

death-consciousness in mind, Hillenbrand has presented madrasahs as primarily ways of “laundering” mausolea. That is to say the endowment of a religious college legitimized the placing of the patron’s tomb within a religious enclosure. While on the subject of the purpose of madrasahs, there has also of course been debate on the importance or not of the teaching carried out in these institutions. It is possible to view the curriculum of the madrasah as a way of promoting and controlling Sunni orthodoxy and, also, as perhaps offering training of a sort to Arabs, some of whom would later enter state service. However, Michael Chamberlain in particular has argued that the madrasahs were primarily ways of managing property and money, and that teaching was carried out everywhere and anywhere, informally, without significantly depending on structured madrasah courses. It is possible that each madrasah will have to be studied on an individual basis, for some performed quite unexpected functions. Berkey noted that al-Ghawrī’s “madrasah” had no teaching facilities at all and Hillenbrand has pointed out that the Mosque-Madrasah of Qarāsunqur was used by *barīd* couriers as a hostel en route to and from Syria.

Another major area of interest has been the role of immigrant craftsmen and the imitation of foreign models in both the architecture and the arts of the Mamluks. There are occasions when it would make more sense to reclassify “Mamluk art” as Saljuq, or Mosuli, or Ilkhanid, or Qaraqoyunlu art. Creswell, in particular, was fond of explaining developments in Egyptian architecture in terms of disasters elsewhere and the consequent incoming waves of refugee architects and craftsmen. There is plenty of evidence for the influence on Mamluk architecture of buildings in Anatolian towns as well as in Ilkhanid Sultānīyah and Tabriz. In other art forms, it is difficult to separate out Ilkhanid Mongol from Chinese influence (for example, the lifting of motifs from textiles imported from China). The question of Mongol influence on the arts shades into the question of Mongol influence on the Mamluks more generally—covering such matters as large-format Qurans, dress, folklore, the courier system, haircuts, the code of the *Yāsa*. The subject got off to a poor start with Poliak’s essay. However, matters have since been put on a sounder footing by Michael Rogers, Ulrich Haarmann, Donald Little, and David Ayalon. Ayalon’s articles on the Mongol *Yāsa* and related matters are fundamental. The weight of the evidence now suggests that the cultural influence of the Mongols on the Mamluk Sultanate was not a significant factor until the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.

The civilian elite has been another major focus of research—inevitably, since the sources are so rich (the civilian elite was very good at celebrating itself). Carl



Petry's *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages*⁵⁴ has taken apart the notion that there was a single civilian elite. Rather there was a threefold division into first, bureaucrats—often from Syria; secondly, jurist-scholars—from all over the Islamic world; and, thirdly, religious functionaries, who tended to come from Cairo and the Delta. As for Joseph H. Escovitz's *The Office of Qāḍī al-Quḍāt in Cairo under the Bahrī Mamluks*,⁵⁵ it of course says many things, but the main thing I got from reading it was that it poured cold water on the notion of the qadis as spokesmen for the subjects of the Mamluks. The qadis accommodated themselves to the Mamluk regime and they handed down its decrees. They defended the interests of the civilian elite as best they could, but were on the whole oblivious to wider needs. Jonathan Berkey's survey of teaching establishments, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*,⁵⁶ used both chronicles and *waqfiyahs* to study the way that the religious sciences were taught and showed how they were taught on an informal and personal basis. I have already mentioned Michael Chamberlain's view, put forward in *Knowledge and Social Practice in Damascus 1190-1350*,⁵⁷ that the madrasah was a conduit for managing property and paying stipends. Chamberlain has studied how a medieval society, by and large, managed without documents and, like Lapidus, he has emphasized how informal ways of getting things done compensated for a relative lack of hierarchy and formal institutions. However, Chamberlain does not believe that madrasahs were endowed in an effort to buy the ulama. In this he differs from, say, Fernandes, whose *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamluk Egypt: The Khānqāh*⁵⁸ argued that *khānqāhs* were a way of, as it were, buying Sufis and controlling Sufism. One problem with all this research on the civilian elite is that only civilians of a certain class got into the biographical dictionaries of Ibn Ḥajar and al-Suyūṭī. Such works tell us very little indeed about merchants, poets, sorcerers, and most of the *awlād al-nās*.

The golden prime of the Mamluks in the late thirteenth century and their wars against the Crusaders and Mongols seems to be relatively uncontentious territory. The same cannot be said of the decline of the Mamluks and there is no agreement yet on when or why or even if the Mamluk Sultanate started declining. Ayalon's "The Muslim City and the Military Aristocracy" blamed it on decadent al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, the expensive and capricious harem, the failure to keep proper military discipline, and extravagant expenditure on building projects. This kind of approach

⁵⁴Princeton, 1981.

⁵⁵Berlin, 1984.

⁵⁶Princeton, 1992.

⁵⁷Cambridge, 1994.

⁵⁸Berlin, 1988.



has been echoed and underlined by Amalia Levanoni in her *A Turning Point in Mamluk History: The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn 1310-1341*.⁵⁹ She similarly found seeds of decline in the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, though there are points of difference between her and Ayalon. Levanoni places less stress, I think, on the personal failings of the Qalawunid sultans. However, I think if one is looking for the causes of Mamluk collapse in the sixteenth century, then the 1330s is too early to start looking for it. It also seems rough to blame any of it on the royal princesses. I doubt if the cost of their dresses contributed much to the decay of one of the world's great medieval empires and I do not think we should encourage al-Maqrīzī and al-Suyūṭī in their misogyny.

Others have been disinclined to blame al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's alleged fecklessness and extravagance and they have looked for broader causes. For example, Rabbat's book on the Citadel suggests a more positive approach to the sultan's public works and attributes decline to international economic factors.⁶⁰ Similarly, Garcin, in his contribution to *Palais et maisons du Caire*, does not find fault with the sultan. Moreover, it must be asked, could things ever have gone all that well with the sultanate after the onset of the plague epidemics from 1347 onwards? Ayalon, himself, was the pioneer on the subject of the plague—in the first study he published in English on the Mamluks in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1946. Ayalon's article suggested that the declining quality of mamluk training and the breakdown in discipline were in large part a product of the need to recruit and train soldiers faster, because of losses due to plague. The few pages in A. L. Udovitch's incisive little essay "England to Egypt" devoted to the demographic and economic effects of the plague are hard to beat, as they demonstrate how demographic decline explains military rapacity, Bedouin incursions, and most of the rest of the problems of the later sultans. Subsequently Udovitch's student, Michael Dols, published *The Black Death in the Middle East*.⁶¹ Dols, like Lapidus, was preoccupied by comparisons with Europe and he, as it were, constructed an ideal type of bubonic plague, in order to assess how Egypt's plague matched up with those of England and Italy. Anybody who might conceivably have been seduced by Poliak's notion that Egypt experienced a slow but steady demographic increase after 1348 would have been firmly disabused by Dols. And finally on plagues, Lawrence Conrad's more literary approach to chronicles which reported on them provides a necessary caution against believing that everything one reads

⁵⁹Leiden, 1995.

⁶⁰Nasser O. Rabbat, *The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture* (Leiden, 1995), 242-43.

⁶¹Princeton, 1977.



on this matter is documentary fact.⁶² Similarly Adel Allouche's introduction to his translation of the *Ighāthah* in *Mamluk Economics: A Study and Translation of al-Maqrizī's Ighāthah*⁶³ cautions against taking al-Maqrizī to be an unprejudiced and reliable source on money matters. Religion took precedence over monetary theory in his muddled brain.

From decline one proceeds to doom. Until recently there was hardly anything to read on the last days of the sultanate. (Well, there was Stripling's old book.) Now we have Petry's two books, one by Har-El, and a number of other more specialized studies (for example, James B. Evrard's *Zur Geschichte Aleppos und Nordsyriens im letzten halben Jahrhundert der Mamlukenherrschaft (872-921 A.H), nach Arabischen und Italeinischen Quellen*⁶⁴). Petry has emphasized the contrasting personalities of Qāytbāy, the dignified conservative, and Qānshuh al-Ghawrī, the ruthless innovator. In some ways Petry is very hard on al-Ghawrī (for I think that anyone who has heard the penultimate sultan talking—as he does in the *Majālis* and the *Kawkab al-Durrī*—must admire him). But Petry's approach to al-Ghawrī is a useful corrective to Ayalon, who overdid the image of the last Mamluks as blinkered, chivalrous reactionaries. Petry's earlier article "A Paradox of Patronage during the Later Mamluk Period" on the coexistence of financial crisis and royal magnificence under Qāytbāy is cogent, for the question is well-put and persuasively answered. The trouble with studying the very last days is the paucity of Arabic sources. The way forward will, I think, depend on increasing use of European sources. Ulrich Haarmann's important recent article "Joseph's Law" makes strikingly effective use of Western sources. Evrard has similarly used Italian sources.

So now, what of the future? I think the main thing is to get away from the activity of studying whatever it is that the obvious sources (mostly chronicles and biographical dictionaries written by ulama) want to tell us. One way of doing this is by use of archives, but I am not clear how much more the Geniza and the Ḥaram al-Sharīf documents have to tell us. There is clearly more material in *waqfiyahs* to be worked on. Even so there are limits to this sort of evidence and several architectural historians have noted mismatches between an endowment's specifications and the building as actually built. Also, I feel that the study of *waqfiyahs* tips Mamluk studies even further in the direction of becoming ulama studies, at the expense of looking at the secular aspects of the age.

One way of getting away from the pious mutterings of the turbaned elite is to focus properly on the amirs. Reuven Amitai has already produced a prosopographic

⁶²Lawrence Conrad, "Arabic Plague Chronologies and Treatises: Social and Historical Factors in the Formation of a Literary Genre," *Studia Islamica* 54 (1981): 51-93.

⁶³Salt Lake City, 1994.

⁶⁴Munich, 1974.



essay on the Zāhirī and Ṣāliḥī amirs and I have great expectations concerning the similar research he has in progress on Maṣṣūrī amirs and mamluks. Another way is to redirect attention to the marginals in Mamluk society. Paul Kahle, an obsessive collector of shadow-puppets, was a pioneer in this sort of territory, with his articles on shadow theatre and on gypsies. Poliak wrote on popular revolt and Brinner on the mysterious *ḥarāfīsh*. Much more recently we have had Boaz Shoshan on popular culture in general, Shmuel Moreh on live theatre, Carl Petry on crime, Everett Rowson on gay literature, and G. J. H Van Gelder on *Ḥalbat al-Kumayt* (an *adab* treatise on wine-drinking). Perhaps the biggest problem in dealing with popular culture is clearly separating it out from high culture. Consider the cult of the criminal and the mendicant among the literary elites in Abbasid and Buyid times. Where should one place Ibn Dāniyāl, the friend of the sultan and the amirs, but also the author of low-life shadow plays? Where should one place those wild Sufis with a following of riffraff, but who nevertheless found patronage and protection in the highest places? While on the subject of people who were neither amirs nor ulama, Huda Lutfī's "Manners and Customs of Fourteenth-Century Cairene Women: Female Anarchy versus Male Shar'ī Order in Muslim Prescriptive Treatises" has shown how much interesting material about antinomian behavior can be derived from just Ibn al-Ḥājj's *Madkhal* alone. And, of course, we are likely to see a lot more published about Mamluk women in the near future.

A reasonable amount has been produced fairly recently on popular literature. There is more written on *The Thousand and One Nights* than one can shake a stick at. Malcolm Lyons, Remke Kruk, Harry Norris, and others have produced important works on the popular epics. However, as I see it, far too little work is being done in America or Europe on the high literature of the late Middle Ages—the *adab* and poetry. Emil Homerin is practically unique, as far as I know. Nothing is more likely to transform our perceptions of the Mamluk age than a detailed study of the belles-lettres of the period. But perhaps a forthcoming volume of the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* will encourage researchers to venture into the *terra incognita* of Mamluk *adab*. And with reference to *terrae incognitae*, what about the Mamluks in the scramble for Africa? André Raymond has shown how much Cairo's prosperity under the Ottomans depended on trade with Black Africa—on the commerce in black slaves, gold, and other commodities.⁶⁵ It is also plausible then that the African trade may have been important in the Mamluk period also. On the subject of commerce and slave imports, I find it astonishing how little reference is made by Mamlukists to Charles Verlinden's various publications on the European trade in white slaves.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle* (Damascus, 1974).

⁶⁶ See especially Charles Verlinden, *L'Esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale* (Ghent, 1977).



I have not discussed scholars working and publishing in the Arab world (though the names of Hassanein Rabie, Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Rāziq, Muḥammad Zaghlūl Sallām, Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid, Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn, and others come to mind). In sad practice, so much of Western research is conducted without reference to Arab work. This should change. But I have gone on long enough as it is. When I started as a student, there was hardly anything to read on the Mamluks, except what had been produced by the Israelis. Really one could read one’s way through the field in a week. Now, though, there is a lifetime’s reading awaiting your students. (Aren’t they the lucky ones!) Israel is still an important place for Mamluk studies, as are Germany and France, but most of the work in the field is now being done in America. Compared with Fatimid, Saljuq, or Ayyubid studies, Mamluk studies is in great shape. It has its set-piece controversies, its website, its journal. You here at Chicago, at the center of Mamluk studies, should feel particularly cheerful. Even so most of one of the world’s great empires still remains mysterious. “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”



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