

The *Maḥmal* Legend and the Pilgrimage of the Ladies of the Mamluk Court

During the Ottoman period in Egypt a legend was created which attributed the origin of the *maḥmal* tradition to Shajarat al-Durr. As women's topics are receiving increasing attention in scholarly research these days, the persona of Shajarat al-Durr ought to be revisited. More particularly, the circumstances that led to the association of the Egyptian pilgrimage with a female royal person deserve our interest. For this purpose, references to the earlier pilgrimage of the Abbasid queen Zubaydah and to the pilgrimage performed by the elite women of the Mamluk court will be examined and compared in the following pages in order to decode the legend about Shajarat al-Durr.

Mamluk history begins with an extraordinary episode—the rule of a female sultan, Shajarat al-Durr, a Turk, who began her career as a slave. She carried the title of *sultānah* and was elected by men to fulfill this function. In her name the *khuṭbah* was delivered and coins were minted.¹ One tends sometimes to disregard this fact because of its exceptional character. In her status as *sultānah* in the medieval Muslim world, Shajarat al-Durr was of course an almost unique case.² Her accession to the throne of Egypt was largely related to the complex and unstable political situation of that time, the end of the Ayyubid dynasty during Louis IX's Crusade against Damietta and the absence of an adequate successor to Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb.³ Although her reign as *sultānah* lasted only three months, or more precisely eighty days, Shajarat al-Durr's involvement in politics covered a much longer period, namely, the seventeen years during which, as the favorite concubine, then as the wife of two consecutive sultans, she was far from being a passive spectator of political events, using all available means to play an active role in decision-making at the sultan's court. This role began during al-Ṣāliḥ's fight for the throne of Egypt, when she accompanied him to prison along with his closest followers. It ended with her decision to murder her second husband Aybak.

Al-Maqrīzī, who seems to have been familiar with Shajarat al-Durr's *waqf* documents, attributes to her important buildings in Cairo. These included her husband's mausoleum as well as a garden, a *ḥammām*, and a palace near the cemetery of Sayyidah Nafīṣah where she also founded a *madrasah* with her own mausoleum.⁴ Shajarat al-

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¹The main source on Shajarat al-Durr is still Götz Schregle's monograph, *Die Sultanin von Ägypten. Šajarat ad-Durr in der arabischen Geschichtsschreibung und Literatur* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1961).

²Only another Turk of the slave dynasty of Delhi, Raḍīyah Begum, at almost the same time (1236-1240), achieved such a career, but she was a sultan's daughter.

³Peter Thorau, *The Lion of Egypt: Sultan Baybars I and the Near East in the Thirteenth Century*, trans. P. M. Holt (London: Longman, 1992), chapters 4 and 5.

⁴al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa-al-I'tibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār*, 2 vols. (Būlāq: Dār al-Ṭibā'ah al-Miṣrīyah, 1270/1853-54), 2:20, 134, 374; Nūr al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb wa-Bughyat al-Ṭullāb*



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Durr's buildings and pious foundations were substantial; a look at their architecture reveals, moreover, a political mind and a great sense of innovation behind their design.⁵ The *miḥrāb* of her mausoleum, for example, includes a kind of rebus; its conch is adorned with glass mosaics representing a tree whose branches carry mother-of-pearl, instead of flowers or fruits. This motif refers to her name, "Tree of Pearls." The mausoleum she erected for al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb adjoins the *madrasah* he had founded in the city center for the four schools of Sunnī Islamic law.⁶ It was the first royal mausoleum in Cairo, and as Christel Kessler observed, the first funerary building meant to assume a role in the life of the city.⁷ Placed in the central part of the main avenue, it projects boldly on three sides with large windows on each facade. No doubt, Shajarat al-Durr attached great importance to the commemoration of her husband through whom she derived the legitimacy of her status and authority. She gave him a solemn funerary ceremony, attended by his *mamlūks*, including her husband and successor al-Mu'izz Aybak; at that time she had already abdicated in his favor. Quran reciters were hired for the service of the tomb, as stipulated in Shajarat al-Durr's *waqf* deed. Shajarat al-Durr erected, moreover, a *madrasah* with her own mausoleum in the cemetery. This was a further innovation, as it was the first time in Cairo that a ruler built a personal mausoleum as part of his own religious foundation. This became a tradition throughout the entire Mamluk period. Whereas al-Ṣāliḥ's *madrasah* was in the heart of al-Qāhirah, her own complex, which included a *ḥammām* and a palace, was in the cemetery of Sayyidah Nafīṣah. The choice of the cemetery of Sayyidah Nafīṣah as the place for her burial was also an innovation of Shajarat al-Durr; earlier members of the Ayyubid dynasty had been buried at the mausoleum of Imam al-Shāfi'ī. While she sought likewise the neighborhood of a holy person, she preferred a cemetery connected to a female saint, that of Sayyidah Nafīṣah where a number of other holy women and relatives of the Prophet such as Ruqayyah, 'Ātikah, and Sukaynah were also buried or commemorated in funerary monuments.⁸ This choice proved to be shrewd, for despite the scandalous end she suffered—being thrown half-naked from the Citadel—Shajarat al-Durr's image in historiography as well as in popular tradition became increasingly exalted, as Schregle demonstrates, so that she acquired an almost holy character. The presence of her mausoleum amidst a number of mausoleums of holy women contributed to her sanctification.

Shajarat al-Durr's buildings are, therefore, among the most political monuments of medieval Cairo. Her religious funerary complex had an impact on the female funerary architecture of the Baḥrī Mamluks. The *madrasah*-mausoleum, built two decades later for Fāṭimah Khātūn, a wife of Sultan Qalāwūn, is similarly located in the neighborhood of Sayyidah Nafīṣah.⁹ Moreover, several women of the Qalāwūn family built mausoleums

fī al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Mazārāt wa-al-Tarājim wa-al-Biqā' al-Mubārakāt (Cairo: Maktabat al-Azhar, 1356/1937), 118.

⁵K. A. C. Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt* [hereafter *MAE*], 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952-59; reprint, New York, 1978), 2:135f.; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "The Lost Minaret of Shajarat ad-Durr at Her Complex in the Cemetery of Sayyidah Nafīṣah," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 39 (1983): 1-16.

⁶Creswell, *MAE*, 2:94ff.

⁷Christel Kessler, "Funerary Architecture within the City," *Colloque international sur l'histoire du Caire* (1969) (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, n.d.), 257-268.

⁸Nūr al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb*, 114f.; Behrens-Abouseif, "Minaret", 6.

⁹Aḥmad 'Abd al-Rāziq, *La femme au temps des Mamlouks en Égypte* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie



for themselves attached to religious foundations, such as the *khānqāh*-mausoleum of Ṭuġhāy, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's wife (ca. 749/1348, *Index*, no. 247),¹⁰ the *madrasah* of Tatar al-Ḥijāzīyah, al-Nāṣir's daughter, (761/1360, *Index*, no. 36), the *madrasah* of Sultan Sha'bān's mother, (770/1368-69, *Index*, no. 125), and the mausoleum of Ṭulbāy, Sultan Ḥasan's wife (ca. 765/1364, *Index*, no. 80).

THE MAḤMAL

In his monograph on Shajarat al-Durr, Schregle refers to the epic known as *Sīrat Baybars*, which is a popular romance based on historical facts, and investigates the *suḷṭānah*'s image in it. In this epic, which acquired its final shape in the Ottoman period, the origin of the *maḥmal* is attributed to Shajarat al-Durr.¹¹ The *maḥmal* was the ceremonial palanquin that accompanied the pilgrim caravan from the reign of al-Zāhir Baybars until the reign of King Fu'ād in the 1920s. The earliest association of the *maḥmal* with the Egyptian pilgrimage caravan occurs in connection with Sultan al-Zāhir Baybars al-Bunduqdārī in 659/1266.¹² Al-Qalqashandī describes the *maḥmal* as a tent made of embroidered yellow silk and topped by a spherical finial made of gilded silver; it was paraded twice a year in the streets of Cairo.¹³ The use of yellow, the official color of the Mamluks, for the *maḥmal* during the Mamluk period indicates its emblematic and political character. The *maḥmal* tradition is distinct from that of the *kiswah*, or veil of the Ka'bah, which was also carried by the pilgrim caravan. The yearly dispatch of the *kiswah* was a prerogative of the caliphate since the early history of Islam, although some Saljuq sultans donated their own. Since the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate of Egypt, a *kiswah* was sent also from Cairo, this one being white, instead of the Abbasid black.¹⁴ The *kiswah* was not carried within the *maḥmal*, which remained an empty and symbolic palanquin. Al-Qalqashandī, in his history and description of the *kiswah*, writes that both were simultaneously prepared and dispatched in Cairo.¹⁵ A well-known miniature of the Baghdad school dated 1237 documents the existence of an Abbasid *maḥmal* at the time of the caliphate.¹⁶ Its shape corresponds very much to the description given by al-Qalqashandī of the Egyptian *maḥmal* and to the much later Egyptian *maḥmals*, including the one of King Fu'ād, now on display in the Ethnographic Museum in Cairo. In the seventeenth century it was covered with black silk embroidered with inscriptions in gold threads on the four sides.¹⁷ In the Baghdad miniature it has a gold color. The Egyptian

orientale, 1973), 20.

¹⁰The numbers of the monuments are those listed in *The Index of the Islamic Monuments of Cairo*, Department of Egyptian Antiquities.

¹¹Schregle, 104f.

¹²al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma'rīfat Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah and Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāh 'Āshūr (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'līf wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr, 1970-73), 1:544.

¹³al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā fī Ṣinā'at al-Inshā'*, 14 vols. (Cairo: al-Mu'assasah al-Miṣrīyah al-'Āmmah lil-Ta'līf wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Tibā'ah wa-al-Nashr, 1964), 4:57; Jacques Jomier, *Le Maḥmal et la caravane égyptienne des pèlerins de la Mecque* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1953), 39f.

¹⁴Yūsuf Aḥmad, *al-Maḥmal wa-al-Ḥajj* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Ḥijāzī, 1937), 241f.

¹⁵al-Qalqashandī, 4:276-284.

¹⁶Richard Ettinghausen, *al-Taṣwīr 'inda al-'Arab (Arab Painting)*, trans. Salman and Takrītī (Baghdad, 1973), 119.

¹⁷Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatnamesi*, vol. 10 (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1938), 432.



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maḥmal was not the only one, however, to appear in Mecca; there were also *maḥmals* from Yemen and Iraq, the Egyptian one having the most prominent position.¹⁸

After the fall of the Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad in 1258 and the establishment in 659/1261 of a symbolic caliphate by Sultan Baybars in Cairo, an event celebrated with great ceremony,¹⁹ it was natural that Baybars would also take over the Abbasid privilege of dispatching the *maḥmal* and the *kiswah* from his capital, Cairo. But to achieve this, he had first to eliminate the Rasulid presence from the Hijaz and bring it under Mamluk control. The Rasulid ruler of Yemen, al-Malik al-Muzaffar Yūsuf ibn al-Manṣūr, had taken advantage of the fall of Baghdad to bring the Hijaz, with the Holy Cities, under his control and have the *khutbah* spoken in his name. After having performed the pilgrimage in 659/1261, he provided the *kiswah* for several years, as successor of the Abbasid caliphs.²⁰ A competition resulted between Yūsuf and Baybars for the privilege of providing the *kiswah*,²¹ until 667/1269 when Baybars made his pilgrimage and established the dispatch of the *kiswah* as the acknowledged prerogative of the Mamluks of Egypt in whose name the *khutbah* of the Hijaz was now performed.²² As a palanquin, the *maḥmal* has obvious female connotations, although men sometimes also traveled in a *mihaffah*, which is the term used in Mamluk sources for the common palanquin. In his study of the Muslim pilgrimage, Gaudefroy-Demombynes has presented three possible interpretations for the *maḥmal*. The first is that it followed the ancient Arab tradition of having a litter with a high-ranking lady accompany military campaigns to incite the soldiers to fight. ‘Ā’ishah, the Prophet’s wife, played such a role in the Battle of the Camel.²³ The second interpretation views the litter as a royal symbol, whereas the third identifies it with a parasol. The third interpretation can be discarded; the two others should be considered and even combined.

Although Shajarat al-Durr herself is not mentioned in any source as having ever been to Mecca, and although Mamluk chronicles agree that it was al-Zāhir Baybars who introduced the *maḥmal* tradition to Egypt and who also performed the pilgrimage, it was Shajarat al-Durr with whom popular culture preferred to associate the pilgrimage and the palanquin, giving her a kind of patron role. This legend has been repeated by Lane and ‘Alī Mubārak,²⁴ the Turkish historian and traveler Evliya Çelebi similarly connects Shajarat

¹⁸Jomier, 48f.

¹⁹Annemarie Schimmel, “Kalif und Kadi im spätmittelalterlichen Ägypten,” *Die Welt des Islams*, 24 (1942): 5-127.

²⁰al-Rashīdī, *Ḥusn al-Ṣafā wa-al-Ibtihāj bi-Dhikr man Walá Imārat al-Ḥājj*, ed. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Aḥmad (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1980), 122f.

²¹Jomier, 30f.

²²Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, *al-Rawḍ al-Zāhir fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Zāhir*, ed. al-Khuwayṭir (Riyadh: n.p., 1976), 354ff.

²³Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Le pèlerinage à la Mekke* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1923), 161. Cf. Heinz Halm who alludes to the possibility that the origin of the *maḥmal* might be related to the *shamsah*, a kind of suspended oversize crown which Abbasid and Fatimid caliphs sent with the pilgrimage caravan to adorn the Ka’bah; “Al-Shamsa. Hängekronen als Herrschaftszeichen der Abbasiden und Fatimiden,” *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, ed. U. Vermeulen and D. De Smet (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1995), 126-138.

²⁴Schregle, 104ff.; Rudi Paret, “Sīrat Baybars,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 1:1126-1127; Edward Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: Dent, n.d.; reprint, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1954), 444f.; ‘Alī Mubārak, *al-Khiṭaṭ al-Tawfiqīyah al-Jadīdah*, 20 vols. (Bulāq, 1306/1888-89), 9:22.



al-Durr with the pilgrimage, however not with the *maḥmal*, but with the *kiswah*. Evliya Çelebi, who worked for the Ottoman government for several years in Egypt (1672-1680), reports that at that time the *waqf* of Shajarat al-Durr was quite substantial and included a number of villages which were endowed to provide the *kiswah* for the Ka‘bah.²⁵ The information he gives on *waqf* is usually trustworthy, as he was himself involved in the supervision of *awqāf* in Egypt. His association of the *kiswah* with Shajarat al-Durr, which is the earliest reference on this subject I could find, should not be entirely discarded, at least as long as the *waqfs* of the Ḥaramayn have not been consulted on this subject. What the exact origins of these *waqfs* are, or if they belonged to a namesake of the *sultānah*, is not possible to tell at the moment, as the Ḥaramayn archives are presently inaccessible. While he attributes the *kiswah* endowment to Shajarat al-Durr, Evliya Çelebi, who was quite familiar with Mamluk chronicles, confirms the fact that the *maḥmal* tradition went back to Baybars.

It is interesting to note that the *wakālah* of Dhū al-Faḡār in the quarter of Jamālīyah in Cairo is known popularly as Wakālat Shajarat al-Durr; it was there that in the late Ottoman period final work on the *kiswah* was performed before its departure.²⁶ Yūsuf Aḥmad, however, in his detailed documentation of the *kiswah* and its endowment, does not seem to have come across any reference to Shajarat al-Durr.

ZUBAYDAH

Shajarat al-Durr was not the first queen to be associated with the pilgrimage. There are multiple references in early and later medieval sources associating Zubaydah, Hārūn al-Rashīd’s wife, with the pilgrimage in most exuberant terms.²⁷ Zubaydah not only performed the pilgrimage, but she is moreover credited with spending an enormous fortune on infrastructural works to conduct water to Mecca after years of drought. According to Ibn Khallikān she spent as much as 50 million *dirhams*, and according to al-Mas‘ūdī 1,700,000 *dīnārs* for infrastructural works on the pilgrimage road.²⁸ She built hospices and cisterns, and dug wells and canals to conduct water from a distance of twelve miles to Mecca across mountains and valleys in the desert. When her intendant tried to warn her about the expenses, she answered “we shall do it, even if every stroke would cost a *dīnār*.” Today the “Darb Zubaydah” in the Hijaz still shows vestiges of the medieval infrastructure.²⁹ Zubaydah, whose wealth was fabulous, was also famous for her elegance and her creative fashion and life-style, which everybody imitated.³⁰ Among her innovations, she is reported to have been the first to use a palanquin of silver, ebony, and sandalwood adorned with clasps of gold and silver and draped with sable and silk of blue, green, yellow, and red colors. It is very likely that she used such a palanquin for her pilgrimage, which could be related to the origin of the *maḥmal* of Baghdad.

²⁵Evliya Çelebi, 10:155, 420, 422, 566.

²⁶Alī Mubārak, 9:22.

²⁷Nabia Abbott, *Two Queens of Baghdad* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

²⁸Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A‘yān*, 2 vols. (Cairo: n.p., 1310/1892-3), 1:189; al-Şafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1962), 14:176f., no. 242; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, ed. C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1861-1871), 8:289ff.

²⁹Sa‘d ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Rashīd, *Darb Zubaydah: The Pilgrim Road from Kufa to Mecca* (Riyadh: Riyadh University Libraries, 1980).

³⁰al-Mas‘ūdī, 8:304f.



Coming back to *Sīrat Baybars*, Shajarat al-Durr is identified there as an Abbasid princess, daughter of the caliph al-Muqtadir,³¹ who came to Egypt on her way to Mecca. There she met Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb who married her. In the epic, furthermore, Shajarat al-Durr adopts Baybars to replace her dead son Khalīl, who died as a child. She is thus represented as the daughter of a caliph and the adoptive mother of a sultan. This establishes another parallel between Shajarat al-Durr and Zubaydah, who was the only Abbasid queen to have been both a daughter and a mother of caliphs. The superposition of Shajarat al-Durr and the Abbasid queen Zubaydah could have been supported furthermore by another factor, which is the location of the complex of Shajarat al-Durr in the cemetery of Sayyidah Nafīṣah. The palace she had built there was later used as the residence of the Abbasid caliphs of Cairo.³² In the same neighborhood, moreover, close to the Sayyidah Nafīṣah shrine, is the undated mausoleum where most of the Abbasid caliphs of Cairo were buried and which was erected in the mid-thirteenth century.³³ In Shajarat al-Durr's own mausoleum one of the Abbasid caliphs was also buried, probably the last one.³⁴ The neighborhood connection with the Abbasid caliphs may have contributed to the association of Shajarat al-Durr with Abbasid tradition and Zubaydah.

MAMLUK LADIES

The legend attributing the *maḥmal* to Shajarat al-Durr took shape in the Ottoman period, i.e., three or four centuries after the *sultānah's* death. There must have been in the meantime an additional factor which contributed to keeping her image alive in such a way as to justify the creation of a legend which presented her as patron of the pilgrimage caravan, who visited the Holy Cities a dozen times and, moreover, provided the *kiswah* to the Ka'bah. This additional factor is to be sought in Mamluk historical accounts about the pilgrimages of women of the aristocracy. Mamluk historians show great interest, even enthusiasm, when referring to the pilgrimages of sultan's wives or concubines. They describe the pilgrimage of a *khawand*, or princess, as a spectacular event. It was the only occasion during which the Cairene population had an opportunity for contact with ladies of the Mamluk court. Otherwise, the sultans' wives made no public appearances; the celebrations they attended, such as marriages or circumcisions, took place within the Citadel. There were, of course, exceptions to this rule, which the historians found worth mentioning, like the occasion when Ṭughāy, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's favorite wife, joined her husband on an excursion to Giza. But even then, the princess was not supposed to be seen, and an order was given that on her way across Cairo, all shops should be closed and people kept off the streets.³⁵ When Sultan Khushqadam's eldest daughter died, her mother, Surbāy, was so grieved that she came down from the Citadel to visit her grave. This visit seems to have been such an exceptional event that it was mentioned in the short biography which al-Sakhāwī dedicated to Surbāy.³⁶ When Khushqadam's next wife, Shakarbāy,

³¹Schregle, 100f.

³²Nūr al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb*, 118; Ibn Duqmāq, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār li-Wāsiyat 'Iqd al-Amṣār* (Būlāq, 1314/1896-97), 4:125.

³³Creswell, *MAE*, 2:93.

³⁴Max van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum: Égypte* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1894-1903), 1:110f.

³⁵al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 2:240.

³⁶Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi' li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi'*, 12 vols. (Cairo, 1896),



traveled to Ṭanṭā to visit the shrine of Aḥmad al-Badawī, this excursion too was mentioned as something unusual. Ibn Taghrībirdī writes explicitly that it was uncommon for Mamluk ladies, *khawandāt*, to go out without their husbands, except for pilgrimage.³⁷ The departure on pilgrimage was the exceptional event which gave the population the opportunity of seeing the palanquin of a *khawand*; it added an exciting touch to a major religious celebration. Mamluk biographies of the elite ladies refer consistently to their pilgrimages, which some of them performed more than once. Just as the biographies or obituaries of amirs and sultans have to include a mention of their buildings and foundations, for the Mamluk ladies it was the pilgrimage that was recorded as a token of their piety. The reference to the pilgrimage was part of the aristocratic lady's image.

Historical accounts concerning the pilgrimages of the Mamluk ladies form a kind of topos. They never fail to include statements about the luxury and beauty of the female convoy. The earliest of these accounts is that referring to Ṭughāy who traveled for the first time in 721/1321 with unparalleled comfort and luxury; her pilgrimage is the feature which characterizes her in all biographical references. She traveled in state, accompanied by a ceremonial orchestra and sultanic banners, with an escort of high dignitaries and eminent amirs. Her caravan included cows to provide her with fresh milk all along the journey, so that she could have her customary hot toasted cheese twice a day, and also camels carrying pots planted with vegetables so that she could maintain a healthy diet. Ṭughāy was praised for her charitable deeds and donations during the journey. The sultan spent more than 80,000 *dīnārs* on her pilgrimage and, moreover, exempted the city of Mecca from taxes that year.³⁸ When referring to Ṭughāy, Ibn al-Dawādārī recalls another lady who had traveled centuries earlier, in a similarly lavish style; this was Jamīlah, the daughter of the Buyid prince Nāṣir al-Dawlah, who was the first princess to make her pilgrimage with camels carrying pots planted with vegetables. She made generous donations and bestowed many robes of honor.³⁹

Ever since Princess Ṭughāy went to Mecca, Mamluk historians have emphasized the elegance and luxury of the Mamluk ladies' outfits and entourage in their pilgrimage, the number of dignitaries who accompanied them, and most of all the charity and benevolence they demonstrated. Sultan al-Ghawrī's wife was exceptional in that she was criticized for her stinginess, especially when compared with her predecessor, Qāyṭbāy's wife.⁴⁰ If the display of elegance and pomp were exaggerated, however, it could be severely criticized, as in the case of some amirs' wives who went on pilgrimage in 746/1346 with extravagant accoutrement, competing with each other in lavishness, and bestowing robes of honor on their servants and bodyguards. This provoked the *qāḍī al-quḍāh*, in his sermon of the *'īd*, to denounce the ladies' extravagant behavior as a bad example for others.⁴¹ The episode

12:66.

³⁷Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Hawādīth al-Duhūr fī Madā al-Ayyām wa-al-Shuhūr*, ed. William Popper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930-1942), 8:593.

³⁸al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 16:447f., no. 481; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar wa-Jāmi' al-Ghurar*, ed. Hans Robert Roemer (Cairo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1960), 9:305; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Durar al-Kāminah fī A'yān al-Mi'ah al-Thāminah* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, 1966), 2:322, no. 2025; ʿAbd al-Rāziq, 298.

³⁹Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar*, 9:305f.

⁴⁰Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr fī Waqā'i' al-Duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Cairo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1961-75), 4:441.

⁴¹al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 2:693.



demonstrates the public significance of the pilgrimage of Mamluk ladies. Barakah, Sultan Sha‘bān’s mother, traveled in state with ceremonial orchestra and sultanic banners escorted by high dignitaries. She also had camels carrying pots planted with vegetables.⁴² Her liberality and benevolence along the way were so great that the year of her pilgrimage came to be named “the year of the Sultan’s mother.”⁴³

When a sultan’s wife made the pilgrimage in the company of her children, her notoriety was increased, as in the case of Sultan Īnāl’s wife, who traveled in 861/1457,⁴⁴ with two sons, one of whom was the *amīr al-ḥājj*, and two daughters, one married to the Grand Dawādār and the other to the second Dawādār. They traveled with three palanquins followed by a large convoy of dignitaries and courtiers. Khushqadam’s wife was accompanied in 868/1464 by her grandson who was the *amīr al-ḥājj* of that year. Ibn Taghrībirdī testifies that this caravan was even more impressive than that of Īnāl’s wife.⁴⁵ The fact that the *amīr al-ḥājj* belonged to the royal family was, of course, convenient. Qāyrbāy’s wife, Fāṭimah (d. 879/1475), had an impressive caravan and sat in a palanquin which Ibn Iyās describes at length, as made of silk embroidered with ruby, turquoise, and pearl.⁴⁶ Her escort included an orchestra for religious music. When al-Ghawrī’s wife went on pilgrimage with her ten-year old son, the sultan himself went to the departure station to ensure the tents were placed in accordance with the proper protocol.⁴⁷ It was observed that the sultan’s wife traveled in the palanquin once used by Qāyrbāy’s wife. Among the signs of luxury was a portable bath, made of copper, as well as utensils for heating water.⁴⁸

An unusual episode this year was that the camel with the *khawand*’s palanquin, on its way out, crossed the city in a procession. Usually the sultanic ladies would leave the Citadel on the desert road across the cemetery, without passing through the city, which was a prerogative of the Mamluk dignitaries. But that palanquin was empty and just for display. The *khawand* herself waited at the Citadel for its return so that she could ride, as was the tradition, through the cemetery. In Mecca the *sharīf* gave her a special reception having his courtiers carry her in her palanquin in a procession across the city. As for the *maḥmal* litter, it preceded the convoy of al-Ghawrī’s son. Although al-Ghawrī’s son was not *amīr al-ḥājj*, as in the cases of Īnāl’s and Khushqadam’s sons, he crossed the city in a particularly grand procession on his way to Birkat al-Ḥājj, the first caravan station on the pilgrimage road. The special pomp displayed on this occasion was probably due to the presence of an Ottoman ambassador in Cairo at that time, whom the Sultan wanted to impress, as he was inclined to do in such circumstances.

Unlike women of the Cairene bourgeoisie, the ladies of the Mamluk aristocracy are not described as scholars or poets; neither is their contribution in religious patronage of particular significance. ‘Abd al-Rāziq lists eleven buildings attributed to female patrons in Mamluk Cairo, and although this number is not high, a closer look reveals that not all of

⁴²Ibid., 2:177.

⁴³Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 2:7.

⁴⁴Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādīth*, 2:303f.

⁴⁵Ibid., 2:476; idem, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah*, 16 vols. (Cairo: n.p., 1963-72), 16:111, 115.

⁴⁶Ibn Iyās, 3:104.

⁴⁷Ibid., 4:409f.

⁴⁸Ibid., 4:433, 441.



them can even be definitely attributed to the ladies to whom they are ascribed.⁴⁹ The number of monuments which can safely be assigned to women of the aristocracy remains low, particularly if one considers their financial potential. Carl Petry estimates that the women's share in the benefits of *waqfs* of Mamluk sultans and amirs was substantial, amounting to about 28 percent, which makes them appear as active partners in the economy of the Mamluk elite.⁵⁰ The estates of females, moreover, were less likely to revert to the state or to be confiscated, as happened with the estates of sultans and amirs. Seen in comparison with the magnitude of religious and philanthropic institutions sponsored by the Mamluk sultans and amirs, the contribution of their female partners is not considerable. The fact that they did not act as founders of institutions does not exclude the possibility, however, that women could have sponsored existing foundations or made donations wherever they were needed. Historians often refer to such philanthropic deeds without specifying what they consisted of.

When a princess built a religious foundation, she did not supervise the construction herself, as the Mamluk amirs and sultans did, but assigned someone else to do it. As previously mentioned, Sha'bān built the *madrakah* for his mother. Whereas the inscriptions name Asalbāy, al-Nāṣir's mother, as the founder of the mosque of al-Fayyūm, Ibn Iyās writes that Sultan al-Nāṣir, the son of Qāyṭbāy, ordered its construction and that Shaykh al-Daṣṭūṭī supervised it.⁵¹ In the Mamluk period women did not perform their prayers in mosques, although they did visit shrines and saints' tombs, especially those in the cemetery. Mamluk mosques, unlike the Ottoman, have no accommodation for female worshippers. It is not even mentioned if the women of the sultan's harem ever visited the mosque in the Citadel which was located in the non-public section.

The pilgrimage remains therefore the foremost expression of piety for a female member of the Mamluk court. If we recall that more sultans' wives performed this religious duty than sultans themselves, of whom only four are recorded to have been to Mecca during their reign,⁵² the ladies' pilgrimage added to the sultanate's religious aura. The opulence displayed by a lady's caravan reflected the sultan's own magnificent image. It was part of the court ceremonial, which most Mamluk sultans eagerly cultivated. The pilgrimage of the aristocratic Mamluk ladies was thus a matter of great interest, its notoriety increasing over time. The procession of the empty palanquin of al-Ghawrī's wife at the end of the Mamluk period reflects the fascination associated with the image of a royal lady as pilgrim, which was not only a product of Ibn Iyās's fantasy. This episode may have been an intermediary stage in the formation of the *maḥmal* legend around Shajarat al-Durr, the empty palanquin becoming the symbol of an absent queen. How far Zubaydah's image contributed to the topos of the female aristocratic pilgrim is difficult to ascertain; she was the first Muslim queen to act as patron and sponsor of the pilgrimage and thus could have set an example and an ideal for later Muslim princesses.

⁴⁹The inscription on the mausoleum of Fāṭimah Khātūn is in the name of Qalāwūn. The mausoleum known popularly by the name of Umm al-Ashraf is not definitely identified and could have been erected by Sultan Barsbāy himself. In the case of the *madrakah* of Umm al-Sulṭān Sha'bān, the sources attribute the foundation to the sultan's mother, the inscription states that it was built by the sultan for his mother, perhaps with her funds. 'Abd al-Rāziq, 20-24.

⁵⁰Carl Petry, "A Paradox of Patronage in the Later Mamluk Period," *Muslim World* 73 (1983): 199.

⁵¹van Berchem, 4:556f.; Ibn Iyās, 3:392.

⁵²al-Zāhir Baybars, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, al-Ashraf Sha'bān, al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy.



Shajarat al-Durr's image in later Mamluk historiography, especially in Ibn Iyās's chronicle, became increasingly colorful and impressive.⁵³ Ibn Iyās is also the author who describes in the most detail the departure of the *khawands* on pilgrimage which suggests a certain acceptance for a female role in religious life. This acceptance is evidenced by al-Sakhāwī's last volume in his biographical encyclopedia which is dedicated to fifteenth century women, mainly from the scholarly milieu, the only one of its kind in the Mamluk period. It should be recalled here that there is no restriction in Islam on women's contribution to religious patronage, just as there were no restrictions for admitting women among the saints. In the Ottoman period several mausoleums of sultans and amirs were visited as saints' tombs, including that of Shajarat al-Durr; during this period also the cult of Sayyidah Zaynab acquired its prominence in Egypt's popular religious life. Her religious-funerary complex, the importance of her pious endowments and the use of her palace as caliphal residence in the Mamluk period contributed to enhance Shajarat al-Durr's memory and bestow it with religious radiance. Popular imagination, which needed a female symbol to associate with the empty *maḥmal*, found no better candidate than Shajarat al-Durr.

⁵³ Schregle, 25f., 46.

