The Term “Zawāwa” in the Medieval Sources and the Zawāwī Presence in Egypt and Syria during the Ayyubid and Mamluk Periods

Amar S. Baadj

ISSN 2193-925X

Bonn, March 2015
Author’s address

Amar Baadj
Annemarie-Schimmel-Kolleg
“History and Society during the Mamluk Era, 1250-1517”
Heussallee 18-24
53113 Bonn
Telephone: 0228/7362941
Fax: 0228/7362964
Website: www.mamluk.uni-bonn.de
The Term “Zawāwa” in the Medieval Sources and the Zawāwī Presence in Egypt and Syria during the Ayyubid and Mamluk Periods

By Amar S. Baadj

Amar S. Baadj is currently a post-doctoral research fellow at the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg in the University of Bonn. His field of research is the history of the Maghrib and Egypt during the Middle Ages. He obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto (Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations) in 2012. His thesis, supervised by Professor Linda Northrup, concerns the history of North Africa and the western Mediterranean basin in the 12th and early 13th centuries. In particular, it focuses on the rebellion of the Banū Ghāniya and the Ayyubid-Almohad rivalry in Ifrīqiya. His recent publications include:


Abstract

1. The Term Zawāwa in the Medieval Arabic Sources 1
2. Prominent Zawāwīs in Egypt and Syria during the Ayyubid and Mamluk Periods 7
Bibliography 14
Map of Central Algeria 16
Abstract

This paper consists of two parts. In Part One I trace the history of the name “Zawāwa” in the medieval Arabic sources both eastern and western from the early Islamic period until the 16th century. The near absence of any reference to the Zawāwa in the early sources for the history of the Maghrib stands in contrast to the frequent appearance of the term in later sources such as Ibn Ḥaldūn’s history and as-Saḥāwī’s biographical dictionary and I propose an explanation for this. In Part Two I have compiled biographical information on prominent Zawāwīs who lived in Egypt and Syria during the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.
1. The Term Zawāwa in the Medieval Arabic Sources

The core territory of the Zawāwa comprises a region of central Algeria between the port cities of Tadallis (Dellys) and Biǧāya (Bougie) from west to east and between the Mediterranean coast and the Ğurğura Mountains from north to south.¹ This area corresponds to the region known as Grande Kabylie. During the Ottoman and colonial periods, the term Zawāwa seems to have been interchangeable with Kabyle.² According to Lanfry, the Kabyle language was called Zawāwī, which was spoken by communities that stretched from Bouira (just east of Algiers) to Annaba.³ Thousands of Zawāwī mercenary troops served the Ottoman governors of Algiers and Tunis and later the French in the nineteenth century who called them the “Zouaves.”⁴

The history of the term Zawāwa during the medieval period is difficult to trace. The standard modern studies in French and Arabic have assumed that there was a fundamental continuity in the Zawāwī identity from at least the time of the Arab conquest if not earlier.⁵ A careful study of the occurrence and use of the term Zawāwa in the medieval Arabic sources will reveal that this is a very problematic assumption.

The Berber tribes were divided by the medieval genealogists and chroniclers into two great families, the Barānis (descendants of Burnūs) and Butr (descendants of Madĝīs al-Abtar). This corresponds to the similar practice of dividing the Arab tribes between the descendants of ʿAdnān and Qaḥṭān. The genealogists did not agree whether the Zawāwa were a Butrī tribe or one of the Kutāmī tribes (the Kutāma were an important Burnūsī tribe that inhabited the area between Annaba and Biǧāya). In his work on the genealogy of the Arabs, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1063) lists the Zawāwa among the Butrī tribes in one place but on another page he asserts that they were one of the groups comprising the Kutāma.⁶ Ibn Ḥaldūn (d. 808/1406) mentions that the Zawāwa were counted among the descendants of Madĝīs al-Abtar by the Berber genealogists and he himself gives the Zawāwa a Butrī genealogy in the opening lines of his short chapter on Zawāwī history. He then seemingly contradicts himself later on in the same section by arguing that the Zawāwa were in fact a sub-group of the Kutāma, adducing the geographical proximity of their traditional homelands and the enthusiastic adherence of both tribes to the Fatimid daʿwa as evidence.⁷

In another passage Ibn Ḥaldūn records a popular tradition which holds that the eponymous ancestors of the tribes of Zawāwa and Zawāğa (a tribe with branches in Tripolitania and the Central Maghrib) were sons of a descendant of Madĝīs al-Abtar named Simkān.⁸ He argues that the appearance of the name Zawāwa in this tradition is due to its confusion with the name of another tribe, which according to him is spelled with a final consonant z rather than w, thus giving us Zawīzā. In this way he refutes the thesis of Butrī ancestry for the Zawāwa and he once again argues that they were in fact a branch of the Kutāma.

---

² Ibid., 82-83.
³ Ibid., 80-81.
⁴ Ibid., 79.
⁸ Ibn Ḥaldūn, al-ʿIbar, 6:120; De Slane, Histoire, 1:178.
The Algerian historian Ḥalfāṭ has put forward a convincing solution to this problem. He notes that while we do not know of any Berber tribe called Zawāza there was an important Butrī tribe called the Zawāra who lived in Tripolitania. Furthermore there is a passage in the Mafāḥir al-Barbar (14th century?) which reads: “The names of the tribes that are called the Berbers of Butr are the Zawāga, Zanāta, and Zawāra. . . .” Ḥalfāṭ suggests that Ibn Ḥaldūn’s Zawāza should be read Zawāra (the difference between the Arabic letters z and r is only one dot). We can conclude from Ḥalfāṭ’s argument the following: firstly that the Zawāwa were closely related to the Kutāma and possibly a branch of the latter; and secondly that there exists the possibility of scribal errors in our sources that can cause confusion between the Zawāwa on one hand, and the Butrī tribes of Zawāra and Zawāga on the other.

The earliest account of Zawāwī history is a two-page passage by Ibn Ḥaldūn in which he discusses the genealogy of the Zawāwa, names their sub-tribes, briefly mentions their relations with the Kutāma, Zirids, and Hammadids, and then devotes most of his attention to their role in contemporary events (8th/14th century). Before Ibn Ḥaldūn we find only the briefest mention of the Zawāwa in the Arabic chronicles. In several of the most important sources they are absent altogether. Ibn ʿIdārī’s (d. early 8th/14th century) Bayān al-muʿāṣir, perhaps our most valuable and detailed source for the history of the Maghrib from the Islamic conquest until the end of the Almohad period, has no mention of the Zawāwa at all. Though Ibn ʿIdārī lived in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, his work draws extensively on earlier mostly lost sources such as the important Zirid epoch historians Ibn Șaraf (d. 459/1067), Ibn Abī ṣ-Ṣalt (d. 529/1124), and ar-Raʿqīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 418/1027). Since the latter were all based in Ifrīqiya it is surprising that the Zawāwa do not appear in their narratives.

The Zawāwa are not mentioned in Ibn al-Aṯīr’s (d. 630/1233) chronicle, another vital source for the history of the western Islamic lands down to the Almohad period, nor in the famous al-Muʿāṣir fī talḥīs aḥbār al-Muʿāṣir of al-Marrākūšī (d. 7th/13th century), nor in the early accounts of the Muslim conquest (faʿāl) of North Africa. An-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333) mentions the Zawāwa once, stating that the eleventh century Zirid ruler al-Muʿizz granted his uncle Ḥammād some lands including Zawāwa, which here appears as a place name. There are also two very brief mentions of the Zawāwa in some Fatimid sources. In the tenth century Ifṭīṭāḥ ad-daʿ wa, the “Rawāwa” are listed as one of the tribes that joined the Fatimid agent Abū ʿAbd Allāh aš-Šīʿī when he established the Fatimid movement amongst the Kutāma in what is now eastern Algeria. In a later Ismāʿīlī source composed in Yemen in the fifteenth century, a similar account appears with the name of the tribe in question changed to Zawāwa. In the history of the Fatimids by Ibn Ḥammād (d. 628/1230) the Zawāwa are mentioned once as one of the tribes that rallied to the third Fatimid caliph al-Manṣūr (d. 9

9 See Ḥalfāṭ, Qabīlat Zawāwa, 52-5.
10 The editor notes that Zawāra is written in the manuscript but he corrected this to Zawāwa thinking it a mistake. Ḥalfāṭ says that we should keep the original spelling. Anonymous, Mafāḥir al-Barbar, 172; Ḥalfāṭ, Qabīlat Zawāwa, 53-4.
12 Ibn ʿIdārī, al-Bayān al-muʿāṣir.
15 Al-Qāḍī an-Nu Ṿan, Ifṭīṭāḥ ad-daʿ wa, 113.
16 Imād ad-Dīn, Tārīḫ, 105-106.
341/953) in Tubna when he was suppressing the rebellion of the Ḥārīqī leader Abū Yazīd (d. 873/947). The earliest mention of the Zawāwa in a geographical source is a single passage in the Buldān of al-Ya’qūbī (d. 284/897). They are mentioned as one of the tribes living in the vicinity of a town called Hāz (which according to Ḥalfāt is identical with the modern ‘Ayn Būṣayf, a town 80 kilometers south of Algiers and therefore well outside the Zawāwī homeland in the Ġūrgūra Mountains). Ibn Ḥawqal (d. 367/977) mentions the Zawāwa in a list of the Zanātī (Butrī) Berber tribes. For the reasons discussed above, it is likely that this is due to a copyist’s mistake which resulted in Zawāra being replaced by Zawāwa in the text. Al-Bakrī (d. 487/1094), and Yaʿqūbī, a town 80 kilometers south of Algiers and therefore well outside the Zawāwī homeland in the Ġūrgūra Mountains. In the second passage al-Idrīsī mentions the Zawāwa as one of twenty Berber tribes, including the Kutāma, who inhabit Ġabal Wanṣāris to the south of the city of Milyāna. To al-Idrīsī the Zawāwa were a minor tribe associated with an area well to the southwest of the Ġūrgūra Mountains.

The nisba az-Zawāwī rarely appears in eastern or western biographical dictionaries written before the fourteenth century. In the famous twelfth century biographical dictionaries of Mālikī scholars by Abū Bakr b. ʿAbd Allāh (d. 542/1148) and Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ (d. 543/1149) only two persons with this nisba are mentioned: Muhammad b. Qāsim az-Zawāwī (d. 280/893) who was reported to have been a companion of the great jurist Saḥnūn (d. 240/854) and his son Abū al-Qāsim (d. 304/916), who was also a scholar. However, the tenth century scholar al-Ḥuṣaṇī in the Ţabaqāt ʿulamāʾ i fīrāqīyya doubted that Saḥnūn had a companion named az-Zawāwī. Apart from this passage there are no other references to Zawāwī individuals in the Ţabaqāt.

---

17 Aṣ-Ṣāḥḥāqi, Aḥbār, 65.
18 Al-Ya’qūbī, al-Buldān, 191; Ḥalfāt, Qabīlat Zawāwī, 126-8.
19 Ibn Ḥawqal, Sūrat ar-ḍīr, 106.
20 Al-Bakrī, al-Masālik, 2:189; al-Ḥamawī, Muḥam, 7:5.
21 Al-Idrīsī, Nuzhat al-muṣṭaq, 2:246, 252.
22 Ibid., 2:246.
23 See Ḥalfāt, Qabīlat Zawāwī, 52 n. 2.
24 Al-Idrīsī, Nuzhat al-muṣṭaq, 252.
27 Al-Ḥuṣaṇī, Ţabaqāt, 154.
We would expect to find a wealth of information on the Zawāwa in al-Ǧubrānī’s (d. 704/1304?) ‘Unwān ad-dirāya which is a substantial biographical dictionary devoted to the eminent persons of Biğāya and its environs, in the very heart of Zawāwī territory.28 Surprisingly only five individuals with the Zawāwī nisba are mentioned here. In later Maḡribī biographical dictionaries the results are only slightly better. Ibn Farḥūn’s (d. 799/1396) Dībāḡ has seven entries under the nisba az-Zawāwī and Aḥmad Bābā’s (d. 1036/1626) Nayl al-ibtiḥāḡ has a total of six.29

The early Mašrīqī biographical sources also contain very few Zawāwīs. Ibn Ḥallikān (d. 681/1282) mentions two.30 Likewise, the al-Muqaffā al-kabīr, a work by al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441) that is rich in biographies of people from the Fatimid period and biographies of Maḡāriba, contains only two Zawāwīs who lived in the late thirteenth century.31 Curiously, biographies of Zawāwīs are most frequently encountered in Mašrīqī sources from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that were composed in the lands of the Mamluk Empire. I counted twenty eight distinct Zawāwīs who are mentioned in as-Saḥāwī’s (d. 902/1496) ad-Daw’ al-żāmī, sixteen in Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Aṣqalānī’s (d. 852/1449) Durar, and nine in as-Ṣaḥāfatī’s (d. 724/1362) A’yān al-‘āṣr.32 As-Saḥāwī’s biographical dictionary is concerned with people from the ninth Islamic century (roughly corresponding to the 15th century A.D.), while Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Aṣqalānī’s book deals with biographies of people from the previous century.

We have seen that the Zawāwa, one of the most powerful tribal groups in the Central Maghrib during the Ottoman period, were hardly mentioned in the Arabic sources before 1300. They are completely absent from some of the most important historical sources such as Ibn ‘Idārī’s chronicle. When the word Zawāwa does appear in an early source it usually occurs no more than once or twice. Furthermore, several of these passages appear to be the result of scribal errors which caused Zawāwa to be substituted for Zawāra or Zawāga.

It is puzzling that al-Ǧubrānī’s (d. 704/1304?) thirteenth century biographical dictionary of eminent inhabitants of Biğāya only records five individuals with the nisba az-Zawāwī while the name is encountered with greater frequency in the important eastern biographical dictionaries of the fifteenth century such as that of as-Saḥāwī.

Perhaps there is a parallel with the use of the term Takrūr/Takrūrī during the same period. The term Takrūr originally referred to a kingdom in the lower Senegal valley, distinct from other West African kingdoms such as Mali, Ghana, and Gao. During the Mamluk period eastern sources referred to western Bilād as-Sūdān (West Africa) in its entirety as Takrūr and people from Bilād as-Sūdān who travelled to Egypt and the Hijaz were called Takrūrī regardless of their origin. An-Naqr suggests that this expanded definition of Takrūr was first used by easterners who applied it to the West African pilgrims in Mecca.33 Over time the new definition became widespread in West Africa itself due to the prestige it acquired as a result of its association with the pilgrimage. It is possible that the term Zawāwī also acquired a

28 al-Ǧubrānī, ‘Unwān.

29 Ibn Farḥūn, ad-Dībāḡ; at-Tunbukī, Nayl al-ibtiḥāḡ.

30 Ibn Ḥallikān, Waṭṭāyāt, 7 vols.

31 Al-Maqrīzī, al-Muqaffā.

32 As-Saḥāwī, ad-Daw’; Ibn Ḥaḡar, ad-Durar; as-Ṣaḥāfatī, A’yān.

broader meaning in the usage of easterners during the Mamluk period and that instead of referring only to a minor tribe it became a generic term for people Biğiya and perhaps the Central Maghrib in general.

The first historian to discuss the Zawāwa in more than a sentence or two and to provide us with a (relatively) detailed account of their history, origins, and location was Ibn Ḫaldūn. It is worth pointing out in this regard that Ibn Ḫaldūn lived the later part of his life in Cairo and he was very much a part of the Mamluk intellectual world. Of all the medieval historians Ibn Ḫaldūn provides us with what is by far the most comprehensive, detailed, and organized survey of the Berber tribes. Modern historians, seduced by the seeming “rationality” of Ibn Ḫaldūn’s approach and the wealth of information that he offers compared to his predecessors, have used his work as a guide to the history of the Berber tribes in the early Islamic period.

Yves Modéran has noted that Ibn Ḫaldūn tried to explain all periods of Berber history by means of the binary Butr/Burnūs genealogical model that was popular in his day and as a result his accounts of the Berber tribes at the time of the conquest contain a good deal of anachronism. According to this model, all of the Berber tribes could be categorized as Butrī or Burnūsī based on their descent from the two eponymous ancestors, Madġīs al-Abtar and Burnūs. Modéran made a convincing case that Butr and Burnūs had very different meanings at the time of the Arab conquest. According to him, Butr was originally a term applied by the Arabs to the pagan non-Romanized Berber tribes whom they encountered in Libya while Burnūs was applied to the predominantly Christian, Romanized tribes that lived in Tunisia and eastern Algeria (the areas encompassed by the Byzantine provinces of Proconsular Africa and Numidia, respectively). Later on, when the Arabs had reached the Atlantic coast, scholars attempted to fit the indigenous tribes of the western Maghrib into the Butr/Burnūs dichotomy. The terms thereby acquired a much broader definition, encompassing as they did peoples who were beyond the horizon of the early conquerors. Over time the original context of the terms Butr and Burnūs was forgotten, certainly long before Ibn Ḫaldūn wrote his great survey of Berber history and genealogy in the 14th century. Modéran’s work demonstrates the fluidity of tribal identities and it serves as a caution against privileging Ibn Ḫaldūn’s late but seemingly richer and better organized account of Berber history over earlier sources.

Since the Zawāwa were a numerous and important group in Ibn Ḫaldūn’s day, he assumed that they had always played an important role in Mağribi history. It did not occur to him that his predecessors who lived hundreds of years earlier understood terms like Zawāwa, Butr, or Şanhāğa differently than did he and his contemporaries and that tribal identities were historical constructs rather than constants. For Ibn Ḫaldūn, the near silence of the earlier sources regarding the Zawāwa was evidence of their incompleteness and he tried to compensate for this by drawing on the genealogical lore of his own time.

In conclusion, the evidence suggests that from the time of the conquest until the thirteenth century the Zawāwa played a negligible role in the history of the Maghrib. The term most likely referred to a small sub-tribe of the famous and powerful Kutāma. From the 1300s onwards the Zawāwa are mentioned with increasing frequency in the sources and they appear to be the most powerful group in the Gurgūra Mountains and in the greater Biğiya area.

---

34 Modéran, Maures, 743-760.
35 Ibid., 685-817.
During this period Zawāwī individuals figure in our sources as prominent judges, scholars, mystics and administrators both in the Maghrib and in the Mamluk east. By the Ottoman period they were without a doubt the most powerful Berber tribal confederacy in the Central Maghrib. When the French arrived in Algeria there was no longer any significant Berber group that identified as Kutāma or Talkāta Ṣanḥāğa. Instead they were confronted by the Zawāwa/Zouaves in what had once been the homeland of the Kutāma and Talkāta.

2. Prominent Zawāwīs in Egypt and Syria during the Ayyubid and Mamluk Periods

The term maḡāriba in the medieval sources referred to inhabitants of the western Islamic lands including both the Maghrib and al-Andalus. The Fatimid period witnessed the establishment of a significant Maḡribī presence in Egypt for the first time. When the Fatimids conquered Egypt from the west in 358/969 their army was comprised largely of Berber recruits, most notably the Kutāma from what is now eastern Algeria. The latter settled permanently in Egypt and their descendants formed a powerful Maḡāribī faction within the Egyptian Fatimid government and military. Unfortunately it is difficult to reconstruct the history of the Fatimid maḡāriba in much detail because sources are scarce compared to later periods and because the Kutāma were mostly military men rather than scholars, and thus of less interest to the medieval Arabic biographers who preferred to record the lives of Sunnī ʿulamāʾ like themselves.

Throughout Islamic history, pilgrims from the west have had to pass through Egypt and Syria on their way to and from the holy cities of the Hijāz. Inevitably some of these pilgrims decided to settle permanently in Cairo, Damascus, and other cities. With the establishment of Ayyubid rule in the late twelfth century and the accompanying restoration of Sunnism as the state creed Egypt became increasingly attractive to Maḡribī ʿulamāʾ who both studied and taught in its madāris. The Maḡāribī presence in Egypt and Syria appears to have reached a new height during the Mamluk period. After the devastation of the eastern Islamic lands by the Mongols, culminating in the destruction of Baghdad in 656/1258, Cairo emerged as the greatest metropolis and the intellectual capital of the Arab-Islamic World while secondary cities such as Damascus, Alexandria, Aleppo, Jerusalem, and Hama also prospered. Naturally, students and fortune seekers from throughout the Islamic World were attracted to the Mamluk cities. A great number of Maḡribī scholars studied and taught in Egypt and Syria during this period and some of them became quiet prominent as the biographical dictionaries attest.

The Zawāwa formed a significant and influential portion of the Maḡāribī community in Egypt and Bilād aš-Šām during the late medieval period. This is not very surprising in light of the fact that they lived in and around Biḡāya, which was the busiest port in the Central Maghrib and one of the great Mediterranean commercial centers before it was eclipsed by Algiers in the Ottoman period. As we shall see, the Zawāwī immigrants to the east distinguished themselves in a wide variety of disciplines.
Yaḥyā b. al-Muʿṭī az-Zawāwī (564/1168-628/1230) was one of the foremost medieval Arabic grammarians.36 Ḥaj-Dahābī called him “ṣayḥ an-nahw.”37 He was born in Biğāya where he received his early education. Curiously our sources report that he was a Ḥanafi, unlike the vast majority of the mağāriba who followed the school of Mālik. He later travelled to Damascus where he lectured while also furthering his own education. Among his teachers there was the great historian Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1175).38 Ibn al-Muʿṭī came to the attention of the Ayyubid Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil (615/1218-635/1238) who honored him and persuaded him to accompany him to Cairo. The Sultan gave Ibn al-Muʿṭī a salary and appointed him lecturer in grammar and literature at the mosque of ‘Amr b. al-ʿĀṣṣ. When the great philologist died his funeral was attended by al-Malik al-Kāmil and he was buried near the tomb of aš-Šāfiʿī.39

Ibn al-Muʿṭī composed a number of works on grammar as well as a dīwān of poetry, a collection of orations, and a treatise on the readings of the Qurʾan.40 His most important work is ad-Durra al-alfiyya. This is a pedagogical grammar of the Arabic language composed in verse, totaling one thousand lines. It appears frequently in the lists of works studied or memorized by ʿulamāʾ of the Mamluk period and at several commentaries were written on it.41 More importantly, it was the model for a new genre of compositions. Many subsequent scholars, including as-Suyūṭī, would try their hands at writing alfiyyāt. An Andalusī scholar who settled in Damascus named Ibn Mālik (d. 672/1274) wrote the Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik which is today one of the most-studied books in the traditional Islamic curriculum throughout the world since it is typically the first work on Arabic grammar that students read.

In 664/1266, during the reign of Baybars, a Mālikī judgeship was created in Damascus for the first time as part of a Mamluk policy which aimed to give the four orthodox law schools official recognition and legitimacy.42 In subsequent decades even the secondary cities in Bilād aš-Šām would have Mālikī judges along with judges from the other law schools. It is interesting to observe that the earliest appointees to the Mālikī judgeship in Damascus were exclusively Zawāwī.

The first of these was Zayn ad-Dīn Abū Muḥammad az-Zawāwī.43 He was born in Biğāya in approximately 589/1193. He moved to Alexandria in his youth where he pursued his studies. In 616/1220 he travelled to Damascus where he became a renowned lecturer in the religious sciences, particularly in the field of Quran recitation. He was a man of great piety and integrity. He only reluctantly accepted the Mālikī judgeship when it was instituted in Damascus in 664/1266 and he served for nine years. Zayn ad-Dīn refused to accept any salary or recompense for his work as a judge. He voluntarily retired from the judgeship after the death of his friend the Ḥanafi qāḍī Šams ad-Dīn b. ʿAtāʾ and he returned to his previous occupation of lecturing at the Umayyad Mosque and the Šāliḥiyya madrasa.44 He died in

---

36 See Ibn Ḥallikān, Wafayāt, 6:197; aḍ-Ḍahābī, Siyar, 22:324; az-Zawāwī, ad-Durra.
37 Ḥaj-Dahābī, Siyar, 22:324.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibn Ḥallikān, Wafayāt, 6:197.
40 Ibn al-Muʿṭī, Durra, 10.
41 Ibid., 13-15.
42 Ahmad, al-Andalusiyūn, 192-194.
44 Al-Yūnīnī, Dāyl, 4:173.
681/1284 and he was buried in the famous Damascene cemetery of Bāb aš-Šaġīr. His funeral was attended by a great crowd of people including the nāʿīb as-saltāna (the sultan’s viceroy in Syria). His reputation was such that his grave became the object of ziyyāra (minor pilgrimage).\(^45\)

Zayn ad-Dīn had a cousin named Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ʿUmar Abū Yaʿqūb Ğamāl ad-Dīn.\(^46\) This Ğamāl ad-Dīn served as deputy (nāʿīb) for Zayn ad-Dīn. When the latter retired, Ğamāl ad-Dīn served for several years as the de facto Mālikī chief judge in Damascus without enjoying the title. He petitioned the sultan until he was finally granted the title of judge. This occurred before Zayn ad-Dīn’s death. Ğamāl ad-Dīn died in 684/1286 while he was making the pilgrimage.

The next Mālikī judge of Damascus was Muḥammad b. Sulaymān b. Sūmar, better known as Ğamāl ad-Dīn al-Mālikī az-Zawāwī like his predecessor to whom he appears to have been unrelated.\(^47\) Ğamāl ad-Dīn was born in 630/1232 in the Maghrib. He arrived in Alexandria at fifteen years of age and he excelled in the study of fiqh there. He began his career by serving as a deputy judge in aš-Šarqiyya, al-Garbiyya, and Cairo. In 687/1288 he was appointed chief judge of the Mālikī school in Damascus. He gained a reputation as a stern but virtuous judge who protected the weak and who was eminently knowledgeable in the law. He is reported to have passed the death sentence on some individuals who mocked the Prophet. He carried out the restoration of the Nūriyya and Şamşamiyya madāris in Damascus. Aṣ-Ṣafadī says that Mālik himself would have been proud of Ğamāl ad-Dīn and that the Mālikī school flourished in Damascus during his judgeship as never before.\(^48\) He died in 717/1317 after a debilitating illness left him paralyzed and without speech.\(^49\)

İsā b. Maṣūd az-Zawāwī (664/1265 – 743/1342) was trained in Mālikī fiqh in his native Zawāwa and later in Biğāya.\(^50\) He travelled to Alexandria to continue his studies and then he took up a judgeship in Qābis in Ifríqiyya. He returned to Alexandria for a brief period and then continued to Cairo where he worked and attended lectures in the Azhar. In 707/1307 he travelled to Damascus where he served as deputy Mālikī judge and taught in the Umayyad mosque. He later returned to Cairo where he held a deputy judgeship and taught Mālikī fiqh in a zāwiya (sufi lodge). He eventually resigned from the deputy judgeship in order to devote himself to writing. Among the works that he composed were a twelve volume commentary on the Şahiḥ of Muslim, a response to Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) on the issue of divorce, and a history.\(^51\)

He was a fierce opponent of metaphysical Sufis such as the followers of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240).\(^52\) He called for the burning of Ibn ʿArabī’s books and ruled that anyone who believed in the contents of these books must repent or be executed. Those who concealed

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 4:173-174.

\(^{46}\) Aṣ-Ṣafadī, al-Więfī, 29:103; al- Yūnīnī, Dāyīl, 4:239; Aḥmad, al-Andalusiyūn, 195.

\(^{47}\) Ibn Ḥaḍar, ad-Durūr, 5:190; aṣ-Ṣafadī, A’yān, 4:456-7; Ibn Farḥūn, Dībāḡ, 2:320.

\(^{48}\) Aṣ-Ṣafadī, A’yān, 4:456-457.

\(^{49}\) Ibid.

\(^{50}\) Ibn Ḥaḍar, ad-Durūr, 4:246-248; al-Biqāʿī, Maṣra’, 157-158; aṣ-Ṣafadī, A’yān, 3:723; Kahhāla, Muʿgam, 8:23; Ibn Farḥūn, Dībāḡ, 283.

\(^{51}\) Ibn Ḥaḍar, ad-Durūr, 4:247-248, Ibn Farḥūn, Dībāḡ, 283.

\(^{52}\) See al-Biqāʿī, Maṣra’, 157-158.
their belief in Ibn 'Arabi’s doctrines were *zanādiqa* (heretics or Manichaeans) in his view and if they were discovered it was the duty of the ruler to make an example out of them.\(^{53}\) 'Isa was also a friend of the famous encyclopedist and historian al-‘Umarī. In the latter’s encyclopedia entitled *Masālik al-abṣār* 'Isa is mentioned in several places as one of his sources for information on the geography and affairs of the Maghrib and Bilād as-Sūdān and as a witness of the visit by Mansā Mūsā to Cairo.\(^{54}\) 'Isa was evidently an oral informant for al-‘Umarī who introduces him with the words “ḥaddaṭanī” or “qāla” (he said).\(^{55}\) 'Isa had a son named 'Alī who was born in Egypt in 713/1313.\(^{56}\) 'Alī was educated by his father and other scholars including Burhān ad-Dīn as-Sāfuqī in Cairo. 'Alī later travelled to Damascus where he met the great scholars of that city including al-Mizzī, al-Birzālī, and ad-Ḍahābī. In 732/1331 he took over his father’s position as instructor at the Mālikī zāwīya in Cairo. Later in life he developed a strong attraction to Sufism and he left his job to became a disciple of the great Sufi masters who shared their esoteric knowledge with him. In 752/1351 he took up residence in Medina. He returned to Egypt and died there in 769/1367. 'Alī’s son Šams ad-Dīn held the position of nāẓir al-aqvāf (Inspector of Endowments) in Egypt.\(^{57}\) Abū 'Alī az-Zawāwī (632/1234-731/1330) left his native Bigāya in his youth to travel to Cairo with his father.\(^{58}\) He received an excellent education in Cairo in jurisprudence, literature, theology, and mysticism among other subjects. He spent the rest of his life lecturing in Cairo.\(^{59}\)

The great polymath Muhammad b. Abī l-Qāsim al-Mašdālī az-Zawāwī (also known as Ibn Abī l-Faḍl) was perhaps the most remarkable of the Zawāwa who flourished in Mamluk Cairo.\(^{60}\) His importance in the eyes of his contemporaries can be gauged by the fact that as-Sahāwī devotes eight entire pages to his biography while the vast majority of his entries are well under one page in length. Of the *maǧāriba* who appear in as-Sahāwī’s dictionary only Ibn Ḥalduñ receives similar treatment.

Al-Mašdālī was born in Bigāya in 821 or 822 A.H. (1418 or 1419 A.D.). In his home city he received a superb education in the Arabic language and literature and the religious sciences as well as arithmetic and astronomy. In 840/1436 he moved to the city of Tilimsān, the leading center of culture in al-Mağrib al-Awsat, in order to continue his studies. He had ten teachers in Tilimsān, all of them distinguished and well-known in their respective fields. In addition to the usual subjects he took up the study of philosophy, mysticism, medicine, geometry, algebra, and the “ancient sciences.” One of his teachers, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muhammad al-Būrī, instructed him in astronomy and the use of the astrolabe, as well as the “science of mirrors”, music, and the writing of talismans.\(^{61}\) Ibn Marzūq, another one of al-Mašdālī’s teachers in

---

\(^{53}\) Ibid.


\(^{55}\) Ibid.


\(^{57}\) Ibid.

\(^{58}\) Ibn Ḥaḡar, *ad-Durar*, 6:125.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.


\(^{61}\) As-Sahāwī, *Dawَ‘*, 9:180-182.
Tilimsān, wrote to al-Maṣdālī’s father regarding his son, “when he [al-Maṣdālī] arrived we thought that he needed us, but we were more in need of him!”

Al-Maṣdālī briefly returned to Biǧāya in 844/1440 to teach. Then he travelled to Constantine, Annaba, and finally Tunis where he arrived in 845/1441. In these cities he attended the lectures of the local scholars (in silence, according to as-Saḥāwī). Before the end of 845/1441 he set sail for Egypt in a Genoese ship. First his ship anchored in a place called “the Land of Pitch” (Bilād al-Qatrān) on the northern shore of the Mediterranean. Later in the voyage storm winds carried the ship off course to Cyprus. It anchored in Famagusta and al-Maṣdālī travelled inland to Nicosia, which was the capital of the Kingdom of Cyprus. There he engaged in debate with some of the bishops. Then he sailed to Beirut and from there he travelled to Damascus. He spent the next few years journeying throughout Bilād aš-Šām. He visited Tripoli and Ḥamā, and settled for an extended period in Jerusalem. In 849/1445 he made the pilgrimage to Mecca and then travelled to Cairo.

In Cairo he taught at the Qubba al-Manṣūriyya, refusing judgeships in Egypt and Syria. His reputation soared and he was highly sought after as an expert in almost every field of study known in his time. As-Suyūṭī remarked that he was a wonder of the ages who was more distinguished than his contemporaries and even his own teachers.

He was also greatly esteemed by Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī, who refused to hear any criticism of al-Maṣdālī. When al-ʿAsqalānī lay on his deathbed he incessantly requested al-Maṣdālī’s presence. Al-Maṣdālī was reluctant to attend at first because he had been asked to give medical advice and he did not want to become known as a famous physician. Finally, he relented and al-ʿAsqalānī was overjoyed when he finally arrived. Al-Maṣdālī was evidently a controversial figure who had many jealous detractors as well whose criticisms are recorded by as-Saḥāwī. At one point al-Maṣdālī became embroiled in a dispute with the chief Mālikī judge of Cairo. Eventually his love of travel and adventure caused him to leave Cairo and undertake another journey across Bilād aš-Šām. He died during the course of this last voyage in Aynṭab in 864/1459 while he was still in his forties.

Aḥmad Abū ʿAṣīḍa al-Biḡāʾī was a contemporary of al-Maṣdālī. He is not mentioned in any of the biographical dictionaries and we only know about him from his sole surviving work, a long letter addressed to al-Maṣdālī entitled Risālat al-ğarib ilā l-ḥabīb. This letter was written in ornate rhyming prose (ṣağ’) and contains many excerpts of poetry as well. It is divided into fourteen parts. From this work we can deduce that Abū ʿAṣīḍa was from the same tribe and possibly even the same family as al-Maṣdālī. He was educated in Biḡāya by al-Maṣdālī’s father, the Mufti Muḥammad al-Maṣdālī and he almost certainly knew al-Maṣdālī well in his youth. At some point he moved to Tunis and later made the first of at least two pilgrimages to the Hijaz.

---

62 Ibid., 182.
63 Ibid., 182-183.
64 As-Suyūṭī, Naẓm, 160.
65 See as-Saḥāwī, Dow’, 184.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 184-185.
68 Ibid., 187.
69 Ibid., 188.
70 See al-Biḡāʾī, Risālat, esp. 18-21, 34-40.
After his first pilgrimage he spent some time in Cairo where he again encountered al-Mašdālī, we can assume that the two were on friendly terms at this point. Then Abū ʿAṣīḍa returned to Tunis. When he inquired about his family and friends in Biǧāya he learned that most of them had died. Grief-stricken, he decided not to go back to his native city and instead he set out for the Hijaz a second time. He settled in Medina where he read and lectured in the mosques and he refused to listen to other maĝāriba who advised him to return home.71 It was while he was in Medina that Abū ʿAṣīḍa composed the Risālat al-ǧarīb for al-Mašdālī, who was now living in Cairo.72 We understand from this work that he wrote repeatedly to al-Mašdālī, sending letters to him and inquiring after him through the other Maġribī pilgrims who travelled between the Hijaz and Egypt. For a long time al-Mašdālī ignored him and Abū ʿAṣīḍa berated him for the coldness of his letters. Then al-Mašdālī sent a note containing three lines of verse in which he criticized Abū ʿAṣīḍa for his tone. Finally, another longer letter arrived from al-Mašdālī in which he apologized for the past.73 The Risālat al-ǧarīb was written as a response to this letter. The Risālat al-ǧarīb contains mention and a brief summary of another work by Abū ʿAṣīḍa called Uns al-ǧarīb wa-rawd al-adīb.74 This lost work included a biography (tarḡama) of al-Mašdālī as well as an account of Abū ʿAṣīḍa’s journey (riḥla) from Biǧāya to Egypt and the Hijaz with mention of the people and places encountered. If discovered it would no doubt be a very valuable addition to the surviving corpus of travel literature written by maĝāriba during the late Medieval period and it would shed light on travel conditions between Ifrīqiya and Egypt during the Mamluk period.75 Muḥammad az-Zawāwī (d. 882/1447) was a colorful and eccentric Sufi from Biǧāya.76 He left to posterity a “dream diary” entitled Tuḥfat an-nāẓir wa-nuzhat al-manāẓir which recounts 109 dreams, scattered throughout a 10 year period between 851/1447 and 861/1457 in which he claimed to have encountered the Prophet Muḥammad. This work was the subject of an excellent dissertation and later a monograph by Jonathan Katz. Az-Zawāwī was educated by prominent Sufi scholars in Biǧāya and Tilimsān.77 His dreams of the Prophet began while he was still in northwest Africa. At some point he made the ḥaǧj and upon returning from the Hijaz he took up residence in Cairo for six months (855/1451-856/1452). A large number of the dreams occurred during this Cairene period and they contain some interesting details about life in the great Mamluk capital. Az-Zawāwī divided his time between the Azhar, the seat of formal scholarship, and the more popular Sufi lodges. He attracted a small band of followers who were convinced of his mystical prowess, mostly from the outcasts of society with the notable exception of a Mamluk amir called Damirdaš. He also enjoyed an audience with the Mamluk Sultan Ṣaqmaq (r.842/1438-857/1453), though we should not give too much importance to this event since the latter was a notoriously superstitious ruler who regularly admitted Sufis and holy men to his court in order to obtain their blessings.78 Az-Zawāwī seems to have made little impression overall in Cairo since he is

71 Ibid., 18-21.
72 Ibid., 34-39.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 25-30.
75 Ibid.
76 See Katz, Dreams; idem, “Vision.”
78 Ibid., 189-192.
not mentioned in any of the Mamluk biographical sources, only Mağribī works mention him. He later returned to Tilimsān and finally Biğāya where the last dream occurred. It is worth noting that az-Zawāwī had a great fear of sea voyages thus he made the journey between the Maghrib and Egypt by land. One of his dreams involved a caravan lost without water in the desert of eastern Libya which he saved in his capacity as a holy man. This may be indicative of some of the dangers faced by pilgrim caravans that traversed Libya between the Maghrib and Egypt during this period.

The Zawāwī immigrants to late medieval Egypt and Syria who appear in our sources were a diverse group. We find among them scholars of the traditional religious disciplines as well as those who embraced less-common fields such as philosophy and the sciences. They included practitioners and opponents of Sufism, renowned judges as well as charlatans. Most of them followed the Mālikī madhab but there were exceptions. For the most part they seem to have thrived in their adopted home and it is evident that they made a considerable contribution to the vibrant culture of the Mamluk east.

---

79 Ibid., 25-29.
81 Ibid., 247-8.
Bibliography

1. Modern Studies

Aḥmad, ‘Alī, al-Andalusiyūn fī Bilād aṣ-Šām min nihāyat al-qarn al-ḥamis ḥattā nihāyat al-

Binšarīf, Muḥammad, “Maṣādir maqribiyya șafawiyyya fī Masālik al-absār li-l-‘Umarī.”

Chaker, Salem and Jacques Lanfry, “Les Zwawa (Igawawen) d’Algérie central (essai
onomastique et ethnographique),” Revue de l’Occident Musulmane et de la

Katz, Jonathan G., Dreams, Sufism, and Sainthood: the Visionary Career of Muhammad az-
Zawāwī, Brill: Leiden 1996.

---, “The Vision of the Prophet in Fifteenth Century North Africa: Muḥammad az-Zawāwī’s

Kahhāla, ʿUmar Riḍā, Muʿgam al-mu‘allifīn, 13 vols., Beirut: Dār ʿIlḥīyā’ at-Turāt al-‘Arabī,

Ḥalfāt, Miftāḥ, Qabīlat Zawāwī bi-l-Maqrib al-awsat mā bayna al-qarnayn 6-9/12-15
(dirāsa fī dawrihā s-siyāsī wa-l-ḥaḍāri), Tizi Wazū: Dār al-Amal li-l-Ṭībā’ a wa-n-
Naṣr wa-t-Tawzī’ 2011.

Modéran, Yves, Les Maures et l’Afrique romaine: IVe-VIe siècle, Rome: École française de

(July 1969), 365-374.

Az-Zawāwī, Abū l-Ya’lā, Tārīkh Zawāwī, Introduction and comments by Suhayl al-Ḥālidī,

2. Primary Sources


Ibn Ḥaḍar al-‘Aṣqalānī, Ḥāmad b. ’Alī, ad-Durar al-kāmina fī a’yān al-mi’a aqt-āmina, 6
vols., ed. Muḥammad ’Abd al-Muʿīd Dān, Hyderabad: Maḡlis Dā’irat al-Maʿārif al-
Uṭmānīyya, 1972.

Ibn al-Aḍīr, Izz ad-Dīn, al-Kāmil fī t-tārīḥ, ed. Abū l-Fīdāʾ ’Abd Allāh al-Qadī, 11 vols.,


Al-Bīqāʾī, Aḥmad Aṣṣidā, Risālat al-ǧarīb ilā l-ḥabīb, introduction, abridgement, and


Aḍ-Dahābī, Ṣams ad-Dīn, al-Ibar fī ḥabar man ḡabar, ed. Abū Ḥaḡīr Muḥammad as-Saʾīd


Ibn Ḥawqal, Abū l-Qāsim, Ṣūrat al-arḍ, Beirut: Dār Šādir n.d.


Map of Central Algeria
Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kabylie_topographic_map-fr.svg