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'ī Misr 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 My claim is that these chronicles, which have usually been considered as historical documents, could actually be counted — according to the analysis which follows — as part of folk literature.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'ī Misr al-Qāhira and its sister chronicles (mainly, another work known under the title of ad-Durra al-musdala fi abhbar al-kinana by al-Amir Ahmad Kaţudâ ‘Azabân ad-DamurdasI), are known as the Damurdâş group1 and have been considered by the historians of that period as popular chronicles2. 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, Mamluks, soldiers belonging to different militia, and even Arab tribes standing in favour of one faction

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1 The Damurdâş group is usually considered to consist of the various copies and versions of Waqā'ī Misr al-Qāhira as well as the copies and versions constituting ad-Durra al-musdala fi abhbar al-kinana. Cf. Crecelius (1989:7-9).


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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-Waqa’i’ 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 Fiqaris and the Qasimis; most of the conflicts told in the narrative take origin or end up serving this split: pashas or ugaqs sent from Istanbul will be in favour of one or the other of the factions, ugaqs 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 Damurdasi set of texts. However, it seems clear that this major split has been instigated by the conflict between two Mamluk households of the time.

Before getting further into the analysis it would be useful to read the paragraphs at the beginning of both al-Waqa’i’ 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):

"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 Tabri, the red one Kulaybi, Zugbi and [vs?] Hilali, Qalawuni and [vs?] Baybarsi, up till the rule of al-Utmān — may God help him — Fiqārī, Sa’ād; Qasimi, Harâm, two clans within themselves, but against the Arabs united. The Fiqārī enjoys modes of music [garaqā Dozy 1881 I, 187]; the Qasimi enjoys the silk strings decorating the cavalrymen. And so the people of Misr al-Mahrusa — 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 Isma’il 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 (ugaqs?) were killed. So Darwīsh bek went to his rescue and met him at al’Aqaba and accompanied him back to Cairo. And the reason was that ‘Ali pasha had charged Ibrahim bek as-Saghr, son of Dū I-Fiqar bek and Darwīsh bek to order the Arabs [bedouins] of ad-Daṣṣā in order for them to carry the grains to the two Holy sites [Mecca and the tomb of the Prophet]. The sangāqs started off in the early morning from behind [of the tomb of] Qa’itbay, they suddenly pierced at them, the Arabs thought they were enemy troops, and so"

A.D., according to al-Ǧabarti, ‘Ağā’îb I, 38-45). In a recent research3, Sabri 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 Qāsimis are associated with the Harām tribe while the Fiqārīs are associated with the Sa’ād tribe. On the other hand, the Hilāls and their opponents the Zugbās are put in parallel to the present parties in conflict.

2. The particular chronicle of Waqa’i’ 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-Ḫāḏr Muṣṭafā b. al-Ḫāḏr Ibrahim 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-Maddād al-Qinālī. The mention of the kunya, as well as al-Maddād, "the panegyrist" seems to indicate the profession of the "author" or of the scribe.

3 Sabri 1995:29-36 where the Qāsimi Fiqārī split is discussed.
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In this text as in others of the Damūrdāšī 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-Ǧabarti, *ʿAǧāʾib I, 38-45). In a recent research, Ẓabrī shows that by dating it at an earlier stage the conflict is thus exalted 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 Ḥaram tribe while the Fiqārīs are associated with the Saʿd tribe. On the other hand, the Hilālīs and their opponents the Zugbīs are put in parallel to the present parties in conflict.

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**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 (ṣalātis) were killed. So Darwīš bek went to his rescue and met him at al-ʿAqāba and accompanied him back to Cairo. And the reason was that 'Ali pasha had charged Ḥabrīm bek as-Saʿūr, son of Duʿl-Fiqārī bek and Darwīš bek to order the Arabs [bedouins] of al-Dašīf in order for them to carry the grains to the two Holy sites [Mecca and the tomb of the Prophet]. The sanāʾqās started off in the early morning from behind of [the tomb of] Qaʿīthāy, they suddenly pierced at them, the Arabs thought they were enemy troops, and so..."
they fought them. Men were killed from the Guzz [Turks] and the Arabs, at sunrise they discovered that these were san queryParams and fled. The soldiers looted the Arabs’ homes, the sanqueryParams drove the camels. At that point the Arabs assembled and watched (lied in an ambush) for the pilgrims at al-Šurafā’ pass (strait), when Ibrahim bek Abū Šanab appeared they waged war to him. So then happened what was to happen at al-Šurafā’.”

Taymūr copy

“Ibrahim bek departed, heading the holy pilgrimage on the third year after a hundred. He accomplished the pilgrimage and returned; the Arabs (bedouins) attacked him at al-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 ‘Ali pasha to inform him of what had happened to him; ‘Ali pasha sent Darwīš bek who went to meet them at al-‘Aqabā. They entered Cairo safely, it was lost for those who had gone. It was said that this had been a plot from the Fiqarls since the treasury [daftar ad-dāriyya] was in the hand of Murād bek, the command of the pilgrimage was with Ibrahim, but the truth is different: ‘Ali pasha had ordered the Darīs Arab to carry the grains to the two Holy sites for [?] the sanqueryParams, Darwīš bek and the son of Zayn al-Fiqār, Ibrahim bek. They reached the Arabs moving on the hills, behind of [the tomb of] Qa‘īt-bāy. Suddenly they pierced at them with the call of as-SafīcI, the Arabs thought it not to be a word is only a way by which the narrative is stocked”. The narrative is elaborated 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.

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 Dar al-Kutub, an old manuscript (cod. G. 8505) and two recent ones (cod. Tarih Taymūr 1402 and cod. Tarih 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-
they fought them. Men were killed from the Guzz (Turks) and the Arabs, at sunrise they discovered that these were sanğâps and fled. The soldiers looted the Arabs' homes, the sanğâps drove the camels. At that point the Arabs assembled and watched (lied in an ambush) for the pilgrims at as-Surafa' pass (strait), when Ibrahim bêk Aib Şanab appeared they waged war to him. So then happened what was to happen at as-Surafa'."

**Taṣmûr copy**

"Ibrahim bêk departed, heading the holy pilgrimage on the third year after a hundred. He accomplished the pilgrimage and returned; the Arabs (bedouins) attacked him at as-Surafa', people were killed, militia men, men of wisdom as well as pilgrims, they also robbed some of the pilgrims. He sent a message to 'Ali pasha to inform him of what had happened to him; 'Ali pasha sent Darwiš bêk who went to meet them at al-Aqaba. They entered Cairo safely, it was lost for those who had gone. It was said that this had been a plot from the Fiqariyya since the treasury [daftardârîyâ] was in the hand of Murad bêk, the command of the pilgrimage was with Ibrahim bêk. But the truth is different: 'Ali pasha had ordered the Dasisa Arabs to carry the grains to the two Holy sites for (?) the sanğâps, Darwiš bêk and the son of Zayn al-Fiqâr, Ibrahim bêk. They reached the Arabs moving on the hills, behind of [the tomb of] Qa'it-bay. Suddenly they pierced at them with the call of as-Safîcî, the Arabs thought it not be wiser to follow Cerquiligni's (1989) advice where he warns the philologist to decide on one of the 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-Waqâ'î is was originally an oral account, the variations found within copies of a "single" text being one of the characteristics of oral literature. 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 narrative 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 Damurdasi group (the Damurdasi and Qinali 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 noted that the chronicle does not bear a title. Waqâ'î Miṣr al-Qâhirâ is a formula found in the first lines of all of the extant copies. Unlike a written text, this one appears as an aïde-mémoire without a specific title.

The qualification of al-Maddâh, the panegyrist, found in the Vienna copy may be an indication of the profession of Mustafa b. al-Hâj Ibrahim, that of a bard who either composed or recited the story telling the events happening in Cairo in the days...
of agitation when Mamluks were at war against each other and the characters of the Qasimi clan – to whose ranks Qanli 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 Isma’il b. ‘Iyad, an important character of the narrative, is most often followed by the formula qalīb sukkrūl sajtīr as-suṣīn kābīr al-miṣdār “a small lump of sugar, young in age but of great value”. To the same person is also attached the epithet of generosity ddhik sukkar sagir as-sinn kabir al-miqdar.

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:

“He arrived at the chief town of Alexandria, a messenger came to announce him. The agas, 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 up the blessed Nile river, until they arrived to the port of al-Warraq. 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 al-Ṣāfī, returned, spent the night at al-Raydānīyya 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 rhythmic 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 the same rhyme in the verse as it is the case in the passage we read: laqīb sajlā tagīr ratīd ǧānāḥ.

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’être 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 Mamluk warriors, Garkas Muhammad, the one we are siding with, wakes up in the morning with a bad premonition, he addresses his war companion, Sulaymān bek: “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 bek 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.
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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:

\[
\text{wa-nar} \
\] aga ilā 'Utmān bēk Dū l-Fiqr āhrād iqlīm al-Manṣūra wa-arsal laha Sālīḥ Kālīf min taht yaddih awrad sana wa-wē tāzīya tazawwug bi-bānīm bint 'Iswād bēk

“To come back to 'Utmān bēk ḇūl l-Fiqr, he took over the region of Mansūra and sent Sālīḥ Kālīf to represent him the first year and on the second he married the daughter of 'Isāw 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:

\[
\text{nār} \
\] qiṣrāt al-qāsimiya, tafsīrājū 'ilā dālikā l-maweqih, nuzārū fih, lam wa-kā \
\] dhā ahad minhum, li-kawmūm lam 'arrāf ahad minhum, li-kawm anna marādīh \
\] yuzir al-fiqāriyya ilā ahl Misr

“Coming back to the Qāsimī'ī’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-Fiqrī, 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 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 argumentative elements:

\[
\text{nabī kawfī namlik al-ḥāb min al-qāsimiyā?} \quad \text{Abd al-Ḥād basadabāsī wa-} \quad \text{Gālīḫ ḫālī dakhdukh l-uṣaq wa-Murād Gāwīš bayt al-māl, wa-l-bākūyīa min tara} \quad \text{shīmī}
\]

“How can we take over the military corps from the Qāsimiyā if Abd al-Ḥād is bādābāšī [chief of a military corps company], if Gālīḫ ḫālī is dakhdūkh [lieutenant], if Murād Gāwīš is in charge of tax collection, and if the chief of the guard is on their side”.

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:

\[
\text{kānāt abl ḫār min qādim az-zūmān finqatayn 'askar wa-rāʾyīyā rāyā baydā wa-baydā harrā}
\]

“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, ‘askar wa-rāʾyīyā 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:

\[
\text{ahad as-sanduq sāhibūb wa-tawaggab}
\]

“He took the chest, its owner, and left”

\[
\text{rattab al-bāb 'Iswād bēk}
\]

“He prepared the battle, ‘Isāw bēk”

---

4 
Muʿādhīr is the term used to designate the sum of money to be paid to the woman in the case of an eventual divorce; muṭa designates the sum of money paid to the divorcee in compensation of the pleasure one has had with her.

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.
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:

"To come back to ‘Utmân bêk Dü I-Fiqâr, he took over the region of Mansûra and sent Sâlih Kâshîf to represent him the first year and on the second he married the daughter of ‘Iwâd bêk.”

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:

"Coming back to the Qâsîmî’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 Fiqârî’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-Fiqâr, the leader of the victorious Fiqârî 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.

3.2.3 Word order can also be a sign of orality in a written text. In the following example:

"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”.

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3.2.4 Asyndetic constructions have been observed to be a factor common in Middle and colloquial Arabic (Hopkins 1984:228-236), but this feature has not been linked to colloquial Arabic (Hopkins 1984:228-236), but this feature has not been linked.

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-Qina‘î 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:

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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 Waqa'i', just as is often the case in oral productions:

nabnu qasidin as-sulh ðal da kulli hul alayr min as-sarr jatawa'llad minhu al-fasâd
"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-Waqa'i' was orally transmitted and that in putting it down in a written form the oral features were not obliterated.

Waqa'i' Misr al-Qahira 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-qubûf fisârah qasid Abl Sâdir whose author al-Shirbini, was an Azhari capable of imitating and reproducing the local speech of the Mansûra area peasants while also mastering the literary language and the art of writing, while Mustafà Ibrâhim is an amateur, non-professional writer who writes as he would speak, using the same strategies, and very much the same manner.

4. al-Waqa'i' 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-Hâqiq Mustâfa b. al-Hâqiq Ibrâhim? Was he a bard or a panegyrist as the title of al-Maddâh would suggest? If so, the question still remains partly unanswered. Because then, for whom was al-Qinâlî a maddâh, a panegyrist? Perhaps for the benefit of the Mamlûk emirs who represent the heroes of the narrative such as Ismâ'il b. 'Iwad or Kuğuk Muhammad, 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 Mamlûk households (Hanna forthcoming).

In any case al-Qinâlî's inclination evidently went in favour of the Qâsimi rather than the Fiqârî group, and in his attitude did not differ from that of the historian al-Qâbarî.

We can also say that he was close to the 'Azab military corps, the second in importance after the Inkişârîyya since he informs us that he was a follower of Hasan Ağa 'Azabân. It is also known that the 'Azab corps were in favour of the Qâsimis in the great split we mentioned above. If close to the ranks of the 'Azab, 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-Qinâlî was perhaps an oral poet close to the military ranks and following their movement, telling his stories to military men who gathered in cafés "situated near the citadel of Cairo which got much business from the soldiers". These soldiers and military officers would gather in the cafés and be entertained hearing the heroic acts of their seniors in the oğag 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 Qâsimi rank who used to gather in the cafés and listen to the stories telling of the exploits of heroes, men such as Ismâ'il b. 'Iwad 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 Damurdâsi 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

Hattox 1982:155 ff. See also Wiet 1969:101 where it is said that in the area of Bayn al-Qasrayn: "De nombreuses réunions s'y tenaient pour écouter la lecture de pièces biographiques ou historiques, ou encore des récitations de poèmes...".
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fatahū bāḥ al-hadīd as-saqqāyīn
“They opened the al-Hadid Gate, the water-sellers”.

Waqd’ic Misr al-Qdhira...
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” (Creelius 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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