PART I
The long-standing question, going back to the concepts of Max Weber, of whether Islamic cities can be said to possess a unified civic culture, rests in large part on the extent to which cities can be considered vertically segmented into quarters, formed on the basis of ethnicity or religion or other criteria. While scholars have in the last two decades rightly moved away from monolithic, essentialist characterization of Islamic cities, there remain many commonalities—social, political, and cultural—among Middle Eastern Arab cities that call for historical explanation. The residential quarter (in Arabic, mahalla) is one such commonality that furthermore embodies, within the framework of early modern Islamic history, a host of questions about the relationship between state and society and the formation of corporate loyalties, in addition to questions directly concerned with the evolution and nature of Arab cities as organic units.

To choose the residential quarter as a unit of analysis may imply a mental dissection, and thus a fragmentation, of the city. Yet this study, as part of a larger investigation, holds the quarter to be only one of a multiplicity of social groups and institutions to which each city-dweller belonged, binding him together with others in overlapping networks of social relations that served, in the end, to unify the city. Trade and craft corporations, religious communities, Sufi brotherhoods, households and patron-client ties, among others, offered different modes of belonging that balanced the quarter as a focus of personal engagement and commitment. This chapter, then, considers only one dimension of

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