

*Pilgrimage Certificates from the Mamluk Period: New Data*

Frédéric Bauden

Université de Liège/Università di Pisa<sup>1</sup>

In an article published in 1964, the Sourdels announced the thrilling discovery they made a year before of thousands of fragments of manuscripts and documents that once were kept in the Great Mosque of Damascus.<sup>2</sup> These fragments had been kept unidentified for about half a century in the Türk ve Islâm Eserleri Müzesi in Istanbul where they had been transferred by the Ottoman authorities some time after the 1892 fire that destroyed most of the prayer hall of the Umayyad mosque in Damascus. The Sourdels could not establish how and why these documents had been preserved there for several centuries — even for a millennium for some of them —, but they suspected that they had been discarded at some time and gathered in a single place inside the mosque.

Inside this trove, they discovered a new category of documents for which no specimen had been published so far: the certificate of pilgrimage made by proxy for the benefit of a living or a dead person. The proxy could perform either the major pilgrimage (*hajj*) or the minor one (*umra*), probably depending on the request made by the beneficiary or the executor of his will. The specimens from Damascus testify that the majority were made for the minor pilgrimage (only about forty correspond to the major pilgrimage with or without the minor one).<sup>3</sup> The juridical literature confirms that such an act could be performed for someone else but no example of this practice had ever been brought to the light of day before that date.

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<sup>2</sup> The discovery was announced in Sourdél-Thomine, J., & Sourdél, D. (1964), “Nouveaux documents sur l’histoire religieuse et sociale de Damas au Moyen Âge”, *Revue des études islamiques* 32, p. 1-25; Sourdél-Thomine, J., & Sourdél, D. (1965), “À propos des documents de la Grande Mosquée de Damas conservés à Istanbul. Résultats de la seconde enquête”, *Revue des études islamiques* 33, p. 73-85.

<sup>3</sup> Sourdél, D. & Sourdél-Thomine, J. (1983), “Une Collection médiévale de certificats de pèlerinage à la Mekke conservés à Istanbul. Les actes de la période seljoukide et bouride (jusqu’à 549/1154)”, in *Études médiévales et patrimoine turc. Volume publié à l’occasion du centième anniversaire de la naissance de Kemal Atatürk*, Paris: Éd. du CNRS (“Cultures et civilisations médiévales”, I), p. 170.