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The Study of Islam within Mamluk Domains

Religion was ubiquitous in the ancient and medieval worlds. It touched nearly everything; some things it saturated. Religion was powerful in China and India, Africa and South America, and certainly in Europe and the Middle East, where people consciously defined themselves in terms of the domains of faith: Christendom and the Abode of Islam. In such a context, nearly everything could have a religious dimension. As a result, scholarship on the Mamluk period (648–923/1250–1517) often touches on religion, and the University of Chicago′s *Chicago On-Line Bibliography of Mamluk Studies* lists nearly five hundred entries under religion alone. That number easily doubles when we add articles on just two important religious figures of the period, Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn Taymīyah; relevant articles on art and architecture, economics, literature, and scholarship could double the number of entries yet again. What is required at the outset, then, is a definition of religion to serve as a guiding and limiting principle for this review:

> Religion is ″an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings.″[1]

As with other human institutions, religion consists of systems of belief, action, and values, where beliefs are generally normative, rituals collective, and values prescriptive. However, religion differs from other cultural systems in that it makes direct reference to interactions with superhuman beings, or ″counter-intuitive agents.″[2] In the following review, then, I will focus primarily on recent studies of religion in the Mamluk age that I believe represent some of the prevalent trends, topics, and problems in this area. Further, it should be noted that in Mamluk domains, religion had three major instantiations: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Since I am not a specialist in either Judaism or Christianity, I have narrowed my scope to the study of Islam, though some references will be made to other faiths when occasions warrant.

Strangely, while the *Cambridge History of Egypt* contains separate chapters on Christian and Jewish communities in medieval Egypt, it does not include a

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[1]Melford E. Spiro, ″Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation,″ in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (London, 1966), 85–126.

[2]Ibid., and see Ilkka Pyysiainen, *How Religion Works* (Leiden, 2001), 9–23.

chapter on Islam in the same period.[3] Naturally, there are competent references to Islam throughout the *History´s* various articles on the Mamluk period,[4] but there is no comparable study of Muslim communities in terms of their religious beliefs and practices. This is a telling statement about the field of Mamluk studies in general. For, as we shall see, there are a number of fine articles and books on particular facets of Islam in the Mamluk period, but I know of no book-length survey in any language on Islam there. Indeed, the source most often cited on this subject is an article written nearly forty years ago by Annemarie Schimmel.

The late Dr. Schimmel is justly renowned for her many erudite works on Islamic mysticism, but one of her early and enduring interests was the Mamluks. In 1943, Schimmel published ″Kalif und Ḳāḍī im spätmittelarterlichen Ägypten″[5] and this would serve as an important source for her broad survey modestly entitled ″Some Glimpses of the Religious Life in Egypt during the Later Mamluk Period.″[6] Schimmel began by describing the largely ceremonial position of the caliphs and their subordination to the Mamluk sultans, who, nevertheless, viewed themselves as protectors of the faith. She then reviewed important religious events, including the Friday prayers at the Citadel, the fast of Ramaḍān and the ʿĪd al-Fiṭr, the annual Hajj and the ʿĪd al-Aḍḥá, and the celebration of the Prophet´s birthday and lesser *mawlid*s of various saints. This leads to her account of Sufism in this period and to brief mention of several institutions, including the *khānqāh* and the *zāwiyah,* and the more prominent Sufi orders. Schimmel noted that Sufi doctrines and practices were at times controversial, as was the case in protracted disputes over the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 637/1240) and Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235). She then concluded with a few brief remarks on astrology, fortune-telling, unlawful taxes, and corrupt judges.

In many respects, Schimmel staked out the areas for later research, and several

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[3]Terry G. Wilfong, ″The Non-Muslim Communities: Christian Communities,″ in *Cambridge History of Egypt,* ed. Carl Petry (Cambridge, 1998), 175–97, and Norman A. Stillman, ″The Non-Muslim Communities: Jewish Communities,″ in *CHE,* 198–210.

[4]E.g., Michael Chamberlain, ″The Crusader Era and the Ayyūbid Dynasty,″ in *CHE,* esp. 231–34; Linda S. Northrup, ″The Baḥrī Mamlūk Sultanate, 1250–1390,″ in *CHE,* esp. 265–71; Jean-Claude Garcin, ″The Regime of the Circassian Mamlūks,″ in *CHE,* esp. 311–13; Jonathan Berkey, ″Culture and Society during the Middle Ages,″ in *CHE,* esp. 401–11.

[5]Annemarie Schimmel, ″Kalif und Ḳāḍī im spätmittelarterlichen Ägypten,″ *Die Welt des Islam* 24 (1942): 1–128.

[6]Annemarie Schimmel, ″Some Glimpses of the Religious Life in Egypt during the Later Mamluk Period,″ *Islamic Studies* 4 (1965): 353–92. For a later German version see her ″Sufismus und Heiligenverehrung im spätmittelalternlichen Ägypten,″ *Festscrift für W. Caskel,* ed. Erich Graf (Leiden, 1968), 274–89. In 1995, Dr. Schimmel mentioned to me that she still hoped to write more on the Mamluks.

of her opinions were standard in Mamluk studies until recent years. This is particularly the case for her characterization of the religious life of the Mamluk military elite:

> The impression that we get from the later sources is that neither the Mamluk Sultans themselves nor the *amirs* who rose from among them had any interest in spiritual things. Only a comparatively small number of them had sufficient knowledge of literary, or at least grammatically correct, Arabic.[7]

However, Schimmel tempered this sweeping judgment, as she went on to relate accounts of pious behavior by Mamluks, their sincere defense of Islam, and their financial support of religious officials and saintly individuals.[8]

That many Mamluks were, in fact, believing Muslims was conclusively shown about twenty years later by Donald P. Little in his influential article ″Religion Under the Mamluks.″[9] Little draws attention to Ibn Khaldūn′s view of the Mamluks as sent by God to save Islam from the infidel Mongols, for, as Ibn Khaldūn noted, the Mamluks ″embrace Islam with the determination of true believers, while retaining their nomadic virtues.″[10] Little argues persuasively that a strong Muslim faith and identity underlie many Mamluk military actions against the Mongols, Crusaders, and Shi'is, as well as the Mamluks′ lavish patronage of mosques, madrasahs, *khānqāh*s, and *zāwiyah*s, and the many religious personnel employed in them. Of special importance to the Mamluks were the holy cities of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem, which they funded generously. Of course, economic and political motives were involved in Mamluk support of Islam and its institutions; *waqf*s supported Mamluks and their families as well as men of religion, and the sultans were not about to cede power to their puppet caliphs. In the vital area of religious law, too, the sultans sought to adjust the system in ways always favorable to their policies and desires.[11] Still, the Mamluks supported the religious establishment as well as wandering mendicants and Sufi shaykhs, but they took care to suppress individuals or groups who posed a threat to civil authority. Such was the case of the Aḥmadīyah-Rifā'īyah dervishes with their outlandish dress and strange behaviors, not to mention their close relationship with the Mongols, archenemies of the Mamluks. Similarly, the Mamluks sought to limit non-Muslim religious practices, especially Christian

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[7]Schimmel, ″Glimpses,″ 356.

[8]Ibid., 356–65, 376–79, 381.

[9]Donald P. Little, ″Religion Under the Mamluks,″ *Muslim World* 73 (1983): 165–81.

[10]Ibid., 165–66.

[11]Ibid., 168–75.

festivals and celebrations that were accompanied by wine, prostitutes, and brawling, while Christian officials in the civil administration were forced to convert to Islam on occasion, though this was by no means a Mamluk policy.[12] By contrast, respected Muslim scholars might also find themselves opposed by the Mamluk ruling elite if their beliefs and/or interests clashed, as happened with Ibn Taymīyah (d. 728/1328), whose vociferous condemnation of other scholars and popular Muslim practices landed him in jail several times.[13] In his assessment of religion under the Mamluks, Little concludes:

> Out of religious conviction and personal piety in some instances but also with an acute sense of their own welfare, the Mamluks strove to keep diverse religious forces in Egypt and Syria in a state of equilibrium. In such circumstances, Islam undeniably flourished.[14]

Whatever their personal proclivities toward Islam, it has long been asserted that politically the Mamluks relied on Islam for their legitimacy to rule. This crucial relationship has been most recently analyzed by Anne Broadbridge in her article ″Mamluk Legitimacy and the Mongols: The Reigns of Baybars and Qalāwūn.″[15] In relation to their subjects, the Mamluks swore to protect and promote Sunni Islam, particularly against their external political rivals, the Ilkhan Mongols. To counter the Chinggis Khanid dynasty and its prestige in terms of lineage and military success, the Mamluk slave dynasty laid claim to defending the faith, enforcing the shariʿah and, especially, to their priority and, hence, superiority in embracing Islam.[16] The issue of legitimacy, however, is but one, albeit major,

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[12]Ibid., 175–80. Also see idem, ″Coptic Conversion to Islam under the Baḥrī Mamlūks, 692–755/1293–1354,″ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39 (1976): 552–69; idem, ″Coptic Converts to Islam During the Baḥrī Mamlūk Period,″ in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries,* ed. Michael Gervers and Ramzi Bikhazi (Toronto, 1990), 263–88; and Linda S. Northrup, ″Muslim-Christian Relations During the Reign of the Mamluk Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn, A.D. 1278–1290,″ in ibid., 253–61.

[13]Little, ″Religion,″ 180–81. Also see idem, ″The Historical and Historiographical Significance of the Detention of Ibn Taymiyya,″ *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (1973): 311–27, and idem, ″Did Ibn Taymiyya Have a Screw Loose?″ *Studia Islamica* 41 (1975): 93–111. For more on Ibn Taymīyah see below.

[14]Little, ″Religion,″ 181.

[15]Anne Broadbridge, ″Mamluk Legitimacy and the Mongols: The Reigns of Baybars and Qalāwūn,″ *Mamlūk Studies Review* 5 (2001): 91–118. Also see Northrup, ″Baḥrī Mamlūk Sultanate,″ 255–56, 269.

[16]Broadbridge, ″Legitimacy,″ 117–18.

strand in the web of relations binding the Mamluks within Islam. In a thoughtful essay, ″The Mamluks as Muslims,″ Jonathan Berkey suggests that we view the Mamluks ″as any social group . . . participating in the dynamic process of constructing and reconstructing Islam.″[17] Far from a static and monolithic tradition, Islam in the Mamluk domains was a complex and malleable faith, whose particular beliefs and rituals were often shaped by Mamluk influence. The Mamluks endowed religious institutions and patronized religious scholars, and they also participated in religious debates and in the transmission of religious knowledge. Though many Mamluks had little interest in religion, and often led lives criticized by the ulama, other Mamluks took an active interest in their adopted faith.

The range, diversity, and complexity of Islam in the early Mamluk period are admirably described and analyzed by Louis Pouzet in his study *Damas au VIIe/XIIIe siècle: vie et structures religieuses d′une métrople islamique.*[18] Pouzet begins his study of religious institutions by examining the four Sunni law schools and some of the scholars and scholarly families that controlled them in thirteenth-century Damascus. While the Shafiʻis were dominant under the Ayyubids, Hanafis gained influence under the early Mamluks, who began to appoint a chief judge for each of the four law schools. Despite their importance, the chief judges of Damascus were now subordinate to those of Cairo, and the Mamluk capital that would dominate their domains. Nevertheless, these and other judges were actively involved in both the religious and political life, and some of them served as official Friday preachers *(khaṭīb),* who swore allegiance first to Ayyubid, then to Mamluk sovereigns. In contrast to such religious officials were the more popular preachers *(wāʻiẓ)* who spread their religious teachings among the masses. Pouzet carefully surveys religious scholarship and teaching in Damascus, with a focus on the madrasah and *zāwiyah*. He describes various teachers and officials who worked in them, with some remarks on the *waqf*s, or religious endowments, that supported them, and he provides a detailed account of their curriculum, which included Quranic studies and recitation, the study of hadith, law, jurisprudence, and theology.[19]

Muslims in Damascus also cultivated the ascetic and mystical life, both individually and collectively. Pouzet refers to several families prominent in Sufism and its orders in the region, members of which held the prestigious office of *mashyakhat al-shuyūkh*. Despite occasional controversies, usually between supporters of Ibn al-ʻArabī and his detractors, such as Ibn Taymīyah, Sufism

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[17]Jonathan Berkey, ″The Mamluks as Muslims: the Military Elite and the Construction of Islam in Medieval Egypt,″ in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Ulrich Haarmann (Cambridge, 1998), 163–73, esp. 173.

[18]Louis Pouzet, *Damas au VIIe/XIIIe siècle* (Beirut, 1988).

[19]Ibid., 11–205.

remained an important element in spiritual lives of many Muslims of the period. Pouzet notes the presence of religious minorities in the area including various Shi'i groups, Christians, and Jews, and he then turns to issues of religion and political power. For both the Ayyubids and Mamluks, unity and the defense of Islam against the Mongols in the east and Christians in the west was paramount. Invasions and threats of invasion were eminent features of politics, religion, and life in general, and these hostilities sometimes made life hard for Christians and Jews living as protected people among the Muslims of Damascus.[20]

In his final chapter, Pouzet broadens his perspective of religious institutions to include religion's roles in the everyday life of Muslims. He reviews the importance of liturgy and prayer, the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, and pilgrimage to shrines, celebrating the Prophet's birthday, and participating in war and jihad. Also essential to daily life were rules and laws regulating personal and public conduct, which were meant to keep Muslims on the straight and narrow and away from temptations to drink and carouse. The interpretations of premonitions and dreams were another essential feature of the faith, as were death and burial, and the collective religious rites and prayers to ameliorate or ward off disasters. In all, Muslim religious life in the thirteenth century continued largely unaffected by the political change that marked the end of the Ayyubids and the rise of the Mamluks. Islam continued to mark the times of day and the seasons, and set the moral and ethical standards of slave and sultan alike.[21]

Pouzet's *Damas au VIIᵉ/XIIIᵉ siècle* is ground-breaking in many respects, as other scholars over the last fifteen years have picked up and developed various subjects and concerns referred to in this insightful work. Among them is Islam's importance to the Mamluk sultans. In his book and elsewhere, Pouzet noted the dealings between Baybars I (d. 676/1277) and the controversial Sufi shaykh Khaḍir al-Mihrānī (d. 676/1277), and this relationship was studied further by P. M. Holt and Peter Thorau.[22] Several studies of other individual sultans and their reigns have also drawn attention to religion in their personal and public lives. Linda Northrup assessed Qalāwūn's (d. 689/1290) building projects, religious opposition to some of them, and the sultan's attempt to influence men of religion via appointments and patronage.[23] In addition, Carl Petry has contrasted Qāytbāy's (d.

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[20]Ibid., 207–338.

[21]Ibid., 339–408.

[22]Ibid., 272, and idem, ″Ḫaḍir Ibn Abī Bakr al-Mihrānī, šayḫ du sultan mamelouk al-Malik aẓ-Ẓāhir Baïbars,″ *Bulletin d'études orientales* 30 (1978): 173–83. Also see P. M. Holt, ″An Early Source on Shaykh Khadir al-Mihrani,″ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 46 (1983): 33–49, and Peter Thorau, *The Lion of Egypt,* trans. P. M. Holt (London, 1992), 225–29.

[23]Linda Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan* (Stuttgart, 1998), 118–25, 230–39.

901/1496) concern for Sunni propriety with al-Ghawrī´s (d. 922/1516) less successful attempts to ″portray himself as the ´Guardian of Sunna.´″[24] One notable way that al-Ghawrī and other Mamluks could publicly proclaimed their piety was in their generous financial support of the annual hajj caravan, particularly those carrying royal wives, though this appears to have backfired for al-Ghawrī´s wife who was as cheap as her husband.[25]

Such royal patronage of religion exerted great influence on the shape and practice of Islam in the Mamluk period, especially in the form of *waqf,* an endowment for ostensibly pious goals. There are numerous studies of the *waqf* documents of this period and of their economic, social, and political importance, including Muḥammad Amīn´s groundbreaking book *Al-Awqāf wa-al-Ḥayāh al-Ijtimāʿīyah fī Miṣr: 648–923/1250–1517.*[26] Amīn dedicated an entire chapter to the religious dimensions of these endowments, especially in their capacity to support religious infrastructure. The *waqf* was essential for financing the construction and maintenance of mosques, madrasahs, *khānqāh*s, and other institutions, for promoting the hajj and jihad, and for supporting the various types of religious personnel necessary for the spread and practice of Sunni Islam.[27] More recently, Adam Sabra has considered the religious importance of *waqf* in the context of his study *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam.*[28]

Sabra begins with a discussion of the ideals and realities of poverty in Mamluk domains, an important issue to jurists particularly regarding who should give alms and who should receive them. In this light, he reviews various social classes among the elite and the common people, who were not always poor. Certain groups, including the chivalrous *futūwah* orders, pledged to aid the poor, while others, such as the morally suspect *ḥarāfīsh,* were actively involved in begging for such aid.[29] Sabra next outlines the religious ideals of asceticism and poverty with a few references to Sufis of the Mamluk period, but relying largely on the work of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) and earlier authorities, who distinguish between material and spiritual poverty, and their effects. For most of these Sufi authors, wealth was a distraction, which could be dispelled by giving alms. By

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[24]Carl F. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians?* (Albany, 1994), 154–58.

[25]Ibid., 158–62. Also see Kathryn Johnson, ″Royal Pilgrims: Mamluk Accounts of the Pilgrimages to Mecca of the Khawand al-Kubrā (Senior Wife of the Sultan),″ *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000): 107–29.

[26]Muḥammad M. Amīn, *Al-Awqāf wa-al-Ḥayāh al-Ijtimāʿīyah fī Miṣr: 648–923/1250–1517* (Cairo: 1980).

[27]Ibid., 178–231. Also see Gary Leiser, ″The *Madrasa* and the Islamization of the Middle East: The Case of Egypt,″ *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 22 (1985): 29–47.

[28]Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge, 2000).

[29]Ibid., 1–17.

contrast, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), Ibn Taymīyah, and other jurists would not equate poverty with piety, claiming that the accumulation of wealth for lawful and pious purposes was a legitimate undertaking. Similarly, the noted Sufi Abū Ḥafṣ al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) held that while spiritual and, at times, material poverty were essential to the mystic path, a Sufi need not be a pauper, and a number of Sufis accepted the support of Mamluk amirs and sultans.[30]

Throughout his study, Sabra seeks to maintain ″the essential distinction between poverty as a form of piety and poverty as a social disability.″[31] It was persons in the latter category who were qualified to receive charity. As for those who gave alms and blessings to the poor, they legitimized their roles as benefactors, who were to receive, in turn, the blessings *(du'ā')* of the recipient and, presumably, heavenly reward. Sabra reviews the opinions of the early Sufis, and al-Ghazzālī in particular, on the etiquette of giving and receiving *zakāh* which, like other forms of charity in the Mamluk period, remained a private affair with little state control.[32] While anyone could give alms, it was the Mamluks who were most often remembered for their substantial almsgiving. They fed the poor during Ramaḍān and on special holidays, and gave charity, freed prisoners, and relieved debtors in hopes of securing God′s favor against personal misfortunes, as well as against plague, war, famine, and other disasters.[33]

Of course, the Mamluks′ most extensive and enduring form of charity was the *waqf,* which the Shafi'i scholar al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) defined in economic and religious terms as ″the alienation of revenue-generating property with the principal remaining inalienable, while its revenues are disbursed for a pious purpose, in order to seek God′s favor.″[34] These endowments served the larger Muslim community by providing a range of essential services, including hospitals and medical care, education, some housing for students, employees, and destitute women, food and water for the poor, and the burial of their dead. Further, at funerals, the Mamluks and other Muslims distributed *kaffārah,* alms for the expiation of sins committed by the deceased.[35] This connection to the dead is essential for understanding the religious significance of the *waqf* and other forms of almsgiving in the Mamluk period. For, while most of these endowments provided revenues to their founders and their direct descendents, they were also believed to yield a spiritual profit. As Sabra notes, many endowment deeds refer to securing reward for the afterlife

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[30]Ibid., 18–31.

[31]Ibid., 35.

[32]Ibid., 35–50.

[33]Ibid., 50–68.

[34]Ibid., 70–71.

[35]Ibid., 73–95.

based on the exchange between the benefactor and the poor, of alms for prayers. Moreover, Mamluk building complexes supported by *waqf*s often contained the graves of the founder and some of his immediate relatives. There, they were to benefit from prayers said on their behalf at the site, which was frequently located near a saint´s tomb or similarly sacred ground.[36]

This spiritual return on alms has been detailed further in my article ″Saving Muslim Souls: the *Khānqāh* and the Sufi Duty in Mamluk Lands.″[37] Based on a study of *waqf* deeds, religious tracts on death and afterlife, and other sources, I discovered that the Mamluk *khānqāh* served primarily as a chantry, where Sufis prayed for their founder´s earthly and heavenly benefit. *Khānqāh* endowment deeds explicitly mandate that the Sufis employed there were to perform a daily communal ritual called *ḥuḍūr*. This ritual included reciting specific prayers and Quranic passages, considered by al-Qurṭubī (d. 681/1273), al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), and other scholars of the period to be the most efficacious for attaining divine favor in this world and the next, and especially helpful for reducing the severity and length of the deceased´s purgatorial punishment in the grave.[38]

This religious dimension of almsgiving underscores the centrality of death within medieval Islam, which has been described by Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Haddad in *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*.[39] Their very useful study, however, is confined largely to matters of theology and doctrine, and so they did not consider the more personal matters of grief and mourning, and religious responses to them. The work of mourning is generally a difficult process through which the living confront the death of a loved one and gradually resolve their grief. The bereaved come to accept their loss as they find consoling substitutes in the memories and idealized images of the dead. Crucial to this process are funerary and mourning rituals, and religious beliefs that assert the continued life of the deceased, albeit in another form and/or realm.[40] The death of a child often

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[36]Ibid., 95–100. Also see Linda S. Northrup, ″Qalāwūn´s Patronage of the Medical Sciences in Thirteenth-Century Egypt,″ *Mamlūk Studies Review* 5 (2001): 119–40.

[37]Th. Emil Homerin, ″Saving Muslim Souls: the *Khānqāh* and the Sufi Duty in Mamluk Lands,″ *Mamlūk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 59–83.

[38]Ibid., 74–83. Also see the study by Ragnar Eklund, *Life Between Death and Resurrection According to Islam* (Uppsala, 1941).

[39]Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Albany, 1981), esp. 1–98, 147–91.

[40]Robert Jay Lifton, *The Broken Connection* (New York, 1983), 3–112. For views of death in classical Islam see Thomas Bauer, ″Todesdiskurse im Islam,″ *Asiatische Studien* 53 (1999): 5–16, and idem, ″Islamische Totenbucher: Entwicklung einer Textgattung im Schatten al-Ġazālīs,″ in *Studies in Arabic and Islam: Proceedings of the 19th Congress: Halle 1998/Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants,* ed. S. Leder et al. (Sterling, VA, 2002).

evokes strong emotions, and this is the subject of ″Child Mortality and Adult Reactions,″ the final section of Avner Gil′adi′s book *Children of Islam*.[41] Based largely on sources from the Mamluk period, Gil′adi observes that Muslim parents regarded their children as a divine gift due, in part, to high rates of child mortality. Not surprisingly, there was a great need for consolation for the many children who died. Juridical and theological works provided hope to bereaved kin by affirming that these children died in innocence, and so dwell in Paradise where they will one day be reunited with their believing parents. Parental grief was also addressed by consolation treatises composed of Quranic citations, hadith, anecdotes, and stories designed to assure the bereaved that they were not alone in their sorrow. As important, the consolation treatises attempt to channel the tumultuous emotions provoked by the death of a loved one into theologically and socially appropriate modes of behavior. Hence, they counsel patience and trust in God, and discourage excessive outbursts of emotion, which might be construed as ingratitude, if not skepticism, regarding the divine promise of immortal life in heaven.[42]

Similarly, elegies from the Mamluk period reveal some of the Muslim doctrines and beliefs invoked to account for the death of loved ones, while affording us the opportunity to witness individual and communal responses to death. This has been my focus in ″A Bird Ascends the Night: Elegy and Immortality in Islam,″ and several other articles written on the elegies composed by the Cairene scholar Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344) for his daughter Nuḍār (d. 730/1329), who died at the age of twenty-seven.[43] Throughout his elegies, Abū Ḥayyān lauds his daughter′s erudition and scholarly accomplishments, her impeccable reputation and saintly life. Making allusions to the Quran and hadith, Abū Ḥayyān envisioned his lost Nuḍār as a martyr to illness who must surely have earned a place in Paradise. In this way Abū Ḥayyān sought consolation in a creative and religious response to his personal tragedy.[44] Such was also the case for the outstanding Mamluk poet Ibn Nubātah (d. 768/1366), who wrote a series of elegies after the death of his young son(s). Thomas Bauer has examined this verse in an insightful article, ″Communication and Emotion: The Case of Ibn Nubātah′s *Kindertotenlieder*,″ where he probes the complex interrelationship between poetic speech and

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[41]Avner Gil′adi, *Children of Islam* (Oxford, 1992), 67–119.

[42]Ibid., 69–100.

[43]Th. Emil Homerin, ″A Bird Ascends the Night: Elegy and Immortality in Islam,″ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59, no. 4 (1991): 247–79, esp. 255–74.

[44]Ibid., and also see Th. Emil Homerin, ″′I′ve Stayed by the Grave′: an Elegy/Nasīb for Nuḍār,″ in *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam,* ed. M. Mir (Princeton, 1993), 107–18, and idem, ″Reflections on Arabic Poetry in the Mamluk Age,″ *Mamlūk Studies Review* 1 (1997): 63–85, esp. 80–85.

overwhelming emotions.[45] Through a close reading of one of Ibn Nubātah′s elegies, Bauer reveals how such poems assist the work of mourning for both the poet and his audience. Specifically, while his son is in heaven above, the poet claims to be in hell below, where he must strive for a dignified patience until they are united again in Paradise. Building on a number of timeless metaphors, including ″life and death are a journey,″ and ″people are plants that must wither and die,″ Ibn Nubātah attempted to make sense of his personal sorrow by viewing death as part of a larger fated cycle. In this way, the poem may offer solace and produce a catharsis, which allow the bereaved to return to public life while reasserting social stability in the face of inevitable death.[46]

Though the problems raised by death are central to all religious traditions, they are by no means religions′ only focus. Regulating life, individually and socially, is also a major task, and within Islam, this was normally undertaken by the ulama. In his foundational study, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages,* Carl Petry concluded that status among the ulama was determined largely by an individual′s competence in Islamic law and literary skills. A qualified scholar might then serve in the Mamluk bureaucracy, the legal system, or in a number of other religious occupations. In terms of religion, the jurists and legal scholars claimed to be guardians of the shari‘ah and *sunnah,* and so came to hold moral authority and influence.[47] Beyond the legal system, members of the ulama might work as readers of religious texts, prayer leaders, preachers, spiritual advisors, and professors and teachers of various religious subjects ranging from the Quran and hadith to law and ritual, theology and mysticism.[48] Generally viewed by medieval Muslim society as the custodians of religious knowledge, the exemplars of normative behavior, and, at times, repositories of spiritual power *(barakah),* the ulama were in a position both to guide the life of the community as well as legitimize the Mamluk dynasty.[49]

Though they were dependent on the Mamluk regime for financial aid and political support, the ulama nevertheless retained considerable independence through their religious and academic networks, and especially through their control of higher education, as noted in separate studies by Michael Chamberlain and

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[45]Thomas Bauer, ″Communication and Emotion: The Case of Ibn Nubātah′s *Kindertotenlieder*,″ *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7 (2003): 49–95.

[46]Ibid., esp. 66–73, 88–95. For some of the many metaphors for death, see George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago, 1989), 1–56.

[47]Carl F. Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1981), esp. 220–41, 312–25.

[48]Ibid., 246–72.

[49]Ibid., 312–25. Also see Ira M. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1967), esp. 107–15, 130–41.

Jonathan Berkey. In *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350,* Chamberlain examines the interactions of the learned elite with the Mamluks. He asserts that the transmission of religious knowledge followed distinctive lines of transmission between teachers and students bound by loyalty and service. Further, in Damascus, the madrasah*s, khānqāh*s, and similar foundations sponsored by the ruling class were not institutions of higher education so much as forms of patronage. ″They were useful to the ruling elite in providing a means of supporting the civilian elites upon whom they depended as a channel of influence into the city, as agents of social control and legitimation, and as religious specialists.″[50]

In *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education,* Jonathan Berkey provides a detailed description of religious education involving Islamic jurisprudence, normally the preserve of the scholarly elite and their students. Like Chamberlain, Berkey notes that a close personal relationship between master and student was at the heart of this system of normative education. Berkey claims that the flexibility within the education system ″resulted from the complete absence of any overarching state or ecclesiastical authority responsible for shaping Islamic education, or indeed any aspect of Islamic religious culture. Norms might be established, in practice as in belief, by consensus within the Muslim community.″[51] Berkey underscores this diversity by noting the difficulties in even defining the term madrasah, the most common historical marker for a school of Islamic jurisprudence. In fact, some madrasahs were not educational institutions at all, while mosques and *khānqāh*s could also sponsor educational endeavors, including the study of law. Moreover, the ulama were generally not bound exclusively to a single institution for their support; some scholars held multiple posts at once and moved from institution to institution. Likewise, scholars participated in teaching circles held outside of their respective institutions, and these gatherings served to extend religious education beyond the realm of jurisprudence and higher education, to a larger body of interested non-academics, including women and Mamluk amirs.[52] As important, most classes and nearly all education, for that matter, took place in a religious setting. Many of the most important educational institutions were part of a madrasah-mosque complex with

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[50]Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, 1994), 90; 69–90, 176–78.

[51]Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, 1992), 1–43, 60. Parts of this section are based on my earlier review of this book in *Mamlūk Studies Review* 1 (1997): 137–39.

[52]Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge,* 44–94. Also see Donald P. Little, ″Notes on Mamluk Madrasahs,″ *Mamlūk Studies Review* 6 (2002): 9–20.

classes and study periods organized around the times for formal daily prayers, and surrounded by other pious and devotional activities such as the public recitation of the Quran or hadith. As Berkey insightfully observes, the transmission of religious texts ″took place alongside, and sometimes as part of Sufi activities, public sermonizing, and popular religious celebration, and those who devoted themselves to education did not necessarily see their efforts as something fundamentally distinct from public worship.″[53]

In his recent book, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East,* Berkey again addresses the transmission of religious knowledge, but by those who were generally outside the small circle of religious professionals. In particular, he studies the many popular preachers and storytellers, and how their activities raised issues of the interrelationship between high and popular cultures, on one hand, and questions of religious authority, on the other.[54] Berkey begins with a discussion of some of the key players involved: the *khaṭīb* was generally a state-appointed religious scholar who delivered the official Friday sermon, while the *wāʿiẓ* (″preacher,″ ″admonisher″) and the *qāṣṣ* (″storyteller″) were often independent and less educated though they, too, called the common people to lead a pious life. As such, this latter group, like the ulama, actively transmitted religious knowledge, but this became a major source of tension. For as Berkey notes, ″the controversy that their activities engendered was in the final analysis about how the common people were to understand Islam.″[55] That much was at stake is clear from the many critiques of the popular preachers written throughout the medieval period by members of the religious establishment, including Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn al-Ḥajj (d. 737/1336), Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1404), and ʿAlī ibn Maymūn al-Idrīsī (d. 917/1511). Though these and other members of the ulama held a variety of theological and legal views, they were united in their stand against unlawful innovation in religion, which they sought to define and articulate in a system of proper Sunni belief and ritual.

Yet this was a daunting task, for the popular preachers and religious storytellers were pervasive in medieval Muslim society, and the common people often adored

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[53]Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge,* 50, 128–81. For more on women and education in the Mamluk period, see Huda Lutfi, ″Al-Sakhāwī′s *Kitāb al-Nisāʾ* as a Source For the Social and Economic History of Muslim Women During the Fifteenth Century A.D.,″ *Muslim World* 71(1981): 104–24, esp. 121, and Jonathan P. Berkey, ″Women and Islamic Education in the Mamluk Period,″ in *Women in Middle Eastern History,* ed. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven, 1991), 143–57.

[54]Jonathan Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle, 2001). Portions of this section previously appeared in my review of this work in *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7 (2003): 246–49.

[55]Berkey, *Popular Preaching*, 21.

them as sources of religious edification and entertainment. Their critics, however, warned of charlatans and fools, who might cheat the people out of their money, while leading them astray. Such imposters and ignoramuses lacked proper education and certification, and so they spread lies, weak hadith, and heresies, while their preaching sessions were thought to encourage the mixing of the sexes and other illicit activities. This was a crucial issue, for popular preaching and storytelling were acceptable, even honorable, activities provided that their practitioners were trained and regulated by the ulama. Indeed, many critics of the popular preachers and storytellers were, themselves, preachers as well as religious scholars. Their sermons were punctuated by Quranic quotations and allusions, traditions of the prophet Muḥammad, and stories of the earlier prophets. Further, two themes central to all preaching were the renunciation of worldly goods and preparation for the Day of Judgment. Berkey reviews these and other themes found in the sermons of popular preachers, and their emotional impact on their audiences. He observes that underlying much of this preaching was Sufism, which was a prominent feature of Islam in the Mamluk period. Poverty and death were major topics of medieval mysticism, which sought to foster the love between God and His servants. But some critics feared that public expressions of pious love would be misconstrued by common folk as blatant eroticism, while the public presentation of mystical teachings could be even more dangerous. In response to such criticism, others defended popular preachers and storytellers as serving a religious service essential to the Muslim community.[56]

Berkey concludes that this debate over popular preachers and storytellers underscores the fact that while the ulama had emerged as the religious authorities of medieval Islam, precisely who qualified for membership in this elite group and on what basis remained somewhat ambiguous.[57] Here, Berkey touches on one of the most vexing problems in the study of Islam in the Mamluk period, namely what constitutes correct religious belief and practice. In a thoughtful article, ″'Orthodoxy′ and ′Heresy′ in Medieval Islam: An Essay in Reassessment,″ Alexander Knysh reviews the use and general misuse of these terms in scholarship on Islam. He pointedly concludes that:

> Eurocentric interpretive categories, when uncritically superimposed on Islamic realities, may produce serious distortions. Thus such distinctly Christian concepts as ″orthodoxy″ and ″heresy″ foster a tendency to disregard the intrinsic pluralism and complexity characteristic of the religious life of the Muslim community, leaving

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[56]Ibid., 36–52.

[57]Ibid., 88–96.

aside significant and sometimes critical ″nuances.″ In order to escape these shortcomings, one should try to let Islamic tradition speak on its own terms, to let it communicate its own concerns, its own ways of articulation and interpretation of religious phenomena.[58]

This observation is particularly relevant for the Mamluk period when, as Chamberlain notes, arguments over correct religious belief were ″one of the premier forms of social combat.″[59] Chamberlain′s evaluation of the situation in Mamluk Damascus is apt for the entire Mamluk period:

> In Damascus, as in many pre-Ottoman Islamic societies, heresy and orthodoxy were problematic categories: there were no state or corporate bodies that promulgated correct doctrine. In Damascus there were partisans of several systems of belief, including shī‘īs, philosophers, ṣūfīs of various kinds, Ḥanbalīs, practitioners of kalām, and even at least one partisan of Ibn al-Rawandī.[60]

Members of the ulama, then, inevitably clashed on matters of doctrine and practice as they sought the right to assert and enforce their truth, with violence, if necessary.[61] Such was the unfortunate case of a Shi‘i legal scholar in Damascus. As Stefan Winter explains in his article ″Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Makkī ′al-Shahīd al-Awwal′ (d. 1384) and the Shi‘ah of Syria,″ Ibn Makkī was declared an extremist and executed in Damascus in 786/1384.[62] Based on this and other cases, Winter determines that while accused heretics could be brought before religious authorities, there were no formal inquisitions organized to root out heresy. In fact, the Mamluk regime did not have a universal policy on the Shi‘ah or Muslim heterodoxy, in general. As Winter notes:

> The Mamluk Sultanate, the Damascene *qāḍī*s, or simply an agitated crowd, *al-‘āmmah,* were liable to declare certain Shi‘is to be intolerable heretics (*rāfiḍī*s). Yet none of them truly followed a consistent policy with regards to Shi‘ism. The Sultanate′s campaigns

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[58]Alexander Knysh, ″′Orthodoxy′ and ′Heresy′ in Medieval Islam: An Essay in Reassessment,″ *Muslim World* 83 (1993): 48–67, esp. 62–63.

[59]Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice,* 167.

[60]Ibid., 167–68.

[61]Ibid., 162–75.

[62]Stefan H. Winter, ″Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Makkī ′al-Shahīd al-Awwal′ (d. 1384) and the Shi‘ah of Syria,″ *Mamlūk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 149–82.

and edicts were directed against certain Shiʻi communities of the province of Tripoli only, not against the Shiʻi faith *per se*.[63]

In addition to the sectarian differences of Sunni and Shiʻi, the ulama were also divided on issues of theology and, especially, law, with the four Sunni *madhhab*s serving as key markers of scholarly identity and organization. Indeed, it was conflicts among these law schools that led the sultan Baybars (d. 676/1277) to establish a chief judgeship for each of them.[64] This range and diversity of Muslim religious belief in the Mamluk period is readily apparent in Alexander Knysh´s recent book *Ibn ʻArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*.[65] Knysh maps controversies involving Ibn al-ʻArabī and his thought throughout the medieval Islamic world, and several chapters focus on events in Mamluk domains. He notes at the outset that while the ulama have been studied extensively in terms of their social power and status, there has been less attention to ″their intellectual concerns, doctrinal disagreements and factional differences.″[66] Following a survey of Ibn al-ʻArabī´s life and thought, and early biographical accounts of him, Knysh proceeds to analyze carefully the polemical tradition that formed against him.

Particularly authoritative for later generations have been numerous writings by the Hanbali jurist and theologian Ibn Taymīyah, who stressed the primacy of the shariʻah over any sort of metaphysical speculation. Ibn Taymīyah zealously opposed anything that he perceived as religious innovation, and he preached jihad against Christians, Shiʻis, and Mongols. But Ibn Taymīyah also felt that Muslim society was under attack from within, especially by beliefs in divine incarnation, mystical union with the divine, and monism. Ibn Taymīyah asserted that such beliefs and doctrines undermine the essential distinction between God and His creation upon which true monotheistic religion was based. Thus he stridently condemned any mystical writings and their authors, whom he believed to be infected by the unity of being, as their teachings blatantly encouraged deviation from God´s truth, which could only be found in the Quran, the *sunnah* of Muḥammad, and codified in the divine law.[67]

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[63]Ibid., 172. Also see Devin J. Stewart, ″Popular Shīʻism in Medieval Egypt: Vestiges of Islamic Sectarian Polemics in Egyptian Arabic,″ *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996): 35–66.

[64]See Joseph H. Escovitz, *The Office of Qâḍî al-Quḍât in Cairo Under the Baḥrî Mamlûks* (Berlin, 1984), 20–28, and Sherman A. Jackson, *Islamic Law and the State* (Leiden, 1996), esp. 49–112. Also see Michael Cook, *Commanding the Right and Forbidding the Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, 2000), esp. 145–64, 348–56, 365–79.

[65]Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ʻArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition* (Albany, 1999).

[66]Ibid., 3.

[67]Ibid., 87–111.

In his attacks, Ibn Taymīyah often reduced abstract and sophisticated mystical doctrines to the grossest pantheism for polemical and rhetorical purposes, yet he made careful distinctions among the monists, revealing a good understanding of their ideas. For instance, Ibn Taymīyah ruled that Ibn al-ʿArabī was not as insistent as some regarding absolute monism, perhaps out of respect for the law and careful attention to the Sufi path. Nevertheless, Ibn Taymīyah denounced Ibn al-ʿArabī′s teachings, especially those found in the latter′s *Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam,* which appeared to pervert God′s literal message. Such allegorical exegesis by Ibn al-ʿArabī and others posed a grave danger to religion and society.[68] Further, their malignant doctrines had been spread in elegant forms such as Ibn al-Fāriḍ′s verse, and so their debilitating effects upon the Muslim community were devastating.[69] Any claims to sainthood on behalf of such heretics, Ibn Taymīyah condemned as an absurd mockery of the religious law that was so necessary for proper communal life. As a result, compromise or accommodation was impossible, and Ibn Taymīyah declared that refutation of the monists was comparable to holy war against the Mongols.[70]

Ibn Taymīyah′s refutations became the foundation for later polemics and public controversies that periodically arose in Mamluk domains. However, Ibn al-ʿArabī had many supporters among the ulama and the ruling class. As Knysh observes, acceptance or rejection of Ibn al-ʿArabī′s ideas was often decided by temporal, not religious authorities. Moreover moderate scholars, including al-Suyūṭī, argued that statements made by Ibn al-ʿArabī and other saints of God could be reconciled with the Quran and shariʿah via allegorical interpretations. Therefore, Muslims should venerate them, not declare them infidels, though their difficult and obscure writings should be restricted to qualified scholars of religion.[71] What emerges from a study of the Ibn al-ʿArabī controversy is the fact that people on both sides of the dispute cut across the various classes and divisions of the ulama. Therefore, the debates and participants involved should not be reduced to static polarities like orthodoxy vs. heterodoxy or legists vs. mystics, which mask the ambiguity and ambivalence at the heart of the matter. Further, such controversies conclusively

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[68]Regarding Ibn Taymīyah′s position on Quranic exegesis in general see Norman Calder, ″Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,″ in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London, 1993), 101–40, esp. 125, 130–33.

[69]Also see Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taymīyah′s Struggle Against Popular Religion* (The Hague, 1976), esp. 24–46, and Abdul Haq Ansari, ″Ibn Taymīyah′s Criticism of Sufism,″ *Islam and the Modern Age* (August 1984): 147–56.

[70]Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi,* 50, 62, 96–99. Also see Th. Emil Homerin, ″Sufis & Their Detractors in Mamluk Egypt: A Survey of Protagonists and Institutional Settings,″ in *Islamic Mysticism Contested,* ed. F. De Jong and B. Radtke (Leiden, 1999), 225–47, esp. 231–35.

[71]Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi,* 113–40; 201–23.

show that for Islam in the Mamluk domains, beliefs and doctrine mattered. As Knysh concludes:

> Like other contested theological issues, Ibn al-'Arabī´s legacy served as a convenient rallying point for various religio-political factions vying for power and supremacy. While no universal *ijmā'* has ever been reached on the problem of Ibn al-'Arabī´s belief/unbelief, local campaigns to either vindicate or condemn him show that a relatively effective machinery was created by the *'ulamā'* for defining and formulating an authoritative position on a given doctrinal issue.[72]

Finally, it should be stressed that nearly all of the antagonists and protagonists in the Ibn al-'Arabī debate accepted and practiced Sufism in various degrees and forms. In ″Sufis & Their Detractors in Mamluk Egypt: A Survey of Protagonists and Institutional Settings,″ I attempt to gauge the place of mystical beliefs and practice in the Mamluk period. As was the case with Ibn al-'Arabī, particular Sufis and their beliefs might be the target of censure, but many other aspects of Sufism were acceptable to most Muslims. The ulama were not polarized between mystics and non-mystics so much as they exhibited a range of opinion regarding mystical experiences and practice, their content and value, relative to other types of authoritative sources. Even Ibn Taymīyah accepted Sufism provided it was grounded in the literal message of the Quran and the prophetic *sunnah.*[73] Perhaps more telling was the fact that the conservative Maliki scholar Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) enumerated Sufism as one of ″the legitimate sciences that originated in Islam″ *(min al-'ulūm al-shar'īyah al-ḥadīthah fī al-millah)*. Elites and commoners alike sought the blessings of saintly shaykhs, and Sufi ceremonies were regularly attended by Muslims of all social classes. In fact, *ṣūfī* was a legitimate occupational category in *waqf* deeds. Not surprisingly, jurists and others criticized those who used the Sufi profession as a means to accrue large sums of money. Yet such behavior was inappropriate to any religious office, and this was not a critique of Sufis in particular, but of the ″ulama″ class, in general.[74]

Clearly, mysticism was a vital part of Islam in the Mamluk age, and this has been the focus of fruitful study for several decades. French scholars, including

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[72]Ibid., 273–74.

[73]Also see Th. Emil Homerin, ″Ibn Taymīyah´s *al-Ṣūfīyah w-al-fuqarā*',″ *Arabica* 32 (1985): 219–44.

[74]Homerin, ″Sufis & Their Detractors,″ 225–47.

Paul Nwyia,[75] Jean-Claude Garcin,[76] and Denis Gril,[77] have been quite active in the field, producing a number of fine articles and monographs, while Victor Danner[78] and Elmer Douglas[79] have contributed translations and studies of important Sufi texts from the period. Many of these and other specialized studies inform the best current introduction to the topic, *Le Soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie* by Éric Geoffroy. Though Geoffroy′s ostensible focus is the later Mamluk and early Ottoman periods, this encyclopedic work covers much of the Mamluk centuries. He begins by situating Sufism within its larger social, political, and religious contexts, and he pays particular attention to the importance of the prophetic model and notions of saintliness in shaping Sufi traditions.[80] Geoffroy examines the important roles played by scholar-Sufis, charlatan Sufis, and the shaykhs and Sufis of the *zāwiyah*s and *khānqāh*s. He finds the *zāwiyah* to have been especially important for the teaching and training of Sufis, while he regards the *khānqāh* as a more impersonal semi-political institution.[81] I have touched on the *khānqāh*′s particular religious function above, and as Geoffroy notes, these institutions have received considerable scholarly attention. Leonor Fernandes and Doris Behrens-Abouseif have published a number of insightful studies on these institutions in terms of their architecture and social, economic, and religious roles, and to their work should be added more recent publications by Donald Little and ʿĀṣim Muḥammad Rizq.[82]

Geoffroy next reviews forms of affiliation among various Sufi paths and their major representatives in Syria and Egypt, with a comparison to those of other regions, and their mutual influences.[83] This is followed by an analysis of several prominent Sufi types including the ascetic, the practicing scholar, the inspired

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[75]E.g., Paul Nwyia, *Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh et la naissance de la confrérie sadilite* (Beirut, 1972).

[76]E.g., Jean-Claude Garcin, *Un centre musulman de Haute Égypte médiévale, Qūṣ* (Cairo, 1976), and a collection of his essays, *Espaces, pouvoirs, et idéologies de l′Égypte médiévale* (London, 1987).

[77]E.g., Denis Gril, ″Une source inedite pour l′histoire du *tasawwuf* en Égypte au VIIe/XIIe siècle,″ in *Livre du Centenaire de l′IFAO* (Cairo, 1980), 441–58, and idem, *La Risāla de Ṣafī al-Dīn Ibn Abī al-Manṣūr Ibn Ẓāfir* (Cairo, 1986).

[78]Victor Danner, tr., *Ibn ʿAtāʾllah′s Spiritual Aphorisms* (Leiden, 1973); idem, *Ibn ʿAtāʾllah: The Book of Wisdom* (New York, 1978).

[79]Elmer H. Douglas, tr., *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili* (Albany, 1993).

[80]Éric Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie* (Damascus, 1995), 1–144. A more recent introduction to the subject, *Al-Taṣawwuf wa-al-Ḥayāh al-Dīnīyah fī Miṣr al-Mamlūkīyah* (Cairo, 2002) by Aḥmad Manṣūr, is an anti-Sufi polemic of no scholarly value.

[81]Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 145–87.

[82]See Homerin, ″Souls,″ for an extensive bibliography on this topic, and ʿĀṣim Muḥammad Rizq, *Khānqāwāt al-Ṣūfīyah fī Miṣr* (Cairo, 1997).

[83]Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme,* 189–281.

illiterate shaykh, the accomplished master, the mad mystic, and finally, the *malāmatī* or blame-seeker.[84] Unfortunately, on this latter topic, Geoffroy did not have access to the fine study by Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God´s Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1500.*[85] Karamustafa argues that the radical renunciation and social deviance that characterize these individuals resulted largely from their belief that Muslim society was an obstacle to salvation in the world to come. These antinomian mendicants similarly rebelled against the more established Sufi orders and institutions, which they regarded as unacceptable compromises with worldly life.[86]

Geoffroy goes on to survey some of the doctrinal debates of the period, including those on permissible forms of *dhikr* and *samā'*, the belief/disbelief issues regarding Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Ibn al-'Arabī and monism, and the value of mystical inspiration.[87] As Geoffroy makes clear, in the face of such controversies, the various lines of Sufi initiation among the ulama were crucial to harmonizing mystical inspiration and practice with social propriety and law. Further, due to the support of Qāytbāy and, subsequently, the Ottoman sultan Selim I, Ibn al-'Arabī and his doctrine gained wider acceptance. Geoffroy argues convincingly that during the Mamluk period, Sufism´s success stemmed, in part, from its flexibility in adapting to a plurality of conditions and needs, from those of the religious elite to those of illiterate peasants. As such, Sufism proved to be a fundamental and dynamic part of medieval Muslim life, socially, culturally, and, above all, religiously.[88]

In his concluding remarks, Geoffroy draws attention to the work of Boaz Shoshan regarding the place and popularity of Sufism in medieval Egypt. Shoshan takes up this and other themes in his book *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo.*[89] He highlights the importance of the Sufi orders to congregational life and calls attention to the sermons of popular Sufi shaykhs. Shoshan examines in some detail the sermons of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh (d. 709/1309), the celebrated Shādhilī Sufi master, who preached that faith and repentance were the foundation of religious life. Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh warned his audiences against Satan and sins, and urged them to perform regularly their prayers and other required religious duties, and to visit the tombs of the saints. Shoshan then draws attention to the close relationship

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[84]Ibid., 283–360.

[85]Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God´s Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1500* (Salt Lake City, 1994), esp. 25–56.

[86]Ibid., 17–23, 97–102.

[87]Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme,* 361–503.

[88]Ibid., 505–10.

[89]Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge, 1993).

between religion and magic, and he cites several cases of con-men and charlatans, followed by Ibn Taymīyah′s condemnation of these frauds and their supporters.[90]

The popularity of magic at this time is further suggested by the work of Ibn Taymīyah′s student, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah (d. 751/1349). Ibn Qayyim wrote an extensive refutation of beliefs in astrology, augury, and alchemy, which John W. Livingston has reviewed in his article ″Science and the Occult in the Thinking of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.″ Livingston suggests that the occult was a refuge for many Muslims in the Mamluk period as they faced war, plague, famine, earthquakes, and other disasters that appeared to harbinger the Judgment Day. However, Ibn Qayyim and other members of the ulama denounced occult practices as sinful for they reduced God′s undivided omnipotence to the flight of birds and moving stars. Significantly, Ibn Qayyim marshaled evidence that such practices were not only morally wrong, but scientifically implausible, and so they should be avoided. [91]

If the occult might relieve stress regarding the future, religious festivals could temporarily ease the burdens of the present, as Shoshan notes in his study of the Nawrūz celebration in Cairo. A popular spring festival, Nawrūz originated in pre-Islamic Iran, but it became associated with the prophet Abraham and spread to Egypt, where it was celebrated for centuries, including in the Mamluk period. Analyzing this holiday in terms of medieval European carnival, Shoshan notes that Nawrūz encouraged uninhibited, even wanton celebration, along with the reversal of social status. In this way Nawrūz may have eased social tensions among the populace, particularly among Cairo′s lower classes.[92] More popular still than Nawrūz was the *Mawlid al-Nabī,* the birthday of the prophet Muḥammad, which has been studied by N. J. G. Kaptein in *Muḥammad′s Birthday Festival*. While the main focus of this book is the *Mawlid al-Nabī* in North Africa, Kaptein provides a translation of a *fatwá* by al-Suyūṭī regarding the permissibility of celebrating the event. In his legal opinion, al-Suyūṭī examined the celebration in the context of religious innovation in general, and while conceding that the celebration was an innovation, he declared it to be a praiseworthy one, which brings heavenly reward to its participants. Significantly, Kaptein notes that al-Suyūṭī attributed the origins of the celebration to the thirteenth-century Ayyubid ruler Muẓaffar al-Dīn Kökbürü, thereby ignoring earlier Fatimid celebrations of the Prophet′s birthday, perhaps in an attempt to provide Sunni respectability to the *Mawlid.* [93]

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[90]Ibid., 9–22.

[91]John W. Livingston, ″Science and the Occult in the Thinking of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya,″ *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112 (1992): 598–610.

[92]Shoshan, *Popular Culture,* 40–51.

[93]N. J. G. Kaptein, *Muḥammad′s Birthday Festival: Early History in the Central Muslim Lands*

Although al-Suyūṭī gave few details about actual celebrations, he did note that it was common for stories of the Prophet′s life and miracles to be recited on this occasion. This aspect of the Mamluk *Mawlid* has been discussed recently by Fāris Aḥmad al-ʿAlāwī in his book *ʿĀʾishah al-Bāʿūnīyah al-Dimashqīyah*. ʿĀʾishah al-Bāʿūnīyah (d. 922/1516) was a noted scholar and poet who composed a number of works praising Muḥammad, including her *Al-Mawrid al-Ahná fī al-Mawlid al-Asná*, and her *badīʿīyah* poem, popularly known as *Al-Fatḥ al-Mubīn fī Madḥ al-Amīn.* As an introduction to his new editions of both poems, al-ʿAlāwī provides a useful survey of the history of celebrating the Prophet′s birthday, and an overview of the *mawlid al-nabī* genre of prose and poetry.[94] Among this poetry, Muḥammad al-Būṣīrī′s (d. ca. 694/1294) *Burdah,* recently studied and translated by Stefan Sperl,[95] has a special place as the most celebrated poem ever composed in Arabic. Al-Būṣīrī′s *Burdah* and other poems praising the Prophet draw attention to the devotional spirit that was pronounced in the Mamluk period, and here, again, poetry helps to gauge Muslim religious concerns. Arabic religious poetry from the Mamluk period ranges from the refined verse of professional poets to the vernacular prayers of pilgrims. At times this verse reveals an ascetic spirit reflecting life′s vicissitudes and the human condition, as noted earlier in elegiac poetry. In such circumstances, some poems counsel pious circumspection and an acute awareness of one′s shortcomings, while others are urgent prayers seeking God′s intercession in troubled times, such as during an outbreak of plague, which evoked these verses from the Cairene judge Ibn al-Tansī (d. 853/1449):

> O God of creation, how great are my sins.
>   Have mercy, for You alone can forgive.
>   O my Lord, help a wretched servant
>   who kneels before the door of Your high home.[96]

Further, much of this religious verse has a homiletic character and often revolves around the mystical themes of love and union with God and, of course, devotion to the prophet Muḥammad.

As God′s final prophet, Muḥammad is universally regarded by Muslims as

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and Development in the Muslim West until the 10th/16th Century (Leiden, 1993), 44–75.

[94]Fāris Aḥmad al-ʿAlāwī, *ʿĀʾishah al-Bāʿūnīyah al-Dimashqīyah* (Damascus, 1994), 63–94. Also see Th. Emil Homerin, ″Living Love: The Mystical Writings of ʿĀʾishah al-Bāʿūnīyah,″ *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7 (2003): 211–34, and my review of al-ʿAlāwī in *MSR* 6 (2002): 191–93.

[95]Stefan Sperl, ″Qasida 50,″ in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa,* ed. S. Sperl and C. Shackle (Leiden, 1996), 2:388–411, 470–76.

[96]Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah* (Cairo, 1963), 15:539, quoted in Th. Emil Homerin, ″Arabic Religious Poetry: 1200–1800,″ in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: The Post-*

″the best of creation,″ and his tomb in Medina attained a sanctity at times rivaling that of Mecca, as Shaun Marmon describes in her study *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society.* Baybars, the first Mamluk sultan, rebuilt the sanctuary surrounding the tomb after it had been destroyed in a fire, and thereby set a precedent for later sultans, who would continue to support the holy site. Guarding this sacred space were ″the eunuchs of the Prophet″ praised for their piety and their ability to control the powerful forces present there. These liminal figures protected the sanctity of the shrine, guarding its boundaries from violations by visitors.[97] Akin to the holy Prophet were his spiritual heirs, the pious saints, and pilgrimage to their shrines was another marked feature of religion in the Mamluk period.

Over the last twenty years, the study of saints and sainthood in Islam has been an area of active interest, reflecting a prominent trend in the study of religion in general. Two works on Christian saints have been particularly influential in the field. In *Saints and Society,* Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell examined saints′ lives for what they may reveal about notions of individual growth and change, the importance of the family to the practice of religion, and the changing configurations of piety and sanctity in the late Middle Ages.[98] Peter Brown, in his *Cult of the Saints,* demonstrated that far from a ″superstition,″ Christian saint veneration was practiced by all social classes for it:

> . . . enabled the Christian communities, by projecting a structure of clearly defined relationships onto the unseen world, to ask questions about the quality of relationships in their own society . . . It was a form of piety exquisitely adapted to enable late-antique men to articulate and render manageable urgent, muffled debates on the nature and power of their own world, and to examine in the searching light of ideal relationships with ideal figures, the relation between power, mercy, and justice as practiced around them.[99]

In addition, several works in the 1980s undertook the comparative study of sainthood with contributions on Muslim saints, as scholars of Islam approached the subject with new interest.[100]

Classical Period, ed. R. Allen and D. Richards (Cambridge, forthcoming).

[97]Shaun Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. 51–92.

[98]Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society* (Chicago, 1982).

[99]Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago, 1981), 63.

[100]William Brinner, ″Prophet and Saint: The Two Exemplars,″ in *Saints and Virtues,* ed. John

As for saints in the Mamluk period, groundbreaking work was done by Jean-Claude Garcin, who studied relations between popular saints and Mamluk amirs, as well as the various types of Sufi saints and their miracles, particularly in the context of the needs of the rural masses.[101] Also of importance has been the pioneering work on saints, shrines, and pilgrimage by Ernest Bannerth, Suʿād Māhir, and Yūsuf Rāghib.[102] Their efforts have served as foundations for more recent contributions to the study of saints and sainthood in Mamluk domains. For instance, *Saints orientaux,* edited by Denise Aigle, features articles by Éric Geoffroy on the hagiography *(adab al-manāqib)* and typology of saints from the Mamluk period, by Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen on a group of rural Sufi saints associated with al-Sayyid al-Badawī (d. 675/1276), and by Denis Gril on the importance of miracles *(karāmāt)* as evidence for Sufism´s prophetic heritage.[103] Miracles are the subject of a second volume edited by Aigle, *Miracle et karāma,* which contains further engaging articles, which occasionally touch on the Mamluk period. Geoffroy reviews the ambiguous position of some Sufis regarding evident and hidden miracles. While a saint might reveal a miracle to help others or defend against her/his detractors, s/he should take care to conceal them on other occasions so as not to become an object of excessive veneration by others.[104] Mayeur-Jaouen also provides a lively discussion of the relationships between animals, miracles, and Muslim

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Stratton Hawley (Berkeley, 1987), 36–51; Lamin Sanneh, ″Saints and Virtues in African Islam,″ in ibid., 144–67; Frederick M. Denny, ″God´s Friends: the Sanctity of Persons in Islam,″ in *Sainthood,* ed. Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond (Berkeley, 1988), 69–97; and more recently, Josef W. Meri, ″The Etiquette of Devotion in the Islamic Cult of the Saints,″ in *The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages,* ed. J. Howard-Johnson and P. A. Howard (Oxford, 1999), 263–86. Also see Richard Gramlich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes* (Wiesbaden, 1987); Michael Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des Saints* ([Paris], 1986); *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam,* ed. Grace Martin Smith and Carl W. Ernst (Istanbul, 1993); and Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint* (Austin, 1998).

[101]Jean-Claude Garcin, ″Deux Saints populaires du Caire au debut XVIe siècle,″ *Bulletin d´études orientales* 29 (1977): 131–43, and idem, ″Historie et hagiographie de l´Égypte musulmane à la fin de l´epoque mamelouke et au debut de l´epoque ottomane,″ *Hommages à la mémoire de Serge Sauneron* (Cairo, 1979), 287–316.

[102]Ernest Bannerth, *Islamische Wallfahrtsstätten Kairos* (Wiesbaden, 1973); Suʿād Māhir, *Masājid Miṣr wa-Awliyāʾuhā al-Ṣāliḥūn* (Cairo, 1976); Yūsuf Rāghib, ″Essai d´inventaire chronologiques des guides à l´usage des pèlerins du Caire,″ *Review des études islamiques* 41 (1973): 259–80; and idem, ″Al-Sayyida Nafīsa, sa légende, son culte et son cimetière,″ *Studia Islamica* 44 (1976): 61–86.

[103]Éric Geoffroy, ″Hagiograpie et typologie spirituelle,″ in *Saints orientaux,* ed. Denise Aigle (Paris, 1995), 83–98; Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, ″Les Compagnons de la Terrasse, un groupe de soufis ruraux dans l´Égypte mamelouke,″ in ibid., 169–80; and Denis Gril, ″Le miracle en islam, critière de la sainteté?″ in ibid., 69–81.

[104]Éric Geoffroy, ″Les Mystiques musulmans face au miracle,″ in *Miracle et karama,* ed. Denise

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saints with several examples from the Mamluk period.[105]

Concern with hagiography, miracles, and intercession is also apparent in *Le Saint et son milieu,* edited by Rachida Chih and Denis Gril. This volume contains important articles by Éric Geoffroy and Richard McGregor on sainthood among the Shādhilī Sufis.[106] As McGregor notes, some Shādhilīs believed in multiple levels of sainthood *(walāyah),* ranging from that found in every believer to the higher levels of accomplished Sufi saints whose mystical inspiration continued Muḥammad′s prophetic legacy.[107] Denis Gril compares the lives of two saints, ʿAbd Allāh al-Minūfī (d. 749/1348), a scholar in Cairo, and Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Farghal (ninth/fifteenth c.), an illiterate peasant from a village in Upper Egypt. Gril notes that both are portrayed as possessing the same interior gnosis, proven by their ability to perform miracles, though al-Minūfī, unlike al-Farghal, attempted to hide his miracles. Again, like the prophet Muḥammad, both saints served their fellow human beings. Moreover, the two saints, and the different accounts written on them, present two prominent and contrasting models of sainthood in medieval Egypt: the saintly scholar and the illiterate saint. The latter was particularly important for those in the rural areas in need of a patron saint and a place for pilgrimage in order to share in the prophetic legacy embodied in all saints.[108] Finally, Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen examines saintly ideals in light of practical realities, in her study of shaykhs in the lineage of Ibrāhīm al-Matbūlī (d. 880/1475) at the end of the Mamluk and beginning of the Ottoman eras. She finds that there was always a need to strike a balance between the concrete realities involved with supporting a *zāwiyah,* and the requirements of maintaining religious comportment *(waraʿ).* This need was especially acute when shaykhs interacted with their Mamluk and Ottoman benefactors, whether at banquets and similar occasions, when receiving their gifts, or when seeking favors on behalf of the

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Aigle (Turnhout, 2000), 301–16.

[105]Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, ″Miracles des saints musulmans et regne animal,″ in *Miracle et karāma,* 577–606.

[106]Éric Geoffroy, ″L′Élection divine de Muḥammad et ʿAlī Wafā' (VIIIe/XIVe s.) ou comment la branche wafā'ī s′est détachée de l′arbre *šāḏilī,*″ in *Le Saint et son milieu,* ed. Rachida Chih and Denis Gril (Cairo, 2000), 51–60.

[107]Richard J. A. McGregor, ″The Concept of Sainthood According to Ibn Bāḫila: A Šāḏilī Shaykh of the 8th/14th Century,″ in *Le Saint et son milieu,* 33–50. Also see idem, ″New Sources for the Study of Sufism in Mamlūk Egypt,″ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65 (2002): 300–22, and his ″Being and Knowing According to an 8th/14th Century Cairene Mystic,″ *Annales islamologiques* 36 (2002): 177–96.

[108]Denis Gril, ″Saint des villes et saint des champs: étude comparée de deux vies de saints d′époque mamelouke,″ in *Le Saint et son milieu,* 61–82.

peasants, who depended on the shaykhs for intercession with both God and the ruling elite.[109]

Mayeur-Jaouen has also carried out extensive research on Egypt's greatest saint, Aḥmad al-Badawī. In her book *Al-Sayyid al-Badawī, un grand saint de l'islam égyptien,* Mayeur-Jaouen describes the saint's fortunes over the centuries until today. Of relevance to the Mamluk period is her study of al-Badawī's life and miracles, and the evolving construction of his saintly reputation and shrine in Ṭanṭā. Significantly, she finds that much of the saint's life and legend has been patterned on Muḥammad's life story, demonstrating, once again, the centrality of the prophetic paradigm in Muslim thought and culture. Mayeur-Jaouen offers further proof that the miracles associated with al-Badawī, including defending the oppressed and helping the poor, reflect the concerns and tensions of Egyptian rural society in the Mamluk period. Similar miracles are attributed to al-Badawī's successors whose village origins are underscored by the fact that many of them were not religious scholars or, in some cases, even literate. Mayeur-Jaouen also surveys some of the major doctrines and practices of the Aḥmadīyah order representing al-Badawī's saintly lineage.[110]

Another famous rural saint of Egypt, Ibrāhīm al-Dasūqī (d. 696/1296), has been studied by Helena Hallenberg. She contrasts al-Dasūqī with his contemporary al-Badawī, suggesting that al-Dasūqī's cult was less developed. She goes on to discuss possible economic motives for al-Dasūqī's cult, and examines the early shrine and its endowment by the sultan Qāytbāy.[111] Hallenberg presents an extensive examination of the cult and mystical teachings ascribed to al-Dasūqī, and speculates on possible pre-Islamic elements within al-Dasūqī's legend and cult. Hallenberg notes that the ancient Egyptian deity previously worshiped in the area was Horus, known as ″He of the two eyes,″ and there is an obvious resonance here with al-Dasūqī's title ″He of the two eyes.″ She also notes that the light imagery and notions of the god-man as an axis mundi involved with al-Dasūqī also had earlier manifestations in ancient Egypt, as did al-Dasūqī's miracle involving a crocodile, and too, the date for al-Dasūqī's *mawlid.*[112]

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[109]Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, ″Le Cheikh scrupuleux et l'émir généreux à travers les *Akhlāq matbūliyya* de Šaʿrānī,″ in *Le Saint et son milieu,* 83–115. For a discussion of various opinions on intercession *(al-shafāʿah)* in general, see Shaun E. Marmon, ″The Quality of Mercy: Intercession in Mamluk Society,″ *Studia Islamica* 87 (1998): 125–39.

[110]Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, *Al-Sayyid al-Badawī, un grand saint de l'islam égyptien* (Cairo, 1994), esp. 161–506.

[111]Helena Hallenberg, ″The Sultan Who Loved Sufis: How Qāytbāy Endowed a Shrine Complex in Dasūq,″ *Mamlūk Studies Review* 4 (2000): 147–66.

[112]Helena Hallenberg, ″Ibrāhīm al-Dasūqī (1255–96): A Saint Invented,″ Ph.D. diss., University of Helsinki, 1997.

In contrast to these rural traditions is my study of an important saint of medieval Cairo. In *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn al-Fāriḍ, His Verse, and His Shrine,* I offer a case study of saint and shrine formation, most of which occurred in the Mamluk period. This renowned Arab poet was regarded as a saint soon after his death, due in large part to what many believed to be the inspired nature of his religious verse. A reverential grandson then composed a hagiography on the poet, which became the basis for much of Ibn al-Fāriḍ′s saintly reputation. However, as we have seen, Ibn al-Fāriḍ and his verse were part of the Ibn al-'Arabī/monism controversies that divided the ulama on several occasions, underscoring the fact that Ibn al-Fāriḍ and his verse were enmeshed in a complex web of competing modes of authority and interpretation. Yet due in large part to the beauty of his verse, and to Mamluk patronage, Ibn al-Fāriḍ and his poetry remained an accepted part of Muslim religion and society in the Mamluk era.[113]

While such studies chart a single saint′s fortunes in the Mamluk period, several recent works take a broader view of the subject. Richard J. A. McGregor, in his *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt,* focuses on Sufi conceptions of sanctity within Islamic mystical theology, primarily through a careful study of the writings of Muḥammad Wafā' (d. 765/1363) and his son 'Alī (d. 807/1405), founders of Cairo′s Wafā'īyah Sufi order. In general, many Muslims of the Mamluk period believed that Muslim ascetics and mystics had attained sanctity. These saints had been annihilated mystically into God yet, due to His grace, they were allowed to abide in this world below as guides to others. These holy men and women, then, form a bridge *(barzakh)* between humanity and God. As spiritual heirs to the prophet Muḥammad, each saint shares in the Muḥammadan Reality, reflecting a portion of Muḥammad′s primordial light. Further, Muḥammad al-Wafā' and 'Alī al-Wafā', following al-Tirmidhī and Ibn al-'Arabī, formulated a doctrine of a seal of the saints who would culminate the cycles of sainthood and presage the end of time and the coming of the Judgment Day.[114]

McGregor′s study gives us a fascinating view of some of the religious beliefs and doctrines circulating during the Mamluk period, particularly regarding the seal of the saints and the apocalypse. By contrast Christopher Taylor′s book *In the Vicinity of the Righteous* maps the sacred geography of Cairo, arguably the center of the Islamic world at that time. He demonstrates a firm grasp of the archeological and textual evidence, and pays particular attention to the often neglected pilgrimage

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[113]Th. Emil Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint* (Columbia, 1994, rev. 2nd ed., Cairo, 2001), esp. 1–75. Also see idem, *'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ: Sufi Verse, Saintly Life* (New York, 2001), esp. 295–335.

[114]Richard J. A. McGregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: The Wafā' Sufi Order and the Legacy of Ibn 'Arabī* (Albany, 2004). Also see my review of this book in this issue of *Mamlūk Studies Review*.

guides. Using these guides and their hagiographic content, Taylor discusses the sacred geography of Cairo, the divine blessings emanating from the tombs of holy persons, and the etiquette of pilgrimage *(ziyārah)* to their shrines.[115] Taylor then probes models of exemplary religious life, which include controlling one´s desire, poverty and the absence of material need, generosity, honesty, and similar exemplary traits that might help others lead better lives and attain heavenly reward.[116] He also reviews several types of miracles and other forms of saintly mediation, and their dynamic functions.[117] Taylor then examines the long-standing debate between Muslims, including Ibn Taymīyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, who have held saint cults to be a pernicious form of idolatry, and the larger Muslim majority who have believed that the saints are God´s special friends whose prayers are answered on behalf of believers.[118] Taylor concludes that the saints and their cults played vital roles within medieval Islam in general, and in Mamluk Cairo in particular, as they combined ″unifying elements of universal significance with considerable diversity in local expression.″[119]

In many respects, Taylor´s study is complemented by Josef Meri´s recent book, *The Cult of the Saints Among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria*. Meri has drawn on many of the sources mentioned above for this fine book, which can serve as both an introduction to medieval Muslim (and Jewish) veneration of holy persons, appropriate to a general audience, and a scholarly study of the subject in Mamluk Syria. Meri begins by describing the spiritual topography of the region and the importance of scripture and religious writings for identifying sacred sites. Unlike Cairo, Syria was the burial place for a number of biblical prophets, as well as saints, while Damascus has often been associated with eschatological events. Meri stresses that devotees did not invent sacred space so much as they ″re-discovered″ it by association with these and other traditions.[120] He then proceeds to definitions of saints and their definitive traits, which include miracles, asceticism, and fasting. Meri, too, identifies various types of venerated people, from prophets, their families, and companions, to mystics, theologians, judges, and other men and women of exemplary learning and piety, to antinomian individuals and the

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[115]Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous* (Leiden, 1999), 1–79.

[116]Ibid., 80–126.

[117]Ibid., 127–67.

[118]Ibid., 168–218. Also see Niels Henrik Olesen, *Culte des saints et pèlerinages chez Ibn Taymiyya* (Paris, 1991).

[119]Ibid., 226.

[120]Josef Meri, *The Cult of the Saints Among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford, 2002), 1–58.

insane.[121] Of particular importance was *barakah,* the sacred blessing or charisma possessed by holy people, places, and relics, which Meri observes ″was spiritual, perceptual, and emotive, rather than conceptual.″[122]

Meri next turns to the practice of *ziyārah,* which he defines broadly as ″not only pilgrimage, but also the culture of devotion of which pilgrimage and saint veneration were an integral part.″[123] He reviews both Sunni and Shi'i *ziyārah* practices and the debates on their legality. Like Taylor, Meri pays close attention to pilgrimage guides and related literature for probing pilgrimage rituals and etiquette, and as a source for a number of insightful sections on women devotees, individual saints, types of talismans, and such practices as seeking cures, rain, and repentance. He suggests that pilgrimage to local shrines had social and economic, as well as religious, motives, and that it may have offered the poor and elderly a way to participate vicariously in the more expensive and difficult hajj.[124] Following a chapter on Jewish pilgrimage, Meri considers various types of shrines and other sacred sites, and their proliferation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Meri ascribes this growth, in part, to the decline of Abbasid central authority and the need by their various successors for religious legitimation as protectors and patrons of Islam and its holy places. The spread of Sufism and its orders also nurtured the growth of shrines and the cult of the saints, while sacred sites were steadily incorporated into larger mosque-madrasah complexes.[125] Meri concludes that the veneration of holy persons was a central part of popular religious life among Muslims, Christians, and Jews of the medieval Near East. But by popular he does not mean ″low″ or ″heterodox″ but normative as ″devotees from all walks of life… sought to reaffirm their faith, chart their sacred pasts, and derive relief from illness and adversity.″[126]

Meri′s recent study reaffirms a general conclusion reached by many of the scholars considered in this essay. Namely, a two-tier model of religion with a high faith of a literate elite above the vulgar superstitions of the masses is an inaccurate and misleading description of religion in the Mamluk period. We should recall that while the Quran and *sunnah* provide the foundation for Islamic belief and practice, they still allow for a wide array of regional and cultural interpretation and expression. Further, as Sunni Islam lacks an official earthly religious authority after the Prophet Muḥammad, local custom may not oppose normative Islam so

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[121]Ibid., 59–102.

[122]Ibid., 103, 104–19.

[123]Ibid., 10, 120–63.

[124]Ibid., 163–213.

[125]Ibid., 249–74.

[126]Ibid., 281–87.

much as determine it. The consensus of a community, its tradition, certifies correct belief and practice to a great extent, and this appears to have been the case in Mamluk domains. I would venture to say that this is the growing consensus of Mamluk scholars today.

Finally, I would like to offer a few concluding observations. First, recent study of religion in the Mamluk period has not been Egyptocentric. Works by scholars, including Little, Knysh, and Geoffroy, cover all Mamluk domains, including Palestine and the Hijaz, while important studies on the ulama, saints, and Sufis in Cairo have their able Damascene counterparts. A similar effect is found if we view this research, at least that on saints and Sufis, in terms of urban-rural relations, with studies of religion in Cairo, Damascus, and Jerusalem finding their village complements. Another positive trend in recent research is a familiarity among Mamluk scholars with related scholarship involving other regions and religions, especially Christianity and Judaism, which allows for a comparative perspective in terms of both subject matter and methodology. I am also encouraged by the fact that a number of scholars have used manuscripts for their research. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of unpublished manuscripts composed during the Mamluk period on religious topics, and careful study of them will, I believe, significantly enhance and, perhaps, dramatically change how we view medieval Islam. Concomitantly, there are still many published works from the period in need of further study involving theology, law, and mysticism, and covering a range of religious topics from death, purgatory, and the afterlife, to prayers and devotions, to the interpretation of the Quran, and dreams. Though we may lack a detailed and comprehensive introduction to religion in the Mamluk period, this should not be an obstacle to continued fruitful research in the future.