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Public Projection of Power in Mamluk Bilād al-Shām

The institutions and courtly protocols that supported the Mamluk sultan and legitimized and projected his power have been investigated in previous scholarship.¹ Such work emphasizes the formalities of relations between the sultan and his amirs and with society at large. Royal etiquette guided the sultan's manners while he was at court² as well as during travel,³ and was designed to distance him from his peers. According to the protocols of the day, for example, only the highest ranking amirs were allowed to enter the central hall (*dihlīz*).⁴ Upon approaching the sultan they were instructed to prostrate themselves in front of him (*kharr*).⁵ Social distance was maintained not only in physical terms but also in the realm of political prerogatives. Mamluk political philosophy recognized three domains in which the sultan's name was publicly proclaimed: his title (*laqab sulṭānī*), being mentioned by name at Friday noon prayer (*khutbah*), and minting coins (*sikkah*).⁶

When the sultan nominated viceroys, the royal chancellery issued letters of appointment that were accompanied by symbolic gifts, which articulated the relationship between the ruler and his appointee.⁷ The sultan customarily awarded

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¹P. M. Holt, "The Position and Power of the Mamluk Sultan," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38 (1975): 237–49; idem, "The Structure of Government in the Mamluk Sultanate," in *The Eastern Mediterranean Lands in the Period of the Crusades*, ed. P. M. Holt (Warminster, 1977), 44–61; idem, "The Sultan as Ideal Ruler: Ayyubid and Mamluk Prototypes," in *Suleyman the Magnificent and his Age: The Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern World*, ed. Metin Kunt and Christine Woodhead (London, 1995), 122–37.

²Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn Iyās, *Badā' i' al-Zuhūr fī Waqā' i' al-Duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Cairo, 1982–84), 4:81.

³For a description of the archetype of the sultan's camp during a hunting expedition, see Qaraṭāy al-'Izzī Khaznadārī, *Tārīkh Majmū' al-Nawādir mim mā Jarā lil-Awā' il wa-al-Awākhir*, 616–694 H, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 2005), 198.

⁴Alī ibn Dāwūd al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs wa-al-'Abdān fī Tawārīkh al-Zamān*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1970–94), 1:114.

⁵Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah (Cairo, 1934–73), 4:608–9.

⁶Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 4:572, 569.

⁷The symbolic role of gift exchanges and their function in facilitating relations between parties has been studied by Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (London, 1966).

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the viceroys a robe of honor (*khil'ah*), a horse-blanket (*kanbash*) made of silk embroidered with gold and silver (*zarkash*), saddles (*surūj*), and furs.⁸ Additionally, the sultan and his viceroys exchanged presents and governors bestowed riding animals, linens (*qumāsh*), garments (*thiyāb*), and other textiles, in addition to cash.⁹

However, to consolidate his position, the sultan had to address a wider circle than his military intimates. Syrian sources of the period attest to the energy and resources sultans devoted to propaganda and projecting their royal persona among the civil population. Considerable sums were dedicated to public relations.¹⁰ Poets, musicians, and preachers were paid to cultivate and promote the sultan's public image.¹¹

Yet, the interaction between the Mamluk sultans and their subjects was not restricted to verbal exchanges. Literary and archeological sources demonstrate the considerable resources the sultan and ruling elite allocated for the construction of public and private buildings.¹² By these projects they hoped to promote several agendas: 1) to make their presence known; 2) to fashion an environment that would reflect their desired images; 3) to establish communication with their subjects. Needless to say, this policy demanded heavy taxation. The willingness of the Mamluk administrators to risk public backlash against harsh levies demonstrates

⁸Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad al-'Aynī, *'Iqd al-Jumān fī Tārīkh Ahl al-Zamān*, ed. 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṭanṭāwī al-Qarmūṭ (Cairo, 1985), 1:125; Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-Ghumr bi-Anbā' al-'Umr*, ed. 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bukhārī (Hyderabad, 1985), 8:1; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 4:79.

⁹Abū al-Maḥāsin Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith al-Duhūr fī Madā al-Ayyām wa-al-Shuhūr*, ed. Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt (Cairo, 1990), 1:96, 108, 112, 164. Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq, *Al-Ta'līq: Yawmīyāt Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Ṭawq; Mudhakkirāt Kutibat bi-Dimashq fī Awākhir al-'Ahd al-Mamlūkī, 885-908 H*, ed. Ja'far al-Muhājir (Damascus, 2000), 1:217; al-'Aynī, *'Iqd al-Jumān*, 1:255, 300–2, 315, 375; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 4:571.

¹⁰The idea of political legitimacy was not foreign to the sultans. Rebellious amirs claimed al-Malik al-Sa'īd ibn Baybars was unfit to rule. They told him: "A king should not spend time in vigorous pursuit of games or amusements. These are not appropriate entertainments." (Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah* [Beirut, 2001], 13:288.)

¹¹Ṣārim al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Aydamar Ibn Duqmāq al-'Alā'ī, *Al-Nafḥah al-Miskīyah fī al-Dawlah al-Turkīyah: min Kitāb al-Thamīn fī Siyar al-Khulafā' wa-al-Salāṭīn*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Sidon, 1999), 67; al-Khaznadārī, *Tārīkh Majmū' al-Nawādir*, 258; Bernadette Martel-Thoumian, "Du bon gouvernement d'après la hadiyat al-'Abd al-Qasir ila al-Malik al-Nasir de 'Abd al-Samad al-Salihi," *Annales islamologiques* 34 (2000): 312 (2), 300–1 (13–14).

¹²Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh Ḥawādith al-Zamān wa-Anbā' ihī wa-Wafāyāt al-Akābir wa-al-'yān min Abnā' ihī al-Ma'rūf bi-Tārīkh Ibn al-Jazarī*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām al-Tadmurī (Beirut, 1998), 1:423.

the importance they assigned to construction projects.¹³ In the following my aim is to broadly outline the Mamluk policy for shaping the public sphere in Syria by focusing on documented examples from Damascus and other Syrian cities, relying on a broad range of local sources of the period.

CREATING PUBLIC SPACE IN BILĀD AL-SHĀM

The Mamluk elite constructed numerous and varied public structures in Syria: mosques,¹⁴ tombs,¹⁵ schools,¹⁶ Sufi lodges,¹⁷ hospitals,¹⁸ caravanserais,¹⁹ gates,²⁰ canals,²¹ public fountains,²² bridges,²³ and walls.²⁴ Moreover, the Mamluk patrons did not limit their investments to new edifices;²⁵ they also devoted considerable

¹³Ibid., 2:331.

¹⁴*Repertoire chronologique d'épigraphie Arabe* (Cairo, 1931–91) (hereafter *RCEA*), 12:176 (no. 4662 Hims 671/1272–73); 13:205 (no. 5100) and 263 (no. 5190); 14:266 (no. 5587 Gaza 730/1329); 15:24–25 (no. 5637 Aleppo). Heinz Gaube, *Arabische Inschriften aus Syrien* (Beirut, 1978), 26 (no. 35) and 45 (no. 76).

¹⁵*RCEA*, 12:75 (no. 4504), 176 (no. 4663), and 182 (no. 4673); 13:75 (no. 4909) and 186 (no. 5065 Tripoli 698/1298); 14:24 (no. 5636), 33 (no. 5251), 113 (no. 5777), 165 (no. 5449 Damascus 721/1321), 181 (no. 5473 Damascus 722/1322), 193 (no. 5486 Damascus 723/1323), and 194 (no. 5487 Hamāh 723/1323); 15:201 (no. 5926 Şafad 741/1341) and 199 (no. 6290 Jerusalem 759/1359); 16:85 (no. 6119), 121 (no. 6181), and 215–16 (no. 6324 Tripoli 760/1359); 18:129 (no. 792007), 127 (no. 792005), 170 (no. 795007), 200 (no. 797009), and 202 (no. 797012). Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 13:280; Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Ibn Şaşrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī'ah fī al-Dawlah al-Zāhirīyah* (Berkeley, 1963), 172; Muḥammad ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, *Uyūn al-Tawārikh al-Sanawāt 688–699 A.H.*, ed. Nabilah 'Abd al-Mun'im Dāwūd (Baghdad, 1991), 129; Anne-Marie Eddé, *La principauté Ayyoubide d'Alep: (579/1183–658/1260)* (Stuttgart, 1999), 448–49.

¹⁶*RCEA*, 15:199 (no. 5923 Jerusalem 741/1340); Gaube, *Arabische Inschriften*, 70 (no. 129) and 82 (no. 156); George Makdisi, "Autograph Diary of an Eleventh-Century Historian of Baghdad," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 19 (1957): 288.

¹⁷*RCEA*, 13:163–64 (no. 5033) and 15:200 (no. 5924 the Şalāḥīyah in Jerusalem in 741/1341).

¹⁸Ibid., 16:147 (no. 6220 Aleppo 755/1345); Ibn Duqmāq, *Al-Nafḥah al-Miskīyah*, 79.

¹⁹*RCEA*, 13:98–99 (no. 4946); 14:22–23, 118 (no. 5235, 5385, 5418 Aleppo 719/1319), and 141 (no. 5590); 15:236 (no. 5971). Ibn Şaşrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī'ah*, 169.

²⁰*RCEA*, 15:35 (no. 5706); Ibn Duqmāq, *Al-Nafḥah al-Miskīyah*, 196.

²¹*RCEA*, 18:179 (no. 796001); Gaube, *Arabische Inschriften*, 113 (no. 204); Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:256.

²²*RCEA*, 12:140 (no. 4611); 13:250 (no. 5171); 14:148 (no. 5427 Jerusalem); 15:74 (no. 5708); 16:12 (no. 6015 Aleppo 746/1345) and 123 (no. 6185). Gaube, *Arabische Inschriften*, 17 (no. 11: a *sabīl* built in 915/1508 by Khā'ir Bek, the governor of Aleppo); Ibn Şaşrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī'ah*, 188.

²³*RCEA*, 12:174–75 (no. 4660, 4661); 15:48 (no. 5670).

²⁴Ibid., 13:204 (no. 5099 Majdal 700/1300).

²⁵Ibid., 12:68 (no. 4530 Gaza); 18:197 (no. 797004 Gaza).

efforts to refurbishing citadels²⁶ and sacred shrines,²⁷ including renovations of the Great Mosque of Damascus. Since Mamluk governors were fully aware of the role such structures played in public image-making, it is not surprising to come across reports of orders to demolish standing structures,²⁸ an act that was aimed at obliterating the memory of their adversaries and reshaping the environment to their own benefit.²⁹

The sheer volume of references in Syrian sources to urban projects strongly supports the view that the Mamluks focused their building initiatives in the cities. Three criteria set urban centers apart from rural communities, dictating appropriate types of investment by the state and its officials:

1) Urban communities were complex societies composed of a range of occupations and economic-cultural strata.

2) Cities were economic hubs. In order to house merchants and artisans, commercial and handicrafts complexes (*wakālah*; *qaysārīyah*), as well as markets, were built.³⁰

3) Urban residents paid taxes on private properties, and their urban plots were not classified as *iqṭā'* land, although they kept gardens.

In addition to these economic, legal, and social criteria, architectural features distinguished the Mamluk cities. As in Egypt, communal buildings, such as cathedral mosques (*jāmi'*),³¹ hospitals, and schools, influenced the layout of neighborhoods and streets in Syrian cities. From time to time the Mamluks made efforts to enforce "Islamic" values and norms on the city dwellers. The inspector of the markets was instructed to impose bans on alcohol, prostitution, and other forbidden activities. These policies were often aimed at women.³²

As administrative centers, cities also served as residences of amirs and civilian officials, and where amirs met regularly with bureaucrats and religious dignitaries.

²⁶Ibid., 18:30 (no. 786006 Aleppo 786/1385).

²⁷Ibid., 18:3 (no. 784004 a mosque in Damascus). Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:318–19.

²⁸On one occasion (in 690/1291) the viceroy of Damascus ordered the destruction of houses, shops, and workshops. Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:60.

²⁹Upon regaining control of Damascus in 1398, Barqūq had structures demolished that the rebel Miṅṭāsh may have built. Ibn Ṣaṣrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī'ah*, 74/104.

³⁰Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 4:620.

³¹Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Kawkab al-Rawḍah fī Tārīkh al-Nīl wa-Jazīrat al-Rawḍah*, ed. Muḥammad al-Shishtāwī (Cairo, 2002), 104.

³²Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah*, ed. 'Adnān Darwīsh (Damascus, 1977), 1:266; Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 1:120–21 and 2:95; al-'Aynī, *Iqd al-Jumān*, 2:371; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-Ghumr*, 1:101; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī Dhayl al-Sulūk*, ed. Najwā Muṣṭafā Kāmil and Labībah Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā (Cairo, 2002), 1:54.

The ruling elite strove to construct an urban environment that would be commensurate with their status and image and would facilitate their daily activities.³³ The Green Hippodrome (*al-Maydān al-Akhḍar*) in Damascus, built to serve the ruling Mamluk army, and the construction of a small market (*suwayqah*) nearby, are only a couple of examples of this concern for image and utility.³⁴

The inauguration of new projects was lavishly celebrated.³⁵ Food was served in great quantities; gifts and awards were bestowed on officials and builders (*mi'mārīyah*).³⁶ At the completion of a canal in Aleppo in 731/1330–31, the viceroy called for a public celebration. The Syrian historian al-Birzālī (1267–1339) described the gathering of army commanders, notables, and commoners, stressing that the puritanical governor banned musicians (*muṭribūn*) from participating in the event.³⁷ The following panegyric by Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Kātib captures one part of public reaction to Mamluk construction activity:

We prostrate ourselves and kiss the ground. Our master's realm is the best (*ghurrah*) amongst the nations, almighty God made it shine. . . . Our sultan's generosity directed him to construct mosques and places of prayer, to build mausolea and shrines. Roads were paved to help travelers arriving and departing. After falling into disrepair, canals were renovated. The great mosque of Damascus was refurbished and regained its splendor, its decorations and marbles restored. The candelabra were multiplied. Many places acquired new looks, and the worshipers' hearts became full of joy.³⁸

Yet, it should be emphasized that Mamluk amirs did not refrain from building mosques in the countryside, where the vast majority of the sultanate's subjects dwelled and labored on the *iqṭā'* lands. Mamluk mosques are still visible in Syrian villages today.³⁹

The policy of construction promoted by the Mamluks also aimed at strengthening the hold of Islam on a territory believed to be under constant threat. While illusory threats of imminent invasions by Franks and Mongols haunted the Muslim

³³RCEA, 18:203 and 204 (nos. 797013, 797014).

³⁴Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:60; 2:327, 329, 330, 455–56, 467.

³⁵Ibn Ṣaṣrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī'ah*, 116, 133–35.

³⁶Ibn Duqmāq, *Al-Nafḥah al-Miskīyah*, 123, 244; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:258–59.

³⁷Aleppo 731/1330–31. Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:455.

³⁸Ibid., 389–90. For the formula of kissing the white hand, see *ibid.*, 441.

³⁹RCEA, 13:53–55 (nos. 4880–82).

population, the building initiative provided society with a sense of security and stability. Sultans and governors invested considerable resources in developing Muslim shrines and other holy sites that attracted large numbers of visitors. These edifices amplified the ruler's image and defined the structure and borders of Mamluk sacred topography. Tombs of biblical prophets such as Noah,⁴⁰ Moses,⁴¹ and Abraham⁴² were renovated or enlarged, as were the tombs of the Prophet Muḥammad's close companions. Baybars started this policy by erecting a sanctuary east of the Jordan River, said to be the burial ground (*mazār*) of Abū 'Ubaydah.⁴³ In southern Palestine a Roman structure was identified as Abū Ḥurayrah's tomb.⁴⁴ Not far away from this location is the shrine (*mashhad*) of Salmān al-Fārisī.⁴⁵ In central Syria the shrine of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd was renovated.⁴⁶ In Aleppo builders constructed the shrine of Sa'd ibn Ayyūb al-Anṣārī.⁴⁷ Another area of investment was the renewal of Latin (Crusader) and Ayyubid fortifications, which delineated the Mamluks' political domain. Inscriptions from Shawbak in southwestern Jordan to Ḥiṣn al-Akrād (Krak des Chevaliers) in central Syria attest to this initiative.⁴⁸

Conspicuously sacred and military structures as these often bore inscriptions appropriate to Syria's role as imperial frontier and holy land. As "public text" they name the founder and announce his self-asserted achievements and titles.⁴⁹ Baybars'

⁴⁰Janine Sourdél-Thomine, "Inscriptions arabes de Karak Nuh," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 13 (1951): 82.

⁴¹*RCEA*, 12:142 (no. 4612).

⁴²*Ibid.*, 13:51–53 (nos. 4876–77); and later renovations: 13:95–96 and 194 (no. 4943, 5079); 18:179 (no. 796001).

⁴³*Ibid.*, 12:208–9 (no. 4714); 13:70 (no. 4901).

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 12:191 (no. 4686); 13:115 (no. 4965).

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 12:134 (no. 4600).

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 12:104–5 (no. 4556, 4557) and 128–29 (no. 4593); although some Muslim authors doubt this identification. Al-Khaznadārī, *Tārīkh Majmū' al-Nawādir*, 277–79.

⁴⁷Gaube, *Arabische Inschriften*, 23–25; Eddé, *Alep*, 431.

⁴⁸*RCEA*, 12:148–51 (nos. 4623–26 Ḥiṣn al-Akrād) and 222–24 (nos. 4733–34 Karak); 13:58–59 (no. 4886 Ḥiṣn al-Akrād) and 176–78 (nos. 5048–51 Shawbak). Reuven Amitai, "An Arabic Inscription at al-Subayba (Qal'at Namrud) from the Reign of Sultan Baybars," *The al-Subayba (Nimrod) Fortress: Towers 11 and 9*, ed. Moshe Hartal (Jerusalem, 2001), 109–23.

⁴⁹Epigraphic data constitute historical sources, generally contemporary with the construction of the buildings. *RCEA*, 12:124 (no. 4588 Baybars in Ramlah 666/1268), 125 (no. 4589 Ṣafad), and 210 (no. 4715 Damascus); 13:41–42 (no. 4859, 4860 Aleppo 684/1284); 14:58 (no. 5291 Damascus 711/1311), 59–60 (nos. 5292–94 Aleppo 711/1311); 77 (no. 5323 Jerusalem 713/1314), 88 (no. 5339 Gaza 714/1315), 89–90 (nos. 5340–42 Ramlah 714/1314), 101 (no. 5358 Tripoli 715/1315), 105–6 (no. 4956 Khalīl in Hims 691/1292), 118–19 (no. 5386 Baalbek 717/1317), 127 (no. 5400 Gaza 718/1318), 128 (no. 5401 Ramlah 718/1318), and 129 (no. 5403 Aleppo 718/1318); 15:4–5 (nos. 5606–7 Jerusalem al-Aqsa mosque); 16:7–8 (nos. 6009–10 Jerusalem al-Aqsa mosque)

name, for example, is accompanied by a long list of royal titles: "our sultan, the victorious king, judicious, righteous, warrior, master of kings and sultans, ruler of the two *qiblahs* [Mecca and Jerusalem], servant of the holy places, partner of the caliph, the commander of the faithful, Alexander of our days."⁵⁰ Qalāwūn's titulature included additional titles, such as: "the greatest sultan, king of kings (*shāhanshāh al-mu'azzam*), the monarch who holds the nations by their necks, the king supported by heaven (*mu'ayyad*)."⁵¹ In addition to insignia and regalia,⁵² inscriptions are informative about financial investments and assert the role of religious endowment (*waqf*) in building or maintaining a specific institution.⁵³ In other instances architectural inscriptions were believed to have a protective quality, shielding property from mismanagement or seizure.⁵⁴ In addition, inscriptions occasionally document the abolition of taxes and limitations on tariffs.⁵⁵

The development of the public sphere was not restricted to stone and marble. To capture the viewers' attention the governing elite shaped the urban space by staging events.⁵⁶ Cities were decorated to celebrate military victories, investitures of sultans, proclamations of royal births, recovery of the sultan's health, or the accession of a new governor.⁵⁷ In a manner resembling an outdoor performance,⁵⁸

746/1345), and 9–10 (no. 6013 Tripoli 746/1345). Also Mūsā ibn Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt al-Zamān* (Hyderabad, 1957), 1:198.

⁵⁰RCEA, 12:57–58 (nos. 4476–77), 103 (no. 4554), 193 (no. 4690), 195 (no. 4692), and 226 (no. 4738).

⁵¹Ibid., 12:196 (4693); 13:9 (no. 4815 Baalbek), 15–16 (nos. 4823–24), 36 (no. 4852 Cairo), 40–41 (nos. 4857–58), and 225 (no. 5135); 14:136–41 (nos. 5412–17).

⁵²Ibid., 18:4 (no. 784005, 784006 Damascus 784/1382) and 155 (no. 794003 Damascus 794/1392 by Sultan Barqūq).

⁵³Ibid., 18:6 (no. 784008 Masjid Ḥaydar al-‘Askarī in Damascus) and 91 (no. 788054 covered market in Jerusalem 788/1386).

⁵⁴Ibid., 18:29 (no. 786005 Aleppo 786/1385).

⁵⁵Ibid., 18:1 (no. 784001 Cairo), 126 (no. 792003 Karak 792/1390), 154 (no. 794002 Karak Nūḥ 794/1392), 169 (no. 795006 Jerusalem 795/1393), 171 (no. 795009), 181 (no. 796002 donations to support the holy tomb of the prophet Nūḥ), 195 (no. 797002 Idfū [Edfou]), and 200 (no. 797009 Baalbek).

⁵⁶Al-‘Aynī, *Iqd al-Jumān*, 1:256, describes acrobats (*min funūn al-bahlawān* [pahlavan]) walking on a strong rope held between two minarets.

⁵⁷Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Jazarī, *Al-Mukhtār min Tārīkh Ibn al-Jazarī al-Musammā Ḥawādith al-Zamān wa-Anbā’ ihī wa-Wafāyāt al-Akābir wa-al-A’yān min Abnā’ ihī*, ed. Khudayyir ‘Abbās al-Munshidāwī (Beirut, 1988), 305 (680/1281), 364, 372 (695/1295), and 388 (the recovery of the sultan Ḥusām al-Dīn Lājīn); Ibn Ṣaṣrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī’ah*, 19, 20, and 112; Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:112.

⁵⁸On references to whitewashing (*tabyīd*) house walls, see Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:526; ‘Abd

the rulers staged parades, public ceremonies, and festivities.⁵⁹ Cavalry and infantry marched, drums were beaten, jugglers performed,⁶⁰ and emblems of state were put on display.⁶¹ Streets and squares were also decorated with textiles, colors, and lights.⁶² On the occasion of the sultan's recovery from illness, the people of Damascus were ordered to decorate the streets with ornaments and pieces of brocade embroidered with gold and silver. The drums played loudly in the citadel and palaces, and the viceroy put on the royal robe of honor in a public ceremony.⁶³ When Altunbughā al-Jubānī reentered Damascus and took up his post as viceroy, candles were lit and the imam of the Great Mosque invoked blessings for the sultan.⁶⁴

The decoration and lighting of the streets was only one element in the staging of these political performances. With lights came sounds.⁶⁵ Bands of drummers (*ṭablkhānah*) played to publicly announce important events.⁶⁶ The rhythm of drums on these occasions differed from the music played by tambourines or the beating of the drums during fighting.⁶⁷ The account of the victorious return of Sultan Barqūq to the throne in 792/1390 preserves the joyful scene at the welcoming reception:

At dawn al-Malik al-Zāhir Sayf al-Islām Abū Sa'īd Barqūq arrived at Raydānīyah. A mission from Cairo proceeded to meet him: the descendants of the Prophet, the Sufis carrying banners (*sanājiq*), army battalions dressed for combat and armed with weapons, Jews carrying candelabra and the Torah, Christians holding candles and

al-Bāsiṭ ibn Khalīl Ibn Shāhīn al-Zāhirī al-Malaṭī, *Nayl al-Amal fī Dhayl al-Duwal*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 2002), 2:43–44.

⁵⁹Al-Kutubī, *'Uyūn al-Tawārīkh*, 107 (on the vizier Ibn al-Sal'ūs's visit to Damascus in 691/1292).

⁶⁰Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhira* (Cairo, 1963–72), 9:7; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 4:59–61, 70, and 72; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 3:267 and 273; Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 1:141.

⁶¹Ibn Faḍl Allāh Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-'Umarī, *Al-Ta'rīf bi-al-Muṣṭalah al-Sharīf*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, 1988), 273–75.

⁶²Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥīm Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt*, ed. Quṣṭanṭīn Zurayq (Beirut, 1942), 7:187; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn, *I'lām al-Warā bi-Man Wulliya Nā' iban min al-Atrāk bi-Dimashq al-Shām al-Kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Duhmān (Damascus, 1984), 116; Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 13:293.

⁶³Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:389 (730/1330).

⁶⁴Ibn Ṣaṣrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī'ah*, 63.

⁶⁵Al-'Umarī, *Al-Ta'rīf*, 103; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm*, 10:22.

⁶⁶The beating of drums also proclaimed the end of fasting during the month of Ramaḍān (Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:77).

Bibles, and the masses. They chanted blessings, and the women trilled.⁶⁸

The decorated streets and buildings were intended by the ruling Mamluk elite as a backdrop to their striking costumes and to gain the admiration of the viewing public (*washshaha al-madīnah ba'da an zuyyinat*).⁶⁹ Official parades and ceremonies marked particularly important events in great splendor (*fī ubbahah 'aẓimah*).⁷⁰ On the arrival of al-Malik al-Sa'īd ibn Baybars to Damascus in 677/1279 the city was decorated. Domed pavilions (*qibāb*) were erected, and people packed the streets. On the day of the Great Feast (*'Īd al-Nahr*) they prayed together at the hippodrome with the sultan. This mass gathering was followed by a more modest event inside the citadel, where a welcoming reception took place.⁷¹ On another occasion, in 741/1341, an ailing sultan ordered the release of all prisoners. In reaction to this gratifying news people came out carrying burning candles, beating drums, and holding Bibles (Jews) and Gospels (Christians) in their hands.⁷²

Victory parades were staged to arouse hopes for stability and peace, in addition to demonstrating authority and strength.⁷³ Riding in front of their troops army commanders entered the cities' gates and led processions along crowded streets.⁷⁴ Returning victorious from a battle against the Mongols, Qalāwūn ceremoniously crossed Damascus with his soldiers and twelve wagons full of prisoners of war.⁷⁵ Several days after Qalāwūn's defeat of the Franks and his capture of Tripoli, a carrier pigeon landed in the Damascus citadel and brought the news. The garrison force played drums, and the streets were decorated.⁷⁶

A similar event was staged following the conquest of Acre by al-Ashraf Khalīl

⁶⁷Ibid., 1:53 and 391; Ibn Ṣaṣrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī'ah*, 58, 76, 79, 80, 139, and 140; Ibn Duqmāq, *Al-Nafḥah al-Miskīyah*, 208.

⁶⁸Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh*, 9:199.

⁶⁹Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 1:682 (he traversed the decorated city); al-Kutubī, *'Uyūn al-Tawārīkh*, 108; Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, ed. Fu'ād M. Shaltūt (Cairo, 1998), 31:35; al-Faṭḥ ibn 'Alī al-Bundārī, *Sanā al-Barq al-Shāmī*, ed. Faṭḥīyah Nabarāwī (Cairo, 1979), 30, 81.

⁷⁰Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 13:301 (the entrance of Qalāwūn into Damascus 682/1283–84); Mufaḍḍal ibn Abī al-Fadā'il, *Al-Nahj al-Sadīd wa-al-Durr al-Farīd fīmā ba'da Tārīkh Ibn al-'Amīd*, ed. Edgar Blochet (Paris, 1911), 67, 68, 151, 156, and 318.

⁷¹Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 13:280.

⁷²Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 2:129.

⁷³Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm*, 7:103 and 104.

⁷⁴Ibn Ṣaṣrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī'ah*, 71, 74, 76, 93–96, 100, 115, and 126.

⁷⁵Li Guo, *Early Mamluk Syrian Historiography: al-Yūnīnī's Dhayl Mir'āt al Zamān* (Leiden, 1998), 67 (Arabic). Ibn Abī al-Fadā'il, *Al-Nahj al-Sadīd*, 300 and 332–33.

in 1291. Damascus was elaborately adorned (*wa-zuyyinat ajmal zīnah*). Riding ahead of his cavalry, the sultan resembled “the full moon surrounded by shining stars” (*ka-al-badr bayna kawkabihi*).⁷⁷ Comparable was the reaction to al-Ashraf Khalīl’s victory over the Armenians and the capture of Qal‘at al-Rūm. Damascus was decorated, the citadel, streets, and palaces festooned. Leading his soldiers, the victorious sultan rode through the city’s streets. In the course of the military parade Armenian captives were exhibited. The chronicles report on the joyful audience crowding the squares.⁷⁸

Other occasions for public celebration included the inauguration of a new sultan or viceroy.⁷⁹ For these events the audience cheered and blessed the new leader,⁸⁰ as was the case for the coronation of al-Malik al-Afḍal, the ruler of al-Ḥamāh.⁸¹ Upon the investiture of the minor prince al-Malik al-Naṣr Faraj ibn Barqūq in 801/1399, a long black cloak (*franjiyah*) embroidered with gold thread was draped over the child’s shoulders and a golden turban (*‘imāmah*) placed on his head. The royal procession in Cairo crossed the city and ascended to the citadel, where the new sultan sat on the throne (*dast*).⁸² Similar performances marked political insurgencies in the provinces. During the revolt of al-Malik al-Kāmil al-Ashqar Sanqar against Qalāwūn, the rebel declared the severing of contact between Damascus and Cairo. This declaration was echoed by a parade joined by cavalry, men of religion, and notables. Leading his forces, Sanqar descended from the citadel and rode towards Damascus’ hippodrome. There he inspected the forces and honored their commander with robes of honor.⁸³

These events provided an entertaining spectacle for the public. Many accounts of celebrations (*yawm mashhūr*) depict large crowds flooding the streets carrying candles and joining the procession, as if they were actors in a play.⁸⁴ On one occasion the merchants of Damascus were ordered to stand outside the city wall when al-Ashraf Khalīl was entering the city. Joining them were artisans led by their master (*‘arīf*); all were holding candles. As the sultan’s convoy drew closer

⁷⁶ Al-Kutubī, *‘Uyūn al-Tawārīkh*, 15; Ibn Duqmāq, *Al-Nafḥah al-Miskīyah*, 113–14; Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh*, 7:152.

⁷⁷ Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Dawādār al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-Fikrah fī Tārīkh al-Hijrah*, ed. Zubaydah Muḥammad ‘Aṭā (Cairo, 2001), 263.

⁷⁸ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:110. Another example is the report on the arrival of Barqūq to Damascus and his meeting with the viceroy Yālbughā al-Nāṣirī in 793/1391 (al-Kutubī, *‘Uyūn al-Tawārīkh*, 131).

⁷⁹ Al-‘Aynī, *‘Iqd al-Jumān*, 2:266.

⁸⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 1:663–64; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, 31:17.

⁸¹ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:519.

⁸² Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 2:5–6.

to the gate they lit their candles. The majestic entourage advanced along an illuminated route from Bāb al-Naṣr to al-Qadam mosque.⁸⁵ On another occasion, as the troops fighting Miṣṣāh advanced towards Damascus, many Damascenes came out of the city holding candles and listening to singers accompanied by tambourines.⁸⁶

When Sultan Barqūq entered Damascus in 793/1391, the official ceremony was said to be "according to the fashion of the kings." The governor Yālbughā al-Nāṣirī bore the royal parasol (*al-qubbah wa-al-ṭayr*) over his head, candles were lit, and girls sang. The people spread pieces of cloth along the streets that the sultan passed on his way to the citadel. Men called out blessings to the sultan, and women gave shrill cries. The citadel's commander had rebuilt, whitewashed, and furnished most of the citadel's structures. Sitting high on his horse Barqūq reviewed the dismounted cavalry. This gesture reflected the distance between royal authority and subordinates. The ceremony ended with the sultan bestowing robes of honor on the amirs "as was the custom of the kings."⁸⁷ These were not low-cost events, and the local population was occasionally asked to bear the financial burden of hosting them.⁸⁸ No wonder, then, that public reaction was sometimes hostile.⁸⁹

Parades were used by the authorities to display (*ashhara*) those who were declared enemies of the public order. In order to humiliate them, they were exhibited to the public, occasionally tied back-to-back on a beast of burden, sometimes fastened with nails to a board (*tasmīr*). In one instance the sultan ordered rebellious soldiers to be put on display. As the camels were led along the streets, the soldiers' wives, their faces unveiled and exposed, dashed around them.⁹⁰ A similar situation was reported in Damascus in 792/1390. The guards beat drums as Ibn Hanash was brought to the city. Soldiers with drawn swords in their hands marched at the column's head, while the prisoners, tied to the backs of beasts of burden, were shown to the public.⁹¹ For three days the heads of two executed amirs were hung in Cairo, first at the citadel gate, then at the town gate. During these days the

⁸³Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 13:290; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:289.

⁸⁴Ibn al-Jazarī, *Mukhtār Ḥawādith al-Zamān*, 353.

⁸⁵Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:118–19.

⁸⁶Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah fī A'yān al-Mi'ah al-Thāminah*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Jād al-Ḥaqq (Cairo, 1973), 1:52.

⁸⁷Ibn Ṣaṣrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī'ah*, 93–96, 128–31, and 151.

⁸⁸Ibn al-Jazarī, *Mukhtār Ḥawādith al-Zamān*, 391; idem, *Tārīkh*, 1:46 and 52. On one occasion an encampment of twelve tents was erected.

⁸⁹Ibn Ṭūlūn, *I'lām al-Warā'*, 204 and 218.

⁹⁰Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 1:270 and 285; Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 1:128 and 130.

⁹¹Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 1:329–30.

military bands continuously beat small drums.⁹²

Dār al-Sa‘ādah palace in Damascus served as a place of assembly where the influential men (*ahl al-ḥall wa-al-‘aqd*) congregated to pay homage (*bay‘ah*) to the new viceroy nominated by the sultan. The first stage in the formal procedure was the reading of the letter of appointment by the light of candles. This was accompanied with the bestowal of a robe of honor. From Dār al-Sa‘ādah the incoming viceroy proceeded to the citadel, where the second stage of the ceremony took place. Arriving there the viceroy bowed and kissed the gate’s doorstep (*‘atabah*) and entered the hall. With this he commenced his term of office.⁹³ Other ceremonies marked the end of service and the departure of officials. They also included the exchange of gifts.⁹⁴

Outside of political functions, the streets of Mamluk cities were also used for religious ceremonies. All strata of society celebrated communal feasts together and participated in mass gatherings. The chronicles report on the departure and return of the hajj caravan and on religious festivals to commemorate Muslim holidays. Worshipers commemorated other occasions, such as the completion of the recital of the entire Quran (*khatmah*) or the end of a yearly cycle of hadith recitation.⁹⁵ The nomination of Ibn Khallikān, the well-known jurist and historian, to a teaching position at the Zāhirīyah madrasah in Damascus in 677/1278 was celebrated by a gathering of political and religious dignitaries.⁹⁶ On his visit to Damascus in 696/1296, Sultan Kitbughā followed the pilgrims’ steps. He paid a visit to the Umayyad Mosque and inspected a precious manuscript said to be the Quran of ‘Uthmān. He then proceeded to the mosque’s southern wall and prayed at the tomb of Nabī Hūd. At Friday prayer he invited members of the congregation to write him and personally collected their petitions (*qiṣṣah*).⁹⁷

Public ceremonies and rituals did not always take place outdoors. Some were held within the walls of religious or governmental buildings. Mosques and shrines served as common loci for public encounters with the rulers. During Friday noon prayers the preacher blessed the sultan, a transparently political gesture. When Barqūq succeeded in taking control of Damascus, a celebratory ritual took place

⁹²Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 2:56.

⁹³Ibn Ṣaṣrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī‘ah*, 24, 25 and 69; Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 289. Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, *Tashrīf al-Ayyām wa-al-‘Uṣūr fī Sirat al-Malik al-Manṣūr*, ed. Murād Kāmil (Cairo, 1961), 61. See also the account of Lājīn’s nomination in Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh*, 7:176.

⁹⁴Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 1:151.

⁹⁵Ibn Iyās, *Badā‘i*, 4:88; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Mukhtār Ḥawādith al-Zamān*, 388.

⁹⁶Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 13:279.

⁹⁷Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:291 and 292; idem, *Mukhtār Ḥawādith al-Zamān*, 380.

in the Umayyad Mosque. Candles were lit, and the preacher, standing on the top step of the pulpit, invoked blessings for the sultan, who stood on a lower step.⁹⁸ Following the recovery of Badr al-Dīn Baydarah from an illness, a communal gathering took place in Damascus' Grand Mosque. Candles illuminated the building, as was the practice on mid-Sha'bān nights. Readers recited short chapters from the Quran, and Baydarah distributed considerable sums of alms (*ṣadaqah*).⁹⁹ After the dismissal of Tankiz, the powerful viceroy of Damascus, in 741/1340, the new governor prayed at the rulers' stall (*maqṣūrah*) in the Grand Mosque. In order to denigrate his predecessor, the new governor listed Tankiz's faults and promised to introduce reforms in taxation and administration.¹⁰⁰

The audiences at these events were not passive spectators. They participated in, and reacted to, the public displays and performances. They crowded the streets, their rising voices heard from every corner of the city. Occasionally they carried candles and even copies of the Quran.¹⁰¹ At least during one occasion of alms distribution, in 'Āshūrā' 912/1506, several people were crushed as the crowd forced its way toward the sultan, who was throwing coins to the poor from horseback.¹⁰² Crowded conditions are plainly illustrated by a report from Damascus. When a procession with an elephant reached a bridge, the poor animal became so terrified that he tumbled over the side of the bridge and died.¹⁰³

It is appropriate to mention here that streets and squares were not used only for prayers and parades. Sultans and commanders used such public spaces for their private rites of passage and invited rich and poor to participate. During ceremonies such as weddings (*zaffah*) and circumcisions (*khitān*) participants dined, listened to bands and poets, and exchanged gifts,¹⁰⁴ as was the case in Damascus for an event sponsored by the local governor in 801/1399. To accommodate the numerous guests, tents were erected, and eleven bowls of sugar were cooked. The governor's son was seated on a horse and accompanied by guests and musicians to the palace where his circumcision took place.¹⁰⁵ At a party given by the sultan in 837/1434, forty boys were circumcised alongside the royal prince. He was presented

⁹⁸ Ibn Ṣaṣrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī'ah*, 63.

⁹⁹ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:11.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 1:123.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Ṣaṣrā, *Al-Durrah al-Mudī'ah*, 68, 69, 74, 75, 101, 126, and 133.

¹⁰² Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 4:94.

¹⁰³ Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 4:264.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Khaznadārī, *Tārīkh Majmū' al-Nawādir*, 63; Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh*, 7:7; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:398; Ibn Duqmāq, *Al-Nafḥah al-Miskīyah*, 215; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm*, 9:101; al-Kutubī, *'Uyūn al-Tawārīkh*, 132; Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 1:93–94; 2:34 and 116.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 4:28–29.

with gifts, jewelry, and sweets. Food and drinks were served to all.¹⁰⁶

Funerals were another opportunity for public relations. An inscription on the wall of the *Zāhirīyah* madrasah in Damascus reads: "our master Sultan Muḥammad Berke ordered the construction of this blessed mausoleum and the two schools. He had built it to inter his father and himself; one day he will join him. Hence this tomb will contain two mighty kings, al-Malik al-Zāhir and al-Malik al-Sa'īd."¹⁰⁷ The coffin of Ibrāhīm ibn Aybak was transferred in 645/1247–48 from Cairo to the tomb that he had built for himself in Damascus.¹⁰⁸ Citizens were summoned from the minarets to take part in funeral processions that traversed the city. Shops were closed, and women exposed their hair as a sign of mourning.¹⁰⁹ In 730/1330 the body of Sayf al-Dīn Bahdar was taken first to the Great Mosque in Damascus. From there the funeral procession (*janāzah*) proceeded to the cemetery. Notables, heads of local government, and the religious establishment participated in the ceremony. All the mourners walked on foot; not a single person was seen on horseback.¹¹⁰ In the services commemorating the end of the first year after the death of Qalāwūn, a customary meal (*simāt*) was served in Cairo and Damascus. The population of Damascus gathered at the Green Hippodrome, north of the old city. Its gates were unlocked. From midday until midnight Quranic verses were recited, and preachers (*wu'āz*) related stories from the sultan's life.¹¹¹

The manipulation of the urban topography of the city and its public spaces for official image-making by the Mamluks was as true for Damascus, and cities of Bilād al-Shām, as it was for Cairo. Building projects, the inscriptions that covered those buildings, and the public performances staged inside and outside their walls combined to fortify and to disseminate the image of Mamluk sultans and viceroys as unquestioned rulers. Various actors participated in those performances, engaging both representatives of the state and the civilian urban population. It was in these urban, public spaces that sultans, commanders, jurists, Sufis, civil servants, merchants, and the masses (*'āmmah*) encountered one another and participated together in the construction of official imagery. Occasionally during these events gifts and awards were bestowed. The exchange of gifts, the distribution of alms,

¹⁰⁶ Anonymous [*mu'arrikh shāmī majhūl*], *Ḥawliyat Dimashqīyah 834–839/1430–35*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1968), 98.

¹⁰⁷ *RCEA*, 13:57 (no. 4884 Damascus).

¹⁰⁸ Al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt al-Zamān*, 1:16.

¹⁰⁹ Sharaf al-Dīn Ibn Ayyūb, *Das Kitāb ar-rauḍ al-'āṭir des Ibn Aiyūb*, ed. Ahmet Halil Güneş (Berlin, 1981), 17; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 1:677; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:16, 19, 71, 134; 2:307. Also al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt al-Zamān*, 1:177.

¹¹⁰ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:410.

¹¹¹ Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 4:29; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Mukhtār Ḥawādith al-Zamān*, 342; idem, *Tārīkh*, 1:58.

communal prayer, and the blessings of the governors merged in an inspiring political ritual.