

Bethany J. Walker / Abdelkader Al Ghouz (eds.)

# History and Society during the Mamluk Period (1250-1517)

Studies of the Annemarie Schimmel Institute  
for Advanced Study III

Bonn University Press



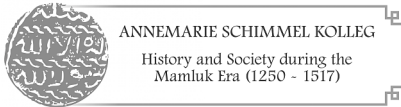


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With 129 figures

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Cover image: Road cleared through basalt scatter in eastern Badiyya, Jordan (courtesy: Prof Peter Akkermans, University of Leiden, Jebel Qurma Project). Pilgrims, merchants, Bedouin, and hungry peasants frequently travelled this route, which connected Egypt with Syria and towns with the countryside, in the waning years of the Mamluk Sultanate. Knowledge and goods, as well, flowed along this remote artery of transport. This final volume of the ASK Working Papers is dedicated to these themes of transmission, migration, change, and renewal.

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## **Travelling and Trading through Mamluk Territory: Chancery Documents Guaranteeing Mobility to Christian Merchants**

This article aims to offer an overview of the documents adopted by the Mamluk chancery to allow Latin traders to enter and travel through the sultanate for the purpose of carrying out commercial activities. Depending on the historical circumstances and the reasons for relations with foreign states, Cairo's diplomacy was capable of effectively adapting the nature of the instruments granting freedom of movement to merchants.

The analysis of such a specific right is also an opportunity to address some broader issues related to diplomatic interaction between the Mamluk government and Christian powers. In particular, this study focuses on some inaccurate historiographical ideas that for a long time have influenced the interpretation of how the Mamluks conceived of and conducted diplomatic dialogue with non-Muslim states.

### **The *amān***

Since the beginning of its existence, the Mamluk sultanate established and then maintained relations with Christian powers such as the Crusader states in Palestine and Syria, as well as several European governments (thirteenth-sixteenth centuries). The reasons behind such exchanges were varied. Primarily commercial, the purposes could be, according to the circumstances, also military, political and religious. Most of the time, the relations implied and fostered the travels of Christian individuals in the Mamluk territories. For this reason, the freedom of movement represented the essential condition for all the foreign ambassadors, merchants and pilgrims who frequented Mamluk Egypt and Syria. In order to grant this right, the chancery of Cairo resorted to several kinds of documents. The aim of the present work is to study and define the characteristics and the nature of these diplomatic instruments, with a particular focus on those authorising traders' mobility.



Traditional historiography dealing with the chancery instruments guaranteeing the circulation of non-Muslim foreigners in a Muslim territory has related the freedom of movement to the *amān* or safe-conduct, considered almost exclusively as a specific – and generally the only – document conferring this right<sup>1</sup>. In the field of Mamluk studies, this association is primarily due to the description of the *amān* provided by al-Qalqashandī (d. 1418), who wrote the most detailed Mamluk chancery manual<sup>2</sup>. This author treats the safe-conducts in the chapter concerning the agreements concluded in peaceful situations<sup>3</sup>. Examining the pacts of *amān* (lit. security, safety), al-Qalqashandī introduces a first distinction between the *amanāt* addressed to Muslims and those directed to non-Muslims. For the purposes of this work, I will focus on the second type of safe-conducts that falls within the macro-category of documents issued by the *dīwān al-inshāʿ* (the Mamluk chancery) to regulate the relations with the “unbelievers”<sup>4</sup>.

Al-Qalqashandī divides the *amanāt* issued for non-Muslims in two categories: the *amān khāṣṣ*, or special safe-conduct, and the *amān ʿamm*, or general safe-conduct. He explains that the *amān khāṣṣ* could be given by any legal competent Muslim to any individual infidel. Instead, the *amān ʿamm* could be conceded only by the imam (the head) of a Muslim community – or his deputies – to any non-Muslim group of people living outside the Muslim territory<sup>5</sup>. The person who received the safe-conduct obtained the protected status of *mustaʿmin*. According to the *Ṣubḥ*, the legal grounds for the *amanāt* addressed to the non-Muslims are found in the Quran. By the verse 6 of the Surah 9, Allah prescribes Muhammad to offer protection to all the polytheists who seek it<sup>6</sup>. The Arabic word used in this passage to designate the asylum is *jiwār*, which connoted a specific right dating back to the pre-Islamic era<sup>7</sup>. Concerning the validity of the *amān*, on the basis of the juridical tradition, Al-Qalqashandī writes that the safe-conduct for the infidels could be valid for a period of four months, extendable up to one year<sup>8</sup>.

Al-Qalqashandī does not deal only with the legal frameworks determining the preparation and the legitimacy of the safe-conducts. He describes also in detail the diplomatic characteristics of these instruments (e.g., format and wordings). This section of the *Ṣubḥ* has led many historians to conceive the safe-conduct as a

1 Wansbrough, *The Safe-Conduct*; Pedani, *La dimora della pace*, p. 13.

2 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*.

3 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, vol. 13, pp. 321–351.

4 Wansbrough, *The Safe-Conduct*, p. 25.

5 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, vol. 13, pp. 321–323.

6 Nasr, *The Study Quran*, Quran, 9, 6: “And if any of the idolaters seek asylum with thee, grant him asylum until he hears the Word of God. Then convey him to his place of safety.”

7 Lecerf, *Djiwār*, pp. 558–559.

8 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, vol. 13, p. 323.

specific document, with distinctive features. However, if we consider the whole set of Mamluk chancery documents concerning the relations with the Christian powers, we can notice that the testimonies, which have exactly the diplomatic characteristics of the *amānāt* as described by al-Qalqashandī, are extremely rare.

## Distinct Chronological Phases, Different Kinds of Documents

When I mention the sources related to the diplomacy between Cairo and the Christian states, I make reference to three types of texts:

1. The original Arabic documents kept in the archives of several European cities that developed commercial exchanges with the sultanate (Venice, Barcelona, Florence, and Ragusa)<sup>9</sup>. These instruments have the appearance of paper scrolls composed of several sheets pasted together, according to the typical chancery shape of the *darj* (pl. *durūj*), that is “scroll”.
2. The translations of Mamluk documents, copied by the secretaries of the European chanceries for the registers of these offices<sup>10</sup>.
3. The documents copied by Mamluk authors in their chronicles or chancery manuals<sup>11</sup>.

The vast majority of the mentioned sources have been published in editions that date back to several decades and, in most cases, do not satisfy all the scientific requirements of contemporary research<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, the studies on Mamluk-European exchanges have focused on the practical implications of these instruments (i. e., trade), rather than on their diplomatic characters<sup>13</sup>. In the cases in which the historians have referred to the Mamluk chancery documents, they have often done so by using generic and improper terms that have led to several misunderstandings. The main reason for such errors is that, for a long time, the

9 Barcelona: Archivo de la Corona de Aragón (ACA), Colecciones, Cartas árabas. Dubrovnik (Ragusa): Državni Arhiv u Dubrovniku. Venice: Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASV), Documenti Algeri, Egitto, Marocco; Libri Commemoriali. Florence: Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Orientali; Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASF), Diplomatico, Varie IV.

10 ACA, Cancillería Real; ASV, Libri Commemoriali; ASF, Signori, Carteggio, missive, I cancelleria; ASF, Signori e Relazioni di Oratori Fiorentini; ASF, Diplomatico, cartaceo, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici.

11 Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, *Tashrif al-ayyām*; Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā*; Ibn al-Furāt, *Ta’rīkh al-duwal*.

12 Amari, *I diplomi arabi*; Alarcón y Santón and De Linares, *Los documentos árabes diplomáticos*; Korkut, *Arapski dokumenti*; Thomas and Predelli, *Diplomatarium Veneto-Levantinum*.

13 Coulon, *Barcelone et le grand commerce d’Orient*; Apellániz., *Pouvoir et finance*; Christ, *Trading Conflicts*.

available sources have not been studied at the light of their diplomatic characteristics, through a comparison with the content of the chancery manuals<sup>14</sup>.

Only over the recent years, the researchers have drawn attention on the importance of better examining the extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of the diplomatic sources in relation to the circumstances and the methods of diplomacy<sup>15</sup>. Concerning the exchanges between the sultanate and Christian interlocutors, these studies allowed the identification of two distinct phases, from a chronological point of view. During the first decades of the sultanate (second half of the thirteenth century), marked by conflicts for the conquest of Syria and Palestine, the documents regulating the agreements between the Mamluks and the Christians were in the majority of cases armistices<sup>16</sup>. In a second phase, after the fall of Acre, the last Christian outposts in the Middle East (1291), the relations between the Mamluks and their European interlocutors had no longer a military nature (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries). The diplomacy adapted in a very short time to the new situation, and other kind of written instruments and strategies were adopted to regulate the diplomatic dialogue<sup>17</sup>.

## The *hudna*

Concerning the documents issued in the first phase, the armistices are diplomatic instruments adopted in wartime conditions. In the diplomatic Arabic lexicon, this kind of document was called *hudna* (pl. *hudan*). This term – originally an abstract word referring to the concept of “calm” or “peace” – assumed the meaning of a suspension of hostilities between two adversaries. For this reason, in the diplomatic language, *hudna* refers to the written instruments ratifying a *muhadana*, namely a truce concluded between two enemies<sup>18</sup>. These agreements would take the form of bilateral undertakings, made with the active participation of two equal parties. Even when one of the two sides was in a stronger position than the other, the diplomatic procedures followed to reach armistices always respected the form of bilateral agreements. Their preparation was based on a negotiating process that led to the drafting of reciprocal oaths, which were then registered in the final version of the *hudna*. The treaty was written in two copies, one for the Mamluk sultanate and the other for the Christian government.

14 Bauden, *Mamluk Diplomatics*.

15 See a recent work that presents several articles examining Mamluk documents through a diplomatic approach: Bauden and Dekkiche, *Mamlūk Cairo: A Crossroads for Embassies*.

16 Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*; Köhler, *Alliances and Treaties*.

17 Frantz-Murphy, *Identity and Security*.

18 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, vol. 14, pp. 1–109.

The armistices were also the first diplomatic tools used by Mamluk administration to enable foreign Christians to carry out pacific activities in Egypt and Syria. Indeed, even though the *hudan* originally served a military purpose, over time they started to present clauses allowing the subjects of the Christian states to travel to the sultanate in order to conduct trade or make pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In the armistice concluded between the sultan al-Manşūr Qalawūn (r. 1279–1290) and the emperor of Constantinople Michael VIII Palaeologus (r. 1261–1282) in 1281, the Mamluk ruler stated that no kind of injustice or oppression could be committed against the merchants coming from the Byzantine Empire in order to practice trade in the Mamluk territories<sup>19</sup>. The text of the treaty adds that the subjects of Michael VIII could not only travel to and through the sultanate, but also reside in it. We find similar clauses in the treaties concluded between Qalawūn and other Christian states, during the following years. The *hudna* negotiated with Lion III (r. 1270–1289), the king of the Lesser Armenia, in 1285, specifies that the merchants of both parties could travel in the respective territories with their chattels and wares, and that they could be escorted into these boundaries<sup>20</sup>. This kind of protection was also a form of control on the foreigners' movements. The treaty concluded with Margaret of Tyre (r. 1284–1291) in the same year allowed the merchants of this city to safely enter in or leave Egypt and Syria in order to buy or sell merchandises<sup>21</sup>.

## An Elaborate “Documentary Procedure”

In the period following the fall of Acre (1291), the relations between the sultanate and the Christian states were no longer characterised – save in exceptional circumstances – by armed conflicts. Trade became explicitly the main reason behind the diplomatic exchanges. Generally, commercial negotiations started with embassies sent to Cairo by European governments in order to obtain the granting or the renewal of rights for the benefit of the foreign trading communities operating in the sultanate. The first among them, in order of importance, was the freedom of trade and circulation. The sultan used to respond to these requests by ordering the secretaries of the chancery the issuing of letters addressed directly to the foreign interlocutors. These documents had the function of communicating the favourable response, by summarising the essential aspects of the stipulations. However, normally they did not specify all the commercial conditions. The rights were instead listed, in the form of clauses, in other kinds of documents. Those

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19 Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*, p. 127.

20 Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*, p. 99.

21 Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*, p. 114.

instruments were in particular decrees (*marāsīm*) or letters (*mukātabāt*) published by Cairo's chancery in the diplomatic form of open ordonnances addressed to the authorities representing the sultan's power in the main Egyptian and Syrian emporia<sup>22</sup>. Specimen of these documents were sent to the governors of the cities and provinces frequented by merchants, and their content was generally directed to all the officers of the Mamluk administration. On the other hand, exact copies of these letters and decrees were produced for the European interlocutors. Once their preparation had been completed, they were signed by the sultan and handed to the foreign ambassadors. Besides the role of informing the diplomatic interlocutors about the conditions of trade, these duplicates performed the function of validating and guaranteeing the sultan's decisions. In turn, the reply letter (*al-jawāb* in the Mamluk chancery lexicon) addressed to the foreign authorities attested the legal validity of these copies. This is the reason why the European archives have preserved original Arabic documents or translations of scripts that are expressly addressed to Mamluk authorities.

The negotiations and their results were therefore based on a complex documentary system. The production of such whole set of documents originated from the letter delivered to the sultan by the foreign ambassadors. This act represented the first step of the written communication. The initial letter, as we have seen, generated then a "network of documents" composed of the reply letter, the ordonnances addressed to the local Mamluk officers, and the copies destined to the European chanceries. All these instruments were closely connected to each other and could function as validation tools for the agreements as a consequence of such reciprocal relation. Indeed, on the one hand, the letter written for the European governors alone was not sufficient to validate the commercial conditions, because it did not specify all the rights granted to traders. On the other hand, the copies of the ordonnances sent to the European governments could not be really valid without the attestation of their legal effectiveness, which was confirmed through the reply letter to the European authorities.

Although this work focuses on the written tools of diplomacy, it should be noted that the success of the negotiations depended also on all the other practical and symbolic modalities of the diplomatic interchange (e. g., oral communication, exchange of gifts, and ceremonial rules)<sup>23</sup>. Only a balanced and effective concurrence among all the forms of communication could allow the Europeans to achieve the expected rights.

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22 Rizzo, *L'ambassade florentine*.

23 Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*.

## Chancery Instruments Allowing the Freedom of Movement after the Fall of Acre

The above-described diplomatic procedure, based on specific interconnected documents, is testified in the chancery sources concerning the relations with the maritime Republics of Venice, Florence, and Ragusa. Such documentary material confirms that this practice was adopted already a few years later the fall of Acre. Indeed, in 1302, the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 1293–1341) responded to the requests of the Venetian emissary Guido Da Canal, by ordering his chancery the issuing of three documents linked to each other<sup>24</sup>. The translations of these scripts have been kept in the chancery registers of Venice. In the archives of the *Serenissima*, we can find a document announcing the *conventiones et pacta*, namely the stipulations (*shurūṭ* in Arabic) negotiated in Cairo. This script is not yet a letter (according to the procedure adopted in the following years), but it is not an armistice, either. In its Latin translation, this script is called *pactum* (pact) and it clearly serves the function of authenticating the agreements as well as attesting the validity of the other Mamluk documents linked to this embassy. These are a *praeceptum* (decree) containing all the commercial clauses and the copy of a letter sent to the governor of Alexandria, informing him about the rights granted to the Venetian merchants. The fact that copies of these three documents (including the letter to the Alexandrian governor) are kept in Venetian archives demonstrates the importance for both chanceries of sharing the all set of written instruments generated by the negotiations. As we have seen, this importance derived not only from the informative role played by these tools. Indeed, these documents were essential in order to legitimise the sultan's decisions.

From the beginning of the fourteenth century onwards, this diplomatic system developed and proved effective in granting the freedom of movement – besides several other trading rights – to the Venetian merchants. The registers of the State Archives of Venice keep several translations in Latin or in Venetian vernacular of Mamluk documents, testifying this practice. At this time, Venice was one of the most powerful European cities active in Mediterranean trade. In February 1344, the sultan 'Imād al-Dīn Ismā'īl (r. 1342–1345) sent a letter to the doge Andrea Dandolo (r. 1343–1354), accompanied by a *praeceptum* (decree) detailing all the trading conditions for the Venetians. This document looks like an open order addressed to all the authorities wielding power in the name of the sultan<sup>25</sup>. In the fifteenth century, this system became more and more elaborated and complex. The letter dated 30 April 1422 addressed by the sultan Barsbāy (r. 1422–1438) to

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24 Thomas and Predelli, *Diplomatarium Veneto-Levantinum*, vol. 1, pp. 5–11.

25 Thomas and Predelli, vol. 1, p. 296: "Omnia suprascripta precepta debeant observari et omnes illi dominium tenentes per dominum soldanum facere debeant, quod observentur".

the doge Tommaso Mocenigo (r. 1413–1423) communicates to the head of the Venetian government the drafting of a set of *praecepta* (*marāsīm*) issued by the *dīwān al-inshā*<sup>26</sup>. In total, these documents are 17, namely a *praeceptum* sent to Venice and several decrees addressed to the local governors of the cities of Alexandria, Damascus, Jerusalem, Aleppo, Tripoli, Amman, and Damietta<sup>26</sup>. These elements highlight how the officers of the central chancery in Cairo were aware about the diffusion of the Venetian commercial activities in the Mamluk territories. Such circulation would not have been possible without a broad freedom of movement.

In the same year (1422), the Florentine government sent its first embassy to Cairo. After having obtained an access to the sea, through the conquest of Pisa and its ports, Florence established diplomatic and commercial relations with the sultanate, inspired by the models of other Mediterranean powers (the Republic of Venice *in primis*). The Florentine mission of 1422 to Egypt is particularly significant in illustrating the functioning and the effectiveness of the diplomatic method developed in the previous decades and already testified in the Venetian-Mamluk relations.

The mission conducted by the Florentine emissaries Federico Brancacci and Carlo Federighi succeeded<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, the sultan Barsbāy replied by sending a letter to Florence, in order to inform the authorities of this city about the acceptance of their requests<sup>28</sup>. By this script, conserved in its original version, the sultan announced to his addressees the issue of four other documents, attesting his decisions: two *muṭlaq*-s (open orders), “on the basis of the Florentines’ requests,” and two *amthilah* (ordonnances, instructions) addressed to the governors of Alexandria and Syria<sup>29</sup>. Unfortunately, the original documents are lost. However, the registers of the Florentine chancery keep the translations of the two *muṭlaq*-s that were seemingly drafted on the basis of the two above-mentioned *amthilah*<sup>30</sup>. Indeed, the content of one of them is explicitly addressed to the governor of Alexandria, while the second one was very probably written on the model of the *mithāl* sent to Damascus.

The practice of responding by means of a letter accompanied by the documents addressed to the sultanate authorities proved once more efficient. In the following years, the sultans will adopt the same practice in managing the dip-

26 Thomas and Predelli, vol. 2, pp. 328–331.

27 Rizzo, *L'ambassade florentine*.

28 ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, scroll A; Translation in Italian of the letter kept in the registers of Florentine Archives: ASF, Diplomatico, cartaceo, 1422/09/22, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici 3r–4r.

29 Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 2, pp. 23–24.

30 ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1422/09/22, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, cc. 1r–2v; ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, 25/9/1422, cc. 1r–2v.

lomatic exchanges with the Florentines. The testimonies in that regard are particularly interesting and rich for the last decades of the sultanate. In 1489, the sultan Qā'itbāy (r. 1468–1496) sent a letter to Florence accompanied by a decree addressed to the functionaries representing the sultan's authority in the sultanate. The two documents are preserved in their original copies<sup>31</sup>. A later embassy dating back to 1497 produced three Mamluk letters, kept in the Florentine Archives: a letter for the members of the government of Florence and two letters sent to the governors of Alexandria and Damascus, listing all the commercial conditions regulating Florentine trade in Egypt and Syria<sup>32</sup>. The letter to the Florentine government refers explicitly to the other two mentioned letters. Finally, in 1510, a few years before the end of the sultanate, the sovereign Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501–1516) replied to the mission conducted by the emissary Bernardino Peruzzi, by sending a letter to the Florentine government with a copy of a letter addressed to the governor of Alexandria<sup>33</sup>. Both scrolls are preserved in the Florentine Archives.

Also in the case of the relations between Ragusa and the sultanate, we can notice the Mamluk chancery practice of sending documents addressed to local officers as means to certify the freedom of movement and other rights. Dubrovnik's Archives, for instance, keep an original Mamluk decree dated 25 November 1515 that is addressed to the Alexandrian authorities and concerns the trade of the merchants from Ragusa<sup>34</sup>.

The diplomatic practice just examined is not attested in the relations between the Mamluks and the Crown of Aragon. In this case, the preserved documentation issued by the chancery of Cairo consists in treaties (thirteenth century) or letters sent by the sultans to the kings of Aragon (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries). These documents did not refer to copies made from decrees or letters addressed to the Mamluk authorities and destined to the Aragon chancery. Furthermore, no specimen of this kind of documents are preserved in the

31 Decree: Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Orientali 455 A, s. A; Wansbrough, *A Mamlūk commercial treaty*, pp. 52–70; Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion* vol. 2, pp. 51–95. Letter: ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, s. D; Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 2, pp. 41–50.

32 Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Orientali 455 A, s. B; Cassetta Cesarini, Doc. Conc. 20; Wansbrough, *Venice and Florence*, pp. 497–523; Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 2, pp. 97–153. ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, s. C; Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Cassetta Cesarini, Doc. Conc. 21; Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 2, pp. 155–208. ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, s. I. Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 2, pp. 209–18; Rizzo, *Three Mamluk Letters*.

33 ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, s. E; Amari, *I diplomi arabi*, pp. 226–9; Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 2, pp. 241–50; Translation: ASF, Diplomatico, cartaceo, 1509/07/02 (B), Riformagioni Atti pubblici, cc. 3, 1v–2v; Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 2, pp. 323–4. ASF, Diplomatico, Varie IV, s. G; Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 2, pp. 251–63. Translation: ASF, Diplomatico, cartaceo, 1509/07/02, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, cc. 1v–2v; Amari, *I diplomi arabi*, pp. 391–2; Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 2, pp. 325–6.

34 Korkut, *Arapski dokumenti*, pp. 38–53.



archives of the Crown, in Barcelona (neither original copies nor translations)<sup>35</sup>. Apparently, the treaties and the letters fulfilled alone the function of guaranteeing the *amān*, the security for the subjects of the Crown travelling in Syria and Egypt. The truce concluded between the sultan al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 1290–1293) and the king James II (r. 1291–1327) on 29 January 1293 announces that all the king's subjects were allowed to visit the holy places in Palestine, under the condition of carrying letters with the king's seal. This letter should be addressed to the representative of the sultan in Jerusalem<sup>36</sup>. Such reference to a specific document requested to the foreigners visiting the sultanate is quite rare in the Mamluk documentation sent to European governments.

In the following years, several sultans' letters attest the freedom of movement for the merchants and pilgrims travelling from the territories of the Crown of Aragon. The agreements aimed above all to encourage and ease Catalan traders' activities<sup>37</sup>. We can only assume the reason why, unlike other European powers, the Crown did not request and need copies of the documents sent to the Mamluk officers as mean of authentication. It is possible that the king enjoyed a privileged status in comparison with the authorities of the Republics, and this difference might have influenced the written modalities of diplomacy. We know that the Mamluk chancery used to adapt the characters of the documentation to the rank of its interlocutors<sup>38</sup>. However, in the current state of knowledge, an opposing hypothesis cannot be ruled out. Indeed, it is also conceivable that relations between the two states, characterised by frequent diplomatic conflicts due to the raids of the Catalan pirates, could have made the diplomatic strategies employed by the Mamluk chancery less rigid than those adopted with other interlocutors<sup>39</sup>.

Thanks to the brief survey on the Mamluk instruments regulating the relations with Christian interlocutors, we can argue that the documents guaranteeing the freedom of movement in the sultanate could be of different kinds. As regards in particular the discrepancy between the theory exposed in the *Subḥ* and the characteristics of the preserved documentary material, Gladys Frantz-Murphy has suggested that al-Qalqashandī illustrated a practice that was in use before the

35 ACA, Colecciones, Cartas árabas; Cancillería Real.

36 ACA, Colecciones, Cartas árabas, n. 145; Amari, *Trattato stipolato*; Alarcón y Santón and García de Linares, *Los documentos árabes diplomáticos*, pp. 338, 343. Translation: ACA, CRD, Jaume II, Cassa 1, num. 222; Masiá de Ros, *La Corona de Aragón*, pp. 266–270. Here, we can notice that the practice of concluding truces continued some years after the fall of Acre (1291). However, in this case, the treaty is probably a verbatim copy of another treaty concluded in 1290 (Holt, *The Mamluk Sultanate and Aragon*).

37 The positive effects of these agreements can be found in Coulon, *Barcelone et le grand commerce d'Orient*.

38 Dekkiche, *Diplomatics*, pp. 185–213.

39 I am currently working on a project concerning the diplomatic exchanges between the Crown of Aragon and the Mamluk Sultanate, in order to address these kinds of issues.

thirteenth century<sup>40</sup>. According to this hypothesis, the diplomatic custom of drafting a specific *amān* addressed to foreigners, at some point, would have been completely abandoned. Frantz-Murphy writes that, while the earliest safe conducts were issued in the form of a letter, the *amānāt* produced during the Mamluk regime used to take the form of decrees addressed to the ruler's officials, with copies given to the consul as the representatives of the foreign merchant communities and to local Mamluk officers. As we have seen, this statement is partly true, but it has been also ascertained that the instruments functioning as safe-conducts were more varied, if compared to Frantz-Murphy's description. First, it should be noted that the practice of producing specific *amanāt* as those described by al-Qalqashandī was not completely abandoned. The author could indeed identify two documents looking like translations of *amānāt* issued by Mamluk chancery: the first one was a safe-conduct expressly addressed to "the Venetian consul and to all Venetian merchants" (1418), and the second one, dated 1508, was issued by the sultan Qāṣawh al-Ghawrī to the "community of the Florentines"<sup>41</sup>. On the other hand, the exam of the preserved archival material demonstrated that the armistices or the letters could perfectly perform the role of granting general safe-conducts. In diplomatic praxis, the written tools functioning as *amanāt* were therefore much more varied in nature than al-Qalqashandī or Frantz-Murphy argue.

## Terminological Misinterpretations in Historiography

The study of the diplomatic instruments employed by the *dīwān al-inshā'* to allow the foreign Christians to frequent the Mamluk territory raises some terminological issues. More specifically, I think it is useful to focus on two concepts that had led to considerable misunderstandings in Mamluk studies, namely those of "treaty" and "privileges".

In diplomatic vocabulary, the word "treaty" generally designates a written agreement concluded between two political powers, formally approved by their leaders. In the field of Mamluk-Christian diplomacy, this term would be appropriate, strictly speaking, to designate the *hudan* (i. e., the treaties of truce or armistices)<sup>42</sup>. As we have seen, several *hudan* were concluded between the sultans

40 Frantz-Murphy, *Identity and Security*, p. 254.

41 ASV, *Procuratori di San Marco, Commissarie miste*, b. 180, fasc. 9, 1r: "Salvoconduto del soldan, che Dio el mantegna, al chonsolo de veniziani et tuti marchadanti veniziani [...] per so segurtà" ("Safe-conduct of the sultan to the consul of Venitians and all Venitian merchants [...] for their security"); ASF, Diplomatico, cartaceo, 1508/11/00, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici: "The present safe-conduct in the name of the Florentines".

42 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā'*, vol. 14, pp. 1–109.

and the Christian states during the second half of the thirteenth century primarily as a solution for armed conflicts. However, if we take into account the studies on Mamluk diplomacy, we can notice that the word “treaty” is often applied to a wider range of documents regulating the relations between the Cairo administration and other interlocutors. “Treaty” has thus become a synonymous of “written agreement”<sup>43</sup>. The broader use of this word has negatively affected the understanding of the nature of chancery documents. Indeed, it has been often applied to instruments such as the *marāsīm* (decrees) or the *mukātabāt* (letters) addressed to Mamluk authorities. We have seen that these documents had different characteristics from the treaties of truce (*hudan*).

Another term that affected significantly the way of perceiving the diplomatic relations between the Mamluks and their Christian interlocutors is “privileges.” This word was used – in different languages – to refer to the results of the agreements made between the representatives of the European governments and the Mamluks. This term was employed both in the medieval translations of Mamluk documents and in the studies concerning Mamluk relations with European states<sup>44</sup>.

The term “privileges” has been usually used to translate the Arabic word *shurūṭ* (sing. *sharṭ*). *Sharṭ* in Arabic literally means “stipulation”, which is a condition or requirement that is specified or demanded as part of an agreement<sup>45</sup>. The word *shurūṭ* occurs in several Mamluk documents concerning the trade with the European communities. It generally refers to all the commercial conditions enjoyed by the foreign merchants and established through diplomatic negotiations<sup>46</sup>. Such connotation is different from the original meaning of the term “privilege” (i. e., a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group). In Arabic, this concept is expressed by the word *imtiyāz*, rather than *sharṭ*<sup>47</sup>.

The misinterpretation of the term *shurūṭ* has led many scholars to depict the results of the embassies sent to Cairo between the fourteenth and the sixteenth century as unilateral “concessions” made by the sultans in response to the re-

43 Wansbrough, *A Mamluk commercial treaty*; Moukarzel, *Venetian Merchants*.

44 Thomas and Predelli, vol. 2, pp. 20, 309, 353; Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 2, pp. 271, 286, 326; Wansbrough, *Venice and Florence*; Theunissen, *Ottoman-Venetian diplomatics*; Christ, *Masked Cooperation*. Even scholars such as Hans Theunissen and Georg Christ, who have closely studied several aspects of Mamluk diplomacy, shedding new light on the dialogue with European states, make extensive use of the term “privileges.” For the reasons set out in this article, the author thinks that such a term could lead to ambiguities with regard to the nature of the documents.

45 Frantz-Murphy, *Identity and Security*, pp. 259–260.

46 Ruiz Orsatti, *Tratado de paz*, p. 336; See the several documents concerning Florentine trade published in Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 2.

47 Frantz-Murphy, *Identity and Security*, p. 260.

quests of the foreign emissaries<sup>48</sup>. These studies assume more or less implicitly a significant disparity of rank between the sultans and their interlocutors. According to this interpretation, after the war against the Crusader states, the Mamluks would have reached a position of superiority over the Christian powers. Not more threatened by the military force of their non-Muslim enemies in Syria and Palestine, the sultans would have thus changed their “diplomatic attitude” towards the European states.

It has been observed that the documents regulating the diplomatic relations in large part changed between the first (thirteenth century) and the second phase (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries). However, it would be an incorrect simplification to attribute this variation to a categorical difference of rank between the Mamluk sultans and their interlocutors. If we consider the diplomatic negotiations as well as the economic dynamics, we notice that the reality was much more complex.

### **Bilateral Stipulations Rather than Unilateral Concessions**

Certainly, the approaches to conclude an armistice were different from those conducting to commercial stipulations. The first ones were based on reciprocal undertakings, while the second ones always started by petitions the European ambassadors submitted to the sultans. However, it must be emphasised that also the commercial agreements were always the result of diplomatic negotiations between the two parties. Testimonies as the preserved travel journals concerning European embassies to Cairo often illustrate in details the different steps of the diplomatic interchange. These sources are very useful tools to understand the length and the complexity of this process. In his journal, Felice Brancacci describes the delicate negotiations conducted to reach the first Florentine-Mamluk agreement in which the main functionaries of the Mamluk administration were involved as intermediaries of the sultan<sup>49</sup>. Ninety years later, the diplomatic procedures were not simpler, if the Venetian emissary Domenico Trevisan had to meet the sultan Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī seven times before reaching an agreement (1512)<sup>50</sup>.

The European diplomats used to leave their governments bringing with them the different petitions to be submitted to the sultans. In some cases, these documents are preserved, in particular when they were copied in the registers of the European chanceries. It is the case, for instance, of the requests submitted by

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48 Theunissen, *Ottoman-Venetian diplomatics*, p. 26; Köhler, *Alliances and Treaties*, p. 295.

49 Brancacci, *Diario di Felice Brancacci*; Rizzo, *Diplomatie sur le terrain*.

50 Schefer, *Le voyage d'Outremer*.

the Florentine ambassador Luigi Della Stufa to Qā'itbāy<sup>51</sup>. The first clause of this document, as was customary, concerns the freedom of movement in the Mamluk domain, namely the indispensable condition – and not an exclusive prerogative – for all the trading communities that were maintaining pacific relations with the sultanate.

Concerning the issue of the alleged “diplomatic superiority” of the sultans in comparison with their European interlocutors, it could be useful to briefly recall the importance of spice trade for the Mamluk state. As recent studies have demonstrated, the sale of spices from East Asia to European merchants was of cardinal importance for the government of Cairo<sup>52</sup>. The revenues collected by the sale of these products became more and more essential in the last decades of the Mamluk regime. Indeed, the sultanate required vast financial resources to maintain the army composed by Mamluk soldiers, especially when the Ottomans became a significant threat, at the juncture of fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A large part of the stocks of spices was sold to European traders by Egyptian or Syrian merchants directly linked to the sultan. The Europeans used to pay these goods in gold that was destined to a large extent to the state coffers. Considering that these profits represented for Mamluk government a key resource for the payment of the soldiers, it follows that it was essential for the Mamluks to make every effort to promote the activities – and their mobility through the sultanate – of the European trading communities. Such economic framework corroborates the fact that the rights enjoyed by Europeans could not be considered as unilateral concessions, or “privileges,” but as the results of beneficial stipulations for both parties<sup>53</sup>.

Gladys Frantz Murphy has noticed how much this misunderstanding has affected the historiography, pointing out that in the *Encyclopedia of the Islam* the entry for the chancery documents concerning European trade is under the Arabic term *imtiyāzāt* (lit. “privileges”). However, this word never appears in the Mamluk archival documentation concerning the exchanges with the Christians<sup>54</sup>.

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51 ASF, Diplomatico, Cartaceo, 1488, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici, cc. 1r–5r.

52 Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*.

53 Such a conclusion obviously concerns the actual conduct of the diplomatic dialogue, rather than the theoretical principles set out in the chancery manuals. While such works tended to hierarchize relations between the parties, in practice the commercial interests meant that the documents issued after the negotiations did not depict the interlocutors of the Mamluks as being of lower status.

54 Frantz-Murphy, *Identity and Security*, p. 260.

## Commercial Rights for Communities of Merchants

Another issue that has influenced the studies on the documents attesting free mobility for the Christians is the identity of their beneficiaries.

For a long time, historiography has interpreted the commercial exchanges testified by the chancery documents as relations between states<sup>55</sup>. In this perspective, the stipulations would concern the subjects of a specific government. More recently, researches that have dealt with both diplomatic documents and notarial deeds have reinterpreted under a new light this idea.

Analysing the diplomatic sources, Frantz-Murphy has specifically aimed attention on the words referring to the beneficiaries of the rights listed in the Mamluk documents. The historian rightly claims that many misunderstandings resulted from the incorrect interpretations of these terms<sup>56</sup>. The letters and the decrees concerning commercial issues usually designate the beneficiaries of the rights as *ṭāʿifa*, *jamāʿa*, and, more rarely, *jins*. *Ṭāʿifa* refers to an association of persons sharing a legal identity, *jamāʿa* indicates a community, and *jins* translates the concept of “kind,” “genus”. The three terms are clearly related to the idea of “community of persons,” rather than “citizens” or “subjects” of a specific state.

In the medieval Italian translations of the Mamluk documents, these terms have often been rendered by the word *natione* (or its variations)<sup>57</sup>. *Natione* comes from the Latin *natio*, which in the Middle Ages referred usually to a community of individuals organised according specific rules (i.e., community of merchants)<sup>58</sup>. The semantic evolution of the term “nation” in the Modern Era would have led many historians to anachronistically conceive the addressees of the documents issued by Cairo as the citizens of nation-states, rather than the members of trading communities.

Recent studies based on notarial deeds concerning the activities of Christian merchants in Mamluk cities have shown the complexity of the dynamics governing the internal and external relations of these communities<sup>59</sup>. From a legal point of view, the members of the *nationes* were not always univocally identified on the basis of their city or state of origin. Indeed, belonging to a *ṭāʿifa* did not necessarily mean to share a common place of origin. We know, for instance, that the Florentines, before establishing diplomatic relations with the sultans in 1422, could carry out commercial activities in Mamluk cities because they were con-

55 Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant*.

56 Frantz-Murphy, *Negotiating the Last Mamluk-Venetian Commercial Decree*, p. 749.

57 Frantz-Murphy, *Identity and Security*, p. 253.

58 Michienzi, *La ‘nation’ et les milieux d’affaires florentins*, pp. 303–304.

59 Christ, *Masked Cooperation*; Christ, *Settling Accounts with the Sultan*; Apellániz, *Judging the Franks*.

sidered affiliated to the Pisan community<sup>60</sup>. Recognised as Pisans, the citizens of Florence – as other Tuscan merchants – could benefit the same rights granted to the merchants of Pisa. These communities responded to the authority of a consul who was in charge of representing its members in front of the Mamluk administration. Even this officer was not always a citizen of the state that gave the name to the community. This is the case of Mariotto Squarcialupi, Florentine consul, who in the middle of the fifteenth century acted as consul of the Catalan community<sup>61</sup>. In this light, it is evident that the boundaries among the communities were not always easily defined.

Some historians have recently drawn attention on the juridical framework regulating the activities of the foreign merchants in cities as Alexandria and their interaction with the local traders. Rather than considering the different *ṭā'ifa*-s as separate groups referring to specific legal systems, scholars as Georg Christ and Francisco Apellániz prefer to describe the merchants as the members of a macro-cosmopolitan community. In a recent article, Christ conceives the Mamluk sultanate as a domain without rigid borders, but able to integrate through effective diplomatic strategies external groups. Christ reports that all foreigners were perceived as coming from the fringes, rather than from outside the sultanate<sup>62</sup>. A consequence of this approach would be the fact that the European consuls were somehow integrated into the Mamluk polity. Christ goes far as claiming that the Venetian consul acted as a vassal of the Mamluk sultan<sup>63</sup>. Although these conclusions should be developed – and perhaps attenuated – they contribute to showing that rights as mobility could not be interpreted as privileges granted univocally by the Mamluk government to the citizens of a state.

In order to understand the limits and the advantages of the mobility, it is useful to dwell with the content of the clauses referring to the freedom of movement.

## Clauses Concerning Mobility

If we look at the document articles concerning the mobility of Christian merchants in Mamluk territory, we can notice that this right is nearly never limited to specific places. Furthermore, the content of the clauses attests it remained almost unchanged from the beginning of the sultanate until its end. Generally, they refer to the possibility of visiting the *thughūr* (sing. *thaghr*) of Egypt and Syria. In the

60 Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 1, pp. 30–31.

61 Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 1, p. 377.

62 Christ, *The Venetian Consul*, p. 63.

63 Christ, *The Venetian Consul*, p. 68.

documents, the term *thaghr*, originally designating a borderland march, is employed to refer to a frontier zone often associated to commercial ports such as Alexandria. The term *thaghr*, unlike other words related to the concept of borders, conveys the idea of a relation with the outside<sup>64</sup>. In such outward looking areas, Muslims and non-Muslims used to interact under the rules set out in the letters and the decrees. Even though, for practical reasons, Latin merchants used to frequent the *thughūr* more than other places, the documents usually refer to the possibility of them travelling through all the territories of the sultanate.

Other kinds of sources shed light on the concrete application of these norms. Testimonies as the notarial deeds or the travellers' accounts provide further information on the places where the merchants conducted their operations<sup>65</sup>. According to these testimonies, the presence of European traders is usually recorded in the customs office and the *funduq*-s (warehouses).

In the custom office, where the goods were weighted and evaluated in view of the taxation, the foreign traders could also temporarily stock their goods in dedicated stores and close their first sales. In the *funduq*, usually a square-shaped building organized around a central courtyard, the foreign merchants and travellers could stay, stock their goods, and conduct trade. All the main trading communities had a *funduq* at their disposal.

Scholars have recently shown the practical and symbolic functions of the customs office and the *funduq* to be those of controlling and protecting foreign merchants<sup>66</sup>. The *funduq*-s could, for example, be locked at night or during Friday prayers<sup>67</sup>. However, the restrictive role these places played should not be overestimated. Indeed, even the pilgrims, who often provide us with the most detailed accounts of the rigidity of the regulation of these buildings, were never forbidden to leave the *funduq*-s and to continue their journey through the Holy Places in Palestine<sup>68</sup>.

It should also be noticed that the *funduq*-s and the custom offices appear more often than other places in sources as the European notarial deeds because the notaries were often active in these buildings. Moreover, no evidence remains of all the transactions regulated by means of oral testimonies.

With regards to the possibility of travelling between the cities of the sultanate, a clause appearing in a decree concerning the Florentine community is partic-

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64 Brauer, *Boundaries and Frontiers*.

65 Sennoune, *Fondouks, khans et wakalas*; Sopracasa, *Les marchands vénitiens*; Apellániz, *Venetian Trading Networks*.

66 Sopracasa, *Venezia e l'Egitto*, pp. 379–386; Constable, *Housing the Stranger*; Valérian, *Le fondouk, instrument du contrôle sultanien*. Concerning the control exercised by Mamluk officers on foreigners, see: Gourinard, *Alexandrie, ville sous haute surveillance*.

67 Valérian, *Les marchands latins*, p. 448; Constable, *Housing the Stranger*, pp. 279–280.

68 Fabri, *Le Voyage en Égypte*; Frescobaldi, *Viaggio di Lionardo di Nicolò Frescobaldi*.



ularly significant. This document grants to the citizens of Florence the right of dressing like the local inhabitants<sup>69</sup>. It is known that in the Mamluk society, such as other traditional societies, the dress code was particularly significant to distinguish its members and to mark the boundaries between the different groups. Some travellers have reported, for instance, that distinctive dressing rules were applied to the followers of the different religions<sup>70</sup>. For these reasons, the right attested by the Florentine document is meaningful. In order to prevent discriminations and harassments at the expense of the Florentines during their travels within the Mamluk territory, the sultan allowed them to adopt the external characteristics of the Mamluk community. It is evident that this advantage would not have been necessary, if their activities had been confined only to specific places.

After having examined the practical aspects of mobility, I briefly take into account the theoretical background legitimising the exchanges.

## Theoretical Background and Diplomatic Pragmatism

A study on the nature of the documents allowing the foreign Christians to move freely through the Mamluk domain cannot neglect the issue of the Islamic principles underlying the management of the relations with non-Muslims.

Dealing with the diplomatic interaction between the Muslim and the Christian chanceries, historiography has often referred to the traditional Islamic division of the world in two main *diyār* (abodes): the *dār al-Islām* (abode of Islam) and the *dār al-ḥarb* (abode of the war)<sup>71</sup>. This partition is based on the assumption that a permanent state of war would characterise the relations between the two parties<sup>72</sup>. In order to enable exchanges between the Muslim territories and the other countries, the conceptualisation of a new block emerged in the juridical discourse: the *dār al-‘ahd* (abode of the pact) or *dār al-ṣulḥ* (abode of the peace)<sup>73</sup>. The *dār al-‘ahd* is a non-Muslim state that, by way of a truce (*hudna*) with the Muslims, can suspend the conflict with its counterpart for a specific duration. In this way, the doctrine of a permanent opposition was modified by the addition of a more pragmatic concept, which allowed the Muslims to develop peaceful relations with non-Muslim interlocutors living outside the *dār al-Islām*.

69 Doc. ASF, Diplomatico, cartaceo, 1488 B, Riformagioni Atti Pubblici; Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion*, vol. 2, p. 302.

70 Brancacci, *Diario di Felice Brancacci*, p. 178; Balestracci, *Terre ignote strana gente*, pp. 191–192.

71 Pedani, *La dimora della pace*, pp. 6–7.

72 Khadduri, *War and Peace in the law of Islam*, pp. 51–53.

73 Pedani, *La dimora della pace*, p. 6.

From a theoretical point of view, the idea of an “abode of the pact” is not detached from the principle that the natural interaction between the two parts is the conflict. Indeed, in the “three abodes” conception, the peace is considered just a temporary suspension of the “natural” state of war.

Scholars have recently questioned the theory of the *diyār* under a new light. The guiding objective of these studies is re-examining the historical and historiographical use of the theory of the abodes and other related aspects as jihad. In the opinion of their authors, these notions have been often simplified as monolithic and unchanged concepts<sup>74</sup>.

In the field of juridical Islamic discipline, the branch dealing with the management of the relations with non-Muslim people is named *siyar*. As the other branches of Islamic jurisprudence, *siyar* is based on the traditional sources, *in primis* the Quran and the hadiths. Among the four schools of jurisprudence, the Ḥanafites were particularly productive in works concerning *siyar*, thanks to authors such as Abū Ḥanīfa and Shaybānī<sup>75</sup>. These jurists studied the principles regulating the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims, examining aspects such as the legitimacy or the practical implementation of the agreements. Their works as well as the commentaries written on them constituted the theoretical basis for handling the relations with the “unbelievers” in the first centuries of Islam. Another legal source that was used for the management of the exchanges and that can provide, at the same time, information on their legal interpretation is the fatwas. The fatwa issued by the mufti Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī in the fourteenth century, for instance, dealt specifically with the safe-conducts addressed to the foreigners travelling in a Muslim territory<sup>76</sup>. This legal opinion is preserved in a manuscript containing also a commentary written some decades after the death of the author<sup>77</sup>. The text distinguishes non-Muslim people visiting a Muslim territory in four classes: ambassadors, merchants, pilgrims, and persons who want to hear the Quran. For all of them, the fatwa envisages the possibility of benefiting from an *amān*.

It is not possible analyse here the qualitative and the quantitative complexity of the juridical sources concerning *siyar*. I would rather focus, once again, on the archival documents, in order to understand how the relations were conceived from a concrete point of view.

As I have discussed, the written modalities of diplomacy between the sultanate and the Christians can be broadly distinguished in two different phases.

74 Heck, “*Jihād*” revisited; Abdelkader, Manabilang Adiong and Mauriello, *Islam and International Relations*; Calasso and Lancioni, *Dār al-Islām*; Albrecht, *Dār al-Islām Revisited*.

75 Dekkiche, *Mamluk Diplomacy*, p. 115.

76 Atiya, *An Unpublished XIVth-Century Fatwā*.

77 The identity of the commentator, named Abu al-Barakāt in the text is uncertain: Atiya, *An Unpublished XIVth-Century Fatwā*, p. 57.

The documents issued by Cairo chancery in the second half of the thirteenth century show references to the war, but the abodes (*diyār*) are not mentioned. The first decades of the Mamluk regime were characterised by battles that led to the defeat of the Christian States in Syria and Palestine and to the conquest of these regions by the Mamluk troops. From a theoretical point of view, this war was almost ever conceived by the Mamluk government as a defensive tool<sup>78</sup>. Indeed, the re-conquest of cities such as Jerusalem represented the defence of Holy places whose importance is crucial in the Islamic tradition. Moreover, taking into account the diplomatic history of this phase, it becomes clear that the conflicts were often provoked by the breakings of agreements previously concluded<sup>79</sup>. The cases of violent episodes – as acts of piracy – are always conceived in diplomatic sources as extraordinary occurrences<sup>80</sup>. At least formally, the government of Cairo justified the attacks on Christians through the violation of a state of peace.

Concerning the documentation produced by the *dīwān al-inshā'* after the fall of Acre (1291), the diplomatic instruments almost never contain references to armed opposition between the Sultanate and Christian states. In the letters and the decrees kept in European Archives, the peace does not appear as a temporary interruption of war. The absence of armed conflicts is rather the natural state of affairs in which the commercial exchanges between the Mamluk sultanate and other powers (never identified as *dār al-Islām*, *dār al-ḥarb* or *dār al-'ahd*) were maintained. This is also the case of the documents the Mamluk chancery issued during the relations with the king Alphonso V of Aragon (r. 1416–1458) that were not always easy because of the Catalans' acts of piracy. The chancery sources concerning the exchanges with the Crown of Aragon in this period insist on peace and reciprocal friendship between the two powers.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that, in the diplomatic documentation, the rights of Christian foreigners (e. g., the possibility of moving through the sultanate) are nearly always represented as ordinary conditions. In no case they are interpreted as “privileges” or exclusive rights conceded in exceptional peacetimes. The security for Christian merchants was rather the obvious prerequisite to allowing them to carry out commercial exchanges in Egypt and Syria. Beyond the traditional dichotomies peace-war or *dār al-Islām-dār al-ḥarb*, this safety made it possible the interaction of the different actors playing in a “macro Mediterranean *dār*.”

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78 Heck, “*Jihād*” revisited, p. 114.

79 Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*, pp. 11–23.

80 Holt, *The Mamluk Sultanate and Aragon*.

The above survey of the chancery sources has shown that, throughout its history, the Mamluk government resorted to different kinds of instruments to ensure the circulation of foreign merchants in the domains of the sultanate. The *amān* – intended here as “safety,” rather than as a specific document – could be guaranteed, according to the historical circumstances, through truces, letters or decrees. The importance of such a right is due to the fact that it guaranteed trading activities that were always beneficial – if not essential – to both the Latin communities and the Mamluk government. For this reason, in theory at least, the documents guaranteed the merchants visiting the sultanate almost total freedom of movement. At the same time, they strongly condemned all kinds of abuse of this right. Harassment was undoubtedly a frequent occurrence, and the favourable conditions attested to in the documents were probably often restricted in practice, but these limitations were obviously never strong enough to prevent commercial transactions. Cairo’s diplomacy was able to remodel its procedures according to the interests of the interlocutors, promoting the continuity of exchanges or, much more rarely, reconciliation after a dispute.

Obviously, the adaptability of diplomacy was never automatic, because the chancery always had to provide a rationale for using its methods. If tangible steps have recently been taken in the study of such modalities, many of them remain to be investigated. This article has focused on the specific aspect of the merchants’ freedom of movement. Future research will examine other features of the relations, taking into account the three levels of the theoretical principles, the chancery instruments, and the effective implementation of the dialogue. In this respect, diplomatic documents should be studied as the key tool of the aforementioned versatility, the central pivot around which the legal theories and the actual exchanges revolved. Only from this perspective it is possible to understand the framework of the practical and symbolic management of diplomacy in its entirety.

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