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Over the past twenty years or so, academic interest and publications on the Mamluk period (1250–1517) have witnessed a boom to such an extent that it is now one of the most studied periods of Islam, both in the West and the Arab world. Various initiatives like the Mamluk Bibliography, managed and continually updated by the Middle EastDocumen	mentation Center of the University of Chicago under the direction of Marlis Saleh, the Mamlak Studies Review published by the same center, and the School of Mamluk Studies established in 2014, just to mention a few, are evidence that the period has now become a field in itself and is attracting more and more students. The book under review is part of this movement, as it contains the proceedings of a conference held at the University of Balamand from May 4–7, 2005, under the auspices of the Said University and the Orient-Institut Beirut. As the editors state in the introduction, the organizers put special emphasis on the cultural history of the Bilād al-Shām during the Mamluk era. In particular, the focus was on engaging with such dichotomized concepts as prosperity and decline or tolerance and preservation. The conference aimed to consider "the cultural history, broadly conceived" of the Mamluk period, seeking to draw the attention to the fact that the period of the Mamluk as a political entity in Egypt are more or less short and thus far, modern scholars of the Mamluk period were of the opinion that this era produced no significant cultural achievements and their scientific and educational institutions were not on par with those in the preceding and following periods. They also argued that the period was characterized by a conflict of religious and political forces that had a fundamental influence on the development of the cultural. The only exception to this was the rise of political and religious orders of the new institution known as the Mamluk, which is a result of the Mamluk period, and its cultural achievements during the period. The book under review is a collection of papers presented at the conference held at the University of Balamand in May 2005, which was published in the form of a book by the Eastern University in 2015.

The volume contains a wide range of topics, including the political, military, and economic aspects of the Mamluk period, as well as the cultural and intellectual developments that took place during this period. The volume is divided into three sections, each dealing with a different aspect of the Mamluk period. The first section, which is dedicated to the political and military aspects of the period, includes papers on the history of the Mamluk military and the role of the Mamluk in the political landscape of the Arab world. The second section, which focuses on the economic aspects of the period, includes papers on the economic development of the Mamluk period and the role of the Mamluk in the economic landscape of the region. The third section, which is dedicated to the cultural and intellectual developments of the period, includes papers on the role of the Mamluk in the development of Islamic thought and the role of the Mamluk in the development of Islamic art and architecture. The book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the Mamluk period, providing a comprehensive overview of the period's political, military, economic, cultural, and intellectual developments.
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broadly conceived, of the era of the Mamluk Sultanate" and, especially, to investigate "the relations of the state to the various social groups within Bilâd al-Shâm" (p. ix).

The focus of the conference organizers on the Bilâd al-Shâm is fully justified by the fact that this region of the Mamluk sultanate is often neglected in studies devoted to this period. Naturally, the capital of the sultanate, Cairo, played a centripetal role that has drawn the attention of historians. Moreover, the sources (documentary or narrative) on Egypt are more numerous than those for the other regions and it is not surprising that, thus far, modern researchers have been more attracted by what was considered the center of Mamluk power. Nonetheless, historians living in the Bilâd al-Shâm during the Mamluk era produced a wide gamut of works that can be exploited by modern scholars. The organizers' wish to initiate a centrifugal research trajectory was thus, more than ever, comprehensible and reasonable. However, as they confess, the results met their expectations only in part. A large number of contributions to the conference and, consequently, of the articles published in this volume of proceedings did not take into consideration the focus on the Bilâd al-Shâm and in fact the majority of the papers deal with Egypt exclusively or consider Egypt and the Bilâd al-Shâm together. This explains why "Bilâd al-Shâm" does not feature in the title of the book. Fortunately, the organizers were more successful with regard to the second point of focus: various social groups of the region were taken into consideration. Understood in religious terms (minorities like Christians, Shiites or Druzes) or in social terms (lower classes, those living on the border of society or the marginalized), these groups feature in two-thirds of the articles.

The volume gathers eighteen papers written in English and Arabic, with the exception of one article that is in French. The editors organized the papers in five parts according to the main themes covered by the authors. Unfortunately, they opted to separate the articles in Arabic from those in Latin characters. Moreover, each section functions independently, with its own introduction and its own index. This choice, undoubtedly made for practical reasons, is infelicitous because it interrupts the dialogue between the articles of each section. The separate indices are also inappropriate: each covers only the section to which it is attached and this means that the reader must consult all of them in order to locate an entry. The five parts are as follows: religious communities and their interaction; fields of cultural production—arts, literature, science; cultural contexts of political practice and social relations.

The first part gathers six papers, among which three are in Arabic. The part opens with an article by Jørgen NIELSEN (pp. 3–13) on the participation of members of religious minorities (Christians and Jews) in the Ayyubid and Mamluk states from a historiographical point of view. In fact, NIELSEN gave a keynote at the conference in order to stimulate the reflections of the other contributors. NIELSEN puts forward various arguments on the question of the dhimmis and their role in Muslim society, and delineates future topics of research. David THOMAS, in "Christian-Muslim Misunderstanding in the Fourteenth Century: The Correspondence between Christians in Cyprus and Muslims in Damascus" (pp. 13–30) revisits the aim, meaning, and impact of an apologetic letter sent by a Christian author settled in Cyprus to Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Abî Tâlib al-Dimashqî. THOMAS notices that the answer provided by the two Muslim authors, though separated by some years, is identical (negative), but that the reasons behind the responses are different in nature. In the meantime, THOMAS has published, together with R. EBED, a book on the issue: Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades: The Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abî Tâlib al-Dimashqî's Response (Leiden 2005). Ray MOUADDAD's "Christian Martyrs in Tripoli in the Mamluk Era" (pp. 31–41) explores sources rarely considered by historians of the Mamluk period. These were written either in Karshûni (Arabic in
Syriac characters) or in Syriac and deals with events concerning the Christian communities their authors represent: Melkites, Maronites, and Greek Orthodox. The examples analyzed demonstrate that the usual Mamluk sources are advantageously weighed against texts stemming from other milieus. Ílyás aL-qat̄ar addresses the dialectics of oppression and tolerance with regard to the religious minorities of Mount Lebanon (Maronites, Jacobites, Shiites, and Druze) in his "al-Mawārīna wa-l-Yāqūba wa-l-Shīʿa wa-l-Durūz fī l-jabal al-lubnānī fī l-ʿahd al-mamlūkī: jadalīyyat al-istiḥād wa-l-ṭasāmūḥ" (pp. 3–27), while Ahmad Hūṭayṭ examines the place and role of another religious minority, this time in Egypt, through the lens of a case study on the Coptic Sharaf al-Din al-Nashw ("al-Aqāb wa-l-idāra al-mamlūkīyya fī ʿahd al-ʿNāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn: Sharaf al-Dīn al-Nashw namūdjaḥan"). pp. 29–40). The latter study has now been superseded in terms of deep analysis by Amāliya Levanoni's article entitled "The al-Nashw Episode: A Case Study of 'Moral Economy'" (Mamlūk Studies Review 9 [2005], pp. 207–220). The last article in this part is by Ānārī Nāṣṣār; it is a study of the place in Christians of Dāmasc and Alepp: "Awādī al-maṣīḥyyīn fī Dimāqs wa-l-Halab fī l-ʿaṣr al-mamlūkī" (pp. 41–75). Nāṣṣār evaluates the various positions occupied by Christians in the administration and their living conditions in the cities considered. He concludes that their roles in city governance secured their rights as dhimmīn.

The next three parts all deal with cultural production, in arts, literature, and science respectively. Arts are treated in four articles. Mat Immerzeel and Adeline Jeudy concentrate on "Christian Art in the Mamluk Period" (pp. 45–66), taking as the starting point of their research the question of the continuity of this kind of art after the accession of power by the Mamluks. The authors take into consideration various items like wall painting, icons, liturgical objects, and wooden furniture, both in Egypt and the Bilād al-Shām. They reach the conclusion that "due to the lack of evidence, the Mamluks must be cleared of the charge of iconoclasm" (p. 52) and that the situation in the regions differed: in the Bilād al-Shām, they note a discontinuity in the production of Christian art; on the other hand, in Egypt, Coptic art flourished until the end of the Mamluk rule, when it slowly began to decline. Dörte Behrens-Abouseif's article, entitled "Craftsmen and Upstarts in the Late Mamluk Period" (pp. 67–75), was later published in the Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies (73, 3 [2011], pp. 375–395) under a slightly different title ("Craftsmen, Upstarts, and Sufis in the Late Mamluk Period"). and is here printed "without the authorisation of the author and copyright owner," as stated on a slip of paper inserted in the book by the editors. It appears that the text published here is closer to the version of the paper she read at the conference, a paper that she later expanded for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. In this paper, she devotes herself to the careers of craftsmen in the administration and their establishment during the Circassian period. Her analysis demonstrates that in previous periods, such careers had been much more difficult, and that under the Mamluks the lower social groups had "unprecedented opportunities ... to fill gaps which the Mamluk establishment could not" (p. 75). Hōwadya al-Hārīthī's study ("Writings on the Wall: Mamluk Monuments of Tripoli", pp. 77–84) is a slightly revised version of a text already published in 1999 and does not add anything new to the subject. The same holds true for Ílyās aL-Zayyāt's "al-Fānn al-maṣīḥī fī Bilād al-Shām wa-l-hiqqa al-mamlūkīyya" (pp. 79–89).

Literature is the subject of two articles which in fact concern two historians: al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Ílyās. In "The Chronicle of Ibn Ílyās as a Source for Social and Cultural History from Below" (pp. 87–98), Axel Havemann investigates the representation of individuals or groups who do not belong to the Mamluk caste, their criminal acts and small scandals as well as stories about beggars. In his approach, Havemann sees the possibility of writing a history of books dealing with the material of Petret and changes the material of 1-Din Aḥmad aL-Din al-Nāṣir al-Din aL-Sharāfī. He then shows in which ways he scatters the themes he develops.

Science is dealt with under the Stars' Section. Presentation of the debate is usually considered to have taken place at a level comparable to that of medicine under Islam. As in the case of the re-appraisal of al-Ṭabarīnī's work, Shāyā's studies are seen through the lenses of al-fattārātayn and fi Tarabulus lama hādī al-filmān.

Finally, the last part of the volume consists of the "Relationships" Section. We take as his subject the "relations between" the two parts of society, as a leading representative of the domestic marital status of women is the multiple marriages. She knew that this was a "necessity" when she decided, and it is shown that people such as General Umar Ibn al-Muqattārī, statesman among them, as he appeared "in their own" (p. 99). Abd al-Salām aL-Dīn al-BurūkJī, siyāsī wa-l-idāra al-mamlūkīyya fī Bilād al-Shām wa-l-hiqqa al-mamlūkīyya" (pp. 79–89).
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ing a history of society and he is indeed right: since the time of the conference, two major books dealing with the Mamluk criminal underworld have been published (one by Carl Petry and the other by Bernadette Martel-Thoumian) and both are based in part on the material provided by Ibn Iyās. Antwān Dūmī’s article, “al-Tajrād fi manhaj Taqi l-Dīn ʿAbd al-Maqrīzī (766–845/1364–1442)” (pp. 93–111), is supposed to establish the way in which al-Maqrīzī renewed the writing of history; unfortunately it turns out to be disappointing; rather than a thorough analysis of al-Maqrīzī’s capacity to innovate in ways that superseded his predecessors and contemporaries, it is merely a catalog of the themes he developed. It fails to demonstrate what the author proposed to put forward.

Science is at the core of three articles. The first one, by George Saliba (“‘Gathering the Stars’ Scientific Activities during Mamluk Times”, pp. 101–125), is an excellent presentation of the progress made by scientists under the Mamluks in the field of astronomy. Usually considered a period of decline in the sciences, Saliba stresses that scientists of that period improved the theories of their predecessors to such an extent that they reached a level comparable to the one achieved in Europe during the Renaissance. At the same time, medicine underwent a major development with the canonization of the medical tradition attributed to the Prophet. Floréal Sanaguin (“La Codification du savoir médical dans la tradition dite ‘prophétique’ à l’époque mameluque”, pp. 127–137) sees the Mamluk period as a key moment for the codification of popular practices and, at the same time, the re-appropriation of sciences inherited from the Greeks, Persians, and Indians. Anis Shafāyā’s study is devoted to the question of the fortifications on the Lebanese coast, as seen through the example of the city of Tripoli (“Taṭawwur al-tāḥṣīnāt al-ḥaskariyya bayn al-fratayn al-salihiyya wa-l-mamlūkīyya ‘alā l-sāhil al-lubnānī; al-Taṭawwur al-mudunī fi Tarābulus ‘ibira dirāsat taḥṣīnāt al-madīna”, pp. 115–123).

Finally, the last part of this volume, dedicated to political practice and social relations, consists of three articles. Albrecht Fueß, in “Legends against Arbitrary Abuse: The Relationships between the Mamluk Military Elite and their Arab Subjects” (pp. 141–151), takes as his starting point a story concerning a Mamluk governor of Tripoli “who cared about the rights of the common people.” As he tentatively demonstrates, this case was quite exceptional given that Mamluks were usually above the law, even in the case of criminal affairs involving non-Mamluks, and generally when authorities reacted, it was out of fear that the hegemony of the state would be put at risk or that the integrity of the leading representatives would be tarnished. The second article, by Aliya Saïdi (“Marriage and Mental Illness in the Mamluk Period”, pp. 153–157), addresses the issue of the effects of polygamy on other wives. The author bases her article on the biographies dedicated to women in Sakhawi’s al-Daw‘ al-lāmi‘; she noticed that this historian mentions marital status in the case of 590 women and that nearly 30 percent of these were married multiple times. She then gives a few examples of women who became insane when they knew that their husband already had a wife. It is, however, difficult to accept her argument when she claims that “the fact that Sakhawi clearly linked mental illness with polygamy shows that polygamy was considered scandalous”. The evidence is too narrow to allow such general conclusions. Yoav Rapoport’s monograph, Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society (Cambridge 2005) is now the standard reference on this issue, though, as he himself recognizes, “polygamy and concubinage ... deserve a monograph of their own” (p. 11). The ḥizba is the subject of the last article in this part; penned by ʿAbd al-Salām, it is entitled “al-Ḥisba fi l-ʿāsr al-mamlūkī bayn al-tawāṣīl al-dini wa-l-siyāsī wa-l-idār l-madaniyya” (pp. 127–143). The author considers three stages, each corresponding to a significant evolution in the position of the market inspector. This has been known for many years now and the question has been reconsidered recently by Kirsten...
Stilt in her Islamic Law in Action: Authority, Discretion, and Everyday Experiences in Mamluk Egypt (Oxford 2011).

All in all, this book leaves its reader with a mixed impression. While some articles are significant and excellent contributions to the study of cultural history in the Mamluk period, others are mere sketches (and, in some cases, not even that) of issues which have been examined elsewhere in articles and books since the conference was organized. It is a pity that the authors were not invited to reconsider their views in light of these recent publications. It is difficult to believe that the articles were peer-reviewed. The imbalance in the overall quality of the various contributions is further exacerbated by the editors' decision to allow authors "some latitude with regard to citation style" (p. xii). As they acknowledge, "these decisions may not conform to the usual standard of scholarly practice". The reader is left with the impression that they simply preferred not to devote time to practices that are indeed very helpful to the reader: coherence should be found not in a single article but in the whole volume. The rules, if given to the contributors, should have been applied to all the articles. For instance, one notices that the bibliography is given in the footnotes by most authors, but in two articles it appears at the end.

To conclude, this volume contributes, in a certain imbalanced way, to a better understanding of cultural aspects of Mamluk society, and particularly of some categories of people usually neglected or little studied.

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Bemerkenswert ist die breite Perspektive, welche die Herausgeber gewählt haben: Sie nehmen sich nicht nur im engeren Sinne liturgische Fragen vor, sondern sammeln Beiträge aus einem weiteren Feld ritueller Praxis und ihrer Deutungen, die in einem wenigstens indirekten Zusammenhang zur Gnosis stehen. Vorab systematisiert erscheinen diese Untersuchungen in fünf Sektionen des Buches: Den ersten inhaltlichen Teil markieren Studien über die Initiationsliturgien der Gnostiker und zeitgenössischer anderer Kulte; dieser einmaligen Gottesdienstform sind in Section 2 Beispiele wiederkehrender ritueller Lebensbewältigung zugeordnet (beispielsweise die hiesigen zwei Beiträge über Bußakte).

Der dritte Abschnitt wird Therapeutic Practices überschrieben und umfaßt Probleme an-