When the Mamluks took power first in Egypt and then in Syria, there must have been many who viewed their ascendancy with dread. During the 650s/1250s the Śāliḥī Bahrī mamluks had acquired a reputation as rapacious thugs. The Mamluk Sultan Baybars (r. 658–76/1260–77), who was feared by his subjects rather than loved, had no literary culture and was, indeed, illiterate. Nevertheless, he did listen to readings of history. Specifically, he listened to the chronicle of his own exploits, the Rawḍ al-Zāhir fi Sīrat al-Malik al-Zāhir, read to him by its author, the historian and senior chancery official Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir. The sultan al-Mansūr Qalāwūn showed little or no interest in literature and his Arabic was notably poor. However, as we shall see, even in that first generation of the Mamluk regime there were some amirs who took a serious interest in literature. More literate and literary mamluks emerged from the second and third generation of the military elite, for the Mamluk regime in Egypt and Syria relied on an unusually literate military elite. This was because the training of a young mamluk in the Cairo Citadel did not just include exercises with sword, lance, and bow. Twice every week, Arab scholars from the city came in to instruct the young mamluks how to speak and read Arabic, as well as the tenets of Islam. There was a faqīh assigned to each barrack (tabaqah) whose job it was to teach the young mamluks the Quran, the Arabic script, and elements of the shariʿah.1 Evidence survives from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that the sultans’ young mamluks in the Citadel were put to work copying manuscripts in the royal library.2

The Ayyubid library in the Citadel, the kḥizān al-kutub, had been destroyed by a fire in 1292, and it is not clear what steps were taken to replace the lost volumes. Subsequently, the wealthy amir and friend of Ibn Khaldūn, Jamāl al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn ʿAlī al-Ūstādār, provided his Jamālī madrasah with a large collection of books purchased from the royal citadel. The sultans al-Muʿayyad Shaykh and al-Zāhir Jaqmaq were fanatical book collectors, but it is not clear whether the books they collected ended up in the royal library of the Citadel. The chief concentration of institutional libraries was in the mosques and madrasahs of the

Bayn al-Qaṣrayn. To mark the restoration of the mosque of al-Ḥākim after the earthquake of 702/1302–3, Baybars II presented the mosque with a library of 500 volumes on the religious sciences, literature, and history. There were also private libraries amassed by some of the great amirs. The Cairo palace of Badr al-Dīn Baybarsī al-Shamsī (d. 1298) had a grand collection of Arab books, as well as a certain “Turkish book” that so fascinated the historian Ibn al-Dawadārī. The wealthy vizier Amir Badr al-Dīn Baydarā similarly amassed a great library. According to Ibn al-Ṣuqāʿī, Baydarā liked adab and singing.

Al-Maqrīzī once composed some verses in which he claimed that people who loitered about in markets were up to no good. The only exceptions he allowed were loitering in the weapons market or the book market. The main book market used to be in Fustat, east of the Mosque of ‘Amr. This market declined steeply in the fourteenth century, but al-Maqrīzī could still remember buying books there as a boy. In 700/1301, however, a new book market, the Sūq al-Kutubīyīn, had been founded, close to the goldsmiths’ market. This market was part of the waqf of the Mansūrī Bimaristan. Another, smaller cluster of bookstalls was to be found close to the Azhar Mosque (and close also to the candle market, where the prostitutes used to hang out). In the fifteenth century, the Sūq al-Warrāqīn, or market of copyists, was close to Barsbāy’s madrasah. Bookshops were, of course, also copying shops and some of them also doubled as circulating libraries.

Barracks, libraries, and bookshops apart, prisons also sometimes served as a somewhat unexpected learning environment for members of the Mamluk elite. Baybars al-Jashinkīr studied Arabic in prison before becoming sultan. The sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad already had Arabic when he was imprisoned, and he used it to study al-Bayhaqī’s eleventh-century writings on hadith. The theologian and jurist Ibn Taymiyyah wrote copiously in prison. Shihāb al-Dīn al-ʿUmarī got much of his (rather inaccurate) information about Europe from a fellow-prisoner who was Genoese. Ibn ʿArabshāh was presumably in prison when he wrote his unfinished eulogistic chronicle of the achievements of Jaqmaq.


Some amirs seem to have identified strongly with Arabic culture. Sanjar al-
Dawādār wrote poetry. Baybars al-Manṣūrī wrote history. Ṭaybughā al-Ashrafi Ṯ wrote a treatise on archery. The brutal amir Uzdamur al-Kāshif had memorized al-Ḥarīrī’s Maqamat, as well as much Arabic poetry. Quite a few amirs and mamluks interested themselves in Hanafi or Shafi’i jurisprudence or in collecting and transmitting hadiths. However, although it is not uncommon to come across references to sultans, amirs, and mamluks who spoke and wrote in Arabic, there seems to be more evidence of this level of culture in the fifteenth century than in earlier periods.⁷

The literary culture of the Mamluk period was Turkish as well as Arabic, though the production of literary works in Turkish mostly seems to have been a late development that reached its peak in the Circassian period. Turkish works composed within the frontiers of the Mamluk Sultanate were written in Kipchak, Oghuz, or a mixture of the two. It is one of the curious features of the Circassian period that, on the evidence of what has survived, more works were then translated from Arabic or Persian into Kipchak or one of the other Turkish dialects than in the preceding Kipchak Turkish Mamluk period. It seems probable that, despite the increased numbers of Circassians imported into Egypt and Syria in the later Mamluk period, some form of Turkish remained the military lingua franca. It is difficult to consider the Turkish literature of Mamluk Egypt in isolation from that of the Golden Horde, Khwarizm, Anatolia, and Azerbaijan. The legacy of Khwarizmian Kipchak literary culture and its continuation in the lands of the Golden Horde was at first particularly important. Later on, translations into Oghuz Turkish, the dialect of the Anatolian and, more specifically, of the Ottoman Turks became more common. However, even towards the end of the Mamluk period, in the reign of Qaṅsūh al-Ghūrī, a mamluk called Asanbāy min Südūn copied a Hanbali religious treatise by Abū al-Layth in the Kipchak dialect for the royal library. Much of what was translated into Turkish was instructional in nature, dealing with jurisprudence, hippology, or furūsīyah and hence of no interest to the student of literature in the narrow sense.

It seems that the earliest text on Turkish grammar to circulate in the Arab lands was produced by an Andalusian immigrant. Athīr al-Dīn Muḥammad Abū

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Hayyān al-Gharnāṭī (654–745/1256–1344) was born in Granada, but like so many of his literary contemporaries, he ended up in Cairo, where he enjoyed the patronage of Sayf al-Dīn Arghūn, the nāʿib al-saltānah in Egypt. Although Abū Hayyān was primarily a grammarian and linguist, he also enjoyed a considerable reputation as an elegant, stylish poet, who produced verses on a wide range of themes. In particular he made use of poetry to expound grammar. An expert linguist, he wrote in Turkish and Persian. His Al-Idrāk li-Lisān al-Atrak is an exposition of the Turkish language as it was spoken in Cairo. Bārkā Faqīh’s translation of part of Khusraw and Shirin from Persian into Kipchak Turkish in 1386 was the first work of high literature to be produced in Turkish in the Mamluk lands. A few years later Sayf-ı Sarayî arrived in Egypt. Sayf-ı Sarayî, as his name suggests, came to Egypt from the capital of the Golden Horde and was the most prominent writer of Turkish verse to reside in the Mamluk lands. He translated Sa’dī’s Gulistan into Kipchak Turkish, and added an appendix of poems, most of which were his own.8 More generally, Turkish scholars and littérateurs were likely to receive a favorable reception from the Mamluk elite. Sayf al-Dīn Sarghitmish al-Nāširi, one of the most powerful amirs in the decades that followed the death of the sultan al-Nāšir Muḥammad and a fanatical partisan for the Hanafi madhhab, founded a Hanafi madrasah that became a magnet for fuqaha’ from all over the Turkish-speaking world.9 Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s and al-‘Āynī’s knowledge of Turkish almost certainly helped bring them to the favor of the Mamluks.10

The sultan al-Zahir Tātār (r. 824/1421), besides studying Hanafi jurisprudence and the shari’ah in Turkish, was fond of listening to poetry, especially Turkish poetry, which he memorized, and he was said to understand the principles of its composition. He also collected books in Turkish. According to Ibn Tahkībirdī, he was the second Mamluk sultan, after al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh, to have had a taste for the sciences (’ulūm),

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arts, and literature. Ibn Taghrībirdī’s obituary of al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh states that that sultan was fond of poetry, though what kind is not stated. Those military men who did interest themselves in literary culture were likely to write in both Arabic and Turkish—and, in a few cases, in Persian as well. Sayf al-Dīn Taghrībirmish al-Jalālī (d. 1448), an expert in fiqh, composed in both Arabic and Turkish.

The brutal Amir Yashbak min Mahdī (d. 1480), the terror of the Arabs of Upper Egypt and a notorious sadist, was also a key figure in the literary culture of the late fifteenth century. Besides bringing peace of a desolate sort to Upper Egypt, he presided over the defeat of Shāh Sūwār in Anatolia and opened hostilities against Uzun Hasan in Iran. One can describe him as the power behind Qāytbāy’s throne, though in fact he was such a prominent statesman and soldier that he could better be described as the power in front of the throne. Judged as a whole, Yashbak’s personality and career are strongly reminiscent of his near-contemporary, John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester (ca. 1427–70), for Tiptoft was notorious as England’s chief torturer and impaler and famed, also, as a pious and cultured humanist. Yashbak wrote a genealogy of the Prophet, as well as soulful religious poems in Turkish. He was also a passionate collector of books and an important cultural patron. He was especially fond of Persian scholars. He was the patron of the Persians Ya‘qūb Shāh and Pīr Ḥajjī. Yashbak commissioned the production of beautiful books, for example the copy of al-Būṣīrī’s poem of praise of the Prophet, Al-Kawākib al-Durrāh, which is preserved in the Chester Beatty Library. This and other acts of religious patronage may raise doubts about Ibn Taghrībirdī’s claim that Yashbak hated religion. Much of what we know about Yashbak comes from his client, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd ibn Khalīl Ibn Ajā al-Ḥalabī (d. 881/1476). Ibn Ajā, a former student of Ibn Ḥajar’s, also wrote poetry in Turkish. Ibn Ajā served Yashbak as military qadi and envoy and he produced a fascinating chronicle of Yashbak’s campaigning against the Dhu al-Qadrid prince Shāh Sūwār. He also translated al-Wāqidī’s Futūḥ al-Shām into Turkish for Yashbak. Al-Sakhāwī, who praised Yashbak’s generosity to fuqara’, hajjis, and

12Ibn Taghrībirdī, Nujām, 6:428.
13Berkey, “Silver Threads.”
16On Yashbak’s political and literary career, see Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd ibn Khalīl Ibn Ajā, Tārīkh al-Amīr Yashbak al-Zāhīrī, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad al-Ṭulaymāt (Cairo, 1974); Carl Brockelmann, Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur (Weimar and Leiden, 1898–1902, 1943–49), S2:78; Haarmann, “Turkish Legends,” 98; Bernadette Martel-Thoumian, “Les dernières batailles
plague victims, wrote the chronicle *Al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī Dhayl al-Sulūk* at his request, and al-Sakhāwī added that Yashbak later carried the book about with him and showed it to other people. However, having celebrated Yashbak’s discrimination and enthusiasm, al-Sakhāwī gloomily and typically added that all that “is a thing of the past. Nothing now remains but stupidity, boorishness, and an interest in worldly trifles.”  

Yashbak’s master, the sultan al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy (r. 872–901/1468–96), shared his henchman’s literary interests. He composed Turkish *ghazals*, as well as Arabic religious poetry and *muwashshahs*, and he composed Sufi *awrād* and *adhkār* in Arabic. Mūhammad ibn Qāyṭbāy followed in his father’s literary footsteps. As we shall see, the penultimate Mamluk sultan, al-Ashraf Qānsūh al-Ghūrī, was at least as cultured as his former owner, Qāyṭbāy.

The literacy in Arabic of many amirs and mamluks may explain the number of manuscripts produced in this period devoted to *furūsīyah*, hunting, hippology, and perhaps also chess (a game that was considered as a training in strategic thinking). Treatises on *furūsīyah* that aimed at the mamluk market were mostly of a practical nature and thus quite unlike the devotional treatises in what was nominally the same genre produced by such pious Arabs as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah. Even so, literary and antiquarian elements might creep in and, for example, al-Aqsarā’ī’s *Niḥayat al-Sū’ūl wa-al-Umnīyah fī Ta’līm A’māl al-Furūsīyah* recycled parts of Aelian’s *Tactica*, a second-century A.D. Greek treatise on strategy that must have been of negligible use for fourteenth-century Mamluk cavalry.

Evidently, the bookish tastes of the Mamluk elite had some part in shaping the literature of medieval Egypt and Syria. However, the role of the *awlād al-nās* was...
perhaps even more crucial. The awlād al-nās, sons of mamluks, many of whom had married into Arab elite households, acted as cultural intermediaries between the Mamluk elite and their Turkish subjects, and many of them also wrote books. The subject has been the subject of an excellent study by Ulrich Haarmann.\(^2\) The ranks of the awlād al-nās included such writers as Ibn al-Dawādārī, Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Jankalā ibn Bābā, al-Ṣafādī, Ibn al-Turkumānī, Ibn Manglī, Ibn Südūn, Ibn Ṭagrībirdī, and Ibn Iyās. In most cases, the identification of the awlād al-nās with Arabic culture was total. However, the historian Ibn al-Dawādārī took an interest in Turkish legends and folklore and Ibn Ṭagrībirdī was famous for his expertise in Turkish matters, though some of his critics doubted that expertise.

A remarkably large part of the literature of the Mamluk age was produced by Arab officials working in the employment of the state, either in the inshā’ (chancery) or in one of the diwāns. The income from state employment may have cushioned their writing activities. On the other hand, in many cases the bureaucrats seem to have been producing literature in the expectation of advancing their careers. Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāḥīr, ‘Īzz al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād, Shāfī ibn ‘Alī, Ibn al-Mukkaram, and Ibn Abī Ḥajalāh were among the chancery men who wrote chronicles celebrating the achievements of ruling sultans.\(^2\) In the case of Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāḥīr, his chronicles, especially the one devoted to the deeds of Qalāwūn, seem to have largely served as a framing device for Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāḥīr’s own drafts of diplomatic pieces and occasional displays of fine prose.\(^2\) (The elaborate official drafts produced earlier in the Ayyubid period by such figures as al-Qādī al-Fāḍil and ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Isfahānī furnished the model for this sort of thing, and Ibn Nubātāh, who worked in the Syrian and Egyptian chanceries, was to produce a collection of al-Qādī al-Fāḍil’s letters, as an act of literary piety.) That chancery prose was esteemed and enjoyed as a form of belles-lettres is indicated by the inclusion of a chapter on the subject in al-Ghuzūl’s \textit{Matḥāli’ al-Buduṣ} (on which see below).

Besides histories, officials in the inshā’ also produced extensive manuals on the running of the chancery and the \textit{adab}, or culture, that the scribes who worked in it might be expected to have. Salādīn’s officials ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Isfahānī and al-Qādī al-Fāḍil served as prose models for writers in the service of the Mamluk inshā’.

\(^{20}\) Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech.”
The chancery official Muḥammad ibn Manẓūr’s chancery treatise, *Tadhkirat al-Labīb wa-Nuzhat al-Adīb*, has not survived (though it was one of Ibn al-Furat’s and al-Qalqashandī’s sources). However, Muḥammad ibn Manẓūr, also known as Ibn Mukarram (630–711/1233–1311), was also well known as a philologist and lexicographer, whose chief claim to fame was his compilation of one of the great dictionaries of the medieval period, the *Lisān al-‘Arab*. The *Lisān* was no mere glossary of words and their meanings. Because of its numerous citations of illustrative fragments of poetry and other material, it was in effect a literary chrestomathy.\(^\text{23}\)

Shiḥāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Nuwayrī (667–732/1279–1332) worked in government service as a scribe and financial official. However, he only wrote his encyclopedia, *Nihāyat al-‘Arab fi Funūn al-Adab*, after leaving government service. Successive volumes dealt with the universe, poetry, female singers and administration, fauna, flora, and history. (The historical section provided disproportionately a large tail to this learned dog.) The *Nihāyah*, like some of its successors, was more of a copious display of knowledge than a seriously useful office manual. Similarly, the *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amsār*, by Shiḥāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Faḍl Allāh al-‘Umāri (700–49/1301–47), was pre-eminently a work of adab, rather than a serious work of reference for the scribe in office. (The same author’s *Al-Taʾrīf bi-al-Muṣṭalāḥ al-Sharīf* would have been more useful in the latter respect.) Like so many authors in this period, al-ʿUmārī was a polygraph, and he wrote a history of his family of distinguished jurists, as well as various other shorter works, including poems.\(^\text{24}\) Shiḥāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Qalqashandī (756–821/1356–1418) compiled the *Ṣubḥ al-Aḥsā fī Sināʿat al-Inshāʾ*, which contains an unusually large number of official documents in it, so that the work comes close to constituting an archive of templates for drafts of official documents. Al-Qalqashandī also wrote a *maqāmah* on secretaryship, as well as a treatise on Arab tribes.\(^\text{25}\) Almost all the officials briefly discussed wrote on a disconcertingly wide range of matters. It was a feature of the age. Poets doubled as biographers and authors of religious treatises. Pornographers wrote poems in praise of the Prophet and treatises on dream interpretation. The disinclination of writers to tie


themselves down to any particular genre makes it more or less impossible to present an orderly picture of Mamluk literature.

After the golden age of the Hamdanids in Northern Syria in the tenth century, there was little in the way of a sustained culture of poetry and belles-lettres in Syria or Egypt until the late twelfth century. There was, however, a literary renaissance in the Ayyubid and early Mamluk period. Like all true renaissances, it had a backward-looking looking and it harked back to the manners and literary productions of eighth– and ninth-century Abbasid Iraq, so that al-Mas‘ūdī and al-Jāḥīz served as models for Mamluk prose stylists. The poets of Cairo and Damascus studied the old Baghdaide prescriptions on how to court beautiful slave girls, cultivate male friendships, dress elegantly, and perfume themselves. There was then an antiquarian feel to much of Mamluk belles-lettres and poetry, as its authors looked back on the cult of the nadim (cup-companion) and the zarif (dandy). Around the mid-thirteenth century, the poets Bahā‘ al-Dīn Zuhayr and Taqī al-Dīn ibn Daqīq al-‘Id (who wrote poetry but was better known as a qadi and an alchemist) embraced fairly self-conscious roles as zarafā‘. In the following generation, Ibn ‘Aṭīf al-Tīlīmsānī, the composer of elegant poetry about wine and love, was also known as al-Shābb al-Zarīf (the Young Dandy). Al-Ghuzūlī’s fifteenth-century belles-lettres compilation included a chapter on the nadim, and another on the repertoire of stories of the nadim, both of which drew largely on Abbasid material. Al-Suyūtī’s later treatise on women, Al-Mustazraf, dealt mostly with slave girls of the Abbasid period and the passions they aroused, and this too was essentially part of the old culture of the zarif. The code of the zarif was not confined to the written page and, for example, the fifteenth-century Amir Jānibak al-Ashrafī dressed and behaved like a zarif.26 The personnel and manners of the zarafā‘ overlapped somewhat with those of the gay community. Al-Tīfāshī remarked how it had become fashionable in literary circles to affect homosexual mannerisms. Besides the cages of singing birds, the chessboard, and bottles of wine, the typical gay man’s apartment contained books of poetry, love romances, and magical treatises.27

Apart from the example of old Baghdad, the court culture of al-Andalus and the Maghrib also provided models for the would-be courtier and writer. Sharaf al-Dīn Abū al-‘Abbās Ahmad ibn Yūsuf al-Tīfāshī (580–651/1184–1253) was an immigrant from Tunisia whose Mut‘at al-Asmā‘ was a treatise dedicated to the pleasures of music, dance, shadow theatre, and wine drinking. His account of the etiquette of court concerts, in which music, song, and wine came together, drew

26 On the persistence (or was it a revival?) of the culture of the zarif, see Mhammaed Ferid Ghazi, “Un group sociale: ‘Les Raffinés’ (zarafā‘),” Studia Islamica 1 (1959): 59.
sharp contrasts between eastern and western ways of holding these entertainments. Al-Tifāshī was also author of a literary encyclopedia, *Fāṣl al-Khītāb fī Madārik al-Hawās al-Khams*, and a well-known treatise on precious stones, *Azhār al-Afkār fī Jawāhir al-Abjār*, as well as various works of erotica. He was one of several well-known North African immigrants who found a patron in the amir Jamāl al-Dīn Yusuf ibn Yaghmūr (d. 663/1265). Abu al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Ibn Sa‘īd al-Maghrībī (d. 673/1274), the poet, anthologist, and geographer, was another. Indeed Ibn Yaghmūr’s salon, where poets used to compete with one another at capping lines, was known as *kāhf al-maghrīribah* (or Cave of the Maghribis). Ibn Yaghmūr was a friend of the father of the historian al-Yūnīnī. (Other writers and scholars from North Africa who found patronage in Egypt or Syria later on in the Mamluk period included such distinguished figures as Ibn Manẓūr, Ibn Abī Ḥajalah, and Ibn Khaldūn.) The strong interest of Egyptian and Syrian poets in the *muwashshaḥ* form is yet another indication of the literary influence of Andalusia.

Since the poetry of the Mamluk period is still only partially explored, it is difficult to offer generalizations about its development or confidently to single out the important poets of the period. At first at least, little panegyric poetry was written in praise of Mamluk sultans (presumably because those sultans were not really interested in poetry). Instead poetic praise (*madālīḥ*) tended to be addressed to the Prophet and to ulama and holy men. Bahā’ al-Dīn Zuhayr (581–656/1186–1258) wrote panegyrics in the hope of securing patronage, but with only modest and intermittent success, and in the end he died in poverty. His less grandiose lighter pieces, hedonistic, satirical, and urbane, are more pleasing to a modern sensibility. Above all his verses commemorated fleeting passions and regrets for wasted youth.

The hedonistic celebration of love and wine gardens was continued by Bahā’ al-Dīn’s successors. Only a few representative figures will be singled out here. Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (657–ca. 750/1278–ca. 1349) was born and died in Iraq. He also spent time in Egypt and Syria. He frequented the court of the Ayyubids of

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29Jean-Claude Garcin, *Un Centre musulman de la Haute-Égypte médiévale*, Qūs (Cairo, 1976), 242 n.


Hamah, and al-Šafadī introduced him to the sultan al-Nāsir Muḥammad in Egypt. Šafī al-Dīn wrote playful and licentious verse (addressed to both sexes). Unlike Bahā’ al-Dīn, he was a master of word play and of the elaborate badī’ style, and more generally he seems to have delighted in displaying his versatility in all the forms of poetry in favor at the time. He wrote qaṣīdahs and muwashshaḥs. He also produced a treatise on popular Arabic poetry of his time, entitled Al-‘Aṭīl al-Hālī. However, by far and away his most interesting work is his Qaṣīdah al-Sāsāniyyah, in which he made use of a wide range of rather esoteric underworld jargon in order to describe the modus operandi of the Banū Sāsān (that is to say the beggars, charlatans, and low life entertainers).³² (On the Mamluk preservation of the old literary cult of rogues, beggars, and freeloaders see below).

Šafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī also produced a panegyric qaṣīdah in honor of the Prophet, Al-Badī’iyyah al-Nabawiyyah. This was modeled on an earlier qaṣīdah, the Burdah of Sharaf al-Dīn al-Būṣīrī (608–ca. 694/1212–ca. 1294). Al-Būṣīrī was a minor figure in the Mamluk administration, who wrote khamrīyah, as well as poetry on a variety of other themes, including attacks on Copts and corrupt officials. The Burdah, though famous and still widely esteemed today for its wonder-working therapeutic properties, is of little literary interest.³³ Šafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī’s version, however, was a much more elaborate and artful affair, which made use of a different rhetorical figure in each of its lines. The latter’s way of emulating and outstripping the Burdah was to be widely imitated by poets who came after him, including Ibn Ḥijjah (whose version was so obscure that its author felt impelled to produce a commentary on it) and ʿĀ’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyyah (a learned Sufi who died in 922/1516).³⁴

Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Nubāṭah (686–768/1287–1366) was, like Šafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī, a poet who found patronage at the puppet court of the Ayyubids of Hamah. His edition of al-Qādī al-Fāḍīl’s letters has already been mentioned. The historian prince al-Mu‘ayyad Abū al-Fidā‘ was one of his patrons and the panegyrics Ibn Nubāṭah wrote for him were collected and entitled Al-Mu‘ayyadāt. After the deposition and death of Abū al-Fidā‘’s son and successor al-Afdal, Ibn Nubāṭah wrote a lament for the end of the Ayyubid dynasty. Though he later briefly found employment in the service of the Mamluk sultan al-Nāsir Hasan, it is hard not to feel that Ibn Nubāṭah’s growing interest in Sufism and his production of zuhdīyāt

³⁴See in this issue Th. Emil Homerin, ‘Living Love: The Mystical Writings of ʿĀ’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyyah (d. 922/1516).”
(poetry of asceticism) indirectly at least reflected his straitened circumstances. He died in poverty.\textsuperscript{35}

The impulse to demonstrate literary diversity is exemplified by the oeuvre of Shihâb al-Dîn Ibn Abî Hajalah (725–76/1325–1375). Born in Tlemcen, Ibn Abî Ḥajalah was a poet, anthologist, and jack-of-all-literary-trades. He produced a much-admired anthology on profane love, the 

Diwân al-Šabâbah (Divan of ardent love), which covered roughly the same ground as the eleventh-century Andalusian Ibn Ḥazm’s famous work on the adab of love, 

Tawq al-Ḥamâmah, and which mostly drew on older materials. However, his literary production was quite diverse and also included qaṣīdahs in praise of the Prophet, a qaṣīdah on Peter of Cyprus’s attack on Alexandria, a compilation designed to console those who mourn over the death of a child entitled Sülwat al-Ḥazîn ﬁ Mawt al-Banîn, a chess maqâmaḥ entitled Unmudhaj al-Qitâl ﬁ Li’b al-Shatranj, several treatises on the plague, and a chronicle of the reign of the sultan al-Nâsîr Ḥasan, as well as an account of the revolt of the julkân (newly imported mamluks) against that sultan. The Sukkârdân al-Sulṭân (Sugar-bowl of the sultan), dedicated to al-Nâsîr Ḥasan, is one of his most curious works, as it harps on the importance of the number seven to the history of Egypt.\textsuperscript{36}

Abû Bakr Taqî al-Dîn Ibn Ḥijjah al-Ḥamawi (767–837/1366–1434) was another who spread himself widely in his literary productions. He started out as a button-maker, but later became a minor chancery official in Syria and, like so many of his colleagues, he produced his chancery treatise (entitled Qahwat al-inshâ’, or Intoxication of the chancery). His major work, however, was his anthology of poetry and prose, the Thâmaraṭ al-Awraq (Fruits of the leaves). This wonderfully miscellaneous compilation included an account of a journey that the author made from Cairo to Damascus and another trip through Anatolia, the history of Hûlûgû in Baghdad, as well as all sorts of curious anecdotes about Umayyad, Abbasid, and Mamluk personalities. Another of his anthologies, the Khizânat al-Adab (The Ornate treasury), assembled the best-known poetry of his time. He wrote a treatise on bâdi‘, which besides setting out the principles of this elaborately rhetorical form of poetry was also an anthology of contemporary bâdi‘ poetry. He wrote


badī’ poetry himself. He also collected jokes, and his decidedly miscellaneous writings include a risālah on the burning of Cairo by Barquq in 791/1389, as well as poetry in praise of chess and horses.\(^37\) Ibn Ḥijjah’s friend, al-Nawājī, was unkind enough to write a study of his plagiarisms.

Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan Shams al-Dīn al-Nawājī (788–859/1386–1455) studied under al-Damrā (on whom see below), taught hadith at a couple of madrasahs and had Sufi links, but he is best known for his anthology devoted to wine, Ḥalbat al-Kumayt (The Racecourse of the bay). Kumayt refers both to a dark bay horse and to a reddish brown wine, cups of which, in al-Nawājī’s metaphor, circulated round the convivial table like race horses. Besides celebrating the joys of wine, al-Nawājī’s anthology also devoted a lot of space to the ambient pleasures, such as gardens, furniture, flowers, candles, and lamps that went best with an amiable drinking session. Al-Nawājī’s Kitāb al-Ṣabūṭ was devoted to the more specialized pleasure of drinking in the morning. Both works followed the conventions of an extensive earlier literature of khamrīyah (works devoted to wine), and it is unclear whether al-Nawājī’s work reflected a genuine enthusiasm for alcohol or whether it was just another example of the literary antiquarianism that was so pervasive in the Mamluk period. The same question applies to his anthology devoted to beautiful boys, Marāṭī’ al-Ghazlān (The Prairie of gazelles), which also included some of his own poems on the subject. Al-Nawājī also compiled the ‘Uqūḍ al-La’āl, strings of pearls, a muwashshaṭ anthology, that drew heavily on Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk and al-Ṣafādī.\(^38\)

Much of Mamluk poetry consists either of light-hearted verses d’occasion or of experiments with riddles, chronograms, and similarly artful and taxing devices. These sorts of productions have not survived well compared to the work of older poets—to, say, the more directly hedonistic poetry of an Abū Nuwās or to the warrior’s rhetoric of an Abū Firās. It is hard to point to much that was distinctively original. Nevertheless, despite the general conservatism of Mamluk poetry (and the badi’, or “original” poetry, was at least as conservative as anything else) there were some developments, including a growing readiness to experiment with folk genres, including the muwashshaṭ, the zajal, and the mawwāl. Andalusian influence was a factor here. Panegyrics were generally to the Prophet and to the ulama rather than to the Mamluk elite. Panegyrics to members of the Mamluk elite, while not unknown, were not so very common. However, Mamluk taste may lie


behind the common choice of a Turkish boy rather than an Arab girl as the object of affection in the ghazal, or love poem.

Though the Mamluk era was an age of compilations and anthologies, it was hardly more so than the centuries that preceded it. It seems to have been a point of pride to write upon any and every topic. Short treatises were written on all manner of subjects; al-Ṣafadī wrote on tears, al-Maqrīzī wrote about bees, and al-Suyūṭī wrote on the legality of wearing the furs of squirrels that had been strangled, on jokes about Saladin’s governor Qarāqūsh, and much else besides. However, the most popular topics for longer compilations of prose and poetry continued to be love and wine-drinking, and the most pious figures had no hesitation in writing about profane love and partying. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, the Islamic rigorist and Sufi (on whom see below) compiled a treatise on love. So did ‘Alāʾ al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Mughīlī ibn Qīlī al-Hanafī (ca. 690–762/ca. 1291–1361), who was a Hanafī professor and specialist in hadith, nasab (genealogy), and biography. His Al-Wādiḥ al-Mubīn fī Dhikr Man Uṣūshīda min Muḥībbīn (The Clear and eloquent in speaking of those lovers who became martyrs), as its title suggests, argued for the reliability of a hadith to the effect that those who die of love are martyrs on the path of God. Al-Tīfāshī’s and al-Nawājī’s compilations which dealt with wine-drinking and its attendant pleasures have already been mentioned.

Much of that kind of material was also brought together by ‘Alāʾ al-Dīn ibn ‘Alī al-Ghuzūlī (d. 815/1412), a citizen of Damascus, in his Maṭālī’ al-Budūr fī Maṭāzīl al-Surūr (Risings of full moons regarding the pleasures of households). The Maṭālī’ is a literary anthology on the pleasures of life. These pleasures including sex, candles, speaking birds, slave girls, chess, animals, cooling breezes, wine, and visits to Birkat al-Raṭīlī (one of Cairo’s pleasure lakes). One chapter, “Fī al-Ṣāḥib wa-al-Nadīm,” dealt with what was expected of a friend in the way of elegant behavior and conversation. Such a friend was a latter-day žarīf, whose uniform included the qalansuwaḥ (a pointed hat), mandīl (handkerchief), expensive green silk belt, and so on. The next chapter consists of a collection of tales suitable to be told by nudama’ in the evenings. The stories date from Abbasid times or even earlier.

A number of important story-collections were put together in this period, of which the best known (after Alf Laylah wa-Laylah, that is) was Al-Mustaṭraf fī Kull Fann Mustaṭraf, compiled by the Egyptian Baha’ al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ahmad al-Ibshihi (790–ca. 850/1388–ca. 1446). This was a vast anthology of prose and classical and folk poetry. The prose material included stories of the

Prophet and of Sufi saints, proverbs, animal fables, and entertaining stories. Many of the stories were of an improving nature and most of it fairly unsophisticated. Stories about simple saints and poor artisans carried a message that the reader should be patient with his lot and content with what God had decreed. However, some tales seem to have been included simply for the comic or erotic pleasure they afforded.41

By contrast with al-Ibshih’s well-known collection, the Fakhāt al-Khulafā’ wa-Mafakhīhāt al-Żurafā’ of Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Arabshāh (791–854/1392–1450) has had little attention paid to it in recent centuries. The Fakhāt, in which animals tell entertaining and improving tales, was modeled on the Persian Marzubān-nāmah of al-Warāwīnī, and, like its prototype, it aimed at an exalted audience, for it was a work in the mirror-for-princes genre. It considerably expanded on its Persian original and included quite a lot of material concerning recent Mongol and Timurid history. Ibn ‘Arabshāh modeled his style as well his content upon Persian exemplars and wrote in a torturous and metaphor-laden rhymed prose. Having spent his youth in Samarkand, he had travelled widely since then, and he wrote copiously in both Arabic and Turkish (but it is dispiriting to find how little attention has been paid to his literary oeuvre). Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s Al-Ta’īf al-Ṭāhir was both a royal biography and a mirror-for-princes, with the Sultan Jaqmaq as the model ruler that other princes should follow. Though it seems to have been written in the hope that the exemplary prince would release Ibn ‘Arabshāh from prison in Cairo, in fact its author was released only a few days before his death. His better-known Ājā‘ib al-Maqdūr fi Nawā‘ib Tīmūr, a history of the career of the villainous Tīmūr, or Tamerlane, was written in Arabic, but again in the Persianate manner. Although it was a popular subject of study for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalists, it seems to have had little or no influence on chroniclers of the Mamluk period, perhaps because of its rebarbative, ornate style, so different from the workaday prose of al-Maqrīzī or Ibn Taghribirdī. Even so, it should be noted that Ibn Taghribirdī was a fan of Ibn ‘Arabshāh and got an ijāzah to teach his writings.42


Ibn ‘Arabshāh has suffered from being treated by modern scholars as merely a historian. But the same is true of Badr al-Dīn al-‘Aynī (762–855/1361–1451) and his collection of entertaining stories about various classes of people, the Majmū’ Mushtamil ‘alā Ḥikayāt wa-Ghayrihā, has received even less attention than the Fakihāt.\textsuperscript{43} His current reputation is based primarily on his authorship of the chronicle ‘Iqd al-Jumān (Necklace of pearls), which he used to read in Arabic to the sultan Barsbāy, and then explain in Turkish. Of more purely literary interest are his presentation chronicles, Al-Sayf al-Muhannad fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Mu‘ayyad and Al-Rawd al-Zāhir fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Zāhir, addressed to the sultans al-Mu‘ayyad Shaykh and al-Zāhir Tātār respectively, which have a belles-lettres quality, as they are not so much chronicles of the sultans’ achievements as panegyrics to the qualities of an ideal ruler. The two texts include disquisitions on cosmology, numerology, genealogy, and pre-Mamluk history, as well as advice of the mirror-for-princes type.\textsuperscript{44} Much of al-‘Aynī’s prestige among his contemporaries rested neither upon his historical nor on his more literary productions, but on his commentary on al-Bukhārī’s hadith collection, ‘Umdat al-Qa‘rī. The work of Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim al-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī (fl. 670s/1370s) has similarly hitherto only attracted the attention of historians. His Kitāb al-Ilma‘ fī ma‘ Jarat bihi al-Ahḵām al-Maqdīyah fī Waqi‘at al-Iskandariyah, which has as its pretext an account of Peter of Cyprus’s attack on Alexandria in 767/1365, is nevertheless better considered as adab, since documentary reporting is crowded out by information about early Arab shipping, stories about Alexander and Aristotle, and other dubiously relevant material.\textsuperscript{45}

Although al-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī’s work may be cited as an instance of what may be called the “literarization of history,” it is questionable whether there was a single trend. Sayf al-Dīn Abū Bakr Ibn al-Dawādārī (d. 713/1313) inserted snippets of Turkish and Mongol folklore into his chronicles.\textsuperscript{46} Ibn Iyās similarly

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\textsuperscript{44} Badr al-Dīn Mahmūd ibn Ahmad Al-‘Aynī, Al-Rawd al-Zāhir fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Zāhir Tātār, ed. Hans Ernst (Cairo, 1962); idem, Al-Sayf al-Muhannad fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Mu‘ayyad, ed. Muhammad Shaltūt (Cairo, 1967); Holt, "Literary Offerings," 8–12; Weintritt, Formen, 185–92.

\textsuperscript{45} Aziz Suriyal Atiya, The Crusade in the Later Middle Ages (London, 1938), 349–75; Rosenthal, Muslim Historiography, 155, 458–59; Weintritt, Formen.

\textsuperscript{46} Haarmann, Quellenstudien, esp. 159–98; idem, "Auflösung und Bewahrung der klassischen Formen arabischer Geschichtsschreibung in der Zeit der Mamluken," Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft 121 (1971): 46–60; Barbara Langner, Untersuchungen zur

enlivened his chronicle of sixteenth-century Egyptian affairs with stories of a folkloric nature. As has already been noted, some chroniclers used their histories as display books for examples of fine chancery prose. The Ba’alabakkī chronicler Qutb al-Dīn al-Yūnīnī (640–726/1242–1326) included a striking amount of poetry in what was formally an annals of Syrian history. In doing so, he was perhaps following the earlier example of Abū Shāmah, the Syrian chronicler of Ayyubid times. (But al-Yūnīnī’s readiness to include satirical poetry and poetry which celebrated love and wine-drinking is curious given the chronicler’s ascetic tendencies, his devotion to hadith studies and his admiration for the austere Ibn Taymiyyah.) Muhammad ibn Muḥammad Ibn Şaṣrā’s late fourteenth-century chronicle of Damascus was peppered with fables, proverbs, and moralizing advice. Nevertheless, there were limits to the literarization of history writing, and most chronicles of the Mamluk period were rather uninterpretative, pedestrian chronicles of public affairs whose authors do not seem to have dreamt of emulating such earlier stylish writers of history as al-Masʿūdī or Miskawayh.

Like the chronicle, the bestiary could also serve as a pretext for the kind of erudition befitting an adīb. For example the Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān (Lives of beasts) by Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Damīrī (745–808/1344–1405) more closely resembles al-Jāḥiz’s classic Kitāb al-Ḥayawān than it does a work of scientific zoology, as al-Damīrī repeatedly digressed into literature and folklore and, for some reason, he chose to add the caliphs to his collection of beasts. However, he was more systematic than al-Jāḥiz in that he dealt with his creatures in alphabetical order. Al-Damīrī, who ended up as a faqīh in Cairo, had started off as a tailor and his career, like that of al-Nawājī, who also started as a tailor, indicates that the life of an alim was a career open to all the talents. The earlier bestiary Kitāb Manāfī al-Ḥayawān (Usefulness of beasts) of Taj al-Dīn ‘Alī ibn Durrayhim (712–62/1312–66) is not so very scientific either, but in Ibn Durrayhim’s

case, discussion of the flora and fauna was skewed by the author’s interest in the occult and healing properties of things. Ibn Durrayhim, an immigrant from Mosul who became a professor at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, wrote on a range of occult and related subjects, including code-breaking, dream interpretation, magic mirrors, and physiognomy.50

Al-Šafadī took an interest in various occult subjects. The Egyptian chroniclers al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Iyās had a strong interest in the legendary history of ancient Egypt with its tales of talismans, treasures, and lost esoteric knowledge. But, in general, this was not a great age for occultism. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah and Ibn al-Hājj (on both of whom, see below) denounced the pursuit of such studies. Al-Suyūṭī declared that all of the ‘ulūm al-awā’il, or ancient sciences, were forbidden by God. (These included not just the occult arts, but also logic.) From the thirteenth century onwards, learned magic, which drew on Greek and other non-Arab traditions, was giving way to a pietist Sufi magic that depended on invocations of the names of God, magic squares, manipulations of the mysterious letters at the heads of certain surahs of the Quran and similar procedures. In the early thirteenth century Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Būnī had been the leading proponent of this kind of magic. Thereafter, Shādhilī Sufis disseminated it.51 It is true that there were still some interesting representatives of the older tradition of Islamic occultism, including Abū al-Qāṣim al-‘Irāqī, the author of the thirteenth-century magical compendium ‘Uyuṇ al-Ḥaqa‘iq (Wellsprings of truth), and ‘Īzz al-Dīn Aydamur ibn ‘Alī al-Jildakī (d. ca.743/1342), the author of several alchemical treatises. However, though they were impressively learned, this knowledge was marginal to the concerns of the scholarly and literary elite, and such figures were rarely, if ever, accorded the dignity of an entry in a biographical dictionary.52

The boundaries between high and low culture were fluid—so much so that it hardly makes sense to speak of boundaries at all. Many writers took pride in demonstrating their command of both fuṣḥá and colloquial Arabic. Piety and pornography were not mutually exclusive, and members of the elite in the Mamluk period imitated their Abbasid and Buyid predecessors in taking a curious interest

in the manners, customs, and argot of the Banū Sāsān and other disreputable
types. In these respects, the career and writings of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn
Dāniyāl (ca. 646–709/1248–1310) are instructive. Ibn Dāniyāl, who came from
Mosul and who made a living as an oculist, with a shop just inside Cairo’s Bāb
al-Futūh, had distinguished friends. They included the historian Ibn al-Dawādārī,
Muḥammad ibn Jankalī al-Bābā (the cultured son of a waﬁdī amir, who was an
expert on medicine, hadith, music, and grammar), and, above all, Qalāwūn’s son,
Khalīl (later to rule as al-Ashraf Khalīl). Ibn Dāniyāl wrote a long medical poem,
several verse panegyrics on Mamluk amirs, qaṣīdahs and muwashshahs, and a
perfectly respectable and respected verse history of the judges of Egypt. But he
also produced scripts for three shadow plays that deal with characters who live in
or on the edges of the social underworld. Ṭayf al-Khayāl (Shadow of the imagination)
is about the quest for marriage of a disreputable old soldier. ‘Ajīb wa-Gharīb
presents a parade of members of the Banū Sāsān and similar folk, each of whom
in turn describes their precarious and disreputable modes of making a living.
Al-Mutayyam wa-al-Ḍā‘ī’ al-Yutayyim (The Love-stricken one and the lost orphan)
is about a homosexual passion, pursued while watching a series of fights between
beasts. The plays celebrate most of the vices of the age, and their concluding
scenes of repentance are perfunctory. The plays all have a strong pornographic
content and make extensive use of low-life slang. (Ibn Dāniyāl also wrote several
poems with a similar content, dealing with wine, hashish, and acting.) Even so,
Ibn Dāniyāl’s audience did not necessarily consist entirely or even primarily of
the low-lifers who frequented taverns in the more disreputable parts of Cairo. The
plays, though perfunctorily plotted, show considerable sophistication in the use of
language and literary allusion and it is clear that Ibn Dāniyāl considered himself
to be writing in the tradition of the maqāmāhs. There are several explicit references
in the plays to al-Ḥarīrī’s work. Certainly Ibn Dāniyāl was read and cited by
al-Ṣafadī, Ibn Ḥajar, al-Suyūtī, and Ibn Iyās, among others. Al-Ṣafadī was probably
his greatest fan.53

Ibn Dāniyāl’s plays were composed at the request of ‘Alī ibn Mawlāhūm
al-Khayālī, a presenter of shadow plays in Cairo who was possibly the brother of

53Muhammad Ibn Dāniyāl, Three Shadow Plays, ed. Paul Kahle, Derek Hopwood, and Muṣṭafā
Badawī (Cambridge, 1992); Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech,” 109–110; Shmuel Moreh, Live Theatre
and Dramatic Literature in the Medieval Arab World (Edinburgh, 1992); Everett Rowson, “Two
Homoerotic Narratives from Mamluk Literature: al-Ṣafadī’s Law’at al-shaki and Ibn Daniyal’s
al-Mutayyam,” in Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature, ed. J. W. Wright, Jr., and Everett
K. Rowson (New York, 1997), 172–84; Li Guo, “Paradise Lost: Ibn Dāniyāl’s Response to Baybars’s
See also the articles by Li Guo and Amila Buturović in this issue of MSR.
Muḥammad ibn Mawlāhum al-Khayālī, the author of two maqāmahs on tradesmen. An Ibn Mawlāhum, as well as Ibn Dāniyāl and the disreputable twelfth-century Spanish poet Ibn Quzmann, is saluted as an esteemed predecessor by ‘Alī al-Baghdādī in the preface to his Kitāb al-Zahr al-Anīq fī Lubūs wa-al-Taʾnīq (The Book of delicate flowers regarding the kiss and the embrace). ‘Alī al-Baghdādī’s collection of bawdy tales about wily women was written perhaps in the 1350s. Although the tales are mostly of considerable antiquity (and some have their analogues in The Thousand and One Nights), they are presented as having happened to real, named and often identifiable figures in the early Mamluk period.

Khālīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), a member of the awlād al-nās who worked as a government official, wrote in broadly the same tradition as Ibn Dāniyāl. Among much else, al-Ṣafadī wrote Lawʿat al-Shākī (Plaint of the lovelorn), a languorous and elaborate commemoration in rhymed prose and poetry of the narrator’s love for a Turkish horse-archer. Al-Ṣafadī also compiled a homoerotic anthology on beautiful boys, a treatise on the khāl, or beauty spot, and a maqāmah on wine. However, he spread himself even more widely than his admired predecessor, Ibn Dāniyāl. He also produced a series of eminently respectable biographical dictionaries. Al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt (The Abundant book on dates of death) is a comprehensive biographical dictionary of Muslim personalities, whereas Aʿyān al-ʿAsr (Leading figures of the age) was restricted to contemporaries. Al-Ṣafadī’s fame and usefulness as a biographer has tended to eclipse awareness of his writings in other areas. Apart from composing and compiling works of belles-lettres and erotica, he also wrote about alchemy and malāhīm (apocalyptic prophecies).

Although it is not possible to cover in this short survey all those writers who devoted themselves to writing bawdy and entertaining pieces, nevertheless no survey of Mamluk literature would be complete without reference to ‘Alī ibn Sūdūn al-Bashbughāwī (ca. 810–68/ca. 1407–64). The son of a Circassian mamluk, Ibn Sūdūn was educated at the Shaykhūnīyāh madrasah, but failed to establish himself as a successful alim and after serving as a poorly-paid imam at several mosques, he set about pursuing an alternative career as a satirical poet and buffoon. He acquired notoriety as a hashish addict and after he was expelled from Cairo, he moved to Damascus where he worked as a copyist, but supplemented that income by occasional poems and other literary exercises, including poetry readings and quasi-dramatic performances beneath the Damascus citadel. His collected work

54Moreh, Live Theatre, 109.
the *Nuzhat al-Nufūs wa-Mudḫik al-ʿAbūs* (The Diversion of souls and the gloomy person’s jester) is in two parts. The first part contains serious panegyrics and love poetry, followed by some humorous material. The second part includes comic *qaṣîdāh* s, trumped-up stories, some (silly) *mawwashshāh* s, other popular verse forms, and brief accounts of wondrous curiosities and strange novelties. According to al-Sakhāwī, Ibn Sūdūn’s poetry was popular with the ʿzurafā’, who fought to get hold of copies of it. 57

A great deal of literature of a broadly popular nature was produced in the Mamluk period that was devoted to such matters as heterosexual and homosexual love, jokes, the wiles of women, hashish-taking, and the jargon of (legal and illegal) crafts and trades. So far this vast body of literature by Muḥammad al-Bilbaysī, ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Ḥawrānī, Taqī al-Dīn Abū Bakr al-Badrī, and others has hardly been explored. 58 Whatever the literary merits of such materials, they are certainly of historical interest. Besides literary entertainments by named authors, the Mamluk age was pre-eminently a period in which anonymous epics and story collections were compiled, elaborated, and expanded. The oldest substantially surviving manuscript of *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* (The Thousand and one nights) dates from the fourteenth or fifteenth century, and some of the stories contained in it reflect, in however fanciful a manner, the social and economic realities of life under the Mamluk sultans. The lengthy pseudo-historical epics, however, seem to have been more popular. Of these the most famous was the *Ṣirat ʿAntar*, which was put together sometime between 1080 and 1400. It was the favorite stock-in-trade of street-corner story-tellers. Despite this epic’s notional setting in pre-Islamic Arabia, some of its episodes are based on the Muslims’ encounters with the Byzantines and Crusaders. Similarly the *Ṣirat Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan*, though set in the Yemen in a fanciful version of the sixth century A.D., shows clear signs of having been composed in Egypt much later. This saga, like so many of its rivals, has an episodic plot, or rather a straggling series of plots. Its chief merit lies in its wild and colorfully inventive deployment of vivid imagery of a magical realist sort—including Snatcher the Jinn who has smoke instead of blood in his veins, the glass bed, and the woman who has been jointly impregnated by a wolf, smoke, and her husband. 59 The *Ṣirat al-Ẓāhīr*, devoted to the legendary exploits of the

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Mamluk sultan al-Zahir Baybars, has a similar lack of narrative sophistication that is only partially compensated for by its madly inventive energy. It is not clear how much of this epic was in existence in the Mamluk period.\(^{60}\) (The oldest surviving manuscript is sixteenth century and the existing versions are full of Ottoman terminology, as well as mockery of the stupidity and thuggishness of Ottoman Turks.) One of the curious features of the story is the hostility shown to the amir (later sultan) Qalāwūn. Equally curious is the co-option of the Ismaili Assassins to be Baybars’ allies in his struggle against Franks, Mongols, sorcerers, and corrupt amirs. The relationship of the story of this epic to real historical events was very slight.\(^{61}\) Nevertheless, as Franz Rosenthal has observed, it “was through these novels that history filtered deep down into the hearts of the people.”\(^{62}\)

The fantasies purveyed in these popular anonymous sīrahs was not so very different from the romances dealing with the origins of Islam, the exploits of ‘Alī, and the early Islamic conquests that were attributed to a certain Abū Ḥasan Ahmad al-Bakrī al-Wā’īz. It seems likely, however, that attribution to “al-Bakrī” denoted a literary genre, rather than the real authorship of an actual individual.\(^{63}\) Whatever the truth of the matter, al-Dhahabī and al-Qalqashandī denounced the lies found in this sort of material. The popular romances suffered the opprobrium of the intelligentsia. Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, writing on the various offices and trades in the Mamluk lands, advised the nāsiḥ (copyist) not to copy “those deceptive books . . . by which God does not offer any useful thing, such as Sīrat ‘Antar and the books by the ahl al-mujūn (the pornographers).”\(^{64}\) Similarly Ibn al-Hājj, in his treatise against unacceptable innovations, inveighed against booksellers who traded in the stories of romantic heroes and most notably in the story of ‘Antar.\(^{65}\) To those who thought like Ibn al-Hājj, it was reprehensible to trade in any books that sought merely to amuse. In this period, the literature of vulgar entertainment and

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\(^{60}\)See in this issue Thomas Herzog, “The First Layer of the Sīrat Baybars: Popular Romance and Political Propaganda.”


\(^{62}\)Rudi Paret, Die Legen Däre Maghāzi-Literatur (Tübingen, 1930), 155–58; Rosenthal, Muslim Historiography, 186.

\(^{63}\)Rudi Paret, Die Legen Däre Maghāzi-Literatur (Tübingen, 1930), 155–58; Rosenthal, Muslim Historiography, 169–70.


delight competed with its opposite, a literature of piety and rigorism (and there were even a few authors who tried their hands at writing both types of literature).

Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn Taymiyah (661–728/1263–1328) was the leading figure in the religious campaign against unacceptable innovations in religious and social practices. He issued fatwas and wrote to denounce a wide range of deviations from pure Islam, many of them of folkloric or Sufi origin. His attacks on Sufi deviations into heterodoxy (for example his assault on what he perceived to be the thirteenth-century Andalusian Sufi Ibn ‘Arabī’s monism) were particularly controversial, and many of the Mamluk elite supported Ibn Taymiyah’s pro-Sufi opponents. However, Ibn Taymiyah was not a root-and-branch enemy of Sufism. Like his chief disciple, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, he was a Qādirī Sufi himself. Moreover, in engaging in polemical controversy with the other members of the religious elite and their Mamluk patrons, he offered at least one hostage to fortune, as his extreme version of Hanbalism allowed his enemies to accuse him of the heresy of anthropomorphism regarding the attributes of God. Despite occasional clashes with the Mamluk regime, he was in general a political quietist. “To demand ideal qualifications in a ruler is a sin against God” was one of his observations. He enjoyed a great following not just among the masses (who were ready to riot on his behalf), but also among prominent members of the Mamluk elite, including Kitbughah al-Manṣūrī and Arghūn al-Nāṣirī. Even al-Ṣafadī seems to have been an admirer of Ibn Taymiyah.66

Ibn Taymiyah’s disciple Shams al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (691–751/1292–1350) was a prolific writer on the Quran, the shari‘ah, and other spiritual matters. In particular, he wrote verse and prose to popularize Hanbali mysticism, and he denounced the occult sciences at length. His Rawdāt al-Muhībbīn (Garden of the lovers) is a fairly conventional treatise on profane love, only with a more spiritual slant than is common in the genre. His treatise on furūsīyah, though it assembles a number of religious precepts on the subject, would have been of no practical use whatsoever to a mamluk horseman.67


Qayyim al-Jawzīyah was based in Egypt, but Ibn Taymīyah was also quite widely admired and supported by what has been called the “codex-swapping crowd” in Syria. Most fourteenth-century historians and compilers of biographical dictionaries in Syria, including al-Jazarī, al-Birzālī, al-Yūnīnī, and al-Dhahabī seem to have supported Ibn Taymiyah in his struggles with the authorities, even though by no means all of them were Hanbalis. Ibn Kathīr, who died in 774/1373, was the last important representative of this tradition. Generalizing rather broadly, this group of scholars conceived of history as the handmaiden of hadith studies.68

Egyptian chronicles tended to be somewhat more secular and court-centered in their orientation. However, plenty of treatises calling for a stricter observance of Islam were produced in Mamluk Cairo. The best known of such works was the Madkhal, a treatise on bida’ by the Maliki jurist Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Ḥājj al-ʿAbdārī (d. 737/1336). The Madkhal’s detailed evocation of hedonistic pursuits, albeit couched in the negative (silk carpets not to be displayed, pleasure gardens not to be visited, picnics not go to on and so forth), makes it an invaluable source on social history. Ibn al-Ḥājj denounced the corrupt practices of the Cairenes with all the vigor of an immigrant from the freshly purified Maghrib. However, his main target seems to have been the pleasures of the lower classes; the mamluks on the whole escaped criticism.69 Idrīs ibn Baydākīn al-Turkumānī also produced a treatise, the Kitāb al-Luma’ fi al-Ḥawādith wa-al-Bida’, sometime in the fourteenth century, which took a similarly dour view of popular pleasures and local superstitions. Some of al-Turkumānī’s targets were conventional, but others were unusual, even eccentric, such as his diatribes against crossbowmen.70 In the Madkhal, Ibn al-Ḥājj had stressed on the importance of niyāḥ, or good intention, and this theme was taken up by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (728–77/1327–69 or 70) in his Kitāb Muʿāḍ al-Niʿam wa-Mubād al-Niqām (The Restorer of favors and the restrainer of chastisements), which is devoted to good intention in the various

ranks, offices, and crafts in Mamluk Egypt. 'Be as the corpse in the hands of the washer' was the book's quietist, Sufi burden.

A considerable quantity of edifying uncontroversial Sufi literature was produced in this period, mostly in the form of poems, sermons, or short biographies of Sufi holy men. Ibn Abī Ḥajalah wrote Sufi poetry. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Asad al-Ŷāfīʾī (ca. 700–ca. 768/1299–1367) compiled Rawd al-Riyāhīn fi Ḥikāyāt al-Šāliḥīn, which contained the biographies of over five hundred Sufis. His collection was later drawn upon by al-Ibshīḥī and by the anonymous continuators of the Arabian Nights. The Shādhili Sufi ʿĀḥmad ibn Muhammad Ibn ʿAṭā Allāh (d. 709/1309) produced collections of spiritual aphorisms and sermons. Both al-Ŷāfīʾī and Ibn ʿAṭā Allāh were implacable opponents of Ibn Taymīyah.71 However, the most heated debates throughout the whole Mamluk period concerned the disputed orthodoxy of two Sufis of the pre-Mamluk period, Sharaf a-Dīn ʿUmar Ibn al-Fārīḍ (576–632/1181–1235) and Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (560–638/1165–1240). Fierce debates raged about the meaning of their poetic output and about whether it was legitimate to use apparently blasphemous metaphors in order to express holy things. Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn al-Fārīḍ avoided official condemnation, and Ibn al-Fārīḍ’s verses in the badī’ manner were widely imitated by poets of the Mamluk age.72 Even so, al-Dhahabī declared that Ibn al-Fārīḍ’s writings were “pastry laced with venom.” Other distinguished hostile critics included Ibn Abī Ḥajalah, Ibn Khalduṁ, and Ibn Ḥajar.

A student of Ibn Ḥajar’s, Burḥān al-Dīn Ibrāḥīm al-Biqaʾī ibn ʿUmar (ca. 809–85/ca. 1407–80) was perhaps the most interesting and certainly the most venomous of the critics of the two famous Sufi poets. Al-Biqaʾī can be considered as a writer as man of action, since he participated in Mamluk raids against Cyprus and Rhodes. He was a stylish and embittered author who wrote on a great range of subjects, including hadith, history, biography, famous lovers, and mathematics. Given the Mamluk court’s tendency to look kindly on Sufism, his onslaught on monism and other alleged Sufi excesses was doomed, and he died in disgrace in Damascus. Since no one else was likely to, he had written his own eulogy.73


Although al-Biqāʿī was unusual in the range and quality of the enemies he accumulated, the ninth/fifteenth century was a great age for *odium theologicum* and scholarly rancor. Ibn Ḥajar and al-Maqrīzī hated al-ʿĀynī, a sentiment that was reciprocated. Al-Maqrīzī and al-Sakhāwī attacked Ibn Ṭaghrībirdī. Al-Suyūṭī and al-Sakhāwī feuded. The intensity of these and other feuds reflected the intensity of the competition for patronage. Writers of ability, or, if not actual ability, at least ambition, flooded into Cairo from Syria, Upper Egypt, Iraq, Anatolia, and North Africa. Many of the leading (and feuding) intellectuals of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century are esteemed today as compilers of useful chronicles and biographical dictionaries. It is certainly true that history writing had a more central role in the literary culture of this period than it had, say, under the Abbasids or the Ayyubids. Even so, few of those who compiled the useful chronologies and obituaries were merely chroniclers of their times and, in some cases, their main interest lay elsewhere. Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (773–852/1372–1449) was the leading intellectual figure of the fifteenth century. He had started out on his literary career as an *adīb* and poet. His *Diwān* starts with panegyrics of the Prophet, then of rulers and other members of the elite, followed by love poems, followed by verses on miscellaneous themes, and finally *muwashshahāt*. Horribly industrious, he wrote some 250 books. He is known today chiefly for his biographical dictionary of fifteenth-century people, the *Durar al-Kāminah*, and his much-read chronicle *Inbaʿ al-Ghumr* (Informing the uninstructed). But in his own time, the reputation of Ibn Ḥajar rested on his expertise in hadith studies and on the many distinguished students he had taught in this field, including al-Sakhāwī, al-Biqāʿī, Ibn Ṭaghrībirdī, al-Qalqashandī, and al-Nawājī.

Ibn Ḥajar, while a political quietist, was anti-Turkish and hostile to those who, like al-ʿĀynī, identified themselves too closely with the interests of the Mamluk regime. The same was true of Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī (766–845/1364–1442). It is clear that al-Maqrīzī’s main interest was history, though he wrote more widely than that, including works on various occult and cosmological matters, Arab tribes, the Sudan, lives of the artists, and, of course, like almost every writer of the Mamluk period, he fancied himself as a poet. His masterpiece, the *Kitāb al-Mawāʿīz wa-al-Iʿtibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭāṭ wa-al-Āthār* (The Book of warning and taking example from places and ruins) is a survey of Cairo and Egypt more generally, in which topography serves as the pretext for literary nostalgia and lamentations about the corruption of the age the author lived in. Al-Maqrīzī’s

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74 On some of these feuds, see Broadbridge, “Academic Rivalry.”
76 The literature on al-Maqrīzī is vast, but see, for a general orientation, Franz Rosenthal, “Al-Maqrīzī,” *EJ*, 6:193–94 and, on one aspect of al-Maqrīzī’s literary output, Aḥmad al-Ghawaby,
Abū al-Maḥāsin Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī (ca. 812–74/ca. 1409 or 1410–69) was similarly primarily a historian, but he also wrote a treatise on the errors that Arabs and Persians make with Turkish names, a collection of proverbs, a treatise on music, and, of course, poetry. Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ahmad Ibn Iyās (852–ca. 930/1448–ca. 1524), besides writing a well-known chronicle, the Badā‘i‘ al-Zuhūr fī Waqā‘ī al-Duḥūr, was a prolific poet.

Ibn Iyās had studied with al-Suyūṭī, but, true to the rancorous age he lived in, he did not think much of him. The latter has already been referred to several times above. This is hardly surprising, for Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (849–911/1445–1505) was one of the last Muslim scholars who aimed to cover everything. His autobiography Al-Tahādduth bi-Ni‘mat Allāh (Speaking of God’s bounty), despite its moralistic exordium, which offered the work as thanks to God and the life as an example for others to emulate, was a sustained piece of boasting riding on an academic’s curriculum vitae. In the Taḥadduth, al-Suyūṭī listed 283 of his works. Al-Sakhāwī accused him of being too bookish. Certainly al-Suyūṭī’s scholarship was of a backward-looking nature, and most of the books he boasted of having read were written at the beginning of the Mamluk period or even earlier. If modern scholars have regarded the Mamluk age as one of intellectual and literary decline, it is worth bearing in mind that this view was widely shared in the Mamluk age itself. Al-Suyūṭī deplored what he perceived to be an unprecedented dearth of scholarship and concomitant spread of ignorance throughout the Mamluk lands. Despite his faith in himself as a mujaddid, or renewer of the religious sciences, al-Suyūṭī shared al-Maqrīzī’s gloom about the future. Fires and earthquakes were omens of further troubles to come and, although he loved Egypt, he predicted the land’s ruin.

In the Indian summer of the Mamluk sultanate, a number of literary salons flourished under the presidency of members of the Mamluk court. One such was established by Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Jaqmaq (847/1444), the son of the Sultan al-Zāhir Jaqmaq and the heir apparent to the Mamluk sultanate. According to Ibn Taghrībirdī, the main source here, the prince was learned in history, rare anecdotes, and Turkish and Arab poetry. He was also fond of the Sufi practice of samā‘ (and this passion for music and song may have been part of a youthful revolt against his learned but austere father, who certainly disapproved of that sort of thing).

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of thing). The prince seems to have held soirees almost every evening, for Ibn Ḥajar attended regularly two evenings a week, while one of his enemies also attended two nights a week, but on different nights. The prince was the patron of both Ibn Ḥajar’s Ḥanā’ al-Ghamr and Ibn Taghrībirdī’s Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah. According to Ibn Taghrībirdī, Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad “almost flew for joy” when he heard that Ibn Taghrībirdī had commenced work on his chronicle. 79 Alas for Ibn Taghrībirdī’s hopes, the prince died of a diet that involved drinking vinegar on an empty stomach.

Although we have no detailed account of the way in which Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad’s salon conducted its affairs, at the very end of the Mamluk period the sultan Qānṣūḥ al-Ghūrī presided over one of the grandest and best-recorded salons. The sultan has already been mentioned as a poet in Turkish and Arabic. He also boasted of fluency in several other languages, and he commissioned the translation by Sharīf Husayn ibn Ḥasan of Firdawsī’s Shāhnāmah into Ottoman Turkish. 80 According to Sharīf’s preface to the Shāhnāmah, al-Ghūrī knew Persian well, but he wanted to make the great work accessible to his amirs. He also presided over regular soirees, of which records were kept and placed in the royal library. The subjects that came up in the sultan’s soirees ranged over history, geography, mythology, current affairs, and jest, but most commonly the topics bore upon religion. How can Ramadan be observed in the Arctic Circle? When and in what circumstances has the hajj ever been suspended? Is there anything in the hadith to license the playing of chess? The soirees were recorded in two sources: the Nafā’is al-Majālis al-Sultānīyah by Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad called Sharīf, covering a few months in 910/1505, and the Kawkab al-Durrī fi Masā’il al-Ghūrī, set in 915/1513–14, of which the first half is missing. Despite the participation of leading Egyptian Arab ulama in these sessions, one thing that emerges is the Turco-Persianate formation of court culture, and there are many references to Māhmūd of Ghaznah, the Shāhnāmah, and the ideal ruler, Alexander (as featured in the Shāhnāmah). Al-Ghūrī’s salon does not seem to have been particularly interested in the famous poets and prose writers of traditional Arab literary culture. 81 Like al-Ghūrī’s enthusiasm for gardening on a grand scale in the Ottoman Turkish manner, the soirees provide evidence of the openness of the sixteenth-century Mamluk court to foreign exemplars and, more broadly, of the spread of an international court culture throughout the eastern Islamic lands.

The debt in all the above to the still scanty and patchy secondary literature

79Ibn Taghrībirdī, Nujūm, 8:211.
must be evident and it is certain that many important and exciting discoveries remain to be made in the *terra incognita* of Mamluk literature. Although the backward-looking nature of so much Mamluk poetry and prose has been stressed here, this feature should not necessarily be identified with decadence. For if Mamluk authors imitated and sought to surpass their Abbasid predecessors, it was also true that Abbasid authors had looked back on and imitated their pre-Islamic and Umayyad precursors. In both periods originality was only valued within quite close constraints. In his *Literary History of the Arabs*, R. A. Nicholson, while confessing to “a desultory and imperfect acquaintance with their work,” ventured that even the best of the poets of the Mamluk period were “merely elegant and brilliantly accomplished artists, playing brilliantly with words and phrases, but doing little else.” In *Arabic Literature*, Sir Hamilton Gibb characterised the literary production of the Mamluk age as follows: “the output was enormous throughout, but the qualities of originality, virility, and imagination, weak from the first, die away completely by the sixteenth century.” While it is hard to dissent from these timeworn verdicts, it is nevertheless the case that modern western literary theory accords originality and “virility” a status that writers and critics of the Mamluk period would have found excessive. On the other hand the versatility, erudition, and literary stamina of most of the writers mentioned above is quite astonishing.

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82 See in this issue Bauer, “Communication and Emotion.”