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Narrating Hierarchy? Dimensions of “Culture” in the Construction of Mamlūk Hegemony over Uzun Ḥasan Aqquyunlu in Ibn Ajā’s Ta’rīkh al-Amīr Yashbak

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Narrating Hierarchy?

Dimensions of “Culture” in the Construction of Mamlūk Hegemony over Uzun Ḥasan Aqqyunlu in Ibn Ajā’s *Ta’rīkh al-Amīr Yashbak*

♦ ABSTRACT

The short account of the final Mamlūk campaign against the Dulghādirid/Dhū l-Qādirid ruler *shāh* Suwār in 876/1471 CE by Ibn Ajā exemplifies the entanglement of historiographic poetics with the pragmatics of its author’s career, particularly in its report of Ibn Ajā’s diplomatic mission to the court of *uzun* Ḥasan Aqqyunlu in Tabrīz. In my contribution, I analyze the construction of the hierarchical subordination of the Aqqyunlu under Ibn Ajā’s Mamlūk patrons, which emerges simultaneously from Ibn Ajā’s description of the economic state of the Aqqyunlu realms and his personal engagement with the scholarly configurations of the Aqqyunlu court. On a theoretical level, I argue that the media-theoretical concept of *Aufschreibesysteme* (F. Kittler) offers a suitable starting point for the analysis of 15th century CE Mamlūk writerly cultures.

I focus my analysis around the nexus of “culture” (Arabic *‘-M-R* as reflected in 15th century CE Arabic-Islamic scholarly discourses in both *ma‘mūr*, cultivated [land], and *‘imāra*, [scholarly] foundation) to argue that Ibn Ajā’s description of the desolate economic state of the Aqqyunlu realms should be seen as inherently connected with his presentation of the desolate state of scholarly knowledge among *uzun* Ḥasan’s courtiers. Thereby, “culture” is deployed by Ibn Ajā as an index manifesting the subordination of the “comparatively less cultured” Aqqyunlu under his Mamlūk patrons.

Keywords: Ibn Ajā, 15th century Eastern Anatolia, Aqqyunlu, Mamlūk, *Aufschreibesysteme*, Friedrich Kittler, *‘-M-R*

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♦ RÉSUMÉ

Narrer la hiérarchie ? Dimensions de la « culture » dans la construction de l'hégémonie mamelouke sur *uzun Ḥasan Aqqyunlu* dans le *Ta'rikh al-Amīr Yashbak* d'Ibn Ajā

Le bref récit d'Ibn Ajā sur les événements de la dernière campagne mamelouke contre le souverain Dulghādirid/Dhū l-Qādirid *shāh* Suwār en 876/1471 CE illustre l'entrelacement de la poétique historiographique avec le pragmatisme de la carrière de son auteur, en particulier dans son rapport sur la mission diplomatique d'Ibn Ajā à la cour d'*uzun Ḥasan Aqqyunlu* à Tabriz.

Dans ma contribution, j'analyse la production de l'ordre hiérarchique établissant la subordination des Aqqyunlu aux Mamelouks d'Ibn Ajā, qui émerge simultanément de la description de la situation économique des royaumes Aqqyunlu faite par Ibn Ajā et de l'engagement personnel de ce dernier auprès des érudits de la cour Aqqyunlu. Sur le plan théorique, je soutiens que le concept de théorie des médias des *Aufschreibesysteme* (F. Kittler) constitue un point de départ approprié pour analyser les cultures littéraires mameloukes du xv^e siècle de notre ère.

Je concentre mon analyse sur le lien entre la « culture » (en arabe *‘-M-R* tel que reflété dans les discours savants arabo-islamiques du xv^e siècle de notre ère, à la fois dans le *ma‘mūr*, la [terre] cultivée, et dans l'*imāra*, la fondation [savante]), qui vise à démontrer que la description faite par Ibn Ajā de l'état économique désolant des royaumes Aqqyunlu doit être considérée comme étant intrinsèquement liée à sa présentation de l'état de détérioration des connaissances scientifiques des courtisans d'*uzun Ḥasan*. Ainsi, la « culture » est déployée par Ibn Ajā comme un indicateur montrant la subordination du « relativement moins cultivé » à ses maîtres mamelouks.

Mots-clés : Ibn Ajā, Anatolie orientale du xv^e siècle, Aqqyunlu, Mamelouk, *Aufschreibesysteme*, Friedrich Kittler, *‘-M-R*

♦ ملخص

سرد الترتيب الهرمي؟ أبعاد «الثقافة» في بناء الهيمنة المملوكية على أوزون حسن (حسن الطويل)
آق قويونلو في كتاب ابن أجا «تاريخ الأمير يشبك الظاهري»

إن الرواية القصيرة لوقائع الحملة المملوكية الأخيرة ضد حاكم الإمارة الدلغاديرية/ذي القادرية شاه سوار سنة ٨٧٦هـ/١٤٧١م لابن أجا تمثل التشابك بين شاعرية التأريخ وبرغماتية المسار المهني لمؤلفها، خاصة في نقل خبر المهمة الدبلوماسية التي قام بها ابن أجا في مجلس حاكم آق قويونلو أوزون حسن بتبريز. في مساهمتي هذه، أقوم بتحليل بناء الترتيب الهرمي المؤسس لخضوع آق قويونلو لسادة ابن أجا الماليك، الذي يبرز بصورة متزامنة من وصف ابن أجا للوضع الاقتصادي لممالك آق قويونلو وتفاعله الشخصي مع هيئات العلماء الموجودة في مجلس الحاكم التركماني. على مستوى

نظري، أزعّم أن المفهوم النظري لوسائل الإعلام المعروف بـ«أنظمة التدوين *Aufschreibesysteme*» لفريدريش كُتْلر (F. Kittler) يشكل نقطة ابتداء مناسبة لتحليل الثقافة المكتوبة للعصر المملوكي في القرن الخامس عشر الميلادي. وأركّز تحليلي بصورة خاصة على الصلة بين مشتقين من الجذر العربي «ع م ر» كما ينعكس استخدامها في الخطابات العلمية العربية الإسلامية التي تعود للقرن الخامس عشر الميلادي، أي بين «معمور»، بمعنى المأهول والمزروع [من الأرض]، و«عمارة»، بمعنى البنيان [العلمي]، للبرهنة على أن وصف ابن أجا للوضع الاقتصادي المقفر لمملكة آق قويونلو يجب أن يُرى كوثيق الارتباط بتمثيله للوضع المتردي للمعرفة العلمية التي يتمتع بها أفراد حاشية أوزون حسن. هكذا، يتخذ ابن أجا «الثقافة» مؤشراً يظهر دونية دولة آق قويونلو «الأقل ثقافة بالمقارنة» وخضوعها لساتته المماليك.

كلمات مفتاحية: ابن أجا، شرق الأناضول في القرن الخامس عشر، مملوكي، أنظمة التدوين *Aufschreibesysteme*، فريدريش كُتْلر، ع م ر

* * *

THIS article is not dedicated to an intellectual figure towering over her time, nor to a text commonly consulted as the classical exposition of an influential theoretical concept. Instead, I present an intriguing vision of “culture” as an overarching system that references the economic, institutional, and linguistic-cognitive foundations of scholarly learning, which facilitated the display of Islamic knowledge in courtly representation. This concept is not presented in an abstract fashion but implied in the description of the Aqqyunlu realms in 876/1471 CE by the Mamlūk scholar and courtier Ibn Ajā sent as a diplomatic envoy to the court of *uzun* Ḥasan in Tabriz. This holistic concept of “culture” as emblematically connected by the Arabic root of *‘-M-R* is used by its author to invest his own (claimed) agency during his diplomatic mission with astonishing discursive power. In addition, he consistently depicts the level of “culture” in the Aqqyunlu realms as subordinate to the configurations of scholarly and courtly learning of his Mamlūk audience. Thereby, he uses the suggestion of collective superiority shared by him and his audience to convey his own exceptional aptitude as an envoy who drew on the relatively higher development of “culture” in the Mamlūk realms to further his diplomatic mission.

Any piece of referential historiographical writing simultaneously operates on the two dimensions of description and narrative framing. On the descriptive level, Ibn Ajā’s eye-witness account has been used to reconstruct the events of the final Mamlūk campaign

against the Dulghādirid/Dhū l-Qādirid ruler *shāh* Suwār in 1417 CE.¹ In addition, Ibn Ajā's account of his diplomatic mission to Tabrīz represents the sole extant Arabic travelogue detailing a diplomatic mission to the Qaraqyunlu or Aqqyunlu "Turkmen" courts during the 15th century CE.² The passages describing Ibn Ajā's journey and activities at the Aqqyunlu court also furnish a wealth of information for the topography and networks of transportation in Eastern Anatolia and Northwestern Iran during the time of his travels.³

As regards the narrative dimension of historiographical writing, Ibn Ajā's "less public" activities as an envoy of the Mamlūk general Yashbak⁴ to the Dulghādirid/Dhū l-Qādirid ruler *shāh* Suwār⁵ and to *uzun* Ḥasan arguably exemplify the entanglement of historiographic writing with the self-promotion of its author. These passages realize some of the genre- and media-theoretical potentials inherent in a performative display of Islamic scholarly learning in a courtly context in the pre-industrial Muslim world. In this way, the word-by-word account including accompanying gestures of the negotiations which Ibn Ajā claims to have conducted with *shāh* Suwār elegantly interlaces various fields of knowledge with performative gestures in a courtly setting and would certainly be deserving of further study.⁶ I have suggested elsewhere that the modes in which Ibn Ajā claims to have drawn on his scholarly background during courtly sessions of *uzun* Ḥasan in Tabrīz consistently build upon an asymmetrical deployment of genres to establish Ibn Ajā as the dominant scholarly figure at the court of *uzun* Ḥasan.⁷ In the present contribution, I argue that Ibn Ajā implicitly draws upon a highly nuanced and developed holistic concept of "culture" to prominently inscribe himself into a collective vision of Mamlūk supremacy over the Aqqyunlu realms.

1. See e.g. Martel-Thoumian 1997, pp. 301–342.

This contribution consistently distinguishes *alqāb* from names (*uzun* Ḥasan, *shāh* Suwār), while retaining a recurring form to refer to recurring individuals and authors. For the name of *shāh* Suwār cf. al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw' al-Lāmi'* III, pp. 243–244: *Wa-yusammā fi-mā qīla muḥammad, wa-yuqālu lahū shāh suwār.*

2. See Leube 2023a, pp. 141–142, 196–201.

3. See Leube 2023b.

4. His biography can be found in al-Sakhāwī, *Daw' X*, pp. 250–252.

5. For him, see al-Sakhāwī, *Daw' III*, pp. 243–244.

6. The *Ta'rikh al-Amīr Yashbak* is preserved in one extant manuscript contained in MS Ahmet III 3057 in the Topkapı Sarayı library in Istanbul. The folios of this manuscript are continuously numbered in Arabic numerals. As the two published editions of Ibn Ajā's *Ta'rikh al-Amīr Yashbak* cite the text according to the photographic copy of the manuscript held in the Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathā'iq al-Qawmiyya in Cairo as MS 3663 *ta'rikh*, I also include references to the continuous numbering of the pages (!) of this copy.

Ibn Ajā's account of his initial negotiations with *shāh* Suwār is contained in Ibn Ajā, *Ta'rikh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 132r–137r, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta'rikh*, pp. 44–54; cf. the editions Ibn Ajā, *Ta'rikh*, pp. 86–93, and Dahmān (1986, pp. 98–104).

Translations of (passages of) the *Ta'rikh al-Amīr Yashbak* have been published in several languages. The Russian translation of Z.M. Buniātova and T.B. Gasanova, *Pohod Ėmira Jašbeka* (1985), is directly based on a Damascene photographic reproduction of the Cairene photographic copy of the manuscript (Buniātova, Gasanova, *Pohod* 7). In contrast, the German study and translation of the passages describing Ibn Ajā's diplomatic mission by S. Conermann (2003, pp. 123–178), and the Turkish translation of M. Şeker (2018), are based on the edition of Dahmān.

7. Leube 2023c.

1. Ibn Ajā and ‘M-R as the Nexus of an *Aufschreibesystem*

Most of what is known of the biography of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd b. Khalīl al-Ḥalabī al-Ḥanafī (1417/1418–1476), known as Ibn Ajā after the sobriquet of his father, is contained in his entry in al-Sakhāwī’s biographical dictionary *al-Ḍaw’ al-Lāmi’*.⁸ After beginning his scholarly career as a pupil of his maternal uncle Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr b. Ṣāliḥ al-Mar‘ashī,⁹ he continued his studies with different teachers, the most notable of whom was Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī.¹⁰ Subsequently, he affiliated himself to the influential Mamlūk general and statesman Yashbak *min* Mahdī, whom he accompanied during the campaign against the Dulghādirid/Dhū l-Qādirid ruler *shāh* Suwār in 1471 CE. During this campaign, he also undertook a diplomatic mission to the Aqqyunlu court in Tabrīz, which he described together with the military expedition in his *Ta’rīkh al-Amīr Yashbak*.

When we compare Ibn Ajā’s biography as given by al-Sakhāwī with the biography of better-known scholars in the same work, Ibn Ajā emerges as a figure who built on his scholarly background to navigate the ‘shared space’ between courtly and scholarly configurations. This is ideally represented in Ibn Ajā’s own depiction of his diplomatic mission to Tabrīz, for instance in an episode during which he claims to have combined his formal training in Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions with his knowledge of Turkic and courtly manners to explain some fundamentals of Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions to *uzun* Ḥasan.¹¹ Similarly, al-Sakhāwī’s suggestion that Ibn Ajā translated the *Futūḥ al-Shām* ascribed to al-Wāqidi into 12 000 Turkic verses is corroborated by the preservation of this translation in two volumes in Istanbul.¹² Beyond al-Sakhāwī’s brief biography and his extant works, Ibn Ajā is occasionally mentioned as an envoy in other Mamlūk chronicles,¹³ as well as being cited as an authority once by the extravagant Abū Ḥāmid al-Qudsi.¹⁴

In his description of the Aqqyunlu realms in the *Ta’rīkh al-Amīr Yashbak*, Ibn Ajā paints a vivid picture of cultural desolation. As suggested by his positionality as a scholar embedded in the interpersonal scholarly networks of the Mamlūk realms, Ibn Ajā deployed this image of cultural

8. Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw’* X, pp. 40–41.

9. His biography stands al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw’* I, p. 211.

10. Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw’* X, p. 41.

11. Ibn Ajā, *Ta’rīkh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 149r–150r, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta’rīkh*, pp. 78–80; ed. Ṭulaymāt, pp. 114–116; Dahmān 1986, pp. 122–123.

12. Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw’* X, p. 41, cf. Flemming 1977, p. 255; repr. in Flemming 2018, p. 111. The first volume is currently held in the Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi as No 00157, formerly 157 in the Saliha Hatun Kütüphanesi, while the second is held in the Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi as Karatay 489 = Koğuşlar 883. The first part has suffered badly from water and represents an undecorated copy of the text, featuring *waqf*-stamps dated to 1165/1751–1752 CE, but no colophon. The second part preserves a decorated frontispiece dedicating the work to Qā’itbāy and a colophon dated to 880/1475–1476 CE, along with numerous remarks that record the dedication of the manuscript as a *waqf* by Qā’itbāy.

13. See e.g. Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’ al-Zuhūr* III, pp. 73, 86, 110.

14. Al-Qudsi, *Traktat über die Segnungen...*, pp. 115–116. The reference is to Ibn Ajā as “one who is knowledgeable in these matters” in attesting to the excellence of sexual intercourse with Turkic women.

desolation to subordinate the Aqqyunlu under his Mamlūk patrons. This subordination of the Aqqyunlu realms under the cultural splendor of the Mamlūks operates on several intersecting levels and overlapping fields, ranging from economic desolation to suggestions of astonishing ignorance on the part of the scholarly elites assembled at *uzun* Ḥasan's court in Tabrīz. These multiple levels subordinating the Aqqyunlu court and realms under their Mamlūk counterparts are strategically deployed by Ibn Ajā to inscribe himself into a favorable position as a Mamlūk scholar and statesman closely affiliated to Yashbak *min* Mahdī and ensure the favorable reception of his report by the scholarly configurations of the Mamlūk realms.

This article suggests that the mutually reinforcing levels and fields on which the Aqqyunlu court and realms are subordinated to their Mamlūk counterparts can be described as tied together by the nexus of “culture” as inherent in the Arabic root ʿ-M-R . The semantic field of this root is of paramount importance for Islamicate performative courtly culture during the second half of the 15th century CE with its powerful projection of a guardianship of divinely sanctioned justice on the courtly figure of the incumbent ruler.¹⁵ In paradigmatic fashion, this common root ties together the concept inherent in the passive participle of the first stem, *maʿmūr* or *cultivated (land)*, and the economic and institutional foundation of Arabic-Islamic scholarly culture, namely flourishing pious foundations or *ʿimārāt*.¹⁶ Thereby, the root ʿ-M-R arguably represents the nexus between the economic and scholarly state of a given realm, both of which are decisively affected by the ruler's more or less efficient guardianship of divinely sanctioned justice (*ʿadāla*). The significance of this nexus beyond the narrative of Ibn Ajā is indicated for instance by the suggestion of the contemporary Mamlūk historiographer al-Ṣayrafī, who summarized the goals of Yashbak's military expedition against *shāh* Suwār as follows:

May God take care to fulfill [the goals of the campaign] and give them victory against their treacherous enemy. May they calm the hearts of the subject population (*al-raʿāyā*) and give them safety, causing a flourishing of the settlements (*taʿammur al-qurā*) and a quieting of civil strife (*tasakkun al-fitān*). May they realize their goals by the blessing of the noblest of God's prophets, the best of His creation and His beloved and prophet. Amen, amen.¹⁷

15. See Leube 2023a, pp. 305–314.

16. A more pervasive significance for ʿ-M-R in Islamicate and Persianate cultures beyond the second half of the 15th century CE is suggested by the importance of this root in monumental epigraphy, see the perceptive remarks by Blair (1992, p. 5). It is also attested within Muslim political thought as negotiated in the reception history of the early Islamic conquests to denote the “flourishing” of towns and regions due to settlement by the new Arab Muslim elites. See the exemplary passage in al-Bakrī, [*Kitāb*] *al-Masālik* II, p. 286, where the town of Sabta/Ceuta in North Africa is incorporated in the Islamic realms by treaty, settled and brought to prosperity by the Arabs (*thumma dakhalaḥā l-ʿarab baʿda dhālika wa-ʿammarahā*), before being devastated by Berber revolts. Cf. the famous development of the term *ṭabīʿat al-ʿumrān* as the methodological foundation of a critical historiographical method by Ibn Khaldūn, *Taʿrīkh* I, pp. 7–31 and *passim*.

17. Al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbāʾ al-Ḥaṣr bi-Anbāʾ al-ʿAṣr*, p. 273. Where not indicated otherwise, all translations in this article are by the author.

As indicated by al-Şayrafi, the nexus of 'M-R can be complemented by its opposites of *fitna* or civil strife. Another antonym, which appears more frequently in Ibn Ajā's travelogue, is *kharāba* or ruin. The importance of the same nexus of 'M-R/"culture" as actualized by the courtly representation of the Aqqyunlu, which certainly did not subscribe to Ibn Ajā's notion that their patrons be "culturally subordinate" to the Mamlūks, is indicated by the frequent occurrence of terms derived from this root in Aqqyunlu courtly writing. Additionally, the root occurs in several extant epigraphic inscriptions recording architectural patronage in the name of *uzun* Ḥasan and other Aqqyunlu patrons.¹⁸

Notwithstanding this wider significance of 'M-R in the discursive traditions of Islamic learning in the 15th century CE and beyond, the range with which Ibn Ajā deploys this term is extraordinary. In this regard, it is particularly remarkable how Ibn Ajā develops the nexus of 'M-R to firmly tie together the inferiority of the Aqqyunlu realms on a wide range of different levels. Nonetheless and to cite but one example, Ibn Ajā's suggestion that the desolation of the Aqqyunlu realms be responsible for the defective speech of the subjects and court of *uzun* Ḥasan is cogent if we keep in mind the artificiality of the cultured language of Arabic *fuṣḥā* and its concomitant need to be taught in a framework of dedicated institutions. In addition, Ibn Ajā's inclusion of *uzun* Ḥasan as one who suffers from the desolation of his own realms arguably suggests a shift of agency from any specific individual to a systemic framework, which includes a sharp awareness of the material, economic, institutional, cognitive-linguistic, and pragmatic foundations of scholarly learning and courtly culture.

To highlight the audacity of this concept of 'M-R as implicitly presented by Ibn Ajā, I suggest the media-theoretical concept of an *Aufschreibesystem* as developed by Friedrich Kittler (1943–2011) as a similarly radical reimagination of the prefiguration of individual agency by an overarching system of material and cognitive structures.¹⁹ Put very briefly, Kittler posited that the production, reception, and negotiation of discourses be determined by the material foundation of its predominant technology for the production of text (*Aufschreibesystem*). Accordingly, an *Aufschreibesystem* ideally aims for a holistic or, in Kittler's words, "elementary" interpretation of (scholarly) culture, bringing together material, economic, institutional, cognitive, and pragmatic aspects of writing and language. As will be shown in the following survey of the *Ta'riḫ al-Amīr Yashbak*, Ibn Ajā's engagement with the nexus 'M-R/"culture" can be described as the differential deployment of an *Aufschreibesystem* of 'Arabic-Islamic Learning' to establish the hierarchic subordination of the Aqqyunlu under the Mamlūks.

18. See for an example that is dated to before Ibn Ajā's journey and is extant in a town which he traversed the inscriptions at the citadel of Urfa in the name of *uzun* Ḥasan edited by Karakaş (2001, pp. 251–252).

19. Kittler 1985. English translation as *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, 1990. Cf. for the disruptive impact of Kittler's work. Holl, Pias [eds.] (2012, pp. 114–192), as well as Kittler [ed.] (1980), and Kittler (1989, pp. 521–536), quoted after the reprint in Kittler (1993, pp. 58–80).

For the suggestion to apply the theoretical framework of *Medienwissenschaft* to Arabic-Islamic writerly culture, I thank Dorothee Kreuzer. See her review of Konrad Hirschler (2012), which appeared in *Sehepunkte* 13, 4, 2013.

Loosely put and without any particular emphasis of the order in which they are presented, the appraisal of Ibn Ajā's concept of a holistic system of "culture" tied together by the nexus of *ʿ-M-R* in terms of an *Aufschreibesystem* that governs and structures individual agency is particularly apt to engage with the entanglement of the following salient aspects of Arabic-Islamic scholarly culture during the second half of the 15th century CE:

1. The embeddedness of scholarly activity in social networks of personal relations, aptly described by İlker Evrim Binbaş as an "Islamicate Republic of Letters".²⁰
2. The entanglement of scholarly writing with the strategic planning of an author's career, exemplarily analyzed for an earlier period by Konrad Hirschler.²¹
3. The material and economic dimension of epistemic discourses inscribing themselves into the society and townscape of Islamicate towns as reconstructed by Michael Chamberlain.²²
4. The importance of writing materials and techniques in shaping Arabic-Islamic scholarly culture, analyzed as "Arabic writerly culture" by Shawkat M. Toorawa.²³
5. The entanglement of material culture and architecture with the tropes of Arabic-Islamic rhetorics as sketched in Thomas Bauer's reconstruction of the aesthetics of Mamlūk literature.²⁴
6. The entanglement of content and generic form, data and style in Arabic-Islamic scholarly writing as analyzed by Fedwa Malti-Douglas.²⁵
7. The relational deployment of cognitive notions of "correct" or "pure" Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) as a vector establishing a social hierarchy of individuals engaging with Arabic language and cultural practices.²⁶

As will be shown in the following section, a concept very akin to Kittler's *Aufschreibesysteme* can be seen to underlie the differential deployment of "culture" as described with the Arabic root of *ʿ-M-R* in Ibn Ajā's description subordinating the Aqqyunlu realms and the court of *uzun* Ḥasan in Tabrīz relative to the cultural configurations of his Mamlūk patrons.

2. Levels of *ʿ-M-R*/"Culture": How the Aqqyunlu Realms and Court are Subordinate to their Mamlūk Counterparts

As indicated above, the various levels and fields on which Ibn Ajā both explicitly and implicitly depicts the Aqqyunlu court and realms as "culturally" inferior to their Mamlūk counterparts overlap and intersect. Presumably, the different arguments were intended to mutually reinforce

20. Binbaş 2016.

21. Hirschler 2006.

22. Chamberlain 1994.

23. Toorawa 2010.

24. See the programmatic article by Bauer (2013, pp. 5–22).

25. Malti-Douglas 1980, pp. 137–162.

26. See the fundamental study by J. Fück (1950).

each other, cementing the subordination of Aqqyunlu (courtly) culture under Ibn Ajā's Mamlūk patrons and colleagues. Nonetheless, I suggest the following sequence as a heuristic structure facilitating the disentanglement of Ibn Ajā's argument.

2.1. *Desolation of Towns and Countryside within the Aqqyunlu Realms*

The most impressive description of a town that is almost entirely devoid of "culture" notwithstanding its favorable supply with water and fertile ground is given by Ibn Ajā's reference to the town of Ḥayn, modern Hani/Diyarbakır.²⁷

Then I arrived at the town of Ḥayn. It is well supplied with trees and vineyards, and springs which flow from beneath its castle. The town has a wall, which is ruined and only remains in traces. Most of its inhabitants are Christians, however I also saw great mosques (*jawāmi'*) and minarets (*ma'ādhin*), some of which had collapsed. Its regular mosques (*masājid*) had become ruined or rather effaced, just as the residences of its notables who lived there. It is a settlement of fresh air and extremely sweet and cold water, so that I wondered about its excellence and beauty, even though it was ruined (*ma'a kawnihā kharāba*).²⁸

The suggestion that the towns and their surrounding areas under intensive cultivation inside the Aqqyunlu realms were in a desolate state notwithstanding favorable natural conditions is reinforced by Ibn Ajā's frequent indications that he and his companions spent the night in the open countryside.²⁹ This simultaneously indicates the lack of settlements and the lack of an infrastructure of lodgings for travellers, the provisioning of which was frequently presented as one of the official avenues of courtly patronage.³⁰

Although the factual extent of the devastation of urban and rural areas during the second half of the 15th century CE is difficult to establish,³¹ references to the flourishing of the realms due to the justice of the incumbent ruler constitute a topos of Aqqyunlu courtly writing.³² In addition, extant inscriptions on the ramparts of Diyarbakır and Urfa commemorate repairs commissioned by *uzun* Ḥasan that predate Ibn Ajā's journey in 1471 CE.³³ Although epigraphic

27. See for the identification of this town Leube (2023b, p. 137).

28. Ibn Ajā, *Ta'rikh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 139r-139v, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta'rikh*, 58–59; ed. Ṭulaymāt, p. 98; Dahmān 1986, p. 109.

29. Ibn Ajā, *Ta'rikh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 139v-140v, 153r, and 154r-154v, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta'rikh*, pp. 59–61, 86, 88–89; ed. Ṭulaymāt, pp. 99–100, 120, 122; Dahmān 1986, pp. 109–110, 126–128.

30. See the introductory praise of *uzun* Ḥasan in the Aqqyunlu court historiography of Ṭihri, *Diyārbakriyya*, p. 7: "By building lodgings and repairing bridges (*ta'mir-i pul*)/He made the journey easy for travellers."

31. See the careful discussion of the economic state of the Aqqyunlu realms during the beginning of the reign of Ismā'il Ṣafawī, Aubin (1988, pp. 69–84).

32. See Leube, 2023a, pp. 307–309.

33. See Basri Konyar (1936, 2, pp. 144–145) and Karakaş (2001, pp. 37, 250–252).

evidence for similar repairs commissioned by courtly actors at Hani has not been preserved, these inscriptions indicate that Aqqyunlu courtly patronage was by no means as completely lacking in the areas traversed by Ibn Ajā as suggested by the *Taʿrīkh al-Amīr Yashbak*.

2.2. *Desolation of Pious Foundations Inside the Aqqyunlu Realms*

Ibn Ajā's indication of the ruined state of the pious foundations (*awqāf*) underpinning Islamic scholarly traditions and observances in the town of Hani has already been translated in the preceding passage. An even more striking picture of Aqqyunlu decadence, this time deployed in an explicit comparison to their Artuqid predecessors, is painted in Ibn Ajā's description of Diyarbakır.

I left [Diyarbakır] after praying in its great mosque famous for the perfection and beauty of its building. It resembles the Umayyad mosque [of Damascus] in its plan, however the greater part of it has collapsed, as have the foundations (*al-ʿamāʾir*) that had been built in Diyarbakır by the Artuqids. These continue to attest to the splendour of their realms and Diyarbakır's culture (*ʿimāratihā*) during their rule in this town. When one regards these ruined sites, the height of their rulership and elevation of their rank becomes clear, bringing to mind the saying of the poet:

The winds blew over the site of their houses/As if they had a rendezvous.³⁴

Although it is again difficult to conclusively ascertain the factual state of Islamic foundations within the Aqqyunlu realms, an extant (if possibly relocated) inscription attesting to substantial architectural patronage at the great mosque of Diyarbakır in the name of *uzun* Ḥasan that predates Ibn Ajā's journey at least suggests that his description was exaggerated.³⁵

2.3. *Ignorant Speech of the Inhabitants of the Aqqyunlu Realms*

The ignorance of the inhabitants of the Aqqyunlu realms is implied by Ibn Ajā's description of how their pronunciation of toponyms deviated from the normative standards of Arabic *fuṣḥā*. This "false" speech of the population should be seen as reinforcing Ibn Ajā's claims regarding the desolate state of the Aqqyunlu realms and their pious foundations, which

34. Ibn Ajā, *Taʿrīkh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 139r, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *taʿrīkh*, 58; ed. Ṭulaymāt, p. 98; Dahmān 1986, pp. 108–109.

The verse is the concluding line of a brief poem ascribed to the caliph ʿAlī, see ʿAlī, *Dīwān*, p. 91. The entire poem as edited by Ḥamūd reads "Those who build and construct for long/Aiming to shelter their people and progeny//The winds blew over the site of their houses/As if they had a rendezvous." Cf. the Persian commentary on this verse by a scholar affiliated to the Aqqyunlu court, Maybudī, *Sharḥ-i Dīwān-i ʿAlī*, pp. 413–414.

35. Konyar 1936, II, pp. 144–145 and *resim* 94.

could be expected to counteract this type of popular ignorance. The most detailed example of this type of “cultural subordination” is manifest in the variants of the toponym of Ḥayn/Hani, which Ibn Ajā noted.

I asked its inhabitants about its name. Some of them gave it as “Ḥayn”, some as “‘Ayn”, which likely is correct, and some as “Hayn”. There can be no doubt that the last is a corruption (*taṣḥīf*) of “Ḥayn” or “‘Ayn”, as the Turkmens mispronounce the letters ‘Ayn and Ḥā’ as Hā’. But God knows best how this may be.³⁶

The suggestion that Ibn Ajā’s mastery of Arabic-Islamic scholarly discourses establishing the normativities of Arabic *fuṣḥā* enabled him to improve upon the toponyms he traversed may also motivate the forms of *al-mallāḥa al-bayḍā’* or *the white salt mine* for the contemporary village of Aktuzla/Malazgirt/Muş³⁷ and *marj sukmān* or *the meadow of Sukmān* for a resting place located at a day’s journey from the town of Khuy. This toponym is mentioned in Persian and Ottoman sources during the 15th and 16th centuries CE as *sukmān-ābād* and *sukmān-ova* by Ṭihrānī,³⁸ as *suqman-ābād* by Faḍlallāh Khunji Iṣfahānī,³⁹ as *sukman-ova* by Matrakçı Nasuh,⁴⁰ and *sukman-ābād-i khūy* by Bidlīsī’s *Sharafnāma*.⁴¹ All these forms combine a first element of *Sukman/*Söğmen with the Persian or Turkic designation of a meadow (*ābād* or *ova*), however Ibn Ajā is, as far as I know, the only source to refer to this meadow in Arabic as a *marj*.

2.4. Ignorant Speech of the Aqqyunlu Ruler

During one of his audiences with *uzun* Ḥasan, Ibn Ajā quotes the Aqqyunlu ruler *expressis verbis* with some garbled words. Due to the interdependency of (Arabic) script and the elaborate normative framework of (Arabic) grammar, it is notoriously difficult to conclusively reconstruct the notation of utterances that do not conform to the general normativities of established

36. Ibn Ajā, *Ta’rīkh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 139v, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta’rīkh*, 59; ed. Ṭulaymāt, pp. 98–99; Dahmān 1986, p. 109. Note that Ibn Ajā’s suggestion of deriving the toponym of Hani from Arabic ‘ayn, spring, is (likely independent from Ibn Ajā’s suggestion) repeated in Sevan Nişanyan’s etymological online database of toponyms in modern Turkey, the so-called *Index Anatolicus* (<https://nisanyanmap.com>).

For the phonetic weakening of the letters ‘Ayn and Ḥā’ in the contemporary spoken Arabic of Kozluk and Sason, some 80 kilometers east of Hani, see Jastrow (1973, pp. 2–3).

37. Ibn Ajā, *Ta’rīkh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 140v, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta’rīkh*, 61; ed. Ṭulaymāt, p. 100; Dahmān 1986, p. 11.

38. Ṭihrānī, *Diyārbakriyya*, pp. 96, 408, respectively.

39. Iṣfahānī, *Tārīkh-i ‘Ālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, ed. Woods, pp. 148, 151; ed. ‘Ashīq, pp. 141, 143. Note the indication of the editors that some of the manuscripts have *sukmān-ābād*.

40. Matrakçı Nasuh, *Beyān-i Menāzil-i* 26b, cf. Posch (2013, p. 745).

41. Bidlīsī, *Sharafnāma* I, p. 310.

scriptural tradition.⁴² Nonetheless, *uzun* Ḥasan's words can possibly be reconstructed within a linguistic *matrix* composed of Arabic and Persian as *akhrabta bayta l-qaḥba zān* or *by that, you've destroyed the whorehouse!*⁴³ This expression not only patently violates (or at the least mixes) the rules of Arabic or Persian grammar, but also contrasts sharply with the courtly register of cultured Persian prose in which sayings of *uzun* Ḥasan are quoted in the work of his court historiographer Ṭihrānī.⁴⁴

Within Ibn Ajā's narration, this utterance of the Aqqyunlu ruler is deployed in stark contrast to the erudition and stylistical prowess of Ibn Ajā's patron Yashbak *min* Mahdī, which reinforces the inferiority of Aqqyunlu "culture" relative to Mamlūk courtly and scholarly configurations. Due to the importance of this contrastive framing for the argument of the present article, I give a full translation.

The *qāḍī* Ḥasan [one of the most influential statesmen at the court of *uzun* Ḥasan⁴⁵] asked me [...] about the *amīr* Yashbak. [..., Ibn Ajā praises the generosity, valor, and erudition of his patron, presenting a rough copy (*musawwada*) of a letter composed by Yashbak to back up his claims.] When the *qāḍī* Ḥasan returned to *uzun* Ḥasan (*al-bādsḥāh*), he described our meeting in its entirety. [*Uzun* Ḥasan asks Ibn Ajā to come to him and present the letter.]

I [Ibn Ajā] read him the letter word by word (*ḥarfan ḥarfan*), translating every passage as soon as I had finished reading it. Amazed, he exclaimed repeatedly: "By that, you've destroyed the whorehouse!", and shook his head. When I had finished the entire letter, he said: "By God, I had not thought there was one like this among the Mamlūks."⁴⁶

42. This is perceptively suggested by Kreuzer (2013: "[In Semitic languages,] the word as a lexematic unit—which is decisive for its recognition or reading—consists of a series of consonants. Their mobilization by means of vocals progresses according to a limited, and thereby foreseeable, number of patterns that results from the context." See for a fundamental reevaluation of the history of the Arabic language from a linguistic perspective the study by my esteemed teacher J. Owens (2006).

As shown by the difficulties in reconstructing supposedly *verbatim* utterances of *uzun* Ḥasan transmitted within the *matrices* of other scriptural and linguistic traditions, these difficulties in reconstructing or, in Kreuzer's terms, "mobilizing" utterances that do not confirm to established scriptural traditions are not limited to Arabic or Semitic languages. Cf. his utterance transcribed within the linguistic *matrix* of Venetian Italian respectively as *hai cabesenne dentider* (Zeno, *Viaggi*, pp. 158–159), and *baycabexen, nederiadir* (Angiolello, *Vita*, p. 380). This utterance becomes intelligible in both reports through the glosse *o figliuol di putana, che mare or son of a... what an ocean!*, see Zeno, *Viaggi*, p. 159, and Angiolello, *Vita*, p. 380, as well as the comprehensive linguistic discussion in Leube (2023a, pp. 263–264).

43. Ibn Ajā, *Ta'riḫ*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 152r, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta'riḫ*, 84; ed. Ṭulaymāt, p. 118; Dahmān 1986, p. 125. The *Alif* of *ZAN* is clearly indicated in the manuscript, excluding a purely Persian reading as *qaḥba-zan* or *prostitute-woman*.

44. Ṭihrānī, *Diyārbakriyya*, e.g. pp. 114, 144–145, 201. See Leube (2023a, pp. 262–265) for a comprehensive linguistic survey of all *verbatim* utterances attributed to *uzun* Ḥasan, which underlines the dependency of the linguistic register in which the Aqqyunlu ruler is represented as "speaking" from the positionality of the author.

45. See for him Leube (2023a, p. 142), as well as Leube (2023c, pp. 185–186).

46. Ibn Ajā, *Ta'riḫ*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 150v–152r, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta'riḫ*, 81–84; ed. Ṭulaymāt, pp. 116–118; Dahmān 1986, pp. 123–125.

2.5. Ignorance of the Scholarly Elites Assembled at the Aqqyunlu Court

In his report, Ibn Ajā describes how he established himself within the performative scholarly sessions held at the Aqqyunlu court (*majlis*) of *uzun* Ḥasan. Although the reception of scholarly elites embedded in the interpersonal networks of Tabrīz by *uzun* Ḥasan on the night from Thursday to Friday is attested earlier in the year 1471 CE in the emic court historiography of Ṭīhrānī,⁴⁷ Ibn Ajā's report is the only description of the sessions in which he participated. As will be discussed below, this type of courtly receptions of scholars, including a recitation of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī, is well attested in Mamlūk courtly practices and should be seen as intuitively understandable by Ibn Ajā's audience.

According to his own report, Ibn Ajā strategically drew on his scholarly knowledge to disrupt the performative reading and discussion and establish himself in a predominant position at the Aqqyunlu court.⁴⁸ As described by Ibn Ajā, this disruptive deployment of his scholarly background was facilitated by the astonishing ignorance of the assembled scholarly elites of the Aqqyunlu realms. This ignorance of the Aqqyunlu courtly scholars ranged from the most fundamental *'ilm al-rijāl* or knowledge of the biographies of Islamic traditionaries⁴⁹ to an ignorance of the state of the art in *tafsīr* or Qur'ānic commentary,⁵⁰ from the derivation of embodied norms of proper eating and drinking from the *sīra* or life of Muḥammad⁵¹ to the *minutiae* of *ḥadīth* criticism,⁵² and from the most elementary knowledge of who the *anṣār* or "helpers" of Muḥammad in Medina were⁵³ to the elaborate discussion concerning the differences of the *sunni* schools of law.⁵⁴ As indicated by a succinct statement in Ibn Ajā's biography as given by al-Sakhāwī, even Ibn Ajā's Mamlūk contemporaries perceived this claim of near-universal Aqqyunlu scholarly backwardness as exaggerated.⁵⁵ This will be discussed in greater detail in the reconstruction of faultlines in Ibn Ajā's narrative concluding the following level.

47. Ṭīhrānī, *Diyārbakriyya*, pp. 558–655, cf. the reference to similar practices performed in Qum described by Ṭīhrānī, *Diyārbakriyya*, p. 530. See also Leube (2023a, p. 198) and Leube (2023c, p. 181),

48. I suggest to describe Ibn Ajā's strategy as based on an asymmetric deployment of genres, see Leube, 2023c.

49. Ibn Ajā, *Ta'rikh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 145r, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta'rikh*, 70; ed. Ṭulaymāt, p. 107; Dahmān 1986, pp. 116–117.

50. Ibn Ajā, *Ta'rikh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 145r–145v, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta'rikh*, 70–71; ed. Ṭulaymāt, pp. 107–108; Dahmān 1986, p. 117.

51. Ibn Ajā, *Ta'rikh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 145v–146r, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta'rikh*, 71–72; ed. Ṭulaymāt, pp. 108–109; Dahmān 1986, pp. 117–118.

52. Ibn Ajā, *Ta'rikh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 148r–148v, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta'rikh*, 76–77; ed. Ṭulaymāt, pp. 112–114; Dahmān 1986, pp. 121–12. This passage will be discussed in greater detail below.

53. Ibn Ajā, *Ta'rikh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 149r–150r, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta'rikh*, 78–80; ed. Ṭulaymāt, pp. 114–116; Dahmān 1986, pp. 122–123.

54. Ibn Ajā, *Ta'rikh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 150r–150v, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta'rikh*, 80–81; ed. Ṭulaymāt, p. 116; Dahmān 1986, p. 123.

55. Al-Sakhāwī, *Daw' X*, p. 250.

As a representative example of how Ibn Ajā drew on the nexus of “culture” to frame the scholarly elites assembled at the Aqqyunlu court as inferior to their Mamlūk counterparts, I translate the first example of how he claims to have disrupted the performative reading of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī.

[Ibn Ajā is invited by *uzun* Ḥasan to join the reception of the scholarly elites of Tabrīz at the Aqqyunlu court.] Thus, the reader began with the *ḥadīth* of the cave [...], which is well-known. In its *isnād*, a certain Nāfi‘ is mentioned who transmitted from Ibn ‘Umar, so I asked everybody: “Who is this Nāfi‘ who transmits from Ibn ‘Umar?”, intending nothing but a conversation starter, as he is better known than *qifā nabki* [the beginning of the *mu‘allaqa* of Imru’lqays]. But, by God!, nobody among all the people at the *majlis* knew him, saying: “It is not necessary to know him!”, and the smart among them said: “He can be found in the *asmā’ al-rijāl*.” The reader finished reading the *ḥadīth* and a *shaykh* among them translated it for the ruler without any order (*bi-ghayri tartīb*).⁵⁶

2.6. Marginality of the Scholars Assembled at the Aqqyunlu Court

Due to the personal mobility of (Persianate) Islamicate scholarly elites within the courtly configurations between India and Istanbul, the presence of the paramount scholars of the age at the court of a given ruler was visible as an important index of the status and legitimacy of this ruler. Within the *Aufschreibesystem* of ‘*M-R*, this courtly presence of specialized scholars is fundamentally linked to the ability of the ruler to contribute to the economic and social bloom of his realms and transfer this economic and social capital into Islamic foundations nurturing scholarly excellency. Conversely, the astonishing backwardness and ignorance of the scholarly elites at the Aqqyunlu court as depicted by Ibn Ajā indicates the lack of courtly guaranteed “culture”, leaving only marginal and lower-ranking scholars to attend the courtly performances of *uzun* Ḥasan.

Having sketched the “ignorance” of the scholarly elites assembled at the court of *uzun* Ḥasan on the preceding level, I will now focus more closely on the geographical and spatial concepts actualized by Ibn Ajā to depict the Aqqyunlu court as marginal. In this context, I argue that Ibn Ajā implicitly subscribes to a modelling of scientific progress as proceeding through waves, which spread from the center to the periphery.⁵⁷ Accordingly, the supposed reliance of Aqqyunlu scholarly culture on outdated theories and sources further cements their marginality when compared with the state of the arts as practised within the Mamlūk

56. Ibn Ajā, *Ta’rīkh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 144v–145r, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta’rīkh*, 69–70; ed. Ṭulaymāt, p. 107; Dahmān 1986, pp. 116–117. The reference likely is to the *Asmā’ al-Rijāl* of al-Maqdisī, *al-Kamāl*.

57. See for a (decentered) view of wave-theories of linguistic diffusion A. François (2014, pp. 161–189), as well as the magisterial discussion of the interferences between social institutions and linguistic innovation by Holger Gzella (2015, particularly pp. 16–22, 217–225).

realms, as the spread of innovation as (implicitly) depicted by Ibn Ajā proceeds spatially from the (Mamlūk) center to the (Aqqyunlu) periphery.

In his report, Ibn Ajā underlines the geographic scope of the assembled scholarly elites at the Aqqyunlu court of Tabrīz during his second attendance of a performative courtly session of *uzun* Ḥasan during the night from Thursday to Friday.

On the following Thursday, he again called me to attend the court. When I came to his palace, I met him among a large assembly of scholars (*‘ulamā’*) from Tabrīz. From Shīrāz, a son of *al-Sayyid al-Sharīf*, the commentator (*shāriḥ*) of the *Kashshāf*, was also in attendance, as well as a number of scholars from Baghdād and Samarqand.⁵⁸

This regional preeminence of the Aqqyunlu court as attested by the attendance of scholars from across the Persianate *mashriq* highlights the superiority of Ibn Ajā’s command over the ‘state of the art’ of Islamic sciences as practised in the Mamlūk realms. Additionally, this passage preempts possible objections by Ibn Ajā’s (Mamlūk) audience claiming that he only attended some minor assembly of secondary scholars within the Aqqyunlu realms.

As suggested above, the depiction of the scholarly elites assembled at the court of *uzun* Ḥasan as relying on outdated information transcends the general ignorance discussed on the preceding level and cements the marginality of Aqqyunlu scholarly culture. Already during his first attendance at a scholarly courtly session of *uzun* Ḥasan, Ibn Ajā had successfully objected to the equation of the three people trapped in the “*Ḥadīth* of the Cave”⁵⁹ with the Qur’ānic *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf*⁶⁰ proposed by one of the Aqqyunlu scholars on the basis of the *Tafsīr* of al-Bayḍāwī.⁶¹ In this context, it may be significant that al-Bayḍāwī was one of the paramount scholars of the Īlkhānid period, who died around the beginning of the 14th century CE, almost 200 (*hijrī*) years before Ibn Ajā’s diplomatic mission to Tabrīz. The outdatedness of the Aqqyunlu scholarly elites is further borne out in Ibn Ajā’s repetition of Ibn Ḥajar’s exegesis, performatively deployed at the Mamlūk court early in the 15th century CE, that expands the number of “people whom God will shade on the Day of Judgement” beyond the seven mentioned by al-Bukhārī (see the following level).⁶² This marginalization of the scholars of the Islamicate East is summed up by Ibn Ajā in the following anecdote:

58. Ibn Ajā, *Ta’rīkh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 148r, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta’rīkh*, 76; ed. Ṭulaymāt, p. 112; Dahmān 1986, p. 120. The reference is to the *tafsīr* or Qur’ānic commentary of al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144 CE), which was commented by ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, known as al-Sayyid al-Sharīf (see his biography in al-Sakhāwī, *Daw’* V, pp. 292–293, where a great-grandson of his, whom al-Sakhāwī met in Mecca, is quoted with biographical information).

59. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* II, pp. 176–177.

60. *Qur’ān* XVIII, 9–26.

61. Ibn Ajā, *Ta’rīkh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 145r–145v, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta’rīkh*, 70–71; ed. Ṭulaymāt, pp. 107–108; Dahmān 1986, p. 117. The equation of the three men of the “*Ḥadīth* of the Cave” with the Sleepers of the *Sūrat al-Kahf* is suggested in al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl* III, pp. 273–274.

62. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* I, p. 88.

[The first scholarly courtly session attended and supposedly dominated by Ibn Ajā dissolves.] The *khwājā* ‘Alī al-Āmidī [...] told me that *uzun* Ḥasan was angry with *qāḍī* Ḥasan, saying: “Nobody among you was able to overcome him and answer him? By God, that angers me!” The *qāḍī* Ḥasan only was able to assuage him by replying: “The scholars of the Persians (‘*ulamā*’ *al-‘ajam*) specialize in the logical sciences (*al-ma‘qūl*), while the scholars of the Arabs only concern themselves with *ḥadīth*, Qur’ānic commentary, and Islamic law (*al-fiqh*). It appeared to me that this envoy presented a lot from these disciplines.”⁶³

Notwithstanding the frank acceptance of Aqqyunlu backwardness in the Islamic sciences, with which Ibn Ajā cites the Aqqyunlu courtier *qāḍī* Ḥasan, internal faultlines in Ibn Ajā’s argument also become visible due to his subsequent statement that he studied together with the father of *qāḍī* Ḥasan.

Due to a strange coincidence, I happened to speak to the *qāḍī* Ḥasan in greater length. He is *uzun* Ḥasan’s *qāḍī al-‘askar* (military judge), his rank in these lands being equivalent to that of a *kātib al-sirr* (chancellor) in the Mamlūk dominions. I had been closely acquainted with his deceased father, the *shaykh* Sharaf al-Dīn⁶⁴ Ya‘qūb, having pursued an Islamic education with him (*shirka fi ṭalab al-‘ilm al-sharif*). For he had read to our deceased master, the *shaykh* Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Mar‘ashī, may God cover him with his mercy!, and I had listened to his reading of two parts of the *Kashshāf*⁶⁵ and other texts. I had also spent time with him and been his companion in Cairo (*miṣr*) for a period. He had been an excellent fellow (*wa-ni‘ma l-ṣāhib kāna*), may God have mercy on him!⁶⁶

Although I am not aware of further information on Sharaf al-Dīn Ya‘qūb, his son *qāḍī* Ḥasan is regularly attested at the court of *uzun* Ḥasan.⁶⁷ As the *shaykh* Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Mar‘ashī was Ibn Ajā’s maternal uncle and revered master,⁶⁸ this information arguably discredits Ibn Ajā’s claim for the backwardness of scholarly knowledge within the Aqqyunlu

63. Ibn Ajā, *Ta’rīkh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 146v-147r, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta’rīkh*, 73–74; ed. Ṭulaymāt, p. 110; Dahmān 1986, p. 119.

64. The honorific *laqab* Sharaf al-Dīn is written in one continuous stroke in the manuscript.

65. The reference again is to the *tafsīr* or Qur’ānic commentary of al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144 CE).

66. Ibn Ajā, *Ta’rīkh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 150v, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta’rīkh*, 81; ed. Ṭulaymāt, pp. 116–117; Dahmān 1986, pp. 123–124.

67. See Ibn Karbalā’ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān* I, p. 89; Muḥīy Gulshanī, *Manāqib-i Gulshanī*, pp. 25, 93–94, and Ḥusayn Wā’iz Kāshifī, *Rashahāt-i ‘Ayn al-Ḥayāt*, pp. 204–205. He also appears among the signatories of a decree of *uzun* Ḥasan, see Ḥusayn Mudarrisī Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Farmānhā-yi Turkmānān-i*, p. 67. See for his position at the Aqqyunlu court the studies by Chad G. Lingwood (2014, pp. 90–91, 101–102), as well as Duniets (2015, p. 122). It may be possible that the epitaph and chronogram on the death of a *khwāja* Ḥasan dated to 894 in Ahlī Shīrāzī, *Kullīyyāt-i Ash‘ār*, ed. Ḥāmid Rabbānī (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Sanā’ī, 1344/1965), 565, refers to the same individual.

68. See his biography in al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw’* I, p. 211, as well as Ibn Ajā’s own biography, al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw’* X, pp. 40–41.

realms. A very appreciative assessment of the state of Islamic education in the Aqqyunlu realms during the rule of *uzun* Ḥasan is also implied by al-Sakhāwī's biography of the courtly historiographer of *uzun* Ḥasan's son *sultān* Ya'qūb, Faḍlallāh Khunjī Iṣfahānī, who obtained an *ijāza* (permission to independently transmit on the authority of al-Sakhāwī) for the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī from al-Sakhāwī himself during his stay in Medina in 1482 CE.⁶⁹ In light of the transregional mobility of Islamic scholars during their search for knowledge (*ṭalab al-ʿilm*), further examples for close contacts between "Persian" and "Arab" scholars during the second half of the 15th century CE could certainly be found.

Accordingly, I argue that the transregional mobility of individuals pursuing scholarly careers amounted to an entanglement of the scholarly configurations embedded in the Mamlūk and the Aqqyunlu realms. Therefore, Ibn Ajā's implicit claim that scholarly practices in the Aqqyunlu realms be almost 200 years behind the state of the arts as practised in Mamlūk scholarly configurations must be seen as counterfactual and evidence for a strategic deployment of the nexus of *ʿ-M-R* in Ibn Ajā's quest to describe his diplomatic mission to Tabrīz in terms that would further his career and status within the Mamlūk realms. This counterfactuality of Ibn Ajā's depiction may possibly be reflected in the brief assessment of his historiographical work contained in the biography of Yashbak *min* Mahdī by al-Sakhāwī: "[The final campaign of Yashbak against *shāh* Suwār:] This was a huge enterprise, which was described in a separate book by his imam Shams al-Dīn (*al-shams*) b. Ajā, however, he exaggerated (*fa-bālagha*)."⁷⁰

2.7. *The Aqqyunlu Court of Tabrīz as an Epiphenomenon of Mamlūk Courtly Performance*

The consistent stylization of scholarly practices performed at the Aqqyunlu court as backward and outdated by Ibn Ajā arguably culminates in the following episode.

[The second attendance of Ibn Ajā at a scholarly session at the court of *uzun* Ḥasan.] The reader read the *ḥadīth* of the "seven whom God will shade on the Day of Judgement".⁷¹ When he had finished reading the *ḥadīth*, he began to translate it into Turkic for the ruler and explain it to him. I asked: "Do you know an eighth to the seven [mentioned in the *ḥadīth* as quoted by al-Bukhārī]?" [The reader sidetracks into a discussion of the excellency of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī, Ibn Ajā counters masterfully, claiming that he knew additional categories of people who will according to prophetic *ḥadīth* as transmitted in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim be given shade by God on the Day of Judgement.]

69. See al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʿ* VI, pp. 155–156, as well as Faḍlallāh's own reference to al-Sakhāwī in Faḍlallāh, *Tārīkh*, ed. Woods, pp. 69–70, 90–91, ed. ʿAshīq, pp. 68, 86–87.

70. Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʿ* X, p. 250.

71. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* I, p. 88.

They replied: “If you do know something concerning more than seven [who will be shaded], tell us!” I, however, did not respond. *Uzun Ḥasan* interjected: “If you do know something about this matter, tell them!” I replied: “My lord and ruler, this situation is turning into an examination (*ḥādihā l-maqām maqām imtiḥānin*). If they did attend a session of learning (*majlis al-ifāda*), I would teach them and lead them up to 14, as I have been taught by my *shaykh* and master, the preeminent traditionary of the East and the West (*ḥāfiẓ al-mashriq wa-l-maghrib*), the *shaykh* Shihāb al-Dīn b. Ḥajar, may God cover him with his mercy!” He asked: “So you will not even teach me?” I responded: “If it pleases my lord the ruler, we will write this down for him, God willing.”⁷²

This episode of Ibn Ajā’s report is an obvious reenactment of one of the most emblematic episodes of performative scholarly sessions at the Mamlūk court of al-Mu’ayyad, in which Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī defeated the *mashriqī* scholar Shams al-Dīn al-Harawī.⁷³ This episode is presented by Ibn Ḥajar in his *Inbā’ al-Ghumr* as follows:

On Thursday, the 18th Rabī‘ al-Ākhar [June 27th 1415], [the Mamlūk ruler] al-Mu’ayyad invited the already mentioned al-Harawī, ordering the four judges [of the *sunni* schools of law] and the *shaykhs* of the sciences to also attend this session. It was a splendid session held in the pavillon (*al-manẓara*) that lies inside the palatial precinct. [..., at some point, the *ḥadīth* of the “seven whom God will shade on the Day of Judgement” is brought up.] The present writer asked: “Does anybody among you know an eighth to these seven?” The assembled scholars replied: “No.” [Ibn Ḥajar puts al-Harawī on the spot, who stays silent. Ibn Ḥajar claims to know an eighth, a ninth, and a tenth in addition to the seven mentioned in the cited *ḥadīth*.] Somebody asked: “Teach us about this!” [Ibn Ḥajar] replied: “This situation is turning into an examination and is not a session for teaching (*al-maqām maqām imtiḥānin, lā maqām ifāda*). If you came to me asking to be taught, I would teach you!”⁷⁴

As indicated by the almost verbatim reenactment of Ibn Ḥajar’s refusal to be put on the spot by Ibn Ajā (*maqām imtiḥānin* vs. *maqām ifādatin*), this passage should be interpreted as a very transparent indication of intertextuality. By suggesting that he had repeated the rhetorical and scholarly exploit of Ibn Ḥajar, Ibn Ajā reiterates his claim that the Aqqyunlu courtly scholars are out of touch with the current state of the art of the Islamic sciences. By means of his obvious intertextual allusion to the courtly performance of Ibn Ḥajar, he furthermore actualizes shared memories of Mamlūk scholarly culture among his Mamlūk audience. While ostensibly directed at the Aqqyunlu court of Tabrīz, his (claimed) response

72. Ibn Ajā, *Ta’rīkh*, MS Topkapı III. Ahmet 3057, 148r-148v, equivalent to Dār al-Kutub MS 3663 *ta’rīkh*, 76–77; ed. Ṭulaymāt, pp. 112–114; Dahmān 1986, pp. 120–122.

73. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā’* III, pp. 57–64, cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī* II, p. 144. I follow the general reconstruction of the episode by Joel Blecher, *Said the Prophet of God: Hadith Commentary across a Millenium*, Oakland, 2018, pp. 89–96, for which reference I am indebted to Professor Ingeborg Baldauf.

74. Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā’* III, pp. 58, 62.

thereby is more fundamentally directed towards other scholars embedded within the Mamlūk realms, who must have been able to appreciate the witty quotation of Ibn Ḥajar. By claiming to have quoted the paramount Islamic scholar of the first half of the 15th century CE in Tabriz, Ibn Ajā arguably casts himself as a lesser revenant of Ibn Ḥajar within the marginal scholarly configurations of *uzun Ḥasan*.

At the same time, this witty claim to have “played the part” of his esteemed *shaykh* Ibn Ḥajar in Tabriz by Ibn Ajā frames the entire performance of scholarly “culture” at the Aqqyunlu court as an epiphenomenon of the performance of scholarly learning at the court of the Mamlūk ruler al-Mu’ayyad over half a century earlier. Ultimately, Ibn Ajā’s Mamlūk audience may have found the joke too good to be true, as the intertextual dimension of Ibn Ajā’s response arguably weakens his credibility as an impartial descriptor of his diplomatic mission.

* * *

As indicated repeatedly throughout this article, little is known of Ibn Ajā after his involvement in the final campaign against *shāh* Suwār in 876/1471 CE, which he described in his *Ta’rīkh al-Amīr Yashbak*. As mentioned above, the colophon of the second volume of his versified Turkic translation of the *Futūḥ al-Shām* dedicated to Qā’itbāy is dated to 880/1475–1476 CE.⁷⁵ As indicated by al-Sakhāwī, Ibn Ajā died soon afterward in the month Jumādā l-Ākhira 881 / September to October 1476 CE.⁷⁶ A son named Maḥmūd is mentioned by al-Sakhāwī,⁷⁷ according to Ibn Ajā’s own entry in the list of “those who were known as the son of so-and-so” given at the end of al-Sakhāwī’s biographical dictionary, Maḥmūd served as the Ḥanafī judge in Aleppo at the time of writing (*wa-bnuhū maḥmūdun qāḍī l-ḥanafīyyati bi-ḥalaba*).⁷⁸ As the colophon of the final copy of al-Sakhāwī’s *Ḍaw’ al-Lāmi’* is dated to the month of Rabī’ al-Ākhir 896/February to March 1491 CE,⁷⁹ it appears that Maḥmūd continued to serve in this capacity at this time.

Due to the sparsity of information on the subsequent career of Ibn Ajā, it is difficult to estimate whether the extraordinary account of his diplomatic activities in the *Ta’rīkh al-Amīr Yashbak* did indeed contribute to the advancement of his career and status. As traced in detail in this article, his description of the Aqqyunlu realms in 1471 CE artfully combines accurate descriptions with some exaggerated claims that may, as suggested above, have been transparent as literary tropes to his Mamlūk audience. Even if some members of the audience may have objected to these exaggerations as undermining the credibility of the narrator, however, the intertextual and theoretical sophistication of the report may also have served to promote this short chronicle as a piece of entertaining and highly cultured prose.

75. See ms. Karatay 489 = Koğuşlar 883, 212r.

76. Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw’* X, p. 41.

77. Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw’* X, p. 136.

78. Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw’* XI, p. 236.

79. Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw’* XII, p. 159.

In either regard, I argue that the holistic conception of “culture” as tied together by the nexus of *‘M-R* in Ibn Ajā’s construction of the backwardness of the Aqqyunlu realms deserves our attention as a highly nuanced theoretical concept that resonates with a similarly holistic conception of writerly culture advanced in the discipline of modern media theory by Kittler. Thereby, only an awareness of the *Aufschreibesystem* of Islamic scholarly culture that is shared by Ibn Ajā and his audience brings to light the entanglement of the multiple levels and fields on which he portrays the Aqqyunlu realms as subordinate to their Mamlūk counterparts.

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