If a Governor Falls in Damascus: Early Mamluk Historiography Analyzed through the Story of Sayf al-Dīn Karāy al-Manṣūrī

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1 Introduction*

On Jumādā 1 22, 711/October 6, 1311, the Mamluk governor of Damascus and viceroy of Syria, Sayf al-Dīn Karāy al-Manṣūrī (d. 719/1319) was arrested. He was subsequently sent to southern Bilād al-Shām (present-day Jordan), where he spent the next seven years imprisoned at the castle of al-Karak. Karāy's life prior to his rule in Damascus has only generated a few scattered references in the sources. However, when he rose to the office of the viceroy of Syria, he caught the attention of several contemporary authors, both inside and outside of Damascus. One aspect of his story that his contemporaries seemed particularly interested in was the question of exactly why Karāy was arrested. In this article, I will examine how six contemporary chroniclers from Egypt and Syria presented Karāy's governorship of Damascus and the circumstances pertaining to his arrest.

This article is inspired by a growing trend within medieval Islamic historiographical studies to soften the conceptual boundaries between chroniclers and literary authors and between *tārīkh* and *adab*. Konrad Hirschler has described this trend as “a cultural turn,” which he defines as the replacement of the traditional source-critical approach to historiography with “an interest in how an authorial decision was made to organize events and of how to endow them with new meanings.”¹ Following this approach, I will thus not be concerned with determining which account of governor Karāy's arrest is closer to the objective historical truth, nor will I attempt to create a stemma for the

* This article is based on chapter 5 of my doctoral dissertation *Just taxes? Tracing 14th century Damascene politics through objects, space and historiography* (Birkbeck College, University of London, 2017). The original thesis chapter also examines the accounts of two additional authors, al-Yūsufī (d. after 755/1355) and al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363). The thesis is available for download via <http://bbktheses.da.ulcc.ac.uk/286/>.

1 Hirschler, *Studying* 167.

accounts under examination. Instead, I am interested in how the individual chroniclers chose to frame the figure of Karāy and how their narratives gave meaning to his arrest.

The cultural turn has also brought about a reconceptualization of the relationship between the written word (chronicles, biographies, epics, poetry, etc.) and contemporary society. Authors are increasingly seen as participants in the discursive production of their cultural and sociopolitical reality rather than detached observers or artists.² With this perspective in mind, I will also explore how the narratives about Karāy's arrest fit into wider ideological frameworks and how the authorial decisions of the individual chroniclers helped to promote both collective and personal agendas.

Apart from examining the individual author at work, I am also concerned with exploring the impact of collective identities on Mamluk historiography. Since the 1990s, several scholars have distinguished between an *Egyptian* and *Syrian* tradition in Mamluk historiography. Following this distinction, specific chroniclers from Damascus have even been identified collectively as the *Syrian School*.³ So far, however, few attempts have been made to test the qualitative impact of this distinction by comparing different geographical and sociopolitical perspectives on the same cases or by examining the internal differences among chroniclers of the same background. As I will show in this article, Karāy's case is particularly well-suited for this kind of examination since he was involved in high politics in Cairo and street-level power negotiations in Damascus. Thus, he attracted the attention of both courtly and local historians.

I will begin this examination by presenting a short overview of the imperial and local historical context of Karāy's arrest. In section two of the article, I will turn to two chronicles written by contemporary authors from an Egyptian, military, and courtly background. The first is *Kanz al-durar fī jāmi' al-ghurar*, a multivolume history of Islam spanning from the 4th/10th to the 8th/14th century, written by Abū Bakr b. 'Abdallāh b. Aybak al-Dawādārī (d. after 736/1336). The second is *Kitāb al-Tuḥfa al-Mulūkiyya fī l-Dawla al-Turkiyya*, a concise annalistic chronicle of the Mamluk sultanate between 648/1250 and 711/1311 written by Baybars al-Manṣūrī (d. 725/1325). In this section, I will explore how the courtly connections, personal political agendas, and authorial aspirations of these two authors prompted them to present Karāy as a side character in an imperial drama of sultanic succession.

2 For Hirschler's contribution to this line of inquiry, see Hirschler, *Authors*.

3 See, e.g., Guo, Mamluk 39.

In section three, I will examine the figure of Karāy as he is presented in the narratives of four Damascene scholar-chroniclers from the first half of the 8th/14th century. In general terms, these narratives can be divided into two strains. The first strain is comprised of the account given by ‘Alam al-Dīn Qāsim al-Birzālī (d. 738/1338) in *al-Muqtafī ‘alā l-Rawḍatayn* and two paraphrased versions of al-Birzālī’s account found in *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya fī l-tārīkh* by Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr (d. 773/1373), and *Dhayl al-Ibar* by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Dhahabī (d. 747/1347). The second strain is made up of one account written by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Jazarī (d. 738/1338). Al-Jazarī’s account is part of a larger chronicle section, which was later ascribed to his colleague Qutb al-Dīn Mūsā l-Yūnīnī (d. 726/1325–6). Therefore, al-Jazarī’s narrative about Karāy is included in al-Yūnīnī’s *Dhayl Mir’āt al-zamān* and not in al-Jazarī’s own chronicle *Tārīkh ḥawādith al-zamān*.⁴ I will examine how the Syrian authors’ narratives are collectively invested in promoting the agency of their city as well as their scholarly colleagues and in defending the sanctity of pious endowments. But I will also explore how different perceptions of historical causality as well as thinly veiled personal disagreements divide these narratives and problematize the notion of a *Syrian School* of historiography.

1.1 Karāy 711/1311: The Historical Context

Sayf al-Dīn Karāy al-Manṣūrī was originally part of *al-Manṣūriyya*, the corps of mamluks founded by the Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (d. 689/1290).⁵ I have found no information about his role in the first tumultuous decade following al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn’s death, only that he was appointed as governor of Safad in 698/1299 and served as a field commander during the Mamluk-Ilkhānid war in 699/1299. During the first decade of the 8th/14th century, Karāy left Safad for Egypt and later Jerusalem, where he was appointed as governor in 707/1307.⁶

In 709/1310, Karāy led the Mamluk forces of Jerusalem to Damascus to support the return of the exiled sultan, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 741/1341), who was the son of Karāy’s original master, Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn. Since his father’s death, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad had been enthroned as sultan twice, but each of his reigns had ended with exile at al-Karak. During his second reign from 699/1299 to 708/1309, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad had been under de facto

4 With regards to the authorship of al-Yūnīnī’s *Dhayl Mir’āt*, I follow the theory of Li Guo. See Guo, *Early* i, 55–9; Guo, *Mamluk* 38.

5 For a detailed examination of the history of this corps, see Mazor, *Rise*. According to Mazor, Karāy was recruited by Qalāwūn before he became sultan but held no offices of great importance during his master’s reign.

6 Ibid. 139, 237.

custody of two senior Manṣūrī amirs, Sayf al-Dīn Salār (d. 710/1310) and Baybars al-Jāshankīr (d. 709/1310). In frustration with this relationship, al-Nāṣir abdicated the throne to al-Jāshankīr in 708/1309 and returned to al-Karak. He stayed there for ten months and then initiated his reconquest of the throne by traveling to Damascus. During his one-month stay in Damascus, more and more amirs from the Syrian provinces rallied to al-Nāṣir's cause. Karāy was one of those who swore allegiance to al-Nāṣir and later participated in his conquest of Gaza and reentry into Egypt.⁷

After al-Nāṣir made his third ascent to the throne in 709/1310, he rewarded Karāy and several other Manṣūrī amirs for their support by appointing them to governorships in Syria.⁸ Meanwhile, he recalled the governor of Safad, Amir Baktamur al-Jūkandār al-Manṣūrī (d. 716/1316), to Cairo and appointed him as viceroy of Egypt. Shortly thereafter, in the spring and summer of 711/1311, al-Nāṣir began to move against these very same amirs in a coordinated arrest campaign. The first victim was his new viceroy Baktamur, whom the sultan accused of planning a coup to rob him of the throne. Next in line were Baktamur's alleged co-conspirators, the Manṣūrī governors of Syria.⁹

Unlike al-Nāṣir's arrest campaign, the local Damascene context for Karāy's arrest has not previously been studied by modern historians. The following summary of what transpired in Damascus between the spring and early fall of 711/1311 is therefore based primarily on the information provided by contemporary Syrian chroniclers. According to the local sources, Karāy had arrived in Damascus in the spring of 711/1311, and while al-Nāṣir started his arrest campaign, the new governor of Damascus was occupied with carrying out a specific order from Cairo: extracting taxes to pay for an expansion of the Damascene cavalry force due to reports of an imminent Ilkhānid raid on Syria. While it is unclear what the sultan's order actually said, the Damascene chroniclers agree that Karāy demanded a total sum of 750,000 dirhem from the merchants of Damascus to pay for 1,500 mounted troops.¹⁰ As far as we can tell, this sum

7 Ibid. 141–3.

8 Levanoni, *Turning* 29. Apart from Karāy the amirs in question were Quṭlūbak (d. 716/1316) who became governor of Safad, Quṭlūqtamur (d. ?) who became governor of Gaza, and Qarasunqūr (d. 1328/728) who was first appointed to Damascus but then transferred to Aleppo, see Olsen, *Just* 169–70.

9 Neither contemporary chroniclers nor modern historians agree about whether there was a coup under way. Amalia Levanoni argues that the accusation was a convenient pretext for a consolidation of power, whereas William Winslow Clifford and Amir Mazor argue that Baktamur was scheming to substitute al-Nāṣir with one of the sultan's relatives. See Levanoni, *Turning* 28–9; Clifford, *State* 190; Mazor, *Rise* 199–200.

10 The sum and number of troops is quoted by, e.g., al-Birzālī and Ibn Kathīr. See al-Birzālī,

was far higher than earlier war taxes imposed on Damascus by previous Mamluk sultans.¹¹ Moreover, according to the local sources, the tax-extraction process of 711/1311 went far from smoothly. During the late summer and early fall, Karāy's collectors held several unsuccessful meetings with the merchants of Damascus, and they even tried to extend the tax to include shop owners and market vendors. Nevertheless, they were unable to meet Karāy's claim. In late Jumādā 1/September, the governor therefore resorted to taxing the rent for real estate in Damascus quarter by quarter. This order included all properties owned by the *awqāf* (pl. of *waqf*; pious foundation). Pressed by this policy a group of *waqf* beneficiaries pleaded for the *qāḍīs* and the *khaṭīb* (Friday preacher) of the Umayyad Mosque, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī (d. 739/1338), to intervene on their behalf.

Consequently, on the morning of Monday, Jumādā 1 13/September 27, the *khaṭīb* assembled a complaint procession in the courtyard of the Umayyad Mosque. From there, they headed toward the Sūq al-Khayl, a parade ground north of the walled city, where Karāy was conducting an inspection parade with his troops. The procession participants brought along the black banners from the minbar of the Umayyad Mosque and the city's primary relics: the Quran of 'Uthmān and the Sandal of the Prophet.¹² Unmoved by their pleas and display of piety, Karāy ordered his guards to beat the plaintiffs and arrest their leaders. In the subsequent scuffles, both relics fell or were thrown to the ground. The *khaṭīb* and others were detained for the day and abused both physically and verbally by the governor.¹³

As I will explain in section three, there are disagreements among the Damascene sources about what happened next, but they agree that ten days after the protest, Karāy was arrested by a party of amirs led by the sultan's *dawādār*, Amir Sayf al-Dīn Arghūn (d. 731/1330–31). Karāy was sent in chains to al-Karak, where

Muqtafī iv, 21; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya* xvi, 88. These taxes were most likely intended to pay for *nafaqa*, a one-time field bonus paid out to troops before a campaign. Based on the sum per rider (500 dirhem), the intention seems to have been recruitment of auxiliary forces from the tribes in the Syrian hinterland rather than Mamluk troops. For a detailed discussion of the nature of the tax and earlier historical parallels, see Olsen, Just 40.

11 In the spring of the year 700/1300, following the Ilkhānid occupation of Damascus, the Mamluk governor requested 480,000 dirhem from wealthy Damascenes, which caused many people to flee the city; see, *Ibid.* 59–63.

12 This Quran was allegedly penned by or for the Caliph 'Uthmān b. 'Affān (d. 47/656), while the sandal had allegedly belonged to Muḥammad. These objects were the most venerated relics housed in Damascus at the time; see, *Ibid.* 47–53.

13 Al-Birzālī, *Muqtafī* iv, 21; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya* xvi, 88; al-Dhahabī, *Dhayl al-'Ibar* 27; al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt* 1435–6.

he remained for seven years. When he returned to Egypt, he was arrested again and died in prison in 719/1319. The taxes Karāy had sought to extract were officially abolished by sultanic decree after his arrest, and there is no indication that further attempts were made to collect similar sums.

In summary, the historical context leaves the question of why Karāy was arrested open by pointing to two potentially decisive factors: sultanic animosity caused by Karāy's alleged connection to Baktamur's coup and provincial unrest caused by his unpopular fiscal policies in Damascus. In the following sections, I will argue that Karāy's story is worthy of further examination due to this openness, which gives chroniclers room to maneuver as authors. Exactly because the figure of Karāy represents an intersection of courtly and local political currents, he is an ideal prism for studying how contemporary chroniclers chose to weigh and prioritize these currents to reflect their own worldviews and promote their agendas.

2 The Egyptian Perspective

In this part, I will deal with the presentation of Karāy's arrest found in the chronicles of Ibn al-Dawādārī and Baybars al-Manṣūrī. Both of these authors were connected to Cairo and the court of al-Nāṣir. In Ibn al-Dawādārī's case, this connection was indirect. He was the son of a Mamluk amir and accompanied his father on different postings across Egypt and Syria. In contrast, Baybars al-Manṣūrī was a Mamluk amir of the same generation as Karāy and an active participant in politics at the highest level.

The following examination will show that both authors are concerned primarily with describing the courtly angle of Karāy's arrest. Both cast the governor of Damascus as a side character within a wider account of Baktamur's coup and the sultan's purge while downplaying his relationship to his Damascene subjects. However, their narratives reflect more than a shared Cairo-centric understanding of contemporary politics. When examined against the background of the respective authors' lives and wider literary oeuvre, they read like discursive acts of maneuvering within contemporary courtly life.

2.1 *Ibn al-Dawādārī*

Compared to the other authors examined in this article, Ibn al-Dawādārī had a unique position for capturing Karāy's story from both a courtly and a local angle: Not only was Ibn al-Dawādārī connected to the army and the court, but he was also present in Damascus during Karāy's governorship in 711/1311. Ibn al-Dawādārī had arrived in Damascus in 710/1310 as part of the retinue of his

father, Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Abdallāh al-Dawādārī (d. 713/1313). Jamāl al-Dīn had been stationed there as the city’s new *mihmandār* (bearer of the protocol), the officer in charge of receiving and accommodating official guests, and his son remained with him throughout his posting.¹⁴

Despite having the privilege of a dual perspective on the events of 711/1311, Ibn al-Dawādārī, nevertheless, devotes his narrative about Karāy to the final 24 hours leading up to the governor’s arrest. Within this short time span, he retains a strict focus on the interactions between Karāy and the man sent from Cairo to capture him, Amir Sayf al-Dīn Arghūn. According to Ibn al-Dawādārī, Arghūn suddenly arrived from Cairo without warning. Arghūn’s arrival alarmed both the author’s father and governor Karāy, despite his explanation that he had simply come to deliver a sultan’s robe of honor (*khil’a*) for the governor.¹⁵ The author then explains that their distrust in Arghūn was justified since he immediately set up a secret meeting with the resident amirs of Damascus to plan Karāy’s arrest.¹⁶ The following day, while hosting a banquet for his officers and guests, Karāy was surrounded by Arghūn and his allies, who put him in chains and sent him off to prison at al-Karak.¹⁷ Ibn al-Dawādārī devotes three full pages to this representation of Karāy’s arrest. Meanwhile, all other details about the governor’s rule in Damascus, including details about the protest and the arrest of the *khaṭīb*, are completely absent from his account.

The author’s presence in Damascus taken into consideration, we could expect him to know about a violent confrontation between the governor and the civilian population, especially one that took place in front of the governor’s entire retinue during the twice-weekly inspection parade in Sūq al-Khayl. We can, therefore, interpret his strict focus on Karāy’s interaction with Arghūn as a conscious authorial decision to omit the local angle from Karāy’s story. One explanation for this omission, of course, could be that Ibn al-Dawādārī was trying to protect Karāy from criticism. After all, the governor was the superior of the author’s father. However, it seems unlikely that Ibn al-Dawādārī should have harbored concerns for Karāy’s reputation since he does not present any defense of the governor when narrating the details of his arrest. The more likely explanation would seem to be that he simply did not find these events

14 See Lewis, Ibn al-Dawādārī 744. According to Ibn al-Dawādārī, his father also briefly held the position *shadd al-dawāwīn* (overseer of the treasury). However, this does not fit with the information from other sources I have examined.

15 Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz* ix, 213–4.

16 Ibid. 215.

17 Ibid. 216.

important enough to mention. In other words, whatever grievances the local population of Damascus might have had with the arrested governor could have been ignored by Ibn al-Dawādārī because he found them either irrelevant or, at best, inferior to the courtly drama marked by the intrigues of intra-Mamluk politics, which he strove to capture in minute detail.

Within the drama of 711/1311, the story of Karāy becomes a parenthesis subsumed under the larger story of Sultan al-Nāṣir and the challenges he faced at the beginning of his third rule. We can see this clearly if we turn briefly to the introduction of the 711 entry in the *Kanz*, of which Karāy's story is part. Here, Ibn al-Dawādārī dedicates a long initial passage to describing how al-Nāṣir decided to move against the viceroy Baktamur and his accomplices: "Our lord the sultan, may God perpetuate his reign, had been made wise by experience, and had again come to fear the poison of the scorpion ... Among those who were made the object of his anger he did not disgrace anyone who had dignity (*ḥurma*), except as retribution for a previous harm and misdeed."¹⁸ In this introduction, the author frames the events of 711/1311 primarily as an account of how the young sultan initiated his third reign with the resolve of a statesman rather than the complacency of a child monarch controlled by his amirs. It is only after these lengthy descriptions and justifications of the sultan's concerns about mutiny that the narrative zooms in on the situation in Damascus during Jumādā 1/September–October.

To summarize, we can say that despite his proximity to the situation, Ibn al-Dawādārī presents the arrest of Karāy as the unequivocal result of the sultan's purge. However, the question remains whether his presentation of Karāy's arrest is colored by the fact that this author was surrounded by the military aristocracy and that he was a mere visitor in Damascus. In answering this question, we can point to two characteristics of Ibn al-Dawādārī's work that could explain why he foregrounds the purge dimension and ignores local events.

First, the focus on the actions of the sultan is not surprising in so far as Ibn al-Dawādārī framed the entire final section of the *Kanz* (the section that covers the period 699–735/1299–1335) as a biography of al-Nāṣir. Throughout this section of the *Kanz*, he portrays the sultan as the sovereign who created peace and stability after century upon century of war and unrest in the Islamic world.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid. 212–3.

¹⁹ Ulrich Haarmann provides two different titles for this section, the original being "al-Nūr al-Bāṣir fī ṣīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir" (The clarifying light regarding the life of al-Malik al-Nāṣir). This was changed to "al-Durr al-Fākhir fī ṣīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir" (The splendid pearls of the life of al-Malik al-Nāṣir). See Haarmann, *Quellenstudien* 80–1. For the portrayal of al-Nāṣir as a bringer of peace, see Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz* ix, 384–7.

When reading Ibn al-Dawādārī's account of Karāy's arrest, we must, therefore, remember that we are dealing with a work centered on al-Nāṣir and possibly even presented to the sultan by the author himself.²⁰ This evidently affects his presentation of political events in the provinces and hereunder Karāy's arrest, which is presented as a prudent decision by a mature sovereign.

Second, we should note that Karāy's arrest provides many opportunities for the author to place himself and his father at the center of events. Haarmann points out that Ibn al-Dawādārī generally tries to make his chronicle unique and interesting by pretending to quote his father or another of his associates when he is really quoting from an existing chronicle.²¹ This tendency for self-promotion becomes especially visible in relation to the story of Karāy. Not only is the author's father cast as a central character in the story, Ibn al-Dawādārī also makes sure to underline his own unique proximity to the governor's arrest in the preface to his 711 entry: "As for Karāy [his arrest] was on Thursday the 23rd of the said month [Jumādā 1]. The servant and author of this book was present during this, saw it, and did not hear about it."²² By focusing on the military aspect of Karāy's arrest, Ibn al-Dawādārī not only favors intra-Mamluk politics and a positive portrayal of the sultan, but he is, in fact, also pursuing a wider strategy of creating a chronicle, which promotes him and his father as central witnesses to the events of the day, perhaps with the hope of becoming a court chronicler.²³

2.2 *Baybars al-Manṣūrī*

Al-Manṣūrī's *Kitāb al-Tuḥfa* distinguishes itself from Ibn al-Dawādārī's *Kanz* in so far as it actually acknowledges Karāy's political problems in Damascus. When mentioning the governor's appointment, Baybars al-Manṣūrī makes the following remark: "he ruled it [Damascus] for a short period but the people received hardship from him nonetheless."²⁴ In contrast to the *Kanz*, we see here at least a cursory interest in the ruling style of the governor. Later, Baybars al-Manṣūrī even highlights that the governor's arrest happened as a direct result of a complaint about his tyrannical way of governing: "In this year he [al-Nāṣir] sent Amir Sayf al-Dīn Arghūn the *dawādār* to Damascus to seize Amir Sayf al-Dīn Karāy when the people complained about the weight of his oppression, his tyranny (*jūr jīratihī*) and the abusiveness of his rule. He was seized at

20 Haarmann, *Quellenstudien* 82.

21 Ibid. 194.

22 Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz* ix, 213.

23 Haarmann, *Quellenstudien* 84.

24 Al-Manṣūrī, *Tuḥfa* 227.

his table after he had adorned the honorary robe of his sultan.”²⁵ In comparison with Ibn al-Dawādārī, Baybars al-Manṣūrī is more attentive to the plight of the Damascenes, but the perspective is nevertheless centered on Cairo and the provincial ramifications of sultanic decisions. First, he does not inform us about the nature of Karāy’s tyranny or the steps taken by the *khaṭīb* al-Qazwīnī and his supporters to deal with his abuse. The central actors of this short narrative thus remain al-Nāṣir’s *dawādār* and, by extension, the sultan himself. Karāy’s arrest is thus again used primarily to highlight the benevolence and justice of the sultan. Second, within the wider context of the 711 entry in *Kitāb al-Tuhfa*, Karāy’s story is but one of several stories of neglect and tyranny in the provinces. Almost immediately after presenting the arrest of Karāy, the author thus mentions how the reigning governor of Gaza, Amir Quṭlūqtamur (d. ?), was dismissed and arrested for neglecting his duties: “This was because our lord the sultan had found out that the said Quṭlūqtamur had neglected the safeguarding of the coastal plains to such an extent that Frankish pirates had begun to covet it.”²⁶ The story of Karāy’s arrest is thus instrumentalized by Baybars al-Manṣūrī in a wider effort to portray the year 711/1311 as a perilous moment where disorder, neglect, and tyranny threatened the internal stability of al-Nāṣir’s sultanate. The new Manṣūrī governors of Syria are thus not only accused of conspiring with Baktamur but also of being reckless and tyrannical rulers. Set against this bleak background, the sultan’s arrest campaign in 711/1311 appears as a legitimate and diligent intervention for the sake of the security of his realm instead of a purely self-serving maneuver to save his own political position. That this is Baybars al-Manṣūrī’s key message is spelled out in unambiguous terms in the concluding comment on the arrests of that year. Here, the author includes two stanzas from a panegyric poem written by the 4th/10th-century poet al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965) to his patron, the Hamdanid prince of Aleppo Sayf al-Dawla (d. 356/967): “By the grace of God what a heroic king, he seizes the lions in their thicket and shows his inner qualities in their jumps.”²⁷ And this is the meaning of the words of al-Mutanabbī. (Poetry) Mighty fear deputised for you and /awe for you wrought more than the heroes achieved. And when those mentioned went into the trap, they were sent to the citadel of al-Karak.”²⁸ The concluding lines of al-Manṣūrī’s account constitute a parallel to the scorpion parable that Ibn al-Dawādārī used in the introduction to

25 Ibid. 228.

26 Ibid. 227.

27 The Arabic word used is *thanyātaḥu* (literally, his folds.)

28 Al-Manṣūrī, *Tuhfa* 228. The translation of the poem is from Arberry, *Poems* 70. NB: My italicization.

his 711/1311 entry and underline the point of the narrative: to praise the sultan for his wisdom, courage, and proficiency as ruler. In this context, the situation in Damascus is presented in vague terms as part of a larger catalog of political problems that the sultan corrected in this year.

As in the case of al-Dawādārī, this narrative also links up with the overarching intention of the work in which it is incorporated. As noted by Li Guo, the slim volume that constitutes *Kitāb al-Tuḥfa* (219 printed pages in the 1987 edition) is not an abridged version of al-Manṣūrī's universal chronicle *Zubdat al-fikra fī tārikh al-hijra*, as Claude Cahen believed. Rather, it is "another original work on the reign of the Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn."²⁹ Like the final volume of the *Kanz*, *Kitāb al-Tuḥfa* is primarily aimed at depicting and praising al-Nāṣir, and according to Abdelḥamīd Ṣāliḥ Ḥamdān, the editor of the 1987 edition, it was most likely intended as a present for the sultan himself.³⁰ The story that includes Karāy's arrest is thus employed to fit this particular authorial agenda.

As in the case of Ibn al-Dawādārī, we should acknowledge that Baybars al-Manṣūrī was also pursuing a narrower personal goal with his work. However, unlike Ibn al-Dawādārī, he had more at stake in the matter of Karāy than the claim to be an eyewitness. Baybars al-Manṣūrī was, in fact, the amir who was appointed as viceroy of Egypt when Baktamur was arrested as part of the 711/1311 purge. In his account, he describes this process in the following words: "He [al-Nāṣir] rewarded with the position of viceroy the slave of his grace, the one who had grown up under the charity of him and his father, Baybars al-Dawādār, the compiler of this *sīra* and the relator of these reports, and he honored me with the designated robe of honour."³¹ According to the editor, Ḥamdān, Baybars al-Manṣūrī began to write *Kitāb al-Tuḥfa* around 709/1310 and finished it in its present form around 711/1311, the year he was appointed as viceroy.³² His work is not simply a tribute to the sultan; it is also a self-portrait of the author at the peak of his power. In this light, we can say that Baybars al-Manṣūrī had obvious self-serving reasons for framing the victims of the purge as negatively as possible, in Karāy's case, by including references to his harsh rule in Damascus. This would indirectly help him frame himself as part of a

²⁹ Guo, *Historiographic Studies* 17.

³⁰ Al-Manṣūrī, *Tuḥfa* 14.

³¹ Ibid. 228. Unfortunately for Baybars al-Manṣūrī, his appointment as viceroy was short lived. He was accused of treason, arrested, and sent off to al-Karak in 712/1312, much like the victims of the purge. He was released and had some of his wealth restored in 716/1316. See Ibid. 14.

³² Ibid. 14.

new, sound, and incorrupt Qalawunid leadership emerging from the political fray of the 711/1311 purge.

Both Egyptian narratives about Karāy's arrest thus betray a view of contemporary politics that is permeated by a center-periphery dynamic. The center of most, if not all, political change is the imperial capital of Cairo, and the decisions taken there reverberate like ripples, causing local change throughout the provinces. This runs counter to the general tendency in the Damascene narratives, which, as we shall see, maintain a continuous focus on the importance of local events and marginalize the influence of the sultan on Karāy's fate.

3 The Syrian Perspective

In this part of the article, I will examine the figure of Karāy as he appears in the narratives of al-Birzālī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Dhahabī, and al-Jazarī. Unlike Ibn al-Dawādārī and Baybars al-Manṣūrī, who shared only their affiliation with the Mamluk military and their geographical attachment to Egypt, these four Syrian historians were personally connected with each other. They were all scholars of hadith and part of the traditionalist trend within the Shāfiʿī school of law. Moreover, within the field of historical writing, they frequently appear as sources, compilers, and editors of each other's work.³³ The connectedness of these authors has caused previous scholars to identify them as belonging to a *Syrian* or *Damascene School* within Mamluk historiography.³⁴

In contrast to the narrative by Ibn al-Dawādārī and Baybars al-Manṣūrī, the accounts of these four Damascene authors adopt a local rather than a courtly perspective on Karāy's arrest by foregrounding his role in the Damascene tax conflict and toning down his alleged participation in the coup against al-Nāṣir. The simplest (and most innocent) explanation for this choice of focus would be to say that it is natural for a historian to be drawn toward dramatic local events, such as the public display of relics, violence against ordinary citizens, and the arrest of local dignitaries. However, it would be a mistake to regard Damascene scholar-chroniclers as mere compilers of local news motivated by an appreciation for the colorful and dramatic. Even though the Syrian chroniclers had no

33 Al-Birzālī edited and copied the chronicles of al-Jazarī and al-Yūnīnī and also appears frequently as a source in their chronicles. Ibn Kathīr in turn edited al-Birzālī's chronicle and quotes extensively from it in his own work. For a detailed overview of these connections, see Olsen, *Just* 24–9.

34 Humphreys, *History* 241; Guo, *Early* i, 83.

direct stake in the internal power struggles of the Mamluk elite or the courtly life around the citadel of Cairo, an examination of their accounts show that they too thought about the figure of Karāy in political terms and framed his story to fit both collective and individual agendas.

3.1 *A Collective View of the Damascene Versions of Karāy's Story*

First, we must recognize that the story of Karāy as a harsh governor and tax collector must have appealed to the Damascene authors in ways that his connection to Baktamur's coup would not. In his uncompromising stance on taxation, Karāy afforded the Damascene chroniclers an opportunity to confer political agency onto the population of Damascus as protesters and negotiators. Al-Birzālī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Dhahabī simply describe the protesters as a group made up of the people (*al-nās*). However, al-Jazarī adds more detail and describes it as a procession made up of "the scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*), the jurists, the Quran readers, the muezzins and the common people (*ʿāmmat al-nās*)."³⁵ Moreover, all four Damascene accounts identify the leader of the protest as Jalāl al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī (d. 739/1338), the *khaṭīb* (Friday preacher) of the Umayyad Mosque. Apart from the *khaṭīb*, they also mention the participation and arrest of Majd al-Dīn al-Tūnisī (d. 718/1319), a Tunisian grammarian who taught in Damascus.³⁶ The specific involvement of these two individuals thus gives the chroniclers an opportunity to emphasize the pivotal political role of the local scholarly community, a characteristic tendency in Syrian historiography that reaches back at least to the 7th/13th century.³⁷

That said, the Damascene chroniclers might also have had a narrower partisan interest in highlighting the roles of al-Qazwīnī and al-Tūnisī since they all shared an affiliation with the Shāfiʿī school of law. A narrative in which al-Qazwīnī and al-Tūnisī, two locally renowned Shāfiʿī scholars, spoke truth to a tyrannical governor and faced physical violence for their words would certainly reflect favorably on the protagonists themselves and, by extension, on their school in general. In addition to their formal association through the

35 Al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt* 1435.

36 While al-Qazwīnī is identified as the leader of the actual procession no details are given about the involvement of al-Tūnisī other than that he was arrested along with al-Qazwīnī and beaten in front of governor Karāy. See al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt* 1436. Al-Jazarī also mentions that the *qāḍī l-quḍāt* of Damascus, Najm al-Dīn b. Ṣaṣrā (d. 724/1324), was summoned by the governor after the protest. However, the judge is not identified as part of the procession, see *ibid.* 1435. In *al-Bidāya*, Ibn Kathīr reports that al-Qazwīnī was verbally abused along with the judge during the protest. See Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya* xvi, 88.

37 For the case of Abū Shāma al-Maqdisī, see Hirschler, *Authors* 113. For the case of Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, see Khalidī, *Arabic* 202–3.

Shāfiʿī school, we can also see a pattern of personal connections between the two protest protagonists and several of the authors. Al-Birzālī studied hadith with or under Jalāl al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī, and both Ibn Kathīr and al-Dhahabī include laudatory obituaries of him in their respective works.³⁸ Moreover, al-Jazarī seems to have known Jalāl al-Dīn's son, Badr al-Dīn (d. 742/1342), since he quotes him as an informant.³⁹ As for Majd al-Dīn al-Tūnisī, both al-Birzālī and al-Dhahabī praise him for his piety and intellect and also mention that they studied with him in Damascus.⁴⁰

In addition to being an opportunity to highlight popular political agency and Shāfiʿī leadership, the story of Karāy's tax policies allows the authors to make a strong case for the sanctity of *waqf*. There are two connected reasons why our authors may have been drawn to a story about *waqf* taxation. The term *waqf/awqāf* refers to the traditional Islamic pious foundations through which a legally capable person donates part of his or her estate either to his or her descendants (*waqf ahlī*) or to a public purpose (*waqf khayrī*). In the Mamluk period, the latter category could include donations for building and financing madrasas or feeding the poor. In principle, *awqāf* were beyond the reach of the state treasury, and taxation or confiscation of *waqf* funds was considered illegal according to sharia law.⁴¹ Consequently, state violations of the *awqāf* were a common occasion for demonstrations and even riots in premodern Middle Eastern societies. According to Miriam Hoexter, these riots were motivated not only by economic grievances that befell those who subsisted on *waqf* funds but also by the fact that infractions on the sanctity of the *awqāf* were seen as a violation of one of the basic principles of good rule.⁴² Against this background, we can read the narratives about the protest as echoes of the wider moral outrage over the taxation of *awqāf* that probably also helped motivate the protesters themselves.

38 The expression used in several obituaries is “wa-kharraja lahu al-Birzālī juzʿan min ḥadīth-ihi.” See, e.g., al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadrāt* viii, 216. For the obituary of al-Qazwīnī by Ibn Kathīr, see Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya* xvi, 287–8; for his obituaries written by al-Dhahabī, see al-Dhahabī, *Dhayl Tārīkh* 448; *Dhayl al-ʿIbar* 112.

39 Al-Jazarī, *Ḥawādith* ii, 183. Apart from this quote, there is also a close description of Badr al-Dīn's inauguration as preacher in 727/1327, which could suggest that al-Jazarī was present at this event, see *ibid.* 185.

40 Al-Birzālī, *Muqtaḍī* iv, 343; al-Dhahabī, *Dhayl Tārīkh* 193. Majd al-Dīn's obituary is not mentioned by Ibn Kathīr. In the case of al-Jazarī's *Ḥawādith*, there is a lacuna in this work that includes the year 718/1319; therefore, we cannot know whether he includes this obituary and what relationship he might have had with the shaykh.

41 Peters, *Wakf* I.

42 Hoexter, *Waqf* 133.

In this context, we should also note that as Shāfiʿī traditionalists, al-Jazarī, al-Birzālī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Dhahabī may have been particularly vulnerable to state encroachment on the *awqāf*. In general, the Shāfiʿī traditionalists earned their livelihood from teaching positions funded by the *awqāf* system.⁴³ The authors in question were no exception. Al-Dhahabī was a prominent hadith teacher, Al-Birzālī at one point worked as a professional witness, but only for two years, and Ibn Kathīr briefly held a position as judge.⁴⁴ Al-Jazarī worked throughout his life as a court notary and professional witness. According to al-Birzālī, however, he refused to take any money for these services, subsisting instead on what he could earn from his teaching positions.⁴⁵ The fact that Karāy ordered a tax on the *awqāf* and then retracted it because of local pressure makes his case a valuable story of local agency in defense of the economic system, which was pivotal to the scholarly community that our authors belonged to. While the Damascene authors display a collective disinterest in Karāy's connection with Mamluk factions and courtly politics, their accounts are therefore still every bit as political and strategic as those of Baybars al-Manṣūrī or Ibn al-Dawādārī. In this context, *political* simply means vested in promoting the agency of local (scholarly) actors and defending an important economic pillar of Islamic urban society as well as their own livelihood.

The following section examines exactly how this story of local agency in defense of the *awqāf* was framed in the authors' respective accounts. As will become clear, the fact that they had a common stake in certain aspects of Karāy's story does not prevent them from making distinct authorial decisions of their own.

3.2 *Al-Birzālī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Dhahabī*

We will begin with a collective examination of the first narrative strain (i.e., the accounts of al-Birzālī, al-Dhahabī, and Ibn Kathīr). Their accounts follow the same succinct pattern; in less than ten lines and without any dialogue, they relate the announcement of the tax decree, the protest, the arrest of the protest leaders, and finally, the arrest of the governor. Moreover, a close comparison of sentence structure and choice of words suggests that these three accounts

43 As Yunus Mirza explains, the traditionalist wing of the Shāfiʿī school of Damascus did not have the access to state resources that many of the rationalist Ashʿarīs in the Shāfiʿī school gained through state offices, e.g., in the judiciary system or the treasury. See Mirza, *Ibn Kathīr* 31.

44 Rouabah, *Une édition* 312.

45 Haarmann, *Quellenstudien* 22.

are related even though we cannot talk of exact copies.⁴⁶ Since al-Birzālī's text is the oldest, it seems probable that the two younger authors, Ibn Kathīr and al-Dhahabī, drew on his version of the protest, albeit without quoting him *ad verbum*.

The common trait of these accounts is that they promote the agency of the protesters by establishing a causal relation between the protest and the subsequent arrest of governor Karāy. In *al-Muqtafi*, al-Birzālī thus concludes his account of the protest with the following words: "Much pain befell the Muslims because of that [Karāy's behavior], and so after that God did not even give him what amounted to ten days, before he was deposed and chained and arrested."⁴⁷ In *al-Bidāya*, Ibn Kathīr presents a very similar conclusion, though, as I will explain below, he adds an appendix to this conclusion, which we do not find in the other two versions: "The people suffered a lot because of this, and so God did not give him more than ten days and then his time came suddenly and he was deposed and arrested."⁴⁸ In al-Dhahabī's version, the causality is slightly less explicit but nevertheless still evident: "The people suffered and they pronounced the *da'wa* against (*da'ū 'alā*) Karāyh. And so after nine days he was taken from the governorship and enchained and imprisoned in al-Karak."⁴⁹ These three accounts all conclude that Karāy's oppressive actions against the Damascenes were the direct cause of his demise. Moreover, according to the first and second quote, the arrest and deportation of the governor was not a question of human agency; it was God who directly decided to grant Karāy only ten days in office before punishing him for his offense against the protesters. Here, the confrontation between the protesting Damascene citizens and the governor is recast in theological terms as a confrontation between good and evil, belief and unbelief. Al-Birzālī adds further emphasis to this trope by identifying Karāy's victims as *the Muslims* (*al-muslimīn*), a strategy that indirectly frames Karāy as an outside threat averted by God. Meanwhile, Ibn Kathīr describes Karāy's victims with the less emphatic term *the people* (*al-nās*). However, his account still makes clear that we are dealing specifically with a group of Damascenes on whose account God intervenes. In other words, his account also conveys the notion of a special proximity between his own local community and the divine.

46 Compare al-Birzālī, *Muqtafi* iv, 24 (4–15) with Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya* xvi, 88 (9–16) and al-Dhahabī, *Dhayl al-'Ibar* 27 (7–11).

47 Al-Birzālī, *Muqtafi* iv, 21.

48 Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya* xvi, 88.

49 Al-Dhahabī, *Dhayl al-'Ibar* 27.

In al-Dhahabī's version, there is no direct mention of who facilitated the arrest of the governor. Whether or not we read his account as one of divine intervention depends on how we interpret the expression "they pronounced the *da'wa* against Karāyh" (*da'ū 'alā Karāyh*). To pronounce the *da'wa* against (*'alā*) someone can mean to curse or invoke the name of God against him, as opposed to pronouncing it *for* (*ilā*) someone.⁵⁰ Since the subsequent sentence is in the passive voice, it is difficult to determine whether he means that it was God or simply the sultan who reacted to their *da'wa*. In any case, the complaint of the protesters still led to the arrest.

Despite their differences, we can say that all three accounts ascribe to the local population, the protesters in particular, the ability to have an abusive governor removed and held accountable for his actions. Moreover, in the case of the accounts of al-Birzālī and Ibn Kathīr, we can see that this causality directly transcends the boundaries between what Bernd Radtke calls the *innerworldly* (*innerweltliche*) and the *outerworldly* (*ausserweltliche*). The explanation for the removal of Karāy is not simply the agency of men but the interference of God, who stands out as the real acting subject (*eigentliche Handlungssubjekt*).⁵¹

If we look elsewhere within the work of al-Dhahabī and Ibn Kathīr, we see that they have resorted to divine intervention before in their narratives as a solution to or punishment for sultanic encroachment on Damascene wealth. A good example is al-Dhahabī's description of the dispute between the Sultan Baybars I (d. 676/1276) and the Damascenes about the rights to the orchards (*basātīn*) of al-Ghūṭa in 666/1267. Al-Dhahabī states that when the sultan decided to confiscate the orchards, God burned them as a punishment for his greed: "The sultan had guarded al-Ghūṭa and had wanted to seize ownership of it. He oppressed (ta'aththara) people with injustice and confiscation, and they moaned and supplicated God. Therefore, when they [Baybars's men] pressured the Muslims and obliged them to weigh out the fees (alzamūhum bi-wazn al-ḍamān) on their orchards and even reached for the awqāf, God burned it."⁵² This account follows the same basic logic as the 711/1311 protest accounts of al-Birzālī, al-Dhahabī, and Ibn Kathīr: When a representative of the sultan infringes upon property that is not rightfully his, the Damascenes, who are identified as *the Muslims*, supplicate God, who resolves the situation, in this case by destroying the property the sultan coveted.⁵³

50 See Wehr, *Dictionary* 326.

51 Radtke, *Weltgeschichte* 162–3.

52 Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh* xv, 21.

53 For an overview of the dispute over the orchards of al-Ghūṭa, see Sublet, *Sequestre* 81–6.

In Ibn Kathīr's *al-Bidāya*, we find a somewhat similar comment when he describes a severe tax campaign in Damascus in 688/1289 ordered by Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn, who died shortly after. The money was collected by the sultan's treasurer, Amir 'Alam al-Dīn al-Shujā'ī (d. 1294/694), but according to Ibn Kathīr, God did not allow the sultan to enjoy the spoils: "Verily this [the tax] accelerated the destruction of the tyrant and his death, for the wealth al-Shujā'ī had gathered for him did not benefit al-Manṣūr, for after this he did not live but for a short while before God chastised him, *he chastises communities in the midst of their wrong* [Q 11:102]."⁵⁴ Once again, we are presented with the idea that God protects the Damascenes from fiscal abuse by making sure that the abuser cannot enjoy his gain, in this case by accelerating the death of the sultan. Here, the point about divine punishment is underlined with a Qur'anic quote that describes God as the historical punisher of unjust pre-Islamic rulers.

To summarize, we can say that al-Birzālī and Ibn Kathīr use the account of the 711/1311 protest to present the specific idea that the people of Damascus can rely on divine protection against tyranny, while al-Dhababī does so in a more indirect fashion. As we can see from the earlier passages in *al-Bidāya* and the *Tārīkh al-Islām*, this trope is not limited to the specific case of Karāy; the idea of a pact between God and the Damascenes seems to permeate the works of these scholars on a broader scale.

Before turning to al-Jazarī's account of Karāy's arrest, we must, however, consider one detail, which separates the three narratives examined in this section. As mentioned above, Ibn Kathīr's protest narrative contains a short but important appendix. Immediately after his statement that God punished governor Karāy, Ibn Kathīr inserts the following comment, which suggests that the sultan arrested Karāy on the advice of the Ḥanbalī jurist and theologian Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taymiyya (d. 728/1328): "It was said (wa-qīla) that the shaykh Taqī al-Dīn had heard about the matter [Karāy's behavior?] from the people of Syria and had informed the sultan of it, and so he immediately sent for him to be forcefully seized."⁵⁵ Through this comment, Ibn Kathīr modifies the divine intervention element of the story by grounding Karāy's arrest in a

54 Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya* xv, 532. The italicized sentence is part of Q 11:102, which reads "Such is the chastisement of thy lord when he chastises communities in the midst of their wrong: grievous, indeed, and severe is his chastisement." Yusuf Ali (trans.), *The Holy Quran* 542. The verse in question is part of a longer description of how God destroyed pre-Islamic peoples who had sinned, including the story of the punishment of Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

55 Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya* xvi, 88.

more mundane political reality. More importantly, however, is the fact that Ibn Kathīr's individual decision to include Ibn Taymiyya shows there is a limit to the ideological uniformity between his and the other two narratives examined here.

3.3 *Karāy's Arrest and the Politicization of Ibn Taymiyya*

Ibn Taymiyya was one of the leading traditionalist scholars of early 8th/14th-century Damascus. Moreover, he was famous for engaging in public polemical debates with theological adversaries, censuring perceived religious innovations (*bid'a*), and participating in local and regional politics.⁵⁶ As a scholar, he enjoined a following among traditionalist-oriented Shāfi'īs, which included al-Birzālī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Dhahabī, all of whom wrote about him in their works. Al-Birzālī's veneration for Ibn Taymiyya is most clearly exemplified in his lengthy obituary of the shaykh. This obituary was later copied by Ibn Kathīr, who adds a great deal of additional information about Ibn Taymiyya's life in *al-Bidāya*.⁵⁷ In the case of al-Dhahabī, the clearest textual testimony to his connection with Ibn Taymiyya is perhaps his biography of the shaykh titled *Nubdha min sīrat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya*.⁵⁸

Returning to Karāy's arrest, the question is thus why only Ibn Kathīr mentions Ibn Taymiyya's involvement when all three authors under examination had personal connections with the shaykh and wrote about him at length elsewhere. One answer could be that this difference reflects the fundamental contradiction among the biographers of Ibn Taymiyya about whether to celebrate or marginalize his polemics and political activity. As explained by Catarina Bori, the Ḥanbali scholars of Damascus were especially uncomfortable with the shaykh's willingness to engage in politics since this did not conform to the pious and noninterventionist image of the founder of their school, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855).⁵⁹ In contrast, Ibn Kathīr, as shown by Bori and others, pursued a general strategy of emphasizing the interventionist aspect of Ibn

56 The fact that this section is confined to comparing a few historiographical representations of Ibn Taymiyya precludes a detailed treatment of his historical role. The complexity of Ibn Taymiyya's juridical and theological doctrines and the width of his engagement in public life has been the subject of many scholarly publications, e.g., Rapoport and Ahmed, *Ibn Taymiyya*.

57 The section of al-Birzālī's *al-Muqtafi* covering the late 720s has not come down to us. For Ibn Kathīr's copy of the obituary of Ibn Taymiyya, see Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya* xvi, 212. For a general overview of Ibn Kathīr's portrayal of Ibn Taymiyya, see Laoust, La biographie.

58 For a philological edition of the *Nubdha* with translation, see Bori, A new source.

59 Bori, Ibn Taymiyya 139.

Taymiyya throughout the contemporary parts of *al-Bidāya*.⁶⁰ In this context, Ibn Kathīr's inclusion of Ibn Taymiyya in his protest narrative seems to be a deliberate choice to divert from al-Birzālī's account of Karāy's arrest to cast Ibn Taymiyya as a political actor by giving him the status of sultanīc advisor.

A closer comparison of other references to Ibn Taymiyya shows that this choice is part of a wider trend in Ibn Kathīr's recycling of al-Birzālī's accounts. Al-Birzālī presents two brief accounts about Ibn Taymiyya and al-Nāṣir around 711/1311. The first account relates to Ibn Taymiyya's arrival in Cairo in 709/1310. According to al-Birzālī, al-Nāṣir ordered that the shaykh be sent to Cairo from Alexandria, where he had spent several months in house arrest.⁶¹ At the citadel in Cairo, the shaykh met the sultan at a courtly gathering that also included Damascene notables who had followed al-Nāṣir on his return from al-Karak.⁶² The second account relates to Ibn Taymiyya's return to Damascus in 712/1313. Al-Birzālī notes that Ibn Taymiyya traveled with the Egyptian army to Gaza and made his way from there to Damascus and that people celebrated his homecoming.⁶³ A comparison reveals that Ibn Kathīr quotes heavily from al-Birzālī when describing these two events. However, the account of the sultan's initial meeting with Ibn Taymiyya is expanded by several pages in Ibn Kathīr's *al-Bidāya*. Among other things, he adds a description of how the sultan embraced Ibn Taymiyya, took his hands, and led him to a private space, where they talked for two hours.⁶⁴ In the homecoming scene from 712/1313, Ibn Kathīr once again highlights the personal connection between Ibn Taymiyya and the sultan. He states that Ibn Taymiyya had traveled with the sultan from Egypt to Gaza while al-Birzālī merely stated that he traveled with the army. Moreover, Ibn Kathīr writes that when the shaykh reached Damascus, he found that the sultan had already traveled on to the Hijaz. With this, Ibn Kathīr might be indicating that Ibn Taymiyya had wished to reunite with the sultan in Damascus, a suggestion that is not made by al-Birzālī.⁶⁵

When we compare this with al-Dhahabī's *Dhayl al-Ibar*, we see an even more restricted representation of Ibn Taymiyya's political ties. Here, the meeting between the shaykh and the sultan in 709/1310 is simply not mentioned.

60 Apart from Bori, scholars such as Henri Laoust and Donald P. Little have also commented on this tendency in Ibn Kathīr's work. See Laoust, *La biographie*; Little, *The historical*.

61 Ibn Taymiyya's house arrest in Alexandria was apparently the result of his hostile relationship with the Sufi shaykh Naṣr al-Dīn al-Manbijī (d. 719/1319), who was closely tied to Sultan al-Jāshankīr.

62 Al-Birzālī, *al-Muqtaḍī* iii, 445.

63 Ibid. iv, 89.

64 Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya* xvi, 75.

65 Ibid. 99–101.

As for Ibn Taymiyya's homecoming in 712/1313, this scene is described in one line that does not include details about his travel arrangements.⁶⁶ Moreover, in *al-Nubdha*, al-Dhahabī's biography of Ibn Taymiyya, we find that he does not simply tone down the connection between Ibn Taymiyya and the sultan around 711/1311. Instead, he explicitly refutes this connection by stating that the shaykh: "settled in Cairo, living in a house, and met with the sultan after that time. [Yet,] the shaykh was not a man of government and did not concern himself with [its] intrigues, so the sultan did not repeat his meeting with him."⁶⁷ In the comparison between Ibn Kathīr's *al-Bidāya* and al-Dhahabī's *Nubdha*, we thus see two radically different portrayals of Ibn Taymiyya in Cairo, which match their respective positions on his influence on Karāy's arrest. Al-Dhahabī emphasizes that even though the shaykh did meet with the sultan, he was "not a man of government" and after their initial meeting was not a frequent confidant of the sultan. This reads like a deliberate defense of the shaykh from any accusations of political involvement and association with the sultan, which further explains why he does not connect Ibn Taymiyya to the arrest of Karāy.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Ibn Kathīr goes out of his way to underline and emphasize the connection between the shaykh and the sultan around 1311/711. Through his decision to add Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Kathīr is, therefore, shaping his account of Karāy's arrest for participation in a much wider struggle among the Damascene supporters of Ibn Taymiyya, a struggle to control the shaykh's legacy through the act of writing history.

3.4 Al-Jazarī

Moving now to al-Jazarī's version of Karāy's story, we see that he follows an entirely different compositional scheme than his Damascene colleagues. Instead of producing a short ten-line summary of the tax, the protest, and the governor's arrest, al-Jazarī devotes several pages to the tax negotiations that preceded and succeeded the protest. Moreover, he devotes 29 lines to the protest itself and includes fragments of dialogue between the different contending parties.⁶⁹

66 Al-Dhahabī, *Dhayl al-Ibar* 32.

67 Bori, A new source 345. Bori's translation from the original Arabic.

68 Aside from his connection to Sultan al-Nāṣir, al-Dhahabī also exhibits general criticism of Ibn Taymiyya's polemical approach to politics, as well as to questions of theology. See Bori, Ibn Taymiyya 37–8.

69 This version of the 711 protest was later picked up and modified by several other authors, such as al-Nuwayrī and al-Ṣafadī. Compare al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt* 1434–7 with al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat* xxxii, 136–8 and al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān* iv, 152–3.

The second general feature that distinguishes al-Jazarī's account is that he deemphasizes the causal connection between the tax protest and Karāy's arrest, which his three colleagues promote. In the course of his narrative, al-Jazarī does this by treating the protest and the arrest as two consecutive yet separate events. Furthermore, he ends his account of Karāy's governorship by presenting two contradictory sultanīc declarations about the reason for Karāy's arrest. According to al-Jazarī, the first declaration was read out to a gathering of the Mamluk amirs and the *qāḍīs* of Damascus. It stated that Karāy was arrested due to his connection to Baktamur's coup. The second declaration was allegedly read out in public at the end of the Friday sermon at the Umayyad Mosque. This declaration stated that the sultan had removed the governor because of the hardship he had inflicted on Damascus.⁷⁰ By quoting both declarations, al-Jazarī leaves it to his readers to speculate what factor determined the governor's fate. We could even say the existence of two sultanīc declaration hints that the very idea that Karāy was arrested due to his tyrannical leadership may have been a publicity stunt aimed at making the sultan more popular with the common population of Damascus.⁷¹ Al-Birzālī does, in fact, present the same two declarations later in *al-Muqtafī*, thereby moderating the claim of direct causality between the protest and the governor's arrest that he made in his protest narrative. Al-Dhahabī and Ibn Kathīr, however, make no attempt to moderate their initial claim that Karāy fell because of his injustice toward the Damascenes as al-Dhahabī quotes none of the two declarations, whereas Ibn Kathīr presents only the second declaration, which tied Karāy's arrest to his tax policies.⁷²

Even though al-Jazarī avoids the claims of causality, which permeate the other three Damascene accounts, we can still regard his presentation of the tax protest and Karāy's arrest as an ideological narrative promoting Damascene identity. As I will show through a series of examples, al-Jazarī's version of Karāy's story also frames the governor as an antagonist against whom the Damascenes can appear sympathetic and exercise political agency. However, al-Jazarī's narrative about Karāy can also be read as a more general story about the breakdown and restoration of principles of proper government. The seeds

70 Al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt* 1440–1. According to al-Jazarī, the first declaration was made at the gate of the Maydān al-Akhḍar (the Green Hippodrome) west of the walled city on Thursday, Jumādā 11 8/October 21, while the second declaration was made the following week on Friday, Jumādā 11 16/October 29.

71 According to Amina Elbendary, it was common for 15th-century Mamluk sultans to make a public show of "sacrificing" a lower ranking official in order to deflect popular criticism. See Elbendary, *Crowds* 177–8.

72 Al-Birzālī, *al-Muqtafī* iv, 25–6; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya* iv, 89.

of the parallel story are in fact planted in al-Jazarī's initial description of Karāy's arrival in Damascus in Muḥarram 711/May 1311: "the people went out to meet him, and they lit candles ... He put up his tent in the Maydān, and did not meet with anyone from among the common population."⁷³ This description functions as a forewarning of the governing style of Karāy. Lining the streets and lighting candles (an expensive commodity in 14th-century Syro-Egypt) was a typical way of honoring civilian and military elites when entering or leaving the city.⁷⁴ Moreover, we know from other descriptions of sultans and governors entering Damascus that meeting with the population and receiving petitions on their first day in office was a way for rulers to project an image of themselves as approachable and attentive toward the plight of their subjects.⁷⁵ By stating that Karāy did not meet with any of the common people or make any other gesture to reciprocate their honorific welcome, al-Jazarī is portraying him as a governor who ignores the common conventions of ruler-subject interaction from the start of his tenure.

When we reach the tax conflict in the fall of 711/1311, Karāy's unwillingness to listen, negotiate, or respect normal conventions are again placed at the center. This is first exemplified by his willingness to tax the *awqāf* of Damascus. According to al-Jazarī's account, Karāy made the decision to tax the *awqāf* single-handedly, when his tax collectors had informed him that they could not extract the requested sums from the merchants and market vendors alone.⁷⁶ The author further emphasizes the severity of this decision with a scene, which precedes the arrival of the *khaṭīb*'s procession to Sūq al-Khayl. According to al-Jazarī, a group of the poorest and most vulnerable *waqf* beneficiaries appeared before the governor shortly before the arrival of the procession. This group included blind paupers, lepers and orphans, and al-Jazarī notes that their pleas and abject misery made the amirs cry, though he says nothing of the governor's reaction.⁷⁷

After the arrival of the complaint procession, Karāy's disrespect for conventions is again brought to the center of the narrative through two scenes where he curses and then hits Jalāl al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī, the *khaṭīb* of the Umayyad

73 Al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt* 1428.

74 For other examples of 8th/14th-century Damascenes parading with candles, see Frenkel, Public 46. The high price of beeswax candles in medieval Cairo is noted by the historian al-Maqrīzī (845/1442). See, e.g., Perho, *The Arabian Nights* 149.

75 The accessible approach was adopted, for example, by Sultan Kitbughā (d. 702/1302) when he visited Damascus in 696/1295. See Frenkel, Public 51. See also al-Jazarī, *Ḥawādith* i, 329.

76 Al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt* 1435.

77 Ibid. 1435.

Mosque who led the protest. According to al-Jazarī, the protesters pushed al-Qazwīnī forward in the direction of the governor, who met him with anger: “By the time the *khaṭīb* reached the governor he [Karāy] had been filled with anger and malice towards him [al-Qazwīnī]. The *khaṭīb* greeted him with a ‘peace be upon you’ and he said, ‘may no peace be upon you’ (*fa-salama al-khaṭīb, fa-qāla lā salām ‘alaykum*).”⁷⁸ In this scene, al-Jazarī shows Karāy openly disrespecting not only al-Qazwīnī but also the office of the *khaṭīb*. According to the traditional Sunni-Islamic liturgy, the *khaṭīb* is supposed to initiate the Friday ceremony with a *salām*, which should be returned by the congregation. By choosing to frame the confrontation between the *khaṭīb* al-Qazwīnī and the governor as a disrupted exchange of *salām* greetings, al-Jazarī further cultivates the image of Karāy as a ruling figure who pays no respect to conventions. This is continued in the following scene where al-Jazarī describes the arrest and interrogation of the *khaṭīb* and of others deemed responsible for the protest: “And upon his return the king of amirs [i.e., Karāy] summoned the *khaṭīb* and struck him three times with his hands, and had the amirs not saved him he would have sentenced him ... and when the banquet was laid out, none of the amirs ate anything from it.”⁷⁹ Al-Jazarī goes on to describe how the governor yelled at the Shāfi‘ī *qāḍī l-quḍāt*, Najm al-Dīn b. Ṣaṣrā (d. 724/1324) and made the grammarian Majd al-Dīn al-Tūnisī suffer 90 cane lashes. In this scene, the extraordinary harshness of the governor is further accentuated not only by his willingness to scold and punish religious and judicial dignitaries but also by the reaction of other Mamluk amirs. In order to show just how extraordinary the behavior of the governor is, al-Jazarī lets the attending amirs act as a restraining force on his impulses. Furthermore, they distance themselves from the governor by refusing to partake in the customary banquet, which followed the inspection parade.⁸⁰

In al-Jazarī’s account, the arrestees were released on Monday evening without any resolution to the tax conflict itself. This resolution came four days later after the Friday ceremony at the Umayyad Mosque and is presented by al-Jazarī as the product of skillful negotiation. According to al-Jazarī, governor Karāy was approached during prayer by the leader of the Ḥarīriyya Sufi order, Shaykh ‘Alī b. ‘Alī al-Ḥarīrī (d. 715/1315).⁸¹ During this meeting, al-Ḥarīrī uttered

78 Ibid. 1436.

79 Ibid.

80 According to the administrative manual of al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418), the governors of Damascus routinely gave a banquet for the amirs after the twice-weekly inspection parades in Sūq al-Khayl. See al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ* iv, 195.

81 This shaykh was the son of the founder of the Ḥarīriyya order, Shaykh ‘Alī al-Ḥarīrī (d. 654/

what seems to be a convoluted threat of further civic unrest: “He [al-Ḥarīrī] talked to him [Karāy] about the situation of the people of Damascus and about lightening the claim on them and among other things he said: I love the House of Qalāwūn and I don’t want anyone to curse them (*an yad’ū ‘alayhim*), and he exerted himself in speech (*bālagha fī al-qawl*).”⁸² According to his account, the words of al-Ḥarīrī compelled Karāy to host a new meeting that ended with the tax being lowered from funding 1,500 troops to 400 troops. In addition, the governor suspended the claim until tax collectors from Cairo directly requested it.⁸³

This is what al-Jazarī says of this meeting:

He [Karāy] said to them: “ask the people of the city to appear before us at the palace (*al-qaṣr*).”⁸⁴ When the Friday prayer had ended they went to the palace and he gave them the most noble welcome and rose before them and they kissed the ground [before him]. Then he asked them to be seated, and he said to them, go and set it [the tax] to 400 troops and I will not collect it unless the noble riders appear, and I will strive not to extract anything from you God willing. Then they left him thanking him and calling his praise.⁸⁵

With this successful meeting, which shows the previously antagonistic governor exert himself in pleasantries in front of the Damascene negotiation party, al-Jazarī ends his account of the tax conflict. However, the wider story of Karāy’s rule in Damascus is rounded off in a scene that takes place after his arrest. As mentioned above, al-Jazarī quotes two sultanic declarations stating the reasons for Karāy’s arrest. The first of these two declarations ends with the following guarantee that local grievances will be addressed by Karāy’s temporary replacement Amir Sayf al-Dīn Bahādur Āṣ (d. 729/1329): “he who has a need (*ḥāja*) should go to the honourable highness (*al-janāb al-‘ālī*) Sayf al-Dīn Bahādur

1248). For the biography of the son, see, e.g., al-Ṣafadī, *A’yān* iii, 466. We can speculate that the other three Damascene authors omitted al-Ḥarīrī’s meeting with Karāy due to the general hostility of traditionalist Shāfi’īs toward the Ḥarīrī *ṭarīqa*, whose members practiced excessive ascetism and self-degradation. For Ibn Kathīr’s hostile attitude toward the *Ḥarīrīyya*, see Laoust, Ibn Kaṭīr 72.

82 Al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir’āt* 1436.

83 Ibid. 1436–7.

84 This reference is unclear, but he could be referring to Qaṣr al-Ablaq (the Piebald Palace), which Sultan Baybars built in the 660s/1260s next to the Maydān al-Akhḍar.

85 Al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir’āt* 1436.

Āṣ and present his case for him (*yaqḍihā lahu*).⁸⁶ The declaration is then followed by a description of how Bahādūr received five or six plaintiffs in one session (*majlis*) on the same day.⁸⁷ The words of this declaration, combined with Bahādūr's reception of the plaintiffs, connects thematically with the scene of Karāy's arrival in Damascus, where he refused to meet with his new subjects. By ending the story of Karāy's rule with an inverted version of his arrival scene, al-Jazarī thus signals the restoration of a more ordered relationship between ruler and subjects.

Let us now, in light of al-Jazarī's account, return to the differences between the Damascene narratives. While the first three Damascene accounts tell a rather simple story of how a sudden crisis erupted and was alleviated through the help of God, al-Jazarī presents a much longer narrative about a protracted conflict between the governor and his subjects that peaks around the protest, after which representatives of the Damascenes are ultimately able to break the governor's recalcitrance at the negotiating table. This is perhaps a more realistic presentation of a political process, but it is just as ideologically charged. In fact, we could say that al-Jazarī's narrative conveys political agency onto the Damascenes in an even more explicit fashion than the other three narratives, since it states that they were able to handle the conflict with Karāy without relying on transcendental intervention.

In this respect, al-Jazarī's narrative about Karāy relates closely to Haarmann's characterization of him as a "Damaszener Lokalpatriot," an author consumed with portraying the Damascene experience of Egyptian hegemony under the early Mamluk sultans.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, al-Jazarī's portrayal of Karāy's governorship also shows the author reflecting on the relationship between Damascus and the Mamluk state in a more nuanced fashion than his three colleagues. As seen above, al-Birzālī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Dhahabī all use the story of Karāy's arrest as an opportunity to identify the Damascenes as a divinely protected community in conflict with an oppressive external power. In contrast, al-Jazarī's account gives a more nuanced impression by underlining that the figure of Karāy does not reflect the character of sultanic representatives in general. This is exemplified both through the scene where the amirs cry out of compassion with lepers and orphans and in the description of how they intervene in the governor's interrogation of the protest leaders. A third example would be the stark contrast between Karāy's arrival in the city and the arrival

86 Ibid. 144o.

87 Ibid. 144o.

88 Haarmann, *Quellenstudien* 26, 138.

of his interim successor Amir Sayf al-Dīn Bahādur Āṣ. What al-Jazarī's narrative seems to suggest is that Karāy's governorship constituted a breakdown of a functional relationship between rulers and ruled, which was since reestablished. In contrast, the previous three accounts seem more intent on using the injustices of Karāy to paint a picture of continued oppression reaching back to the previous century. On this basis, we could perhaps modify Haarmann's characterization of al-Jazarī by saying that his *local patriotism* leaves room for ideas of a less abusive form of sultan rule based on the principles of accessibility as well as attention to and respect for local actors.

4 Conclusion

The six narratives about the arrest of Sayf al-Dīn Karāy al-Manṣūrī that I have examined in this article illustrate the tendency of Islamic historians to shape narratives about the same set of events according to their respective geographical and sociopolitical affiliation. According to the background of the author, Karāy's governorship and arrest are thus presented either as a courtly story about mutiny or a local story about unjust government or, in the particular case of al-Jazarī, as a story with two parallel tracks—one courtly and one local. Thereby, the findings in this article partially confirm the preconceived division of the historiographical landscape of the early Mamluk period into an *Egyptian* and *Syrian* tradition. When I say partially, it is because these six narratives also reveal the influence of factional and personal agendas, which cannot be ascribed solely to geography. In Ibn al-Dawādārī's case, the imperial angle on Karāy's arrest certainly reflects his military and courtly horizon. However, his account also shows his aspiration to create a panegyric description of Sultan al-Nāṣir's maturation and his interest in carving out a literal place in history for himself and his father, who were at the center of Karāy's demise but otherwise on the margins of early 8th/14th-century Mamluk politics. Moreover, in the case of Baybars al-Manṣūrī, we have seen how this author incorporates Karāy in a specific political campaign with a strong personal element. His depiction of Karāy as a tyrant legitimizes al-Nāṣir's arrest campaign and general consolidation of power after his third ascent to the throne. However, equally important is the fact that Baybars al-Manṣūrī utilizes Karāy's arrest to present his own ascent to the office of viceroy as part of the end of chaos and disorder in the sultanate.

When we reach the four Damascene authors, the idea of a geographical, sociopolitical identity looms even larger since we are dealing with a close-knit group of friends and colleagues from the same profession, who explicitly state that they copied from each other and wrote within a shared tradition. In

line with the idea of the *Syrian School*, I have identified similarities between the Damascene authors, such as a shared interest in promoting members of the Shāfiʿī school and condemning the taxation of *waqf* property. However, by focusing on their specific detailed treatment of one case rather than their chronicles at large, my examination also reveals differences, which the collective school label and a macroperspective on Syrian historiography tend to occlude. These differences relate to questions of whether Karāy was brought down by divine intervention through the aid of Ibn Taymiyya or as a result of nonlocal events. They also relate to the question of how the authors conceive the figure of Karāy in relation to the amirs as a group. This shows that while the *Syrian School* is a comprehensive concept for identifying a group of connected chroniclers who shared a specific model for writing history, further studies are needed, which go beyond the macro level and test the impact (and occasional lack of impact) of these connections on the narratives produced by these writers, who were evidently concerned with presenting both their collective and individual views and with advancing personal sociopolitical agendas as well as the agendas of the group or school.

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