

MAMLŪK STUDIES REVIEW

XIII

(2)

2009



MAMLŪK STUDIES REVIEW

XIII
(2)



2009

MIDDLE EAST DOCUMENTATION CENTER (MEDOC)
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PLEASE NOTE: As of 2015, to ensure open access to scholarship, we have updated and clarified our copyright policies. This page has been added to all back issues to explain the changes. See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/open-access.html> for more information.

MAMLŪK STUDIES REVIEW

PUBLISHED BY THE MIDDLE EAST DOCUMENTATION CENTER (MEDOC)

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

E-ISSN 1947-2404 (ISSN for printed volumes: 1086-170X)

Mamlūk Studies Review is an annual, Open Access, refereed journal devoted to the study of the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria (648–922/1250–1517). The goals of *Mamlūk Studies Review* are to take stock of scholarship devoted to the Mamluk era, nurture communication within the field, and promote further research by encouraging the critical discussion of all aspects of this important medieval Islamic polity. The journal includes both articles and reviews of recent books.

Submissions of original work on any aspect of the field are welcome, although the editorial board will periodically issue volumes devoted to specific topics and themes. *Mamlūk Studies Review* also solicits edited texts and translations of shorter Arabic source materials (*waqf* deeds, letters, *fatawa* and the like), and encourages discussions of Mamluk era artifacts (pottery, coins, etc.) that place these resources in wider contexts. An article or book review in *Mamlūk Studies Review* makes its author a contributor to the scholarly literature and should add to a constructive dialogue.

Questions regarding style should be resolved through reference to the MSR Editorial and Style Guide (<http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html>) and *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Transliterated Middle Eastern languages should conform to the system utilized by the Library of Congress (see the conversion chart near the end of this volume). The Style Guide covers Unicode fonts and diacritical marks, specifications for photos, maps and other graphics, text formatting, and other matters. Please read it carefully. Articles which diverge widely from the guidelines may not be accepted, and graphics which do not meet the requirements may not be usable. Submissions may be made by emailing the editor at the address below. Please contact the editor with questions about format, graphics or other matters before sending the article.

OPEN ACCESS

Mamlūk Studies Review is an Open Access publication. We believe that free and open access to scholarship benefits everyone. Open Access means that users, whether individual readers or institutions, are able to access articles and other content in *Mamlūk Studies Review* at no charge. All content published in *Mamlūk Studies Review* will be immediately and permanently free for anyone to use.

Content in *Mamlūk Studies Review* is copyrighted by its authors and published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY), which explicitly grants anyone permission to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, use, or link to the work, as long as users properly cite the author(s) and *Mamlūk Studies Review*. Please contact the editor regarding uses which may fall outside of this description. For more information, please see <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html>.

CONTACT

All communications should be sent to: The Editor, *Mamlūk Studies Review*, 5828 South University Avenue, 201 Pick Hall, Chicago, IL 60637, USA. The editor can be contacted by email at msaleh@uchicago.edu.

The logo that appears on the cover and title page was created by John E. Woods.

Readers of *Mamlūk Studies Review* are encouraged to visit MEDOC's websites, including <http://guides.lib.uchicago.edu/mideast> and <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu>. These sites provide links to back issues of this journal, The Chicago Online Bibliography of Mamluk Studies (a fully searchable database of thousands of primary and secondary sources), and other Mamluk Studies resources created and maintained by MEDOC. The site also has information about subscribing to the Mamluk listserv, an open forum for discussing all aspects of the history and culture of the Mamluk Sultanate. The Editors of *Mamlūk Studies Review* encourage readers to use the listserv to comment upon and discuss issues raised in the journal..



This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). *Mamlūk Studies Review* is an Open Access journal. See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information.

MAMLŪK STUDIES REVIEW

PUBLISHED BY THE MIDDLE EAST DOCUMENTATION CENTER (MEDOC)
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Mamlūk Studies Review is a biannual refereed journal devoted to the study of the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria (648–922/1250–1517). It appears in January and July. Beginning with volume XIII, no. 1, *Mamlūk Studies Review* will no longer appear in conventional print format, but will continue as an open-access online publication. The goals of *Mamlūk Studies Review* are to take stock of scholarship devoted to the Mamluk era, nurture communication within the field, and promote further research by encouraging the critical discussion of all aspects of this important medieval Islamic polity. The journal includes both articles and reviews of recent books. Submissions of original work on any aspect of the field are welcome, although the editorial board will periodically issue volumes devoted to specific topics and themes. *Mamlūk Studies Review* also solicits edited texts and translations of shorter Arabic source materials (waqf deeds, letters, fatāwá and the like), and encourages discussions of Mamluk era artifacts (pottery, coins, etc.) that place these resources in wider contexts. Transliterated Middle Eastern languages should conform to the system utilized by the Library of Congress. All questions regarding style should be resolved through reference to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th edition. Submissions should be composed with current word-processing software, and if possible should use a Unicode font, such as Charis SIL (see the website below for further information). Submissions may be made via email, but authors must also send a printed copy and a labeled CD-ROM which includes the article, all figures and illustrations, and any special fonts used. Articles which diverge widely from format and style guidelines may not be accepted, and illustrations which do not meet the requirements set forth by the editors may not be usable.

Readers of *Mamlūk Studies Review* are encouraged to visit MEDOC's websites, including <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/su/mideast> and <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu>. These sites provide links to The Chicago Online Bibliography of Mamluk Studies, a fully searchable database of thousands of primary and secondary sources, and The Chicago Online Encyclopedia of Mamluk Studies, as well as other resources created and maintained by MEDOC. The *Mamlūk Studies Review* page provides authors with editorial and style guidelines, instructions for creating and submitting illustrations, and information on using Unicode fonts for composition. The site also has information about subscribing to the Mamluk listserv, an open forum for discussing all aspects of the history and culture of the Mamluk Sultanate. The Editors of *Mamlūk Studies Review* encourage readers to use the listserv to comment upon and discuss issues raised in the Review.

E-ISSN 1947-2404 Copyright © 2009 Middle East Documentation Center, The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, in any form or by any means, electronic, photocopying or otherwise, without permission in writing from the Middle East Documentation Center.

The logo that appears on the cover and title page was created by John E. Woods. Olaf Nelson and Gregg Reynolds are providing valuable technical and conceptual assistance in the journal's transition to online format.

All communications should be sent to: The Editor, *Mamlūk Studies Review*, 5828 South University Avenue, 201 Pick Hall, Chicago, Illinois 60637, USA. The editor can be contacted by email at brcr@uchicago.edu.

MAMLŪK STUDIES REVIEW



Editor

BRUCE D. CRAIG, The University of Chicago

Associate Editor

MARLIS J. SALEH, The University of Chicago

Editorial Board

REUVEN AMITAI, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
DORIS BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
VANESSA DE GIFIS, Wayne State University
LI GUO, University of Notre Dame
TH. EMIL HOMERIN, University of Rochester
R. STEPHEN HUMPHREYS, University of California, Santa Barbara
DAISUKE IGARASHI, University of Tokyo
DONALD P. LITTLE, McGill University
JOHN L. MELOY, American University of Beirut
CARL F. PETRY, Northwestern University
WARREN C. SCHULTZ, DePaul University
BETHANY J. WALKER, Missouri State University
PATRICK WING, University of Redlands
JOHN E. WOODS, The University of Chicago

The Bruce D. Craig Prize for Mamluk Studies

The Bruce D. Craig Prize, carrying a cash award of \$1,000, is given annually by *Mamlūk Studies Review* for the best dissertation on a topic related to the Mamluk Sultanate submitted to an American or Canadian university during the preceding calendar year. In the event no dissertations are submitted, or none is deemed to merit the prize, no prize will be awarded. To be considered for the 2009 Prize, dissertations must be defended by December 31, 2009, and submitted to the Prize Committee by January 31, 2010. Submissions should be sent to:

Chair, Prize Committee
Mamlūk Studies Review
The University of Chicago
Pick Hall 201
5828 S. University Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637

Previous Prize Winners:

2004: Tamer el-Leithy, Princeton University, "Coptic Culture and Conversion in Medieval Cairo: 1293-1524."

2005: Zayde G. Antrim, Harvard University, "Place and Belonging in Medieval Syria, 6th/12th to 8th/14th Centuries."

2006: Nahyan A. G. Fancy, University of Notre Dame, "Pulmonary Transit and Bodily Resurrection: The Interaction of Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in the Works of Ibn al-Nafis (d. 1288)."

2007: No prize was awarded.

2008: No prize was awarded.

CONTENTS

OBITUARY

- Winslow W. Clifford, 1954-2009** 1
BRUCE D. CRAIG

ARTICLES

- Introduction** 3
JOHANNES PAHLITZSCH
- Mamluk Religious Policy** 7
JONATHAN P. BERKEY
- ʿIlm, Shafāʿah, and Barakah: The Resources of Ayyubid
and Early Mamluk Ulama** 23
DANIELLA TALMON-HELLER
- The Collection and Edition of Ibn Taymiyah's Works:
Concerns of a Disciple** 47
CATERINA BORI
- The Problem of Sufism** 69
RICHARD MCGREGOR
- Idealism and Intransigence: A Christian-Muslim Encounter
in Early Mamluk Times** 85
DAVID THOMAS
- A Christian Arab Gospel Book: Cairo, Coptic Museum
MS Bibl. 90 in its Mamluk Context** 105
LUCY-ANNE HUNT
- At the Limits of Communal Autonomy: Jewish Bids
for Intervention from the Mamluk State** 133
MARINA RUSTOW

BOOK REVIEWS

- Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Farghānī**, *Muntahá al-Madārik fī Sharḥ Tā'iyat Ibn al-Fāriḍ* 161
(Th. Emil Homerin)
- Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-Raḥīm ibn Aḥmad al-Kātib al-Malakī al-Muẓaffarī** 163
Ibn al-Mughayzil, *Dhayl Mufarrij al-Kurūb fī Akhbār Banī Ayyūb*
(Paul M. Cobb)
- Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras III: Proceedings of the 6th, 7th and 8th International Colloquium Organized at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in May 1997, 1998 and 1999**, edited by U. Vermeulen and J. Van Steenbergen 165
(Albrecht Fuess)
- Tamīm Ma'mūn Mardam Bek**, *Al-Malik Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī al-Ashraf wa-al-Wazīr Lālā Muṣṭafá Bāshā Dhī al-Sayf al-Aḥnaf* 169
(Igarashi Daisuke)
- Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣuwayrikī**, *'Ā'ishah al-Bā'ūniyah: Fāḍilat al-Zamān (865–922 H = 1460–1516 M)* 170
(Th. Emil Homerin)
- Daniella Talmon-Heller**, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria: Mosques, Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and Ayyūbids* 171
(Zayde Antrim)
- Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Nawājī**, *Ta'hīl al-Gharīb* 174
(Geert Jan van Gelder)
- Ibn al-Jī'ān**, *Al-Qawl al-Mustaẓraf fī Safar al-Malik al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy, and Anonymous, Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy* 177
(Li Guo)
- LIST OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS** 179



BRUCE CRAIG
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Winslow W. Clifford, 1954–2009

The teachers, colleagues, and friends of Wyn Clifford at the University of Chicago regarded him as a young scholar of uncommon promise. Had his career not been interrupted some twenty years ago by the first in a series of recurring cancers, there is no doubt he would have produced a much larger body of important scholarship in the field of Mamluk studies. Instead, from his early thirties onward, his daily existence was dominated by his determined, stoic will to survive. That he managed to do so for so long is remarkable and is a tribute to his grit and valor. He died on February 6 in Whittier, California. With his passing, our field has lost someone special.

Winslow Williams Clifford was born on September 13, 1954, in the Army hospital at the Presidio in San Francisco, California. At the age of 5, he moved with his family to Japan, where his father, Carleton, a colonel in the Army Corps of Engineers, was sent to work in the reconstruction after World War II. When the family returned to the U.S. after a lengthy stay in Japan, they settled in Whittier, where Wyn graduated from La Serna High School. He then entered Pomona College, in Claremont, California, from which he graduated, with honors, in 1975, with a degree in Early Modern European (Economic) History.

Wyn arrived at the University of Chicago at the age of 22 in 1976. Even though he would eventually spend more than half his life in Chicago, he pointedly clung to his Californian persona. He had come to Chicago to study Byzantine history, and in 1978 he was awarded a Master's degree in History, after defending his thesis "The Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon: Socio-Economic Aspects of the Byzantine East on the Eve of the Muslim Conquest," which he wrote under the direction of Walter E. Kaegi.

At some point in his studies, he developed an interest in Arab history. He then embarked on the study of Syro-Egypt, focusing on the history of the Mamluk Sultanate. During the next few years he occupied himself with an intensive reading program, formal seminars on Middle Eastern history, and learning Arabic, a task at which he was entirely self-taught, owing to his impatience with the conventional way in which it was taught. During these years he also worked as a research assistant, instructor, and librarian.

In 1994, while still a graduate student, he published two important articles in the influential German journal *Der Islam* on the relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Safavid rulers of Iran. These articles were based on a research paper he wrote for a seminar conducted by his mentor, John E. Woods. They



©2009 by Bruce D. Craig.

DOI: [10.6082/M1NG4NRS](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1NG4NRS). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1NG4NRS>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

displayed a striking level of intellectual maturity, and announced his arrival on the scholarly scene. The very next year he submitted his Ph.D. dissertation “State Formation and the Structure of Politics in Mamluk Syro-Egypt, 1250–1340.” In his dissertation, he introduced a new level of analysis in Mamluk history based on social theory. His skillful interpretation of Mamluk politics using models of social theory, much of which had been developed by a group of sociologists of the so-called “Chicago School,” was immediately recognized as ground-breaking and revolutionary, and established for him a unique niche in the field. It is a great pity that it was never published so that it could have reached a wider audience. His intention to expand and amplify it for publication was never realized.

In 1977, he was among a handful of scholars at the University of Chicago who founded this journal. He served as book review editor of *MSR* for a number of years, and contributed several influential articles, most importantly “Ubi Sumus? Mamluk History and Social Theory,” in which he called for a wider application of social theory to the analysis of Mamluk history.

Wyn was widely esteemed for his intellectual prowess and ability to articulate scholarly issues. His passing has deprived the field of one of its most promising voices. He was a man of refined taste; he loved vintage cars (especially BMWs), and appreciated the cut of a finely-tailored Italian wool suit. He was legendarily at home in the kitchen and knew his way around a wine cellar. Curiously, he never visited the Middle East. He is survived by his former wife, Mary Montgomery, of Chicago, and his fiancée, Elena Medellin, of Whittier.



Introduction

When Donald Little wrote his influential article on “Religion under the Mamluks” in 1983, his focus was on the religious beliefs and practices of the Mamluks themselves. Little comes to the conclusion that “out of religious conviction and personal piety in some instances but also with an acute sense of their own welfare,” they strove “to keep diverse religious forces in Egypt and Syria in a state of equilibrium.”¹ Since then great progress has been made, as Emil Homerin’s detailed, comprehensive survey of the study of Islam in the Mamluk period demonstrates.² The ulama are now seen as a heterogeneous group exhibiting a wide range of religious opinions. Furthermore, Sufism as well as what could be called popular religion have attracted much interest in the last few years. Homerin thus summarizes that “a two-tier model of religion with a high faith of a literate elite above the vulgar superstitions of the masses is an inaccurate and misleading description of religion in the Mamluk period.” Rather, “a wide array of regional and cultural interpretation and expression” of Islam could be found.³

It seems that recent study of religion in the Mamluk period has produced a quite nuanced and differentiated picture of Muslim society. However, Homerin was well aware of the fact that “in Mamluk domains, religion had three major instantiations: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.”⁴ Indeed the Mamluk state as other states in the eastern Mediterranean was characterized by its multi-ethnic and multi-religious character. Only an interdisciplinary approach will make it possible to illustrate the complexity of its social reality.⁵ The study of Sufism has already helped to widen Mamluk studies to include non-Muslim communities.⁶ However, one of the best examples for a new cross-cultural approach is Tamer El-Leithy’s still unpublished dissertation on Coptic culture and conversion in Mamluk Cairo. Using legal documents in addition to other sources, El-Leithy reconstructs everyday social practices and settlement patterns of converts and their families which quite often maintained their Christian faith.⁷

Thus, it is the goal of this theme issue of *Mamlūk Studies Review* to bring

¹ Donald P. Little, “Religion under the Mamluks,” *Muslim World* 73 (1983): 181.

² Th. Emil Homerin, “The Study of Islam in the Mamluk Domain,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 1-30.

³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵ See Johannes Pahlitzsch, “Mediators Between East and West: Christians Under Mamluk Rule,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 31-47.

⁶ See Richard McGregor’s contribution to this volume with further references.

⁷ Tamer El-Leithy, “Coptic Culture and Conversion in Medieval Cairo, 1293–1524 A.D.,” 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2005).



together scholars working on Islamic history and scholars interested in the history of oriental Christian or Jewish communities as a first step for interdisciplinary research on religion and religious culture in the Mamluk period. For the Muslim part of the society, Jonathan Berkey examines in his article on “Mamluk Religious Policy” the complex and nuanced relationship between religious and political authority. The most consistent feature of what could be called the religious policy of the Mamluks was the cultivation of a symbiotic relationship of the Mamluks with the ulama. Besides defending Syria and Egypt against the Mongols, the Mamluks’ main service to Islam consisted, according to Berkey, in embracing the active and munificent support of the religious establishment which in exchange validated the Mamluk regime.

While Berkey’s paper deals mainly with the Mamluks, Daniella Talmon-Heller studies how the ulama, the ones who possess *‘ilm* (knowledge of the religious sciences) secured power and prestige under the Ayyubids and Mamluks. It seems that the mastery of religious knowledge implied also the authority to mediate and intercede (*shafā‘ah*), and the capacity to bestow spiritual and material blessing (*barakah*), at times through the manifestation and manipulation of metaphysical power (*karamāt*). Muslim sainthood was obviously not reserved to Sufism.

One of the most influential as well as controversial religious scholars of the Mamluk period was Ibn Taymīyah. However, without students who were engaged in activities of copying, abridging, and commenting on his work, he would not have achieved the prominent position he still has today for many Muslims. Caterina Bori studies the process of the formation of a circle of students and the transmission of Ibn Taymīyah’s writings. Actually, by the time of his death the status of Ibn Taymīyah was more problematic and less consolidated than we are accustomed to considering it. So it is thanks to the action of a few determined students that his work was preserved and disseminated.

Ibn Taymīyah was a fervent advocate of his idea of Islam. However, to use the terms “orthodox” and “heretic” in this context is problematic. Richard McGregor points out that these terms have their roots in European intellectual history. For Islam it seems more appropriate to use the term “orthodox” as a historically determined qualifier indicating a position of relative dominance, rather than for signifying a supposedly unchanging and ahistorical core of doctrinal commitments. Especially with regard to Sufism these categories are of little analytical value.

Ibn Taymīyah also participated in the theological debate with an unknown Christian writer from Cyprus who sent his apologetic treatise to Ibn Taymīyah and his contemporary Muḥammad Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī at the beginning of the fourteenth century. This provoked both Muslim scholars to write long and disparaging replies which constitute the most substantial correspondence in the history of Christian-Muslim relations. David Thomas presents the Christian



text and al-Dimashqī's answer and analyzes the very different attitudes towards the respective opponent. While al-Dimashqī seems more concerned to appeal to Muslims and was not engaged on any deep level with the Christian treatise, the Christian author obviously hoped to start a serious debate in which his arguments were weighed dispassionately.

Contact between Christians and Muslims in the realm of art is studied by Lucy-Anne Hunt in her article on an illuminated Arab gospel book from the Coptic Museum in Cairo. The large size of the book and its pristine state indicates that it was intended to impress. Maybe one of its purposes was also to dissuade those who may have been tempted to convert to Islam. Its style of decoration points to a discourse representing Arab Christian culture within, and sensitive to, its Islamic environment.

The last contribution deals with the relations of the Jews with the ruling elite. Marina Rustow questions the stereotypical view of the Jews as passive victims of an oppressive Mamluk regime. Indeed this picture is based in many cases on the impression given by Muslim and Jewish sources, which both for different reasons tend to present the events as coming about on the initiative of the Muslims—be it the sultan and his amirs or the qadi—while in reality the Jews manipulated them to serve their own political aims.

Certainly the articles collected in this issue do not cover all aspects of the religious life of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Mamluk period. Papers on the Coptic community, the Syrian Orthodox church or other Christian communities, as well as articles on Jewish religious beliefs and practices at the time would have been welcome. What is particularly missing are further studies on the relationship of Muslims with Christians from the Islamicists' side. There is a certain danger in seeing the society of Mamluk Egypt and Syria almost exclusively as an Islamic entity. The influence as well as the numbers of the non-Muslim communities might have declined from the thirteenth century on, but still these groups must be taken into account as important factors of social life under the Mamluks despite the partial view of the sources that were written in their majority by the ulama.

Johannes Pahlitzsch
 Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz
 Guest Editor



©2009 by Johannes Pahlitzsch.

DOI: [10.6082/M1X06567](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1X06567). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1X06567>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

JONATHAN P. BERKEY
DAVIDSON COLLEGE

Mamluk Religious Policy

Al-Islām dawlah wa-dīn, runs a well-known adage in the Muslim world, one translated very imperfectly as “Islam is both a state and a religion.” The relationship between political and religious authority has been subject to distinctive pressures in the Muslim world, and it consequently has developed along a very different course than that with which most societies in the West are familiar. At the time of Muḥammad and the very early caliphs, there was probably little if any separation between the two. The subsequent history of the relationship between political and religious authority is, however, much more complex. With the gradual emergence of a distinctive group of religious scholars, the *ulama*, a locus of authority arose which challenged the undifferentiated character of the caliphs’ power. The failure of al-Maʾmūn’s *miḥnah* in the ninth century is sometimes, and with reason, taken to mark a fundamental turning point: that the *ulama* and not the caliphs (or, indeed, subsequent Islamic rulers who held different titles) were recognized as the ultimate arbiters of matters of doctrine. But the fallout of the *miḥnah* entailed nothing like a separation of church and state, and political authority remained deeply entwined with the religious authority exercised by the *ulama*. The power of caliphs, amirs, and sultans was conceptualized and justified in explicitly religious terms, and the fundamental purpose of any Islamic state was to implement the *shariʿah*, the law articulated by the jurists.

By the time of the rise of the Mamluk regime in the middle of the thirteenth century, more than six hundred years had elapsed since the rise of Islam—more than six hundred years of complex development in the relationship between political and religious authority. From a certain standpoint (including that of the Salafists in the contemporary world), this development was largely one of linear decline. Each turn of Islamic history brought with it a further distancing from the norms and ideals established in the foundational narratives. The caliphs had adopted the trappings and attitudes of mere monarchs; the caliphs’ political authority was supplanted by that of amirs and sultans; finally the caliphs, who in at least residual form marked a sort of chain of “apostolic” authority, were swept away by the Mongol tide. In this view, the rise of the Mamluk regime became a benchmark for what we could almost call a “secularization,” unwanted and un-Islamic, of political authority. The Mamluks themselves were of non-Muslim origin; they frequently indulged in frankly un-Islamic behavior; and they had

© The Middle East Documentation Center. The University of Chicago.



©2009 by Jonathan P. Berkey.

DOI: [10.6082/M1DZ06FH](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1DZ06FH). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1DZ06FH>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

overthrown a regime (that of the Ayyubids) that many Muslims had come to revere for its services in restoring the religion and the political fortunes of Islam in the eastern Mediterranean.

In fact, of course, the religious character of the Mamluk regime, and the relationship between religious and political authority under its rule, was much more complex and nuanced. One of the dominant themes of scholarship about the Mamluks over the last three decades has been to assert and trace the close and in many cases symbiotic relations between the political and religious establishments. For all that they might complain about the behavior of individual Mamluks, the *ulama* were generally appreciative of the regime and its services to the faith—whether that meant protecting it from external enemies, such as the Mongols and Crusaders, or providing the infrastructure of religious life at home. Through those moments at which political and religious authority intersected, we can trace the outlines of the religious policies of the Mamluk state.

Religious *policies*—although not, perhaps, a religious policy. It is difficult to discern an overriding, clearly-defined religious objective of the Mamluk state, or a coordinated series of sustained activities designed to accomplish a broad religious goal. It is much easier to detect such a coordinated policy in the earlier Sunni regimes which, to some degree, provided models for the Mamluks. The Saljuqs in Iraq and Iran, for example, particularly under their vizier Nizām al-Mulk, deliberately sought to strengthen the institutional infrastructure and ideological matrix of Sunni Islam in the face of the challenge posed by both Isma‘ili and Twelver Shi‘ism. The Ayyubids in Syria and Egypt, a more proximate model for the Mamluks, also left evidence of a coordinated religious policy. Their construction and endowment of madrasahs, and their efforts to promote and extend the authority of jurists and the various schools of law (*madhāhib*), served both to revitalize a Sunni community which (in Egypt) had atrophied under Fatimid rule, and to circumscribe the aspirations of a renascent Christian population emboldened by the prominence of Christian officers and soldiers under the later Fatimids—and also, perhaps, to provide a symbolic response to the perceived threat of the Christian Crusaders.¹ In both the Saljuq and Ayyubid cases, the religious challenges were clear—whether they emanated from Twelver crowds in the city of Baghdad, or Isma‘ili Assassins in their redoubts in Iran and the Jazirah, or Crusader principalities in Syria, or Armenian warriors controlling the apparatus of the state in Fatimid Egypt. Consequently, the responses of the new Sunni regimes to those challenges were equally clear.

¹ Ira M. Lapidus, “Ayyubid Religious Policy and the Development of the Schools of Law in Cairo,” *Colloque internationale sur l’histoire du caire* (Cairo, 1969), 279–86; Gary L. Leiser, “The Madrasa and the Islamization of the Middle East: The Case of Egypt,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 22 (1985): 29–47.



By contrast, there is an ad hoc and pragmatic feel to the religious policies of the Mamluk sultans. Individual sultans responded to particular religious crises and questions, but continuity between the religious policies of one ruler and his successors was mostly fortuitous rather than planned. There are any number of reasons why this should have been the case. In part it simply reflects the limited and extemporaneous character of most pre-modern political structures. In part it reflects the long duration of Mamluk rule and the differing circumstances faced by Mamluk rulers over that long period of time. (A similar stretch at the beginning of Islamic history would lead from the state of the Prophet at Medina, through the rule of the “rightly-guided” caliphs, through that of the Umayyads and early Abbasids, to the time of the *miḥnah* and beyond. What “religious policy” could be discerned in that broad sweep of history?) Above all, perhaps, the absence of a continuous religious policy reflects the contentious and factional character of Mamluk politics. The overriding concern of individual Mamluks was to acquire and retain power; what we might call ideological or theoretical concerns were distinctly secondary.²

Not surprisingly, the clearest evidence of a deliberate religious policy can be found in accounts of the earliest Mamluk sultans, especially Baybars (r. 1260–77). It is possible that this is an optical illusion, generated by the fact that Baybars’ reign has been studied more thoroughly than that of any other Mamluk ruler. But more likely it reflects Baybars’ response to the particular circumstances he faced, which required a more conscious and deliberate religious policy. Baybars was not the first Mamluk to rule, but he was in many ways the effective founder of the Mamluk state and was responsible for justifying the Mamluk seizure of power; the policies he adopted continued, often simply through inertia, to serve his successors thereafter. Moreover, external religious challenges were still palpable in the mid and late thirteenth century, in the form of Christian Crusaders and pagan Mongols. Most importantly, Baybars operated under the shadow of Ayyubid rulers (the memory of whom was still fresh), and many of his religious policies can be viewed as building upon those of his predecessors.

Baybars cemented the centrality of jihad as a foundation of his state—a stance that was of course consistent with that of most medieval Sunni regimes. For Baybars, as for the Ayyubids, the principal threats were both external and religious: Christian Crusaders and pagan Mongols. That fortuitous combination tended to sharpen the ideological importance of jihad—that is, to mark this religious duty as an aspect of state policy. As one of the heroes of the Mamluk victory over the Mongols in Syria, Baybars stood out as a *mujāhid*. It was he who set in motion the series of campaigns which ultimately resulted in the final expulsion of the Crusaders from

² See Robert Irwin, “Factions in Medieval Egypt,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1986): 228–46, esp. 236–37.



Palestine. His status as a holy warrior made the defense of Islam through jihad one of the principal pillars of Mamluk legitimacy, which it remained to the end of the regime. The language of both the literary record, especially chronicles of the period, and also official documents and decrees, reinforced the ideal of the sultan as *mujāhid*. Subjects of the Mamluks were reminded of their rulers' status as wagers of jihad in myriad ways. As Stephen Humphreys has speculated, even the external decoration of the congregational mosque constructed by Baybars in the northern suburbs of Cairo, which reminds the observer less of a mosque than a fortress, may have been intended to link the Mamluk regime with the fortunes of "Sunni Islam militant and triumphant."³

But jihad was as broad and malleable a principle in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries as it is in the twenty-first, and the Mamluk regime's rhetorical and ideological commitment to it should not suggest that they engaged in a continuous policy of fighting Islam's external enemies. When threats appeared, the Mamluks responded to them. Qalāwūn continued and all but brought to fruition Baybars' campaign against the remaining Crusader forces in Palestine (he died just as the Mamluk army that would conquer Acre was leaving Cairo)—an event which the Muslim historians trumpeted as full of religious import, although from Qalāwūn's perspective the campaign may have loomed larger for its commercial significance and its strategic relationship to the Mamluk war against the Ilkhanids.⁴ Even after the Crusaders had been driven from Palestine, the possibility of a new Crusader threat loomed over the Mamluks and their subjects—a threat that was not entirely fanciful, as the attack of Peter of Lusignan on Alexandria in 1365 would make clear. Concern over this perceived threat was one factor driving Barsbāy's invasion of Cyprus in 1426. But with the slow evaporation of the Crusader threat, and with the conversion of the Ilkhanids to Islam, the powerful and convenient concatenation of military and religious threats was broken. The strategic rivals of the later Mamluks were mostly Muslims—the Ak-Koyunlus, for example, or the Ottomans. In this altered environment, the obligation of struggling on behalf of religion might be understood differently—as confronting internal Muslim challenges to accepted Sunni norms or doctrines, for example, or even simply supporting the institutions and scholars who propagated the faith.⁵

³ R. Stephen Humphreys, "The Expressive Intent of the Mamluk Architecture of Cairo: A Preliminary Essay," *Studia Islamica* 35 (1972): 89–90.

⁴ Donald Little, "The Fall of Akka," in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of Professor David Ayalon*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Leiden, 1986), 159–81; Linda Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan: The Career of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and the Consolidation of Mamluk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678–689 A.H./1279–1290 A.D.)* (Stuttgart, 1998), 126–58, esp. 156–57.

⁵ Cf. the remarks of Stephen Humphreys concerning the Ayyubids, "Ayyubids, Mamluks, and the Latin East in the Thirteenth Century," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 2 (1998): 1–17.



A more concrete policy adopted by Baybars to legitimate his rule was his decision to recognize a member of the Abbasid family and refugee from the Mongol destruction of Baghdad as caliph in Cairo—or more accurately, to recognize in rapid succession two such Abbasid refugees. These two individuals, al-Mustansir and then al-Hākim, were the first of a series of Abbasids who reigned as caliphs in Cairo until its conquest by the Ottomans in 1517, although few outside Egypt recognized their authority. (There were some exceptions, foreign rulers who sought formal investiture from the caliphs, including the sultans of Delhi.) Few within Egypt took their authority seriously either, beyond recognizing the caliphs as titular heads of the Islamic community. For the most part, the caliphs of Cairo wielded no power; some lived under what amounted to house arrest. The historian al-Maqrīzī painted a dismissive portrait of the caliphs of Cairo, deprived of real power and reduced to flitting on holidays from the houses of the Mamluk amirs to those of the chief scribes and judges.⁶ Their anomalous and marginal political position has given rise to a well-developed scholarly literature analyzing the historical significance of the Abbasid caliphate of Cairo.

For Baybars, the recognition of the Abbasid caliphs was a deliberate choice, taken with very specific objectives in mind. Most importantly, of course, it represented an effort to confer legitimacy on the new Mamluk regime in accordance with the tenets of traditional Islamic political theory—that is, to make the new regime more palatable in the eyes of the ulama and a pious public. Not only had the Mamluks only recently come to power by overthrowing the respected Ayyubids, but Baybars himself was responsible for the murder of his Mamluk predecessor, Qutuz—a violent seizure of power which might well be attenuated by a stamp of caliphal approval. On this point most recent studies agree, although they differ on how significantly Baybars' recognition of the caliph figured in his broader effort to legitimize his regime. But a caliph sitting in Cairo could serve Baybars in more immediate ways, too, particularly in helping to draw the newly-converted ruler of the Golden Horde, Berke Khan, into an alliance against his Mongol cousins and the Mamluks' principal strategic rival, the Ilkhanids.⁷ After this, however, the caliphs played little political role. Baybars' recognition of the Abbasid caliph was a decision which, once taken, became for later sultans simply part of the background fabric of political life in Mamluk Egypt—a product of political inertia, rather than a matter for conscious policy-making.

On the other hand, that inertia was not something the Mamluks could ignore, for all that they ignored the particular holders of the caliphal office. Chroniclers

⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk li-Maʿrifat Duwal al-Mulūk* (Cairo, 1934–73), 1:41.

⁷ P. M. Holt, "Some Observations on the 'Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 47 (1984): 501–50; Reuven Amitai-Preiss, "The Fall and Rise of the 'Abbasid Caliphate,'" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116 (1996): 492.



of the period often mark the beginning of each reign, or each year, by listing the chief holders of political and religious offices, and the caliph routinely appears at the top of the list.⁸ Some contemporary writers dismissed the traditional insistence of Islamic political theory that the authority of a Muslim government depended on the delegation of power from an imam or caliph of the Quraysh tribe—that is, that the only legitimate source of political authority was a Qurashī caliph, which the Abbasids were.⁹ But others did not. The Shafi‘i jurist Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā‘ah, author of one of the most important Mamluk-era treatises on political authority, recognized that the caliphs might in fact have delegated all effective authority to the sultans; nonetheless he retained, at least as an ideal, the ancient principle that that authority should be properly delegated from a Qurashī imam.¹⁰ After Baybars’ re-establishment of the Abbasid line in Cairo, future sultans would mark their accession with a formal ceremony during which the caliph would delegate his powers to the new ruler and bestow on him a robe of investiture.¹¹ The residual hold of the idea of the caliphate on the Mamluks’ Muslim subjects was profound—witness, for example, the historical writings of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, who even at the end of the Mamluk period could insist on the imperative of caliphal authority.¹² In the end, the position of the caliphs under the Mamluks was inherently anomalous: no Mamluk sultan could even contemplate a policy of completely dispensing with the caliph, but neither did any Mamluk sultan feel compelled to pay the caliph much attention.

A more proactive and innovative policy of Baybars concerns his decision to

⁸ For one example among many, see Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1929–72), 15:222.

⁹ Wilferd Madelung, “A Treatise of the Imamate Dedicated to Sultan Baybars I,” *Proceedings of the 14th Congress of the Union européenne des arabisants et islamisants* (Budapest, 1995), Part 1:91–102.

¹⁰ Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā‘ah, *Taḥrīr al-Aḥkām fī Tadbīr Ahl al-Islām*, ed. Hans Kofler, “Handbuch des islamischen Staats- und Verwaltungsrechtes von Badr-ad-Din Ibn Ġama‘ah,” *Islamica* 6 (1934): 349–414 and 7 (1935): 1–64. See esp. 6:355–65.

¹¹ For one example of such a ceremony, see Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, 10:4–5. However, the subordinate political position of the caliphs is often evident in the ceremonies of investiture, or in the language with which the historians describe them—in which, for example, the caliphs, along with the qadis and others, were “summoned” to participate. See, for example, *ibid.*, 15:526.

¹² Especially in *Tārīkh al-Khulafā’* (Cairo, 1964) and *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍarah* (Cairo, 1967). Cf. Jean-Claude Garcin, “Histoire, opposition politique et piétisme traditionaliste dans le *Husn al-muḥadarat* de Suyuti,” *Annales islamologiques* 7 (1967): 33–89. On the continuing resonance of the *idea* of the caliphate with both the ulama and the common people, see Lutz Wiederhold, “Legal-Religious Elite, Temporal Authority, and the Caliphate in Mamluk Society: Conclusions Drawn from the Examination of a ‘Zahiri Revolt’ in Damascus in 1386,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999): 203–35.



appoint four qadis, one for each of the principal schools of Islamic law—a policy which has also generated considerable discussion in the secondary literature. In this matter, it is again possible to trace continuity between Baybars' action and developments under the Ayyubids and even earlier Sunni rulers. We are accustomed to thinking of the mutual recognition of the four *madhāhib* and their acknowledgement of the legitimacy of each as characteristic of Sunni Islam, although in fact it only gradually emerged as such over the medieval period.¹³ Already in the twelfth century, the sultan Nūr al-Dīn had appointed qadis belonging to the four *madhāhib* in the territories he ruled in Syria.¹⁴ The Ayyubid ruler al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ (r. 1240–49) established a madrasah in Cairo with provisions for the instruction of jurisprudence according to all four of the *madhāhib*—the first of its kind in Egypt, although many of those constructed and endowed by the Mamluks followed this pattern as well. Before formally appointing qadis according to all four schools, Baybars had instructed the Shafi'ī qadi Ibn Bint al-A'azz to appoint three deputies, one for each of the Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali *madhāhib*. Al-Maqrizī saw Baybars' decision to appoint four chief qadis as a defining moment, the culmination of a long process through which the four Sunni schools emerged as the only acceptable forms of normative Sunni Islam.¹⁵ After the formal appointment of the four chief qadis in Cairo, the pattern was extended to Damascus and other provinces in the Mamluk empire. Baybars' action did not end all tension between the *madhāhib*—the endowment deed of one Damascene madrasah stipulated that “no Jew, Christian, Magian, or Hanbali” should enter it, which certainly put the Hanbalis in their place.¹⁶ But it did mark an important step in the emerging pattern of roughly equal status among the schools of law, if only because of the importance of the Mamluk capital of Cairo as a center of Islamic culture in the post-Mongol period.

Beyond fitting into an evolving pattern of mutual recognition among the four Sunni schools of law, what did Baybars' decision mean? Sherman Jackson has argued convincingly that the sultan's action had (again) a very specific and immediate goal: namely, overcoming the reluctance of Ibn Bint al-A'azz, in his capacity as Shafi'ī qadi, to implement decisions according to the other schools

¹³ In the early medieval period, competition between the adherents of the different Sunni schools sometimes turned violent, as Richard Bulliet showed concerning the city of Nishapur in eastern Iran. *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972).

¹⁴ Nikita Elisséef, *Nur al-Din: un grand prince musulman de Syrie au temps des croisades (511–569h/1118–1174)* (Damascus, 1967), 3:826.

¹⁵ Al-Maqrizī, *Al-Mawā'iz wa-al-I'tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khīṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār* (Bulaq, 1853–54), 2:344.

¹⁶ Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, 1994), 169.



of law. The Shafi'i chief judge was too esteemed and powerful to be dispensed with, but his refusal to respect the rulings of the non-Shafi'i *madhāhib* was a source of disruptive contention, and so Baybars' action served to unify the ulama belonging to the different schools of law and to attract their support for the new Mamluk regime.¹⁷ More recently, Yossef Rapoport has pointed out that making judges of the four schools roughly equal in authority¹⁸ had the effect of providing flexibility to an increasingly rigid legal system. As the authority of the *madhāhib* became more firmly established, and as the legal principle of *taqlid* narrowed the scope of ruling acknowledged as acceptable according to the consensus of the jurists, a degree of flexibility in the outcome of legal disputes could be retained by judiciously selecting which judge (Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki, or Hanbali) heard a particular case—although whether Baybars' reform of the judicial system deliberately “aimed” at this result is perhaps less clear.¹⁹

No later Mamluk sultan attempted any reform of the judicial system so sweeping as Baybars' action, but they did routinely intervene in matters judicial; moreover, Rapoport's analysis points to a broader conclusion, that under the Mamluks “the state was more actively involved in the legal sphere than is commonly assumed.”²⁰ It is only to be expected that the Mamluks would keep a close watch on judicial matters: even if the formulation of the law was exclusively the preserve of the ulama, its application was a matter of intense interest to the political authorities. At the most obvious level, of course, the sultans retained the right to appoint the chief qadis of the different schools, and over the course of the Mamluk period they exercised their authority to appoint (or dismiss) qadis for a variety of reasons: competence, personality issues, policy differences.

But sultans also exercised a kind of supreme judicial authority of their own. The prerogative of the ruler to hold judicial sessions for those seeking redress of grievances is of course a very old one in the Middle East, one that was well-established at the rise of Islam, and one that was recognized by the early Muslim jurists under the rubric of *mazālim*, that is, “the [righting of] wrongs.” The pre-eminent historian of *mazālim* under the Mamluks, J. S. Nielsen, is skeptical of the direct connection between the Mamluk sultans' administration of justice

¹⁷ Sherman Jackson, “The Primacy of Domestic Politics: Ibn Bint al-A‘azz and the Establishment of Four Chief Judgeships in Egypt,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115 (1995): 52–65.

¹⁸ Their positions after Baybars' reforms were not entirely equal. The Shafi'i qadi remained a sort of *primus inter pares* and retained certain prerogatives, such as the responsibility of supervising the property of orphans.

¹⁹ Yossef Rapoport, “Legal Diversity in the Age of *Taqlid*: The Four Chief *Qādis* under the Mamluks,” *Islamic Law and Society* 10 (2003): 210–28. The comment about the deliberate nature of the reform is found on page 226.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.



and the theory of *mazālim* as developed by earlier writers such as al-Māwardī.²¹ But two things about the *mazālim* as administered by the Mamluks are clear. In the first place, while the *mazālim* has been viewed as a kind of “secular justice” (in Nielsen’s phrase) and the prerogatives of the sultan’s court allowed him to sidestep some of the niceties of Islamic law (involving, for example, rules of evidence), there was an unmistakably religious flavor to the proceedings, and the sultan’s obligation to use them to administer justice was an important part of the ideological underpinnings of the Mamluk state. Ibn Jamā‘ah cited the responsibilities of the ruler in dispensing justice, along with his obligation to wage jihad, as the most important duties of the sovereign.²² Following Ayyubid precedent, the Mamluks at first supervised judicial sessions in a madrasah, an institution devoted to instruction in Islamic jurisprudence, although later they were transferred to a “house of justice” (*dār al-‘adl*) constructed explicitly for this purpose.²³ Wherever they were held, the presence of the qadis and other religious scholars lent them a religious imprimatur.

In the second place, the Mamluks on the whole took their judicial responsibilities quite seriously. To be sure, there was a kind of bureaucratization of the sultan’s responsibility to administer justice under the Mamluks.²⁴ But the highly-organized character of the process by which a subject might petition the ruler, and by which the ruler or his delegated subordinates would respond, could be read as a mark of the importance they attached to the subject. Not all Mamluk rulers took a keen personal interest in supervising *mazālim* sessions—some, of course, especially those whose reigns were abortive either because of the ruler’s youth or because of the brevity of his rule, had little opportunity to demonstrate an interest in the process—but others certainly did. Qāyṭbāy (r. 1468–96), for instance, cleverly used his *mazālim* sessions to cultivate a reputation for delivering firm, swift, compassionate justice, and so to build a following among the masses. Despite his occasional public criticism or humiliation of a scholar or jurist, even the ulama on the whole were impressed by Qāyṭbāy’s commitment to justice and to Sunni orthodoxy. Even al-Ghawri (r. 1501–16), while not as politically nimble as Qāyṭbāy, understood the importance of his judicial responsibilities and actively

²¹ Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Secular Justice in an Islamic State: Mazālim Under the Bahri Mamluks, 662/1264–789/1387* (Istanbul, 1985), 35.

²² Ibn Jamā‘ah, *Tahrir al-Aḥkām*, 6:369–74.

²³ The institution of the *dār al-‘adl* itself had an ideological significance, giving concrete expression to the understanding of the medieval jurists (such as Ibn Jamā‘ah) that the administration of justice—and a justice conceived in explicitly Islamic terms—was the fundamental purpose of the Muslim state. See Nasser O. Rabbat, “The Ideological Significance of the *Dār al-Adl* in the Medieval Islamic Orient,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27 (1995): 3–28.

²⁴ Nielsen, *Secular Justice*, passim, esp. chapters 5 and 6.



exploited them.²⁵ Twice-weekly formal processions of the sultan and the officials who advised him to the madrasah or other institution where the *maẓālim* sessions were held were among the most prominent public spectacles in Mamluk Cairo. Clearly, the active and successful administration of their judicial responsibilities was a persistent cornerstone of Mamluk religious policy.

Given limitations on both their time and interest, the Mamluks seem not to have intervened across the broad gamut of matters regulated by the law. As a general rule, only those questions that had political ramifications regularly captured their attention—the malfeasance of officials, for example. But where the established order was threatened, the Mamluks were ready and willing to intervene. One of the more famous examples involves the ever-controversial Ibn Taymīyah, who in 1320 was arrested and imprisoned as a consequence of fatwas he had issued on the subject of divorce and oaths by which husbands would repudiate their wives. At first sight, such matters would seem to fall within a sphere of doctrine—the law of personal status—over which the political authorities had little or no authority. Ibn Taymīyah, however, had espoused positions on the force and legitimacy of oaths of repudiation which threatened the established order, either by brazenly challenging the jurisprudential consensus of the ulama, or possibly by implicitly undermining the oaths which the Mamluks themselves had sworn to obey the reigning sultan. The sultan’s efforts to muzzle Ibn Taymīyah, therefore, served both to protect his own throne and to reinforce the authority of the ulama as a whole—that is, to defend the established order.²⁶ Sometimes the intervention itself became the issue—when, that is, the sultan’s reputation and public responsibility as enforcer of the shari‘ah needed reinforcement. So, for example, al-Ghawrī, not generally reckoned the most pious and scrupulous of Mamluk sultans, furiously rebuked all four of the chief qadis in a case involving adultery—again an apparently apolitical matter. The jurists had recommended lenience to the adulterers. Their reluctance to prescribe the *shar‘ī* penalty, stoning, allowed al-Ghawrī to pose as defender of the shari‘ah and reinforce his authority over the judicial sphere.²⁷

Not surprisingly, many if not most of those legal cases in which the state intervened directly concerned issues involving theoretically inalienable

²⁵ Carl F. Petry, “Royal Justice in Mamluk Cairo: Contrasting Motives of Two Sultans,” in *Saber Religioso y Poder Politico en el Islam*, ed. Manuela Marin and Mercedes Garcia Arenal (Madrid, 1994), 197–211.

²⁶ Yossef Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (Cambridge, 2005), 96–105, and idem, “Ibn Taymiyya on Divorce Oaths,” in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, ed. Amalia Levanoni and Michael Winter (Leiden, 2004), 191–217.

²⁷ Petry, “Royal Justice in Mamluk Cairo,” esp. 207ff; idem, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamluk Sultans and Egypt’s Waning as a Great Power* (Albany, 1994), 149–58.



endowments (*awqāf*, sing. *waqf*).²⁸ This was a matter of vital concern to the Mamluk state, for two inter-related reasons. On the one hand, *waqfs* posed a potential threat to the fiscal health of the state, either by reducing the tax base or by threatening the economic productivity of the property included in the endowment. On the other hand, sultans and other Mamluks made extensive use of the Islamic law of *waqf* to protect their own property for themselves and for their heirs, and also to legitimize their rule—a point we will return to shortly. At the same time, endowments mattered tremendously to the ulama, both because the shari‘ah was quite explicit about how *waqfs* were to be treated, and also because endowments provided the funds that supported the mosques and other religious institutions in which the ulama worked. The history of endowments under the Mamluks is essentially a balancing act, in which the competing religious and material pressures compelled Mamluks and ulama to negotiate solutions suiting the shifting contingencies of the moment.²⁹ It illustrates the fundamentally pragmatic character of Mamluk religious policies as clearly as any issue does.

Law was one area of religious concern where the sultan (and the political establishment) had a prescribed and necessary role. But over other religious matters, the Mamluks’ authority was limited at best. This reflects, among other things, one practical consequence of the resolution of the ninth-century *miḥnah*—that the ulama, and not the rulers, were responsible for judging what was properly Muslim. Consequently, the Mamluks were generally reluctant to intervene in disputes over questions of a spiritual or doctrinal nature. Occasionally, accusations of blasphemy or other heretical behavior were brought to the sultan’s attention. He might, for example, be asked to adjudicate disputes among the ulama themselves over the behavior of some mendicant Sufi, or the sermons of some controversial preacher.³⁰ Where an individual’s offending behavior drew upon him a judgment of apostasy, the political authorities might be called upon to intervene, either to resolve differences among the qadis, or, more practically, simply to carry out a sentence of execution. Not infrequently, however, one senses a tired, almost exasperated reluctance on the part of the ruling authorities to involve themselves in complicated doctrinal issues.³¹

²⁸ As numerous scholars have observed. See, for instance, Joseph Escovitz, *The Office of the Qādī al-Qudāt in Cairo under the Bahrī Mamlūks* (Berlin, 1984), 148–54, and Nielsen, *Secular Justice*, 45. Cf. Muḥammad M. Amīn, *Al-Awqāf wa-al-Ḥayāh al-Ijtimā‘iyah fī Miṣr, 638–923/1250–1517* (Cairo, 1980), 125ff.

²⁹ One particularly clear moment of such negotiations occurred in a meeting of leading Mamluk amirs, including the future sultan Barqūq, and prominent ulama in 1379. See al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 3:345–47.

³⁰ Escovitz, *Office*, 134–47, surveys a number of such incidents.

³¹ Consider, for example, the case of Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Murrah, a disciple of Ibn Taymiyah



With regard to religious communities that lay outside the Sunni norm, in particular various Shi‘i groups, Mamluk policies were more tolerant than has sometimes been supposed, or at least more indifferent and inconsistent. Whether or not there was such a thing as a “Sunni renaissance,” that is, a sharpening of Sunni identity fostered by the predominantly Turkish regimes which came to power in the later Islamic Middle Period in response to the Shi‘i regimes (such as the Buyids and Fatimids) which had dominated the Middle East in the tenth and eleventh centuries, it is difficult to discern anything approaching an “inquisition” under the Mamluks.³² To be sure, there were occasions when the Mamluks took measures, including violent measures, to oppose or suppress various manifestations of Shi‘ism. This was especially true in Syria—not surprisingly, since Syria contained a larger proportion of Shi‘is than other provinces of the Mamluk empire. For the most part, however, these episodes resulted not from a systematic campaign to expunge Shi‘ism from the realm, but from the perception of an immediate political threat—a rebellion by Shi‘is in conjunction with a Mongol invasion, for example.³³ At other times, Shi‘is moved reasonably freely in Mamluk society. Their number included prominent *ashrāf* in Damascus, and even the famous Shi‘i jurist Muḥammad ibn Makkī, executed under sultan Barqūq and known therefore to Shi‘is as *al-shahīd*, “the martyr,” had traveled widely within the Mamluk realm, encountering, befriending, and studying with Sunni ulama.³⁴

Indeed, the Mamluks themselves were often drawn to expressions of Islam that were not entirely kosher in the eyes of the leading Sunni ulama. Individual Mamluks submitted themselves to the spiritual direction of controversial religious figures—mendicants, renunciants, preachers, and others whose teaching or practices generated considerable skepticism and criticism from the more established religious elite. Many of those religious figures revered by the Mamluks, of course, were Sufis, and the devotion of the Mamluks to Sufism generally is by now well established. Their Sufi inclinations were not, however, in any way unusual, since

whose attacks on Sufis aroused the anger of both leading religious scholars and their supporters among the ranks of the amirs. Ibn Murrah was brought before a council presided over by the sultan for judgment, at which Ibn Murrah’s accusers and defenders almost came to blows. The sultan, according to the sources, unable to resolve the dispute, simply referred it to the *nā‘ib* (deputy) for resolution. See al-Maqrizī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:263; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah fī A‘yān al-Mi‘ah al-Thāminah* (Cairo, 1966–67), 1:323.

³² As Eliyahu Ashtor famously did in “L’inquisition dans l’état mamlouk,” *Rivista degli studi orientali* 25 (1950): 11–26.

³³ Henri Laoust, “Remarques sur les expéditions du Kasrawan sous les premiers Mamluks,” *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* 4 (1940): 93–115.

³⁴ A history of Shi‘ism under the Mamluks is an important *desideratum* of the field. For now, see Stefan Winter, “Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Makkī ‘al-Shahīd al-Awwal’ and the Shi‘ah of Syria,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 149–82.



Sufism itself was widely accepted among Sunni Muslims in the Middle East by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. What was perhaps more notable about the Mamluks was the particular nature of some of the Sufis and other religious figures whom they admired. Baybars himself had a famous and psychologically complex attachment to a somewhat bizarre shaykh, Khāḍir al-Mihrānī, known especially for his divinatory powers.³⁵ Divination, in fact, was a common fascination of the Mamluks—perhaps, some have speculated, a legacy of the shamanism to which many were exposed as children and youth in the Central Asian homelands.³⁶

But the Mamluks' attraction to marginal religious figures may reveal less about them as a distinctive cultural group than it does about the widespread and remarkable diversity of Islam in medieval Middle Eastern society. Take, for instance, Barak Baba, a flamboyant, antinomian Turkish ascetic whose appearance in Damascus in the early fourteenth century generated controversy. Donald Little has seen in the inconsistent reaction of the Mamluks to Barak Baba—the viceroy in the city at first welcomed him, other amirs were offended by the dervish's unruly asceticism, the sultan in Cairo finally forbade him from approaching that city—an ambivalence in their attitude toward religion: on the one hand they allied themselves with the normative Islam of the urban ulama, on the other they retained a more-than-vestigial interest in religious ideas and practices associated in a general way with Central Asian shamanism. But the truth is Barak Baba had followers among local Muslims as well.³⁷ Similarly, toward the end of the Mamluk period, several Mamluks, including the sultan Qāyṭbāy, became embroiled in a controversy over the legacy of the Sufi poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ. Some of the ideas expressed in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verse were subjected to scathing criticism from scholars such as Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, who saw in them an un-Islamic monism. But the Mamluks who defended Ibn al-Fāriḍ were not alone: they took their cues from other local ulama, including the historian al-Suyūṭī and the esteemed jurist Zakariyā al-Anṣārī.³⁸

Whatever peculiar proclivities and sensibilities the Mamluks may or may not have brought to Islam as experienced under their rule, the most consistent feature of the relations of the Mamluk state with the religious establishment—the thing that came closest to a permanent religious policy—was the symbiotic relationship

³⁵ Louis Pouzet, "Hadir ibn Abi Bakr al-Mihrani (m. 7 muh. 676/11 juin 1277) ṣayh du sultan mamelouk al-Malik az-Zahir Baibars," *Annales islamologiques* 30 (1978): 173–83.

³⁶ See, for example, Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan*, 67, note 15.

³⁷ Compare Donald P. Little, "Religion under the Mamluks," *The Muslim World* 73 (1983): 165–81, and Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1550* (Salt Lake City, 1994).

³⁸ Th. Emil Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn al-Fāriḍ, his Verse, and his Shrine* (Columbia, SC, 1994), 55–75.



they cultivated with the ulama. Each group was able to supply the other with something it needed. The Mamluks provided the ulama with the physical and financial infrastructure for their professional and religious activities. Not all mosques, madrasahs, and *khānqāhs* constructed in Cairo and other cities during the Mamluk period were constructed by the sultans and amirs, but the vast majority of them, and almost all of the largest institutions, were the product of Mamluk largesse.³⁹ Both within and beyond the world of religious institutions, patronage of the ulama by the ruling authorities constituted a central feature of their professional lives. Michael Chamberlain has brilliantly illustrated how the competition for the “monetized honors” offered by religious institutions shaped the social world of the ulama, and also how their social relations paralleled those within the Mamluk elite itself.⁴⁰ But there was a vertical as well as horizontal character to the struggle for place, position, and money, and patronage of individual scholars by individual Mamluks played an important role, particularly in the competition for positions at the disposal of the government, such as appointments as qadis.⁴¹ This patronage was not necessarily venal—it was rather a natural by-product of the fact that the articulation and enforcement of Islamic law required the cooperation of both the ulama and the ruling authorities.⁴²

In exchange, the Mamluks received a good deal from their relationship with the ulama. In the first place, and not to be dismissed as a motivating factor, there were perceived spiritual benefits to the relationship and to the ruling elite’s patronage of the ulama and their institutions. Some Mamluks may have been only superficially Islamicized, but many others were sincerely committed to their adopted faith. Moreover, the benefits that might accrue as a result of being buried next to a mosque or madrasah—and many such institutions included tombs intended for the burial of their founders—were available to anyone, pious or not (although the efficacy of such benefits is not something that historians can measure!). In addition, of course, there were material advantages to establishing a foundation to support a religious institution, since by it a Mamluk could preserve at least a portion of his wealth from confiscation and pass on to his heirs that part of a foundation’s income not committed to the institution’s upkeep and expenses.

³⁹ For one study of this phenomenon, see Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, 1992).

⁴⁰ Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, passim.

⁴¹ See, for example, Joseph Escovitz, “Patterns of Appointment to the Chief Judgeships of Cairo During the Bahri Mamluk Period,” *Arabica* 30 (1983): 147–68.

⁴² The fact of such patronage is well known, but the overall parameters and consequences for Mamluk society of what the Ottomans would later call *intisap* await fuller study. On the Ottoman case, see Norman Itzkowitz, “Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Realities,” *Studia Islamica* 16 (1962): 73–94.



Especially under the later Mamluks, religious endowments were employed not simply to preserve private wealth but to provide the sultan with the financial means to carry out political policies.⁴³ More generally, and more importantly, the ulama granted the Mamluks a sort of seal of approval. The scholars' willingness to receive appointments to remunerative posts as professors, prayer leaders, preachers, etc., in institutions founded by the Mamluks, and very often housing their tombs as well, worked to legitimate the regime itself as well as the rule and reputations of the individual Mamluk benefactors. There are signs that the Mamluks understood quite explicitly the political benefits their munificence promised—hence, for example, Qalāwūn soon after his accession as sultan embarked on a program of constructing and repairing religious institutions in the sacred towns of Medina, Jerusalem, and Hebron as a way of solidifying support for his new regime.⁴⁴

This is not to say that the interests of the Mamluks and of the ulama were perfectly aligned. The political priorities of the Mamluks could trump the spiritual or material concerns of the ulama—as, for instance, when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad closed the recently-constructed *khānqāh* of his rival Baybars al-Jashankīr.⁴⁵ For all his devotion to Khāḍir al-Mihrānī, Baybars allowed himself to be persuaded that state security required the shaykh's imprisonment. At their accessions, Mamluk sultans sometimes announced plans to enforce shari'ah rules—for example, the suppression of non-*shar'ī* taxes, or enforcement of legal restrictions on the behavior of the *dhimmīs*—although the repetition of such proclamations over time suggest that the ruling authorities did not follow through consistently and whole-heartedly. One of the most important points of conflict between the interests of the Mamluks and the ulama concerned the religious minorities whom the Mamluks had reason to protect, especially those Copts who served in the government bureaucracies.⁴⁶ For all that they might admire and venerate the ulama, the Mamluks also feared them for their potential to mobilize opposition to the Mamluk regime. Upon the death of the respected shaykh Ibn 'Abd al-Salām, Baybars is said to have remarked that only now was his kingdom secure, since Ibn 'Abd Salām could have led the people to drive him from his throne.⁴⁷ The late-Mamluk/early-Ottoman Sufi and scholar al-Sha'rānī recalled that his master, the illiterate but revered shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Matbūlī, so frequently opposed Qāyṭbāy on various matters that the sultan finally remarked, quite literally, that Egypt was

⁴³ A process outlined insightfully in Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians?*, esp. 190–210.

⁴⁴ Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan*, 85–86.

⁴⁵ On which see Leonor Fernandes, “The Foundation of Baybars al-Jashankīr: Its Waqf, History, and Architecture,” *Muqarnas* 4 (1987): 21–42.

⁴⁶ See D. S. Richards, “The Coptic Bureaucracy under the Mamluks,” *Colloque internationale sur l'histoire du caire* (Cairo, 1969), 373–81.

⁴⁷ Ibn al-ʿImād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār Man Dhahab* (Cairo, 1931), 5:302.



not big enough to hold both of them.⁴⁸

Such moments of conflict, however, did little to affect the larger pattern of cooperation between the Mamluks and the ulama. Their tacit alliance lay at the foundation of contemporary justifications for Mamluk rule and appreciations of the Mamluks' place in history. As David Ayalon famously pointed out, no less an authority than Ibn Khaldūn understood the nature of their contribution and acknowledged their role in saving Islam, in particular from the Mongol onslaught.⁴⁹ But the Mamluks' service to Islam went well beyond military valor, to embrace the active and munificent support of the ulama establishment. In exchange, the ulama validated the Mamluk regime generally and the rule of individual sultans in particular. Like any good relationship, this one had its difficult moments, but it lasted for more than two and half centuries and may have helped to shape the character of relations between political and religious authorities in the Sunni Islamic Middle East long after the Mamluks themselves were gone.

⁴⁸ Al-Sha'rānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (Cairo, 1965), 2:80.

⁴⁹ David Ayalon, "Mamlukiyyat: A First Attempt to Evaluate the Mamluk Military System," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 321–49.



‘*Ilm*, *Shafā‘ah*, and *Barakah*: The Resources of Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Ulama

We were attending al-Ḥāfiẓ’s class outdoors, on a very hot day. He said: “Let us move away from this heat into the mosque.” Just as we were getting ready to go, and perhaps some of us had already risen, a cloud suddenly covered the sun, and he told us to sit down again. I saw our friends looking at each other, the word spreading among them: “Why, this is a *karāmah*;¹ there was not a cloud to be seen in the sky!” And Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn al-Maqdisī told many things of this kind.²

This fascinating glimpse into the way medieval Muslims perceived the working of *barakah* is offered in Ibn Rajab’s *Dhayl Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah*, an early fourteenth-century biographical dictionary of Hanbali scholars, as a quotation of the Damascene historian Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn al-Maqdisī (d. 643/1245). In the rest of the entry, Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn portrays al-Ḥāfiẓ ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Maqdisī (d. 600/1203–4), his uncle, as an outstanding authority on hadith with a special expertise in ‘*ilm al-rijāl* (the study of hadith transmitters), and as a stringent moralist and ascetic. Illustrating how ‘Abd al-Ghanī’s reputation of sanctity sprang up, this little story also reveals how easily the ordinary and the extraordinary merged for these medieval men, as perhaps

© The Middle East Documentation Center. The University of Chicago.

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the International Workshop on “Facing Modernity: Rethinking ‘Ulama in the Middle East,” at The Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in June 2006, and at a meeting of the Medieval Islamic Colloquium of Israel, November 2007, at Bar-Ilan University. I thank the organizers and participants of those panels for their invitations and comments. I also benefited greatly from the advice of my friends and colleagues Nimrod Hurvitz, Cana Werman, Yuval Harari, Daphna Ephrat, and Yaacov Lev. My special thanks are due to Johannes Pahlitzsch, who wrote the introduction to this volume.

¹ A wonder or marvel of a holy man (*walī*), perceived as a token of God’s special blessing (*barakah*), and differentiated from *mu‘jizah*: the demonstrative miracles of prophets (see Louis Gardet, “Karāma,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 4:615–16), and *sihr*: sorcery, attributed to heretics and infidels (see Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī* [New Brunswick and London, 1982], 188).

² Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl ‘alā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib Ḥamīd al-Fiqī (Cairo, 1952–53), 2:16–17.



for devout believers of all ages.

ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Maqdisī was an ʿālim, a teacher of hadith in two central institutions: the Great Mosque of Damascus and the Hanbali mosque of the nearby suburb on Jabal Qāsyūn. He was a troublemaker who often confronted colleagues and political authorities and was made to pay the price,³ but most ulama of his kind enjoyed unprecedented prosperity during the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods. Members of the ruling elite extended their patronage to dozens of religious institutions in capital cities and in provincial towns. They constructed and refurbished mosques, madrasahs, colleges for the study of hadith, Quranic schools, Sufi lodges, commemorative shrines, and mausolea with sanctuaries and sacred relics. Laymen contributed money and labor to the building or reconstruction of numerous smaller religious institutions and donated funds for study circles and assemblies for the recitation of Quran or hadith in mosques and mausolea. Ulama who invested in reaching out to wider circles were rewarded with admiration, popularity, and economic benefits.⁴ Evidently, ʿilm (knowledge of the religious sciences) secured identity, power, prestige, and livelihood in the medieval Middle East, not to speak of its spiritual rewards.

All this is well documented in the Arabic sources and has been studied by quite a few modern scholars.⁵ Yet, the specific venues by which ʿilm served as a resource of power in medieval Muslim societies deserve further study and elaboration. My contention here is that for men of the Mamluk period the mastery of religious knowledge implied much more than the right to teach and the duty to expound the shariʿah. It carried with it also the authority to mediate and intercede (*shafāʿah*)⁶ and the capacity to bestow spiritual

³ For a summary of his biography, see Stefan Leder, “Charismatic Scripturalism: The Ḥanbali Maqdisi of Damascus,” *Der Islam* 74 (1997): 297–300.

⁴ Preoccupied as they were with networking within the scholarly class, ulama seem to have cared very much about their popularity in wider circles as well. They do not fail to mention the attendance of the ʿammah at their sermons, assemblies, and funerals, conveying the impression that the presence of men of plebeian classes was worthy of notice and added to the prestige of scholars.

⁵ E.g., Ira Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 1967; second edition 1984); Joan Gilbert, “Institutionalization of Muslim Scholarship and Professionalization of the ʿUlamāʾ in Medieval Damascus,” *Studia Islamica* 52 (1980): 105–35; R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton, 1991), 187–209; Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus 1190–1350* (Cambridge, 1994); Daphna Ephrat, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunni “Ulama” of Eleventh Century Baghdad* (New York, 2000).

⁶ On *shafāʿah* in medieval sacred and secular contexts, see Shaun E. Marmon, “The Quality of



and material blessing (*barakah*),⁷ at times through the manifestation and manipulation of metaphysical power (*karāmāt*). The purpose of this article is to explore perceptions of the relationship between *‘ilm*, *barakah*, and *shafā‘ah* in Ayyubid and early Mamluk times, and to analyze the discourse about wonder-working scholars. Surprisingly little attention has been given to these phenomena in modern scholarly literature, perhaps because a “symbiotic relationship between Muslim sainthood and Sufism” (to use Vincent Cornell’s phrase)⁸ has always been assumed, and therefore Muslim sainthood has been studied almost exclusively in Sufi contexts.⁹ Another reason may be modern Western rationalism, which classifies belief in miracles as incompatible with “serious” learning or scholarship. This attitude is nicely illustrated in Fritz Meier’s introduction to the hagiographical work of thirteenth-century Sufi authors: “A common characteristic of the three above-mentioned authors . . . is their credulity, their uncritical attitude in dealing with the subject and their unbridled interest in miracles. They are not unique in this respect . . . this is particularly astonishing in the case of so great a mind as Ibn al-‘Arabi.”¹⁰

It is worth noting that the comparable case of the miracle-working Jewish sages of late antiquity has been studied with considerable methodological sophistication and has produced some very interesting insights on the

Mercy: Intercession in Mamluk Society,” *Studia Islamica* 87 (1998): 125–40; in more recent religious imagination, see Catherine Mayeur, “L’Intercession des saints en islam Egyptian: autour de Sayyid al-Badawī,” *Annales Islamologiques* 25 (1991): 363–88. For mediation as the essential component of the spiritual authority of Sufi shaykhs from the ninth century onwards, see Arthur F. Buhler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh* (Columbia, SC, 1998), 10–13.

⁷ For a rich discussion of the concept, see Joseph W. Meri, “Aspects of *Baraka* (Blessings) and Ritual Devotion among Medieval Muslims and Jews,” *Medieval Encounters* 5 (1999): 46–69.

⁸ Vincent J. Cornell, *The Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, 1998), xxxv.

⁹ A quick look at the inventory of over 1700 titles listed by the *Index Islamicus* under the keyword “saints” strikingly indicates this state of affairs. For exceptions, see the short studies of the *muwallah* (“fool for God”) in Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: the Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford, 1992), 378–410; Daniella Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria: Mosques, Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and Ayyūbids (1146–1260)* (Leiden, 2007), 239–40; and of the rural wonder-working shaykh, in idem, “‘The Cited Tales of the Wondrous Doings of the Shaykhs of the Holy Land’ by Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn Abī ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahīd al-Maqdisī (569–643/1173–1245): text, translation and commentary,” *Crusades* 1 (2002): 111–54.

¹⁰ Fritz Meier, “Ṭāhir al-Ṣadafī’s Forgotten Work on Western Saints of the 6th/12th Century,” in his *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism* (Leiden, 1999), 431.



complex connections between knowledge, power, religion, and magic.¹¹ *Mutatis mutandis*, I hope to draw on some of these insights in my analysis of the medieval Arabic sources: primarily the biographical dictionaries of the Mamluk historians Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1393) and al-Subkī (d. 771/1369), and a few other contemporaneous historical and theological works.

BARAKAT AL-'ILM

The study of the religious sciences and their transmission (*ta'allum* and *ta'līm*), just like prayer and Quran recitation, were regarded as pregnant with *barakah* and were considered to affect circles far wider than those of learned shaykhs and their intimate disciples. This *barakah* was known to benefit also the passive attendants of large study assemblies, which included ordinary men who did not belong to the scholarly class and may have hardly been able to follow the lectures, and the community of Muslims as a whole.¹² These notions are clearly expressed already in the eleventh century, by Ibn Abī Ya'lá (d. 458/1066), the compiler of the first Hanbali biographical dictionary. Writing about the close disciple of a great saintly scholar, he mentions the flow of *barakah*: "The blessing of his teacher reflected upon him, and he became learned, ascetic, and pious. He was popular and well-loved by the people, and known to have his prayers answered (*'ādat barakatuhu 'alayhi fa-sāra 'āliman, zāhidan, 'ābidan, wa-zahara lahu fi al-nās al-qubūl wa-al-mahabbah wa-ijābat al-du'ā*)." ¹³ Referring to his father,

¹¹ See Yuval Harari, "The Sages and the Occult," in *The Literature of the Sages. Second Part: Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Shmuel Safrai, Zeev Safrai, Joseph Schwartz, and Peter J. Tomson (Assen, 2006), 521–64; Chana Safrai and Zeev Safrai, "Rabbinic Holy Men," in *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis and Joseph Schwartz (Leiden, 2004); Zeev Safrai and Chana Safrai, "The Study of the Torah and its Values: the Birth of a Resource of Power Essential to the Status of Sages," in *Renewing Jewish Commitment: The Work and Thought of David Hartman*, ed. Avi Sagi and Zvi Zohar (Tel Aviv, 2001), 2:877–922 [in Hebrew]; David Levine, "Holy Men and Rabbis in Talmudic Antiquity," in *Saints and Role Models*, 45–57; Eli Yassif, "Legends and History: Historians read Hebrew Legends of the Middle Ages," *Zion* 64 (1999): 187–220; Jacob Neusner, "The Phenomenon of the Rabbi in Late Antiquity," *Numen* 16 (1969): 1–20; Joshua Levinson, "Borders and Witches: Conflicts between Rabbis and Sorcerers in the Literature of the Sages" [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 75 (2006): 295–328.

¹² See sayings in this vein regarding the study of hadith in Ibn al-Ṣalāh al-Shahrazūri, *Al-Muqaddimah fi 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, ed. D. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Hindawī (Sidon and Beirut, 2001), 123. For Seljuk Baghdad see Ephrat, *A Learned Society*, 144–47; for Ayyubid Damascus see Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, 122; for Mamluk Cairo, see Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, 1992), ch. 7.

¹³ Ibn Abī Ya'lá, *Ṭabaqāt al-Hanābilah*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib Ḥamīd al-Fiḳī (Cairo, 1952), 2:255–56. Al-Yūnīni conveys a similar notion in the late thirteenth century, writing



Abū Yaʿlā Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn (d. 390/1000), whom he presents as a great scholar in all branches of *ʿilm* and who had assembled unprecedented audiences for his public classes of hadith, Ibn Abī Yaʿlā says that “the people received blessing by looking at him (*bi-al-naẓar ilayhi yatabarrakūna*).”¹⁴ *Barakat al-ʿilm* was considered effective even for the dead. Hence, those who could afford it located their mausolea as close as possible to madrasahs. Founders of madrasahs asked to be buried in the institutions of study they had patronized and brought their relatives for burial within them. Nūr al-Dīn’s funerary madrasah, constructed in Damascus in 1168, several years before the sultan’s death, is an early example of such an arrangement.¹⁵ The historian and qadi Bahāʾ al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād (d. 632/1234) located his own *turbah* in between the two institutions of learning he had earlier endowed in Aleppo: a madrasah and a *dār al-ḥadīth*. The whole complex had connecting doors and seven inner grille windows on a single axis.¹⁶ The biographer Ibn al-Wardī (d. 749/1348) quotes the people of Aleppo conjecturing that Ibn Shaddād “had hoped that the *barakah* of learning (*barakat al-ʿilm*) would affect him in death, as it had served him in life.”¹⁷ Berkey notes that in the later Mamluk period the connection between institutions of learning and places of burial was so natural that the terms madrasah and *turbah* could be conflated.¹⁸

Yet, as we can learn from our sources, ulama did not necessarily propagate *barakah* through teaching or by the direct utilization of religious knowledge. For one, there may have been a notion that *barakah* is inherent in some official or semi-official positions. Consider the following excerpt from Bahāʾ al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād, regarding the *barakah* of preachers (*khaṭībs*). “Saladin

about another disciple of another shaykh: “He became his student and was known by his companionship. . . . The light of the shaykh and his *barakah* reflected upon him and he acquires his virtues,” al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mūrāt al-Zamān* (Hyderabad, 1954–61), 2:57; Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, 109, 118–19.

¹⁴ Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:201. Mentioning his father and forefathers he adds: “*wa-jaʿala dhikrunā la-hum barakah taʿūdu ʿalaynā*” [and may our recalling be a blessing for them, that returns to us], Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:208.

¹⁵ For other funerary mosques and madrasahs in Ayyubid Damascus see R. Stephen Humphreys, “Women as Patrons of Religious Architecture in Ayyūbid Damascus,” *Muqarnas* 11 (1994): 38–49; for Mamluk Cairo, see John A. Williams, “Urbanization and Monument Construction in Mamluk Cairo,” *Muqarnas* 2 (1984): 34–35; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic Architecture in Cairo: an Introduction* (Leiden, 1989), 95–105.

¹⁶ Donald S. Richards, *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin or al-Nawādir al-Sultāniyya waʾl-Mahāsīn al-Yūsufiyya by Bahāʾ al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād* (Aldershot, 2001), 3.

¹⁷ Ibn al-Wardī, *Tārīkh* (Beirut, 1996), 2:157.

¹⁸ Berkey, *Transmission*, 144.



always sought out Fridays for his battles, especially the times of Friday prayer,” he explains in his biography of the sultan, “to gain the blessing (*barakah*) of the preachers’ prayers on the pulpits, for they were perhaps more likely to be answered.”¹⁹ The Shafīʿī ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām al-Sulamī (d. 660/1262), one of the most important, learned, and assertive scholars of his age, seems to be combating the idea of such “automatic” *barakah* and *shafāʿah* in one of his fatwas. He warns *khatībs* that if they phrase their supplications in false terms, using the laudatory titles (*alqāb*) of rulers without justification (calling a tyrant *al-ʿādil*, or an ignoramus *al-ʿālim*, for example) their *shafāʿah* would become null and void.²⁰

Some ulama transmitted *barakah* by touch: the direct touch of their hand, or the mediated touch of their garment or seat, food they had partly consumed, the utterance of a phrase, a book or an amulet containing their handwriting (*bi-khatīhi*).²¹ Talismans and amulets are rarely mentioned in narrative sources, but on the basis of extant medieval “magic material,” as yet little researched, we have good reason to assume that they were in common use.²² Talismans prepared by the very learned *muḥaddith* and *muftī* Abū Aḥmad al-Silafī of Alexandria (d. 576/1180), for example, were known to be particularly effective for women in labor.²³ The uncle of the Aleppo historian Ibn al-ʿAdīm, a copyist well versed in hadith and *fiqh*

¹⁹ Richards, *The Rare and Excellent History*, 72. Nūr al-Dīn is quoted expressing a similar dependence on intercessory prayers (*duʿāʾ*)—those of jurists, Quran reciters, ascetics, and Sufis; see Yaacov Lev, “Piety and Political Activism in Twelfth Century Egypt,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 31 (2006): 225.

²⁰ ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn ʿAbd al-Salām al-Sulamī, *Fatāwā*, ed. Muḥammad Jumʿah al-Kurdī (Beirut, 1996), 400–1. True to himself, al-Sulamī refused to mention the title “al-Ṣāliḥ” (the righteous) of the Ayyubid ruler al-Malik Ismāʿīl ibn al-ʿĀdil II in his Friday sermon, holding him a traitor to the Muslim cause on account of the treaty he had concluded with the Franks in 638/1240. As a result, al-Sulamī’s *shafāʿah* may have remained intact, but his pulpit was taken away from him, and after a short period in jail he was banished from Damascus. For the historical context, see R. Stephen Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193–1260* (Albany, 1977), 266–67.

²¹ For Joseph Meri’s typology of the transmission of *barakah*, see his “Aspects of *Baraka*,” 63–64.

²² For a short introduction on amulets and talismans see Emilie Savage-Smith, “Introduction,” in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. idem (Aldershot, 2004), xxii–xxv. She claims that “the twelfth century, for whatever reason, saw a marked increase of interest in magic . . . and the production of magical texts began to increase dramatically,” *ibid.*, xxvii.

²³ One of his disciples reveals, sarcastically I think, that what the shaykh actually wrote was: “*Allāhumma, innahum qad aḥsanū ḡannahum bi, fa-lā tukhayyib ḡannahum fiyya*” [God, they think well of me. May they not be disappointed]. Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād al-Maʿrūf and Muḥyī Hilāl al-Sirḥān (Beirut, 1981), 21:28.



who was extremely fond of the works of al-Tirmidhī and had collected most of his volumes, used to prepare charms (*ta'āwīdh*) from the pen parings (*barawāt al-aqlām*) he gathered during the months of Ramaḍān, which he spent copying the Quran and practicing *i'tikāf* (seclusion in a mosque). The *barakah* of those charms was well known, according to Yāqūt.²⁴

Finally, medieval biographers tell of ulama whose *barakah* was manifest in the performance of wonders (*karāmāt*), implying that they enjoyed the elevated status of *wilāyah*—sainthood emanating from intimacy with God.

THEORY OF *KARĀMĀT*

The first extant coherent theory of *wilāyah* was composed by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, one of the greatest and most prolific Sufi authors of the ninth century. According to his theosophical system, the *awliyā'* are second to the prophets in the spiritual hierarchy of the cosmos. They, rather than the scholars, are the true heirs of the prophets,²⁵ and their proximity and direct access to God accord them second sight (*firāsah*), divine inspiration (*ilhām*), and the power to perform wondrous feats (*karāmāt*). For al-Tirmidhī, all this was so self evident that he could not think of any motive other than envy behind the stand of those who denied the existence of the above-mentioned hierarchy.²⁶ Stories about the wondrous deeds of the friends of God have been collected and transmitted since the ninth century, one of the earliest compilations being *Kitāb al-Awliyā'* by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281/894).²⁷ Eleventh-century Sufi authorities such as al-Hujwīrī, al-Qushayrī, and al-Ghazzālī repeated and developed those perceptions.²⁸

At the same time, the notion of sainthood and the feasibility of *karāmāt*

²⁴ David Morray, *An Ayyūbid Notable and his World: Ibn al-ʿAdīm and Aleppo as Portrayed in his Biographical Dictionary of People Connected with the City* (Leiden, 1994), 178; Yāqūt, *Irshād*, ed. David Samuel Margoliouth, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, vol. 6 (Cairo, 1930), 34. The title of the first edition is: *The Irshād al-Arib ilā Maʿrifat al-Adīb or Dictionary of Learned Men of Yāqūt*, ed. David Samuel Margoliouth, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series (London, 1913), 6:34.

²⁵ Bernd Radtke, "Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī on Miracles," in *Miracle et Karāma*, ed. Denise Aigle (Turnhout, Belgium, 2000), 290–91; Bernd Radtke and John O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism: Two Works by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī* (Richmond, 1996), 8.

²⁶ Radtke, "Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī," 295; idem, "Walī," *EP*, 12:110. Another early creed professing similar ideas is that of the Egyptian Hanafī scholar Abū Jaʿfar al-Tahāwī (d. 321/933); see Joseph Meri, *The Cult of the Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford, 2002), 68.

²⁷ Radtke, "Walī," 109–10.

²⁸ Frederick M. Denny, "Prophet and Walī," in *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions*, ed. Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond (Berkeley, 1988), 91.



became widely acknowledged well beyond the Sufi milieu. In the tenth century most Ashʿaris and even some Muʿtazilis developed theological-scholastic arguments that supported the validity of *karāmāt*.²⁹ In the early thirteenth century, the renowned Hanbali jurist Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī wrote the following paragraph in praise of the people of the Sunnah: “It is amongst them [the Sunnis] that one finds the observant ulama (*al-ʿulamāʾ al-ʿāmilūn*), the friends of God (*al-awliyāʾ*), and the righteous (*al-ṣāliḥūn*) . . . and *ahl al-walāyāt wa-al-karāmāt*. . . . They are a refuge to men afflicted by hardship, and kings and others of lesser ranks go out and visit them, and are blessed by their supplications (*yatabarrakūna bi-duʿāʾihim*), and appeal to God through their intercession (*yastashfaʿūna bi-him*).”³⁰ Whether Ibn Qudāmah is speaking of four separate categories, or of overlapping groups, it is clear that this excerpt (taken from his polemical anti-Muʿtazili treatise) unequivocally illustrates the wide recognition of *barakah* and its manifestation in *karāmāt* in all echelons of society. It also establishes a clear connection between piety, intercession, and wondrous deeds.³¹

In some circles, however, the notion of sainthood remained contested throughout the ages, due to different theological reasoning,³² or because of the apprehension that charismatic, spiritual, non-scholarly, and potentially disruptive authority aroused among the established ulama.³³ In anti-Sufi

²⁹ Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ed. and trans. Samuel Miklos Stern and C. R. Barber (London, 1967), 2:337–41; Gardet, “Karāma,” 615–16.

³⁰ *Ibn Qudāma’s Censure of Speculative Theology*, ed. and trans. George Makdisi (London, 1962), 14, (trans. partly used here) 10.

³¹ See also Josef Van Ess, “Sufis and their Opponents,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, ed. Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden and Boston, 1999), 35.

³² For al-Andalus, see Maribel Fierro, “The Polemic about the *Karāmāt al-Awliyāʾ* and the Development of Sufism in al-Andalus (fourth/tenth–fifth/eleventh centuries),” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55 (1992): 236–49. Fierro finds that the polemic was imported into al-Andalus from Qayrawān in the second half of the fourth/tenth century, and was concerned mainly with the danger of discrediting prophets. Al-Sulamī, in sixth/thirteenth-century Syria, disputes with “the Muʿtazilis and others,” who consign miracles and wonders to prophets only, denying *karāmāt al-awliyāʾ* (al-Sulamī, *Zabad Khulāsat al-Taṣawwuf al-musammā bi-Ḥall al-Rumūz wa-Mafātīḥ al-Kunūz* [Cairo, 1995], 77–78). See a short discussion of this theme in William M. Brinner, “Prophet and Saint: The Two Exemplars of Islam,” in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John S. Hawley (Berkeley, 1987), 36–51.

³³ Meri, *The Cult*, 66; Alexander Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition* (New York, 1999), 53; Maribel Fierro, “Opposition to Sufism in al-Andalus,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, 183. For a live (and lively) contest between a wonder-worker (the Sufi shaykh Ibn Qawām, d. 658/1260) and anti-Sufi scholars and dignitaries in a northern Syrian town, see al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl*, 1:392–412, or al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyah al-Kubrā*, ed. A. M. al-Hulūʾ and M. al-



polemics well into the Mamluk period, miracle-workers were unfavorably compared with men of intellectual and educational superiority, and their *karāmāt* were juxtaposed with the knowledge, rectitude, and piety of the scholars. A fine example may be quoted from ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Maqdisī, the protagonist of our first anecdote. Asked why more tales of *karāmāt* are told about “shaykhs” (*mashāyikh*) than about scholars, he answers: “Can the scholars wish for a greater wonder than their being preoccupied with study (*ishtighālihim bi-al-‘ilm*)?”³⁴

The apologia of the Egyptian scholar and Sufi Ibn Abī ‘Aṭā’ Allāh (d. 709/1309) “on the theme of saint’s miracles” seems to indicate that he felt the need to defend “such things as the collapsing of the distance between one place and another, walking on water, flying through the air, cognizance of entities which used to exist [but exist no longer], or of entities which have not yet come into existence through supernatural means, multiplying food or drink, producing fruit out of season . . . etc.” He also piously adds that “miracles of the spirit,” e.g., constant observance of God and sincere reliance on him, are the greatest of wonders.³⁵

While the realness of wondrous feats was hardly doubted (allegations of trickery are very rare in our sources), the sanctity of individuals who were known to perform them was not necessarily beyond doubt. It was questioned in sayings such as “Satan goes in one moment from the East to the West” (attributed to Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abī al-Khayr of the tenth century),³⁶ or in Ibn Taymīyah’s claim that “a premonition or inspiration about something, or supernatural deeds . . . allegedly occur [also] to many infidels, unbelievers, and heretical innovators.”³⁷ Some wonder-workers were suspected of collaboration with jinn, rather than with divine grace.³⁸ ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Sulamī insists that a *karāmah* may occur only to a true believer and devout Muslim, neither by his choice, nor necessarily with his awareness. Moreover, the true saint was expected to conceal his *karāmāt*.³⁹

The best indication of the near-consensus in favor of the recognition of sainthood and its wondrous manifestations may be found in the occurrences

Tanāhī (Cairo, 1971), 8:412–13 (trans. in Meri, *The Cult*, 161).

³⁴ Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl*, 1:15–16.

³⁵ Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī, *The Subtle Blessings in the Saintly Lives of Abu Abbas al-Mursi and His Master Abul-Hasan*, trans. Nancy Roberts (Louisville, KY, 2005), 73–74.

³⁶ Quoted in Denny, “Prophet and Walī,” 93.

³⁷ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū‘ Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymīyah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-‘Aṣimī (Riyadh, 1990), 2:213–14, translated in Meri, *The Cult*, 69.

³⁸ See my “Cited Tales of the Wondrous Doings,” 121, 137; Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl*, 2:336–38.

³⁹ Al-Sulamī, *Zabad al-Khulāsah*, 77.



of *awliyāʾ* and *karāmāt* in non-Sufi literature, written by judicially trained ulama. General (as opposed to Sufi) biographical dictionaries, and the *wafayāt* sections of chronicles, relate anecdotes about wondrous feats. These include restoring health, assuring safety in perilous situations, thwarting sin and crime, securing the supply of water and grain, conveying knowledge of future events and things hidden from the eye, arbitrating with humans and with God, and bringing about conversion to Islam. In these genres scholars could be praised both for their literary production and for performing wonders in the same entry. A comparable mingling of the fields of scholarly work and magic, which secular men and women of the modern age usually find surprising, could be found on the institutional level in Mamluk cities. The *dār al-ḥadīth* constructed by the Ayyubid sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf (d. 635/1237) in Damascus was designated to serve a double purpose: the study of prophetic tradition, and the display of a sandal of the Prophet, a precious relic that was bequeathed to the sultan by one of his subjects. The combining of the cult of the Prophet as a saint and the “academic” study of his lore must have made perfect sense to al-Malik al-Ashraf and to his contemporaries.⁴⁰ Another institution that disseminated *ʿilm* and *barakah* simultaneously was the Madrasah al-Jawhariyah, established in Cairo some 300 years later, in which a magical pearl and a talismanic bowl were kept for healing purposes.⁴¹

BIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE

The eleventh-century biographer Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, the author of the first comprehensive dictionary of Hanbalis (to which Ibn Rajab later added his *Dhayl*), glorifies God, saying: “He has made the scholars of this nation (*ummah*) absolutely the most virtuous among the scholars of all nations, and the most blessed. And he has provided them with wonders (*karāmāt*).”⁴² Ibn Abī Yaʿlā does not mention any wonders in the entries dedicated to members of the first two generations of the Hanbali school. *Barakah* and *karāmāt* first appear in his book with scholars of the third generation, men of the fourth/tenth century, in the second volume of the modern edition of the work. The numbers are small: 10 of the 129 entries of the volume report about the *barakah* and *karāmāt* of their biographees. The first case appears in the biography of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Zāhid al-ʿArīf (d. 313/925). Moved by the misery of a student who is about to have his hand amputated by his

⁴⁰ For a full account of this story see my *Islamic Piety*, 203–5.

⁴¹ Jonathan Berkey, “Tradition, Innovation, and the Construction of Knowledge in the Medieval Near East,” *Past and Present* 146 (1995): 38–39.

⁴² Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:212.



physician, Abū al-Ḥasan beseeches God's mercy in a somewhat provocative manner, then "reads over" the sick man (most likely Quranic verses, but perhaps some other formulae), and the hand is cured. Interestingly, Abū al-Ḥasan's colleagues, who are quoted discussing his *shafā'ah*, *barakah*, and spiritual ranking, use the typically Sufi terms *awliyā'*, *abdāl* ("substitutes," an elevated saintly status),⁴³ and *mustakhlifūn* ("successors," here designating an even higher rank, equivalent to that of the prophets).⁴⁴ A similar scene is depicted in the biography of Shaykh Abū Bakr 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Ja'far (d. 363/974), who was an author of varied scholarly works. Ibn Abī Ya'lá's informant describes a group of people standing at the city gate, talking about *karāmāt al-awliyā'*.⁴⁵ Whether the voice speaking is that of the eleventh-century compiler or that of the tenth-century discussants at the gate (a feasible possibility, in my mind), *karāmāt* obviously formed a part of the religious imagination of scholars from an early stage, even if they were not often ascribed to men of their own circles.

Ibn Rajab's "appendix" to Ibn Abī Ya'lá's work, *Al-Dhayl 'alá Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah*, is comprised of 613 entries dedicated to Hanbalis who lived between ca. 400/1010 and 740/1340. Many entries are very short: merely 2–3 lines that supply minimal data. Some are several pages long (up to 38 pages), rich with anecdotes about the biographee, descriptions of his scholarly works, and summaries of the juristic and theological debates he took part in. *Karāmāt* are ascribed to 27 of the biographees. If we do not take into account some 40 entries which provide hardly anything more than names and dates of death (assuming that at least in some of those cases the dearth of material is due to the compiler's limited access to information, rather than to the biographee's insignificance),⁴⁶ five percent of shaykhs are portrayed as possessing *barakah* and *karāmāt*.

The seventh and eighth volumes of Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyah al-Kubrā* include 480 entries dedicated to men who had died

⁴³ According to Sufi theory, a fixed number of *abdāl* are chosen by God to preserve universal equilibrium, especially during periods between prophets, and to perform *shafā'ah* for their brethren on the Day of Judgement (Jacqueline Chabbi, "Abdāl," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* [London, 1985], 1:173–74).

⁴⁴ "Al-*mustakhlif* fī al-*arḍ* makāmuhu makām al-*anbiyā'*" (Ibn Abī Ya'lá, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:62–63). For more anecdotes, see the appendix.

⁴⁵ Ibn Abī Ya'lá, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:123.

⁴⁶ This is explicitly acknowledged by Ibn Rajab at the end of his very short entry about al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Hamadhānī: "wa-lā a'lamu min ḥālihi ghayr hādihā" (Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl*, 1:208; similar comment *ibid.*, 2:481).



between 500/1106 and 700/1300 (excluding a hundred “empty”⁴⁷ and extremely brief entries). The vast majority of the biographees are scholars, but some members of the ruling and military elite are included as well. Most entries are very short and strictly informative. Some of the longer entries consist of anecdotes of sorts, poems, fatwas, and selected scholarly contributions, especially in the field of jurisprudence. Slightly more than six percent of the entries relate wondrous doings or occurrences, or explicitly mention *barakah* and *shafāʿah*.

Ibn Rajab and al-Subkī are much alike in their treatment of *barakah* and *karāmāt* not only number-wise, but also in the typology of their wonder-working scholars. Early and late wonder-working scholars in both works are constructed by similar characteristics: extraordinary piety expressed by devotional works, commitment to the service of fellow men, frugality and asceticism. Both dictionaries, however, also portray ascetics (*zuhhād*) and Sufis to whom no wonders are ascribed.⁴⁸

The first wonder-working scholar in Ibn Rajab’s dictionary is Abū al-Wafāʾ ibn al-Qawās (d. 476/1083–84), a member of the twelfth generation of Hanbalis, an ascetic who spent fifty years in retreat in his mosque. A student who used to study Quran with the shaykh narrates the wonder, referring to it, rather generously, as “remarkable.” It is a rather unassuming version of *firāsah*: the shaykh astonished his student by offering him, at the end of the school day, the exact sum he needed for the return trip home, but had lost on his trip to town earlier that day.⁴⁹

An unusually dense concentration of *karāmāt* is to be found in the biographies of scholars belonging to the Hanbalī milieu of the Ṣāliḥīyah, a neighborhood that was established in the 1160s by emigrants from Jabal Nāblus.⁵⁰ Stephan Leder treated the outstanding members of this clan, known as al-Maqādisah, in a fine article in *Der Islam* (1997). He coined the term “charismatic scripturalism” to characterize their particular type of

⁴⁷ Entries that consist of nothing more than a name. Perhaps al-Subkī had meant to complete them at a later stage of his work, but never did; perhaps information was lost by copyists of later generations.

⁴⁸ For example: 7:112–14, 156–57. Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṣūfī, the nephew of the Shaykh Abū Najīb al-Suhrawardī, who was master to many novices, is not described as a wonder-worker, but his *barakah* is mentioned as the power that has led sinners to repentance and men to God (al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 8:340).

⁴⁹ Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl*, 1:39.

⁵⁰ See Daniella Talmon-Heller and Benjamin Z. Kedar, “Did Muslim Survivors of the 1099 Massacre of Jerusalem Settle in Damascus? The True Origins of the al-Ṣāliḥīyah Suburb,” *Al-Masāq* 17 (2005): 165–69.



religious leadership, highlighting their “extraordinary ability to combine two elements of religious experience which were often held distinct: the literalist aspect of traditionalist religious orientation, and charismatic religious leadership.”⁵¹ The *muḥaddith* ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Maqdisī, with whom we opened this paper, was one of them. His two cousins, shaykh Abū ‘Umar Ibn Qudāmah and Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāmah, enjoyed a similar, if not higher, reputation. Abū ‘Umar, the imam and *khaṭīb* of the Hanbali mosque in the Ṣāliḥīyah, was known for piety, *shafā‘ah*, and *karāmāt*. His prayer for rain during a dry season (which he carried out with his female relatives on a holy site in the vicinity of Damascus) was instantly accepted. He could recognize indecency and read thoughts. People believed that he mediated *barakah* by the vocalization of certain verses from the Quran. A member of his community gives eloquent testimony to the efficacy of the shaykh’s *barakah*, saying that Abu ‘Umar’s custom of frequently reciting the *āyāt al-ḥaras* (Quran 2:284–86, 7:52–54, 7:109–11, 9:256, 37:1–11, 55:33–36, 59:212–14, 70:1–4) and *āyat al-kursī* (2:255) kept evil away from them in times of constant warfare, violence, and banditry. He also used to copy the Quran and certain works of exegesis, Hanbali theology and law, and Sufi biographies, and distributed them gratis among community members. Books in his handwriting were considered to carry *barakah* into the homes of those holding them. Likewise, petitions he addressed to local governors and officials on behalf of people who asked for his intercession in matters of this world were considered to be helpful not necessarily on account of their content, but rather due to the *barakah* contained in the document he had handled. A riot almost broke out at his funeral, as men and women fought over the water that had washed his body in preparation for burial.⁵²

Muwaffaq al-Dīn, author of the first comprehensive compilation of Hanbali law, *Al-Mughnī*, and of several important theological treatises, was regarded as an extraordinary scholar by his contemporaries and throughout the centuries. His biography in Ibn Rajab’s *Dhayl Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah* includes the following laudatory quotation of the Ba‘labakī Hanbali scholar ‘Abd Allāh al-Yūnīnī (d. 617/1220), who must have known him in person:

I have seen his noble character, his fine companionship, his abundant forbearance, great knowledge and intelligence, his

⁵¹ Leder, “Charismatic,” 298.

⁵² For a detailed portrait of shaykh Abū ‘Umar, see Daniella Talmon-Heller, “Hanbalite Islam in 12th–13th Century Jabal Nāblus and Jabal Qāsyūn,” *Studia Islamica* 79 (1994): 103–20. Chamberlain suggests that copying had a talismanic power not only by transmitting the *barakah* of the copyist, but also of the author, whether alive or dead (*Knowledge*, 144).



perfect manliness and great modesty and constant cheerfulness and his detachment from things of this world and its people and offices, to a degree that the greatest *awliyāʾ* hardly attain. The Prophet had said: “The greatest blessing that God can bestow upon his servant is to inspire him with constant remembrance of himself,” which means that *ilhām al-dhikr* is worthier than *karāmāt*, and the worthiest *dhikr* is that which extends benefits to other men, namely the teaching of the religious sciences and the sunnah.⁵³

Al-Yūnīnī seems to be engaging in a competition between scholars and Sufis. Himself at home in both traditions,⁵⁴ al-Yūnīnī praises scholars using Sufi discourse, especially the theme of *naḥʿ*—benefit to the people. Here, he positions Ibn Qudāmah as more virtuous than most *awliyāʾ* in this respect and stresses his righteousness. A few lines down the page the compiler Ibn Rajab dedicates a paragraph to “the mention of some of his [Ibn Qudāmah’s] wonders.” There we find two rather pale examples of Ibn Qudāmah’s penetrating insight and healing techniques, crowned by the following little anecdote, which is related by the *qawwām* (keeper) of the Damascene mosque Ibn Qudāmah used to frequent. The *qawwām* says: “When Ibn Qudāmah spends the night in the mosques, the doors open for him and close behind him by themselves.”⁵⁵

ʿImād al-Dīn al-Maqdisī was another renowned saintly figure of the Banū Qudāmah in thirteenth-century Damascus. Though learned, he preferred good works to scholarly work (“*wa-kāna min kuthrat ishghālihi wa-ishtighālihi lā yatafarraghū lil-taṣnīf wa-al-kitābah*”), and never completed his book on religious law.⁵⁶ His devotion and generosity to his students and to those who came to seek his guidance, advice, and help was legendary. Many *karāmāt* were attributed to him, such as the overwhelming effect his presence had on a sinner.⁵⁷ It was even said that he was one of “the seven who uphold

⁵³ Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl*, 2:138. On the importance attached to *dhikr*, the memory of God, in Christian and Islamic non-Sufi contexts, see Johannes Pahlitzsch, “The Concern for Spiritual Salvation and *Memoria* in Islamic Public Endowments in Jerusalem (XII–XVI C.) as compared to the Concepts of Christianity,” in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, vol. 3, ed. Urbain Vermeulen and Jo van Steenbergen (Leuven, 2001), 332–35.

⁵⁴ Al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl*, 2:57. See Li Guo, *Early Mamluk Syrian Historiography* (Leiden, 1998), 1:15, about Sufism in the al-Yūnīnī family.

⁵⁵ Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl*, 2:137–38.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:94–95.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:101.



the earth.”⁵⁸ Another family member to whom *aḥwāl* (spiritual “states”) and *karāmāt* (especially of multiplying food for the needy) are attributed is Aḥmad ibn Abī al-Makārim (d. 1225/622), the righteous imam and *khaṭīb* of the village of Mardā (Jabal Nāblus).⁵⁹

The Banū Qudāmāh correspond well to Ernst Gellner’s category of “charismatic lineages,” typical of the Moroccan Atlas.⁶⁰ *Barakah* “ran” in the family for at least four consecutive generations, perhaps due to the particular characteristics of the community that recorded its wonders. It was a community of emigrants from a rural area, with an extraordinarily dedicated and competent leadership,⁶¹ and with a documented tendency towards the veneration of holy men and the production of a hagiographical tradition.⁶² If we surmise that stories of *karāmāt* are told where there are not only charismatic shaykhs, but also needy communities and convincing storytellers, the case of the Banū Qudāmāh is a combination of all three prerequisites.

A few other examples will take us away from the Banū Qudāmāh. Speaking about the grammarian, poet, and expert on *qirā’āt* Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim ibn Firruḥ al-Shāṭibī (d. 590/1194) of the Madrasah al-Fāḍiliyah in Cairo, the Damascene historian Abū Shāmāh (d. 665/1267) notes that Shaykh al-Shāṭibī not only “combined learning with good works,” but was also a saint of well-known miracles.⁶³ Muḥammad ibn al-Khiḍr Ibn Taymīyah (d. 622/1225) was the undisputable spiritual leader of Ḥarrān, on top of being the learned author of many works. He served as the *khaṭīb* and imam of the great mosque of Ḥarrān, he taught in one of its main madrasahs (al-Nūriyah), and he held popular assemblies of exhortation (*maǰālis al-wa‘z*) for both the elite and the commoners. Ibn Rajab notes that he was known to have performed wondrous deeds and supernatural feats (*karāmāt wa-*

⁵⁸ Ibid., 2:103.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2:164.

⁶⁰ About “holy lineages” (albeit as an alternative to the ulama), see Ernst Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge, 1981), 116–17.

⁶¹ See my “Islamic Preaching in Syria during the Counter-Crusade (Twelfth–Thirteenth Centuries),” in *In Laudem Hierosolymitani: Studies in Crusades and Medieval Culture in Honour of Benjamin Z. Kedar*, ed. Iris Shagrir, Ronnie Ellenblum, and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Aldershot, 2007), 65–66.

⁶² See Talmon-Heller, “Hanbalite Islam”; idem, “The Cited Tales.”

⁶³ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ismā‘īl Abū Shāmāh, *Al-Bā‘ith ‘alā Inkār al-Bida‘ wa-al-Ḥawādith*, ed. H. Salmān (Riyadh, 1990), 223; Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fi Akhbār Man Dhahab*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā‘ūt and Muḥammad al-Arnā‘ūt (Beirut, 1991), 6:494–95. Ibn al-‘Imād does not relate the *karāmāt*, but he stresses the righteousness of al-Shāṭibī and his special pious customs.



khawāriq), but he does not give specific examples. He does offer a detailed account of the shaykh's theological disputations with Muwaffaq al-Dīn ibn Qudāmāh, and of dreams attesting to the shaykh's elevated status post mortem.⁶⁴

In the very long biographical entry dedicated to ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Sulamī in *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿīyah al-Kubrā*, al-Subkī inserts short stories about al-Sulamī's *karāmāt* between the plot of a complicated theological debate in which the shaykh was involved, and a presentation of his *fatāwā* regarding highly contested political issues. In one anecdote, al-Sulamī recognizes the impurity of a piece of cheese brought to him as a present (and indeed it turns out that it had been bought from a *dhimmi* woman who had pork on her hands).⁶⁵ The most spectacular wondrous doing of his was performed during the battle of al-Manṣūrah in the winter of 647/1250. When the Frankish boats came dangerously near to the Muslim forces, al-Sulamī raised his hands towards the wind and ordered it, in a loud voice, to turn against the enemy. The wind immediately changed its course, the Frankish boats capsized, and many of their passengers drowned. The Muslims gave thanks to God "for giving them a man whom the wind obeys,"⁶⁶ "a man that, had he been in India, or at the very end of the world, the sultan should do his utmost to bring him to his country in order to secure his blessings for himself and for his country" (*law kāna fī al-Hind aw fī aqṣā al-dunyā kāna yanbaghī lil-sultān an yasʿa fī ḥulūlihi fī bilādihi li-tatimma barakatuhu ʿalayhi wa-ʿalā bilādihi*).⁶⁷

Claiming that it was superfluous to tell the *karāmāt* of al-Sulamī's contemporary and fellow Shafīʿi Yaḥyá ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676/1278) since they were so well known, al-Subkī reproduces only a small hagiographical anecdote about the scholar's childhood. He quotes al-Nawawī's father, telling that when Yaḥyá was only seven years old, he was the only one in the household to be awakened by a glorious light in the middle of *laylat al-qadr*. Al-Subkī also comments that the impossibly huge volume of al-Nawawī's writing must be regarded as wondrous. Al-Nawawī himself, in his exemplary piety, was willing to recognize as wondrous only an answered prayer, a sip of water in the desert, or a piece of bread in the wilderness.⁶⁸

The only shaykh whose *karāmāt* were transmitted *bi-al-tawātur*,

⁶⁴ Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl*, 2:151–62.

⁶⁵ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 8:213.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8:216, 84.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8:96.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 8:396; Richard Gramlich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes: Theologien und Erscheinungsformen des islamischen Heiligenwunders* (Wiesbaden, 1987), 298.



uninterruptedly (according to ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī), and to whom the largest number of *karāmāt* were attributed (according to Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāmah), was Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (d. 563/1166). Known by later generations as the founder of a Sufi *ṭarīqah*, in Ibn Rajab’s biographical dictionary he is presented as a renowned preacher, connected with a large madrasah. Ibn Rajab relates only a few of his wonders (all demonstrating *firāsah*) and emphasizes that he was admired by both scholars and ascetics (“*akthar mashāyikh al-ard, min al-‘ulamā’ wa-al-zuhhād*”).⁶⁹

Tales of the wondrous deeds of ulama may be found also in Mamluk pilgrimage guides to the cemetery of al-Qarāfah. Christopher Taylor, who worked on a collection of such manuscript guides, retells some of these stories. He mentions the jurist Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Raslān (d. 571/1175–76), who made a wheat merchant’s business prosperous by touching his merchandise (until a Jew touched the wheat and ruined everything!), helped a woman in difficult childbirth by giving her a mirror with a line of his writing, and turned water into honey.⁷⁰ The Hanbali jurist Abū ‘Amr ‘Uthmān ibn Marzūq (d. 564/1168–69) made the Nile rise when it was too low, or recede when it was too high, just by performing his ritual ablutions at the river’s bank.⁷¹ The jurist Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Marzūq Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Rudaynī (d. 1145–46) is reported to have flown like a bird to a disputation with a colleague. After his death, he answered the fervent prayers of a poor man who visited his tomb and miraculously supplied him with the 10,000 dirhams he needed in order to pay his creditor.⁷² A house was robbed in a Cairene neighborhood and the frightened neighbors went to the jurist Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm, also known as Ibn Khallās al-Anṣarī, and asked him to pray on their behalf. Thanks to his prayer, local inhabitants were spared from beatings by the police; the robber confessed, repented, and was also spared.⁷³ The tombs of all these saintly ulama, so we learn from Christopher Taylor, were popular sites for visitation. Men wished to be buried in their proximity in pursuit of the *barakah* they believed would help them in this world, and ease their way to the hereafter.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl*, 1:292–93.

⁷⁰ Christopher Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden, 1999), 119, 134, 137.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 138, 144.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.



CONCLUSIONS

From the tenth century onwards, comments such as “he was [a man] of wonders (*kāna dhā karāmāt*),” and anecdotes that relate the wondrous doings of learned men, some of whom were madrasah professors and authors of scholarly volumes on jurisprudence, commentary, and theology, are integrated into biographical dictionaries and chronicles. Such a mixture of hagiography and supposedly realistic historical data about jurisconsults and theologians may be disturbing to our understanding of the world,⁷⁵ despite recent scholarship that repeatedly deconstructs previously assumed dichotomies between religion and magic, scholars and saints,⁷⁶ learned versus vulgar, or “high” culture versus “low” or popular culture.⁷⁷ As I have attempted to illustrate in this paper, this mixture of the miraculous and the mundane was perfectly congruent with the sensibilities of men of the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, learned and unlearned. In their minds—as mirrored in the biographical and theological works they have produced—knowledge of religious lore (*ʿilm*), successful intercession with God and with secular powers (*shafāʿah*), and spiritual metaphysical powers (*barakah*) were interconnected, intertwined, and even organically tied to each other.

At this stage, I would like to offer some further thoughts on the issue of hagiographies of scholars, in an attempt to enhance our understanding of the roles and images of ulama in Mamluk society from a rarely posed perspective. As we have seen, the discourse of ulama about themselves reflects the appropriation of Sufi terminology and the employment of the characteristic traits of ascetics and mystics. In Michael Chamberlain’s words, “The learned associated themselves with other forms of ritual power [other than *ʿilm*] by linking their *ʿilm* to Sufism . . . by casting themselves as ‘true’ Sufis, and by using Sufi terms.”⁷⁸ The impetus, I would like to add, could also have come from below. Namely, the disciples of ulama—ranging from the humble yet popular imam of a neighborhood mosque to a renowned jurist and author—and their admirers from among commoners attached some of the attributes of Sufi shaykhs onto them. The gatekeeper of the mosque Ibn Qudāmah used to frequent at night, the Muslim soldiers at al-Manṣūrah, and the crowd at the funeral of ʿImād al-Dīn Ibn Qudāmah (all

⁷⁵ As expressed in Stefan Leder’s interpretation of ʿAbd al-Ghanī’s rejection of his own saintliness, namely “that any other attitude would probably have been inconsistent with his serious, down-to-earth and toilsome work as a scholar” (Leder, “Charismatic,” 299).

⁷⁶ See Cornell’s refutation of Gellner’s oppositional pairs: Cornell, *The Realm*, xxvii, 106.

⁷⁷ Regarding the inappropriateness of these dichotomies in Islamic context see Savage-Smith, *Magic and Divination*, iii. She contends that boundaries are indistinct and shifting.

⁷⁸ Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, 128–30.



of whom are mentioned as the informants of the biographers and compilers of written biographical material) certainly did.

Alternatively, or simultaneously, the discourse about wonder-working scholars may have been tied to a competition that took place within the ranks of the ulama, rather than between them and Sufis (who, according to most contemporary researchers, were separated from scholars by rather porous boundaries, with a significant overlap between the two categories).⁷⁹ In this context, *karāmāt* were the signifiers of impeccably pious and ethical men, scholars who thanks to their righteousness enjoyed the grace of unusual intimacy with God. The identity of ulama was first and foremost constructed on the acquisition and dissemination of *‘ilm*, of course.⁸⁰ The unusual authority scholars had in medieval Muslim societies drew also upon the *shafā‘ah* and *barakah* (in varying combinations and degrees) that was attributed to them. *Karāmāt* were the “special ingredient” of the depiction of the saintly scholar, who outdid his peers in piety and good works.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Emil Homerin, “Sufis and their detractors in Mamluk Egypt,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, 226–27.

⁸⁰ I thank Yaacov Lev for stressing this for me.



APPENDIX

Selected anecdotes about wondrous doings of scholars from Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, Ibn Rajab, and al-Subkī:

1. The Prophet appears in a dream of an anonymous *muḥaddith*, who had spent years in search of an answer to some peculiar theological question that bothered him, and refers him to Shaykh Abū Bakr ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Jaʿfar, better known as Ghulām al-Khalāl (d. 363/974). The *muḥaddith* hastily departs for Baghdad, enters Jāmiʿ al-Khalīfah (as instructed), and easily recognizes the shaykh by his particular eyebrows and especially loud voice. Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz approaches him first, and discreetly asks him if he is the fellow sent by the Prophet.⁸¹ In a second anecdote the shaykh himself is the narrator. He tells of a wonder he had witnessed when accompanying his shaykh on a visit to the keeper (*nāṭūr*) of Bāb al-Ḥarb: the transformation of food into gold (supposedly, for his own sake). More interestingly, the scene depicted by the narrator is that of a group of people telling *karāmāt al-awliyāʾ*. After his death, a ray of light (*ʿamūd nūr*) was seen rising from his grave to the sky.⁸² A Muslim who lived in the vicinity of the grave heard the Prophet in his dream, promising that a visit to shaykh Abū Bakr’s grave secures God’s forgiveness.⁸³ He is said to have foreseen the exact day of his own death: a Friday at the age of 78, just like Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Abū Bakr al-Murūdī. Ibn Abī Yaʿlā notes that “*hādhihi karāmah ḥasana la-hu.*”⁸⁴

2. Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn Samʿūn (d. 387/997), known for his *zuhd fī al-dunyā*, tells the following story: on a visit to Jerusalem, after a sojourn in Medina, his *nafs* craved for fresh dates. He admonished it, and took out the dry dates he had put aside for his meal. To his great surprise, they were fresh! He did not touch them. By suppertime, he found that they had been restored to their former, dry, condition, so he ate some of them.

According to an anecdote told by a student of his, Abū al-Ḥusayn could read thoughts and predict the future. Thanks to his advice, the student did not sell his last belongings, despite his stressful economic situation, and waited patiently for God’s succor. It indeed came. Another informant recalls that the shaykh had paused for an hour in the middle of one of his

⁸¹ Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:122–23.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2:124–25

⁸³ Here the editor, Muḥammad al-Fiqī, adds a footnote, commenting in a typically modernist fashion that it is a shame that such pagan mausolea and sanctuaries were built.

⁸⁴ Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:126–27.



sermons, so as not to disturb a student who had dozed off, explaining that the latter was enjoying the apparition of the Prophet in his dream.⁸⁵ Finally, Abū al-Ḥusayn predicted that some time after his death his body would be taken out of its grave, and then reburied. When this indeed happened, his shrouds were found intact.⁸⁶

3. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Jaʿfar al-Radhānī (d. 494/1101) was an ascetic *muqriʿ* and *faqīh* whose prayers were answered (“*mujāb al-daʿwah*”). He was also a wonder-worker (“*ṣāhib karāmāt*”). One of his wonders is spelled out: a deer came over to play with his little son one morning, in accordance with a promise he had given the child on the night before.⁸⁷

4. The Bedouin shaykh (*baʿd ahl al-bādiyah*) Abū Ṭālib al-ʿAshārah, Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Faṭḥ (d. 451/1059), who was an ascetic and an expert on hadith, was known to pray for rain effectively in times of drought. Ibn Abī Yaʿlā adds: “*wa-la-hu karāmāt kathīrah.*”⁸⁸

5. Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-ʿUlthī (d. 503/1109–1110), a student of Abū Yaʿlā, restored the health of a sick little boy (with the recitation of Quranic verses, and his saliva), and “not few of his [other] wonders became known.”⁸⁹

6. ʿUthmān ibn Marzūq al-Qurashī, known also as Abū ʿUmar al-Zāhid (d. 564/1168–69), described as “*al-faqīh, al-ʿarīf al-zāhid,*” who taught both law and mysticism, was involved in theological debate (regarding *khalq al-afʿāl*) and had “*karāmāt wa-aḥwāl wa-maqāmāt wa-kalām ḥasan ʿalā lisān ahl al-ṭarīqah.*” Once, he stopped the Nile from flooding agricultural land, and in another year, he prevented a severe drought.⁹⁰

7. Al-Ḥasan ibn Aḥmad Abū al-ʿAlāʾ, known as al-ʿAṭṭār Shaykh Hamadhān (d. 569/1173–74), is described as a prominent scholar of hadith, author of works on different branches of hadith studies and devotional treatises (*zuhdiyyāt wa-al-raqāʾiq wa-ghayr dhālika*). He was popular among scholars and commoners, including Muʿtazilis and Jews(!), and inclined towards asceticism. The preacher Nāṣiḥ al-Dīn ibn al-Ḥanbalī is quoted saying about him: “and his standing in the eyes of the common people and the elite is

⁸⁵ Ibid., 2:157.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 2:161–62.

⁸⁷ Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl*, 1:92.

⁸⁸ Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:192.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 2:255–56; Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl*, 1:130–31. In Ibn Rajab’s version, Abū al-Ḥusayn (Ibn Abī Yaʿlā) precedes the story with the somewhat apologetic “*akhbarānī man athīqu bi-hi.*”

⁹⁰ Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl*, 1:306–11.



well known, as are his *karāmāt*.”⁹¹

8. Ismāʿīl ibn Zafar Abū Ṭāhir al-Mundhirī al-Dimashqī (d. 639/1241–42) traveled extensively for the study of hadith. Little else is said of him, except that he was pious, righteous, chivalrous, and humble, as well as *ṣāhib karāmāt*.⁹²

9. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Yūnīnī al-Baʿalbakī “*aḥad aʿlām wa-shuyūkh al-islām*,” (d. 658/1260), was a scholar versed in hadith and *fiqh*, and a Sufi, a disciple of shaykh ʿAbd Allāh al-Yūnīnī (also renowned for *karāmāt* and *aḥwāl*), who donned the Sufi mantle (*khirqah*) he had received from shaykh ʿAbd Allāh al-Baṭāʿihī. He had also attained mystical states and performed *karāmāt*, but he was reluctant to expose wondrous doing, claiming that: “God has commanded the prophets to exhibit their miracles (*muʿjizāt*), and the saints (*awliyāʾ*) to conceal their wonders.”⁹³

10. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Yaḥyā al-Suʿbī (d. 553/1158–59) was a pious Yemenite scholar and author. It was told about him that he was once attacked with swords (the circumstances are not revealed), but turned out to be immune to their edge. He himself recalled reciting *sūrat yāʾ sīn*, or according to another version, seven other specific verses. He claimed to have learnt of their protective power being a witness to a wondrous sight: a lamb playing at the side of a wolf, unharmed, thanks to a folded piece of paper which was tied around its neck, containing these very verses.⁹⁴

11. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Ṭabarī (d. in the 530s/1135–45), *ṣāhib al-aḥwāl wa-al-karāmāt wa-al-jidd fī al-ʿibādāt*, was a professor at the Niẓāmīyah, but resigned and settled in Mecca, where he spent the final forty years of his life in absolute poverty. A little pool or cistern would fill up with water exclusively for him, whenever he needed water for performing ablutions.⁹⁵

12. Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf al-Shaybānī al-Mawṣilī, known as al-Kawāshī (d. 680/1281–82), *al-mufasssīr, al-rajul al-ṣāliḥ, al-zāhid, al-warīʿ, dhū al-aḥwāl wa-al-karāmāt* (too many to tell!), resided in the mosque of Mosul for more than forty years. He was the author of a Quran exegesis in two versions, honored and sought by the sultan “and by his inferiors,” and known to master “the greatest name of God (*ism Allāh al-aʿẓam*).”⁹⁶

⁹¹ Ibid., 1:324–29.

⁹² Ibid., 2:224.

⁹³ Ibid., 2:272.

⁹⁴ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 7:140–41.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 7:190–92.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 8:42. The penetration of the mystery of the Greatest Name of God—who is known to possess ninety-nine of the most beautiful names—is considered to be the source of the highest bliss in this world and the next, and of miraculous powers (Annemarie Schimmel,



13. ‘Abd al-Ghaffār ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qazwīnī, Najm al-Dīn (d. 665/1267), author of *Al-Hāwī* and other works, including a book on arithmetic (*Kitāb al-Ḥisāb*), “*kāna min al-ṣāliḥīn arbāb al-aḥwāl wa-al-karāmāt.*” He could write his work at night thanks to a wondrous light glowing from his finger. Al-Subkī adds that two other Qazwīnīs were blessed by the very same wonder: ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Muḥammad al-Rafī‘ī and his father.⁹⁷ Al-Rafī‘ī’s powers are attested in a separate entry,⁹⁸ where he is described as exceptionally learned and pious, an author of important works in jurisprudence, *tafsīr*, and hadith, and highly praised by contemporary scholars. Al-Nawawī is quoted as saying that al-Rafī‘ī (d. 623/1226) was “one of the local righteous men (*al-ṣāliḥīn al-mutamakkinīn*), who had many *karāmāt.*”⁹⁹

Mystical Dimensions of Islam [Chapel Hill, 1975], 25, 177).

⁹⁷ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 8:276–78. For al-Rafī‘ī’s light see *ibid.*, 284.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8:281–93.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8:284.



©2009 by Daniella Talmon-Heller.

DOI: [10.6082/M1CZ35BK](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1CZ35BK). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1CZ35BK>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

CATERINA BORI
UNIVERSITY OF PERUGIA

The Collection and Edition of Ibn Taymiyah's Works: Concerns of a Disciple

In the world of medieval Islam generally, and particularly in the Mamluk period with which we are concerned here, the transmission of knowledge was closely connected to the willingness and ability of a scholar's pupils to transmit his writings. This implies the existence of a circle of students and their engagement in activities of copying, abridging, and commenting on a scholar's work. In itself, this constituted a mark of recognition and affiliation.

In a book devoted to the formation of the four Sunni schools of law (*madhāhib*) in the ninth and tenth centuries, Christopher Melchert has significantly highlighted the pivotal moment of this process as the point when the students of the four imams started recognizing their doctrines, collecting and editing them, and then teaching them. The subsequent formal inclusion of the schools' adherents in collections of biographies organized according to school affiliation substantially contributed to the formalization of the schools, as did the development of a system of qualification for the transmission of knowledge in teaching institutions.¹ Although this discourse concerns the end of the formative period of Islam (ninth and tenth centuries A.D.), which is not the one involved in this article (first half of the fourteenth century A.D.), some of these observations can serve as theoretical focal points for the case presented in this contribution. Additionally, Michael Chamberlain has written a fascinating and rich book on the social dynamics that affected the production and reproduction of knowledge in medieval Damascus (1190–1350).² His arguments on the importance of personal affiliation and mechanisms of loyalty form the general framework of this article.

Despite the attention that the renowned Hanbali jurist and theologian Ibn Taymiyah (d. 728/1328) has attracted in recent years, Ibn Taymiyah's journey to modernity remains a fascinating and relatively unexplored subject of research. This article tackles the earliest stage of the long and complex process of the transmission of Ibn Taymiyah's works after his death. It will also bring to light

© The Middle East Documentation Center. The University of Chicago.

¹ All these issues are synthesized and critically presented by Christopher Melchert, "The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law," in *The Formation of Islamic Law*, ed. Wael B. Hallaq (Aldershot, 2004), 351–66, and see the bibliography therein; idem, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th–10th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden, 1997).

² Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, 1994).



©2009 by Caterina Bori.

DOI: [10.6082/M15H7DDJ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M15H7DDJ). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M15H7DDJ>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

some issues regarding the status of Ibn Taymiyah that have been discussed in greater detail elsewhere.³

A number of factors could affect the survival, transmission, and eventual circulation and success of somebody's corpus of knowledge in the Mamluk period. Among these, one can cite the position that a scholar enjoyed among the influential people who promoted a culture of patronage in important teaching institutions. Patronage of urban works and scholarly enterprise was indeed an important cultural and political feature of Mamluk society, as a good deal of modern scholarship devoted to this topic shows.⁴ Another non-negligible aspect concerns the popularity of the ideas and practices endorsed by a given scholar, as well as the ability of his scholarship to offer appropriate responses to the religious and social demands of his time. The dynamics that the circulation of somebody's ideas created in the political, social, and religious arena in which he was located, and the consequent need to respond to his doctrines, should also be taken into account. This latter factor may be relevant when dealing with some of the controversial doctrines of Ibn Taymiyah. However, a thorough analysis of scholarly reactions to Taymiyan doctrines has yet to be carried out.⁵

As for the first two factors, I am of the opinion that neither played a relevant role in the transmission and dissemination of Ibn Taymiyah's scholarship. As far as patronage is concerned, the common idea that Ibn Taymiyah was at odds with the Mamluk authorities needs to be revisited.⁶ Nevertheless, his closeness

³ Caterina Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya *wa-jamā'atu-hu*: Authority, Conflict and Consensus in Ibn Taymiyya's Circle," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Shahab Aḥmad and Yossef Rapoport (Karachi, forthcoming), 23–52.

⁴ For Mamluk patronage in teaching institutions and scholarly life, see Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, 1992), 95–127, esp. 96–107; Mohammad Awad, "Sultan al-Ghawri: His Place in Literature and Learning (Three Books Written under His Patronage)," in *Actes du XXe congrès international des orientalistes, Bruxelles, 5–10 September 1938* (Louvain, 1940), 321–22; Carl F. Petry, "A Paradox of Patronage during the Later Mamluk Period," *The Muslim World* 73 (1983): 182–207; idem, "Scholastic Stasis in Medieval Islam Reconsidered: Mamluk Patronage in Cairo," *Poetics Today* 14 (1993): 323–48; Anne F. Broadbridge, "Academic Rivalry and the Patronage System in Fifteenth-Century Egypt: Al-'Aynī, al-Maqrīzī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 85–107.

⁵ The most notorious group of texts produced in refutation of some of Ibn Taymiyah's doctrines is that by Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), *Al-Rasā'il al-Subkīyah fī al-Radd 'alā Ibn Taymiyah wa-Tilmidhihi Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah*, ed. Kamāl Abū al-Mūnā (Beirut, 1983). An analysis of polemical reactions to Ibn Taymiyah in the first half of the fourteenth century can be found in Caterina Bori, *Ibn Taymiyya: una vita esemplare: analisi delle fonti classiche della sua biografia*, Supplemento monografico n. 1 alla *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 76 (Pisa, 2003), 141–70.

⁶ The idea of conflict between the Mamluk authorities and Ibn Taymiyah is upheld, for instance, in an influential article by Donald P. Little, "The Historical and Historiographical Significance of the Detention of Ibn Taymiyya," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 3 (1973):



311–27. Biographical sources and chronicles report plenty of evidence regarding the relationship between Ibn Taymiyah and the Mamluk authorities. For instance, Ibn Taymiyah seems to have been on good terms with the amir Sayf al-Dīn Jāghān, the finance agent (*mushidd al-dawāwin*) in Damascus between 697 and 702/1297 and 1303 and occasionally deputy of the viceroy (Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī [d. 744/1343], *Al-Uqūd al-Durriyah min Manāqib Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyah*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib Ḥamid al-Fiḳī [Cairo, 1938], 198–99). He had good relations with the governor of Damascus Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afram (d. ca. 720/1320–21) as well. Ibn Kathīr reports that he had accompanied al-Afram on one of the campaigns against the Shi‘i populations of Kasrawān in 699/1300 (Ibn Kathīr [d. 774/1373], *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah fi al-Tārīkh*, ed. Fu‘ād ‘Alī al-Kurdi [Cairo, 1932–39], 14:12, ll. 12–20). In the year 700/1300 the viceroy and the amirs of Damascus are described as asking Ibn Taymiyah to go to Egypt to exhort the sultan to send his troops against the Tatars (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:15, ll. 15–20). According to Ibn Kathīr’s version, in Cairo Ibn Taymiyah met with the sultan, the vizier, and the notables who consented to come to Syria (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14: 6, ll. 11–13). Ibn Taymiyah’s interventions regarding both the Mongol authorities and the Egyptian administration are recorded by several chronicles (al-Birzālī [d. 739/1339], *Al-Muqtafā*, in *Al-Jāmi‘ li-Sīrat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyah (661–728) khilāl Sab‘at Qurūn*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Uzayr Shams and ‘Alī ‘Imrān [Mecca, 1420 H], 149–50; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:8 and 14; al-Yūnīnī [d. 726/1326], *Early Mamluk Syrian Historiography: Al-Yūnīnī’s Dhayl Mūrāt al-Zamān*, ed. and trans. Li Guo [Leiden, 1998], 2:108–9, 119, 123–24; Ibn Dawādārī [d. ca. 736/1335], *Kanz al-Durar wa-Jāmi‘ al-Ghurar*, ed. Hans Robert Roemer [Cairo, 1960], 9:32–33, 36; Karl Vilhelm Zetterstéen, ed., *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mamlukensultane in den Jahren 690–741 der Hīgra nach arabischen Handschriften* [Leiden, 1919], 69–70, 76–79; al-Nuwayrī [d. 733/1333], *Nihāyat al-Arab fi Funūn al-Adab*, ed. al-Bāz al-‘Arīnī [Cairo, 1992], 31:395). It is hard to believe that he acted only privately. According to al-‘Umārī (d. 749/1349), al-Afram was not willing to let Ibn Taymiyah go to Egypt when summoned there in 705/1306 (al-‘Umārī, *Masālik al-Abṣār fi Mamālik al-Amṣār*, in *Al-Jāmi‘ li-Sīrat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyah*, 260: “*famanā‘a nā‘ib al-shām . . .*”). The sultan Qalāwūn (d. 741/1341), after regaining power in 709/1310, asked Ibn Taymiyah to avenge his enemies with a fatwa, but the shaykh refused (Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 282–83). In the same year Ibn Taymiyah persuaded the sultan to maintain the status of *dhimmīs* as instituted by Baybars al-Jashnikīr (Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 281). In 711/1311–12 Ibn Taymiyah is reported to have advised Qalāwūn to appoint al-Afram to the vice-regency of Tripoli (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:60–61: “*intaqala al-Afram ilā niyābat Ṭarābulus bi-ishārat Ibn Taymiyah ‘alā al-sultān bi-dhālika*”). In the same year he went back to Damascus in the company of the sultan and the army (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:67, ll. 7–10), where he is reported to have aroused the envy of some of his fellow scholars “*li-taqaddumihi ‘inda al-dawlah*” (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:37, l. 7). Ibn Taymiyah himself declares his allegiance to the Mamluk regime in various instances: “There is no enmity or hatred between me and anybody in Egypt. I never stopped loving them (the Mamluks) and considering them as friends: their amirs, their scholars and judges” (Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmū‘ Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim al-Najdī al-Ḥanbalī [Rabat, 1981], 3:259, ll. 5–7; see also 3:216, ll. 7–8). The very composition of his political treatise *Al-Siyāsah al-Shar‘iyah* is usually associated with Ibn Taymiyah’s close connection with the sultan Qalāwūn (see Caterina Bori, “Théologie politique et Islam, à propos d’Ibn Taymiyya [d. 728/1328] et du sultanat mamelouk,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 224, no.1 (2007): 10, n. 13, for all the references regarding the composition of the *Siyāsah* according to Henri Laoust. See also Ibn Taymiyah, *Les intermédiaires entre Dieu et l’homme [Risālat al-wāsita bayna l-khalq wa l-haqq]*, suivi de *Le Shaykh de l’Islam Ibn Taymiyya: Chronique d’une vie de théologien militant*, ed. Yahya



to some prominent men of the military elite does not imply any kind of direct patronage either from the Mamluk authorities themselves or from other powerful scholars of his time. This does not mean that he was beyond the dynamics of competition that characterized the scholarly life of his time. On a few instances he is reported as actively taking part in the struggles for control of stipendiary posts (*manāṣib*).⁷ Even so, generally speaking Ibn Taymīyah's teaching activities took place in peripheral institutions.⁸ While some aspects of his scholarship and personal activism seem to have been appreciated—I am thinking mainly of both his physical and intellectual engagement in activities of jihad—nevertheless, many other aspects of his doctrines remained minority views.⁹ I am referring to his unpopular positions on divorce oaths and triple divorce (*al-ḥilf bi-al-ṭalāq* and *al-ṭalāq al-thalāth*) and the visitation to tombs of pious men (*ziyārat al-qubūr*) in particular, but also to his open criticism of Sufi ideas and practices.¹⁰

Michot [Paris, 1996], 22). The letters that Ibn Taymīyah wrote to the sultan to support the war against the Mongols or to promote the Islamization of the Jabal Kasrawān populations also point in the same direction (see Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 182–94, and Ibn Taymīyah, *Risālah ilā al-Sultān al-Malik al-Nāṣir fī Sha'n al-Tatār*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid [Beirut, 1976]). It was the *fitnah* which broke out in Damascus in 718/1318 regarding divorce oaths that caused Ibn Taymīyah to lose the support of both the sultan and the governor of Damascus, Tankiz (d. 740/1339). In fact, as demonstrated by Yossef Rapoport, the position of Ibn Taymīyah on divorce oaths did not only challenge well-established social practices and issues of patriarchal authority, but also the sphere of public life. See Yossef Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (Cambridge, 2005), esp. 89–110; and idem, "Ibn Taymiyya on Divorce Oaths," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Syrian and Society*, ed. Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni (Leiden, 2004), 191–217.

⁷ See the reports about the deliberations (and subsequent strife) over the allocation of positions that took place at the death of the shaykh al-Fāriqī (d. 703/1304) (see Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:28, and al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, ed. Fahīm Muḥammad 'Ulwī Shaltūt [Cairo, 1998], 32:79–80) and at the death of the shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn al-Sharīsī (d. 718/1318) (see al-Dhababī, *Thalāth Tarājim Nafisah lil-A'imma al-A'lām: Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah, al-Ḥāfiẓ 'Alam al-Dīn al-Birzālī, al-Ḥāfiẓ Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī: Min Kitāb Dhayl Tārīkh al-Islām*, ed. Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir al-'Ajmī [Kuwait, 1995], 56).

⁸ See Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya wa-jamā'atu-hu," 31–32.

⁹ Ibn Taymīyah's intervention during the Mongol invasions of Syria has been an important factor in the construction of his image as a paradigm of activism to this very day. The bio-hagiographical literature has doubtless exploited Ibn Taymīyah's activism in jihad as an undisputable point in his favor (see for instance al-Bazzār, *Al-A'lām al-'Alīyah fī Manāqib Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid [Beirut, 1976], 63–65; al-'Umārī, *Masālik*, 253–54, 258–59; Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 177–80; al-Mar'ī ibn Yūsuf al-Karmī [d. 1033/1623–24], *Al-Kawākib al-Durrīyah fī Manāqib al-Mujtahid Ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Najm 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khalaf [Beirut, 1986], 93–94). On jihad against the Mongols, now see Denise Aigle, "The Mongol Invasion of Bilād al-Shām by Ghāzān Khān and Ibn Taymīyah's Three 'Anti-Mongol' Fatwas," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2007): 89–120.

¹⁰ On the *ṭalāq* controversy, see—as quoted above—Yossef Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce*;



With this in mind, the role of his circle of pupils must have been crucial in the process of transmission of his work. The massive 37-volume fatwa collection of Ibn Taymiyah, the many printed books of his writings available on the market today, and the large number of manuscripts lying scattered in libraries all over the world encourage one to imagine a steady, ongoing, and successful transmission throughout the centuries.¹¹ Contrary to these expectations, this article will show that just after Ibn Taymiyah's death, the issue of the collection and transmission of his *mu'allafāt* (writings) was a rather troublesome matter for one scholar in particular.

A DISCIPLE'S PRACTICAL CONCERNS

An impressive amount of biographical material on Ibn Taymiyah has survived. No other contemporary scholar was the subject of such a large number of biographical writings. Among these, two monographs written shortly after his death stand out, together with a third, later one, which does not impress the reader with its originality—in fact, it draws heavily on previous materials.¹² A series of biographical entries in collective dictionaries or obituaries in chronicles adds to

idem, "Ibn Taymiyya on Divorce Oaths"; and Abdul Hakim I. Al-Matroudi, *The Ḥanbalī School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah: Conflict or Conciliation* (London and New York, 2006), 171–85. For Ibn Taymiyah's criticism of Sufi ideas and popular practices, see Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Leiden, 2007), 108–14; Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford, 2002), 126–38, esp. 130–34; Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, 1999), 87–111; Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden, 1999), 168–218; Thomas E. Homerin, "Ibn Taymiyya's al-*Ṣūfiyya wa-al-fuqarā'*," *Arabica* 32 (1985): 219–44; idem, "Sufis and their Detractors in Mamluk Egypt: a Survey of Protagonists and Institutional Settings," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, ed. Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden, 1999), 225–45, esp. 231–35; Niels H. Olesen, *Culte des saints et pèlerinages chez Ibn Taymiyya (661/1263–728/1328)* (Paris, 1991); Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawāb al-Saḥīḥ* (Delmar, NY, 1984), 5–14 and 24–39; Paul Nwyia, "Une cible d'Ibn Taymiyya: Le moniste al-Timlisānī (m. 690/1291)," *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales* 30 (1978): 127–45; Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle against Popular Religion* (The Hague, 1976).

¹¹ However, it should be noted that some of Ibn Taymiyah's most voluminous works are not included in the Saudi collection of his *fatāwā*. See, among others, Ibn Taymiyah, *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-Naql wa-al-'Aql*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 11 vols. (Riyadh, 1981–83); and idem, *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyah fī Naqd Kalām al-Shī'ah al-Qadarīyah*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 9 vols. (Riyadh, 1986).

¹² Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*. See also the new edition from a different manuscript, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār fī Dhikr Aḥwāl Qāmī' al-Mubtadi'īn wa-Ākhir al-Mujtahidīn Taqī al-Dīn Abī al-'Abbās Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyah*, ed. Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Jalaynad (Cairo, 2003). Al-Bazzār, *Al-A'lām al-'Aliyah*; al-Mar'ī ibn Yūsuf al-Karmī, *Al-Kawākib al-Durriyah*.



this bulk of texts.¹³ To my knowledge, no other fourteenth-century scholar was inundated by such a cascade of bio-hagiographical attention, let alone the single-subject volumes composed for him in the style of *manāqib* (usually monographic biographical works of a laudatory nature). For instance, although the powerful Shafi'i chief qadi Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355) received an impressively long and wordy *tarjamah* (biographical notice) composed by his son Tāj al-Dīn (d. 771/1369) that was inserted in his monumental *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, no monographs were penned to enhance his personal and scholarly status.¹⁴ Sultans did enjoy the privilege of being subjects of *sīrahs*, but this is a matter of an altogether different nature.¹⁵

Luckily, many epistles of Ibn Taymīyah to his family and companions have withstood the ravages of time, as have some letters written by members of his close circle of students and supporters. These materials do not usually share the language and purpose of the bio-hagiographical tradition, but they can still be considered biographical materials.¹⁶ Some of them display an interesting personal flavor mixed with doctrinal issues that help contextualize and further our understanding of the vicissitudes of the *shaykh al-islām* and the cultural and political milieu of which he was a part. Among these letters is that of Ibn Murri al-Ḥanbalī, to which I shall now turn my attention.

Ibn Murri was a Hanbali scholar from Ba'lbak. This background in itself did not necessarily entail his being a follower of Ibn Taymīyah, but he indeed was. His name comes up in the sources in connection with some disturbances that

¹³ For a critical survey of Ibn Taymīyah's biographical tradition, see Hasan Qasim Murad, "Miḥan of Ibn Taymiyya: A Narrative Account based on a Comparative Analysis of the Sources" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1968), 1–73; and Bori, *Ibn Taymiyya: una vita esemplare*, 29–59, 177–81. Al-ʿUlaymī (d. 927/1520–21), *Al-Manhaj al-Aḥmad fi Tarājim Aṣḥāb al-Imām Aḥmad*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Arnāʿūt et al. (Beirut, 1997), 5:24–44, should be added to the list of sources examined in the latter reference. I should like to thank Christopher Melchert for letting me have a copy of the text.

¹⁴ Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāhī and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥilw (Cairo, 1964–76), 10:139–340.

¹⁵ See for instance Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Ibn Nāhiḍ (d. 841/1438), "Ibn Nāhiḍ's *as-Sīra aṣ-Ṣaykhiyya* (Eine Lebensgeschichte des Sultans al-Muʿayyad Ṣaykh): Ein Beitrag zur Sīra-Literatur," ed. Rudolf Veselý, *Archiv Orientalní* 67, no. 2 (1999): 149–220; Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir (d. 692/1292), *Al-Rawḍ al-Zāhir fi Sirat al-Malik al-Zāhir*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khuwayṭir (Riyadh, 1976). Paulina B. Lewicka, *Šāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī's Biography of the Mamluk Sultan Qalāwūn* (Warsaw, 2000), contains a critical edition of a biography of the sultan Qalāwūn (d. 689/1290) entitled *Al-Faḍl al-Maʿthūr min Sirat al-Sultān al-Malik al-Manṣūr*.

¹⁶ See Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī, *ʿUqūd*, 257–59, 259–67, 272–77, 284–85, 291–321; Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā*, 3:202–10, 211–47, 249–77; 28:30–46, 47–48, 48–50, 50–57, 57–59. Some of the letters in *Majmūʿ Fatāwā* coincide with those in *ʿUqūd*. This list does not include the letters sent to the sultan Qalāwūn, which display, all in all, a different type of discourse.



took place in the year 725/1324–25 in Cairo, where he was tried and punished by the Maliki judge al-Ikhnā'ī (d. 732/1331–32) for preaching in support of Ibn Taymiyah's ideas on asking for the Prophet's aid and intercession (*al-istighāthah wa-al-tawassul*). The affair concluded in his expulsion from Cairo together with his family.¹⁷

Ibn Murri is the author of a *risālah* to Ibn Taymiyah's pupils. The letter was written shortly after the shaykh's death,¹⁸ and it has the clear purpose of encouraging Ibn Taymiyah's students to engage in the collection and edition of their master's works. Ibn Murri's concern regards the state of Ibn Taymiyah's *mu'allafāt*—which, he laments, are scattered, disordered, and full of lacunae—and their subsequent transmission.

He illustrates this painful situation as follows:

I urge your sound endeavors to get hold of the notebooks (*karārīs*) of the “Refutation of the Doctrines of the Philosophers” (*Al-Radd ‘alā ‘Aqā'id al-Falāsifah*), as there is not a complete extant copy of this work except mine, which was stored in the northern cabinet (*al-khuristān al-shamālī*) of our shaykh's madrasah.¹⁹ The shaykh Sharaf al-Dīn²⁰—may God be compassionate to him—informed me that he had deposited the whole collection in a secure place, but he was loath to help me access these notebooks when he went to Damascus—God is the uniquely powerful. Abū ‘Abd Allāh [ibn Rushayyiq] took the fourth one from me, which is [now] with him,

¹⁷ A biographical note on Ibn Murri can be found in Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 1:178–79. For an account of his *fitnah*, see al-Jazarī (d. 739/1338–39), *Tārīkh Ḥawādith al-Zamān wa-Anbā'ihī wa-Wafayāt al-Akābir wa-al-A'yān min Abnā'ihī al-Ma'rūf bi-Tārīkh Ibn al-Jazarī*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmuri (Beirut, 1998), 2:61–62. Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:117; al-Maqrizī (d. 845/1441), *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma'rīfat Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Mustafā Ziyādah (Cairo, 1971), 2:1:263; Hasan Qasim Murad, “Ibn Taymiyya on Trial: A Narrative Account of his Miḥan,” *Islamic Studies* 18 (1979): 24–25; and idem, “Miḥan of Ibn Taymiyya: A Narrative Account based on a Comparative Analysis of the Sources,” 110–11. Joseph H. Escovitz, *The Office of Qāḍī al-Quḍāt in Cairo under the Bahri Mamlūks* (Berlin, 1984), 141–43.

¹⁸ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, in *Al-Jāmi‘ li-Sīrat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyah*, 97–104. One of the people mentioned in the letter as most suitable to revise and edit Ibn Taymiyah's work is the qadi Sharaf al-Dīn who died in 731. One may therefore assume that the letter was written between 728 and 731. *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁹ Perhaps *al-madrasah al-ḥanbaliyah* where he last taught. For the history of the madrasah, see al-Nu‘aymī (d. 927/1521), *Al-Dāris fī Tārīkh al-Madāris*, ed. Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, 1990), 2:50–62. For Ibn Taymiyah's teaching career there, see *ibid.*, 57–58.

²⁰ It is unclear who the person in question is. Perhaps it is Ibn Taymiyah's brother, Sharaf al-Dīn, who died in 727/1326–27, i.e., before Taqī al-Dīn. Alternatively, perhaps it is the judge Sharaf al-Dīn mentioned below.



while the original copy written by the shaykh is in a state of severe disarray (*fī al-qaṭ' al-kabīr*); that one was also here [with me]. Less than one page remains of the other two copies. So let all this reach Abū 'Abd Allāh that he may complete the copy until he says: "This is a chapter and that is a chapter. God knows best what is right."²¹

On the one hand, and as underscored elsewhere, this source demonstrates Ibn Murri's close and active affiliation with Ibn Taymiyah. On the other hand, and more significantly for the purposes of this paper, it brings to light the issue of the written transmission of Ibn Taymiyah's works. In this regard, Ibn Murri's practical concern is fascinating in its seemingly down-to-earth character. In fact, in its unusual nature, the *risālah* is an interesting text since it is not primarily concerned (at least apparently) with God's eternal attributes and the great theoretical debates that animated theological and religious scholarship in fourteenth-century Mamluk Egypt and Syria, but with the material survival of his teacher's books, obviously instrumental to the circulation and consolidation of his doctrine. For a number of concrete reasons, the issue was not at all banal.

Firstly, Ibn Taymiyah was renowned for being a very prolific author: "From one day to the next he would write four quires or more of exegesis, jurisprudence, the principles of Islamic religion, and refutation[s] of the philosophers and of the speculative sciences. It is no exaggeration [to say] that up to now his writings have reached five hundred volumes."²² Al-Dhahabī also mentions "the utmost difficulty and obscurity" of his handwriting.²³ His most renowned biographer, Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343), was well aware of the difficulty of putting together a complete list of Ibn Taymiyah's *mu'allafāt*, and, with due caution, he warns that it is almost an impossible task due to the amount he wrote, the speed with which he wrote, and the fact that he used to write from memory without relying on any written texts (*wa-yaktubu min ḥifẓihi min ghayr naql*).²⁴ Yet, he promises he will make every effort to compile a comprehensive list. To a certain extent, the dismay of the shaykh's biographer can be understood, for even today it is not easy to acquire a systematic knowledge of the whereabouts of Ibn Taymiyah's

²¹ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 99.

²² Al-Dhahabī, *Nubdhah min Sirat Shaykh al-Islām Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyah*, in Caterina Bori, "A New Source for the Biography of Ibn Taymiyya," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 67, no. 3 (2004): 321–48, quotation is from p. 341. See also Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 64–65.

²³ Al-Dhahabī, *Nubdhah*, 340.

²⁴ Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 64. One should not forget the hagiographical character of such statements. In this case memory (*ḥifẓ*) is emphasized as a most desirable quality for the good traditionist. As a matter of fact, in one of the letters sent to Damascus from Egypt, Ibn Taymiyah asks for some books to be brought to him; Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 285.



manuscripts and writings.²⁵

Secondly, in the first half of the fourteenth century it is unlikely that any copyists would assure the reproduction and diffusion of somebody's work in exactly the way it was first conceived by its author. Moreover, Ibn Taymīyah did not have a systematic mind. Rather, he was unsystematically explosive both in the quantity and in the quality of his works. Anybody approaching his writings must cope with his digressive and repetitive style, with the immense number of authorities and past scholars he had in mind or to whom he directly refers, and with his polemical language and the targets it implicitly or explicitly strikes.

To this one may add that his mandatory travels and changes of residence (from Damascus to Cairo, from Cairo to Alexandria, from Alexandria back to Cairo, then finally to Damascus), combined with his ongoing intellectual activity, must have contributed to the dispersal. Ibn Murri mentions several times. Furthermore, when he was imprisoned in 726/1326 in the Citadel of Damascus, his books were taken away and were only recovered after his death by the amir Sayf al-Dīn Qutlūbughā al-Fakhrī (d. 742/1343). Ibn Taymīyah himself recalls the confiscation episode in two of his letters. He rejoices that his books were taken from the prison (Damascus, 728/1328), for they would be read and understood and his arguments would show the wrong charges of his enemies.²⁶ It seems that the recovery of Ibn Taymīyah's books was a bone of contention between the amir al-Fakhrī, who held Ibn Taymīyah in great esteem, and Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, the major detractor of Ibn Taymīyah. Once he had successfully retrieved them, al-Fakhrī is said to have handed them to over Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah and to Ibn Taymīyah's brother Zayn al-Dīn.²⁷

Should we believe al-Bazzār (d. 749/1349) when he highlights the shaykh's great generosity by reporting that he gave his books away to whoever came to visit him and asked for one of them? The anecdotal and hagiographic character of these reports revolves around the idea that Ibn Taymīyah did not stop anybody from accessing religious knowledge, therefore complying with prophetic injunctions.²⁸ We read of him saying about the confiscation of his books in prison: "I have never

²⁵The following catalogs may be of use: *Majmū'at Mu'allafāt Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah al-Makhtūṭah (al-Aṣṭiyah wa-al-Matbū'ah) al-Mahfūzah fī al-Maktabah al-Sulaymāniyah bi-Istānbūl*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Shaybāni, pt. 1 (Kuwait, 1993); *Majmū'at Mu'allafāt Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah al-Makhtūṭah (al-Aṣṭiyah wa-al-Matbū'ah) al-Mahfūzah fī Markaz al-Makhtūṭāt wa-al-Turāth wa-al-Wathā'iq*, ed. idem, pt. 1 (Kuwait, 1993).

²⁶ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' Fatāwā*, 28:47 and 58.

²⁷ See Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:197–98; and Henri Laoust, "Hanbalisme sous les Mamlouks Bahrides (658/784–1260/1382)," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 28 (1960): 60.

²⁸ Meaning not necessarily, or not only, the books he had written, but also the books he possessed. See al-Bazzār, *Al-A'lām al-'Aliyah*, 65–66.



written anything in order [for it] to be concealed from anybody.”²⁹

Moreover, we are informed that: “He would write an answer, and if somebody turned up to make a good copy of it, [it would be preserved], otherwise the person who asked for it (*al-sā'il*) would take his writing and go,” or: “Perhaps one of his disciples took it, so it was impossible to get it transcribed, [and furthermore] he did not return it, so it was gone.”³⁰ This report points to the circumstantial nature of Ibn Taymīyah's scholarship, which is attested by the shaykh himself. In various instances, he affirms that he used to write (in matters of belief [*i'tiqād*]) only at the request of a person that would present him with a query and press him for an answer.³¹ The *mustaftī*, the person who demands a legal response (*fatwā*), is here defined as *mustarshid*, seeking (and being in need of) guidance. In this way the ethical value of conveying knowledge is also underlined.

It is the very circumstantial nature of his *fatāwā* (the occasions of their composition are often left unspecified) and the overwhelming quantity of Ibn Taymīyah's production that makes it hard even today to date Ibn Taymīyah's production. Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī was fully aware of this, as he explains:

He was asked about something, so he would answer, “I have already written about this but do not remember where it is.” So he turned to his disciples and told them, “Return my writing to me and show it to him (i.e., the *mustaftī*) so that it may be transmitted.” But because of their own greed to keep it (*fa-min hirsihim 'alayhi*), they would not bring it back, and because of their own inability, they would not transmit it, so his work got lost and its title remained unknown. For this and other reasons it is impossible to enumerate what he wrote and what he composed.³²

In a somewhat dramatic picture, we are then informed that when Ibn Taymīyah was imprisoned, his followers were dispersed, as were his books (*tafarraqa atbā'uhu wa-tafarraqa kutubuhu*). His disciples were afraid of showing his books, so they fled with them, kept them hidden, sold them, and gave them away as gifts; some of their books were even stolen or their existence disavowed.³³ Loyalty turned into shameful behavior, it would seem.

This leads to the most relevant point of my argument: despite Ibn Taymīyah's

²⁹ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' Fatāwā*, 28:47, see also 3:259, l. 1.

³⁰ Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 65.

³¹ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' Fatāwā*, 3:161, 243, 258–59.

³² Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 65.

³³ *Ibid.*



immense popularity, which is stressed by all of his biographical accounts, there seems to be a very limited number of people Ibn Murri envisages as capable transmitters of the shaykh's thought and doctrines. He remarks, "There will be no substitute for any of the most important brothers once they have gone, after him" (*wa-kull man dhahaba ba'dahu min akābir al-ikhwān mā 'anhu 'iwad*).³⁴ What is more, and worse, Ibn Murri seems to question the willingness of the shaykh's pupils to engage fully in this crucial activity. Hence, he composed the *risālah*.

In sum, the situation was dire enough to cause Ibn Murri substantial worry. As a remedy, Ibn Murri proposes to his addressees a communal editorial undertaking. Ibn Taymiyah's writings should be gathered and handed over to Ibn Rushayyiq (d. 749/1348), whom he considers the most competent and expert of the group, for "he is the one of the *jamā'ah* who best knows the possible locations of the individual benefits which have been cut off from their original source" (*huwa akhbar al-jamā'ah bi-maḥāḥ al-maṣāliḥ al-mufradah allāti qad inqata'a māddatuhā*).³⁵ His efforts should next be checked by the best of the group (*jamā'ah*), or collated with the original copy. A further revision should then be carried out by the traditionist al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341–42), the most trustworthy of them,³⁶ and then by Ibn Qayyim (d. 750/1351)³⁷ and the judge Sharaf al-Dīn,³⁸ who are the most proficient in the rational method (*al-manāḥij al-ʿaqliyah*) and theological research (*al-mabāḥith al-uṣūliyah*). A sound transmission will thus be guaranteed.³⁹

The real protagonist of this procedure is the above-mentioned Ibn Rushayyiq, who emerges as the new face of this group of scholars. An attentive reading of the sources indicates that Ibn Rushayyiq, a Maliki, was a faithful disciple of Ibn Taymiyah, as well as the one who was most dedicated to the collection and edition of his works. Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) and Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī confirm Ibn Murri's

³⁴ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 100.

³⁵ Ibid. By *al-maṣāliḥ al-mufradah*, the author means any single-topic work (such as a *risālah* or a fatwa), or even a passage, paragraph, or sentence from such a work, which is beneficial for the *jamā'ah* or to readers in general. The meaning of this phrase, as well as the phrase *qad inqata'a māddatuhā*, is clarified in an earlier passage of Ibn Murri's *risālah*, when he laments the loss of many of Ibn Taymiyah's works or parts of them: "We ask God for assistance in the recovery of these splendid benefits after their dispersal" (. . . *jam' shaml hādhihi al-maṣāliḥ al-jalīlah ba'da shatātihā*). In his opinion, Ibn Rushayyiq is the only one capable of recovering these works or restoring the fragments to their original source material (*māddah*). My gratitude goes to Livnat Holtzman for her help with this passage.

³⁶ For a lengthy biography of al-Mizzī, see al-Subkī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyah*, 10:395–430.

³⁷ For a good introduction to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, see now Birgit Krawietz, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah: His Life and Works," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (2006): 19–64.

³⁸ Not identified.

³⁹ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 100.



view.⁴⁰ For instance, it is reported that a small part of what the *shaykh al-islām* wrote during his last incarceration relating to Quranic exegesis was sent by him to Ibn Rushayyiq, whereas the rest remained with the judges. Then, according to Ibn Rushayyiq, “The shaykh died and his works are still with them, approximately fourteen bundles (*rizmah*).”⁴¹ Ibn Murri encourages his “brothers” (as he calls them) to support, help, and protect Ibn Rushayyiq, for “he has truly remained peerless in this skill (*li-annah qad baqiya fi fannihi faridan*) and no one of the *jamā'ah* can ever, in any way, replace him . . . so write down the works that he has with him and let him write what you have with you.”⁴²

On the basis of Ibn Murri's letter combined with other evidence, the editors of the large collection of biographical materials on Ibn Taymīyah, Muḥammad 'Uzayr Shams and 'Alī 'Imrān, believe that the list of Ibn Taymīyah's writings usually attributed to Ibn Qayyim and published by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid in 1953 should instead be attributed to Ibn Rushayyiq.⁴³ The point is well taken, but the issue is still open to further research. In any case, the letter brings to light somebody who was hardly known from previous studies, and it also offers a starting point for reflection over Ibn Qayyim's long-assumed role in the reception and transmission of his master's work.

What is at stake is quite clear: a sound and attentive transmission of Ibn Taymīyah's doctrines is obviously vital to the survival of his thought and of his understanding of Islam: “As the shaykh benefited from the scholarship (*kalām*) of the previous imams, similarly who comes after him will benefit from his scholarship. So, follow the divine command and engage in the collection of everything you can of the different types of his voluminous writings (*al-mu'allafāt al-kibār*), of the scattered pieces of his small questions, of the copies of his dispersed fatwas, and

⁴⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:229; Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 27.

⁴¹ Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 28.

⁴² Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 98.

⁴³ Shams and 'Imrān, *Al-Jāmi' li-Sirat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah*, 8–13, 98 n. 1, and 220ff. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, *Asmā' Mu'allafāt Ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Damascus, 1953). Their argument is based on various observations: (1) a confusion created by the fact that the two authors (Ibn Rushayyiq and Ibn Qayyim) share the same *kunyah* (Abū 'Abd Allāh); (2) that Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī and Ibn Kathīr make statements about Ibn Rushayyiq's engagement in the writing down of Ibn Taymīyah's works; (3) that Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī reports some parts of Ibn Rushayyiq's list of the shaykh's works (4) on the basis of Ibn Murri's *Risālah*. As for point 3, it needs to be noted that Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī does not report the *Risālah* of Ibn Rushayyiq, but only some titles of Ibn Taymīyah's works on the authority of Ibn Rushayyiq. Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī reports the opening of a work called *Kitāb Tanbih al-Rajul al-Āqil 'alā Tamwīh al-Jadal al-Bāṭil* (pp. 29–35), followed by a list of the shaykh's *mu'allafāt* which, however, is not attributed to Ibn Rushayyiq (pp. 35–67). See also Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, 6, n. 14.



of the rest of his scholarship that has already been dictated.”⁴⁴

What is less obvious is the reason for Ibn Murri’s anxious concern over this issue. Was the problem simply that Ibn Taymiyah had been overly productive and, unfortunately, rather careless in the compilation of his works? Or was the sense of vacuum left by the death of the *shaykh al-islām* so overwhelming as to produce the urgent appeal of this text? The letter seems to follow shortly after Ibn Taymiyah’s death. The passing of time (*al-fawt*) looms heavily in the *risālah* and hints at both the death of the shaykh and the threatened loss of his precious oeuvre unless a collective effort to preserve it is promptly undertaken.⁴⁵ But is the death of the shaykh enough to have caused Ibn Murri’s lack of confidence and gloomy state of mind? Or does the letter reflect something else about the status of Ibn Taymiyah (and of his scholarship) among his circle of scholars at the time of his death? I propose that the latter is true, for it seems that a subtext lurks behind the lines of Ibn Murri’s *risālah*.

IN SEARCH OF UNCHALLENGING AUTHORITIES: IBN HANBAL, AL-BUKHĀRĪ, AND IBN TAYMĪYAH
If Ibn Taymiyah was such a popular scholar and his ideas were so widely known and accepted (except by those who persistently criticized him), what would inspire Ibn Murri’s urgent and insistent call to take action against the loss of his works? If his “circle of pupils” (*jamā’ah*) or his “brothers” (*ikhwān*) (both words are repeatedly used by Ibn Murri) were the people most faithful to Ibn Taymiyah—those who had attended him, studied with him, shared with him his understanding of Islam (with its active implications) and experienced his grievances and sorrows—why would they need to be so strongly exhorted?

As noted above, Ibn Murri is not confident about the eagerness of his “brothers” to commit to assuring Ibn Taymiyah’s works the survival they deserve. Sorrow and mourning for Ibn Taymiyah’s death are simply not enough to preserve his memory and do not do justice to Ibn Taymiyah’s efforts. Spreading his knowledge is intended as a fulfilment God’s command in a charismatic vision of activism that perfectly matches that of Ibn Taymiyah.⁴⁶ At some point, he admonishes them: “Do not behave at present as you have behaved in the past.”⁴⁷ The allusion is not completely clear here, but it has recently been sufficiently demonstrated that Ibn Taymiyah’s theological and legal choices created uneasiness even in his own circle of scholars. Ibn Taymiyah himself seems to be well aware of this when he writes in one of his letters from Egypt to his companions: “Even when someone

⁴⁴ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 101.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 98, 99, 101.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 97, 104.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.



from the group has remained absent from us, or has come to us only now, his status in our eyes today is [nevertheless] greater, higher, and more honorable than it was before" (*wa-mā ghāba 'annā aḥad min al-jamā'ah, aw qadima ilaynā al-sā'ah, illā wa-manzilatuhu 'indanā al-yawm a'zam min mā kānat, wa-ajall, wa arfa'*).⁴⁸ The main idea running through the text is that of forgiveness towards those who have harmed him, be it his enemies or some of the people close to him.⁴⁹

Ibn Murri provides two authoritative examples from the past by which he presumably intends to motivate his addressees and to corroborate Ibn Taymiyah's stature. The first one is Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). He mentions Ibn Ḥanbal's dislike of his opinions being recorded. But after his death, writes Ibn Murri, his disciples (*aṣḥābuhu*) attended to this matter: "They transmitted his knowledge, clarified his objectives, and made his benefits known, so his way (*ṭarīqatuhu*) became victorious and his footsteps were followed."⁵⁰ In other words, Ibn Ḥanbal's opinions became the basis for a "school" (*madhhab*), although this is not what he would have liked.⁵¹ Ibn Taymiyah's followers are therefore encouraged to imitate Ibn Ḥanbal's pupils' example, with the difference that Ibn Taymiyah does not seem to have been disturbed by the idea of his doctrines being written down; however, the parallel is evocative. Ibn Murri then goes on to reassure any sceptics that Ibn Taymiyah's scholarship (*kalām*) will be accepted (*maqbul*).

The vicissitudes of the famous traditionist al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) are then mentioned as somebody who, despite the excellence of his knowledge, was banned (from Nishapur) and died as an outcast (*thumma māta ba'da dhālika gharīban*). The allusion here is to the charge made against al-Bukhārī late in his life that he held that the uncreatedness of the Quran did not apply to its recitation: "The Quran is the uncreated speech of God, but the deeds of men are created." Or, more explicitly: "Al-Bukhārī . . . was among those who stated, 'my pronunciation of the Quran is created' (*lafẓi al-qur'ān makhluq*). For this reason he died in the

⁴⁸ See Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 264; on the previous page Ibn Taymiyah hints at dissent among his own companions concerning him. See Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya *wa-jamā'atu-hu*" for plenty of other pieces of evidence.

⁴⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 259–67; also in Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmū' Fatāwā*, 28:50–57.

⁵⁰ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 101–2: "It is known that, in his life, al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal prohibited the writing down of his opinions (*kalām*) so that the hearts may keep together on the original great source (*al-māddah al-aṣliyah al-uẓmā*)." On Ibn Ḥanbal's reluctance about his opinions being written down, see Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law*, 137, 141, and idem, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (Oxford, 2006), 59, 81.

⁵¹ On the formation of the Hanbali *madhhab*, see Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law*, esp. 137–55; Nimrod Hurvitz, "Schools of Law and Historical Context: Re-examining the Formation of the Hanbali Madhhab," *Islamic Law and Society* 7, no. 1 (2000): 37–64; and idem, *The Formation of Hanbalism: Piety into Power* (London, 2002): 103–12.



sorrow of hostility.”⁵² Yet, God compensated his misfortunes with success and wide acknowledgment of his works and skills. Great men are destined to meet with obstacles and grief, but it is part of God’s plans to turn seeming defeats into victories. It is not difficult to detect here a pattern of prophetic lives in general, and of the Muḥammadan *sīrah* in particular.⁵³ Towards the conclusion, Ibn Murri expresses his wish for Ibn Taymiyah’s scholarship to enjoy a great share in this authentic heritage (*al-wirāthah al-ṣāliḥah*), referring to the above-mentioned al-Bukhārī.

Here Ibn Taymiyah is firmly placed in the most honored traditionist scholarly experience. In so doing, Ibn Murri prepares the ground for the exposition of Ibn Taymiyah’s rational theological method. He used correct tradition (*al-naql al-ṣaḥīḥ*) as the foundation for each of his scholarly statements, and then corroborated them by sound reasoning (*bi-al-‘aqliyāt al-ṣaḥīḥah*). Ibn Taymiyah’s ultimate goal, states Ibn Murri, was to demonstrate the lack of contradiction between the two kinds of proofs while connecting his views back to the *salaf* (the early generation of pious Muslims).⁵⁴ In a letter written from Egypt in the month of Ramaḍān 706/1307 to an unspecified addressee, Ibn Taymiyah uses similar language when he refers to the lack of argument produced by his enemies against him:

If they want to refute [my beliefs] with whatever they will of the rational and traditional arguments (*min ḥujaj ‘aqliyah wa-sam‘iyah*), I will answer them to all of it and I will explain by clear exposition—understandable both to the elite and the commoners—that my words are in agreement with what reason and constitutional nature have made necessary (*li-ḍarūrat al-‘aql wa-al-fiṭrah*) and that they are in agreement with the Book, the Sunnah, and the Consensus of the Pious Ancestors of the community, and that the person who contradicts all this opposes clear reason and correct tradition (*sariḥ al-ma‘qūl wa-ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl*).⁵⁵

⁵² See al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), *Tārīkh Baghdād aw Madīnat al-Salām* (Cairo, 1931), 2:4–34, esp. 30–33; al-Subkī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyah*, 2:212–41, esp. 228–30, and 218–20 (quotations are from pp. 228, ll. 9–10, and 229, ll. 16–17); Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* (Hyderabad, 1907–9), 9:47–55, esp. 53–55, and 2:361–62.

⁵³ For instance, on the theme of Muḥammad’s persecution, see Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of the Prophet as viewed by the early Muslims: A Textual Analysis* (Princeton, 1995), 127–66.

⁵⁴ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 103. For a competent exposition of his method, see now Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, 19–69; Shahab Ahmed, “Ibn Taymiyya and the Satanic Verses,” *Studia Islamica* 87 (1998): 67–124, esp. 112.

⁵⁵ Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmū‘ Fatāwā*, 3:246, ll. 6–9. The letter is dated by Yahya Michot between Shawwāl and the beginning of Dhū al-Ḥijjah 706 (April–beginning of June 1307); see Yahya Michot, “Textes Spirituels d’Ibn Taymiyya IX: «Moi, je ne vous ai pas demandé de me faire sortir



A number of important recent studies have highlighted Ibn Taymīyah's combination of philosophical and traditionist discourses, which led him to support his literalist views with a selective and highly original application of rational argumentation.⁵⁶ Accordingly, the long-established image of Ibn Taymīyah as an uncompromising anti-rationalist is now undergoing a process of serious revision. Ibn Murri was aware of the novelty that Ibn Taymīyah's views represented in the fourteenth-century Syrian and Egyptian traditionist milieu, and he therefore had to convince his addressees that, despite his trials and tribulations, Ibn Taymīyah could still be considered as having the same rank as Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Bukhārī and that his works were thus worthy of transmission.

The absolute prominence Ibn Taymīyah attributes to the *salaf* in his own theological and legal reasoning is crucial and can explain some of the tensions his doctrine created in his own environment. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Ibn Murri already defines the Taymīyan way as *al-tariqah al-salafiyah* (the way of the pious ancestors).⁵⁷ Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, draws its concept of authority from the past. Identification with the *salaf* was therefore a very powerful weapon that allowed Ibn Taymīyah to support the incontestability of his arguments in the face of the condemning authorities, while simultaneously leading him to bypass the boundaries of the dominant theological and legal schools which were a significant component of the Mamluk legal system, a focal point of social identity, and an important form of professional network.⁵⁸

Ibn Taymīyah's challenge is exemplified by the charge commonly levelled against him of contradicting the four schools of law, as well as by the sentiment

d'ici...», p. 2, n. 7, located at www.muslimphilosophyonline.com/it/index.html, under the heading "His Works" and the subheading "TEXTES SPIRITUELS I-XVI." Here Michot presents the translation of some excerpts of the letter. A summary of the letter can be found in Henri Laoust, *La profession de foi d'Ibn Taymiyya: La Wasitiyya* (Paris, 1986), 26–29.

⁵⁶ The best demonstration of this Taymīyan method is now that of Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*. See also Yahya Michot, "Vanités intellectuelles...L'impasse de rationalistes selon *Le Rejet de la contradiction* d'Ibn Taymiyya," *Oriente Moderno* 19 (2000): 597–617; idem, "A Mamluk Theologian's Commentary on Avicenna's *Risāla aḍḥawiyya*: Being a Translation of a Part of the *Dar' al-Ta'āruḍ* of Ibn Taymiyya, with Introduction, Annotation and Appendices," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14 (2003): 149–203, esp. 165–72, and 309–63. On different issues regarding Ibn Taymīyah's rational theology and methodology, see also the articles by Livnat Holtzman, Jon Hoover, Mehmet Sait Özerarli, and Racha el-Omari in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*.

⁵⁷ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 101.

⁵⁸ On the meaning of the *salaf* in Ibn Taymīyah's thought, see the papers of Walid Salih and Rascha el-Omari in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* and the introduction to the volume. For Ibn Taymīyah's attitude to *madhāhib*, see the articles of Yossef Rapoport and Caterina Bori in the same volume. For Ibn Taymīyah versus his own school, see now Al-Matroudi, *The Ḥanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah*, 40–45.



expressed in his own words:⁵⁹

In my life up to this point, I have never pushed anybody in the field of theology (*fī uṣūl al-dīn*) to join the school of Aḥmad or anybody else, and I have not supported this sort of attitude nor have I mentioned it in my doctrine. I only mention that upon which the Pious Ancestors of the community and its imams have agreed. In spite of this, I have told them [i.e., his opponents in the 706/1307 Egyptian trial] more than once: I am indulgent with he who has been contradicting me for [the last] three years [and I wait for him] to come about with one word on the authority of the imams of the first three centuries that contradicts what I have said.⁶⁰

This attitude towards creed goes hand in hand with that towards jurisprudence in a logical correspondence between theological and legal reasoning.⁶¹ In the same text, Ibn Taymiyah expounds on the ways the term *sharʿ* was understood in his day. Three basic meanings are highlighted: the revealed law (*al-sharʿ al-munazzal*), the interpreted law (*al-sharʿ al-muʿawwal*), and the distorted law (*al-sharʿ al-mubaddal*). The first consists of the Book and of the Sunnah of the Prophet. Adherence to it is compulsory (*wa-hādhā yajibu ittibāʿuhu*) and punishment (*al-ʿuqūbah*) must be inflicted on whoever contradicts it. The second consists of the activity of *ijtihād* and the opinions of the scholars. It is into this category that the various *madhāhib* fall, and adherence to them is permissible but not obligatory. Nobody can either compel the commoners to follow the opinions of a jurist or prevent them from doing so; *taqlīd* is not prohibited, but neither is it encouraged, especially for the majority of Muslims.⁶² The distorted or substituted law consists of lies made in the name of God, the Prophet, or other religious figures, and propagated by means of false testimonies (*al-shahādāt al-zūr*). The person who engages in it is an unbeliever.⁶³ In this context, Ibn Taymiyah's organization of the meanings of law works in his defense and serves to invalidate the judgment of his prosecutor, Ibn Makhlūf. In

⁵⁹ For instance: Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā*, 3:217, 253; but also Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:67; Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1393), *Kitāb Dhayl ʿalā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah*, ed. Muḥammad Hāmid Fiqī (Cairo, 1952–53), 2:389, 394.

⁶⁰ Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā*, 3:229.

⁶¹ On this point see Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, 19–69, and Yossef Rapoport, "Ibn Taymiyya's radical legal thought: Rationalism, pluralism and the primacy of intention," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, 193–95.

⁶² Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā*, 11:265 and 431: "*wa-lā yajibu ʿalā ʿumūm al-muslimīn ittibāʿ aḥād bi-ʿaynihi illā rasūl Allāh*" (the polemic runs here towards those pseudo-Sufis and ascetics who blindly imitated their shaykhs).

⁶³ Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā*, 3:268.



fact, he argues, no matter to which school Ibn Makhlūf (d. 718/1318) belongs, it is not his right to compel people to accept it. Before, he had strongly argued for the incompetence of Ibn Makhlūf in matters of creed, in order to explain his failure to produce a favorable verdict.⁶⁴ Yet, the debate over Ibn Makhlūf's competency has far-reaching implications. It reveals a contention over who is entitled to have the final word in cases involving religious issues. In the same letter, Ibn Taymiyah broaches the boundaries of both the sultan's and the judges' judicial power in matters of religious sciences; his imprisonment provided a crucial opportunity to reflect upon these matters. He argues that it does not devolve to the judge to resolve disputes concerning issues of universal religious knowledge (*fi masā'il al-ilm al-kulliyah*), such as Quranic exegesis, hadith, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and so forth.⁶⁵ On the contrary, it is incumbent upon the sultan either to resolve these disputes by referring to the Book and the Sunnah (Q. 4:59 is the verse quoted) or to accept the way in which his subjects live, their doctrines (*madhāhib*) included. Yet, whenever innovations are manifestly opposed to the shari'ah, it is the sultan's duty to declare their reprehensible character (*'alā al-sultān inkāruhā*). Since the number of innovators is so high, it can happen that their doctrines are considered equivalent to those of righteous people (here *ahl al-ilm wa-al-sunnah*). In this case, the authority (*man yatawallā al-amr*) is in need of "somebody that brings to light the proof of God (*hujjat Allāh*) and explains it clearly so that after the proof there can be the punishment." The formulation of the punishment before the proof is presented is unlawful (*mashrū'*). Thus, the sultan is to be assisted by experts in religious science who help him produce legal proofs, without which no judgement is permissible and no punishment applicable. What does the qadi do, then? He basically ascertains what the disputants involved in the case have said or done, and he assesses the proofs, but he is not asked to produce a legal verdict on general statements that belong to the realm of doctrine.⁶⁶

A broader look at Ibn Taymiyah's *fatāwā* shows that his differentiation of the three *shar'* types occurs a few other times.⁶⁷ He specifies that "the interpreted law" consists of the judgment of the person who is entitled to formulate it (*ḥukm al-ḥākim*), and this person may be right or wrong. What Ibn Taymiyah is trying to say here is that there is a high possibility for a judge to be wrong: "When a

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3:235–36, 255.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 3:238.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 3:240–41. These passages have been also translated and commented upon by Yahya Michot, "Textes spirituels d'Ibn Taymiyya X « Je ne suis dans cette affaire qu'un musulman parmi d'autres... »," *Le Musulman* 23 (Paris, 1994): 27–29 (reproduced at the website www.muslimphilosophyonline.com/it/index.html; see n. 54 above).

⁶⁷ Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmū' Fatāwā*, 11:262–65, 430–31, 506–9, in particular 506–7; 19:308–9; 35:389 (for *al-shar' al-munazzal*) and 395–96.



judge judges according to something that he considers a legal proof (*al-ḥujjah al-sharʿīyah*), like a piece of indisputable evidence (*bayyinah*) or a confession (*iqrār*), and the inner meaning is in contradiction with the outward one, it is not permissible for the person in favor of whom the judgement was produced (*al-maḳḍī lahu*) to follow it, and this should be agreed upon.”⁶⁸ Thus, it is not only the doctrinal authority of the four schools, but also that of judges, that the *shaykh al-islām* is trying to define and, in the case of his own trial, to restrict.⁶⁹

The theological controversy over the createdness of the Quran that is implicit in the mentioning of al-Bukhārī is also significant. Ibn Murri seems to imagine an invisible thread joining the three vexed traditionists. The *miḥnah* regarding the createdness of the Quran (*khalq al-qurʿān*) initiated by the caliph al-Maʿmūn (d. 218/833) reflected some Hanafī and Muʿtazili positions.⁷⁰ The eventual defeat of al-Maʿmūn’s position was not only a milestone in the consolidation of the ninth century ulama’s religious authority⁷¹ and in the formation of the dogma of the uncreated and eternal Quran,⁷² but, more specifically, it marked the success of the party headed by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and established his fame once and for

⁶⁸ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā*, 11:262–63.

⁶⁹ For an overview on the judges’ competencies and activities during the Bahri period in Cairo, read Escovitz, *The Office of Qāḍī al-Quḍāt in Cairo under the Bahri Mamlūks*, 131–72, and esp. 133–47 for cases involving charges of *kufr*, *zandaqah*, and apostasy.

⁷⁰ Joseph Schacht was the first to suggest a connection between the issue of the created Quran and some fringes of Hanafī thinking rather than Muʿtazili doctrine. See Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muḥammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1950), 258–59; Joseph van Ess, “Ḍirār b. ʿAmr und die ʿCahmīya’: Biographie einer vergessenen Schule,” *Der Islam* 13 (1967): 1–70, esp. 35; and idem, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (New York, 1992), 3:175–88. Martin Hinds’ article “Miḥna,” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1993): 7:2–6, remains a good starting point on this fascinating episode of early Islamic history and contains a useful bibliography. More recent analyses of the *miḥnah* are to be found in John A. Nawas, “A reexamination of three current explanations for al-Maʿmūn’s introduction of the Miḥna,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (1994): 615–29; Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophet in the Age of al-Maʿmūn* (Cambridge, 2000), 117–38; Nimrod Hurvitz, “Miḥna as self-defense,” *Studia Islamica* 92 (2001): 93–111; idem, *The Formation of Hanbalism*, 115–57.

⁷¹ The *loci classici* of this argument are Ira M. Lapidus, “The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6 (1975): 363–85; and Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, 1986). Muhammad Qasim Zaman has challenged the argument of the separation between state and religion in his *Religion and Politics under the early Abbasids: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunni Elite* (Leiden, 1997), 70–118.

⁷² For an analysis of the early development of the dogma with reference to Ibn Taymīyah as well, see Wilferd Madelung, “The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran,” in *Orientalia Hispanica sive Studia F. M. Pareja octogenario dicata*, ed. J. M. Barral (Leiden, 1974), 1:504–25.



all.⁷³ The highly respected traditionist al-Bukhārī was possibly as involved in this controversy concerning the physical recitation of the Quran as some other scholars of his time.⁷⁴ For his part, Ibn Taymīyah elaborated a dynamic vision of God's essence that led him to a similar conclusion, i.e., that God speaks from eternity by his will and power, that the Quran is uncreated, but its human recitation is created.⁷⁵ The issue was one that Ibn Ḥanbal apparently shunned, preferring that the matter be avoided.⁷⁶

In connecting the life stories of Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Bukhārī, and Ibn Taymīyah, Ibn Murri reveals not only his need to ground the soundness of Ibn Taymīyah's method and scholarship in the example and experience of eminent past authorities, but he also explicates his own understanding of Ibn Taymīyah's lack of consensus in his own time, which he attributes to theological factors.

CONCLUSIONS

In fourteenth-century Mamluk Syria and Egypt, knowledge was transmitted from master to student, and this process took place both inside and outside formal teaching institutions. At that time the qualification that granted somebody the authority to transmit a scholar's corpus of knowledge was sometimes formalized by written certification (*ijāzah*), and sometimes not. Yet, the *ijāzah* was not a *conditio sine qua non* for knowledge to be transmitted. As Michael Chamberlain has put it, the *ijāzah* represented a formal acknowledgement through which "shaykhs deemed disciples ready to represent a body of knowledge and to exemplify its carriers."⁷⁷ However, without a social network of loyal pupils willing to recognize their affiliation and legal or theological orientation openly, the process of transmission would have been severely hampered.⁷⁸

⁷³ See *ibid.* On Ibn Ḥanbal and his pious attitude towards the Quran, see Christopher Melchert, "Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Qur'ān," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2004): 22–34.

⁷⁴ See al-Subkī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyah*, 9:119, ll. 1–3; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, 2:361–62; and Christopher Melchert, "The Adversaries of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal," *Arabica* 44 (1997): 234–53, esp. 241–42.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of this issue in comparison also to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, see Jon Hoover, "Perpetual Creativity in the Perfection of God: Ibn Taymiyya's Hadith Commentary on the Creation of this World," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15, no. 3 (2004): 296–99; and *idem*, "God Acts by His Will and Power: Ibn Taymiyya's Theology of a Personal God in his Treatise on the Voluntary Attributes," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*.

⁷⁶ Al-Subkī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyah*, 9:118–19 and 229–31. Melchert, "The Adversaries of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal," 241.

⁷⁷ Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Practice*, 89.

⁷⁸ On the *ijāzah* system in Damascus, see Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Practice*, 69–90, esp. 87–89; in Egypt see Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 31–33; George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1981), 140–52. For a complete bibliography



The letter of Ibn Murri concerns exactly this topic. The text deals with the issue of the transmission of Ibn Taymiyah's writings and presents some practical concerns. Who was to carry out the work, and how? A group of followers is identified as apt to do the job, and some names are specified; Ibn Rushayyiq stands out among these names, and not Ibn Qayyim as one would normally expect. Ibn Murri is rather direct about the method to be followed. He envisages it as a collective endeavor, but highlights the names of the most skilful. So far, no inconsistencies emerge except for the fact that, for some reason, the project seemed problematic to Ibn Murri. Why was that? Two main reasons have been identified. The first is the state of disorder of Ibn Taymiyah's writings (confirmed by other sources); the second is an embarrassing reluctance on the part of those who would have normally performed the task.

As I have argued elsewhere, by the time of his death, the status of Ibn Taymiyah was more problematic and less established than we are accustomed to believe (as also the amount of his biographical writings confirm), and this is true even among the traditionist ulama of his circle. The letter of Ibn Murri splendidly testifies to this situation. By recalling Ibn Taymiyah's rational method and the theological issue of the uncreated Quran, Ibn Murri suggests that the uneasiness was theological. Here and elsewhere, I suggest that Ibn Taymiyah's detachment from the authority of the four *madhāhib* and his challenge to judicial authority became socially and politically inconvenient at some point, as his death in prison shows. These different factors do not contradict each other. On the contrary, they underline Ibn Taymiyah's scholarly consistency and complexity.

Finally, one must note that in spite of all the difficulties, the plea of Ibn Murri did not go unheard. Ibn Rushayyiq seems to have done a good job, for we do possess today the large collection of *fatāwā* and many other fulsome volumes. How, to what extent, where, and in which circles and circumstances Ibn Taymiyah's ideas were eventually taught, discussed, and transmitted after his death remains an unexplored subject of research.⁷⁹ On a broader level, the letter sheds light on the patterns of transmission of religious knowledge among the civilian elite of fourteenth-century Mamluk society and confirms the logic of personal affiliation and social consensus to which it was subjected.

on the subject, refer to Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 30, n. 43.

⁷⁹ Al-Matroudi, *The Hanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah*, devotes a chapter (pp. 129–70) to the influence of Ibn Taymiyah on later Hanbali jurists.



RICHARD MCGREGOR
Vanderbilt University

The Problem of Sufism

Anyone visiting the modern city of Cairo will surely be struck with the impression that medieval Egypt, and particularly the capital city of the Mamluk empire, remains close at hand. In fact, it remains literally at arm's length through its monumental architecture, its ordering of the cityscape, and even its design aesthetic that in the twentieth century has been reborn as the "classical" style of Islamic Egypt. This neo-Mamluk design phenomenon may rightly be interrogated, among other things, for some of the easy assumptions it makes about "high" culture and our urge, even in the modern age, to streamline the past and oversimplify our historiography.

An even greater challenge to us as historians are the various phenomena that together constituted Sufism in the Mamluk period. I point to this as a problem because it appears that within our field there has recently been a significant increase in research relating to Sufism, and yet, as the following pages will show, in many instances we continue to labor under a methodology that is far from perfect and at times even misleading. By identifying the *problem of Sufism* as my object of study, I seek to bring to light the challenge Sufism continues to represent to our historiographical methods. I will briefly survey some of the more promising recent research in this area, and follow with an inquiry into one area of particular importance to the study of Sufism. Specifically, my aim will be to show that contemporary historians' use of terminology relating to the concept of "orthodoxy" in discussions of Mamluk Sufism has failed in its account of the particular historical examples it confronts and has steered us away from the deeper methodological challenge that the phenomenon of Sufism represents for historians.

The study of Sufism has recently contributed to a number of wider debates and thematic explorations within the field of Mamluk studies. One theme rather well developed in the historiography of the medieval West, but only recently taken up in earnest by students of the Mamluk period, centers on the tension between city and countryside. Contributions to this area have come from research on particular Sufi figures and, more widely, the religious topography of the Egyptian Delta.¹ Jean-Claude Garcin's work on the Upper Egyptian city of Qūṣ has recently

© The Middle East Documentation Center. The University of Chicago.

¹ Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, *Al-Sayyid al-Badawī: un grand saint de l'islam égyptien* (Cairo, 1994); idem, "Maîtres, cheikhs et ancêtres: saints du Delta à l'époque mamelouke," in *Le développement du soufisme en Égypte à l'époque mamelouke*, ed. Richard McGregor and Adam Sabra (Cairo, 2006),



©2009 by Richard McGregor.

DOI: [10.6082/M1S75DGH](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S75DGH). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S75DGH>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

become available in a re-edition; elsewhere he has revisited a phenomenon he first addressed in 1969, namely that of rural Sufis and their integration into the urban fabric of Cairo.² Of particular significance are his observations that, although historians have often avoided using Sufi literature, this material can in fact provide unique perspectives on the diversity of social groupings as well as popular conceptions and critiques of Mamluk political authority. In the same direction, Adam Sabra has drawn on Sufi literature to animate certain dimensions of social history.³

Of singular importance in urban settings are the phenomena of procession and pilgrimage. These practices go back at least to the Fatimids in Cairo, and from early on they have been studied with emphasis on the roles, both actual and symbolic, of the ruling elite.⁴ But recent research into the use of public space for Sufi parading, and the impact of pilgrimage routes and visitation sites on the urban topography, has continued to develop. Analysis of pilgrimage literature, itineraries, topography, and the range of personal titles associated with venerated Sufis has shed statistical and quantitative light on lesser-known dimensions of pilgrimage and procession.⁵

Mamluk society was of course multi-religious. To date, good research has been produced on this topic, although often from the wider perspectives of Jewish history or the history of Eastern Christianity. The study of Sufism has begun to help us here, widening Mamluk studies to include these minority communities. Comparison of saint-day (*mawlid*) celebrations in the Muslim and Coptic traditions has expanded our model of popular piety across religious boundaries.⁶ The role sometimes played by prominent Sufis in anti-Christian public violence has recently

41–50.

² Jean-Claude Garcin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute Égypte médiévale: Qûs* (Cairo, 1976 and 2005); idem, “L’insertion sociale de Sha’rani dans le milieu cairote,” in *Colloque international sur l’histoire du Caire* (Cairo, 1969), 159–68; idem, “Les soufis dans la ville mamelouke d’Égypte: Histoire du soufisme et histoire globale,” in *Le développement du soufisme*, 26–32.

³ Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250–1517* (Cambridge, 2000), 8–31.

⁴ Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany, 1994), 83–94; Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge, 1993), 70–76.

⁵ Tetsuya Ohtoshi, “*Tasawwuf* as Reflected in *Ziyâra* Books and the Cairo Cemeteries,” in *Le développement du soufisme*, 299–329; May Al-Ibrashy, “Cairo’s Qarafa as Described in the *Ziyâra* Literature,” in *Le développement du soufisme*, 269–98; Christopher Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyâra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden, 1999), 65–69, 168–226.

⁶ Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen “Pélerinages d’Égypte, mouleds coptes et mouleds musulmans,” (Mémoire d’habilitation, Paris IV-Sorbonne, 2000).



been studied, shedding new light on inter-communal relations.⁷ Finally, Paul Fenton has contextualized and illuminated important elements of the devotional life of Egyptian Jews by drawing on Sufi literature.⁸

This short list of recent work on the history of Sufism should make clear the substantial contribution of specialists in this lesser-known area to the wider field of Mamluk studies. Beyond its value to the broader historical themes outlined above, this research opens up significant new materials for analysis. Until recently, devotional and mystical literature, saintly *vitae* (*manāqib*), and pilgrimage manuals had rarely been exploited. It is as a corrective to this historiographical blind spot that I enumerate the studies above; however, my primary concern in this article is to refine the methodological basis upon which these and future historians will address the problem of Sufism. To this end, I will briefly explore the science of early and medieval *kalām*, paying particular attention to the boundaries of the concept “orthodoxy.” For a second perspective, I will turn to the fourteenth-century historian Ibn Khaldūn, who will nuance this methodological landscape further. With these insights in mind, I will then explore some specific examples of historical research on Sufism that suffer because of their reliance on an overly simplified conception of “orthodoxy.” This oversimplification has its roots in European intellectual history, and more specifically the complex phenomenon known in our field as Orientalism.

ON THEOLOGY AND AUTHORITY

As we turn to the methodological issues at stake in our discussion of Mamluk era Sufism, we must consider some of the underlying conceptual structures upon which such analysis rests. While a systematic survey of terms such as “orthodoxy” and “heresy” is well beyond the scope of this article, a summary comment is certainly in order. The issue may first be considered from the perspective of institutional authority. In the Christian West the categories of “orthodoxy” and “heresy” arose from the history of church doctrine. Through various institutions the Catholic Church honed its theological positions, defended them, and variously enforced them. By the Middle Ages, in European social and intellectual history “orthodoxy” had become more than simply a measure of proper belief: it had become synonymous with the authority of institutionalized religion. In short, the Church simply was “orthodoxy.” Not surprisingly, this association of institution and doctrinal authority made its way into the religious conceptions and categories

⁷ Tamer El-Leithy, “Sufis, Copts and the Politics of Piety: Moral Regulation in Fourteenth-Century Upper Egypt,” in *Le développement du soufisme*, 75–120.

⁸ Paul Fenton, “Juifs et soufis en Égypte mamelouke,” in *Le développement du soufisme*, 121–35; idem, “Les traces d’al-Hallaj, martyr mystique de l’islam,” *Annales Islamologiques* 35 (2001): 101–12.



of Western Orientalists as they produced knowledge of the Islamic world.⁹ The implication of this for our present study is that modern scholarship maintains this inherited categorization. More particularly, as will be seen in detail in the final section of this article, historians have tended to project this pattern onto their analyses of the Islamic religious tradition, in essence treating the learned class (or *ulama*) as a functional equivalent to the Church.

Beyond this institutional association, a second issue is one of implementation. Certainly the history of synods, councils, and inquisitions in the Western tradition is complex, but for our purposes one simple point is that, in contrast to Mamluk Egypt, medieval Europe at its harshest moments asserted “orthodoxy” through Church tribunals. The situation in the Islamic context was rather different, in that questions of “orthodoxy,” while also the concern of theologians and their supporters in the civil authority, were equally the concern of the jurists (*fuqahāʾ*), a class of religious functionaries that has no equivalent in the Christian context. The jurists played an essential role in translating any transgression, often articulated first by theologians in doctrinal terms, into points of religious law. One might be accused of “heresy” (e.g., *zandaqah*, *kufr*, *shirk*, etc.), and the case may have been strong, but the charge would eventually have to be put into legal terms if punishment were ever to be meted out. Despite his attacks elsewhere on the unacceptable theses of the philosophers, al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) makes just such a point when he warns against the hasty use of *takfīr*, saying that unbelief is a purely legal category.¹⁰ At the risk of overstating the distinction between theologians and jurists,¹¹ my point here is simply to underline the essential function of law in the Islamic equation.

This legal dimension is important to our consideration of terminology and method, in that it represents a point of significant divergence between what lies behind the common Orientalist usage of the term “orthodox” and the historical situation of medieval Egypt. Wielding the term uncritically, we evoke a process (albeit in vague non-historical terms) in which theological discourse has identified “heresy” and responded to it with censure. As carried over into the Islamic context, this picture is misleading in two important ways. First, as we have just seen, the uniquely Islamic institution of religious law will have been marginalized. But perhaps more significantly, this perspective will prevent us from understanding an important reality on the ground. In historical practice, the censure of questionable religious behavior and belief was carried out by political

⁹ Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston, 1997), xiii–xiv, 1–5.

¹⁰ Josef van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, trans. J. M. Todd (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 39–40.

¹¹ They were often the same individuals, and jurists regularly generated their own cases against “heresy.”



authorities, not as an implementation of a ruling of “heresy” as identified by theologians, but rather more typically in their role as protectors of public order, itself a concept defined within Islamic law. In other words, to echo al-Ghazzālī, the censure of “heresy” should stand primarily as a matter of law. If we as historians turn to such phenomena with the conceptual assumptions of “orthodoxy” and “heresy” transferred from the Christian context, our analysis will suffer due to an incongruity of categories and actors. Insisting, for example, on characterizing a censured miracle worker as a “heretic” will evoke a theological reflection and procedure that very likely never occurred, while blinding us to the much more plausible explanation that representatives of the regime were carrying out censure within a conceptual framework of response to infractions against public order.

Despite my somewhat abstract presentation so far, it should be noted that these methodological issues are in fact anchored in the history of texts, schools of thought, and religious movements. The danger, however, is that students of this history, if employing the terms “orthodoxy” and “heresy” uncritically, will produce analyses that, in the words of one historian, “disregard the intrinsic pluralism and complexity characteristic of the religious life of the Muslim community. . . .”¹² This overlooked complexity inheres in the discourse itself and calls for an open-ended historical elaboration. In other words, the attempts made to speak for “orthodoxy” in the Islamic tradition have always succeeded only temporarily. On the one hand, the essential elements of the discourse remain constant, but the competition to speak authoritatively for them continues. It is this ongoing process of negotiation that is in danger of being lost to us if our historiography insists on a static determination of “orthodoxy.” The tenth-century heresiographer al-Shahrastānī reflects this reality in his typologies and descriptions of the *Religious and Philosophical Sects*.¹³ His overarching presentation of Muslim debate on right belief describes “a perpetual collision of individual opinions over an invariant set of theological problems that eventually leads to a transient consensus that already contains the seeds of future disagreement.”¹⁴

This insight into the continuously evolving historical reality of “orthodoxy” is not only a challenge to our methodology; it is also a challenge to much of the Islamic tradition’s self-understanding. Joseph van Ess has recently made just such a point. In the context of a wide-ranging study of Islamic theology, he describes an early landscape in which “local orthodoxies” rose and fell. Developing one of these trends, he expands on the case of Mu‘tazilism, attributing its success to its ability to extend its relevance beyond its original locale, Basra, largely by

¹² Alexander Knysh, “‘Orthodoxy’ and ‘Heresy’ in Medieval Islam: an Essay in Reassessment,” *The Muslim World* 83, no. 1 (1993): 62.

¹³ Muḥammad al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa-al-Niḥal*, ed. W. Cureton (Piscataway, NJ, 2002).

¹⁴ Knysh, “‘Orthodoxy’ and ‘Heresy’ in Medieval Islam,” 57.



broadening its theoretical base and making its rationalist approach relevant to several of the perspectives it was competing against. But this success was not a simple triumph—despite the *mihnah*—nor was its eventual defeat ever complete. Not only when it was the “orthodox” position did it fail to do away with its rivals (e.g. the Shi‘ah, Kharijites, Murji‘ites, Qadarites), but when replaced by other “orthodoxies” it continued to exert a significant influence on them and other subsequent movements. Van Ess’s point as it relates to our concern here is that from a historical perspective, doctrinal positions and their authority over the determination of right practice and belief, far from being complete, unmoving or final, in reality adapt to the various realities they find themselves in. They rise and fall, wax and wane, compete and often compromise. Van Ess’s study goes on to make clear that as historians we would do well to avoid the anachronistic and oversimplified narratives that later perspectives routinely impose upon earlier ones: “Theological problems may be eternal, but they are not static. The responses that befit a given situation at a given time quickly become rigid stereotypes.”¹⁵ These anachronisms, it should be restated, loom not only over the work of the historian, but are also well entrenched in the Islamic tradition itself.

In light of these comments from Knysh and Van Ess as to the rivalrous and diverse historical reality underlying these constructed “rigid stereotypes,” we may expand further on the category of “orthodoxy.” My argument here is that ultimately the only academically defensible use of the term “orthodox” is one that takes it simply as a qualifier, and not a signifier of any particular doctrine, school or practice. In other words, the terms “orthodox” and “orthodoxy” have no universal content to them, nothing outside of their immediate historical reality.

THE HISTORIAN IBN KHALDŪN ON SUFISM

To conceive of a full history of Sufism is itself a daunting challenge. The variety of associated phenomena, institutions, texts, and practices, to say nothing of the social, political, and economic roles it played in Mamluk Egypt, together make for an object of study almost beyond circumscription. However, impressive studies have been completed, focusing on particular aspects of Sufism. One approach centers on the development of buildings dedicated to Sufism;¹⁶ others have treated individual figures of the period.¹⁷ By far the most wide-ranging study in the area to date is that of Éric Geoffroy, which is a work truly impressive in scope.¹⁸

¹⁵ Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, 5–7.

¹⁶ Leonor Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamluk Egypt: The Khanqah* (Berlin, 1988).

¹⁷ Th. Emil Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn al-Fāriḍ, his Verse and his Shrine* (Columbia, SC, 1994).

¹⁸ Éric Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie sous les derniers mamelouks et les premiers ottomans*:



However, for a discerning first-hand perspective on Mamluk-era Sufism we may turn to an author who, though not a Sufi himself, was directly involved with the phenomenon. This would be Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406),¹⁹ who had traveled from Tunis to Cairo in the 1380s, took up the post of Grand Qadi of the Maliki school of law, and was appointed director of the Sufi hospice Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ (or *khānqāh* Sultan Baybars Jashankir), the most prominent official institution of its kind. Although certainly best known today for his innovative philosophy of history, Ibn Khaldūn's detailed discussion of Sufism in his *Muqaddimah* preserves for us a careful and nuanced presentation, with particular emphasis on the position of Sufism among the other religious sciences.²⁰

We are told from the start that Sufism is an essential dimension of the Islamic religious impulse: it is “one of the lawful sciences of the (Islamic) community. Its basis is the path that was established among the earliest ancestors and the most prominent companions (of the Prophet), their immediate successors, and those who followed. It is a true path that leads to devotion and divine worship, and freedom from the temptations and distractions of a worldly life. . . . All of this was common among the ancestors and companions.”²¹ For Ibn Khaldūn the origin of Sufism is clearly identified with the origin of the Islamic community itself; but as a good historian, he goes on to nuance its subsequent developments.

In addition, Ibn Khaldūn was clearly familiar with the practices of Sufism. He summarizes for his readers central concepts such as remembrance of God (*dhikr*), asceticism (*zuhd*), and spiritual retreat (*khalwah*), and he singles out the Sufi concern for the self-scrutiny and self-discipline that for them lay behind the common acts of worship and obedience to the Law. We are told that by the second century, worldly matters had become the primary concern of most Muslims. At that point a minority who devoted themselves fully to worship came to be designated

orientations spirituelles et enjeux culturels (Damascus, 1995).

¹⁹ He was buried in Cairo in the northern section of the Qarāfah cemetery, but his tomb was destroyed in 2003 in the course of a road-widening project.

²⁰ The *Muqaddimah* was composed shortly before leaving the Maghreb for Egypt. Ibn Khaldūn had written even earlier on Sufism. For a discussion of his *Shifāʾ al-Sāʾil li-Tahdhīb al-Masāʾil*, ed. M. al-Tanjī (Istanbul, 1957), translated by R. Pérez as *La Voie et la voie, ou le maître et le juriste* (Paris, 1991), and more on his understanding of Sufism that with time seems to have hardened particularly against the school of thought identified with Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ, see Alexander Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: the Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, 1999), 187–97.

²¹ *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, ed. Aḥmad al-Zuʿbi (Beirut, 2001), 517. Also in English translation as *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (Princeton, 1967), but cf. Fritz Meier, “Khurasan and the End of Classical Sufism,” in *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O’Kane (Leiden, 1999), 189–90.



as Sufis (*al-ṣūfiyah wa-al-mutaṣawwifah*).²² Due to this concern, and the concepts and terminology specific to such reflections, the Sufis emerged as a distinct class among the ulama. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the Sufis had become specialized in a kind of knowledge (*‘ilm*) that no other branch of the lawful sciences covered.²³ The Sufis systematized their field of inquiry, just as the jurists and exegetes did. We are told that, “Once the sciences (*‘ulūm*) were collected and recorded, and the jurists (*fuqahā*) began writing on jurisprudence and its principles, as well as speculative theology, Quran exegesis, and similar things, the men of this path (i.e., Sufis) wrote on their discipline (*ṭariqah*).”²⁴ Thus emerges a clear early division within the tradition, each branch with its own area of focus and expertise. The simple model here is one of increasing specialization among the Islamic sciences, and the attendant development of classes of religious specialists.

Ibn Khaldūn’s historical analysis of Sufism continues with the introduction of a further distinction, that between ancient and recent Sufis. This distinction is largely, but not wholly, temporal. In a discussion of the various positions taken on the existential relationship of God to creation, Ibn Khaldūn surveys the jurists, the hadith scholars, the speculative theologians, and the philosophers. In this mix of opinions he identifies a mainstream position—one that emphasizes the distinctiveness and separateness of God’s essence and attributes from those of creation—and ascribes it to most of the religious scholars, including the ancient Sufis. Interestingly, these “ancients” are identified as those represented in al-Qushayrī’s *Risālah* and those who follow their example.²⁵

According to Ibn Khaldūn, the recent Sufis include those who more closely identify God with creation, some even going as far as adopting the doctrine of divine indwelling or *ḥulūl*. Another distinction to be made is that between the ancients’ commitment to cultivating speculation on spiritual matters, along with the language and terminology required for such, and the recent Sufis’ concern with themes such as divine self-disclosure (*tajalli*) and manifestation (*mazhar*).²⁶ The latter category of recent Sufis is further divided between those who hold to this “oneness” shared by God and creation, and those who hold an even more integrative position identified in short by the term “absolute oneness.”²⁷ Ibn Khaldūn further nuances his categories by identifying the Sufis of veracity (*al-*

²² *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, 517.

²³ *Ibid.*, 519.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 529. Al-Qushayrī wrote in the fifth/eleventh century.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 522.

²⁷ For more on the polemical context of some of these doctrinal positions see Michel Chodkiewicz, “Le procès posthume d’Ibn ‘Arabi,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, ed. Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden, 1999), 101–3.



muḥaqqiqūn min al-mutaṣawwifah) among the recent Sufis. These are a later group whose doctrine allows them to bridge the earlier differences between the ancient and recent Sufis, specifically relating to the existential question of God's relationship to creation. These Sufis of veracity recognize the reality of the "oneness" perspective or experience; however, they move beyond this stage to reassert the distinction (*farq*) between the created individual mystic and God.²⁸ These categories and concepts would reward further inspection in light of the wider intellectual history of Mamluk-period Sufism, but for our present purposes the central point is one of the diversity within the science of Sufism. Ibn Khaldūn's breakdown of the Sufism of his day along temporal and doctrinal lines gives us an insight into the complexity of this religious discourse.

However, our historian is not content simply to describe the doctrinal hairsplitting that went on among Sufi theorists, nor does he shy away from condemning what he sees as unacceptable behavior. To his credit, and perhaps not surprisingly, Ibn Khaldūn presents a nuanced picture of one of the more controversial practices among Sufis (both ancient and recent), the ecstatic utterances known as *shataḥāt*. These were the inspired statements, often cryptic or startling, that most branches of Sufism took to be a form of legitimate inspiration. Our historian opens his discussion by describing some of the responses to this issue from the wider ulama. We are told that, "Many of the jurists and muftis are intent on rejecting these recent Sufis . . . and insist that everything on the (Sufi) path is loathsome. However, the truth is that their discourse is quite complex."²⁹ Here Ibn Khaldūn is making the point that such blanket condemnations are a disservice, particularly where informed critique is vital for discerning which Sufi positions are to be challenged. To the *shataḥāt* he argues that three responses are possible: approval, interpretation, and condemnation.³⁰ He claims that since Sufis are simply overcome by these inspirations, and that such unusual experiences cannot easily be put into common speech, we must judge the status and character of the individual, rather than the content of the utterances themselves. The premise is that, in this state, Sufis "are beyond the sensory realm and are overwhelmed by their spiritual inspirations such that they speak out in unintended ways. This enraptured individual is beyond reasoning with, and *he who is compelled is excused*."³¹ Thus, Ibn Khaldūn argues that the character and sincerity of the individual Sufi are grounds for discerning when these utterances are objectionable. Those Sufis who are meritorious and worthy of emulation are not to be condemned for

²⁸ *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, 524.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 526.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 527.



their *shataḥāt*, but those whose character and background are unknown should indeed be censured if they make such declarations, since there would be no basis for properly interpreting such speech. The instances that categorically require censure are those in which the individual is insincere by virtue of having retained his faculties—that is, he declares *shataḥāt* while in control of his senses, and is thus indeed the author of his own speech. Such an individual then assumes responsibility for his transgression. Ibn Khaldūn makes it clear that such censure would come as much from other Sufis as from the jurists. Of the famous case of al-Ḥallāj, we are told that for this very reason the jurists and the prominent Sufis (*akābir al-mutaṣawwifah*) of the time together issued a legal opinion calling for his execution (*aftā . . . bi-qatl al-Ḥallāj*).³²

The events surrounding the execution of al-Ḥallāj in 309/922 were hardly so neat, but that is not our historian's central point. What is of concern here is that questions of censure and legitimacy were not categorical; that is, Sufis condemned *some* Sufis, and the better jurists also condemned *some* Sufis.³³ Ibn Khaldūn extends this illustration to include other practices. Although some ulama express reservations, exercises for spiritual discipline and discussions of saintly miracles are for the most part sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and should not be criticized. Our historian again takes the middle ground when he comes to the question of mystical discourse on “realities of the higher order.”³⁴ Here he suspends judgment, saying such language should be left un-interrogated and un-interpreted, much as the ambiguous passages (*al-mutashābihāt*) of the Quran are.³⁵

WRITING MORE CLEARLY

With Ibn Khaldūn's observations in mind, we turn now to the problem of Sufism as it has more recently appeared among modern historians of the Mamluk period. More precisely, my claim here will be that in applying the terms “orthodoxy” and “heresy” with little qualification, or as supposedly self-evident terms, our historical analyses can be seriously misdirected. In the remaining pages I will attempt to show exactly how this has happened.

In one particularly influential study of medieval Egyptian society, Boaz Shoshan throws light on what life would have been like for the popular classes.

³² Ibid.

³³ This diverse reality is reflected in the case of the third/ninth century ascetic Ghulām Khalīl, who led the persecution in Baghdad of the Sufi Abū al-Ḥasan al-Nūrī. See Josef van Ess, “Sufism and its Opponents: Reflections on Topoi, Tribulations, and Transformations,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, 26–27. On the complex relationship between Sufis, Hanbalis, and Mu‘tazilites, see Florian Sobieroj, “The Mu‘tazila and Sufism,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, 68–92.

³⁴ *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, 527.

³⁵ Here the reference is to Quran 3:7.



The essays presented in this study are innovative in conception and thorough in documentation; however, the treatment of Sufism undoes one of the central aims of the book. Shoshan's otherwise nuanced treatment of popular versus elite runs into trouble when it turns to an analysis of Sufism. The author makes clear that he is trying to substantiate "that there was 'another' Islam in medieval Cairo (as elsewhere)—an Islam practiced and experienced by the commoners."³⁶ This thesis is a worthy one, and the collection and presentation of such data relating to culture and religion on the popular level is a service in itself as a corrective to the more prevalent "top down" approach to social history. However, in this case the effort is undone by a flawed conception of Sufism. In the heart of his study he moves to nuance the high versus low dichotomy and identifies Sufism essentially with lower culture, in contrast to the elite who are the agents of "orthodoxy." However, the historical data will not cooperate, and Shoshan is left with a dilemma. The problem is (and Shoshan deserves credit for resisting any selective presentation of the facts) that the historian is quickly confronted with Sufis who do not belong to the popular class. That Sufis of this upper social class are prevalent undoes the earlier claim that Sufism is to be associated with the popular classes. Sufism among the elite of Cairo is in fact easily found; one thinks simply of the early Shādhilīyah (Ibn Bākhilā, Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī), or al-Sha'rānī's beloved Wafā'īyah.³⁷ But Shoshan, as a good historian who has committed himself to a less than perfect argument, tries to save his sinking thesis with a patch. He endeavors to explain away the historical inconsistencies by proposing that Sufism was allowed to "climb up the social ladder." That is, despite being essentially popular, Sufism had somehow obscured its origins and "found its way not only into the ruling body, but also into the world of orthodox scholars."³⁸ We will return to the problem of "orthodox scholars" in another context below, but here we can address this confusion of category by simply returning to Ibn Khaldūn. The latter clearly presents Sufism as a branch of religious knowledge (*sharī'ah*) and not as the religious pursuit of one social class or another. Ibn Khaldūn is not reductive in his analysis, nor is he idealistic in his account of Sufism; we noted earlier the series of distinctions he identifies within Sufi doctrine, and the variety of positions he entertains with regard to censure. Before running up against data that would not fit into his model, Shoshan would have done better to incorporate some of Ibn Khaldūn's insights, which would have forced Shoshan to nuance his stark untenable binary of popular Sufism versus elite "orthodoxy."

Shoshan is not alone in struggling under this burden. Other important studies

³⁶ Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*, 10.

³⁷ Richard McGregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: The Wafā'ī Sufi Order and the Legacy of Ibn 'Arabī* (Albany, 2004), 56–61.

³⁸ Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*, 76.



of religious and social history of the Mamluk period are methodologically hamstrung by a messy and less than rigorous conception of Sufism. The following passage is illustrative of some of this: “It is extremely difficult to generalize about the connections between orthodoxy and Sufism, owing to the complexity and subtlety of these ties and the different nature of each of these two aspects of Islam. While orthodoxy was quite uniform, Sufism was amorphous and multifaceted. The education and attitudes of the ulama were similar everywhere throughout the (Sunni) Islamic world, despite local scholastic differences. By contrast, the Sufi movement revealed a confusing diversity. . . .”³⁹

The first problem to note here is that of the category of “orthodoxy.” It is presented simply as the antipode to Sufism, which in such an equation would constitute the “heretical” or “unorthodox.” We may object to this inasmuch as “orthodox”—according to our arguments above—does not indicate a substantive category, but only primacy of position, and thus in this passage we are facing a false comparison. Further, and perhaps more substantively, we might appeal to Ibn Khaldūn’s presentation of censure. As we saw above, he is careful to show that censure did not simply follow the dividing lines between the sciences. That is, censure (the identification of “heresy”) was neither a distinguishing feature of any particular science, nor was it essential to the relationship between any of the sciences. Ibn Khaldūn is happy to expand on the distinctions between branches of religious knowledge, but “heresy” will not be part of such categorization. One might object further to Winter’s statement above by asking about the other side of the equation, that is, who exactly is intended by the term “orthodox”? Ibn Khaldūn is of little help here, since in his schema the sciences were fundamentally present but undifferentiated in the earliest community, and were later distinguished from one another only as they became more systematized among later generations. In this analysis none is more or less “orthodox” than any other. The only remaining possibility would be to identify the “orthodox” as the adherents of all the other sciences put together. To speculate, this is likely the answer most in the spirit of Winter’s passage quoted above. However, such a conception is unsustainable as a category since we can hardly say that all religious thought other than Sufism is to be automatically taken as “orthodox.” Another point raised in the above passage points to the *unity* of the “orthodox” ulama, contrasting it to the *diversity* of Sufism. Here we would do well to recall Van Ess’s warning (albeit specifically within the field of theology) against the blind spot that a stereotypical snapshot has for diversity of opinion. But beyond this, the deeper problem is that the passage assumes the religious culture of the “orthodox” is different from that of the Sufis. This is untenable historically. Sufis were very often the same people who were

³⁹ Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society Under Ottoman Rule 1517–1798* (London, 1992), 129.



muftis, judges, jurists, traditionists, theologians, etc.⁴⁰ The ulama class contained many Sufis, and every learned Sufi could claim membership in the ulama.

This use of “orthodoxy” as synonymous with the ulama, identified essentially by their common opposition to Sufism, is also problematic in that it retroactively projects clear distinctions that in fact were never there.⁴¹ Following the quotation above, we read: “From earliest times, orthodoxy and Sufism were rivals.” And more specifically, that this rivalry opposed “the mystics on the one hand and the theologians, jurists, and *madrasa* teachers on the other. . . .”⁴² This characterization of permanent categorical conflict, as we saw above, runs contrary to Ibn Khaldūn’s understanding of how the sciences are divided and how censure should be properly exercised. But just as importantly, this categorization fails to reflect the historical reality that a great many theologians, jurists, and *madrasah* teachers were themselves trained in Sufism and retained some affiliation with a Sufi order or teacher. Although we cannot quantify the numbers involved,⁴³ in the Mamluk period many prominent individuals embodied just such an overlap.⁴⁴ At least as significant is the fact that: “No single ‘*ālim* [Ibn Taymiyah included] can be named as disapproving of Sufism in principle.”⁴⁵ That is, this categorization was never even a rhetorical reality. The wider methodological problem represented here again rests in the use of the term “orthodox.” The characterization is that Sufism is a category universally opposed to that of the “orthodox.” The presentation of Sufism here is oversimplified, but more importantly the category of the “orthodox” is thrown up as if it were a historically identifiable entity. The reality is much more complex, rendering the category of the “orthodox” of little analytical value.

A strikingly different use of the term “orthodoxy” appears in discussions of some of the doctrinal (and ritual) disputes among Sufis of the Mamluk period. Here again, inappropriate terminology hinders analysis and argument. One such discussion opens with the question of the identification of the various Sufi

⁴⁰ In a study of urban elites of Damascus, Michael Chamberlain’s categories of learned elites as distinct from Sufis leads him to the untenable claim that: “The learned elite were often Sufis themselves . . . but they still competed with Sufis for the capacity to represent ‘ilm [religious knowledge].” Here of course epistemologies compete, not social classes. See *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (New York, 1994), 128.

⁴¹ Th. Emil Homerin makes this point explicitly in “Sufis and Their Detractors in Mamluk Egypt: A Survey of Protagonists and Institutional Settings,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, 226.

⁴² Winter, *Egyptian Society Under Ottoman Rule*, 129.

⁴³ For a quantitative study of such overlapping identities as represented in the Qarāfah, see Ohtoshi, “*Ṭaṣawwuf* as Reflected in *Ziyāra* Books and the Cairo Cemeteries,” 305–14, 327.

⁴⁴ Eric Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie*, 145–65. See also his “La Voile des apparences, ou la double vie du grand Cadi Zakariyya al-Ansari (m. 926/1520),” *Journal Asiatique* 282, no. 2 (1994).

⁴⁵ Winter, *Egyptian Society Under Ottoman Rule*, 161.



orders, some being “orthodox” and others not.⁴⁶ However, at the same time these orders “were capable of transforming themselves from orthodoxy to heterodoxy and vice versa.”⁴⁷ The context for this statement is the variety of doctrines and practices that could be found under a single order designation—in particular those of the Shādhiliyah and the Aḥmadiyah. Here some individuals within an order are described as agents of true and uncorrupted Islam, making them the “orthodox” Sufis. (At this point we are quite far from the juxtaposition of Sufism with “orthodoxy” we saw earlier.) In one sense, this recognition of dissent and diversity within single orders is welcome—and Ibn Khaldūn’s argument for censure certainly resonates here. However I would argue that the utility of the term “orthodox” remains questionable. Ibn Khaldūn would not have understood proper censure (which we remember for him is not a simple binary of “heresy” versus “orthodoxy”) as Sufis doing the job of non-Sufi ulama; rather, all the ulama, including educated Sufis, should engage in censure of objectionable practices or ideas. But more importantly, in these discussions the qualifying term “orthodox” is inconsistent. At times it is used to denote the practices of certain dominant Sufi groups, while in other instances it evokes the entire non-Sufi ulama.

The unfortunate assumptions behind such uses of the term “orthodoxy” can quickly lead us to historically indefensible positions. One such dead end is the argument tying Sufism to cultural decline. The reasoning here seems to be that “orthodoxy” is civilization’s bulwark against chaos and barbarity. This methodological assumption, when fused with an amorphous and unchanging ulama identified as “orthodox” and pitted categorically against Sufism, can lead to clearly false conclusions. One analysis describes a rise in prominence of Sufism shortly after the establishment of Ottoman rule in Egypt. This ascendancy is apparently inversely proportionate to a “decline of the ulama.” The argument is that this decline was precipitated by the Ottoman regime’s removing the Egyptian elite from important positions such as judgeships, and appointing Turks to these key offices. The attendant rise of Sufism is described thus: “All these developments were the result of Egypt’s relegation from an Empire to a province, which may have caused a widespread malaise that was favorable for Sufism. The strengthened position of Sufism may serve as a barometer of the Egyptian people’s general cultural and intellectual decline during the Ottoman period.”⁴⁸ Here the association of Sufism with cultural decay could not be stated more clearly. This argument, however, can only be sustained by an un-inspected assumption of Sufism as somehow anti-ulama—and thus a degenerate force—and certainly not by historical evidence.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*



In fact, the latter speaks to the contrary, even in the pages of this same study. Sensibly, elsewhere we are told that Mamluk-era Sufism was well positioned, and that “there was no lack of support for Sufis among the Mamluk emirs. Although the Ottomans’ patronage of the Sufis is well documented, Mamluk support for them did not lag far behind.”⁴⁹ To assert that Sufism was present, even flourishing, in the Mamluk period is hardly contentious. However, to sustain the argument above, one would have to claim that the Mamluk period, in order to reach the cultural and intellectual heights it did, was instead free of Sufism, or at least had held such a destructive force at bay. This was clearly not the case. Simply put, the problem here is that in the Mamluk period Sufism and the ulama of the remaining branches of religion thrived under shared political and cultural conditions. The characterization above of an unchecked Sufism pulling society towards decline is contrary to the historical evidence. This argument fails because of its commitment to an untenable characterization of Sufism.

The wider intention of this study has been to set forth a more nuanced and accurate conception of Sufism, not by presenting new and better definitions, but rather by pointing out methodological bottlenecks that obstruct sound historical treatment of the subject. I have argued that the terms “orthodoxy” and “heresy” should not be used without first exploring the theological baggage they usually carry with them. My efforts here have also been aimed at illustrating how this baggage can tilt and even overturn the analyses of the best historians among us. Sufism becomes a problem for the historian when perspectives such as those of Ibn Khaldūn are pushed aside in preference for terminology and categories that are more familiar and easily applied. Ibn Khaldūn’s portrayal of a Sufism diverse in both doctrine and practice, along with his wider view of the process of censure—one that places it above the lines dividing the various branches of the ulama—obliges us to nuance, if not abandon, our common use of the terms “orthodoxy” and “heresy.” However, if we choose to preserve these categories, we would do well to incorporate Van Ess’s observations on the fluid and impermanent historical reality of the “orthodox.” In this spirit, my own proposal would be simply that we apply the term “orthodox” as a historically determined qualifier, one that indicates a position of relative dominance, rather than allowing it to continue to function as the signifier of a supposedly unchanging and ahistorical core of doctrinal commitments.

⁴⁹ Ibid.



DAVID THOMAS
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Idealism and Intransigence: A Christian-Muslim Encounter in Early Mamluk Times

Sometime just before 1316 an unknown Christian author resident in Cyprus wrote a carefully composed letter in which he showed how his own faith was supported by the Quran. He wrote with the evident intention of opening a debate with Muslims, because in 1316 itself a copy was sent to Ibn Taymīyah in Damascus, and then five years later another was sent to Muḥammad Ibn Abī Ṭālib, a local celebrity in the Damascus area. It provoked both scholars to write long and disparaging replies, making what is undoubtedly the most substantial correspondence in the history of Christian-Muslim relations—few in number at only three items but containing two of the longest Muslim responses to any claims by Christians. The correspondence is unique in the detailed knowledge of the beliefs and doctrinal positions of the other that is shown by the three participants, but it is typical in many ways of the relations between followers of the two faiths that had developed over the seven centuries since the origin of Islam. Moreover, it eloquently represents the regard—or lack of it—that Christians and Muslims held towards one another in the turbulent times in which the letters were written.

The story of this correspondence actually begins about a century before the first letter was written. This was when the Melkite bishop of Sidon, Paul of Antioch, sent his politely worded but ingeniously subversive letter to a Muslim friend.¹ Writing in Arabic, he employed the personae of Christian scholars in Europe to demonstrate that in its own terms the Quran proves that Muḥammad was sent with an Arabic revelation to the pagan Arabs alone, and that its teachings give unmistakable indications that the main elements of Christian belief and practice are sound and God-given. Exactly when Paul wrote is not known,² but a date in the latter years of the twelfth century seems best to fit the available evidence.

This letter circulated widely among Christians,³ and it evidently became known to Muslims as well because in the mid-thirteenth century the Egyptian jurist Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfī (1228–85) targeted its arguments in his *Al-Ajwibah al-Fākhirah*

© The Middle East Documentation Center. The University of Chicago.

¹ Paul Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche, évêque melkite de Sidon (xiiie s.)* (Beirut, 1964).

² On this see Samir Khalil Samir, "Notes sur la 'Lettre à un musulman de Sidon' de Paul d'Antioche," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 24 (1993): 179-95.

³ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymīyah, *Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ*, ed. 'Alī Ibn Ḥasan Ibn Nāṣir et al. (Riyadh, 1999), 1:101.



©2009 by David Thomas.

DOI: [10.6082/M189140F](https://doi.org/10.6082/M189140F). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M189140F>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

‘*an al-As’ilah al-Fājirah*, though without identifying it.⁴ Then, sometime in the early fourteenth century the anonymous Christian in Cyprus made Paul’s letter the basis of his own initiative to encourage some debate with Muslim scholars about faith.

This unknown master worked carefully through Paul’s letter and made subtle changes, additions, and omissions to turn it into a document with a rather altered character from the original.⁵ It could be that a different temperament was responsible, or that changed political and social conditions demanded a new tenor, but the result is a work that invites agreement and acknowledgement rather than the provocation and assertiveness of Paul’s original.

A close comparison of the two letters shows that the anonymous author approached Paul’s letter conservatively, but with his own clear intentions; he went much further than simply editing it.⁶ Put briefly, he completed quotations from the Quran that Paul had edited down in order to fit his arguments, he removed some of the more pointed exegeses of verses used by Paul to bring out Christian significances, and he added a long series of verses from the Quran and Bible, mainly the Old Testament. Thus, he removed quotations that might have caused unnecessary offense to Muslims, and reduced the chances of his version of the letter provoking disagreement. Whereas Paul might be said to compel his reader to admit the pure logic of his case, this author was more concerned to persuade and maybe to commend the point that Christianity and Islam were complementary faiths that need not compete.

Two features of his letter give strong indications that this was indeed the author’s intention. The first is the long series of quotations from Old Testament books that show uncompromising prejudice against the Jews. These are added to Paul’s original in a series of lengthy blocs,⁷ which serve to demonstrate that although the Jews possessed in their scriptures clear indications that God would send Christ, they ignored them, and more seriously they ignored the commands he gave:

When Moses withdrew from them onto the mountain to converse

⁴ Edition by Bakr Zaki ‘Awaḍ (Cairo, 1987).

⁵ Published in Rifaat Y. Ebied and David Thomas, ed., *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades: the Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī’s Response* (Leiden, 2005), 54–147.

⁶ On this see *ibid.*, 1–14, and more fully, David Thomas, “Paul of Antioch’s *Letter to a Muslim Friend* and *The Letter from Cyprus*,” in *Syrian Christians under Islam: the First Thousand Years*, ed. *idem* (Leiden, 2001), 203–21.

⁷ Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades*, 76–81, 84–89, 98–107, and particularly 108–17.



with God the exalted, and took the Torah from the hand of God the exalted for them, they abandoned the worship of God and forgot all his acts, worshipping a heifer's head.

Then after this they worshipped idols, not once but many times. They made sacrifices to them, not inarticulate animals but their sons and daughters. This is according to what the prophets prophesied against them. All their acts are written in the chronicles of the People of Israel.

When God, blessed and exalted, saw the hardness of their hearts, their stubbornness and their disbelief in him, and their vile, abominable acts, he grew angry with them and made them contemptible and insignificant among all the nations, and they have had no king, priest or prophet ever again. This is as the prophets prophesied about them, and as their books, which they have in their possession today, bear witness.

To this effect is what God said to the prophet Isaiah, "Go, say to this people: You will hear but not understand, you will look but not see, because the minds of this people have been dulled and they understand little of what they hear; they have closed their eyes so that they cannot see or hear with their ears or understand with their minds or turn to me to save them."

Isaiah also said, "Likewise your sabbaths and new moons are abominable to me and have become despicable in my eyes"; God said: "On that day I will put an end to all sabbaths and festivals, and I will give you a new chosen law, not like the law I gave to my servant Moses on the day of Horeb, the day of the great assembly, but a new chosen law which I will enjoin and will send out from Zion." Now Zion is Jerusalem, and the new chosen law is the law which we Christians have received from the hands of the Apostles, the holy disciples. What demonstration could be clearer than this that we have quoted from the word of God the exalted, particularly since our enemies the Jews acknowledge to us that this is correct? If they did make a denial, this would be a denial among those who had no knowledge of their books, and this is due to their wickedness, ignorance and stubbornness. Just as these prophecies are in our possession, so they are in the possession of the Jews and also of all the Christians scattered over all the world and in all their languages, as they received them from the pure Apostles, to this day a single message.

As for the Jews' argument concerning these prophecies, they



say and believe that they are true, and they do not deny that they are the word of God, blessed and exalted. But they say that they will be fulfilled and completed when the Messiah comes, though the Messiah has not come and is far off, and he who has come is not the Messiah. And not only do they not believe, but they want only to compound their unbelief by saying that he was a deceiver, for the Messiah is still to come, and the prophecies of the prophets' will be fulfilled. "And when he comes, we will follow him."

This is what they think and believe about the lord Christ, though what greater disbelief could there be than theirs? It is because of this that the Quran has called them "those who earn thine anger," because of their dispute over the word of God which he uttered through the mouths of the prophets. And since we Christians adhere to the word of the prophets, and since we hold to what the pure Apostles commanded us, it calls us "those whom thou hast favoured."⁸

Clearly, the Jews have been superseded by the God-given truth of Christianity. In developing this idea at such length, the author is inviting his Muslim readers to acknowledge that his own faith is part of God's plan in history, and he is also perhaps appealing to them to unite in friendship with the Christians, as both of them express a common hatred of the Jews. Here he would have been inviting his Muslim correspondents to admit openly the same prejudices that four hundred years earlier the essayist and stylist Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869) had resentfully mocked among the people of Baghdad. In the Abbasid capital al-Jāḥiẓ noted how Muslims admired Christians because of their senior positions in commerce and the professions, while both faiths despised the Jews because of their inferior trades and their physical ugliness.⁹ The author of this letter appears to be appealing to a similar sentiment as he documents the stubbornness of the Jews and their condemnation by God, and thereby distinguishes the Christians, who by comparison are obedient and blessed by God, for commendation by Muslims.

The second feature is what the author says about Muḥammad and Islam. This is more implicit than direct, but he makes plain at the beginning that the Prophet, who was sent to the Arabs with an Arabic scripture, was clearly sent from God as an inspired messenger.¹⁰ While he does not develop this point at any length,

⁸ Ibid., 111–17.

⁹ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Fī al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, in *Thalāth Rasā'il li-Abī 'Uthmān al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. Joshua Finkel (Cairo, 1926), [10–38] 13–19; trans. (in part) Joshua Finkel, "A Risāla of al-Jāḥiẓ," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 47 (1927): [311–34] 322–30.

¹⁰ Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades*, 56–61.



his use of the Quran as the basis or support for many of his arguments in favor of Christianity presupposes that he accepts it as an authentic scripture.

Both these features are present in Paul of Antioch's original, but the anonymous author makes more of them by adding illustrative verses from the Bible and Quran to present by implication an argument that seeks to locate Christianity as a faith that commands respect and acceptance in a relationship with Islam in which both figure as inspired dispensations.

This much will, in theory, have attracted, or been intended to attract, Muslim readers to the letter, and warmed them towards the arguments it contains. The author ingeniously suggests a communion of spirit between the two faiths in their ascendancy over the Jews, and also finds a place for the Prophet and the Quran within a divine economy centered on Christianity. This is extremely unusual among Christians before the modern era, and it shows remarkable openness towards a figure who among Europeans at the time was conventionally cast as demonic and condemned to the lowest circles of hell. The conclusion can thus be understood as a sincere declaration of agreement between the faiths, and a well-meant invitation to constructive debate:

This is what I was able to ascertain about the views of the people I met and conferred with, and about the arguments they were using on their own behalf. Praise and blessing be to God, for he has brought unanimity of view and put an end to suspicion between his servants the Christians and Muslims, may God protect them all!

If he has found anything different from this, may our master the revered teacher (may God eternally protect him and prolong his existence) point it out so that I may inform them about it and determine what views they have on it. For they have asked me to do this and made me a mediator. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds.¹¹

This is a singular and in many ways startling composition. The positive attitude towards Islam it expresses leads one to ponder the author's intention in writing, though the investigation of what this may have been introduces less constructive implications than at first appear and relates this apparently enlightened initiative to the stubborn difficulties that waylaid Christian-Muslim relations from the start.

Nothing is known about the author apart from what is given in this letter,

¹¹ Ibid., 147.



which is very little.¹² Writing from Cyprus, he was obviously at home with Arabic, editing Paul of Antioch's letter and turning it into his own Arabic composition. This raises the question whether he was, in fact, a native of the island or had come there from the mainland. He knows the Quran intimately, and maybe by heart, so much so that he could change Paul's edited version of Q 57:25: "And we sent our messengers with clear proofs, with them the book, that mankind might observe right measure," to the correct: "Indeed, we sent our messengers with clear proofs, and we sent down with them the book and the balance, that mankind might observe right measure."

Paul's small omissions create the impression that the messengers sent with the book are the Apostles of Jesus, though the anonymous author's restoration shows this is a distortion of the original. He was also able to supply the names of surahs, as well as quote the Bible in Arabic. And lastly, he knew Damascus so well that he was able to identify as recipients of his letter not only the renowned scholar Ibn Taymiyah but also the more locally known Ibn Abī Ṭālib. Thus it is possible that he was originally from the Damascus area and may even have been a convert to Christianity from Islam.¹³ This being so, his letter may not have had the pure intentions which the reading offered above suggests. For one thing, his portrayal of the Jews may not have been simply historical and literal, relating how they turned away from the signs and revelation given by God to follow their own intransigent ways. He may also have meant it symbolically to refer to Islam, with the veiled warning that if the Muslims ignore what is evident in their scripture about Christianity, which he spells out in the course of this letter, they risk the same fate as the Jews: religious rejection and social ostracism. And for another, his portrayal of Muḥammad and the Quran ranks them below Christ and Christianity. For, as the letter says at the start,¹⁴ the Quran was not sent to people who already had a scripture, but as an Arabic revelation it was intended only for native Arabic speakers. Thus, the Prophet, although sent from God, possessed only local significance in Arabic-speaking areas, and coming after the revelation of Christianity he was secondary in status, a messenger sent to bring the pagans to a simple form of monotheism.

The apologetic purpose that is detectable in the letter may be taken as a reflection of the wider inter-religious context in which it was written.¹⁵ This would be in the period after 1291 when the Crusader forces had lost their last possessions on the mainland and the refuges that many had sought in Cyprus had

¹² Ibid., 5–19, contains a full discussion of most of the following details.

¹³ Of course, Paul of Antioch's intimacy with the Quran indicates that not only Muslims learnt it, though he does not show the evident respect for it that this author does.

¹⁴ Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades*, 55–61.

¹⁵ Ibid., 13–17.



become permanent homes—in fact, could the author have been a refugee (and if a convert, someone who had found it acutely necessary to escape from the incoming Mamluks)? Moreover, this was after the invading Mongols had dashed Christian hopes by failing to join an alliance against the resurgent Muslims, had been defeated at ‘Ayn Jālūt in 1260, and had become Muslims. So there could have been an imperative, in some minds at least, to maintain an engagement of sorts with the Muslims in order to appear not to have surrendered completely. In fact, at the time of writing in the early fourteenth century, the author would have been aware of numerous plans to launch fresh crusading offensives against the eastern and southeastern shores of the Mediterranean with Cyprus as the marshalling point. Almost every few years a new plan was presented in the papal and royal courts of Europe, and in Cyprus rumors about these plans must have kindled hopes and expectations, though the lack of armies to put these plans into effect must have made them seem progressively hollow and fanciful, continually raising hopes and then dashing them.

The author of the letter may, therefore, have had in mind the plan to produce a sound theological argument that proved the ascendancy of Christianity in order to show to leading Muslims that his faith was not to be dispensed with easily, but commanded respect and careful consideration. Thus, while Christian forces may have suffered a temporary loss, the faith itself retained the integrity it had been given by God at the beginning. It is also possible that he wrote to encourage Christians who could read his words, especially the remnant communities who lived under Muslim rule, to remain loyal to their faith. This they would do when they were reminded that the faith of their rulers was in its essence a distorted form of an original that was not only compatible with Christianity, if a pale preliminary version of it, but also derived from a scripture that attested to Christian truth and that was intended only for the local audience of pagan Arabia. They might thus be able to put Islam in its proper relationship with Christianity and not give in to the temptation to convert.

Of course, the letter gives no indication of its purpose or its author’s intention. But if the inferences drawn here are at all accurate then it can be seen as more a weapon of hostility or a defensive mechanism than its conciliatory and persuasive tone at first suggests. Offering discussion on grounds that Muslims would find familiar and presumably acceptable, with the implicit acknowledgement that the Quran and Muḥammad are authentic, it actually leads to the ascendancy of Christianity over Islam. No wonder the two scholars it is known to have reached replied so vehemently and at such inordinate length; they must have seen these dangers, and they took elaborate measures to counter them.

From very early times, Muslim attitudes towards Christianity were based on the acknowledgement that the earlier dispensation was given from God with a



scripture that agreed in essence with the Quran mediated by a messenger who was like Muḥammad. But it very quickly qualified these appraisals with the accusation that Christians had distorted the pure teachings about God, had divinized Jesus, and had mistaken or textually distorted the teachings of the Gospel. There was a strong element in their attitude that Islam had come not only to confirm but also to correct Christianity, and there was little that this fractured faith could give them in return. Added to this, for purposes of social relations, Christians, like other scriptural believers, were given client status and were governed by the set of regulations known as the Pact of ‘Umar, after the second caliph. The precise form that these took in the early centuries is not clear, but there is enough evidence in the documents that have survived to show that by the ninth century they theoretically imposed upon *dhimmīs* restrictions that separated them from Muslims in society and impressed upon them a clear sense of their own inferiority.

By the time this letter from Cyprus was written, it is likely that the regulations of the Pact of ‘Umar had become so internalized into Muslim consciousness that they formed the framework in which attitudes to matters of society and religion were expressed. An eloquent attestation of this is to be found in the *Refutation of the Client People and Those Who Follow Them*, which was probably written a few decades before the letter from Cyprus by a certain Ghāzī al-Wāsiṭī.¹⁶ Originally from Iraq, as his name indicates, this author had served in northern Syria in the mid-thirteenth century before moving to Egypt where he wrote his refutation. The latest reference he gives is datable to 1292,¹⁷ so his work may have appeared in Egypt within twenty years of the letter from Cyprus. It is a colorful portrayal of the place of *dhimmīs* in the society that al-Wāsiṭī knew.

Like the *Refutation of the Christians* of al-Jāhīz, written more than four hundred years earlier about the Christians of Baghdad,¹⁸ al-Wāsiṭī’s work has the character of a resentful complaint against the liberties taken by Christians in Ayyubid and Mamluk Syria and Egypt and their ungrateful and deceptive ways. Although it shows no knowledge of the earlier diatribe, this thirteenth-century reply could almost have been framed on its predecessor.

Al-Wāsiṭī sets out his general attitude at the very start: “The protected people who, not being subjected to fear, have been allowed to live freely in Egyptian and Syrian regions, some of them unbelievers belonging to the Jewish faith and

¹⁶ Richard Gottheil, “An Answer to the Dhimmi,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 41 (1921): 383–457. Moshe Perlmann, “Notes on Anti-Christian Propaganda in the Mamlūk Empire,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 10 (1942): 844, suggests 721/1321 as a possible date of composition but without offering an explanation.

¹⁷ Gottheil, “Answer,” 384.

¹⁸ See n. 9 above.



others to sects of the Christians, are worse unbelievers and more stiff-necked than those who wield the sword (*ahl bi-al-sayf*) who have kept their hold over Islam by oppression and tyranny.”¹⁹ He draws a contrast between the client populations and the Crusaders, and he implicitly questions the attitude of the former, who show hostility even though they are given freedom and treated fairly. His understanding is evidently that they have no reason to be anything but compliant because their treatment is unexceptionable, and they are religiously in the wrong anyway.

Al-Wāsiṭī begins to build his case by quoting Quranic verses that condemn the People of the Book and counsel separation between them and Muslims—there is no mention of such positive verses as Q 5:82, where Christians are called the nearest in affection to the believers. He follows with prophetic hadiths, injunctions from the founders of the Sunni law rites, and stories of dealings between early caliphs and Christians, all showing that the authorities of Islam distanced themselves from Christians while treating them with fairness and respect. The underlying reason is religious, as he indicates early on in his argument: “Just as soon as any one of the People of the Book declares the law of Allah and of his Prophet to be untrue, and disobeys the demands as laid down by the Prophet of Allah, idolatry adheres to him (*fa-lazimahu al-shirk*).”²⁰ As *mushrikūn*, associators of other divinities with God, Christians among other People of the Book are religiously suspect and unclean. Therefore, as the stories from the Prophet and the caliphs describe, even the help offered in warfare and in bureaucratic jobs must be refused. The priority of doctrinal principle over practical considerations is so important to al-Wāsiṭī that even financial loss is better than allowing Christians to go on unimpeded. He makes his point with a well-known story from the Umayyad caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, who, when the governor of Egypt informed him that conversions from the client populations to Islam were reaching such a pitch that tax revenues from them were at risk of drying up, ordered the governor to be punished and expressed the hope that they would all be converted, for “Allah has sent Muḥammad as a preacher, not as a tax-gatherer.”²¹

Al-Wāsiṭī builds upon this a series of stories from nearer his own time about the perfidiousness of Christians and Jews in Egypt, including one of the Christian Ibn Dukhkhān who spied for the Crusaders,²² and another of Christians who dressed

¹⁹ Gottheil, “Answer,” 416 (quotations are from his translation with reference to the Arabic text).

²⁰ Ibid., 418. Al-Wāsiṭī’s condemnation of Christians and Jews committing the sin of *shirk* (he may have in mind Q 9:30: “The Jews call ‘Uzayr son of God and the Christians call Christ son of God”) may seem extreme, but it is paralleled in al-Dimashqī, who habitually accuses his Christian opponents of committing this same sin; Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades*, e.g., 217, 291, 295, 385.

²¹ Gottheil, “Answer,” 424.

²² Ibid., 435–38.



to look like Muslims and intentionally misled Muslims out of spite.²³ He goes on to complain about the Christians who profess to be Muslims for professional reasons but retain their own beliefs and practices in private, and he includes a story in which he was personally involved of Christians in Damascus who took advantage of the ruling Mongols' declaration that all faiths could be followed freely to write books exposing contradictions in the Quran.²⁴ Maybe his most telling point from his own times is his contrasting of Christians who amass wealth from public service which they use for their own enrichment and pleasure with Muslims who use the earnings from the same service "for the interests of the Sultanate and increasing its splendour. . . . Indeed, at the end of their life they are in debt and poor, because of the strength of mind they have shown and their fidelity [to the ruling house]."²⁵ The Christian is self-centered and ready to take personal advantage of the position granted him in society, while the Muslim is public-spirited and open to acknowledging his debt to society.

This refutation is, of course, a collection of arguments and illustrations intended to prove al-Wāsiṭī's point about the inferiority and untrustworthiness of Christians (and to some extent Jews). In this respect, it must be treated with care as a historical document, though it is evidently indicative of one attitude towards Christians that must have been recognizable and was maybe acceptable in early Mamluk society. Furthermore, at least some of the stories and appraisals it brings together must have been known to its intended readers. Thus, it can be taken as giving some indications of popular estimations of Christians in the society of the time, and as revealing an ingrained impression that, apart from any religious or doctrinal errors Christians preserved in their beliefs, they were social pariahs who took advantage of the privileges they were accorded by Muslims to betray the trust placed in them and harm wider society in whatever ways they could. The series of complaints brought together here point to rivalry and mistrust in all relations between the two faiths, arising from the moral failure that is consistently shown by Christians. The clear implication is that the faith they profess is fatally fractured, and there is little profit in taking them as colleagues and friends, or at all seriously.

This refutation gives some hints about Muslim attitudes towards Christians at the time the anonymous Christian author sent his letter from Cyprus. Interestingly,

²³ Ibid., 439–40.

²⁴ Ibid., 445–50. Al-Wāsiṭī's brief reference to one of these, entitled *Al-sayf al-murhaf fi al-radd 'alá al-muṣḥaf*, "The sharp sword, in refutation against the Scripture" (447–49), shows it contained arguments long known in Christian anti-Muslim polemic. Its author's knowledge of the Quran shows none of the completeness of the author of the Letter from Cyprus, and certainly none of his respect.

²⁵ Gottheil, "Answer," 445.



it says little about the Crusaders themselves; they are on the margins of al-Wāsiṭī's concerns as a menace with whom the indigenous *dhimmī* Christians are often in conspiracy. It is as though they are a defining evil, against which the betrayals and malevolent acts of Christians within Muslim society can be gauged. If these latter are unworthy of anything but the harshest treatment, the Crusaders are beyond any fair treatment at all.

The date when the anonymous author in Cyprus wrote cannot be known exactly. But since his reworked version of Paul of Antioch's letter reached Ibn Taymiyah in 1316, having been sent to him expressly, it is unlikely that it was finished very much earlier. It was, of course, sent to him as the leading religious scholar of his day, and certainly the best known religious authority in Damascus. It was sent with the express intention of inviting a reply; as its conclusion, which has been quoted above, innocently says, let the recipient indicate any points on which he disagrees, so that there can be discussion between the two sides.²⁶ But if he thought he would start a serious debate in which the Muslim would weigh the points he had made and ponder them dispassionately, he was completely wrong.

Ibn Taymiyah replied with the *Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-Man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ*,²⁷ a painstakingly detailed exposure of Christianity that is not rivalled in the whole of Islam for its detail and length. This text has been the subject of a number of studies,²⁸ although a full analysis of its contents remains to be made. In short, it can be said that Ibn Taymiyah pays little regard to the arguments from Cyprus, but rather uses the letter to show how Muslims can be led away from the path of true faith by distorted interpretations such as this. While he quotes the letter at length in the course of his reply, he does not so much give answers to it as employ it as a warning to fellow Muslims of the dangers of any deviation from the norms of the Quran. Thus, his *Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* is not addressed to the author from Cyprus or even to Christians, but to Muslims, and it ranks Christianity with forms of Shi'i extremism as a faith that departs from true monotheism.

Whether this thundering reply was ever sent to Cyprus is not known. But about five years after the anonymous author sent his first copy to Ibn Taymiyah in Damascus, he sent another copy, this time to Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn

²⁶ Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades*, 147 (quoted above).

²⁷ Ed. 'Alī ibn Ḥasan ibn Nāṣir et al. (Riyadh, 1999); partial trans. Thomas Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawab al-Sahih* (Delmar, New York, 1984).

²⁸ Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*; Mark Swanson, "Ibn Taymiyya and the *Kitāb al-Burhān*: a Muslim Controversialist responds to a Ninth-Century Arabic Christian Apology," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad (Gainesville, 1995), 95–107; David Thomas, "Apologetic and Polemic in *The Letter from Cyprus* and Ibn Taymiyya's *Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*," in *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times*, ed. Shahab Ahmed and Yossef Rapoport (Karachi, forthcoming).



Abī Ṭālib, a well-known scholar in the town and, like Ibn Taymīyah, someone whose response would be based on experience and sincere scholarship in faith. His reply, written in 1321, within a few months of receiving the letter, can be placed alongside Ghāzī al-Wāsiṭī's refutation as a prime example of the attitudes held among Muslims towards Christians in early Mamluk times, and an indication of the tremendous differences between the faiths that present obstacles not only at times of open hostility such as the Crusades but at all times.

While he apparently did not enjoy the international celebrity status of Ibn Taymīyah, al-Dimashqī was enough of a celebrity in Damascus to merit an entry in al-Ṣafadī's *Al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt* and again in his *A'yān al-ʿAṣr wa-A'wām al-Naṣr*.²⁹ Al-Ṣafadī was, in fact, a personal friend of al-Dimashqī and remembered spending time at his home and being asked by him to revise one of his poems. He regarded al-Dimashqī as "one of the cleverest people alive, with the power to penetrate into every discipline and the boldness to write about every field."³⁰ Thus, to anyone in Cyprus who knew something about the intellectual and cultural life in Damascus, he would be the natural recipient of a letter that was intended to start a public discussion.

Al-Dimashqī followed Ibn Taymīyah in replying to the anonymous letter with one of the longest and most detailed exposés of Christianity that has survived, the *Jawāb Risālat Ahl Jazīrat Qubruṣ*.³¹ He may, in fact, have known Ibn Taymīyah's *Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*—he certainly knew that Ibn Taymīyah had been sent another copy of the letter³²—because a number of the illustrative arguments he employs are also found in the earlier work. But a close examination of the two remains to be made.³³

Al-Dimashqī gives some details about the circumstances in which he received the letter from Cyprus, recounting that it was personally delivered to him by a

²⁹ *Al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*, vol. 3, ed. Sven Dederer, Bibliotheca Islamica vol. 6c (Wiesbaden, 1974), 163–64; *A'yān al-ʿAṣr wa-A'wām al-Naṣr*, ed. ʿAlī Abū Zayd et al. (Beirut and Damascus, 1998), 4:475–80.

³⁰ *Wāfi*, 3:163.

³¹ Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades*, 150–497.

³² *Ibid.*, 156–57.

³³ A full investigation of Ibn Taymīyah's *Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* and al-Dimashqī's *Jawāb Risālat Ahl Jazīrat Qubruṣ* should also include Ibn Taymīyah's *Risālat al-Qubruṣīyah*, which contains some of the same arguments; ed. and trans. (French) Jean Michot, *Lettre à un roi croisé = al-Risālat al-Qubruṣīyya* (Louvain-la-Neuve and Lyon, 1995). This work, which was written to a noble in Cyprus to request fair treatment for Muslim prisoners, can be dated to just after 1300, a good fifteen years before the correspondence between the anonymous author in Cyprus and the two Damascus scholars began. It might be assumed that it forms part of the background reason for the Christian letter, but the latter shows no explicit or implicit awareness of it or of its contents.



certain Kilyām the merchant, chamberlain of the Watchtower (*wazīr al-Marqab*).³⁴ Al-Marqab (Margat) was the great Crusader fortress along the shore road north of Latakia that was captured by Sultan Qalāwūn in 1285, and Kilyām (presumably Guillaume), if he was a real person, would have been one of the original garrison. He is mentioned a number of times in the *Jawāb*, though al-Dimashqī appears to use him as a persona to whom to attach questions and arguments in the letter from Cyprus that are otherwise awkwardly anonymous. If he was indeed real, he serves to show that in a period of open hostility, when papal edicts frequently forbade trade between Muslim and Christian areas, communications were still in fact maintained.

The letter reached al-Dimashqī in March 1321, and he completed his reply in June of the same year. Like Ibn Taymiyah, he follows the method of quoting a passage from the letter and using it as the basis for a demonstration of the truth of Islam and the impoverishment of Christianity. He finds no merit at all in what the letter attempts to set out, and he dismisses its arguments without any constructive response. A Muslim would find many familiar arguments in it, for while the *Jawāb* is directed at the Christians, it was clearly intended for a Muslim audience as well. His reply is a sustained attestation to Muslim self-confidence and the intolerance towards Christianity that Ghāzī al-Wāsiṭī exemplifies in his briefer refutation.

Al-Dimashqī divides his *Jawāb* into thirteen sections, each headed by a quotation from the letter, together with a short introduction. He makes his stance clear at the very start, where he explains his interpretation of the intention held by the people of Cyprus in writing the letter: “They were opening up means of seeking a confrontation through it, under the impression that they had mastered what they had been assured was teaching, or that this might lead straight to the religion by mention of it.”³⁵ His realistic assessment of the letter, that all it is attempting to do is either to confuse Muslims or convert them, shows that he has seen through its politeness and irenic posturing and has sensed the danger implicit in what it proposes.

Al-Dimashqī gets into the main argument of the *Jawāb* in response to the first claim he identifies in the letter, namely that Muḥammad appeared without warning rather than after announcements from earlier prophets and the miraculous signs that were conventionally associated with each advent of a prophet. This section of the *Jawāb* is the longest,³⁶ and it affords an excellent insight into his approach, giving a perspective of the general Muslim attitude towards the supremacy of Islam at the time.

³⁴ Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades*, 154–55.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 156–57.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 158–227.



Al-Dimashqī expresses shock at this accusation and systematically presents a long string of proof texts and stories to counter it. He begins with a series of quotations from the Old and New Testaments that from the ninth century or earlier had been seen by Muslims to contain references to the Prophet.³⁷ Many of these were familiar by the fourteenth century, and some, such as the riders on the ass and the camel of Isaiah 21 and the promises of the coming of the Paraclete in the Last Supper discourses in John 15 and 16, were commonplace. But they serve his purpose more than adequately. He adds to them stories that had passed from legend into religious history, such as the discovery of portraits of the Prophet and Rightly-Guided Caliphs in the possession of the people of Sicily when the first Muslims landed there,³⁸ and the surrender of Jerusalem to the caliph ʿUmar when the people recognized him as the one foretold: “This would never have happened unless they had known about the mission of Muḥammad (may God bless him and give him peace) to all humankind and the pre-eminence of his religion over all others, and, from his particular description and bearing, that his caliph ʿUmar would be the conqueror of Jerusalem.”³⁹

Of course, there is no question of the veracity of these stories, but more importantly there is no evident need for al-Dimashqī to do much more than refer to them or summarize them for him to consider his point made. They are obviously so well known among Muslims that the simple reminder of what they say is enough. This is strongly suggestive of widely held prejudices throughout Muslim society at this time.

But al-Dimashqī does not leave the matter with this spectacular display of evidence in support of Muḥammad’s being attested by prophecies and miracles. He goes on to explain why Christians have ignored them, locating the guilt for this in the early community. In a breathtaking rewriting of known historical facts, he recounts how Constantine was converted to Christianity and wanted to proclaim his new faith in the empire. So Christian teachings were put in order, and the emperor was informed about the Gospel references to the Paraclete, though the religious experts were afraid that he might abandon his faith if he knew the true identity of this being and said it was the Holy Spirit. “This became Constantine’s conviction, for he had been a Ṣābian, a worshipper of idols and the spiritual forces of the stars. So he accepted what they claimed about the matter of the Holy Spirit because he himself was familiar with belief in spiritual forces.”⁴⁰ This official acceptance of the misinterpretation of Jesus’ true teachings is the starting

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 162–75.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 174–76.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 178–79.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 184–85.



point of Christian errors and the reason why, in al-Dimashqī's explanation, the Quran contains condemnations of the distorted doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation.⁴¹

To say that this reinterpretation of well-known Christian history is contentious is to state the obvious. Christians would have challenged every detail and insisted upon its factual inaccuracy. Al-Dimashqī, however, is clearly untroubled by this eventuality. The version of this history he preserves, and particularly the key role played by Constantine in perverting original Christian truth, is so securely accepted among his fellow Muslims that any challenge would stand little chance of a hearing, let alone acceptance. It shows how fully Muslims at this time were provided with an explanation of the way in which Christianity originally presented true teachings, as the Quran states, but these were distorted through wilful misinterpretation by a power-seeking elite, and how Islam then came to restore the truth and expose the criminal distortions.

It cannot be assumed that this recasting of the history of Constantine and the early years of the emancipated church is al-Dimashqī's own composition. Certainly, Constantine is conventionally implicated in Muslim explanations of the distorted form of Christianity.⁴² And judging by another story al-Dimashqī employs, it might well be the case that with Constantine as well he is drawing upon a well-recognized tradition. This other story concerns St. Paul and his part in the corruption of the faith.

According to al-Dimashqī, Paul, who lived about a hundred and fifty years after Christ, was at first a persecutor of the Christians but then "he showed a desire for Christianity." So he withdrew from the world and was served in his seclusion by four scholars. He took each of these aside in turn and fed him teachings about the nature of Christ, each slightly different, and "in this way they became four sects."⁴³

This account is as neat as the story of Constantine, telling how historical Christianity split into the main denominations known within the Muslim world. Its historicity is, of course, entirely spurious since it conflates the ministry of Paul in the first century with the emergence of the non-Chalcedonian churches in the fifth century and after. But al-Dimashqī need not be troubled about questions of factual accuracy, because this etiology had been circulating in different forms since at least the eighth century.⁴⁴ And if the historian Sayf ibn ʿUmar (d. 796 or

⁴¹ Ibid., 186–93.

⁴² See Samuel M. Stern, "Abd al-Jabbār's Account of How Christ's Religion was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs," *Journal of Theological Studies*, new series 19 (1968): 142–45, 159–76.

⁴³ Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades*, 398–401.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 397–99, n. 23.



slightly later), who wrote one of the first accounts of the dissension within the earliest Muslim community, is to be believed, the account can be traced back to ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Abbās, the Prophet’s cousin, in the seventh century.⁴⁵ In Sayf’s version the fourth servant of Paul was a certain al-Mu’min. He rejected what Paul said, and he and his successors preserved the true monotheistic teaching of Jesus until the coming of Muḥammad.

This example, from later in the *Jawāb*, serves to show how full al-Dimashqī’s work is with tales and examples from Islamic polemic and apologetic history, and how by his time this history had achieved a complexity and substantiality that would withstand any attempts by Christians to suggest the facts might tell a different story.

Returning to the first section of the *Jawāb*, having now established to his own satisfaction that Muḥammad was foretold in Christian scripture, that his coming was accompanied by miraculous events, and that Christians only reject this because of distortions in their history, al-Dimashqī now adds eight anecdotes, as he calls them, to support and confirm his argument.⁴⁶ They contain further elucidations of Biblical verses to show that these refer to Muḥammad, a reconstruction of the events of the passion and crucifixion of Christ to indicate the truth of the Muslim belief that he himself was not executed, but Judas in his place, and a retelling of further details of Christian history to explain the theologizing attempted by Christians in their endeavor to explain why Christ was sent by God to die.

This great accumulation of arguments goes further than supporting the contention that Muḥammad was truly sent by God, for it gradually retells early Christian history and suggests why the account preserved by Christians is wrong in the places where it diverges from the Quran-based account. Al-Dimashqī exhibits supreme confidence in the approach he takes, with no acknowledgement that his rival reconstruction may not command the acceptance of his Christian opponents. His disdain for them is well demonstrated in his concluding comment to his examination of the Christian account of the death of Christ:

People with understanding and compassion took some consideration for the Christians and said to advise and admonish them, “If anyone were to relate to you part of this tragic joke from other people, and reported that they had cut themselves off from humankind in a corner of the earth, and that this doctrine was theirs, this creed theirs, and this supposition about the Lord of the worlds was theirs, would you people regard them as reasonable, call them people

⁴⁵ Pieter van Koningsveld, “The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 200–28.

⁴⁶ Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades*, 192–221.



of religion, say that they followed the religion of any prophet, or had any serious purpose? No, by God! Instead, you would be amazed at God's gentleness and forbearance towards them, and you would conclude that they were in error and ignorance. And as a declaration that he is above all this you would say, 'Our God is holy, and is far above the things with which these people associate him and characterise him.'"⁴⁷

He essentially dismisses the Christian doctrine of the atonement as an irrational fantasy.

Al-Dimashqī rounds off this long and variegated reply to the first point in the letter from Cyprus by dealing with the interpretations given there of Quran verses that refer to the specifically Arabic Quran. The anonymous author maintains that these verses indicate the Quran was not intended as a universal scripture but was sent only for Arabic speakers. However, al-Dimashqī shows, one by one, that the verses do have a universal reference, and so they actually destroy the Christian's case rather than support it. A single example from his response to this matter gives an indication of his uncompromising approach. The Christian has quoted Q 3:164, "By sending them a messenger of their own," as part of his point that Muḥammad was from the Arabs and for them, following the conventional vocalization of the last words, *min anfuṣihim* (pl. of *nafs*), to understand them as "from among themselves," with the implied restriction upon his activities and relevance. But al-Dimashqī challenges this, reading the last words as *min anfasihim* with the slightly changed vocalization to mean "from the most distinguished among them," in which *anfasihim* is taken as the elative form of the adjective *nafis*, and the verse is open to mean that Muḥammad was the most distinguished person of his time.⁴⁸ This reading had substantial authority, in that the Prophet himself was supposed to have sanctioned it,⁴⁹ but it presumably did not have much currency in al-Dimashqī's own time or the anonymous author would not have risked the reading he did. But al-Dimashqī will not concede even this one point, and is prepared to challenge the received reading of this verse in order to maintain his resistance.

This response to the first point made in the letter from Cyprus comprises an onslaught that brings together a substantial variety of scriptural, historical, to some extent rational, and exegetical arguments. Al-Dimashqī evidently intends to remove all possibilities that might suggest his opponent's arguments have validity. He repeats this procedure in all the other twelve sections of his *Jawāb*, building up

⁴⁷ Ibid., 216–17.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 222–23.

⁴⁹ Cf. al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqā’iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl*, ed. ‘Ādil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwad (Riyadh, 1998) ad Q 9:128.



one form of argument upon another to provide an unanswerable demonstration that the contents of the letter do not deserve any serious reception.

He is clearly incensed by what he reads in the letter (this is evident from the very start of his reply where he upbraids the author for not using the proper form of commendation when referring to Muḥammad),⁵⁰ and maybe he perceives the implicit intention to make Muḥammad and the Quran secondary in importance to Christianity and restricted in relevance to the Arabian peninsula and its inhabitants. His approach, with the confident arguments he adduces, perhaps has something in common with al-Wāsiṭī's refutation, in that it appears to assume from the start that the Christian approach is insincere and bound up with trickery, as well as having no validity in either reason or scripture. Again, words from the opening of his *Jawāb* strongly suggest this: "A letter came . . . exemplary in politeness but alien in intention and shocking in purpose."⁵¹ Beneath its courteous surface he detects duplicity and cunning.

Whatever the true intention of the Christian, who may or may not have meant to imply that Muḥammad and the Quran were secondary to Christianity itself, al-Dimashqī's reply contains a degree of rejection that amounts to vehemence. He does not so much want to show where these particular points are wrong, or even where Christian doctrines and beliefs are wrong, but appears to want to prove that both Christianity as a faith and Christians as people are to be condemned and dismissed as valueless and contemptible. In this, his stance is the same as that of al-Wāsiṭī and Ibn Taymīyah, and it contrasts noticeably with the more measured approach of earlier Muslim masters.

Three or four centuries before al-Dimashqī's explosive reply to Christian claims, Muslim theologians such as al-Māturidī, al-Bāqillānī, and 'Abd al-Jabbār also wrote about Christianity. These three leaders of theological thinking left the first surviving treatises of Islamic theology, in which they combined in different forms demonstrations of their own theology with refutations of Christianity and other non-Muslim faiths.⁵² With some subtlety they positioned these refutations in relation to their presentation of positive Muslim doctrine so as to make clear that the errors of logic in the way the practitioners of these faiths presented them both made them unviable and also proved the validity and inevitability of the strict monotheism of Islam. Thus, for example, the Mu'tazilī 'Abd al-Jabbār (who died in 1025, three hundred years before this correspondence between Cyprus and Damascus), in his great theological compendium the *Mughnī*, places his refutation

⁵⁰ Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades*, 160–63.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁵² Cf. David Thomas, "Dialogue with Other Faiths as an Aspect of Islamic Theology," in *Religious Polemic in Context*, ed. Theo L. Hetteema and A. van der Kooij (Assen, The Netherlands, 2004), 93–109.



of Christianity, together with attacks on dualist faiths, after his exposition of the Mu'tazilī doctrine of *tawhīd*. Just as he proves that dualist versions of doctrine are wrong, so he proves that the Trinity, which fragments the being of God, and the Incarnation, which brings divinity into intimate proximity with creaturely humanity, are also wrong in that they cannot be given a rational foundation. According to the severely rational frame of reference he sets himself, his arguments disprove Christianity as uncompromisingly as al-Dimashqī's, but he does so in a measured, systematic way that Christians who observed the same logical method could appreciate and either accept or respond to with arguments of a similar character. The same applies to other tenth-century theological refutations, which forensically analyze the doctrines they have before them and expose their deficiencies with unrelenting logical rigor.

The dispassionate, abstract approach of these Muslim precursors is far from the arguments assembled by al-Dimashqī, not least in the way their argumentative cogency contrasts with the anecdotes and popular tales he employs. Their intention is manifestly to impress their religious opponents with points that must be accepted by rational minds, while al-Dimashqī seems more concerned to appeal to Muslims who would accept his accounts of Christian belief and history and traditions of the Prophet's veracity than to Christians who would decry them as unfounded. His stance is utterly different from his predecessors of a few centuries.

One can imagine that as an individual al-Dimashqī would be less concerned to win the minds of Christians than to display to local Muslims the strength of his case for rejecting the contents of the letter. But one must wonder whether, in the circumstances of the time, with the Christian West in retreat and Islam triumphant in lands that within living memory had been occupied by Crusaders and invaded by Mongol armies, there was a more widespread sense that Christians and their faith did not have to be taken seriously. There was no need to engage on any deep level with the claims of their faith, the intellectual battle had been won just as the military encounter had proved decisive, and it was now a matter of reminding oneself and one's fellow believers about the reasons for accepting the supremacy of Islam.

Al-Dimashqī says nothing to support such suppositions, and the relative superficiality of his huge response to the carefully worked letter cannot be finally explained. But in this instance of an apparently naïve and idealistic Christian constructing fragile possibilities and an intransigent Muslim countering with unconvincing stories is to be found one of the permanent traits of encounters between followers of the two faiths. True meeting of minds was a rare occurrence in this period, though it has hardly occurred between Christians and Muslims at any other.



LUCY-ANNE HUNT

MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

A Christian Arab Gospel Book: Cairo, Coptic Museum MS Bibl. 90 in its Mamluk Context

The illuminated manuscript of the Arabic Gospels (Cairo, Coptic Museum MS Bibl. 90) (figs. 1–6), written and illuminated in Mamluk Damascus in 1340, is a major expression of Christian religious and artistic practice and scholarship in the Mamluk period. This contribution aims to draw attention to the insight the manuscript offers into Christian cultural, artistic, and intellectual concerns of the middle of the fourteenth century. This will be undertaken through an assessment of the information that is known or can be deduced about the book, and a discussion of aspects of its illumination, suggesting that its points of contact with both the Quran and other eastern Christian illuminated manuscripts indicate a discourse representing Arab Christian culture within, and sensitive to, its Islamic environment.

While the manuscript has been known through brief surveys in the catalogues of Marcus Simaika Pasha and Georg Graf before the mid-twentieth century, a fuller description of the illumination in the light of the text is timely (see appendix 1).¹ In

© The Middle East Documentation Center. The University of Chicago.

¹ I am grateful to Madame Samiha Abd al-Shaheed, Chief Curator of Manuscripts of the Coptic Museum, Old Cairo, for facilitating my study of the manuscript. I am also grateful to Dr. Filiz Çağman and Dr. Banu Mahir at the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi as well as Dr. Michel Garel at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris for enabling my study of other manuscripts discussed here. The work in Istanbul was made possible through a British Academy Grant in the Humanities. For MS Bibl. 90 see: Georg Graf, *Catalogue de manuscrits arabes chrétiens conservés au Caire* (Vatican City, 1934), 77–80, no. 180; Marcus Simaika Pasha, assisted by Yassā ‘Abd al-Masih, *Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic Manuscripts in the Coptic Museum, the Patriarchate, the Principal Churches of Cairo and Alexandria and the Monasteries of Egypt* (Cairo, 1939), 1:10–11, no. 13, with pls. XVIII–XIX; Maria Cramer, *Koptische Buchmalerei: Illuminationen in Manuskripten des christlichen-koptischen Ägypten vom 4. bis 19. Jahrhundert* (Recklinghausen, 1964), 40, with Abb. 26–27, no. 51 (misnumbered); Robert S. Nelson, “An Icon at Mt. Sinai and Christian Painting in Muslim Egypt During the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” *Art Bulletin* 65, no. 2 (1983): 214, with fig. 24; David James, *Qur’āns of the Mamlūks* (London, 1988), 149; Samir Khalil Samir, “La version arabe des évangiles d’al-As‘ad ibn al-‘Assāl,” in *Actes du 4e congrès international d’études arabes chrétiennes (Cambridge, September 1992)*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir = *Parole de l’Orient* 19 (1994): 465–67, no. 10; Lucy-Anne Hunt, “Introducing the Catalogue, in progress, of the illustrated Manuscripts in the Coptic Museum,” *Parole de l’Orient* 19 (1994): 405, with fig. 4, reprinted in idem, *Byzantium, Eastern Christianity and Islam: Art at the Crossroads of the Medieval Mediterranean* (London, 2000), 2:355, with fig. 4. The manuscript is included in Lucy-Anne Hunt and Leslie MacCoull, with the collaboration of Fr. Wadi Abullif and others, *Catalogue of the Illustrated Manuscripts in the Coptic Museum, Old Cairo* (forthcoming, as part of the *Catalogue Général du Musée Copte*).



©2009 by Lucy-Anne Hunt.

DOI: [10.6082/M11R6NPT](https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

addition to the four Gospels, the book contains an Introduction and Canon Tables, as well as a Prologue and Tables of Chapters accompanying each Gospel. Each section has illuminated headpieces, and there is a double frontispiece page before St. Matthew's Gospel. A large book (its folios measure 36 x 25 cm) and aniconic in its illumination, it represents a counterweight to the large display Qurans produced under the Mamluks. There is a unity to the book, its organization, and its calligraphy, which points to its purpose as a Christian Arab textual exemplar and work of art. Made of fine, smoothly prepared paper, there is a consistency and finesse to its calligraphy, with its titles in *thuluth*, *muḥaqqaq*, and Kufic, with the vocalized text throughout in *naskh* against a red scrolled or hatched ground.

The manuscript is very informative (see appendix for description of folios 1–24r and pages numbered 1–624 following thereafter). The note at the end of the book (p. 624) records that it was copied during the primacy of Anbā Buṭrus, the metropolitan of the Copts of Jerusalem and Syria, by the priest Jirjis Abū al-Faḍl; the text was copied and collated with an autograph manuscript written by the Egyptian scribe al-Asʿad ibn al-ʿAssāl.² The copyist, Jirjis Abū al-Faḍl, points out that he has not included any of the words added in the Arabic manuscripts, as they do not appear in the Coptic, Greek, or Syriac. He goes on to say that the present manuscript was collated in the presence of this metropolitan and the monk Tūma, known as Ibn al-Ṣāʿigh. This monk is himself known as a copyist.³ The manuscript's frontispiece page (fol. 20r) also includes the information that the book was made for the library of the lord and shaykh al-Asʿad. Fr. Samir Khalil Samir has suggested that this shaykh al-Asʿad might in fact have been al-Asʿad ibn al-ʿAssāl himself, the scribe of the prototype manuscript, and that this is evidence that his own library was maintained and replenished nearly forty years after his death.⁴ This library would have been an important repository and resource for Coptic ecclesiastics and scholars and others, and it should be seen as comparable in importance and influence to the many Islamic libraries of the Mamluk period.

While the copyist's colophon provides, then, a clue to the variety of Christian books that al-Asʿad's library contained, it is necessary to step back to the thirteenth century to the formulation of this version of the Gospels and to the activity of al-Asʿad himself, his family, and intellectual circle. Al-Asʿad ibn al-ʿAssāl's critical version of the Gospels was completed during the course of 1253.⁵ Written as an

² Samir, "Version arabe," 466, identifies this metropolitan as Buṭrus II (1340–62).

³ Georg Graf, "Die koptische Gelehrtenfamilie der Aulād al-ʿAssāl und ihr Schrifttum," *Orientalia* 1 (1932): 54 with n. 1. Samir, "Version arabe," 466–67, 470–72, citing P. Khalil Marta's description of the Gospel book Jerusalem, Dayr Mar Jirgis of the Copts MS 2 of 1042 A.M./1326 A.D.

⁴ Samir, "Version arabe," 465 with n. 71.

⁵ Wadi Abullif, "Vita e opere del pensatore copto al-Ṣāfi Ibn al-ʿAssāl (sec. XIII)," *Studia Orientalia Christiana: Collectanea* 20 (1987): 137; Samir Khalil Samir, "Version arabe," 450–51.



alternative to the available Arabic version of his day, the so-called “Egyptian Vulgate,” al-As‘ad produced his version taking into account other Arabic versions, derived from Greek, Syriac, or Coptic, as well as returning to the original Greek, Syriac, and Coptic versions themselves.⁶ He worked as a copyist in Damascus, as in 1230, where he acquired manuscripts for his library.⁷ He was famed for his skill, and one of the brothers of the Awlād al-‘Assāl, or their father, is credited with developing *al-khatt al-as‘adī*, the script identified by Georg Graf as being used in Bibl. 90.⁸ The Coptic family Awlād al-‘Assāl played a major role as intellectuals and leaders within the minority Coptic community with a residence in Cairo. They combined a mastery of Arabic with their knowledge of Coptic, Greek, and Syriac.⁹ The commissioning of manuscripts for their libraries formed part of their intellectual activities. The scribe Gabriel (later Patriarch Gabriel III) wrote the bilingual text of a Copto-Arabic Gospel book (Cairo, Coptic Museum Bibl. 93) in 1257 in the household of shaykh al-Amjad ibn al-‘Assāl, al-As‘ad’s half brother, to which he had been attached, in Syria and Cairo, for the previous ten years.¹⁰

Bible translations were one aspect of the preservation of Coptic Christian culture in the face of the inevitable dominance of Arabic. This ran concurrently with the process of codification, including the writing of Copto-Arabic grammars and dictionaries to ensure the preservation of Coptic culture and also to ensure its future development through the medium of Arabic. An example of this type of synthesis is the *Nomocanon*, a work dealing with both canon and civil law written in ca. 1235 by al-Ṣafī Abū al-Faḍā’il ibn al-‘Assāl, another member of Awlād al-‘Assāl and brother of al-As‘ad, for the patriarch Kīrillus Ibn Laqlaq.¹¹ Such a description could as well be applied to the Gospel book Bibl. 90.

Al-As‘ad’s famous library in Cairo was enriched both from his acquisitions of manuscripts during his travels outside Egypt—including those to Syria—and the

⁶ Samir, “Version arabe,” 444. Recent work suggests that al-As‘ad ibn al-‘Assāl’s version was closer to the Bohairic Coptic than others: see Hikmat Kachouh, “The Arabic Versions of the Gospels: A Case Study of John 1.1 and 1.18,” in *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden and Boston, 2007), 35, where he refers to the version as “Family 11.”

⁷ Samir Khalil Samir, “Al-As‘ad Ibn al-‘Assāl copiste de Jean Damascène à Damas en 1230,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 44 (1978): 190–95.

⁸ Abullif, “Al-Ṣafī,” 136, with references, n. 35. Graf, *Catalogue*, 77, identifies it as “un très beau nashī (*sic*) as‘adī.”

⁹ Aziz S. Atiya, “Awlād al-‘Assāl,” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1991), 1:309–11.

¹⁰ George William Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Northern Dialect* (Oxford, 1898–1905), 1:xcī–xcīi.

¹¹ See the comments of Samir Khalil Samir, “Rôle des Chrétiens dans la civilisation arabe,” in *Eastern Crossroads: Essays on Medieval Christian Legacy (Proceedings of the 1st International Congress on Eastern Christianity, University of Cordova 2005)*, ed. Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala (Piscataway, NJ, 2007), 16.



production of manuscripts in his own house, and it remained a reference point for later writers.¹² It was not unique. An example of another Christian library of the fourteenth century is that of the son of the late Fakhr al-Dīn Abū al-‘Alā’, for which the Istanbul Gospel book Topkapı Sarayı MS Ahmet III 3159 was made. Although undated, the colophon states that the Istanbul Gospels were made for this “old, Christian and venerable” library.¹³ We do not know where this library was located, but either Damascus or Cairo is likely in the light of the present discussion. The manuscript has been attributed to Egypt or Syria in the middle or second half of the fourteenth century, with the middle to third quarter being the most likely.¹⁴ It is a smaller manuscript than the Cairo Gospels (18.7 x 13.7 cm) and was surely made as a private prayer book for the inheritor of the library.¹⁵

The similarity of Bibl. 90 to Quran manuscripts raises the question of the parallel, and even inter-related functions, of Muslim and Christian libraries. This is dependent on contacts between Christians and Muslims, especially through the Mamluk administration, in the service of which Copts were useful as scribes, administrators, and intermediaries with foreign powers.¹⁶ The educational function of Islamic libraries—including those of madrasahs and other institutions—has been highlighted, as has the role of the madrasah in upholding the supremacy of Sunni orthodoxy, not least in the light of Christian attempts to retain the independence

¹² Graf, “Die koptische Gelehertenfamilie,” 54 with n. 2; Samir, “Al-As‘ad,” 190–95; Abullif, “Al-Şafi,” 136 with n. 36. .

¹³ Jules Leroy, “Un évangélaire arabe de la bibliothèque de Topqapi Sarayi à décor byzantin et islamique,” *Syria* 44 (1967): 123 with fig. 2 (colophon fol. 178r).

¹⁴ Yildiz Demiriz, “Topkapı Sarayı III: Ahmed Kütüphanesinde bir arapça incil,” *Sanat Tarihi Yıllığı* 2 (1966–68): 94, attributed the manuscript to mid-fourteenth century Syria; Nelson, “Icon,” 216, attributed it to Egypt or Syria in the middle or second half of the fourteenth century. Features of its illuminated frontispieces are comparable with some of those from the undated Cairene Quran, planned in thirty parts, which was later donated to a mosque in Cairo by Sultan Faraj ibn Barqūq, with surviving sections now in various locations. See, for example, Dublin, Chester Beatty Library MS 1465, for which see David James, *Qurʾans and Bindings from the Chester Beatty Library: A Facsimile Exhibition* (Catalogue of a photographic exhibition, The British Library, 1976) (London, 1980), 47, no. 31 with plate, where it is dated ca. 745/1345, and idem, *Qurʾāns of the Mamlūks*, 211, fig. 145 (cat. 35), where it is dated ca. 1370–75.

¹⁵ Lucy-Anne Hunt, “Cultural Transmission: Illustrated Biblical Manuscripts from the medieval Eastern Christian and Arab Worlds,” in *The Bible as Book: The Manuscript Tradition*, ed. John L. Sharpe III and Kimberly Van Kampen (London and New Castle, DE, 1998), reprinted in idem, *Byzantium, Eastern Christendom and Islam: Art at the Crossroads of the Medieval Mediterranean* (London, 2000), 2:20–21, with pl. 7.

¹⁶ The attacks on Christians in the fourteenth century, including inciting the mob to violence, were not official Mamluk policy: see, recently, Johannes Pahlitzsch, “Mediators between East and West: Christians under Mamluk Rule,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): esp. 38–39 with bibliographical summary, n. 24.



they enjoyed under the Ayyubids.¹⁷ The presence of a wide variety of books, including Qurans, in a Muslim Mamluk scholar's library is attested by the books itemized in the estate sale of the Sufi scholar and qādi Burhān al-Dīn al-Nāṣirī, who died in 790/1388.¹⁸ But Christian books also found their way into Muslim libraries. When the library of the Bayt al-Māl of the Great Mosque of Damascus was finally reopened in 1317/1899 by the Ottoman sultan Abd al-Hamid II, it was reported that, in addition to Qurans, there were fragments with “[Biblical] hymns in the old Palestinian Aramaic language . . . treatises on [Christian] theology, literature, and stories dealing with monasticism—all transcribed in the Greek handwriting . . . full copies of the Bible and the Torah. . . . Even poems dating back to the Crusades were also located. These items were variously written in the Coptic, Kurji, Armenian, Hebrew, Samaritan, Latin, and French vernaculars.”¹⁹

THE ILLUMINATION OF MS CAIRO, COPTIC MUSEUM BIBL. 90 (WITH REFERENCE TO APPENDIX AND FIGS. 1–6)

The close similarity between the illustration of Bibl. 90 and Quran manuscripts is evident. The large size of the manuscript, the script, type of geometric illumination, and use of gold, as well as ornamental features, penmanship, and bordering are all features in common. David James has even described the manuscript as “almost Islamic in conception” and pointed out that Coptic manuscripts with “Islamic” illumination “can be used to fill gaps in our knowledge of Islamic manuscript illumination, for there are no Qurans from the first fifty years of Mamlūk rule in Egypt.”²⁰ He draws particular attention to a comparison with a Quran in the National (Iran Bastan) Museum in Tehran, written in 739/1338–39 by a named scribe, particularly in the appearance of gold strapwork, blossom design, and “gold-on-gold” decoration, the use of concave cartouches, and the accuracy of workmanship.²¹ Indeed, it is on the basis of this comparison that he attributes this Quran, the earliest in the “classical” style following the dominance of the master-illuminator Abū Bakr known as Ṣandal, to Damascus. James also makes comparisons with two Qurans in the Nasser D. Khalili collection of Islamic art,

¹⁷ Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, 1992), 24, 123, 131–32.

¹⁸ Ulrich Haarmann, “The Library of a Fourteenth-Century Jerusalem Scholar,” *Der Islam* 61 (1984): 327–33.

¹⁹ Mohamed Makki Sibai, *Mosque Libraries: An Historical Study* (London and New York, 1987), 74 with n. 120, citing Muhammad Kurd Ali, *Khīṭaṭ al-Shām* (Damascus, 1944), 6:199–200; and Jirjī Zaydān, *Tārīkh Adab al-Lughah al-‘Arabīyah* (Cairo, 1965), 4:117–18.

²⁰ James, *Qur’āns of the Mamlūks*, 149.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 149. For the Quran, see *ibid.*, 138–49, 217, 227 (cat. 20) with figs. 98–99.



one of which was written in Damascus by a scribe with an Iranian background.²² Bibl. 90 is, therefore, a major plank in James' argument for the productivity and superiority of Damascus in relation to Cairo in the production of Quran manuscripts at the time.

And yet, there are also elements comparable with the work of the illuminator Muḥammad ibn Mubādir working in Cairo at the turn of the fourteenth century, again with Coptic links.²³ A section of a Quran, formerly attributed to Damascus in the 1340s, has recently been re-attributed to the hand of Ibn Mubādir working in Cairo for Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Jāshnakīr, either as vizier or sultan, in ca. 1298–1310.²⁴ If correct, the rounded cartouches, strapwork, and use of white beading here all preempt their appearance in Bibl. 90 by thirty to forty years.

Furthermore, alongside the inquiry into the close association with Quran manuscripts, it is also important to view this symbiosis in the light of the Copto-Arabic tradition, and to point to the internal structure and illumination of the manuscript and its decoration as a Christian Arab document. The case needs to be made for a more nuanced discourse to include awareness of Arab Christian visual culture in its own right, rather than assuming that it was merely subsumed into Islamic art. The close links between Cairo and Damascus of the al-ʿAssāl family, and subsequently of the Christian community in general, argue against thinking in terms of a dichotomy between manuscript production in Damascus and Cairo. Instead, it may well be that productivity in these centers was interconnected through family and institutional library networks with their origins in Ayyubid workmanship and scholarship, as well as absorbing Iranian and Iraqi innovations.

Illumination and enlightenment according to a Christian interpretation are stressed in the inscriptions and complement the golden illumination of Bibl. 90. The Kufic inscriptions in white in cartouches at the top and bottom of each of fols. 23v–24r, the dual frontispieces to St. Matthew's Gospel, read "The pure Gospel, the shining lamp which is the source of life and the ship of salvation according to the Holy Apostles" (fig. 4). The Quran terms itself as light, a theme which is borne out in Quranic illumination, including the verse numbering in the margins ringed in gold with golden rays, with examples in the Tehran Quran and another from 600/1203–4 in Istanbul (Turkish and Islamic Museum T 107).²⁵ This echoes the

²² David James, *The Master Scribes: Qurʾāns of the 10th to 14th centuries* (Oxford, 1992), no. 43 (The Umayyad Mosque, Damascus ca. 1330–1340, Accession no. QUR 807), 176 with plates pp. 177–78; no. 44 (Accession no. QUR 187), 180 with plates pp. 181–82.

²³ James, *Qurʾāns of the Mamlūks*, 47.

²⁴ Marcus Fraser, *Geometry in Gold: An Illuminated Mamlūk Qurʾān Section* (London, 2005), *passim*, esp. 6, 34–35, 41 with references. See also n. 42 below.

²⁵ Martin Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination* (London, 1976), 74 with plates 23 and 34 respectively.



divine light illumination suffused from Mamluk mosque lamps, especially of the late thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century, inscribed with the *ayat al-nūr* (Verse of Light, 34:35), and the appearance of the symbol of the lamp in prayer rugs and architectural sculpture and other forms of decoration.²⁶

However, the idea of a lamp providing clarity and illumination is also central to Christian thought in the fourteenth century. This is exemplified in the work of the encyclopedist Abū al-Barakāt, known as Ibn Kabar (d. 1324), who codified canon law and church services in his twenty-four-volume work “The Lamp of Darkness for the Elucidation of the Service (of the Church).”²⁷ A priest at the church of al-Mu‘allaqah in Old Cairo, as well as historian and secretary in Sultan Baybars al-Jāshnakīr’s administration, Ibn Kabar’s writing in the first quarter of the fourteenth century has been seen to typify the elegant use of Arabic by arabophone Christians who were determined, from the end of the twelfth century, to wrest the use of elegant literary Arabic from the sole domain of Muslim writers.²⁸ His work has been shown to draw directly on al-As‘ad ibn al-‘Assāl’s work.²⁹ It is not unreasonable to assume, therefore, that he for one had access to al-As‘ad’s library.

CANON TABLES

While the Introduction is opened (fol. 1v) with the *bismillāh* phrase in black and title in gold, the main illustrative process of the manuscript starts with the Eusebian canon tables. The preliminaries to the canon tables are headed by titling which employs three scripts (fol. 14v, fig. 1). The *bismillāh* phrase is in golden *thuluth* on a white-dotted blue ground, with the title below in *muḥaqqaq*, followed by the vocalized *naskh* text written in black ink and contained in cloud shapes on a red-hatched ground. A similar bold headpiece appears in the fourteenth-century Arabic book in Istanbul (Topkapı Sarayı Library Ahmet III 3519 fol. 176v) containing the *bismillāh* above the introduction to St. John’s Gospel (fig. 9), even

²⁶ Esin Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks* (Catalogue of an exhibition circulated by the Smithsonian Institution) (Washington D.C., 1981), 120 with nos. 52 (lamp), 53 (lamp made in ca. 1310–20 for Karim al-Dīn, a convert from Christianity), and 111 (plaque in the shape of a mihrab).

²⁷ Abū al-Barakāt Ibn Kabar, *Miṣbāḥ al-Ẓulmah fī Ḍāḥ al-Khidmah*, vol. 1, ed. Samir Khalil Samir (Cairo, 1971) (Arabic text); vol. 2, ed. Bishop Samuel (Cairo, 1992) (Arabic text). See Samir Khalil Samir, “L’Encyclopédie liturgique d’Ibn Kabar (+ 1324) et son apologie d’usages coptes,” in *Crossroad of Cultures: Studies in Liturgy and Patristics in Honor of Gabriele Winkler*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Feulner, Elena Velkovska, and Robert F. Taft (Rome, 2000), 619–55.

²⁸ See the comments of Samir, “Rôle de chrétiens,” 15–16. For Ibn Kabar see also Aziz S. Atiya, “Ibn Kabar,” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, 4:1267–68.

²⁹ Samir, “Version arabe,” 448 with n. 4, 457.



though *muḥaqqaq* is used and the cloud shapes surrounding the text itself are in beige.³⁰ Described as an “hieratic” ornamental script, it has been noted that *thuluth* is rarely used for the text of Qurans; it is rather used in titles, colophons, and headpieces, although a particular example of its use is found in the golden text of the seven-volume Quran in the British Library, written by the scribe Muḥammad ibn al-Waḥīd for Baybars al-Jāshnakīr in 704–5/1304–6.³¹ So, while it does not appear again in Bibl. 90, its appearance here is an impressive statement early in the manuscript’s illumination.

The canon tables of Bibl. 90 are gilded with lotuses in blue in the spandrels (fig. 1). There are several examples of the appearance of lotuses in Mamluk manuscripts, a feature which is often ascribed to Ilkhanid influence.³² However, they appear considerably earlier, in thirteenth-century eastern Christian painting, including Copto-Arabic and Syriac manuscript painting. The curtain suspended above the head of St. Luke in the portrait of the evangelist in the mid-thirteenth century Copto-Arabic New Testament (now divided between Cairo and Paris), written by the aforementioned scribe Gabriel, displays a lotus design, as does the cloth draped over the table in the scene of the Supper at Emmaus in a thirteenth-century Syriac lectionary.³³ The lotus design also appears in a double frontispiece in the Istanbul Gospels, at the end of the chapter titles and the beginning of St. John’s Gospel (fols. 10v–11r, fig. 8).³⁴ Relations between eastern Christians—especially Syrians and Armenians—and the Mongols might well explain the introduction

³⁰ Leroy, “Évangélaire arabe,” 122–23 with pl. X, 2; Demiriz, “Topkapı Sarayı,” 92 with fig. 8.

³¹ Yasin Hamid Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy* (London, 1978), 19, 52 with pl. 34 for London, BL Add. 22406; see also Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy*, 119 with color plate 62, and James, *Qurʾāns of the Mamlūks*, 41–42, figs. 18–19 (cat. 1). For the British Library Quran (BL Additional MSS 22406–22413) as a whole, see also recently Colin F. Baker, *Qurʾan Manuscripts: Calligraphy, Illumination, Design* (London, 2007), 43–56 with color plates, and http://www.bl.uk/collections/treasures/quran/quran_broadband.htm?top (Turning the Pages).

³² Martin Lings and Yasin Hamid Safadi, *The Qurʾān* (Catalogue of the exhibition at the British Library 3 April–15 August 1976) (London, 1976), nos 79–80 reproduced in color, plates XII–XIII of the frontispieces of two Qurans, the first donated in 769/1368 and the other attributed to the late fourteenth century. James, *Qurʾāns of the Mamlūks*, points out that the Ilkhanid elements in Mamluk manuscripts precedes 1326, the usually ascribed date.

³³ Paris, Institut Catholique Copte-Arabe 1, fol. 105v (St. Luke), and London BL Add. 7171, fol. 163v (Supper at Emmaus), both conveniently reproduced in Lucy-Anne Hunt, “Christian-Muslim Relations in Painting in Egypt of the Twelfth to mid-Thirteenth Centuries: Sources of Wallpainting at Deir es-Suriani and the Illustration of the New Testament MS Paris, Copte-Arabe 1/Cairo Bibl. 94,” *Cahiers Archéologiques* 33 (1985), reprinted in Lucy-Anne Hunt, *Byzantium, Eastern Christendom and Islam: Art at the Crossroads of the Medieval Mediterranean* (London, 1998), respectively 1:261 with fig. 11 and 263 with fig. 23.

³⁴ Leroy, “Évangélaire arabe,” 121, 127 with pl. XI, 1; Dimiriz, “Topkapı Sarayı,” 93 with fig. 13.



of this motif in advance of its appearance in Quran manuscripts.³⁵ Other eastern Christian parallels are apparent. The rounded arches of the canon tables in Bibl. 90 (fig. 1) give way to ogive-shaped arches on fol. 17v. A parallel for these more pointed arches is in the canon tables of an Armenian manuscript illustration of the thirteenth century, now Erevan, Matenadaran MS 9422.³⁶

FRONTISPIECES

The frontispiece preceding the prologue to St. Matthew's Gospel (fol. 20r, fig. 2) continues the tripartite sequence established in fol. 14v. The phrase "The Holy Gospel and the Shining Star" is in gold *muḥaqqaq* on a blue ground with white foliage scrolls. This is followed by the phrase below introducing the four Gospels, with Matthew as the first, against the red scrollwork arabesque, with pointed medallions with a lotus design indicating the text. The latter are not unlike the floral motifs "floating" above the text of fol. 1v of a Quran produced in Cairo in 744/1344.³⁷ The statement that the manuscript was made for al-As'ad's library comes at the bottom in gold *muḥaqqaq*, with the later inscriptions of patriarchal ownership above and below it.

The double-page frontispiece to St. Matthew's Gospel (fols. 23v–24r, fig. 4) with its structure of four octagons in the central field converging in a star-shaped center, Kufic text of "the pure Gospel, the shining lamp," is appropriately golden, with blue as the secondary color with some green. It is ambitious in its associations. A parallel for the geometric structure of the central field, as well as the floral border beyond the strapwork, is the double frontispiece to the second volume fols. 1v–2r of the Quran of Baybars al-Jāshnakīr illuminated by Ibn Mubādir in Cairo in 704–5/1304–6.³⁸ A nearer-contemporary example is the left-hand frontispiece of a Quran in Istanbul (Topkapı Sarayı Library 138.M5) dated 741/1341 and attributed to Damascus, in which four eight-pointed stars occupy the main field with Kufic inscription in cartouches above and below, surrounded by strapwork

³⁵ For artistic relations between eastern Christians and the Mongols in the thirteenth century see Lucy-Anne Hunt, "Artistic Interchange in Old Cairo in the Thirteenth to Early Fourteenth Century: The Role of Painted and Carved Icons," in *Interactions: Artistic Interchange between The Eastern and Western Worlds in the Medieval Period*, ed. Colum Hourihane (University Park, PA, 2007), 59; and idem, "Eastern Christian Art and Culture in the Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Periods: Cultural Convergence between Jerusalem, Greater Syria and Egypt," in *Ayyubid Jerusalem: The Holy City 1187–1250*, ed. Sylvia Auld and Robert Hillenbrand (London, 2009), 339–44.

³⁶ Sirape Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Century*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies*, vol. 31 (Washington, 1993), vol. 2, figs. 510–11.

³⁷ Topkapı Sarayı Y 365: James, *Qur'āns of the Mamlūks*, 151 with fig. 102 (cat. 67).

³⁸ London BL Add. 22406–13, fols. 1v–2r: see James, *Qur'āns of the Mamlūks*, 44, fig. 22. For this manuscript see also above, n. 31. Nelson, "Icon at Mt. Sinai," 214 with figs. 24 and 27, draws a parallel between the Bibl. 90 frontispiece and London, BL Or. 848.



and a floral border.³⁹ Eight-pointed stars are also the main motif of the illuminated left-hand frontispiece to the Istanbul Gospels Topkapı Sarayı Library Ahmet III 3519 (fol. 2r, fig. 7 here), the inscriptions of which also refer to the pure Gospel and the shining lamp.⁴⁰ Here, too, there is elaborate bordering, white beading, and blue outlining, and Kufic inscriptions above and below, albeit in gold in the Istanbul Gospels. Also similar is the color balance. While the predominant colors are gold and blue, there is a noticeable mid-green presence in the petals of the eight-pointed stars and octagonal. Another Christian manuscript may be drawn into the discussion. The white Kufic text in blue cartouches and the strapwork with squares and floral border are also found in an Arabic Pentateuch of 1353 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Arabe 12).⁴¹ This manuscript was written by the priest Abū al-Mufaḍḍal collating Greek, Hebrew, and Coptic against a manuscript written by Ibn Kabar.

PROLOGUES

The text of St. Matthew's Prologue (fols. 20v–21v) does not have a titlepiece at the start of the text, but the tripartite formula of rectangular titlepiece with *muḥaqqaq* text on a blue background with gilded scrolls is followed across the openings of the Prologues of Mark (p. 162) and John (p. 470). These have rectangular frames at the top with the *bismillāh* phrase, the title below in gold *muḥaqqaq* against the red foliage scrollwork, and the text below in a cloud pattern against a red hatched ground. Luke (p. 276) reverses the upper and middle fields, with the rectangular blue title band in the center of the page.

An oval medallion on fol. 21v (fig. 3) marks the end of the Prologue to Matthew and the start of a new section. It takes up the bottom third of the page and is ornamented with a foliage scroll design in red penmanship, surrounded by borders of white strapwork and beading, completed by the ubiquitous blue frame. Similar oval section dividers are found in the margins of fourteenth-century Mamluk Quran manuscripts.⁴² Another shaped motif, similar although in three parts, is

³⁹ Fol. 2r: James, *Qur'āns of the Mamlūks*, 143 fig. 95 (cat. 21), where, despite the attribution to Damascus, he makes a comparison with a Cairene Quran of 731/1132 (cat. 16).

⁴⁰ Leroy, "Évangélaire arabe," 128 with pl. IX, 1. The parallel between the two frontispieces was noted by Nelson, "Icon," 214 with figs 24–25.

⁴¹ Marie-Geneviève Guesdon entry in *L'Art Copte en Égypte: 2000 ans de christianisme* (Catalogue of an exhibition, Institut du monde arabe Paris, 15 May to 3 September 2000 and the Musée de l'Éphèbe au Cap d'Agde, 30 September to 7 January 2001) (Paris, 2000), 85 no. 63 with 57, color reproduction.

⁴² Lings and Safadi, *The Qur'ān*, 55 no. 78, reproduces an example from a fourteenth-century Quran in a private collection, which was probably made in Egypt. An oval marking the beginning of a new section of the Quran text (*nisf hizb*) placed vertically at the beginning of a surah in London BL Or 848, fol. 27r, is described and reproduced by Baker, *Qur'an Manuscripts*, 65–66 with fig. 34.



found on page 163 marking the end of the Prologue to St. Mark's Gospel.

TITLES OF THE TABLES OF CHAPTERS

The title of the tables of chapters to St. Matthew's Gospel (fols. 21v–22r, fig. 3) is written in a rectangular frame in white *muḥaqqaq* on a gold ground, with small dark crosses in a checkered design at either end. This headpiece is marked with a gilded medallion, surrounded with blue, in the left margin. Thereafter, in the headpieces to the other Gospels, Kufic texts (mostly white) are the norm, in more colorful cartouches of different shapes. Page 164 (table of the chapters of St. Mark's Gospel) sees the introduction of a white Kufic title in a rounded-ended cartouche. Green is used with blue for the scrolled ground, with gilded foliage on a gilded ground at the four edges in the spandrels. A blue, green, and gold hasp extends into the left margin. The color scheme changes again for the headpiece to the table of chapters of St. Luke's Gospel (p. 278), which displays a red Kufic title with green and red foliage scrolls on a gold ground in an oval-ended cartouche. There is gold foliage on a red ground in the corners and the hasp is in gold, red, and blue. Finally, the title of the table of chapters of St. John's Gospel (p. 473, fig. 6) is in white Kufic contained in a cartouche of interlocking semicircular shapes drawn in white, blue, and gold. Behind the script are gold foliage scrolls on a blue ground. At the four corners of the rectangular frame is a design of gold foliage on a red ground, as in St. Luke, suggesting the same illuminator's hand. A blue and white hasp, with a triple leaf tinged with red, extends into the right margin. The interlocking shapes of this last headpiece are also found in the headpieces to the books of Exodus and Leviticus in the Paris Pentateuch, Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS Arabe 12.⁴³ Such interlocking shapes reappear in the Eastern Kufic surah headings in a Quran illuminated in Cairo in 734/1334.⁴⁴

GOSPEL TEXTS

The opening to St. Matthew's Gospel (pp. 1–2, fig. 5) displays white Kufic inscriptions against a blue ground with gilded foliage scrolls which compare with headpieces in the Pentateuch in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Arabe 12 of 1358.⁴⁵ It also very closely resembles a folio from the Quran in Tehran, National

Oval marginal markers are a special feature of the section of a Quran recently re-attributed to the workmanship of Muḥammad ibn Mubādir, ca. 1298–1310; see Fraser, *Geometry in Gold*, 16 with diagram F in color. See also n. 24 above.

⁴³ Fols. 72v–73r; 132v–133r.

⁴⁴ Cairo, National Library 81, fols. 375v–376r; Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy*, 119 with color plate 63.

⁴⁵ *L'Art Copte en Egypte*, no. 63 with 57, color plate of fols. 2v–3r, the titlepiece and beginning of Genesis.



(Bastan) Museum MS 2061 of 739/1339–39 in several further respects. These include the white Kufic inscriptions in rounded-ended cartouches linked to a floral medallion on either side, the strapwork border with intermittent squares, the framing of white beading and blue outlining, and medallions in the outer margins.⁴⁶ As noted earlier, very similar features appear in a Quran of contemporary date in the Nasser D. Khalili collection.⁴⁷ The use of color is also paralleled elsewhere, including the mid-green, with the white, blue, and gold in the frontispiece page in the fourteenth-century Quran in London (British Library Or. 848), later donated to a mosque in Cairo during the reign of Sultan Faraj ibn Barqūq.⁴⁸

As with the titles to the table of chapters, a wider range of colors make an appearance in the headpieces preceding the Gospels of Saints Mark, Luke, and John. The gold *bismillāh* text in *muḥaqqaq* preceding St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels (pp. 166 and 281) is set against colorful red scrolls on a blue ground. The text numbering below, on a gray scrolled ground, has a pendant floral marker very similar to those in fol. 20r (fig. 2). The white *bismillāh* text preceding John (p. 475) reverts to the gold foliage scrolls on a blue ground, but the circles of the letters are filled in red, and the text below is in blue Kufic against beige foliage scrolls. The floral motif in the center of the gilded numbering text harks back to those at the center of the octagons in fols 23v–24r (fig. 4), and that in the circular medallion in the margin is similarly drawn and colored to the spandrels of the canon tables (fol. 15r, fig. 1). This similarity suggests that despite variety in the illumination—including the varied colored scheme of the titles of the tables of chapters—it probably represents the work of one illuminator, who was probably the scribe, the priest Jirjis Abū al-Faḍl ibn Luṭf Allāh.

CONCLUSION

The Gospel book Bibl. 90 raises a number of issues. Its colophon elucidates the planning and production of a major Christian Arab manuscript—the copy of al-As'ad's autograph manuscript of the four Gospels—for the important library that bore his name. This is not unlike the combined effort of the production of a Mamluk Quran. Its illumination then provides an insight into the articulation of Christian Arabic calligraphy and illumination, subtly engaging with its Quranic counterparts while remaining distinct from them. The book itself emerges as an

⁴⁶ James, *Qur'āns of the Mamlūks*, 147, fig. 99.

⁴⁷ Idem, *The Master Scribes*, 180 with color plates, 181–82.5 (cat. 44). James related the manuscript to that produced from the Great Mosque in Damascus from the same collection: *ibid.*, 176 with plates, pp. 177–79 (cat. 43.)

⁴⁸ Lings and Safadi, *The Qur'ān*, 55 no. 75 with cover plate in color; Baker, *Qur'an Manuscripts*, 65 with fig. 33 in color. This manuscript was part of the same Quran as Dublin, Chester Beatty Library MS 1465, for which see n. 14 above.



instrument of Christian-Muslim debate and exchange in the Mamluk period.

The large size of the book and its pristine state (apart from the addition of the printed illustrations in 1915, for which see the appendix here) indicate that it was intended to stand as an exemplar, a definitive version, a display copy. Qurans too were designated to be copied.⁴⁹ Several people were also often involved in their making. Such a lavish Gospel book as Bibl. 90 must have been intended to impress, and it can be suggested that one of its purposes may also have been to dissuade those who may have been tempted to convert to Islam.

The fact that the three men—the copyist/priest, the monk, and the metropolitan of the Copts of Jerusalem and Syria—came together in Damascus for the purpose of copying and collating this manuscript indicates the importance of the project. One may speculate as to why this took place in Damascus. It may well have been due to the availability of books and libraries there; the copyist's note (p. 624) suggests that Coptic, Greek, and Syriac manuscripts were on hand. It may also be attributed to the presence of diverse Christian groups and their respective manuscript collections in Damascus in the fourteenth century.⁵⁰ Given their similarities with Bibl. 90, it is possible that the Paris Pentateuch and Istanbul Gospels may also have been made in Damascus, an avenue which needs further exploration, taking into account the Istanbul Gospel's figural evangelist portraits as well. The scribal tradition in Damascus may also have played a part; or perhaps it was for political reasons. However, given that both individuals and books can and did travel, and also given that close associations existed between Cairo and Damascus (as well as other centers such as Jerusalem), it may well be that artistic practices were similar in both places. Above all, Bibl. 90 demonstrates the role of the visual within our growing knowledge of Arab Christian culture operating within the Islamic Mamluk state.

⁴⁹ Cairo, National Library 72 part 19, made in 713/1313 for a royal patron al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, was given as *waqf* in 726/1326 to a funerary foundation in Cairo with the intention that it be used as a model for copying; see Lings, *Quranic Art*, 119 with pl. 54.

⁵⁰ The existence of these groups is touched on by Juan Pedro Montferrer-Sala, "An Arabic-Muslim quotation of a biblical text: Ibn Kathīr's al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya and the construction of the arc of the covenant," in *Studies in the Christian Arabic Heritage in Honour of Father Prof. Dr Samir Khalil Samir S. J. at the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Rifaat Ebied and Herman Teule (Louvain, 2004), 265 with n. 5, 277. Johannes Pahlitzsch, "The Translation of the Byzantine *Procheiros Nomos* into Arabic: Techniques and Cultural Context," *Byzantinoslavica* 65 (2007): 19–29, esp. 22–23, points to Damascus as a center of Melkite Arabic learning in the thirteenth century on the grounds that several manuscripts of the *Procheiros nomos* were copied there anew by collating different Arabic and Greek manuscripts.



APPENDIX

Cairo, Coptic Museum Library MS Bibl. 90.

CONTENTS:

Four Gospels in Arabic, written in Damascus in 1340 according to the recension of al-As‘ad ibn al-‘Assāl. Prefaced by an introduction and canon tables, with a prologue and tables of chapters accompanying each Gospel.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fols. 1v–13r: Introduction to the Gospels, headed with the *bismillāh* phrase in black ink, and gilded title. Punctuation: blue rosettes.

2. CANON TABLES

Fol. 14v (fig. 1): Preliminaries to the Eusebian canon tables. The tables are headed (fol. 14v) by the *bismillāh* phrase in *thuluth* script, gilded, on a blue ground with white dots in a rectangular frame. Below this, against a red cross-hatched ground, is the title in gold in *muḥaqqaq* script and explanatory text in vocalized black *naskh*. The page is completed by a survey of the ten canons, in tabular form, written in gold and black. The page is bordered with white beading, completed with a thin line of blue, with finials at the four corners. This framing is characteristic of the illuminated pages of the manuscript as a whole.

Fols. 15r (fig. 1)–18v: Canon tables. Each page is headed by the title in gold in *muḥaqqaq* in a rectangular cross-hatched red frame. Below this stands the framing device of the canons, with gilded columns with gilded capitals and column bases supporting spandrels of a lotus design on a blue ground, between which the names of the evangelists appear in gold. This structure is doubled up on fols. 17r, 18r, and 18v, while the arches of fol. 17v are ogive rather than rounded.

Base of fol. 18r–fol. 19r: Tabulated lists of texts particular to specific Gospels, with the title for each Gospel in *muḥaqqaq* in gold in a rectangular frame on a red cross-hatched ground.

3. 20R FRONTISPIECE PAGE (FIG. 2)

The folio is divided into three: (1) At the top, written in *muḥaqqaq* in gold against white foliage scrolls on a blue ground, is the text “The Holy Gospel and the shining star.” (2) Below, in *naskh* in black ink and drawn around with a fine red scrollwork arabesque, flanked by two pointed medallion lotus-style markers, acting as text markers, the text continues: “legislation of help and the source of



life, written by the four pure disciples in far-away countries and at different times, and they are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the first of these good tidings is that of the apostle Matthew.” (3) At the bottom, written in *muḥaqqaq* in gold, is the text “For the sublime library of the lord and master, the shaykh al-As‘ad, may God conserve it.”

Above and below this third text are later statements of ownership, in black ink (see below, Inscriptions and Stamps).

4. ST. MATTHEW’S GOSPEL

Fols. 20v–21v: Prologue to Matthew, written against a red-hatched ground, scattered with triple black dots, with gold rosette punctuation marks finished in red and blue, completed by an elliptical shape at the base of fol. 21v (fig. 3) containing a delicate foliage design in red and bordered with bands of white interlace and white beading.

Fols. 22r–23r: Table of chapters (85), written in three series in black ink, numbered in gold. Fol. 22r (fig. 3): title written in white *muḥaqqaq* on a gold ground within rectangular frame with decorative end pieces in gold and blue forming small crosses, and a circular medallion in the margin.

Fols. 23v–24r (fig. 4): Dual frontispieces to Matthew’s Gospel. The Kufic inscriptions in white in cartouches at top and bottom of each page, against a blue ground with gold foliage tendrils, read “The pure Gospel, the shining lamp which is the source of life and the ship of salvation according to the Holy Apostles.” At the heart of the page four large octagons and a smaller central one interlock. Each contain floral motifs and the whole design comes to rest at a central, floral-filled star.

Fol. 24v, modern Arabic page 1–page 161: Text of St. Matthew’s Gospel.

Pages 1–2 (fig. 5): Beginning of text of St. Matthew’s Gospel with white Kufic headings in blue cartouches with gold floral scrolling. These are linked, with white beading banding, to roundels which each contain a flower, with blue outer petals and green inner ones. The text is bordered with strapwork interspersed with small blue squares. Initial chapter numbering (Coptic) “a” is in dark red.

5. ST. MARK’S GOSPEL

Page 162–163: Prologue to St. Mark’s Gospel.

Page 162 (recto page): The *bismillāh* phrase in gold *muḥaqqaq* at the top of the page is contained within a blue rectangular frame with gilded foliage scrolls. The title



of Mark's Gospel below is in gold *muḥaqqaq* on a red foliage scrollwork ground with small triple black dots. A floral marker stands to the left side of the rectangle. The main text below is written in black *naskh* in cloud patterning between red cross-hatching. Page 163 (verso page): completion of the text between the red cross-hatching with black dots. There is a tripartite shape at the bottom of the page in a rectangular band, with scrollwork arabesques in red.

Pages 164–165: Table of chapters (52).

Page 164 (recto page): In a cartouche, a white Kufic title (“translation of the divisions of Mark the Apostle”) to the Prologue is written against blue-green scrolls, bordered with gold foliage on a red ground. A hasp in gold, green, and blue is attached to the left of the rectangular frame.

Pages 166–275: Text of St. Mark's Gospel.

Page 166 (recto page): The *bismillāh* phrase at the top appears in gold *muḥaqqaq* against a red and blue ground, with a gold and blue hasp to the left of the rectangular frame beaded in white. The *muḥaqqaq* title below is in gold against a gray finely scrolled, dotted ground, with a green, blue, and gold marker, with an initial (Coptic) “A” in the margin. Gilded rosettes encircled in red, gold, and blue form the punctuation in the text of Mark's Gospel.

6. ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL

Pages 276–277: Prologue to St. Luke's Gospel.

Page 276 (recto page): The *bismillāh* phrase is in gold *muḥaqqaq* against a red scrollwork arabesque ground. In a band in the middle of the page is the title in red *muḥaqqaq* against a background of blue scrolls on a gold ground. The text, in *naskh* black ink against the red hatched, black dotted ground, completes the lower part of the page, and the next, between red hatching. Blue floral punctuation marks.

Pages 278r–280: Table of chapters.

Page 278 (recto page): At the top, the red Kufic title is in a gold ground, against green foliage scrolls in an oval-ended cartouche. Gold leaves on a red ground complete the rectangular frame, which is a simple blue line rather than the beading. Hasp in blue, gold, and red to the left.

Pages 281–468: Text of St. Luke's Gospel.

Page 281 (verso page): The *bismillāh* phrase at the top is in gold *muḥaqqaq*, against a background of red scrolls on a blue ground. The heading below is also in gold *muḥaqqaq*, against a red scrolled ground, with white beaded and blue bordering.



The gold rosette punctuation in Luke is sometimes encircled in red, gold, and blue.

7. ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL

Pages 470–472: Prologue to St. John's Gospel.

Page 470 (recto page): The *bismillāh* phrase at the top is in a rectangular frame in red *muḥaqqaq* behind which are gold foliage scrolls on a blue ground, and a hasp to the left in gold, blue, and red. Below this is the title in gold *muḥaqqaq* against red scrollwork arabesque. Below and subsequent text of the table of chapters is written in black *naskh* in cloud patterning between red hatching with triple black dots.

Pages 473 (fig. 6)–474: Table of chapters (45).

Page 473 (verso page): Title written in white Kufic in interlocking shapes in a rectangular band with golden scrolls behind on a blue ground. In the corners are gold foliage motifs on a red ground. The tables have the same format as the tables preceding the other Gospels, also written in gold and black ink.

Pages 475–624: Text of St. John's Gospel.

Page 475: The *bismillāh* text is in white *muḥaqqaq* in a rectangular panel against gold scrolls on a blue ground, with some of the “eyes” of the letters filled in red. The heading below is in blue Kufic against beige scrollwork arabesque. The chapter numbering heading is in gold, with a floral star design in the centre, and there is an A marker in the margin. A circular hasp in the margin is in blue, red, and gold. Gold/blue bordering. Punctuation marks are ringed in red, gold, and blue.

FOLIOS:

345 folios. Paper. Folios measure 36 x 25 cm. There are 9 binding pages in front, with one marbled page (opposite the binding) and the same in the back of the book. European numbering (which actually starts on the original second page of the manuscript) exists to fol. 24. The manuscript is thereafter (from fol. 24v to the end) numbered consecutively in modern Arabic numbering, pages 1 to 624. The earlier Arabic numbering, on the rectos, is partially preserved. Graf's correct numbering is followed in this description.

RULING:

Ruled on verso, 11 lines of text in a single central column (26 x 17 cm), written through the ruled line, with an additional margin of 2.6 cm to contain numberings



SCRIPT:

Vocalized *naskh* in black ink, elegant, regular, and vocalized, with gilded rosettes as punctuation. There are blue rosettes as punctuation in the Introduction.

QUIRING:

Quires are numbered in Arabic in red on the top left of rectos. The quiring is in quinions: 34 x 5 + 5 folios (this excludes binding folios).

BINDING:

Twentieth-century binding of red leather stamped with a gold decorated cross within two gilded borders.

INSCRIPTIONS AND STAMPS:

Fol. 1r: titles and stamps of the Patriarch Cyril V.

Fol. 13v: The book is signed and sealed to left and right by the patriarch Cyril V A.D. 1915. The signature above the left seal reads “the 112th Patriarch of Alexandria.”

Fol. 20r (fig. 2): In the centre of the lower part of the page is the original gilded dedication to the library of Shaykh al-As‘ad (see above, fol. 20r). Below it is a later inscription recording that the manuscript came into the possession of the patriarchal library in the month of Hatūr 1127 A.M. (November 1410 A.D.) and asserting that no one has the authority to remove it. Above it, with the stamps of Patriarch Cyril V and dated 15 Baramūda 1631 A.M. (23 April 1915 A.D.), is another inscription asserting that the book is the pious endowment of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate in Cairo and Alexandria.⁵¹

Page 624: A scribal note at the bottom of the page, at the end of St. John’s Gospel, gives the information that the manuscript was completed in 1056 (era of the Martyrs), 1652 (Alexandrian era), 751 (A.H.), equivalent to 18 October 1340 A.D., during the primacy of Buṭrus, metropolitan of the Copts in Jerusalem and Syria. It was copied by the priest Jirjis Abu al-Faḍl ibn Luṭf Allāh and collated with the original manuscript written by the hand of the shaykh, the venerable master al-As‘ad Abū al-Faraj Hibat Allāh, the Egyptian scribe known as Ibn al-‘Assāl. He here asks that everyone who uses the book beseech for him the mercy and pardon of God. He also notes that he has not included words added in Arabic manuscripts because these are not found in the Coptic, Greek, or Syriac.

⁵¹ The Coptic Museum was founded in 1910 by Marcus Simaika Pasha. It is now under the authority of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture but was until 1931 under the control of the Coptic Patriarchate (http://www.copticmuseum.gov/english/internal/brief_history.asp).



The present manuscript was copied and collated in the presence of the above mentioned Buṭrus, metropolitan of Jerusalem, and the monk Tūmā, known as the monk Ibn al-Ṣā'igh.

EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY NEW TESTAMENT RUSSIAN PRINTED ILLUSTRATIONS ADDED TO THE TEXT, 1915:

Last binding page verso: Nativity.

Fol. 19v: Crucifixion.

Page 275: Annunciation; Angels.

Page 469: Baptism; Last Supper.

Some of these accompany later inscriptions, e.g., Fol. 19v: the image of the Crucifixion is pasted onto the folio below the added text "In the name of the One God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit, this book is read by the most miserable and shameful of servants." This and the other Russian images were added in 1915.



©2009 by Lucy-Anne Hunt.

DOI: [10.6082/M11R6NPT](https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

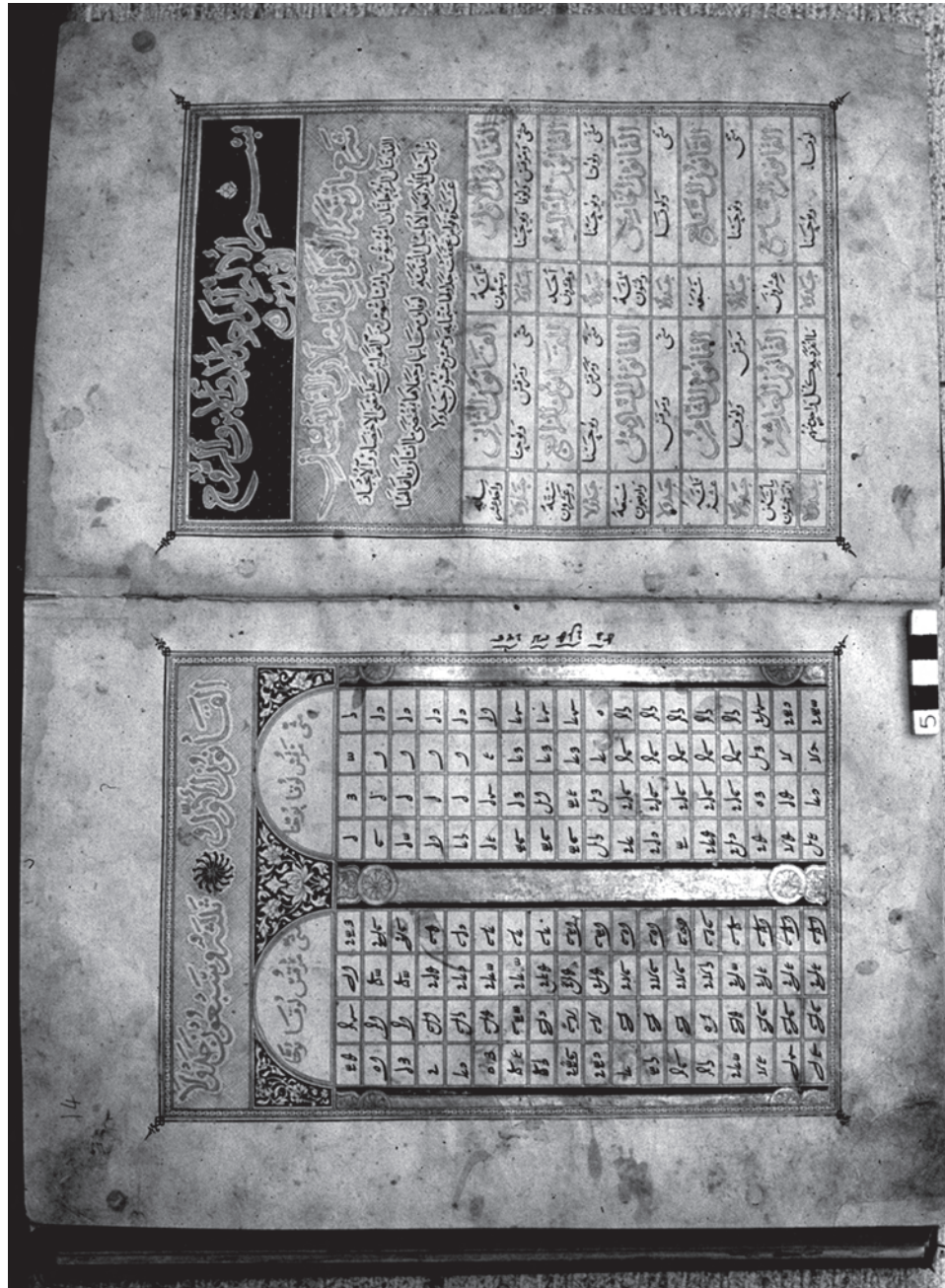


Fig. 1. Old Cairo, Coptic Museum MS Bibl. 90, fols. 14v–15r. Opening to canons and first canon table page. (Photo: L.-A. Hunt by permission of the Coptic Museum).



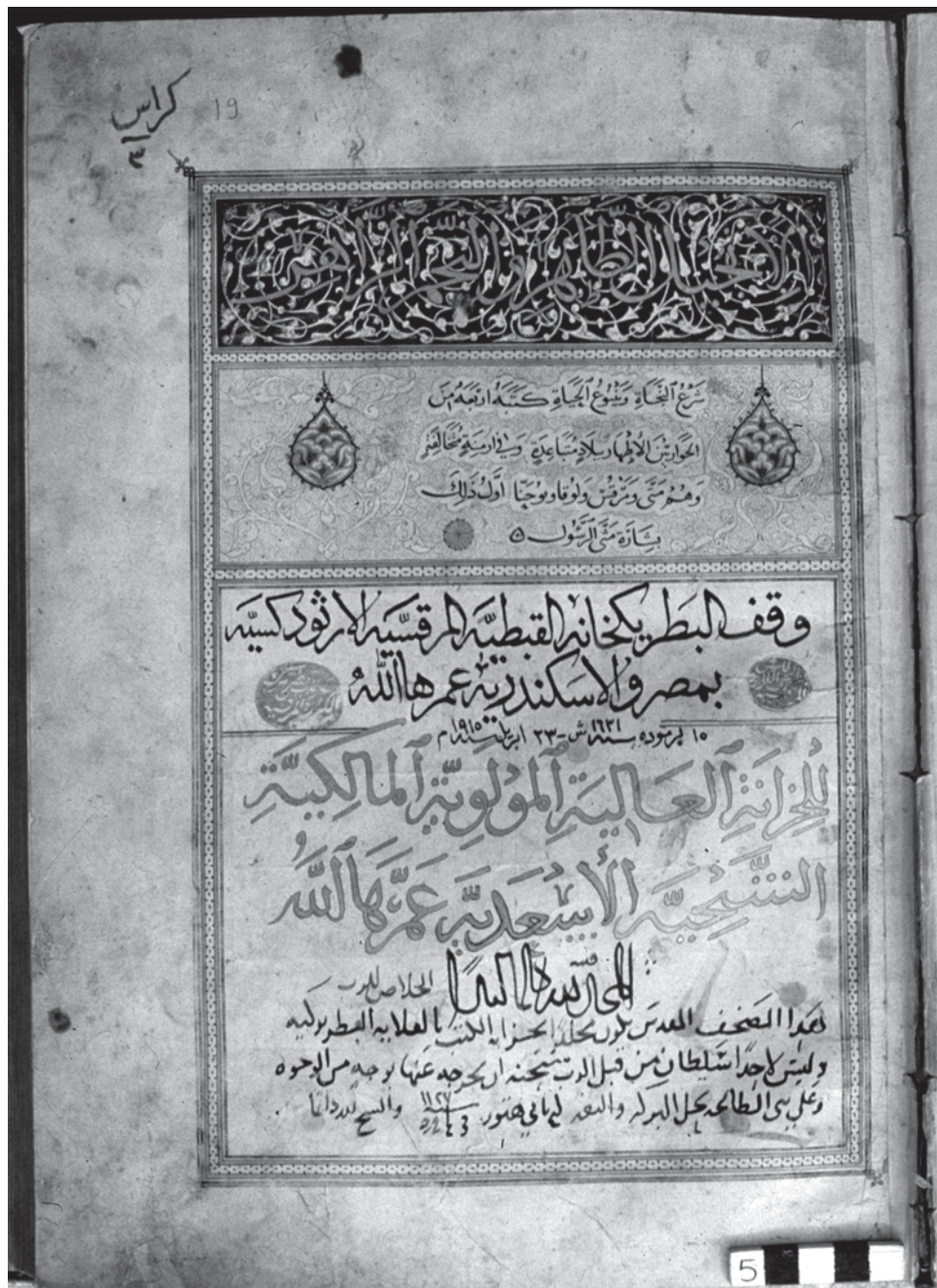


Fig. 2. Old Cairo, Coptic Museum MS Bibl., 90 fol. 20r. Frontispiece. (Photo: L.-A. Hunt by permission of the Coptic Museum).



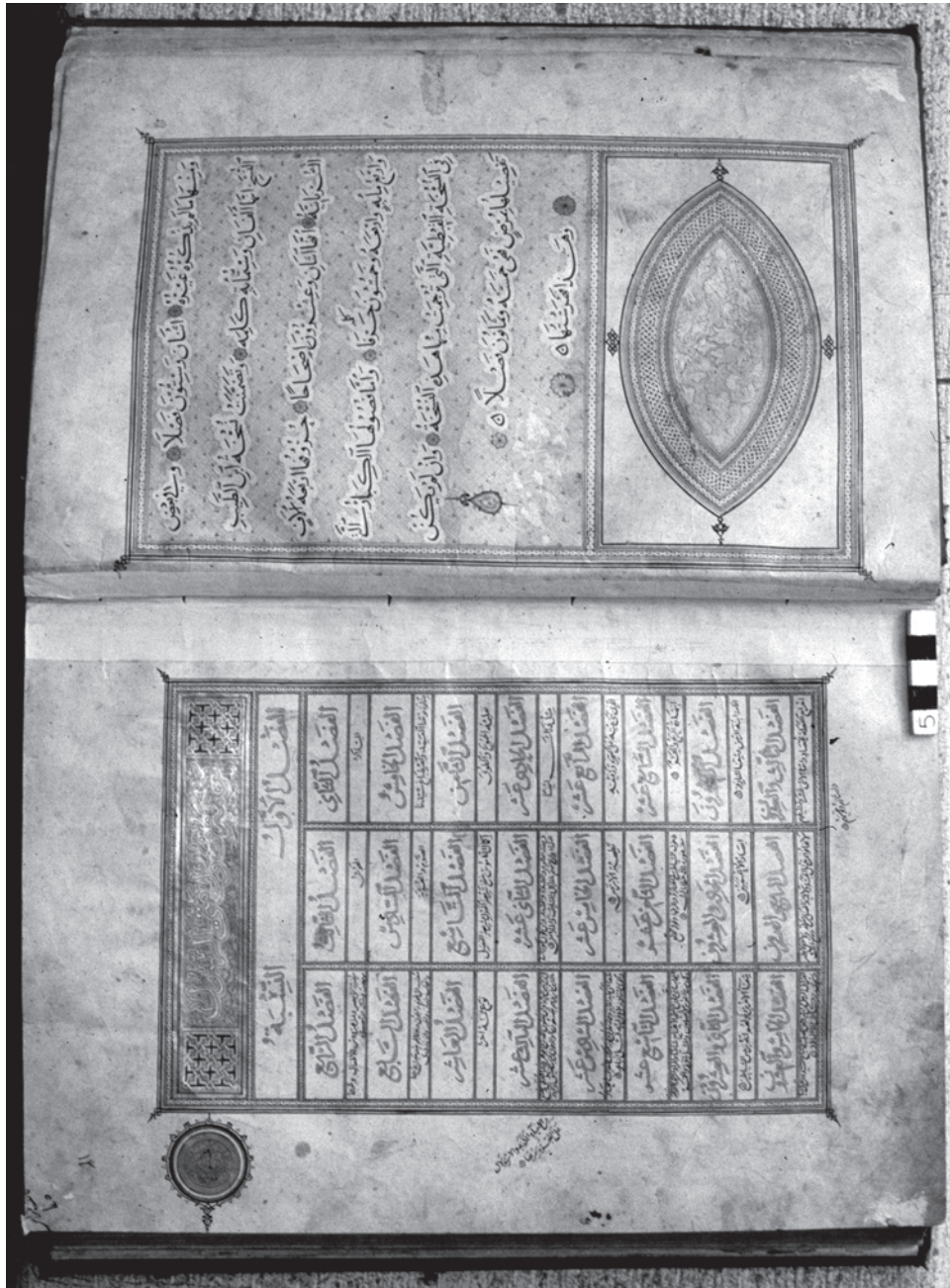


Fig. 3. Old Cairo, Coptic Museum MS Bibl. 90, fols. 21v–22r. End of prologue of St. Matthew and start of table of chapters. (Photo: L.-A. Hunt by permission of the Coptic Museum).



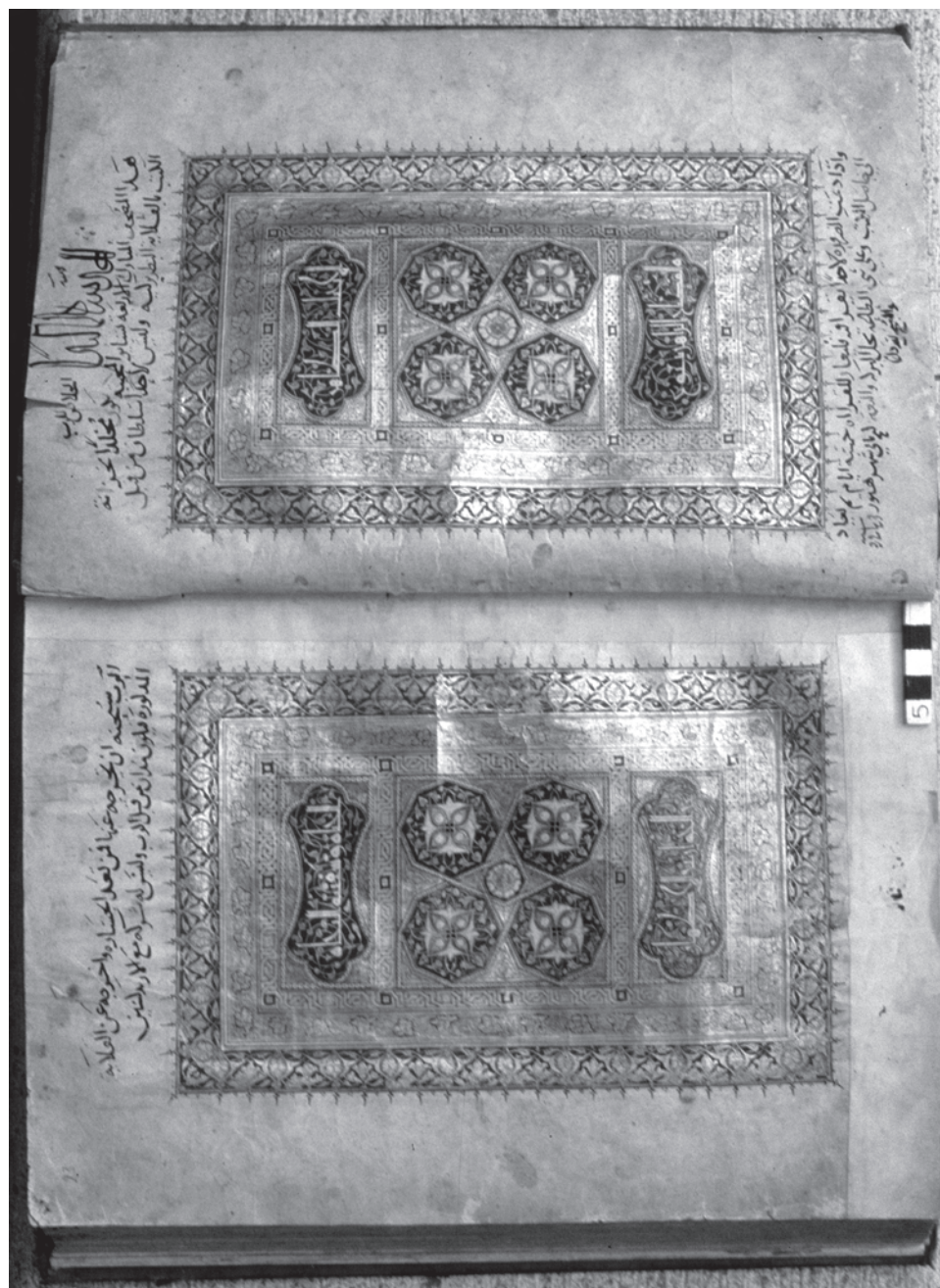


Fig. 4. Old Cairo, Coptic Museum MS Bibl. 90, fols. 23v–24r. Dual frontispieces to St. Matthew's Gospel. (Photo: L.-A. Hunt by permission of the Coptic Museum).



©2009 by Lucy-Anne Hunt.

DOI: 10.6082/M11R6NPT. (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: 10.6082/M1S180KZ. See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.



Fig. 5. Old Cairo, Coptic Museum MS Bibl. 90, pages 1–2. Opening of the Gospel of St. Matthew . (Photo: L.-A. Hunt by permission of the Coptic Museum).



©2009 by Lucy-Anne Hunt.

DOI: [10.6082/M11R6NPT](https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

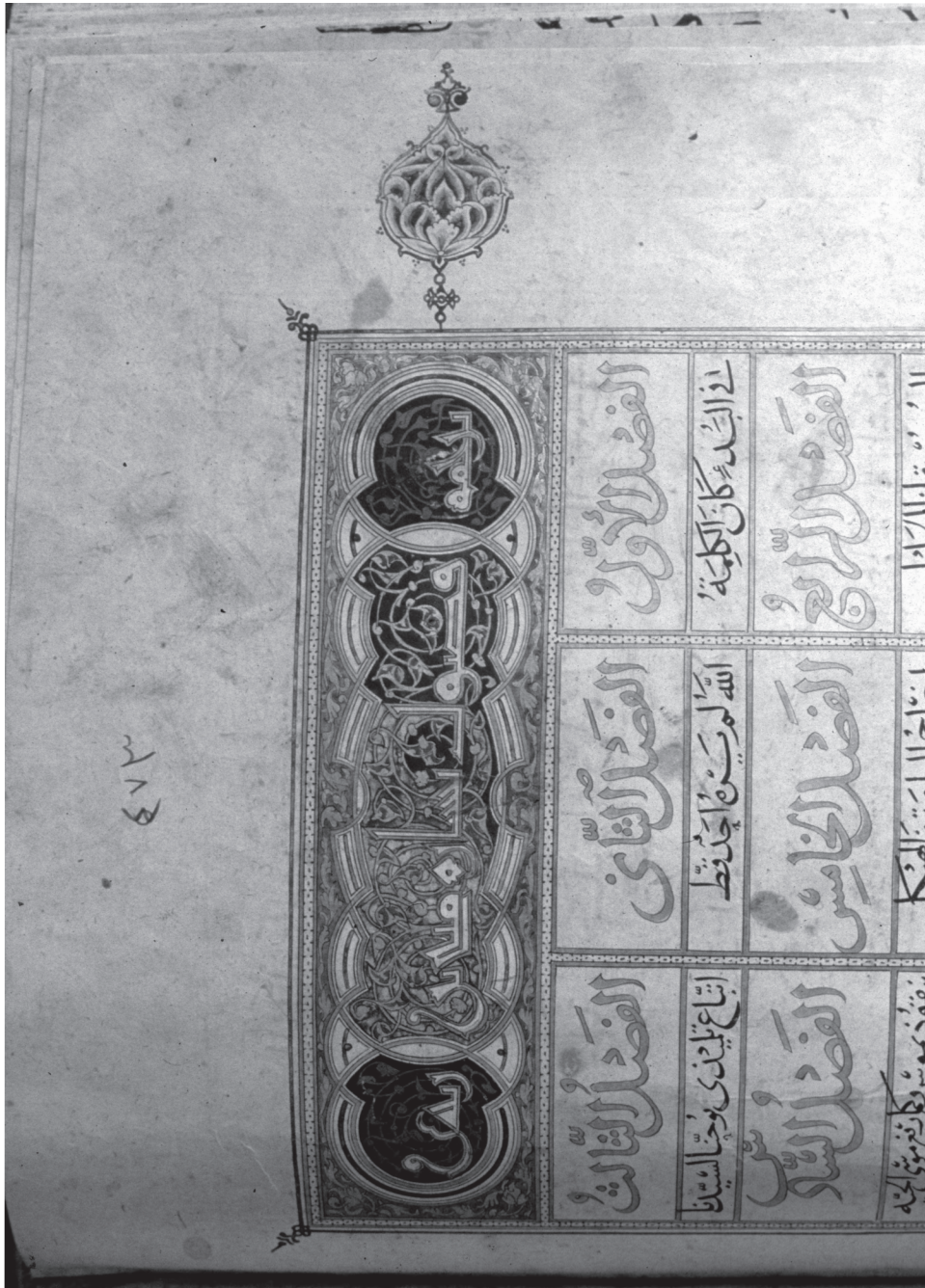


Fig. 6. Old Cairo, Coptic Museum MS Bibl. 90, page 473. Titlepiece to the table of chapters of St. John (detail). (Photo: L.-A. Hunt by permission of the Coptic Museum).



©2009 by Lucy-Anne Hunt.

DOI: [10.6082/M11R6NPT](https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

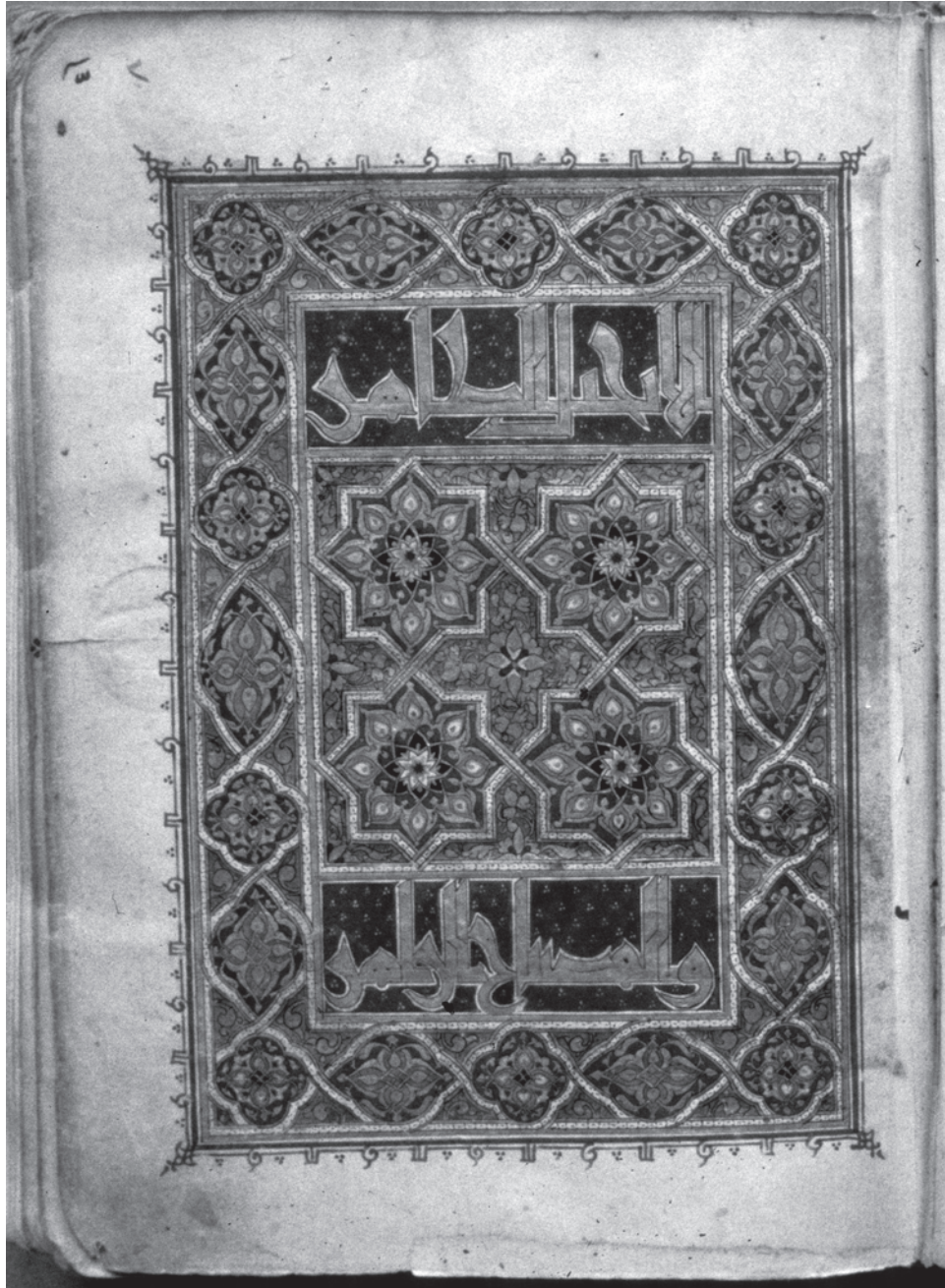


Fig. 7. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Library MS Ahmet III 3519, fol. 2r. Left-hand frontispiece. (Photo: L.-A. Hunt with permission of the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi).



©2009 by Lucy-Anne Hunt.

DOI: [10.6082/M11R6NPT](https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.



Fig. 8. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Library MS Ahmet III 3519, fols. 10v–11r. Dual frontispieces marking the end of chapter titles and the opening of St. Matthew's Gospel. (Photo: L.-A. Hunt by permission of the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi).



©2009 by Lucy-Anne Hunt.

DOI: [10.6082/M11R6NPT](https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

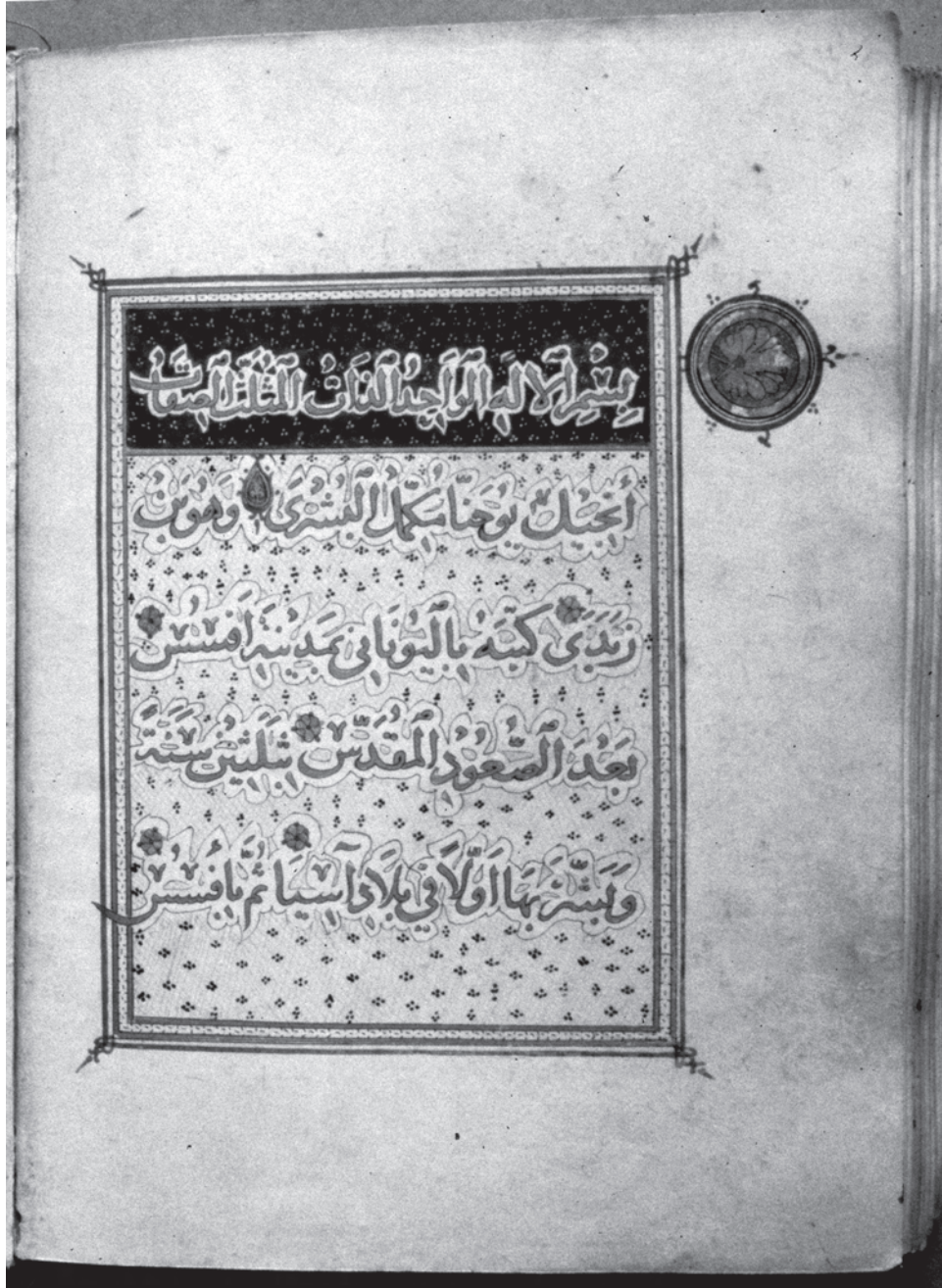


Fig. 9. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Library MS Ahmet III 3519, fol. 176v. Introduction to St. John's Gospel. (Photo: L.-A. Hunt by permission of the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi).



©2009 by Lucy-Anne Hunt.

DOI: [10.6082/M11R6NPT](https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M11R6NPT>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

MARINA RUSTOW
EMORY UNIVERSITY

At the Limits of Communal Autonomy: Jewish Bids for Intervention from the Mamluk State

The mid fifteenth century in Egypt witnessed an unusual concentration of state legislation in Jewish affairs. In 1442, inspectors looking for signs of illegal synagogue repairs discovered Arabic inscriptions on a synagogue minbar that they read as Aḥmad and Muḥammad and thus signs of blasphemy, since anyone ascending the minbar would have been forced to step on them. The investigation resulted in the destruction of the minbar and three confessions. Those who confessed were beaten publicly; two died of their wounds and the third converted to Islam. Churches and synagogues throughout the capital were subsequently inspected and fined.¹ Six years later, in 1448, an edict from Cairo prohibited Christian and Jewish doctors from treating Muslims, though in 1463, when the sultan reissued a previous ban on *dhimmī* employment in the state bureaucracy, he made the prudent exception of physicians and moneychangers.² Were Jews and Christians the hapless victims of a rapacious Mamluk state bent on interfering in their communal life and mulcting their property to the maximum extent possible?

In principle, premodern Jews held the twin prerogatives of judicial and administrative autonomy, which granted them the latitude to adjudicate court cases according to Jewish law and appoint leaders to administer public affairs. But a long-standing historiographic consensus has taken these twin prerogatives to indicate—sometimes despite evidence to the contrary—that in practice, Jews sought neither redress in Islamic courts nor the interference of state authorities, for fear of eroding their communal autonomy. Scholars have now questioned this consensus on the basis of Fatimid, Ottoman, and medieval Iberian records, and their questions might profitably be asked of Mamluk material as well: did *dhimmīs* jealously guard their communal autonomy, balking at the intervention of the chancery or the qadi courts in their affairs? Did they, in fact, actively

© The Middle East Documentation Center. The University of Chicago.

¹ For details and the sources, see Mark R. Cohen, “Jews in the Mamluk Environment: The Crisis of 1442 (a Geniza Study),” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 47 (1984): 425–48, and below.

² Prohibition: al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī Dhayl al-Sulūk* (Būlāq, 1896), 215; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾiʿ al-Duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Wiesbaden, 1931–72), 2:265. Exceptions: Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhūr*, 4:412–13; Abū al-Mahāsīn Yūsuf Ibn Taghribirdi, *History of Egypt, 1382–1469 A.D.*, ed. William Popper (Berkeley, 1954–63), 7:721–22. All cited in Tamer El-Leithy and Marina Rustow, “Toledan Conversos in Late Medieval Cairo,” paper presented at the 79th annual meeting of the Medieval Academy of America, Seattle, Washington, 2 April 2004.



©2009 by Marina Rustow.

DOI: [10.6082/M1HQ3X2X](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1HQ3X2X). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1HQ3X2X>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

protect their right to communal autonomy, and were they as loath to invite the state and Muslim judicial authorities into their affairs as the entrenched view has maintained?³

Jews in the Mamluk period stood heir to a long political tradition of both leaders and factions within the community utilizing the state to help promote personal or collective interests. The state, for its part, gladly interfered in their affairs when asked to do so, not because it felt nefariously compelled to control its *dhimmī* subjects, but because its interest in extending the domain of its administrative power coincided with the Jews' own desire to govern their community and be governed more effectively (i.e., with resort to stronger punitive sanctions against their co-religionists). Most often, then, the state intervened at the behest of the *dhimmīs* themselves and according to the agenda that they dictated.

This suggests the need to revisit the notion that the *dhimmī* communities lay locked in a struggle over their communal autonomy with the Mamluk state. Such a notion substitutes a set of presumptions about the structure of Mamluk-*dhimmī* relations for actual analysis of how power operated. It also fails to consider a tradition of Jewish politics, dating from well before the Islamic conquests, according to which Jews cultivated vertical alliances with the highest government authorities and negotiated both their status and their judicial and administrative privileges with them directly. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi has commented at length on this “royal alliance” and noted that Jews in early modern Christian Europe, after the series of expulsions that culminated in their exile from the entire Iberian peninsula, continued to place their faith in it even after it had failed them.⁴ The

³ For the first and most pointed criticism of this consensus, with examples from nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiography, see Joseph Hacker, “Jewish Autonomy in the Ottoman Empire: Its Scope and Limits: Jewish Courts from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries,” in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Avigdor Levy (Princeton, 1994), 153–202. See now also Elka Klein, *Jews, Christian Society, and Royal Power in Medieval Barcelona* (Ann Arbor, 2006), 26–51; Jonathan Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier: The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia* (Ithaca, 2006), 104–11; Marina Rustow, “Karaites Real and Imagined: Three Cases of Jewish Heresy,” *Past & Present* 197 (2007): 35–74; Uriel Simonsohn, “Communal Boundaries Reconsidered: Jews and Christians Appealing to Muslim Authorities in the Medieval Near East,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 14 (2007): 328–63; and Marina Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Empire* (Ithaca, 2008), chapter 3 *et passim*. All these critiques were preceded by the judicious remarks of Salo Wittmayer Baron, *The Jewish Community: Its History and Structure to the American Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1942), 1:21–25 and 2:221–24.

⁴ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, “Serviteurs des rois et non serviteurs des serviteurs’: Sur quelques aspects de l’histoire politique des Juifs,” *Raisons politiques* 7 (2002): 19–52; see now the English version, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, “*Servants of Kings and not Servants of Servants*”: *Some Aspects of the Political History of the Jews*, Tenenbaum Family Lecture Series in Judaic Studies at Emory University (Atlanta, 2007). See also Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1958), quoted in *ibid.*, 8–9; and further below, conclusion.



“royal alliance,” as both an arrangement of political expediency and a topos sustained by habit, was a persistent feature of Jewish politics under Muslim rule as well.

This article will argue, first, that repeated state intervention in *dhimmī* affairs was not new to the Mamluk period, but continued a long-standing pattern of administrative relations between *dhimmīs* and the palace in Cairo. That pattern originated during the Fatimid period—a strange statement at first glance, since the Fatimids were notoriously laissez-faire in their dealings with *dhimmīs*, while medieval chronicles lauded the Ayyubids and Mamluks as having restored Sunni Islam and returned the *dhimmah* to their rightful place in the religious hierarchy. The Fatimids used chancery petitions and rescripts (*al-tawqīʿ ʿalā al-qīṣaṣ*) as a method of rule, effectively handing their subjects the latitude to arrange their own communities’ administrative structures, which the chancery then ratified; the Ayyubids and Mamluks, on the other hand, are generally viewed as having tightened the reins of the administration and shifted power from the populace to the palace. This shift would seem to suggest a radical reconfiguration of the relationship between *dhimmīs* and the palace; how can the Mamluk pattern be seen as continuing an earlier Fatimid one?

The answer hinges on two questions. The first is whether one sees the initiative for Mamluk legislation as coming from the government or the *dhimmīs* themselves. In fact, it came from both, for different reasons at various times. Though the Mamluk era did witness a progressive deepening of state and judicial intervention, it did not necessarily lead to the administrative passivity of the Jewish community, let alone to the situation of persecution and decline that is a motif of modern historiography on Mamluk Jews. On the contrary: the Jews responded to centralization and intensified government control by utilizing the system in new and sometimes ingenious ways. The second question is how the Ayyubid and Mamluk chroniclers represented the regimes whose deeds they preserved for posterity. Precisely the desire to paint a picture of Sunni orthodoxy and *dhimmī* subservience sometimes led the medieval historians to overlook the fact that *dhimmīs* themselves often created and helped to maintain the state’s interest in their affairs. The historians thereby made the regime seem more omnipotent than it really was.

All this, in turn, touches on the problem of what a trend in modern historiography has termed “agency”: the extent to which subalterns are capable of acting in furtherance of their own interests or exerting pressure on those in power.⁵ Subaltern agency under the Mamluks has recently been the subject of several important studies that have inspired the approach I take in this article. Yossef Rapoport

⁵ The now classic theoretical statement of subaltern power is James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London, 1990).



has argued that when in 1265 Baybars (r. 1260–77) decreed the appointment of four chief qadis, one from each Sunni school, the effect was not just to regulate and organize the judiciary, but to allow claimants a modicum of flexibility in seeking justice, regardless of which school they claimed personally.⁶ Rapoport has extended the search for agency to women, arguing that divorce in medieval Egypt was frequent and not merely the result of a patriarchal order in which men could repudiate their wives at will. “The majority of divorces in Mamluk society were consensual separations,” he writes, demonstrating the economic independence of women sustained by dowries, banking instruments, and paid labor, particularly textile production.⁷ Similarly, in an exhaustively researched dissertation, Tamer El-Leithy argues that *dhimmī* subjects of the Mamluks used to their advantage the legal multiplicity afforded by the four *madhāhib*, gaining economic and legal concessions by seeking different rulings from the qadis of one school or another. He demonstrates that Copts utilized an extraordinarily sophisticated set of techniques for manipulating the Islamic legal system to their advantage. One such strategy he discusses is single-generation conversion, whereby male heads of household converted to Islam while keeping their wives and children Christian or Jewish, thus both exempting themselves from the *jizyah* and preserving their family’s inheritance.⁸ These studies suggest the importance of considering power not just as a prerogative of the elite but as the product of negotiation between those on various levels of the social, judicial, and administrative hierarchy. To consider the elite point of view alone results in a distortion of the historical events under consideration—and of the meaning of power.

The second argument I will make, then, concerns the models with which historians have habitually understood religious hierarchies and, in particular, *dhimmī* communities in the medieval Near East. I will suggest that these models rest on the presumption that any act involving politics and the law served the interests of religious piety and communal unity. In fact, the evidence suggests that more prevalent motives were convenience, self-interest, and political advantage. The interests of elites on both sides dictated how the memory of Mamluk-*dhimmī* relations has been passed on for posterity. The pyramidal model of Muslim-*dhimmī* relations—or the rigid model of state power that pits the Mamluk state against its *dhimmī* subjects—might, then, be replaced with a more flexible one in which those

⁶ Yossef Rapoport, “Legal Diversity in the Age of *Taqlid*: the Four Chief Qadis Under the Mamluks,” *Islamic Law and Society* 10 (2003): 210–28.

⁷ Yossef Rapoport, *Marriage, Money, and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (Cambridge, 2005), quotation on 112.

⁸ Tamer El-Leithy, “Coptic Culture and Conversion in Medieval Cairo, 1293–1524 A.D.” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2005), chapter two.



elites shared interests and did what they could to wield power over others.⁹

FATIMID PRECEDENTS

Beginning with Fatimid rule from Cairo—the first period in which there is substantial documentation about Jews under Islamic rule—Jewish elites utilized the caliph’s chancery to further their pursuit of power over their followers and over each other. Both of the Jewish *madhhabs*, the Rabbanites and the Qaraites, proved capable of availing themselves of governmental authority and possessed a subtle understanding of high politics. That understanding increased progressively over their decades of experience with the caliphal court.¹⁰

Between 969 and 1041, Jews submitted no fewer than seventeen petitions to the Fatimid chancery or to local governors in Palestine seeking to support a particular leader or to check the rights and prerogatives of one political faction in the community and further the interests of another.¹¹ All of these decrees served them as instruments of power in communal conflicts, and all point to the same general pattern: Jews sought intervention in order to strengthen the hand of a reigning leader or in a situation of political deadlock, when neither of the Jewish factions managed to impose its will upon the other without resort to the state. This pattern is in keeping with the paradoxical nature of *dhimmi* administrative autonomy. Though in theory the Jewish community governed its members independently from the state, in fact it depended on the government for its exercise of power, and especially of physical coercion.

For this reason, too, Jewish courtiers played an enormously important role in communal life. They were the ones who offered their co-religionists access to the chancery. It is no accident that thirteen of the petitions date from the second quarter of the eleventh century, a period in which three Jews held formal or informal positions at court and also served as leaders within the Jewish community. All of them, coincidentally, were Qaraite: Abū Naṣr Ḥesed al-Tustarī and his brother Abū Sahl Ibrāhīm, in their capacity as long-distance traders and bankers, served the court of al-Ẓāhir (1021–36) as purveyors of luxury goods

⁹ See the judicious comments of Simonsohn, “Communal Boundaries Reconsidered,” 329–31.

¹⁰ Jews used the term *madhhab* to refer to both the Rabbanites and Qaraites throughout the Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk periods. On the former, see Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community*, index, s.v. *madhhab*, and idem, “Karaites Real and Imagined,” 46–48; on the latter, see *ibid.*, 51, 56.

¹¹ Only seven of these seventeen petitions have been preserved (some as decrees, others in copies or drafts, all but one in the Cairo Geniza); the other ten appear as references in Geniza letters or in other petitions. Details in Marina Rustow, “Fatimid Decrees and Jewish Communal Politics,” in *Reason and Faith in Medieval Judaism and Islam*, ed. María Ángeles Gallego (Leiden, forthcoming). The one non-Geniza manuscript was preserved in the archives of the Qaraite synagogue in Cairo, on which see below, n. 61.



and achieved concrete posts only under al-Mustanşir (1036–94); and David ben Yişhaq served as an appointee in one of the most important ministries, the *dīwān al-kharāj*. All three helped to procure caliphal investitures for the *ga'on* of the Jerusalem yeshiva, who was recognized as the head of the Rabbanite Jews in the realm.¹²

One additional example from beyond this corpus illustrates the paradoxes of communal autonomy in practice. In 1027, a certain Ibrāhīm bar Shemu'el al-Andalusī approached the rabbinical court of the Palestinian-rite synagogue of Fustat for litigation in some matter. One of the court's three judges, having heard his case in a previous session, excused himself from the case with the claim that he was too busy to hear it again. But al-Andalusī dug in his heels, refusing to have his case heard by anyone else. His next step was to petition an unspecified high-ranking Fatimid bureaucrat to issue a decree (*tawqī'*) to the governor (*qā'id*) of Fustat-Cairo, presumably either ordering the judge in question to attend the session or allowing al-Andalusī to have his case heard in an Islamic court. When he returned to the court, the judges questioned him about his temerity in going over the heads of the court's members. Al-Andalusī retorted that he did so only to obtain what was rightfully his. And it worked: the court resolved that if it did not attend to al-Andalusī's case by the end of the month, he was free to seek justice in an Islamic one.¹³ It seems highly paradoxical that a petition to the government should have resulted in his case being heard in a Jewish court, as though he needed to go outside the Jewish community to seek redress within the Jewish community. But in fact, this was the standard pattern: Jews called upon authorities outside the Jewish legal and administrative apparatus in order to solve problems within it.

The case, then, provides a concrete statement of the paradoxes of communal autonomy as it was established under the Fatimids. *Dhimmīs* did not regard the exercise of their autonomy as entailing a vacuum seal between themselves and non-Jews, but rather saw the ways in which their legal and administrative system

¹² Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community*, with references to numerous previous studies.

¹³ The record is from the legal court itself and is dated 16 Ṭevet 1339 Seleucid (December 18, 1027). Cambridge University Library, Taylor-Schechter Collection (hereafter T-S), 13 J 5.1, in Judeo-Arabic; S. D. Goitein's unpublished edition is available online through the Princeton Geniza Project (<http://www.princeton.edu/~geniza/>). See also the edition and Hebrew translation (with facsimile of verso) in Elinoar Bareket, *Shafṛir Mitsrayim: ha-hanhagah ha-Yehudit be-Fuṣṭaṭ ba-maḥatsit ha-rishonah shel ha-me'ah ha-aḥat-ʿeśreh* (Tel Aviv, 1995), 215–18; and S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (Berkeley, 1967–93), 2:321–22, where he mentions a similar case from 1016 (Bodleian MS Heb. B 13.42), a fragmentary court record about a merchant from Palermo who had waited a month for a Jewish court to hear his case. When he complained to the police about this, they apprehended one of the Jewish judges for a night.



was dependent on the state and the Islamic courts. It also shows that Jews did not regard judicial and administrative autonomy as identical, nor were they likely to conflate the two types of redress—appealing to the government and appealing to the Islamic courts. (The blanket condemnations of Jews appealing to non-Jewish authorities that one finds in rabbinic literature and in some modern historiography are misleading: medieval Jews recognized that judicial and administrative redress differed in significant ways.)

This pattern was sustained throughout the Middle Ages in Egypt and Syria. Jews lodged appeals to the government to do three sorts of things: to confirm the appointment of some communal leader or to strengthen his hand politically; to compel their own leaders to do things they might not wish to do; or to oppose some prior government decree, usually one brought about at the behest of another Jewish leader or faction. Sometimes those situations overlapped, as when the *ga'on* of the Palestinian-rite academy (1025–51) and head of the Rabbanite Jews in the Fatimid realm, Shelomoh ben Yehudah, asked the caliph to repeal an appointment he had granted to a rival, Yūsuf al-Sijilmāsī, the chief of an Iraqi-rite community of Jews that sought to escape the *ga'on*'s jurisdiction.¹⁴ This pattern continued through the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, with some important variations.

FROM CHANCERY TO QADI: THE AYYUBID AND MAMLUK PERIODS

The importance of judicial and administrative appeal as political instruments continued throughout the Ayyubid period. While the Fatimids had been singularly unconcerned with the details of religious practices among their *dhimmī* subjects (on the reasoning, perhaps, that all non-*Ismā'īlīs* were equally benighted), the Ayyubids styled themselves restorers of Sunni orthodoxy, and this changed the rules of the game. One might think that the self-styled Ayyubid restoration would have restricted the options for redress in Jewish factional conflicts, since notions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy now pervaded religious discourse, and there could be only one correct party. In fact, Jewish factions themselves now began to use the rhetoric of orthodoxy against one another.

¹⁴ New York, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Elkan Nathan Adler collection (ENA) 4020.65, Judeo-Arabic (probably a copy of an Arabic original), published in S. D. Goitein, "Congregation versus Community: An Unknown Chapter in the Communal History of Jewish Palestine," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 44 (1954): 291–304, with facsimile between pages 291 and 292; see his revised interpretation in idem, "Petitions to the Fatimid Caliphs from the Cairo Geniza," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 45 (1954): 30–38; document republished in Moshe Gil, *Erets-Yiśra'el ba-teḳufah ha-Muslemit ha-rishonah (634–1099)* [Palestine during the first Muslim period (634–1099)] (Tel Aviv, 1983), doc. 312.



A MAIMONIDEAN CONTROVERSY

The incident from this period that best exemplifies the new rules is a protracted battle between factions of the Palestinian-rite synagogue in Fustat during the first decades of the thirteenth century. At the center of the conflict stood Moses Maimonides' son Avraham, who had followed in his father's footsteps as *ra'is al-yahūd* of Egypt and Syria (1205–37). Like his father, Avraham also served as physician at the court of the Ayyubid sultan; and like his father, he faced repeated opposition over his position in the Jewish community.¹⁵ His main opponents were from the same family who had forced his father to abandon his post temporarily (Moses Maimonides served 1171–ca. 1177 and ca. 1195–1204).

The pretext Avraham's opponents used to undermine his power had to do with the fact that, in keeping with his Sufi piety and a significant Sufi movement among Jews, he had made changes in the choreography of the synagogue ritual, adopting full prostration during prayer (which Jews had practiced but abandoned at some point in late antiquity). To condemn Maimonides and his liturgical innovations, his opponents queried a qadi in the service of the Ayyubid court regarding the permissibility of the innovations.¹⁶

The first and second drafts of the query have survived in the Cairo Genizah. Its author was the cantor of the synagogue—possibly a member of the opposing family, but his name is not mentioned.¹⁷ In addressing the qadi, he enthusiastically and opportunistically deploys the rhetoric of religious conservatism, betraying his assumption that the qadi, as an Ayyubid appointee charged with defending orthodoxy, would find any liturgical innovation (*bid'ah*) reprehensible and declare

¹⁵ He served as physician to both al-Malik al-ʿĀdil (1200–18) and al-Malik al-Kāmil (1218–38); see Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 5:493; cf. *ibid.*, 476–77, quoting Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿah's entry, which notes only that he served al-Malik al-Kāmil, but also that the author met him only in 631 or 632 A.H. (1231–33).

¹⁶ See the comments of Naphtali Wieder, *Hashpa'ot Islamiyot ʿal ha-pulḥan ha-Yehudi* [Islamic influences on the Jewish worship] (Oxford, 1947), 65–68; Goitein, "New Documents from the Cairo Geniza," 707–12; Paul Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool: Al-Maqāla al-Ḥawḍiyya* (London, 1981), 4–25; Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 5:491–92; Stefan C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer* (Cambridge, 1993), chapter 6; and Geoffrey Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge and New York, 1993), 292 and 293–94.

¹⁷ T-S Ar. 41.105 (first–second decade of the seventh century A.H.), in Arabic, published in Paul Fenton, "Tefillah beʿad ha-rashut u-rashut beʿad ha-tefillah: zutot min ha-genizah," *Mi-mizraḥ u-mim-maʿarav* 4 (1983): 20–21, and republished with emendations to both the reading and translation in Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, doc. 65; and the document from the Consistoire Israélite de Paris (now at the Alliance Israélite Universelle; I have not been able to verify the current shelf-mark) published in Richard J. H. Gottheil, "Some Genizah Gleanings," in *Mélanges Hartwig Derenbourg (1844–1908): Recueil de travaux d'érudition à la mémoire d'Hartwig Derenbourg par ses amis et ses élèves* (Paris, 1909), 97–99. These drafts are undated; my attempt at inserting them within the chronological narrative must be regarded as tentative.



it contrary to law. His query culminates in a series of loaded questions about the permissibility of Maimonides' liturgical innovations. He writes:

A group of Rabbanite Jews have had a synagogue for a long stretch of time and numerous years engaging in the conduct (*sīrah*) and customs (*minhāj*) with which its builders built it.¹⁸ Until now, it has maintained the customs (*minhāj*), rituals (*rusūm*), traditions (*sunan*), and conduct (*sīrah*) of readings and prayer throughout the year, on weekdays, Sabbaths, and festivals. It has a prayer leader administering its affairs in the wake of his predecessors (*khalf salaf*) and the community is content with this.

Now a faction has joined forces to change its customs, abrogate its traditions, alter its prayers, and coerce the prayer leader regarding them, and to adopt something that has never before been practiced regularly. The congregation and the prayer leader are holding fast to that to which they are accustomed.

Is it permissible for [these things] to be changed in opposition to them, for it [the faction] to adopt something that has never before been practiced regularly, and for the prayer leader to be forced to abandon that to which he is accustomed? Is it permissible for change and innovation to be made in the days of Islam—may God cause them to endure—even if those who effect the change are pious? What action should be taken with regard to them?

Grant us your opinion, may God have mercy upon you.¹⁹

That the cantor attempted to coerce the *nagid* by appealing to the state fits the Fatimid pattern of redress. The key difference is that rather than appealing to a member of the ruling dynasty directly, he appealed to a qadi. One wonders what, precisely, the cantor hoped to achieve with a fatwa. Upon finding that a government-appointed jurist condemned his innovations, would Avraham Maimonides have desisted from them? Or did the cantor simply want him to feel shaken by the condemnation? Either way, in contexts such as this one, Jews understood Islamic law to have more of a say in internal Jewish religious affairs than has hitherto been admitted.

The Islamic judiciary, for its part, did not share this perception, and the cantor's traditionalist rhetoric failed to win him the fatwa he wanted. We learn this from a letter written by one of Maimonides' opponents in Fustat, addressing another

¹⁸ T-S Ar. 41.105, lines 3–4: *qawm al-yahūd rabbānīn lahum kanīṣah min al-duhūr al-madīdah wa-al-sanīn al-ʿadīdah ʿalā al-sīrah wa-al-minhāj alladhī banāhā bānūhā ʿalayhi*.

¹⁹ T-S Ar. 41.105, beginning from the end of line 2; the translation is my own.



member of his faction currently in Damascus. The letter also reveals details about the methods that both sides employed on their own behalf.²⁰

The letter explains that leaders of the opposition first approached a government appointee referred to only as “the *faqīh*,” apparently the qadi to whom the drafts of the query were addressed. However, he declined to adjudicate, claiming that during the month of Ramaḍān he was in retreat and would not hear petitions.²¹ The *faqīh* hardly comes across as eager to interfere in Jewish communal matters. Maimonides’ opponents, for their part, were unwilling to wait until after Ramaḍān (or assumed that even if they did, the *faqīh* would find some other reason to decline). They therefore addressed a written petition (*qiṣṣah*) to al-Malik al-ʿĀdil himself.

But the sultan, too, refused to take part in a battle against one of his own appointees. Instead of acting on the *qiṣṣah*, he provided Maimonides with a copy of it (or else a courtier called Sharaf al-Dīn Yaʿqūb did so, as some of his followers claimed; or perhaps it was a minor government functionary, *aḥad al-khuddām*, in the opinion of the letter’s author).²² Again, the picture is hardly one of a government eager to intervene in the affairs of the Jewish community. On the contrary, everyone whom Maimonides’ opponents approached seems to have attempted to find some way out of involvement in the affair.

The letter goes on to explain that Maimonides, for his part, now understood the level on which his opponents conducted battle and filed a brief (*maḥḍar*) in his own defense in which he claimed that he had adopted the liturgical innovations in the privacy of his own home but had never attempted to impose them on his congregation. He, too, detailed his pious motivations (at least according to his opponent): he described himself as having given himself over to the service of God (*tabarraʿtu bi-taʿabbud allāh*) and gone beyond the call of duty in practicing genuflection, full prostration, and prayer (*wa-tanaffal[tu] bi-rukūʿ wa-sujūd wa-ṣalāh*).²³ Perhaps aware that piety might not suffice in his own defense, he also called upon two hundred witnesses to confirm that he had never insisted that others adopt his reforms.²⁴

In the opinion of the letter’s author, however, both Maimonides and his two hundred witnesses were lying blatantly. Everyone knew that he had enforced his innovations in the synagogue.²⁵ S. D. Goitein points out in Maimonides’ defense

²⁰ T-S Ar. 51.111, in Judeo-Arabic, published with Hebrew translation in S. D. Goitein, “New Documents from the Cairo Geniza,” in *Homenaje a Millás-Vallcrosa* (Barcelona, 1954), 1:717–18.

²¹ T-S Ar. 51.111, lines 8–9.

²² *Ibid.*, lines 9–11.

²³ *Ibid.*, lines 11–13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, lines 13–16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, lines 16–17 and 24–25.



that one of his published responsa addresses a group of fellow pietists on whether prostration is permissible according to Jewish law; Maimonides states that it is permissible and he himself engaged in it, but he would never insist that his questioners adopt it, “for you are at liberty to do as you like.”²⁶ But this hardly proves the case. Given that Avraham Maimonides was a charismatic and powerful leader, his opponents (and even his followers) may not have perceived such a clear difference between his permitting the changes and his mandating them.

But the use of sanctimonious rhetoric did not end there. In describing the controversy, the author of the letter accuses Maimonides and his supporters of “informing” on fellow Jews before the authorities (the word appears in Hebrew in the Judeo-Arabic letter, *masrut*, a variation of the standard Hebrew *mesirut*).²⁷ The insult was as ancient in Jewish tradition as its application was opportunistic in this instance: factions were often quick to brand their opponents *moserim*, informers, nearly demonic figures in rabbinic responsa, since they were thought to threaten the Jews’ jealously guarded communal autonomy by collaborating with the government and disrupting the supposed unity of the Jewish community. In fact, like charges of heresy, charges of *mesirut* were leveled selectively against Jews whose enemies had some reason to object to their appeal to the government. After all, the same opponents who now called Maimonides a *moser* had approached the palace in Cairo first.

On the advice of his supporters, then, the *nagid* threatened to place his opponents under a ban of excommunication. Interestingly enough, however, the pretext he chose was not that they had approached the sultan’s court against him, but that they had taken false oaths: apparently he would not have dared to excommunicate someone for seeking redress from the government, for the obvious reason that he himself had done so as well. Even Jewish leaders could not denounce the practice of petitioning the government—or perhaps especially Jewish leaders, who did so as a measure of frequent resort in sustaining their power over the community.

The letter ends *in medias res* and we do not know how this chapter of the dispute concluded. But in an undated Genizah letter, Maimonides’ followers complain to him that their co-religionists—at the behest of an unnamed communal official,

²⁶ Goitein, “New Documents from the Cairo Geniza,” 712, quoting Albert Freimann and S. D. Goitein, *Responsa Abraham Maimuni: ex codicibus librisque impressis* (Jerusalem, 1937), no. 62; see Goitein’s further comments, 712–13; and cf. Avraham Maimonides’ letter of reproof to a student in his yeshiva who was not sufficiently devoted to pietistic practices, T-S 10 J 13.8, in Judeo-Arabic, published in S. D. Goitein, “Documents on Abraham Maimonides and His Pietist Circle” [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 33 (1963): 187.

²⁷ T-S Ar. 51.111, line 17. On the form of the word, see Goitein’s note, “New Documents from the Cairo Geniza,” 711 n. 10. My interpretation of the pronouns in this sentence differs from his (*ibid.*, 710–11).



again presumably a member of the opposing family—were persecuting them, preventing them from praying according to their preferred custom, and spreading malicious rumors about them.²⁸

Nor did the controversy subside after Maimonides died (at age fifty-one, apparently in an epidemic). His son, David, now acceded to the office of *raʿīs al-yahūd*, but no sooner had he done so than the opposing family attempted once again to abolish his father’s innovations. In retaliation, a supporter tried to place the innovations on firm legal ground. We learn this from a query, first identified and published by Geoffrey Khan, submitted to yet another qadi.²⁹ The supporter writes:

A group of Jews whose word is authoritative, namely, the *raʿīs al-yahūd* and those of their sages who follow him, have established genuflection and prostration in their religious practice. They have stated that this was an ancient part of their revealed law, and that they have revived an aspect of religious practice that had fallen into desuetude. They established and practiced it over a long period, approximately twenty years.

When their *raʿīs* died, a man who was not a sage rose up and spoke against their earlier sages and disapproved of genuflection and prostration. What action should be taken against him on account of his opposition, since he opposes [the practice]?

Grant us your opinion, may God have mercy upon you.³⁰

It is unclear whether a fatwa stating the permissibility of the practices might have convinced the chief opponent to cease and desist from harassing the pietists. But apparently the author of the query hoped for more. He attempted to sway the qadi to his side by claiming that the opponent was forbidding the practice of Judaism according to hoary tradition (much as the opponents had claimed to follow tradition in their own query), and he asked the qadi what kind of action should be taken against the perpetrator. Again, we are ignorant as to how this posthumous conflict was resolved, but a hint may lie in the fact that in 1237,

²⁸ T-S 10 J 13.14, published in Goitein, “Documents on Abraham Maimonides,” 185. See also his comments in *Mediterranean Society*, 5:483.

²⁹ T-S AS 182.291, in Arabic, published in Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, doc. 66, beginning from line 4.

³⁰ I have altered Khan’s translation, especially at line 9 (*Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, 293), where Khan suggests that an opponent came to office on Avraham Maimonides’ death. But as the letter of 1237 quoted below (T-S 10 J 16.12) indicates, his son David succeeded him without interruption.



Avraham Maimonides' son David succeeded his father and received the post by express permission of the government. The Jewish courtiers first cleared the matter with all the important palace officials; then one of those officials took the extra step of summoning ten elders of the Jewish community, to be sure that his decision represented the community's will.³¹ With so much support for David's candidacy, it is likely that the instigator of the opposition was not heard from again. Indeed, the Maimonidean family continued to serve as *ru'asā' al-yahūd* for several more generations.

The incident of Avraham Maimonides' liturgical innovations parallels the Fatimid appeals: in every instance, the initiative for government intervention came from the Jews themselves. There are, however, two significant differences between the documents from the Fatimid period and these. First, in the Fatimid period the conflicts were purely political and administrative, centering around political factions of the Jewish community, while here the authorities were invited to express their opinions on intimate matters of Jewish religious practice. Second, in the Fatimid period the Jews appealed to the state only, while here they appeal to the qadis as well.³² This second difference was due in part to the nature of the Fatimid caliphate and its theopolitical claims: as implied in the Fatimid petition's standard closing formula, "to our master [the caliph] belongs the exalted decision," a Fatimid rescript had the force of a legal opinion.³³ It was also due to the expansion of the Sunni judiciary under the Ayyubids and Mamluks and those regimes' concomitant efforts to centralize it. One can, in fact,

³¹ T-S 10 J 16.12, in Judeo-Arabic, published with translation and commentary in S. D. Goitein, "A Letter to Maimonides and New Sources Regarding the Negidim from His Family" [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 34 (1965): 237–40. See also his comments in *Mediterranean Society*, 2:32; and cf. T-S Ar. 38.93, a copy of the charter appointing a Jewish official in Syria, dated Jumādā I 589/May–June 1193, first published in Geoffrey Khan, "A Document of Appointment of a Jewish Leader in Syria Issued by al-Malik al-Afdal 'Ali in 589 A.H./1193 A.D.," in *Documents de l'Islam médiévale: Nouvelles perspectives de recherche*, ed. Yūsuf Rāḡib (Cairo, 1991), 97–116, and republished with a new translation in Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, doc. 121.

³² They appealed to qadis in less religiously charged cases, too: see, e.g., a fragment of a twelfth- or thirteenth-century query regarding the permissibility of dissolving or altering Jewish foundations for the poor. T-S NS 306.60, in Arabic, published in Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, doc. 69.

³³ For the closing formula of petitions to Fatimid caliphs and viziers, *li-mawlānā al-ra'y al-'ālī* (or 'ālī al-ra'y) *fī dhālik*, see, e.g., T-S Ar. 7.38, in Arabic, published in Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, doc. 70, lines 14–15; T-S Ar. 30.273, in Arabic, published in *ibid.*, doc. 77, lines 16–17; and Bodl. MS Heb. b 18.23v, in Arabic (I am currently preparing this document for publication), line 16. See also the analysis in Geoffrey Khan, "The Historical Development of the Structure of Medieval Arabic Petitions," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 53 (1990): 19–22; and the Ayyubid variation described in S. M. Stern, "Petitions from the Ayyubid Period," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 27 (1964): 9.



sense the shift from the chancery alone to a combination of the chancery and the judiciary during the Maimonidean incident itself: finding the *faqīh* unwilling to consider their case, the opponents resorted to the old method of petitioning the ruler himself. Under the Mamluks, as we shall see, the number of Jewish queries to Muslim qadis only increased.

COOPERATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND JEWISH AUTHORITIES

The reluctance of the chancery and judiciary to involve themselves in the Jews' liturgical and political factionalism should not be understood as a general reluctance to regulate Jewish communal affairs. On the contrary, the late Ayyubid and early Mamluk chanceries also required regular reports from the Jewish community on the death of Jews. The state was, then, willing to intervene when it came to the disposition and taxation of *dhimmī* estates. Khan has identified six such reports dated 1224–98 among the Genizah papers, all of them testifying to the deaths of women who had appointed heirs, along with one formulary to aid in the composition of what must have been routine documents.³⁴ Indeed, al-Nuwayrī attests that the heads of *dhimmī* communities stood obligated to notify the government of deaths, and al-Qalqashandī affirms that the *diwān al-mawārith* kept a register of them. Other sources confirm that, at least in the early Mamluk period, the government taxed estates even when there were heirs.³⁵ The witnesses to these transactions are all Jews, suggesting that Jews participated in this aspect of the administration of their affairs even though it deprived heirs of part of their inheritance. Since the alternative—not reporting the deaths—was equally viable, we must assume that the practice represented at least some modicum of cooperation with the authorities. It may well be that the level of cooperation decreased markedly with an edict of al-Ṣāliḥ in 1354 decreeing that estates without heirs reverted not to the Jewish community (as they had done before) but to the state.³⁶

However, this kind of intervention does not indicate that the government's purposes were always confiscatory or nefarious. On other occasions, the state was more than willing to cooperate with communal leaders in keeping funds within the Jewish community—even if it meant depriving the sultan's coffers of

³⁴ T-S AS 182.278; TS NS J 469; Cambridge University Library, Or. 1081.2.25; T-S AS 121.229 (verso reused for Hebrew liturgical poetry); T-S Ar. 39.189 (verso and part of recto contain a Judeo-Arabic business account); T-S NS 297.1; and T-S Ar. 39.277 (the formulary; verso contains an Arabic letter). All published in Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, docs. 125–31.

³⁵ Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā fī Šinā'at al-Inshā'* (Cairo, 1964), 3:464; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab* (Cairo, 1923–98), 8:242–45; both cited in Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, 473 (see there for further references).

³⁶ El-Leithy, "Coptic Culture and Conversion," 96.



revenue. Thus in 1203, the estate of a certain Jew named Avraham al-ʿAṭṭār ibn Abū al-Karam had fallen into the hands of the *dīwān al-mawārith*. A deed drawn up in a Jewish court attests that the Jewish elders refused to abide by the *dīwān al-mawārith*'s confiscation of the estate and petitioned the qadi appointed over (*mutawalli*) the *dīwān* to transfer the estate to the Jewish community for a fee of thirty dinars payable to the qadi from the estate. The request was granted.³⁷ The deceased had been close to government circles—or so I gather from the fact that he owed money to someone titled Amīn al-Dawlah, a clerk in the *dār al-wakālah* (the port bureau). This account suggests that the government claimed estates only when it knew they existed, and it was more likely to know of large ones belonging to friends of the palace.³⁸

Ongoing relations between the government and the Jewish community are also suggested by the number of reused chancery documents preserved in the Genizah. Frédéric Bauden has recently demonstrated that al-Maqrizī reused official documents from the Mamluk archives as writing paper, and that one such document—a deed of *iqṭāʿ* for a government official—came into al-Maqrizī's hands after a raid on the palace that sent hundreds or perhaps thousands of official documents into circulation as scrap writing paper for sale on the open market.³⁹ Something similar to Bauden's reconstruction of events may hold true for a few of the reused chancery documents from the Cairo Genizah, such as a once luxuriant Ayyubid or Mamluk decree that was cut into pieces and now contains a Hebrew writing exercise in an awkward hand;⁴⁰ another Judeo-Arabic letter written on the

³⁷ Bodl. MS Heb c 28.54, in Judeo-Arabic. Goitein's unpublished edition is available online through the Princeton Geniza Project. He seems to have surmised the date from the receipts on verso for the payment of debts on the estate, which are dated 1203.

³⁸ The function of the *dār al-wakālah* was to store, sell, and otherwise assist merchants in disposing of their merchandise, and together with the *wakīl al-tujjār* (merchants' representative), it gained official standing and government backing under the Mamluks. See Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 1:186–92, and Roxani Eleni Margariti, *Aden and the Indian Ocean Trade: 150 Years in the Life of a Medieval Arabian Port* (Chapel Hill, 2007), chapter 6, and p. 299 n. 76.

³⁹ Frédéric Bauden, "Maqriziana I: Discovery of an Autograph Manuscript of al-Maqrizī: Towards a Better Understanding of his Working Method: Description: Section 1," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7 (2003): 21–68; idem, "The Recovery of Mamluk Chancery Documents in an Unsuspected Place," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, ed. Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni (Leiden and Boston, 2004), 59–78.

⁴⁰ Bodl. MS Heb d 74.38, in Judeo-Arabic and Arabic, unpublished, verso. My dating of the decree is based on paleography and must be regarded as tentative. The *ḥasbalaḥ* in the last line (the fragment contains only the last five lines of the document) does not demonstrate without doubt that the document is a decree rather than an archival copy; cf. the discussion in Geoffrey Khan, "Copy of a Decree from the Archives of the Fatimid Chancery," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49 (1986): 451.



back of part of a chancery decree;⁴¹ or a collection of Hebrew liturgical poems, two pages of which each contain two lines from separate Mamluk (?) decrees.⁴² That both decrees were cut into pieces suggests that they may have passed through the hands of stationers.

However, routes other than the paper market could have granted Jews access to chancery documents. There were a great many Jewish courtiers under the Fatimids and Ayyubids (though admittedly fewer under the Mamluks), and circumstantial evidence suggests that they carried drafts of chancery documents, disused petitions, and other non-archival documents out of the palace to serve the Jewish community as models for official correspondence.⁴³ Avraham Maimonides' grandson Yehoshua^c, who inherited the post of *ra'is al-yahūd* from his father, is the author of at least one letter rigorously adhering to the protocols of the *sultānīyāt* genre of administrative correspondence (decrees making the ruler's will known by his meting out of rewards, chastisements, titles, and honors to his subjects).⁴⁴ This suggests that Jews had access to the modes and manners

⁴¹ Bodl. MS Heb c 28.10, in Judeo-Arabic and Arabic, unpublished. Eliyahu Ashtor makes two attempts to derive a date for the Judeo-Arabic side: late eleventh century (the mid-eleventh century date he proposes can be dismissed since the office of *nagid* did not yet exist), and (implicitly) fourteenth century; Goitein corrects him. See Eliyahu Ashtor, "Le coût de la vie dans la Syrie médiévale," *Arabica* 1 (1961): 61; idem, "La recherche des prix dans l'Orient médiéval: sources, méthodes et problèmes," *Studia Islamica* 21 (1964): 140 n. 4; and Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 2:34. Neither author discusses the Arabic side of the document.

⁴² Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, David Kaufmann Collection (DK) 147, in Hebrew and Arabic, unpublished. My thanks to Ezra Chwat for sharing his notes on this collection, and to the Friedberg Genizah Project for making high-resolution digital photographs of the collection available.

⁴³ This is an argument that I plan to present in a fuller form in an article tentatively entitled "From the Palace in Cairo to the Synagogue in Fustat: Petitions to the Fatimid Chancery Preserved in the Geniza." I have counted roughly thirty Jewish courtiers who served the Fatimids in the tenth and eleventh centuries only (in both al-Mahdiyyah and Cairo), but the count should be continued into the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. See, e.g., a mid-thirteenth-century letter from Yehuda ibn al-^cAmmānī, a court clerk, cantor, and schoolmaster in Alexandria, to a Jewish official in Cairo vouching for the character of a blind man from the Maghrib whom some tragedy (war? an earthquake?) forced to abandon his home and property. He arrived in Alexandria via Sicily and the writer now turned to wealthy potential benefactors to help him, including the government functionary addressed in the letter, who bears a series of exalted titles listed in the opening lines of the letter. T-S 16.287, in Judeo-Arabic, published in Eliyahu Ashtor, *Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Miṣrayim ve-Suryah taḥat shilṭon ha-Mamlukim* [History of the Jews in Egypt and Syria under the rule of the Mamluks], vol. 3, *Te'udot min ha-genizah* [Geniza Documents] (Jerusalem, 1970), doc. 59, and incorrectly dated to 1408 C.E.; cf. Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 5:179, and idem, "Geniza Documents from the Mamluk Period" [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 41 (1971): 70.

⁴⁴ ENA 2559.11, in Judeo-Arabic, published in Mark R. Cohen, "Correspondence and Social Control in the Jewish Communities of the Islamic World: A Letter of the Nagid Joshua Maimonides,"



of official correspondence in use within government circles. Similarly, a decree issued by one of the four sultans titled al-Malik al-Nāṣir was preserved in its entirety in the Genizah, despite the fact that it has nothing to do with the Jews and was never reused for Hebrew writing exercises. That it found its way into the Genizah suggests that someone from the Jewish community carried it there from the palace.⁴⁵

In sum, Jews had access to the chancery when they needed it, and one of the functions of the leaders of the Jewish community was to provide them with that access. No one could hope to lead the community without connections at court—a fact that Jews already understood well by the third decade of the eleventh century, and that continued to hold true throughout the Mamluk period.⁴⁶

COOPERATION WITH JEWISH INDIVIDUALS

This attitude of friendly cooperation between the Jews and the government extended from leaders of the community to individuals. This was the case when, for instance, Khaybarī Jews sought exemption from the *jizyah* via court-issued certificates. Since Muḥammad was said to have granted the Jews of Khaybar special privileges, their descendants claimed—and were granted—exemption from various *dhimmī* disabilities. Thus a fragmentary certificate dated Shawwāl 654 (October–November 1256) attests to the status of a certain Ibrāhīm ibn Ismāʿīl as a Khaybarī Jew—and to his proficiency in dealing with the government and the judiciary. That his certificate was preserved in the Genizah, despite its being written in Arabic characters, suggests that he deposited his entire archive there and this document along with it, and by extension that he was a regular,

Jewish History 1 (1986): 39–48. Cohen states that “it was doubtless from Arabic epistolographic manuals like this that Jews first became familiar with the forms and conventions of Arabic letter-writing which they subsequently incorporated into their own correspondence” (ibid., 40), but one might also imagine channels of transmission via courtiers with direct experience in *inshāʿ* and other social contexts that lent themselves to the ongoing diffusion of epistolary style. On the *sultānīyāt* genre, see al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā*, 8:233–303 (cited in Cohen, “Correspondence and Social Control,” 47 n. 6).

⁴⁵ DK 228.1, in Arabic, unpublished. The possibilities include: al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (ibn Qalāwūn, r. 1293–94, 1299–1309, 1310–41); al-Malik al-Nāṣir Aḥmad (ibn Muḥammad, r. 1342); al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ḥasan (r. 1347–51, 1354–61); and al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad IV ibn Qāytbāy (r. 1496–98). The form of the petition is consistent with these dates (but I have excluded the Ayyubid sultan Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, who bore the same title). I am grateful to Geoffrey Khan for alerting me to the presence of this decree in the Kaufmann collection.

⁴⁶ Not every government functionary who appears in Genizah documents was regarded in a friendly way by Jews: see Bodl. MS Heb. B 11.27, in Judeo-Arabic, unpublished, in which Luʿluʿ, the freedman of the Zengids of Mosul (d. 1259; see Claude Cahen, “Luʿluʿ, Badr al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍāʾil al-Malik al-Raḥīm,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 5:821), is cursed as one of the enemies of Israel (lines 2–3).



dues-paying member of the Jewish community of Fustat rather than a man on its margins; in this sense, he may be taken as broadly representative of the whole. Though avoiding paying the *jizyah* was not always difficult (in certain towns in the countryside the *jizyah* was not collected at all), instead of merely avoiding the tax collector, he sought official exemption. One can only speculate on what he presented as proof of his descent from the Jews of Khaybar, but his willingness to cooperate with the system and uphold its tenets was clear.⁴⁷

Similarly, the Jewish physician Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Abī al-Sahl ibn Ibrāhīm was asked (by a prospective high-ranking patient?) for a certificate attesting to his professional qualifications and good conduct. Three separate drafts of the testimony have survived occupying the same sheet of paper (the drafts are undated and the witnesses are identified only as “free Muslim men”). Abū al-Ḥasan’s attempt to procure the certificate suggests that he was adept at negotiating the channels of the Islamic judiciary, and the fact that the drafts survived in the Genizah suggests even more. Had a Muslim notary given Abū al-Ḥasan the drafts for some reason? Were witnesses not available the day he appeared in court, or was he traveling and had to take the texts to another jurisdiction? Abū al-Ḥasan may have written the drafts himself: physicians were literate; Jewish physicians were literate in Arabic; and many physicians served as scribes, courtiers, and court functionaries, all professions in which Abū al-Ḥasan may have learned to write such a document. Or he may have based the draft on a similar testimony that he had received previously.⁴⁸

Physicians and courtiers at times, in fact, proved more capable of exercising power and more adept at negotiating the channels of government than the *raʿīs al-yahūd* himself. A Mamluk decree also preserved in the Genizah contains the story of a physician whom the *raʿīs* had prohibited from entering the synagogue of which he was a member. The physician got around the problem by seeking redress from the sultan. The *raʿīs* was forced to rescind his ban.⁴⁹

Even individuals in the community knew how to navigate the channels of the government and judicial bureaucracy. While one of the functions of their leaders was to help them do this, some were capable of doing so without assistance. This

⁴⁷ T-S NS 327.2, in Arabic, published in Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, doc. 49. On Khaybarī Jews and their exempt status, see his commentary there. On towns where the *jizyah* was not collected, see Mark R. Cohen, *Poverty and Charity in the Jewish Community of Medieval Egypt* (Princeton and Oxford, 2005), 138, citing evidence from the twelfth century.

⁴⁸ T-S NS 305.115, in Arabic, published in Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, doc. 51. The document bears no date, since the sections with the dates in the first and third drafts are deliberately left blank; Khan dates it to the thirteenth century (for paleographic reasons?).

⁴⁹ T-S Ar. 38.131, in Arabic, unpublished (I am currently preparing an edition for publication). See also Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 2:168, 327.



corroborates El-Leithy's findings about Copts in the Mamluk period: many were perfectly capable of devising strategies for turning the apparent restrictions of *dhimmī* status to their advantage.⁵⁰

GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE IN THE LATE MAMLUK PERIOD

This brings us full circle to the affair of the blasphemous minbar of 1442. Mark R. Cohen has treated the incident and its literary and documentary sources exhaustively; here I wish to address only one lingering problem that the evidence presents.⁵¹ The medieval Muslim chroniclers, including one eyewitness to the events, depicted the synagogue inspection (and the more general synagogue and church inspections that began in the wake of the minbar incident) as a routine round of government enforcement of discriminatory legislation against *dhimmīs*. But in fact, from a Genizah document discovered by Cohen, it emerges that the officials entered the Jewish synagogue in the first place in response to a complaint from its members, who had petitioned the chief qadis to depose their corrupt and incompetent *raʿīs al-yahūd*, a certain ʿAbd al-Laṭīf.⁵² Why did the chroniclers record nothing of the Jewish initiative for the government's intervention?

THE SILENCE OF THE CHRONICLERS

One of the synagogue inspectors was Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (1372–1449), the chief Shafiʿī qadi, who recorded the incident in his history *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr bi-Abnāʾ al-ʿUmr*. The narrative also appears with variations in the chronicle of his student al-Sakhāwī (1427–97). Both chroniclers imply that the initiative for the inspections came from the government. Ibn Ḥajar writes: “On the fourth day [of Dhū al-Ḥijjah 845/15 April 1442], the Shafiʿī and Hanafi qadis and the *muḥtasib* and a group of people went to the synagogue of the Jews in Qaṣr al-Shamʿ in Fustat”—as though the inspections were in the routine order of business. Having found the blasphemous minbar, they explain, the Hanafi qadi, Amīn al-Aqṣarāʾī, went on to undertake a general inspection of synagogues and churches in Fustat and Cairo. Sure enough, he found evidence of repairs that contravened the Pact of ʿUmar, and he proceeded to close some of them.⁵³

⁵⁰ El-Leithy, “Coptic Culture and Conversion.”

⁵¹ Cohen, “Jews in the Mamluk Environment.”

⁵² T-S AS 150.3, a Judeo-Arabic draft of the petition to Sultan Jaqmaq discussed below; published in Cohen, “Jews in the Mamluk Environment,” 431–34, with English translation and facsimile between pages 434 and 435.

⁵³ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr bi-Abnāʾ al-ʿUmr*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Muʿīd Khān (Hyderabad, 1967–76), 9:169–70, 182–86; al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Tibr al-Masbūk*, 36. Cohen compares the two passages (as well as an unpublished manuscript of Ibn Ḥajar, Istanbul MS Yeni Cami 814, fols. 282r, 283v, and 284r) in “Jews in the Mamluk Environment,” 426–30; Ibn Ḥajar tells the story



Ibn Iyās (1448–1524) is even more laconic in his description of events. “In that year [845 A.H.],” he writes, echoing Ibn Ḥajar, “the shaykh Amīn al-Dīn al-Aqṣarāʾī al-Ḥanafī undertook the destruction of some of the houses of worship of the Jews and the Christians.” For some reason he renders Ibn Ḥajar’s “inspection” (*kashf*) as “destruction” (*hadm*), while in Ibn Ḥajar’s account the inspection resulted in the closure of only some of the synagogues (*ubṭilat ʿiddatu kanāʾis*). Further down the page, Ibn Iyās corrects himself, adding in equally lapidary fashion, “In it [the year 845], the sultan ordered the four qadis to go to Qaṣr al-Shamʿ to inspect the houses of worship there. So they went there and inspected.”⁵⁴ The distinct impression the chroniclers offer is of government initiative for the incident in the normal course of pious regulation of *dhimmīs*.

Given the fact that Ibn Ḥajar was the Shafīʿī chief qadi at the time these events took place, one might expect his account to cling scrupulously to details of the events. In fact, the inspection was merely a pretext for the qadis to enter the synagogue—which they actually did at the behest of some of its leading members, who wished to end ʿAbd al-Laṭīf’s misrule over the community. As in the Maimonidean affair, the Jews had approached the qadis as the first resort in resolving a conflict within the community. And as in the Maimonidean incident, the qadis failed to bring about the changes the Jews requested: the qadis did not depose the *nagid*. The Hanafi qadi merely extracted his confessions and moved on to other *dhimmī* houses of worship; the best course of further action became a matter of dispute between him and Ibn Ḥajar.

Having watched the qadis intervene to no avail, the Jews were left no other recourse than to petition Sultan Jaqmaq (1438–53) himself. The document that Cohen discovered is a Judeo-Arabic draft of the petition, likely a near-final one, since it follows the standard form and format of the late Mamluk petition. It also includes copious details of ʿAbd al-Laṭīf’s wrongdoings—details, the petitioners are quick to add, with which the sultan’s chief qadis are already quite familiar since they had brought them to their attention before. These wrongdoings included fiscal malfeasance, extortion, fraud, ruining the synagogue financially, violating both Jewish law and the Islamic laws of *waqf*, and general unsuitedness to speak on behalf of the community (which I read to mean his lack of strong connections at the palace, a key qualification for the office of *raʾīs al-yahūd*).⁵⁵ In the wake of

twice, and his internal contradictions call for some explanation as well.

⁵⁴ Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾir al-Zuhūr*, 2:22; cited in Cohen, “Jews in the Mamluk Environment,” 427 n. 6.

⁵⁵ T-S AS 150.3. The references to the qadis appear on recto, lines 19–22 (“The lords the chief qadis, may God exalt and honor them, and the (other) qadis are well aware of his lack of ability and of the fact that he is un[fit] (*ghayr [ṣ]āl[īh]*) to speak on behalf of a community of *ahl al-dhimmah*”); and verso, lines 18–21 (“Your slaves have informed you about this, intending that [the] qadi, may God honor him, would indicate to them wha[t] he would do, out of his bounty and for the sake of



the synagogue inspections—and the church inspections that followed them—the petitioners appended three additional accusations designed to place the blame for the entire affair squarely on their *raʿīs*. The first was “his defiance in proceeding with the matter of the synagogues”—that is, of their renovation—without the proper legal authority. The second was his responsibility for the blasphemies the inspector found on the minbar, “for which, at the very least, he should have been reprimanded and removed from office.” That is not to say that ‘Abd al-Latīf himself really placed the inscriptions there; rather, they noted, “A group is prepared to testify against him that he was one of those who ascended the minbar.” Apparently the petitioners were still undecided as to whether they wished to accuse him of having committed blasphemy wittingly or unwittingly. To this, they added the third complaint that “even the Christians have had wrongdoing perpetrated against them because of him,” holding him responsible for the anti-*dhimmī* persecutions that followed the affair.⁵⁶

Cohen characterizes these three added accusations as desperate measures inviting considerable risk, seeing government intervention as a threat to *dhimmī* communal autonomy. But the risks were apparently well past at the time of the petition: the qadis had already used the inspections for their own purposes, as an opportunity to exert tighter control over the *dhimmī* communities, and failed to deliver the result the Jews wanted. The qadis may even have begun their inspections at the behest of the Jewish community, who invited them there as an excuse to depose ‘Abd al-Latīf. The petitioners hint at this: “Your slaves have informed you about this, intending that [the] qadi, may God honor him, would indicate to them wha[t] he might do, out of his bounty and for the sake of God the exalted, so that this wrongdoing may be re[m]oved from them.” I interpret this to mean that the Jews invited the qadis’ intervention at some point in the affair. But when the qadis failed to deliver the results they wanted, they took their complaint to the sultan. They appear singularly untroubled by the prospect of risking their communal autonomy. In fact, at this point in the incident, by inviting government intervention they stood to lose nothing but their *raʿīs*.

Why do Ibn Ḥajar, al-Sakhāwī, and Ibn Iyās never mention the Jews’ initiative in the denunciations? Al-Sakhāwī and Ibn Iyās can be excused the omission on the grounds that they may not have known the true cause of the events; they only inherited the narrative Ibn Ḥajar had bequeathed them. But Ibn Ḥajar, the Shafīʿī qadi whom the Jews approached, personally inspected the synagogue and was certainly aware that they had wanted to bring him there. Why is he silent on the

God the exalted, so that this wrongdoing may be re[m]oved from them”). For a detailed analysis of ‘Abd al-Latīf’s misdeeds, see Cohen, “Jews in the Mamluk Environment,” 437–44.

⁵⁶ T-S AS 150.3, recto, line 33 and margin; recto, line 15; verso, margin (added as an afterthought and meant to be inserted earlier in the petition?); and verso, lines 2–3.



matter?

Ibn Ḥajar's silence suggests that he had something to gain by implying that the events came about due to his own initiative and that of his colleagues. Indeed, making the inspections appear routine casts him and his Hanafi counterpart in the role of pious enforcers of the statutes regarding *ahl al-dhimmah*. At the end of his narrative, in fact, the qadis coax the Christians and Jews into supplicating them to reissue the Pact of ʿUmar, in a ritualized reenactment of the circumstances said to have produced the original pact when the Christians first drew it up as a petition to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.⁵⁷ Thus were the qadis able to demonstrate their piety and effectiveness as defenders of the faith. Ibn Ḥajar also paints Amin al-Dīn al-Aqṣarāʾī as the more zealous and uncompromising of the two, who when he heard of the minbar episode “wanted to cut off the feet of those who were involved in standing on that spot, as well as the hands of some others,” while Ibn Ḥajar demurred. Thus Ibn Ḥajar appears as rigorous in his enforcement of the law but humane in its application, and thus both Ibn Ḥajar and al-Aqṣarāʾī appear as the enforcers of *dhimmī* subservience. But the petition demonstrates—in addition to the usual dangers of relying on literary evidence—that the Jews did not play the role of passive victims in this incident. Rather, they used the qadis' politics of piety to serve their own political aims.

WHY ALL THIS FUSS OVER THE *DHIMMĪS*?

In his anatomy of the Jews and the “royal alliance,” Yerushalmi asks why

the highest authority not only tolerated the Jews and their alien faith, but allowed them such a wide latitude of autonomous privileges. Obviously it was not out of mere generosity. Among the many factors involved, certainly the most important was the overriding perception that on the whole the Jews were a useful element. Above all, they were an important source of revenue, paying for their privileges in the form of special taxes. Their internal self-government was convenient, for it relieved the ruler of many administrative and other burdens. They were potentially the most loyal element in the population since, especially after their loss of an independent state they were the most exposed and vulnerable, the most dependent on the ruler, those with the most to lose by betraying him. In short, the royal alliance was based on a reciprocity of interest.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Cohen, “Jews in the Mamluk Environment,” 429 n. 8; and see idem, “What was the Pact of ʿUmar? A Literary-Historical Study,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 23 (1999): 100–58.

⁵⁸ Yerushalmi, “*Servants of Kings*,” 10.



To this catalogue of reasons why rulers might find the Jews useful, one must add another item: selective intervention in their affairs could make a ruler appear more powerful.

Indeed, as Cohen points out, in 1438 the office of *raʿīs al-yahūd* itself became a point of intense conflict within the Mamluk court. Following the death of Barsbāy (1438), his son and the amir Jaqmaq struggled over the succession and the latter besieged the citadel. A temporary lull in the fighting came about when a different conflict between the rivals distracted them from physical combat: Jaqmaq, at the recommendation of one of his amirs, appointed as *raʿīs al-yahūd* an Alexandrian Jew who had previously held the office but had apparently been deposed. The Jews immediately protested to a second amir, who removed the Alexandrian from office, a move that did not please Jaqmaq at all. Thus did the conflict over the *riʾāsat al-yahūd* temporarily eclipse the struggle over the sultanate itself.⁵⁹

The amirs themselves could not have been particularly concerned with who filled the office of *raʿīs al-yahūd*. Rather, the ability to appoint leaders over protected minority communities served them as a way of gaining power over the populace via power's corollary, patronage. The situation parallels the conflicts between the church and the state over the Jews in high medieval Europe, when both institutions issued protective or persecutory edicts concerning the Jews depending on the political advantage to be gained by one or the other.

While the Jews used the rulers and their qadis to serve their ends, then, both the qadis and the rulers used the Jews to serve theirs.

AFTERSHOCKS OF THE AFFAIR

During the conflict of 1442, the petitioners had complained that the only result the *dhimmīs* achieved from the thousands of dinars in fines that they and the Christians had been forced to pay the government was that they were “exposed to public view.” The allusion was apparently to the ongoing suspicion cast upon all *dhimmī* houses of worship and their continued inspection.⁶⁰ In fact, the atmosphere of suspicion continued as late as 1456. In that year, further church and synagogue inspections revealed that a church had exceeded the lawful limitations placed on repairs, and several Christians were beaten. Some Muslims demanded even harsher punishment and more sweeping action against *dhimmīs*, on the argument that they had violated the pact they had renewed only fourteen years earlier. In this atmosphere, the head of the Qaraite community brought a petition before the Hanafi chief qadi explaining that synagogue property had been damaged in

⁵⁹ Abū Muḥammad Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad Al-ʿAynī (d. 1451), *ʿIqd al-Jumān fī Tārīkh Ahl al-Zamān*, cited in Cohen, “Jews in the Mamluk Environment,” 444, from Istanbul MS Carullah 1591, fol. 817 b, *apud* Ashtor, *History of the Jews*, 2:86.

⁶⁰ As Cohen explains in “Jews in the Mamluk Environment,” 444.



the recent riots and seeking permission for lawful repairs. In the course of his petition—whose wording is preserved in the *ḥukm tanfidhī* that the Hanafi qadi wrote for him—the Qaraite had the good sense to mention the reconfirmation of the pact in 1442 along with the names of all the *dhimmī* chiefs who had agreed to it, the chief of the Qaraites among them. He also asked explicitly for reconfirmation of the royal covenant (*‘ahd sharīf*) of Sultan Īnāl regulating the mutual obligations of Muslims and *dhimmīs*, thus recapitulating the ritualized obeisance the Jews and Christians had made before the qadis in 1442.⁶¹ That the Qaraite *ra’īs* had seen fit to petition the Hanafi qadi before undertaking repairs suggests the atmosphere of high tension that persisted in the wake of 1442 and 1456. But it also points to his resourcefulness in petitioning the chief qadi preemptively, even going so far as to supplicate the sultan for renewal of the Pact of ‘Umar before some officious qadi could coerce him to do so.

Such resourcefulness was hardly exceptional. In 1465, the Qaraites again exhibited their adroitness when a group of ex-conversos from Toledo arrived in Cairo and sent the Rabbanite and Qaraite *madhhabs* into a crisis of competition over which synagogue the newcomers would join. Rather than resolving the matter among themselves, the Qaraites helped the newcomers to query the chief qadis on the matter (one from each school plus a fifth, the Shafi‘i *qāḍī al-quḍāh*) as to whether the Toledans, who were Rabbanites on their arrival in Egypt, could become Qaraite—in other words, whether Rabbanite and Qaraite Judaism were to be considered one *dhimmī* religion or two. Though they had never been considered anything other than a single religion, the Qaraites, rather than running the risk of abetting an unlawful conversion, simply accepted Islamic legal regulation of internal Jewish religious affairs to the extent that they allowed the qadis to determine the matter for them. All the qadis but one ruled that the transfer was merely one of *madhhab*; but the second Shafi‘i caused them great consternation when he ruled that if members of each *madhhab* consider one another heretical, the only permissible change in religion was conversion to Islam. Paradoxically, this second Shafi‘i fatwa, which allowed the Qaraites the greatest degree of

⁶¹ Cairo, archives of the Qaraite synagogue, document D 20, a Hanafi *ḥukm tanfidhī* 598 centimeters long (!), published in Richard J. H. Gottheil, “Dhimmis and Moslems in Egypt,” in *Old Testament and Semitic Studies in Memory of William Rainey Harper*, ed. Robert Francis Harper, Francis Brown, and George Foot Moore (Chicago, 1908), 2:353–414 (Arabic text on 409; English on 384); reedited in D. S. Richards, “Dhimmi Problems in Fifteenth-Century Cairo: Reconsideration of a Court Document,” *Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations* 1 (1993): 127–63. See also idem, “Arabic Documents from the Karaite Community in Cairo,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 15 (1972): 120–21 (doc. 9). I have not seen the originals of these documents but studied the set of photographs on deposit at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem (these can be consulted on request from the manuscript librarians). The shelf-mark I use is marked on the photographs; Richards (who saw the documents in Cairo in 1969) records it as 20.



religious autonomy, was precisely the one that least served their purposes in this instance.⁶²

Religious, judicial, and administrative autonomy was not, then, what the Jews always wanted. True, in an atmosphere of systematic religious subordination, their courses of action may have become increasingly limited. But they themselves had laid the groundwork for this kind of government intervention—in the long term, by means of their ongoing relationship with the palace; and in the short term, by hoping that the qadis and the sultan would depose their *nagid*.

AT THE CONFLUENCE OF MOTIVES

To see the late Mamluk regime as oppressively denying Jews their communal autonomy may appear, superficially, to be an argument in defense of medieval Jews; however, what they require is not defense but historical analysis. Without understanding the degree to which they, too, brought about the events the chronicles record, one has not offered them this.

In Yerushalmi's anatomy of the "royal alliance" and why rulers might have afforded the Jews such a wide range of autonomous privileges, he also explains why, in their turn, the Jews chose to place their destiny in the hands of governments who acted unpredictably and entirely in their own interests:

On their side, Jewish perceptions of their relation to their non-Jewish rulers were based not only on their actual historical experience, but on their own inner religious traditions, beginning with Scripture itself which, studied and interpreted from one generation to the next, became an equally potent historical force in shaping Jewish mentalities. The need to come to terms with the reality of exile is already present in the famous letter sent by the prophet Jeremiah (ch. 29) to the first exiles carried off to Babylon a decade before the destruction of the First Temple, arguing against the other prophets and soothsayers who were blithely forecasting an imminent return: "Thus says the Lord of Hosts . . . unto all the captivity whom I have caused to be carried away captive from

⁶² This account is preserved in three parallel Judeo-Arabic manuscripts, all of them Ottoman copies, of which Tamer El-Leithy and I are currently preparing a critical edition and translation together with a historical and literary commentary. Meanwhile, see Hartwig Hirschfeld, "A Karaite Conversion Story," in *Jews' College Jubilee Volume* (London, 1906), 81–100; William M. Brinner, "A Fifteenth-Century Karaite-Rabbanite Dispute in Cairo," in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, ed. Mark R. Cohen, Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Sasson Somekh, and Sidney H. Griffith (Wiesbaden, 1999), 184–96; El-Leithy, "Coptic Culture and Conversion," 412, 418–21; Rustow, "Karaites Real and Imagined," 49–57.



Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and dwell in them, plant gardens and eat the fruit of them; take wives and beget sons and daughters . . . and multiply there and be not diminished. And seek the peace of the city to which I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall you have peace. . . . Let not the prophets that are in the midst of you, and your diviners, beguile you, for they prophesy falsely in my name. I have not sent them.”⁶³

Yerushalmi’s discussion covers a stretch of history that includes the exile in Babylonia, the Jewish mission to Caligula, the charters negotiated with the bishops of medieval Germany (remembered in Jewish chronicles as having been granted by Charlemagne himself), and nineteenth- and-twentieth century nation-states.⁶⁴ From the medieval world, he presents examples from Christendom. But instances from the Islamic Near East are hardly lacking.

The office of *raʿis al-yahūd* itself is one example. A group of Egyptian Jewish courtiers and other grandees built the office gradually; in the 1060s, they accumulated prerogatives of leadership over the Jewish community and only then petitioned the chancery for recognition. Thus did the *raʿis al-yahūd* become an Egyptian Jewish institution until the Ottomans did away with it in the sixteenth century. But the Jewish chroniclers of the Mamluk and Ottoman periods recorded the office as having been founded by the Fatimids themselves, presumably since royal initiative lent it an aura of greater authority.

The latter, more romanticized version of events first appeared in a responsum by the Egyptian Jewish jurist David ibn Abi Zimra (1479–1573), and was lent more elaborate form in the chronicle of the historian Yosef al-Sambari (1640–1703).⁶⁵ According to them, the office was founded in the year 366/976–77, when the Abbasid caliph al-Ṭāʾiʿ gave his daughter in marriage “to the king of Egypt”; she, in turn, called for the establishment of a Jewish leader in Egypt on the model of

⁶³ Yerushalmi, “*Servants of Kings*,” 10; my emphasis.

⁶⁴ For an analysis of the Charlemagne legends, see Ivan Marcus, “History, Story, and Collective Memory: Narrativity in Early Ashkenazic Culture,” in *The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History*, ed. Michael Fishbane (Albany, 1993), 255–79.

⁶⁵ Shimon Shtober, “The Establishment of the Riʿasat al-Yahud in Medieval Egypt as Portrayed in the Chronicle Divrey Yosef: Myth or History?,” *Revue des études Juives* 164 (2005): 33–54, with part of the passage in question translated into English, 36–37; Hebrew original in *Sefer divrey Yosef by Yosef ben Yitzhak Sambari: Eleven Hundred Years of Jewish History under Muslim Rule*, ed. idem (Jerusalem, 1994), 138–41; see also the English translation in Mark R. Cohen, *Jewish Self-Government in Medieval Egypt: The Origins of the Office of Head of the Jews, ca. 1065–1126* (Princeton, 1980), 7–9.



the exilarch in Iraq.⁶⁶ The legendary account received its fullest elaboration only after the Ottomans had abolished the office—perhaps even as a polemic against its abolition, as if to protest to the sultan by comparing him implicitly with the more generous caliph.

A host of other Jewish foundation myths set after some dynastic change also depicted the old ruler personally granting the Jews the authority to run their own communal affairs. Flavius Josephus had Alexander of Macedon bow before the high priest of the Jerusalem temple (which in Josephus' day the Romans had just destroyed).⁶⁷ The epistle of a tenth-century Iraqi Jew in Qayrawān named Natan ha-Bavli lavishly described the ceremony appointing the Iraqi Jewish exilarch in order to impress the Jews of Ifrīqiyah with the pomp of an Abbasid court now steeply in decline.⁶⁸ Like these foundation myths, the Ibn Abī Zimra/al-Sambarī account drew heavily upon the topos of the royal alliance.⁶⁹

Like the Mamluk chroniclers of the events of 1442, these Jewish authors had a vested interest in emphasizing the administrative authority of the ruler and his or her court. The Muslim chroniclers wished to portray the regimes they served as upholders of the faith; the Jewish ones wished to portray themselves as clients of powerful states. And thus did a confluence of interests eclipse the subaltern actors preserved in the documents of the Genizah, furthering the impression that Jews were the hapless victims of all-powerful rulers. In fact, actors less visible on the stage of history established the terms and the tenor of the performance.

⁶⁶ As David Neustadt (later Ayalon) pointed out, al-Ṭāʿī himself (r. 974–91) married the daughter of the Buyid *amīr al-umarāʾ*; see David Neustadt (Ayalon), “Problems Concerning the Negidate in Egypt during the Middle Ages” [in Hebrew], *Zion* 4 (1938–39): 126–49; and Shtober, “Establishment of the Riʿasat al-Yahud,” 40.

⁶⁷ Flavius Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 11.8.5.

⁶⁸ Hebrew version in A. Neubauer, ed., *Mediaeval Jewish Chronicles and Chronological Notes, Edited from Printed Books and Manuscripts* (Oxford, 1887–95), 2:78–88; Judeo-Arabic fragments in Israel Friedlander, “The Arabic original of the report of R. Nathan Hababli,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* o.s. 17 (1905): 747–61; and Menahem Ben-Sasson, “The Structure, Goals, and Content of the Story of Nathan Ha-Babli” [in Hebrew], in *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson*, ed. Menahem Ben-Sasson, Roberto Bonfil, and Joseph Hacker (Jerusalem, 1989), 137–96.

⁶⁹ For an analysis of Jewish foundation legends in this period, see Arnold E. Franklin, “Shoots of David: Members of the Exilarchal Dynasty in the Middle Ages” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2001), chapter 6.



Book Reviews

MUḤAMMAD IBN AḤMAD AL-FARGHĀNĪ, *Muntahá al-Madārik fī Sharḥ Tāʿīyat Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, compiled by ʿĀṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyah, 2007). Vol. 1, pp. 496; vol. 2, pp. 334.

REVIEWED BY TH. EMIL HOMERIN, University of Rochester

Saʿīd al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d. 699/1300) wrote what is believed to be the first commentary on ʿUmar Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s famous Sufi poem the *Naẓm al-Sulūk*, also known as *Al-Tāʿīyah al-Kubrā* (Ode in T-major), since the poem rhymes in “t” and spans 760 verses. Al-Farghānī was a third-generation disciple of Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 637/1240), having studied with the latter’s student and stepson Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274). Al-Qūnawī was a known admirer of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s verse, and he used to recite and comment on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s *Al-Tāʿīyah al-Kubrā*. His comments were then incorporated by his student al-Farghānī into the latter’s commentary, *Muntahá al-Madārik* (The utmost perception), which al-Farghānī wrote first in Persian and then in an expanded Arabic version. The Persian edition, *Mashāriq al-Darāri* (The rising places of the shining stars), was edited and published by Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī,¹ while the Arabic version appeared as a lithograph in 1876.² Recently, ʿĀṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī has made a new Arabic edition of the work.

This new edition will be welcomed by scholars of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and especially students of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his Sufi heirs. Scholars studying the religion of the Mamluk period will also appreciate this new printing of the commentary, as the *Muntahá al-Madārik* was read and admired by many scholars of the time, but denounced by others, including Ibn Taymīyah and Ibn Khaldūn. In fact, a public reading of the commentary sparked a major religious controversy in Cairo in 874–75/1469–70. However, al-Kayyālī’s edition has several shortcomings. First, he does not provide any information on manuscript sources, and I suspect that he has only reformatted the 1876 litho edition. Al-Kayyālī provides little information about al-Farghānī’s life or thought; he merely cites al-Farghānī’s date of death, mentions that he was a follower of Ibn al-ʿArabī by way of al-Qūnawī and Rūmī, and that he

¹Mashshad: Dānishghāh-i Firdawsī, 1980.

²Istanbul: Maktab al-Sanāʿī.



wrote several other works. Al-Kayyālī then lists latter commentators on the verse of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, some of whom were influenced by al-Farghānī’s work (1:3–6). This scant introduction is then followed by a short “biography” of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, which al-Kayyālī drew from al-Munāwī’s (d. 1031/1622) *Al-Kawākib al-Durriyah fī Tarājim al-Sadāt al-Ṣūfiyah*, a hagiographical work on Sufi masters (1:7–12). While this account provides very few actual facts about the poet’s life, it does offer a popular, reverential image of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, while mentioning and denouncing the controversies of the Mamluk period regarding his monistic views and those of others, including Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Farghānī.

Al-Farghānī divides his commentary into two parts. First is a long introduction detailing his theosophy of emanation in four sections: (1) on the Divine Essence and the names and attributes engendered from It, with particular attention to the 99 Divine Names (1:18–69); (2) on the properties (*aḥkām*) of the Realm of Spirits and the World of Dominion (*‘ālam al-malakūt*) and how they are realized and engendered from the Presence of Invincibility (*ḥaḍrat al-jabarūt*) (1:70–78); (3) on the engendering of the World of Similitudes (*‘ālam al-mithāl*), the Realm of Corporeal Bodies, and the creation of Adam (1:79–101), and (4) on the origin of the human being, its phases and states, and how it returns by the path of mystical practice to its spiritual home and union in love (1:102–45).

Throughout this long introduction, al-Kayyālī identifies wherever possible the source of Quranic citations and those for hadith. Occasionally, he will define a Sufi technical term or an obscure word, or clarify an idea, but for the most part, he makes no attempt to present a systematic and analytical presentation of al-Farghānī’s ontology, theology, or anthropology. For this the reader should consult the excellent article by Giuseppe Scattolin, “Al-Farghānī’s Commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s Mystical Poem *Al-Tā’iyyat al-Kubrā*.”³

Turning to the commentary itself, we learn that al-Farghānī believed that Ibn al-Fāriḍ had attained the high mystical “Station of Muhammad” (*al-maqām al-Muḥammadi*; 1:145), which then served as the basis for *Al-Tā’iyyah al-Kubrā*. There, al-Farghānī observed, Ibn al-Fāriḍ explores aspects of mystical love and the Sufi path, offering guidance and instructions, and often speaking or “translating” from the Station of Muhammad. Proceeding to his verse by verse commentary, al-Farghānī first explains lexical and grammatical issues within each verse, and then provides an interpretation of the verse in terms of his mystical and theological ideas presented in his

³*Mélanges (Institut dominicain d’études orientales du Caire)* 21 (1993): 331–83.



introduction. He frequently suggests allusions to the Quran, hadith, and Sufi doctrines that may be present in a verse. At times, al-Farghānī will interrupt his commentary to clarify key points, such as on divine love or mystical annihilation, or to summarize what has occurred so far in the poem. Occasionally, al-Farghānī gives sub-headings to sections of the poem regarding their subject matter. Al-Farghānī also cites the “Saying of Willing Devotions,” and this Divine Saying is, indeed, central to Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poem. However, to a large extent, al-Farghānī’s interpretations of the verses in terms of his elaborate theosophy are not supported by the poem itself. Nevertheless, his *Muntahá al-Madārik* is an important Sufi work in its own right both for understanding developments in the “Ibn al-‘Arabī School” of Islamic mysticism, as well as important religious trends of the Mamluk period.

NŪR AL-DĪN ‘ALĪ IBN ‘ABD AL-RAḤĪM IBN AḤMAD AL-KĀTĪB AL-MALAKĪ AL-MUẒAFFARĪ IBN AL-MUGHAYZIL, *Dhayl Mufarrij al-Kurūb fī Akhbār Banī Ayyūb*, edited by ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Sallām Tadmurī (Sidon and Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-‘Asriyah, 2004). Pp. 206.

REVIEWED BY PAUL M. COBB, University of Notre Dame

Appearances can be deceptive. As discrete forms of historical writing, Dhayls, or continuations, tend to be brief, even curt little things, and they give the impression that they merely offer scattered provincial afterthoughts to the “real” chronicles they claim to continue. But as the pioneering work of Li Guo has shown us, dhayls—perhaps especially Syrian dhayls—are not to be trifled with. Ibn al-Mughayzil’s dhayl of Ibn Wāṣil’s famous Ayyubid dynastic chronicle, the Mufarrij al-Kurūb, is a case in point. The edition under review here is a marvelous example of how this often misunderstood genre of historical writing can hold real treasures.

The editor of the text, ‘Umar Tadmurī, has done a very fine job of definitively identifying the author of the Dhayl, around whom a certain amount of confusion exists in the manuscript history and catalogues. Tadmurī has also fleshed out his portrait of the author with a sketch of the author’s family, a task for which readers will thank him given the prominence that family gossip has in Ibn al-Mughayzil’s work. As for the edition itself, it is based on two manuscripts of the work, attached to the two Paris manuscripts of Ibn Wāṣil’s Mufarrij al-Kurūb (as one would expect), Bibliothèque Nationale fonds arabe 1702 and 1703. It is unclear from the introduction whether Tadmurī has examined the Cairo or Istanbul manuscripts of the Mufarrij to see if Ibn al-Mughayzil’s Dhayl has been



appended there as well. In any case, the edition has left me with the unscientific impression of being a solid one: variants are reported, editorial readings seem sound, and the notes are filled with references to parallel accounts—this last feature a great boon to researchers.

Ibn al-Mughayzil (d. 701/1302) was born into a large notable family from Ḥamāh that included in their ranks a vizier, a qadi, a mufti, a muḥtasib, a khaṭīb, an imam, several traditionists, and a number of kuttāb, including our author. They provided their services to the Abbasid court in Baghdad, the Mamluk sultans in Cairo, and to various Ayyubid lords in Syria, especially that of Ḥamāh. In short, his family represents a cross-section of the medieval Syrian a‘yān. Ibn al-Mughayzil himself seems to have been raised in the household of his grandfather, the Maliki shaykh al-shuyūkh, and was sent on various missions with him or with other relatives. He was an eyewitness to Baybars’ campaigns against Franks and Mongols in Syria, and so must have been part of the administrative corps attached to the army—he doesn’t seem to be the warrior type himself. For the period 682–98/1283–99 he served as the kātib dīwān of al-Malik al-Muẓaffar, the Ayyubid lord of Ḥamāh. At al-Muẓaffar’s death in 1299, Ḥamāh briefly fell under the direct control of Mamluk Cairo. During this period, nothing is known of Ibn al-Mughayzil’s activities, though it is perhaps telling that when we next encounter him, it is away from Ḥamāh in 701/1302, by which time he had joined the entourage of a Mamluk amir sent to govern Tripoli, where he died later that year.

The work, as Tadmurī has determined, was written sometime between 696/1297 and 697/1298, or, to be precise, before the death of al-Muẓaffar on 22 Dhū al-Qa‘dah 697/31 August 1298, just a few years after the expulsion of the Franks from the Levant. It covers—in no way completely—the events of some thirty-four years, from 662 to 695/1263 to 1297, focusing on major political events. But the real importance of the work lies in the fact that the author provides both his own completely unique eyewitness accounts and transcripts of chancery documents related to such events as the conquest of Antioch in 666/1268, Ḥiṣn Marqab in 684/1285, and Tripoli in 688/1289, and the defeat of the Mongols at Elbistan in 675/1277, as well as unique accounts on the life and conduct of the sultan Baybars and other battles such as the conquest of Acre in 690/1291. It also includes a great deal of information on Ibn al-Mughayzil’s family and intellectual networks, as the author drops names like they were going out of style, and is always ready to quote samples of his own poetry for us.

Part chronicle, part autobiography, part inshā’ collection, part dīwān: there’s a little something for everyone in Ibn al-Mughayzil’s Dhayl. Historians interested in Mamluk Syria, conflicts with the Franks, Mamluk-Mongol relations, and the world of the “civilian elite” of medieval Syria will be rewarded in ways belied by the small size of this svelte volume. I recommend a copy for every Mamlukist’s bookshelf.



Book reviews ©2009 by review authors.

DOI: [10.6082/M1959FQJ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras III: Proceedings of the 6th, 7th and 8th International Colloquium Organized at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in May 1997, 1998 and 1999, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 102, edited by U. Vermeulen and J. Van Steenbergen (Leuven: Peeters, 2001).

REVIEWED BY ALBRECHT FUESS, Universität Erfurt/Équipe Monde Arabe et Méditerranée, Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Université de Tours

This conference volume is the product of three international colloquia on Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk eras which were organized at the Catholic University Leuven in May 1997, 1998, and 1999. This annual conference series started in 1992 and has been organized since on a yearly basis by Urbain Vermeulen and Jo van Steenbergen. The seventeenth colloquium of this kind was held in May of 2008 at the University of Ghent. The continuity of this effort underlines the importance of Belgian scholars in current research on the Middle East in the medieval period. In this context, certainly Frédéric “Maqriziana” Bauden from the University of Liège with his innovative work on Mamluk historiography has to be named as well.

The third volume of proceedings of the series contains seventeen English, five French, and two German articles. The papers are arranged chronologically. You will find three articles concerning the Fatimids and five concerning the Ayyubids. The majority of the articles (fifteen) deal with the Mamluk era. The conference volume covers therefore a time period of over five hundred years (969–1517). Fortunately Egypt and Syria receive equal attention and the work is therefore not leaning solely towards Egyptian history.

There is no thematic restriction. This leads to a large variety of topics which allows the authors the utmost flexibility and elucidates the depth and diversity of contemporary research.

Two articles focus mainly on the role of women in Muslim medieval societies. Recently Carl Petry and Lucian Reinfandt have already shown the importance of women as supervisors of charitable trusts (awqāf) in the Mamluk era, but other aspects of the history of women in Muslim medieval societies receive increased interest as well. Yaacov Lev, for example, explains (pp. 1–31) the social life of common and royal women in the Fatimid period. He provides us with an insight into some aspects of the daily life of common women and shows how the Fatimid royal women tried to cope with the problem that the participation of women in political life was on the one hand restricted, but on the other hand there were the needs of dynastic politics, which also necessitated public involvement. Amalia Levanoni (pp. 209–218) draws our attention to the most prominent woman of Mamluk times: Shajar al-Durr, the Mamluk sultana. As it is well known, she reigned as “queen of the Muslims” for three months in 1250 after the death of her husband al-Şāliḥ Ayyūb and the killing of the Ayyubid



Book reviews ©2009 by review authors.

DOI: [10.6082/M1959FQJ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ>)

heir al-Mu‘azzam Tūrān-Shāh. Although she had to leave the place of official ruler to a man after three months, the former Qipchaq slave girl played an extraordinary role in the ensuing power struggles until she was finally murdered in 1257. Amalia Levanoni explains this active role of Shajar al-Durr convincingly by the high status women were accorded in the Mongol regency of the Golden Horde, the homeland of the Qipchaq Turk Mamluks. Therefore the Mamluks accorded this prominent role to Shajar al-Durr in the formative period of the Mamluk Empire. Once they had found out that the Egyptian environment was fundamentally hostile to such experiments, the Mamluks never repeated it again.

Another important part of the conference volume deals with different forms of landownership, land taxes, and pious endowments. Stuart Borsch has recently worked out in his *The Black Death in Egypt and England*⁴ that Egypt had an entirely agrarian economy in the Middle Ages and “derived almost all of its Gross National Product from agrarian revenue. . . . Long-distance trade played a subordinate role in the overall development of Egypt’s economy.”⁵ When we take these findings into consideration than we can understand how important it was for Mamluk society to define the access to the revenues of agrarian income even in the provinces. Yehoshua Frenkel (pp. 193–208) explains therefore the different aspects of land tenure in Mamluk Palestine, especially as income for the military, and the same author (pp. 33–49) also draws attention to the ketubba (Jewish marriage document) as a source for the study of the economic history of the Fatimid period.

C. Morisot (pp. 309–28) explains that it was common practice for merchants to possess for pious foundations “*waqf des commerçants*” and he explains in detail the content of such *waqf* documents. Urbain Vermeulen reflects on the circumstances which led to the issue of a tax lowering document for fourteenth-century Damascus, while Johannes Pahlitzsch (329–44) elaborates on the more spiritual background of the endowment practice in Mamluk Jerusalem, thereby comparing it to contemporary Christian concepts.

Of course, such a conference volume broadens our knowledge about less-known manuscripts. Angelika Hartmann (pp. 89–100) does so with the Syrian chronicle *Al-Tārīkh al-Manṣūrī* of Ibn Naẓīf al-Ḥamawī from the thirteenth century, who is apparently one of best informed historiographers of the Ayyubid period, but the question remains if another copy of the manuscript is to be found in the future apart from the one in St. Petersburg. M. Aguiar Aguilar (pp. 163–70) discusses Arabic treatises on the sinical quadrant in the Mamluk period, which served to provide answers to problems of spherical trigonometry.

⁴Austin, 2005.

⁵Borsch, *Black Death*, 19.

Book reviews ©2009 by review authors.



DOI: [10.6082/M1959FQJ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ>)

Needless to say, aspects of archaeology and architecture form an integral part of the book. Lorenz Korn (pp. 123–37) demonstrates his broad expertise when explaining the attitude of contemporary historiography towards Ayyubid building activities, thereby stating that it was increasingly popular among authors of late Ayyubid and early Mamluk times to describe buildings, and that criticism from religious scholars for constructing profane buildings is hardly to be found. The same author (pp. 101–21) provides us with a detailed study of al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb's madrasah in Cairo.

The contributions of Hanisch (pp. 61–88) and Petersen (pp. 345–406) deal with the archaeological evidence for the planning of castles and towns in Ayyubid and Mamluk times. In these articles the military function of places and fortresses is explored as well.

There are three papers which deal mainly with military issues. P.-V. Claverie clarifies the role of the Templars of Catalonia in the final defense of the Frankish Crusader kingdoms up to the fall of the island of Arwād/Rouad opposite Tartūs in 1302 and the beginning of the juridical process against the Templars in Cyprus in 1310. The importance of the Templars in the diplomatic relations of Catalonia with the Mamluk Empire and the Persian Ilkhanate is explored as well.

David Nicolle's article (pp. 139–62) touches on a crucial point in the military history of the Near and Middle East, i.e., the scarcity of necessary raw materials from the tenth to the fourteenth century. He demonstrates how the especially vital iron had to be imported from Europe, Anatolia, and India. On the other hand, this scarcity of raw materials led to special forms of armament such as hardened leather. The article provides numerous further aspects dealing with the manufacture and storage of arms. Moreover it provides an excellent appendix of eleven pages for further reading on the topic. Equally valuable is Dionisus Agius' (pp. 49–60) work on the Arab shalandī in the Fatimid era. Shalandī is the name given by the Arabs to a special type of Byzantine war vessel. Agius enlightens us here with a further insight into Arab shipbuilding, classifies the different types of ships used by Muslims, and discusses the scarcity of wood in the region. The shalandī seems to be originally a Byzantine warship and the name apparently derives from the Greek. It seems that the shalandī was decked and that we can see here a difference from other contemporary ship types. The Fatimids ordered the buildings of shalandīs in Egypt in order to be competitive with the Byzantines. However, it seems from my point of view that the shalandīs were as powerless as the rest of the Fatimid navy against the Crusaders. We do not hear of the shalandīs in later periods and especially not in Mamluk times. But the Mamluks did not have a navy worthy of the name anyhow.

The last cluster of themes which can be grouped together in the present conference volume deals with aspects of the civilian and military elites in



Book reviews ©2009 by review authors.

DOI: [10.6082/M1959FQJ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

the Mamluk Empire. Bernadette Martel-Thoumian (pp. 271–308) reflects first on the role of the urban elites in the Circassian period, before describing in detail the life of Muḥibb al-Dīn Salāmah ibn Yūsuf al-Aslamī, a very prominent secretary in Damascus on the eve of the Ottoman conquest (pp. 219–70).

Another interesting double set of articles concerning members of the civilian elite in Mamluk Syria is provided by G. Schallenberg, who explains the negative attitude of the famous Damascene scholar Ibn Taymiyah towards the Shi‘ah (pp. 407–20), before elaborating on the most prominent disciple of Ibn Taymiyah, i.e., Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, and his spiritual way to healing “the diseases of the heart,” in his second contribution (pp. 421–28).

Finally, Jo van Steenbergen (pp. 429–48) explains the functioning of the Mamluk governorship in Damascus from 1341 to 1382 and provides a list of all Mamluk governors of the period. In a second article (pp. 449–66) the same author examines the question of whether the powerful amir Qawṣūn was a statesman or a courtier. Van Steenbergen concludes that Qawṣūn was a pawn in the double policy of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. Qawṣūn had been installed by the sultan to counterbalance other powerful Mamluk factions, but after the death of the sultan, Qawṣūn had not been capable of building enough alliances to hang on to power and therefore he was overthrown in 1342. (In this context I would like to point out the very good recent study of Henning Sievert, who has examined the structures behind Mamluk succession struggles in the Circassian period: *Der Herrscherwechsel im Mamlukensultanat: Historische und historiographische Untersuchungen zu Abū Ḥāmid al-Qudṣī und Ibn Taḡribirdī* [Berlin, 2003]). Regarding the case of the succession of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, van Steenbergen concludes, alluding to the ambiguous role of the sultan: “But as soon as the puppeteer left his play, the system collapsed and chaos seemed about to ensue” (p. 466). But as van Steenbergen knows all too well himself, there will be always “Order Out of Chaos.”

To sum up: All contributions to this conference volume are of high scholarly standard and display thematic depth and intellectual sharpness. Moreover, the book provides starting points for further research. It has to be clearly acknowledged that the Belgian conference series with the accompanying proceedings in Leuven, and nowadays Ghent, are one of the few established and vital scientific platforms where scholars of medieval Egypt and Syria can present their current research and intensify international academic contacts.



TAMĪM MAʾMŪN MARDAM BEK, *Al-Malik Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī al-Ashraf wa-al-Wazīr Lālā Muṣṭafá Bāshā Dhī al-Sayf al-Aḥnaf* (Damascus: Maktabat Dār Ṭulās, 2007).

REVIEWED BY IGARASHI DAISUKE, Japan Society for the Promotion of Science,
The Toyo Bunko

The title of this book is an arrangement of the names of Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī—the de facto last Mamluk sultan, who was killed in the Battle of Marj Dābiq, which was fought between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Ottoman Empire in 1516—and of Vizier Lālā Muṣṭafá Pasha, who held various governmental posts including the governorship of Damascus (1561–68) and took the command of the army in various campaigns such as the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus (1571) under the reign of the Ottoman sultan Suleyman I (r. 1520–66) and Selim II (r. 1566–74)—both of whom were prominent military rulers but appear to have no connection with each other. This title might sound strange until one studies the family tree of its author. The Mardam Bek family, one of Syria’s most distinguished, traces its ancestry back to this very Lālā Muṣṭafá Pasha. Lālā Muṣṭafá Pasha was married to Fāṭimah, the daughter of al-Ghawrī’s son al-Nāṣirī Muḥammad and his wife, the daughter of Amir Sibāy (the viceroy of Damascus under al-Ghawrī). This implies that the author of the book is a fifteenth-generation descendant of al-Ghawrī and, at the same time, a thirteenth-generation descendant of Lālā Muṣṭafá Pasha. In addition, the author’s great-grandfather was married to a woman who was the eleventh-generation descendant of Sibāy. Therefore, this book is not so much an academic study as it is an introduction to the author’s own great ancestors.

This book is comprised of the following six chapters: (1) The biography of Sultan al-Ghawrī, (2) the biography of Sibāy, (3) the biography of al-Nāṣirī Muḥammad al-Ghawrī, (4) the biography of Fāṭimah Khātūn al-Ghawrī (the wife of Lālā Muṣṭafá Pasha), (5) the biography of Vizier Lālā Muṣṭafá Pasha, and (6) the genealogical tree of the Mardam Bek family (an additional chapter).

Although this book contains some interesting information regarding these historical figures, unfortunately, we must state that it is inappropriate for academic use. This is because it disregards the basic principles of academic writing. For example, Chapter 1 includes al-Ghawrī’s brief biography and the “edited” text of two Arabic sources—*Nafāʾis al-Majālis al-Sultāniyah fī Ḥaqāʾiq al-Asrār al-Qurʾāniyah* (by Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī) and *Al-Kawkab al-Durri fī Masāʾil al-Ghawrī*. Both of these sources include dozens of questions (most of which pertain to religious matters) submitted by al-Ghawrī to the sultanic council (*majlis*) along with the ulama’s answers.



Book reviews ©2009 by review authors.

DOI: [10.6082/M1959FQJ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ>)

However, almost the entire chapter is copied word for word from ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ‘Azzām’s *Majālis al-Sultān al-Ghawri: Ṣafḥāt min Tārīkh Miṣr fi al-Qarn al-‘Āshir al-Hijrī* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Lajnat al-Ta’līf wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr, 1941), probably without referring to the original manuscripts of the two Arabic sources. In addition, the author has added some trivial information, including excerpts from Wikipedia. This problem applies not only to this chapter but to entire sections within the book. Due to the defectiveness of his annotation, it is impossible to know exactly what information and details are being relied on for authority. Moreover, the author has not clearly demarcated which descriptions he has written himself and which descriptions are quoted from papers written by other researchers.

Thus, it is hard to say that this book meets the acceptable levels for academic study. Nonetheless, it does not diminish the value of research on this unique family that originated through the formation of marital relationships among members of the military elite of the destroyed old regime and of the new empire at its peak. It is expected that the book will inspire further research on this family by specialists in Mamluk and Ottoman history.

MUḤAMMAD ‘ALĪ ṢUWAYRIKĪ, *‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyah: Fāḍilat al-Zamān (865–922 H = 1460–1516 M)* (Amman: Wizārat al-Thaqafah, 2006). Pp. 203.

REVIEWED BY TH. EMIL HOMERIN, University of Rochester

This book was published to coincide with UNESCO’s commemoration of ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyah and her contributions to human knowledge and culture approximately five centuries after her death. The book was compiled by Muḥammad ‘Alī Ṣuwayrikī, who offers a concise biography of ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyah and a list of her writings (pp. 11–50), followed by a small sampling of her poetry with little commentary (pp. 51–67). The third section of the book contains two works by ‘Ā’ishah in praise of the prophet Muḥammad, her famous *badī‘iyah*, *Al-Faṭḥ al-Mubīn fi Madḥ al-Amīn*, and one of her *mawliids*, *Al-Mawrid al-Ahná fi al-Mawlid al-Asná* (pp. 69–184). The final section of the book contains brief proclamations by various Jordanian ministries and writers in support of UNESCO’s recognition of ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyah (pp. 185–98).

The book is clearly a commemorative volume aimed at a literate Arab public. Ṣuwayrikī openly acknowledges that he drew all of his material from Arabic secondary sources; he seems unaware of Western scholarship



Book reviews ©2009 by review authors.

DOI: [10.6082/M1959FQJ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

on ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyah¹ For his biography, bibliography, and selection of poems, Şuwayrikī relied heavily on Ḥasan Rabābi‘ah’s ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyah: Shā‘irah (1997)²; while reprinting editions of ‘Ā’ishah’s works from Fāris Aḥmad al-‘Alāwī’s ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyah al-Dimashqīyah (1994),³ complete with notes, minor omissions, and typographical errors. It is clear that Şuwayrikī is not a scholar of Mamluk literature, and that the book under review offers no new scholarship, though it is a readable general introduction to the life and work of ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyah, a very gifted Sufi poet of the Mamluk period.

DANIELLA TALMON-HELLER, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria: Mosques, Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and Ayyūbids (1146-1260)*, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture (Leiden: Brill, 2007). Pp. 332.

REVIEWED BY ZAYDE ANTRIM, Trinity College

This meticulously researched and lucid monograph is a valuable contribution to ongoing investigations into the religious culture of medieval Muslims. In it, Daniella Talmon-Heller tackles two thorny and persistent questions faced by scholars in this area of inquiry: first, did the experience of communal worship create actionable corporate solidarities for medieval Muslims at an intermediate level between the *ummah* on the one hand and the family on the other? And second, is it appropriate to speak of a “popular” culture of worship in tension with the “high” or “orthodox” religious authority of the ulama? The answer to both questions, Talmon-Heller convincingly argues, is “no,” though more emphatically in the latter case than in the former.

Although her theoretical framework for the study is far-reaching and comparative, informed by anthropologists of religion and cultural historians as well as works on late antique and medieval Christianity and Judaism, Talmon-Heller sets herself in most direct dialogue with scholars of Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt and Syria, such as Stephen Humphreys, Louis Pouzet, Michael Chamberlain, Jonathan Berkey, and Charles Taylor. Talmon-Heller makes clear the particular influence on her thinking of works by Berkey and Taylor, which “place at the center of their inquiry the religious experience of the individual rather than power relations” (p. 21), although she does not always find herself in agreement with their conclusions, partly because both of them focus primarily on Egypt in the Mamluk period while she focuses on Syria in the earlier Zangid and Ayyubid

¹ E.g., MSR 7, [no. 1] (2003): 211–34.

² See *ibid.*, 236–39.

³ See MSR 6 (2002): 191–92.

Book reviews ©2009 by review authors.



DOI: [10.6082/M1959FQJ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ>)

periods. By elucidating aspects of the overlapping, and often intimately linked, ritual practices of the ulama, the ruling elite, and the unlettered masses, Talmon-Heller's research on the "hybrid religious orientations" (p. 1) of medieval Syrian society adds an important layer to the aforementioned studies of the complex religious life of this period.

Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria is divided into three sections, all of which draw from an extensive and diverse body of sources, including narrative histories and geographies, religious treatises, administrative manuals, and inscriptions, to occupy the spaces and observe the practices of medieval Syrian religiosity. The first section deals with mosques, their physical structures, their personnel, and the activities associated with them; the second moves from the mosque to the cemetery and the shrine, addressing similar issues and generally interpreting them as extensions and/or alternate sites of the same religious sensibilities expressed in and around mosques; the third section subjects the same sources from which she extracts empirical data in the first two sections to discourse analysis in order to gain a better understanding of the meaning of piety and impiety in Syrian society of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In all three sections, Talmon-Heller demonstrates an impressive facility with her wide-ranging source base as well as an uncompromising critical eye: she is as ready to assert her findings from the sources as she is to remind us of their limitations. While there is insight to be gained from all three sections, the first section represents the most comprehensive and original contribution to the existing literature.

The achievement of Talmon-Heller's in-depth study of mosques in medieval Syria is the portrait it paints of "truly popular and vibrant institutions, accommodating a loosely organized body of faithful, men, women and children" (p. 145). Mosques in this period were public spaces par excellence, marked by extreme inclusivity. Despite the admonitions of some (but by no means all) members of the ulama against inappropriate uses of mosques (for women's prayer, sleeping, selling, emotive displays, political dissent, special devotions) they were enthusiastically and repeatedly put to all of these uses and more. As the sheer number of mosques in both urban and rural areas increased considerably during the Zangid and Ayyubid periods, the concomitant increase in the amount of space available for such activities made possible an increase in the activities themselves as well as the number of people participating. Moreover, although some members of the ulama looked askance at some mosque activities, at least an equal number joined right in and/or furnished the leadership in the role of preacher (*khaṭīb*) or prayer leader (*imām*) necessary to produce and reproduce the "culture of pluralism and heterogeneity" in Syrian mosques (p. 144). Talmon-Heller skillfully weaves together anecdotes about mosque building, biographies of preachers, transcripts of sermons, and descriptions of the ever-popular "assembly of exhortation" (*majlis al-wa'z*) to evoke a culture of mosque-going in which ulama, commoners, and princes mingled, perhaps to different ends but by shared means. In this culture



Book reviews ©2009 by review authors.

DOI: [10.6082/M1959FQJ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

the ulama acted more as mediators between social groups than as arbiters of an orthodox Islam.

Did this culture produce corporate solidarity in the form of local self-regulating and self-conscious congregations? In general, Talmon-Heller answers in the negative—at least in terms of what the extant sources allow us to see—with one important exception: the Hanbali communities of Syria, and Damascus in particular, tended to coalesce around strong leaders who created a sense of belonging to a community of worship, usually coterminous with a neighborhood or suburb. Nevertheless, Talmon-Heller is not willing to go as far as Michael Chamberlain in downplaying the importance of associative identities above the level of the individual family but below the level of the *umma*. She suggests—and argues her sources suggest—the presence of a culture, a mosque-going culture, or a culture of piety, in medieval Syria that had the capacity to bind a broad range of people together, even if only for the length of time (admittedly, sometimes quite epic) of one of the assemblies of exhortation led by the famous preacher Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī in early thirteenth-century Damascus.

This sense of belonging to a culture of piety for which the mosque was the chief public space can also be extended to the spaces of the cemetery and the shrine. Just as the number of mosques in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Syria increased, so too did the number of shrines and cemeteries designated (whether officially or unofficially) as destinations for pious visitation (*ziyārah*). In the second section of *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria*, Talmon-Heller contributes to earlier studies of *ziyārah* in medieval Syria by including a discussion of the translation of relics in this process, by setting the visitation of tombs in the context of Crusade-era inter-faith encounter and conflict, and by observing the coexistence between, and occasional patronage of both, Shi‘i and Sunni sites of visitation. The invocation of blessing (*barakah*) and intercession (*shafā‘ah*) on behalf of either the living or the dead, Talmon-Heller argues, was the primary goal of founding, preserving, and visiting cemeteries and shrines for people from across the social spectrum. In accordance with the book’s overall argument, these sites should be seen as widely accessible and well-used “outlets for piety in a ‘pious age’” (p. 207), rather than merely expressions of political propaganda or new doctrines of sainthood (though they could be these things as well).

In the final section of the book, Talmon-Heller turns to the meaning of piety in this period. She identifies two trends, moderate Sufism and moderate Hanbalism, converging in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Syria to produce an ecumenical understanding of piety that embraced both activism and asceticism. Particularly revealing of what constituted piety in this period, she argues, was the discourse on impiety that made up a good part of the scholarly production of the ulama. While Talmon-Heller does not dismiss interpretations of this discourse as a struggle over religious authority or power among elites, she insists that the *content* of the discourse was meaningful in and of itself to the individuals who participated in



Book reviews ©2009 by review authors.

DOI: [10.6082/M1959FQJ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

the discourse and to those whom they led in worship at mosques, cemeteries, and shrines. “From the point of view of our medieval informants, correct belief, legitimate behavior, and the construction of boundaries between right and wrong indeed were at stake; not merely political benefits disguised as debates about religion” (p. 227). Thus, condemnations of astrology, philosophy, and antinomian Sufism should be seen as expressions of commitment to the shari‘ah and the Quran as the most important moral standards for social and spiritual life. The Syria presented by Talmon-Heller was one in which the ulama, the ruling elite, and the unlettered masses shared a religiosity informed by this mainstream understanding of piety: “an outlook successfully disseminated in all echelons of society thanks to its highly inclusive character, and to the efficient activity of its agents in the central arenas of the mosque, the cemetery, the shrine, and the public assembly of exhortation” (p. 251).

In *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria*, Daniella Talmon-Heller has given scholars of many fields, including cultural history, anthropology, and religion, a gift of meticulous research and lively prose. Reading the book is a delightful experience for the specialist, as the copious anecdotes Talmon-Heller relates from her sources (often with full Arabic transliteration) capture the sensibilities and senses of humor that pervade literary production from this period. Perhaps its greatest contribution is its presentation of an alternate vision of religious culture grounded in time and place that complicates assumptions about tensions between “high/elite” and “low/popular” versions of Islam.

SHAMS AL-DĪN MUḤAMMAD IBN ḤASAN IBN ‘ALĪ AL-NAWĀJĪ, *Ta’hīl al-Gharīb*, edited by Aḥmad Muḥammad ‘Atā’ (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 1425/2005). Pp. 1165.

REVIEWED BY GEERT JAN VAN GELDER, University of Oxford

Tāhīl al-Gharīb (“Familiarizing the Strange,” or, if one prefers, “Making the Stranger Feel at Home”) is a very large anthology, now edited for the first time, of longer poems on lyrical themes, mostly love, including introductory *nasīb* sections of panegyric poems. It was compiled by al-Nawājī (d. 859/1455), himself a poet but now better known as the author of the Bacchic anthology *Ḥalbat al-Kumayt*. The present collection, apparently made in emulation of an anthology with the same title by his friend (and later enemy) Ibn Ḥijjah al-Ḥamawī, contains more than one thousand pieces, some 12,000 verses in all, mostly from the seventh/thirteenth, eighth/fourteenth, and ninth/fifteenth centuries, arranged alphabetically



Book reviews ©2009 by review authors.

DOI: [10.6082/M1959FQJ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

according to rhyme-letter, each section subdivided into rhymes ending in $-ū$, $-ā$, $-ī$, *sukūn*, and rhymes with a suffix. This, incidentally, enables us at times to see how poems are based on earlier models in emulation (*mu'āraḍah*) or parody (see, e.g., poems nos. 767–774, with quotations from Imru' al-Qays's *Mu'allaqah*). The poet most often quoted is Ibn Nubātah, with 141 pieces, followed at considerable distance by Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī, Bahā' al-Dīn Zuhayr, Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk, Ibn al-Nabīh, al-Nawājī himself, and Ibn Ḥijjah al-Ḥamawī. The earliest periods are represented minimally: there is only one pre-Islamic poem (by Zuhayr) and seven from the Umayyad period. Abbasid times are better represented, but the great majority of poets and poems (727 of a total of 1068) date from the Mamluk period. Apart from the well-known poets mentioned above there are many others, including lesser known poets; 48 pieces are anonymous. The compiler has provided no commentary or context, apart from indicating, where appropriate, if the poem was made as a panegyric; in such cases the piece stops at the *takhalluṣ*, or transition from the lyrical introduction to the panegyric section. He set himself the task of including poems rhyming in every letter of the alphabet, even the less popular rhyme letters: there are only three pieces rhyming in *z*, five in *gh*, and, as he tells us, he was forced to compose a poem in *kh* himself for the occasion, after searching for years in vain for a suitable piece in this rare rhyme (better suited to lampooning than to lyrical themes).

Perhaps surprisingly, no *muwashshahāt* or *azjāl* are included; the only strophic form represented is the *takhmīs*, with rhyming hemistichs of the pattern *a1a2a3a4a5 b1b2b3b4a6 c1c2c3c4a7*, etc., often embedding an earlier *qaṣīdah* (*a4a5 b4a6 c4a7 . . .*); see nos. 198, 262, 264, 430, 555, 775, 1047. Love is the dominant theme, but there are wine poems too, such as the very first one, by Abū Nuwās (the famous *Da' 'anka lawmī . . .*), one of the very few poems in the collection that could be classified as *mujūn* (see vs. 3). Wine and obscenity are also present in a sequence of poems (nos. 740 to 743) beginning with one by al-Nawājī inviting a friend to a party. Ibn al-Fāriḍ's famous wine poem (*Sharibnā 'alá dhikri l-ḥabībi mudāmatan . . .*) is also quoted in its entirety, and one may justly wonder—as so often without arriving at an unambiguous answer—how many of the *ghazal* poems are to be taken in a mystical rather than (or in addition to) a profane sense. There is some descriptive poetry: Ibn Nubātah's depiction of a shooting trip with the crossbow (no. 430), Ibn al-Ṣā'igh's description of Damascus (no. 662), Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī on a candle (no. 1006). Twelve poems take the form of a riddle, e.g., nos. 38 (on a water-skin), 217 (a pigeon), 233 (a prayer mat), 975 (the sweetmeats *kunāfah* and *qaṭā'if*). One poem, by al-Nawājī (no. 763), is an acrostic in which the initial



letters of the ten verses spell “‘Alī al-Zarkashī,” the name of the boy whose praises are sung, a form less usual in Arabic than in Western literatures.

The editor, who must be thanked for making this rich collection accessible, has provided useful appendices on the poets and, in his introduction, some statistics on the poets and the periods represented in the anthology. Although *Tāhīl al-Gharīb* is preserved in several manuscripts, the editor says (pp. 40–41) that only one was available to him (Cairo, Maḥad al-makḥṭūṭāt, no. 2406); his written requests for microfilms from other libraries (Paris, Topkapı, British Museum) were, apparently, not honored with answers. This is deplorable, but collating the various manuscripts and adding variants to the apparatus would have added considerably to the editor’s efforts as well as to the size of the already bulky paperback. The Cairo manuscript, according to the editor, is riddled with scribal errors and the order of its folios is in some disarray. In his annotation the editor points out obvious errors in the manuscript and variants offered by *dīwāns* or other sources. Since the manuscript is unvoweled he has also provided nearly full vocalization.

This does not mean, unfortunately, that the edited text is as free from error as could be desired. It does not matter much, perhaps, if the meter of a poem is wrongly identified by the editor (no. 256 is not *rajaz* but *kāmīl*, no. 1002 is not *sarīf* but *munsarīh*, no. 1068 is not *madīd* but *ramal*); but it is another matter when such misidentifications, ignorance of the meter, or general carelessness results in faulty readings and vocalizations. Thus the fifteen verses of poem no. 1068, by Abū al-Faḍl Ibn Abī al-Wafā, contain a rich sprinkling of errors: *muhjatuhū* read *muhjatun*, *fiya* read *fī* (twice), *bulītu* read *baliyat*, *āhin* read *āhi*, *al-ḥayyā* read *al-ḥayā*, *arwāhuhum* read *arwāḥahumū*, *ab‘ada tamuwwuhā* (?) read *ab‘adtumūhā*, *wa-hiya* read *wa-hya*, *qaḍaytu muddata* read *quḍiyat muddatu*. Poem 256, by Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Makḥzūmī, fares little better: *ḥumran* read *ḥamrā‘u*, *awdat ba‘ḍa l-bānati* read perhaps *aw dhāti ghuṣni l-bānati*, *jīdan* read *jaydā‘a*, *aw in / anshadat ghannat* read *aw anshadat / ghannat*, *lā taḥfalanna* read *lā taḥfilan*, *ṣufratan lawnihi* read *ṣufrata lawnihi*, *ghīdan* read *ghaydā‘u*, *la-adḥā* read presumably *lā ṣaḥbi*, *wa-ḥaltu* read *wa-ḥalītu*, *lākinna dhawā‘iba* read *lākin dhawā‘ibu*). These poems may not be representative, but there are other pages with a similar density of mistakes. The first five lines of a poem in *ṭawīl* (no. 354) by Ibn Makānis are unmetrical and have been left uncorrected (*li-hawāhu* read *lahwihī*, *min al-mudāmi kumaytan* read *mudāma kumaytin*, *fa-innahā* read *fa-inna*, *wa-l-Iskandarā* read—to make it scan!—*wa-l-Issikandarā*, *wa-qaṣrin Qayṣarā* read *wa-qaṣrin tuṣuwwirā*).

Within its self-chosen thematic limitation, the collection shows off so-called post-classical Arabic poetry at its best, or perhaps one ought to say at its most accessible to a modern readership: lyrical verse, without extremes of difficulty, artifice, fulsome panegyric, tedious piety, or dreary didacticism: a kind of *Golden Treasury* of Arabic verse (but one that, unlike Palgrave’s English anthology, will not easily fit into any pocket).



Book reviews ©2009 by review authors.

DOI: [10.6082/M1959FQJ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ>)

DOI of Vol. XIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M1S180KZ](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1S180KZ). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/H4JA-V574> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

IBN AL-JI'ĀN, *Al-Qawl al-Mustazraf fi Safar al-Malik al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy*, and ANONYMOUS, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy*, edited by Muḥammad Zaynuhum (Cairo: al-Dār al-Thaqāfiyah lil-Nashr, 2006). Pp. 142.

REVIEWED BY LI GUO, University of Notre Dame

Two historical accounts of the reign of the Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy (r. 901–3/1496–98) are published here. The first, the title of which is translated by Carl Petry as “The elegant report recounting the voyage of . . . the esteemed monarch,” is a log of the sultan’s journey that “describes conditions of rural life as well as receptions accorded the royal guests by provincial officials.”⁴ The author, Abū al-Baqā’ Muḥammad Ibn al-Ji’ān, served as deputy to Qāyṭbāy’s privy secretary Zayn al-Dīn Ibn Muzhir and participated in the sultan’s trip through Syria to the Euphrates frontier in 882/1477.⁵ The work was published once before, with a French translation, by H. Devonshire, in the IFAO *Bulletin* 20 (1922): 2–40.

None of the above is mentioned in the Introduction to the present “edition.” Worse, it did not even get the author right, claiming the author to be Abū al-Barakāt Ibn al-Ji’ān, “the brother of Abū al-Baqā’” (p. 6), instead. Since I have not seen the manuscript upon which the present edition is based—a hand copy from the Maḥad al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-‘Arabīyah in Cairo of a manuscript attributed to one “Ibn al-Ji’ān” housed in the Dār al-Kutub (tārīkh 210)—I am not in a position to determine whether the error has to do with the substandard catalogue system in the Dār al-Kutub, or with the less-than-diligent homework on the part of the editor. Of the several Ibn al-Ji’āns, Abū al-Barakāt, who is *not* the author, seems to be an easy choice: anecdotes about his blind loyalty to the sultan are well documented in the chronicles⁶ and are quoted verbatim, without naming the sources, in lieu of an adequate biography (even for the wrong person) in the Introduction. The Introduction does not shed light on the manuscript situation of the work either; there is therefore no way of knowing whether the Cairo manuscript used for this edition is among the ones listed by Carl Brockelmann⁷ and utilized by the Devonshire 1922 edition, or not.

The next text is perhaps more interesting. Despite the fact that scholars have long been aware of it,⁸ it has remained in manuscript form—and there is a good reason for that. This “*précis* of Qāyṭbāy’s reign,” in Carl Petry’s assessment, does

⁴Carl Petry, *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamlūk Sultans al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy and Qānṣūh al-Ghawri in Egypt* (Seattle and London, 1993), 11–12; idem, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt’s Waning as a Great Power* (Albany, 1994), 8.

⁵Petry, *Twilight*, 11.

⁶See Petry, *Protectors*, 135.

⁷*Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, 2:38, S2:26.

⁸*Ibid.*, 2:38.



not yield “any original information.”⁹ The present edition is based on a codex from the Ma‘had al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-‘Arabīyah in Cairo, which in turn is a copy of a manuscript in the Dār al-Kutub (8554 ḥ). According to the Introduction (p. 5), the “manuscript” (of the Ma‘had or the DK?) consists of 82 folios (*waraqah*). In the present edition the full text runs some 60 pages (pp. 41–117), with footnotes. The footnotes are very odd. They are too long on the things we already know, such as the hadith transmitters ranging from al-Bukhārī to Abū Hurayrah, but frustratingly short, or nearly absent, on the things we really want to know, namely persons and technical terms of the time in question. It seems that the editor tried hard to give the book a “scholarly” look: in addition to Introduction, text, and footnotes, which all turn out to be unscholarly, it includes several indexes and a bibliography. Upon closer examination, the seemingly scholastic apparatus again reveals its inadequacies. While some of the indexes are not totally unhelpful, some are inadequate. For example, the index of verses (p. 137) fails to cite the full *matla‘* (opening line) with the rhyme (*al-qāfiyah*) of any given poem; as a result, it is useless. The long bibliography (pp. 137–42) looks impressive for such a slim volume, but again, it lacks substance: the majority of it is made up of titles irrelevant to late Mamluk historiography, to say nothing of the recent publications on Sultan Qāyṭbāy.

⁹Petry, *Twilight*, 12; idem, *Protectors*, 8.

Book reviews ©2009 by review authors.



DOI: 10.6082/M1959FQJ. (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1959FQJ>)

LIST OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- AMĀYIRAH, KHĀLID MUḤAMMAD. *Mawānī' al-Baḥr al-Aḥmar wa-Atharuhā fi Tijārat Dawlat al-Mamālik*. Riyadh: Dārat al-Malik 'Abd al-'Azīz, 2007. Pp. 443.
- DĀWŪD, JURJ ṬARĪF. *Ḥalab fi al-'Aṣr al-Mamlūkī al-Awwal 1259–1381*. Amman: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah, 2008. Pp. 282.
- ḤALLĀQ, ḤASSĀN. *Mu'jam al-Jāmi' fi al-Muṣṭalaḥāt al-'Uthmāniyah dhāt al-Uṣūl al-'Arabīyah wa-al-Fārisīyah wa-al-Turkiyah wa-al-Ayyūbiyah wa-al-Mamlūkiyah: al-Muṣṭalaḥāt al-Idāriyah wa-al-'Askariyah wa-al-Siyāsīyah wa-al-Iqtisādīyah wa-al-Ijtimā'īyah wa-al-Dīniyah wa-al-'Ā'iliyah*. Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabīyah lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr, 2009. Pp. 256.
- HAMADHĀNĪ, MUḤAMMAD IBN 'ABD AL-MALIK. *Qīṭa' Tārīkhīyah min Kitāb 'Unwān al-Siyar fi Maḥāsin Ahl al-Badw wa-al-Ḥadar, aw Al-Ma'ārīf al-Muta'akhhirah, wa-bi-Dhaylihi Shadharāt min Kitāb 'Umarā' al-Ḥajj*. Edited by Shāyī' 'Abd al-Hādī al-Hājirī. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2008. Pp. 384.
- IBN IYĀS, MUḤAMMAD IBN AḤMAD. *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr fi Waqā'i' al-Duhūr*. Edited by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā. 3rd edition. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wa-al-Wathā'iq al-Qawmīyah, 2008. 5 vols.
- IBN AL-JAZARĪ, MUḤAMMAD IBN MUḤAMMAD. *Al-Ḥiṣn al-Ḥasīn min Kalām Sayyid al-Murāsīlīn*. Kuwait City: Ghirās, 2008. Pp. 435.
- IBN AL-JAZARĪ, MUḤAMMAD IBN MUḤAMMAD. *Al-Iḥkām fi Dabṭ al-Muqaddimah al-Jazarīyah; wa-Tuḥfat al-Atfāl wa-al-Ghilmān fi Tajwīd al-Qur'ān, naẓm Sulaymān ibn Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Jamzūrī*. Edited by Muḥammad ibn Fallāḥ al-Muṭayrī. Kuwait City: Ghirās, 2008. Pp. 200.
- IBN TAGHRĪBIRDĪ, ABŪ AL-MAḤĀSIN YŪSUF. *Al-Dalīl al-Shāfi' alá al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*. Edited by Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt. 2nd edition. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyah, 1998. 2 vols.
- IBN TAYMĪYAH, AḤMAD IBN 'ABD AL-ḤALĪM. *Al-Ta'liqāt al-Tawḥīdīyah alá Muqaddimat al-Fatwá al-Ḥamawīyah*. Commentary by Ṣāliḥ ibn Fawzān ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Fawzān. Edited by 'Ādil ibn Muḥammad Mursī Rifā'ī. Riyadh: Dār al-'Āshimāh lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2008. Pp. 300.

- ISMĀ'ĪL, İKTİMĀL. *Al-Ĥamalāt al-Maghuliyah wa-Āthāruhā al-Ijtimā'iyah wa-al-Iqtisādīyah 'alā Bilād al-Shām, 1250-1400 M.* Damascus: Dār wa-Mu'assasat Raslān, 2008. Pp. 276.
- JAMZŪRĪ, SULAYMĀN IBN ḤUSAYN IBN MUḤAMMAD. *Tuḥfat al-Atfāl wa-al-Ghilmān fī Tajwīd al-Qur'ān.* See under Ibn al-Jazari, *Al-Iḥkam fī Ḍabṭ al-Muqaddimah al-Jazariyah.*
- KAHIL, ABDALLAH. *The Sultan Ḥasan Complex in Ciaor, 1357-1364: A Case Study in the Formation of Mamluk Style.* Beirut: Orient-Institut der DMG Beirut, 2008. Pp. xxxiii + 403.
- SHA'RĀNĪ, 'ABD AL-WAHHĀB IBN AḤMAD. *Mukhtaṣar al-I'tiqād lil-Imām al-Bayhaqī.* Edited by Yūsuf Raḍwān Kūd. With an introduction by Jūdah Muḥammad Abū al-Yazīd al-Mahdī. Cairo: Dār al-Karaz lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2008. Pp. 311.
- SHILLĪ, FAYṢAL. *Bilād al-Shām fī Zill al-Dawlah al-Mamlūkiyah al-Thāniyah: Dawlat al-Jarākisah al-Burjīyah, 1381-1517 M.* Damascus: Dār al-Zaman, 2008. Pp. 320.
- SUBAYTĪ, MUṢṬAFĀ MAḤMŪD. *Al-Mamālīk wa-Āthāruhum al-Dīniyah fī Lubnān, 648-922 H., 1251-1516 M.: Bayrūt, Ṣaydā, Ba'labak, Ṭarābulus.* Beirut: Dār al-Mawāsīm lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2008. Pp. 327.
- SUBKĪ, TĀJ AL-DĪN 'ABD AL-WAHHĀB IBN 'ALĪ. *Taḥqīq al-Naẓar fī Huḳm al-Başar.* Edited by Jawād Ḥamām. Damascus: Al-Mashriq lil-Kitāb, 2008. Pp. 179.
- WAYSĪ, YĀSĪN. *Ibn Khaldūn wa-Naẓratuhu fī al-Taṣawwuf.* Damascus: Dār Ninawá lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2009. Pp. 122.
- YŪSUF, KHĀLID İBRĀHİM. *Al-Naṭhr al-'Arabī Ayyām al-Mamālīk wa-Man 'Āṣarahum min Dhawī al-Sulṭān.* Beirut: Dār al-Naḥḍah al-'Arabīyah lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr, 2008. Pp. 239.

Arabic Transliteration System

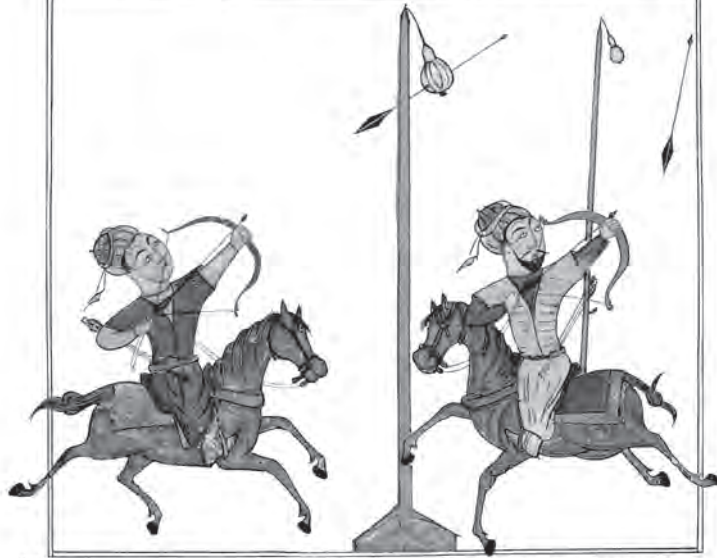
Romanized Arabic in *Mamlūk Studies Review* follows the Library of Congress conventions, briefly outlined below. A more thorough discussion may be found in *American Library Association-Library of Congress Romanization Tables* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1991).

ء	’	خ	kh	ش	sh	غ	gh	م	m
ب	b	د	d	ص	ṣ	ف	f	ن	n
	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. 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 the following terms: 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.

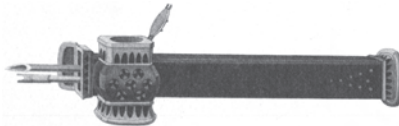
mamluk.uchicago.edu



MAMLUK STUDIES RESOURCES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST DOCUMENTATION CENTER
The Chicago Online Bibliography of Mamluk Studies
The Chicago Online Encyclopedia of Mamluk Studies
The Bruce D. Craig Mamluk Studies Dissertation Prize
Mamluk Studies Review
and more

CHICAGO STUDIES ON THE MIDDLE EAST

A SERIES PUBLISHED BY
THE CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



Revolutionary Melodrama: Popular Film and Civic Identity in Nasser's Egypt
by Joel Gordon

*Commemorating the Nation: Collective Memory, Public Commemoration,
and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Egypt*
by Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski

*The Wine of Love and Life: Ibn al-Fāriḍ's al-Khamriyah
and al-Qayṣarī's Quest for Meaning*
Edited, Translated and Introduced by Th. Emil Homerin

Palestine in the Evolution of Syrian Nationalism (1918-1920)
by Muḥannad Salhi

*Power and Patronage in Medieval Syria: The Architecture
and Urban Works of Tankiz al-Nāṣirī*
by Ellen Kenney

For further details about these titles, for ordering information, or to contact the editor
about submitting a finished manuscript for consideration, please visit:

<http://ChicagoStudiesOnTheMiddleEast.uchicago.edu>