Scripting Mamlūk Cities: Insider's Look. Explorations into Landscape Narratives

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Abstract

In a memorial lecture for Charles Beckingham, David Morgan[1] *evoked one of this prolific travel literature scholar's astute observations: "[T]he study of travel narratives, especially travel narratives about a culture quite different from the traveller's own, can be very revealing, not only about the culture he observed, but about the culture to which he belonged".*[2] *This insight indeed undergirds my own approach to the descriptions of cities by both insiders and outsiders. Narratives of cities, indeed of any landscape, are but interpretative and hermeneutics texts which can be surely used to narrate the very landscape, but also as texts which may be used to understand the culture and perceptions of the narrator. Over the course of this paper, I examine two accounts (texts) of residents of Mamlūk provincial cities in* al-Shām. *These texts will be placed under the scrutiny of the data and the existing literature of those cities. In other words, the 'conceptualised city' as narrated by the sources will be compared with the 'tangible city'. The latter we may unearth from various other sources (mostly texts) as well as the city's built environment. Thus, this chapter examines the ways in which Mamlūk cities of* al-Shām *were scripted and narrated by two local 'storytellers' and 'image-makers' of the city.*[3] *In this context, 'storyteller' is an umbrella term for those who left us with a narrated legacy of their city. I decided to call them storytellers for the purpose of accentuating their inherent subjectivity. Informed and accurate as some of these narrators may have been, all of their experiences with and accounts of the urban landscape were guided by a personal understanding and their own cultural background. Since each of these texts is about spatial practices and spatial arrangement (landscape) of the city, the argument can be made that they all fall under the heading of travel writing.*[4] *What is more, any narrative with a spatial dimension (Michel de Certeau would argue that there is no such thing as a narrative without one) is a story that organises space. Against this backdrop, the objective of this chapter, above and beyond presenting 'spatial stories' of cities of Syria, is to demonstrate the complexity of the reading landscape and particularly the ways*

[1]Indeed, it is such an honour and a privilege to be one of David's well-wishers here. Like so many others I have always found him not only the first-rate scholar that he is, witty and insightful but, and more importantly, a wonderful friend. And as for so many others, David was instrumental and helpful throughout my academic career. In his long-term role as the editor of *JRAS* David facilitated the publication of my first peer-reviewed paper and completed the cycle when, at the very end of his twenty two years as general editor of the Cambridge Studies of Islamic Civilization series, he oversaw the publication of my first book with Cambridge University Press.

[2]C. F. Beckingham, "In search of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa", *Asian Affairs* 8 (1978), pp. 263–277 (at p. 263); cited in D. O. Morgan, "Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and the Mongols", *JRAS*, 3rd series, 11/1 (April 2001), pp. 1-2, n. 4.

[3]For more on the concept of urban image makers, see K. Olds, *Globalization and Urban Change: Capital, Culture, and Pacific Rim Mega-Project* (Oxford, 2001), p. 141.

[4]M. de Certeau, "Spatial stories", in A. Ballantyne (ed.), *What is Architecture?* (New York, 2002), pp. 72-73.

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landscape descriptions need always be taken as subjective, culture-based, culturally constructed, and a constant negotiation between the traveller/story-teller/source narration, the 'actual' built environment and the political context.

Landscape and Mental Maps – A Few Rudimentary Notes

Landscape is surely one of the more vexing terms in the Romance languages. Ken Olwig points out that initially the term 'landscape' indicated a region which people have carved with an axe and a plough (that is, human labour was at work in order to construct it) and it belongs to the people that have carved it out.[5] Further, landscape was understood to be part of a cultural identity and a feeling of belonging to the place. Surely, although landscape signifies an arrangement of things on the land it is not just an accidental array of objects and artefacts scattered on the ground.[6] Landscape, as the argument goes, is not just simply out there to be studied as a natural phenomenon. It is certainly not 'nature' as landscape (as form, meaning and representation) is derived from and connected to human labour and creativity.[7] Landscapes simply do not exist without human agents and culture. Landscape is society's unwitting biography in which and through which ideas, codes of practice, religious norms and cultural standards take physical form. This is, perhaps, the most comprehensive medium through which societies and individuals have expressed their uniqueness, aspirations, status among many other socio-political needs.[8] The formation of landscape is inexorably linked to politics, power structures, and surely struggles over meanings and ownership. The creation or rather the construction of landscape is all about power and therefore entails struggles and the use of force. Thus, the construction of landscape is a continuous dialogue and indeed struggle among different forces. Landscapes carry signs and symbols which represent social norms, identity, memory, cultural codes, and surely the ways these were, and still are, fought over and debated among different forces. Landscape is indeed a text and context written by many participants following changing codes of practices, preferences, ideals and more.

The challenges of reading and understanding landscape are legion. It is simultaneously a system of signification but always open to a plethora of interpretations based on the reader's point of view, politics and, by implication, culture. The following excerpt from Italo Calvino's novel *Invisible Cities* may help explain these trajectories and ruminations on landscape. In this work of fiction, which is set as an inter-lingual dialogue between Kublai Khan and Marco Polo, Calvino expounds upon the complexities and reflexivity that inhere any city. The following description of Tamara, a fictional city, epitomises the problems involved in reading and depicting the landscape:

> Finally the journey leads to the city of Tamara. You penetrate it along streets thick with signboards jutting from the walls. The eye does not see things but images of things that mean other things . . .

[5] K. Olwig, "Sexual cosmology: Nation and landscape at the conceptual interstices of nature and culture; or What does landscape really mean?", in B. Bender (ed.), *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* (Oxford, 1993), p. 311.

[6] D. Mitchell, "Landscape", in D. Atkinson, P. Jackson, D. Sibley and N. Washbourne (eds.), *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts* (London, 2005), p. 49.

[7] Y. Tuan, "Thought and landscape", in D. Meinig (ed.), *Interpretations of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographic Essays* (New York, 1979), pp. 89–102.

[8] D. C. Harvey, "Landscape organization, identity and change: Territoriality and hagiography in medieval West Cornwall", *Landscape Research* 25/3, (2000), pp. 201-202.

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> Other signals warn of what is forbidden in a given place (to enter the alley with wagons, to urinate behind the kiosk, to fish with your pole from the bridge) and what is allowed (watering zebras, playing bowls, burning relatives' corpses). If a building has no signboard or figure, its very form and the position it occupies in the city's order suffice to indicate its function: the palace, the prison, the mint, the Pythagorean School, the brothel . . . Your gaze scans the streets as if they were written pages: the city says everything you must think, makes you repeat her discourse, and while you believe you are visiting Tamara you are only recording the names with which she defines herself and all her parts.
> However, the city may really be, beneath this thick coating of signs, whatever it may contain or conceal, you leave Tamara without having discovered it . . . .[9]

This reading of the city's landscape renders very clearly the idea of landscape as text. It also makes it clear that any reading of the city's built environment is culturally based (and biased?) and inherently interpretative and reflects among other things the reader's own mental map of the city.

All human beings avail themselves of mental maps, as these sorts of images enable us to wend our way through changing geographic settings.[10] Like 'real' maps, the mental varieties are mnemonic devices that help us navigate through familiar surroundings on a daily basis by structuring and storing knowledge. Kevin Lynch considers the mental maps of urban dwellers to be cognitive images. Besides the images of individual residents, Lynch also believes that there is another type:

> There seems to be a public image of any given city which is the overlap of many individual images. Or perhaps there is a series of public images, each held by some significant number of citizens. Such group images are necessary if an individual is to operate successfully within his environment and to cooperate with his fellows. Each individual picture is unique, with some content that is rarely or never communicated, yet it approximates the public image, which in different environments is more or less compelling, more or less embracing.[11]

Shared urban maps are predicated on mutual cultural perceptions. These images allow urban dwellers to feel relatively sure of themselves as they make their way through streets, neighbourhoods, institutions and public compounds. What is more, they help residents and visitors (e.g., travellers, tourists and merchants) process a litany of complex variables into a coherent, manageable body of knowledge with which to get from point A to B. Lynch also finds that people use images to connect to places as well as communicate and form strong ties with others in their environment. The individual map, in his estimation, conflates with the public one, thereby forming a common memory. Against this backdrop, Lynch has coined two terms that pertain to the skill of reading and experiencing the landscape: imageability and legibility. The first is "the quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer".[12] Legibility is "the ease with which the parts of the cityscape can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern".[13] In

[9] I. Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, translated by W. Weaver (New York, 1974), p. 19.
[10] Y. Tuan, "Image and mental maps", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 65/2 (1975), pp. 209-211.
[11] K. Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge MA, 1960), p. 46.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[13] *Ibid*, pp. 2-3.

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what follows I will employ Lynch's terminology and findings as part of my effort to further understand the ways in which locals have conceptualised their cities in Mamlūk Syria.

Insider's Look – Take I

How, then, did urban dwellers read the Mamlūk city? What were the mental maps that stood at their disposal? What were the images that had been ingrained in their consciousness and sustained their sense of place? Put differently, how did they read their own landscape? It needs to be said that detailed accounts of Mamlūk Syria's towns are lamentably scarce. However, two compositions by local residents have survived. The first is a text by the Ṣafad native Shams al-Dīn al-ʿUthmānī.[14] The second is the astonishingly comprehensive work of Mujīr al-Dīn al-ʿUlaymī (d. 928/1522). Both documents offer a rare and intimate look at how the empire's residents viewed their hometowns.

Shams al-Dīn al-ʿUthmānī served as the judge (*qāḍī*) and narrator (*khatīb*) in various mosques of Ṣafad during the second half of the fourteenth century.[15] The present discussion is concerned with his narration *Ta'rīkh Ṣafad* ("the History of Ṣafad"), which was probably written sometime between 774/1372 and 778/1376.[16] In the introduction, al-ʿUthmānī promises his readers a comprehensive history of Ṣafad from the Mamlūk conquest in 1265 to the events that transpired during his own lifetime. According to al-ʿUthmānī, he endeavours to remove the "veil behind the beauty" of 'his' city and province.[17] Needless to say, people often develop a sense of loyalty to their extended place of residence.[18] Therefore, it is only natural that a deep sense of belonging and a burning indignation over the fact that Ṣafad and its environs were misrepresented and certainly under-represented were among the principal motivations behind the writing of *Ta'rīkh Ṣafad*. It also bears noting that this book is targeted at the judge's social milieu, namely people from a similar religio-scholarly background; or, as al-ʿUthmānī put it himself, "those whom God granted passion for noble knowledge".[19]

Most of the writer's actual description of Ṣafad is set within the framework of a dialogue between two fictional local residents: the first, the cynical (*baʿd ahl al-zarf)*, who harps on the town's shortcomings; and his imaginative positive interlocutor who sings its praises. Through these voices, al-ʿUthmānī discloses his urban perception and the central landmarks on his mental map of the Galilean town. According to al-ʿUthmānī, Ṣafad is a wonderful city, despite the lack of "regular urban planning".[20] Although the book does not spell out what "regular urban planning" consists of, al-ʿUthmānī subsequently provides a smattering

[14]Bernard Lewis was the first to publish excerpts from al-ʿUthmānī s manuscript which he found at the Library of Istanbul University (Arabic MS 4525). See B. Lewis, "An Arabic account of the province of Safed", *BSOAS* 15 (1953), pp. 477-488. This ms was recently published as Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿUthmānī, *Ta'rīkh Ṣafad*, (ed.) S. Zakkār (Damascus, 2009). For the purpose of this Chapter I would refer to the early edition of this ms as published by Lewis. For an in-depth discussion of *Ta'rīkh Ṣafad* with particular reference to local Sufis and their relations with the Mamlūk Sultanate elite, see O. Amir, "Sufis and Mamlūks: A chapter in Islamization in Palestine", MA Thesis, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem, 2013) [unpublished, Hebrew]. I wish to thank Mr. Amir for assisting me with certain issues regarding the new edition of *Ta'rīkh Ṣafad* by al-ʿUthmānī.

[15]At a later phase in his career, al-ʿUthmānī was transferred to Damascus to serve as a qāḍī.

[16]Lewis, "Arabic account of Safed", p. 477, n. 3.

[17]*Ibid*., pp. 478-479.

[18]N. Lovell, "Introduction", in *idem* (ed.), *Locality and Belonging* (London and New York, 1998), pp. 1-2.

[19]Lewis, "Arabic account of Safed", p. 479.

[20]*Ibid*., p. 480.

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of clues. The conspicuous and menacing citadel serves as the focal point and the most iconic landmark of the author's mental map, as the fortress comes up several times in his description. The way the city soars over its immediate surroundings also draws considerable attention. For example, he recounts a local story according to which the city's name derives from the word *aṣfād* or shackles. This derivation implies that Ṣafad's residents are metaphorically shackled to their homes by the extreme cold of this high-altitude town. Al-'Uthmānī also elaborates on the *satūrā*, which is apparently a sophisticated device for supplying water to the citadel's reservoir. According to the writer, the *satūrā* is operated by three mounted riders whose circular movement lifts buckets of water to the fortress' main pipe. This supply is primarily intended for the soldiers that are stationed in the citadel, but surplus water is channelled to Ṣafad's civilian areas. The next largest edifice in this account is the Red Mosque, which was built shortly after Ṣafad fell into the hands of Baybars. The mosque's courtyard is depicted as a place of 'mercy and grace'.[21]

These attractions notwithstanding, al-'Uthmānī is not content with enumerating the city's existing buildings and institutions. For instance, he chastises the community for its lack of a single madrasa and for failing to provide any religious education whatsoever. Moreover, he quotes a passage from al-'Umarī's work on intermittent water shortages that befell the town, despite the storage system that Sultan Baybars installed. While on the topic, al-'Uthmānī describes the pathetic conditions of the local bath houses. In addition, he bemoans the fact that houses are clustered into an unmanageable heap and squares cannot be distinguished from the streets that merge into them. He pins the dearth of various urban infrastructure and facilities, such as a defensive wall, *ribāṭ*s and madarasas, on the lack of generous patrons. This statement thus sheds light on how urban communities operated and how their own citizens felt they should be run. In order to compensate for these cultural-urban shortcomings, al-'Uthmānī praises the area's natural landscape. For example, he mentions that local residents stroll in the deep gorges and ravines that surround the city, and the town's salubrious qualities, including its fresh air, render it an ideal place to recuperate from sickness.

In summation, al-'Uthmānī provides a unique balance of commendation and rebuke. Furthermore, his account offers a rare glimpse at how contemporary citizens grasped provincial Mamlūk cities, as it is undoubtedly based on a certain reality that the author experienced as a denizen of Ṣafad. Along with the icons that comprise and sustain his mental map or imagery, *The History of Ṣafad* also stands out for what its author omitted. As evidenced by the accounts of Ṣafad that were written by visitors, al-'Uthmānī left out elements that definitely existed in the city during his lifetime. Perhaps the most salient feature of this account is the author's willingness to highlight the city's inadequacies. This suggests that he had a vision, a notion, of what constitutes a city. Through his description of the advantages and shortcomings of his hometown, al-'Uthmānī articulates a clear vision of urbanism. It is through this vision that he negotiates his criticism of Ṣafad. The writer measures Ṣafad against his own template of a city and builds his description accordingly. The outcome of this process is a highly specific mental map. In any event, he deftly deflects personal responsibility for these critical views by ascribing them to a cynical character. Since the *History of Ṣafad* was apparently dedicated to the province's Mamlūk governor, amir 'Alamdār

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 481.

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(in office 774/1372-778/1376) it stands to reason that al-'Uthmānī was not at liberty to critique the personal shortcomings and apathy of state officials.[22] Besides reporting on the Ṣafad he actually experienced, al-'Uthmānī paints a portrait of the desired, yet unfulfilled version of his hometown – an imagined landscape that serves as a foil for the imperfect and earthly city he knew.

Insider's Look – Take II

Unlike his Galilean counterpart, the Jerusalemite Mujīr al-Dīn demonstrates a deep and unabashed local patriotism, which runs like a thread throughout his book. Early on in *al-Uns al-jalīl bi-ta'rīkh al-Quds wa'l-Khalīl*, the fifteenth-century Ḥanbalī judge states his motivations for this undertaking. Apparently, he set out on this ambitious task of writing a book about Jerusalem (although Hebron is included in the title, the attention it receives pales in comparison to Jerusalem) because he could not find any existing book that fits the bill.[23] Mujīr al-Dīn's keen interest in the city's Islamic elements and heritage is manifested by the very structure of *al-Uns*. The author starts with a lengthy history of the pre-Mamlūk city, which indeed concentrates on its Islamic influences. For instance, he provides an in-depth survey of *Faḍā'il Bayt al-Maqdis* ("Virtues of Jerusalem"), a literary genre aimed at bolstering Jerusalem's lofty religious status.[24] Similarly, in Mujīr al-Dīn's exhaustive disquisition on local notables, most of the subjects are pious scholars of Islamic canonical texts. The final part of the book analyses the urban events that transpired during the judge's lifetime, especially during the reign of Sultan Qāītbāy. [25] At the very outset of the book, he declares that the primary objective of this undertaking is to provide a complete history of Jerusalem and Hebron.[26] Unlike other cities in the region, Mujīr al-Dīn felt that his hometown had yet to receive the scholarly attention it deserves. What is more, he is motivated by the fact that "I have seen people yearning for such a work".[27] This book is arguably the most comprehensive history of the city during the Mamlūk period. Mujīr al-Dīn's vast and intimate knowledge of Jerusalem, the abundant sources that he leaned on and his meticulous approach make this thick tome an invaluable database on the city and other towns in the region.

> Jerusalem, according to its native son, is a densely-populated city, quaintly nestled between mountains and valleys. Summing up his topographical survey of the city, Mujīr al-Dīn concludes that "[t]he construction of Jerusalem is of the utmost solidity and firmness; all [the buildings] are made of hewn white stone, with no bricks or any wood used in the roofs. Travellers have

[22] On 'Alamdār, see Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm al-ẓāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa'l-Qāhira*, (ed.) W. Popper (Cairo, 1934), pp. 5, 273, 296.

[23] Mujīr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Ḥanbalī al-'Ulaymī, *al-Uns al-jalīl bi-ta'rīkh al-Quds wa'l-Khalīl*, 2 vols ('Ammān, 1973), I, p. 5.

[24] *Faḍā'il Bayt al-Maqdis* has received ample attention in the literature. On the importance of this genre to the study of early Islam and Jerusalem in particular, see, for example, M. J. Kister, "'You Shall Only Set Out for Three Mosques'. A study of an early Tradition", *Le Muséon* 82 (1969), pp. 173-196; also A. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (Leiden, New York and Köln, 1995).

[25] Little also scrutinises this work in D. P. Little, "Mujīr al-Dīn al-ʿUlaymī's vision of Jerusalem in the ninth-fifteenth century" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115/2 (1995), pp. 237-2347.

[26] Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns*, I, p. 4.

[27] *Ibid.*, I, p. 5.

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said that in all kingdoms there is no place more solidly constructed or more beautiful".[28] This description of the stone roofs is indeed commensurate with the findings of the vernacular survey that I conducted of the city's Mamlūk-era structures.[29]

The passage below not only confirms Mujīr al-Dīn's infatuation with Jerusalem, but enhances our understanding of the centrality of the Ḥaram al-Sharīf on the mental map of the city's residents:

> And as for the way Jerusalem is viewed from afar, it is a marvel renowned for its radiance and its fine appearance . . . If Gods allows an aspiring visitor to reach the noble al-Aqṣā Mosque and the noble Tomb of Abraham, from the moment he sees these glorified places, he will receive so much delight and joy as can scarcely be described, and he will be relieved of hardship and fatigue.[30]

The importance of the Noble Sanctuary also comes across in Mujīr al-Dīn's topographical survey. Focusing on architectural marvels of Islamic religious or pious significance, Mujīr al-Dīn starts out with a detailed portrait of the Ḥaram al-Sharīf, which is the hub of the surrounding concentric layers that comprise the rest of this survey. The description follows in concentric and growing circles from the Ḥaram to the rest of the city and beyond of mostly Islamic pious buildings and landmarks.

Especially relevant to understand his mental map is Mujīr al-Dīn's spatial descriptions of Jerusalem's topography. His account substantiates not only Ḥaram al-Sharīf's role as the pre-eminent religious and spiritual centre, but [to] the precinct's centrality in the mental map of the city's Islamic population. Indeed, during the Mamlūk period members of the elite of the Mamlūk Sultanate were heavily engaged with constructions within and without the compound. The Noble Sanctuary's religious standing lured numerous dignitaries to endow and build institutions in the vicinity, which were complemented with new gates and streets leading to the sacred area. In turn, the streets surrounding the holy precinct were adorned with bustling markets, bathhouses, pilgrimage lodges, madrasas and Sufi centres. In light of all the institutions and bustle, this extended area formed the epicentre of the inhabitants' mental map.

However, all this applies mostly, if not exclusively, to the Muslim population, as the city's other communities had their own hubs and landmarks. Jerusalem's non-Muslim buildings and areas warrant little attention throughout the book. Mujīr al-Dīn does briefly touch on the existence of about twenty churches, but only mentions a few of them by name. The most conspicuous Christian institution in Mujīr al-Dīn's account is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. However, he refers to it as *Kanīsat al-Qumāma* ("the Church of the Garbage"), thereby distorting one of its real names, *Kanīsat al-Qiyāma* ("the Church of the Resurrection").[31] This flagrant expression of contempt was hardly a one-time occurrence

[28] *Ibid.*, II, p. 55.

[29] N. Luz, *The Mamluk City in the Middle East. History, Culture and the Urban Landscape* (New York, 2014), pp. 69-83.

[30] Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns*, I, p. 56.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 51.

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during the Mamlūk era.[32] As the sultanate's power eroded over the course of the fifteen century, the animosity between sectarian groups took a sharp turn for the worse. This socio-political development was punctuated with outbursts of violence.[33] Additionally, Mujīr al-Dīn practically ignores the city's Jewish populace. One of the only references to a Jewish synagogue comes as an aside to Mujīr al-Dīn's recollection of a lingering dispute between the local Muslim and Jewish community.[34]

The Muslim-dominated east side receives his undivided attention, whereas the entire area west of the city's main boulevard—starting at the present-day Damascus Gate (*Bāb al-'Amūd*) and running south up to the Gate of Zion (*Bāb Ṣahyūn*)—constitutes an exceedingly peripheral section of his mental map. His image revolves around Jerusalem's prominent Islamic area. The wide-ranging and highly-informative description of Islamic topics (buildings, events and people) stands in stark contradistinction to the scarcity of data on Christian and Jewish matters. It is quite evident that Mujīr al-Dīn's mental map is inconsistent with the city's 'actual' layout during his lifetime. While the citadel on the western edge of town certainly stands out on Mujīr al-Dīn's map, there is a void between this installation and the nearest cluster of Muslim buildings, most of which are to the east of the main thoroughfare. Lynch refers to these neglected areas on the urban mental maps of local residents as "edges" – "elements not used or considered as paths by the observer".[35]

The author's cognitive image of Jerusalem is clearly driven by his socio-cultural background and predispositions. More specifically, Mujīr al-Dīn's mental map is a product of his educational background as a religious legal scholar and his personal inclinations as a devout Muslim. In other words, the way he reads and narrates the urban landscape is directly influenced by his personal history and upbringing. His reading of the cityscape is organised around prominent, inherently Muslim cultural landmarks. On the other hand, the Christians institutions—even the most famous shrines—barely merit a word and have little impact on the way he negotiates the city. Similar to al-'Uthmānī, it is rather obvious that Mujīr al-Dīn's focus is on Islamic cultural elements and spatial images.

Concluding Remarks

Al-'Uthmānī and Mujīr al-Dīn indeed belonged to the same learned strata of Syrian urban society. For this reason, the extent to which these two authentic local voices can be considered representatives of the entire Muslim community is far from certain. Drawing on Lynch's hypothesis of a public common cognitive map, I contend that they do fit the bill. While the formidable citadel, the main Friday mosque and other Muslim elements are showcased in their mental images of the Mamlūk city, their sensory and spatial experience cannot be solely reduced to the landscape's Islamic components. The surrounding environment,

[32]This denigrating attitude towards this church is frequently echoed in Christian travel accounts. For an in-depth discussion on this topic, see D. R. French, "Pilgrimage, ritual, and power strategies: Felix Fabri's pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1483", in B. F. Le Beau and M. Mor (eds.), *Pilgrims and Travellers to the Holy Land*, Studies in Jewish Civilization series 7 (Omaha, 1996), pp. 169-179.

[33]D. P. Little, "Communal strife in late Mamlūk Jerusalem", *Islamic Law and Society* 6/1 (1999), pp. 69-96.

[34]Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns*, II, pp. 300-340.

[35]Lynch, *The Image of the City*, p. 47.

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external influences and the unique characteristics of each city are also featured in their intimate description of their respective hometowns. Both of these accounts, especially Mujīr al-Dīn's, indicate that there were substantial discrepancies between the authors' mental maps and the existing urban landscape. If we compare description of the city against the landscape of the city as emerging from an extensive field survey and acquaintance with the contemporary Old City in Jerusalem the discrepancies are staggering. While the city holds, to this very day, a rather dominant 'Christian' landscape or at least an impressive number of Christian sites adorning its landscape Mujīr al-Dīn seems to omit them from mental map. He focuses almost solely on the Muslim contribution and constructions in the urban landscape. Thus, when we conflate the mental map of the storyteller (the conceptualised city) to the very landscape of the city (the tangible city) we become more aware of the depth and complexities of landscape as a system of signification which is assembled not only by those who constructed it but also by those who interpret it. As I conclude this discussion I would like to reiterate Beckingham's astute observation which started this chapter: "[T]he study of travel narratives, especially travel narratives about a culture quite different from the traveller's own, can be very revealing, not only about the culture he observed, but about the culture to which he belonged".[36] Apparently one does not need to go far from one's native culture to narrate a city and tell its story in conjunction with one's own cultural perspectives. Both works discussed throughout this chapter are surely valid texts from which we can understand cities better. Be that as it may, they are also in the most de Certeauian sense 'storytellers' and therefore susceptible to a very culturally biased description of 'their' urban landscape. Understanding the complexities of landscape and the lively theoretical discussion that still accompanies analysis of spatial stories of the urban is exactly what I suggested in the introduction. However, unlike the pessimistic approach of Calvino I suggest (in a more optimistic vein) a methodology and a theory of the urban which help to get closer to a better understanding of the tangible and the socially constructed and conceptualised city and landscapes – that is the built environment writ large. luznimrod@gmail.com

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[36]C. F. Beckingham, "In search of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa", p. 263; cited in Morgan, "Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and the Mongols", pp. 1-2, n. 4.

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