

Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies

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Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies

Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics

Edited by

Frédéric Bauden
Malika Dekkiche



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Cover Illustration: Timur receiving gifts from the Mamluk ambassadors (*Zafarnāma* of Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī, Iran, Shiraz, 839/1436). Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts. Keir Collection, England.

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Preface

In this volume we have gathered twenty-eight essays, most of which were presented at an international conference organized at the Université de Liège (September 6–8, 2012). The aim of *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies* was to convene specialists from various fields of expertise to engage in the debate over the diplomatic relations between the Mamluk sultanate and other Muslim and non-Muslim powers in the time frame corresponding to the ascent of the Mamluks to power (1250) until their fall to the Ottomans (1517).

Our choice to focus on the Mamluk sultanate of Egypt and Syria for such an inquiry is expedient for a number of reasons. First, the period that saw the emergence of the Mamluks is of the greatest importance to the field of Islamic history, as it witnessed the end of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad and with it the collapse of the *mamlakat al-Islām* ideal. This gave birth to a new Islamic order characterized by the recognition of an Islamic world both divided and manifold. The Mamluks were situated at the junction of these two worlds: the old, which they sought to reproduce, and the incipient one they witnessed. Second, the Mamluks proved themselves to be supreme Islamic rulers. They did so by defeating the Mongols' advance in Palestine and, later, by defeating the crusaders. They thus became the saviors and defenders of Islam. They also earned themselves prestige for restoring the Abbasid caliphate in Cairo. Even if their position was very often questioned and challenged by Muslim rivals, one cannot, however, deny their major role as protectors of the Muslim community during the pilgrimage. Indeed, Mamluk sultans, by their seasonal domination in the Hijaz, as well as their hold on Christian holy sites, were unavoidable interlocutors with both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Their strategic holding of the Hijaz also further increased Mamluks' importance in the commercial sphere, particularly in the case of transit trade. This dominance brought about a significant increase in exchanges with the Latin West, which was quite concerned with its commercial interests at that time and was anxious to preserve certain benefits. Finally, we cannot ignore the importance of Cairo, the Mamluk capital, as the epicenter of Islamic culture and knowledge. The Mamluks set themselves up as worthy heirs of the Ayyubids in the fashion of a revival of Sunni Islam. This, in particular, they accomplished by establishing four chief judgeships over each of the schools of law and by patronizing numerous *madrasas*, such that Cairo became an inevitable stage for people in search of knowledge. The Mamluk sultanate therefore occupied a central and strategic position in the premodern period. Every day, its capital, Cairo, received representatives from many foreign countries seeking to discuss various matters with

the sultan. In constant contact with the neighboring world, Cairo truly proved itself a crossroads for embassies.

In addition to the obvious importance of the Mamluk sultanate as a diplomatic interlocutor, another reason justifies our focus on this power as a primary field of inquiry: the sources. Indeed, the Mamluk period is well known for the abundance, but also the great variety of its historiographic production. Not only do we possess numerous chronicles, which recorded the arrival and reception of foreign embassies to Cairo—and to a lesser extent Damascus—, throughout the entire period of Mamluk rule, but many other narrative sources are extant, which complete and adjust the data found in the chronicles. Biographical dictionaries, for example, provide additional details on the status and careers of the men involved in the exchanges. The corpora of administrative literature, which accurately characterize the encyclopedic trends of the time, are even more relevant to this inquiry into diplomatic contacts. This administrative literature is crucial to our understanding of the frame and modalities of the exchanges as they establish the institutional basis that regulated diplomatic contacts. Furthermore, along with the theoretical information they contain, those corpora also retained copies of numerous correspondences, treaties, and other documents that have not reached us through the archives. These copies are of prime importance, since they represent the only witness of the contacts that took place between the Mamluk sultans and their Muslim and non-Muslim counterparts. Along with these obvious sources, other works from the period addressed diplomatic contacts more indirectly. This is, for example, the case of the *Mirror for princes* literature and some fatwa collections, which touch on the normative and practical dealing of diplomatic relations, respectively.

If the Mamluk period is rich in sources produced under the patronage of the sultans or their elites, many powers in contact with the Mamluks also recorded or kept a record of these exchanges. In the latter category, we note the numerous original documents preserved in various European archives (especially in Italy and Spain). These documents are essential, since, on the one hand, they represent the only example of original material we have. But on the other hand, they include, in some cases, translations of Arabic originals, which also attest to the translators' work. Whereas these archives are a direct witness of diplomatic contacts, the Latin West has also provided us with many indirect accounts, such as those of pilgrims and merchants who made their way to Mamluk territory. In some cases, these individuals recorded diplomatic encounters in their travelogues and memoirs, which they describe in more or less detail. Along with the 'European' materials, other Muslim courts also kept records of their contacts with the sultanate in their historiographies. All these materials combined offer

unique opportunities to reconstitute, if not a *total* history of Mamluk diplomatic contacts, at least a connected one.

The period of the Mamluk sultanate (1250–1517) is highly exciting for the history of the diplomatic contacts. It was a time of tremendous change, with regard to the means and discourse of legitimacy, and the formulation of ideologies, a time in which Turco-Mongol traditions brought new components, that often opposed the *sharīʿa* ideals. These new discourses are well attested through the many exchanges—cordial and hostile—that took place among the various powers. The Mongol invasions of core Islamic regions also had major consequences for the increased mobility of individuals (military and civilians) seeking asylum and new opportunities. Many of those settled in Mamluk territory, brought not only their skills, but also—maybe more importantly—their networks and connections to their ‘homelands.’ The Mamluks (both sultans and elite) being themselves ‘outsiders’ had no problem integrating and accommodating these new elements. Finally, the so-called *Pax mongolica* also had a tremendous impact on the process by which Latin individuals and merchants were integrated into the open system it created.

While most studies of diplomatic relations of the Mamluk sultanate—but also of other contemporary powers—have so far looked at contacts between ‘state’-like entities on the model of the nation-state studies, in this volume, our aim is to combine all those separate cases and break through the frontiers—both ideological and spatial—that supposedly divide them. Therefore, following a trend initiated by Sanjay Subrahmanyam in his 1997 article (Connected histories: Notes towards a reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia, in *Modern Asian Studies* 31/3 (1997), 735–62), our goal is also to connect all the various historiographies dealing with those contacts. Even though many of the contributions in this volume focus on Mamluk historiography, specialists of other regions allow us to bridge the various traditions more efficiently. While using the methodology proposed by the field of ‘Connected histories,’ in this volume we have, as stated above, used as our object of inquiry the field of ‘Diplomatic studies’—a field that has recently witnessed an increasing interest from scholars of the premodern Islamic world.¹

Our goal here was to play on the ambivalence of the word ‘diplomatic,’ i.e., related to diplomacy, but also to diplomatics. Diplomatics is a field that has

1 In this respect, it is worth mentioning that two participants published their books shortly after the conference, which, in the first case, was the impetus for its writing: D. Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising diplomacy in the Mamluk sultanate: Gifts and material culture in the medieval Islamic world*, London 2014; C. Yüksel Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks: Imperial diplomacy and warfare in the Islamic world*, London and New York 2014.

also witnessed a revival over the last twenty years and that is now attracting more attention in Islamic studies, particularly for the Mamluk period. Although this field is usually associated with a more traditional approach to diplomatic history (i.e., the dealing with documents, including their editions, dating, and criticism), in this volume we aim to take advantage of another trend of study, the so-called 'new diplomatic history,' which approaches 'diplomats' in a new and original way, and links it more efficiently to issues of political and social histories. Our understanding of 'diplomacy' follows the same trend. Far from assuming the actual existence of such a concept during the premodern period, we use it as an analytical frame to address several issues pertaining to state formation and legitimation, elite communication and circulation. Both aspects ('diplomats' and 'diplomacy') are dealt with in more detail in the two introductory chapters of the volume devoted to the states of the research.

Beside these two states of the research, the volume gathers 26 articles and is divided into six parts. The first part, on diplomatic conventions, looks at the rules of letter-writing and ceremonial in Cairo (reception of embassies, ritual of signature). It establishes the general framework for the practice of diplomacy in the Mamluk capital, which is well attested through the case studies presented in the volume. The five following parts of the volume focus on Mamluk exchanges with the various geographical regions (in order of importance, as stated by the Cairene chancery): The Mongols and their successors (Ilkhanids, Jalayirids, Golden Horde); the Timurids, Turkmens and Ottomans; the western Islamic lands (Andalus, Maghrib); Arabia, India, and Africa; and the Latin West (the Italian city-states, Portugal, and Cyprus). Finally, the volume ends with two original studies on material culture.

The organization of the conference would not have been possible without the help of various institutions and persons to whom we express our deepest gratitude. First and foremost, we would like to thank the following institutions for their generous financial support: the Fondation Max van Berchem (Genève), the Fonds de la recherche scientifique (F.R.S.-FNRS, Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles), and the Patrimoine and the Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres of the Université de Liège. The conference was placed under the aegis of the Commission internationale de diplomatique (CID), a clear sign of its wish to open the committee and to widen its focus to specialists of non-European areas.² We are also grateful to the colleagues who kindly accepted to be part of the scientific committee whose main role was to assess the value of the proposals,

² The CID organized a 'technical' colloquium in two parts on the theme *Pushing Boundaries in Diplomats: Why Expand the Range of Activities of the CID?* (Ghent, April 25–6, 2014, and Strasbourg, March 30–1, 2017).

PREFACE

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thus guaranteeing the scientific quality of the essays presented in this volume: Doris Behrens-Abouseif, Michele Bernardini, Ludvik Kalus, and John Woods. In this context, we would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of the volume for their thorough reading of the contributions and their comments. Last but not least, we offer our thanks to the contributors whose articles, taken together, offer one of the most exhaustive and refreshing analysis of diplomacy and diplomatics in premodern Islam.

Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche

Abbreviations

ACA	Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, Barcelona
ADBR	Archives départementales des Bouches du Rhône
AEM	<i>Anuario de Estudios Medievales</i>
AI	<i>Annales Islamologiques</i>
AIÉOA	<i>Annales de l'Institut d'études orientales d'Alger</i>
AO	<i>Archiv Orientální</i>
ASF	Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Florence
ASI	<i>Archivio Storico Italiano</i>
ASVe	Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Venice
ASTo	Archivio di Stato di Torino, Turin
BÉO	<i>Bulletin d'études orientales</i>
BIÉ	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte</i>
BL	British Library, London
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
CAJ	<i>Central Asiatic Journal</i>
EI ²	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 2nd ed., Leiden 1954–2004
EI ³	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam Three</i> , Leiden 2007–
EIr	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i> , online edition, New York 1996–
ES	<i>Eurasian Studies</i>
IC	<i>Islamic Culture</i>
IJMES	<i>International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies</i>
IOS	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
JA	<i>Journal asiatique</i>
JAH	<i>Journal of African History</i>
JAIS	<i>Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies</i>
JAL	<i>Journal of Arabic Literature</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JARCE	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JIM	<i>Journal of Islamic Manuscripts</i>
JIS	<i>Journal of Islamic Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSAI	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
ME	<i>Medieval Encounters</i>
MEAH	<i>Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

XV

<i>MHR</i>	<i>Mediterranean Historical Review</i>
<i>MME</i>	<i>Manuscripts of the Middle East</i>
<i>MSR</i>	<i>Mamlūk Studies Review</i>
<i>MUSJ</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph</i>
<i>OCP</i>	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
<i>OIM</i>	Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago
<i>OL</i>	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>OLP</i>	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica</i>
<i>OM</i>	<i>Oriente Moderno</i>
<i>OP</i>	<i>Orientalia Pragensia</i>
<i>PO</i>	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
<i>QSA</i>	<i>Quaderni di Studi Arabi</i>
<i>RÉI</i>	<i>Revue des études islamiques</i>
<i>REMMM</i>	<i>Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée</i>
<i>ROC</i>	<i>Revue de l'Orient chrétien</i>
<i>ROMM</i>	<i>Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée</i>
<i>RSO</i>	<i>Rivista degli Studi Orientali</i>
<i>SI</i>	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
<i>SIr</i>	<i>Studia Iranica</i>
<i>WZKM</i>	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

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