Court Cultures in the Muslim World

Courts and the complex phenomenon of the courtly society have received intensified interest in academic research over recent decades; however, the field of Islamic court culture has so far been overlooked. This book provides a comparative perspective on the history of courtly culture in Muslim societies from the earliest times to the nineteenth century, and presents an extensive collection of images of courtly life and architecture within the Muslim realm.

The thematic methodology employed by the contributors underlines their interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach to issues of politics and patronage from across the Islamic world stretching from Cordoba to India. Themes range from the religious legitimacy of Muslim rulers, terminologies for court culture in Oriental languages, Muslim concepts of space for royal representation, accessibility of rulers, and the role of royal patronage for Muslim scholars and artists, to the growing influence of European courts as role models from the eighteenth century onwards. Discussing specific terminologies for courts in Oriental languages and explaining them to the non-specialist, chapters describe the specific features of Muslim courts and point towards future research areas. As such, it fills this important gap in the existing literature in the areas of Islamic history, religion, and Islam in particular.

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Introduction

Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung

Court and court culture

“In the court I exist and of the court I speak, but what the court is, God knows, I know not”,
1 wrote Walter Map (d. c. 1209 CE), writer and clergyman at the twelfth century
court of Henry II of England, in his Courtiers’ Trifles. One might easily assume that
this puzzle, posed by a member of a medieval European court society had long since
been solved. Surprisingly, that is not the case. The above quotation also describes the
difficulty of defining the phenomenon of the “court”,
2 which characterizes contemporary research. Despite numerous historical studies of the “great men”
3 and their entourage, not much has changed since the times of Walter Map.

This grim outlook is, of course, exaggerated. Since the second half of the
twentieth century academic research has repeatedly attempted to grasp the concept
of the court, primarily by trying to understand its underlying structures rather than
in a narrative manner. The phenomenon has been approached from multiple
angles, which have produced a number of interesting insights. The study of the
renowned sociologist Norbert Elias, first published in 1969, using the French
absolutist court of Louis XIV as an illustration, can be classified in many respects
as groundbreaking. One of Elias’ main accomplishments lies in the fact that he
perceived the court in a typological way, namely as “specific figurations of people
that are no less in need for elucidation than cities or factories”.
4 This description
has had a lasting impact on most of the studies on the matter since.
5

Elias’ decision to describe the phenomenon of the court typologically has led to
certain methodical consequences. Neither the tools of the historian nor of the social
scientist are sufficient on their own to ensure a structural and functional classifica-
tion of court and “court society”. Therefore, a transdisciplinary approach is needed
that combines historical and sociological tools. The phenomenon, according to
Elias, can only be understood by creating a transculturally applicable ideal type in
a Weberian sense; something to help us understand the underlying structural
commonalities and connections beyond the “unrepeatable and unique aspects”
6 of
single historical case studies. This, in turn, is significant, because it is exactly such
a universalistic approach of unravelling the structures of the phenomenon of courts
that serves to deepen the understanding of specific historical cases in culturally
different contexts, and, subsequently, leads to a greater analytical depth.
Departing from the work of Elias, numerous new questions related to the issue under investigation have been raised by the scientific community. Could, for instance, a court society perhaps be perceived as a catalyst for elite-building? What are the functions of a ruler’s position for the constitution of a court? Moreover, the analysis of personal networks in and around court and the numerous patron-client relationships created at various levels have received increasing attention. So has the examination of political functions of ritualized procedures during court ceremonials and artistic representations of various provenances. Finally, and perhaps most closely related to the ideas of Norbert Elias, are the constant attempts to define court that overarch all the previously asked questions. Such attempts range from an understanding of court based upon the palace and other architectural components and all their related actors, to explanations that draw on Elias’ research by defining court as a “series of occasions” combined with a permanent court society that congregates around a regent. For contemporary European historians like Ronald G. Asch and Jeroen Duindam, who came forth with useful and refined ideas of what a court may be, the work of Elias still remains the main reference point.

As can be seen from this struggle for a truly comprehensive definition of court and court society, and despite the numerous and detailed case studies ever since the publication of Elias’ Court Society, many questions remain unanswered even regarding “European court culture” and demand the development of an analytical framework distinct from Elias’. However, the situation regarding research on “Muslim court culture” is even more problematic.

Muslim court culture

Measured against the state of research on European court culture, the study of Muslim court culture falls far behind and has so far not moved beyond the—indisputably valuable—stage of case studies. As opposed to the European context, scholarship remains at the stage of basic research, that is, the localization and first scrutiny of manuscripts and edited texts relevant to the respective cases. However desirable and productive a comparative approach of structural elements of court and court society, along the lines suggested by Norbert Elias, might be, it has to be acknowledged that the global community of Islamicists and scholars of the history of Muslim societies has so far not contributed significantly to this wider undertaking.

However, before the disciplines of Islamic studies and Near and Middle Eastern history are able to contribute some of their expertise to this larger research project, comparative approaches within these disciplines have to be established, which recognize the specificity of the Muslim context. This would force a re-evaluation of the analytical categories in the light of indigenous terms and concepts before looking elsewhere and causing the danger of creating rather distorted images by forcing a terminology to fit even when inappropriate. Categories like “nobility” and “feudalism” are just two cases in point where terminology designed for European contexts is transplanted to the Muslim context without any critical
reflection. This situation and the necessity for a revised attitude to the terms and concepts used has been summarized by Nadia El Cheikh:

Court studies are almost non-existent for various periods of Islamic history. The terminology itself, namely the term “court” needs to be investigated and defined in the ways in which it may be used in connection to [...] Islamic societies.16

Besides sharpening awareness of the terminology used, a comparative approach to the complex of Muslim court culture within the field of Islamic studies is also needed to identify core analytical questions particular to the Muslim context.

Towards a joint discussion

Starting out from this rather bleak picture, as editors of the present volume, we felt the urge to ignite or fuel the debate on this issue among Islamicists and historians working on the region. We felt there was no better way to achieve this than by bringing together a selection of accomplished scholars from Islamic studies and Near and Middle Eastern history and, thus to inaugurate a first comparative approach to the issue of Muslim court culture within these academic disciplines. It was this idea that became the spark for organizing an international conference on the topic, that was held on 2–5 July 2007 in Gotha, Germany, and that led to the present publication of the proceedings.

Hardly any other venue in Germany seemed better suited to host a conference on “Court culture in the Muslim World” than the baroque Schloss Friedenstein at Gotha in the heart of the federal state of Thuringia. The research library situated in the castle hosts the third largest collection of oriental manuscripts in Germany and is frequently used by international scholars. Moreover, the impressive collection of Islamic manuscripts in Gotha might in itself be seen as an indicator of European court culture, as the manuscripts were collected by the German scholar Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (d. 1811) at the turn of the nineteenth century under a commission from Duke Ernest II of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg (r. 1772–1804). Seetzen undertook a research expedition to the Middle East from where he dispatched, among other things, more than 2,500 oriental manuscripts to Gotha, which he had collected in Istanbul, Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem and Cairo, before finally disappearing under unclear circumstances in Yemen in 1811.17 It was therefore only natural to choose Gotha as the appropriate venue for our conference. Moreover, the wide and positive response we received to our invitation from leading scholars in the field worldwide testified to the importance of our aim, namely to provide the first structural overview of the state of the research on different aspects of courts and courtly life in the Muslim World from the earliest times to the nineteenth century.

Modifying leading questions

As the long-term objective of both the conference and the present volume was to contribute to a wider comparative research on courts and court societies in a
transcultural perspective, it seemed appropriate to tackle some of the above-mentioned analytical core questions raised by researchers on European court cultures in the wake of Elias. The first core question is what should be understood by court? Does this term refer to some spatial entity, as the Latin word *cohors*—“enclosure”, from which the English word is derived, or should it rather be understood as a structured conglomeration of people, a second definition of the Latin *cohors* meaning “entourage” of a Roman provincial governor? Or is it, as Ronald G. Asch suggests, a series of periodical events? If opting for one of the latter two definitions, what would be the relationship between court and “palace”, especially in contexts where there is no exact term for court? If one opts for the first definition of court as a spatial entity, would there be a hierarchy of spaces?

The fundamental problem of defining court raises a host of subordinate questions that have already been posed by scholars of European court culture, following the methodological suggestions made by Norbert Elias. These would now have to be utilized for the investigation of Muslim court culture.

However, even though the questions that dominated the comparative study of Muslim court culture during the Gotha conference were strongly influenced by those analytically very valuable ones developed by the research on European court culture, the focus was on a field that is culturally distinct. The question about whether something can be specifically termed “Islamic” in the context of Muslim court culture had to be placed at the core of the discussion. In this context the term Muslim court culture had to be thoroughly scrutinized. Does the term hint only at the religious creed of those who rule, or is this rule itself subject to religious legitimacy, drawing from the authoritative texts of Islam?

With this, the overall theme of the Gotha conference and, therefore, of the present volume, was identified as the tension between ideal and reality, or, in other words, between a normative expectation, that is of temporal and spatial invariance that is suggested by the text of the Qur’ānic revelation itself, and of a variety of distinct historical situations in diverse local contexts. Into this larger framework the other three themes that shaped the discussions during the conference and the contributions to the present volume fit neatly: the legitimization of actual and potential political rule; the strategies of adaptation to prevailing political, social, and cultural contexts; and, finally, the strategies for the elaboration of splendid court culture. Most of the contributions touch upon more than one of these themes.

**a) Legitimization of political rule**

With the question of the legitimization of actual political rule we are already entering a field that, although some inspiration from research on European court culture may be drawn, has a specific and distinct Islamic connotation. Although one might find indications in the authoritative texts of Islam that could be interpreted as Muslim rule being legitimized by God, an Islamic equivalent to the concept of “Kingship by the Grace of God” in medieval and early modern Europe seems to be absent. After all, the God of the Qur’ān appears to be far more transcendent
and, therefore, unapproachable to man than the incarnated God of the Gospel. Therefore, legitimization of political rule must draw its inspirations from elsewhere. It is precisely a Qur’anic verse like 2:30, which refers to the deputyship of God on earth (khilāfah allāh fi’l-ard), which points to the direction in which we may have to look. God entrusted deputyship on earth to his prophets, those who stood as guarantors for the correct implementation of God’s will on earth. Thus, although in a historical salvation context it has been used to try and legitimize a succession of mundane rule that proceeds from God’s appointment of Adam as Khalīfah allāh,22 from our perspective it seems more appropriate to start with the Prophet Muḥammad as a benchmark.

After all, the question of the religious legitimacy of rulers gained special importance for Muslim societies after his death. With this, however, we are stepping onto the hotly debated field of determining the “nature” of the Prophet. Was Muḥammad only the propagator of the conclusive version of the monotheistic revelation, or was he also a worldly ruler,23 and as such keeping court around his house in Medina? Clearly, the person of the Prophet combines the ideal of political with spiritual leadership (imāra wa-imāma)24 and thus serves as the ultimate standard of Muslim governance. But is this sufficient to categorize the political practices of Muḥammad as court culture? As Michael Cook points out in his contribution to this volume, from the standard biographies describing Muḥammad’s eighth century rule in Medina it appears egalitarian and free from social hierarchy and courtly protocol. Muḥammad’s rule, Cook concludes, could therefore perhaps be better described as “anti-court”.

After all, there are numerous elements that seem significant at least for later Muslim court culture, which do not appear in the political and administrative practices of the Prophet. Muḥammad, it seems, was easily accessible to those who wanted to speak to him, at least according to later hagiographical sources. Later Muslim rulers were much more distant from their subjects and, as is the case with the Mughals, their contact with commoners and officers of lower rank was highly ritualized, or they were, as with the Ottoman sultans, hardly ever seen in public. Another issue is the humbleness the Prophet displayed even as a statesman that clashes with the flaunting of a splendid court culture in later periods.

Whether Muḥammad’s rule can be seen as paradigmatic, Muslim court culture therefore remains a worthwhile issue for further research. At least for the moment, however, scholarship on Muslim court culture in general seems to be correct in assuming that, even though it cannot be denied that the Prophet served as a role model for “good governance”, it is not really legitimate to speak of Muslim court culture prior to the mid-seventh century CE, when, with the dispute over leadership, the political centres of the young Muslim Empire shifted from Medina to Syrian Damascus and Iraqi Kufa. It was in this context that a dynastic principle became established in the Muslim context of governance. Both issues, the shift of the Muslim political centres to the Fertile Crescent and Iraq and the establishment of the dynastic principle within the Muslim context, had far-reaching consequences.

As the new dynasties developed in areas with long established courtly traditions they needed to integrate into the prevalent practices while gradually developing a
distinct Islamic pattern of governance and, following on from this, an unmistakable Muslim court culture. If what has been said above about the Prophetic practice as a paradigm for Muslim rule holds true, then the deviation from his practice, including Muhammad’s reluctance to designate a successor for the leadership of the Muslim community, has to be reconciled. The new Muslim monarchs had to establish criteria to depict their rule as good governance. Here, terms like the “common good” (maslaḥa), “charity” (ṣadaqa), and “justice” (‘adāla) played an important role in the constitution of what became “royal conduct” (adab al-mulūk). The contributions of Jan-Peter Hartung, Lucian Reinfandt, Christian Müller, and to some extent, of Albrecht Fuess, deal with one or more of the above categories in various historical contexts. Another important point that contributed strongly to the definition of royal conduct in the field of tension between normative expectations and actual realities is the role of a ruler’s patronage of the arts and sciences. This is exemplified by the articles of Sonja Brentjes on the patronage of physicians, mathematicians and philosophers at Ayyubid courts between the late twelfth and mid-thirteenth century CE; Abbas Amanat on the painter Şanî‘ al-Mulk (d. 1283/1866–7) at the court of the nineteenth century Iranian Qajars, and, again, of Jan-Peter Hartung. All the above-mentioned points that contributed over time to various formulations of royal conduct have found their embodiment in the so-called “mirrors for princes” (naṣīḥāt al-mulūk), a genre of courtly literature about the interface of philosophical ethics and the practice of rule. The mirrors for princes literature, prominently beginning with the works of Ibn al-Muqaffa’ (executed c. 139/756), was meant to provide useful guidance for rulers. The virtues of patronage are frequently highlighted in this kind of text as evidenced by the chapter of Syrinx von Hees on Ibn Nubātā al-Miṣrī (d. 742/1342), a panegyrist of the Ayyubid prince Abū ‘l-Fidā’ of Hamāh (d. 732/1331) and his successor. Stefan Leder focuses in his contribution to this volume on the ways in which the descriptions of culinary taste were used in naṣīḥāt al-mulūk to indicate the literary taste of a ruler that was frequently displayed in the patronage of poets and other literati.

With regard to the issue of the legitimization of political rule there is one additional point that inevitably needs to be addressed for a better understanding of the historical development of Muslim court culture within a wider temporal and spatial framework. A number of contributions to this volume shed light on the patterns of dynastic succession. Sunil Kumar, for instance elaborates on the shift in residential space with each new ruling lineage during the Sultanate of Delhi between 1206 and 1526 CE, while Felix Konrad focuses on alterations in courtly rituals made by the nineteenth century khedives, originally the Ottoman governors of Egypt but, at least after their recognition by the Ottoman sultan ‘Abdül’aziz in 1867, a sovereign dynasty of their own. From these two papers it appears that the nucleus for a new dynasty is established in manifold dissociations from its predecessor. In this, they seem to follow the practice of earlier Muslim dynasties which, too, had, as stated earlier, to integrate into the existing non-Muslim courtly traditions while gradually developing a distinct Muslim court culture. This issue, although closely related to the question of legitimization of political power, is at the core of the second theme that pervades a number of papers in the present volume.
b) Strategies of adaptation and emancipation

In order to establish dynastic rule, based on a set of entirely new values, in an environment that possesses long traditions of governance, leaders must first develop means of adapting to the prevailing political, social and cultural context. After all, the administrative experience of the leaders of the young Muslim community was no match at all for the Byzantine and the Sasanian empires that first bordered on the Muslim lands and were subsequently absorbed into the “House of Islam” (dār al-islām), that is the territory where Islamic jurisdiction applied. It was thus only natural that in the beginning hybrid forms of administration developed, which became gradually Islamized in the following periods.25

This process of transition is well illustrated by the contribution of Stefan Heidemann. He shows how the early adaptation of Byzantine and Sasanian coinage by the Umayyad caliphs was justified in Islamic terms, but, owing to the development of a distinct identity by the Muslim rulers, it increasingly gave way to the minting of new coins which corresponded to a new Islamic symbolism. The contribution of Hugh Kennedy falls into this theme, too. He shows convincingly how the early Muslim elites of the Fertile Crescent derived much of their income and prestige from the ownership of large landed estates, a situation that was, he argues, derived from the culture of the pre- and early Islamic Hijaz as well as from the Byzantine and Sasanian empires. Only over time, when Islamic principles permeated the administrative practices of the early Muslim empires, was the ownership of land replaced by the control of taxation as the main form of elite resources.

The shift towards a more discernible Islamic character in early Muslim dynastic rule during the process of the self-affirmation of the rulers is clearly visible on the architecture of this formative period of Muslim court culture. It is therefore little wonder that among the main achievements of the Umayyads were landmark buildings of the new religion including the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem built at the end of the seventh century CE26 and, the Umayyad mosque in Damascus built at the beginning of the eighth century CE, on the foundations of an earlier Jupiter temple27 as two prominent cases in point. It is primarily these explicitly religious buildings that have survived from this period and thus provide some evidence for the fact that the architectural representation of a Muslim court culture proper was in the making in this formative period. However, all that remains are some minor castles in the Jordanian desert, which Hugh Kennedy has to rely upon for evidence of his theory, since traces of proper caliphal palaces such as the so-called “Green Palace” (al-khadrā’) of the Umayyad caliphs in Damascus have disappeared.28 It appears that the elaborate courtly architecture still visible in Cairo, Istanbul, Isfahan, Samarqand, Agra and Lahore, is thus a later development in the history of Muslim court cultures.

While the rule of the Umayyads seems to have been primarily characterized by processes of acculturation, the Abbasids, who superseded them in the middle of the eighth century CE, benefited from the fact that the religion of Islam had developed further and Islamic principles had begun to permeate society to a much higher degree. Although in the beginning the Abbasids, too, drew quite strongly from the
imperial Byzantine and Sasanian heritage in the extent of their rule, they appeared much more able to reformulate in Islamic terms those elements that they had integrated into impressive courtly practices and rituals. In her important contribution to this volume, Nadia Maria El Cheikh focuses on the Abbasid courtly nomenclature and protocol. From what she argues in her paper, as well as from the fact that the new form of courtly representation—ritual and protocol as well as architecture—is said to have reached its almost mythically glorified heyday under the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809 CE), it is clear that from that time on the Abbasid court became the central reference point for the formulation of Muslim court culture.

Representation of Abbasid rule had come a long way from the Prophet’s practice of government. While in theory still based on the Prophetic example of Medina, the Muslim court culture of the Abbasids was actually closer to Byzantine and Persian practices—albeit still clothed in distinctly Islamic garb. This example was to a large extent copied by the courts of Muslim local rulers who either broke away from, or loosened the ties to, the Abbasid caliphate from the beginning of the ninth century onwards.

It is quite understandable that an investigation into the adaptation strategies to the respective prevailing political, social and cultural contexts clearly emphasizes the formative period of Muslim court culture. However, at least one example in the present volume provides evidence for the fact that such acculturation processes did not cease after the establishment of the Abbasid benchmark for Muslim court culture, but continued, although under different circumstances. Hend Gilli-Elewy shows that, in order to legitimize their government, the newly converted Ilkhanid rulers of thirteenth century Baghdad tried to adopt to the courtly practices of the former Abbasid caliphate. To this end they employed local administrative elites and thus adjusted their non-Islamic Turco-Mongol visions of rule in the Muslim context to the medieval paradigm of an elaborated Muslim court culture, that is, the Abbasids.

Thus adaptation, as it is presented in the contributions to this volume, took place in two directions, both of which served the legitimization of rule. First, the adaptation of non-Islamic elements during the formative phase of Muslim court culture introduced means for the legitimization of political rule prevalent and acknowledged in the Byzantine and Sasanian realm. Secondly, in later periods it was the adaptation to Islamic elements that helped originally non-Muslim rulers to legitimize their rule and elaborate their court culture within an Islamic framework.

c) Elaboration of Splendid Court Culture

An investigation into the third theme that traversed the discussion on Muslim court culture, namely the development of an increasingly sumptuous court culture in the aftermath of the Abbasids, may be conducted in a twofold way. In fact, each approach can be traced to the different definitions of court that historians and other social scientists have developed by critically building upon the structuralist work that Norbert Elias began in the 1960s. If court is understood in spatial terms, then research should be directed towards localizing the place where court culture
Introduction  

actually happens. This is significant because to follow this thread means to determine the boundaries of court culture in dissociation from the mere administration of a realm. Only if we are able to localize court culture in spatial terms, can we test the second definition of a court as human figuration or a series of specific events in a Muslim context.

Various essays in this volume deal with the elaboration of a splendid court culture in spatial terms. First and foremost there is the issue of the palace. Is a stable architectural structure a precondition for the development of court culture? The earlier examples of the Umayyads and the Abbasids seem to affirm such an assumption. The mobility of a number of later courts, however, or the difficulty of confining the court to one or more buildings seriously challenges this image. Indeed, as clearly shown by the contributions of Albrecht Fuess on the court of the Mamluk sultans in thirteenth–fourteenth century Egypt, of Eva Orthmann on the Mughal ruler Humāyūn (d. 963/1556), and of Christoph Werner on the “small, baroque-style, princely court” of Karīm Khān Zand in eighteenth century Shiraz, Muslim court culture could well be located in tents.

The prominence of the tent, or the encampment, can be seen as reminiscent of the nomadic origins of the early Muslim community and of the constant tension between a nomadic and an urban Muslim culture, which was at the centre of the theoretical considerations of the late medieval Muslim thinker Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406). In the light of his early social theory one may, with regard to Muslim court culture, even risk the bold hypothesis that the tent served at times as a nomadic substitute for the palace, until “nomadic court culture” became increasingly “domesticated” in major urban places and, thus, became a sedentary urban phenomenon. However, the “travelling courts” of later Muslim dynasties can perhaps be seen as reminiscent of their mainly Central Asian nomadic legacy; hence the fact that the tent remains as a key element in the public display of an urbanized Muslim court culture.

After having more or less satisfactorily localized the court within the inherent tensions between palace and tent the elaboration of a splendid Muslim court culture can be developed from a social perspective. If the court is perceived as a human figuration, then investigation is needed into the question of its composition, including an analysis of the various recruitment strategies that were utilized in the temporally and spatially varying contexts. It is again Christoph Werner who has investigated the composition of a regional court that is not confined to a solid architectural structure, but stretches in fact throughout the city of Shiraz, including the circles of poets and scholars as well as the red-light district. Andrew Newman, focusing on predecessors of the Zands, the Safavids of late seventeenth century Iran, shows how the shahs attempted to mediate between the popularity of Sufism within the wider society and the staunch anti-Sufi and anti-philosophical sentiments among the increasingly powerful ‘ulamā’ by carefully balancing their recruitments. Thus, the composition of the court became an expression of an adjusting religio-political strategy in a period of economic hardship that could guarantee the rulers maximum support. Jan-Peter Hartung investigates the mutual dependence of ruler and ‘ulamā’ by using various examples from pre- and early
modern times. He thus demonstrates the importance of Muslim religious scholars, be they jurists, philosophers, or poets, for the religious legitimization of rulers, while the ‘ulamā’ were often dependent on stipends they received from a ruler, and the diverse signs of prestige with the bestowal of which a ruler was able to ensure the compliance of the ‘ulamā’. Usually, this relationship was kept balanced although under certain circumstances the scales tipped clearly in favour of the learned clients of a ruler. As Sonja Brentjes shows, medical doctors were highly sought after in Ayyubid times and thus enjoyed a certain degree of independence from the ruler as their services were indispensable for sick princes.

Public displays of Muslim court culture also took place to a considerable extent in arts and architecture. The contribution of Lorenz Korn on the Artuqids of twelfth century Northern Mesopotamia shows how their artistic and architectural production, a refined merger of various regional traditions, was not least used as a public representation of their rule in a relatively small dominion.

However, if court is alternatively perceived as a series of temporal events, that is, if court is synonymous with “keeping court”, than the elaboration of splendid Muslim court culture should be investigated by focusing on its public display. This can take a variety of forms, often, however, clearly determined by spatial confines. Albrecht Fuess analyzes different but intermingled scenarios of public exposition of Mamluk court culture and shows that it was often security concerns that determined the highly standardized rituals of public accessibility of the sultans during the regular holding of a court of appeal (mażālim) and the processions (mawākib) from the citadel of Cairo to the public space where those sessions were held. Although not viewed from a security perspective and within a different context, Christian Müller, too, discusses the importance of presiding over mazālim sessions for the public recognition of a Muslim ruler as one who would rule in accordance with shari’a.

As these contributions show, court, if understood not exclusively as a more or less static entity tied to an architectural structure—the court society—, but by emphasizing its basically dynamic character of holding court—be this understood as a social event or legal procedure—is an important expression of legitimate Muslim rule. As such, the court cannot be defined solely as one or the other. This fact is perhaps best illustrated by the essay of Paul E. Walker on the Fatimid court in Cairo between the tenth and late thirteenth centuries CE. Although here we are provided with a detailed picture of the highly standardized processions as an expression of the dynasty’s religio–political claims, it cannot be confined to a description of public display only. From his descriptions of such ostentation, Walker moreover extracts valuable information regarding the composition of the courtly elite, and thus perceives the court not solely as a series of occasions, but as human figuration, too.

Based on the example of the rulers of eighteenth and nineteenth century North Indian Awadh, Hussein Keshani provides evidence that the public staging of Muslim rule gains special importance in situations of dissociation from either previous or from superordinate rule. The rulers of Awadh, although formally maintaining a nomenclature of subordination as deputys (nawwāb-vazīr) of the
Mughal pādishāh in Delhi, used their Twelver Shiite creed as a cornerstone for shaping their residential towns of Fayzābād and, later, Lucknow as large and complex spaces for the public display of piety and royal splendour, and thus established themselves as factual sovereigns in dissociation from their Sunnite Mughal overlord.

In his contribution on the court of the khedives in nineteenth century Egypt, Felix Konrad is the contributor to the current volume, who builds most significantly on the scholarship of Ronald G. Asch and his notion of the court as a series of occasions in which the princely household is opened for members who do not belong to this household. By elaborating on the khedival state ceremonies and what he terms “court spectacles”, on occasions such as the ruler’s birthday or the anniversary of his accession to the throne, Konrad shows how these were influenced by both Ottoman court culture of the tanẓīmāt period under the sultans ‘Abdülmeçid I (d. 1277/1861) and ‘Abdül’aźīz I (d. 1293/1876), and the court culture of the French Second Empire under Napoléon III (d. 1873). The result of these influences was the rise of hybrid forms of courtly representation, the consequences of which for the subject of Muslim court culture in general will have to be further investigated by future research. However a brief overview indicates that the distance to locally grown Muslim institutions of court culture seems to have increased over time, meaning that by the nineteenth century a successful ruler would adopt the style of London, Paris or St Petersburg. When in 1878 the Egyptian Khedive Ismā‘īl (d. 1312/1895) is reported to have depicted his country as part of contemporary Europe instead of Africa (“Mon pays n’est plus en Afrique, nous faisons partie de l’Europe actuellement”), he appears to have captured a symbolic element in the development of the perception of Muslim court culture at that point in time. It also turned out that he was correct, although Egypt was brought to Europe in a different manner than he predicted. Only four years later Britain occupied Egypt and transformed it into a European colony. Based on the Egyptian example alone, one could thus hypothesize that the nineteenth century Muslim World’s encounter with European forms of political representation led inevitably to an end of a distinct Muslim court culture.

The contribution of Abbas Amanat however shows that this is not necessarily the case. Although the Iranian Qajars did not shut themselves off from European influences, as the example of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh (d. 1313/1896) alone provides vivid evidence, they managed to remain at least formally independent from the competing European imperialist powers. Amanat illustrates through the example of the court painter Şanī‘ al-Mulk how, in his artistic works, he merged European artistic influences with narratives from Islamic heritage and Qajar courtly life. As impressively shown by Şanī‘ al-Mulk’s commissioned illustrations of a then-contemporary Persian translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*, they are not only examples of a process of hybridization from classical Islamic literary topics and Western, mainly Italian, artistic styles. In addition to the illustrations of the royal codex are fine examples of both an indigenization and contemporization that moved a masterpiece of classical Arabic literature into the world of the nineteenth century Qajar court of Tehran.
Those contributions that lay more stress on the court as events in analyzing the elaboration of sumptuous Muslim court culture also focus on yet another issue that emerged from the joint discussions during the 2007 Gotha conference: the question of the accessibility of the ruler. The question of who gains access to the ruler, and how such access is achieved, ultimately links the spatial to the social dimension in the investigation of Abbasid and post-Abbasid elaborations of Muslim court culture and leads to a number of subordinate issues. First, the accessibility of the ruler seems to depend on a hierarchy of spaces. Secondly, access to each space seems to depend on the personnel in charge of those respective spaces. In this regard, the contribution of Henning Sievert on the role of the chief eunuch as favourite of the Ottoman Sultans Ahmed III (d. 1149/1736) and Mahmūd I (d. 1168/1754) is most enlightening. While the essays of Walker, Müller, Fuess, Konrad and Keshani focus on a variety of situations of public access to the ruler, Sievert shows the powerful position of the eunuch, at the threshold of the sultan’s private chambers, the harem, for the mediation of access to the ruler. In his function as what Sievert calls “the king’s patronage manager”, the eunuch “used to serve the ruler and also served a demand from below by conferring his patronage upon the clients.” In this context again, the question arises as to what extent, if at all, the political and administrative practice of the Prophet served later Muslim courts as an example. Michael Cook in his preliminary inquiry into this matter seems to give a negative answer to this question. From the account of Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833) on the life of the Prophet it appears that Muhammad emphatically did not want to stand out in the early Muslim community of Medina, nor did he want access to him regulated or even restricted. In conclusion, Cook shows that styling Muḥammad as a king with a court, sitting separate from others in an elevated place, is the product of later times, owing to the increasing impact of pre-Islamic Persian patterns of kingship.

What remains to be said

After having provided a structured overview of the contents of the present volume, one may ask whether and, if so, to what extent the current contributions enhance our understanding of Muslim court culture. While conclusive answers can neither be expected, nor provided, our aim is rather to indicate the rich potential that a comparative perspective contains for a possible advancement of our understanding of Muslim court culture in particular, and court culture in general. In open and fruitful discussions among the international participants of the conference at Schloss Friedenstein in Gotha in July 2007 questions were raised and issues identified which appeared relevant for the study of court cultures throughout time and space and, particularly, in the Muslim context.

However, not all issues that were touched upon in this introduction could be dealt with extensively in the present volume and therefore require further investigation. Moreover, we have to acknowledge that, although we have attempted to cover as many periods and regions as possible, there are large chunks of the map that are missing including Transoxiana, Muslim South East Asia, and Muslim North and sub-Saharan Africa. Further research needs to take these areas into consideration.
Apart from the acknowledgement of these obvious shortcomings in the present volume, we hope nonetheless that it will contribute to an intensified discussion within our disciplines across particular regions and times, as well as with experts from outside Islamic studies and Near and Middle Eastern history. Therefore, we hope that the description of thematically and temporally comprehensive subjects is either a first step towards defining typologies that will help us to understand the peculiarities of an ideal-type Muslim court culture, along the lines that Norbert Elias and those following him have proposed, or towards finally acknowledging that there is no such thing as a distinct Muslim court culture at all, which might still be considered a worthwhile achievement. Hopefully more is to come. This is just a beginning, there shall be no end.

Acknowledgments

Everyone who has ever organized an international conference on whatever topic knows that this cannot be done without the help of numerous people. Our first thanks go therefore to the former director of the Research Centre Gotha for Cultural and Social Studies at the University of Erfurt, Professor Peer Schmidt. He encouraged the plans for holding an international conference on Muslim court culture right from the start, suggested Schloss Friedenstein in Gotha as a worthy venue, and offered all possible assistance throughout the process of organizing the event. Likewise, we would like to thank Ms Miriam Rieger and Ms Monika Leetz of the Research Centre Gotha for their excellent help in organizational matters. We are very much indebted to the vital assistance that was offered to us by the Chair of Islamic Studies at the Department of Religious Studies of the University of Erfurt, Professor Jamal Malik, and his staff members Ms Ines Scheidt and Ms Bärbel Wölke.

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**A note on formal issues**

The romanization of terms in Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish follows the
ALA-LC standards for each language. In contributions where more than one of these
languages are used the transliteration follows nonetheless the ALA-LC standard
for each. An exception to these standards is the romanization of Hindustani which,
for the sake of better readability, generally follows the ALA-LC romanization of
Persian; the transliteration of retroflex consonants follows the convention of the

Where two dates are given without any further indication, the first one refers to
the Islamic Lunar Calendar and the second to the Gregorian one. Where a “sh” is
added to the first date it refers to the Iranian Islamic Solar Calendar. In cases
where only the Hijrī year is given a “h” has been added as indicator.

**Notes**

1 Map (1983), 3.
2 Throughout this volume, conceptual terms such as “court” or “court culture” only appear
in quotation marks the first time they are mentioned in each individual contribution, to
indicate the awareness of all authors that these are complex conceptual rather than
empirical terms.
3 The idea of history as one of only “Great Men” goes back to the Victorian historian
Thomas Carlyle (d. 1881). He argued that it was only exceptional individuals who
shaped history by a combination of extraordinary personalities and divine inspiration.
5 For more recent examples, see Pečar (2003); Butz/Hirschbiegel/Willoweit (2004);
Carreras/Garcia (2005); Gunn/Janse (2006).
7 Of utmost importance, especially for the problem of patron-client networks, are the
works of the historian Wolfgang Reinhard concerning the system of governance of
Pope Paul V (d. 1621). See idem (1979). Reinhard’s considerations have recently
inspired scholars who work on Muslim court culture as well. For an exemplary work
on this matter, see Sievert (2003). Generally on the complex of patronage, see Maćzak
(1988).
8 See Duindam (2005), 95f.
9 For example, see Jarrard (2003).
10 See Elton (1976), 217.
12 See Asch (1991); idem (1993); Duindam (2005).
13 Elias’ work has recently become the subject of a critical re-evaluation. The criticism is
aimed especially at the small number of original sources with which Elias described the
court and court society of Louis XIV. Moreover, it is problematic to use the court of
Introduction

Versailles as a blueprint since its applicability to other contexts is questionable. See Müller (1995), 96; Schwerhoff (1998).

14 For example, see Kennedy (2004).
15 It has to be acknowledged, though, that some steps in this direction have already been taken. In December 2005 the Institute of Iranian Studies of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna organized a transdisciplinary conference entitled Diplomatische Praxis und Zeremoniell in Europa und dem Mittleren Osten in der Frühen Neuzeit. For a published review of this conference, see Köhler (2006).
16 See the contribution of El Cheikh in the present volume.
17 See Kruse et al. (1854–9); Stein (1995).
18 See Kazhdan/McCormick (1997), 172f.
19 See Asch (1991), 7–9; idem (1993), 12f.
21 See, for example, Qur‘ān 2 (al-Baqara):30; 24 (al-Nūr):55.
22 For example, see al-Ṭabarī (1426/2005), I:28–53, esp. 52: “After the parting of his father Seth [i.e. the son of Adam] it was Enoch who took over the governance of the realm and the administration of those under his control (siyāsat al-mulk wa-tadbīr man tahta yadayhi min ra‘iyatihi) in place of his father Seth”.
23 This is at least suggested from Patricia Crone’s convincing notion of Muḥammad as a “political prophet”. See Crone (2004a), 12.
24 See ad idem (2004b), 21–3.
27 See Flood (2001); al-‘Uqayli (2008).
29 In this regard, one may already compare the impressive building arrangements in the Abbasid residential towns Baghdad and Samarra (see Kennedy (2004), 145–7) with the Prophet’s house and mosque in Medina (see Behrens (2007), 72–9).
30 See the contribution by Werner in the present volume.
31 See Ibn Khaldūn (1320h), 116f.
32 Cited in Schölch (1972), 391.
33 One may of course argue that the tobacco concessions to the British Imperial Tobacco Company at the end of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh’s reign, which triggered the events that eventually led to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11, is a clear sign of the factual influence of Western powers on the Qajar rulers. It remains however a fact that Iran formally remained a sovereign state.
34 See the contribution of Sievert in the present volume.

Bibliography


Part I

Politics
The Prophet and the
eyearly Caliphates
Did the Prophet Muḥammad keep court?

Michael Cook

Introduction

Did the Prophet Muḥammad keep court? If so, in what sense? If not, what did he do instead? These are interesting questions, but I can make no claim to have thought of them for myself. They were put to me by the organizers of the conference on court cultures in the Muslim World which was held, so appropriately, in Schloss Friedenstein at Gotha in July 2007. I found the questions intriguing enough to devote a summer of research to them, and I have every hope of returning to this project in the future, and of writing it up with full references to the sources. But here, as at the conference, I shall attempt to survey only a small part of the subject, namely the pattern of access to Muḥammad; and for the most part I will consider it only as it appears in a single standard source, Ibn Hishām’s Life of the Prophet.1 I will, however, end my discussion with some comments addressing the wider concerns of the conference.

For non-specialist readers, I should mention that the place and time with which this account is concerned is Medina in the decade 622–32 AD. This decade opens with Muḥammad’s arrival from Mecca, and ends with his death. His career as a prophet began in the Meccan phase of his life, but it was only in Medina that he established and ruled a polity. This polity was initially small and weak, but by the end of Muḥammad’s life it was, at least by Arabian standards, a significant state.

Access to Muḥammad: What happened

One obvious question to ask about any powerful person, particularly a ruler, is how those who need to get to see him obtain access. In the case of Muḥammad we have many accounts of people who came to see him, and if we put these accounts together a composite picture of the pattern of access readily emerges. It may be summarized as follows.

If you wished to speak to Muḥammad, your best course of action was to go to his Mosque (masjid) in Medina. Unsurprisingly, one of the first things Muḥammad did on arriving there was to set about constructing a mosque. It was, of course, nothing like the grandiose mosques of later centuries. As can be seen from the sketch-plan,2 it is best thought of as a roughly square space enclosed by a wall.
Parts of this space were roofed over, but most of it was open to the skies. There were several gates, but for our purposes we need remember only the one closest to the north-west corner of the mosque (at bottom right). Along the eastern side (on the left) were the houses of Muḥammad’s wives, each with access to the Mosque. On the south side (at the top) was the pulpit (minbar), and it was on the same side that the structure known as the mihrāb was to be placed, eventually assuming the form of a niche. The primary purpose of the Mosque was, of course, to serve as a place of worship: five times a day the Muslims assembled there and Muḥammad led them in prayer. But our interest is rather in the informal role of the Mosque between prayers: it was here that the Muslims would spend time unless they had reason to be somewhere else, sitting around in circles talking to each other. Muḥammad himself was no exception, and the Mosque was accordingly the place to look for him.
Did the Prophet keep court? 25

Once you reached the Mosque, you dismounted and tethered your camel outside the gate; people did not ride into the Mosque on camel-back. You then entered, obviously by walking through the gate into the Mosque, and there you would see the circles of Muslims sitting and talking. If you had already met Muhammad and knew what he looked like, you would have no problem picking him out. But if you were seeing him for the first time, you would need help in identifying him. Perhaps someone would point him out to you, or you might go up to a circle and ask those present if one of them was Muhammad; if he was, he would identify himself. Once you had located Muhammad, you would go up to him and greet him. You would then sit down in front of him, say what you wanted to say, and receive his reply. Thereafter, it seems, you would get up and leave.

Such was the pattern of access to Muhammad, and there is very little that needs to be added. Matters were not significantly different when Muhammad was in a public space outside the Mosque, for example leading an expedition. The main qualification to this picture of open access relates to occasions when Muhammad was in a private space, for example the house of one of his wives; in such a case access was subject to permission, just as it was with any private residence, but it was not usually denied. So rather than try to elaborate further on this account, it will be more useful to identify some themes that are conspicuously absent from it.

Access to Muhammad: What did not happen

First, you did not go to a palace to look for Muhammad. Obviously this makes Medina very different from capital cities outside Arabia like Ctesiphon or Constantinople, but there is a more humble contrast worth noting here: Muhammad’s home-town of Mecca. Qusayy, the leader who several generations before Muhammad had established the tribe of Quraysh in Mecca and ruled it as king, built himself what might be called a palace, the Dār al-Nadwa or “court of assembly”. After Qusayy there were no more kings, but his palace still played some role as the political centre of the Meccan polity in the time of Muhammad. Yet Muhammad created nothing comparable in Medina—nothing that in the language of the time would be called a “court” (dār); the dwellings of his wives were no more than private houses (buyūt). The Mosque was thus the sole centre of the Muslim polity; if we could speak of Muhammad having a court in our sense of the word, the Mosque would have to be it.

Second, you were not stopped at the gate. Now gates were invented to control access, a role they perform most effectively when accompanied by gate-keepers. But there was no gate-keeper at the entrance to the Mosque. No one asked you to identify yourself, state your business, make an appointment, be content with speaking to a minor functionary, or deposit a weapon before entering. In other words, no procedures were in place to screen out undesirables, trouble-makers, or even assassins.

Third, there was no chamberlain inside the Mosque to take charge of visitors, guide their movements, and decide when and how they should have access to Muhammad.
Fourth, the fact that Muḥammad was the most powerful person in the Mosque did not serve to identify him. He was not sitting on the pulpit at the centre of everyone’s attention (unless he was formally addressing his followers), nor was he dressed in a fashion that distinguished him from the Muslims at large.

Finally, no elaborate protocol governed your interaction with Muḥammad. You greeted him, but you did not kiss his hand, let alone prostrate yourself in front of him. You did not even ask his permission before sitting down, nor did you ask leave to depart when your conversation was over.

In short, we see here a pattern of completely open access as long as Muḥammad is in the public space of the Mosque.

The wider context: Looking back

The picture I have put together above is based on narratives in the biography of Muḥammad that we owe to Ibn Hishām. He died in 218/833, but derived the great bulk of his materials at one remove from his predecessor Ibn Isḥāq, who died in 150/767–8. We can thus say with some confidence that our picture was current in the eighth century. But to what extent can we project this picture back to the early seventh century? Does it tell us how things really were in the days of Muḥammad, or are we looking rather at the hagiographical fantasies of later generations? I will deal with this question very briefly, partly because my research is in its early stages, and partly because even if I am able to complete it I do not anticipate coming up with a definitive answer.

In general, it can be argued that the pattern of access as it appears in the accounts of Ibn Isḥāq and Ibn Hishām is plausible. It fits well with the material poverty of Arabian society, and of Medina in particular. It is also compatible with the flat management style that these accounts implicitly impute to Muḥammad; he appears a micromanager rather than a delegator, and in consequence we would hardly expect him to interpose a hierarchy of ranks and offices between himself and the mass of his followers. My first impression is also that the pattern of open access conforms to a style of leadership that is attested in Arabia at other times and places. All these are reasons for taking seriously the picture outlined above.

On the other hand, there are reasons for caution over and above the difficulty—or impossibility—of being sure that eighth-century accounts go back to narrators contemporary with the events. One is that there seems to be no sign of any shift in the pattern of access over the course of the decade of Muḥammad’s rule, despite the considerable expansion of the Muslim polity and its resources; unrestricted access to a leader who had 314 men with him at the battle of Badr in 2/624 is quite plausible, but less so for one who led 12,000 at Ḥunayn in 8/630. Another reason for caution is that while Ibn Isḥāq’s narratives suggest that Muḥammad had only the most skeletal staff to assist him, other sources detail considerably more of an entourage. Finally, the biographical tradition may not be entirely innocent in conveying an appealing image of prophetic simplicity. Access to the eighth-century rulers of the Muslim polity was by no means unrestricted, and the image of Muḥammad’s polity may imply criticism of contemporary court culture. In this
sense what Ibn Ḩishāq was imputing to Muḥammad was perhaps more of an anti-court than a court.

In any case, I leave it to readers to make what they will of these considerations. In the end, from the point of view of the concerns of the conference, seventh-century realities are of no great importance; what matters in this context is not how Muḥammad actually was, but how he appeared to later generations.

The wider context: Looking forward

Let us now look forward to these later generations. Two major questions arise here. The first is whether the image of Muḥammad changed over the centuries. Here there is a basic distinction to be made between scholarly and popular literature. Responsible scholars were by definition uncreative; for them virtue lay in the faithful transmission of what had come down to them, and their writings accordingly reveal few signs of a changing image. It is at a popular level that we can look for creativity, and we find it in writings associated with the notorious—and undatable—Abū ʾl-Ḥasan al-Bakrī. Works belonging to this corpus contain several points of interest. We now seem to find people asking permission to enter the Mosque; Muḥammad sits in a special place, in front of the miḥrāb or niche in the southern wall; people kiss his hands, and sit down when he tells them to do so. The Bakrī corpus is in Arabic, but it found its way into Persian and Turkish (and even Aljamiado). Ḥmad ibn Ṭāj al-Dīn Astarrābdī, a sixteenth-century Shiite author of a biography of Muḥammad in Persian, adopts some of Bakrī’s novelties, and incidentally refers to Muḥammad as a “king (pādishāh)” and speaks of his “court (dargāh)”. A fourteenth-century Turkish rendering of Bakrī’s narratives was lavishly illustrated in late-sixteenth-century Istanbul; here we can actually see Muḥammad sitting in front of the miḥrāb, immediately identifiable by anyone entering the Mosque. These details add up to a significant shift towards a more court-like culture, but they are not a sea-change. Prophetic simplicity has been somewhat eroded in these accounts, but it has by no means disappeared.

This survival of the image of prophetic simplicity at both learned and popular levels provides the basis for the second question. What did it mean for the court cultures of the Muslim world down the centuries that the paradigm of Islamic political legitimacy was the anti-court of the Prophet? How did posterity respond to this basic dilemma?

The most remarkable response I know is that of the fourteenth-century Ziyā’ al-Dīn Barānī, a courtier of the Delhi Sultanate who wrote on politics after falling out of favour. For him, the generation of the Prophet and his immediate successors stands out as the only time of righteous rule in the history of mankind, past, present and future. Barānī stresses that such righteousness did not work well even for Muḥammad’s immediate successors—witness the number of them who were assassinated. For any subsequent ruler to attempt to return to this model would be courting disaster. In fact the only style of rulership that has been viable since that fleeting moment of righteous rule is the vain, pompous and egotistical tradition of kingship inherited by the Muslim world from the pre-Islamic rulers of Persia. This
Court cultures in the Muslim world: seventh–nineteenth centuries

is an evil political culture, but a necessary one; a starving man is permitted to eat carrion to stay alive, and a ruler should adopt the Persian model in the same spirit. The equation of court culture with carrion is not perhaps a tactful note on which to end a paper in a volume such as this. Yet the dilemma was a real one, though my impression is that most people involved with the royal courts of the Muslim world wisely ignored it.

Notes

1 See Ibn Hishām (1375/1955), (Guillaume (1955)). In most cases I limit myself to a single example when citing this and other sources.
2 This sketch-plan is taken from Mustafā (1981), 59. The reconstruction relates to the last years of Muhammad’s life.
5 See Ibn Hishām (1375/1955), III-IV:587 line 15 (Guillaume (1955), 642), where it is clear that there is more than one circle.
13 See Ibn Hishām (1375/1955), I-II:661 line 17 (Guillaume (1955), 318f), where the detection of the assassin is fortuitous.
14 For an example, see Ibn Hishām (1375/1955), III-IV:650 line 8 (Guillaume (1955), 679).
15 See, for example, Ibn Sayyid al-Nās (1980), II:390–6.
16 For a relatively recent study of this obscure figure, see Shoshan (1993), 23–39.
17 See [MS Berlin, Pm. 495], fol. 91b line 5. For this manuscript, see Ahlwardt (1887–99), IX:182f no. 9627.
18 See the passages quoted ibid., VIII:27 no. 9,005, 32 no. 9,015, 35 no. 9,021.
19 See [MS Berlin, Pm. 495], fols. 44b line 11, 91b line12.
21 See Astarābādī (1374sh/1995), 316 line 11, 324 line 1.
22 Ibid., 156 line 14.
23 Ibid., 325 line 8.
24 See Tanndi (1984), no. 70 (and see the description in ibid., 143).

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a) Manuscript

[MS Berlin, Pm. 495] Kitāb mubārak majmūʿ fīhi ghazwat Badr al-kubrā wa-ghazwat Uḥud wa-futūḥ Makka al-musharrafīa wa-ghazwat Tabūk wa-ghazwat Bani Qurayṣa qabla ghazwat Tabūk
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2 The representation of the early Islamic Empire and its religion on coin imagery

Stefan Heidemann

The crucial early decades

How did the theology of Islam and its idea of an empire evolve, based on the Hellenistic Romano-Iranian foundation, in the face of Christianity, Judaism, Neo-Platonism and Zoroastrianism? This much debated question has raised much scepticism and polemic against “established” knowledge and its sources. The extreme points of view taken in this controversy are possible to maintain because there are few undisputed Arabic sources on the first decades of Islam. Since the beginning of this discussion, in the 1970s, much progress has been made. Increasingly, sources have been studied that are almost independent from the Arab Islamic tradition. In this discourse, the imagery and text on coins has become more important than ever and knowledge of these coinages has grown tremendously since the 1990s. Coins offer the only continuous and contemporary independent and primary source for the period of the genesis of the new religion and its empire. The present contribution attempts to provide an overview of the development of coin imagery and the representation of the evolving Islamic polity, as it is discussed today. Ultimately the Hellenistic iconography with images of deities was replaced by an “iconic” representation of the empire by the Qur’ānic Word of God.

The first decades: Representation of power and religion

1. The early phase: Imitation of coinages

In the seventh century Muslim armies swiftly conquered three major zones of monetary circulation and took over much of their fiscal and monetary organization: in the centre of the former Byzantine territories, in the east of the Sasanian Empire and in the west of Germanic North Africa and Spain.

In the Byzantine territories, the workhorse of the fiscal cycle, of taxation and state expenditure, the gold solidus or nomisma (see figure 2.1) was used, while the money utilized for daily purchases was the copper follis (plural folles) (see figure 2.2). In the first decades after the battle of Yarmūk in 636 CE and the establishment of the Taurus border zone, Byzantine gold and copper coins
remained in circulation in Syria, probably until the reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705 CE) in 77-9/696-9. The obverse of the *folles* shows the emperor or the emperors—here (see figure 2.2) the standing figure of Constans II (r. 641–68 CE) wearing a crown with a cross, holding a *globus cruciger* in one hand and a long cross in the other. On the reverse the *m* indicates the Greek numeral 40, the mark of value of the standard copper coin. Archaeological findings show that from about 641 CE on, Constantinople continued to supply substantial quantities of newly minted copper coins to its lost provinces of Syria and northern Mesopotamia. The importation of Constans II *folles* slowed down and came to a halt in about 655–8 CE.3 How should this continued importation of copper coins to the lost provinces be interpreted politically? Rome-Byzantium still thought of itself as the universal world empire, but with soft borders, not as a state in the modern sense with well-defined borders that provide separation in a number of respects.
Early Islam, outside the Hijaz, was the elite religion of a tribally organized military. During the period of conquest, the *futūḥ*, the Islamic religion possessed only a rudimentary theology, which was probably even more basic among military units. At that time Islam would almost certainly not have been perceived as a new and equal religion by outsiders, especially when compared with the sophisticated and diverse Christian theology and the other contemporary religions such as Judaism, Zoroastrianism, or the pagan pantheon turned into its late neo-Platonic form. Contemporary Byzantium might have seen the conquest as a menacing rebellion resulting in a temporary loss of authority and—if they had noticed the religious dimension at all—as an Arab heresy of Judaeo-Christian origin. Neither perception would have necessarily challenged the universal claim of the all-embracing Roman Empire, since the idea of Rome was neutral to religion. Uprisings, territorial losses and gains, and heresies constituted a recurrent challenge during the more than millennium of Roman history. This early situation can be compared in certain respects with the historical situation of the Germanic migration and conquest of the Western Roman Empire.

For these early decades there is no contemporary evidence that the Arab-Islamic leaders developed an imperial ideology of their own. The idea of having a universal empire is different from having a state, with institutions and a governing body. As leaders of the victorious Arab armies, inspired by the teachings of the new Prophet, they were probably at first content with their de facto rule. Despite their successful conquests, the Arab-Islamic elite may have thought that universal rule could only be achieved within the framework of the Roman Empire with its capital at Constantinople. What evidence would support such a hypothesis? First, the idea of Rome was widespread and historically powerful also in Asia until the Ottoman period. The Arab population and tribes in Bilād al-Shām and northern Mesopotamia, especially the Ghassanids, were exposed to the idea of Rome for almost 800 years. Secondly, frequent and large-scale attempts to conquer Constantinople were ventured in the period under study until about the time of the uprising of the caliph ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr in the 680s CE. Thirdly, al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) relates a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet who called for the conquest of Rome (Constantinople), saying that until that had been accomplished there would be no Day of Judgement. This can be read to mean that the Day of Judgement will come only after the creation of the (Roman) universal empire of Islamic denomination.

Already during the Persian occupation of Syria and northern Mesopotamia, local imitations of current Byzantine copper coins supplemented the circulating stock. When the import of the aforementioned Constans II *folles* ended, imitations were struck in much larger quantities probably until the mid-660s or even until about 670 CE. The most commonly imitated type was the then-current “standing emperor” Constans II. These coins are encountered in a broad variety. Their mints cannot yet be located. We do not know who the regulating authorities were. We know from the reports on the *futūḥ* that the Christian urban and parochial elite represented the cities when dealing with Islamic military tribal leaders and were the mainstay of the early Umayyad civil administration.
2. The phase of dissociation: Umayyad “Imperial Image” Coppers

The next phase, after importation and imitation, can be assumed to have begun in the 660–70s CE during the reign of Mu‘awiya. It ended around the years 691–4 CE, the years of the Marwānid reforms. Luke Treadwell assumed that there was some sort of coordination in the main provincial mints in Syria, if not a central policy. His assumption complements the picture of a more pronounced role by Mu‘awiya in state building, that is now becoming apparent from inscriptions and papyri (see figures 2.3 and 2.4). These so-called “Imperial Image” coppers still depict Byzantine emperors and crosses. Officially recognized regular mints were set up and named on the coins, in Greek and/or Arabic. Validating expressions in both languages, such as kalón or ṭayyib (both meaning “good”), bismi ‘llāh (in the name of God) or others were included in the design. This established Arabic as the language of the validating authority. Almost no attempt was made to represent the new state or religion on coins. Petty coinage, first and foremost, served as a means of exchange.

Figure 2.3 Anonymous, fals, Damascus, without date [c. 50s/660–74/692], Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 303-D09 (3.84 grams).

Figure 2.4 Anonymous, fals, Emesa/Hims, without date [c. 50s/660s–74/692]; validating mark KALON and ṭayyib; Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 303-C08 (3.85 grams).
An awareness of the cross as a symbol can be seen in a comparatively limited series of imitative gold coins, probably struck in Damascus, closely copying a nomisma of Heraclius and his son Heraclius Constantine, with slightly blundered Greek legends (see fig. 5). The prominent “cross on steps” on the reverse (see figure 2.1) was transformed into a “bar on a pole on steps”. Hoard evidence suggests a date for these imitations not much later than 680 CE, around the period of Mu’āwiya. At this stage and in this iconographic context the new design was probably regarded first of all as a mutilated cross. The cross might have been perceived as more than merely a Christian religious symbol and identified also with the rival Byzantine Empire. Thus it could also be termed a de-Byzantinized cross.

3. The former Sasanian realm

How did the currency and visual representation of power and religion develop in the newly conquered lands of Iraq and Iran? The centralized Sasanian Empire was attacked at its apogee, despite the devastation and chaos caused by the aftermath of Heraclius’ victory. Even after the assassination of Khusraw II (r. 590/1–628 CE) in 628 and the almost complete annihilation of the army in the battle of Nihāwand in 641 CE, institutions and the monetary economy remained largely intact. The centralized Sasanian state enabled the conquerors to take over the administration swiftly.

In the Sasanian Empire the coinage of the fiscal cycle was the uniform silver drakhm of about 4.2 grams that was struck during the reign of Khusraw II in about 34 mints. The typical late Sasanian drakhm (see figure 2.6) shows on the obverse the portrait of the shāhānshāh—either Khusraw II or Yazdgard III (r. 632–51 CE); their portraits are almost identical—with an enormous winged crown as a sign of his royalty. On the reverse side the fire altar served as the central symbol of Zoroastrianism, the dualistic Iranian religion. Priest attendants stand on either
Islamic Empire and its religion on coin imagery

Figure 2.6 Khusraw II, drakhm, mint abbreviation ‘HM (Hamadhān), regnal year 29 (618–9 CE); Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 302-B05 (3.46 grams).

side. Beside them are abbreviations indicating the mint and the regnal year of the ruler. Few coins were minted between the decisive battle of Nihāwand in 641 CE (regnal year 10) and the assassination of Yazdgard III in his last retreat in Marw in 651 CE (regnal year 20). Coins struck in the conquered territories are almost indistinguishable from those struck under the authority of Yazdgard III, except that the mints lay outside his shrinking realm.14

The next phase lay between regnal year 20 and about 30 of Yazdgard (YE), corresponding with 31–41/651–61. In contrast to Byzantium, the Sasanian Empire collapsed completely and the shāhānshāh’s claim to universal rule ended. The Islamic conquerors did not attempt to maintain this claim until the Abbasids. The outlook of the Syrian Umayyads was different, following from the Roman tradition. Coins continued to be struck in the names and with the portraits of “Khusraw II” or “Yazdgard III” and with the fire altar and its attendants. The dating remained according to the regnal years of Yazdgard (see figure 2.7). Frequently, but not always, additional Arabic validating expressions appeared in the obverse margin usually in the second quadrant, such as bismi ‘llāh (“in the name of God”) or jayyid (“good”). These general expressions have no specifically Islamic connotation. The resulting picture for the early decades seems to correspond to a situation in which the Sasanian administration remained intact, but functioned only at a provincial level and was responsible to Arab governors.15

In the 30s/50s the mint authorities began dating coins with Hijrī years written in Pahlavi.16 The introduction of the new era in coins indicates that the administrative Arab elite were becoming aware of its Islamic identity but there was still no overt representation of the Islamic religion and its empire.

Contemporary Georgia shows that religious iconographic symbols were of importance in coin imagery elsewhere. Christian Georgia had belonged to the
Sasanian realm. A strong sense of religious identity is found here. New coins, supplementing the circulating stock of *dramh* (see figure 2.8), show on the obverse a portrait resembling that of Hormizd IV (r. 579–90 CE), but the Georgian inscription names the Bagratid king Stepanos who reigned 18–43/639–63. On the reverse the fire altar was distinctly replaced by a Christian altar with a cross on top.

The third and fourth phases of development cover approximately the years 40–72/661–81, that is, the Sufyânid period up to the Second *fitna*. As in Syria, a
gradual regularization of the administration, including minting, is visible on the coins. The names of Khusraw and Yazdgard were replaced, at first occasionally and then regularly from 50/671, with the names of the provincial governors in Pahlavī script (see figure 2.9). At many mints the Yazdgard era ceased to be used and was replaced with the Hijrī year.

Some years after the First fitna, between 656 and 661 CE, Umayyad governors began to affirm their rule with a reference to God in Arabic in the obverse margin. The first was the governor of the East, Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān (r. 670–84 CE). Since 47/667–8 he regularly promulgated his authority with the legend bismi ‘llāh rabbī, “In the name of God, my Lord”. Other governors followed this example.18

4. The Second fitna—Zubayrid and Khārijite challenges

The Second fitna—the Zubayrid movement and caliphate of Ibn al-Zubayr between 681 and 693 CE—and the much fiercer Khārijite challenge between 687 and 697 CE constitute the fifth phase, and marks a watershed in the progress towards a clear iconographic expression of the new religion and state. ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr was a close, venerated member of the family of the Prophet. He emphasized the religious character of the caliphate and demanded a state in accordance with the principles of Islam. After Mu‘awiya’s death in 60/680, Ibn al-Zubayr strongly opposed the Sufyānid claim to the caliphate and was supported in many parts of the empire.

In 62/681–2 ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr’s name first appeared on coins of Kirmān. In 64/684, the coins show that he assumed the imperial title “amīr of the believers” (see figure 2.10). In the year 67/687 his brother Muṣʿab secured Basra in Iraq.
and the territories to the east as far as Sijistān. The Umayyads seemed to have lost their cause. The coin designs of the Zubayrid governors in Iraq and Iran remained almost the same as before, with the portrait of the šahānsšāh, the fire altar, and its attendants.

Between the years 66/685 and 69/688–9, the Zubayrid governor of the East placed the legend Muḥammad rasūl Allāh—“Muḥammad is the messenger of God”—in Arabic in the obverse margin of the coins for the first time. These were struck in Bīshāpūr in the Fārs province (see figure 2.11). Probably in 70/689–90, according to a numismatic analysis by Lutz Ilisch, the Zubayrid authorities of Aqūlā, the older twin city just north of the important garrison town Kufa, went a step further. Coins were created with the name of “Muḥammad (is) the messenger of God” in front of the portrait of the šahānsšāh and—for the first time—the profession of faith and the unity of God, the shahāda, was placed in Arabic in the obverse margin (see figure 2.12): bismi ‘llāh lā ilāha illā ‘llāh waḥdahū (“In the name of God, there is no deity other than God, He is alone”). Also in 70/689–90, an anonymous coin with the Pahlavī inscription “Muḥammad is the Messenger of God” in place of the governor’s name was struck in Kirmān province, then probably under Khārijite control. The Zubayrids and Khārijites thus propagated the new Islamic imperial rule with reference to the Prophet and putative founder of the state. The acknowledgement and invocation of the messenger-ship of Muḥammad was obviously fundamental to the new religion. Even ideologically opposed groups referred to him in this way. With the growing debate over a community built on Islamic principles, the representation of Islam and its state became essential for the legitimation of power. These changes were the first successful attempts in coin protocol which heralded the next decisive changes in the religious and imperial self-image of the elite.
In the year 72/691–2, the Zubayrid governor of the remote province of Sijistān in south-eastern Iran, brother of the aforementioned innovative governor of the East, went a step further by replacing the Zoroastrian fire altar and attendants with a profession of the new faith; Iraj Mochiri transcribed the Pahlavī inscription thus: “Seventy-two/One God but he/another God does not exist/Muhammad (is) the messenger of God/SK [mint abbreviation for Sijistān]” (see figure 2.13). The shahāda appears here in Pahlavī script and in the Persian language. The fire altar
replaces the altar with a cross from Georgia, it is the first known iconic symbol of the Islamic religion and its empire. The Zubayrid governors had targeted the ideological and religious deficiencies of the Sufyānid Umayyad regime. In the provinces under Khārijite control, Islamic religious propaganda addressed the crucial question of legitimate power: lā ḥukma illā li’llāh (“Guidance/Sovereignty belongs to none but God”) and bismi ’llāh wali ‘l-amr (“In the name of God, the master of authority”).

In 72/691–2, the Marwānids reconquered Iraq, and in 73/692, brutally suppressed the caliphate of ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca. The ideological much more aggressive Khārijite movement, though, still controlled much of Iran.

Finding a new ideological formula for the Umayyad Empire

The reforms and activities of ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān and his omnipotent governor of the East, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, can be seen on the one hand as an attempt to integrate the defeated moderate Zubayrid movement and on the other hand, as a forceful reaction to the ongoing and ideologically much more potent Khārijite challenge. At the latest at this time, if not before, the idea of a universal Islamic Empire in its own ideological right arose. Mecca was too far away for a representative imperial religious cult to be successfully controlled. In 72/691–2 ‘Abd al-Malik built the present Dome of the Rock and the Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem, probably the first architectural manifestations of the new Islamic Empire. The choice of Jerusalem placed the imperial state religion in the tradition of Judaism and Christianity and in the centre of the medieval world.

The elements of traditional coin design were reconsidered as well. Two necessities had to be balanced: first, the conservatism of precious metal coin design to
make the coins acceptable, and secondly, the need to create a symbolic rhetoric for both Islam and its empire. Between 72/691–2 and 77/696–7, the Marwānid administration experimented with new symbols and designs; not all the imagery is fully understood today. A recurrent theme was the inclusion of the formula Muḥammad rasūl Allāh, and increasingly the profession of the unity of God. These legends were the symbol of Islam comparable to the cross, fire altar and menorah. Muḥammad, the all-but-human messenger of God, was raised to a position almost as sacred as the divine revelation itself. The anachronistic iconographic symbols on the coins, however, were secondary in ideological terms and had to serve as recognizable marks of value. Based on the Zubayrid slogans on coins, the search for appropriate new designs and symbolic representations of the Marwānid Empire seems to have started in Damascus in 72/691–2. With the exception of some coppers the new designs were anonymous. These experiments followed a different but related course in Syria, in the super-provinces of Kufa and Basra and in the Northern provinces (Jazīra, Armenia and Azerbaijan).²⁶

At the latest in 72/691–2, ‘Abd al-Malik began to experiment with coin designs in Syria. His administration chose yet another circulating type of Heraclius’ nomisma as a model, initially leaving the anachronistic Greek inscription in place (see figure 2.14). The obverse shows three standing emperors still wearing tiny crosses on top of their crowns. On the reverse the cross, as the symbol of the Christian Byzantine Empire, was replaced by a “bar on a pole on steps.” The emblems of the rival Christian Empire were gradually removed, while the recognizable design pattern of the circulating Byzantine gold coinage was retained.²

Before 72/691–2, silver drahm were not known to be minted in Syria. The new Marwānid Damascus drahm (see figure 2.15) were modelled on the then-current Sasanian drahm retaining the images of the shāhānshāh and the fire altar with attendants. The coins are anonymous; the invocation Muḥammad rasūl Allāh in Arabic is placed in front of the portrait, however at first without the profession of the unity of God.²⁸ The Zubayrid propaganda was adopted as suitable for the ongoing power struggle with the Khārijites. From 72/691–2 to 74/693–4, the

Figure 2.14 Anonymous, nomisma, without mint [Damascus ?], without year [c. late 60s–72/late 680s–691–2 CE], Spink (1986), no. 86.
name Khusraw in Pahlavi is again found in front of the portrait so that the design, with the exception of the Arabic invocation of Muḥammad on the margin, remains the recognizable standard drahm design.\(^{29}\) In the year 73/692–3 the invocation of the messenger of God, Muhammad, was supplemented with an Arabic shahāda in the obverse margin of the silver, and probably also on the undated gold coins of Damascus, (see figures 2.16 and 2.17) and on the drahm of Kufa too.

The gold coinage followed the same course. Probably in 73/691–2, but before the year 74/693–4, the crosses were finally removed from the conventional meaningless image of the emperors and the symbol on the reverse was replaced by a globe on a pole on steps.\(^{30}\) Probably parallel to the silver issue of 73/691-2, the profession of faith, including the unity of God and the invocation of the messenger of God, Muḥammad, encircled the central symbol (see figure 2.16). The globe/
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Between the years 74/693–4 and 77/696, the next ideologically more consistent, indeed almost unified, iconographic representation of the empire was created for Syria, in gold, copper and silver (see figures 2.17 to 2.19). The obverse of the gold and copper coins shows the image of the standing caliph. The precious metal coins are anonymous, giving only titles, but some copper issues name ‘Abd al-Malik (see figure 2.18). An important mark of the figure’s imperial status is his long, broad sword sheathed in a scabbard, the hilt firmly in his grip. On the gold dīnār, the caliph is surrounded by the shahāda and the invocation of the messenger-ship of Muḥammad. The reverse repeats the globe on a pole on steps motif; the design was modified on copper coins. The reverse uses the familiar globe on a pole on steps design but with the addition of an ellipse, thus resembling the Greek letter phi. The precise rendering of the globe (or other tops) on a pole

Figure 2.17 Anonymous, dīnār, without mint [Damascus], year 77h (696 ce), Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 303-A02 (4.45 grams).

Figure 2.18 ‘Abd al-Malik, fals, Qinnasrīn (in northern Syria), without date [74–77/693–696], Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 303-F08 (3.15 grams).
with ellipse motif varied considerably at the different mints in Bilād al-Shām and the western Jazīra. On the silver coins in Damascus in 75/694–5, the image of the shāhānshāh remained on the obverse as the iconic mark of the drahm. The standing ruler is placed on the reverse (see figure 2.19). On either side of his image, the title amīr al-muʾminīn was inscribed for the first time in the Arabic language and script. A second title is found here for the first time on a dated document as well, the divination of the emperor as khalīf Allāh (“deputy of God”). The title enhanced his claim to politico-religious leadership.32

The depiction of a ruler on both sides may not have been a satisfactory design, as Treadwell suggested. The solution was probably a new type with the caliph’s half bust and the arch. It did not entirely deviate from the accepted Sasanian appearance of drahm but nevertheless created an ideologically more consistent design (see figure 2.20). It was also anonymous, but with imperial titles, though it bears neither mint nor date. It was presumably struck in Damascus between 75/694–5 and 79/697–8. Instead of the conventional portrait of the shāhānshāh, a new half-length portrait was created. It was close to Sasanian iconography, but distinctive. The figure’s hand firmly holds the hilt of his broad, sheathed, sword similar to the standing caliph motif. This newly created image can be understood as the representation of the caliph. The name “Khusraw”, placed again in front of the portrait, has been reduced to a meaningless part of a conventional coin design. The margin carries the shahāda and the reference to Muhammad that had become the norm by then. The reverse shows an arch on columns with capitals. On either side of the arch are the imperial titles, “amīr of the believers” and “deputy of God”, as on the standing caliph drahm. The arch covers a lance or spear, and on either side is the inscription naṣr Allāh (“Victory of God”) or naṣara Allāh (“May God give assistance”). Treadwell discarded earlier interpretations of
the arch as a prayer-niche (mihrāb) for art history reasons. This kind of decoration was mainly part of a late Roman convention to frame any image, here a lance, which is, according to the inscription, a symbol of victory.33

The iconographic significance of the bar/globe on a pole on steps and its variations is no longer known. The different representations must be considered as a group, but they lack an unambiguous counterpart in the growing corpus of early Islamic imagery. Various interpretations have been suggested, but none is entirely satisfactory because of the lack of parallel sources in literature and iconography. In 1952 George C. Miles saw it as a qadīb, a ceremonial staff or rod of the Prophet.34 Alternatively, in 1999 Nadia Jamil interpreted the symbol as the qūṭb or omphalos, the lynchpin of the world, a parallel to the cross of Golgatha, which is seen on Byzantine gold nomisma (see figure 2.1). This would point to Jerusalem, the centre of the imperial religious cult. According to Nadia Jamil, the rotation of the world might be visually expressed in the ellipse on the copper coins (see figure 2.18). The suggested foreshortening perspective of a movement, though, raises serious doubts about such a theory.35

Hanswulf Bloedhorn suggested another plausible interpretation.36 On the famous mosaic map of Jerusalem in Madaba (sixth century CE) a monumental Roman column is depicted as a pole on steps with something on top (capital, globe?) standing on the plaza before the northern gate of the city (today the Damascus Gate) (see figure 2.21). In the early Islamic period this column seems to have already been a landmark. Al-Muqaddasī (d. 381/991)37 and other writers knew the nearby gate as that of the “column,” Bāb al-‘Amūd. Such monolithic columns symbolized urban and civic pride and were a common feature in late Roman and even Umayyad cities, and therefore understandable even without a specific allusion to Jerusalem.38 In this interpretation the pellet on the top of the pole on the coins might represent a globe without a cross and the bar might

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Figure 2.20 Anonymous, drakhm, without mint [Damascus], without date [c. 75–79/694–698], Baldwin’s (2001), no. 1569.
represent an empty platform or capital. The urban column would then be a non-religious symbol and close enough to the Byzantine Christian “cross on steps” to serve as a recognizable mark of value. This function of the symbol is apparent on North African gold coins. The mark for the Byzantine semissis was the cross standing on a globe; this was continued as a globe on a pole on steps for Islamic semisses. The sign for the Byzantine tremissis, a cross potent, was transformed on the Islamic thulth into the early Islamic bar on a pole on steps.39 In Syria the only gold coin struck was the nomisma/dinár. A distinguishing mark for a denomination was not necessary, but a recognizable design connected the dinár with the previous Byzantine nomisma. The “steps” of the cross potent was the most distinct design element of the reverse. In the period of Mu‘awiya the bar on a pole on steps motif had probably appeared for the first time (see figure 2.5); it is not possible to interpret it as other than a de-Christianized or de-Byzantinized object on “steps.” It became a conservative symbol for the value of the coin, like the shāhānshāh. The phi-shaped symbol on steps on the copper coins should be considered as a mere mark of value too, replacing the Greek M or m. It might thus simply be regarded as being a Greek phi for follis as John Walker suggested.40 Whatever the original symbolic meaning of these images might have been, it was obviously secondary to their function as marks of value and fell into oblivion after
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‘Abd al-Malik’s reforms. The lance and the globe/bar on a pole on steps or column should be seen as non-venerated objects of pride, power and victory and as a substitute for the symbols of other religions.

The profession of faith as the symbol of religion and the Word of God as the symbol of the Universal Empire

Between late 77/696 and 79/699, the definitive symbolic representation of Islam and the Islamic Empire was introduced on coinage. This occurred immediately after the victory over the Khārijite caliph Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujā’a (r. 69-79/689–99), and must be seen as an attempt to legitimize Marwānid rule in the entire empire with Islamic propaganda common to all Muslim factions. This reform was organized by the caliph in Damascus in close cooperation with al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, the supreme governor of the former Sasanian east. In 77/696 new dīnār were struck (see figure 2.22), probably in Damascus. They bear the new religious symbols of Islam and the empire, the shahāda, encircled by the Qur’ānic risāla, the prophetic mission of Muḥammad (shortened version of Qur’ān 9:33), and on the opposite side the Word of God, the beginning of the sūrat ikhlāṣ (shortened version of Qur’ān 112), surrounded by the date of the striking.

Late in the year 78/697–8 al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf ordered the reform of the dirhams in his realm. The new coins weighed about 2.8 to 2.9 grams with slight regional differences. The new design was very similar to that of the new dīnār, but in addition carried the mint name. As far as we can currently tell, the reform began in Kufa, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Jayy and Shaqq al-Taymara in the Jibāl. The following year saw the adoption of the new design by more than 40 mints all over the east (see figure 2.23) many of them in the former regions of Khārijite dominance—and in the imperial capital Damascus.41

Until the time of the Abbaṣid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–75 CE), precious metal coins remained anonymous. Not only the name of the ruler but also his image was removed from any representation of the empire on precious metal coins. This constituted a historically unprecedented breach with Hellenistic coin imagery.

Figure 2.22 Anonymous, dīnār, without mint [Damascus], year 93h (711-2 CE), Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 306-A02 (4.23 grams).
going back about a millennium in the Roman west and the Iranian east. The path for the change was laid during the Zubayrid and Khārijite wars by the almost complete separation of the meaningless images, serving as mere marks of value, and the Arabic inscriptions carrying ideological messages.

On the silver coins the ruler’s side bears the Word of God, the sūrat al-ikhlāṣ, surrounded by the risāla that represents the sovereignty of God, almost a concession to Khārijite thinking. The shahāda is found on the opposite side. On coins in the Hellenistic tradition the latter is the side used for religious symbols. The aniconism of the precious metal coins for circulation was the result of the new iconic symbols: the Qur’ānic Word of God as an expression of sovereignty and the profession of faith as an expression of religion. Anonymity did not mean modesty, because the new Islamic universal emperor claimed to be nothing less than khalīfat Allāh (deputy of God). This presupposes an entirely new understanding of the role of the Islamic Empire and its religion.

**Summary of the history of coinage and the representation of Empire and religion**

Coin iconography reveals the early search for an identity of the Arab Islamic state that ultimately led to a suitable formula to represent the new, all-embracing universal Islamic Empire in its own ideological right. Until the period of the Zubayrid and Khārijite wars, almost no distinct imperial representation on coins can be discerned. Repeated attempts to conquer Constantinople can be interpreted as the wish of the then-new Arab-Islamic elite to inherit the Roman claim to universal rulership. From about the late 650s CE until the uprising of ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr, the Second fitna, minting was gradually regulated at the level of the provinces and districts. But the images of a Byzantine emperor with a cross insignia, the
portrait of \textit{shâhânsâh} and the symbol of Zoroastrianism, the fire altar, remained the standard designs until the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik. The most serious political, military and ideological challenge to the Umayyad regime was the Second \textit{fitna}, the caliphate of ‘Abdallâh ibn al-Zubayr between 62/681–2 and 73/692 and the even more aggressive Khârijite movement between 68/687 and 78/697. For the first time, as a manifestation of the new Islamic imperial self-consciousness, in 66/685–6, Zubayrid governors put the invocation of the messenger-ship of Muhammad on the coins; then, presumably in 70/689–90, extended it with the profession of the unity of God. In 72/691–2, one Zubayrid governor even replaced the fire altar of Zoroastrianism with these invocations in the Persian language and written in the Pahlavi script. These iconic statements are indeed the first symbols of Islam and comparable to the cross, fire altar and menorah.

In the period between 72/691 and 77–78/694–8, the experiments of ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjâj ibn Yûsuf can be seen as a response to these challenges, in an attempt to integrate the Zubayrid movement and to face the ideological Khârijite menace. After the suppression of the Khârijites in the years 77–78/696–8, coin design was radically changed. Precious metal coinage finally became anonymous; iconographic representations were abandoned. The Islamic Empire had finally found its distinctive symbolic form of representation: the bare iconic Word of God, the \textit{sûra} 112, representing the sovereignty of the new universal empire, along with the prophetic mission of Muhammad (Qur’ân 9:33) and the profession of faith, the \textit{shahâda}, which symbolized the new distinct religion.

Notes
1 A detailed and fully annotated version of this contribution can be found in Heidemann (2009).
3 See Phillips/Goodwin (1997); Heidemann (1998); Foss (1994–9); Walmsley (1999); Pottier/Schulze/Schulze (2008).
6 See Abel (1958).
7 See Pottier (2004); Goodwin (2004); Pottier/Schulze/Schulze (2007); idem (2008).
8 See Album/Goodwin (2002); Pottier/Schulze/Schulze (2008).
10 See Donner (1986); Foss (2002); Hoyland (2006).
11 These short expressions have no specific religious connotation.
12 See Foss (2002).
13 In Byzantium the cross became almost an imperial symbol that denoted the victory of the emperor over his enemies. See Moorhead (1985), 178.
14 See Tyler-Smith (2000).
16 See ibid., 8f.
17 The phases are according to Album in ibid.
18 See ibid., 12–5; Sears (2003a).
19 See Ilisch (2007).
20 In this contribution the term shahâda denotes only the profession of the unity of God.
21 See Foss (2005). For the history of the Khârijites, see idem (2002).
As founder of an empire, the Prophet Muhammad is as putative as Osman for the Ottoman Empire and Romulus and Remus or Aeneas for the Roman Empire.

See Foss (2002); Sears (2003a).
For the developments in the provinces, see Treadwell (1999), Sears (2003b).
See Miles (1967), 209f, nos. 4f.
See Sears (1995); idem (2003b); Ilisch (2007).
See Walker (1941), 23 no. DD1 (74h); Miles (1952), pl. xxvii no. 4 (74h, coll. P. Balog); Miles (1957), 191f no. 6 (72h); Bates (1986), 243f; Shams-Ishrāq (1990), 95 no. 137 (73h); Jazzar (2000), (72h); Album/Goodwin (2002), no. 278 (72h), no. 279 (73h).
See Bates (1986), 246.
See Miles (1967), 210f.
For the controversial discussion about this title, see Rotter (1982), 33–5; Crone/Hinds (1987), 4–23, esp. 20f and n. 81; Madelung (1997), 46 n. 51.
For this type, see Treadwell (1999); idem (2005).
See Miles (1952), 165; idem (1959).
See idem (1952); Jamil (1999).
Brief personal communication, email dated 3 March 2007.
See al-Muqaddamī (1906), 167.
See Arnould (1998); idem (1999), 109; Baumann (2000). On the mosaics in the Lion church and in St Stephen’s church in Umm al-Raṣāṣ in Jordan a similar column at the intra-mural side of the gate is visible. In the centre of the forum of Jerash a column may also have stood. See Harding (1949), 14.
For the Byzantine denominations, see Walker (1956), xxxii, x1-xl, 64–78; Balaguer (1976); Hahn (1981); Bates (1992), 272f, 282; Bates (1996).
See Walker (1941), xxiii.
See Klat (2002).

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Court cultures in the Muslim world: seventh–nineteenth centuries


Islamic Empire and its religion on coin imagery


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3 Great estates and elite lifestyles in the Fertile Crescent from Byzantium and Sasanian to Islam

Hugh Kennedy

Early Islamic elite culture is still something of a mystery and important questions remain to be investigated. Among the most central of these questions are the extent to which this aristocracy derived its wealth and status from the ownership and exploitation of landed property. In this paper I want to argue that the early Islamic elites of the Fertile Crescent derived much of their income and prestige from the ownership of large landed estates. I also want to investigate the environment of aristocratic residence and display, or, in more concrete terms, whether the aristocrats lived on their country estates or were simply city dwellers who derived their income from properties that they seldom visited and never lived on. I shall suggest that, unusually in the history of the Middle East, the early Islamic ruling class did actually reside, for at least part of the time, on their estates and that they constructed large and richly decorated buildings on these estates to be their centres of entertainment and display.

Attitudes to landownership and rural architecture of display derived from Sasanian and Byzantine practice and from the culture of the Arab Hijazi elite of the early seventh century. Although the coming of Islam brought many changes, late antique attitudes to land-ownership and exploitation continued among sections of the early Islamic elite until about the year 800 CE. I shall conclude by suggesting that this landed society disappeared at around the start of the third/ninth century when control of taxation, rather than ownership of land, was the main form of elite resources.

Great estates in Late Sasanian Iran

The tantalizing fragmentary evidence that we have suggests that the Sasanian elite was essentially rural, a network of elites whose power and prestige derived from the ownership of large estates and the palaces and castles they built on them. The evidence from texts, seals and coins is very sparse and we must hope that more archaeology will fill it out in years to come. The sources suggest that there were indeed extensive landed estates that belonged to the government and the fire-temples. There were also large private estates. Middle Persian texts refer to such estates by the name daskart, a term that is used to describe the estate including the dwelling house, various other buildings, canals and wells. The daskart was not the same as a village but was more closely equivalent to the Arabic qaṣr.
The empire was based on two very distinct landscapes, the alluvial plains of Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau. There has been very little investigation of elite building in the countryside of late Sasanian Iraq: the fact that almost all construction was made of mud-brick has meant that very little of it has survived in recognizable form: mud-brick dissolves in ways stone walls never do. The difficulty of discerning mud-brick architecture in the archaeological record is compounded by the fact that there have been few excavations of late antique rural sites. The one exception is the structure known now as Tulūl al-Ukhaydir, which seems to be the Qaṣr Banī Muqāṭil mentioned in classical Arabic geographical texts. The structure is rectangular and measures about 220 by 170 metre in area. Like many of the ḗūṣur of the Syrian desert, it is surrounded by an enclosure wall with regular semi-circular and three-quarter round towers. The only section to be excavated revealed a small three-aisled audience hall, again strikingly similar to some Syrian examples from the Umayyad period. The surfaces were decorated with stucco and painting, only fragments of which survive. These fragments do indicate, however, that this was a building for elite use. Finster has suggested a sixth-century date, based on textual evidence and there is nothing in the archaeology to contradict this. Qaṣr Muqāṭil is said to have been built by a Christian notable from nearby Ḥīra and it is mentioned in the Kitāb al-aghānī as a meeting place for hunting parties in the pre-Islamic period. The Sasanian Shah Khusraw II (r. 590–628 CE) is reported to have met the lord of Ḥīra in the qaṣr. Around the square building, there is no sign of agricultural activity in the area though the oasis of ‘Ayn al-Tamr is not far away. In short, the site presents an aristocratic residence isolated in the steppe lands, but not, as far as we can tell, an associated agricultural estate.

When the Byzantine chronicler Theophanes described the emperor Heraclius’ march through Iraq in the winter of 625–6 CE he did not record the names of cities conquered but of royal palaces sacked at Dezeridan, at Rūsa and at Beklāl, all on the east side of the Tigris. At Beklāl, where the emperor rested, the Byzantines found a hippodrome and a large agricultural estate: “He found one enclosure with 300 corn-fed ostriches, in another about 500 corn-fed gazelles and in another 100 corn-fed wild asses” all of which he gave to his soldiers. They also found sheep, pigs and oxen without number and “the whole army rested contentedly and gave thanks to God.” They then pursued Khusraw to the most famous daskart of them all, the “Daskarta de Malka”, known to the Arabs as “Daskarat al-Malik” on the road from Ctesiphon to the Zagros mountain passes. It seems to have been built by Khusraw II who certainly lived in it for more than 20 years, never visiting his official capital at nearby Ctesiphon. When the Byzantine army approached, he panicked and secretly fled to the city where he was soon murdered. Theophanes’ description of what the Byzantines found when they entered the palace grounds gives some idea of the opulence of the Sasanian royal palaces. In addition to 300 captured Roman (by which he means Byzantine) military standards, they also found:

- aloes and big pieces of aloe wood each weighing 70 or 80 pounds, much silk and pepper, more linen shirts than one could count, sugar, ginger and many
other goods. Others found silver, silken garments, woollen rugs and woven carpets—a great quantity of them and very beautiful, but on account of their great weight they burned them all. They also burned the tents of Chosroes [i.e. Khosrow] and the porticoes he set up whenever he camped in a plain, and many of his statues. They also found in this palace an infinite number of ostriches, gazelles, wild asses, peacocks and pheasant, and in the hunting park huge live lions and tigers...he gladdened and restored his army while he destroyed the palaces of Chosroes. These priceless, wonderful and astonishing structures he demolished to the ground so that Chosroes might learn how great a pain the Romans had suffered when their cities were laid waste and burnt by him.9

It is telling that the text makes clear that when the Persians invaded the Byzantine empire they sacked and burned cities, when the Byzantines invaded the Persian empire, they burned and sacked country palaces.

Not everything was destroyed, however. Ya’qūbî in the late ninth century CE remarked on the beauty of the buildings of Daskarat al-Malik.10 Ibn Rusta (d. c. 300/913) describes the palace as a fortified enclosure with only one gate on the west but he found no buildings inside.11 The site was visited by the German archaeologist Herzfeld in 1905 and again in 1911. He found one surviving wall, 500 metres in length built of fired brick and strengthened with twelve surviving and four destroyed round towers. He remarked that it was the most massive fired brick wall he had discovered.12

In the Iranian plateau a more modest but still impressive country house of the Sasanian period was the structure at Ḥājjīābād, described by its excavator as a “manor house”.13 The site lies in the east of the Iranian province of Fars, about 30 kilometres south of the Sasanian round city of Dārābgird, an important urban centre. The first point to stress is that the house was in a rural environment. It was not completely isolated; there were other poorer dwellings in the area and a fortress and a small fire-temple on a nearby hill, but it was certainly in the countryside. The second point is that this was clearly a high-status dwelling. Much of the site was lost by bulldozing before the excavations began but the building seems to have been divided into three distinct areas. There was a ceremonial area, consisting of an īwan with an open courtyard in front of it. Behind the īwan there was a lateral corridor and then another rectangular court with a further īwan behind it, an enfilade of ceremonial spaces, which was the public or būrānī section.14 The court was richly decorated with stucco and mural painting, indicating the prestige of the building.

To the west of this axis were a variety of chambers and courts which probably comprised the domestic quarters, the andarūn of later Iranian housing. Within this domestic complex there were high status rooms as well, some richly decorated with stucco wall panels and containing striking plaster statues of human figures including a full length female nude, and busts of a number of males, including of the ruling Shah of the time Shāpūr II (r. 309–79 ce). Clearly the people who built this house wanted to align themselves with the ruling class.
Great estates and elite lifestyles in the Fertile Crescent

The third interesting feature of this site is the position of the manor in the landscape. The annual rainfall in the area is about 100 mm and the plain around the manor could only be farmed with the aid of an irrigation system. The excavator suggests that:

the uniformity of the irrigation system also suggests that the entire network was probably initiated by a “central” decision maker, conceivably a feudal lord, who could afford the cost of the project. Part of the surveyed area may thus have prospered thanks to the investments of a feudal lord, and it is conceivable that his same lord may have built the Manor House as his residence.15

The evidence from Ḥājjī‘ābād must be used with caution. It is at present unique and it is difficult to know whether it was typical of numerous such estates or not. In addition it clearly dates from the fourth century CE and was ruined and deserted long before the Muslim conquests. Despite these problems, the estate at Ḥājjī‘ābād does provide an example of a Sasanian estate complete with high status dwelling and agricultural infrastructure.

Other information about estate ownership in Sasanian times comes from incidental mentions in saints’ lives or Arabic accounts of the Muslim conquest.16 It is from a saint’s life that we hear of Mihramgushnasp, an aristocratic, absentee landlord who became a Christian martyr.17 His grandfather had been the prefect of New Antioch for Khusrav I Anūšīrvān (r. 531–79 CE) and his father was üstāndār of Nisibis, a key strategic city on the Persian frontier with the Byzantine Empire. The family lived in the capital, Ctesiphon, and they appointed a Christian overseer to manage their rural estates.

We hear of another important landowner at the time of the Muslim conquest from early Arabic narratives. For example, Narsī was the maternal cousin of Khusrav II who owned lands at Kaskar and had had an estate at Nirsīyān, which is described as his stronghold (hīman). It was there that he retreated with his troops after the defeat of the Persian army by the Muslims at Qādisiyya. His daughter Kāmin Dār owned a qaṣr near Basra which she surrendered to the advancing Muslims.18 This seems to describe like a residential estate. Most of the major landowners were Persians but some were local Aramaeans, like the Christian Yazdin who had been finance minister of Iraq for Khusrav II and who held extensive lands in Kirkūk and Marghā or Šalūbā ibn Nistūnā, a large landowner in the Ḥīra region. The Lakhmid kings of Ḥīra were clearly great landowners too. We hear of an estate (qatī’a) belonging to al-Nu’mān ibn al-Mundhīr in the lower Euphrates near where Basra was subsequently founded which had a qaṣr on it.19

The family of Yazdin is perhaps the best known of Persian non-royal aristocrats.20 The family were Nestorian Christians from the town of Karkā in Bēth Sṭūk. They had risen to wealth and fortune as tax-collectors and financial agents in the service of the Sasanian Kings. One of them had hosted a synod of bishops in his own house in about 484 CE. In the reign of Khusrav II, a later Yazdin is described as “chief of the [Nestorian] believers”21 and according to the Chronicle
of Seert was “governor of all the lands from Bēth Garmā’ī to the Greek frontier.”

He protected the Nestorian church in his homeland but also played an important role in ameliorating the position of the Christians in Jerusalem after the Persian conquest. After his death, probably around 620 CE, his possessions were confiscated by Khusraw II, but in 628 CE we find that his sons still had property near the imperial palace of Darşgard and, according to Theophanes, Heraclius’ army, after the victory at Nineveh, spent Christmas “in the houses of Yazdin,” which must have been fairly extensive. One of his sons, Kortak, seems to have inherited his father’s administrative role while another, Shamta, was one of the leaders of the conspiracy that resulted in the death of Khusraw II in 628 CE and he lost his own life in the intrigues which followed. According to the De Ceremoniis, one of Yazdin’s relatives was among the prominent Persian prisoners brought in triumph to Constantinople in 639 CE. Thereafter the family disappears from history. Apart from the fact that they were Christian and probably of Aramean rather than Persian origin, they were typical of the aristocracy of Sasanian Iraq, playing important roles as provincial governors, financial administrators and property owners.

The peasants on these estates seem to have lived in semi-serf-like conditions and there was a vast social divide between them and the landowners. Something of the nature of the relationship between landlord and peasant can perhaps be gleaned from an anecdote in Tābarī’s account of the Muslim conquest of Iraq. The protagonist is a Persian horseman who is visiting a village near Ctesiphon where he clearly has property. He had heard rumours of the arrival of the Arabs but was not overly concerned. As he rode around his estate, he entered the house of some of his serfs and found them packing their clothes and preparing to leave. When he asked what they were doing, they replied that they were being driven from their homes by hornets. The Persian called for a crossbow to be brought and began shooting at the hornets (nests), splattering them against the wall. However, he soon seems to have realized that there was more to it than that and that the peasants were leaving because of the coming of the Arabs. Feeling his authority was crumbling, he went on his way but soon encountered an Arab horseman who ran him through with his spear.

The information we have about the great estates of the Sasanian empire are too sparse to be conclusive, but it does suggest that much of the agricultural economy was dominated by latifundia and that the ruling classes lived on these estates. This picture is supported by the apparent absence of high status and monumental building in Sasanian cities. This may be an optical illusion created by the inadequacy of the archaeological and textual evidence but it does seem to be generally true that there is almost no trace of aristocratic residence in cities.

Great estates in the Byzantine Near East

The evidence for the existence of great estates in late antiquity in those areas of the Middle East under Byzantine rule is somewhat fuller, both textually and archaeologically, than that for the Iranian world, but it remains sparse and full of gaps. We know that large estates in parts of the East were the cause of anxiety to the imperial government because much legislation was issued with the aim of
controlling their development and expansion. Justinian addressing the governor of Cappadocia in his *Novella 30* declares:

News has come to us of such exceedingly great abuses that their correction can hardly be accomplished by one person of high authority. And we are even ashamed to tell with how much impropriety the managers of “landlords” estates promenade about surrounded by body-guards, how they are followed by large mobs of people and how shamelessly they steal everything... State property has almost entirely passed into private ownership, for it was stolen and plundered, including all the herds of horses, and not a single man spoke against it, for all mouths were stopped with gold.²⁷

We would be wrong to conclude from this legislation that Byzantine Syria was necessarily dominated by the grasping owners of large estates. The legislation was directed at Cappadocia and the problem may have been much more acute there. Furthermore, the rhetorical introductions to legislation are likely to exaggerate in order to stress the urgency of action. Finally we should always be wary of assuming that the situation as it existed in Justinian’s day continued unaltered through the traumas of the Persian invasion and occupation into the 630s CE. Nonetheless, the *Novella* does show that great estates did exist in the East, if not necessarily in Syria, and that landlords could exercise great authority in their own areas.

Is there any evidence that such estates and landlords existed in Syria on the eve of the Arab conquest? The clearest archaeological evidence of such a *latifundium* comes from the ruins at Bāb al-Hawā’.²⁸ Unfortunately the site lies exactly on the modern border between Syria and Turkey. Not only does this mean that investigation and photography are virtually impossible but much of the surviving fabric has been removed to construct the frontier post and the road. Nonetheless, the combination of epigraphic and architectural remains allow us to say something about the design and function of the building. The structures consist of an arch across the old road (the ‘Bāb’ of the Arab name), a church on one side of the road and a large rectangular building on the other. The complex lies at the end of a small valley, about 2 kilometres by 400 millimetres, providing fertile land for the growing of cereals.

Tchalenko dated the church, on stylistic grounds, to the fourth century CE but the most interesting piece of evidence is an inscription on a stele found about 200 metres to the west of the site. This reads as follows:

Land [kórian] belonging to the holy house [oikos] of the property of Hormisdas, administered by Magnus, the most illustrious consul, Count of the Sacred Domstics, kouratóros general.²⁹

The estate seems to have been part of the lands that were granted to Hormisdas, the brother of the Sasanian king Shāpūr II, when he defected to the Romans in 323 CE. Magnus the Syrian is known to have been finance minister (*comes sacra-rum larginionum*) and to have been active in the Persian wars in 573 CE, but to have been replaced by one Domentiolus. It is not clear whether the estates still belonged
to the descendants of Hormisdas or whether, more probably, they had been incor-
porated into the imperial fisc. The ruins of Bāb al-Hawā’ are not well enough pre-
served for us to be able to talk with confidence of an elite residence; what we do have is a centre of estate management whose administrator was careful to make sure that anyone approaching from Antioch would know who owned and ran it.

Evidence for great estates in the Euphrates valley can be gleaned from a short passage in Baladhūrī’s Futūh in which he discusses the history of the city of Bālis. Bālis and the neighbouring settlement of Qāṣīrīn belonged to two brothers from the Greek aristocracy (min ashrāf al-Rūm). They had been assigned the villages (uqṭā al-qurā) and made protectors (ḥāfidhīn) of the cities in between. The vocabulary here is problematic. Though often translated as “fief”, the root q-ṭ-’ can be used to describe land held in absolute ownership and hāfidhīn is not a word normally used in this context in classical Arabic. If this account is anything more than a legend, it suggests a situation where a number of small towns and estates in this crucial strategic area were owned by magnates who were also responsible in some way for their defence. This tantalizing but very brief passage may point to the existence of a military landowning aristocracy on the Syrian frontier.

The extensive survey of rural settlement in Palestine in the Byzantine period published by Hirschfeld has yielded little firm evidence of elite dwellings in the countryside. There are certainly some more elaborate farmhouses, sometimes with baths and fortified towers but the overall proportions were modest and the architecture unpretentious. At the so-called “Third Mile Estate” near Askelon we find clear evidence of an industrial estate designed as a self-sufficient unit, which exported oil and wine in jars made in kilns of the estate. There was a bathhouse and fish-ponds and the proprietors or managers seem to have lived above the store where the wine jars were kept. At Ramat Ha-Nadiv near Cæsarea there is a substantial farm of the Byzantine period with a wine press and storage facilities and simple but substantial dwelling wing. These may point to the existence in Palestine of “landowning provincial upper classes” of which the great historian Procopius was a member.

An interesting example of a major landowner in late antique Palestine was the Empress Eudocia, estranged wife of Theodosius II, who withdrew from Constantinople and settled in Palestine in about 442 CE and remained there until her death in 460 CE. She used the extensive imperial estates in Palestine to endow numerous monasteries and charitable foundations in the province. Whether any of these estates remained in imperial hands into the sixth century CE or whether they had all passed into ecclesiastical ownership as the result of her generosity is not clear. More literary and epigraphic evidence for large estates in late antiquity comes from three imperial estates in the south of Palestine. The Saltus Constantiniacus and the Saltus Gerariticus both lay on the arid margins of Limes Palestine: To these can be added the estate of Sycomazon to the south of Gaza. They were administered by procuratores and actors of the res priuata who collected rents from tenant farmers. Settlement in this area needed careful water management and the remains of large cisterns and water channels have been found. The Saltus Gerariticus appears on the Madaba map and it and the Saltus Constantiniacus are recorded in the lists of George of Cyprus. A richly dressed and bejewelled donor
portrait of “Calliora, Lady of Saltus” has been discovered in a church of St Elias of Kissufim, dated to 576–8 CE. The estates clearly retained their identity, or at least the memory of their identity down to the time of the Muslim conquests and it may be that in the person of Calliora we have that most elusive of creatures, the great landed proprietor (or in this case, proprietress), of the end of the sixth century CE.37 Also in Palestine, Procopius records that the orator Evangelus from Caesarea bought the coastal village of Porphyreon for the vast price of three centenaria of gold only to have it confiscated by Justinian.38

One of the fullest descriptions we have of the lifestyle of a late antique aristocrat in Syria comes in the story of the misfortunes of the family of Sergius son of Iwannis Rusafoyo from Edessa.39 Sergius was one of the sources for the Chronicle of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre whose family had inherited the Rusafoyo properties.40 The story begins when Khusraw II was fleeing into exile in the Byzantine Empire at the beginning of his reign in 590 CE. The fugitive monarch stayed in Edessa at the palace of one Marinus, which was next door to the palace owned by Sergius’ father Iwannis.

Both Iwannis and Marinus had a certain status in the civil hierarchy of the Roman Empire, but Marinus had always been jealous of Iwannis, not only because of the high esteem in which the emperor held him but also because his estates were more lucrative than those of Marinus.41 Khusraw was impressed by the beautiful buildings of Iwannis’ palace and had himself invited to dinner. Iwannis put on a great party with:

the complete service of gold and silver implements tables, plates, serving-dishes, spoons, dessert-dishes, drinking-goblets, wine-jars, pitchers, flagons, basins and vessels of every kind, all of gold and silver.42

As so often in stories of rich men who entertained kings, things turned out badly. Iwannis’ wife inadvertently insulted Khusraw and when the monarch returned to Edessa in 604 CE, this time as a conqueror, he had her and her son Sergius deported to Persia (Iwannis was presumably dead by this time). She was forbidden to wash and allowed no new clothes and died in miserable captivity. Her son was pardoned in memory of his father’s hospitality and allowed to return to his estates but when he returned he found that all his moveable property had disappeared so that “nothing was left except villages, orchards, mills and shops.”43 In fact his mother had buried all the gold and silver but had neglected to tell anyone where it was and its whereabouts were still unknown when Dionysius was writing in the mid-ninth century CE.

This story is interesting for all sorts of reasons and the family connection with the chronicler Dionysius provides an explanation as to why it has been preserved. It does, for example, provide one of the rare textual accounts of the deposition of a hoard of precious objects, a process well-attested in the archaeological record. It also makes important points about aristocratic power. Marinus and Iwannis owe their status both to their position in the imperial administration and their ownership of estates in the countryside but they live in their town palaces and it is here that they display their wealth. Finally, it is interesting to note that the ownership
of these estates does not seem to have been affected by the Arab conquests as they were passed down by inheritance within the same group of Edessan families at least until the ninth century CE.

There is no evidence in the archaeological record, or elsewhere, of the sort of villa civilisation typical of Italy and much of the late Roman West in the fourth and fifth centuries CE, that is to say, of the large, elite dwellings surrounded by their own estates and estate buildings. However, two sites, both of the desert margins of Syria can be possibly be interpreted as elite rural residences. The first of these is the kāstron at Androna (al-Andarīn) a finely built quasi-military structure with a bathhouse outside the walls, which became the nucleus of a small urban/large village settlement that continues to thrive into Umayyad times. We know from an inscription that this was constructed by one “munificent Thomas” in 558 CE. Frustratingly, we know nothing more about who this Thomas might have been or why he was building this high status building in such a remote outpost. Was he an officer of the imperial administration, an agent of the Ghassanid rulers who policed the desert frontier for the Byzantine administration, or a local landowner seeking to protect his possessions and his clients? We have no means of telling.

Even more enigmatic is the nearby site of Qaṣr Ibn Wardān. Here we find an impressive palace and church, both preserved very well and a ruined building nearby, which has been identified as barracks. The architecture, largely of fired brick with stone columns and window and door frames is of a very high quality. We have a date of 564 CE recorded in the inscription but no builder’s or owner’s name. Here again there are the same range of possibilities but no means of knowing which one to accept. Androna and Qaṣr Ibn Wardān seem to stand alone as examples of high status rural building on late antique Syria. Were they the centres of great estates? Survey work around Androna suggests that the irrigation system was well developed and it is likely that cultivation was fairly widespread in these potentially fertile lands. The hinterland of Qaṣr Ibn Wardān had never been systematically surveyed so we have no means of telling whether the complex stood at the heart of an agricultural estate or in splendid isolation on the fringes of the desert.

It has been argued that many rural settlements in Byzantine Syria were inhabited by independent peasant proprietors holding their houses and lands either in absolute ownership or on long-term emphyteutic contracts. Discussing the period from the sixth century CE, Kaplan has concluded that the rural economy of the Byzantine Empire was characterized by:

la prédominance de la petite exploitation paysanne dans la mise en valeur du sol, constante aussi absolue que l’araire tire par une paire de boeufs dans la vie rurale Byzantines. De la santé économique et sociale de cette petite exploitation dépend la croissance ou la récession dans les campagnes Byzantines et donc, dans un empire qui cache derrière une brillante façade urbaine la prédominance fondamentale de l’économie rurale, la prospérité ou la crise.45

The evidence which might point to the existence of a society of small proprietors lies in the archaeological evidence from northern Syria. We cannot, however, draw
Great estates and elite lifestyles in the Fertile Crescent

too firm conclusions from this evidence since the vast majority of it comes from three rather exceptional areas, the Limestone Massif of northern Syria, the basalt hills of the Hawrān in southern Syria and the Negev desert of southern Israel. These areas all shared the same chronology of development. All were densely settled in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries CE, a period of continuous building and expansion. The seventh and eighth centuries CE were a time of stagnation, if not of actual decline. The ninth century CE saw the almost complete abandonment of settled sites throughout. They were all marginal areas only developed for agriculture in times of great prosperity or demographic pressure. All these areas, too, were dry farming lands where there were no large-scale irrigation projects to be organized. By contrast we have virtually no archaeological data from areas like the plains of central Syria between Ḥimṣ and Aleppo, the oasis (ghūṭa) of Damascus and the plain Sharon in central Israel, areas which must have been cultivated throughout history and where we might expect to find evidence of large estates. This is partly because the sites have been built over again and again and partly too because, at least in the Syrian examples, the domestic architecture would have been of mud brick and therefore much less likely to survive in an easily recognizable form.

In both the Limestone Massif and the Hawrān, the remains of numerous villages do survive, their stone-built houses often complete right up to the wall-heads. The neat rows of houses may give an initial appearance of middle-class prosperity, and occasional opulence, but recent research has shown that this was a society of peasant proprietors and small farmers. There are no indications of large estates. Some houses are larger than others but there are none that can be clearly identified as manor house or other high status dwelling. Of the many villages in the limestone massif, there is only one that is known to have formed part of a large estate, surrounded by a wall, and the evidence for this comes from the second century CE, well before the great flowering of this rural culture which began in the fourth century CE.46

Some support for the idea that the Syrian villages were inhabited by peasant proprietors can be found in the hagiography. The recently published Arabic life of Timothy of Kāḥuṣṭā tells the story of a saint who flourished in the villages of the limestone massif in the early Abbasid period.47 In this world there are richer and poorer farmers but even the rich ones plough their own land. Decisions about important matters such as inviting the saint to stay or building an enclosure for him seem to be taken by the inhabitants as a group, though there is a passing mention of a group of leaders (ru’asā’ al-balad) with whom the saint’s family want to make a good impression.48

The evidence from Syria is tantalizingly rich but inconclusive. The remains of the limestone villages suggest communities in which many of the inhabitants were of a broadly similar wealth and social status. There is no proof, however, that they were owners of the lands they cultivated. It may well be that many of these settlements were in fact village-based estates, owned by one absentee landlord who lived in the nearby city. With the exception of the brothers from Bālis discussed above, there are no large landowners mentioned in the Arabic accounts of the Muslim conquests (as there are for Iraq) to carry on the traditions of the Byzantine gentry.
We know that there was a rich landowning elite in pre-Islamic Egypt. We know that because the affairs of families like the Apions were documented in the papyri, which means that we have a clearer idea of their personal and financial arrangements than we have for elite society in any other part of the late Antique world. The Apions disappear from the record, if not necessarily from the historical reality, in the early seventh century CE, but we know from the evidence of early Islamic administrative papyri that Greek-speaking elite families continued to hold estates and conduct local administration through the Muslim conquests and well into the first century of Islamic rule.

Another factor which must be considered when discussing the nature of landholding in Syria on the eve of the Muslim conquests is the proportion of land that was owned by the church, especially the monasteries. It is impossible to know how much land was owned by ecclesiastical establishments. The only estimate we have, based admittedly on very fragmentary documentary evidence from Aphrodito, a village in rural Egypt, suggests that in late antiquity in one area between 40 percent and 57 percent of the land was owned by the church. Although some of this was owned by churches in the provincial capital of Antaiopolis, most of it belonged to local monasteries. Occasionally these were the properties of absent landlords: in the sixth century CE, the Church of Rome itself held lands in Tyre on the coast and Cyrrhus north of Aleppo although, as with many other things, it is impossible to know whether these estates were restored after the Persian occupation at the beginning of the seventh. Local churches were certainly important landowners in Palestine. The estates of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre required special legislation by Justinian. Monasteries certainly did own land but the limited evidence suggests that this was usually limited to gardens and fields in the immediate vicinity of the community, rather than extensive properties. Some monastic leaders actively discouraged the acquisition of property to provide a secure income for the institution. St Sabas (d. 532 CE), the great monastic leader of early sixth-century Palestine and founder of the monastery in the Judaean desert that still bears his name, does not seem to have wanted to build up big landholdings, though he did invest in hostels for pilgrims, both at the monastery itself and in Jerusalem. The monks were dependent on donations in cash or kind from the faithful along with the small income the monks might derive from the making of baskets and other handicrafts because the abbot felt that a regular income would make them soft and complacent.

The fate of church lands after the Muslim conquest must have varied. It is clear that many monasteries were deserted in the early seventh century CE, either at the time of the Persian or Arab invasions. Some such refugees made their way to Rome where a number of “Greek” monasteries appear in the records from the early seventh century onwards and in some cases they were expressly said to have been inhabited by monks from the lands now ruled by the Muslims, specifically from St Sabas in Palestine and Nisibis in the Jazira.

The varied evidence from the Byzantine provinces tends to suggest a mixture of great estates and smaller peasant owned plots of land. However, with the exception of Andarin and Qasr Ibn Wardan, there is little evidence of high status rural dwellings and we must presume that most estate owners were in fact resident in towns.
Estates in the Hijaz at the coming of Islam

There was also a well-established tradition of estate ownership among the Hijazi elite who dominated the early Islamic state. It might seem surprising at first that the Arabs, who were, after all, largely Bedouin in lifestyle before the conquests, should play an important role in the expansion of agricultural lands. It is important to remember, however, that the first Islamic society emerged in the agricultural environment of the Medina oasis and that the possession of agricultural estates was widespread among the early Muslim elite, even before the great conquests brought them untold wealth. In some cases, these estates had belonged to the families of these individuals since the days before the coming of Islam. Abū Sufyān (d. 32/653) had owned a village called Qubbash (unidentified) in the Balqâ’ in Transjordan and, given that he was a travelling merchant who spent much of his time in Mecca, he must have been an absentee landlord. Another major figure in early Muslim politics who was also a well-established landowner was ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ (d. 42/663). His estate at al-Waht, inherited from his father, lay on the road between Mecca and Tā’if. It was the source of immense wealth: when the raisins it produced were piled up, we are told, it was like a lava field. It was in turn inherited by his son ‘Abdallāh. It may have been a residential estate for ‘Amr’s father had died on the way there in 622 CE. When ‘Abdallāh owned it, it was administered by an agent (qayyim) and cultivated by his mawāli.

There are numerous traditions that the Prophet Muḥammad himself became a landowner, cultivated his estates and used the revenues to feed his family, to provide a contingency fund in case of disaster and for a variety of charitable causes. Some of this land was taken from the Jewish inhabitants of the Medina oasis. In the lands of the Banū Nadīr, for example, he is said to have cultivated the land, which is described as his personal possession (khāliṣa) and used the produce as food (qūṭ) for his family and wives. The surplus (mā fadala) he put to for arms and armour for the Muslims. This implied that the surplus was sold, or possibly bartered, for arms. Some of the rest of the land was given as estates (qaṭā’i’) to some of his closest companions. He also possessed an estate at al-Juraf, three miles from Medina, which he cultivated (izdara’a) and which the caliph ‘Uthmān subsequently gave as a qaṭi’ a to al-Zubayr and a number of properties known as “al-Ṣadaqāt al-Sab’”, again near Medina, which are said either to have been left to him by a Jew called Mukhayriq or to have been part of the properties taken from the Banū Nadīr. According to yet another account, he had bought the properties from some Jews and irrigated them and cultivated date palms. Most of the important members of the early Islamic elite, including the caliphs ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and ‘Ali and the muḥājirūn al-Zubayr ibn ‘Awwām and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf, had estates in the Hijaz.

It is not clear how large or how valuable these estates were but the important thing from the point of view of this paper is first that the Prophet himself and his most eminent companions were believed to have owned landed property and used the produce and revenues from this property as a source of income and livelihood. The ownership of landed properties, in fact, had prophetic precedents in the Islamic
world as well as in Sasanians and Byzantine elite culture. The Prophet's reported attitude toward landholding was to prove significant for later Muslim elite.

Latifundia in the early Islamic period

When the Muslims conquered the Fertile Crescent and Egypt they came to rule over lands where the possession of landed estates was an important part of elite incomes and status. The Hijazi leadership also came from a society in which the ownership of land and the use of the income from it was well established. It would have seemed natural, therefore, that the conquerors would establish themselves as major landowners. In fact, however, things were not as simple as that. It is clear that from an early stage, probably from the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, that the policy of the Muslim government was not to allow this process but instead to keep the cultivated and productive lands as the communal inheritance of the conquerors, who were to be paid pensions or salaries from the tax (kharāj) raised. The properties were to remain in the hands of the original owners. There were, however, exceptions, notably lands from which the owners had fled or been dispossessed or lands which were unproductive but could be brought under cultivation. Such lands could be given as qaṭā'ī to individuals.

The granting of qaṭā'ī and the ownership of large estates was hugely controversial: was it in accordance with Islamic law? In the first two centuries of Islam, a strong body of opinion emerged which held that the possession of large estates was contrary to good Islamic practice. The fundamental argument against them was the idea that all the conquered lands should form part of the fay of the community as a whole. They should be cultivated by a subject population and their revenues used to pay the pension/salaries (ṣūd) of the Muslims. There was also the secondary argument that the owning of land diverted the Muslims away from the jihād, which was the only proper way for the pious to enrich themselves. Along with this was the feeling that Muslims who owned landed estates could be obliged to pay the kharāj which was humiliating in that it lowered the Muslims to the status of subject peoples.

To counter these arguments, there also emerged a vigorous stream of traditions in defence of property and in praise of agriculture. As we have already seen, Muhammad is said to have cultivated date palms on his own land and uttered pronouncements in favour of landownership. There were also practical arguments that stressed that land was a good investment and, according to some reports the Arabs used to say "sell animals and buy dead lands (mawātan)." Land, it was argued, was a better investment than gold or silver, which would never grow or increase like an agricultural estate.

The fullest discussion of these issues is in the Kitāb al-amwāl of Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224/837). Ibn Sallām produces evidence that the Prophet himself granted qaṭā’ī, at least on a limited scale. The two clearest examples are the grant of lands at Khaybar with (fruit) trees and palms to be veteran companion, al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām and the lands around Bethlehem to Tamīm al-Dārī. In the case of the latter this was a sort of pre-emptive grant because the lands had
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not yet been taken by the Muslims and Tamīm, who came from the area, is said to have requested the lands as a gesture of confidence in the Prophet and the future expansion of Islam. When the lands were conquered in due course, the caliph ‘Umar confirmed the grant but with the stipulation that the lands could not be sold and, Ibn Sallām says, the family still held the lands in his own time, nearly two centuries after the initial grant. It is impossible to assess the historical reliability of these reports but they show that lawyers in the eighth and early ninth centuries CE believed that the practice of giving out qaṭā’i’ had Prophetic sanction. However, neither of these cases conformed to later ideas about the granting of qaṭā’i’ since, in both cases, the land was already cultivated. In the case of the Khaybar lands this was justified either because the lands had been brought under cultivation by an Anṣārī inhabitant of Medina who had given them up voluntarily or because they had formed part of the Prophet’s sawāfi which he could, of course, give to whomever he wished.69 It was not, in short, a precedent for giving cultivated lands as qaṭā’i’. Ibn Sallām then goes on to discuss other examples of pre-emptive gifts, stressing again that they are not normative. He has problems, however, with the grant of land at ‘Aqīq and has to content himself by saying that he cannot find anything “more extraordinary (a’jab) than this”.70

The development of the classic theory of the granting of qaṭā’i’ is ascribed to the decisions of ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān. ‘Umar is portrayed as generally hostile to, or at least suspicious of, the granting of private estates, but he did establish the categories of lands which were to form part of the sawāfi. These included the lands of those killed in battle (against the Muslims), lands belonging to Muslim deserters, lands of Kisrā (a generic name given by the Arabs to Sasanian kings) and the royal family, lands that were waterlogged (maghid ma’) and lands set aside for the support of the postal service.71 In another anecdote ‘Umar is portrayed as distributing properties, in one case a piece of dead land (ard mawāt) which the new owner subsequently sold, showing that it was his in absolute ownership.72

Ibn Sallām goes on to explain that all these were lands whose owners (ahl) had deserted and which had no inhabitants to cultivate them and that they were therefore at the disposal of the ruler. When ‘Uthmān became caliph he decided that it would be better for the Muslims and their kharāj if these lands were cultivated rather than being left idle. He therefore gave them as gifts (a’taha . . . iqṭā’an) to those who would cultivate them as other lands were cultivated and would pay the dues to the Muslims which other lands paid.73 He then gives a number of illustrative examples, including villages in Iraq which had been part of the Persian royal lands.74 He granted lands in Basra, subsequently known as Shaṭṭ ‘Uthmān, to ‘Uthmān ibn Abī ‘l-Āṣ al-Thaqafī because they were waterlogged (sabakh) and saline (ajāman) and he drained the land (istakhrajaha) and revived it.75 According to another authority on early Islamic taxation, Abū Yusuf, the caliph ‘Umar had said that if someone had been granted land and neglected to cultivate it for three years, other people who will farm it will be allowed to take over.76

Ibn Sallām goes on to discuss problems that could and did arise from these grants. ‘Umar is said to have defined what was meant by reviving land. The fundamentals were building on it and bringing it under cultivation (al-bunyān wa’l-harath). The
most basic operation was providing what was necessary to achieve that, whether by opening up a canal, uncovering a spring or digging a well. If a man does this and then builds on the land and cultivates it, this is “complete revival” (iḥyā’ kulluhu) with the implication that it belongs entirely to him. If however he only provides water and other people cultivate it, then he only receives revenues proportionate to his expenditure (al-ḥarām limā ahdatha). We also hear how the boundaries of qaṭā‘ī were established, by setting up pillars (manāran), digging a ditch (ḥafīr) or trench (musannāh). What if someone was given a qaṭī‘a and did not bring it under cultivation? What happened if someone else appeared and did revive this land, whether they knew that it had been granted to someone else or not?

Ibn Sallām provides the classic account of the development of Muslim law on qaṭā‘ī. They are clearly intended to be grants held in absolute ownership so long as the owner builds on them and brings them under cultivation. What is less clear is the fiscal status of the properties. The only comment he makes is an incidental statement that they should pay kharāj to the Muslims like other lands do but whether this means kharāj as the full land-tax or a generic term for any sort of taxation is not clear. The question is dealt with more fully by Abū Yūsuf in his written advice to Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809 CE). He explains that the rate of taxation on qaṭā‘ī is at the discretion of the ruler. If the lands are irrigated by water flowing from kharāj lands, then kharāj should be paid on them, but he goes on to add, “Ushr is charged on qaṭā‘ī only when the granted land requires heavy investment for digging canals, erecting farm buildings and other heavy expenses for the farming of the qaṭī‘a”. This comment is extremely significant. It makes it clear that qaṭā‘ī developed on newly irrigated lands were subject to a much lower rate of taxation (the ‘ushr or tenth) than already cultivated estates on which the Muslim owners had to pay the much higher kharāj.

The conflict in the early Islamic state between those who sought to preserve the fay as the rightful income of the conquerors and those who were in effect, in favour of privatizing at least a portion of it became acute during the caliphate of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (r. 644–56 CE), who was accused by his detractors of giving properties which rightly belonged to the whole community, away to his own relatives. The first Umayyad caliph, Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān (r. 661–80 CE) is recorded as having embarked on an ambitious programme of estate development in Medina. Even though the political capital was now at Damascus, Medina remained an important city, enriched by the proceeds of the conquests, an important market, in fact, for agricultural produce. Furthermore, prisoners of war captured in the conquests provided a useful source of cheap and often skilled labour for cultivating these estates.

Mu‘āwiya had acquired, by confiscation, purchase or other means a large quantity of agricultural estates as well as the houses (dūr) and palaces (qūṣūr) of many famous early Muslims. These properties were described in the early sources as sawāft. The agricultural estates were said to have produced 150,000 wasq of dates and 100,000 wusq of wheat which were taken to Mu‘āwiya. These fields were cultivated by a group of Umayyad mawālī (freedmen, probably at this stage ex-prisoners of war), led by one Ibn Mīna, whose name suggests he may have been of Greek origin.
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These agricultural developments aroused considerable opposition in the city, partly because of the way the lands had been acquired and partly because of competition over water resources. Trouble broke out when Ibn Mina and his men tried to cultivate lands which were claimed by the Medinese tribe of Balharith ibn al-Khazraj. The violence spread and a full-scale rebellion broke out. In the end this led to violence when a group of Medinese rebelled against the government of Mu‘āwiya’s son Yazīd. On 27th Dhī ‘l-Hijja, 63/26th August 683 the rebels were defeated by an Umayyad army which included a contingent of mawālī.

Mu‘āwiya continued the policy of agricultural development in Mecca where he dug wells and planted palm trees. In a reported dialogue with ‘Abdallāh ibn al-‘Abbās, orchards in Mecca were referred to as “a valley flowing with gold,” clearly indicating the profitability of such enterprises. As in Medina, so in Mecca, this activity attracted the hostility of the pious, who contended that planting trees where there had never been any before was against the will of Allah.

The precedent set by Mu‘āwiya was continued by many later Umayyads, notably the sons of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 86/705). Two of these in particular, Maslama (d. 121/738) and Hishām (the later caliph, d. 125/743) are recorded in texts as investing large sums in bringing dead lands under cultivation and creating large-scale latifundia. This literary evidence is confirmed in a number of cases by the archaeological record.

Between 1987 and 1990 a team led by Sophie Berthier conducted surveys and limited excavations in the middle Euphrates valley, between Dayr al-Zūr and the Iraq border at Abū Kamāl. The results, published in 2001, are extremely impressive and provide a fascinating insight into the agricultural life of this area in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Most of this area of the Euphrates valley enjoys between 100 and 150 millimetres of rain per year, with perhaps a bit more in the north-west. This is well short of the 200 millimetres which is the lowest rainfall which permits dry farming. Any agricultural activity is therefore based on irrigation. The river flows through a valley that might be as wide as 15 kilometres in some places but much narrower in others. On each side of the valley rise plateaux, of Syria to the west and Jazīra to the east. The height of the escarpment means that raising water from the river to the level of the plateau is out of the question. Agriculture is only possible in the floor of the valley between the river and the escarpments.

In places norias are used nowadays to raise water and of course mechanical pumps provide a means to supply water to the fields. In early Islamic times, however, large-scale irrigation required the construction of canals that would lead water off the river or its tributaries so that it flowed at the level of a metre or two above the surrounding fields. Gravity could then used to lead the water from the main canal into subsidiary irrigation ditches and thence to the fields. These canals, flowing as they do between artificial dykes above the level of the valley floor, require constant maintenance, both to prevent the channel from silting up and to keep the dykes from being breached. This agriculture can be very productive but it is investment-intensive, requiring constant and sustained expenditure. Only in certain rare and favourable circumstances could it be undertaken.
In the lower half of the length of the river surveyed by Berthier and her team, there was no evidence of large-scale irrigation and settlement in the early Islamic period was limited to a handful of small sites. The picture in the upper section, however, was very different. Here there were two major irrigation projects with rather different profiles and histories.

The lower one was based on the Dawrīn canal system. The Dawrīn was drawn, not from the Euphrates but from the lower valley of its tributary, the Khābūr, which flows into the main river from the north. Much of the length of the canal can still be traced. It flowed from the Khabur and was led along the main valley of the Euphrates for about 130 kilometres. The channel was usually between 9 and 11 metres wide and probably fairly shallow, about 1 metre only in depth.90

It appears as if the only major settlement in the area in the pre-Islamic period was the Roman frontier fortress of Circesium (ar.: Qarqūsiyya), which lay immediately upstream from the confluence of the Khābūr and the Euphrates. This represented the furthest outpost of Roman and Byzantine control in the Euphrates valley. Beyond that must have been a sort of man-man’s land where lack of security made agriculture hazardous if not impossible. The Muslim conquests changed this strategic position entirely. From being a frontier war zone, the valley of the middle Euphrates became a main highway between two important provinces of the same empire.

There had been a canal along at least part of the course of the Dawrīn canal in the third and second millennia BC, but it seems to have fallen out of use after that. We have no specific historical record of the digging of the canal but Ṭabarī records that Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, before becoming caliph, was given lands known at Dawrīn as a qaṭī’a. The land was at this time deserted (kharāb) and he asked a secretary called Dhuwayb who was working with him what should be done. Dhuwayb replied by asking him what he wanted in exchange and Hishām said “Four hundred dinār.”91 Dhuwayb then entered Dawrīn and its villages in the diwans (presumably in his own name) and made a vast amount of money out of developing the land. When Hishām became caliph, he refused to give Dhuwayb a job and banished him from Syria because of the way in which he had exploited his position.92 If this story (which is told to illustrate Hishām’s notorious carefulness with money rather than the process of agricultural development) has any truth in it, it suggests that the development of Dawrīn formed part of a whole group of large-scale irrigation projects in the Euphrates valley undertaken by the sons of ‘Abd al-Malik, including that of his brothers Maslama’s at Bālis and Sa’īd’s just up river from Dawrīn among them. It also shows how an entrepreneur like Dhuwayb could make a fortune from it. The last Umayyad caliph seems to have constructed the fortress still known as Marwāniyya in the area and used Dawrīn as a staging post for the army of 20,000 men led by Ibn Hubayra on its way to conquer Iraq in 744–5 CE.93

Archaeological evidence, not from the canal itself but from the 17 or so villages that developed along its course, also suggests that the canal was developed in the later Umayyad period. It continued to be maintained in Abbasid times with the number of settlements increasing. The canal itself was dredged out on at least one occasion. By the year 900 CE, however, the canal seems to have been abandoned and large-scale irrigation in the area had ceased. Qarqūsiyya, which
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had been an important, fortified city in Umayyad times, was gradually deserted and its role as the most important urban centre in the area was taken over by Raḥba, upstream from the Dawrīn canal.

With the coming of the Abbasids after 750 CE, most of these lands were given to members of the new ruling family but we have no information about the ownership of the Dawrīn canal area. The last Umayyad caliph Marwān II (d. 132/750) had developed a fortress there and it may well be that Abbasid caliphs themselves took it over and it formed part of the royal ṣawāfī. This was a period of continuing investment, the dredging of the channel for example, and increasing settlement. This must be connected with the foundation and phenomenal growth of Baghdad.

According to al-Ṭabarī, one of the reasons al-Manṣūr gave for choosing the site of Baghdad was its closeness to the Euphrates from which the Sarat canal provided a direct link by water which meant that “everything from Syria, al-Raqqa and the surrounding areas could be brought to the city.” The role of the Euphrates in the transport of provisions (mīra) is stressed in other passages. The subsequent development of al-Raqqa and the increasing importance of the river route between al-Raqqa and Baghdad, effectively the twin capitals of the early Abbasid caliphate, must have increased the value of these lands considerably. In the ninth century CE, the capital moved to Samarra, which was not connected to the Euphrates by a direct water link and al-Raqqa ceased to be used by the caliphs. By the end of the century, much of the Jazīra was under the control of the Hamdanids and the ravages of the Qarmathians at the beginning of the tenth century CE seem to have dealt a final blow to the prosperity of the area. With the drying up of the great urban markets and the continuing security problems, there was no incentive to continuing the massive investment necessary for maintaining the Dawrīn canal. Those villages that survived, did so on the basis of subsistence agriculture or supplying the most need of the little town of Raḥba. The remarkable development and collapse of this area can be seen as a direct consequence of its economic integration into the wider Muslim empire, a sort of Islamic globalization. When circumstances changed, the pattern of settlement and farming returned to what must have been its more usual and natural state.

Further up the river, on the west or Syrian side, the team investigated the Nahr Saʿīd or Saʿīd canal system. This was in many ways similar to the Dawrīn canal, both in history and function, but at least parts of it were in use over a much longer period. According to Balādhurī, the area was presented by the caliph Walīd I (r. 705–15 CE) to his brother Saʿīd, known as “al-Khayr” (the Good) because he practiced asceticism (nask), as a qaṭī’a. Other accounts ascribe the gift to ʿUmar II (r. 717–20 CE). He caused the canal to be dug in an area that had previously been a jungle (ghayda) infested with lions. Berthier doubts the historicity of this account, citing the absence of identifiable Umayyad material along the course of the canal but, as she acknowledges in other cases, this may not rule out the Umayyad origins of the system. Two other considerations suggest that the canal known as Nahr Saʿīd may indeed have been the work of the Umayyad prince of that name. The first is that Saʿīd was a comparatively obscure member of the ruling family, not a man about whose achievements, legends grew up; if it had
been ascribed to Hishām, we might have more reason for scepticism. The second is that the canal is mentioned by name in a narrative of military events in the reign of Marwān II.99

The nahr said seems to have been in use through the second half of the eighth and the whole of the ninth centuries CE. As in the case of the Dawrīn canal, there is almost no evidence of activity in the tenth century but, in contrast to the Dawrīn, it is clear that at least some sections of it were repaired in the eleventh and remained in use until the early fourteenth. The canal itself was a gravity irrigation canal, that is, that the channel ran above the level of the fields which it irrigated.100 The archaeological evidence suggests the fields it serviced lay between the canal and the Euphrates River itself and that it formed a barrier, or at least a demarcation between the pastoral lands on the west side and the irrigated lands to the east.101

Apart from the old Byzantine fortress at Qarqīsiyya and the Marwāniyya there were few major settlements along the Dawrīn. Along the Nahr Saʿīd, however, among the 14 identified habitation sites were a number of quasi-urban settlements, one of which, Tell Mohasan, built on a middle Bronze Age tell, had an area of 900 by 700 metres, though not all of this may have been occupied continuously. Two such were investigated by the archaeologists. Tell Guftan, which may have been the mediaeval “Fam Nahr Saʿīd” (Mouth of the Saʿīd canal) had pottery that could be dated to the late eighth century CE in its lowest strata.102 At Tell Qaryat Medad, the earliest ceramics recovered from the limited sondages were dated to c. 840 CE.103

Both canals and the associated settlement show clearly the massive investment in irrigation and the consequent expansion of agricultural activity in the eighth and into the ninth century, and both show the collapse of the canal systems and the depopulation of a number of sites at the beginning of the tenth. Such growth is clearly related to the landowning policies of the members of the Umayyad family and, after 762 CE, the growth of Baghdad as a major market for agricultural produce.

Another area from which there is evidence of major investment in agricultural infrastructure in the early Islamic period was the south of Iraq. From the time of Muʿāwiya onwards, there was a massive amount of investment in digging new canals and bringing new land under cultivation in the south of Irāq. ‘Abdallāh ibn Darrāj, Muʿāwiya’s freedman had been responsible for bringing this land out of the mawāt and under cultivation. As governor, al-Ḥajjāj continued the work of land reclamation digging new canals and a whole new administrative centre at Wāṣit.104

Once more Maslama ibn ‘Abd al-Malik was in the forefront. In al-Ḥajjāj’s time the levees were seriously breached. The governor wrote to al-Walīd saying that repairs would cost 3,000,000 dirham. The caliph replied to the effect that that was too much. It was at this point that Maslama made an offer to put up the money and do the work on condition that any lands reclaimed after the 3,000,000 had been spent would be a qaṭīʿa for him. He clearly knew what he was doing. He dug a new canal, farmers and sharecroppers came to till the land and many neighbouring owners of estates (diyā’) entrusted (aljāʿa) their lands with him. After the Abbasid revolution the lands were confiscated and given as a qaṭīʿa to Dāwūd ibn ‘Alī before being purchased from his heirs and made into government estates.
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(\textit{diyā\textsuperscript{2}}). In early Abbasid times, one of the caliph al-Manṣūr’s numerous uncles ʿĪsā ibn ‘Alī, had a \textit{qaṭī‘a} with a canal named “Nahr al-Amīr” after him.\textsuperscript{105}

Unlike the land reclamation projects of Syria, this prodigious development of the southern Sawād continued into the early Abbasid period with, once again the ruling family being the main investors and beneficiaries. It was probably at this time that large numbers of Zanj slaves were imported from east Africa to do the hard work, men whose descendants were to form the backbone of the Zanj rebellion, which successfully defied Abbasid authority for many years in the late ninth century CE. None of this appears in al-Balādhurī’s brief notes about which canals were developed by whom, but he does record that al-Ḥajjāj ordered that the workmen on one of his projects be chained together so that they did not desert (\textit{lā yushadhdhū wa-yataballātū}),\textsuperscript{106} which hardly suggests that they were in it for the money.

Some of these agricultural developments were linked to elite residences. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the \textit{quṣūr}, the so-called desert palaces but simply to note that they form one element in a wider picture of latifundial development\textsuperscript{107}. At Ḥisn Maslama and possibly at Bālis there seem to be archaeological traces of high-status buildings attached to agricultural developments described in the written sources. We have no such evidence from the developments in the Middle Euphrates valley or the Sawād of Irāq, but this may simply be the result of the deficiencies of the evidence. By contrast we have clear evidence of elite buildings in marginal areas along the edges of the Syrian desert for which there is no documentary evidence. Among these Qaṣr Hallabāt were the palace, constructed in an old Roman frontier fort, and the mosque lay at the centre of an extensive estate whose boundaries can still be traced. At Quṣayr ‘Amra the celebrated bathhouse was just one element in a development that included a \textit{khan}. In the Balqā’, the country houses at Umm al-Walīd and Khān al-Zabīb stand in the middle of the fertile lands. In the northern part of the desert, the palace and urban settlement at Qaṣr al-Khayr al-Sharqī lay at the centre of newly irrigated agricultural lands in an inhospitable part of the Syrian steppe.

Conclusion

The evidence that we have suggests that landowning as a source of support for the governing elite was well established in pre-Islamic Iran and in the Hijaz. The position in the Byzantine Empire is perhaps less clear-cut and in some cases official government appointments may have been equally important in providing resources for the aristocracy. In the early Islamic period, landownership continued to be a major source of elite income and status, despite a strong current of Muslim opinion that resources should belong to the \textit{umma} as a whole and should not be divided out. There is considerable evidence, both textual and archaeological, that the first century of Muslim rule saw major investments in agricultural infrastructure, primarily irrigation works. New canals were dug, new lands brought under the plough and new villages founded. An important feature of this expansion was that it was essentially, driven by large estate owners rather than being the result of independent peasant initiative. This agricultural development was accompanied in some, but by no means all, cases by the construction of high status dwellings in rural areas. In the
irrigated lands of the Euphrates valley the development seems to have been reinforced in response to the demands of new urban markets. These markets opened up as a direct result of the Muslim conquests and were intensified by the foundation of Baghdad in 762 CE and its rapid development into a major metropolis.

Notes

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung for inviting me to the conference in Gotha at which the first version of this paper was given. I would also like to thank Simon Ford for his helpful comments and suggestions and Caroline Goodson for her valuable comments and suggestions.

2 The term “aristocracy” is clearly problematic in the context of early Islamic history, as it is a word that has origins and more clearly delimited meaning for Classical Greek culture (rule by the best), and by extension refers to the ruling elites of a society. Despite these linguistic and cultural differences, I believe that we can use “aristocracy” to describe members of the Umayyad and early Abbasid elite. They were a distinct group closely related by ties of kinship or service to the caliphs themselves with a shared elite culture.

3 For the political and social importance of the landed aristocracy in Sasanian Iran, see Pourshariati (2008); for the legal structures of landowning Perikhanian (1983), 627–81.

4 On Sasanian palaces the basic account remains Reuther (1938), I:439–578, but see also the sceptical comments in Bier (1993).

5 For a discussion of the term, see Pigulevskaja (1963), 150–3.

6 See Finster/Schmidt (2005). The article is based on research conducted in 1973 and 1975.

7 Qaṣr Mshattá for example, although Tulûl is much smaller and, typically for Mesopotamia, the columns are of brick not stone.


9 Theophanes (1883), 322 (Mango/Scott (1997), 451f).

10 See al-Ya‘qûbî (1892), 270.

11 See Ibn Rusta (1891), 164.

12 See Sarre/Herzfeld (1911–20), II:76–93, and IV: plates cxxvii and cxxviii.

13 See Azarnoush (1994).

14 See ibid., 90–2.

15 See ibid., 240.

16 For the best discussion of landowning in late Sasanian Iraq, see Morony (2005), esp. 171f, 184–201.

17 See ibid., 184f.

18 See al-Balâdhurî (1866), 340.

19 See ibid., 363.

20 On this family, see Fiey (1965–8), III:23–8; Flusin (1992), II:246–54.

21 Flusin (1992), II:248.

22 Ibid., II:249.

23 Theophanes (1883), 320 (Mango/Scott (1997), 450).

24 See al-Tabarî (1879–1901), I:2112f.


26 For larger estates in late antiquity see Sarris (2006); Banaji (2002), and the extensive review by D. Kehoe (2003). For a critique and reappraisal of the evidence, cf. Chavarria/ Lewitt (2004); Sarris (2004). For the agricultural economy of Levant in late Antiquity see Decker (2001); Kingsley (2001). Both authors present an optimistic picture of a thriving agriculture with surpluses to export throughout the Eastern Mediterranean.

27 Quoted in Vasiliev (1933), 596f.

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29 Jalabert/Mouterde (1929–86), 528. See also the commentary by H. Gregoire (1923), 158. On the career of Magnus and the office of kouratóros see Feissel (1985).

30 See al-Balādhuri (1866), 150.


32 See ibid., 46, 69f and figs. 23f.


35 On Eudocia in Palestine, see Hunt (1984), 221–48.

36 See Dauphin (1998), 72f, 104f.

37 The mosaics are reproduced with a slightly different interpretation in Cohen (1993).

38 See Procopius (1935), XXX: 18f.

39 See the “reconstitution” of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre’s chronicle in Palmer (1993), 122–4. I am grateful to Simon Ford for drawing my attention to this text.

40 See ibid., 98–100.

41 See ibid., 122f.

42 Ibid., 123.

43 Ibid., 124.

44 See Applebaum (1989), 124–31. See also the attempt to find elite dwellings in the rural areas in Graf (2001), 227–30.

45 Kaplan (1992), 3.

46 On this estate at Zæro, see Tate (1992), 213–5.

47 See Lamoureux/Cairala (2000). The text is also numbered internally pp 1 to 199. For a survey of the hagiography of early Islamic Syria, see Foss (2007).


49 For classic views of the role of large estates in Byzantine Egypt, see Bell (1917), 86–106; Hardy (1931). Banaji (2002), 128, argues, based on Egyptian evidence that “by the seventh century the aristocracy had enormously tightened its grip over landholding and (by implication) over society as a whole.” Also, see Sarris (2004), 64–8.

50 See Alston (2001), 194f.

51 See Jones (1964), II:782.

52 See Avi-Yonah (1958), 47f; Hunt (1984), 139f.


54 See Sansterre (1980), I:30f.

55 For a good general account, see El-Ali (1959).

56 See al-Balādhuri (1866), 129.


58 See al-Hamawī (1866–73), IV:943f.

59 See al-Balādhuri (1866), 18.

60 See al-Sambhādi (2001), IV:207f.


62 The qaṭī’a (pl. qaṭā‘i‘) though often misleadingly translated as “fief” is not to be confused with the later iqtā‘. It was property held in absolute ownership and was both heritable and alienable.


64 See, for example, Ibn Sallām (1975), 205.

65 Kister (1991), 293.

66 For these argument, see ibid., 290–4.

67 See Ibn Sallām (1975), 678.

68 See ibid., 683f.

69 See ibid., 693.

70 Ibid., 694.

71 See ibid., 696. See also the Kitāb al-kharāj of Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ibrāhīm al-Thaqafī, according to whom the yields of the sawāfī in Sawād in the time of `Umar were either 4,000,000 or 7,000,000 dirham. See Ben Shemesh (1967), 32.
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72 See al-Balādhurī (1866), 12f.
73 See Ibn Sallām (1975), 696.
74 See ibid., 698.
75 See ibid., 699.
76 See Ben Shemesh (1967), 76.
77 See Ibn Sallām (1975), 717.
78 See Ben Shemesh (1967), 73–7.
79 Ibid., 73.
80 For these developments and their violent consequences, see Kister (1977).
81 See ibid., 41–3.
82 See ibid., 41.
84 See al-Samḥūdī (2001), I:250f.
85 See Kister (1977), 44.
86 See ibidem (1972), 88–91.
87 Ibid., 90.
88 See, for example, al-Balādhurī (1866), 151.
89 See Berthier (2001), 175 (map).
90 See ibid., 33.
91 Ibid.
92 See al-Ṭabarī (1879–1901), II:1735. This seems to be the most likely interpretation of the anecdote. Hillenbrand’s translation makes no sense at all. Cf. al-Ṭabarī (1989), 77.
93 See idem (1879–1901), II:1895, 1909; Berthier (2001), 566f.
95 See ibid., III:275f.
97 See ibid., 166.
98 See ibid., 41.
100 See Berthier (2001), 101.
101 See ibid., 106.
102 See ibid., 109.
103 See ibid., 127.
104 See al-Balādhurī (1866), 290.
105 See ibid., 291f.
106 See ibid., 290.
107 The literature on the ṣuṣūr is very extensive. For a useful introduction see Creswell (1989). For a more recent overview, see Genequand (2006).

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Court cultures in the Muslim world: seventh–nineteenth centuries


4 Court and courtiers
A preliminary investigation of Abbasid terminology

Nadia Maria El Cheikh

The royal court and court culture in early modern Europe has been for the past 25 years "an important and exciting area of study in history, literature and political theory." Previously considered a topic "suited only for reactionaries and eccentrics," the court was roused from its historiographical somnolence mostly through the efforts of Norbert Elias whose "epoch-making studies restored the relevance and legitimacy of the court as a theme of research." However, it has been approached from multiple angles and has appropriated many models so that it can be difficult "to achieve a proper perspective on the functions of the court as a whole." The main historiographical developments have focused first, on the ritual and symbolic aspects of rulership as part of the political system and second, on the personal and domestic world within which the prince lived. According to one scholar, "Court and state are now seen as contemporary, confused, or identical, and no longer as separate worlds."

Historians of the court have, however, pointed to the complexity of the subject. John Larner talks about "the ease with which any attempt at coherent examination dissolves either into a discussion of one of its parts . . . or into general account of the character and policies of the prince who presided over it." Any historical investigation of the court faces the problem of definition because courts were so diverse and also because any ruler’s court could be different on different occasions. This may explain, to some extent, why it is that court studies are almost non-existent for various periods of Islamic history. Of course the terminology itself, namely the term “court” needs to be investigated and defined in the ways in which it may be used in connection to Islamic societies. The term court, in Arabic most often rendered as \textit{balat}, is used by modern scholars, both Western and Arab, without any assessment or reassessment of what the term means and what underlies the particular terminology, specifically as it pertains to the Abbasid fourth/tenth century. In this chapter I focus on the terminology used in the Abbasid sources to delineate court and courtliness.

This investigation starts with the premise that it is essential to limit the inquiry to a particular historical moment in order to overcome the “deadly sameness” of abstraction that allows for no differences among times and places. The narratives pertaining to the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (295–320/908–932) are particularly rich for such an investigation. During his reign the power struggle
between the various factions at the court allowed his mother Umm al-Muqtadir, along with high-ranking administrative officers, notably eunuchs, chamberlains and harem stewardesses (qahramanāt), to exercise political power and influence. Accounts of this period underscore the weakening of the institutional integrity of the Abbasid caliphate that in turn contributed to problems plaguing the caliphate in the first part of the fourth/tenth century. In this view the youth and personal incapacity of al-Muqtadir, in contrast to the vigour and ability of his immediate predecessors, opened the door to the “meddling” of harem women and influential “courtiers.” The sources for the reign of al-Muqtadir are, in some ways, unique in providing insights on the workings of the court and the domestic world. For this particular period the observer can get behind the scenes and have a glimpse at the informal networks operating at court.

The Abbasid fourth/tenth century witnessed a sharp rise in the number of chronicles and other literary works. Sources for the reign of al-Muqtadir offer a lot of varied information. Written from diverse perspectives, the accounts allow one to reconstruct, to a certain extent, a balanced and nuanced representation of the period. The sources reveal details about the personalities of members of the court and harem as well as the relationships among them. Indeed, one aspect of these texts is their overemphasis on the role of the individual. This chapter is based on a number of such sources, most notably Tajārib al-umām of Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), Kitāb al-awrāq of al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/946) and Tuḥfat al-umārā’ fī taʾrikh al-wuzarā’ and Rusūm dār al-khilāfa of Hilāl al-Ṣābi’ (d. 448/1056).

The Caliphal Palace at Baghdad was the structure that defined the court in a physical way. The palace was the setting for the court. But what was the court and is it possible to formulate a definition that could apply to the fourth/tenth century Abbasid court? In their study of the Byzantine court, Alexander P. Kazhdan and Michael McCormick state that:

the court was the human group physically closest to the emperor, a social world in which the emperor’s household and his government overlapped, and a social world structured by the emperor’s decisions.9

The authors surmised that it comprised the emperor’s friends, the middle-ranking bureaucrats, stewards, housemen and porters who were the people who raised the curtains at imperial audiences, heated the palace baths and opened and closed doors, both literally and figuratively. The same group included the doméstikos of each palace, the imperial goldsmiths, the lamplighters, clock attendants and others. Next to them came the servants of the tables of the emperor and empress.10 Stuart Airlie defines the Carolingian court as:

the king and his family and the personnel around them together with the institutions (e.g. the royal chapel) and buildings (e.g. palaces) that housed, served, and very often, in their scale and design, expressed the essence of the royal household.11
In his study of the European medieval court Malcolm Vale states that although the term court could carry different meanings, there is, however, “a broad measure of agreement that a ruler’s household played a fundamental part in giving substance to the idea of ‘the court’.” This definition concurs with that of Norbert Elias who declared with reference to the French court: “What we refer to as the court of the Ancien Regime is, to begin with, nothing other than the vastly extended house and household of the French kings and their dependants, with all the people belonging to them.”

How can we define the fourth/tenth century Abbasid court? Like the Byzantines, the Abbasids did not identify the court and courtliness as a social and cultural phenomenon worthy of literary attention. Thus, they did not really have a word for court, which is a word that comes from the medieval West. Perhaps, as in Byzantium, court culture was a fact of life that those who lived it did not feel the need to articulate.

In his study of the third/ninth century Abbasid caliph Harūn al-Rashīd, Sa’dī Ḍannawī, for instance, tried to define the word balāṭ stating that etymologically, it derives from both a Latin root and an Arabic root. The Latin root is palatium, meaning qasr, palace. As for the Arabic root, it derives from balaṭa, a flagstone or slab stone that transformed into balāṭ to signify a pavement or tiled floor; balāṭ was then used for the palace. However, the meaning of qasr or palace, whatever its derivation, is not found in the seventh/thirteenth century lexicon of Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿarab, which provides the meanings of slab stone and pavement. The much later Tāj al-ʿarūs of Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791) provides the following additional meaning for balāṭ: “Dār al-balāṭ in Constantinople was a prison for the captives [of the army] of Sayf al-Dawla ibn Hamdān. Al-Mutanabbī has mentioned it in his poetry.” However, this meaning is Byzantine specific and there is no implication in al-Zabīdī’s meaning that balāṭ was used to refer to Abbasid palaces.

Ḍannawī further deduces that the Arabic meaning for balāṭ implies a human occupation of the space, that is, a place where people meet, and hence the term court to signify the human institution constituted of the king, the courtiers (rījāl al-ḥāshiyya), the employees (aṣḥāb al-waṣāʾif) and the representatives of the tribes, including the udabā’, poets and others who form part of a regular majlis. However, this latter derivation seems to me unsupported by the sources. Fourth/tenth century sources do not use the term balāṭ in either of these implied meanings. The term dār may come closer to this conception. Although the Lisān al-ʿarab does not include in its definitions of the term dār any meaning that suggests the idea of the court, dār is the term that Abbasid authors use to refer to the Caliphal Palace complex. Sometimes it stands alone and sometimes it is used alongside another qualifying term: dār al-khilāfa or dār al-sulṭān. This word dār perhaps best describes the specific reality of the fourth/tenth century court, since it is the term used by contemporary sources to refer to the palace complex of al-Muqtadir both physically and metaphorically. Dār al-khilāfa is used not only to denote the buildings but also the establishment surrounding the emperor or court.

The term that comes closest to describing the courtiers is al-ḥāshiyya. In references to al-Muqtadir, ‘Arib al-Qurṭūbī (d. c. 369/980) includes statements such as
“his mother and others of his ḥāshiyya” and “the reputation of al-Hallāj spread among the ḥāshiyya.” In Tajārib al-umam, Miskawayh mentions that the vizier ‘Ali ibn Ḥusayn (d. 334/946) abolished raises which had been extended to all ranks of the army, to al-khadam, to al-ḥāshiyya and to all clerks (al-kuttāb) and employees (al-mutaṣarrijīn). In their translation of Tajārib al-umam, Amedroz and Margoliouth use the terms “retainers”, “attendants”, “court-attendants” and “court” to translate the term ḥāshiyya.19 They also use the word “retainer” to translate ḥāwās or ḥāṣṣa. According to Roy Mottahedeh, sometimes the soldiers and secretaries were lumped together as a common interest group and were called ḥāṣṣa or ḥāwās.20

The ḥāṣṣa or ḥāwās of al-Muqtadir were singled out among those who refused to partake in the conspiracy of Ibn al-Muṭazz (assassinated 296/908–9). Miskawayh states: “There were present the commanders of the army, the heads of bureaux . . . the judges and notables [wujūh al-nās], with the exception of the vizier Abū ʿl-Ḥasan ibn al-Furāt [executed 312/924] and the khawās of al-Muqtadir.”21 One way of defining the term is by exclusion; the term would thus exclude the groups that appear on this list. In the translation of this particular passage Amedroz and Margoliouth translate khawās as “the persons attached to al-Muqtadir.”22

That the two terms khawās and ḥawāshī are distinct and define different categories of people seems clear in al-Ṣābi’i’s text where it is stated that al-khawāṣṣ and al-ḥawāshī paid official visits to the vizier.23 One passage is particularly useful in making a distinction between the two terms: “ʿAli ibn Ḥusayn made himself disliked by al-khāṣṣa, al-ʿummā and al-ḥāshiyya.”24 These terms are translated by Amedroz and Margoliouth as courtiers, the public and the retinue, respectively.25 In yet another passage, ʿAli ibn Ḥusayn is said to have been appalled by the misconduct of al-ḥāshiyya, this time translated by Amedroz and Margoliouth as courtiers.26 The two terms, ḥāṣṣa and ḥāshiyya, are often interchangeable in the translation of Tajārib al-umam, although the text appears to create a distinction between them.

The term al-hasham seems to be a subcategory of al-ḥāshiyya. In one passage Miskawayh states that Ibn al-Furāt proceeded to examine ʿAli ibn Ḥusayn with references to the allowances of the ḥāshiyya:

“You”, he said, “in the five years of your administration, reduced the allowances of the ḥārim, the princes, al-hasham and the horsemen.” In his defence, ʿAli ibn Ḥusayn answered: “Your plan for meeting expenditure was to transfer sums from the private to the public treasury, thereby pleasing the ḥāshiyya . . . .”27

From this passage it would seem that the term al-ḥāshiyya is inclusive of the ḥārim, the princes, the hasham and the horsemen. In their translation of this passage, Amedroz and Margoliouth use the term attendant to translate hasham and the term court to translate ḥāshiyya.28 In yet another passage, an ally of Ibn al-Furāt, Ibn Farjawayh, sent letters to the caliph calling attention to delays in the payment of salaries to the royal children, the members of the ḥārim and the hasham.29
Another term often translated as “courtier” is that of jālīs (pl. julasā’). This is how Marius Canard translates it: “Rendi ne pensa à aucun de ses courtisans [āḥad min al-julasā’] et ne donna aucune reception [wa-lā jalsa]”; and “il était l’homme le plus généreux et le plus aimable avec ses courtisans [julasā’]”. A term which is also used seemingly as a synonym for ḥāshiyya is biṭāna, although it mostly appears in the Adab al-sulṭāniyya genre.

A multitude of functionaries were needed for the daily administration of the palace, working in the guardhouse, the kitchens, the storerooms, the workshops, the gardens, the stables and the audience halls. The feeding, clothing and furnishing of this enormous household required workshops that were responsible for a whole range of activities, from cooking, to baking, to tailoring to candle-making, to washing, to gardening. The budget statement prepared the ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsá for the year 306/918 may provide some help in trying to specify the people who constituted the court personnel:

For the Turks, in the private and public kitchens, for the feeding of the animals, the monthly allowance prescribed to Umm al-Muqtadīr, to the princes, to the female relatives and to the servants; the allowance for those in charge of the animals in the various stables, . . . the allocations for all those connected with the coppers of the saddles; for the men managing the river boats of the distinguished men of state and those managing the four river boats of the residence, . . . the salaries paid to al-julasā’ and to others in their categories; salaries for the ḥufarī ghilmān.

Another list is provided by Miskawayh, who states that during his second vizierate, ‘Alī adopted strict measures. He reduced the allowance of the eunuchs (al-khadām), al-hasham, al-julasā’, table-companions (al-nudāmā), the minstrels (al-mughānnin), the purveyors (al-tujjār), the intercessors (ašḥāb al-shafā‘āt) and those of the retainers (ghilmān) and the dependants of the heads of bureaux (ašbāb ašḥāb al-dāwawīn). Evidently large categories of people were implicated making it quite difficult to determine the boundaries between the different categories of courtiers, retinue and bureaucrats.

Several terms were thus used in the texts to refer to the human group who surrounded the ruler and played a political role by assuming certain functions and positions or, indirectly, through partaking in the majlis of the ruler where they carried out their role in giving advice. ‘Izz al-Dīn al-‘Ālam lists the following seemingly synonymous terms in his discussion of the literary genre of al-Adab al-sulṭāniyya: ḥāshiyya, khāṣṣa, biṭāna, a’wān, atbā’, khāṣṣat al-khāṣṣa. The authors of these texts do not display great interest in comprehending these terms conceptually as they fail to elucidate the nature of the tasks for each position or function.

There is, thus a lack of clarity as to what these terms exactly mean in the various contexts in which they appear. The ways in which these terms were used in the texts and the ways in which they have been translated mask a confusion and an imprecise understanding of the terms and of the categories implied. The Arabic terminology used in the medieval texts is vague and equivocal. The ambiguity of
our sources is, of course, telling. The court was not an institution in any formal sense but rather a gathering of people, often fluid in composition and constantly changing.

Difficulties in apprehending the nature of the Abbasid court spring in large part from the fact that “while the court had institutional aspects it was not simply an institution . . . what was subject to it was much less important than that business it carried out informally and through personal contact.” Trevor Dean suggests that historians should conceive of the court “not as a closed, autonomous space but as a contingent space, with its personnel installed or removed through the operation of patronage.” The Abbasid court of the fourth/tenth century was not dominated by the caliph but was polycentric and eclectic, and seems to have constituted a space open to a vast range of outside influences.

The inhabitants of the Dār al-Khilāfa numbered in the thousands. A great many of these were servants, gardeners, stable-boys and specialized craftsmen of various kinds who saw to the daily upkeep of the palace and its grounds. They made the Dār al-Khilāfa routine practical by their physical labour so that the menagery, the ships on the canal should be ready at a moment’s notice and that meals and receptions should be properly prepared. We know that at the time of al-Mu'tadid (r. 279–89/892–901) the court establishment consisted of the princes of the caliph’s house; the palace-staffer including white and black slaves; freedmen; the guards, the private secretaries, Qur’ān readers, muezzins, astronomers, officers-in-charge of the clocks, storytellers, jesters, couriers, standard-bearers, drummers, trumpeters, water-carriers, workmen from goldsmiths to carpenters and saddlers; hunters, menagerie-keepers, valet-de-chambre, cooks, physicians, lamp-lighters and the ladies. Al-Muqtadir’s court establishment was even more elaborate. Indeed, by the fourth/tenth century, the caliphal court had greatly expanded reaching, in the words of Sourdel, frightening proportions. Hilāl al-Šābi’ states that:

It is generally believed that in the days of al-Muqtadir bi’llāh . . . the residence contained 11,000 servants: 7,000 blacks and 4,000 white Slavs, 4,000 free and slave girls and thousands of chamber servants. Šābi’ adds that the residence also contained farms and farmers, private livestock and four hundred baths for its inhabitants (ahlīhā) and retinue (hawāshiḥā). Thus a distinction is made here between the household and the retinue. Another distinction is between household and retinue on the one hand (serving the ruler) and the bureaucracy (serving the state) on the other. This distinction between serving the ruler and serving the state tended to be blurred, however. There was an overlap of functions that makes it difficult to establish a division between the administration and those attendant on the caliph’s person.

The interconnection between the two spheres was linked to the fact that the caliph was, in theory, and usually in practice, the ultimate source of authority and, therefore, a large part of the business of government was determined by the politics of intimacy. Indeed, the real criterion for membership of the court was access to the caliph. Proximity to the caliph was a sure way of building a power-base at court.
Access was closed to all but a handful of staff. It is important to point out that those who had such access did not necessarily belong to the household, whereas many household members of lower station were excluded from access to the ruler.

Regardless of the actual distribution of the various elements, perhaps one can posit that the court enclosed the caliph by limiting access to him to a select and favoured entourage. Everything to and from the caliph had to pass through the filter of this entourage before it could reach him. The caliph could exert influence only through the mediation of the people closest to him. To the ordinary subject the caliph was in practice not easy to access. He was always surrounded by those “known at court.” Proximity had real advantages. Those known at court had the privilege of presenting petitions to the caliph and of introducing someone to the caliph or to an influential personality at the court. The personal attendants were feared as men close to the caliph; men who could exercise profound influence over him. They deployed the power of intimacy or the politics of intimacy on the public stage. The court experienced the politics of manipulation acutely. At the same time, the caliph found himself enmeshed in specific networks of interdependences.

Ultimately, access to the caliph was what mattered. The history of the court is, to a large extent, the history of those who enjoyed that access. What were the rewards of access? How influential were the persons known at court? What part did they play in the factional struggles to place men and dictate politics?

The example of the harem stewardesses or qahramānāt is a case in point as they managed to forge alliances with powerful and influential people through their intercession with the caliph and his mother. Acting as messengers between the harem and the court, since they had the privilege of going in and out of the palace, their leverage was great and their exercise of political power real as exemplified by the qahramānāt Zaydān, who was attached directly to al-Muqtadir. Prisoners of state of high rank were committed to the custody of the Zaydān for incarceration in the caliphal complex. Her role as jailer allowed her to come into contact with influential persons, individuals who had temporarily fallen out of favour but who had the potential to rise to power and influence once again. Her exclusive access to these important personalities and her ability to act as a mediator between her prisoners and the caliph provided her with important leverage and allowed her to develop a web of influence built on past favours and moral debt. This was certainly the case with the famous vizier Ibn al-Furat who was placed in the custody of Zaydān.

Al-Muqtadir deliberated much about Ibn al-Furat, at times craving after his money, at others, disliking the thought of his dying in Hāmid’s hands. Zaydān, the stewardess, having ascertained this of al-Muqtadir’s mind told Ibn al-Furat.44

Zaydān thus communicated to Ibn al Furat al-Muqtadir’s predispositions towards him. Consequently, Ibn al-Furat decided to pay the required fine. His dependence on the intercession of Zaydān was commented upon by his successor to the vizierate, Hāmid ibn al-‘Abbās (d. 311/923) who told him: “You depended on the
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gahramāna . . . to plead your case and defend you.”45 Upon his re-appointment to the vizierate Ibn al-Furāt bestowed fiefs upon Zaydān in the region of Kashkar (today’s Wāsit) on the Tigris as well as proceeds from yields in Basra.46 The relationship between Ibn al-Furāt and Zaydān was to remain good for the remainder of his life. Ṣābi’ mentions that, in his correspondence, Ibn al-Furāt used to address Zaydān as “my sister.”47

The personal attendants built a career of pleasing the caliph on a daily basis. They were, naturally, subject to greater fluctuations in favour and disfavour. The Rusum dār al-khilāfa warns the chamberlains in the following way:

Beware of arguing with the sultan when he is angry or of urging him to leniency when he is obstinate . . . Try to avoid him when you detect his wrath mounting. Wait to present your excuse . . . until his anger is calmed . . . guard against the temptation of speech. Let your answer about matters with risky consequences be more of a hint than a direct expression; more of the probable than of the definite. It is easier for you to say what you have not said than to retract what you have already uttered. . . . Beware of excessive informality with the sultan. . . . If he gives you a gift do not disparage it, and if he performs a good deed towards you do not belittle it. Do not complain . . . do not persist . . . be thankful . . . be patient. . . .48

But while they might routinely endure personal abuse, they could also receive rich rewards from proximity. The pensions and wages of those close to the caliph became part and parcel of the political strategizing that the viziers and potential viziers had to follow since winning over the courtiers was of primordial importance. The court society’s complex structure of personal and institutional allegiances was cemented by tips and gratification. We know that the eunuch Muḥlijh was granted allowances, fiefs, and gifts.49 He and others like him could have had income from land-grants and also income that came from salaries, grants, kickbacks, or gifts associated with court life and which formed a substantial component of their revenues. These servants in turn reinforced the ties binding them to the rest of the court through their own largesse.

Indeed, the court was never a single entity, nor did it offer a single route to favour patronage or power. In reality, the caliph’s mother, his influential servants and his military commanders fostered a series of subordinate patronage networks. Umm al-Muqtadir had her own retinue, secretaries and other officials who all formed a formidable network of patronage. Her gahramāna Umm Mūsā became herself a locus of such a major patronage network that she became a real threat to the caliph’s mother and to the caliph himself. The vizier Ibn al-Furāt also had his own micro-court. During a visit by Byzantine envoys, they were first made to visit the palace that the vizier Ibn al-Furāt occupied in al-Mukharrim. Instructions were given that:

[h]is own retainers and troops with the vice-chamberlains posted in his palace should form a line from the doorway of the palace to the reception room. A vast saloon with gilt roof in the wing of the palace called Dār al-Būstān was
splendidly furnished... the vizier himself sat on a splendid praying carpet, with a lofty throne behind him, with serving men [al-khadam] in front and behind, to the right and to the left, while the saloon was filled with military and civil officials.50

Thus, there was a sequence of subsidiary courts that could act as rival foci of policy and patronage.51 The influential courtiers and the members of the household not only advanced themselves but promoted others. The court and the patronage networks based at the court complemented government by bureaucratic institutions. All of this demands a subtler analysis of court politics as it concealed a diversity of parties competing for power. Of course court politics remained on one level a politics of access and the ruler almost invariably continued to be the one to whom access was most keenly sought. But he was not the sole focus of the courtiers’ attention or the only agent through which business could be done.52

Rather than presenting a clear definition of the Abbasid court, this chapter has revealed the ambiguities surrounding this concept. The Arabic terminology used in the medieval texts is vague and equivocal (at least to this author). Navigating between hāshiyya or hawāshī, hasham, khāṣṣa or khawāṣṣ, which mean in a variety of contexts attendant, court attendant, courtier and servants, the terminology does not translate adequately into any clear definition of court and courtier. Analyses of contemporary usages of these terms reveal an elasticity that threatens to collapse into amorphousness. Clearly, ample work needs to be carried out in order to come to a clearer definition as to who the individuals and groups concerned and implied were in particular contexts and to arrive at an approximation of the conception and meaning of court and courtiers in the Abbasid context.

Notes
2 Duindam (2003), 7.
3 Ibid.
5 Dean (1995), 137.
6 Larner (1983), 669.
8 See Rich (2003), 29–42.
10 See ibid., 177–82.
12 Vale (2001), 15.
13 Elias (1983), 41.
15 See Dannawi (2001), I:19f.
16 al-Zābidī (1306h), V:111.
17 See Dannawi (2001), I:19f.
18 al-Qurtubi (1897), 24, 88.
19 See Amedroz/Margoliouth (1921), I:6, 32 (Miskawayh (1920), I:5f, 29).
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21 Miskawayh (1920), I:5.
22 Amedroz/Margoliouth (1921), I:6.
23 See al-Ṣābi’ (1904), 268.
24 Miskawayh (1920), I:40.
25 See ibid., I:32 (Amedroz/Margoliouth (1921), I:36).
26 See Miskawayh (1920), I:40 (Amedroz/Margoliouth (1921), I:45).
27 Miskawayh (1920), I:108.
28 See Amedroz/Margoliouth (1921), I:120f (Miskawayh (1920), I:108).
29 See ibid., I:43.
31 See al-Tha‘labi (2003), 45, 50, 70, 153.
33 See Miskawayh (1920), I:152 (Amedroz/Margoliouth (1921), I:170).
37 Dean (1995), 143.
38 It has been estimated that those who lived at Versailles, in the palace or outside, with employment or residence at court, numbered some 25,000. See Hatton (1977), 233–61.
39 See Mez (1937), 141f.
40 See Sourdrel (1960), 669f.
41 al-Ṣābi’ (1964), 8 (Salem (1977), 14).
42 See al-Ṣābi’ (1964), 7f (Salem (1977), 13).
44 Miskawayh (1920), I:66 (Amedroz/Margoliouth (1921), I:72).
45 al-Ṣābi’ (1904), 91.
46 See ibid., 31.
48 Idem (1964), 70f.
49 See Miskawayh (1920), I:87, 155f.
50 Ibid., I:53f (Amedroz/Margoliouth (1921), I:57).
51 Adamson (1999), 7–41, 314–20, defines the court of the ancien regime as a “polycentric entity”.

Bibliography


Court cultures in the Muslim world: seventh–nineteenth centuries


Muslim court cultures of the middle ages
5 Redressing injustice

Maẓālim jurisdictions at the Umayyad Court of Córdoba (eighth-eleventh centuries CE)

Christian Müller

A ruler’s direct responsibility to dispense justice was a common feature in pre-modern Islamic history which took different forms. With the evolution of Islamic law (fiqh) and a regular qāḍī jurisdiction after the first century of Islam, the ruler’s prerogative transformed into an extraordinary form of redressing injustice that was performed for public audiences in connection with court ceremonies.

This extraordinary jurisdiction by political authorities, as demonstrated by the early Abbasid caliphs like al-Mahdī and al-Hādī in the eighth century CE, became widely known under the term of maẓālim, the irregular plural of the Arabic word mazālima, an unjust or oppressive action.1 Within the Abbasid Empire, these maẓālim sessions were subsequently adjudicated by a vizier and later by other officials within the state bureaucracy.

In his classic on Islamic governance, Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya, the eleventh-century scholar al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) describes maẓālim as a judicial institution empowered with far greater competence than the ordinary qāḍī courts. He mentions public maẓālim sessions led by the official in charge, assisted by guards, qāḍīs, jurists, secretaries and witnesses. It is assumed that this description referred to earlier historical realities in the Abbasid Empire and that Māwardī paved the way for the restoration of caliphal authority under the new Sunnite dynasty of the Saljuqs in Iraq. Another major difference, according to Māwardī, was that maẓālim justice was not governed by procedural law, which set very strict limits to the qāḍī’s authority in investigating a case.2 This concept of an extraordinary maẓālim justice, as the sovereign’s prerogative, prevails in pre-modern Muslim political theory.3

A different trajectory occurred under Umayyad rule in the Iberian Peninsula, which became an independent emirate from the year 756 CE onwards. The political and institutional development of al-Andalus was no longer directly subject to the Abbasid court. Muslim Spain remained however part of the dār al-islām, the medieval Muslim world, and as such participated in their religious and legal developments. The present article examines the rulers’ exercise of jurisdiction and the evolution of maẓālim institutions in al-Andalus during the first five centuries of Muslim rule, when this region was a politically independent entity before the arrival of the North African Almoravid rulers at the end of the fifth/eleventh century.
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Some 50 years ago, Evariste Lévy-Provençal and Émile Tyan insisted that *mażālim* in al-Andalus developed very differently than in the Abbasid Empire. In re-examining this statement today, it seems difficult to compare these historical settings for two reasons: sources and chronology. Later historical chronicles provide detailed descriptions of life at the Abbasid court in Baghdad, the capital of the major Muslim state since the mid-eighth century CE. The Umayyad court in Córdoba, situated at the periphery of Muslim influence, was rarely the subject of mainstream Islamic historiography. A specific Andalusī-Umayyad historical tradition is conserved only in the works of Ibn Ḥayyān (d. 469/1076), who cited and used tenth-century historians. His detailed annals, *al-Muqtabas*, cover the history of Umayyad Andalus until the end of the tenth century CE and centre on its capital Córdoba and the ruler’s court. This work is however only partially preserved. For the periods concerning us here, Ibn Ḥayyān’s work was cited and abridged by later authors. It became an essential part of the historiographical tradition of Umayyad Andalus.

A second difference in comparing *mażālim* concerns a major chronological shift. Reports on a specific *mażālim* institution in Córdoba do not pre-date the tenth century CE—a period when the Abbasid caliphate and its *mażālim* had already undergone profound changes. Any comparison between the eighth-century Abbasid and tenth-century Umayyad courts will contain anachronisms.

What follows is a survey of historiographical descriptions concerning Umayyad rulers dispensing justice in Córdoba, mostly in the form of anecdotes of an “event.” They convey a certain image of the ruler’s personality and his method of governing and dispensing justice. Since these “events” span a period of four centuries (eighth to eleventh) during which Islamic law (*fiqh*) developed into the primary source of applied law, well beyond the legislative authority of the Islamic suzerain, these changes need to be integrated into the present analysis. The ruler’s role of dispensing justice has to be seen within the frameworks of juridical evolution and of legal institutions.

This contribution illustrates how the Córdoba *mażālim* emerges as an independent institution only during the tenth century CE. This fact reflects the tenth-century diversification of the Umayyad state-apparatus that was shaped by the status of Islamic law and its increased role within society.

The first Umayyad emir in al-Andalus, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I (r. 138–72/755–88), in the eighth century CE is reported to have “held sessions for the ordinary people, listened to them and judged between them. The weak could raise his complaint of iniquity (*ẓulāma*) without hardship.” This image of the easily accessible sovereign is reinforced by another report: On his way to a funeral, which he used to attend regularly, irrespectively of the deceased’s social position, a man approached him and presented his complaint against the unjust treatment by the *qāḍī*. The ruler ordered his *qāḍī* to “treat this with justice (*inṣāf*).” Both citations from Ibn Ḥayyān illustrate regular tendencies of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I.

His son and successor to the emirate, Hishām I (r. 172–80/788–96) held regular sessions in a mosque south of his palace to “judge upon unjust actions [al-ḥukm...
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Other sources note that Hishām I sent trustworthy persons into the provinces to supervise the conduct of his agents. He encouraged the population to report unjust acts by officials and affirm these accusations by oath.

At the turn to the ninth century CE, the Emir al-Ḥakam I (r. 180–206/796–822) is said to have personally dispensed justice to the general population twice a week. During the ninth century CE, reports of Umayyad emirs dispensing justice are very rare, a fact possibly due to the lack of sources. Nearly one century later, the emir ‘Abdallāh (r. 275–300/888–912) held sessions for the members of his family and the court. For his Palace in Córdoba, he constructed a new “Gate of Justice” (Bāb al-‘adl) next to the passage linking it to the Friday Mosque. This gate was reserved for petitioners from the populace (‘āmma), who “felt oppressed or presented a writing of grievance” (mutaẓālim aw-rāfi‘ kitāb bi-zuḻāma). Every Friday they thus had access to the emir’s public sessions without being hindered by the chamberlain (ḥājib).

These few citations from historiographical sources do not mention any mazālim ceremony by the ruler amidst the court council in Córdoba, as was reported under the Abbasid caliphs. This lack of a collective element in the ruler’s jurisdiction made Lévy-Provençal and Tyan insist that there was a difference between the mazālim tradition of Muslim Spain and the Abbasid tradition. Such comparison does not however consider the larger importance of the court in Baghdad, capital of a huge empire, compared to the provincial Umayyad capital.

Andalusī chronicles also mention several Umayyad emirs who delegated the task of dealing with complaints to trustworthy persons. During the ninth century CE, two Umayyad emirs, al-Ḥakam I and ‘Abd al-Rahmān II (r. 206–38/822–57), are known to have entrusted the treatment of complaints (mazālim) to subordinates: al-Ḥakam I to his eunuch named Masarra, and his successor ‘Abd al-Rahmān II to his long-time counsellor and vizier ‘Īsā ibn Shuhayd (d. 426/1035).

Until the beginning of the tenth century CE, sources mention the treatment of injustice (zuḻāma or mazālim) by various individuals: the ruler, his officials or the qāḏī. From a historical perspective, there is, however a major difference between the task of redressing injustice and a specific institution designed for treating complaints. Therefore, references in the sources to “correcting injustices” need to be distinguished from those on a specific office (khujṭa), designed to deal with injustices and empowered with specific competences. This major shift occurred during the reign of ‘Abd al-Rahmān III (r. 300–50/912–61), the newly proclaimed Caliph al-Nāṣir, who created an independent mazālim office in 325/937. The holder of this office, the sāḥib al-mazālim, was specifically charged with treating complaints of the population, and he received a monthly salary (rizq). Public appeal sessions for royal justice—familiar from other parts of the Islamic world—are not reported as occurring under the Umayyad caliphs in the tenth and beginning of the eleventh century CE. For the second part of the tenth century CE, this lack of public appearance of the Umayyad rulers may also be explained by their diminished importance. Since the year 367/977 the ḥājib Muḥammad ibn Abī ‘Āmir al-Manṣūr (d. 392/1002) took power and shielded the young Umayyad caliph
Hishām II (r. 366–99/976–1008 and 400–3/1010–3) from public life. Following the practice of a sovereign ruler, he established his own court in Ma’dinat al-Zahrā’ and personally corrected injustices.20 After the death of al-Mansūr’s last son in 399/1008 civil strife broke out between rival military factions who placed various Umayyad pretenders to the throne. These Umayyad caliphs however held few real powers and depended entirely on the factions supporting them. In the year 422/1031, the Córdoban leader Ibn Jahwar (d. 435/1043) undermined the authority of the last Umayyad caliph, thus opening up the period of independent city-states (mulūk al-tawā’if). Political history explains the diminished role of Umayyad rulers and the silence of the sources regarding events at court.

The mazālim office and its holder, the šāhib al-mazālim, existed in Córdoba from the time of its creation in 325/937 through the tenth and eleventh centuries CE until the arrival of the Almoravid rule in 487/1091. Information on the mazālim office and on the šāhib al-mazālim during the tenth century CE stems from two types of sources: chronicles and citations in later anthologies cover historical events and some nominations; and biographical dictionaries mention certain Córdoban scholars such as šāhib al-mazālim, holder of the mazālim office.21 Whereas the period of the eleventh century CE is covered by biographical dictionaries,22 only small portions of Ibn Ḥayyān’s historiographical writings persist in later anthologies.23 For the new Almoravid rulers they were of little interest.

These two types of sources, biographical and annalistic, are complementary to what may be learned from mazālim in Muslim Spain: events at the Umayyad court and the realm of religious scholars. Taken as a whole, information on the mazālim office in tenth- and eleventh-century Córdoba remains partial. Nevertheless, certain trends may be discerned.

During the reign of ‘Abd al-Rahmān III, chronicles only occasionally mention the šāhib al-mazālim, an officer recruited from among trustworthy persons from the caliph’s court, most of them holding the rank of vizier. The first mazālim judge (šāhib aḥkām al-mazālim) was the caliph’s longstanding and trustworthy military leader, Muhammad [ibn Qāsim] ibn Ţumlus (d. 361/972).24 Three years later, he was replaced by the powerful vizier and chief of police, “Dhū ‘l-wizaratayn” ʿĀḥmad ibn Shuhayd,25 only to be reinstated two years later when Ibn Shuhayd temporarily lost all his offices.26 These rapid changes in office were part of a general policy and not specific to the mazālim office. The chronicle of Ibn Ḥayyān with its detailed information on court officials was lost after the year 330/942. A remaining textual fragment covering the years 360–4/971–5 mentions the wāżir šāhib al-mazālim only once, undertaking a mission to Seville in order to deal with complaints against courtiers and officials.27

During the first half of the tenth century CE, various Umayyad officials at the rank of vizier were charged with dealing with complaints and requests by the population.28 We cannot however be sure that they held the office of šāhib al-mazālim. All holders of the mazālim office during this period were powerful clients of the Umayyad ruler. The chronicles mention all those known by name, that is Ibn Ţumlus, Ibn Shuhayd and Ibn Ḥudayr, who were part of the caliph’s retinue in varying capacities. Were it not for Ibn Ḥayyān’s insistence on the fact
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that the creation of the mažālim office in 937 CE as an “independent office from then on [fa-udhārīa min hādhā ‘l-ta’rikh]” increased the efficiency of raising petitions, we might consider this policy of nominating powerful laymen and courtiers as simply a continuation of ninth-century practice.

However, from the second half of the fourth/tenth century on, under the reign of al-Hakam II, and certainly after 367/977 under the chamberlain al-Manṣūr, biographical literature mentions several holders of the mažālim office drawn from religious and legal scholars. These personalities were closely related to the judge of Islamic law in Córdoba, the so-called qāḍī ‘l-jamā‘a. Either they were personally nominated to this office during a later stage of their career, like Muḥammad ibn al-Sālim and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Fūṭays, or they replaced the qāḍī ‘l-jamā‘a when the latter accompanied the ruler on his military campaigns, like Muḥammad ibn Dhakwān.

Our sources do not allow for reconstructing the activities of the šāhīb al-mažālim continuously over this period. However, there seems to be a significant shift in his professional background. Formerly he was recruited from among the powerful persons of the ruler’s entourage but without possessing any specific juridical knowledge. During the last one-third of the tenth century CE, several holders of the mažālim office were religious and legal scholars according to the biographical dictionaries.

Another type of juridical source may help to understand this change in the function of the mažālim office. In his collection of court cases entitled al-Ahkām al-kubrā, the jurist Ibn Sahl (d. 486/1093) collected cases and juridical responses (fatāwā) from ninth to eleventh century jurists of Córdoba. As part of Mālikī legal heritage, many of these cases were integrated into the general collection of Wansharīsī who died as late as 914/1508.

What is of interest here is that Ibn Sahl mentions seven cases adjudicated by the šāhīb al-mažālim Ibn Adham, who died in 486/1093 in Córdoba. These cases took place under Sevillian rule (of the Banū ‘Abbād) between the years 461–4/1069–72 and Ibn Sahl participated personally as a juridical counsellor—mushāwar. An earlier case cited by Ibn Sahl was presented to the Córdoban šāhīb al-mažālim Ibn ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf (d. 424/1033).

As a rule, Ibn Sahl collected cases of special interest for jurists serving as counsellors at the qāḍī court. At first sight, there is no difference between the mažālim cases and those presided over by the qāḍī, either from an institutional or from a legal perspective. The mažālim cases reflect perfectly the juridical practice of their time, which is probably why Ibn Sahl cited them. Upon closer inspection, however, there is one aspect common to all of these cases. Due to certain circumstances, such as contradicting claims or lack of evidence, the claimant would not have had a cause of action in a qāḍī court, but had a strong desire to resolve their problem. The cases presented to the šāhīb al-mažālim Ibn Adham are the following:

1 After the sale of a female slave, the buyer wanted to annul the contract or receive a partial refund because of existing, undisclosed damage to her eye.
The seller disputed the date of the contract and presented diverging medical evidence. A man made a claim on a bull that was lost when his father had been killed. The new owner agreed to its restitution, when a third person came forward presenting evidence of ownership. Following a claim, the mażālim judge restored agricultural land that had been usurped by the former rulers of Córdoba, the Banū Jahwar. The claimants then attempted to confirm this judgment through a qāḍī judgment. Two cases concerned heirs claiming the restitution of an endowment (ḥubs) of land that had been sold by their father, the former proprietor and creator of the endowment. One case remained pending since one of the four borders of the property was not attested by two witnesses while the second case involved conflicting evidence and the sealing of the house by the qāḍī. The former guardian of an orphan was sued to reimburse money to the child stemming from a credit-partnership (qirāḍ; commenda). He refused to pay after challenging former maintenance payments and raising the issue of heavy losses in trading operations. Members of a family wanted an immediate settlement of their mother’s will. During her lifetime, she had acknowledged the existence of a second husband who now could not be located and therefore hindered succession. The eighth case by Ibn ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf (d. 424/1033) concerned a woman who had won a judgment in her favour from a qāḍī in her claim to be a free woman, not a slave. Later she revoked her claim and held that she was her former master’s slave.

These cases were probably neither representative of the mażālim jurisdiction, nor did they cover the whole range of possible claims that could be brought. However, they provide an important insight into the legal administration of complaints and the need for an extraordinary jurisdiction beyond that of the qāḍī, as a supplement, not a replacement. The theory was that mażālim jurisdiction was inspired by jurists’ law, fiqh, but could overrule certain procedural constraints and limits that were imposed by the law of the qāḍī. These mażālim cases do not systematically indicate whether they were preceded by an unsuccessful claim in a qāḍī court, although some do specify this. The unsatisfactory result may have been the sentence prescribed by the qāḍī or, alternatively, that it was impossible for the qāḍī to come to a decision. Córdoban mażālim cases therefore probably did not systematically overturn a former qāḍī judgment. In one case concerning an endowed estate (dār), the sāhib al-mażālim did in fact quash a former qāḍī hukm that had sealed access to the estate. Significantly, the sāhib al-mażālim could do this because of the ruler’s order (tawqī’). It is important to note that the Córdoban sāhib al-mażālim acted on behalf of the ruler. It was the ruler, not the qāḍī, who empowered him to deal with grievances. One anecdote in chronicles of the tenth century CE mentions this aspect. The Córdoban sāhib al-mażālim should therefore not be considered a subordinate magistrate to the qāḍī. Similarly, if a court secretary (kātib al-ahkām) became
the secretary of maza’il it was considered a promotion. Both institutions belonged to different spheres despite the fact that sahib al-maza’il and qadi ‘l-jam’a were recruited from among the same social group during the second half of the tenth century CE. When the sahib al-maza’il Ibn Futays was nominated qadi ‘l-jam’a in 394/1004, he changed his outfit from a vizier to that of a jurist (faqih)—an external sign that the qadi’s jurisdiction was based on sacred law, the fiqh, and did not, like maza’il justice belong to the political sphere. During state ceremonies, the rank of vizier was superior to that of the qadi ‘l-jam’a.

Legal and historical sources report on two distinct phenomena that both concern “correcting injustice.” On the one hand, there were the ruler’s public actions that were incorporated into the chronicles of the time as strong evidence for his justice and good governance. On the other hand, there was a specialized jurisdiction of the maza’il dealing with legal affairs of people in distress. The link between the ruler and the jurisdiction of the maza’il consisted of a set of administrative procedures undertaken following a petition and any judgment passed. One source attests indirectly to the procedure of submitting written petitions to the maza’il office. When the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Rahman IV reintroduced all the tenth century court offices during his short reign in the year 414/1023, he established among other things the “service of documents and presentation of petitions [khidmat al-wathā’iq wa-ra’f kutub al-maza’il].” This practice of presenting petitions in a maza’il jurisdiction, however, was well known from Mamluk Egypt.

What do the eight maza’il cases described in Ibn Sahl’s collection teach us? Although they are neither representative nor exhaustive, they illustrate two important aspects of this institution. Cordoban maza’il courts did not specialize in penal cases, nor were they courts of appeal against qadi judgments. None of the maza’il cases cited by Ibn Sahl concerned penal law. They all dealt with civil law issues, not with punishment for a crime. This is best illustrated by the case of the lost bull. In the maza’il court, the son made a claim to restore the bull to his ownership; he did not seek to prosecute his father’s murderers. It is possible that the Cordoban sahib al-maza’il also dealt with criminal cases and inflicted punishment, but Ibn Sahl does not mention these.

Secondly, the maza’il were not appeal courts against qadi judgments. Several of these cases were heard by the maza’il judge without any former qadi judgment having been delivered. This observation is not contradicted by the annulment of a qadi judgment in one case. It is safe to assume that the highly formalized law of evidence blocked certain cases, which ended in a standstill, such as the inheritance case mentioned above. In the fourth case cited, the market-inspector had refused to certify an endowment of land (hubs) since one of its four borders had been attested by only one witness, rather than two. Both these aspects, the lack of specific competence in penal cases and the lack of an appeal function, distinguish the Cordoban maza’il justice exercised during the tenth and eleventh centuries CE, from Mawardi’s typology.

In the Cordoban context, the jurisdiction of the maza’il was complementary to the qadi’s jurisdiction. The outcome in both cases may have been the same, but
the former jurisdiction was based on the ruler’s authority to allow for less formalistic decisions. In all the mazālim cases cited by Ibn Sahl, the same counsellors who had acted for the qāḍī used Islamic law (fiqh) in their effort to find a satisfactory solution. The fiqh rules of evidence, such as witness testimony, sermon and acknowledgement, were respected, but without being taken to an extreme if these formalities would have prevented an equitable decision. In one case mentioned above, the claimants wished to confirm the decision of a mazālim to restore usurped land with a subsequent hukm from the qāḍī. The counsellors did not agree with the necessity for the latter, since the mazālim-decision was legally binding. It cannot be concluded, therefore, that persons seeking to redress injustice sought the jurisdiction of the sāhib al-mazālim exclusively. This would wrongly neglect the importance of qādis and other magistrates in the administration of justice.

The historical reports illustrate that when considered in the broader context of the evolution of Islamic law and regular qāḍī jurisdiction, an important shift occurred in the suzerain’s prerogative to correct injustice. During the eighth and ninth centuries CE, Umayyad emirs personally acted upon the grievances of their subjects, or ordered trustworthy members of their court to do so. The growing influence of juridical thinking on the administration of law became visible through the introduction of the Mālikī school of law by Hishām I around the year 170/786–757 and the arrival of a complete version of Mālik’s Muwatta’ in the circle of Córdoban jurists, as reported by Ibn Ḥayyān, by the time of Ḥakam I.

At the end of the second/eighth century, Islamic law, as enacted by the qāḍī, had acquired such normative force that the ruler would not have wanted to counter decisions based on legal procedure, not even in favour of persons close to him. One anecdote provides an example. When ‘Abbās al-Marwānī, one of al-Ḥakam’s counsellors, usurped a landed estate, the legal heirs to this land had their ownership rights attested by witnesses and claimed its restitution in court. The counsellor did not answer the qāḍī’s summons to court, but wanted the emir to excuse the qāḍī from the case and to judge it himself. The qāḍī refused, and the emir is reported as having said to his counsellor that nothing is a harder stroke than the pen of a qāḍī. In another case, mentioned above, inhabitants of a house were expelled by the qāḍī because two different parties held legally registered title to the same property. The emir replied to the petitioner that he personally would have complied and quit the property if the qāḍī had passed such a decision against him.

Reports on unjust acts by powerful persons changed during the tenth century CE. These individuals committed injustice by using legal procedure to their advantage, like producing false or ambiguous witness testimony that helped them to usurp other people’s property or inheritance. Thus legal procedure itself became an injustice and the law a tool in the hands of the powerful to achieve their goals. Some cases cited by Ibn Sahl testify to this.

As a result of this analysis covering the establishment of Islamic law as a basis for both legal and social relations, regulated by ordinary qāḍī jurisdiction, we see the Córdoban rulers submit to this jurisdiction. No longer did they confine the task of “redressing injustice” to legal laymen, the former mazālim lords among the Umayyad viziers. Rather, this task was undertaken by persons with legal training
who were vested with judicial powers as defined by the *fiqh*. As a consequence, the development of the *mažālim* institution in al-Andalus illustrates how the ruler’s competence in “governance” (*siyāsa*) integrated the judicial system of Islamic society. This is what Muslim jurists would later term *siyāsa sharʿiya*.

**Notes**

2. Cf. ibid., Cf. Mawardi (1990), idem (1915).
6. For example, see the works of Ibn Bassām (d. 543/1148), Ibn ‘Idhārī (fl. eighth/fourteenth century) and al-Maqqarī (d. 1041/1632), referred to in this article.
8. Ibid., III:37, citing Ibn Ḥayyān. Criticized by some courtiers for this non-ruler-like behaviour, he later stopped this custom and sent his son to attend the funerals. See ibid.; al-Khālīfāfī (1413/1992), 540.
9. For parallels, see anonymous (1983), I:92.
14. On this, see Tyan (1960), 552; Ibn ‘Idhārī (1980), II:153. Ibn Ḥayyān’s passage on free access to the emir may be an allusion to the situation during the tenth century CE when the ḥājib al-Manṣūr prevented access to the caliph Hishām II, see below.
15. See above.
16. See anonymous (1989), 128. al-Khālīfāfī (1413/1992), 542 wrongly claims this to be the introduction of a mažālim office (*khūṭṭat al-mažālim*).
17. Ibn Ḥayyān (1971), 166: “wallāhu al-nazar fīl-mažālim wa-tanfidh al-ahkām ‘alā tābāqāt ahl al-mamlaka.” [al-Khālīfāfī (1413/1992), 544, cites “al-nazar fīl-mažālim” as “khūṭṭat al-mažālim,” which is not the same, see below.] On his career during the years 215–320h as a member of the Emir’s council, see Ibn Ḥayyān (2003), 295; as plenipotentiary (*muḍābbīr*) and accompanying the Emir’s sons on military expeditions, see ibid., 424, 429, 462; and as leader against the Norman invasion, see ibid., 451, 458. Further sources in Meouak (1999), 132ff.
21. A survey of available biographical dictionaries of the tenth century CE is given in Müller (forthcoming).
22. On this, see Ibn Bashkuwāl (1955).
23. The most detailed one being Ibn Bassām (1399h). On this work and its relation to Ibn Ḥayyān, see Ohlhoff (1999), 25–33, 37–41.
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24 On him, see Meouak (1999), 155f, with an account of his career as military leader from 301–27/913–37 and then until his death. I do not think we can preclude the possibility that these were two persons, the first Muḥammad ibn Ṭumlus and the second Muḥammad ibn Qāsim ibn Ṭumlus.

25 See Ibn Ḥayyān (1979), 416. He was also a man of letters, see Meouak (1999), 136f, esp. n. 529 and 535.

26 See Ibn Ḥayyān (1979), 486.

27 See idem (1965), 86. The vizier in charge, ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Mūsā ibn Ḥudayr, is also mentioned as vizier in the years 360/971 and 363/974. See ibid., 29, 185.

28 E.g. in 344/955–6, the vizier Muhammad ibn Ḥudayr was charged with dealing with the demands of the people (al-nazar fi maṭāliḥ al-nās wa-ḥawā’ijihā) and addressing the necessary decrees. See Ibn ʿIdhārī (1980), II:220.

29 Ibn Ḥayyān (1979), 416.


33 See Ibn Sahl (1978), All references will be to this edition. The commercial edition (see idem (2007)) does not indicate textual variants.


36 See Müller (1999), 333f, 360–2.


43 For cases 5 and 6, see ibid., 346, 350. In case 4, a claim against the market inspector did not yield a satisfactory result, i.e. a decision (hukm). See ibid., 345.

44 For case 5, see ibid., 346f.

45 See Ibn ʿIdhārī (1980), II:289; al-Maquqarī (1188), I:410, where al-Mansūr orders his chief of police to bring the offender with his adversary to the šāhib al-maẓālim, who would judge and punish him.

46 This is contrary to Tyan (1960), 524; Lévy-Provençal (1950–67), III:146.


48 See Ibn Bashkuwāl (1955), I:300 (no. 682).

49 For the ranking during court ceremonies in al-Ḥakam II’s reign, see Ibn Ḥayyān (1965).

50 Ibn Ḥayyān in Ibn Bassām (1399h), I:51. Also, see Lévy-Provençal (1996), 97f.


52 See case 2 in idem (1999), 341.

53 See the anecdote under al-Mansūr, note 45.

54 For case 7, see Müller (1999), 353–60.

55 For case 4, see ibid., 345.

56 For case 3, i.e. the opinion of Ibn Sahl opposing Ibn Faraj, who opted for a second qāḍī trial, see ibid., 344.


58 The first to bring a complete and certified by “audition” (samāʾ) version of this fundamental work to Córdoba was Ziyād ibn ʿAbd al-Rahmān Shabṭūn. He transmitted it to
Layth ibn Layth. See Ibn Ḥayyān (2003), 200. This report contradicts the common isnād "Layth ibn Layth from Mālik ibn Anas".

59 See al-Khushānī (1966), 25f; al-Khallāf (1413/1992), 541. A slave-girl from the palace was claimed by her legal owner who had his property rights attested to by the qāḍī. The offer of financial compensation was declined and the Emir Ḥakam I finally conceded that the girl should leave the palace to be identified in person by the witnesses. The judge then ruled in favour of her owner. For further noteworthy cases of this qāḍī, Ibn Basḥīr, see Ibn Ḥayyān (2003), 205f, 212f, 215; Ibn ‘Idhārī (1980), II:78.

60 “law sajjala ‘alayya al-qāḍī fī maq‘ādī la-ḥaṣaraju ‘anhu”. Ibn ‘Idhārī (1980), II:66. The term “sajjala” implies that the qāḍī had listened to attestations of upright witnesses according to fiqh procedures.

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6 Social elites at the Fatimid court

Paul E. Walker

Occasional reports concerning the arrival of a foreign ambassador and, more frequently, detailed accounts of royal ceremonies and processions readily attest to the brilliance of the Fatimid court. Typically such sources testify most fully about the caliph, his appearance, what he rode, what he wore, with less said about the courtiers, those of the elite who participated in such ceremonies, occupied the higher echelons of the government, and formed the social networks that surrounded and supported the court itself. What was the position of the members of the ruling family, for example? Were Ismailis privileged over others? How, and how often, did major families maintain their lofty status through succeeding generations? Was there a class distinction, a group elevated by self-perception of superiority, and, if so, did it function interactively by forming alliances through social relations and marriages?

The information required to answer these questions is far less obvious than that concerning the ruler. The centre of this dynasty was clearly its imām-caliph who represented to his devout followers the Prophet’s only legitimate heir. His rank in the earthly hierarchy was supreme, his authority unqualified and unmitigated, his very person exalted. If he was present all attention fell on him alone. Still, important data does exist about those around him, the courtiers at his court. It provides a means for investigating the role of these people: the rank order of marchers in a procession; who was summoned to climb the minbar at the festival, descriptions of an appointment to office, the seating arrangement at a session with the imām. Although most accounts of this type simply list a few names, in rare instances there is more information about the participants and the social context of their activities. Additional details can be culled from biographical materials where they exist and from the reappearance of the same individual or that person’s descendants in yet other lists. In at least two cases, we possess as well the story of a private gathering—one features a quite notorious drinking party—in which members of the elite met together socially out of court. And such events suggest that the ties that bound the key figures of the government together operated separately from loyalty, religious or otherwise, to the caliph.

Evidence for the court and the courtiers who attended it

The earliest report of the Fatimid court comes from the moment when al-Mahdī, recently released from house detention in Sijilmāsa, sat to greet Abū ‘Abdallāh’s
Kutāma Berber army and to be recognized for the first time as caliph in late August of 909 CE.\(^1\) Ja’far, the imām’s personal servant, provides a fairly lengthy description of the ceremony, indicating that already the new dynasty intended to observe a much more lavish style than the rough and ascetic habit of the dā’ī who had organized the revolution that brought it to power. The trappings of the caliph’s office were to be appropriately royal, in fact so much so that one possibly legitimate explanation of why al-Mahdī felt forced to execute Abū ‘Abdallāh was the latter’s continued objection to what he saw as the corruption of the Berbers through the wearing of silk robes and other temptation of rank and privilege urged on them by the new ruler.

The memoir of Ja’far, who was from that day and thereafter the chamberlain of the new court, is an essential source. Others include the recollections of Ibn al-Haytham,\(^2\) the records of Ustādh Jawdhar,\(^3\) and Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s Kitāb al-majālis wa’l-musāyarāt\(^4\) and the same author’s Kitāb al-himma fi ādāb atbā’ al-a’immā.\(^5\)

Such material depicts an idealized situation which, nevertheless, reveals both an early caliphal taste for regal display and yet, alongside that tendency, a reluctance to ignore the old North African requirement of simplicity. There are accounts of al-Mu’izz sitting, for example, for his Kutāma adherents in a manner devoid of pretence, the imām at work in humble fashion.\(^6\)

With the advent of al-‘Azīz in 975 CE, however, and the real commencement of the Egyptian, Cairene phase of Fatimid rule, the court ceased any pretence to humility and became as extravagant as the times and funds would allow. This caliph inherited a prosperous empire and he personally loved pomp and ceremony. He set the tone for all his successors who, with a few minor exceptions—a period of asceticism under al-Ḥākim\(^7\) and economic troubles in the middle of the reign of al-Mustanṣir\(^8\)—continued to favour extravagant spectacle over modest self-effacement to the end of the dynasty.

A fine example that shows the court’s lavish extravagance occurs in the following report of a Byzantine ambassador’s arrival at the Fatimid court in 391/1001:

On 16th Jumādá al-Ākhira, an emissary from the Byzantine emperor arrived. Soldiers from various districts were mustered for the occasion. They stood in two rows, with al-Ḥākim positioned to be seen by them. The emissary approached between the soldiers to the Bāb al-Futūḥ where he dismounted and walked to the palace kissing the ground along the whole distance until coming into the presence of al-Ḥākim at the palace. The great hall of the palace had been furnished, rare drapes hung in it that were said to have been ordered searched for in the storehouses of furnishings until there were found in it twenty-one individual but similar pieces that the lady Rāshida, daughter of al-Mu’izz, remembered that they had been in the train of furnishing transported from Kairouan to Egypt with al-Mu’izz. The clerks of the furnishings’ treasury found written on one of them the date 331[h], the work of the servants, in brocaded silk and gold thread. The whole of the hall was furnished with it, hiding in the process all of its walls, so that its entire floor and walls were of gold, gleaming with majesty and luxury. In the centre of
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the hall the golden shield was suspended crowned by a splendidly unique gem of each variety, radiating what surrounded it. When the sun hit it, eyes could not look at it out of feebleness. The emissary entered and kissed the ground, then presented letters and gifts.9

Other examples of this type exist, but most, as here, except for a mention of the caliph’s aunt Rāshida, who belonged therefore to the royal family, offer no additional information about members of the elite. Better material comes occasionally from reports, especially when taken from an eyewitness, concerning royal processions. Here is how the amīr al-Musabbiḥī10 describes three such events from the year 415/1024–5:

On Friday two nights into the month of Ramaḍān, our master [mawlānā] . . . rode for Friday prayer in the Anwār Mosque.11 He was accompanied by all of his servants, as well as the elite notables of his government. He wore a fine linen shawl. . . . The chief qāḍī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī ’l-’Awwām mounted the minbar with him, as did Ibrāḥīm, the companion and tutor, known as al-Jafis [i.e. the boon-companion]. . . . He [i.e. the caliph] delivered the khutba for himself. It was a beautiful khutba, most complete and perfect. Then he offered a prayer for his forefathers, and for himself and all his servants and the prominent men of his government. The chief qāḍī and Ibrāḥīm the tutor next raised the curtains of the dome that was above the minbar and the two descended before him. He, on whom be peace, then descended and prayed with the people a most complete and beautiful prayer. He departed for his palace safely, thanks to God. As was my custom, I walked along with the company of all the notables in the presence of the imām, both as he rode out and as he came back.12

Saturday was the ʿīd al-fiṭr [29th December 1024 CE] and our master rode in procession with his troops and the prominent men of the government. In front of him there was the one elephant that remained of the elephants and the giraffes, golden banners brocaded with silver, drums and other things. Various types of unmounted horses were paraded in front of him bearing saddles studded with jewels and heavy amber, along with all of the commanders of the Turks and the servants under commission in arms and others. . . With him were his black eunuch servants wearing types of gilded, heavy adornments, fashions of great value. I walked in his presence to the musallā from the time before reaching its gate until he entered. He prayed a quite beautiful prayer, quite complete and perfect, and next delivered a most eloquent khutba. When he, peace be upon him, went up the minbar, he summoned the chief qāḍī, who also went up. This man was ill as result of a sting he had received. Next he summoned Ibrāḥīm, the companion and tutor, and he climbed the minbar. Then he summoned Shams al-Dīn Abū ’l-Faṭḥ Masʿūd ibn Tāhīr al-Wazzān and he went up as well. He summoned Tāj al-Dawla Ibn Abī Ḥusayn, who was formerly master of the Sicilians, but he was not present. He summoned ‘Alī ibn Masʿūd ibn Abī ’l-Ḥusayn Zayn
al-Mulk and he went up. Then he summoned ‘Alī ibn al-Faḍl and after him ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Ḥājib, so he went up as well.\textsuperscript{13}

The ’īd al-nahr was Thursday the 10th Dhī ’l-Ḥijja [9th February 1025]. On it our master . . . rode in procession to the outskirts of the musallā by way of the Bāb al-Futūḥ with his servants, his troops, his eunuchs, and the prominent men of his government. In front of him were handsome unmounted horses, golden banners brocaded in silver, two flags, the giraffes, and the one elephant remaining of the elephants. With him were his Turkish servants in heavily adorned robes and fine arms, and his servants who had received commissions as officers in the finest of attire, most splendid and perfect. . . . Behind him were the Kutāma friends [i.e. Ismailis] and the notables of the government. . . . On his forehead was a jewel and over his head the red parasol heavily adorned with gold being carried by the Slav Muẓaffar Bahā’ al-Dawla. The notables dismounted in front of him as was their custom. He prayed a beautiful prayer, quite completely and perfectly. He climbed the minbar and gave an eloquent khuṭba that was most beautiful. He summoned up the minbar the chief dā’ī Qāsim ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn al-Nu’mān and handed over to him the roster of the names of those who, according to protocol, climbed the minbar. He summoned the chief dā’ī Shams al-Mulk but he was not present. He summoned Muẓaffar the Slav, then ‘Alī ibn Mas‘ūd and Ḥasan ibn Rajā’ ibn Abī ‘l-Ḥasan. Next ‘Alī ibn Faḍl. Prior to the group just mentioned, he called for the boon-companion Ibrāhīm, the tutor and goldsmith. Then he summoned at the end, ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Ḥājib and the son of his uncle. All of them mounted the minbar in accord with protocol.\textsuperscript{14}

From almost exactly one hundred years later (516/1121), we have another important account from the contemporary chronicler Ibn al-Ma’mūn:\textsuperscript{15}

The supervisor of those preparations stood with the qāḍī at the bottom of the minbar. Incense was released. The vizier was responsible not to let anyone open any door except the door through which the caliph would come at which he stood. The dā’ī sat in the entryway with the mu’ādhhdins reciting beside him. The princes, the ashraf nobility, the witnesses, and notables entered but no one else unless given a pass by the dā’ī. If the prayer fell due the caliph approached in the attired we described . . ., the sceptre of power in his hand. Immediately behind him were all of his brothers and uncles.\textsuperscript{16}

And again even later another as reported by Ibn al-Ṭuwayr:

On the second Friday [of the month of Ramaḍān], he [i.e. the caliph] rides to the great Anwār Mosque wearing the outfit of the festival seasons and those items of accoutrement mentioned previously. . . . When the call to Friday prayer sounds, the chief qāḍī goes into [the caliph] and says: “Greetings to the Commander of the Believers, the most noble judge, may God have mercy on him and bless him. The prayer, may God have mercy on you!” Then the
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caliph precedes out walking, around him are the eunuchs and muḥannakūn, the vizier behind him, and those of the elite following them, those belonging to the Youth Guard with weapons in their hands—they are officers bearing this name. He mounts the minbar to the top, beneath the perfumed dome. Once he is seated, with the vizier at the door to the minbar facing him, he signals the latter to climb up. The qāḍī goes up until he reaches him and then kisses his hands and feet in full view of the people.

For the festival of fast-breaking, the caliph rides in procession at the onset of Shawwāl at the close of Ramaḍān. . . . Once finished, he extends greetings and mounts the minbar for the ʿid khaṭba of the festival of fast-breaking. When he has taken his seat at the top. . . . The people of that gathering see him sitting at the top. Standing at the base of the minbar are the vizier, the chief qāḍī, the chamberlain, the commander of the army, the head of the chancery, the controller of the palace, the master of the bureau of state, the parasol bearer, the leaders of the ashrāf relatives, the treasurer, the lance bearer, the head of the Alid nobility. The vizier faces him. The caliph signals to the vizier to climb up and so he does, approaching and stopping, his face opposite his feet. He kisses them in view of all those present. Then he rises and stands to the right of the caliph. Once standing he signals to the chief qāḍī to come up. He goes up to the seventh step. Then the boon-companion. . . . He takes out of his sleeve a register that has been presented to him the day before from the chancery after having been passed by the caliph and the vizier. As he reads it he discloses what it contains. He says: “In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. This confirms who is to be honoured by mounting this sacred minbar on such and such day, which is the ʿid al-ʿfīr, of such and such a year, of the servants of the Commander of the Believers, may God’s blessings be on him and on his pure forefathers, and the noble prophets, following the mounting of the Illustrious Lord and his approved title and his pious benediction.” If the caliph wants to bestow honours on any of the sons of the vizier and his brothers, the qāḍī would call them up by the title mentioned therein. Next follows the name of the aforementioned qāḍī, who is himself the reader [of the document]. . . . Next he summons those we mentioned who were standing at the door of the minbar by their titles, citing their service and inviting them according to rank. In going up each of them knows his place on the minbar, left or right.

The authors of these accounts each observed the event in question and that makes the information in them highly significant. However, none of the original works in which they first appeared exist now. What survives of al-Musabbīḥ’s text, although certainly a copy of a part of the original, belongs, in this instance, to a small fraction of what he wrote. Even so, although each report contains extensive detail about the ceremony and its protocol, there is precious little information about the participants beyond title and in several cases names. Nonetheless, each suggests the kind of material required to answer the questions raised above.

Fatimid ceremonial is well represented on the whole by a wealth of information covering hit and miss most of the dynasty’s two and a half centuries and that
has already attracted a number of scholarly studies, most notably *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo* by Paula Sanders. Many of the details have a prominent place also in Heinz Halm’s volumes on the Fatimids. Thus, although there is still more material available to be analyzed, these ceremonies as such are less in need of investigation than the social context surrounding them. Moreover, various descriptions of the apparatus of Fatimid government, especially those of al-Maqrîzî and al-Qalqashandî, but others as well, provide data about offices and ranks. Still, even so, a court cannot exist without courtiers and it is their personal stories we are seeking in this instance.

A few reports add to the information provided by the accounts of processions. A few key examples may suffice. Al-Nuwâyrî provides a description of what he calls “the customary order of giving salutations to the kings of this dynasty.” First enters the vizier (here al-Ma’mûn), then the amîrs each according to rank, next the ashraf, the diwanîs of correspondence and the chancery, the chief qâdî, the notary witnesses, the dâ’î, the supervisors of the grooms, the superintendent of the diwan of the kingdom. From another direction comes the army, followed by the governor of Cairo, then Fustât, next the patriarch and the Christians, and the clerks among them, likewise the head of the Jews, and next the poets by rank. An incident from long before (the year was 395/1004–5) has groups of governors, various members of the guards, servants of the palace, and all manner of others, fearing the wrath of al-Ḥâkim, request a written guarantee of person security (amânârî). The report we have gives a relatively long list of these groups: Daylamîs, Jilânîs, pages of various kinds, men belonging to the different guard regiments, purchased slaves, mu’adhhdhîns of the palace gates, and many more. Although there is no order to the list, it is quite extensive, possible providing the most complete picture of those who served the court in one capacity or another. Unfortunately, however, it still gives us no names of individuals.

A more fruitful example comes from 516/1025–26 and an assembly formed to denounce the Nizârî claim to the Imamate against that of the ruling caliph al-ʿAmîr, whose father had succeeded in place of his brother Nizâr. In this case the reason for this session is in the main religious. Accordingly, those in attendance represented predominantly the Ismaîli establishment, with some others who were Twelvers (the fuqaḥâ’ al-ismâ’ilîyya wa l-imâmiyya, as the text puts it). The list includes by name the chief dâ’î (dâ’î al-du’â’t), a group of additional Ismaîlî du’â’t, the supervisor of the Dâr al-ʿilm, the faqîh of the Ismaîliyya, his associate, the sharîf Ibn ʿAqîl, the elders (shuyûkh) of the Alîd nobles (shuraqî), the chief qâdî, the sons of al-Mustansîr (i.e. the great uncles of the caliph), a group of the caliph’s kin, the kâtib al-dast (head of the chancery), and a selection of commanders. By including the names of each individual, this list offers more social information than those cited previously.

One more example, a particularly tantalizing case, comes from early in the reign of al-Ḥâkim. Because it appears to describe a regularly held sitting of the court, the information in it is unusually significant. Al-Maqrîzî reports that:

A group of those who were accustomed to visit al-ʿAzîz at night came to al-Ḥâkim. They were ordered to frequent the palace at the time of his
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audiences, which then extended into the evening. The first such night was Wednesday, 7th Jumādā al-Ūlā [390; i.e. 16th February 1000]. Those who came included the general Ḥusayn, the general Faḍl ibn Ṣāliḥ, and al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḥasan al-Bāzyār, who took up seats to the right, first Ḥusayn, next Faḍl and then Ibn al-Bāzyār. After them was Abū ’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Rassūlī, followed by the qāḍī Abū al-‘Azīz ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Nuṭān. On the left sat Rajā’ and Mas‘ūd, two sons of Abū ’l-Ḥusayn, beyond them the physician Abū ’l-Fath Manṣūr ibn Ma’ṣhar, and the clerk Abū ’l-Ḥusayn ibn al-Maghrībī and his brother. Placed close by were a number of relatives of the caliph and a group of commanders, among which were Manjūṭakīn and some others. Next, another group including Ibn Ṭāhir al-Wazzān came in. This same order remained in effect until the twelfth of Jumādā al-Ākhirā.27

In contrast to the reports about processions, the information here (almost certainly from al-Musabbiḥ) describes the court in session at the palace. Assuming we can locate additional material about the individuals named, about their relationship first to the state and second to each other, we can begin to understand the social underpinnings of the dynasty itself. Ultimately, merely having an account of an event or a session of the court, even with names of known individuals, is only a first step in the search for personal data about the holders of these offices and how they relate to one another socially. In most cases we do not even know, of those mentioned in various contexts, which were Ismailis (other than the head of the daʿwa and the duʿāt). For most of the chief judges, for example, it is possible to track down such information in Ibn Ḥajar’s work on the judges of Egypt (the Rafʿ al-iṣr ‘an quḍāṭ Miṣr)28. But for lesser officials we have little or nothing of the kind.

Still, as with the example just cited above, many of the names mentioned in it are of reasonably well-known figures. They clearly represented the elite of the time. At least three of the men—the commander-in-chief, the head of the judiciary, and the leading member of the Alid nobility—appear as participants in the drinking party to be discussed below. The two al-Maghribīs belonged to a prominent family of clerks,29 all of whom—six or seven in all—were executed in 400/1009–10, with the exception of a son of one of these men. That son Abū ’l-Qāsim managed to flee; later he became quite famous as ‘al-Wazīr al-Maghrībī’. Manjūṭakīn was a prominent commander in Syria; three others at one time held the post of wāṣīṭa (the lesser vizierate) under al-Ḥākim. Two, Faḍl ibn Ṣāliḥ and al-Bāzyār, had briefly served as viziers to al-‘Azīz (the former for a few days, the latter for a year and three months). Ibn Ma’ṣhar30 had treated al-Ḥākim during an illness and for his effort received 10,000 dinār, a staggeringly large sum. He then became the caliph’s person doctor, a rank of high standing as is clear from the order of seating. He died four years later in 394 CE and was replaced by Abū Ya’qūb ibn Ḍaṭār, about whom more needs to be said in connection with his death in 397 CE as a consequence of the same drinking party. Rajā’ ibn Abī ’l-Ḥusayn was put to death in 399 CE for having prayed the supererogatory tarāwīḥ prayers during Ramaḍān, thus strongly suggesting that he must have been Sunni. All in all, in this instance and with this report, we are provided solid information. Admittedly, it comes from a fairly
well-documented period of Fatimid history, but it illustrates, even so, how scattered information together with an account of the court in session can begin to create a valuable picture of the social elite of the time.

Some preliminary results of this line of inquiry

Of the several questions posed at the start, a few remain quite difficult to study. The religious affiliation of many important figures in the Fatimid government is unclear despite attempts to determine it in each case. A few are obvious, but more are not. There were Ismailis, Twelvers Shiites, Sunnites of various schools, non-Muslims, both Jews and Christians, and many more of an undetermined variety. One obvious conclusion is that adherence to Ismaili Islam, and loyalty to the imām-caliph with full Shiite devotion, was not a requirement for government service, or membership in the social elites.

The following three areas of inquiry offer interesting conclusions as well: 1) the role and status of the royal family, 2) the long-term participation of major families, and 3) examples of social interaction out of court.

1) The royal family

It would be almost axiomatic that the social elite surrounding the caliph included, first and perhaps foremost, his extended family, primarily the blood relatives on his father’s side. The several accounts quoted above indicate as much with a mention of “relatives of the caliph,” “the sons of al-Mustaṣṣir [i.e. the great uncles of the caliph], a group of the caliph’s kin,”31 Rāshida, the caliph’s aunt. More examples could be added to these. Clearly then the royal family was important quite beyond those sons of the imām-caliph who might have a chance of succeeding to the throne. The evidence we have also shows that the royals preserved their elite status economically as well as socially. However, in contrast to the Abbasid caliph—to cite the main opposition—who could be removed from the caliphate by the military, the Fatimid imām was, in theory, immune to a coup designed to replace him by another member of his family. The Buyid amīr Bahā’ al-Dawla in 381/991 deposed the caliph al-Ṭā’ī and substituted for him al-Qādir, without violating irreparably the office or harming the Abbasid dynasty in the long run. Succession to the Isma’ili line of a’imma, however, depended on the explicit designation by the preceding holder of that position of the person who follows, normally his son (though not necessarily his eldest son). Collateral members of the family have no share in the succession, nor can they have. A coup by one branch against another, one brother against a brother already seated on the throne, was unthinkable.

And yet it is fairly certain that the Fatimid caliphs regarded their own family with circumspection and caution not untypical of other monarchs. The royals were guarded carefully and kept in check. Nonetheless they were evidently pampered and showered with the privileges of wealth and elite status. Still, most curiously, no blood relative of the caliph, aside from the son or sons groomed for possible succession, seems to have held a position of authority, an office of
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government or a military command. Were they simply decorative? That appears to be the only conclusion possible. But, as a consequence of their lack of participation in the actual functioning of the government, the information about the royal family, individually or collectively, is relatively elusive.

A good place to begin is with its size. About that we know, first, the names of the sons of the caliphs, though usually only the names. The men of the dynastic family, those who did not become caliphs—the brothers, uncles, and great uncles—should be of interest. Again, the information about them is scant. Because none were ever appointed to positions of authority, unfortunately, there exist for them almost no obituary notices. Moreover, since they could and did marry, as was not the case with Fatimid women, and they did produce offspring, their estates were inherited by their children. Accordingly, there was no reason for a government audit of their holdings. Thus their affairs were largely private and remained so, and no record of these inheritances entered the public domain.

By the time of al-Ḥākim’s accession to the caliphate, five generations of earlier a’īmma had, even without the participation of the female members, produced a burgeoning, extended royal family. Al-Mahdī left seven sons, including his successor al-Qā’im, who had himself seven more. Al-Manṣūr produced five sons; al-Mu’izz four. Those who lived to adulthood might well have in turn generated progeny, as is clear in several known cases involving the descendants of these same sons. The first three caliphs had between them sixteen daughters in all. There were thus potentially also many unmarried aunts and great aunts.

Immediately subsequent generations were thinly populated at the highest level. Al-Ḥākim likewise had two sons, of which one survived, and at least one daughter. Al-Ẓāhir had only one son. From here to the end of the dynasty the information about daughters is all but non-existent. The sons are another matter. Al-Mustanṣir, partly as a benefit of a long reign, left as many as seventeen in all.

Inadvertently, al-Maqrīzī provides an unusual kind of evidence in this matter. When Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Ayyūb brought a formal end to Fatimid rule in 567/1171, he ordered all available members of the former ruling family arrested and incarcerated in the Dār al-Muẓaffar, males and females to be kept separated. Obviously the females needed to be imprisoned for some months only. The males, however, were held until death. In the year 608/1211, the 63 individuals that remained were transferred to the citadel. Of these but 40 were living in 623/1226 when an interested party decided to make an inventory of them. Al-Maqrīzī provides us that list and it gives the names of the surviving Fatimids with full genealogy back to al-Mustanṣir. Using it one can obtain the beginnings of a family tree for, at least, a portion of the later Fatimids. No such record is complete, however, but it does confirm for us that al-Mustanṣir had a great many sons. It proves, moreover, that at the end—the time when it was abolished—there were a notably large number of Fatimids. As sons of al-ʿĀḍid alone, we can count 17, possibly 18, even though he was barely 21 when he died. It is slightly ironic that, over the final decades of the dynasty, when the strict rule of succession solely by designation broke down,
and when with strife and murder among the royal family became more common, it proliferated.

Fatimid royal women, unfortunately, rarely appear in the histories. Sitt al-Mulk is an exception, notably so. Two daughters of the caliph al-Mu’izz are also prominent in our records. Both died long in 442/1050, at the age by then of about 90. The first, called al-Sayyida Rāshida, left an estate worth an astonishing 1,700,000 dinār, a figure well beyond that for most rulers and kings of the time. The lady’s wardrobe contained 30,000 silk gowns, 12,000 robes of unmixed colours and a hundred glass jars full of camphor. She was, says one historian who reports this, even so quite devout, living off her spinning and not from funds of the government. Her sister, ‘Abda, died three days later. Both were born in Raqqāda in the Maghrib. The second sister also left such a massive estate it took, says the report, 40 Egyptian pounds of sealing wax and 30 reams of paper to complete the inventory of all items found in it, among which were 1,300 pieces of silver, each weighing 10,000 dirham, 400 swords embossed in gold, 30,000 pieces of Sicilian cloth, gems of which there was an ardabb (24 śā’) of emeralds. And yet throughout her life she ate nothing but bread mixed with some meat broth.

The evidence for the astonishing wealth of Fatimid royal women includes more examples but mainly, as in these cases, in connection with the obituary notice of their deaths. One more obituary of the same type concerns the daughter of al-Ḥākim. Known as Sitt Miṣr (the Lady of Egypt), she died in 455/1063, long after her father, leaving again an impressive estate, among which were 8,000 female servants, over 30,000 Chinese vases all full of musk, unique gems, one of which was a piece of ruby weighing ten mithqāl. Her landholdings yielded an income of 50,000 dinār annually. Yet she, like her great aunts before her, was noted for virtue, in her case for generosity and munificence.

For the long run of Fatimid history there are other examples of the kind. What is rarely stated, however, is that all the estates in question, as fabulous as they were, became the property of the government. These women had no heirs; none had ever married. And, because they lived so long, their brothers and other immediate family were deceased. In the case of Rāshida and ‘Abda, whose wealth obviously engendered the envy of each successive caliph, it would be al-Mustanṣir who eventually benefited. It is most curious that we have no evidence of any of these women marrying, or producing offspring. Although no written policy exists to confirm it—there is in the literature no discussion of a rule to that effect—evidently Fatimid royal women, here mainly the daughters of the caliphs, were not permitted to marry. In contrast to the royal families elsewhere, whose fathers regularly contract marriage alliances through their daughters to enhance their prestige or solidify treaties of mutual association, the Fatimid never engaged in such a practice. The reason for this attitude eludes us. Since dynastic succession and the transference of the Imamate occurred strictly by designation, not by primogeniture or any other means that allow either the automatic inheritance of the caliphate by the oldest son, or by any member of the family not explicitly chosen by the preceding imām, the possibility of some daughter spawning a contender was unlikely in the extreme. And in fact it never happened.
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But also, if none were married, their estates can have only derived from personal inheritance, gifts, and the carefully management of their holdings. By law these women, as daughters, like also wives, would have inherited a portion, less than males but not apparently negligible in these cases, of the estate of their fathers and husbands. If the father was the Fatimid caliph, such estates might have been enormous. The size of his daughter’s holdings may thus provide some indication of al-Hākim’s own estate, remembering that she would have received substantially less than her brother, the caliph al-Ẓāhir. The holdings of the two aunts hints likewise at the extreme wealth of the dynastic family as a whole.

One report that ought to be included here suggests that the royal family could and did create its own social network and that the caliph monitored its activities most carefully. In the year 392/1002, comments al-Maqrīzī,

that year . . . ‘Abd al-A’lā, son of the prince Hāshim who was a son of the caliph al-Manṣūr, received permission to leave town to visit one of his estates. Al-Hākim himself gave this permission to his cousin who went out with a group of his boon companions. Al-Hākim sent with them a spy to report on their activities. The party travelled to the place of their recreation and began to eat and drink. A part of their story is that one of the sons of al-Mughāzīlī, the astronomer, said to Ibn Hāshim, “There is no doubt that the caliphate ought to be yours; you are the Imām of this Age.” When they got back, Ibn Hāshim went to see al-Hākim. When he had taken a seat, al-Hākim pulled out from under a cushion an unsheathed sword and struck him with it. Ibn Hāshim was carried to his own house and there wrote seeking to be excused for whatever crime had reported about him. He swore that he had been struck even though he himself was not at fault. He begged for permission for a doctor to treat his wound and that was granted. However, when he had recovered, he sought permission to go to the baths, a permission granted. Al-Hākim sent to the baths someone to slay him there and bring back his head. He then turned against those who had been present at the party; they were killed and burned. Among them were the sons of al-Mughāzīlī, Ibn Kharīṭa, the son of the [old] vizier Abū ’l-Faḍl ibn al-Furat, and a number of young Kutāma.34

Here then is solid evidence that collateral members of the royal family were watched closely and kept under some form of strict supervision—as is proven by this prince needing to ask permission to leave town and to visit his own estate—and yet they managed, even so, to form their own social networks of friends and supporters.

2) The long-term participation of major families

Although much work remains to be done on this topic, it is already relatively easy to identify many instances of a family that contributed at least two successive generations to government service under the Fatimids. It is true from the earliest decades to the end. Often such service by the later member follows immediately
that of the earlier, but not infrequently it skips over an intervening period. Occasionally we have a record of individuals from the same family rising to the highest positions generation after generation.

The most prominent case is that of justly famous qāḍī al-Nu‘mān and his clan whose hold on the office of chief judge ran through six individuals over four generations. Al-Nu‘mān entered Fatimid service as far back as 313/925. From 341/952, when he moved from being a regional judge (western Tripoli), to al-Manṣūriyya, the capital of the empire, he was recognized as the highest legal authority in the Fatimid domain. Two of his sons, first ‘Alī, until his death in 374/984, and then Muḥammad became chief qāḍī one after the other. Upon the latter’s death in 389/999, the former’s son al-Ḥusayn assumed the same lofty rank. He was coincidentally also the head of the da‘wa, the dā‘ī al-du‘āt. The caliph removed him in 394/1004 for his cousin Muḥammad ibn al-Nu‘mān’s son ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, who held the same two offices until his fall from grace in 398/1008. It is this same ‘Abd al-‘Azīz who was mentioned as attending the sessions of the court in 390 CE—his status was high as a judge even prior to his appointment as chief justice. He was also later a participant, with his brother-in-law, in the notorious drinking party discussed below. His son Qāsim expected to succeed his father but was passed over twice, before eventually landing the position of chief dā‘ī in 414/1023–4. In 418/1027 he was given also the post of chief justice, which he lost and regained at least once. His tenure finally came to an end in 441/1049, a date which seems to signal the termination of this family’s influence. Still, it was a remarkable run. The al-Nu‘mān clan preserved their place in Fatimid society and in the government at the highest levels for a century and a quarter.

Another example, much less well known, is that of the Fāriqīs. Members of this family rose high enough to hold the same offices, that of chief justice and head of the da‘wa, and also, in addition, the post of vizier. The first name in our sources is that of al-Ḥākim’s tutor Sa‘īd ibn Mālik al-Fāriqī (d. 391/1001). Two of his sons rose to become chief justice; one of them, Mālik, was at the same time head of the da‘wa. Three sons of the other, ‘Abd al-Ḥākim, became chief justice, two were also vizier, and one of the latter was twice head of the da‘wa. A member of this generation, ‘Abd al-Karīm, produced three sons who attained prominence; one, Aḥmad, becoming chief justice on seven different occasions and vizier probably five times, the last in 461/1067–8.

3) The drinking party

Quite without warning, near the end of his report covering the year 397 (September 1007–September 1008), al-Maqrīzī comments tersely:

In it [i.e. 397h] Ya‘qūb ibn Nasṭās, the Christian, died. He was al-Ḥākim’s personal physician. He was found drunk [sakrān] in a pool of water. He was carried to a church in a coffin and the town grieved over him. Then they returned him to his house and interred him in it. All the notables of the states [ahl al-dawla] marched in his funeral procession, along with a multitude of
lighted candles and many censors of incense. He was the physician of his time, highly knowledgeable in the subject. He was also a prodigy of memory. Although a tune were played for him only once, he would memorize it. If a hundred singers each sang him one song in a single session, he would memorize all that they sang and could thereafter discourse on their melodies and poetry. He also had a gift for playing music. He was the sole doctor serving al-Ḥākim and he thus became rich, leaving in excess of 20,000 dīnār in cash, not counting clothing and other things.39

It is odd that this is all that al-Maqrízī says for surely he knew more of the story, as, for certain, did his contemporary Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, who tells us the rest of it in his biographical notice for the chief justice ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Nu’mān, the latter a man who was himself a party to what happened.40 In fact Ibn Ḥajar reveals that he has his information from al-Musabbiḥī, who in turn claims that he heard it from the astronomer Abū ’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Iṣmā‘īl al-Ṭabarānī, who was also present at the event.

One evening late in the summer of 1008 CE, friends gather at the abode of al-Ḥusayn ibn Jawhar. The house lay out of Cairo next to a small lake in the area between the city wall and the Nile. Al-Ḥusayn was at the time the chief executive of the Fatimid empire, a position called then the wāṣīṭa, a kind of lesser vizier, but nonetheless powerful. This man was the son of the famous Slavic slave from Sicily, Jawhar, who had risen to command the Fatimid army that conquered Egypt, which he thereafter ruled for four years—it was he who built Cairo—prior to the arrival of the caliph and his court. Upon his father’s death in 381/991, al-Ḥusayn inherited much of his father’s status. With the advent of al-Ḥākim, he assumed a prominent role with the title “Commander-in-chief” (qā‘id al-quwwād). He is often mentioned in the lists of those at various events (as in the sessions of court cited above). More might be said about him but he was, in short, wealthy, well connected and at the highest rank.

That fateful night his brother-in-law ‘Abd al-‘Azīz came to visit. This man, born, like al-Ḥusayn, in North Africa (in 355/966), had likewise inherited his family’s status. His grandfather was Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān; his father had been the chief justice for many years; and, after a long period of service in the judiciary, now he also, since 394/1003–04, held that same position, which included supervision of all judges, the mazālim courts, the endowed trusts, the mint, weights and measures, and mosques throughout the empire. In addition he was head of the Ismaili da‘wa (dā‘ī al-du‘āt), a separate but also major responsibility. Like his host, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was well off, well connected (two of his sons were married to two daughters of the general Faḍl ibn Ṣāliḥ), and powerful.

Another guest was Abū ’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Rassī al-Ḥasanī, the leading figure among the Alī (ashrāf) nobility, who was greatly esteemed by the Fatimids. When sons were born to al-Ḥākim in 395h; it was he who performed the ‘aqqīqa ceremony (in company with al-Ḥusayn ibn Jawhar). When the Fatimid army took Egypt, his father had been the head of the Ashrāf there. Eventually the son inherited the same position.
Abū 'l-Ḥasan ‘Alī was the court astronomer and was especially close to the caliph, who had a special love for this subject. Ibn Yūnus, the greatest astronomer of the day, lived in Egypt at the time but was so odd a character, so idiosyncratic and bizarre in his behaviour, ‘Alī served the public function of this office better, although the two astronomers were evidently personal friends as well as professional colleagues.

As the story unfolds, these four men are eating dinner at al-Ḥusayn’s house, which is more likely a lodge, out by the river, when a servant enters the room to say that a man is at the door asking if he can join them. They are only too happy to receive him for he is Abū Ya’qūb Iṣḥāq ibn ʿIbrāhīm ibn ʿAnṣās (Naṣāḥ), the Christian doctor mentioned already. He like them comes from privilege, money and high rank, a member therefore of their inner circle. Moreover, he is well known as a bon vivant, and a talented musician to boot! They are quite happy to see him.

Soon the food and table are removed to be replaced by fruit and drink which they consume merrily. As the evening progresses enjoyably, they are, as the report says, soon enough drunk. The qāḍī decides to depart and does so, but al-Ḥusayn and al-Rassī fall asleep more or less in place. Only the good doctor carries on, playing, singing and, of course, drinking, until he, finally over come with intoxication, makes his way out to search for his mule. The servants, however, bring him the mule of al-Rassī, which he refuses. The poor servants then ask him to return inside to wait while they locate his. He goes back in and lies down next to al-Rassī and passes out. Later one of the servants goes in to check on them. Raising the curtain around them, he finds al-Rassī but not Abū Ya’qūb. The man enters and begins to search for the missing doctor. Finally someone spots the doctor’s clothes in the water. They call for a servant who knows how to swim. That man goes into the lake and retrieves the body. It is clear that the doctor came out in the night thinking to go for a swim and that, in trying to pull his jalābiyya up over his head, he, still quite drunk, tipped over and fell into the water where he drowned, tangled up in his own clothes.

The alarms sound. Those present immediately send for the qāḍī who returns at once. All know that, not only is drinking intoxicating beverages strictly forbidden, but that Abū Ya’qūb was a particular favourite of the caliph. His death is an obvious tragedy and also an instant scandal. The great men pick the astronomer to go tell al-Ḥākim. As he is explaining to the caliph how the doctor brought about his own death, the other three arrive on foot and out of uniform, each to swear up and down that they had no responsibility for it, al-Ḥusayn and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz backing al-Rassī and he them.

There is no indication that drinking parties of this type were not uncommon among the elite but surely, even if they were, given al-Ḥākim’s determination to outlaw alcoholic drinks, we would normally have heard nothing of them. It took an accident and the scandal it revealed to open a window onto their existence and the behaviour of the men who attended them. It helps that the doctor was Christian, someone who might rightly, in normal times, drink wine; his reputation was not thus jeopardized by the consumption of alcohol. The rest, however, did not have that protection. That the chief justice, a man who was also head of the da’wa,
might have participated and become intoxicated appears hard to explain. Perhaps
the same is true of the others. But ultimately that is a minor issue. For us now this
event suggests most clearly the evidence of a social elite in action. Its members, all
powerful figures in the caliph’s court, gather together in friendship, to eat and
drink quite separate from both their public duties, the affairs of government, and
their loyalty to the ruler, who is here the Fatimid imām-caliph. The ties that bind
them, moreover, are not any of those that might operate under other forms of rule
or another dynasty. An ideological bond is not evident, for example. With the
exception of the qāḍī, we cannot be sure if any of the others were Ismaili. Ethnicity
is not a factor. Al-Ḥusayn was a Slav; not so the rest. Military service, patronage,
land ownership, seems not to be involved. And yet wealth, inherited status and
rank are certainly there. The Fatimid court in its urban setting had engendered an
aristocracy that had come into existence quite apart from the caliphate, although
symbiotically related to it, and, although certainly not in opposition, nonetheless
largely separated from the military, two of the other poles of power in the empire.

Conclusions

The Fatimids typically proclaimed their right to rule with lavish ostentation. The
caliph’s court began with show and maintained its extravagant display throughout
its two and a half centuries. Ceremony and ritual spectacle remained a cornerstone
of the dynasty’s claim to pre-eminence. At the centre there was always the imām-
caliph, a semi-sacred figure from a revered lineage; for some of his followers he
held the ultimate authority in all matters, both religious and worldly. He was both
pope and king together. Yet the empire he ruled comprised a diverse and mixed
population: Ismailis, non-Ismaili Sunnites and Shiites, Christians of various sects,
Jews, all further divided by ethnicity. Early attempts to impose a religious standard
for full participation in Fatimid government service failed miserably. Instead,
whether by policy or not, the court surrounding and supporting this caliphate settled
for an eclectic mixture representing the diversity of its population. Fatimid armies
prior to the advent of Badr al-Jamālī in 466/1074 and the commencement of a
military vizierate, rarely threatened the state; an army coup from within, so common
elsewhere, was not as likely here. However, as the direct power of the imām waned,
even while the lofty status of the office was, in theory, preserved, a social elite
consisting of those with inherited rank and wealth took over. This new aristocracy
is most clearly apparent in the details of the drinking party, outlined above, but it
existed at other times as well. Additional evidence suggests that it included a large
selection of royal relatives, who belonged to the elite but had no role in government,
as well as a continued presence of members of major families, such as Nuʿmāns, the
Fāriqīs and many others, who staffed the higher ranks of the bureaucracy.

In truth, however, few or perhaps no members of the elite just described
possessed a status earned or held independently of the ruling dynasty. They had
all come to high rank because of it and the personal favour of the caliph. None
were leaders of a major ethnic block and none had ties to land and territory.
Absent the ruler’s approval of them and his continued desire for their service to
him and his government, they all might fall just as quickly as they had risen. It is especially significant that the long duration of the Nu’mān clan is exceptional; few others lasted more than two generations, typically a father and son. Severe limitations on the royal family also meant it had little chance of playing a critical role in the progress of the dynasty. They simply had almost no responsibility for the course of events. Therefore, whatever new aristocracy might have been in the process of formation, it never attained a self-sustaining existence. If and when the Fatimid court ceased to exist, permanently or even temporarily, it died as well.

Notes

2 See his Kitāb al-munāẓarāt, (Madelung/Walker (2000)) which describes in fair detail the “court” of Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Shī‘ī and his brother, and then the contrast under al-Mahdī.
3 See al-Katib (1374/1954); Canard (1958). Jawdhar, who died in 362/972, was the major-domo—a quasi-vizier—of the Fatimids during the North African phase of their rule.
5 See idem (1948). This text is, in fact, a manual on how the faithful are to behave at the court (i.e. in the presence) of the imām.
6 See as a particularly good example the account of al-Mu‘izz holding an audience for the Kutāma in 351/962 in which he reveals to them his austere working conditions: See al-Maqrīzī (1967–73), I:95; Walker (1997), 194.
7 During the final seven years of his rule, al-Ḥākim began to present himself in a simpler, more ascetic style. Not infrequently, even so, he had his heir-apparent appear in full royal regalia.
8 In the period from about 1066 to 1074 CE, years known as the ayyām al-shidda, the caliphate suffered severely from a financial crisis that forced it to curtail or limit many of its public functions.
10 Al-Mukhtār ‘Izz al-Mulk Muḥammad al-Musabbīḥ, who died in 420/1029, was both an important amīr at the Fatimid court and a major historian of that era.
11 This was later known as the Mosq of al-Ḥākim.
15 The historian Jamā‘ al-Dīn Abū Ṭālib Mūsā ibn al-Ma’mūn, who died in 588/1192, was the son of the Fatimid vizier al-Ma’mūn.
16 Ibn al-Ma’mūn (1983), 88f.
17 These passages from his work were collected and published by Ayman Fu‘ād Sayyid in Ibn al-Ṭuwayar (1992), 172–85, although they come from al-Maqrīzī’s Mawa‘īz wa l-i’tibār bi-dhikr al-khiṭat wa l-‘āhār. This historian lived from 525–617/1130–1220.
18 Only a small section of the original survives and that in a manuscript in the Escorial. The first part (historical section) was published as al-Musabbīḥ (1978); part 2 (literary section), ed. Ḥusayn Naṣṣār (Le Caire: Inst. français d’archéologie orientale, 1984).
19 See Sanders (1994).
21 See especially his description of Fatimid administration at the end of the Itti’āz. See al-Maqrīzī (1967–73), III:335–44.
22 al-Qalqashandī (1912–9).
24 See ibid.
28 al-'Asqalānī (1957–61).
29 On them in general see Smoor (1985).
30 Sometimes read as Ibn Muqshir.
33 It does not give a record of those who died without issue, or of those who left Egypt, or in one way or another did not get included in this highly unusual survey of survivors.
34 al-Maqrizī (1967–73), II:47.
35 The pioneering study of this family’s influence is Gottheil (1906).
36 He died in Cairo in 363/974.
37 On the relationship between these two offices, as well as more about the men who held them, see Walker (2006).
38 For all the details see idem (2000).
40 It is available in Ibn Ḥajar’s Raf‘ al-‘isr as well as in Sayyid (1981), 24f.

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7 Courts, capitals and kingship
Delhi and its sultans in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE

Sunil Kumar

The Arab intellectual Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) had remarked on the close connection between the fortunes of a dynasty and the city. The scholar had linked the civilizational glory of a city, the political compulsion to endow it with great architectural marvels, and the gradual ebb in its fortunes to his cyclical theory of the rise and decline of states and the waxing and waning of the ‘aṣabiyya, the group solidarity of the ruling classes. In his interpretation, as political incumbents were replaced by parvenu adventurers with greater political cohesion, they scripted their seizure of power with great monumental constructions honouring their achievements.¹

Although few intellectuals of his time were able to theorize on the political conditions of their age with equal facility, some of Ibn Khaldūn’s more narrow observations regarding the extreme temporality of political authority were also present in the writings of the courtier of the Delhi sultans, Ẓiyā’ al-Dīn Barānī (d. c. 761/1360), himself a victim of regime-change. Unlike Ibn Khaldūn’s sociology, Barānī’s reading of statecraft was conceptualized within a juridical vocabulary and articulated as a didactic text on political conduct.² Not surprisingly, therefore, he gave a scathing review of the vanity of Sultanate rulers in their search for self-glorification and absolutist rule.³ But equally, the pragmatism of the courtier was also on display: Barānī grudgingly acknowledged the need to accommodate administrative non-shariʿati laws and courtly behaviour for the security and prosperity of the Muslim community.⁴ Absolutist rule and its accoutrements, the display of authority through monumental architecture and the pomp of courtly ceremony were evils that Muslims had to therefore accept in an imperfect world.⁵ This was a double-edged sword: in Barānī’s reasoning the traditions of absolutist governance followed by Delhi sultans were derived from Iran, a land that also produced many positive principles of social ordering and urbane conduct. These were, however, disassociated in his mind from its traditions of governance: the conduct of its rulers, the Khusrovan, should be emulated only in their pursuit of justice, not in their practice of despotic power.⁶

If we read Ibn Khaldūn and Ẓiyā’ al-Dīn Barānī together, it is possible to isolate three characteristics of Sultanate governance: an insecure political environment marked by the cyclical rise and fall of dynasties; a Persianate model of absolute kingship with its attendant rituals that were de rigueur for the practice
of monarchical rule; and an Islamic paradigm that recognized the sovereignty of God and was hence critical of kings and their pretensions of absolute temporal authority. The problem with this characterization, of course, is its extreme generalization—it could apply equally well to nearly all Sultanate regimes located in the Persianate milieu without developing any one of their salient characteristics. In this paper I use this general template as a point of analytical departure for a more inflected study of the political traditions and courtly practices of the Delhi sultans.

The first three sections of my paper focus on the turbulent political history of the Delhi sultans and their massive architectural constructions in Delhi. Most historians have followed colonial historiography in reading Sultanate construction of capitals, palaces and mosques as a statement of power and authority (by wasteful despots) over vanquished foes. Additionally, this huge amount of construction activity was also interpreted as striking evidence of the material resources available to the Delhi sultans—a visible testament of their ability to hire skilled craftsmen, mobilize slaves and forced labour, employ new technologies to expedite construction and use their military might to seize raw materials. Shortage of water, an increase in population and a search for security were also reasons provided for the frequent shifts in royal residences.

Although this historiography is perfectly correct in pointing out that thirteenth century Sultanate Delhi was hardly an “organic” city, my analysis shifts the ground to relate the hectic construction and transferring of capitals not just to the inspiration of the sultans of Delhi but as a response to the challenges posed by the political conditions of their age. As newly enthroned monarchs sought to consolidate their authority through the recruitment and deployment of military personnel, there was an urgent need to “house” the new political dispensation as well. In other words, in the competitive politics of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, any effort at consolidating authority implied both, the deployment of a military cadre loyal to the new monarch and an ambitious building programme where the newly constituted court could assemble. By correlating construction activity with the turbulent politics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, I argue that it is possible to notice how the reproduction of new capitals and courts in the Delhi region was not just a part of the period’s cultural expectations; it was a necessity dictated by the ways in which society and politics were structured at this time. Since it would be impossible for me to cover the two centuries within the confines of this paper I have restricted my study to specific examples until the beginning of the fourteenth century CE and the dynastic change that brought the Tughluqs to power.

The last section of my paper revisits the turbulent politics of the Delhi Sultanate in a slightly different way. It focuses on the transitions in the composition of Sultanate elites and the impact this might have had on political culture and courtly rituals. Conventionally, change in the Delhi Sultanate is not a subject studied by many historians, past or present. Delhi sultans were either good and strong or bad and weak monarchs. Their personal qualities were further grafted onto larger civilizational templates to ascertain how Muslim (or not) they were. In an attempt to break out of this subjective evaluation of individual monarchs and
an inherently synchronic reading of Islam and Sultanate history, I focus on a period of dynastic change and the establishment of the Khalajī and Tughluq regimes. Although we know that the founders of these regimes had their origins as political adventurers in the marches of Afghanistan, we actually have very little information about their social backgrounds. Other than the political stress caused by regime-change, I try to identify whether the arrival of new military personnel from the frontier marches brought any cultural or social change in the life of the court and the capital. To elaborate on this point, I study an unusual accession episode from the Khalajī dynasty and a political ritual from the Tughluqs. Although the events and ceremonies that I discuss were obviously a part of public discussion and the rituals were integral in the making of monarchical charisma, the significance of these traditions were completely elided in the homogenizing impulse present in the Persian chronicles.

It is hardly surprising that this homogenization led many scholars to unreflectively describe the Delhi Sultanate as a Muslim state. The monolithic character ascribed to it by Persian chroniclers was uncritically accepted and a linear history of “Persianization” extended to incorporate the diffusion of Islam in the subcontinent.10 As I try to bring out in this paper however, the turbulent politics of migrations, dynastic changes and rebellions, which were an intrinsic part of the political history of the thirteenth and fourteenth century Sultanate, need to be read back into the social processes of constituting and reconstituting Muslim identities and structures of governance. Through a study of the politics involved in the construction of the capitals of the Delhi sultans and the traditions of accession and royal pageantry I have tried to recreate the fragile political world of the early Delhi Sultanate when a slave or a humble frontier commander could become king. I am also interested in assessing the narratives of the urbane litterateurs in Delhi for their descriptions of a world that was so distant from their ideal—a world fraught with violence and instability where “royalty” was not the creation of a patrician, aristocratic class, but was seized by humble warriors of plebeian origin.

In my attempt to access this world, I begin my paper by introducing readers to the various courts and capitals constructed in Delhi in the thirteenth and fourteenth century CE, and correlating the spatial dispersal of these capitals with the changes in the political dispensations of the various sultans.

Sultanate capitals in the Plain of Delhi

We have few details about the nature of the pre-Sultanate city of Delhi or its political, cultural and economic life. Delhi was the capital of the Tomara Rajputs in the eleventh century CE and a frontier outpost of the Chauhāns in the twelfth. At this time, Delhi’s commercial importance certainly enhanced its significance in the region. It housed an indeterminate number of Jain merchants, wealthy enough to construct several small stone temples in the neighbourhood.11 The commercial importance of the city is also suggested by the presence of a mint and the base billon coin, the dīhlīvāl, which had a very wide circulatory ambit and was eponymously known after the city.12
At the turn of the twelfth century CE, the army of sultan Muʿizz al-Dīn Ghawrī (r. 1173–1206 CE) of the Shansabanid dynasty of Ghūr captured Delhi, but it was not until the mid-1220s that Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish (r. 1210–36 CE) established the paramount authority of the city over distant areas of north India. Through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, successive sultans constructed their capitals on a triangular-shaped riverine plain, bounded on the east by the River Yamuna and on the North-West, West and South by the outlying spurs of the Aravalli hills. The table below lists the Sultanate capitals constructed on the riverine plain during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The first Sultanate capital was constructed around the old Tomara-Chauhān fort on the south-west edge of this plain and referred to as “Dīhlī”, the name of the first city, quite generically for any or all of the later Sultanate capitals. To distinguish the first city, quite generically for any or all of the later Sultanate capitals, I have always referred to it as “Dīhlī-ya kuhnah”, literally “Old Delhi”, a term coined for the first city in the beginning of the fifteenth century by the Timurid chronicler Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī (d. 858/1454).

The table provides sufficient information to correlate the frequent shifting of the Sultanate capital to moments of great political stress and conflict among the

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<td>1242–6</td>
<td>‘Alā’ al-Dīn Masʿūd Shāh</td>
<td>Dīhlī-ya kuhnah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1246–66</td>
<td>Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd</td>
<td>Dīhlī-ya kuhnah</td>
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<tr>
<td>1266–87</td>
<td>Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Balbān</td>
<td>Dīhlī-ya kuhnah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1287–90</td>
<td>Muʿizz al-Dīn Kayqūbād</td>
<td>Dīhlī-ya kuhnah &gt; Kīlōkhārī</td>
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<tr>
<td>1290–96</td>
<td>Fīrūz Shāh Khalajī</td>
<td>Kīlōkhārī</td>
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<tr>
<td>1296–1316</td>
<td>‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khalajī</td>
<td>Dīhlī-ya kuhnah &gt; Sīrī</td>
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<tr>
<td>1316–20</td>
<td>Quṭb al-Dīn Mubārak</td>
<td>Sīrī</td>
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<tr>
<td>1320</td>
<td>Khusrū Khān Barwārī</td>
<td>Sīrī</td>
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<tr>
<td>1320–24</td>
<td>Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Tughluq</td>
<td>Sīrī &gt; Tughluqābād</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1324–51</td>
<td>Muḥammad Tughluq</td>
<td>Tughluqābād &gt; ‘Ādilābād &gt; Dīhlī-ya kuhnah &gt; Jahānpanāh ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1351–88</td>
<td>Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq</td>
<td>Jahānpanāh &gt; Fīrūzābād</td>
</tr>
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(*) denotes capitals outside the riverine plain of Delhi;
(>) denotes multiple capitals or transition from one capital to another;
(?) denotes insufficient information to confirm capital or date of transition
Courts, capitals and kingship

political elites especially in the context of regnal change. But it also highlights the fact that the establishment of a new capital did not have a mechanical correlation with the monarch’s ability to impose his/her authority or mobilize material resources. Both Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Balban (r. 1266–87 CE) and ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khālaṭī (r. 1296–1316 CE) were among the most powerful and authoritarian of the Delhi sultans; yet neither constructed “new” capitals for themselves, choosing instead to reside in Dihlī-yi kuhnah, the old city. In the following two sections I study the history of Dihlī-yi kuhnah and that of Kīlōkhrī and Sīrī. I have tried to underline how the history of these capitals was shaped by the structure of political relationships and networks in which they were located. In the following two sections I elaborate how the capitals of the Delhi sultans were splendorous signs of royal power, pomp and majesty, as well as vital arenas of conflict that could, in differing contexts, incarcerate or empower their resident monarchs. Even as they provide an insight into the construction of authority, the capitals of the sultans in Delhi also provide an unusual insight into the forces that challenged their power.

Dihlī-yi kuhnah, Kīlōkhrī and the dispensations of the sultans

It is sometimes forgotten that at the moment of sultan Iltutmish’s accession in 1210 CE, the capital of the “Delhi” sultans was Lahore, not Delhi. Lahore was the old capital of the Ghaznavids and carried with it the prestige of past association with one of the most powerful empires of the eastern Iranian world. The old Rajput heritage of Delhi was hardly a marketable attribute by comparison.

Through the duration of his reign Iltutmish piloted the city towards a new Sultanate identity. By the time of his death in 1236 CE, he had constructed a formidable political enterprise through the deployment of a cadre of carefully trained and trusted military slaves (bandagān) and used them to cohere the distant provinces of north India around Delhi. He had also gained considerable stature as a pious Muslim sovereign who befriended the learned at a time when the Chingisid invasions were destroying the cultural and religious centres of Islam. The Sultanate of Delhi and the world of Islam had altered during the duration of the monarch’s rule and “Minhāj-i Sirāj” Jūzjānī (d. 657/1259), the sultan’s chronicler, tried to communicate its new character when he referred to the city as Qubbat al-Islām, or the sanctuary/axis of Islam.15 From one of the garrison camps of sultan Mu’izz al-Dīn Ghawrī, Iltutmish turned Dihlī-yi kuhnah into a city without a rival in north India. In 1260 CE Jūzjānī was already referring to it as the “sacred” city, ḥazrat-i Dihlī, an appellation that would be its leitmotif into the nineteenth century.

These accolades notwithstanding, Iltutmish’s successor, sultan Rukn al-Dīn (r. 1236 CE), was quite emphatic about not wanting his father’s political arrangements to continue into his reign.16 Rukn al-Dīn was an ambitious young sovereign and before his accession had served several years as a governor in his father’s dispensation. His household included a large military retinue and secretarial help and these stayed with him when he became sultan. The introduction of new
personnel in the court meant challenging the entrenched might of his father’s slave commanders who would resist any effort at marginalization. In short, if Rukn al-Dīn had to function with any degree of independence, the old dispensation of power had to give way to the new.

The future of Dihlī-yi kuhnah was deeply tied up with the conflicts among the city’s political elite. In his effort to neutralize his father’s commanders, the young monarch’s response was to shift his capital out of Dihlī-yi kuhnah to Kīlokhrī, the first of several occasions when the sultan’s court would leave the Old City. The new capital, Kīlokhrī, was located on a low hillock by the banks of the River Yamuna, a day’s march to the north-east of the Old City. Sultan Rukn al-Dīn augmented his troops here and started a long-distance interference in the politics of the Old City: siblings were executed and attempts made to attract junior Shamsī commanders to join the Ruknī dispensation. The Shamsī bandagān responded quickly to the challenge: they seized and executed Rukn al-Dīn’s sister Razīyyah on the throne and consolidated their grip over Dihlī-yi kuhnah.

Although the crisis was over within the year, in placing a woman on the throne, the Shamsī slaves merely reinforced their rather conventional search for pliable puppet rulers within their master’s household.17 Razīyyah was deposed when she displayed signs of rebelling against her protectors and was followed in quick succession by three more Shamsī descendents. These Shamsī princes made periodic but unsuccessful attempts to establish their independence but their slowly diminishing influence was effectively parodied by a court chronicler:

He [Nāṣir al-Dīn, r. 1246–66 CE] sought the goodwill of the army chiefs and cordially wished each one of them well. He did not take any decision [rā’ y’ zādī] without their knowledge [bī-’īlm-i īshān], or moved a foot without their orders [nah bī-ḥukm-i īshān dast va pā ’īzādī]. He did not drink a drop of water, nor sleep a moment without their knowledge. . . .18

While Iltutmish’s descendents were unsuccessful in gaining the political initiative over the Shamsī bandagān we should not miss the fact that they were also unable to shift the capital of the Sultanate out of Dihlī-yi kuhnah (see table above). It is also important to notice that these rulers did not stay in their ancestor’s Shamsī capital out of choice; they were more appropriately incarcerated in the city by the Shamsī bandagān.

The reign of the Shamsī lineage came to an end with the accession of sultan Ghiyāḥ al-Dīn Balban in 1266 CE whose rise to influence in the Delhi court had a much longer history. In the early years of his career he was a falconer in Sultan Iltutmish’s retinue of military slaves and struggled with the political anonymity that came with the humble position.19 Balban’s first significant political appointment occurred in 1244–5 CE when he was made court chamberlain (amīr-hājīb). Although this was during the early years of the political conflict between the Shamsī bandagān (1242–54 CE), the instability helped rather than deterred Balban’s rise to political stardom.20 By 1249 CE he had consolidated his position in the court sufficiently to be appointed the deputy (nā’īb) of the state, a political
elevation that had social repercussions when his daughter was married to sultan Nāṣir al-Dīn (r. 1246–66 CE). A brief hiatus in political exile in 1253 CE notwithstanding, Balban’s stature in Dihlī-yi kuhnah was effectively unchallenged for 21 years (1244–53 and 1254–66 CE) before he became monarch. During this time he successfully raised a large military retinue that included Turkish slaves and humble déraciné migrants, described derogatively by Jūzjānī, Barānī and Amīr-i Khusraw (d. 725/1325) as homogenous ethnic groups—Afghans, Sistanis and Mongols.

The fourteenth century chronicler Ẓīyā’ al-Dīn Barānī mentioned how Balban’s old compatriots feared visiting Delhi because they were convinced that their old mate was conspiring to have them all killed. Barānī’s account was exaggerated: Balban’s dispensation did include some of his old peers, but this was an exclusive group that included only those who had exchanged their original Shamsī affiliation for a new Ghiyāṣī one. Or, looked at from a slightly different perspective, with the shift in the political affiliation of Dihlī-yi kuhnah’s political elites, the old (Shamsī) city now housed the Ghiyāṣī political dispensation. Through his long career in politics Balban had transformed Dihlī-yi kuhnah into a capital that reflected and constituted his authority.

Balban’s successor, Sultan Mu‘izz al-Dīn Kayqubād (r. 1287–90 CE), however, chafed under his grandfather’s legacy in ways that were very reminiscent of Rukn al-Dīn’s experience with the Shamsī dispensation earlier in the century. But there were important differences between the two as well. Although Kayqubād was appointed to the throne by Ghiyāṣī commanders he moved quickly to insulate himself from their influence. He shifted his capital to Kilōkhīrī and supported his protégé, Nizām al-Dīn, in a purge of the old Ghiyāṣī commanders.

Mu‘izz al-Dīn Kayqubād’s choice of Kilōkhīrī was also interesting—it had already been a Sultanate capital and had not atrophied in the 50 years since Rukn al-Dīn’s reign. In the context of celebrations held in the royal court in Dihlī-yi kuhnah in 1258 CE, some years before Balban’s accession, Jūzjānī described Kilōkhīrī as the “New City” (shahr-i naw). In the preparations to receive Mongol ambassadors in the Old City, the New City had functioned as one of its outlying suburbs. But the real transitions in Kilōkhīrī only occurred in the 1280s, under Sultan Kayqubād’s patronage. At that time Barānī and Ḥāmīd Qalandar (d. 641/1244) describe how Kilōkhīrī came to possess the bazaars, the congregational mosque, the complex of neighbourhoods and leisure activities that historians today associate with an urban milieu. Over a half century later, in the middle of the fourteenth century, Barānī reminisced about his joyous youth spent in the New City.

Sultan Kayqubād’s own fortune did not prosper in the same measure as his capital. In dealing with Nizām al-Dīn and a succession of overbearing military commanders Kayqubād looked for subordinates outside the entrenched circle of Delhi’s elites. He seized upon Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī, the military commander of the frontier districts of Sāmānā, a great candidate because together with his abilities as a general he was a virtual foreigner in Delhi. Although the Khalajīs had long served in Sultanate armies, their presence in the higher echelons of power was still a rarity; even as late as Balban’s reign pointed allusions were made towards a Khalajī ambassador’s rusticity by Delhi courtiers. Even if raising a frontiersman to a
position of political eminence was a source of some consternation in politically conservative circles in Sultanate politics, it was completely in line with the consistent patronage offered to social menials and déraciné marginals by Delhi sultans. Sultan Kayqubād’s effort at establishing his independence was challenged by members of the old Ghiyāšī dispensation, led by the slave commanders Aytemür Kachchan and Surkha and they moved to replace the monarch with his infant nephew. This was an immediate threat to the balance of power in the court and it forced Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī into precipitous intervention to protect his interests.

Jalāl al-Dīn was actually well settled by this time to counter the Ghiyāshī challenge. He had rallied his family members and other Khalajī groups around himself, gradually insinuating his family members and allies in Delhi politics until he had negated the denatalized condition that had originally made him an attractive subordinate to Sultan Kayqubād. The frontiersman had struck roots in the capital quickly enough to challenge its power brokers. By the time the dust settled from the ensuing conflict, Kayqubād had been murdered; the infant prince, Kayûmars̱ī and his promoters, Aytemür Kachchan and Surkha, were also dead. The intra-dispensational conflict of 1290 CE left Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī as the new master of Kīlōkhri, but some members of Balban’s family and retinue were still alive and present in Dīhī-yi kuhnah.27

According to Baranī, because of the hostility of the city-residents (shahrīyān) to the new rulers, Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī felt it prudent to stay away from the Old City and reside instead at Kīlōkhri. Baranī’s narrative explained that since the residents of the Dīhī-yi kuhnah included high officers of the deposed dynasty, they had reason to be unhappy about how kingship had passed from the lineage of the Turks to another (az ašl-i turkân dar ašl-i diğar).28 Baranī’s reportage is particularly valuable for the way in which it inserts a spatial dimension to a conflict between rival dispensations. This conflict was between the “old” Balbanid coterie of commanders located in Dīhī-yi kuhnah and the “new” Khalajī dispensation of power based in the shahr-i nawa: two cities in the riverine plain of Delhi hosting rival dispensations of power. Baranī explained that Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī visited Dīhī-yi kuhnah but did not feel welcome enough to situate his court and capital in that city.

We should, however, not misinterpret Baranī’s narrative of these events as the mark of an exceptional moment in the history of the Sultanate. In 1290 CE sultans of Turkish, slave descent were removed from the throne of Delhi but these changes did not alter the structure of Sultanate governance or the contexts in which these monarchs shifted or stayed in their new and old capitals in the riverine plain of Delhi. In an effort to underline this point, the next section focuses on the turn of the thirteenth century CE and a renovated Dīhī-yi kuhnah and its relationship with the new sultanate capital of Sīrī.

Dīhī-yi kuhnah, Sīrī and the dispensations of the sultans

Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī’s rule (1290–6 CE) was abruptly terminated when the monarch was assassinated by his nephew, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khalajī who became the next sultan of Delhi (r. 1296–1316 CE). At ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s accession Kīlōkhri was inhabited by
the sons, other relatives and followers of the late monarch. Although Dihlí-yi kuhnah was still ambivalent about Khalají rule, it might have welcomed ‘Alá’ al-Dín as the slayer of the disliked Jalál al-Dín Khalají. According to Baraní the new ruler lavished largesse on the residents of the city. On his arrival in the region of Delhi, ‘Alá’ al-Dín defeated Jalál al-Dín’s younger son, Qadr Khán and then made a ceremonious entry into Dihlí-yi kuhnah, finally terminating the relationship between the Delhi sultans and the New City.29

During ‘Alá’ al-Dín’s reign it was the Old City that witnessed large-scale building activity, considerable renovation and repair, a huge increase in population and the construction of a new suburb, Sirí. Baraní does mention that ‘Alá’ al-Dín Khalají altered the composition of his political dispensation thrice during the course of his reign.30 Correlating these transitions with the more general developments in ‘Alá’ al-Dín’s reign illuminates the significance of his development activity in and around Dihlí-yi kuhnah.

According to Baraní’s narrative, the first phase of ‘Alá’ al-Dín’s reign, just after Jalál al-Dín Khalají’s assassination, was clearly accommodative and inclusive, a period when the regicide was trying to win over supporters, including a large number of Jalálí servants. The effort made to recruit followers is also communicated by Baraní’s description of the indiscriminate distribution of largesse by the monarch during his march and on his entry into Dihlí-yi kuhnah.31 And yet, the fissures created by the inter-dispensational conflict that had displaced the collateral lineage of Jalál al-Dín and bought ‘Alá’ al-Dín to power were dramatically underlined when Dihlí-yi kuhnah was chosen as capital: just as Sultan Jalál al-Dín lacked support in the Old City and made his capital in Kılıokhri, ‘Alá’ al-Dín could not countenance living in the New City and made his capital in Dihlí-yi kuhnah.

According to Baraní, this brief moment of accommodation (c. 1296–7 CE) was followed by a systematic purge of Jalálí commanders, a moment of exclusion which introduced the second phase in the construction of the ‘Alá’í dispensation.32 The military commanders who were particularly important during this period were family members like Ulugh Khán, old military elites like Nuṣrat Khán and administrators like Malik Hamíd al-Dín. The sifting of subordinates that occurred during this phase altered the composition of the ‘Alá’í servants; it coincided with military campaigns into Gujarat and large-scale construction activity in the city that altered the face of Dihlí-yi kuhnah. This was the time when Delhi’s first congregational mosque was expanded until it was double in size to the Shamsí mosque,33 the fortifications of the city were repaired; the old “sultan’s reservoir” (hawz-i sulţânī) was dredged, a new and larger one built (hawz-i khâşî), new markets and price regulations were instituted and an army cantonment—Sirí—constructed just outside the Old City.34

By the time ‘Alá’ al-Dín started appointing slaves and social menials to high positions in his dispensation, the monarch had also moved towards scripting his authorship over the face of the Old City.35 As in the case of Balban a generation ago, this Delhi monarch did not change his capital; he purged old personnel and deployed new servants in a bid to establish his control over the Old City. Here he was far less successful than his esteemed predecessor. ‘Alá’ al-Dín’s rise to power...
was far faster than Balban’s and despite his energetic interventions he was unable to marginalize elite households in the Old City or silence opposition to his authoritarian rule. It is important to note that despite his investments in Dihlī-yi kuhnah, Barānī mentioned that ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khalajī did not like living in the Old City. He was fed up with the resistance that he faced from its old households and chose to live outside the city in the vicinity of Sīrī which he eventually developed as a cantonment (lashkargāh) and alternate residence. Sīrī was critical in preserving ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s authority: it allowed him the chance to escape from Dihlī-yi kuhnah; it became the cantonment where his huge standing army could be garrisoned to counter the threat of Mongol invasions; and it was the site from where the sultan could monitor politics in the Old City.

The historical antecedents of Sīrī, like Kilokhrī, are not very clear. The first references in sultanate literature to Sīrī appears in the context of sultan Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī’s campaigns in 1290–1 CE, during the first year of his reign. Amīr-i Khusraw mentions Sīrī as a site that existed between Dihlī-yi kuhnah and Kilokhrī. Apparantly the Khalajī sultan used Sīrī as a mustering point, an encampment outside the Old City. ‘Alā’ al-Dīn used the site in a similar fashion: he camped there after assassinating Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī and provided this encampment with fortifications sometime during 1300 and 1303 CE in response to the invasions of the Mongol commanders Qutlug Qocha and Taraghay. Effectively, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s court and political base oscillated between Dihlī-yi kuhnah and Sīrī. The latter was of great strategic importance to him and he spent a considerable amount of time there with his army. It may not have been his formal residence or “capital” but it was an important adjunct to Dihlī-yi kuhnah and significant to the construction of the monarch’s authority.

Towards the end of his reign ‘Alā’ al-Dīn had become increasingly reliant upon his military slave Malik Kāfūr “Hazārdīnārī” (killed 715/1316), the general who had led Khalajī expeditions into South India. The ‘Alā’ī slave exploited his position of trust with the sultan and consolidated his position in the court. When the sultan fell sick in 1316 CE Malik Kāfūr came into conflict with other important ‘Alā’ī commanders, especially Alp Khān, and in the intra-dispensational conflict Khalajī princes like Khizār Khān and Shihāb al-Dīn ‘Umar were “fronted” by rival camps.

Qutb al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh Khalajī, a third candidate, triumphed in the succession conflict and the death of the major combatants in the year of intra-dispensational strife gave him the opportunity to consolidate his position. He proceeded to do so by deploying senior ‘Alā’ī commanders as provincial governors and creating a cadre of loyal military slaves to dominate the Delhi region. Concurrently Mubārak Shāh Khalajī (r. 1316–20 CE), developed Sīrī as his capital and the home of his dispensation while quite deliberately diminishing the influence of Dihlī-yi kuhnah.

At this time the relationship between Sīrī and the Old City was somewhat similar to the one that had existed between Kilokhrī and Dihlī-yi kuhnah, although Mubārak Shāh Khalajī’s political independence and initiative far exceeded Kayqubād’s. Mubārak Shāh seems to have expended considerable effort at giving Sīrī an urban character: like Kilokhrī, it was fitted with a new congregational
mosque and its fortifications were refurbished. In keeping with the grandiloquent title of khalīfah assumed by Mubārak Shāh, Sīrī was also ceremoniously referred to as the “residence of the caliph” (dār al-khilāfat), even though its more non-descript identity as “army camp” (lashkargāh) continued to linger.

Mubārak Shāh Khalajī was murdered in Sīrī in 1320 CE by his slave Khusraw Khān Barwārī/Parwārī who had gained the sultan’s intimacy and trust.42 In constructing his own dispensation of power Mubārak Shāh had allowed Khusraw Khān to bring his kinsmen and other Barwārīs/Parwārīs to Delhi. Much like Kayqubād’s recruitment of the déraciné frontier commander Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī, Mubārak Shāh relied upon the denatalized slave Khusraw Khān to construct his authority. The efforts of both sultans were negated when their subordinates brought their associates to the capital and used their support to gain the throne.

Despite Baranī and Amīr-i Khusraw’s vitriolic attack on the apostate character of Khusraw Khān, the newly enthroned slave actually won considerable support in Delhi.43 It is important to keep in mind that Khusraw Khān was not challenged by any member of the Khalajī dispensation in the Delhi region; it was Ghiyāš al-Dīn Tughluq, the frontier commander of Dīōpālpūr who was apparently most aggrieved by events in Sīrī. Ghiyāš al-Dīn’s attempts to rally support from Khalajī commanders in Delhi were spurned and he led a motley crew of frontiersmen to Delhi. In the Tugluqnama, Amīr-i Khusraw’s eulogy to the future monarch, the author noted:

[Ghiyāš al-Dīn’s] troopers were mainly from the upper-lands [iqlīm-i bālā; i.e. an euphemism for Khurasan and Transoxiana] and not Hindustanis or local chieftains. They included Ghuzz, Turks and Mongols from Rūm and Rūs and some Khurasani Persians [tāzik] of pure stock [pāk asl].44

To this motley crowd, Abū ’l-Malik ‘Īṣāmī (d. 761/1360) added the Khokars, a body of frontier pastoralists, forever in conflict with Sultanate armies and at least one Afghan commander.45

Ghiyāš al-Dīn Tughluq (r. 1320–4 CE) won the battle for Delhi and, like Jalāl al-Dīn and ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khalajī, commenced his rule on an accommodative note, reinstalling a large number of the old Khalajī commanders to office. He kept his capital at Sīrī because he wanted to emphasize continuity with the Khalajī regime and gain support from a political elite who greeted the new frontiersman-turned-sultan with some ambivalence. While accommodating a large element of the old Khalajī elite, Ghiyāš al-Dīn’s political dispensation included members of his frontier entourage. Baranī commented:

The maliks, emirs and other officers of his predecessors, he confirmed in their possessions and appointments. When he attained the throne, his nobleness and generosity of character made him distinguish and reward all those he had known and been connected with, and all those who in former days had shown him kindness or rendered him a service. No act of kindness was passed over. . . . 46
Court cultures in the Muslim world: seventh–nineteenth centuries

For a frontier commander new to Delhi politics, Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Tughluq moved with remarkable assurance in his early search for political stability. Quite significantly this phase of his reign coincided with the duration of his residence at Sīrī. By 1323 CE construction in his new capital of Tughluqābād had progressed sufficiently for Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn to shift his court there. Apparently, the great ‘Alā’ī commanders were aware of the changes that were occurring in the power equations in his realm. While campaigning in south India they were ready to believe a rumour that the Sultan had ordered their execution. They rebelled, were captured and executed.47 The episode is significant for a variety of related factors: that the nature of developments in Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn’s reign could warn ‘Alā’ī commanders and sway them into rebellion; that their execution marked the final dissolution of the old Khalajī dispensation; and finally that the news of the suppression of the Khalajī revolt was sent to Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn’s new court at Tughluqābād. By 1323 CE the new dispensation of power in Delhi had a residence all to its own.

Like Dihlī-yi kuhnah and Kīlōkhī, Sīrī would never again be used as a capital by a Delhi monarch. The following sultans of the Tughluq dynasty started another round of construction activity in the riverine plain: Tughluqābād was followed by ‘Ādilābād and Jahānpānāh when Muḥammad Tughluq became monarch (r. 1324–51 CE) and Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq (r. 1351–88 CE) constructed the new capital of Fīrūzābād, all in the fourteenth century CE.

When medieval chroniclers narrated the coming and going of Delhi sultans with such rapidity they found in it lessons about fate and destiny, the transitory nature of material success and a reminder of God’s sovereignty in the affairs of mortals. ‘Īsāmī constructed his whole versified epic on the Delhi sultans, Futūḥ al-salāfīn, as a reminder of God’s sovereign will embodied in Qur’ān 3:26: “O Allāh! Possessor of the kingdom, You give the kingdom to whom You will, and You take the kingdom from whom You will . . . .” The theme had wide currency and it infiltrated an anecdote reported by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 779/1377), the Moroccan traveller to the court of Muḥammad Shāh Tughluq, explaining the construction of the capital of Tughluqābād. The story concerned a conversation between Sultan Mubārak Shāh Khalajī and his military commander Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Tughluq which occurred during a hunting expedition near the Aravalli hills at the south-eastern edge of the Delhi plain. The Sultan’s servant, Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Tughluq, initiated the conversation by remarking on the excellent qualities of the escarped land where they had stopped to rest. He suggested that it was an appropriate site for Mubārak Shāh Khalajī to construct his capital. With a touch of prescience, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s story had Mubārak Shāh Khalajī reply: “When you are sultan, build it!” Ibn Baṭṭūṭa concluded the anecdote thus: “It came to pass by the decree of God that [Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn] became sultan, so he built [his capital there] . . . and called it by his name.”48 Just as destiny had decreed that Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Tughluq would be sultan, so too had God identified Tughluqābād as a site for a Sultanate capital.

The insertion of divine agency took the historical element out of the prosaic temporal world of mortals and added to the prestige of a monarch and, indeed, his capital. This was necessary, of course, because as we have noticed, the frequent transitions in kingship and capitals through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries
made it really difficult for litterateurs to graft any semblance of royalty on the careers of their protagonists. Only a particularly gifted litterateur—someone like Amīr-i Khusraw—could prosper as a eulogist in this world over the long duration. Since the construction of power, kingship and capitals were not associated with birthright they had to be assembled afresh in each generation. A monarch that failed to recruit his (and as it happened in one case, her) retinue ran the certainty of losing political independence, a fate that often left them incarcerated within the boundaries of their predecessor’s capital.

Implicit in the study of the constant shifting of capitals in the Delhi plain is the recognition that the seizure of political power by parvenu military commanders of various social and cultural backgrounds also periodically reconstituted Sultanate society at the highest levels. Even as historians underline the great political flux and discontinuities of the Sultanate period, they do not research the social and cultural consequences that this constant shuffling created in making and reproducing Muslim society through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The next section studies this subject from the perspective of political traditions and customs brought to Delhi by new ruling groups and the response of the Persian litterateurs to the political cultures of their masters.

Persianate Literati, Parvenu Lords and courtly culture

Through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE the population of Dīhlī-yi kuhnah increased substantially. Sometime around 1287 CE and the end of Bal-ban’s reign, the young Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’ (d. 725/1325) arrived in the Old City. His did not yet possess the stature of a great teacher and mystic; in the late 1280s Niẓām al-Dīn was only an impoverished student, reliant upon his friends for a room in Dīhlī-yi kuhnah where he stayed briefly. The Old City had expanded over the last century until a visitor to the city, someone like Niẓām al-Dīn, found its crowded, dirty environs distasteful. Niẓām al-Dīn spent much of his waking hours outside the city in the environs of the nearby reservoir, the ḥawz-i rānī, before leaving the precincts altogether and setting up his hospice some distance away, near Kīlokhrī, in the relatively remote area of Ghiyāspūr.49 This discomfort with the Old City had a lot to do with Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’’s ideological ambivalence towards material life and comfort, elements that were quite unambiguously associated with the court of the Delhi sultans.

As we have already noticed the imprint of Delhi’s rulers was strongly felt on the city and there was unanimity in thirteenth and fourteenth century sources that Delhi’s prosperity was a consequence of the incumbent ruler’s patronage. But this might have only been a half-truth. Whereas the munificence of the Delhi sultan and his/her courtiers “pulled” people to the capital, Mongol depredations in eastern Iran, Transoxiana, Afghanistan and in the Punjab and Sind provinces “pushed” a large number of émigrés to Delhi as well. Its impact was most evident in the sheer diversity of the migrants who reached Delhi. Beyond the large numbers it is the change in the social profile of migrants through the thirteenth century CE that is most interesting. In the 1220s and 1230s, as the centres of
Muslim urban civilization in Kh’arazm, Transoxiana, Khurasan, Sistan and Afghanistan suffered devastation, a large number of litterateurs, secretaries, landed elites and aristocrats sought sanctuary in Delhi. Their numbers gradually tapered off in the 1240s and 1250s and Baranī who speaks of the social profile of the émigré nobles present in Iltutmish’s court with the greatest degree of respect displays no such sentiment for immigrants intruding into Delhi politics from the second half of the thirteenth century. At that time different types of frontier elements—Mongol groups and their auxiliaries—migrated to the Sultanate in search of patronage and fortune. For a Persian scholar such as Ziyā’ al-Dīn Baranī, a fourth generation descendent of family of secretaries whose ancestors had served the Sultanate regimes in high administrative positions, these Mongol migrants were regarded as naw-musalmān, new Muslims of indiscriminate social origins. But it was not just the Mongols who were derided by the Persephone literati. Baranī and other sultanate chroniclers also looked askance more generally at people of pastoral backgrounds, trading professions, local converts and manumitted slaves who aspired to high positions in Sultanate administration and society. These individuals and groups were described as “base born” (bad aşlı va na-kas); people who were base and impure (na-jinsan va khabīsan); or those who belonged to the class of the “lowest and basest of the low and base-born” (siflah tarīn va rizālah tarīn-i siflah’gān va rizālah’gān). According to the Persian authors, sultanate rulers would do well to respect birth and cultural accomplishments when they chose their servants and administrators.

The context in which the Persian litterateurs tendered their advice should not be forgotten. Quite contrary to the aristocratic normative systems recommended in the Persian courtly literature the sultans of Delhi and the commanders they empowered came from nondescript social backgrounds. Even if the slave lineages of Iltutmish and Balban had acculturated to the Persianate, urbane traditions of Delhi through the thirteenth century CE, this was not the case with recent migrants from the frontier like the Khalajīs or the Tughluqs. Both Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī and Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Tughluq lacked a base in Delhi and were strongly opposed by the capital’s political elite. These were the courtiers towards whom the Persian literati directed their advice on governance and the need to patronize aristocrats and not the riff-raff, marginal social groups that constituted their political dispensations.

The Persian literati had to show remarkable discretion in their discussion of these themes; they could hardly draw attention to the indifferent social backgrounds of their political masters especially when like the Qarā’ūna Tughluqs or the Khalajīs, at one time allies of the Qarluqs, they had shared ethnic or a past service association with the Mongols, inveterate foes of Islam and the Sultanate. There was a great deal of dissimulation and a considerable amount of reification in the narratives of the Persian litterateurs as they tried to comprehend and communicate the unfamiliar, frontier-pastoral cultural traditions of their masters into a familiar lexicon of Perso-Islamic traditions of governance. To elaborate the complicated terrain that this process of translation can cover I have studied two examples, one each from the Khalajī and Tughluq regimes.
The first example concerns traditions of succession followed by members of the Khalaji dynasty during the short 30-year duration of their rule (1290–1320 CE). At the outset, these traditions were evident at the time of Jalāl al-Dīn’s murder in 667/1296. At his death the Delhi sultan had two sons: the older one, Arkali Khān, who had the monarch’s trust, was given considerable authority over armies, territories and in the punishment of rebels. Jalāl al-Dīn’s younger son, Qadr Khān, was too young to have received any prior political appointment. At Jalāl al-Dīn Khalaji’s murder Barānī expected that the competent Arkali Khān would succeed his father and could not restrain his surprise when the Queen mother, Malikah-yi Jahān placed the younger sibling on the throne. Barānī’s inability to comprehend these developments is apparent from his clichéd, gendered remarks about Malikah-yi Jahān. She was somewhat of a shrew, Barānī informs us, a stubborn, willful person who had dominated her husband while he was alive. The impetuous act of placing the young Qadr Khān on the throne and assuming the regency herself was in keeping with her naïve, foolish character. She did not consult anyone and as her experiment led the dynasty into disaster, Barānī had Malikah-yi Jahān confess the folly of her actions. According to Barānī the queen admitted: “I am a woman and women are deficient in judgement [naqīṣat-i ‘aql]”. Tenuous as the gendered explanations provided by the author may be, they are rendered even more fragile at Barānī’s recounting of the older son’s reactions at the loss of the throne. The energetic, valiant Arkali Khān who had once had the Sufi saint Sīdī Muwallī crushed by an elephant, accepted his exclusion from the throne as a fait accompli. Instead of disputing the succession, he retreated to his appanage in Multān. There he remained despite Barānī’s account that the queen apologized repeatedly for her actions and entreated the older son to return to Delhi to oppose the rebel ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khalaji.

The Khalajīs ruled for three generations and every succession during their rule of 30 years was disputed. Obviously the assumption of high office was never resolved to the satisfaction of rival claimants. Important to keep in mind is the fact that these claimants were always members of the ruling family and in attempting to curtail intra-lineage conflict, the fourth dynast, Mubārak Shāh Khalaji (716–20/1316–20), incarcerated many of his siblings, eventually blinding and executing them. In this milieu, Malikah-yi Jahān’s placing of young Qadr Khān on the throne—Barānī’s horror notwithstanding—was one accession that remained unchallenged. The older brother seemed to accept—for the moment anyway—the right of his younger sibling to the throne.

This was in contrast to ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khalaji’s own experience. After seizing the throne he was generous to many of his relatives and gave them high positions, but as we have already seen, through the duration of his reign he progressively segregated authority in his own person. Sometime around 700/1301 an attempt was made on ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s life. The perpetrator was Ikit Khān, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khalaji’s youngest brother’s son. Barānī attributed base ambition as the motive for Ikit Khān’s animosity but it should not escape our scrutiny that in seizing power, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khalaji had reversed the order of succession that had prevailed a generation earlier. If Malikah-yi Jahān had appointed the youngest son to the throne excluding...
the older sibling; ‘Alā’ al-Dīn was the oldest sibling and his right to the throne was challenged by the disaffected descendent of his youngest brother.

Barānī’s reportage makes it extremely difficult to comprehend the working of Khalajī customs of inheritance. Certainly one of their traditions seemed to privilege the rights of the youngest son. It is hard to say whether these constituted traditions of ultimogeniture somewhat like the rights of the “hearth-prince” (ötcign) recognized by some Turkish tribes and the Chingisid family.60 Tantalizing as the evidence might be, in its scantiness it remains hardly compelling. More germane for our present discussion, however, is the need to notice Barānī’s complete inability to fathom the customary practices of the regnant sultans of Delhi. While his diatribe against Malikah-yi Jahān reveals the author’s own rather conventionally gendered location, it also underlines the Persian litterateur’s inability to comprehend the cultural world of his protagonists, recent émigrés to the Sultanate and now its rulers. Even as they became governors of the Persianate world of the sultanate and masters of Delhi, the “Sanctuary of Islam”, they continued to practice succession rituals whose customary provenance was quite incomprehensible to their court chroniclers.

Equally distant to the cultural traditions of Delhi were the Tughluqs, whose dynastic founder, Ghiyās al-Dīn, was hailed as the “Saviour of Islam” even though his retinue consisted of Khokhars, “Ghuzz, Turks and Mongols from Rūm and Rūs”,61 all of whom had challenged the authority of the sultanate in the past. No Persian chronicler ever made anything of the disjuncture between the past careers and present fortunes of the members of the early Tughluq political dispensation. And yet the travelogue of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa suggests that the Tughluqs placed considerable premium that their notables acculturate rapidly to “Muslim ways”. He noted that in Muḥammad Tughluq’s reign:

all [courtiers] were required to show a knowledge of the obligations of ablution, prayers and the binding articles of Islam. They used to be questioned on these matters; if anyone failed to give correct answers he was punished and they made a practice of studying them with one another in the audience hall and the bazaars and setting them down in writing.62

This was an unusual requirement to demand of practicing Muslims unless, of course, their ritual praxis was regarded as somewhat deficient.

While Persian chronicles gloss over some uncomfortable details about their lords and masters, the amateur ethnography of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa carries interesting details about Tughluq court rituals and ceremonial. He provided the following description of Muḥammad Tughluq’s royal procession on festivals:

On the morning of the feast all the elephants are adorned with silk, gold and precious stones. There are sixteen of these elephants which no one rides, but they are reserved to be ridden by the sultan himself, and over them are carried sixteen parasols of silk embroidered with jewels, each one with a shaft of pure gold. . . . The sultan himself rides on one of these elephants and in front of him
there is carried aloft the ghāshiya, that is his saddle-cover, which is adorned with the most precious jewels. In front of him walk his slaves and his Mamluks.63

Ibn Batṭūta added further details regarding the ritual at the time of the sultan’s entry into the capital:

On some of the [sixteen] elephants there were mounted small military catapults and when the sultan came near the city, parcels of gold and silver coins mixed together were thrown from these machines. The men on foot in front of the sultan and the other persons present scrambled for the money, and they kept on scattering it until the procession reached the palace. . . .64

While ghāshiya has an Arabic etymology, meaning to cover or veil,65 the origin of the ceremony lies in the accession and ceremonial rituals of the early Turks where the “Lord of the Horse” would be identified with the newly enthroned leader and the procession would celebrate the conquest of the four quarters by the Universal Emperor.66 The tradition was followed in some of the major steppe-descended polities in the central Islamic lands: by the Saljuqs, the Zangids and the Bahri Mamluks of Egypt (with a military elite of Qipchaq origin).67 At least in Syria and Egypt it was accepted as a ritual associated with royalty and performed by the Kurdish Ayyubids, who learnt of it from their Turkish patrons the Zangids. With the Ayyubids it was integrated as a part of their accession ceremony together with the ritual pledge of allegiance, bay’a, and the investiture from the caliph.68

Detailed descriptions of the ghāshiya ritual exist from the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt where Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470) clarified that it was a part of the accession ceremonies of the monarch and repeated on major festivals. Its performance in Egypt mirrors Ibn Batṭūta’s description of the ceremony from Muhammad Tughluq’s court and Aḥmad al-Qalqashandi (d. 821/1418) provided the following description:

[The ghāshiya] is a saddle cover of leather, decorated with gold so that the observer would take it to be made entirely of gold. It is borne before him [i.e. the Mamluk sultan] when riding in state processions for parades, festivals, etc. The rikābdāriyya [grooms, i.e. ghulāms] carry it, the one who holds it up in his hands turning it right and left. It is one of the particular insignia of this kingdom.69

An important common feature between the Mamluk state in Egypt and the Delhi Sultanate was their common reliance upon Turko-Mongol personnel from the trans-Caucasian steppes, the dasht-i Qipchaq. The sultanate’s link with the Eurasian steppe already present in Ilutmish’s reign continued into the reign of Ghiyās al-Dīn Tughluq who was of Negüderid background, and had a retinue of “Turks and Mongols from Rūm and Rūs”.70
Just as Baraṇī had noticed the curious succession traditions of the Khalajiš but unable to understand them had reported it in the gendered terms familiar to his
world, he certainly witnessed Tughluq procession rituals but filtered out those elements that made them unfamiliar to his experience. Curiously enough Baraṇī’s description of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s triumphant march to Delhi after Jalāl al-Dīn’s murder (695/1296) does possess some of the elements present in Baṭṭūṭa’s description although completely different motives to the discharge of gold coins (panj mān akhtar, lit.: five mans of gold stars) among the crowds observing the sultan’s march are ascribed by the author. Equally selective was Yahyā ibn Aḥmad Sirhindī’s early fifteenth century account of Muḥammad Tughluq’s celebratory procession after his accession. The narrative is close enough to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s description of the ghāshiya ritual for us to follow its main features but the elisions are important as well. Sirhindī noted that:

[the lanes were decorated with coloured and embroidered cloth. From the time that the sultan set his foot in the city till he entered the imperial palace, gold and silver coins were rained from the back of the elephants among the populace, and gold was scattered in every street, lane, and house.]

In Baraṇī and Sirhindī’s accounts the sultan’s triumphal processions receive due recognition but there is no reference to the ghāshiya. Was the omission deliberate or was it an aspect of Turko-Mongol practice quite unfamiliar to Persian secretaries? Were they, in other words, just inadequate historians reifying the practice of their subjects either through ignorance or because of their own class and cultural prejudices?

Baraṇī was a contemporary of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and both authors were in Delhi during Muḥammad Tughluq’s reign. If the Moroccan visitor could notice and learn about the ghāshiya during his visit, so, theoretically speaking, could Baraṇī. In Baraṇī’s narrative Ghiyās al-Dīn was a “Saviour of Islam”, a morally righteous Muslim, renowned for his combat with the infidel Mongols and against the heathen menace that was suddenly threatening Delhi. The challenge to Islam appeared when the usurper Khusraw Khān Barwārī/Parwārī, a recent convert slave, killed his master and his heirs, despoiled his master’s harem and apostatized. Just as Ghiyās al-Dīn Tughluq had saved the sultanate from the Mongols, this conflict with Khusraw Khān Barwārī/Parwārī was over the future well-being of the Muslim community. By incorporating details about the Turko-Mongol antecedents of Ghiyās al-Dīn and the composition of his retinue, or noting the practice of (un-Islamic) steppe rituals by the frontier commander, Baraṇī would have complicated the simple binaries around which he had framed the qualities of his protagonist—the Muslim hero versus the non-Muslim—and his narration of the triumph of rectitude over evil. The author preferred not to tread these waters. Once the social and cultural backgrounds of Ghiyās al-Dīn Tughluq and his frontier retinue were erased what was left was a relatively monochromatic picture of a Muslim Delhi Sultanate valiantly battling a sea of infidels, holding aloft the banner of Islam even as the Mongol deluge swept away the civilization of the dār al-islām elsewhere. In this narration the complex connections of the Tughluqs with regions and cultures outside the subcontinent were completely erased.
Conclusion: Writing a history of sultanate courtly traditions

In conventional historiography the Delhi sultanate is characterized as a Muslim state that had by the fourteenth century seized control over much of the material resources of north India and was expanding aggressively into the Deccan. In this historiography, the sultanate was established with its Islamic and Persianate credentials intact, receiving its high traditions from its Ghaznavid, Saljuq and Kh‘arazmī neighbours. This was a state that was Mughal-like in its imperial vision even if it remained deficient in comparison to its successor in the administrative execution of its lofty vision. Within the limits of this historiography, the constant shifting of capitals by the Delhi sultans was believed to have served the grandiose, authoritative purpose of validating the rule of powerful monarchs even if they were also wasteful, indulgent displays of their wealth and power. In this instance, modern bourgeois and socialist preferences coalesced with medieval Islamic ones in an ambivalent response to absolutist rule.

In contrast to those who would read the sultanate as a period of absolutist rule, my paper suggests that an abiding characteristic of the Delhi sultanate in the long duration was the extreme fragility of its political associations. Although this political instability allowed for the concentration of extreme authority and material resources in the hands of a monarch, it made its reproduction in succeeding generations extremely difficult. Since structures of political association resided on paternalistic, inter-personal ties they required renewed mobilization under each ruler through a fresh dispensation of favours. One material manifestation of this political process was the construction of capitals to house new political dispensations.

Studying the construction and representation of sultanate authority in Delhi also underlines the great diffusion of authority among a variety of political agents in the realm. Sultans were frequently forced to move from Dihlī-yī kuhnah because its entrenched elite were altogether too hostile to new incumbents. Inter and intra-dispensational conflicts were common during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries but what is perhaps unique to the Delhi sultanate is the spatial dimension this conflict could take. If the construction or resettlement of a capital marked a monarch’s bid to establish his or her own autonomous political sphere, not all monarchs were able to achieve this end.

The political arena of the Delhi sultanate expanded dramatically through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with a large number of new players surfacing with each generation. This was not just an increase in numbers but also in social and ethnic complexity. Afghans appeared on the political terrain in the 1260s and were described with some awe by a Persian chronicler thus:

Their heads are like big sacks of straw, their beards like the combs of the weaver, long-legged as the stork but more ferocious than the eagle, their heads lowered like that of the owl of the wilderness.  

By the 1280s when Turko-Mongol contingents started joining sultanate forces Baranī derided them as nāw-musalmān. Amīr-i Khusraw communicated his
sentiments about these people when he described his Qarāʾūna captor as follows: “He sat on his horse like a leopard on a hill. His open mouth smelt like an arm-pit, whiskers fell from his chin like pubic hair.”

Notably Amīr-i Khusraw penned these sentiments in 1285 CE and 35 years later he was eulogizing Ghiyāš al-Dīn Tughluq as the “Rescuer of Islam” in his Tughluqānāmah, blithely ignoring the fact that his patron was also a Qarāʾūna Turk who had only lately been a nomad. Ghiyāš al-Dīn’s ethnicity and social background made it difficult—but not impossible—for him to break into the circles of power in Delhi. Once he had crossed the Rubicon and seized the throne his identity and past were recrafted in terms that the Persian literati felt was commensurate with the status of a great monarch of Islam. Other than frontier commanders, Persian chronicles also grafted enviable genealogies for rulers of slave descent like Iltutmish and Balban. But there was also the notable exception of sultan Khusraw Khān Barwārī/Parwārī, a favourite slave of Mubārak Shāh Khalajī, raised to high political service who went on to usurp the throne in 1320 CE. Khusraw Khān alone had the dubious distinction among slave-rulers of having court chronicles focus on his natal origins, receiving harsh criticism for possessing the temerity to become monarch and ultimately charged with apostasy, foregoing thereby all rights to be the leader and protector of the Muslim community. The bias of the Persian literati against Khusraw Khān is particularly exceptional given the support he apparently received from the elite circles in Delhi—including the Sufi Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’.

It is possible that Khusraw Khān’s subcontinental origins were remembered once the tide had turned against him; Amīr-i Khusraw may well have eulogized him had he continued as sultan. Certainly the selective display of amnesia shown by the Persian literati is telling. A Qarāʾūna ex-nomad made for an acceptable monarch in the opinion of these litterateurs but not a slave from the subcontinent—what other uncomfortable elisions and glosses do these Persian narratives carry and what facets of social life did they chose to elide?

The point is of some relevance in the context of court ritual. As with sultanate regimes elsewhere in the Islamic world, Persian chroniclers suggested that the Delhi sultans also broadcast their authority in fairly traditional ways: they had their name read in the Friday sermon (khutbah), they issued coins with their titles on the sigilla, their authority was ceremoniously recognized by elites (bay’ah), they sought Caliphal recognition to rule and they followed the grand courtly rituals of Iran requiring petitioners to prostrate (sijdah) and kiss the ground or the hem of the royal cloak (pāʾī būsī/qadam būsī). But these were by no means the only rituals of authority performed by the Delhi sultans. There were traditions of succession and rituals of pomp and pageantry performed by the Khalajī and Tughluq sultans that were not a part of the Perso-Islamic milieu of the Persian literati. These were a part of the customary traditions followed by the frontier elements that withstood acculturation and became a part of the culture of the Delhi court. The Persian literati grappled to comprehend these and almost always filtered them through cultural lenses that refracted their contents into familiar contours. The records of the Persian literati were thereby extremely successful in transcribing the world of the Delhi sultans in relatively seamless and homogenous
terms. This world did have its aberrations when *naw-musalmāns* were patronized or the apostate Khusraw Khān became sultan. But these were exceptional moments where normalcy and order was restored in Persian narratives through heroic characters such as Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Tughluq.

The impression of a monolithic, stable Muslim society and state carried in the thirteenth and fourteenth century Persian records should hardly surprise us. We should not expect Persian litterateurs located on Islam’s eastern frontier, facing Mongol invasions, to acknowledge the humble social origins of their rulers and their practice of unfamiliar non-*ḥarī‘atī* political traditions and rituals. And yet, it was these turbulent historical processes that shaped the complex character of the Muslim community under the Delhi sultanate, created the conditions for the frequent coming and going of sultans and their many capitals and marked a centre of the world, an axis that gained credibility as *ḥazrat-i Dīhlī*.

Notes

2 See Baranī (1972). This was not the only didactic text written by Zjiyā’ al-Dīn Baranī. His *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz shāhī* (see idem (1860–2)), is critical to an appreciation of the author’s opinions on ideal governance. The intertextuality between the two works has been usefully detailed by Hardy (1957), 315–21; idem (1966), 20–39.
3 See Baranī (1860–2), 179f.
5 See ibid., 140f.
7 A good example of colonial historiography in this genre would be Cunningham (1871), 1:132–84.
8 For the most lucid and forceful exposition of this argument, see Habib (1978), 287–303.
9 See Ali (1986), 34–44.
10 For the clearest theorisation of this argument see Wink (1997–2004).
11 See in particular Cohen (1989), 513–19. According to Goswamy (1986), 137f, Delhi was the centre of Jain manuscript production in the thirteenth century CE. Although the longer history of this tradition has only started to be researched (see Cohen (1989)), it is certain that Jain manuscript production did not start *de novo* in the thirteenth century. Delhi certainly possessed a sizeable Jain population and their patronage of cultural and religious artefacts is visible in the spolia of Jain temples in Delhi’s twelfth century congregational mosque.
12 An extremely valuable discussion on the *dihlīval* and the presence of a mint in Delhi can be found in Deyell (1990), 144–83.
13 Baranī (1860–2) is particularly problematic in this context. Note, for example, his narrative on Kīlokhrī during Kayqubād’s reign (157–65) where the author uses *Dīhlī* and Kīlokhrī quite randomly. See also the useful discussion in Jackson (1986). Since the various Sultanate settlements in Delhi ranged a great deal in size and complexity describing them as undifferentiated cities can be somewhat confusing. At the time of their inception, many scarcely deserved the epithet of “city” and others declined from flourishing urban centres to mere military camps. Although a study of the processes of urbanization is not the subject of my inquiry I have tried to remain sensitive to these differences while remaining attentive to size, scale and changes in the histories of Sultanate capitals.
144  Court cultures in the Muslim world: seventh–nineteenth centuries

14  See Yazdī (1888), I:125, cited in Ali (1986), 35. “Dihlī-yi kuhnah” is to be preferred over “Qīl‘ah-yi Rāī Pithorī”, a name coined for the first city by Abū ‘l-Fazl ‘Allāmī (assassinated 1011/1602). In the Āṭān-i akbarī, Abū ‘l-Fazl provided a brief history of Delhi’s ruling families and in that context identified the Old Fort as the “Fort of Rāy Prithvīrāj”. Abū ‘l-Fazl’s account was incorrect in that Prithvīrāj Chauhān (d. 1192 CE) resided in Ajmer, never in Delhi which was under the control of his governor, Govind Rāṇī. Lately ultra-nationalist Hindutva historiography has appropriated Prithvīrāj as a significant “national” martyr who died defending India from foreign Muslim incursions. In this malicious reinterpretation of history where Hindus and Muslims are in perpetual combat, it helps for Delhi, the capital of the modern state, to also appear as Prithvīrāj’s capital. On some of these historiographical issues see Kumar (2009 forthcoming).

15  See Jūzjānī (1863–4), I:441. For a discussion of these historical processes see Kumar (2001), 140–82.


17  Space prohibits a fuller discussion of the subject which I am developing separately in an article preliminarily titled “The Woman and the kisāb of Men: Sulṭānah Razīyyah and Early Sultanate Society”. See also Jackson (1998), 81–97.

18  ‘Īṣāmī (1938), 146.

19  On Iltutmīsh’s death, Balban, together with his other junior cohorts, fled from Dihlī-yi kuhnah in search of better opportunities, see Jūzjānī (1863–4), II:48, 51. For further details on the nature of this intra-dispensational conflict (1242–55), see Kumar (2007), 266–72; for Balban’s early political career see ibid., 254, 263, 269–85.


21  See Kumar (2007), 277f, 314f.

22  See Jūzjānī (1863–4), II:83. In 1287, when Sultan Kayqubād also established his capital at Kīlōkhri, Barānī used identical terms—shahr-i naw—to describe the young monarch’s capital; see Barānī (1860–2), 175f, 180f. Curiously enough, Jūzjānī did not use this appellation for Rukn al-Dīn’s capital in 1236. This may not be terribly significant: in all likelihood shahr-i naw was coined in Rukn al-Dīn’s reign as a name for his capital and gained currency to differentiate it from the Old City. The persistence of the name, however, does suggest continued habitation in the area contradicting Nizām al-Dīn’s more polemical remarks about the desolate nature of the region when he first established his hospice in the neighbourhood; see Sijzī (1990), 243.

23  See Barānī (1860–2), 130f, 164–6; for the congregational mosque in Kīlōkhri see Qalandar (1959), 252, 283.

24  See Jūzjānī’s supercilious comments regarding Balban’s emissary, Jamāl al-Dīn Alī Khalajī, see Jūzjānī (1863–4), II:86–8.

25  For a full development of this trend see Kumar (2006), 83–114.

26  Although many followed Malik Chhajjū (Balban’s nephew) to Kara (see Barānī (1860–2), 181f, 184) when he was appointed governor of the region, there were still significant numbers around in Delhi to support Sīdī Muwallīh’s bid to the throne in circa 1292 CE (see ibid., 181, 208–12).

27  See ibid., 176.

28  See ibid., 246f.

29  See ibid., 249–51, 336f.

30  See ibid., 243–5, 247.

31  See ibid., 249–51.

32  For a development of this idea in the context of ‘Alī al-Dīn’s renovations and construction in Dihlī-yi kuhnah’s congregational mosque see Kumar, (2000), 37–65.

33  See Yazdī (1888), cited in Ali (1986), 35. “Dihlī-yi kuhnah” is to be preferred over “Qīl‘ah-yi Rāī Pithorī”, a name coined for the first city by Abū ‘l-Fazl ‘Allāmī

34  See ibid., 243–5, 247.

35  For a full development of this trend see Kumar (2006), 83–114. Although many followed Malik Chhajjū (Balban’s nephew) to Kara (see Barānī (1860–2), 181f, 184) when he was appointed governor of the region, there were still significant numbers around in Delhi to support Sīdī Muwallīh’s bid to the throne in circa 1292 CE (see ibid., 181, 208–12).

28  See ibid., 176.

29  See ibid., 246f.

30  See ibid., 249–51, 336f.

31  See ibid., 243–5, 247.

32  See ibid., 249–51.

33  For a development of this idea in the context of ‘Alī al-Dīn’s renovations and construction in Dihlī-yi kuhnah’s congregational mosque see Kumar, (2000), 37–65.

34  On ‘Alī al-Dīn Khalajī and Sirī, see also Jackson (1986).

35  Barānī described this as his final, most authoritarian and misbegotten phase. See Barānī (1860–2), 337. The chronicler provided no dates for the beginning of this phase and distinguished it as a unique moment because of the changes that occurred in the offices
of the dīvān-i risālat, vizārat and inshā’. These secretarial posts remained with the “people of the pen”, but among individuals who Barānī did not respect. The deployment of slaves and social menials on the other hand was pursued by ‘Alā’ al-Dīn through out his reign. Note for example, Barānī’s description of the role of slaves in protecting ‘Alā’ al-Dīn during the attack of Ikit Khān at Tilpūt, ca 1301 CE (see ibid., 273). According to Barānī’s periodisation, this event occurred during the second phase of the sultan’s rule.

36 See ibid., 283.
38 See Barānī (1860–2), 246, 302.
39 For a useful account of Malik Kāfūr and the South Indian expeditions see Jackson (1999), 175f, 201–4, 206–9, 213f.
41 His capacity for independent political initiative was perhaps best displayed when he launched military expeditions into South India. See Amīr-i Khusraw (1950), 62–73, 195–202.
43 See ibid., 409–23; Amīr-i Khusraw (1933), 55–70 for details on military commanders who supported Khusraw Khān against Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Tughluq.
44 Ibid., 84.
45 See ‘Īsāmī (1938), 382f. Although Amīr-i Khusraw ignored the Khokars in this list, he gives them a prominent role in the battle with Khusraw Khān. See Amīr-i Khusraw (1933), 128.
46 Barānī (1860–2), 427.
47 For one version of the events that led to the rebellion see ibid., 447f. For a variant account see Ibn Baṭṭūta (1958–71), III:652f.
48 Ibid., III:619.
49 See Sījī (1990), 242; Amīr-Khūrūd (1978), 120; Kumar (2002); idem (2009 forthcoming).
50 For details on this subject see idem (2006).
51 See Jāzjānī (1863–4), I:454; Barānī (1860–2), 33, 505.
52 For additional details on the backgrounds of the Khalajīs and Tughluqs and the mode of dissimulation pursued by Persian chroniclers see Kumar (2009).
53 See Barānī (1860–2), 182f, 212f, 243.
54 See ibid., 238.
55 For Barānī’s portrayal of Malikah-yi Jahān as wife and mother-in-law see, ibid., 196f, 221.
56 Ibid., 245. Barānī provides the incidental information that Qadr Khān was married to sultan Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd’s grand-daughter (see ibid., 196). He does not suggest, however, that the affinal link with the old ruling family strengthened the young prince’s claim to the throne.
57 See ibid., 212, 239, 245f.
58 See ibid., 313.
59 See ibid., 273–6.
61 Amīr-i Khusraw (1933), 84.
63 Ibid., III:663f.
64 Ibid., III:668.
65 See also Qur’an 88 (al-Ghāshiyya).
66 For a review of Turko-Mongol ideals of universal dominion see Turan (1955), and for a discussion of iconographic representations from the Saljuq period of the monarch,
“the equerry and the honorific spare horse with saddle-cover” (Esin (1970), 108) see ibid., 108f.

67 See anonymous (1965); Holt (1975), 245.

68 See references above and Holt (1977), 47.


70 Amīr-i Khusraw (1933), 84.

71 See Baranī (1965) “Ghārābīs,” for the gold coinage, panam/panam, i.e. fractions of the hun, seized as plunder by ‘Alī al-Dīn in his Deccan campaigns.

72 Sirhindī (1932), 99. I have followed Basu’s translation.

73 Mīrzā (1935), 51f cites from Amīr-i Khusraw, Tuḥfat al-sīghār (MS IOL Persian 412, fols. 50f).

74 Badā‘īnī (1868), I: 153 cites from Amīr-i Khusraw’s Wasṭ al-hayāt.

Bibliography


Courts, capitals and kingship


Court cultures in the Muslim world: seventh–nineteenth centuries

8 Between *Dihlīz* and *Dār al-‘Adl*

Forms of outdoor and indoor royal representation at the Mamluk Court in Egypt

*Albrecht Fuess*

**Introduction**

As everyone knows, engaging in outdoor activities always contains a certain element of danger. And that is just what the Mamluk sultan Qūṭ (r. 657–8/1259–60) encountered when he was looking for recreation and went on a hunting party after the Mamluk victory against the Mongols at the tiresome battle of ‘Ayn Jālūt in 658/1260:

The sultan [left Syria] and kept on going until he reached the Egyptian desert near al-Ṣālihiyya; but then he deviated from his way to go hunting with his *umarā‘*. When the hunt was over, the sultan returned to the royal tent [*al-dihlīz al-sulṭānī*]. There *amīr* Baybars asked that the sultan be given a wife from the Mongol prisoners and the sultan handed her over to Baybars. Baybars then took the hand of the sultan in order to kiss it. This was the sign of conspirators. To the surprise of the sultan he was struck on his shoulder with a sword by *amīr* Badr al-Dīn Baktūt, then *amīr* Anis pulled him down from his horse and finally *amīr* Bahādūr al-Mu‘izzī shot an arrow, which wounded the sultan badly. This happened on Saturday 15th Dhī‘l-Qa‘dā 658 [22th October 1260]. . . . Afterwards the *umarā‘* assembled in the royal tent and *amīr* Aqtāy asked: “Who actually killed him?” Baybars replied “I killed him”, and then Aqtāy said: “Oh Lord! Sit down on the throne and take the [sultan’s] place.”

This story of a murder in the “royal tent” (*al-dihlīz al-sulṭānī*) highlights the problem of public accessibility to Mamluk rulers, who lived among the elites of military slaves who followed the so-called “law of the Turks,” meaning the murderer of the sultan succeeded him.²

For the benefit of the sultans’ survival, accessibility to them had to be canaled and formalized under these circumstances to limit the danger. Yehoshua Frenkel has shown that one aspect of royal etiquette in the Mamluk period was to distance the sultan from his peers while he was at court or during travel. Upon approaching the sultan *umarā‘* were ideally supposed to prostrate themselves.³ Nevertheless, despite these rules for court ceremonies, the murder of sultans still occurred. This is understandable given the fact that the position of sultan could not be inherited in
the Mamluk Empire, and the new sultan usually came from the ranks of powerful umarāʾ of the former sultan. Physical survival therefore depended on the strength of the ruler. The murder of weak rulers could not be altogether prevented even by following highly elaborate court procedures. However, it seems that these practices limited the possibility of someone attacking the ruler.

The issue of the accessibility of Mamluk rulers will constitute a leitmotiv of the present chapter. As will be shown it seems that accessibility to the ruler was rendered more difficult during the Mamluk period, but was not abolished altogether. It remained possible to encounter the sultan personally until the very end of the Mamluk sultanate, especially during legal hearings held in public at the “palace of justice” (dār al-ʿadl) in the citadel. By allowing this, Mamluk rulers tried to uphold their image of being just and ideal Muslim sultans. Mamluk sultans liked to go out in public and be hailed by the masses. For these appearances they also wore special clothes and turbans. A case study from the end of the fifteenth century CE will explore a very impressive piece of Mamluk headgear and its role as a sign of legitimacy in inner-Mamluk power struggles.

Very important for public representation, however, was of course the space where the overt display of royal power took place. As in many medieval Muslim societies the combination of tent and palace played an important role in the public representation of the ruler. The significance of the tent had increased with the nomadic tribes, mainly of Turkish origin, which had poured into the Middle East from central Asia since the ninth and tenth centuries. The Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century CE had intensified this nomadic lifestyle. Once the tribes settled in the Middle East, they became accustomed to urban societies. Turkish and Mongol rulers therefore adjusted the use of their representational institutions. Quite often a specific combination of the use of the royal encampment and the royal palaces emerged.

The early Mamluk sultans had been raised in a Turkophone nomadic society in the Kıpchaq steppe north of the Black Sea, before being sold to slave traders and brought as future soldiers to Egypt. They knew about the value and the usefulness of a tent. The royal tent therefore played an important role in the Mamluk system of governance. A murder at the right time at the right tent was worth a sultanate.

Dihlīz

The term dihlīz literally means vestibule. In houses it would be used as an ante-room or corridor. In the context of encampments, the outer parts of the tent like the sun blind or an ante-tent would be called dihlīz. In the early Mamluk period the dihlīz denoted the first tent of the encampment where the sultan would usually hold his audiences during military campaigns.

Apparantly the late Ayyubid sultans had been the first to name the audience tent of their military encampment dihliți. The term is mentioned for the first time in the year 643/1246. The Ayyubid sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb (r. 637–47/1240–9) had set out from Cairo to fight the Khwarazmians in Syria, when he received two ambassadors of the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad in his royal tent (al-dihlīz
Between Dihlīz and Dār al-ʿAdl

al-sulṭānī) during this campaign. The important role the royal dihlīz acquired in Egypt within a few years is underlined by the fact that sultan Baybars I (r. 658–76/1260–77) had royal tents (al-dahālīz) made especially for an Abbasid survivor, who had fled Baghdad after it had fallen to the Mongols in 656/1258. Baybars recognized the Abbasid officially as caliph al-Mustanṣir and the tents were made in 659/1261 for a military expedition of the new caliph who set out to fight the Mongols in Iraq, but he was defeated and killed. Apparently Baybars thought that a Muslim ruler needed a royal tent.

Unfortunately, very few descriptions of the royal tent have been passed down. The description of the Mamluk author Ibn Faḍlallāh al-ʿUmarī (d. 749/1349) reads as follows:

The sultan is surrounded by the ṭabarḍāriyya [i.e. his personal bodyguards carrying axes]. . . until the dihlīz is reached. Here in the first tent, he descends from his horse and goes to the first residential tent, which is a wide round tent followed by a smaller tent. In the centre of the encampment lies the central tent, the lajūq. The inner structure of each tent is built by a wall of wooden planks [kharqāh]. In the centre of the lajūq there is a small wooden palace, which is used for the overnight stay. Opposite each residential tent there is a bathroom [ḥammām] with bathtubs and toilets, as you would find in a house in the city, only smaller. When the sultan sleeps the Mamluks and other guards go round the dihlīz for its surveillance. . . . Large processions of guards go round the dihlīz each night on two occasions: At bedtime and when the camp awakes. . . . For the sultan’s convenience even a small hospital with doctors is part of the encampment. (see figure 8.1)

Carrying a small hospital within the encampment could come in handy. We know of two sultans, the Ayyubid al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb (r. 625–47/1228–49) and the Mamluk sultan Qalāwūn (r. 678–89/1279–90), who died from illnesses in the dihlīz during military campaigns.

More dangerous than diseases however were the enemies within. Security arrangements did not always prove to be effective. The first sultan to be killed in the dihlīz was the last Ayyubid sultan Tūrān Shāh in 648/1250. After his father sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb had died from disease in the dihlīz, his widow Shajar al-Durr had held public audiences in the dihlīz claiming that her husband would recover soon from his illness. By doing so she waited until Tūrān Shāh came from Anatolia to Egypt. Tūrān Shāh immediately angered the Mamluks of his father when he tried to replace them with his own favourites. Baybars al-Bunduqdārī undertook the first unsuccessful assassination attempt when the sultan sat in the dihlīz. Other umarāʾ tried successfully three days later on 28th Muharram 648/2nd May 1250. Afterwards the umarāʾ could not agree in their council in the dihlīz on who among them should rule and therefore Shajar ad-Durr was allowed to rule for three months as “Queen of the Muslims” (malikat al-muslimīn).

However, as mentioned above, Baybars al-Bunduqdārī’s second attempt on the life of a sultan was more successful. He killed sultan Quṭūz in 658/1260 and
became sultan himself. Sultan al-Ashraf Khalīl ibn Qalāwūn (r. 689–93/1290–3) was the next sultan to fall to tent violence in 1293. He repeated the error of Qūṭuz and went hunting near Giza. The conspirators struck him fatally. Their leader, Viceroy (nāʾīb al-saltana) Baydara, went immediately to the royal tent. There he sat on the sultan’s throne in the dihlīz and claimed the sultanate. However, other powerful Mamluks loyal to al-Ashraf Khalīl went to Giza and avenged their master by cutting off Baydara’s head. Only three years later an attempt was carried out by leading Mamluks...
to assassinate sultan Kithbugha (r. 694–6/1294–6) in the dihlīz outside Ramla. Kithbugha escaped to Damascus, but apparently he had been considerably shocked and shaken. He resigned as sultan and ended his days as governor of Ḥamāh.\textsuperscript{16} Given this violent history of attacks in the dihlīz it is no wonder that Mamluk sultans of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries CE refrained from calling a specific tent a royal tent any more. The use of the term dihlīz to designate the royal tent totally disappeared from Mamluk sources from the early fourteenth century CE onwards. Authors then occasionally described the whole encampment when talking about dihlīz. In the fifteenth century dihlīz is not used in any connection with tents but is used only to designate corridors of palaces. It seems that the central role of the dihlīz came to an end under the long reign of sultan al-Naṣīr Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (r. 693/1293, 698–708/1299–1309 and, 709–41/1310–41). He had witnessed the murder of his brother al-Ashraf Khalīl in the dihlīz and only narrowly escaped himself from an attack on the dihlīz by a group of newly arrived Oirat Mongols in Mamluk service in 699/1299.\textsuperscript{17} It is difficult to know whether the dihlīz as royal tent was ever officially abolished as a royal institution since the sources are silent on this matter. The last time Mamluk sources used the term dihlīz in connection with a Mamluk military encampment was in the early fifteenth century, during the temporary conquest of Syria by the troops of Timūr-i Lang or “Tamerlane” (r. 771–807/1370–1405).\textsuperscript{18} Maybe the disappearance of the term dihlīz just reflected the general trend of the Mamluk Empire, which became far more static once the initial wars against Crusaders and Mongols were brought to a successful end at the beginning of the fourteenth century CE. The expansion of the Empire was over and the Mamluk army therefore stayed mainly in Cairo at the citadel and did not move around Syria in tents on a regular basis anymore.

Furthermore, the concept of a royal tent accompanying a Mamluk sultan as he wandered around the empire did present a considerable danger for the Mamluk sultans since leading Mamluks could kill the sultan and had a legitimate claim to the sultanate. Therefore the royal tent as an institution was abolished. However, the disappearance of the dihlīz as royal tent did not mean that tents no longer played an important role in the Mamluk context. Military expeditions to Syria, particularly, were preceded by gathering the troops in an encampment at al-Raydānīyya outside of Cairo, which from the fourteenth century onwards was usually called by the Arab name mukhayyam (encampment) or al-mukhayyam al-sharīf (the noble encampment).\textsuperscript{19} Apparently the encampment at al-Raydānīyya developed later on into a permanent military base. Mamluk sultans went there sometimes with public processions (mawākiḥ) and bestowed robes of honour on leading umarā.\textsuperscript{20} The mukhayyam at al-Raydānīyya therefore had developed as one of many places of public representation of Mamluk sultans in and around Cairo. It contained a fading reminiscence of nomadic lifestyle but it did not have the “royal aura” the dihlīz had enjoyed in the formative period of the Mamluk Empire.

**al-Mawkib**

The citadel of Cairo represented the centre of the public representation of Mamluk sultans (see figures 8.2 and 8.3). The sultans left the citadel on a regular basis by
Figure 8.2 Cairo in Mamluk Times.
Figure 8.3 The Citadel of Cairo.

Ibid., xi.
means of a highly ritualized public procession, the so-called mawkiib. Maqrīzī describes the first procession of sultan Baybars as follows:

On Monday, 7th Ṣafar 659 [i.e. 11st January 1261], al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars rode out of the citadel of the mountain with the sultan’s insignias. He then entered Cairo by the Bāb al-Naṣr and the umarā’ and the army walked in front of him until the Bāb Zuwayla. Then they returned to the Citadel. Cairo had been decorated for this event. Dirham and dinār were scattered on the sultan. He bestowed robes of honour on the nobles of the Empire. This had been his first public outing. And from this day onwards the outings were followed by a game of polo.21

The processions became a regular part of Mamluk public representation. They were also undertaken by Mamluk governors in provincial capitals and in every city of the Empire where units of the Mamluk army were stationed.22 The most common form of processions took place on the days when the sultan heard the complaints of his subjects in the house of justice, the dār al-‘adl. The sultan and the umarā’ went to these dār al-‘adl sessions twice a week in public processions (mawākib) and after hearing the cases an official banquet (simāṭ) followed and the whole ceremony became known as “service” (khidma).23 During the processions people were apparently allowed to approach the sultan. In a memorandum from Sultan Qalāwūn to his son al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ on how to govern Egypt during his father’s absence for military reasons, he stated that:

If petitions were handed to Him while riding (on processions outside the citadel), let Him help the one who hands them, treat him justly and give redress against the wrongs. He should investigate the injustice personally and not entrust the case to those who delay things.24

It is difficult to know how successful such a “petition by chance” was, but sultans were handed petitions on a regular basis once they descended from the citadel.25 Of course the public processions contained a certain element of danger. No wonder that sultan Qalāwūn told his son in his memorandum to watch his back carefully and never leave the official route on public outings.26

Dār al-ʿAdl

The processions normally preceded the so-called mazālim sessions.27 Literally, mazālim denotes unjust or oppressive actions. From the early periods of Islamic history onwards Muslim rulers heard cases of alleged injustice at these public hearings. In Mamluk times the mazālim sessions were usually held indoors in the so-called “palace of justice” (dār al-ʿadl) on the citadel, thereby following the example of the Ayyubids, who had a dār al-ʿadl built there around 1207 CE.28

The Mamluk Sultan Baybars I decided to install his own dār al-ʿadl just below the citadel in 662/1264. He used it for holding mazālim sessions and for
inspecting the Mamluk army. Sultan Qalāwūn then moved it back to the citadel to the principal royal audience hall, the īwān, a large columned hall. His son Sultan al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 689–93/1290–3) renovated this structure, before Khalīl’s brother, Sultan al-Naṣīr Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn, finally had the building torn down and built his impressive īwān/dār al-ʿadl on the citadel, whose remains could still be seen by European visitors in the early nineteenth century (see figure 8.4). Al-Naṣīr Muḥammad initially held his mazālim sessions in his new dār al-ʿadl once a week on Mondays, before switching to bi-weekly sessions on Mondays and Thursdays. Sultan Barqūq (r. 784–91 and 792–801/1382–9 and 1390–9) then revived the mazālim sessions in the dār al-ʿadl/īwān, after they had been held at the palace of the powerful viceroy, the dār al-niyāba, on the citadel during the rule of the weak Qalāwūnid sultans in the second half of the fourteenth century. In order to underline the uniqueness of his own sultanate, Barqūq then transferred the hearing of the petitions to some place in the royal stables in 789/1387. According to Linda Darling the new setting was not degrading as “in Turkish practice stables were often places of political sanctuary.” The royal stable apparently represented the main mazālim venue in the fourteenth century before a new location was introduced in the time following sultan Barsbāy (r. 825–41/1422–38), the so called dikka (bench) in the sultan’s park (ḥawsh), which consisted of a wooden bench with an imperial tent above it (see figure 8.5).

Sultan Qānṣawī al-Ghawrī (r. 906–22/1501–16) finally added another venue for the sessions. Some of his mazālim sessions were held in the racecourse (maydān) just underneath the citadel. He even ordered the building of a special throne and a house on the racecourse in 909/1503 in order to administer justice there in front of large public audiences. One reason for this could be that in the racecourse more people could attend to witness the public dispensing of justice by the ruler. In Shawwāl 921/November 1515 for example he summoned to the racecourse a Jewish merchant, who came originally from the lands of the Franks but had lived for a while in the Mamluk Empire, and had him tortured in front of the crowds, because he had apparently stolen a considerable amount of money. Asked about the whereabouts of the money the merchant did not say, but instead recited out loud the shahāda to show that he had become a Muslim. The crowd started to shout Allāhu Akbar but the sultan ordered further torture, saying: “There are many Muslims and Islam does not need that one.”

The arrangements of the public justice sessions were very impressive for foreign visitors. The German pilgrim Arnold von Harff (d. 1505), who visited Cairo in 1496, says that he came through eight doors before he was brought into a large square. He saw 16,000 men standing there, who had to come there three times a week with the sun beating down on their heads. The Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 901–4/1496–8) himself sat high on a bench on precious carpets with his legs crossed. In this manner he would sit there three times a week to hear the complaints of his subjects and to render justice (see figure 8.5).

Within the context of these public sessions the issue of the personal accessibility of a Mamluk ruler was again of importance. The mazālim sessions provided on

Figure 8.4 *Iwān* of the Citadel.
the one hand every subject with access to the ruler to complain against injustice. On the other hand the ruler had to protect himself against possible attacks from the crowd. The procedures for the mazālim sessions were therefore highly formalized. An account of the court ceremonies is given by above-mentioned Ibn Faḍlallāh al-ʿUmarī who served as an official in the chancery of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muhammad. According to these descriptions the sultan sat during mazālim sessions in the dār al-ʿadl on a higher seat, with his feet barely touching the ground, but besides the royal throne. The eschewing of the royal throne during the sessions was supposed to symbolize that the sultan was almost equal to the rest of society. The marginally higher seat meant that he still had slightly higher standing. His nobles were arranged around him in special order, which had to remain the same. In front of the circle of Mamluk dignitaries stood the chamberlains (ḥujjāb) and the the so-called bearers of the inkwell (dawādārān) in order to receive written petitions (qiṣas) by the plaintiffs. The petitions were then read to the sultan and he decided who should deal with them. If he thought it should be the qudāt, they received it. Matters concerning the army were brought to the attention of the chamberlains and the privy secretary and so on.38

Figure 8.5 sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad on his Throne.

Of course this arrangement must have impressed the ordinary citizen, even more so as proceedings were very formalized and contained theatrical elements. In 879/1475 sultan Qaytbay (r. 872–901/1468–96) for example was holding a court session in the royal stable where the petitions were being read to him by the privy secretary (kātib al-sīr) when a man entered the scene who complained about amīr Yashbak al-Sūdānī (d. 850/1446), the dawādār. The sultan ordered that Yashbak should go down to the man and stand in front of him and stay there face to face as long as it took to reach a verdict. The same happened when another man complained about another dignitary. The mazālim sessions not only provided the sultan with an opportunity to excel as a just ruler, but moreover it helped to control and to keep his entourage busy at least twice a week. In the memorandum of Sultan Qalāwūn to his son it therefore states:

Nobody presents a petition directly to the Prince and nobody participates in handling the petitions, if it is not his customary duty. Nobody speaks about matters that do not concern him; nobody stands in a place other than his own; and nobody stands by the sultan’s side, if it is not his customary duty. Everyone who participates in the court session performs his duties in a place and location assigned to him. Let the Prince’s eyes be open for this and His thoughts concerning those important matters—pertinent.

Needless to say, despite such elaborate rules, attacks on Mamluk sultans or their representatives did take place during these sessions. In 664/1266 the viceroy Amīr ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Ḥillī was almost killed by a member of the sect of the assassins. The man had appeared with a written petition in his hand and was brought before the amīr, when he suddenly produced a knife which was hidden under his clothes and launched his attack on the viceroy. More common were fatal disputes among Mamluks themselves as they knew that their opponents would be present at the palace of justice at a certain time. For example, an attempted coup on the life of Amīr Sayf al-Dīn Qawṣūn during a mazālim session failed in 742/1342. Another violent incident occurred in 758/1337 when a Mamluk soldier was refused a salary increase by the decision of amīr Shaykhū. The soldier murdered Shaykhū on the spot in the dār al-'adl. A rather bizarre episode happened in 801/1398, when a Persian dressed in ṣūfī style presented himself with a petition in the royal stables. He went up to Sultan Barqūq, grabbed his beard and insulted him with great vigour. By the sultan’s order he was then submitted to corporal punishment. Other dangers came from above. If you embark on outdoor activities always be careful about the weather. A heavy thunderstorm blew away a mazālim session on the dikka in the park in 893/1488. Ibn Iyās commented on the storm by saying: “And the weather really created great injustice [wa-qad azlama al-jaw zulmān].”

Mamuk Royal Horns

In the context of royal representation the issue of clothes was very important, especially in an elite society like the Mamluk warrior class who desired a clear
separation between them and the common people. Of course they wanted to be seen as just and accessible rulers by their subjects, but their appearance had to be special and distinct from the rest of society. Only seldom did Mamluks themselves rebel against the rules of Mamluk dress code. One such example was the young Sultan al-Nāṣir Muhammad, son of Sultan Qāytbāy, who chose to wear inappropriate headgear in public (see figure 8.5). 47

He appeared in Muḥarram 902/September 1496 at the Friday prayer with a casual takhhīṣa ṣaghīra (the small “lighter” turban) on his head instead of the usual oversized official kallawta or kallafta, a small cap surrounded by an immense turban. Wearing a takhhīṣa ṣaghīra was a clear sign of provocation towards the powerful umarāʾ of his father. By doing so, he showed them that he was determined to grasp power and not willing to wait until they had decided who the “real” new sultan would be. The credo of the powerful Mamluk umarāʾ in the fifteenth century was clearly: “Regency has no children (al-mulk ʿaqīm).” 48

Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad defied this rule in public by his particular choice of headgear. The reaction of the umarāʾ was soon to follow. A month later in Ṣafar 902/October 1496 the umarāʾ started wearing the takhhīṣa as takhhīṣa kabīra (the great “lighter” turban) with long horns. 49 Ibn ʿIyās gives two explanations for the appearance of this new headgear. The first one reads:

[An] amīr told us why he started [wearing it]: “I was in the war and Dhū ʿl-Qarnayn was calling me: ‘I am a ram. When the sheep pass me by and try to go out then I push them with my horns.’ ” 50

The second reason he gives is that the Mamluk umarāʾ deliberately followed the example of the ancient Persian kings by wearing this kind of headgear. 51 Both explanations hint to the fact that by putting the horns on, the Mamluk umarāʾ referred to Alexander the Great (Iskandar), 52 usually identified as Dhū ʿl-Qarnayn, the two horned hero from the Qurʾān, 53 in the Muslim tradition. 54 Iskandar was apparently seen as “the model of the Muslim hero, the Iranian knight, through his own merits worthy of acceding to the rank of prophet of the One God.” 55 The Ottoman poet Ahmādī (d. 815/1413), who had spent considerable time in Mamluk Cairo, had written a very popular version of the Iskandarnāmah at the end of the thirteenth century and dedicated it to Süleymān (d. 814/1411), a son of the Ottoman sultan Bāyezīd I “Yıldırım” (r. 791–805/1389–1403). 56 Surely the Mamluk umarāʾ had been influenced by this contemporary popular culture when putting their horns on. 57

The gesture also stated that it was the umarāʾ who were entitled to power, not the young sultan. Two years later they struck. The sultan, having left the security of the citadel, was slain near Giza on 15th Rabīʿ al-Awwal 904/31th October 1498. 58 The takhhīṣa kabīra now became the official headgear of the Mamluk sultans. The Venetian ambassador Domenico Trevisan who was received by Sultan Qānsawh al-Ghwārī in 1512 recalls that the sultan was sitting on his richly decorated bench (mastaba) wearing a great turban with two horns which were the length of half an arm (see figure 8.6). 59
Figure 8.6 Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī with the nāʿūra.

Boissard, Jean Jacques (1648) Abbildungen der Türckischen Kayser und Persischen Fürsten/so wol auch anderer Helden und Heldinnen : von dem Osman/hīb auf den andern Mahomet ; Auß den Metal-len/in welchen sie abgebildet/genommen/und in gegenwertige Kupffer gebracht. Wie dann auch vorher eines jeden wandel kürzlich mit Versen Beschrieben Durch Georg Greblinger alias Seladon von Regensburg, Franckfurt: Ammon 1648, Figure 20: sultan Cansaves Gavris. Latin inscription reads as: What is it for use that you bound Egypt to Syria, when the jealous destiny refuses to recognize you as sultan. Be aware that Achomenos [Shah Ismāʿīl ?] defends the tempted frontiers, when Selymus will have taken your properties. (There exists as well an edition from 1596 (Franckfurt), but the images are not as well preserved).
According to the Meccan author of the sixteenth century, Qutb al-Dīn al-Nahrawālī (d. 990/1582), the Mamluk hierarchy was shown by the number of horns one was entitled to wear on the turban. The sultan had six horns, while the high ranking commanders of a hundred horsemen and leaders of a thousand infantrymen (amīr mi'a wa-muqaddam alf) wore four horns and the umarā’ with ten troops under their command were left with two horns on their turbans.60 On a European painting from the reception of a Venetian embassy by the Mamluk governor of Damascus from the turn of the fifteenth century CE, the reason why this headgear was nicknamed “waterweel” (nāūra) becomes even more evident (see figure 8.7).

The six horn version was witnessed as well by contemporary European witnesses. In 1512 Jean Thenaud, the guardian of the Franciscan monastery of Angoulême, describes the outer appearance of sultan Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī during an official reception with the following statement: “Sa robe estoit de tafetas jaune et avoit en sa teste une faciolle de fine toille d’Ynde moult haulte, laquelle faisoit six longues et large cornes dont deux estoient sur le front, aultres deux à dextre, aultre à senestre.”61

**Conclusion**

Throughout the Mamluk period Mamluk sultans wanted to be present in the public sphere. In some instances they adjusted and canalized their accessibility as shown through the abolishment of the use of the royal tent (dīhlīz) and the decreasing importance of tents as places of royal audiences in general.

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**Figure 8.7** Reception of the Ambassadors.

From the fourteenth century onwards the main venue for public appearances of Mamluk sultans was Cairo, especially the citadel. Within the citadel the *maẓālim* sessions on court days were the best way to access or attack the ruler. However, attacks on sultans in the citadel were very rare due to high security measures. Mamluk sultans must have regarded the institution of the *maẓālim* sessions as safe and they were held due to public demand through to the very end of the Mamluk sultanate. Therefore the public image of the Mamluk sultan was someone who was accessible to his subjects, either outdoors in his tent, during processions or indoors in the citadel on court days. Maybe Mamluk sultans thought they needed these public appearances and the wearing of impressive headgear to bolster their legitimacy towards their subjects, as they had been imported initially and had come to Egypt as military slaves from rather modest social backgrounds.

If we compare the public attitude of the Mamluks to the contemporary Ottomans we see a totally different approach. Once the Ottomans conquered Cairo the public court sessions stopped immediately. The contemporary Mamluk historian Ibn Iyās remarked:

> When Ibn ‘Uthmān [i.e. the Ottoman sultan Selīm I “Yavuz” (r. 918–26/1512–20)] went up to the Citadel he hid from the people and did not show himself to anyone. He did not sit for public hearings on the *dikka* in the park in order to help the wronged against the oppressor.  

Compared to the Ottoman approach of imperial seclusion the Mamluk sultans were real public creatures.

**Notes**

1. al-Maqrīzī (1934–73), I/2:435f.
4. For the issue of succession in the Mamluk Empire, see Sievert (2003).
5. For the issue of palace and tent, see Gronke (1992); idem (1995).
7. See al-Maqrīzī (1934–73), I/2:323.
9. According to al-Qalqashandi (d. 821/1418) the *khargāh* was like a house of wood, which was made especially to form the inner structure of the tent. It was covered with cloth and provided protection against the cold in winter. See al-Qalqashandi (1421/2000), 146.
11. Unfortunately, I have not come across the image of a Mamluk encampment yet. Figure 8.1 is the image of an Ottoman encampment after the fall of Szigetvár, Southwest Hungary, in 1566 CE. The audience tent at the camp entrance is notable. Mamluk tent arrangements were probably similar.
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13 See al-Maqrīzī (1934–73), I/2:346.
14 See ibid., I/2:359–63.
16 See al-Maqrīzī (1934–73), I/3:819f.
17 See ibid., I/3:883.
18 See Ibn Qādī Shuhba (1977–97), 159.
19 See, for example, Ibn Ḥaṣan (1960–75), III:467, 572; IV:362. The term al-mukhayyam al-sharīf was also used when sultan Qāytbāy (r. 872–901/1468–96) visited Syria during one of the very few non-military journeys of a Mamluk sultan to Syria in 882/1477. See Ibn Jīʾān (2004), 62, 65, 75.
24 See Lewicka (1998), 35, 37 (English text); 36 (Arabic text).
26 See Lewicka (1998), 35, 37 (English text); 34, 36 (Arabic text).
27 For the aspect of maẓālim in Mamluk times, see Nielsen (1985); idem (1993); Fuess (2009).
33 See ibid., III:662, 666.
34 Darling (2006), 14.
35 See Ibn ʾIyās (1960–75), IV:56.
36 Ibid., IV:481.
37 See Harff (2004), 89f.
40 Lewicka (1998), 19, 21 (English text); 16, 18 (Arabic text).
41 For this, see Lewis (1968).
42 See al-Maqrīzī (1934–73), I:550f.
44 See al-Maqrīzī (1934–73), III:33f.
46 Ibn ʾIyās (1960–75), III:249f.
47 For Mamluk headgear, see Fuess (2008).
50 Ibid., III:340.
51 See ibid., IV:332.
52 I would like to express my gratitude to Stefan Heidemann for valuable information concerning the Iskandar topic.
54 See Watt (1978), 127.
55 See Abel (1978), 127.
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56 See the cover image of the present volume which is taken from the Gotha manuscript of the Iskandarnāmah [MS Orient T-186/123].
57 See Lewis (1960), 299f.
58 See Ibn Iyās (1960–75), III:400f.
60 See al-Nahrawālī (1861), 188.

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9 The Mongol court in Baghdad
The Juwaynī brothers between local court and central court

Hend Gilli-Elewy

Introduction
Since 617/1219, or the beginning of the Mongol invasions, then Muslim contemporaries viewed these conquests as an unprecedented catastrophe that culminated in the extermination of the Abbasid caliphate.1 Although the capture of Baghdad might have been merely a stepping stone for the Mongols on their way to the Mediterranean Sea, for the Arabic-Persian population the fall of the caliph marked a symbolic and epoch making date. Since its foundation under the second Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr in 145/762, Baghdad had been the capital Abbasid city, seat of the caliph and the cultural, religious as well as economic centre of the Islamic world. Even though the caliphate had been in a process of decline since the middle of the twelfth century CE and had already lost some of its political sovereignty and power, the role of the caliphate as Imamate still symbolized the only legitimate Islamic rule, based on prophetic revelation and the shari‘a. With the Mongols and the fall of the last caliph al-Musta‘sim (r. 640–56/1242–58), Islam lost its claim to be the only legitimate principle of sovereignty and also its supremacy over other religions. The disintegration of the Islamic Empire created a division between the Arabic-speaking Mamluk region and, in opposition, the Persian-Mongolian Ilkhanate. The Euphrates River became the depopulated edge of the Mongol Empire2 rendering Baghdad a rather insignificant city on the periphery of both spheres. The Mongol invasion meant for Baghdad and Iraq first a separation from the rest of the Arabic-speaking world and secondly it became the only Arabic province affiliated with the Persian-speaking Ilkhanid state. The centre of the Islamic world now shifted to the west, to Damascus and Cairo. For the Ilkhanids, the Persian city of Tabriz gained prominence.

This chapter concentrates on the administration established in Baghdad after the Mongol conquest and investigates the service of the two Juwaynī brothers: ‘Alā‘ al-Dīn ‘Aṭā‘ Malik as provincial governor in Baghdad and Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī as sāhib-dīwān, chief financial officer, of the Ilkhanate. The roles the two brothers played in the midst of struggles, rivalries and embroilments between the nomadic military Mongol elite and the Persian civil administrators and, in the case of Iraq, the Arabic population, reflect some general characteristics and internal structural problems of the early Ilkhanid court prior to the ascension of Ghāzân Khān (r. 694–703/1295–1304). This chapter will also shed light on the role of Baghdad within the
establishment of the Ilkhanid court. By way of background, the following sections will present the primary sources and briefly describe the conquest of the city.

A note about the sources

The immediate consequences of the Mongol conquest with its destruction, massacres and devastation has been described in many sources and has mostly been evaluated as a lasting catastrophe for the Islamic world. For then Arabic and Persian contemporaries it was linked with eschatological ideas and apocalyptic visions that were partially taken over by the secondary literature and still circulate today. Regardless of whether one agrees with this interpretation of events or not, the fact remains that those events represented a collective trauma for many generations. Furthermore, the changed political situation resulting from the Mongol invasions and the schism between the Mamluk territories in Egypt and Syria and the Mongol Ilkhanids in Persia and Iraq is also reflected in the historical writing of the time. The Arabic-Mamluk and the Persian-Mongolian authors were both striving to explain the events around Baghdad within their own political, ideological and religious conceptions. Especially the Arabic sources conceived the events predominantly in a theological-deterministic context. The contemporary authors of the time as well as later writers repeatedly showed a fatalistic and apocalyptic position often underlining the historical caesura marked by the end of the caliphate and the end of Islam’s supremacy both in rule and religion. Whereas the Arabic-Mamluk sources provided little information on the conquest of Baghdad and its consequences, whether due to lack of information or lack of interest in the newly established ruling house, Persian historical writing flourished under the Mongols and brought forth numerous works, mostly official chronicles.

Apart from the official Mongol-Persian sources, there are also sources that originated from Iraq itself. The most important source for the history of Baghdad under Mongol rule is the local chronicle al-Ḥawādith al-jāmi’a, generally attributed to Kamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Fuwāṭī (d. 723/1323). Ibn al-Fuwāṭī, taken prisoner by the Mongol commander Hūlegü during the fall of Baghdad in 656/1258, was then sent back to Baghdad to become head of the Mustanṣirīyya Library. The Ḥawādith al-jāmi’a is a local chronicle written in a traditional annalistic style and deals with the history of the province of Iraq from 626/1228 to 700/1300. Like a newspaper, it also includes stories on everyday issues such as festivities and petty crimes, and therefore contains plenty of details not to be found elsewhere. Although Ibn al-Fuwāṭī was committed to the Mongol rulers, his representation of the events is not manifestly apologetic or euphemistic.

The Mongol Ilkhanid Court in Baghdad

a) Aftermath of the Conquest in 656/1258

Ibn al-Fuwāṭī provides a very lively and extensive account of the conquest of Baghdad and its direct consequences, which I will not elaborate upon here.
description of Baghdad is filled with an intense feeling of doom, yet this apocalyptic image is moderated by his accounts of the immediate reconstruction and reorganization of the administration of the city that conveys a certain continuity of urban life and also reflects the role Baghdad played for the surrounding areas. The extent of the destruction does not seem to have been as apocalyptic as presumed by the sources that rendered the continuation of life in the city impossible.

After the conquest of Baghdad, the Mongol commander Hülegü did not leave the city in a devastated state and continue his military expansion westward; rather, he instated a separate local administration independent from the rest of the newly created Ilkhanate. Before he left Baghdad he filled the most important positions and demanded that reconstruction begin immediately and bazaars be reopened. One of the first actions he took was to affirm the rule of Islamic law by appointing judges in Baghdad and thus he assumed one of the responsibilities of an Islamic ruler even though he was rather indifferent towards religion and did not grant Islam any dominant position. Furthermore, Hülegü also upheld the sikka law and the Baghdad mint continued its production the same year. Prior to this the Mongols did not practice coinage laws similar to the Islamic sikka in the conquered territories. Only after the capture of Baghdad did they introduce a unified coin system to the Ilkhanate. With it a significant element of Islamic law was incorporated into the Mongolian concept of sovereignty. The fact that this only took place after the conquest of Baghdad indicates the importance attached to this event. It marked the beginning of Hülegü’s autonomy from the Great Khan and the foundation of an independent Ilkhanid state in Persia and Iraq under his rule. The first mention of īlkhān as a personal title for Hülegü appeared on coins in the year 657/1259–60, and his successors continued to use it.

Further positions upheld in this early Baghdad administration were: the vizier and the chief financial officer (sāhib-dīwān) who were both confirmed in their positions, as well as the supervisor of the religious endowments (waqf), who was ordered to begin immediate reconstruction of the city. Through the adoption of the existing structures and the reinstatement of the former officials Mongol rule guaranteed a certain sense of continuity in the city. The Mongol occupying forces were put under the command of shihna ‘Alī Bahādur/Asūtū (executed 660/1262) and Emir Qarābughā assuring a military presence in the city and the region that would allow further expeditions to the west. During the following year, 657/1258–9, a census of the population was carried out and taxes assessed. It should be noted that the administration of the city was split into two domains from the very beginning, the Mongol military leadership and the local civil administration that remained unchanged both in structure and personnel, a schism that was to become characteristic of the Ilkhanid way of government.

b) Mongol visions of rule and government

Even though the caliphate had witnessed several examples of Turco-Mongol invasions since the fifth/tenth century, the Mongol invasions since 617/1219 were seen as an unprecedented catastrophe. What differentiated these later Mongol
conquests from earlier ones was that the conquerors entered the Muslim world as non-Muslims and did not convert to Islam until much later. Furthermore, they impressed their Muslim contemporaries by their large numbers and exceptional military organization that aimed at political and military dominance. The Saljuqs, for example, had converted briefly before entering the Muslim lands and represented themselves as heirs to the Muslim tradition, protectors of the Sunna and the caliphate; they adapted to and developed the existing Muslim political ideals and institutions. The Mongols, however, brought about a break with the past that was manifest on several levels. The Mongols had a military aristocracy superior to the conquered peoples and as the nomadic elite they wanted to distinguish themselves from the sedentary population of subjects in order to establish their position as rulers. Not only did the Mongols not share their subjects’ religion but they also showed disdain for the city dwellers and agriculturalists whom they exploited as vigorously as possible with no thought for the consequences.

Throughout the whole system of the Eastern Muslim political organization there runs like a red thread the division of all organs of the administration into two main categories, the dargah (palace) and diwan (chancery). This general tendency among the Mongol rulers had its parallels in the traditional Muslim differentiation between ʿašḥāb al-sayf (the people of the sword) and ʿašḥāb al-qalam (the people of the pen). Under the Mongols this dichotomy not only differentiated between the two major functions of the state but also between two groups of peoples, the nomadic Turco-Mongol population that represented the military and the sedentary non-Mongol conquered population. However, from the very beginning the Mongol Empire showed internal contradictions in its attempt to maintain a dichotomy between the nomadic military Mongol elite and the sedentary subject populations. From the earliest stages the Mongols used the Persian functionaries in their civil administrative apparatus, which has sometimes even been evaluated as the latter’s willingness to participate in the foreign Mongol rule.

The central political figure of the vizier, the head of the civil administration, had been part of the dargāh under the Saljuqs and thus had direct access to the ruler. Under the Mongols the vizier suffered a radical attenuation of his powers and responsibilities. He was no longer head of the entire administration but lost some of his domains to the Mongol military administration, notably that of the armies. Apart from appointing government officials and tax assessment, the financial administration remained the vizier’s most important task, although it was occasionally partially separated from his office. Due to his role as chief financial officer he sometimes also carried the title ʿṣāḥīb-dīvān; and as a representative of the ruler, he was at times also referred to as nāʿīb. The lack of clarity in nomenclature makes it difficult to differentiate the various roles and responsibilities of the vizier. This might on the one hand be due to the fact that the Mongols did not yet have a concrete concept of how to run the bureaucracy; on the other hand the roles a vizier actually adopted might have depended on his personality, his
influence and his power in the court. The tendency to divide the power of the highest civil officials was later carried out in different forms, either by splitting away financial affairs or by appointing an imperial supervisor (mushrif al-mamalik). However, this usually led to increased competition and rivalry among the court officials and became untenable.²⁷ The Ilkhan Ōljyyū for example found himself forced to divide the bureaucracy into two parts because of flagrant struggles between Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍllallāh and Tāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Shāh.²⁸


The provisional government of Baghdad during the first year after the conquest of Baghdad came to an end when ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Juwaynī²⁹ was appointed governor of Baghdad and Iraq and head of a Persian administration established in an Arabic speaking province in 658/1260. He came from a family of administrators that had served the Saljuqs and the Khārazmshāhs, and even claimed to be a descendant of al-Faḍl ibn Rabī’a, the vizier of the famous caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.³⁰ Juwaynī was initially secretary of the Emir Arghūn (d. 690/1291) and then stepped into the service of Hülegū in 654/1256. At the same time as he was sent to Baghdad as head of the Iraqi civil administration, his brother Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī was appointed sāhib-dīwān of the Ilkhanate.³¹ ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Juwaynī accompanied the history of the city under three Ilkhans: Hūlegū, then Abāqā and finally Ahmad Tekūdar, and in many ways restored and improved agricultural and city life.³² Nevertheless, his position was disputed, he was often accused and arrested, disowned and even sentenced to death (although the sentence was never implemented); there was even an attempt on his life.³³ His controversial position was part of a broader subtext that reflected the intrigues, embroilments and rivalries of the Ilkhanid court. Most accusations aimed at discrediting and neutralizing political enemies were based upon charges of embezzlement or collaboration with the Mamluks, both of which characterized weaknesses of the Ilkhanid court. The court was unable to control corruption among its officials and it lived in constant fear of the Mamluks which may have been due to the fact that the defeat at the battle of ‘Ayn Jālūt (658/1260) was still fresh in recent memory.³⁴

When ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Juwaynī was sent to Baghdad he was ordered to share power with ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī, the deputy of the Mongol emir Qarābughā.³⁵ Already during his first year in service he became involved in court embroilments when the local Mongol military commanders allied with local Iraqi deputies against him.³⁶ They went to Hūlegū’s camp and accused the governor of misappropriating funds. ‘Alā’ al-Dīn was tried in Baghdad, found guilty and Hūlegū ordered his execution. On somebody’s recommendation (probably his brother’s), unfortunately the sources do not reveal the name of the person, his life was spared and he returned to Baghdad. Only his beard was shaved and Ibn al-Fuwaṭī explains how he had to sit in the dīwān and cover his face in shame. In the following year, his brother Shams al-Dīn came to Baghdad with an official decree declaring his innocence and ordering those who had accused ‘Alā’ al-Dīn to be put to death.³⁷
Incidentally, they were also accused of embezzlement. Within the same year, the newly appointed military commander again complained to the central *ordu* and accused ‘Alā’ al-Dīn.38 This time the trial was presided over by Hūlegū himself. The judgment was decided in ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s favour, the accusers were sentenced to death and the military commander replaced. Yet again, the new military commander once in office accused ‘Alā’ al-Dīn, this time of conspiring with the Mamluks.39 The charges had to be dropped when the main witness admitted under torture that the story was fabricated. Thus, especially the first years of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s rule in Baghdad were very unstable, and he faced accusations both from the Mongol military commanders as well as from the local Iraqi population. However, with the help of his brother, active in the court of the Ilkhan Hūlegū, he was able to prove his innocence and intervene in the nomination of officials in his province, eliminating political enemies and keeping those he hoped would be loyal followers.

After Hūlegū died in 663/1265, Abāqā took over the Ilkhanate and ruled for almost 20 years until 1282 CE, with the emir Sughūnjāq as his top military commander and Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī as his *sāhib-dīwān*.40 With regards to this duo Aubin writes:

Il [i.e. Abāqā] eut la chance de pouvoir faire gouverner ses États par deux hommes très capables et qui, chose rare, au lieu de s’entre-détruire s’entredétaient bien, Suğunčaq Aqa et Şamsuddin Muhammad Ğuvaynī.41

During this time of relative stability Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī was able to fill most important positions with members of his family and his brother ‘Alā’ al-Dīn was able to dedicate himself to the reconstruction efforts of the city and the agricultural hinterland:42 “The situation in Baghdad during the time of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn was better than during the caliphate [kānat Baghdād ayyām al-ṣāhib ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ajwad mā kānat ayyām al-khalīfa].”43 However, the series of accusations, intrigues and attacks against the Juwaynī brothers continued even under Abāqā, probably due to the fact that they had gained considerable influence and wealth during their long years in office. The source of attacks against ‘Alā’ al-Dīn came from different factions: Christians, Shiites, Mongols and others.44 Yet behind the most dangerous attacks stood the politically well-informed and ambitious Majd al-Mulk Yazdī who climbed up the ranks and later became imperial supervisor (*mushrīf al-mamālik*).45 He was behind a series of serious accusations and humiliating trials attacking both brothers that started in 677/1279 and ended in 681/1282. He conspired with high-ranking Mongol emirs and accused the Juwaynī brothers of having misappropriated large amounts of money.46 Shams al-Dīn was spared because of a recommendation on his behalf by Ilkhan Abāqā’s wife, Üljay Khatīn (d. 686/1287).47 Yet he did experience severe limitations on his office when Abāqā appointed Majd al-Mulk to the office of imperial supervisor. The office of imperial supervisor is otherwise only mentioned once in the sources together with the vizierate of Sa’d al-Dawla al-Yahūdī.48 ‘Alā’ al-Dīn on the other hand was forced to pay a certain sum of money, and because he was not able to meet further
financial demands, he was taken back to Baghdad in chains, humiliated, mis-
treated and then set free. The same happened the following year, 680/1281, and
again in 681/1282. When Abāqā suddenly died he was succeeded by his brother
Tekīdar who had just converted to Islam and called himself “Sulṭān Ahmad”. The
new Ilkhan reversed the situation, liberated ‘Alā’ al-Dīn, ordered that his confisc-
ated wealth be returned to him and reinstated his brother as šāhīb-diwan. Majd
al-Mulk was put on trial, convicted and executed in the same year. His body was
dismembered; his head taken to Baghdad, and publicly paraded. But ‘Alā’
al-Dīn’s own end was close at hand. There was open hostility between the new
Ilkhan and his nephew Arghūn who was determined to bring about the Juwaynī’s
ruin. Arghūn went to Baghdad, revived the old charges of embezzlement and
began to arrest and torture Juwaynī’s agents. Arghūn also ordered that the body of
a recently deceased agent be exhumed and thrown in the street. ‘Alā’ al-Dīn, upon
learning of this barbarity, according to one source was seized with a headache
which he died shortly afterwards. Dhahābī (d. 748/1348), however, relates
that he died from a fall from his horse in 682/1283. In the next year Arghūn
dethroned and succeeded his uncle and immediately ordered the execution of
Shams al-Dīn and his four sons, extinguishing the Juwaynī family.

Although ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s period in office was marked by turbulence, conspira-
cies and attempts to end his rule, it still represented an effort to create continuity
in Baghdadī life after the break induced by the Mongol conquest. He distinguished
himself by his active interest in construction that placed him in the tradition of
Muslim rulers. First of all he ordered that a palace with an elaborate colonnade,
a hammām, and a large garden be built outside the city walls on the eastern side
of Baghdad between the Žafariyya and Halba gates. He also dedicated himself
to rebuilding Baghdad’s urban infrastructure especially the water system, the
famous Mustanṣirīyya School that had been damaged under the caliphs and
the dam of al-Qamariyya Mosque that had also been damaged by floods during
the caliphate and never properly repaired. In 670/1272 he had the minaret of
the Friday mosque and the Nizāmiyya School repaired. He also built a new mosque
for Shaykh Ma’rūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815–6); and his wife ordered the construc-
tion of a new school, al-‘Iṣmāṭiyya, that she richly endowed and where she
included a burial place (turba) for herself. He also ordered the construction of
a bridge leading to Tustar which became part of his province’s jurisdiction by
Abāqā in 672/1274. Finally, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn promoted the Shiite holy sites by
adding a ribāṭ to ‘Alī’s mausoleum in Najaf in 666/1268 which he also richly
endowed. Moreover, he built a canal from the Euphrates town of Anbār to Kufa
and Najaf in an effort to promote agricultural production and allegedly led to the
creation of 150 villages along the bank. Another example of settlement develop-
ment was the construction of a new city, al-Ma’man, along the Ja’far canal in the
Wāsiṭ district, equipped with a Friday mosque, a diwan, a market and a school. It
was quickly populated and became a centre for traders and merchants to and from
Basra.

Repairs and new construction of schools, mosques, arbija, roads, canals and
dams as well as promoting agricultural production, trade and city life were all
recognized as beneficial acts that should be expected from any ruler. They were visible symbols of a functioning government and instruments of social organization, and as such they represented the return of order to Baghdad after the catastrophic experience of the invasions. ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s attempts to reinstate stability and the continuity of social and religious life in the city were also reflected in his resumption of the ḥajj pilgrimage to Mecca. The first mention of preparations to conduct the ḥajj occurred in 666/1268. He paid Arab Bedouins to accompany the travellers and see to their safe return home and also appointed a guide. The ḥajj was successfully completed in 669/1271 and 678/1280. Nevertheless, it is notable that mentioning the ḥajj no longer figured as a significant part of the annual accounts as was traditionally done in Muslim chronicles.

The period from of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s death in 681/1283 until the accession of Ilkhan Ghāzān was a time of administrative disorder and financial malfunction; high court spending and military expeditions emptied the treasuries quickly and different desperate attempts were undertaken to increase the flow of money (e.g. paper money, chāw, introduced in 693/1294). However, the reign of Ghāzān Khān, whose conversion to Islam and extensive reforms enforced the emancipation of the Ilkhanate from the Central Khanate symbolized a break in the history of the Ilkhanate. For Baghdad and Iraq this meant a stronger integration into the rest of the Ilkhanate.

Notes
1 On the first penetration of Chingiz Khān into Islamic territory, see Ibn al-Athīr (1987), X:399–401 (year 617h).
2 Rashīd al-Dīn (1940), 350, stresses the depopulation of the border regions to the Golden Horde, the Chaghhatay Khanate and the Mamluk Sultanate.
3 Most of the literature on Baghdad concentrates on examining the city in the context of the caliphate during its height as a cultural, political, and religious centre up to the fall of the last caliph. There are also a large number of topographical studies. However, the secondary literature dealing specifically with the Mongol conquest of Baghdad and the Ilkhanid rule of the Iraqi province is usually limited to parts of monographs dealing with the history of the Mongols in general. Exceptions are the historical overviews presented in al-ʿAzzāwī (1935–56) and Khaṣbāk (1968). A good summary can also be found in Ashtor (1976), 249–79. For an examination of the end of the caliphate and the transfer of power to Syria and Egypt, see Heidemann (1993) and Ayalon (1960). The works dealing with the Mongols in general will often either describe the bloody events of the siege and conquest of the city, or they might address a certain question as to how the caliph was killed and whether the vizier was guilty of having betrayed the caliph. For example, see Howorth (1965), III:113–39; Hammer-Purgstall (1842–3), 128–58; Le Strange (1900), 340–4; Browne (1956–9), II:458–66; Spuler (1985), 44–50; Boyle (1968), 346–50; Wickens (1962), 23f (on Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī’s addition to Juwaynī); Spies (1965), 97–112 (on al-Subki’s account of the fall of the caliph); Boyle (1961) (on Juwaynī’s account) and Saʿīdī (1972) (on the role of the vizier). In my PhD dissertation I examined the administrative, socioeconomic and religious development of the city of Baghdad under the Ilkhans based on the accounts of Ibn al-Fuwaṭī as related in his chronicle, al-Ḥawādith al-jāmi’a. See Gill-Elewcy (2000). The present paper concentrates on the Mongol court in Baghdad and its relationship to the royal ordū especially by taking a closer look at the roles of the Juwaynī brothers.
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4 See, e.g., the repetition of the phrase “yet again, this year started without the Muslims having a caliph” in Ibn Kathīr’s chronicle during the first years after the conquest of Baghdad (Ibn Kathīr (1985) XIII:228, 231, 242). Also, the qaṣīda by al-Sa’dī mourns the death of the last caliph in images of cosmic dimensions. See Somogyi (1933–5).

5 The most important sources here are: al-Juwaynī (1912), a high government official and later governor of Iraq; including an appendix of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī on the fall of Baghdad; Rashīd al-Dīn (1940; 1941), vizier under Ghāzān Khān, Ōljaytū and Abū Sa’īd, whose work was continued by al-Qāshānī (1348sh/1070) and Ḥāfiz-i Abrū, later supplemented by ‘Abdallāh ibn Fadllālāh “Waṣṣāf” (see Āfī (1346sh/1967)). On Mongol historiography, see Spuler (1938); idem (1955); idem (1962).

6 On Ibn al-Fuwāṭī, see Rosenthal (1971); also the biographical information in al-Shābībī (1950); Iqbal (1937); Spuler (1985), 12.


8 He confirmed the acting grand qāḍī Nizām al-Dīn al-Bandānjī (d. 667/1268–9) in his position. See Ibn al-Fuwāṭī (1407/1987), 332f, 363f (necrologue).

9 See the collected data in Heidemann (1993), 49–51, 57.

10 It is still unclear what the title ṭikhān actually means. It is usually translated as “sub-khān”, which would make Hūlegū a khān (of a part of the Mongol tribes) who acted in the name of the Great Khan (qa’an). See Spuler (1985), 220; Amitai-Preiss (1991), 353 n. 2. Krawulsky (1989), 93–9 translates the term as “peacemaking khan”, however Amitai-Preiss (1995), 14, shows that this interpretation is not sufficiently proven. Erdal’s examination of the title has shown that it originally went back to the Turkish term elkhān, an abbreviation of elīkhan, which means khan of tribal confederation (el). See Erdal (1991). It is difficult to determine whether Hūlegū had received the mandate to establish his own Sub-Khanate from the Great Khan Möngke or whether he disregarded his authority and founded his own dynasty autonomously. For a summary of the different interpretations in the secondary literature see Spuler (1985), 220; Allsen (1987), 48f; Jackson (1978), 220–2; Morgan (1987), 148–50; Amitai-Preiss (1991), 353–361; idem (1995), 13f.

11 Nevertheless, the Ilkhans saw themselves at least nominally as part of the Great Khanate until Qubilay’s death in 1294 CE and coined their coins in the name of the Great Khan (qa’an al-a’zam or al-a’dal). See Rashīd al-Dīn (1941) 7, 62; Spuler (1985), 222, 224; Lane-Poole (1875–1890), VI:17. After Qubilay’s death, Ghāzān Khan adopted the title qa’an which symbolized the end of the Mongol Great Khanate.

12 I have dealt with the provisional government of Baghdad during the first year after its conquest in Gilli-Elewý (2000).


14 Ibn al-Dāmghānī died in 657/1259 and was succeeded by Ibn al-Mu‘īn who also died within the same year. See Ibn al-Fuwāṭī (1407/1987), 333. Hūlegū also appointed Najm al-Dīn Ahmad ibn ‘Umrān as governor over the districts in East Baghdad and Tāj al-Dīn ibn al-Dawāmī as governor over the Euphrates districts (see ibid. 332).

15 See ibid. 331f, 336, 340; Hamadānī (1367sh/1988), II:714; Bar Hebraeus (1932), 467; Juwaynī (1912–37), III:479–81; Boyle (1975), 33f. He was later found guilty of fraud and executed under Juwaynī.


19 Bartol’d (1928), 227.
These two groups are referred to in Persian as *aštāb-i ūgh va qalam*. See Horst (1964), 3; Lambton (1988), 28.


The four major parts of the *diwān al-a’lā* were the *diwān al-inshāʿ wa’l-tughra*, the *diwān ishrāf al-mamālik* and the *diwān al-ʿarḍ*. On the vizierate, see Sourdel (1959–60); Klausner (1973); Lambton (1988), 28–68; idem (1989), 175–91.

See al-ʿUmarī (1968), 93 (Arabic text), 153 n. 82.

Besides the vizier Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī, Majd al-Mulk was appointed treasurer and financial supervisor in 680/1281–2. See Mīr Khānīd (1338–9/1959–60), V:95. In 694/1295 the vizier’s brother Ḥājī Beg was put in charge of *diwān* affairs (*umūr-i dīwān*) (see ibid. V:116). ‘Alāʾ al-Dīn was also appointed treasurer in 727/1327 (See Rashid-Eldin (1836), xliii).

On this title, see Spuler (*1985*), 235f.

For example, see Ibn al-Fuwāṭī (1407/1987), 482 (Jamāl al-Dīn Dastjirdānī); Raschid-Eldin (1836), xlvii; Mīr KhānI (1338–9/1959–60), V:151 (Tāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Shāh). Sometimes the vizier’s representatives were also referred to as *nāʿīb*, such as in the case of Sughunjāq (see ibid. V:98f).

See for example the rivalry between Majd al-Mulk Yāzdī and Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī under Hūlegū, and between Šadr al-Dīn Khālidī and Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍlallāh under Ghāzān Khān, as well as between Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍlallāh and Tāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Shāh under Abī Saʿīd.

See al-Qāshānī (1348sh/1970), 194f.

On him, see Qazwīnī’s introduction to his edition of Juwaynī (1912–37); Barthold/Boyle (1965), 606f.

His uncle Muʿayyad al-Dawla Muntajab al-Dīn Juwaynī, author of *Attabat al-kataba*, was head of the chancery under Sanjar. His father Bahāʾ al-Dīn Juwaynī was *ṣāhib-dīwān* under Chūnmūr, Korgūz, and Argūn.


“[H]e did much to improve the lot of the peasantry and it was said, with some exaggeration, that he restored these provinces to greater prosperity than they had enjoyed under the Caliphate.” (Barthold/Boyle (1965), 606). Also, see Juwaynī (1912–37), I:xxx; al-Kutubī (1951–2), II:453.

I would like to mention here that only one Ilkhanid vizier died a natural death.

For the battle of ‘Ayn Jālūt see Amitai-Preiss (1995), 26–48; Humphreys (1977), 333–58; Spuler (*1985*), 52f. The Mongols might have also feared a Mamluk attack on Baghdad in an attempt to restore the caliphate, since in the same year an Abbasid descendant al-Jākīm “bi-amrī lillāh” (r. 659–60/1261) had initiated a raid in the direction of Baghdad but retreated back to Syria before it came to a confrontation with the Mongol forces. On the interim period between the execution of the last caliph and the restoration of the caliphate in Cairo, see Heidemann (1993).


See ibid. 343.
See Rashîd al-Dîn (1941), 41; Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (1951–2), II:452.

44 See Rashîd al-Dîn (1941), 41; Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (1407/1987), 415f.

45 See ibid. 365.

46 For the names of the different umarā’ al-hajj, see ibid. 16, 53, 60, 74, 174, 189.

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Muslim Court Cultures of 
Early Modernity
10 Monolithic or dynamic
The Safavid court and the Subaltern in the late seventeenth century

Andrew J. Newman

When addressing any aspect of Safavid history and culture there is no doubt that one is labouring under an enormous burden of history. Here I do not refer to any particular dimension of Safavid history or culture, the distance in time which the research has to travel to reach the period, or even the legion of primary sources from the period that are now at the researcher’s disposal.

Burden is in reference to the burden of the parameters of inquiry under which scholars of the period labour. Where Middle Eastern studies may be said to have been operating under a joint Orientalist/modernisation paradigm in the years immediately preceding the Iranian revolution, it has been suggested that the revolution itself and the “Islamist” discourse that rose to prominence throughout the Islamic world in its aftermath itself produced a “neo-Orientalist” response. Such a suggestion does, at least, acknowledge some paradigmatic “progress” in the field of Islamic and Middle Eastern studies.

In the field of Safavid studies, by contrast, there seems to have been very little such development in the years since the appearance of some of the very earliest English-language discussions of the period—in the 1920s, at least. This is certainly the case with discussions of the seventeenth century, the second century of the Safavid dynasty, the conventional dates of 1501 to 1722 for which make it Iran’s longest Islamic-period dynasty, an achievement usually unacknowledged by scholars of the period. Beginning at least as far back as the 1920s the seventeenth century has been depicted as beginning with a burst of cultural and intellectual achievement, in an atmosphere of military, political, and economic stability, due largely to the policies undertaken by ‘Abbās I (r. 996–1039/1588–1629). ‘Abbās, it was said, checked the influence of the Qızılbāş tribal coalition which had put his great-grandfather Ismā’īl I (d. 930/1524) in power in two ways: first, he opposed their military might with that of large numbers of Georgian and other Caucasian converts—called ghulām—and, secondly, he drove underground the very millenarianism which had driven the tribal levies’ earlier conquests. Having checked centrifugal domestic forces ‘Abbās then used his “new model army” to retake territory seized by the Ottomans and Uzbeks during the ten or more years of civil war that followed the death of his grandfather Ṭahmāsb I in 984/1576, moved the capital to Isfahan, embellished that city with monumental architectural undertakings of a secular and non-secular nature, patronized poets, artists and philosophers and promoted contacts with Europe.
Yet ‘Abbās also is said to have set in motion certain forces that his successors, universally judged as distinctly less able, could not manage—friction obtained between ‘Abbās’ newly created non-Qızılbaş military corps and the traditional tribal elite. In addition, to meet their own, increasingly extravagant expenses successive courts expanded khāṣṣah lands (lands under direct control of the central court) at the expense of mamālik lands (lands under provincial administration) and degraded the level of the realm’s military preparedness.

‘Abbās’ successors are portrayed as having been born and reared in the ḥaram and, therefore, susceptible to the pernicious influence of such powerful, intriguing parties at court as the ḥaram women and palace eunuchs. As a result later rulers were more interested in debauchery or in religion than in the affairs of state. Sulṭān Ḥusayn (r. 1073–1135/1694–1722), the last Safavid shah, is depicted as more attentive to the goodwill of courtiers and clerics—the latter including the famous Twelver Shiite cleric Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699)—and ostentatious building projects than in mounting any credible response to burgeoning internal socioeconomic and political crises and to bold raids by the Afghans from the East. Following one such incursion, the Afghan capture of Isfahan in 1722 is understood as signalling the dynasty’s end.

This is the view of the period on offer from the time of Edward Browne, in volume IV of his well-known A Literary History of Persia, first published in 1924, through Laurence Lockhart’s 1958 The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty to Roger Savory’s 1980 Iran Under the Safavids. This remains the general understanding of the period, even though during the three decades since the appearance of Savory’s contribution, the field has expanded in an almost logarithmic fashion to encompass all manner and variety of subdiscourses.

Elsewhere, and this is the paper’s second assumption, we have suggested that over the last three to four decades Middle Eastern studies in its recent history as a field has depended heavily on outside discourses and disciplines for its most innovative ideas. The most recent of these is “Subaltern Studies”, a discourse originating some three decades ago in South Asian studies. To date, however, Middle Eastern studies’ recourse to this paradigm has been almost exclusively with reference to modern political and historical phenomena.

In the case of Safavid studies, the case of “popular” Sufi discourse in the second Safavid century has been raised to suggest that the “history from below” approach, long on offer in studies of pre-modern English history in particular, was better equipped and had greater experience in addressing “the popular,” particularly when a “text” is not immediately available. As has been suggested, certainly seventeenth century popular Sufism, let alone other of the period’s “voices from below” have been of, at best, only passing interest to the field.

If the popular has generally been overlooked in Safavid studies to date the court as well has been less than adequately studied. As has been suggested above, the field has portrayed the late-seventeenth-century Safavid shahs as indolent creatures of various factions at court and the latter as an institution so beset by and preoccupied with infighting as to be aloof and unresponsive to the concerns of the realm’s subjects.
The present paper questions the continued usefulness of this conventional understanding of the court by discussing the responses of the centre under the penultimate Safavid ruler, Sulaymān (r. 1076–1135/1666–94), to various of the challenges that marked his reign in comparison with those of his father and immediate predecessor ‘Abbās II (r. 1052–76/1642–66).

A series of unfortunate events

Several sets of calamities are known to have beset the realm during Sulaymān’s reign. As post-1979 secondary sources have shown, for some decades prior to Sulaymān’s assumption of the throne at the death of his father ‘Abbās II, the polity had been battered by economic winds whose origins largely lay outside its own control. The effects of specie outflow, of some concern for several decades, were aggravated by decisions by the foreign trading companies to end or to limit their purchase of Iranian silk in favour of cheaper silk sourced elsewhere: the English East India Company (EIC) ceased all purchases of Iranian silk in 1642, and the Dutch East India Company (VOC), which purchased no silk at all between 1645 and 1651, were moving trade profits to specie and exporting the latter, with the assistance of local Armenian, Banyan (Indian), and Jewish merchants. The specie crisis was further worsened by the harsh winter of 1654–5, itself marked by severe famine and rampant inflation.4

The polity was also affected by what can best be termed “spiritual” challenges. Like the economic these spiritual challenges also had been a matter of concern since the last years of the reign of Sulaymān’s great-great grandfather ‘Abbās I. In the two decades beginning in 1633–4—that is during the reigns of Şafī I and his son and successor ‘Abbās II—some 20 essays were written attacking the popularity of Abū Muslim al-Khurāsānī (executed 137/755), a driving force in toppling the Umayyad Caliphate in 750 CE, and the urban storytellers said to be promoting the tradition and singling out one cleric, Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659), for especially harsh criticism. From the 1650s, authors of essays attacking Sufism began to focus their attacks on particular Sufi groups and their allegedly unorthodox doctrines and practices. Initially, authors combined these with attacks on the veneration of Abū Muslim. Gradually, however, the essay writers become increasingly concerned with named Sufi groups and the alleged “extreme” beliefs and practices of their members. Shaykh ‘Alī al-‘Āmilī (d. 1102/1691–2) focused his attack on the practice of singing (ghinā’) and various of the groups named in essays composed such figures as Muḥammad Ṭāhir (d. 1098/1687) were accused of believing in a variety of other heretical doctrines. The latter included incarnation (hulūl), unitive fusion (ittiḥād) and the unity of existence (vahdat-i vujūd). Members of some groups were said to claim partnership (mushārikah) with God, while other groups were said to believe in reincarnation (tajassum) and predestination (jabr), to claim mystical illumination (kashf) and miraculous grace (karamāt) and to have rejected the authority of the ‘ulamā’ and formal theological knowledge (‘ilm) in favour of esoteric knowledge (‘ilm-i bāṭin). Other groups were accused of abandoning such required practices as daily prayer, fasting and
the pilgrimage and of wearing such unsuitable clothing as wool, felt hats, and yellow clothes and of associating with the insane. Some groups were also accused, so attributed to these groups practices that were clearly deviant, if not degenerate; these were mainly of a sexual nature. The essay writers’ references to some groups clearly indicates these were active at the time of the essays’ composition.5

This anti-Sufi polemic was no mere esoteric discussion. Earlier in the century, ca. 1606, the “Shaykh-i Bahāʾī” Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1030/1621), had resigned from his post as Isfahan’s shaykh al-islām owing at least in part to accusations of Sufi connections. Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640), better known as “Mullā Ṣadrā”, was forced withdrew to the village of Kahak, near Qum, his overt interest in philosophy leaving him, also, vulnerable to charges of interest in Sufism. Mīr Lawḥī (d. after 1083/1672), a prominent anti-Sufi essayist, claimed he was physically attacked by followers of Taqī al-Majlīsī following Mīr Lawḥī’s public allegations as to Taqī al-Majlīsī’s veneration of Abū Muslim. In 1632, shortly after the ascent of Shah Ṣafī (r. 1038–52/1629–42) to the throne and following the 1631 messianic rising of Darvīsh Rizā, an internal coup brought to power at court a new elite configuration that included anti-Sufi elements. Soon the philosophically-minded grand vizier, the Sayyid Khalīfah Sulṭān (d. 1067/1654), was dismissed, his four sons were blinded and Ḥabīballāh al-Karākī, a noted critic of Sufism, was made ṣadr. The continued high profile of such critics of Sufism as al-Karākī, who remained ṣadr until his death in 1652–3, and ‘Alī-Naqī Kamrāʾī (d. 1050/1650), a known opponent of singing who was appointed the capital’s shaykh al-islām in this period, insured the continuation of the anti-Sufi discourse.6

The large number of anti-Sufi essays in this period and, especially, the diatribes launched against particular, clearly contemporary points of doctrine and, especially, practice, suggests the continued popularity of the Abū Muslim tradition and ongoing interest in popular Sufi doctrine and practice on the part of the less visible in Safavid society. The latter would certainly have included the urban lower orders least able to stave off the combined effects of specie outflow, currency devaluations and price inflation and seeking alternative spiritual guidance in the midst thereof.

During the latter years of ‘Abbās II’s reign, the political centre had striven to address both the economic and the ongoing spiritual concerns.

In response to the latter in particular the centre strove to avoid overtly favouring one or the other discourse and indeed to identify itself with elements of each simultaneously and thus to transcend the conflict.

Thus, for example, al-Karākī and Kamrāʾī were left in post until their deaths, clearly in deference to opponents of popular Sufi doctrine and practice.

At the same time, however, the Shah himself evinced some, more public interest in Sufism. Not only did the Shah himself associate openly with figures clearly linked to the popular Sufi discourse but the court also appointed to other influential posts those interested in mystical and philosophical discourse. Khalīfah Sulṭān returned to the post of vizier in 1645. A commission was offered to the same Taqī al-Majlīsī and a post was proffered to Mūḥsin Fayz al-Kāshānī
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(d. 1091/1680), a son-in-law of Mullā Šadrā, in the hope that together they might chart a middle path between the popular and their opponents. In the case of Fayz, especially, it was hoped that he might restrain the former in the process. Fayz was appointed Isfahan’s Friday prayer leader. By his own admission, however, his efforts only exacerbated the capital’s religious tensions and by 1666 Fayz had resigned the post.7

As for the economy, the court actively sought to better the terms of its trade, particularly in silk, with the foreign trading companies and to limit the impact of the specie crisis. The vizier Khalīfah Sulṭān devalued the currency, both in 1645, the year of his appointment, and again in 1648. He also maintained a tough attitude toward the Dutch in negotiations over trade. The failed 1649 attempt to seize Qandahar, and thus extend Iranian control over the caravan routes to India—Iran’s chief foreign trading partner throughout the period—is best seen as part and parcel of these efforts. A 1652 treaty with the Dutch curbed specie export but the Dutch failed to honour their part of the bargain to increase purchases of Iranian silk. Khalīfah Sulṭān died during the midst of a harsh winter that brought about famine and inflation. His replacement, Muḥammad Beg (assassinated 1083/1672), responded to the popular unrest undoubtedly rooted in these conditions, dismissing two unpopular local officials as demanded by Isfahan’s guilds. In 1657, the centre ordered further controls on specie export; these VOC easily evaded with the help of its local agents among Iran’s minorities. In 1659, a survey of national taxable income was ordered, some military expenditures were cancelled and further land was brought under direct control of the court (the khāṣṣah land).

In 1661 Muḥammad Beg was dismissed in favour of the sayyid and sadr Muḥammad Mahdī—son of Ḥabībballāh al-Karakī and the daughter of Luṭfallāh al-Maysī, and descendant of ‘Alī al-Karakī, who had served Ismā‘īl I and Šahmāsp I in the sixteenth century. Muḥammad Mahdī retained the post until 1669, into Sulaymān’s reign. The new vizier continued efforts to check the export of specie and encourage trade via the overland route to the Levant.

In the last years of ‘Abbās II’s reign the success of these efforts was certainly not aided by a widespread drought in 1663 in Iranian Azerbaijan, as well as, from 1665 a series of bankruptcies among local merchants, likely compounded by the specie outflow.8

On balance, however, the overland trade with India and the overland movement of Iranian silk to the Mediterranean and thence to Europe continued to be of greater volume and, hence, importance to the realm, and the court than trade with the companies.9 Continued peace on the Western flank—the 1639 Zuhāb treaty with the Ottomans remained honoured by both parties—allowed for more attention to be focused on these crises and for direction of sources into various projects. These included a series of efforts to divert popular attention from the effects thereof. The Shah, his family and other elites embellished religious shrines, built schools and mosques. ‘Abbās himself also maintained court sponsorship of religious celebrations and festivals, especially including Muḥarram ceremonies, both in Isfahan and in the provinces. Under both Khalīfah Sulṭān and his successor Muḥammad Beg, the court undertook very public moves against the religious
minorities, many of whom were well known to be involved in the export of specie.\textsuperscript{10}

As well the court undertook to enhance the material infrastructure, including the economic infrastructure, so as to maximize the realm’s ability to respond to commercial twists and turns. The Shah and other family members as well as court officials built sarais and two new bridges were also built in Isfahan.\textsuperscript{11} Other elites, including Armenian merchants, participated in various building projects in this period as well.\textsuperscript{12}

Overall, despite the above crises, at the death of ‘Abbās II the realm was at least as prosperous and stable as it was ‘Abbās I’s death in 1038/1629.

The reign of Sulaymān: Conventional wisdom and the reality of the response

The notion that “the rot set in” after the death of ‘Abbās I was first offered by the French Huguenot Jean Chardin (d. 1713) who, in fact, reached Iran some decades after ‘Abbās’ death.\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, both of the last two figures who ruled Safavid Iran before the 1722 Afghan capture of Isfahan, the event conventionally held to mark the end of the dynasty, have been portrayed as distinctly ill-suited for the job.

As for Sulaymān, the paucity of Persian-language sources available for his reign seems to have encouraged an uncritical overreliance both on the accounts of Western visitors to the country and on post-Safavid Persian-language sources. Based thereon, beginning with Browne, the secondary sources have consistently portrayed Sulaymān as a creature of the \textit{ḥaram}, cruel, fond of women and alcohol and indifferent to political and administrative matters. His 28 years of rule are depicted as a period in which corruption and bribery flourished alongside pomp and ceremony.\textsuperscript{14}

Such an understanding ultimately owes its origins to the very traditional “great man” theory and an anachronistic view of the court structure, and the \textit{ḥaram} in particular, with the influence of the latter usually being (pre)judged as pernicious.

A more careful examination of Sulaymān’s reign that encompasses consideration of the contributions of range of personalities other than the Shah himself suggests that the centre’s responses to the above economic and spiritual crises were nuanced and complex, if, in their bases, they represented continuations of those pursued during ‘Abbās II’s reign. If the latter two sets of challenges were familiar ones, their impact on the polity was only accentuated by a series of almost unprecedented series of natural disasters.

While, as noted above, during his father’s reign the realm had been struck by famine and inflation, from the outset of Sulaymān’s reign natural disasters were endemic. Sixteen sixty-six and 1667 witnessed especially poor harvests; the impact of a poor harvest in 1669 was worsened by an outbreak of plague. In fact, although Sulaymān was enthroned in 1666, two very bad harvests, a violent earthquake in Shīrvān coupled with Cossack raids in the Caspian region suggested that the ceremony had been performed at an inauspicious time.

As a result Sulaymān was enthroned again in Isfahan itself in March 1668. Despite its being held twice, Sulaymān’s accession was perhaps the smoothest of
the polity’s accessions to date. The array of constituencies attending the second ceremony in Isfahan—“all the amirs and notables and learned men and religious scholars (‘ulamā‘)”15 as well as the populace, according to Khātūnābādī—at testifies to the degree of loyalty the crown enjoyed.

The natural disasters continued apace, however. The 1670s were a decade of crises, swept by drought, harsh winters, swarms of locusts, famine and earthquakes; in 1678–9 some 70,000 were said to have perished from famine in Isfahan alone. In 1681 famine struck Armenia and Azerbaijan. The rest of the 1680s were marked by rampant plague: plague struck Gilân in 1684–5, spread to Ardabîl, killing some 80,000, and Hamadân. In 1686–7 plague struck Azerbaijan, Māzandarān, Astarābād and the capital. In 1689 plague killed thousands in Shiraz and affected areas from Baku to Basra, Mosul and Baghdad. The early 1690s saw plague strike the North and West, especially Baku and Tiflis, Basra, and Baghdad: a 1,000 per day were dying in the latter end of 1691. Southeast Iran was also struck, and, two years after Sulaymān’s death, in 1696, Fars was hit by drought and famine.16

Fortunately, the realm remained at peace with its Ottoman neighbours over this period: the court did not respond to repeated entreaties from a variety of sources to take up arms against the Porte.17 Thus both attention and resources that might have been directed to foreign military ventures could be channelled to domestic concerns.

In the face of the combination of natural disasters and economic challenges, the centre’s response was, in fact, quick. Immediately upon his second accession Sulaymān moved to address Isfahan’s price inflation. In 1669 the vizier al-Karakī was replaced with Shaykh ‘Alī Khān, of the Zangana Kurds, a tribal grouping with a history of long association with the Safavids. Shaykh ‘Alī himself then undertook measures to cut costs and increase revenues. In 1672, coincident with another harsh winter, consequent food shortages and further inflation Shaykh ‘Alī was briefly dismissed, no doubt in response to resulting domestic unrest. Obviously an otherwise competent administrator he was back in post after 14 months. He thereupon resumed his efforts to raise income: he instituted tax farming for collection of customs duties, raised some local tax rates, attempted to re-centralize the domestic movement of silk and negotiated a new trade agreement with the Dutch.

If some revenue raising measures were successful, efforts to control specie outflow were not, for the same reasons that such measures under his predecessors were also less than successful.18 At Shaykh ‘Alī’s death in 1689, just before the death of Sulaymān himself, the new vizier, Muḥammad Ṭāhir, continued with his predecessor’s efforts.19

**A master stroke: Facing the spiritual challenges**

If both natural disasters and the many factors affecting the realm’s economy remained outside the direct influence of the centre, the domestic spiritual situation—to the extent that it was not aggravated by both—was less so. In this area also the centre adhered to the programme dating to the later years of the reign of ‘Abbās II, to strike a balance in identifying with the conflicting discourses such
that the person of the Shah stood above and, thus, transcended the fray as a symbol of the unity of the realm. In reality, as it had during the reign of ‘Abbās II, in this area the centre pursued a policy as nuanced and complex as the spiritual challenge itself.

The anti-Sufi tirade continued apace in this period, attesting to the continued vitality of the popular search for alternative spiritual guidance, perhaps especially on the part of those of the “lower orders” least able to weather the economic and natural crises noted above. Muhammad Ṭāhir continued his polemic against philosophical inquiry and both Mīr Lawhī and Shaykh ‘Alī al-‘Āmilī continued their polemics.

Although the latter two never received any official recognition, Muḥammad Ṭāhir was careful, as he had been during the reign of ‘Abbās II, to demonstrate his loyalty to the larger Safavid project by dedicating various essays to the Shah himself. He was appointed Qum’s šaykh al-islām in this period. Another prominent participant in the attacks on Sufism, al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī (d. 1693), was appointed to the same post in Mashhad.

In this context the field’s understanding of the 1687 appointment of Taqī al-Majlisī’s son Muḥammad Bāqīr as Isfahan’s šaykh al-islām merits re-examination.

For decades the secondary sources have universally condemned Muḥammad Bāqīr as “one of the greatest, most powerful and most fanatical mujtahidīn of the Safavi period”. Browne also pointed to Muhammad Bāqīr’s “ruthless persecution of Sufis and heretics” and blamed the prominence to which he rose for Isfahan’s fall to the Afghans in 1722. Lockhart noted his implacable hostility to philosophy and that Muḥammad Bāqīr had spearheaded “a religious campaign” which “took the form of denunciation, and often persecution, of all who did not follow the straight and narrow path of his own choosing”. The latter, it was said, sapped the polity of any ability to respond to the Afghan invasion. More recent scholars have been little kinder.

In fact the appointment, made during the vizierate of the same Shaykh ‘Alī Khān and, as such, part and parcel of the centre’s responses to the range of crises affecting the polity, was something of a master stroke.

Muḥammad Bāqīr’s immediate predecessor in the post, Muḥammad Bāqīr Sabzavārī (d. 1090/1679), had held the post since 1653—the year before Muḥammad Bāqīr’s father Taqī al-Majlisī and Fayẕ al-Kāshānī were called to court—and later presided over the second coronation of Sulaymān in 1668. His appointment, as the calls to Taqī al-Majlisī and Fayẕ, was part of an effort to balance the court’s affiliation with both sides of the anti-Sufi discourse. During his tenure Sabzavārī, like Fayẕ, had attempted to steer a middle course between these conflicting spiritual polemics. However, as Fayẕ also had come under attack by those whose passions he had been asked to still, so after Sulaymān’s second accession, Sabzavārī himself came under attack: in 1676–7, two years before his death, the same Shaykh ‘Alī al-‘Āmilī composed an essay critical of Sabzavārī’s effort to chart a middle position on the legality of singing and other scholars, whose views on singing paralleled those of al-‘Āmilī, launched attacks on
Sabzvārī’s position on the legitimacy of Friday prayer during the absence of the Imam. In essence, by his death Sabzvārī, as Fayz, by 1666, had become part of the problem and not the solution.24

Muhammad Bāqir was uniquely well positioned to replace Sabzvārī. By the late 1680s the al-Majlisī family, originally Lebanese, was now well integrated into Isfahan society. Muhammad Bāqir’s nine sisters were married to Iranian clerics, sādat among them, who were or would soon become prominent in their own right.

Too, Muhammad Bāqir himself was personally acquainted with the spiritual turmoil of the period. He had in fact studied with scholars of the period’s opposing currents of thought.

On one hand, he was a student of Fayz and Khalīl al-Qazvīnī (d. 1089/1678–9), whose philosophical, if not popular Sufi, tendencies were well known; the latter had accepted a commission from ‘Abbās II at the same time as Fayz and Muhammad Bāqir’s own father. Via these and his father’s own teachers and associates, Muhammad Bāqir was linked to all the major scholars associated with the court-clerical alliance which had underpinned the reigns of ‘Abbās I and ‘Abbās II—including Shaykh-i Bahā’ī and Khalīfah Sultān—and such scholars of Sulaymān’s reign as Sabzvārī and the philosopher Ḥusayn Khānsārī (d. 1099/1687–8). Well prior to his appointment also, Muhammad Bāqir’s loyalty to the Safavid project, like that of his father and his father’s associates, was well established. Indeed, as a sign of the court’s favour he had received financial assistance from the court for the project of ḥadīth compilation that eventually resulted in Bihār al-anwār, parts of which he dedicated to Sulaymān.25

At the same time, however, before his father’s death Muhammad Bāqir had also studied with Shaykh ‘Alī al-‘Āmilī and Muhammad Ṭāhir, both fierce opponents of popular Sufism and philosophical inquiry. He had also studied with al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, whose own anti-Sufism was well known, and was himself on record with some, albeit perfunctory, reservations about popular religious doctrines and practices.26

On balance, with such connections Muhammad Bāqir was in a better position than his father, Fayz, and Sabzvārī to chart a middle course in the spiritual conflict. This he did by grounding his discourse firmly on the Imams themselves. Thus Bihār al-anwār, drawing on his early religious “primers”, focused squarely on the Imams as the ultimate sources of knowledge on all matters of doctrine and practice. Thus, in the face of conflicting discourses over doctrine and practice, Muhammad Bāqir’s approach was to call on all parties to acknowledge and to identify with perhaps the single-most distinctive and defining aspect of the faith, the Imams and their role. As such al-Majlisī challenged contemporary divisive polemics, reinforced the position of senior clerics, including himself, as delegated by the imām to interpret issues of jurisprudential and theological import and to undertake such matters of daily practical import to the community based on their unique abilities to access the sources, including the leading of Friday prayer, and firmly linked these clerics to, and thereby legitimized, the broader “Safavid project.”27
Indeed, over the period the court also continued its other efforts to identify itself as the chief protector and propagator of the faith. The wherewithal for such efforts remained available to the centre as, in fact most of Iran’s silk continued to move to Europe across Ottoman territory—with whom the polity remained at peace—and the realm’s major trading partner remained India, also reached via overland routes.28

As a testament to the centre’s effort to associate itself with the faith, the family and other courtiers also built schools and mosques. Sulaymān’s family also sent money to the Shiite shrine cities in Iraq, although these had been under Ottoman control since 1639. To embellish further embellishing the centre’s authority in the face of the challenges noted above, undertook such larger building projects such as the Hasht Bihāst palace and the Tālār-i ashraf were also undertaken.29

The court also continued its role as chief promoter of all manner of popular religious practices. Its involvement in Muharram ceremonies, for example, insured that these, especially, were festivals of “public entertainment,” with “diversion” clearly in mind, rather than purely “devotional” activities. Elaborate Muharram ceremonies were also mounted in the provincial capitals. Sulaymān himself also embellished several of the capital’s imāzādahs and other popular religious sites. The period also witnessed moves to re-emphasize the Shah’s status as head of the Safavid Sufi order.30

The court also continued its policy of “redirecting” popular dissatisfaction toward the religious and ethnic minorities, as had been the case during the earlier vizierates of both Khalīfah Sulṭān and Muḥammad Beg. Thus following his appointment as the capital’s shaykh al-islām and still during the vizierate of Shaykh ‘Ali Khān, whose anti-Armenian measures have been noted, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, otherwise tolerant of Christians and Jews31—as “People of the Book”—ordered the destruction of the idols of Isfahan’s Indian community, whose role in the export of specie was well known and at the root of the widespread popular resentment with the Indians noted by foreigners resident at the time.32

**Conclusion**

The field’s preoccupation with the court itself as a monolithic, undynamic institution in favour of focus on “the great man” has obscured attention to the nuanced manner in which the centre addressed these crises over the second Safavid century let alone the reasons for the failures and very real successes of those responses.

As a first step toward challenging the overwhelmingly teleological concerns of the field, close attention both to the crises affecting the Safavid polity over the reigns of ‘Abbās II and his son Sulaymān, and to the responses of the centre as a whole thereeto, suggests a fair degree of continuity in both over the half-century in question.

The efforts undertaken during Sulaymān’s reign to address the spiritual challenges facing the polity, together with the departure of Muhammad Ṭāhir to Qum and his death in 1098/1687, the year of al-Majlisī’s appointment, al-Ḥurr
al-ʿĀmili’s departure to Mashhad and his death six years after al-Majlišī’s appointment, and the deaths of Mīr Lawḥī after 1672 and Shaykh ʿAlī al-ʿĀmili in 1691–2, seem to have had a positive result. The extreme anti-Sufi polemic is harder to trace in contemporary sources in the years following al-Majlišī’s appointment. At the same time, if foreign accounts are at all reliable, the Shah’s own reputation among the populace remained high.

Shāh Sulaymān died in his bed from illness, having reigned a few years short of three decades. Less than two weeks later, in August 1694, with Sulaymān’s body on the way to Qum for burial, the eldest of Sulaymān’s seven sons, 26-year old Sultān Ḥusayn, acceded to the throne with the help of his aunt Maryam Begam, herself the wife of the sadr, and other court attendants. Pomp marked the coronation: drums and trumpets sounded and lions and elephants paraded in ‘Abbās I’s illuminated square, and robes of honour were bestowed on various notables.

The smoothness of Sultān Ḥusayn’s accession, like that of his father, underlines the degree to which, between and among each other, the realm’s various key constituencies were still cooperating more than competing at this juncture. As to foreign concerns, at the onset of Ḥusayn’s reign, the realm comprised roughly the same territory as that at the death of ‘Abbās I, minus Baghdad and its environs and some Eastern areas lost during Șafi’i’s reign. Indeed, the realm was at peace with its Ottoman and Mughal neighbours. Foreign trade and, especially, the outflow of specie, did continue to be matters of concern but their impact remained, as before, more limited in nature than is generally thought.

Nevertheless, it is Sulaymān’s son who receives the lion’s share of the blame in the secondary sources for the fall of the capital to the Afghans and, thus, the demise of the dynasty itself. The reality of his role therein, let alone the extent to which those at the time understood the events of 1722 as marking the dynasty’s end, await a similarly more nuanced examination of his reign than has heretofore been offered.

Notes

2 Lockhart rehearsed aspects of his 1958 “analysis” of late-Safavid Iran in his Nadir Shah: A Critical Study Based Mainly Upon Contemporary Sources (see Lockhart (1938)). Browne, of course was at Pembroke College, Cambridge, from which Lockhart received his degree in 1913.
3 See Newman (forthcoming[c]). Recent examples of the preoccupation of the Middle East Studies variant of Subaltern Studies with “the modern” include Atabaki (2007); Chalcraft (2008). Even its Ottoman studies variant seems skewed toward the modern; see Quataert (2008).

Subaltern Studies as founded by scholars of South Asia was itself inherently preoccupied with the modern period. This remains the case: Despite its title, Bates (2007) is overwhelmingly devoted to consideration of the period from the nineteenth century. A reading of Spivak (1994) suggests a lack of interest in the pre-modern was intrinsic to Subaltern Studies.
4 See Floor (2000a), 80, 173. On the VOC’s silk and specie export, see Matthee (1999), 136f, 244; Floor/Clawson (2000), 348–50; Floor (2000a), 173, 181–96, 327f.
5 See Newman (1999b), 95–108; idem (1999a), 135–64; idem (forthcoming[b]).
6 See idem (1986), 188–90; (1999a), 143; Babayan (1993), 317.
9 On trade with India, see Floor/Clawson (2000), 347f; Floor (2000a), 199–216.
12 The well-known All Saviour’s Cathedral dates from this period. See Blake (1999), 89f, 185–90.
13 “When the Great Prince [‘Abbās I] ceased to live Persia ceased to prosper”, as quoted in Lockhart (1938), 16; see as well Savory (1980) 103, 226; Stevens (1974), 441. Chardin arrived in Iran in the mid-1660s, some four decades after the death of the “Great Prince”. Chardin’s information about “inside” goings-on at court, on which the field has relied for so long, came from an unnamed court eunuch who, if one believes other secondary-source discussions of the conflicting factions at court during Chardin’s residence in the country (1666–7, 1669 and 1672–7), would hardly have been a disinterested observer. See Matthee (forthcoming); Newman (2006b), 147 n. 12. See Emerson (1991), 369–77. On the factional feuding at court see, for example, Babaie et al. (2004).
14 See Browne (1902–24), IV:112f, citing the Polish Jesuit Tadeusz Krusiński (d. 1751), who reached Iran in 1704, and Chardin; Lockhart (1938), 29f, citing Fryer, in Iran from 1677–8, Sanson, in Iran from 1683 to 1691 and Muhammad Muḥsin’s Zubdat al-tavārīkh, composed for Nādir Shāh in 1741–2, nearly half a century after Sulaymān’s death; Roemer (1986), 304–7, 310, citing, among others, the German explorer Engelbert Kaempfer (d. 1716), in Iran from 1683–4; Savory (1980), 238f, citing Chardin. On the rising influence of the haram from the reign of ‘Abbās II, cf. also Matthee (1994), 81; idem (1998), 151f, citing Chardin, Krusiński, Kaempfer and the Frech priest François Sanson among other foreign sources. Ferrier (1996), 69–75, summarises Chardin’s remarks on the palace and the haram; on the problematic nature of Chardin’s access to the haram, see n. 13 above. On Sulaymān’s fondness for drink, based on Carmelite sources, see Floor (1998), 230.  
15 Khāṭūnābādī (1352/1973), 529f.
16 See ibid. 537f, 543f; Ja’ fariyān (1373sh), 331f; idem (1379sh/2000), II:761f, 777; Matthee (1999), 177f; Floor (1998), 229.
19 See Matthee (1999), 175–92, 244; Floor (2000a), 174, 189–91, 194; idem (2001), 38 n. 255.
20 Chardin noted the deterioration of the traditional centre of Isfahan, based around Ḥārān-i vilāyāt square while the centre established under ‘Abbās I to the Southeast was flourishing. In 1704, ten years after Sulaymān’s death the Dutch painter de Bruyn spoke of the old maydān as being used mainly as stables, with only the poorer guilds still carrying on any business. See Blake (1999), 113f, 181f; Keyvani (1982), 125f; Haneda (1996).
21 In his Persian-language *al-Favā‘īd al-dīniyyah* Muhammad Ṭāhir argued philosophical inquiry was incompatible with the faith. See Ṭibrānī (1353–98), I:428, XV:71–3, 287, XVI:335f; XVIII:101f; Newman (1999a), n. 21, n. 43; idem (1999b), n. 46. On al-Hurr, see idem (forthcoming[c]).

Both Muhammad Ṭāhir and al-Hurr were, no doubt, acutely aware of what might happen if any criticism crossed the line to criticism of the legitimacy of the sitting shah: if Chardin is to be trusted, ca. 1664 a certain Mullā Qāsim's criticisms of the centre included an argument that “another pure branch of the imams” (Blake (1999), 182f; Calmard (1996), 168) specifically the son of *shaykh al-islām*, whose mother was a daughter of ‘Abbās I, should rule instead. Mullā Qāsim was executed at some point and is otherwise unknown in the Arabic and Persian sources.

22 Browne (1902–24), IV:120. Also, see ibid. 194f, 366, 404.

23 Lockhart (1958), 32f, 70, 71 n. 1. Lockhart referred to Browne (1902–24), IV:120.

24 See Newman (1999a), n. 21, n. 43; idem (2001), 44; Ṭibrānī (1353–98), XV:66f, 79–81.

25 On the family, see Tabrīsī (1374sh), 173f; Bihibānī (1370sh), 99f; Dānishpazhūh (1951–6), V:1144f, 1613. As to his loyalty to the Safavids, Majlīṣi favoured the pro-court position on Friday prayer and, in the tradition of ‘Alī Karākī, in a 1662 Persian-language work he had upheld the authority and legitimacy of temporal rulers and cooperation with them, even if they were unjust tyrants, in order to preserve and protect the community of believers. As early as 1661, he had interpreted certain hadith texts as referring to the appearance of the Safavids. See Ṭibrānī (1353–98), XV:66, 79. On the debate over Friday prayer in the period, see Newman (2001); idem (2006a), 237–69.

Al-Majlīṣi did not himself live to the completion of *Bihār*, an early version of which was finished in 1659, the year of his father’s death when he himself was thirty-two years old, and several volumes of which were completed by 1670. On these dates see Khāṭūnābādī (1352/1973), 535f; Kohlberg (1990).

26 On his teachers, see the sources in n. 23 as well as Dānishpazhūh (1951–6), V:1613. On his critique of Sufism, see Newman (2006b), 226f n. 51.

27 On his reconciliation of the Hellenistic approach to medicine with the Imams' *ahādīth*, see Newman (2003); idem (forthcoming[a]).

28 On trade with India, Iran’s major trading partner over the period, see Floor/Clawson (2000), 347f; Floor (2000a), 199–216. On the overland silk trade with Europe, see Matthee (1998), 154f; idem (1999), 173, 192f, 200–3; Floor (1993), 354; idem (2000a), 174; Herzig (1992), 65, 69–73. In the early 1690s the bazaars of Tabriz and Ardabil were well stocked with domestic and foreign luxury items. See Keyvani (1982), 126f. Not surprisingly, the court evinced increasingly less interest in addressing foreign trade concerns.

29 See Blake (1999), 44, 71f, 76, 89f, 152–4, 168, 191. On Armenian churches, see Carswell (1968), 57, 59; Hunfarār (1344h/1665), 516. McCabe (1999), 188–94, notes that despite the taxes imposed on the community “the richest were still immensely wealthy” (Ibid. 191), and Chardin (see Ferrier (1996), 65) noted that Julfa contained over 3,500 houses, the most lavish of which were located along the river.

30 See Calmard (1996), 158f, 162f, 165f; Ferrier (1998), 399; Blake (1999), 170f; Hunfarār (1344h/1665), 531; Ja’fāryān (1379h/2000), II:362. *Nasabnāmah-yi safavīyāh*, completed in 1679 by a descendant of Šafi al-Dīn’s own spiritual guide (*mursīd*) Shaykh Zāhid of Gīlān, accorded special attention to the Sufi origins of the Safavid project. *Khuld-i barān*, completed in 1667 by Muhammad Yūsuf Qazvīnī, the brother of Mīrzā Muhammad Ṭāhir, the author of *Abbāsnāmah* and vizier from 1689, took a similar view of Safavid history. On these and other sources, see Newman (2006b), 228 n. 59.

31 In line with the *hadith* al-Majlīṣi sanctioned recourse to Christian and Jewish doctors. See Newman (2003), 392.

32 See Khāṭūnābādī (1352/1973), 541; Blake (1999), 130.

33 It is notable that the opponents of Sufism apparently produced few students of note where those of al-Majlīṣi, for example, were numerous.
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34  See Minorsky (1943), 13, 13 n. 3, citing Chardin and Sanson.
35  See Khātūnābādī (1352/1973), 549f, 558, where he notes that in 1708–9 robes were also distributed to religious figures.
36  From Lockhart on there is little change in this critique. See, for example, Lockhart (1938), citing de Bruyn; Matthee (1999), 204f, citing the post-1722 anonymously written Mukāfātānāmah and Mar‘ashi’s much later Majma‘ al-tavārīkh. On Bāqir al-Majlisī’s role in the dynasty’s fall, according to the Western-language secondary sources, see Newman (2003), 371–4.

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11 Court culture and cosmology in the Mughal Empire
Humāyūn and the foundations of the dīn-i ilāhī

Eva Orthmann

Manesson Mallet’s Description de l’Univers, contains an interesting picture entitled “Le grand Mogol”.1 The Mughal Emperor, dressed in blue and red clothes, is sitting on a European-style chair which stands on a podium. One man is bowing down before him, while another one is watching. The Emperor is adorned with a huge necklace. In his left hand, he holds a large golden globe. A nimbus in the shape of a huge star is shining from behind his head. With its succession of straight and curved rays, the nimbus of the emperor resembles the one of Louis XIV (d. 1715) in his representation as Apollo.2

It was not however the French Sun King who served as a model for Manesson-Mallet, but a recently discovered portrait of Nūr al-Dīn Jahāngīr (r. 1013–37/1605–27).3 The latter is a huge picture of the emperor which—except for being side-inverted and omitting the marginal inscriptions—resembles in many respects the Mughal’s representation in the Description de l’Univers. Three minor changes should be mentioned: in the original picture, the globe in the emperor’s hand is not golden, but rather silver or whitish; the chair is golden, and not wooden; and the emperor’s feet are resting on a pedestal-like folded carpet in the Indian painting, while in the French copy, the entire chair is on a podium.

In her study on Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Akbar (r. 963–1013/1556–1605) and Jahāngīr, Heike Franke convincingly shows that the remarkable picture of Jahāngīr was intended to portray the emperor as ruler over “both worlds”, ږūrah and ڏānā. The visible world (ږūrah) is represented by the globe and illuminated by the emperor’s nimbus like the earth by the sun.4 The world of meanings, or spiritual world (ڏānā), is not shown in the picture, but mentioned several times in the inscriptions.5 The rule over ږūrah and ڏānā is identified by Franke as a cornerstone of the imperial ideology of Jahāngīr and explained as a further development of the dīn-i ilāhī, whose initial elaboration is attributed to Akbar both by the sources and the consensus of historical research.

In this chapter, however, I will argue that central elements in the staging of power of both Jahāngīr and Akbar can be traced back to Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad Humāyūn (r. 937–47/1530–40 and 962–3/1555–6). This is especially true for the cosmological connotations of imperial rule manifest in the emperor’s court culture as well as in the globe in Jahāngīr’s hand in the aforementioned picture. Finally, I
will consider the consequences of this observation for our understanding of the foundations of the dīn-i lāhī.

Humāyūn’s cosmological structures

To investigate the importance of cosmology in Mughal ideology and the astral and solar staging of imperial rule, it is important to look back to the beginning of Mughal rule in India. While Zahir al-Dīn Muhammad Bābur (d. 937/1530), the founder of the Mughal dynasty, does not seem to have referred to cosmology for legitimacy, Humāyūn was deeply interested in sciences, astrology and cosmology. Depicted with a pair of compasses in his hand in a famous miniature of Timūr-i Lang or “Tamerlane” (r. 771–807/1370–1405) and his successors, he is said to have ordered and undertaken astronomical observations and to have interpreted the horoscope of his son Akbar by himself. No other Mughal emperor is said to have had such a profound understanding of science and natural philosophy.

Humāyūn was however not only interested in science, but made use of his knowledge to develop an ingenious staging of power which reflected the ideological foundation of his rule. Unfortunately, not much information on his conception of power has been preserved, and some details would be hard to understand without our knowledge of later practices in the time of Akbar. Taken together they are however clear enough to reconstruct a consistent cosmological ideology.

By far the richest source on Humāyūn’s court ceremonial—and, in my opinion, on the emperor in general—is the Qānūn-i Humāyūnī or Humāyūnīnâmah of Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Khwāndamīr. Khwāndamīr, the famous grandson of Mīr Khwānd and author of several chronicles, came to India in 1528. As he died in 942/1534–5, the Qānūn-i Humāyūnī is one of the rare sources on Humāyūn written during his lifetime and therefore not contaminated by retrospective interpretations from Akbar’s time. Completed even before Humāyūn fled to Iran, it shows the second Mughal emperor as a powerful and mighty ruler whose later losses and failures were not yet apparent.

The Qānūn-i Humāyūnī is however a very strange record of Humāyūn’s rule. It does not describe any battles or conquests, but revolves around the emperor’s innovations and inventions. It mainly describes buildings, construction and festivities. Hitherto, these descriptions have mostly been interpreted as manifestations of Humāyūn’s inclination to pleasure and entertainment and his ineptness for rule. As these inventions and innovations were however so important for Humāyūn that he ordered the only known record of his reign to be focused on them, they were presumably related to his imperial conception of power. Far from being easy to understand—most of the descriptions are in verse—they give us a rare insight into the cosmological connotations of Humāyūn’s court culture if interpreted against the background of astrology and Islamic natural philosophy.

These connotations can best be understood from the description of the “carpet of mirth” and the “tent of the twelve zodiac signs”. The carpet was designed as a huge two-dimensional cosmic model:
One of his pleasure-increasing inventions was the “carpet of mirth”. This was a round carpet corresponding to the orbits and the spheres and the elemental regions. The first circle which corresponded to the sphere of Atlas was white. The second blue, the third black, like Saturn, the fourth, which was the house of Jupiter, was light brown, the fifth, which was related to Mars, was ruby-coloured. The sixth, which was the house of the sun, was golden, the seventh, which was the house of Venus, was bright green, the eighth, which was the station of Mercury, was iris-coloured \[sūsanī\]. For the nature of Mercury is composite and when blue and rose are mixed, the result is \[sūsanī\] . . . . The ninth circle, which was the station of the moon, was white. After the station of the moon came the region of fire and air, then that of earth and water. The inhabited quarter of the earth was divided into seven climates.

His majesty had this carpet spread on a round platform in the size of the carpet. To himself, he assigned the golden sphere, similar to the sun in lustre, light and purity. Each group was ordered to sit in accordance with the one of the seven planets which was appropriate to it in the circle which corresponded therewith. Thus, the Indian officers and the old men sat in the circle of Saturn, which is black. The sādāt and the religious scholars \[‘ulamā’\] sat in the circle of Jupiter which is light brown. And so on.12

The composition of this carpet corresponded to the composition of the world according to Islamic natural philosophy.13 In that conception, the entire cosmos was composed of concentric spheres. The sublunary world, that is the world below the moon, consisted of the four elements of earth, water, air and fire, with earth as the heaviest in the middle. While every element usually had a sphere of its own, on the carpet two elements shared one sphere. Probably, this was done to place the sphere of the sun in the middle of the spheres.14 The planetary spheres were composed of the five planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn plus the moon and the sun which were regarded as planets, too. The colours attributed to those spheres followed traditional patterns; the combination of planet and colour were however not uniform, but diversified.15 Beyond the sphere of Saturn, the sphere of the fixed stars was dark blue. As the fixed stars were not imagined as radiating bodies, but as small holes in this dark sphere, the Atlas sphere which was seen through these holes had to be white. In some cosmologies, the sphere of God’s pedestal and God’s throne were added beyond the Atlas sphere.16

The sphere of the fixed stars and the Atlas sphere were however not only depicted on the carpet, but also reconstructed three-dimensionally by the “tent of the twelve zodiac signs”.17 It was a kharqāh or trellis tent; that is a round tent with a solid frame similar to a yurt.18 The tent consisted of an inner and an outer cover. The inner cover was divided into 12 compartments corresponding to the 12 zodiac signs. These compartments were probably shaped by the tent’s framework, especially the laths of the roof construction.19 By representing the stars as small holes in the inner cover through which the outer cover was shining, this tent perfectly imitated the conception of the sphere of the fixed stars as a globe with
small holes, and the Atlas sphere as a comprehensive outer globe. One might assume that the colour of the inner cover was dark blue, and the outer one was shining white, but without giving any details, the text suggests that they were more colourful. In any case, the carpet and the tent together represented the entire cosmos. This cosmic model was easy to transport and could be erected at different places and occasions. The tent and the carpet could each be employed separately, too.\textsuperscript{20}

**Cosmology and administration**

The limited information available about the use of the carpet and the tent give us some insight into Humāyūn’s staging of power and the administrative structure of his realm. According to the above-mentioned tradition, the carpet was used for assemblies (\textit{majālis}).\textsuperscript{21} In these assemblies, people were seated on the carpet in the sphere of the planet corresponding with their status or function. Regrettably, the details of the arrangement are only mentioned for the sphere of Jupiter and Saturn, and not for all the planetary spheres, and nothing is revealed about the elementary spheres and the sphere of the fixed stars. Therefore we do not know if they were empty or if people were sitting there, too. The planetary arrangement points at any rate to a classification system of Humāyūn’s courtiers relying on cosmology.

The existence of such a system is corroborated by further evidence from the \textit{Qānūn-i Humāyūnī} and other sources, allowing us to reconstruct a coherent classification of the courtiers and attendants into elements, planets and zodiac signs.

The four elementary groups were called \textit{bakhsh} (department). The four departments of earth, water, air and fire were each presided over by a superintendent. People belonging to one of these departments were responsible for duties related to their respective element. Thus, those belonging to the water department for example were responsible for the wine cave and the digging of canals, and those belonging to the fire department for the artillery, weapons, various types of engines, and so on. They were clothed in garments in their element’s colour; those of the fire department for instance in red.\textsuperscript{22} Presumably, they sat in the elementary spheres of the carpet during the \textit{majlis}.

The planetary classification of people mentioned in the description of the carpet is corroborated by Firishtah’s account of one of the emperor’s palaces.\textsuperscript{23} This palace had seven rooms, each of them dedicated to one planet and decorated with its attributes. Every day of the week, Humāyūn held his audience in the room of that day’s planetary ruler, attended by people related to that planet, and engaged in that planet’s activities. Not only was the emperor himself dressed in that planet’s colour,\textsuperscript{24} but also people attending his court put on coloured clothes to match the designated planet.\textsuperscript{25} The chances are that these people were the same as those sitting in the planetary spheres on the carpet.

While the grouping into elementary and planetary groups did not reveal any differences of status and rank, the grouping into 12 arrows or zodiac signs was done according to hierarchical criteria:
And among the customs introduced by this fortunate and ingenious king was that of the division into arrows [taqṣīm-i tūr]. By this means, the rank of each of the servants of the throne, the residence of the majesty, was marked.

According to the different standards of gold, the ranks of the people composing the classes of dawlat, saʿādat and murād are divided into twelve distinctive arrows, and the rank and dignity of every one has been conveyed to an appropriate position. . . . Each of the described arrows had three grades, the highest one, the middle and the lowest—and He has mastery over all he wants.

And it should not remain secret and hidden from the intelligent and sagacious minds, that these numerals which the illustrious Pādishāh has chosen for classifying the positions of the courtiers and all servants of the royal court are an inspiration from the Lord and a Divine dispensation, and a cause for transferring the order of eternal affairs onto the servants of the royal court. Because twelve is a number according to which since the beginning of the world to the present time, many religious and universal affairs have been arranged.

First of all, the eighth sphere is divided into twelve zodiac signs, and the revolution of the sun and the moon and the other stars and the seven planets are contingent on the zodiac. The calculation of the months and the years are based on their course, and the light of the truth of these words shines similar to the course of the days and months on the face of the different parts of the universe.

Even though Khvāndamīr subsequently provides other possible justifications for the choice of the number 12—it is the number of the Shiite aʿīmma, the number of the tribes of Isrāʾīl, and so on—, the cosmological explanation seems to be the most important one. The subdivision into three subcategories, too, makes most sense with regard to astronomy or rather astrology, as the 12 zodiacal signs of 30° arc length each are subdivided into three so-called decans of 10° arc length. Perceived as zodiacal signs, this classification into 12 arrows would complete the elementary and planetary groupings. Together they would form a thorough model of the cosmos, assigning a place to everybody in the majlis seemingly irrespective of ethnicity, family background and religion.

The Sun King and the Planet King

Let us now look at the place of Humāyūn on the carpet: he is sitting in the sphere of the sun, “similar to the sun in lustre, light and pureness”. The parallel between the King and the sun is not only drawn by Khvāndamīr, but obviously intended by the choice of the emperor’s place. The entire scenario suggests that Humāyūn represented the sun and identified with it. Other details of Humāyūn’s behaviour corroborate this interpretation. The emperor’s identification with the sun was in particular expressed by his imitation of its daily and annual course.

To imitate its daily course, Humāyūn showed his face every morning at sunrise to the people:
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Every morning when the Jamshīd-like sun raises its head out of the collar of the horizon and adorns its body with the garment of satin [āṭlas] of the exalted sphere, and when the heavenly sky puts the golden crown of the world-adorning sun on its head, and shows its shining face [jabīn-i mubīn] to the inhabitants of the earth, the king adorns his person in a robe of such a colour as was appropriate to the day. And dressed in a new suit, he places on his head a crown of the same colour—as the Saturday is the day of Saturn, and the colour of Saturn is, according to the astrologers, black, the king dressed on that day in black—and shows the face of the sun of joy [tal’at-i khurshīd-i bahjat rā] to the people, like Jupiter shining in the darkness of night.32

Leaving aside for the moment the colour of Humāyun’s clothes, it is quite evident that the emperor’s face was considered to be the image of the sun, and that in showing himself at sunrise, he intentionally behaved like the rising sun. This blending of King and sun is further intensified by the metaphorical language of Khvāndamīr who uses human terminology for the description of the sun—it has a body and puts on clothes,— and astral metaphors for the King, tal’āt usually meaning “ascendant”, a word mostly used in the context of astrology.33

The annual course of the sun was imitated by the celebration of Nawrūz. The best description of this festival is again given in the Qānūn-i Humāyūnī:

In the same way, the wisdom-acquiring King holds a festival on the date on which the sun reaches its exaltation. He has dispensed with the ancient Nawrūz, as the latter day was observed by the Magi kings, and the followers of the orthodox faith have condemned the reactivation of their observances.34

The Emperor, protector of the world, like the shining sun which by the light of its own presence provides to the sign of Aries the happy tidings of eternal exaltation, took on that day his seat in the tent of the twelve zodiac signs and raised to the seventh heaven the ranks of a number of the court, the nest of imperial dignity, by the award of robes of honour and suitable appointments.35

Nawrūz, the beginning of the New Year, has since ancient times been celebrated in Iran. According to the Shāhnāmah, it was introduced by the legendary King Jamshīd, who is said to have mounted his throne on that day and to have sat there similar to the shining sun in heaven.36 Traditionally Nawrūz is celebrated at the moment of the sun’s entry into the sign of Aries; in astronomical terms, at its transit. On this date, the 1st of Farvardīn, the New Year begins.

Humāyūn however did not celebrate Nawrūz at the sun’s transit, but rather at the moment of its sharaf or exaltation. Within the 360 degrees of the zodiac, every planet reaches its upmost power and strength at a specific place or rather at a specific degree. This degree is called the planet’s exaltation. Al-Bīrūnī compares it with the thrones of kings and other high positions. According to the Muslim tradition, the sun’s exaltation is at Aries 19°, a place reached by her on the 19th Farvardīn—the date Humāyūn chose for his celebration.37
In an astrologically based ideology, it is ingenious to celebrate the sun, and the king as its likeness, on that day. I have not come across any earlier examples of a celebration of Nawrūz on the 19th Farvardīn. As Humāyūn was very well versed in astrology, he might have been the first to move Nawrūz to that date, thus avoiding religious conflicts and creating a most suggestive ceremony at the same time. By mounting the throne at the moment of the sun’s exaltation, the emperor became her symbol in strength and power.

Khândamîr explicitly mentions that this celebration took place in the tent of the 12 zodiac signs, a most appropriate place for such a cosmological staging. Even if the spherical carpet was not mentioned in that context, doubtlessly Humāyūn’s throne was standing at that moment on this carpet in the sphere of the sun.

Besides presenting himself as a sun king, Humāyūn also imitated the planets. As already mentioned above, Humāyūn dressed every day in the colour of the corresponding planet, and divided the week according to astrological rules. Every day in the week is dominated by one planet—Saturday by Saturn, Sunday by the sun, Monday by the moon, and so on. This association of planets with days goes back to Hellenistic times and was transmitted to India. We therefore find the same combination of planets with days in the Perso-Muslim, the Indian and the Western tradition.

Dressing in the planets’ colours meant to identify with them. The king became every day’s planetary ruler. This identification was perfectly expressed by his imitation of the ruling planet’s activities. As the moon for example is related to missions and agencies, Humāyūn received ambassadors, messengers and travelers on that day. On Tuesday, the day of Mars, Humāyūn was administering justice.

The cosmological aspect of Humāyūn’s power was probably also demonstrated by a strange construction of four ships called the Chārtāq-i chār ‘unṣur, the “Pavilions of the Four Elements”. These were two-storied swimming buildings linked to each other in such a way that they formed an octagon. If these ships were indeed meant to symbolize the elements, the two stories of every building might have represented the two qualities every element is composed of: earth being cold and dry, water cold and humid, air hot and humid and fire hot and dry. According to Islamic natural philosophy, elements are transmuted by changing one of their qualities. For example, fire is changed into air by moistening or into earth by becoming cold, but fire cannot directly be transformed into water. The arrangement of the swimming buildings and their respective junction might have followed this elementary circle of transmutation. Strangely enough, the “elementary people” were not mentioned in the description of these ships.

Humāyūn celebrated certain festivities on these ships and sat at these occasions in one of the elementary pavilions in each case. As the transmutation of the elements is initiated by the movement of the celestial bodies, the entire construction might again have symbolized Humāyūn’s identification with the sun and the planets. Its exact function and meaning are however unclear.
The throne of God

The significance of the last element of Humāyūn’s staging of power to be investigated here might even have gone beyond his astral claims. In the description of the celebration of Humāyūn’s birthday, Khāndamīr mentions that Humāyūn’s throne was standing outside the tent of the 12 zodiac signs. Of course, it is possible that the throne was erected outside to make the King visible to more people. In that case, the tent would have been without any function, and the throne might have been erected anywhere in the camp. Taking into consideration the highly developed symbolism of Humāyūn’s staging of power, it is hard to believe that he chose the place beside the tent arbitrarily. Assuming that the place of the throne was selected on purpose, I thus propose the following interpretation. As we have seen above, the carpet and the tent consisted of the elementary spheres, the planetary spheres, the sphere of the fixed stars and the Atlas sphere. According to Islamic cosmology, however, the universe does not end with the Atlas sphere, because beyond that last sphere, God’s pedestal and God’s throne are standing. Sitting outside the cosmological tent on a golden throne, Humāyūn thus took the place of God.

Perhaps this interpretation overstates the cosmological imagery of Humāyūn. Khāndamīr admittedly does not allude to divine aspirations in the context of the birthday celebration, but uses only solar metaphors here. The image of Humāyūn sitting on the throne of God is not totally absent from his book and is evoked in the description of a particular palace to praise the emperor. When Humāyūn was sitting on his throne in this palace Khāndamīr says, the sun needed the help of the pedestal (kursī) to reach the King and to prostrate before him. Both the idea of the sun prostrating before the King and the place of the emperor being beyond the kursī showed that the emperor was not meant to be the sun or its representative, but something transcendent and godlike. Traditions such as Humāyūn veiling his face and people saying that light was shining forth when he lifted his veil, as well as the emperor’s demand for prostration, allegedly based on a claim for omnipotence, might have indicated the same divine aspirations.

Akbar and the celebration of Nawrūz

In the time of Akbar, the cosmological connotations of the ruler were initially stopped. It is interesting to learn that their resumption was closely linked to the development of Akbar’s reform policy and the elaboration of what is known as the dīn-i ilāhī. Badā’ūnī describes how Akbar started dressing every day in the corresponding planet’s colour after moving to Fatḥpur Sikrī. Like his father, Akbar chose Thursdays for discussions with learned people, and even in the time of Jahāngīr, justice was still administered on Tuesdays. Thus the weekly schedule of Humāyūn seems to have been maintained during Akbar’s and Jahāngīr’s reigns, harmonizing each day’s work with the dominant planet.

In Fatḥpur Sikrī, the emperor also revealed himself every morning at sunrise. In addition to what we know about his father, however, Akbar prayed to the sun and recited its 1,001 names on that occasion.
The celebration of Nawrūz was observed for the first time in 990h. In this case, too, Akbar did not just take over the ceremony developed by his father, but further elaborated the festivities. As he did not have any regard for the ‘ulamā’’s displeasure with this Old Iranian feast, Akbar celebrated Nawrūz on the traditional date of 1st Farvardīn. However, he did not abolish the celebration of the Sun’s exaltation, but combined the two dates into one long-lasting festival starting on 1st Farvardīn and continuing until the 19th of the same month:

From this year, there was the commencement of the celebration of the New Year feast and other ancient festivals, and they became current throughout the world. . . . When the New Year was approaching, His Majesty gave orders that the able workmen of the sublime court should decorate the great dawlatkhānah which is surrounded by 120 stone porticos [īvān]. The great amīrs and the other prosperity achieving servants executed the upmost care in its decoration. Golden and very valuable clothes were brought to use, and they decorated it with jewels of different colours. With pleasure and auspiciousness, on Sunday, 15th Ṣafar 990 of the lunar year, after the passing of fourteen minutes and 37 seconds, the light of the portico of this great dome conferred again fresh glory to the Sign of Aries, and adorned the world with the redness of flourishing. The beginning of the year Khurād of the third cycle took place in prosperity. The enlightened Shāhanshāh mounted the throne of fortune and brought fresh splendour to this world and the world beyond [ṣūrah va ma’nā]. . . . It was arranged that every year from the time of transit to the time of exaltation, there should be a festival and that each day, an auspicious servant should take charge of the glorious banquet.

When the time of exaltation drew near, the dawlatkhānah-yi khāṣṣ was decorated. Wonder-working magician-like men performed marvels, and wisdom had a daily market. The soul of ancient wisdom-collectors was refreshed, and reached the virtuous Shāhanshāh for this reason.

According to Badā’ūnī, the last day of celebrations was considered particularly holy (sharaf al-sharaf). As can best be understood from the Jahāngīrnāmah, the king used to mount the throne twice during the celebrations: once at the moment of transit, when the sun entered Aries, and once at the moment of exaltation, when the sun entered Aries 19°.

As Humāyūn’s staging of power was closely related to space and architecture, it would be interesting to know to what extent his cosmological constructions were inherited by his son. In the case of Nawrūz, Akbar’s vazīr-i kull Abū ‘l-Faẓl ‘Allāmī (assassinated 1011/1602) explicitly mentions that the moment of transit was celebrated in the great dawlatkhānah which was surrounded by 120 īvāns. This building is easy to identify in Fatḥpūr Sīkri. However, historians of architecture still disagree about the identification of that edifice. However, an examination of the building traditionally regarded as the dīvān-i khāṣṣ, reveals a ceiling divided into nine regular squares.
With the four squares situated in the corners subdivided into two triangles each, the shape of the ceiling corresponds exactly to the standard horoscope schemes of Mughal times. As horoscope schemes are nothing but schematic sketches of the sky and the astronomic constellation at a given moment, the ceiling should therefore be considered as a representation of the sky.

I therefore assume that this building is indeed the *dawlatkhānah-yi khāṣṣ* in which Akbar celebrated the sun’s exaltation—in the tradition of his father, and like him under a representation of the zodiac. This idea can be developed even further. In his interpretation of this building, Ravinder Nath associates the famous column in the centre of that building with a solar cult. According to him, the column repre-
sented the universe on which the sun rested at midday. To sit on that column would therefore have been to come quite close to sitting on Humāyūn’s throne in the sphere of the sun. Therefore Akbar’s *dawlakhānah-yi khāṣṣ* can perhaps be seen as a further development of Humāyūn’s tent of the 12 zodiac signs, or a kind of translation into stone of Humāyūn’s cosmic model. Even the strange construction of the central pillar might have been inspired by the central pole of a tent. In that case, the purpose of this building would have been predominantly ceremonial.
Figure 11.3 Layout of the Carpet of Mirth.

**He who seized the world**

It is worth briefly mentioning that Jahāngīr and Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh Jahān (r. 1037–68/1628–57) continued to present themselves as sun kings. Jahāngīr kept celebrating Nawrūz on the model introduced by his father, that is during the 19 days between 1st and 19th of Farvārdīn. This feast was obviously very important, because for every single year in the Jahāngīrīnāmah, the details of its celebration are mentioned. He also revealed himself every morning at the jharokā window.

Jahāngīr’s most remarkable feature was the highly elaborated iconography he developed in his painting to demonstrate his claims to universal rule. In several of these pictures, the emperor is either standing on a map or a globe or is receiving one, the latter image fitting perfectly with the meaning of his name as “he who seized the world.” Most of these globes unmistakably represent the earth with
oceans and continents on it. The globe Jahāngīr is holding on the huge picture described at the beginning of the article, however, does not show any continents or oceans, it is not even blue, but rather silver or whitish.

Taking into consideration all we have learnt about the Mughal staging of power, presumably the colour of the globe was meant to depict the whitish Atlas sphere. In that case, the picture of Jahāngīr on the Golden throne beyond the Atlas sphere would resume the same divine aspirations as already conjectured for Humāyūn in the interpretation of the place of his throne outside the tent of the 12 zodiac signs. In the tradition of his grandfather, Jahāngīr would have thus sat on the throne of God.⁶⁹

Even if one does not accept this final conclusion, the evidence for a continuity of the imperial image of a sun king and the cosmological connotations of Mughal rule since the time of Humāyūn is still striking. The second Mughal emperor’s ideas and concepts were later taken up by Akbar and further developed by him and Jahāngīr. They constitute, however, not only minor details of Mughal ideology, but central elements of the dīn-i īlāhī. The dīn-i īlāhī should therefore no longer be regarded as the ingenious creation ex nihilo of Akbar—as Abū ‘l-Fażl would like us to believe—but as a continuously evolving ideology whose foundations can be traced back to Humāyūn.

Figure 11.4 The Horoscope of Iskandar Sulṭān.
The Welcome Institute Library [MS Persian 13], London.
Notes

1 See Manesson-Mallet 1683, II:fig. 52; see below figure 11.1.
2 One of the most famous pictures of Louis XIV, it appears in almost every publication on him. See, for example, Kantorowicz (1963), fig. 56; a similar nimbus is also shown in fig. 57.
3 See Franke (2005), fig. 25; see below figure 11.2.
4 For the role of the nimbus in Mughal painting, see ibid. 212–5.
5 See ibid. 324–6.
6 See Goswamy/Fischer (1987), 90f (fig. 40).
7 See ‘Allāmī (1877–86), I:363f; (Beveridge (1897–1921), I:656f); Firishtah (1831) I:397; ‘Afi Ra’īs (1899), 48f; (2007), 61.
8 See ‘Allāmī (1877–86), I:21 (Beveridge (1897–1921), I:64).
9 See Avashty (1967), 23f; Bakshi/Sharma (2000), 32.
10 See Storey (1927–53), I/1:101–9, 536; ibid., I/2:1237f; Conermann (2002), 68, 92–4; Hidāyat Husayn (1940), xv.f.
12 Kh’andamīr (1940), 110–12. See also ‘Allāmī (1877–86), I:361 (Beveridge (1897–1921), I:649f).
13 This system has been described by many authors; see for example al-Bīrūnī (1934), 43f (§ 121). For its use in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī, whose ideas were very influential at the Mughal court, see Burckhardt (2001), 12–14. The carpet has been described in extenso in Orthmann (2008).

14 See idem (forthcoming).

15 See Caiozzo (2004); Pingree (1964–5); for more details about the colours on the carpet see Orthmann (2008), 301f.

16 This is, for example, the case with Ibn ‘Arabī. See Burckhardt (2001), 13.

17 See Kh‘andamīr (1940), 68–70 (Prasad (1940), 48f); ‘Allāmī (1877–86), I:361 (Beveridge (1897–1921), I:649f).

18 See Andrews (1987), 149; for the trellis tent in general, see idem (1997), especially I:3–7, 25–35. Also, see the contribution of Albrecht Fuess to the present volume.

19 For such a construction, see for example ibid., II:fig. 12, 35, 46 and drawings in section a 2.

20 Later on, even greater and more magnificent tents were constructed. Some of them were compared with the Atlas sphere, too. See idem (1987), esp. 152.

21 See Kh‘andamīr (1940), 111f (Prasad (1940), 81).

22 See Kh‘andamīr (1940), 48–50 (Prasad (1940), 35f); ‘Allāmī (1877–86), I:359f (Beveridge (1897–1921), I:646f).

23 See Firishtah (1831), I:397.

24 See Kh‘andamīr (1940), 72–7 (Prasad (1940), 51–4); ‘Allāmī (1877–86), I:361, (Beveridge (1897–1921), I:650f). For more details about this division of the week, see below.

25 See Firishtah (1831), I:397.

26 Overlapping with the cosmological classification, there was another division of the courtiers into the three categories of ahl-i dawlat (people of dominion), ahl-i sa‘ādat

Figure 11.6 Standard Horoscope Scheme.
Court culture and cosmology in the Mughal Empire

(people of fortune) and ahl-i murād (people of joy). See Kh’andamīr (1940), 32–5 (Prasad (1940), 24–6); ‘Allāmī (1877–86), I:357ff (Beveridge (1897–1921), I:642–4). The background to this second division and its relationship to the cosmological classification remains unknown. See also Streusand (1989), 36ff.

27 Kh’andamīr (1940), 43ff (Prasad (1940), 31–3); see also ‘Allāmī (1877–86), I:359 (Beveridge (1897–1921), I:645ff).

28 The idea of the zodiac is however not really consistent with a hierarchical system.

29 See al-Būrūnī (1934), 262ff (§§ 449–51).

30 Kh’andamīr (1940), 111 (Prasad (1940), 81).

31 A similar imitation of the daily and annual course of the sun was described in detail for Akbar in Franke (2005), 224–31.

32 Kh’andamīr (1940), 72ff (Prasad (1940), 51).

33 This blending of astral and human metaphors was first described for Akbar in Franke (2005), 227ff.

34 Kh’andamīr (1940), 95 (Prasad (1940), 69).

35 Kh’andamīr (1940), 96 (Prasad (1940), 70).

36 See Firdawsī (1966), I:41ff (= “Jamshīd”, verses 48–53); see also Franke (2005), 226.

37 See al-Būrūnī (1934), 258 (§ 443).

38 See Kh’andamīr (1940), 36ff, 72–7 (Prasad (1940), 26ff, 51–4); ‘Allāmī (1877–86), I:361 (Beveridge (1897–1921), I:650ff); see above.

39 The seven day week and its planetary rulers have been described comprehensively in Bennedik (2007).

40 See al-Būrūnī (1934), 254 (§ 435).

41 See Firishtah (1831), I:397.

42 See Kh’andamīr (1940), 75 (Prasad (1940), 53); ‘Allāmī (1877–86), I:139ff (Beveridge (1897–1921), I:314ff).

43 See Kh’andamīr (1940), 52–61 (Prasad (1940), 37–43); the name Chārṭāq-i chār ‘unṣur is mentioned on p. 56 (40). ‘Allāmī (1877–86), I:360 (Beveridge (1897–1921), I:647).

44 The theory of the four elements and their qualities goes back to Aristotle and was adopted by the Muslim world where it became especially important for astrology and alchemy.

45 See Kh’andamīr (1940), 57 (Prasad (1940), 40).

46 See Kh’andamīr (1940), 102–4 (Prasad (1940), 74–6).

47 See Kh’andamīr (1940), 80 (Prasad (1940), 57).


49 See Badā’unī (1868), II:261.

50 See ibid. 255. It was actually the night from Thursday to Friday. From the above-mentioned quote however (Kh’andamīr (1940), 72f), I understand that the emperor only dressed at sunrise in the new planet’s clothes, attaching the night to the planetary ruler of the previous day.

51 See de Laet (1928), 93.


54 ‘Allāmī (1877–86), III:379 (Beveridge (1897–1921), III:557ff); compare also Franke (2005), 227.


56 See Badā’unī (1868), II:309ff.


58 See Petruccioli (2007), 168 (plan), 175 (text).


60 See North (1986), 2 table b; Welch (1978), 71 pl. 16. For the structure of the ceiling see Petruccioli (2007), 241 and below, figure 11.5.
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61 See Nath (1985), II:258–69; idem (1976), 11–21. See also Petruccioli (2007), 238–40
who interprets the central column as the axis of the world.
62 Compare the round horoscope of Iskandar Sulṭān which probably resembled the sky in the tent with the quadratic horoscope scheme and the ceiling of the dawlakẖānah (figs. 4–6).
63 See Andrews (1997), II:figs. 2f, drawings in section a 1, c 11.
64 This ceremonial aspect has also been emphasized by Asher (1993), 282.
65 See ibid. 293–330.
66 As the jharokā ceremony of Jahāngīr has been dealt with thoroughly by Franke, I will not discuss it here. For any details, sources and illustrations, see Franke (2005), 300–8.
67 See ibid. 293–330.
68 See ibid. figs. 12f, 16, 22; a globe is also included in figs. 9 and 14.
69 An imitation of the throne of God was probably also intended by Shāh Jahān with his ‘Peacock Throne’ (takht-i fāvīs). See Koch (1988), 28. For traditions about the throne of God, see Vitestam (1990). Also, see the contribution of Abbas Amanat to the present volume.

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12 Taming the tribal native
Court culture and politics in eighteenth century Shiraz

Christoph Werner

Introduction
Shiraz evokes images of gardens, rivers and wine—of leisure, roses and love—an imagery that is mostly due to the prominent place the city occupies in Persian poetry. The administrative and cultural centre of the province of Fars was home to successive smaller local dynasties—notably the Mongol umarā of the Īnjū and their successors, the Muzaffarids—who patronized artisans and workshops. It was only in the eighteenth century under Karīm Khān of the Zand Dynasty, that, for a short time, Shiraz became the capital of all of Iran, except Khurasan. However, for the rest of the eighteenth century no undisputed capital existed in Iran that could have rivalled Isfahan’s splendour during the Safavids. This is also true for the short period when Nādir Shāh Afshār (r. 1147–60/1736–47) promoted Mashhad as the object of his royal patronage.

Without a central and universally acknowledged capital there are obvious difficulties in identifying a royal court during this period. The court at Shiraz has been described as a small, baroque-style, princely court. This description is further bolstered by the reluctance of Karīm Khān to assume the title of pādishāh and his modest rule as deputy (vakīl). Still, Shiraz soon became the focal point for poets, scholars, musicians and artists who gathered there and enjoyed the liberal atmosphere of the city.

A classical description of Shiraz under Karīm Khān Zand is given by the English Ambassador John Malcolm (d. 1833) in his History of Persia:

All the cities in Persia flourished under this prince; but none in a degree comparable with Shiraz. . . . He was at great pains to strengthen its defences; and he improved and ornamented the city itself with a number of useful and magnificent buildings, and beautified its environs by the erection of some fine edifices, near which were planted luxuriant gardens; but he appeared still more desirous of promoting the comfort and prosperity of its inhabitants, than of increasing its magnitude or splendour.

Quoting the Tārīkh-i zandiyyah he adds:
The inhabitants of that favoured city enjoyed perfect tranquillity and happiness. In the society of moon-faced damsels they passed their leisure hours; the sparkling goblet circulated; and love and pleasure reigned in every breast.  

This is indeed the imagery that is commonly associated with Shiraz and Karīm Khān’s court and this article will return to this motif and the moon-faced damsels below. The present contribution is a collage of different reflections and approaches to the question of provincial court culture in eighteenth century Iran. The article also attempts to address two basic sets of questions. The first revolves around the fundamental enquiry into the nature of the “court”—in other words what was a court or, perhaps even more difficult to answer, what was a “Muslim court,” in eighteenth century Iran? Which traditions did it emulate and how did it evolve? This is crucial because the eighteenth century, or the thirteenth century of the hijra, was a watershed moment between traditional court culture on the one hand and a court that became increasingly Western, inspired under the Qajars, on the other hand. For earlier periods, in particular under the Timurid and the Turkmen dynasties, the distinction between an itinerant and tent-based court and an urban settled court located in fixed buildings, be it a palace, an administrative building (divānkhanah) or a fortification (arg, qal'ah), was of central importance. Is such a distinction still valid and useful for later periods? Where did the court reside? Was there a unique locality or was the court at Shiraz a multifaceted institution? These questions will necessarily involve some discussion of terminology and sources.

The second set of questions relates to the functions of the court, in particular, those functions that go beyond the immediate purposes of legitimization, patronage or administration. Court culture might not only have served to emphasize the legitimacy or grandeur of the ruler, but might also have had more immediate political functions such as taming, civilizing or deliberately corrupting. Eighteenth century Iran has been characterized as a period of tribal resurgence and thus the establishment of a particular court culture may have been a component of the general Zand strategy of controlling other tribal forces and confederacies. This will be illustrated by a short sketch by one of the most famous literati of the Zand and early Qajar periods, ‘Abd al-Razzāq Beg Dunbulī, who was raised and educated at the Zand court in Shiraz as a hostage. Of special interest in his case is the interrelatedness of several aspects of Zand court culture: the presence of numerous guests and hostages at court, the intentional loose morals that were actively supported and propagated by the Zand and the presence of literati and scholars who found patronage in Shiraz at a time when Isfahan had been destroyed and the only other alternative was India.

The Court at Shiraz

Despite the new buildings erected by Karīm Khān from around 1180/1766 onwards, when he had become victorious over all his rivals in western Iran and chosen Shiraz as his capital, his efforts were never comparable with the systematic approach towards large-scale urban planning undertaken by Shāh ‘Abbās in
Isfahan. What constituted the court under Karīm Khān Zand at Shiraz and where exactly was it located? Whereas Mehdi Roschanzamir in 1970 had no qualms in describing a patrimonial concept of rule for Karīm Khān that subsumed administration, bodyguard and harem under the general category “Hofhaltung,” John Perry comes much closer to reality in his chapter The Vakil at Home where he distinguishes between Karīm Khān’s building activities and his army. The former is understood primarily as “defence;” the latter is identified as “camp and court.”

The chronicles of the time reveal a never-ending series of military campaigns and raids, where rebellions had to be crushed and insurgents punished. The court in this context was primarily a military concept; it comprised the retinue of the ruler, his immediate followers and troops, and it was itinerant in nature, since it accompanied the ruler wherever he went. The urban court, on the other hand, was not primarily conceived of as the abode of the ruler in these sources, but as the home and the safeguard of the families of his military retinue. In 1180/1766 Karīm Khān had finally managed to bring most of western Iran under his control and when he began to fortify Shiraz his primary aim was not one of representation but of security. In the words of Ṣādiq Nāmī in his Tārīkh-i gū’ī gushā:

The ruler had chosen the ulkā of Fars as the continuous seat of his government. After his return from the campaigns to Lar it came to his mind to re-establish the fortress of Shiraz, to improve on it and to embellish it. It is incumbent for a ruler to have a fortified place in order to exercise his rule. It is necessary to provide a fortified citadel, a secure haven as a home and a safeguard [maskan va ma’man] for the bunah, the household, of those in the retinue of the refuge of good fortune.

The court at Shiraz, at least in the Tārīkh-i gū’ī gushā, is rarely referred to as darbār (i.e. durbar, court) or mentioned with comparable terms, such as royal threshold (dargāh). As shown above, the fortified city was primarily a place for the security of the families of the ruler’s army. It was a place of residence in a very concrete sense, not merely a metaphor for the court as an enlarged household of the ruler. The families of those engaged in military campaigns needed somewhere to stay as they could not always accompany the campaigns—although in fact they did frequently do so—and had to be protected from counter attacks, looting, and rape when they stayed behind. According to the writings of Ṣādiq Nāmī, the major chronicler of the time, the most frequent term to be translated into court was not darbār, but bunah (i.e. baggage train, retinue) or the combined term kuch va bunah (i.e. ménage and retinue). If emphasis is placed on things that could be carried away and looted then the royal retinue could be termed asbāb va asāsah-yi dawlat—or the equipment of the court. Thus the court frequently became synonymous with the ruler’s harem, although this notion is quite different from the one suggested by orientalist fantasies.

If it is difficult to reconcile the idea of a family-refuge with a royal court, how then should we connect it to the idea of culture, patronage and royal splendour: to feasts, poets, and artistic brilliance? From the perspective of the Zand chroniclers, the court as an institution featured only once a year during the official Nawrūz
celebrations, when the term dargāh or darbār appeared as part of the setting for
the annual New Year receptions. Ṣādiq Nāmī describes the festivities in the year
1172/1759 when the court was not yet established in Shiraz:

The holiday’s banquet and the blessed Nawrūz circle were summoned in the
paradisiacal district of Tehran, where the heads and shoulders of the army’s
nobles and the sleeves and pockets of those in the vicinity of the court
[dargāh] through the grant of gold-threaded robes and the gift of dīnār and
dirham turned into a model for the rose garden and the flowery meadow.9

To examine other aspects of the court at Shiraz, especially in the cultural
realm of artists and literati, it is necessary to turn to literary anthologies and
historiographies that focus on entertainment rather than battle scenes. In addition,
the iconography of the Zand court in Shiraz that displays new artistic trends is
highly informative. Two famous paintings from this period are illustrative of
different aspects of Karīm Khān’s court.

One of the most famous paintings from the Zand period shows Karīm Khān
in the midst of his courtiers, or to be more precise, his comrades and fellow
tribesmen. It does not depict the ruler with all his regalia as shown in depictions
of both Safavid and later Qajar rulers. Instead, Karīm Khān is on the same level
as his courtiers or kin—he wears the same clothes, and is first among equals. In
this context we are less interested in the political image of Karīm Khān as a ruler
who pretends to be merely a vakīl (a deputy), not a shah, but in the setting of the
court that is pragmatic, male dominated and without glitter and glamour. There is
no merriment, no protocol, no throne—no women, no jesters, no music, no wine
and no artwork. No mural paintings are to be seen, nor any elaborate floor
coverings, apart from one small single rug where Karīm Khān is seated, smoking his

Figure 12.1 Karīm Khān Zand and his Court (oil painting, attributed to Muḥammad Ṣādiq,
after 1779).
Figure 12.2 Karīm Khān’s Mistress Shākhnubāt as portrayed by E. Scott Waring (1807).
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water-pipe. This is a court that only by chance finds itself in a stone-building instead of a tent and that is ready to march off on short notice. The image of this military or tribal court is best described as urdū (camp) and as such it is frequently mentioned in the narratives of official historians.

A completely different image of Shirazi court life emerges in the iconography of the harem that was eagerly picked up by Western illustrators of the nineteenth century. In the stylized engraving in the travelogue of the British civil servant Edward Scott Waring (d. 1821), a woman appears with remarkably pretty trousers and a see-through negligee top, holding in her hand a tār that is more decoration than instrument and a carafe of wine, waiting for the return of her lover. The title identifies her as Shāikhnubāt, the mistress of Karīm Khān. The copper plate, faithfully based on an original Persian painting, demonstrates another aspect of court life in Shiraz.10

Karīm Khān himself was not averse to worldly pleasures—however he also used these with a very clear political impetus and a clear agenda, as stated explicitly by ‘Abd al-Razzāq Beg Dunbūlī:

Even though Karīm Khān was by nature good-humoured and during his reign easily satisfied in gaining sensual pleasures and attaining carnal delights, there was another design on his mind. He made the stubborn and obstinate from all lands reside in the paradisiacal Shiraz, to keep them busy and prevent them from engaging in rebellion and intrigues. In order to make them accept their role as happy fools, they were paid with a small allowance, but being empty-handed they were not able to plot and scheme and did not have the power to quarrel or disturb; accordingly, he made the Abode of Knowledge [dār al-‘ilm] the Abode of Pleasure [dār al-‘aysh].

This transformation of Shiraz from a city of learning to a city of voluptuous pleasures was accomplished deliberately as part of Karīm Khān’s policies. This is confirmed by the most renowned author of eighteenth century Iran, “Rustam al-Ḥūkamā,” who writes:

The noble Karīm Khān, vakil al-davla—potent as Jamshīd, with the bearing of Dārāb, the conduct of Darā and the nature of Bahram—ordered for the benefit of the realm [maslāḥat-i mulk] to build for the boon companions, friends of wine and drunkards comfortable and flourishing taverns and inns. This quarter which was designated for the tender, enchanting and coquettish prostitutes and courtesans was called Khayl. Around five to six thousand moonfaced women with rosy cheeks and the odour of musk, all talented, together with musicians and gypsies were placed in this quarter 12

The establishment of a red-light district to keep members of his armies occupied and to curb the ambitions of his numerous guests and hostages may not seem so astonishing at first glance, although the numbers may be embellished. Due to the particular circumstances of the time, Karīm Khān did not have to fear opposition
from a well-established clergy or self-appointed keepers of morals. Of particular interest, however, is the close interrelatedness between the court and its self-perception with this red-light district. Some of the names that Rustam gives in the passages following the above quotation were courtesans of Karim Khan himself, many closely connected to the court, and as we have seen in the case of Shakhnubat, became part of the official iconography of his rule. Furthermore, the concept of dār al-‘aysh as a political agenda should be seen in conjunction with another contrivance of Zand politics, the systematic taking of hostages from the families of subordinate governors and rival tribes.

The court as an educational institution

If the court is examined as an educational institution two aspects have to be reconciled: an éducation sentimentale that would teach the rough natives the pleasures of wine and women and an éducation littéraire that would enable them to engage in literary discourse and to appreciate intellectual debates. Although the troop commanders around Karim Khan Zand and his close relatives did not appear to have placed much importance upon this field, there was an impressive gathering of intellectual circles at that time in Shiraz. This was not necessarily due to the attractiveness of Shiraz, but rather to the fact that after the fall and destruction of Isfahan there was a lack of alternatives in Iran, unlike in India, during most of the eighteenth century. Above mentioned John Malcolm presents the perceptions of his Persian informants and summarizes the facts as follows:

Kareem Khan had received no education. It is stated that he could not even write; . . . he was an admirable horseman and expert in all military exercises; but though unlearned himself, he valued and encouraged learning in others. His court was the resort of men of liberal knowledge.13

Two further questions emerge: who were these rough natives who had to be tamed and/or morally corrupted? And with whom did they associate, or who exactly were these men of liberal knowledge? First, it is important to understand the hostage system established by Karim Khan. Partly born out of necessity—he simply did not have the resources to govern all the areas and people integrated into his realm—Karim Khan left most of the previous autonomous tribal leaders in charge of their territories, acknowledged their sovereignty and confirmed their rule. In order to ensure their subordination, though not necessarily their loyalty, he took hostages from their families, usually the first or second-born sons, though sometimes also wives or other close relatives, and settled them in Shiraz. This practice was not limited to western Iran, with hostages taken from among the Qajars, the Afshar and the Bakhtiyari, but also employed for the Arab tribes on the Persian Gulf coast, as described in a report from Carsten Niebuhr:

The present Schiech, Naser, of the family of Matarisch, possesses likewise the isle of Bahhrein, upon the coast of Arabia, by which he is enabled to keep on foot
some shipping. He also has considerable domains in Kermesir, which he holds from Kerim Khan, with whom Naser’s children are placed as hostages for their father’s fidelity. It is a happy circumstance for Schiraz, that the Prince of Abu Schaehr can thus be retained in the interests of Persia by means of his possessions in Kermesir.\textsuperscript{14}

While the political importance of the hostage system has been recognized, the strong correlation with the court, court culture and cultural activities at Shiraz has hitherto not received much attention, largely because of the encyclopaedic differentiation between chapters on politics, religion, and culture in most standard works on the period.\textsuperscript{15}

One of the hostages at Shiraz was ‘Abd al-Razz\u00e2q Beg Dunbuli, who is best known for his history of the Russo-Persian wars, \textit{Ma\'\textsuperscript{a}sj-r-i sul\textsuperscript{a}niyyah}, one of the earliest printed books in Iran.\textsuperscript{16} He came from a tribe of Kurdish descent that ruled parts of western Azerbaijan and had participated in most of the wars and struggles of the eighteenth century. How did it happen that a princeling from a Turkish speaking tribe known primarily for its military prowess, became one of the most articulate and refined authors of his time who had a fascinating command of various literary styles and moved effortlessly between Arabic and Persian? ‘Abd al-Razz\u00e2q Beg went to Shiraz as a hostage at the age of 10, when he was sent to replace his older brother. He stayed in Shiraz until the death of Karim Khan and only returned to Azerbaijan at the age of 24. While many others like him received their allowance and filled their time with simple pursuits, ‘Abd al-Razz\u00e2q used the chance to acquire a remarkable education. Since he arrived at such a young age, his movements were not curtailed and he could move with ease among the learned individuals of the town.

His work contains several highly stylized autobiographical passages where he reflects upon his ambiguous situation at Shiraz and the circles where he received his literary training. In a seemingly fictitious letter—in prose and verse—to one of the teachers of his childhood, M\textsuperscript{i}rz\textsuperscript{a} ‘Al\textsuperscript{i}-Naq\textsuperscript{i}r Ta\textsuperscript{f}ah\textsuperscript{a}n [d. 1191/1777], made my lonely hut the envy of eternal paradise by the grace of his stride and opened with the blessings of his breath the doors of intimacy for my saddened heart. Through his paternal teachings he raised my self-esteem to the heights of sun and moon. In the prison of exile he cheered me up with teaching me the sciences, with his natural tenderness and his magnificent and magnanimous compassion he devoted himself to my
education: he saw me writing and asked for the page I had composed. He looked at what I had written—like an intimate friend, a revered companion and honoured master at my hidden and open states and like a physician possessed of the breath of Jesus at my bodily and mental illnesses and ailment—and he wept at the sight of my desperate pain.  

‘Abd al-Razzāq Beg once more stresses the importance of Mīrzā Naṣīr as an intimate friend and teacher in his own biographical entry on him in Tajribat al-ahrār and says about him:

This servant had complete recourse [bāzgasht] to that revered master who from time to time acted as a professor for this broken-winged-one . . . and kindled desire and hunger for the study of perfections.

Mīrzā Naṣīr Ṭāṭīb Isfahānī thus constituted a vital link between one of the hostages of Karīm Khān Zand’s court and the intellectual and poetic circles in Shiraz. He was also part of the inner administrative and representative circle of the court, because he held an official position as hakīmbāshī, private chief physician to Karīm. Mīrzā Naṣīr was known as a philosopher (ḥikmat va ‘irfān), jurist (faqīh), outstanding mathematician and famous poet. Abū l-Ḥasan Ghaffārī in his Gulshan-i murād has two entries on him, one in the section on famous ‘ulamā and fuzalā, and a second one where he is listed among the famous poets of his time. Referring to the court, Ghaffārī uses the expression urdū-yi humāyūn (royal camp) when he describes how Karīm Khān had personally called on him to come to Shiraz. He also was an intimate friend of Mīrzā Muḥammad the kalāntar of Fars who himself was a protégé of Karīm Khān.  

‘Abd al-Razzāq Beg’s attitude towards Karīm Khān Zand and the perception of his own personal circumstances as a hostage in Shiraz contains some ambiguities. On the one hand he praises Karīm Khān and eulogizes Shiraz:

Since my resting place became the royal court of the refuge of pleasure . . . I found him to be an ocean, his benevolent hand opened like a wide stretched wave . . . and the climate of Shiraz superior to that of Khitay, Damascus and Samarqand . . .

On the other hand he bears a barely disguised grudge towards the Zand who had forced him into exile, and made him grow up alone, in foreign lands, away from his family. He repeatedly expressed these feelings—as already illustrated—in the metaphor of a captive bird as in the verse: “They built us a place in the corner of a cage and the gardener out of malice destroyed our nest.” His final verdict on his time spent at the court at Shiraz was rather bitter: “Fourteen years have I uselessly suffered the pain of being a stranger in Shiraz and Esfahan and hopelessly have submitted to the desert of hopelessness.” Even the company of the intellectual circles could not make up for the circumstances of his exile: “While enduring this period of being a stranger, concerning the presence of literati and critics of all
kinds, as well as ʿulamā, there was plenty of it: ʿYou are a Ṭufayl, an uninvited guest, man and fairy cling to you—show devotion to carry off happiness.’ 26

His autobiographic notes—despite their stylized expressions—are a vivid testimony of the struggles of an eighteenth century Iranian who was both in a very privileged position and yet the object of the whims of his time.

Conclusion

What is “Islamic” about the court of Karīm Khān Zand in Shiraz? ʿAbd al-Razzāq played deliberately with basic Islamic ethical maxims when he proclaimed: “In the imperial capital preventing anybody from having a good time was considered a grave sin [gunāhī munkar].” 27 In what respect was this part of a wider Muslim court culture and how does it differ from its most obvious model, the imperial Safavid court in Isfahan, and from the itinerant courts in the Turko-Mongolian tradition? The interwoven elements of different types of court in eighteenth century Shiraz, as discussed above, came at the end of a long tradition of Iranian-Islamic court culture. In some aspects, Karīm Khān’s court already foreshadows the nineteenth century, while in other areas it is deeply anchored in the past.

Perhaps the most central feature, which grew out of a long tradition, was the dual character of the court as an itinerant, military tent-city, as encountered in designations such as urdū (camp) or bunah (retinue), and as an urban, palatial representative court, usually termed dargāh/darbār.

As Monika Gronke has pointed out, the concept of a capital city did not feature very prominently in the majority of Iranian chronicles and under most Iranian dynasties since the Mongol period. 28 The tradition of having a nominal capital, where royal workshops, families, ateliers and intellectuals lived, coupled with a court that was constantly on the move, accompanied by the key administrative personnel and some hand-picked poets and advisors, was a custom transmitted from the Timurid-Turkmens to the Safavids and then to eighteenth-century Shiraz. In fact, the elaborate Safavid court at Isfahan, with its ceremonial performances, the imperial workshops (buyūṭāt) and its enlarged harem, was actually an interlude, when viewed from the longer nomadic tradition that interestingly enough became even stronger under the early Qajars. In his early years, Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh Qājār (r. 1212–50/1797–1834) only spent the winters in Tehran, and the court’s seasonal move to Azerbaijan—where a tent city was set up on grounds near Ujān—that took place regularly after the official Nawrūz celebrations was amongst the most central events in the official Qajar court calendar. This tradition only came to an end as a consequence of the outcome of the Russo-Persian wars.

The court of Karīm Khān at Shiraz expresses a unique connection between the dual faceted court with both a nomadic/representational element and an urban society and culture, linked by a political agenda expressed by the system of taking hostages to pacify rivals and opponents. What might appear as a farfetched and artificially drawn connection between the political system of hostage taking, the establishment of a semi-residential court at Shiraz and the transformation of this city into a place of worldly pleasures was actually documented by its main
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witness, ‘Abd al-Razzāq Beg Dunbulī, who joins together these three aspects in a single sentence:

[Karīm Khān] took from all the lords of Azerbaijan the retinue [kūch va bunah] as pawn, . . . he went to the Dār al-‘ilm Shiraz and decided on this place as the seat of his government and his capital, and he opened the doors of pleasure and delight for his own times.29

While the retinue of a tribal leader has been described by the term kūch va bunah as equivalent with his household and thus his court, in its present usage it describes the taking of hostages as the pawns of the ruler. The choice of a capital city appears haphazard; the dichotomy between palace and camp is not dissolved. Yet the establishment of a seat of government went hand in hand with the re-definition of the city under the maxim of pleasurable living, of hedonism—in Persian ‘aysh va ‘ishrat.

In a graphic presentation of the dualist court that is both palatial court (darbār) and itinerant camp (urdū) the two aspects are joined together by overlapping spheres that comprise the hostages taken to safeguard Zand rule, the circles of

Figure 12.3 The two-sided court at Shiraz.
intellectuals and poets and, via the court’s courtesans, what is labelled as the “City of Pleasure” (dār al-‘aysh). The court as a cultural centre—as in the case of Shiraz and perhaps also elsewhere—is not bound to concrete buildings (such as a palace or the abode of the ruler) but rather encompasses an imagined space, a cultural and intellectual arena that can physically be located in a whole city. This is the reason why the court of Karīm Khān Zand extends to the red-light district of eighteenth century Shiraz as well as to the networks of poets and philosophically or poetically inclined bureaucrats of the court. An individual such as ‘Abd al-Razzāq Beg who was brought to the court as a hostage was able to move between these different spheres, becoming part of an imagined court that he recreated in his own writings.

Notes

1 “Shiraz . . . conjures up images of dreaming minarets and magical gardens, of sweet wines and beautiful though veiled women.” (Arberry (1960), vii).
2 For the heyday of Shiraz see the recent contribution by Limbert (2004); for artisan’s workshops in Shiraz and patronage see Uluç (2000).
5 See Perry (1979), 272–8, with a map of new or repaired buildings.
6 “Hofhaltung” is the “running of the court.” See Roschanzamir (1970), 140–56. He does not actually employ the expression patrimonial; instead, he refers to the feudal structures in Iran.
7 See the relevant chapter in Perry (1979), 272, 279.
8 Isfahānī (1317sh), 153.
9 Ibid., 89.
10 See Waring (1807), 61 (pl. 2). The original painting on which this engraving is based is from Muhammad Šādiq, dated Shiraz 1183/1769–70, Diba/Ekhtiar (1998), 157; Diba (1989).
11 Dunbulī (1349–50sh/1970–1), II:42. This is also a pun on a famous verse by Ḥāfīz where Shiraz is the “City of Love:” ‘ishrat-i shabgīr kun bī āndar shahr-ī ‘ishq—shabravān-rā āshmāyīhāst bā mīr-ī ‘asas Ghazal 261:5 in Ḥāfīz (1359sh/1980), 538.
12 Āṣaf (1348sh/1969), 340; also see Hoffmann (1986), II:579.
13 Malcolm (1824–9), II:86.
14 Niebuhr (1792), II:146.
15 See also Perry (1979), 218 for further names of hostages. The reign of Karīm Khān was too short for this system to evolve into a ritualized and stable practice. Remnants of it can still be traced in early Qajar politics, but with the consolidation of Fath-‘Alī Shāh’s rule it became obsolete. Similar practices such as the sankin kōtai (參勤交代), the system of alternate residence under the Tokugawa in Japan that included the enforced stay of wife and heir in the capital, might be of comparative interest.
16 For a short biography see Werner (2008).
17 Sayyid Mīrzā ‘Ali-Naqī Qazvīnī was probably part of the administration in Shiraz. He is not mentioned elsewhere.
18 Dunbulī (1349–50sh/1970–1), II:64.
19 Ibid., II:67.
21 See Kāshānī (1369sh/1990), 392, 449. Mīrzā Naṣīr Ṭabīb Isfahānī is, however, not listed in Baygdilī (1337sh/1958).
22 See Ibn Abī ‘l-Qāsim (1325sh/1946), 59, 112f.
24 Idem (1342/1963), 286 (mā’rā maqām-i kunj qafas sākhtand va dād—bar bād baghīhān zī sitam ašlyān-i mā). The malicious gardener is probably ‘Ali Murād Khān Zand who transferred the hostages to Isfahan and thus destroyed the cozy atmosphere at Shiraz.
25 Ibid.
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13 Global and local patterns of communication at the court of the Egyptian khedives (1840–1880)

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Introduction

In the first decades of the nineteenth century Egypt became an autonomous dynastic state within the Ottoman Empire. The viceroy (vâlî) Meḥmed ʿAlî Paşa (r. 1805–48) and his successors pursued a policy that aimed at the centralization of political, economic and military power in the ruler’s and his family’s hands. Conflicts with the Ottoman central government arising from this policy were brought to an end in 1841 when Sultan ʿAbdülmecîd (r. 1839–61) sanctioned Egypt’s privileged position as an autonomous province of the Empire. In an edict, the Sultan and his government recognized Meḥmed ʿAlî as a lifelong viceroy of Egypt and conceded the right of hereditary rule to his descendants. Thus, Meḥmed ʿAlî’s family, now the legitimate Ottoman-Egyptian dynasty, was established as the undisputed centre of state and society in Egypt. The title “khedive” (turk.: ḥīdīv, ar.: khidīw), claimed by Meḥmed ʿAlî and his successors as early as the 1830s and recognized by the Porte as their official title in 1867, expressed their unique position as quasi-sovereigns of an Ottoman province.

Hand in hand with this political development a princely court emerged. From the 1840s onward, the court of the Egyptian khedives evolved into a prestigious centre in political, social and cultural terms. In Cairo, and sometimes in Alexandria as well, this court was almost constantly visible at a wide range of ceremonial occasions and festivities. Official receptions on feast days were followed by solemn processions. The ruler’s birthday and the anniversary of his accession were celebrated with sumptuous banquets and splendid balls. Circumcisions and weddings of members of the dynasty often lasted for a week or longer. These festivities were accompanied by illuminations, fireworks and artillery salutes; the participants rushed through the city in coaches and on horseback, attired in precious garments and shiny decorations.

This full-fledged court of the khedives can be conceived of as a unity of representation serving different communicational requirements of the ruler and the court elite. This chapter analyzes the court of the khedives as a means of communication and representation. For this purpose, the focus will be upon two kinds of court festivities. I will argue that the choice of specific types of festivities was directed by various communicational and representational requirements and by the intentions
underlying each court occasion. I will further show that the system of representation of the Egyptian court was influenced by two distinct court cultures: Ottoman court culture of the tanzimat era (1839–76), and European, or, more precisely, French court culture of the Second Empire (1852–70), both of which served specific communicational purposes. I will discuss this hybrid system of representation in a trans-local perspective, taking into account the contexts of the Ottoman Empire and of Egypt as well as global trends of the nineteenth century.

The court as a medium of communication

Communication and representation are essential features of princely courts and the central theme of this contribution. Before I conceptualize the court as a means of communication, it is necessary to discuss the term “court” and to outline its features in an effort to use it as an analytical category. The general understanding of the term court, used in everyday speech and sometimes academic language, is rather elusive. On the one hand, court can refer to the place where a prince or a king lives and carries out his duties. In this usage, court is synonymous with the residence of a ruler. On the other hand, court can denote the group of people surrounding a prince or king, helping him in his governmental and ceremonial duties, and forming his personal company or entourage. Thus, in the term court, both topographical and social connotations intertwine. To understand the historical phenomenon of a princely court, however, such an open, rather unspecific understanding of court is not of great value. Therefore, I have developed analytical concepts to study the court of the khedives, which I have derived from studies of early modern and nineteenth-century European courts. Their high degree of abstraction allows them to be used—with certain modifications—in a non-European context as well.1

Adopting the definition of the German historian Ronald G. Asch, I define a princely court as a “series of occasions.” This means that the court only comes into existence when a prince or a ruler actually holds court. To hold court means that the prince opens his household on different occasions to people who are not part of the household and who do not have constant access to the prince. These occasions, usually accompanied by pomp and circumstance, may be festivities and ceremonies, or audiences and receptions. They may be events at which the ruler bestows favours in the form of decorations and pensions, hands out gifts, appoints officers, or the like. In this sense, the court is a phenomenon that is established only through the recurrent event of holding court, thus forming a series of occasions.2

As a consequence, one has to distinguish between the court and the ruler’s household. The ruler’s household is an institution that embraces the ruler’s family and numerous servants, as well as other people who work and usually live in his house. In contrast to the court, the household also exists when the ruler is absent.3 The court, however, cannot be conceived of as an institution because it only comes into being when the ruler actually holds court. Yet not all household members take part in the occasions when the ruler holds court, as many servants who might work towards the event do not actually appear at it.
Global and local patterns of communication

For this reason, the members of the ruler’s household cannot be equated with “court society.” I define court society as the social group that usually participates in the occasions wherein the ruler holds court and thus they gain access to the ruler. It is only through their participation that a princely court comes into existence. Some members of the court society might be closely connected to the ruler’s household or even be a part of it (e.g. as holders of a high household office), but usually they are not. Building on the work of Norbert Elias, I understand a court society to be a privileged and prestigious social and cultural elite. Its members are grouped around the ruler and his family; they are organized in a hierarchical structure whereby personal relations and loyalties—often based on ties of patronage—interdependently connect them to each other and to the ruler’s family.4

In order to consider the social and cultural practices at the court of the khedives, I further define the court as a series of occasions of communicational character. This definition draws on the research of the German historian Ute Daniel and is based upon three arguments. First, the court is used by the ruler as a means of communication with other courts and with his subjects. Second, the court is constituted by communication, as the court society defines itself through acts of communication; through communication it separates itself from outsiders and defines its own hierarchy. Third, the court is marked by a specific kind of communication, which defines what is to be considered as court or courtly.5

Most court occasions can be understood as acts of communication.6 From a theoretical point of view, social reality is (re-)produced by agents through acts of communication. With these acts, they produce meaning through speech, behaviour or performance. Seen from this perspective, acts of communication are constitutive elements of the self-conception of a social group or even of the group itself.7

In court ceremonies and festivities, non-verbal or symbolic communication played a central part and was probably even more important than verbal communication. Whereas verbal communication allows complex and abstract messages, which are meant to be basically clear and unmistakable, symbolic communication is less clear and rather ambiguous, leading to different associations. This ambiguity is due to the character of symbols, which are sensually perceptible and metaphorical signs that evoke feelings and can be interpreted in different ways. The most complex form of symbolic communication can be found in rituals and ceremonies. Potentially, these formal, standardized sequences of actions may not only represent a specific social or political order, but may even constitute it.8

When analyzing occasions at the court in respect of their communicational and representational content, the term 
courty representation, developed by medievalists, becomes useful. The notion of courtly representation subsumes the diverse forms and signs of joint acts that represent and (re-)produce the exclusive position of the court society as well as its qualities and attributes.9 Courtly representation encompasses ritualized forms with various functions. On the one hand, these forms draw a social and cultural border between the court elite and its subjects. On the other, they establish relationships between courts and court societies abroad. These two communicational functions are complemented by a third one, as courtly representation has an integrative effect by producing and assuring the
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court society’s cohesion and identity. In the case of the Egyptian court, the situation is somewhat peculiar, as the ruler who held court there was not sovereign but rather subordinate to the Ottoman sultan. Hence, the court of the khedives also served as a means of communication with the superior Ottoman court.

When interpreting symbolic communication at court ceremonies and festivities, three main questions have to be asked:

(1) What was communicated or represented? In order to avoid the simple interpretation of court festivities as representation of nothing but power, it is important to consider the motives that lay behind them and their intended effects as well as the forms and consequences they had.

(2) How was the message transmitted? To answer this question, the respective court festivity has to be analyzed in a wider context, which encompasses the occasion of the festival and its preparation as well as the meanings and the consequences it had for its participants.

(3) Who were the addressees of the communication or the representation? The subjects of the respective rulers were certainly not the only ones addressed by court festivities; trans-local court society and foreign courts have to be considered as addressees as well. Hence, ceremonial signs during the occasions when a ruler held court might have been directed at various court societies defined by territory or to a trans-territorial court society.

State ceremonials

During the reign of ‘Abbās Paşa (1848–54), the Egyptian court was established as a series of occasions. Paşa was the first viceroy of Egypt who held court on a regular basis by arranging numerous ceremonial events shortly after his accession to the throne. Among these occasions there were official receptions for the highest Muslim feasts, the one for the breaking of the Ramaḍān fast (‘īd al-fitr) and the Feast of the Sacrifice (‘īd al-adḥā), ceremonial processions of his female relatives, splendid feasts to celebrate the circumcision of his son and other ceremonies.

Though there had been occasions like official receptions on feast days and circumcision feasts under ‘Abbās’ grandfather, Meḥmed ‘Alī, as well, these occasions cannot be described as courtly in the sense of the definition above. Since feasts celebrating the circumcisions of Meḥmed ‘Alī’s sons and grandsons were only arranged on an irregular basis and with a considerable space of time between them, they did not constitute a series of occasions. As for the regular receptions on feast days, there was no opening of the household in the strict sense. The people received at these events were—for the most part—elite figures who have to be counted among the members of the ruler’s household in the narrow or the broader sense.

Under ‘Abbās, a system of representation was developed which was further differentiated under his successors. It included various kinds of court festivities, many of which were state ceremonials. State ceremonials can be defined as festivities that publicly stressed the relationship between the ruler and his subjects. They thereby connected the actual exercise of rule and power with its symbolic...
representation. Their ritual and ceremonial character clearly set them apart from everyday life. State ceremonials did not only connect the ruler with those he ruled, but they also represented the relationship between the ruler and the elite through which he exercised power.

In Egypt, the main occasions of state ceremonials were the official receptions at 'Id al-fitr and 'Id al-adhā, as well as the solemn lectures of edicts (farāmīn) delivered by the Ottoman sultans to the khedives. Under the rule of ‘Abbās, these state ceremonials gained greater importance. This is reflected in new detailed ceremonial regulations he issued at the beginning of his rule. The protocol department (kālem-i teşrifāt), which was part of the important household body of the viceregal staff or entourage (ma‘īn-i sēniye), was responsible for issuing and supervising these prescriptions. It was quite busy sending decrees to heads of various governmental departments and individuals among the elite. As the decrees were sometimes disregarded in the beginning, the protocol department had to keep sending them anew. The regulations promulgated by ‘Abbās Paşa often described the correct protocol for those attending the court of the Ottoman sultan. He instructed all those who participated in ceremonial occasions at ‘Abbās’ court about the uniforms, the decorations and badges they had to wear; furthermore, he made regulations about the place where attendees had to stand during the ceremony and how they had to move. Whether or not someone was wearing the appropriate clothes and marks of distinction was a major criterion used to determine if that person was allowed to participate in the occasion.

The norms adapted for state ceremonials in Egypt were the Ottoman norms of the tanẓīmāt era. They comprised a new symbolic code including, among other things, uniforms of more or less European design, the fez and decorations introduced by Sultan Maḥmūd II (r. 1808–39). The reforms of the tanẓīmāt-ı ğrayriye were institutionalized by the Gülhane ḥaṭṭ-ı şerīf of 1839 and the ḥaṭṭ-ı hīmāyūn of 1856. The tanẓīmāt and the standardization, uniformity and modernization they put forward came to be an important instrument by which the Ottoman monarchy tried to legitimate itself as a modern monarchy—at least in its relation to the outside world, and particularly the European powers.

Above all, ‘Abbās Paşa’s prescriptions regulated the formal receptions during high religious feasts when members of the elite ceremonially paid homage to the ruler. In mid-nineteenth-century Ottoman Turkish sources at the Egyptian National Archive, these ceremonies are called dāmenpūsī, which describes a ritual at which the hem of a superior’s garment was kissed as a sign of respect and allegiance. Less frequently, the expression hākipūsa is also used, which literally means to kiss the dust (beneath somebody’s feet). At these ceremonies, dignitaries of the state, army officers, ‘ulamā‘ and sometimes Christian and Jewish clerics, notables and respected merchants were received by the ruler—ordinarily one group after another—and expressed their loyalty to him.

The dāmenpūsī ceremonies were a form of symbolic communication. The very ritual of rendering homage established, strengthened and renewed the personal relationship between ruler and elite or between the ruler and representatives of the
subjects. By performing this ritual, the participants symbolically communicated
their position in relation to the ruler, and thereby acknowledged it. Consequently,
the dâmenpûsî ceremonies constituted a symbolic representation of the social
order in general. The sporting of visual signs that pointed out the hierarchical
position of every participant in the ceremony represented, (re-)produced
and strengthened the social order among the participants. Hence, the dâmenpûsî
ceremonies had socially and politically stabilizing effects upon the court society
and strengthened the ties among its members.

The symbolic code applied at these occasions was purely Ottoman. Not only
were the uniforms and decorations Ottoman, but also the norms of the protocol
and the proceedings, emulating similar occasions at the court of the sultan
(resmî mu‘âvede).20 ‘Abbâs Paşa’s protocol aimed at both communicating the
hierarchical structure of the elite and representing its belonging to the Ottoman
Empire through clear signs. Thus, pomp and circumstance accompanying the
occasions were a means of communication with the subjects, showing them
the close allegiance between ruler and elite as well as the internal hierarchy of the
elite and its affiliation to the Empire.

It should be mentioned that the Ottoman system of representation was not first
introduced by ‘Abbâs as something new. Meḥmed ‘Alî had already applied
Ottoman symbols of representation at his feast day receptions and at the circumci-
sion festivals of his sons and grandsons. From the reign of ‘Abbâs onward, the
procedure and form of the feast day receptions remained fairly stable. Some mod-
ifications, however, were introduced by İsmâ‘îl Paşa (r. 1863–79), as he received
additional groups of people21 and introduced new dates for official receptions,
such as his birthday.22 But procedure and form did not change fundamentally; the
content and meaning of the ceremonies remained essentially the same.

There was, however, one significant innovation in İsmâ‘îl’s time, which partly
affected the character of the feast day receptions; the reception ceremonies were
extended to include members of İsmâ‘îl’s family. From the late 1860s onward,
İsmâ‘îl’s sons, foremost the designated heir to the throne, Tevfiḳ Paşa, held formal
receptions too.23 As early as from 1869 onward, the vâlide paşa (“Mother of the
Pasha,” i.e. of İsmâ‘îl), Ḥuşyâr Ḍâvin Efendi, who held the highest rank among the
elite women, regularly received formal homage on feast days not only from other
elite women, but also from men. This usually happened through an intermediary,
who was her chief eunuch.24 In the 1870s, male members of the elite began to go to
the residences of İsmâ‘îl’s wives in order to pay their respects in the same way.25
Thus, the ceremonies of rendering homage were extended to the most prominent
members of İsmâ‘îl’s family. Consequently, they focused not only on the ruler but
rather on İsmâ‘îl’s branch of the Ottoman-Egyptian dynasty. This branch had become
the highest-ranking one in the Dynasty when the right of succession was changed
from the principle of seniority to primogeniture in İsmâ‘îl’s family in 1866.

This extension of the circle of those who received homage reflects on the one
hand the firm establishment of the dynastic order in Egypt. On the other hand,
it stands for the transformation and the adaptation of Ottoman ceremonies to
local necessities and situations. In the early years of İsmâ‘îl’s reign, the feast day
cere monies were modified according to the requirements of dynastic representation that played an important role at the Egyptian court. Unlike dynastic representation on other occasions held on an irregular basis—most important among them were the marriage festivals of 1869, 1873 and 1874—the feast day receptions established a permanent series of occasions. At these occasions, the allegiance between the elite and the ruling family as a whole could be renewed and affirmed in a regular manner.

The local modifications and peculiarities notwithstanding, the feast day receptions remained Ottoman in both character and content and were still so in the 1880s, under the Khedive Tevfik Paşa (r. 1879–92). The way in which officeholders and dignitaries gathered, and the way they were received group by group and according to rank, was distinctly Ottoman, as were the ceremonial uniforms and the medals and decorations they wore. With these features, the feast day ceremonies were clearly marked as a local adaptation of Ottoman court culture that came to be part and parcel of Egyptian court culture.

A further element of Ottoman court culture was the solemn ceremony wherein a fermān addressed by the Sultan to the Egyptian viceroy was publicly read in Cairo. The Sultan used these edicts to vest the viceroy with governmental rights, to confirm existing rights and privileges, but also to expand or restrict these rights. The public lecture made these edicts legally valid. That is why the lecture of a fermān was an act of state, celebrated by state ceremonials. The handing out of the fermān and its reading followed a fixed ceremony held partly in the public space of the capital, Cairo. The person who delivered the decree in Cairo—normally a high functionary of the Sultan’s household—was usually taken in procession (alay or mevkib) through the city and led to the citadel, where the fermān was read and an official reception held.

The practice of processions was a long-standing tradition at the Ottoman court. This tradition was adapted in early times to Egyptian court occasions and developed into a major component of the system of courtly representation. Processions in Cairo were not only arranged in connection with fermān lectures, but also at festivities for princes who were circumcised, at weddings of princesses and princes and at the return of ladies of the dynasty from abroad.

The solemnities held in connection with the delivery of a sultan’s decree were as much a public display in front of the subjects as they were a mise en scène in front of the bearer of the decree. With ceremonial pomp, the khedive presented himself to the population as a ruler loyal to the sultan. Ceremonial pomp was also meant to impress the delegate of the sultan. The Egyptian functionaries and dignitaries who attended the occasion illustrated the support the khedive had in his country and among its elite. Hence, the ceremonial forms were meant to communicate with the subjects and with the court of the sultan.

The solemnities in Cairo in the summer of 1868 clearly reflect this. On 1 August, a decree (menşür) was read in which Sultan ‘Abdül‘azīz (r. 1861–76) promoted İsmā‘īl’s eldest son Tevfik Paşa to the civil rank of vizier (rütbē-i vezāret) and to the military rank of field marshal (mūşur). İsmā‘īl Paşa, who was in Istanbul at that time, sent precise directions to the Egyptian Department of
Military, the Department of Interior and the Department of Finance concerning details of the event. He instructed them as to how Tevfik Paşa and Emīn Bey, the Sultan’s private secretary who delivered the document, were to be received in Alexandria, what boats, special trains, horses and carriages were to be used and in what palaces Emīn should be lodged. Most of all, he was concerned with the proceedings of the procession to the lecture ceremony at Cairo’s citadel, and with the lecture itself. The procession should, Īsmā‘īl wrote, “be most magnificent and brilliant,” and at the lecture “all office-holders” should be present and present themselves “splendidly and in compact rows.”

Obviously, it was Īsmā‘īl’s aim to impress the Sultan’s delegate and to show him the Egyptian court in all its splendour. Emīn Bey was to experience the viceregal court, held by the heir to the throne, Tevfik, as Īsmā‘īl’s representative. He should enjoy the highest respect in place of Sultan ‘Abdül‘aziz. Hence, the display of pomp and splendour served—for the most part—as a means of communication with the court of the Sultan. The symbols used for this communication were purely Ottoman. The procession, the ceremonial of the lecture and the outward appearance of the assembled office-holders were all in accordance with the court traditions of Istanbul. In this way, the court of the khedives presented itself as a localized Ottoman court.

**Court spectacles**

‘Abbās Paşa’s successors Sa‘īd Paşa (r. 1854–63) and Īsmā‘īl Paşa maintained the repertoire of court festivities initiated by ‘Abbās. Moreover, they extended it by introducing new occasions and new kinds of festivities. Among these were the birthday of the ruler and the anniversary of his accession to the throne. The new forms of court festivities can be described as *court spectacles*. Like state ceremonials, court spectacles were occasions set apart from everyday life. Unlike state ceremonials, their character was rather private, as they were accessible only to a restricted number of privileged people. Furthermore, they tended to have the character of entertainment rather than of official ceremonies. Yet, in Egypt, spectacles and state ceremonials sometimes overlapped, as it was quite common that spectacles accompanied state ceremonials. The participation at court spectacles was probably considered as much a duty as was the participation at state ceremonials.

Representation at spectacles of the khedival court was quite different from representation at state ceremonials. Spectacles were characterized by amusements emulating the practices of European court culture. The first spectacle of this kind was arranged by Sa‘īd Paşa in March 1855, when he celebrated his birthday at the Nile Barrages below Cairo (*al-qanāṭir al-khayriyya*). The festivities lasted three days and included diverse aspects. At the centre were amusements for the elite. Among them, there was an Italian opera, a comedy by Molière translated into Turkish, and as a highlight, a state banquet for 500 guests presided over by the viceroy himself. On the fringe of the festival, there were military parades, manoeuvres and a consecration of the colours as well as entertainment for the populace who were provided with free meals.
The participants in the occasion were local as well as foreign. There were members of the Ottoman-Egyptian elite side by side with the consular corps and guests from the European finance and trading bourgeoisie of Alexandria and Cairo. Sometimes even European high noblemen and noblewomen were present, such as, for example, the heirs to the Belgian throne (Duke and Duchess of Brabant) who were invited to the birthday celebrations in 1855 while on a tour through Egypt.

With the birthday festivities of 1855, Sa‘īd established his style of holding court, which he adhered to throughout his reign. At the core of his court occasions was a banquet for several hundred guests as well as various entertainments such as theatre and opera performances and military pomp. By far the greatest occasion of this kind was Sa‘īd’s second throne jubilee in July 1856. On this occasion, the viceroy had the palace and the gardens of his residence Qabbārī in Alexandria redesigned in a European manner, adding columns and statues, a triumphal arch, two huge banquet halls, and a throne room. On the morning of the first feast day, the viceroy, accompanied by his eldest male relatives, went to the throne room and held an official reception in a manner common on religious feast days. This official ceremony was closed by a short troop parade. On the two following evenings, the program included various spectacles for a select audience. On the first evening, there was an opera by Donizetti (L’elisir d’amore) and a ballet (Trionfo di Flora) for “Turkish” and for a restricted number of European guests. On the second evening, Sa‘īd gave a grand ball in his palace. The climax was the lavish banquet on the third evening, to which between 600 and 750 guests, among them 250 Europeans, were invited.

During these festivities—most obviously during the final banquet—the select guests appeared as a court society, grouped around the ruler. One hundred among them who were considered to be the most distinguished dined at Sa‘īd’s table. Sa‘īd sat in front of the highest-ranking guest from Istanbul, Muṣṭafā Reşīd Paşa (1799–1857). This former grand vizier, who held the same rank in the Ottoman hierarchy as the viceroy of Egypt, had travelled to Egypt especially for Sa‘īd’s throne jubilee. The other tables were presided over by Egyptian princes and ministers as representatives of the viceroy. Thus, the banquet reflected the hierarchical structure of the Egyptian court society that arose in the early 1850s: the viceroy stood in its centre, and the members of the dynasty and the ministers formed its core. The medals and decorations worn by the guests were not the only symbolic expressions of the individual’s status and hierarchical position. The location of one’s seat was especially significant, as it defined the position someone had in relation to the central figure of the viceroy. Through communal acts like dining together, the people present demonstrated that they were members of an exclusive social group and recognized the position and the qualities attributed to them.

This spectacle of the throne jubilee served as a means of communication not only within the court society, but also with the superior court of the Sultan in Istanbul. Therefore, Sa‘īd had invited three prominent members of the Ottoman elite: the former grand vizier Muṣṭafā Reşīd Paşa; Yūsuf Kāmil Paşa (d. 1876), a member of the Ottoman State Council and brother-in-law of Sa‘īd and Necīb
Paşa, a high-ranking courtier of Sultan ‘Abdülmecid. The representation at the jubilee was aimed at these representatives of the Sultan. In fact, the jubilee’s beginning was postponed by almost one month in order to allow Necib to participate. Sa‘id was interested in presenting himself to his Istanbul guests as a well-recognized, popular and generous ruler of Egypt, and expected them to report their positive impressions to the Sultan. By this means, he could prove himself worthy of the favours ‘Abdülmecid had shown to him on the occasion of the jubilee, for Necib Paşa had, on behalf of the Sultan, given him a medal, a sword of honour, a personal letter and a decree promoting his four-year-old son Ṭūsün to the rank of a colonel-general (feriḳ).

During these festivities, other courts besides the Sultan’s communicated with Sa‘id’s court as well. Through their presence, the consuls demonstrated the recognition of Sa‘id Paşa’s rule by the foreign powers. The Greek government made its recognition especially clear by decorating Sa‘id with an order, which was handed to him by the consul general on the day after the banquet.

From Sa‘id’s point of view, the occasions of March 1855 and July 1856—and other ones as well—were successful. Through their participation, the Ottoman-Egyptian elite reiterated their position vis-à-vis the viceroy; they renewed and strengthened their loyalty and allegiance to him and symbolically reproduced their internal hierarchy and structure. Yet when Sa‘id held court, he was not always as successful. During his birthday festivities in Jumādana al-Ākhirah 1274/February 1858, Sa‘id tried to assure himself of the elite’s loyalty at a special banquet. According to the French consul, the guests were exclusively “Turkish:” ministers, members of the State Council, some ‘ulamā’ and a few of Sa‘id’s confidants. During the meal, Sa‘id rose and addressed those present. He complained that he was suffering from the burden of governance and that his ministers and chief officials would rather obstruct his work instead of supporting him. After his speech there was an embarrassed silence and nobody contradicted the viceroy or assured him of his loyalty. At that, Sa‘id left the room and retired to his apartments for the rest of the night.

Obviously Sa‘id’s special banquet proved to be unsuitable for the renewal of the elite’s allegiance. The distance emerging between Sa‘id and the elite towards the end of the 1850s could not be bridged by a court spectacle. Sa‘id’s shrinking popularity was also reflected by the dwindling number of guests at these birthday festivities. The majority of his male relatives did not show up, the consular corps, who usually participated in such occasions quite enthusiastically, was only represented by two men and Sa‘id even had difficulty attracting enough guests to the final banquet.

Sa‘id’s court spectacles of March 1855 and July 1856 marked a turning point in Egypt’s court culture. For the first time European-style spectacles were used to give the viceroy an opportunity to interact with his elite and with representatives of foreign courts. Ottoman patterns of representation receded, while European forms came to the fore. The operas, theatres, ballets and banquets as well as the reshaping of the viceregal residence elevated the locus where Sa‘id held court to a prestigious and privileged centre of elite culture. Thus, Qabbārī as well as the
Qanātir al-khayriyya became the proper centres of Sa‘īd’s court spectacles; centres set apart from the citadel of Cairo, the place where state ceremonials were usually held.

The court of the French Emperor Napoléon III (r. 1852–70) in the Tuileries was an important model for Sa‘īd’s court spectacles. This model inspired not only the forms of entertainment but also the outward appearance of his court. As early as 1854 he began having the guards of his household dress in uniforms emulating those of Napoléon III’s garde impériale.40 İsmā‘il Paşa’s orientation towards the French court model was even stronger than Sa‘īd’s. At İsmā‘il’s festivities footmen and other servants wore white gloves and wigs. Many household servants came from Paris, since he employed ex-members of the French imperial household. Especially after the fall of Napoléon III, French equerries, coachmen, waiters, cooks and other servants41 played a considerable role in İsmā‘il’s spectacles.

İsmā‘il organized most of his spectacles to celebrate the anniversaries of his accession to the throne. This occasion was celebrated on 18 January (according to the solar calendar, as opposed to the hijra calendar), and thus court occasions were especially frequent in winter. Among Europeans, winter came to be known as the “season” of Cairo, when European-style amusements such as balls, banquets, smaller scale evening entertainments called soirées musicales et dansantes, and other events, took place in the palaces of the khedive.42 European guests at these spectacles, who knew the court of Napoléon III, were familiar with these types of events.43

The great balls, called “state balls” by Europeans, were usually the most splendid occasions of the season. An American diplomat called them “exact copies of European royal entertainments.”44 Such a ball (bālū) was part and parcel of each throne jubilee.45 Balls were also held on other occasions such as marriages in the ruling family,46 or when leading European aristocrats were guests of the Egyptian state. The latter occurred most frequently in 1869. In March, İsmā‘il gave a state ball for the Prince and Princess of Wales.47 Before and after the inauguration of the Suez Canal in November, balls were given in Cairo for European monarchs and princes attending the opening celebrations.48 In the same year, evening entertainment was organized in honour of aristocrats. The Duke Amadeo of Aosta, a son of the King of Italy, and his wife, were invited to a soirée with music and theatre performances in October.49

The number of guests invited to the balls often amounted to several hundreds or even a thousand. When a throne jubilee ball coincided with another unusual event it took on especially grand dimensions. İsmā‘il’s throne jubilee ball of January 1873, for example, took place at the same time as the beginning of four weddings in the ruling family and entertained some 5,000 people.50 The guests at such balls were comprised of the local elite and foreigners,51 with numerous European ladies and gentlemen usually receiving invitations. European aristocrats staying in Egypt as tourists were sometimes invited as guests of honour.52 Travellers’ accounts relate that invitations were quite popular with European residents in Egypt, European employees of the Egyptian state and even among European tourists staying in Cairo and Alexandria; gaining access to the balls was usually not difficult for Europeans.53 Consuls sometimes recommended their
fellow countrymen for invitations. Status and rank were not always considered very important. An observer wrote that the balls “often brought together thousands of guests of such a colourful mix of social elements, which even at the smallest European courts would not be thinkable.”\(^5^4\) It seems that the main criterion for the admission of Europeans was their ability to behave and dance in a European way considered appropriate for the balls. The local guests were exclusively male, and among them there were prominent members of the Ottoman-Egyptian elite (zevāt), higher Egyptian state and army officers, some ‘ulamā’ and other dignitaries.\(^5^5\)

The balls that were hosted by ʿİsmāʿīl were large-scale spectacles where he could show off his household and interact with his guests. The display was meant to impress the population of his realm and their representatives who had access to these balls. Illuminations and fireworks made the splendour and pomp of the balls visible throughout the capital. In this way, the viceregal court was presented with the “modern” grandeur of European cultural forms. Since high symbolic and cultural prestige was ascribed to these forms, they were well-suited to represent the privileged position of the ruler and his household. They underlined the function of the court as the symbolic and actual centre of state and society. They set the culture of the viceregal residence and court apart from the cultural code of the subjects, and presented them as a distant, magnificent and privileged centre that derived its prestige from the participation in an internationally validated and recognized court culture. Everything was undertaken to add to the khedive’s prestige: the brightly lit palace where the ball was held, the illuminated streets through which the guests drove to the ball, the carriages they rode, their costly attire and glittering decorations and the ostentatious consumption of luxury celebrated at the ball itself.

The balls were also meant as a display to the European guests. They entertained wealthy European residents in Egypt, members of European dynasties and European nobles touring through Egypt. The khedive and his court society demonstrated to these guests that they were not only familiar with the symbolic code of European courts, but shared a common court culture. Hence, the balls hosted by ʿİsmāʿīl were a medium of communication with European court societies, to whom he presented himself as a modern ruler.

**Global standards of court representation**

As discussed above, the court of the khedives saw the development of a diverse system of representation that emerged in the formative period of the court between the late 1840s and the early 1860s. In its development, elements of two different systems of representation were adopted. Representation at state ceremonials was markedly Ottoman, whereas court spectacles were dominated by European patterns. These two types of courtly representation were used according to the communicational needs of the Egyptian ruler and Egyptian court society.

Thus, it is quite clear that the Egyptian court did not evolve in a purely local, Egyptian setting. The court of the khedives acted in a broader, Ottoman and even global, setting. Hence, the Egyptian court and its culture cannot be interpreted nor understood in a local context alone. Using a trans-local perspective allows us to
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put the Egyptian court into the framework of a broader court culture in which globally recognized norms set the standard. With regard to the dimension of global history, the Egyptian court must be discussed as a local case embedded in a global environment.56

Global history investigates the processes of formation and change of cultural and social practices under the influence of global trends and developments. These processes are essentially marked by selective and often critical acts of receiving, translating, adapting and modifying globally present structures, institutions and ideas by local agents on a local level. In the nineteenth century, the prevailing global structures, institutions and ideas were dominated by European concepts and standards that were adapted and modified by local agents and institutions. The relationship to European civilization and societies, which set the global norms and standards, was always characterized by appropriation and rejection. It can thus be described as a dynamic process of diffusion and exchange transgressing political, cultural and social borders. In the cultural sphere, the result of this diffusion and exchange was, more often than not, hybrid, as it combines elements of local and global/European culture.

By adapting the style of European courts, notably the style of the French imperial court, the court of the khedives participated in a global trend of the nineteenth century, as did other courts in America, Asia, Africa and Europe. In the first place—and also most visibly—the diffusion of European courtly codes and their adaptation in non-European societies became apparent in the reshaping of the outward appearance of court occasions. The preservation of local particularities notwithstanding, uniforms, decorations, medals and also palaces were adjusted to European norms. Good examples of this are the Ottoman ceremonial uniforms of the tanẓīmāt era and the Ottoman decorations introduced from the 1830s onward.57 Similar developments can be noted with regard to other courts in the second half of the nineteenth century. In Iran under Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh (r. 1848–96), the monarchy developed a new vocabulary of representation with uniforms, decorations and medals, showing European and Ottoman tanẓīmāt patterns.58 At the Japanese imperial court, new clothing norms, inspired by European fashion, were introduced in 1869.59 The courts of the emperors of Brazil and Mexico, both descendants of European dynasties, were, naturally, very European in appearance, too.60

This global trend was partly due to the fact that up until the early twentieth century, the prevailing form of government globally was the monarchy. Republics were—at least in the Old World—rather short-lived in the nineteenth century. All the European states that were newly constituted in the nineteenth century were monarchies (Kingdom of Belgium from 1831; Kingdom of Italy from 1861; Empire of Germany from 1871). The states in south-eastern Europe, which became independent from the Ottoman Empire, were also constituted as monarchies, and often a Central European (preferably a German) prince was called to the throne.61 Even in America, the only continent where republics were in the majority, three states were established as monarchies. Although the empires of Haiti and Mexico were only very short-lived, the Brazilian Empire lasted for more than six decades.
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The dynastic monarchy as a “standard model” required a system of representation that was comprehensible and recognized within the global political system. As the nineteenth-century courts served as a medium of representation and communication for their respective states, they adapted their symbolic vocabulary more and more to European norms, which became globally valid. In this process, the French imperial court of Napoléon III’s Second Empire came to be an important model. For the Egyptians of the third quarter of the century, it was the prototype of court culture, and remained important for some time after the fall of the emperor. Egypt looked to the French imperial court as a model of an up-to-date, modern and progressive court.

In Egypt, the adaptation of globally valid norms of courtly communication even entailed a transformation within the viceregal household. This transformation affected the important household body of the viceregal staff (*ma’iyet-i seniye*), who fulfilled mainly political functions as an administrative board exerting control and direction during Meḥmed ‘Alī’s reign. Under his successors it changed into a personal service to the viceroy primarily occupied with matters of correspondence and protocol. But the members of the *ma’iyet-i seniye* were also charged with tasks of representation, foremost during the occasions when the ruler held court. The old structure of the viceregal household, which under Meḥmed ‘Alī and ‘Abbās, had largely corresponded to the household of the Ottoman sultans, gradually vanished in the 1860s. Parts of the traditional outer service (*bīrūn*) and inner service (*enderūn*) lost their importance or were, to a certain extent, incorporated into the *ma’iyet-i seniye*, while other parts of them disappeared entirely.

Correspondence of the viceregal cabinet and nineteenth-century publications in European languages suggest that under İsmā’īl Paşa this development led to a reinterpretation of the *ma’iyet-i seniye* inspired by international norms rather than by the model of the sultan’s household. The *ma’iyet-i seniye* was conceived of as an “official household,” as İsmā’īl’s *maison civile et militaire*. Hence, it was considered as an institution common to nineteenth-century princely households. Officials who were previously part of the *enderūn*, but also physicians and engineers, numbered among the *officiers de la maison civile; aides-de-camp*, officers of the guards and some functionaries like equerries, formerly part of the *bīrūn*, were considered as *officiers de la maison militaire*. The holders of the highest offices and ranks (Keeper of the Seal, Chief *aide-de-camp*, Chief Secretary, Chief Treasurer and Chief Master of Ceremonies) formed the core of this official household.

This reinterpretation was closely linked to the changes in the representational and communicational function of the court. The older form of the ruler’s household, composed of *enderūn* and *bīrūn*, supplied the structure for court occasions oriented towards local and Ottoman addressees. The *maison civile et militaire* however, provided the structure for court occasions aimed at communication with courts on an international, primarily European level. The *maison civile et militaire* was the structural basis for a new kind of communication. Thus, it played the same role as the equivalent household bodies of other ruling houses.

The adaptation described was relevant insofar as during the nineteenth-century court and ceremonial, pomp and circumstance became increasingly important as a
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means used by sovereigns in the competitive struggle for international prestige, legitimacy and power. In the context of rivalry among states, monarchs tried to legitimize themselves by ceremonies that were adapted to, or newly created upon, the model of global standards. Ceremonies were to represent “civilization,” “modernity” and “progress” of the monarchs and their states—three principles originating from Europe that were considered as universal and globally valid in the nineteenth century. The use of ceremonial as a means of legitimization was analyzed by Selim Deringil for the Ottoman Empire under Sultan ʿAbdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909). The same function for ceremonial occasions can be found in Meiji Japan, along with ritual representations of a new, “modern style” reign towards their subjects and the outside world. European monarchies, too, used pomp and ceremonial in order to increase and strengthen the legitimacy and the power of the monarch and the state.

In Egypt, the case was somewhat particular, as it was not the ceremonials, but rather the balls, banquet and opera and theatre performances that were used to express the modernity of the khedive and his rule. It was by these court spectacles that the khedives defined themselves and their state as civilized, progressive and modern. In this way, they underpinned their legitimacy in the competition between the world powers and communicated their modernity and progressiveness to the outside world. In addition, this modernity and progressiveness were substantial sources of legitimacy for the Egyptian dynasty, as it could not base itself on a long dynastic history nor claim any religious legitimacy as other dynasties, notably the Ottomans, could. The representation of modernity and progressiveness through European court spectacles climaxed in the festivities for the inauguration of the Suez Canal in November 1869. This project was the very epitome of the modernity and progress of the nineteenth century. The festivities for the opening ceremonies were all based on models of European court culture. Even the guests invited for the inauguration came from Europe, most prominent among them were Eugénie, the Empress of the French, Francis Joseph, Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary and Frederick William, the crown prince of Prussia.

Seen in this light, the adaptation of French court culture in Egypt cannot simply be seen as the result of a process of Europeanization or Westernization. Rather, it was an adaptation to a courtly style that was accepted as a global standard. Moreover, the participation in a globally valid court culture integrated the monarchs, their families and their court societies into a much wider, translocal court society. In the Egyptian case, this became evident in the growing number of personal contacts between Egyptian court society and other court societies. Personal relations were established through visits of European nobles at the Egyptian court and visits by members of the khedival dynasty to European courts. The visible signs of these contacts were, for example, the growing exchange of decorations between the Egyptian ruling family and members of European royal households in the same period.

It was the adaptation of the European courtly style, and even more its modern secularity, which distinguished the Egyptian monarchy from the Ottoman sultanate. The latter had, besides its modern legitimacy, based on the institutionalized reforms of the tanẓīmāt, the firm underpinnings of an old dynastic and
relational legitimacy. The modern legitimacy was effective on an international level, whereas its dynastic and religious counterpart was effective within the Ottoman state and society. Consequently, it is not surprising that there were no purely secular spectacles, like the Egyptian state balls, at the court of the sultans. The representations at the Ottoman court were instead based on state ceremonials focusing on dynastic and religious legitimacy. Thus, one of the most important occasions at the Istanbul court—especially under Sultan ʿAbdülhamīd II—was the sultan’s procession to the Friday prayer (cumʿa selâmlığı). This time-honoured ceremony took new forms in the nineteenth century, but still represented the sultan’s and therefore the Ottoman state’s religious legitimacy.72

Conclusion

If we look at the court of the khedives of Egypt as a series of occasions with communicative character and if we apply the three questions—what was communicated at court festivities, how was it communicated and to whom was the communication addressed?—it becomes clear what purpose the court served.

In the case of the state ceremonials, arranged for official receptions at religious and secular feast days and on the occasion of fermān lectures, the code of communication was the Ottoman one of the tanẓimat era. Egyptian state ceremonials corresponded—small modifications notwithstanding—to the ceremonial of similar occasions at the Istanbul court, an element of Ottoman court culture that became firmly rooted in Egypt. The Ottoman symbolism of these occasions, found in uniforms, decorations and medals, but also in the ceremonial itself, illustrate the fact that the Egyptian state, the khedives and the elite through which they ruled, were all an integral part of the Ottoman Empire. The state ceremonials communicated this fact to the population and, at least at the occasions of fermān lectures, to the Ottoman court in Istanbul. A further function of state ceremonials was to reinforce and intensify the hierarchical structure of Egyptian court society and its allegiance to the ruler and, from the late 1860s onward, his family.

The picture is very different when it comes to court spectacles. There, we do not find the Ottoman symbolic code but rather a European courtly style, primarily inspired by the French imperial court. The interaction between members of Egyptian court society at banquets, balls and other amusements at court was based on a cultural code that represented the exclusiveness of the court society and its social and cultural identity that contrasted with the cultural identity of the population. Communication at these occasions was directed, on the one hand, to the Egyptian court society; it served as a tool of integration and helped to consolidate its group identity. On the other hand, it was addressed to the common people, showing them through the ostentatious display of splendour and glamour the privileged exclusivity of the court elite. In addition, symbolic communication at these court occasions was a device of representation in front of a non-Egyptian public, above all in Europe and at European courts. Thus, the participation of the khedive, his family and his court society in a court culture that was considered to be modern and progressive was communicated symbolically through court spectacles.
The hybrid representation system of the Egyptian court makes sense if it is considered within a wider perspective encompassing local Egyptian peculiarities, Ottoman tendencies and influences, as well as global trends. Different forms of court culture were applied to different communicative purposes. Ottoman court culture was mainly used as a way of communication with the superior Istanbul court and as a means of representing state power to the subjects. Global/French court culture was used to represent the exclusiveness of Egyptian court society within Egypt and as a way illustrate the modernity of the Egyptian Khedivate to Europe. For the khedive and his court society there was no fundamental contradiction between Ottoman and global/French court culture. Both of them implied—though differently cast—modernity. The Ottoman court culture of the tanẓīmāt era was a symbol for progress and reform in the Ottoman Empire and represented its modern identity. The French court culture of the Second Empire was a symbol for the European concept of modernity and progress that increasingly gained global validity. These two court cultures were brought to a kind of synthesis at the court of the khedives, a synthesis through which the khedive and his elite participated in both modernities.

Notes

1 For a detailed discussion, see Konrad (2008), 21–30.
2 See Asch (1991), 7–9; idem (1993), 12f.
3 See idem (1991), 9.
6 Generally, all human acts and behaviour can be understood as forms of communication. Being a reciprocal relationship between two or more agents, communication is a collective phenomenon, always embedded in social contexts. It can be realized under certain conditions. In the first place, there has to be a piece of information. Secondly, this piece of information has to be told to somebody. And thirdly, the information has to be understood by the person or persons to whom it is told. This broad definition applies to verbal communication as well as to non-verbal communication. See Stollberg-Rilinger (2004), 489–527, esp. 492–6.
7 See ibid. 495.
9 See Ragotzky/Wenzel (1990), 7f.
11 For these questions and the following considerations, see idem (2004).
13 See Konrad (2008), 440. For a characterization of the Ottoman-Egyptian elite of the first half of the nineteenth century as a “household elite,” see Toledano (2003), 69, 102; also Hunter (1999), 22–7.
14 “State ceremonial” is one of the main forms of courtly representation described by the historian Ralph E. Giesey; see Giesey (1987), 41–59, esp. 42f.
15 There are two register volumes in the Egyptian National Archive exclusively containing decrees of the protocol department of the ma‘īyet-i seniye: see DWQ/MST 471 (S 1/73/1), ‘Ṣādir al-ifādāt bi-qalam tashrīfāt al-ma‘īyya’ (5th Rajab 1265 to 21st Shawwāl 1268/27th May 1849 to 6th August 1852); DWQ/MST 487 (S 1/73/2), ‘Ṣādir al-ifādāt bi-qalam tashrīfāt al-ma‘īyya’ (26th Zī ’l-Qa‘da 1268 to 29th Zī ’l-Ḥijja 1270/11th September 1852 to 23rd September 1854).
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16 E.g., see DWQ/MST 471 (S 1/73/1), 7f. no. 16 (on 19th Rajab 1266/2nd February 1850); 19f (on Ramazân 1266/July–August 1850).

17 See DWQ/MST 467 (S 1/55/13), 41 no. 59 (on 15th Jumâdá al-Úlá 1265/8th April 1849); DWQ/MST 449 (S 1/55/12), 277 no. 59 (on 15th Jumâdá al-Úlá 1265/8th April 1849); DWQ/MST 471 (S 1/73/1), 7f no. 16 (on 19th Rabî al-Awwal 1266/2nd February 1850); 19f (on Ramazân 1266/July–August 1850).

18 For a detailed consideration of dynastic representation at the Egyptian court, see Ebeling (1878), 347–9; for weddings, see ibid. 362–79.

19 E.g., see ibid., 20 (on Ramazân 1266/July–August 1850). Here, pe is also used instead of be. For ceremonies of rendering homage to the Ottoman sultan, see Karateke (2004), 76–101.

20 Unlike ‘Abbâs, Îsmâ’îl not only received ‘ulâmâ’, consuls and state dignitaries of the administration and the army, but also other members of the elite such as civil servants of subordinate governmental offices, provincial governors, inspectors, police and post officers, administrators of the vice-regal estates, teachers and students of the state schools and Christian and Jewish clergymen. Sometimes he received heads of Sufi orders together with the ‘ulâmâ’. See, e.g., al-Waqâ‘î al-Miṣrîyya 485 (8th Shawwâl 1289/9th December 1872) and al-Ahrâm 115 (8th Shawwâl 1295/4th October 1878).

21 At the receptions at Îsmâ’îl’s birthdays, the circle of people received tended to be wider than at ‘id al-fitr and ‘id al-aḍhâ. In the sources, quite regular references to notables (a’yân al-balâd), heads of Sufi orders, European and Egyptian merchants and sometimes to the members of the Consultative Chamber of Delegates (maṭlis shirâ al-nawwâb) can be found. See, e.g., al-Waqâ‘î al-Miṣrîyya 60 (18th Şafar 1283/26th November 1866), 245 (17th Şafar 1285/3rd November 1868), 693 (6th Muḥarram 1293/21st January 1877); Sâmi Bahsh (1916–1936), III/2:731, 792f.

22 See Wâdi al-Nîl 4/69 (7th Shawwâl 1287/31st December 1872); al-Waqâ‘î al-Miṣrîyya 485 (8th Shawwâl 1289/9th December 1872).

23 See Pouiade de la Valette, on 15th January 1869, in: MAE/CP Egypte 45, fols. 19–22; Pouiade de la Valette, on 27th March 1869 (see ibid. fols. 237–254).

24 See Ebeling (1878), I:97; Chennells (1893), I:34.

25 For a detailed consideration of dynastic representation at the Egyptian court, see Konrad (2008), 347–9; for weddings, see ibid. 362–79.

26 For the participants of official receptions by Tevfîk, see al-Ahrâm 201 (10th June 1880), 202 (17th June 1880), 203 (24th June 1880).

27 For a general overview of the different kinds of Ottoman processions, see Nutku (1991).

28 For descriptions of various kinds of processions see Pardiçî (1851), 148f (procession after the circumcision rites of ‘Abbâs Paşa’s son İbrâhîm İlhamî in 1849 [in Ottoman Turkish sînnet alayî]; Politis (1931), 185 (procession at the entry of ‘Abbâs Paşa’s mother Penbe Kadın Efendi in Cairo [vâlide alayî] in 1849); Lesseps (1887), II:74 (procession at the entry of Sa‘îd Paşa’s sister Zeyneb Hanım Efendi in Cairo in 1854); Perrières (1873), 154f (bridal procession [gelin alayî] of Îsmâ’îl Paşa’s daughter Emîne Hanım Efendi at her marriage in 1873).

29 See DWQ/MST 573-I (S 1/55/24), 90 no. 92, 92 no. 29, 93f. no. 57 (on 1st Rabî al-Śânî 1285/22nd July 1868).

30 DWQ/MST 573-I (S 1/55/24), 92 no. 29, 93f no. 57 (on 1st Rabî al-Śânî 1285/22nd July 1868).

31 See Giesey (1987), 42f. Apart from “state ceremonials” and “spectacles” Giesey distinguishes “court ritual” (or “etiquette”) as a third form of courtly representation. Because of limited space and rather scanty sources on this topic, it is not possible here to deal
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with it. Court ritual organized everyday life in a princely household and formalized
social behaviour. It can be seen as a medium that internally communicated the hierarchy
and the structure of a court society. Court ritual played an important role, not only in
everyday life at the ruler’s household, but at court occasions as well, and it was probably
even more important at court festivities than in everyday life.

33 See Sabatier to Drouyn de Lhuys, on 25th March 1855, in: MAE/CP Egypte 26, fols. 34–8.
34 See De Leon (1869), 43.
35 See Sabatier to Drouyn de Lhuys, on 25th March 1855, in: MAE/CP Egypte 26, fols. 34–8.
36 See Sāmī Bāshā (1916–36), III/1: 264f, 311 (banquets at Sa’īd’s birthdays in
February 1858 and January 1859 respectively); Sabatier to Colonna Walewski, on
20th February 1859, in: MAE/CP Egypte 28, fols. 177–84 (birthday celebrations in
1859); Benedetti to Colonna Walewski, on 19th Sept. 1856, in: MAE/CP Egypte 27, fols.
11–21 (festivities at hījrī new year’s day 1273).
37 The following is based on Lo Spettatore egiziano 1/40 (24th July 1856); Rossetti
to Baldasseroni, on 28th June and 25th July 1856, in: DWQ/AU-AI; Benedetti to
Colonna Walewski, on 25th July 1856, in: MAE/CP Egypte 26, fols. 318–31; Bruce to
Clarendon, on 22nd July 1856, in: PRO/FO 195/522, fols. 105–11. The quotation is
from the Spettatore egiziano.
38 For a detailed analysis of the Egyptian court society, its development and structure, see
39 The following is based on Sabatier to Colonna Walewski, on 10th and 22nd February
41 Documents concerning French and other European personal in Īsmā’īl’s household can
be found in DWQ/AU-AI 39/8, no. 7 (on 8th October 1868); no. 15 (on 4th May 1870);
no. 78 (on 3rd October 1877), no. 82 (on 16th October 1877), no. 85 (on 19th October
1877). Also, see DWQ/AU-AI 39/4, no. 26 (Allix to Khayr Paşâ, on 26th December
1871); no. 31 (on 13th January 1873); no. 39 (Allix to Barrot Bey on 16th September
1873); no. 81 (St.-Maurice to Barrot, on 19th September 1878); no. 97 (on 10th May
[1873]); no. 94 (Fleury to Īsmā’īl, on 5th March [no year]); DWQ/AU-AI 27/14, No. 1
to della Sala, on 4th January 1877).
42 See De Leon (1878), 175, 336f.
43 E.g., see Colet (1879), 126.
44 De Leon (1878), 96.
45 See Chennells (1893), I:240.
46 E.g. on the occasion of the marriage of Īsmā’īl’s daughter Tevḥīde Khanım and Yeğen
Mansır Paşâ in spring 1869; see al-Waqā‘ī’ al-Miṣriyya 283 (18th Zī ’l-Hijja 1285/31st
March 1869).
47 See Russell (1869), 313; Gellion-Danglar (1876), 236.
48 See Friedrich Wilhelm (1971), 94; Savigny de Moncorps (1873), 62 (a ball given
for Frederick William, crown prince of Prussia); Taglioni (1870), 276–9; Morra di
Laviano (1997), 133 (a ball given for Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria-Hungary).
49 See al-Waqā‘ī’ al-Miṣriyya 325 (24th Jumādā al-Ākhirah 1286/30th September 1869);
Colet (1879), 105, 121–3.
50 See al-Waqā‘ī’ al-Miṣriyya 491 (22nd Zī ’l-Qa’dā 1289/21st January 1873).
51 For guests invited to balls, see Lüttke (1873), II:24; al-Waqā‘ī’ al-Miṣriyya 270
(26th Shawwāl 1285/8th February 1869), 789 (17th Ramaḍān 1295/12th December
1878).
52 See ibid. 278 (25th Zī ’l-Qa’dā 1285/8th March 1869); a brother of the Grand Duke of
Baden and a British ex-Viceroy of India being invited as guests of honour to a ball.
Ebeling (1878), I:126–8; Chennells (1893), II:222ff.: Prince Arthur, son of Queen Victoria and Duke of Connaught, and the Hereditary Prince of Mecklenburg-Schwerin as guests of honour to a ball (January 1875).

E.g., see Ebeling (1878), I:116. Although European ladies passing through Cairo or Alexandria were invited to balls, women dancing at the balls were always scarce. According to Charles Hale, the male/female-ratio was usually around 1:10 or 1:5. See Hale (1876), 518.

Lüttke (1873), II:209.

Whereas gevāt and other members of the Egyptian urban elite associated fairly easily with Europeans, it seems that at the balls ‘ulamā’ rather stayed among themselves (see Ebeling (1878), I:129ff).

For the following, see Conrad/Eckert (2007), 7–49, esp. 24–39. For the concept of “translocality,” see Freitag (2005).

For Ottoman decorations, see Landau/Pellat (1995).

For European influence in Iranian court culture, see Mansel (1988), 67–9; also the contribution of Abbas Amanat to the present volume. Details about court life in late-nineteenth-century Iran can be found in the memoirs of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh’s chief physician Joannès Fevrier (see Fevrier (1899)). The code of the tanṣīmāt was of course also adapted with local modifications by the autonomous Ottoman province of Tunisia. See Brown (1974); Mansel (1988), 54–8.

For Brazil, see Barman (1999); for the Mexican court, see Blasio (1999).

E.g. in Greece, the first king Otto (r. 1832–62) was a Bavarian prince; George I., the second king, was a Danish prince (r. 1863–1913). Bulgaria elected in 1879 Alexander of Battenberg, and in 1886 Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, two German noblemen, to be prince of the country. Charles of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, another German nobleman, ruled in Rumania (1866–1914).

See Hunter (‘1999), 63f. At the same time the state administration was separated from the ruler’s household.

A main purpose of the complex household structure under Meḥmed ‘Alī and ‘Abbās was to create loyal followers of the ruler. In the endeṛūn, young men (called gilmān), among them many mamlāk slaves, were socialized and trained. In the 1860s and 1870s, the household no longer served this purpose, since in Saʿdī’s and Ismāʿīl’s households there were no gilmān anymore. The household and state officials who served Saʿdī and Ismāʿīl had—as a rule—not been socialized and educated in their respective ruler’s households. As a consequence, the endeṛūn was much reduced in scale and lost its importance. Having lost its function as a place of household education and training, the endeṛūn no longer had much significance as a structural element of the household, and, likewise, the biṛūn, as an “exterior” makes no sense without “interior.” The harem—the third main structural element of the old vice-regal household—was not affected by this structural change; see Konrad (2008), 128–30.

E.g. the draft of a letter by Ismāʿīl to Şefer Paşa announcing the he had elected him to be his “grand écuver” (Grand Equerry, Ottoman Turkish mīrāḥār) contains the phrase “vous feriez partie de Ma Maison Militaire”. DWQ/AU-AI 39/4, no. 100 (Ismāʿīl to Şefer Paşa, no date).

Also, see François-Levernay (1868), 44f. (differentiation between ministres and maison du Vice-Roi); n.n. (1875), 871 (list of members of the Hofstaat des Khediven); McCoan (1877), 90 (lists the same men as members of the “official household”).

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For “universals,” see Hopkins (2006), 7f. For the acceptance of the universal principle of “civilization” by non-European, especially Ottoman, elites and intellectuals of the mid-nineteenth century, see also Aydīn (2007), 18–24.

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See Deringil (1998), 16f., 22–6, 171f.
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68 See Fujitani (1996), 11–8, 31–4, 95, 98f.
69 For state and court ceremonials as an instrument in the struggle for power among European states (1870–1914), see Cannadine (1983), 120–30.
70 See Konrad (2008), 282–90, 292.
71 See ibid. 290–2.

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Court cultures in the Muslim world: seventh–nineteenth centuries


Part II

Patronage
Networks of Patronage
14 The administration of welfare under the Mamluks

Lucian Reinfandt

Religious endowments in Mamluk society

Religious endowments (awqāf) have always been a crucial factor in Islamic societies. The assignment of productive capital (mawqīf, i.e. agricultural land, urban estates) to trusts and the allocation of the yields for communal purposes (mawqīf ‘alayhi, i.e. upkeep of cultural and religious institutions, hospitals, orphanages, drinking wells, etc.) is a widespread phenomenon.1 This article will focus on Islamic religious endowments in the late medieval Syro-Egyptian Mamluk sultanate as a specific form of pre-modern urban patronage.

A variety of motives led rulers and wealthy individuals to become donors to the general public. Most important among these was, perhaps, the promise of salvation in the afterlife. The here and now which was disease-ridden and full of insecurity, political turmoil and countless other disasters must have made altruistic motives paramount and should not be underestimated by modern scholars.2 Less religious motives, however, were also important. Thus, endowments served to fund communal needs such as street-cleaning, nightly illumination or the provision of the public with drinking-water, nowadays provided by modern communal administration.3 Economic aspects have been much studied, such as the maintenance of one’s own offspring,4 the tax exemptions of waqf yields5 or the use of waqf as a safeguard against confiscation by the state, always hard-pressed for money.6 Moreover, since the donor often served as the foundation’s original administrator, the accumulation of waqf capital might have served, in not a few cases, as a highly profitable covert “bank” providing the donor with considerable means of political power in times where money was chronically short.7

The donors’ high profit-sharing is explained by the fact that the income from endowed capital (mawqīf) in many cases exceeded the benevolent institutions’ (mawqīf ‘alayhi) running expenses. Remaining endowment deeds from the second half of the ninth/fifteenth century indicate high profit margins (fā‘id) with up to 90 percent of the endowments’ total yields not required by the benevolent institutions and thus available for the donors’ own purposes.8 Even if these accumulations were meant, at least in part, to compensate for a possible future loss of worth or productivity of the capital, the main aim seems to have been to raise the donors’ private yields. There were too many cases with such a quick increase not to give the
impression of a general desire for a quick profit.9 Thus a type of clandestine economy evolved that was independent from, and sometimes supportive of, the more open regular economy.10 Endowment deeds show a clear tendency towards capital accumulation in the decades following a foundation’s establishment. The capital stock was used to reimburse the actual cost of the benevolent institutions, thereby serving both the institutions themselves and the expectations of the public. By accumulating additional capital (mawqūf), however, a speculative margin evolved that remained in the hands of the investor (donor).11 The benevolent purpose of the endowment helped to conceal the donor’s main interest.12

For the Mamluk ruling elite these motives were also significant. However, they were also concerned with accumulating symbolic capital and attaining the legitimacy to rule over Egypt and Syria.13 Financing “culture” (generally understood as religious and educational institutions and their personnel) secured the savants’ (‘ulamā’) loyalty to the ruling elite. The ‘ulamā’ were not only the largest group of beneficiaries but also the moral authority of their time and the alleged guardians of Islam. Thus their loyalty to the Mamluks assured the latter political power and favourable public opinion.14 It was during the politically and economically troubled times of the late ninth/fifteenth and early tenth/sixteenth centuries, when the splendour and plenty of the foundations reached its peak. One explanation for this phenomenon may be the Mamluks’ love of the arts. More convincing, however, is their desperate dependence on public legitimacy in order to sustain their rule.15

Examples of sultans’ charity: İnāl, Aḥmad ibn İnāl, Qāytbāy

The ninth/fifteenth century was the heyday of donors’ bounty. Among the many well-documented cases, I will focus on the one of Sultan al-Ashraf İnāl (r. 857–65/1453–61).16 İnāl had his own mausoleum (turba) erected in Cairo’s Northern Cemetery (ṣahrā’) in 855/1451, when he still held the position as commander-in-chief of the army (atābak al-‘asākir).17 In 857/1453, only two months before ascending the sultan’s throne, he set up four private tombs there for himself, his wife and his two sons, Aḥmad and Muḥammad.18 At the time İnāl could not have known about his imminent ascendance which came as a surprise to everyone. All the family members were ultimately buried in the mausoleum and thus it served its purpose.19 While the deed in this case was not preserved, we can assume that the mausoleum was financed by a family endowment (waqf ahlī), as was common at this time.20 If there was such an endowment, İnāl’s benevolence would have clearly served a clear family purpose.

However, when İnāl ascended the sultan’s throne in Rajab 857/March 1453, one of his early measures was to enlarge the basic foundation with an additional building, of public interest: a Sufi convent (khānaqāh). This building, completed in Muḥarram 858/January 1454, was directly connected to İnāl’s mausoleum and was an architectural extension of it.21 The primary endowment deed is now lost but the deed for an additional endowment of agricultural lands from the year 863/1458 is preserved.22 It stipulates the distribution of the land’s annual yields to pay for the convent’s structural upkeep, the payment of wages for the employees and running
expenses for another building, a dervish’s hermitage (zāwiya), which had also been erected on the same area before 863/1458.\textsuperscript{23} In the meantime, ʿInāl had begun another public institution, again as part of the same building complex in the cemetery: a colossal high school (madrasa) in combination with a Friday mosque (jāmiʿ), both finished in 860/1456.\textsuperscript{24} The quick completion of these projects, within just seven months, illustrates the excellent building abilities in late medieval Egypt, but might also hint at ʿInāl’s haste to complete these important undertakings due to his advanced age and his possibly weak constitution.\textsuperscript{25} A final element of ʿInāl’s funerary complex in the Northern Cemetery was a roofed drinking well (sabīl) which provided water to the entire facility.\textsuperscript{26} The courtyard around the building complex had been designated for the burial of ʿInāl’s entourage (jamāʿat al-sulțān).\textsuperscript{27} A final increase in the endowment capital seems to have occurred in the middle of 864/1459, since after this year the documentation stops.\textsuperscript{28}

Not only Cairo, but also Jerusalem, benefited from ʿInāl’s building activities. Thus the Temple Mount (haram sharīf) was enlarged by a drinking well (sabīl).\textsuperscript{29} Also the al-Aqṣa mosque received a dedicated copy of a precious Qurʾān—with the permanently employed reciter included—as well as luxurious textile covers for the four famous tombs inside the mosque.\textsuperscript{30}

The extensive capital stock required to finance these ambitious welfare projects consisted first and foremost of agricultural lands and, to a lesser extent, of urban real estate. The sale of state land to private investors was common in Mamluk Egypt and Syria, since this generated a flow of money into the chronically deficient treasury.\textsuperscript{31} Both ʿInāl and his son Aḥmad purchased land from the state when they were sultans.\textsuperscript{32} However, in other cases ʿInāl simply confiscated state land and transferred it into his own endowment. The endowment deeds carefully record the provenance of lands. There were cases in which the donor had previously purchased the land, and others where he had taken it from the state exchequer without financial reimbursement.\textsuperscript{33} Still other objects, mainly commercial buildings in Cairo, were presumably acquired by the donor by legal exchange (istībdāl).\textsuperscript{34}

ʿInāl’s second major endowment as documented in the deeds was for a different purpose. In 865/1460, one year after the presumptive completion of his benevolent building complex in Cairo and only one year before his death, he established a huge family endowment, for which he appointed a total of 19 commercial buildings in downtown Cairo as well as shares of the lands of 20 different villages in Syria and Egypt.\textsuperscript{35} Their yields were exclusively devoted to the subsistence of ʿInāl’s family: his sole wife, two sons and two daughters and their future offspring. Only after the family became extinct were half of the yields devoted to support the needy in Mecca and Medina and the other half to support the offspring of the slaves kept by the ʿInāl family. In the case where no beneficiary remained alive, the second half of the yields was to be devoted to support ʿInāl’s Friday mosque in Cairo.\textsuperscript{36} The endowment’s primary purpose was the material support of the founder’s family in case of his demise. A second aim was to render his son Aḥmad powerful enough to found a dynasty.\textsuperscript{37} The public aspects, namely supporting the needy in Mecca and Medina and the Friday mosque in Cairo, did not constitute the investor’s main aim.\textsuperscript{38}
Ināl’s son al-Mu‘ayyad Ahmad, after succeeding his father on the throne in 865/1461, quickly increased his father’s family endowment with shares from another 37 lands in Egypt and Syria. He had purchased them the day his father passed away, thus seemingly acting in light of this event. He did not have a chance to establish other endowments with a more public aim due to his short reign of only a few months. In contrast, his mother Zaynab bint ‘Alī b. Khāṣṣbak had plenty of time to engage in public welfare. Thus in 865/1460–1, under her husband’s sultanate, she established a hospice in Mecca and another one in Cairo. Both were undoubtedly financed by endowments in their favour.

A benevolent manner very similar to Ināl’s was displayed by one of his successors, Sultan al-Ashraf Qāytbāy (r. 873–901/1468–96). He also purchased lands in Egypt and Syria as well as real estate inside Cairo to finance his numerous religious and charitable foundations. He established public institutions including a huge funerary complex, complete with mosque and high school (madrasa-jāmi‘), in Cairo’s Northern Cemetery, four drinking wells (sabīl) and another small mosque (masjid), all in Cairo; as well as a Friday mosque (jāmi‘) in Salamūn and a high school (madrasa), hospice (ribāṭ) and public kitchen (maṭbakh) in Medina. Apart from these public institutions, he also built three private houses in Cairo devoted to the accommodation of some of Qāytbāy’s relatives as part of the benevolent programme. Like Ināl, his first steps were devoted to public charity (among others the funerary complex in Cairo and the institutions in Medina), although with stipulations in the respective endowment deeds to spend any possible surplus for other charitable purposes. The yields were thus kept in the cycle of public welfare instead of flowing back to the donor. However, Qāytbāy then made significant modifications in subsequent years concerning the surplus, so that it ultimately flowed back to the trust administration. It was no coincidence that Qāytbāy established three houses in Cairo to harbour his close followers after these modifications. Thus the endowments became for the donor’s private benefit.

Waqf and patronage

The aforementioned examples describe Muslim endowments as a specific form of patronage in a pre-modern society. The cultural blossoming of the Mamluk sultanate was facilitated by the generous financial support of wealthy individuals, both members of the military and civilian elites. Despite contributing to public prosperity, patronage in modern times has had a somewhat troubled reputation, since a lack of transparency and even the susceptibility to corruption are always inherent. Interestingly enough, observers of the Mamluk era were already aware of this danger, as the examples of Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) und Abū Ḥāmid al-Qudsī (d. 888/1483) illustrate. Nonetheless, the benefits seem to have outweighed the concerns. The benefits included the protection of property against physical violation or confiscation, thus providing a certain amount of social stability—a precious good in a period lacking constitutional protections and rife with insecurities.
Patronage supported a wide array of issues: from feeding the needy to communal welfare to a programme of funding the highly elaborated concept of Muslim culture as represented by the ‘ulamā’. All of these were understood as being pious motives according to well-established concepts of Islamic waqf. However, patrons naturally also benefitted from their patronage. Besides religious or fiscal considerations, donors used patronage to display social prestige. By promoting charity, they swayed public opinion in their favour. The remuneration was a type of symbolic capital that helped shore up their legitimacy.

Mamluk rulers were encouraged to garner public support and legitimacy by financing the research and teaching of ‘ulamā’. In return, they were portrayed by chroniclers and biographers as good and pious Muslims. Of all the arts which could be sponsored, architecture was of special significance due to its striking appearance. Like newspapers nowadays, buildings were “read” by everybody. The erection of a colossal religious complex comprising a high school, Sufi convent, Friday mosque and dervish hermitage was a common undertaking in Mamluk times. Like so many other sultans before him, İnāl chose to erect his complex in one of the great Cairo cemeteries. Given his well-documented ability to switch properties by means of istibdāl, a prestigious building site in the populated city centre would have been available, too. However, he preferred a concentration of benevolent institutions on a marked spot outside the city centre where they stood out from the crowd and were instantly visible.

Although the motive of generating public esteem (through benevolence) may seem to have outweighed the desire for actual public welfare, İnāl’s religious complex in the Northern Cemetery was as much a charitable institution as a monument for himself. It helped change the public image of an otherwise unpopular and even un-noteworthy reign. Moreover, it provided employment for a large number of savants and other individuals. In return, İnāl’s fame in life and his historical legacy can be attributed almost exclusively to this institution of higher education. In addition, his commercial structures in downtown Cairo, designated to finance his benevolence, contributed to public recognition and were praised by contemporaries as a benefit to and embellishment of the general cityscape. Undoubtedly the general public appreciated İnāl’s investments more than all his other measures put together. It would not be an overstatement to say that without his waqf İnāl would have disappeared into historical insignificance.

Charitable trusts were thus a way to enhance the ruler’s court. As the external representation for the general public, they were functionally equivalent to the internal courtly ceremonial open to select visitors only. As a manifestation of factual rule, they were noticeable at every corner. Without those outposts, Mamluk presence in the cities would have all too easily been reduced spatially to barracks and citadels, and culturally to their non-Muslim origins. It appears generally to have been the case that the more bellicose the times, the more self-evident the legitimacy of the rulers; the more peaceful the times, the more dependent the rulers were on public perception. This explains the blossoming of royal waqf and patronage in the later Mamluk sultanate.
Notes

1. For Islamic religious endowments in general see Peters, et al. (2002); Hoexter (1998); Meier/Pahlitzsch/Reinfandt (2008).
5. See Amīn (1980), 90–3. The exemption from taxes was abolished only during Qāytbāy’s reign (873–901/1468–96).
6. Religious endowments, although invulnerable in theory, were often confiscated in Mamluk reality. See ibid, 77f; Behrens-Abouseif (1994), 145; Lapidus (1967), 72–5.
7. Possible abuses of religious foundations for financial aims have already been deplored by contemporaries like Ibn Khaldu’ (d. 808/1406) and Abū Hāmid al-Qudṣī (d. 888/1483), both cited in Haarmann (1998), 71f. A similar critique is expressed by Ṭağı al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), see [Gotha 979]. Also, see Petry (1983), 203–7.
9. The additional accumulations were documented in many cases as additions in the preserved endowment deeds, either on the margins or as in the body of the main text.
10. The notion of a clandestine economy in connection with the late Mamluk sultanate was introduced for the first time by Carl Petry. See Petry (1983), 203–7.
11. An example of an accumulative process is the endowment of Sultan Barsbāy (d. 840/1437) in support of his Cairo Friday mosque. See Amīn (1980), 78. The original endowment deed is preserved in the Cairo Ministry for Religious Endowments. An excerpt of the document, kept in the Egyptian National Library, has been edited by Darrag (1963).
13. For more on the idea of symbolic capital in a sociological context see e.g. Bourdieu (1998), 108f.
15. See Petry (1994), 197 where he mentions the remarkable increase of new endowments in the last years before the Ottoman invasion in 1517. The growth in the total number of the respective endowment deeds in these years is documented in Amīn (1981), passim.
16. Portion of Ināl’s charitable foundations has been preserved in two long endowment deeds now kept in the Dār al-Kutub al-Qawmiyya [DK 63 ta’rīkh] and in the Dār al-Wathā’iq al-Qawmiyya [DW 51/346] in Cairo. See Amīn (1981), 327 no. 884; 29f no. 137. Ibid., 116 no. 392 mentions a third deed in the Wizārat al-Awqāf (910 q[adīm]), dated 17th Dhī ‘l-Hijja 861/5th November 1457, which had got lost, however, when I was working with the documents in 1996–7.
18. The tombs’ epitaphs have been replaced in 858/1454 on the occasion of Ināl’s ascension to the throne and his sons’ promotion as sultan’s successors. See van Berchem (1900), 397 nos. 272f, 405 n. 1.
19. Ināl himself was buried in 865/1461, his wife Zaynab in 884/1479, his two sons Muhammad and Ahmad in 886/1482 and 893/1488, respectively. See Ibn Iyās (1960–75), II:367; Ibn Taghrībirī (1909–60), VII:557; al-Sakhāwī (1934–6), I:246, VII:148, XII:45; van Berchem (1900), 399 n. 4. An account of the events that led to Ināl’s promotion to sultanate is given in Sakhāwī (1934–6), II:328.
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20 See Reinfandt (2003), 60.
21 See ibid.; Behrens-Abouseif (2005), 143f; Meinecke (1992), II:378f. About the khānaqāh in general see the fundamental study of Fernandes (1988).
23 See ibid., 153. About the hermitage see Ibn Iyās (1960–75), II:330f; Reinfandt (2003), 67. The hermitage’s primary deed is lost.
24 Two inscriptions at the main entrance designate Rajab 860/February–March 1456 as the start date of construction. However, this must be the construction’s completion, since a full-length building inscription attached to the four walls of the inner court confirms the most important data: building belonging to Ināl, start of construction in Dhi ‘l-Qa’da 859/October 1455, completion in Rajab 860/February–March 1456. See van Berchem (1900), 401f; Meinecke (1992), II:379.
25 See Reinfandt (2003), 62f, 74. An endowment for financing the madrasa was presumably established in 17th Dhi ‘l-Qa’da 861/15th November 1457. See Amīn (1981), 116 no. 392 However, the original endowment deed, the above mentioned [Awqāf 910 q(adir)], is now lost. The jāmi’ was financed by an endowment established in 20th Jumādā al-‘Khira 862/15th May 1458, for which the original document is also lost. See Reinfandt (2003), 157. Both the madrasa and the jāmi’ received a financial increase with the establishment of additional endowments of agricultural lands in the years 862–63/1458–59. See deeds [DK 63 ta’ríkh] A, B and E in Reinfandt (2003), 137–49, 155–9.
26 The financing of the sabīl was arranged at the same time as the basic endowment for the madrasa. See ibid. 146.
27 See Ibn Iyās (1960–75), II:331.
28 See Reinfandt (2003), 70.
29 The exact date of erection is not recorded. For this building, see Meinecke (1992), II:2, 385; Tovell (1991), 30f n. 30; van Berchem (1927), 60–2 no. 188.
30 See [Pococke 362], fols. 143af. For this notice I am indebted to Sa‘id Abū Śāfī, Berlin.
31 See Amīn (1980), 300f. The militarization of the iqṭā’ and the privatization of formerly state-owned agricultural lands is a well-known phenomenon in the pre-modern Middle East. For a general survey, see Cahen (1953); Sato (1997).
33 For the first case, the respective passage in the deed was al-jāri jam‘ī ‘uhu fi ‘amlāk bayt al-māl. See deed [DK 63 ta’ríkh] A line 105; Reinfandt (2003), 142. The other case was paraphrased with al-jāri jam‘ī ‘uhu fi amlāk al-wāqif yashhad bi-milkihi li-dhālik kitāb tabāyu’. See [DK 63 ta’ríkh] B lines 98–113; Reinfandt (2003), 145. The sultan, however, was basically entitled to transfer state property into individual endowments (irsād). See Amīn (1980), 95f.
35 See Reinfandt (2003), 70.
36 See [DW 51/346] A lines 789–830; Reinfandt (2003), 231f.
37 See ibid. 55–8.
38 See ibid. 71.
40 7th Jumādā al-‘Khira 865/20th March 1461. The purchase deed is mentioned in document [DW 51/346] J line 122; see Reinfandt (2003), 255.
42 See al-Sakhāwī (1934–6), XII:45; ‘Abd-ar-Rāziq (1973), 25; Meinecke (1992), II:386.
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43 See Reinfandt (2003), 69f. In his land register, written before 885/1480, Ibn al-Jīān mentions several lands that had been endowed by Zaynab. See Halm (1979–82), II:753.
45 For an account of a Mamluk sultan as patron of the arts see eadem (2002).
46 See above n. 7.
47 See Behrens-Abouseif (2002), 71. For the concept of a connection between justice and the legitimacy to rule as well as its origins in the ancient Orient see Donner (1986), 290.
48 For the two Cairene necropoleis (al-qarāfatayn) and the Northern Cemetery see Taylor (1999), 17–60.
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15 Favouritism at the Ottoman court in the eighteenth century

Henning Sievert

Today, court culture and especially court politics tend to generate negative connotations, as they are usually associated with the rule of vicious intrigue and personal whim. As courts were once a central feature of monarchic polities globally, it is important to understand how they worked not only in a particular society, but in various cultural contexts as well. It is also worth investigating how to relate the study of these courts to those of the better-known Christian courts of Western Europe.

The Ottoman court was in many ways a Muslim institution, but at the same time may be considered Turco-Persianate, post-Byzantine or even European, as arguably the Ottoman Empire was effectively as much a European power as it was an Asian and African one. While anachronistic classifications are unhelpful and differences between Muslim and Christian courts are not to be denied, they may have had more in common than has previously been suggested. Among the many features of court politics and court culture that deserve thorough treatment (and indeed are addressed in this volume), this contribution proposes to examine just one, namely favouritism.

The impressive body of studies dealing with court culture in Western Europe should suggest to scholars of Muslim courts just how much work remains to be done, even in the case of a comparatively well-known court like the Ottoman one. Cultural differences notwithstanding, the phenomenon of favouritism is evidenced in the Ottoman case as well. In the Western European context a lot has been written about how favouritism differed from one court to another, how it changed historically and how it was related to the emergence of the modern state. By contrast, Ottoman favourites appear to have remained unchanged for centuries.

It is important to note, however, that there is no equivalent to the Western term “favourite” in Ottoman Turkish or in Arabic. The analytic concept of favourite is not derived exclusively from early modern Western discourse either, but from the study of social practice as discerned from the sources. Hence, it should be possible to ask the same questions with regard to Ottoman sources as well. In this contribution I will argue that in the early to mid-eighteenth century, the position of royal favourite was contested by the grand vizier and the chief eunuch, and that in 1757 the chief eunuch was decisively defeated by the first grand vizier, a member of the bureaucracy, who became a favourite himself, but in a new way.
The concept of favourite in the early modern West

Research on the phenomenon of favouritism has produced a considerable amount of specialized studies focusing on the political culture of the early modern period in Western Europe. Favouritism has been explained as a corollary of a patrimonial society where face-to-face interactions were the norm and which worked mainly on the basis of granting and withdrawing favour.5 Thus the relationship between protector and favourite could be classified as a special type of patron-client relationship,6 with the important distinction that the patron was the ruler and the favourite his main protégé. In contrast to other courtiers who enjoyed some degree of royal favour, a favourite’s position in the sense of an ideal type was characterized by his exclusive closeness to the monarch, manifested not so much in holding high office or gaining wealth and power, but in controlling access to the ruler who put his trust in him.7 Seen from the ruler’s perspective, the favourite would not only advise him prudently, but also functioned as “the king’s patronage manager.” In this function, he not only served the ruler but also served a demand from below by conferring his patronage upon clients.8

In this capacity, the favourite had plenty of opportunities to help friends as well as to make enemies. He may have been supported by a certain faction that sought to gain influence through him, or he may have been the head of a faction created by the monarch.9 Consequently, rival factions pushed into the background were quite unfavourably disposed towards the royal favourite. Many favourites were portrayed by their enemies as bad counsellors encouraging unlawful acts, illegal taxes and even war against the subjects, selling privileges or doing dubious business (which actually may well have been the ruler’s own). Accusations of this kind show how a favourite’s policies could polarize court factions in the context of contemporary political discourse.

Favourites were thus reproached with usurping royal prerogatives out of self-interest and placing their clients and relatives in influential positions without regard to precedence and rank.10 While the former criticism refers to the relationship with the ruler, the latter one reflects the sole way the favourite could achieve some degree of independence from the ruler.11 If he failed to secure his position through patronage ties and alliances of his own, there was little to protect him against his enemies if the monarch were to abandon him. This dependence on royal favour enabled the ruler to entrust the favourite with a quasi-monopoly of royal patronage in terms of offices and benefices without much risk, since after the favourite’s fall from grace most of it could be claimed back on the grounds of illegal cronyism. In the best of circumstances, the ruler could use his favourite to build up a (hopefully) loyal faction while he himself remained impartial.

A favourite always ran the risk of having too many enemies, but for the ruler he could be quite useful as the “negative identity of a king who could not do wrong”.12 The function of the favourite as an alter ego meant opposition could be directed against him instead of the monarch. This was not only helpful for the ruler, but also the realm’s elites, for whom opposition against the monarch himself would also have been problematic as opposing the king amounted to treason and
Favouritism at the Ottoman court in the eighteenth century was a violation of the divinely legitimated order. In addition, the ruler may have also looked upon his favourite as an alter ego in a psychological sense. While this is hard to prove in most cases, Elizabeth Marvick quite convincingly claims that many kings could have been attracted by alter egos who represented either similar or complementary qualities, or who fulfilled the function of a fatherly counselor. Hence, these traits may have played a role in choosing favourites.

By leaving unpopular policies to his favourite, the ruler was able to preserve the aura of impartial sovereignty, or to abandon the favourite if a scapegoat was required. This political alter ego function grew in importance where the monarch was believed to possess a special dignity or even sanctity. In early modern Europe, the most significant example of a sanctified ruler was the pope, but there also existed a tradition of “imperial invisibility” in several Asian monarchies, which raised the ruler above all factions and everyday politics, at the same time thinning out his communication network and curbing his capacity to intervene. Most early modern Western European rulers were occupied with maintaining a culture of honour that required all kinds of pageantry and ritual, or war and hunting, leaving little time for administrative tasks. While the monarch had to keep a certain distance from administrative tasks, the emerging state grew more or less steadily, with an expanding bureaucratic apparatus and an increasing degree of professionalism in administration and warfare. Therefore, the ruler needed a favourite in order to fulfil his duty to preserve laws, liberties, customs and true religion as well as retaining some control over strategic decisions without meddling in daily bureaucratic affairs.

These circumstances facilitated the rise of the so-called minister-favourite who was chosen mainly for his administrative competence and whose classical period in Western Europe was reportedly the first half of the seventeenth century. However, in the second half of the eighteenth century, “first ministers” dominated governments in many European states. Unlike most of their predecessors, these first ministers were not necessarily favourites in the sense of courtiers, as many of them were lesser nobles who began their career in administration or other kinds of royal service outside the court proper. Their dominant position in government, however, was not due to some constitutional arrangement, but to the monarch’s special favour. Administration had become more efficient, specialized and independent at that time, but, from the monarch’s point of view, an able and trusted coordinator was even more important. Particularly in times of crisis or when the ruler was inexperienced, a first minister could assume the power of an effective regent. But in order to safeguard their position, “all first ministers had to become courtiers as well, though after 1750 many (and perhaps a majority) initially came to prominence through their administrative abilities”.

Favourites in the eighteenth century Ottoman court

Before taking a closer look at the south-eastern counterparts to the Western European favourites, it is necessary to outline some peculiarities of the Ottoman court. The structure of the Ottoman Empire seems to have been perceived by its
inhabitants as a set of concentric circles. In the middle, the Imperial residence was the centre of the Empire, or even of the realm of Islam, as symbolized by the ruler, the “refuge of the world” (padişah-ı 'ālemencen). In his immediate vicinity, the royal family (harem-i hümâyûn) and their personal attendants lived at the core of the royal household, the “inner part” (enderûn) as defined by proximity to the ruler and segregated from the “outer parts” (bîrûn). With the exception of the ruler himself, the only persons allowed to transgress the boundary between the inner and outer parts of the royal household were the eunuchs.

The boundaries of the bîrûn were less well defined, as for a long time most of the central administration could be considered as part of it. In the course of the sixteenth century, however, the monarch became increasingly “invisible,” retreating from the daily business of government. Actual governmental duties were taken over by the grand vizier (sâdr-i a'зам) who traditionally acted as the ruler’s authorized agent (vekil-i muṭlaq) as long as the ruler trusted him. The increasing separation between royal household and administration manifested itself spatially when, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the grand vizier’s residence, which came to be called the Sublime Porte (Bâb-i aṣaﬁf, Bâb-i ‘âlî), was established outside the palace. It gradually became the seat of government, as most offices and officials left Topkapı Palace and moved either to the Sublime Porte or to the nearby buildings of financial administration (Bâb-i defterdârî).

But, as in Western monarchies, the ruler’s court remained in the centre of the polity, so that proximity to the ruler still meant superior power. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the second most powerful person of the enderûn was the chief black eunuch (dârussa-’āde ağası). The chief black eunuch controlled the links between the royal family (harem) and the other parts of the royal household, and by extension, the Empire. This position enabled the chief eunuch to become the royal favourite.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the chief eunuch’s position as a favourite was often strong enough to dominate the royal household, but it was not irrevocable. Rather, it depended on the relationship with the monarch. As will be shown below, dominating the royal household was not sufficient, as there were various groups and households from the “outside” that could form alliances and power bases of their own among ‘ulemâ’, in the military, or in the bureaucracy, and eventually find allies at court. At that time, the court seems to have lost much of its centrality with regard to political practice (albeit not on the ideological level), because factions inside and outside the court circles were able to exert influence in either direction.

The favourite’s position was not at all restricted to the chief eunuch. In fact, some grand viziers of the period were also described. Because of his proximity to the royal family and to the ruler himself, the chief eunuch held a high rank. Formally, however, he did not exercise any governmental authority, which belonged to the grand vizier. The vizier’s office as the sultan’s authorized agent could indeed serve as an institutional base for a favourite’s position. This often resulted in either political dependence or structural tension between them.

As the royal family’s agent, the dârussa-’āde ağası supervised the huge imperial endowments for the benefit of the holy places of Mecca and Medina (awqâf
The chief eunuch as favourite

The most influential chief eunuch in Ottoman history was el-Ḫāc Beşir Ağā, who was the power behind the throne during the reigns of Aḥmed III (1703–30) and Maḥmūd I (1730–54). Upon el-Ḫāc Beşir Ağā’ς death after 30 years in office, the palace treasurer (ḥazınedār-i şehriyârī), next in the eunuchs’ hierarchy, became the favourite in the early days of June 1746. This new chief eunuch, Morali Beşir Ağā, also enjoyed the confidence of the new Sultan Maḥmūd I, who had been in close contact with him for years. As royal princes used to be confined to a certain part of the palace, the so-called “cage” (kafes), eunuchs probably took part in their education.

The reason we know that Morali Beşir Ağā became the royal favourite is because he had the ruling grand vizier ousted and had his own candidate appointed instead. In August 1747, the grand vizier Teryâkî el-Ḫāc Meḥmed Paşa was exiled to Rhodes. Meanwhile, Morali’s faction had arranged for the secret return of their ally Boynuğrî Seyyid ‘Abdullâh Paşa to the capital from an office in western Anatolia. According to Dilâverzâde, the biographer of grand viziers, “certain eminent persons of the enderûn” (probably Morali Beşir Ağā himself) succeeded in having Boynuğrî appointed to the office of acting vizier (kâ‘im-makām)—or grand vizier—despite the reluctance of Maḥmūd I. Thus, the new grand vizier remained completely dependent on Morali Beşir Ağā.

Subsequently, Morali’s clients obtained key positions, enabling their own followers to obtain offices and benefits, while preventing others from receiving them. Petitioners could only gain access to the Imperial council (divân-i hümâyûn) if they presented Morali’s men with precious gifts. At the same time, the price for the sale of offices increased considerably. Aḥmed Resmî emphasizes these practices, not because they represented unusual or improper behaviour, but because of the excessive levels involved. According to Resmî, this misbehaviour was indicative of boundless greed, which was contradictory to any kind of just rule. In addition, by inhibiting the delivery of petitions to the Imperial council, this practice impeded the ruler from dispensing justice to those who complained.
In a similar way, Western favourites were reproached for advising unlawful acts, conducting obscure business, usurping royal prerogatives, and bringing their cronies into offices earmarked for “more qualified” people from other factions.

As the eunuch’s faction preferred their own candidates for office, taking high prices from others meant excluding members of rival factions from coveted offices and sources of income, but without completely alienating all other elite factions. Of course, it meant making a lot of money as well. Resmī, in fact, made his above statement from the perspective of his own, then disadvantaged, faction in the bureaucracy. From Morali’s point of view as a royal favourite, it was essential to dominate as many court-related offices as possible in order to control access to the monarch. To retain his position, the favourite had to have a courtly faction loyal to him surrounding the monarch and he had to prevent rivals from having access to the sultan.33

Losing power

Morali Beşir Ağa’s faction had its power base in the enderūn, while several of its opponents were bureaucrats and ‘ulamā’. The favourite’s faction tried to extend its influence into these groups and into the janissary corps, but was reportedly not very successful.34 Opposition among the ‘ulamā’ and the janissaries seems to have been particularly dangerous, as these groups had closer connections with the populace than the bureaucrats—the ‘ulamā’ in their capacity as preachers, imams or teachers, and the janissaries through their involvement in trades and crafts. But even when the commander of the janissaries sided with Morali, the rank and file grew increasingly discontented.35

The chief eunuch and his allies made some effort to weaken their bureaucratic opponents by confiscation, or by sending them away to distant offices,36 but alienating large parts of the imperial elite only increased Morali Beşir Ağa’s dependence on the monarch. In order to reduce political tension, Morali in January 1750 effected the dismissal of “his” grand vizier Boynueğri Seyyid Abdullah Paşa, who allegedly had had some kind of argument with leading ‘ulamā’. The situation did not change fundamentally with the new grand vizier Devātdār Meḥmed Emīn Paşa, because he also depended completely on the chief eunuch,37 while the ruling faction still failed to satisfy its rivals. With regard to economic difficulties, opposing ‘ulamā’ and janissaries could easily stir up popular unrest.

This seems to be what happened in 1752, when arson spread throughout the city, wreaking havoc in the palaces of the rich and powerful. From the elites’ point of view, these instances of arson were a clear sign of readiness to revolt among the janissaries (who served as the fire-brigade), as had been the case as recently as in 1730 and 1740.38 Morali Beşir Ağa made scapegoats of his grand vizier, Devātdār Meḥmed Emīn Paşa, and the commander of the janissaries, Macar Hasan Ağa.39 Devātdār Meḥmed Emīn Paşa was humiliated when he had to return the royal seal (mühr-i hümâyūn)—the symbol of his authorization by the sultan—during a public ceremony in front of the assembled janissaries and court servants.
After this demonstration of supposedly eliminating incompetence in government, the relatively low-ranking courtier Bāhir Muṣṭafā Beğ was nominated grand vizier. Bāhir was also described as a client of Morali Beşir Ağa and was promoted in an extraordinarily rapid fashion. But after some time Bāhir Muṣṭafā, now Paşa, dissociated himself from his patron. The chronicler Şemʾdānīzāde has Bāhir considering his predicament thus:

Now I have become the chief eunuch’s personal servant. But the dignity of the vizierate is repugnant with the servility shown by my predecessors. If I act like them, that will result in dismissal, punishment and unrest. Since the pādişāh likes the chief eunuch so much, nobody dares to tell him such things. If rebellion breaks out, it will do harm to sultan and dynasty [devlet]; if no rebellion breaks out, corruption on that scale will destroy the order of the empire [devletiñ niẓāmi].

According to Şemʾdānīzāde, Bāhir realized that either remaining under Morali’s control or rebuffing him would have damaged the political and social order, not to mention his own fate. If Bāhir turned against his patron, he would fall, and if he remained his patron’s puppet, he would fall as well, being turned into a scapegoat sooner or later. The only solution for him was to bring about the royal favourite’s downfall, but Bāhir could not achieve this, because even if he could have approached Maḥmūd I without Morali’s consent, the sultan would have turned a deaf ear to him.

Bāhir Muṣṭafā Paşa’s solution was to abandon his master and to forge an alliance against him with leading ‘ulamāʾ, namely the şeyhülislām Feyżullāhzāde Murtaţā Efendi and the former şeyhülislām Ebû-İşākzāde Meḥmed Es’ad Efendi. This new alliance could hurt the chief eunuch, because, as supreme advisor of both the Imperial harem in the centre of the Empire and the endowments to the haramayn at the centre of Islam, the chief eunuch had to avoid criticism from the ‘ulamāʾ. On the one hand, the eunuch favourite was dependent on the monarch, and on the other hand, influential ‘ulamāʾ could cooperate with rebellious janissaries and turn opinion against the favourite or even the sultan himself. Moreover, Morali’s position was seriously threatened when Feyżullāhzāde Murtaţā sided with Bāhir Muṣṭafā, because the şeyhülislām was more or less the only person from outside the palace the chief eunuch could not keep away from the ruler.

When one of Morali’s men mistreated the qādi of Üskūdār, Bāhir and his associates convinced the sultan that the chief eunuch had put the “order of the world” (niẓām-i ʿālem) into danger by transgressing the limits of his position (tecâvüz-i hudūd). This suggested danger to the dynasty (devlet), since a serious violation of the traditional order and the ruler’s continuous failure to uphold stability and enforce justice could damage his legitimacy severely. Due to the hostility of the great majority of factions, this could have cost him the throne. The sultan thus ordered Morali’s exile to Egypt, as was customary for dismissed chief eunuchs. But the grand vizier, fearing Morali’s revenge and not willing to take any risks, had him executed in July 1752.
Morali Beşir Ağa’s case demonstrates the usual risks and opportunities facing favorites. After having enjoyed the sultan’s confidence for five years, Morali fell in the end because he failed to divide the opposing factions and to win sufficient support for his own. His fate, however, was similar to that of many favorites. Morali’s power was based on controlling access to the monarch and distributing offices and benefits in his name. While privileging his own faction, though, he alienated too many rival factions who united against Morali, accusing him of transgressing his boundaries, abusing his position and thus endangering the dynasty and, by extension, the Empire. Thus it was no longer an issue of Morali sacrificing his men, but of the sultan abandoning Morali.

The eunuch and the bureaucrat

During the reign of ‘Osmān III (1754–7), another chief eunuch assumed the position of favourite: Ebūkūf Ahmed Ağa. Shortly after his accession to the throne, ‘Osmān III had recalled Ebūkūf from exile in Egypt and appointed him palace treasurer (ḥāżīnedär-i sehriyārī) in December 1754. This position led him to the top of the hierarchy. In September 1755, he finally became dārussa ‘āde ağası, and a royal favourite as well.

Like Morali Beşir Ağa before him, Ebūkūf made a habit of replacing one grand vizier with another after a short tenure to avoid any threat to his own power. This may well have been the strategy employed by ‘Osmān III himself, but it certainly served the interests of Ebūkūf Ahmed Ağa, keeping away potential rivals and strengthening the favourite’s position. On the one hand, it provided a scapegoat if necessary without endangering the favourite. On the other hand, retaining the same grand vizier for a long time could either strengthen the vizier’s position or induce several factions to unite against the ruling group and eventually to take their share by force.

Ebūkūf continued this policy until the governor of Aleppo, Rāġīb Meḥmed Paşa, was appointed to that office in January 1757. Rāģīb Paşa was an experienced administrator and diplomat, about 60 years old, who, after a successful career in the imperial bureaucracy, had been sent away by his opponents to offices in distant parts. Then, after 13 years in Egypt, Anatolia and Syria, he finally returned, but under the chief eunuch’s control. For nine months, the vizier acted in an extremely cautious way, or in the words of his secretary Aḥmed Nüzhet, “he was like a falcon circling in vain over a village, waiting for the sunrise of liberation to spot the movement of a prey.”

Ebūkūf’s reasons for accepting Rāģīb as grand vizier are not completely clear; probably the eunuch’s position was not as established as those of Morali Beşir Ağa and el-Ḥācc Beşir Ağa before him. Morali Beşir Ağa preferred to install dependent courtiers, thereby alienating rival factions, while el-Ḥācc Beşir Ağa seems to have made some kind of compromise with other factions. When Rāģīb Paşa was nominated grand vizier, he had connections with influential circles in the imperial bureaucracy and high-ranking ‘ulamā’, but hardly any in the enderūn. The pasha, rather, had fallen out with el-Ḥācc Beşir Ağa (who actually had effected Rāģīb’s
removal from the capital 13 years earlier), and had remained an enemy of his successor Morali Beşir Ağası as well. The new grand vizier’s appointment may have been some kind of compromise with Râşib’s allies, but from the favourite’s point of view, Râşib’s weak position at court would have been the decisive advantage of that move.

In autumn of 1757, the situation changed completely when ‘Osman III fell seriously ill. When Ebûküf Ahmed Ağası learned of the sultan’s terminal illness, he immediately realized that he himself was in danger, because the monarch’s death would deprive him of his status as favourite. So he planned to replace Râşib Paşa with yet another pasha. Ebûküf gave an order to take the royal seal away from Râşib Paşa, which symbolized the grand vizier’s capacity to rule on behalf of the monarch. But Râşib was warned by one of the chief eunuch’s scribes and allegedly went into hiding to keep the seal.\(^{51}\) Keeping the royal seal may have been of symbolic importance, but only through ‘Osman III’s death could Râşib escape his dismissal. This did not necessarily mean, though, that the new monarch would be willing to keep Râşib Paşa as his grand vizier.

After ‘Osman III’s demise, the grand vizier took part in the accession ceremonies of the new pâdişâh, Muştafa III. The new monarch was about 40 years old, but did not have any experience with the world outside the palace walls, because, like all male members of the dynasty in this period, he had been confined to the palace for the whole of his princely life. His accession to the throne came as a surprise after the unexpected death of his older brother.\(^{52}\)

The new pâdişâh was confronted with a large number of officials, clerics, military officers and courtiers paying their homage as well as the duties of reigning over a vast empire. This entirely new situation, the multitude of unknown expectations and the intricacies of ceremonies must have been unsettling for him.\(^{53}\) During the accession ceremonies, Muştafa was impressed by Râşib’s knowledge and experience. For example, the chronicler ‘Abîf emphasized that Râşib introduced the high religious dignitaries without even looking at the list of names because he knew all of them personally.\(^{54}\)

The main weakness of a royal favourite was his dependence on the monarch, that is, if he lost his master’s confidence, all his power was gone. This is what had happened to Morali Beşir Ağası after his opponents had convinced Mahmut I of Morali’s endangering the political order. Now Muştafa III decided to abandon his predecessor’s favourite, Ebûküf Ağası, in favour of Râşib Paşa.

To actually rule the Empire, Muştafa III relied completely on his grand vizier Râşib Mehmûd Paşa, retaining him until he died in 1763.\(^{55}\) Râşib was an eloquent and erudite old man, who had served the Empire for decades as an administrator and diplomat in war and peace. He enjoyed a reputation as a man of letters and had great influence on the Imperial central bureaucracy, while his personal networks among provincial grandees and notables reached as far as Egypt and Iraq.

Râşib Paşa’s predominance was as sensitively noted by foreign observers as had that of the eunuch favourites: “Never before has a grand vizier been at the helm who enjoyed such an unlimited power as the present one. He is the sultan, and the emperor [i.e. Muştafa III] has to be happy with anything he wants to do.”\(^{56}\)
The sultan’s mentor

It is difficult to evaluate the relationship between the Sultan and his grand vizier. Some historians assume that they usually agreed or were kindred spirits. Some sources point to the opposite, like the chronicler Şem‘dânîzâde who stated that Râğib Paşa “knew the pâdişâh’s character: the pâdişâh could not yet distinguish between bitterness and sweetness nor did he know a man’s value.” According to him, Râğib and the şeyhüislâm had a lot of trouble preventing the inexperienced and impulsive monarch from rushing into more than one unwise decision.

Muṣṭafâ III is said to have been eager to participate in the Seven Years’ War, while Râğib tried to prevent him from doing so, as illustrated by a famous anecdote. Muṣṭafâ III rejected Râğib’s reservations remarking that a lack of money would not be the problem, as there was enough of it in the treasury to pave the way from Istanbul to Rusçuk (on the Danube). Râğib’s answer takes the form of a didactic explanation:

Your Majesty’s exalted empire has of old appeared to its enemies as a terrible lion. The foreign powers have not forgotten our victories of the past years. Because of that they fear us, but in the meantime the lion’s claws have become blunt, and if the enemy notices that, great difficulties will arise. It would be better to think about such things after the army has been put into order.

The difference between the inexperienced Sultan and his well-versed vizier could hardly have been greater. In fact, Râğib Paşa seems to have become a kind of “fatherly mentor” to Muṣṭafâ III. This would correspond to one of the two types of royal favourites Marvick highlights in the context of early modern Europe. Like all grand viziers and all favourites, Râğib was dependent on royal favour, but his position was not exclusively based on Muṣṭafâ III’s confidence. He could also rely on his networks of patronage and his allies within the bureaucracy and the ‘ulamâ’, and on his contacts with provincial notables. Given that he did not belong to the ‘ulamâ’, Râğib possessed an extraordinary erudition and seems to have played the role of a dignified “wise vizier” following the examples of Buzurgmihr or Aristotle. This image is reinforced by Râğib’s close contacts with scholars and the literati within the framework of his famed salon (meclis), by his patronage of literature and arts, by his own literary production and by his establishment of a publicly endowed library.

All this should have stabilized Râğib Paşa’s position especially vis-à-vis the ‘ulamâ’ and bureaucrats independently from his being Muṣṭafâ’s favourite. But as his connections with the enderûn were weak, his position could still be attacked from the core of the Imperial household. This danger was reduced when in June 1758, Muṣṭafâ III gave his sister, Şâliha Sultân, to Râğib in marriage. The grand vizier, now a royal son-in-law (dâmâd-i sehriyârî), was henceforth connected with the core of the Imperial household, which was the greatest favour a eunuch would have been able to receive. However, while this special status served to tie
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influential pashas to the monarch, it did not prevent the ßâmâîd from falling out of favour with the monarch or being driven out by political rivals.

Besides, there were other ßâmâîds who because of their equal status could endanger Râgıb Paşa’s position as long as they stayed in the capital or its vicinity. So, the grand vizier made every effort to remove them, especially when they seemed to gain Muştafa III’s favour. From the monarch’s point of view, this kind of rivalry was one of the advantages of the ßâmâî-d-î şehriyârî institution.

Râgıb Paşa’s strong position in relation to the monarch is illustrated by the “Nûrî Beg case.” Râgıb Paşa made sure that most important government offices were constantly occupied by his own clients. In 1759, Râgıb was about to confirm his client Kâşîf Mehemmed Emîn Efendi to the leading bureaucratic office of re ‘isülküttâb, but this time Muştafa III interfered. The Sultan wanted to appoint Lâlâzade Nûrî Mehmed Beg, the son of Muştafa’s former teacher, who had married a relative of the Sultan. Râgıb Paşa rejected Nûrî Beg’s appointment openly, referring to Nûrî’s lack of skills and experience in administration. The Târhi-i Vâşîf has Muştafa III retorting: “If Nûrî Beg cannot become re ‘isülküttâb, then Emîn Efendi shall not become it, either. Give the office to whomever you want!” It seems that Muştafa III could block Râgıb Paşa’s demands, but he was not independent enough to push through his own candidates for an office against the will of Râgıb Paşa. In the end, Râgıb appointed one of his old associates as a compromise.

Râgıb Paşa successfully replaced the chief eunuch as a royal favourite, although there were important differences in the way he served as a favourite. In addition, Râgıb Paşa was the first bureaucrat to hold the grand vizierate for some years; after him, and especially in the nineteenth century, many more bureaucrats would follow. It is tempting to ask whether Râgıb Paşa represented an Ottoman counterpart to the eighteenth century “first minister” mentioned above. Like several contemporary first ministers in Western states, he had risen through administrative offices and was appreciated especially for his diplomatic abilities. On service in Iraq as well as in the central administration, he had successfully negotiated with Persia, Austria and Russia, and during his term as re ‘isülküttâb (1740–4), he had been responsible for the reorganization of part of the bureau structure. His diplomatic abilities also proved to be useful when he had to deal with local elites as a governor in Egypt, western Anatolia and Syria. Like Western first ministers, Râgıb joined the court from outside and had to “become a courtier,” which was considerably facilitated by his marriage to Şâliha Sultan.

During his grand vizierate, Râgıb Paşa pushed ahead with bureaucratic regularization in order to permanently weaken the chief eunuch’s position in an attempt to prevent the rise of another eunuch favourite in the future. After Ebûkîf’s fall, the grand vizier ordered a tallying up of the Imperial endowments and prohibited the appointment of leading officials of the endowment administration proposed (‘arz) by the chief eunuch. The chief eunuch remained supervisor (nâzîr) in name, but the endowments’ tax units (mukâta‘ât) were auctioned and farmed out as regular tax farms by the financial bureaucracy. From then on, the related payments went to the imperial treasury, providing substantial additional revenue.
In contrast to the eunuch favourites, Râgieb was not part of the enderûn, but Muṣṭafâ’s mentor and first minister. In addition to the monarch’s confidence, Râgieb could rely upon supporters in the bureaucracy as well as in the clerical hierarchy (‘ilmîye), and upon allies in several provinces. The grand vizier was successful in removing all potential rivals from Istanbul and sending them to remote provinces (or having them executed). As for Ebûkûf and some of his clients, Râgieb used the opportunity of the hajj caravan disaster of 1757 to get rid of them, effecting Ebûkûf’s execution and restructuring the administration related to the pilgrimage and the holy cities.73

Concluding remarks

Courtly favouritism took various forms, depending on the circumstances and cultural environment. In the eighteenth-century Ottoman environment, the chief eunuch was in a perfect position to become a favourite if the ruler trusted him. In order to consolidate this position, he built up his own patronage network in an attempt to achieve more independence, and at the same time to tighten his control over access to the ruler. This seems to have worked with Moralî Beşîr Ağa for some time. But Moralî and Ebûkûf Ağa eventually fell when their opponents from outside the palace walls managed to convince the ruler that he was badly served by his favourite.

Although there are important cultural differences between Western or Central European courts and the Ottoman court, similarities are not confined to the level of networks and factionalism. Negative images produced by the favourite’s enemies also bear some resemblance to each other: the favourite is portrayed as a greedy and deceitful bad counsellor who violated the rights of virtuous people, fundamentally endangering the sovereign and just rule. By contrast, the ruler himself cannot be criticized because of his symbolic function. The sultans of the time hardly participated in daily politics, just like many Western rulers who stayed away from administrative work. Especially when administration, warfare and economy had become more and more differentiated, an inexperienced (or incapable) ruler needed a reliable first minister even more.

It would be unrealistic to postulate parallel paths of development in several European countries, and even more so with regard to the Ottoman Empire. But there are hints at some similarities; for example, imperial bureaucracy gradually dissociating itself from the royal household and growing in several ways. Both cases reviewed indicate that there were important factions not based at court, but in the bureaucracy and the religious hierarchy (and also the military), who could counterbalance the power of a favourite. The career bureaucrat Râgieb Paşa came to power with hardly any connections in court circles, although, like most first ministers, he was obliged to become a courtier. After he had changed the rules of the game, no chief eunuch could become a royal favourite.

These concluding remarks must remain provisional, as there is much left to be done in the research of eighteenth-century Ottoman history, but it cannot be done without understanding the dynamics of the court.
Notes

1 Many of the topics touched upon in this contribution are treated in detail in Sievert (2008). As for the present essay, I am indebted to Felix Konrad (University of Kiel) for many useful suggestions.

2 The same is true of royal favourites, as democratic institutions are designed precisely to counter the rise of uncontrollable favour, networks of power brokerage and corruption. See Paravicini (2004), 12–7.

3 By contrast, the language of patronage was quite elaborate, but has not been subject to systematic examination so far. If we assume that patronage, clientelism and social networks were as important as in Western contexts (see Droste (2003)), then it would be possible to compare the respective languages of patronage of both cultural environments.


6 See Asch (2004), 518f; Hirschbiegel (2004), 38f. Asch maintains that a favourite’s office as secretary, mistress, queen mother or, for that matter, chief eunuch, only safeguarded his position based on the relationship with the monarch. This was true even of most eighteenth-century “first ministers” (see below); thus, the Austrian minister Kaunitz, who dominated Habsburg politics for decades, never became prime minister. He rejected the very establishment of such an office, stating that it would have diminished the monarch’s sovereignty, but he probably also suspected that if he had occupied that office, opposition against him would have grown stronger. See Szabo (2003), 354; Scott (1996), 36.

7 See Thompson (1999), 20–1, following Asch. Thompson further argues that the Spanish valido of the seventeenth century served to unify the court and suppress factionalism, to coordinate the machinery of government, to connect court and country and to mobilize all resources for royal policy. Although this may have been the case in that specific context, it is doubtful if every single favourite was really able to solve all these problems.

8 See Asch (2004), 522f. Also, see Brockliss (1999), 284, referring to Japan, but a similar tradition seems to have existed in some Central Asian empires. This is of course not at all a difference between Asia and Europe, as there were plenty of active and visible rulers in Asian countries, while several Western kings as well as the Byzantine emperor used to claim a good portion of sanctity. On the illuminating case of papal Rome, see Reinhard (1979); and, in full detail, idem (1974). While the later sultans starting from Mahmūd II (r. 1808–39) were increasingly visible in public, ‘Abdülhamīd II (r. 1876–1918) apparently resumed the “invisible style.” See Georgeon (1997), 93–124.


10 For a concise overview, see Scott (1996), 21–52. Among these eighteenth century first ministers were Kaunitz in Austria, Pombal in Portugal, Bernstorff in Denmark, Fleury, Choiseul and Vergennes in France, and Tanucci in Naples.
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17 Although Scott differentiates between favourite and first minister, it seems useful in many cases to regard the minister as a favourite in an analytical sense, even if he is not a courtier in the first place. Also, see Szabo (2003), 346, 354.

18 See Scott (1996), 38–42. Crises cited are the Lisbon earthquake, the Silesian war and France’s financial crisis.

19 Ibid. 50.

20 For Topkapı’s symbolic language, see Necipoğlu (1991).

21 See Öñay/Saricaoğlu et al. (1994), 82. For similar developments in the Holy Roman Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Reinhard (2000), 125f; Dipper (1999), 206f.

22 For the case of Nevşehirli Dâmâd İbrahîm Paşa, see Aykut (1993). For the powerful seventeenth century vizier household of the Köprüülü family, see Ilgürel (2002); Özcan (2002a); idem (2002b); idem (2002c).

23 On this topic, see Güler (2002); al-Bayyümî (2001); Hathaway (1997).

24 On el-Ḥâcc Beşîr Ağâ, see A. Özcan, (1992a); Hathaway (2005). One of the few sources of information about individual palace eunuchs is the collective biography Ǧâmilât al-küberâ by the well-known bureaucrat Ahmed Resmî Efendi (d. 1197/1783); on him, see Aksan (1995)), which provides biographies of black chief eunuchs between 1591 and 1752. Recently, two editions of Ǧâmilât al-küberâ have been published, one of them in 2000 as a monograph by A.N. Turan, the other one a year later as an article by Z. Aycibin. Resmî presented his work as a literary gift to successive addressees, which, in some instances, necessitated certain adjustments of content. He probably wrote the chief eunuchs’ collective biography to find favour with Morali Beşîr Ağâ, and therefore concluded it with a flattering piece about Morali, but this did not work. In the piece about Morali, Resmî drew heavily on classical Arabic literature in favour of black-skinned people, mainly the twelfth century apologia Tanwîr al-ghabash fi faḍl al-Sūdân wa’l-Habash of ‘Abd al-Rahmân ibn al-Jawzî’s (d. 597/1200). Later, Resmî turned to the chief eunuch’s enemy Râqib Meḥmed Paşa (on him, see below) for support and presented a revised version of the Ǧâmîlet to him, this time including a disparaging appendix about Morali. For more information about Resmî’s work and his view of Morali Beşîr Ağâ, see Sievert (2007).

25 See [TTK Y 86], fol. 8b; Resmi Efendi (2000), 24b.

26 Morali Beşîr Ağâ (d. 1165/1752) entered the palace service around 1725, after the death of his former master, the chief tax farmer (muhaçins) of Morea Ahmed Paşa. See Şüreyyâ (1308–16/1890–9), I:234 (Ed. 197); Baṣar (1997), 67. In 1730, Beşîr became companion (muṣâhîb) of prince Mahmûd, and palace treasurer in 1731. On Morali Beşîr Ağâ, see Özcan (1992b); Resmi Efendi (2001), 22b–23b, 26b–29b; Şüreyyâ (1308–16/1890–9), II:20 (Ed. 371).

27 Although Western princes were on furlough more often, the constraints of courtly life affected those royal children as well. See Marvick (1983), 471.


29 See ibid.; Şem’dânîzâde (1776–80), I:133.

30 See Resmi Efendi (2000), 26b. Itzkowitz (1959), 144f, cites the British resident James Porter: “. . . the Vizier exists but by their [the Kızlar Aghas] breath, the former does not take a step without him, . . . he will not even sit down in the presence of the Black Eunuch, until he desires him.” On Teryâkî (d. 1164/1751), see Dilâver-Ağaçâde (1969), 73–4; Şüreyyâ (1308–16/1890–9), IV:237–8 (Ed. 1075). On Boynevâr (d. 1174/1761), see Dilâver-Ağaçâde (1969), 74–6; Şüreyyâ (1308–16/1890–9), III:382f (Ed. 80).


32 The ruler was expected to redress unjust acts of oppression (ar.: mažâlim). On this kind of petitioning, see Toprakyar (2007).
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33 This strategy was applied by most royal favourites. For the typical case of Don Francisco Gómez de Sadoval y Rojas, the first Duke of Lerma (d. 1625), as the favourite of Philip III of Spain (r. 1578–1621), see Feros (2000), 68.


37 See Dîlâver-Ağaçâde (1969), 76–8; Resmî Efendi (2001), 26b; Şüreyyâ (1308–16/1890–9), IV:239f (Ed. 477).

38 See Olson (1974); idem (1977).


41 He was made pasha and grand vizier on the same day (see A. RSK. 1578).

42 Şem‘dânîzâde (1976–80), I:166. The term devlet probably refers to the Ottoman dynasty, or to the reign of an individual pâdisâh (e.g. devlet-i maḥmûdîye, the “turn” of Maḥmûd I). As the dynasty was conceived as the essence of the empire, damage to the authority of the house of ‘Osmân meant damage to the empire as a whole. Later on, it actually took on its modern meaning in Turkish and Arabic (“state”).

43 On Feyzûllâhzâde Murtaçâ, see Müstaḵīmzâde Süleymân Sa‘deddîn (1978), 97f; on Mehmed Es‘ad, see Doğan (1995).

44 The transgression of one’s proper limits within the order probably refers to the persianate concept of the so-called circle of equity (dâ‘ire-i ‘adâlet), which preserved social harmony (and the establishment’s power) as long as everybody remained in his proper place in society.

45 Allegedly, Bâhir and his associates justified this move by referring to Morali’s resistance against his arrest and to the necessity of calming the people’s wrath. See Şem‘dânîzâde (1976–80), I:166f; Jamgocyan (1988), 490.

46 See Şüreyyâ, M. (1308–16/1890–9), I:254f (Ed. 150). In the 1996 edition, his appointment to the office of hâzînedâr has been omitted. The unusual nickname “Ebûkûf” means either “father of the ear tip” or “father of the dried and emptied fruit [E bükûf-i hî-vûkûf]”. Vâṣîf Aḥmed Efendi (1243/1827), II:13.

47 See [TTK Y 86], fol. 171a. After Morali Beşîr Ağa’s fall in 1752 there was another Beşîr Ağa in that office.

48 During the three years of ‘Osmân’s rule, six pashas took turns at the grand vizierate. Although this is a rather high number, changes after less than one year in office were not totally unusual, because high-ranking officials at that time were regularly appointed for one year only. Foreign diplomats, however, did not always appreciate this mode of rotation. Thus, the Prussian envoy Rexin complained about the annoying habit of constantly changing the government officials: “Die beständigen Changements im hiesigen Ministerio sind das allererdrdriefflichteste.” (GstA PK, I. HA Geh. Rat, Rep. 11 Ausw. Bez., 275 d. Türkei, fasc. 16, no. 26, fol. 8a).

49 For details about Râgîb Paşa, see Sievert (2008).

50 [Ragib 1191], fol. 3b: “bâz-i faḵîd ül-ihîtîzâz-ı rûstâyî gibi hareket-i mezbûh ile mütârasçî-i tûlû’ yûh-i fütûhî”. For an example of Western diplomats’ views, see the British envoy Porter in Izikowitz (1959), 141, 145 (“...he acts as they will have him”); Hammer-Purgstall (1963), VIII: 206.
This story appears only in the court chronicle of Vâşîf Efendi. See Vâşîf Ahmed Efendi (1243/1827), I:77.

See Itzkowitz (1959), 149, after Alderson (1992), xli. Since 1617, the oldest living male of the dynasty used to rule (ekberiyet; see ibid. 12).

See Marvick (1983), 471.

See Itzkowitz (1959), 149; [Esad 2108], fols. 3b–4a.

Itzkowitz emphasizes that for the whole Ottoman period, no other grand vizier who remained in office from one sultan to the next ever remained in office for such a long time (namely, five and a half years as opposed to an average of about four months after the accession of a new sultan) See Itzkowitz (1959), 147.

GstA PK I. HA Geh. Rat, Rep. 11, 275 d. Türkei fasc. 17, fol. 3a: “Noch niemals hat ein GroßVeizer [sic] am Ruder gesessen, welcher ein so unumschränktes Pouvoir, als der gegenwärtige, gehabt. Er ist Sultan, und der Kayser muß sich, alles was er thun und entremprenen will, gefallen lassen.”

E.g. see Baykal (1959–60); Izgöer (2003), xxxvi.


This is confirmed by Rexin’s report (see GstA PK, I. HA Geh. Rat, Rep. 11, 275 d. Türkei, fasc. 16, no. 26, fols. 7b–8a), whereas the opposite claim was made in Kramers (1992).

Uzunçarşılı (1956), 366. Beydilli (1985), 42, assumes that one reason for Râğib Paşa to negotiate with Prussia about a possible alliance was to satisfy Muştafâ III.

See Marvick (1983), 463–89.

Aristotle was imagined as Alexander the Great’s advisor; hence, grand viziers were often described with honorific titles like aristo-tedbîr. Buzurgmîhr was the minister of the Persian ideal ruler Khusraw Anûshîrvân.

Râğib’s most important writings besides his poetry, compiled in a dîvân, are exemplary letters and proposals (münste ʿat-i Râğib, telhîşât-i Râğib), an account of negotiations with Nâdir Shâh (tahkîk ve tevîfîk) and a voluminous compilation of Islamic knowledge called Sâfinat al-Râghib wa-daşînat al-matâilîb. For a short presentation of Râğib Paşa’s public library, see Koç (1994). It would be interesting to compare Ragib’s literary circle with that of Kaunitz, as both were centres of their respective networks. On Kaunitz’ circle, see Lebeau (1996); on his “nocturnal assemblées” see Szabo (2003), 358.

Şâliḥ Sultan bint Ahmed Hân (d. 1192/1778), one of Ahmed III’s numerous daughters, was married to four successive pashas, Râğib being the third one. See Alderson (1982), xli, 106.

More precisely, he became Muştafâ III’s brother-in-law. For the status of dâmâd-i şehrîvârî, see Uzunçarşılı (1988), 160f.

In accordance with their status and capabilities, they were usually appointed governors of distant provinces. The aim of removing dangerous rivals was obvious to keen observers like Rexin who in April 1761 reported that Râğib Paşa had two of the pâdisâhî’s “greatest favourites” appointed governors of Cyprus and Aleppo, respectively: “Er hat noch vor etlichen Tagen, 2 derer grössten favoriten [sic] des Sultans, mit Bassato versehen und den einen, nach Cyprus, den anderen aber nach Aleppo geschickt, um sie, weil sie wegen der großen Confidence mit dem Sultan, ihm verdächtig geschienen, von seiner Seite zu entfernen.” (GstA PK I. HA Geh. Rat, Rep. 11, 275 d. Türkei fasc. 17, fol. 3a).

On him, see Resmi Efendi (1992), 97f.


Vâşîf Ahmed Efendi (1243/1827), I:158.

See ibid. I:109; [Esad 2108], fols. 19a–b; A. RSK. 1588, 87, 93.

See [Esad 2108], fols. 19a, 26b–29b.

See Cezar (1986), 100 (after Cevdet Malîye 22372 and Hatt-i Hümayun 7906). Also, see Şem’dànîzâde (1976–80), II:17. This expansion of mâlikâne tax farms corresponds
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to the general tendency of transforming sources of taxes into mālikāne tax farms that continued until the 1760s (see Genç (1975), 115).

Rāği̇b held Ebū’ṣ-ṣafar and certain clients of his responsible for the deaths of thousands of pilgrims because they had withheld subsidies for the Bedouin tribes on the way. See Barbir (1980).

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Sciences
16 Enacting the Rule of Islam

On courtly patronage of religious scholars in pre- and early modern times

Jan-Peter Hartung

All political rule, regardless of its respective foundation, appears to be subject to a tension between a temporally and spatially invariant normative expectation and numerous variant realities throughout time and space. Muslim societies are no exception to this. In order to better comprehend the specifics of Muslim political rule, however, one would have to look for the normative expectation, that is, what makes political rule legitimate in pre- and early modern Muslim societies? Integrally related to this, and indispensable in order to better understand how these societies dealt with the tension between normativeness and facticity, is the question of how legitimate political rule has been made. I will argue in this chapter that both questions are strongly related to the role Muslim religious scholars played in court, as it was the interaction of rulers with the ‘ulamā’ of various provenances that provided at least one way of defining and reaffirming the legitimacy of political rule.

For this, I will first consider the question of the separation of powers in the Muslim context, to determine the respective place of ruler and scholar therein. Following this, I will show that the functional division, which emerged over time within the class of ‘ulamā’, resulted in different approaches to theoretical core concepts that contributed to an overarching notion of legitimate rule. To this end I will create a functional typology of three groups within the class of ‘ulamā’, which I consider relevant for my attempt to offer a possible explanation for the mechanism of bringing about legitimacy of rule in the Muslim context. This I will do by using a variety of historical examples as illustration. Finally, I will depict how the competition between at least two of these functional groups of ‘ulamā’ reflects on the issue of courtly patronage, and how ‘ulamā’ might have contributed to the establishment of political authority among competing rulers.

Three powers, one yardstick

At a glance the pattern of interpretation appears clear and even transculturally applicable: political rule is considered legitimate inasmuch as it is just. Just rule, in turn, is judged by the degree to which it can guarantee lasting security of the Lebenswelt within a given polity, that is, to care for the diverse interest of its subjects. Islam, it might be hypothesized, provides an authoritative framework of rules and regulations to ensure the sustainability of such conditioned political
rule. As a logical consequence, a territory where such rule applies is designated dār al-islām. This, in turn, is a concept of such complexity that it is imperative to take a closer look at some of its different dimensions since the question of what lies behind the concept of dār al-islām has not been adequately answered yet.

The academic literature on the conception of dār al-islām oscillates roughly between two poles. Although both acknowledge the spatial connotation, signifying “the territorial boundaries of civilization and the law of the revelation,” the first perceives it with an emphasis on good individual conduct (adab), thus depicting it to an extreme as primarily an ethics-related concept. The other pole has dār al-islām almost exclusively as a legal concept, denoting a territory that is under Muslim jurisdiction and is strongly related to Muslim theories of Just War (jihād).

However, both poles appear interwoven. After all, according to the Qur’ān, God states that “my righteous servants [‘ibādī al-ṣāliḥūn] shall inherit the earth” as His viceregents, provided that they “believe and work righteous deeds [al-ṣāliḥāt].” Both poles meet with the above-mentioned assumption that Islam authoritatively provides rules and regulations for exemplary social interaction in an exclusivist and, moreover, universalistic manner. Because of this comprehensible interlacing of the ethical and political it appears useful—and not only in the cases discussed in this chapter—not to confine one’s view to only one of the two. After all, according to classical political theory, the revealed law needs to be reinforced from above. On the other hand, classical ethics, with its focus on the eschatological dimension, stresses the individual responsibility of each and every believer in front of God to obey what Baber Johansen has named “Islamic normativeness” (sharī`a), even under conditions where a ruler does not reinforce it. It is this duality of the legal and the ethical that brings me now to the complex intertwining of political rule and religious scholarship, and thus to the process of the formation of legitimacy.

Islamic normativeness is believed to be incorporated in the revealed text of the Qur’ān and the Prophetic Sunna, albeit the latter was granted this status only later. It constitutes the basis for the creation and codification of Positive Law (fiqh) in binding rules (qawānīn) that respond to strict methodical criteria and claims legal force in all areas of discernible human activity. This fact ascribes to the ruler executive force, but has to deny him, at least unlimited, legislative force. This latter realm, again, is the domain of the Muslim jurists (fiqhāh), who produce “probable, but fallible interpretation of infallible texts.” From a religious point of view, however, the legislative force of the jurists can only be secondary. After all, it is believed that it is God who ultimately enacts the law either verbally or through the agency of the Prophet, and He must therefore be considered the absolute legislative power, whereas the judiciary can only be a relative legislative power.

However, legitimacy of political rule ultimately has to be judged with respect to how the ruler himself subdues his rule to the legal norms deduced by the judiciary from the divine legislation. Both ruler and scholar are part of the Muslim community (umma), described in the Qur’ānic revelation as “the best community I [i.e. God] have brought forth among mankind. You enjoin the good and forbid the wrong.” To rule according to the sharī`a, that is, to implement the Qur’ānic
injunction of the *amr bi 'l-ma'rūf wa-nahy 'an al-munkar* was, therefore, an inevitable requirement for an authoritatively grounded Islamic state. However, it remains to be asked what it means to rule according to the *shari'a*.

The yardstick for the introduction of *shari'a* based law was, at least since the Caliphate of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb (assassinated 23/644), the “Common Good” (*maṣlaḥa*; then however *khayr or naf*) of all Muslims. This, perhaps, is not only by chance. ‘Umar, who is said to have addressed his marching troops late in the year 635 CE with reference to the above Qur’ānic dictum, saying: “March on the earth that God, in the Book, has promised to make you heirs to,”16 has clearly transformed the idea of the *khilāfāt allāh* when adopting the more personalized title of “Commander of the Faithful” (*amīr al-muʾminīn*). The authoritative justification for this might be found in the Qur’ānic verse “Oh ye who believe! Obey God, and obey the Messenger, and those invested with command among you [wa-ulī 'l-amr minkum].”17 This way, the caliph became the one who possessed the monopoly of definition on what it meant to “believe and to work righteous deeds,” as the Qur’ān states; by knowing what righteous (ṣāliḥ) is he consequently knew the *maṣlaḥa*. This seems an important element for the constitution of the caliph as the ultimate authority of appeal in the dār al-īslām, perhaps corresponding with the developing *mazālim* jurisdiction at least during the early Abbasid Caliphate. Although the Medinese caliphs already administered justice themselves, they may not have done so in their capacity as rulers, but rather as *aʾimma* for the entire Muslim community, who were responsible in the first place for proper guidance on the path to salvation.18 With the establishment of a dynastic element this attitude towards leadership seems to have changed. The Abbasid practice of *mazālim* could be seen rather as reminiscent of the juridical practice of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs at a time when, as mentioned earlier, the relative legislative power and the executive power had become separate. By resuming the earlier caliphal practice the dynastic rulers had claimed at least some relative legislative power that was earlier the sole monopoly of the judiciary.19

The necessity of a ruler for the prosperity of an Islamic polity has repeatedly been emphasized throughout history. Resting on authoritative statements, Muslim jurists considered the ruler, as the ultimate authority of appeal, to become an integral part of the legal construction known as “rule in accordance with Islamic normativeness” (*siyāsa shariʿiyya*), or simply “Good Governance”.20

The renowned medieval Ḥanbalite faqīh Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Ṭaymīyya (d. 728/1328), in a work devoted entirely to this issue, went even further. He claimed that the ruler was an absolute necessity, regardless of the latter’s morality, stating that “sixty years with a tyrannical leader [*imām jāʾir*] would still be much better than a single night without a ruler.”21 However, Ibn Ṭaymīyya would have been the last person to tolerate rule that was not in accordance with the *shariʿa*. His ideas about the meaning and objective of the revealed Islamic normativeness, however, do by and large fit with mainstream opinion of Muslim jurists. From a rather subliminal notion in the works of Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/796),22 up to its solid manifestation in those of Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī23 one can thus draw a genealogy from which the Common Good, as a legal procedure that “resorted to
reasoning that did not appear to be directly based on the revealed texts,"24 emerged as a highly important criterion for legal decision-making, if not as the ultimate purpose (maqṣūd) of the sharī'a.25

We mean by maslaha the preservation of the purpose of the law [muḥāfīza ‘alā maqṣūd al-shar]. The purpose of the law, as far as mankind is concerned, is to preserve them their religion, their soul, their intellect, their progeny, and their property.26

Despite the slightly different context in which al-Ghazālī gave this definition, and which has to be taken into account when focusing solely on his contributions to Islamic legal theory,27 we may nonetheless, on the grounds of later developments that I will explicate through a selection of examples below, establish an important nexus between the theoretical concepts of maqāṣid al-sharī‘a, maslaha and khilāfa. This confluence, in turn, results in far-reaching consequences for our topic, because in practice it refers to the complex relationship between ruler and scholar, who both, in their interactions, attempted with these concepts to define real, as well as ideological, space as dār al-islām. Three different ideal-typically construed factions among the ‘ulamā‘, namely the jurists, the philosophers-cum-theologians, and the poets, offer on the one hand different approaches to the three theoretical concepts, while on the other hand, their different approaches have different effects on the relationship between ruler and scholar. Courtly patronage, I argue, constitutes an important, if only one possible way to view this relationship.

Below I will explain in more detail, and with a number of supporting examples, how these three ideal-typically construed factions among the ‘ulamā‘ contribute to the definition of a sphere of political control as dār al-islām and how their respective contributions are reflected in courtly patronage.

Obtaining legal support

With the beginning of the dissolution of the Abbasid Caliphate in the late tenth century CE, at least the claim to political leadership passed into the hands of Aḥmad Mu‘izz al-Dawla (d. 356/967), head of the Shiite Buyid Dynasty, which effectively ruled the Abbasid lands for almost seven decades. Although the Buyid princes were formally invested by the caliph, their title “Commander of the Commanders” (amīr al-umarā‘)—originally indicating the military commander of Baghdad—along with their religious creed that differed considerably from that of the Abbasid Caliphs, could be read as suggesting a greater ambition. It is conceivable that in the eyes of the Buyid ruler the title amīr al-umarā‘ underwent a semantic shift—from a term that had an unequivocal meaning within the administrative nomenclature of the Abbasid political establishment to the more literal meaning of a Commander of the Commanders, consequently perceiving the Commander of the Faithful as just one commander among others.

If this hypothesis holds true, then the Buyids would have been among the first to contest the religious leadership of the amīr al-mu‘minīn without openly
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challenging their nominal overlord. In turn, this would result in serious consequences with regard to the guardianship of the *maṣlaḥa* by the Commander of the Faithful. The sultans, whose ideals of rule might be perceived much more within the framework of pre-Islamic Iranian traditions, tended more and more towards equating the Common Good with their respective personal interest, perhaps indicating absolutist rule.28 This was also an attempt to make the religious-legislative, the actual domain of the *fuqahā’*, and its executive, originally the ruler’s domain, congruent. This in no way implies a shrinking role for the jurists; yet their position and—resulting from that—their impact on actual legislation appears to have become increasingly dependent on the ruler.

Here, however, it has to be conceded that this was not entirely new. The redaction (*jamʿ*) of the Qur’ān under the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, along with the destruction of conflicting copies,29 the Abbasids’ efforts regarding the collection and circulation of Prophetic *ahādīth*, including the strengthening of the Abbasid family *asānid*,30 or the writing of Ibn Ishāq’s standard biography of the Prophet by order of the first Abbasid caliph31 might well be seen in this light.32 Although the functional differentiation among the *ulamā* was not yet entirely completed, as in pre-Buyid times authoritative legal rulings and theological precepts, being related, were needed by the rulers to religiously legitimate their respective regimes. Patronage was the common means of binding religious scholars to the ruler, relying on the common sense notion that you should never bite the hand that feeds you. The enormous efforts of the Buyid rulers and their leading courtiers regarding patronage of the learned of whatever provenance has led authors like Joel Kraemer to label their reign as a “Renaissance of Islam,”33 something that has been put in perspective not least by the works of Muhammad Qasim Zaman on the relationship between ruler and scholars in the early Abbasid period. What is remarkable in the Buyid case, however, are two things. First, although their rule was initially not dependent on religious justification, as they did not contest the supreme position of the Abbasid caliph, they nonetheless developed a practice of patronage for the learned folk that clearly resembled the practice of the caliphs. Second, by patronizing *fuqahā’*, they seem to have followed the caliphal model of the ruler as the ultimate authority of appeal in their sphere of control, the precondition of which was to consult a range of *fuqahā’* in order to form a conclusive judgement. Here, the Buyids do not seem to have been carried away by their own Shiite proclivities by assigning the monopoly to the emerging Shiite *muḥaddithūn-cum-fuqahā’*. Instead, they granted moderate Sunnite jurists an equal if not pre-dominant position. The Ḥanafite *quḍāt* Abū ‘l-Qāsim al-Tanūkhī (d. 342/953) and Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Quray’a (d. 367/978), who regularly attended the learned soirées of the vizier Abū Muḥammad al-Muhallabī (d. 352/963), are just two cases in point.34

Others followed soon after along the lines of the Buyids. One of the most illustrious examples is the Hamdanid Emirate of Aleppo,35 established in 947 CE by Abū ‘l-Ḥasan Sayf al-Dawla (d. 316/967). However, unlike the Iranian Buyids, the Hamdanids were descended from an Arab family and were known for their frequent challenges to successive Abbasid caliphs that finally led to the emergence of
two largely independent emirates in Mesopotamia and Syria within the realm of the Caliphate. In the construction of sovereignty of his rule, however, Sayf al-Dawla followed the Buyid model. He was reported to have had visible Imamite inclinations and he did not at any point aspire to the titles of khalīfa and amīr al-muʾminīn. Instead, he recruited such a large number of famed scholars and literati to his entourage, even a few years before he got firmly established in Aleppo, that even three centuries after his death he was still praised in the renowned biographical dictionary of the Mamluk scholar Ibn Khallikān al-Irbīlī (d. 681/1282):

His court [ḥadratuḥu] was the attraction of visitors, the point where beneficence raised, the qibla of hopes, the spot where the caravans discharged their loads, place of concourse for learned men [mawsim al-udabī], and the arena for poets. It is said that never on the doors of any king, other than the caliphs, did there assemble so many masters in the poetic art; stars of the age. Only mighty rule [sulṭān] is the market to which such wares are brought as can be best disposed of there.36

Prominently among the army of poets, calligraphers, epistolographers, astrologers and theologians who accepted the invitation of Sayf al-Dawla to join his so-called “Poetic Circle” (majlis majmaʿ al-fuṣulāʾ fi jamīʿ al-maʿārif) were, from early on, illustrious jurists including the Shāfiʿite faqīh Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Muhāmilī (d. 414/1024), Abū Saʿīd al-Sayrafbī (d. 368/979)37 and the former companion of the Buyid vizier al-Muhallabī, the Ḥanafite qāḍī al-Tanūkhī.38 Their integration into court may serve as an indication that Sayf al-Dawla, despite locating himself within the Abbasid nomenclature, aspired nonetheless to exercise supreme rule in his realm of power. The fiqhāʾ were to serve as his legal advisers, while at the same time they had to legitimize legal rulings by the regent as being in accordance with the Common Good in exchange for the favours bestowed upon them. Here again, the Hamdanid practice resembled that of the Abbasid caliphs where the rulers surrounded themselves with fiqhāʾ as legal advisors in their endeavour to maintain just rule within their realm of power. In doing so, they could claim their territory to be dār al-islām without openly challenging the religious authority of the Abbasid caliph.

Similar to these cases, Muslim jurists figured prominently among the religious scholars patronized by the ruler in early Safavid Iran. They advanced political rule by defining the scope of the Common Good for the polity and, thus, presented the Shāh as a just and prudent ruler and, consistently, his kingdom as dār al-islām. A vivid example in this context is the dispute over the office of the shaykh al-islām in the Safavid capital Qazvin in a period where Twelver Shiism, as the state religion, had only superficially permeated Iran. As Devin Steward has convincingly argued, the rise in importance of this office within the nomenclature of the young state clearly shows an attempt by Shāh Ṭahmāsb I (d. 984/1576) to strengthen the legalist element among the religious scholars in the vicinity of the court. By so doing he was able, first, to programmatically dissociate from the Ottomans—his powerful Sunni neighbours to the West—and, secondly, to reassure the almost equally
powerful Qizilbash forces within the empire that the Safavid’s inclination towards Twelver Shiism was genuine. The already widely discussed co-option of fiqah from Jabal ‘Amil, in modern-day Lebanon, might be seen in the same context. The scarcity of proper Twelver Shiite jurists, who were very much in demand, from among the native Iranian scholars, serves as one common explanation for the rise in prominence of Lebanese fiqah, such as ‘Izz al-Din Husayn al-‘Amili (d. 984/1576). During his seven-year-term as shaykh al-islam of Qazvin, al-‘Amili compiled two legal treatises, dedicated to his patron, which carefully negotiated between the religious ideas of Tahmasb I and Twelver Shiite legal theory.

As economic and social resources were scarce, ‘Izz al-Din was challenged by Sayyid Husayn ibn al-Hasan al-KarakI “Mujtahid” (d. 1001/1593), yet another recent immigrant from Lebanon. Immediately after his arrival in Iran in 1552, the latter dedicated a number of copies of his treatise Daf’ al-munawa’at ‘an al-tafdiil wa’l-musawwat to the Safavid ruler, attempting to win him over and, thus, to gain access to the resources provided by the court. Only a few years later he dedicated his work al-Lum’a fi amr salat al-jum’a solely to Tahmasb I, promulgating the view that the Friday prayer is only valid in the presence of a mujtahid. His adversary al-‘Amili responded to these self-serving ideas with the ‘Iqd al-husayni, one of the two aforesaid legal treatises, in which he stated that there was no living mujtahid known at that particular point in time. With this, however, he did not succeed. The regent finally decided between the two competing jurists—their disagreement manifest in their conflicting positions inherent in the treatises—in about 1561, most probably in a learned disputation (munazara), and in favour of Karaki. In this way, Tahmasb I inaugurated a policy of homogenizing Shiite scholarship—especially the religious jurisprudence—in the Safavid realm of power at this particular point in time, by granting the monopoly to a particular faction among the competing fiqah of mainly Lebanese provenance. In return, the Shah, albeit only a sulthan al-zaman, expected to be recognized by the fiqah as being as close as possible to the ideal Shiite ruler, the sulthan al-‘adil, thus approaching a core virtue of the Shiite Imams.

Defining the commendable, praising the commander

There were, however, religious scholars from provenances other than fiqah who were granted courtly patronage for the sake of legitimizing political rule, as will be explicated in the following examples of the philosopher-cum-theologians and the poets. After all, there are at least two more dimensions to this pattern of patronage, which go beyond the mere legal matter of justifying a particular ruler as upholder of maslaha and, therefore, as administrator of the dar al-islam.

Islamic law, according to Baber Johansen, refers in the first place only to the realm of externally notable human behaviour, the so-called “forum externum” (al-zahir), whereas the Qur’an calls upon believers to pay equal attention to the spheres concealed from social control, the so-called “forum internum” (al-batin). Individual moral perfection thus goes hand in hand with strict adherence to the binding rules (qawainin), deduced by the experts of Positive Law from “infallible
texts,” in the attempt to define the siyāsa al-sharʿiyya. As stated earlier, a ruler could only be as legitimate as his willingness to subjugate his rule to the legal norms. He would, on the other hand, only do so inasmuch as his moral integrity allowed. This correlation refers to an important point in the formulation of “Royal Conduct” (adab al-mulāk), which had repercussions for the pattern of courtly patronage of religious scholars.

Already at the early Muslim courts of Kufa, Baghdad and Córdoba the co-option of Muslim religious scholars by the courts served the development and display of an exemplary court culture. As in European courts, rulers and ambitious courtiers were expected to spend a considerable amount of their respective treasure on patronage of religious scholars of various provenances, along with provisions of subsistence for their respective establishments, be it madāris or khānaqāhs. After all, royal conduct was not least measured by the promotion of the sciences and arts, making learning and literate taste a main constituent of the “Just Ruler,” as will be shown below.

Support for the learned and wise, however, was by no means unconditional, and had to go hand in hand with the sovereign ensuring that provisions were made for the maintenance of maslaḥa, thus again, ruling in accordance with the siyasa al-sharʿiyya. This mutual relationship between patronage of the learned and the authoritatively grounded expectations of the ruler found its literary expression in the naṣīḥāt al-mulāk, the “mirrors for princes” literature, originating in pre-Islamic Iranian tradition and becoming very popular in later centuries, especially in Persianate polities. However, the origins of this genre can be found in Abbasid times, although it might not be a coincidence that the author of the first work that explicitly appealed to the ruler as the upholder of the Common Good, Ibn al-Muqaffa’, was of Persian origin. In his Risāla fiʾl-ṣaḥāba, al-Muqaffa’, himself not a faqīḥ, recommended to his patron, the caliph al-Manṣūr (d. 158/775), the standardization of religious law within the empire. As soon as a contradiction arose between the consensus of different localities, he would be the ultimate legal authority (ḥujja), adopting whatever led to good (ḥasan) and proper (maʿrūf).

No independent judgements will be passed in this land [ʾimāra], except made in its favour and benefit. We desire that herein lays the well-being of the people [salāḥ liʾl-raʾiya] and of these lands on earth, and the shutting down of the gates of treason [khiyāna] and of oppression of the commoners [ghashm al-ʿummāl].

Starting out from the example of Ibn al-Muqaffa’, the interdependence of patronage and the idea of the Just Ruler touches upon another issue. As the ruler, in order to prove his legitimacy, he had his provisions for the Common Good publicly displayed. He thus strongly depended on the assistance of the learned, using their credibility to add weight to his claims and sell them as “consultative” (mashwara). Perhaps this was in Ibn al-Muqaffa’’s mind when he advised his overlord in what is considered one of the earliest mirrors for princes, the Adab al-kabīr waʾl-adab al-ṣaghīr, to very carefully choose the learned ones with
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whom he surrounded himself. On the other hand, the dependence of a ruler on the approval of the learned ones seems to also be the reason why the composing of mirrors for princes was commissioned from those who were provided subsistence and prestige in return. In this regard, we read in the Saljuq vizier Nizām al-Mulk’s celebrated Siyāsatnāmah, also known as Siyar al-mulūk, that he was ordered by his benefactor, the Sultan Malikshāh (d. 485/1092):

to give thought to the condition of the country, and to consider whether there is in our [i.e. sultan Malikshāh’s] time anything out of order either in the court [bar dargāh va dar dīvān], or the audience hall [bārgāh va majlis], anything whose obligations are not being observed by us or are concealed from us; whether there are functions [sharā‘ī] which kings before us have performed and which we are not following. Consider further what have been the ordinances and customs of kingship and kings [ā‘īn va rasm-i mulk va mulūk], followed in past time by the Saljuq kings, make a digest of them and present them for our judgement [ra‘y]; we shall reflect upon them and give orders that hereafter religious and worldly affairs [kārḥā-yi dīnī va dunyāvī] should proceed in accordance with their proper rules [bar ā‘īn-i khī‘īsh].

Not long after a shift seems to have taken place with regard to the mirrors for princes. If the Siyāsatnāmah was a work clearly intended to provide practical guidance to the ruler who had commissioned the work with this very aim in mind, later works took the shape of theoretical treatises on ethics, thus moving closer to the realm of philosophy. This fact is reflected in two different ways.

First, although such works might have been commissioned by a patron with a similar intention to the commissioners of earlier mirrors, the scholars were not necessarily following their mandates. A good illustration of this is the Akhlāq-i nāṣirī of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274). Originally the scholar had only been commissioned by his patron at that time, the Nizārī-Ismaili governor of Qhistan Naṣīr al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ibn Abī Maṣṣūr (d. 655/1257), to simply render the Kitāb al-tahāra of Abū ʿAṭī Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) into Persian. Considering this request Ṭūsī decided instead to compose an entirely new and comprehensive work on practical philosophy (ḥikmat-i ‘amalt), but not without asking permission from his patron. The title of the work implies a dedication to the patron, although this was not made explicit anywhere in the text.

Secondly, some of these works, attempting to scientifically justify the ethical rules to be applied upon rulers in order for them to impart these rules on their subjects, give no indication as to whether they were commissioned. Whether their authors were nonetheless, like Nizām al-Mulk, in influential positions in Muslim courts can therefore neither be deduced from an explicit statement on the reasons and circumstances that led to the composition of these works, nor from their actual contents. The latter shows the scholar’s quest for an objective philosophical treatment of ethical issues; the only indication that these works fulfil the criteria of naṣīḥāt al-mulūk and were intended to serve their respective ruler accordingly, were dedications or eulogies to the rulers at the beginning of each work.
dedications are enlightening not only because they provide an indication of the courtly context from which these works arose, even if they were not explicitly commissioned. In cases such as the Akhlāq-i jālālī of Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502), first sadr to the Qarā Qoyūnlū ruler Jahānshāh (d. 872/1467) and later qāḍī of Fars under the Aq Qoyūnlū sultan Üzün Hasan (d. 882/1478), they can shed light also on yet another crucial point which appears from formulations such as:

[He is] the most exalted king and most noble khāqān, who has the power over the keys of time in his hands and in whose grasp are enough reins for the welfare of mankind [maṣāliḥ nawʿ al-insān], the protector of the land of God from assault and disaffection, the extirpator to their last remnants of oppression and aggression, the king who is son of a king who was son of a king, the glory of the state and the Caliphate, of the world and the religion [wa l-khilāfa wa l-dunyā wa l-dīn]. Hasan Beg Bahādur Khān—may God Almighty make the shadows of [his] Caliphate eternal and perpetuate the lustre of [his] compassion, and never may the exalted standards be lowered which float over the sky’s fairest portion, and the enemies of [his] elevated state may never rise.57

By eulogizing a patron as caliph, and his reign as a worldly and religious caliphathe above styling of a ruler as the guardian of the maṣlaḥa and, thus administrator of the dār al-islām, is realized also in the context of a paradigmatic ruler who cares about the promotion of sciences and arts at court.58 It does not seem to be mere accident that we read such lines in the work of a philosopher in the peripatetic tradition; after all, it was the political thought of Hellenic and Hellenist philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus that shaped the Muslim philosophers’ idea of the Common Good. Aristotle’s “Common Interest” (tō koinon sympherón) and “Common Good”, or “Common Welfare” (tō koinon agathón),59 correspond to a degree with Plato’s “Welfare” (tō agathón),60 as it was taken over in Plotinus’ Enneads and, finally, received by the Muslims as Uthulūjiyya Arisṭūfālis.61 From this context it becomes plausible to ascribe to Muslim philosophers and theologians an almost equally important role for the justification of rule in accordance with maṣlaḥa to the jurists, because while the latter focus on the legal side, the former emphasize the ethical side, as incorporated in the adab al-mulūk. This, in turn, was not entirely selfless. After all, men such as Tūsī and Davānī found, in this way, economic security and social recognition. We may thus conclude that, here too, patronage followed a simple utilitarian pattern: clients were generally expected to serve the patrons at their command.

On the other hand, it was philosophers, particularly, who also followed an agenda of their own when entering into patron-client relationships with political rulers, seeing themselves as political advisers and educators of the princes. Herein we may find an otherwise not entirely clear reason why the outstanding philosopher Abū Naṣr Muhammad al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), known as “Alfarabius” or “Avennasar” in Latin medieval text, and as the “Second Teacher [after Aristotle]” (al-muʿallim al-thānī) to Muslims, joined the “Poetic Circle” of the afore-mentioned Hamdanid
amīr Sayf al-Dawla in 942 CE. Taking into account the scholar’s strong references to Hellenist thought and the works believed to be from Plato and Aristotle in particular, we may construct a parallel agenda to Plato’s politico-philosophical one, which dwells to some extent on the idea of the political and social role of philosophy as conceptualized by Pythagoras of Samos. As can later be found in a much more detailed way in Plato’s Politeia, Pythagoras considered the role of a philosopher as that of a consultant and mentor. In this regard he was himself active as an adviser to the senate of the Southern Italian Croton, then part of “Greater Greece” (megálè hellás), and as a moral tutor to the households of the dignitaries. However, unlike al-Fārābī later on, Plato’s conviction, namely “that philosophy—in the sense of Socrates—was important, nay, essential to the health of a city,” and the disappointing experiences he had during his three visits to Sicilian Syracuse, led him to think about ways in which the philosophers could keep this demand in the wake of Socrates’ fate. How could the objective of the philosopher as a prudent adviser to the worldly ruler be maintained, while, at the same time, avoiding conflict with the society around them? Plato’s solution for this was the establishment of an institutionalized study group (katástasis) in a grove outside Athens, dedicated—in his own words—to “the studies for making philosophers and statesmen (for that is, essentially, what we are doing).”

Unlike the týrannos Dionysius I of Syracuse (d. c. 367 BC) in Plato’s time, the Muslim rulers seemed much more open to prudent advice from the learned. After all, it was the ‘ulamā’ in their different guises who provided the ruler with their authoritatively grounded interpretations of the Common Good. In this fact we might find a convincing reason for al-Fārābī’s becoming an esteemed companion of amīr Sayf al-Dawla, who, after all, aspired to adjust to proper Islamic standards what was perceived as the declining rule of the Abbasids.

Fārābī had completed the rough draft of his final major treatise on statecraft, the Mabādi’ ārā’ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila, just before he moved to Aleppo, but continued to refine the work during the period he was with Sayf al-Dawla. In this final philosophical summa, he discussed at length the Perfect Ruler, combining Neoplatonic metaphysics with Platonic ideas of governance and Islamic conceptions about ideal rule. Following the treatment of God as the Active Intellect (’aql fa’‘āl) and the Passive Intellect of the recipient of the divine revelation (’aql munfa’i)—“the sovereign [al-ra’īs al-awwal] over whom no other human being has any sovereignty whatsoever—; . . . the Imām, . . . the first sovereign of the virtuous city, . . . the sovereign of the virtuous community [al-umma al-fāḍila],” he proceeded to the actual prudent ruler after the end of prophethood and the Rightly-Guided Caliphates:

The next sovereign, who is the successor of the first sovereigns, will . . . be distinguished by the following six qualities [sitt sharā’ī]: First, he will be a philosopher [ḥakīm]. Second, he will know and remember the laws and customs and rules of conduct [al-sharā’i’ wa’l-sunan wa’l-siyar] with which the first sovereigns had governed the city, conforming in all his actions to all their actions. Third, he will excel in deducing [jūda istinbāt] new laws by
analogy where no law of the predecessors has been recorded, following in his
deducing the principles laid down by the first leaders [wa-yakūnu fīmā
yastanbiṭuḥu min dhalik muḥtadīḥyān ḥadhwa al-aʾimma al-awwalīn].
Fourth, he will be good at deliberating and be powerful in his deducing to
meet new situations for which the first sovereigns could not have laid down
any law; when doing this he will have in mind the good of the city [sāliḥ hāl
al-madīnā]. Fifth, he will be good at guiding the people by his speech to fulfil
the laws of the first sovereigns as well as those laws which he will have
deduced in conformity with their principle after their time. And sixth, he
should be of tough physique [thabāt] in order to shoulder the tasks of war,
mastering the serving as well as the ruling military art. 70

With such expositions, embedded in a highly elaborated philosophical system,
al-Fārābī made explicitly clear what he expected from a prudent ruler when
accepting the invitation of Sayf al-Dawla. Moreover, he was not obliged to
provide a philosophical justification for the ruler’s actual political preferences,
because al-Fārābī at no time became financially dependent on Sayf al-Dawla
by accepting an official position at court, as other philosophers readily did. From
the Kitāb ikhbār al-ʿulamāʾ bi-ʾakhbār al-ḥukamāʾ of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qīfī
(d. 646/1248), minister to the Ayyubid amīr of Aleppo, we learn that al-Fārābī
only “stood under his [i.e. Sayf al-Dawla’s] protection for a while, wearing the
garment of the Sufis”. 71 Sayf al-Dawla must have felt fortunate to count al-Fārābī
among his entourage without any formal commitment, but just to “favour and
honour him, knowing his rank in science [ʿilm] and position in insight [fahm]”.
72 To be accompanied by an uncompromising seeker of the truth who, moreover,
had outlined the criteria for the performance of good governance would have
helped Sayf al-Dawla to create an aura of a ruler who had “in mind the good of the
city,” 73 that is, the maslahā. The philosopher, in turn, although not financially
dependent, received grand recognition in return for his company, which might
have nourished his reputation even further. Reputation again was a necessity for
the learned to make their respective voices heard by a larger audience.

The picture of this dimension of the entanglement of ruler, scholar and the
concept of dār al-islām would not be complete without mentioning that the praise
of a royal benefactor as upholder of the Common Good, as visible from dedications
to them in preludes to philosophical treatises, reached its formal climax in the elab-
orate compositions of court poets. Starting out from the above-mentioned early
Arabic mirrors for princes of Ibn al-Muqaffāʿ, al-Ghazālī’s Naṣīḥat al-mulūk,
Nizām al-Mulk’s Sīyāsatnāmāh and the Bahr al-favāʿīd of an anonymous
Persian author from about the same period, the genre was refined in medieval
Persian court poetry. Using an increasingly allegorical language, along with other
stylistic particularities of poetry, its function became twofold. First and foremost,
edifying qasāʿīd or ghazals of famed poets, such as Manūchirrī-ye Damghānī
(d. c. 432/1040), Awhād al-Dīn-i Anvārī (d. c. 585/1189), Nizāmī-ye Ganjaāvī
(d. 608/1209), and Hāfiz-i Shīrāzī (d. 792/1390), were panegyric, thus praising their
respective patron as an exemplary ruler. 75 In this respect the poems resemble
the eulogizing introductory dedications of the philosophical works that we came across.

The role of poets in the court societies of the Persianate World, however, did not end with the composition of panegyric. By drawing from the vast reservoir of poetic expressions it was particularly the distinctively Persian genres of the ghazal and the maqṣna where panegyric and didactic elements seem to have become most intertwined. In this context Julie Scott Meisami has argued that, for example, “fervent love” (‘ishq)—the prime topic of courtly poetry—addressed “a wide range of ethico-didactic purposes.” Here, the issue of unswerving loyalty (wafā’) of a lover to the beloved plays an important role; it might well be read as the uncompromising care of a ruler for his subjects, as well as his devotion to God. Whereas the latter is clearly designed to display the virtue of piety (taqwā), the former seems rather to indicate the ruler’s care for maṣlaḥa.

It is thus not surprising that it was often the poets who held the office of the ruler’s confidant (nadīm), “expected to function not only as boon companion and familiar, but also as a source of counsel and of moral guidance.” However, as shu’arā’ the learned ones in court had to be content only with their subtle appeals to maintain a certain standard of royal conduct; they did, however rarely, contribute to the development of the valid norms of maṣlaḥa. Here the poets had to rely on the fruits of the labour of the two other groups of scholars, the jurists and the philosophers-cum-theologians. While all three groups of scholars competed for the favour of a ruler, it was in particular between fuqahā’ and philosophers-cum-theologians that an internal quarrel evolved over the monopoly of definition of the content of the constituents of dār al-islām. The following section will show that this had clear repercussions on their competition for courtly patronage.

**Contesting the monopoly of definition**

The different solutions in legitimizing actual political rule offered by the jurist and the philosophers-cum-theologian opened up yet a further dimension. As both groups exclusively claimed a monopoly on defining the Common Good, and both had convincing arguments for their respective positions, it was for the ruler to decide to which one of the two he would give his preference. This fact, in turn, led to a strong competition between the jurists, as well as the philosophers and theologians, in a philosophical guise, for the favour of the rulers. Besides, the dispute did not only proceed along the “jurist vs. philosopher” line but also within both factions, as we know from the frequent contests between the different madhāhib al-fiqh and strands of kalām. The reason for the attempts to win over the sympathy of a ruler was obvious. After all, with a specifically designed office in court the possibility to win increasing influence over the ruler as well as the ruled increased, and this is even before considering all of the economic arguments.

There are numerous examples throughout the history of Muslim societies for temporal monopolies of definition by one party, leading to the displacement of others. In fact, the two examples presented here are rather exceptional, as both refer to situations where a ruler attempted to substantially convert larger segments
of society by way of restructuring the religio-political Überbau. Future research may provide further examples to either verify or refute this point.

The first instance I wish to put forward is the so-called “testing”, the miḥna, under the Abbasid caliph al-Maʾmūn and his successors al-Muʿtaṣim and al-Wāṭiq between 833 and 851 ce. The increasing influence of a few scholars of a particular strand of thought in court helped to eventually propagate a particular religious doctrine as the official one, which had previously been considered sheer heresy. The idea of the “Createdness of the Qurʾān” (khalq al-qurʾān), allegedly voiced for the first time by Jaʿd ibn Dirham, teacher of the Umayyad caliph Marwān II (r. 744–50 CE), who was executed around 125/743 on the charge of apostasy, was garnering more support, with the Muʿtazila gaining strength in the heyday of the Abbasid Caliphate. Still Ḥārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809 CE) is reported to have said that, on hearing about the Ḥanafite jurist and alleged Jahmite theologian Bishr ibn Ghiyāth al-Marīsī (d. 218/833) advocating the createdness of the Qurʾān, he was willing to kill him with his own hands.80 However, al-Maʾmūn, who had himself been taught by the famous Ḥanafite jurist and alleged Muʿtazilite inclinations, Ḥasan ibn Ziyād al-Luʾtuʾī (d. 204/819), became increasingly open to this idea and filled key courtly offices with adherents to this theological dogma.

Montgomery Watt argues in this context that this decision was by no means coincidental, but had clear political implications. While an eternal, uncreated Qurʾān would leave the power of interpretation entirely to the ʿulamāʾ; a “created Qurʾān had not the same prestige, and there could not be the same objection to its provisions being overruled by the decree of an inspired imam. Thus the doctrine of createdness enhanced the power of the caliph and the secretaries, while that of uncreatedness, the power of the ulema.”81 Martin Hinds, on the contrary, sees al-Maʾmūn’s motivation as less of an attempt to strengthen the position of the caliph, than to build up a front against the “populist hadīth enthusiasts”82 in favour of the Ḥanafite-Muʿtazilite way of dealing with the Islamic normativeness. Perhaps a combination of both was the case, as the approach of Dominique Sourdel suggests. He shows how the caliph’s pro-Muʿtazilite sentiments went along with pro-Shiite ones and reflected his attempt to gain control over the rather unstable religio-political situation in his empire. A clear indication for this would be the simultaneous establishment of the doctrine of khalq al-qurʾān and the superiority of ‘Alī bin Abī Tālib over the other companions of the Prophet (tafṣīl ʿAlī).83 In a way strongly reminiscent of Shiite practice, al-Maʾmūn claimed to have been chosen by God and, therefore had almost Prophet-like immunity from sin and error (ʿisma). In this way he emphasized the role of the caliph as the spiritual leader of the Muslim umma, styling himself as the supreme authority (al-ʿālim) in this world, the only one who was able to make infallible provisions for the welfare of his subjects.84 Therefore it is conceivable that he would not have been likely to tolerate those learned ones whose social recognition rose steadily and who eventually challenged his self-proclaimed supremacy on religious grounds which in turn led to al-Maʾmūn’s favouritism towards his loyal Ḥanafite-Muʿtazilite and Shiite supporters.

The most instrumental scholar in this regard was his Ḥanafite qādī al-quḍāt Aḥmad ibn Abī Duʿād al-Iyādī (d. 240/854), pupil of Hayyāḥ ibn al-ʿAlā al-Sulāmī,
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who again had studied with Wāsil ibn ‘Aṭā’ (d. 131/748), the original protagonist of the theological movement known as Mu‘tazila. Ibn Abī Du‘ād is said to have exerted enormous influence on the Caliph’s decision to standardize religious opinion in his realm of power, as when the latter ordered the application of the “testing” in a missive to the Tahirid amīr of Baghdad, Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm (d. unknown), in Rabī’ al-Awwal 218/March–April 833:

Summon together all the judges in your sphere of jurisdiction [bi-hadratik] and read out to them this letter from the Commander of the Faithful to you. Begin by testing them out [bi-imtiḥānīhim] concerning what they say and by finding out from them their beliefs about God’s creating and originating the Qur‘ān in time [ya‘tqidūna fi khalaq allāh al-qur‘ān wa-iḥdātihi]. Inform them that the Commander of the Faithful will not seek the assistance in any of his administrative tasks of anyone whose religion, whose sincerity of faith in God’s unity and whose own religious beliefs are not deemed trustworthy, nor will he place any reliance on such a man in the responsibilities laid on him by God and in the affairs of his subjects which have been entrusted to him.

The order, affirmed in three subsequent letters by the Caliph, was carried out for almost two decades to such an extent that adherents to different positions in fiqh and kalām were banned from teaching and, in the worst case, physically forced to subject themselves to the official religious opinion of the state.

A similar fate, however, met those ‘ulamā’ who benefited most from the persecutions of learned adversaries during the mihna, after its abolition under al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–61 CE) in the third year of his reign. Ibn Abī Du‘ād and his son and successor as qādī al-qudat, Abū ‘l-Walīd Muḥammad (d. 239/854), for example, were dismissed and dishonoured, all their property confiscated and the latter even imprisoned. A similar fate met philosophers like Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb al-Kindī (d. c. 244/860), the “Philosopher of the Arabs” (faylasūf al-‘arab), who had been too close to the heart of power. His large library was confiscated and he was publicly beaten. Now came the time for those who suffered under the mihna, but who had remained nonetheless firm in their beliefs. The most prominent figure here might be Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), who gained an almost symbolic status for the “Traditionalist Resurgence” that began under al-Mutawakkil.

Clearly the endurance of what Muhammad Qasim Zaman has called the “Proto-Sunnī-elite” during the mihna contributed to their rise in social esteem afterwards. In spite of Zaman’s remark, that the events of the mihna did not alter the relationship between ruler and scholars, it is necessary to put the entire event into proper context. Nonetheless, these events seem to indicate that, in general, it was solely in the capacity of the ruler to advance those who supported his regime, while taking measures against those who were not willing to do so. This can be illustrated by similar incidences, found in later periods and different local and denominational contexts, which in turn suggest a certain pattern beyond spatial and temporal boundaries. However it must be repeated here that further examples provided by
future research may very well also expose the following sample as exceptions rather than the rule and, thus, unsuitable for the construction of a paradigm.

The above-mentioned Arab fuqahā’ from Jabal ‘Āmil, who arrived in early Safavid Iran, increasingly permeated the courts at Tabriz and Qazvin and very soon ousted native Iranians, like Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Maṣūr Dashtakī (d. 949/1542–3), from prestigious offices. Dashtakī himself had only a few years earlier been able to triumph over other scholars in the competition for the favour of the new rulers of Iran and had thus ended a generation-long learned dispute between his family and that of the above-mentioned Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī94 who, even more than Dashtakī, represented the intellectual heritage of peripatetic philosophy of al-Fārābī and Abū ‘l-‘Alī ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037).

Because Davānī’s demise had occurred just before the Safavids had firmly established themselves in his native province of Fars, it relieved him from the inconvenience of strategically reconsidering his adherence to Sunni Islam. The Dashtakī family, on the other hand, did change their religious proclivities to Twelver Shiism without much compunction.95 However, Jamāl al-Dīn Astarābādī (d. 913/1525), a favourite pupil of Davānī, filled the position of ṣadr al-ṣudūr under Shāh Ismā’īl I, although we have very little information regarding the actual circumstances of this appointment.96 Since, according to Savory, the task of the ṣadr, head of the religious administration, “was the imposition of doctrinal unity, namely Shī‘ism, throughout the Šafawid empire,”97 Davānī’s pupil obviously must have converted to Twelver Shiism as well. The learned argument between Davānī’s father and Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī was thus transferred to a new level. Now both factions competed for the monopoly of definition within the realm of Twelver Shiism, as manifested in their rivalry over appropriate offices in court.

Astarābādī’s somewhat strained relations with Shāh Ismā’īl’s viceregent (vakīl) Mīrẓā Shāh Ḵusayn ʿĪṣāfānī (assassinated 929/1523) and other leading court officials must have played well into the hands of Dashtakī. After all, his relationship to the vakīl must have been quite good, for the latter summoned him to Qazvin and wanted him to be installed as at least a joint-ṣadr, thus posing a counterweight to Astarābādī in court. This plan, however, did not work out. A learned disputation (mubāḥasah) between the two competing scholars was held under the auspices of the nobility, which Astarābādī was able to decide for himself.98 For once, Dashtakī left court a beaten man.

However, when Astarābādī tried to transgress his sphere of competence and developed a taste for other administrative domains and entrusted the ṣādārat to his son Ṣafī al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. unknown) these developments were counteracted by a number of high-ranking courtiers and Ṣafī al-Dīn was eventually expelled.99 Then Dashtakī took his chance and, after two intermediate office-holders, he finally succeeded in becoming the sole ṣadr in the late 1520s. At this moment it seemed as if the generation-long learned argument between the Davānī and the Dashtakī factions had ultimately been decided in favour of the latter. The above-mentioned changes in religious policies under Shāh Ṭahmāsb I, who attempted to strengthen the legalist element among the learned courtiers, overshadowed Dashtakī’s triumph and led to his fall only two years after he assumed office.
The Iranian scholars jealously watched the increasing integration of Arab fuqahā’ especially into the higher ranks of the Safavid religious administration. The central player on the side of the Arabs from the beginning was ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-‘Alī al-Karākī, better known as “al-Muḥaqqiq al-Thānī” (d. 939/1533), who rose enormously in esteem during the early years of the reign of Shāh Ṣāḥib I, as is evident from the honorifics “Seal of the Mujtahids” (khātam al-mujtahidīn) and “Mujtahid of his Age” (muṭahid zamānī). Moreover, in a farām, dated 16th Dhī ‘l-Hijja, 939/9th July, 1533, the Shāh officially recognized the aged scholar as “Vice-regent of the Imam” (nā‘īb al-imām), “Seal of the Mujtahids” (khātam al-mujtahidīn), “Guardian of the Religion of the Commander of the Faithful” (ḥāris dīn amīr al-mu‘minīn), “Heir of the Sciences of the Foremost of Messengers” (wārith ‘ulūm sayyid al-mursalīn), “Guide to all People of the Age” (muṭtadī kāfīrat ahl al-zamān) and “Example of the Knowledgeable Scholars” (qidvat al-‘ulamā‘ al-râスキhīn), and thus clearly showed his royal favour for the Muḥaqqiq al-Thānī’s interpretation of Twelver Shiism over those of others. The Arab scholars used the last few months of his life to establish a considerable number of fuqahā‘, mainly belonging to his own family, in key positions of the religious administration and was in this way able to wrest the monopoly of definition from the so-far dominant Iranian philosophers-cum-theologians. Understandably, the Iranians were not willing to give up their positions uncontested.

One of the strongholds of the Iranian resistance against what was felt to be an illegitimate monopolization by the Arab fuqahā‘ was Ghiyāsh al-Dīn Dashtakī. The šadr who, according to his contemporary Navīdī, was “more eminent in hikma and falsafa, astronomy, mathematics and medicine than other scholars [az digar-i ‘ulamā‘ mumtāz]”, but obviously less versed in fiqh, dared nonetheless to challenge the Muḥaqqiq al-Thānī in legal questions. The disagreement was solved in a public disputation under the supervision of the regent himself. Ṣāḥib’s own account of this affair speaks almost for itself:

At this time learned controversies arose between the “Mujtahid of the Age”, shaykh ‘Alī [ibn] ‘Abd al-‘Alī, and Mīr Ghiyāsh al-Dīn Manṣūr, the šadr. Notwithstanding that the “Mujtahid of the Age” was triumphant they did not submit to his ījtihād and turned to rebellion. We guarded the side of truth and affirmed him in ījtihād.

The seventeenth century Tārīkh-i ʿālamʾārā-yi ʿabbāsī of Iskandar Beg indicates that the argument between Dashtakī and the Muḥaqqiq al-Thānī was not, as the memoir of Ṣāḥib suggests, an entirely clean fight, as would have been appropriate for two men of wisdom. Instead, he informs us that their “learned argument [muḥāhasāh-yi īlmī] . . . ended in a fight and turned their differences entirely into ugliness [qabāḥāt].” Be that as it may, the lost argument did cost Dashtakī royal favour and, as a consequence, his office. The monarch had shifted his emphasis in religious policy, assuming that a stronger legal element would contribute much more to the firm establishment of Twelver Shiism in the young state than adherence to the indigenous Iranian scholarship with its strong philosophical and
theological leanings. The latter was much less distinctly Shiite and, thus, less eligible to promote what was considered to be the Common Good, here clearly discernible as the objectification of the personal interest of the ruler: the imposition of Twelver Shiite Islam as religious legitimization of the Safavids’ claims to rule. Once again it was the Shāh who bestowed the monopoly of definition upon those who served his changeable personal interests best by providing learned explanations for these interests as contributions to the maṣlaḥa.

Joining the good ones, fighting the evil ones

It is this that leads us to another aspect in the complex relationship between rulers, the learned and the issue of dār al-islām. Those religious scholars who found patronage either by way of an office in court (mansīḥ), or by fiefs and pensions, were frequently employed by their patrons to strengthen the latter’s position in conflicts over hegemony with other Muslim sovereigns. Especially after the reduction of the Abbasid Caliphate to the so-called “Shadow Caliphate” of Cairo after 1258 CE, the emerging powers between the Bosphorus and the Bay of Bengal competed for the governorship of the entire dār al-islām. Here, again, the scholars had to prove their respective patron worthy of this claim. They were to aim at demonstrating that the regent in question ruled prudently in accordance with the maṣlaḥa of—at least in theory—the entire umma. Examples of this, sometimes bordering on sophisticated insult, are numerous indeed.

The employment of ‘ulamā’ in this regard seems to have secured a certain standard of subtlety. Awkward and brazen advances such as the ones of Shāh Ismā’īl I, founder of the Safavid Empire, against the Mamluks and the Ottomans, in the conflicts over hegemony between the Muslim empires of Early Modernity, seem to carry less of a scholar’s trademark. After all, the offensive dispatch of body parts from defeated enemies was usually unsuitable to prove one’s rule in accordance with the maṣlaḥa.

Later diplomacy between the heads of the early modern Muslim empires, however, was much more elaborate in its attempt to determine precisely who was at the helm of the dār al-islām, that is, who cared most for the Common Good of all subjects within Muslim governed territory. The display of military power, demonstrating the ability to protect the inhabitants of a state and their diverse interests, was one means. It was such strength that caused smaller and considerably weaker kingdoms to diplomatically subject themselves to the rule of the more powerful ones. The subjugation of the Twelver Shiite Deccani kingdoms to the Iranian Safavids in the early sixteenth century CE, or the alleged subjugation of Ṭīpū Sultān (killed 1213/1799), ruler of eighteenth-century South Indian Mysore to the Ottoman Sultan ‘Abdīhīmād I (d. 1203/1789) are just two examples in which ‘ulamā’ were involved in various ways. Both are revealing in some sense.

The first example seems to revive the fitna of the early Islamic period, contesting the claims of the Sunnite rulers to represent the administrator of the entire dār al-islām. After all, while the heirs to the Abbasid caliphate, the Ottomans, were still acknowledged as supreme rulers over the (Sunni) Muslim world, given the fact that
they took responsibility for the protection of the haramayn, Shiite kingdoms tended to assign this role to the Safavids, the first sovereign Twelver Shiite dynasty ever.108 Thus, shortly after he established Twelver Shiism as the state religion in Bijapur in Dhī ʿl-Hijja 908/June 1502 the first ʿĀdilshāh Yūsuf (d. 941/1534)109 had an embassy dispatched to Tabriz to congratulate Ismāʿīl and to declare his loyal submission to Shāh Ismāʿīl I.110 Yūsuf’s successors to the throne went even further when, in a letter from Ibrāhīm ʿĀdilshāh II (d. 1037/1627) to Shāh ʿAbbās I (d. 1038/1629) from 1612, the Indian monarch referred to himself as “an old servant in due and faithful submission,”111 explicitly stating that:

It is visible to the whole world that the Deccan territories . . . form as much a part [qīṭʿa] [of the Safavid empire] as the imperial provinces [mānālīk-i mahrūṣah] Iraq, Fars, Khurasan and Azerbaijan and, accordingly, the [sermon] in the name of this exalted lineage has been, is, and will be the ornament of the pulpits. . . . We look upon ourselves as officials of the court [mansīb dārān-i dargāh] in guardianship of this territory [ḥīfẓ va ḥirāsat-i in vilāyat] which in fact was lent to this servant by His Majesty.112

Obviously, in exchange for their subordination under the Safavids, the ʿĀdilshāhs, as well as their Shiite neighbours the Quṭbshāhs of Golkonda, were expecting the Iranians to perform their duty as protector, especially in situations where they were pressured by the Mughals.113 The Safavids were obviously flattered and made every diplomatic endeavour to secure the Deccani kingdoms from annexation to the Mughal Empire.114 However since they did not provide military support at the hour of greatest need they failed to maintain recognition as supreme rulers over the dār al-islām in the eyes of the Deccani sultans, as might be concluded from the diplomatic lull between them and the Safavids from the second half of the seventeenth century.115

In the second case, ʿĀlīpū Sultan’s ostentatious embassy to Constantinople between 1786 and 1789 clearly reflected the fact that, after being denied recognition as a prince of the empire by the Mughal ruler Shāh ʿĀlam II (d. 1221/1806), he had little choice but to declare himself an independent monarch. Given the fact that the Mughals were, despite an increasing disintegration of their empire, still a dominant political force, ʿĀlīpū had to gain approval for his sovereignty elsewhere.

In this endeavour, it has long been held in the literature, he revitalized the earlier practice of investiture by the caliph,116 or integrating one’s territory into the dār al-islām. Although the Mughals had—even though for the limited territory of India and Transoxania—claimed khilāfa themselves, it was the Ottoman sultan as the “Guardian of the haramayn” who fulfilled the legacy of the early caliphs.117 When the Ottomans took Cairo in 1517 they did not bother to have the caliphate officially conferred upon them. Meanwhile however, this empire showed signs of corrosion and it must therefore not have been unwelcome when the Russian tsarina addressed ʿAbdūlhamīd as “Caliph of Islam”. If ʿĀlīpū was really after approval of his sovereignty by the Ottoman ruler, then this must have had a desirable double effect. While the Indian monarch could himself bear up against the
mighty empire in the north, his request for recognition had explicitly acknowledged the Ottoman sultan as caliph. The case is still debated among historians. Although Tīpū’s embassy “departed [in 1789] from the imperial court [at Constantinople] fully satisfied, bestowed, among others, with precious robes and an answer to the letters” the documentary evidence is far from unequivocal. If we nonetheless assume for now that Tīpū had indeed reaffirmed the Ottoman’s contested claim to represent the entire Muslim umma and, thus, put the aspirations of the “House of Tīmūr” to that effect in their place, then the at least partly successful completion of this mission was owed, at least in part, to the diplomatic skills of the learned ones in Tīpū’s chancellery, who drafted the missives to the Ottoman dignitaries, and those who delivered them to ‘Abdülhamid.

However, another means of resolving the dispute regarding who represented the entire umma after the Abbasid Caliphate came to an end was an even more subtle one and involved, once again, the learned ones in and around the court. We know of quite a number of examples where scholars, patronized by the ruler or leading courtiers, were members of diplomatic embassies, or where their scholarly works constituted an important part of the obligatory gifts dispatched with the embassy. This fact can be interpreted in a twofold way. First, the consignment of exemplary works of Islamic scholarship, quite often of theological and philosophical provenance, can be seen as an attempt to prove the ruler’s own erudition, as well as his chosen taste for scholarship at a high level, represented by the scholars and literati whom he was able to connect to his court by means of patronage. Here, one is again reminded of the interesting relationship between the Hamdanid amīr Sayf al-Dawla and the philosopher al-Fārābī in the tenth century CE. Second, the official delegation of scholars to other courts was a subtle attempt to challenge the scholarship assembled at the other court. Both practices can be explained by the statement in Niẓām al-Mulk’s Siyāsatnāmah that “the conduct [sīrat] and the acumen [ra’y] of an ambassador provide a clue to the conduct and the prudence of his king.”

Sometimes, however, this strategy did not work and led instead to self-made humiliation. The ignominious appearance of a Mughal embassy in a mumāẓara at the Safavid court of Isfahan in 1646 is just one case in point. Here, the disgrace on the Mughal emperor Shāhjahān (d. 1086/1658) was ultimately erased by the dispatch of a philosophical treatise, commissioned from a renowned scholar from the entourage of the Mughal court.

Conclusion

The crux of the complex issue of legitimate, that is, just, political rule in pre- and early modern Muslim societies, appears to be the entanglement of the ethical and legal concepts of maqāṣid al-sharī’a and maṣlaḥa, with the political concept of khilāfa, the spatial expression of which seems to be the dār al-islām. In order to put this sophisticated conceptual framework into practice a ruler needed a learned affirmation by those who claimed trusteeship of the Islamic normativeness (sharī’a) and, thus the basis of the Common Good (maṣlaḥa). A scholar, in turn, needed a prestigious social status if he wished to succeed in competition with
other, equally qualified scholars. Here, the issue of courtly patronage of Muslim religious scholars comes into being.

As courtiers, religious scholars and literati functioned as “agitators,” or legitimizing agents of actual political rule. They had to legitimize the regime of their respective patron as just, that is, *maslaха* oriented and, thus, as being in accordance with the *shar‘a*, which in turn was a precondition for the right to the *khilāfa*. Their means were manifold and, at the same time, reflected a functional differentiation within the class of the learned into what has ideal-typically been introduced here as the triad of jurists, philosophers-*cum*-theologians and poets.

As *fuqahā*’ they attempted to reconcile precepts of legal theory with the sometimes divergent views and tastes of the ruler. As *ḥukamā*, finally, they provided a philosophical and/or theological elaboration of the ethical content of *maslaха*. From this division of labour it appears that from an early period there was good reason for the intense debate over the priority of either the group of philosophers and theologians, or the jurists. This controversy was reflected in their competition for the favour of a ruler; we can thus see an almost dialectical relationship between courtly patronage and the internal quarrel in Muslim religious scholarship over the monopoly of definition, as shown in a number of examples. As *shu‘arā*, finally, the scholars and literati styled their masters as exemplary rulers in panegyric poems while at the same time exhorting the rulers to meet the normatively grounded expectations laid out in the mirrors for princes, thereby strongly relying on the definitions brought about by the jurists and/or the philosophers-*cum*-theologians.

The integration of all three groups of learned men into the court finally provided evidence for the fact that the ruler met an important requirement of the *adab al-mulūk*, namely to be a patron of the arts and sciences.

**Notes**

1 I am most grateful to Thomas Hayoz, Stefan Reichmuth, Henning Sievert, Justyna Nędzıa, Thomas Eich and Stephan Conermann for their critical remarks on earlier drafts of this chapter.
2 The concept of an ‘*ālim* employed throughout this chapter is deliberately chosen to be as wide as possible. It denotes everyone who possesses skills in a particular field of learning, thus including also the *udabā*.
3 Honesty demands that I acknowledge that, in reality, these three functional groups do not appear as distinct as I portray them here, but do usually overlap in one and the same person.
4 See, for example, the description of Muḥammad ibn Tughluq (d. 752/1351), the sultan of Delhi, by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, which resembles almost identically pre-Islamic ideas of a just ruler. See Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1877), III:216f; Katouzian (2003), 236f; also the contribution by Sunil Kumar to the present volume. Originally, however, the ability of a ruler to ensure the safety of the annual *ḥajj* and the *ziyāra* to the tomb of the Prophet at Medina played an important role in the Islamic concept of just rule. See, for example, Behrens (2007), 15.
7 Qur‘ān 21 (al-Anbiyā‘):105.
8 See ibid. 24 (al-Nūr):55.
9 See Johansen (1999), 39.
10 “Revelation [waḥy] includes that which is recited [i.e. the Qurān] and also the revelation [al-risāla] by which he [i.e. the Prophet] established his sunna.” al-Shāfī‘ī (1321–5h), V:113.


12 See Peters (2005), 8f.

13 Johansen (1999), 37. Also, see Tyan (1938–43), I:433–9; II:201–6, 328–33; Dupret/ Ferrié (1997), 195f, 207–11. The famous medieval polymath Abū Hāmid Muhammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), however, is more concrete in his most mature summa on ḫṣūr al-fiqḥ, the Mustaṣfā min ‘ilm al-ṣūlā, where he clearly dissociated the approach of the fuqāhā’ to the authoritative texts of Islam from that of the mutakallimūn, especially the Mu‘tazilites. See al-Ghazālī (1970), I:5.


15 See Khadduri (1991), 738. The care for the “Common Good” of all Muslims seems to originate in the fact that, according to classical Islamic political theory, the caliph is leader (imām) of, and, thus, responsible for the entire umma. See Māwardī (1410/1990), 29.


17 Qur‘ān, 4 (an-Nisā‘):59.

18 This is evident from Ibn Sa‘d’s respective accounts on ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb and ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, the second and the third Caliph, in his Tabaqāt kubrā (see al-Baṣrī (1418/1997), I:48–53, 208–40). They are said to have appointed magistrates, or “Proto-quḍāt” (see Hallaq (1992), 34) but, as the example of ‘Umar’s disapproval of the immediate killing of an apostate by his appointees Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal and Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘ārī, provides evidence for, the caliph remained the highest authority within an emerging judiciary (see Malik ibn Anas (1280/1863), II:292f).

19 See Māwardī (1410/1990), 149f; Tyan (1938–43), II:151f, 205–15, 270–2; idem (1959), 104; Müller (1999), 128–34; El-Cheikh (2003), 52f; Hallaq (’2007), 99–101. For the bureaucratization of the petition system in the Ottoman Empire of the seventeenth century, see Majer (1984).

20 See Tyan (1938–43), II:161–9; idem (1959), 101–8; Hallaq (’2007), 99. This is emphasized by the fact that scholars like ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Muqaffa’ (executed c. 139/756), about whom we shall read below in greater detail, assigned to the caliph not only unlimited executive force, but wanted him to function as judiciary as well, thus limiting the power of the legal experts.

21 Ibn Taymiyya (1408/1888), 139. Interestingly, this view has apparently been shared by leading early Twelver Shi‘ite fuqāhā’, originating perhaps in their realization that, first, the affairs of the community need to be administered, and second, that during the time of the Greater Occultation of the Twelfth Imam al-Mahdī almost every Muslim rule is to be considered unjust. In view of these facts they developed a sophisticated theory of defensive jihād that included the practice of precautionary dissimulation of faith (taqiyya). See Sachedia (1988), 94–118.

22 The term maslahā, however, does not appear in Mālik’s own writings. It was rather his pupil al-Shāfī‘ī (d. 204/820) and later generations of Muslim fuqāhā’ who assigned the “Common Good” as a basis for legal rulings to Mālik, even though here, too, the terms maslahā or istislahā do not explicitly appear. See al-Shāfī‘ī (1358/1940), 331–42. The first mention of both terms within the realm of ḫṣūr al-fiqḥ is found in the Maṣāḥīḥ al-‘ulūm of Muhammad ibn Aḥmad al-Khārazmī (d. after 387/997). See Opwis (2001), 19.


24 Hallaq (2007), 145.


27 This quote from al-Mustaṣfā has to be seen in the wider context of the evolution of al-Ghazālī’s works on legal theory. Completed in the middle of the year 1109 CE (see Ibn Khallikān (1968–72), IV:217f; al-Subkī (1383/1964), VI:256) this work must be seen as a reflection on his uncompromising stand after his spiritual crisis and subsequent
withdrawal from worldly affairs. Hallaq points out that his very literalist attitude on the issue of *maṣlaḥa*, which does not accept the derivation of its constituents from outside the authoritative texts, stands in clear contrast to his *Shīfāʾ al-ghalīl fī bayān maṣālik al-taʾlīl*, written while al-Ghazālī taught *fiqh* in Baghdad and was interested in the rational sciences, where a much more pragmatic position was adopted. See Hallaq (1992), 189–191.

29 See, for example, al-Sijistānī (1986), 19.
30 See Zaman (1997a), 120–35.
32 It might be argued that the canonization of the collections of sound *ḥadīth* by al-Bukhārī and Muslim that took place only a little later on behalf of the Saljuq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk al-Tūsī (assassinated 485/1092) was equally designed to foster the *maṣlaḥa* for an increasingly disparate Sunni Muslim community, if not by the ruler himself then at least by a high-ranking and most influential courtier. See Brown (2007), 4, 367–74.
33 See al-Zuhayrī (1368/1949), 126–36; Kraemer (1992), 52–60, 207–12 et passim. A major source for Kraemer’s argument, the *Imtā’ wa l-mu‘ānasat* of Abū Ḥāyyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023), is a rather biased one, given the fact that this work depicts the activities at the court of the author’s patron, the vizier Ibn Sa’dān (executed 373/983). See ibid. 212–22.
34 Thus we read in Ibn Khallikān that al-Tanukhī “was one of the group of jurists and judges [jumlat al-fuqahāʾ wa l-qudāt] who caroused at the vizier al-Muḥallabī’s. They met with him on two evenings of each week and indulged in drinking and dissoluteness [al-qasf wa l-khālā]”. Ibn Khallikān (1968–72), III:366f. Also, see ibid., IV:383; Kraemer (1992), 16, 54.
35 See al-Zuhayrī (1368/1949), 119. Here, also the Samanids and, implicitly, the Fatimids, the Zirids and the later Umayyads are mentioned, who performed a similar role in Khorasan, North Africa and al-Andalus. On the example of the second Umayyad dynasty in al-Andalus, see Safran (2000), 44f.
38 See Ibn Khallikān (1968–72), III:366. Using a number of examples, Mahmūd al-Zuhayrī puts some stress on the fact that the learned of this time used to travel from court to court, thus suggesting that patronage was a very changeable affair. See al-Zuhayrī (1368/1949), 120f.
40 See e.g. ibid., 388; al-Muhājir (1410/1989), 105–18; Newman (1993), 93, 106f.
41 See Stewart (1996), 396f.
42 See ibid. 404.
43 On the legal concept of the *ṣulṭān al-ʿādil* (versus the *ṣulṭān al-jāʿir*) in Twelver Shiīte political thought, see Sachedina (1988), 94–105.
46 For example, see Davānī (1283h), 16.
51 See idem (1390/1970), 25.
52 Niẓām al-Mulk (1334h), 1f.
53 Here it seems helpful to consider Julie Meisami’s analytical distinction between “administrative”, “philosophical”, and mirrors for princes. The paradigm for the first seems to be the *Siyāsāt-nāma*; prominent examples for the homiletic ones, which draw
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on a wide range of exclusively Islamic authorities such as ḥadīth, akhbār, sīyar and works of ʿfiqh, are al-Ghazālī’s Nasīḥat al-mulūk and the Sirāj al-mulūk of Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Tūrūshī (d. c. 520/1126). See Meisami (1991), vii, xii–iv.

54 See Tusi (1373sh), 36f. Similar to this seems to be the case of the Akhlāq-i jālālī, where its author Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī was initially requested to render an unspecified work by “some of the ancient writers [mutaqaʿaddīmān]” into a more contemporary idiom. Davānī decided instead to compile an entirely new work that incorporated “all the authorities [arkān] of ethics and politics”, especially the Islamic ones. Davānī (1283h), 16f. From the text itself it does not however appear whether Davānī’s master gave his consent to this.

55 See ibid. 48. This, of course, refers to the famous “Theory of the Philosopher-king”, elaborated in the Fifth Book of the Politieia: “Unless . . . either philosophers become kings [ἔ ὧι philosophei basilēusōsin en] in our states or those whom we now call our kings and rulers take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately, and there is a conjunction of these two things, political power and philosophic intelligence [dunamis te politikē kai philosophia], . . . there can be no cessation of troubles . . . for our states, nor . . . for the human race either.” Plato (1903) V:473c–d St.

56 See Niẓām al-Mulk (1334sh), 1; Ṭūsī (1373sh), 34f; Davānī (1283h), 8f.

57 Ibid.

58 It is interesting to note that Niẓām al-Mulk appeared much more modest than later authors when he styled his patron and commissioner of the Siyāsát-nāmah, the Sultan Malīkshāh, as only “Trustee of the Caliph” (amīn-i amīr al-muʾminīn). See Niẓām al-Mulk (1334sh), 1. The reason behind this might be the fact that the Abbasid caliphate was formally still in force and the caliph was recognized as such by the Saljuq rulers. This occurs for example from the respective passages in Ibn al-Athīr’s Kāmil fiʾl-taʾrīkh, (1862–71), vols. IX and X. With reference to Davānī, however, it has to be conceded that already by the fourteenth century CE the meaning of “caliph” and “caliphate” has become rather vague, as the entry in Ibn Manẓūr’s Līsān al-ʿarab provides evidence for (see Ibn Manẓūr (1300–7h), X:431). At Davānī’s time both terms seem to have been released for common use and have been filled with various meanings. I would nonetheless argue that Davānī’s decision on these terms was well considered and his use was along the lines proposed below.

59 See Aristotle (1957), II:1276a; II:1284b.

60 See Plato (1903), II:379b St.

61 Friedrich Dieterici, to whom we owe the standard edition of the Kitāb uṯḥālājiyya Arousīṭālīs wa-ḥuwaʾl-qawlʿalāʾl-rubūbīyya, assigns the original text to Proclus Diadochus (d. 485 CE). See Dieterici (1965), iii. This, however, is not supported by more recent research on the matter. See Adamson (2002), 6.


63 Proof for this might be served by, among others, his work al-Jamʿ bayna raʿyay al-Ḥakīm Aflaṭūn al-ilāhī wa-ʿArūṣūṭālis. See Dieterici (1890), 1–33.

64 See Riedweg (2002), 26–34, 85f.


66 See ibid. 47. This, of course, refers to the famous “Theory of the Philosopher-king”, elaborated in the Fifth Book of the Politieia: “Unless . . . either philosophers become kings [ἔ ὧι philosophei basilēusōsin en] in our states or those whom we now call our kings and rulers take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately, and there is a conjunction of these two things, political power and philosophic intelligence [dunamis te politikē kai philosophia], . . . there can be no cessation of troubles . . . for our states, nor . . . for the human race either.” Plato (1903) V:473c–d St.


70 Qifī (n.d.), 183.

71 Ibid, Ibn Khalilīkān, however, provides a slightly different picture. He informs us about some tension between the two in the beginning, as al-Fārābī had been tested by Sayf al-Dawla until he had proven worthy of the honours bestowed upon him. It is even stated that the scholar
received a monthly pension of four Dirham, “this is to which he [i.e. al-Fārābī] had limited his demand (iqtasār ‘alayhā bi-qanā‘ aṭithi)”. (Ibn Khallikān (1968–72), V:156).

73 al-Fārābī (“1991), 129. This has also been argued by Douglas M. Dunlop with reference to another of al-Fārābī’s works on statecraft, the Fūṣūl al-madānī, where, in § 27, the “True King” is characterized as “he whose aim and purpose in the art by which he rules the cities are that he should afford himself and the rest of the people of the city true happiness (al-ṣan‘a‘a al-ḥaqīqa), which is the end and the aim of the kings’ craft (al-qāhira wa ’l-gharaḍ min al-mīhna al-malikiyya)”. (Dunlop (1961), 40, 122) In § 57, al-Fārābī states how this, for which in § 52 he uses the word “ṣalāh” (see ibid. 49, 135), is achieved: “It is controlled and maintained by justice and the action of justice (bi ‘l-‘adl wa-afā ‘il al-‘adl)” (Ibid. 53, 140).


75 Sincerity demands that I stress that this function of courtly poetry, and thus of the court poet, was not specific only to the medieval Persianate context. Using the example of poets such as Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi (d. 328/940), tutor and boon companion of the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Rahmān III (d. 350/961), and ‘Abd al-Azīz ibn Ḥusayn al-Qarawi (d. unknown) who served the same roles to the caliph al-Ḥakam II (d. 366/976), Janina Safran shows that panegyrics were used in a very similar way during the second Umayyad Caliphate in al-Andalus. See Safran (2000), 23f, 45–9, 87–91.

76 Meisami (1987), 20. Also, see ibid. 258–98.

77 In this context yet another group of scholars, with whom I cannot deal here in detail for reasons of space, are the court historians who were also sometimes poets and boon companions of a ruler. Historiography, especially commissioned court chronicles, served very much the same purpose as courtly poetry, although using different stylistic means. A good example of this would be Abū ’l-Fazl ’Allāmī Fāhāmī (assassinated 1011/1602), vizier, chronicler, poet and confidant of the Mughal ruler Akbar (r. 1555–1605 CE).


79 Since at this point, especially, the limits of my ideal-typical differentiation of the three functional groups within the ‘ulama‘ in court become obvious, it has to be admitted that in reality these three groups—fuqahā‘, ḥukmā‘ and shu‘arā‘—did overlap even in most of the cases cited here.

80 See Patton (1897), 48; Sourdel (1962), 32, 42f. On Bishr, who was considered by more traditionalist forces as “instigator to the mīhna”, see van Ess (1991–7), II:175–88, III:176f.

81 Watt (1973), 179.

82 Hinds (1990), 5.

83 See Sourdel (1962), 43–6. The growth of traditionalism and, at the same time, also strong pro-Umayyad sentiments among the opponents of al-Ma’mūn’s policies could thus be explained.


85 See al-Subkī (1383/1964), II:37.

86 See ibid. 38f.

87 al-Ṭabarī (1968), VIII:633.

88 See ibid. VIII:635–IX:154; Patton (1897), 61–130.

89 See ibid. 56.

90 See Ivry (1974), 3. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a (on him, see the chapter by Sonja Brentjes in the present volume) quotes a more detailed account on the circumstances of this event. According to him it was the two scientists-cum-engineers Muḥammad bin Mūsā ibn Shākir (d. 259/875) and his brother Abū Bakr ʿAbd Allāh bin Mūsā ibn Shākir (d. 259/875) who instigated al-Mutawakkil to have al-Kindī publicly beaten and his possessions expropriated. Their reasons for this are unclear, but professional jealousy could well have played a part, given the fact that the Abnū Mūsā were held in esteem by al-Ma’mūn (see. Ibn Khallikān (1968–72), V:162f). Interestingly, the very same brothers had to restore al-Kindī’s library a little later when they were in danger of falling from the caliph’s grace. See Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a (1299/1882), I:207f.
As stated earlier, neither the Buyids nor the Hamdanids challenged the supremacy of Tabari. Subki and, under their influence, Patton want us to believe. According to Hinds, Ibn Hanbal made concessions under torture and was therefore released.

See Zaman (1997b), 32f.

One may be reminded here of the persecution of Shafiites-cum-Ash'arites of Khurasan under the controversial Seljuq vezier Amid al-Mulk Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Kunduri (executed 456/1064) around 1050, which became almost as intense as the mi`ar and forced such renowned scholars as the “Imam al-`aramayh” Abü ’l-Ma`āli al-Juwayni (d. 478/1085) and Abü ’l-Qasim Abü al-Karim al-Qusayry (d. 465/1072) into exile. See Ibn al-Athir (1862–71), X:21, 141; Halm (1971). I am much indebted to Stefan Reichmuth for drawing my attention to this example.

See Glassen (1971), 260.


See Ruml`i (1342sh/1963), I:190; Glassen (1971), 261.

See Ruml`i (1342sh/1963), I:190.

See Savory (1964), 114.

See Savory (1961), 79f.


For the full text of the farm`an, see ibid. 227f.

Abdulaziz Sachedina goes as far as to ascribe to the Mu`aqiq al-Thani’s endeavours during these few years a lasting impact on the rise in importance of the Twelver Shiite fuqahā’ to the dominant political factor in a Shiite polity, culminating in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. See Sachedina (1988), 18f.

Navidi (1369sh), 72.

al-Sha`favi (`1343sh), 14.

Turkm`an (1350sh/1971), I:144.

Ism`i`l first had a drinking vessel, made of the scull of the overthrown Uzbek ruler Shaybani Khann (killed 916/1510), dispatched to the Mamluk sultan Q`ansaww al-Ghawri (d. 922/1516). See Ibn Iy`as (1379/1960), IV:221. Later, Isma`i`l had a document dispatched to Q`ansaww in which he attempted to prove his descent from the Ahl al-bayt, and, thus, claimed religious leadership against the Sunnite ruler of the Hijaz. See ibid. IV:265f, 271. The Safavid standard chronicle for this period, however, has it that “his wicked head [sar-i pur-sharr-i `u] should be cut off the body, stuffed with straw, and sent to Sultan B`ayezd [II (d. 918/1512)] of the Ottoman lands”. Ruml`i (1342sh/1963), I:122. Herein we have a clear reflection of the increasingly tense relations between Safavids and Ottomans around the time of the Battle of Chaldir`an (920/1514).

See Aziz (1963), 791–3; idem (1965), 278f.

As stated earlier, neither the Buyids nor the Hamdanids challenged the supremacy of the Abbasid caliphate. Given the fact that the Fatimids were not acknowledged by all Shiite Muslims, the Safavids were indeed the first sovereign Shiite dynasty which, as shown above (see fn. 85), contested the claim of the Sunnite rulers to fulfill caliphal duties, i.e. to uphold the maslaha in the entire dari al-islam.

See Astarabad`i (1831), II:17f.

See ibid. II:22f. In the answer to this letter, which reached Bijapur after a delay of seven years, Yusuf’s successor Ibrramh ‘Adlsh`ah was addressed as sovereign monarch. See ibid. II:32f.

Nayeem (1974), Appendix VII, 1. This is a photographic reproduction of the letter from the ‘Abd al-Husayn al-Tusi’s Makutib-i zamah-yi salafin-i safavyyah (MS Asafiyah [tarkhi-i farsi 1314], fols. 404a–6a).

Ibid.

See ibid. Appendix VII:1f.
117 See Qureshi (1945), 83f; Behrens (2007), 38.
118 See Hartung (forthcoming).
119 ‘Abd al-Qâdir (1968), 155.
120 See ibid. 1f.
121 Niẓâm al-Mulk (1334sh), 121.
123 See ibid. 119–23.

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Enacting the Rule of Islam 325

17 Ayyubid princes and their scholarly clients from the ancient sciences

Sonja Brentjes

The Ayyubids (1171–1260 CE) are often seen as a dynasty that patronized generously physicians, but contributed to ruining the philosophical disciplines in Syria and Egypt with their execution of Shihāb al-Din Suhrawardī in 586/1191 and their removal of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233) from his chair at the Madrasa ‘Azīziyya after 1229. In this paper I discuss what it meant to be a scholar patronized by an Ayyubid prince. I will survey the relationships of scholars to the ruler or the prince they served and to the world outside the princely sphere. I will ask where they lived, how they earned their livelihood, with whom they interacted and which fields of knowledge they considered important. I will discuss types of patronage and their features. I will point to components that challenge the traditional understanding of patronage as a hierarchical relationship between two people—a protector and a dependent. I will suggest that this deviation from standards is caused by two main factors—the specifics of the profession of the dependent and the specifics of the power set up of the family of princely patrons. I will highlight the position of the mathematical sciences through the particular lens of the physicians’ interest in them. Finally, I will argue that the philosophical sciences were not persecuted by the Ayyubid dynasty, but supported through their patronage of physicians and other scholars.

The richest source for a study of Ayyubid patronage for medicine, astrology, astronomy, philosophy and other ancient sciences is Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’ā’s (d. 668/1270) ‘Uyūn al-anbā‘ fi ṭabaqāt al-āṭibbā‘. Some information can also be found in the historical chronicles of the period, while almost none can be gleaned from Ibn al-Qīfī’s (d. 646/1248) Taʾrīkh al-hukamā‘. Thus, at the moment there is almost no other source available that can be used to corroborate the basic features of patronage described by Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a, let alone the detailed and at occasions very colourful stories he interspersed his biographical entries with. Thus, I will not assume that Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a delivers facts, reports neutrally on real events or surveys fair and square the main features of patronage for the ancient sciences. I assume though that the picture of the lives of his immediate predecessors, friends of his family and contemporaries he draws will not be fiction either, if only because he shared it with several of these people, including patrons, and hence must have met their expectations to some degree at least. A systematic analysis of Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s presuppositions, assumptions and goals is beyond
the scope of this paper. I rather try to survey the author’s terminology, types and content of information and narrational foci. Given the paucity of source material available at the moment, my interpretations of my condensing description of Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s reports are more speculative and provide more questions than answers.

**Physicians at Ayyubid courts**

Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a had a particular interest in the educational and professional features of the lives of the physicians since this is the foremost subject matter of his dictionary. As a result, the entries he compiled have a certain regular structure that agrees with other biographical dictionaries of the period. They list names, relatives, locations, educational activities, professional activities including the oeuvre, additional activities and skills, dates of birth and death, if known, and burial sites plus accompanying events. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a moved beyond this standard pattern by telling stories about the doings of a person and the events that involved him. The content of these stories demonstrate that Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a was eager to report social and cultural aspects of the physicians’ conditions in society and to gossip or comment on their personality marks on a fairly broad scale. An analysis of the chapters on physicians in Egypt and Syria in the late twelfth and during the first half of the thirteenth centuries CE shows that Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a had two focal points in his narration—patronage and excellence. Patronage appears as the unifying factor of the group of physicians Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a described. Excellence defines the paragons among the patrons and the clients. Excellence is defined by position or rank in the respective group plus quantitative and qualitative features separating a member presented as excellent from other members of the group. In the group of the physicians exemplary status is defined by knowledge, experience, success and behaviour. In the group of the patrons exemplary status is defined by the position in the ruling family and in regard to the family, the number of clients, the clients’ status and the patron’s behaviour.

These focal points are made visible by the fact that many, if not most of the physicians in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s biographical entries regarding the Ayyubid dynasty and its immediate predecessors were linked in patronage relationships with one of the warlords, city rulers or heads of dynasties of the region at some or the other point in their life. Physicians with no patronage relationships are rare exceptions. Although princely patronage was not the only possibility to earn a living as a physician, the other options, that is, engaging with lower-ranking patrons such as ʿumaru, working in a hospital, working for the fortress or the troops, working for a number of patients in town or working as an itinerant doctor appear less often, with the exception of hospital service, in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s entries. It is, however, not very likely that almost all physicians of the Ayyubid period earned their living in the service of an Ayyubid prince, while almost none worked for an ʿamīr or the notables of Damascus, Cairo or any of the other Ayyubid cities and towns. Hence, this lesser visibility of alternative sources of income must reflect a conscious choice by the author. This focus on physicians in patronage
relationships with Ayyubid princes corresponds with Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s own position and that of his family in the hierarchical world of Ayyubid doctors. It reflects in all likelihood the social values held by the author and the group of patronized physicians. The focus indicates that the position of a physician was only partially defined by his knowledge, skills and achievements in healing. It depended secondly on his success to acquire patrons among the members of the Ayyubid family and to assure the continuity of patronage. A third part that went into building the position of a physician was his behaviour towards patrons, patients and other members of the medical community. Patients were of least importance in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s reports and comments on behavioural aspects. Patrons and their social equals could be occasionally rejected, overruled or ridiculed. What mattered most in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s stories was exercising support and help to younger and less well-established members of the professional community and to be courteous and linked in friendship with colleagues of equal or higher ranking. Physicians who managed to achieve high marks in all three domains were paragons of knowledge, virtue, sociability and success.

The focal points of patronage and excellence also structure the presence of the Ayyubid princes and their umarāʾ in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s biographical entries. Most of their activities take place in the framework of patronage relationships indicating their intent of establishing such relationships, their contributions to and behaviour in the relationships and the criteria they applied for evaluating clients and their deeds. The group of Ayyubid princes is explicitly ranked according to the historiographical identification of the dynasty with its founder and first head. Frequency of naming in relationship to cities and fortresses shows that in addition Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a implicitly ranked the princes according to localities and thus status within the family.

It is thus not surprising that the most coveted patron, in the view of Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, was the founder of the dynasty, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Ayyūb (r. 1171–93 CE). Many of the physicians of the Ayyubid period described by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a were his clients. Such a distribution is not likely to reflect the realities of 90 years of medical practice in Ayyubid Egypt and Syria. Nor is it reasonable to assume that Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a disposed of more precise information for the early period of Ayyubid patronage of the medical arts than for that of his own lifetime. The pre-eminence of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn as a patron in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s report about the Ayyubid dynasty is rather the author’s version of the story of the extraordinary qualities of this warlord become ruler. His pre-eminence is also made visible by his appearance in stories about physicians that give space for describing the components of his exemplary behaviour and for highlighting that at times he even had an inclination to do too much of the good. In addition, in relative terms the number of physicians who are reported to have served Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn as clients is indeed fairly high (29). The other members of the family appear less often as a patron in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s entries: al-‘Ādil (r. 1199–1218 CE)—eleven clients, al-Kāmil (r. 1218–38 CE)—ten clients, al-Mu‘azzam ʿIsā (r. 1218–27 CE)—eight and al-Ashraf Mūsā (r. 1229–37 CE in Damascus)—seven. All the many other Ayyubid princes appear as patrons not more than five times, but often even only once or
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twice. These numbers are not fully reliable, since in some cases Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a does not say explicitly that a patronage relationship existed, while in other cases he mentions the same patron–client combination in more than one entry. Occasional remarks by Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a as well as tradition suggest, however, that all Ayyubid princes extended their patronage to more than one or two physicians. As a rule, they made several physicians look after their health and consult about the most commendable therapy in cases of sickness. Thus the quantitative differences in the group of the patrons are part of Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s narrative strategies in regard to his two focal points.

Although Ṣālah al-Dīn’s pre-eminence in the group of the patrons is the result of the author’s selection and presentation, it is not reasonable to assume that the number of physicians he had surrounded himself with is an exaggeration. Ṣālah al-Dīn obviously bound many of the senior physicians in Damascus and Cairo as clients. Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a even seems to suggest that the Ayyubid ruler tried to establish exclusive relationships with them, that is, invited them to serve him alone, when he remarked in one of the entries that Ṣālah al-Dīn paid and treated those who agreed to such a relationship excessively well. This desire for exclusive relationships and the high number of clients suggest that other than purely medical reasons will have motivated Ṣālah al-Dīn’s approach to patronage. Building prestige through acquisition of reputation was one such additional motive. Another motive hinted at by Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a through the aspects he emphasized and highlighted was the display of royal qualities in an Islamic context that combined urban with tribal groups and mentalities—generosity, justice, loyalty and lenience. In special cases, though, as in the case of Moshe ben Maïmon or Maimonides (d. 1204 CE), professional reputation was the most important motivation to establish such a relationship.

General elements

Beyond the two focal points, Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s biographical entries display a number of other general features. They suggest first that Ayyubid princes did not introduce substantial novelties into patronage patterns for the ancient sciences, but rather continued the practices of their predecessors. The Ayyubids provided physicians who had served the last Fatimid caliph ʿĀḍīd Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh (r. 1160–71 CE), the Zangid ruler Nūr al-Dīn Zangī (r. 1146–73 CE) or the Artuqid prince Nūr al-Dīn ibn Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Artuq (r. 1174–85 CE) with positions in their own entourage and supported or imitated the institutions of healthcare they had installed, that is, hospitals, heads of the main medical branches (physicians, ophthalmologists, surgeons) per region (Egypt, Syria) and administrators of hospital awqāf. They granted various kinds of monetary and non-monetary remuneration to the physicians whom they patronized—monthly or yearly stipends (jāmakiyya; jirāya) mostly paid from the patron’s private treasury, tax farms (iqṭā’ī) and robes of honour (khil’ā). The only indirectly emphasized difference between the Ayyubids and their predecessors is in terms of quantity caused by the size of the family and their holdings. According to Ibn Abī
Uṣaybī’a’s entries, the system of power distribution among the Ayyubid princes created more outlets for physicians looking for patronage than those of their predecessors. In terms of quality as summarized above, Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s picture is one of continuity and uniformity of patterns from the predecessors of the Ayyubids, among the members of the dynasty and to their Mamluk successors. This impression of continuity and uniformity is strengthened by Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s usage of a stable vocabulary when talking about patronage relationships. When compared with other sources, the rhetoric of patronage between these three periods appears to have been stable insofar as it concerned the direct relationships between the patron and his client and the region ruled by the Ayyubids. Outside this region and in indirect or mediated relationships the rhetoric of patronage was much more variable than Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s work allows for. At the centre of his patronage terminology are words like service (khidma), benefit (ni’ma), honour (ikrām), respect (iḥṭirām) and favour (ḥuṣwa). A client served and a patron provided benefits, favours and graces. A client was knowledgeable and skilled in his service and the patron respected and honoured him in return. Occasionally, the relationship between a patron and a client is designated as companionship (suḥba), a term that described in addition to the hierarchy of positions emotional ties close to friendship as some remarks of Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a about friends of his grandfather or father demonstrate. Nonetheless, some physicians refused to enter relationships termed companionship. Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a wrote emphatically about ‘Imrān al-Isrā’īlī (d. 637/1240), that he did not serve any of the princes in companionship and did not go with any of them on a journey, but every single one of them asked for him in cases of disease. ‘Imrān al-Isrā’īlī’s behaviour suggests that there was a difference between a companionship and a service. The latter term covered most likely a broad variety of relationships, while the companionship seems to have implied a more exclusive, personal bond. The physician refused for instance al-‘Ādil’s ardent wish to enter in a companionship with him, but accepted to come for treatments whenever he was called by one of the princes or notables. He also accepted to travel to far away smaller Ayyubid holdings when he was mature and stay there for some time until the patient had recovered. This kind of relationship called by Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a khidma could be remunerated with a monthly stipend. When the payments continued after one and a half year the physician refused them. Thus ‘Imrān seems to have preferred relationships of a more focused kind in which he indeed treated an acute disease over a long-term, general kind of relationship. Although physicians regularly treated female members of Ayyubid princely families, it is only in rare cases that Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a reports that an Ayyubid woman had a patronage relationship of the khidma type with a physician. One such rare case is the patronage that Sitt al-Shām, the sister of al-‘Ādil, exercised in regard to Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s uncle Rashīd al-Dīn ibn Khaṭīfah (d. 616/1219). The second case is that of the sister of Ahwād Najm al-Dīn ibn al-‘Ādil (d. 607/1210 in Mayyāfāriqin) who was married to Šālāh al-Dīn ibn Yāghīṣān, a Saljuq amīr who ruled Antioch.

Loyalty, apparently expected on both sides, was expressed through duration of service, promotion and continuation of existing relationships after the death of
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either party.\textsuperscript{18} Thus it is not surprising that most physicians in patronage relationships with Ayyubid princes stayed for years in their service until either of the two died. In several cases the sons continued the relationship either as the patron or the client.\textsuperscript{19} Due to the Ayyubid family network shifts in patronage could also involve other male relatives such as brothers, uncles or cousins.\textsuperscript{20} In some cases, a client outlived more than two successive patrons.\textsuperscript{21} The transfer from one Ayyubid prince to another involved issues of maintenance of status, remuneration and other allocations and possessions. Ibn Abī Usaybī‘a does not speak in great detail of such material aspects of patronage transfer, but refers to them repeatedly.\textsuperscript{22} The case of Raḍī al-Dīn al-Rahābī (d. 631/1233), who worked at the fortress and in the Nūrī hospital, is particularly interesting since he refused to accept the patronage offer by the new head of the family. Despite this refusal al-‘Ādil accepted to continue paying the physician all his entitlements from his relationship with Śalāh al-Dīn. Raḍī al-Dīn continued to remain on the pay list of al-‘Ādil until the ruler’s death. Then his son al-Mu‘azzam took over the responsibility reducing, however, the monthly payments.\textsuperscript{23} In a few cases, a transfer of patronage relationships could not be achieved.\textsuperscript{24}

Loyalty also included demands for mobility, although it was not a necessary condition for the continuation of a patronage relationship. When an Ayyubid prince moved to another position some of his clients were asked to accompany him and some indeed accepted the offer.\textsuperscript{25} Other clients, however, left a particular patronage position or refused to move to a new locality.\textsuperscript{26} Raḍī al-Dīn al-Rahābī refused to follow orders of two of his Ayyubid patrons, Śalāh al-Dīn and al-‘Ādil, neither of whom insisted on their demands.\textsuperscript{27} In some of the cases when a client rejected to leave the place of his living, in particular if it was Damascus, the payments continued when the client agreed or continued to work at the hospital or the fortress or, perhaps, when there was an understanding that the physician would serve his patron whenever he visited Damascus.

A further necessary element of a patronage relationship was the exchange of gifts. Physicians mostly wrote or dedicated medical treatises to their patrons.\textsuperscript{28} Occasionally they also offered works on other subject matters, including panegyric poetry.\textsuperscript{29} Patrons presented gold, silver, jewels, precious ceramics or porcelain and other luxury objects to their physicians for particularly successful services.\textsuperscript{30} When the head of the family recovered from a severe disease the physician who led the treatment was not only generously rewarded by the patient and patron, but also by his sons and other male relatives. In addition to al-‘Ādil’s 7,000 dinār Muḥadhdhab al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ibn ‘Alī received from his relatives gold, robes of honour, mules with gold bridles and other items.\textsuperscript{31} When al-Kāmil and many of his khawāṣṣ recovered from an illness, they sent Muḥadhdhab al-Dīn gold amounting to 12,000 dinār, fourteen mules with gold bridles, robes of honour made from atlas and other items.\textsuperscript{32}

Entering patronage relationships with princes was in the view of Ibn Abī Usaybī‘a undoubtedly the best professional position a physician could acquire. A second, very important position was the service at the major hospitals in Damascus and Cairo. While Ibn Abī Usaybī‘a states that Nūr al-Dīn Zangī hired
a physician to work at his hospital, he only rarely says so about the Ayyubid princes. One of the cases where he imparts a little more information about the place of the hospitals in Ayyubid princely patronage is the case of al-Kāmil after the death of his father al-ʿĀdil. One of the obligations al-Kāmil had to face was to decide which of his father’s physicians he would take over as his own clients. Among those who received an extension of patronage was Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa’s father and Muhadhdhab al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ibn ʿAlī (d. 628/1230). While the former apparently became a member of the group of physicians who took care of the new ruler, al-Kāmil assigned a ḥākmayya and a jirāya to the latter and ordered him to reside in Damascus and to work at the Nūrī hospital. Another case is that of al-Ashraf after he had conquered Damascus in 1229 CE. In this case Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa does not only say that al-Ashraf ordered a physician to take care of the princely houses in the fortress, but also reports that al-Ashraf told him to practice regularly healing the sick in the great hospital. In addition, Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa’s occasional remarks that it were the princes who paid the physicians for their hospital services suggests to see these activities as a second mode of patronage relationships where the client did not deliver personal services to the patron. The fact that the leading physicians of Damascus served at the Nūrī hospital for long years and several of them even most of their lives and that they treated there umarāʾ, aʾyān, and ordinary people speaks of the importance of this hospital in the career of an Ayyubid physician and of the social reputation that this institution possessed in the first half of the thirteenth century CE. Although Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa’s rhetoric and narrative emphasis clearly single out the personal service for a patron as the most desirable professional career goal the life-long affiliation of such leading physicians to the hospital and its being chosen by some of them rather than a personal patronage relationship suggests considering it in this period as a very competitive career option. In addition to the high quality of its personnel, the variety of its patients and the vivacity of its scholarly atmosphere, it provided the more conscientious physicians like ʿImrān al-Īṣrāʾīlī, who apparently preferred to stay away from worldly power, an excellent alternative to personal service engagements. A second position of such a general type was that of a fortress physician. As the patronage relationships of Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa’s grandfather, his father, his uncle and himself indicate the position of a fortress physician who was responsible for all the houses in the fortress brought high reputation. A third position of a general type an Ayyubid prince could offer to a physician was that of a military doctor.

Two other options for patronage relationships a physician could enter were those with Ayyubid umarāʾ and those with successful physicians. Young physicians, in particular when they travelled and arrived at a new location, often turned to physicians with high reputation and a broad network of relationships for supervision, introductions, recommendations and advice. Ayyubid umarāʾ and the lesser princes of the family served as entrance opportunities into the circle of patronage. Introductions to them, if they lived in the same city or town, were done in person. The local physician accompanied his young client to a sick amīr for an official visit of inspection and installed him as an executor of the therapy and
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personal care taker. If the sick and the physician happened to live at different locations, a ghulām and letters of introduction served the same purpose. Letters of recommendation were an important instrument for a client who wished to enter into the service of a patron. When brought from scholars in other cities letters of recommendation eased the access to local dignitaries. When solicited from an influential local client, letters of recommendation were a crucial asset when approaching an Ayyubid patron for the first time. The literary quality of the letters mattered as much in a successful application as did their calligraphy. Advice included medical treatment, behaviour and dress codes.

**Particular elements**

In addition to these general features of patronage between Ayyubid princes and physicians, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a also reports details, mostly as part of a story, that allow to establish a denser web of cultural features characterizing these relationships. This web includes Ayyubid interfamilial relationships, particularities in relationships between patrons and clients, living arrangements, mobility, social advancement and values. The more prominent and the more successful a physician was the more stories Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a included in his biography that give testimony to the events that marked the physician’s life and characterize the physician’s position within the medical community and in regard to the princes. Several of such details challenge the understanding of patronage relationships between Ayyubid princes and their physicians. They suggest that patronage was not a closed system between two people. They point to the relative flexibility of boundaries between the military and physicians as distinct professions, carriers of particular values and recipients of specific kinds of benefits or favours. Some of the details show that physicians could not only rise to positions of trust with a patron due to their professional skills, but move beyond into administrative and advisory posts. The terminology used in such cases seems to imply that this meant a transformation of the patronage relationship not merely to a higher, but also to a more abstract, less personal level of meaning. Other details indicate that power was not solely concentrated in the hands of the patron. A client disposed of various ways to determine whether a patronage relationship was established and what its conditions were. Although Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a is very opaque about the contractual aspects of the relationship there are some whispers in his entries about negotiations and the conclusion of agreements before a decision about a patronage relationship was reached. He describes more often and more clearly the fact that patrons as well as clients sought such relationships. They asked for them, invited them, ordered them, applied for them, modified them by posing conditions or declined them.

Client–patron relationships are often understood as relationships of service and obedience on the side of the client, and power and control on the side of the patron. This is indeed the image produced by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a through his terminology of service, benefits, favours and honours. It portrays a model of spikes radiating from one centre. This model is, however, not sustained by the behaviours
Professional excellence appears in Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s narration as an important criterion for establishing and regulating a patronage relationship. It was applied by both parties at various occasions. Merit served as an argument in salary and status negotiations when a new offer for patronage was made and a particular position was at stake. Muhadhdhab al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ibn ‘Alī who became one of the most prominent physicians of the Ayyubid period was at the beginning of his career in the service of Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Shukr, the vizier of al-‘Ādil. Ṣafī al-Dīn paid him a comfortable income (jāmakiyya) since “he knew . . . his rank in the medical arts.” In 1207–8 CE, al-‘Ādil informed his vizier that he wished to add a second physician to the medical service of the troops who would cooperate with Muwaffaq al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 604/1208). The vizier recommended his own client for the job and told Muhadhdhab al-Dīn of the promotion: “I praised you in front of the sultan and these thirty Nāṣīrī dīnār are for you every month in the service.” Muhadhdhab al-Dīn refused answering: “O my Lord, the physician Muwaffaq al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz has every month one-hundred dīnār and a [further] payment equivalent to them. I know my rank in the science and I do not serve below his settlement.”

Ayyubid princes used the criterion of professional excellence in addition to determining rank and payment for gauging the behaviour of the clients and displayed by the physicians in the stories Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a collected. The image produced through the stories rather suggests a model of a web of spider nets of different sizes connected with each other. The language of order and service is contradicted by the behaviour of invitation or proposal and refusal or negotiation. An important indicator of this web-like quality of the patron–client relationship in Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s narrative is the fact that physicians did not only serve a succession of patrons, but could have several patrons at the same time. Another important reflection of this quality is the repetition of statements that an Ayyubid prince desired the companionship or service of a particular physician or ordered him into his service, wishes the coveted client declined and orders he refused. Two motives given by Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a for these reactions were the wish to remain where one was, mostly in Damascus, and the affiliation to a hospital, mostly the Nūrī hospital in Damascus. A fourth feature that led to the web-like quality of the patron–client relationship was the spread of the Ayyubid family over some major urban centres and numerous lesser holdings. Thus clients had alternatives in terms of patrons and professional opportunities, while patrons desired to be served by particular clients. At the heart of the different model suggested by the various reactions of physicians to patronage offers by Ayyubid princes was however the profession of the clients and the needs of the patrons. It was the particular skills and type of knowledge involved in patronage relationships between a physician and his patient that modified the spike model of a unilateral direction of the patronage relationship from top to bottom, patron to client. The dependence of the patron in case of sickness on his client shifted the power potential between the involved parties. As a result, clients had a certain freedom to choose and to determine some of the conditions of the relationship. Professional expertise was an important factor for this bargaining power and was acknowledged as such by both sides.

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deciding how much aberration from the norm could and should be tolerated. Arrogance, excessive pride, violations of social norms and eccentric behaviour could be overlooked by the patron if the client was seen possessing over-average theoretical knowledge and a successful record in exercising his craft. In the same time it was expected that clients who had successfully amassed goodwill on the side of their patrons, power and material means applied themselves to mediate conflicts, in particular issues of remuneration, for clients in less fortunate positions and to support the profession at large. Arrogance and pride, while occasionally tolerable when applied to umārāʾ and other people of high rank in the Ayyubid dynasty, were not behaviours well looked upon when the professional community was concerned. The exemplary case of both ways of behaviour was Muwaffaṣ al-Dīn ibn al-Maṭrān (d. 587/1191). He served Šalāḥ al-Dīn for many years and rose to a position of great wealth and power. His status was so high that Ibn Ābī Uṣaybiʿa described him as “concealed” by the ruler and as having stopped treating people.43 When he began treating even the princes with arrogance and excessive pride, Šalāḥ al-Dīn accepted it because he respected and revered him due to his professional excellence.44 Ibn al-Maṭrān sulked and refused to serve for days when his patron graced another of his clients with excessive generosity or curbed some of Ibn al-Maṭrān’s excesses of haughtiness such as setting up during a campaign against the crusaders not only a tent of the same red colour as that of Šalāḥ al-Dīn, but one that had more luxury than that of the ruler. In order to appease his main physician the ruler sent him each time a small fortune.45 Ibn al-Maṭrān’s behaviour was of a very different kind, claims Ibn Ābī Uṣaybiʿa on the authority of Ibn al-Qīfī and others, in regard to the scholarly community at large and the medical community in particular. When he went to study at the mosque he walked, although many of the mamālik accompanied him riding. He respected the shaykh who held the class, sat among the students and participated like them speaking in a soft voice and with great courtesy. He lent his authority to all those physicians who needed help for settling payment disputes, introduction to wealthy clients or an opportunity for earning a living. Those who succeeded came to deliver the often substantial benefits they had received. Paragon that Ibn al-Maṭrān was, he declined magnanimously the fees and assured his clients of his continued good will and support.46

The most unusual marker among the qualifiers of good behaviour that sets Ibn Ābī Uṣaybiʿa’s rhetoric apart from other biographical dictionaries of scholars in the Ayyubid and Mamluk period is the term murūʿa. He used it to describe Ibn al-Maṭrān’s behaviour towards young professional newcomers to Damascus and a young man fallen into hard times with no knowledge of the medical profession whom he secured nonetheless entrance to patronage with an Ayyubid prince. It is a term that appears in the entries of the leading Ayyubid physicians, often only as the short claim that the person “possessed the complete ideal of manhood [dhūʾl-murūʿa al-kāmila].”447 Often the word seems to refer primarily to acts of generosity and support for the less fortunate as in the case of Ibn al-Maṭrān whom Ibn Ābī Uṣaybiʿa described as having much murūʿa and a noble soul explaining this by adding that he gave his students books, benefited them, and gave them robes of
honour when they healed a patient.48 A story about one of Ibn Abi Uṣaybi‘a’s teachers and most prominent Damascene physicians, Muhadhdhab al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ibn ‘Alī, makes clear, however, that the concept means more than mere generosity and charity. In Ibn Abi Uṣaybi‘a’s view it is closely related to “tribal or group solidarity” (aṣabiyya), which a man of excellence should possess in abundance.49 The system of Ayyubid patronage apparently was sustained on the side of its clients by a strong sense of belonging to a social group and by a code of honour that included the obligations to exercise murū‘a and ‘aṣabiyya. The social group often centred on the practitioners of the medical arts, but could also include scholars of other disciplines and those who served in the judiciary and possibly other public positions.

The web-like quality of the patron–client relationship between Ayyubid princes and their physicians reflects the Ayyubid practice of power sharing within the family on the one hand and of contesting power by military means on the other. This practice made mobility a key component of Ayyubid rule, including their patronage relationships. Ayyubid mobility encompassing campaigns, moves to a new location due to an advancement or downfall in the family hierarchy, family visits, pilgrimage and a few leisure activities. Some of the strongest terms of appreciation Ibn Abi Uṣaybi‘a used when talking about a patron’s perceptions of his client express the desire of the patron to be with his client. This desire could be described by saying that the prince spent most of his time with the physician. It also could be expressed by saying that he rarely was separated from him (wa-lā yufārīquhu fī akthar awqāthi) or that he wished to have him with him whether in residence or on a voyage (fī’l-ḥadar wa’l-safar).50 While described as one of the greatest honours an Ayyubid prince could bestow upon his client, this mobility did not, however, please all physicians. Not only did physicians resist the demand to relocate with their patrons, some apparently also found travelling around a nuisance. When Rashīd al-Dīn, Ibn Abi Uṣaybi‘a’s uncle, received a patronage offer from al-Mu‘azzam due to his skills as an orator it was specifically agreed that his service was of a kind that he was exempted from the sultan’s movements.51 Many physicians though accepted travelling with their Ayyubid patrons, be it to a new location or on a campaign against the Crusaders, members of the Ayyubid family and other Muslim rulers.52 The language used by Ibn Abi Uṣaybi‘a for describing the participation of physicians in military campaigns only rarely reveals the reasons why physicians accompanied their patrons into an encampment or even a battle. Some provided medical service to the soldiers. Others accompanied their patron as part of their overall duties as a client of high standing as was the case of Ibn al-Maṭrān.53 A few participated voluntarily in such campaigns as fighting men as was the case of ‘Abd al-Mun‘im al-Jilyānī (d. after 587/1191) and perhaps also Rashīd al-Dīn ibn al-Ṣūrī (d. 639/1242).54 Some of the physicians who accompanied their patrons on a campaign also continued teaching medical texts to their students as happened to Ibn Abi Uṣaybi‘a himself at the beginning of his studies with Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ya‘qūb, a Christian physician of al-Mu‘azzam ‘Īsā.55

The web-like quality of patronage relationships between Ayyubid princes and physicians was supported by the practice that heads of Ayyubid households did
Ayyubid princes and their scholarly clients from the ancient sciences

not only establish themselves as patrons for their own health and that of their wives, concubines and under-age children. They assigned at least occasionally physicians who were bound to them as clients to adult male relatives, mostly sons, who ruled their own sub-domains of the Ayyubid territory. Such an assignment could impose on the respective client additional obligations, among them either to travel or to relocate from an Ayyubid centre to an Ayyubid periphery.\textsuperscript{56} Another form of assigning physicians as clients to male relatives was the fulfilment of an obligation offered to a client as payment for a special service. When the Christian physician Abū Sulaymān Dāwūd ibn Abī ʿI-l-Munan (d. c. 583/1187) had given voluntary astrological advice to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn that convinced him to campaign against the Crusader kingdom of Jerusalem ending with its conquest, the Ayyubid prince offered him to rely on him. As a response the physician asked for his protection of his five sons. The ruler agreed to look after them and attached them to his brother al-ʿĀdīl.\textsuperscript{57} Al-ʿĀdīl on his turn assigned three of the brothers to his son al-Kāmil and two to his other son al-Muʿāẓẓam ʿĪsā.\textsuperscript{58} Elder male relatives occasionally invited physicians of the head of the dynasty to serve them in a particular kind of disease without addressing their request to their family head and patron of the physician.\textsuperscript{59} Ayyubid princes also asked physicians to travel on their behalf to their relatives for a check up and treatment.\textsuperscript{60} While in cases of princely assignments it remains unclear whether clients could have declined accepting them, in the case of invitations and requests, the physician apparently could make his own decisions, even if it meant several days of travel and longer absences from the patron or position he served. In 1219 CE, when Rashīd al-Dīn ʿAṭīf ibn Khalīfah was in the service of al-Muʿāẓẓam, his patron’s brother al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl (r. 1237–8 and 1239–45 CE in Damascus) sent him a letter in his own hand, as Ibn Abī Usaybīʾa proudly notes, asking him to come to Basra since his mother and other people in his retinue had fallen ill. Rashīd al-Dīn, although well advanced in years, accepted the invitation, went to Basra and healed the princess, a service which they remunerated by paying him gold and giving him robes of honour.\textsuperscript{61}

Promotion within a patronage relationship reflected the dependence of the patrons on their clients. Clients were promoted within the domain of their professional competence for their knowledge of medical theory, the skills in healing, their capability of producing powerful theriacs and their familiarity with a broad range of simple and compound drugs. A patron chose to rely on a particular physician in these three domains of theory, therapy and pharmacy, which Ibn Abī Usaybīʾa expressed by describing the physician as a pillar on which the prince leaned.\textsuperscript{62} When Muwaffaq al-Dīn Yaʿqūb ibn Saqlāb (d. 624/1227) served al-Muʿāẓẓam ʿĪsā and was with him in a companionship, the prince was filled with good, firm belief in him until he relied on him in many medical and other views. He profited from them and commended their effects.\textsuperscript{63} Saḥīḥ al-Dīn Abū Manṣūr (fl. thirteenth century CE) served al-Ṭāṣir Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Dāwūd in a companionship in al-Karak. He raised him to a high position and relied on him in the art of medicine.\textsuperscript{64} In addition to this singling out for particular professional expertise as a physician, clients were also tapped for their additional skills in the mathematical sciences, as a companion in sessions of conviviality and as political or financial advisors and
managers. Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s uncle Rashīd al-Dīn served al-Amjad on the prince’s request as an author of a manual on arithmetic. Al-Mu’aẓẓam implored him to become the head of the administration of the troops. Several physicians of Ayyubid princes rose to become their viziers, namely Muhadhdhab al-Dīn Yūṣuf ibn Abī Saʿīd (d. 624/1227), his nephew Amīn al-Dawla Abū ʿI-l-Ḥasan ibn Ghazāl ibn Abī Saʿīd (d. 648/1250), Fakhr al-Dīn Riḍwān ibn Rustam al-Sahāfī (d. 629/1230), Najm al-Dīn al-Lubūdī (d. c. 65/1265) and Najm al-Dīn ibn Minfākh (d. 652/1254). Muhadhdhab al-Dīn Yūṣuf ibn Abī Saʿīd was highly appreciated for healing Sitt al-Shām when she suffered under a dysentery. He served ‘Īzz al-Dīn Farrukhshāh (d. 587/1191) and his son al-Amjad in Baʿbāk as a physician. The latter turned more and more to him for advice in his affairs (umūr) and relied upon him in his powers (ahwāl). Intelligence and virtue made the physician’s advice sound and approved of by the prince who finally made him his vizier. Muhadhdhab al-Dīn Yūṣuf ibn Abī Saʿīd rose to a high rank until he was the manager of all of his realm (dawla) and powers (ahwāl). Nobody equalled him in authority and command. In a few cases, the head of the family honoured a client’s success with his relatives by appointing him to high ranking positions in the administration of Egypt or Syria. Not all clients accepted however this promotion above and beyond the medical profession underscoring the possibilities of choice for a client in the Ayyubid patronage system. Al-Mu’aẓẓam ʿĪsā wished Muwaffaq al-Dīn Yaʿqūb ibn Saqlāb to chair some part of the management of his realm (dawla) and to administer it, but the physician refused, limiting himself exclusively to his medical work.

The fact that physicians did not live, as a rule, in the households of their patrons, but had their own houses in town, may have enforced the flexible character of the patronage system since it gave clients spaces of their own and distance from their patrons. While physicians did not live in the houses of their patrons, they met there regularly for their service. The expression by which Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a describes time and again the presence of the physicians in the houses of their patrons is being at the bāb al-dār. One day early in his career, Muhadhdhab al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ibn ʿAlī, for instance, was “at the bāb dār al-sulṭān and with him was a group of the physicians of the houses”, that is, the houses at the fortress, when a eunuch came with a slave girl to consult the doctors about something that ailed her. Many times Muhadhdhab al-Dīn met with Muwaffaq al-Dīn Yaʿqūb at this very place “where the physicians sat at the dār al-sulṭān and discussed medical research matters.” Since it is very unlikely that a medical consultation between a eunuch and a physician would have taken place in the open air, in front of the princely residence, not to mention the presence of a slave girl in such an environment, and since it is not plausible to assume that the two physicians always met in a courtyard for discussing their professional opinions, the bāb al-dār does not signify the entrance of the house or the fortress, but rather a space in the house that preceded the rooms of the princely patron. It is there where the physicians of an Ayyubid prince worked and spent their service time as doctors. Unfortunately, Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a is silent about the equipment of this space, that is, whether it contained furniture for medical instruments and remedies as well as shelves for manuscripts.
If the clients were prominent and well-established physicians they were able to accrue much wealth. They expressed their economic fortunes through large and richly endowed houses, the quality of their attire, and the beauty and education of their personal. Most of their wealth consisted of cash and in some cases of landed property in villages. The separation of the living spaces of patrons and clients reflects the lack of a formalized court, the flexibility of Ayyubid lifestyle including their accommodations while in town and the fact that not all Ayyubid princes engaged in exclusive patronage relationships with their physicians, that is, not all physicians served only a single princely patron. Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abī Sulaymān (d. 613/1216–7), that is, one of the sons of the Christian physician Abū Sulaymān whom Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had promised to protect, is named by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a as the client of three Ayyubid princes—Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, al-‘Ādil and al-Kāmil—with the implication that he served them simultaneously, not subsequently. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s relatives also served several Ayyubid princes at the same time—Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and his children or al-‘Ādil, al-Mu‘azzam ‘Īsā and al-Amjad. Even in cases where Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a seems to imply that a physician had entered an exclusive service with one patron only such a status did not prevent him from exercising his profession among other patients in town.

Many, but not all Ayyubid princes lived in their fortresses when in town. Al-‘Ādil for instance lived in Cairo in a residence called the “House of the Viziers.” Physicians lived mostly outside of the fortresses, but could occasionally also live in a house inside a fortress. Another of Abī Sulaymān’s sons and a client of al-‘Ādil, Abū Shākir (d. 613/1216–7), had a house in the fortress of Cairo in order to live with and take care of al-Kāmil according to al-‘Ādil’s wish. In other cases, the house of a physician could be linked through a door or a hallway to the house of the Ayyubid prince for the delivery of special services. When al-Kāmil ruled the city of al-Ruha, his residence was connected with the house called “House of Ibn al-Za‘frān” where the physician al-Fāris Abī ‘l-Khayr ibn Abī Sulaymān (fl. twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE) lived. Whenever al-Kāmil went for a bath, al-Fāris was supposed to deliver fruits and rosewater.

The group of physicians that served Ayyubid princes as clients was composed of members of various Christian and Jewish communities and of Muslims. Religious affiliations beyond the generalities were not unimportant for Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a as his occasional hints at specifics in cases of Christians and Jews indicate. But they appear to have been of less importance in the case of physicians than in other fields of intellectual enterprise. The Ayyubids also were willing to disregard stipulations that discriminated against the ahl al-dhimma when they wished to include non-Muslim physicians among their clients, something they did regularly and in relatively great numbers. A particular favour and right that Ayyubid princes granted their Muslim, Christian or Jewish physicians was the permission to ride in town, to ride into their fortresses and up to the door of their residences and to remain on horseback even in the presence of their patrons. The Christian physician Abū Shākir ibn Abī Sulaymān, for instance, was allowed to ride into the fortresses of Damascus, Karak, al-Ruhā and Jaʿbar. When al-‘Ādil became head of the family residing in Cairo, he extended this permission to the
fortress of Cairo. One day he visited his son in the fortress, went to the physician’s house, ordered him to mount a mule that al-‘Ādil had brought along with him from his own residence and ride on it from the fortress to the “House of the Viziers,” while the umarā’ and his son walked there.79 Not all Muslim inhabitants of the Ayyubid territories acquiesced to such revocations of Muslim legal stipulations. An inhabitant of the famous Sufi Khānaqāh al-Sumaysī took it upon himself to punish a perceived perpetrator of unlawful behaviour in Cairo. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā described him as being acquainted with Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb who ruled in al-Jazīra and his brother Asad al-Dīn, having “a heavy spirit”, living an ascetic life, being hard in religion and “eating the world by law and order.”80

When Asad al-Dīn moved to Cairo, he followed him and settled in the mosque close to the House of the Viziers. He began slandering the people of the fortress and cursed them when praising God, becoming very influential. Whenever he saw a dhimmī riding he wished to kill him. One day, he saw the Jew al-Muwaffaq ibn Shū’a [d. 579/1183–4], one of the senior physicians of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, riding. He threw a stone at him and hit his eye in a way that it could not be saved.81 Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā’s choice of words indicates that he did not condone such behaviour against a colleague. But he did not provide further comments on this event. Hence it remains unclear whether Ayyubid patronage relationships included the obligation to extend legal and material protection in such cases of bodily harm.

When particularly successful Christian or Jewish physicians serving an Ayyubid prince agreed to convert to the religion of their patrons, elaborate and lavish ceremonies took place to celebrate the event. One such case described by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā on the authority of Ibn al-Qifṭī was the conversion of Ibn al-Maṭrān. He received panegyric poems and an extraordinary amount of other gifts.82 The umarā’ al-dawla competed with each other for giving him the best of the best. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn married him to Jawza, one of the preferred servants of his wife Khawand Khaṭūn. Jawza was a very rich woman in her own rights and improved her husband’s position and affairs “putting them in order, rectifying his conditions, taking care of his attire and beautifying his interior and exterior.”83 His conversion was celebrated with a royal announcement (wa-ṣāra laḥū dhikr sāmin fiʾl-dawla).84

Physicians were highly appreciated for their medical skills. This alone did not bring, however, necessarily, an invitation to an evening session of conviviality, although some of the leading physicians seem to have been included in the leisure activities of their patrons, due to their intellectual status and ranking. Those physicians who were well-versed in poetry, played ‘ūd or had a good singing voice received such invitations, independent of their medical skills, as well as patronage offers that emphasized their capabilities as artists and delightful companions. Fakhr al-Dīn ibn al-Sāʿatī excelled in calligraphy and poetry. In addition to being a physician and a vizier of two Ayyubid princes, he also became a boon companion to one of them, namely al-Muʿazzam, and played the ‘ūd for him.85 Rashīd
al-Dīn, Ibn Abī Ḫaybī’a’s uncle, was an exemplary client being highly talented as a musician and capable of reciting poetry in Arabic, Persian and Turkish in addition to his medical skills. On the 15th Ramadān 605/23th March 1209, al-Mu‘āẓẓam ʿĪsā “invited him for listening to his speech. He was very pleased by his performance, benefited him [and] ordered him into his service.” Another time, when al-Kāmil visited his brother al-Mu‘āẓẓam the two princes spent a night of conviviality together. Rashīd al-Dīn participated in the event and received for his contributions a perfect robe of honour and five hundred Egyptian dinār. Other festive events (ḥafla) were organized as scholarly sessions. ʿAbd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī (d. 629/1231) reported that one evening in Jerusalem after Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had concluded a truce with the Christian troops in Akko he felt it necessary to pay him a visit. He collected from his books of the ancients what was possible and made his way to Jerusalem. He found the ruler completely pleased, with a happy heart and all of his companions joyous like him. The first night of his presence in Jerusalem a ḥafla session with the ahl al-ʿilm (i.e. scholars, primarily of the religious disciplines, but also of other fields) took place. They presented talks and readings about the various kinds of sciences, making it a thoroughly pleasant and enjoyable event.

Ayyubid patronage relationships existed between individuals, not between groups or institutions, even in the case of the more general types of patronage referred to above. This personal character is reflected in the numerous particularities that separate one relationship from the other. Patrons could override both law and custom if they wished to honour a client in a special way. The transfer of property rights was one of the most sensitive issues, in particular when land was involved. Such a transfer of land figures only occasionally in Ibn Abī Ḫaybī’a’s accounts, but occurred nonetheless with a certain regularity insofar as it is reported for the Zangids, the Ayyubids and the Mamluks. Patrons could also interfere into the private affairs of their physicians if they wished to. Ibn Fāris loved to dress in military dress and to fight although he served as a physician. When he had a little son he also dressed him in uniform. One day al-Kāmil was served in his bath in al-Ruha fruits and rosewater by this little boy. Looking at him he recognized him as a relative of his physician. He called the father and said to him:

This your son is intelligent. Do not teach him to be a soldier. We have many soldiers. You are a fortunate family. You are blessed with your medicine. Send him to the physician Abū Sa’īd in Damascus that he will read with him medicine.

The “father had no option but to follow the order” and the son, Rashīd al-Dīn ibn Ḫalīqa, became one of the most prominent Ayyubid physicians who at the end of his life served the Mamluk sultan al-Zāhir Rukn al-Dīn Baybars (r. 1260–77 CE). Clients could approach a patron for special favours such as financial help in family affairs. The Christian physician Abū ʿl-Faraj served Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and his household.
One day he said to the sultan that he had daughters and that he needed to endow them. He demanded that he granted him what he needed in this respect. Şalâh al-Dîn said to him: write down on a piece of paper all that is necessary for endowing them and bring the paper. Abû 'l-Faraj departed and wrote on the paper jewellery, fabric, utensils etc. of about 3,000 dirham. When Şalâh al-Dîn read the paper he ordered the treasurer to buy for Abû 'l-Faraj all that it contained, leaving nothing out.94

Scholars of the mathematical sciences at Ayyubid courts

Ibn Abî Uṣaybi‘a’s work is only in one respect a rich source for studying the places that the mathematical sciences occupied under Ayyubid rule, that is, in regard to the education and preferences of physicians. This general aspect includes as a sub-theme the professions in which people had earned their living before they switched to medicine. A second sub-theme is the skills that a physician possessed in addition to his medical knowledge and proficiency in healing. A third sub-theme is the kind of people with whom the physicians met, related to in friendship and visited for learning from them. In all three cases, patronage relationships appear as one component of the story. The three possible situations when Ibn Abî Uṣaybi‘a talks about the mathematical sciences indicate that while only a minority of physicians seem to have studied one of them these sciences had a very high reputation. Those that were of interest to patrons were astrology, the compilation of astronomical handbooks, the construction of instruments, arithmetic, engineering and music; the latter in particular when combined with musical practice. Other disciplines such as geometry or ‘îlm al-hay‘a (mathematical cosmography) were considered as theoretically challenging and caused amazement and wonder if mastered fast and profoundly.

The mathematically related professions that were exercised by several physicians before they acquired their medical training were architecture and instrument making, in particular the construction and repair of sundials. These professions when exercised on public buildings like the Nûrî hospital or the Umayyad mosque were financed by stipends from the princes, an approach already practised by Nûr al-Dîn Zangi.95 Muhadhdhab al-Dîn ibn al-Ḥâjib (d. after 583/1193), praised by Ibn Abî Uṣaybi‘a as strong in theoretical thinking (naẓar) in geometry, was one of those physicians who began their career with serving the clocks at the Umayyad mosque.96 Another was Fâkhr al-Dîn al-Sâ‘îṭî who had learned the craft and astrology from his father, a migrant from Khurasan.97 Some physicians also built other astronomical and geometrical instruments. Abû Zakariyyâ Yahyâ al-Bayâsî (fl. twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE) came from the Maghrib and excelled in the mathematical sciences. He made geometrical instruments for his teacher in medicine, Ibn al-Naqqâsh al-Baghdâdi.98 He also played ‘ūd and the organ.

Rashîd al-Dîn ibn ‘Alî ibn Khalfîa, Ibn Abî Uṣaybi‘a’s uncle, studied not only medicine, but also arithmetic, music, geometry, ‘îlm al-hay‘a and astrology. He was very gifted in all these fields.99 Rashîd al-Dîn’s knowledge of the theory and practice of these various mathematical sciences improved his chances in receiving
honourable and lucrative patronage offers. When al-Muʿazzam asked him to chair the administration of the troops he felt that he had to comply with the demand. After some time of sitting on the council he discovered that all of his time went into running the chancellery and the accountancy, while nothing remained for his personal life or his study of the rational sciences. Although his position brought him much power and connections, he decided it was not worth it. He turned to the Sultan and demanded his release. But the Sultan kept him as one of his khawāṣṣ until he finally discharged him.100

Several of Ibn Abī Uṣaybīʿa’s teachers also studied various mathematical sciences and excelled in them. Muhadhdhab al-Dīn ‘Abd Ṭāhir ibn ‘Alī studied ‘ilm al-hayʾa and astrology. He took classes in these two disciplines with the astrologer Abū ’l-Faḍl al-Usrāʾīlī. He purchased the brass instruments that were needed in this art and possessed 16 treatises on the astrolabe written by various authors.101 Muwaffaq al-Dīn Yaʿqūb ibn Saqlāb was born and grew up in Jerusalem. There he learned Greek and studied in the monastery Dayr al-Siyyāq with a monk who was a virtuous man, a philosopher and very knowledgeable in natural philosophy, geometry and astrology.102

The interest in the mathematical sciences motivated a few physicians to undertake long-distance travel for studying with a leading expert. When Sharaf al-Dīn Ţūsī (d. c. 607/1210) was in Mosul, Muhadhdhab al-Dīn ibn al-Ḥājjīb and Muwaffaq al-Dīn ‘Abd al-ʿĀẓīz travelled there to meet with him and study with him. When Sharaf al-Dīn returned to his native town in north-eastern Iran, the two Damascene physicians accompanied him and stayed there with him for some time. On his way back to Damascus, Muhadhdhab al-Dīn ibn al-Ḥājjīb passed through Irbil where he met another gifted scholar of the mathematical sciences, the astrologer Ibn al-Dahhān al-Thuʿaylab (d. 590/1194). The two scholars then travelled together to Damascus. There, the astrologer was very well received by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and all the leading men. The Ayyubid ruler honoured the astrologer greatly and settled a monthly stipend (ʿiṭra) of 30 dinār on him. In the Kalāṣa quarter an unnamed patron built a lodge (maqṣūra) for the astrologer.103

A field studied only in exceptional cases, if one was to trust Ibn Abī Uṣaybīʿa, was the construction of automata where the work of the Banū Mūsā (fl. ninth century CE) was used for instruction and guidance to build some such machines.104 The fact that ʿAlam al-Dīn Qaysar also is known for his activities in this domain, having constructed on al-Ashraf’s order many beautiful things, among them an octagonal palace in Raʾs al-ʿAyn, and a certain, albeit not well-documented interest in the work of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Jazārī (fl. 1200–22 CE) in the Ayyubid period, suggest that this subject matter was not of major relevance to Ibn Abī Uṣaybīʿa and his work and hence received only little attention.105

In addition to such information linked to scholars who practised medicine Ibn Abī Uṣaybīʿa has little to say of Ayyubid patronage for the mathematical sciences. He even does not apply the language of patronage to the few scholars of these sciences whom he mentions and who did not belong to the medical community. Other sources such as Ayyubid historical chronicles and biographical dictionaries written outside the Ayyubid realm confirm, however, that the few
leading scholars of the mathematical sciences who were linked to Ayyubid princes and are known to us through their work, that is, Mu‘ayyad al-Dīn al-‘Urdī (d. 660/1260), Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn Abī Shukr al-Maghribī (d. 681/1282), and ‘Alam al-Dīn Qayṣar, talked of themselves as serving Ayyubid princes and were perceived by others as their clients. Mu‘ayyad al-Dīn al-‘Urdī described his relationship with the last Ayyubid ruler Nāṣir Shalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf as one of service when he told his new friends and colleagues in Maragha how he had escaped through his own courage the bloodbath in which all members of the court had died except for himself and two sons of the ruler.106 Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Wāṣīl (d. 697/1298), a historian of the Ayyubid dynasty and well educated in various disciplines including mathematics and philosophy, characterized his relationship to the patron of his father, Nāṣir Shalāḥ al-Dīn Dāwūd, as well as the relationship of his older colleague in the mathematical sciences ‘Alam al-Dīn Qayṣar to al-Ashraf exclusively by one term: service (khidma).107 Historical chronicles, while not overly rich in information about Ayyubid patronage of the mathematical sciences, also suggest that the impression that Ayyubid princes had only limited interest in astrological counselling and hence only supported very few practitioners of this discipline may not reflect the historical conditions in their complexity. Sībi ibn al-Jawzī (d. 654/1257) described in his chronicle Mir‘āt al-zamān how al-Ashraf went about to kill his relative Bahrāmshāh ibn Farrukhshāh (r. 1191–1230 CE) in Ba‘kbak against whom he carried an old grudge in his heart. Part of the intrigue was to make him leave his own territory and come to Damascus. Bahrām Shāh agreed, but planned to take the city. In preparation for the campaign his Jewish astrologer Ibn Fahīd determined the auspicious hour. The astrologer used an astrolabe for this purpose and undertook the operation in the presence of his patron who was playing a game with his secretary ‘Abbās ibn Akhī al-Sharīf al-Bahā’ according to their habit.108 Unfortunately, the hour proved the astrologer wrong and his patron was killed. The intimacy of the story as well as the religious affiliation of the astrologer paint Ayyubid patronage of the mathematical sciences in colours not known from other sources. Astrologers like physicians were not merely professional experts who delivered services. They were persons of trust who operated in the immediate and often private environment of the patron.

**Philosophers, princes, and their predilections**

Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a included in his biographical entries 75 scholars who lived and worked in Ayyubid Egypt and Syria. Twenty-four of them are presented in chapter XIV about Egypt and fifty-five in chapter XV about Syria. Although most of them were practising physicians, some of them had at best a literary knowledge of the field. Scholars like Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmīdī, Rafī al-Dīn al-Jīlī (executed between 637–43/1240–5), Shams al-Dīn Khusrawshāhī (d. 652/1251–2), Shams al-Dīn al-Khūṭī (d. 637/1240) and Afdal al-Dīn Khuṇī (d. 640/1243) are better known for their contributions to the rational sciences than for their medical expertise. Their presence in Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s biographical dictionary of physicians is one of the indicators for the presence of and interest in the
philosophical disciplines and their relatives among the religious disciplines, in particular *usūl al-dīn*, in the Ayyubid period. These five scholars apparently were the leading representatives of this intellectual domain in Ayyubid Damascus and Cairo. To ignore them was obviously not a choice Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā wished to make. The relevance of this decision becomes clearer when we consider that the author did not treat leading astronomers and mathematicians of the period in the same manner. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā’s inclusion of the five leading and often controversial figures of the rational sciences in Ayyubid Syria and Egypt into his dictionary was neither an accident nor a decision based merely on a wish for comprehensiveness. In some cases he obviously wished to report the events in which the scholars had been involved and suggest his view of what had happened to them. But critiquing his contemporaries and their deeds was not a consistent approach that Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā followed in his book. The five mentioned scholars and their entries are rather linked by the fact that they were famous representatives in their respective fields, that some of them were the author’s teachers and that most of them were friends of his family and some of his teachers. In 1239–40 CE, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā read in Cairo with Aḍal al-Dīn Khunjī parts of the *kulliyāt* of Ibn Sīnā’s medical *Qānūn*. In Damascus, he studied with Shams al-Dīn Khusrawshāhī and Rafī al-Dīn al-Jīlī a philosophical text of Ibn Sīnā and other works.

Among the 70 physicians presented by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā, 26 are mentioned as students of either *hikma* or falsafa. This number is most likely an inferior boundary since there are cases like the one of Sadīd al-Dīn Ibn Abī ‘l-Bayyān (d. after 638/1240) where Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā does not mention their training in these disciplines in their own entry, while referring to it in other biographies. In most cases Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā merely enumerates the disciplines in an additive form. He obviously did not feel a need for justifying the presence of the philosophical sciences in his dictionary and saw no reason for hiding a scholar’s interest in them. A certain hint towards undercurrents of change may be contained in juxtapositions between the philosophical and the legal disciplines when Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā emphasizes that a physician in addition to his acquisition of philosophical knowledge also was versed in *sharī‘a*. The shift from philosopher-physician to jurist-physician has been marked by Sabra as one important component of the transformation in the cultural role of the ancient sciences in the late ‘Abbāsid period. The developments in the Ayyubid realm contributed substantively to this process.

When we turn to the question how Ayyubid patrons looked upon the philosophical sciences the information delivered by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā tells us first and foremost that the princes sponsored almost all of the physicians with training in philosophy. They did not question their future clients about it nor did they reprimand them for having sessions on such topics. Some of them accepted treatises on philosophical topics by their clients as gifts. Other indicators of the overwhelmingly either positive or neutral position that Ayyubid princes took towards the philosophical studies of their clients are to be found in the fact that all viziers who came from the medical profession except for one either taught or wrote about
philosophical subjects, that several head judges appointed by Ayyubid princes were deeply involved with the philosophical sciences and that the four Ayyubid princes who were involved either in the execution of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī or in the problems of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmīdī, that is, Ṣalāh al-Dīn, al-Zāhir, al-Kāmil and al-Ashraf, all patronized other scholars with strong and well-known philosophical interests. Those princes who cared at all for these intellectual debates and the tensions resulting at times from them may have well believed like Rashīd al-Dīn, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s uncle, that ḥikma meant “following the example of God, the Most High”.

Some of the scholars with only a literary or theoretical competence in medicine also were clients of Ayyubid princes or of an Ayyubid vizier, who honoured them, assigned teaching positions in the newly built madāris to them or appointed them as head judges. Several of them had studied with Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) or one of his students. The most influential student of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in Ayyubid Damascus was Shams al-Dīn Khusrawshāhī. He was sponsored by al-Mu‘azzam and appointed as tutor of his son al-Nāṣir Dāwūd. He taught philosophy in both terms, that is, as ḥikma and falsafa, to several of the physicians mentioned by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, including Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a himself. Shams al-Dīn al-Khūṭī was another one of them. Al-Mu‘azzam allocated stipends to him, appointed him head judge of Damascus and gave him a professorship in the Madrasa ‘Ādiliyya where Shams al-Dīn took his residence. Shams al-Dīn, on his side, linked himself with the prince in a companionship.

Scholars trained in the philosophical sciences who worked in Ayyubid Egypt and Syria had often acquired their respective knowledge outside the Ayyubid realm in al-Andalus, Iran, Baghdad and al-Raqqā. They taught their knowledge in Cairo, Damascus, al-Karak and Ḥamāh. The most prominent scholar studied in such classes was Ibn Sinā. The work that according to Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a attracted most attention was his Kitāb al-ishārāt wa‘l-tanbihāt. Najm al-Dīn al-Lubādī wrote an epitome of this treatise. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a studied the original with Rafī al-Dīn al-Jīlī in Damascus. Muhadhdhab al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ibn ‘Alī studied with Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmīdī several of al-Āmīdī’s books on the philosophical sciences, among them his commentary on Ibn Sinā’s treatise. Rafī al-Dīn al-Jīlī composed a commentary on Ibn Sinā’s treatise for the Ayyubid ruler of Ba‘lībak, Taqī al-Dīn ‘Umar. A second type of philosophical work of Ibn Sinā studied by the scholars in Ayyubid cities was his encyclopaedias. Shams al-Dīn Khusrawshāhī wrote an epitome of the great encyclopaedia, the Kitāb al-shifā‘. Muwaffāq al-Dīn Ya‘qūb al-Sāmārī (d. 681/1283) imitated it and composed an introduction into the sciences of logic, natural philosophy and metaphysics. The reason for this focus was Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s critique of this treatise and the debates about Ibn Sinā’s philosophy at large that Fakhr al-Dīn’s students brought from the East to Damascus and Cairo. Other philosophers whose oeuvre was taught and discussed in the medical communities under Ayyubid rule were Aristotle and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s uncle studied Aristotelian texts with ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī, a well-known scholar with a broad philosophical education and friend of Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s father from their shared
studies at the Madrasa Niẓāmiyya in Baghdad. Teacher and student discussed difficult passages found in these works. Rashīd al-Dīn also went to philosophy classes held by another teacher who had a high reputation in these disciplines in his time, Sadīq al-Dīn ibn Abī 'l-Bayyān. In comparison to ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī’s exposure not only to Aristotle, Ibn Sīnā and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, but also to Plato, the great commentators Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. second and third centuries CE) and Themistios (d. 388 CE), Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and other ancient and medieval scholars as well as his own philosophical oeuvre the philosophical studies in Ayyubid Damascus and Cairo appear to have been of a fairly limited scope and depth. But this was not the result of any kind of interference by the Ayyubid patrons. It rather reflects the then dominant perception, as ‘Abd al-Latīf reported about his own education, that philosophy was the study of Ibn Sīnā’s œuvre and the commentaries available on it.

In this kind of atmosphere and activities, why did Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī lose his teaching post and why did he stay confined to his house? Was his confinement part of the punishment or a reaction to the loss of his teaching position? Can it be corroborated that he suffered this exclusion from the public sphere for having taught philosophy and related sciences? Why has his case been taken as a symptom of an overall anti-philosophical attitude of the Ayyubid dynasty? Or, if other reasons caused the confinement, why were philosophical activities accepted as the major culprit, both by medieval and modern scholars? These questions have puzzled me for a long time. Not all of them can be answered with the available sources. The biographical dictionaries and historical chronicles written in the thirteenth century CE offer however a much richer array of rhetorical strategies and narrative plots than allowed for so far by modern commentators on the event. The medieval writers do not offer variations of one, but of several perspectives on the events. Their differences on the factual as well as narrative level are so profound that it seems if not altogether impossible, but at least very difficult to harmonize them into a single, coherent story. The thirteenth-century authors constructed their own representations of what happened, when and why. They either highlighted intrigues in the scholarly communities of Baghdad and Cairo, but kept their silence about the collegial climate in Damascus. Or they pointed to Sayf al-Dīn’s pride and conviction of being the leading scholar of the rational sciences in his time, a position that brought him into conflict with the faction of the “Persians” as well as with one of the Ayyubid rulers of Damascus. Others emphasized al-Āmidī’s true or alleged breach of etiquette in his relationship with the Ayyubid princes. The fourth type of narrative singled Sayf al-Dīn’s study and teaching of philosophy out as the main cause for his downfall. A fifth approach is a strategy of silence or, in a softer variant, of imprecision. As a rule, more than one of these narrative lines makes up an author’s biographical record. Sayf al-Dīn’s “biographers” of the thirteenth century CE were Ibn al-Qiftī, Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a, Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, and Ibn Wāṣil. I will focus here exclusively on the latter’s story because of the author’s love for detail. Ibn Wāṣil took up elements of Ibn al-Qiftī’s, Ibn Khallikān’s and Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī’s reports in non-trivial ways. He shared with them a certain taste for the
dramatic. In contrast to the previous writers, Ibn Wāṣīl though had a penchant for the particular and the precise. He tells more individual stories than any of the other biographers and presents himself as possessing numerous specific details. Although it is by no means clear whether this is more than a narrative technique, Ibn Wāṣīl may well have had access to previously untapped information because he and his father served several Ayyubid and Mamluk patrons and were members of the scholarly elite of al-Shām. The nucleus of Ibn Wāṣīl’s report on how and why Sayf al-Dīn lost his professorship agrees with Ibn al-Qifṭī’s story, based like it on unnamed informants:

Al-Malik al-Ashraf turned away from al-Āmidī because he loathed him. Then al-Malik al-Maṣʿūd, the lord of Amida, sent for him, demanding him [to come]. Thereafter happened what we mentioned about the taking away of Amida from her lord. After she was taken from him, al-Malik al-Kāmil said to the lord [of Amida] according to what I was told: “In your city, you have no one of excellence.” But he erred and the lord answered: “I had sent for the Shaykh Sayf al-Dīn demanding him [to come to me] and I was promised that he would come to me.” This was so painful for al-Malik al-Ashraf and al-Malik al-Kāmil that the two grew very angry against Sayf al-Dīn. As a consequence, al-Malik al-Ashraf dismissed him from the teaching at the Madrasa ‘Azīziyya. He withdrew to his garden and stayed there as someone who had been treated unjustly until he died in this year being half a year older than eighty years. It is however more specific and detailed than that of Ibn al-Qifṭī, which enabled Ibn Wāṣīl to construct a meaningful story about the loss of face of the two Ayyubid princes in front of a defeated Artuqid ruler. The historian set up this culmination of the drama by informing his readers at the beginning of the biography that the ruler of Amid had already invited Sayf al-Dīn to this very same position when the scholar was serving the Ayyubid prince of Ḥamāh. But the prince did not want him to depart and so the scholar had declined the invitation. After the death of al-Manṣūr ibn Taqī al-Dīn (d. 617/1220), Ibn Wāṣīl writes, al-Mu‘azzam invited Sayf al-Dīn to come to him to Damascus promising him beautiful rewards. Sayf al-Dīn accepted this offer and al-Mu‘azzam honoured him with the teaching post at the Madrasa ‘Azīziyya and a wonderful house in a beautiful street. After al-Mu‘azzam’s death, his son al-Nāṣir Dāwūd honoured the scholar greatly and gave him the lavish sum of 8,000 dinār for buying a palace and a garden. He joined Sayf al-Dīn as a disciple, although he already was affiliated with Shams al-Dīn Khurasawshāhī, and asked him to write a book on the rational sciences for him, the Farā`īd al-qalā`īd. Thus while al-Āmidī served three Ayyubid princes as a much honoured client and rejected the offers of the lord of his native town in their favour, at the end of his life he is portrayed as someone who had changed sides. This alone might have been of no consequence had it happened under “normal” circumstances. Changing patrons was not at all uncommon. Moving from one principality to another was part of the patron–client relationships of the
period. But the fact that this switch of patrons had become an element in a public
 TAUNT on the battle
field may have indeed created the atmosphere where it was felt
obligatory to retaliate not merely against the military enemy but also against the
scholar who was thrown as the gauntlet into the face of the victors causing them a
loss of face.

A second major point of difference between Ibn Wāṣil’s biography of Sayf
al-Dīn and those told by his predecessors is the non-trivial reformulation of the
involvement of the philosophical sciences in the conflict presented in similarly
dramatic tones. Ibn Wāṣil spoke colourfully about tensions between Sayf al-Dīn
and the faction of the Persians and about why the Ayyubid princes disliked the
scholar. Already in Ḥamāḥ when writing many books, Sayf al-Dīn was obsessed
with refuting, criticizing and maligning Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Ibn Wāṣil found
this behaviour so reprehensible that he offered bluntly his own opinion: Sayf
al-Dīn violated good tone and taste because he envied Fakhr al-Dīn and because
he was convinced that he was superior or at least equal to him in ‘ilm. To his
dismay, however, Sayf al-Dīn had to see that people preferred Fakhr al-Dīn
and his works. Moreover, Ibn Wāṣil claims, Fakhr al-Dīn had found a much more
generous patron than Sayf al-Dīn and more students pooled around the Iranian
scholar. This difference in success and public respect was the main reason for
Sayf al-Dīn’s incessant battles, Ibn Wāṣil opined. A second, equally important
component for this state of affairs in Ibn Wāṣil’s view was the cultural difference
between the ‘arab (Sayf al-Dīn) and the ‘ajam (Fakhr al-Dīn).

Sayf al-Dīn’s opinion of and attitude towards Fakhr al-Dīn was at the heart of
the displeasure that al-Mu‘azzam felt for him. One day namely Sharaf al-Dīn,
known as Ibn ‘Aynayn (d. 630/1229–30), visited Sayf al-Dīn and listened to him
deriding Fakhr al-Dīn. But this Sharaf al-Dīn, being one of the zealots of Fakhr
al-Dīn, became infuriated with what he heard and ran to al-Mu‘azzam to com-
plain. His report diminished Sayf al-Dīn’s standing in the eyes of the Ayyubid
ruler. Despite this al-Mu‘azzam continued to visit the Friday night sessions of
the ‘ulamā’ where Sayf al-Dīn shone with eloquence and intelligence so that
nobody could live up to him in a disputation or could surpass him in
figurative speech as stressed by al-Mu‘azzam’s son al-Nāṣir Dāwūd in an encounter with
Ibn Wāṣil:

The Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Dāwūd—may God have mercy with him—told
me, and we were in his service at al-Karak, saying: “When Shaykh Sayf
al-Dīn was with my father—may God have mercy with him—I went to the
meeting in order to hear his speech. I marvelled at his rhetoric and his excel-
lent Arabic, the beauty of his arguments and his towering over the others in
the disputation.” I answered al-Malik al-Nāṣir: “who of the two men is more
excellent in the view of my Lord the Sultan—Shams al-Dīn Khusrawshāhī or
Sayf al-Dīn [al-Āmidī]?” He said: “SubhānAllāh, how can you say that! All
of those were chicken to slaughter for Sayf al-Dīn! Sayf al-Dīn saw himself
as more excellent than their teacher Fakhr al-Dīn. Hence he considered them
as insignificant”.

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Such an outspoken judgment by an Ayyubid prince may have caused the medieval reader of the biography to chuckle or to sneer, depending on his position towards the involved scholars. It also subtly counterbalanced the unfavourable comments Ibn Wāṣīl himself had made earlier in his story about Sayf al-Dīn. He now let the reader know that yes, the scholar was arrogant and excessive in his critique towards Fakhr al-Dīn, but he also was in many respects superior to his peers and a true star in the courtly sphere of Ayyubid Damascus, a fact that father and son obviously appreciated.

Ibn Wāṣīl’s biography of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī is undoubtedly the one richest in detail and narrative power. It elucidates the edges of the scholar’s personality, the intellectual fights that took place under Ayyubid patronage about philosophical and related issues and the tensions that flared up occasionally because of the overpowering standing of Sayf al-Dīn in comparison to Fakhr al-Dīn’s students and his own feelings of deprivation. In Ibn Wāṣīl’s view none of these elements, however, led to Sayf al-Dīn’s dismissal from his teaching post at the Madrasa ‘Azīziyya by al-Ashraf. They rather seem to have dwindled away since several scholars who had participated in these sessions chaired by al-Nāṣir Dāwūd left Damascus with him after al-Ashraf’s victory or followed him later to al-Karak on his invitation. Thus the last, like the first, narrator of the story about how and why Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī lost his professorship agreed that it was a case of confrontation on the battlefield over an issue of patronage that gave the defeated enemy a chance to retaliation and cause a public loss of face to two Ayyubid princes, an affair of public shame for which the scholar as a publicly claimed client of an inimical patron had to be punished. Hence the benefits given to him by his former patrons were removed from him. Sayf al-Dīn’s withdrawal into his house and garden appears then less as an exclusion from the public domain of Damascene scholars than as a deliberate refusal to communicate with his vengeful former patrons.

The material, its arrangement and presentation, the judgments and evaluations of the thirteenth-century historians served writers between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries in Mamluk and Ottoman Egypt and Syria for their transmissions of Sayf al-Dīn’s biography as well as modern scholars of the twentieth century for their evaluations of the relationship between the Ayyubids and the ancient sciences. The most often used source was Ibn Khallikān’s report. Some writers also drew on Sībī ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn al-Qiṭīfī. The story about the patronage conflict receded into the background, while the claim that the ancient sciences were at the heart of all conflicts in which Sayf al-Dīn was involved during his life, including his loss of the Madrasa ‘Azīziyya, became not merely predominant, but also got sharper and more rigidly framed. Examples of these transforming interpretations can be found in the works of Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) or ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Nu‘aymī (d. 927/1520). A similarly narrow focus on Ibn Khallikān and Ibn al-Qiṭīfī, occasionally bolstered by some of the “testimonies” of the later writers, can be found among the modern scholars who wrote about Sayf al-Dīn’s life and his loss of position. They too considered the ancient sciences and their opponents among the ‘ulamā‘ as the reason that motivated Ayyubid activities...
against Sayf al-Dīn in particular and adherents of the ancient sciences in general. The belief in a widespread hostility of rulers and scholars of Islamic societies against the ancient sciences characterized the views of many historians of Islamic societies throughout the entire twentieth century. The sources they used and the methods they applied for their interpretation seemed to confirm that their expectations were justified. Ideological and historiographical presuppositions as well as a paucity of method consciousness among modern scholars cooperated with ideological and disciplinary presuppositions among medieval scholars writing about Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmiddī and led them to overlook the other elements that filled the stories about the conflicts in his life.

Conclusions

The culture of patrons and clients as talked about by the author who provided me with most of my material is surprisingly rich, amazingly flexible and astonishingly happy. Physicians as clients wielded power due to their expertise, acted as patrons and mediators and were free to choose. They were sought after and patrons competed with each other for their favours. They could amass riches as any of the princes or umarā. While they were pious believers they did not have to belong to the dominant religion, nor were they puritans. They loved poetry, music, luxury, beautiful women and men as well as a good debate about all sorts of topics, from religion to philosophy, from diseases and their critical days to the stars and their omina. They were broadly educated in most of the ancient sciences and appear as their main guardians and customers. The Ayyubid princes and their households are portrayed as the main patrons of the physicians, a perspective most likely set by Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s social position and value system. They were generous, lenient, supportive, and intelligent enough not to drive their most capable clients into the arms of other patrons. They understood that professional expertise in hours of sickness weighed more than a particular creed or character trait. In a sense, the world of the princes and their physicians as portrayed by Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a is perfect. If the content of the profession was not disease and death the picture would almost be too perfect. There are no severe conflicts between patrons and clients, except if one of them acts like a tyrant oppressing the people. Then draconic punishment can be meted out, against the misbehaving client of course or an inferior prince. There are no severe intrigues between the clients either. Nobody tries to triumph over a rival. All are nice, polite, linked in friendship, striving to live up to the ideal of manliness. Such an ideal state of affairs cannot be but a construct. Unfortunately, other sources than Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s biographical dictionary do not focus in a comparable manner on issues of patronage and hence do not provide us with material to pierce through the peaceful, happy appearance of the princely physician and his enjoyable life with his colleagues and patrons. If we consider the artificial harmony and conviviality of Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s picture as a kind of panegyric laudatio of both, the patron and the colleague, and focus our attention on the various activities of the many who were participants of the system we are well served by Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a’s rich terminology of patronage, his references to
material aspects of patronage, his description of the particularities that honours, graces and benefits comprised and the singular moments celebrated in the many stories that he collected, embellished and perhaps occasionally even made up. While there are no terms for court or patronage in any of the Ayyubid sources I am familiar with, Ibn Abī Uşaybi‘a had a particular liking for three terms—dawla, murā‘a and bāb dār al-sulṭān. I have argued that the second term meant more than the ideal of an individual manliness prescribing generosity, courtesy and honour. I suggested that the third term represents, in contrast to its literal meaning, a space inside the residence of a prince close to his living quarters or bedroom although where an Ayyubid prince resided was subject to change. I did not discuss the first term as extensively as it would have been possible on the basis of the available material. The variations between the different usages and their individual contexts, even if only taken within Ibn Abī Uşaybi‘a’s dictionary, seem to be too large to be covered in this paper. My impression is that it can cover such different terms as time period, dynasty, realm, power, administration, and perhaps even household and thus may be the word that could come closest to the term court found in Christian cultures. Finally, Ibn Abī Uşaybi‘a’s work leaves no doubt that he, his relatives and his colleagues felt free to study, teach and practise any of the ancient sciences they liked, be it for professional purposes or for their pleasure and cultured lifestyle. Their Ayyubid patrons profited from this broad educational ideal and practice in their sessions on intellectual topics as well as in the nights filled with poetry and music. They enjoyed speeches for their linguistic and rhetorical brilliance as well as for their intellectual bite and fire. Although they may have despised opinions on intellectual matters that they did not share they did not interfere yet as often into the affairs of the ‘ulamā‘ as it became the norm under their successors. If they deposed or executed them it was mostly about issues of power and public offence.

Notes

1 Examples are found in Ibn Abī Uşaybi‘a (1965), 630, 673, 682, 696, 706 (here Ibn Abī Uşaybi‘a reports about his move to the fortress Sarkhad where he entered the service of its lord, the amīr ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Mu‘azzamī, in the year 634/1236), 728.

2 His grandfather, father, uncle and himself served several Ayyubid princes beginning with Şalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Ayyūb.

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4 For instance, see Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a (1965), 737f.
5 See ibid. 652.
6 See ibid. 582.
7 Examples of physicians taken over by Ṣalah al-Dīn are Muhadhdhab al-Dīn ibn al-Naqqaš (d. 574/1178; served previously Nur al-Dīn Zangī), Raḍī al-Dīn al-RAḥabī (d. 631/1233; served previously at the fortress and the hospital of Nur al-Dīn Zangī in Damascus), Saḏīd al-Dīn ibn Raqīqa (d. 635/1237; served previously Nur al-Dīn ibn Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Artuq), Abū Sulaymān Dāwūd ibn Abī al-Munan (d. unknown; served previously the Fatimid caliphs). Examples for the continuation of the posts of head physician of Egypt or Syria can be found in: ibid. 585f, 672.
8 See ibid. 589, 599, 600, 637, 646, 660, 671f, 718 et passim.
9 See ibid. 599.
10 See ibid. 581f, 589, 591, 600, 630, 635, 637, 652, 661, 718 et passim.
11 See ibid. 639, 646, 683f, 698.
12 See ibid. 673, 696.
13 Ibid.
14 See ibid. 697.
15 See ibid.
16 For a story about the treatment of Sitt al-Shām, the sister of al-‘Ādil, see ibid. 721.
17 See ibid. 706.
18 See ibid. 585, 599, 601, 659–61, 671, 718 et passim.
19 See ibid. 582f, 585, 599, 601, 661.
20 See ibid. 585, 659.
21 See ibid. 673, 700.
22 Three examples are the confirmations of the rights and possessions of Raḍī al-Dīn al-RAḥabī by al-‘Ādil after Ṣalah al-Dīn’s death, of Muwaffaq al-Dīn Abū Sa‘īd Ya‘qūb (d. 625/1228) by al-Nāṣir Dāwūd (r. 1227–9 CE in Damascus; 1229–49 CE at Karak) after the death of his father al-Mu‘azzam and of Sa‘d al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Sulamī (d.644/1246) by al-Kāmil after the death of his brother al-Ashraf. See ibid. 672f, 699.
23 See ibid. 673.
24 See, for instance, ibid. 689.
25 See ibid. 585.
26 See ibid. 637, 673, 696, 700.
27 See ibid. 673.
28 See ibid. 583, 599–602, 630, 638, 647, 651, 658f, 703, 717, 750 et passim.
29 See ibid. 630, 635.
30 See ibid. 592.
31 See ibid. 730.
32 See ibid. 731.
33 See ibid. 628.
34 See ibid. 731.
35 See ibid. 706.
36 See ibid. 697, 706.
37 See ibid. 731f, 737, 739.
38 See ibid. 738f.
39 See ibid. 673, 697, 706, 729.
40 Ibid. 729.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 See ibid. 652.
44 See ibid.
45 See ibid. 652f.
46 See ibid. 653–5.
Ibid. 703. Also, see ibid. 590.

48 See ibid. 655.
49 See ibid. 729.
50 See ibid. 635, 663, 739.
51 See ibid. 737.
52 See ibid. 585f, 700.
53 See ibid. 656.
54 See ibid. pp. 630, 700.
55 See ibid. 698.
56 See ibid. 590.
57 See ibid. 588.
58 See ibid. 589–91.
59 See ibid. 652.
60 See ibid. 741.
61 Ibid.
62 See ibid. 738 et passim.
63 See ibid. 698.
64 See ibid. 699.
65 See ibid. 738.
66 See ibid. 740.
67 See ibid. 722.
68 See ibid. 663.
69 See ibid. 698f.
70 Ibid. 729.
71 Ibid. 698.
72 See ibid. 589.
73 See ibid. 736–8.
74 For instance see ibid. 707.
75 See ibid. 589.
76 See ibid.
77 See ibid. 590. Ibn al-Zafrān was a former ruler of al-Ruha who had been disposed by the Ayyubids.
78 See ibid. 589.
79 See ibid.
80 Ibid. 581.
81 Ibid.
82 See ibid. 657.
83 Ibid. 65
84 Ibid. 654.
85 See ibid. 662.
86 See ibid. 737.
87 Ibid.
88 See ibid. 739.
89 See ibid. 688.
90 See ibid. 591, 638.
91 Ibid. 591.
92 Ibid.
93 See ibid.
94 Ibid. 652.
95 See ibid. 661, 670.
96 See ibid. 659.
97 See ibid. 661.
98 See ibid. 637.
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99 He learned arithmetic from Abū 'l-Taqī Śāliḥ ibn Ahmad al-Maqdisi, astrology from Abū Muhammad ibn al-Ja'dī, the son of a Fatimid amīr who had served the Fatimid caliphs and was considered one of their khāwāṣṣ, mathematical cosmography from ‘Alam al-Dīn Qaysar ibn Abī 'l-Qāsim (d. 649/1251), “the leading scholar of the mathematical sciences in his time” (Ibid. 736) in the Ayyubid realm and music from practitioners as well as writers about the field according to Arab and Persian teachings. See ibid. 736f, 740.

100 See ibid. 740.
101 See ibid. 733.
102 See ibid. 698.
103 See ibid. 659.
104 See ibid. 704.
106 Ibn al-'Irāqī (1958), 280.

109 Despite the fact that Sharaf al-Dīn Ṭūsī spent some time in Damascus and was acknowledged by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a as the leading exponent of the mathematical sciences and a major figure in the philosophical disciplines, he did not devote an entry to him. The same applies to Mu‘ayyad al-Dīn al-‘Urḍī and Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn Abī Shukr al-Maghribī, both leading scholars of the mathematical sciences of their time and clients of Ayyubid princes, the former at least having been known and appreciated by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a (1965), 768.

110 He is, for instance, conspicuously silent about Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī’s loss of position and its causes.

111 See ibid. 586.
112 See ibid. 649, 729.
113 See ibid., 583, 737.
114 See ibid. 600.
115 Sabra (1987), 236f.
117 See ibid. 718, 721, 751.
118 Ibid. 745 (al-hikma al-iqtiadā’ bi ‘llāh ta‘ālā).
119 See ibid. 683, 649, 768.
120 See ibid. 646.
121 See ibid.
122 See ibid. 662.
123 See ibid. 683, 699.
124 See ibid. 668.
125 See ibid. 725.
126 See ibid. 733.
127 See ibid. 648.
128 See ibid. 650.
129 See ibid. 767.
130 See ibid. 737.
131 See ibid.
132 See ibid. 688.
133 For an earlier version presenting a number of stories told by different authors see Brentjes (1997).

134 See for instance, Goldziher (1915), 393f; Sourdel (1986), 434; Chamberlain (1995), 83f.
136 See ibid. V:40.
137 Ibid. V:36.
Bibliography


Literature
18 Royal dishes

On the historical and literary anthropology of the Near and Middle East¹

Stefan Leder

Comparable to Schloss Friedenstein in Gotha, one of the pearls of the former Saxony dukedoms, royal and governmental courts in the capitals and provinces of the Middle East served—and continue to do so in some parts of the region—as political and administrative centres, and as residences of the rulers’ households. This rendered courts instrumental for the accommodation of various functions and, just as importantly for representative purposes, demonstrated the distinct and extraordinary character of the location, of its residents and its atmosphere.

Both aspects, the political and the representative, are closely intertwined. Authority in general and political power in particular obviously needs more than an executive apparatus in order to endure; the foundations, organization and strength of power need to be conveyed. Visual symbolic representation and ceremonial arrangements are used to present an image of the conceptual frameworks that legitimate and buttress claims to political power. This holds true generally and beyond the confines and boundaries drawn by language, religion or regional context. The equation of splendour with power in palace descriptions found in Persian poetry, for instance, may reflect how the conspicuous exposure of wealth and treasure turned the palace into a trophy.²

Of course, for the Middle East and Central Asia, Islamic doctrines of government as well as wisdom literature of mostly Greek and Indo-Iranian origin and advice literature, were bound together in a multifaceted discourse which flourished in the mirror for princes genre especially from the eighth to the seventeenth centuries CE, and had an impact on the concepts, morals and social strategies of political power. When referring to the foundations of statehood and political power, it is also important to consider the long-lasting impact of the precarious and fluctuating alliance—and antagonism—between religious and political authority, as both alliances and antagonisms between these spheres were incumbent in different political systems throughout this period.

However, court cultures in themselves are highly complex organisms, creating specific expressions of their inner constitution by various means, such as, for example, architecture, which expresses itself in splendid palaces as well as in tents.³ Particular institutions and offices, such as the notorious doorkeepers, who were in fact omnipresent chamberlains, helped to create and maintain controlled and standardized relations among the courtiers as well as with their peers and the
commoners of the outside world. Also, boon companions, poets and court scholars belonging to the entourage of rulers constituted a more or less institutionalized, conspicuously continuous and marked presence throughout the period. Prominent representatives of this rank have been portrayed in Arabic belles-lettres and contributed to literature themselves. The simple remains of their provincial relatives may still be seen in the early twelfth century fortress of the Āl Saʿūd in Riyadh where rooms were reserved for guards and companions who were at the disposal of the Emir day and night. In summary, we may say that the organization of time, the creation of spatial structures, the semiotics of dress and body postures as well as the semantics of formulaic speech can all be considered manifestations of the court and as agencies producing the image of the court.

The last aspect is particularly manifest in the chancellery, where decrees were issued and diplomatic correspondence was composed, as it demonstrates the importance given to literary expression, ornate style and calligraphy representing eminence and grandeur. Most illustrious stylists and outstanding intellectuals were employed in this office, such as Ibn al-Khaṭīb, whose honorific title was the “Tongue of Religion” (lisān al-dīn). Famous poet and litterateur of Andalusia, he was employed at the Nasrid court of Granada, where he was also put to death in 776/1375 at the outcome of a political trial accusing him of heresy. Abū ʿl-Faḍl al-Bayhaqī (d. 470/1077), a historian writing in Persian in the eleventh century, started his career as an assistant secretary to the Ghaznavid Sultan Maḥmūd at Ghazna (r. 388–421/998–1030) and ended it as a prisoner during the political turmoil accompanying the advent of a new power, the Saljuq Turks. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), the most prominent author of the Arab west, began his career as state-secretary, diplomat and scholar as a scribe in the chancery at Tunis, copying formulaic eulogies on the ruler’s decrees and thus certifying the authenticity of the documents.

There are various possible approaches to the description and evaluation of court culture. Whether the comprehensive scheme suggested by Norbert Elias in his “civilizing process” would be of any help in the current context has yet to be examined, as far as I know. Elias’ concept suggests the gradual rise of self-control fostered by the establishment of a monopoly of power, which triggers the transformation of social constraint into an internalized self-constraint. This inspiring vision, however, seems to be of a rather Freudian inspiration, and it might therefore be problematic or not suitable at all for generalization. Instead, the contribution of cultural studies, which incorporates the symbolic and imaginary aspects of courts and court organization, may be more expedient in this context. However, this is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Studying the Arab nomad, or Bedouin, as he is depicted in literary testiments, means to discuss images of simplicity, naturalness and pride, in contrast to the elegance and refinement prevailing in court life. This can contribute to the subject matter, first methodologically, but later, substantively. The Bedouin constitutes a widespread mental representation of long-lasting presence, which includes the mechanisms of othering and produces the most inert component of Arab self-defining concepts. The chorus, which integrated the Bedouin’s voice, created, from late antiquity on, an anthropology avant la lettre, offering a portrayal of man

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on the basis of both empirical data as well as imaginative interpretation, which includes all sorts of social contexts and spheres of activity.

The considerations and perspectives arising from the notion of an histoire de l’homme total offers an inspiration, which I tend to see as a possible enrichment in the framework of studying court cultures. The approaches offered by historical anthropology, as they were spelled out by Harald Neumeyer and Jakob Tanner, for instance, may not necessarily be applicable to every issue concerned and may not be appropriate for understanding all aspects of court organization. However, they are helpful insofar as they foster an understanding of the contexts into which the intentional arrangements of court life are inscribed. The rulers’ ostentatious hospitality, for instance, as it was displayed during seasonal festivities of life-cycle feasts addressed man’s pleasure in luxurious food consumption as a sensual and emotional experience, and the careful arrangement of magnificent dishes also asserted the host’s disposal of unlimited resources as a demonstration of supremacy and hierarchy. Quite similarly, public performances of extreme violence—torturing the rulers’ victims to death—offered sensational scenarios connecting the experience of awe and, possibly, lust with the manifestation of power structures and public order. Physical manifestations of court life make use of symbolic representation, of course, and the imagery which courts produce refer to and interact with the imagination of the audience. Courts in literature provide imagined stages enabling a critical evaluation of glamour, rule and rulers, such as the description of the court of Aleppo by the poet al-Ma’arrī (d. 973/1058). Nearly any depiction of the court in literary discourse is necessarily coloured by interpretations that contribute to the construction of the court as a representation of social relations and the rules and devices of sovereignty. However, this does not represent impairment, but rather enrichment. “The literary medium”, says Emily Growers in her Loaded Table, a study on representations of food in Roman literature, “need not be seen as an obstruction; indeed the kind of evasions and prejudices that seem to cloud it can be illuminating in themselves”.

A treatise from the eleventh century may illustrate the close interrelation of description and interpretation, of reference to realities and the constructions that make it significant. Hilāl al-Ṣābi’ (d. 448/1056), from an old family of scholars and secretaries, a convert to Islam from the Sabean creed, head of the chancery of Fakhr al-Mulk Abū Ghālib (executed 407/1016) and vizier to the Buyid ruler Abū Naṣr Bahl al-Dawla of Baghdad (r. 379–403/989–1012), left a book on the Rules and Regulations of the Abbasid Court, describing ceremonies, offices and customs of, mostly, the caliph’s court. The author, who probably wrote this book at a period when, after the dismissal of his patron, he lived as a freelance scholar, intended to magnify the caliphs’ splendour at a time of their decline. Many issues occupied his mind, and particularly the intricate relations between courtly advisers and rulers. His perceptiveness in such matters extended to ceremonial aspects of the court that he connected to changing political attitudes.

In the past it was the practice of the caliph to sometimes offer his hand, covered with his sleeve, . . . to a governor or minister to kiss. . . . The practice
has now been replaced by kissing the ground. . . . In the past the crown princes from among the sons of the caliph, . . . the judges, jurists, ascetics and readers of the Qurʾān kissed neither the hand, nor the ground. . . . Now, however, they [also] have joined the others in kissing the ground.8

Al-Ṣābiʿ’s remark demonstrates an awareness of the arbitrary character of the ceremonial gestures of submissiveness. Referring to the ancient Arab tradition of emphasizing political equality, and to the reservations and resistance of religious scholars to acknowledging the supremacy of worldly rule, he gives proof of the existence of different policies of comportment at court. When he describes the arrangements applied on the occasion of general audiences held by the caliph, he makes it quite clear that all those measures that create distance, produce order, centralize visual perspectives and display the instruments of enforcement, are means to demonstrate “the dignity of the audience and to make it awe-inspiring”.9

In the golden days of the Abbasids, magnificent festivities were frequent, and their splendour was described by many authors with relish. Descriptions of the fabulous wedding party of the caliph al-Maʿmūn to Būrān, daughter of his former minister, held in southern Iraq in the year 825 CE, focus on the amount of precious gifts and the hospitality extended even to the common people.10 This extraordinary, fairy-tale event may represent the image of inexhaustible affluence and interminable generosity. The occasions punctuating the life cycle of the royals, thus unconnected to the seasonal and religious calendar, point to the exemplariness of the ruler’s person, whose individual life stands for, and in celebrations, extends to the entire society.

Courtly hospitality also aimed at the cultivation of refinement. Literature enables us to witness how the caliph al-Mustakfī (d. 338/949), after having been blinded by the Buyid leader Muʿizz al-Dawla (r. 334–56/945–67), invited his companions to recite famous poems including verses regarding the most unusual dishes, and then ordered them to be served.11 This kind of exercise was not entirely new. His father al-Muktafī (r. 289–95/902–8), famous for his avarice, once attended the meal of his guests where qaṭṭāʿif, a well-known sweet dish, which was particularly delicious, was served. It was a leftover from what had been served to the caliph before. When al-Muktafī asked whether any poet had ever described such a delicacy, one of his guests recited verses in which the pleasure of eating this dish was wittily compared with the pleasure of exercising absolute power. While stressing the supremacy of the royal food, the verses also comment ironically on the caliph’s lack of generosity.

Qaṭṭāʿif stuffed tightly as bananas/With almonds and powdered sugar, // swim on seas of walnut oil./My pleasure when I possess them // May be compared with the joy/of ‘Abbās upon becoming caliph.12

Another of the literati present reminded the caliph of a verse saying: “And upon that qaṭṭāʿif were brought, which were fine (laṭṭāʿif)!”13 The caliph, however, did not pay heed to the polite proposition of extending his hospitality. Instead he gave
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preference to the literary representation of food. Replying that such a beginning—
of recitation—would require continuation, his guest felt obliged to present an
entire poetic description of luscious dishes.14

It goes without saying that alcoholic drinks were treated the same way among
friends and litterateurs. A quite different type of banquet was held on the occasion
of a religious festival and was known as “simāṭ”, which is the ceremonial cloth or
table upon which food was served and which was described in particularly great
detail during the Mamluk period of Egypt.15 However, this manner of serving a
large number of people, often including officers and regular troops, was familiar
from the Abbasid period in Baghdad.16

Descriptions of festive hosted events on the occasion of the fitr, or end-of-
Ramaḍān feast, and the festival of sacrifice in the month of the pilgrimage were
particularly abundant in Egypt since the Fatimid period. We are informed of the
considerable luxury displayed for particular guests who were served at silver
tables loaded with gold and silver plates, which in turn were filled with food
“which modesty forbids to enumerate”.17 Another Ramaḍān feast is described as
serving:

twenty one immense basins containing twenty one roasted lambs, hundreds
of broilers, chickens and pigeons, garnished with all sorts of sweet dishes.
Between those huge basins earthen plates were put, each containing nine
roast chicken breaded in colours harmonizing with the sweets as well as
with the fried meat spiced with musk. They had arranged five hundred
eating plates in perfect order and brought in two fancy cakes shaped as
palaces, each weighing seventeen qantar [which would amount to about 500
kilogram]. . . 18

Various details in this description, referring to the year 973 ce deserve more atten-
tion than can be paid to them here including the arrangement of food on precious
dinner sets, its luxuriousness and abundance of rare varieties, the refinement of
preparation, and the degree of generosity displayed by distributing food to the
wider public. In summary, the disposal of resources and their redistribution in the
form of hospitality, the refinement displayed in the preparation and presentation
of exclusive dishes and the combination of culinary with literary taste, are recur-
ing elements constituting the necessary ingredients of a banquet.

Food and dishes are addressed throughout the ages in cookery books, often written
by men of letters. Moreover, they are mentioned, to use just the Arabic tradition, in
medical books dealing with diets, in books on market regulation, in Islamic law, and,
as we have seen, in belles-lettres and historiography. The studies of Peter Heine,
Manuela Marin and David Waines, and others, provide much insight into this matter,19
and Geert Jan von Gelder’s study provides a detailed survey on literary interests in
culinary issues.20 I will therefore turn my attention away from the ingredients, recipes
and adornments to food as a semantic field of contested concepts.

Food, good food in particular, is an experience implying sensual pleasures—
and not only in this sense is it a close relative of sexual enjoyment as many
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authors, also in pre-modern Arabic literature, have observed, but it also stimulates the imagination. It lives as much through verbalization as through the art of cooking. Words cannot replace food, but the pleasure of listening to food-talk can, of course, compete with the pleasures of eating. Long before modern anthropology rediscovered the two human spheres of the raw and the cooked, food had been a theme frequently referred to and linked to different conceptualizations about what man is and what he should be. This may be illustrated with the words attributed to Khālid ibn Ṣafwān, the legendary orator of the eighth century CE:

When he came to the [governor of Iraq], Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab, the latter was having his lunch. When Yazīd asked Khālid to join him, he answered: “May God bless the Emir! I have once eaten a meal I shall never forget!” “What did you eat then?” asked Yazīd, and Khālid answered: “I came to my estate at the time when palms were planted and fields were sown. I walked around until the sun was at its hottest . . . [and then] went to a cool room of mine in the garden. Its gates were wide open, and it had been sprinkled with water and paved with fresh flowers: sweet basils, perfume scented jasmines, blossoming daisies and fresh roses. Then I was brought rice bread which was just like carnelian, ḥunéf fish, which have a wide stomach, blue eyes, black sides, a wide belly, and a thick neck. Thereto I had some seeds and different sorts of vinegar . . . and legumes. Then I was brought fresh, yellow dates, perfect with no blemishes . . . Then I leaned back eating now from this, now from that.” Yazīd said: “Ibn Ṣafwān, a measure of your words is better than a thousand measures of corn!”

Talking about such an idyllic garden scene serves a practical purpose here: it is a delicate issue to turn down an invitation, but the reference to a “fulfilling” memory is rather elegant and efficient as well. First, it asserts the supremacy of the mind over the belly—a statement no educated man can easily contradict. And second, it offers a gift in the form of a fine piece of oratory art. It is demonstrated in practice in front of the governor that talking of food may be more valuable than food itself; but the supremacy of thought over food is also manifest in the speech, when imagination is used to adorn food, and bread is compared to fish. This seems to imply that literary taste is more entitled to carry the crown of refinement, and that it is more rewarding than food. More generally, man is defined here by his ability to think symbolically, and he is also presented in his capacity of conceptualizing. The speech also offers, in a disguised and contradictory form, a praise of the simple and natural.

Food, its preparation and consumption, indeed constitute a field in which several concepts meet, where social distinctions become evident and cultural divides are manifest. In his Cooking, Cuisine and Class, Jack Goody interprets the story of a war between King Mutton and King Honey, which is described in a text from the fifteenth century CE Mamluk period first studied by J. Finkel. He recognizes that in this story the two kingdoms of food correspond to different social
classes. “Meat is the food of the rich, the rest the food for the poor. . . . Eurasian society is marked by a hierarchical cuisine whose literary forms express the tension between the styles of life of rich and poor.”

It could be possible to pursue this perspective, although it might not lead to very distinct boundaries between the two domains. However, I want to add two further divides pertinent to social and literary treatment of food in the Arab Middle East. They are rather conceptual in character but clearly belong to the system of norms, values and practices connected to food and food consumption at courts and elsewhere: first of all, the image of heroic endurance of destitution and hunger, which stands in contrast to the refinement built upon abundance. The second concerns the religiously motivated visions of the righteous and permissible that, as a result, lead to the censure of court habits.

Hunger is, like food consumption, embedded in a context of practice and meaning. In Arab tradition, the paragon representing resistance against harsh conditions, including the lack of food and all kinds of material insecurity, is the nomad or nomad-like free man of the steppes. Hunger figures among the many aspects of this ethos, depicted in ancient poetry and in less ancient stories. Hunger appears as a heroic alternative to the generosity of wealthy people. Among rural people, hunger may be exercised voluntarily in order to feed others and thus might be an accompaniment to the obligation of securing honour and pride through hospitality. Parallel to the cultivation of refinement where food may inspire words, enhancing its value and even replacing it, hunger may transform the hero’s flesh into words, whereby words may surpass the effects of food. The story of the first/seventh century poet Abū Khirāsh illustrates this case of the hero as a counter weight to lavish ceremonial food consumption.

Hungry, he is invited by a lady who does not have much for herself, so he resists.

His stomach rumbled, so he struck it with his hand, saying: “You rumble because of the smell of food. But, by god, I shall not feed you any of it”. Then he said: “Madam, haven’t you got anything bitter?” “What will you do with it?” asked the woman. “I want it”, he said. She brought him some which he devoured. Then he rushed to his camel and mounted it. The woman implored him, but he refused . . . and went away saying:

“I bury hunger away until it is bored with me, then
I live while neither my clothes nor my body is soiled.
In the morning I drink pure water and I have enough,
While weaklings find the food tasty.
I restrain the fierce snake of my belly, you know that; I
Would rather that others, like your children, would eat.”

Religious reservations concerning the comportment of worldly rulers was widespread and, for a certain period, quite openly directed against the ruler’s claim to superior authority. The political and social dimension of that conflict is not addressed here. A main argument used in the course of that struggle concerned the
legal status of food matters and proper comportment when sharing food. The theologian al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) wrote a compendium on Islamic belief and ethics, stressing the questionable character of governmental possessions whenever they were not based on revenues sanctioned by Islamic law. In his famous work he condemns any kind of splendour or waste when food is offered to guests, and is critical of any kind of pretension. The author’s work led to a critical reassessment of all agencies of political rule in his time and perpetuated the traditional dispute between religious and political authority.24

Both counter-images mentioned here, heroic self-denial and religious righteousness, do not necessarily stand out in contrast to courtly practices. Military campaigns implied more or less discomfort, as well as exposure to dangers and the vicissitudes of nature. This meant that more frugal lifestyles might be required even for princes and kings. Restrictions, brought about by circumstance, are one thing, a conceptual framework which integrates the rulers’ comportment into a comprehensive structure stressing heroic and religious values is another. Such a conceptual framework is the jihād ideal, which emerged anew during the Crusader period in the Near East. Various agencies, religious scholarship, court officials and authors of belles-lettres participated in the promotion of this concept. The appearance of the sultan’s power centre in both of its aspects, in practice and representation, was fashioned in a way that put the court in the service of this ideal.

Perhaps the most exemplary figure of that ideal was Şalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Ayyūb or Saladin, the founder of Ayyubid rule, champion of Ḥaṭṭīn and re-conqueror of Jerusalem. Saladin’s image was to a very large degree the result of a political document whose author, Ibn Shaddād (d. 632/1234), was an important voice in the propaganda of jihād, and, after having been Saladin’s close companion for more than six years until the Sultan’s death in 589/1193, he wrote retrospectively in order to present the biography as a glorious monument of an ideal ruler representing an exemplary dedication to jihād which had vanished in the time when the work was written under the influence of continuous conflicts among Ayyubid princes.25

Accordingly Saladin’s dedication to the defence of Muslim territories, his courage and personal involvement are depicted as a commitment to jihād. The author relates that he spent nights talking to the Sultan in his tent when the latter felt grief and despair during military campaigns, regularly shared meals and ritual prayers alone with the Sultan, was consulted by him in judicial matters, and, during endless days of regular duty, witnessed his way of dealing with people, military officers, relatives, petitioners, prisoners, Frankish princes and so forth. This personal relationship functions as a continuously reappearing narrative focal point creating an atmosphere of intimacy that the reader shares. The resulting personalization of the character, based upon the personalization of the narrator, has in fact no parallel in earlier texts. This focus is consistent with the message, as Saladin’s emotional and spiritual dimensions are always exposed in relation to the dedication to his cause and his honest and profound piety. Ibn Shaddād’s depiction of heroic fulfilment of the predicaments of jihād refers, in accordance with
Islamic tradition, to a combination of the militant defence of Islamic territories and the struggle for inner accomplishment. Saladin gives much evidence of his patience in the face of fate, as for example, the loss of relatives, personal courage in war, self-restraint, exaggerated generosity—giving away literally all he owned—and almost brotherly conviviality that is especially demonstrated by sharing his meals. Repeatedly the author mentions invitations issued during campaigns in his tent, or to one of his rather simple residences; the Sultan’s habit of inviting everybody present to share his daily meals; his care never to eat, as long as any hungry person in the vicinity might be excluded; his particular care to feed emissaries of the Franks; his attention and respect for ceremonial meals offered by his allies; the use of banquets in order to consult his allied princes and advisors; his great delight in consuming simple and natural food and his respect for the rules of hospitality, which forbade any harm to anybody who received food or drink. In sum, this image subordinates courtly ceremonial under the rather pragmatic perspectives determined by jihād as a supreme obligation. This restrictive and in many ways simplifying ideal thus is able to stress the values of good governance, articulated in the terms of service and obligation, and to fashion a court design centred upon the appearance of simplicity that alluded to the notion of political equality. The image conveyed by the author is of an idealistic ruler and his court; what Saladin actually did in reality is far less important.

We have seen food and food consumption in various contexts here, as part of court culture and also outside of it. It might have become obvious that dishes, as well as the way they are prepared, presented and referred to, are part of the constructive process in which people link practice to meaning. The general interrelation of food and cuisine with other concepts, such as literature, plays a role in court culture, and must be read in a wider context of conceptual frameworks.

**Notes**

1 Opening lecture, Gotha, 2 July 2007. The text has only slightly been amended and references have been added.
3 See Andrews (1999).
4 The fortress in question is Qaṣr al-Maṣmak. Compare Albini (1’419/1998), 43f.
5 See Neumeyer (2003); Tanner (2004).
7 Growers (1996), 2.
8 al-Šābī’ (1977), 29.
9 Ibid. 64.
11 See van Gelder (2002), 59f.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid. §3388.
17 al-Qalaqashandī (1357/1938), 523–5.
18 Ibn Taghrībirdī (1963), V:96f.
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22 Goody (1983), 133.
24 See al-Ghazâlî (1922); on the manners relating to eating see idem (2000), book XI.

Bibliography

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19 The Guidance for Kingdoms

Function of a “mirror for princes” at court and its representation of a court

Syrinx von Hees

Political advice literature is regarded as forming an integral part of court culture in the Muslim world. This genre—which is often referred to as “mirrors for princes”—was certainly widespread in Arab and Persian Islamic cultures. Over the centuries many such counselling works were composed anew. In most cases these texts were written for one particular ruler. Since advice literature addresses the sovereign directly, these works are deliberately placed in close proximity with the ruler. In this sense, political advice literature has a clear role in courtly life.

Within court culture several functions for advice literature can be discerned. The most important function, of course, was to advise the sovereign on political matters. In this context it is interesting to explore how advice was given and how the rulers used these texts. Did they really read them? And if so, at what point and how often? Did princes deal with such a text on their own or did they discuss the advice with someone else? If the latter proves to be the case we might ask with whom they did so—maybe even with the author himself? How far did the advice given in the text play any role in a real political situation or have an impact on the daily actions of a monarch?

Another function of advice literature was its use in establishing a patronage relationship between the author and the sovereign. This, of course, was not the case when a father was writing for his son, which characterizes some of the genre’s works. In the first part of this chapter I will discuss the questions raised above on the function of political advice literature at court. I will use as an example the book The Guidance for Kingdoms written in the fourteenth century CE in Arabic by the well-known man of letters Ibn Nubāṭa al-Miṣrī for the last Ayyubid king reigning at Ḥamāh.

It is well known that a large amount of political advice literature was written in Arabic and Persian. This literary genre has provoked the interest of many scholars. Most of them have raised the following question: Which political theories formed the basis of these counselling texts? Scholars have thus demonstrated a keen interest in understanding the influence of pre-Islamic Persian as well as Greek political thought. They have pointed out the dominant presence of Iranian hierarchical models of rule that can be seen in texts written by Muslims. Following this observation, the main focus within the research conducted on political advice literature has been to analyze the position that Muslim authors allocate to
the Islamic religion in this context. One of the main issues is the way in which sovereigns and their politics were legitimized in these works. To demonstrate this, some scholars have carefully examined not only the models of rule, but also the models of society as they are presented by different authors. The legitimization of rule is without doubt another key function of this literary genre. However, these issues will not be discussed in this chapter.

The second part of this chapter will address the model of a court, which is presented in *The Guidance for Kingdoms*. At this point a terminological issue arises: what do we actually mean by the term “court”? The problem becomes even more obvious when we are looking for an Arabic equivalent. In modern texts the European concept of court is translated as *balāṭ*, a term that literally means paved ground, tiled floor or flagstone, and this is how it was mainly used in pre-modern Arabic texts. The term court, as it is used in many European languages, indicates in its original meaning a place. In a figurative sense it is also used to describe the society that is connected with this space. Hence court denotes the seat of the ruler, his residence, as well as the society that surrounds him.

Due to this problematic, the second part of this chapter will address the issue of what terms are actually used in late medieval Arabic works in order to speak about the ruler’s court as a place. In addition, I will analyze the personal networks that surround the king as they are depicted in this text.

**Function at court**

The particular fourteenth century Arabic mirror for princes, which is the focus of this study, will be discussed first with regards to its function at court. Existing research on advice literature does not seem to have been aware of this text, which was only recently edited and published with a good introduction. However, a major part of the text is missing in this edition. For this reason I refer to an older version of the manuscript in my possession. This manuscript bears the title *Kitāb sulūk duwal al-mulūk*, which can be translated as *The Guidance for Kingdoms*. The subtitle informs us that this work is: “A selection [ikhtiyār] by Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Nubāṭa al-Miṣrī.”

The author of the mirror for princes under discussion was one of the most distinguished men of letters in the Mamluk period. He was born in Cairo in 686/1287, where he studied ḥadīth and started writing poetry at a young age. In 716/1316, at the age of 30, he left Cairo for Damascus in order to make his first work known to the Damascene circle of literati working in the chancellery. This work was a thematically arranged literary anthology (*maṭla‘ al-fawā‘id*), described by Thomas Bauer as defining the importance of an ṣadīb in his society. In his work Ibn Nubāṭa shows his mastery of prose and verse and his thorough knowledge of language and literature. He dedicated this anthology to the ruler of Ḥamāh, Abū ‘l-Fidā’ ‘Imād al-Dīn.

Abū ‘l-Fidā’ is known today mainly as a historian and geographer. He was born in 672/1273 as a late descendant of the Ayyubid family and in his youth participated in the last campaigns against the crusades. The principality of Ḥamāh was
ruler, above others: the faculty of desire (\textit{ghadab}) and speech (\textit{nutq}). He stresses the importance of these categories in society to these faculties. He continues that God raised some humans above others: first the prophets, then the kings, whose duty it is “to construct the world and secure law and order.” At this point he introduces his one and only Qur’\text{\'a}nic quotation: “When he raised up prophets among you, and made you
kings.” Ibn Nubāta presents, in a very concise manner, the most standard Muslim argument for legitimizing the ruler.

The following chapters deal with the way the king should conduct his life (fi siyāsat al-malik nafsahīn), with the guidance of his family and relatives (fi siyāsatīh li-ahlīh wa-dhawī qirābatīhī) and how he should guide his elite (fi siyāsat al-malik khāṣṣatahī) and his commoners (fi siyāsat al-malik li-‘ammatīhī). The sixth and last chapter of the book is dedicated to warfare (fi siyāsat al-hurūb).

In the text Ibn Nubāta gives very concise and general pieces of advice on how the ideal ruler should behave. He refers to the ideal sovereign as al-malik al-hāzīm, which can be translated using a variety of adjectives such as determined, resolute, vigorous, firm, strong, clever, witty, intelligent, wise, sound or prudent. In this chapter I have adopted the translation, “the clever king.” To give one example, in the second chapter Ibn Nubāta advises the king on how he should protect himself: “The clever king does not use the same road again when riding and travelling.” These short instructions are followed by stories that explain and illustrate the brief lines of advice. These exemplary stories have been collected from the biographies of historical personalities. The protagonists in Ibn Nubāta’s stories are mainly figures from Umayyad, Abbasid, Buyid, Fatimid and Ayyubid history, with Mu‘awiya, Hārūn al-Rashīd and Śalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūb referred to the most, as well as local rulers from the Fertile Crescent. He also includes Byzantine, Frankish and Christian-Andalusian rulers, who occasionally make the right decisions and are presented as good examples.

Apart from the one passage above, Ibn Nubāta does not cite any hadīth, or verses from the Qur‘ān. The prophet and his companions as well as biblical figures are never used as good examples to follow. Persian kings, be it from pre-Islamic or Islamic times, are absent as well. He does not cite any wise sayings and keeps his use of poems to a minimum.

Regarding the question of how al-Malik al-Afḍal actually used this text, there is no definitive answer. We can only speculate that he probably simply ignored the book altogether. However, Ibn Nubāta’s text gives clear indications on how he envisaged the “correct” usage of such counselling works.

In the second chapter, which deals with the king’s self-control, Ibn Nubāta explains that the excellence of a person is apparent from how much reason, courage and virtue he possesses. In order to sharpen his reason, the author continues, the clever king first “associates himself with intelligent people and such that possess life experience and wisdom” and second “reads the biographies of kings and books on politics [siyar al-mulūk wa-kutub al-siyāsa].” Thus Ibn Nubāta recommends that the ruler should actually read his political advice literature, which is filled with biographical anecdotes of bygone rulers. However, it seems that he considered a simple reading of the book as insufficient. Instead he clearly encourages active examination and use of the lessons offered by the counselling work: clever kings “reflect on the opinions that are presented to them and they correct their own characters through them until they are refined and improved.”

In order to illustrate “how the king should spend his day and night,” Ibn Nubāta narrates a story about Mu‘awiya. The first Umayyad caliph Mu‘awiya I (r. 661–80 CE) is regarded in the Arabic tradition as a wise and mild sovereign, who
was clever in attending to the interests of his allies, excelling in his fairness and self control.27 In the anecdote offered by Ibn Nubāta it is said: “When night arrived, he passed one third of the night in pleasant conversation and listened to poetry and stories of the Arab heroes [akhbār al-‘arab].”28 According to Ibn Nubāta the latter are useful to stimulate the ruler’s courage: “Then he slept for one third of the night, and then got up again, sat down and the lives and stories of the kings [siyār al-mulūk wa-akhbārihā] and the politics of the Persians [siyāsāt al-‘ajam] were read to him.”29 This exemplifying story points out that Ibn Nubāta suggests that a ruler should ideally occupy himself on a daily—or more precisely on a nightly—basis with political advice literature that deals with the life of previous kings in an exemplary way. In the example given, Mu‘āwiya does not read such stories to himself, but they are read to him. Bearing that in mind it is easy to imagine a conversation between the ruler and the narrator about what has been read.

In the context of the mirror for princes such an exemplary story serves to illustrate the general advice. In this way the historical event is placed within an abstract space and needs to be interpreted. The monarch, who is reading these stories or is listening to them and is discussing them, will in most cases not be able or willing to follow precisely the conduct of the former kings. The stories leave broad room for interpretation. The same holds true for the general, abstract instructions for action, that is, how the ideal ruler should behave. They also need to be interpreted by the recipient in order to be transferred into concrete action. Hence such political advice literature could not be consulted as a governmental manual. It does not offer any concrete instruction for specific situations.30 The king who received Ibn Nubāta’s book as a present could have read it as intellectual training, but would have needed to draw his own lessons from it.

In one of the short narratives it becomes evident that in the ideal case one would possess these lessons. Everyone, not only the ruler in this case, should have internalized the moral from these anecdotes. Sayf al-Dawla (d. 316/967), the founder of the Hamdanid Emirate of Aleppo, is said to have provoked his assembly by asking for a very harsh punishment for someone. However, as no one dared to contradict, he admonished his court ushers: you behave in such a miserable way “as if you had never in your life met a human being and never heard the narratives of the kings [akhbār al-mulūk].”31

Presentation of a court

In search of Arabic terms designating a courtly space

As already mentioned, in this second part I will discuss the ways in which a “court” is presented in Ibn Nubāta’s mirror for princes. First, I will examine the way Ibn Nubāta speaks in his text about the court of the ruler. “Court” in the English language, as well as in other European languages, refers first of all to a place. It designates an open space around which several buildings can be grouped. In connection with a monarch such an architectural complex is the very seat of the sovereign or in other words, his residence. On the basis of architectural monuments
we know that a ruler like al-Malik al-Aḍal lived and governed in a building containing a court, possibly in a building complex with several courts.

However, in the general advice that Ibn Nubata introduces with “the clever king does this-and-that,” we do not come across any reference to such a courtly space. There is not one instruction with regard to how the ruler should build his palace or how he should locate his buildings around it. There is no advice on how he should use the space at his disposal, for instance for a possible court protocol, for a ceremony, a banquet or a council meeting. That is to say, the text remains silent about the court as a space.

In the illustrative anecdotes the court as a space is not a prominent theme either. However, one can find certain terms referring to a space that can be connected to the ruler’s court. As for example, one of the anecdotes states that the ruler of Khilāṭ, a town situated on the north-west shore of Lake Van, is seated (jālis) when a man comes to his door (bāb) offering ten cucumbers. In another story the ruler of al-Andalus regrets that he has cursed his jurists: “They had just arrived at the door of the palace [bāb al-qasr], when they were called to come back and the chamberlains [hujjāb] received them with grandeur and honour and elevated their seating places [majālis].”

One anecdote narrates how Kaftār (d. 357/968), the black eunuch who grasped power in Egypt, went for a ride with a Sharīf and when they arrived at the door of his house (bāb dārīhī), the Sharīf said farewell. In one story a curtain (sitr) is rolled down in order to create a private space for the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705 CE) and someone who requested to speak to him privately. Another anecdote mentions that it was a custom for the Byzantine ruler to sit on his throne (sarīr) behind a small door (bāb), so that any envoy to the monarch had to enter on his knees with his hands on the floor, a posture reminding the Muslim envoy of prayer.

In these few stories that I have mentioned, the sovereign is shown as separated spatially from his surroundings. However, the narratives do not depict the space of the ruler’s seat, but rather take it for granted. What the anecdotes discuss, on the contrary, is the door (bāb) that marks the border offering controlled access to the ruler. It appears to be of lesser importance what exactly one finds behind the door—be it a house, a tent or a luxurious palace. Of crucial importance however is the spatially controlled access to the ruler and his clearly defined separation from his surroundings.

There is one story that combines several space indications connected directly to the sovereign. It is the already mentioned story about Mu‘āwiya, given as an example of “How the king spends his day and night.” In this story it is said that Mu‘āwiya started his day with a consultation with some of his khāṣṣa and was joined later by officers of his dīwān:

At midday they had lunch together. After that, he stood up, went to his dwelling [manzil], and stayed there until afternoon. From there, he went to the mosque, sat down on the stool [kursī], and leaned his back at the lodge [maqsūra] while his guard was there at his service. The weak and the young, the Bedouin and the women came with their complaints, which he ordered to be examined and redressed. When no one was left, he went to his dwelling.
[manzil], sat down on the throne [sarîr] and asked the people to sit down according to their rank [martaba] in order to report the problems of those who were not able to come to him in person.41

We have already heard how he used to spend the night. This story provides some details on how later writers have described the space used by Mu’āwiya. The fact that Ibn Nubāta takes this story as an example tells us that he may have wished for this kind of spatial order as an ideal setting, which he was eager to present to the ruler al-Malik al-Afḍal.

However, the examination of terms that refer to a specific space used by the ruler does not produce much information and perhaps just indicates yet again that it is a difficult undertaking to search for an equivalent Arabic concept for something that was formed in a European context.

How does Ibn Nubāta present the people that surround the ruler?

If we understand court in the figurative sense of a personal network that a monarch builds around himself, then Ibn Nubāta’s texts offer a type of model court.

It is obvious that the king in his text is represented as the centre of power responsible for controlling himself and all others. In order to achieve this, the ruler needs reason, courage and virtue. Ibn Nubāta explains: “The full mastery of the arts of politics, the ability of building a good opinion and making a right judgement, are necessary in order to deserve the title ‘king.’”42 As already mentioned, Ibn Nubāta recommends, “the company of judicious and experienced sage men.”43 This will help the ruler to “sharpen his reason,” as well as reading and discussing the “biographies of kings and books on politics.”44

Apart from conducting himself in an exemplary fashion, the sovereign has to guide different groups of people. According to Ibn Nubāta his own family comes first. The author actually speaks only of the ruler’s son who the king should prepare to inherit the government by endearing him to the people. The best way to achieve this is to make the son responsible for an office in charge of distributing money.

Next comes the khāṣṣa. This term is, of course, crucial for understanding the kind of personal network Ibn Nubāta recommends to surround the king. We may at first translate it in a general way as referring to the elite as opposed to ‘āmma, the “commoners.”45

According to Ibn Nubāta, the khāṣṣa include viziers, counsellors (ashāb al-raʿy), judges, secretaries, the intelligence services, envoys and interpreters, all of whom are led by the power of intellect. Military commanders, the chieftains of the army, the governors of the frontier strongholds as well as the soldiers (jund), all belong to the khāṣṣa and all are led by the faculty of anger. Finally, those of the khāṣṣa who are led by desire include the tax collectors.

All those whom Ibn Nubāta discusses as belonging to the khāṣṣa hold official posts. It seems that he presents a group of people that were chosen by the ruler for their specific offices and who are directly dependent on the ruler who gives them orders and pays them. As noted, even the soldiers are part of this group. If this is
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a convincing reading, then Ibn Nubāta is talking about court officers in the service of the king. He draws a picture of a very well-structured and controlled court state.

The function of most of these offices and their use to the ruler are not discussed. Rather, they are taken for granted. The clever ruler should know the characters and capabilities of each and every one of them and should guide them by using motivation and intimidation in the right measure, that is to say, the carrot and stick method. The clever king is mainly instructed to be aware of the intrigues employed by viziers and to control the judges and take care that they do not give a judgment that might cause an uprising. The ruler should closely observe his secretaries, who tend to falsify letters and seals. He should know all the different groups of reporters and the best way to avoid the spread of false information is to pit each reporter against another.

Ibn Nubāta accords to the ašhāb al-ra’y second place in his list of people belonging to the khāṣṣa. He explains that these “are the experienced and knowledgeable sage men.” It seems that he is referring to exactly those people who help the king sharpen his reason. In the exemplifying stories it turns out that these are ordinary people, mainly old men, who might meet the king accidentally and give him the right advice. If we take Ibn Nubāta’s description of the khāṣṣa as referring to court officers, it is difficult to include these counsellors (ašhāb al-ra’y). It is clear that they are not financed directly by the ruler but they provide him with good service and in this way they, too, belong to the ruler’s court servants.

In the chapter devoted to the guidance of the commoners, they are also divided into those who use the faculty of speech such as preachers, jurists and ascetics, those led by the faculty of desire such as traders and those who act according to the faculty of anger such as the people of Sharīfian and noble descent (ahl al-sharaf wa-dhaw al-hasab).

The clever king needs to deal with the commoners with caution and ensure that especially the first group do not generate fiṭna by taking too radical a stance in religious affairs. As far as the people of noble descent are concerned, Ibn Nubāta writes: “The clever king respects and helps them so that they love and obey him.” This instruction is illustrated by one story only, where Kāfūr, after riding out with a Sharīf, does not invite him into his house, but rewards him with a well-equipped horse for his courteous behaviour.

In general, Ibn Nubāta states:

The following words illustrating this advice are put in the mouth of an Amīr al-umarāʾ in Baghdad:

Even though I am not a man of learning, I want to have the masters of all handcrafts [sanaʿār] and the chairmen of all virtues [fāḍila] and the best of all sciences and knowledge [ʿilm wa-maʿrifāʾ] in my entourage [jumla].


In the next anecdote the ruler of Ifrīqiya attracts to his service with a large sum, a famous scribe and a skilful doctor from far away Baghdad. We thus learn that Ibn Nubāta envisages the sovereign choosing from among his commoners the most professional for service in his government. Through such an appointment they would become part of his khāṣṣa.

For the remaining subjects, “the clever king insures himself that the ‘āmma remain always under his control by making sure that they are occupied with their arts and will not interfere in the affairs of the ruler.” In case of doubt, the king is expected to take care of individuals even among his commoners. He is, for example, advised to support someone who had sunk into poverty after having lived a wealthy life and to check the prisons for innocent people who were imprisoned unjustly and free them.

In his mirror for princes, Ibn Nubāta draws a picture of an absolute ruler who has full command over his whole kingdom. He employs the best professional officers and ensures their loyalty by a balanced use of motivation and intimidation. In order to secure the stability of his rule, he cultivates relationships with many different people. Ibn Nubāta distinguishes different grades of intensity in these relationships: the family, the elite and the commoners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to contrast the picture that we have drawn from the late medieval Arabic mirror for princes about the ruler’s court, considering the historical circumstances of the text, with the concept of a court as developed by European historians.

The definition of court, as developed by Norbert Elias from the example of the seventeenth century French court, is still relevant today. For him, the court is the enlarged household of the king, which offers accommodation not only to his family, but for the whole court society. More recent research distinguishes between the household of the monarch and the communicative act of “holding court.” In this respect, the household consists of the ruler, his family and those among the elite that occupy a court appointment, together with the lower personnel. The event of holding court on the contrary excludes the latter, but ties a much wider circle of the elite to the ruler. The elite are the people who belong to the court society and take part in courtly events. The court society distinguishes itself further through a hierarchical order and through an extremely high esteem for courtly manners, that is, to use the French word, etiquette. Orders of rank and etiquette are expressed and displayed in ceremonies and court festivities, that is to say, in the events of holding court.

Taking these concepts that were developed in the context of European history as our reference, the analysis of the late medieval Arab mirror for princes has shown that this text described a very different phenomenon. With regard to the household of the monarch, Ibn Nubāta’s short account suggests that the ruler’s household consisted mainly of his family. In the chapter on the guidance of family and relatives Ibn Nubāta assumed a hereditary monarchy. This, of course, is
central to the European concept of “court.” It is most likely that the family members together with the lower household servants were the people living in the palace at Ḥamāh. However, the text does not tell us about their life there. Furthermore, Ibn Nubāta does not include any advice concerning court appointments. In one of the exemplary stories the term hujjāb (sometimes rendered in English as “chamberlain”) is used. However, in connection with the ruler, for whom this mirror was composed, such a court appointment or anything comparable was not mentioned. Without further investigation, it is impossible to know whether al-Malik al-Afḍāl employed such personnel at his palace. However, Ibn Nubāta’s political counselling work is silent about such court appointments, which implies that Ibn Nubāta did not consider them as an important function in the political duties of the ruler.

With regard to the group that surrounds the ruler, Ibn Nubāta talks about “the elite,” al-khāṣṣa. The khasṣa are depicted as a group of professionals working under the direct control and support of the ruler. These people do not have much in common with the European concept of “court society.” Their function is more that of state employees, be it in the administration or the military service. The ruler is strongly encouraged to build personal ties with the latter from which in turn his administration would benefit. Furthermore, he should also be well informed about the affairs of his commoners and attend to individual cases.

What is completely missing in Ibn Nubāta’s text is any advice concerning the holding of court. Ibn Nubāta did not provide any information about any kind of ceremony or court protocol nor is any sort of etiquette discussed. Banqueting and dancing are left out completely and so is the subject of giving audiences or receiving poets, just to mention a few examples. The ruler he presents is not in need of this kind of representation—so it seems—but simply chooses as his officers the best professionals from all branches who work for him, but who do not spend much leisure time with the king.

Through other sources we might be able to reconstruct some sort of courtly activity for the last Ayyubid king of Ḥamāh. We know for example about the wonderful poetry of praise that Ibn Nubāta wrote for al-Malik al-Afḍāl and more prominently in honour of his father. Ibn Nubāta used to travel in person to Ḥamāh, at least once a year, from where he received his yearly stipend. And, it was the courtly life of al-Malik al-Mu‘ayyad that offered him the opportunity to meet other poets such as Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d. c. 749/1348).56 The outstanding significance of poetry at different courts in the Muslim world has been rightly stressed.58 From a poem by Ibn Nubāta commemorating a hunting party we also know that al-Malik al-Afḍāl around the year 728/1328, that is prior to his father’s death, enjoyed going out for hunting together with the Mamluk governor of Syria, Tankiz.58 The hunt was an important part of court culture in the Muslim world. How such events were used to communicate who belonged to court society and/or to indicate the hierarchies within this society needs to be investigated and lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

The mirror for princes written in the fourteenth century CE by Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī can be precisely positioned historically. He wrote this text for al-Malik
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al-Afdal who from Ibn Nubata’s perspective was incited and led astray by asceticism. He tried to persuade him to take firm action in his reign. Because the danger of losing control was imminent, he advised him first and foremost to control his administration. It may be for this reason that the more entertaining “courtly life” is not discussed in this specific text.

Notes
1 The best recent overview of the genre, including a long bibliography is Marlow (2007).
2 See, for example, ‘Umran (2002); Farrukh (1950).
4 I would like to thank Thomas Bauer, who brought this mirror for princes to my attention and provided me with copies of two of its manuscripts, namely [Oxford 29] and [Vienna 474].
5 For example, it is not mentioned at all in the above cited overview on advice literature by Marlow (2007).
7 In al-Misri (2006), 122, the text that deals with the ashāb al-akhbār, the people of the intelligence service, in the fourth chapter, is interrupted and followed without any indication of a break with stories from the fifth chapter. In the manuscript [Oxford 29], this gap includes fols. 37b–86b.
8 This is manuscript [Oxford 29] from which very probably the manuscript [Vienna 474] was copied. Evidence for this can be seen for example in the blank space after the word amwāl in [Oxford 29], fol. 6a, line 9. In [Vienna 474], fol. 4b, line 15, we can read in a smaller script “blank in the original” (bayāḍ al-aṣl). Manuscript [Oxford 29] consist of 110 folia with 11 lines per page.
9 [Oxford 29], fol. 1a.
10 On the biography of Ibn Nubata see Bauer (2008).
11 See Bauer (2003), 93.
12 See Bauer (2008), 17.
14 See ibid. 49–52; Bauer (2008), 16f. 21–3; Gibb (1960); Sourdell (1971).
17 al-Misri (2006), 90, based on [Topkapi 1822]. This seems to be the version given to al-Malik al-Afdal. [Oxford 29] and [Vienna 474] represent most probably a version intended for a broader public where in this quote all the adjectives are missing. See [Oxford 29], fol. 1b.
18 See ibid. fol. 1b.
19 See ibid. fol. 2a.
20 Ibid.
21 See ibid. fol. 2a-b. The Qur’anic passage is 5 (al-Nisā’):20.
22 [Oxford 29], fol. 12b.
23 See ibid. fol. 3a.
24 See ibid. fol. 3b.
25 See ibid.
26 See ibid. fol. 11b.
28 [Oxford 29], fols. 3b–5a.
29 Ibid. fol. 12a.
30 See Graßnick (2004), 207.
31 [Oxford 29], fol. 5a.
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32 Al-Malik al-Mużaffar I had a palace built at the end of the twelfth century CE that was still used in the fourteenth century CE, after the death of al-Malik al-Afdal, by the Mamluk governors. However, this palace does not exist anymore. See Sourdel (1971), 121. This residence might have been similar to the Artuqid palace in Diyarbakır that is described in the contribution by Lorenz Korn in the present volume.

33 See [Oxford 29], fol. 10b.
34 Ibid. fols. 86a–b.
35 See ibid. fol. 88b.
36 See ibid. fol. 41b.
37 See ibid. fol. 44a.
38 The reason for this may very well be found in the literary nature of the akhbār that usually follow a scenic narrative without long descriptions of the scenery, but only a few stage directions. I thank Sara Binay for sharing her insights in these matters with me.

39 It is interesting to note, that “the custom of calling the palace, court or government of a ruler ‘porte’ or ‘doorstep’ was very prevalent in ancient times” (Deny (1960), 836), and that it was used in this way under the Ottomans.

40 [Oxford 29], fol. 11b.
41 See ibid. fols. 11b–12a.
42 Ibid. fol. 10a.
43 Ibid. fol. 3b.
44 Ibid.
45 See Beg (1978), as well as the discussion of this term by Nadia El Cheikh in the present volume.

46 See [Oxford 29], fol. 20a.
47 See ibid. fol. 88a.
48 See ibid. fol. 88a–b.
49 See ibid. fol. 86b.
50 Ibid. fol. 87a.
51 Ibid. fol. 90a.
52 See ibid. fol. 91b.
53 See ibid. fols. 92a–94b.
54 See Elias (‘1999), 68.
55 Here and in the following I refer to the discussion of the terms “Hof” (court), “Hofhaltung” (running the court), “höfische Gesellschaft” (court society) and “Herrscherausgaben” (household of a ruler) in Konrad (2008), 21–30.
56 Bauer (2008), 17, speaks in this context of “the court of Ḥamāh”.
57 See, for example, Ali (2008); Meisami (1987).
58 See Bauer (2008), 21.

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Printed materials

Court cultures in the Muslim world: seventh–nineteenth centuries


Art and Architecture
20 Art and architecture of the Artuqid courts

Lorenz Korn

In the long and varied history of Islamic art and architecture the Artuqids (1102–1232 CE) played a special part. Artistic objects and buildings that were created under the rulers of this dynasty, and for their purposes, can be counted among the most intriguing material relics from the sixth to seventh/twelfth to thirteenth centuries. Art produced for the Artuqid princes forms an excellent example of the representation and the self-understanding of an Islamic dynasty during this period. At the same time, its stylistic and iconographic peculiarities appear significant for the confluence of artistic currents in a region of mixed cultural background. With the fascinating pieces that have been preserved, the importance of Artuqid art appears grossly disproportionate compared with the political role of the dynasty.¹

The art and architecture of the Artuqids can be considered to a large extent as courtly products. The preserved buildings were commissioned by ruling princes, and objects were designed for their use. However, one can argue that there were different levels of use, or different spheres of access. This becomes immediately clear when we consider that the façade of certain buildings could be seen by everyone, while the illustrations of a book which was kept in the palace were only looked at by the prince and his close followers. The different spheres will be used to categorize monuments and objects below.

Politics, geography and economy

The Artuqid Dynasty had its territorial base in Northern Mesopotamia, the Jazīra, for more than three centuries.² The career of the eponymous Artuq ibn Aksab (d. 483/1090) started during the 460s/1070s, when he became known as one of the Turkoman military leaders in Anatolia. Later, he operated in Syria under the Great Saljuqs. He gained Palestine as an administrative grant (iqṭāʾ)³ from Sultan Malikshāh in 479/1086. After they lost Jerusalem to the Fatimids in 491/1098, Artuq’s sons Īlghāzī and Sukmān moved to the Jazīra to carve out their principalities in Māridīn (today Mardin in Turkey), Mayyāfāriqīn (Silvan) and Ḥiṣn Kayfā (Hasankeyf). The Artuqids were temporarily able to extend their influence as far as Aleppo since the Saljuq Empire had been weakened by the death of the Saljuq Sultan Muhammad ibn Malikshāh in 511/1118. One of Īlghāzī and Sukmān’s brothers ruled over Kharpūt, in the south-eastern Taurus Mountains.
Thus, different branches of the family established themselves in different parts of the country, with residences in the cities mentioned. Later during the twelfth century CE the important city of Āmid (Diyarbakır) fell into the hands of the Artuqids of Ḥiṣn Kayfā and functioned as their residence.

The region in which the Artuqids had built their states had been under Islamic rule from the early conquests onwards. Geographically, the Jazīra was in a central position between Iran, Iraq and Syria. Connections between the major centres of the Islamic world went through the northern Mesopotamian plain, which presented no particular difficulties for traffic, except for the passages across the Euphrates and the Tigris, which were restricted to a few points. With its mostly fertile soil, the land between the foothills of the Taurus in the north and the Syrian steppe was cultivated and populated to a high degree, although scarcity of rainfall imposed natural limits to agriculture in the southern parts.

At the time when the Artuqids were in power, the Jazīra had lost its character as a borderland. For four centuries from the great Arab conquests onwards, the frontier between the Byzantine Empire and the Caliphate had been more or less fixed along the Taurus ridges between Tarsus and Erzurum. This had changed with the Saljuq occupation of Anatolia after 1071 CE. Among the successor states of the Great Saljuq Empire, the Artuqid principalities held a position between the Saljuqs of Rûm (i.e. Central Anatolia) in the north-west, the Zangids of Mossul and Aleppo in the south and the east, and the principalities of the Ildenizids and the Shah-Arman in the north-east, in Azerbaijan and around Lake Van. Artuqid territories of the Jazīra were, in the mid-twelfth century CE, interspersed with possessions of the neighbouring dynasties. Thus the city of Āmid, governed by the competing families of the Inālıds and the Nişānids, separated the Artuqid principalities of Ḥiṣn Kayfā and Māridin from that of Kharpūt (Khartpert). Despite the fragmentation into small political units, the Jazīra seems to have prospered during the twelfth–thirteenth centuries CE. Numerous monuments and the descriptions by travellers and geographers testify to this wealth.4

The political power of the Artuqids diminished commensurate with the increase in the power of the Zangids and Ayyubids. When Saladin conquered the western half of the Jazīra, the Artuqid Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Qarā Arslān (r. 562–81/1167–85) took sides with him, and received the city of Āmid in 579/1183. By contrast, the Artuqid prince of Māridin strongly opposed the expansion of Saladin’s power. In 581/1185, he was forced to cede the city of Mayyāfāriqin to the Ayyubids. At the end of the twelfth century CE, not only the strategic passes over the Euphrates but also the mountain passage to the Armenian highlands were under Ayyubid control.

During the first half of the thirteenth century CE, the Artuqids tried to maintain their position in the face of continued Ayyubid expansion. Āmid and Ḥiṣn Kayfā became Ayyubid possessions in 630/1232, but Māridin resisted. Ayyubid armies laid siege to the city twice, but were unable to take it, mostly due to its impregnable topographic location. Another factor in reducing Artuqid power was the appearance of the Rum Saljuqs of Konya who gained control of the Eastern Taurus in the early thirteenth century CE and terminated the existence of the
Artuqid principality of Kharpūt. Artuqid territory remained more or less confined to Mardin and its surroundings. Occasional disputes occurred with the neighbours over the towns of Dārā, Naṣībin and Ra’s al-‘Ayn.

While the loss of power of the Artuqids and the rise of the Ayyubid Empire the political map of the Jazīra changed, but important structures of political and social order continued very much the same as before. The Ayyubid Empire was not a unified state, but a confederation of principalities held together more by dynastic ties than by common political goals. The Ayyubid areas of the Jazīra were not governed from Damascus or Cairo, but by members of the dynasty like al-Muẓaffar Ghāzī of Mayyāfāriqīn (r. 617–42/1220–42) and his son al-Kāmil Muḥammad, who resided in the region and who acted according to their interest as territorial rulers. Thus the Ayyubid principalities did not alter the basic structure of the fragmented political landscape but became part of it, even if connections with Aleppo and Damascus were intensified.

The Mongol conquest did not spare the Jazīra or the Artuqid dynasty. However, the princes of Mardin survived by becoming subordinate to the Mongol suzerainty. This led to a second phase in the history of the dynasty, which lasted until the coming of Timur. But this is not the subject of the present chapter.

Concerning the internal structure of the Artuqid principalities, it can be noted that their population was certainly ethnically mixed. Peasants were Aramaic-speaking and Kurdish, while towns and cities were partly Arabicized, with large portions of Armenians. The Syriac church held an important position in the cities, but even more so in those parts of the countryside where monasteries existed. Monastic communities as important as Dayr al-Za‘farān near Mardin, and Barṣawma between Kharpūt and the Euphrates, were certainly not the rule. But smaller monasteries were numerous, particularly in the Tūr ‘Abdīn between Mardin and Ḥiṣn Kayfā. Syriac Christians and Muslims coexisted side by side. In the village of Hah (today Antlı) the largest standing monument in the village until today is the monastery of St Mary, and several other churches are lying in ruins; however, the minaret of the little mosque is built in the style of the twelfth–thirteenth century CE, which indicates that there was probably already a sizeable Muslim community at that time. From a first glance at Syriac chronicles, it appears that during the sixth to mid-seventh/twelfth to thirteenth centuries the relationship between the Christian communities and the ruling dynasties continued without existential crises.

Overall, it seems clear that the princes with their Turcoman troops and officers were totally separated from other parts of the population. Certainly the court was the centre of political and military decision-making. In military terms, the principality depended on tribal forces, often with a semi-nomadic lifestyle, whose leaders had to be satisfied with material grants and honourable treatment. On the other hand, the court was dependent on the established administrative competence of the urban elite. Scribes had to be recruited who knew at least a minimum amount about the rules of chancery. For the upkeep of political order, the prince also relied on local notables in the cities, and had to grant them access to his courtly sphere. For the period in question, no sharp distinction can be drawn between the administration of the state and the household of its ruler. Although the court ceremonial was not
very sophisticated, compared with Baghdad during the ninth century CE or with Ottoman Istanbul, it seems clear that the princely court of the Artuqids had developed a culture that adequately expressed the position of the prince in relationship to other parts of society.7

Bridges, mosques and fortifications

For the revenues of the Artuqid principalities, long-distance trade apparently played a major role. The route from Aleppo to Mosul ran through the territory of the Artuqids of Mardin. A road that branched off to the north crossed the Tigris at Ḥiṣn Kayfā. Here, the Artuqid Ḥarār Arslān ibn Dāwūd had the famous bridge erected (or rather, completely rebuilt) at some time in the first half of the twelfth century CE. Its central arch, with a span of 40 metres, collapsed only in the sixteenth century. Another bridge of nearly the same dimensions is still intact; it spans the Batman Suyu east of Silvan (see figure 20.1).8 Here, the road from Āmid up to the Armenian highlands around Lake Van crossed the river. The bridge was built in 542/1147–8 at the order of the Artuqid Ḥusām al-Dīn Timurtāsh (r. 516–48/1122–54). It is evident that the Artuqids cared for the road network in their realm, which certainly brought them profit. The fact that Artuqid silver dirham were struck at Dunaysīr, the halting place for caravans in the plain south of Mardin, and not in the capital itself, speaks in favour of the importance of the long-distance trade routes, and of the attention which the rulers paid to them.

Figure 20.1 Batman Suyu (Malabadi) Bridge, view from East bank.

Photo: L. Korn
The bridges were decorated with inscriptions and figural reliefs. An example can be seen on the south face of the western pillar of the bridge across the Batman Suyu (see figure 20.2). Here, the relief combines the image of the sun with that of a lion below in a field. From other sources, it is clear that this image belongs to a cycle of representations in which the signs of the zodiac were combined with symbols of the seven planets. Astrological imagery of this type occurs on other bridges, like the one at ‘Ayn Dīwār near Cizre. It was also frequently used to decorate pieces of metalwork. A rather general interpretation of these representations posits them as signs of good fortune, serving to show that the foundation of the building was in accordance with heavenly constellations. The monumental inscription next to the figural relief placed the name of the ruler prominently in view, and made it clear that it was he who made the comfortable passage across the river possible.

Figure 20.2 Batman Suyu (Malabadi) Bridge, relief of South side.

Photo: L. Korn
Another category of construction for public well-being was the mosques. Providing a space for communal prayer had been a task of Islamic rulers since the days of the Prophet, and was always used as an opportunity for royal representation. For their construction, the Artuqids relied on the highly developed craft of stonemasons, which had a long tradition in the Jazīra. Extensive decoration on the facade of the Great Mosque of Silvan, built under Najm al-Dīn Alpī in 561/1165–6, still remains, with a blind arcade and a row of corbels above the windows with their profiled frames. These densely decorated parts contrast with the even surfaces of the walls. Likewise, the interior of the mosque shows a clear differentiation between architectural elements that are heavily decorated or underlined with profiles, and the smooth surfaces of walls, pillars and vaults. Although the individual motifs are different, this kind of arrangement can be traced back to the late antique stone architecture of the region, for example in the monasteries of the Tur Abdin. On the other hand, the mosque of Silvan was highly innovative for its time, because it represented a new building type. It combined the traditional hypostyle hall with arcades in naves with the wide central dome, nearly 15 metres in diameter. This gives the building a notable spatial centre. It is very likely that this innovation was inspired by Iranian Saljuq mosques, first of all the Friday Mosque of Isfahan, where the new element of the monumental dome chamber had been introduced in the late fourth/eleventh century. It can be assumed that a principal purpose of this architectural innovation was to create a monumental protective screen (maqṣūra), thereby highlighting the place where the ruler or his deputy performed the prayer. The Great Mosque of Silvan is not the only one where this new building type was realized under Artuqid rule; two formidable examples are the Great Mosques of Mardin and Dunaysīr (Kızıltepe). It can be argued that these buildings paved the way for the further development of domed mosques in Anatolia and the Balkans under the Ottomans.

The third category of architectural works in which royal representation was enhanced by public visibility was military construction. A brief glance at the famous city walls of Diyarbakır shows that there was a long tradition of inscribing its towers and curtain walls with royal inscriptions, when Nūr al-Dīn Mūḥammad ibn Qarā Arslān received the city of Āmid from Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Ayyūb or Saladin in 579/1183. The fortifications, originally from the period of Constantius (fourth century CE), had been rebuilt and added to over several centuries. Caliphs, sultans and regional rulers had inscribed their names on these walls. In some cases the inscriptions were combined with representations of animals. The first addition after the Artuqids took over can be seen in the framing of the Western gate, leading to Urfa and Aleppo. The relief (see figure 20.3) dates to 579/1183, very shortly after Saladin had besieged the city and given it to the Artuqid Mūḥammad ibn Qarā Arslān. Dragons flank the inscription above the gate, and the keystone of the relieving arch above is adorned with an eagle clasping the horns of a bull’s head, from which hangs a stone ring. Certainly, these animal figures were not simply decorative elements, and have to be seen in connection with the inscriptions. Their symbolic value was most certainly associated with the ruler and his power.

At the beginning of the sixth/thirteenth century, the Artuqid Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḩmūd added some massive towers to the city walls of Āmid. The fortifications
were built according to the new standard of military architecture, and were able to withstand attacks by siege machines. At the same time, they offered large surfaces on which inscriptions could be executed. The ruler inscribed his name on his city, thereby advertising his rule, and adding himself to the list of his predecessors. The inscriptions are crowned by a double-headed eagle, and accompanied by sculptures of fantastic beings and animals. The meaning of these images can be understood partly as a metaphor for the power of the ruler (the double-headed eagle as a symbol of the sultan) and partly as an allusion to his control over all beings, even in the remotest corners of the world. In addition, an apotropaic function, fending off evil of all kind, can be assumed. The rich imagery has a parallel in the figural reliefs that adorned the Rûm Saljuq city walls of Konya, with a similar iconography.

Outside the field of architectural decoration, the artistic language of Artuqid royal representation was equally marked by a wealth of images. Coinage was one of the media representing royal authority, and enjoyed the widest circulation. There was a wide variety of images on copper coins of the Zengids, Artuqids and Ayyubids in the late sixth and early seventh/twelfth and thirteenth centuries. On some of them, classical elements are quoted in striking likeness: there are figures draped in classical garb, busts of rulers in Hellenistic forms and genii hovering above a head with long hair like that of a Medusa. In some cases, Hellenistic coins can be identified as immediate prototypes. Pieces of classical material must have been around, which aroused the interest of the ruler and the artists at his court. Apparently, a connection
with the past somehow appealed to their senses. There is no proof, but it seems likely that this interest was associated with Alexander the Great, the hero and ideal ruler in Islamic lore. Alexander’s legendary quest for wisdom was put into verse by Ṣanāʿī (d. 608/1209) at the same time as the princes of the Jazīra had copied the portrait of Hellenistic rulers onto their own coins. Other motifs on the copper coins are clearly of Byzantine origin, some are part of the astrological iconography, and with some it is difficult to imagine which source inspired them.

In general, it can be stated that for the purpose of representation in public buildings and on coins, a consistent visual language was applied. The same motifs and the same manner of presenting them together with inscriptions were used in different media and on different scales. It is also important to note that the manner in which the Artuqid rulers presented themselves had parallels in other principalities, particularly that of the Rûm Saljuqs but also in Syria and other neighbouring areas. However, the extent to which images were used and the richness of carved decoration on city walls, mosques and other buildings appears as a particularity of the Jazīra and emphasizes the regional tradition in which the Artuqids acted.

The palace in the citadel

Entering the inner sphere of the court proper was, in the fifth and sixth/twelfth and thirteenth centuries, equal to entering the inner circle of defence of the fortified residence: the citadel. The fortress attached to the city, usually integrated into the line of city walls, but laid out as a separately defendable unit, had been an established venue for the seat of the ruler in the tradition of the Near East and Iran from the earliest times onwards. With the expansion of Saljuq power, fortified residences in the shape of urban citadels spread widely throughout Syria and the Jazīra. Some examples from the Ayyubid period have been preserved. During this period, the fortifications assumed gigantic proportions, with massive towers, elaborate means of defence and intricate systems of communication. The citadels of Aleppo, Damascus and Cairo are well-known examples. Also in smaller towns like Bosra and Hārim, and in cities of the Jazīra like Harrān, massive citadels were constructed.

Usually, the residential buildings were relatively small. They formed a separate complex within the enclosure of the citadel, organized as a group of rooms clustered around a square courtyard, on which īwāns opened in the axis of one or more sides. In some cases, the size of the residential complex was reduced to a degree that the roofed courtyard with īwāns was fitted into a tower, like at Bosra. The architecture was carefully executed and decoration emphasized the crucial points. In some places, like Aleppo, elaborate portals were added to mark the entrance to the palace. Another characteristic was the hydraulic installations. A fountain with an elaborately carved basin in the centre of the courtyard was the rule, but wall fountains (salsabīl) were also frequent. At Şahyūn, the fountains, basins and canals in the palace were so elaborate that the whole complex was interpreted as a luxurious bathhouse.

It is clear that a palace of this type could not house a large court. If the palace was used as a residential unit, it could only house the ruler and his family or immediate followers. For meetings and receptions, it can be assumed that the ruler
was seated at the back of the largest īwān, with some of his courtiers at his side. An incoming visitor was probably guided into the courtyard, then presented himself at the courtyard side of the īwān, until he was seated, either opposite or next to the lord of the palace. Probably, the courtiers who held court offices like that of the robe-bearer, cup-bearer, etc. were placed at certain points.

In the city of Diyarbakır, the citadel occupies the north-eastern corner of the fortified enclosure on a hill overlooking the Tigris. On the northern and eastern sides the outer walls of the citadel are identical with the city walls, while a separate wall fortified the residence against the city towards the south and west. While the present wall seems to date to the reign of the Ottoman sultan Süleymān I “Ḳānūnī” (r. 926–74/1520–66), it can be assumed that it had a predecessor that already existed during the Artuqid period. The interior of the citadel is divided by another strong wall. Possibly of older origin, it was not used to defend the inner part of the citadel during the Artuqid period, but apparently served to mark off its north-eastern half as the residence proper. Adjacent to it stands the citadel mosque, the minaret of which bears the date 555/1160. The dividing wall encloses the highest part of the citadel, a hill with steep flanks, on which the former centre of the residence can be assumed. While recent military use has destroyed some remnants of the Artuqid residence, three important elements of that period have been preserved or documented.

In the northern wall of the citadel a gate, now blocked, once connected the citadel with the area extra muros. The inner facade of the gate (see figure 20.4) consists of a carefully designed arch with an inscription above. Remains of two

Figure 20.4 Diyarbakır, citadel, north gate, interior.

Photo: L. Korn
Court cultures in the Muslim world: seventh–nineteenth centuries
corbs and holes for beams indicate that a balcony above the inscription must have been part of the facade. The whole structure was inserted into the existing wall, as indicated by the break between the smooth ashlar masonry of the gate and the rougher stonework of the adjacent parts of the wall. The opening of the gate is designed as a broad shoulder arch, a shape which had its local predecessor in one of the lateral facades in the courtyard of the Great Mosque. The voussoirs of the horizontal section of the arch and the keystone of the relieving arch above are of white limestone, contrasting with the surrounding basalt. The “inverted keystone” of the horizontal section is internally locked with its neighbouring voussoirs—a masterpiece of the stonemason which is typical of the period. The inscription mentions the Artuqid al-Mas'ūd Sukmān ibn Muḥammad (r. 581–97/1185–1201), with the title “Sultan Dīyār Bakr” as patron, with the date 595/1198. The inscription with its bold cursive letters, arranged in a longer line between the corbels and two shorter sections at both sides of the arch, contributes to the aesthetic value of the whole. It is clear that this gate was conceived of as a representative facade, not a mere opening in the wall to fulfill the needs of traffic. It would be valuable to know more about the external facade of the gate, of which, however, no parts of the same period remain. Although very little is known about the shape of the citadel when the Artuqids came to power in Ḩīmad, the design of the gate suggests that its function as a residential complex at the end of the sixth/twelfth century created the need for a more ceremonial design of its access.

This is underlined by the second element, which dates to the Artuqid period, the impressive remnants of a gate in the dividing wall to the south. In the middle of the wall a wide pointed arch opens that spans more than eight metres (see figure 20.5). The joints in the masonry to the west suggest that it may have been built into an existing wall. The arch appears rather squat, because its springing is not far removed from the present floor level. Even if a possible rise of the floor level can be assumed, it is difficult to imagine that this arch should ever have been closed by leaves. There is simply no place left for the hinges of a pair of leaves, particularly not leaves spanning eight metres. This pre-supposes that there was a defendable outer wall, possibly on the same line as the present one. The arch is flanked by the remnants of a broad relief band of white limestone, which originally must have framed the arch in the shape of an inverted U with ends bent sideways. The band is filled with a cursive inscription, of which the date 603/1205–6 can be deciphered. Thus, the arch belongs to the reign of Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd, the same Artuqid who had the massive towers with relief images added to the city walls. The horizontally bent ends of the band are occupied by figural reliefs showing a lion attacking another four-legged animal (see figure 20.5). The age-old motif of the “conquering lion” had its local predecessor on the east facade of the Great Mosque, in the relief decoration of the Inalid period. Again, it can be understood as a metaphorical representation of royal power. The architecture of the gate shows that it was designed to fulfills ceremonial functions, to mark the entrance to the residence, to give it a representative appearance and to adorn it with symbols of authority—in a combination of royal titulature in the inscription with the iconography of the royal beasts on both sides.
Excavations in the early 1960s brought to light a small palace complex within the citadel. Its remains have now disappeared without leaving a trace. Probably, they were located at the foot or on the top of the central hill, the ancient core of the citadel, and were removed for recent military use. The core of the building consisted of a courtyard from which four īwāns branched off (see figure 20.6). The central square of the courtyard measured little more than three metres on each side, and was nearly fully occupied by an octagonal basin clad with marble and floor mosaic. In its centre rose a fountain decorated with inlaid marble. The four īwāns were of different depth. The two deeper ones were flanked with corridors that opened in doors on the shallower īwāns. This arrangement resulted in something similar to the tripartite facades in Ayyubid palaces mentioned above. Clearly, the accent was placed on the deepest īwān on the southern side. On its back wall, water flowed down from a salsabīl and then through a canal in the axis of the īwān, until it reached the octagonal basin. Small size, building type, hydraulic installations and decoration connect this palace to the Ayyubid examples from Syria, although there are slight differences. Fragments of a glazed tile frieze, which were excavated in the palace and which are now displayed in the Archaeological Museum of Diyarbakır also belong to the remarkable features of this palace. The tiles are square in shape, relieved and glazed in three colours. Turquoise borders form the top and bottom, while the centre is occupied by an epigraphic band with white letters on a cobalt blue background. According to the preserved letters, the text contained royal titles, certainly of the ruling Artuqid. The epigraphic evidence allows no conclusive identification of the
Figure 20.6 Diyarbarkır, citadel, palace, ground plan (cf. Aslanapa 1962.)
ruler, but the technique and style of the high relief white letters on dark blue are strongly reminiscent of a Rûm Saljuq example in Konya, on the Alaeddin Türbesi in the Great Mosque, dated to the early seventh/thirteenth century.

Architecture and decoration of the small palace give adequate testimony to the Artuqid’s will to equip their residence with the necessary reception rooms. The palace was designed according to the fashion of the time. It shows no ambition to house a great number of people, but was suitable for small receptions of a more intimate character. The stylistic features of the building have parallels in Syria as well as in Anatolia. They indicate that the Artuqids acted in a typical manner, building palaces similar to their Ayyubid and Saljuq counterparts.

In the Jazîra, the self-representation of the ruler was apparently in some cases connected with a representation of his close followers. A Zangid building in Sinjâr shows relief figures in little niches arranged on the frame of a larger niche. It is likely that the figures were meant to depict the khâṣṣakiyya, the retinue of courtly Mamluks around the prince. Again, their relatively small number fits the size of the palace buildings mentioned above. The court of the Artuqids and their neighbours did not include a large entourage. They had little to do with “courtly society” in the sense of Norbert Elias, where the structure of a whole class was built around the royal court. Rather, the Artuqid court presented itself as an expanded household of the ruler, in which court offices and military ranks were present. As to the form of figural representation, the arrangement of the little niches around the Sinjâr niche has a close parallel in the monastery of Mar Behnam near Mosul, where saints were depicted in little niches on a richly decorated doorframe. This example is extremely valuable for the elucidation of the “cultural mosaic” of the Jazîra during the sixth–seventh/twelfth–thirteenth century in several respects. It shows that the same motif could be used for completely different purposes, that the representative language of figural reliefs could be applied in the sphere of the princely court and in a monastery, and that it was not tied to a specific religious context. The close stylistic similarity demonstrates that designs forms were exchanged between the Islamic and the Christian communities of the Jazîra, and makes it likely that Christian stonemasons were also employed at the Artuqid court.

**Metalwork, bookpainting and princely iconography**

It is difficult to assess which objects were used in the context of public appearances of the ruler, and which were designed for his personal use or for meetings in a more private atmosphere. In general, one might assume that richly decorated objects were made for representation. In some cases, the subject dealt with in a manuscript suggests a close connection with the prince and with court life. This is the case with al-‘Iqd al-farîd li’l-Malik al-Sa’dî, a “mirror for princes,” which was written by Muhâammad ibn Ṭalḥa al-‘Adâwî (d. unknown) for the Artuqid prince of Mardin in the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century. The copy preserved in Gotha with its beautifully illuminated title page (see figure 20.7) dates from a later phase of Artuqid cultural patronage during the ninth/fifteenth century, but it can easily be imagined that the original manuscript must have been just as splendidly decorated.
However, with all the images of luxury that they must have conveyed, it is difficult to imagine that the lavishly illustrated or illuminated books were ever displayed in front of a large audience. They were certainly made to be looked at only by a few people at a time, and thus their use for royal representation was limited (besides, it has been justly remarked that a great number of objects on which courtly scenes are depicted were certainly not made for the royal household).

For the Artuqid court during the period in question, there is evidence that the engineer Badī‘ al-Zamān Ismā‘īl ibn al-Razzāz al-Jazarī (d. unknown) wrote his Kitāb fi...
maʿrifat al-hiyal al-handasiyya at Āmid in 602/1206 for Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd. The copy at Istanbul was written and illustrated shortly after the original. One can imagine that it enhanced the reputation of a ruler if he had an ingenuous technician at his court, able to build a clock that announced the hours with a particular optical sign or sound. But it is not a priori evident why a whole treatise on water-clocks, vessels for hand-washing and wine-pouring, musical automata, water-lifting machines, etc. appealed to a Muslim ruler of this period. These ideas were rooted in a Hellenistic tradition, which had already earlier been transmitted by Arabic authors. In al-Jazārī’s book, some of the automata were explicitly designed for use in a courtly context, in the majlis of the ruler with his companions. Here, a wine-pouring figure with some additional gimmicks could certainly contribute to entertainment. The illustrations have a technical aspect, as they contain instructions on how to build the machines that are explained in the text. However, they also have an artistic quality. Some of them are lavishly coloured, and in many illustrations the sculptured figures play a central part in the outer appearance of the automata. Thus not all of the machines would actually have to be built, but their depictions could be used to raise interest in the text, to fuel the imagination of those who looked at them and to spur discussions on mechanical techniques, physics, timekeeping, astronomy and other branches of science.

Nevertheless, the interest with which al-Jazārī’s mechanical devices were received at the Artuqid court was certainly much more than theoretical. After all, the Jazīra was rich in metal ore, particularly in copper, which made metalworking one of its well-established crafts. Al-Jazzārī had constructed doors for the palace at Ḥiṣn Kayfān and explains the manner in which he cast the pieces and mounted them to form intricate geometrical designs. A drawing of a part of one door leaf illustrates the text, another drawing shows a door knocker in the shape of two opposed dragons.

A door that matches al-Jazzārī’s description very closely has been preserved (see figure 20.8). It belonged to the Great Mosque of Cizre on the Tigris. Inscriptions mention the Zangid ruler Maḥmūd ibn Sanjarshāḥ (r. 605–48/1208–51). From Cizre, the two door leaves have been moved to the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul. One of its door handles is now part of the David Collection in Copenhagen. Cast in one piece, it consists of two opposed dragons with snake-like bodies that form a loop on each side. Little wings adorn the shoulders while the heads are turned outward. The tails terminate in two griffin-heads. While different in some details, the general shape of the door handles is very close to al-Jazzārī’s drawing. Another door handle similar to that from Cizre is preserved in the Islamic Museum in Berlin.

Splendid examples of metal vessels are also preserved from the very period of the Zangids and Artuqids onwards. In the early seventh/thirteenth century, Mosul metalwork became famous for its combination of brass with engraved decoration and silver inlay. The basins and ewers signed by Mawṣili craftsmen are lavishly decorated. Between the geometric patterns, epigraphic bands and floral motifs, figurual decoration plays an important part. The images are arranged in little scenes of what has been named the “princely cycle;” hunting, battle, music and feasting are among the activities that were apparently likely to be depicted on pieces of royal splendour. This iconography has parallels in painted ceramics in Iran.
popularity of these themes seems to indicate that courtly life was a fashionable subject to decorate objects which were in use not only at the court itself, but also in broader strata of the society.

However, there are a few pieces that can be ascribed to the immediate use of the ruler himself. The famous enamel bowl in Innsbruck is a unique piece not only today, but it must have been enormously prestigious at its time, when it was made for Rukn al-Dawla Dāwūd ibn Sukmān ibn Artuq (r. 502–39/1109–44). Its style and technique support the assumption that it was made in Constantinople; it might...
have reached the Artuqid court as a stately gift. The bowl offers a rich imagery. Scenes in roundels—eagles, animal fights—are interspersed with single trees, single dancing figures and acrobats. In the centre of the bowl, there is again an element of classical iconography: Alexander is carried to heaven in his chariot pulled by two griffins. The inner margin bears the Arabic inscription mentioning the name and titles of the prince. Another inscription on the outer margin was most probably meant to render a text in Persian. However, it is so badly written that it cannot be deciphered. This indicates that the bowl was clearly made for an Artuqid prince, but that the place of its production was probably not located within the borders of the principality. The technique of enamelling was at that time highly developed in Byzantium. There are also examples of high-quality cloisonné from Georgia. Both regions can be considered possible places of origin. The manner of representing the ruler, with his crown and garment, is clearly rooted in the Byzantine tradition. At any rate, the iconography fits in the general image of the appreciation of classical motifs for royal representation. But its technique and style have no close parallel in any other piece. A comparison between the Innsbruck bowl and Mosul metalwork shows that the Byzantine mode of the former remained an exception. If it ever met with reception, its style was in retreat by the end of the sixth/twelfth century and was supplanted by a coherent Islamic style represented by the Blacas ewer.

Another unique piece is the bronze mirror in the David Collection, which was made for Nūr al-Đīn Artuqshāh, the Artuqid ruler of Kharpūt on the Upper Euphrates. With a diameter of 24 centimetres, it is much larger than the usual size of bronze mirrors—truly a “royal” piece. The back of the mirror is decorated in concentric circles. The outer circle bears an inscription with the name, elaborate genealogy and titles of Artuqshāh. After this follows a band of 12 medallions with representations of the zodiac. The inner ring has an inscription interspersed with seven busts in what appears to be classical, Hellenistic, garb. It might be assumed that these are the seven planets, but their usual attributes are missing. The centre is occupied by an eagle, which can be interpreted as a symbol of royal power. Despite the astrological imagery, the mirror itself had probably no function in a scientific astronomical or astrological context. However, when handling the mirror in the company of his courtiers, the ruler could present himself as knowledgeable about astronomical issues. Besides, viewing himself in the mirror and with the zodiac on the back of the mirror, the ruler could integrate his own self into the harmony of celestial spheres and fit his rule into the cosmic constellations. The concept of dynastic rule, expressed by the outer inscription, was thus combined with a more philosophical view of the world.

Conclusion

With some of the examples mentioned above, it becomes clear that some of the finest pieces of Islamic art originated from the courts of the Artuqids, and that the sixth–seventh/twelfth–thirteenth century can be considered a period in which artistic means of royal representation were highly developed. Patronage of the arts was largely dominated by the court. The artistic language of royal works of art,
however, was rather universal. It can be demonstrated that corresponding sets of forms and iconographic elements were used in different media and in different contexts or spheres of accessibility.

The iconography of the Artuqid court was not unique—for almost every single element parallels can be found in neighbouring regions, which were governed by other dynasties. Evidently, there were artistic connections between the Jazīra and Syria, Anatolia, Iran, Iraq and the Caucasus. In many instances, examples from these neighbouring regions can be used for a better understanding of art at the Artuqid court. It was the hybrid combination of different elements that was typical of the region of Northern Mesopotamia. A regional extravagance can also be seen in the lavish use of figural representation, and in some stylistic idiosyncrasies, which are best explained by the connection with local artists. In this, Artuqid art was different from Islamic art in Iraq and Egypt and influential on the art of Syria and Anatolia in the seventh/thirteenth century.

Another explanation for the stunning richness of artistic production at the Artuqid courts lies in the political situation. Seemingly, the restricted possibilities for territorial expansion and military action made it desirable for the small courts to distinguish themselves by patronage of the arts. In other words, when raids to the border regions of the Byzantine and Georgian enemy had become difficult, because the frontier had moved far away from the Upper Tigris, other fields had to be cultivated in which the ruler could present himself as the champion of Islam. The close proximity of small principalities in the Jazīra might have functioned as an incentive to promote the arts of one’s own court, and outdo one’s Artuqid, Zengid and Ayyubid neighbours with works of inlaid metal, book painting or architecture. In this sense, the political fragmentation of the Jazīra may be considered as a factor that helped to realize the artistic potential of the region. In a similar way, it should be taken into account that social groups that had not previously acted as patrons of art were now actively involved in the commissioning of precious objects. The well-known Paris manuscript of the Kitāb al-diryāq of an anonymous fifth/tenth-century author dated 596/1199 can be taken as evidence that non-princely patrons were able to order lavishly illustrated manuscripts with elaborate calligraphy. It seems that the competition in artistic patronage did not only take place between different courts, but also between different strata of society.

Another, more geographic factor should also be considered. The small residences of the Artuqids were located at the crossroads of the Islamic world, where travellers passed on their way from Egypt to Iran, from Baghdad to Konya, where merchants disposed of their money and their goods. This is also part of the answer to the question why the Artuqids as a small dynasty were able to sustain such a variegated artistic production at their court. Evidently they used their connections to all sides, and they tapped into the rich heritage of the different cultures within their own realm. Using the little material wealth which was available, they managed to gather some of the most gifted artisans of their time. It would be most interesting to know more about the role of these artists, the way in which their works were commissioned and how they were integrated into the life of the court.
Notes

1 An exhaustive survey of Artuqid art or of art and architecture in the Jazāra in the sixth and seventh/twelfth and thirteenth centuries remains still to be written, and van Berchem’s contribution in “Amida” (see Berchem/Strzygowski (1910)) remains essential. For a recent overview, see Gladiß (2006); Ettinghausen/Grabar/Jenkins-Madina (2001), 217–23, 244–9, 254–65. Aspects of the cultural diversity of the Near East, and the Jazāra in particular, during the period in question have been approached by Koenen/Müller-Wiener (2008). For architecture under the Artuqids and in the Jazāra, see the examples described and analyzed by Sözen (1971), Altun (1978), and Meinecke (1996).

2 For the history of the Artuqids, see Väth (1987); Ilisch (1984); for a brief introduction, see Hillenbrand (1985).

3 For this term see the contributions of Hugh Kennedy and Lucian Reinfandt to the present volume.


5 It should be evident from the historical context that these terms, which implied language, religion, genealogical affiliation, and a common historical myth, should not be understood in congruence with modern notions of ethnicity or nation. More research on the multiple ethnic structure of the Jazāra in the Middle Ages is still needed.


8 See Gabriel (1940), 232–6.

9 For stone reliefs with astrological imagery, see Gierlichs (1996), 125–8. While the iconography of astrological symbols differs in some details between works of Eastern Iran and of the Mosul region, the general scheme is very similar. Likewise, the shapes of certain individual elements resemble each other. Therefore, it seems that this kind of representation was common to different parts of the Islamic world during the sixth-seventh/twelfth-thirteenth century.

10 More specific interpretations, e.g. in the sense that the representations show a horoscope of the time of the construction, are unfounded.

11 See Gabriel (1940), 221–8; Sinclair (1985), 50–9.

12 The history of architecture in the Jazāra between late antiquity and the Islamic Middle Ages is to a large extent unclear. However, elements connecting the architecture of the two periods have been remarked upon by several authors, e.g. Rogers (1971). Allen (1986) has made the connection between Northern Syria and the Jazāra, and has argued for a specific meaning in the “revival” of classical forms; Tabbaa (1993) has pronounced a different opinion, underlining the unbroken continuity of architectural practice until the early twentieth century. For the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE, the close correspondence between Islamic and Christian architecture of the Jazāra can be observed in a comparison between the carved stone decoration of the Artuqid mosques and that of the monasteries of Mar Behnam ( Kháḏr Ilyās) and Karakōşh near Mosul; see Preusser (1984), 4–14, pl. 2–20.

13 For the development of Friday mosques in Saljuq Iran, see Ettinghausen/Grabar/Jenkins-Madina (2001), 139–45; Korn (2009).


15 See Gabriel (1940), 105–82; Sinclair (1989), 167–76.

16 See Gierlichs (1996), 214f, cat. no. 59.

17 See ibid. 115f.


19 The exhibition in the University of Tübingen “Antike Bilder—Islamische Tradition: Münzgeld und Münzbild im Nahen Osten zur Zeit Saladins und der Kreuzfahrer,”
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2006–7, showed the rich iconography of the coinage of the Jazīra in the period in question and demonstrated the connections with classical and Byzantine prototypes. The texts accompanying the exhibition are as yet unpublished.

See Kennedy (2006); David (2007).

See Korn (2004), 75–9.

See Beddek (2001).

In the written sources of the period, descriptions of court ceremonial are rare and usually limited to occasions when the ruler presented himself in public, e.g. on the occasion of his accession to the throne; see Eddé (1999). Assumptions on the functioning of palace architecture are therefore derived from the layout of the buildings.

Sinclair (1989), 190, takes it that the dividing wall was the exterior wall of the citadel during the Artuqid period, and that consequently the citadel had no strong defence against the city at that time. Gabriel (1940), 151–7, seems to argue differently and to assume that a predecessor of the Ottoman citadel wall existed.

The highly curious building complex in the north-eastern corner of the citadel, sometimes identified as a palace of the Artuqid period (see Sinclair (1989), 192) is not included among the Artuqid works here. Since the clearing works of 2007–8, it appears more likely that its eastern part was originally a church, perhaps of the sixth century CE, while the western part can perhaps be dated to the Aqqoyunlu period, when the whole complex was apparently used as a palace. This does not exclude, however, the possibility that the former church building was already used as a palace during the Artuqid period.

See the examples described by Allen (1986).

See Gabriel (1940), 153, fig. 124.

Sauvaget in Gabriel (1940), 323, no. 73.

See Gierlichs (1996), 217f., cat. no. 61.

See Aslanapa (1962).

See Whelan (1988).

See Elias [Q1](1969).

See Preussner (1984), 9f, pl. 11f.

See MS Topkapı [A 3472]; also Hill (1974); for the dating of the manuscript see Ward (1985).


See ibid. 32, fig. 10.

See Folsach (2001), 312, no. 496; Gladiß (2006), 68f, no. 25.

See ibid. 70f, no. 26.

See Hagedorn (1992); idem (1994); al-Harithy (2001), each with reference to earlier literature.


See Folsach (2001), 315, no. 503; Gladiß (2006), 64f, no. 21.

See MS BNF Paris [arabe 2964]; also Pancaroğlu (2001).

Bibliography


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21 Court patronage and public space
Abū ’l-Ḥasan Ṣanī‘ al-Mulk and the art of Persianizing the other in Qajar Iran

Abbas Amanat

In the dominant narrative of modern Iranian history, the Qajar period (1785–1925) often receives unfavourable treatment, at least in traditional scholarship. The Qajar court, in particular, tends to be depicted in European contemporary accounts—and later in the historiography of the twentieth century, both Western and Persian—as decadent, uncouth, and bankrupt and the Qajar rulers, at least in the latter half of the century, as greedy, cruel and occasionally ignorant. Iranian society of the period, too, is portrayed as impoverished and oppressed. There is plenty of evidence, no doubt, in support of such characterizations and European travellers of the period, with few exceptions, were anxious to illustrate the shortfalls of Iranian society rather than its accomplishments. Presenting the Qajar court as exotic, if not bizarre, they contrasted it with what they perceived as the polite etiquette of European courts and their patronage of the arts. Even when Europeans were impressed with the pomp and circumstance of the Persian court, especially in the earlier part of the century, or with the courteous shahs and their generosity, their accounts betrayed an undertone of cultural superiority toward Persian court protocol and social mores.

Missing from these narratives are descriptions of the cultural and artistic dimensions of the Qajar era, whether the lives and works of individual artistic and literary figures or artistic expressions that were rooted in popular culture. There is relatively little in Western accounts about painters, musicians, poets, architects, calligraphers, chroniclers and craftsmen of the period. Acute observers, among them the British diplomats Sir Harford Jones Brydges (d. 1847), John Malcolm (d. 1833), Edward Scott Waring (d. 1821), Sir Gore Ouseley (d. 1844) and his elder brother, the orientalist William (d. 1842), the French diplomat Pierre Amédée Jaubert (d. 1847), and later Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (d. 1882) and Lord George N. Curzon (d. 1925), who wrote about the Persian court, had little to say about artistic culture. To them it was elusive and beyond their reach. Even more artistically inclined observers such as Aleksej D. Saltykov (d. after 1848), Robert Kerr Porter (d. 1842), James J. Morier (d. 1849), Col. Gaspard Drouville, Eugène Flandin (d. 1876), Charles James Wills (d. 1912) and the American Samuel G.W. Benjamin (d. 1914), who paid some attention to local painting, offered few interesting details about the identity of individual artists and their works.1
No more helpful in enrichting the cultural landscape of the Qajar era, Persian sources from that period offer few useful details. Despite numerous literary dictionaries (*tażkirah*), biographical dictionaries of different types, chronicles commissioned by Qajar rulers and later the entries in published journals and gazettes of the time, there is relatively little about the lives and works of artistic personalities beyond formulaic and often terse descriptions and incidental references. The cautious style of the authors leads to a dearth of important details. Writing about music and painting, not to mention dancing and erotic poetry, was viewed as taboo; these were topics to be seen and enjoyed but unworthy of recording for posterity. The Islamic prohibition on visual arts—and thus the fear of being stigmatized—and the low status that artistic activities were generally accorded in official accounts contributed to the low level of recognition for artists.2

One obvious outcome of this state of affairs was the demise of Qajar art. In the absence of court patronage fewer students were trained and the artistic production of even the major painters of the nineteenth century was tragically lost or destroyed. Further, the shift in cultural tastes, prompted by adulation of Western aesthetic standards and adherence to the romantic realism that was in vogue during the early Pahlavi period, put the remaining artists and craftsmen out of commission. Even those works of the artists that survived, some miraculously, lost their historical context since they were often lacking provenance and reliable records. The loss of context of the pictorial artefacts, more than with other forms of artistic expression, was lamentable since it offered clues not only to historical trends, personalities and events but also served as the incentive behind royal and elite patronage.

Despite the lack of interest by observers and historians, at the time the Persian cultural sphere—with Iran of the Qajar period at its centre—enjoyed a unique position within the rest of the Middle East for its preservation of a pictorial heritage up to the early twentieth century. The painting tradition was kept alive by the Qajar rulers and their affiliated elite, as well as by the audiences listening to storytellers (*naqqal*hā*) in the coffee houses and itinerant dervishes in the streets. They helped to legitimize the sovereigns as much as enliven stories of the *Shāhnāmah* and the tragedies of Karbala. Furthermore, painting proved to be an important vehicle for the discourse of modernity by providing new modes of expression, new techniques, new messages and new clientele. Persian royal painting made the successful transition into print culture in the form of illustrations for lithographic prints. Crossing the time-honoured barrier between the state and the subject (*dawlat va ra’iyyat*), painters as graphic artists of the Qajar era contributed to public imagination. Through the press and the publication of popular stories, religious art and cheap prints they tried to break away from the confines of the court and communicate with larger audiences of ordinary people.

**The making of a court painter**

Mīrzā Abū ‘l-Ḥasan Khān Gaffārī Kashānī, called “Ṣanī al-Mulk” (literally “the crafter of the domain”), the “chief [royal] painter” (*naqqāsh bāshi*) of the first two
decades of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh’s reign (1848–96), is an outstanding example of a Qajar artist in search of new forms and a new medium. Despite recent interest in his life and work, it is still necessary to locate Ṣanī’ al-Mulk in the emerging modernity of the Qajar era. His works offer not only artistic commentary on his time but also clues to his artistic innovations, personal convictions and possibly his premature death. In particular his gradual move from the private space of the court to the public realm of the press and publishing deserves attention.3

Abū ’l-Ḥasan Ghaffārī (also known in his earlier years as “Abū ’l-Ḥasan II”) was born in 1229/1814 in Kashan to an old family of statesmen and artists who for generations since the late Safavid period produced great Persian painters as well as distinguished diplomats, physicians, judges and historians. Between the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, there were 11 painters of repute from the Ghaffārī family of whom the first was Abū ’l-Ḥasan I (also known as Mustawfi Ghaffārī Kashānī; active between 1774 and 1800), the paternal great uncle of Abū ’l-Ḥasan. The last was Muḥammad Khān Ghaffārī, Kamāl al-Mulk (1847–1939), the great nephew of Ṣanī’ al-Mulk and the most celebrated Iranian painter of the period. The shift in the Ghaffārī family from judges and local governors of Kashan and Natanz in the early eighteenth century to artists and diplomats in the nineteenth century signifies the changing cultural climate of the post-Safavid era, especially during the Zand period. With the accession of Fath ‘Alī Shāh (r. 1797–1834), who was himself brought up in the Zand court, the Qajars began to fully absorb the courtly traditions of the Zand era (1760–85).4 Some of the most influential families in the service of the Zands, including the Ghaffārīs, shifted loyalties to the emerging northern power and brought to Tehran, the new capital, the rich heritage of the southern court, which itself was grounded in the seventeenth-century artistic legacy of the late Safavid period.5

Young Abū ’l-Ḥasan was probably first trained by his father, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ghaffārī—and by other members of his family—before studying in the late 1820s and early 1830s with the celebrated Mihr ‘Alī Isfahānī, the royal master of the late Fath ‘Alī Shāh court. Though our knowledge is scanty and most of our evidence circumstantial, it appears that through his family, but more so through his teacher, Abū ’l-Ḥasan mastered the techniques and traditions of large-scale royal portraiture as well as sketching (siyāh-qalam) and watercolour. Though originating from the late Safavid Isfahan, the art of life-size royal images was fully developed in Tehran under Fath ‘Alī Shāh—who was the prime subject of many portraits by Mihr ‘Alī and his contemporaries—and in provincial capitals where artists were patronized by prince governors during the first three decades of the nineteenth century.6

Abū ’l-Ḥasan was first admitted to the service of the Qajar rulers as a court painter toward the latter part of Muḥammad Shāh’s reign (1834–48) and soon made a name for himself as the rising star of the next generation of painters, presumably due to his versatility. Even in his early works we can detect a tangible departure from the style of his teacher, Mihr ‘Alī, and the glittering grandiosity of his period. The sobering mood of Muḥammad Shāh’s court in contrast to that of
Fath ‘Alī Shāh is detectable in the artistic taste of the period.7 The change was in part, though not entirely, shaped by the Sufi affinities of the ruling monarch and his chief minister and spiritual guide, Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāṣī Īravānī (d. 1265/1848), who called himself the First Person (shakhṣ-i awwal) rather than the customary sādr-i aʿẓam (grand vizier). A change from the protocol-conscious pomposity of Fath ‘Alī Shāh’s court to the more modest stance of Muḥammad Shāh who had a more realistic self-image and whose reign led to the downsizing of the royal household, abolishing the old princely system of provincial governments, purging the administration (dīvān), cutting expenditure and expropriating some of the estates belonging to the nobility. The Āqāsī administration, despite its failings that tarnished its image as chaotic and bankrupt, should be credited for pioneering a state-sponsored sense of national identity that superseded Qajar tribal loyalties. These notions found expressions in the works of Ṣanīʿ al-Mulk and his fledgling artistic worldview.8

Yet for court artists such as Abū ’l-Ḥasan, who depended on royal commissions, the change in climate no doubt meant less work and none on the scale once possible under Fath ‘Alī Shāh and his many offspring. Even smaller scale portraits of Muḥammad Shāh were fewer in number, presumably because there was less need for projecting an image of grandeur at home and abroad. Defeat in the war with Russia (1826–8), a humiliating loss of territory and the payment of an enormous war indemnity that virtually bankrupted the Persian state, left little opportunity for celebrating kingship. Even the military campaign of 1837–8 which aimed to reassert Iran’s historic claim over the province of Herat ended ingloriously.9

Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s depiction of Muḥammad Shāh reflects something of this changing mood. In 1258/1842 he produced an oil-on-canvas portrait in the style of his teachers, but notably on a smaller scale. Not only the size, which in the style of European portraits of the period only showed the torso, but also the Shah’s appearance was different. With trimmed beard and calm posture the Shah appears in a Persian jubbah worn over a buttoned-up European military jacket and a bowtie, a European-style buckle, a Qajar long lambskin hat with plumed jiqqahs, standing in front of a Western-style red drapery hanging in front of a veranda in the background (see figure 21.1). This was a major departure from the conventions of the Fath ‘Alī Shāh era. A small watercolour two years later (1844) showed Muḥammad Shāh in a modern outfit and an even more realistic depiction of his demeanour; he was suffering at the time from severe gout and other ailments. The same realism is visible in a miniature portrait of Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāṣī from around 1846.10

The change in the court climate and the state’s financial constraints—which made the commissioning of multi-panel wall paintings and similar large-scale projects undesirable—must have contributed to Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s decision to leave Iran for Europe in order to study the techniques and styles of European masters in Italy. It appears that this was a personal initiative by Abū ’l-Ḥasan and was paid for from his own pocket. It is not unlikely however that in making such a decision he was motivated by a number of European artists residing in Iran at the time. The
Italian-French officer, Col. F. Colombari, an army engineer and watercolour artist of some talent, served in the Qajar army from 1833–48. He belonged to a circle of artists who were close to the young crown prince Nāṣir al-Dīn Mīrzā. In 1847 Colombari made a watercolour portrait of Muḥammad Shāh that somewhat resembled Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s aforementioned royal portrait implying a possible influence on the latter by the Italian artist. We also know of an 1844 watercolour by Colombari of the young crown prince Nāṣir al-Dīn Mīrzā showing him in a realistic pose and modest attire not unlike the later watercolours produced by Abū ’l-Hasan. In addition, an 1845 sketch by the crown prince states that he copied Colombari and thus suggests that he took lessons from the Italian. Later in 1848, Nāṣir al-Dīn Mīrzā, while governor-general of Azarbajjan, also received painting lessons from a different Italian tutor, I. Cosolani. These Italian artists may have known Şanī’ al-Mulk and enamoured him of Italian art schools and art collections. In later years Şanī’
al-Mulk himself served as a painting tutor to the young shah and perhaps continued the tradition of Nāṣīr al-Dīn’s earlier instruction.11

If Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s European visit started, as circumstantial evidence suggests, at the time of Nāṣīr al-Dīn Shāh’s accession to the throne in Tehran in October 1848, it is then possible to suggest that his departure may have been related to the drastic change in court politics and even to the collapse of the Āqāsī government. The rise of the celebrated Mīrzā Taqī Khān, “Amīr Kabīr”, as the grand vizier and the Shah’s tutor and chief of the army was aimed at bringing about a new order (naẓm) in the organization of the state. The new contingent imposed by Amīr Kabīr may indeed have contributed to the termination of Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s services as a court painter. It may be argued on the other hand that Amīr Kabīr’s intended reform scheme also had a cultural component aimed at promoting a modern artistic culture beyond the court and into the emerging public space, especially through the press. Such a project may have required indulging the young Shah’s artistic interests by dispatching to Europe a talented young artist such as Abū ’l-Ḥasan in order to master the art of the press and newspaper publication.

Visiting revolutionary Europe

In his less than three-year stay in Italy Abū ’l-Ḥasan chiefly studied works of Renaissance masters. The statement announcing the opening of the art academy established by Abū ’l-Ḥasan in 1862, in the official government gazette, Rūznāmah-yi dawlat-i ‘alliyyah-yi Iran, states that “in his Italian trip, a number of canvases that he copied from works of Master Rafail [Raphael] received the approval of all [his] teachers.”12 In addition to Raphael, the announcement implies Abū ’l-Ḥasan also copied works of Michelangelo (Mikā’il), Titian (Tisīyānah) and other masters.13

This is as much of a written record as we have of Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s training in Italy. A number of the copies of Italian masters that he brought back home survived him (and are apparently extant). Much however remains to be confirmed about the itinerary of his visit, the art collections he visited, the art academy or academies he may have attended and his teachers. Judging by the subjects of the copies he made, it seems that as well as Rome, the Vatican and Florence, he may have also visited Venice. As was customary at the time, students of painting spent many hours copying works of masters in galleries and museums, and Abū ’l-Ḥasan was no exception. The fact that upon his return to Iran he established an art school in the European model may confirm his study in an Italian art academy, most likely in Florence, a centre for classical training.

Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s Italian visit and his whereabouts are particularly significant given that during his stay in 1848–51 a nationalist revolutionary movement, the Risorgimento, was attempting to unify the country (as part of a wider revolutionary trend that swept Europe at that time). Abū ’l-Ḥasan must have witnessed the events of the Risorgimento and was most likely impressed by them. In late 1848 he may have seen the arrival of the revolutionary forces in Rome, the Italian Legion led by Giuseppe Garibaldi (d. 1882). He may also have seen, in early 1849, the proclamation of the ephemeral Roman Republic, the creation of the
Constituent Assembly and the appointment of Giuseppe Mazzini (d. 1872) as prime minister. At this time, in early 1849, a young revolutionary priest, Abbé Arduini, attacked the Pope and denounced his claim to temporal power as “a historical lie, a political imposture, and a religious immorality.” Moreover, Abū ’l-Ḥasan may have witnessed the collapse of the infant republic after a two-month siege of the city by the French troops who were supporting the Papacy. The revolutionary leaders fled Rome and the Papal authority was restored. In Florence, too, a number of students in art academies, later among Italy’s leading romantic and proto-impressionist painters, participated in revolutionary uprisings in Tuscany and Lombardy against Austrian hegemony.

The revolutionary romanticism of the period greatly influenced not only Italian painting but more significantly the graphic art and mass production of the time. If nothing else, the popular press of the period must have amply demonstrated to Abū ’l-Ḥasan the power of images, something that he later tried to employ in his own directorship of the Persian press. Moreover, the 1848 revolutions must have reminded Abū ’l-Ḥasan of events closer to home. Since 1844 the claims of Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad, the “Bāb” in Iran, challenged the authority of the Shiite mujtahidān. The messianic movement of his followers, the Bābīs, began to rage at exactly the same time as the Risorgimento. The Bābī resistance at the fort of Ṭabarṣī in Māzandarān, one of the highlights of the movement, was crushed in May 1849 by joint forces of the ‘ulamāʾ and the Qajar state after seven months of resistance by the Bābī defenders.

Contrary to its dramatic political upheavals, artistically, Italy was no longer at the cutting edge and the Italian academies were not exactly hotbeds for new trends in pictorial art. Their pedagogy was strictly determined by classical norms grounded in the works of Renaissance masters. In Florence, Abū ’l-Ḥasan could have attended the Accademia di Belle Arti, which by the mid-nineteenth century was still the most prestigious, though not the most advanced, art school. More likely, he may have gravitated toward the school of Luigi Mussini (d. 1888), where the teaching emphasized a new approach to the fifteenth-century Florentine principles of drawing and orderly construction. Mussini, himself of German origin, who fought in the 1848 revolution, did not follow the strict rules of the Accademia, but was more interested in free expression inspired by Renaissance masters and especially by Raphael. Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s deep admiration for Raphael could have been nurtured in such an environment. This may also explain his reluctance later in life to strictly follow the rules of perspective and other European conventions. Although not explicit, artistic influences from the Italian trip—and the political awareness that came with it—shaped Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s life and work in subtle ways. He remained remarkably loyal to the Persian pictorial tradition to the end and yet there was much that he internalized—in effect Persianized—from his European experience.

**Illustrating One Thousand and One Nights**

The earliest of such projects incorporating European arts may be observed in the monumental project of illustrating *One Thousand and One Nights* (*Hazār va yak
shab; also known in European languages as the Arabian Nights, translated from the recovered Arabic version Alf layla wa-layla) under Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s supervision. The One Thousand and One Nights project was perhaps the most important example of royal patronage of the Qajar period and arguably one of the greatest artistic achievements of the nineteenth-century Muslim world. Commissioned by the young Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh in 1268/1851–2, shortly after Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s return to Iran, the illustrated royal manuscript in six massive volumes was based on a masterful 1259/1843 translation from Arabic by ‘Abd al-Latīf Ṭaṣūjī, a capable literary scholar from Azarbaijan, and with the poetic contribution of Surūsh Iṣfahānī (later the poet laureate of the early Nāṣirī period; d. 1285/1868). Both men served in the Tabriz provincial court of Bahman Mīrzā, brother of the ruling monarch and prince governor of Azarbaijan in the late 1830s and early 1840s. A capable prince with a range of cultural interests and a substantial library, he inherited from his father, ‘Abbās Mīrzā, an interest in European modernity. Much of Nāṣir al-Dīn Mīrzā’s interest in modern art and culture was first cultivated in Tabriz when, in 1847, he replaced his ousted uncle Bahman Mīrzā and inherited from him not only his library but also the cultural figures attached to his court.²⁰

Ṭaṣūjī’s translation was based on a 1251–2/1835 Bālāq edition of Alf layla wa-layla (commissioned by Muḥammad ‘Alī Pāshā of Egypt) that probably belonged to Bahman Mīrzā’s library. The translation was published shortly thereafter in 1261/1845 in Tabriz and to instant fame. Greatly enjoying the stories of One Thousand and One Nights (which were read aloud to him), the adolescent crown prince reportedly was so enthralled that he imagined himself in that world as the king of the fairyland (shāh-i parīyān).¹⁹ It is therefore not surprising that upon his accession the young Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh was eager to commission a multi-volume illustrated manuscript of his favourite story. In fact, his support for Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s travels to Italy may have been in part to prepare the young artist for undertaking this massive project with the encouragement of his influential confidant, Ḥusayn ‘Alī Khān, “Mu’āyyir al-Mamālik,” scion to one of the oldest families of Iranian nobility, and an influential patron of Abū ’l-Ḥasan.

We may even surmise that the start of the project in the months just after the downfall and secret murder of Amīr Kabīr in early 1852 was not a mere coincidence. Amīr Kabīr was often critical of the young Shah’s self-indulgence, and at times childish conduct, and would have hardly agreed with a costly artistic project that merely indulged the Shah’s prurient pleasure. His successor, Mīrzā Āqā Khān Nūrī, who was a tactical ally of Mu’āyyir al-Mamālik, on the other hand, was anxious to encourage the Shah’s artistic patronage through such projects and hence keep him away from affairs of state; a wish that Nāṣir al-Dīn welcomed for some years.²⁰

The royal project was produced in the Majma’ al-Ṣanā’ī (the Arts and Crafts Complex), a complex that was part of a new development initiated by Amīr Kabīr but came to fruition after his fall. Founded by Mu’āyyir al-Mamālik, the short-lived Majma’ al-Ṣanā’ī in the Tehran bazaar aimed to promote Persian arts and crafts as well as printing, artistic education and commercial marketing of homemade handicrafts. Supporting fine arts was an important component of the scheme
possibly with the persuasion of Ḥusayn ‘Aṭī‘ī’s son, Dust ‘Alī Khān (the future “Mu‘ayyir al-Mamālik”), who later became an important cultural modernizer of the Nāšīrī period. The idea of a complex may have been rooted in the Safavid institution of royal workshops (kārkhānah) but in a new garb—beyond the exclusive limits of the court and thus more accessible to the public. Perhaps Ṣanī‘ al-Mulk, too, who had just returned from Europe, played a part in the development of the complex. Among various crafts the government gazette mentions a carriage workshop, watchmaker, designer of military uniforms and accoutrements, a gunsmith, a sword maker and painting (naqqāshī).  

Ṣanī‘ al-Mulk’s workshop, which apparently was first set up in the house of Mu‘ayyir al-Mamālik, soon moved to Majma‘ al-Ṣanā‘ī‘ in order to allow sufficient room for no less than 34 apprentices working on the project. According to a contemporary report, even the new space was not sufficient, and for good reason. Altogether, 42 painters, calligraphers, book illuminators (muzahhib), papier-mâché artists and bookbinders were involved. While the text was produced in the Nasta‘līq style by the master calligrapher Mīrẓā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tihrānī (whose sobriquet was “Ishrat”), the painters, book illuminators and bookbinders were involved at various stages. In the short period of three years between 1268–71/1852–5 the master painter Abū ‘l-Ḥasan and his apprentices, who worked with him on various stages of manuscript illustration such as sketching, detailing and filling in, produced a total of 1,134 pages of illustrations. Throughout the six volumes of the royal folio totalling 2,280 pages, every page of the text was interspersed with a page of illustrations. With every page containing three to five captioned scenes (majālis), the entire manuscript consisted of at least 3,500 to 4,000 illustrations. The overall supervision of the project was assigned to Mu‘ayyir al-Mamālik, who apparently worked in close consultation with the Shah.  

The most remarkable aspect in the conceptualization and execution of the royal manuscript was Abū ‘l-Ḥasan’s artistic courage to contemporize the illustrations of the ancient tales of Indian, Persian and Arabian origin. In contrast to European illustrated editions of the Arabian Nights published as early as 1811 (and even earlier), which invariably orientalized the images by imagining what seemed to them an “authentic” historical context for the tales such as the Abbasid court in Baghdad, the adventures of Sindbad or Aladdin (a tradition that has found its way through to Disney’s animated productions of our time), Abū ‘l-Ḥasan’s depictions of all the tales were ostensibly contemporary. There was no Baghdad of the orientalist imagination as appeared in popular illustrations of the nineteenth century, but rather scenes from the Qajar court and the Qajar capital with ordinary people in Persian outfits in their houses, in the streets, shops, bathhouses and other public and private spaces, and with unmistakably Iranian physiognomies.  

The fictional characterization in the manuscript project, moreover, paid special attention to women’s space and depicted characters—facilitated by the stories of One Thousand and One Nights—often left out of the official narratives of the period: servants, household slaves, children and a range of entertainers, musicians, dancers, street vendors and beggars. The women were shown, often, not in sober and enveloping hijāb in the exterior space, but in the jolly intimate environment of
the interior, liberally attired, with uncovered faces, and occasionally uncovered bodies. Equally intimate were numerous scenes of musical performances and dancing, festivities, food and wine, playful lives and many liberties enjoyed by a host of princes, kings and caliphs as well as fairies, the jinn and other fantastic beings who routinely fell victims to their illicit escapades, their own gullibility and the trickery of their deceitful ministers and crafty servants, wives, concubines and slaves. One wonders if there could have been a more appropriate vehicle than this collection of ancient tales to allegorically depict the artist’s own time and surroundings.

The royal manuscript is indeed an enormous visual collection of ethnographic and anthropological value depicting life in the Qajar era: the interior and exterior of houses, barber shops, stores in the bazaar, street and alleys, public buildings such as bathhouses, mosques and madrassas, water reservoirs and buildings as well as outfits of various social groups and professional guilds, women’s dresses and makeup, men’s hats and trimmed beards and their smoking habits. The rendering of European visitors—often depicted as Romans (rūmīyān)—and European technological innovations, including steamers, embedded in the narrative, offered a window into the positive representation of Europeans (farangīyān) in the Iranian consciousness. There are scenes of warfare, hunting, murder and robbery as well as various penalties and capital punishment; all faithful portrayals of the artist’s and his associates’ acute observations of their surroundings (see figures 21.2 and 21.3).

With a lively artistic touch and, at times, satirical eye, Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s workshop also produced daring scenes of amorous affairs and lovemaking, depicting slaves and masters, orgies, and other erotic encounters not only among humans but also between humans and fairies, demons and fantastic animals. The stories’ erotic content, perhaps the prime motive for the young Nāṣir al-Dīn’s commission, offered a convenient vehicle for Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s emphasis on sexuality. References in the accounts of the period to the Shah’s preoccupation with fairies and with sexual experiences further explains the particular nature of Nāṣir al-Dīn’s royal patronage (see figure 21.4).

Yet the depiction of gender and sexuality, if at times erotic, was not altogether dismissive of women and did not portray them merely as sex objects, nor was the painter’s artistic eye entirely male-dominated. Yet gender roles were distinctly differentiated and markers for the sexes were clearly set. The male and female physiognomies are unmistakably vivid and the scenes of entertainment, dancing and lovemaking do not suggest any ambiguity. As far as can be ascertained from a specimen of the illustrations available, women are not depicted with moustaches and only very few men are shaven and in European (farangī) outfit. Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s works no doubt bear some European influence, yet there is little to suggest that either before or after his European trip the boundary between the sexes was crossed. Even though we can detect in some of the images, especially those of the supernatural figures or images of lovemaking between black slaves and white masters, a break from accepted conventions of sexuality, they nevertheless belong to the harem life of the elite or to the world of imagination and not to the scenes
Figure 21.2 Scenes from *Hazār va yak shab* (One Thousand and One Night), Gulistan Library: Tāj al-Mulūk, the vizier, and ʿAzīz conversing with the Shaykh (top); in the bathhouse (middle); out in the street (bottom).
Figure 21.3 Scenes from Ḥazār va yak shab (One Thousand and One Night), Gulistan Library: Ẓaw’ al-Makān fighting the Europeans (rūmīyān) (top); prince Hardūb consulting with Ẓāt al-Dawwāhī (middle); prince Afrīdūn rewarding the troops (bottom).
Figure 21.4 Scenes from *Hażar va yak shab* (*One Thousand and One Night*), Gulistan Library: Nuzhat al-Zamān’s nocturnal party (top); Illumination of the capital (middle); Nuzhat al-Zamān and prince Shirkān in the wedding chamber (bottom).
of ordinary life. It is also quite possible to assume that though the manuscript was primarily aimed at a royal audience and a small circle of male attendants, it is very likely that many of the women of the royal harem including the wives, sisters and other relatives of the shah as well as servants and affiliates of the largely informal courts of the Nāṣirīr period also enjoyed the voyeuristic pleasures of the illustrated manuscript. Indeed, a then-contemporary European source, Heinrich K. Brugsch 8 (d. 1894), a member of the Prussian embassy to the Persian court between 1860 and 1861, reported that the royal manuscript was prepared as a gift by Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh to his mother, Jahān Khānum Maḥz ʿUlyā; an important detail since it confirms the influential Maḥz ʿUlyā’s interest in art and especially in the illustration of One Thousand and One Nights.

Yet indulging Nāṣir al-Dīn’s voyeuristic urges did not dissuade Abū ʿl-Ḥasan from cogent pictorial commentary and some illustrations even give subtle hints as to the artist’s political orientation. One striking example is a reference to an incident in 1850 that contributed to the murder of Amīr Kabīr. Depicting the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809 CE) and his celebrated minister, Jaʿfar Barmakī, two of the personalities in a well-known tale of One Thousand and One Nights, Abū ʿl-Ḥasan substituted the young Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh for Hārūn and Amīr Kabīr for Jaʿfar Barmakī, both appearing in contemporary Qajar attire (see figure 21.5). The scene is an allusion, no doubt, to the royal tour of Isfahan when Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh became highly suspicious of his grand vizier, who also was his royal tutor (atābak), for showing favour toward the younger half-brother of the shah, ʿAbbās Mīrzā (III), also shown standing behind the grand vizier. The presumed favour harboured by Amīr Kabīr toward the prince—probably a figment of the Shah’s imagination and rooted in his dislike of ʿAbbās III—was interpreted by the Shah as proof of the grand vizier’s treasonous design to replace him on the throne by his hated half-brother. Soon thereafter, upon returning to the capital, Amīr Kabīr was dismissed, exiled and executed in secret.

That Abū ʿl-Ḥasan employs the story of Jaʿfar Barmakī’s execution in 803 CE by the order of caliph Hārūn to depict events of his own time may be taken as something more than a whimsical satire. The popular story, as narrated in One Thousand and One Nights, held that Jaʿfar’s death was because he consummated his marriage to ʿAbbāsa, the caliph’s sister, despite the condition set by the caliph not to. This was a further parallel to Amīr Kabīr’s story and his unwanted marriage to ʿIzzat al-Dawlah, the Shah’s younger sister. Given the sensitivity of the whole affair, the diplomatic damage that Amīr Kabīr’s execution caused to the Shah’s prestige, and the extensive concealment of the whole affair in the literature of the period, Abū ʿl-Ḥasan’s attempt appears as a daring rebuke, albeit allegorically. We don’t know if this artistic reference was understood by the Shah—having been included among many thousands of illustrations—and if so how it was received.

The speedy compilation of the One Thousand and One Nights, however, was handsomely rewarded. We are fortunate to have the contract and some details concerning the cost of the royal commission. The contract (muqātaʿa) drawn up on 10th Zīr ʿl-Qaʿda 1268/26th August 1852 and signed by Ḥusayn ʿAlī Khān Muʿayyir al-Mamālīk, commissions Abū ʿl-Ḥasan and his partner, Ustād Āqā
Figure 21.5 Scenes from *Hazār va yak shab* (*One Thousand and One Night*), Gulistan Library: Ghānim’s mother and sister along with Qawt al-Qulūb on his bedside (top); the caliph converses with Ja’far (middle); Ghānim with his mother and his sister (bottom).
Naqqāsh, presumably the illuminator working with Abū ’l-Ḥasan, to illustrate and illuminate the manuscript within three years for the sum of 3,580 tumān (roughly equivalent to British 1,630 pound sterling); a hefty sum by the standards of the time. Of the 3,280 scenes (majālis), 320 were already completed and the remaining ones were to be delivered on a monthly basis and the appropriate sum to be released to the artist in return. If there was any delay, the document warned, the artists would be “exposed to royal rebuke.” Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh’s marginal note confirmed the arrangement and added: “God willing, this book is to be completed in three years with utmost effort and precision in order to bring it to completion in the best possible fashion.”

That Abū ’l-Ḥasan actually entered into contractual relations with Ḥusayn ‘Alī Khān Mu’ayyir al-Mamālik, who was acting on behalf of the crown, may well indicate something of a modern interaction between the patron and the artist. Abū ’l-Ḥasan was no longer a mere servant of the Shah but an artist with legal personality not unlike the Renaissance masters he admired; an artist who rendered services in exchange for a monetary reward showing he clearly recognized the artistic value of his work and the appropriate reward he was entitled to receive.

Yet the time constraints and the enormity of the task were bound to affect the quality of the work which, at times, especially in the later volumes, appeared somewhat rushed, uneven and repetitive. Yet, shortcomings aside, the emerging work of art despite its cost—which surely would have been frowned upon by Amīr Kabīr if it were done during his term of office—became a great accomplishment of the Nāṣirī period for it tried to break the conventional mould and bridge the yawning gap between Persian and Western pictorial sensibilities.

Allusive art of the private space

Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s monumental work however remained confined within the walls of the royal library and very few, aside from the Shah, ever glanced at it. Interest in the manuscript seems to have faded with the Shah passing away in his early youth. Besides a reference in the unpublished 1271/1854–5 Tārīkh-i qājār by Mīrzā Aḥmad Munštī Badāyī’ī’ nigār, we don’t know of any other reference in the contemporary sources. Even Muḥammad Ḥasan Khān I’timād al-Saltanah, the cultivated minister of publications of the late Nāṣirī period and the royal librarian who compiled the first catalogue of the royal collection, does not make a reference to it in his copious secret diaries. The illustrations, even the most conservative among them, seemed hardly fit for publication since they were suspiciously close to actual Qajar court life, almost a pictorial commentary. Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s influence on Qajar art was not widespread though not entirely absent either, albeit discrete. We can surmise that many of the apprentices working on the project were later involved in other projects or produced works of their own. The thriving art of popular paintings and lithograph illustrations in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shows some resemblance to the watercolours of One Thousand and One Nights.

Successful completion of the manuscript project established Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s reputation as the royal painter (naqqāsh bāshi), a position to which he was
appointed upon his return from Italy. The next grand project, this time a large programme of wall panels commissioned in 1854 by the grand vizier (sadr-i a’zam) Mīrzā Āqā Khān Nūrī for his newly constructed mansion, the Niẓāmiyyah (named after his son, Kāzīm Khān Niẓām al-Mulk), clearly demonstrated Abū ‘l-Ḥasan’s ability to make large-scale panels in the style of his predecessors from Fatḥ ‘Alī Shāh’s era; an era which Nūrī admired as the paradigm of Persian kingship and therefore wanted to emulate in his own reign.

Completed in 1274/1857, the seven-panel oil on canvas panels installed around the reception hall of the Niẓāmiyyah (now in the Irān Bāstān Museum), depicted the court of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh in the style of Fatḥ ‘Alī Shāh’s court and utilized the techniques and composition of the master painters of that period (such as Abū ‘l-Ḥasan’s own teacher, Mīhr ‘Alī Īṣfahānī). Placing Nāṣir al-Dīn on the Sun Throne (takht-i khārshīd; better known as the “Peacock Throne,” takht-i ṣāvūs), surrounded by the royal princes, all major state officials, military officers and other dignitaries including the diplomatic corps, the whole programme was meant to reassert the young Shah’s still shaky throne six years into his reign when he was especially troubled over succession and his choice of the crown prince. The Shah’s uncle, Prince Bahman Mīrzā—who claimed the regency over the Qajar throne from his exile in Russia—had allied himself with the Shah’s half-brother ‘Abbās Mīrzā III. He enjoyed Russia’s backing and hoped for Britain’s approval.

The panels were thus meant to signal to the Shah, to his favourite wife, Jayrān, and other powerful courtiers of the Nāṣirī court the grand vizier’s full loyalty to the throne. Representing the Qajar nobility, all 94 of them, was thus a delicate and highly sensitive task that no doubt was arranged through full consultation with Nūrī himself. The Qajar figures all appeared in their formal attire: the princes of the royal family and Qajar khans in their colourful silk and wool jubbahs with tall black slant sheepskin caps; the statesmen with their distinct turban-like headgear and European envoys in all their finery, all surrounding the throne on which the Shah and the royal princes appeared in the full regalia distinctive of their country. The whole project was meant to convey a sense of confidence, stability and order, a task that Abū ‘l-Ḥasan managed to complete with remarkable skill and realistic precision but also with subtle hints of political contentions and court intrigues, which he achieved by positioning rival personalities in remoter locations to the Shah and enhancing others by proximity to the throne (see figure 21.6).

Like the exclusive viewing of One Thousand and One Nights, the Niẓāmiyyah panels were only seen by the Qajar elite as was the case with other projects of the Fatḥ ‘Alī Shāh era (and most other examples of royal and noble artistic patronage in Europe at that time). Strictly closed to the general public, the panels’ subject matter—depicting Qajar glory with the subtext of the premier’s palpable power—were treated as a private affair. Even though Nūrī employed other means to promote his own public image and the autonomy of his office through various publications such as newspaper articles and a commissioned history of the grand vizierate (sadrārat), which was published during his time, no lithographic reproduction of the panels was ever produced.
Employing satire

Commissions from the court and the nobility including a large number of portraits of officials and dignitaries—executed in a novel technique and often with a critical eye into their personality—was a boost to Abū ʿl-Ḥasan’s prestige and no doubt a reliable source of income. As a royal tutor to Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh, his drawing lessons impressed the Shah and his style and wit influenced the Shah’s cartoon-like drawings. He accompanied the monarch on his domestic trips and made watercolour sketches of scenes of royal hunting and encampment, military reviews and horse races. Yet his comfortable life as the royal painter did not seem to fulfil him. As time passed, he tried to liberate himself both from the artistic conventions of his time and the strictures of royal patronage.

One obvious departure may be seen in a number of satirical watercolours—perhaps part of a larger collection that is no longer extant (or not yet recovered)—that represent an alternative view of court life and society at large. As if lampooning his serious commissions—and the Niẓāmiyyah panels in particular—his satirical commentary on the ills and failings of his surroundings seems to have been inspired by European political caricatures. The earliest known, and perhaps the most remarkable, produced on 26th Ramazān 1268/14th July 1852, shortly after his return from Italy, depicts the scene of a brawl—almost a riot—in the city of Tabriz (see figure 21.7). The caption on the top left of the watercolour identifies it as:

the portrait of ʿAzīm Khān ʿĪsfāhānī during the governorship of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khān. One day he received news that two Turks had engaged in revelry in public and brought [... one word has been discarded; possibly “a prostitute”]. Whereupon ʿAzīm Khān accompanied by a large crowd set out to hunt them down. Alerted to this, the Turks drew their sabres and attacked ʿAzīm Khān’s army. At once he and his people were knocked down to the ground.
The riot depicted in Isfahan around 1266/1850 may very well have been the one that triggered a long and bloody period of unrest and uprising mostly against the local Qajar governor and the central Qajar state. Almost a revolution, for several years the popular unrest claimed many lives, wreaked much destruction and caused serious trouble for the Qajar state. Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s portrayal thus may be seen as a satirical take on the helplessness of the government forces in the face of city brigands (lūṭīyān), represented in this scene by two sabre-rattling Turks. Given their dress they most likely were Caucasian émigrés (muhājiriyān) whose sacrilegious breach of the sharī’a code seemed to have aroused the anger of the pious people of Isfahan. The Caucasian émigrés came to Iran after the 1828 Turkmāncha’ī peace treaty with Russia and the ensuing exchange of population and were often employed as government agents. Almost a private army to Hājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī, their unfamiliar behaviour was distasteful to the local population—including drinking and debauchery—and caused urban clashes and riots.

A small watercolour (56 by 44 centimetres) with roughly 62 human figures and seven donkeys depicts with mastery the frightened crowd in a moment of panic and chaos. The caricature-like figures in the crowd, the timidity of ‘Azīm Khān and the audacity of the Turkish lūṭīyān presents a strong undertone of social turmoil, one that is accentuated by a huge mass of entangled bodies with sabres and cudgels in hands, broken caps and eyes transfixed in a moment of terror. It is
a work of almost surreal quality, one that may have been influenced by Western graphic art, possibly contemporary Italian posters. Particularly puzzling is a mounted figure in the background (top left) holding a rooster and wearing a European-like helmet as if he is bringing a message of deliverance to the tumultuous crowd. Is this a reference to events in Europe at this time? The rooster (cock) may indeed signify revolutionary France; a symbol first adopted in the 1830s to represent the political virility of the French people. Whatever the symbolism, Abū ’l-Ḥasan’s work offered a masterful allusion to the pre-revolutionary state of his own country at the time and the challenges to the authority of the Qajar state. Between 1848 and 1852 the Bābī messianic movement was at its height, the Sālār secessionist rebellion was raging in Khurasan and much of Iran, including Isfahan, was mired in urban unrest and rebellion.34

In other works Abū ’l-Ḥasan also satirizes the court and princely life with a daring finesse, and apparently to the Shah’s delight. His watercolour of Prince ‘Abd al-Šamad Mīrzā ‘Izz al-Dawlah, a half-brother of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh, in Sulṭāniyyah (today’s Arak) dates from 1859 (see figure 21.8). It captures the sycophancy and intrigue of attending servants (nawkarān) with a moralized message not unlike the Isfahan riot. This appealed to the Shah who was always suspicious of the machinations of his own family. Another young prince, probably the other disfavoured brother of the Shah, prince ‘Abbās Mīrzā III, was also depicted—by the “order of His Majesty”35—as if he too is manipulated by his attendants, a bunch of dishevelled rouges. Though both works seems to have been commissioned to ridicule princes and indulge the Shah’s vengeful dislike of them, they

Figure 21.8 Prince ‘Abd al-Šamad Mīrzā ‘Izz al-Dawlah and his attendants, watercolor, 1276/1876.
nevertheless offered a piercing commentary on the dismal state of the Qajar court. It was as if the artist subtly hinted that the court culture of his own royal master was not substantially different. Yet Abū 'l-Ḥasan seems to have indulged his master in the hopes of a more favourable appointment beyond the court circle.

In search of a public medium

His appointment on 19th Ṣafar 1277/6th September 1860 to the editorship of the government’s official gazette, *Vaqāyi’ ittīfāqiyyah*—the first regular journal of the Iranian state initiated by Amīr Kabīr in early 1851—was an important turning point in Abū ‘l-Ḥasan’s career. Published under the title *Rūznāmah-yi dawlat-i ʿalliyah-yi Īrān* (*The Journal of the Sublime State of Iran*)—a grand title adopted under Abū ‘l-Ḥasan’s editorship—the weekly journal took a new format with lithographic illustrations, a visible improvement in quality and style and even some improvement in the quality of the reporting. Though it visibly, even more than previous years, adopted a sycophantic tone in reporting the court and portraying the Shah, it also exercised over time a certain editorial independence. Abū ‘l-Ḥasan, who in 1861 received the title “Ṣānī’ al-Mulk,” no doubt enjoyed the full support of the Shah as well as the blessing of the cultivated prince ‘Alī-Quli Mīrzā, “Lṭīğād al-Saltanah,” minister of sciences and publication in the new administration that came to power in 1858 after the dismissal of Mīrzā Āqā Khān Nūrī and under the Shah’s direct supervision.

The following six years (1860–6)—corresponding to Ṣānī’ al-Mulk’s term in office as the editor—coincided with half-hearted attempts at administrative and political reforms including establishing a state consultative council, a cabinet with ministerial posts, and a semblance of ministries devoted to various affairs of the state. Although the reform movement was ultimately frustrated by entrenched conservatism within the court and government, the period did result in the broadening of the political sphere. The most notable changes were a division of responsibilities at the cabinet level, rather than a monopoly of ministerial power in the hands of the grand vizier, while the consultative council with its limited legislative mandate contained a few reform minded members. Even a semi-clandestine political party, still in gestation, began to emerge as the House of Oblivion (*farāmūshkhānah*), remotely modelled on the European Freemasonry by the celebrated reformer and statesman Mīrzā Malkum Khān (d. 1908).

Ṣānī’ al-Mulk’s appointment no doubt accorded with these initiatives and was supposed to give them a public voice. One of the most influential figures behind the reform initiatives of this period, Farrukh Khān Ghaffārī, “Amin al-Mulk,” (later “Amin al-Dawlah”)—a capable statesman and diplomat—was a second cousin of Ṣānī’ al-Mulk. Upon his return from a European mission as Iran’s chief negotiator who signed the 1857 Paris Peace Treaty, he was appointed as court minister in 1859, a year later as the chief minister in an ephemeral cabinet and shortly thereafter to various other ministerial posts. Royal favour aside, Ṣānī’ al-Mulk must have enjoyed Amin al-Mulk’s patronage. He painted him a number of times and must have shared reformist aspirations with him.36
Under Şanî’ al-Mulk’s editorship, the Rūznāmah’s illustrations and other graphics dramatically improved, above all in the presentation of the gazette’s elaborate logo of the lion and the sun, the official emblem of the Iranian state. The emblem, widely in use as the state symbol since the 1840s, represents curious cultural complexities. The association of the lion and the sun with the Iranian kingship is old, perhaps going back to pre-Islamic times. At least since the Safavid times the lion symbolism was attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his title (often in folk culture) as Asad allāh al-ghālib (“the victorious lion of God”). He was seen in the Safavid and Qajar political culture as the patron saint of the Shi'ite rulers. The logo displayed on the first issue of the state gazette in 1851 made this association obvious, as did the legends on the coins of the Muḥammad Shāh era a few years earlier. Moreover, during the course of recapturing the city of Herat and the subsequent war with Britain (1856–7), Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh commissioned Şanî’ al-Mulk to produce a commemorative medallion that portrayed ‘Alī as the victorious lion of God holding his sabre on his lap. The sun in the state emblem, with a female face, seems to have been associated, at least under the Qajars, with the motherland (mām-i mīhān), a concept harking back to the Shāhnāmah. The lion of the state at least since the 1840s was armed with a sabre representing its military power presumably in defence of the motherland (see figures 21.9 and 21.10). The logo of the official gazette aimed to accentuate the growth of royal power. After the dismissal of premier Nūrī, the Shah’s direct rule needed a new pictorial representation and was evident even in the first issues under his direction. The lion with its massive mane is jubilant as if he is confident in his defence of the unveiled and somewhat vulnerable sun of the motherland. The reverse page carrying an iconic full-length portrayal of the Shah in royal regalia imbued the same sense of confidence.

The obvious infusion of royalist themes, implying the energetic start of a new era, seemed particularly necessary as a face-saving measure when the country and monarchy encountered new challenges. Defeat in the war with Britain in 1857 proved highly damaging to the Shah and his government. The Iranian army, despite some partisan resistance from the tribes of southern Fars, proved utterly incapable of resisting British advances in the Persian Gulf and in the interior of Fars. Nor was Iran allowed to hold control over the long-coveted Herat province. The Paris Peace Treaty demanded that Iran renounce sovereignty forever over a province crucial to the Qajar’s political prestige. The Herat debacle was soon followed by an equally disastrous defeat, this time during the Merv campaign of 1860 against the marauding Turkmens of the northeast. The Iranian army was entirely wiped out in the Central Asian desert and its troops died of thirst or were captured in droves to Turkmen slavery.

The spirit of grandiosity is also traceable in almost every issue of the gazette carrying frequent portrayals of the Shah, the princes and the statesmen and covering royal engagements such as horseracing, reviews of the troops and public audiences. These pictures were accompanied with flattering reports on the balanced condition of the Shah’s “blessed frame” (vujūd-i mas ’ūd), his unending hunting
Figure 21.9 Portrait of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in an illuminated page revering the First Shiite Imam, 1277/1861, Malik Museum, Tehran.
and other excursions to his many palaces and resorts and other ceremonials designed to give the impression of normalcy and stability.

These were the earliest images seen by the Iranian public (beyond manuscript illustrations of Persian literature accessible only to the privileged elite). The illustrations in the gazette were meant to convey to the reader the preserved order under the Shah’s auspices and by men of government and the army. Thanks to Şanî’ al-Mulk’s artistic talent the gazette was thus turned into a pictorial album of the ruling elite, portraying dignified statesmen, young prince governors and their guardians and supervisors, chiefs of the army, major state accountants and some members of the clergy. Every account of the “sublime” royal court praising the Shah’s competence and of the provinces of the “guarded domains” (mamālik-i mahrūsah) was meant to assure readers that peace and prosperity reigned. It appears that Şanî’ al-Mulk was determined to prove his loyalty to the Shah and to promulgate a glorified image of his royal patron and the Qajar nobility to the public, as he had done a decade earlier in the private confines of the Niżāmiyyah mansion with his wall panels. Indeed, throughout his term as editor only three scenes of public life—and those of no particular significance—appeared in the paper (see figure 21.11). The reporting was likewise inattentive to the dire
Figure 21.11 Illustrations from *Rūznāmah-yi dawlat-i 'aliyyah-yi Irān*: Miracle in a local shrine around Rasht (top); Sudden death for a dishonest dervish (bottom).
conditions in the country throughout the 1860s and especially the recurrence of regional famines and pandemics.

One may sense a subtext of scepticism, even a sneer, at the empty pomposity of the ruling elite and the inability of the Shah and his statesmen to overcome the country’s mounting problems. As if behind the façade of good statesmanship in the fanciful domain of the “Pivot of the Universe” Ṣanī’ al-Mulk could see the undercurrents of discontent and unrest. Yet as a public figure and the editor of the government gazette Ṣanī’ al-Mulk remained dismally submissive to royal whims and wishes and was conscious of his limits, at least on the surface.

An art school for the public

It is not thus surprising that while he was the editor of the Rūznāmah, Ṣanī’ al-Mulk sought an alternative outlet for his artistic aspirations. With the European fine art academies as his model, in 1862 he established a modern art school and an art gallery together with a lithographic workshop, the first of its kind in Iran. A notice in the Rūznāmah in April 1862 informed readers that:

The chief royal painter has established a government lithographic and painting school [kārkhānah-yi basmāh-i taṣvīr va naqqāshkhānah-yi dawlātī]. There he displayed excellent lithographic copies made after the works of famous [European] masters. He also provided the necessary means and implements for an art academy [maktabkhānah-yi naqqāshi] as he had seen in Europe and brought with him by the royal order. He has set up this establishment so that anyone willing to learn these crafts would not face any difficulty in acquiring them. Moreover, perhaps others engaged in various arts and profession who are seeking examples of superior taste would not remain idle and likewise popularise such lithographic workshops and regularly produce various images and thus give to such a craft a full exposure [ravāj-i kāmil].

Emphasis on lithographic printing is particularly noteworthy for it signals not only Ṣanī’ al-Mulk’s departure from the privacy of a royal court painter and the Shah’s drawing instructor but also his awareness of the power of printed images, something that he may very well have witnessed in the graphic art of revolutionary Europe.

The announcement further noted that four lithographic presses (charkh) in the printing workshop (kārkhānah-yi basmāh) were set up not only for the publication of newspapers and government public announcements, but also for private commissions such as producing high-quality copies of people’s portraits, up to a thousand copies. Earlier on, Ṣanī’ al-Mulk’s 1860 self-portrait published in the Rūznāmah (one of two extant) places him above a manual lithographic press, clearly implying a close association. It is as if his image—his artistic self—is blooming out of the printing machine holding a royal scroll proudly over his heart (see figure 21.12).
Figure 21.12 Abū ’l-Ḥasan Khān Ṣanī’ al-Mulk’s self portrait with his lithographic press, no. 472, 19th Ṣafar 1277/6th October 1860.

The announcement also informs us that in his art academy Ṣanī’ al-Mulk displayed copies of Raphael’s works he himself produced (and were approved by his Italian instructors) as well as lithographs of works by Raphael, Michelangelo and Titian, and plaster models (ṣūrat’hā-yi gachī) by these and other masters. According to the same announcement Ṣanī’ al-Mulk also published a drawing manual with the names and descriptions of European masters (now lost).

Soon after the Shah officially opened the state art academy (naqqāshkhānah-yi dawlatī) and expressed his satisfaction with Ṣanī’ al-Mulk’s efforts, another notice appeared in the Rūznāmah, notifying readers that anyone who wished his child to be instructed in the art of painting could register at the academy. Once a week Ṣanī’ al-Mulk himself taught the students while other days of the week the students copied the works of masters. On Fridays “which is a holiday for the state and the people,” the academy which was located in the royal citadel (arg-i sultānī) and adjacent to the government bureau (divānkhānah) was to be “open to all visitors whether servants of the court [nawkarān-i darbārī] or people from
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other professions [aṣnāf-i sā’ir-i umam] who are interested to view paintings.42 Ṣanīr al-Mulk thus attempted not only to admit art students without family or class discrimination but also to allow public viewing of European paintings in the academy, including scenes of Madonna and the Child, the Ascension and other Christian themes, within the confines of the restricted royal citadel. Such an unusual measure—presumably with the Shah’s approval—may reflect Ṣanīr al-Mulk’s plebeian proclivities and his desire to break through class barriers.

Dissident publications and a suspicious end

Not long after the establishment of Ṣanīr al-Mulk’s press, the earliest examples of dissident literature began to appear. Perhaps this was not a coincidence. In May 1862 a clandestine pamphlet (kītabchah) highly critical of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh’s statesmanship and his personal life was published in Tehran. Five hundred copies were ordered with the promise that soon it would be distributed throughout the country. Rebuking the Shah for profligacy, pleasure-seeking, capriciousness and mismanagement, the pamphlet presumably was written by the remnants of the farāmūshkhānāh group, the aforementioned secret society. Possibly penned by Mīrzā Ya’qūb Khān of Julfa in collaboration with his son and the founder of the secret society, the celebrated Mīrzā Mālḵum Khān, the tract blamed the Shah, among other things, for the murder of Ṣanīr Mālib, for the humiliating dismissal of his successor, Mīrzā ʿĀqā Khān Nūrī, and for labelling the Shah’s critics as dangerous Bābīs.43

There was obviously no mention of the printing house where the tract was produced but it stirred enough anxiety in the royal mind to order the arrest and exile of its presumed authors. The Shah also ordered the printing houses to be placed under tighter control, a task that was assigned to Ṣanīr al-Mulk as the editor of the Rūznāmah. Moreover, the closing down of the farāmūshkhānāh was soon followed by a number of purges, arrests and exiles of dissidents and presumed dissidents associated with Mālḵum Khān and his circle. A number of Bābīs were also arrested and executed on the charge of conspiring to assassinate the Shah. A number of announcements in the Rūznāmah, and a one-page supplement to the gazette, strictly forbade membership of the secret society and banned even mentioning its name. The coming to power of a high-ranking military officer, Muḥammad Khān Sipahsālār Qājār, as the new acting premier was also seen as a show of force; a mild coup de grâce engineered by the Shah to clam down—more accurately to repress—widespread unrest that disturbed the Shah’s peace of mind.44

A notice in a December 1863 issue of the Rūznāmah also complemented the draconian measures and reflected the Shah’s periodic alarm over the growing supply of “unsuitable” and harmful books and other printed material that he felt were bound to corrupt the hearts and minds of the children and the youth. The notice further demanded that Ṣanīr al-Mulk, as the chief officer in charge of publications and printing houses of the Guarded Domains of Iran, “exercise utmost supervision and vigilance so that books offensive to the public taste do not appear in print.”45 The royal decree, although on the surface aimed at children and youth,
also signalled official anxiety at the spread of dissident tracts critical of the monarchy, the failure of the reforms and the dire state of affairs. That Ṣānī‘ al-Mulk was the appointed man to tackle these problems may indicate the Shah’s confidence in the royal painter and long time editor of the government gazette. It may be read on the other hand as a call for greater vigilance and even a veiled threat to Ṣānī‘ al-Mulk.

Whatever the circumstances may have been, from the middle of 1865, less than a year and a half later, there was a degree of inconsistency in the format and production of the Rūznāmah, including a change in the design of the lion and the sun in its logo and the quality and style of the illustrations; discrepancies that may imply undisclosed changes in the editorship due to Ṣānī‘ al-Mulk’s deteriorating health or possibly his demotion and gradual distancing from the court. By July 1866, judging by the announcement in the Rūznāmah, Ṣānī‘ al-Mulk may still have been in charge of the gazette—at least nominally—but no doubt his contribution had substantially changed due to behind-the-scenes decisions at the highest level.

The public notice informed readers of the gazette that since the administration of newspapers was under the supervision of the Ministry of Sciences (vizārat-i ’ulūm), a royal ordinance addressed to ‘Alī Qūlī Khān “I’tizād al-Saltanah,” the minister in charge, instructed him that from now on four monthly papers were to be published and Ṣānī‘ al-Mulk was to supervise their publication on behalf of the Ministry. The four papers were listed as:

first, the Government Gazette [rūznāmah-yi dawlatī] without illustrations; second, the Government Gazette with illustrations; third, the National Paper [or People’s Paper; rūznāmah-yi millatī] which will be written in a free manner [bi-taww-i āzādī nivishtah shūd] and fourth, the Scientific Paper [rūznāmah-yi ‘ilmī].

Although the name of the gazette soon changed to Rūznāmah-yi dawlatī, the illustrations contrary to the above-mentioned decree continued to appear in a few of the issues. It is difficult to say if these were Ṣānī‘ al-Mulk’s or belonged to some other illustrator among his students working in his style. It is not clear either if he was still the editor. He may even have been dismissed from his post or was the subject of the Shah’s wrath (something that happened with greater frequency in this period) since there is no mention in the gazette of Ṣānī‘ al-Mulk when in March 1867 the Shah received in the Dār al-Funūn members of the Publication Bureau (dār al-ṭibā‘a), the department headed by Ṣānī‘ al-Mulk. Nor was there any mention of him in subsequent issues of the Rūznāmah or indeed in any other publications of the period and for decades to come. He simply vanished from the pages of the Qajar historical records.

Even his resting place remained obscure, save for a marginal reference made by one of his students. Years later, as Yahyā Zūkā‘’s assiduous research has shown, he is mentioned in passing in an epigram composed by the influential Qajar prince, Farhad Mīrzā, in his literary mêlange entitled Zanbīl (Basket). The
epigram, from 1283/1866–7, is not at all gratifying but nonetheless informative: “The opium-addict royal painter died [naqqāsh bāshī-yi charsī ba-murd].”47

The absence of even a minor reference in contemporary sources is puzzling. For one thing, it is unusual that the Rūznāmah ignored the death of its own editor, a renowned artist and painter to the crown. The gazette frequently published obituaries of dignitaries and even second-tier officials unless they were out of royal favour (maghzūb). It is difficult, moreover, to attribute Farhad Mīrzā’s derogatory epigram to a personal grudge, at least based on his treatment in the gazette. The influential prince’s portrayal appears at least once in the Rūznāmah and numerous references to him, all favourable, can be found in its pages. Nor is it plausible to assume that addiction to chars—concentrated opium residue—could have killed Ṣanī al-Mulk on its own, given the increasing number of opium and chars addicts who lived long lives. A diagnosis of saktah—a common term for both heart attack and stroke or any other kind of sudden death—was mentioned by later sources in a rather offhanded fashion and was perhaps prompted by Ṣanī al-Mulk’s sudden death. In his al-Maʿāṣir vaʾl-āṣār, an almanac published in 1304/1887 on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh’s accession, for example, the editor-in-chief of the volume, Muḥammad Ḥasan Khān Iʾtimād al-Salṭanah, mentions saktah as the cause of Ṣanī al-Mulk’s unexpected death.48

Given the above, it is possible that Ṣanī al-Mulk’s death at the age of 54 was the result of foul play, possibly carried out under the Shah’s order. What makes such a hypothesis more plausible is that his death occurred in between two other “sudden deaths” of high ranking officials. The former grand vizier, Mīrzā Āqā Ḵān Nūrī, died in Qom under extremely suspicious circumstances in March 1865 while on his way to Tehran presumably to assume the premiership once again. While dismissed and living in exile in Yazd for nearly a decade, Nūrī—a highly complex politician—was held responsible for several protests and commotions in the capital staged by supporters. The other sudden death, that of Muḥammad Ḥasan Khān Sipahsālār Qājār (acting premier from 1865–6), occurred in Mashhad while he was serving as the trustee of the shrine of Ṣ|hīʿ al-Riḍā. Foul play by the Shah’s agents was also suspected in his death, which occurred immediately after a royal visit to the city in June 1867.49 Both deaths may have occurred by administrating poison-laced coffee or other poisonous concoctions, known as “Qajar coffee” (qahvah-yi qajar), which was the preferred method of eliminating political dissidents and personal enemies in the Nāṣirī period.50

If there was foul play, and given the circumstances there is a good chance that there was, we may speculate on the motives for murdering an esteemed artist and loyal servant. One possibility may arise from Ṣanī al-Mulk’s affiliation with the dissidents in the aftermath of the “Farāmūshkhānah affair.” He was never identified as a member or sympathizer (though we don’t have a complete list of membership) nor was he implicated (as far as we know) in the publication and dissemination of dissident literature. Yet his sensitive post, as the editor of the government gazette and supervisor of printing houses and all publications—equivalent to the state censor—could have put him in a precarious position. Could it be that he too was exposed to the Shah’s capricious conduct and became critical
of his arbitrary decisions especially in the poisonous environment of the time including court intrigue, hasty dismissals, exiles and murders? The coincidence between the elimination of one of Ṣanīʿ al-Mulk’s chief patrons, Mīrzā Āqā Khān Nūrī in Qom in March 1865, a few months before the last tangible evidence of Ṣanīʿ al-Mulk’s service in his post, may suggest a connection. Could it be that he was eliminated because he was advocating in some way or fashion the return of Nūrī to power and hence an end to the Shah’s direct rule and his personal style of government that had caused great discontent in many quarters? That dissident intellectuals, heretics and activists were routinely arrested, imprisoned, exiled, publicly executed or secretly murdered throughout the Nāṣīrī period further supports the chance that Ṣanīʿ al-Mulk too fell victim to the Shah’s wrath or possibly became a victim at the hands of some powerful courtier who was condoned by the Shah.

An eclipsed legacy

A gradual change in Ṣanīʿ al-Mulk’s artistic style and his subtle satire—visible even in portrayals commissioned by the Qajar notables or in his lithographic prints—may well be taken as signs of a gradual change in his artistic worldview. While he remained loyal to his royal master and his patrons among the Qajar elite, he was also capable of sneering at the Shah’s court and the culture of the elite. He was moreover willing, and to some extent able, to move away from the court enclosure and the kind of exclusive art that was associated with it. The illustrations from the manuscript of One Thousand and One Nights demonstrate his success in breathing into the ancient tale a new element of indigenous contemporaneity. While he was no doubt influenced by European graphic art, he was confident enough to depict the Persian world with its own norms and values. The mix of realism, irony, caricature and the delicate touch of Persian miniature paintings in his works were evidence of the emergence of this home-grown form of artistic modernity and its ingrained social message. Similarly, his engagement with lithographic art, mixing a Western medium with Persian motifs, denotes an effort to develop a visual language fit for public audiences. He was not a great journalist—nor would the circumstances have allowed him to be—but his pictorial language certainly tried to transcend the strictures of conservative court culture. His attempt to establish a modern art school for painting and lithography, too, reflected his desire for a breakthrough.

These efforts toward a vernacular modernity were largely aborted despite promising beginnings. They were inhibited by the actions of an autocratic ruler suspicious of any public space and a genuine print culture. They were also stifled, it may be argued, by the prevalence of Western-style painting techniques, lithography and photography in the latter decades of the nineteenth century; its overwhelming influence permeated teachers and students of Dār al-Funūn and there was much greater accessibility to Western technology and to Western graphic art than ever before. Ṣanīʿ al-Mulk thus was largely ignored and his influence diminished in a short period of time. We don’t even known whether his art school survived him
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and if so, for how long. With the exception of a few students we know very little about the apprentices working with him in the Majma` al-Ṣanā`yī` or trained by him in the Rāznāmah or in his academy.

Perhaps closest in style, taste and desire to break away from the court patronage was his aforementioned nephew, the celebrated Muhammad Khān Ghaffārī, Kamāl al-Mulk. He is best known for his masterpieces of the Nāširī period and yet like his uncle—and perhaps with him in mind as his role model—he abandoned the court to travel to Italy and study Renaissance masters. And like Ṣanī` al-Mulk, he too developed his own style of social realism. Most remarkably, following in his uncle’s footsteps in 1907, at the height of the Constitutional Revolution, Kamāl al-Mulk established the School of Fine Arts (madrasah-yi ṣanā`yī`-i mustazrafaḥ) and over a period of more than two decades trained a generation of artists—mostly children of the elite of the Qajar period and post-Constitutional era—in a school of romantic realism that struggled to remain independent of the patronage of the court and nobility by appealing to the rising Iranian bourgeoisie of the early Pahlavi era.

Notes

1 For an overview of Persian painting in the Qajar period (and Western travel literature on the subject) see Robinson (1991); Diba/Ekhtiar (1998); Floor (1999), especially n.6.
2 The cultural attitude of the Pahlavi period (1925–1979) which for the most part disdained the Qajar past, also tended to disregard or belittle the cultural patronage of the eclipsed dynasty. Qajar accomplishments were viewed as outmoded, if not naïve, and with few exceptions—among them memoirists with ties to the Qajar past—little if any attention was paid during the early Pahlavi period to preserving Qajar art and artefacts let alone studying the lives and works of their creators. Only in the 1960s and 1970s under the aegis of Farah Pahlavi (Dibā) and the establishment of the Negāristān Museum Qajar royal painting received much deserved attention. Falk (1971) highlighted the value of the genre. Even as late as the 1960s, before serious studies by Basil Robinson and Yahyā Ţukā` (Zoka) highlighted the importance of Qajar art, the dominant narrative of Persian art tended to treat the Safavid era (1501–1732) as the glorious end of the “classical” period.
3 The excellent monograph by Ţukā` (1383sh/2003), was published posthumously and is based on his earlier scholarship, e.g. idem (1342/1963). His work is by far the best study available. Yet Ţukā` does not attempt to contextualize Ṣanī` al-Mulk career and his works.
4 See the contribution of Christoph Werner in the present volume.
5 For artistic members of the Ghaffārī family see Ţukā` (1383sh/2003), 16; Karīmzādah Tabrīzī (1363–70/1985–91), I:21–37 (and under other members of the family); Floor (1999), 141–6.
6 For the evolving notion of kingship in the Qajar portraits of Fath ‘Alī Shāh as symbolized by the shaping of the Kayanid Crown see Amanat (2001).
7 For the Fath ‘Alī Shāh era see idem (1998c); idem (1999).
8 See idem (1987); idem (1993). For Āqāsī’s negative portrayal as enemy of the nobility see Tihrānī (1376/1997).
9 See Amanat (2004).
10 See Ţukā`, Y. (1383sh/2003), ills. 88f; see ibid., ill. 77.
11 For Colombari see Thornton (1981). Among other artists visiting Iran in the early 1840s were the Russian Prince Aleksey Saltykov, who left behind a valuable account of
his visit and masterful sketches of the shah and the royal family. Also, French artists Xavier Pascal Coste (d. 1879) and Eugène Flandin left behind a set of volumes of magnificent lithographs depicting in watercolour, the preferred medium of Šanā’-i Mulk, scenes of Iranian architecture, urban scenes and countryside. For I. Cosolani and Saltykov see Amanat (2008), 44f. Ābū ’l-Ḥasan’s European visit, moreover, may have been facilitated by Mu’ayyir al-Mamālik, the chief of the royal mint and himself the scion of another old family with roots in the Zand and Safavid courts. It is also likely that Ābū ’l-Ḥasan was advised by the former Persian envoy, Ḥusayn Khān Muqaddam Nizām al-Dawlah, whose 1839 visit to European courts may have kindled his interests beyond Western politics to European art. Even the young Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh (r. 1848–96), who had just ascended the Qajar throne, may have been instrumental.

For the contrasting attitude of the two premiers toward the shah and his duties see Amanat (2008), 118–224. Reference to the Majma’ al-Ṣanā’ī‘ appears in RVI, no. 111 (6th Jumādā al-Āakhir, 1269/3rd March 1853), 2. Ādamiyyat (1348/1899), 390, states that the Majma’ al-Ṣanā’ī‘ was one of Amīr Kabīr’s initiatives. Yet the above issue of the RVI cited by Ādamiyyat clearly attributes the foundation of the complex to Mu’ayyir al-Mamālik. It reports a visit by Mīrzā Āqā Khān Nūrī, who succeeded Amīr Kabīr at the complex. Also, see Żukā’ (1349/1970), 366. Today, Majma’ al-Ṣanā’ī‘ (or Dār al-Ṣanā’ī‘) survives only by name as an alley (rāstah) leading from the east corner of the Sabzah-Maydān square to the main thoroughfare of the Tehran bazaar.

For a stimulating, yet at times selective, reading of Qajar socio-cultural history that considers the assigning of gender roles to modern times and hence views the blending of sex markers and sexual ambivalence as a characteristic of the early Qajar era see Najmabadi (2005), 94f.

The text of the contract appears in full in ibid., 56f (n. 36). The author must have recovered the contract archive of the Gulistan royal library. The yet unexplored library,
containing Naṣir al-Dīn Shāh’s private correspondence may reveal more about the project and other issues related to royal patronage. A full palaeographical description by Mahdī Bayānī is cited in ibid., 31–3. See Atabāy/Bayānī (1355sh/1976), which reproduces a number of watercolours.

28 Published as I’timād al-Saltanān (1345sh/1966). References to another Abī ‘l-Ḥasan Ṣānī al-Mulk in this source refers to the royal architect (ma’mar bāštī) of the 1880s. Reference to our Ṣānī al-Mulk in I’timād al-Saltanān’s Ma’āṣir va ‘l-āṣır does not add much to our knowledge. See idem (1363sh/1984), III-777 (index). Reference to Mīrzā Ahmad Munshī appears in Zuḵā’ (1383sh/2003), 31. The first reference in modern sources presumably is in Pope (1938–9). The first reference in the Persian sources appears to be in Muhammad Ḵān Kamīl al-Mulk’s memoirs (see Zuḵā’ (1383sh/2003), 33). Also, see Mu’āyyir al-Mamālīk (1336sh/1957).

29 This requires further research. The influence perhaps became more accentuated after the “rediscovery” of the manuscript in the Gulistan royal library and references by Arthur Pope and Phyllis Ackerman and by a notice in the review of Survey of Persian Art by Yeda Godard, the curator of the Iran Bāstān Museum.

30 Another volume also illustrated by Ṣānī al-Mulk survives in the Gulistan Library. Presumably executed after A Thousand and One Nights, it is a copy of a long lyrical poem by Vahshī Baḵqī, but with only five scenes. There is another album of Naṣir al-Dīn’s hunting excursions (see Zuḵā’ (1383sh/2003), 116).

31 A contemporary description of the Nizāmiyyah panels appear in Brugsch (1862–3), II:chap.15; for a list of the figures see Zuḵā’ (1383sh/2003), 42–4, 109–15. Also, see Diba (1998). No detailed study has yet been done on these panels. The premiership of Nūrī and the political context of the Nizāmiyyah project are discussed in Amanat (2008), 316–37.

32 For the inherent tension between the crown and the office of the vizier see ibid., 327–47, and the cited sources. For Nūrī’s career see idem (1998a).

33 Zuḵā’ (1383sh/2003), 29f.

34 The “Story of ‘Azīm Khān” is in the Gulistan museum collection. It appears in Zuḵā’ (1383sh/2003), 74. Also, see ibid. 29f.

35 Ibid. 152.


37 Reference to commissioning of the imaginary portrayal of ‘Alī appears in RVI, no. 317 (1st Rajab 1273/25th February 1857) where he is identified as “the Victorious Lion.” For the image see Zuḵā’ (1383sh/2003), 40f, 79. The medallion appears in a number of Naṣir al-Dīn’s formal portraits. See for example the portrait by Bahram Kirmānsḥāhī in 1274/1857 (see Diba (1998), 244f, no. 57) and by Akop Ovnatanian (see Robinson (1983), 299 and fig. no. 8). For the circumstances of its creation, see also Amanat (2008), 293.

38 For the symbolism of the lion and the sun, see Najmabadi (2005), 63–96 and cited sources. Her interpretation of the shift in representation of the female sun into a gender-free or into a male symbol in the twentieth century is refreshing. Yet changes in Ṣānī al-Mulk’s rendering of the state symbol, as discussed above, remain unexplored.

39 See RD’A’I, no. 473 (26th Șafar 1277/13th September 1860).

40 Ibid. no. 518 (3rd Shawwāl 1278/3rd April 1862).

41 See ibid. no. 472 (19th Șafar 1277/6th October 1860).

42 Ibid., no. 520 (27th Shawwāl 1278/27th April 1862).

43 For a full study of this early example of Persian clandestine tracts see Amanat (2008), 389–94. For the farāmūshkhānah see ibid. 358–64, and the cited sources. Algar (1973) suffers from typical anti-modern biases. Persian modern historiography also demonstrates conspiratorial and myopic proclivities toward farāmūshkhānah. See, for example, Kafīrāʾī (1361/1982), 59–82.
45 RD’AI, no. 552 (12th Rajab 1280/23rd December 1863).
46 Ibid. no. 591 (6th Rabī‘ al-Awwal 1283/19th July 1866). The phrase: “in a free manner” (bi-tawr-i ʿazādī) may also be read “in a casual manner” (bi-tawr-i irādī). The omission of the dots may be intentional given the sensitive connotation of the word ʿazādī (freedom). ʿZukā’ (1383sh/2003), 53, noticed the change in the style. For I’tizād al-Saltanah and his career see Amanat (1998b).
47 Mu’tamad al-Dawlah (1329/1911), 155. The epigram is one of many the author composed, some equally disparaging. He offers no further details about Ṣanī‘ al-Mulk.
48 See ʿZukā’ (1383sh/2003), 52f.
49 See Amanat (2008), 395, 398 and cited sources.
50 After the execution of Amīr Kābir (in the bathhouse by the old method of opening the veins), an open secret around the court and beyond that caused severe criticism from European powers, Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh became more discrete. The Qajar coffee proved to be an effective method that over the years took the lives of many, high and low. The qahvah-yi qajar or qahvah-yi qaajaran (not qājār or qājārī) is not dissimilar to “l’affaire des poisons” in seventeenth-century France, a period well known to Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh. As a history buff he had good knowledge of Louis XIV and his court. The poisonous drink presumably was brought to the victim by a confidant or a trusted servant of the Shah and often taken by the victim with knowledge of the outcome. The “qahvah-yi qajar affair” deserves a separate study.

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RVI  Rāznāmeh-yi vaqāyi’-i ittifāqiyyah

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444  Court cultures in the Muslim world: seventh–nineteenth centuries


22 Theatres of power and piety
Architecture and court culture in Awadh, India

Hussein Keshani

Introduction
Among the most active architectural patrons in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Islamic world were the rulers and elites of Awadh, a fertile and prosperous region in North India. With a thriving agricultural economy, Awadh was an important, semi-independent province in the Mughal (Indo-Timurid) empire, which was increasingly challenged by forces both internal and external. While navigating the ambitions of the Rohillas, Sikhs, Mahrattas and late Mughal court factions, Awadh elites were both contenders and allies with the British, whose grasp over South Asia’s economies and political regimes was tightening. Comprised mainly of Twelver Shiite Muslims and select Hindus, Awadh elites not only began to appropriate Anglo-European languages of power but continued to employ South Asian forms, particularly those synthesized by the once dominant Mughal dynasty. Monumental architecture, through its patronage, production and use, served as an important medium in which courtly society defined itself and enacted its diverse rituals of power.

In Awadh’s premier cities Fāyzābād and Lucknow, architecture and courtly ritual were two deeply entangled forms of cultural practice. The region’s rulers, initially based in Lucknow, developed a new city 120 kilometres to the north, first called Bangla and later known as Fāyzābād as a bustling headquarters that some effusively saw as a future rival to Mughal Shāhjahānābād (Delhi). Awadh rulers later returned to Lucknow in the late eighteenth century, enriching it with their patronage and making the city their principal base of power. Awadh then provides a useful case study to study the relationship between power and spatiality of “court cultures” and to observe the interplay between Mughal inspired courtly ceremony, Twelver Shiite ritual practice, court power relations and monumental architecture.

Studying power and spatiality need not be limited to the domain of throne and palace spaces. Two commonly overlooked Islamic architectural genres are forecourts and Twelver Shiite mourning centres, known as imāmārāhs, whose respective courtly ritual practices include arrival and departure processions and Muharram mourning rituals. Particularly relevant is the Great Imāmārāh complex of Lucknow (completed in 1791), which was commissioned by Nawwāb-vāzīr
Āṣaf al-Dawlah (r. 1775–97) and integrates both forecourt and imāmbārah architecture (see figure 22.1). Examining these two kinds of entanglements of architecture and courtly ritual more closely reveals how the interplay between power and spatiality can be highly nuanced. It shows that the still persistent view of Awadh’s monumental architecture simply as evidence of Awadh court culture’s moral and political decadence, as British onlookers often commented, or as signs and symbols of wealth and luxury is insufficient. Rather, such works were part and parcel of the definition, maintenance and negotiation of the hierarchies of “court

Figure 22.1 Plan of the Great Imāmbārah complex of Lucknow commissioned by Nawwāb-vāzīr Āṣaf al-Dawlah and completed in 1791.
society.” The architectural works combined with their associated ritual activity were urban performative spaces that served not simply as stages but more like theatres, in which performers and their audiences were momentarily bound in courtly spectacle. These theatres and their designs were integral to the Awadh elites’ ritualized performative acts of authority and status among themselves and their wider communities.

Architecture and court culture in the Islamic world

With only a handful of books on Awadh’s architectural history, the narratives of the built landscape still tend to be preliminary in scope and documentary in nature. Historical literature on Awadh, though more developed, is also slender and generally does not treat architecture as a significant aspect of power relations or court society. Unsurprisingly then, the interplay between court culture and monumental architecture is relatively unexplored in the existing literature.

For other periods and regions of the Islamic world the situation is more encouraging, as a cursory glance of art historical literature reveals. The topic surfaces in literature focusing on “palace” architecture. However, the limited number of preserved palaces, the prevalence of generic spatial typologies and multipurpose spaces, and the range and mobility of Islamicate court practices have proven challenging. Overall, examining how exactly court hierarchies relate to spatial ones has so far yielded less success than exploring architecture’s relationship to courtly practices such as civic royal processions, court ceremonials, and other displays of power.

Several decades ago, for instance, Oleg Grabar investigated how ceremonials, art, material culture and architecture were effectively deployed to transform Umayyad rulership and court culture from its initial patriarchal character into one that was increasingly regal in appearance. As with the Umayyads, courtly spectacles for the subsequent Abbasid dynasty tended to be palatine-based rather than public in nature as was the case with the Fatimids of North Africa. Writing more recently about the Fatimids, Paula Sanders moved beyond earlier efforts to correlate caliphal processions in the jāmi‘ masjid and the widening of the central miḥrāb aisle in Fatimid jāmi‘ masjīd with Byzantine ritual; she examined the Fatimids’ use of public processions between palace complexes and Friday mosques and to tie older Fusṭāṭ together with newly founded Cairo. Especially interesting is how bleachers were erected to view the processions.

In the South Asian context, Mehrdad and Natalie Shokoohys’ study of fourteenth-century Tughluqābād’s remains in the Delhi region observed the construction of processional avenues between the royal palace and congregational mosque. They remind us that in South Asia such processional avenues were common as the cities of Ahmadābād and Bidār show.

Seventeenth-century Safavid Isfahan’s famous vast urban enclosure, the maydān-i shāh, has often spurred discussion on royal ritual and architecture. For example, historian Susan Bambaie sees Isfahan’s maydān—a site used for court-sponsored public religious festivities such as ‘id al-fīr, military parades and equestrian entertainments—as setting a new precedent in creating a notion of city
centre that framed and consolidated the city’s royal, administrative, religious and economic functions. The architectural historian Gülru Necipoğlu, notes Isfahan’s maydān along with its ‘Alī Qāpū gate house were viewed as kind of theatre for competitive public spectacles.

Necipoğlu noted that the public visibility of the Safavid Shah stood in marked contrast to the Ottoman sultans, who like the Abbasids favoured royal seclusion as a sign of power and ensured that the design of imperial Topkapi palace permitted the sultan to gaze upon ceremonials while remaining concealed from view. Arranged in three courts, the first accommodated displays of the imperial court, and served as a holding area for animals and servants and a place of assembly for public processions. The second court was geared towards imperial administration while the third was reserved for the royal household. Necipoğlu’s in-depth study of court ceremonial and architecture at the Topkapi palace stands out as an especially rigorous exploration of the topic in its Ottoman context.

Mughal architecture and ceremonial has been addressed in various places, a sustained treatment being the 1991 issue of Environmental Design entitled Mughal Architecture: Pomp and Ceremonies. South Asian Muslim courts such as the Tughluqs, Mughals and Awadhis belong as much to the Indic constellation of cultures as they do to the Islamic ones. Also germane are studies such as Jennifer Howes’ study of South Indian palaces processions and perceptions that draw attention to Indic notions of power, visuality and spatiality. The importance of religio-political notions of seeing and being seen as evinced by the Sanskrit concept of darśana, that is, a vision or apparition of the divine, should not be underestimated. Architectural works then acquire greater significance as demarcators not only of space but vision.

In general, the discussion of architecture’s intersection with courtly ritual in Islamic contexts has dwelled more on urban space, geography and spatial schema than architectural form and design. Occasionally, focus is placed on throne spaces and audience halls or palace complex design. The discourse has also leaned more towards description than interpretation. The topic can perhaps be probed more deeply by considering some of the ways material culture like architecture and court societies have been thought about in other contexts.

Three notions

Thinking about court society has become increasingly refined, especially by scholars of European history, for whom the nature and role of court societies have become important gateways into conceptualizing the larger politics of a region or period. In recent literature, court societies have been imagined as fluid hierarchies, whose actors often change and shift positions. For example, in her recent study of late medieval Portuguese court society, historian Rita Costa Gomes, who draws upon the highly influential ideas of Norbert Elias, provocatively concludes, “To consider the medieval [European] court as a social configuration or a ‘network of interdependent human beings, with shifting and asymmetrical power balances’ implies for the historian the construction of a new subject.”
Building upon aspects of Elias’s thought as well as materialist conceptions of court society, Gomes goes on to examine Portuguese court society in terms of its social organization, spatial dimensions and its routine events. According to Gomes:

[T]he medieval court appears not only as a particular human configuration but also as a spatial-temporal complex which the royal presence reproduced in several ways, for example in relation to the city, through the urban palace, and through the royal entry.\(^{15}\)

With her emphasis on the reproducibility of royal presence in different settings, Gomes draws attention to the intricacy of relationships between power and courtly spaces.

Traditionally, focus has been placed on how power relations are manifested as spatial relations but not the inverse, that is, how spatial relations are manifested as power relations. The idea that courtly power relations correspond directly to space relations underestimates the complexity of architectural form and space and the ways in which it participates in the establishment of power relations, particularly with respect to court cultures.

For many who study material or visual culture, it is virtually axiomatic to regard visual culture, with all its formal elements, as interdependent, even interwoven, with the ways power, authority and social rank are articulated within human communities. This goes beyond thinking of space as a direct manifestation of power relations. For instance, the noted archaeologist Ian Hodder portrays material culture not as a passive reflection of society but as having an active role in social discourse.\(^{16}\) Creating and selecting the appropriate spatial contexts are essential for framing the effective delivery of speech acts that create social delineations. Furthermore, monuments in particular can “act” in various ways helping to control people’s access, movement and interaction. Ceremonial and material features of court cultures, previously seen as trivial or unrelated to the study of court cultures, are now increasingly deemed important to the study of political cultures. For example, in his introduction to a collection of essays on the court cultures of antiquity, Anthony J.S. Spawforth suggests that it is increasingly difficult to separate the “trappings” of power—ceremonial, architecture, costume—from the “substance” of power.\(^{17}\)

Further enriching the current conceptions of court societies is the related discussion of power in terms of performance and performativity, useful tools developed by the field of gender studies.\(^{18}\) Identities and power relations between people are theorized as being established iteratively using performative acts of power in which participants momentarily adopt the roles of “performers” and “spectators.” Court societies accordingly can be reimagined in terms of the key performative acts employed to sustain themselves. Integral to performative acts are the contexts, both temporal and spatial, in which they occur since these are crucial in determining how a performative act resonates.

These views of active material culture and the spatial and performative dimensions of power no doubt warrant more elaboration, but for now they can be
deployed as described to interpret the interplay between Awadh forecourt and imāmbārah architecture and the ritual life of Awadh court society. Applied to the study of pre-modern Muslim court societies and cultures like Awadh the implication of the “active” notion of material culture is clear: material culture is integral to the workings of court and ruling societies, however diverse they may be. Abstraction people out of their material contexts, expected behaviours and ritual practices divorces them from the very things that help establish their social positions, obscuring important aspects of how social order and hierarchies are created and maintained.

**Awadh court society—a sketch**

In theory, Awadh rulers were subjects of the Mughal emperor, the pādishāh, who ruled over Awadh in name. The responsibilities and rewards for Awadh’s administration were bestowed upon his designated deputy or nawwāb, someone typically selected from his attending soldier-aristocrats. The story goes that the Iranian Mīr Muḥammad Amin “Saʿādat Khān” (d. 1151/1739) came to administer the region after heroically subduing rebellious locals and his successors continued to control Awadh, while rising to the distinguished position of vizier of the Mughal Empire. As a result, the Awadh deputy came to be known as the “nawwāb-vazīr,” signalling his dual role with respect to the Mughal court. Subsequent rulers such as Āṣaf al-Dawlah and Saʿādat Alī Khān (r. 1798–1814) continued to see themselves as tied to the Mughal court.

The annual receipt of the emperor’s robes, the ritual recital of the Mughal emperor’s name in the Friday mosques, the emperor’s appointment of officers to the Nawwāb-vazīr’s court and the submission of provincial revenue all helped sustain the impression that Awadh continued to be a Mughal province despite its increasing military and economic autonomy in the second half of the eighteenth century. These appearances dissolved completely in 1819, when Awadh’s Nawwāb-vazīr, Ghāzī al-Dīn Ḥaydar (r. 1814–27), crowned himself as emperor of Awadh, dispensing with the pretence of Mughal authority though he himself was now beholden to the British.

Not surprisingly then, Awadh court society in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century developed in large part along Mughal lines and was part of a network of regional courts among which elites circulated. At Awadh’s centre was the Nawwāb-vazīr, the zanānah (women’s household) and the household staff and personal troops. The Nawwāb-vazīr’s central place in court society owed much to his ability to dispense land-revenue rights, salaries and gifts. Quite naturally, the families of the Nawwāb-vazīr and his principal wives were part of the courtly sphere as were his family and friends. A strong common bond in the Nawwāb-vazīr’s family network was the commitment to Twelver Shiite Islam and its practice.

An important feature of Mughal and Awadhi courtly culture was the band of musicians called the nawbat, normally stationed at palace gates and used to lead processions. Their purpose was to signal the hours of the day but also to announce
the comings and goings of the ruler, magnifying their presence audibly. As Bonnie Wade puts it, the *nawbat* was the means “by which the presence and sovereignty of the [Mughal] emperor was announced, enunciated, reiterated, and symbolized.”

The Awadh court historian Fayz Bakhsh described the *nawbat* at Fayzābād, “From sunrise to sunset and from sunset to sunrise the noise of the drums and kettle-drums of the regiments never ceased, and the sounds of the gongs which told the hours and the watches deafened the ears.” Fayz Bakhsh, who deemed Āṣaf al-Dawlah unfit for rule, also criticized him for misusing the *nawbat*. When the British later attempted to curtail his use of the *nawbat*, Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s successor Ša‘ādat ‘Alī Khān took great offence. A highly precise discussion of the instruments and occasions on which the *nawbat* occurred is provided by the writer ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Sharar (d. 1344/1926), who claims to have seen Awadh ruler Wājid ‘Alī Shāh (r. 1847–56), a skilled musician, actually don the ṭāsahdrum during a Muḥarram procession. To see a ruler play the role of a servant musician would have been quite a sight.

Polygamy, concubinage, and gender segregation practices such as female veiling among male strangers were the hallmarks of noble life. The *zanānah* had its own hierarchy based on women’s status as principal wives drawn from noble families or secondary wives drawn most often from Awadh’s courtesans and dancing girls. Acting as intermediaries for the secluded women, the attending eunuchs wielded considerable influence, especially the supervisor of the harem. Troops of personal guards were retained for both the Nawwāb-vazīr and the *zanānah*, whose numbers included a contingent of female soldiers.

Awadh’s military was controlled by male officials distinguished by the numbers and types of troops they commanded. The chief groups were the cavalry, red-shirted salaried foot-soldiers and black-shirted irregular troops. A small coterie of European military advisors was included in the circle of military officials, the most well known being Col. Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil (d. 1799), Antoine-Louis Henry Polier (d. 1795), and Gen. Claude Martin (d. 1800). However, Awadh rulers increasingly came to rely on the services and weaponry of the British East India Company’s armies. The status of British East India Company’s representative, the Resident, was often confused. The Nawwāb-vazīr’s treatment of them wavered between that of familial courtiers or duplicitous spies, while the British typically saw themselves as representatives of an equivalent or superior power.

Among the important administrative positions to be had were the superintendent of the treasury and the paymaster. Many of these administrators bear Indic instead of a Muslim name, indicating religious affiliation was not an insurmountable barrier to becoming an Awadh elite. Nobles like Rāja Ḥā’o Lāl, or Ṭīkāī Rā’ī commanded considerable influence in Awadh. A network of landholders and revenue collectors, many of them followers of the Vedic traditions, were also highly influential.

The services of the learned were often required, giving them entry into courtly society. Tutors skilled in the languages of Arabic and Persian, literature and calligraphy instructed the children of Nawwāb-vuzārā. In a predominantly Twelver
Shiite court, Sunni religious scholars seem to have played a minor role and were soon overshadowed by the emergence of Twelver Shiite scholar-officials, looking to replicate Iraqi and Iranian institutional models.

Accomplished singers, poets and orators were called upon to help observe the solemnities of mourning during the month of Muḥarram, in which the Twelver Shia commemorate the martyrdom of the Prophet’s grandson Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī in 680 CE. In addition, poets, singers, dancers and their bands were frequently called upon for entertainment. Trained in music and dance and as sexual consorts, courtesans tacitly came to be an important part of Awadh court society. Occasionally, some made the transition into the zanānah as secondary wives.

Gatherings and processions

Awadh elites would assemble on various occasions, important opportunities for the display of status. Some of the principal occasions of courtly ritual life included the ruler’s daily darbār, bakrī ‘id or ‘īd al-adhā, Muḥarram assemblies (majālis), nawrūz, and basant (i.e. the Indian festival to celebrate the beginning of spring) gatherings that often involved grand processions. On these occasions and others such as weddings and funerals, the present state of the elite hierarchy was illuminated and subject to revision. For most nawwāb-vazarā, holding daily darbār, especially during residencies in the cities, seems to have been a regular practice, in which routine administrative affairs were addressed and supplicants were given audiences.26 Walled gardens within and outside palace compounds were also suitable for the occasional private audience with the Nawwāb-vazīr.

More often, gardens were recreational destinations for Awadh elites, especially by veiled women of the zanānah. As the nawwāb-vazarā increasingly socialized with Company officials and Europeans, their forms of recreation also included mixed gender banqueting and ballroom festivities. However, the pre-eminent form of entertainment remained watching nautch dancers who were called with their accompanying musicians to perform in luxurious residences and airy gardens.

The increasingly public practice of Twelver Shiite rituals is one of the distinguishing features of Awadh society. For the Twelver Shia of Awadh, practising communal Friday prayers was a new concept and it is not clear how actively the navwāb-vazarā participated in the new ritual. Instead, participation in the annual mourning of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn, the Prophet Muḥammad’s grandson, was entrenched more deeply. Assemblies (majālis) where Ḥusayn’s tragedy was ritually retold over a ten-day period, visits to mourning centres called imāmbārah, visits to small-scale models of the tombs of al-Ḥusayn and others known as ta’ziyyah, and public ta’ziyyah processions held during the Muslim calendrical month of Muḥarram were the principal occasions for royal participation and displays of piety to court society and the wider public.

The mourning processions of Muḥarram engaged broad segments of Awadh society. Households would contribute taʿāzin made from materials ranging from paper and wood to the most precious metals and they would be displayed in local
imāmbārahs, with the grandest belonging to the Nawwāb-vāzīr’s household. Taʿziyyah processions became a forum for competitive displays of devotion and the most prestigious venue for taʿziyyah display was typically the Nawwāb-vāzīr’s imāmbārah. The practice during these processions of cursing the first three caliphs of Islam as an assertion of Shia doctrine often invited retaliatory responses from Sunni groups, rendering processional practice as a site for doctrinal contest. Muḥarram rituals came to be concluded with a final taʿziyyah procession to burial grounds known as “Karbala,” named after the place of Imām Ḥusayn’s martyrdom. There, the taʿziyyah were buried, a symbolic re-enactment of the burial of al-Ḥusayn.

In addition to the ideas that such processions were re-enactments of Imām Ḥusayn’s tragic journey or symbolic pilgrimages to Karbala, it has been suggested that they bear some resemblance to Durga Pūja and Jagannāth processions, the implication being that Indic venerative practices were adapted to Twelver Shiīte ends. Like the Mughal emperor Akbar, who would visit Sufi shrines on foot, early Awadh rulers Shujāʿ al-Dawlah (r. 1754–75) and his son Āṣaf al-Dawlah often participated conspicuously in public Muḥarram procession by travelling on foot. These displays of piety and humility to affirm the ruler’s authority were in stark contrast to the more ostentatious norms of travel by horse or elephant.

According to Mrs Mir Ḥasan ‘Ali’s 1832 account of Lucknow, bakrī ʿīd, was a key ceremonial event there. The annual pan-Muslim event commemorated Abraham’s intended sacrifice of his son as an act of devotion to God. Rulers and elites would travel with their entourages to the city’s ʿīdgāh. There, the ruler initiated the first ritual sacrifice. The processions consisted of camels for sacrifice and camel drivers, footsoldiers, cavalry, red-shirted footsoldiers, kettle drummers on horse, elephant carriages for the Nawwāb-vāzīr and the British Resident, all splendidly attired in silks velvets, silver and gold. The sequence of parties included the Nawwāb-vāzīr’s personal forces, the Nawwāb-vāzīr and Resident travelling by elephants, noblemen and state officials, and Awadh military forces.

Following the ʿīdgāh rituals, the Awadh court reassembled at the Nawwāb-vāzīr’s throne hall. There, the Nawwāb-vāzīr seated upon a velvet cushioned, canopied, gold platform received tributes and dispensed titles and bundles of gifts. One’s immediate level of prestige was signalled by the quality and amount of gifts, typically numbering between five and one hundred. Gifts such as robes, swords, scabbards, turbans, and turban ornaments were common. Senior titles and positions, such as “Nawwāb,” “Khān” or “Rāja,” were bestowed along with new, prestigious means of transport such as well-adorned elephants, horses, and palanquins, maximizing their visibility. It’s important to note that these forms of transportation came with new movement rights in public spaces.

The rights of Awadh elites to ride elephants and employ drummers and musicians were dispensed by the Nawwāb-vāzīr and the Mughal emperor as well. Dignified processions moved slowly and the footmen were supposed to be well attired, a standard that some complained was eroding. Should two processional parties meet in an urban area, etiquette required the head of the junior party have
their elephant kneel, dismount and pay respects to the more senior one. If a junior party wished to pass by the gates of the residence of a senior, permission was ideally required as well. 29 Fayz Bakhsh and apparently onlookers too thought it scandalous when Āṣaf al-Dawlah on one occasion dismounted to salute his mother, while he instructed her eunuch Javāhir Ṭīlī Khān to remain mounted since he was accompanying the Nawwāb-bīgām. 30 That a eunuch should remain mounted before Awadh’s ruler, who was on foot, was unseemly.

As the British Residents’ power in the Awadh court grew they increasingly became a part of Awadh court ceremony. They accompanied the Nawwāb-vazīr on elephant during bakrī ʿid, they sat on gilt chairs on his right during the presentation of tributes—Awadh elites sat on the left—and were conspicuously garlanded before Awadh elites and returned the honour if so inclined. Surprisingly, the wives of the Resident and key European soldiers were typically included in court ceremonies and in banquets as well.

Moving from one destination to another was not a simple affair for the Nawwāb-vazīr and Awadh elites, particularly on major occasions and during seasonal hunts. The early Nawwāb-vazīrs practiced a semi-nomadic lifestyle, leaving for months at a time to hunt. Āṣaf al-Dawlah for example remained in Lucknow during the rainy seasons and went on extended hunting expeditions and tours of his territories in the other seasons. While most processional occasions were male events, those of the seasonal hunt included ladies from the zanānah in curtained compartments carried atop elephants and by palanquin bearers on foot. Carts of maidservants hauled by bullocks would follow. 31 Senior women also commanded large processions and Fayz Bakhsh’s account of the unusual flight of Amat al-Zahrā “Bāhu Begam” (d. 1195/1781) to her mother-in law following a dispute with her son Āṣaf al-Dawlah makes clearer the prestige associated with participating in processions when he notes it was unusual for lowly servants to be included in such journeys as they were on this occasion. 32

The most elaborate processions could involve mace bearers and troops travelling on foot, soldiers riding adorned horses and elephants bearing senior dignitaries, as well as ladies from the zanānah in curtained compartments carried atop elephants and by palanquin bearers on foot. Carts of maidservants hauled by bullocks would follow. For onlookers, the processions’ scale signalled not only the importance of the person travelling but people’s position within these mobile spectacles exposed their standing within elite households including the ruling court.

As with, South Asian, Mughal and late-Mughal courts the processional culture of Awadh meant that arrivals and departures of rulers were highly ceremonious occasions. For example, when Āṣaf al-Dawlah heard that the Calcutta-based Governor-General of the British East India Company Sir John Shore (d. 1834) was planning to visit Lucknow in 1794, he promised that he would march out of the city to greet him. They would then return and arrive in Lucknow together. 33 The subsequent Governor-General Francis Rawdon, the 1st Marquess of Hastings (d. 1826), visited Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s successor Sa’ādat Ṭīlī Khān and recorded details of his ceremonial entry into Lucknow, presumably through the forecourt (jilawkhānah). Sitting side by side with the Nawwāb-vazīr atop the royal elephant,
Theatres of power and piety

Rawdon was instructed to scatter 1000 rupees among the populace. The Governor-General appreciated the architectural splendour of the preceding courts more than the destination itself commenting, “[The palace] does not aim at anything splendid, yet the number of courts through which one passes gives an air of considerable magnificence.”

Rawdon was unwittingly emulating Mughal emperors like Jahāngīr (r. 1605–27) who described in his journal how before entering Agra on Sunday, 11th April 1619, he waited for the arrival of the auspicious hour and date determined by court astrologers. He then proceeded to enter the city mounted atop a royal elephant scattering alms to the poor. He wrote, “A large crowd of men and women were lining the streets and markets and standing in doorways and on roofs in expectation.” When Āṣaf al-Dawlah and Saʿādat Ḍālī Khān both aimed to teach their British guests how to use Lucknow’s Great Imāmbārah jilavkhānah to perform as rulers, they rendered themselves as lead performers and the visiting Governor-Generals as subordinate understudies while still communicating to Lakhnawis the respect to be accorded to the British.

Images of processions

Attesting further to the importance of processional spectacles as displays of power and hierarchy is the visual record. Like north Indian art of the period, contemporary indigenous Awadh imagery frequently depicts processions. A late eighteenth-century painting held in the State Museum of Lucknow depicts Āṣaf al-Dawlah seated upon an elephant in a royal procession accompanied by well-dressed standard bearers and horsemen. In the background behind some trees lies a tranquil river—perhaps Lucknow’s Gomti river—and across the banks is a white palace complex with red accents receding in size. Moving further into the background the scale abruptly enlargens to show an open expanse bounded by walls and a pavilion. Beyond the walls is a forest that recedes into the horizon.

Processions appear even more so in the explanatory and documentary forms of imagery produced for Anglo-European audiences. Such processional imagery highlights not only artists and patrons’ exposure to these displays along with the wider populace but the significance that they were regarded with. Artists sought best to convey the practice and public experience of power in Awadh through documentary images of processions.

One engraved image that epitomizes the documentary genre was included in the English travel narrative of Shaykh Dīn-i Muḥammad, better known as “Dean Mahomet” (d. 1267/1851), an Indian soldier in British employ. The engraving, which documents Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s retinue, went so far as to label the participants as follows: 1) the camel of the drummer (nawbat) and flag bearer (bandār); 2) a bullock carrying water and a water carrier (bihishīḥ); 3) flute players and flagbearers; 4) the šūbadārān/principal officers (cavalry); 5) seal or silver staff bearers (chūbdār); 6) the Nawwāb-prince’s elephant and the Nawwāb-vazīr’s elephant bearing the Nawwāb-vazīr, his aide-de-camp and fly swatters; 7) an accompanying Rāja and his elephant; 8) a nobleman and huqqah bearer; 9) infantry soldiers; 10)
the paymaster’s horse; 11) the camel of the herald (naqīb); and finally 12) the elephant keeper.

Dean Mahomet’s accompanying text recounts the episode between his own East India Company platoon and Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s hunting party and near Bilgram that inspired the image:

We were honoured with a visit from the Nabob Aspa-dulah, accompanied by General Stibbert, his Aid-du-Camps [sic], and other Officers of distinction, who met him on the way, in his usual style of grandeur, mounted with his Nobles, on an elephant rich compared, and attended by his numerous train of Burkendaws, Chopdars, pages &c. and a native band of music to enliven the procession, of which the annexed plate will give you a more perfect idea, than this description. His entry through Belgram was announced by the beating of drums, firing of cannon, and other marks of military honour.38

Another intriguing processional image appears in a Fayzābād painting commissioned by the above-mentioned French soldier Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil showing his friend Shujā’ al-Dawlah and son Āṣaf al-Dawlah participating in a winding Muḥarram procession divorced of any spatial context.39 Processions and architecture continue to be strongly linked in the imagery of later Awadh rulers such as Wājid ‘Alī, who is depicted parading through a later Lucknow palace development, the Qaysār Bāgh, in grand courtly processions.40

Aside from representations of the nautch, scenes of gatherings were less common. A painting held in the British Library and dated 1812 after Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s death in 1797 shows the Nawwāb-vazīr attending what appears to be a Muḥarram majlis.41 The details and location of its manufacture are unclear but the image captures the dark mood of the Muḥarram assembly and illustrates Āṣaf al-Dawlah smoking a ḥuqqah pipe seated with his co-religionist courtiers surrounded by standard bearers listening to the ritualized retelling of Imām Ḥusayn’s tragedy. Altogether the painting is an effective representation of Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s courtly performance of piety.

Both texts and images suggest gatherings and processional spectacles, then, were an important means of communicating social rank, affluence, and on occasion piety. Yet gatherings and processions always have a spatial context, which in turn help define the choreography of the procession and the social hierarchies of the moment. Given their prominence, it is worth inquiring where these spectacles took place and more specifically what architectural forms evolved to accompany them. The challenge is to relate courtly practices with the architectural landscape.

Theatres of power: Forecourts in Fayzābād and Lucknow

In most studies of Islamic architecture, the forecourts of palace quarters, religious institutions, tombs and other complexes are seldom dwelled upon at any length. Robert Hillenbrand’s erudite and extensive survey of Islamic architecture west of the Indian subcontinent, for example, makes little reference to these ancillary
architectural forms and spaces. There is a tendency to think of these relatively simple structures as peripheral, antecedents to the more grand architectural displays that lie within any given complex. Yet in Awadh, forecourts known as "jilavkhānahs" came to be important transitory venues with considerable architectural embellishment and sites of ritual climax in the escalation and de-escalation of processional spectacles. In other words, they were the principle theatres for performances of power and authority. Given that large urban spaces were relatively rare in Awadh cities, open expanses were frequently the scene of social and physical projections and contests of power.

**Forecourts in context–Fayzābād and Lucknow**

In his account of Fayzābād’s history, court chronicler Muḥammad Fayz Bakhsh described the development of the city and its forecourts under Awadh rulers until Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s rule. As much an idealized vision in which urban development emanates from the rulers’ household as it is an account based on real developments, Fayz, Bakhsh’s narrative portrays Fayzābād’s palace forecourts as buffer spaces that evolved as an afterthought as the Awadh court became more formalized. From him we learn that Fayzābād began with the ruler’s thatched residential building and a large surrounding area enclosed by rectangular, mud wall, with a bastion on each corner and spacious enough to accommodate female quarters and stables as well as assemblies of cavalry, infantry and artillery. Eunuchs and cavalry officers built residences within the enclosure. Around the perimeter, Mughal chiefs laid out gardens and revenue and cavalry officers erected bazars, which encouraged tradespeople to build houses nearby.

Under Shujā’ al-Dawlah, Fayzābād was reorganized. The fort walls were rebuilt and areas outside the walls appear to have been cleared. The residences of court officials were relocated from within the walls to a large plain outside the fort. Within the fort, space was reorganized and a naqqārkhānah gate (“Drum House” or nawbatkhānah) was built at its entrance to announce the times of days, ceremonial departures, and the arrival of visitors, who were expected to dismount and disarm. The plain outside the fort walls was initially demarcated by a trench but later bounded by walls on which regular and irregular troops were stationed. A bazaar was developed from the south gate of the fort running the length of 10 bullock carts. It was named after a large open area called chawk with three gates—one of them a three-arched one (tirpawliyā)—on its perimeter walls and was likely located adjacent to the fort.

No such cogent narrative exists for Lucknow and crafting one for the development of its forecourts is less simple. The development of Lucknow’s forecourts draws heavily from the earlier developments at Fayzābād. Yet, in contrast to Fayzābād, Lucknow’s forecourts were preplanned and were increasingly elaborate in design.

Early Awadh rulers occupied Lucknow’s Pānj Mahall palace complex, one of the city’s principal monuments, until Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s redevelopment of the area around 1791. The pre-1791 Pānj Mahall appears to have had a narrow,
rectangular outer forecourt along the Gomti River with two gates, one on the west and the other on the east. The eastern one was identified as a nawbatkhānah, in which drummers and other musicians would typically announce the times of the day or other significant events. Today little remains of the Pānj Maḥall complex including its outer forecourt due in large part to the destruction that accompanied the 1857 rebellion.

Despite the expansion of British power in north India in the late eighteenth century, Āṣaf al-Dawlah undertook one of the most ambitious building programs in South Asia. The Great Imāmbārah complex in Lucknow was his major architectural feat. It was located adjacent to Lucknow’s historic Pānj Maḥall palace complex within the fortified Machhī Bhavan citadel (see figure 22.2). It included an enclosed court that incorporated two towering monuments—the first Friday mosque for Lucknow’s Shia community with its towering minarets and the rectangular Great Imāmbārah a ritual centre for the observance of Muḥarram mourning rituals (see figure 22.3). It was preceded by an intermediate court and a large outer jilawkhānah with monumental gatehouses located immediately adjacent to the older, outer forecourt of the Pānj Maḥall (see figure 22.4).

Figure 22.2 Plan of Machhī Bhawan, detail of map entitled “City & Environs of Lucknow” based on records and surveys from 162–3 and 1865–66 and published by the Military Department, Government of India. In G.W. Forrest, A History of the Indian Mutiny, 3 vols. London: W. Blackwood & Sons, 1904.
Lucknow’s great Imāmbārah outer forecourt

Though partially demolished, much of the outer forecourt of the Imāmbārah complex survives today. It consisted of four gates. On the eastern side it incorporated the nameless gate of the Pānj Mahall forecourt. At the other end, a new and distinctive monumental gate, famously known as the Rūmī Darvāzah, was built. The Rūmī Darvāzah presumably displaced the old Pānj Mahall nawbatkhānah gate, shifting the principal entrance into the Machhī Bhavan Fort from the east end to the west. It may well have served as a new nawbatkhānah, housing drummers and horn players.

The focal point of the outer forecourt of the Imāmbārah complex was its mid-section where two enormous, mirroring gateways were built. The one leading into the Imāmbārah complex, the Imāmbārah Gate, was flanked by a two-story arcade capped with a series of small domes and bracketed by octagonal bastions with
The mirroring “gate” was not really a gate at all, but a small building with a number of chambers (see figure 22.5). At least, one writer identified it as a *nawbatkhānah*, but the location is perplexing and its functions were perhaps shared with the Rūmī Darwāzah. Regardless, the building’s three large openings each bore a projecting balcony built over two arched stories below. Flanking the “mirror” gate were one-story high, flat-roofed arched chambers once bracketed by two octagonal structures. There is good reason to believe that some if not all of the arcade rows at ground level of the outer forecourt served as shops.45

There are two important things to note about the architectural design of the outer forecourt—its siting and the vertical and ornamental hierarchy of its spaces. Given that the outer forecourt was located adjacent to the forecourt of the old Pānj Maḥall complex—the principal residence of the Nawwāb-vazīr—and in front of the Imāmbārah complex, it was a crossroads for various processions, both royal and religious in nature. The *jilawkhānah* served as a giant semi-public receiving room for processions of dignitaries mounted on elephants and horses in which the performance of power blended displays of hospitality, charitability, and affluence. For his seasonal hunts, visits to gardens and public visits to the Great Imāmbārah, the Nawwāb-vazīr and his retinue would have needed to pass through the outer forecourt. Without such a focal point, moments of arrival or departure would be less pronounced. Consequently, the architectural landscape shaped the nature of
the performance, compressing it and giving it a beginning and an end or at the very least a definitive moment of transition. The monumental jilawkhānah provided a climactic focal space for performances of power in all its intonations.

The spatial logic of the jilawkhānah was upended in 1789 when Āṣaf al-Dawlah relocated his personal residence to a new palace complex called the dawlatkhānah, outside and to the west of the Machhi Bhavan complex. However the jilawkhānah remained an important nexus of public theatre. The reception of important dignitaries continued to be an important occasion since the Pānj Mahall still likely served as a guest residence and as a home to a part of the zanānah, arrival displays still took place. The principal processional spectacles in the outer forecourt now came to revolve around the Nawwāb-vazīr’s visits to the Great Imāmbārah complex during Muḥarram.

While the spatial positioning of the jilawkhānah made it a locus for public spectacle, its design with its intricate ornamental and vertical hierarchy of spaces, made it an urban theatre complete with a variety of spaces for not only performers, but spectators too. The same performance was received differently by elite and common spectators, the latter being subjected to more imposing, grandiose visions of the architectural stage-set in the performance of power. In the jilawkhānah, the open court was the principal stage where Awadh elites displayed themselves in grand and pious processions (see figure 22.6). Paradoxically, it was where spectators of the lowest social standing were admitted as well; it was a rare spatial crossroads where the powerful and powerless converged. The ground level
arcaded chambers embedded in the monumental gates and surrounding enclosure were more desirable spaces, several of which were likely occupied by merchants. The broad flat roofs of the enclosure were ideal vantage points to view events as they unfolded. The most privileged spaces such as the elegant projecting balconies of the monumental gates ornamented with delicate columns and plasterwork offered the greatest degree of cover as well as the best views into the *jilawkhānah*.

It is difficult to say with any precision who or what kinds of people occupied these spaces and when. In addition to those permitted to enter from outside the Machhī Bhavan, spectators could be drawn from within. The *jilawkhānah* itself had shops and shopkeepers at ground level, the adjacent court preceding the imāmbārah court was an administrative centre where officials worked and the Pānj Mahall could supply its own audience as well. The practice of stationing troops along high walls combined with the fact that the *jilawkhānah* formed in part the exterior of Lucknow’s central Machhī Bhavan Fort would indicate soldiers and military officials were significant presences along these walls and gates, which were a kind of military barracks.47 The monumental gates then afforded excellent opportunities for intimidating vertical displays of military numbers. The spectre of surveillance and force would have been palpable.

Regardless of how the space was actually used, the architectural ensemble of the *jilawkhānah* offers an architectural representation of an idealized social hierarchy. Spectators in the *jilawkhānah* were grouped as elite, middle elite or common, based on the degree the space they occupied was covered and the height from

*Figure 22.6 View of interior of the first forecourt or jilawkhānah as seen from the Rūmī Dārvazah.*
which they viewed the performance. Those at ground level were low in the social order, while those who had access to the roofs and covered areas of the jilawkhānah held greater privilege. Middle elites likely belonged in the open areas and elites in the covered areas. The jilawkhānah’s gates then also serve as premium spectator spaces with reserved balconies and more intricate architectural ornament.

In addition to regulating people’s access to the Machhī Bhavan, the jilawkhānah acted more like a theatre than a stage. Viewed as a theatrical space the jilawkhānah contributed to the momentary creation of two broad categories of people: that of performer or spectator. It temporarily organized Lakhnawis in three-dimensional space into their respective performative roles of lead, subordinate, or minor performers, and elite, middle elite, or common spectators. Performers were divided into lead performers and supporting cast members with lead performers demonstrating full knowledge of the theatrical space at hand. In the moment arrival ceremonial were performed, the social order was temporarily crystallized and made explicit to all.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Awadh ruler Muḥammad ‘Alī Shāh (r. 1837–42) created another imāmbārah complex, the Ḥusaynābād Imāmbārah, a short distance to the west of the Great Imāmbārah complex after which it was partly modelled. Like its predecessor the Ḥusaynābād complex had an outer rectangular forecourt that served as the city’s newest bazaar and processional theatre. An intriguing panorama painting held in the British Library, whose production details await fuller explication, provocatively suggests that processions passed through both jilawkhānahs, creating an extended urban theatre. The panorama depicts Muhammad ‘Alī Shāh in a carriage in a sparse procession and is itself a visual procession through the structures of the Ḥusaynābād and Great Imāmbārah complex culminating in the Great Imāmbārah of Āṣaf al-Dawlah. Together, the forecourts of the Ḥusaynābād Imāmbārah complex, the Great Imāmbārah complex and the Pānj Mahāll complex created an extended processional space along Lucknow’s Gomfi River.

Theatres of piety: Muḥarram ceremonies and courtly Imāmbārah

The Great Imāmbārah’s jilawkhānah was not only a theatre for regal displays of affluence and might, it was also a place where piety could be performed. For example, court reports for Āṣaf al-Dawlah record that on 1st Muḥarram 1209 (29th July 1794), he began walking—probably in the evening—on foot a distance from his palace, most likely the new dawlatkhānah. A little ways from the entrance to the jilawkhānah he mounted a horse, which he rode into the jilawkhānah accompanied by bearers of ḍālamāt and pānjāhs, sacred military standards. Halfway through, he dismounted at the monumental gate leading to Imāmbārah complex. Now accompanied by musicians playing mournful tunes and only Twelver Shiite Muslims he preceded towards the Great Imāmbārah. In deliberate contrast to arrival and departure processions, Āṣaf al-Dawlah like the Mughal emperor Akbar, attempted to project sincerity and humility by creating spectacles of dismounting, foot travel and grief in and around the jilawkhānah.
On some of the following days Āṣaf al-Dawlah visited—likely in grand procession—the households of various nobles who had built their own much smaller imāmbārah and left donations at the taʿāzin stored there. These included imāmbārah of ʿAfiqallāh Bābūr, Ashraf ʿAlī Khān, Ḥasan Rizā Khān, Miyān Taḥṣīn ʿAlī Khān, and Rāja Jhāo Lāl. These and hundreds of others like them were likely built after the Great Imāmbārah and were similar in design.50 Āṣaf al-Dawlah also visited the homes of nobles and his wives that did not have imāmbārah but had taʿziyyah displays before which he placed donations. Business was also conducted on these visits. Debts were collected, gifts dispensed and salaries issued.51 On the tenth of Muḥarram he seems to have participated in the final taʿziyyah procession in which all Lakhnawis took their taʿāzin across the Gomtī River and buried them in a newly built enclosed court called a “Karbala.”

According to Keith Hjortshoj’s analysis, processions emanating from the imāmbārah of prominent men in Lucknow’s urban quarters converged with the processions emanating from their superiors, the highest status being accorded to the imāmbārah of the Nawwāb-vāzīr. Lucknow’s imāmbārah and the sequence of processions traced out a network of status relations throughout the city.52 This imāmbārah network enlarged the stage for Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s performance of piety and authority to urban dimensions. The Nawwāb-vāzīr’s courtiers stood to enhance their standing with the Nawwāb-vāzīr by having a taʿziyyah display and more importantly an imāmbārah to help attract Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s annual performance of piety to the courtier’s household where they could perform the role of host. In addition, the neighbourhood imāmbārah produced a focal point for their own performances of power and piety at the neighbourhood level. In exchange, Āṣaf al-Dawlah was afforded the opportunity to extend his royal presence beyond the Machhī Bhavan and dawlatkhānah so as to create royal movement throughout the city and intimate his level of satisfaction with his courtiers on a more individual basis. Through the sequence of visitations during Muḥarram, the size of donations, or the dispensation of gifts, the degree of his satisfaction could be expressed. It was a unique way for Āṣaf al-Dawlah to both ritualize the city and assert his courtly authority. The imāmbārah network then was both instrumental in allowing courtiers to reinforce their status and for the Nawwāb-vāzīr to demonstrate his authority and piety.

For Awadh elites, the Great Imāmbārah, an epicentre of royal Muḥarram activity, was an inspirational model (see figure 22.7). There, Āṣaf al-Dawlah recited the Fāṭiha, a funerary prayer, over symbolic “replicas” of Imām Ḫusayn and other martyrs’ tombs known as the taʿziyyah and commanded the 10-day ritual recitation of the tale of al-Ḥusayn’s tragedy and the singing of tragic songs (marsīyyah) to begin. On other occasions he recited the Twelver Shi’ite duʿūrū, salutatory prayers, and performed mātām, ritual self-flogging, with other Twelver Shi’ite elites.

The Great Imāmbārah was a more exclusive theatre than the jilavkhānah, suitable for Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s continuing performance of piety with his co-religionists and peers. The building also had a spatial hierarchy. According to Aḥū Ṭālib Īṣfahānī (d. 1221/1806), ordinary religious participants sat on a vast open-air platform in front of the building, while the principal ritual activity was observed in the
main rectangular hall by the Nawwāb-vazīr, his principal courtiers, and the silent but lavish taʿāzin of the elites stationed in the hall. Looking onto the main chamber was an elevated arched hall called the shāh ʿnashīn, literally the “Shāh’s seat.” If current practice serves as a guide, the most elaborate taʿziyyah were installed in the elevated open archways concealed by curtains that could be drawn up when necessary. The hooks around the archways remind one that the taʿziyyah were often veiled and only revealed for ritual purposes.

To anyone familiar with the ways rulers ranging from the Abbasids to the Qajars gave audience the curtained taʿāzin were unmistakeably familiar. In the Great Imāmbārah, instead of a ruler occupying an elevated and curtained seat the taʿziyyah of Imām Husayn and other sacred Shiite personalities did. In the Great Imāmbārah, the spatial design for royal audience chambers served as the template for the Muḥarram ritual hall.

What is interesting here is that Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s role as lead mourner of Imām Husayn’s sufferings and death ironically entailed performing the role of a spectator who listens to the tale of Ḥusayn’s martyrdom and emotive marsjīyyah. His role is also one of a courtier seeking an audience with the Imam Ḥusayn symbolized by the taʿziyyah. This point is made more clear by recognizing that the principal taʿziyyah were located within the arches on the elevated shāh ʿnashīn platform in the imāmbārah hall, which meant that Āṣaf al-Dawlah and his peers sat at the feet of the taʿziyyah. Even in death, Āṣaf al-Dawlah was buried before
and among the taʿzīyyah of the Great Imāmārāh and his canopied grave can still be seen.

Both the arrival and Muḥarram ceremonials were performances of power but ones intoned in different keys. In the Muḥarram ceremonial, power was performed as piety and the imāmārāhs were the theatres. One of the key distinctions between the Shujāʾ al-Dawlah and Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s processional practice was that the latter’s took place within the urban context of Lucknow and were integrated with a network of imāmārāhs built by Āṣaf al-Dawlah and his courtiers. In Lucknow, ceremonial became wedded to architecture.

**Conclusion**

The development of monumental architecture and its ritual use as a form of political relations extends beyond simplistic projections of grandeur, be they authentic or disingenuous. The relationships between court cultures and monumental architecture can also be thought of in terms that go beyond competitive patronage, the schematic spatialization of court hierarchies or as embodiments of socio-political discourses. If court culture and relations and architectural production in Muslim societies are increasingly thought of in terms of integrated performative acts of power then it is worth considering more carefully what architectural landscapes contribute to the definition and modulation of those performances. This requires viewing the architectural landscape not simply as a response to ritual activity or as a background setting that serves as a stage-set but as part and parcel of the theatrics of power and court culture practice. In many ways, works of monumental architectural act as ritual instruments that direct and focus social attention with political effect.

The case of Awadh, and Lucknow in particular, shows how monumental architecture forms a significant dimension to the practice of court culture outside the throne hall. By creating a range of spectator roles as with the Great Imāmārāh forecourt or by ritualizing and reproducing court settings throughout the city as with the imāmārāḥ network, Lucknow’s architecture was instrumental in defining how Āṣaf al-Dawlah, Lucknow’s elite and the general population should relate to each other during performative acts of power and piety.

The Great Imāmārāh forecourt can be viewed as a public theatre for the performance of power using the arrival ceremonial. On these occasions, the jilawkhānah helped make power relations more explicit by sifting the populace, the court and attending soldiers using the categories of performer, subordinate performer, elite spectator and common spectator. The Great Imāmārāh and the courtly imāmārāḥ network can be viewed as performative spaces for power and piety and as catalysts for creating encounters between the Nawwāb-vazīr and his courtiers in which their status relations could be clarified. The imāmārāḥ network of Lucknow in particular shows how the small-scale reproduction of architecture became the means of extending the practice of court culture of bringing the domestic environs of elites into the court and the court into the domestic environment.
In general there were far fewer architectural spatial categories in forecourts and imāmbārahs than the various social categories that comprised Awadh courtly society. While there were numerous social hierarchies of the court based on functional roles and familial ties, spatial hierarchies, such as those delineated through spatial positioning and ornament, revolved around the ephemeral positioning of performers and spectators in relation to each other. The spatialization of social hierarchy then involved the creation of larger, more blunt, and more generic categories that varied across architectural settings. Performative acts demanded the reconciliation of the more numerous social categories with the less numerous spatial ones. In these sifting moments, segments of Awadh’s general and courtly society were fleetingly consolidated and reconstituted as different kinds of performers and spectators.

In order to fully appreciate the ways in which architecture and court culture are intertwined, the specific visual character of architectural works, that is their design, and not simply geo-spatial schema, need to be considered. Details, such as the degree of covering, vantage point, viewability, ornament, contribute to the differentiation of space and the establishment of spatial hierarchies. Court hierarchies manifest differently, depending on the specific architectural context exposing the fluidity of courtly society as well as their integrity. Close examination of architectural design and genres and their attendant ritual activity then can be a potential strategy to locate the specificity of court cultures in diverse Muslim contexts and beyond.

Notes
1 A common alternative spelling for Awadh is “Oudh.”
2 See Llewellyn-Jones (1993), 231. An example revealing the persistence of traditional British narratives in post-Independence writing can be found in Rizvi (1986), II:76, where he writes, “The Nawwab, unable to prevent administrative collapse, concentrated mainly on fostering the development of art and architecture. Nawwab Asaf al-Dawlah’s insatiable passion for constructing imposing monuments is reflected in the Rumi Darvazah, the Asafi Imambarah and the mosque near Awrangzib’s mosque in Lucknow.”
4 Some key historical texts on Awadh include Srivastava (1939–45), II:8–11; Ahmad (1971); Barnett (1980); Rizvi (1986); Fisher (1987); Cole (1988).
7 See Sanders (1994).
8 See Shokoohy/Shokoohy (1999), 426f.
9 See Babaie (2004), 86f.
10 See Necipoğlu (1993), 311.
13 See Pinney (2004), 8f; ‘Allámí (1927), I:165.
14 Gomes (2003), 2. For an examination of court culture in early medieval India, see Ali (2004).
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16 See Hodder/Hutson (2003), 3.
18 See Digeres (1994).
20 Wade (1998), 5. Also, see Wolf (2000).
21 Fayz Bakhsh (1889), II:9.
22 See ibid. II:22.
23 See Hastings (1858), I:206. A previous British Resident, Mr. Cherry was especially irritated with the nawbat during Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s Muḥarram processions. See Rizvi (1986), II:311.
25 For a more thorough examination of British Resident and Indian court relations, see Fisher (1990).
26 See Ahmad (1971), 98.
27 See Hjortshøj (1979), 166f; Chelkowski (2006).
30 See Fayz Bakhsh (1889), II:97f.
31 See Blane (1788), 368.
32 See Fayz Bakhsh (1889), II:131.
33 See MS Anon. (1); MS Anon. (2). A summary appears in Rizvi (1986), II:309.
34 Hastings (1858), I:191.
35 Jahangir (1999), 300.
37 See “View of the Grand Nabob Asaphdoulah of Lechnough and his Retinue (Mahomet, Travels, Letter XXIII”)’. Reproduced in Mahomet (1997), fig. 3.
38 Ibid., 94f.
41 See [MS BL Add.Or.2595].
42 See Hillenbrand (1999).
43 See Fayz Bakhsh (1889), II:2–6.
45 See Keshani (2006), 243.
47 See Fayz Bakhsh (1889), II:8. Writing of Fayzābād, Fayz Bakhsh notes at one point the military commander’s cavalry and infantry dwelled in the city walls. At another point Bāhu Begam’s soldiers occupied certain portions of the walls, see ibid., II:130.
48 “Panorama showing the main buildings of Lucknow with a procession of Muhammad Ali Shah (king of Awadh (1837–42) passing along the road, watercolour and pencil on paper, anonymous, c. 1848”, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, BL, London [Add.Or.739]. Reproduced in part in Sharar, pl. 17 and Keshani, figs. 13 and 14.
50 For a comparison of plans, see Das (1991).
52 See Hjortshøj (1979), 85.
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[MS Anon. (1)] Intikhāb-i akhbār-i nawwāb-vāzīr al-mamālik Bahādur va intikhāb-i akhbār-i darbār-i mu’āllah va ātraf 1208–1209, no. 92 M.P. Cat. 90, Box 43, Royal Asiatic Society, London.


**Printed material**


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