THE MAMLUK DOCUMENTS OF THE VENETIAN STATE ARCHIVES: HANDLIST
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FRÉDÉRIC BAUDEN

THE MAMLUK DOCUMENTS OF THE VENETIAN STATE ARCHIVES: HANDLIST

This article aims at providing a short description of the Mamluk documents (material and contents). Under this heading, we decided to gather all the Arabic documents preserved in the Venetian State Archives: those issued by officials of the Mamluk government, still in the original language or translated into Venetian, as well as those of a private nature dealing with members of the Venetian community in Alexandria. Some of them have already been studied, but the major part remains unpublished and is still waiting for a thorough analysis and an edition, a task that we would like to achieve in the near future. It is a commonplace to say that we have at our disposal very few documents from the Mamluk period in comparison to later periods in Islam or to the situation in Europe, although this impression is progressively tempered by new discoveries. With this small contribution, we hope to bring to the knowledge of scholars the existence of these documents and reveal their importance for Mamluk as well as Mediterranean studies.

I

Documenti Algeri, Egitto, Marocco, busta unica: Egitto, no. 1 (previously Documenti turchi, busta 15). Oriental paper; width 20 cms., actual length 588 cms.; 24 sheets (waslı) each of 27,5-29 cms., including the fragments at the beginning; three fragments at the top of document; verso blank.

i. Letter from the Mamluk Sultan Qā’itbāy to the Doge Niccolò Tron, dated 10 Ša‘bān 877 A.H./10 January 1473 A.D.; 60 lines.

S. Labib was the first to describe this document and to partly translate it into German (“Ein Brief des Mamluken Sultans Qā’itbey an den Dogen von Venedig aus dem Jahre 1473”, in Der Islam 37 (1957), pp. 324-329). Then, it was published by J. Wansbrough (“A Mamluk Letter of 877/1473”, in BSOAS 24 (1961), pp. 200-213), and later by Fr. Hours (“Fraude commerciale et politique internationale: les relations entre

1 Cf. documents I, II, III, VI, XIII, XVI.
2 Cf. document IV.
3 Cf. documents V, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XV, XVII, XVIII, XIX.
4 The first document to be studied will be XIII.

QSA 20-21 (2002-2003), pp. 147-156
l’Egypte et Venise d’après une lettre de Qāyṭ Bāy (1472-1473)”, in BEO 25 (1972), pp. 173-183), who apparently ignored the latter’s work, as no reference to it is found in his article. J. Wansbrough gave a transcription of the Arabic text with an English translation together with a transcription of the official contemporary translation prepared by a Venetian clerk and found in the Libri Commemoriali, adding a facsimile of the complete document that may be found between pp. 206-207, while Fr. Hours translated in French the Arabic text, of which he proposed a reading.

The document is in fact a reply to a letter sent by the Doge to the Sultan, in which Tron complained about the quality of pepper exported from Egypt and the mistreatments received by Venetian merchants in Syria, but also exposed the possible conclusion of an alliance between Venice and the Āq Qoyûnlū. In his answer, the Sultan reassured the Doge about the purity of the pepper and the condition of the Venetian merchants in his lands. However, he took the opportunity to present to the Doge his own grievances regarding the purity of gold and silver brought on Venetian vessels, the quality of merchandises like velvet and woolen clothes imported by Venetian merchants, and finally about the fact that Muslims were attacked and made prisoners by persons aboard the ships on which the envoy travelled.

Notes:

1) The following readings in Fr. Hours, op. cit., must be corrected with those found in Wansbrough’s article: 1. 19 (in the document) al-ṭāghr al-sikandariyya (recte al-ṭāghr al-sikandari), 1. 31 bi-l-miyar (recte bi-l-miyan), 1. 34 minhu (recte min ḍālik), 1. 36 yuḥdirū (recte yujahhizā), 1. 38 ya’tamidūn (recte ya’tamidū), 1. 38 minhu (recte min ḍālik), 1. 47 Allāh (recte ḍālik), 1. 54 fa-nuḥītū (recte fa-yaḥītū), 1. 55 al-karim (recte al-nukarram), 1. 58 before Muḥammad add sayyidinā as suggested by Wansbrough (p. 210, note 1).

2) Moreover Hours did not read the ḥasbala for which Wansbrough proposed ḥasbunā Allāh ṭuknun, although the reading ḥasbunā Allāh wa-kafā seems better in this case.6

3) On the other hand, the following readings appearing in Wansbrough’s article must be corrected according to what is found in Hours: 1. 3 wa-Lamāyisiyya (recte wa-l-Māyisiyya), 1. 47 fa-yuḥhizahum (recte fa-yuḥahhizahum).

4) Hours was unable to identify the word Karāk which corresponds to Croatia in the document.

II

Documenti Algeri, Egitto, Marocco, busta unica: Egitto, no. 2a7 (previously Documenti turchi, busta 15). Oriental paper; width 18,5 cms., length 27,5 cms. Traces of folding in four perpendicular strips, then one horizontal.

6 Cf. H. Ernst, Die mamlukischen Sultansurkunden des Sinai-Klosters, Wiesbaden 1960, p. XXXVII, where it does not only appear in two documents, as indicated by Wansbrough (p. 213, note 7), but rather fifteen.
A. Recto

Left margin

i. Document related to the Cyprus tribute to be paid by Venice; dated on the verso (see under iii below); 17 lines.

Contents: It concerns the tribute to be paid for the island of Cyprus by the Venetian community (jamāʿat al-Banādiqa). The document specifies that the payment will be made in Alexandria by the Venetian Consul. The interpreter Taḏrī Birdī will be involved in this transaction. J. Wansbrough (“A Mamluk Ambassador to Venice in 913/1507”, in BSOAS 26 (1963), pp. 503-530) just mentioned this document in relation with Taḏrī Birdī’s titles. It appears that he did not use this part of the document as he did not quote the title al-Ašrafī appended to Taḏrī Birdī’s name.

Right margin

ii. Receipt for the Cyprus tribute paid by Venice to the Mamluk Sultan, dated 6 Du al-Ḥijja 895 A.H./21 October 1490 A.D.; 8 lines.

Contents: In presence of the Viceroy in Alexandria, ‘Alī Bey,9 Taḏrī Birdī the translator9 testifies that he received six thousand dinars from the hands of Markaňţūn (Marco Antonio),10 deputy of Amrūj Kuntarīn (Ambrogio Contarini), Venetian Consul in Alexandria. Three attestations.

B. Verso

iii. A date in the same handwriting as i (22 Du al-Qa’da 895 A.H./7 October 1490 A.D.); 2 lines.

iv. Inscription in Latin (same as appearing on 2b); 3 lines.

III

Documenti Algeri, Egitto, Marocco, busta unica: Egitto, no. 4 (previously Miscellanea di Atti Diplomatici e Privati, no. 1576). Parchment; width 42 cms., length 57.5 cms.

Commercial treaty in Latin and Venetian concluded between the Republic and the Sultan through his ambassador Taḏrī Birdī, dated 31 May 1507.


The document was published by J. Wansbrough (“A Mamluk Ambassador to Venice in 913/1507”, in BSOAS 26 (1963), pp. 503-530). He gave a transcription of the

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7 2b consists in a sheet of paper which served as an envelope where the following Latin inscription was written: ‘Littere Serenissimi Domini Sultani pro receptione Ducatorum. VI’.
10 The name that follows is illegible at the present stage of this research.
full text, the Arabic attestations included, and a translation into English (pp. 518-530) together with a facsimile of the document (between pp. 512-513).

Note: The word “ibn” betweenMuḥammad and ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, and between Aḥmad and ‘Abd was not read by J. Wansbrough, although it appears clearly on the document.

IV

Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, fasc. IX, no. 1. Occidental paper; a sheet of paper folded in two; width 22,5 (45) cms., length 20 cms.; second page blank.

A. Recto

i. Translation in Venetian of a decree (marsūm); dated 2 [Rabī’ 1] 821/9 April [1418]; 31 lines.

Contents: The document was addressed to “l’almraio grando” (malik al-umarā’) in Alexandria. The Venetian Consul presented a petition regarding Muslim creditors. The first of them, called Zemeledin Torexin (Jamāl al-Dīn), is the creditor of several Venetian merchants who are in prison. The other, a renegade from Castilla, who says that a Venetian merchant owes him money, should receive nothing according to the Muslim law. The Consul asked, for him and all the members of the community, not to pay for these merchants, lest they have signed a document testifying that they are their guarantors, and this in respect of the various decrees issued in this sense by the Sultan’s predecessors. The decree confirms this attitude and further stresses that the Venetians should not be molested and that anyone who would behave in this manner must be arrested and punished.

Translated from Arabic into Venetian by the translator of the community whose name was Abraim (Ibrāhīm). The year is not given, but it can be deduced that it corresponds to 821/1418 as 2 Rabī’ I was equal to 9 April that year and given that other documents in Venetian preserved in the same box dealing with the same affair are dated 1418-1419.

B. Verso

ii. Translation in Venetian of a safe-conduct (amân); dated 2 Rabī’ 1 [821]/9 April [1418]; 32 lines.

Contents: A safe-conduct issued by order of the Sultan in favour of the Venetian Consul and his merchants confirming privileges attributed by his predecessors.

Translated from Arabic into Venetian by the same translator as i.

V

Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, fasc. IX, no. 2. Occidental paper (no watermark); width 14 cms., length 20 cms.; verso blank.

I wish to express my gratitude to M.P. Pedani for deciphering this document for me.

For the month, cf. below under B. Verso, ii.
i. Agreement (muʿaqada) concluded between al-ḥājj Āḥmad ibn al-ḥājj ʿAlī ibn Mubārak al-Sibāʿī, known as the old man (al-harim) and the priest (al-qiss) Jawān ibn Nuqūlā al-Fīranjī al-Bunduqī (Giovanni qd Niccolò the Frank the Venetian), dated 2 Rajab 821 A.H./5 August 1418 A.D.; 10 lines.

Contents: Āḥmad will bring letters to Damascus and come back to Alexandria with the answer within a full month. In exchange of this, he will receive twelve ducats of which he already got four. If he is late, he will lose the eight remaining ducats. Attested by Ṭābihq. Two attestations at the bottom by Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn ... and Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-...awl.

Note: Ṭābihq also appears as a witness in X, XII, XV.

VI

Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, fasc. IX, no. 3. Occidental paper (no watermark); width 12,5 cms., length 19 cms.; verso blank.

i. Envelope for document XVI (see below); 2 lines.


VII

Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, fasc. IX, no. 4. Oriental paper; composed of two pieces pasted one below the other; width 13,2 cms., length 32-32,5 cms.; traces of folding in horizontal strips of roughly 1 cm.

A. Recto

i. Letter addressed to the Venetian Consul; dated 3 Muḥarram 820 A.H./20 February 1417 A.D.; 16 lines.

Contents: The writer informs him that, since he travelled to Cairo, he did not receive any news from him, although it had been decided that he would do so within three months. Given that this is the fifth month since his departure, he wrote this letter to remind him his promise and expects his answer.

B. Verso

ii. Addressed to the Consul of the Venetians; 1 line.

VIII

Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, fasc. IX, no. 5. Oriental paper; composed of two pieces pasted one below the other; width 13,3 cms., length 41-cms.; traces of folding in horizontal strips; verso blank.


Contents: The writer reminds to the Consul that they agreed he should wait three months during which he should have received news. However, eight months have passed so far without result. In the meanwhile, he has been informed [by someone else]
that a vessel (markab) coming from Venice had arrived to Alexandria fifty days before sending this letter.

Note: same handwriting as VII.

IX

Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, fasc. IX, no. 6. Oriental paper; composed of three pieces pasted one below the other; width 12 cms., length 32,5 cms.

A. Recto

i. Letter addressed to the Venetian Consul; undated; 22 lines.

Contents: The sender informs the Consul that his letter has arrived and that he has understood all its contents, particularly about the copper. He has also informed the chief judge and the letter has been transmitted to al-Maqarr al-Åšraf al-Šāhibī al-Badī. In case the vessel on which gold belonging to the sender reaches the port of Alexandria, information must be provided to him.

Note: same handwriting as no. VII.

B. Verso

ii. Addressed to the Consul of the Venetians; 1 line.

X

Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, fasc. IX, no. 7. Occidental paper with watermark; width 22,5 (45) cms., length 29,5 cms.; a sheet of paper folded in two; verso and other page blank.

i. Purchase deed for a slave-girl; dated 22 Şafar 822 A.H./20 March 1419 A.D.; 11 lines.

Contents: The Venetian Consul in Alexandria bought from the priest (al-qiss) Yūḥannā, son of the bishop (al-usquf) ...13 son of the priest Šaŋūda al-Naṣrānī al-Yaʿqūbī, a Christian slave-girl called Mubaraka for the price of 27 Venetian ducats. Attested by Ṭābiq ibn Muḥṭār ibn Raḥma. Two attestation marks by Ahmād ibn ... al-Rawḍi (?) and Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Rabaʿī (?)

Note: These same witnesses appear also in XII, XV.

XI

Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, fasc. IX, no. 8. Occidental paper; width 15 cms., length 21,3 cms.; traces of folding in four strips of approximately 4 cms.; verso blank.

A. Recto

i. Agreement for transportation; dated 17 Rabīʿ I 823 A.H./1 April 1420 A.D.; 11 lines.

Name without dots.
Contents: The rayyis Nasir ibn 'Umar ibn Abū [sic] Bakr, known as Ibn al-Kāwīnī (?), from Būlāq, has concluded a contract with Šihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥyī al-Dīn ‘Uṯmān. The rayyis agreed to transport him with his goods and troops on board his vessel from Fuwwa to Būlāq. The amount to be paid for this service has been fixed to five Venetian ducats of which three have already been given to the rayyis.

XII
Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, fasc. IX, no. 9. Oriental paper; width 17,8 cms., length 26 cms.; traces of folding in strips of 1,5 cms.; verso blank.

A. Recto
i. Purchase deed for a prisoner; dated 15 Jumādā II 818 A.H./22 August 1415 A.D.; 13 lines.

Contents: The merchant Muḥammad ibn ‘Askar ibn Šābir al-Ṭarābulusī has sold to the Venetian Consul’s priest, Brīl Lināwnū ibn Sārū (Brignano qd. Sardo), a prisoner called Marīn ibn Anjīlī al-Būlī (Marino qd. Angelo di Pola ?) that he brought with him from the sea. The fixed price was thirty-five Venetian ducats of which the merchant received twenty-five, the balance being paid in one instalment ten days later. Attested by Ṭābiq ibn Muḥṭār ibn Raḥma. Two attestation marks by Aḥmad ibn ... al-Rawdī (?) and Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Raba‘ī (?)


Contents: The merchant acknowledged that he received the remaining ten ducats. Attested by the same witnesses as above.

XIII
Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, fasc. IX, no. 10. Oriental paper; width 16,5 cms., length 33,5 cms.; traces of folding in strips of 2 cms.; verso blank.

A. Recto
i. Oath taken by interpreters; dated 29 Ṣafar 822 A.H./27 March 1419 A.D.; 16 lines.

Contents: Seven interpreters (six Muslims and one Jew) working in Alexandria have sworn, in presence of Nāṣir al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad, ustādār of Nāṣir al-Dīn Šadr al-Mudarrisin Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-‘Aṭṭār, viceroy of Alexandria, that from now on they will not speak about merchandises reaching the port with nobody before their notification to the ustādār. Two attestation marks by Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥaṭīb and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Muḥāṭībī.

XIV
Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, fasc. IX, no. 11. Oriental paper; width 11,3 cms., length 40,6 cms.

A. Recto
i. Letter in Persian, undated; 26 lines.
B. Verso

ii. Inscription in Arabic indicating that the letter must be dispatched to Cairo, at the door of the funduq al-Halili where it must be transmitted to the mu'allim Amîr 'Alî al-Ḫayyâṭ who will give it to the Ḫwâja Yusuf al-Kilânî al-Kaldaši; 2 lines.

XV


A. Recto

i. Sworn declaration (iqrâr); dated 4 Dû al-Ḫijja 818 A.H./4 February 1416 A.D.; 9 lines.

Contents: ‘Alî ibn Ḥamza (?) ibn ‘Abd Allâh al-‘Ajân of Alexandria testifies that he received from Bartulmây Aṣṭâlârû (Bartolomeo Storlato), Venetian Consul in the same city, the amount of six hundred ducats for the renting of a store (hânîtî) situated near the door of the funduq of the Venetians, and this for a period of one year. Testimony of Ṭâbiq Muḥtâr [sic] ibn Raḥma. Attestation marks of Ḥamd ibn ... al-Râwî (?) and Muḥammad ibn Ḥamd ibn Muḥammad al-Râba‘î (?).

B. Verso

ii. In Venetian; 3 lines.

Contents: On the 4th of February, 600 ducats were given to ‘Alî through the intermediary of Tomado Jalina for the renting of a botega near the door of the funduq for one year.

XVI

Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, fasc. IX, no. 13. Oriental paper; composed of two pieces pasted one below the other; width 12,5 cms., length 38,3 cms.; traces of folding in strips of 2 cms.; verso blank.

A. Recto


Contents: This letter was issued by an official of the Sultan al-Mu’ayyad Šayh, as it is confirmed by the expression “al-Malakî al-Mu’ayyadî” found at the beginning of the document, just below the basmala. This official is Ḥasan ibn Naṣr Allâh, whose name appears in the right margin. He was in charge of the army (nâzîr al-juyûš) at that time. The letter deals with the Venetian Consul and the merchants placed under his responsibility. So far, we have not been able to understand the whole document due to the handwriting which is particularly difficult to decipher (about two thirds have been transcribed), but it is clear that the amount of one thousand dinars is requested.

XVII

Procuratori di San Marco, Citra, busta 198, doc. G. Oriental paper; width 13,6 cms., length 18,6 cms.; traces of folding in horizontal strips of 3,5 cms.
A. Recto

i. Sworn declaration (iqrār); dated 12 Safar 883 A.H./15 May 1478 A.D.; 5 lines.
   Contents: The mu'allim Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥājj Muḥammad al-Anṭākī al-Jazārī testifies that he will receive (?) 1400 dirhams from Ṭumāzū ibn Bartulumiyū al-Firanji (Tomaso qd. Bartolomeo the Frank) in several weekly instalments (every Tuesday) of 60 dirhams. Two attestation marks by Maḥmūd al-Anṭākī and Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Anṣārī (?)

ii. Account notes in Venetian.

B. Verso

iii. Account notes in Venetian.

XVIII

Procuratori di San Marco, Mistì, busta 205, fasc. I. Occidental paper with watermark; width 21 cms.; length 29 cms. A piece of paper torn from the upper edge on the left. Traces of folding in perpendicular strips of about 5 cms., then one horizontal strip; verso blank.

A. Recto

i. Sworn declaration (iqrār); dated Friday 8 Nīsān (April) 1435 A.D.; 21 lines.
   Contents: Amārī Dulfīn (Marin Dolfin), Anṭūn ‘Uwaydāt and Yuhannā ‘Uwaydāt, brothers and executors of the late HMYS (?), have sworn in the presence of al-Nazzārī (?) that they cancelled all the transactions their brother had with Luwīz Kūrāl (Alvise Correr) between the first [day of the month] and the day of his death, and that they released him from this. Given that the brothers were unable to write, they asked ... ibn Gūl (... qd. Golius) to write this document in their name and sign it and asked al-Nazzārī (?) to testify all this. Four attestation marks by Salumūn ibn Jirjis (Salomone qd. Giorgio), Dāwūd ibn Jurj Fantìn (?) (Davide qd. Giorgio Fantin), Nukūlā Bārīlī (?) (Niccolò Barilli) and Nazzārī (?) ibn...

ii. In Venetian; above the attestation marks; 3 lines.
   Contents: Golius is designated as the procurator for the estate.

XIX

Procuratori di San Marco, Mistì, busta 205, fasc. II. Occidental paper; width 22-22,5 cms.; length 8 cms.

A. Recto

i. Promissory note in Venetian; dated 28 November 1433 in Nicosia; 5 lines.
   Contents: Marin Dolfin recognises that he must pay to Zorzi 1820 bessanti from the next day during eight months. The amount to be paid is for 20 zambelloti at 91 bessanti the piece.

B. Verso

ii. Promissory note in Arabic; undated; 3 lines.
Contents: Same as above, in Marin Dolfin’s handwriting (hāḏā ḥaṭṭ Amārīn ṣiḥr Luwīz Kūrāl 'alā taman 'iṣrīn ūlw bi'r al-ṭawb 91 bisanṭi jumlat al-ṭīyāb 1820 bisanṭī).

List of the documents arranged in chronological order
13 Dū al-Hijja 816 A.H./6 March 1414 A.D. (XVI)
4 Dū al-Ḥijja 818 A.H./4 February 1416 A.D. (XV)
3 Muḥarram 820 A.H./20 February 1417 A.D. (VII)
2 Rabī’ I 821/9 April 1418 (IV)
2 Rajab 821 A.H./5 August 1418 A.D. (V)
22 Ǧaḥiẓ 822 A.H./20 March 1419 A.D. (X)
29 Ṣafar 822 A.H./27 March 1419 A.D. (XIII)
17 Rabī’ I 823 A.H./1 April 1420 A.D. (XI)
28 November 1433 (XIX)
8 Nīsān (April) 1435 A.D. (XVIII)
10 Ǧaḥiẓ 877 A.H./10 January 1473 A.D. (I)
12 Ṣafar 883 A.H./15 May 1478 A.D. (XVII)
22 Dū al-Qa‘da 895 A.H./7 October 1490 A.D. (II.i)
6 Dū al-Ḥijja 895 A.H./21 October 1490 A.D. (II.ii)
18 Muḥarram 913 A.H./30 May 1507 A.D. (III)

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SUMMARY
This article provides a brief handlist of all the Arabic documents from the Mamluk period preserved at the Venice State Archives. They were either issued by the Mamluk authorities, either in the sphere of the Venetian community in Alexandria or Cyprus. Most of them are the originals, but in a few cases they are only preserved in a Venetian translation. The unpublished documents will progressively be dealt with and published according to the interest they may present.