MILITARY CHRONICLES OF 17TH CENTURY EGYPT AS AN ASPECT OF POPULAR CULTURE

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In this paper I shall be dealing with a group of Arabic chronicles dating from the second half of the seventeenth century in Egypt, when Egypt was under Ottoman rule. I have already studied lengthily, for my doctorate dissertation, one of the chronicles referred to here, a chronicle known under the title of *Waqā'iʿ Miṣr al-Qāhira*. Some readers may already be familiar with an important aspect of what I shall be discussing.

Here, however, I shall be considering this chronicle, and others close to it, in the context of folk literature and as representatives of folk literature and of popular culture. My claim is that these chronicles, which have usually been considered as historical documents, could actually be counted — according to the analysis which follows — as part of folk literature. Both form and content would seem to indicate that these chronicles are very similar to epics aimed at entertaining an audience of listeners be either the militaries or other.

This paper will perhaps answer certain questions while leaving others unanswered. The part which I believe I have an answer to concerns the nature of the text(s) and the condition of its composition; the part unanswered concerns the material, historical side of my hypothesis, such as for instance being more precise about the authorship or audience of the account.

1. *Waqā'iʿ Miṣr al-Qāhira* and its sister chronicles (mainly, another work known under the title of *ad-Durra al-muṣāna fī aḫbār al-kināna* by al-Amīr Aḥmad Kaṯḫudā ʿAzabān ad-Damurdāšī), are known as the Damurdāšī group[1] and have been considered by the historians of that period as popular chronicles[2].

All of them tell very much the same story and share the same *vision du monde* which will be defined later in this study. The story is that of Egypt and more particularly the events which took place in Cairo in the middle of the seventeenth century between all the factions then present in Egypt: pashas, Mamlūks, soldiers belonging to different militia, and even Arab tribes standing in favour of one faction

[1] The Damurdāšī group is usually considered to consist of the various copies and versions of *Waqā'iʿ Miṣr al-Qāhira* as well as the copies and versions constituting *ad-Durra al-muṣāna fī aḫbār al-kināna*. Cf. Crecelius (1989:7-9).

[2] Cf. Holt 1963 and Raymond 1966.

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or the other. In the background also sometimes appears the local population, with the ulemas, the tradesmen, and the people of Cairo who lived as victims of the internal strife and warfare launched by the various factions.

On the level of the content, the series of manuscripts of *al-Waqā'iʿ* tells the same narrative as the text of *ad-Durra*, they moreover share, as I was saying earlier, the same ideology or *vision du monde*. With a sharp split dividing the society in two clans the so called Fiqārīs and the Qāsimīs; most of the conflicts told in the narrative take origin or end up serving this split: pashas or *wālī*s sent from Istanbul will be in favour of one or the other of the factions, *oğaq*s will be partisans of one or the other etc. When and why the conflict started between the two parties little is known (see below) if it were not for the information given by the Damurdāšī set of texts. However, it seems clear that this major split has been instigated by the conflict between two Mamlūk households of the time.

Before getting further into the analysis it would be useful to read the paragraphs at the beginning of both *al-Waqā'iʿ* and *ad-Durra* in order to get a feeling of the text and understand what is meant by the *vision du monde* I was alluding to as appears through the following passage extract from the Vienna manuscript (see below):

كانت أهل مصر من قديم الزمان فرقتين، عسكر ورعية، راية بيضا وراية حمرا، البيضا تبعي والحمرا كليبي، زغبي وهلالي، قلاووني وبيبرسي، إلى دولت آل عثمان — نصره الله تعالى —، فقاري سعد، قاسمي حرام، فرقتين في بعضهم، وعلى العرب واحدة. الفقاري يهوي الجراقات والقاسمي يهوي العمارات. وكانت أهل مصر المحروسة يعرفون الفقاري والقاسمي في المواكب — إما الموكب المحفل الشريف، وإما موكب الباشا — بالمزاريق ...

"The people of Egypt from times immemorial have been split into two clans, [both] militaries and civilians, a white flag and [vs?] a red flag, the white one Tabʿī, the red one Kulaybī, Zuġbī and [vs?] Hilālī, Qalāwūnī and [vs?] Baybarsī, up till the rule of al-ʿUṯmān — may God help him — Fiqārī, Saʿd; Qāsimī, Ḥarām, two clans within themselves, but against the Arabs united. The Fiqārī enjoys modes of music [*ğarāqāt* Dozy 1881 I, 187]; the Qāsimī enjoys the silk strings decorating the cavalrymen. And so the people of "Miṣr al-Maḥrūsa" could recognize the Fiqārī from the Qāsimī in the processions — either the procession of Holy Pilgrimage or the procession of the Pasha — by the spears".

In this text as in others of the Damurdāšī group, the conflict between Qāsimīs and Fiqārīs is said to have started as early as the beginning of Ottoman rule in Egypt. According to other sources, probably more reliable, the split was a recent one (1640

A.D., according to al-Ǧabartī, *ʿAǧāʾib* I, 38-45). In a recent research[3], Ṣabrī shows that by dating it at an earlier stage the conflict is thus exhalted and given a more noble lineage.

On the other hand, one can see how the present split is associated with previous ones which took place between tribal groups. So for instance, the Qāsimīs are associated with the Ḥarām tribe while the Fiqārīs are associated with the Saʿd tribe. On the other hand, the Hilālīs and their opponents the Zuġbīs are put in parallel to the present parties in conflict.

2. The particular chronicle of *Waqāʾiʿ* is represented by a set of five different copies of a text. Not exactly one and the same text, however, since between one and the other of the manuscripts there are a number of differences, in spite of the fact that they all bear the same name of the supposed "author" or "scribe". This common name found on all of the extant copies would permit us to admit that all the group could have been written or at least copied by the same person. al-Ḥāǧǧ Muṣṭafā b. al-Ḥāǧǧ Ibrāhīm is that common name found in all of the copies known to me, only one of them (the Vienna version), and that is the one I have used to edit the text, adds to the previous name: al-Maddāḥ al-Qinālī. The mention of the *kunya*, as well as al-Maddāḥ, "the panegyrist" seems to indicate the profession of the "author" or of the scribe.

Considering the differences which appear between one copy and the other(s) may already raise questions about the nature of the text and the conditions of its composition.

Briefly, these discrepancies (between the manuscripts) vary from very slight ones (orthographic, such as for instance, the proper name Ismāʿīl written with a long or a short vowel), to major differences concerning the total structure of the account. To have an idea of these discrepancies, one could consider two texts relating the same event as can be observed in the following:

Vienna copy

"He left, heading the holy pilgrimage on the second year after a hundred and returned on the third, mistreated and robbed, soldiers of his and men from the militias (*oǧaqs*?) were killed. So Darwīš bēk went to his rescue and met him at al-ʿAqaba and accompanied him back to Cairo. And the reason was that ʿAlī pasha had charged Ibrāhīm bēk aṣ-Ṣaġīr, son of Dū l-Fiqār bēk and Darwīš bēk to order the Arabs [bedouins] of ad-Dašīša in order for them to carry the grains to the two Holy sites [Mecca and the tomb of the Prophet]. The *sanǧāqs* started off in the early morning from behind of [the tomb of] Qā'itbāy, they suddenly pierced at them, the Arabs thought they were enemy troops, and so

[3] Ṣabrī 1995:29-36 where the Qāsimī Fiqārī split is discussed.

they fought them. Men were killed from the Ġuzz [Turks] and the Arabs, at sunrise they discovered that these were *sanǧāqs* and fled. The soldiers looted the Arabs' homes, the *sanǧāqs* drove the camels. At that point the Arabs assembled and watched (lied in an ambush) for the pilgrims at aš-Šurafā' pass (strait), when Ibrāhīm bēk Abū Šanab appeared they waged war to him. So then happened what was to happen at aš-Šurafā'."

Taymūr copy

"Ibrāhīm bēk departed, heading the holy pilgrimage on the third year after a hundred. He accomplished the pilgrimage and returned; the Arabs (bedouins) attacked him at aš-Šurafā', people were killed, militia men, men of wisdom as well as pilgrims, they also robbed some of the pilgrims. He sent a message to ᶜAlī pasha to inform him of what had happened to him; ᶜAlī pasha sent Darwīš bēk who went to meet them at al-ᶜAqaba. They entered Cairo safely, it was lost for those who had gone. It was said that this had been a plot from the Fiqāriyya since the treasury [*daftardāriyya*] was in the hand of Murād bēk, the command of the pilgrimage was with Ibrāhīm bēk. But the truth is different: ᶜAlī pasha had ordered the Dašīša Arabs to carry the grains to the two Holy sites for [?] the *sanǧāqs*, Darwīš bēk and the son of Zayn al-Fiqār, Ibrāhīm bēk. They reached the Arabs moving on the hills, behind of [the tomb of] Qā'itbāy. Suddenly they pierced at them with the call of aš-Šāfiᶜī, the Arabs thought they were enemy troops so they pierced at them and fought the *sanǧāqs* for about an hour. Men died from the two sides, that was until the Arabs realized that it had been *sanǧāqs* and so they fled. So the *sanǧāqs* looted their houses and their camels. That happened on the beginning of Muḥarram at the start of the fourth year after a hundred. It is then that the Arabs gathered their forces and prepared the ambush on the way of the pilgrimage, and happened what was to happen."

Even a rapid reading of the two passages can show a number of variations between the texts, such as the dating of the event, or the fact that the second passage offers an interpretation of the narrated incident (according to which it could have been instigated by the Fiqārīs). Above all, one will notice that the two texts are phrased in a different way although demonstrating a similar level of language.

As to the extant copies known they are as follows:

On the one hand, the version of the National Library of Vienna (cod. H.O. 38) which stands alone. On the other hand, a group of four copies sharing grossly a common structure of account and formulation, of these, three belong to Cairo's Dār al-Kutub, an old manuscript (cod. G. 8505) and two recent ones (cod. Tārīḫ Taymūr 1402 and cod. Tārīḫ 4048).

Within this set of manuscripts the differences concern only details: the presence *vs.* the absence of religious formulas in one text or the other, lexical or orthographi-

cal variations, but all the copies follow the same ordering of the account. The fourth copy belongs to the Royal Library of Copenhagen (cod. CLIX). It would seem that this manuscript was copied from a different source than the previously mentioned ones since this copy is the only complete one. The general presentation of this manuscript would seem to indicate that it is the most recent one.

To make the story even more puzzling I should add that the sister text I have referred to earlier (in 1.), *ad-Durra* by al-Amīr Aḥmad Kaṯḫudā ʿAzabān ad-Damurdāšī, shares the same features as the text I was mainly concerned with both in form and content. The same level of language, the same *vision du monde*, the same degree of importance given to very much the same events.

3. Faced with this multiplicity of copies and with the wide differences appearing between one of the copies and the others plus the presence of such a close sister text, I have come up with a double hypothesis:

The first is that the chronicle of *al-Waqāʾiʿ* was originally an oral account, the variations found within copies of a "single" text being one of the characteristics of oral literaure. As Guillaume (1987) puts it, the variation found between copies "is not accidental (due to copyists' errors, etc.) but structural, since the written word is not, as usually the case, the place where the narrative is elaborated, [...] rather the written word is only a way by which the narratve is stocked". The narrative is elaborated during the live performance, writing is only a way of preserving the text so as to prevent it from being forgotten. The multiplicity of forms by which a text appears may thus be a sign or an indication of vocal or oral origin.

The second hypothesis is that the Damurdāšī group (the Damurdāšī and Qinālī series of texts) constitutes in fact one and a single narrative, transmitted in different manners and then eventually transcribed by different individuals. Instead of trying to decide on *one* original text, which would be *the* older, *the* most authentic, would it not be wiser to follow Cerquiligni's (1989) advice where he warns the philologist from searching for a "unique authentic text". Why not, as he recommends, admit to a generalized authentic?

My hypothesis seems also enhanced by the internal observation of the text, by that I mean the observation of a) indications as to the oral nature of the text, and b) linguistic signs of the orality of the text.

3.1 Indications as to the oral nature of the text

It should be remarked that the chronicle does not bear a title. *Waqāʾiʿ Miṣr al-Qāhira* is a formula found in the first lines of all of the extant copies. Unlike a written text, this one appears as an *aide-mémoire* without a specific title.

The qualification of al-Maddāḥ, the panegyrist, found in the Vienna copy may be an indication of the profession of Muṣṭafā b. al-Ḥāǧǧ Ibrāhīm, that of a bard who either composed or recited the story telling the events happening in Cairo in the days

of agitation when Mamlūks were at war against each other and the characters of the Qāsimī clan – to whose ranks Qinālī seems to belong – lived, fought and died like heroes or traitors.

Another indication is the presence of formalistic expressions, a feature of folk literature. So for instance standard epithets and clichés are attached to the characters of the narrative. The mention of Ismāʿīl b. ʿIwaḍ, an important character of the narrative, is most often followed by the formula *qālib sukkar ṣaġīr as-sinn kabīr al-miqdār* "a small lump of sugar, young in age but of great value". To the same person is also attached the epithet of generosity *fāʿil al-ḫayrāt*, and that of pleasant appearance *ḍāḥik as-sinn*. Ibrāhīm bēk Abū Šanab, another character of the narrative is usually described in a pejorative manner: so he is qualified as being coward and double faced *bi-waǧhayn*.

Formulas do not just appear in the forms of clichés but also in that of entire passages which are almost textually repeated. One of these passages repeated all through the text is the one recounting the episode of the enthronement of the new pasha, after the deposition of his predecessor:

(... قابجي باشا. حضر صحبة عبد الله باشا) طلع بندر الاسكندرية، أتى ساعي خبّر به، نزلت له الأغاوات والجواويشية والملازمين، لاقوه وإلى ثغر رشيد جابوه. أقام بها الأيام المعلومة، نزّلوه في السفاين على وجه بحر النيل المبارك، أرسوا به تحت ناحية الوراق. بات تلك الليلة إلى الصباح، فطر، وعدّا على الصماط، خلع قفطين القدوم، وأخذ التقادم، وزار حضرة الإمام الشافعي ليلا، وعاد بات في الريدانية، وعند الصباح دخل مصر في موكب عظيم، طلع إلى قلعة الجبل، عملوا له شنك، الإنكشارية مدافع من الأبراج، أقام يتعاطا الأحكام ...

"He arrived at the chief town of Alexandria, a messenger came to announce him. The *aġas*, the soldiers and the lieutenants met him and to the port of Rosetta led him. He stayed there for the customary period. They flew him down the blessed Nile river, until they arrived to the port of al-Warrāq. There he spent the night and on the next morning, after having eaten he crossed to open the banquet. He offered the customary kaftans and received the presents in honour of his arrival. Then by the evening he visited his Highness al-Imām aš-Šāfiʿī, returned, spent the night at al-Raydāniyya and by the next morning, in a great procession, he entered Cairo, and walked up to the Citadel. There the canons were activated by the corps of the Inkišāriyya from the towers. He started giving the orders..."

The repetition of a passage within a text is among the features indicating an oral strategy (Zumthor 1982).

Actually, repetition in itself is usually recognized as a factor of orality. Since on the level of communication, repetition is what prevents a message, mainly based on linearity, from being partly lost. Since one cannot "look back" as in a reading process, repetition makes the message more "resistant". On the other hand as has been shown by Lord (1981), repetition is a functional part of the narrative since it gives the oral poet a pattern to follow (in Lord's case the pattern is rythmic since he deals with oral poetry and the works he based his observations on were sung epic poetry).

Enhancing the theory of oral or vocal origin we can also notice that on some occasions the recurrent passage is even told using some rhyme in the verse as it is the case in the passage we read: *lāqūh wa-ilā ṭaġr rašīd ǧābūh.*

These episodes are very similar to a refrain reappearing as many times as a new pasha was welcomed to Egypt during the period narrated, and that is 25 times. The fact that this refrain/passage is historically justified, does not diminish the folk quality of the document. Although the historical genre of this chronicle follows the so-called Sultan-Pasha framework which supposedly constitutes the *raison d'écrire* of these narratives, as noticed by Hathaway, the mention of pashas does not really command the narrative and "as the chronicler nears his own time, he tends to include more and more events in each pasha's term, with the result that the viceroyalty begins to lose its coherence" (Hathaway 1990:58). One can indeed see in the repetition of the passage concerning the enthronement of a pasha not just in its historical function but as part of the oral narrative strategy.

Some sequences of the text are loaded with suspense and other dramatic features in the aim of entertaining the audience. In the prelude to a confrontation between two Mamlūk warriors, Ǧarkās Muḥammad, the one we are siding with, wakes up in the morning with a bad premonition, he addresses his war companion, Sulaymān bēk: "Today is a bad omen for us", but his companion discards this presentiment: "How can a one day old newborn kill a two days old?" In the course of the battle, Sulaymān bēk is hurt, a horse is presented to him, but Sulaymān feels that the horse would not bear carrying him with all the weight of harness he is wearing. He refused to ride because his destiny was to be killed on that day (p. 329).

3.2 Linguistic signs of the orality of the text

The hypothesis of an oral origin of the chronicle is enhanced because the texts exhibit various features of orality which I will try to set forth in this section.

3.2.1 Pronoun ambiguity

According to our modern habits a good writer is supposed to be as "explicit" as he can, and to leave little work to his potential reader. The writer must take into account the "readability" of his text. This is a fundamental condition in order for the reader to learn something he did not know beforehand.

Some passages of the text are difficult to understand because of the ambiguity of pronominal reference. The following examples are but a few among many in which it is almost impossible to understand the passage out of its context:

wa-narǧiʿ ilā ʿUṯmān bēk Dū l-Fiqār aḥad iqlīm al-Manṣūra wa-arsal lahā Ṣāliḥ Kāšif min taḥt yadih awwal sana wa-fī ṯ-ṯāniya tazawwaǧ bi-hānim bint ʿIwaḍ bēk

"To come back to ʿUṯmān bēk Dū l-Fiqār, he took over the region of Manṣūra and sent Ṣāliḥ Kāšif to represent him the first year and on the second he married the daughter of ʿIwaḍ bēk."

Without reading the following pages, it is unclear whether the master or the follower got married. The context as well as the proper intonation accompanying it would probably have removed the ambiguity from these written sentences.

In another example the reference of the pronoun is absent from the text; only common knowledge of the political and historical situation could provide the absent information:

narǧiʿ li-firqat al-qāsimiyya, tafarraǧū ʿalā ḏālika l-mawkib, naẓarū fīh, lam waǧadū aḥad minhum, li-kawnih lam ʿarraf aḥad minhum, li-kawn anna marādīh yuẓhir al-fiqāriyya ilā ahl Miṣr

"Coming back to the Qāsimī's, they saw this procession, they watched it, and found none of them [of their own clan] among its ranks, since *he* had informed none of them, since *his* will was to parade the power of the Fiqārī's."

Although the name of the person to whom *he* and *his* refer, which I have emphasized in the text, is not explicitly revealed, it should have been clear to anyone that it was Zayn al-Fiqār, the leader of the victorious Fiqārī faction.

It can be assumed that for the listener or the reader of the account during this period, the references were clear since the text is part of a living situation.

3.2.2 Asyndetic constructions have been observed to be a factor common to Middle and to colloquial Arabic (Hopkins 1984:228-236), but this feature has not been linked to the factor of orality. In what follows, I shall be more concerned with studying the asyndetic relation which can be observed in the junction between phrases, as well as the ellipsis (absence or omission) of argumentative elements.

i) ellipsis of the junction between phrases:

aqāmū ḥattūh fī-s-siǧn, ḫallaṣ minhu l-muta'ḫḫir wa-l-mutʿa ṭalāq al-qādirīn

"They put him in prison, he extorted from him the arrears and the compensation[4] as is practiced by the rich in their divorce".

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[4] *Mu'ahhir* is the term used to designate the sum of money to be paid to the woman in the case of an eventual divorce; *mutʿa* designates the sum of money payed to the divorcee in compensation of the pleasure one has had with her.

The original text, unlike the translation, does not exhibit a link between the two elements of the phrase, the comparison is not expressed explicitly by the preposition *as*. One is to believe that the intonation, of which any written text is necessarily deprived, originally expressed the semantics of the comparison.

ii) ellipsis of argumentative elements:

naḫnu kayfa namluk al-bāb min al-qāsimiyya? Aḥmad Baġdādlī bāšōḍabāšī wa-Ġālib Ḫalīl kaṯḫudā l-waqt wa-Murād Ǧāwīš bayt al-māl, wa-l-bākġiyya min ṭarafihim?

"How can we take over the military corps from the Qāsimiyya *if* Aḥmad Baġdadlī is *bāšōḍabāšī* (chief of a military corps company), *if* Ġālib Ḫalīl is *kaṯḫudā* (lieutenant), *if* Murād Ǧāwīš is in charge of tax collection, and *if* the chief of the guard is on their side"[5].

The last example I shall give of asyndesis is, I believe, a very good illustration of the ambiguity which can result from a text closer to the code of speech than to the code of writing. Indeed, vocal communication relies on intonation as a vital element in the production of meaning; punctuation contributes only to a small degree to substitute for the role of intonation. The text of al-Qinālī does not, of course, even bear the marks of punctuation. In some cases, the intelligibility of the text depends on restoring the intonation which we suppose accompanied the phrase, as is the case in the following example:

kānat ahl Miṣr min qadīm az-zamān firqatayn ʿaskar wa-raʿiyya rāya bayḍā wa-rāya ḥamrā

"The people of Egypt, military as well as civilian, has been divided since early times into two factions, the red flag and the white flag".

In the original Arabic text, *ʿaskar wa-raʿiyya* can be interpreted not as an intermediate group of words defining more precisely the constitution of the people of Egypt, but as the two factions dividing the country. In the translation, the meaning is obtained by means of the punctuation marks.

3.2.3 Word order can also be a sign of orality in a written text. In the following examples focalization is no doubt one of the factors justifying the word order followed. I have intentionally preserved in the translation of these sentences, the word order of the original text:

aḫaḏ as-sanḍūq ṣāḥibuh wa-tawaǧǧah

"He took the chest, its owner, and left"

rattab al-ḥarb ʿIwaḍ bēk

"He prepared the battle, ʿIwaḍ bēk"

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[5] In the conflict between the Qāsimī and the Fiqārī clans, the latter are plotting to take over the Janissary military corps, an obstacle remains: the main officers of the Janissaries are from the opposite clan.

fataḥū bāb al-ḥadīd as-saqqāyīn

"They opened the al-Ḥadīd Gate, the water-sellers".

In all of the preceding examples the same word-order is followed, that is V-O-S. It is as if the sentences had been composed first as verbal phrases formed by a verb and an object, the subject then coming as an afterthought responding to a need for further precision. This structure is reminiscent of the oral behaviour in which information adds up as one talks, in some cases, by the addition of details while the utterance takes place.

3.2.4 In some cases, the notion of "sentence" is impossible to apply to the utterances of the *Waqā'iᶜ*, just as is often the case in oral productions:

naḥnu qāṣidīn aṣ-ṣulḥ ᶜalā kulli ḥāl aḫyar min aš-šarr yatawallad minhu al-fasād

"We ask for reconciliation, in any case better than evil, it engenders corruption".

The phrases which constitute this utterance come as a series of successive elements, each dependent upon the previous. The notion of sentence is impossible to apply to it.

So from what has preceded it seems possible to prove that the text of *al-Waqā'iᶜ* was orally transmitted and that in putting it down in a written form the oral features were not obliterated.

Waqā'iᶜ Miṣr al-Qāhira is not a text written using the dialect, rather it is written in a variety of language where features of literary Arabic appearing do not respect the grammatical norms of this level. This variety is known as Middle Arabic; the particularity of this text, however, resides elsewhere, *i.e.* in the oral nature of its writing as I have tried to show. It shows a sample of layman writing much more authentically than does another better known text of the same period *Hazz al-quḥūf fī šarḥ qaṣīd Abī Šādūf* whose author aš-Širbīnī, was an Azharī capable of imitating and reproducing the local speech of the Manṣūra area peasants while also mastering the literary language and the art of writing, while Muṣṭafā Ibrāhīm is an amateur, non-professional writer who writes as he would speak, using the same strategies, and very much the same means.

4. *al-Waqā'iᶜ* as folk literature in the social life of the period

If the chronicle considered was, as I have tried to show, of oral origin, one could then ask for whom and by whom it was performed. Who was al-Ḥāǧǧ Muṣṭafā b. al-Ḥāǧǧ Ibrāhīm? Was he a bard or a panygerist as the title of al-Maddāḥ would suggest? If so, the question still remains partly unanswered. Because then, for whom was al-Qinālī a *maddāḥ*, a panegyrist? Perhaps for the benefit of the Mamlūk emirs who represent the heroes of the narrative such as Ismāᶜīl b. ᶜIwaḍ or Kuǧuk Muḥammad, the fair and righteous man whose deeds remind us of some episodes of the 1001 Nights? In her recent research, historian Nelly Hanna shows how various forms of cultural activities developed around individual Mamlūk households (Hanna forthcoming).

In any case al-Qinālī's inclination evidently went in favour of the Qāsimī rather than the Fiqārī group, and in this his attitude did not differ from that of the historian al-Ǧabartī.

We can also say that he was close to the ᶜAzab military corps, the second in importance after the Inkišāriyya since he informs us that he was a follower of Ḥasan Aġa ᶜAzabān. It is also known that the ᶜAzab corps were in favour of the Qāsimīs in the great split we mentioned above. If close to the ranks of the ᶜAzab, his role was perhaps that of following the activity of the men of these corps and of telling their deeds and exploits in order to strengthen their courage and boost their morale for coming fights. So he might have been a military bard, and for that matter let me quote what Lord (1981) observed in the situation he studied, "that the singers do not seem to form a special class. They can belong to any group in society. The oral singer in Yugoslavia, is not marked by a social distinction; he is not an oral poet because he is a farmer or a shopkeeper or a bey. He can belong to the "folk, the merchant class or the aristocracy".

al-Qinālī was perhaps an oral poet close to the military ranks and following their movement, telling his stories to militaries who gathered in cafés "situated near the citadel of Cairo which got much business from the soldiers"[6]. These soldiers and militaries would gather in the cafés and be entertained hearing the heroic acts of their seniors in the *oǧaq* told by the storyteller. The audience could have been constituted by military men or generally by broader groups of the population of Cairo, artisans of the Qāsimī rank who used to gather in the cafés and listen to the stories telling of the exploits of heroes, men such as Ismāᶜīl b. ᶜIwaḍ who lived courageously and to whose death the poet could even claim to have been present at.

I have tried to answer the questions concerning the nature of the chronicles considered, their condition of production and the nature of the language used in them.

Another question, which will remain unanswered, concerns the audience of the chronicle. If it is to be considered as a piece of popular literature then one should expect to be able to define the public or audience to which it was addressed. This public or audience could have been very close to the military society since the story tells about the conflicts which most often turn into armed conflicts between the partisans of the two clans.

The view I suggest for the Damurdāšī chronicles should not be seen as an attempt to empty these chronicles from their historical interest or undermining their value as sources for the understanding of Egypt, as it has been said by Crecelius – historian

[6] Hattox 1982:155 ff. See also Wiet 1969:101 where it is said that in the area of Bayn al-Qaṣrayn: "De nombreuses réunions s'y tenaient pour écouter la lecture de pièces biographiques ou historiques, ou encore des récitations de poèmes...".

of Ottoman Egypt –: "The Damurdashi group of manuscripts written by the semiliterate men of the Odjaqs are actually a major source for al-Jabarti's history, and for the history of Ottoman Egypt" (Crecelius 1989:8). As he puts it, these sources "ought to be given greater importance". Viewing the function of these texts as elements of folk literature could add to the information we have on the period of the second half of the 17th century, since this understanding can shed light on the inclination of the people at whose intention these texts were composed and told, their views and their passion.

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