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## **Mapping the Mamluk Sultanate**

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# Mapping the Mamluk Sultanate

by Yehoshua Frenkel (Haifa/Bonn)

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  - "Mamluk Hebron: Social and Religious institutions in a Medieval Islamic town 1260-1516," *The New Middle East* 50 (2011), pp. 9-28. (in Hebrew)
  - "Hebron – An Islamic Sacred City (634-1099)," *Cathedra* 141 (2011), pp. 27-52. (in Hebrew)
  - "Marriage and Family in Mamluk Palaces," in: *männlich und weiblich schuf Er sie. Studien zur Genderkonstruktion und zum Eherecht in den Mittelmeerreligionen*, eds. Matthias Morgenstern, Christian Boudignon and Christiane Tietz, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2011, pp. 239-248.
- „Muslim Responses to the Frankish Dominion in the Near East (1098-1291),” in: *The Crusades and the Near East: Cultural Histories*, ed. Conor Kostick, London: Roudledge 2011, pp. 27-54.

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## Introduction

Official documents from the Mamluk period provide data on the historical-geography of the Sultanate. Several document types illustrate this point, including orders (*taḍkira* pl. *taḍākir*),<sup>1</sup> reports and court cases. To these we can add inscriptions *samā'āt* and colophons.

The present brief contribution aims to shed light on a particular source, namely on official reports about natural disasters. These documents, known as *maḥḍar* (pl. *maḥāḍir*), were recorded by an inspector or an inspection team, following a severe event. That is to say they are a bureaucratic product of an official or a team of officials and authenticated by a judge.<sup>2</sup> These texts, which were composed almost immediately after the reported events, are a potential source for the study of Mamluk historical geography and, to the best of my knowledge, have not been adequately studied until now.

These contemporary documents, a sample of which were translated and distributed among the conference participants, reflect the bureaucratic apparatus of the sultanate and its administrative and legal procedures. As such they provide rich and precious topographical data on places that were taxed or assigned as *iqṭā'*. The composers of these *maḥāḍir* name towns, villages and hamlets.<sup>3</sup> Their contents certainly contribute to our efforts in reconstructing the past and the drafting of historical maps. In addition, the data illuminate the administration, its hierarchical order, the chain of command and the lines of communication.

This sort of data is vital for sketching the administrative structure of the sultanate. It supplies much needed information on urban and administrative centers and it is an essential contribution to our efforts to draw maps of the countryside. No reconstruction of roads and stations (*barīd*) or of the communication and the bureaucratic networks can be achieved without this geographical information.

Moreover, the data that these *maḥāḍir* documents provide is not restricted to the organization of the sultanate and its bureaucracy. Several very detailed lists cast light on urban landscapes and on religious institutions, including foundations established voluntarily by officers and private citizens. *Awqāf* records name pious charities and the properties, which have been endowed to maintain them. They illuminate a great variety of religious and social constructions. Based on this information we can proceed and to draw maps of institutions and their properties. I will return to this point in a moment.

The information on land use, crop cultivation and farming seasons, certainly enriches our knowledge of Mamluk farming and land use and enables us to produce taxation maps. This is true even in regard to orchards and water rights in urban centers. Often the data is rich and detailed. *The ta'liq by Ibn Ṭawq* provides a sound support to this characterization and tells of the neighboring villages in the Gouta that supplied Damascus with fruits.

Reporting on a severe wave of cold weather in Damascus (732/March 1332) Ibn al-Ġazarī says that it struck apricot, apple, nuts and almond trees, which were covered with spring and

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Furāt, for example, quoting earlier authors such as al-Ġazarī, transmits several. Ibn Furāt, *Ta'riḥ*, vol. 8 (683-696), 2 (Palestine), 3, 5 (kakhṭa); cf. Fernandes, *On conducting the affairs of state*, 81-91.

<sup>2</sup> These documents are often associated with *qāḍīs'* courts. Al-Asyūṭī, *Ġawāhir al-'uqūd*, 2: 374-375, 377; cf. Guo, *Commerce, culture, and community*, 287; In the cases studied here, the *maḥāḍir* were only validated by a *qāḍī* and notaries, who authorized a document that was drawn up by a civilian clerk.

<sup>3</sup> To this category we may add *mirabile dictu* and hagiographical accounts that name villages and remote corners.

early summer fruits (*fawākih bakīra*).<sup>4</sup> He also enriches our knowledge of the fruit market by providing a detailed description of the tax-farming (*damān*) of this market. In this list he includes the names of fruits: black mulberry, plums (prunus), common fig, pomegranate, quince, pears, and peach.<sup>5</sup>

The chronicles cast light on the supply of other foodstuffs. A report from Damascus recounts that vineyards, vegetables and eggplants were devastated by intense cold.<sup>6</sup> Cereals, including wheat, were brought to Damascus from villages that subsisted on dry-farming.<sup>7</sup>

One conclusion that can be deduced from our maps is that they demonstrate close relations between town and countryside as well as between neighboring and remote regions of the sultanate. Additionally, they illustrate the lines of communication between the various branches and nodes of the sultanate's administration.

Allow me now to hypothesize about the motives behind the *maḥādir*. At face value, we can assume that governors operated according to the administrative code and informed the center about the fate of remote villages that were stroke by natural disasters. The appended translated documents illuminate this case. They are accounts of disasters that hit potential tax revenues.

But we may speculate that a subversive *modus operandi* drove local governors to record disasters. They worried about the financial repercussions of natural calamities and of massive destructions. Hence, they were determined to document declines in income. Potentially, they could produce these texts as supporting explanations for their appeals and the records supplemented their request for additional *iqṭā'* property. If this explanation is feasible, we then should question the accuracy of the records.

Let me provide several examples: Badr ad-Dīn Baktūt al-'Alā'ī wrote from Homs to Ḥusām ad-Dīn Lāḡīn al-Manṣūrī the viceroy of Syria, who was in Damascus. 'Alam ad-Dīn Saḡar aṭ-Ṭarqaṣī the governor of the hilly *ṣafaqa al-qibliyya* sent a *muṭālī'a* to the *nā'ib* in Damascus. The amir Sayf ad-Dīn Qibḡaq al-Manṣūrī, the *nā'ib as-saltana* of Hama reported to Damascus on an event in the fields of Bārīn. The *barīd* brought a copy of this memorandum to Cairo.<sup>8</sup> The *amīr* Šihab ad-Dīn Qarātay sent a *maḥḍar* from Tripoli to Damascus. The viceroy of the city studied it and transmitted the document to the judges of Damascus. Then it was dispatched to Cairo to the sultan al-Malik an-Nāšir b. Qalawūn. The *amīr* Sayf ad-Dīn Tankiz ordered the head of the treasury (*wakīl bayt al-māl*), the judge Kamāl ad-Dīn aš-Šarīsī, to travel to Baalbek.

There is no need to name the villages and to point out their locations on the maps. Suffice it is to say, that several of them can be located in geographical compendia from the Mamluk period. Ġasūla for example is described by Yāqūt. On Bārīn he says briefly: "a pleasant town between Aleppo and Hama and the commoners spell its name Ba' rīn". Krak de Chevaliers is

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<sup>4</sup> Al-Ġazarī, *Ta' rīḡ ḥawādiṡ az-zamān*, 2:521 (732/March 1332), and cf. *ibid*, 3:601 (733/June 1333 adds black mulberry).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:876-881.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:664 and cf. 758 (on a disease that dried vineyards and gardens in the Ġūṭa in 735/1334), 3:858.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:459 (on the building of 'arṣa, i.e. granary or storage (hurī pl. aharā'/ahrī in the text! or *bāyika* pl. *bawāyik*) to store flour near Bāb al-Ġabiya in Damascus).

<sup>8</sup> On Mamluk *barīd* see Silverstein, *Postal systems*, 165.

well-known,<sup>9</sup> and so is Baalbek. Buṣrā's fame is unquestionable. Kara near Damascus is easily identified.<sup>10</sup> Other places are less known<sup>11</sup> and their location unknown to me.

Maps provide data for spatial analysis. Vector systems tend to inform the reader of directions, communication, and hierarchy. They are quite useful for the production of neat, clean lines. Raster systems are predominantly analysis oriented; they represent density, central and periphery. Yet maps are never value-free images.<sup>12</sup>

Hence, they might lead to an unhistorical deviation. By processing partial information, we produce images. By using them and placing them on maps that are drafted by us, we allow the viewer to assume that he is watching an objective series of neutral landscape representations. Indeed, we manipulate his or her viewpoint. It is our interpretation of selective data and does not reflect the assumptions of the Mamluk administration.

Despite this reservation, these maps certainly are a useful contribution to the reconstruction of past territories. Maps should be labeled: "use with caution".

Data and analysis - I would suggest to draw a series of maps that represent the historical landscape based, upon clusters of 20 years of maps.<sup>13</sup> These maps will offer a retrogressive analysis, which is a technique for unraveling the contemporary physical (soil, rainfall, and springs) and chronological data. The archiving of these data and maps will be the duty of a centre.

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<sup>9</sup> See Grandin, *The Castle of Salah ad-Din*.

<sup>10</sup> Strange, *Palestine under the Muslims*, 478.

<sup>11</sup> Wādī l-ʿAsl in Ġabal Samʿān is mentioned in the list of properties endowed to support the an-Nūrī hospital in Aleppo. Al-Ġazzī, *Nahr aḍ-ḍahab*, 2: 65.

<sup>12</sup> Harley, *Maps, knowledge, and power*, 278.

<sup>13</sup> For the application of GIS N. Levin et al., "Maps and the settlement of southern Palestine, 1799–1948: an historical/GIS analysis," *Journal of Historical Geography* 30 (2009): 1–2.

Documents for the hinterland of Damascus:  
A study in geographical [environmental] history

**Appendix (translated *maḥḍār*)**

Contemporary Mamluk chronicles provide accounts of natural disasters: floods, earthquakes and droughts. Some of these accounts are based on official records (*maḥḍār*) and private letters. Among other topics, these bureaucratic documents shed light on geography and urban history. The reports mention regions, places, buildings, streets and institutions and are a potential source for the study of the geographical and material history of the sultanate.

The present contribution aims to illustrate these potential sources. My point of departure is a short list at the end of *Taʿrīḥ al-Faḥrī*,<sup>14</sup> an insignificant chronology that was composed during the days of al-Malik an-Naṣir Muḥammad b Qalawūn. This appendix is entitled: *Dīkr mā jarā min al-ḥawādīṭ bi-l-amākin allatī tuḍakar ka-r-riyāḥ al-ʿawāṣif, wa-l-amṭār al-ḡizār, wa-l-barad al-kibār, wa-s-suyūl wa-ṣ-ṣawāʿiq wa-l-ḡarad li-istiqbāl sanata khams wa-ṭamānīn wa-sittimīʿa*. The importance of the list, which starts in 685/1286 and ends in 728/1328, stems from the considerable number of official reports (*maḥḍār; muṭāliʿa*) that it contains, although the disasters are mentioned in other chronicles.

**A Hurricane in Ġasūla (17 Ṣafar 685/14 April 1286)**

Ḥusām ad-Dīn Lāḡīn al-Manṣūrī the viceroy of Syria, whose headquarters were in Damascus,<sup>15</sup> received a letter from Badr ad-Dīn Baktūt al-ʿAlāʿī,<sup>16</sup> an army commander stationed in Homs:

“The slave [Badr ad-Dīn Baktūt al-ʿAlāʿī] kisses the ground and informs that on Thursday, Safar the 14<sup>th</sup>, at evening, in Ġasūla<sup>17</sup> towards ʿUyūn al-Qaṣab a huge black cloud built up, it thundered several times and produced noisy sounds, while black smoke emerged from it and descended till it touched the ground. The smoke had the shape of a frightening (or gigantic) serpent (*aṣala*)<sup>18</sup> the size of a huge pillar that a group of man cannot hold in their arms. Its head touched the raincloud high in the sky and playing with its tail, it touched the ground, as it was an alarming hurricane (*zawbaʿa*= also devil). It carried enormous stones, lifting them in the air and throwing them as if it was a bow shooting arrows. It produced blows and hurled the rocks each against the other, thus producing fearsome sounds that reached long distances. This occurrence continued till it reached the army’s encampment. Everything it touched was lifted into the air and thrown as if it was an arrow. The hurricane lifted saddles, coats of mail, equipment, swords, and quivers of arrows, pots, clothes, textiles, under-dresses, copper and buckets into the air. Everything was flying in the air as if it was a bird. In the stable was a big leather bag full with iron horseshoes that the veterinarians use to treat hooves. The wind carried it away and simply heaved it, like a bow shot. Among the property carried away by the

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<sup>14</sup> Al-Fākhīrī, *Taʿrīḥ al-Faḥrī*.

<sup>15</sup> He is the future sultan. Holt, *The Sultanate of al-Mansur Lachin*.

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Furāt, *Taʿrīḥ Ibn al-Furāt*, vol. 8 (683-696):37-38.

<sup>17</sup> A caravan station at the distance of a day’s journey from Homs towards Qara. Ar-Rūmī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 3:802-803; Strange, *Palestine*, 441. On Qara see MWNF

<http://www.explorewithmwnf.net/location.php?cn=sy&th=1&location=206> (January, 2013)

<sup>18</sup> Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:65.

wind were several big and fat camels with their burdens, as well as soldiers and stewards. A considerable number of saddles were taken by the wind and lances were lost. The hurricane ground them up and they became useless. It destroyed every property on its way and a considerable amount of military equipment and gear vanished. About two hundred soldiers and commanders lost their belongings. Practically, they were left with no possessions or gear. Then this serpent-like cloud disappeared high in the sky and moved eastward inland. It carried away some of the soldiers' gear, part of which were recovered by the army. I, your servant, patrolled the surroundings and the army, mustered and inspected it, handing back a considerable quantity of the lost equipment. Yet, despite these efforts a great amount was missing, as I have already reported. No one in the past had ever encountered such a disaster. After that, it rained for a short while. The large planks that were still standing after the wind had carried them away remained rocking in the air. Allah is sufficient for us and He is the best guardian.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Lightning (ṣā‘iqa/ṣāḥiqa) to the east of Damascus (806/1306)**

On Monday 28 Rabī‘ II AH 706 (7 November 1306) at noon, when the call for prayer sounded, lightning (ṣāḥiqa) struck the gardens (*bustān*) of Ibn Tarūs in the ravine (*wādī*) in the eastern (*bāb aš-šarqī*) hinterland of Damascus, in the depression covered with quince trees (*ḡiyād as-safarḡal*) outside the walls of Damascus, the city protected by Allah (*al-maḥrūsa*). At the time it happened three men were in the abovementioned orchard. The three brothers were among the workers (*riḡāla*) of the orchard and they met to eat their lunch (*biyataḡaddūn*, colloquial for *tagḡdaw*). The lightning struck the three of them. The head of one of them was covered by a wool cap (*qubb‘ ṣūf*) and in it were several silver coins (*darāhim*). The *dirhams* melted and became a lump. The second was struck in his leg and ankle. The third took most of the strike and died instantly. Then the lightning struck the ground. The two remaining brothers suffered from pain for days before recovering. Before the lightning struck, it rained heavily.<sup>20</sup>

Al-Yūnīnī provides a slightly different account:

On Monday 28 Rabī‘ II AH 706 (7 November 1306) heavy rain poured down on us in Damascus, thanks to God and His mercy. It rained from four o’clock till evening. At noon, when the call for prayer sounded, lightning (ṣā‘iqa) hit the gardens (*bustān*) of Ibn Tarūs in the ravine (*wādī*) in the eastern (*bāb aš-šarqī*) hinterland of Damascus. The four sons of ‘Adī, the farmer (*fallāḥ*) [who tended] this orchard, were there. The youngest among them ploughed the orchard. At noon he and the workers who were sowing with him sat down for lunch (*tagḡaddu*) when lightning struck and hit three of them. The head of one of them was covered by a wool cap (*qubb‘ ṣūf*) and in it were several silver coins (*darāhim fiḡḡda*). The *dirhams* melted and became a lump. The young Ibn ‘Adī was struck in his leg and ankle. The third took most of the bolt and died. Then the lightning struck the ground. The others were not injured. The two wounded men suffered for days from pains before recovering.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Al-Fākhīrī, *Ta’rīḡ al-Fāḡhīrī*, 417-418; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 31:85-86; two versions of this letter (*kitāb*) were published by Haarmann, *Quellenstudien* [al-Ġazarī’s account in *Hawādīth az-zamān wa-anba’ihi wa-wafayāt al-akābir wa-l-‘ayān min abna’ihi* of the years 682-687], 76-79.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Fākhīrī, *Ta’rīḡ al-Fāḡhīrī*, 419.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Yūnīnī *Ḍayl mir’āt az-zamān*, 2:1129.



### **The Consolidation of two mountains near Hama**

In the year AH 706 (1307) an official dispatch (*muṭāli‘a*) arrived in Damascus. The governor (*na‘ib as-salṭana*) of Hama, the emir Sayf ad-Dīn Qibḡaḡ al-Manṣūrī, reported on an event in the fields of Bārīn. There were two distant mountains separated by a ravine with running water. Then a half of one of them moved from its place and united with the other. Not a single stone rolled down to the ravine. Followed by the *qādī* of Bārīn, the governor of Hama visited the location and an official account (*maḥḍar*) was composed. The length of the landslide is 110 cubits (*dirā‘* pl. *aḍru‘*) and its width is 55 cubits. The breath of the ravine is 100 cubits. The dispatch and the official account were read [at the citadel of Cairo].<sup>22</sup>

This report is transmitted by several chroniclers. Al-Yūnīnī provides the following account:

The official postal services of the sultanate (*barīd*) brought to Cairo a letter that was written by the *amīr* Sayf ad-Dīn Qibḡaḡ al-Manṣūrī, who at that date (beginning of Ramadan 706/second week of March 1307) served as the governor of Hama. The communication informed that:

It spread around and became known among city dwellers and countryside population that that in the county (*‘aml*) of Ḥiṣn al-Akrād (Krak de Chevaliers), a mountain in wādī Rāwīl was partly relocated. If God wishes so it is not impossible. This information reached the ears of the *amīr* Sayf ad-Dīn, the viceroy of Hama, may God bless him with good news only and favorable courses. He wished to study closely what happened and to be sure of the events, to ascertain the affair clearly. So he ordered the chief commander (*naqīb*) of the armies stationed in Hama the victorious, the *amīr* Ḥusām ad-Dīn, to ride to Bārīn. He carried a written order to Šihāb ad-Dīn, the governor (*mutawallī*) of the town. They were instructed to travel in the company of the local judge (*ḥākim*), who would sign the upper margins of this official report.<sup>23</sup> They were escorted by several notaries, who would attest and sign at the bottom of this report, too. This company was ordered to go to the abovementioned ravine and to inspect the mountain in order to understand what happened. They were to examine the place and be more precise regarding the rumors about this event or whether the story was simply absurd.

Quickly the company travelled to the place; hastily they advanced toward the mountain. They arrived at a village named Baq‘irā. They asked the local inhabitants about what had happened lately at this mountain. Accidently they came upon two men who had entered this ravine between these two mountains. The two told the mission that the mountain where the landslide had happened had not collapsed totally and had not blocked the ravine. The water continued to flow, to pour, to gush and to stream. They stood on a winding road (*‘arqūb*) on the southern mountain and independently inspected the landscape, viewing the hills and the valley. The landslide hit the summit of the corresponding mountain and collapsed. Only a very limited amount of the landslide hit the ravine with the running waters, mainly dust. “My Lord made it true”<sup>24</sup>; “He made the Gods into one God”.<sup>25</sup> What was left of it remained in the shape of a bow resting on the other mountain, resembling a prayer-niche made of stone. The stream in the ravine continues unaffected. The water flows regularly, breaches and falls. The avalanche

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<sup>22</sup> Al-Fākhirī, *Ta‘rīḥ al-Fāḥirī*, 419-420.

<sup>23</sup> On this see al-Asyūfī, *Ġawāhir al-‘uqūd*, 2:369-370.

<sup>24</sup> Q: 12, 100.

<sup>25</sup> Q: 38, 5.

did not affect the stream and the riverbed did not change course, despite the fact that the landslide is precisely only 110 cubits long and its width is half of it. Its depth was roughly half of 55 cubits. It was a high mountain that moved and became close. The local people that were present at the scene reported that it happened at the end of the month of Rağab or at the beginning of Ša‘bān. The inspection took place on Thursday 28 Ša‘bān in the year 706 (2 March 1307).

The official report arrived in Cairo during the first third of Ramaḍān 706 (5-14 March). The vice-judge at Bārīn, in the county of Ḥiṣn al-Akrād, signed this official document on Rağab of 706. He stated in it that Bārīn is near wādī Rāwīl in the county (*iqḷīm*) of Ḥiṣn al-Akrād. There is a water canal (*nahr*). The water moves a water wheel that grinds flour. The ravine cuts across two mountains, north and south. Its length is 110 cubits, its width is half this size and its height is 26 cubits. The length of the landslide is 110 cubits. One mountain with its plants and stones slid towards the other mountain. No dust whatsoever blocked the water. This is the entire reproduction of the official account. God knows best.<sup>26</sup>

An account by al-Nuwayrī of a bizarre event:

“In this year (AH 706) an official memorandum (*muṭāli‘a*) sent by the viceroy of Hamah was received [in Cairo]. It contained [a report] on a landslide in the territory of Bārīn in the province (*balad*) of Hama. There are two mountains in that region separated by a ravine with a torrent of flowing water. A half of one of these mountains moved from its place and fused with the other mountain. Not a single stone fell to the ravine that is between the mountains. The viceroy of Hama, accompanied by the qāḍī of Bārīn, inspected the place and composed an official account (*maḥḍar*). The length of the half mountain that moved from its place is 110 cubits and its width is 55 cubits. The length of the wādī between these two mountains is 100 cubits. I read the memorandum and the *maḥḍar*. Here is its text:

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate and the Merciful.

It spread around and became known among city dwellers and countryside population that that in the county of Ḥiṣn al-Akrād a block in a mountain in wādī Bārīn changed place and moved. If God wishes so it is not impossible. This information reached the ears of the viceroy (*kāfil*) of Hama, may God bless him with good news only and favorable courses. He, may God raise his cause and fill his heart with light and belief, wished to discover (*kašafa*) what happened and to be sure of the events, to ascertain the affair clearly. So he ordered the chief commander (*naqīb*) of the armies stationed in Hama the victorious, His Excellency (*al-ğanāb al-‘ālī*) the amīr Ḥusām [ad-Dīn] to ride to Bārīn. He carried a written order (*marsūm karīm*) to His Highness (*al-majlis al-‘ālī*) Šihāb [ad-Dīn], the governor (*mutawālī*) of the well-built town of Bārīn. The two of them were instructed to travel with the local judge (*ḥākim*), who would sign the upper margins of this official report. They were escorted by several notaries who would attest and sign at the bottom of this report, too. This company was ordered to go to the abovementioned ravine and to inspect the mountain in order to figure out what happened. They should examine the place and be more precise regarding the rumors about this event or whether the story was simply absurd.

The company rushed to fulfill the order and hastily travelled to the place; hastily they advanced toward the mountain. They arrived at a village (*qarya*) named Baq‘abrā. They asked

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<sup>26</sup> Al-Yūnīnī, *Ḍayl mir‘at al zamān*, 2:1131-133.

the local inhabitants about what had happened lately at this mountain. By chance they came upon two men who had entered this ravine between these two mountains. The two told the mission that the mountain where the landslide had taken place had not collapsed totally and did not block the ravine. The water continued to flow, to pour, to gush and to stream. They stood at the winding road (*‘arqūb*) on the southern mountain. It was conspicuous and noticeable that this mountain is between joining and collapse. It fell upon the slopes of the corresponding mountain and collapsed. Only a very limited amount of the landslide hit the ravine with the running water, mainly dust. This is a miracle. What was left from it remained in the shape of a bow resting on the other mountain, resembling a prayer niche. The stream in the ravine continued unaffected. The water flowed regularly. The avalanche did not block the watercourse and nothing prevented the stream’s flow. The riverbed did not change course, despite the fact that the landslide is precisely 110 cubits long and its width is half of that. The terrain is roughly half of the width and the limits of the landslide are nearly its length.

The local people that were present at the scene reported that it happened at the end of the month of Raġab or at the beginning of Ša‘bān. Thus [say those] who were at the place, inspected it and wrote the information contained in this document. They add their signatures at its bottom. The inspection took place on Thursday 28 Ša‘bān in the year 706 (2 March 1307). In the appendix to the official report are the signatures of the notary and on its upper margins is the signature of the judge of Bārīn. It states: Praise God and make him pleased. I was present at the ravine, which is mentioned in the document, and witnessed the avalanche that took place, the landslide including the rocks and plants and the way it hit the slopes of the opposite mountain, its complete length and the very fact that no dust blocked the stream as the document explains. It was written by Abū Bakr b. Naṣr al-Hāšmī al-Mu‘ād aš-Šāfi‘ī al-‘Abbāsī the judge of Bārīn, may Allah will forgive him.<sup>27</sup>

A short account by Baybars al-Manṣūrī:

“On that day letters from Hama reached Cairo, They reported on an astonishing event that amazed all, that had occurred in the region of Ḥiṣn al-Akrād. Near Bārīn, that is in the province of Hama, are two mountains separated by a ravine with a stream of water. Half of one mountain moved across the ravine and touched the second mountain. Yet not a single stone has fallen into the ravine. The viceroy of Hama, accompanied by the deputy-judge of Bārīn, inspected the place and composed an official account (*maḥḍar*). The length of the half that slid from the mountain is 110 cubits and its width is 55 cubits. The length of the ravine is more than 100 cubits. The mountain’s name is Munbāya(?) and the name of the nearby village is Warāna(?)”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> An-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 32:98-90.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-fikra*, 388-389.

### **A lightning bolt in the region of Buṣrā (709/1309)**

“On Thursday 2 Ğumāda II 709 (6 November 1309) a lightning bolt in the fields of the village (*qarya*) of an-Nuayma in the county (‘*aml*) of Buṣrā struck a man from this village, who was busy preparing the field for sowing. His name was Ḥammād b. Salāma b. Tābit. He was killed on the spot as was the yoke (*faddān*) of oxen with which he was ploughing. An official report (*maḥḍar*) was written. To authenticate it the document judge (*qāḍī*) of Buṣrā signed it.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Heavy Rains in Damascus (710/1311)**

“On the night between Wednesday and Thursday 17 Dū l-Qa‘da 710 (7 April 1311), it rained heavily in Damascus. During the last stage of the showers, red clay dust fell. All the landscape, the trees, the leaves, the fruits and the paved ground, was covered with this red mud.

In his chronicle the sheikh Šams ad-Dīn b. al-Ġazarī mentions that he asked the old and noble sheikh Kamāl ad-Dīn b. an-Naḥḥās, who during his lifetime was one of the renowned Syrian scholars, for the causes of this unusual phenomenon of red mud. The sheikh told him that in the year 646 he was sitting in the cathedral mosque of Damascus in the hall of the Ḥanbalites when a rain of mud fell. In the courtyard of the mosque a frog and a *wada*‘ (mouse/mole) – of the kind that lives near the sea shores – fell. The people congregated at the mosque. Group after group came to inspect the creatures and to be amused by the sight of the frog.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Rain and Floods in Bilād al-Shām in AH 716/1316**

“At the beginning of Šafar 716 (started on 24 April 1316), heavy precipitation fell in the mountains overlooking Qārā and in Baalbek (Bāl Bakk), as well as on the city of Homs (Hims)<sup>31</sup> and the region of al-Munāṣafāt (the villages that were controlled jointly by the Franks and the Mamluks during Baybars’ and Qalāwūn’s days). The rain spread toward Hama, Aleppo and ‘Azāz. The heavy precipitation was accompanied by massive hail-stones. Each stone was the size of an orange, some were even bigger but others were smaller. After two or three day a single hailstone was measured. It weighed three Syrian ounces. These rains caused widespread flooding in these mountainous regions.<sup>32</sup> The ravines became full of water and the dams burst, flooding the villages of Ğūsiyya, an-Nā‘ima and Qads.<sup>33</sup> They flowed into the lake of Homs, filled it up and overflowed. The torrent carried away the village of Ḥasmak, which is near an-Nā‘ima, with all its crops and harvests. Most of the inhabitants drowned in the water. Only five survived: three men, a child and a girl. Their escape was miraculous. They stumbled upon an ox floating in the water. Two of the men clung to his horns, the boy and the girl climbed upon his back, the third man held his tail. The ox floated in the flooding water and carried them till they landed on elevated hard ground. They were delivered from the flood and rested there. The torrential water carried away a considerable number of tents, of Turkumāns (*ḥarkāhāt*), Bedouins (*buyūt*) and Kurds. [These nomads] were living in this territory. The water carried them off and they drowned. Their animals also sank in the torrents

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<sup>29</sup> Al-Fākhirī, *Ta’rīḥ al-Fāḥirī*, 421.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Fākhirī, *Ta’rīḥ al-Fāḥirī*, 421.

<sup>31</sup> In *Nuzhat al-Mālik wa-l-mamlūk* (ed. Tadmurī) 233 province (*bilād*) instead *madīna*.

<sup>32</sup> In *Nuzhat al-Mālik wa-l-mamlūk* (ed. Tadmurī) 233 adds the valley (*qā’*) of a-Muḥadaṭa.

<sup>33</sup> On this region see al-Qalqašandī, *Šubḥ al-a’šā*, 4:80, 84.

and their carcasses were carried by the water to the lake of Homs. A great number of human cadavers and animal carcasses were carried by the waters to the orchards of Ğūsiyya and remained hanging from the trees.

The hail fell mainly over two ravines in the mountains and filled them up. It remained so for a considerable period. The governor and the judges of Hama and Baalbek went to the scene and observed it.

A person who experienced the event, who is very knowledgeable and can be trusted, mentioned that during those days heavy rain struck the town of ‘Azaz-this is the rain that I had previously mentioned. With the precipitation fish of all sizes fell from the sky. A considerable quantity of them was collected and eaten. He added that at the same time, it also rained in Saramīn and Ḥārim. With this rainfall frogs fell from heaven, some of the creatures were alive”.<sup>34</sup>

The account by an-Nuwayrī is almost identical. He names his sources. The *amīr* Ğalāl ad-Dīn aṣ-Ṣafadī, who served as an *barīd* officer in Egypt and the *amīr* ‘Alā’ ad-Dīn Ayduġdī aṣ-Ṣahasūrī, who served as the major-domo (*usdāt*) of the *amīr* Šams ad-Dīn Qarā-Sunqur al-Miṣrī, who transmitted the information from his father, Šihāb ad-Dīn Aḥmad, later from Aleppo. The father claimed to be an eyewitness.<sup>35</sup>

Aṣ-Ṣafadī’s account is shorter and contains slight changes.<sup>36</sup>

### **Terrific Flooding in Baalbek (AH 717/1313)**

In the year AH 717 a terrific flood washed through Baalbek. An official report (*maḥḍar*) of this event was written. It reads as follows:

In the Name of Allah the Compassionate the Merciful:

Oh Lord, forgive and have mercy

Allah says in the Quran: “and We frighten them, but it only increases them in great insolence.”<sup>{37}</sup>

Allah says: “Surely in that is a lesson for men possessed of eyes.”<sup>38</sup>

Those who saw this terrifying experience and pondered about it, those who witnessed it and thought about it, they all praised Allah and knew that only good are His deeds and He made it to teach a lesson. [As He said]: “His command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it ‘Be,’ and it is. So glory be to Him, in whose hand is the dominion of everything, and unto whom you shall be returned.”<sup>39</sup>

On Tuesday afternoon, 27 Ṣafar 717 (10 May 1317) Allah the mighty, may He be praised, sent a weighty cloud, thunder and lightning, a downpour of heavy rain. The watercourses (*wādī*, pl. *awdiya*) east of Baalbek flooded. The water carried off everything that stood in its way: vineyards and other trees. Near the town the torrent split into two streams. One stream flowed on the eastern side southward. The water built up till it pooled near the walls, it was in the size of a huge pond. The water was so high that it touched the walls’ embattlements. The water swelled, expanded and its pressure intensified. Thanks to God’s mercy, the walls were

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<sup>34</sup> Al-Fākhirī, *Ta’rīḥ al-Fāḥirī*, 421-422.

<sup>35</sup> an-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 32:178.

<sup>36</sup> In *Nuzhat al-Mālik wal-mamlūk* (ed. Tadmurī) 232-233 adds that the hail blocked the roads for several days.

<sup>37</sup> Q: 17, 59 (trans. Arberry).

<sup>38</sup> Q: 3, 13 (trans. Arberry).

<sup>39</sup> Q: 36, 82-83 (trans. Arberry).

strong enough and did not collapse and withstood the challenge of the water. Thank God, only minor damages occurred, and no serious devastation or harm (*fasād*).<sup>40</sup>

The second stream flowed around the walls from Damascus gate to Naḥla gate, on the eastern-northern corner of the town. The water intensified and pressed the walls. Eventually the weight of the water burst the walls and opened a passage, 40 cubits was its size. This happened despite the sophisticated construction and the deep and strong foundations. Despite the walls' thickness, roughly 5 cubits, they broke under the pressure. The water carried an entire tower with everything in it and part of the northern front rampart which was built from massive rocks (*badaniyya*). Each side of this tower was 15 cubits long. The water carried it off in one piece. It did not break up, only after a considerable distance of 500 cubits. The water washed the town. The stream flowed westward. Everything in its way was smashed. Every towering building was flattened. It destroyed housing and demolished properties. Men, women and children were covered by water. Fathers, mothers, orphans, widows, spouses and children drowned. The stream continued flowing and flooded the mosque and the nearby *madrasa*. The water stopped and pooled till it reached the pikes of the pillars where it stopped flowing. It destroyed all the properties in the compound: scrolls of Qurans and volumes, books of *ḥadīth* and religious studies. Everything was smashed, scattered underwater and destroyed. The hearts were filled with distress and fear. Then the western wall of the mosque failed under the pressure and collapsed. The water carried away everything, people indeed watched it happening, and it flowed till it reached the moat of the citadel. It took about 25 cubits of the adjacent wall and gushed to the lands outside the town. It swiftly uprooted everything on its way and washed away orchards and trees. Was not it said in the Quran: "And it was said, 'Earth, swallow thy waters; and, heaven, abate!'"<sup>41</sup> Because of it landlords found themselves wandering and begging, affluent people became dependent upon charities. Mosques were destroyed and praying stopped.

A great number of miracles occurred on this day and uncounted wonders happened. Narrators that could be trusted spoke about a column of fire that came down from heaven at the beginning of the flood. They saw the smoke and heard loud sounds that shattered the strongest persons. Those poor who Allah chose to protect survived it, and those who were not forgiven found their death."

The size of the buildings that the water carried off almost equalled the piece of the wall that the water took. It is practically impossible to assess the number of the buildings that were under the water. Considerable quantities of properties, furniture, equipments, and yields were lost. In one of the public baths (*ḥammām*), seven women and children drowned, but a great number were saved. A large number of bodies were discovered west of the mosque. Mills and baths stopped working. The local hospital collapsed and the sick joined the dead. Yet God removed death from the great majority and the numbers of the survivors was considerably higher than the drowned.

The local judge (*ḥākim*) signed the document and validated its contents. His official signature is "praise God and thank Him."

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<sup>40</sup> cf. the report on flooding that washed Baalbek. Ibn Furāt, *Ta'riḥ Ibn al-Furāt*, vol. 8 (683-696):156-157 (692/June 1293).

<sup>41</sup> Q: 11, 44 (trans. Arberry).

Amongst the notaries that validated this document are Quṭb ad-Dīn al-Yūnīnī<sup>42</sup> and Šams ad-Dīn [b.] Mağd ad-Dīn al-Ba‘labakkī, in addition to several other high-profile figures.

The author [al-Fāhirī] says that this official *maḥḍar* arrived at the court of al-Malik an-Nāšir in the citadel of Cairo (*al-abwāb as-sulṭaniyya an-nāširiyya*) and was read at the supreme council (*al-masāmi‘ aš-šarīfa*). The amīr Sayf ad-Dīn Balabān al-Quḡuqārī, who served at that period as the sub-major-domo, provided me with a copy of it. I copied it and transmitted it in the format quoted here.”

The sheikh Šams ad-Dīn b. al-Ġazarī provides in his chronology (*ta‘rīḥ*) a different account of the flood in Baalbek:<sup>43</sup>

On Tuesday 29 Šafar 717 (12 May 1317) news reached Damascus about a severe flood that washed the town of Baalbek. In reaction to this, the viceroy of Damascus and the region (*nā‘ib as-salṭana bi-š-šām*), the amīr Sayf ad-Dīn Tankiz<sup>44</sup> ordered the judge Kamāl ad-Dīn aš-Šarīsī,<sup>45</sup> who served as the head of the treasury (*wakīl bayt al-māl*), to travel to Damascus and to confiscate (*ḥūṭa*) the property of the deceased and to secure the possessions [left with no owner]. He travelled to Baalbek and returned to Damascus in the month of Rabi‘ I. I met him on this occasion, blessed him on his safe return and asked him about his experience. He produced the sheets of paper that carried the report on what happened and the effects of the flood. There were four official reports: 1) one to our lord the sultan, may God prolong his realm; 2) a memorandum to the viceroy of Damascus; 3) a report to the governor of Baalbek; 4) a copy that he preserved for himself. I copied one of these documents. Its contents are as follows:

Blessed papers that contain information on the extent of the destruction caused by a flood in Baalbek, may Allah protect the town, on Tuesday 27 Šafar 717 (12 May 1317). As will be mentioned below, the water shattered the congregational mosque (*ḡāmi‘*) and the constructed praying places (*masāğid*), that were occupied with prayers. The torrent also smashed the walls from two directions, houses, shops, baths, mills, stables and, it will be mentioned below, killed men, women and children, horses, burden, animals and others. The treasury (*bayt al-māl*) is entitled to a share (*našīb*) of the properties [of the deceased] that were identified, in addition to the [properties] of the non-locals (*ğurabā‘*), who were in the mosques and along the roads and who were not identified.

This was executed in line with the instructions (*taḍkira*) brought by the magistrate and judge the sheikh, imam, savant, Kamāl ad-Dīn the superintendent (*wakīl*) of the treasury office of Damascus. [This inspection] was accomplished under the supervision (*mubāšara*) of the superintendent (*wakīl*) of the treasury office of Baalbek, and those notaries who joined him and signed this document and the inspectors of the administration office (*dīwān*). Badr ad-Dīn the governor of Baalbek and the region was also present,<sup>46</sup> and with him were the judge

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<sup>42</sup> On him see Guo, *Early Mamluk Syrian Historiography* [the years 697-701/1297-1302 accompanied by an English translation].

<sup>43</sup> Also quoted by an-Nuwayrī. See al-Ġazarī, *Ta‘rīḥ ḥawādiṯ az-zamān*, 1:472-473.

<sup>44</sup> On him see Kenney, *Power and Patronage*.

<sup>45</sup> The judge of Homs judge Jamāl ad-Dīn aš-Šarīsī is mentioned in a report on floods that devastated the city. Al Ġazarī, *Ta‘rīḥ ḥawādiṯ az-zamān*, 2:515-516 (quotes the diary of ‘Alam ad-Dīn al-Birzālī, 732/13-14 October 1331).

<sup>46</sup> According to the document quoted by aš-Šafādī, *Nuzhat al-mālik wa-l-mamlūk*, 242-244: “this is a copy of [a document] approved by Ġamāl ad-Dīn ar-Raḍiyī the *qādī* of Ba‘lbak. He had signed it and wrote ‘I witnessed

Kamāl ad-Dīn, the superintendent of the treasury office in Damascus; Ğamāl ad-Dīn, the magistrate (*ḥākim*) of Baalbek; Ğamāl ad-Dīn b. Sābik, the controller (*nāzir*) of the *dīwān*. The situation in the vineyards and orchards on the outskirts of Baalbek were excluded since no one had explored them. They were ordered to count the victims, men, women and children, excluding those who were lost in the mosque and along the ways and were not identified.

Lives	Dead persons: 174.	Animals: Horses: 4 Mules: 2 Beasts of burden: 5 Oxen: 1 ox.
Houses: 895	Destroyed: 481	Smashed: 414
Shops: 131	Destroyed: 54	Smashed: 77
Religious constructions: 13	The cathedral mosque Schools Mosques	
Water canals	Destroyed: 4	
Mills: 11	Destroyed: 2	Smashed: 9
Tannery ( <i>madbaġa</i> )		Smashed: 1
Orchards within the wall	Flooded: 44	
Enclosures ( <i>afrisa?</i> ): 17		
Dungheaps ( <i>diman</i> ): 17	Destroyed: 2	Smashed: 15

#### The Ḥārat Ḥaṣarā:

Lives	74 people were killed in this neighbourhood	
Houses: 176	Destroyed: 160	Smashed: 16
Weavers' Shops: 20	Destroyed: 9	Smashed: 11

<sup>47</sup>

#### A Storm in the Region of Aleppo (AH717/1317)

“On Wednesday 13 Rabī’ I 717 (25 May 1317) at 8 o’clock in the daytime, a very strong wind struck Aleppo. It was an alarming event that brought plenty of dust and was accompanied by tremendous flashes of lightning and loud thunder. The universe turned so heavily dark that a person could not identify his companion that was next to him and people could not open their eyes. The people were convinced that the end of the world was at hand. With the strong winds heavy rains poured on the earth.

The wind and the rain spread to the county (*iqḷīm*) of Mount (*ġabal*) Sam‘ān, west of the city of Aleppo. It uprooted a great number of old (*rūmāniyya*) trees: oaks, olives and vineyards. It ripped up huge trees with their roots. The hurricane killed travellers on roads and completely destroyed every village that stood on his way. In total, it shattered eleven villages: Taḍīl

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more than that and a great number of notaries [approved it]. These all are signs of warning and forgiveness, intimidation and awakening”.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Fākhirī, *Ta’rīḥ al-Fāḥirī*, 423-427.



(Taḍbil), Kafar ‘Ammah, Kafar Ğūm (Ğūr), Bālā, ‘Afīs, Rubiya‘ah (Rabi‘iya), Yuqād (Mu‘ād), ‘Ayn Ğārā, Yaṣṭarātūn (Barātūn), and al-Absazu (10!) and Umm Taḥnīn. All living creatures in these villages: men, animals, farm beasts and chickens were killed by the hurricane. The rain caused flooding.

A strong torrent washed the road that crosses wādī al-‘Asal (the honey ravine). This is a wide ravine and along it runs the high road (*ad-darb as-sulṭānī*) that connects Aleppo and the neighbouring regions. The travellers from Aleppo to all locations in Ğabal Sam‘ān, the districts (*‘amal*, pl. *a‘māl*) of Ḥārim and other places use this road. The water gushed, and men and beasts of burden that were in its way drowned. For a while, people refrained from using this road.

A [fire]pillar came out from this hurricane and shot fire flashes. It struck a church in al-Rubiya‘ah (Rabi‘iya). This was a very old (*rūmāniyya*) construction built from huge (Heraclius) boulders. Even ten porters could not carry a single boulder. It was built very sophisticatedly. The fire column entered the church and lifted it from its foundation. It elevated the construction high in the air, to the altitude of an arrow shot or even higher. The church did not break up and remained intact, each stone in its place. People that survived the hurricane, that were outside the area affected by the pillar of wind, saw it in this condition. They started calling upon God for help and asking for refuge under His protection, begging His forgiveness and praising Him. As the church reached the peak the stones started breaking and falling apart. The stones hit the ground so powerfully that some of them penetrated it so deeply that they were even not visible. Other stones were partially buried. The place of the church changed and resembled a ditch.

News of this event reached Egypt. The informants were truthful people. The reports spread and became familiar. The miracles made by God are numerous and His marvels are many. We ask shelter from God’s revenge and from His painful punishment. We pray for Allah’s forgiveness, His pardon and acceptance. He is generous and benevolent.”<sup>48</sup>

An-Nuwayrī adds:

The amīr ‘Alā’ ad-Dīn Ayduġdī aš-Šarazūrī informed me about this event, basing his words on a letter that he had received from his son Šihāb ad-Dīn Aḥmad. He said: When I received my son’s letter, I wrote to him and asked about the validity of this account. So he responded and informed me: This account was verified. The viceroy [of Aleppo] dispatched a team to investigate the news and he was among those who visited the site affected. Moreover, I [an-Nuwayrī] learned about the event from others, in addition to the amīr ‘Alā’ ad-Dīn Ayduġdī aš-Šarazūrī, and confirmed the account.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Al-Fākhīrī, *Ta’rīḥ al-Fāḥīrī*, 428-429.

<sup>49</sup> An-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 33:251-225.

### Locusts in Aleppo AH 718

In the year 718 (March 1318-February 1319) locusts appeared in the province (*bilād*) of Aleppo, ‘Ayn Tāb (Antep), al-Fū‘a, Ma‘rat al-Miṣriyyin, Mount (*ğabal*) Sam‘ān, the county (*balad*) of ‘Azāz, Tell Bašīr, and al-Rāwandān. They were king-size locusts the size of a bee (*naḥl*?). The governors assembled to fight the locusts. The governor of Rāwandān collected the dead insects. From 15 Muḥarram till 6 Rabī‘ I, AH 718 (19 March-8 May) they counted 2852 *makkūk* (c. 60 kg.)<sup>50</sup> of dead insects. Only in Rāwandān alone they counted 950 *makkūk*. The rest were killed and collected in the farms (*ḍay‘a* pl. *ḍiya‘*) around. An official memorandum (*maḥḍar*) was composed and signed by the local judge (*ḥākim*) to verify it. The total of the killed and burned locusts was even larger, since not all were collected and weighed. So the whole sum was considerably greater. These numbers are only regarding Rāwandān and the neighboring farms, and exclude the other regions that were mentioned above. A *raṭl* (c. 450 grams)<sup>51</sup> of locusts were collected, weighed and sorted. It turned out that an average *raṭl* contains 87 thousand (! presumably 1087) insects. An official memorandum (*maḥḍar šar‘ī*) was composed.”<sup>52</sup>

### A Wind Storm in the region of Tripoli, northern Lebanon (AH718/1318)

On Wednesday 2 Šafar 718 (5 April 1318), a group of followers of ‘Alā’ ad-Dīn, the controller of the road and the chief of the Turkmans were sitting in a tent (*zuq*)<sup>{53}</sup> in the territory between al-Rakil and the village of al-Mu‘aysara near the lagoon (*al-ğun*) of Tripoli, in a place named Kir Ibrahim in the district (*‘aml*) of Tripoli. This occurred after the noon prayer. A strong wind came from the sea and hit the tents of the road guardians. It demolished them. However, he [i.e., ‘Alā’ ad-Dīn?] did not lose property or men. Then the wind blew towards the tents of the *ḥāğğ* Turali b. al-Baki. It resembled a pillar of dust, connected to the clouds in a shape resembling a dragon (*tinnīn*). For an hour it hovered over the tents, moving southwards and northwards. It did not leave a single item untouched and shattered the tents and the furniture. As he witnessed it, Turali called: Oh Lord you carried away all the food and left a family with no food. What have you left that will enable me to feed them? The wind in the shape of a dragon returned towards his camp and killed him, his wife, daughter, grandsons, a slave girl and others. All together, 21 people were killed. Three were wounded by the stones and sticks that the gusts of wind blew. Two of Turali’s camels were carried off by the wind. They were lifted up in the air to the altitude of ten javelins. The wind tore clothes and furniture and scattered them. They flew in the air till they disappeared. The wind drove the bronze jars and pans and piled them one on top of the other. A slave girl of Turali’s was carried away from place to place to the distance of 70 arrow shots. A nearby encampment of Bedouins lost four camels that were carried off by the wind. The camels were lifted up in the air and fell down in pieces. Many beasts of burden died.

After the wind, heavy rain and hail poured down. The weight of the hail was three ounces and less. It resembled sharp pointed stones shaped like triangles and quadrangles. A wide area of

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<sup>50</sup> Maya Shatzmiller in Measuring the Islamic Medieval Econom  
<http://www.medievalislamicconomy.uwo.ca/measures-syria.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Ashtor, *Makayil* and Artl., *Raṭl*.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Fākhirī, *Ta’rīḥ al-Fāḥirī*, 430.

<sup>53</sup> See in an-Nuwayri, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 32:286 buyut

fields and meadows was destroyed. 24 villages in the coastal zone of Tripoli were hit by the storm. Some lost absolutely everything and others a half or a third.

Following this, the viceroy of Tripoli, the amīr Šihab ad-Dīn Qarātay, ordered an inspection of the place. A team of notaries was sent by the law court of Tripoli. They inspected and wrote an official account. It was approved by the judge of Tripoli and he added his signature to it. The *maḥḍar* was sent to Damascus. The viceroy of the city studied it. He transmitted the document to the judges of Damascus. Then it was dispatched to Cairo to the sultan al-Malik an-Nāṣir b. Qalawūn. Among the victims of the storm that were carried by the wind was a son of Turali. God rescued him. He travelled to Cairo and informed the sultan's court about the episode. He applied to receive the position and income of his father and his request was favorably answered. It was said that his life was saved because the wind carried him and dropped him on a piece of land rich with grass and flowers. This saved his life. Yet he was wounded and injured and for a period he grew lean, but then he recovered.”<sup>54</sup>

### **Heavy Rains between Jerusalem and Baalbek (AH 728/1328)**

“On Tuesday 21 Dū l-Qa‘da 728 (27 September 1328), heavy rains washed the valley of Lebanon. The precipitation spread towards Baalbek, South Lebanon (Šaqīf) and the province of Safad. The rain moved eastward and flooded ‘Aḡlūn, an event that will be described below in great detail. The rain spread to Jerusalem and Hebron. The ravines of the Hawran were filled with water. The water pools, including Birkat Zura‘ and Birkat aṣ-Šanamīm, <sup>{55}</sup> that was completely dry, filled up. The lands of al-Liwa in the Ḥawrān (Hauran) became black (i.e. covered).<sup>56</sup>

I say: the land of al-Liwa resembles the land of Egypt. First it is submerged under the Nile then as the water retreated and dried up it is planted. So is this region of al-Liwa. It stretched up to Ġabaḡib and al-Kiswa. Only a limited quantity of water reached Damascus and it did not affect the city.”<sup>57</sup>

### **Violent Storm and Flood in ‘Aḡlūn (728/1328)**

Heavy rains caused floods that destroyed considerable properties in ‘Aḡlūn (728/ 1328).<sup>58</sup> Several historians wrote about it and incorporated official accounts that reached Damascus and Cairo.<sup>59</sup>

“A copy of an official dispatch (*muṭāli‘a*) sent by ‘Alam ad-Dīn Saḡar aṭ-Ṭarqašī, the governor of the hilly territory south (*ṣafaqa al-qibliyya*)<sup>60</sup> of Damascus, to the viceroy (*nā‘ib*) of the sultanate in Damascus.

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate:

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<sup>54</sup> Al-Fākhirī, *Ta‘rīḥ al-Fāḡirī*, 430.

<sup>55</sup> A town in the Hauran. Strange, *Palestine*, 530-531.

<sup>56</sup> and in al-Ġazarī, *Ta‘rīḥ ḥawādiṯ az-zamān*, 2:273 *ḡuriqat* = flooded.

<sup>57</sup> Al-Fākhirī, *Ta‘rīḥ al-Fāḡirī*, 434-435.

<sup>58</sup> On the region under the Mamluks see Walker, *Mamluk Investment in Southern Bilad al-Sham*, 244.

<sup>59</sup> Al-Ġazarī, *Ta‘rīḥ ḥawādiṯ az-zamān*, 2:274-276; al-Birzālī, *al-Muqtafā*, 4:477-479; an-Nuwayrī, *Nihayat al-arab*, 33:268-273; Ibn Kaṭīr, *al-Bidaya*, 18:302. Ibn Ḥabīb al-Ḥalabī, *Taḍkirat an-nabīh*, 2:181, 189-190.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. al-Ġazarī, *Ta‘rīḥ ḥawādiṯ az-zamān*, 2:104, 105, 191, 253 (728/December 1327), 3:596 (‘Alam ad-Dīn Saḡar aṭ-Ṭarqušiyī’s death in Tripoli in 733/1333).

The commander (*as-sayfī*) kisses the ground and informs that his official dispatch notifies of rains and floods that occurred on Wednesday 22 Dū l-Qa‘da 728 (28 September 1328). It reports on a flood (*sayl*) that washed ‘Aġlūn and in an incomparable way affected it. The [state] servant (*mamlūk*) prepared an official account (*maḥḍar*) on the effects of the event that happened in ‘Aġlūn and the destruction that the flooding caused, so that he [the viceroy] will be able to inform the sultan court (*al-‘ārā’ al-‘āliya*) [in Cairo] about it:

This is the official *maḥḍar*

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate:

Praise God Who sends his miraculous signs to frighten the worshipers and to demonstrate to them clear evidence of His power, so that they will advance along the orthodox roads; to display His mighty authority, so that they will choose the proper needs for them. They should know that the Last Day shall come. There is no question about it. Allah will not act contrary to His promises. He informs mankind about His care and compassion. The [letter] presents the distressing and potent event that occurred.

Almighty Allah sent on Wednesday 22 Dū l-Qa‘da 728 (28 September 1328), with His total power and entire will, a stormy wind that struck the town (*madīna*) of ‘Aġlūn, bringing heavy clouds that poured rain which overspread and overflowed. The strong winds shattered and the rain did not stop pouring. Lightning flashed. The mountains and ravines echoed with the sound of thunder. The noise struck fear into men’s hearts. The people believed that the Day of the Last Judgment had arrived. They raised their voices calling ‘[The Imminent is imminent]; apart from God none can disclose it.’<sup>61</sup> [In panic] they exposed their heads and were seized with fear. Their eyes shed tears. Their hearts felt embarrassed. Their necks bent [to the execution]. They raised their hands to the sky calling for help, appealing to the One who controls Earth and Sky. On that very day they experienced an awful fear. They were anxious that Allah had punished them severely. While the people were amazed in these circumstances they prayed: ‘They [Adam and Eve] said, ‘Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if Thou dost not forgive us, and have mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the lost.’<sup>62</sup> At that time a shocking flood of high water astonished them. Its gushing water had swollen. The storm’s clouds filled them with anxiety. It made loud sounds. [The water] gathered from the slopes of the mountains, from the beds of the ravines and from the low plains. ‘[Then We opened the gates of heaven unto water torrential, and made the earth to gush with fountains], and the waters met for a matter decreed.’<sup>63</sup> and ‘And We left it for a sign. Is there any that will remember?’<sup>64</sup> The sounds of crying rose and tears were shed. Fear built up and losses multiplied. Every person who sought refuge for himself, fled to save his soul. He left all his property, assets and fields, in hope that God’s mercy would redeem him.

The strong torrent swept away everything that stood in its way: houses, workshops and markets.<sup>65</sup> The water washed away mills and orchards. A section of the easterners' quarter (*ḥārat al-mashāriqa*) that was adjacent to the ravine (*wādī Ġawd*) was washed away. The water took off the court (‘*arṣa* or fruit garden) and the leathermakers’ (*ādamiyyīn*) market, the

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<sup>61</sup> Q: 53, 58.

<sup>62</sup> Q: 7, 23.

<sup>63</sup> Q: 54, 12.

<sup>64</sup> Q: 54, 15.

<sup>65</sup> Kenney, *Reconstructing Mamluk Ajlun*.

cotton market, a section of the soup kitchen (*dār at-ṭa‘m*), the caps makers’ (*aqbā‘*) market, the used stuff (*ḥalī‘*) market, the merchants’ covered and gated compound (*qaysāriyya*)<sup>66</sup> that the *amīr* Sayf ad-Dīn Baktimur had built, and the ancient workshops’ (*qaysāriyya*) compound. From the *qaysāriyya* built by Malik al-Umarā‘ our master that had been endowed to support the hospital in ([*bi-*]māristān) Safad,<sup>67</sup> the water torrent carried off twenty shops, scattered what was left of the [building’s] fence and smashed the doors. It destroyed the goldsmiths’ market and carried it away. The water swamped the corn chandlers’ (*al-fāmiyya*) market that was near the spring. It also demolished the charity endowment of the congregational mosque and the pedlars’ (*saqaṭiyyīn*) market. The torrent carried off the famous market that the *amīr* ‘Alā‘ ad-Dīn b. Sa‘īd had built, and the butchers’ market and the bakeries. It also flooded the market that the *amīr* Rukn al-Dīn had built in the citadel of ‘Aḡlūn and the shops of the pious endowment of the magistrate Faḥr ad-Dīn, the inspector of the armies of Egypt, that had been bequeathed to support *al-madrasa* al-Faḥriyya in Nablus. The water flooded *al-madrasa* al-Niqābiyya (?) and destroyed the southern portico (*riwāq*) of the mosque and its eastern gate. A section of the *ḥammām* built by the *amīr* Ṣāliḥ ad-Dīn Mūsā was destroyed by the water. This was also the fate of the *ḥammām* al-Sulṭān. It carried away the toilet of the mosque and the upper square room (*murabba‘*). The slaughterhouse was demolished. Along its way, the violent flow carried away bridges, overpasses and fords that people used while they crossed the ravine. About ten people died in the event in ‘Aḡlūn. This is the wish of the Almighty Ruler. Pay attention you men.

It rained without pause from early morning till evening.

The viceroy of Damascus ordered, on 24 Dū l-Qa‘da 728 (30 September 1328), to copy this written report and to send it to the local governors in the country south of the city. At the bottom of the official account are the signatures of the notaries and on its upper edge the sign of the judge ‘praise God He deserved to be extolled’.<sup>68</sup>

## Appendix

### Rain in Damascus 725 (1325)

[The first of Rabī‘ the second was on Sunday 17 Aḏḏār (17 March 1325) on Sunday the 29<sup>th</sup> (14 April) it rained heavily in Damascus and in the neighboring regions of the Ġūṭa, the valley (*marḡ [rāhiṭ]*) and southern Syria (bilād aš-šām). The rain was accompanied by heavy hail. Most of the hail was in the land of [the village of] Ḥarastā. The hail spread to Barza, Bayt Lahiyā and Saṭrā. The people weighed the hail and found out that its weight was between seven to thirteen *dirhams* (X 4.25 gram). It hailed for about a half hour. The size of the hail in the village [of Ḥarastā] was small. It destroyed a considerable amount of apricot and other seasonal fruits, ripen fields and other crops.

‘Alā‘ ad-Dīn al-‘Urḏī informed me about a farm (*ḍiyā‘*) in the village (*qarya*) of Tall al-Dahab, which is in the valley (*marḡ rāhiṭ*) where he owns a share. He said that the hail destroyed his yielding field: “The stalks of corns and the ears of grains were flattened and the

<sup>66</sup> For an Abbasid account of this important urban institution see Kennedy, *From Shahrīstan to Medina*, 28.

<sup>67</sup> Sayf ad-Dīn Aruḡṭāy an-Nāṣirī (d. AH750) built a bīmāristān in Safad. Ibn Qāḏī Ṣuhba, *Ta‘rīḥ*, 1 (741-750AH):682 (quoting al-‘Uṭmānī, *Ta‘rīḥ Ṣafad*).

<sup>68</sup> Al-Fākhīrī, *Ta‘rīḥ al-Fāḥirī*, 435-436.

farmers provided them to their farm animals. Yet after a while the stalks re-grow the yield of the fields in that particular year was 6-7 ġirāra (X 18 kg). After the destruction of the ripen fields I harvested 23 ġirāra of wheat”.

The Ḥāğğ Nāšir ad-Dīn b. ‘Umar b. Šihāb ad-Dīn Quṭayna told about a share his family have in a village in the Houran. This field yielded in average 50 ġirāra of wheat. The hail had destroyed the ripen fields. At the time of harvest they collected 200 ġirāra. Some stalk carried more than hundred corn ears. This was a rich and fruitful year. Praise God for His grace.<sup>69</sup>

### **Hail in Damascus 731/1331- an eyewitness account**

On Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> Ša‘bān 71, 28 Āyyār (May 1331) at the afternoon, before the dusk I was at the an-Nayrab orchard. Clouds covered the sky, strong and cold wind blow, thunders and lightning followed. It hailed; big and small ice balls fall in showers. Some pellets were in the size of nuts other were smaller, some weighed two *dirhams* but other pellets were heavier or lighter. This climate event prolonged for two hours. It pierced the [glass] caps (*ğāmāt*) of the *ḥammām*. It carried on for an hour. Allah will guard us and provide us peace. Most of the hail hit Ğabal Qāsiyūn, Nayrab, al-Mizza, Kafar Sūsiya, the lands of al-Luwān, al-Qaṭā’i’ and some parts of aš-Šāğūr, starching from the village towards the city and the [surrounding] region. Yet the eastern flanks of the Ğūṭa were not affected by it: the district (*iqḷīm*) of Bayt al-Ābār, the lands of al-Manḥa, al-Ġiyāḍ, Ğisrayn, Zabadīn, ‘Ayn Ṭarmā, Kafr Baṭnā, Dā‘iya, Saqbā, Ḥamūriya and other places had no rain or hail. This was a marvelous occurrence. The water canals flooded. On Sunday morning the Qanawāt, al-Mizza, Kafar Sūsiya and other canals broke their banks. The roads and villages were covered with thick mud, similar to the conditions when it rains in December. After the hail severe cold air covered the city. The population redressed with winter clothes and overcoats, after they have already stored them. This is one the miracles that occur not in season. God produced them to demonstrate His power and might and to bestow on mankind His mercy and forgiveness.<sup>70</sup>

Several Mamluk chroniclers transmit a memorandum from Damascus that reported on an amazing event that occurred in one of the province’s villages in the year 695/1296:<sup>71</sup>

“[A] great number of people from Damascus narrated a story that quickly spread through the city and everyone was fascinated by it (during the first ten days of Muḥarram). Its source was the judge of the district of Ğubbt ‘Asal (the honey ditches),<sup>72</sup> a district in the province of Damascus who related that an ox had spoken in one of the hamlets. The essence of the tale was that a boy led the ox to the water trough. When the animal finished drinking, it said: “Praised be Almighty God”. This astonished the boy who reported the event to his master, the ox’s owner. This person refused to believe the story and the next morning joined the boy and the ox at the trough. As the ox finished swallowing, it praised God. On the third day a group of farmers came to the site and heard the ox blessing God. They had been doomed to seven years of drought, yet due to the intercession of the Prophet, He changed it to fertility”. Then

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<sup>69</sup> Al-Ġazarī, *Ta’rīḥ ḥawādiṯ az-zamān*, 2: 63-64.

<sup>70</sup> Al-Ġazarī, *Ta’rīḥ ḥawādiṯ az-zamān*, 2: 465-66.

<sup>71</sup> Frenkel, *Narratives of Animals*.

<sup>72</sup> Yāqūt names the district (*naḥiya*) Ğubbat al-‘Asil and locates it between Damascus and Baalbek (*Mu‘ğam al-buldān*, 2: 108b).

the ox mentioned that the Prophet had instructed him to transmit this information. The animal asked the Prophet: “What will be the evidence that I am reporting the truth?” and the Prophet answered: “Immediately after informing them you will die”. The informant added, and then the ox advanced and ascended to a higher ground, fell and died. Hoping to gain blessing the people skinned the ox, wrapped him in shrouds and buried the animal.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> An-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 31:295-96; Ibn al-Furāt, *Ta'riḥ*, 8:203 (both quoting al-Ġazarī; cf. idem, *Ta'riḥ ḥawadīṯ az-zaman*, 1: 279-80); al-Maqrīzī, *as-Sulūk*, 1:811 (quotes an official account that reached to Cairo's citadel); Ibn Taġri Birdī, *an-Nujum az-zahira*, 8:59 (*apud* the year 695 AH, he quotes a report extracted from the Syrian historian Quṭb ad-Dīn Yunīnī. Ibn Taġri Birdī appends a remark to the piece of information transmitted by him: “This is a strange story, yet our chronicler is a trustworthy source and he has mentioned that the story circulated widely in Damascus”); Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i' az-zuhur*, 1:380-81 (quoting as-Suyūfī).

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