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“The Arabs who Witnessed the Conquest Were Lost in the Passage of Time”: al-Maqrīzī’s History of the Rural Tribesmen of Egypt

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“The Arabs who Witnessed the Conquest Were Lost in the Passage of Time”

Al-Maqrīzī’s History of the Rural Tribesmen of Egypt**

♦ ABSTRACT

In *al-Bayān wa-l-i’rāb ‘an mā fi arḍ Miṣr min al-a’rāb*, or “The Book of Clear Arabic Expression regarding the Arab Tribes of Egypt”, a work that currently enjoys wide circulation, al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) listed the Arab and Berber tribes found in the late medieval Egyptian countryside according to their geographic locations. This paper sets out to explain al-Maqrīzī’s aims in compiling the *Bayān*, considering the social and political context of the Egyptian countryside during the Mamluk period. I argue that al-Maqrīzī was probably writing with a royal patron in mind, and that he sought to downplay the prestige of the Arab and Berber tribes of his own time while highlighting the failure of their past rebellions against the authority of the Mamluk sultans.

Keywords: al-Maqrīzī, Arab tribes, Mamluk, Egypt, genealogy, historiography, rebellions, Ibn Ḥaldūn

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♦ RÉSUMÉ

« Les Arabes qui ont été témoins de la conquête ont été anéantis par le temps » :
Histoire des tribus rurales d'Égypte par al-Maqrīzī

Dans *al-Bayān wa-l-i'rāb 'an mā fi arḍ Miṣr min al-a'rāb*, ou *Livre en expression arabe claire sur les tribus arabes d'Égypte*, un ouvrage qui bénéficie actuellement d'une large diffusion, al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) dresse la liste des tribus arabes et berbères présentes dans l'Égypte rurale de la fin du Moyen Âge, d'après leur localisation géographique. Cet article vise à expliquer les objectifs d'al-Maqrīzī en compilant *al-Bayān*, sans perdre de vue le contexte social et politique de l'Égypte rurale durant la période mamelouke. Je soutiens qu'al-Maqrīzī écrivait probablement en pensant à un mécène royal, et qu'il cherchait à atténuer le prestige des tribus arabes et berbères de son époque tout en soulignant l'échec de leurs rébellions passées contre l'autorité des sultans mamelouks.

Mots-clés: al-Maqrīzī, tribus arabes, Mamelouks, Égypte, généalogie, historiographie, rébellions, Ibn Ḥaldūn

♦ ملخص

«العرب الذين شهدوا فتح مصر قد أبادهم الدهر»: تاريخ المقرئ عن القبائل في ريف مصر في كتاب «البيان والإعراب عن ما في أرض مصر من الأعراب»، وهو مصنف يلقي رواجًا كبيرًا حاليًا، أورد المقرئ (ت. 1442م) قائمة لقبائل العرب والبربر التي كانت تعيش في ريف مصر في أواخر العصر الوسيط وفقًا لمواقعها الجغرافية. ترمي هذه الورقة البحثية إلى توضيح أهداف المقرئ من تأليف «البيان»، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار السياق الاجتماعي والسياسي للريف المصري إبان العصر المملوكي. وأجادل بأن المقرئ كان ربما يكتب وفي ذهنه راع ملكي، وأنه سعى إلى التقليل من شأن القبائل العربية والبربرية المعاصرة له مع تسليط الضوء على فشل ثوراتها السابقة ضد سلطة سلاطين المماليك.

كلمات مفتاحية: المقرئ، القبائل العربية، مملوكي، مصر، علم الأنساب، تاريخ، تمردات، ابن خلدون

* * *

AL-BAYĀN wa-l-i'rāb 'an mā fi arḍ Miṣr min al-a'rāb, or "The Book of Clear Arabic Expression regarding the Arab Tribes of Egypt", brings together al-Maqrīzī's life-long preoccupation with the history of Egypt and his parallel interest in the history of

the Arabs.¹ The work lists the Arab and Berber tribes found in the late medieval Egyptian countryside according to their locations, following a geographical order. It also provides historical and genealogical background on most of them. The treatise relies heavily on the tribal register of the Mamluk official Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥamdānī (d. after 680/1280), as well as on the section on Arab tribes in *Masālik al-Abṣār* by Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī (d. 749/1349). The *Bayān* only very rarely updates al-Ḥamdānī's information to reflect the 15th century realities of al-Maqrīzī's own lifetime. Yet, although this is largely a derivative treatise not free of crude copying mistakes, it has enjoyed significant popularity in later centuries, as is evident from the number of extant pre-modern manuscript copies.²

As recent scholarship has shown, Arab genealogical knowledge transmitted to us by medieval authors was not a record of actual historical events but rooted in the political and social context of the period in which it circulated. In his *Roots of Arabic Genealogy*, Zoltan Szombathy argued that the genealogical tradition was a product of the early Islamic period, and served as a skeleton onto which later manufactured family pedigrees could easily be attached.³ In *Imagining the Arabs*, Peter Webb contended that books of genealogy, such as the foundational genealogical text by Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204/819), were vehicles to produce an Arab collective identity among the urban elites of the Abbasid Empire.⁴ Kazuo Morimoto demonstrated that the genre of Ṭālibid genealogies emerged in the 10th century in tandem with the new institution of *naqīb al-aṣrāf*, the official responsible for distributing pensions and endowment benefits to descendants of the Prophet's household.⁵ The visualisation of genealogical trees in the post-Mongol world has been linked by İlker Evrim Binbaş to a universalist outlook and with the rise of dynastic forms of political legitimation.⁶

Genealogical texts, like the other historical texts discussed in this special volume, should be treated as authored texts that demand scrutiny for their own sake, representing the agendas of their writers and, as texts, wielding influence in the social, religious and political arenas. Applying such a critical approach to the *Bayān* is doubly important because of the current wide circulation of the treatise and the manner in which it is used in scholarly discussions about

1. There are several modern editions of this treatise, including al-Maqrīzī, *Bayān* (ed. Wüstenfeld); al-Maqrīzī, *Bayān* (ed. ʿĀbidīn); and al-Maqrīzī, *Rasāʾil*. In this paper, I will refer to the new edition and the first translation into English in al-Maqrīzī, *Bayān* (ed. and trans. Daaif and Rapoport).

2. Frédéric Bauden has identified thirteen manuscript copies of the *Bayān*, mostly pre-dating 1800, located in Cairo, Istanbul and European libraries. For comparison with the popularity of other fifteenth-century texts by al-Maqrīzī, see “Bibliography of 15th Century Arabic Historiography (BAH)” at <https://ihodp.ugent.be/bah/> (this database lists ten manuscript copies).

3. Z. Szombathy, *The Roots of Arabic Genealogy: A Study in Historical Anthropology*, Pilsicsaba, 2003.

4. P. Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam*, Edinburgh, 2016. See also Ibn Qutaybah, *The Excellence of the Arabs*, S. Bowen Savant, P. Webb (trans.), New York, 2019.

5. K. Morimoto, “The Formation and Development of the Science of Talibid Genealogies in the 10th & 11th century Middle East”, *Oriente Moderno* 79, 2, 1999, pp. 541-570.

6. İ. E. Binbaş, “Structure and Function of the Genealogical Tree in Islamic Historiography, 1200–1500”, in İ. E. Binbaş, N. Kılıç-Schubel, I. Togan (eds.), *Horizons of the World: Festschrift for İsenbike Togan = Hudûdü'l-âlem: İsenbike Togan'a Armağan*, Istanbul, 2011, pp. 465–544.

Arab and Egyptian identities. The prolific Egyptian author Muḥammad ‘Imāra, for example, referred to the *Bayān* in his recent history of the Muslim conquests, utilizing it to prove that the Arabs arrived in Egypt with the aim of spreading Islam and did not undermine the foundations of Egyptian society at the time.⁷ The same is true of ‘A. Ḥūršīd al-Barrī’s history of the Arab tribes in early Islamic Egypt (1996). Ḥūršīd al-Barrī cites in full al-Maqrīzī’s introduction to the *Bayān* in order to substantiate his claims that the Arab tribes fully dissolved and integrated into Egyptian society, instilling in Egypt the spirit of Arabism (*rūḥ al-‘urūba*).⁸ For these authors, the 15th century context of the *Bayān* and the authorial agenda of al-Maqrīzī are of little consequence.

This paper sets out to explain al-Maqrīzī’s aims in writing the *Bayān*, taking into account the social and political context of the Egyptian countryside during the Mamluk period, and particularly in the first half of the fifteenth century, as well as al-Maqrīzī’s broader historiographical agenda, including the influence of Ibn Ḥaldūn. I will first discuss the framework of the treatise, its date of composition, its possible audiences, its structure and its main sources. The second part of the paper looks in detail at the only major original contribution of the treatise, which is al-Maqrīzī’s account of the rebellion of Ḥiṣn al-Dīn Ibn Ṭa‘lab in 652/1253–1254. In the third and concluding part I explain al-Maqrīzī’s aims in the *Bayān* by taking up his claim that the Arab tribes who participated in the Islamic conquest of Egypt were “lost in the passage of time.” Instead of weaving the history of the Arab tribes of Egypt into the history of Islam, al-Maqrīzī appears to create a deliberate disjuncture, stating right at the opening lines of the treatise that contemporary tribes do not stem from the tribes who participated in the Muslim conquest. It is this disjuncture, I would argue, that forms the underlying message of the treatise as a whole.

I. Date of the *Bayān*

The *Bayān* is included in Leiden Or. 560, a collection of opuscles by al-Maqrīzī copied by a scribe at al-Maqrīzī’s request in 841/1438. After the scribe finished copying the collection, al-Maqrīzī revised the whole, indicating the result of his collation in the margins or in the body of the text. According to a note al-Maqrīzī placed at the end of the treatise, he completed his corrections of the *Bayān* in Dū l-Qa‘da 841/April–May 1438. He also added a couple of inserts in his own hand, probably at that time, or shortly after.⁹ While we can be certain that the treatise as a whole was composed before it was copied into Leiden Or. 560, i.e., before April–May 1438, the date of composition is unknown. The single reference to events that occurred during al-Maqrīzī’s lifetime, the Hawwāra’s expansion to Upper Egypt under Sultan Barqūq, is in an insert added by al-Maqrīzī after the treatise was copied by the scribe.

7. M. ‘Imāra, *al-Futūḥāt al-Islāmiyya: taḥrīr aw tadmīr*, Cairo, 2016, p. 24 and following.

8. ‘Abd Allāh Ḥūršīd al-Barrī, *al-Qabā’il al-‘arabiyya fī Miṣr fī l-qurūn al-ṭalāṭa l-ūlā li-l-ḥiḡra*, Cairo, 1996, pp. 69–71.

9. The history of Leiden Or. 560 is explained in van Steenbergen (2017, pp. 109–111). His account builds on several articles by Frédéric Bauden.

The opuscles included in Leiden Or. 560 could have been originally written much earlier in al-Maqrīzī's long career, perhaps even in the 1410s. Nonetheless, the topic discussed in the treatise suggests that the *Bayān* was written in the 1430s, shortly before it was copied in 841/1438. Al-Maqrīzī's other works that dealt with the history of the Arabs were written at this later stage in his life: *al-Ḥabar 'an al-Bašar*, his major history of the Arabs before Islam, was his last work before his death in 845/1442. Likewise, the treatise on Tamīm al-Dārī and the rights of his descendants in Hebron was probably composed in 840/1437.¹⁰ By that time, al-Maqrīzī had completed his three major works on Egyptian history: the *Sulūk* was already sufficiently advanced in 833/1429, when a copy of it was presented to an envoy from a Timurid court.

Al-Maqrīzī states that he compiled the *Bayān* for his personal use, almost as if it was a collection of notes: "I composed [this treatise] for myself and for my fellow people (*abnā' ḡinsī*) whom God may lead to read it."¹¹ He added the second part of this sentence in his own handwriting on the margin of the scribe's copy; the "people" (*ḡins*) may be fellow Arabs, fellow Muslims or fellow men of knowledge and culture. This declaration stands out as unusual, as other short thematic works by al-Maqrīzī were composed for a royal patron, or to commemorate an occasion.¹² Al-Maqrīzī may have originally written the *Bayān* with a patron in mind, and then decided to drop the dedication.¹³

If the *Bayān* was intended for a patron, this was likely to have been the young prince and future sultan Ḡamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf (827/1423-1424–868/1463), son of Sultan Barsbāy (r. 1422–1438). Ḡamāl al-Dīn was appointed amir of hundred in 836/1432-1433, when he was nine years old, and was a sultan for three months in 841–842/1438. After his arrest he was sent to Alexandria, where he lived until his death. It seems that al-Maqrīzī sought his patronage throughout the 1430s, when Ḡamāl al-Dīn was young heir to the throne. Al-Maqrīzī wrote a thematic treatise on the occasion of the young prince's circumcision in 837/1434, and a treatise on royal pilgrimages, *al-Dahab al-Masbūk*, probably commemorating the pilgrimage the seven-year-old Ḡamāl al-Dīn undertook with Sultan Barsbāy's senior wife in 834/1431.¹⁴ A Ḡamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf, most likely the same prince, is also listed as the dedicatee of a copy of a treatise on Arab genealogy, *Nihāyat al-arab fī ma'rifat ansāb al-'Arab*; this further suggests a special interest in Arab genealogies, and a good match with the contents of the *Bayān*.¹⁵

10. Frenkel 2014, p. 47.

11. *Bayān*, § 2.

12. Van Steenberghe 2017, p. 43.

13. There are similarities with Ibn Taḡrī Birdī's introduction to his chronicle and biographical dictionary, both ostensibly written for the benefit of the author, without a patron. See R. ben Othmen 2020, pp. 176–177.

14. Van Steenberghe 2017, pp. 47–48, 108.

15. The copyist, Muḥammad al-Qalqašandī, son of the famous bureaucrat, describes the dedicatee, Ḡamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf, as a prince and a governor in Alexandria. The copy is undated. See Rapoport 2021; al-Qalqašandī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, p. 32; Bauden 2013, p. 214. On Ḡamāl al-Dīn's biography, see <https://ihodp.ugent.be/mpp/actor-al-'aziz-yusuf-b.-al-'ashraf-barsbāy>.

2. Structure and Sources

Al-Maqrīzī's *Bayān* is arranged in a geographical order, beginning in the north-eastern border of Egypt with Palestine, then moving to the eastern Delta, Upper Egypt, and back to the western Delta. The first tribes discussed are said to occupy lands in northern Sinai and southern Palestine. The next section deals with the region of Damietta in the north-east coast, to be followed by long sections on the Ğudām clans in the eastern and central Delta. The next section is on Upper Egypt, beginning in Aswan and proceeding northwards along the Nile Valley up to Giza. The concluding part of the *Bayān* loses its geographical coherence after reaching Giza, and is punctured with historical and genealogical digressions, especially on the Berbers. Towards the end there is a return to a geographical progression, with a focus on the tribes in the western Delta provinces and west of Alexandria. The treatise ends with the tribes responsible for providing protection along the different sections of the Hajj route, from Egypt to Mecca.

The most important source of the *Bayān* is the lost work by the 13th century al-Ḥamdānī, who wrote a register of contemporary Arab tribes based on his experience as the official *mihmindār* under several Ayyubid and Mamluk Sultans, including al-Kāmil Muḥammad (r. 1218-1238) and al-Mu'izz Aybak (r. 1250–1257). As *mihmindār*, al-Ḥamdānī was in charge of receiving delegations of Arab tribal leaders, of providing them with accommodation and of presenting them to the ruler. Al-Ḥamdānī's work was also extensively used by Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, whose works were a major source for al-Maqrīzī throughout his historical corpus, and by al-Qalqašandī (d. 821/1418), who was al-Maqrīzī's personal acquaintance.¹⁶ Al-Maqrīzī never mentions al-Ḥamdānī's name, so his reliance on al-Ḥamdānī is not immediately obvious. But passages which al-'Umarī and al-Qalqašandī attribute to al-Ḥamdānī make up at least 60% of the *Bayān*, including its account of the tribes of the eastern and central Delta (Ṭa'ālabā, Ğarm and Ğudām), of Upper Egypt (Hilāl, Baliyy, Qurayš, Kināna, Lawāta, Laḥm), and some additional sections on al-Buḥayra and on Sinai. As we shall see, al-Maqrīzī adds material on Ibn Ṭa'ālab's rebellion which was also likely taken from al-Ḥamdānī. Overall, the material in the treatise is decidedly Fatimid or Ayyubid in nature; excluding the short insert on the Hawwāra added by al-Maqrīzī after the completion of the *Bayān*, the latest date mentioned is 652 AH (1253–1254).

Al-Ḥamdānī was a state official, and his treatise was a tribal register rather than a genealogical treatise. Instead of offering a genealogical tree unifying all the different Arab sections, al-Ḥamdānī was interested in the reality on the ground, locating tribes in geographical space. His aim was a presentation of a demographic mapping of the countryside, as well as a discussion of the relations between the different tribal groups and the authorities in Cairo. The methodical presentation of the data suggests it was composed as an administrative resource, as if the information was kept in official registers in Cairo. The preserved passages from this work are reminiscent of the *Villages of the Fayyum*, al-Nābulusī's nearly contemporary cadastral survey of 643/1245. In al-Nābulusī's text, each cereal-growing village in the Fayyum belongs

16. On the personal relationship between al-Maqrīzī and al-Qalqašandī, see Bauden (2017).

to a named clan, and the clans form territorially contiguous confederacies, carving the Fayyum into well-defined spaces.¹⁷ Al-Ḥamdānī's view of the countryside has much in common with that of the tax-collector al-Nābulusī—a state administrator trying to map the social groups of the Egyptian countryside, with each tribe located in a province or in a group of villages.

Al-ʿUmarī, writing in the middle of the 14th century, reproduced al-Ḥamdānī's work and updated it. Like al-Ḥamdānī, al-ʿUmarī was a Cairo-based bureaucrat, who served as secretary of state (*kātib al-sirr*) in the Mamluk chancery. Together, their works constitute a distinct genre of Mamluk “administrative genealogy”, whose focus was the tribes of the countryside of Egypt and Syria, with special emphasis on their relationship to the court. Following al-Ḥamdānī, al-ʿUmarī focused on the Arab tribes of his own age: “The Arabs found in our present time, and their locations.”¹⁸ This section, which is part of his encyclopaedic work *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*, covers Arab tribes from the Atlantic to Iraq, but the vast majority of the text is devoted to the Arab tribes that inhabit Mamluk Egypt and Syria. Al-ʿUmarī also deals with the hierarchy of tribal amirs in his administrative manual, *al-Taʿrīf*.¹⁹ While reproducing and updating al-Ḥamdānī, al-ʿUmarī sought to distinguish between the authentic and proud Arabs of the desert and the settled Arabs found in the villages of the Mamluk countryside. Al-ʿUmarī states that nomadic Arabs were only found in the Syrian desert, and in the western and eastern edges of the Delta. Everywhere else—in Upper Egypt and in the central Delta, in Palestine, in the Hawran and in the Beqaa—Arabs lived a sedentary meek existence of agricultural cultivation.

3. Themes

The *Bayān* belongs to the Mamluk-era genre of tribal registers initiated by al-Ḥamdānī but has a different structure and a different ideological purpose. The first difference is the treatise's subject matter. The *Bayān*'s focus is the Arab and Berber tribes found in Egypt, excluding the tribes of Greater Syria and of the wider Middle East. There are some exceptions to this rule, such as tribes in southern Palestine who migrated to Egypt, the tribes that controlled the pilgrimage route from Egypt to Mecca and, most importantly, the North African Berber tribes linked to Berber tribes in Egypt, an unusual digression discussed in Lahcen Daaïf's contribution to this volume.

As the Berber digression suggests, al-Maqrīzī offers no reflection on the meaning of Arab-ness. There is no discussion of the Arabic language, or any connection between eloquence in Arabic and Arab identity. Desert life is not valorized over the sedentary one; al-ʿUmarī's distinction between the 'authentic' desert tribes and the settled ones is omitted, surely by design. The treatise's subject matter is by and large the agricultural areas of the Nile valley and the Delta, with barely any discussion of pastoralism. The *aʿrāb* of the title, commonly understood in this period as the nomadic sub-group of the Arabs, rhyme with *iʿrāb*, clear Arabic expression—but both nomads and eloquence are missing from the body of the treatise.

17. Rapoport 2018.

18. This section was published by Dorothea Krawulsky as al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār* (1985).

19. Al-ʿUmarī, *al-Taʿrīf*, pp. 76–80.

Second, the *Bayān* offers historical depth that is mostly missing from the other works of the Mamluk tribal registers. As bureaucrats, both al-Ḥamdānī and al-ʿUmarī approached history as ancillary to state administration. The *Bayān* makes an effort to fill in these gaps by providing genealogical and historical background on each of the tribes. For this purpose, al-Maqrīzī sometimes uses the work of the genealogist al-Ġawwānī (d. 588/1192), who was *naqīb al-ašrāf* (“Representative of the descendants of the Prophet”) under Saladin. The majority of the genealogical information added by al-Maqrīzī is taken up from well-known genealogical encyclopaedias. It consists of lists of ancestors and common etymological myths that explain tribal names.

Perhaps most striking is the near absence of any updates about Arab uprisings and tribal politics during the 14th and the early 15th century. Al-Maqrīzī was not writing an account of Arab tribes in his own time but rehashing and recycling two-centuries-old material. While al-ʿUmarī and al-Qalqašandī sought to update the tribal register of al-Ḥamdānī from their experience in the state bureaucracy, al-Maqrīzī was content to leave out nearly all the information that post-dates al-Ḥamdānī’s 13th-century treatise. Even the input by al-ʿUmarī and al-Qalqašandī hardly leaves any trace in the *Bayān*. Also absent are the 14th century Arab uprisings in Upper Egypt, such as the peasant unrest of 701/1301 and the major uprising by al-Aḥḍab in the 750s/1350s, in the aftermath of the first outbreak of the Plague. These uprisings feature prominently in al-Maqrīzī’s own chronicle; his *Sulūk* is in fact our main narrative source for al-Aḥḍab’s rebellion, but he chose to not even mention it in the *Bayān*.

4. The Rebellion of Ḥiṣn al-Dīn Ibn Ṭaʿlab

The only major original historical intervention of the *Bayān* concerns the great Arab rebellion led by the Šarīf Ḥiṣn al-Dīn Ṭaʿlab in 652/1253–1254. This rebellion is reported by several other sources, most importantly al-Nuwayrī’s *Nihāyat al-Arab* and al-Maqrīzī’s own *Sulūk*. In the *Bayān*, the rebellion is discussed in two different passages: first, in connection with Banū Sinbis of al-Buḥayra, who had joined forces with Ḥiṣn al-Dīn but were defeated near Saḥā in al-Ġarbiyya, leading to their banishment from the western Delta; and second, in a much longer passage, the *Bayān* lists the descendants of the Šarīf Maġd al-ʿArab Ṭaʿlab al-Ġaʿfarī, including his son, the prominent Ayyubid amir Faḥr al-Dīn Ismaʿīl (d. 613/1216–1217), up to his great-grandson Ḥiṣn al-Dīn, the leader of the rebellion. It records the deaths of Ḥiṣn al-Dīn and two of his cousins, one of them hanged at Bab Zawīla (or Zuwayla) in 652/1253–1254.

The level of detail concerning the Banū Ṭaʿlab family tree suggests it originated with a mid-13th century text, most likely al-Ḥamdānī’s, although this family tree is not found in either al-ʿUmarī or al-Qalqašandī, the two other authors of Mamluk tribal registers who heavily relied on al-Ḥamdānī.²⁰ There are a couple of other passages in the *Bayān* which

20. Al-ʿUmarī has the following on the Šarīf Ḥiṣn al-Dīn: he was the lord of Ḍarwat Sarabām; Banū Ṭaʿlab, led by him, aspired for kingship; they rebelled against al-Muʿizz Aybak and the Turkish dynasty and corresponded with al-Malik al-Nāšir, but were eventually defeated; the Šarīf was executed by Baybars. See al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abšār* (2003), IV, pp. 367–368.

probably go back to al-Ḥamdānī's thirteenth-century text but are not reproduced by al-ʿUmarī. These include a reference to Qalʿat al-Ṣadr in the Sinai, deserted circa 1250, and to Arabs who occupied the rural hinterland of Tinnīs, a town demolished by the Ayyubids in 1227. If the genealogical tree of the Banū Ṭaʿlab originated with al-Ḥamdānī, it was therefore available to al-ʿUmarī, who chose not to include it in his treatise—perhaps anxious that it gives too much space and prestige to rebels.

Al-Maqrīzī's decision to introduce the family tree of Ḥiṣn al-Dīn Ṭaʿlab into the *Bayān* reflects the importance he attached to this rebellion as a watershed in the history of the Arab tribes of Egypt. The Ibn Ṭaʿlab lineage emerged in the Ayyubid period as an important power broker in Cairo, acting from a base they established for themselves in the strategic town of Darwat Sarabām, modern Dayrut, in Upper Egypt.²¹ Fahr al-Dīn, grandfather of Ḥiṣn al-Dīn, was crucial for Ayyubid Cairo's provisions of grains, and was wealthy enough to build a madrasa. His surviving grand tombstone in the Qarāfa cemetery describes him as amir al-Ḥaḡḡ.²² His grandson Ḥiṣn al-Dīn makes a surprise appearance in the Ayyubid section of the Coptic *History of the Patriarchs*, where he is described as a valiant knight that fought off a Frankish raid in the Sinai in the early 1240s.²³ Al-Nuwayrī, our earliest source on the rebellion itself, describes Ḥiṣn al-Dīn as leading Arab forces of 12,000 riders and 60,000 infantry. His forces went about looting Upper Egypt despite their leader's attempts to control them. According to al-Nuwayrī, they were easily defeated near Iḥmīm by some 2,000 Mamluk cavalry.²⁴ Al-Nuwayrī's matter-of-fact report emphasizes the unruliness of the Arabs and the determination of the Mamluk commander to squash the rebels despite their great numbers.

At al-Maqrīzī's hands, however, Ḥiṣn al-Dīn's rebellion acquires an overtly ideological dimension as well as long-term consequences. In the *Bayān*, al-Maqrīzī explains that "The Arabs (ʿurbān) of Egypt disdained [al-Muʿizz Aybak's] rule over them, for he was a slave of the Bahriyya corps of military slaves, and was stained by bondage (*massahu al-riqq*)".²⁵ In the *Sulūk*, al-Maqrīzī has Ḥiṣn al-Dīn declare "we are the masters of the land", a statement that is not found in any earlier source, and that "we are more befitting of kingship than the Mamluks; it is enough that we served Banū Ayyūb, who were foreigners (*ḥawāriḡ*), for these *mamlūks* are their slaves (ʿabīd)".²⁶

In the *Bayān*, the Šarīf Ḥiṣn al-Dīn, descendant of the Prophet, is quoted as disdaining the rule of the Turks, former slaves; in the *Sulūk*, Ḥiṣn al-Dīn views them as foreigners, and

21. See also the early 13th-century entry for "Darwat Sarabām" by Yāqūt in *Muʿḡam al-Buldān*. Yāqūt describes it as a village with orchards and date-palms, where the Šarīf Ibn Ṭaʿlab established a congregational mosque at the entry point to al-Manhā Canal.

22. Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk* I, p. 244 (for the year 593/1196–1197); al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ* IV, p. 216. For the tombstone see *Thesaurus d'Épigraphie Islamique* (TEI), no. 3054.

23. Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ [attrib.], *Tārīḡ Miṣr*, pp. 774–776.

24. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab* XXIX, pp. 427–429.

25. *Bayān*, § 18.

26. Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk* I, p. 479.

says that the Arabs are the masters of the land. This ideological dimension of Ḥiṣn al-Dīn’s rebellion is not attested in any earlier account of the rebellion and appears to be added by al-Maqrīzī in the early 15th century. In al-Maqrīzī’s retrospective interpretation, the rebellion was a conflict between two ideal forms of political legitimacy, Prophetic lineage and kinship versus military slaves, and Ḥiṣn al-Dīn’s defeat led the way to the consolidation of Mamluk rule. The *Sulūk* describes the rebellion as a turning point in the history of Egyptian Arabs: “After that they weakened and their numbers decreased, until they became what they are in our days”.²⁷ Against this background, the *Bayān*’s expansive detail regarding the Ibn Ṭa‘lab family tree underscores the symbolic importance of the rebellion and its eventual failure.

Al-Maqrīzī’s ideological narrative about legitimacy was likely a projection of 15th century attitudes. The terms which are used here to describe the military elite—especially the memorable “stain of bondage”—are anachronistic, and undoubtedly reflect what Jo van Steenbergen called the “Mamlukisation” of the Sultanate in the fifteenth century.²⁸ A similar dichotomy of Arab *nasab* vs. Mamluk military slavery is recorded by the merchant Emmanuel Piloti, a resident of Alexandria, circa 1420.²⁹ Piloti comments on the rise in power of Arab tribes in Egypt, and views the Arabs as the major force opposing the Mamluks, with the conflict between Arab tribesmen and the Turks comparable to the conflict between Guelfs and Ghibellines.³⁰ Most importantly, Piloti is aware of the ideological framing of Arab resistance to the Mamluk regime. According to his account, the Arabs see the Mamluks as illegitimate former slaves, while viewing themselves as the nation of the Prophet. Piloti, an exact contemporary of al-Maqrīzī, understood Arab opposition to the Mamluk regime as legitimised by claims of lineage and status. Al-Maqrīzī retrospectively imposed this ideological dimension onto Ḥiṣn al-Dīn’s revolt, based on his familiarity with the claims made by Arab tribal elites in his own time.

5. Al-Maqrīzī and Arab History

Al-Maqrīzī’s *Bayān* should be viewed in the context of his overall pre-occupation with the history of the Arabs, a pre-occupation which attracted the attention of several modern historians. Nasser Rabbat explained al-Maqrīzī’s interest in Arab history as an extension of his self-identification as a descendant of the Fatimid caliphs, and through them to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.³¹ In her recent monograph on the Arab tribes of the Mamluk empire, Sarah Büssow-Schmitz refers to the nostalgic element of al-Maqrīzī’s writing, and suggests he may have been fascinated by the Arab tribesmen as carriers of a cultural tradition that linked his society to its roots in the Arabian Peninsula. She also speculates about al-Maqrīzī’s adherence to classical political

27. Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk* I, p. 481.

28. Van Steenbergen et al. 2016.

29. Büssow-Schmitz 2016, pp. 1–2; citing Piloti, *L’Égypte*, pp. 11–20.

30. Cf. the comparison made by Frescobaldi in 1384: “These are rural folk who have no abode, and who do no work, and who have among them captains, who lay certain small taxes on the cities of Egypt as is the custom with companies in Italy” (Frescobaldi, Gucci, Sigoli, *Visit*, p. 56).

31. Rabbat 2003, pp. 6–10.

theory, with legitimate rulers coming from the line of Hāšim, and points to Ibn Ḥaldūn's cyclical view of dynasties, from tribal solidarity to urban luxury, as guiding al-Maqrīzī's interest in contemporary Arab tribes. Finally, Büssow-Schmitz highlights the space given to Arab disturbances in his *Sulūk* as means of drawing attention to the failure of the Mamluk state to bring law and order.³²

The *Bayān* is decidedly not a personal treatise. In his *Durar al-ʿUqūd*, al-Maqrīzī lists his own ancestors up to Tamīm, whom al-Saḥāwī identifies as a grandson of the Fatimid caliph al-Muʿizz. After al-Maqrīzī's death, his nephew raised the lineage back to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.³³ Be that as it may, nothing of that leaves a trace in the *Bayān*. While both al-ʿUmarī and al-Qalqašandī used the tribal canvas to draw attention to their own personal lineage, al-Maqrīzī chose not to do so. If al-Qalqašandī and al-ʿUmarī were insiders to Arab tribal identity, in the *Bayān*, at least, al-Maqrīzī appears as an outsider.

Nor does the *Bayān* display any nostalgia for Arab cultural traditions, the Ġāhiliyya, or the ways of the desert. Unlike al-ʿUmarī, al-Maqrīzī does not glorify the camel-herding nomads, and in fact barely mentions camels at all; the only tents are those of the non-Arab Beḡa. Al-Maqrīzī also shows very little interest in the culture of the pre-Islamic Arabs. Al-Qalqašandī ends his genealogical treatise with a discourse on the lore of the pre-Islamic Arabs and their famous battle days. The *Bayān* contains a couple of references to the stereotypical generosity and hospitality of Arab leaders who lived in the Fatimid period, but nothing more. This was also the case in his *al-Ḥabar ʿan al-Bašar*, where he has little time for cultural aspects of Arab-ness.³⁴ Al-Maqrīzī offers no longing for pre-Islamic Arabia, unlike al-ʿUmarī's admiration for the Banū Maḥzūm who were "the most noble during the Ġāhiliyya" (*ašrafuhum ġāhiliyyat^{an}*).³⁵ Al-Maqrīzī may have been purposefully avoiding the themes of the Arabic popular epics, which became immensely popular in Mamluk Cairo. Ron-Gilboa suggested that al-Maqrīzī's treatment of pre-Islamic brigands may have been an attempt to re-appropriate the history of the Ġāhiliyya away from the idealizing lens of the epics. The *Bayān* has no evidence of the themes of the epic or its vocabulary: no great fits of courage, no half-caste black slaves, no runners outpacing horses.³⁶

The most important message of the *Bayān*, I would argue, is its conceptual disassociation of the Arabs of Mamluk Egypt from the Arabs of the age of Prophet. Already in the first few lines of the treatise, al-Maqrīzī states that the Arab tribesmen of the Egyptian countryside are not the offspring of tribes who conquered Egypt in the very early days of Islam. "Let it be known", he says, "that the Arabs who witnessed the conquest of Egypt were lost in the passage of time, and their descendants are mostly unknown" (*iʿlam anna al-ʿarab allādī šahidū fath Mišr qad abādahum al-dahr wa-juhilat aḥbār aḥtār aʿqābihim*).³⁷ According to the *Bayān*,

32. See the summary in Büssow-Schmitz (2016, p. 83).

33. Al-Saḥāwī, *Dawʿ* II, pp. 22–24.

34. Webb 2019, p. 74.

35. Al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abšār* (2003), IV, p. 370.

36. Ron-Gilboa 2015; Webb 2019, pp. 88–89.

37. *Bayān*, § 3.

the tribes who inhabited the Egyptian countryside during the late medieval period mostly came later, under the Fatimids and the Ayyubids. They came from Syria and from North Africa, with little direct connection to the cradle of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. Only towards the end of the treatise does al-Maqrīzī incorporate reports, also found in his *Ḥiṭaṭ*, on the Umayyad-era settlement of Syrian Arab Sulaym in the eastern Delta, but even here he does not link them to any of the tribes in his own time.³⁸

In line with this general view, al-Maqrīzī omits or suppresses tribal claims to prestige based on links to the Prophet, his Companions or indeed the Arab conquest. For example, al-Ḥamdānī, as quoted by al-ʿUmarī, reports that the Ğudām “were the first to dwell in Egypt, as they came with ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ and were awarded (*uqṭiʿū*) lands in it. Some of these lands are in their hands to this day”.³⁹ This sentence is paraphrased by al-Maqrīzī, who instead reports that “Ğudām are among the oldest of the Egyptian Arab tribes (*ʿurbān*). They came with ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ”.⁴⁰ While al-Maqrīzī acknowledges that the Ğudām are known to have come to Egypt at the time of the conquest, his paraphrase is omitting the reference to lands awarded to them at the time of the conquest, and severs the link, made explicit by al-Ḥamdānī, between their participation in the conquest and their present prestige and location. In another example, al-Maqrīzī omits the lineage of a leading family of the Ğudām that linked them to a Companion.⁴¹ His brief mention of the Banū Maḥriyya omits a longer account, cited by al-ʿUmarī, where the focus is on the Companion Rifāʿa and his interactions with the Prophet.⁴²

For the purpose of refuting prestige claims of Arab tribes, al-Maqrīzī employs the authority of the Ayyubid-era genealogical author al-Ġawwānī. While the ʿUmarīs in Egypt trace their lineage to ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb, “the genealogist, the Šarīf Muḥammad b. Asʿad al-Ġawwānī, said that this is a lie, as their lineage does not reach him. He also said that he met some of them and demonstrated to them the falsehood of their claims in a scientific manner”.⁴³ The tribal claims for prestigious lineage are quashed with the help of proper science. Al-Ġawwānī, the Cairene-born son of an immigrant from Mosul, was a very prolific author on genealogy—so prolific that his earliest biographer, Ibn al-Qifṭī, mentions that he was widely suspected of fabrication.⁴⁴ Of eighteen titles in the science of genealogy listed in biographical dictionaries, only a couple survive.⁴⁵ Al-Ġawwānī’s introduction to the science of Arab genealogy has been

38. This account of the settlement of the Sulaym of Qays by the Umayyad Ibn al-Ḥabḥāb is also found in al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ* I, pp. 151–152, attributed to al-Kindī. In the *Ḥiṭaṭ*, it is the opening report in the section on the settlement of the Arabs in the *rif* of Egypt and their taking up of agriculture. On this, see Bouderbala (2019).

39. Al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār* (1985), p. 157.

40. *Bayān*, § 46.

41. Al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār* (1985), pp. 174–175.

42. Al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār* (1985), p. 173.

43. *Bayān*, § 83. Similarly, he refutes Banū Ṭalḥa’s claim to descend from Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr al-Šiddīq (*Bayān*, § 67).

44. Al-Qifṭī, *Šuʿarā*, pp. 147–148.

45. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā* V, pp. 167–169, no. 1893.

incorporated, more or less *in toto*, into al-Nuwayrī's fourteenth-century encyclopaedia, and his works were also used extensively by al-Maqrīzī in the *Ḥiṭaṭ*.

The same kind of scepticism towards tribal claims to prestige marks al-Maqrīzī's separate epistle on the descendants of Tamīm al-Dārī and their rights over lands near Hebron which were promised to them by the Prophet, a treatise recently edited and translated by Yehoshua Frenkel. In this treatise, al-Maqrīzī accepts the authenticity of the Hadith tradition containing the Prophet's promise of the villages of Hebron and Bayt 'Aynūn to Tamīm al-Dārī and his descendants. But in a concluding note, al-Maqrīzī questions the continuity of the Tamīmī line to his present day, given the Crusader interruption. He reasons that even if the two villages were in the hands of the Dāriyyūn since Caliph 'Umar's time, the arrival of the Franks meant that all Muslims in the region were either killed or exiled; no Dārī from the pre-Frankish period remained in these lands. Al-Maqrīzī concludes that the process by which the Dāriyyūn now reclaimed exactly the same lands remains unknown and should be clarified.⁴⁶

Al-Maqrīzī's programmatic statement at the beginning of the *Bayān*—"the Arabs who witnessed the conquest of Egypt were lost in the passage of time"—is a re-statement of Ibn Ḥaldūn's more universal judgement about contemporary Arabs. In his *Ibar*, Ibn Ḥaldūn calls the Arabs of his own time *al-'arab al-musta'ğama*, "the Arabs who have become non-Arabs" because they mixed the pure eloquent Arabic of their ancestors with foreign languages (*'uğma*). Ibn Ḥaldūn goes on to state that "The Arabs of the generation of the conquest vanished (*talāshaw*) and were obliterated (*duṭirū*)", and "one does not encounter any of their clans any more, or find any of their travelling campsites, or know any of their solidarity groups (*fa-lam yabqa minhum ḥayy yuṭraq wa-lā ḥillah tunğā' wa-lā 'ašir yu'raf*).⁴⁷ The current Arabs are no heirs to the Arabs of the generation of the Conquest—neither by blood nor by prestige. The *Bayān*, following Ibn Ḥaldūn, applies this general rule to the Arabs of Egypt, and by doing so undermines the claims of Mamluk-era tribal elites for superiority.

The influence of Ibn Ḥaldūn on al-Maqrīzī's historical oeuvre has been frequently discussed in recent years.⁴⁸ Ibn Ḥaldūn saw Mamluk Egypt as an exception to the rule of the cyclical rise and fall of dynasties. He observed in the *Muqaddima* that "royal authority in Egypt is most peaceful and firmly rooted, because Egypt has few [...] tribal groups."⁴⁹ The continuous importation of military slaves allowed the Mamluk regime to replenish itself without need for tribal solidarity. Like Ibn Ḥaldūn, al-Maqrīzī lets the reader believe that Egyptian Arabs do not pose a threat to the Mamluk regime, or at least that they no longer do. The great rebellion of Ḥiṣn al-Dīn Ṭa'lab in the middle of the 13th century was the watershed moment; its failure led to the rise of the Mamluk regime of imported military slaves, the opposite of a state based on Prophetic lineage. In the *Sulūk*, al-Maqrīzī tells us that the defeat of Ḥiṣn al-Dīn was the

46. Frenkel 2014, pp. 246–247.

47. Ibn Ḥaldūn, *al-Ibar* VI, pp. 5–6.

48. See Rabbat 2012 (the *Ḥiṭaṭ* as inspired by Ibn Ḥaldūn's decline of civilisation paradigm); Irwin 2003 (highlighting al-Maqrīzī's praise for Ibn Ḥaldūn's *Muqaddima*); Van Steenberg 2018.

49. Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Muqaddima* I, p. 334.

downfall of the Arab tribes as political power in the Mamluk countryside. The *Bayān* similarly ends its story in 652/1253–1254, the last date mentioned in the main body of the treatise.

The paradox is that al-Maqrīzī’s own lifetime saw an unprecedented rise in the power of Arab and Berber lineages in the countryside, as is demonstrated in al-Maqrīzī’s own *Sulūk* as well as in other 15th-century narrative sources.⁵⁰ In Upper Egypt, the major rebellion by al-Aḥḍab in the early 1350s led to his official co-optation into Mamluk administration with overall responsibility for tax collection in several provinces. In the decades following al-Aḥḍab’s revolt, the co-optation of Arab tribal leaders into provincial administration became widespread. This was especially true for Upper Egypt, where the descendants of al-Aḥḍab gave way to leaders from the Hawwāra, the most successful tribal dynasty in the history of Islamic Egypt. By the 1410s, the Hawwāra leaders became the effective rulers of much of the region, with official appointment from the Mamluk sultan. The Hawwāra then continued to dominate Upper Egypt up until the 18th century.⁵¹

As mentioned above, al-Maqrīzī added an insert in his own handwriting regarding the emergence of Hawwāra power in Upper Egypt in the late fourteenth century, the only section in the treatise that can be securely dated to al-Maqrīzī’s own lifetime. In this insert al-Maqrīzī reports that the Hawwāra were installed in Upper Egypt in 782/1380–1381 by al-Zāhir Barqūq, who gave them Ġirġā as *iqṭāʿ*. He then adds that the Hawwāra elite, previously located in the western Delta, put much land into cultivation and set up waterwheels and sugar presses. The passage ends with the name of the current leader of the Hawwāra, Yūsuf b. ʿUmar. When this insert was written, sometime between 841/1438 and al-Maqrīzī’s death in 845/1442, the Banū ʿUmar of the Hawwāra had already established semi-autonomous rule in Upper Egypt. Al-Qalqašandī, writing in the 1410s, stated that the Hawwāra exert influence from al-Bahnasā to Aswan, with the rest of the Arabs (ʿurbān) in Upper Egypt bowing to their will.⁵² The *Bayān*’s brief note, on the other hand, focuses on the agricultural wealth of the Hawwāra and not on their political power. It is unclear why al-Maqrīzī felt obliged to add a note about the Hawwāra—perhaps their hold on power in Upper Egypt was too visible to ignore. Yet even this insert gives no hint of their administrative role and political clout, keeping intact the *Bayān*’s image of the decline of Arab power in Egypt.

50. For a summary of these developments, see Elbendary (2016, pp. 48–54) and Rapoport (2023).

51. Rapoport 2023; Abul-Magd 2013.

52. Al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ* IV, p. 69; VII, p. 162; al-Qalqašandī, *Qalāʾid*, no. 1635.

* * *

What was then the message of the *Bayān*, with its focus on the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods, for the political elites of al-Maqrīzī's time? The key message, it seems, was the lack of historical continuity between the age of the Prophet and the Egyptian Arabs of his own day. They are not, as al-Maqrīzī states in the opening lines, descendants of the tribes of the conquest. Many of them were Berbers, who might trace their genealogy like Arabs but are not even descended from the Arab genealogical tree. Claims of individual tribes to lineage from Companions of the Prophet are denied or suppressed. The Arab tribesmen were not necessarily unruly; they even might conserve some noble Arab qualities. But there is no historical line that connects them to the Prophetic age. They are historical actors like any other, not designated by their ancestry to be the leaders of the community or rulers of Egypt. The Arab and Berber tribal elites of the Mamluk era were not the heirs of the conquerors, but rather the servants of later dynasties. This was a poignant message at a time in which Arab leading houses established themselves as de facto rulers in several Egyptian provinces, most notably in Upper Egypt.

Al-Maqrīzī's disassociation of the present Arabs from the Arab conquest takes its cue from Ibn Ḥaldūn. While the *Muqaddima* views tribal solidarity as a key driving force in human history, the Arabs of Ibn Ḥaldūn's own age are excluded. They are mainly subjects of states rather than their future rulers. In the *Bayān*, too, the actions of Egyptian tribal groups are commonly driven by the manipulations of state authorities. They remain firmly limited to the countryside rather than infiltrating the capital. Their migrations are nearly always at the behest of urban rulers: the arrival of the Sulaym to al-Šarqiyya under the Umayyads, the Fatimid installation of Sinbis in al-Buḥayra and of Qurayš in al-Ašmūnayn, and even the late 14th century settlement of the Hawwāra in Ġirġā are all attributed to decisions made by non-tribal actors in Cairo. There is no Ḥaldunian cycle; the tribes of Egypt do not carry the seeds of a new 'aṣabiyya-based dynasty.

The *Bayān* derives its authority and subsequent popularity from presenting itself as a work of history, written in the cool tone of the detached scholar. The treatise is set in the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods, and intentionally avoids the history of the tribal countryside under the Mamluks. Al-Maqrīzī was a master of telling stories about the past that resonated with the concerns of his own generation. If there is a dramatic climax in the *Bayān*, it lies in the rebellion of Ḥiṣn al-Dīn Ṭa'lab. Al-Maqrīzī attributes to Ḥiṣn al-Dīn an ideology of Prophetic lineage and social status, contrasting it with the manumitted slavery at the heart of the Mamluk regime. Eventually, Ḥiṣn al-Dīn lost, 'Izz al-Dīn Aybak won. It does not seem to be a moral judgment on al-Maqrīzī's part, just the moral of history: the attempts of Arab tribesmen to take control over Egypt are bound to fail.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

AnIsl = *Annales islamologiques*

MSRev = *Mamluk Studies Review*

Database

Al-Maktaba al-Shamela, online database,
<https://shamela.ws/>

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