Slave Traders and Kārimī Merchants during the Mamluk Period: 
A Comparative Study

Both slave traders (nakhkhās, jallāb) and Kārimī merchants played important economic and social roles in Mamluk Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz. As Ira M. Lapidus has stated, slave traders were regarded on religious grounds as disreputable, like brokers, town criers, and money changers, but nevertheless were employed in the slave trade for the army of the Mamluk sultanate and became important figures in Mamluk circles. David Ayalon was the first historian to provide a brief overview of the characteristics of slave traders. In an investigation of mamluk names, titles and nisbahs, he also discovered the personal ties that existed between slave traders and ex-mamluks, that is, the sultans and amirs sold by them. On the other hand, Subhi Y. Labib’s voluminous book on commercial activities in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt presents only a brief description of the slave trade during the Mamluk period. Eliyahu Ashtor and Andrew Ehrenkreutz have also touched upon military slaves supplied by the Genoese from the end of the thirteenth century on; however, both failed to refer to Muslim slave traders during that period. Al-Sayyid al-Bāz al-‘Arīnī, in his book entitled Al-Mamālik, explained the title khwājā, which was held mostly by slave traders, and their transactions in military slaves, through case studies of several merchants during the Mamluk period.

As for the Kārimī merchants, more research has been accomplished than in the case of slave traders. S. D. Goitein, in a study on the origins of the Kārimī merchants based on the Geniza documents, refers to their close relationship with

© Middle East Documentation Center. The University of Chicago.
1Ira. M. La
pidus, Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 82, 122–23.
2David Ayalon, L’esclavage du Mamelouk (Jerusalem, 1951), 1–4.
6Al-Sayyid al-Bāz al-‘Arīnī, Al-Mamālik (Beirut, 1979), 73–77.
the merchants active on the west coast of India.\(^7\) Walter J. Fischel, following up on the pioneering study by Gaston Wiet,\(^8\) states that the Kārimī merchants formed a strong association and played an important role in Mamluk fiscal administration through their participation in the profitable spice trade between Egypt and Yemen.\(^9\) By adding new Arabic sources, Ashtor criticized Fischel’s views, stating that (1) the Kārimīs were a loosely-organized group of merchants dealing not only in spices but also slaves and agricultural products between Egypt and Yemen, including Syria, and (2) contrary to Fischel’s belief that the Kārimīs were an exclusively Muslim group of merchants, there is no reason why the Kārimīs should not have admitted Christians and Jews into their ranks.\(^10\) Based on plentiful Arabic and non-Arabic sources, Labib systematically describes their activities from the Fatimid to the Mamluk period.\(^11\) Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Ashqar has furthered the historical study of the spice trade during the Mamluk period with a book entitled *Tujjār al-Tawābil fī Miṣr fī al-ʿAṣr al-Mamlūkī*,\(^12\) which provides a very useful list of 201 Kārimī merchants containing their full names, personal information, and related historical sources.

As mentioned above, slave traders and Kārimī merchants have been studied mainly in the context of the social and economic history of Mamluk Egypt and Syria. Given that my interest lies in the similarities and differences between these two groups of merchants, this article will attempt to compare them during the Mamluk period, in terms of their fields of commercial activity, commodities, relationships with Mamluk sultans, and religious and cultural activities, based on the cases of two famous slave traders and one leading family from among the Kārimī merchants as depicted in the contemporary Arabic sources.


TWO SLAVE TRADERS

The activities of Khawājā Majd al-Dīn Ismā‘il ibn Muḥammad ibn Yāqūt al-Sallāmī (671–743/1272–1342) and Khawājā Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Uthmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Ayyūb ibn Musafīr al-As‘ardī (d. 783/1381) are described in the Arabic chronicles and biographical dictionaries, allowing one to obtain a general grasp of their origins, spheres of activity, commodities, types of activity, relationships with the Mamluk sultans, and religious and cultural activities.

ORIGINS

Majd al-Dīn al-Sallāmī was born in the village of al-Sallāmīyah near Mosul in al-Jazīrah in the year 671/1272. According to Yāqūt (574 or 575–626/1179–1229), al-Sallāmīyah was a large village located on the east bank of the upper Tigris. Al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) says that he came to Egypt as a merchant and was granted the much-coveted title of khawājā during the reigns of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 693–94/1293–94, 698–708/1299–1309, 709–741/1310–41). Khawājā (Arabic corruption of hoja) was a title (laqab) bestowed upon wealthy merchants operating in official service from outside the Mamluk domain in places like al-Jazīrah, Fars, etc. Al-Šafadī (696–764/1297–1363) states that he was a significant figure, intelligent, friendly, and an excellent mediator between local rulers.

Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Uthmān al-As‘ardī was from As‘ard, a town to the south of Āmid in al-Jazīrah. He was granted the title of khawājā for his distinguished service in transporting Barquq (future sultan 784–91/1382–89, 792–801/1390–99), then his father and his brothers to Cairo in 782/1381. According to Al-Nuḥūm al-Zāhirah, Fakhr al-Dīn was thought of as brave, intelligent, and dignified.

As to language ability, both Majd al-Dīn and Fakhr al-Dīn should have spoken Arabic.

16 Al-Qalqashandī, Subḥ al-A‘shā fī Šinā‘at al-Inshā‘ (Cairo, 1963), 6:13; Ayalon, L’esclavage, 3:4; Lapidus, Muslim Cities, 122–23, 127–29; Muhammad Qandîl al-Baqlî, Al-Ta‘rīf bi-Muṣṭalahlāt Subḥ al-A‘shā (Cairo, 1984), 124. Ashtor states mistakenly that the honorific title khawādja or khawājāki which was bestowed upon them is not mentioned in the great manual of state administration compiled by al-Qalqashandī (A Social and Economic History, 321).
18 Abū al-Fida‘, Taqwīm al-Buldān (Paris, 1840), 289.
19 Ibn Qaḏī Shuhbah, Tārikh Ibn Qaḏī Shuhbah (Damascus, 1977), 1:3:38, 70.
Arabic fluently since they were from al-Jazīrah. However, Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470) states that Fakhr al-Dīn could speak Turkish, but not Arabic. Ibn Qādī Shuhbah (779–851/1377–1448) gives his name as Fakhr al-Dīn al-‘Ajamī (al-asl) al-Miṣrī, which indicates that he was originally not an Arab, but later lived in Cairo. As al-‘Arīnī concludes, judging from their names, most of the slave traders during the Mamluk period were non-Arabs.

**Spheres of Activity**

Al-Maqrīzī (766–845/1364–1442) states in Kitāb al-Sulāk that Majd al-Dīn traveled often between Cairo and Tabriz using post (barīd) horses, which were formally for official business. Tabriz at the beginning of the fourteenth century was not only the capital city of the Ilkhans but also an emporium of international trade. Al-Maqrīzī states in Al-Khīṭat, “Majd al-Dīn used to go in the countries of Tāṭar, trade there and return with slaves (sing. raqīq) and other goods.” It is related that when he visited the court (urudū) of the Ilkhanids, he would stay there for two or three years.

As in the case of Barqūq, who was from Charkas, Fakhr al-Dīn was involved in the trade between Cairo and the province of Charkas to the north of Tabriz. Fakhr al-Dīn also constructed a splendid trading center (qaysārīyah) in Damascus, which indicates that his activities encompassed both Egypt and Syria. According to al-Maqrīzī,

Sultan al-Nāṣir increased the number of male slaves (sing. mamlūk) and female slaves (sing. jāriyāh) to be purchased. He summoned the slave traders and gave them money to purchase male and female slaves. When the traders returned from Uzbek, Tabriz, Rūm and

---

22 Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, Tārīkh, 1:3:73.
23 Al-‘Arīnī, Al-Mamālīk, 76.
26 Al-Maqrīzī, Al-Khīṭat, 2:43.
Baghdad [to Cairo] with mamluks, the sultan would bestow precious goods upon them.  

The spheres of activity of Majd al-Dīn and Fakhr al-Dīn—Tabriz and the province of Charkas—were included in the districts for purchasing slaves as mentioned by al-Maqrīzī.

COMMODITIES

Majd al-Dīn was known as a mamluk trader for the sultan (tājir al-khāşṣ) during the reign of al-Malik al-Nāṣir. He often traveled to the Tatar provinces and returned with mamluk and jāriyah slaves (sing. raqāq) and other goods. The Arabic sources do not describe the "other goods"; however, Majd al-Dīn might have purchased such products in the Tatar provinces as furs, silk goods, and silver.

Fakhr al-Dīn was a “mamluk merchant” (tājir fī al-mamālīk), widely known as the trader (jālib) who brought al-Atābak Barquq from the Charkas provinces to Cairo around 764/1363. According to Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, Fakhr al-Dīn was a “merchant of the sultan” (tājir al-sultān) bringing mamluks and jāriyahs from the Turkish provinces (Bilād al-Turk). However, it is not related whether or not he traded other goods besides slaves.

TYPES OF ACTIVITY

According to the Arabic sources, the slave traders of the Mamluk period were engaged in commerce on an individual basis, not forming any trade organizations. According to al-Maqrīzī, Majd al-Dīn al-Sallāmī was a person of high intelligence, a skillful manager, who had gathered information on the character and manners of local rulers, and a man of gentle character, moderate speech, and handsome appearance. These talents and knowledge enabled him to form a personal bond of trust with Sultan al-Nāṣir. Al-Šafadī relates that Majd al-Dīn earned the trust (waqājah zā‘īdah) of both Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir and the Mughuls (the Ilkhanid court) due to his outstanding conduct.

---

31 Al-Maqrīzī, Al-Khiṭaṭ, 2:43; idem, Al-Muqaffā, 2:181.
33 Ibn Ṭaghribirdī, Al-Nujūm, 11:223.
34 Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārīkh, 1:3:73.
35 Al-Maqrīzī, Al-Muqaffā, 2:182; idem, Al-Khiṭaṭ, 2:43.
36 Al-Šafadī, Al-Wāfī, 9:220. See also Ibn Ḥajār, Al-Durar, 1:407.

Article: http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/MSR_X-1_2006-Sato-Tsugitaka_2.pdf
On the other hand, Ibn Taghrîbirdî remarks in the obituary notice for Fakhr al-Dîn ‘Uthmân that he achieved salvation (saʿâdah) for his personal contribution in bringing Barquq to Egypt.37 Because Barquq was also grateful to Fakhr al-Dîn for services that had opened his opportunity for advancement in Egypt, the sultan would stand up from afar whenever he saw Fakhr al-Dîn and pay his respects.38 Thus Fakhr al-Dîn, like Majd al-Dîn, developed his trading business based on a personal relationship with the sultan. However, we do not find any account that their descendants inherited their slave-trading businesses following their deaths.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MAMLUK SULTANS

From the time of the establishment of the Ilkhanid dynasty in 654/1256, hostile relations continued between the Mamluks and the Ilkhanids until the end of Ghazan Khan’s reign (694–713/1295–1304). Since Majd al-Dîn had the confidence of both Sultan al-Nâṣîr and Ghazan’s nephew, Abû Saʿîd (716–36/1316–35), he attempted to mediate between them. Majd al-Dîn traveled to Tabriz several times for the sultan carrying letters and gifts (sing. ḥadîyah) he himself chose for the notables at the Ilkhanid court.39 In 722/1322 Amir Aytamish al-Muhammadi was eventually sent to Abû Saʿîd to conclude a peace treaty (ṣâlūḥ). The treaty, which was effective for ten years and ten days,40 guaranteed that roads between the two countries would be open, enabling all merchants to travel freely and a caravan to travel from Iraq to al-Ḥijâz every year with a decorated palanquin (mahmîl) and the flags (sanjaq) of both countries.41

Due to his contribution to the peace treaty, Majd al-Dîn confirmed his position with Sultan al-Nâṣîr and gained even greater esteem and favor than before.42 Consequently, Majd al-Dîn obtained various privileges from the Mamluk government: the sultan assigned iqṭâ’s of the ḥalqâh to his mamluks, and granted him meat, bread, white unleavened bread (kumâj), barley, sugar, sugar candy, etc., worth one hundred and fifty dirhams a day. Furthermore, the sultan allotted him the village of Arrâq in Baʿlabakk, which yielded ten thousand dirhams annually.43

37Ibn Taghrîbirdî, Al-Nuṣûm, 11:220.
42Al-Maqrîzî, Al-Muqaffâ, 2:181; idem, Al-Khitat, 2:43.
In addition, according to al-Maqrīzī, Majd al-Dīn was granted another fifty thousand dirhams and received a 50% tax exemption on his goods.\footnote{Al-Maqrīzī, \textit{Al-Sulāk}, 2:246.}

It is widely known that Barquq named himself Barquq al-`Uthmānī because he greatly respected Fakhr al-Dīn `Uthmān. When Fakhr al-Dīn died in 783/1381, just before Barquq ascended the throne, he prayed to God and wailed much for him.\footnote{Ibn Ḥajar, \textit{Inbā`,} 1:247.} Furthermore, Ibn Ḥajar al-`Asqalānī (773–852/1372–1449) relates that Fakhr al-Dīn personally requested the abolition of the pomegranate tax \textit{(maks al-rummān)} in Damascus and his request was eventually granted by the sultan.\footnote{Ibid.} It is interesting to find that both Majd al-Dīn and Fakhr al-Dīn were exempted from taxation due to their personal relationships with the sultans.

**Religious and Cultural Activities**

As to the public works sponsored by slave traders, we do not find any information on such activities except Fakhr al-Dīn’s trading center \textit{(qaysār|yah)} in Damascus. Research to date documents only a few religious and cultural activities conducted by slave traders during the Mamluk period.\footnote{Ibn Hājir, \textit{Al-Durar,} 2:141. Al-Ḥusayn ibn Dawwūd al-Khawaṭjā `Izz al-Dīn al-Sallāmī was a merchant who constructed a madrasah known as ”al-Sallāmīyah.”}

**The Kārimī Merchants**

From the end of the Fatimid period on, the Kārimī merchants cultivated commercial relations with Yemen, India, Southeast Asia, and China. During the Mamluk period there were such influential families among the Kārimīs as al-Maḥallī, al-Kharrūbī, Ibn Kuwayk, and Ibn Musallam. Here I will take up al-Kharrūbī as an example of an upstart wealthy Kārimī merchant to be compared with the slave traders discussed above.

Since ”kharrūb” in Arabic means carob, the family ancestor, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Miṣrī al-Kharrūbī, might have been a carob retailer. According to Ibn Ḥajar, the Kharrūbīs originated from Kharrūb square in Fustāṭ where carob was usually sold.\footnote{Ibn Duqmāq, \textit{Kitāb al-Intisār li-Waṣiṭat `Īqd al-Amṣār} (Cairo, 1893), 1:35. According to this account, the square was originally called ”Rahbat Dār al-Malik,” then it came to be named ”Rahbat Kharrūb” because carob was usually sold there.} In any case, the family’s activities as Kārimī merchants lasted for seven generations from Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī (mid-thirteenth century) to Fakhr al-Dīn...
Sulaymān (d. 864/1460), who was imprisoned due to his large debt.\textsuperscript{50}

**Origins**

It was after the time of the two brothers, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad (d. 769/1368) and Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad (d. 762/1361), that concrete descriptions of the Kharrūbīs appear in the Arabic chronicles and biographical dictionaries. Their activities were centered around Fustāṭ, where they were probably born as Arab Muslims. Among the Kharrūbī merchants, only Sirāj al-Dīn or Badr al-Dīn ibn Abī ‘Umar ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn\textsuperscript{51} and Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Aḥmad (d. 802/1400)\textsuperscript{52} were granted the title of khawājā.

**Sphere of Activity**

Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad constructed al-Madrasah al-Kharrūbīyah on the outskirts of Fustāṭ and his brother Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Aḥmad built a large tomb (turbah) in al-Qarāfah.\textsuperscript{53} Khawājā Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī, who was a manly (muruwah) and benevolent (khayr) person, came to be one of the most notable merchants in Egypt and went to Mecca several times, probably both for pilgrimages and trade.\textsuperscript{54} He was also the owner of a school (sāḥib al-madrasah) near the bank of the Nile in Fustāṭ.\textsuperscript{55}

Zakī al-Dīn Abū Bakr ibn ʿAlī al-Kharrūbī (d. 787/1385) was brought up as a Sufi (faqīr), because his father, who yearned for the ascetic life, built a monastery (zāwiyah) for his son at al-Jīzah. After he returned from Yemen via ‘Aydhāb with a small amount of goods, Zakī al-Dīn inherited a large fortune from his brother Badr al-Dīn, which provided him with the opportunity for success.\textsuperscript{56}

Ibn Hājar relates in *Al-Durar al-Ḵāminah*,

[In Mecca] I was under the patronage of Zakī al-Dīn like his slave (raqīq) because my father had requested him to take care of me due to my young age. In 786/1384 I returned [to Cairo] with him and Zakī al-Dīn still retained the title of leadership (riʿāsah).\textsuperscript{57}


\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 3:267, 8:246.


\textsuperscript{54} Ibn Hājar, *Inbā*, 1:123.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ*, 1:2:636.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibn Hājar, *Al-Durar*, 1:481–82.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 482. See also al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 3:539; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Ṭārīkh*, 1:3:167–68. Since Ibn Hājar was born in 773/1372, he was thirteen years old when he returned to Cairo with Zakī.
When Zakī al-Dīn died in 787/1385, Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Maḥallī took the title of leadership (riʾāsat al-tujjār) exclusively until he died in 806/1403. Al-Maqrīzī relates that Burhān al-Dīn al-Maḥallī was a large-scale Kārimī merchant who traveled to Syria and Yemen many times.

According to the above accounts, the sphere of activity of the Kārimī merchants, particularly those of the Kharrūbī family, were Fustāt, Cairo, Mecca, Yemen, and Syria. We know that there was a not-insignificant number of Kārimīs who unlike the Kharrūbīs traveled to India and as far as China.

Commodities

The research to date informs us that the Kārimīs traded spices (bahaʾr), lumber, textiles, precious stones (jawāhir), wheat (qamh), sugar (sukkar), pottery (fakhkhār), slaves (sing. raqiq), etc. Al-Qalqashandi (756–821/1355–1418) states that "the office of spice and al-Kārimī" (naẓar al-bahaʾ wa-al-Kārimī) supervised the various spices (bahaʾr) and other goods the Kārimī merchants brought from Yemen, so there is no doubt that the Kārimīs specifically brought spices from Aden to Cairo, Alexandria, and Damascus.

However, as I have already mentioned in another article, we find an interesting account in Ibn Duqmāq’s (d. 809/1406) Kitāb al-Intiṣār, which relates that among the 65 sugar refineries (matbakh al-sukkar) located at Fustāt, 7 were owned by the sultan, 21 by amirs, and 13 by merchants (sing. taʾṣir). Among the 13 refineries owned by merchants, 4 were managed by sukkarīs (probably Muslim and Jewish sugar merchants) and another 4 by the Kārimī merchants. Among the 4 refineries owned by the Kārimīs, 2 were managed by Kharrūbī family members: Matbakh Siraḥ al-Dīn ibn [Abi ʿUmar] al-Kharrūbī and Matbakh Nuʿr al-Dīn [ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz] al-Kharrūbī. Sirāj al-Dīn ibn Abī ʿUmar was the family’s fourth-
generation merchant prior to Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī, who died in 802/1400. This indicates that the Kharrūbīs had already begun managing sugar refineries during the latter half of the thirteenth century. Accordingly, we need to correct Ashtor’s view that the first generation was represented by Ṣālah al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad (d. 769/1368).

Among the Kharrūbīs, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad (d. 762/1361) was particularly well known as a “sugar refinery merchant” (taʾjir fī maṭābikh al-sukkar) at Fustāṭ. In 751/1350 Sultan Ḥasan (748–52/1347–51) ordered the Kharrūbīs to provide sugar for his grant of the commodity during the month of Muḥarram. The above accounts show that the Kharrūbīs profited not only from the spice trade but also from sugar refining and sale. Al-Maqrīzī says, “When the water of the Nile flows into the Alexandria Canal during Mīṣrā (25 July–23 August), ships (sing. markab) loaded with various kinds of goods, like crops (ghallah), spices (bahār), and sugar (sukkar), would set sail.” Sugar during the Mamluk period was thought to have been one of the most important exports to Europe as well as a luxury good consumed by sultans and amirs at their private residences or during public festivals.

**Types of Activity**

It is widely known that the Kārimīs formed a loose confederation of merchants bound together by professional interest and that they constructed hostelries (sing. funduq) on various occasions for common purposes. According to Lapidus, Kārimī merchants themselves were headed by raʾīses, who acted as liaisons between them and the state for the purpose of discipline, diplomacy, banking, and other services. However, Ashtor emphasizes the fact that such titles as “chief of the Kārimīs” found in Arabic chronicles and biographical dictionaries should not be taken too literally.

In the case of Zakī al-Dīn Abū Bakr al-Kharrūbī, who held the title of raʾīs al-tujjār, Ibn Ḥajar relates that after he obtained the title, the influential merchants

---

65 Ibn Iyās, Badāʾiʿ, 1:2:636.
68 Al-Maqrīzī, Al-Sulāk, 2:829.
70 Sato, State and Rural Society, 215.
72 Lapidus, Muslim Cities, 125.
came to be subject to him. Arabic sources do not state distinctly what sort of authority he held over the Kārimī merchants, but it is clear that the title was closely related to the Mamluk government. This will be discussed in the following section.

Though the Kārimīs formed a loose confederation, there was, at the same time, a strong business rivalry among several of them. For example, when a dispute arose between Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Kharrūbī and Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Musallam (d. 776/1374), Ibn Musallam said to Badr al-Dīn, "Buy sacks for all your money and bring them to me. Then I will fill them for you with my coins." However, interestingly enough, Ibn Musallam gave his daughter in marriage to Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 825/1422), a Kharrūbī merchant, in order to strengthen ties between the two families.

Another example of the rivalry that existed among the Kārimī merchants can be found in Ibn Ḥajar’s  Inbā’ al-Ghumr, already noted by Labib. In 786/1384, when trouble arose between Zakī al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Fāriqī, an influential merchant from Yemen, they were both tried before Sultan Barquq. In answer to al-Fāriqī’s accusations, Zakī al-Dīn quoted a letter written by al-Fāriqī and addressed to the lord of Yemen, which read, "At present Egypt is in a state of corruption (fasād). Since there is no credible lord (ṣāḥīb), you need not send any gifts from here on. The present lord [sultan] is the lowest and the most despicable among the mamluks." After reading this, Barquq ordered al-Fāriqī seized and his tongue cut out. Then the sultan bestowed on Zakī al-Dīn a fine robe (khil’ah) and granted him the title of "great merchant" (kabīr al-tujjār).

RELATIONSHIPS TO THE MAMLUK SULTANS

The account of the Zakī al-Dīn/Shihāb al-Dīn dispute tells us that Zakī al-Dīn was granted the title of great merchant or chief merchant (ra’īs al-tujjār) in 786/1384. In Al-Durar al-Kāminah, Ibn Ḥajar states, "Zakī al-Dīn approached the state (dawlah) and gained the title of leadership (ri’āsah), thus surpassing his equals," showing distinctly that Zakī al-Dīn petitioned Sultan Barquq to bestow

---

74 Ibn Ḥajar, Al-Durar, 1:482; idem, Inbā’, 1:306. Zakī al-Dīn was also called “kabīr al-tujjār” (a leading figure of merchants) (al-Maqrīzī, Al-Sulūk, 3:539).
78 Ibn Ḥajar, Inbā’, 1:288.
79 Ibn Ḥajar, Al-Durar, 1:482.
upon him the title of riʾāsah. Since he died in 787/1385 at Fustāt,80 Zakī al-Dīn held that title for about two years. Ibn Ḥajar relates that after he gained the title, Zakī al-Dīn’s status (qadr) in the government improved, and he became preeminent among the Kārīmī merchants.81

Before that, in 781/1379, Kamāl al-Dīn, a grandson of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ʿĀhmad al-Kharrūbī, was arrested and whipped by amir Barquq because he attempted to obtain the rank of vizier with a bribe of 100,000 dinars. Following that incident, Kamāl al-Dīn was exiled to Qūṣ in Upper Egypt, where he was ordered to reside until his death.82 Consequently, Kamāl al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī was not summoned with three other influential Kārīmī merchants—Burhān al-Dīn al-Mahallī, Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Musallam, and Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn al-Kharrūbī—to supply Sultan Barquq with 1,000,000 dirhams for the war against Timur when the latter attempted to invade Syria in 796/1394.83 The above three Kārīmī merchants’ share thus amounted to ten percent of the 10,000,000 dirhams expended for Barquq’s royal mamluks just prior to the war.84

According to al-ʿAshqar, the Kārīmīs during the Mamluk period were supported and administered by “the office of spices and the Kārīmī,” which issued passports (sing. jawāz) to them and imposed taxes (2.5 percent) on their trade goods.85 Furthermore, Lapidus argues that the Kārīmī merchants became officials because of their close association with the government.86 However, Zakī al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī, for example, though he gained the title of raʾīs al-tujjār and had authority over his Kārīmī colleagues, was never regarded as a state official.

Religious and Cultural Activities

Compared to the slave traders, we find many more instances of religious and cultural activities conducted by the Kārīmīs. As mentioned above, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Kharrūbī (d. 762/1361), who was known as a “sugar refinery merchant,” constructed a school (madrasah, later called “al-Madrasah al-Kharrūbīyah) to which he appointed Shaykh Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿUqayl

---

80 Al-Maqrīzī, Al-Sulūk, 3:539; Ibn Ṭaghrībirdī, Al-Nuṣūr, 11:305; Ibn Ḥajar, Al-Durar, 1:482. It is related that when he died, Zakī al-Dīn left a will stating that he provide Sultan Barquq with 30,000 dinars (Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārīkh, 1:3:168).
81 Ibn Ḥajar, Inbāʾ, 1:306.
82 Ibid., 195–96.
84 Al-Maqrīzī, Al-Sulūk, 3:803.
86 Lapidus, Muslim Cities, 128.
professor of law" (*muḍarris fiqh*) and Shaykh Siraj al-Din ‘Umar al-Bulqini assistant (*mu‘īd*).\(^8^7\) It is said that Badr al-Din set down the condition that non-Arabs not be appointed to its faculty.\(^8^8\) His brother, Salah al-Din Ahmad (d. 769/1368), built a large tomb (*turba*) at Qarafa, which his grandson, Nur al-Din ‘Ali (d. 802/1400), repaired and to which he later added a fine washroom (*maṭharah*).\(^8^9\) According to Ibn Hajar, ‘Izz al-Din ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (d. 776/1374) was the owner of a fine madrasah adjacent to his house.\(^9^0\) Taj al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Kharrubi (d. 785/1383) built a large house on the bank of the Nile and converted it into a madrasah, to which he donated a *waqf* and appointed a professor of tradition (*muḍarris hadith*).\(^9^1\) Salah al-Din’s son, ‘Izz al-Din Muhammad (d. 776/1374), also built a madrasah in the suburbs of Fuṣṭat, which was larger than that of his uncle Badr al-Din, but he died before its completion.\(^9^2\) According to Ibn Iyas (852–ca. 930/1448–ca. 1524), Khawaja Nur al-Din ‘Ali al-Kharrubi (d. 802/1400) was also the owner of a madrasah in Fuṣṭat near the Nile.\(^9^3\)

After he returned from Mecca in 786/1384, Zakariya al-Din (rā‘is al-tujjar) invited Najm al-Din Ibn Razin to learn *Ṣahih al-Bukhari* from him. It is said that he was a person of decency (*hisāmah*), esprit de corps (*‘asabiyah*), and manliness (*murūwah*), donating generously to scholars and poets.\(^9^4\) Al-Sakhawi (d. 902/1497) relates that Badr al-Din ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Kharrubi (d. 825/1422), who had yearned to hear the Quran, listened to his reading many times and died heavily in debt.\(^9^5\) Nur al-Din ‘Ali, who was a pious Sufi (*muṭawwif*), donated 100,000 dirhams for the reconstruction of al-Haram al-Sharif in Mecca.\(^9^6\) Although Nur al-Din was called ‘the last of the Kharrubi merchants (*ākhir tujjar Miṣr min al-Kharrāribah*),”\(^9^7\) actually he was not the last merchant to come out of the Kharrubi family, for his nephews, ‘Izz al-Din Muhammad ibn ‘Umar (d. 842/1438), Badr

---

\(^8^7\) Al-Maqrizi, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, 2:369. Badr al-Din also built *rab‘*s (living quarters) near the school (ibid.).

\(^8^8\) Ibid., 369–70.

\(^8^9\) Ibid., 369.


\(^9^2\) Ibid., 370.


\(^9^4\) Ibn Hajar, *Al-Durar*, 1:482. We also find al-Khaqan al-Kharrubiyah in al-Maqrizi’s *Khiṭaṭ* (2:426–27). However, Zakariya al-Din Abū Bakr al-Kharrubī originally constructed this as a private house for his family. In 822/1419 the house was converted into a *khānqāh* in accordance with the wishes of Sultan al-Mu‘ayyad Shaykh.


\(^9^6\) Ibid., 5:240.

\(^9^7\) Ibid.
al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar (d. 833/1430), and Fakhr al-Dīn Sulaymān ibn ʿUmar (d. 864/1460), etc., still continued to be active in trade. Fakhr al-Dīn, who had spent a luxurious life reading the Quran, suffered misfortune, fell deeply into debt, and was consequently imprisoned,\(^98\) no doubt as the result of the spice and sugar monopoly policies attempted by Sultan Barsbāy (825–41/1422–38).\(^99\)

In conclusion, the above comparison between several slave traders and the Kharrūbī family of Kārimī merchants during the Mamluk period can be summarized in the following six points.

1. Most of the leading slave traders who were from outside the Mamluk domain were given the title of “khawāja,” while only two merchants were granted the title of “khawājā” among the Kharrūbīs, who were based in Fustάṭ.

2. Slave traders traveled from Cairo or Damascus to Tabriz and the province of Charkas along the northern routes, while the Kharrūbīs traded between Fustάṭ, Cairo, Mecca, and Yemen along the southern routes, but not as far as India, Southeast Asia, or China.

3. Slave traders returned from Tabriz and the Tatar provinces with male and female slaves and other goods, while the Kārimīs traded goods such as spices, sugar, lumber, textiles, precious stones, wheat, pottery, and slaves. The Kharrūbīs, in particular, earned large profits not only from the spice trade but also from sugar refining and sale.

4. While slave traders engaged in business on an individual basis, the Kārimīs formed a loose confederation headed by chief merchants (raʿis al-tujjjār), which title sultans bestowed upon several wealthy merchants.

5. Since slave traders were favored and relied upon by both the Mamluk sultans and the Mongol khans, they played an active part as diplomats using their knowledge of the characters and manners of the local eastern rulers. They were often exempted from taxation due to their personal relationships with sultans. The Kārimī merchants also enjoyed the protection of sultans in return for their contribution to the spice trade and contribution to military expenditures. However, the Kharrūbīs were never regarded as state officials, despite their close association with the Mamluk sultans and influential amirs.

6. As to the public works of slave traders, we find little positive information

\(^98\)Ibid., 3:267.

on their activities. In contrast to this, there are many accounts of the religious and cultural activities conducted by the Kharrūbīs, like the construction of schools in Fustāt, appointment of professors to those schools, and donations for the reconstruction of al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf in Mecca. Accordingly, it seems that the Kārimī merchants, most of whom were Arab Muslims from Egypt, Yemen, and Syria, made attempts to return part of their wealth to society through such public welfare (maṣlaḥah)-oriented religious and cultural works.
**Genealogical Table of the Kharrūbīs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Šalāḥ al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī</td>
<td></td>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Abū 'Umar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Abū 'Umar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirāj al-Dīn or Badr al-Dīn 'Alī</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Alī</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td>‘Izz al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(d. 762/1361)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Şalāḥ al-Dīn Aḥmad</td>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Abū 'Umar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(d. 769/1368)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Alī</td>
<td>Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Aḥmad</td>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Abū 'Umar</td>
<td>(d. 762/1361)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Aḥmad</td>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Abū 'Umar</td>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Abū 'Umar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Abū 'Umar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zakī al-Dīn Abū Bakr</td>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(d. 776/1374)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Abū 'Umar</td>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Abū 'Umar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Abd al-'Azīz</td>
<td>Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
<td>Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td>Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibn Musallam</td>
<td>Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
<td>Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(d. 802/1400)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Abd al-'Azīz</td>
<td>Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
<td>Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
<td>Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bint Muḥammad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
<td>'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(d. 842/1438)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td>Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(d. 833/1430)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td>Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td>Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fakhr al-Dīn Sulaymān</td>
<td>Fakhr al-Dīn Sulaymān</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

100 Revised and enlarged genealogy based on the table by E. Ashtor (1956).