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Mamluk Historiography Revisited – Narratological Perspectives

With 3 figures

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Introduction

In Damascus in Ramaḍān 899, the sufi shaykh Mubārak al-Qābūnī was imprisoned and beaten by the Mamluk authorities. After being rescued by some eminent jurists, his followers went to the prison on the next day to achieve the release of their companions who were still held there. The Mamluks attacked the crowd and pillaged the village of Qābūn.¹ Economic life in Damascus came to a standstill for days, and the Mamluks apprehended everyone who looked like one of Mubārak’s sufis. This episode resulted in probably the highest death toll suffered by the city on any single day during sultan Qāʾitbāy’s later reign. In the aftermath, the local authorities feared a full-scale uprising of Bedouins, peasants and brigands led by Mubārak. The importance ascribed to these events is reflected in their being mentioned in local historiographical literature until the early 17th century.²

However, it is not so much the events themselves what will be examined in the following. Rather, they shall serve to illustrate the authors’ agency in shaping their respective past into diverging narratives. Historical works were literary and public texts, and authors used narrative techniques to meet (or surprise) the expectations of their respective audience(s). Material was added, rejected, re-

¹ Qābūn lies northeast of Old Damascus and was Mubārak’s base of operations where he had his house and convent.
shuffled, or merely rephrased from one account to the next; events were emphasised, summarised or omitted; leading in some cases to dramatically changed meaning of a story itself. The above-mentioned episode was subjected to almost ten retellings over the following century and thus offers itself for a comparative study of narratives as well as of the intertextual relations between them.

In my opinion, two of the most inspiring recent narratological studies in our field are Boaz Shoshan’s *Poetics of Islamic Historiography* and Konrad Hirschler’s *Authors as Actors.* This article takes up Hirschler’s contention that through the application of a narratological approach “even texts of ‘minor’ authors appear as more multi-faceted than previously assumed”, because only if we diverge from the focus on their respective factual value do we see how these authors “developed, in their outwardly quite similar texts, distinctive versions of their immediate past”. In contrast to both Hirschler and Shoshan, I will focus on a joint analysis of chronographical and biographical works on the micro-narrative level. Inspired by the French literary scholar Gérard Genette’s systematic approach, the analysis will focus on the temporal arrangement of narratives, for this allows us another perspective on their claim to ‘truth’. It will further be shown that the largest narrative shift occurred in Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn’s (d. 953/1546) works. Through a radical condensation of the preceding accounts, it opened up ways for a reinterpretation of this episode, and thus was adapted by all succeeding biographers.

The article proceeds in a rather conservative ‘narrative’: First, I will introduce my sources, the relations between them, and the accounts they give of the incident. Then, I will introduce my narratological approach and conceptual vocabulary, before we turn to the chronology of the historical episode and its diverging narrative treatments. The overall number of accounts has proven too great to include all of them. I have thus restricted the scope to four accounts by Ibn Ṭawq (d. 1509), Ibn al-Ḥimṣī (d. 1524), and, twice, Ibn Ṭūlūn. The reason for this selection is that the narrative of the clash had been mostly ‘canonised’ after

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3 Boaz Shoshan (2004), *Poetics of Islamic Historiography. Deconstructing Ṭabarî’s History*, Leiden; Boston; Konrad Hirschler (2006), *Medieval Arabic Historiography. Authors as Actors*, London; New York. For a thorough survey of the current state of narratological studies in our field, the reader is pointed to the introduction of this volume.


5 In terminology I follow Chase Robinson, who distinguishes between biographical (ṣīra), prosopographical (tabaqāt), and chronographical literature (tārikh). The term chronographical is more appropriate than ‘annalistic’ or ‘chronological’, for not all chronicles are arranged by year nor do they follow chronology on all levels, as will be shown below. See Chase Robinson (2007), *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge, xxiv–xxv.
these works. Finally, the conclusion will give an outlook on the later biographical transmission until the early 17th century.

The Transmission on Mubārak

Shaykh Mubārak’s clash with the Mamluks has been the subject of several accounts, the earliest of which was penned by Ibn Ṭawq around the time of the events themselves and the latest of which was written by Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī (d. 1652) in his Kawākib al-Sā’ īra well after 1600. I could identify six biographical entries and three chronographical accounts of the episode, not all of which have survived (in full).6 Figure 1 shows these texts clustered into three groups, dividing the latter group further into literary chronicles and diaries. As I argue elsewhere, the latter is still caught up in the events it reports, whereas the former can, due to editing at later stages, take a deliberate stance towards said events.

Whereas Ibn Ṭawq mentions Mubārak in entries throughout his text, the chronicles of both Ibn al-Ḥimṣī and Ibn Ṭūlūn already attempt a ‘biographicalisation’.7 Thus, the shaykh appears only once, in the context of the central episode. Although Ibn Ṭūlūn’s Mufākaha might give the impression (at first glance) that it is ‘only’ a diary,8 comparing only the length of the description of the clash between Mubārak and the Mamluks (48 lines in Ibn Ṭawq to only 13

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7 For the concept of the ‘biographicalisation’ of historical writing, see Otfrid Weintritt (2008), Arabische Geschichtsschreibung in den arabischen Provinzen des Osmanischen Reiches (16.–18. Jahrhundert), Hamburg-Schenefeld, 11, 16.

lines in Ibn Ṭūlūn) quickly destroys this notion. The Mufākahah must have been edited later on or it would have given the event much more space, as will become apparent below. It should thus be regarded as a “literary creation in its own right” rather than a pragmatic collection of dated events.

Two things become apparent in figure 1. First, the biographical writing on Mubārak (the large cluster to the left) is richer and more long-living than the chronographical one (the smaller cluster to its right). Second, on the surface the chronographical and the biographical clusters seem to exist independent from each other. This separation is even more striking once we introduce references between texts (figure 2). Explicit citations and ‘implicit’ references (copy of anecdote without acknowledgement of the source) only occur between bio-

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9 If Ibn Ṭūlūn had written contemporaneous to these events, he would have ascribed much more importance to it, just as much as the two authors discussed so far.


11 Arrows indicate explicit citations of either a work or an author (if oral transmission is not explicitly mentioned); simple lines indicate that material was used from these works without acknowledging the source.
graphical works, where Ibn Ṭūlūn’s two accounts constitute the central texts. As I will demonstrate in the following, the two clusters also intersect in one of these works and there the transfer of narrative patterns took place.

The following analysis is concerned only with the first ‘phase’, which consists primarily of chronographic accounts but moves into the biographical sphere towards its end. It focuses on the descriptions of the two central days of conflict. The most detailed description of the events can be found in Ibn Ṭawq’s Taʾliq; it also was written closest to the events portrayed. Ibn Ṭawq’s account of Mubārak’s exploits is mostly a scattered narrative, disappearing and resurfacing throughout his text between the years 894 and 903. The central confrontation in Ramadān 899, however, takes the centre stage in the Taʾliq within the coverage of that period (48 lines). For reference, I have here already included the signifiers for the events making up the historical episode. They will become important in the analysis and will be elaborated on in the following section.

13 See Ibn Ṭawq, Taʾliq III, 1287–1296. From among those ten pages, Mubārak is a topic on seven; in some cases he is the only topic.
[Friday, 2 Ramaḍan 899] (B1) During the ‘id, Shaykh Mubārak and three others passed the al-Nuḥhās madrasa, just as [the dawādār] Arakmās was sitting in his tomb (turba). Whether someone informed him or he saw [Mubārak], he sent for him and sat down in the window and started an unnecessary dispute with him. (B) Then he sent about five Mamluks – maybe more, maybe fewer – after him, and they captured him and two [men] who were with him. They brought them to the governor. (C1) One could escape; another [man] escaped from the meeting and is now at Shaykh Faraj’s house. (B*) Meanwhile, the order was given to flog [Mubārak] heavily for his insubordination, as is told. (C2) Another [man] escaped from the meeting and is now at Shaykh Faraj’s house. (C) He rode off immediately to the governor and stayed with him until, after much dispute, he freed [Mubārak]. (C4) Apparently a decree was written or he was advised that he and his faction were not allowed to carry weapons, and they intimidated him. (C*) The judge had arrived after sunset. (K) He and his faction were not allowed to carry weapons, and they intimidated him. (D*) Meanwhile, the Shaykh al-islām came down from Qābūn for his residence, after three messengers had been dispatched there. The last of them had been Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ṣamīdī but he did not inform him of anything. When the Shaykh arrived, he let him know so that (C) he rode off immediately to the governor and stayed with him until, after much dispute, he freed [Mubārak]. (F1) It is said, he is a paper merchant from Sālihiyya. (F2) It is also said that with him a group of inmates of the outer prison escaped. None of the [real] criminals from the big prison escaped. (F3) The prison guards informed the household of the governor, (G) and his deputy sent out a unit of Mamluks who went and cut with their swords amongst the people. Most of them were just bystanders and fled their path. About sixty people were killed and many more wounded. (G1) It was told that they captured two men and beheaded them. This was done in front of the governor’s seat. (G2) Corpses lay from the Sūq al-Raṣīf all the way to the bench of the muτtasib and to the wall. (G3) One group had locked themselves up in a caravanserai there but one unit killed a number and injured seven of them […]. (H) The governor ordered the Mamluks to pillage Qābūn. (H1) With them went the dawādār Qaṭaj. They went first to lower Qābūn and (H2) started at Mubārak’s house and convent (zāwiya). From there they went killing and injuring people all the way to the market. (H3) The fitna lasted until noon. (I1) They went to the gate of our master the Shaykh al-islām’s house, broke open the ledge (ḥawḥa) and forced their way to the door of the corridor. They tried to break it open but God

14 Another militant Sufi of the time; I am grateful to Boaz Shoshan to make me aware of him.
dispersed them! (I2) At the Şâfi‘î chief judge’s house they forced open the gate’s ledge, entered and shot about ten arrows. (I3) The governor’s deputy (kâfîl) sent a grand emir, the hâjjîb al-ţuîjâb, the sultan’s dawâdâr and the second hâjjîb to the judge to demand Mubârâk. He replied: “Have I seen Mubârâk? Since even if he was with me, I could never deliver him to you, I cannot tell you.” (I) The markets were closed, and the city (balad) was in turmoil. This state continued until the end of the day, (I3*) when the aforementioned came to the judge and they rode together to the deputy. (H4) All the people have left Upper Qâbûn. (K*) It was a disastrous day! Oh God, don’t punish us for our misdeeds nor for our ill activities! (I4) The killed were carried to the Aминîyya madrasa. The people came and took their dead. There were about 15 people. Our mawla the shaykh [al-islâm] decided to wash them on the next day. (H*) Regarding those who went to Qâbûn, all the soldiers were in full armour, riders and foot soldiers, and [with] their grooms (ghulmân) and those who joined them they were about two thousand men.16

Ibn al-Ḥîmî dedicates two long entries in his chronicle Ḥawâdîth al-Zâmân to the clash itself (pp. 252–254) and to its aftermath (pp. 255–256) respectively. I will focus on the first, which retains almost the length of Ibn Ṭawq’s account (43 lines):

(B) On the evening of said Friday [2.9.899] Arakmâs, the sultan’s dawâdâr, ambushed shaykh Mubârâk al-Qâbûnî, took him prisoner and brought him to the governor of Damascus Qânsûh al-Ŷâhyâwî. (A) This shaykh Mubârâk had demolished the taverns on the ‘id and hindered the alcohol traders’ deliveries. He had had earlier confrontations with the Mamluks. Thus, the governor and the Turks hated him. (B*) When shaykh Mubârâk was at the governor’s, he ordered him to be beaten severely. One of his sufis, who was with him, was [also] beaten with a stick. Both were shackled and thrown into the prison at the Bâb al-Barid. (C1) The people were in unrest, and (C) the shaykh al-islâm Taqi al-Dîn Ibn Qâdî ‘Ajlûn hurried with a group of ulamâ’ to the Şâfi‘î chief judge Shihâb al-Dîn Ibn al-Farîfûr. […]

(D) Then, on Saturday the 3rd, the populace came together to greet shaykh Mubârâk and wish him well. He then went from lower Qâbûn (E) to the Şâfi‘î judge’s house, accompanied by about 200 of his Sufis who praised [the judge]. Then [Mubârâk] went to the shaykh al-islâm Taqi al-Dîn and praised him. Some of his Sufis were with him; (F) the others were at the gate. (F1) Some of them said: “They have done this to our shaykh Mubârâk. He was unjustly beaten, and our comrade is in prison. Let us go and free him from the prison.” (F*) So they went and freed the sufî of shaykh Mubârâk (F2) but could not free the other prisoners. So they shouted. (F3) At this point, a crowd gathered and broke down the prison gate and freed the prisoners who fled and dispersed. (G) When the governor of Damascus heard about this, his mamluks17 and other soldiers came in

15 I am not completely certain if this refers to one of the emirs or to Mubârâk, but the latter is, in this context, rather unlikely.
16 Ibn Ṭawq, Ta‘lîq III, 1287–1289.
17 He means here the type of mounted soldiers, armed with lance, sword and bow, not the Mamluks as rulers or dynasty.
full armour. (G1) They came to the prison gate, and the sufis and commoners fled into the Umayyad Mosque. They locked all the gates but one through which the mamluks entered the mosque and attacked them. They injured uncountable souls. (G2) Then the crowd fled towards the amber market, opposite the gate of the mosque, but its gate was locked. There the mamluks came upon them. They used their swords against High and Low, against the sufis and all others. More than 70 people were killed by the amber market, while some lost a hand, a whole arm, or an eye. (G3) Then, the Mamluks reached the swords market and pillaged parts of it. (I) The markets of Damascus were closed. The fear and anxiety was indescribable. (J) The Mamluks – may God defeat them – cut the throat of everyone wearing a mizar.18 (H1) Then they returned to the governor and told him what had happened. He ordered the mamluks and the emirs: “Go to Qābūn and pillage it!” (H) They went to Lower Qābūn and pillaged it, taking people’s utensils, clothes and cattle – they left them nothing! They killed whoever they found and tore down shaykh Mubārak’s zāwiyā. (J*) They killed everyone wearing a mizar. (I*) Upon their return from Qābūn the populace was in such a fear that it cannot be described. If the hājīb and the other emirs had not reached them, they also would have pillaged Upper Qābūn. (I1) I have seen the corpses with my own eyes: they lay like cattle in the Amīnīyya madrasa in front of the gate of the Umayyad Mosque. I counted more than 100.

(K) So gaze, oh brother, on this disaster so great that it has not its equal!19 There is not power nor strength but in God! And the emirs informed the sultan of it […].

Ibn Ṭūlūn’s chronological account in the Mufākahat al-Khillān (henceforth Mufākahah) is much shorter and, despite being stretched over three entries (1, 2 and 4 Ramaḍān 899), consists of mere 13 lines of text:

“(B1) On Thursday, the [1.9.899] a large crowd met in the Umayyad Mosque, and they allowed the prayer call of the noon and the afternoon prayer only in the gallery by the gate to the minaret. And they shouted ‘Allāh Akbar!’ against the sultan’s dawādār, because he had captured two of shaykh Mubārak’s faction, (A) for they had been keeping the wine merchants from entering Damascus. […]

(B) Then, at the end of this day [2.9.899], the amīr al-hājj Arakmās apprehended shaykh Mubārak and another man. He brought both to the governor’s seat. The governor tortured/beat both and had them imprisoned. (B2) He spoke to shaykh Mubārak: ‘If you have (any) secret, disclose it!’, (A*) because he was enraged by his fetching the wine deliveries. (C) As the judge heard of his imprisonment, he sent for him and freed him from prison. […]

(D) Then, on Saturday [4.9.899], (D) a crowd came from Qābūn to the prison at Bāb al-Barid, (F) broke in, and freed shaykh Mubārak’s follower, and he fled. (G) The governor’s mamluks rushed armed from the governor’s seat towards them and killed scores,

18 A type of headgear that was the ‘uniform’ of Mubārak’s followers.
19 A similar statement is to be found at the end of the second entry dedicated to Mubārak: “So gaze, oh brother! This black slave, when he stood fast and faithful to God, God rescued him from them [the Mamluks] and submitted them to him. Praised be He who changes hearts.” Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, Ḥawādith al-zamān, 256.
more than 150, of them and of the people of Šaliḥiyya, the poor (al-nudra), and others, at the Bāb al-Barīd, (G2) the gate of the amber market, and (G1) the grave of Zakariyyā in the Umayyad Mosque. (I) Damascus was in turmoil, and (J) the judges abstained from being present at the Dār al-ʿAdl on [the following] Monday. (K) There is no power but in God!”

In his Mufākhabat al-Ikhwān, which has survived only in copies from later biographical dictionaries, Ibn Ṭūlūn offers a more encompassing picture of Mubārak’s life, adding information both before and after the clash, although the clash remains the centrepiece of the ‘biography’. The following version was quoted directly on Ibn Ṭūlūn’s authority by both Ibn al-ʾImād and al-Ghazzī:

(A1) Shaykh Mubārak had recited the Ghāyat al-ikhtiṣār before the shaykh al-islām Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Qādī ʿAjlūn, who built a zāwiyah for him in the vicinity of Lower Qābūn. There, he lived with his followers (jāmāʿa), (A) and they searched the road for alcohol traders, and [when they apprehended them] cut open the vessels and spilled the alcohol. (B1) When this became known to the governor, he captured some of the shaykh’s faction and threw them in the prison at Bāb al-Barīd. (B) Shaykh Mubārak came to intercede on their behalf but the governor had him imprisoned (as well). (C) As these news were brought to shaykh Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Qādī ʿAjlūn, he interceded and freed him. (F) Then the rest of shaykh Mubārak’s faction attacked the prison, broke its gates, and freed their comrades. (G) News reached the governor, and he sent a detachment of his Mamluks who killed about 70 people around the Bāb al-Barīd, (G2) the amber market, and (G1) the Umayyad Mosque. (J) Then, shaykh Mubārak gave up and only stayed in the zāwiyas [...].

The account of Ibn al-Mibrad, which the later biographical dictionaries cite as well in unison, is not regarded in the following analysis, for it only alludes to the central conflict: “(A) Shaykh Mubārak appeared in the year 897 or earlier or later, and to him came followers and the amr bi-l-maʿrūf. He worked against the vices (al-munkar) by destroying alcohol, among other things. (B-H) After he had done this, he turned against the Turks, and they against him.”

It suffices to acknowledge that here the main event of the other accounts has itself become mere epilogue to the campaign against the vices, which usually appeared only as a pretext or prologue to said event.

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20 Ibn Ṭūlūn, Mufākha 1, 158.
21 This lack of information on the clash should be attributed to Ibn al-Mibrad’s comparatively early death in 1495. His work was probably ‘published’ even before that incident. See identical in Ghazzī, Kawākib 2, 245; Ibn Ayyūb, “al-Rawḍ”, f. 286a; Ibn al-ʾImād, Shadharāt al-dhahab 8, 259.
Historical Time and Narrative Time

While “motives, figures and narrative strands” (“Motive, Figuren und Erzählstränge”), as Thomas Herzog explained (part of) his interest in the *sirat al-Zahir Baybars*,22 are certainly part of the narrative repertoire, I move the analysis to a different, micro-narrative level. An analysis of this level provides us with another approach to how such motives were embedded in narratives – and how the description of certain events could be accommodated to existing tropes or ‘modes of emplotment’.23 It is thus an analytical approach, which is narrower than and, at the same time, goes beyond the study of tropes or topoi. It is my contention that this approach also allows us to scrutinise the distinction between genres, such as ‘biography’ or ‘chronicle’ and opens an additional path to understand the “narrativization of the past”.24

My approach is primarily concerned with the micro-narrative level, or micro-arrangement, which “deals with the internal arrangement of these reports, that is how did the authors arrange their material about a specific event to form a report.”25 I adapt several key concepts from Gérard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*. Although this book is foremost concerned with a modern fictitious novel (Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*), many aspects of his method can be applied, in my opinion, to the study of premodern Arabic historiography. Genette, first of all, introduces the distinction between the ‘story’, which is a series of ‘events’, and the ‘narrative’, which is an account of this ‘story’.26 Since this choice of terminology has proven confusing, I instead to speak of a ‘historical sequence’ or ‘episode’, of which we have several ‘accounts’ with their respective narratives. Each account consists of a number of ‘events’, which are presented in different detail. And what constitutes an event in one account might correspond to any number of events (or of historical incidents) in another.27

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23 Hirschler, *Authors as Actors*, 4.
27 With regard to Ṭabarī’s History, Boaz Shoshan distinguishes the elements which make up its narrative at large as *akhbâr*, medium-sized reports, and whole sequences/episodes (occasionally followed by a summary by the historian). Only on the level of sequence, Shoshan finds a narrative reconfiguration of the temporal order, a break in the chronology or continuity of the story. However, as will be shown below, this happens even on the level of *khabar*, for what constitutes a *khabar* in the *Tāʾlīq*, does not necessarily constitute a *khabar* in Ibn Ṭūlūn’s *Mufâkaha*, or such-and-such a number of *akhbâr* in the former are subsumed under
Genette divides the narrative treatment of time into three categories: temporal order, duration, and frequency. The first one is concerned with the divergences of the order, in which events are related, from the order, in which they occurred; the second one with the space devoted within the narrative to the description of specific events at the expense of others (“the narrative devotes considerable space to a momentary experience and then leaps over or swiftly summarizes a number of years”); the third one (which is of minor importance here) could be described as the analysis of repetition: either the repeated narrating of the same event or the single narrating of an event that happened recurrently.\(^{28}\)

The temporal order can be interrupted or dissolved by advance notices and retrospections, which Genette calls prolepses and analepses, “designating as prolepsis any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later, designating as analepsis any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the [historical sequence] where we are at any given moment”.\(^{29}\) I myself have used them amply in this article, pointing to arguments which already have been made or will be made later. An analepsis has also been used both by Ibn al-Himṣī and Ibn Ṭūlūn to explain why the central clash between Mubārak and the Mamluks came about. They both opt for a beginning in medias res, which is “seemingly part of the earliest and most lasting narrative tradition” and which allows them to place the complete episode at one place in their works.\(^{30}\) Although the prolepsis is much rarer in the works considered here, it is not completely absent from their authors’ repertoire, either.

The reshuffling of the temporal order serves to highlight a specific event within a historical sequence and thus is closely linked to the category of duration. Large parts of an account relate events leading up to said event or resulting from it only in summary and thus reduce them to mere prologue and epilogue of a central event, which is described in more detail. Genette proposes for this distinction the binary between ‘scene’ and ‘summary’, which corresponds to quite different proportions between time narrated and text dedicated to its narration. This distinction carries with it a hierarchisation of events by their importance. The ‘scene’ zooms in and “most often in dialogue […] realizes conventionally the equality of time between narrative and story”.\(^{31}\) In the accounts studied here, this

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\(^{29}\) Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 40.
\(^{30}\) Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 46.
\(^{31}\) Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 94. Genette proposes a fourfold model of “basic forms of narrative movement”, in which the extreme poles are the ellipsis (events are omitted) and the descriptive pause (narration happens outside of time, so to speak). The summary and the
is achieved by use of monologue or dialogue, often in direct speech, or by adopting a ‘worm’s-eye view’, relating events without mention of their outcome. Through these means, other elements of a sequence appear only in condensed or summarised form and thus are pushed to the background.

The difference between scene and summary should become clearer in the following example, which comes from Ibn Tawq’s Taʿlīq and deals with an earlier confrontation between Mubārak and the mamluks. It takes place on 29 Rabī’ II 898, right after Mubārak had reported attacks on two taverns to the Shaykh al-Islām and the Shāfiʿī chief judge (until here it is only summary). The entry starts with a summary of Mubārak’s last raid on taverns. The scene begins, when “all but a few of his people had left him”:

[During the night] Shaykh Mubārak attacked two taverns, one of which was on the slopes of Malik Āss. They spilled much alcohol after the morning prayer. Some Christians defended [it]. The rumor goes that they raised their voices in the Christian prayer (dhikr al-ṣalīḥ wa-naṣarahū llāh). [Mubārak] was accompanied by a large force.

In the morning hours he returned to greet and inform our mawlā the shaykh [Ṭaqī al-Dīn Ibn Qāḍī ‘Ajlūn] and the Shafiite Qādir. Then he left towards his current residence. All but a few of his people had left him. When they passed the old Dār al-Ṭām, they came upon mamluks close to al-ʿAnābā, many of whom were mounted and armed with lances and more. They had a skirmish with them. Then they ran and saw the last ones approximately in al-ʿAnāba; they had a brawl with them (ibtalashū bi-him). Then they ran. [Mubārak] entered the Anbār quarter and others, [being chased] through the main street all the way to the Zuqāq al-Rummān and the Naqūlīsh (unidentified). When the mamluks had surprised them and they had faced each other, there were only around 10 men with [Mubārak], and the mamluks counted many. They injured several of [Mubārak’s] men and took about six prisoners, whom they brought to the dawādār kabīr of the governor. He beat them, released two and put the rest into the prison at the Bāb al-Barīd. Shaykh Mubārak was unharmed and came to us to Qābūn shortly before noon.32

The length of this scene (which might have even been written while or after the story was told in Qābūn on the same day) is stretched by the giving of details (number of men, weapons of the Mamluks) but even more because the whole sequence is laid out, although it repeats itself (skirmish – flight – skirmish – flight); then Ibn Ṭawq’s account follows first Mubārak’s flight before it returns to the (first?) skirmish and comments upon the fate of the other men. A summary of the same event could have been much shorter (Shaykh Mubārak comes across Mamluks; he can flee but they caught half of his men), as is demonstrated by the

scene are only intermediate forms. For our purpose here, however, they are the common modes, in which events are narrated. An example of ellipsis would be Ibn al-Mibrad’s treatment of the central conflict between Mubārak and the Mamluk authorities, which he simply omits.

32 Ibn Ṭawq, Taʿlīq III, 1173–1174.
beginning of the entry, where Ibn Ṭawq’s focus clearly is on the results. Although it does not feature any dialogue, Ibn Ṭawq’s tracing of the shaykh’s paths clearly makes it the scene of the narrative framed by summaries. This distinction is, as we will see, more pronounced in the literary chronicles and biographies than in Ibn Ṭawq’s diary, which is obviously connected to greater awareness of an audience other than the author himself.

The Historical sequence

Although a short summary of the main historical events that involved shaykh Mubārak has been given at the beginning of this article, it is necessary, now that the appropriate narratological terminology has been introduced, to establish the individual historical events, which constitute this historical sequence, and their chronological order.

Since in all accounts but Ibn Ṭawq’s Mubārak’s campaign against the vices merely appears as ‘prologue’ to the central clash,\(^{33}\) and the same is true for its ‘epilogue’, which is often omitted altogether, I have listed them only as such. In contrast, the central sequence covers only a few days; events thus cover very short time periods in this case. The narrative can be been broken down into eleven events from (A) through (J), as has been indicated above:

A. Prologue;
B. Mubārak is captured, brought before the governor, beaten, and imprisoned;
C. He is released through intercession by important Shāfiʿīs;
D. Mubārak returns with his retinue to Damascus the next day;
E. He goes to thank his saviours;
F. His followers attack/are freed from Bāb al-Barīd;
G. Mamluks attack the crowds;
H. They pillage Qābūn;
I. The crisis encompasses all of Damascus;
J. Epilogue and consequences.

Events (B) and (C) occurred on the first day; events (D) through (I) on the second, with (A) and (J) framing those two days. Although it is not part of the historical sequence itself, the historian’s commentary, as Shoshan points out, may be part of an account. For it is important for ascribing meaning to the events, it shall be

\(^{33}\) In some of the biographies, on the other hand, the campaign becomes the main message, although the clash is usually mentioned (as cited from Ibn Ṭūlūn) at least once.
included as a separate item (K). This structure is still very basic, and is tested by the additions we find in the four accounts examined here. These have thus been marked with additional numbers (e.g. B1) to indicate variations in content. If one event is narrated repeatedly in one account, this is indicated with an asterisk (e.g. F* for the first repetition; F** for the second, etc.).

The Taʿliq

Since Ibn Ṭawq knew (and had written) about the reasons for the Mamluks’ animosity against shaykh Mubārak (A), his account of the clash starts directly with the shaykh’s capture (B) and in general follows a chronological arrangement. This leads him to shift his gaze during the first day constantly between the sites of (B) and (C): B-C1-B*-C2-B2-C including C3–4 and C*, ending his account with his own interpretation (K). On the second day, he mostly continues likewise from (D) through (I), but with less alternation between sites. However, directly before and after his own commentary (K*), he diverges from the chronology to revisit the care for the dead (I5), the flight of the people from Qābūn (H4) as well as the size of the expedition (H*). The impact on the city (I) and epilogue (J) continue to be subject of his text during the following days, weeks, and years, falling back into a purely chronological order.

There is a strong difference in focus between the two entries. On the first day, the focus is completely on Mubārak; both (B) and (C) focus exclusively on his ordeal and his rescue from it respectively. If we can speak of a scene at all, it would be this, for the shaykh’s capture and torture create the narrative frame and duration; Ibn Ṭawq revisits it time and again between his tracing of the rescue efforts. Also there is indirect dialogue (B1). The effect evoked by the constant alternation between places is unsettling and translates well the feeling of the author that time was running out. As soon as the chief judge is informed, the narrative reverts to summary (C, C*). The second day oscillates between summary and scene, always depending on which information the author could gather and what he deemed important. The scenic character is strongest, where the wider impact on Damascus is described, for there he also loosens his grasp on the chronological arrangement. In particular, I mean the ‘scene’ of the emirs’ visit to the judge’s house (I3 through I3*), which apparently occurred at “the end of the day”. Not only does it feature monologue; it also frames the short-term analepsis

34 Technically, the comment is the latest event within any episode, for it is situated in the author’s time of writing about those events.

35 The impact of the central event is even taken up in entries which have nothing to do with Mubārak. Thus he applaudes shaykh Zayn al-Dīn Barakāt for his recitation at the end of Ramadān for it being admirable “considering the circumstances”. Ibn Ṭawq, Taʿliq III, 1295.
on the general turmoil in the city (I), which only lasts until this meeting (I3*). (H4) could still be seen as part of it (as another analepsis), for it emphasises again the extent of the crisis.

Admittedly, the emphasis on the scene is not very strong in Ibn Ṭawq’s account. It is too close to the events in general. Nonetheless, it indicates that his main concern was reserved for his personal acquaintances and ‘patrons’ in particular (Ibn Qāḍī ‘Ajlūn, the chief judge Ibn al-Farfūr, and Mubārak himself), and, in effect, for his own position.36 We will see in the following that the literary accounts make more refined and conscious choices between scene and summary to endow these events with a particular meaning. Certainly, temporal distance and the resulting safety of their authorial position enabled bolder narrative choices.

Variations of Narrative: Ḥawādīth and Mufākaha

Ibn al-Ḥimṣī deals with Mubārak in two, Ibn Ṭulūn in three entries, which are in both cases centred on the clash. All events before are summarised to make up merely the prologue or pretext of this one event. Therefore, both accounts begin “in medias res, followed by an expository return to an earlier period of time”, following “one of the formal topoi of epic”.37

However, whereas Ibn al-Ḥimṣī concentrates his narrative to lead up to one central scene, Ibn Ṭulūn’s consists of nothing but summary. Indeed, the divergence can already be glimpsed from the works’ titles (especially the ‘guiding phrases’).38 Ibn al-Ḥimṣī is concerned with the singular events of his age (one could say, for their own sake), while Ibn Ṭulūn promises to offer conversation topics on these events. The events are here merely the subject, from which more general lessons could be learned.39 Therefore, we find a strong emphasis on the central clash in the Ḥawādīth al-Zamān, whereas it is downplayed and decon-

36 Ibn Ṭawq was closely aligned with all three figures. Mubārak and Ibn Qāḍī ‘Ajlūn at least saw eye-to-eye on the issue of alcohol and drugs. Most telling is a comment by the latter on a minor skirmish between the former and some mamluks in Rajab 899: “The governor would save us the trouble if he [just] proclaimed an end to the places of vice (mahramât) and the taverns. Then neither Mubārak nor anyone else would do a thing.” Ibn Ṭawq, Taʾliq III, 1273.

37 Genette, Narrative Discourse, 36.

38 Rhymed titles of Arabic Historiographical works consist of a ‘guiding phrase’ and a ‘thematic phrase’. The latter describes the subject of the work, whereas the guiding phrase “were intended to prepare the reader for the following narrative structure.” See Hirschler, Authors as Actors, 66–72; quote: 67.

39 The irony of it all is that Ibn al-Ḥimṣī’s lavish descriptions and temporal juxtapositions are – to the modern reader at least – much more entertaining and would therefore make a much better conversation piece.
textualised in the *Mufakhat al-Khillān*. This is not to mean that the latter is less of a literary work; rather Ibn Ṭūlūn mastered the technique of condensation, retaining the important ‘facts’, while arranging them in a new narrative that would be adapted in all biographical accounts.

**Ḥawādith al-Zamān**

Ibn al-Ḥīmṣī applies refined techniques to lead the reader through his narrative. His account starts *in medias res* with the ambush on and imprisonment of Mubarak (B), followed by a condensed analepsis to explain the causes behind this event (A). It then returns to the former point, describing the beating at the governor’s seat (B*). After that, he mostly follows the chronological order in his account, but arranges it around one central scene. This scene is the clash between sufis and Mamluks around the Umayyad Mosque (F to F3; G to G3; H1), which takes up about half the text. After he summarises Mubārak’s actions (E), he turns his full attention towards to his centre stage: “Some of his Sufis were with him; (F) the others were at the gate.” Their motives and intentions are uttered by these sufis themselves (F1): “They have done this to our shaykh Mubārak. He was unjustly beaten, and our comrade is in prison. Let us go and free him from the prison!”

Only in the scene, his narrative inspects the events closely, evoking a sense of escalation, urgency and uncertainty: First, the sufis move against the prison and can free only one prisoner; then, not satisfied, they shout so that a larger crowd gathers and helps them break down the gates, enabling the other prisoners to flee (F, F2, F3). As soon as the Mamluks react, repetition of the same basic sequence (Mamluks attack; people flee; Mamluks attack) is used to increase this effect: (G) the soldiers attack; (G1) inside the Umayyad Mosque, the people are unable to lock all gates; the crowd flees to the amber market (G2) but find their way blocked; the Mamluks attack once more. Then they loot the swords market (G3). Another instance of direct speech makes the governor responsible for the whole affair (H1), before the raid on Qābūn is summarised (H). Ibn al-Ḥīmṣī emphasises the centrality of his central scene also by immediately laying out its consequences: the closing of the markets (I) and the hunt for “everyone wearing a *mīzar*” (J).

Ibn al-Ḥīmṣī consciously built his narrative around this central scene, which is therefore charged with “fully paradigmatic importance”.41 The account thus ends with the author himself taking the stage at the same place, certifying the credi-

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40 According to Ibn Ṭawq, this began only on 4 Ramaḍān; Ibn Ṭawq, *Ṭālīq III*, 1289–1290.
41 Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 111.
bility of his account (I1) as well as the validity of his conclusions from it (K).\footnote{42} Even in his more general epilogue (J), which receives its own extensive treatment in the second entry (dated 21 Shawwāl 899) and uses an even more complex approach to chronology, using two analepses, where the second is even inserted in the first, he redirects his audience’s attention to this scene.\footnote{43} Thus, his narrative depicts these events as being of a unique impact for Damascus.

Mufākahat al-Khillān

In contrast, Ibn Ṭūlūn’s account goes towards an overall condensation. Like the Hawādīth, Ibn Ṭūlūn’s narrative begins in medias res. The entry for 2 Ramadān follows almost the same arrangement (B-A-C), but the governor is the only one speaking (B2), and (C) is summarised in only one sentence, omitting the involvement of the shaykh al-islām. The day of the clash is even more condensed. The sufis go directly from Qābūn (D) to the prison (F). What constituted a scene in Ibn al-Ḥimṣi’s work, is here only summary: “(G) The Mamluks . . . rushed . . . towards them and killed scores, more than 150 . . ., at the Bāb al-Barīd, (G2) the Bāb al-Anbariyīn, and (G1) the grave of Zākariyyā in the Umayyad Mosque.”\footnote{44} The attack on Qābūn (H) is discounted altogether, and his acknowledgement of the impact (I) is as brief as possible – as is the conclusion he draws from it (K): “There is no power but in God!” However, he adds in a prolepsis one consequence of those events (J).

Ibn Ṭūlūn’s terseness is not due to a larger temporal distance between the events and his writing, but to a different intention of the text, one that is common

\footnote{42} Also, here he does not mention that the shaykh al-islām was present at this madrasa, as well; see Ibn Ṭawq’s account above (H2).

\footnote{43} The entry begins with the arrival of sultanic decrees to Damascus, before revisiting Mubārak’s ‘adventures’ in Cairo after his leaving Damascus. From there the narrative looks back again and continues the episode where the first entry had stopped: “When he [Mubārak] suffered his ordeal (mithna), about which I have talked before, from his prison break and the oppressors’ mounted attack (rūkāb) against him and his following, the killing of more than 100 of them and other people in front of the gate of the Umayyad Mosque, and their looting of Qābūn, and the oppressors’ search for shaykh Mubārak, dispatching [search parties] on the roads to catch him.” Ibn al-Ḥimṣi follows chronology from then on, tracing the shaykh’s escape to Cairo, leading back to that time, before returning to the present of the greater narrative, i. e. the events actually dated. Again, he closes the entry with a comment: “Now gaze, o brother, upon this black slave: when he had true intentions (akhlaṣa al-niyya li-ilāh), God saved him from them [the ‘oppressors’] and subjected them to him. Praised be to the changer of hearts.” Ibn al-Ḥimṣi, Hawādīth al-zamān, 255–256. The account of the journey agrees with Ibn Ṭawq’s notes but no discussion of the sultanic decrees took place until after the end of Shawwāl 899; Taʿlīq III, 1290–1292, 1294, 1299, 1300.

\footnote{44} The numbers here refer to the same points used in Ibn al-Ḥimṣi’s account.
in many of his ta’liq works. He actually succeeds in retaining all (or most) of the essential ‘facts’ of the episode, while stripping the original context from it (which is easier if the protagonist appears only in this one place in his entire chronicle). In my opinion, Ibn Ṭūlūn purposefully retained the appearance of a diary for it gave it a different kind of credibility, but also because it allowed him to shift or change the narrative without sacrificing the factuality of the events it describes. Thereby, he could frame the whole affair in binaries of good and evil, pious and unjust, and so on. The consequences of the clash become more important than the events themselves. The summarisation emphasises the focus on the consequences and subjects the singular events to the lessons to be learned from them. There might be repetition at work on the macro-narrative level, which would indicate that Ibn Ṭūlūn wrote a story in which the Mamluks (or at least this governor) took the part of the villain.

This becomes clearest in the first entry (1.9.899), where the imprisonment of two of Mubārak’s followers is answered with the occupation of the Umayyad Mosque (B1) and its minarets. Their shouting the takbīr indicates their moral superiority as much as the reason for the imprisonment (A).46 Since this incident is not to be found in the other sources discussed above, which, in general, were much more attentive to the whole affair, I suggest that this incident might actually have never happened in that way (or at that time) and serves rather as an advance notice (prolepsis) of the events to follow.46 The whole clash is already foreshadowed here. Ibn Ṭūlūn introduces the main characters (Mubārak and the dawādār) and alludes to the nature of the conflict. Furthermore, this frame takes the focus (or blame) off Mubārak: first his followers get arrested, then he himself is a victim of the ruthless dawādār (the “large crowd” indicates that Mubārak has a majority of the – Muslim – people on his side). Mubārak disappears from the narrative after the second entry; any connection between him and the riot is thus rejected.

Changing the subject: Mufākahat al-Ikhwān

Comparing Ibn Ṭūlūn’s biographical account to those from the two literary chronicles, we find that the focus has shifted from the events to their central figure. All information pertaining to other consequences has been stripped from


46 In fact, Ibn Ṭawq mentions an incident quite similar to Ibn Ṭūlūn’s description for Sunday 1 Jumādā I 898. Ibn Ṭawq, Ta’līq III, 1174.
the account (H, I, J), while new material about Mubārak’s life has been added (A1, J). It also re-establishes the chronology, albeit on a rather larger scale (A comes before B). One could say that, on that level, the clash with the Mamluks (as a whole) has become the central ‘scene’ (B1 through G1) in this life story, if only because everything else has been condensed or omitted. This effect is boosted by the lack of dating. Thus it seems that the whole episode could have happened over the course of only one day.

Within this scene we find similarities with the chronicles. The narrative order of events clearly follows the Mufākaha, both on the level of entries (1st entry: B1; 2nd entry: B, C; 3rd entry: F, G) and within those entries (G2 before G1, omission of E). However, the focus of this scene (the slaughter around the Umayyad Mosque) is closer to Ibn al-Ḥimṣī’s version. Indeed, the death toll, which is restricted to central Damascus, seems to be directly copied from the Hawādith (F2). Furthermore, Ibn Qāḍī ʿAjlūn is being made the central figure in Mubārak’s rescue (C). Yet, this does not mean that Ibn Ṭūlūn merely compiled the material in a new way. He constructed a strikingly different narrative, in which most of Mubārak’s agency is discounted. On one hand, he is turned into a client of the shaykh al-islām, who first built him his zāwiya (A1) and then comes to his rescue (C). The omission of the judge ways heavy in this respect. On the other hand, Ibn Ṭūlūn’s first entry (B1) has been promoted here from mere ‘advance notice’ to the primary cause of the clash. Mubārak merely tried to intercede (B) peacefully but could not stop the escalation. He could not even control his followers (F). The epilogue insists that the magnitude of the massacre led him to resign his effort for a ‘better’ world. Thus framed, the central scene becomes the biographee’s life-changing moment; the citywide crisis is reformulated into a personal one.

Conclusions

As was demonstrated, the different chronicles and biographies did not, while they might reuse the same material, reproduce one another’s narrative or meaning. The interpretation of the Mubārak’s clash with the Mamluks changed tremendously from one account to another. Ibn Ṭawq portrays it as a threat to his patrons and thus, in the end, to his own position in the world. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī rephrases it as a struggle of Damascenes against Mamluk “oppressors”. Ibn Ṭūlūn, first, turns it into a (minor) ‘case study’ on the contest between good and

47 This is just tentative speculation, but the judge’s exclusion might have, stipulated by the new Ottoman judicial setup, actually proven Mubārak’s piety and distance from the rulers.
48 Ibn Ṭawq records a last raid in 902; Talʿīq III, 1513.
The later biographies generally embed the episode within a more general description of the shaykh, which might seem hagiographic, were it not for the peculiarity of the qualities highlighted. Among those are his strength, dark skin, impressive figure and determination, but also a speech impediment and his skills in singing, hunting, and swimming. They thus change the topic, and the clash between Mubarak and the Mamluks becomes part of a strikingly different ‘macro-narrative’ than in the literary chronicles or diaries analyses here.

Al-Ghazzi, Ibn al-‘Imād (d. 1622), and Ibn Ayyūb (d. 1592) all devote at least half of their accounts to a description of the central clash. In this, they rely exclusively on two entries, copied from Ibn al-Mibrad and Ibn Ṭūlūn’s Musfākahat al-Ikhwān respectively. Ibn Ayyūb also quotes the first (from the Tamattu’), but declares the latter as his own writing; the account still follows the same arrangement, although the terminology and certain emphases are altered. Furthermore, he presents the two accounts in an order opposite to both chronology and the arrangement chosen by the other biographers. The later biographical transmission on Mubarak mostly accepted Ibn Ṭūlūn as the authority on the sufis haykh. He is cited at least once on other aspects of Mubarak’s biography in all the three following accounts. Even his transcripts of Ibn al-Mibrad’s text would outlive citations of the original. His Musfākahat al-Ikhwān, although it does not seem to have survived, became authoritative in the bio-

49 Whereas Ibn al-‘Imād only mentions the shaykh’s talents and skills, both Ibn Ayyūb and al-Ghazzi elaborate in two anecdotes how Mubarak once shot two birds although with a broken crossbow and how he used to dive into the river and would resurface with fish in both his hands – and feet! The assessment of his speech impediment is quoted by all from Ibn Ṭūlūn (no work given). Ghazzi, Kawākiʿ 2, 246; Ibn Ayyūb, “al-Rawḍ”, f. 286a; Ibn al-‘Imād, Shadharāt al-dhahāb 8, 259–260. I have uploaded my translations of these three biographies on my blog Damascus Anecdotes (thecamel.hypotheses.org). A search for Mubarak turns up all entries.

50 In counting, I have substracted the last half page from Ibn Ayyūb’s entry, which deals exclusively with the biography Mubarak’s son shaykh Muḥammad; Ibn Ayyūb, “al-Rawḍ”, ff. 286a–286b.


52 Ibn Ayyūb’s approach to the episode and to Mubarak’s biography more generally, is certainly the most intriguing among the three. He emphasizes the influence of Ibn Qāḍī ʿAjlūn over Mubarak and discredits his activities by calling his followers ‘unruly youth’ (utūra / utūrat al-shabāb). He wrongly gives the governor’s name as ʿĪsā Bāshā (rather an Ottoman than Mamluk title) and ascribes the alcohol trade exclusively to the Christian village of Sayyidnāyā. He omits any consequences of the massacre but ends his account with the words: “[The mamluks] killed about 70 of [Mubarak’s followers] at the Bāb al-Barīd […] The rest fled”. The conflict thus appears as not much more than a gang fight, not a city wide crisis. See Ibn Ayyūb, “al-Rawḍ”, f. 285b.
graphical works, both because it provided the most convincing narrative and because it hides the narrative’s origins.\textsuperscript{53} The clusters are penetrated in this one case (see figure 3), which emphasises the centrality of Ibn Ṭūlūn’s works for the transmission even more. His works became the mainstay of biographical writing on Mubārak and his biographical account as ‘canonical’ as Ibn al-Mibrad’s.\textsuperscript{54}

Still, Mubārak’s legacy remained contested through ‘narrativisation’ until the early 17th century. Later biographers concentrated on other elements of Mubarak’s biography, in which they treated each other’s works in much the same way, as Ibn Ayyūb treated the Mufākahat al-Khillān or Ibn Ṭūlūn the chronicles at his disposal: they copy-catted them. This is interesting to observe with regard to the emergence of a transmission as well as to literary practice. Copying without explicit reference was of course a very common practice. Only once a certain version had achieved a ‘canonical’ status, would its source be acknowledged. But what was the reason that Ibn Ṭūlūn reached this status? Did it depend on the later biographers’ temporal distance from the events described? Only al-Ghazzī cites

\textsuperscript{53} In other, smaller biographical works, he explicitly refers the reader to his chronicle: “I have mentioned an abridged version [of such-and-such an incident] in my book Mufākahat al-Khillān fi Ḥawādith al-Zāmān”; Ibn Ṭūlūn, “Ghāyat al-bayān fi tarjamat al-shaykh Arslān”, MS Süleymaniyeye U Külpahanesi, Esat Effendi 1590, f. 10b.

\textsuperscript{54} This account is explicitly cited from the Tamattu by al-Ghazzī and Ibn Ayyūb, the Mufākahat al-Ikhwān explicitly by al-Ghazzī and implicitly by Ibn al-ʿImād.
both works explicitly, whereas Ibn al-ʿImād refers to their author as his source of information (“Ibn Ṭūlūn spoke”) and Ibn Ayyūb cites him only in part. Was it his contemporaneousness to the events? Ibn al-Ḥimṣī was a contemporary, too. Was it that he authored both chronicles and biographies? Yet, his chronicle is not cited in any account, although it was accessible even to the latest biographer al-Ghazzi.\(^5\) Was it Ibn Ṭūlūn’s reputation as a scholar and historian? Despite the many citations, most of his works remain only as autographs. Or did a taste for a certain style of narration play a role in this process of canonisation?

It is probable that his narrative really was perceived as the most convincing, concise and adaptable, and that this granted it its ‘canonical’ status. Not even Ibn Ayyūb’s rewrite could change that, and Ibn al-ʿImād and al-Ghazzi discounted this version. Muḥsin al-Musawi’s finding that one main concern of historical narrative was “[t]o be true to life, but not real” looms large in this respect.\(^6\) In any case, the different Mubāraks and clashes are a result of those procedures, in which the past was constantly reinterpreted to illuminate an ever-changing present.

**Bibliography**

**Primary Sources**


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\(^5\) From other biographies, we know that al-Ghazzī had access to the Mufākaha. Also Ibn Ayyūb used Ibn Ṭūlūn’s chronicle (“*ṭāʾīkh*”) and other works abundantly. See the biographies of Abū Bakr Ibn Qādī ʿAjlūn, Ghazzī, *Kawākib* 1, 114–118; Günes, *Das Kitāb ar-raʿud*, 28–30; Conermann, “*Life and Works*”, 139.


**Secondary Literature**


