

Qalāwūnid discourse, elite communication and the Mamluk cultural matrix: interpreting a 14<sup>th</sup>-century panegyric.

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#### Abstract

This article analyses a brief panegyric text from mid-14<sup>th</sup>-century Egypt, authored by the court scribe Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī (d. 1352) and dedicated to the Qalāwūnid Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl (r. 1342-5). It challenges this panegyric's standard treatment as a work of history and as a product of court propaganda and connects it to wider issues of Mamluk literary production and social organisation. In doing so, a new understanding of this panegyric emerges within a specific context of Mamluk elite communication and social performance, demonstrating at the same time how such a social semiotic reading of Mamluk cultural expressions generates further insights into the symbiotic interactions between Mamluk culture and society.

#### Keywords

Mamluk literature - panegyrics - *risālah* - Qalāwūnid dynasty - Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī - al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl - *mujaddid* - Mamluk cultural matrix - discourse - social performance - social semiotics

This article is about Arabic literary production in the Mamluk period (1250-1517), a historical period that on the one hand has been deemed no less than a 'silver age of Muslim scholarship', but that on the other has been and continues to be largely downplayed or even neglected as a valid subject for systematic research.<sup>2</sup> This article aims to further contemporary understandings of this vast but as yet little understood production by applying a less conventional approach that focuses on its wider social semiotic rather than on its mere literary, artistic or aesthetic values. Whereas this consideration of the multilayered interplay between social organisation and literary forms, functions and meanings is hardly anything new, it will be shown how current understandings of this interplay and its constituents can be advanced in a highly rewarding manner when literary texts are conceptualised as one particular set of discursive modes of elite communication, semiotically linked to —even defined by— issues of social identity, elite integration, and their performance. This approach will be applied to one remarkable mid-14<sup>th</sup>-century panegyric in particular, demonstrating how this text should not just be understood as an unusual literary history of the early Mamluk sultanate nor simply as a surprising discursive token of court propaganda, but also as an intriguing performance of identity through belletrism within the specific context of mid-14<sup>th</sup>-century Mamluk social organisation.

#### Setting the scene: Mamluk Literature vs. Mamluk Society ?

The as yet thin field of Mamluk literary studies generally assumes that by the Mamluk period literary culture in particular was more than ever before becoming an integral aspect of society's public organisation. But despite this general consensus on the wider circulation of literary culture in the Mamluk period beyond the private circles of professional *literati* and their patrons, the debate on the effects of this transformation on the overall quality of Mamluk literary production remains both vehement and unresolved. Furthermore, the debate on the actual extent of this wider circulation and on its functionality has hardly begun. This latter issue will be the point of departure for the

<sup>1</sup> This article originated as a paper to the 24<sup>th</sup> congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants, Leipzig, 24-28 September 2008; I am grateful to the organisers for accepting the paper, and to all participants to the session 'Classical Arabic Literature' for their feedback and comments. I am also grateful to my colleague Patrick Wing and to the journal's anonymous reviewers for most valuable comments and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Carl F. Petry, "Scholastic Stasis in Medieval Islam Reconsidered: Mamluk Patronage in Cairo," *Poetics Today* 14, no. 2 (1993), 323-48, esp. 324 ; Thomas Bauer, "Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches", *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005), 105-32; Thomas Bauer, "In Search of "Post-Classical Literature": A Review Article", *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11, no.2 (2007), 137-67; Salma Kh. Jayyusi, "Response to Thomas Bauer, review of *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*", *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12, no. 1 (2008), 193-207.

present article. In their respective general appreciations of Mamluk literature, Robert Irwin and Thomas Bauer concluded that whereas belletrism had indeed become “a pre-eminent medium of communication”, current knowledge of that literature suggests that Mamluk political and military elites were increasingly excluded from that communication, for simple lack of interest. In Bauer’s reading, the Mamluk period even saw the rise of a more egalitarian system of literary exchange among scholars and the marginalisation of “the former asymmetric poetic communication between a prince and patron as addressee on the one side and the poet as supplicant on the other”, which almost paradoxically resulted in “an increase in the social importance of poetry” as its freeing from the reins of political patronage allowed it to become a defining feature of scholars’ social identity instead of *literati*’s professional identity.<sup>3</sup>

In the present article, it will be argued that such a marginalisation of political elites and interests from current understandings of Mamluk literary culture is increasingly difficult to maintain, and that a more inclusive conceptualisation of Mamluk literature’s social importance may be more rewarding.<sup>4</sup> The obvious reason for such an argument is this article’s main subject, as this concerns one particular panegyric literary product by a mid-14<sup>th</sup> century secretary that upon close inspection turns out to involve not just political elites, but also issues of social identity and asymmetric communication at the same time.

This brief panegyric has survived—by sheer luck, it would seem— in one manuscript only, which was preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.<sup>5</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, baron M. de Slane, in his posthumously published catalogue of the library’s Arabic manuscripts collection, provided an informative description of this manuscript, identifying quite clearly the asymmetric and political nature of the text it contained:

*Al-Nūr al-lā’ih wa-l-durr al-ṣādiḥ fi ṣṭifā’ mawlāna l-sultān al-malik al-ṣāliḥ.* ‘The Brilliant Light and the necklace of Pearls, demonstrating that our lord the sultan al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ enjoys divine favour’, by Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qaysarānī, the Qurayshite, also known as al-Khālīdī since he was a descendant of Khālīd b. al-Walīd. This is a panegyric for the Mamluk sultan, al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā’īl, the son of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the grandson of Sayf al-Dīn Qalāwūn. The author was a secretary (*kātib dast*) of sultan al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ. He gives a summary account, but with dates, of how sovereignty in Egypt passed on from Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd, son of Zangī, to Qalāwūn’s grandson. This volume, written with exceptional elegance and in the author’s own handwriting, has a double frontispiece, very artistically executed with gold and colour; the two final pages are similarly decorated in gold. The manuscript was created between the years 743 and 746 of the *hijra* (1342-1345 AD)...<sup>6</sup>

This brief text’s Paris manuscript consists of 45 text folia with seven lines on each page only, written in a fine, very clearly legible and fully voweled *thuluth* script. As de Slane already noted, its opening and closing pages are richly decorated, suggesting that it was a product of artisanship. Unfortunately, any reference to a date of production is

<sup>3</sup> Robert Irwin, “Mamluk Literature”, *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7 (2003), 13; Thomas Bauer, “Mamluk Literature”, 108-11.

<sup>4</sup> For references to the involvement of political elites and interests, see Muhsin al-Musawi, “Pre-modern Belletristic Prose”, in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, eds. R. Allen and D.S. Richards (*The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 111-3, 132-3; Konrad Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography. Authors as Actors* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Ms. arabe 1708, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (a photocopy of the Paris ms. is preserved in Egypt’s National Library [Ms. 2223 *tārīkh Taymūr, Dār al-Kutub, Cairo*]). This Paris ms. was referenced as a historical biography in C. Brockelman, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur. Zweiter Supplementband* (Leiden: Brill, 1938), 24 (§ 3. Die Geschichtsschreibung. A. Einzelne Biographien). In 1982, a useful edition of the text on the basis of this manuscript was prepared by ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī, presenting the work as a history of the Ayyubids and Mamluks: Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Qaysarānī al-Qurashī al-Khālīdī, *al-Nūr al-lā’ih wa l-durr al-ṣādiḥ fi ṣṭifā’ mawlāna al-sultān al-malik al-ṣāliḥ wa-huwa tārīkh salāṭīn al-Ayyūbiyyīn wa-l-Mamālīk*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Tripoli: Dār al-Inshā’ li-l-ṣaḥāfa wa-l-ṭibā’a wa-l-nashr, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> Entry translated by the author from M. Le Baron de Slane, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1883-1895), 317-8.

lacking in the colophon, and a specialist study of the manuscript remains wanting, so that we know nothing about this manuscript's origins and material history.<sup>7</sup> As de Slane equally noted, the text's author is known in full as Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Qaysarānī al-Khālīdī (d. 1352), a professional scribe who made his career in the administrations of Mamluk Damascus and Cairo, and who is referred to in the text itself as writing it in the course of the *ḥijrī* year 743 (1342-3).<sup>8</sup> As the title of the text —*al-Nūr al-lā'ih wa-l-durr al-ṣādiḥ fi ṣṭifā' mawlānā al-sultān al-malik al-Ṣāliḥ* (The Brilliant Light and the necklace of Pearls, [demonstrating] the divine election of our lord the sultan, al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ)— makes amply clear, Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī wrote it as an encomiastic literary text dedicated to the sixteenth Mamluk sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl (known in full as al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ 'Imād al-Dīn Abū l-Fidā' Ismā'īl b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn), who was born in about 1320, who was enthroned in Cairo in June 1342, and who reigned relatively successfully over Mamluk Egypt and Syria until his death from natural causes three years later, in the summer of 1345. In this prose panegyric by one of his own chancery clerks, this Qalāwūnid or descendant of the illustrious Mamluk sultan Qalāwūn al-Ṣāliḥī al-Alfī (r. 1279-90) is presented as sent by God, his reign as the result of divine providence, and history as culminating in his rule over Mamluk Egypt and Syria.

In spite of Bauer's aforementioned observations regarding the remarkable transformations of literary culture in the Mamluk period, this first superficial encounter with Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī's panegyric for sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl already suggests that at least in the panegyric case the emergence of more symmetric forms of elite communication should not be taken for granted as a general rule. It has been well established by now that throughout the Mamluk period social organisation was asymmetrical and inclusive, with different Mamluk social groups, including scholars and political and military elites, all being integrated into one social system that was defined first and foremost by relationships of power across social roles.<sup>9</sup> It is also well-known that cultural patronage, most notably by political elites, was an equally defining feature of the Mamluk social environment, resulting amongst others in architectural landscapes and artefacts that continue to remind of the importance that was attached to these cultural expressions by late medieval Islamic elites such as those of Mamluk Egypt and Syria.<sup>10</sup> In fact, there exists yet another emerging scholarly consensus that throughout the Mamluk period elite groups of whatever background indeed operated within a cultural matrix of highly integrated political, religious and socio-economic interests.<sup>11</sup> The increased social importance of Mamluk literature, and Mamluk panegyrics in particular, should not be considered an exception to this integrative process. After all, Arabic panegyric prose and poetry always represented one of those cultural forms that

<sup>7</sup> By lack of a proper colophon, it is unclear whether de Slane had any material evidence to suggest that this manuscript was written by the author himself between the *ḥijrī* years 743 and 746, but it is not unlikely that it is indeed an autograph produced towards the end of 743 AH (Spring 1343) (see below). Further study of the marginal notes (*mutāla'āt*) on the opening and closing pages (including a 15<sup>th</sup>-century amir's emblem (*rank*), composed of a penbox and a cup flanked by two napkins) may prove helpful in this respect, even though most of them are hardly legible.

<sup>8</sup> See below for more details on his life. There remain two entries on him in the Mamluk biographical dictionaries: Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān al-Aṣr wa-A'wān al-Naṣr*, eds. 'A. Abū Zayd et al. (Beirut & Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1998), I: 84; Aḥmad b. Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-Kāmina fī A'yān al-Mī'a al-Thāmina*, ed. H. al-Nadawī (Beirut: Dār al-Jayl, 1993), I: 37.

<sup>9</sup> This current appreciation of Mamluk social organisation has been summed up in a most intelligent manner in Jonathan P. Berkey, "Culture and Society during the late Middle Ages," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, *Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 386-411. See also Jonathan P. Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle & London: Univ. of Washington Press, 2001); Jo Van Steenberg, "The Mamluk sultanate as a military patronage state: household politics and the case of the Qalāwūnid Bayt (1279-1382)", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> See Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks. A History of the Architecture and its Culture* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> A term pioneered by Berkey, "Culture and Society during the late Middle Ages," pp. 386-411. See also J. Van Steenberg, "The amir Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī (d. 1366), the Qalāwūnid sultanate, and the cultural matrix of Mamluk society. A re-assessment of Mamluk Politics in the 1360s," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131, no. 3 (2011), in press.

are most illustrative of the intimate relationship between culture and social organisation.<sup>12</sup> They should therefore rather be conceptualised within this same epistemological perspective of the integration into one asymmetric social system of different social groups, including political and military elites. As already suggested above, Ibn al-Qaysarānī's panegyric for sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl presents a graphic illustration of this integrative process, which actually enables —as will be pursued in this article— to further current considerations of the increased social importance of Mamluk literature and of its meanings for Mamluk social organisation.<sup>13</sup>

The following pages will therefore be devoted to a close reading of this panegyric text, moving from the more traditional approaches of political history and literature to a more novel one that focuses on the text's wider social semiotic value and on the manner in which it allowed for its author to engage with social realities.<sup>14</sup> More precisely, it will be shown how the author of this text applied prevalent historiographical and literary modes of communication within a performative context of social identity, patronage and Mamluk social organisation.

### The historical dimension: *Al-Nūr al-Lā'ih* as an exponent of Qalāwūnid discourse

In 1992, Otfried Weintritt convincingly applied the perspective of Ulrich Haarmann's 'Literarisierung' of Arabic historical writing in the later medieval period to an analysis of four pseudo-historical texts from the late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Despite Weintritt's emphasising of the literary rather than the mere historical character of these texts —each of them being built up around a historical case, either a single event (the 1365 sack of Alexandria by the Cypriot king Peter I and his Latin allies) or an individual sultan (al-Nāṣir Ḥasan [r. 1347-51; 1354-61]; al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh [r. 1412-21]; al-Zāhir Ṭaṭar [r. 1421])—, he yet also had to concede that there was a fundamental layer of historicity that should not be ignored and that the panegyrics of Shaykh and Ṭaṭar in particular also have to be understood within a larger context of the performance and communication —even propaganda— of a ruler's legitimate authority.<sup>15</sup> Peter Holt had actually nurtured this approach<sup>16</sup>, and he furthered it in his own 1998 study of seven literary texts from Mamluk and Ottoman Egypt, all of which were defined as panegyric offerings in the form of a book to the ruler of the time. Holt stated that the most conspicuous points these variegated 'literary offerings'— as

<sup>12</sup> For a most inspiring insight into the links between society and culture in 13<sup>th</sup>-century Syria, see now Hirschler, *Authors as Actors*. For assessments of pre-Mamluk Arabic panegyric literature's social engagement, see amongst many others R. Rubinacci, "Political Poetry", in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, eds. J. Ashtiany et al (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 185-20; Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the poetics of the 'Abbāsīd age* (*Studies in Arabic Literature* vol. 13) (Leiden: Brill, 1991); A. Hamori, *The Composition of Mutanabbī's Panegyrics to Sayf al-Dawla* (*Studies in Arabic Literature* 14) (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Abbasid Panegyric and the Poetics of Political Allegiance: Two Poems of al-Mutanabbī on Kāfir", in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia & Africa. vol. 1 Classical Traditions & Modern Meanings*, eds. Stefan Sperl and Chr. Schackle (*Studies in Arabic Literature* vol. 20, no. 1) (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 35-63; B. Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry. Ibn al-Rūmī and the patron's redemption* (*RoutledgeCurzon Studies in Arabic and Middle-Eastern Literatures*) (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Jocelyn Sharlet, *Patronage and Poetry in the Islamic World. Social Mobility and Status in the Medieval Middle East and Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Apart from Hirschler's, there are within the small field of Mamluk literary research more and more studies that take into account Mamluk literature's engagement with specific social realities, including, for example, contributions by Geert Jan van Gelder, Thomas Bauer, Everett Rowson, Muhsim al-Musawi, Thomas Herzog, Amila Buturović, Li Guo and Emil Homerin to *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7 (2003), a special thematic issue dedicated to the literary culture of the Mamluk era.

<sup>14</sup> This specific way of looking at Mamluk literature —and at cultural practice in general— is to a large extent grounded in Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' and in the performative turn in the social sciences; it is heavily indebted to, amongst others, various contributions to *Social Performance. Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics and Ritual*, eds. J.C. Alexander, B. Giesen & J.L. Mast (*Cambridge Cultural Social Studies*) (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), and to *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*, ed. Carey Jewitt. London: Routledge, 2009. Within the field of Mamluk studies, suggestions for an understanding of the interaction between society and literature along such performative and social semiotic lines may be found in Hirschler's *Authors as Actors* and in Thomas Herzog, *Geschichte und Imaginaire: Entstehung, Überlieferung und Bedeutung der Sīrat Baibars in ihrem sozio-politischen Kontext*, (*Diskurse der Arabistik* 8) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> O. Weintritt, *Formen spätmittelalterlicher islamischer Geschichtsdarstellung. Untersuchungen zu an-Nuwairī al-Iskandarānīs Kitāb al-Ilmām und verwandten zeitgenössischen Texten* (*Beiruter Texte und Studien* 45) (Beirut-Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992), 183-200 (185-6: "Ihre Hauptintention ist auf eine affirmative Rechtfertigung der Herrschaft der Sultane angelegt, um den Nachweis des berechtigten Anspruchs auf das Sultanat zu erbringen.").

<sup>16</sup> P.M. Holt, "Three biographies of az-Zāhir Baibars", in *Medieval historical writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds*, ed. D.O. Morgan (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1981), 98; Weintritt, *Formen spätmittelalterlicher islamischer Geschichtsdarstellung*, 186.

he coined them— had in common, were their timing and authorship, considering that “they were all produced at, or shortly after, the time at which the ruler assumed power” and that “the role of patronage, even of participation in the composition of these works is indicated.” As a result, Holt similarly concluded that the seven texts of his study also shared the more specific historicising characteristic that each of them was carefully geared towards the justification and legitimisation of a recent transition of power. In Holt’s view, this was certainly true for Ibn al-Qaysarānī’s panegyric to sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl, *al-Nūr al-Lāʾih*, which was one of these seven ‘literary offerings’, in this particular case “commemorating the accession of al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl” to the Mamluk throne in June 1342, “the body of the work” at the same time being identified as a rather poor “piece of historical writing”.<sup>17</sup>

To a large degree, a close reading of this text indeed offers many reasons to follow Holt’s analysis of this text as a mediocre work of history with a legitimating cause.<sup>18</sup> In this prose panegyric, compiled—as stated in the text<sup>19</sup>— in the year following al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl’s accession, this Qalāwūnid Mamluk ruler “is hailed as ruler by hereditary right, ‘the sultan, son of the sultan, son of the sultan; the imam, son of the imam, son of the imam’, who will bring in better times; ‘he reassures the alarmed hearts of Islam, and gives stability to the distracted minds of men’.”<sup>20</sup> As Holt thus rightly summarised, *al-Nūr al-Lāʾih* clearly presents this sultan as sent by God, his reign as the result of divine providence, and history as culminating in his legitimate accession to rulership over Mamluk Egypt and Syria. The tone of this message, permeating the entire text, is already set in the opening paragraph:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَصْلَحَ شَأْنَ الْأُمَّةِ الْإِسْلَامِيَّةِ بِأَعْظَمِ سُلْطَانٍ نَضَّرَ وَجْهَهَا وَأَقْرَبَ عَيْنَهَا  
وَأَنْجَحَ أَمْرَ الْمَمْلُوكَةِ السُّلْطَانِيَّةِ بِأَعَزِّ مَلِكٍ أَجَلَ لِأَوْلِيَائِهَا حَيَاتَهَا وَعَجَّلَ لِأَعْدَائِهَا حَيَاتَهَا

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate.

Praise to God, who mended the decay of the Islamic community by [installing] the most powerful sultan, one that made its face blossom and its eye smile.

[Praise to God, who] saved the case of the sultanic kingdom by [raising] the firmest king, one that delayed [the end of] its life for the benefit of its partisans and that speeded up its destruction of its enemies.<sup>21</sup>

After this and similar telling invocations of God’s providence, the text begins with a long series of prose encomia, praising the qualities of this yet unnamed saviour sultan and, eventually, introducing its main theme: the divine election of that sultan, identified as al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl. In Holt’s summary of these opening pages, “al-Qaysarānī stresses the divine election of al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl as sultan, and proceeds to give his titlature at considerable length.”<sup>22</sup> Amongst many others, the latter list of titles includes wide-ranging epithets that stress Ismāʿīl’s far-reaching claims to religious and territorial authority, such as sultan of Islam (*sulṭān al-islām*) and of Arabs, Persians and Turks (*sulṭān al-ʿArab wa-l-ʿAjam wa-l-Turk*), imam of mankind (*imām al-anām*), elevator of the head of the faithful (=the Abbasid caliph) (*rāfiʿi raʿs al-muʿminīn*), reviver of justice in the worlds (*muḥyī al-ʿadl fī l-ʿālamīn*), God’s shadow on earth (*ẓill allāh fī l-ard*), ruler along the length and breadth of the regions (*al-ḥākīm fī l-ṭūl mina l-ʿaqtār wa-l-ʿarḍ*), Alexander of his age (*Iskandar al-zamān*), lord of the two prayer directions (i.e. the *ḥaram* in Mecca and al-Aqṣā in Jerusalem) (*ṣāḥib al-*

<sup>17</sup> P.M. Holt, “Literary Offerings: a genre of courtly literature”, in *The Mamluks in Egyptian politics and society*, eds. U. Haarmann & Th. Philipp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3-16, esp. 6, 16.

<sup>18</sup> See also the editor Tadmurī’s afore-mentioned explicit assessment of the text as a “history of the Ayyubids and Mamluks” (Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lāʾih*, 12-3), and Brockelman’s reference to the text as a historical biography (Brockelman, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur. Zweiter Supplementband*. 24)

<sup>19</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lāʾih*, 55.

<sup>20</sup> Holt, “Literary Offerings”, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lāʾih*, 47.

<sup>22</sup> Holt, “Literary Offerings”, 6.

*qiblatayn*), and servant of the two holy places (i.e. Mecca and Medina) (*khādim al-ḥaramayn al-sharīfayn*).<sup>23</sup> Despite its apparently audacious claims, by the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century such a lengthy inflated list of worldly and otherworldly official titles seems to have become rather standard official epithets for Mamluk royals, confirming first and foremost Ismā'īl's rightful place among his predecessors and forefathers.<sup>24</sup>

This long, encomiastic introduction of the text then ends by suggesting a rationale for this divine election, revealing the work's central argument and the angle from which the author, Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī, is to tackle the theme of divine election. In fact, he derives this rationale from the following explicit statement about al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl:

أَعْلَمَ بَعْدَهُ وَفَضَّلَهُ أَنَّهُ الَّذِي بُعِثَ لِهَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ عَلَى رَأْسِ هَذِهِ الْمِائَةِ السَّنَةِ لِجَدِّدَ لَهَا دِينَهَا

Through his justice and excellence, it became known that he is the one who is sent to this community at the beginning of this century to renew its faith.<sup>25</sup>

In Ibn al-Qaysarānī's view, al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl was chosen by God, but not just as the new sultan of the Mamluk realm. He rather was the centennial renewer or *mujaddid* of the Islamic community, a concept well-known from Islamic tradition, but quite unusual as an explicit legitimator of 14<sup>th</sup>-century Mamluk political authority.<sup>26</sup>

The remaining three quarters of Ibn al-Qaysarānī's 'literary offering' focus entirely on elaborating and providing 'evidence' (*dalīl*)<sup>27</sup> for this thesis. According to the text, such evidence is to be found in the Quran, in the Sunna of the Prophet, and in the history of the sultanate; or, as Ibn al-Qaysarānī phrased it:

فَضَّلَهُ بِوَلِيَّتِهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ  
لَمَّا نَطَقَ بِهِ الْقُرْآنُ الْمُبِينُ وَالْحَدِيثُ الْمَتِينُ فِي حَقِّهِ  
وَجَاءَ التَّارِيخُ مُطَابِقًا لَهُ بِسَعَادَةِ جَدِّهِ وَعَلَى وَفْقِهِ

[God] made him excel by appointing him over His creatures [...]

[as is evident] from what the lucid Quran and solid Ḥadīth say about his case,

history turning in his favour through the good fortune and on account of his grandfather [Qalāwūn].<sup>28</sup>

The text then quotes from the Quran, sūrat al-Ḥajj (22), verse 75:

اللَّهُ يَصْطَفِي مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا وَمِنَ النَّاسِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ

God elects from the angels messengers, as [he does] from the people; truly, God hears and sees [everything].

<sup>23</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 49.

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed descriptive listing of the many single and composed epithets that were in use in Mamluk chancery practice, including most of those found here in *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, see the early 15<sup>th</sup>-century manual of court protocol by Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī (1355-1418), *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā' fī ṣinā'at al-inshā'* (Cairo, 1910-20 [repr. 1985]), VI: 5-75. Ismā'īl's grandfather Qalāwūn's titulary, including such titles as 'sultan of Islam and the Muslims', 'lord of the two qiblas', 'servant of the two harams', 'reviver of justice in the worlds', 'sultan of the whole earth in its length and breadth', and 'sultan over the Arabs, Persians and Turks', has been analysed in some detail in Linda S. Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan. The Career of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and the Consolidation of Mamluk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678-689 A.H./1279-1290 A.D.)*, (*Freiburger Islamstudien* 18) (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998), 173-7. Northrup also refers to how already by the later 13<sup>th</sup> century such titles reflect newly emerging realities of sovereignty, that of the sultan increasingly being appreciated as transcending by far that of the 'Abbāsīd caliph as a result of divine providence (pp. 172-4) (see also Holt's observation, in a footnote, that "the salutation of al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl (and also by implication of his father and grandfather ...) as imam is in line with a tendency in the Mamluk sultanate to transfer the caliph's prerogatives to the sultan." [Holt, "Literary offerings", 8, fn. 15]).

<sup>25</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 50.

<sup>26</sup> E. van Donzel, "Mudjaddid," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, VII:290; J.J.G. Janssen, "Tadjid (a.)," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, X: 61.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 51.

<sup>28</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 51.

Furthermore, the text repeats the well-known saying of the Prophet that

اللَّهُ يَبْعَثُ لِهَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ عَلَى رَأْسِ كُلِّ مِائَةٍ سَنَةٍ مَنْ يُجَدِّدُ لَهَا دِينَهَا

God will send to this community at the head of every century someone to renew its Faith.<sup>29</sup>

After establishing these scriptural credentials for divine election and for the status of centennial renewer, the text quickly turns to the more challenging issue of fitting into a centennial time schedule al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl's reign, in particular his accession in the year 743 of the Muslim calendar. Ibn al-Qaysarānī only manages to do so by leaving the traditional view that the Prophetic saying refers to a century of the Muslim lunar calendar, proposing the following alternative instead:

مِنْ ابْتِدَائِهَا وَإِلَى حِينَ انْتِقَالَ مَوْلَانَا وَسَيِّدِنَا السُّلْطَانَ الشَّهِيدِ الْمَلِكِ النَّاصِرِ ... مِائَةَ سَنَةٍ  
وَذَلِكَ أَنَّ أَوَّلَ دَوْلَةِ التُّرْكِ وَابْتِدَائِهَا بَدِئَتْ فِي سُلْطَنَةِ الْمَلِكِ الصَّالِحِ نَجْمِ الدِّينِ أَيُّوبَ  
بَدِئَتْ تِلْكَ الْمِائَةُ بِالْمَلِكِ الصَّالِحِ وَخْتَمَتْ بِمَوْلَانَا وَسَيِّدِنَا الْمَلِكِ الصَّالِحِ

Between the beginning [of the regime of the Turks in Egypt] and the passing of our lord and master, the sultan, the martyr, al-Malik al-Nāṣir [Muḥammad, the father of al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl] ..., there are 100 years; for, the initial start of the regime of the Turks was in the sultanate of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb. So this century started with al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ and it ended with our lord and master, the sultan al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, quite inventively, Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī identified the start of the Mamluk sultanate with the last of its Ayyubid predecessors in Egypt: al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, who reigned between 1240 and 1249, or, indeed, about 100 years before al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl. Ibrāhīm further justified this —in Holt's words— “neat literary turn, but a slight blurring of chronology”<sup>31</sup> by explaining that

فَإِنَّهُ كَانَ فِي سَنَةِ ثَلَاثٍ وَأَرْبَعِينَ وَسِتِّمِائَةٍ أَمْرٌ عِدَّةٌ مِنْ مَمَالِكِهِ وَاسْتَنْبَابَ مِنْهُمْ وَحَكْمَهُمْ فِي الْمَمَالِكِ وَاسْتَمَرَ حُكْمُ التُّرْكِ إِلَى الْآنَ بِالْأَمْرِ  
الْمَصْرِيَّةِ وَالشَّامِيَّةِ وَمِنْ قَبْلِ كَانَ الْحُكْمُ وَالْمُلْكُ بِهَا لِأَوْلَادِ النَّاسِ وَلَمْ تَقُمْ دَوْلَةُ التُّرْكِ مِنَ الْمَمَالِكِ إِلَّا فِي سَنَةِ ثَلَاثٍ وَأَرْبَعِينَ وَسِتِّمِائَةٍ وَاسْتَمَرَ  
إِلَى هَذِهِ السَّنَةِ الْمُبَارَكَةِ سَنَةَ ثَلَاثٍ وَأَرْبَعِينَ وَسَبْعِ مِائَةِ الْمُدَّةِ مِائَةَ سَنَةٍ

in the year 643 [1245], [al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyub] had made several of his mamluks amir, he had appointed governors from among them, and he had enabled them to rule the provinces. The rule of the Turks in Egypt and Syria continued until now. Before, the rule and reign there had been for the *awlād al-nās*, and the polity of the Turks, belonging to the mamluks [of al-Ṣāliḥ], was only established in the year 643, and it has continued until this blessed year, the year 743, the [entire] period [being] 100 years.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 51. The latter phrase refers to a prophetic tradition preserved in Abū Dāwūd's collection of 'authentic' *Ḥadīth* (Janssen, “Tadjīd,” 61).

<sup>30</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Holt, “Literary Offerings,” 7.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 55. This passage includes a somewhat puzzling chronological, dynastic opposition of the *awlād al-nās* —a concept usually thought to be referring to *mamlūks*' offspring, as with al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl and his father— and the 'regime of the *turks*' — an at first sight more ethnically inspired concept that in fact constituted the standard contemporary denomination of what modern history has labeled 'the Mamluk sultanate'. Both categories definitely need further clarification and research, but for now, see especially U. Haarmann, “Arabic in speech, Turkish in lineage : Mamluks and their sons in the intellectual life of fourteenth century Egypt and Syria,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33 (1988): 81-114; U. Haarmann, “Joseph's Law - the careers and activities of mamluk descendants before the Ottoman conquest of Egypt,” in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, 55 - 84; U. Haarmann, “Ideology and History, Identity and Alterity : The Arab Image of the Turk from the 'Abbasids to Modern Egypt,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1988): 175-196.

Having thus established his centennial historical scheme, Ibrāhīm expresses his intention to devote the remainder of his text to brief discussions of the different rulers that preceded al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl during these one hundred years.<sup>33</sup> From that point onwards the text mainly discusses those rulers, from Ayyūb and his son Tūrān Shāh, over Shajar al-Durr, Aybak, Qutuz and Baybars and his two sons, to Qalāwun and his two sons, Khalīl and Muḥammad, ending in a gloriously culminating sequence with

السُّلْطَانُ ابْنُ السُّلْطَانِ وَالْإِمَامُ ابْنُ الْإِمَامِ ابْنُ الْإِمَامِ وَمَلِكُنَا السُّلْطَانُ الْأَعْظَمُ الْمَالِكُ الْمَلِكُ الصَّالِحُ عِمَادُ الدُّنْيَا  
وَالدِّينُ أَبِي الْفِدَاءِ إِسْمَاعِيلُ جَمَعَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى لَهُ بَيْنَ سَعَادَتَيْ الدَّارَيْنِ وَجَعَلَ وَجْهَهُ بِنُورِ اللَّهِ ثَانِي الْقَمَرَيْنِ وَعَدْلُهُ بِفَضْلِ اللَّهِ تَالِي الْعَمْرَيْنِ  
the sultan, son of the sultan, son of the sultan; the imam, son of the imam, son of the imam; our lord and  
master, our ruler, the almighty sultan, the ruler al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ 'Imād al-Dunyā wa-l-Dīn Abu l-Fidā' Ismā'īl,  
may God the Exalted combine for him the good fortune of the two dwellings, may his face become second only  
to the two moons through [its reflection of] God's divine light, and [may] his justice [be] succeeding to [that  
of] the two 'Umars by God's grace.<sup>34</sup>

Clearly, it cannot and should not be denied that passages such as the preceding one, with which this work is replete, are fully in line with Peter Holt's view that this literary offering fits within a larger context of political ideology and public propaganda; *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih* obviously supports and promotes the view that the transition of power—in this case the accession to the Mamluk throne of al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl in June 1342—was just and legitimate, and it does so by referring throughout the text to two supplementary sets of legitimating ideas: divine sanction and royal lineage, at one instance jointly evoked by the author as follows:

وَأَسْتَقَرَّتِ السُّلْطَنَةُ الشَّرِيفَةُ فِي الْبَيْتِ الشَّرِيفِ الْمَنْصُورِيِّ مِنْ رَجَبِ سَنَةِ ثَمَانٍ وَسَبْعِينَ وَإِلَى الْآنِ ...  
وَمِنْ حِينَ أَقَرَّ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى الْمَلِكَ الْمُنِيفَ لِهَذَا الْبَيْتِ الشَّرِيفِ مَدَّةَ أَرْبَعَةٍ وَسِتِّينَ سَنَةً وَعَشْرَةَ شُهُورٍ  
مَلَكَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى مَوْلَانَا السُّلْطَانَ الْأَقْطَارَ وَأَجْرَى بِدَوَامِ الْمَلِكِ فِيهِ وَفِي بَنِيهِ الْأَقْدَارَ وَأَنْفَذَ أَمْرَهُ وَنَوَاهِيَهُ فِي سَائِرِ الْأَمْصَارِ وَأَيْدَهُ مِنْ مَلَائِكَتِهِ  
الْمُقْرَبِينَ بِأَنْصَارٍ مَا تَعَاقَبَ اللَّيْلُ وَالنَّهَارُ

The noble sultanate remained with the royal house of al-Manṣūr [Qalāwun] from Rajab of the year [6]78 (December 1279) until now...

64 years and 10 months after God, the exalted, had assigned the sublime kingship to this noble house, God, the exalted, gave our lord the sultan royal authority over the regions, executing through the continuance of royalty in him and in his offspring the divine decree, ensuring the execution of his commands and prohibitions in all the cities, and assisting him with supporters from his favourite angels, for as long as night and day succeed each other.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, the invocation of divine sanction and fortunate lineage to support al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl's accession was hardly anything exceptional in the period's public representations of the authority of the Qalāwūnid dynasty (1279-1382). Indeed, it is becoming more and more evident that in the explanation of their sovereignty to various audiences, 14<sup>th</sup>-century Qalāwūnid rulers and their representatives increasingly used to rely on these two sets of ideas, combining in the best of post-Seljuq traditions Islamic with Turco-Mongol precedents and thus producing nothing less than a pervasive discourse of Qalāwūnid authenticity, speciality and entitlement that became a crucial element in the

<sup>33</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 65.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 59.



period's system of kingship.<sup>36</sup> As Holt already surmised, the discursive argument developed in *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih* by Ibn al-Qaysarānī clearly partook in this Qalāwūnid system.

#### The literary dimension: *Al-Nūr al-Lā'ih* as an exponent of belletrist prose

This 14<sup>th</sup>-century Qalāwūnid discourse informing *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*'s substance suggests that it represents no less than a prime example of Holt's interpretation of such literary offerings as factors of propaganda and the performance of royal authority. Nevertheless, there are quite a few peculiarities that set this text apart from the other royal panegyric books identified as such by Holt and Weintritt, and that in fact hint at its functioning at other levels of interaction and communication.

First of all, in the majority of panegyric books identified by Holt as royal offerings, prophecies from revered *shaykhs*, prophetic dreams, astrological predictions, and the symbolic meanings of letters and numbers are appealed to as topical devices of legitimisation and political propaganda.<sup>37</sup> *Al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, however, is the only one of these texts in which none of these "specimens of a literary form favoured by the encomiasts of Mamluk sultans"<sup>38</sup> can be found. Rather than appealing to such 'popular' beliefs, Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī seems to have sought and found his inspiration in the Quran and Sunna, and thence in a specific interpretation of divinely ordained political history. From this, al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl emerges not just as the rightful, providential political ruler of the Syro-Egyptian sultanate, but also as a universalist leader with legitimate claims to universal authority, sent by God to follow in the Prophet's footsteps and to lead the Islamic community at the end of the first century of Turkish rule back to a purified, revived version of its faith. This *mujaddid*-paradigm is really the key argument and organising principle of the text, and it is in this context of Qalāwūnid discourse quite a remarkable one, indeed. Whereas from the perspective of its regular recurrence in later, 15<sup>th</sup>-century Turkic legitimating practices it would prove a very powerful concept, it is found here for the very first time explicitly in the framework of explaining Turco-Mongol royal authority to internal audiences.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as far as could be established at this point, it is entirely unique for the genre of panegyrics to rulers, and — as detailed above— its attachment to a ruler's accession in the year 743 of the Muslim calendar is quite challenging from the perspective of Islamic tradition, to say the least. Thus, beyond tapping into standard Qalāwūnid discourse, Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī's panegyric for sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl features even more prominently the more specific, unique and therefore striking theme of the *mujaddid*, which joins the text's different historical data into one more or less coherent argument.

But this axial *topos* is not all that distinguishes *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih* from Holt's other "literary offerings in the form of a book", as he identified them.<sup>40</sup> What first and foremost catches the attention of any observer really should be *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*'s disappointing briefness —630 lines in the manuscript, or a mere 18 pages in the 1982 edition—, whereas other extant contemporary royal offerings, like the *Rawd al-Zāhir* by Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, the *Sukkardān al-Sulṭān* by Ibn

<sup>36</sup> For detailed references to the emergence and exploitation of such a discourse, see especially A.F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization)* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 2008), 99-167. For the issue of Qalāwūnid dynastic trends, see J. Van Steenbergen, "The early Mamluk sultanate as a military patronage state: household politics and the case of the Qalāwūnid Bayt (1279-1433)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* (forthcoming); F. Bauden, "The Sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the Politics of Puppets: Where Did It All Start?," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13, no. 1 (2009): 53-81; J. Van Steenbergen, "'Is Anyone my Guardian ...?' Mamluk Under-age Rule and the Later Qalāwūnids," *al-Masāq* 19, no. 1 (2007) (themed issue: Under-age Rule): 55-65. For Mamluk sultans being considered rulers with a heavenly mandate, see also I. Perho, "The Sultan and the Common People," *Studia Orientalia* 82 (1997): 145-157, esp. 145, 150-1.

<sup>37</sup> Holt, "Literary Offerings," 4, 5, 9, 10, 11; also Weintritt, *Formen spätmittelalterlicher islamischer Geschichtsdarstellung*, 185-200.

<sup>38</sup> Holt, "Literary Offerings," 10

<sup>39</sup> See Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, pp. 10-11, 65-66, 113, 198-9, demonstrating how the Ilkhān Ghāzān (r. 1295-1304) and the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn after him only implicitly toyed with this powerful idea in their diplomatic correspondence, and how in her view this only changed in the course of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when "rulers after Temür like the Aq Qoyunly Uzun Ḥasan (r. 1457-78/861-82) began to use the Islamic concept of the 'Centennial Renewer (*mujaddid*)' at which both Ghazan and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad had once hinted...."

<sup>40</sup> Holt, "Literary Offerings," p. 3.

Abī Ḥajala, or the *Sayf al-Muhannad* by al-‘Aynī, are all ten to twenty times longer.<sup>41</sup> In fact, as far as this formal issue is concerned, rather than being such an offering in the form of a book (*kitāb*), *al-Nūr al-Lā’ih* displays many of the characteristics of the widely popular *risālah*-genre, as defined by Hämeen-Antilla “as artistic prose of medium length, mainly in rhymed prose (*saj*) with a heavy emphasis on literary tropes and figures of speech, while the plot is of varying importance.”<sup>42</sup> Following Hämeen-Antilla’s references to the classification of literary *risālahs* by the Mamlūk secretary and belletrist al-Qalqashandī (1355-1418), Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī’s 1343 *risālah* obviously falls within the subgenre of “panegyric letters (*mā yaridu minhā mawrid al-madh wa l-taqrīd*).”<sup>43</sup> Such a new classification of *al-Nūr al-Lā’ih* as a literary, panegyric *risālah* is not only supported by its briefness and by its being written to eulogise al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā’īl, the axial *mujaddid*-paradigm functioning as a literary trope that could also be interpreted as a figure of speech and that allowed the author first and foremost to make his encomiastic enterprise stand out. It is also suggested by stylistic elements, such as the prolific but irregular application of rhymed and rhythmic prose (*saj*) throughout the text. A fine example of this is in the passage below, in which rhymes in pausal form (lines 3-7: ‘*ibādih ... bilādih ... tilādih ... ‘ajdādih ... ṣī’ādih* /lines 8-9: ‘*arḍih ... farḍih*) and varied lengths of lexical units create two rhythmic entities (lines 4-7 and 8-9), the two first sentences of each (lines 4 and 8) mirroring each other and linking these two investments of al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā’īl with worldly and religious authority respectively to their grammatical subject *allāh* (line 3) and to the general idea of incontestable royal authority (lines 1-2):

فَلَيْسَ لِأَحَدٍ فِي ذَلِكَ نِزَاعٌ  
وَلَا لِلْمَلِكِ إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى مِنْ مَلِكِهِ انْتِزَاعٌ  
لِإِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى اخْتَارَهُ عَلَى عِبَادِهِ  
وَحَكَّمَهُ فِي بِلَادِهِ  
وَصَرَّفَ أَمْرَهُ فِي طَارِفِ الْأَمْرِ وَتِلَادِهِ  
وَحَفِظَ بِسُلْطَانِهِ الصَّالِحِ مُلْكَ آبَائِهِ الْكِرَامِ وَأَجْدَادِهِ  
وَأَتَاهُ الْمَلِكُ صَفْوًا عَفْوًا لَا بِيضِهِ وَصِعَادِهِ  
وَمَكَّنَهُ فِي أَرْضِهِ  
وَأَقَامَهُ لِإِقَامَةِ سُنَّتِهِ وَقَرَضَهُ

No one should dispute that,  
nor should his reign ever—God the Exalted willing— be removed from his ownership,  
because God the Exalted has chosen him [to rule] over His servants:  
He has given him sovereignty over His domains,  
giving him wide-ranging authority over new and old things,  
preserving through his sound dominion the reign of his honourable fathers and forefathers,  
and awarding him the reign purely and spontaneously, not by aggrandising and advancing him;  
He has empowered him over His land,  
installing him so as to set up His Sunna and His command.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See Muḥyī al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Zāhir, *al-Rawḍ al-Zāhir fī sirat al-Malik al-Zāhir*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Khuwayṭir (Riyad: s.e., 1976), 476 pp.; Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā Ibn Abī Ḥajala al-Tilimsānī, *Sukkarḍān al-Sulṭān*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad ‘Umar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), 225 pp.; Badr al-Dīn al-‘Aynī, *al-Sayf al-Muhannad fī sirat al-Malik al-Mu‘ayyad*, ed. Fahīm Muḥammad ‘Alawī Shaltūt (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriya, 1998), 346 pp.

<sup>42</sup> J. Hämeen-Anttila, “The Essay and Debate (*al-Risālah* and *al-Munāẓara*)”, in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, 135. I am grateful to Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila for this suggestion. For a complementary appreciation of the many issues involving the genre of epistolography in this time period, see also M. al-Musawi, “Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose”, 101-133.

<sup>43</sup> Hämeen-Anttila, “The Essay and Debate”, 137-8; al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ al-A‘shā*, XIV:172-204.

<sup>44</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā’ih*, 48-49. In this quotation, the organisation of the Arabic text into separate lexical units is directly copied from the text’s manuscript version, to which rosette-like figures have been added throughout to visually indicate and separate those units (Ms. BN arabe 1708, fol. 9v.)

Apart from such regular occurrences of *sjj'*, other stylistic aspects include the occasional appearance of materials from Quran and *hadīth*, as in the case of the above mentioned recitations to establish the scriptural credentials for divine election and for the status of centennial renewer. These belletrist aspects finally also include poetry, as *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih* contains three poems in three different meters (*kāmil*, *basīṭ*, *ṭawīl*), two of which appear to have been produced by Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī himself eulogising al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl's father Muḥammad and grandfather Qalāwūn.<sup>45</sup> These different characteristics that suggest to formally consider *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih* a panegyric literary *risālah* are amply demonstrated in the text's concluding paragraphs.

وَهَنِيئًا لِمَوْلَانَا السُّلْطَانَ  
 الْأَعْظَمِ خَلَدَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى مُلْكَهُ  
 مَعَ مَا خُصَّ بِهِ مِنْ مُلْكِ الدُّنْيَا وَنَعِيمِ الْآخِرَى  
 مَا مَنَحَهُ مِنْ عَظِيمِ سَعَادَةِ الْبَشَرَى  
 وَهُوَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى يُعِينُهُ عَلَى مَا وُلَّاهُ  
 وَيُسَدِّدُهُ فِيمَا أَوْلَاهُ  
 وَيُرْعَاهُ فِيمَا اسْتَرْعَاهُ  
 وَيَكْلَأُوهُ بِحَفِظِهِ بِمُعَقَّبَاتٍ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ  
 لِقَوْلِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ  
 صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ لِعَادِ بْنِ جَبَلٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ  
 يَا مُعَاذُ لَا تَسْأَلِ الْإِمَارَةَ  
 فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ أُعْطِيتَهَا عَنْ مَسْأَلَةٍ وُكِلْتَ إِلَيْهَا  
 وَإِنْ أُعْطِيتَهَا عَنْ غَيْرِ مَسْأَلَةٍ أُعْطِيتَ عَلَيْهَا  
 وَجَاءَهُ مَوْلَانَا السُّلْطَانُ نَصْرَهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى لِلْمَلِكِ الشَّرِيفِ كَانَ هُوَ الْمَسْئُولُ  
 وَأَمْرَهُ الْمَأْمُونُ وَبِرَهُ الْمَأْمُولُ  
 وَإِلَى أَبْوَابِهِ الشَّرِيفَةِ أَلَّتْ أُمُورُ الْإِسْلَامِ وَإِلَيْهَا إِلَى آخِرِ الدُّهُورِ كُلِّ الْأُمُورِ تَوَلَّى  
 إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى

May our lord, the almighty sultan —may God the Exalted make his reign everlasting—  
 benefit from the kingship in this world and the blessing in the next that have been awarded to him,  
 and [from] the great fortune of good tidings that He has granted to him;  
 for, God the Exalted endows him with an astute eye for what He has commissioned to him,  
 He offers him guidance in what He has charged him with,  
 He cares for him in what he has been asked to take care of,  
 and He protects him, guarding him with “attendant angels, before him and after him, watching over him by  
 God’s command” [Quran 13, 11].  
 [This is in agreement] with the words of God’s messenger —God bless him and grant him salvation— to Mu’ādh  
 b. Jabal —may God be pleased with him—:  
 “O Mu’ādh, never ask for leadership:  
 if it is being awarded to you by appeal, you will be obliged to assume it,  
 but if it is being awarded to you without appeal, you can always turn it down.”  
 The standing of our lord the sultan —may God the Exalted assist him— vis-à-vis the noble kingship is now  
 being appealed to,  
 his leadership is being relied upon, and his righteousness is being hoped for.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 60 (Qalāwūn, in *basīṭ*), 64 (Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, in *kāmil*). The third poem, in the *ṭawīl* metre and consisting of one verse only, was quoted as coming from an anonymous poet (*qāla l-shā'ir*) and referred to two of the author's own forefathers (p. 54).

May the affairs of Islam revert to his noble gates and may all affairs revert to them until the end of time

—God the Exalted willing.<sup>46</sup>

In this specific passage, truly representative for the entire text, there is indeed not just the eulogising of al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl as the object of divine providence and guidance and the exhortation for his new rule to go well. This discursive plot is cast in the artistic prose form that comes with the *risālah* genre, as is evident from the irregular application of *saǰʿ*, particularly the rhythmic play with final rhymes (*al-ukhrā ... al-bushrā* [lines 3 and 4] versus *wallāh ... awlāh ... starʿah* [lines 5, 6 and 7, in pausal form], and *al-masʿūlu ... al-maʿmūlu* [lines 12 and 13]) and from the surprising connections made between the Quranic “attendant angels” verse and the Prophet’s advice to the Companion Muʿādh.

#### The social semiotic dimension: *Al-Nūr al-Lāʾih* as an exponent of symbolic communication

Addressing a leading member of the political elites —al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl— using familiar discursive and literary modes, Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī’s *al-Nūr al-Lāʾih* was clearly couched in belletrist forms that transcend the common characteristics that were defined by Holt for Mamluk ‘literary offerings’. Somewhat paradoxically, these belletrist forms of *al-Nūr al-Lāʾih* were actually wide-spread in Mamluk elite’s literary practices. As amongst others Thomas Bauer’s reading of a contemporary prescriptive text by Ibn Nubātah (1287-1366) makes clear, epistolography (*inshāʿ*) —including the literary *risālah* genre, but also correspondence emanating from the sultanate’s chanceries— fully participated in that increased social importance of literature, having become a wide-ranging skill that was a defining aspect of elite identities and a predominant channel for verbal elite communications. More in particular, any belletristic utterance that sprouted from those skills acted as a social performance, the functionality of which defies modern conceptions of aesthetics, originality and literature, and the meaning of which has everything to do with the dynamic social order which it helped to communicate, mediate or even create in the interactions between its participants.<sup>47</sup> As far as Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī’s panegyric *risālah* is concerned, this opens up yet another dimension for its consideration, beyond its purely historiographical and literary capacities and towards its social functionality, as a conveyor of meanings and a performer of identities in the Mamluk social environment of the 1340s.

The key issue to finally look at, then, is whether *al-Nūr al-Lāʾih*’s functionality indeed revolved around issues of royal propaganda and the communication of legitimate authority, as Holt claimed, the text and its author in that case representing nothing but passive instruments in a performance that emanated from al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl’s court.<sup>48</sup> In view of *al-Nūr al-Lāʾih*’s legitimating message, it would be quite tempting to suggest so, implying at the same time that such powerful legitimating devices as the axial *mujaddid*-paradigm originated with the new sultan and his entourage. There certainly are some factors that could support this, such as the fact that Ismāʿīl was the first ruling sultan since the last of the Egyptian Ayyubids one century before to take the royal style of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ, which tallies in remarkably well with *al-Nūr al-Lāʾih*’s revision of the origins of Mamluk history and its suggestion of a centennial link between the Ayyubid and Mamluk al-Ṣāliḥ.<sup>49</sup> There also is the historical context of the early 1340s, when the end of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s longstanding reign in June 1341 had been followed by a year of extremely destructive, almost

<sup>46</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lāʾih*, 65-66. In this quotation, again the organisation of the Arabic text follows the text’s manuscript version (Ms. BN arabe 1708, fol. 46v-47v).

<sup>47</sup> Bauer, “Mamluk Literature,” 119, 125-7; see also al-Musawi, “Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose”, 111-3; M. al-Musawi, “Vindicating a Profession or a Personal Career? Al-Qalqashandī’s Maqāmah in Context,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7 (2003): 122-7. For a general appraisal of the period’s epistolographic practices, see Adrian Gully, *The Culture of Letter Writing in pre-modern Islamic Society*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Holt, “Literary Offerings”, 16.

<sup>49</sup> However, the circumstances and intentions of the actual awarding of this royal style remain vague, as it is only summarily referenced in the sources, as with the contemporary chronicler Shams al-Dīn al-Shujāʿī (d. after 1356) stating that “[the senior amirs] awarded him the royal style of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ (*laqqabūhu al-malika l-ṣāliḥa*)” (al-Shujāʿī, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn al-Ṣāliḥī wa-awlādihī*, ed. Barbara Schäfer, *Die Chronik aš-Šuǧāʿīs* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977), I: 230.

apocalyptic political turmoil and social upheaval in all corners of the sultanate, so that his son Ismā'īl was enthroned in June 1342 in the genuine hope that he would be able to restore the order and prosperity of his father's reign, after his three brothers' failure to do so in the preceding twelve months.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, unlike in the other literary offerings that were studied by Holt, no specific reference is made at any point in this work to any commissioning authority, nor to any sort of supervision. On the contrary, the only individual who figures prominently and actively in the text, is the author himself, who seems to be quite pleased with himself and with his inventiveness. Thus, immediately after the first reference to the *mujaddid*-paradigm, the text states that:

وَمَا رَأَى الْعَبْدُ الْفَقِيرُ  
إِلَى عَفْوِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى الْعَلِيِّ الْكَبِيرِ  
إِبْرَاهِيمَ بْنَ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ الْقَيْسَرَانِيِّ الْقُرَشِيِّ الْخَالِدِيِّ كَاتِبِ الدَّسْتِ الشَّرِيفِ الْمَلِكِيِّ الصَّالِحِيِّ عَفَا اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَنْهُمْ  
مُؤَلَّفُ هَذِهِ السِّيَرَةِ الشَّرِيفَةِ  
وَالْمَتَشَرَّفُ بِجَمْعِ مَنَاقِبِ مَوْلَانَا السُّلْطَانَ ...  
عَلِمَ أَنَّ ذَلِكَ سِرٌّ مِنْ أَسْرَارِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى أَوْدَعَهُ فِيهِ  
وَأَنَّ مَا مَلَكَهُ الْإِفْطَارَ وَخَارَ فِيهِ وَلَهُ وَاحْتَارَ  
إِلَّا لِيَجْتَنِبَهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَيَصْطَفِيَهُ

When that was realised by the servant in need of almighty God's amnesty, the lofty and eminent Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. al-Qaysarānī al-Qurashī al-Khālīdī, scribe of the noble bench of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ —God, the exalted, have mercy upon them—, compiler of this noble biography and the one who prides himself on gathering the glorious deeds of our lord the sultan (...), he understood that that was one of Almighty God's secrets which He confided to him [=Ibrāhīm] and that He would not have given him [=al-Ṣāliḥ] the regions to rule, nor would have been favourably disposed towards him regarding this matter, nor would have made His choice, if He had not singled him out for this world and the next and [if He had not] selected him.<sup>51</sup>

The text then continues by making it very clear that no one but Ibrāhīm himself provided the afore-mentioned scriptural and historical evidence for this view, after he “had scrutinised the chronicles and found that they are in agreement with what he had made clear in this biography.”<sup>52</sup>

Clearly, it was Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī who could openly purport to be the original author of this work and of its discursive twists and turns, without any external involvement, royal or otherwise. And this then leads to a final revealing difference with Holt's other literary offerings. In spite of Ibrāhīm's just mentioned characterisation of his work as a biography (*sīrah*) of sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl and as a collection of his glorious deeds (*manāqib*), no such historical information whatsoever can be found in the text. When Ibrāhīm's historical chronology reaches its culmination point, the glorious renewer al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl, he contents himself with a brief belletrist repetition of his legitimating message, summarily finishing off the work by repeating once more that “all that was said and written by

<sup>50</sup> For a detailed reconstruction of these events following al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's demise, see J. Van Steenberg, “Caught between Heredity and Merit: Qawṣūn (d. 1342) and the legacy of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 1341)”, in *The Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria: Aspects of a Medieval Muslim State*, eds. A. Levanoni & R. Amitai (London: Ashgate, 2011) in press; J. Van Steenberg, *Order out of Chaos: Patronage, Conflict and Mamluk Socio-Political Culture. 1341-1382 (The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1453, 65)* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 147-150.

<sup>51</sup> Ms. Paris BN arabe 1708, fol. 12v (In the manuscript, the first two lines [*wa-lammā ... al-kabīr*] are indented and written in a large, bold and gilded script, leaving no doubt that the author intended to stress this, and thus his own astuteness; unlike the manuscript text quoted here, the edition has the author's name as ‘Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. al-Qaysarānī [Ibn al-Qaysarānī, al-Nūr al-Lā'ih, 50]).

<sup>52</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 50 (*wa-staqarra l-'abdu al-tawārīkha fa-wajadahā muṭābiqatan limā 'awḍahahu fī hādhihi l-sīrah*). Again, in the autograph manuscript the first line (*wa-staqarra l-'abd*) is tellingly stressed, by indentation and the use of large, gilded script (Ms Paris BN arabe 1708, 14v).

the humble servant Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī al-Qurashī al-Khālīdī, secretary of the bench of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ”.<sup>53</sup> Obviously, Ibrāhīm lacked either the intention, or the access to suitable information, or both, to include a proper biography, despite the standards of the biographical genre, and even despite his own statement to the contrary.

Most surprising, however, is the fact that *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih* does yield some peculiar information of a biographical nature, not on the sultan, but on some illustrious members of Ibrāhīm's own long-standing Syrian family of the Khālīdīs.<sup>54</sup> And in order to do so, the author saw no objections against transgressing his own tight centennial schedule, adding a substantial discussion of the Zengids and Ayyubids as a sort of lengthy prequel to the reign of the last Ayyubid al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb. Clearly, within the framework of the axial *mujaddid*-paradigm, there was no need for this. But from the perspective of introducing Ibrāhīm's own pedigree, there was. This digression not only enabled him to refer to a well-known patriarch from the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, Khālīd b. al-Walīd, the Sword of Islam; it also allowed him to discuss at some detail the career of another of his forefathers, Khālīd b. al-Qaysarānī, who acted as a vizier to the legendary Syrian ruler Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Zankī (1146-1174).<sup>55</sup> Further on in the text, a similar digression occurs when the discussion of the reigns of the Mamluk sultans allowed the author to devote some space to his grandfather, Faṭḥ al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Qaysarānī, who served under at least three sultans, again as a vizier in Syria, and eventually also as a chancery clerk in Cairo.<sup>56</sup>

As markers for the social semiotic dimensions of the text, these more striking *topoi* —the frank appropriation of the *mujaddid*-paradigm by the author and the references to three of his illustrious forefathers— can also be interpreted as unequivocal claims to social status, demonstrating not just Ibrāhīm's historiographical and belletrist skills but also his fine administrator's pedigree.<sup>57</sup> When this obvious reference to this chancery clerk's own *ḥasab wa-nasab* (rather than just to a politico-religious discourse that underpins al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl's legitimacy) is linked to Ibrāhīm's biography, as preserved by one of his colleagues in Cairo's chancery, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī (ca. 1297-1363), an entirely new picture emerges on this *risālah*'s micro-historical social context.

Ibrāhīm was known to al-Ṣafadī as a very skilled administrator, who, indeed, coupled his impressive pedigree to substantial secretarial skills, and who had managed to make a career in Cairo's chancery with the support of such great political patrons as Tankiz al-Ḥusāmī, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's viceroy in Syria for more than 20 years until his arrest and death in 1340, and the Qalāwūnid magnate Bahādur al-Tamurtāshī, married to al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl's full sister and an important power broker in the early days of this sultan's reign.<sup>58</sup> This amir Bahādur, however, died soon after his son-in-law's accession, in March 1343, depriving Ibrāhīm of all known bonds that were to secure his position and status at court. Al-Ṣafadī, at least, suggests how this loss badly affected him when he states that

<sup>53</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 66 (*qāla dhālika wa-katabahu l-'abdu l-faqīru 'ilā llāhi ta'ālā 'Ibrāhīmu b. al-Qaysarānī al-Qurashīyu al-Khālīdī kātibu l-dasti l-sharīfi l-maliki l-Ṣāliḥi*).

<sup>54</sup> See also Holt, “Literary Offerings”, 6; Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 11-12 (for a brief discussion of the three prominent members of his family that appear in the text, by the editor ‘Umar Tadmurī). For a contemporary reference to “the Qaysarānī family” (*banū l-qaysarānī*), listing six names, including Ibrāhīm's, see Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān al-'Aṣr wa-A'wān al-Naṣr*, eds. ‘A. Abū Zayd et al. (Beirut & Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1998), IV: 142; for a reference to a 19<sup>th</sup>-century member of this long-standing and prominent Syrian family, see S. Moreh, “al- Khālīdī , rūḥī,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, 4:936.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 53-4: *wa-jaddu l-mamlūki l-'alā huwa l-imāmu khālīdu bnu l-walīdi sayfu llāhi ta'ālā raḍīya llāhu 'anhu wa-jaddu l-mamlūki l-'adnā huwa khālīdu bnu l-qaysarānī wazīru hādihā l-sultāni l-maliki l-'ādili nūri l-dīni l-shahīdi*.

<sup>56</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 56: *wa-tasāltana ba'dahu waladuhu l-maliku l-sa'īdu wa-wazzara jadda l-mamlūki faṭḥa l-dīni 'abda llāhi bna l-qaysarānī bi-l-shām*; 59: *wa-aqarra jadda l-mamlūki faṭḥa l-dīni 'alā wizāratihī l-latī kānat mufawwāḍatan ilayhi fī l-dawlati l-sa'īdiyyati wa-rasama bi-tajdīdi taqlīdin sharīfin lahu bihā wa-lam yazal yudabbiru dawlatahu l-sharīfata ilā an 'umila 'alayhi wa-staqarra bi-dīwāni l-inshā'i l-sharīfi ḥattā tuwuffīya ... fī sanati khamsin wa-sab'i mī'atin*.

<sup>57</sup> On the social importance of these aspects of chancery practice, see al-Musawi's reading of al-Qalqashandī's *maqāma* on secretaryship, in his “Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose,” 111-3.

<sup>58</sup> On these two amirs, see E. Kenney, *Power and Patronage in Mamluk Syria: The Architecture and Urban Works of Tankiz al-Nasiri, 1312-1340* (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2009); St. Conermann, “Tankiz ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥusāmī al-Nāṣirī (d. 740/1340) as Seen by His Contemporary al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363),” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-24; J. Van Steenberg, “Mamluk Elite on the Eve of an-Nāṣir Muḥammad's death (1341): A Look behind the Scenes of Mamluk Politics”, *Mamluk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 173-99; Van Steenberg, *Order Out of Chaos*, 61, 85, 104, 110, 112, 180.

“[Ibrāhīm] had Turkish mamluks and exquisite apparel. He bequeathed extended benefit and acquired standing with the governors. If the amir Sayf al-Din Bahādūr al-Tamurtāshī would have lived longer, [Ibrāhīm] would have obtained high rank and status.”<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Ibrāhīm failed to translate his many merits into further career advancement until his own death a decade later, in May 1352, he still managed to maintain his prestigious position in the hierarchy of the court’s administration, as *kātib al-dast*, one of the handful of scribes of the sultan’s public bench, who handled the administration of royal justice.<sup>60</sup> Within such a specific personal context of remarkable high-profile continuity in spite of that sudden loss of his patron, *al-Nūr al-Lā’ih* —written in the year 1343<sup>61</sup> and quite peculiar in nature— can also be read as an attempt by Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī to demonstrate his wit, his skills and his credentials to a potential new patron: either the new sultan al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā’īl or someone from his close entourage. In the latter case, the function of the work was not so much to communicate the legitimacy of the new ruler’s accession with undefined audiences, as Holt implied, but rather to try and use effective cultural forms for the symbolic communication of individual claims to identity and status with that ruler and his entourage. It was a leading secretary’s attempt to communicate and establish new bonds with his overlords, embedding such a functionality in an established belletrist literary form that enabled the performance of this secretary’s social identity, status and entitlement in a semiotic interaction with his intended audience of courtiers and peers.

#### Conclusions: *al-Nūr al-Lā’ih* as an exponent of a Mamluk cultural matrix

Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī’s brief panegyric text *al-Nūr al-Lā’ih* represents a surprisingly complex combination of different historical, literary and social semiotic dimensions. Considering the afore-mentioned assertions and assessments by Holt and Weintritt, their focus on the legitimating functionality of Mamluk panegyric works in particular, this specific re-assessment of *al-Nūr al-Lā’ih* throws some interesting new light on the wider workings of Mamluk ideologies of kingship in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In a sense, one could claim that that legitimating discourse in *al-Nūr al-Lā’ih* had so far been quite misleading for the modern reader, as it was in reality used and understood as a means to communicate and perform authorial identity rather than to justify, support or merely record al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā’īl’s June 1342 accession. First and foremost, therefore, the occasionally even apocalyptic Qalāwūnid discourse of *al-Nūr al-Lā’ih* should be deemed a functionally coded vocabulary, a specific language register, or even a *lingua franca* of elite communication, formally derived from dominant 14<sup>th</sup>-century political ideology, but not necessarily party to

<sup>59</sup> al-Ṣafadī, *A’yān al-‘Aṣr*, I: 84. Another biography, detailing that Ibrāhīm had been a *kātib al-dast* in Damascus and in Cairo and that he indeed was the author of *risālahs* and poetry (*lahu tarassul wa-nazm*), was preserved in Aḥmad b. Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-Kāmina fī A’yān al-Mī’a al-Thāmina*, ed. H. al-Nadawī (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1993), I: 37.

<sup>60</sup> On the Mamluk chancery (*dīwān al-inshā*) and its organisation, see especially J.S. Nielsen, *Secular Justice in an Islamic State: Mazālim under the Bahrī Mamlūks, 662/1264-789/1387* (*Publications de l’Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul* 55) (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1985), 85-90 (esp. 86-87: “The secretaries - *kuttāb al-dast*”), 166-170 (Appendix C: A List of *Kuttāb al-Dast* [incl. a reference to Ibrāhīm, and to al-Ṣafadī, p. 167]).

<sup>61</sup> Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā’ih*, 55.

it.<sup>62</sup> In other words, this specific type of elite communication had gratefully tapped into a powerful ideological current that dominated the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, that was built up around ideas of Qalāwūnid leadership's divine sanction and dynastic legitimacy, and that had resulted in the formation of a wide-spread discourse of Qalāwūnid authenticity, specialty and sovereignty.<sup>63</sup> As Holt surmised, this discursive engagement with that Qalāwūnid *lingua franca* allowed for *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*'s integration into the Qalāwūnid ruling system. But in reality this was only a means to another, far more concrete, end: the author's own continued integration in and engagement with the Qalāwūnid elites of the 1340s.

This turning upside down of Holt's interpretation of *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*'s performative effect, prioritising the individual agency of the author and the malleability of the Qalāwūnid discourse, undoubtedly also necessitates a re-assessment of the other panegyrics that were included in his study. In spite of all the afore-mentioned differences, from their length to their application of rather more standard "specimens of a literary form favoured by the encomiasts of Mamluk sultans",<sup>64</sup> a re-appraisal of their authorial agency may well result in similarly more nuanced insights into the social semiotics of these works of literature. Doing so will at the very least already offer a new heuristic way into the dynamics of political ideology in the late medieval and early modern eastern Mediterranean, into the dynamic subjectivity of the resultant *lingua franca* of elite communication in particular, transcending by far the Qalāwūnid 14<sup>th</sup> century. Only one other of the historical 'literary offerings' studied by Holt actually pertained to that Qalāwūnid era and subscribed to its *lingua franca*: *al-Tuḥfah al-mulūkiyyah fī l-dawlah al-Turkiyyah*, honouring the sultans Qalāwūn and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn and ascribed to no other than Egypt's mamluk viceregent, Baybars al-Manṣūrī (ca. 1245-1325).<sup>65</sup> The other offerings, such as the afore-mentioned panegyrics to the sultans al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh and al-Zāhir Ṭaṭar, pertained mostly to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but also included a 16<sup>th</sup>-century and a 17<sup>th</sup>-century panegyric. A further study of these post-Qalāwūnid texts may therefore yield similarly telling insights into the winding roads taken by the complex ideas of legitimacy by which various audiences continued to be integrated into the region's systems of sovereignty. And just as *al-Tuḥfah al-mulūkiyyah* and *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih* present "the history of the Mamluk sultanate as proceeding to its glorious culmination in the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn" and of his son al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl respectively,<sup>66</sup> so must there be other works of history and historical biography from the Mamluk period that are consciously and unconsciously tapping into such dominant political discourses and that remain to be mined for similar insights into this aspect of the region's "histoire des mentalités".

Returning finally to *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih* itself, and to the conclusion that it was instrumental in its author's pursuing of continued integration into the elites of the 1340s, it should be noted that this re-assessment also transcends the

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<sup>62</sup> See useful parallels in Wansbrough's identification of a Mediterranean *lingua franca* in the format of chancery practice, representing —whatever the languages employed in diplomatic communication across the Mediterranean— "a meta-language which dictated the arrangement of the text and identified the equivalent items to be employed... The conventional form of the document, the sequence of its elements, the syntax, the phraseology and the vocabulary, all combined to produce a standard vehicle for the authoritative record of what had actually been agreed: ... the medium was at least three-quarters of the message." (J. Wansbrough, *Lingua Franca in the Mediterranean* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996); M. Brett, "Lingua Franca in the Mediterranean: John Wansbrough and the Historiography of Mediaeval Egypt", in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950-1800)*, ed. H. Kennedy (*The Medieval Mediterranean. Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1453* 31) (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1-11 [quote from p. 3]). Another useful related parallel may be found in Sanders' employment of the term in the context of 12<sup>th</sup>-century Fatimid ritual, when "the Fatimids deliberately created a ritual *lingua franca* that was systematically articulated through ceremony, which emphasized those aspects of ritual that could be conceived of as broadly Islamic and that were not explicitly embedded in Isma'ilism. Cairo became the site on which this ritual *lingua franca* operated as an urban language, thus blurring the boundary between Isma'ilis and Sunnis and mitigating urban religious tensions." (Paula Sanders, *Rituals, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994], 39-40)

<sup>63</sup> For this discourse's performance in the context of Qalāwūnid rituals of power, see Jo Van Steenbergen, "Ritual, Politics and the City in Mamluk Cairo: the *Bayna l-Qaṣrayn* as a dynamic 'lieu de mémoire'", in *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in the Medieval Mediterranean*, eds. Alexander Beihammer et al. (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

<sup>64</sup> Holt, "Literary Offerings," 10

<sup>65</sup> Holt, "Literary Offerings," 3-6; Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *al-Tuḥfah al-Mulūkiyyah fī l-dawlah al-Turkiyya: Ta'rikh Dawlat al-Mamālik al-Baḥriyyah fī l-fatrah min 648-711 hijriyyah*, ed. 'A. Ṣ. Ḥamdān (Cairo: Dār al-Miṣriyya al-Lubnāniyyah, 1987).

<sup>66</sup> Holt, "Literary Offerings," 6.



insights offered into the individual agency of authors and into the workings of Qalāwūnid political ideology. In fact, such a re-assessment also suggests how current considerations of the increased social importance of Mamluk literature and of its meanings for Mamluk social organisation may be furthered. In pursuing his elite integration, Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī did not just actively engage with the dominant discourse of Qalāwūnid legitimacy, wittingly contributing with the innovative religious imagery of the *mujaddid* that was slowly establishing itself as a functional legitimating device. He tried to couple this with literary elegance, with demonstrations of intellectual and practical competence in the skills required from a secretary of his status (including knowledge of history, Quran and *ḥadīth*, and the art of epistolography), and with reminders of the longstanding links that connected his family to what Musawi termed the “scribal hierarchy [of] ... epistolary scribes or chancery secretaries”.<sup>67</sup> These complex ways in which an author like Ibn al-Qaysarānī could effectively mobilise cultural forms, ideas and symbols suggests an interconnected field of meaning shared by Mamluk elites and others that may usefully be called a Mamluk cultural matrix. Such a concept does then not just refer to culture being a common interest of all Mamluk elites,<sup>68</sup> but to the acknowledgement that Mamluk social reality always was expressed culturally and that Mamluk culture always was a social construction, meaningfully being shaped by and shaping the public organisation of Mamluk society as that emerged from the interaction among social groups.

As a result, also in this respect the horizon may be widened beyond *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*'s engagement with that Qalāwūnid *lingua franca* and with other forms, ideas and symbols, applying this cultural matrix perspective to other Mamluk cultural activities, to other literary products from the Qalāwūnid era in particular. Considering the increased social importance of belletrism, there appear to be many good reasons to do so, enabling to contemplate within one integrative epistemological framework the social dimensions of the ‘Literarisierung’ of verbal communication as well as the cultural dimensions of Mamluk social organisation. For the wider literary production of Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī himself —said by one of his biographers to have authored an undefined number of letters and poetry— this social semiotic approach to literature certainly makes much sense.<sup>69</sup> Apart from *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, there only remains one other of his epistolographic creations, which has again been preserved in a unique manuscript that, however, still awaits edition and further study.<sup>70</sup> What can and should already be said about it here is that it has an almost identical and therefore equally suggestive title, pertaining to the very different political climate of the eventful year 742 of the Muslim calendar (1341-2): *al-Durr al-Maṣūn fī ṣṭifā' al-maqarr al-ashraf al-sayfī Qawṣūn* (‘The well-preserved pearl, [demonstrating] the divine election of the noble lord Sayf al-Dīn Qawṣūn’). Although briefer (360 lines spread over 40 pages) and less elaborate than *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, this *al-Durr al-Maṣūn*, written during the short reign of al-Manṣūr ‘Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (r. 1341) for the strong man behind his throne Qawṣūn al-Nāṣirī (ca. 1300-1342), demonstrates upon a first inspection striking discursive, textual and stylistic parallels with the panegyric to ‘Abū Bakr’s brother al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl.<sup>71</sup> In fact, these unmistakable parallels suggest no less than that *al-Durr al-Maṣūn* simply was an earlier draft version of *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, differing in object of praise, but not in discursive and literary forms, nor

<sup>67</sup> See Musawi, “Pre-modern Belletristic Prose,” 110-3. On the importance of knowledge of history for a secretary, see also Li Guo, “Mamluk Historical *Rajaz* Poetry: Ibn Dāniyāl’s Judge List and Its Later Adaptations,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 14 (2010): 58 (“Al-Nuwayrī [d. 1332]... names five “arts” [*funūn*], or expertise in five areas, as the qualifying requirements for a candidate applying for lucrative state jobs, such as the *kātib*-clerk. Among the five, history tops all as the crown jewel.”)

<sup>68</sup> As it is used in Berkey, “Culture and Society during the late Middle Ages,” 386-411.

<sup>69</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-Kāmina*, I: 37.

<sup>70</sup> See Tadmurī’s reference in Ibn al-Qaysarānī, *al-Nūr al-Lā'ih*, 12, to this title.

<sup>71</sup> Ms. Dublin, Chester Beatty 4179, fol. 1r-21v. See Arthur J. Arberry, *The Chester Beatty Library. A Handlist of the Arabic manuscripts* (Dublin: E. Walker, 1955-1966), V: 4179: “*al-Durr al-Maṣūn fī ṣṭifā' al-maqarr al-ashraf al-sayfī Qūṣūn*, by Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qaysarānī al-Qurashī al-Khālīdī (d. 753/1352). [A panegyric account of Qūṣūn and his family.] Fol. 23. 18 x 13 cm. Fine scholar’s naskh. Autograph. Undated, 8/14<sup>th</sup> century. No other copy appears to be recorded.”

undoubtedly in performative intended meanings.<sup>72</sup> As such, it demonstrates remarkably well the working of the Mamluk cultural matrix, socio-political changes affecting the semiotic framework within which the author had to operate—hence the encomiast’s change of subject from Qawṣūn to Ismā’īl—but not the semiotic tools that he had at hand.

In view of such shared semiotic tools and easy switching between semiotic frameworks, it is—just as with the discursive nature of that *lingua franca*—extremely difficult to imagine that Ibrāhīm was creating these very peculiar sorts of performative panegyric *risālahs* in some form of splendid isolation.<sup>73</sup> After all, his case was hardly unique within the clientelistic structure of Mamluk society, where just as al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā’īl or Qawṣūn all political elites inherently took on social roles of symbiotic engagement with cultured men of social standing and functional capacity such as Ibrāhīm. Considering the ubiquitous, standard nature of belletristic prose and poetry in Mamluk elite communication, Ibrāhīm’s literary production arguably represents an extremely graphic example of a fundamental aspect of elite interaction that also warrants further research, both synchronically and diachronically. Just as in this specific case, dominant discursive and literary modes of Mamluk social communication may well have been used by many others in similarly semiotic ways, the meaning of which would have been very clear to contemporary participants to this type of elite interaction. For modern scholars that have to operate outside of a Mamluk cultural matrix, it means that literary products such as these historicising works of praise remain occasionally enigmatic, are always multi-dimensional, and should certainly never be taken at face value.

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<sup>72</sup> According to Holt, the same was apparently true in the case of the literary offerings to the sultans Mu’ayyad Shaykh and Ṭaṭar, both produced by the same author, the judge and historian Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-‘Aynī (1361-1451), who “had a model ready to hand in his own ...[offering to Shaykh], the plan of which he follows closely [in the subsequent offering to Ṭaṭar], sometimes even plagiarizing himself, with of course such adaptation as was necessary to suit the new ruler” (Holt, “Literary Offerings,” 11).

<sup>73</sup> For interesting parallels, involving a contemporary Arabic mirror-for-princes dedicated to an Ilkhanid vizier, and al-Qalqashandī’s *maqāma* on secretaryship from 1389, dedicated to the chief secretary of the time, see L. Marlow, “The Way of the Viziers and the Lamp of Commanders (*Minhāj al-wuzarā’ wa-sirāj al-umarā’*) of Aḥmad al-Iṣfahbadhī and the Literary and Political Culture of Early Fourteenth-Century Iran,” in Gruendler & Marlow, *Writers and Rulers*, 169-89, esp. 187-9; al-Musawī, “Vindicating a Profession or a Personal Career,” esp. 115-22.