sup>27</sup>Meloy, "Copper Money in Late Mamluk Cairo," 298.

<sup>28</sup>This is sometimes done explicitly for food prices as well; Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq, *Al-Ta'liq: Yawmīyāt Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq: Mudhakkirāt kutibat bi-Dimashq fī awākhir al-ʿahd al-mamlūkī*, ed. Shaykh Jaʿfar al-Muhājir (Damascus, 2000–7), 1:52–53; 4:1691.

<sup>29</sup>Shoshan, "From Silver to Copper," 105; Bacharach, "Circassian Monetary Policy," 43, 45.

<sup>30</sup>Warren C. Schultz, "Recent Developments in Islamic Monetary History," *History Compass* 9, no. 1 (2011): 75.





The permeation of foreign coins is most visible for gold coins, which, at the same time, were not subject to any reissue during the period under study.<sup>31</sup> Aside from the “endemic” *ashrafī* dinar,<sup>32</sup> which made up the bulk of gold coins used in late Mamluk Damascus, there was also the “invasive” and slightly less valuable *iflūrīn*, which could refer to Florentine or Venetian gold coins. The Venetians had long been present in both Damascus and Beirut.<sup>33</sup> Since the sources at hand usually subsume agents of both city states under the generic term *al-faranj* (“the Franks”), it is difficult to establish whence these coins originally entered local circulation. The only other gold coin that makes an appearance in Ibn Ṭawq’s account is called *manṣūrīyah*, which indicates a Mamluk origin.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to the early fifteenth century, when the relative value of gold dinars ranged widely between 38 and 140 *dirham min al-fulūs*, exchange rates with silver dirhams during the late Mamluk period appear rather stable.<sup>35</sup> In the majority of cases, the *ashrafī* is given at a rate of 52 dirhams, whereas the *iflūrīn* was valued at about 45 dirhams.<sup>36</sup> Comparable relative values are attested by German travelers around 1480.<sup>37</sup> Even after the Ottomans conquered Damascus, they kept similar rates for Mamluk dinars: the *ashrafī* issued by Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī should now exchange for 60 dirhams, whereas another Mamluk dinar, “minted by Kamāl al-Dīn,” was to have an exchange rate of 56 dirhams.<sup>38</sup> The only exception to the stable rates is found on 20 Shawwāl 886/12 December 1481, when the *ashrafī*’s relative value soared to 1:91, almost double the usual value. It seems that this was part of a temporary measure connected to a devaluation of silver coins in the year

<sup>31</sup>One exception was “maghribī dirhams,” which were taken out of circulation in 886/1482; Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta’līq*, 1:181. Furthermore, at least one sultan, Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī, issued new gold coins, according to Ibn Ṭūlūn, and kept the name *al-ashrafī*. They should probably not be treated as a reissue, since other gold coins were not taken out of circulation (see below).

<sup>32</sup>The first coin by this name was originally issued by Sultan Barsbāy in 829/1426; Bacharach, “The Dinar Versus the Ducat,” 77–78.

<sup>33</sup>Fuess argues, however, that Florence was also extending their trade contacts to the Mamluk Levant during the fifteenth century; Albrecht Fuess, “Beirut in Mamluk Times (1291–1516),” *ARAM* 9–10 (1997): 99.

<sup>34</sup>The name might refer to the short reign of Sultan al-Manṣūr ‘Uthmān, who indeed issued gold coins in 857/1453–54; Balog, *Coinage*, 328: type 756.

<sup>35</sup>For the exchange rates, see Allouche, *Mamluk Economics*, 96–98.

<sup>36</sup>Ibn Ṭawq gives 3 *iflūrī* as the equivalent of 136 dirhams (p. 261). Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta’līq*, 1:121, 261–62, 551, 552, 553; 2:969; 4:1659.

<sup>37</sup>Sebald Rieter witnessed rates around 1:50 in Mamluk Syria in 1479, while Walter von Gugglingen and others mention the same in the years 1482 through 1484. Walther Hinz, *Islamische Währungen des 11. bis 19. Jahrhunderts umgerechnet in Gold: Ein Beitrag zur islamischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Wiesbaden, 1991), 9–10.

<sup>38</sup>Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahah*, 2:65.



prior.<sup>39</sup> When new cold struck silver coins were issued, it caused a panic; markets were closed and food became unavailable. It seems that the new coins had a lower intrinsic value, and the authorities initially reacted to the crisis by proposing an exchange rate at 12.5 dirhams per dinar “for both old and new coins.” Although Ibn Ṭawq speaks of distinguishable coins here, it seems that this rate would only make sense if the coins were exchanged according to weight. The exchange had limited success and both issues remained in circulation side by side. Even years later, Ibn Ṭawq distinguishes between these old (*‘utuq*) and new (*judud*) coins. In fact, the old coins remained the standard currency for at least a year. Again in 886, Ibn Ṭawq calculates an outstanding debt as “414 old coins,” which he paid with “149 old” and “392 new silver coins.” The reissue only found its place in the monetary system at two thirds the value of the old coins.<sup>40</sup>

It should be said that this is the only devaluation of currency mentioned by Ibn Ṭawq. That is not to say that no further devaluations occurred, but that Mamluk authorities learned from the effect the measure had in this instance and proceeded more carefully in the following instances. It is also possible that they switched completely to other means of fiscal extraction. Among these, a set price on sugar looms large.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, this instance is informative about the monetary situation in two ways. On the one hand, it demonstrates that concern over a devaluation might require a return to measuring currency by weight. On the other hand, no such measure is recorded for copper coins during that period, which places silver coins as the standard currency at the time in Syria. This is supported by the manifold transactions described by Ibn Ṭawq.<sup>42</sup> He gives a large number of exchanges between silver and gold coins. A transaction in which the *manṣūrīyah* coin is mentioned might suffice as an exemplary case. Furthermore, it addresses both the official exchange rates between dinars and silver dirhams and the overall invisibility of copper coins at the time. It is the only transaction mentioned in any of the sources where copper coins appear at all. Ibn Ṭawq relates that in 890/1485–86 a sum of 500 current (*mutaqaddimah*) dirhams was paid in five dif-

<sup>39</sup>Balog records no Damascene issue of silver coins for 885 and only one issue for 886 that is evidently not from Cairo; Balog, *Coinage*, 352: type 820.

<sup>40</sup>Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta’līq*, 1:26–27, 97, 261–62.

<sup>41</sup>A duty on sugar developed into a political issue in 886. Ibn Ṭawq blamed the sultan’s *ustādār*, Ibn Shādībak, as the source of price rises in several cities. In Damascus, he wanted to raise the price of sugar from 14 to 28 dirhams. The merchants immediately sought the help of the Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Qāḍī ‘Ajlūn and later the sultan. The conflict lasted for half a year, between Rabī‘ II and Sha‘bān. Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta’līq*, 1:62–63, 66, 70, 74–75, 82.

<sup>42</sup>For a list of transactions from volumes 2 and 3 of the edition, see Li Guo, review of *Al-Ta’līq: Yawmīyāt Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq*, ed. Sheikh Jaafar Al-Muhajir (Ja’far Al-Muhājir), Vol. II: 891/1486 to 896/1491 (text: pp. 577–1069), Vol. III: 897/1492 to 902/1497 (text: pp. 1081–1517), *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12, no. 1 (2008): 216–17.



ferent currencies: four *ashrafī* dinars (208 dirhams), two *iflūrīn* (ca. 90 dirhams), 30 silver coins (*fiḍḍah*), two *manṣūrīyah* coins, and ten copper coins.<sup>43</sup> Assuming that the silver coins used had a similar value to the “current silver dirhams,” the known coins make up 328 of the 500 dirhams. The two unknown gold coins and the ten copper coins thus had a joint value of slightly less than 172 dirhams, a decisively higher value per gold coin than usual. I cannot say whether the copper coins made up a considerable part of this sum or whether they were included to fill the gaps created by the *manṣūrīyah* and *iflūrī* coins.

The silver standard is also attested from another, unexpected side: the Maghribī Sufi shaykh ‘Alī ibn Maymūn (d. 917/1517) wrote a polemic critique of the innovative practices of Syrian Sufis and jurists.<sup>44</sup> In this work, titled *Bayān ghurbat al-Islām bi-wāsiṭat ṣinfayn al-mutafaqqihah wa-al-mutafaqqirah min ahl Miṣr wa-al-Shām wa-mā yalihimā min bilād al-A‘jām*,<sup>45</sup> he also complains about current money-lending practices, saying that those Syrian *mutafaqqihūn*—he denounces the jurists as mere pretenders—would lend out money at 30 percent interest and generally only looked for their personal gain and profit. One could dismiss this as moralist rancor if it was not corroborated by other sources.<sup>46</sup> Ibn Maymūn’s other complaint about monetary practices is even more important for the present purpose, since he also attacks their greed in the exchange of coins (in the words of Ignaz Goldziher): “in den Tauschgeschäften, wenn sie nämlich Gold für Gold oder Silber für Silber, oder Gold für Silber und umgekehrt auswechseln, jagen sie nach Vortheilen und Gewinnsten.”<sup>47</sup> Again, there is no mention of a copper currency, although this might have fit nicely into an argument over the vices of the established scholarly families.

## Where Was the Copper?

The silver dirham emerges as the standard currency in Ibn Ṭawq’s account, whereas copper coins are barely visible. These descriptions are supported by numismatic evidence as well. While there is proof for regular issues of silver coins,

<sup>43</sup>Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta’līq*, 1:553.

<sup>44</sup>On him, see Wollina, “Between Beirut, Cairo, and Damascus,” particularly 58–62.

<sup>45</sup>I know of two manuscript copies, one in Leipzig (MS Vollers 849) and one in Cairo (Dār al-Kutub, MS Majāmi‘ Muṣṭafā Fāḍil 48). A recent edition has been published in Beirut: ‘Alī Ibn Maymūn al-Maghribī, *Bayān ghurbat al-Islām bi-wāsiṭat ṣinfayn min al-mutafaqqihah wa-al-mutafaqqirah min ahl Miṣr wa-al-Shām wa-mā yalihimā min bilād al-A‘jām*, ed. Ḥakimah Shāmī (Beirut, 2007).

<sup>46</sup>Ibn Ṭawq also speaks of the “common practice of lending against interest”; Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta’līq*, 4:1891–92.

<sup>47</sup>Ignaz Goldziher, “‘Alī Ibn Mejmūn al-Maghribī und sein Sittenspiegel des östlichen Islām: Ein Beitrag zur Culturgeschichte,” *Zeitschrift der Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 28 (1874): 311–12.





there is little evidence of copper coins being minted in Damascus.<sup>48</sup> That said, the evidence might not be as unanimous as presented so far. The overall invisibility of copper could have several causes. One of these is certainly the notarial context in which coins were most often enumerated. In the context of Qāyṭbāy's efforts to return to a silver currency, for example, the enumeration of sums in contracts according to copper coins was once more abolished. Another possible cause is the authors' affiliation with the wealthy and powerful. Most cases that Ibn Ṭawq notarized dealt with rather large sums; to pay those, silver and gold coins were an obvious choice. While this development certainly constitutes a paradigm shift from the "age of copper," can we really assume that all transactions were now executed in silver dirhams?

There is little evidence to the contrary, but it stands to reason that copper money, measured either by coins or by weight, retained its importance for large parts of Mamluk society long after local mints had ceased to issue new coins. Indeed, upon the first Ottoman mint run of copper coins in 923/1517, Ibn Ṭulūn mentions that "old copper coins would be declared void" a few days later. These must have been Mamluk copper coins. The new coins were initially distributed at a rate of one eighth of a silver dirham (in itself a testimony to the silver standard?) and shortly after devalued to one sixteenth of a silver dirham.<sup>49</sup> Provided that these rates were comparable to earlier exchange rates (as those for gold coins were), sums paid in copper coins might have eluded the chroniclers' interest for the most part.

This further raises the question of whether the "old coins" mentioned were simple pieces of bullion, as numismatic evidence suggests, or rather the product of minting efforts under the last Mamluk sultans.<sup>50</sup> This is, of course, connected to the question of whether copper was exchanged by weight or by number of coins. Indeed, Ibn Ṭawq provides two glimpses that raise suspicions as to the trade in coins only, both of which happened outside the legal transactions he attended. The first case is the extraction of money from several Damascene madrasahs to pay the ransom for hostages from a pirate attack in 886/1486–87. He describes the extraction as "*istikhrāj darāhim min al-nuḥās*."<sup>51</sup> The term he uses for copper money differs from the better known *dirham min al-fulūs* and could actually refer to copper coins proper. In fact, it would attest to their low value, comparable to the

<sup>48</sup>On silver coins issued in Syria from the reign of Qāyṭbāy through Qānṣūh, see Balog, *Coinage*, 349, 354, 362, 375.

<sup>49</sup>Ibn Ṭulūn, *Mufākahah*, 2:59, 60.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Schultz, "The Monetary History of Egypt," 338.

<sup>51</sup>Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta'liq*, 1:65–66; on the role of madrasahs in raising the ransom and in housing the ransomed prisoners, see Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge and New York, 1994), 58, and *ibid.*, n. 108.



rates around the time of the Ottoman conquest, that only they would be taken, whereas the profits in silver would be reserved for the regular beneficiaries. More importantly, it indicates a wide availability and use of copper coins.

The second case indicates that copper was also still exchanged by weight. After a period of absence in 894/1488–89, Ibn Ṭawq relates news he heard from his shaykh and relative Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Qāḍī ‘Ajlūn (d. 928/1521–22).<sup>52</sup> In particular, Taqī al-Dīn had recently resigned from a teaching position in the Shāmīyah al-Barrānīyah for an amount of “600 [dirhams], weighing 400 [dirhams].”<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, Ibn Ṭawq’s absence from the actual procedures results in both cases in a terse description of the transactions, devoid of the details he usually provides. Yet, together they subvert the picture drawn by his renditions of contracts and betray the continuing relevance of copper money even in administrative processes and among the highest strata of local society.

There is further, albeit circumstantial, evidence to the continuing relevance, if not centrality, of copper to everyday transactions. The narrative sources follow to different degrees the development of grain, meat, and other prices, which in turn allows for conclusions about the purchasing power of the different coins in circulation. Although these reports do not primarily deal with monetary issues, they often address them indirectly—in any case, they provide us with a different perspective on the value of money.

Most studies on the economic history of the Mamluks have a strong focus on grain prices, for a variety of reasons. Grain was a—if not the—staple food for the vast majority of the population. As such, it occupied an important symbolic position that connected the provision of grain (and, in turn, bread) with the ability to rule justly.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, grain prices are fairly common in the narrative sources of the period, which still constitute the bulk of our available material. However, there a number of issues with the evidence on food prices as provided by most chronicles. The first issue is that grain prices are usually given in huge measurements. The Damascene sources usually mention the price according to the local *ghirārah*, which measured about 265 liters, equaling around 207 kilograms of wheat or 178 kilograms of barley.<sup>55</sup> It is the consensus that this unit of capacity

<sup>52</sup>On him, see Wollina, “Between Beirut, Cairo, and Damascus,” particularly 62–68.

<sup>53</sup>Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta’līq*, 2:904; cf. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Nu‘aymī, *Al-Dāris fī tārikh al-madāris*, ed. Ja‘far Ḥasanī, (Damascus, 1948), 1:295–96.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Linda Darling, “Medieval Egyptian Society and the Concept of the Circle of Justice,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (2006): 1.

<sup>55</sup>I follow in this a table of conversions provided by the University of Oldenburg. Their conversion rates are based on cases from late nineteenth-century Germany. See <http://www.nausa.uni-oldenburg.de/zuroev/masse.htm> (accessed 8 December 2014). One liter of wheat weighs about 0.782 kilograms, while the same capacity of barley amounts to only 0.672 kilograms. Ashtor relies on estimates made by Hinz and comes to a rate of 0.757 kilograms per liter of wheat. Eliyahu Ashtor,



probably refers to wholesale prices and thus at best offers indirect evidence for retail prices. The high investment of a purchase of only one *ghirārah* notwithstanding, few people would have had the means to store such quantities, and the prices given might refer to the prices set by local authorities.

Retail prices would rather refer to smaller units of capacity (one *ghirārah* = 12 *kīl*/72 *mudd*),<sup>56</sup> but in most cases that I found, even grain was sold according to the weight-based *raṭl*.<sup>57</sup> The Damascene *raṭl* usually consisted of six to seven *awqāyah*, weighing 1.7 to 1.9 kilograms and thus almost four times its Cairene counterpart (about 450 grams).<sup>58</sup> In an unfortunately not completely legible entry, however, Ibn Ṭawq relates that in 886/1480 it “was set for the merchants at a maximum of four *uqqah*.”<sup>59</sup> This would have put the Damascene *raṭl* at 1.2 kilograms at most, but it is uncertain for how long this regulation was really enforced.<sup>60</sup> By 1495, Sultan Qāyṭbāy attempted another standardization of scales and measures on the imperial level and decreed that the Damascene markets should adopt the Egyptian *raṭl*. This measure must be seen as part of a larger strategy of centralization under the last Mamluk sultans to strengthen their control over far-away Syria and make its resources more easily accessible for the sultan’s agents. The institution of the Egyptian as the one and only “imperial” *raṭl* would have increased the power of the imperial center over the provinces,<sup>61</sup> but this attempt seems to have failed due to strong local resistance.<sup>62</sup> Even though the *raṭl* did not remain stable dur-

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“Levantine Weights and Standard Parcels: A Contribution to the Metrology of the Later Middle Ages,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 45, no. 3 (1982): 480; Walther Hinz, *Islamische Masse und Gewichte; umgerechnet ins metrische System* (Leiden, 1955), 37–38.

<sup>56</sup>The term *ghirārah* could also refer to an actual bag of cereals, which measured at one *kīl*. Ibn Ṭawq uses the term in this way while relating a fight with a business partner over a harvest of sorghum. Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta’līq*, 2:806; Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, *Ḥawādith*, 516, n. 3.

<sup>57</sup>The *mudd* appears only once for flour and once for barley; Ibn Ṭūlūn, *I’lām al-warā’*, 158; Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, *Ḥawādith*, 117–88 (see below).

<sup>58</sup>Ashtor, “Levantine Weights and Standard Parcels,” 476–77; Shoshan, “Money Supply and Grain Prices,” 52.

<sup>59</sup>Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta’līq*, 1:24.

<sup>60</sup>At least, it was also reported by Venetian merchants and other European visitors, on whose accounts Ashtor’s and Hinz’s findings that the *qinṭar* weighed about 180 to 185 kilograms depend. This would, in turn, also put the *raṭl* at around 1.2 kilograms. Hinz, *Islamische Masse und Gewichte*, 30; Eliyahu Ashtor, “Spice Prices in the Near East in the 15th Century,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* (New Series) 108, no. 1 (1976): 26–41, 27.

<sup>61</sup>I presume that a standardization of scales and measures was to help avoid losses in tax money, the need for which might have been further increased by the role of Damascus as a major way station of the Mamluk armies on their way to the northern frontier. Purchases of provisions had to be made locally and the sultan’s agents would often not have had the necessary knowledge to avoid being taken advantage of.

<sup>62</sup>Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahah*, 1:163; Ashtor, “Levantine Weights and Standard Parcels,” 487.





ing the period under study, the historical accounts insist on giving many prices “according to the [customary] Damascene *raṭl*.”<sup>63</sup> With the exception of livestock, chickens, and eggs (which were counted by piece), the *raṭl* was the central unit by which retail sales of food were measured. For many lower class people, however, purchase by *awqīyah* must have been more common, and these purchases would have been paid for in copper, at least under normal—or “good”—circumstances.

Perhaps measuring by *raṭl* should in itself be regarded as a result of the peculiar circumstances in which chroniclers usually come to speak of food prices. This is the second issue with the evidence as presented in narrative sources: they usually record grain prices only when they exceeded what contemporaries considered a fair or just price; prices were only recorded when the system was under strain. As Carl Petry observes, chroniclers were more conscious of these items after they had themselves experienced a harsh shortage. Therefore, “Ibn Iyās’ price data for [Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī’s reign] was meager compared with the multiple details provided by historians of Qāyṭbāy’s time.”<sup>64</sup> The most significant crisis for the period under study occurred in 873/1468–69. Al-Buṣrawī follows the inflation in a day to day fashion from Ṣafar to Shaʿbān. During that period, the price for wheat rose five-fold, from an already high 420 dirhams per sack (*ghirārah*) on 25 Ṣafar to 900 dirhams on 15 Rabīʿ I and again on 5 Jumādā II, then to 2,000 dirhams on 13 Shaʿbān.<sup>65</sup> The focus on crises is understandable but makes for poor evidence for estimations of regular purchasing power.

Ibn al-Ḥimṣī’s treatment of the 873 crisis is instructive as to what can be gained from the sources despite these obstacles. Whereas al-Buṣrawī concentrates solely on grain prices, Ibn al-Ḥimṣī gives a rather comprehensive list of how living costs in general were affected:

[W]heat cost 40 gold dinars [2080 dirhams]<sup>66</sup> per *ghirārah*; a *mudd* of barley was worth 10 dirhams [= 720 per *ghirārah*]; the *qinṭar* of flour 1200 dirhams [= 8 per *raṭl*]; one *raṭl* of bread 80; one of rice 15; one of date syrup (*dibs*) 7; *samn* oil 28, sesame oil 15; the *raṭl* of cauliflower 2; of carrots 2; of onions 3.5; of cheese 18; of yoghurt 7; of sweet potatoes 4; 4 eggs cost 2 dirhams; [the *raṭl* of] boiled

<sup>63</sup>This formulation is used by Ibn al-Ḥimṣī; see *Ḥawādith*, 118.

<sup>64</sup>Carl F. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt’s Waning As a Great Power* (Albany, 1994), 105.

<sup>65</sup>Al-Buṣrawī, *Tārīkh al-Buṣrawī*, 34–37.

<sup>66</sup>While this conversion is based on the exchange rates given by Ibn Ṭawq only a decade later, the total sum also agrees with the prices given by al-Buṣrawī.



chickpeas 4; of boiled beans 5; of raw fish 6—all according to the Damascene *raṭl*.<sup>67</sup>

This list is interesting for dietary and food studies in a number of ways that go beyond the scope of the present article. It also offers important information for the purpose of this paper. In particular, all the prices are given in silver dirhams. Furthermore, the differentiation between raw and prepared foodstuffs stands out. Boiled beans or chickpeas cost double what other raw vegetables were offered for, and uncooked rice, which was twice as expensive as wheat flour, still ranked far below baked bread. As Amalia Levanoni has argued for Mamluk Cairo, most people depended on pre-cooked food for a large part of their diet. Thus, the crisis would have hit them more severely than wealthier households, which had cooking as well as storage facilities.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, it shows the complexity of deducing retail from wholesale prices.

Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's choice of units of measurement and currencies should be taken seriously. His switch from *ghirārah* to *mudd* implies that poorer people had to make do with barley and that ready-made bread and even wheat flour were beyond their means. In other cases of (less) extreme dearth, authors suddenly switch to the *awqīyah*, usually the weight of one loaf, to measure bread and other items.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, the measurement by *raṭl* could suggest an atmosphere of stockpiling in expectation of a worsening crisis. At the same time, it is possible that at the highpoint of the crisis wheat was indeed only sold in exchange for gold coins, as Ibn al-Ḥimṣī relates. They would have allowed for a safer storage of one's wealth in the face of future devaluations of either silver or copper.<sup>70</sup>

No other comparable shortage struck Damascus during the remainder of the period under study. Nonetheless, the authors continue to record only extreme prices for grain. For other foodstuffs, however, I would argue that the price information allows for an estimation of “normal” or “just” prices between 885/1480 and 906/1501. The following prices will refer to “the [customary] Damascene *raṭl*.” Ibn Ṭawq gives all these prices according to the silver dirham (*fiḍḍah*). For wheat

<sup>67</sup> Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, *Ḥawādith*, 117–88.

<sup>68</sup> Amalia Levanoni, “Food and Cooking During the Mamluk Era: Social and Political Implications,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 204–8.

<sup>69</sup> Al-Buṣrawī, *Tārīkh al-Buṣrawī*, 116; Ibn Ṭūlūn, *I'lām a-warā*, 158. For the weight, see Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta'liq*, 3:1242.

<sup>70</sup> In contrast, Ibn Ṭūlūn records all prices during another dearth shortly after the Ottoman conquest in dirhams. The prices he gives are: one *ghirārah* of wheat at about 400 dirhams, of barley at 360, one *raṭl* of mutton at 10, of beef and goat at 8, of *samn* oil at 30, of honey at 18, of olive oil at 15, of sesame oil at 18, of syrup at 7, of rice at 6, of charcoal at 5, of firewood at 1. He concludes that “all kinds of household effects are expensive,” but this is clearly dwarfed by the dearth of 873; Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahah*, 2: 42.



bread, prices between one and two dirhams were regarded as normal, with only three recorded higher prices between 880/1475 and 923/1517.<sup>71</sup> For cheese, Ibn Ṭawq usually gives a price of 3 dirhams, although it is my impression that he still considered that price high.<sup>72</sup> Yoghurt was cheaper at usually one half to one dirham.<sup>73</sup>

Interestingly, Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's list is completely devoid of meat, another symbolically charged consumable.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps it was not sold at all during the crisis or access to it was restricted to specific parts of the population; in any case, it appears to have been exempt from market exchanges completely.<sup>75</sup> In the case of meat, availability was as much as problem as price. It bespeaks Ibn Ṭawq's relatively high status and/or financial means that he could complain about going just a few days without it.<sup>76</sup> Mutton, the most valued variety, had an average price of three to five dirhams—prices below three dirhams were considered cheap.<sup>77</sup>

It has already been pointed out that none of the chroniclers can be regarded as a commoner. For Damascenes of a lower status, it would have been much more common to purchase only one to three *uqqah* at a higher frequency, especially if they had to buy prepared food. If four dirhams for a *raṭl* of boiled chickpeas and beans was regarded as an exceptionally high price, how would they purchase lower quantities at lower prices? The same question arises with regard to the other food prices provided by Ibn Ṭawq. The silver dirham at the time was already a half-dirham (*niṣf*). Still, Ibn Ṭawq frequently mentions price rises of half a dirham. Would still smaller quantities be paid for in copper coins?

One final aspect should be considered: what was the spending power of a Damascene commoner? Ibn Ṭawq offers some information on wages of people on whose services he called. Among them are those of the “manager” (*mu'allimah*) of the bathhouse his wife used to visit and daily wages of a workforce he hired

<sup>71</sup>For the “just” prices, see Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta'liq*, 1:70, 72; Ibn Ṭulūn, *I'lām a-warā*, 174 (appendix, citing from the *Mufākahah*); Ibn Ṭulūn, *Mufākahah*, 2:60. In the other cases, the prices only rose to 3 dirhams per *raṭl*; see al-Buṣrawī, *Tārīkh al-Buṣrawī*, 116; Ibn Ṭulūn, *I'lām a-warā*, 193 (appendix, citing from the *Mufākahah*); Ibn Ṭulūn, *Mufākahah*, 2:2.

<sup>72</sup>Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta'liq*, 2:749 (twice). Ibn al-Ḥimṣī records a price of 15 dirhams shortly before the Ottoman conquest; *Ḥawādith*, 516.

<sup>73</sup>Ibn Ṭawq also gives prices of 6 dirhams per *raṭl*, but that is described as exceptionally high. Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta'liq*, 1:125, 292; 2:749; 4:1577.

<sup>74</sup>The classic study on the symbolism of meat remains Joshua Finkel, “King Mutton, a Curious Egyptian Tale from the Mamluk Period,” *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und Verwandte Gebiete* 9 (1932): 122–48.

<sup>75</sup>Ibn Ṭawq mentions that in 899/1494 meat was so scarce that only “the people of the state (*dawlah*) and the notables eat it”; Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta'liq*, 3:1260.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:1101.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:89, 125, 287, 291, 425, 553; 2:675; 3:1201, 1353, 1459, 1462; 4:1590, 1802, 1892.





for repairs of his house and garden. The *mu'allimah* received twelve dirhams, although it is uncertain whether that accounted for one visit or for an undeterminable period. The foreman (*mu'allim*) of his workforce was certainly paid that amount per day. His wages were thus considerably higher than the six to eight dirhams common workers received, but less than the seventeen dirhams a skilled carpenter gained from one day of work.<sup>78</sup> It is difficult to extrapolate a monthly salary from these numbers. We can assume that the *mu'allimah* received frequent payments from all customers of her establishment, but the workers and craftsmen could probably not hope to have work throughout the month. In a crisis such as in 873, their daily wages would have been eaten up instantly in providing for their households. Even in good times, they probably had to stretch their income to get through the month. Whereas Ibn Ṭawq, who would receive an average of ten to twenty dirhams for each notarization, with exceptions of up to more than 300 dirhams per case,<sup>79</sup> could afford to count his money in silver dirhams, the majority of Damascenes would probably more often deal in copper coins.

## Conclusions

As this contribution has demonstrated, evidence from late Mamluk Damascus does not indicate a continuation of the “age of copper” beyond the mid-fifteenth century. The silver dirham was once again—or had indeed remained—the standard currency, one that was measured at face value (except in crises). It was predominant in those everyday transactions recorded in the sources; even a *raṭl* of vegetables or fruits would be paid for in silver. The fact that all four writers neglect copper almost completely does in fact attest to the end of the “age of copper,” when even chronicles acknowledged the prevalence of “*fulūs*” and gave prices in this currency.<sup>80</sup>

In conclusion, the Mamluk sultanate might not have had the means to reinstate a purely bi-metallic standard based on the exchange of gold and silver coins alone during its twilight years. Although copper certainly remained important in local and especially low-scale transactions, it did not occupy a central position in the economy at large and only reemerged as a state-sanctioned medium of exchange with the region’s integration into the Ottoman system.<sup>81</sup> Late Mamluk Syria did not undergo the same fiscal upheavals that troubled Egypt in the early fifteenth century; rather, it retained its local economy that rested mostly on silver

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 1:32, 98, 101, 105–7.

<sup>79</sup>Torsten Wollina, *Zwanzig Jahre Alltag: Lebens-, Welt- und Selbstbild im Journal des Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq* (Göttingen, 2014), 126.

<sup>80</sup>Schultz, “The Monetary History of Egypt,” 338.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.



and gold but also allowed for exchanges in copper, which could be traded either by coins or by weight.

Finally, the last section of the article attempted to shift the perspective toward the more elusive everyday transactions, especially of lower class Damascenes, through a reverse reading of the sources. Their economic reality is mostly beyond our grasp, and copper coins or bullion might have remained their main means to procure their livelihood. I tried to incorporate sources from authors of diverse backgrounds, with Ibn al-Ḥimṣī and Ibn Ṭūlūn representing the higher echelons of Damascene society and al-Buṣrawī and Ibn Ṭawq being in lower positions. Nonetheless, all authors had some connections to the wealthy classes, and their accounts would be biased by their own social and financial status in that they could afford to neglect the less valuable copper money used by large numbers of Damascenes.

It is my contention that an analysis of these lived realities would require going beyond currency as such. It would have to approach the subject from a wider perspective that juxtaposes the scarce information on wages and costs of living, and also acknowledge the specific measurements and currencies used in the sources. Ibn Ṭawq's diary seems to be a promising starting point for such a study and, indeed, his own financial improvement is traceable when short notes on personal expenses (without currency!) disappear towards the end of the edition's first volume (ca. 890/1485). This shift would also have to take into account the coexistence of a market and a household economy, competition in the labor market, and, in conjunction, migration within and beyond the Mamluk Empire.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>For the household economy, see Yaacov Lev, "The Regime and the Urban Wheat Market: The Famine of 662/1263–64 in Cairo," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 8 (2004): 149–61. For migration, see Bethany Walker, "Mobility and Migration in Mamluk Syria: The Dynamism of Villagers 'On the Move,'" in *Everything is on the Move: The Mamluk Empire as a Node in (Trans-)Regional Networks*, ed. Stephan Conermann (Göttingen, 2014), 325–48. On labor, see Maya Shatzmiller, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World* (Leiden, 1994).



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## Waste, Excess, and Obsession in the Mamluk Harem

Royal women, in spite of the restrictions of seclusion, engaged with the urban space of the Mamluk Sultanate at its capital in Cairo in a variety of ways. Modern scholarship has focused primarily on their pilgrimage processions and building projects, the most “visible” manifestations of their influence on Mamluk society and governance.<sup>1</sup> Less studied has been *how* medieval Islamic scholars constructed their narratives about royal women. What kind of categories and assumptions were in use? What choices did they make in depicting these women? How were accounts of royal women similar or different across different texts, and what can that tell us about Mamluk chronicle-writing more broadly? Using the descriptions of royal women written by three prominent Mamluk chroniclers—al-Maqrīzī, Ibn Iyās, and Ibn Taghribirdī—I emphasize the differences in chronicles in terms of the value judgments that the authors made about royal women and events in their lives and what they chose to emphasize and neglect in weaving together an account of Mamluk reigns. In doing so, I argue that motifs of waste, excess, and obsession are frequently used: waste of precious resources by sultans or the members of their harem, excessive displays of wealth, and sultans’ distracting obsession with wives and mothers. Through these themes this article explores broader issues of how chroniclers depict royal women and the variation in such narratives.

The chronicles illuminate a complex negotiation between the urban populace, the state, and their own record of events. When sultans are long lasting, strong, or otherwise stable, chroniclers often praise prominent royal women for their

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<sup>1</sup>For instance, see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “The Mahmal Legend and the Pilgrimage of the Ladies of the Mamluk Court,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 1 (1997); Howayda Al-Harithy, “Female Patronage of Mamluk Architecture in Cairo,” in *Beyond the Exotic: Women’s Histories in Islamic Societies*, ed. Amira El-Azhary Sonbol (Syracuse, NY, 2005); Kathryn Johnson, “Royal Pilgrims: Mamlūk Accounts of the Pilgrimages to Mecca of the Khawand al-Kubrā (Senior Wife of the Sultan),” *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000); Carl Petry, “The Estate of al-Khuwand Fāṭima al-Khaṣṣbakiyya: Royal Spouse, Autonomous Investor,” in *Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, ed. Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni (Leiden, 2004); idem, “Class Solidarity versus Gender Gain: Women as Custodians of Property in Later Medieval Egypt,” in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (Cumberland, RI, 2008); Susan Staffa, “Dimensions of Women’s Power in Historic Cairo,” in *Islamic and Middle Eastern Societies: A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Wadie Jwaideh*, ed. Robert Olson (Brattleboro, VT, 1987); Caroline Williams, “The Mosque of Sitt Hadaq,” *Muqarnas* 11 (1994).



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elaborate processions, pious giving, and political savvy. In prolonged periods of ineffective rulers, political turmoil, or other issues, however, the chroniclers tend to emphasize motifs of greed, ostentation, and misrule that implicate women's activities in urban space or the preoccupation of a reigning sultan with his harem. At these times, the chroniclers make it a point to mention how the populace reacted, usually with rumors or expressions of distaste. As a result, royal women are even more "visible" than the women on the streets of the city because their actions are recorded in the chronicles as representative of a ruling husband or son, or even the state of the sultanate as a whole. One of the moments in which the themes of waste and excess are most prominent in the chronicles is the public parading of the pilgrimage caravan to Mecca, which was one of the duties of royal women. The chroniclers also use these themes when describing what occurred in the harem. Before discussing the themes in both locations, general differences between the three chroniclers are elucidated as well as some remarks about the representations of class and gender in chronicle writing. What follows is an analysis of the themes of waste, excess, and obsession in the contexts of the harem and the pilgrimage parade, after which the theme of obsession is analyzed more fully with some examples of prominent royal women's public excursions.

### Chronicling Royal Women

This study focuses on three Mamluk chroniclers: al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), Ibn Taghribirdī (d. 874–75/1470), and Ibn Iyās (d. ca. 930/1524), as well as al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary for the ninth/fifteenth century. In some cases, al-Maqrīzī is clearly a source for Ibn Taghribirdī. In other cases, Ibn Taghribirdī edits out information and includes different anecdotes than al-Maqrīzī. This revision is clearly seen in the discussion of the pilgrimage parade, the descriptions of which sometimes include themes of waste and excess, discussed below. Al-Maqrīzī discusses pilgrimages of royal women with detail, while Ibn Taghribirdī typically does not. For al-Maqrīzī, the parades, including the participation of royal women in them, were an important state function, while Ibn Taghribirdī sometimes highlights the role of royal men rather than the role of women. In most instances, the latter's descriptions tend to be formulaic.

Ibn Iyās is quite specific in describing the pilgrimages, especially those that occurred during the middle and end of the sultanate; clearly for this scholar these were important markers of Mamluk power. Ibn Iyās tends to revel in the pageantry of royal women's parades and provides the most detail when they were present. However, he chooses not to include many accounts that both al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghribirdī relish about the reigns of the sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (d. 742/1341) and their obsession with the women of the harem, also discussed



at length below. While Ibn Iyās is less explicit with the motif of waste and excess that the other two chroniclers frequently use, he does use this motif when describing the ostentation of the pilgrimage parade of one of the last Mamluk rulers, Qānṣūḥ al-Ghawrī (d. 922/1516). Thus, while each chronicler has different perspectives on the events that are most pertinent to various sultans' rule, they still represent royal women using similar themes, descriptions, and motifs.

Chroniclers and biographers typically describe royal women with the same or similar terminology used to discuss their male counterparts: amirs and sultans. As Julie Scott Meisami has asserted, "If the outcome of a woman's actions was positive, the woman might be praised for her wisdom, perspicacity, determination and so on; if it was negative, the old saw about women's malign influence might be trotted out..."<sup>2</sup> In the descriptions in the texts under study here, royal women and royal men have much more in common than, say, royal women and women of the urban populace. For instance, when the chroniclers write that "women" were banned from the streets of Cairo at a certain time, women of the royal household were certainly not included in that category. Thus, it is common for accusations of greed and wastefulness also to be leveled against sultans and amirs. However, I contend that these themes of waste, excess, and obsession are often interrelated in the chronicles and that depictions of royal women as being wasteful, excessive in their decorations or behavior, or the object of obsession are frequently used by chroniclers to make implicit claims about the economic and political state of the sultanate or to criticize sultans in a more covert fashion.

## In the Harem

The mid-eighth/fourteenth century ushered in a period of crisis, both politically and economically. The Black Death, whose initial outbreak occurred approximately 747–50/1347–50 and then recurred periodically for the next 150 years, caused demographic decline, which led to a decrease in agriculture.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the state was facing increasing competition from European kingdoms.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, years of expenditures exceeding revenues and poor attempts at increasing the state treasury—such as confiscating land and wealth—had already

<sup>2</sup>Julie Scott Meisami, "Writing Medieval Women: Representations and Misrepresentations," in *Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam: Muslim Horizons*, ed. Julia Bray (New York, 2006), 64.

<sup>3</sup>For a study on the plague in the Middle East, see Michael Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ, 1977). He comments that the plague caused severe depopulation, a decline in the Mamluk army, changing prices and salaries, and the abandonment of some agricultural centers. Dols also notes that after the initial outbreak, the plague recurred in cycles of 9–12 years.

<sup>4</sup>Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History: The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn (1310–1341)* (Leiden, 1995), 133–40.



planted seeds of incoming economic trouble.<sup>5</sup> The state experienced monetary crisis with an influx of copper coinage into the market and a decrease in silver and gold coins. The recurring problems of the plague, poor agricultural revenues, environmental disasters, and famine contributed to economic decline into the ninth/fifteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

While these economic problems were emerging, the chroniclers accuse a series of sultans of spending lavishly on their own households and harems. The sultans were said to give the women of their harems extravagant gifts of gold and jewelry and to grant them more access than before to economic benefits outside their allowances. The chroniclers cast the wealth and power that the women of the harem wielded in this period in a negative light, although for other women, like Zaynab, the wife of Īnāl (d. 865/1461), in later years, and Ṭughāy, the wife of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (d. 741/1341), a few decades earlier, these same traits were portrayed positively. However, the period of the mid-eighth/fourteenth century saw a series of abortive reigns that the chroniclers sought to criticize, and the themes of excess expenditures and greedy women of the harem gave them a narrative around which to shape that criticism.

Sultans who had grown up in the harem were often characterized as being strongly influenced by their wives, mothers, and concubines, as well as by the powerful commanders who helped put them on the throne. Several of the sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad attempted to retain control of the sultanate after his death, although prominent amirs largely controlled the government.<sup>7</sup> It is in this period where al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghribirdī rely on motifs of waste and obsession in order to criticize rulers that they considered weak by pointing to their concern with women and sport instead of rule.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 148, 151.

<sup>6</sup>For a succinct discussion of Mamluk political and economic history see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and its Culture* (London and New York, 2007), 1–6.

<sup>7</sup>After al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's death, his son, Abū Bakr, was put on the throne for only a few months before another faction of amirs made another son, Kujuk, sultan. A third son, Aḥmad, also gained the support of a Mamluk faction and reigned for four months before the first of the sons discussed here, Ismā'īl, was raised to the throne. These reigns are discussed in Jo van Steenberg, *Order Out of Chaos: Patronage, Conflict and Mamluk Socio-Political Culture, 1341–1382* (Leiden, 2006). He brings to light the roles of patronage and conflict and the varying networks that vied for dominance. For an analysis of Aḥmad's infatuation with a beautiful young man, see Everett Rowson, "Homoerotic Liaisons among the Mamluk Elite in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria," in *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, ed. Kathryn Bayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi (Cambridge, MA, 2008). As Rowson points out, the chroniclers are not concerned with Aḥmad's love of the young man but rather with his "obsessiveness." Furthermore, Rowson speculates that his class may have also been a factor in his unsuitableness. (207–8).





One ambitious amir, Arghūn al-ʿAlāʾī, wed the mother of Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl (d. 745/1345) and, as al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrībirdī note, became the de facto leader of the state.<sup>8</sup> To further cement the two households, the sultan also married the daughter of Arghūn al-ʿAlāʾī.<sup>9</sup> The young sultan, however, had little interest in rule because of his preoccupation with the concubines of the harem. Al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrībirdī state that he was fond of a slave girl named Ittifāq, and Ibn Taghrībirdī says that his love for her exceeded proper bounds.<sup>10</sup> He comments, “He [Ismāʿīl] shirked ruling the kingdom out of his devotion to women and singers.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, according to the chronicler, he was constantly in the company of his mother and women of the harem, even on trips outside the citadel. Al-Maqrīzī relates an anecdote in which Ismāʿīl was afraid of retrieving items from the treasury to gift to Ittifāq because his stepfather would not approve. Consequently, he had another official retrieve jewelry and other goods from the treasury in secret, an account that illustrates the sultan’s timidity.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, Ibn Iyās does not provide these provocative and detailed anecdotes about al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl. Instead, he simply says that the sultan was inclined to the love of slave girls of various ethnicities.<sup>13</sup> Al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl eventually married Ittifāq, although his time with her would not last long. When he became ill and died, his stepfather managed to place his brother, Shaʿbān, on the throne, in an attempt to continue the line of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s sons and also his own power as a relative to the reigning sultan.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk* (Cairo, 1934–73), 2:620. See also Abū al-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah fī mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1963), 10:79, 90. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duḥūr* (Wiesbaden and Cairo, 1960–92, repr. Mecca), 1:1:509. Ibn Iyās mentions Arghūn al-ʿAlāʾī as the stepfather for Ismāʿīl and his brother Shaʿbān later than al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrībirdī, during Shaʿbān’s reign. See also this discussion in Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History*, 186–90. She analyzes several of the events mentioned here with al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s sons. However, she also asserts that the harem had little government influence after these sons were ousted from the throne, which seems dubious considering the powerful and influential royal women in the following century. A council of nine amirs was appointed for economic matters by the late eighth/fourteenth century, and it gave the sultan an allowance to keep him from overspending (194).

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:90.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 10:96.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 10:96–97.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:662–63.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr*, 1:1:505.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:680. Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:95, 117.



Shaʿbān (d. 747/1346) proceeded to marry his brother’s wife, Ittifāq; she bore him a son in 747/1346.<sup>15</sup> During one incident, she, along with his mother and the other women of the harem, convinced him to travel to the Ḥijāz for pilgrimage at a time when the state was unstable. Against the wishes of the amirs he went, only to have to come back once the situation had worsened. Al-Maqrīzī writes that “demands had increased upon the people,” in regard to grain prices and yields; the economy was in such dire straits that two officials begged him to cancel his trip.<sup>16</sup> The amirs eventually agreed that he must be removed from the sultanate in light of his desire to leave the capital when the economy was in such disarray. The chroniclers imply that the women of his harem had offered him unwise advice and, due to his preoccupation with them, he chose to listen to them instead of his officials.

Shaʿbān’s stepfather, Arghūn al-ʿAlāʾī, did not agree with his stepson’s removal from power, and as a result he was beaten with clubs “until he collapsed.”<sup>17</sup> Upon hearing this news and being told he would be removed from the sultanate, Shaʿbān fled to the citadel to his mother’s side.<sup>18</sup> Later, he was killed and his brother put on the throne. Al-Maqrīzī sums up his reign by saying that he enabled the servants and women of the harem and allowed them to engage in poor behavior. One such instance is an excursion in which the women drank wine in public.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, as will be discussed, the women are described as being greedy and extorting property from the populace. Shaʿbān also spent an excessive amount of time with his pleasures: hunting, playing games, and riding horses, with a “lack of shame from evil deeds.”<sup>20</sup> Ibn Taghrībirdī specifically mentions his preoccupation with polo.<sup>21</sup>

His half brother, the next sultan—al-Muẓaffar Ḥājī (d. 748/1347)—was not immune to the charms of the harem, particularly Ittifāq; he also married her, albeit

<sup>15</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:707. Ibn Taghrībirdī discusses Shaʿbān’s extraordinary love for Ittifāq at Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:119.

<sup>16</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:708.

<sup>17</sup>Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr*, 1:1:510. He was not beaten to death, but in 748/1348 the sultan al-Muẓaffar Ḥājī imprisoned him in Alexandria, where he was later killed. Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:735, 756. Al-Muẓaffar Ḥājī had a different mother than Ismāʿīl and Shaʿbān and thus Arghūn al-ʿAlāʾī lost the power he had as a relative of the sultan when al-Muẓaffar Ḥājī ascended to the throne.

<sup>18</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:712; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr*, 1:1:511. While Ibn Iyās does mention the role of Shaʿbān’s stepfather and the sultan being overthrown, the chronicler does not discuss Ittifāq in accounts of either Shaʿbān or his brother Ismāʿīl.

<sup>19</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:713; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:141.

<sup>20</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:713.

<sup>21</sup>Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:128, 132.



in secret.<sup>22</sup> He was also enamored with sport and engaged in different activities on different days of the week, like riding near the Nile or playing polo in the square. Sometimes he would have gatherings of people in the square to view sports and other entertainments; his mother and some of the wives of the commanders would attend.<sup>23</sup> Al-Maqrīzī writes that he even would play with the common people, sometimes stripping off his clothing to wrestle with them, as well as playing other games—behavior inappropriate for a ruler.<sup>24</sup> With many of these depictions, obsession with the women of the harem and obsession with play instead of rule work in tandem. The sultans are shown to be young, irresponsible, and as a result the state of the sultanate suffers.

In 755/1354, another son of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, al-Ṣāliḥ Ṣāliḥ (d. 755/1354), also exhibited excessive deference to women of the harem, particularly his mother. In one account, he traveled with his harem and prominent officials to Siryāqūs, a summer resort for the Mamluk elite outside Cairo.<sup>25</sup> There, he met with artisans, such as cooks and silk weavers, and prepared a magnificent feast “by his own hand.” He also arranged for a procession for his mother that mimicked that of the sultan. The slave girls and servants carried the royal Mamluk symbols of *al-qubbah wa-al-ṭayr* (the parasol and the bird) over her head, and she was “dressed like a king and in the form of a female sultan.”<sup>26</sup> After the “procession,” the sultan gave out robes of honor and gifts of money, and everyone ate the food he had prepared. He assisted his mother while she ate. This event seems to perplex al-Maqrīzī in its extravagance as well as the overly deferential way that the sultan treated his mother. The “procession” seemed to make a mockery of sultanic rituals. Here, at a private, lavish party, the same symbols bestowed upon the sultan’s mother and the mimicking of a public procession seemed garish and excessive.

The unwise influence that the harem held over the sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad is a constant theme in the chronicles; several incidents are given in which they give poor advice, such as the aforementioned account of encouraging the sultan to go on pilgrimage during an economically turbulent period. In another account,

<sup>22</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:720; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:153.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:735; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:155.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:740; Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr*, 1:1:518.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:929. For a brief discussion of Siryāqūs, see Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History*, 160. She comments that it was built in 723–35/1323–25 and contained “magnificent palaces for the sultan and his amirs, and a *khānaqā* [Sufi institution], large enough to house one hundred Sufis who were maintained and supported by the treasury.” It had gardens with “fruit trees brought from Damascus.” Sultans would regularly go there to hunt, play polo, and attend banquets, as Levanoni notes. Ibn Iyās describes the building of the *khānqāh* there in 723/1323 under al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr*, 1:1:454–55. He furthermore notes that the sultan went and stayed the night at the *khānqāh* when it was finished.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:929.





Ibn Iyās describes how another son, the sultan al-Nāṣir Ḥasan (d. 762/1361), received word in 762/1361 that the commander Yalbughā plotted to kill him. He brought him into the palace, and one of his concubines interceded on the commander's behalf. Instead of being killed for his insubordination, the amir was awarded a robe of honor and let go.<sup>27</sup> This move, however, turned out to be unwise, as Yalbughā returned to his camp and predictably began plotting against the sultan again. Sultan Ḥasan eventually had to gather his troops and try to defeat the errant amir to solve the plot against his life.

Thus, the chroniclers clearly see these women as a distraction from the reigning sultans at best. The advice they offer—such as going on the pilgrimage or releasing a captive—is described as foolish, and the money spent on gifts and parties for them is seen as extravagant. Furthermore, the chroniclers characterize several of the sultans as more concerned with play than with rule. This period of abortive reigns by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's sons was politically turbulent, and the poor decisions made by the sultans are exemplified by their fixation on the harem and close connection to their mothers. Other women, who lived in more stable times, were able to advise the sultan and throw even more lavish events during their reign without the condemnation and condescension present in the way the royal women are portrayed in these episodes.

The gifts and allowances the women of the harem received during the reigns of the sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad were also excessive, according to the chroniclers. Ibn Taghrībirdī notes disproportionate giving in the case of Ismā'īl toward Ittifāq.<sup>28</sup> Al-Maqrīzī comments that Sha'bān's gifts to Ittifāq and the favor bestowed upon her were like those to “no other women in her time.” Both chroniclers record that the sultan built her a house and gave her several pieces of expensive clothing; she had forty dresses inlaid with jewels, sixteen that were embroidered, and eighty veils of enormous value.<sup>29</sup> She also had her own retinue of slave girls and servants. Sha'bān's brother, al-Muẓaffar Ḥājji, upon consummating his marriage with her, gave her sixty satin cloths and literally showered her in gold. He also gifted her jewels, including four stones for a ring and six pearls, the cost of which was four hundred thousand dinars.<sup>30</sup>

Not only were the women given material items, but they also used their position to take property from other prominent members of society. Sha'bān's mother extorted five hundred acres of land and its waterwheel from the sons of an amir

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 3:60–61. See the discussion of Ḥasan's loss of power to his mamluks in Van Steenberg, *Order Out of Chaos*, 157–58.

<sup>28</sup>Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:96.

<sup>29</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:715; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:150.

<sup>30</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:721; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:154.



named Tuquzdamar.<sup>31</sup> She also took property from the vizier of Baghdad, including land at Birkat al-Fil as well as a location with an oil press.<sup>32</sup> Ittifāq, the beloved concubine, obtained four grain mills. Al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrībirdī bluntly say that the women of the harem were greedy and that they took what was “in the hands of the people”: water wheels, grain mills, gardens, and buildings belonging to elites, such as the amir Tuquzdamar and the vizier of Baghdad. Al-Maqrīzī explicitly states that the sultan enabled the women in their poor behavior.<sup>33</sup> There is no mention of any charitable giving on the part of these women, which likely also incited the people against them. If they gave charitably, the chroniclers chose to neglect it in favor of reflecting more selfish attitudes.

Themes of waste, greed, and excess follow royal women in times of political turbulence, as seen in the case of this mid-eighth/fourteenth-century era of short reigns and—for the chroniclers—excess waste in the face of economic difficulties. As Jo van Steenbergen has noted, the “volatile political climate” of these sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad led to a sultanate that “never fully managed to regain the stability it had known.”<sup>34</sup> Trips outside the citadel and the confiscations of material goods were visible to the public, fueling rumors that appear in the chronicles about the extravagance and waste at the citadel. Ibn Iyās, unlike al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrībirdī, tends to not focus on the role of women of the harem during this period and instead makes indirect comments about their influence. He places the blame on the ineffective rule of the sultans themselves and on Mamluk factionalism, while al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrībirdī, who clearly uses al-Maqrīzī as a source, emphasize anecdotes that implicate the greed of the women of the harem and the sultans’ obsession with these women, sport, and pleasure during a time of political disruption.

## The Pilgrimage Parade

In addition to these rumors and accusations of conduct inside the harem, chroniclers also used royal women’s public presence to level criticism against the state. Mentioned above was one incident of royal women supposedly drinking wine on an excursion outside the harem and another in which women jointed the sultan at Siryāqūs. Excursions like these were relatively rare, however. The main event for which royal women could leave the citadel was to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. While sultans rarely went, the chronicles indicate that the pilgrimage parade was

<sup>31</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:692; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:141.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:713. See also his brother al-Muẓaffar Ḥājjī giving away property to the women at *ibid.*, 2:740.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:713.

<sup>34</sup> Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 169.



a significant part of royal women's responsibilities. Ibn Iyās and al-Maqrīzī certainly give this impression, while Ibn Taghrībirdī tends to focus more on women's activities inside the harem.

Many of the pilgrimages discussed in the chronicles are mentioned with little note, especially those without any royal attendees. Those that are described, however, typically laud the extravagance of the royal women's processions because they were manifestations of the sultanate's piety, grandeur, and strength. The visible representation of the sultanate through these processions, on the other hand, also allowed chroniclers to point out improper rule, excess spending, and impiety by criticizing the behavior of royal women. Furthermore, the processions were closely connected with charity and pious bestowal, as the royal women frequently endowed *waqfs* (charitable endowments), had members of their processions toss coins or sweets, and provided food, water, and other goods to pilgrims along the journey. As Amy Singer notes, women's giving was a part of a "larger beneficent calculus on behalf of the family," not just a reflection of their own piety or wealth.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, emphasizing stinginess or selfishness during the pilgrimage was a way to point to the sultanate's improper use of resources.

The royal family's charitable giving is an example of a transactional kind of piety, as described by Marion Katz.<sup>36</sup> Sultans wanted to gain divine favor through performing recommended actions like almsgiving and *waqfs*, as well as the favor of the religious elites for their devotion to the religion and the favor of the populace for their generosity and assistance. As Adam Sabra points out in his discussion of poverty and charity, in times of trouble the state would engage in extravagant acts of charity in hope of God's help. On several occasions of plague outbreak, the sultan would lead people in mass prayers for repentance, make sacrifices, and give food to the poor. Sultans would also give alms to nearby shrines in "fear of impeding war" or if they or a member of the family were taken ill.<sup>37</sup> The establishment of charitable endowments likewise was transactional in the sense that the elite engaged in an "act pleasing to God" (*qurbah*) while also benefiting themselves and their descendants through the receipt of revenues and prayers said on their behalf if the building endowed was a tomb complex.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the pilgrimage procession was an avenue of charitable giving that was expected. When this expectation was not met, the chroniclers emphasize this

<sup>35</sup> Amy Singer, *Charity in Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, 2008), 128.

<sup>36</sup> Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (Oxford, 2007), 66–67.

<sup>37</sup> Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250–1517* (Cambridge, 2000), 55–58.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 72–73. For a discussion of women's role in founding *waqf*, see Petry, "Class Solidarity versus Gender Gain."





lack of giving and extrapolate from the actions of the uncharitable a statement about the misrule of the sultan of the time. Furthermore, the ostentation of the parade could just as easily be turned against royal women with accusations of vanity and pettiness. These accounts tend to arise during times of turbulent rule, successive short reigns, or general economic and political uncertainty. The chroniclers, then, use the parade in these instances to criticize the actions of the sultan and his officials in an indirect way, by instead attacking the behavior of the royal women in public.

During the years of al-Ashraf Qānṣūḥ al-Ghawrī's reign (906–22/1501–16), several royal women went on the pilgrimage. However, it was the pilgrimage of al-Ghawrī's wife that was particularly notable and drew the criticism of Ibn Iyās. Qānṣūḥ al-Ghawrī was the last reigning sultan before the empire fell to the Ottomans, and thus the political and economic uncertainty of the time is reflected in chronicles like that of Ibn Iyās, which look back on the fall of the sultanate and attempt to find someone or a set of circumstances to blame.

Ibn Iyās tells us that the *maḥmal* (a ceremonial litter sent out during the pilgrimage) left Cairo in 920/1514 along with Sultan al-Ghawrī's wife, Umm Sīdī Muḥammad, and their son, Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad, who was the *amīr al-ḥajj* (head of the caravan).<sup>39</sup> It was a particularly grand affair, as there were four armed detachments, each sponsored by an amir who was making the pilgrimage.<sup>40</sup> The sultan's son sponsored one, which was accompanied by men in their battle attire and musicians with drums and flutes. The banners of the sultanate flew. Two rows of camels with gold Venetian tassels were in the parade, as were horses with yellow silk blankets atop them. The chronicler even goes into detail about the luggage: an excessive amount of kitchenware, porcelain vases from China, ewers, basins, and other objects of great beauty. The excess seems to bewilder even Ibn Iyās. He says that the sultan's wife's palanquin was "the most beautiful in the world." The palanquin was made of red velvet fabric and decorated with gold embroidery with wide bands at the bottom stitched with Venetian gold. Five plumes topped it adorned with pearls and gold rings fitted with ruby and turquoise. It alone cost more than twenty thousand dinars. Her family and her personal guests traveled in twenty litters of colored velvet. It took about a thousand camels to carry the baggage of the royal family and those accompanying them. Perhaps this extravagance was meant to impress the Ottoman ambassador, because he is said to have been in attendance. Or, perhaps, it was also meant to instill confidence in

<sup>39</sup>Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr*, 4:409–12. For a discussion of the *maḥmal*, see Jacques Jormier, *Le Maḥmal et la Caravane Égyptienne des Pèlerins de la Mecque (XIII–XX Siècles)* (Cairo, 1953). See also Behrens-Abouseif, "The Mahmal Legend."

<sup>40</sup>Johnson, "Royal Pilgrims," 124.



the people, that the sultanate was still as powerful and magnificent as it had been in previous days.

If the latter was the intention, it backfired spectacularly. According to the chroniclers, the people were aghast at the display of luxury, considering the turbulent political environment, and considered it an inauspicious omen, one that might mark the end of the sultan's reign. Rumors swirled about Umm Sidī Muḥammad, alleging that when she went by the city, on the typical routes that avoided the city center, her palanquin was in fact empty. It was then brought back to the citadel by way of the roads near the cemeteries to return to fetch her. The image of the empty palanquin, surrounded by luxury, seemed to be a metaphor for the reign of al-Ghawrī: an excessive display that, if one looked closer, lacked any real substance. Furthermore, Ibn Iyās makes direct comparison between al-Ghawrī and the previous sultan, Qāyrbāy (d. 901/1496), using the pilgrimages of their wives as examples.

Fāṭimah al-Khāṣṣbakīyah, wife of Qāyrbāy, was generous during her pilgrimage, giving charitably when the caravan stopped for water. Perhaps her generous giving early on was the cause for the lack of water at the end of the trip; the reason for this lack is unclear from the chronicles, but she is not blamed for it. In contrast, al-Ghawrī's wife did not offer the customary sweets or boxes of pastries, and Ibn Iyās comments that many of her entourage complained of hunger.<sup>41</sup> Instead of blaming her alone, however, he implicates the sultan, calling him foolish and miserly. He also notes that the sultan's son, who was the *amīr al-ḥajj*, was old enough to know the proper protocol. Ibn Iyās writes that no one commented on the good deeds of the princess and her son; as seen in other cases, commonly the generosity of the royal family was part of what made the event special for the people of Cairo. Not only were the wives and mothers of the sultans allowed to be in their midst, but they also benefitted the people, even if it was only by raising morale through the giving of sweets. Often these deeds included bringing extra camels and water, setting up *waqfs* in commemoration of their pilgrimage, and giving various gifts.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the denial of charitable giving could be read as Umm Sidī Muḥammad and her son rejecting an opportunity for cultivating religious merit and blessings, for themselves, the other travelers, and the sultanate as a whole by refusing (intentionally, at least in the way Ibn Iyās paints the account) to engage in the transactional piety typical of these events. The pilgrims were accustomed to generosity from the family members to make their journey more bearable. Ibn Iyās notes that the custom was that part of the supplies for the royal family was set aside for distribution. Yet, on this occasion, much of the

<sup>41</sup>Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr*, 4:441.

<sup>42</sup>Marina Tolmacheva, "Female Piety and Patronage in the Medieval Hajj," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, ed. Gavin R. G. Hambly (New York, 1998), 164.



royal supplies still remained when they arrived back in Cairo.<sup>43</sup> The complaints of hunger, then, seem especially poignant in contrast with the wealth of food that remained.

When the royal caravans and the rest of the pilgrims arrived back in Egypt in Muḥarram of 921/1515, all the notables of Cairo went to greet them, including the four major qadis.<sup>44</sup> Afterward, the sultan's son, Muḥammad, went to Cairo and spent the night with the commanders who had been on the pilgrimage. Umm Sīdī Muḥammad, however, went overnight into the citadel. Ibn Iyās paints the scene of her palanquin going through the streets of Cairo in secret, the way "lit by torches and lanterns."<sup>45</sup> The populace had no idea that she had already ascended to the citadel. They missed the typical parade that occurred when members of the royal household returned from pilgrimage, which often included sweets or small coins thrown to the crowds.<sup>46</sup> Not only, then, did Umm Sīdī Muḥammad neglect her fellow pilgrims, she also neglected the people of Cairo, who had witnessed her (or rather, what was suspected to be her empty palanquin) just months before in what was probably the most lavish pilgrimage procession they had ever seen. The irony was not lost on them. They satirized her and her son's stingy nature and lack of hospitality in poetry, some parts of which Ibn Iyās recounts in his chronicle.

Al-Ghawrī's wife was not the only royal woman to be criticized for her activities during the pilgrimage. Occasionally the lavishness of the royal pilgrimage could be considered a detriment instead of a point of pride. In some cases, the royal ladies may have been overly extravagant in their caravans in contrast to how generous they were with giving gifts to pilgrims along the way or charitable giving during and after the hajj. Al-Maqrīzī mentions some amirs' wives who were criticized for their behavior on their pilgrimages.<sup>47</sup> These women, who went on the pilgrimage in 746/1346, were accused of excess in the decorations of their litters and caravans. They dressed elaborately in silk and inlaid necklaces and traveled with an air of pride. The women even began to compete with one another, quarreling and trying to surpass their companions in extravagance and beauty. The women bestowed upon the camel riders and water carriers robes of honor (*aqbiyah*) to wear, a mockery of the sultanic practice of bestowing robes on important officials or guests. Al-Maqrīzī writes in shock at the display, saying that there had not been seen anything like that before, and that the people renounced their deeds on the pilgrimage. The outrage was such that the chief qadi

<sup>43</sup>Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr*, 4:438–39.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Johnson, "Royal Pilgrims," 127.

<sup>47</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:693.





mentioned it during his holiday sermon at the citadel, admonishing these commanders' wives and repudiating their behavior.

Examining the incident in the greater context of the problems during Sultan al-Sha'bān's reign, described above, it seems as if either the women were indeed spending excessively and bragging because of the sultan's generosity with gifts and money, or perhaps the chroniclers and the populace read the incident as ostentatious at a time when the sultanate was not politically stable. Perhaps rumors had even begun to circulate in Cairo during his reign about the influence his wives and mother had on him, leading to a negative reaction by the people upon seeing their palanquins and parade in public in all their finery.

Clearly some criticisms about the hajj caravan had to do with popular reception of the sultan and the general consensus about his effectiveness as a ruler, as in the case of the blatant comparison made between the wives of Qāyṭbāy and al-Ghawrī. As noted by Petry in his analysis of the two monarchs, Qāyṭbāy sought to restore the empire to what it once was while al-Ghawrī made innovations to keep the government afloat.<sup>48</sup> Qāyṭbāy was seen as preserving their heritage, while al-Ghawrī attempted new ways of accumulating money, and acquiring troops, military techniques, and weaponry. Chroniclers and biographers, their contemporaries, largely celebrated the former while denigrating the latter. As for the mid-eighth/fourteenth-century pilgrimage with the vain princesses, this period was one of young sultans, as described above, who the chroniclers describe as foolish and more occupied with the harem than with rule.

The hajj procession during the Mamluk period offered a wealth of opportunities for the sultanate to position itself as the leading Muslim empire, with its role in sending the Ka'bah covering to Mecca, and to make a statement to Cairo about both the grandeur of the sultanate and its commitment to piety. The royal women were a crucial part of this image making, as their deeds on the pilgrimage and after were considered representative of that of the empire as a whole. Furthermore, even in times of social unrest, with warring factions, plague, and other disturbances, royal women usually went on the pilgrimage. At these times, their public presence was valuable as a way to demonstrate the strength of the sultanate and its commitment to Islamic values. However, if the public—or at least the chroniclers recording their reactions—were not pleased with the performance, they had the chance to respond through rumors and satirizing poetry.

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<sup>48</sup>Carl Petry, *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamlūk Sultans al-Ashrāf Qāyṭbāy and Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī in Egypt* (Seattle, 1993). For more detailed background on the political and economic circumstances of the final decades of the sultanate, see idem, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (Albany, NY, 1994).



## Love or Obsession?

Chroniclers wove narratives about sultans' relationships with their mothers, wives, and concubines to explain why certain women were favored or lost favor. For favored wives—and, indeed, favored sultans—chroniclers often looked positively on what they perceived as expressions of love, unless those expressions exceeded the appropriate bounds. For the women of the harems of the sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, the chroniclers tend to describe the sultans' love as excessive, obsequious. At one point in his chronicle, Ibn Taghrībirdī plainly states, “These three sultans of the sons of Ibn Qalāwūn [al-Nāṣir Muḥammad] married this black slave girl [Ittifāq] and favored her. This is a strange thing.”<sup>49</sup> He goes on to allege that the sultans' preoccupation with her was due to her *‘ūd* playing and singing. While these women were largely criticized in the sources, it is illustrative to compare their accounts with women the chroniclers portray positively, for instance, Ṭughāy, wife of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, and Zaynab, wife of Īnāl. Both of these women, according to the chroniclers, were influential wives, and both were given special permission to go on excursions outside the citadel, incidents through which we can examine chroniclers' usage of the themes of love and obsession.

Ṭughāy, along with the rest of the harem, joined al-Nāṣir Muḥammad on a trip to Giza in the winter of 723/1323. The sultan decreed that all the shops were to be closed the day of her travel and that people were to be driven off the streets to keep even her palanquin hidden.<sup>50</sup> It is unclear exactly why this strict measure was taken in this case because there are several other instances of royal women traveling the streets of Cairo, albeit covered, without such disturbance. However, she was the sultan's favorite and, according to the chroniclers, much beloved; perhaps this display was a way of demonstrating her importance. Protecting her honor and seclusion was of such value that extraordinary measures were taken.<sup>51</sup>

Zaynab bint Badr al-Dīn ibn Khāṣṣbak (known as Zaynab al-Khāṣṣbakīyah), wife of the sultan al-Ashraf Īnāl, went to down to Būlāq on the Nile River in 859/1455.<sup>52</sup> Her husband did not accompany her, as he was occupied in Cairo with

<sup>49</sup>Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:154.

<sup>50</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, 2:240. Al-Maqrīzī seems to be the only one of the three chroniclers discussed here to recount Ṭughāy's trip. Ibn Iyās only mentions her pilgrimage two years before, while Ibn Taghrībirdī has relatively little to say about her and instead focuses on al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.

<sup>51</sup>Al-Maqrīzī remarks on the favored position of Ṭughāy when discussing her endowment of a Sufi institution in idem, *Kitāb al-mawā'iz wa-al-i'tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-al-āthār* (Bulaq, 1853), 4:245–46.

<sup>52</sup>Al-Sakhāwī gives her biography at Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *Al-daw' al-lāmī' li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi'* (Beirut, 1992), 12:44–45.



appointing individuals to governmental positions.<sup>53</sup> The chroniclers agree that she made the trip to see the Nile because of an illness or indisposition (*tawa<sup>c</sup>uk*).<sup>54</sup> Presumably it was thought that being in the “purer” air near the water would be beneficial for her recovery; it was assumed the illness was brought on by impure air.<sup>55</sup> Her son and daughters also accompanied her on her trip to the riverside, and Ibn Iyās mentions that some of the other royal ladies were in attendance. When she felt better, she went into the *ḥammām*, the bathhouse, of the residence in which she was staying while in Būlāq. Afterward, the notables of the state—amirs, judges, and others—came to visit her.<sup>56</sup> The sultan joined her there to accompany her back to the citadel when she felt cured. When she was better, drums and horns were sounded, and on the night of 28 Rabīʿ II, there was a great spectacle of fireworks.

During the celebration of her recovery, the streets and the shore were crowded with people; Ibn Taghrībirdī says it resembled occasions when the ceremonial pilgrimage palanquin made its rounds about Cairo or the Nile celebrations.<sup>57</sup> It was a spectacle and a memorable day, according to the chronicler, indicating the rarity of such an excursion. Another rarity was the unusually large number of women at this event; there were twice as many women in the street as men, and they were out from dawn until dusk. Unlike Ibn Iyās, Ibn Taghrībirdī ends on a critical note, saying that a variety of abominations and scandalous deeds happened during this celebration, making it a disgrace.<sup>58</sup> He also comments on the uncommonness of such an occasion, of the wife of the sultan going out like this and the celebrations surrounding it. He mentions that Sultan Īnāl was enamored with her, taking no other wife or concubine during their marriage, which was unusual, alluding to the fact that it was this preoccupation with her that perhaps led to his allowing her this excursion to the river in her time of illness.<sup>59</sup> While Ibn Iyās remarks on the love that Īnāl had for Zaynab, Ibn Taghrībirdī instead alludes to obsession, or at least a love that made him act inappropriately, by approving of such a trip for his ill wife.

Comparing the trips of Ṭughāy and Zaynab, both of which involved women who were the favorite wives of their husbands, suggests that on one hand, the

<sup>53</sup>Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿiʿ al-zuhūr*, 2:324.

<sup>54</sup>Abū al-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith al-duḥūr fī madā al-ayyām wa-al-shuhūr* (Beirut, 1990), 2:522. Al-Maqrīzī is not a source for this event due to his death in 845/1442.

<sup>55</sup>See also the discussion of this incident in Yehoshua Frenkel, “Popular Culture (Islam, Early and Middle Periods),” *Religion Compass* 2 (2008): 13.

<sup>56</sup>Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith*, 2:523.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 2:524.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 2:525. See also her biography in al-Sakhāwī, *Al-dawʿ*, 12:44–45.





sultan showed favor to Ṭughāy by more strictly enforcing her seclusion—she was in public, yet no one else was there to see her—while on the other, the sultan indulged Zaynab by allowing her to make a trip to the Nile when she was ill, even if he could not go with her right away. The former was largely seen as praiseworthy on the part of the sultan, while the latter, at least for one chronicler, drew criticism for the increased mixing of men and women that resulted during the celebrations for the recovery of her health. Thus, even for beloved wives, the actions of the sultans toward them could sometimes be criticized if they were seen to be excessive. However, this criticism is minor compared to the stories told by the chroniclers, especially Ibn Taghribirdī and al-Maqrīzī, about the sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and their love for the women of their harem. Such love, as the chroniclers describe it, led to obsession rather than indulgence.

## Conclusion

In recent decades, scholars have made great strides in illuminating royal women's presence in the chronicles and other Mamluk works, revealing the ways in which they were an integral part of the economic, social, and political spheres. At the same time, as I demonstrate here, the depictions of royal women are not monolithic, even though chroniclers tend to use the same themes and motifs in their writing. First, I argue that the themes of waste, excess, and obsession are frequently used by chroniclers when narrating events of the lives of royal women, and then, second, I contend that examination of these themes reveals the variation in the chronicles in terms of when these motifs were utilized and what kinds of narratives and rhetoric Mamluk scholars chose to employ in light of their particular depiction of different reigns and, more broadly, the history of the sultanate as a cohesive whole.

These themes are most prominent when describing events that took place in the harem and during the pilgrimage procession to Mecca, the former consisting of speculation and rumor about what went on behind closed doors and the latter being the relatively rare public appearance, albeit in a covered litter, of these royal women. In enumerating on the theme of obsession, however, it is clear that trips could be gifts that provoked chroniclers' criticism because of the presence of these royal women in public and the nuisance that crowds in the street could cause, in addition to the ever-present specter of potential immoral behavior between men and women in large crowds. While some chroniclers see indulgence of sultans toward beloved wives and concubines, others see obsessive behavior to the detriment of Mamluk society. Royal women's presence in public was an easy way to level criticism or praise at certain rulers, while their gifts in private and



the display of wealth in public allowed chroniclers to critique the sultans' rule and the state of the Mamluk economy in general.



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## Marriage and Kinship among the Amirs of the Banū al-Ḥusayn: The Rise of the Buḥturid Qadis in Rural Mamluk Syria (Eighth/Fourteenth Century)

Under Mamluk rule, the Buḥturid amirs embodied power in the Gharb region of Syria, earning them the honorific title of the “amirs of the Gharb.”<sup>1</sup> They were recognized by the authorities, owned properties (*amlāk*), had land concessions (*iqṭāʿs*) of which they claimed ownership from the *rawk al-nāṣiri* onwards, levied taxes in the name of the sultan (*istikhrāj al-ḥuqūq al-sultānīyah*),<sup>2</sup> and were respected by village headmen (*ruʿasāʾ*) and peasants (*fallāḥūn*) alike.<sup>3</sup> Yet “amirs of the Gharb” was not an official title, since it is absent from the majority of chancellery documents copied by Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyá. Nevertheless, the Buḥtur were officially viewed as non-Mamluk amirs, that is, free men forming a contingent within the circle of Mamluk officers (*ḥalqah*).

In 691/1292, several Buḥturid amirs were admitted as officers of the *ḥalqah*<sup>4</sup> and succeeded—not without difficulty—in maintaining their position and passing it on to their descendants. They were assigned minor commands, and with the exception of Buḥtur ibn Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAramūnī (d. 700/1301), who rose to the rank of *tabalkhānah*<sup>5</sup> in the final year of his life,<sup>6</sup> the highest military charge obtained by a Gharb amir was twenty heavy cavalry (*tawāshī*). This was the case of the eminent al-Ḥusayn, who particularly marked the history of his family, first by founding the amirate of ʿBayy where he settled with his kin and then by establishing a system of matrimonial alliances within the group. The lineage of al-Ḥusayn—the Banū al-Ḥusayn—was the main branch of the Buḥtur family during the eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries, and its members were local authorities

<sup>1</sup>Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt wa-huwa akhbār al-salaf min dhurriyat Buḥtur ibn ʿAlī Amīr al-Gharb bi-Bayrūt*; *Tārīḥ Bayrūt: Récits des anciens de la famille de Buḥtur b. ʿAlī, émir du Gharb de Beyrouth*, Histoire et sociologie du Proche-Orient, 35, ed. Francis Hours and Kamal Salibi (Beirut, 1969), 43, 52, 58, 68, 71, 179, 192. See also Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-durar al-kāminah fī aʿyān al-miʿah al-thāminah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Wārith M. ʿAlī (Beirut, 1997), 2:31; Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafādī, *Al-wāfi bi-al-wafayāt*, ed. Aḥmad al-Arnāʿūṭ and Tazkī Muṣṭafá (Beirut, 2000), 12:223.

<sup>2</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 40.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 84–85.

<sup>5</sup>On this second-rank amirate, see Bernadette Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils et l'administration dans l'état militaire mamlūk (IXe/XVe siècle)* (Damascus, 1992), 66.

<sup>6</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 79.







Figure 1. The Gharb Region in Mamluk Syria



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who served the central government. This article focuses on al-Ḥusayn's accomplishments, most notably the alliance strategies forged, primarily by marrying his daughters into other prominent families of the region, which led to the founding of a lineage of Buḥturid qadis.

Unsurprisingly, the Gharb amirs adhered to a clan system. The descendants of Buḥtur, the eponymous founder of the family about whom little is known, formed the house (*bayt*) of Buḥturid in the eighth/fourteenth century, driven by an esprit de corps that enabled them to remain united for nearly two centuries. Even though the clan union of the Buḥturid amirs predated the amir al-Ḥusayn, the latter became the main actor in the political and social affirmation of his family by rendering their authority more far-reaching and princely. In the villages neighboring ʿBayy, the place of origin of the Buḥtur, al-Ḥusayn helped to set up his brothers and first cousins, while forging alliances with ruling or noble families further afield. As a result, the Buḥtur family eventually included a branch of local qadis or “qadi substitutes (*nāʾib al-qāḍī*),” which attests to the considerable delegation of judicial power under the Mamluks. As shown in this article, the rise of the first Buḥturid qadis depends on two factors: on the one hand, al-Ḥusayn's political and cultural strategy to bring greater visibility to his family and secure their local power; and on the other, the conception of clan kinship reflected in his matrimonial strategy aimed at extending his authority in the Gharb region.

### Building an Amirate in ʿBayy under the Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (709/1310–741/1341)

Ḥajī the Great was the first amir of the house of Buḥtur to settle in ʿBayy. He exchanged his house in the village of Ṭardalā for the dwelling (*bayt*) of a person named Ibrāhīm in the existing village of ʿBayy.<sup>7</sup> His brother Khuḍur then came to join him and built in the vicinity two adjoining *ʿullīyahs*<sup>8</sup> with a residential and reception function along with their outbuildings.<sup>9</sup> The eminent al-Ḥusayn, the son and principal heir of Khuḍur, later completed the work begun by his parents, making him the greatest builder in the house of Buḥtur. He erected living quarters, reception halls, *īwāns*, a water basin, a *majlis*,<sup>10</sup> and a stable, while also

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>8</sup>The term “*ʿullīyah*” can signify “elevated room,” similarly to other terms derived from the same root *ʿLW*: “*ʿulī* (bedroom on the first floor),” “*ʿalwā* (upper floors),” or even “*ʿalawī* (heavenly or superior);” see Reinhart Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes* (Leiden-Paris, 1967), 2:166–67.

<sup>9</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārikh Bayrūt*, 107–8.

<sup>10</sup>This *majlis* or meeting place should not be confused with that of the Druze. On the institution of the Druze *majlis*, see Wissam H. Halawi, “La réforme druze dans les montagnes syriennes au IXe/XVe siècle,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 135 (2014): 117–19.



helping his brothers and cousins to settle in the surrounding area.<sup>11</sup> By the time of al-Ḥusayn's death in the middle of the eighth/fourteenth century, the village of ʿBayy had become an amirate with juxtaposing *bayts* and *ʿullīyahs*.<sup>12</sup>

Several houses built by al-Ḥusayn—or his descendants—are still visible in ʿBayy; some are currently occupied by Druze religious or were sold by the Lebanese state to influential individuals for private use; others are reduced to a state of ruins. Although the modifications made to these buildings over the centuries are uncertain, it is evident to the naked eye that the *ḥārah*<sup>13</sup> mentioned by Ibn Yaḥyá was more than just a street in the village. The *ḥārah* of the amirs would therefore have occupied a significant part of the village. The question arises as to whether another *ḥārah* was inhabited by peasants. Finally, it should be noted that the current inhabitants of ʿBayy date to the ninth/fourteenth century the market streets—commonly known as “*sūq*”—located near a large building with a central courtyard and water basin.

Domestic and civil architecture may be a significant source of information for the historian, as shown in Bethany Walker's book on Tall Ḥisān,<sup>14</sup> a Mamluk village in present-day Jordan. However, our knowledge of rural settlements in pre-modern Syria is still imperfect. Even though all the other buildings in the area, mainly those of amirs Abillama in Matn and Shihāb in Dayr al-Qamar,<sup>15</sup> date from the Ottoman era, it cannot be said that the building projects of al-Ḥusayn and his descendants were unusual in Mamluk-era villages. Nevertheless, the mapping of the buildings by al-Ḥusayn and his descendants across time shows that these buildings in ʿBayy made it the site of an amirate, and draws a parallel between this building activity and the building projects of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and Mamluk governors of Damascus (Sayf al-Dīn Tankīz), Aleppo (ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Alṭunbughā), and Tripoli (Sayf al-Dīn Ṭaynāl).<sup>16</sup> The foundation of ʿBayy should therefore be considered as part of an ambitious sultanate and amirate policy.

<sup>11</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 108–9.

<sup>12</sup>For a schematic reconstruction of the buildings of the Buḥtur family in ʿBayy, see Wissam H. Halawi, *Les Druzes aux marges de l'islam: Étotérisme et normativité en milieu rural XIVe–XVIe siècle* (Paris, 2021), Fig. 21.

<sup>13</sup>I translate the term *ḥārah* as “village,” but it can also be rendered as “street” or “neighborhood.”

<sup>14</sup>Bethany Walker, *Jordan in the Late Middle Ages: Transformations of the Mamluk Frontier* (Chicago, 2011). See also idem, “Sowing the Seeds of Rural Decline? Agriculture as an Economic Barometer of Late Mamluk Egypt,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2007): 173–99.

<sup>15</sup>See Ray Jabre Mouawad and Lévon Nordiguan, *Les Abillama, émirs du Metn: Histoire et palais XIIIe–XIXe siècle* (Beirut, 2013). So far, there has been no archaeological survey of the village of Dayr al-Qamar.

<sup>16</sup>See Anne Troadec, “Les Mamelouks dans l'espace syrien: stratégies de domination et résistances (658/1260–741/1341)” (Ph.D. diss., Paris, 2014), 202–5.





In his contribution to the collective volume titled *Palais et maisons du Caire*, Jacques Revault depicts how the sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (d. 741/1341) “during his long reign gave a remarkable impulse to Mamluk architecture between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.”<sup>17</sup> Michael Meinecke<sup>18</sup> also describes the third reign of al-Nāṣir (709/1310–741/1341) as an architectural “apogee,” recognized by art historians as a period of exceptional activity for the construction and renovation of buildings.<sup>19</sup>

A few textual historians view al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s government in more measured terms. Amalia Levanoni speaks of an “illusion of growth” in her monograph on the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad,<sup>20</sup> who, in her view, undermined the state finances by his excessive overspending<sup>21</sup> as he sought to establish his authority and create the image of a great sovereign. The same may not be said of Jean-Claude Garcin, who portrays him as a sovereign who transformed Cairo,<sup>22</sup> or Julien Loiseau, for whom “the beautiful epoch of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ... was also the medieval apogee of the Egyptian capital.”<sup>23</sup> The architectural policy of the sultanate was accompanied by the rise in power of the Mamluk amirs, who be-

<sup>17</sup>Jacques Revault, “L’architecture domestique du Caire à l’époque mamelouke (XIIIe–XVIe siècles),” in *Palais et maisons du Caire*, vol. 1, *Époque mamelouke (XIIIe–XVIe siècles)*, ed. Jean-Claude Garcin, Bernard Maury, Jacques Revault, and Mona Zakariya (Paris, 1982), 89 (my translation).

<sup>18</sup>Michael Meinecke, *Die Mamlukische Architektur in Ägypten und Syrien (648/1250 bis 923/1517)* (Glückstadt, 1992). See also the review of Oleg Grabar, “Michael Meinecke and His Last Book,” *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 1–6.

<sup>19</sup>On this subject, see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and its Culture* (London/New York, 2007), esp. chap. 13–16; idem, “Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and al-Aṣraf Qāytbāy—Patrons of Urbanism,” in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk Eras: Proceedings of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd International Colloquium organized at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in May 1992, 1993, and 1994*, ed. Urbain Vermeulen and Daniel De Smet (Louvain, 1995), 267–84; idem, “Muhandis, Shad, Mu’allim: Note on the Building Craft in the Mamluk Period,” *Der Islam* 72 (1995): 293–309; Sheila S. Blair and Jonathon M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam, 1250–1800* (New Haven/London, 1995), esp. chap. 6.

<sup>20</sup>Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History: The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn (1310–1341)* (Leiden, 1995), 155ff. On the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, see also David Ayalon, “The Expansion and Decline of Cairo under the Mamlūks and its Background,” in *Itinéraires d’Orient: Hommages à Claude Cahen, Res Orientales*, ed. Rika Gyselen and Raoul Curriel (Bures-sur-Yvette, 1994), 13–20; Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate, 1250–1382* (Carbondale, 1986), 105–24 (chap. 6).

<sup>21</sup>On the sultan’s expenditure on construction projects, see Levanoni, *Turning Point in Mamluk History*, 156–65.

<sup>22</sup>Jean-Claude Garcin, “Habitat médiéval et histoire urbaine à Fustāt et au Caire,” in *Palais et maisons du Caire*, vol. 1, *Époque mamelouke*, 163.

<sup>23</sup>Julien Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks (XIIIe–XVIe siècle): Une expérience du pouvoir dans l’Islam médiéval* (Paris, 2014), 125 (my translation).



came “miniature sultans in their respective provinces”; this tension between the power of the amirs and the authority of the sultan is placed at the heart of Anne Troadec’s analysis of epigraphic inscriptions at the time of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.<sup>24</sup>

The amirs’ desire to compare themselves to the sultan, sometimes even competing with his power, was echoed in the realm of domestic architecture. This was the case with the great amirs of the eighth/fourteenth century, as attested by the palace of Qawṣūn-Yashbak in Cairo.<sup>25</sup> The other amirs of lesser means imitated their wealthier counterparts by building prestigious residences,<sup>26</sup> which would suggest that al-Ḥusayn’s construction of a princely village at ‘Bayy was intended to flaunt his local hegemony within the limits of his means.

Drawing on the information provided by Ibn Yaḥyá in his chronicle, it is possible to reconstruct the dwellings of the amirs of ‘Bayy in the middle of the eighth/fourteenth century. First, the habitations include the *bayt* that Ḥajī the Great exchanged for his house in Ṭardalā, the two adjoining ‘*ulliyahs* and their outbuildings, and the *bayt* built by Khuḍur when he came to settle in the immediate vicinity.<sup>27</sup> This part of the village had several dwellings before al-Ḥusayn decided to set up his court there, thus making it a place of residence and power.<sup>28</sup>

In the year 696/1296–97, when he was only twenty-eight years old, the amir al-Ḥusayn erected two adjoining ‘*ulliyahs* with outbuildings between the building (*‘imārah*) of his uncle and that of his father.<sup>29</sup> After his father’s death, he then had built the lower *qā‘ah*, the *īwān*, and the *baḥrah* or water basin, although some of his contemporaries mention that the foundations were laid in his father’s time.

Al-Ḥusayn later undertook the construction of a large ‘*ulliyah* with outbuildings, and then an adjoining *bayt* and a *ḥammām*; this architectural complex was located to the north of the original buildings.<sup>30</sup> Based on a note penned by al-Ḥusayn, Ibn Yaḥyá states that he had committed the sum of ten thousand dirhams to complete the construction of the *ḥammām* but was obliged to seek the help of the local inhabitants (*al-nās*), because it was exceedingly difficult to cut out a large block of rock (*shaqīf*) where the saunas were to be installed. This event took place in 725/1325, but a few years earlier in 719/1319, a *qanāh*, or subterranean canal, was dug to provide water to the new dwellings, which provides some indication as to the scale of the construction works.

<sup>24</sup> Anne Troadec, “Les Mamelouks dans l’espace syrien,” 200–12 (for the citation, see 200).

<sup>25</sup> Revault, “L’architecture domestique du Caire,” 51–74.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 57.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Ḥusayn’s court is described by Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, esp. 82–83, 168.

<sup>29</sup> The description of this dwelling at the time of al-Ḥusayn is based on *ibid.*, 107–10.

<sup>30</sup> The information provided by Ibn Yaḥyá regarding the houses of Ḥusām al-Dīn and Ibn Ma‘n allows us to situate the buildings in the north of the village.



Indulging in his taste for luxury, the amir also erected a large *bayt* on the southern slope of the village, which was adjoined by two *ṭabaqaḥs*, known as al-Dahshah or the Marvel, as well as a stable (*iṣṭabl*) and a large *majlis*.<sup>31</sup> One of his last building achievements was a *qāʿah* situated at the village gate (*bawwābat al-ḥārah*), which he had constructed for his son Taqī al-Dīn Ibrāhīm.

Ibn Yaḥyá does not specify the location of the domed mosque (*al-masjid wa-al-qubbah*) built by al-Ḥusayn. The author mentions other amirs of the *bayt* who were helped by al-Ḥusayn to build their home not far from his residence. He recounts that the amir Fakhr al-Dīn, the grandson of Ḥajī the Great, after marrying the daughter of al-Ḥusayn, settled in an *ʿullīyah* built to the northwest of the latter's building (*ʿimārah*). Similarly, Faṭḥ al-Dīn, the younger brother of al-Ḥusayn, settled in a new *ʿullīyah* that adjoined the *ʿimārah* of his father Khudūr, while ʿIzz al-Dīn, another younger brother, took up residence in a *qāʿah* with a cellar (*qabw*), which was situated between the *ʿullīyahs* of al-Ḥusayn and his father.

Regarding the amir Ḥusām al-Dīn, the brother of Fakhr al-Dīn whose place of residence is known, he defied al-Ḥusayn by building an *ʿullīyah* with a portico (*uṣṭuwān*) right in front of the dwelling of the eminent amir, thus blocking his view. In retaliation, al-Ḥusayn helped a member of the Maʿn family to build his *ʿullīyah* in front of that of Ḥusām al-Dīn so as to block his view.

Several decades later, Sayf al-Dīn Yaḥyá I (d. 790/1388) followed the example of his grandfather al-Ḥusayn by constructing the *qāʿah* bearing his name in ʿBayy. This reception room had marble floors, arabesque-covered walls, and a private water supply.<sup>32</sup> The amir Sayf al-Dīn also undertook the reconstruction of the village's *īwān* originally built by al-Ḥusayn and also widened the water canal (*qanāḥ*) to increase its flow.<sup>33</sup> Another amir from the Banū al-Ḥusayn, Sayf al-Dīn Zankī (d. 864/1459–60), constructed his own *ʿullīyah* next to a stable.<sup>34</sup>

There is every indication that al-Ḥusayn was behind the architectural development of the village by giving it a princely allure with the construction of important buildings—the large *bayt*, *īwān*, large *majlis*, *ḥammām*, stable, and mosque—to accommodate a court and receive distinguished guests. Moreover, Ibn Yaḥyá

<sup>31</sup>On the foundation inscription of the *bayt kabīr*, see Halawi, *Les Druzes aux marges de l'islam*, Fig. IV-3. On the building's exterior facades, outbuildings (kitchen, sink), and reception rooms, see *ibid.*, Fig. IV-VIII.

<sup>32</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 193. The author provides no information that situates this room in relation to the previous constructions of al-Ḥusayn.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.* There is also the *īwān* and water supply system that the amir Sayf al-Dīn had built in Beirut.

<sup>34</sup>Aḥmad Ibn Sibāṭ, *Ṣidq al-akḥbār: Tārīkh Ibn Sibāṭ*, ed. ʿUmar Tadmurī (Tripoli, 1993), 2:809.





points out that al-Ḥusayn's indulgent spending exceeded his means,<sup>35</sup> which led him to incur many debts (*duyūn*),<sup>36</sup> some of which were reimbursed by his son Zayn al-Dīn. Yet the prestigious constructions are undoubtedly in keeping with the image of power that al-Ḥusayn wanted to project at the local level, not to mention the image of grandeur that he sought to convey to the central government.

### **Bayt as a Place for Living and Kinship**

Claude Lévi-Strauss defined the house as “a corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary line, considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship and affinity and, most often, of both.”<sup>37</sup> In his chronicle, Ibn Yaḥyá associates the term *bayt* with two socially distinct realities: on the one hand, a living space shared by the members of an extended family, and on the other, an abstract space expressing the bonds of kinship.

To describe the settlement of the Buḥturid amirs in ʿBayy, Ibn Yaḥyá uses the word *bayt* in addition to *ʿulliyah* (elevated room) and *qāʿah* (ceremonial room). Al-Ḥusayn and his kin also had several residential buildings constructed in the village (*hārah*), including houses known as *bayt* or *bayt kabīr*,<sup>38</sup> although Ibn Yaḥyá does not specify their size or shape. While the *bayt* was probably a domestic dwelling,<sup>39</sup> its precise structure in the mountainous regions of pre-modern Syria is still unknown. As the archaeological remains in ʿBayy are yet to be investigated, I will draw on Nimrod Luz's description of the Mamluk *buyūt* identified in Jerusalem, Tripoli, and Ṣafad, which are comprised of residential rooms accessible from a central courtyard.<sup>40</sup>

Ibn Yaḥyá also gives the term *bayt* the signification of extended patrilineal clans: he first mentions Buḥtur, the founder (*jadd*, lit. grandfather) of the

<sup>35</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 108–9. On al-Ḥusayn's overspending, see the author's note in the margins of his manuscript.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>37</sup>Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Way of the Mask* (Seattle, 1982), 194. See also idem, “Maison,” in *Dictionnaire de l'ethnologie et de l'anthropologie* (Paris, 1991), 434–36; idem, *Paroles données* (Paris, Plon, 1984), 189–241 (chap. “Clan, tradition, maison”).

<sup>38</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 108.

<sup>39</sup>These places of residence were probably shared by many family members: for example, Zayn al-Dīn grew up with his cousins Khuḍur and Ḥajī (Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 44, 76); Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf lived with his children in the *ʿimārah* of his father Khuḍur (ibid., 146); and Sulaymān lived with his children in the *qāʿah* of his distant cousin al-Ḥusayn (ibid., 223).

<sup>40</sup>Nimrod Luz, *The Mamluk City in the Middle East: History, Culture, and the Urban Landscape* (Cambridge, 2014), 75–76.



“house,”<sup>41</sup> and then traces the *nasab* of the “*bayt*,” going back to the oldest ancestor, Jumayhar.<sup>42</sup> This genealogy would have been transmitted from generation to generation,<sup>43</sup> even though, according to the author, some “foolish” people (*ḥamqā*) doubted its accuracy.<sup>44</sup> Ibn Yaḥyá finally focuses on the individuals who were the “glory of the house (*majd al-bayt*),”<sup>45</sup> notably the eminent al-Ḥusayn, who “built the house (*shayyada al-bayt*),”<sup>46</sup> and his son Zayn al-Dīn.

Ibn Yaḥyá uses the term *bayt*<sup>47</sup> to denote both a place of communal living and an expression of kinship. Thus, the amirs of ‘Aramūn, though settling in a neighboring village, continued to belong to the house of Buḥtur as *qarāʿib* or close kin. The notion of *bayt*, as a consequence of *qarābah*, was defined in relation to a personal authority—head of the family—who was recognized by the entire family group bound together by tribal<sup>48</sup> or clan ties.

### From Kinship to Political Alliance among the Buḥtur

The notion of *qarābah* or kinship among the Banū Buḥtur allows us to redefine the criteria for linking the different families of the amirs to the *bayt*, even though the bonds of solidarity within the group have always been viewed as the result of consanguineous kinship. The term *qarābah* literally conveys the notion of closeness (*qarīb* “close”) and distance (*baʿīd* “distant”) from the perspective of the physical space separating two individuals or groups as well as the concept of kinship ties within a lineage or genealogy (*nasab*). Thus, it not only expresses the spatial proximity between the inhabitants of a village or region, rendered by

<sup>41</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 39.

<sup>42</sup>On Jumayhar, see Halawi, *Les Druzes aux marges de l’Islam*, 527, 598–600.

<sup>43</sup>For the genealogy of the Banū Buḥtur from the time of Jumayhar onwards, see *ibid.*, Fig. 32.

<sup>44</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 42.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>47</sup>On the term *bayt* as a synonym of “tent,” “dwelling,” or even “*sharaf* (honor),” see Mohammed Hocine Benkheira, “Le vocabulaire arabe de la parenté dans les sources anciennes,” in *La Famille en islam d’après les sources arabes*, ed. Mohammed Hocine Benkheira, Avner Giladi, Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, and Jacqueline Sublet (Paris, 2013), 51. In the Mamluk context, *bayt* signifies military house; see Mathieu Eychenne, “Le *bayt* à l’époque mamelouke,” *Annales islamologiques* 42 (2008): 275–95. On the use of the term *bayt* in other Semitic languages and among the pre-Islamic Arabs to designate a travelling temple or shrine, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *La religion discrète: Croyances spirituelles dans l’islam shi’ite* (Paris, 2006), 35, n. 55.

<sup>48</sup>The conception of the *bayt* as both a physical space and a unit of kinship, and the links between *qarābah* and *jīwār*, physical proximity and degree of kinship, fit into a tribal society. However, these do not exist only in tribal societies.



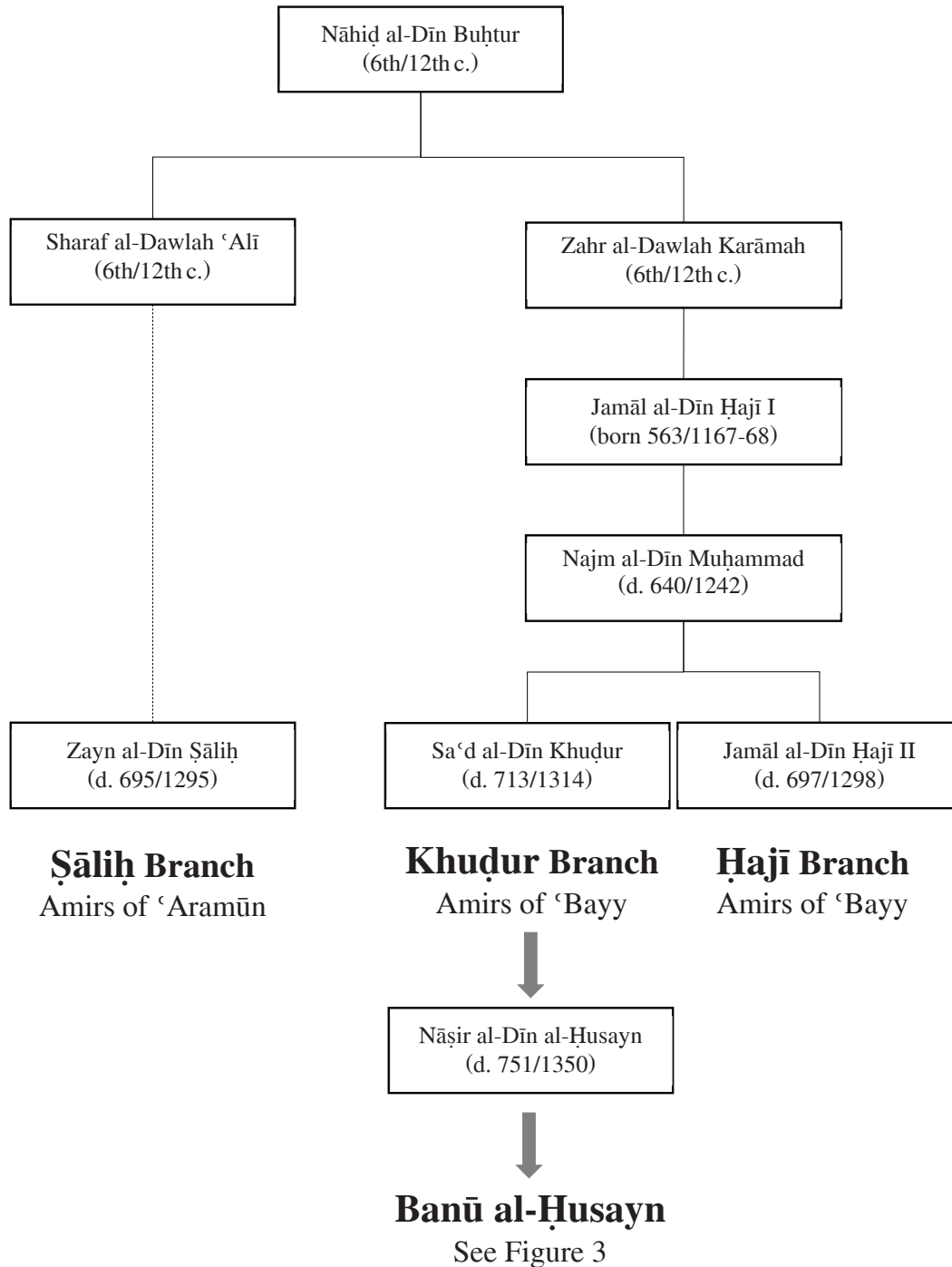


Figure 2. Main family branches of the Banū Buḥtur





the word *jiwār* (neighborhood), but it also indicates the degree of kinship between two individuals from the same family.

The links of consanguinity within the *bayt* will be studied below in the framework of the system of matrimonial alliances set up by al-Ḥusayn. In this context, *qarābah* will be analyzed in the sense of closeness founded on a political alliance between the representatives of the house of Buḥtur. I will thus show how al-Ḥusayn conceived solidarity between the amirs of his region and established himself as a local authority during the *rawk al-nāṣirī*. Indeed, al-Ḥusayn's preeminence, already manifest during the foundation of ʿBayy as a place of personal and family power, cannot be separated from the visibility sought for his social group in the Gharb, which emerges as a founding moment for the house of Buḥtur.

When al-Ḥusayn protested against the *rawk al-nāṣirī* imposed by the Mamluk authorities between 712/1313 and 713/1313,<sup>49</sup> he pleaded on behalf of all his *aqārib* (sing. *qarīb* “close”), who were subsequently conceded one or more *iqṭāʿ*s.<sup>50</sup> He justified his request by his kin's special interest in their land, which was inhabited by their *rijāl* (men) and *ʿashīrah* (clan or blood relations).<sup>51</sup> According to al-Ḥusayn and his allies (*aqārib*), their *iqṭāʿ*s could no longer be taken away from them, or even renegotiated or reassigned, since they had been managing them for so long, and passing them in inheritance, that these *iqṭāʿ* lands had become their property (*amlāk*).<sup>52</sup>

This incident reveals two important aspects: the notion of *qarābah* based on common strategic interests, and the preeminence of al-Ḥusayn over his *aqārib* or other members of the group. In his petition to the governor of Damascus, al-Ḥusayn stresses the role played by the Banū Buḥtur amirs in defending the boundaries of Beirut as well as their loyalty to the sultan.<sup>53</sup> In exchange, he indirectly asks the sultan not to record his *iqṭāʿ*s and those of his family in the *rawk*. Not only does al-Ḥusayn emerge here as the head of the Banū Buḥtur and the legitimate intermediary with the state, but he also emphasizes the local power of his kin. This family power nevertheless had to be continually renewed with the state authorities to counter the ambitions of other families in the Gharb. Indeed,

<sup>49</sup>On the new cadaster organized by the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, see Troadec, “Mamelouks dans l'espace syrien,” 356–59.

<sup>50</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 86.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid. According to Mohammad Hocine Benkheira, the term *ʿashīrah* refers to “close male kin” (see Benkheira, “Vocabulaire arabe,” 48). On the use of this term in reference to sociability or friendship within a group, see Boris James, “Une ethnographie succincte de l'entre-deux kurdes' au Moyen Âge,” *Études rurales* 186 (2010): 23–24.

<sup>52</sup>It should be noted that the Banū Buḥtur needed approval from the Mamluk authorities for their *iqṭāʿ* assignments, which was given to them by *manshūr*. See Halawi, *Les Druzes aux marges de l'Islam*, 572–76.

<sup>53</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 86.



during the *rawk al-nāṣirī*, the Banū Buḥtur emerged victorious and succeeded in asserting themselves against their sworn enemies, the Banū Abī al-Jaysh.<sup>54</sup>

According to Ibn Yaḥyá, the Banū Abī al-Jaysh descended from the Banū Saʿdān in ʿAramūn. They had previously resided on the coast at Khaldah, south of Beirut, before holding *iqṭāʿ*s in the Gharb and becoming amirs like the Banū Buḥtur.<sup>55</sup> However, they were never part of the house of Buḥtur, contrary to Sami Makarem's theory that links them to the Arislān.<sup>56</sup> In his view, in the ninth/fifteenth century, an amir of the Banū Abī al-Jaysh married a woman descended from the Banū Buḥtur in order to seal the unity of the Gharb amirs. However, neither this marriage nor the affiliation of the Banū Abī al-Jaysh with the Arislān<sup>57</sup> (or vice-versa) is attested in the chronicles of Ibn Sibāṭ or Ibn Yaḥyá. For his part, Kamal Salibi suggests that the Banū Abī al-Jaysh were decimated by the Banū Buḥtur in the late eighth/fourteenth century when their *iqṭāʿ*s passed into the hands of the latter.<sup>58</sup>

During the *rawk al-naṣirī*, al-Ḥusayn and his kin united against any revision of the cadaster. Al-Ḥusayn's preoccupation was thus to conserve his personal advantages and those of his family, who were also his principal allies in the region. The strategic alliances offered by *qarābah*, the esprit de corps stemming from the clan structure of the Buḥtur, were thus vital to ensure a strong territorial cohesion. They allowed al-Ḥusayn to legitimize the power of his family at the local level and in the eyes of the central government, while establishing his reputation as a clan leader and renewing the support given by the different family clans within the group. This local union based on family and political ties did not go unnoticed by the Mamluk state, which confirmed the leading role of al-Ḥusayn

<sup>54</sup>For the favorable response of Tankīz, governor of Damascus, see Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 94. On the animosity between the Banū al-Jaysh and the Banū Buḥtur, see *ibid.*, 54, 63, 67, 75, 89–94, as well as Kamal S. Salibi, "The Buḥturids of the Ġarb: Mediaeval Lords of Beirut and the Southern Lebanon," *Arabica* 8, no. 1 (1961): 94.

<sup>55</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 41–42, 198.

<sup>56</sup>Sami N. Makarem, *Lubnān fī ʿahd al-umarāʾ al-Tanūkhīyīn (Lebanon under the Tanūkhid Emirs)* (Beirut, 2000), 201. On the supposed link between the Banū al-Jaysh and the Arislān, see *ibid.*, 269. The author draws on the *sijill* or register of the Arislans, which is of dubious authenticity: see *Al-sijill al-Arislānī*, ed. Muḥammad Khalīl Bāshā and Riyāḍ Ghannām (Beirut, 1999).

<sup>57</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá (*Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 92, 180, 215) mentions an amir named Rislān, the son of a certain Masʿūd, whose grandson ʿImād al-Dīn Mūsá was the last representative of the house before being killed in 791/1389. The influential Arislān family, which nowadays plays a leading political role in Lebanon, portrays a different view of its origins and filiation. Based on the family archives that were orally transmitted and later put into writing, its members developed their own account of their origins that counters that of the Buḥtur (see *Al-sijill al-Arislānī*). Similar to the latter, they consider themselves to descend from the Tanūkh and Banū al-Jaysh who were once amirs of the Gharb. For the lineage of the Arislān as described in the *Sijill*, see Makarem, *Lubnān*, 313.

<sup>58</sup>Salibi, "Buḥturids of the Ġarb," 94.



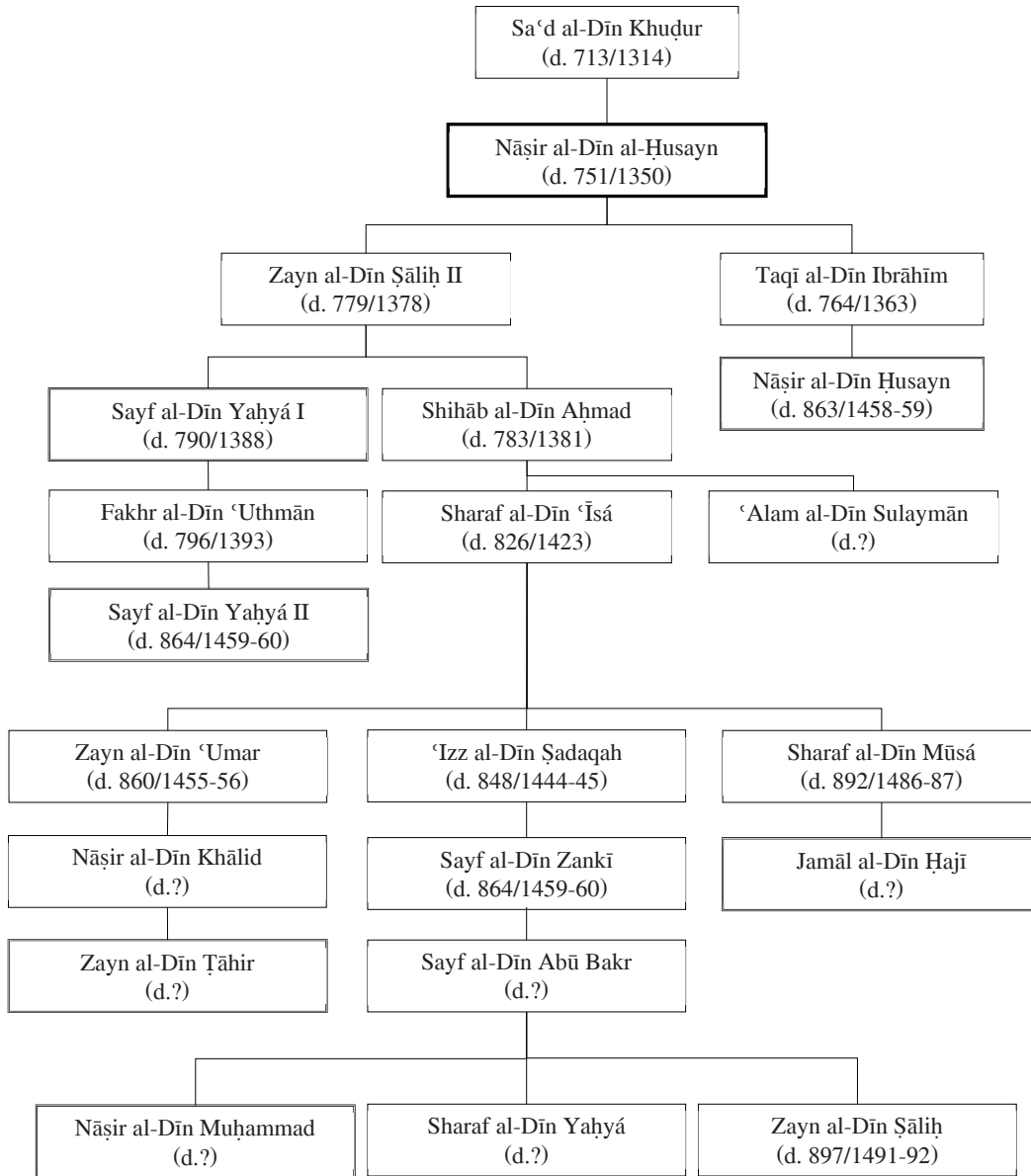


Figure 3. The Banū al-Ḥusayn Branch





and his clan allies in presiding over the region. Consequently, the Buḥtur family, and in particular, the Banū al-Ḥusayn branch, became the privileged partners of the Mamluk political authorities, especially the governor of Damascus.

### “*Banū al-‘amm*”: Male Kinship

Turning to the marriages among the Buḥtur, Ibn Yaḥyá mentions the successive wives of each amir included in his chronicle as well as their children and respective spouses. He also clarifies the degree of kinship of the spouses by using the terms *ibnat ‘amm* or *ibnat khāl* for first cousins.<sup>59</sup> For second or more distant cousins, Ibn Yaḥyá disregards the maternal lineage and only states the degree of kinship in relation to the male ascendants, as attested by the expression *ibn ‘amm abīhi* (first cousin of his father).<sup>60</sup> This reinforces the male expression of kinship within the *bayt*, as the names of women are absent from the *nasab* of any members of the group.

Even though Ibn Yaḥyá most frequently employs the term *aqārib* to denote the kin of an amir, he also uses the expression “*banū al-‘amm* (paternal cousins)”<sup>61</sup> to designate the amirs of ‘Aramūn, whose degree of kinship to the amirs of ‘Bayy seems to be merely an “agnatic illusion.”<sup>62</sup> The usage of the singular form of *khāl*, *khālah*, and *‘ammah* indicates the closeness between two individuals in a group. While Ibn Yaḥyá refers to cousins as *qarā’ib* (consanguineous kin), patrilineal filiation prevails in the expression *banū al-‘amm*, which Mohammed Hocine Benkheira believes to result from unilineal filiation.<sup>63</sup> Regarding *‘amm*, Benkheira derives his interpretation from the root ‘MM: the abstract notion that emerges is characterized by the general, the common, and the vulgar contrary to *khāṣṣ* and *khāṣṣah*, which relate to the private and elite spheres. Thus, according to Benkheira, the anthropological sense of the term *‘amm* would emphasize the father’s first cousins in a patrilineal society, whereas female kinship would remain part of the intimate or private sphere, thus explaining its absence from the chronicles.

The semantic analysis of André Miquel adds some interesting details to this interpretation.<sup>64</sup> According to Miquel, *a‘mām*, the plural form of *‘amm*, designates

<sup>59</sup>See, among others, Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 189, 191.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 202.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 64, 166.

<sup>62</sup>Here I borrow the expression of Édouard Conte on elective kinship: “Affinités électives et parenté arabe,” *Études rurales* 157–158 (2001): 86.

<sup>63</sup>Benkheira, “Vocabulaire arabe”, 57–58. In the author’s view, unilineal filiation would reflect an anthropological reality based on the vision of the authors of ancient texts, which historians should not disregard.

<sup>64</sup>See Jean Cuisenier and André Miquel, “La terminologie arabe de la parenté: Analyse sémantique et analyse componentielle,” *L’Homme* 5, nos. 3–4 (1965): 33–36.



all ascendants: in the expression *mu‘amm wa-mukhwal*, the derivative *mu‘amm* from the term *‘amm* denotes patrilineal ancestry as a whole, unlike the terms *khāl* and *mukhwal*. Indeed, *khāl* signifies a maternal uncle and never refers to kinship in more general terms like cousinhood, whereas *mukhwal* only appears in the expression in question. These two interpretations converge somewhat, since in both cases the first cousins of the father epitomize visible kinship in a patrilineal Arab society.

Likewise, in Ibn Yaḥyá’s chronicle, female filiation is only mentioned in relation to cousins of the first degree; in other cases, it is simply assimilated with agnatic filiation. These expressions are always employed in the context of matrimonial ties within the *bayt*, which reveals the existence of marriages between cross or parallel cousins.<sup>65</sup> These endogamous alliances recall the concept of the Arab marriage, even though the latter is theoretically a union between two parallel patrilineal cousins. Was intermarriage in the *bayt* initially an elitist practice in the Gharb? And when did it become systematic within the group?

### “Marrying the Closest” among the Banū Buḥtur

Ibn Yaḥyá provides only scarce information about the marriages in the *bayt* during the four first generations.<sup>66</sup> He does not mention the wives of Buḥtur—the eponymous founder of the *bayt*—or those of his two sons, ‘Alī and Karāmah.<sup>67</sup> The mother of Ḥajī I, the grandson of Buḥtur, is designated by the teknonym (*kunyah*) “Umm Ḥajī,” suggesting that Ibn Yaḥyá knew neither her name nor her *nasab*.<sup>68</sup> Muḥammad, son of Ḥajī I, married an unknown woman from the village of al-‘Azzūniyah,<sup>69</sup> located in the far east of the Gharb region between the villages of ‘Ayn Dārā and Shārūn, which was not in the immediate vicinity of Ṭardalā, where the Banū Buḥtur lived at the time.

Ibn Yaḥyá gives further details on the marriages in the fifth generation, stating the identity of Ṣāliḥ’s wife and the filiation of Khuḍur’s second wife. However, he does not mention the first wife of the latter or name the two wives of Ḥajī the

<sup>65</sup>Cross cousins are the children of opposite-sex siblings, while parallel cousins are the children of two brothers or two sisters; see Laurent S. Barry, Pierre Bonte, Salvatore D’Onofrio, Nicolas Govoroff, Jean-Luc Jamard, Nicole-Claude Mathieu, Enric Porqueres i Gené, Jérôme Wilgaux, András Zempléni, and Françoise Zonabend, “Glossaire de la parenté,” *L’Homme* 154–155 (2000): 723.

<sup>66</sup>“Marrying the closest”: Here I borrow the title of the edited volume by Pierre Bonte, ed., *Épouser au plus proche: Inceste, prohibitions et stratégies matrimoniales autour de la Méditerranée* (Paris, 1994).

<sup>67</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 39–44.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 50.



Great.<sup>70</sup> This is all the more surprising considering that Ḥajī the Great lived only a few decades before the birth of Ibn Yaḥyá and that his wives gave birth to five amirs who were contemporaries of the author. After the death of his first wife, Khuḍur married Sārah, whose maternal grandmother belonged to the *bayt* before marrying an outsider.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Ibn Yaḥyá only gives the identity of the wives from the Banū Buḥtur, as distant marriages were viewed as matrimonial strategies to forge alliances between local families. For this reason, Khuḍur's first wife from the village of Kfar-Silwān, as well as Ḥajī the Great's two wives, remained anonymous, while the name of Ṣāliḥ's wife, Ṣādiqah, is cited, as she was part of the Buḥtur family.<sup>72</sup>

Marriages contracted at the time of al-Ḥusayn, who belonged to the sixth generation of the *bayt*, are fully documented in Ibn Yaḥyá's chronicle. Al-Ḥusayn first married the daughter of Ṣāliḥ and Ṣādiqah, who was his paternal aunt.<sup>73</sup> The two spouses were thus unilateral cross cousins.<sup>74</sup> Al-Ḥusayn's second wife, whom he wedded after the death of his first wife, was not a member of the *bayt* but the daughter of a renowned man whom the sultan had presented with a *khil'ah* (robe of honor or gift).<sup>75</sup> Ibn Yaḥyá refers to the mutual aid between al-Ḥusayn and his father-in-law.

Al-Ḥusayn's brothers married their cousins from the Ḥajī branch: Muḥammad and Ḥasan married the two daughters of 'Abd al-Raḥmān, the son of Ḥajī the Great, while Yūsuf wedded the daughter of Aḥmad ibn Ḥajī.<sup>76</sup> Al-Ḥusayn's sister married Yūsuf ibn Ṣāliḥ, who belonged to the house of the 'Aramūn amirs,<sup>77</sup> while al-Ḥusayn himself was married to Yūsuf's sister. Indeed, the matrimonial alliances between these two families of amirs go back to Ṣādiqah, al-Ḥusayn's paternal aunt, who was already married to Ṣāliḥ al-'Aramūnī. These alliances between members of the three branches of the house—Khuḍur, Ḥajī, and Ṣāliḥ—become reinforced among the daughters of al-Ḥusayn: five married the 'Aramūn amirs, and two wedded the descendants of Ḥajī the Great.<sup>78</sup> Regarding the daughters of Sulaymān, the brother of al-Ḥusayn, the majority married amirs from the latter's

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>71</sup>Sārah bint 'Alam al-Dīn 'Alam belonged to the Banū 'Abd Allāh family and came from Kfar Fāqūd, a village in the Shūf; see Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 57.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>73</sup>On the marriage of al-Ḥusayn with the daughter of Zayn al-Dīn Ṣāliḥ al-'Aramūnī, see Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 133. On his kinship with Ṣādiqah, the sister of Khuḍur, see *ibid.*, 75.

<sup>74</sup>The amir married his paternal first cousin, of whom he was the maternal cousin.

<sup>75</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 133–34.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 144, 146, 147.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 134–35.





lineage: three of his daughters wedded the grandsons of Zayn al-Dīn, the son of al-Ḥusayn, while the fourth married her first cousin, the son of Yūsuf.<sup>79</sup>

The descendants of Zayn al-Dīn, al-Ḥusayn's son, also married within the *bayt*. Two of his sons wedded women from the Ḥajī branch, and a third married the daughter of an 'Aramūn amir;<sup>80</sup> in addition, three of his granddaughters, Umaymah bint Aḥmad, Ḥasanah bint 'Alī, and Malīḥah bint Abū Bakr ibn Aḥmad, married 'Aramūn amirs.<sup>81</sup> In her first marriage, Sārah, the daughter of Ibrāhīm, the youngest son of al-Ḥusayn, married her first cousin, Aḥmad ibn Zayn al-Dīn ibn al-Ḥusayn.<sup>82</sup> Among the Ḥajī, other unions took place with the Ḥusayn branch: Sitt al-Jamī', the daughter of 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Aḥmad, and Mawminah, the daughter of 'Abd al-Raḥmān, respectively married Mūsá and Yaḥyá, the sons of Zayn al-Dīn ibn al-Ḥusayn.<sup>83</sup> The 'Aramūn amirs continued to form alliances with descendants of the house of al-Ḥusayn: besides the aforementioned marriages among the Šāliḥ, we can observe the marriages of Nujaymah, the daughter of Mūsá ibn Yūsuf, with the son of Zayn al-Dīn ibn al-Ḥusayn; Ḥasan ibn Mūsá and Muḥammad ibn 'Alī with Ḥasanah, Umaymah, and Malīḥah, the granddaughters of Zayn al-Dīn; and finally, Aḥmad ibn Ḥalīl ibn Mufarraǰ with Sārah bint Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ḥusayn.<sup>84</sup>

This practice of marrying close kin among the Buḥtur highlights the place of so-called Arab marriages in the *sunnah* (good practice) of the *bayt*.<sup>85</sup> Of the sixty-eight marriages reported by Ibn Yaḥyá, only twelve (i.e., 17.5%) are between patrilateral parallel first or second cousins. The other marriages in the *bayt* may be categorized as follows: twelve (17.5%) between patrilateral parallel third or fourth cousins; eight (12%) between patrilateral parallel cousins of the fifth degree or more; eleven (16%) between cross cousins of unilineal descent; nine (13%) with outsiders with existing kinship ties to the family; and eight (12%) with outsiders without kinship ties.

The union of patrilineal parallel cousins, commonly designated by the expression "Arab marriage," has been the subject of several interpretations relating to the segmentary kinship system in Arab societies based on matrimonial strategies. Let me first cite the alliance theory, also known as the general theory of exchanges, according to which Claude Lévi-Strauss interprets Arab marriages

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 155, 191–92.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 191.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 187.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 155, 201.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 189, 191, 199, 224.

<sup>85</sup>For the expression *sunnat al-bayt fī al-zawāǰ* in Ibn Yaḥyá's chronicle, see *ibid.*, 175.



from a structuralist perspective.<sup>86</sup> In the functionalist method, this type of union may be explained through its economic and political functions.<sup>87</sup> Other conceptions have been espoused by Murphy and Kasdan, among others, who describe the Arab marriage as a means of organizing the ruptures and alliances necessary for the perpetual redefinition of “discrete groups.”<sup>88</sup> This perspective—contrary to the unilineal approach of the first two theories—considers these groups to be structurally bilateral.<sup>89</sup>

Lastly, Pierre Bonte questions the foundations of the Arab marriage.<sup>90</sup> Although the author acknowledges the importance of Ladislav Holy’s research on the notion of “appreciation,”<sup>91</sup> he criticizes the assumption that the Arab marriage is always preferred from both a normative and statistical point of view. Bonte views the prohibition of hypogamy as the only positive rule that conditions statutory equality in Arab-Muslim societies and indirectly attributes a normative character to the Arab marriage. Laurent Barry shows how the Arab marriage is

<sup>86</sup>Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Paris, 1949); idem, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris, 1974), esp. chap. 15. According to Lévi-Strauss, marriage can be explained by kinship structures as opposed to functional rules. The author thus conceives the Arab marriage as a means of escaping from elementary kinship structures, since a woman is given to seal a covenant between agnates; by contrast, marriages between cross cousins perpetuate a fixed pattern, since, from generation to generation, one woman is exchanged for another.

<sup>87</sup>Fredrik Barth, “Father’s Brother’s Daughter Marriage in Kurdistan,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 10 (1954): 164–71; Raphael Patai, “The Structure of Endogamous Unilineal Descent Groups,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 21, no. 4 (1965): 325–50; Emrys Lloyd Peters, “Aspects of Affinity in a Lebanese Maronite Village,” in *Mediterranean Family Structures*, ed. J. G. Peristiany (Cambridge, 1976), 27–79.

<sup>88</sup>Robert F. Murphy and Leonard Kasdan, “The Structure of Parallel Cousin Marriage,” *American Anthropologist* 61, no. 1 (1959): 17–29; idem, “Agnation and Endogamy: Some Further Considerations,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 23, no. 1 (1967): 1–14.

<sup>89</sup>In the context of bilateral descent, the lineage does not determine the formation of a social group; it is rather a consequence of the chosen matrimonial alliance strategy, whether endogamous or exogamous.

<sup>90</sup>Pierre Bonte, “Manière de dire ou manière de faire: Peut-on parler d’un mariage ‘arabe’?” in *Épouser au plus proche*, ed. Bonte, 371–98.

<sup>91</sup>Holy focuses on marriage between cousins, notably in the context of the Arab marriage, in order to show that it is a “conceptual artifice without intrinsic unit,” since such unions adopt a different signification depending on the context; Ladislav Holy, *Kinship, Honor and Solidarity: Cousin Marriage in the Middle East* (Manchester, 1989), 31. The author considers the Arab marriage to be favored, and throughout his study, he asks the question: how and why would this type of marriage be preferred or more appreciated among the members of a group? See also idem, *Anthropological Perspectives on Kinship* (London, 1996).



the least endogamous of unions, because, in his view, kinship is not transmitted by the father (blood)<sup>92</sup> but instead by the mother (maternal milk).<sup>93</sup>

In the house of Buḥtur, marriages between patrilateral parallel cousins (17.5%) are not representative of the matrimonial system, as men can choose from several women in their extended household or even contract a marriage with an outsider as long as the social rank is respected. The social norm reflected in the Arab marriage is thus not a positive rule among the Banū Buḥtur, as it does not generate a negative rule prohibiting other forms of marriage. This type of alliance is likewise not a normative preference, as no specific matrimonial rule is stipulated in the sources. It would therefore seem that this mechanism of marital union is simply not observed in the *bayt*: the descendants of an Arab marriage do not necessarily contract a marriage of the same type, perhaps because no such requirement exists or because of the lack of cousins to perpetuate the alliance strategy of their parents.<sup>94</sup>

Although Arab marriages between patrilateral parallel first cousins were not customary in the *bayt*, 63% of unions were contracted between members of the group. This attests to the strong preference of the Buḥturid amirs to marry someone from one of the clans in their extended family and hence from the same social category. The matrimonial strategy of “marrying the closest” was initiated by al-Ḥusayn: he gave his daughters in marriage to the ‘Aramūn amirs or, as we will see below, to influential men outside the *bayt* who were his friends and allies. In this sense, women may be viewed as vectors for the transmission of kinship both within and outside the group through endogamous and distant marriages.

The Buḥturid kinship system contained bilateral rather than purely patrilineal ties (contrary to what the sources suggest at first glance),<sup>95</sup> meaning that it em-

<sup>92</sup>Blood is not the material support for kinship transmission according to Laurent Barry, “Les modes de composition de l’alliance: Le ‘mariage arabe,’” *L’Homme* 147 (1998): 17–50. For Édouard Conte, blood represents a shared responsibility between members of the group; Conte, “Affinités électives,” 66–68.

<sup>93</sup>Barry, “Mariage arabe,” 17–50. The author criticizes the functional view of the Arab marriage, which is not unique in his opinion. On this subject, see Sophie Caratini, “À propos du mariage ‘arabe’: Discours endogame et pratiques exogames: l’exemple des Rgaybāt du nord-ouest saharien,” *L’Homme* 110 (1989): 30–49; Jean Cuisenier, “Endogamie et exogamie dans le monde arabe,” *L’Homme* 2 (1962): 80–105; Sophie Ferchiou, “Structures de parenté et d’alliance d’une société arabe: Les ‘aylāt de Tunisie,” in *Hasab wa nasab: Parenté, alliance et patrimoine en Tunisie*, ed. Sophie Ferchiou (Paris, 1992), 137–67.

<sup>94</sup>Élisabeth Copet-Rougier describes the Arab marriage as an “impossible model” to perpetuate across multiple generations, because the group gradually turns into a cross marriage as it grows; Élisabeth Copet-Rougier, “Le mariage ‘arabe’: Une approche théorique,” in *Épouser au plus proche*, ed. Bonte, 453–73, esp. 455.

<sup>95</sup>For a more detailed presentation of the Buḥturid bilateral kinship system, see Halawi, *Les Druzes aux marges de l’Islam*, 539–43.





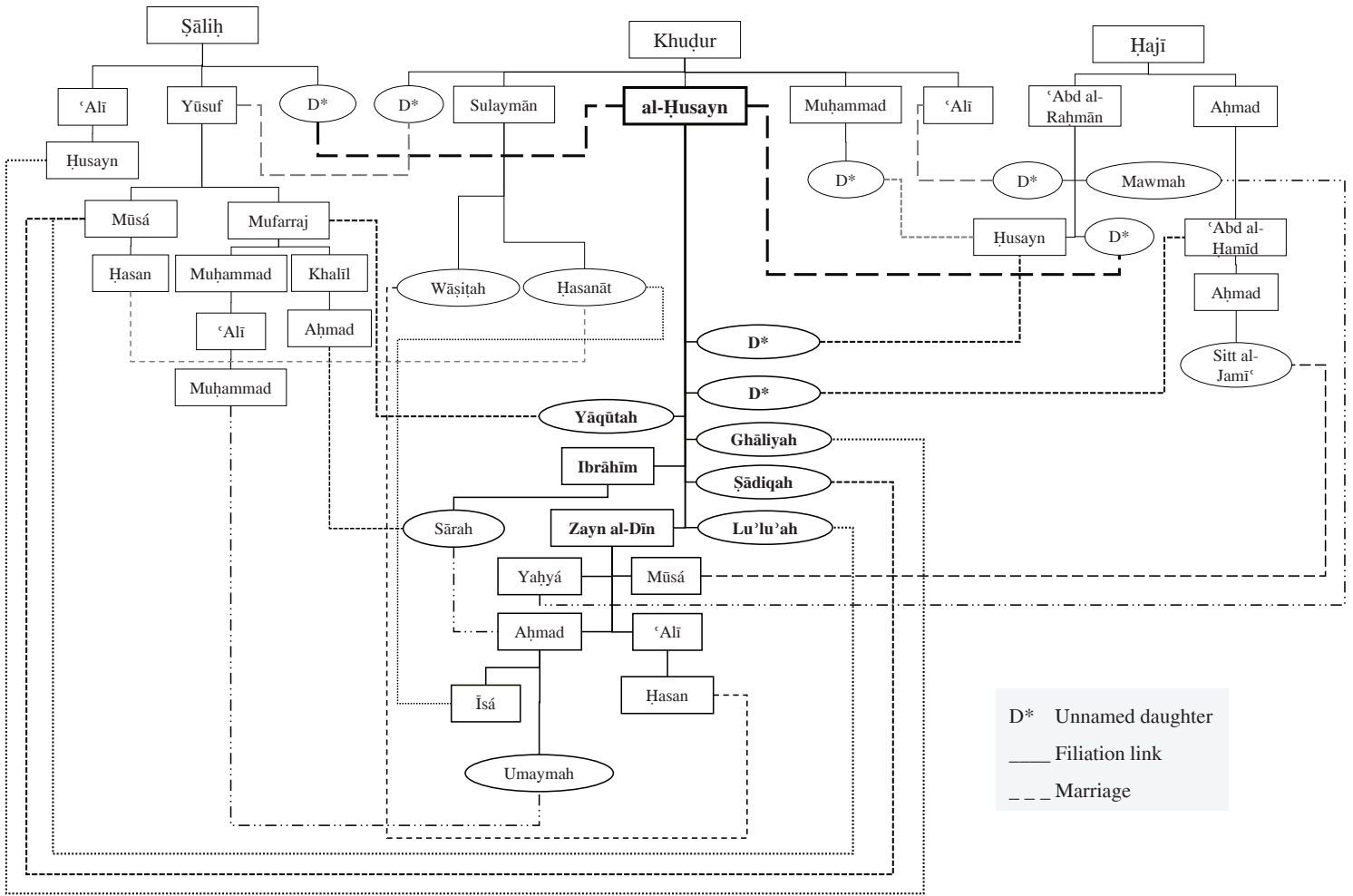


Figure 4. Family Branches and Marriages among the Banū Buḥtur

phasized female as well as male kinship. However, this finding does not suggest that the rural Buḥturid society had a unique kinship system among pre-modern Middle Eastern kinship systems. Eve Krakowski reaches similar conclusions in her study of an urban minority group.<sup>96</sup> Apart from Krakowski and Rapoport's<sup>97</sup> studies—the latter focuses on the economic aspect of divorce—no other study has yet examined the diversity of medieval families in a social history approach.

<sup>96</sup>Eve Krakowski, *Coming of Age in Medieval Egypt: Female Adolescence, Jewish Law, and Ordinary Culture* (Princeton, 2018).

<sup>97</sup>Yossef Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (Cambridge, 2007).



## Matrimonial Strategies of al-Ḥusayn: Elective Kinship and Durable Alliances

At the time of the amir al-Ḥusayn, personal affinities influenced the matrimonial alliances arranged among the Buḥtur. While *qarābah* in the *bayt* denotes both spatial proximity and kinship, it also implies a feeling of affinity that is expressed in the context of marriage according to the Buḥturid *sunnah*. Affinity was thus a *sine qua non* of marriage, as revealed by the union of al-Ḥusayn's youngest daughter with Mūsá al-ʿAramūnī. In his note on the groom, Ibn Yaḥyá explains this choice: al-Ḥusayn cherished Mūsá and took care of his affairs; in return, Mūsá showed great affection for his maternal uncle and successively married his two daughters<sup>98</sup> to maintain his fondness for him (*ḥifẓ al-mawaddah li-khālihi*).<sup>99</sup> This affection was not reserved for Mūsá alone, since his brother Mufarraǰ also married one of his uncle's daughters and benefited from his generosity: al-Ḥusayn built him a *qabw* (cellar) and *majlis* (reception room).<sup>100</sup>

While al-Ḥusayn's fondness for the ʿAramūn amirs is evident, it is not limited to this branch of the *bayt*, as he also intervened in the affairs of other members of his family. He thus gave his grandson, Muḥammad ibn Zayn al-Dīn, the first two houses that he had constructed in ʿBayy and decided to marry him to Sitt al-Jamīʿ, whose father was one of his closest friends.<sup>101</sup>

Al-Ḥusayn also expressed his preference for some amirs of the Ḥajī branch, such as ʿAbd al-Ḥamid ibn Aḥmad, to whom he betrothed one of his daughters.<sup>102</sup> However, he was acrimonious toward his brother ʿAbd al-Qāhir ibn Aḥmad, who in turn married two outsiders, Ṣādiqah and then her sister Shamsah,<sup>103</sup> who were the daughters of Miʿḍād, the *muqaddam* of the Shūf region in Saida.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, al-Ḥusayn preferred endogamous marriages, favoring unions between members

<sup>98</sup>Both levirate and sororate were common practices in the house of Buḥtur. Mūsá's marriage is therefore not exceptional: his third cousin, Muḥammad, married Umaymah, the granddaughter of Zayn al-Dīn, and then her sister Maliḥah after the death of the former (Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 224). In the Ḥajī branch, ʿAbd al-Qāhir ibn Aḥmad married Ṣādiqah and then Shamsah; the latter was previously married to Ḥajī ibn Aḥmad, but after being widowed, she married her brother-in-law (ibid., 185). Similarly, Ḥasanāt, the wife of Aḥmad ibn Ḥajī the Great (ibid., 151), married her brother-in-law ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Ḥajī the Great following the death of her first husband (ibid., 155).

<sup>99</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 164–65.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 163.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 187.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 160.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 185.



of his own family branch, the Khuḍur. Once the group had increased in size,<sup>105</sup> the lineage of al-Ḥusayn occupied a central place in the matrimonial system of the *bayt*. More than half of the marriages contracted among the Buḥturid amirs henceforth took place between one of al-Ḥusayn's descendants and someone from another branch of the house; the remaining marriages occurred between the Khuḍur branch—not from the direct lineage of al-Ḥusayn—and other members of the Buḥtur family.

These marriages point to the new alliance strategy adopted by al-Ḥusayn. Previously, consanguineous proximity had been of little importance in the *bayt*; as a result, marriages were not endogamous and could be contracted with individuals outside the group. Khuḍur and Ḥajī the Great, not to mention all the amirs from the previous four generations, married outsiders. By contrast, the marriages contracted during al-Ḥusayn's lifetime were conditioned by his desire to become closer to the amirs of 'Aramūn, namely, the Ṣāliḥ, who likewise sought to marry into the family branch of al-Ḥusayn.

Al-Ḥusayn's nephews tended to marry their cousins from the Banū al-Ḥusayn branch rather than other members of the group. Indeed, the preferred type of marriage at this time allowed a family member to be as close as possible to the eminent amir or maintain ties with him. However, his matrimonial strategy was not limited to unions between members of the group, as he also arranged distant marriages, which led to the integration of two new groups into the *bayt*: the amirs of Ramaṭūn and the qadis of Bayṣūr.

This extension of the *bayt* through the affiliation of the Buḥturid amirs with outside groups took place exclusively through al-Ḥusayn's arrangement of distant marriages.<sup>106</sup> He thus cemented his friendship with the Ramaṭūn amirs by marrying his only two sons to Ramaṭūn women. Similarly, he betrothed one of his daughters to the qadis of the Gharb who originated from the village of Bayṣūr. In the eyes of the local chroniclers, these two families henceforth belonged to the *bayt*, which explains why they gave precise indications about their members. Although the sources do not describe al-Ḥusayn's motives, these exogamous marriages appear to seal an existing friendship between the eminent amir and the founders of these two lineages. It was indeed al-Ḥusayn who arranged these alliances, which endured until the early tenth/sixteenth century.

<sup>105</sup>The *bayt*, initially composed of three men (Khuḍur, Ḥajī the Great, and Ṣāliḥ al-'Aramūnī), had sixteen individuals by the time of al-Ḥusayn, that is, just one generation later, and thirty-six in the following generation.

<sup>106</sup>On elective kinship in the context of Arab societies, see, among others, Conte, "Affinités électives," 65–94.





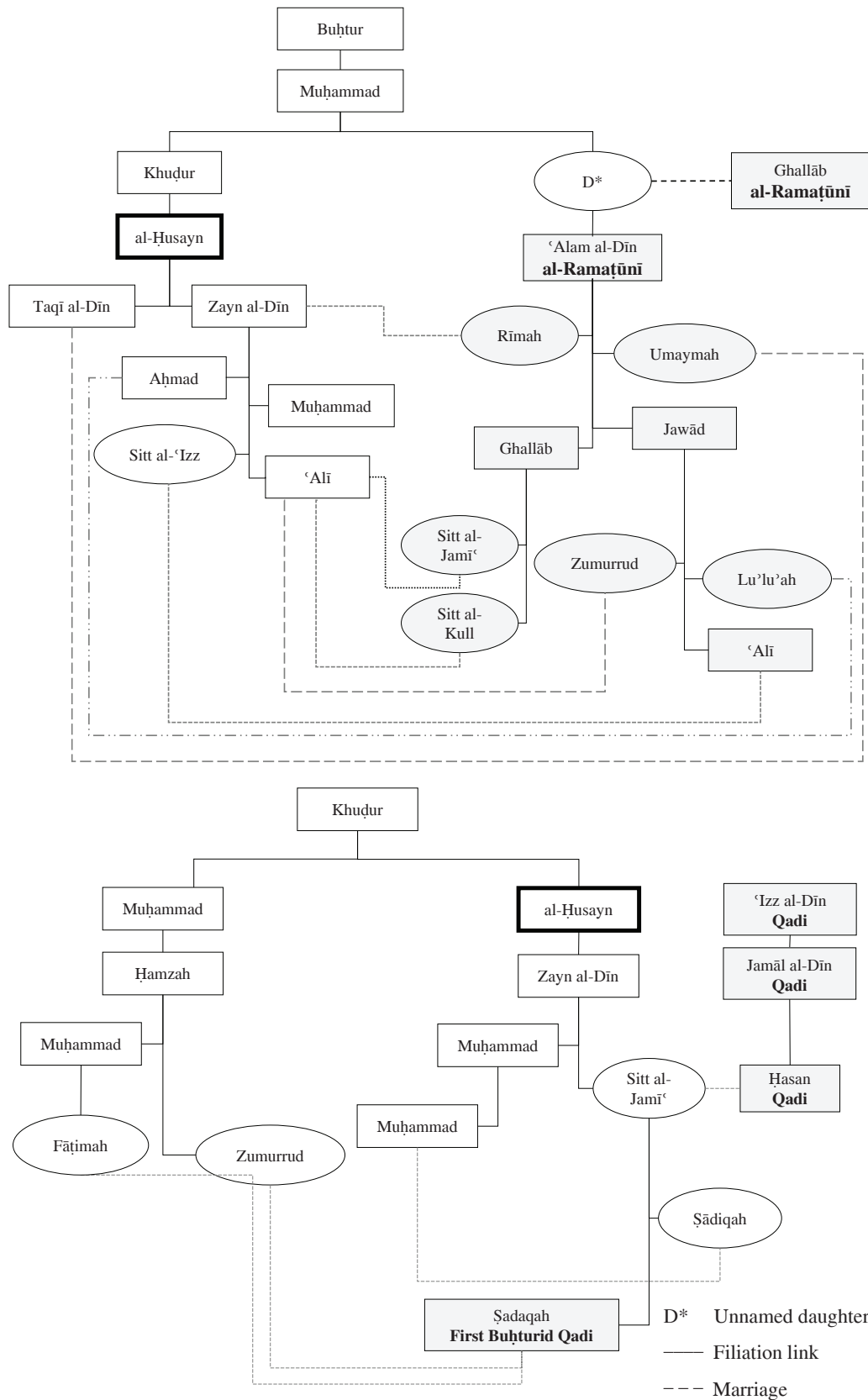


Figure 5. Distance Marriages among the Banū al-Ḥusayn



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## The Ramaṭūn Amirs

Ibn Yaḥyá describes al-Ḥusayn's closeness with the Ramaṭūn in the following manner: "When al-Ḥusayn sat in a *majlis*, his cousin Shujā' al-Dīn would be on his right and 'Alam al-Dīn al-Ramaṭūnī on his left; his other kin would sit lower down, each according to his rank."<sup>107</sup> In 709/1309, al-Ḥusayn granted 'Alam al-Dīn the title of amir (*ta'ammara*) and gave him half of the agricultural land known as the *Small Amarīyah*,<sup>108</sup> which he had owned before acquiring the more prosperous area called the *Large Amarīyah*. This was the first time that a member of the Ramaṭūn branch had received the title of amir or was granted an *iqṭā'*.<sup>109</sup> Was it in al-Ḥusayn's power to grant amiral titles to his supporters and allies, and to distribute *iqṭā'*s as he saw fit? This would run contrary to what we expect from the centralized Mamluk system, and would suggest a great degree of autonomy granted by the Mamluk state to the amirs of the Gharb. In fact, as with the *manshūrs* of the *iqṭā'*s,<sup>110</sup> the amiral titles were most probably granted by al-Ḥusayn but subsequently confirmed by the Mamluk authorities. Al-Ḥusayn therefore enjoyed considerable autonomy, although he could not ignore the central authorities.

The new amirs originated from the village of Ramaṭūn near 'Bayy. They subsequently became the masters of 'Aynāb, gradually acquiring the *iqṭā'*s of this locality from the descendants of Najm al-Dīn, the son of Ḥajī the Great, who founded the house of 'Aynāb after being disinherited by his father.<sup>111</sup>

The affiliation of the Ramaṭūn with the amirs of 'Bayy dates back to the time of al-Ḥusayn's paternal aunt who married Ghallāb, the father of 'Alam al-Dīn.<sup>112</sup> While this union brought the two families together and probably marked the beginning of the friendship between al-Ḥusayn and his cousin 'Alam al-Dīn, the Ramaṭūn were not yet members of the *bayt*. And the marriage of al-Ḥusayn's paternal aunt was by no means exceptional, as marital unions tended to be exogamous at that time.

After the Ramaṭūn became amirs and al-Ḥusayn's two sons wedded 'Alam al-Dīn's daughters,<sup>113</sup> the descendants of al-Ḥusayn joined the *bayt*. Marriages between the two families became more prevalent, as evidenced by the marriages between al-Ḥusayn's grandsons and 'Alam al-Dīn's granddaughters.<sup>114</sup> Should these

<sup>107</sup> Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 168.

<sup>108</sup> This made 'Alam al-Dīn an amir of five, since the *Small Amarīyah* was worth ten (*ibid.*, 81, 133).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 168–69, 172.

<sup>110</sup> See above, n. 50.

<sup>111</sup> Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 51–52, 161; Ibn Sibāt, *Tārīkh*, 857.

<sup>112</sup> Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 168.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 184–86.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 186–87.



later alliances be viewed as endogamous marriages? Ibn Sibāṭ clearly describes the affiliation of the Ramaṭūn amirs with the house of Buḥtur: “They became a single *bayt* through marriage, and the descendants of ‘Alam al-Dīn were henceforth related (*yunsabūn*) to the amirs of the Gharb.”<sup>115</sup>

### The Buḥturid Qadis and the Mamluk Jurisdiction

In addition to the Ramaṭūn family, al-Ḥusayn forged alliances with a family from the village of Bayṣūr, likewise on the basis of his close friendship. At the beginning of the eighth/fourteenth century, a man from the village of ‘Ayn Ksūr was in charge of the judicature of the Gharb.<sup>116</sup> However, al-Ḥusayn interceded—perhaps around 710/1310, at the same time as his intercession for Ramaṭūn—with the Mamluk authorities on behalf of his allies in Bayṣūr so that they would be conferred the *niyābat al-quḍāh* (qadi substitute or local qadi institution)<sup>117</sup> of the Gharb. Ibn Sibāṭ’s account is unambiguous on this issue: “The judicature (*qaḍāwah*) first belonged to a man from ‘Ayn Ksūr called Abū al-Sarāyā ibn Abī al-Qāsim; it was transmitted between them [i.e., members of his family] until it was accorded to Abū al-‘Izz following the intervention of al-Ḥusayn.”<sup>118</sup>

At the time of this episode, ‘Izz al-Dīn Abū al-‘Izz was close to al-Ḥusayn, but the two men were not related. Although the sources remain silent about the reasons for the amir’s intervention, he most likely wanted the local judiciary to be led by individuals who were favorable to him. In this case, why not advocate a member of his own family? It is quite possible that al-Ḥusayn’s kin were not capable of fulfilling the function of qadi, as the role required special religious training. But it is also quite possible that the choice of al-Ḥusayn was part of his matrimonial strategy, that is to expand his clan by allying with relatives who were not part of his family.

The first qadi in the Buḥtur family was Ṣadaqah (d. 835/1431–32), the great-grandson of both ‘Izz al-Dīn and al-Ḥusayn.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, al-Ḥusayn had arranged the marriage of his granddaughter Sitt al-Jamī‘ to Ḥasan, the grandson of the new qadi in the Gharb.<sup>120</sup> This alliance between the two families then continued: the qadi Bahā’ al-Dīn Ṣadaqah first married Zumurrud, his maternal third cousin and daughter of al-Ḥusayn’s nephew, and after her death, he wedded Fāṭimah, the

<sup>115</sup>Ibn Sibāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 857.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 862.

<sup>117</sup>For the usage of this expression in the sources, see Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 223, and Ibn Sibāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 862–69.

<sup>118</sup>Ibn Sibāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 862–63.

<sup>119</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 223; Ibn Sibāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 863.

<sup>120</sup>Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 186.



niece of his first wife.<sup>121</sup> His sons ‘Alā’ al-Dīn and Zayn al-Dīn successively succeeded him as head of the *niyābat al-quḍāh* in the Gharb,<sup>122</sup> followed by Shams al-Dīn, the son of the latter.<sup>123</sup> The distant marriage arranged by al-Ḥusayn thus provided the *bayt* with a lineage of qadis, adding judicial authority to the political authority already held by the Buḥturid amirs descended from the Banū al-Ḥusayn branch.

The sources nevertheless provide scarce information on the *niyābat al-quḍāh* in the Gharb. The Buḥturid qadis were probably promoted to the function of *nā’ib* (qadi substitute) by the qadi of a larger city, who delegated power to the *nā’ibs* at the local level.<sup>124</sup> The Gharb qadis, or more precisely the qadi representatives, belonged to the Mamluk administration as local representatives of state jurisdiction. Ibn Sibāt mentions the death of the qadi ‘Alam al-Dīn ibn Jamāl al-Dīn in 912/1506, a qadi substitute from another family in the village of ‘Ayn Dārah in the Shūf. Although the author does not expand on the subject, the existence of several representatives of the Mamluk judicial authorities in the Gharb and Shūf provides some insight into the organization of the judicature in Bilād al-Shām during this period.

Based in medium-sized towns or large cities, the qadis delegated judicial authority to their local representatives in rural areas, such as the Gharb and Shūf. The qadi substitutes were from local families and passed their judicial position on to their descendants. The Mamluk authorities also delegated the exercise of justice in local communities to dhimmis, as shown in the valuable deeds of sale drawn up by the Maronite Patriarchate of Qannūbīn in rural Syria.<sup>125</sup> However, in parallel to this exclusively intra-community justice system, the Maronite Patriarch regularly sought a Muslim qadi to draw up contracts for land purchases, regardless of whether the seller was Muslim or Christian.<sup>126</sup>

The equivalent of a qadi from the Shafi’i *madhhab* (doctrinal school of law) to whom the Maronite Patriarch turned for purchase deeds was necessarily the Buḥturid qadi in the Gharb. Nevertheless, the Christian qadi, who had the authority to approve transactions between the Patriarch and the members of his own community, was not the same as the Druze qadi, known as the *sāyis*, whose

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>122</sup> Ibn Yaḥyá, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 223; Ibn Sibāt, *Tārīkh*, 864–65.

<sup>123</sup> Ibn Sibāt, *Tārīkh*, 865.

<sup>124</sup> Émile Tyan, *Histoire de l’organisation judiciaire en pays d’Islam* (Paris, 1938–43), 1:148–49.

<sup>125</sup> Wissam H. Halawi and Élise Voguet, “Dhimmi-s de la Syrie rurale et institutions mameloukes: de l’utilisation de la théorie shāfi’ite à l’autonomie juridictionnelle du Patriarcat maronite d’après cinq actes d’achat inédits (IXe/XVe siècle),” *Islamic Law and Society* 27. No. 4 (2020): 51–59.

<sup>126</sup> Wissam H. Halawi and Élise Voguet, “La propriété foncière du monastère de Qannūbīn: un témoignage sur le paysage agraire du nord du *Jabal Lubnān* (fin xive–mi xvie siècle)” (forthcoming).





function was established in the Gharb in the late ninth/fifteenth century.<sup>127</sup> As the *sāyis* was not the state-recognized representative of the qadi, any judgments or contracts drawn up for example as a *wafqīyah*<sup>128</sup> were without legal value in an official court. Indeed, as the Druze were not dhimmis, their cases had to be brought before a Muslim qadi.

In the Gharb, the Buḥturid qadi was the only one to be recognized by the Mamluk authorities. His Druze religious affiliation is never mentioned by Ibn Yaḥyá, nor by Ibn Sibāṭ afterwards. These local chroniclers did not oppose the Druze identity with Islam. They even considered some Buḥturid amirs to be eminent Islamic scholars.<sup>129</sup> The exclusion of the Druze qadi (*sāyis*) from the Mamluk judicial system was due to the legal doctrine of Druze law, which did not recognize other Islamic legal doctrines. By establishing the institution of the *sāyis*, Druze law submitted the religious Druze to an exclusive community judicature of state justice.<sup>130</sup>

The precise jurisdiction of the local qadi substitutes, whether Buḥturid qadis from the Gharb or Shūf, is not specified in the chronicles. It is thus unknown whether their justice applied to all inhabitants of the region regardless of their religious affiliation or whether the local qadi was sometimes solicited depending on the nature of the conflict or case in question. At present, the rules codifying the *niyābat al-quḍāh* in the Gharb and Shūf under the Mamluk reign are still unknown. However, by receiving the delegation of justice from the Mamluk authorities, the Buḥturid qadis undoubtedly exercised justice in the region on behalf of the state, like any substitute of the qadi in the provinces of the sultanate. That was certainly different for the Druze religious: they applied Druze law for their private matters, under the control of the *sāyis*, while they had to submit their extracommunity affairs to the local qadi recognized by the Mamluk sultanate.

## Conclusion

In the eighth/fourteenth century, the eminent al-Ḥusayn implemented various matrimonial strategies by which the members of his family married their cousins or the descendants of his close friends. Drawing on his status and ties with both his kin and the Mamluk authorities, al-Ḥusayn played a central role in forging

<sup>127</sup>On this subject, see Wissam H. Halawi, “L’arbitrage et la médiation des cheikhs religieux chez les Druzes du Gharb au IXe/XVe,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 140 (2016): 110ff. For a more detailed presentation, see idem, *Les Druzes aux marges de l’Islam*, 487–94.

<sup>128</sup>On the *wafqīyah* in Druze law, see Halawi, “L’arbitrage et la médiation,” 116–17.

<sup>129</sup>See Wissam H. Halawi, “Le druzisme prémoderne en Syrie: émergence du droit druze et des premières institutions religieuses,” *Arabica* 65 (2018): 476–82.

<sup>130</sup>For more details, see Halawi, *Les Druzes aux marges de l’Islam*, 438ff.



the alliances that gave the Buḥtur family the structure described in the chronicle of Ibn Yaḥyá. The ever-growing family group comprised several clans settled in different villages. Thus, by establishing rules of good practice (*sunnah*) in the *bayt* for the matrimonial, political, and economic domains, the Buḥtur succeeded in maintaining their esprit de corps. This notably took place through the customary law of endogamous marriages, and even unions contracted outside the family became endogamous, as the new family members were incorporated into the *bayt*.

The clan identity of the family clearly owed its existence and survival to this matrimonial *sunnah* of the *bayt*, which was promoted by al-Ḥusayn with his unparalleled strategic spirit. By marrying their first cousins, the Buḥturid amirs favored the closeness of kinship ties, which is the primary connotation of the term *qarābah*, thus ensuring that all members of the group were *awlād ‘amm* (first cousins). This system of alliance was continued by al-Ḥusayn’s descendants, the new clan leaders within the Banū Buḥtur, which confirms not only the pertinence of this matrimonial strategy but also the lasting cohesion created by these marriages for the members of the group. Indeed, at this time, the house of Buḥtur became visible on both a social and political level.

The marital unions arranged between the Buḥtur and the Gharb qadis, originally from the village of Bayṣūr, allowed al-Ḥusayn to have representatives of the Mamluk judiciary within his own family. The Gharb amirs consequently formed a political and judicial elite in the rural landscape of Bilād al-Shām during the Mamluk period. Although the emergence of Buḥturid qadis was certainly part of al-Ḥusayn’s matrimonial strategy, it is also a reflection of his credibility in the eyes of the central administration. By interceding with the Mamluk authorities on behalf of his allies in Bayṣūr, the amir al-Ḥusayn succeeded in making them judicial representatives in the Gharb, which reveals not only the importance of this judicial function but also the local prestige that it brought to all members of his family.



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## Reassessing the Significance of Archival Material in Mamluk Diplomatic Studies: A Survey of Florentine-Mamluk Relations through the Lens of Chancery Sources (Fifteenth–Sixteenth Centuries)

### Contextualization of the Corpus

Somewhere along miles of documentary material in the State Archives of Florence and the Laurentian Library of Florence lies a set of documents related to the exchanges established between the City of the Lily and the Mamluk Sultanate.<sup>1</sup> This corpus, aside from a few chronicles, constitutes the sole historical testimony available for outlining the framework of the diplomatic and trade relations maintained by these two powers from the third decade of the fifteenth century until the beginning of the sixteenth.<sup>2</sup> The aim of this article is to describe the essential features of such documentary material in order to highlight its diplomatic significance and to offer an overview of the historical development of these relations. Our purpose is also to show on what chancery modalities and strategies the dialogue between Florence and the sultanate could be established and how it developed.

During the first decades of the *Quattrocento*, Florence was pursuing a policy of military expansion that significantly modified the political balances in the center of the Italian peninsula in just a few years.<sup>3</sup> With the conquest of Pisa in 1406 and the acquisition of the harbors of Porto Pisano and Livorno in 1421, Florence definitely defeated its historical rival city and gained direct access to the sea.<sup>4</sup> The republic could now take a new maritime and commercial role, on a Mediterranean scale. The same year that they secured control of those two ports, the Florentine authorities established a system of commercial galleys based on the model of the

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<sup>1</sup> The documents are preserved in the following archival collections: Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASF), Diplomatico, Varie IV; ASF, Signori, Carteggio, Missive, I Cancelleria; ASF, Signori e Relazioni di Oratori Fiorentini; ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici. Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana (BML), Orientali, 455 A; BML, Cassetta Cesarini, Documenti Concilio.

<sup>2</sup> The relations between Florence and the Mamluk Sultanate were the subject of my Ph.D. dissertation: Alessandro Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion, Diplomatie et échanges entre Florence et le sultanat mamelouk (début XVe–début XVIe s.)” (University of Liège, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200–1575* (Oxford, 2006), 194.

<sup>4</sup> *Firenze e Pisa dopo il 1406: La creazione di un nuovo spazio regionale*, ed. Sergio Tognetti (Florence, 2010).



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Venetian navy.<sup>5</sup> The building and organization of the fleet was assigned to the *Consoli del Mare*.<sup>6</sup> This initiative responded to a *dirigiste* bent in the city rulers' maritime and commercial policy, and was a clear hint at their intention to exert more direct control over the merchants' activities, in contrast to the relative operative freedom until then enjoyed by Florentine financial companies in the main European and Mediterranean trade centers.<sup>7</sup>

The first destination of the new state fleet was the Mamluk Sultanate. The Florentines had long been aware of the huge profits that could be reaped in the Middle East, since the merchants of the city had for centuries been frequenting the markets of Egypt and Syria. However, until the fifteenth century, lacking institutions of their own in those lands, they had been compelled to seek protection from other European trading communities and to fit into their existing structures. Now, Florence claimed direct business and diplomatic partnership with the sultan of Cairo. To this end, in 1422 the *Signoria* sent two ambassadors to Barsbāy (r. 1422–38), the Florentine citizens Carlo Federighi and Felice Brancacci.<sup>8</sup> This mission was the first step of a diplomatic relationship that was to endure into the last years of the Mamluk regime. Florence was pursuing these exchanges for economic reasons (first among which was the purchase of spices) but also out of political—and symbolic—concerns: these relations would help forge a new image of the city, both within the Italian peninsula and in the Mediterranean world.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Florentine Galleys in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Mallett, "The Sea Consuls of Florence in the Fifteenth Century," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 27 (1959): 156–69.

<sup>7</sup> Concerning this phase in the Florentine commercial policy, see Franco Franceschi, "Intervento del potere centrale e ruolo delle Arti nel governo dell'economia fiorentina del Trecento e del primo Quattrocento: Linee generali," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 558 (1993): 863–909; idem, "Istituzioni e attività economica a Firenze: considerazioni sul governo del settore industriale (1350–1450)," in *Istituzioni e società in Toscana nell'Età Moderna*, ed. Claudio Lamioni (Rome, 1994), 76–117.

<sup>8</sup> Several articles have been written about the first Florentine embassy to Cairo. Those works deal with different aspects of the mission: Armando Saporì, "I primi viaggi di Levante e di Ponente delle galee fiorentine," in idem, *Studi di Storia economica* (Florence, 1967), 3:3–21; Claudia Tripodi, "Viaggi di ambasciatori tra Firenze e Il Cairo nel XV secolo," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 122, no. 2 (2010): 411–40; Cristian Caselli, "Strategies for Transcultural Trade Relations: Florentine Attempts to Reproduce the Venetian Commercial System in the Mamluk Empire (First Half of the 15th Century)," in *Union in Separation: Diasporic Groups and Identities in the Eastern Mediterranean (1100–1800)*, ed. Georg Christ (Rome, 2015), 267–84; Alessandro Rizzo, "Diplomatie sur le terrain: la première mission diplomatique florentine en territoire mamelouk," in *Culture matérielle et contacts diplomatiques entre l'Occident latin, Byzance et l'Orient islamique (XIe–XVIe siècle)*, ed. Frédéric Bauden (Leiden, 2021); idem "L'ambassade florentine de 1422 et l'établissement des relations commerciales avec les Mamelouks: les premiers documents" in *De la guerre à la paix en Méditerranée médiévale: acteurs, propagande, défense et diplomatie*, ed. Élisabeth Malamut and Mohamed Ouerfelli (Aix-en-Provence, 2021).





Florence could now present itself as the rightful heir to the Pisan maritime tradition and as a direct rival of Venetian trade.

It should first be noted that some of the diplomatic sources bearing testimony to these relationships have been partly studied in the past. More than a century and a half ago, Michele Amari published a large swath of these documents in *I diplomi Arabi del Reale Archivio Fiorentino*, a reference work for all historians who dealt with the relations between the Mamluks and the European powers.<sup>9</sup> However, this publication provides neither a diplomatic analysis nor appropriate historical study of the sources. A century after Amari, in two articles dating to the 1960s, John Wansbrough published and studied two unpublished Mamluk scrolls kept in Florence.<sup>10</sup> While remaining milestones in Mamluk studies, these publications fall short of exploiting the full historical potential of these sources. In fact, Amari's and Wansbrough's editions and analyses contain several errors or inaccuracies that can now be corrected thanks to recent progress in the field of Mamluk diplomatics. Such scientific obsolescence induced us to re-examine those documents.

The archival material related to Florentine-Mamluk relations is diverse in nature, but it is possible to group those sources in two major sets according to their place of origin. The first group includes original Mamluk documents in Arabic, released by the chancery in Cairo (*dīwān al-inshā'*). The second includes the documents drafted by the secretaries of the Florentine chancery for the registers of this office, including both Florentine texts and Italian versions of Mamluk documents.

As regards the diplomatic nature of these sources, the first group (i.e., the original Mamluk documents) may be divided into two categories: letters (*mukātabāt*) and decrees (*marāsīm*). In accordance with the canons of the *dīwān al-inshā'*, these documents are in the shape of scrolls (*darj*) of paper made of several sheets pasted together.<sup>11</sup> Each document is different in length (the longest scroll exceeds 20 meters).

These ten scrolls hold a special place in the field of Mamluk diplomatics for being some of the very few original documents from the *dīwān al-inshā'* preserved to this day. The chancery of Cairo based the preparation and drafting of such

<sup>9</sup> Michele Amari, *I diplomi arabi del R. Archivio fiorentino* (Florence, 1863); idem, *I diplomi arabi del R. Archivio fiorentino, Appendice* (Florence, 1867).

<sup>10</sup> John Wansbrough, "A Mamlūk Commercial Treaty Concluded with the Republic of Florence 894/1489," in *Documents from Islamic Chanceries*, ed. Sámuel Miklós Stern (Oxford, 1965), 39–79; idem, "Venice and Florence in the Mamluk Commercial Privileges," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 28, no. 3 (1965): 483–523.

<sup>11</sup> Malika Dekkiche, "Le Caire, Carrefour des ambassades" (Ph.D. diss, University of Liège, 2011), 293–316.



documents on strict rules, as shown by the manuals composed by secretaries like al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) and al-Saḥmāwī (d. 868/1464).<sup>12</sup>

When dealing with letters (*mukātabāt*), these manuals distinguish three types: the *khalīfatīyāt*, written in the name of or addressed to the caliph; the *sultānīyāt*, issued or received by the sultan; and the *ikhwānīyāt*, exchanged by members of the administration.<sup>13</sup> All the Mamluk letters kept in Florence fall under the second category—*sultānīyāt*—and were issued by the sovereigns of Cairo in response to requests for commercial rights submitted by Florentine diplomats. Some of them were sent by the sultan to the Florentine government, while others are copies of documents addressed to the local authorities of the sultanate. In both cases, the documents were notifications that the sultan had received the ambassadors from Florence and responded favorably to their demands. The letters to the sultan’s representatives typically list the rights granted to the Florentines, subdivided in different articles or clauses.

The *marāsīm* announce the sultan’s orders.<sup>14</sup> This category includes a very wide range of diplomatic instruments. As in the case of the *mukātabāt*, the Mamluk decrees concerning Florentine trade comprise documents addressed to the Florentines and copies of *marāsīm* sent to local governors.

With regard to the corpus of testimonies produced by the Florentine chancery, these sources are either in Latin or Italian. Such documents are of various kinds: letters to the sultans or to the Mamluk authorities, letters of instructions for the ambassadors, final embassy reports, and translations of Mamluk letters and decrees.

## A Brief Overview of Florentine-Mamluk Relations through the Diplomatic Sources

The first Florentine embassy to Cairo is the richest in terms of preserved documentation. Thanks to such testimonies, it is possible to reconstruct this mission in all its stages.

The earliest preserved document presents the preliminary instructions given by the *Signoria* to the emissaries Federighi and Brancacci and dates back to

<sup>12</sup> Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā fī ṣinā’at al-inshā’*, ed. M. ‘A. al-R. Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1913–19; 2nd ed., 1963); Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Saḥmāwī, *Al-Thaḡhr al-bāsim fī ṣinā’at al-kātib wa-al-kātim*, ed. Ashraf Muḥammad Anas (Cairo, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Dekkiche, “Le Caire,” 280–81; Frédéric Bauden, “Ikhwānīyyāt Letters in the Mamluk Period: A Document (Muṭāla’a) Issued by al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh’s Chancery and a Contribution to Mamluk Diplomats,” in *Egypt and Syria under Mamluk Rule: Political, Social and Cultural Aspects*, ed. Amalia Levanon (forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 11:107–12.



14 June 1422.<sup>15</sup> According to diplomatic usage, members of government would communicate the directives to the ambassadors orally before their recording in writing by the chancery. The document containing the instructions could take different names, such as *memoria* (report), *instructione* (instruction), *sommario* (summary), *nota* (note), *ricordança* (memorandum), *informatione* (information), or *mandato* (mandate), and its function was to specify the purpose of the mission and the means to achieve it.<sup>16</sup> The letter of instructions given to Federighi and Brancacci is named *nota et informatione*. It expresses the *Signoria's* willingness to establish regular commercial relations with the sultanate. The *nota* simultaneously betrays all the authorities' misgivings about the new diplomatic partner.

Brancacci's travel diary provides valuable testimony on the mission's evolution.<sup>17</sup> The *Diario* offers a detailed account of the embassy, from the practical aspects of the journey (means of transportation, accommodation, subsistence) to the description of the diplomats' psychological reactions. It also attests that at the close of complex negotiations the Florentine delegation actually secured the much-coveted commercial rights. This positive outcome is confirmed by three documents issued by the *dīwān al-inshā'* and by the ambassadors' final record. Barsbāy's letter to the Florentine authorities, dated 22 September 1422, represents the only original Mamluk document related to this mission that has been preserved.<sup>18</sup> A contemporary translation into Italian of this *mukātabah* was produced and kept in the Florentine chancery archives.<sup>19</sup> By means of this letter, Barsbāy granted commercial rights to the traders from Florence and informed the *Signoria* that he had ordered the issuing of four documents: two *muṭlaqs* (open orders) that were expressly requested by the members of the Florentine government and two *amthilah* (instructions, orders) for the representatives of his authority in Syria and Alexandria. The *muṭlaq* was a kind of decree containing general orders addressed to all the authorities of the sultanate. The *amthilah* were copies of the sultan's

<sup>15</sup> ASF, Signori, Legazioni e Commissarie, reg. 7, fols. 1r–3r.

<sup>16</sup> Ilaria Taddei, "La dynamique de l'échange diplomatique à partir de la lettre d'instruction (Florence, XIVe–XVe siècle)," in *La politique par correspondance: Usages politiques de la lettre en Italie, XIV–XVIIIe siècles*, ed. Jean Boutier, Sandro Landi, and Olivier Rouchon (Rennes, 2009), 81–108; Isabella Lazzarini, "The Preparatory Work: From Choice to Instructions," in *Italian Renaissance Diplomacy: A Sourcebook*, ed. Monica Azzolini and Isabella Lazzarini (Toronto, 2017), 11–16.

<sup>17</sup> Felice Brancacci, "Diario di Felice Brancacci ambasciatore con Carlo Federighi al Cairo per il Comune di Firenze," ed. Dante Catellacci, *Archivio storico italiano* 8, no. 126 (1881): 157–88, 326–34; Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, *Florence's Embassy to the Sultan of Egypt: An English Translation of Felice Brancacci's Diary* (New York, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll A.

<sup>19</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1422/09/22, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fols. 3r–4r.



orders sent to the local officers.<sup>20</sup> The original specimens of these four documents have not been preserved. However, the Florentine Archives hold the translations of the two open orders that were given to Brancacci and Federighi: a *muṭlaq* probably based on the instructions sent to the governor of Syria (22 September 1422)<sup>21</sup> and a *muṭlaq* explicitly addressed by the sultan to the governors and the officers of Alexandria (25 September 1422).<sup>22</sup> These two sources mention all the rights related to Florentine trade in Syria and Egypt. The text kept in the Florentine registers specifies that these translations were made by Abraham, the Florentines' translator in Alexandria, and by Tommaso Cardo from Nicosia, probably in the port city or in Cyprus.<sup>23</sup>

The final report submitted by Brancacci and Federighi dates to 17 February 1423.<sup>24</sup> In accordance with diplomatic custom, this instrument had the function of informing the authorities about the outcome of the mission.<sup>25</sup> On the basis of the contents of the *memoria*, Florentine merchants were finally recognized as an autonomous community and were granted a *funduq* and a consul in Alexandria.

In the following decades—until the 1480s—the diplomatic contacts between the two powers are attested by documents in Italian or Latin held in the registers of the Florentine chancery. No original Mamluk documents are preserved for these fifty years.

Coming back to the first part of the century, in 1435 the Florentine authorities sent a letter to Barsbāy. The Latin version is dated 15 January 1435.<sup>26</sup> In this document, the members of the government apologize for a previous interruption of galley travels and introduce the new consul of the Florentine *natione*, Arnaldo Manelli, to the sultan.

Ten years later (11 May 1445), the *Signoria* addressed a letter of credential to Sultan Jaqmaq (r. 1438–53), introducing galley captain and emissary Giovenco della Stufa.<sup>27</sup> The Florentine citizen sailed along the North African coast to Egypt,

<sup>20</sup> Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 7:219–23; Donald S. Richards, *Mamluk Administrative Documents from St. Catherine's Monastery* (Louvain-Paris-Walpole, 2011), 18–19; idem, "A Mamlūk Emir's 'Square' Decree," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 54 (1991): 63.

<sup>21</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1422/09/22, Rifirmagioni Atti Pubblici, fols. 1r–2v.

<sup>22</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, Rifirmagioni Atti Pubblici, 25/9/1422, fols. 1r–2v.

<sup>23</sup> Rizzo, "Le Lys et le Lion," 2:275, 279, 281.

<sup>24</sup> ASF, Signori e Relazioni di Oratori Fiorentini, n. 2, fol. 109r–v.

<sup>25</sup> Isabella Lazzarini, "The Final Report," in *Italian Renaissance Diplomacy*, ed. Azzolini and Lazzarini, 57–60.

<sup>26</sup> ASF, Signori, Carteggio, Missive, I Cancelleria, vol. 33, fols. 179r–180r. From now on, when we deal with a letter sent from Florence to the sultanate, we refer to copies in Italian or in Latin that are kept in the registers of the archives. These documents most likely were translated into Arabic in the Mamluk territory.

<sup>27</sup> ASF, Signori, Carteggio, Missive, I Cancelleria, vol. 36, fols. 102v–103r.





where he renewed commercial agreements with the sultan. On that same occasion, the authorities of the Republic wrote two more letters introducing Giovenco to the *nāzir al-khāṣṣ* and to the governor (*nāʿib*) of Alexandria.<sup>28</sup>

In 1465, the government of Florence sent a *credenziale* to Sultan Khushqadam (r. 1460–67) and another one to the *nāʿib* of Alexandria offering Mariotto Squarcialupi as the new consul of the Florentine community.<sup>29</sup> These documents were also a means to reaffirm the agreements between the republic and the sultanate. Very likely, it was Squarcialupi who brought the letters to the two recipients, acting as a direct intermediary between the two governments.

In those years, thanks to the commercial stipulations concluded with the Egyptian court, Florentine tradesmen could increase their commercial activities in market towns such as Alexandria and Damascus.

On 28 February 1476, with trade access once more in view, the Florentine authorities sent a letter to Sultan Qāyṭbāy (r. 1468–96) introducing their citizen Zanobio Carnesecchi, who travelled to Egypt to recover the goods of a Florentine merchant, Rinaldo Altovita.<sup>30</sup> These goods had been brought to Alexandria by Louis Aimé, a citizen of Marseille, who died in Egypt.

A few years later, on 5 December 1484, Qāyṭbāy sent a letter to Lorenzo de' Medici (r. 1469–92) to inform him that after a diplomatic mission in Florence, the Mamluk ambassador, Muḥammad ibn Maḥfūz, was back in Egypt.<sup>31</sup> On that occasion, Lorenzo had solicited a renewal of commercial agreements and offered precious gifts to the sultan's emissary. The letter, preserved only in its Italian translation, attests to Qāyṭbāy's favorable response to the Florentine requests.

In the following years, diplomatic activity between Cairo and Florence became particularly intense. Indeed, aside from the traditional commercial relations, the two states were involved in a sensitive political situation in which Lorenzo de' Medici was to play an important role. In those years, the Mamluk Sultanate and many European states were engaged in disputes over the Ottoman prince Cem. After the death of Mehmed II (r. 1444–81), his son Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), feeling threatened by the power of his brother Cem, had forced him to leave Ottoman

<sup>28</sup> ASF, Signori, Missive, I Cancelleria, reg. 36, fol. 103r–v.

<sup>29</sup> ASF, Signori, Carteggio, Missive, I Cancelleria, vol. 45, fols. 25v–26v.

<sup>30</sup> ASF, Signori, Carteggio, Missive, I Cancelleria, vol. 47, fol. 34r–v.

<sup>31</sup> Rizzo, "Le Lys et le Lion," 1:113–14.



territory.<sup>32</sup> The prince had initially taken refuge in the Mamluk Sultanate (1481).<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, he reached an agreement with the Grand Master of the Knights Hospitallers, Pierre d'Aubusson, who provided him hospitality in Rhodes (1482) and then transferred him to France (1483).<sup>34</sup> The French kings Louis XI (r. 1461–83) and Charles VIII (r. 1483–98) were among the sovereigns who, concerned with the Ottomans' increasing military power, attempted to hold Cem prisoner as a means of retaliation against the Turkish sultan.<sup>35</sup> Among these rulers were also Mathias I, king of Hungary (r. 1458–90), and Pope Innocent VIII (r. 1484–92). It was, in fact, the pontiff who called on Lorenzo de' Medici (to whom he was bound by family ties) for help and intermediation.<sup>36</sup> Lorenzo had good relations with the Grand Master of the Knights Hospitallers and the French court. At the same time, the Republic of Florence had for several years maintained commercial and diplomatic exchanges with the Ottoman Empire.<sup>37</sup> In 1483, the Turkish ambassador Ismā'īl went to Florence to renew trade relations before continuing on to Savoy, where Cem was detained at that time,<sup>38</sup> and Lorenzo instructed the Florentine merchant and diplomat Paolo da Colle to accompany Ismā'īl to Savoy. The present study does not purport to examine all the diplomatic negotiations relating to Bayezid's brother. What is relevant here is the fact that Da Colle would be, a few years later, sent to Egypt to meet Qāyrbāy, who, given the increasing threat posed by the Ottomans, was particularly interested in Cem's fate. On 3 June 1486, the Florentine authorities sent a letter to the Mamluk ruler commending the ambassador to him.<sup>39</sup> A note in the *Protocolli* of Lorenzo's letters provides evidence that on 6 June 1486 he wrote a letter to Qāyrbāy and to *Malfora* (i.e., the aforementioned

<sup>32</sup> George Viviliers Jourdan, "The Case of Prince Djem: A Curious Episode in European History," *The Irish Church Quarterly* 8, no. 32 (1915): 298–312; Ahmad Darrāj, "Jam Sulṭān wa-al-diblūmāsiyah al-duwalīyah," *Al-Majallah al-tārīkhīyah al-Miṣrīyah* 8 (1959): 201–42; Halil Inalcik, "A Case Study in Renaissance Diplomacy: The Agreement between Innocent VIII and Bayezid II Regarding Djem Sultan," in *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Halil Inalcik (Bloomington, 1993), 345; Nicolas Vatin, *Sultan Djem* (Ankara, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> Viviliers Jourdan, *The Case of Prince Djem*, 298; Carl F. Petry, *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamlūk Sultans al-Ashraf Qāyrbāy and Qānsūh al-Ghawrī in Egypt* (Seattle, 1993), 91.

<sup>34</sup> Viviliers Jourdan, *The Case of Prince Djem*, 299. See also: Nicolas Vatin, *Rhodes et l'ordre de Saint-Jean-de-Jérusalem* (Paris, 2000), 17–40.

<sup>35</sup> Viviliers Jourdan, *The Case of Prince Djem*, 299–300.

<sup>36</sup> Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lettere (1486–1487)*, vol. 10, ed. Melissa Meriam Bullard (Florence, 2003), 287.

<sup>37</sup> Lorenzo Tanzini, "Il Magnifico e il Turco: Elementi politici, economici e culturali nelle relazioni fra Firenze e Impero Ottomano al tempo di Lorenzo de Medici," *Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea* 4 (2010): 271–89.

<sup>38</sup> Franz Babinger, "Lorenzo de' Medici e la corte ottomana," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 121, no. 3 (1963): 305–61.

<sup>39</sup> Wansbrough, "A Mamlūk Commercial Treaty," 42.



diplomat, Ibn Maḥfūz) together with another letter addressed to the “great Dragoon of Cairo,” containing instructions for Da Colle.<sup>40</sup> These letters have not been preserved.

Thanks to a letter addressed by the authorities of the republic to the Florentine consul in Pera on 20 December 1487, we learn that Paolo da Colle had been sent to Cairo to negotiate the affair of Cem’s detention as well as commercial issues.<sup>41</sup> This document informed the representative of the Florentine trading community in Pera that Qāyṭbāy had responded positively to Florence’s requests. Da Colle’s diplomatic mission did not lead to a definitive settlement, because the ambassador died in Egypt. However, the Florentine Archives contain an undated document that is probably—as Wansbrough suggested—a draft of the agreements between the Florentine ambassador and the sultan.<sup>42</sup> In order to reach a definitive accord on the Ottoman prince and on trade matters, Qāyṭbāy decided to again send his emissary, Ibn Maḥfūz, to Florence.

According to the Florentine chronicles of the time, the Mamluk ambassador arrived in Florence in November 1487, bringing rich gifts for Lorenzo and the members of the *Signoria*.<sup>43</sup> In that circumstance, a group of influential tradesmen of the city drafted a document, dated 27 November 1487, in which they presented a number of commercial requests in addition to those already granted to the Florentines in previous years.<sup>44</sup> This document refers explicitly to two types of rights: those originally conceded to the merchants of Venice and then extended to the Florentines, and those directly granted to the citizens of Florence. In particular, the first series of *capitoli* lists—in the same order—the clauses contained in a decree issued to the authorities of Alexandria concerning Venetian trade in October 1442 by Sultan Jaqmaq.<sup>45</sup> The fact that a copy of this *marsūm* is held in the Florentine Archives demonstrates that the Venetian model remained the yardstick for Florentine merchants active in the Middle East.<sup>46</sup> The specific rights

<sup>40</sup> Babinger, “Lorenzo de’ Medici,” 350.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Müller, *Documenti sulle relazioni delle città toscane coll’Oriente cristiano e coi Turchi fino all’anno 1531* (Florence, 1879), 237.

<sup>42</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1488 B, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fol. 6; Wansbrough, “A Mamlūk Commercial Treaty,” 45.

<sup>43</sup> Luca Landucci, *Diario Fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516*, ed. Iodoco Del Badia (Florence, 1883), 52; Lorenzo Montemagno Ciseri, “Camelopardalis: storia naturale e straordinaria della giraffa di Lorenzo il Magnifico,” *Interpres: rivista di studi quattrocenteschi* 31 (2012/2013): 354–55; Alamanno Rinuccini, *Ricordi storici di Filippo di Cino Rinuccini, dal 1282 al 1460 colla continuazione di Alamanno e Neri suoi figli fino al 1506*, ed. Giuseppe Aiazzi (Florence, 1840), 143.

<sup>44</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1487/11/27, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, cc. 1r–2r.

<sup>45</sup> *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum sive acta et diplomata res venetas graecas atque levantis*, ed. Georg Martin Thomas and Riccardo Predelli (Venice, 1880–99), 2:353–64.

<sup>46</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Atti Pubblici, Spoglio 3, num. 4.



accorded to the citizens of Florence, for their part, are listed in an undated document in Italian.<sup>47</sup>

As regards the political reasons for Ibn Maḥfūz's journey to Florence, Qāyrbāy wished to negotiate prince Cem's transfer from France to a place where he could become a greater threat to Bayezid. More specifically, as Lorenzo explained on 9 December 1487 in a letter addressed to the Florentine *oratore* in Rome, Giovanni Lanfredini, the Mamluk ruler hoped that, through Lorenzo's mediation, the Ottoman prince would be transferred to Rome.<sup>48</sup> From there, the pope could launch a crusade against the Ottoman Empire in order to replace Bayezid with his brother. These negotiations succeeded, and Cem finally arrived in Rome in March 1489.<sup>49</sup>

In the meantime, the authorities of Florence were preparing a new embassy to the Mamluk Sultanate with a view to obtain from the Mamluk chancery an official document defining the conditions of Florentine trade in Egypt and Syria. The government designated Luigi della Stufa as ambassador to fulfill this mission. He would accompany Ibn Maḥfūz on his return journey to Cairo, where he would meet Qāyrbāy.

On 15 November 1488, the representatives of the Florentine government imparted the official instructions to Della Stufa. The document containing these directives is preserved in the registers of the chancery.<sup>50</sup> The Florentine Archives also keep a copy of all the commercial clauses that Della Stufa was supposed to negotiate in Egypt.<sup>51</sup> The Florentine diplomat must have brought the original document with him as a draft for the final agreement.

Della Stufa's diplomatic journey in Egypt and the different phases of the negotiation process are substantiated by two kinds of sources: letters from the ambassador to the members of the republic government or to Lorenzo de' Medici,<sup>52</sup> and journals penned by two eyewitnesses. The first diary, held in the Florentine Archives Corsi Salviati and published in 1958 by G. Corti, contains the travel report of the priest Zanobi del Lavacchio, who went with Della Stufa to Egypt.<sup>53</sup> The sec-

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Lorenzo De' Medici, *Lettere (1487–1488)*, vol. 11, ed. Melissa Meriam Bullard (Florence, 2004), 487–92.

<sup>49</sup> Louis Thuasne, *Djem-sultan, fils de Mohammed II, frère de Bayezid II (1459–1495), d'après les documents originaux en grande partie inédits, étude sur la question d'Orient à la fin du XVe siècle* (Paris, 1892), 227.

<sup>50</sup> ASF, Signori, Legazioni e Commissarie, 21, fols. 79v.–80r.

<sup>51</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1488, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fols. 1r–5r.

<sup>52</sup> These letters are published in the article: Patrizia Meli, "Firenze di fronte al mondo islamico: Documenti su due ambasciate (1487–1489)," *Annali di Storia di Firenze* 4 (2009): 243–73.

<sup>53</sup> Zanobi Del Lavacchio, *Relazione di un viaggio al Soldano d'Egitto e in Terra Santa*, ed. Gino Corti, *Archivio storico italiano* 116 (1958): 247–66.





ond one, held in the Ricciardiana Library and published in 2010 by Marina Montesano, is the work of Michele da Figline, who, in the course of his pilgrimage to the Holy Places, mentions his meeting with the Florentine delegation in Cairo.<sup>54</sup>

Della Stufa's mission was successful: on 31 October 1489, the Florentine diplomat obtained from the sultan an official document listing all the rights conceded to the citizens of Florence (and those renewed). This decree, containing 32 clauses, is addressed to all the authorities of the sultanate.<sup>55</sup> On 18 November 1489, a letter from Qāyṭbāy informs Lorenzo that all the rights requested by his emissary have been granted.<sup>56</sup> As had been the case with the 1422 mission, the letter to the diplomatic interlocutors together with the copy of the document addressed to the representatives of the sultan's authority in the sultanate formally possess certification status for the decisions of the Mamluk ruler.

A few years after Della Stufa's journey, the Florentine government sent a new diplomatic mission to the Egyptian capital. The only available sources documenting this embassy are three letters issued by the *dīwān al-inshā'* and held in Florence,<sup>57</sup> concerning the renewal of trade agreements between that city and the sultanate. The *mukātabāt* are respectively addressed to the governor of Syria (25 Jumādā I 902/29 January 1497),<sup>58</sup> to the governor of Alexandria (7 Jumādā II 902/10 February 1497),<sup>59</sup> and to the representatives of political power in Florence (10 Jumādā II 902/13 February 1497).<sup>60</sup> They do not specify the names of the diplomats who carried out the negotiations. The diplomatic talks likely began under Qāyṭbāy and were successfully concluded under his son al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 1496–98).

Nine years later, a new document testifies to the resumption of relations between Florence and Cairo. The decree, dating to 18 Dhū al-Qa'dah 911/12 April 1506, is the first of a series of diplomatic sources attesting the continuation of exchanges between the two powers into the last years of the Mamluk regime.<sup>61</sup> This document, addressed by Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501–16) to all the authorities of his domain, bears all the features of a renewal of the rights granted

<sup>54</sup> Marina Montesano, *Da Figline a Gerusalemme: Viaggio del prete Michele in Egitto e in Terrasanta (1489–1490), Con il testo originale di ser Michele* (Rome, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> BML, Orientali 455 A, scroll A.

<sup>56</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll D.

<sup>57</sup> Concerning this embassy and the three letters see: A. Rizzo, "Three Mamluk Letters Concerning the Florentine Trade in Egypt and Syria: A New Interpretation," in *Mamluk Cairo: A Crossroads for Embassies*, ed. Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche (Leiden, 2019), 782–97.

<sup>58</sup> BML, Orientali 455 A, scroll B; Cassetta Cesarini, Doc. Conc. 20.

<sup>59</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll C; BML, Cassetta Cesarini, Doc. Conc. 21.

<sup>60</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll I.

<sup>61</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll F.



by Qāyṭbāy to Luigi della Stufa. Some months later, when Qānṣūh sent his ambassador Taghrībirdī to Venice, a Florentine delegation met the Mamluk emissary.<sup>62</sup> Two documents inform us about the results of this meeting: a letter sent by Florence to the sultan (13 April 1507)<sup>63</sup> and a decree issued by Qānṣūh and aimed at the community of Florence (12 Jumādā II 913/19 October 1507).<sup>64</sup> By means of the letter of 13 April, the members of the Florentine government informed the ruler of Cairo that the citizens of Florence had been guaranteed freedom of circulation and trade on Mamluk territory by Taghrībirdī. The *marsūm* notified the Florentines that the diplomat had reported to his sovereign the outcomes of his mission.

The following year (November 1508), Qānṣūh issued a safe-conduct to the benefit of the Florentines. This document is preserved in its Italian copy.<sup>65</sup>

The last diplomatic documents concerning relations between Florence and Cairo are a letter and a decree from 14 Rabīʿ I 916/21 June 1510.<sup>66</sup> The Florentine Archives also contain their Italian translations, erroneously dated 1509.<sup>67</sup> The *mukātabah* and *marsūm* represent the last documented agreements between the two powers. Seven years later, the Ottoman army would conquer Egypt, putting an end to the Mamluk Sultanate and causing significant damage to the central archives of Cairo.

## Validity and Functioning of the Documentation

The corpus of documents kept in Florence makes it possible to sketch the history of Florentine-Mamluk exchanges over a period of approximately ninety years. These documents highlight a varied array of rights, the practical effects of which can be found in other kinds of sources, such as the deeds drafted by Venetian notaries in cities like Alexandria or Damascus.<sup>68</sup> The notarial documents shed light on the commercial and legal transactions conducted by the Florentine citizens involved in trading in Egypt and Syria. Among the most significant rights granted by the sultan was the possibility to be represented by consuls, who are often the main actors of the deeds.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>62</sup> John Wansbrough, "A Mamluk ambassador to Venice," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 26, no. 3 (1963): 503–30.

<sup>63</sup> ASF, Signori, Missive, I Cancelleria, n. 55, fol. 202r–v.

<sup>64</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll H.

<sup>65</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1508/11/00, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fol. 1.

<sup>66</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll E.

<sup>67</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1509/07/02, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fols. 1v–2v; 1509/07/02 (B), Riformagioni Atti pubblici, fols. 3, 1v–2v

<sup>68</sup> Rizzo, "Le Lys et le Lion," 1:20–21.

<sup>69</sup> We know the names of five Florentine consuls in Alexandria: Ugolino di Vieri Rondinelli (August 1422–October 1422), Antonio Minerbetti (November 1422), Francesco Manelli (1425–34), Mar-



Despite the relative abundance of such testimonies, the bulk of business handled by the Florentines never matched that of other trading communities operating on Mamluk territory. Florence, for instance, was never on equal footing with Venice in terms of the profits made by their respective merchants, especially since the volume of its trading activities—for reasons that we cannot analyze here—was limited.<sup>70</sup> However, it should be stressed that unlike other communities, Florence, by virtue of its diplomacy, always succeeded in maintaining peaceful relations with the Mamluks. Sources show that Florence's exchanges with the sultanate were never tainted by periods of conflicts as occurred with other powers, such as the Crown of Aragon or the Venetian Republic, for reasons ranging from piracy to non-payment for their cargos of spices.<sup>71</sup>

The letters and decrees preserved in Florence never specify how long the rights granted by the sultans were meant to remain in force. However, if attention is paid to the dates on those documents, it will be noticed that the agreements were renewed at a frequency of roughly ten years. This period matches that of the pact sealed between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Quraysh in Ḥudaybiyah (628), which traditionally constitutes the legal basis for the agreements negotiated between Muslim authorities and non-Muslims.<sup>72</sup> This treaty secured a ten-year moratorium between the Prophet and his enemies in their armed conflict, and jurists later emphasized that this instituted a precise deadline for the validity of this type of agreement. For the same reason, the armistices between the Mamluks and the Crusader states in the second half of the thirteenth century usually specify a ten-year term.<sup>73</sup> In the following period, after the fall of Acre (1291), when *hudan* (truces) were no longer regulating relations between the Mamluks and the Christian powers, the diplomatic documents tended not to specify the period of validity of the stipulations. However, based on the dates of the decrees and letters preserved in Florence it appears that a period of ten years was also maintained for diplomatic negotiations concluded in peaceful conditions.

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iotto Squarzialupi (1434–56; 1465), Baldo di Ridolfi (1444–45). Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 1:374–77.

<sup>70</sup> Eliyahu Ashtor, “The Venetian Supremacy in Levantine Trade: Monopoly or Pre-Colonialism?” *Journal of European Economic History* 3 (1974): 5–53; Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 1:336–42.

<sup>71</sup> Damien Coulon, *Barcelone et le grand commerce d’Orient au Moyen Âge: Un siècle de relations avec l’Égypte et la Syrie-Palestine (ca. 1330–ca. 1430)* (Madrid-Barcelona, 2004), 42–51; Francisco Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne: le deuxième État Mamelouk et le commerce de épices (1382–1517)* (Barcelona, 2009).

<sup>72</sup> Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore, 1955), 210–13; Maria Pia Pedani, “La dimora della pace: Considerazioni sulle capitolazioni tra i Paesi Islamici e l’Europa,” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi: Studi e testi* 2 (1996): 15.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Malcom Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy (1260–1290): Treaties of Baybars and Qalāwūn with Christian Rulers* (Leiden-New York, 1995), 4, 17, 33, 41, 48, 56, 72, 108.



Equally notable is the mode chosen by the Mamluks to grant and guarantee commercial rights to European merchants during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The diplomatic procedures and the instruments validating the decisions of the sultans have seldom been studied with due attention.<sup>74</sup> However, analysis of the Mamluk documents preserved in Florence allows us to form a precise idea of Cairo's strategy for the regulation of its relations with the Florentine and other trading communities until the fall of the sultanate.<sup>75</sup>

When a foreign diplomatic delegation arrived in Cairo with specific commercial requests, the sultan's first response was a letter to the government represented by the ambassadors, accepting their requests and granting them the solicited rights. This *mukātabah*—usually rather brief—referred to the stipulations in general terms, without ever specifying all the commercial rights. In contrast, in the letters or decrees that the secretaries of the *dīwān al-inshā'* were instructed to draft for the representatives of the sultan's authority in the cities and provinces of Egypt and Syria, the trade conditions were listed in detail. Such documents, with all the rights divided into different chapters or clauses, were intended to inform local governors and officers of the sultan's decisions that they were expected to enforce. On the sultan's order, these *mukātabāt* and *marāsīm* were then copied by the scribes of the chancery. Once these copies had been completed, they were signed by the Mamluk ruler and handed to the foreign ambassadors. In addition to informing the diplomatic interlocutors about the commercial rules applied to their merchants, such diplomatic tools performed the function of certifying the decisions of the sultans from a legal point of view. In turn, reply letters guaranteed the validity of these copies. The whole set of documents—i.e., the letter sent to the foreign government, and the decrees and letters addressed to the local authorities as well as their copies—made the sultan's orders effective and certificated their legitimacy. All these written instruments formed a kind of “documentary network,” within which no one piece was completely valid without the others.

<sup>74</sup> Among the few studies that have examined the diplomatic characteristics of the Mamluk documents to European powers, see: Gladys Frantz-Murphy, “Identity and Security in the Mediterranean World ca. AD 640–ca. 1517,” in *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth International Congress of Papyrology*, ed. Traianos Gagos and Adam Hyatt (Ann Arbor, 2010), 253–64; idem, “Negotiating the Last Mamluk-Venetian Commercial Decree (922–3/1516–7): Commercial Liability from the 6th/12th to the Early 10th/16th Century,” in *Mamluk Cairo*, ed. Bauden and Dekkiche, 749.

<sup>75</sup> Concerning this diplomatic practice, see Alessandro Rizzo, “L'ambassade florentine de 1422 et l'établissement des relations commerciales avec les Mamelouks : les premiers documents” in *De la guerre à la paix en Méditerranée médiévale*, ed. Malamut and Ouerfelli; idem, “Travelling and Trading Through Mamluk Territory: Chancery Documents Guaranteeing Mobility to Christian Merchants,” in *History and Society during the Mamluk Period (1250–1517)*, Mamluk Studies 3, ed. Bethany Walker and Abdelkader Al-Ghouz (Göttingen, 2021), 493–97.





The diplomatic practice just described, developed by the Mamluk administration in the fourteenth century for exchanges with other European powers (especially the Republics of Venice and Ragusa), was used repeatedly to manage relations with Florence (in the embassies dated 1422–23, 1489, 1497, and 1510).<sup>76</sup> The continuity and profit of Florentine trade in Mamluk Egypt and Syria demonstrate the effectiveness of this strategy.<sup>77</sup> Thanks to the documents and the documentary practices examined, together with all the other symbolic and practical modalities of diplomatic dialogue (exchange of gifts, oral messages, ceremonial, etc.), the Florentine merchant community was able to buy and sell merchandise in the main Mamluk trading centers until the collapse of the sultanate.

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<sup>76</sup> See Frédéric Bauden's study on the state of research on Mamluk diplomatic studies; this work includes also a survey of the documents related to the diplomatic relations by and with the Mamluk Sultanate: Frédéric Bauden, "Mamluk Diplomats: The Present State of Research," in *Mamluk Cairo*, ed. Bauden and Dekkiche, 1–104.

<sup>77</sup> Rizzo, "Le Lys et le Lion," 1:331–52.



## APPENDIX

Survey of the preserved chancery documents related to the exchanges between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Republic of Florence. The documents—originals (o) or copies (c)<sup>78</sup>—are listed by embassies.

1422–23

### Florentine embassy to Cairo

Ambassadors: Carlo Federighi and Felice Brancacci.

- Letter of instructions given by the *Signoria* to the emissaries dated 14 June 1422<sup>79</sup> (c).
- Letter from al-Ashraf Barsbāy to the Florentine authorities dated 5 Shawwāl 825/22 September 1422<sup>80</sup> (o–c).
- Decree (open orders) issued by al-Ashraf Barsbāy and addressed to the authorities of the sultanate (probably in Syria) dated 5 Shawwāl 825/22 September 1422<sup>81</sup> (c).
- Decree (open orders) issued by al-Ashraf Barsbāy and addressed to the authorities of Alexandria dated 8 Shawwāl 825/25 September 1422<sup>82</sup> (c).
- Final report of the ambassadors to the *Signoria* dated 17 February 1423<sup>83</sup> (c).

1435

### Florentine embassy to Cairo

- Letter from the Florentine authorities to al-Ashraf Barsbāy dated 15 January 1435<sup>84</sup> (c).

<sup>78</sup> By the term “copy” we refer both to the Florentine documents (letters sent to the sultans, instructions given to the ambassadors, reports of the emissaries) and the translations of the Mamluk documents copied in the registers of the Florentine chancery.

<sup>79</sup> ASF, Signori, Legazioni e Commissarie, reg. 7, fols. 1r–3r; Amari, *I diplomati*, 331–35 (no. XXXVII of the seconda serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:269–73.

<sup>80</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll A; Amari, *I diplomati*, 165–68 (no. XXXVII of the prima serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:19–39. Translation: ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1422/09/22, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fols. 3r–4r; Amari, *I diplomati*, 336–37 (no. XXXVIII of the seconda serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:275–76.

<sup>81</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1422/09/22, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fols. 1r–2v; Amari, *I diplomati*, 338–40 (no. XXXIX of the seconda serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:277–79.

<sup>82</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, 25/9/1422, fols. 1r–2v; Amari, *I diplomati*, 341–43 (no. XL of the seconda serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:281–84.

<sup>83</sup> ASF, Signori e Relazioni di Oratori Fiorentini, n. 2, fol. 109r–v; Amari, *I diplomati*, 344–46 (no. XLI of the seconda serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” vol. 2, 285–87.

<sup>84</sup> ASF, Signori, Carteggio, Missive, I Cancelleria, vol. 33, fols. 179r–180r; Amari, *I diplomati: Appendice*, 15–16 (no. V); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:289–90.



1445

## Florentine embassy to Cairo

Ambassador: Giovenco della Stufa

- Letter from the Florentine authorities to al-Zāhir Jaqmaq dated 11 May 1445<sup>85</sup> (c).
- Letter from the Florentine authorities to the *nāzir al-khāṣṣ* dated 11 May 1445<sup>86</sup> (c).
- Letter from the Florentine authorities to the governor of Alexandria dated 11 May 1445<sup>87</sup> (c).

1465

## Travel of the Florentine consul Mariotto Squarcialupi to Egypt

- Letter from the Florentine authorities to al-Zāhir Khushqadam dated 14 August 1465<sup>88</sup> (c).
- Letter from the Florentine authorities to the governor of Alexandria dated 14 August 1465<sup>89</sup> (c).

1476

## Zanobio Carnesecchi's travel to Cairo

- Letter from the Florentine authorities to Qāytbāy dated 28 February 1476<sup>90</sup> (c).

1484

## Mamluk embassy to Florence

Ambassador: Muḥammad ibn Maḥfūz

- Letter from al-Ashraf Qāytbāy to Lorenzo de' Medici dated 16 Dhū al-Qa'dah 889/5 December 1484<sup>91</sup> (c).

<sup>85</sup> ASF, Signori, Carteggio, Missive, I Cancelleria, vol. 36, fols. 102v–103r; Amari, *I diplomati: Appendice*, 17–18 (no. VI); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:291–92.

<sup>86</sup> ASF, Signori, Missive, I Cancelleria, reg. 36, fol. 103r–v; Amari, *I diplomati: Appendice*, 18 (no. VI).

<sup>87</sup> ASF, Signori, Missive, I Cancelleria, reg. 36, fol. 103r–v; Amari, *I diplomati: Appendice*, 18 (no. VI). The same letter is addressed both to the *nāzir al-khāṣṣ* and to the governor of Alexandria.

<sup>88</sup> ASF, Signori, Carteggio, Missive, I Cancelleria, vol. 45, fols. 25v–26r; Amari, *I diplomati: Appendice*, 38–39 (no. XXII); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:293–94.

<sup>89</sup> ASF, Signori, Carteggio, Missive, I Cancelleria, vol. 45, fol. 26v; Amari, *I diplomati: Appendice*, 39–40 (no. XXII).

<sup>90</sup> ASF, Signori, Carteggio, Missive, I Cancelleria, vol. 47, fol. 34r–v; Amari, *I diplomati: Appendice*, 43 (no. XXVIII); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:295.

<sup>91</sup> Amari, *I diplomati: Appendice*, 46 (no. XXXI of the seconda serie).



1487–88

### Florentine embassy to Cairo

Ambassador: Paolo da Colle

- Draft of a decree to be issued by Qāyṭbāy to the authorities of Florence datable to 893/1488<sup>92</sup> (c).

1487–89

### Mamluk embassy to Florence and Florentine reply embassy to Cairo

Ambassadors: Muḥammad ibn Maḥfūz and Luigi della Stufa

- Emendations proposed by Florentine merchants dated 27 November 1487<sup>93</sup> (c).
- Instructions of the Florentine authorities to Luigi della Stufa dated 15 November 1488<sup>94</sup> (c).
- Petitions presented by Luigi della Stufa to Qāyṭbāy dated to 1488<sup>95</sup> (c).
- Decree issued by Qāyṭbāy and addressed to the authorities of the sultanate dated 6 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 894/31 October 1489<sup>96</sup> (o and c).
- Letter from Qāyṭbāy to Lorenzo de' Medici dated 24 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 894/18 November 1489<sup>97</sup> (o).

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<sup>92</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1488 B, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fols. 6; Amari, *I diplomati*, 363–71 (no. XLV of the seconda serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:299–307.

<sup>93</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1487/11/27, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fols. 1r–2r; Amari, *I diplomati*, 361–62 (no. XLIV of the seconda serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:297–98.

<sup>94</sup> ASF, Signori, Legazioni e Commissarie, 21, fols. 79v.–80r; Amari, *I diplomati*, 372–73 (no. XLVI of the seconda serie); Meli, “Firenze,” 260–61 (no. 2); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:309–10.

<sup>95</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1488, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fols. 1r–5r; Amari, *I diplomati*, 374–81 (no. XLVII of the seconda serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:311–18.

<sup>96</sup> BML, Orientali 455 A, scroll A; Wansbrough, “A Mamlūk Commercial Treaty”; Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:51–95. Translation: Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, Fondo Del Furia, cod. 50.

<sup>97</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll D; Amari, *I diplomati*, 181–83 (no. XXXIX of the prima serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:41–50.





1497

## Florentine embassy to Cairo

Ambassador(s): unknown

- Letter from al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qāyṭbāy to the governor of Damascus dated 25 Jumādā I 902/29 January 1497<sup>98</sup> (o).
- Letter from al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qāyṭbāy to the governor of Alexandria dated 7 Jumādā II 902/10 February 1497<sup>99</sup> (o).
- Letter from al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qāyṭbāy to the authorities of Florence dated 10 Jumādā II 902/13 February 1497<sup>100</sup> (o).

1506

## (Probable) Florentine embassy to Cairo

Ambassador(s): unknown

- Decree issued by Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī and addressed to the authorities of the sultanate dated 18 Dhū al-Qa‘dah 911/12 April 1506<sup>101</sup> (o).

1507–8

## Mamluk embassy to Venice (the ambassador also met Florentine diplomats)

Ambassador: Taghrībirdī

- Letter from the Florentine authorities to Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī dated 13 April 1507<sup>102</sup> (c).
- Decree issued by Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī and addressed to the authorities of Florence dated 12 Jumādā II 913/19 October 1507<sup>103</sup> (o).
- Decree with safe conduct issued by Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī regarding the Florentines dated Rajab–Sha‘bān 914/November 1508<sup>104</sup> (c).

<sup>98</sup> BML, Orientali 455 A, scroll B; Cassetta Cesarini, Doc. Conc. 20; Wansbrough, “Venice and Florence”; Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:97–153.

<sup>99</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll C; BML, Cassetta Cesarini, Doc. Conc. 21; Amari, *I diplomati*, 184–209 (no. XL of the prima serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:155–208.

<sup>100</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll I; Amari, *I diplomati*, 210–13 (no. XLI of the prima serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:209–18.

<sup>101</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll F; Amari, *I diplomati*, 214–17 (no. XLII of the prima serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:219–29.

<sup>102</sup> ASF, Signori, Missive, I Cancelleria, n. 55, fol. 202r–v; Amari, *I diplomati*, 387 (no. XLIX of the seconda serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:319.

<sup>103</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll H; Amari, *I diplomati*, 218–20 (no. XLIII of the prima serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:231–39.

<sup>104</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1508/11/00, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fol. 1; Amari, *I diplomati*, 388 (no. L of the seconda serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:321–22.



1510

## Florentine embassy to Cairo

- Ambassador: Bernardino Peruzzi
- Decree issued by Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī and addressed to the authorities of Alexandria dated 14 Rabī<sup>c</sup> I 916/21 June 1510<sup>105</sup> (o and c).
- Letter from Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī to the authorities of Florence dated 14 Rabī<sup>c</sup> I 916/21 June 1510<sup>106</sup> (o and c).

<sup>105</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll E; Amari, *I diplomati*, 226–29 (no. XLV of the prima serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:241–50. Translation: ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1509/07/02 (B), Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fols. 1v–2v; Amari, *I diplomati*, 389–90 (no. LI of the seconda serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:323–24.

<sup>106</sup> ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll G; Amari, *I diplomati*, 221–25 (no. XLIV of the prima serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:251–63. Translation: ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1509/07/02, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, fols. 1v–2v; Amari, *I diplomati*, 391–92 (no. LII of the seconda serie); Rizzo, “Le Lys et le Lion,” 2:325–26.



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## The Trials and Tribulations of the Rasulid Sultan al-Malik al-Mujāhid ‘Alī (d. 764/1363)

### Introduction

The fifth Rasulid sultan of Yemen, al-Malik al-Mujāhid ‘Alī, may be considered both the luckiest and the unluckiest of the monarchs of this dynasty, which was a distant rival to the Mamluks during his reign.<sup>1</sup> He ruled for a total of 42 years, a

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<sup>1</sup>For details on his biography and reign, see ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Allāh Abū Makhramah, *Tārīkh thaghr ‘Adan* (Beirut, 1987), 171–83; Taqī al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Fāsī, *Al-‘iqd al-thamīn fī tārikh al-balad al-amīn*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Ṭabākḥī (Beirut, 1986), 6:158–84; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Alī Ibn al-Dayba’, *Qurrat al-‘uyūn bi-akhbār al-Yaman al-maymūn*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Akwa’ (Ṣan‘ā’, 1988), 349–67; Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Al-durar al-kāminah fī a’yān al-mī‘ah al-thāminah*, ed. Sayyid Jādd al-Ḥaqq (Hyderabad, 1945–50), 49–50, no. 106; Ismā‘īl ibn Abī Bakr Ibn al-Muqrī, *‘Unwān al-sharaf al-wāfi fī ‘ilm al-fiqh wa-al-‘arūḍ wa-al-tārīkh wa-al-naḥw wa-al-qawāfi*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī (Beirut, 1996), 168–69; Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan al-Khazrajī, *Al-‘asjad al-masbūk fīman waliya al-Yaman min al-mulūk* (Ṣan‘ā’, 1981), 338–410; idem, *Al-‘uqūd al-lu’lu’riyah fī tārikh al-dawlah al-Rasūliyah=The Pearl-Strings: A History of the Resūliyy Dynasty of Yemen*, ed. James W. Redhouse (London, 1906–18), 2:3–109, 5:1–126; idem, *Al-‘iqd al-fākhīr al-ḥasan fī ṭabaqāt akābir ahl al-Yaman*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Qā’id al-‘Abbādī (Ṣan‘ā’, 2008–9), 3:1392–1415; al-Malik al-Ashraf Ismā‘īl ibn al-‘Abbās, *Fākihāt al-zamān fī mufākāhāt al-ādāb wa-al-fanan fī akhbār man malaka al-Yaman*, ed. ‘Alī Ḥasan al-Ma‘īlī (Riyadh, 2014); al-Malik al-Afdal al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Alī, *Al-‘aṭāyā al-sanīyah wa-al-mawāhib al-hanīyah fī al-manāqib al-Yamanīyah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Wāhid al-Khāmīrī (Ṣan‘ā’, 2004), 480–82; Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Caliphate and Kingship in a Fifteenth-Century Literary History of Muslim Leadership and Pilgrimage: al-Dahab al-masbūk fī dīkr man ḥaḡḡa min al-hulafā’ wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Jo Van Steenberg (Leiden, 2016), 402–9; Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-‘uqūd fī tarājīm al-a’yān al-mufīd*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Jalīlī (Beirut, 2002), 2:484–97; Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Shawkānī, *Al-badr al-ṭālī’ bi-maḥāsīn man ba’d al-qarn al-sābi’*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Ḥallāq (Beirut, 1998), 483, no. 308; Tāj al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Baqī ibn ‘Abd al-Majīd, *Bahjat al-zaman fī tārikh al-Yaman*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥibshī and Muḥammad al-Sanabānī (Ṣan‘ā’, 1988), 285–96; Yaḥyá ibn al-Ḥusayn, *Ghāyat al-amānī fī akhbār al-qitr al-Yamānī*, ed. Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ ‘Āshūr (Cairo, 1968), 494–519; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-Wuṣābī, *Tārīkh Wuṣāb al-musammá al-i’tibār fī al-tawārikh wa-al-āthār*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥibshī (Ṣan‘ā’, 1979), 119–20.



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span second only to that of his grandfather, al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf, who held power for 46 years and is credited with building up the Rasulid state.<sup>2</sup> Al-Mujāhid faced numerous rebellions, including by four of his sons, and suffered the humiliation of being kidnapped in Mecca and held in Mamluk territory for fourteen months.<sup>3</sup> His story reveals the difficulties the Rasulids faced in their fragile relations with the Mamluks—especially in terms of competition for influence in Mecca—as well as their constant conflict with the Zaydī imams in Yemen’s north and rebellion by tribes in the coastal Tihamah region. There were also internal family struggles over succession. Al-Mujāhid’s reign began at the midpoint of the dynasty and signaled the Rasulids’ increasing weakness in the region. It is a story that needs to be told but has received little attention thus far.<sup>4</sup> After a brief discussion of the Rasulid context and their influence in Mecca, the life of al-Mujāhid will be discussed, followed by a detailed analysis of his kidnapping.

The story of the Rasulid dynasty begins with the Ayyubid conquest of Yemen by Tūrānshāh, the brother of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, starting in 569/1173. Later Yemeni historians report that among the amirs assisting the Ayyubids were three grandsons of a man known as the *rasūl* (the messenger).<sup>5</sup> One of these amirs, Nūr al-Dīn ‘Umar, would rise through the ranks to become entrusted with control of Mecca and later was left in charge of Yemen when the last Ayyubid king, al-Malik al-Mas‘ūd Yūsuf, left for a post in Damascus. After al-Mas‘ūd Yūsuf died in Mecca in 626/1229 and no new ruler was sent from the Ayyubid court, the *de facto* assumption of power by the new Rasulid sultan, now named al-Malik al-Manṣūr ‘Umar, began in Jumādā I 626/April 1229, two decades before the Bahri Mamluks overthrew Ayyubid rule in Egypt. Nūr al-Dīn received the blessing of the caliph al-

<sup>2</sup>The Rasulids under al-Muẓaffar are discussed in Daniel Martin Varisco, “Texts and Pretexts: The Unity of the Rasulid State in the Reign of al-Malik al-Muẓaffar,” *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 67, no. 1(1993): 13–21. For a concise introduction to the Rasulid dynasty, see G. Rex Smith, “Rasūlids,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 8:455–57. The early sequence of Rasulid rulers was as follows: al-Malik al-Manṣūr ‘Umar (626–47/1229–49), al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf (647–94/1249–95), al-Malik al-Ashraf ‘Umar (694–96/1295–96), al-Malik al-Mu‘ayyad Dāwūd (696–721/1296–1322), al-Malik al-Mujāhid ‘Alī (721–64/1322–63).

<sup>3</sup>The term Mamluk, when capitalized here, refers to the Bahri Mamluk dynasty that overthrew the Ayyubids. When not capitalized, “mamluk” simply refers to slave soldiers.

<sup>4</sup>One of the few modern scholars to discuss the kidnapping and its impact is Éric Vallet, *L’Arabie marchande: état et commerce sous les sultans Rasūlides du Yémen (626–858/1229–1454)* (Paris, 2010), 463–64, 517–18, 690; idem, “Les sultans du Yémen protecteurs de la Mecque (XIIIe–XIVe S.),” *Académie des inscriptions & belles-lettres: Comptes rendus des séances de l’année 2017* (Paris, 2017), 226–27.

<sup>5</sup>The genealogy of the Rasulid sultans, including a fictive claim to a Yemeni ancestor, is discussed by Daniel Mahoney, “Writing the Ethnic Origins of the Rasulids in Late Medieval South Arabia,” *The Medieval History Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 1–20.





Mustanşir in Baghdad in 631/1234 to legitimize his own dynasty in South Arabia.<sup>6</sup> As both were heirs to the Ayyubids, a rivalry evolved between these two major powers regarding trade, control over Mecca, and competition in promoting Islamic learning after the fall of the caliphate. During the long reign of al-Manşūr's son al-Malik al-Muzaffar Yūsuf, who came to power after the assassination of his father in 647/1249, the Mamluk preoccupation with both the crusading Franks and the Mongols kept them from opening a southern front in Yemen against the Rasulids. This was one of the few times in Yemen's long history that its power was on an almost equal footing with a regime outside the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most important political rivalries between the Rasulids and both the Ayyubids and the Mamluks was over control of the sacred pilgrimage center of Mecca, which until the fall of the Abbasid caliphate was generally ceded, at least in principle, to the caliph in Baghdad.<sup>8</sup> During the Rasulid era, Yemen was one of the most important trade partners of Mecca and the Hijaz, due to Rasulid control of trade in the lower Red Sea to the port of Jiddah and Mecca's close proximity to both the Yemeni highlands and Tihamah coast. The items the Hijaz received from Yemen, either directly or through the entrepôt of Aden, included raisins, almonds, grapes, sugarcane, honey, cowpeas, clarified butter, incense, sweets, gemstones, henna, *wars* (*Memecylon tinctorium*) and indigo dyes, wood, fine silk clothing, all kinds of fabric, hides, essences and perfumes, live animals, and weapons.<sup>9</sup> The trade continued uninterrupted, as did the annual pilgrimage from Yemen, no matter whether the Mamluks or Rasulids held sway with the Meccan sharifs.

Rasulid interest in Mecca began during the reign of the Ayyubid al-Malik al-Mas'ūd, who appointed Nūr al-Dīn 'Umar governor there in 617/1220–21. Upon assuming power, the first Rasulid sultan al-Malik al-Manşūr 'Umar sent troops to Mecca, where he was well regarded. The local Ayyubid commander, Shujā' al-Dīn

<sup>6</sup>It is reported that al-Manşūr sought the *tashrīf al-salṭanah* as early as 628/1230, and during 630/1232 al-Manşūr minted coins in his own name, which was proclaimed in the *khuṭbah* throughout Yemen, according to al-Khazraji, *Al-'uqūd*, 1:97, 4:51. The official declaration and robe of honor for his dynasty were sent by the caliph in 631/1233–34 but did not arrive until the following year because the pilgrimage from Iraq had been blocked, according to Ibn Ḥatīm in *Al-ṣimt al-ghālī* (G. Rex Smith, *The Ayyubids and Early Rasulids in the Yemen [567–694/1173–1295]* [London, 1978], 1:206–7).

<sup>7</sup>I am indebted to Andre Gingrich for making this point.

<sup>8</sup>For details on this rivalry, see Noha Sadek, *Custodians of the Holy Sanctuaries: Rasulid-Mamluk Rivalry in Mecca*, Ulrich Haarmann Memorial Lecture 20 (Berlin, 2019).

<sup>9</sup>This list was compiled in the thesis of 'Alī 'Abd al-Karīm Barakāt, "Al-ṣilāt al-ḥadāriyah wa-al-fikriyah bayn al-Yaman wa-bilād al-Islāmiyah (626–858 H/1229–1454 M): Mişr wa-al-Hijāz anmūdhajān—dirāsah tārikhiyah" (Şan'ā', 2010), 207. The Hijaz also exported a number of items to Yemen.



Ṭuġtakīn, fled to the coastal town of Yanbuʿ, notifying the sultan al-Kāmil of this intrusion. The next year Ayyubid troops routed the Rasulid soldiers, killing the amir leading them.<sup>10</sup> In 639/1242 al-Manṣūr defeated the mamluks deployed to Mecca. The Ayyubid amirs were unpopular due to the institution of unlawful taxes (*mukūs*) and the strong-arm tactics of their soldiers. Al-Manṣūr set up a marble marker near the Zamzam well that declared an end to these taxes; this lasted until 646/1249 when irregular taxes were reinstated by a corrupt Rasulid deputy there.<sup>11</sup> In 641/1243 al-Manṣūr ordered the construction of the Manṣūriyah madrasah to the west of the great mosque. When the newly installed caliph al-Mustaʿsim arrived on the pilgrimage with his mother, they were warmly received by al-Manṣūr’s deputy in Mecca. It is recorded that al-Manṣūr went to Mecca eight times during his reign, though not during the actual pilgrimage season.<sup>12</sup>

When the Mamluks came to power in Egypt in 648/1250, al-Manṣūr’s son al-Muẓaffar had already assumed the throne after his father. The year before the Mamluk takeover in Egypt al-Muẓaffar had sent a message to al-Mustaʿsim in Baghdad requesting the continued blessing of the caliph for his rule over Yemen. In 659/1261, three years after al-Mustaʿsim was killed, al-Muẓaffar performed the pilgrimage, providing the *kiswah*, washing and perfuming the Kaʿbah, spreading alms, and having the *khutbah* delivered in his name.<sup>13</sup> The prestige of providing the *kiswah* for the Kaʿbah became a major point of contention after the fall of the caliphate. For example, in 667/1269 the Meccan sharif Abū Numayy sent a letter to the Mamluk court warning that his uncle, the sharif Idris ibn Qatādah, had sided with the ruler of Yemen; Abū Numayy sent his uncle out of Mecca and the *khutbah* was restored for the Mamluk sultan.<sup>14</sup> This was the same year that the Mamluk amir Baybars made the pilgrimage, washing the Kaʿbah with rose water and hanging up the Mamluk *kiswah* with his own hands. He wrote a letter at the time to the Rasulid al-Muẓaffar, exhorting him to join the jihad against the Mongols.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk* (Beirut, 1997), 1:366; al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:96–97, 4:49.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Ḥātim in Smith, *The Ayyubids*, 1:221; al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:113, 4:77–78; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:435–36.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:103, 4:62. For details on al-Manṣūr in Mecca, see al-Fāsi, *Al-ʿiqd al-thamīn*, 5:360–65.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Caliphate and Kinship*, 349. For details on the *kiswah* sent to Mecca during the Rasulid era, see Sadek, *Custodians of the Holy Sanctuaries*, 13–19. Sadek notes that “the Rasulids’ insistence on providing their own *kiswah* for the Kaʿbah, and on restoring the sanctuaries, expresses not just their religiosity, but also their refusal to being regarded as vassals of the Mamluks.”

<sup>14</sup> Baybars al-Manṣūrī al-Dawādār, *Zubdat al-fikrah fī tārikh al-hijrah*, ed. Donald S. Richards (Beirut, 1998), 120.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Caliphate and Kinship*, 361–63; idem, *Sulūk*, 1:61.



Although there is no record of either of the next two Rasulid sultans, al-Ashraf ʿUmar and al-Muʿayyad Dāwūd, traveling to Mecca, they did send envoys along with the annual pilgrimage caravan. The Meccan sharifs who vied for control of Mecca continually played on the rivalry between the Rasulids and the Mamluks, although after the reign of al-Muẓaffar the Mamluks usually had the upper hand. According to al-Khazrajī, in 696/1296–97 the Meccan ruler Abū Numayy received the envoy of al-Muʿayyad and swore an oath of loyalty to the Rasulid sultan.<sup>16</sup> With the death of Abū Numayy in 701/1301, al-Muʿayyad entered into the rivalry between the Meccan ruler’s sons for succession. Ironically, both Abū Numayy and his grandson Thaqabah were ardent supporters of the Zaydī imams, against whom the Rasulids fought for control of Yemen’s central and northern highlands.<sup>17</sup> As will be related below, it was al-Mujāhid’s support for Thaqabah in the mid-fourteenth century that resulted in his kidnapping.

### The Teenage Sultan

According to the late fourteenth-century Rasulid court historian Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Khazrajī, al-Malik al-Mujāhid ʿAlī was born in Zabīd, either during Jumādā II 706/December 1306 or in Ramaḍān 707/March 1307.<sup>18</sup> His mother was the daughter of a respected Islamic scholar named Muntakhab al-Dīn Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥalabī, who arrived in Yemen from Mecca during the reign of al-Muẓaffar. His main tutor was Shihāb al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Zafārī. Among his other teachers were Abū Qāsim al-Ṣaghānī and Tāj al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Bāqī al-Yamānī.<sup>19</sup> He was only about 14 or 15 years old when his father al-Muʿayyad died in 721/1321, but he is said to be the only surviving son.<sup>20</sup> His young age explains why there is no mention of any previous official assignments in charge of a region, as was the case for most sons of sultans. On assuming the throne he allied with the power-

<sup>16</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:268–69, 4:336.

<sup>17</sup> Richard T. Mortel, “Zaydi Shiism and the Hasanid Sharifs of Mecca,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987): 1:461.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:282–83, 4:370. Al-Mujāhid’s son, al-Malik al-Afḍal al-ʿAbbās (*Al-ʿatāyā al-sanīyah*, 480), notes that the correct date is 706/1306. Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Maḥāsīn Ibn Taghribirdī (*Al-manhal al-ṣāfi wa-al-mustawfā baʿd al-wāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn [Cairo, 1999], 8:76–79) gives his birth date as 701/1301–2 in Taʿizz.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:76. Tāj al-Dīn, who served in the chancery of al-Muʿayyad, was the author of *Bahjat al-zaman fi tārikh al-Yaman*.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Maqrizī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 2:484, notes that he was 15 years old at the time; al-Maqrizī’s lengthy discussion of al-Mujāhid appears to be taken from al-Khazrajī. His brother al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Ḥasan, who had been active in commanding troops for al-Muʿayyad, died in 712/1313, according to al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:303, 4:403. His brother al-Malik al-Zāfir had died before this. On assuming power, however, he gave positions to two sons of his brother, although their ages are not provided.



ful amir Shujāʿ al-Dīn ʿUmar ibn Yūsuf ibn Manṣūr, who was made commander (*atābak*) of the royal troops. As noted by al-Khazrajī, Shujāʿ al-Dīn was the real power at the start of al-Mujāhid's reign and was someone to be feared. Shujāʿ al-Dīn was well aware of the threat from al-Muʿayyad's uncle, al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn al-Malik al-Ashraf, and convinced al-Mujāhid to seize and imprison his uncle, first in Taʿizz and then in Aden.

As a youthful successor to the throne, al-Mujāhid had much to learn and he does not seem to have been well prepared for the task. Al-Khazrajī notes that people disapproved of the way al-Mujāhid handled his father's funeral.<sup>21</sup> One of his first recorded acts, when he departed from the highland fortress of Taʿizz, suggests that he did so at what the court astrologer considered an inauspicious time, foreshadowing his future problems. He soon visited the storehouse of the Rasulid treasury in the fortified mountain stronghold of al-Dumluwah, seeing what wealth he now owned. When he returned, however, he did not provide largesse to certain important individuals and soldiers, as was normally the custom of the sultan. This upset a number of the amirs and major mamluks, who decided to back another uncle, al-Malik al-Manṣūr Ayyūb ibn al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf, and staged a coup. They killed Shujāʿ al-Dīn, along with his son-in-law, the chief judge, and a shaykh of the ʿAns tribe. Shujāʿ al-Dīn had major enemies in Taʿizz and created more by having al-Malik al-Nāṣir imprisoned. The rebelling troops then seized al-Mujāhid, continuing to attack the houses of those in Taʿizz who supported the young sultan. Al-Manṣūr took over as the new sultan, but did not harm al-Mujāhid. Although al-Mujāhid was under arrest, he was given whatever he needed, including female companions.

In his first 70–80 days the rival al-Manṣūr spent an enormous amount of money from the royal treasury, but his reign did not last long. It is reported that one of the slaves (*ghilmān*) of al-Mujāhid had escaped and gathered forty men who surreptitiously entered the fortress in Taʿizz, killed the overseer, and captured al-Manṣūr. When the news reached those below in the city, al-Malik al-Nāṣir, who had been liberated by al-Manṣūr from prison, attempted to rescue al-Manṣūr, but neither he nor the rebel amirs could enter the fortress. When al-Mujāhid was freed, he commanded a herald to let the people in Taʿizz know that they could take whatever they wanted from the houses of those associated with his uncle al-Manṣūr. In the commotion that followed al-Mujāhid was restored to power, arresting the amirs who were against him and pardoning the soldiers. He even released al-Malik al-Nāṣir and one of al-Manṣūr's sons, demanding that al-Manṣūr, who was now imprisoned in Taʿizz, write to his son al-Malik al-Zāhir to hand

<sup>21</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:318, 4:441. It is not clear what al-Mujāhid did, since the directions for his burial are said to have been given in advance by al-Muʿayyad. These included burial at night using common items from the Taʿizz market rather than a public celebration.





over the treasure fortress of al-Dumluwah. In reply, al-Zāhir soon mounted a campaign against al-Mujāhid, taking the nearby town of al-Janad and sending forces composed of Kurds and mamluk soldiers to Ta'izz, where they were defeated after a brief siege. A furious al-Mujāhid refused to pardon the mamluks who had rebelled against him, giving license for anyone to capture or steal from them. Seventeen were killed, while a number of them fled to Zabīd and took possession of the city for al-Zāhir.

The unrest in Ta'izz and Zabīd spilled over into Laḥj and Abyan, with a force loyal to al-Zāhir taking Aden in 723/1323. This meant that the revenues from Aden would go directly to al-Zāhir in al-Dumluwah, a major blow to al-Mujāhid. Two of al-Mujāhid's nephews also openly rebelled against the sultan and took their troops to the Tihāmah. Unrest continued in Ta'izz in 724/1323–24 with infighting between the remaining mamluks loyal to al-Mujāhid and tribesmen of the Shafālīt tribe,<sup>22</sup> the latter outnumbering the mamluk soldiers. In the midst of this the rebel mamluks allied with al-Zāhir returned to Ta'izz from Zabīd. Forces also arrived from Aden and al-Dumluwah with two ballistas, although these proved to be ineffective in removing al-Mujāhid from the Ta'izz fortress.<sup>23</sup> Al-Mujāhid's luck worsened when two confidants turned against him and he was forced to sleep in a different place each night due to the continued onslaught of rocks thrown by the ballistas. Then, as related by al-Khazrajī, a miracle happened.<sup>24</sup> After performing his ablutions, a nearby wall opened and a young man (*ghulam*) appeared and immediately moved al-Mujāhid to another space. At first everyone was alarmed, but then a rock that would have killed him fell exactly where he had been sitting. The young man told al-Mujāhid he was his brother by a slave-girl of al-Mu'ayyad and had been brought up as a jinn and would help him defeat his enemies. Further rebellion erupted in the Tihamah, drawing away some of the rebel mamluks, and eventually the siege was lifted.

The constant rebellion and unrest kept al-Mujāhid from traveling to the coastal town of Zabīd—an annual custom for the sultans—until Jumādā II 725/May 1325, in time for the date palm festival known as *sabt al-subūt*.<sup>25</sup> In a pragmatic

<sup>22</sup>Information on this tribe is not available in the major sources. They appear to be from near Ta'izz, probably closer to al-Janad, according to Redhouse (al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 3:154, n. 1003).

<sup>23</sup>Al-Mujāhid wrote a brief description of the ballista and this survives in the mixed manuscript of his son, al-Malik al-Afḍal; see Daniel Martin Varisco and G. Rex Smith, eds., *The Manuscript of al-Malik al-Afḍal al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī b. Dāʿūd b. Yūsuf b. ʿUmar b. ʿAlī ibn Rasūl* (Warminster, 1998), 258–59.

<sup>24</sup>According to al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:15, 5:20, this information came from a female slave of al-Mujāhid's mother.

<sup>25</sup>*Sabt al-subūt* usually occurred on the first Saturday of the month *Ayyār* (May), but it often lasted throughout the date harvest in the Tihāmah; for details on this, see Daniel Martin Varisco, *Medieval Agriculture and Islamic Science: The Almanac of a Yemeni Sultan* (Seattle, 1994), 157–58.



move, he gave amnesty to all who had supported al-Zāhir. Before returning to Taʿizz, he asked the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad for help against his local enemies.<sup>26</sup> In response, a large expeditionary force arrived to Zabīd from Egypt, reported to include 2,000 horsemen, 1,000 foot soldiers, four amirs, and 22,000 camels.<sup>27</sup> They first honored the 18-year-old al-Mujāhid, presenting a robe of honor from the Mamluk sultan, and then part of their force accompanied him on his return to Taʿizz. As they neared Taʿizz, the Mamluk troops appropriated much of the local food, plundered villages, beat and killed people, and even captured and sold women as slaves. Several of them went to al-Dumluwah to see al-Zāhir, who gave them gold and incited them to seize al-Mujāhid, who escaped to the impregnable Taʿizz fortress before they could take him. The beleaguered sultan immediately informed the Mamluk amirs that their services were no longer needed, even sending them money, but they paid little attention and killed people in a number of the surrounding villages before laying waste in the northern Tihāmah and eventually returning to Egypt. Al-Zāhir continued to oppose al-Mujāhid until 734/1333, when he sought amnesty. This was granted by al-Mujāhid, but al-Zāhir died soon after arriving in Taʿizz. Al-Mujāhid then ordered that the body of his enemy be inspected to make sure it had been a natural death and he would not be blamed.

Only four years after assuming power, the young sultan still had little direct control of the area ruled by his father and grandfather. When his attempt to take Aden failed, he accused his troops of not trying hard enough. With growing unrest among his troops he went by land to al-ʿĀrah on the southern sea coast and eventually to Zabīd for the Ramaḍān fast. Instead of acting as a peace-maker he took soldiers with him and attacked the area of the Maʿāzibah tribe, perennial foes of the Rasulid sultans.<sup>28</sup> Many people were killed and date palms were cut down as a penalty for their alleged crimes as rebels. Before returning to Taʿizz in 726/1325 there is a record of the first gifts sent by al-Mujāhid to the Mamluk

<sup>26</sup>See al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 2:487, who notes that al-Mujāhid had been advised by his father, al-Muʿayyad, to seek help from the Mamluk sultan, promising to send much wealth back to Cairo for this help. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-durar al-kāminah*, 3:49, states that the experience of the Egyptian troops led to many tales (*qiṣaṣ ṭawīlah*), but he does not elaborate them. The reception of this expeditionary force is also described by Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmiʿ al-ghurar*, ed. Hans Robert Roemer, ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ ʿAshūr, and Ulrich Haarmann (Cairo, 1960–96), 9:318. Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:27, 5:32, does not mention that al-Mujāhid had requested help from the Mamluk sultan.

<sup>27</sup>Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:27, 5:32, noting that the two main amirs were Sayf al-Dīn Baybars and Jamāl al-Dīn Ṭaylān. Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 2:489, and Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:77, record 2,000 foot soldiers.

<sup>28</sup>The Maʿāzibah were one of the most important tribes of the Tihāmah, centered on the town of Bayt al-Faqīh.



court in Cairo. The next year he came down with a serious fever, but his health returned. He later appears to have suffered from a pox (*judarī*), which he survived.<sup>29</sup> Following another unsuccessful attempt to retake Aden, he returned to Taʿizz in response to news that the Zaydī imam Muḥammad ibn Muṭahhar was on his way with 1,000 horsemen and 12,000 foot soldiers. This anticipated attack did not occur and by 728/1327 al-Mujāhid's troops finally took control of Aden. This time al-Mujāhid was merciless to captives, blinding some, hanging others, and even drowning rebels. By this time al-Dumluwah had been liberated from al-Zāhir, so al-Mujāhid was finally able to visit his treasure fortress again. In 730/1329 al-Mujāhid returned to Taʿizz with a major force said to be between 12,000 and 17,000 men and found the city in open rebellion against him. For fifteen days his forces murdered inhabitants, especially on Jabal Ṣabir, until he gave amnesty to those who laid down their weapons.<sup>30</sup> It is clear from the sources that he could rarely trust the forces allied with him, but his record of executions and his limited grants of amnesty only made more enemies.

In addition to the difficulties al-Mujāhid faced in coming to power at such a young age, he was the target of numerous rebellions during his reign, including by four of his sons. In 744/1344 his son al-Malik al-Muʿayyad took over the important coastal town of al-Mahjam, because his father had bestowed a higher rank on his younger brother, al-Malik al-Muḥaffar. This act forced his father to send troops against him, but al-Muʿayyad soon sought immunity and returned to Taʿizz, where al-Mujāhid imprisoned him and where he soon died due to severe beatings. Three years later a group of slaves in Zabīd plotted to seize al-Mujāhid while he was out among the date palms near Zabīd. The plan was to replace him with his cousin, al-Malik al-Fāyiz Abū Bakr ibn Ḥasan ibn Dāwūd. One of the plotters informed al-Mujāhid, who escaped and then took vengeance on the plotters. A decade later the men of al-Shaʿir, who had been loyal to the sultan, were accused of plotting against him.<sup>31</sup> The sultan arrested seventeen of these shaykhs who had come in peace to negotiate. Trouble in the southern Tihāmah continued with the constant rebellions of the Maʿāzibah tribe, who often held their own against the Rasulid forces. After some of these battles, notes al-Khazrajī, some villages were abandoned and never recovered. During these rebellions the town of Fashāl along Wadi Rimaʿ, although placed under the control of al-Mujāhid's son

<sup>29</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:42, 5:52. This is said to have occurred in 729/1328. The term *judarī* is often used for smallpox, but it can refer to several diseases which produce pock-marks on the body.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:44, 5:55.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:81, transliterates this tribal name as al-Shīʿr, but the reference appears to be to al-Shaʿir near Ibb; see Ibrāhīm Aḥmad al-Maḥfāfi, *Muʿjam al-buldān wa-al-qabāʾil al-Yamanīyah* (Ṣanʿāʾ, 2002), 1:868–69.



Šāliḥ, was destroyed in 759/1358 along with al-Qaḥmah, al-Kadrā, and most of the villages near Zabīd.<sup>32</sup>

During 763/1361–62 there was a revolt by two of the sultan's sons: al-Malik Šāliḥ and al-Malik al-ʿĀdil. At the same time the amir Muḥammad ibn Mikāʿil, governor of several northern districts of the Tihāmah, turned against al-Mujāhid and declared himself sultan, minting coins in his own name and having his name recited in the *khuṭbah* of the mosques at al-Maḥjam, al-Maḥālib, and Ḥarād. His aggrandized title was the noble and highborn sharif (*al-sharīf al-ḥasīb al-nasīb*) and he claimed to be descended from the Prophet Muḥammad through Ḥusayn. His rule in the region only lasted about two years. Soon, yet another son, al-Malik al-Muẓaffar, rebelled against his father, allying with several Egyptian Mamluk amirs that had recently come to Taʿizz on a diplomatic mission. Al-Muẓaffar attempted unsuccessfully to gain entry into Aden; his father sent a force against him, but it was defeated. Then al-Mujāhid went himself to Aden, where he died in Jumādā I 764/March 1363—at the age of 57—and was later buried in his madrasah in Taʿizz. The weakness of the Rasulid state was evident at the time of his death. In the same year the important northern town of Ḥalī was taken over by the Meccan sharif, ʿAjlān, revealing the dynasty's weakness.<sup>33</sup> Accompanying his father to Aden was al-Malik al-Afḍal, who had remained loyal, and he was chosen as the most suitable successor to his father.

Whether it was due to his young age or lack of experience outside the royal court, al-Mujāhid was remarkably ignorant of conditions in the country he was attempting to rule. In 736/1335–36 he authorized the minting of a new silver dirham called the *riyāḥī*, which was to be used for all revenue payments from farmers and merchants.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, the new coins only became available when the market prices were so low that local farmers became destitute. The situation was so dire that many fled and stopped growing crops along the lucrative Wadi Zabīd. The problem was that the taxes throughout the earlier dynasties had been assessed according to the market price during Dhū al-Ḥijjah of the preceding year. This time the prices during that month had been high but declined considerably when it actually came time to pay, making it difficult for the farmers to

<sup>32</sup>ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Sulaymān al-Ahdal, *Tuḥfat al-zaman fī tārikh al-Yaman*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥibshī (Abu Dhabi, 2004), 523.

<sup>33</sup>ʿUmar ibn Muḥammad Ibn Fahd, *Ithāf al-warā bi-akhbār Umm al-Qurā*, ed. Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt (Mecca, 1984), 3:294. Most of the territory formerly held by the Rasulids was lost near the end of al-Mujāhid's reign, according to the later Yemen historian Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn, as recorded by ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Anisī al-Ṣanʿānī, *Ithāf dhawī al-ḥiṭan bi-mukhtaṣar dhawī anbāʾ al-zaman* (Ṣanʿā, 1981), 42.

<sup>34</sup>Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:52, 5:65. The notes to the translation suggest that this term may have been that of the die-maker, since in 800/1398 a man by that name was said to making coins for the Rasulids (*ibid.*, 3:219).





afford the taxes. When al-Mujāhid heard about the crisis, he descended to Zabīd and gathered the local officials, wanting to hear from the local people themselves what the problem was. Al-Mujāhid, who al-Khazrajī states was fond of the farmers, agreed that this was unfair and resolved the crisis by ordering that the market prices be taken twice a month so taxes would not be based on a single inflated amount. He is also credited with increasing the supplemental payments made to Tihāmah farmers and reducing their overall tax burden by a quarter, actions that endeared him to local farmers.

### Kidnapping in Mecca: The Rasulid View

Unlike his predecessors, al-Mujāhid did not perform the pilgrimage during his first two decades in power, due in large part to his preoccupation with establishing control at home. He finally arrived in Mecca in Shawwāl 742/April 1342. Al-Khazrajī describes the pilgrimage, on which he was accompanied by the Meccan sharif Thaqabah ibn Rumaythah.<sup>35</sup> The Rasulid sultan was well-received in Mecca by Rumaythah, the local sharif ruler, who in turn received 40,000 silver *riyāhī* dirhams, clothing, perfume, robes of honor, horses, and mules. In Mecca, al-Mujāhid stayed at the Shafī'i Mujāhidīyah madrasah, which al-Khazrajī claims was set up in 740/1339–40 and supported by *waqf* from three places along Wadi Zabīd.<sup>36</sup> As al-Khazrajī reports, relations with amirs of the Egyptian and Syrian pilgrimage delegations were cordial and al-Mujāhid honored both with robes of honor. Both sets of amirs are said to have kissed his noble hand repeatedly. His return to Yemen was through the main towns of the Tihāmah, where he gave out alms and was treated with festivities and entertainment.<sup>37</sup> The local officials in charge of al-Mahjam and Ta'izz created floats with musicians and singers to entertain the sultan.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 2:56, 5:71–72. The Redhouse translation misnames the sharif as Bāghīyah; the associated Arabic text of *Al-ʿuqūd* misspells Thaqabah as Baqīyah (!). The sharif Thaqabah ibn Rumaythah challenged his brother ʿAjlān for control of Mecca during the Mamluk era. In 761/1360 he is reported to have killed many people in Mecca in acts that are called repugnant (*qabīḥah*) by al-Shawkānī, *Al-badr al-ṭālīʿ*, 1:125. See also the description of this pilgrimage by al-Mujāhid's son, al-Malik al-Abbās, *Al-ʿatāyā al-sanīyah*, 481.

<sup>36</sup>Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:56, 5:68. Al-Fāsī, *Al-ʿiqd al-thamīn*, 5:251, disagrees with al-Khazrajī, stating that the madrasah was built the year before. This Meccan scholar locates it to the south of the main mosque. He also mentions a building (*ʿimārah*) provided by al-Mujāhid for the *mawlid* celebration of the Prophet in Mecca's Sūq al-Layl. Some scholars reported that at the base of the Ka'bah was a silver plaque with the name of al-Malik al-Mujāhid in thick letters, but al-Fāsī said it did not exist in his time.

<sup>37</sup>From Mecca he first went to Ḥalī, then on to the coastal towns of al-Maḥālib, al-Mahjam, al-Kadrā', Fashāl, Zabīd, Ḥays, and finally back to Ta'izz.



Nine years later, in 751/1351, al-Mujāhid made his second pilgrimage, one that would not end with a triumphal return through his coastal towns.<sup>38</sup> This time the sultan of Yemen was kidnapped by Mamluk soldiers and taken to Egypt, where he spent 14 months before being able to return. The Rasulid sources describe the trip to Mecca and the kidnapping, but do not report anything about what happened to al-Mujāhid during his stay in the Mamluk realm. The Yemeni historian al-Ahdal (d. 855/1451) briefly mentions the second pilgrimage of al-Mujāhid in 751, noting that he was captured (*asira*) and taken to Egypt, where he was imprisoned for nearly a year and then released and returned home in 752, when there was great turmoil in Yemen.<sup>39</sup> Fortunately, the Mamluk and Meccan texts provide important details about his trip as a prisoner to Cairo, his reception by the Mamluk sultan, the first attempt to return to Yemen, his later imprisonment in al-Karak, and his eventual return to rule. Although each of these sources has bias, a comparative analysis indicates a broader picture than any specific account affords.

The main Rasulid source is al-Khazrajī's chronicle, *Al-ʿuqūd al-luʿluʿiyyah*, which contains virtually the same information as his *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*.<sup>40</sup> According to al-Khazrajī, al-Mujāhid appointed several high-ranking officials to be in charge during his absence. The amir Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn al-Qāhirī took over the Taʿizz fortress, where all al-Mujāhid's children except al-ʿĀdil were placed for protection.<sup>41</sup> The highly regarded eunuch Amīn al-Dīn Ahyaf was designated the paymaster (*shaddād*) with oversight of the *wazīr* and chief judge Muwaffaq al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī al-Yaḥyawī.<sup>42</sup> Another eunuch, Jamāl al-Dīn Bārīʿ, was left in charge of troops in the fortress of Irbāb.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup>This is said to be his third pilgrimage by Yaḥyá ibn al-Ḥusayn, *Ghāyat al-amānī*, 516, but all other sources indicate that it was his second.

<sup>39</sup>Al-Ahdal, *Tuḥfat al-zaman*, 523.

<sup>40</sup>Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:69–76, 5:83–90. The Redhouse edition of al-Khazrajī's text has many flaws, but it is the most available account. There is also a Yemeni edition edited by ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥibshī (Ṣanʿā, 2009). The account in his *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, 385–91, only adds a few more details. There is a shorter account in his *Al-ʿiqd al-fākhir al-ḥasan*, 3:1407, which does not mention the imprisonment. The surviving texts from Yemeni historians who lived during the time of the kidnapping were by al-Wuṣābī, *Tārīkh Wuṣāb*, 119–20, and by al-Mujāhid's son al-Malik al-ʿAbbās ibn ʿAlī, *Al-ʿatāyā al-sanīyah*, 482. The later chronicle of al-Malik al-Ashraf Ismāʿīl is virtually the same as al-Khazrajī's *Al-ʿuqūd*.

<sup>41</sup>These included the older ones, al-Muẓaffar and Ṣāliḥ, as well as the younger sons al-Afḍal, al-Ẓāfir, al-Nāṣir, al-Manṣūr, and al-Masʿūd.

<sup>42</sup>A detailed study of Ahyaf is provided in Magdalena Moorthy-Kloss, "Slaves at the Najahid and Rasulid Courts of Yemen (412–553 AH/1021–1158 CE and 626–858 AH/1229–1454 CE)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, 2019), 139–47.

<sup>43</sup>Irbāb was a fortress between Ibb and Taʿizz. Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:147, 5:169.



Al-Mujāhid took with him his son ʿĀdil, his mother Jihāt Ṣalāḥ,<sup>44</sup> several dignitaries, servants, and soldiers. Once again, al-Mujāhid was accompanied by the sharif Thaḡabah, recently expelled from Mecca by his brother ʿAjlān. A rumor reached ʿAjlān that al-Mujāhid intended to replace him with his brother and take him as a prisoner back to Yemen. So ʿAjlān went to the amir of the Egyptian Mamluk delegation, arguing that al-Mujāhid planned to put his own *kiswah* on the Kaʿbah, and set up his own governor with his troops. He insisted that if the Mamluk amirs did not seize al-Mujāhid he would return with them to Cairo rather than be captured by the Rasulid sultan; this would obviously upset the Mamluk sultan who had given him authority over Mecca.

The Egyptian troops planned to capture al-Mujāhid in Minā, when he was separated from the bulk of his own troops. They found him in a camp with only a few guards, since he had gone ahead of the pilgrimage group that included his mother and his son al-ʿĀdil. There was killing on both sides. Realizing that resistance would be futile, he offered himself up and asked the Mamluks not to harm those with him. They agreed and treated him honorably when taking him to their camp, where he was given his own tent and allowed to take one of his amirs with him. When his mother and his troops entered Mecca, they were able to recover most of what had been taken from him. While this account describes how the news of his capture reached Yemen and events that took place in his absence, there is no information from al-Khazrajī about how he was treated while held in Egypt for over a year.

The Rasulid scholar Ibn al-Muqrī (d. 837/1433) does not mention the kidnapping, only noting that al-Mujāhid went to Egypt after his pilgrimage and returned safely.<sup>45</sup> The Rasulid historian al-Wuṣābī, however, records a line of poetry that the Mamluk sultan reportedly recited to al-Mujāhid when he was taken to Egypt: “The water of the Nile was indeed low, but it rose over the riverbank due to your flowing generosity” (*wa-qad kāna baḡru al-Nīl daḡḡāḡan māʿuhu, fa-amaddahu bi-al-sīf min jawdikum baḡru*).<sup>46</sup> It is not clear how this Yemeni historian received this information. It is possible that it came directly from al-Mujāhid, since it has a positive spin. I interpret the term *baḡr* here both in its literal sense to the Nile and also with the connotation of someone who is generous. Since all the Mamluk accounts suggest that al-Mujāhid was received honorably and even caught the

<sup>44</sup>Her full name was ʿĀminah bint al-Shaykh al-Ṣāliḡ Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAbd Allāḡ al-Ḥalabī, known as al-Naqqāsh. Ibn al-Daybaʿ, *Al-faḡl al-mazīd ʿalā bugḡyat al-mustafīd fī akḡbār madīnat Zabīd*, ed. Joseph Chelhod (Ṣanʿāʿ, 1983), 99.

<sup>45</sup>Ibn al-Muqrī, *Unwān al-sharaf al-wāfī*, 169.

<sup>46</sup>Al-Wuṣābī, *Tārīḡ Wuṣāb*, 120. This follows four lines of poetry that al-Mujāhid is said to have given when he began the pilgrimage. Al-Mujāhid was said to be a noted poet and some of his verses survive in al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿiqḡ al-fāḡḡir*, 1411–15.



affection of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, such a line of poetry is plausible.<sup>47</sup> The line may also relate to the fact that the Mamluk sultan expected al-Mujāhid to send him a very lucrative set of gifts from Yemen after his return.

The son and successor of al-Mujāhid, al-Malik al-Afdal al-ʿAbbās, put a positive spin on the experience of his father in Egypt without mentioning the cause of his being there or his imprisonment.<sup>48</sup> He wrote that his father had entered Egypt and engaged in discussion with scholars on every kind of science, winning their hearts to the extent that they magnified his intellectual prowess and praised him so much that the sultan had feared they would select al-Mujāhid to rule Egypt and replace him. So his father had stayed there for twelve months and then returned satisfied to Yemen. Al-Afdal refers to the pilgrimage as a famous story (*qiṣṣah mashhūrah*), but totally omits any negative reference to his father.

In *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, al-Khazrajī adds a detail not found in the earlier published edition of *Al-ʿuqūd*. He writes that he himself heard the news of the kidnapping in Minā a day or two after it happened while he was in Zabīd, but that it was not clear if it was true or false and undoubtedly it had arrived via a devil (*shayṭān*).<sup>49</sup> People stopped talking about the alleged kidnapping after two or three days because it could not be verified. He then notes that a Yemeni pilgrim named ʿUmar ibn Zurayzir was the first to return and confirm it with a message from al-Mujāhid.

In al-Mujāhid's absence the threat of rebellion was raised. The eunuch Jamāl al-Dīn Bārīʿ left his post in Irbāb with his troops for al-Janad hoping that he could endear himself to one of the sultan's sons if al-Mujāhid did not return. The alarmed eunuch Amīn al-Dīn Ahyaf demanded to know why Bārīʿ had left his post, but he lied and said that he had been summoned by the chief judge. Both the judge and Bārīʿ were promptly called up to the Taʿizz fortress and arrested. Deciding that he could trust neither, Ahyaf had both men hanged and appointed a new chief judge. When the sultan's mother, Jihāt Ṣalāh, finally returned to Taʿizz in Ṣafar 752/April 1351, she was given a royal reception and received an oath of loyalty from Ahyaf. Letters written by the sultan eventually arrived from Medina and Cairo. In Rabīʿ II 752/June 1352 a message arrived that al-Mujāhid had started his return to Yemen but had been called back to Cairo, although no reason is given. Another letter arrived from al-Mujāhid when he was at the African port of Suwakin. His troops met him when he landed on Yemeni soil at the harbor of

<sup>47</sup>The Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ḥasan came to power in 1347 at age 12 and was at first under the control of several powerful Mamluk amirs. In 1351 he was overthrown but returned to power in 1354, lasting until 1361, when he was killed at the age of 27 by one of his mamluks.

<sup>48</sup>Al-Malik al-ʿAbbās, *Al-ʿaṭāyā al-sanīyah*, 482.

<sup>49</sup>Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, 387. In 752 al-Khazrajī would have been 22 years old. This is also recorded by Ibn al-Daybaʿ.





al-Ḥādith, and they went on to Zabīd, where his mother and his sons joined him from Ta‘izz. It is clear that the sultan’s mother was exercising power during her son’s absence.<sup>50</sup>

### Kidnapping in Mecca: The Mamluk View

The Mamluk sources provide some of the same information about the capture of al-Mujāhid in Mecca, but add new and different details about the events leading up to the Mamluk pilgrimage that year, the troops’ encounter with al-Mujāhid in Mecca, and the Rasulid sultan’s sojourn in the Mamluk realm. One of the main sources is al-Maqrīzī, writing almost a century later, in his *Al-dhahab al-masbūk*,<sup>51</sup> *Durar al-‘uqūd fī tarājim al-a‘yān al-mufīd*,<sup>52</sup> and *Al-sulūk fī ma‘rifat al-mulūk*.<sup>53</sup> Al-Maqrīzī no doubt borrows some of his information from the earlier account provided by Ibn Kathīr, who remarks that stories about this were known in his day.<sup>54</sup> Regarding the first pilgrimage of al-Mujāhid in 742/1342, al-Maqrīzī differs from al-Khazrajī in noting that the ruler of Mecca prevented al-Mujāhid from covering the Ka‘bah with his *kiswah* and that al-Mujāhid left in anger. Before the second pilgrimage a decade later, the sharif Thaqabah had visited al-Mujāhid, seeking assistance in overthrowing his brother ‘Ajlān.<sup>55</sup> In *Al-sulūk* al-Maqrīzī reports that in Rajab 751/September 1350 ‘Ajlān had visited the Mamluk sultan in Egypt asking for troops to defend Mecca. This was denied, but ‘Ajlān was able to buy 40 mamluk soldiers, hire 20 foot soldiers and 100 horse soldiers, and return to Mecca. That year the pilgrimage delegation from Egypt was led by the amir Buzlār with as many as forty higher and lesser amirs, including Baybughā Rūs, the deputy of the sultan.<sup>56</sup> The amir Ṭāz, commander of the troops for the pilgrim caravan from Egypt, brought 150 mamluks and 60 horse soldiers.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>50</sup>She died in 762/1361, according to al-Khazrajī, *Al-‘uqūd*, 2:100

<sup>51</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Caliphate and Kingship*, 402–9.

<sup>52</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-‘uqūd*, 2:493–96.

<sup>53</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:130–31, 134–36, 146.

<sup>54</sup>Ibn Kathīr, *Al-bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*, ed. Riyāḍ Murād and Muḥammad ‘Abid (Qatar, 2015), 16:356–60, places the kidnapping in 752. Ibn Kathīr would have been alive when the event happened. Unfortunately, he provides a very brief account of the kidnapping and nothing about the reception in Cairo. He also does not provide news of the death of al-Mujāhid in 764.

<sup>55</sup>For a Mamluk perspective on ‘Ajlān (d. 777/1375), see Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:9–12.

<sup>56</sup>Buzlār al-Nāṣiri (d. 756/1355) was a high-ranking Mamluk amir. The amir Baybughā Rūs or Ārūs (d. 753/1352) was the main amir in charge of the young al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, who had become sultan at the age of 12; for details on his life see Ibn al-Taghribirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 3:486–89, who notes he became an alcoholic when he was appointed to Aleppo.

<sup>57</sup>Sayf al-Dīn Ṭāz ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Nāṣiri (d. 763/1362) was a powerful amir in the Cairo court. In 1351 he orchestrated the replacement of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ḥasan with his brother for three years.



In Yemen al-Mujāhid set out for the pilgrimage with Thaqabah, who wanted his support to replace his brother ʿAjlān as ruler of Mecca. Along with his mother and at least one son, al-Mujāhid gathered a large number of soldiers and prepared a Yemeni *kiswah* to cover the Kaʿbah. When al-Mujāhid reached the northern town of Ḥalī, Thaqabah’s two brothers Sanad and Mughāmis joined the troops. When ʿAjlān heard of their arrival, he forbade their entry into Mecca, but al-Mujāhid ignored him and entered to do “mischief” without respecting the Meccan sharifs or the amir Buzlār, so ʿAjlān informed the amir Ṭāz that al-Mujāhid was bringing soldiers and weapons that would create a chaotic situation (*fitnah*) in Mecca. The Egyptian amirs sent a message to al-Mujāhid warning him not to cause problems and to hand over Thaqabah as a hostage until his royal pilgrimage was completed. Al-Mujāhid is said to have seen no choice but to comply and a group of Egyptian soldiers was sent to assist him, but instead they disarmed his soldiers and prevented him from parading with his royal insignia (*ghāshiyah*). Al-Maqrīzī adds that al-Mujāhid was biding his time, waiting until the amir Ṭāz left so that he and Thaqabah could take over Mecca.

Then an altercation occurred on the day the pilgrims were in Minā.<sup>58</sup> The commander of the Egyptian caravan, Buzlār, called out to al-Mujāhid or one of his retinue, who refused to come to him. When one of Buzlār’s mamluks wounded one of al-Mujāhid’s soldiers, a fight broke out and both sides took losses. Soon ʿAjlān arrived with a large number of troops, but the amir Ṭāz told ʿAjlān to protect the pilgrims and leave the fighting to the Egyptians. In the end the Yemenis were defeated.<sup>59</sup> According to al-Maqrīzī, al-Mujāhid fled to his tent, but he was surrounded and the tent ropes were cut so that he and his sons were thrown to the ground and could not escape. Al-Mujāhid’s possessions were looted and al-Mujāhid himself was captured, along with his *wazīr*. A large number of his troops were killed, as were many pilgrims. Thaqabah took advantage of the chaos to escape his guards. It is reported that Ṭāz placed al-Mujāhid’s mother and his women under the protection of ʿAjlān.

There is some confusion in Ibn Kathīr’s account, even though he suggests that there were still people around who had memories of the event. First, he briefly mentions the fighting between al-Mujāhid and the Mamluk amirs on Thursday,

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He was later imprisoned and blinded in al-Karak. For details on his life, see Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfī*, 6:362–65.

<sup>58</sup>This is called a strange event (*kāʿinah gharībah*) by Ibn Kathīr (*Al-bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*, 16:356), who notes the killing took place in Wadi Muḥassir, and a great strife (*fitnah ʿuzmā*) by al-Zāhiri (*Nayl al-amal fī dhayl al-duwal*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmūrī [Beirut, 2002], 1:210).

<sup>59</sup>Ibn Kathīr (*Al-bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*, 16:358) claims that the Yemeni force suffered more casualties and that as a result many people looted their possessions.



12 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 751, that resulted in al-Mujāhid being taken in chains to Cairo.<sup>60</sup> The same event is treated by Ibn Kathīr in more detail for 752. He says the cause of the problem was the attempt by al-Mujāhid to replace the sharif ‘Ajlān with his exiled brother Thaqabah, causing ‘Ajlān to go to the Mamluk amir Buzlār and ask for help. This made the pilgrims fearful, but the Mamluk troops were patient, waiting to capture al-Mujāhid until the pilgrims had completed the sacrifice. On 12 Dhū al-Ḥijjah there was a battle between the Egyptian and Yemeni forces, with many of the Yemenis being killed. Al-Mujāhid fled but was taken prisoner and chained. His horses and camels were also seized and the Yemeni possessions were looted. In addition to al-Mujāhid, the Mamluk amir Baybughā Rūs and the previous deputy of Medina named Ṭufayl were also bound with chains and taken to Cairo. Ibn Kathīr does not explain why the two Mamluk amirs were seized, although he later notes that both Baybughā Rūs and al-Mujāhid were released from prison in al-Karak. Al-Dhahabī writes that the amir Ṭāz arrested Baybughā Rūs because he thought that Baybughā Rūs had made the pilgrimage without the permission of the sultan.<sup>61</sup> Ibn Taghribirdī states that al-Mujāhid did a number of shameful things in Mecca, including bringing 200 hunting dogs with him to the holy city.<sup>62</sup>

When the amir Ṭāz left Mecca, he took the Rasulid sultan with him, treating him honorably. In Muḥarram 752/March 1351 they entered Cairo with al-Mujāhid in chains. Upon meeting the Mamluk sultan, al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, the Rasulid sultan kissed the ground three times and his chains were removed after the amir Ṭāz commended al-Mujāhid’s behavior.<sup>63</sup> At this point he was treated as a guest in the Ashrafiyah palace, with a large stipend and servants. Al-Nāṣir Ḥasan granted the Rasulid sultan two robes of honor and permitted him to ride in the royal public procession. One condition of his release was that he should make an annual payment to the Mamluk court, as had been the Mamluk rule. Although it is said that he could have returned sooner, al-Mujāhid spent up to ten months in Cairo before his first attempted journey back to Yemen. During this journey he attempted to

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 16:356–57. This date is known as *nafr*, the day that the pilgrims depart from Minā.

<sup>61</sup>Al-Dhahabī, *Al-‘ibar fī khabar man ghabar*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (Kuwait, 1967), 6:284. The Meccan account of al-Sinjārī (*Manā’ih al-karam* [Mecca, 1998], 3:245–48) notes that Baybughā Rūs was arrested because his brother Manjik rebelled against the sultan. The editor of al-Sinjārī’s *Manā’ih al-karam* wrongly asserts in a footnote that al-Malik al-Mujāhid was the brother rather than son of al-Malik Mu’ayyad (2:358, n. 3).

<sup>62</sup>Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:10.

<sup>63</sup>Failure to kiss the ground before the Mamluk sultan would no doubt have angered him, as was the case for an Ottoman ambassador before Khushqadam (r. 865–72/1461–67), noted by Y. Frenkel, “Embassies and Ambassadors in Mamluk Cairo,” in F. Bauden and M. Dekkeche, eds., *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics* (Leiden, 2019), 249.



flee the accompanying amir Qasṭamur, who complained to al-Nāṣir.<sup>64</sup> As a result, al-Mujāhid was arrested again in Yanbuʿ and sent to prison in al-Karak.<sup>65</sup> Ibn Iyās suggests that the reason he was sent back from Yanbuʿ was that he tried to kill the Mamluk amir sent with him.<sup>66</sup> According to al-Maqrīzī, al-Mujāhid was in al-Karak from the end of Rabiʿ I until early Shaʿbān, which would have been about four months.<sup>67</sup>

Al-Mujāhid was eventually freed from al-Karak due to the intercession of the Mamluk amir Baybughā Rūs and sent to Cairo, where the Mamluk amirs reprimanded him.<sup>68</sup> Borrowing money from the Kārim merchants, he bought mamluk soldiers, horses, and camels for his return journey. Ibn Taghrībirdī writes that it was his mother who asked the merchants to grant him a loan, after she sealed off their items stored in Aden, Taʿizz, and Zabīd.<sup>69</sup> The amount was said to be 100,000 dinars, which he paid back after his eventual return to Yemen.<sup>70</sup> Al-Nāṣir gave him another robe of honor; then sent him along the Nile and eventually by ship from ʿAydhāb. According to al-Maqrīzī, al-Mujāhid arrived back in Taʿizz in Dhū al-Ḥijjah 752/February 1352 and soon wrote to al-Nāṣir that he was preparing the promised gifts. Most of the sources note that his mother had been in charge in Yemen during his absence.

Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī adds an anecdote about the journey of al-Mujāhid up the Nile after the second release.<sup>71</sup> Al-Mujāhid’s horse became thirsty and went to drink from the Nile. When the horse had quenched its thirst, al-Mujāhid burst into tears, so he was asked about this. Al-Mujāhid responded that an astrologer had told him that he would rule Egypt when he drank from the water of the Nile. When he saw his horse drinking from the Nile, he realized this to be a fateful sign that he would never be able to rule Egypt. A similar but somewhat confusing anecdote is related by al-Zāhirī about a prediction from an astrologer. This referred to an event at the madrasah known as Aqbughawīyah, where his horse threw him after a fire (*nār*) erupted. After this dreadful event, he knew his kingdom would

<sup>64</sup>Qasṭamur al-Manṣūrī (d. 770/1369) was the financial controller (*shādd al-dawāwīn*), according to al-Maqrīzī, *Caliphate and Kingship*, 407 n. 371.

<sup>65</sup>This is reported in al-Maqrīzī, but al-Zāhirī (*Nayl al-amal*, 1:213) and Ibn Iyās (*Badāʿiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʿiʿ al-duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā [Cairo, 1960], 1:537) say he was first taken to Alexandria.

<sup>66</sup>Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿiʿ al-zuhūr*, 1:537.

<sup>67</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 2:495–596.

<sup>68</sup>Ibn Kathīr, *Al-bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*, 16:360. He arrived back in Cairo on Saturday, 9 Shaʿbān 752/1 October 1351, according to Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah* (Cairo, 1929–72), 10:264.

<sup>69</sup>Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:264.

<sup>70</sup>According to al-Zāhirī (*Nayl al-amal*, 1:212), the amount was 400,000 dinars.

<sup>71</sup>Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-durar al-kāminah*, 3:50. This is later repeated by al-Shawkānī (*Al-badr al-ṭālīʿ*, 484), noting that al-Mujāhid had been informed by his astrologers while in Yemen.





not continue.<sup>72</sup> After al-Mujāhid's release, the sharif Thaḡabah visited Cairo and was made co-regent of Mecca with his brother 'Ajlān. Thaḡabah borrowed a considerable amount of money from Mamluk amirs, as well as merchants, in order to buy horses, mamluks, weapons, and the service of some soldiers. It is noted that no one in Mecca had news of what had happened to al-Mujāhid in Egypt until the Egyptian pilgrimage came to Mecca in 753/1352.

### Kidnapping in Mecca: The Meccan View

In *Al-iqd al-thamīn*, Taḡī al-Dīn Muḡammad ibn Aḡmad al-Fāsī, the well known early-fifteenth-century historian of Mecca, presents a biography of al-Mujāhid, including his seizure in Mecca.<sup>73</sup> Al-Fāsī notes that along with Thaḡabah were two of his brothers, Sanad and Muḡhāmis, but this disturbed 'Ajlān, the brother who was then in charge of Mecca and had exiled all of them. So 'Ajlān warned the Egyptian amir Ṭāz that al-Mujāhid wanted to cover the Ka'bah with his *kiswah*, take control of Mecca, and drive the Mamluks out. Ṭāz accepted this view since al-Mujāhid had not made cordial overtures to him.<sup>74</sup> On the day of *nafr* (12 Dhū al-Ḥijjah), the commander of the Egyptian pilgrims went to Minā, but although al-Mujāhid wanted to cause trouble, he had few servants with him and thus fled to the mountain above Minā. When the place where he stopped was taken by force, he had no choice but to surrender to the Egyptians. He was granted safety and treated with honor before being taken to Egypt as a prisoner. In Cairo al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ḥasan honored him and treated him well, ordering that he be returned to his country.

When al-Mujāhid reached al-Dahnā' in Wadi Yanbu' on his first attempt to return home an event occurred which resulted in his imprisonment in the Mamluk stronghold of al-Karak. The reason for this, according to al-Fāsī, was that the Rasulid sultan did not think it proper to be accompanied by a Mamluk amir on his return. He offered the amir a piece of land in Yemen known as Ḥāfah Munīḡ if he would let him go on his way. The amir asked some of the sultan's servants where

<sup>72</sup> Al-Zāhirī, *Nayl al-amal*, 1:378. This account does not mention the horse drinking water from the Nile.

<sup>73</sup> Al-Fāsī, *Al-iqd al-thamīn*, 5:258–59, #6061. Al-Fāsī ends his biography of al-Mujāhid by noting that there are many things in the sultan's life that are not recorded in al-Khazrajī's *Al-uqūd*, a source he consulted. See also his *Shafā' al-gharām bi-akhbār al-harām* in Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka* (Leipzig, 1859), 282–83. Other Meccan accounts of the kidnapping can be found in al-Sinjārī, *Manā'ih al-karam*, 2:358–62, and 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ṭabarī, *Al-arj al-miskī* (Mecca, 1996), 122.

<sup>74</sup> On a previous pilgrimage in 742/1342 al-Mujāhid had lavished gifts on the Egyptian amirs and given them robes of honor.



this was and they responded that it was the place reserved for lepers in Taʿizz.<sup>75</sup> When the amir realized al-Mujāhid's ruse, he wrote to the court in Egypt and orders were given for the Rasulid sultan to be returned and imprisoned in al-Karak. He remained there until his release was mediated by the Mamluk amir Baybughā Rūs, and he returned again to the Mamluk sultan in Cairo. In his *Shafāʾ al-gharām bi-akhbār al-ḥarām*, al-Fāsī notes that al-Mujāhid visited Jerusalem and Hebron after his release from al-Karak.<sup>76</sup> Finally, al-Mujāhid was sent home, sailing from ʿAydhāb and Suwakin and landing on the Yemeni coast at al-Ḥādith during Dhū al-Ḥijjah 752/January 1352. Al-Mujāhid's soldiers met him and his mother handed back control of the country. According to al-Fāsī, he was not weakened by this absence except for rebellion in the area of Baʿdān. The Meccan author notes that after him the Rasulid rulers were weak. Al-Mujāhid briefly prohibited merchants from traveling from Yemen to Mecca out of anger at ʿAjlān's behavior. Three years later he sent a major gift to the sultan in Cairo, as had been demanded.

Writing a few decades after al-Fāsī, the Meccan historian Ibn Fahd provides more details on the kidnapping in Mecca.<sup>77</sup> Ibn Fahd notes that al-Mujāhid came to Mecca with his mother and sons (*awlād*), as well as 700 horsemen and 800 archers. When he reached Ḥalī in Yemen's north he was met by the sharif Thaqabah and his brothers Sanad and Mughāmis. This year the Egyptian pilgrimage included up to forty amirs of all ranks. The amir Baybughā Rūs, who brought with him 150 armed mamluks, left Cairo two days before the others. The commander of the Egyptian forces was the *atābak* Ṭāz, who had 60 horsemen, with Buzlār in charge of the pilgrims. Because the minister Manjak, brother of Baybughā Rūs, had been seized for attempting a coup, the sultan wrote to Ṭāz and Buzlār to be wary of Baybughā Rūs. A message was also sent from the sultan about his brother to Baybughā Rūs, who was told he could either complete the pilgrimage or return right away. He was dumbfounded by this news and told the sultan's messenger that "We are all mamluks of the sultan" (*Kullunā mamālik al-sulṭān*). When he met up with the other two major amirs, they seized him and disarmed his personal mamluks (*tulbah*). He was then escorted directly to prison in al-Karak.

Having set the stage regarding the Mamluk amirs, Ibn Fahd writes that al-Mujāhid entered Mecca with the three brothers of the sharif ʿAjlān, who was in

<sup>75</sup>The same story is told by Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:78, and by Bā Makhramah, *Tārīkh thaghīr ʿAdan*, 180, who probably saw this in the earlier Mamluk and Meccan sources. The *ḥāfah* in the dialect of Taʿizz is the same as *ḥārah*, in the sense of a part of a town (Muḥammad Jāzim, personal communication). There is no known Yemeni placename of Muniḥ, although this term is used for a mountain in the central Arabian desert of al-Dahnāʾ (Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān* [Beirut, 1988], 5:217).

<sup>76</sup>Wüstenfeld, *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka*, 283.

<sup>77</sup>Ibn Fahd, *Ithāf al-warāʾ*, 3:244–53.



charge and had forbidden them to enter. We are told that al-Mujāhid did not do anything good and was not well received by the local residents or the other sharifs, nor by the Egyptian amirs. ‘Ajlān was told that al-Mujāhid was waiting for the Egyptians to leave, so he could put Thaqabah in charge of Mecca and take ‘Ajlān in chains back to Yemen. With this news, ‘Ajlān went to warn Buzlār and the other amirs about what al-Mujāhid was planning. If they did not do something to stop this, ‘Ajlān said, he would be forced to abandon Mecca and return with them to Cairo. On 13 Dhū al-Ḥijjah, as the Yemeni troops were spread out in Minā and preparing to leave, the plan was hatched to capture al-Mujāhid, since he had only a few guards with him. The Mamluk forces surprised him in his tent and people on both sides were killed, so al-Mujāhid decided not to resist due to the sacredness of the time and place. At first he fled up to the mountain, then realized that he needed to give himself up to prevent further loss of life. He was placed on a mule and taken, with the respect due his rank, to the Egyptian camp, where a special tent was set up for him. The horses and other items taken from him and his Yemeni forces were returned, and his mother and son were put under the protection of ‘Ajlān. Meanwhile, ‘Ajlān’s three brothers escaped in the direction of Yemen.

The turmoil was not over, however: a group of Meccan sharifs decided to plunder the Egyptian forces and set al-Mujāhid free but were stopped by ‘Ajlān. The Egyptians considered seizing ‘Ajlān, thinking he might try to take al-Mujāhid from them. ‘Ajlān responded by assembling a large force but did not prevent the Mamluk troops from leaving, which they did immediately. Ibn Fahd now adds another dimension to the entry of al-Mujāhid into Mecca. In addition to what was said earlier, he writes that ‘Ajlān had taken up arms, ready to fight his brother Thaqabah, causing the Egyptians to suspect that the Rasulid sultan was planning to replace ‘Ajlān with Thaqabah after they left. The amirs told al-Mujāhid that anyone entering Mecca must not do so with arms and that Thaqabah should be given over as a hostage until the pilgrimage was ended. Al-Mujāhid agreed, which pleased the amirs, but the Rasulid sultan would not be allowed to enter Mecca with armed guards or with the *ghāshiyah*, the royal saddle emblem of his authority. The story is then told, similar to the version in the Mamluk sources, of the altercation in Minā that led to fighting and the eventual capture of al-Mujāhid. In this account, however, the amir Baybughā Rūs was still in Mecca and taken in chains along with al-Mujāhid to Yanbu‘, from where the amir was then sent directly to al-Karak. Unlike the account by al-Fāsī, no explanation is given about the problem in Yanbu‘ that led to returning al-Mujāhid to Egypt, nor does Ibn Fahd mention that al-Mujāhid was imprisoned in al-Karak. Finally, al-Mujāhid arrived via ‘Aydhāb to Zabīd on Wednesday, 18 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 752/February 1352. The same year Thaqabah, now in control of the port of Jiddah, levied stiff customs on the Yemeni merchants who arrived there. The loss of revenue from Jiddah



forced ʿAjlān to impose new taxes on date palms in Mecca and confiscate horses and property. The next year al-Mujāhid prevented the Yemeni merchants from traveling to Mecca, out of anger over what had happened there.<sup>78</sup>

## Comparing the Sources

One of the most interesting results in comparing the sources is that the Rasulid texts provide virtually no details about what happened to al-Mujāhid during his fourteen-month absence. The only Rasulid era source that mentions that he was imprisoned in al-Karak is the *Tārīkh al-Shaʿbī*; this source attributes the kidnapping to the jealousy (*hasad*) of the Meccan *ashrāf* and their anger at his bringing soldiers to Mecca.<sup>79</sup> The Rasulid chronicle known as *Al-kitāb al-zāhirī*, which covers events up until 840/1436, simply claims that he went on the pilgrimage in 751 and returned from Egypt in 752, commenting that his entry into Egypt made a great biographical story (*sīrah ʿazīmah*).<sup>80</sup> Al-Malik al-Afḍal describes his father's sojourn in Yemen as such a total success that the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir feared for his own rule; no mention is made of al-Mujāhid's humiliation and imprisonment. The lack of detail on al-Mujāhid in Egypt was no doubt intentional in the major Rasulid chronicles of al-Khazrajī, who as a court historian presented the Yemeni sultans in a positive light.<sup>81</sup> Without the details provided in the Mamluk and Meccan texts, our knowledge of the experience of al-Mujāhid in Mecca and Egypt would have been very one-sided and present the Rasulid sultan as a victim.

Later Mamluk historians had access to al-Khazrajī's work, although they added many more details about the kidnapping. The Mamluk historians who lived or wrote during the time of the kidnapping include al-Ṣafadī (d. 1363) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373), but only Ibn Kathīr describes the kidnapping.<sup>82</sup> The Meccan scholar al-Yāfiʿī (d. 1367), of Yemeni origin, does not mention the kidnapping in his *Mirʾāt al-jinān wa-ʿibrat al-yaqzān*.<sup>83</sup> The accounts provided by al-Maqrizī almost a century

<sup>78</sup>Ibn Fahd, *Ithāf al-warā*, 3:263.

<sup>79</sup>This is from the manuscript of Abū Bakr ibn Dāwūd al-Shaʿbī, who died around 800/1398. I am grateful to the Yemeni historian Muḥammad Jāzim for providing me with a copy of the relevant manuscript pages.

<sup>80</sup>Al-Ḥāsib al-Maṣrī, *Al-kitāb al-zāhirī fī tārikh al-dawlah al-Rasūliyah bi-al-Yaman*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥibshī (Beirut, 2010), 80.

<sup>81</sup>For example, al-Khazrajī does not mention that al-Malik al-Ashraf ʿUmar was poisoned by two slave girls, perhaps to make his brother al-Muʿayyad sultan, while several of the Mamluk sources do.

<sup>82</sup>Al-Ṣafadī in his *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr wa-aʿwān al-naṣr* (ed. Aḥmad al-Arnāwāt and Turkī Muṣṭafā [Beirut, 1998], 2:251) mentions the early problems facing al-Mujāhid, but says nothing about the kidnapping in this text. Ibn Kathīr, *Al-bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*, 16:356–57.

<sup>83</sup>Al-Yāfiʿī, *Mirʾāt al-jinān wa-ʿibrat al-yaqzān*, ed. Khalil Manṣūr (Beirut, 2012).





after the events expand on what has survived from the earlier sources, although there were no eyewitnesses alive when he was writing. There are a number of differences between the Mamluk and Meccan texts regarding how al-Mujāhid was captured. Al-Maqrīzī writes that al-Mujāhid had fled to his tent, which collapsed on him and his son, but this is not found in any of the other sources. Most sources suggest he had tried to flee up the mountain from Minā but found no escape. While both Mamluk and Meccan sources mention the seizure of the Mamluk amir Baybughā Rūs, Ibn Fahd provides the most details about the reason for this. Both al-Maqrīzī and al-Fāsī note that al-Mujāhid was released from al-Karak due to the mediation of Baybughā Rūs. There are differences in the Mamluk sources regarding where al-Mujāhid was imprisoned, most saying al-Karak but some adding Alexandria.

The Mamluk sources include a few details that might best be called anecdotal embellishment, meaning that they provide interesting or entertaining pieces of information that go beyond the thread of description in the texts. There is little reason to doubt that al-Mujāhid was kidnapped, given the wide range of sources that relate this. However, unique and at times fanciful anecdotes in a single source raise questions about their veracity. For example, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī relates the story of al-Mujāhid being promised the Mamluk kingdom if he drank the water of the Nile, but when his horse drinks from the Nile, he knows this can never happen and breaks down crying. Another example is the statement by Ibn Taghribirdī that al-Mujāhid brought 200 hunting dogs with him to Mecca. This may have happened, but it is also a way to denigrate al-Mujāhid's plan to wrest control of Mecca away from the Mamluks. A story that has the markings of possible fantasy is the claim by the Meccan al-Fāsī, who probably had no access to an actual eyewitness to the kidnapping, that al-Mujāhid had tried to bribe the accompanying Mamluk amir with what turned out to be a leper colony in Ta'izz. Given the obvious wealth that al-Mujāhid had in Yemen, it is hard to believe that he would have tried this kind of trick or that his personal servants would have given an accurate answer. It is more likely that he tried to escape control of his amir, as reflected in several other sources.

Some accounts of what happened are obviously fictitious. In the Meccan *Manā'ih al-karam* of al-Sinjārī, the history titled *Bughyat al-khāṭir wa-nuzhat al-manāẓir* by Ibn Kānī is said to report a unique story by the Yemeni Tahirid historian Ibn al-Dayba.<sup>84</sup> This was reportedly related by the muezzin of a mosque in Zabīd. In the last third of the night a stranger surprised the muezzin at a time

<sup>84</sup>Al-Sinjārī, *Manā'ih al-karam*, 2:360–61. Ibn Kānī (d. ca 1040/1630) was an official of the Ottomans in Yemen. A brief version of this account is found in Ibn al-Dayba' (*Qurrat al-ʿuyūn*, 2:363) and in Yahyá ibn al-Ḥusayn (*Ghāyat al-amānī*, 516) and is attributed to al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, 387.



when few would go out for fear of the town guards. This man went to the market area where animals were butchered, then turned into a dog and mingled with the other dogs there. The muezzin was almost blinded by this sight, but he heard the dogs asking what news the newcomer had and where he came from. The new dog said he had come from ʿArafah in Mecca and that al-Malik al-Mujāhid had been seized by the Egyptians, so he was on his way to Aden to inform his fellow jinn.<sup>85</sup> After this, the muezzin recited two lines of poetry from the minaret.<sup>86</sup> When he came down, he found two individuals who took him to see al-Mujāhid's mother, who asked the reason for his verses. He said there was no reason, but she insisted that he had indeed informed her through this poetry about the sultan's kidnapping. She then told him to keep quiet until they could find out the truth. When the pilgrims returned, they confirmed that al-Mujāhid had been kidnapped and taken to Egypt. Apart from the reference to a man being a jinn who becomes a dog, al-Mujāhid's mother would have been in Mecca when the kidnapping happened. Another version of this tale is found in the margin of the published edition of al-Khazraji's *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, where the dog brings the news on the day that the sultan was kidnapped.<sup>87</sup>

Later Yemeni sources provide few details on al-Mujāhid's kidnapping, although it is not clear whether their sources were Rasulid or Mamluk. In his chronicle *Bughyat al-mustafid*, from the Tahirid period, Ibn al-Daybaʿ (d. 944/1537) does not mention the kidnapping but simply says that al-Mujāhid went on the pilgrimage and reached (*balagha*) Egypt in the company of the pilgrims, staying there awhile and returning safely the following year.<sup>88</sup> Writing almost five centuries later, al-Shawkānī reports a disagreement when al-Mujāhid attempted to place his *mahmil*, the pilgrimage litter, before that of the Egyptians. This caused a fight and the consequent seizure of al-Mujāhid.<sup>89</sup> Al-Shawkānī adds that the people of Mecca tried to support him, which is the opposite of what is generally reported in both the Mamluk and Meccan sources. He does mention that al-Mujāhid attempted to flee when at Yanbuʿ on his first attempt to return to Yemen and was

<sup>85</sup> A version of this tale is found in the margin of the published edition of al-Khazraji's *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, 387, where the dog brings the news on the day that the sultan was kidnapped.

<sup>86</sup> As reported by al-Sinjārī, these are:

“*Yā rāqīdu al-layli masrūrān bi-awwalīhi, In al-ḥawādithah qad yaṭruqnā aṣḥarā / lā taʿmannā bilaylin ṭāba awwaluhu, fa-rabba akhiri laylin ajjaja al-nārā*”

(Oh happy sleeper at the start of the night, events will be known to us before daybreak / We should not believe what is good news at night's start, for the last of the night possesses blazing fire.)

<sup>87</sup> Al-Khazraji, *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, 387.

<sup>88</sup> Ibn al-Daybaʿ, *Bughyat al-mustafid*, 98. In his *Qurrat al-ʿuyūn*, 363, Ibn al-Daybaʿ does note that he was seized in Mecca and taken to Egypt, but does not mention imprisonment there.

<sup>89</sup> Al-Shawkānī, *Al-badr al-ṭālīʿ*, 483.



imprisoned in al-Karak. It appears that al-Shawkānī had access to sources other than al-Khazrajī and no doubt had read the Mamluk history of the period.

## Conclusion

Reading the sources on the life of al-Mujāhid, two main things stand out. First, his rule over Yemen was tenuous from the start, culminating in being held in the Mamluk realm for fourteen months and enduring rebellions by his sons. Rasulid forays into the heartland of the Zaydī imams ceased with no mention in the Rasulid sources of attacks on Dhamār, Ṣanʿāʾ, or Ṣaʿdah. The main Rasulid towns in the Tihāmah, including the summer residence of the sultan in Zabīd, were subject to continual attacks by local tribesmen and some were devastated. There is little credible evidence that al-Mujāhid himself was much of a warrior, nor that he inspired loyalty, even in his own family. His vengeance was often ruthless, and he was at times convinced of nonexistent plots against him. He showed pity on farmers in Zabīd, but this was a pragmatic move since his tax revenues would dwindle considerably without their crop production. The contributions he made to his realm were often for his own pleasure, such as expanding the garden palace grounds of Thaʿbāt in Taʿizz. Although it has been claimed that the reigns of al-Mujāhid and his son al-Afḍal were a golden age (*al-ʿaṣr al-dhahabī*) in Yemen, this was not due to their political or military success.<sup>90</sup>

A second issue is the discrepancy between the praise heaped upon al-Mujāhid by al-Khazrajī and other Rasulid sources in contrast to the biographical details that emerge about his life. The list of qualities provided by al-Khazrajī reflects the tendency of this court historian to eulogize former Rasulid sultans.<sup>91</sup> Thus, al-Khazrajī describes al-Mujāhid as fortunate (*saʿīd*), intelligent (*ʿāqil*), reasonable (*rashīd*), generous (*ajwad*), sensible (*labīb*), courageous (*shujāʿ*), awe-inspiring (*muhīb*), knowledgeable (*ʿālim*), and clever (*dhakī*). In his biographical text, al-Khazrajī expands on the qualities of al-Mujāhid, adding that he was very ambitious (*ʿālī al-himmah*), honorably minded (*sharīf al-naḥs*), of liberal character (*karīm al-akhlāq*), of superb nature (*ḥasan al-shamāʿil*), with a mild-mannered disposition (*layyin al-ʿarīkah*), superb in governing (*ḥasan al-siyāsah*), having a keen eye (*ṣādiq al-firāsah*), and fortunate in his undertakings (*saʿīd al-ḥarakah*), among other positive traits.<sup>92</sup> In contrast, the Mamluk historian Ibn Taghrībirdī suggests that al-Mujāhid was pompous (*dhakhm*), clever (*shahm*), brave (*shujāʿ*), and haughty

<sup>90</sup> As noted by ʿAbd al-Wāhid al-Khāmīrī, the editor of al-Malik al-Afḍal's, *Al-ʿaṭāyā al-sanīyah*, 72.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:106, 5:124. Similar praise is given by his son, al-Malik al-Afḍal, *Al-ʿaṭāyā al-sanīyah*, 480.

<sup>92</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿiqd al-fākhīr*, 3:1492.



(*mutakabbir*).<sup>93</sup> The Mamluk characterization seems a more accurate portrayal based on what is known about his trials and tribulations.

Some sources claim that al-Mujāhid was more learned than the previous Rasulid sultans.<sup>94</sup> Al-Fāsī quotes the view of the Meccan shaykh ʿAbd Allāh al-Yāfiʿī that al-Mujāhid was the best of the Rasulid house.<sup>95</sup> Given that he became sultan at such a young age, it does not seem that he could have had as much education before ascending to the throne as his father, uncle, or grandfather. Nevertheless, there are at least six books ascribed to him.<sup>96</sup> One is on agriculture, as referenced repeatedly in his son al-Afḍal's later agricultural treatise, *Bughyat al-fallāhīn*. His text on horses and veterinary science called *Al-aqwāl al-kāfiyah wa-al-fuṣūl al-shāfiyah fī ʿilm al-khayl* has survived.<sup>97</sup> This provides details on Yemen, including a rare discussion of elephants. According to al-Ahdal, al-Mujāhid's work on animals was quoted in the major zoological work of the late-fourteenth-century Mamluk scholar al-Damīrī.<sup>98</sup> Al-Mujāhid is also credited with a diwan of poetry and a text on falcons and pigeons now located in the Rampur Raza library of Uttar Pradesh, India. In the mixed manuscript prepared for al-Malik al-Afḍal there is a short text by al-Mujāhid on distances between places in Yemen.<sup>99</sup> Given the lack of copies of most of his works, as well as no record of citation, it is hard to judge the quality of his intellectual pursuits. It is also possible that some of his texts were ghost written.

Al-Ahdal states that al-Mujāhid was trained in *fiqh*, astronomy, and astrology (*falak* and *nujūm*), geomancy (*raml*), and the like.<sup>100</sup> It is claimed that he had memorized the Shafīʿī book *Al-tanbīh fī al-fiqh* of Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī.<sup>101</sup> Like his predecessors, al-Mujāhid sponsored a number of religious institutions in Yemen as well as in Mecca. In 731/1331 al-Mujāhid built a madrasah, mosque, and *khān*

<sup>93</sup>Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:79.

<sup>94</sup>For example, Ibn al-Daybaʿ, *Bughyat al-mustafīd*, 98. Al-Ahdal, *Tuḥfat al-zaman*, 492, claims he was more learned than both his father and grandfather.

<sup>95</sup>Al-Fāsī, *Al-ʿiqd al-thamīn*, 5:260. Al-Yāfiʿī, originally from Yemen, was a major scholar in Mecca.

<sup>96</sup>Al-Ḥibshī, *Maṣādir al-fikr al-Islāmī fī al-Yaman* (Abu Dhabi, 2004), 652–53.

<sup>97</sup>*Al-aqwāl al-kāfiyah wa-al-fuṣūl al-shāfiyah fī al-khayl*, ed. Yaḥyá al-Jabbūrī (Beirut, 1987), based on the Berlin manuscript. The British Library ms. is called “Al-aqwāl al-kāfiyah wa-al-fuṣūl al-shāfiyah fī ʿilm al-bayṭar”; see Charles Rieu, *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1984), 553–54. There are also two copies in Paris; see Baron de Slane, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes* (Paris, 1883–95), 508. His “Kitāb fī al-khayl wa-ṣifathā wa-anwāʿhā wa-bayṭarahā” (Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyah MS 107) may be the same as the published text, according to al-Ḥibshī, *Maṣādir*, 652.

<sup>98</sup>Al-Ahdal, *Tuḥfat al-zaman*, 492.

<sup>99</sup>Varisco and Smith, *The Manuscript of al-Malik al-Afḍal al-Abbās*, 274–76.

<sup>100</sup>Al-Ahdal, *Tuḥfat al-zaman*, 528.

<sup>101</sup>Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:76.





in Ta'izz, staffing the madrasah with scholars and assuring its finances through *waqf*.<sup>102</sup> Three years later he built a small mosque in the royal garden palace of Tha'bāt.

The life story of al-Mujāhid encapsulates the decline of the Rasulid dynasty as a major regime in the region. As Éric Vallet suggests, “La capture du sultan en 751/1351 fut un tournant décisif dans les relations entre les différents pouvoirs de la mer Rouge.”<sup>103</sup> His reign was never secure, even from members of his own family. His survival is all the more remarkable for the instability that characterized Yemen during his reign, the second longest of the Rasulid sultans. After the rule of al-Mujāhid's son and grandson, the last seven sultans survived only five decades before being overthrown by local rivals known as the Tahirids. After al-Mujāhid's kidnapping, there was no further attempt by the Rasulids to exert major influence in Mecca. The extent of their domain continued to shrink with gains made by the Zaydī imams, renegade Kurds, and independent local tribes. The Mamluks eventually gained control over Yemen, defeating the last Tahirid sultan ʿĀmir ibn Dāwūd in 945/1517, the same year they were themselves conquered by the Ottomans.

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<sup>102</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:48, 5:59. For other details on the buildings he sponsored, see al-Fāsī, *Al-ʿiqd al-thamīn*, 5:620; al-Khāmīrī in al-Malik al-Afḍal, *Al-ʿaṭāyā al-sanīyah*, 73–78; and Richard Mortel, “Madrasas in Mecca during the Medieval Period: A Descriptive Study Based on Literary Sources,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 60, no. 2 (1997): 241–42. For details on the madrasah set up by al-Mujāhid in Ta'izz, see Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAlī al-Akwaʿ, *Al-madāris al-Islāmīyah fī al-Yaman* (Damascus, 1980), 173–77.

<sup>103</sup> Vallet, *L'Arabie marchande*, 690.



## Book Review

Jo Van Steenbergen, ed., *Trajectories of State Formation across Fifteenth-Century Islamic West Asia: Eurasian Parallels, Connections and Divergences* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020). Pp. 361, 4 maps (Rulers and Elites: Comparative Studies in Governance Series). (Published Open Access.)

Reviewed by Anne F. Broadbridge, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

This book is the product of two grants from the European Research Council, which funded a collaborative project on fifteenth-century state formation in the Mamluk Sultanate of Cairo. It concluded in a stimulating conference, “Whither the Early Modern State? Fifteenth-Century State Formation across Eurasia: Connections, Divergences and Comparisons,” at Ghent University, 10–12 September 2014. As noted by the editor, Jo Van Steenbergen, publication of the proceedings took longer than anticipated, appearing only in 2019.

The volume opens with an introduction and two chapters on theoretical approaches to state formation in “West-Asia” (i.e., the Middle or Near East), followed by seven case studies of regional dynasties. These are further subdivided into two sections: one on centers of power in the Mamluk Sultanate and Ottoman Empire, and a second on peripheries of power, meaning bureaucratic, scholarly, or mercantile elites in smaller locales. The theoretical chapters employ technical terminology from historical sociology like “structuration,” “trajectories,” “potentialities,” “resource flows,” “leadership configurations,” “centripetal and centrifugal forces,” and “globalizing diachronic approaches.” The case studies refer to this language, but otherwise employ traditional historical terminology.

The conference proceedings present an investigation of the entire region rather than focusing on a single dynasty or state. The goals of the organizers appear in the Introduction and Chapter 1, both written by Jo Van Steenbergen, and Chapter 2, co-authored by Van Steenbergen and Jan Dumolyn. These goals were two-fold: first, to use historical sociology and theories of state formation, which have been largely dominated by Europeanists, to investigate state formation in “West-Asia.” This discussion takes place in Chapter 2, and involves all the usual suspects—Max Weber, Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, and Charles Tilly, among others—as well as regional specialists who grappled with Europeanists’ ideas, among them Marshall Hodgson, Ira Lapidus, Michael Chamberlain, Timothy Mitchell, Cemal Kafedar, Karen Barkey, John E. Woods, Beatrice Manz, and Maria Subtelney, with a surprise cameo by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1405). The scholars in this project sought to ap-



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ply these theories to West-Asian society, and also convince Europeanists to look outside their own geographically-bounded work. Overall inspiration came from a 2009 French project under historian Patrick Boucheron, who saw the fifteenth century as a period of “opening” and global connection and moved away from the prevalent teleological model wherein certain events (like Constantinople, 1453) are seen merely as precursors to a modern world dominated by Europe. When applied to the Middle East, this approach recasts the fifteenth century from the century of Ottoman rise or a prelude to the Gunpowder Empires and the modern world into a century that was important on its own terms.

The organizers’ second goal was to invite specialists to think comparatively in light of other parts of the region, especially since so many states and polities were dominated by Turko-Mongol ruling elites that shared practices, interests, and habits. Thus, Chapter 1 presents a general history of the region, written in broad-brush style with an emphasis on charismatic male figures from regional dynasties (i.e., Shah Rukh’s influential wife Gawharshad does not appear). This chapter casts Temür’s career as a watershed for fifteenth-century historical and political trends: the rise of the Temürid family, the empowerment of new mercantile, scholarly, and military local elites, and the emergence of the Mongol Jalayirids and the Türkmen confederations alongside the Mamluks and (resurgent) Ottomans. A key concept is centripetal-centrifugal tension, which here can be understood as the centralizing tendencies of the most powerful elites, governing from cities or camp cities, in opposition to local elites and agents, who gained authority from the central court but operated outside it in peripheral realms. Despite the interest this approach should spark, however, the organizers note that it has not yet been widely used by Middle East specialists.

The volume then moves into the case studies. In the first, Kristof D’hulster combines historical sociology with history to propose investigating the *atābak* as a necessary precursor to the position of sultan in the fifteenth century. Rather than seeing succession as an ad hoc process fueled by the personal charisma and loyalties enjoyed by individual candidates, the *atābakīyah* provided essential experience for the job of sultan, thus rendering the *atābakīyah* an “institutional constraint” on the path to the sultanate—those who did not serve as *atābaks* were unlikely to attain the sultan’s job.

Next, Albrecht Fuess uses a traditional historical approach to examine the ill-starred sultanate of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qāyṭbāy (r. 1496–98). As the son of a sultan, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad invoked an earlier, successful son-turned-ruler, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (d. 1341). Unfortunately for the later al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, the fifteenth-century process of Mamlukization, in which the political elite was reordered to simultaneously limit the highest positions to Royal Mamluks and open other opportunities for non-Mamluk elites, had so thorough-



ly transformed the institutions and politics of the sultanate that he stood little chance of succeeding and died violently at the age of 16.

By employing a comparative and intertextual approach to Ottoman narratives of the state and state actors, Dmitri Kastritsis uses the Çandarlı bureaucratic family and the consumption of wine to analyze what we can know about the family and how they were treated by different historical sources—including anecdotes and rumors—for each author’s political, social, or ideological purposes. This careful approach to tricky material challenges dominant paradigms in Ottoman history by charting the development of a narrative of hostility to centralization.

Like Kastritsis, Beatrice Manz highlights the importance of a comparative approach to sources, although in her case not to untangle myths so much as to step outside the limitations of each genre. Doing so allows her to demonstrate that the great divide between Turko-Mongol rulers and their Iranian servitors was actually not so great as we have assumed, particularly in military matters, and that local elites in fact regularly trained for and participated in fighting, including the defense of cities. Although Manz does not explicitly mention the Hodgsonian *a’yān-amīr* model of societal division here, this article serves as a useful counter to it.

John Meloy applies the abovementioned concept of Mamlukization to the relationship between the rulers in Cairo and the sharifs and judges of Mecca in the fifteenth century. He sets the scene in the fourteenth century, when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (d. 1341) in Cairo began to appoint judges in Mecca, usurping that prerogative from the Rasulids of Yemen. He also implemented an anti-Zaydī (Shiite) policy in his relationship to the Meccan sharifs, even though many in that family were Zaydīs. By the fifteenth century, rulers in Cairo were increasing the number of judicial appointments in Mecca, incorporating judicial families into the structure of the distant sultanate, and consolidating their hegemony over the sharifs, all of which demonstrate how central state control can extend over elites at the periphery.

Patrick Wing studies the al-Muzalliq family of Syrian merchants, who aligned their commercial interests with sultanic desires to expand trade and reassert control over Damascus after its ruin by Temür in 1400–1. As merchants to India, the al-Muzalliq family was well-positioned to join the *khwājakīyah*, a new class of fifteenth-century traders who worked closely with the ruling elite. By virtue of the first al-Muzalliq’s savvy positioning, the family was able to amass wealth, engage in strategic marriages with other trader families, endow public buildings, and branch into corollary positions as judges or military officials. This demonstrates Syria’s unique position in the sultanate in this century and highlights a new path to joining the political elite, which no longer had to begin in the citadel or a madrasah.





George Christ presents the final case study, which reveals a dispute between Venetian merchants in Alexandria and the Mamluk sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (d. 1421). By analyzing key pages copied from a now-lost Venetian consul's ledger, Christ makes a compelling case that the Venetian consul was less a foreign agent acting in Alexandria than a quasi-sultanic official, with salary, rights, and privileges appropriate to a particular rank in the sultanate's bureaucracy. Like the previous studies by Manz, Meloy, and Wing, this demonstrates the incorporation of local elites—even foreign nationals—into a state apparatus.

Overall, the book presents an interesting theoretical exercise fleshed out by individual case studies. The strongest idea to emerge from it is that of the complex, negotiated, and re-negotiated interactions between center and periphery, which is very well illustrated by the studies. Another valuable point is the usefulness of working comparatively in light of the history of other regional dynasties, rather than keeping within a single dynastic format.

A few critiques. Although the project focuses on post-Chinggisid elites in the fifteenth-century world, this reviewer would have liked to see some discussion of the powerful Chinggisid legacy, especially among the Temürids. In particular, legitimacy and ideology were explicitly omitted on the grounds that not enough scholarship has been done on them, but this reviewer suggests that state formation cannot be divorced from ideas. Where are the Temürids without Chinggis Khan's example? Where are the Ottomans without Osman's dream? Temür's ideology in particular has been well studied and could have appeared. Furthermore, at times some authors link the Türkmen and Temürids, but they are not entirely comparable. Rather, the Temürids, as noted, are better understood in light of the Chinggisids, while the Türkmen confederations differed significantly both ideologically and in historical origin. Finally, as this reviewer knows from personal experience, proceedings of a conference can be seriously delayed in publication. Although the scholars and editors are not to blame for this, it does mean that new topics may arise during the delay that then cannot appear in the volume. In this case, such later lines of inquiry include new conversations about slavery in the Islamic world and strategic marriages in Turco-Mongolian politics.



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ء	’	خ	kh	ش	sh	غ	gh	م	m
ب	b	د	d	ص	ṣ	ف	f	ن	n
ت	t	ذ	dh	ض	ḍ	ق	q	ه	h
ث	th	ر	r	ط	ṭ	ك	k	و	w
ج	j	ز	z	ظ	ẓ	ل	l	ي	y
ح	ḥ	س	s	ع	‘				
		ة	h, t (in construct)			ال	al-		
		َ	a	ُ	u	ِ	i		
		َـ	an	ُـ	un	ِـ	in		
		آ	ā	وُ	ū	يِ	ī		
		أ	ā	وُـ	ūw	يِـ	īy (medial), ī (final)		
		ى	á	وِ	aw	يِـ	ay		
						يِـ	ayy		

Avoid using apostrophes or single quotation marks for ‘*ayn* and *hamzah*. Instead, use the Unicode characters ‘ (02BF) and ’ (02BE).

Capitalization in romanized Arabic follows the conventions of American English; the definite article is always lower case, except when it is the first word in an English sentence or a title. The *hamzah* is not represented when beginning a word, following a prefixed preposition or conjunction, or following the definite article. Assimilation of the *lām* of the definite article before “sun” letters is disregarded. Final inflections of verbs are retained, except in pausal form; final inflections of nouns and adjectives are not represented, except preceding suffixes and except when verse is romanized. Vocalic endings of pronouns, demonstratives, prepositions, and conjunctions are represented. The hyphen is used with the definite article, conjunctions, inseparable prepositions, and other prefixes. Note the exceptional treatment of the preposition *li-* followed by the article, as in *lil-sultān*. Note also the following exceptional spellings: Allāh, billāh, lillāh, bismillāh, mi’ah, and ibn (for both initial and medial forms). Words not requiring diacritical marks, though following the conventions outlined above, include all Islamic dynasties, as well as terms which are found in English dictionaries, such as Quran, sultan, amir, imam, shaykh, Sunni, Shi’i, and Sufi. Common place-names should take the common spelling in American English. Names of archaeological sites should follow the convention of the excavator.

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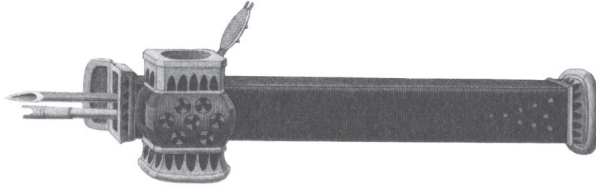
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