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*Beyond Dominant Paradigms in Ottoman
and Middle Eastern / North African Studies*

A Tribute to Rifa'at Abou-El-Haj

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İSAM 

Crime and Punishment in Mamluk Damascus

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*All ages resemble one another in respect
of the criminal folly of mankind.*

Voltaire¹

This research is presented in the form of vignettes that include events (*ḥawādith*) recorded by al-Jazarī in his *Ta'rīkh*,² and which are grouped around one criminal incident or another. Often, such incidents occur in the obituaries (*wafayāt*) that tell of people interacting in a variety of real life situations. Al-Jazarī often lapsed into the *'āmmiyya*, Damascene popular

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1 Quoted in Peter Gay, Gerald J. Cavanaugh, and Victor G. Wexler, *Historians at Work*, 4 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1972-5), vol. 2, 285.

2 The full title of this manuscript is *Ḥawādith al-zamān wa anbā'ihī wa wafayāt al-akābir wa'l-a'yan min abnā'ihī*. The manuscript covers nearly 140 years but most of it is lost. What we have of the manuscript is in three fragments, Gotha Library, which is divided into three sections, A1559, A1560, A1561; Bibliothèque National MS Arab 6739, and Köprülüzade 1037. All of this does not constitute the whole manuscript and huge gaps between the annals remain. Reference in this article will be made to the Gotha fragments (Gotha ms) and to the edition by 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī, *Ta'rīkh* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Asriyya, 1998) in three volumes which encompass the Bibliothèque National and the Köprülüzade fragments.

Arabic, especially when he described these situations and other aspects of popular culture. In fact, the use of colloquial Arabic distinguishes this manuscript from its contemporaries or those of the same genre. Furthermore, al-Jazarī was never a court historian or one that relied on patronage and thus he included what he saw fit in his *Ta'riḫ*. Accordingly, in addition to reports about state events or obituaries of notables, the usual focus of most chroniclers, al-Jazarī mentions also the unusual, the bizarre, the mundane, and the noteworthy which could run the gamut from the funeral procession carrying the coffin of an obese man, to the recipe of a deodorant, to severe weather phenomena, or to a Sufī who sweeps the streets with his overcoat. Information of this type is relayed first hand due to al-Jazarī's engagement with his surroundings. Accordingly, al-Jazarī's account provides us a close up view of Damascene society, its culture and its practice in the period following the demise of Baghdad at the hands of the Mongols. While this particular research focuses on criminal activity, the manuscript is full of reference to so many other day-to-day activities as al-Jazarī often paid attention to details not found in contemporary chronicles. Thus, al-Jazarī's style, his choice of subject matter, and his first-hand accounts support the departure from the dominant paradigm in Mamluk historiography and encourage the pursuit of micro history, as this research hopes to show.³

There seems to have been several prisons in Damascus. Al-Jazarī identifies in the course of his chronicle six prisons (some of these might be one and the same). These were Ḥabs al-Qāḍī; Ḥabs al-Shar', Ḥabs al-Jāmi', Ḥabs Wāli al-Barr, Ḥabs Bāb al-Ṣaghīr, and finally Ḥabs al-Qal'a (the citadel). This prison is also known as the Governor's prison (*Ḥabs*

3 Popular culture during the Mamluk period has been receiving some attention although the lion's share of these studies is on Egypt but with occasional reference to Syria; see, for example, Jonathan Berkey, "Culture and society during the Middle Ages," *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517, ed. Carl Petry, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 375-411; Ḥayāt Nasser al-Ḥājī, *Aḥwāl al-'Āmmah fī Ḥukm al-Mamālīk* [Conditions of the Commoners during Mamluk Rule], 2nd ed. (Kuwait: al-Qabas Press, 1994); Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For specific studies on Syria, see Ibrahim Za'rur, *al-Ḥayāh al-Ijtimā'iyyah fī Bilād al-Shām* [Social life in Syria] (Damascus: al-Jumhuriyya Press, 1993); see also James Grehan, "Street Violence and Social Imagination in late Mamluk and Ottoman Damascus," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (2003): 215-36.

al-Wālī). Al-Jazarī does not tell much about conditions in these prisons, except that beating, whipping, flogging, and other forms of torture seem to have been common with instruments such as the *dabbūs*, the *maqāri'*, and the *ma'āšir*. Ibn Taymiyya's imprisonment in the Citadel must have been an exception. He was allowed to have whatever he needed to read and write (at least for a while), to have a choice of a servant (Ibn Taymiyya chose his brother) and to have a room with its own running water.⁴ Al-Jazarī offers a few hints about the practice of the imprisoned, namely that a prisoner could buy some necessities while in jail and that prisoners could send or receive letters. For example, prisoners who were illiterate had to depend on the service of Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Tamim, known as Ibn al-Mughrabi, a crotchety and cantankerous old man, whom, because he was a gossipmonger to boot, no one else employed, except this literally captive population.⁵

Al-Jazarī reported a couple of occasions when Sultans would declare an amnesty and prisoners would be released, such as al-Ashraf Khalīl's decree to grant amnesty on the occasion of his accession to the Sultanate, and al-Nāšir Muḥammad's when he was cured from an illness.⁶ However, not all prisoners were included in these amnesties. For example, Bahā' al-Dīn al-Ḥarrānī died in prison seven years after the clemency of al-Nāšir Muḥammad. Bahā' al-Dīn was serving a life sentence for the murder of his Christian farmer. Al-Jazarī says that Bahā' al-Dīn murdered him to get at his savings. However, back in 723 AH his crime was discovered and he was thrown in jail where he died fourteen years later.⁷

Of course, not all those in prison deserved to be there in the first place. When the oppressive Sanjar al-Shujā'ī was finally disgraced, the various prisons in Damascus emptied out their detainees. His tenure is marked by an insatiable desire to use the *ma'āšir* to squeeze the Damascene out of

4 For the arrest and imprisonment of Ibn Taymiyya, see *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 111. For general references to prisons and prisoners see vol. 1, 298; vol. 2, 193, 486; vol. 3, 767, 669.

5 Al-Jazarī describes Ibn al-Mughrabi in very unflattering terms. He was the *wakīl* of Dar al-Qadi and the *naqīb* of the Shafi'i deputies of the chief Qadi. He was nasty and contrarian; he was greedy and put obstacles before any deal that did not benefit him; *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 204.

6 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 1, 8; vol. 2, 382; vol. 3, 763, 767.

7 Bahā' al-Dīn had been in jail for 14 years when he died; *Ta'rikh*, vol. 3, 1002.

their wealth by repeated confiscations (*muṣāḍarāt*). The worst of these cases was in the first months of 688/mid 1289. The sugar and lumber, among other things, of the rich merchant Taqī al-Dīn Tawbah al-Takrītī were confiscated. The government kept the sugar but *ṭarahū* (forced purchase) the wood; they sold it in the marketplace at a price four times the value. Al-Jazarī himself bought some wood and made a profit of 154 dirhams on an investment of 600. Soon after that, however, Shujā'ī pursued so many Damascenes that all of them lived in fear of becoming the next victim. They began to flee into the rural areas around Damascus. Al-Jazarī admits that he and his family fled the city and laid low in properties or with relatives outside of Damascus for 31 days. When Ibn Susra met al-Jazarī on the street and remarked that he had not seen him of late, al-Jazarī responded that he had been in hiding. Ibn Susra responded “*hādhi rās māl i-l'ālam il-yom bi dimashq* (that is the state of the world today in Damascus).”⁸ Damascus and its inhabitants suffered terribly at the hands of Shujā'ī who jailed so many of them unfairly. Consequently, once he was disgraced, there was no longer any case against them and the prisoners were set free.⁹

Cases of the wrongfully detained and civilian prisoners seem to fall under the jurisdiction of the Qadi as we learn from the case of Ibn Khallikan. Damascus was in a festive mood when Ahmad ibn Khallikan arrived on Muḥarram 23, 677 (June 6, 1278) to assume his new duties as chief judge in Damascus (later there were going to be four chief judges in the city). He was very popular in Damascus, having served previously as its chief judge in a crucial period following the victory at the battle of ‘Ayn Jālūt (1260) that launched the Mamluk state. Throngs of people, including prominent figures in the legal profession, went out to greet him. Some Damascenes met him as far south as Gaza. When he finally arrived, the governor himself came out to greet him at the head of a large welcoming party. Al-Jazarī, observant as he is to certain details, says that those who did not have a

8 Gotha ms. A 1561, f. 28a. The practices of confiscation and forced purchase were endemic in the Mamluk economy. While forced purchase at three or four times the value raised cash for the state, there seems to be also another form of wealth distribution going on as the modest profit made by al-Jazarī here suggests. For a record of confiscation during the Mamluk period, see Bayyumi Ismail al-Sharbini, *Muṣāḍarat al-Amlāk fī ‘Aṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk* (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-miṣriyya li’l-kitāb, 1997), vol. 1, 65-79, for general causes; and vol. 2, 184-7, for a list of confiscations during the period under study.

9 Gotha ms. A 1561, f. 28b.

horse of their own had to rent one to come along with the procession. They paid up to 10 dirhams per mare. Poetry was recited on the return of this favorite son from a sojourn of seven years. His jurisdiction covered the territory from al-‘Arīsh to Salamiyyah. His first judicial act took place in the *Madrasa ‘Ādiliyya*, which also doubled as his place of residence: He charged two individuals, each a reputable and trustworthy person (‘*adl*, pl. ‘*udūl*) to survey the prisons and to write up a list of the prisoners and the reason for their detention.¹⁰

But no matter how popular one is in the Mamluk realm, one is at risk of losing it all in the blink of an eye, and one did not have to be guilty of any crime. Ibn Khallikan escaped death by the skin of his teeth barely two years after such an enthusiastic welcome. Damascus became the seat of a coup against Sultan Qalawun when Sunqur al-Ashqar declared himself Sultan in Muḥarram 679/1280. A potentially serious split in the Mamluk state was thus created: a state in Cairo and a state in Damascus. Mamluk *amirs*, from Aleppo and other cities in Syria, backed Sunqur al-Ashqar and showed their support by sending some of their troops to Damascus. As the soldiers began to converge on Damascus, the emissary of Qalawun also arrived from Cairo, and tried to reconcile the two sides but to no avail. This drama took place, mind you, during the months when the Damascene pilgrimage caravan usually returns from Mecca, which could be anytime or season of the year. This time it was summer and, indeed, the pilgrims began to arrive on the Ṣafar 6, 679 (June 7, 1280), just a little over a month into the insurrection. That very day, al-Jazarī tells us the price of apricots reached three hundred dirhams per *qinṭār*, same as the price of pistachios. A *qinṭār* of mulberries, on the other hand, fetched one hundred dirhams, an unprecedented situation!¹¹

As market forces worked themselves out in Damascus, the two camps of Sunqur and Qalawun remained unreconciled and thus met on Ṣafar 15, 679. But before long, the coalition put together by Sunqur fell apart and he fled across the Syrian Desert intending to join the Mongols. Qalawun’s army proceeded to take control of the town. These are indeed confusing circumstances and they usually follow such sudden turn of events. The loyalty of the civilian staff in the government of Damascus, including that

10 Gotha ms. A 1559, f. 1b.

11 Gotha ms. A 1560, f. 2b; a *qinṭār* is a varying weight equal to 100 ratls.

of Ahmad ibn Khallikan, was tainted by association with the rebellion. In fact, Ibn Khallikan was accused of giving a *fatwa* supporting Sunqur, and for that *fatwa*, there was a warrant for his execution. Meanwhile, other high bureaucrats were held in the citadel prison. Within few days, however, oaths and guarantees of security were given out; even a general pardon to all Damascus came from Qalawun himself. Ahmad ibn Khallikan was, nonetheless, removed from his post. Accordingly, he had to vacate his residence at the *Madrasa 'Adiliyya*. In fact, he was clearing his room and was packing the last of his books when soldiers arrived to escort him to the citadel. That very hour, the *barīd* (post) had arrived from Cairo with the pardon and the reinstatement of Ibn Khallikan to his original post. Al-Jazarī seems to suggest that Ahmad was unfairly accused, especially because the Sultan speaks highly of him by saying that Ahmad is “*minnā wa ilaynā* (one of us).”¹² In the end, this was a minor event in Qalawun’s career, but it could have tragically deprived Ahmad of a few more years during which he added new entries to his monumental compilation of obituaries, the *Wafayāt al-A’yān*, that he had been collecting for over thirty years.¹³

The above mentioned prisons were not the only detention centers found in Damascus. Members of the legal profession, usually those who worked in some government capacity, such as *mustawfis*, *qadis* and *wakils* were remanded to a *madrassa* while an investigation of the charges against them was carried out. This manner of detention was called *tarsīm*. The *madrassa* most often associated with this kind of discipline is the *Madrasa 'Adhrāwiyya*, a *waqf* supported institution founded by ‘Adhrā, Salah al-Din’s niece, in 580 AH / 1184 CE. It was to be a *waqf* for the benefit of the Shafī’īs and the Ḥanafīs.¹⁴ By the time al-Jazarī flourished in Damascus, this *madrassa* was already a century old and was going to live on for another couple of centuries. It is not clear why this *madrassa* in particular became a place of temporary detention and a jail where someone would serve out his sentence.

12 Gotha ms. A 1560, f. 8.

13 Ahmad Ibn Khallikan, *Kitāb Wafayāt al-A’yān wa Anbā’ Abnā’ al-Zamān*, ed. Ihsan Abbas, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dar Sader, 1977), vol. 1, 19-20, vol. 7, 44, 49, 51-53.

14 ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Nu‘aymi, *Al-Dāris fī Ta’rīkh al-Madāris*, ed. Ibrahim Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1990), vol. 1, 283-5.

Those in the civilian administration who committed fiscal crimes were also subject to *ta'zīr*, public humiliation. Three officials, Muhammad ibn al-Qutb, the secretary of the governor, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Miṣrī, the Shafī'ī judge, and al-Amīn al-Sukkarī were involved in a shady sugar deal when they used money from the treasury to buy *qand* and process it into sugar for their own profit. Not only were they publicly humiliated and beaten, and lost their posts, but also their families were thrown out of their residence, and they also had to pay enormous fines that compelled them to liquidate their assets. Ibn al-Qutb, for example, had to sell a *ḥammām* (bathhouse) he owned for 30,000 dirhams. He also sold a house that he had built for over 70,000 dirhams, in addition to furniture and horses, among other properties, to come up with the fine.¹⁵

While these officials used their position to employ public money for their own benefit, others defrauded the public by impersonating these very officials. Al-Muḥyī ibn al-Ḥakam, a low level functionary, impersonated the deputy of the Maliki Chief Judge and set himself up as a tax collector in a house in the street known as *darb ibn al-Bānyāsī*. Al-Muḥyī had four accomplices who brought into the house a man who was threatened with death on some trumped up charges. At that point, the accomplices interceded and allowed the man to buy his own release for the amount of 1,200 dirhams, half of which he happened to have and paid on the spot. He had to sign a document stating that he still owed 600 dirhams before he was finally released. He immediately ran to the authorities to complain. When the deputy Mālikī Qadi was brought in, the plaintiff could not identify him. The deputy Ḥanafī Qadi (who had the same name) was also brought in, but again it was not the one. At that, a contingent of soldiers accompanied him to the house where they arrested al-Muḥyī and his four assistants. They were beaten, their noses split, and they were paraded around town on donkeys (backward) before they were taken back to prison.¹⁶

Some robbed people in daylight; others used the cover of darkness to commit their crimes. The year 695 AH was a terrible year with famine and starvation all over Egypt and parts of Syria. But no one expected the murder of night watchmen, one or two a night, to take place in the darkened alleys of Damascus. Fear, rumors, and theories abound to explain

15 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 3, 118-19.

16 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 319-20.

such events, especially as there was nothing stolen or missing. The governor, thus, increased night patrols, stationed guards in specific locations, and divided the city into sections with guarded entrances. Nearly a month passed under such circumstances until finally a *faqīr muwallah* was arrested for these crimes. He confessed to the killing of the watchmen and others whereupon he was nailed to a board for two days before he was suffocated to death.¹⁷

Located inside the city gates in the area of Bab al-Nasr, the *Madrasa 'Adhrāwiyya* was once the scene of a suicide of one of its occupants. A decree arrived from Cairo on Jumada II 22, 689 AH, ordering an investigation into the operations of Nāṣir al-Dīn Ibn al-Maḡdisī. This man had been in a very powerful position as the *wakīl* of Sultan Qalawun. He supervised the treasury and the *awqāf* in all of Syria, including those in Damascus. Thus, his fiscal jurisdiction on behalf of the Sultan encompassed the endowments supporting various *madrasas*, the Umayyad Mosque, the three *māristāns* (hospitals/medical schools) in Damascus, *Dīwān al-Aytām* (the bureau of the orphans), *Dīwān al-Umyan* (the blind), *Dīwān al-Judham* (the lepers), and *Dīwān al-Asrā'*, the Muslim captives to be ransomed from the Crusades. Al-Jazarī knew Ibn al-Maḡdisī and sat with him for an interview. Ibn al-Maḡdisī lamented at the litigious nature of the Damascene as he had upwards of 300 complaints that day, one accusing the other. But disgrace could come quickly in the Mamluk realm and Ibn al-Maḡdisī was remanded to the *Madrasa 'Adhrāwiyya* while an accounting of his dealings was carried out. Two months later, a decree arrived to pack him off to Cairo. The very next day, he was found hanging in his room.¹⁸

Suicide, it would seem, was the only option left to Taqī al-Dīn Muḡammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Ḥusaynī, i.e. from a sharifian family, when

17 *Faqīr* usually refers to a mystic and *muwallah* usually refers to one who “was touched by the spirits” and who lost his mind and gone mad; see *Ta'riḡh*, vol. 1, 285.

18 For *dīwān al-asrā'*, see *Ta'riḡh*, vol. 2, 192, where we learn that Chief Judge Qazawīnī started the practice. The ransom was paid from this *dīwān* in full to the merchant who brings a captive alive. In Ramadan 727 AH a group of 140 captives, purchased by Christian merchants at a cost of 60,000 dirhams, arrived from Cyprus. The rent on a stall inside the city paid by Musliḡ b. Muhammad al-Ḥūḡī, a druggist/herbalist originally from Persia, was paid to the *dīwān al-asrā'*, see *Ta'riḡh*, vol. 2, 155. For the man in charge of this *dīwān*, see p. 457. The story of Ibn al-Maḡdisī could be found in Gotha ms. A 1560, f. 55.

he could not repay a debt of 10,000 dirhams he owed to al-Ḥaj Jāmi' al-Sulāmī. Sunday evening Jumada II, 14 731 / March 25, 1331, as creditors stood at the gate, he locked himself in his house, in the Balāṭah neighborhood of Damascus, and hung himself. His body, along with a suicide note, was discovered the following morning.¹⁹ Some years later, Abū Bakr Zayn al-Dīn was murdered in the *Madrasa Shāmiyya* where he was a teacher of fiqh. This murder was committed in the middle of Ramadan 737 / April 1337.²⁰ Three months later, Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Balabān hanged himself in his own stables fearing torture and humiliation.²¹ His fears, we later find out, were unfounded! The *Madrasa Zāhiriyya*, another long-lived and celebrated *madrasa*, was also the scene of a crime. One of its residents, Ḥaḥṣ ibn 'Umar al-Fāriqī, was found dead in his room. He was suffocated to death on Muharram 3, 689 / January 16, 1290. A scholar of Shafī'ī *fiqh*, he was also noted for his knowledge of astrology, astronomy, and language sciences. His murderer eventually confessed.²² The murderer of the 90 year old deputy supervisor of the *waqf* was also apprehended. He was executed as was the murderer of Jamal al-Din Mahmud Ibn al-Hijazi who was killed on his way to Aleppo.²³

The 'Amāma Thief

By the fourteenth century, the 'amāma, a turban that was usually a shawl that was rolled and wrapped intricately around the head, had become part of the sartorial collection of urban notables. Chief Judge al-Qūnawī ordered the practitioners in the legal system to do business while wearing an 'amāma. Some of the *shuhūd*, professional witnesses, even had to borrow money to afford a decent looking 'amāma.²⁴

Al-Jazarī pays significant attention to the turban. Scenes of chaos are described as situations when the 'amāmas were pell-mell snatched right

19 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 492.

20 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 3, 945.

21 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 3, 683.

22 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 1, 12; vol. 3, 606.

23 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 1, 411.

24 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 276.

from the head.²⁵ Another scene he describes took place in Muharram 692 in today's southern Jordan. Muharram 692 coincided with January 1293, which means winter in the Levant and it seems that the New Year ushered in a very bad season for the Eastern Mediterranean. Storms, up and down the coast, of high winds, torrential rains, and copious hail, destroyed properties and crops, killed people and their beasts of burden. In one episode during this winter, al-Jazarī tells us that pilgrims returning along with the Damascene caravan experienced the full wrath of a storm when they reached Ma'ān. Severe winds, according to al-Jazarī, the kind that carry away stationary camels, hit the caravan and caused great difficulty, including the launch of an untold number of *'amāmas* up in the air.²⁶ You might be able to imagine two, three, or a dozen *'amāmas* flying up in the air, now try to imagine the scene knowing that the Damascene pilgrimage caravan could have upward of 15,000 camel loads.²⁷

The *'amāma* could be a beautiful and expensive piece of textile. Men and women in Damascus wore their *'amāma* proudly and displayed it in different styles. One might think that there was a debate or a competition between the genders regarding who should wear the bigger *'amāma*. If there was such a controversy, it should have been settled by Shujā'ī, governor of Damascus, when he decreed on Ramadan 25, 690 / September 1291 that women should not wear any *'amāma* deemed to be bigger than those of the men's. A Woman's *'amāma* should be a modest affair; otherwise transgression will be severely punished. Al-Jazarī reports that although women disliked the order, they grudgingly complied. The Damascene knew Shujā'ī to be an odd governor when ten days earlier he imposed a night curfew on Damascus, which was to commence after the second evening prayer, a time when shops, too, were to close their doors. Such an order was considered, *shawādh*, indeed odd given that these are the few remaining nights of Ramadan, a time of great and spirited activity. It was also September, and no doubt the temperature was warm enough to

25 See, for example, his description of a panicked crowd losing shoes and *'amamas* in Alexandria in 1327 in *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 185-8; see also Mahmood Ibrahim, "The Silk-Weavers' Rebellion," *Mamluk Studies Review*, forthcoming.

26 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 1, 151-2.

27 The caravan of the pilgrimage season of 728 reached 15,000. It started out on Monday, Shawwāl 8, and continued until the following Thursday; see *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 268.

send people outdoors, especially along the Baradā, an area the shops and swimming pools of which were also closed down by Shujā'ī. They thought that such an order will not pass. However, later that night people who were walking about were picked up by Shujā'ī's men and taken to prison. In the negotiations to release these prisoners and to ease up on the curfew, Shujā'ī demanded that each *Shaykh al-Ḥārah* (neighborhood chief) must inform him of what goes on in his district. We may concede to Shujā'ī that such a move betrays a crude and calculating figure, but it should be remembered that the intelligence he got, not only led to the 'amāma decree but also to the order that Qur'anic verses should not be embossed or embroidered on handkerchiefs and such textiles.²⁸

The 'amāma was a pricey part of the attire and the demand for it seems high. But, while some were willing to pay for it or borrow money to acquire it, there were others who were not so inclined and decided to steal their 'amāma. Fortunately, these were not many. Being an 'amāma thief was not only a losing venture but it could also send you to prison, or even worse trouble! A *liṣṣ*, i.e., a thief, the kind that snatches 'amāmas, confessed to one Riḍwān Ibn Qursuq, a Damascene jail-keeper, of the strangest night in his career. He says "in a dark night, in a particular place, no sooner than I stood there at that spot, my 'amāma was snatched from the top of my head. I walked back home and I had a *takhfīfa* (an underlayer), so I took it and put it over my head as an 'amāma and went to another place. Again, no sooner than I had stood in a spot, the *takhfīfa* was snatched, too. I then went back home again and this time I took the *muqanna'a* (headdress/veil) of my wife and used it as an 'amāma. My wife protested thinking that I intended to give the headdress to a girl in town. All the while, she was cursing and swearing that if the headdress is lost, she will tell the authorities. I went out yet to a third place and the headdress was snatched, too. I could not go home empty handed, especially fearing my wife and her threats. But it is well into the night and no place remained open except *Siqāyat Jūrūn* (a caravanserai). I had a *mindeel*, a handkerchief, which was tied to my waist, so I put it over my head and walked to the *Siqāya*. I went in and stood to the side to watch who comes in, and lo and behold a man walked in with a big 'amāma over his head, I mean big to a degree (*ilā ghāya*). I thought to myself "that 'amāma ... I will steal." So I waited until he was well settled down and comfort had overtaken him; I opened his door and quickly

28 *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 1, 59.

snatched the *'amāma* and ran in one breath all the way home. When I inspected what I had grabbed, I found the *'amāma*, the *takhfīfa*, and the *muqanna'a* that were stolen from me that night; they were whole, no thread added, no thread missing, my night ended with no profit and no loss. I was the happiest, however, for the return of my wife's headdress, otherwise she would have told the authorities and who knows what else."²⁹

Thieves stealing *'amāmas* did not only operate in Damascus. A network of night-robbers who specialized in stealing *'amāmas* and other clothes was caught in Cairo after the leaders of the gang, Ibn Salem and al-Majdhum, were apprehended after being tracked for nearly three months. Some members of this network were executed by splitting in half; others were nailed to boards as punishment.³⁰

'Amāma thieves and dark alleys were real enough a threat that al-Šāhib Shams al-Dīn Ghibriyāl (Gabriel) took action to curb their activities. His tenure in Damascus is the flipside of Shujā'ī's: Ghibriyāl oversaw much construction. Ghibriyāl, an Egyptian Copt, was employed in the Cairo treasury when in December 1293 a coup took place against al-Ashraf Khalil – he was attacked and killed while on a hunting trip outside of Cairo. While there seems to be a good number of Mamluk commanders who went along with the conspiracy, there were others who put forward the candidacy of Khalil's younger brother as Sultan. Immediately, the success of the coup came to be questioned and some conspirators had to flee or stay out of sight. One conspirator, Qara Sunqur, found a refuge and a hiding place in Ghibriyāl's house. When the succession to al-Ashraf Khalil was sorted out about a year later, Qara Sunqur surfaced and all the while acknowledged that he owed a great debt, if not his life, to Ghibriyāl. Thus a strong bond was forged between the two. Al-Jazarī says that this bond was the key to Ghibriyāl's prosperity and good fortune. Ghibriyāl did not need to convert to Islam to work in the government. But, after seven years into his association with Qara Sunqur, that is in 701/1302, Ghibriyāl decided to convert, an event witnessed by Ibn al-Miḥaffdār, *amir jandar*, who was a friend, a colleague, and a frequent correspondent of al-Jazarī. In fact, al-Jazarī was staying in Ibn al-Miḥaffdār's house in Cairo having fled there,

29 This event is related by Ibn Qursuq who was an acquaintance of al-Jazarī; *Ta'rikh*, vol. 1, 144.

30 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 320.

along with so many from Syria, ahead of the final Mongol invasion of Damascus. The conversion ceremony, Ibn al-Miḥaffdār informed his guest, took place in the Citadel, and each of the converts, in this case two, was named ‘Abdallāh, each was rewarded with robes of honor, and each was confirmed in the post he already held.³¹

Ghibriyāl’s tenure in Damascus was long lasting and a productive one. He first came to Damascus in 709/1309 when Qara Sunqur, the newly appointed governor, brought him along as his trusted associate and appointed him to supervise the *waqf*, reportedly for a salary of 700 dirhams per month. Ghibriyāl was confirmed in 713/1313 and was given greater fiscal powers and responsibilities before he was finally removed in an administrative shakeup that commenced in Muharram 733/1332.

By the time he was recalled to Cairo, Ghibriyāl had established three *waqfs* paid for from his own money. He purchased a ruined church inside Bab Saghir, knocked it down, and built it in his wife’s name as *Ribāṭ Nisā’*, for the widows of Damascus. In the neighborhood of Bab Sharqi, Ghibriyāl built a mosque which had an endowment to support an *Imam*, a *khaṭīb*, two *mu’adhdhins*, a Qur’an reciter, and a *kursī*, or chair, for the teaching of Hadith. He built also a *turba* (mausoleum) intending it to be his burial place. The third *waqf* was also in the area of Bab Sharqi, to the south, or opposite, of the mosque. This was a bathhouse for the lepers. It was rented out for four dirhams a day, money to be used by the lepers as they see fit.

Ghibriyāl did not like a dark alley that stretched between his house and the Gates of Bab Saghir. It was also narrow and apparently the perfect location for ‘*amāma*’ thieves. To remedy the situation, Ghibriyāl bought the house that was located on the other side of the alley, knocked it down, and removed the walls. He, thus, opened up the space which once was narrow and brought light in where it was once dark; he removed the cover of darkness that allowed the ‘*amāma*’ thieves to pursue their nefarious deeds.

Ghibriyāl died less than two weeks after his wife passed away. He was survived by six daughters and one son. It is interesting to note that after 33 years three of the daughters were Muslim and the other three were Chris-

31 *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 2, 104, 530; vol. 3, 587-8, 590, 593, 677. For a discussion of Copts converting to Islam during this period, see Donald Little, “Coptic Conversion to Islam under the Bahri Mamluks, 692-755/1293-1354,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39 (1976): 552-69.

tian. Ghibriyāl's wealth, after an extensive investigation, was found to be legitimate and was released to his heirs. Ghibriyāl's legacy was eventually divided into eight shares, the son got two shares and the six daughters received one share each.³²

Ghibriyāl's mixed-faith family was not an exception. Al-Jazarī tells us that Farajallah ibn abi al-Barakāt al-Miṣrī, who was promoted to several posts in the city government, including supervision of farmlands around Damascus, died on Sunday 23, 731 / June 30, 1331. He was a Muslim employed in the various bureaus for over 30 years. His father remained a Christian and was also employed in the government, as the *mustawfi* of the governor.³³

Ibrahim ibn Hubasa from Jerusalem, also a *mustawfi*, was a recent convert to Islam and, naturally, part of his family was Christian. As he lay dying on his deathbed in the early days of 728, his cousin converted to Islam so he can share the inheritance with other survivors, mainly a wife and two daughters. It so happened also that one of the daughters died three days after her father passed away. The convert received five shares from his cousin's legacy and four shares from the daughter's. In finalizing the distribution, he had to pay a death tax in the sum of 7,000 dirhams on account that he only became a Muslim three days previously.³⁴

Conversion between faiths is a personal matter and was done, no doubt, for a myriad of reasons and by people in different stations of life and the social ladder. As conversion had its own rewards, it also had its own risks. That is what Tuma ibn 'Abdallah found out on Tuesday, Jumada II 18, 726 / April 22, 1326 when he was beheaded for apostasy. Tuma became Muslim at the hands of none other than Ibn Taymiyya, and remained a Muslim in good standing for a long while before he recanted, reportedly saying that the Qur'an is one third Torah and one third New Testament, and the

32 For Ghibriyāl's obituary and works, see *Ta'rikh*, vol. 3, 677-8, 683, 735-6; for the release of his properties and the division of the inheritance, see vol. 3, 866-7.

33 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 501-2.

34 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 281. The case of the house of Badr ibn Qais, however, was different. A Christian man was caught drinking wine with a Muslim woman in Ramadan. Al-Jazarī seems to indicate that the punishment, burning down the house and the man in it, and splitting the nose of the woman, was politically motivated; see Gotha ms. A 1560, f. 56.

other third made up.³⁵ Another convert to Islam who changed his mind was beheaded on Shawwal 29 730 / August 15, 1330.³⁶ Beheading seems also to be the punishment that fell upon Muslims who were accused of *zandaqa*, such as ibn al-Hitī, once an accomplished Qur'an reader. There was much controversy whether he should be executed or not, but he was finally beheaded in *Suq al-khayl*, the Horse Market, outside the city walls, a recurrent location for public executions.³⁷

The Wedding Crasher

For better or worse, for richer or poorer, marriage was an institution, universally celebrated. The wedding is really the *'aqd qirān*, literally the tying of companionship, i.e., the marriage contract, and for the most part this ceremony was usually private. The *'urs*, or public celebrations that follow, were modest affairs, except, of course, if it was the wedding of the Sultan's daughter or his son.³⁸ For example, Ibrahim, son of the Shafī'ī Qadi, married the niece of Jalal al-Din, once the Qadi of Jerusalem. The ceremony was conducted in one of the halls of the *Madrasa 'Ādiliyya* (residence of al-Ikhnā'ī, the chief judge and the father of the groom) and *jullāb* (rose water) was passed around in celebration. On that occasion a *sadāq khutba*, a wedding oration, was recited; and we may assume that the oration was delivered by the chief judge himself. Otherwise, as al-Jazarī informs us, you can order a *khutba* to be recited at your wedding or other public ceremonies from Ali ibn Ghānim, who worked as a scribe, but who also composed customized *khutbas* for all occasions, especially for those who perform marriage contracts.³⁹

35 *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, 108.

36 *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, 400. A Muslim who was accused of blasphemy was jailed although he denied the charges; see vol. 2, 463; a Christian who cursed the Prophet caused a great deal of debate but he was eventually set free; see vol. 1, 202.

37 *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, 106.

38 For a discussion of marriage practices, see Yossef Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

39 For weddings of the Sultan's son and daughter and the enormous expense of the festivities, see *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, 184-5, 198-9, 524. The modest ceremony with *jullāb* took place on Friday, Muharram 1, 732 AH; see vol. 2, 514. The obituary of Ibn Ghānim appears in vol. 3, 946.

A *zaffa* was usually part of the marriage celebrations, when the wedding party, especially the men, celebrate the groom's transition into married life with song and chants while parading through the neighborhood. Apparently the *zaffa* could be held at night since al-Jazarī informs us that a group of 40 men holding candles formed a procession and went through the streets from one shop to another. The people of the neighborhood thought that they were part of a *zaffa*. It turns out that these forty men were breaking into shops and stealing their wares. By the time the ruse was discovered, the thieves made away with merchandise worth 20,000 dirhams.⁴⁰

Part of the marriage contract is the *mahr*, the dowry and the *ṣadāq*, the marriage gifts. Al-Jazarī provides a glimpse of this when he reports that Jalāl al-Dīn ibn al-Qalānisī married his cousin, her *ṣadāq* was 300 Egyptian dinars.⁴¹ Marrying one's cousin was considered ideal, except, of course, for the Mamluks who practically had no cousins. The author's own son, Ibrahim, married his cousin. Ideal or not, this marriage lasted only a month and ended up in divorce. It took Ibrahim five years to attempt marriage again, this time to a girl from a different family altogether.⁴²

A long lasting marriage was that of Ḍaifah bint 'Umar who married Muhammad ibn al-Irbilī, another acquaintance of al-Jazarī. Ibn al-Irbilī described the difficult time during one Ramadan when he suffered a bout of *ramad* (ophthalmia, or bleary-eyed), and thus could not work: His family, with a young girl named Nafīsa, went hungry more than necessary in Ramadan because they did not have anything to eat in the first place. Ḍaifa, therefore went to work as a seamstress in the *kawāfī* (*tukhayiṭ fī al-kawāfī*), textile workshops, perhaps for kafīyyehs.

Her wages were half a dirham per day and her master (*mu'allim*) paid her once every two days. They were so poor they subsisted on bread and some greens. Ibn al-Irbilī eventually worked as a *ḍāmin* (renter) of bath-houses and a khan. He used to give Ḍaifah all his proceeds and she would

40 This incident took place Sunday night, Dhu'l-Hijja 8, 695; *Ta'riḫh*, vol. 1, 293. Candles were used in processions receiving major dignitaries and may have led to the confusion. Al-Ashraf Khalil ordered that shopkeepers in Damascus greet him, and bid him farewell, with candles; see *Ta'riḫh*, vol. 1, 118-19.

41 *Ta'riḫh*, vol. 2, 395.

42 For his first marriage which lasted only a month, see *Ta'riḫh*, vol. 3, 598; for the second marriage in 738 AH, see vol. 3, 1012.

manage the money. Al-Jazarī adds that Ḍaifah, even 14 years after the death of her husband, managed the money so well to marry off three daughters and to raise one son, all on her own.⁴³

While Ḍaifah's management allowed her to live a satisfying albeit a hard life, different qualities distinguished the women in the household of Ahmad Ibn al-Dujājiyya. His grandmother was blessed with longevity. She outlived the rest of her family, accumulating more wealth as she inherited their property. By the time she died, her property was nearly half of the properties of *awlād Māḍi*, the Madi clan. When his grandmother died, Ahmad inherited all of that. His wife, al-Jazarī tells us, was a beautiful woman. She had her own wealth to begin with, inheriting a great deal from her father. She also outlived two rich husbands; both happen to be uncles of al-Jazarī himself. She also inherited a share from their wealth. She needed the advice of legal experts to settle all those accounts. Wajīh ibn Munajjā, an expert in the affairs of *Dīwān al-Ḥashriyyah*, the bureau that deals with inheritance matters, stepped forward to help her sort out all the necessary procedures. Al-Jazarī says that Wajīh was also interested in marrying her and that she seems to have led him on until the business with the *Dīwān* was settled. Despite all the gifts that Wajīh gave her, she refused to marry him because all the while she had her eye on Ahmad, a *qayyim amlāk*, an assessor of properties in Damascus, whom she eventually married. This marriage lasted enough for a miracle to happen. She had been barren all these years and spent nearly three thousand dirhams on medicaments and other stuff in order to conceive but to no avail, or as al-Jazarī says, God did not will it then. After she married Ahmad, she fell ill (in 680 AH) with a very bad fever. After her fever broke, she conceived and later gave birth to her only son. When she died, Ahmad Ibn al-Dujājiyya thus inherited a considerable fortune in addition to that which he had inherited from his grandmother.⁴⁴

Ibn al-Dujājiyya was fortunate not only because of the women in his life, but also because of his own industry having become a foremost expert on assessment of properties. If his life appears somewhat charmed, that of Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Sullamī, known as Ibn Quṣaybāt, was cursed. Ibn Quṣaybāt seems to have been a dunce who could not make

43 Daifah passed away in 729 AH and her obituary is in *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 375.

44 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 200.

it in whatever he tried, the opposite of his own father, a phenomenally successful merchant. His luck seems to run out on him quickly and more often. Al-Jazarī, once again provides curious details. Muhammad senior spent 5,000 dirhams on festivities when his son was circumcised (actually al-Jazarī uses the word *khiser* ‘*alayh* which means “lost on him”). When the young man married his cousin, the father spent 10,000 dirhams on the wedding celebrations (including the *kiswa*, the bridal attire and other clothes). The father, trying to do everything for his son, set him up in a business in Alexandria with capital of 50,000 dirhams. In addition, Ibn Quṣaybāt inherited 30,000 dirhams from his father when the elder finally passed away. It seems that no matter what amount his father spent or what the son got into, Ibn Quṣaybāt could not manage to turn a profit and the money simply disappeared. He died poor as he had neither the managerial skills of Ḍaifah nor the good fortune of Ibn al-Dujājīyya.⁴⁵

It was those types of wedding celebrations as that of Ibn al-Qalānisī, or even of Ibn Quṣaybāt, where guests put on their fine clothes and jewels, which the wedding crasher and her husband targeted for their criminal activity. Al-Jazarī calls her a *qawwāda*, a derogatory term, meaning a procurer or a pimp. She would enter the halls where wedding celebrations (*afrāḥ*) were taking place and she would scout the lady with the most jewelry, the finest adornments, and the most beautiful clothes. She would sit next to her, befriend her, and talk to her enticingly that she knows a handsome young man who would pay 50, even 100 dirhams for a liaison. If the woman was agreeable to the offer, the *qawwāda* would claim that such an encounter cannot take place in town, with the neighbors and others looking on. She would take her to a *bustān* (orchard) on the outskirts where her husband would be waiting, and that would be the end of the lady. One time, the *qawwāda* seduced a *māshīṭah*, a hair dresser, who also had an assistant. Three days after the hairdresser disappeared with more jewelry than usual, her assistant ran to the authorities and informed them of the affair. The husband of the *qawwāda* immediately ran away and no trace of him was ever found. The woman, however, was brought to prison where she was tortured for a confession. Despite that, she denied all accusations to a point that the authorities began to suspect that the assistant was lying. Prison officials then played a trick on the *qawwāda*. They asked a young woman to act as a mole, to make her believe that she is carrying a letter and money

45 *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 3, 786.

from the husband. The letter supposedly instructed her not to confess, that she spend the money as she wishes, and that more money will be sent to meet her needs. Having felt at ease with the mole, the *qawwāda* then told her that she has not divulged anything. When the authorities knew of this exchange, they tortured her again, this time hanging her by one arm while the other was weighted down. She finally confessed that she did this scam with a number of women. Al-Jazarī remarks that, consequently, too many things happened to explain in this sordid affair. She was condemned to death and was executed by hanging.⁴⁶

Another violent crime took place outside Damascus, in the Qubaybāt area. It was perpetrated by five men. They entered a house, raped a woman, and tied her up from head to toe before running off with wares and textiles from the house. Her husband, who was away working in the fields, came back in the evening to find his wife tied up and the house robbed. She told him of her ordeal upon which he immediately went to complain to the authorities. Wāli al-Barr was put in charge of the investigation and eventually captured four of the five men. They were beaten severely, their noses were split, and three of them were castrated. The fourth was spared from castration because the woman testified that he did not participate in the rape.⁴⁷

Violent crimes also took place inside the city walls. A man lived with his family in a house on Darb Banī Ṣabra, just inside Bab al-Jābiya. The wife passed away and the man remained with his own children and two female servants. He wasted the days drinking and “committing sin” with the young servants. One day the neighborhood guard found the door wide open with nothing to be seen except the two little children. The guard informed the authorities who sent some men to investigate. They found that the man had been suffocated to death and that the servant girls had run away. A long investigation ensued and it was finally determined that the older of the servant girls conspired with two soldiers to kill the man, take his money, the jewelry, and whatever they could carry. After committing the crime, they went to the house of one of the soldiers outside the city walls. There they spent their time drinking wine, eating, and abusing the servant girls. Eventually, the younger of the two girls had had enough

46 The story appears in *Ta'rikh*, vol. 3, 939.

47 *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, 252-3. A man who used to assault young boys was also castrated, vol. 3, 677. However, a man, a peeping-tom, who climbed the roof of the citadel to peep at the women, was executed; see vol. 1, 111.

and threw herself out of the window. The water carrier of the neighborhood who happened to be nearby took her to the authorities who immediately surrounded the house and arrested the three conspirators inside. They were publicly humiliated: Their noses were split, and they were paraded around town before they were executed for their crime. They were buried in a separate cemetery for those who had been executed, *maqbarat al-mushannaqīn*. As for the young girl, she was handed over to the *Diwan al-Aytam* (the Orphans Bureau) in exchange for 800 dirhams, which were given to the two surviving children.⁴⁸

A *qaysāriyya*, a caravanserai, which belonged to Ibn Fadlallah, in the market of al-Kaftiyyin (Suq al-Kaftiyyīn) was the scene of a horrendous crime. A dough-maker (*‘ajjān*) in the market attacked and killed a handsome youth by stabbing him repeatedly. The dough-maker confessed of his crime—and his love for the boy—in front of the Malikī judge who ruled that he should be executed. The killer was handed over to the family of the boy. The cousin of the dead boy performed the execution. The body and the head were displayed in the market area until the following afternoon.⁴⁹ A similar fate happened to a woman and two men. Apparently, they attacked a soldier on his way to Egypt and killed him near Gaza. They eventually made their way to Damascus where they tried to sell the soldier’s horse in the horse market. But people identified the horse and thereupon the crime unraveled. The three were executed, the woman was hanged and the two men were split in half.⁵⁰

Some regarded executions as a spectacle and al-Jazarī was sometimes disgusted by the crowds’ crush and reaction at these events. There was, however, one form of entertainment that was becoming increasingly popular, shadow plays, *khayāl*. A *khayyāl*, a puppeteer, came to Damascus to entertain the public. One of the subjects of his skits was the *Harāfīsh*. He poked fun at this “low class.” The *Harāfīsh* then organized a demonstration calling upon all the *Harāfīsh* in the city and beyond to gather and they did; 700 hundred strong, they protested at the governor’s residence. The governor relented and ordered the puppeteer out of the city immediately. Another local *khayyāl* was involved in a crime. Al-Jazarī says that

48 *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 2, 386.

49 *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 2, 386.

50 *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 2, 75.

two young men had been living together for some time (*muta 'āshirān*, co-habiting); Dawud was a young man who was employed as a tailor and Muhammad worked with his father in the bathhouses entertaining patrons with shadow puppets. They even had traveled to Tripoli where they also lived together for some time before coming back to Damascus. But discord seems to have flared up between them and Muhammad attacked Dawud intending to kill him. Dawud indeed died of his injuries, but not before revealing the identity of his attacker. An “all points bulletin” of sorts was declared and each responsible individual was ordered to remain vigilant in the search for the fugitive. He was finally tracked down and captured to be executed for his crime by hanging.⁵¹

In conclusion, al-Jazarī, among other chroniclers of the Mamluk period, provides us with enough information to study popular culture, not only in Cairo, but in Damascus and other major cities. There is enough information to bring into the light of history what might be termed the subaltern classes, even this very marginal population of criminal elements. Such studies add another dimension to our understanding of Damascene society during the Mamluk period.

51 For the *Harafish* and their protest, see *Ta'rikh*, vol. 3, 1026; for the story of the crime, see vol. 2, 346.