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

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- “The Political Context of the Egyptian Gold Crisis during the Reign of Saladin,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2014): 117-134.
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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 Biḡāya (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 Madġīs al-Abtar). This corresponds to the similar practice of dividing the Arab tribes between the descendants of ‘Adnān 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 Biḡāya). 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 Madġīs 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 da‘wa as evidence.⁷

In another passage Ibn Ḥaldūn records a popular tradition which holds that the eponymous ancestors of the tribes of Zawāwa and Zawāga (a tribe with branches in Tripolitania and the Central Maghrib) were sons of a descendant of Madġīs 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 *Zawāza*. 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.

¹ Chaker, Lanfry, “Les Zwawa,” 77.

² Ibid., 82-83.

³ Ibid., 80-81.

⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁵ See Chaker, Lanfry, “Les Zwawa”; az-Zawāwī, *Tārīḥ Zawāwa*.

⁶ Ibn Ḥazm, *Ġamharat ansāb al-‘arab*, 496, 501.

⁷ Ibn Ḥaldūn, *al-‘Ibar*, 6:168-9; De Slane, *Histoire*, 1:255-6.

⁸ Ibn Ḥaldūn, *al-‘Ibar*, 6:120; De Slane, *Histoire*, 1:178.

The Algerian historian Ḥalfāt has put forward a convincing solution to this problem.⁹ 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...”¹⁰ Ḥalfāt 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 Ḥalfāt’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).¹¹ 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 ‘Iḍārī’s (d. early 8th/14th century) *Bayān al-muḡrib*, 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.¹² Though Ibn ‘Iḍārī 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 Šaraf (d. 459/1067), Ibn Abī ṣ-Šalt (d. 529/1124), and ar-Raqīq 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-Aḫḫār’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-Mu‘ğib fī talḫīs aḥbār al-Maḡrib* of al-Marrākušī (d. 7th/13th century), nor in the early accounts of the Muslim conquest (*fath*) of North Africa.¹³ An-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333) mentions the Zawāwa once, stating that the eleventh century Zīrid ruler al-Mu‘izz granted his uncle Ḥammād some lands including Zawāwa, which here appears as a place name.¹⁴

There are also two very brief mentions of the Zawāwa in some Fatimid sources. In the tenth century *Iftitāḥ ad-da‘wā*, the “Rawāwa” are listed as one of the tribes that joined the Fatimid agent Abū ‘Abd Allāh aš-Šī‘ī when he established the Fatimid movement amongst the Kutāma in what is now eastern Algeria.¹⁵ In a later Ismā‘īlī source composed in Yemen in the fifteenth century, a similar account appears with the name of the tribe in question changed to Zawāwa.¹⁶ 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-Manšūr (d.

⁹ See Ḥalfāt, *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. Ḥalfāt says that we should keep the original spelling. Anonymous, *Mafāḥir al-Barbar*, 172; Ḥalfāt, *Qabīlat Zawāwa*, 53-4.

¹¹ Ibn Ḥaldūn, *al-Ibar*, 6:168-170.

¹² Ibn ‘Iḍārī, *al-Bayān al-muḡrib*.

¹³ Ibn al-Aḫḫār, *al-Kāmil*; al-Marrākušī, *al-Mu‘ğib*; Ḥalfāt, *Qabīlat Zawāwa*, 61.

¹⁴ An-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 24:206.

¹⁵ Al-Qāḍī an-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ ad-da‘wā*, 113.

¹⁶ ‘Imād ad-Dīn, *Tārīḥ*, 105-106.

341/953) in Tubna when he was suppressing the rebellion of the Ḥārīgī leader Abū Yazīd (d. 873/947).¹⁷

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 Būsayf, a town 80 kilometers south of Algiers and therefore well outside the Zawāwī homeland in the Ğurğura Mountains).¹⁸ Ibn Ḥawqal (d. 367/977) mentions the Zawāwa in a list of the Zanātī (Butrī) Berber tribes.¹⁹ 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 Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229) who follows him, list the Zawāwa and Zawāga as two of the tribes inhabiting the countryside around Qābis in southeastern Tunisia.²⁰ Since Qābis is far from the territory known to have been inhabited by the Zawāwa, but very close to Tripolitania where the Zawāra lived as neighbors of the Zawāga, we should follow Ḥalfāt’s suggestion and read Zawāra instead of Zawāwa.

Al-Idrīsī (d. 560/1165) mentions the Zawāwa twice in his geography.²¹ One of these reports is suspect because it places them in the vicinity of Fez, far to the west of the areas known to be inhabited by the Zawāwa.²² According to Ḥalfāt, a branch of the Zawāga lived near Fez, so it is likely that a copyist confused the two names.²³ In the second passage al-Idrīsī mentions the Zawāwa as one of twenty Berber tribes, including the Kutāma, who inhabit Ğabal Wanšarīs to the south of the city of Milyāna.²⁴ To al-Idrīsī the Zawāwa were a minor tribe associated with an area well to the southwest of the Ğurğura Mountains.

Al-‘Umarī (d. 786/1384) says that the Zawāwa inhabit the Zawāwa (Ğurğura) Mountains which lie between Biğāya and the countryside around Algiers. He appears to be the first geographer who placed the Zawāwa in their traditional homeland in the Ğurğura Mountains. Ibn Sa‘īd (d. 685/1286) refers to the “mountains of the Zawāwa and Ṣanhāga” which lie between Biğāya and Tilimsān.²⁵

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 Mālīkī scholars by Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh (d. 542/1148) and Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ (d. 543/1149) only two persons with this *nisba* are mentioned: Muḥammad b. Qāsim az-Zawāwī (d. 280/893) who was reported to have been a companion of the great jurist Ṣaḥnūn (d. 240/854) and his son Abū al-Qāsim (d. 304/916), who was also a scholar.²⁶ However, the tenth century scholar al-Ḥušanī in the *Ṭabaqāt ‘ulamā’ ifrīqiyya* doubted that Ṣaḥnūn had a companion named az-Zawāwī.²⁷ Apart from this passage there are no other references to Zawāwī individuals in the *Ṭabaqāt*.

¹⁷ Aṣ-Ṣanhāgī, *Aḥbār*, 65.

¹⁸ Al-Ya‘qūbī, *al-Buldān*, 191; Ḥalfāt, *Qabīlat Zawāwa*, 126-8.

¹⁹ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, 106.

²⁰ Al-Bakrī, *al-Masālik*, 2:189; al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘ğam*, 7:5.

²¹ Al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-muštāq*, 2:246, 252.

²² *Ibid.*, 2:246.

²³ See Ḥalfāt, *Qabīlat Zawāwa*, 52 n. 2.

²⁴ Al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-muštāq*, 252.

²⁵ Al-‘Umarī, *Masālik al-abṣār*, 4:394; Ibn Sa‘īd, *al-Ğuğrāfiyā*, 145.

²⁶ As-Sabtī, *Tarīb al-madārik*, 4:414-415; al-Mālīkī, *Riyāḍ an-nufūs*, 1:248.

²⁷ Al-Ḥušanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 154.

We would expect to find a wealth of information on the Zawāwa in al-Ġubrīnī's (d. 704/1304?) *Unwān ad-dirāya* which is a substantial biographical dictionary devoted to the eminent persons of Biḡāya 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 Farḡūn's (d. 799/1396) *Dībāğ* has seven entries under the *nisba* az-Zawāwī and Aḡmad Bābā's (d. 1036/1626) *Nayl al-ibtihāğ* has a total of six.²⁹

The early Mašriqī 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 Mašriqī 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-Saḡhāwī's (d. 902/1496) *ad-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, sixteen in Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī's (d. 852/1449) *Durar*, and nine in aṣ-Ṣafaḍī's (d. 724/1362) *A'yān al-'aṣr*.³² As-Saḡhāwī's biographical dictionary is concerned with people from the ninth Islamic century (roughly corresponding to the 15th century A.D.), while Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī'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-Ġubrīnī's (d. 704/1304?) thirteenth century biographical dictionary of eminent inhabitants of Biḡāya 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-Saḡhāwī.

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-Naqar 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-Ġubrīnī, *Unwān*.

²⁹ Ibn Farḡūn, *ad-Dībāğ*; at-Tunbukfī, *Nayl al-ibtihāğ*.

³⁰ Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt*, 7 vols.

³¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā*.

³² As-Saḡhāwī, *ad-Ḍaw'*; Ibn Ḥaḡar, *ad-Durar*; aṣ-Ṣafaḍī, *A'yān*.

³³ An-Naqar, "Takrūr," 365-374.

broadier 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 Biḡāya 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 Ḥaldūn. It is worth pointing out in this regard that Ibn Ḥaldūn 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 Ḥaldūn 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 Ḥaldūn’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 Ḥaldūn 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.³⁴ 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, Madḡīs 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 Ḥaldūn wrote his great survey of Berber history and genealogy in the 14th century.³⁵ Modéran’s work demonstrates the fluidity of tribal identities and it serves as a caution against privileging Ibn Ḥaldūn’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 Ḥaldūn’s day, he assumed that they had always played an important role in Maḡribī history. It did not occur to him that his predecessors who lived hundreds of years earlier understood terms like *Zawāwa*, Butr, or Ṣanhāḡa differently than did he and his contemporaries and that tribal identities were historical constructs rather than constants. For Ibn Ḥaldūn, 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 Ḡurḡura Mountains and in the greater Biḡāya 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 Ṣanhāḡa. 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 *maḡāribā* 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 *maḡāribā* 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 *‘ulamā’* 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 *‘ulamā’* 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.

Yahyā b. al-Mu‘ṭī az-Zawāwī (564/1168-628/1230) was one of the foremost medieval Arabic grammarians.³⁶ Aḍ-Ḍahabī called him “*ṣayḥ an-naḥw*.”³⁷ He was born in Biḡāya where he received his early education. Curiously our sources report that he was a Ḥanafī, unlike the vast majority of the *maḡāriba* who followed the school of Mālīk. 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-Mu‘ṭī 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-Mu‘ṭī a salary and appointed him lecturer in grammar and literature at the mosque of ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣṣ. When the great philologist died his funeral was attended by al-Malik al-Kāmil and he was buried near the tomb of aš-Šāfi‘ī.³⁹

Ibn al-Mu‘ṭī 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 Quran.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 ‘*ulamā*’ 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 Mālīk (d. 672/1274) wrote the *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālīk* 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 Mālīkī 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 Mālīkī judges along with judges from the other law schools. It is interesting to observe that the earliest appointees to the Mālīkī judgeship in Damascus were exclusively Zawāwī.

The first of these was Zayn ad-Dīn Abū Muḥammad az-Zawāwī.⁴³ He was born in Biḡāya 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 Mālīkī 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 Ḥanafī *qāḍī* Šams ad-Dīn b. ‘Aṭā’ 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-Ḍahabī, *Siyar*, 22:324; az-Zawāwī, *ad-Durra*.

³⁷ Aḍ-Ḍahabī, *Siyar*, 22:324.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt*, 6:197.

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Mu‘ṭī, *Durra*, 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13-15.

⁴² Aḥmad, *al-Andalusiyūn*, 192-194.

⁴³ Aḍ-Ḍahabī, *al-‘Ibar*, 3:348; aš-Šuqā‘ī, *Tālī*, 105-6; al-Yūnīnī, *Ḍayl*, 4:173-4; Aḥmad, *al-Andalusiyūn*, 194-5.

⁴⁴ Al-Yūnīnī, *Ḍayl*, 4:173.

681/1284 and he was buried in the famous Damascene cemetery of Bāb aṣ-Ṣaġīr. His funeral was attended by a great crowd of people including the *nā'ib as-saltāna* (the sultan's viceroy in Syria). His reputation was such that his grave became the object of *ziyāra* (minor pilgrimage).⁴⁵

Zayn ad-Dīn had a cousin named Yūsuf b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar Abū Ya'qūb Ğamāl ad-Dīn.⁴⁶ This Ğamāl ad-Dīn served as deputy (*nā'ib*) 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 aṣ-Ṣarqīyya, al-Ġarbiyya, 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 Ṣamṣamiyya *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

'Īsā b. Mas'ūd az-Zawāwī (664/1265 – 743/1342) was trained in Mālikī *fiqh* in his native Zawāwa and later in Biġāya.⁵⁰ He travelled to Alexandria to continue his studies and then he took up a judgeship in Qābis in Ifrīqiya. 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 *Ṣaḥīḥ* 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 'Arabī (d. 638/1240).⁵² He called for the burning of Ibn 'Arabī'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-Wāfi*, 29:103; al- Yūnīnī, *Dayl*, 4:239; Aḥmad, *al-Andalusīyyūn*, 195.

⁴⁷ Ibn Ḥaġar, *ad-Durar*, 5:190; aṣ-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 4:456-7; Ibn Farḥūn, *Dībāġ*, 2:320.

⁴⁸ Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 4:456-457.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibn Ḥaġar, *ad-Durar*, 4:246-248; al-Biqā'ī, *Maṣra'*, 157-158; aṣ-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 3:723; Kaḥḥāla, *Mu'ġam*, 8:23; Ibn Farḥūn, *Dībāġ*, 283.

⁵¹ Ibn Ḥaġar, *ad-Durar*, 4:247-248, Ibn Farḥūn, *Dībāġ*, 283.

⁵² See al-Biqā'ī, *Maṣra'*, 157-158.

their belief in Ibn ‘Arabī’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

‘Īsā was also a friend of the famous encyclopedist and historian al-‘Umarī. In the latter’s encyclopedia entitled *Masālik al-abṣār* ‘Īsā 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 ‘Īsā was evidently an oral informant for al-‘Umarī who introduces him with the words “*ḥaddaṭani*” or “*qāla*” (he said).⁵⁵

‘Īsā 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-Sfāqusī in Cairo. ‘Alī later travelled to Damascus where he met the great scholars of that city including al-Mizzī, al-Birzālī, and ad-Ḍahabī. In 732/1331 he took over his father’s position as instructor at the Mālikī *zāwiya* in Cairo. Later in life he developed a strong attraction to Sufism and he left his job to become a disciple of the great Sufī 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 *nāzir al-awqāf* (Inspector of Endowments) in Egypt.⁵⁷

Abū ‘Alī az-Zawāwī (632/1234-731/1330) left his native Biḡāya 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 Muḥammad 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-Saḥāwī devotes eight entire pages to his biography while the vast majority of his entries are well under one page in length. Of the *maḡāriba* who appear in as-Saḥāwī’s dictionary only Ibn Ḥaldūn receives similar treatment.

Al-Mašdālī was born in Biḡāya 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-Maḡrib al-Awsaṭ, 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 Muḥammad 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.

⁵⁴ Al-‘Umarī, *Masālik*, 3:504; 4:126, 128, 134, 147; Binšarīfa, “Mašādir,” 243.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibn Ḥaḡar, *ad-Durar*, 4:111; as-Saḥāwī, *at-Tuḥfa*, 2:290.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibn Ḥaḡar, *ad-Durar*, 6:125.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ As-Saḥāwī, *Ḍaw’*, 9:180-188; as-Suyūṭī, *Naẓm*, 160; al-Biḡā’ī, *Risālat*.

⁶¹ As-Saḥāwī, *Ḍaw’*, 9:180-182.

Tilimsān, wrote to al-Mašdālī's father regarding his son, "when he [al-Mašdālī] arrived we thought that he needed us, but we were more in need of him!"⁶²

Al-Mašdālī briefly returned to Biḡāya 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-Saḡāwī). 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-Mašdālī 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.⁶³

In Cairo he taught at the Qubba al-Manšūriyya, 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-Suyūfī remarked that he was a wonder of the ages who was more distinguished than his contemporaries and even his own teachers.⁶⁴

He was also greatly esteemed by Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī, who refused to hear any criticism of al-Mašdālī.⁶⁵ When al-ʿAsqalānī lay on his deathbed he incessantly requested al-Mašdālī's presence. Al-Mašdālī 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.⁶⁶ Al-Mašdālī was evidently a controversial figure who had many jealous detractors as well whose criticisms are recorded by as-Saḡāwī.⁶⁷ At one point al-Mašdālī became embroiled in a dispute with the chief Mālikī judge of Cairo.⁶⁸ 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 Ayntab in 864 /1459 while he was still in his forties.⁶⁹

Aḡmad Abū ʿAṣīḍa al-Biḡāʿī was a contemporary of al-Mašdālī. 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-Mašdālī entitled *Risālat al-ḡarīb ilā l-ḡabīb*.⁷⁰ This letter was written in ornate rhyming prose (*saḡʿ*) 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-Mašdālī. He was educated in Biḡāya by al-Mašdālī's father, the Mufti Muḡammad al-Mašdālī and he almost certainly knew al-Mašdālī 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-Suyūfī, *Naẓm*, 160.

⁶⁵ See as-Saḡāwī, *Dawʿ*, 184.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 184-185.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 187.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 188.

⁷⁰ See al-Biḡāʿī, *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 ‘Ašīḍa returned to Tunis. When he inquired about his family and friends in Biḡāya 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 *maḡāribā* who advised him to return home.⁷¹

It was while he was in Medina that Abū ‘Ašīḍa composed the *Risālat al-ḡarīb* 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 *Maḡribī* pilgrims who travelled between the Hijaz and Egypt. For a long time al-Mašdālī ignored him and Abū ‘Ašīḍa berated him for the coldness of his letters. Then al-Mašdālī sent a note containing three lines of verse in which he criticized Abū ‘Ašīḍa for his tone. Finally, another longer letter arrived from al-Mašdālī in which he apologized for the past.⁷³ The *Risālat al-ḡarīb* was written as a response to this letter. The *Risālat al-ḡarīb* contains mention and a brief summary of another work by Abū ‘Ašīḍa called *Uns al-ḡarīb wa-rawḍ al-adīb*.⁷⁴ This lost work included a biography (*tarḡama*) of al-Mašdālī as well as an account of Abū ‘Ašīḍa’s journey (*riḥla*) from Biḡāya 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 *maḡāribā* during the late Medieval period and it would shed light on travel conditions between Ifrīqiya and Egypt during the Mamluk period.⁷⁵

Muḡammad az-Zawāwī (d. 882/1447) was a colorful and eccentric Sufi from Biḡāya.⁷⁶ He left to posterity a “dream diary” entitled *Tuḡfat an-nāzīr wa-nuzhat al-manāzīr* 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 Muḡammad. 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 Biḡāya and Tilimsān.⁷⁷ His dreams of the Prophet began while he was still in northwest Africa. At some point he made the *ḡaḡḡ* 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 Ğaḡmaq (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.”

⁷⁷ For a summary of his life see Katz, “Vision,” 18-24.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 189-192.

not mentioned in any of the Mamluk biographical sources, only *Mağribī* works mention him.⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹ 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.

⁸⁰ Katz, "Vision," 240, note 51.

⁸¹ Ibid., 247-8.

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Map of Central Algeria

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