

about Avicenna's system: why does he say that never-instantiated, yet conceivable, things are "impossible"? Might it be because matter is simply never suitable to become these things? This would not be an impossibility due to the lack of a particular potentiality right here and now, as Shihadeh describes (pp. 116, 126) – but rather an impossibility stemming from the fact that matter *never* offers the right sort of potentiality.

Shihadeh's book combines an important historical and philological contribution with rich philosophical analysis. Even readers who think they can afford to skip knowing about the relatively obscure al-Mas'ūdī should consult it, if they have any interest in Avicenna's philosophy or its reception.

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JEAN-MICHEL MOUTON, DOMINIQUE SOURDEL, JANINE SOURDEL-THOMINE
(avec un appendice de JEAN RICHARD):

Gouvernance et libéralités de Saladin d'après les données inédites de six documents arabes.

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Since the 1960s, the editors of this small but meritorious volume have had exclusive access to arguably the most important archive of pre-Ottoman documentary sources outside of Egypt. Kept for centuries in Damascus in the Umayyad Mosque's treasure house (*Qubbat al-khazna*), they were finally made accessible to a German researcher in 1900 and removed in 1903, mostly to Istanbul where they still are today. As in previous publications, the editors erroneously cling to a story by which the existence of the stash was revealed only through a fire in 1893 (p. 9), when in fact knowledge of it even among foreigners had been growing throughout the nineteenth century.

The present volume combines the edition of six documents with a short appendix by Jean Richard on the freed slaves of Saladin. What is supposed to give this volume coherence is Saladin's politics of public generosity. Documents directly related to the reign of this famous ruler are extremely rare and the provenance from Damascus only adds to the significance since the vast majority of pre-Ottoman Arabic documents are of Egyptian origin. For these reasons, each text in this volume merits a publication in its own right. Still, as the editors chose to place them within the thematic framework of "governance and benevolence", the whole collection seems somewhat haphazard.

Document 1 is one of the most interesting Arabic letters preserved from the period. Written by a Damascene merchant in Cairo it gives an unusually spirited and often vernacular account of this man's affairs in the city but especially of the entrance of Saladin's father and a meeting the writer had with the two. For the events described the letter must have been written in 565/1170, a time when the young ruler was still vizier to the last Fatimid caliph in Egypt. The writer is able to use his personal acquaintance to acquire management of taxes on cheese. To see those back-room deals spelled out here is certainly illuminating.

Alongside smaller quibbles, I found only one major misinterpretation of the text. Line 33: اليهود وامه واخته واركات; the translation: "à Ḥalaf, à Barakāt ainsi qu'à sa

soeur et sa mère et au juifs” should read: “after Barakāt, and his sister, and his mother, the Jews”.

Document 2 is a petition by Iqbāl, a eunuch of the former ruler Nūr al-Dīn who would continue to play an important role in the entourage of Saladin, but is here presenting himself as a poor foreigner (*fī bilād al-ghurba*), devoid of means and in need of the new ruler’s generosity just to return home.

Document 3 contains the requests of the Kurdish officer Mankalān b. Dā’ūd who presents himself as burdened with debt, claiming his allotment (*khubz*) of 1.000 dinar from land duties (*‘ushr*) insufficient to sustain himself and asks for another *khubz* in Egypt. The word *iqṭā’*, equated by the editors with the *khubz*, does not figure in this text. The petitioner would die shortly thereafter in 571/1176 protecting his master from an assassination attempt.

Three lines above the document not deciphered by the editors and identified as “quelque exercise d’écriture” (p. 52) are written in a very challenging cursive hand. My guess is they might refer to the delivery or archiving of the paper and could partly read: *yunhā ‘alā yaday* (name) / (*Ḥusayn?*) *al-khādīm*, meaning “to be delivered at the hands of N.N. the servant”?

Document 4 is the re-edition of a pilgrimage certificate to the Sufī of Iranian origin ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Qushayrī (around 526/1131–2–576/1180). The text certifies to the pilgrim his performance of prayers and intercessions at the holy places for the sponsor of his travel, Saladin. The documentation, of grand proportions, must have played a prominent role in demonstrating publicly the piety of the sultan and was apparently not rare judging from the more than 200 specimens preserved in the corpus. The editors see more, an attempt to assert influence on the mystical orders by elevating the prestige of a *shaykh* of his choosing.

Document 5, besides being dated within his lifetime, does not seem to have anything to do with Saladin or his “liberalités”. Called a “mémorandum” by its editors, it presents the costs incurred during the restoration of a bathhouse, the *ḥammām Kullī* in Damascus, in 577/1182.

Document 6, finally, constitutes the draft of another petition. The students of the Madrasa al-Mālikīya, a foundation of Saladin, are said to be discontent with their current professor whose removal and replacement are demanded. Although the editors acknowledge that nothing about the outcome of this petition is certain, not even whether one was ever submitted, they claim rather forcefully its ability to prove that Saladin had every intention not only of donating an institution but also personally and directly shaping its organization and teaching (p. 96). Indeed, the only thing it shows is that the authors of the petition wanted their sovereign to act in this way.

What do the texts tell us about Saladin’s concrete “liberalités”? Judging from their ongoing splendid careers the editors assume that petitions 2 and 3 proved successful for their writers and thus tell us about Saladin’s decision making and use of grants. The one crucial element missing for such an evaluation, besides actual proof of the outcome, would be the instances where requests have been denied, which must necessarily have been the case given rival interests. If mechanisms were in place behind the scenes to ensure that only petitions guaranteed success be placed in the ruler’s hands we don’t know them.

The editors have done a very good job in placing the texts within their historical contexts, and the commentaries are extensive and illuminating. At times, their enthusiasm with the material may have led them to untenable interpretations, a professional weakness easily understood and forgiven by everyone working with these fascinating documents.

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