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Europe and the Muslim World
Before 1700

David Blanks
Editor

Contributors
Thabit Abdullah
Omaima Abou-Bakr
David Blanks
Nadia El-Cheik
Nabil Matar
John Rodenbeck
Elizabeth Sartain
John Tolan

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CHAPTER FIVE

MEDIEVAL MUSLIM-EUROPEAN RELATIONS: ISLAMIC JURISTIC THEORY AND CHANCERY PRACTICE

E. M. SARTAIN

The aim of this paper is to examine Muslim relations with Europe and Europeans, first from the standpoint of Muslim jurists, who gave recommendations on correct Islamic practice, and second, from the standpoint of Islamic chancery officials who were responsible for official correspondence with foreign rulers and their representatives.

Although only a small part of the relevant material is surveyed here, I believe it is sufficient to show that attitudes towards foreigners, whether European or not, were complex, and indeed the whole concept of "foreignness" in these medieval sources is vague and fluid. Owing to the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of the Middle East, feelings of mutual solidarity were usually based on a common political allegiance while ethnic and religious affiliations were subsidiary. Groups of Europeans and individuals could and did become subjects of Islamic dynasties, and as such they were part of the Islamic *umma* (community, or commonwealth). While it is true that the majority of Europeans, who were not under Islamic rule, were certainly viewed as foreigners and aliens, as "others", the perception of their "otherness" was not rooted essentially in ethnic or religious differences, except where pagan tribes were concerned. More important in creating a sense of difference was actual or potential hostility towards the Islamic state, especially if this was combined with a failure to comply with standards of behavior accepted as civilized in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Since European peoples differed from each other in their attitudes towards Islamic countries and in their degree of civilization, Muslim views of them varied. Indeed, medieval Muslim writers

seem to have been unfamiliar with the concept of "Europe" as a region inhabited by related peoples with a common culture.

Islamic Juristic Theory

Muslim jurists based their theories of recommended practice on Qur'anic precepts and on the practice of the Prophet and the early Islamic community, or *umma*. It follows that Islamic theory of peace and war reflects the historical conditions of the *umma* in the seventh century during the spread of Islam in Arabia and the subsequent Arab-Islamic conquests in the Middle East.

The *umma* which was formed in Medina in 622 comprised from the first non-Muslims as well as Muslims. Surrounding tribes who did not yet know anything of Islam or the Islamic *umma*, had to be informed of the obligations expected of them as Muslims or as allied non-Muslims and given the opportunity to join the *umma* voluntarily. If they rejected this option, they were regarded as enemies, to be fought until they were either killed or until they submitted and joined the *umma*. If they submitted, they had the choice of either converting to Islam or paying tribute and accepting the status of subordinate protected non-Muslims (*dhimmis*).¹ Although not all communities qualified for *dhimma* or protected status within the Islamic state, the Muslims found no difficulty in accepting Christian and Jewish peoples. These were people of the Scripture, who followed the same Abrahamic religion as the Muslims, and they could therefore be offered *dhimma*, even though they were considered to have deviated in various ways from the correct path.² *Dhimma* status was conditional upon loyalty to the Islamic state and the payment of tribute.³

Since the *umma* was continually expanding during its formative years, there was no precedent in early practice for long-term peaceful relations between the Islamic *umma* and non-Muslim peoples or nations who did not accept a

¹ Mawardi (d. 1058), *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya wal-waza'if al-diniyya* (Cairo, 1966), pp. 37, 49-50, 142-45. See also *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (hereafter abbreviated as EI 2), "dihad", vol. 2, p. 538.

² EI 2, "ahl al-kitab", vol. 1, pp. 246-266.

³ Mawardi, pp. 143-45.

tributary status.⁴ Non-tributary countries came to be classified by jurists as *dar al-harb* (territory of war), and their peoples were termed *kuffar* (unbelievers, infidels)⁵ or *harbis* (belligerents), against whom the Muslim ruler should wage *jihad* as a religious duty, until they became Muslim or agreed to become protected communities under Islamic rule.⁶

Although in the early period of Islamic expansion all Europe was *dar al-harb*, from the standpoint of Islamic theory there was nothing which distinguished Europe from any other region: its people might remain hostile to the Islamic *umma*, or they might join the Islamic state as converts to Islam or as protected peoples. This indeed is what happened in practice. As examples of European members of Islamic countries, one may cite the inhabitants of Muslim Spain and Sicily, and later the inhabitants of Greece and the Balkans. Most of these had the status of protected non-Muslim peoples, although some converted to Islam, like the Bosnians.⁷ European converts could rise to positions of power in Islamic states, especially if they had entered government service as slaves. The Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz' Commander-in-Chief, Jawhar al-Siqilli, who founded Cairo in 969 and built the famous al-Azhar Mosque, was a European of Slav or Mediterranean origin.⁸ During the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as a result of the development of the Ottoman *kapikul* and *devshirme* systems, converted Europeans came to form the elite of the Ottoman army and

⁴ Mawardi, p. 51; EI 2, "*djihad*", vol. 2, p. 539b. The only exception to this was the baqt treaty (pact) between Egypt and Christian Nubia, which was an anomaly.

⁵ For the exact meaning and use of this term, see EI 2, "*kafir*", vol. 4, pp. 407-409.

⁶ Mawardi, p. 16; Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), *al-Siyasa al-shar'iyya fi islah al-ra'i wal-ra'iyya* (Cairo, 1955) (reprint), pp. 117-125; M. Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State* (Hyderabad, Deccan, 1942), p. 102; M. Khadduri, "International law" in *Law in the Middle East*, M. Khadduri and H. Liebesny, eds. (Washington, D.C., 1955), vol. 1, pp. 350-51; EI 2, "*djihad*", vol. 2, pp. 538-540.

⁷ W.M. Watt and P. Cachia, *History of Islamic Spain* (Edinburgh, 1965), pp. 31-32; S.J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge), 1976, vol. 1, pp. 19, 24, 58-59, 114.

⁸ EI 2, "Djawhar al-Sikilli," vol. 2, pp. 494-495. For other examples of Slav and other European slaves in military and administrative service, see Hilal al-Sabi' (d. 1056), *Rusum Dar al-khilafah*, E. A. Salem, trans. (Beirut, 1977), p. 14; Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217) *Rihlat ibn Jubayr*, Husayn Nassar, ed. (Cairo, 1992), pp. 236, 243; EI 2, "Sakaliba," vol. 8, pp. 872-881.

administration.⁹ European women, both enslaved and free, became wives or concubines or mothers of Muslim rulers and notables,¹⁰ and were sometimes able to exercise considerable influence, whether they had converted to Islam or not.

Thus we can see that, for jurists, ethnic origin was irrelevant: what mattered was firstly whether an individual or group was willing to become a member of the Islamic community, and secondly, their religious affiliation, which determined whether they were entitled to join the community, and how they should be treated if admitted as members.

Attitudes of Islamic Chancery Officials

In considering the attitudes of officials in the Islamic chanceries and other government departments, it must be remembered that the Arab-Islamic conquests did not greatly disrupt the administrative structures of the conquered territories. The new Arab rulers had no choice but to rely heavily on the services of the indigenous non-Muslim, non-Arab bureaucratic classes, who continued to follow customary administrative procedures to a large extent.¹¹ The Arabization of the administration was slow: it was over fifty years before government departments were required to translate tax assessments and other administrative records from Greek, Aramaic, and Persian, and to carry out their administrative work entirely in Arabic.¹² Conversion to Islam was slower: in the former provinces of the Sassanid Empire, it is believed that non-Muslims were still quite numerous even in the tenth century.¹³ In Syria, and especially in Egypt, a much larger proportion of the inhabitants remained non-Muslim, although conversion was increasing by the fourteenth century. Even so, Christians remained influential in the administration, especially in finance.¹⁴ Therefore it must be borne in mind

⁹ Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, pp. 27, 90, 113-115; EI 2, "devshirme," vol. 2, pp. 210-213; "ghulam," vol. 2, pp. 1085-1091.

¹⁰ See for example, Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, p. 24.

¹¹ EI 2, "katib," vol. 4, p. 755a.

¹² EI 2, "diwan," vol 1, p. 324a.

¹³ EI 2, "Iran," vol. 4, pp. 43-44; "Madjus," vol. 5, pp. 1110-1112.

¹⁴ EI 2, "Kibt," vol. 5, pp. 90-95.

that most chancery officials were not of Arab origin, and they were not all Muslims.

The most detailed surviving medieval handbooks on chancery practice are Egyptian and date to the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods (twelfth to fifteenth centuries). I have relied on the best known of these for information on attitudes of Egyptian Muslim officials, not only towards external foreigners, both Muslim and non-Muslim, but also towards their Christian colleagues and the non-Egyptian Muslim rulers of Egypt. This enables us to place views of Europeans in a broader context.

One of the most comprehensive manuals for the Egyptian bureaucrats is Qalqashandi's *Subh al-a^ḥsha fī sina^ʿat al-insha*. This encyclopedia of chancery craft was completed in 1412 and makes use of documents and material from older works.¹⁵ Qalqashandi's section on foreign peoples and kingdoms is of especial interest since it shows how European peoples were classified relative to non-Europeans, both Muslims and non-Muslims. After a survey of world geography, Qalqashandi gives a brief history of the Islamic caliphate, which is followed by a description of Egypt and its dependencies. Egypt was at that time the center of a kingdom ruled by Mamluk sultans of mainly Turkish and Caucasian origins, and it was also the seat of a nominal Abbasid caliph. After giving a detailed account of the Mamluk territories and their administrative structures, Qalqashandi proceeds to survey foreign countries. He divides these into four main groups: lands to the East, West, South, and North of Egyptian-controlled territory.¹⁶ The principal countries and peoples in each region are described, either briefly or at length, and data on geography, flora and fauna, history, court ceremonial, administration, currency, prices, and exchange rates may be included, depending on the extent of Qalqashandi's information and what he thought the chancery official should know.

European kingdoms and peoples here are not "the West": they fall mainly into the northern region, together with the Muslim principalities in Anatolia. Only Spain is placed with the western countries, which also include the North

¹⁵ EI 2, "al-Kalkashandi, Shihab al-din Abu el-^ḥAbbas Ahmad b. ^ḥAli", vol. 4, pp. 509-511.

¹⁶ Qalqashandi, *Subh al-a^ḥsha fī sina^ʿat al-insha* (Cairo, 1913 - 1918), vols 3-5.

African Muslim kingdoms and peoples. The European kingdoms to the north are arranged according to importance, the great kingdoms being those of Constantinople, the Alman (Germans), Rome, Venice, and Genoa. These are followed by smaller kingdoms or states, such as Pisa, Apulia, the kingdoms of the Lombards, of the French, and of the Serbs and the Bulgars, and also by peoples like the Russians and the Slavs.¹⁷

The arrangements and contents of this section demonstrate a very Egyptocentric view of the world. Egypt was the center of the Islamic world, and according to Qalqashandi, an Egyptian, it was "of all countries the most important and the greatest in rank; and the most splendid of them as a state; it has the most fertile soil, the sweetest water, the most productive crops, the best fruit and the most pleasant air and it is the nicest place to live."¹⁸ It was surrounded by lesser civilized and uncivilized nations, both Muslim and non-Muslim. The primary division made by Qalqashandi is thus between Egypt and its dependencies on the one hand, and non-Egyptian countries on the other, not between Muslim and non-Muslim, or between "East" and "West".

If the information which Qalqashandi gives is truly typical of chancery knowledge, the Egyptian official seems to have been conservative and to have followed the traditions of the past. As much space is devoted to the ancient pre-Islamic world as to recent and contemporary conditions. Wherever possible, the main ruling dynasties from the time of the Flood are listed. Qalqashandi discusses Babylonians, Canaanites, the Hyksos, the Ionians, Greeks, and Macedonians; he gives details about Rome and Constantinople and their caesars and emperors. However, when it comes to rising western European states, his treatment is very sketchy. He discusses some political developments, for instance the Christian Reconquest of Spain, but in general the information he gives is sparse in comparison with the details which are found in his descriptions of most other countries. In the section on the Spanish kingdoms, he remarks: "The organization of the Frankish kings (of Spain) is like that of other Frankish kingdoms, which is unknown to us."¹⁹ By contrast, he has information on

¹⁷ Qalqashandi, vol. 4, pp. 369-422.

¹⁸ Qalqashandi, vol. 3, p. 285.

¹⁹ Qalqashandi, vol. 5, p. 272.

prices and exchange rates in the Sultanate of Delhi, as well as the ranks and salaries of government officials, court dress, and ceremonials.²⁰

In spite of the gradual increase of "Frankish" power in the Mediterranean at the expense of Egypt and the Byzantine Empire,²¹ little interest is shown in these countries' governments, military capacity, administration, or economy. Although Egypt had diplomatic and commercial relations with several of the western Mediterranean states, and presumably Qalqashandi could have collected more information from merchants and envoys who had visited them, he does not appear to have thought it worth the trouble, and there were evidently no detailed descriptions compiled by earlier authors to draw upon.

We also notice that Europe does not figure as a coherent entity: the European peoples form no distinct category or group. Qalqashandi sees European peoples and kingdoms as numerous different entities, which differ from each other in ethnicity and degree of civilization, and are very often at war with each other. He notices no particular connection between them other than their descent from Japhet, which is hardly significant since Japhet's descendents also include the Chinese and the Turks.²²

Qalqashandi devotes considerable space in his manual to the ranks, titles, and forms of address appropriate for all the different rulers and notables with whom the Egyptian chancery corresponded. Titles for Muslims are listed separately from titles for non-Muslims, since each category had different protocols, and within each category further distinctions are made on the basis of rank. The titles and honorific epithets which chancery convention deemed suitable for European dignitaries throw light on official attitudes towards them.

Qalqashandi begins the section on titles of non-Muslims by quoting juristic opinion that honorific titles should not be used in addressing non-Muslims *kuffar* (infidels), because Muslims have been instructed by God not to show any politeness or friendship towards them. When the Prophet wrote to Heraclius, he addressed him simply as "Heraclius", without according him any honorific

²⁰ Qalqashandi, vol. 4, pp. 84-98.

²¹ Qalqashandi refers to the decline of the Byzantines at the hands of the Franks (vol. 6, p. 92).

²² Qalqashandi, vol. 1, pp. 366-371.

titles.²³ Consequently, it comes as a surprise to find that the titles listed by Qalqashandi as suitable for use when addressing Europeans and other *kuffar*²⁴ are both elaborate and complimentary. A few examples will suffice to show the style of address:

In addressing the Byzantine Emperor, who, with the King of Ethiopia, was the highest ranking Christian foreign potentate, the chancery clerk should use such epithets as: the Lion, the Brave, the Reverend, the Pure of Lineage, Heir to the Ancient Caesars, Preserver of the Ways of the Philosophers and Wise Men, Expert in the Matters of his Religion, Just in his Realm, Bastion of Christianity, Endowed with Thrones and Crowns, Defender of Seas and Inlets, King of Kings of the Babylonians, Well-beloved of the Pope, Paragon of Kings and Sultans, Trusty Friend, and Friend of the Muslims.²⁵

The Pope of Rome, who is described as the equivalent of a caliph for the Melkite Christians,²⁶ may be addressed as the Saintly, the Spiritual, Exemplar of the Sects of Jesus, He who appoints the Kings of Christianity, Reciter of the Gospels, Resort of Patriarchs, Bishops, Priests and Monks, He who makes known what is Licit and Illicit, Friend of Kings and Sultans.²⁷

The King of Spain, generally known in Egypt as the Adfunash or the Funsh (a corruption of Alphonse), was of lower status, ranking below the King of Georgia. In spite of the dubious nature of his relations towards Muslims,²⁸ he was nevertheless to be addressed as the Lion, Surviving Descendent of Caesar, Heir of Lotharic, Warrior of Land and Sea, Hero of Christianity, Standard-Bearer of the Christians, He who Resembles St John the Baptist, Friend of Kings and

²³ Qalqashandi, vol. 5, p. 433.

²⁴ Qalqashandi has copied some of these from earlier works on chancery practice, some he claims to have copied from actual documents preserved in chancery archives, and others from chancery lists of protocols (*dasatir*, sing. *dustur*). See vol. 6, pp. 95-96.

²⁵ Qalqashandi, vol. 6, pp. 175, 177.

²⁶ Qalqashandi, vol. 5, p. 472.

²⁷ Qalqashandi, vol. 6, p. 173.

²⁸ Ibn Fadlallah (d. 1349) remarks that this King was noted for his evil intentions and his open and covert malevolence. See his *al-Ta^crif bi-lmustalah al-sharif*, Muhammad Husayn Shams al-din, ed. (Beirut, 1988), p. 92. This work is one of Qalqashandi's sources.

Sultans, and even Dear Friend of the Muslims.²⁹ The King of the Serbs and Bulgars, if Christian, was honored by such titles as Pillar of Christianity, Pride of the Community of Jesus, Treasure of the Christian Community, and Defender of Castles and Frontier Forts; the Doge of Venice was to be addressed for example as the Noble Duke, the Hero, Pillar of the Baptized, Pride of Christianity, Supporter of the Pope of Rome, as well as the usual Friend of Kings and Sultans.³⁰ Other titles are listed for foreign rulers' representatives, consuls, and merchants, and vary according to their rank and position.³¹

It is patently obvious that the use of titles and honorific epithets such as those mentioned owes very little to early Arab practice or official Islamic ideology. Indeed, we may ask why Egyptian Islamic chancery officials needed to use such complimentary forms of address to infidel dignitaries if on-going *jihad* was expected of the Muslim state. The answer is probably that after the disturbances occasioned by the first waves of the Arab-Muslim expansion had subsided, the countries of the eastern Mediterranean resumed their customary relations, which were dictated not so much by the claims and demands of their respective ideologies, now oppositional, but by their political and economic interests. For example, Egyptian governors and rulers, especially after they managed to free themselves from effective Abbasid control in the late ninth century, endeavored to follow policies which benefited Egypt, even if this meant fighting Muslim neighbors and concluding treaties of non-aggression or trade agreements with European infidel states. An independent Islamic Egypt continued to need alliances with countries in the eastern Mediterranean, firstly for strategic reasons, for instance for mutual protection against threats from Iraq, ruled successively by Abbasids, Iranian Buwayhids, Turks, and Mongols. Secondly, it had to ensure its vital supplies of timber, iron, weapons, and slaves, as well as grain imports in times of famine. European states in turn required Egyptian commodities and other goods imported via Egypt from India and the

²⁹ Qalqashandi, vol. 5, p. 484; vol. 6, p. 176.

³⁰ Qalqashandi, vol. 6, pp. 178-179.

³¹ Qalqashandi says that these titles are not fixed but based on chancery convention, and the chancery clerk may use his discretion in the exact choice of titles, as long as he observes the rules of suitability and rank. These are accepted usages, even though the addressee may not possess the qualities attributed to him (vol. 6, pp. 96, 181).

Far East and from sub-Saharan Africa. As long as conquest of the supplying country was not feasible, these goods had to be obtained by commercial agreements.

A fine example of such an agreement is that concluded between Egypt and Florence in 1489, which has been studied in detail by Wansbrough. It took two years to negotiate by various envoys sent by both parties, and when eventually ratified, it contained thirty-two clauses, which protected Florentine merchants and gave them various rights which facilitated their trade with Egypt.³²

In negotiating such treaties and conducting diplomatic relations with other countries, Egyptian administrators and chancery officials were without doubt relying on long-standing conventions shared throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Some of these may have developed when Egypt was part of the Byzantine and the Roman Empire, but their origins must go back far earlier, since formal diplomatic activity between Egypt and other countries of the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East can be traced back to the second millennium B.C.³³

Whatever may be the case, official Islamic ideology was no serious bar to alliances between Muslim and infidel European countries, and it did not prevent polite diplomatic correspondence between rulers who were formally enemies. For example, the Byzantine Emperor is reported to have written to congratulate Salah al-Din when he recaptured Jerusalem from the Franks in 1187. No doubt the Emperor had the interests of the Syrian Orthodox Christians in mind as well as the restoration of Byzantine authority over the Christian holy places.³⁴ Another example is the letter of the Fatimid caliph al-Hafiz to King Roger II of Sicily, in which he recognized the latter's capture of the island of Gerba, informed him of the release of Sicilian captives at his request, granted his vessels and envoys

³² J. Wansbrough, "A Mamluk commercial treaty concluded with the Republic of Florence, 894/1489" in *Documents from Islamic Chanceries*, S.M. Stern, ed. (Oxford, 1965).

³³ See for instance O.R. Gurney, *The Hittites*, revised ed. (Harmondsworth, 1990), pp. 62-63, especially his account of the treaty negotiated between Egypt and the Hittite Empire in 1258 B.C., of which two copies have survived.

³⁴ S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* (Harmondsworth, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 467-468.

relief from various port dues and taxes on their arrival in Egypt, and discussed other matters of mutual concern. This letter is quoted by Qalqashandi as an example of letters by Muslim caliphs to infidel rulers.³⁵

Such formally friendly relations were demanded by practical politics and economics. This is not to say, however, that relations between Muslim and infidel European countries were always friendly, and when the political situation demanded a tough line, Islamic invective and threats of *jihad* could then be relied upon to provide an appropriate response. For example, Ibn Fadlallah, a predecessor of Qalqashandi, relates an occasion when the Mamluk ruler sent the Funsh of Spain a rope and a stone, to imply that he was a dog and that if he was not restrained, he would have stones thrown at him.³⁶ As a master of Arabic prose style, Ibn Fadlallah also suggests for the use of chancery officials some examples of suitable openings for letters to enemy infidel rulers. For correspondence to the ruler of Rhodes, a nest of pirates, he proposed the following blessing, which convention demanded had to follow the addressee's titles: "May God forgive him, and safeguard him from the outcome of our ultimatum, and caution him of the consequences of his wickedness before it is too late."³⁷ As a preamble for a letter to the Funsh of Spain, after the titles and the blessing, he suggests: "The following is sent to him, (and he should know that) our spears cannot be turned back from slaughter, nor can our cavalry be stopped by walls, even when these are erected behind the protection of the sea!"³⁸ All this is composed in elegant rhymed prose.

In order to place relations with Europeans in the wider context of Muslim chancery officials' relations with various people whom they regarded in some way as "other" from themselves, it is instructive to consider the attitudes of Ibn al-Sayrafi, who was Fatimid Secretary of State and head of the Egyptian chancery in the early twelfth century.³⁹ In his *Qanun fi diwan al-rasa'il*, a work on

³⁵ Qalqashandi, vol. 6, pp. 458-463.

³⁶ Ibn Fadlallah, p. 92.

³⁷ Ibn Fadlallah, p. 85.

³⁸ Ibn Fadlallah, p. 94.

³⁹ EI 2, "Ibn al-Sayrafi," vol. 3, p. 932.

chancery practice which he believed was the first of its kind,⁴⁰ he begins by advising the ruler on the qualifications which his Head of Chancery and Secretary of State should possess. One of the essential qualifications is Islam. Ibn al-Sayrafi emphasizes that a Christian should not be appointed, because the Secretary of State was virtually the ruler's *wazir*, or prime minister, with authority over the affairs of Muslims. As the ruler's private secretary, he was privy to state secrets, and Ibn al-Sayrafi doubted whether a Christian minister could be trusted, especially as the enemy was now on Egypt's doorstep.⁴¹ He also points out that the Secretary of State or any high-ranking secretary who drafted correspondence to foreign kings must be able to use Qur'anic quotations to adorn his official correspondence and to prove the Islamic viewpoint. A Christian would naturally find it difficult to express the Islamic position with conviction, and in any case should not quote the Qur'an.⁴²

Both Ibn al-Sayrafi and al-Qalqashandi raise the questions of accuracy, loyalty, and security in their advice on translation to and from foreign languages. The secretary who composed correspondence addressed to foreign dignitaries should know their languages and translate the Arabic originals himself. If the secretary was unable to do this, an outside translator would have to be employed, which was understandably considered less secure. Correct translation was extremely important because errors might have serious consequences.⁴³ When letters in Armenian, Greek, Frankish, or other foreign languages arrived at the Chancery, they had to be translated into Arabic, and Ibn al-Sayrafi states that the Arabic translations must be officially certified as accurate in the presence of two witnesses. This was because the translator was usually a non-Muslim of the same religion as the writer of the letter, and his religious loyalties might tempt him to tamper with it.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Sayrafi (d. 1147), *al-Qanun fi diwan al-rasa'il*, A. F. Sayyid, ed. (Cairo, 1990), p. 6.

⁴¹ Ibn al-Sayrafi, p. 8. This refers to the Kingdom of Jerusalem, which had occupied Egyptian-controlled lands in South Palestine.

⁴² Ibn al-Sayrafi, pp. 8-9, 25.

⁴³ Ibn al-Sayrafi, p. 26; Qalqashandi, vol. 1, p. 165.

⁴⁴ Ibn al-Sayrafi, pp. 33-34.

All this serves to remind us that both Christians and Muslims were employed in the Egyptian chancery, and that it was evidently feared that Christians might be sympathetic towards foreign infidels who were co-religionists, and might betray the state or at least support actions that were not in its best interests.⁴⁵ Whether or not such fears were justified, they demonstrate that Christian Egyptians were suspected of having a different attitude towards European and other Christian foreigners than their Muslim colleagues.

Yet Egyptian Muslim and Christian chancery officials, who shared the same language, culture, and profession, probably had more in common with each other than with their rulers, who were not of Egyptian origin and in some cases retained their foreign languages and customs. Qalqashandi states that the good secretary should know foreign languages, not only to correspond with foreign rulers, but also to communicate with his own ruler and with the army officers, who might not speak Arabic well. Therefore the secretary should speak their language, whether Berber, Turkish, or Persian, in order to "facilitate comprehension and mutual understanding."⁴⁶

In the context of relations between the largely indigenous bureaucratic class and a foreign military elite, administrators' remarks about how to guide their rulers so that they govern well and in accordance with the interests of the state are pertinent. Ibn al-Sayrafi, who served under Fatimid military sultans of Armenian origin, discusses the Secretary of State's duty to ensure that the actions and writings which issued from his ruler were ones which benefited the state, redounded to its credit, and harmonized with Islamic Shari'a law. He should tactfully steer his ruler away from anything which was wrong or

⁴⁵ See Ibn Fadlallah's description of an incident, which he witnessed, when Christian officials supported the request of an envoy from the King of France that Jerusalem be ceded to him and jurisdiction over parts of Palestine shared, in exchange for a large down-payment, pp. 92-93.

⁴⁶ Qalqashandi, vol. 1, p. 166.

damaging to the state.⁴⁷ Works by administrators in the eastern Islamic provinces show that they had the same attitude towards their rulers.⁴⁸

The indigenous bureaucratic class as a whole seems to have identified very strongly with the state, and saw themselves as the best guardians of its interests. They not only considered it their duty to conduct relations with foreign powers to the benefit of the state and according to the accepted forms, but they also felt that they were responsible for maintaining good orderly government and advising their rulers how to rule. From the point of view of the Muslims among them, a recently converted, ignorant and violent barbarian military elite might do a lot of damage to the state, but was still preferable to rule by an infidel enemy. One cannot be sure that all the local Christians felt the same, and a consideration of the events in Syria and Palestine during the First Crusade (1098-1099) or during the Mongol occupation of Syria in 1259-1260 will quickly show the difficulties faced by Syrian Christians and Jews in deciding whether to collaborate with the non-Muslim invaders or not.

In conclusion, according to juristic theory, the true "others" were any infidel *kuffar* who refused to accept Islamic rule, and it made little difference whether these were Arabs, Europeans, Africans, or Asians. Protected peoples under Islamic rule were members of the Islamic state who had a special status characterized by different rights and duties from those of Muslims. Variations in the treatment of different groups were based on religion not on ethnic affiliation. Thus, European Christians were treated no differently than Syrian or Egyptian Christians.

The interests of the state dominate the standpoint of chancery officials. In general, their world was divided into friends and enemies, a division which did not always coincide with the theoretical juristic division into infidels and members of the *umma*. Moreover, Muslim chancery officials' attitudes towards

⁴⁷ Ibn al-Sayrafi, pp. 12, 13, 18.

⁴⁸ For example, *Risala fil-Sahaba* written by Ibn al-Muqaffa^c (d. 756) for the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur, and *Siyasatname* (*Siyar al-muluk*), written by Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092) for the Turkish Seljuk sultans. Both these administrators were Iranians.

their *dhimmi* Christian or Jewish colleagues, as well as to their Muslim "barbarian" rulers, were sometimes ambivalent.

In either case, the category "European" or "Western", as commonly understood today, does not appear as a classification for any group of aliens in the material which I have consulted. There seems to be no trace of the image of a collective hostile European "other", whose culture and political or economic power might prove a real threat to Islamic countries. Although the Muslims of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries certainly noted the rise of western European "Frankish" power, they were also aware of the internal struggles between the various European peoples and kingdoms, and perhaps thought they were too disunited and too backward to be potentially dangerous. Meanwhile, their traditional major enemy, the Byzantine Empire, was losing territory and in obvious decline.

In the light of the concerns of medieval Egyptian officials about possible treachery by their Christian colleagues and the best ways to maintain a strong, prosperous and independent Egypt in the face of external infidel threats, it is somewhat ironic that it was not the Franks or Byzantines who succeeded in conquering Egypt, but the Muslim Ottoman Turks. They rose to power on the ruins of the Byzantine Empire and inherited its imperial traditions, and it was they who brought Egypt and Syria back under the control of Constantinople. These were the new Byzantines, and although they were Muslims, a substantial number were Europeans.

Therefore, when considering images of the "other", it is necessary to bear in mind that there are many shades of "otherness". In a multi-cultural and multi-religious society, the concept of foreignness is relative. Images of the self and of the other can be multiple; in our Middle Eastern sources, we can see that they shift constantly according to the context and the viewer's standpoint, which is not static. The modern division of the world into West and East resembles the Muslim jurists' division of the world into Islamic territory and the territory of war; it is too simplistic and does not reflect the complexity of the real world.