Arabic Studies of Mamluk Jerusalem:
A Review Article

The study of Islamic Jerusalem by Arab scholars over the last century has been less important than the work of non-Arab scholars, but the situation is now changing. Arab scholarly studies of Islamic Jerusalem have blossomed since the early 1980s and publications by Arab authors now predominate in terms of number, and increasingly also in terms of quality. This is especially the case since the mid-1990s with the M.A. theses of the students at the Institute of Islamic Archaeology, al-Quds University, and other institutions. Arab scholarship has reached the point where it is scarcely possible to do thorough research about Mamluk Jerusalem without an awareness of Arabic publications. This article has the objective of presenting what recent Arabic scholarship has to offer for the study of Mamluk Jerusalem. It does not attempt to survey the work of Western or Israeli scholars, whose publications are better known and more easily accessible than Arabic ones.

Arabic publishing activity about Mamluk Jerusalem began as early as 1866, when Mujrūr al-Dīn’s fundamentally important history about Jerusalem and Hebron was first edited. But the first significant scholarly work had to wait until after the First World War with Kurd ‘Alī in the 1920s, and Mukhlis in the 1920s and 1930s, and more substantially until after the Second World War with al-‘Arif, starting in 1947 and culminating in his Mufaṣṣal of 1961, and al-Dabbaḥ in the

©Middle East Documentation Center. The University of Chicago.

1This article borrows heavily from my forthcoming publication, The Sites and Monuments of Islamic Jerusalem (Beirut, 2000), which is intended to provide encyclopedic coverage and comprehensive bibliography for all the Islamic sites and monuments.

2Mujrūr al-Dīn, Al-Uns al-Jalīl bi-Tārīkh al-Quds wa-al-Khalīl (Cairo, 1866). His history in manuscript form remained well-known throughout the Ottoman period to Jerusalemites and travellers/pilgrims, such as the late seventeenth-century sufi author ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī.

3Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī, Khīṭat al-Shām (Damascus, 1925-28).


Article: http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/MSR_V_2001-Schick.pdf

©2001 by the author. (Disregard notice of MEDOC copyright.) This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). Mamluk Studies Review is an Open Access journal. See http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html for information.
Those studies covered the fuller history of Jerusalem, of which the Mamluk period is only a part. The first lengthy studies focused on the Mamluk period were by al-Imám in 1976,⁸ and Ḥamūdah in 1979,⁹ but those studies were largely reworkings of the information that Mujīr al-Dīn had provided. Only al-‘Arīf’s studies included much additional documentation, such as the texts of building inscriptions.

But it was in the 1980s that the shelf of Arabic publications about Jerusalem in the Islamic periods, and specifically in the Mamluk period, began to fill up, in particular with the publications of Kāmil al-‘Asalī.¹⁰ While not attempting to cite every Arabic publication, this article will present the most important publications, arranged by topic.

**Text Editions**

Many Arabic manuscripts have been edited over the years, but a sizable number still await editing. The single most important text for the history of Mamluk Jerusalem, Mujīr al-Dīn’s *Uns al-Jalīl bi-Tārīkh al-Quds wa-al-Khalīl*, written in 900–902/1495–96, was first edited in the nineteenth century, while the most commonly cited version, which contains editing mistakes and misprints, was published in 1973.¹¹ An index was produced in 1988.¹² A careful new critical edition was published in 1999,¹³ but because it does not have an index, it does not fully obviate the need for the 1973 edition.¹⁴ A second major text for the later

---

¹⁴One should note the following studies about Mujīr al-Dīn: Kāmil al-‘Asalī, ‘Mujīr al-Dīn al-‘Ulaymī al-Ḥanbalī: Mu‘arrīkh al-Quds: Naṣṣ Jaddī ‘an Hayāthi wa-Naṣṣ Dhayl Kitābihi al-Uns
Mamluk period by Mujr al-Din, his general history entitled *Al-Tārikh al-Mu’tabar fi Anbā’ Man ‘Abara fi al-Tārikh*, remains unedited.\(^{15}\) The other text of fundamental importance for Mamluk Jerusalem, especially for the buildings on the Ḥaram al-Sharīf, *Masālik al-Abṣār fi Mamālik al-Āmsār*, which al-‘Umarī wrote around 745/1345, was first edited in 1924.\(^{16}\)

A recently edited text is by Ibn Nubātah, a native of Cairo and a poet who was the superintendent of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Christian pilgrimage in the 1330s under Amīn al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh, the governor of Damascus. While normally resident in Damascus, Ibn Nubātah made frequent trips to Jerusalem, especially around Easter. In 733/1333 or 735/1335–36 Amīn al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh traveled to Jerusalem to inspect his newly constructed al-Madrasah al-Amīnīyah and its endowments. Ibn Nubātah accompanied him on that trip and wrote an account that is most interesting for the description of al-Madrasah al-Amīnīyah.\(^{17}\)

The genre with the largest number of texts is the ‘Islamic Merits of Jerusalem’ literature, surveyed by al-‘Asālī and Ibrahīm in the 1980s.\(^{18}\) Three recently edited ‘Merits of Jerusalem’ texts from the Mamluk period are Ibn ‘Asākir’s *Tārikh Madinat Dimashq*,\(^{19}\) al-Maqdisī’s *Muthîr al-Gharām*,\(^{20}\) and al-Suyūtī’s *Ithāf al-Akhīsā` bi-Fadā` il al-Masjid al-Aqṣā*.\(^{21}\) There are many additional unedited manuscripts, but their value as independent works is lessened because the authors

---

\(^{15}\) Photocopied manuscript in the possession of Fahm al-Ansārī, Jerusalem.


frequently reworked earlier texts. That makes the study of the "Merits of Jerusalem" literature relatively unfruitful.

One should also note the three publications by al-Dabbāgh, al-ʿAsali, and al-Tāzi with excerpts of travellers and pilgrims from all periods writing in Arabic about Jerusalem,22 such as for the Mamluk period Muḥammad Ābu Muḥammad al-ʿAbdarī, a native of North Africa, who went on pilgrimage to Mecca and spent five days in Jerusalem in 690/1291—the brief information about Jerusalem in his al-Riḥlah al-Maghrībiyyah focused on the Ḥaram—and Khaṭūb ibn ʿĪsā al-Balawī, a qadi and native of Spain, who went on pilgrimage to Mecca and spent two months in Jerusalem in 737/1337. His account of his travels, Tāj al-Mafraq fī Taḥliyat ʿUlamaʿ al-Mashriq, concentrated on the Ḥaram and the religious scholars in the city.

**PRIMARY DOCUMENTS**

There are a number of collections of documents covering both the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, such as Darrāj’s collection of documents connected with the Franciscan monastery on Mount Zion,23 al-ʿAlamī’s publication of waqf documents related to the Maghribi Quarter (the area of the Western Wall plaza today),24 and al-ʿAzizī’s presentation of some documents related to the Christians.25 The 800-odd documents found in the Islamic Museum in the mid-1970s, known as the Ḥaram Documents, studied in most detail by Donald Little, have attracted only limited attention from scholars writing in Arabic. While al-ʿAsali26 and al-Ṣāliḥiyah27 published the texts of some of the documents, information derived from the documents rarely appears in Arabic studies of Mamluk Jerusalem. Ābu Ḥāmid’s

---


23 ʿAbd Allāh ʿĀlāmī, Waṭaʿiq Maqdisyah Taḥriq 1 (Amman, 1983); idem, Waṭaʿiq Maqdisiyah Taḥriq 2 (Amman, 1985); idem, Waṭaʿiq Maqdisiyah Taḥriq 3 (Amman, 1989).

A M.A. thesis about the Islamic law court judges in the Mamluk period is one notable exception. But by far the most important documentary source for Mamluk Jerusalem is the Ottoman sijills, the records of the Islamic law court in Jerusalem during the Ottoman period. Most of the annual volumes survive, including some from the first years of the Ottoman period, each containing summaries of hundreds of court cases written in Arabic. A thorough examination of the documents in the sijills is a mammoth task that remains to be undertaken, but would reveal hundreds of court cases related to such topics as property ownership and endowments that shed light on the Mamluk period. For example, many Ayyubid and Mamluk period endowment documents, lost in the original, are preserved because they were copied into the sijills. Al-‘Asal| through his numerous books and articles, along with ‘Abd al-Mahd|, largely pioneered the practise of using the sijills extensively for documenting the history of the Islamic institutions in Jerusalem, and most other scholars have subsequently included sijill citations in their publications. But citations of the sijill documents must be used with caution because they are prone to errors, and regrettably some authors deliberately cite erroneous or incomplete sijill references as a way to prevent rivals from finding the specific documents. The Ottoman Islamic law court sijills represent a vast source of as yet untapped information about Jerusalem and they are far and away the most potentially fruitful topic for research into Mamluk Jerusalem.

As an example of what remains to be learned about Mamluk Jerusalem from the Ottoman sijills, Ghu≠shah has come across a number of citations that refer to the location of the various city gates both before and after the rebuilding of the city wall by the Ottomans in the 1530s. Those sijill references, such as the ones to both an old and new Bāb al-Khal|l (Jaffa Gate), seem to demonstrate that the Ottomans did not always build their city wall on top of the derelict Ayyubid-Mamluk walls, but rather in the west and south the Ottomans expanded the area enclosed

---

29For the best presentation of what the sijills have to offer, see the chapter by Khadr Salāmah in Robert Hillenbrand and Sylvia Auld, eds., Ottoman Jerusalem: The Living City (London, forthcoming 2000). The most easily accessible microfilm copy of the sijills is at the University of Jordan.
by their city wall to include some neighborhoods that had built up over the previous centuries outside the earlier derelict walls.32

INSCRIPTIONS
The bulk of the Arabic inscriptions from the Mamluk period were published by Max van Berchem in the 1920s. Only a handful of new inscriptions have been identified since then, notably by Maššur, who included in his M.A. thesis several previously unpublished Mamluk inscriptions in the Islamic Museum on the Haram al-Sharīf in Jerusalem.33 A complete catalogue of the Arabic inscriptions in the Islamic Museum, including a number of previously unknown Mamluk period inscriptions, is in preparation by Khaḍr Salāmah and Robert Schick.

ARCHITECTURE
Little architectural study was done prior to Michael Burgoyne’s Mamluk Jerusalem,34 the fundamentally important work, but one should note the dissertations by Nāṣir,35 the general corpus of Islamic monuments in Jerusalem prepared by Najm and others,36 and studies of the Madrasah al-Ṭashtamarāyih, al-Turbah al-Kilānyih, and the Sabīl of Qāyṭbāy.37 Al-‘Asali’s publications are less studies of architecture than they are documentary histories based on the Ottoman sijills.38

As recent additions to the architectural study of the city, one should note Hawari’s study of the Ayyubid architecture of Jerusalem,39 and Natsheh’s study of

---

34Michael Burgoyne, Mamluk Jerusalem: An Architectural Study (with additional historical research by D. S. Richards) (London, 1987). An Arabic translation has been prepared by Aḥmad al-‘Alamī, but awaits publication.
38Especially Kāmil al-‘Asali, Min Āthārīnā fī Bayt al-Maqdis (Amman, 1982).
39Mahmoud Hawari, “Ayyubid Jerusalem: An Architectural and Archaeological Study” (Ph.D.
sixteenth-century Ottoman public architecture in the city. Al-Anšārī’s studies of some secondary mosques in the Old City from the Mamluk period concentrate more on their recent history. Rizq has compared the monuments in Jerusalem with those that the same patrons built in Cairo.

There are numerous Mamluk buildings in the Old City that are not included in Burgoyne’s study, while the historical documentation provided by Richards from the Ottoman sijills is far from exhaustive. But only a few more Mamluk buildings have been added to the documented corpus of buildings. Al-Dajjānī’s study of the Tomb of David on Mount Zion and Ṭaha’s study of the Golden Gate in part covered the Mamluk period. But more significantly, Abū Rayyā’s study of the Islamic monuments on the Mount of Olives covered much new ground. Abū Rayyā was remarkably successful in combining attestations from Western Christian pilgrims and Arabic sources; that enabled him to determine that the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives was converted from an open structure into an enclosed mosque just prior to 737/1337. He also documented for the first time the Maqām al-Arba‘īn, located in the middle of the Muslim cemetery near the Mazār Salmān on the east side of the Mount of Olives. It may be the same monument as the mausoleum of al-Sittah Zahrah, the wife of the amir Tughān al-‘Uthmānī, the inspector of the two Ḥarams and the governor of Jerusalem in the 840s/1430-1440s.

Another addition to the corpus of Islamic buildings in the city is Ghušah’s study of the Sa’d Quarter, the area between Damascus Gate and Herod’s Gate north of the Via Dolorosa. Ghušah’s book is the first comprehensive study of


41 Fahmī al-Anšārī, Masjid al-Sultān Barquq (Jerusalem, 1994); idem, Masjid al-Shaykh Rihān, Masjid Qalāwūn, Masjid al-Qaymarī (Jerusalem, 1995).


45 Muḥammad Ghūshah, Ḥārat al-Sa‘dīyah fī al-Quds al-‘Uthmānī (Jerusalem, 1999) (a greatly expanded version of his M.A. thesis for the Institute of Islamic Archaeology, al-Quds University, 1998).
one of the residential neighborhoods in the Old City, in which he provides historical and architectural documentation for some forty buildings, most previously unstudied. While most of those buildings date to the Ottoman period, he presented architectural documentation or information derived from the Ottoman *sijills* about the Bāb al-Dāʾîyah gate, removed when the Ottomans rebuilt the walls, the Zāwīyah al-Luʾluʾiyah, endowed in 775/1373, the ḏār of the amir Ṭūgḥān, founded in 864/1459, and the oven and mill of Dāʿūd ibn al-Asyad, endowed in 879/1474.

There is little architectural documentation left to be done for the buildings on the Ḥaram al-Sharīf and the other major public monuments in the Old City, but much remains to be documented elsewhere, such as the little-known northeast area of the Old City, east of Herod’s Gate and north of the Via Dolorosa. A number of Mamluk madrasahs and other buildings attested in historical sources such as Mujir al-Dīn’s history have yet to be identified on the ground, while there are numerous extant buildings with architectural features suggesting a date in the Mamluk period that have not been identified or documented. A thorough examination of the Ottoman *sijills* should provide information to help resolve the numerous outstanding questions of identification.

**Art**

Little about Islamic art of Mamluk Jerusalem has been written, despite the riches of the Islamic Museum on the Ḥaram al-Sharīf, which houses a large collection of Quran manuscripts, lamps, incense burners, and other objects that were endowed to the al-Aqsa Mosque, Dome of the Rock, or other Islamic institutions over the centuries. Beyond Abū Khalaf’s thin study that includes photographs of a mosque lamp from the time of the governor Tankiz, there is little to note. A catalogue of some, but by no means all, of the exquisite Quran manuscripts in the Museum, including a number of Mamluk period ones, is currently in press.

**General History**

Several authors, notably Ghawānumah and ‘Ali, have produced general studies of the Mamluk period. There are also numerous recent general multi-period histories of Jerusalem that include the Mamluk period; al-ʿAsalī’s work on medicine is of...
especial interest. Many others are not worth listing here. Evidence for the first years of Ottoman rule sheds much light on the preceding late Mamluk period; the best study of sixteenth-century Ottoman Jerusalem is the one by Ya‘qūb.

**Education**

Islamic education has been the topic of several studies. The histories of the numerous madrasahs in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, focusing on information derived from the Ottoman sijıls about their administrators and teachers, have generated numerous studies. The information that Mujrīr al-Dīn provided about the madrasahs in Jerusalem has been rehashed more times than is worth citing here, most recently in al-‘Alamī’s thin study.

**People Buried in Jerusalem**

Studies of famous Muslims buried in Jerusalem is a sub-field of its own, with information for the Mamluk period largely derived from Mujrīr al-Dīn. Kāmil al-‘Asalī wrote about each of Jerusalem’s cemeteries and mausolea, while al-Anṣārī studied the Māmillā Cemetery, and collected the names of the people known to be buried there.

**Various**

A number of other studies on specific topics are also worth noting, such as Yahyā’s study of libraries, and Tasan’s study of administration. Jerusalem in

---


Arabic literature during the Crusades has been the subject of two books by ‘Abd al-Mahdī.\(^{58}\) The biography of Kamāl al-Dīn ibn Abī Sharīf at the end of the Mamluk period has been studied in detail by Abū Sanīnah.\(^{59}\)

**Popular Articles**

Occasional brief popular articles about Islamic Jerusalem are published in the Islamic magazines *Hadī al-Islām*, published by Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-al-Shu’ūn wa-al-Muqaddasāt al-Islāmiyyah bi-‘Ammān since 1956; *Hudā al-Islām*, published by Idārat al-Awqāf wa-al-Shu’ūn wa-al-Muqaddasāt al-Islāmiyyah bi-al-Quds since 1982; *al-Isrā’,* published by Dār al-Fatwā wa-al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah fi al-Quds wa-al-Dīyār al-Filașṭīniyyah since 1996, and *Al-Minbar*, published by Dā’īrat al-Awqāf al-Filașṭīniyyah since 1997. Those articles do not warrant separate mention here. But one should also be aware of the popular magazine *Al-Quds al-Sharīf* published between 1984 and 1994. Of particular interest are the many articles that al-‘Asalī published there. Occasional details in those articles are not found in his other publications.\(^{60}\) The publications of the Yawm al-Quds conferences held annually in Amman, Jordan and at al-Najah National University in Nablus are of limited interest.

**Accessibility**

While I have attempted to show the range of current Arab scholarship, tracking down the references I have given is a difficult problem, especially the various unpublished M.A. and Ph.D. dissertations. The numerous interesting publications of the Qism Ihyā’ al-Tūrah al-Islāmiyyah (Department of the Revival of Islamic Heritage) in Abū Dīs,\(^{61}\) regrettably are also very poorly distributed. One needs to be in Jerusalem itself to track the citations down; Fahmī al-Anṣārī’s library in East Jerusalem is the place to start.\(^{62}\)

---


\(^{60}\)A complete list can be found in my *Sites and Monuments of Islamic Jerusalem*.

\(^{61}\)They are the publishers of, for example, the books by Fahmī al-Anṣārī cited earlier.

\(^{62}\)I must extend a special word of thanks and appreciation to Fahmī al-Anṣārī, for his assistance over the years from December 1994 to January 2000, when I was the Islamic Studies Fellow at the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem.