

## **(Im)Mobility and the (Re-)Combination of Knowledge in the Mamluk period**

### *Towards a conceptual intellectual history*

Call for papers – International Conference and Collective Volume

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In regard to its literary and scholarly production, the Mamluk period is often described as one of commentaries and supercommentaries, predominantly occupied with hadith-studies unfolding within a broader age of Arabic encyclopaedism. This has caused many to assume an intellectual decline beginning in this period and continuing into subsequent ones. Despite this devaluating opinion, it is simply impossible to ignore the immense intellectual output of the Mamluk period. The sharp increase of writing and scholarly activity in a wide variety of knowledge fields including the hadith sciences, historiography, poetry, Islamic jurisprudence, Sufism and many others, actively disproves any narratives or paradigms of decline. Numerous biographical dictionaries which describe the lives and relationships of thousands of intellectuals interacting with each other, along with the many schools (*madrassa*, *dār al-hadīth*, *dār al-qurʿān* and *ḥānqāh*) that boosted knowledge circulation and production, and the popularization of knowledge disciplines that became visible in the engagement of non-scholarly men (demonstrating a possibly higher rate of literacy), all indicate that the scholarly hubs of Cairo and Damascus were in fact thriving academic centers with a highly active intellectual scene.

From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, this development is especially interesting, since it can be seen as the outcome of the very specific social and political context of the period and a number of (social and intellectual) triggers. The high number of scholars and schools demonstrate Damascus and Cairo as vibrant intellectual centers with their own powerful attraction akin to a modern Harvard or Silicon Valley drawing in scholars and intellectuals from all over the world. The existence of many teaching institutions offering salaries and stipends led to an increase of scholars and learned people with the resources to focus on the circulation and production of knowledge as a means for social status. The high number of commentaries (*ṣurūḥ*), abridgements (*muḥtaṣarāt*), supplements (*ḍayl*), the cluster-like dense production of certain sorts of texts within a relatively short time range (e.g. the numerous *ḥadīth* collections, *fiqh* works, *ṣūfi* literature and historiographical texts etc.), and attempts to synthesize previous knowledge (e.g. encyclopedic-like works in the field of historiography, *ḥadīth*- and *fiqh*-studies and others) reflect the social context of this period. On the one hand, these trends indicate a dense knowledge exchange within homogenous groups in which the participants referred to the same sets of shared ideas to gain status within one group and hence led to a **specialization and differentiation of knowledge**. On the other hand, they also refer to a heterogeneous society, due to the influx of scholars from diverse regions (e.g. Andalusia, North Africa, Iraq, Iran and others), in which group boundaries were frequently overcome and knowledge of disparate fields was combined, leading to **genre combinations and a hybridization of knowledge**.

The aim of the conference and the edited volume is to bring together a number of case studies which illustrate how the social context of a given author influences knowledge production. The topic should therefore be addressed from two angles, i.e. **(im)mobility** and **(re-)combination of knowledge**. While travelling in the pursuit of knowledge is a well-known phenomenon, not all scholars could afford to travel or had opportunity to do so. Rather it seems as though the majority of scholars neither left Mamluk territory nor even their own hometowns! At the same time, the two cities, Damascus and Cairo witnessed a large influx of scholars from all over the Islamicate world. The question of *physical mobility* shall be complemented with a *social*

**mobility** to include those learned individuals who came from a non-scholarly background, but continued to pursue the acknowledgement of the social class of *'ulamā'*. In a third dimension, the **intellectual mobility** is considered as a crucial factor in the production of knowledge and shall be defined as the mobility to overcome knowledge traditions such as *madhhab* affiliations or to borrow ideas from other disciplines. All three kinds of mobility and immobility leave their traces in the production of knowledge. To trace back the influence of (im)mobility, and therefore the prerequisites of knowledge production, the concept of **re-combinant knowledge growth** has proven a useful tool. Its basic assumption is that the production of knowledge almost always consists of a (re-)combination of preexisting knowledge. It follows, that the combination of **homogeneous knowledge**, resulting from an immobility of individuals and ideas, leads to **knowledge specialization** with a higher degree of differentiation and efficiency. On the contrary, the combination of **heterogeneous knowledge**, resulting from a mobility of individuals and ideas, leads to **knowledge brokerage** that is characterized by genre combinations and hybridization of ideas.

The conference/volume welcomes papers focusing on a specific author, a network of scholars, a group of texts or on the emergence and/or development of a specific genre or knowledge discipline (*hadīth*-studies, jurisprudence, grammar, philosophy, *tafsīr*, Sufism, poetry, historiography etc.) within the Mamluk period. The studies must address the social context of the author(s) and how their (im)mobility influenced the intellectual outcome with a number of examples demonstrating the specialization or hybridization process. The following research questions shall guide the contributions: What is the (social, political, intellectual) background and context of the author/s? In what (social and intellectual) circles does he/do they interact? Is his/their intellectual production characterized by knowledge specialization or rather by knowledge brokerage (hybridization)? What works and ideas reflect the author/s physical, social, and intellectual (im)mobility? Does the authors' immobility lead to knowledge specialization? Does the authors' mobility lead to knowledge brokerage (hybridization)?

The edited volume is planned as a conceptual one, so that a theoretical framework will be provided by the editor (Mohammad Gharaibeh) that every contribution shall refer to in one way or another. Moreover, it is expected that every paper will follow a roughly similar structure to enhance the overall argument of the volume.

Conference: The conference will be organized by Mohammad Gharaibeh in cooperation with the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg and will take place in Bonn from **September 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> 2019**, expenses for travel and accommodation will be covered by the organizers.

Publication foreseen in: Series *Mamluk Studies* (Bonn University Press (V&R) eds. Bethany Walker and Stephan Conermann) (peer reviewed)

#### Time Frame

- Please submit proposals by **September 15<sup>th</sup> 2018**, including the title of the contribution, an abstract of about 300 words, a short CV, a list of relevant publications (if possible).
- Once the proposal has been accepted, you will be asked to prepare a short presentation (10-15 min), or an extended abstract (2-3 pages, mentioning the approach and sources etc.) to discuss this with the editor in **March/April 2019**.
- Conference in Bonn in **September 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> 2019**
- The first draft of the full article will be due by **December 31<sup>th</sup> 2019** (7.000–20.000 words)

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