

FAITH AND THE COMMON MAN
A Damascene Barber and Popular Religion, 1741-1763

By

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Abstract

This study aims to explore some aspects of the popular religious practices of the eighteenth-century Damascus, roughly during the period of 1741-1763. For this purpose, this thesis uses an eighteenth-century manuscript produced by a barber-chronicler which covers the aforementioned years. Due to the recent discovery of the manuscript, this work offers a chapter committed to juxtaposing the manuscript with its printed edition, presenting results of this comparison.

Through the barber-chronicler's manuscript, this study analyzes some elements of the eighteenth-century Damascene practiced religion, providing the overview of customs shared by the population of the city as perceived and documented by the barber. This research will point out the issues which emerge from attempts to study the popular religious practices of Damascus (and elsewhere) through the examination of the normative texts only. Furthermore, it shall be pointed out that the study of practiced religion of a people (in this case, the Damascenes of the eighteenth century) requires the realization that it does not seem valid to separate the formal from the informal religious practices.

This thesis will highlight the role which religious tropes had for self-representation, representation of others, and in some cases, for negotiating social mobility. Some elements of the popular beliefs and practices of the eighteenth-century Damascenes (as described by the barber) shall be provided. Furthermore, it shall be demonstrated that popular religious practices had the potential to serve as a symbol of unity for the population of the city. This study will help illuminate some of the details necessary for acquiring a clearer understanding of the region under study approximately a century before the first Islamic reformers emerged.

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This work is dedicated to the people of Syria and Damascus, both of ages present, and those long gone. It is committed to all those who perished in horrid circumstances which were at times present throughout history, as well as to who are suffering through ordeals now, while these words are being written. They should never be forgotten.

Budapest,
June 9th, 2014

Note on Transliteration

The manuscript used in this study is written in colloquial Arabic language native to Damascus of the eighteenth century. The fact that there is no exact system which allows precise annotation of Arabic colloquial sounds and expressions, I resorted to using one of the standard transliteration systems for classical Arabic language. I did not correct the grammar contained in the manuscript. The transliteration of both the manuscript and the published works in Arabic used throughout this thesis is conducted according to the ALA-LC transliteration system.

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Introduction

The City and the Barbershop: Popular Religion in Eighteenth-Century Damascus

And in the year 1154 [1741], the first day of which was Saturday [March 18th], the common people spread [the tale] that a great earthquake will happen in Damascus, and that it will destroy many places, and that the men will turn into women...¹

It is with this sudden report that the text of a Damascene barber begins. There is no introduction, and no preparation of the reader for what is to ensue – just a sudden sense of impending doom.

The words on the first page of this most peculiar manuscript imply that the fear of demise, caused by the earthquake to come, enveloped a large number of the Damascenes, demonstrating the power of rumor over the inhabitants of the city. This apocalyptic earthquake which threatened to break the men along with their homes never came. If it did, however, the barber's Damascenes would, perhaps, pay a visit to a shrine of a powerful saint whose body was entombed in one of the local graveyards. Or perhaps they would offer a prayer in a mosque which had a peculiar power to help the prayers come true. A Sufi shaykh, whose miracles were famous far and wide, might gather a procession and conduct a ritual specifically aimed at preventing this horrid threat.

One can speculate endlessly, but as the manuscript of the barber shows, in other instances when the city would face a more tangible threat, the reactions of the population would

¹ Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Budayr, "Hawādith Dimashq al-Shām al-Yawmiyya min Sanat 1154 ilā Sanat 1176 [The Daily Events of Damascus Between the Years 1741 and 1763]." MS Chester Beatty Library, Ar 3551/2, Dublin. In addition to Ibn Budayr's texts, the Ar 3551/2 collection includes a chronicle recounting the attack on Medina in 1781, as well as an account of the governors of Bagdad in the second half of the 18th century. I have found no clues to help me ascertain the exact time of the manuscript's production. The covers of the manuscript collection state that all three manuscripts are autographs. In chapter 2, I shall show that this statement is, in the case of the barber, inaccurate. Furthermore, because of the inconsistency pertaining to the page numbering of the manuscript, I will use my own markings while quoting the text. The folio no. 24 of the Dublin manuscript will thus hold pages 1A and 1B – this is the first page after the cover of the text, which begins with the report of the rumored earthquake.

indeed resemble what was proposed above. The present study seeks to examine such actions, recounted by the barber. This is a work about Sufi shaykhs, miracle-workers, saints living and dead, and peculiar messages sent by nature to the inhabitants of this eighteenth-century city. In short, this study is about popular religion of the Damascene inhabitants. It is the barber who made my research possible. I will take what his text conveys and present it in the following pages.

I.1. Reinventing Middle-Eastern Piety: Imagined Orthodoxy in the History of the Ottoman Empire

Much of the older historiography focused on the Ottoman Empire, like the works of Jennings, Wittek, or Gibb and Bowen,² approached the study of religious practices within its borders with Orientalist notions of Islamic orthodoxy. This approach to the study of the Ottomans was further encouraged by the non-critical analysis of source narratives which sometimes tended to depict the imperial subjects' religious practice in terms of normative Sunni doctrine. Previously, the scholars of the Middle East displayed a tendency to assume that religion within the Empire may be studied only through the normative written texts conveying the sets of rules and practices prescribed by the religious authorities of the Muslim community – the texts which establish allowable sets of practices pertaining to one's religion. This simplified attitude may facilitate the creation of a schematic historiographical narrative of the overall development of Middle Eastern religious practices, but it contains many flaws. The reality seems to have been much different and far more complex, as more recent scholarship shows. In a manner similar to the histories of the early Islamic Empires, as well as in many

² See Ronald C. Jennings, "Some Thoughts on the Gazi-Thesis," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 76 (1986): 151-161, and Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1938). See also Sir Hamilton Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West: A Study of the Impact of Western Civilization on Moslem Culture in the Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950).

other regions of the world, the development of Islamic Sunnism under the Ottoman government was paralleled by the emergences within the corpus of religious practices and beliefs which were not always conforming to the normative written tradition, and which changed through the passage of time, flourished and became more nuanced. Sufism, a term used to combine the various Islamic mystical doctrines and traditions, spread and developed from the twelfth century onwards.³ It blossomed under the Ottomans (as well as under the Mamluks, and even in earlier periods), much due to its flexibility and optimism towards religious syncretism. Another reason for this rapid growth and development of mystical Islam under the Ottomans is the fact that the Ottoman sultans were quite open for such traditions, and that the population of the Empire seemed eager to accept it.⁴ This went to such an extent that the Empire's rulers used mystical tropes to depict the sultan's charisma and authority – the appropriation of the Sunni doctrine and the incorporation of *shari'a* into the official codes of law is more rightly described as a means to justify jihads against rival neighbouring states and local rebels than as a proof of Ottoman “orthodoxy.”⁵ The Ottomans, in fact, supported the development of these mystical orders so much that in the second half of the seventeenth century it became truly hard to distinguish between a member of a Sufi order and the rest of the population. It might, indeed, be suggested that in the early modern Ottoman Empire there were not many individuals who did not belong to a Sufi order.⁶

³ Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 231.

⁴ Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 52.

⁵ The neighbouring Safavid Empire slowly adopted Shi'ism in the same period, much for the same reasons. See Markus Dressler, “Inventing Orthodoxy: Competing Claims for Authority and Legitimacy in the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict,” in *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Hakan T. Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski, (Boston: Brill, 2005), 171. See also Suraiya Faruqi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources*, (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9.

⁶ Eminegül Karababa and Güliz Ger, “Early Modern Ottoman Coffeehouse Culture and the Formation of the Consumer Subject,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 37 (2010): 17, doi: 10.1086/656422. See also James Grehan,

Sunnism itself represents a broad doctrine, within which a number of trends with mutual recognition developed over time. The picture can be made even more complex. Islam did not represent the only religious confession within the Ottoman Empire. Christianity and Judaism – in fact, various Christianities and Judaisms – also maintained their presence within the Empire’s borders. Every religious confession was further influenced by local folklore, which filtered into the everyday practice of the Empire’s population. The Ottomans had to be flexible to maintain an empire of such a wide diversity, so the varieties of religious practices multiplied and grew, creating an interesting set of religious identities native to different geographical regions within the Empire. Such was the case with Ottoman Syria, the traditional home to the three monotheistic religions, the interplay of which significantly shaped and guided the overall development of its territory from the early rise of Islam, till the present years.

It would be wrong, however, to believe that religion represented an exclusive guiding line for the subjects of the Empire. Religion was indeed present among the population, but it was not necessarily a dominant force in all domains of life at all times. Bruce Masters rightly states that it is, perhaps, the preeminent role of the *‘ulamā* in the process of creating historical sources that led previous researchers to think otherwise.⁷ Scholars like Krstić, Rothman, or Pierce demonstrated that the subjects of the Ottoman Empire, regardless of gender or confession, sometimes even tended to utilize religious tropes and notions for the sake of achieving quite mundane goals, like defending their cases at court, advancing their social status, or enhancing their material conditions.⁸ In her work on eighteenth-century Ottoman Aleppo,

Everyday Life & Consumer Culture in 18th-Century Damascus (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 21-55.

⁷ Bruce Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire, 1516-1918: A Social and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 105.

⁸ See Tijana Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change and Communal Politics in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2011), 121-164, E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects Between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University

Meriwether shows through court cases that the norms prescribed by religious law, especially with regards to marriage and inheritance, did not always have absolute authority.⁹ Bruce Masters further points out that the use of religion as a political ideology made the rule over the Arab lands easier for a sultan,¹⁰ proceeding to show that religion in everyday context did not seem to have such exclusively decisive role.¹¹ This study will also show that religion did not always represent an essential driving force for the population I will argue, however, that religion was always available for the people, and that one of its main functions was, as Masters states, to give “structure and meaning to those who inhabited Arab provinces in the Ottoman centuries and [inform] their culture.”¹²

Religion under the examination of the present study, however, is not the religion recorded by the Ottoman *‘ulamā* in endless heaps of paper. Bruce Masters indicates that beyond this “institutionalized” religion described in normative writings most of the subjects believed in saints, communications with the spiritual world, and other notions of a magical and mystical nature.¹³ It is my belief that it seems quite impossible to establish a religious practice that corresponds only to those elements which Masters labels “institutionalized.” Religion, especially popular religion – the body of worship, practices, and rituals widely spread among the population of the empire – cannot be approached historically through the analysis of these normative texts only. The examination of religious practices must first be conducted by

Press, 2012), 29-34, and Leslie Pierce, *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003) 176-208, 251-310. See also, for instance, Heinz Schilling and István György Tóth, “From Empires to Family Circles: Religious and Cultural Borderlines in the Age of Confessionalisation,” *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe 1*, ed. Schilling and Tóth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41. Interesting with regards to the Ottoman policies pertaining to religion is Dimitris J. Kastritsis, “Religious Affiliations and Political Alliances in the Ottoman Succession Wars of 1402-1413,” *Medieval Encounters* 13 (2007): 222-242.

⁹ Margaret L. Meriwether, *The Kin Who Count: Family and Society in Ottoman Aleppo, 1770-1841* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 3-6.

¹⁰ Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire*, 10.

¹¹ Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire*, 81-82.

¹² Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire*, 105.

¹³ Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire*, 105.

observing those practices which were (or are) present among the people. Only then can one turn to analyze the texts of the scholars – in the case of the Ottoman Empire, the *‘ulamā*. On the other hand, when one turns attention to the religious practices of a people within a certain geographical region, it seems hard to disentangle informal practices from those informed by the normative texts. As I will argue later in this work, religion of the imperial subjects was a product of a merge between the formal religious practice as described in normative writings and accepted by the population, and the wide scope of beliefs and legends (in short, the folklore of a people). Only in this form can religious practices of a certain geographical area be thoroughly examined, yielding satisfactory results for researchers.

1.2. Popular Religious Practices and Bilād al-Shām: Damascus before Modernity

This thesis will focus on the analysis of popular religious practices in the eighteenth-century Damascus, the capital of the province which carried the same name, and which stretched during the eighteenth century into parts of Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon. By using the term “popular,” I do not wish to imply a contrast between religious practices used by different groups, or different strata of society within a certain geographical area (in the present study, the city of Damascus). I am rather using the term “popular” in its everyday meaning in the English language. I will refer to religious practices which were widespread and accepted by all levels of the Damascene society (as observed by the Damascene barber), regardless of rank, social status, or occupation. Naturally, by stating that I will examine the religious *practices* of the barber’s eighteenth-century Damascenes, I aim to underline the significance of studying the forms of practiced religion which are applied by society, and which are therefore present and living among the people of the city.

I choose to examine the developments of the eighteenth century for several reasons. Previous scholarship expressed its conviction that the Middle Eastern society during the nineteenth century underwent a drastic set of changes, which were later described in scholarship with terms such as the “Arabic Renaissance” (in Arabic – *al-Nahḍa*). As some scholarly works produced after 1990 argue, however, the Arab World (along with the city of Damascus) was not in a deep, decadent slumber from which it awakened only through contacts with Europe. In addition, several scholarly works suggest that the processes of Enlightenment in the Middle East began as early as the eighteenth century.¹⁴ The analysis of the elements present in the Syrian culture of the eighteenth century, including popular religious practices, serves well to further illuminate the state of affairs in Damascus prior to the nineteenth-century developments, increasing historians’ understanding of the early modern history of Syria and the Middle East, and allowing the researchers to assess claims for an ‘Enlightenment’ in the eighteenth century. In terms of the development of religious practices, the chosen century, according to Bernd Radtke, represents a centerpiece within a historiographical period of the overall development of religious practices in the Eastern Mediterranean, which lasted from the second half of the sixteenth to the first half of the nineteenth century. Radtke points out, for instance, the long influence of certain Sufi personalities which took roots in the seventeenth, and extended well into the nineteenth century.¹⁵

Analyzing a chronicle written by a Damascene barber during the middle of the eighteenth century, I will examine the way in which these developments of religious practices

¹⁴ See Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad Al-Shawkani*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 12, and Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3. Of importance is the discussion in Reinhard Schulze, “Mass Culture and Islamic Cultural Production in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East,” in *Mass Culture, Popular Culture, and Social Life in the Middle East*, ed. Georg Stauth and Sami Zubaida (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987.)

¹⁵ Bernd Radtke, “Sufism in the 18th Century: An Attempt at a Provisional Appraisal,” *Die Welt des Islams* 36 (1996): 326-327.

were treated and applied by the eighteenth-century population of Damascus (as it was perceived by the barber-chronicler). I shall demonstrate the complexity of religious customs within the city, while at the same time providing significant facts which will contribute to a better interpretation of the culture which existed in the Syrian society prior to the emergence of the nineteenth-century reformers. It is my belief that the various religious influences shared by the population of Syria spurred the creation of an original community of shared values in which religious practices figured as a combination of both normative writings and a rich local folklore – the two inseparable parts of a whole.

I.3. The Voice of the Barber: A “Semi-Literate” Chronicler in the Center of Damascus

The chroniclers of Damascus weave the story of their city, its rulers, social activities, politics, and administration. Readings of these chronicles, however, might present a researcher with a significant issue. Works like the famous chronicle of Ibn Kannan significantly benefit a historian’s attempt at reconstructing the historical image of eighteenth-century Damascus, but the problem lies in the fact that the art of creating an Arabic chronicle stands predominantly (but not absolutely) subjected to the literary canon of the intellectual elites and authorities of the period – the *‘ulama’*. These intellectual elites, however, were not the only ones entitled to produce such texts in the Middle Eastern past. The eighteenth century Middle East was no exception, and it also witnessed the appearance of a number of authors without previous formal education who recorded diaries of their cities. A peculiar characteristic of these chroniclers is that they belonged to the non-elite population of Damascus, or Syria. They used colloquial Arabic for their works, and some attempted to imitate the official style of Ottoman chronicle-writing. Attempting in that way to enter the territory of the *‘ulamā’*, these “semi-literate” authors left their trace in Syrian history, representing their peers and colleagues, criticizing, or

appraising societal changes, rulers, and innovations, and recording, sometimes to minute details, the developments which emerged within their habitats.

Many non- '*ulamā*' authors appeared in the Ottoman Empire of the eighteenth century – the practice of chronicle-writing was adopted by many imperial subjects of different allegiances, religious beliefs, origins, and cultural traditions. In the eighteenth-century Levant, the chroniclers included one barber, a priest, a Shi'ī farmer from Jabal 'Āmil and his son, a Samaritan from Nablus, a clerk from Homs, a Damascene soldier, and a janissary warrior. All of these chroniclers speak from different vantage points – some as soldiers, others as clerks who meticulously wrote down everything that transpired in courts of their cities, and some as priests or craftsmen.¹⁶ The study of their texts is very important if a researcher desires to obtain a clearer understanding of this age and region, seen from different points of view. In addition to the voice of the scholarly elite, this variety of points of view is invaluable for piecing out the history of the eighteenth-century Levant. Out of this wide scope of authors, I will choose a Damascene barber, whom I deem fit for the purpose of this research – Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Budayr, positioned between what he deems common, and the city's elites. It is through his writings, which cover the period between 1154/1741 and 1176/1763 that I will examine the popular religious practices within the city walls - through his eyes the reader shall observe the city and its various inhabitants with all of their peculiarities. The vantage point of the barber and his tone are the topics of Chapter 2.

The discovery of the barber's manuscript is owed to Dana Sajdi's *The Barber of Damascus* (2013). Through this work, it is possible to find out that the existing edition of the

¹⁶ Dana Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 77-114.

text which was first published in 1959,¹⁷ seems to coif the barber's words much as he, undoubtedly, coiffed his customers in the middle of the eighteenth century. Indeed, the barber served many famous figures of eighteenth-century Damascus, at the same time learning from them, becoming an auto-didactic individual who dared to write a work of his own and attempt to enter the circles shared by the scholarly elite of this eighteenth-century city. The barber, indeed, made many peculiar claims for himself and his family, using his writing as a device of mediation.¹⁸

In a sense, the barber represents a Middle Eastern counterpart of the Italian miller, Menocchio.¹⁹ It is highly doubtful, as the readers will see from Chapter 2, that the barber led a life which was common for the population of the eighteenth-century Damascus. Both he and the Friulian miller seem to represent *exceptions* within their societies, but the reasons for their exceptionality are different for each of them. Not every miller, or every inhabitant of Italy, had an urge to read, purchase, distribute, or make known the heretic texts and engage in fervent discussions about religion. In a similar manner, not every barber, or indeed – every Damascene inhabitant, had the opportunity to gain contact with some of the city's most prominent figures and acquire the leverage which Ibn Budayr possessed. On the other hand, while Menocchio was engaged in reading heretic vernacular works, seemingly not able to stop himself from proclaiming his feelings and attitudes publicly, the barber appears as (or at least fashions

¹⁷ Aḥmad al-Budayrī al-Ḥallāq, *Ḥawādith Dimashq al-Yawmiyya [The Daily Events of Damascus] 1154-1175/1741-1762*, in the recension of Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Qāsimī, ed. Aḥmad ʿIzzat ʿAbd al-Karīm (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Lajnat al-Bayān al-ʿArabī, 1959). This is the edition which will be used consistently throughout the text. The second edition was published in Damascus: Dār Saʿad al-Dīn, 1997. These editions correspond to the barber's text in the Dublin collection of manuscripts Ar 3551/2. I will use the manuscript, as well as the printed text published in 1959, referring to each of them with the name of the author as stated on the cover page of the text – thus the printed version will be marked with the author's name as al-Budayrī, while the manuscript will be referred to with the proper name of the author – Ibn Budayr.

¹⁸ The barber's personal history, as well as the implications of his chronicle, represent the subject of Chapter 2.

¹⁹ See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980).

himself to appear as) more conservative about his religious attitudes. This traditionalist view is the trait that differentiates the barber from Menocchio, but exactly this trait of the barber will help to reach an understanding about the Damascene popular religion of Ibn Budayr's period. Through his criticism, Ibn Budayr exposes many peculiar events which transpired in Damascus of his time, providing for this study an invaluable pool of information. Finally, both Menocchio and Ibn Budayr wished their voices to be heard in society, and it seems that they were successful in carrying this mission out. Because of this wish for publicity Menocchio was executed on the stake. Of Ibn Budayr's fate, however, historians do not know, although he does not seem like a "troublemaker" – it is doubtful that he was punished by execution like the Friulian miller.

Ibn Budayr complains, quite emotionally, about the social order of his period, listing for historians a whole set of social practices and customs which make possible the research into the culture of the Damascene eighteenth-century inhabitants. In addition, the barber writes with diligence about strange occurrences within the city, leaving behind a detailed report which enables the examination of a wide variety of beliefs which constituted the folklore of the eighteenth-century Damascenes. As I will show, it might be presumed that the barber sometimes utilized religious tropes and integrated them in his narrative so as to dramatize certain events he described. At other times, however, the barber simply wrote what he overheard, and as such he will, indeed, serve well to the purpose of this study – not as a model through which the inhabitants of the eighteenth-century Damascus might be understood (for he, after all, was an exceptional individual with regards to his acquaintances), but as a medium with enough capability to stand on the line between the leading members of society and the non-elites, and tell the story of the city from his own perspective.

I.4. Religion and Society: Popular Religious Practices as Symbols of Culture and Identity

This thesis, then, is about some of the religious practices present and witnessed by the Damascene barber Ibn Budayr during the period between 1154/1741 and 1176/1763. Its goal is to present the readers with a coherent overview of some elements which constituted the religious practice of the Damascenes in the eighteenth century. The examination of the Damascene popular religion comprised of both normative texts and a rich folklore shall widen one's understanding of the culture which was shared by the Damascenes approximately a century before the rise of modernity. It was previously stated that religion of a people in significant part informs the culture of that people. In addition, religious tradition of a group of people living in the same geographical region may partially serve as an expression of that group's identity.

Presenting an overview of the eighteenth-century Middle East through the case of Ottoman Aleppo, Abraham Marcus indeed positions religion in the center of the process of identity-formation. According to his words, different confessional groups of Aleppo used their religious beliefs as the basis for making distinction between the city's inhabitants.²⁰ The case of Damascus in the same period proves to be somewhat different – during the period the barber writes about, for instance, the city's government alleviated taxes and other obligations which distinguished the Muslim from the *dhimmī* community, which increased, to an extent, the liberties of the *dhimmīs* and allowed more intermingling in the Damascene society. Indeed, Najwa al-Qattan argues that the Muslims and the *dhimmīs* of Damascus in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries did not live in isolation from each other – their society was much more

²⁰ Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 39-48.

fluid.²¹ I will further show that the barber's Damascenes of the eighteenth-century had a wide corpus of tradition, folklore, and superstition to draw from, which brought them together into a solid group of imperial subjects and gave an original local character to their religious practices. It is my hope that the readers will understand the inseparability of formal and informal religious practices perceivable within the Damascene society. I will inform the readers about the possibilities of creating an image of one's self, as well as of others, through the employment of religious tropes and notions. This study will offer a look into some of the beliefs and reactions to them which were present among the eighteenth-century Damascenes, and the case of the barber will serve well to demonstrate how certain individuals might have attempted to negotiate their social position and authority precisely through the use of elements which belonged to practiced religion within the city walls. Finally, in a similar fashion to Natalie Zemon Davis, who demonstrates the power which religion and its communal practices might extend over large groups of inhabitants in Early Modern France,²² I will show how proud the Damascenes could sometimes be of their own communal rites and rituals, and how these practices could become a symbol out of which a communal identity, informed by the Damascene culture, folklore, and tradition could be formed.

The first chapter of this work will offer a brief insight into the state of affairs within the eighteenth-century Damascus, establishing a context for my research. The readers will be provided with the glimpse of the city's geography, architecture and infrastructure of the city. Some customs and habits of the population will be examined in broad strokes. The period covered by this study largely follows the al-'Azm family's rule in Damascus. The al-'Azms

²¹ Najwa al-Qattan, "Litigants and Neighbours: The Communal Topography of Ottoman Damascus," *Comparative Studies in Society and history*, 44, no. 3 (July 2002): 512-514.

²² See Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), especially 65-96 and 152-188.

introduced many innovations in governing, economy, and social policy, causing an increase of liberty within the city and the whole Ottoman province of Damascus. Introducing the reader to some of some information about the people that inhabited the city during this period will benefit to the overall understanding of the arguments developed in this study.

The second chapter is committed to the barber-chronicler whose words provided the material for my research. It is here that the reader will find information about the identity and personal history (as much as it can be gathered from his manuscript) of the barber Ibn Budayr. This section will suggest explanations of his motivation to preserve his words on paper. A brief analysis of the text itself will be provided, followed by the juxtaposition of the manuscript and its printed counterpart.

The third chapter will commence with the examination of some aspects of the Damascene popular religious practices. Within this chapter, it will be revealed how religion could have served as a device for self-representation, fashioning of self and others, and in some cases for negotiating authority and social mobility. In addition, I will introduce the readers to some popular customs of the Damascenes, such as visitations (*ziyārāt*) of graves, shrines, and other sacred places, as well as to the power which omens might have had, both over the inhabitants and as integrated elements of Ibn Budayr's narrative. Furthermore, this chapter will concern itself with religious practices in the context of social interaction. I will question whether (and in what measure) religion had impact on the interaction between the inhabitants, demonstrating that the rich corpus of the eighteenth-century Damascenes' religious practices consistently paralleled the life of the city. Instead of serving as an exclusive guiding line, however, it simply remained available for the people, when they saw it necessary.

The fourth chapter is committed to communal religious beliefs and practices. Celebrations of large religious holidays, communal prayers, and rituals, will be analyzed. This

chapter will uncover significant information about religious practices conducted *en masse* which had the potential to serve as an expression of an original Damascene religious identity of the eighteenth century. This chapter will also indicate the connection of this period to previous and more recent periods. Its main purpose is to explain the stimuli which brought the population to unity through religious practice. In the remaining text, some concluding remarks will be given.

The quest for the popular religion of the eighteenth-century Damascenes is, thus, mapped and ready to commence. The reader shall first be provided with a brief glimpse into the life, structure, and society of the eighteenth-century capital of Ottoman Syria, so as to with more ease locate, in midst of its towers, minarets, alleys, and gardens, a barbershop in which Ibn Budayr meticulously canvased the twelve eventful years of the city's history.

Chapter 1

Through the Labyrinth of Back-Alleys and Towers: Reconstructing Damascus and its Environment

The examination of the practices and customs common to the people of a city requires first an overview of the city itself. Its geographical location and immediate surroundings influence the inhabitants as much as the changes in polity, economy, and social interaction. Weather changes and occasional catastrophes shape the city along with the changes in fashion among the inhabitants. Only with the overview of all these elements will a complex understanding of the people's social practices become available. This chapter serves to in brief outlines draw the image of eighteenth-century Damascus, position the city geographically, and provide an overview of its inhabitants. The surroundings of Damascus will serve well as the background canvas upon which the topography of the city can be depicted. The roles of its various notables will help illuminate the ways in which the city's businesses functioned, while an examination of some habits of the population will enrich its atmosphere, within which the barber emerged with his text.

1.1. From Frozen Hilltops into the Desert: Landscape and Surroundings

Nestled atop the eastern slopes of Mount Lebanon, more than a thousand meters above sea level, Lake Barada sends its river towards the Syrian Desert. Some twenty kilometers to the west of Damascus, this river, Barada, recharges itself with the waters of the spring called 'Ayn al-Fījah, descending then through Rabwe, a tight, steep gorge. On its passage through Damascus towards the oasis of al-Ghūṭa, its waters split into six branches (which are called

‘rivers’), enveloping the city and fueling the swamps that lie on the very edge of the desert. Then they disappear into the sands.²³

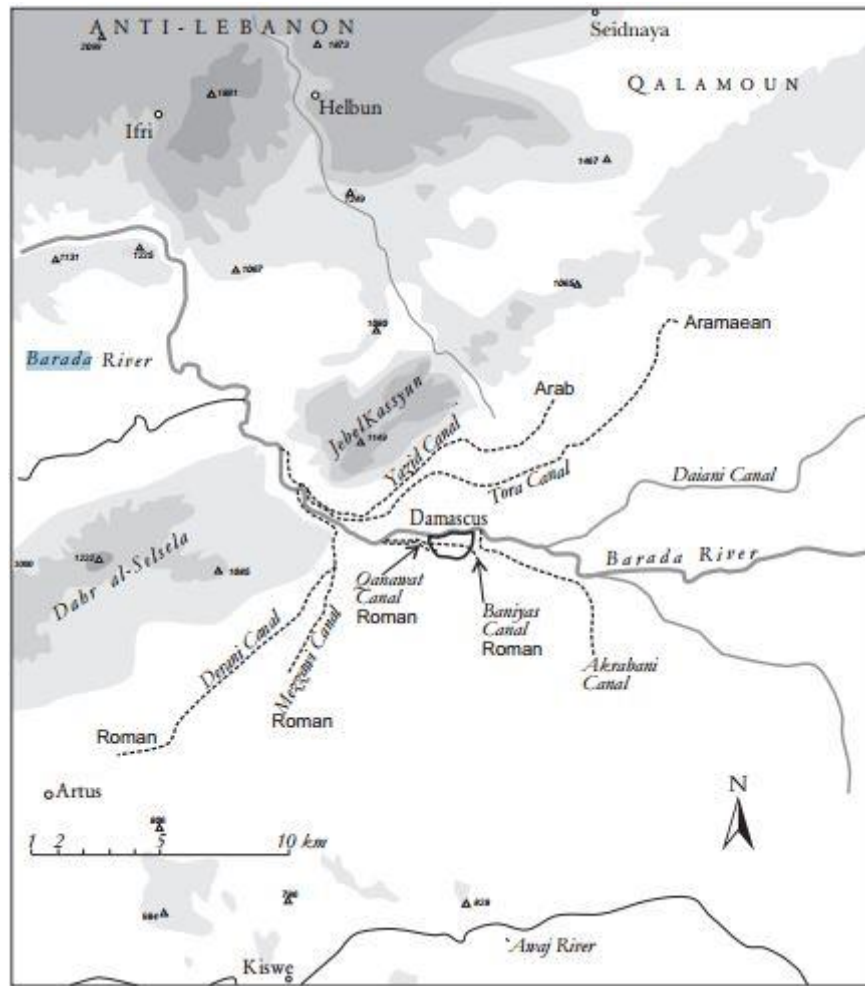


Figure 1: The Branches of the Barada River. Source: Ross Burns, *Damascus: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 18.

Sprawling to the east and south of Damascus, the al-Ghūṭa Oasis shielded the city from the dry grasslands on the borders of the Syrian Desert. In the eighteenth century, a thin belt of

²³ For an account of an eyewitness from the eighteenth century, see John Green, *A Journey from Aleppo to Damascus with a Description of Those Two Capital Cities, and the Neighbouring Parts of Syria. To which is Added, An Account of the Maronites Inhabiting Mount Libanus, Collected from their own Historians. Also The Surprising Adventures and Tragical End of Mostafa, a Turk, who, after professing Christianity for many Years in Spain and Flanders, returned to Syria, carrying with him his Christian Wife. The Whole illustrated with Notes and a Map* (London: W. Mears, 1736), 38-47. This work was digitalized on July 22nd 2009, and is, thus, available online, on <http://books.google.hu/books?id=Q1pFAAAAYAAJ&q=alleys#v=onepage&q=damascus&f=false> (last accessed June 9th, 2014).

fields named al-Marja separated the oasis from the desert, its main function to yield grain for the city.²⁴ Nourished by the water of the Barada River, al-Ghūṭa represents one of the most fertile areas in western Asia.²⁵ In the eighteenth century, it was covered by orchards of olive and fruit trees. Its surface of some thirty thousand hectares hosted a large network of irrigation canals, products of a centuries-long process of construction and maintenance. Closer to the city, the oasis turned into a labyrinth of gardens, enjoyable destinations whose rich surroundings and incredible beauty attracted words of praise from foreign visitors. Henry Maundrell writes:

You have indeed... the most perfect prospect of Damascus. And certainly no place in the World can promise the beholder at a distance, greater voluptuousness. It is situate [sic] in an even Plain of so great extent, that you can but just discern the Mountains that compass it, on the farther side... The Gardens are thick set with Fruit Trees of all kinds, kept fresh, and verdant by the waters of *Barrady* [Barada]. You discover in them many Turrets, and Steeples, and Summer-Houses, frequently peeping out from amongst the green boughs, which may be conceiv'd to add no small advantage and beauty to the Prospect. On the North side of this vast Wood... [there exist] the most beautiful Summer-Houses and Gardens.²⁶

The gardens of al-Ghūṭa represented a favorite destination for picnics and walks in which women enjoyed as much as men.²⁷ In 1163/1750, the barber-chronicler Ibn Budayr expressed with surprise that on one occasion there were more women than men at the river bank on a high plateau which overlooks the al-Marja and al-Takiyya al-Sulaymāniyya.²⁸

1.2. Towers and Mazes: An Overview of the Damascene Urban Landscape

It cannot be said with precision where Damascus ended, and where the oasis began. Many orchards and gardens were settled during the process of urban expansion, but in many

²⁴ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 23.

²⁵ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 22.

²⁶ Henry Maundrell, *A Journey: From Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter A.D. 1697* (Oxford: Theather, 1703), 120-121.

²⁷ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 23.

²⁸ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 57B.

other areas, gardens stood in the places of former houses and shops.²⁹ Since the time when Syria became a part of the Ottoman Empire (in 1516), the population of Damascus grew immensely.³⁰ The city itself expanded to the northwest of al-Ghūṭa, all the way to Mount Qāsiyūn which stood overlooking the forest of minarets emerging from the rooftops of Damascene madrasas and mosques. On the highest point of the foothill of Mount Qāsiyūn stood a pavilion named Qubbat al-Naṣr (The Dome of Victory), overlooking the entire city.³¹ The slopes of Qāsiyūn hosted the neighbourhood of al-Ṣāliḥiyya, which developed alongside other suburban neighbourhoods, expanding to the north, west, and southwest since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.³² Thus the walls of the old, medieval city, built in a rough shape of a rectangle, ceased to serve as a barrier for traffic. New settlements grew around the walls, gradually taking over parts of the oasis and joining the city.³³ Of all the neighbourhoods, Sūq Sārūja and al-Qanawāt were the most prosperous in the eighteenth century, becoming a home for distinguished inhabitants, Ottoman officials and military dignitaries.³⁴ The most populous, and undoubtedly, most turbulent quarter was al-Maydān the southwestern district of the eighteenth-century city, developed from a thin belt of settlements which ran along the road to the south. This road, which was a part of the Pilgrimage route, was also used for grain transportation from Hawran.³⁵ Within the walls of the old city, Sūq al-Darwīshiyya was located near the Damascene citadel, while the quarter of Bāb al-Barīd stood in the center of the old city,

²⁹ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 25. See also Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates in the 18th and the 19th Centuries* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1985), 7.

³⁰ Schilcher, *Families in Politics*, 3-4.

³¹ Samer Akkach, "Leisure Gardens, Secular Habits: The Culture of Recreation in Ottoman Damascus," *METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture* 27 (2010): 73. Accessed May 7th, 2014, doi: 10.4305/METU.JFA.2010.1.4.

³² Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 27.

³³ Schilcher, *Families in Politics*, 7-11.

³⁴ See, for instance, 'Abd al-Razzaq Moaz, „Domestic Architecture, Notables, and Power: A Neighbourhood in Late Ottoman Damascus. An Introduction," *10th International Congress of Turkish Art, Geneva. 17-23 September 1995* (Geneve: Fondation Max van Berchem, 1999), 489-495. Moaz shows how the Ottoman officials managed to influence the development of a city district.

³⁵ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 26-28.

representing one of the prized locations to live in. For a number of years during the middle of the eighteenth century, this quarter also hosted a barbershop which is very important for this study – the shop of Ibn Budayr.³⁶ This area was mostly populated by the Muslim inhabitants. The Christian quarter concentrated around Bāb Tūmā, in the eastern section of the inner city, and south of it was Ḥayy al-Yahūd – the Jewish quarter. The quarters were not exclusive, however, and certain studies show that the population intermingled quite often.³⁷ Outside the walls, the city also hosted quarters for minorities, like the Kurdish quarter, or the neighbourhood populated by the people originating from Bagdad. Clashes could sometimes take place between these minorities.³⁸

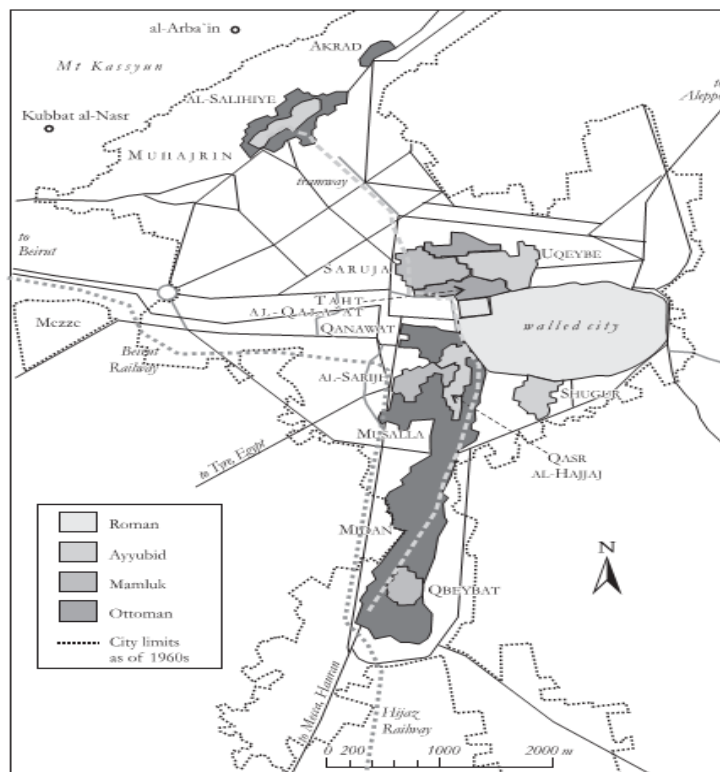


Figure 2: Historical Development of Damascus. Source: Burns, *Damascus*, 310.

³⁶ See section 2.1.

³⁷ Colette Establet and Jean Paul Pascual, "Damascene Probate Inventories of the 17th and 18th Centuries: Some Preliminary Approaches and Results," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 3 (August, 1992): 383-384, 389.

³⁸ For an example, see Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 90A. For the urban developments within Damascus, see Karl K. Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus, 1708-1758* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), and Ira M. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

Many areas within the city were comprised of dense residential quarters, closely huddled buildings removed from the main roads and interconnected by a maze of back alleys, barely wide enough for two men to walk abreast.³⁹ Within the northwestern section of the old city, a large Ottoman citadel, which in previous periods served as a Roman fortress, to be later turned into the residence of the Ayyubid and Mamluk governors, dominated the northwestern section of the inner walls on the bank of the Barada River. The main business district extended to the south, rich with markets and caravanserais which were also available for long-distance trade.⁴⁰ Within these walls rose the minarets of the Umayyad Mosque, the main mosque of the city since the eighth century. Along with al-Šāliḥīyya, strongly associated with Islamic learning, the inner city hosted most of the mosques and religious schools. In addition to mosques, the Damascene neighbourhoods often held Sufi lodges. Aside from madrasas and mosques, the buildings would rarely be comprised out of more than two stories.⁴¹

For the wealthy, there existed ample opportunities for the display of wealth and fortune. The Damascenes never refrained from public displays of luxury and power.⁴² Over the course of the eighteenth century, private palaces and public buildings rose in great numbers as monuments symbolizing the good fortune of prosperous Damascenes. During this century, seventeen new mansions were erected within the walls of the old city, while the notables moved in with their families, for the sake, perhaps, of proximity to the great bazaars where important trade was conducted. Nineteen prominent families, thus, took residence in the inner city, and the most famous of their mansions⁴³ was the residence of a Damascene governor, As‘ad Pasha al-‘Azm, built from spolia, recently condemned structures, and even monuments which were

³⁹ See Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 29-30.

⁴⁰ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 28.

⁴¹ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 28.

⁴² Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 20.

⁴³ See, for instance, Shimon Shamir, “As‘ad Pasha al-‘Azm and Ottoman Rule in Damascus (1743-58),” *Bulletin of the Shool of Oriental and African Studies* 26, no. 1 (1963): 1-28.

still standing at the time.⁴⁴ The al-ʿAzm family, whose members governed Damascus throughout most of the eighteenth century, built several complexes, mosques, madrasas, and numerous mansions, efficiently displaying material power, and influencing the formation of an original architectural style.⁴⁵ Asʿad Pasha bought houses, orchards, and wheat mills (which presumably enabled him to substantially influence the prices of bread), and his mansion was built very near to the Umayyad Mosque, between 1749 and 1750. He had the Umayyad Mosque redecorated, ordered the reconstruction of the road to the al-Maydān district, and built an edifice around the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, the daughter of the Fourth Righteous *Khalīfa*, ʿAlī, which was often visited by the Sufis of the city.⁴⁶ The governor commissioned the construction of an enormous caravanserai, which was in his honor named Asʿad Pasha Khān.⁴⁷ Interior ornamentation was, apparently, of great importance, and it was done to such an extent that the international museums today exhibit a large number of the eighteenth-century Damascene rooms. The fashionable and wealthy Damascenes were obviously very proud of their homes.⁴⁸

In addition to private residencies, the wealthy population of Damascus commissioned the construction of many public buildings. Two centuries earlier, it was the Ottoman officials from Istanbul, including the sultan himself, who sponsored monuments like mosques. However, during the eighteenth century, the notables of the Arab provinces overtook the initiative in constructing mosques, along with madrasas, caravanserais, and fountains.⁴⁹ Rivalries would sometimes find a way to display themselves through commissioning of such large architectural

⁴⁴ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 21.

⁴⁵ Jane Hathaway, *The Arab Lands under Ottoman Rule, 1516-1800* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), 108.

⁴⁶ Abdul-Karim Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus, 1723-1783* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), 182-183. For the architecture under the al-ʿAzm family, also see Schilcher, *Families in Politics*, 31-35.

⁴⁷ Hathaway, *The Arab Lands*, 108.

⁴⁸ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 23-27.

⁴⁹ Hathaway, *The Arab Lands*, 107.

works. The As‘ad Pasha Khān competed in splendor with the Qaymariyya Mosque (built in 1743), the project of the governor’s rival, the *Daftardār* (treasurer) Fathī al-Falāqinsī. This official did not shy away from commissioning public works, which awarded him much prestige within the society of Damascus, as well as affection from Istanbul.⁵⁰ Under the governor’s orders, this treasurer was executed in 1159/1746.⁵¹

The city, thus, served not only as a home to those inhabiting it, but also as a stage for exhibiting power and negotiating prestige within society. The shifting urban landscape influenced the fashion and trends within the city, forming at its center a “reincarnated residential uptown,”⁵² surrounded by a tangle of narrow corridors and alley-ways, which led into the distant quarters watched by the towers of Sufi schools and minarets of al-Şāliḥiyya.

1.3. Who Is Who among the Powerful: A Brief Overview of the City’s Hierarchy

The highest political authority lay in the hands of the governor, who spent most of his time in the capital city of the province of Damascus, which was (in the sixteenth century) split into ten *şanjaqs*: Jerusalem, Gaza, Şafad, Nāblus, ‘Ajlūn, Lajjūn, Tadmur (Palmyra), Sidon and Beirut, and Karak and Shawbak.⁵³ The governors in the middle of the eighteenth century usually held the title of a *wazīr*.⁵⁴ Other Arabic terms were employed to describe the function, and among the mostly used were *wālī*, *nā’ib al-Shām*, *kāfil*, or *ḥākim*. In the eighteenth century, as in the centuries before, the governors were confirmed in office on a yearly basis. This practice was meant to represent a threat to the continuity of their rule. However, many a governor was capable enough to avoid, or reverse his deposition, much due to the slovenly

⁵⁰ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 149-152. See also Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 28.

⁵¹ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 32A-32B.

⁵² Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 21.

⁵³ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 1.

⁵⁴ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 10.

administration of the Ottoman state. The decision of confirmation often provided a chance for a grandiose public celebration, another occasion for attaining prestige and reputation within the city.

During the period between 1725 and 1783, the office of the Damascene governor was, at intermittent periods, held by the al-‘Aẓm family, as was the case with the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. The most prominent in the line of governors was, perhaps, As‘ad Pasha al-‘Aẓm (r. 1742-1757), the son and for a time the *mutasallim* of Ismā‘īl Pasha.⁵⁵ In spite of tumultuous circumstances surrounding the first years of his rule, As‘ad Pasha managed to consolidate his power, much due to his flexible policies, especially with regards to provincial economy. Faced with inner power struggles, as well as outside threats, As‘ad Pasha was still able to enforce his policy, mainly devised for the sake of amassing more wealth.⁵⁶ A Damascene priest-chronicler, Mīkhā‘īl Burayk al-Dimashqī, reports that As‘ad Pasha lifted the poll tax, along with all other regulations imposed on Christians, which apparently brought him much praise from the members of the Christian community within the city.⁵⁷

The governor’s office in Damascus was located near Sūq al-Darwīshiyya, close to the citadel of the inner city.⁵⁸ The governor could primarily rely upon four different types of troops – the feudal forces, two groups of the janissaries (*yerliyya*, the locals, and *kapi kulus*, imperial troops), and the *dalātiyya*, the *deli* irregular troops. Other military units, such as *maghāriba* (mainly Algerian and Tunisian infantry), musketeers, and *lāwand* (or *levant* in Turkish – the

⁵⁵ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 160-169..

⁵⁶ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 169-180.

⁵⁷ As cited in Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 79.

⁵⁸ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 11-12.

term was originally used for foreign mariners, to be later, in the eighteenth-century Damascus, often associated with Kurdish soldiers⁵⁹) existed in small numbers.

The two groups of janissaries at times displayed a strong adversity towards each other. While *yerliyya* were comprised mostly of the local populace, *kapi kulus* were comprised of soldiers who originated from different areas of the Empire. At times, the *kapi kulus* members would be more supportive of the governor and his institutions, while *yerliyya* figured as constant “trouble makers” in the barber’s chronicle, often displaying immoral public behavior like drinking openly, or enjoying the company of prostitutes. For the barber, though, the *kapi kulus* units were only marginally better. The clashes between these two groups were not rare during the period described by the barber.

One of the most important duties of the governor was to take command of the Pilgrimage. For the sake of funding it, the governors often organized tours around the province, during which they collected a special tribute from the local tax-farms. This tax would be used to finance the Pilgrimage, and the tour was called *al-dawra*. Depending on the problems which the governor had to deal with, the *dawra* usually lasted for a month. It had to end before the start of the Pilgrimage, and its start was determined by the governor himself.⁶⁰

Next in the hierarchy of power was the *mutasallim* (or *musallim*), whose role was to serve as a viceroy to the governor of the province. The title could cause a certain ambiguity, for it was also employed by the governors of *sanjaqs* (although these officials sometimes bore the title of *mutaşarrif*). The importance of the role would become obvious during the governor’s absence (while he leads the *dawra*, for instance), or during the periods of interregnum (in the

⁵⁹ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 37-38.

⁶⁰ On the *dawra*, see Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 21-22.

case of which this official would, according to Rafeq, be known as *mutasallim mā bayn*).⁶¹ *Mutasallims* were usually chosen by the governor. In certain instances, however, the *yerliyya*, or the *kapi kulus* janissaries chose the person who would carry out this duty.

The *daftardār* or *al-daftarī* would take care of the provincial treasury. This official would sometimes be called *daftardār al-Shām*, or the *daftardār Dimashq*, in order to distinguish him from the private treasurers employed by rich households to tend the affairs of the family. It is interesting to notice that the Ottoman government relied more on Jews and Christians when it came to the matters of finance – the Jews were more preferred as treasurers, while the Christians were more active in trade.⁶² In addition, two *dīwāns* were present in Damascus – the administrative, comprised of notables who tended to the registers, and the consultative, which represented the full assembly of officials, *a'yān*, who discussed the decisions of the governor, or the sultan.⁶³

With regards to the offices of religious authority, the exact hierarchy was not completely clear. As Rafeq states in his *The Province of Damascus*, the exact authority and status of the office depended on the individual who took the mantle, as well as on the current circumstances.⁶⁴ It is important to note the significance of the Ḥanafī judges, being that they represented the official school of jurisprudence (*madhab*) of the whole Ottoman Empire, including the territory of Syria. This judge was sometimes called *qāḍī al-quḍāt*.⁶⁵ The appointment of this judge would usually be conducted by the *mufī* of Istanbul. From time to time, a judge would appoint one or more deputies, who had the power to act instead of him in times when this was needed. It is interesting to note that during the eighteenth century this

⁶¹ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 13.

⁶² Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 19.

⁶³ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 10-42.

⁶⁴ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 43.

⁶⁵ Literally, “the judge of [all] judges,” meaning the high judge.

judge also performed the functions normally observed by the market inspector (*muḥtasib*), which made him responsible, among other things, for the rises and falls in food prices, at least in the eyes of the population.⁶⁶ In contrast to the Ḥanafī judges, who often (but not always) had *Rūmī* origins, the judges of other schools were chosen from the local populace, most likely by the supporters of their respective school of law, and they tended to hold on to their offices for a long period.⁶⁷

The Ḥanafī *muftī* was considered lower in rank than the judge. The choice of the individual who will carry out the duty of this office also lay in the hands of the *shaykh al-Islām* in Istanbul. All officials performing this function during the eighteenth century were of local origin. As was the case with the judges, the *muftīs* of other schools were chosen by their schools, with the approval of the governor.⁶⁸

It is important to notice the significance of the group known as the *ashrāf* – the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad, ‘Alī, and Fāṭima. This group shared a kind of a noble blood, informed through the bloodline which stems from the Prophet through the Fourth Righteous *Khalīfa*. An individual carrying the title of *naqīb al-ashrāf* resolved the issues within the group. Rafeq notices the different influence this group managed to establish in Aleppo and Damascus. While the *ashrāf* played an important role in Aleppo, they attained political influence in Damascus only much later, around the middle of the eighteenth century, without any impressive successes.⁶⁹

Since the middle of the seventeenth century, the ‘*ulamā*’ of Damascus did not enjoy a strong position – a result of the cancellation of certain stipends formerly received from the

⁶⁶ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 47.

⁶⁷ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 48.

⁶⁸ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 49.

⁶⁹ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 51.

sultan. The weakening of their status occurred simultaneously with the increasing power of the janissaries. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, the *'ulamā'* managed to recover. For some members of this group, the early eighteenth century represented a volatile period, during which some members were exiled, while others led rebellions within the city. For instance, a *mufti* was leading the popular rebellion which arose in Damascus prior to the rise of al-*'Azms* to power, supported by the inhabitants.⁷⁰

Such was the milieu of officials who oversaw and tended to the political, social, and religious matters in Damascus. Their power, however, depended greatly on the people of the city. This dependence did not manifest itself only in the form of financial tributes like taxes, or tithes. The people of the city were sometimes capable enough even to force the deposition of governors and their deputies, as was the case with the revolt against the governor Abū Ṭawq.⁷¹ Politics of the city often represented interesting subjects for discussion, but there was, indeed, more. The people of Damascus shaped its trends, fashion, and interests, influencing both social and political circumstances within the city and its surroundings. I will, thus, steal a swift glance into their life and habits, making the vision of the eighteenth-century Damascus more colorful and complex.

1.4. The People and Their City: Some Habits and Customs of the Damascenes

The Damascene barber often interpreted the events around him as proofs of shifts in local social relations. The power of notable families depended on support from the Ottoman capital, but Istanbul alone could not maintain their welfare. In addition to gaining support from the imperial capital, these notables had to rely on the local actors to facilitate their power.

⁷⁰ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 35, 81.

⁷¹ See Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 77-83.

Patronage was an important means of acquiring political, as well as social prestige, and its usage allowed the common, non-elite people to participate in the city's contestations over authority, brought ever-closer to the cores of power through a web of boons and favors. The social topography of the city, thus, never stayed the same, and its dynamics guided the events throughout the century, and in later periods. As Dana Sajdi states, "the eighteenth century was about social flux, about a *reshuffling of the social topography*."⁷² Damascus was, like many other cities of the Empire, a stage of intensive social mobility which changed its image along with the rise of new notables, creation of new networks, and developments of social relations among the inhabitants. The complex Damascene society of the eighteenth century shared many common habits and practices – in a sense, a common culture. The brief examination of certain elements of that culture will serve well to illustrate the background for the following study.

Like their wealthier neighbours, the Damascene common people – common in the sense that they had no function among the official ruling institutions within the city - seemed to have enjoyed their public visibility. Among the favorite ways to spend free time were picnics, often organized in the oasis surrounding the city. Enjoyed by both women and men, these picnics attracted even the attention of foreigners, who amiably wrote about them:

Like the Jordan, it [The Barada River] is clear and rapid, and wanders circuitously for several leagues through a wilderness of gardens whose innumerable fruit-tress, flowers, and water-works it keeps perpetually fresh and full: it is a stream that peculiarly ministers to luxury and enjoyment; every fathom of its course is precious and useful to the pleasure-loving Damascenes, who, reclining on its banks, beneath the shadow of their own trees, or in a little summer house, listen to its quick murmur, smoke, and sip coffee, while their beautiful Arab steeds, richly caparisoned, are near, to take their indolent masters home in the cool of the evening.⁷³

⁷² Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 20.

⁷³ W. H. Bartlett and William Purser, *Syria, The Holy Land, Asia Minor &c. Illustrated in a Series of Views Drawn from Nature. With Descriptions of the Plates by John Carne, ESQ* (London, Paris & America: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1836), 35.

It appears that the city gave ample opportunities and many wonderful locations for picnics. Enjoyable sites could be found everywhere, and indeed, it seems that their charm was irresistible to the local population.⁷⁴

For Sajdi, this outdoor culture represents an “indication of a relative abandonment of privacy.”⁷⁵ The eighteenth century witnessed the increased social visibility of women, whose participation in these outdoor activities surprised Ibn Budayr greatly (or at least he appears quite surprised in his writing).⁷⁶ The Damascene barber paints in strong emotions what he understood as social shifts that took place during the eighteenth century. His amazement, however, was not of such an extent to prevent his own literary talents to come to the surface. Ibn Budayr, thus, provides a short poem, celebrating his wonderfully spent day:

A day unlike any before [today] passed, oh, uncle,
In Damascene Marja where you will not find a free place,
Oh, what a Thursday! It passed without mishaps,
On the eighteenth day of *rabī‘ al-‘ākhar* the cold went away,
Oh, people of literacy, record it, [for on that day] your malaise vanished.⁷⁷

The people of Damascus, indeed, enjoyed in poetry as much as its notables. When the women were absent from social gatherings, men would often compensate with the exchange of elegies and love poetry. In addition to poems about the beauty of nature, the beauty of women and men was celebrated.⁷⁸ ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulī, perhaps the most prominent literary and religious figure of the eighteenth century, compiled an anthology of these poems and published it under the title *Khamr al-Bābil wa Ghinā’ al-Balābil* [*The Wine of Babylon, and the Songs of the Nightingales*].

⁷⁴ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 29.

⁷⁵ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 30.

⁷⁶ See Chapter 3, 84.

⁷⁷ *Maḍā lanā yawm mithlahu mā sabaqa yā khāl, fī Marjat al-Shām mā baqā fīhi mawḍa‘ khāl, millā Khamīs! Maḍā mā šādāfahu ‘arzāl, fī thāmin ‘ashar Rabī‘ al-‘Ākhar rāḥa al-bard, ya hal al-‘adab ‘arrikhūh al-ḍiq ‘ankum zāl.* See Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 57B.

⁷⁸ Samer Akkach, “Leisure Gardens”, 69.

The oasis, however, did not represent the only popular place for the Damascene. It is noteworthy to mention the two largest cemeteries on the outskirts of the city. To the north, one would find the al-Ḍaḥḍaḥ Cemetery. Another ancient cemetery, Bāb al-Ṣaghīr, stood southwest of the Umayyad Mosque. Both cemeteries hosted shrines and tombs of local saints, which were objects of frequent visitations, of which there will be word in Chapter 3.

But picnics did not represent the only form of spending quality pastime in the eighteenth-century Damascus. Since its arrival from Yemen, coffee represented a great pleasure for the Damascenes. It may be suggested that the owners of coffeehouses around the city enjoyed a great reputation – the opening and running of a coffeehouse required a decent amount of capital, although some individuals borrowed the funds from other parties and, interestingly enough, religious establishments.⁷⁹ Coffeehouses represented another preferred place for gatherings (although mostly, for men) which offered, in addition to the chance for gossiping, games like backgammon, and what seems more interesting, games of chance which often involved dice. Like poetry, the Damascenes seemed to praise music highly, so some coffeehouses had to provide skilled musicians. Ibn Budayr once noted:

During that month [*Jumādā al-Thānī*, 1160/June, 1747], three Jewish musicians arrived from the city of Aleppo to Damascus. They started to work in coffeehouses, and both distinguished figures and the commoners listened to them.⁸⁰

Budayr notices that these Jews sat on higher stools than the Muslims, seizing the opportunity to build on his own image of a religious traditionalist through his apparent surprise with this act (of which there will be word in Chapter 3). Coffeehouses became so popular that people sometimes refused to leave them for the Friday prayers, and a leader of a rebellion in al-

⁷⁹ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 142.

⁸⁰ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 38A.

Ṣāliḥīyya died in one at the hands of his opposition.⁸¹ In addition to coffee, smoking represented a passion which drew both men and, as the barber shows, women.⁸²

It is important to keep in mind that the people of Damascus were much more concerned with local matters, than with those in other parts of the Empire. Travel and information-exchange represented long, slow processes, especially because the majority of people used their own feet as the most common method of transportation.⁸³ The people's attention would mostly be occupied with local emergencies, while the news from the "outside," although sometimes proclaimed with grandeur, rarely held on for long in the minds of the populace. Although this orientation towards the local might have been a direct consequence of the troubles which the Ottoman Empire faced on two military fronts – against Russia (1768-1774) and during Napoleon's occupation of Egypt (1798-1801), the poor technological development with regards to transport definitely took its toll.⁸⁴ The populace, thus, mainly tended to itself, for the sake of itself.

Damascus, however, was not only a place of peaceful leisure and joy. Unrests in the form of violent outbursts threatened to shake the city to its walls in some instances.⁸⁵ Sufi processions attracted the attention of locals, while the people from other villages and cities walked for miles to be able to see and listen to the figures they respected. Folk saints held lectures on the streets, amassing their followers, but also, their opposition. On some occasions, processions were led by the most unexpected of groups. Ibn Budayr, thus, remembers a procession led by the "daughters of passion" (*banāt al-hawā*) who gathered without their head-

⁸¹ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 144-145.

⁸² Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 146-155.

⁸³ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 35-46.

⁸⁴ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 54-55. For the state of roads in Syria, See Leila Fawaz, "The Beirut-Damascus Road: Connecting the Syrian Coast to the Interior in the 19th Century," in *The Syrian Land: Processes of Integration and Fragmentation. Bilād al-Shām From the 18th to the 20th Century*, ed., Thomas Philipp & Birgit Shaebler (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1998), 20.

⁸⁵ See, for instance, Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 31-34, and Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 77-83.

dresses in the streets in the middle of the day.⁸⁶ This dynamic needlepoint of rulers and subjects, craftsmen and traders, priests and saints faced earthquakes, plagues of locusts, extreme rises and falls of temperature, and sudden changes in market prices – all these factors shaped the city during the eighteenth century, giving it a distinct, original atmosphere out of which the barber emerged to leave his words for posterity.

The next chapter is, thus, committed to the barber Ibn Budayr. Fortunately, the barber possessed a keen ability to notice the developments in his society during the middle of the eighteenth century. His decision to write a chronicle of the city was most fortunate, and deserves a favor in return. I will, thus, use the following chapter to get deeper into the past of the barber. I will recount who he was (to the extent of what he chose to provide in his text), for the sake of discovering the main motivations which made him start writing. The barber expressed his thoughts with a strong voice, attempting to trespass into the domain of the famous figures of the eighteenth-century Damascus. Through his text, the barber will communicate more about the people of the city, their passions, habits, and beliefs.

⁸⁶ See section 4.4.

Chapter 2

From Ibn Budayr to Al-Budayrī: The Editorial Strategies of Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Qāsimī

The Daily Events of Damascus, of which most was published during [the reign] of two glorious *wazīrs* – Sulaymān Pasha and Asʿad Pasha who belonged to the notables and *wazīrs* of the glorious al-ʿAẓm family – were collected by the virtuous Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Budayr al-Budayrī known as a barber to cover the wonders, oddities, and horrors between the years 1154 [1741] and 1176 [1762]. Because of the simplicity of the author, who wrote [*Daily Events*] in colloquial language, proceeding to expatiate with additional words and rhymed supplications, getting the listener bored and the reader tired, I peeled off the crust from these *Events* and left their pulp, refining and correcting [the text] as much as possible.⁸⁷

It is with this paragraph that the nineteenth-century scholar, Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Qāsimī, begins his redaction of an eighteenth-century chronicle, referring to its author as al-Budayrī. Al-Qāsimī's edition of the text was later prepared for publishing. Two versions are now in circulation, along with a translation of the text in Turkish, and the original author, whose name was changed by the editor Aḥmad ʿIzzat ʿAbd al-Karīm into al-Shaykh Aḥmad al-Budayrī al-Ḥallāq (“the barber”) became a common reference for the scholars of the eighteenth-century Damascene history ranging from Abdel Karim Rafeq to James Grehan.

Among the sources discussed at the end of *The Province of Damascus*, Abdel Karim Rafeq reveals that he had read and analyzed al-Qāsimī's manuscript – the barber's edited text – stating that the barber's own manuscript was not available in its original form.⁸⁸ Rafeq sees no reason to claim that al-Qāsimī “altered what Budayrī stated,” using as an argument the religious upbringing of al-Qāsimī, as well as the fact that the scholar served as an imam of the Sināniyya

⁸⁷ ... fa-ʿinna Ḥawādith Dimashq al-Shām al-Yawmiyya allatī ṣadara ghālibuhā fī ayām al-wazīrayn al-ʿaẓmayn: Sulaymān Bāsha wa Asʿad Pasha alladhayn humā min ʿa-ʿayān wuzarāʾ Banī al-ʿAẓm al-ʿūẓām, jamaʿah al-fāḍil Shihāb al-Dīn ʿAḥmad bin Budayr al-Budayrī al-shahīr bi-l-ḥallāq, min sana 1154 ʿilā sana 1176 qad ishtamalat ʿalā gharāʾib wa ʿajāʾib wa ʿahwāl, wa li-basāʾat muʿallifihā katabahā bi-lisān ʿammī, thumma aṭnaba bi-ziyādāt kalimāt wa ʿadʿiya musajaʿa yamillu sāmiʿahā wa yasaʿamu qārīʿahā, fa-ḥadhaftu al-qishr min hādhihi al-Ḥawādith wa waḍaʿtu al-lubāb, wa hadhabtuḥā ʿalā ḥasbi al-istiṭāʿa bi-l-ṣawāb... Al-Budayrī, HDY, 3.

⁸⁸ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 321.

Mosque in Damascus. Developing his argument further, Rafeq lists the works written by this ‘*ālim* of the nineteenth century, concluding that it seems reasonable to accept “his word that he did not alter the account of Budayrī.”⁸⁹

An unedited manuscript of the barber’s text seems to have been, however, preserved. Its discovery was much due to the research of Dana Sajdi, who provided the results of juxtaposing the barber’s text and its edition by al-Qāsimī in her *The Barber of Damascus* (2013).⁹⁰ This juxtaposition seems to be of high importance, for it serves to in many ways bring Rafeq’s statements into question. It would seem that the scholar al-Qāsimī indeed did whatever he could to improve the grammar and expression of the barber’s text, but he did much more. After only a brief comparison between different versions of this text, it might be concluded that the interventions of the nineteenth-century imam completely altered the intent with which the barber set off to write his work.

This chapter is, thus, committed to the barber and his text. Its main goal is to present the ways in which his text was manipulated through the later processes of editing, exposing the possible reasons for the barber’s motivation to become an author of a chronicle. I will recount the barber’s personal history (to the extent shown in his chronicle), and demonstrate some of the changes and interventions conducted by al-Qāsimī’s quill. I will show that the editor conducted numerous changes which effectively managed to expel the barber’s own self out of a good part of the text, change his modes of speech, and completely change the purpose of the text itself. From a medium which the barber could use for self-representation and negotiation of his image and position in society, the text turned into a standardized chronicle revolving around the annual events of Damascus and its rulers. The tone of *Daily Events* changed through the

⁸⁹ Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 322.

⁹⁰ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 1-4, 11.

editor's work. An urgent, emotional text, aimed at criticizing the notables, dramatizing peculiar events, and recounting entertaining tales turned into a calm and monotonous prose. It is my strong belief, therefore, that the study of the barber's text cannot be conducted through reading the published version of this text – scholars who attempt such a thing will receive a completely distorted understanding of what Ibn Budayr tried to convey. The study of his text should start with a research of Ibn Budayr himself, so the next section will assemble the autobiographical data which the barber provided and create out of it a narrative about his own past.

2.1. Who was Ibn Budayr: The Barber and His Origins

The cover page of the barber's manuscript states that the author is "the skilled and brilliant litterateur, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Budayr, the Damascene barber of the Shafī'i *madhab*."⁹¹ Although the barber does not refer to himself very often, the information he does provide makes it possible to reconstruct Ibn Budayr's personal circumstances to a certain extent. Considering the years covered by his chronicle, Ibn Budayr must have been born sometime during the early eighteenth century. According to the information provided in the manuscript, the barber did not stem from a family of notables, nor was he a member of any wealthy Damascene household. Quite the contrary, it would seem that the male members of his family worked as carriers for the pilgrims going to Mecca. Ibn Budayr mentions this in the context of an obituary composed for one of his cousins – the barber states that his father, his deceased cousin, and their grandfather all worked in this line of business.⁹² Dana Sajdi identifies this occupation as an *'akkām* – a porter for the pilgrims.⁹³ With significant pride, Ibn

⁹¹ *al-shaykh al-adīb al-māhir al-bāri* 'Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Budayr al-ḥallāq al-Dimashqī al-Shafī'ī.

⁹² Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 43A-44B.

⁹³ See Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 40. For the description of the occupation, see Muḥammad Sa'īd al-Qāsimī, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and Khalīl al-'Aẓm, *Qāmūs al-Ṣinā'āt al-Shāmiyya [The Dictionary of Occupations in*

Budayr states that his cousin escorted the pilgrims to Mecca on fifty one Pilgrimages. In another obituary, describing the death of a former imam of the al-Daqqāq Mosque situated in the al-Qubaybāt neighbourhood, the barber relates that this was the area where he was born. This neighbourhood was located on the pilgrimage route, more than a kilometer away from the Damascene old city.⁹⁴ This is where the barber lived until his father's death, upon which he moved with his family to a more costly district of al-Ta'dīl,⁹⁵ southwest of the al-Qanawāt neighbourhood. In this area, inhabitants could find work and affordable housing with more ease, along with the necessary contacts which would enable them to “integrate themselves into local society.”⁹⁶

Given this information, a question arises – how was the barber capable of affording the purchase (Ibn Budayr uses the verb *ishtarā*, indicating that he did buy, and not rent his new house) of a new home in a more expensive part of the city? His own choice of occupation might offer some clues. Out of reasons unknown, Ibn Budayr developed a relationship with a professional Damascene barber known as Ibn Ḥashīsh, of which he seems exceptionally proud. Ibn Ḥashīsh had a powerful clientele which included Shaykh Murād Efendi al-Naqshibandī, Shaykh Muḥammad al-‘Ajlūnī, and “the axis (*quṭb*) of his time,” the famous Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulī. It would seem that this relationship brought necessary connections to Ibn Budayr.⁹⁷ The chronicle conveys that Ibn Budayr managed to open a shop in the very center of the eighteenth-century city – in the district of Bāb al-Barīd. Later on, his shop will be relocated

Damascus], ed. Zāfir al-Qāsimī (Damascus: Dār Ṭlās, 1988), 318-319. People involved in this occupation were expected to tend the camels and travelers during this arduous journey.

⁹⁴ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 40.

⁹⁵ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 22B-23A.

⁹⁶ Schilcher, *Families in Politics*, 18. See also Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 40.

⁹⁷ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 6A-6B.

to more modest areas, first to the quarter of al-Darwishyya, and then to al-Sināniyya.⁹⁸ According to the *Dictionary of Crafts* compiled by al-Qāsimī, barbers who would be capable of opening their own shops counted above the “peasant barbers” who worked outdoors, in the streets. The barbershops were favored places for gossip, where the barbers could operate both as collectors and distributors of “hearsay” information among the inhabitants (which might prove that the barber was well-informed about the events transpiring in the city – as retold by these other inhabitants). In addition to providing grooming services, these men would also perform selected healing services, bloodletting, cupping, and circumcision.⁹⁹ Ibn Budayr, however, does not convey that he performed any of these services usually performed by the barbers of the eighteenth century, except coiffing. Haykel offers one possible explanation for this in his work on eighteenth-century Yemen, stating that these services were counted as some of the more scornful among the population.¹⁰⁰ A question arises, however, whether a comparison between Yemen and Syria of the eighteenth century might be valid. Ibn Budayr’s readers will note, however, that the barber indirectly mentions these skills when speaking of his own mentor, so the reasons behind this omission remain to a certain extent unclear.¹⁰¹

During the years which the barber spent working in the inner city (according to the chronicle, between 1155/1742 and 1167/1754), he got to know many of the powerful and famous Damascenes. The barber does not shy away from displaying great pride in working for these men. Some of the most prominent figures of the eighteenth-century Damascus, including the Damascene chronicler al-Maqqār, who was the barber’s neighbour and a member of the

⁹⁸ For the reports about changing the location of the barbershop, see Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 77B. For the description of the quarters, see Schilcher, *Families in Politics*, 16.

⁹⁹ Al-Qāsimī, *QŞ*, 103-104.

¹⁰⁰ Bernard Haykel, “Disassembling Descent, or How the Barber Lost His Turban: Identity and Evidence in Eighteenth-Century Zaydī Yemen,” *Islamic Law and Society* 9, no. 2, Evidence in Islamic Law (2002): 205-206.

¹⁰¹ For Ibn Budayr’s master, see section 3.2.

Sufi Qādiriyya order,¹⁰² seem to have been using his services, and more than one liked to spend time and talk with the barber.¹⁰³ Perhaps it is through these relationships that the barber was inspired to start reading and educating himself, eventually undertaking the process of authoring his own chronicle. In addition, it is obvious that the contact with these persons represented a large influence on some of the more important decisions which Ibn Budayr made during his lifetime. His relationship with Shaykh Aḥmad al-Sābiq led to the barber's initiation in the Sufi Qādiriyya order,¹⁰⁴ and his relationship with one of the important scholars of the al-ʿAjlūnī family probably made him opt for the Shafiʿī *madhab* of Islamic jurisprudence.¹⁰⁵ Ibn Budayr's friendship with one of the popular local storytellers, (*al-ḥakawī*) whom the barber describes as his friend, teacher, and father, might have provided Ibn Budayr with some of the other literary forms he introduces to his chronicle.¹⁰⁶ The chronicle does not, however, offer any hint that the barber received any sort of formal certificate of education. It would seem that he was a self-taught individual, while one of the main purposes of his chronicle seems to be his attempt of self-fashioning in the manner of contemporary scholars he knew.

In spite of his apparent connections to some of the more prominent figures of the eighteenth-century Damascus, it does not seem that the barber led a cozy and relaxed life. He needed to provide for his family which included, as far as it can be gathered from the chronicle, his mother,¹⁰⁷ undoubtedly his wife (who is unsurprisingly not mentioned in the chronicle at all), and at least three children – two sons and a daughter. In addition, the barber celebrated the

¹⁰² The barber testifies to this relationship in Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 20A.

¹⁰³ An account of some of them is located in section 3.2. of Chapter 3. Socializing with these powerful figures must have brought much prestige to the barber, provided that his reports about his friendship with them were truthful.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 15B.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 76A.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 10B.

¹⁰⁷ See the extensive report on the death of the barber's mother in Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 9A.

birth of his grandson on *Jumādā al-Awwal* 14th, 1170/February 3rd, 1757.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Ibn Budayr consistently reports about the rate of prices in Damascus, often frustrated by the high taxes and expenses required for some of the barest life necessities. During his complaints, the barber himself makes a clear distinction between the common and the poor with whom he identifies when writing about such matters (while at other times seemingly looking down on them from a clear vantage point of a middle-classed artisan) and the powerful inhabitants of the city, whom he accuses of hoarding supplies and exacting oppressive economic policies.¹⁰⁹ In addition to his frustration about the costly house he purchased in al-Ta‘dīl, Ibn Budayr shows persistent concern about the prices, complaining about difficult life conditions in the city.

Similar to the exact time of Ibn Budayr’s birth, the time and circumstances of his death remain unknown. His chronicle ends abruptly (the last sentence is not finished, and the last word seems hastily written, as if something distracted the writer), which might imply that the barber suddenly died before his work was finished, or that the potential copyist of the particular manuscript which I had the chance to observe stopped before finishing the text.¹¹⁰ For now it seems impossible to discover why the ending of the text is missing. Ibn Budayr, however, left behind enough to implicate the prevailing circumstances during the time while he was composing *Daily Events*. The barber was a witness of what he interprets as drastic changes that took place within the eighteenth-century society of Damascus. He was an auto-didactic individual with connections to some of the most prominent individuals of the eighteenth-century Damascus (and Syria). Finally, he attempted to enter the space of the city’s intellectuals by recording a history of the city – *The Daily Events of Damascus*.

¹⁰⁸ For the birth of the daughter, the death of one son, and some information about the other one, see Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 4B, 24B-25A, 69A-69B respectively. For the birth of the grandson, see Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 82B.

¹⁰⁹ See, for instance, Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 52A. Reports about the prices in the city recur throughout the chronicle.

¹¹⁰ See subsection 2.2 of this chapter.

2.2 *The Daily Events of Damascus: The Barber's Text as a Tool for Leverage*

Daily Events begin the same way as they end – abruptly, without any introduction. There is no trace of a *muqaddima* (preamble) or a *khutba*, which would be expected to precede the main text. This fact might lead one to think that some material is missing from the beginning – but it also might be stated that Ibn Budayr simply did not wish to make a proper introduction to his work. Lamenting the death of his son, however, the barber mentions that he inserted a eulogy in his name at the beginning of his text.¹¹¹ This section seems to be absent from the text which abruptly begins with the urgent report of the imaginative earthquake,¹¹² indicating that it may be true that some beginning paragraphs were lost. Furthermore, considering that the version of the text edited by Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Qāsimī begins with the same descriptions as the original manuscript (and also ends with the same event), it would appear that the nineteenth-century scholar read the same version which I use in this work (and which was used by Dana Sajdi for the preparation of *The Barber of Damascus*), or an identical copy.

The text of the manuscript is written in a very clear handwriting, skillfully done, with almost exact spacing between the words and proper justification of the margins. This fact, along with the *bismillah* which is located immediately before the abrupt beginning of the barber's text, indicates that *Daily Events* might have been copied, and perhaps distributed, during or after the barber's lifetime. Copies of texts in the eighteenth-century Damascus, as well as elsewhere in the Middle East, were usually obtained per order, so it seems that the

¹¹¹ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 25A.

¹¹² See Introduction, page 1.

barber's words had some recognition among the Damascenes.¹¹³ Finally, it does not seem that the name of the barber, which is spelled on the cover page of the manuscript, proves the manuscript I use is an autograph. The name is followed by the formula *raḥamahu Allah* ("may God have mercy upon him"), which would signify that the particular copy of the manuscript at my disposal was produced *after* the barber's death. Furthermore, the folio 51B of the manuscript contains an interesting comment on the margins, stating that the manuscript was found as a scroll in someone's house (no further data was given), and that someone read it on the 15th of *Dhū al-Qa'da*, of the year 49. If the year in question is 1249, the date would correspond to April 15th, 1834, well after the barber's death, and much before al-Qāsimī could have read the text. This note is written in different handwriting than some others which appear on the margins, leading one to think that this particular copy changed a number of hands before its redaction ensued.

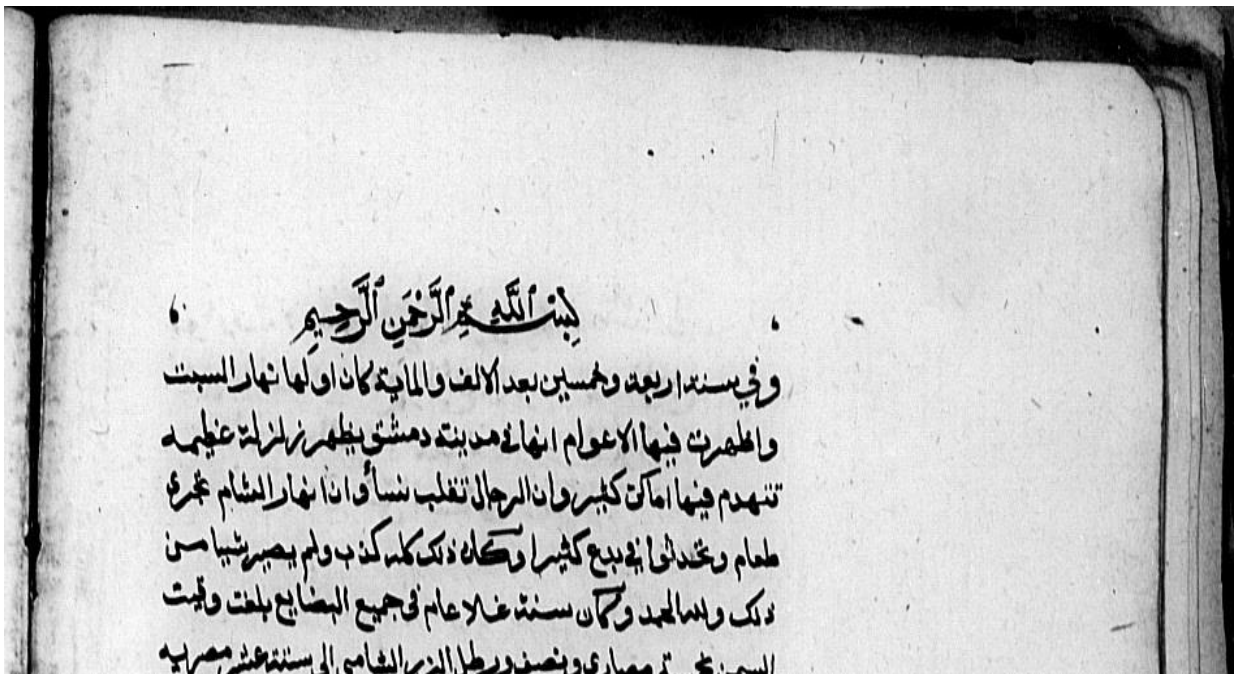


Figure 3: A Part of The First Page of Ibn Budayr's text. Source: Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 1A.

¹¹³ See, for instance, Nelly Hanna, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo's Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 82-90.

نظر فيه من تأمل معانيه
وسببه كان في بيته حوي
وهو ذي النون ^{سبح}
١١٨ ب

والقسوة والهم والغم زايدي على جميع الخلق والناس واشتد الباس وزاد
الموسواس وعظم المراس ولا اعتراض على رب الناس وفي شهر ربيع
الاول وصل خبر الى دمشق بان طرابلس الشام صارت عزة اعظم من
الفرقة التي جرت في دمشق قبل ذلك العام وقد معنا ذكرها لان نقلوا
ان نهر طرابلس طاف عليهم شيئا كثير من اربط الطوفان ومات فيه نحو خمسين
انسان ماعدا الدواب والاعنام والمتاع والمال نعود بالهم من عقاب الجبارها
ماطر والليل النهار وفي تلك الايام اغارت اعوان الظاهر عن شيخ طبرية
على جمال سيايره من الشام ونهب اهلها واخذ ما لها وكان سبب ذلك
ان في بلاده وارضه عرب نازليين وتركمان فامر اسعد باسا والي
عسكره ان يغير عليهم فغاروا عليهم ونهبوهم واخذوا ما لهم واغناهم
وقتلوا منهم جماعة والنوايا عنهم ففرقوا الباشا على الصليح والنز
باغلا الاثمان والباقي طرحه على حامت الشام كل منة في طريقه نجسته
قروش حتى كل واحد من الخيام خمسة وستة وسبعة وفي ذلك الشهر
صار رطل الخبز ثمان مصرية وبنسعة وبعشرة وباشا عشر والخبز العروك
بسبعة عشر مصرية الرطل الشامي ورطل اللحم بازوية وعشرون ورطل
الشوم بازوية وعشرين وغرارة الفخ بالثين وخمسين وغرارة الدرة
بثمانية واربعين والبيض اثنتي عشرة مصرية والتمر بخمسة عشر مصرية ورطل
القمم بستة مصرية وكل شئ عالى والحكم لله الملك المتعالي وفي شهر ربيع
الثاني قتل الباشا ثلاثة نفر من المتاوله فقامت المتاوله وقطعت الطريق
والشيخ صاهر عن قطع من جهة الطريق وفي ذلك الشهر سلكوا واحد
من جماعة الزرب الهاريبي اسمه البطيحي فقتله الباشا وفي يوم الاثنين
اربعة خلعت من جامد الثاني دخل السيد محمد افندي بشمعة نذاه الى
دمشق الشام قاضي بها وكان ارسل نايبه قبل مجيئه بعدة اشهر يحكم بيني

Figure 4: The Curious Note on the Margins of Page 51B. Source: Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 51B.

In his prologue to al-Qāsimī's printed version of the barber's text, Aḥmad 'Izzat 'Abd al-Karīm states that al-Qāsimī's family relates several tales of how Ibn Budayr's manuscript could have ended up in al-Qāsimī's hands. According to one of them, the nineteenth-century imam wished to buy something from the spice merchant. The merchant wrapped the sold goods in a piece of paper with some writings on it. Being that al-Qāsimī loved to read, he went back home, unwrapped his purchase and started to read the text, discovering that he has a part of a written history in front of him. He returned to the vendor with haste, managing to obtain the whole text and assemble *Daily Events*.

According to another story which some other members of al-Qāsimī's family related, the nineteenth-century scholar obtained the barber's text on an auction held in the Umayyad Mosque. The written works on offer belonged to a recently deceased Damascene 'ālim, who was famous for his collection of both printed works and manuscripts. Al-Qāsimī noticed the barber's manuscript and wanted to purchase it. When he made an offer, however, others seemed to realize the value of the work. Losing the auction bid to one of his friends, Ṭāhir al-Jazā'irī,¹¹⁴ al-Qāsimī later managed to borrow the book and copy it. According to the story, al-Jazā'irī's copy was not preserved.¹¹⁵

It would seem that the exact account of the manuscript's discovery might not be available. Regardless of the way in which al-Qāsimī obtained the text, he could certainly notice some of the peculiarities woven into the narrative of the barber's chronicle. The expected

¹¹⁴ Al-Jazā'irī (1852-1920) was one of the most famous Syrian religious reformers, sometimes called the "Muḥammad 'Abduh of Syria." See Michael Dumper and Bruce E. Stanley, *Cities of the Middle East and North Africa: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 125. See also Joseph H. Escovitz, "He Was the Muḥammad 'Abduh of Syria': A Study of Ṭāhir al-Jazā'irī and his influence," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18, no. 3 (August, 1986): 293-310.

¹¹⁵ For the account of these stories, see Aḥmad 'Izzat 'Abd al-Karīm, "Muqaddima [Prologue]" in Al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 18.

function of an Arabic chronicle is to provide the data and chronology of an established Islamic state, legitimizing it in the process.¹¹⁶ Its main protagonists are high officials and notables, and its story revolves, after the exact day and year is provided, around these officials. It should be indicated that two ways of chronicle writing existed – writing about past events, or recording them as they happened, similar to a diary. Regardless of the exact type of a chronicle, however, this form of writing was most often connected with the function of supporting the state, and its authors mostly belonged to the ‘*ulamā*’. The chronicle, however, also represented a worthy genre for the non- ‘*ulamā*’, for it offered opportunity for the author to introduce himself to the events described in the texts. Authors other than those of the ‘*ulamā*’ often wrote in a more mundane mode of speech, taking interest in everyday occasions, humorous instances, and peculiar events. The language employed within a chronicle could vary – it was possible to compose such a work through usage of colloquial language – a practice also employed by the eighteenth-century non- ‘*ulamā*’ Levantine chronicles.¹¹⁷ Ibn Budayr’s chronicle is no different, and it is, in its nature, auto-centric. The barber often points out himself as a reference point (in first person plural, as it was common), signifying the events he himself witnessed or heard about. The obituaries he composed are based on his own relationships with the deceased. The author was, thus, capable of positioning himself within his history, giving clues both about the time described, and about his personal views of the contemporary state of affairs.

¹¹⁶ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 6. See also Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20-21.

¹¹⁷ See Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 115-124, Claude Cahen, “History and Historians,” in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Religion, Learning, and Sciences in the ‘Abbasid Period*, ed. M.J.L. Young, J.D. Latham, and R.B. Serjeant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 188-233, Young, Latham and Serjeant, *The Cambridge History*, 172, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Badawī, ed., *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 75, and Paul Starkey, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 6. For the development of chronicle-writing and its many variations in different periods, see Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 59-84, 87-88, 204-267, or Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

That the barber was certainly no *‘ālim* must have been unusual for his nineteenth-century editor.¹¹⁸ The barber’s chronicle displayed many traits which might have at first confused al-Qāsimī, spurring him to insert a large number of modifications in the text. As earlier indicated, al-Qāsimī belonged to the *‘ulamā’*, and left three written works among which is the *Dictionary of Crafts of Damascus* which is used throughout this study. His son Jamāl belonged to the prominent generation of the *salafiyya* movement for Islamic reform in Syria, and was deeply engaged in printing and publishing in various magazines, newspapers, and journals. The family resided in a home famous for literary and musical salons.¹¹⁹ To Dana Sajdi it appears that al-Qāsimī’s interest for Ibn Budayr stems from the fact that his own father was also a barber.¹²⁰ Of that there is no proof. There is, however, no doubt that a nineteenth-century scholar with such a background felt that the barber’s text required significant modifications.

The nineteenth-century *‘ālim* could see that *Daily Events* represent the barber’s harsh critique of the government and the highest-ranking notables of the eighteenth-century Damascus. Very often, the barber sets off with the reports of prices in the city immediately after establishing the year and the date. The high prices are then connected with a lack of diligence on the part of the government, inertia of the state organs whose function is to control the state of the prices in the markets, and the excessive greed of the city’s officials. As a result, the barber would highlight the poverty of the subjects and the emergences of crime waves, corruption, and sin among the population.¹²¹ The barber does not, as one would expect, begin

¹¹⁸ Ibn Budayr was not the only common chronicler of the eighteenth-century Syria. See Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 77-114.

¹¹⁹ See Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 174, Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 321-322, and David Dean Commins, *Historical Dictionary of Syria* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 230. For a work largely committed to al-Qāsimī’s son, see David Dean Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹²⁰ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 176.

¹²¹ This is obvious almost from the very beginning of the manuscript. See, for instance, the report in Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 6B-7A.

his reports with celebrating the government and its officials, nor does he focus his events to revolve around annual occasions, like the celebration of Ramaḍān, the Pilgrimage, or the annual commencement of the governor's *dawra*. These events are indeed mentioned, but often only in passing, while the barber was engaged in powerful criticism of the state and society, or describing other events he deemed more interesting.

The chronicle gives the impression that Ibn Budayr lived as a pious individual, firm in his traditionalist attitudes towards life and society of his city. His critiques did not target only the governing authorities – the barber's accusing finger sometimes pointed at the whole Damascene society. Public immorality seemed to disturb him greatly,¹²² and the chronicle became a medium for his thoughts. Within a predominantly oral culture of the eighteenth-century Damascene society, scribal works would usually be read aloud to the inhabitants,¹²³ and the barber's acquaintance with the common habits and pastimes of the city leads one to presume that the *Daily Events* might have been read and discussed in its many coffeehouses.¹²⁴ According to what I have already suggested, the text must have earned some merit, considering that copies of it were produced and read after his death (and before the editorial process began). The barber certainly recorded strong statements, clearly expressed thoughts and attitudes, and sometimes even direct curses aimed at those who, in his opinion, needed to rethink the way they lived and acted in his city. From his vantage point between the common and the poor (*ʿawām*) and the patricians (*akābir*) the barber shouts his curses, wanting his voice to be heard.

When the barber was not concerned with society and its ill-mannered habits, he reported a large number of strange incidents which occurred in the city during the years covered by

¹²² See, for instance, Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 24A.

¹²³ See, for instance, Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 36-37.

¹²⁴ For the barber and coffeehouses, see Chapter 3, 87-88.

Daily Events. Strange suicides, fits of domestic violence, and miraculous events fill the pages of the manuscript equally with the clashes and skirmishes between military and societal groups both within and outside the city walls. Humorous incidents, mysterious events and reports of sex scandals form (roughly) a good twenty percent of the text. The barber clearly marks the events he witnessed himself, but at most times, he reports from gossip probably gathered in the barbershop by inquiries, or overheard in the streets. It is impossible to prove Sajdi's statement that the barber obviously believed absolutely everything he wrote down,¹²⁵ but what does seem peculiar is that these events, sometimes highly unrealistic, figure in the text without any hedging, or an additional comment. At times it seems that the barber is utilizing strange, miraculous occurrences as literary devices to accentuate or emphasize his point, but more often he just seems to have written down the tales of *Daily Events* exactly as he heard them.

Daily Events, then, appear to be the barber's "soapbox" for expressing both his deep thoughts about the city and its inhabitants, and for entertaining the audience with humorous events and rich stories. To maximize the potential of his work, the barber employs additional literary devices, most probably begotten through his relationship with some of the city's elites, attempting to carve for himself a niche of authority both among his peers and among the famous Damascenes. The most obvious literary device he uses is a *tarjama* – an obituary of a person usually written posthumously, accompanied with an exact date and cause of death. In addition to this basic information, a *tarjama* might include interesting incidents which transpired during the deceased's life. These reports were usually composed for the notables and elites of a society. For instance, the biographer, *ʿālim*, and *mufti*, Muḥammad Khalīl al-Murādī, published four volumes of *tarjamas* dedicated almost exclusively to the elites of the eighteenth-century Damascus. Al-Murādī himself was a prominent scholar, with authority to compose a

¹²⁵ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 13.

book whose function was similar to a catalogue of everyone who was important in a city. To enter a book of *tarjamas* represented a great achievement for an individual.¹²⁶

Within his text, Ibn Budayr provided more than sixty obituaries, of which al-Qāsimī omitted many which he deemed unimportant. For instance, the *tarjama* of ‘Uthmān Ibn al-Qudsī,¹²⁷ who worked as a scribe, seemed to be left out because of its insignificance to the nineteenth-century ‘*ālim*. The barber, however, did not enjoy the same scholarly authority as al-Murādī to decide who was worthy of a *tarjama*. Ibn Budayr wrote on the basis of acquaintance with the deceased. In addition to the deaths of his family, which are described and lamented in detail within his text, his *tarjamas* figure the scholarly elites and Sufi shaykhs with whom the barber had a personal relationship.¹²⁸ Writing in this way, the barber could attempt to insert himself into the world of scholars, Sufis, and intellectuals, complimenting them with posthumous reports. With the *tarjamas*, the intent of *Daily Events* is obvious – through his text, Ibn Budayr attempted to ascend up the social ladder and enter the circles of the city’s cultural elites, at the same time maintaining his self-proclaimed right to criticize the mighty and wealthy, as well as the common and poor of his Damascus.

Ibn Budayr is writing both in prose and poetry. In some cases, he uses rhymed prose to dramatize a certain event,¹²⁹ and on certain occasions he is inspired enough to compose a short verse.¹³⁰ The barber, again, imitates the poetic inspiration known among the scholarly elites of the city (and in the Middle East in general). The verses he composes, however, correspond to the form called *mawwal* – a specific verse which was written to be sung. This form of poetry

¹²⁶ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 51.

¹²⁷ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 58B.

¹²⁸ It seems interesting that Ibn Budayr does not mention his affiliation with other barbers, or a guild. In addition to the *tarjama* of Ibn Ḥashīsh, the barber simply mentions in passing that a shaykh of the barbers’ guild died. See Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 68B.

¹²⁹ See Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 45A-45B.

¹³⁰ One of many instances is Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 57B.

never managed to enter the elites' circles of the Arab world,¹³¹ which might indicate the barber's own position in society.

One of the most striking ways in which the barber claims authority for himself is the appropriation of dream visions known among the Sufi shaykhs of the eighteenth-century Damascus. Those aspiring towards the mystical expected and hoped to receive mystical dreams in which a communication with the divine would be established, but these dreams could sometimes appear to inhabitants other Sufi mystics. The barber testifies that he received one himself. His dream of divine inspiration is carefully documented in *Daily Events*,¹³² and serves several purposes. Ibn Budayr uses it to explain the unjustifiable incorporation of the title *sayyid* in the names of his sons.¹³³ In addition, by using this dream, the barber once more strives to gain leverage and stand among the spiritual figures of the eighteenth-century Damascus. He also builds up on his image, fashioning himself as a receiver of divine instructions for himself and his family, and this particular dream serves to help historians understand the influence that the philosophies of his clients might have had on him.

Upon comparing the barber's text with its printed version, it can be concluded that the barber's negotiation of social mobility through writing did not impress al-Qāsimī at all. Quite on the contrary, in what follows I will show that the nineteenth-century scholar did everything he could to amend the way the barber wrote and rectify his "transgressions."

¹³¹ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 65.

¹³² Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 25A.

¹³³ See Chapter 3, 71-72.

2.3. The Barber Meets the *‘Ālim*: The Scope of al-Qāsimī’s Interventions on *Daily Events*

The first issue which attracts the eye of the researcher upon juxtaposing the manuscript to its published version is the apparent difference in dates given in the title. The published edition claims that the scope of years covered by Ibn Budayr ranges from 1154 to 1175 (1741-1762), despite that the cover page of the barber’s manuscript shows the years 1154-1176 (1741-1763). Both al-Qāsimī and ‘Abd al-Karīm agree that the barber has accidentally added one year during his writing. Dana Sajdi seems to support this view.¹³⁴ However, it would seem that the barber – or the copyist of his manuscript – “forgot” to mention the coming of 1173/1760 in between 1172/1759 and 1174/1761, which probably led the editor to group the events of two years into one. However, between the reports of these two years, certain months are doubled, and Rafeq notices that the deposition of ‘Abd Allah Pasha occurs in the edited text a year before it actually happened.¹³⁵

In addition to the problem with dating, many other issues seem to arise from the comparison of the manuscript and its printed edition. I indicated previously that the barber’s text begins abruptly, with the report of an earthquake which would never happen. Al-Qāsimī, however, browses through the Ibn Budayr’s words, reordering the text so that it begins in a proper (in his own opinion) fashion. The edited version, thus, begins with this paragraph:

And in the year 1154 [1741], Hajji ‘Alī Pasha of the Turks was the ruler of Damascus. This was eleven years after the beginning of the rule of our master, Sultan Maḥmūd Khān, the son of Sultan Muṣṭafā Khān, may God support the throne of this state until the final hour.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ See ‘Abd al-Karīm, “Muqaddima,” 9. See also Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 12.

¹³⁵ See Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 92A-93B. See also Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*, 322.

¹³⁶ *wa fī sana 1154 kāna wālī^{yun} bi-l-Shām al-hājj ‘Alī Bāshā min al-‘Atrāk wa dhalika ba‘ada maḍā ‘iḥdā ‘ashara sana min julūs mūlānā al-Sulṭān Maḥmūd Khan ibn al-Sulṭān Muṣṭafā Khān, ‘ayyada Allah ‘arsh hadhihi al-dawla ‘ilā ākhir al-dawarān.* Al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 4.

The reader who wishes to familiarize with this paragraph in the original text may locate it, but only after the report of the rumored earthquake, followed by the report of unbearable prices in the markets. The barber wrote a bit differently:

At the beginning of the year, ‘Alī Pasha ruled Damascus, and the sultan was Maḥmūd Khān, son of Sultan Muṣṭafā, and he reigned for eleven years.¹³⁷

The comparison of these paragraphs betrays the difference between the formal modes of speech used by the nineteenth-century editor and a somewhat more relaxed language which Ibn Budayr used. Furthermore, it would seem that the barber did not bother with the words of praise for the rulers of Damascus and the Empire, being at the moment of writing more occupied with other necessities, like public safety and the availability of resources. For al-Qāsimī, this was unacceptable. He had to intervene and first celebrate the local and imperial officials before proceeding further. Other portions of the text had to be reorganized as well – it does not seem that the barber’s text revolved around the governors and sultans of the period, but around local events, punctuated by unending poverty and moral decay of the inhabitants. Furthermore, the barber did not attempt to compose unbroken narratives of events which stretched for days, or months. Instead, he wrote down his reports in succession, as they occurred. Al-Qāsimī sometimes needed to reshuffle the text so as to create uninterrupted narratives of certain events.¹³⁸ Insertions of praises to the Damascene notables were necessary in many places within the text where the barber did not show proper respect for the official authority. Al-Qāsimī, it seems, did not wish to portray the glorious members of the ruling family in any negative light.

¹³⁷ ... wa kāna al-ḥākim bi-l-Shām ‘Alī Bāshā awwal sana wa al-Sulṭān Maḥmūd Khān ibn al-Sulṭān Muṣṭafā wa lahu fī al-mulk iḥdā ‘ashar sana... Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 1A.

¹³⁸ An example of a textual rearrangement can be found, for instance, when comparing Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 7A with Al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 23-27. It seems that the editor did not find appropriate that the report about the celebration of the treasurer’s daughter precedes the celebration of circumcision of the pasha’s son. In between these two reports, several briefings of military campaigns outside the city were given. The editor collected them and assembled them into an unbroken text.

Dana Sajdi provides an example of this tendency in her discussion of the barber's reports concerned with the architectural works commissioned by As'ad Pasha al-'Aẓm – while the barber complains that these works are quite costly in comparison to the general poverty of the population, al-Qāsimī makes it look like the newly-built structures reflect the glory of the powerful ruling family, celebrating them in his edition through the mouth of the barber.¹³⁹ Of the barber's original complaint there remains no trace – omission represents another important point which needs to be discussed with regards to al-Qāsimī's changes to the text.

As al-Qāsimī states at the beginning of his edition of *Daily Events*, he considers the barber tiresome at times, so he strives to shorten his reports, providing what is crucial, but erasing the barber's thoughts on the subject. Many supplications, thus, directed to God by the barber in the name of himself and the people of Damascus were erased from the text.¹⁴⁰ In a similar fashion, the editor cuts out much of the poetry which Ibn Budayr provides.¹⁴¹ Al-Qāsimī in many instances rephrases the passages which the barber wrote in rhymed prose for the sake of dramatization.¹⁴² In this way, the edited text remains faithful to its meaning (but not to its intent!), while its tone changes, gaining a calmer, passive voice.

It would appear that the nineteenth-century 'ālim did not wish the barber to play a major role in *Daily Events*. Much of Ibn Budayr's reports about himself are, thus, omitted from the edited version. As previously stated, the barber did not speak much about his family, but *Daily Events* still hold enough for a researcher to assemble at least a basic image of some parts of his life. The edited version does not contain any information about the death of one of Ibn Budayr's sons, nor about the occupation of his father, grandfather, and possibly other male cousins. The

¹³⁹ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 184-185.

¹⁴⁰ Compare, for instance, Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 74B, and al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 174, or Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 52A, and al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 127.

¹⁴¹ The poem, for instance, in Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 43A-44B, is missing from the edited version.

¹⁴² Compare, for instance, the report in Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 45A-45B, with al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 112.

reader of the published text may encounter only three reports about Ibn Budayr's personal life – the obituary of his mother, the birth of his daughter, and the mentioning of his son Muṣṭafā (during the occasion of visiting Zaynab's shrine).¹⁴³ The obituaries of more modest people who did not, for instance, enter al-Murādī's tomes of biographies (like the aforementioned storyteller), or whom the editor deemed inappropriate, were also left out of the published edition. Many of the barber's acquaintances are lost for a researcher who uses the published text of *Daily Events*, which makes the study of the barber's past more difficult.

As for the remaining *tarjamas*, al-Qāsimī did everything he could to omit the barber from them. The report of the death of a person would, thus, stand unchanged, but the barber would be completely expelled from it, as if it was not appropriate for a person such as him to mingle with the elites of the city. The reader of the edited *Daily Events* would never, thus, find out about the barber's close acquaintance with Shaykh Jabrī, Shaykh al-Ṭabbāgh,¹⁴⁴ or the celebrated poet Bahlūl.¹⁴⁵

Through these changes, the voice of the barber is effectively silenced, leaving as a result a chronicle which is reorganized so as to revolve around important figures among the Damascene notables. Little did remain in the edited version of the text of the way the barber's Damascenes understood the changes and events around themselves – indeed, little did remain of the viewpoint of the barber himself. Al-Qāsimī, of course, had to testify to the existence of an original author, as is visible from the beginnings of certain paragraphs in the edited text which begin with an introductory note stating, for instance, “the historian said,” or “al-Budayrī said” (*qāla al-mu'arrikh*, or *qāla al-Budayrī*). Ibn Budayr, however, told much more than what was carried over by the nineteenth-century scholar.

¹⁴³ Al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 30, 18, and 168 respectively.

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 3, section 3.2.

¹⁴⁵ Compare Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 57A, with al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 139.

In several instances, al-Qāsimī inserts his own remarks in the text. This occurrence is not encountered often, but it is still perceivable, especially when the editor is holding strong attitudes against a certain individual. Perhaps it is, thus, his dissatisfaction with the notables of Damascus hoarding supplies in the face of a harsh economic crisis which made him describe these individuals as brazen people, not afraid of God.¹⁴⁶ In another instance, while carrying over the reports about the transgressions of the Damascene treasurer al-Falāqinsī, al-Qāsimī inserts a verse from the Qur’ān as if to announce that the demise of the *daftarī* is at hand.¹⁴⁷

The nineteenth-century editor of Ibn Budayr’s *Daily Events* conducted many repairs with regards to the barber’s grammar and style. Some of these repairs seem quite unnecessary, while others may reflect the developments of Modern Standard Arabic in the century after Ibn Budayr’s time. The barber often writes in colloquial Syrian dialect, inserting many localisms, omitting the letter *hamza* (ء) from the words, and often using masculine pronouns with feminine nouns, or nouns in plural which refer to non-sentient objects (which are treated as nouns of feminine singular). Al-Qāsimī mostly rectifies these divergences (but he also neglects, or willingly ignores some of them) from the Modern Standard Arabic, adding other necessary changes, such as the accusative endings to the words where they are necessary. The opening paragraph of the barber’s chronicle will serve well to demonstrate some of the changes made by the editor. Ibn Budayr writes:

... wa azharat fihā al-a‘wām annahā fī madīnat Dimashq yaẓhar zalzala ‘azīma tatahaddam fihā amākin kathīr wa anna al-rijāl tuqlab bi-nisā wa anna nahār al-Shām tajrī ta‘ām wa taḥaddathū fī bad‘ kathīr^{an} wa kān dhalika kulluh kadhib wa lam yaṣīr shay^{an} min dhalika...

¹⁴⁶ Al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 127.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 56.

The translation is as following: “... the common people spread [the tale] that a great earthquake will happen in Damascus, and that it will destroy many places, and that the men will turn into women, and that the days will pass in hunger. They told much, but it was all a lie, and not a thing of it happened...”

Edited by al-Qāsimī, the same passage becomes:

Jarā ‘alā lisān al-‘āma ‘annahu sayahduthu bi-Dimashq al-Shām zilzāl ‘azīma [sic] tuhaddimu bi-sayyihā ‘amākin kathīra, wa ‘anna al-rijāl sa-tuqlabu nisā’, wa ‘anna ‘anhār al-Shām tajrī ṭa ‘ām^{an}. Wa taḥaddathū fī ḥawādith kathīra min mithla hadhihi al-khurāfāt, wa šārū yatadāwalūnahā fīmā baynahum, wa lam yahduth shay’ fīmā ba‘ada min hadhihi al-sana.

In translation: “The common people started to tell that a great earthquake will happen in Damascus and that it will destroy many places with its evil, and that the men will turn into women, and that the days in Damascus will pass in hunger. In many instances they told many such fairytales, passing them on amongst themselves, but not a thing [that was told] happened during the rest of this year.”

This example demonstrates how al-Qāsimī conducts the repairs of grammar within the barber’s work. The proper cases for the nouns are added, the more frequent plural forms are used, and in the beginning of the sentence, the future tense is marked in front of the verb. Al-Qāsimī inserts modifications even with regards to the barber’s writing style. It is as if the editor feels necessary to further explain some of the statements of the original author – some of the changes within the text seem quite unnecessary, with the purpose only to, perhaps, demonstrate the editor’s own linguistic skills.

Most of the barber’s text is modified in the way similar to what is shown in this chapter. A researcher interested in the language which the eighteenth-century Damascenes used will certainly not be satisfied with reading the edited version of this chronicle. However, al-Qāsimī

did not stop at the barber's grammar and style. Many facts about the author, his life, work, friends, and acquaintances were lost in the process of editing, and the whole intent of the text was changed. Ibn Budayr's text represents a social critique which served on the one hand to express a strong opinion about the circumstances prevailing in Damascus during the middle of the eighteenth century, and on the other to elevate the barber and allow him to trespass into the territory of the scholarly elite. Out of the hands of al-Qāsimī emerged a scholarly chronicle, indeed peculiar – for it was written by a barber, but still fulfilling the same purpose which the *'ulamā'* chronicles mostly served. It is my strong belief, thus, that it is impossible to use the book attributed to Shaykh Aḥmad al-Budayrī without a close scrutiny of the original manuscript, for such an act would cause a distorted perception of what is conveyed within the barber's pages.

2.4. Conclusion: The Barber's Legacy

In the center of the eighteenth-century Damascus, Ibn Budayr coiffed, gathered the tales, wrote them down, and passed them on to be, perhaps, read aloud to audiences in the many coffeehouses of the city. Much of the events related within his pages might not have entered the work of a well-standing scholar of the same period. Ibn Budayr, however, wrote with diligence, leaving a peculiar history of his time to the future researchers.

Ascertaining the credibility of the barber's reports is not easy, especially with regard to some of the more miraculous incidents which are mentioned in *Daily Events*. As I will show in the following chapters, the barber quite often tends to exaggerate and dramatize his reports. Dana Sajdi states that the credibility of his history is attested by some of the more prominent

historians of the Middle East, providing Rafeq's *The Province of Damascus* as an example.¹⁴⁸

However, this classic work of Abdel Karim Rafeq has its own issues which need revising and resolving. It seems more productive to use Ibn Budayr as a reflection of the attitudes and beliefs of the people of the eighteenth-century Damascus – expressing his opinion about the events transpiring within and outside the city, the barber tells volumes about the thought prevailing among the inhabitants of this provincial capital.

The barber echoes many of the people's attitudes and relates much about them. He uncovers their more private habits, sometimes their darker sides, favorite role-models, and hated individuals. Recounting the stories he overheard, he relates what people tended to believe in, what they sometimes found credible. In a sense, these beliefs represent the concern of the present work, which strives to present an overview of the eighteenth-century Damascenes' beliefs and inquire into their religious practices. For such a study, the chronicle of a barber who listened and recorded with diligence seems invaluable. The barber will, thus, tell his stories, weaving them into the essence of the following chapters. His role in this work established, the inquiry into the popular religious practices of the Damascenes may truly commence.

¹⁴⁸ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 13.

Chapter 3

Of Sacred Things and Pleasures: Religion and Ibn Budayr's Damascenes of the Eighteenth Century

Shaykh Ibrāhīm, known as Al-Kaykī, a holy, modest, and demented man died during these events [1161/1748]. He was a blessed man, whose father belonged to the faithful of the Al-Qubaybāt neighbourhood. He would often clap his hands, swaying to the front and back, shouting from the top of his lungs...¹⁴⁹

At first glance, this seems to be just another of the barber's sometimes quite detailed reports of deaths in the city. According to Ibn Budayr, however, the story of Al-Kaykī deserved more than just a couple of lines providing the time of death and the place of burial. It seems that Al-Kaykī enjoyed a certain level of popularity within the city, for according to the barber the inhabitants told many tales about the miracles he performed.¹⁵⁰ Ibn Budayr provides an account of one of these miracles to his audience. Of his miracles the barber might have been aware himself, considering that al-Kaykī's family apparently shared the same neighbourhood of origin as that of Ibn Budayr. According to the barber's report, one day Al-Kaykī happened to pass by a milk-vendor. Upon noticing the trader, he started shouting at him, saying that he wishes to be given a container of milk. Shaykh Ibrāhīm started crying and clapping his hands until the people gathered around him. They took a container of milk and presented it to the swaying man.

According to the barber's report, this act did not seem to satisfy Al-Kaykī who was still crying. Clapping his hands without pause, he pointed to a particular container saying that he does not wish any other, so the people obliged him. Upon receiving the desired container of milk, Shaykh Ibrāhīm immediately emptied its content on the ground. A large snake, the barber

¹⁴⁹ ...*wa fī hadhihi al-waqa' tawaffā al-wallī al-majdhūb al-khālī' al-'idhār al-Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-mulaqqab bi-l-Kaykī wa kāna rajul mubārak wa abūh rajul min al-ṣulahā' min maḥalla al-Qubaybāt wa kāna fī ghālib awqātihi yaduqqu 'alā yaddayhi wa yamīlu ilā warāihi wa ilā quddāmihi wa yunād bi a'alā ṣawtihi...* Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 49B.

¹⁵⁰ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 49B.

continues, fell out of the container and the shaykh's excitement subsided. He left the snake, the vendor, and the onlookers, and went on his way. Ibn Budayr finishes his report mentioning that this was but one of many miracles the shaykh performed during his lifetime.¹⁵¹

Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Kaykī was certainly not unique. According to Ibn Budayr's reports, eighteenth-century Damascus hosted many men and women who built up their reputation through miraculous words and deeds. Miracles were not exclusively the trait of mentally challenged. Ibn Budayr, along with many other authors, such as the biographer al-Murādī, described the wondrous deeds of many a pious man – while the wealthier population of eighteenth-century Damascus could publicly express their piety by commissioning, for instance, repairs and construction of structures like mosques, shrines, and madrasas, the faith and piety of the rest of the population would often be rewarded with peculiar powers.

3.1. Formal Religion and its Practice: Different sides of a Whole

This chapter will examine some aspects of the role which religion had for Ibn Budayr's eighteenth-century Damascenes. Placing the barber's chronicle under my focus, I shall demonstrate the significance of integrating religious tropes in narratives which depicted certain individuals of eighteenth-century Damascus. Furthermore, my analysis will highlight some of the important beliefs and superstitions conveyed by the Damascene barber, underlining also the significance of certain places of power which existed within and around the city in the eighteenth century (and of which some still exist). It is through this examination that the reader shall receive an overview of the Damascenes' popular religious practices as expressed by the eighteenth-century barber, as well as of Ibn Budayr's idea of significance which religion had within his society.

¹⁵¹ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 49B.

It is my hope that the reader shall realize that the corpus of religious practices and beliefs which existed among the people of the eighteenth-century Damascus seems to have been built out of many different sources, which include both the traditional understanding gained from reading normative religious texts, as well as a wide array of practices native to the folklore of the region (and the rest of the Empire), such as Sufi rituals, meditations which lead to altered states of mind, dream visions, and visitations of graveyards and other places of power. On the first glance, these two sources which informed the religious practice of the eighteenth-century Damascenes might seem opposed to each other. Discussing a similar issue in the European religious tradition, Wouter Hanegraaff, for instance, argues that the esoteric religious practices always existed in parallel with the mainstream religious beliefs, and that the corpus of established religious traditions is in no small part fashioned on the basis of its differences from what is described as esoteric (the quest for the mystical which falls out of the scope prescribed by the normative text).¹⁵² Through this chapter I will show, however, that informal religious practices represented in no small part the material from which religious tradition of the barber's eighteenth-century Damascenes was formed. In addition to listening to preachers in mosques and adhering to the advices of *muftis*, Ibn Budayr's Damascenes observed a wide variety of other practices which formed an essential part of their religious tradition. In the following text, the reader will encounter Sufis, saints dead and living, miracle-workers, dreams of divine inspiration, and mysterious omens which figured in the life of the Damascenes (as described in the barber's work) – it is the combination of practiced customs and written normative tradition which informed the popular religion of the barber's Damascenes.

¹⁵² For the discussion, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-esoteric Polemics and Academic Research," *Aries* 5, no. 2 (2005): 225-251.

Through this analysis, I shall show that religion played a significant role in self-representation and representation of others within society – personal piety represented an important quality for depicting an eighteenth-century inhabitant of Damascus. In the case of the barber Ibn Budayr, I will show that appropriation of religious tropes and notions had the potential to help in the process of self-fashioning and negotiating social mobility in the eighteenth-century Damascene society. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how the integration of religious tropes in a narrative could be used against a particularly unpopular individual, or to emphasize a particularly undesirable set of circumstances which could arise in the city. A narrative aimed against an unpopular individual could draw upon and emphasize particular habits of that individual, which might otherwise be ignored by Ibn Budayr's Damascenes. Finally, I will discuss the presence and role of religion in the context of the eighteenth-century Damascenes' social intercourse, intending to show that the rich Damascene religious tradition led a parallel existence with the life of the city – the inhabitants sometimes displayed a tendency to completely disregard its presence, but it nevertheless remained close at hand, so the people of the city could draw upon it, if they felt so moved. Ibn Budayr's Damascenes could, in case they felt it necessary, reach for their religious tradition to defend themselves from a threat, explain a particularly startling event, and praise or denigrate a certain individual. On the other hand, they could choose (and Ibn Budayr reports that they sometimes did) to disregard that part of their wide cultural corpus.

The piety of the eighteenth-century Damascenes had a significant role in the barber's Damascene society, for it sometimes helped determine the amount respect an individual acquired from Ibn Budayr's Damascenes, or at least contribute to the overall impression which an individual desired to leave on others. In what follows I will analyze some of the methods which the barber uses to portray a respected individual in the eighteenth-century city, as well as

some of the claims the people of the city made when they wished to build a respectful image of themselves. Displays of piety and proper observance of religious customs (where “proper” is defined by the Damascenes’ culture as conveyed by the barber) seem to have been an integral part of such acts of representation and its role will be discussed in the following text.

3.2. Public Displays of Piety: The Importance of Religious Tropes for Depicting the People of Damascus

James Grehan relates the story of one ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Aḥmad who had to defend himself in court. After divorcing his wife an argument ensued about the exact amount of dowry which he had to pay to his former spouse. While he claimed that the dowry had the value of fifty piasters, the woman and her brother maintained that it was one hundred. It would appear that neither of the parties was capable to present enough proof, so the judge decided to make ‘Abd al-Raḥmān swear on the Qur’ān. Upon doing so, the defendant would be free of any charges. However, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān refused this opportunity – three times in succession, and the case was closed with the defendant paying one hundred piasters to his former wife.¹⁵³

According to Grehan this case was not unique, and the author argues that the reason preventing people from taking an oath and resolving their problems lay in the significance and importance of verbal agreements and spoken words for the reputation of an individual.¹⁵⁴ The honor of an individual in eighteenth-century Damascus seems to have depended quite a lot on spoken agreements and vows. This can be demonstrated through the example of a scholar

¹⁵³ James Grehan, “The Mysterious Power of Words: Language, Law, and Culture in Ottoman Damascus (17th-18th Centuries),” *Journal of Social History* 37, No. 4 (Summer, 2004), 991.

¹⁵⁴ Grehan, “The Mysterious Power of Words,” 992. This seems to be common for the whole Mediterranean region, as well as many others. For the sake of comparison with wider studies of the Mediterranean, see for instance Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 10-14, or Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, “‘I Also Have a Moustache’: Anthropology and Mediterranean Unity,” in *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 485-523.

Aḥmad al-Manīnī. This scholar composed a poem celebrating the beauty of a young man. Upon hearing this poem, the young gentleman in question declared in public that he shall kiss the feet of the author. However, upon encountering Al-Manīnī in a market and trying to fulfill his vow, the scholar refused him, stating that he did not compose the poem with his feet, but with his mouth, leaving the young man in an unwelcoming position. The young gentleman apparently went through the motions of honoring his words before distancing himself from the poet, not wanting to display in public that he does not honor his words.¹⁵⁵ Ibn Budayr writes about a prostitute who swore to offer prayers for her beloved if he recovers from a disease. The latter's recovery spurred the forming of a merry procession that attracted, according to the barber, quite a lot of curious observers.¹⁵⁶ Adhering one's word insured the continuous honorable reputation and a good standing of an individual between his or her peers.

Religion also played a significant role in maintaining one's reputation. Adhering to the codes of conduct given by the normative texts was commendable, but the piety of a person could manifest itself in various other ways. Such public demonstrations of religious feelings seem to have been easier for the wealthy notables of the city, but the more modest population of the eighteenth-century Damascus had their own ways to represent themselves.

In *Rabī' al-Awwal* of 1156/May of 1743, for instance, Sulaymān Pasha al-ʿAẓm (r. 1733-1738 and 1741-1743), made a powerful claim and a commendable political move when he offered circumcision free of charge for everyone poor during the ceremony organized in honor of the circumcision of his own son. Bestowing gifts to the population during such a ceremony served to increase the popularity and the honorable reputation of the Damascene

¹⁵⁵ Muḥammad Khalīl al-Murādī, *Silk al-Durar fī A'yan al-Qarn al-Thānī 'Ashar* [A String of Pearls among the Notables of the Eighteenth Century], 4 vols. (Būlāq: Al-Maṭba'ah al-ʿĀmirah, 1883), I, 142.

¹⁵⁶ See section 4.4.

governor.¹⁵⁷ The pasha's act was not an exception – it was rather a practice displayed by many wealthy families of the region, but it helps to show how the wealthier population of the city could influence the improvement of their own public image. In April of the same year, the treasurer of the city, Fathī al-Falāqinsī, made an excellent display by gathering shaykhs of the city for a communal prayer in praise of God at the closure of the celebration honoring the marriage of his daughter.¹⁵⁸ During his reign, As'ad Pasha invested a large amount of material resources for the sake of restoring and redecorating religious structures, such as mosques, madrasas and shrines.¹⁵⁹ Besides making a powerful political claim and investing resources in architectural works so they could not be later confiscated by the Ottoman government, As'ad Pasha contributed significantly to the image of his own personal piety. Such acts, along with his successes and political moves in other fields, earned significant support from the population. When writing about this governor, Ibn Budayr often uses lengthy sentences filled with blessings and prayers for his well-being – much longer than for other governors who appear in his chronicle.¹⁶⁰

The common people of the eighteenth-century Damascus could not, however, commission great architectural works, or invest in religious sites. Their piety had to find a different channel to manifest itself. Ibn Budayr did everything he could to record and preserve these displays for his audience. His obituaries (*tarjama*) are, thus, filled with praise for particular Damascene shaykhs and Sufis, but also of others who lived in the city. In 1155/1742, Ibn Budayr records a *tarjama* of Shaykh Muṣṭafā al-Mugharbil, stating that “he was a pious

¹⁵⁷ See section 4.3. Also Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 14A-14B.

¹⁵⁸ See section 4.3.

¹⁵⁹ See, for instance, Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 54B, 57B, or 69A-69B, where the barber seems to be particularly excited by the renovations and redecorations commissioned within the Shrine of al-Sayyida Zaynab.

¹⁶⁰ See, for instance, Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 59A, 69A-69B.

man [who followed the teachings] of Shaykh Yūsuf al-Ṭabbākh al-Khalwatī.”¹⁶¹ This example tells of a specific sort of piety which Ibn Budayr recorded among the Damascenes. Popular Sufi orders had their followers and saints who spread their teachings around the city (and the whole region in some cases). The piety of some of them would manifest through saintly powers which Ibn Budayr recorded, sometimes with obvious pride, in his diary of Damascus.

Shaykh al-Ṭabbākh’s own *tarjama* can be located in Ibn Budayr’s work, and according to it, the shaykh himself was a well-known and respected person among both the small and the great. Ibn Budayr takes great pride in the fact that he personally cut the hair of this man, of whom al-Murādī says that he was celebrated as one of the eighteenth-century saints whose hands the people rushed to kiss, requesting his blessings.¹⁶² Another very representative example is the *tarjama* of Muḥammad Jabrī, whom the barber describes as a person capable of performing miracles and enter altered states of mind. Besides being depicted as a modest man who was equally respected by both the small and the great, Jabrī drank “the wine of the Greatest King,” acquiring many divine blessings through his meditations.¹⁶³ The piety of the Sufi was rewarded with a mystical charisma, bestowed upon him from the divine, and his ability to enter a spiritual trance earned him a high level of respect among the inhabitants.

Religion seems an integral element of Ibn Budayr’s *tarjamas*. The barber feels that it is necessary to underline that a deceased person was pious, and in the case of obituaries such as the one committed to Jabrī, the main part of the narrative is committed to the divine blessings which the deceased received throughout his lifetime. The examples stated above serve well to demonstrate the characteristics of piety which were apparently praised within the Damascene society – this form of piety is comprised of Sufi asceticism, capability of performing miracles

¹⁶¹ ... *wa kāna rajul^{an} ṣāliḥ^{an} min al-ustādh al-Shaykh Yūsuf al-Ṭabbākh al-Khalwatī* [sic]... Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 6B.

¹⁶² Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 27B. Also, al-Murādī, *SD*, IV, 245-246.

¹⁶³ ... *wa yashrabu khamr sharāb al-malik al-jabbār*... Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 56A.

and wonders, as well as passing divine blessings on to the rest of the population. The inseparability of these elements from the institutionalized religious tradition of Ibn Budayr's eighteenth-century city seems evident in these reports.

While certain individuals would succeed in becoming saints whom the people revered, the rest of the Damascenes could, in addition to receiving blessings through contacts with these saints,¹⁶⁴ gain the opportunity to display their own piety through following the advice mediated through the teachings of these respected figures. Miraculous expressions of piety were not, however, reserved only for the celebrated Sufis and saints. Other strata of the Damascene society could as well become known by their own religious feelings and their outright manifestation. Reports of their own lives and deaths in Ibn Budayr's work also display many elements which figure in the biographies of prominent saints. Religious practices comprised of both the institutionalized tradition and various forms of mysticism went along with charity and an overall display of good manners, honor, and generosity.

The obituary of Ibn Budayr's master barber, Ibn Ḥashīsh, seems a good illustration. The barber writes:

And a pious man, Hajji Aḥmad Ibn Ḥashīsh the barber, died on Tuesday, the twenty third of the blessed month *Ramaḍān*, 1155 [November 20th, 1742]. He was a pious, temperate man who saw many things and traveled to many lands... He did well in his profession. Never did he place his hand on the sick, ailing, or those suffering from the pain in the eyes without healing them... He coiffed the poor and students [for free]... I received blessings from him, may God have mercy upon his soul. Amen.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ See section 3.3.

¹⁶⁵ ...*wa tawaffā al-rajul al-ṣāliḥ al-Ḥājī Aḥmad al-Hallāq ibn Ḥashīsh fī nahār al-Thulātha thālith wa 'ishrīn yawm^{an} khilā min al-shahr al-Mubārak Ramaḍān fī al-sana al-madhkūra wa kāna rajul^{an} ṣāliḥ^{an} qunū^{an} wa qad ra'ā 'ajāyib^{an} kathīra wa dāra bil-bilād dawr kabira... wa kāna yaf'alu al-khayir fī ṣun'atihi wa mā yaḍa' yaddah 'alā rajul marīḍ au qasīm au mawjū' al-'uyūn alā ḥaṣala lahu al-shaffā... wa kāna dāym^{an} yahliqu lil-faqr aw ṭalabat al-'ilm wa lahu rughba fī dhalika...wa minhu ḥaṣala lanā al-futūḥ raḥmat Allah Ta'ālā amīn... Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 6A-6B.*

Ibn Budayr first establishes that his deceased mentor was a pious man. As the *tarjama* progresses, the audience becomes introduced to the impressive healing techniques of the old barber. In addition to cutting and trimming hair and beards, the barbers of the eighteenth-century Middle East also circumcised and provided healing services. Ibn Budayr, however, weaves his narrative as if he wishes to imply that the healing skills of his late mentor had a distinct miraculous quality. The barber's excitement might stem from the fact that Ibn Ḥashīsh provided services for several important Damascene saints, including Shaykh 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī,¹⁶⁶ which provided the deceased barber with a source of *baraka* – the divine beneficent force which flows through certain chosen objects and individuals. The *baraka* represents the energy of divine grace. Touching a saint meant receiving these divine blessings, and a man as pious as Ibn Ḥashīsh (as portrayed by Ibn Budayr) could then utilize this blessing to gain benefits to his own healing techniques.¹⁶⁷ Charity once more plays an important role for the status of an individual. Charitable people of the city no doubt remained in the memory of the population with much praise to their name.

Ibn Ḥashīsh's *tarjama* is one of the longest obituaries in *Daily Events*. Ibn Budayr took obvious pride in his relationship with his late mentor – the contact with him secured a source of *baraka* for the barber, in addition to all the saints whom Ibn Budayr himself coiffed.¹⁶⁸ To demonstrate the quality of his old mentor, Ibn Budayr had to put a heavy emphasis on the piety of the deceased. Death accounts similar to this one (if not exactly as long) can be found

¹⁶⁶ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 6A. For more information about this prominent figure, see Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus: 'Abd al-Ghanī Al-Nābulusī, 1641-1731* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), Yannis Toussulis, *Sufism and the Way of Blame: Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology* (Wheaton, III.: Quest Books/Theosophical Pub. House, 2011), 231, and Bruce Masters, "Al-Nabulusi, Abd al-Ghani," *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, ed., Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Alan Masters (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 415.

¹⁶⁷ For references to *baraka*, see Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 62-63, or Masood Ali Khan and S. Ram, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Sufism: Basic Principles of Sufism in Islam* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2003), 125, 147, 275.

¹⁶⁸ See, for instance, Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 6B.

throughout the *Daily Events*, and the individuals featuring in them were at least depicted as pious, respectful persons, even if they did not display special supernatural qualities.

Religious tropes might also be used against an individual. Those who were not respected by the population, as well as those who somehow fell from grace, sometimes became eligible targets for attacks on their religiosity. During 1162/1749, in one of the numerous instances when the high prices caused great trouble to the population, Ibn Budayr overheard that the *mufti* of Damascus, Ḥamid Efendī Ibn al-‘Imādī began to hoard wheat, similar to the notables and the wealthy population of the city. Al-Qāsimī adds that these notables had no fear of God.¹⁶⁹ Towards the end of the paragraph, the barber concludes that there is no one who could be blamed if the *mufti* of the faithful does such a thing.¹⁷⁰ Both the barber’s statement and the editor’s insertion display the tendency to make strong arguments against a person through referring to his or her piety. It might be presumed that this strategy left a strong impact on the people who judged the behavior and deeds of the person described in such a manner. Furthermore, such statements indicate that Ibn Budayr’s Damascenes seemed to expect a certain level of piety and honorable behavior from the authorities they depended on.

The chronicler Mīkhā’īl al-Dimashqī provides another interesting example while speaking about the Christian Patriarch Dāniyāl. This particular patriarch seems to have loved material property, and the chronicler portrays him as someone who was ready to hoard his riches by many forbidden and illegitimate deeds (*ḥarām*).¹⁷¹

After the execution of the Damascene treasurer Fathī al-Falāqinsī which As‘ad Pasha ordered in July 1746, Ibn Budayr wrote about the man’s vile nature which led to corruption and

¹⁶⁹ Al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 127.

¹⁷⁰ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 52A.

¹⁷¹ Mīkhā’īl al-Dimashqī, *Tārīkh Ḥawādith al-Shām wa Lubnān: Aw Tārīkh Mīkhā’īl al-Dimashqī [The History of Events in Damascus and Lebanon: Or the History of Mīkhā’īl al-Dimashqī] 1192-1257/1782-1741*, ed. Aḥmad Ghassān Sabānū, (Damascus: Dār Qutayba, 1403/1982), 20.

evil deeds. On the list of his misdeeds, the drinking of wine also appeared.¹⁷² The biographer al-Murādī also writes about al-Falāqinsī's bad habits, which included wine drinking and “violating many things private (*al-ḥurumāt*)”.¹⁷³ As a representative of the common people of the eighteenth-century Damascus, Ibn Budayr expresses dissatisfaction with the behavior and deeds of the late treasurer, denigrating his religiosity as an integral part of his narrative. This act, in turn, helps the barber to establish his own religiosity – his seemingly disapproving attitude with which he writes these pages indicates that the barber wished to depict himself as a very pious person. Indeed, he uses contrasting between himself and the executed treasurer well to achieve this purpose.

Even without such devices, Ibn Budayr would not be faced with any problems while demonstrating his own piety. His manuscript is full of supplications directed to God, often both in his, and all the Muslims' name. While relating the events of the months of Ramaḍān, for instance, the barber provides clear reports of his own fasting throughout the holy month. But he goes a step further, attempting to negotiate his own social status and the amount of respect he enjoys in the Damascene society precisely through religious tropes.

During his lifetime, the barber acquired for himself several direct sources of *baraka*. His relationship with Ibn Ḥashīsh most certainly had a significant part in this process, but it still represents an indirect source. Fortunately for him, the barber had a more direct method to communicate with the Damascene saints – his own profession. Being the barber of the famous Shaykh al-Ṭabbākh, Ibn Budayr takes pride in his opportunity to speak with the holy man, joke with him, trim his hair and beard, and “make use of his blessings.”¹⁷⁴ Similar narrative can be

¹⁷² Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 32A-32B. It is interesting how the editor Al-Qāsimī “hedges” away from this whole event, stating that his role is just to edit this chronicle and publish its text. See Al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 76.

¹⁷³ Al-Murādī, *SD*, III, 280.

¹⁷⁴ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 27B.

observed in the *tarjama* of Shaykh Jabrī – the barber is proud to proclaim that he barbered the deceased several times, “claiming some of the shaykh’s blessings and [mystical] secrets.”¹⁷⁵ Within both accounts, the barber directs praises to God several times for being granted such a glorious opportunity.

Ibn Budayr must have striven to achieve an elevation of his social status with such narratives. Spending time in company of these two, as well as many other Sufis and saints, enabled him to claim significant authority, for he had direct access to the saints’ divine blessings. The barber did not stop there, however. His initiation into the Qādiriyya Sufi order¹⁷⁶ is particularly telling. The eighteenth-century population of Damascus did not find this order particularly popular. However, the intellectuals who had tendencies towards the mystical usually joined this order, and the choice of the barber to follow the same steps helped him make a large claim and attempt to increase his own prestige by fashioning himself as a peer of such famous figures.¹⁷⁷

Upon losing his fourteen-year old son, al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mahdī, to the plague (1157/1744), Ibn Budayr wrote a lengthy *tarjama*. This obituary relates that the barber’s son helped Ibn Budayr at the barbershop. The barber praises the boy’s religious fervor and respect for the Qur’ān. Justifying the decision to give his son a title which was reserved for the descendants of the Prophet,¹⁷⁸ Ibn Budayr claims he got an “inspiration from God” to do so during a dream.¹⁷⁹ Direct contact with the divine was an achievement toward which many Sufis aspired, and the barber’s claims strove to enable him to enter their territory. Further praise to

¹⁷⁵ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 56B.

¹⁷⁶ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 15B.

¹⁷⁷ See section 2.2 of the present work.

¹⁷⁸ On “sayyidization,” see Hülya Canbakal, *Society and Politics in an Ottoman Town: ‘Ayntāb in the 17th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 77-83.

¹⁷⁹ ... *wa dhalika al-ilhāman* [sic] *min Allah Ta ‘ālā*... Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 24B-25A.

God is given in this instance, confirming the barber's belief during his attempt to, no doubt, comfort himself because of his loss.

These and similar segments of Ibn Budayr's chronicle testify to his acute awareness of religious ideals present within the eighteenth-century Damascus. Carefully woven narrative such as the one he used in his *tarjamas* could have served only as a literary device designed to improve the significance of the author, but the fact remains that Ibn Budayr must have had a finely-attuned sense of how religion could have been important for self-representation during his time. It has already been mentioned, however, that the information conveyed in the barber's chronicle cannot accurately determine whether such a sense was present among the majority of the eighteenth-century Damascenes – the barber might have simply been fortunate enough to mingle with the scholars and saints who made it possible for him to make such big claims about himself. The barber shows, however, that religion did indeed matter for the representation of an individual in the eighteenth-century Damascene society. Inclusion of religious tropes and notions, if only on the rhetoric level, had the potential to attract respect from the rest of Ibn Budayr's society. *Daily Events* reflect, furthermore, the current trends of Damascus in the middle of the eighteenth century (as the barber perceived them), illuminating a specific kind of piety which Ibn Budayr's Damascenes praised – the one punctuated by charitable deeds, acts of generosity and honor, and comprised of living saints, divine grace, and dreams of divine inspiration which dazzled the population.

On several occasions, Ibn Budayr's chronicle provides information about practices which were so common for the barber that he does not throw them a second glance. They are usually mentioned in context of other events which represent his current focus, but they give an insight into those elements which the barber considers a part of his everyday routine. Furthermore, if Ibn Budayr might serve as a representative example of an eighteenth-century

common inhabitant of Damascus, such cases indicate a part of the Damascene religious tradition of his time. The barber prayed and listened to preachers in mosques,¹⁸⁰ studied with *muftis*,¹⁸¹ and paid occasional visits to the shrines of powerful Damascene saints.¹⁸² With regards to many of such practices, he might not have been different than many inhabitants of the eighteenth-century city. The religious corpus of these people was, however, full of miracles, wondrous incidents, and ominous emergencies which require an analysis so as to further clarify the elements of the popular religious practices of the eighteenth-century Damascenes.

3.3. Of Graves and Witches: Powerful Sites and Superstitions of the Barber's Damascus

While Ibn Budayr conversed with and provided services to saints of eighteenth-century Damascus, other inhabitants had to find different ways to gain access to divine energy. Not all of them enjoyed the circumstances which allowed direct contact with these powerful figures, which might explain their apparent exhilaration with which they ran, according to al-Murādī, to kiss the hands of the famous al-Ṭabbākh. Where the contact with a living saint of the city was not an easily accessible option, however, contact with a dead one might have served as an alternative. The graveyards and mosques of Damascus hosted many powerful figures from the past, around whose tombs shrines were erected. The people paid visitations (*ziyāra*) to these shrines, questing for *baraka* and good fortune for themselves and their loved ones. This practice emerged well before the early modern period – both notables and the rest of the population went to the graves of saints in search of divine blessings throughout a good part of Islamic

¹⁸⁰ For example, Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 51A, 55A.

¹⁸¹ For instance, Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 76A.

¹⁸² Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 69A.

past.¹⁸³ Visitations of graves would include prayers, walking around the graves in a procession, presenting offerings, and in some cases the reading of poetry, or staging plays. In addition to walking around a grave, lying on its soil was sometimes practiced, as it was believed that the soil of a sacred grave possesses healing properties.¹⁸⁴

The cemetery of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr in Damascus allegedly held the graves where many Companions of the Prophet lay, like Aws Ibn Aws al-Thaqafī, Bilāl Ibn Rabāḥ (Bilāl al-Ḥabashī), and Abū al-Dardā. Outside of the walls of the city lay the graves of famous saints like Shaykh al-Sarūjī and Ubayy Ibn Ka‘b (although it would appear that the grave of this Companion is actually somewhere in Medina, while the one in Syria belonged to Abān Ibn Abān).¹⁸⁵ Of the more important shrines which figure frequently in Ibn Budayr’s chronicle are the shrines of Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī (Ruslān in Damascene dialect)¹⁸⁶ who was one of the most important saints in the region, sometimes called “the Protector of Damascus,” and Ibn ‘Arabī (whose tomb was located in the neighbourhood of Al-Ṣālihiyya).¹⁸⁷ The cemetery of Marj al-Daḥdāḥ got its name from Abū Daḥdāḥ the Companion. In addition, according to Shaykh al-Nābulī, the al-Aqṣāb Mosque held the graves of several martyrs executed by

¹⁸³ For ziyārāt in Medieval Damascus, see Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 118-120.

¹⁸⁴ Christopher Schurman Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints*, (Leiden and Boston, Brill, 1998), 62-79, Donald Swenson, *Society, Spirituality, and the Sacred: A Social Scientific Introduction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 178-179. See also John Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 26.

¹⁸⁵ For a more complete list of important shrines and graves in Syria, see Elizabeth Sirriyeh, “‘Ziyārāt’ of Syria in a ‘Rihla’ of ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulūsī (1050/1641 – 1143/1731),” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1979): 109-122.

¹⁸⁶ See Eric Geoffroy, "Arslān al-Dimashqī, Shaykh," *Encyclopaedia of Islam III*, ed. Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson. Brill Online, 2014. Url: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/arlan-al-dimashqi-shaykh-COM_23403 (Last accessed May 29th, 2014).

¹⁸⁷ For Ibn ‘Arabī see Claude Addas and Peter Kingsley, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabī* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), and Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 25-37, 113-120, 133-140.

Mu‘āwiyya for leading ‘Alid rebellions against his Umayyad dynasty.¹⁸⁸ The shrine of al-Sayyida Zaynab was one of the most popular visitation destinations for the inhabitants, and this practice of *ziyāra* appeared (and still does) to be very common for the population. Ibn Budayr mentions only as a passing episode that he went with his older son (another sayyid – al-Sayyid Muṣṭafā) to visit Zaynab’s shrine, reciting the scripture on his way and hoping to receive the saint’s *baraka*.¹⁸⁹

Prayers directed to the saints residing in their tombs within and around the walls of Damascus were to ensure that the divine grace reaches the population of the city, and some of the entombed shaykhs allegedly even specified the exact way to do so. Shaykh al-Nābulī thus left in his writings that the Shaykh Maḥmūd, shortly before his death and burial in al-Šāliḥiyya, specifically instructed al-Nābulī’s mother to bring young al-Nābulī to his grave and rub him with its soil in order to gain *baraka* for the child.¹⁹⁰ Graves had power in the eighteenth-century Damascus, and the people strove to harness that power, gaining *baraka* through the process of visitation.

Al-Nābulī recounts another interesting custom of his lifetime tied to the alleged grave of Ubayy Ibn Ka‘b. According to the Sufi saint, a Damascene judge received a vision of the grave in his dream and decided to build an edifice around it. Rumors had it that the bodies of deceased Jews and Christians would fall to the ground if carried in a funeral procession past this grave, which made the Christian and Jewish population pick a different funeral route – along the city walls.¹⁹¹ If there is any merit to this habit of the religious minorities of Damascus, this could be an aetiological tale fashioned to explain an old custom. The story does not seem to

¹⁸⁸ Sirriyeh, “Ziyārāt,” 111.

¹⁸⁹ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 69A-69B.

¹⁹⁰ Sirriyeh, “Ziyārāt,” 112.

¹⁹¹ Sirriya, “Ziyārāt,” 110.

be supported with any further references, however, so the whole matter seems somewhat blurred. What seems important is the obvious role which belief has in this tale.

In addition to the graves of saints, the population of Damascus also went out to the graveyards to visit their deceased loved ones and relatives, in addition to which the cemeteries became one of the preferred places for picnics, of which there will be word later in the text.¹⁹²

Aside from cemeteries, Damascus had other sites which were considered important for performing religious rituals. The Umayyad Mosque, the most dominant symbol of the Islamic Damascus, allegedly hosted the head of Saint John the Baptist, which granted it the beneficence of a saintly aura. Of particular note is the Al-Muṣalla Mosque, around which the neighbourhood of Bāb al-Muṣalla was built.¹⁹³ Ibn Budayr remarks that this mosque was well-known for its power to make prayers come true,¹⁹⁴ and many prayers of significance for the community were conducted there. The population often gathered within this particular mosque to conduct prayers for the rain, and in one instance, a prayer to God seeking salvation from a horrid wave of earthquakes.¹⁹⁵ Places of power seem to have been widely used in order to imbue the prayers with saintly blessings and mysterious powers.

The Christian population of Damascus had their own special places to which numerous miracles were also tied. A striking example is a legend told about the Ṣaydnaya Monastery which is located north of Damascus. The legend was retold by a Western visitor to the region, Henry Maundrell, who writes on May 2nd, 1697:

In the Chapel, made use of by the Convent for their dayly Services, they pretend to shew a great Miracle, done here some years since, of which take this Account, as I receiv'd it from them. They had once in the Church a little Picture of the Blessed Virgin very much resorted

¹⁹² See section 3.5.

¹⁹³ See Abdul Karim Rafeq, "The Social and Economic Structure of Bāb-al-Muṣallah (Al-Mīdān), Damascus, 1825-75," in *Arab Civilization: Challenges and Responses. Studies in Honor of Constantine K. Zurayk*, ed. George N. Atiyeh and Ibrahim M. Oweiss (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 272-311.

¹⁹⁴ ... *wa inna hadhā al-makān mashūr bi 'ijābat[sic] al-da'ā'inda ahl dimashq al-shām...* Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 92B.

¹⁹⁵ See section 4.4.

to by Supplicants, and famous for the many Cures, and Blessings granted in return to their Prayers. It happened that a certain Sacrilegious Rogue took an opportunity to steal away this Miraculous Picture: but he had not kept it long in his custody, when he found it Metamorphsed into a Real Body of Flesh. Being struck with wonder, and remorse at so prodigious an event, he carried back the prize to it's true owners, confessing, and imploring forgiveness for his crime.¹⁹⁶

It was not unheard of that religious icons which rightly belong to a certain religious confession enter the space of another. The priest Burayk reports how a Damascene *mufṭī* dreamt of Virgin Mary. The inspiration he got through this dream drove him to commission the reconstruction of Ṣaydnaya.¹⁹⁷

In addition to power of certain sites, icons, and saints, other common people might have also been attributed with miraculous qualities. An example of such wondrous traits is Shaykh al-Kaykī himself. Ibn Budayr describes this individual with an Arabic word *majdhūb*. The word is derived from the root (*j, dh, b*) which conveys the meaning of pulling, or attracting – a word often used to express theolepsy (*jadhba*, for instance) – of which an example is the trance of Sufis during which an individual is pulled (out of body) by the divinity and bestowed with magical properties. The word can, however, also be used in an everyday context for somebody foolish, or a person with psychological problems.¹⁹⁸ As it was already implied, however, Al-Kaykī was by no means an exception.

I have already showed how a barber like Ibn Ḥashīsh might display a kind of a miraculous quality himself through his honorable behavior and association with powerful figures of religious significance. Even Ibn Budayr himself seems to be able to receive mystical dreams and commune with the divine, rewarding his sons with a title of significant implications

¹⁹⁶ Maundrell, *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem*, 130.

¹⁹⁷ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 79. n.8.

¹⁹⁸ An interesting synonym in this context would be the word *majnūn*, which also implies a madman, or someone who is possessed by *jinn*, a malevolent spirit.

(the barber does not testify that he made an attempt to induce these dreams). A peculiar case of “witch hunt” in the year 1160/1747 provides further illustrations. Ibn Budayr records:

And during these days, news appeared in Damascus that there is a woman in the city who they [the people] call a sorceress, who tricks boys and men and makes poisons out of them. The people were scared and panic built up, so they started warning each other about this, afraid of death and peril. Uproar spread in Damascus and [people] were saying: “Get the witch!”¹⁹⁹

Upon further inquiry, the barber found out that the “sorceress” was apprehended by a group of the Damascenes and taken to the *qāḍī*, who had the woman’s pockets and house searched. There was no apparent evidence testifying to the accusations against the woman, and her neighbours vouched for her, stating that she was just a poor woman who lived alone in their street for a long time. In the end, the “witch” was able to go home in peace.²⁰⁰ This incident is unique in the barber’s chronicle – Ibn Budayr’s text offers no clues that similar episodes tended to occur during the period covered in the manuscript. It demonstrates, however, the power of rumor and superstition over certain individuals who lived in Ibn Budayr’s Damascus.

In addition, the people’s decision to take the accused woman to the *qāḍī* implicates the willingness to subdue to the religious authority of the city and its decisions about this matter. It seems reasonable that the people will turn to such a figure when it comes to religious issues, but this incident also implies how strong superstitions could be for Ibn Budayr’s Damascenes. On the level of practice, this incident shows how informal belief can be connected and inseparable from the formal understanding of religious authority.

¹⁹⁹ ... wa fī tilka ayām shā` khabr fī Dimashq bi-anna fī al-Shām imra yuqālu lahā al-sammāwiyya tamsaku al-awlād wa al-rijāl bi-l-iḥtiyāl li-ajli ikhrāj al-summ minhum fa-khāfat al-nās wa kaththura al-faza` wa šārat al-nās tuwṣā ba`ḍuhā ba`ḍ bi-dhalika khawf^m min al-mawt wa al-muhālik wa ba`ada min ayām waqa` ḍajja fī Dimashq al-Shām wa qālū imsakū al-sammāwiyya... Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 36B.

²⁰⁰ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 36B.

According to *Daily Events*, Ibn Budayr (along with other inhabitants of the eighteenth-century Damascus) had a strong attitude towards what is right and wrong, and was keen on receiving signs from the mysterious world around himself, sometimes as a warning, and sometimes as guidance. These signs occasionally appeared as the portents of blessings which are to be received, but sometimes arrived to admonish improper behavior and serve as a lesson for the Damascenes and their families. The significance of such symbols is clearly expressed within the barber's text, playing an integral role in the overall corpus of the Damascenes' understanding of religion during Ibn Budayr's lifetime.

3.4. The Mysterious Power of Omens: Signs and Portents in the Narrative of Ibn Budayr

And after sundown of *Rajab* 23st, 1157, [August 31st, 1744], the sky split and out of it emerged a great blight. This [tale] spread among the people, but I did not see it.²⁰¹

This is how the barber finishes his narrative about the confiscation of the property and material resources of the late Sulaymān Pasha al-‘Azīm. The officials who came from Istanbul to assess and redistribute the personal property of the former pasha acted, according to Ibn Budayr's opinion, very violently and disrespectfully. During the investigation, the wife and daughters of the deceased pasha were threatened, and their vaults were emptied. The barber recorded his own feelings about the matter, cursing those involved quite emotionally.²⁰² In addition, during the same year the barber reported about the rise of a devastating plague, the deaths of many popular shaykhs, a suicide of one leader of a Sufi order, and an increase of prostitution.²⁰³

²⁰¹ ...wa fī thalātha wa ‘ishrīn min Rajab ba‘ada al-‘ishā inshaqat al-samā wa nazala minhā āfa ‘aẓīma wa ishtaharat dhalika bayna al-nās wa ana lam arā dhalika... Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 26B.

²⁰² Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 25A-26B.

²⁰³ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 24A-24B.

It seems that omens had a powerful role in the barber's work. Ibn Budayr employs them often at an end of a section where he intends to show a particular dissatisfaction with the outcome of certain events. Some of these appearances which play a role in the text seem to have been of a purely physical nature – terrifying storms, comets, or eclipses, the appearances of which can, in the present century, be verified. Other appearances, however, (like the unrealistic rumor about a splitting sky) seem to be pure products of imagination. Regardless of the credibility of these appearances, it seems that their role in the barber's manuscript is to add further dramatization to certain events which he finds deeply disturbing, or particularly significant.

Five days after the beginning of the year 1155 (which corresponds to April 11th, 1742), the people of Damascus were spreading tales of a star with a tail of impressive length that shone for several days. It would appear on the eastern sky in the second half of each evening and it would vanish with the sunrise. It seems that the barber understood this emergence as a sign of a fortunate year under God, and his report continues with a poem written by his shaykh, Aḥmad al-Sābiq. The joyful verses of the poem celebrate the newly-ensuing year and God's blessings bestowed upon it.²⁰⁴ The treatment of this portent, both by the barber and the shaykh,²⁰⁵ might be indicative of the significance attributed to such symbols by the people of Damascus in the eighteenth century.

Not all signs sent from the nature around the barber, however, served to foretell a merry and enjoyable year, or God's blessings upon the population. Various symbols entered Ibn Budayr's narrative to heavily underline some of his feelings toward the events he describes. The example of this might be observed in the case of one particularly violent riot caused by the

²⁰⁴ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 3B.

²⁰⁵ This particular shaykh was the one responsible for the initiation of the barber into the Qādiriyya order. See Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 15B.

extremely high prices of food and other articles in the year 1158/1745. A large crowd of the Damascenes first went to the citadel to complain about the prices, but the current governor, As‘ad Pasha al-‘Az̧m sent them to the *qāḍī*. In front of the court the judge’s retinue engaged in combat with the crowd, killing and wounding many of them. However the judge was forced to escape and hide.²⁰⁶ Only after the beginning of the year 1159/1746 was he able to return. He reached the court escorted by a large number of men armed with rifles and other equipment, which represented, according to Ibn Budayr, a very unusual instance.²⁰⁷ In the following days, the barber writes that the people of Damascus witnessed the eclipse of the moon which the barber interpreted as “a lesson for those who pay heed.”²⁰⁸ According to the official website of NASA, the partial eclipse of the moon indeed occurred during that year – twice.²⁰⁹ Only once was it visible in the Middle East, and only a month after the dated event in the chronicle. The barber seems to be “fast-forwarding” events, using the eclipse to warn the notables of Damascus of the divine wrath which could ensue if they continue with their greed.

Ibn Budayr the barber provides a similar warning for the year 1161/1748. The governor of the city was absent on a military campaign against the Druzes of Mount Lebanon. While the people were dying in the skirmishes, the prices soared and unending swarms of locusts fed upon the fields and orchards around the city. The people offered prayers in order to be released from their suffering, and in those days the thunderstorms came. Heavy rains followed the thunder clouds for a number of days, and then they stopped – the thundering still continued, representing a “lesson for those who pay heed.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 27B-28B.

²⁰⁷ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 28B.

²⁰⁸ *‘ibra li-man i‘atabara*, Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 28B.

²⁰⁹ The data about lunar eclipses is available on the website of NASA. URL: <http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/LEcat5/LE1701-1800.html> (Last accessed: June 9th, 2014).

²¹⁰ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 37B.

The role of mysterious incidents to admonish and warn the people of their behavior in society are numerous in *Daily Events*. Ibn Budayr describes another which the inhabitants related to him in the *tarjama* of one Mustafā Agha Ibn al-Qabbānī, who died of illness in 1159/1746. It would appear that this man had a tendency to hoard supplies within the premises of his estates, even in times when the prices were disastrous for the majority of the Damascene population. In addition, it seems that he wished to sell his goods to the population by unsatisfying prices. Ibn Budayr reports:

... and they [the people] informed me about him. When they dug a grave for him and wished to place him [in it], they saw a giant snake inside, so they filled the grave [with earth] and dug another one, where they also saw [a snake] and thus they dug several graves... This [appearance of the snake] followed his vileness...²¹¹

If the barber's narrative was truthful in its claim that this tale was related by other Damascenes, it displays a tendency among other inhabitants of Damascus to employ tales of ominous incidents so as to warn their co-inhabitants about their behavior. Such a tendency is well reflected in *Daily Events*.

If the barber's thoughts can reflect the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes of the eighteenth-century inhabitants of Damascus, it would seem obvious that these people held a significant amount of respect for phenomena such as comets, eclipses, frightening weather conditions, and other miraculous manifestations. Furthermore, the barber seems to be using these mysterious signs to build on the significance of his reports. His critique of the government officials and his powerful descriptions of the hard living conditions in the city may have been amplified by these ominous emergences so that they would appeal more to his audience, which could also lead to the presumption that the importance of such symbols was indeed high among the people of the

²¹¹ ... wa qadd balaghanī 'anhu annahu lamā ḥafarū lahu al-qabr wa arādū an yatralūh wajadū fihi thu'abān 'aẓīm fa-ḍammū al-qabr wa ḥafarū ghayrahu fa-wajadū kadhalika ḥattā ḥafarū 'idat qubūr... qad sabbaqa dhalika al-amr fī al-salaf li-ba'aḍ al-zulmihi [sic]... Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 28B.

city. On the other hand, if the barber was conforming to the widely accepted trend, the omens in his narrative can be interpreted as elements which further help him to ascertain his personal piety in the form which was expected among his peers.

Disturbing events recorded in Ibn Budayr's text were often followed or punctuated by one, or an entire succession of strange incidents. The barber's narrative about, for instance, the outbreak of a large civil war after the deposition of As'ad Pasha al-'Aẓm (1171/1758) included an eclipse of the moon, followed by an eclipse of the sun, as well as an earthquake which lasted for several days. NASA records do not show any data about the eclipse of the sun. In this instance, the eclipse of the moon which was visible in the Middle East happened some months before the incident itself – the barber is again tying this symbol as a narrative element, keen on augmenting his account with the use of mystical signs.²¹² Prior to a particularly devastating wave of earthquakes in Syria during 1171/1758, the barber described a night in which the people heard a terrifying, booming roar. Some of them noticed that the roofs of houses disappeared to allow the stars to be clearly visible from within homes. The rooftops returned to their places, and several days after this incident a star was noticed right after the evening prayer. It was traversing the sky, from west to east, illuminating the mountains. Then it fell from the heavens, creating a sound “stronger than any cannon.”²¹³

Whether as literary devices or real natural manifestations, omens had significance and the barber had to include them in his narrative. Their inclusion in the text seems to have served the purpose of increasing the impact of the barber's descriptions. In some instances, however, like the sighting of the comet which appeared in 1155/1742 or the splitting of the sky in 1157/1744, the barber indicates that he only heard the tale and written it down. This fact may

²¹² Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 85A-85B. For the list of the eclipses of the sun on the NASA website, refer to the URL: <http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEcat5/SEhybrid5.html> (Last accessed, June 9th, 2014).

²¹³ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 92A.

imply that the barber's case was not an exception when it came to perceiving, interpreting, and spreading the warnings provided by the nature around the city. What he *did* see, however, he incorporated however he could in his narrative. It would seem that these phenomena represented a common element within the corpus of religious beliefs and folklore of the barber's eighteenth-century Damascenes.

At a first glance, the nature of the Damascenes' beliefs in the eighteenth century seems binding, especially with regards to the level of piety required for achieving and maintaining a respectful image in society. These expectations were, indeed, respected at times. However, the society of the eighteenth-century Damascus had much more to offer than what was written in the texts of occasional *tarjamas*, and the daily life of the city naturally went on in spite of ominous thunderstorms, and blights descending from the sky. The following text will examine the extent to which normative religious prescriptions, as well as elements of folklore applied to the context of social intercourse within the eighteenth-century Damascus. The analysis of some favorite leisure habits of the Damascenes will serve well to cast some light on the place which religion occupied within this old provincial capital. Places where the people of Damascus gathered and interacted will once more, thus, enter under the spotlight.

3.5. The Damascenes' Passion and its Daughters: The Crossing of Boundaries in Social Intercourse

And on Thursday [April 5th, 1750] I went out with some of my beloved [friends] for a picnic to al-Sharaf which overlooks the al-Marja and it was the time when the flowers blossom in the gardens. We sat so we can see al-Marja and al-Takiyya Al-Sulaymāniyya and we saw women in such large numbers that there were perhaps more [of them] than the men. [They were] sitting on the riverbank and around al-Marja and al-Takiyya throughout the day with food, drinks, tobacco, and coffee, like the men do. I have not seen such a thing, nor was there anyone who saw it before until now.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ ... wa fī yawm al-khamīs thāmin wa 'ishrin Rabī' al-Thānī kharajnā ilā al-sīrān nāḥiya al-Sharaf al-muṭṭal 'alā al-Marja ma'a ba'aḍ aḥbābinā wa kāna al-waqt fī awwal khurūj al-zuhr fī al-basātīn wa jalasnā muṭṭalīn 'alā al-Marja wa al-Takiyya al-Sulaymāniyya wajadnā al-nisā wa rubamā al-kathīra aghlabīn al-rijāl jālisīn 'alā shafīr

This is how the barber Ibn Budayr describes his surprise by a scene he witnessed during his leisure time spent on picnics around Damascus. His description of this particular picnic illuminates well what he understood as changes in social liberties which took place during the eighteenth century, but it also serves as another instance in which the barber could build on his respectable, pious image.

It does not come as a surprise that a Christian priest-chronicler, Mīkhā'il "the Damascene" Burayk, writes in admonishing tones about what he deems an exaggerated freedom displayed by Christian women during picnics around the city. Dana Sajdi relates paragraphs written by him, in which the Damascene priest claims that the Christian women of Damascus were tricked by Satan and full of false pride. Faced with the opportunity provided by the governor of Damascus, Burayk claims, they felt that a bit too much of freedom is in order to be displayed.²¹⁵ The women, thus, began to act as men did, displaying themselves in improper clothing and smoking even in the places where people could see them. According to what Sajdi reads from the chronicle of Mīkhā'il the Damascene, the women would even use an excuse of visiting the graveyards so that they could gather, drink alcohol and enjoy coffee in places where men could mix with them.²¹⁶

The social visibility of women obviously presented a shock for Ibn Budayr, who had the chance to observe the changes within his society as they gradually took place during his lifetime. But the paragraphs shown above also imply the popularity of enjoying coffee and tobacco - practices mostly frowned upon during the previous centuries of the Middle Eastern

al-nahr wa hum [sic] ḥawla al-Marja wa al-Takiyya ṭūl al-nihār bil-ma'akul wa al-mashrab wa al-tutun wa al-qahwā kamā tafa 'al al-rijāl wa hadhā shay' mā ra'aynā wa lā alladhīna hum min qablinā ilā fī hadhā al-zamān...
Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 57B.

²¹⁵ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 80.

²¹⁶ For an exact citation, see Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 30.

history. In addition, the popularity of graveyards as destinations for visitation made them enter the social world of the Damascenes as one of the favorite spots for spending leisure time.

This unsurprising lack of correspondence between the social life and the normative setting provided by texts on law and religion was not obvious only in the social behavior of eighteenth-century women. It seems that the men of all religious confessions freely intermingled, especially during the rule of As‘ad Pasha. This, undoubtedly, still caused some shock among the people – the barber, for instance, locates another niche for improving his own image when he mentions the three Jewish musicians who started touring the coffeehouses of Damascus, adding in apparent surprise that “they were brought to sit on high chairs, while the *ashrāf* and the Muslim people did not have any.”²¹⁷ The trends and passions of the Damascenes surpassed the written rules of the ‘*ulamā*’, it seems, and the discrepancies between these rules and their application in practice seems to be in no small measure tied to the behavior of the celebrated Sufis of the city.

The Islamic proscriptions of alcohol provide a very interesting example in this context. Although Muslims were banned for drinking it, its production was continuous, in some part due to the Christians and Jews who had the right to drink it, even if in the privacy of their homes²¹⁸ - the consumption of alcohol in public seems to have become more common after the alleviation of the rules imposed on Christians in the middle of the eighteenth century.²¹⁹ Certain Sufi saints, however, consumed alcohol regularly, and it might be presumed that the figures of such high popularity must have inspired some of the other Damascenes to do the same. Some Sufis used wine regularly as a preparation for certain ceremonies, and this practice attracted

²¹⁷ ... *wa aṣ‘adūhum ‘alā al-karāsī al-‘āliyāt wa ajlasū dūnahum al-ashrāf wa ahl al-islām...* Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 38A.

²¹⁸ Very informative is the entry in Al-Qāsimī, *QS*, 127.

²¹⁹ Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 79.

whispered rumors about homosexuality.²²⁰ It does not seem, however, that the consumption of alcohol managed to change the social status of the saints who engaged in such acts. The Shaykh Jabrī, of whom there was mention previously, was sometimes seen sober and sometimes drunk, but this did not influence the exhilaration with which the barber describes him, nor did it make the barber stop and throw a second glance to the topic.²²¹

Besides those Sufis who used alcohol as a means of intoxication necessary for their ritual practices, rumors accused some of the notables of Damascus for participation in this forbidden pleasure. The case of late Fathī the treasurer had already been mentioned, but he was not the only one. In an almost comic fashion, Ibn Budayr recounts an episode about the Damascene *qāḍī* who was spotted drunk in front of his own court in the midst of Ramaḍān, and rumors of adultery seemed to have followed this incident.²²² The janissaries of Damascus (mostly *yerliyya*) tended to make impressive display of themselves, parading through the streets drunk and often in the company of prostitutes.²²³ Maundrell describes an instance in which he met one intoxicated janissary, obviously terrified by this encounter.²²⁴

Coffee and tobacco represented similar objects of discussion within the Middle East. Coffee first arrived in Damascus from Yemen in the fifteenth century (and the coffeehouses attained popularity in the Ottoman Empire during the 16th and the 17th centuries). It would seem that this drink at first caused suspicions among the population and authorities, to be later popularized by Sufis. Tobacco appeared in the Middle East later – the import from the New World started during the seventeenth century.²²⁵ Sufis used coffee and tobacco to enhance their

²²⁰ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 134.

²²¹ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 56A.

²²² Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 53B.

²²³ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 37A-37B.

²²⁴ Maundrell, *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem*, 131.

²²⁵ See Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 124-155. Also Karababa and Ger, "Early Modern Ottoman Coffeehouse Culture," 2-4, 7. Also see Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near*

spiritual states. Coffee helped them to stay awake during rituals which lasted throughout the night.²²⁶ The ‘*ulamā*’ had scorn for coffee-drinking and smoking, and their views are in some measure echoed by the biographer and *mufti* Al-Murādī, who applauds to acts of converting local coffeehouses into religious objects and admonishes those who sat and smoked openly in these establishments.²²⁷

The common people, however, seemed to have held different opinions of these pastime pleasures. Ibn Budayr complains that coffee and tobacco became so popular that an increasing number of men, women, and even young girls began to partake of them, proceeding to report that the governor As‘ad Pasha proclaimed an official ban on these items. The ban did not last long, however.²²⁸

The people of the city had the opportunity to spend their time in numerous coffeehouses around the city, in which they would be entertained by storytellers and musicians while enjoying their cups of coffee and their hookahs - sometimes until late hours of the night.²²⁹ They would at times become so fascinated with the traveling entertainers, such as musicians, or street performers to whom they gave money that some Damascenes attempted to imitate their acts.²³⁰ In some cases, the popularity of the coffeehouses surpassed the popularity of the mosques during Friday prayers, and even the most restrictive governors do not seem to have been able to prevent them from operating.²³¹ The official attitude of religious authorities,

East (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), and James Grehan, “Smoking and ‘Early Modern’ Sociability: The Great Tobacco Debate in the Ottoman Middle East (Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries),” *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (December, 2006): 1352-1377.

²²⁶ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 135.

²²⁷ For the sake of comparison, see al-Murādī, *SD*, II, 293, and al-Murādī, *SD*, I, 41-42.

²²⁸ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 53A.

²²⁹ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 142-146.

²³⁰ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 59A.

²³¹ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 145.

however, remained clear – spending leisure time in coffeehouses was connected to all manners of immoral entertainment including bad behavior, vulgarity, and illicit sex.

In 1157/1744, Shaykh Ḥassan Ibn Yūsuf al-Rifāʿī committed suicide by jumping off a minaret in the district of al-Qubaybāt. Ibn Budayr writes:

I asked what the reason for this was and I was told that the brother of [Shaykh Ḥassan's] wife brought a prostitute to his house. He found out about it... and [his brother in law] scolded him and wanted to beat him, he was a fool. [The shaykh] went to the notables of his neighbourhood and informed them about this matter, but they criticized him and talked him off, cause all of them are down to their ears [deeply engaged in similar matters]. [The shaykh] then went to the Al-Daqqāq Mosque, where he finished his morning prayer with the imam. He then conducted the death prayer in his own name and climbed up the minaret, where he shouted: “Oh, Community of Islam, it is either death or pimping here under this government today,” and he threw himself off [the minaret], may the Exalted God grant him mercy and forgiveness.²³²

In many instances, the chronicle of the barber shows Ibn Budayr's great concern with prostitution in eighteenth-century Damascus. Even though the written law prescribed severe penalties for cases of illicit sex, it seems that the application of these regulations was not much different in Damascus than in Aleppo of the same period.²³³ In most cases of prostitution, the women accused would either be approached and reprimanded by their neighbours, or expelled from the quarter they were living in.²³⁴

Ibn Budayr records just one occasion in which the Damascene government issued radical orders against the prostitutes. This occurred in 1157/1744 when the Damascene judge encountered, while taking a walk, an apparently very famous prostitute who went by the name of Salamūn. The “daughter of passion” was intoxicated – she was swaying in the middle of the

²³² ... *fa-sa'alnā 'an dhalika al-sabbab fa-qīla lanā anna akhū zawjatihi jāba imra' ilā baytihi wa kānat min al-dāyirāt fa-nahāhu 'an dhalika... fa-naharahu wa arāda ḍarabuhu wa kāna min al-jihāl fa-dhahaba ilā akābir al-ḥāra wa akhbarahum bi-dhalika al-sha'an fa-yu'ayyibūhu wa shāghalūhu bil-kilām li-annahum ghāṭisīn jam^{an} ilā fawq al-adhān fa-dhahaba ilā Jāmi' al-Daqqāq wa ṣallā al-ṣubḥ ma'a al-imām wa ṣalla 'alā nafsīhi ṣallāt al-mawt wa ṣa'ada al-mināra wa nādā yā Ummat al-Islām al-mawt hūn wa lā al-ta'arīṣ ma'a dawla hadhā [sic] al-ayām...* Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 21B.

²³³ See Elyse Semerdjian, “Off the Straight Path”: *Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 94-137.

²³⁴ Semerdjian, “Off the Straight Path,” 84. See also Abdel Karim Rafeq, “Public Morality in the 18th Century ottoman Damascus,” *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 55-56 (1990): 182.

street, and when the judge shouted reproachful comments to her, she attacked him with a knife. The judge's retinue stopped her and took her away to face trial. The Damascene *mufī* issued a *fatwā* ordering her execution, after which the judge and the *mutasallim* ensured that the sentence was done. These Damascene officials proclaimed after this incident that prostitutes should be killed on sight.²³⁵

This decree, however, did not last for a long time, and the barber often lamented the number of the prostitutes which walked the city during daylight and night-time.²³⁶ The *Daily Events* make it more than obvious that prostitutes could find plenty of work in the eighteenth-century Damascus. Salamūn was apparently able to entrance boys and men with her charm to such an extent that they presented her with many expensive gifts, which seems to have been outrageous for the officials who discussed her case prior to her execution.²³⁷ She was by no means an exception, as Ibn Budayr shows in his other reports. Prostitutes tended to attract the soldiers within the city walls. In 1162/1749, As'ad Pasha's *dīwān*, according to Ibn Budayr, complained that these women are displaying themselves everywhere – they strolled down the markets and alleys, and slept over in coffeehouses, bakeries, and other stores. The *diwān* asked the pasha to solve this problem either by sending them away from the city, or designing a specific place for them where they would not be so visible. As'ad Pasha, however, refused to intervene in this matter, adding that he does not wish them to appeal to God against him.²³⁸ Rafeq explains this lack of action through a popular belief that “since the prostitutes bear the guilt of mankind, God out of sympathy to them accepts their appeals,”²³⁹ not giving any reference to the origin of this interpretation. In 1750, however, the pasha proclaimed that the

²³⁵ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 24B.

²³⁶ The barber often records at the beginning of a new year how corruption grew in the city, along with the high prices and the increase in prostitution. See, for instance, Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 24A.

²³⁷ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 24A.

²³⁸ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 52A.

²³⁹ Rafeq, “Public Morality,” 189.

prostitutes who worked in the city have to pay a monthly tax to the government.²⁴⁰ This governmental decree implies that the popular belief explained by Rafeq might not have been as important as the chance to collect profits from a seemingly reliable source.²⁴¹

Much due to the somewhat inert mechanisms for issuing and applying religion-related policies (along with the tendencies toward private enrichment, of course), the city went on with its life in an orderly fashion. But Damascus was not only about spending lovely and exciting time within the aesthetic locations spread within its territory. As in any other city of the word, criminal acts and violence were not unheard of. The sanctity of graves could be disregarded if the Companions' tombs held items worthy of stealing,²⁴² clashes between the militant groups of the city could grow so intensive that communal prayers had to be cancelled,²⁴³ and homeless people could get their throats slit even in the very interior of the Umayyad Mosque for the sake of petty thievery.²⁴⁴

Most of the Damascene people, of course, went about their business with a somewhat relaxed understanding of prescribed norms and regulations. They enriched their free time with pleasures like coffee and tobacco, enjoying in socializing and gossiping in establishments such as the coffeehouse. Even Ibn Budayr, who strives to maintain a well-mannered pious attitude, criticizing, thus, the coffeehouses in the manner of al-Murādī and other intellectual elites, gives himself away with his decisions that the news of newly-opened coffeehouses is significant enough to enter his chronicle, or when providing a location of a coffeehouse in order to situate

²⁴⁰ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 55A.

²⁴¹ This taxing of prostitutes is not an unprecedented measure. See Semerdjian, "*Off the Straight Path*", 100-101.

²⁴² Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 71B.

²⁴³ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 9A-10A.

²⁴⁴ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 22A.

an event geographically.²⁴⁵ Along with their daily life, however, a rich religious tradition existed, to which they would be capable of turning if they felt it necessary.

3.6. Conclusion: Ibn Budayr Between Religion and Daily Life

In this chapter I have demonstrated the significance of religion for self-fashioning and depiction of the eighteenth-century Damascenes. Ibn Budayr displays this significance in his numerous *tarjamas* within which the piety of a person is incorporated as an integral element of the overall narrative describing an “ideal” man of his city. In a similar fashion, the barber strives to display himself in the most favorable light, often employing religious tropes to achieve this goal.

Through the barber’s text, the importance and power of certain sacred places and individuals becomes obvious. Representing the population of the eighteenth-century Damascus and conducting same practices and rituals as many of his fellow co-inhabitants, the barber opens a window to the complex and rich set of beliefs and convictions which were present within the walls of this Ottoman provincial capital. To appeal to his audience, the barber integrates omens and miracles into his narrative, creating a twofold effect. The material he wrote certainly became more interesting to his audience, while its appeal increased through reiteration of the attitudes and beliefs shared, no doubt, by many of the barber’s contemporaries who lived and worked in the city. In addition, the barber manages to demonstrate to a researcher how powerful the symbols, miraculous incidents, and omens could have been for the wider population of eighteenth-century Damascus.

The inhabitants, of course, did not seem to have lived their lives only in pious fervor and religious ecstasy. Figures of religious importance had the means to change the popular trends

²⁴⁵ See Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 80B and 77B respectively.

within the city and shift the boundaries of behavior in society, but they also lived and earned for a living in a similar fashion as the rest of the population. Poverty, immorality, and corruption reigned in some years covered by the barber, while others were marked with blessings, welfare, peace and prosperity. Battles raged in its streets, and public celebrations spread joy among the populace. Religion, however, existed in parallel with the daily life of the Damascenes, close enough to be sought after when it was needed.

The religious tradition described in this chapter differs in many ways from what is described in traditional Islamic textbooks. Esoteric practices and beliefs which originated on the margins of the Islamic world became gradually incorporated into the mainstream of culture and tradition of the city's inhabitants – in the eighteenth century, such practices seem to have been common and, indeed, widely supported. Ibn Budayr's Damascus drew on the power of saints, both living and dead, and other people with divine charisma obtained through miraculous ways. It shielded itself through prayers upon powerful sites, and sent warnings to its inhabitants through means ranging from natural phenomena to mysterious manifestations. Religious syncretism was not unseen, not even among different religious confessions, as the narrative about renovating the Saydnaya monastery implies. Religious corpus of Ibn Budayr's Damascenes spreads out to envelop traditional and esoteric, piety and superstition – all of these streams formed an inseparable tradition, deeply ingrained in the culture of the city's inhabitants. They must be observed as many integral parts of a whole, and only together should they be examined.

The power of religious rituals and beliefs was sometimes, indeed, formidable for the population of the barber's Damascus. In certain times, these rituals would unite a large number of the city's inhabitants, regardless of their role in society and their social standing. As the next chapter will demonstrate, in certain times of need (and sometimes even as a first reaction to an

outside stimulus), the Damascenes would reach within their religious tradition, demonstrating how religion can unify the population of the city and contribute to the process of establishing a kind of a communal identity – the identity shared by the Damascenes.

Chapter 4

The Wings of Samarmar: Communal Processions and Rituals in the Eighteenth-Century Damascus

And in the month of May of this year [1747], the locusts arrived to Damascus, and spent years around it...When they reached Damascus, they fell upon its gardens and plants and ate so much. The pasha sent two distinguished men [the Sufis] to a journey and gave them money to bring him the water of Samarmar...²⁴⁶

Local legends spin the tale of a mysterious black bird, Samarmar, attracted by the water which flows from a special spring, located between Shiraz and Isfahan. According to tradition, it was important that the Sufi experts see to the necessary preparations and bring the water to the city. Once they take the water from the spring, they must not, under any circumstances, look back, place the water on the ground, or pass under any kind of roof with the water in their hands. With all these prescriptions properly observed, Samarmar would appear, followed by a flock of black birds so large as to resemble an enormous, black cloud. Samarmar would descend upon the locusts and feast on them until there was not an insect left.²⁴⁷

It was the middle of August when the two experts returned with the powerful water. Sufi shaykhs of the city went out to greet them, followed by a large number of dervishes. They were carrying flags and flowers. The beating of their drums sounded the arrival of Samarmar's water, and a large procession formed. The Sufis entered the city with their prize, and around them, countless onlookers followed, first to the minarets of al-Şāliḥīyya, where the containers filled with water were left high above the ground. The crowd then approached the Umayyad Mosque and hung the containers filled with the essence of the magical Persian spring on its minarets, proceeding then to distribute the water, hanging their pails on high vantage points in the city, its

²⁴⁶ *Wa fī Jumādā al-Awwal waṣala al-jirād ilā Dimashq, wa kāna ḥawlahā lahu sinīn... wa lamā waṣala Dimashq nazala 'alā basātīnihā wa al-nabāt wa akala shay' lathīr mih al-ḥaḍr wa arsala al-bāsha ithnayn min al-aḡāḍil wa ammarahum bil-safar a 'tāhum māl li-ya'atūn lahu bimā' al-Samarmar...* Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 31B.

²⁴⁷ The legend of Samarmar is explained both by the editor of Ibn Budayr's chronicle, Aḥmad Ghassān Sabānū, in *Al-Budayrī*, *HDY*, 73, n. 1, and by the biographer Al-Murādī. See al-Murādī, *SD*, III, 214.

other minarets, towers, and walls. Some water was also left within the city's citadel, so that it could be sent to the lands of Ḥawrān.²⁴⁸ The city could be at peace and wait, for it was just a matter of time before the Samarmar would swoop down and end, once and for all, the trouble with the locusts.

4.1. The Power of a Ritual over Crowds: Religion as a Rallying Banner

In this chapter, I will analyze the barber's descriptions of rituals and prayers conducted by large parts of the Damascene community during the eighteenth century. I shall explore what communal religious practices, rituals, and beliefs meant for the barber's Damascenes during the eighteenth century, and what could have been obtained through their enactment. Accent will be placed on public processions, celebrations, and manifestations during which the Damascenes assumed a kind of a common identity. Some of the manifestations I will analyze are of purely local character, while others share common properties and elements with those observed in other regions of the Ottoman Empire. I shall show, however, that most of the Damascenes' communal religious practices developed "a taste of the local" over time, creating an original religious and cultural tradition, the examination of which will allow a deeper understanding of the people who resided in this eighteenth-century provincial capital.

In the following text, the reader shall encounter some of the great catastrophes which struck Damascus and Syria during the eighteenth century, celebrations in honor of certain events or people, as well as processions organized by certain groups within the city. I will examine some elements of the eighteenth-century Damascene religious practices which figure in these ceremonies. No matter the occasion, the events described in what follows attracted the participation of large crowds of the Damascenes, who in some instances retold their tales about

²⁴⁸ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 33A.

these occasions much after the event itself would be over (while the barber would be writing them down). I will take interest in these crowds when the reason for their assembly was the enactment of a religious ritual aimed at, for instance, alleviating a certain disastrous set of circumstances. Natural catastrophes, however, were not the only phenomenon which united the barber's Damascenes under a particular set of religious practices. Public processions often represented an intentional breach of the customs proscribed by normative trends, but as I will show, even such acts contained a significant level of religious behavior. Celebrations of the most important religious holidays played a significant role in the lives of the Damascenes, and their elements deserve a detailed analysis.

The goal of this chapter is, thus, to use the barber's work in order to illuminate the significant capacity of religious tradition expressed through public rituals to serve as symbols of unity for various groups and individuals of the city. Ibn Budayr's Damascenes united through such rituals usually strove to achieve a specific effect, but I will further show that the significance of the traditional and religious corpus on which the united inhabitants drew lies in the fact that it helped ascertain the identity of a Damascene, defining who he is, and where he belongs.

4.2. A Unique Taste of the Local: The Origins of Samarmar

The legend of Samarmar seems to have been deeply ingrained in the minds of eighteenth-century Damascenes. So deep, in fact, that the summoning of the mystical bird represented the initial response of even the formidable As'ad Pasha al-'Azm. The Damascene governor even planned ahead and ordered that some of the water be stored in the citadel to be later sent to other regions troubled similar issues. This initial reaction to catastrophe, displayed even on the highest levels of the city's authority, clearly demonstrates the extent to which certain beliefs

could grasp the people of Damascus. It is of worth to mention that Ibn Budayr does not feel it necessary to explain the legend of Samarmar in *Daily Events*. Instead, he simply mentions the name, as if he expects the reader to know about the topic. This fact also implies the deep roots of this particular legend in the consciousness of the barber's Damascenes.

It appears that Samarmar is an exclusive “property” of the Syrians (in particular those residing in large cities, such as Damascus and Aleppo) – there seem to be no reports or sources witnessing the same strategy for dealing with locust infestations in other regions of the Ottoman Empire.²⁴⁹ The earliest report of the ritual emerges in 1196, when the population of Aleppo sent three Sufis of Persian origin to get the water. As late as the sixteenth century, the Ottoman government of Aleppo still insisted that the Sufis sent forth to bring Samarmar's water have to be of Persian origin.²⁵⁰ The involvement of Persians as one of the main elements of the ritual might imply that the legend could have migrated to Syria from Persian territories, or that it was inspired by the people of Persian origin residing, or passing through the Syrian territories. In addition, these facts demonstrate the flexibility of the Ottoman attitude towards local religious practices in various territories under their rule. For the Ottoman state, it would have been virtually impossible to impose a certain set of allowed religious practices within every single territory which was joined to the Empire. Samarmar was initially allowed to soar through the skies above Damascus since it made no political implications (even with the Sufis of Persian origin involved) which opposed the Ottoman regime.

On another occasion when Samarmar was summoned in Aleppo, to the middle of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman authorities seemed to tolerate the Sufi processions within the city, insisting only that the inhabitants proceed with collecting and burying daily quotas of

²⁴⁹ James Grehan, “The Legend of the Samarmar: Parades and Communal Identity in Syrian Towns c.1500-1800,” *Past & Present* 204 (2009), 120.

²⁵⁰ Grehan, “The Legend of the Samarmar,” 121.

insects. When the inhabitants, however, attempted to hang containers with Samarmar's water on the high towers of the citadel, the military commander turned them down, stating that the power to allow such an act belongs only to the sultan.²⁵¹ As it was shown, however, some two centuries later, Samarmar's water reached even the city's citadel, under the orders of the governor himself. This can, on one hand, be explained by the origin of the governor, a distinguished member of the al-ʿAzms. Originally a Turkoman family, in the eighteenth century its members were described as "sons of Arabs," hinting at their gradual localization in the region, or at least to the fact that the local population accepted them as locals.²⁵² However, the ritual summoning of Samarmar in 1747 also shows the powerful, grasping nature of the communal belief itself, which managed to embrace the entire barber's city with its inhabitants – starting from the common people and traveling upwards to the highest instances of authority. It is also important that the significance of Persians for the ritual decreased with the passage of time – by the eighteenth century, Damascus sent forth local Sufis to obtain the water, which testifies to the gradual process of the ritual's localization. In his biography of Shaykh ʿAlī al-Miṣrī, one of the Sufis who was sent to retrieve Samarmar's water during the seventeenth century, Al-Murādī does not mention the involvement of any Sufis of Persian origin.²⁵³

Despite its uniqueness and exotic properties, Samarmar was not the only inspiration for organizing public religious manifestations in the eighteenth-century Damascus which Ibn Budayr had the chance to observe. Regular religious holidays were celebrated, which gave to the people opportunities to rejoice. But these ceremonies also included certain practices which were, in their nature, local. In addition, they sometimes tended to "lend" their elements to other, more specific rituals which took place during the eighteenth century. The application of these

²⁵¹ Grehan, "The Legend of the Samarmar," 122.

²⁵² Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 79.

²⁵³ Al-Murādī, *SD*, III, 214.

elements in no small part led to the formation of an original corpus of Damascene religious practices, the understanding of which can be improved through a thorough analysis. These elements will represent the subject of examination in the next section.

4.3. Bright Lights and Cannon-Fire: Religious Elements of Public Celebrations

One of the most important religious events of the year was the fast observed during the month of Ramaḍān. The Damascenes would proclaim the beginning of the sacred month by the firing of cannons, while the shops, groceries, and bakeries would open during night-time. The Damascenes would illumine the minarets and markets of the city with numerous candles and lanterns which would burn throughout the month, while the communal prayers would, as always, take place in the Umayyad Mosque. The barber Ibn Budayr does not bother to describe this ceremony in much detail – to him it seems obvious and common.²⁵⁴ The firing of cannons was an element in various kinds of official Ottoman proclamations, including the arrival of new governors, judges, and other officials in the city.²⁵⁵ The birth of a sultan's heir, or his ascension to the throne was also accompanied by the sound of cannons.²⁵⁶ On one occasion, in 1776, the inhabitants of Damascus celebrated the birth of future sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) for seven days. The continuous cannon fire, as well as the illumination of the city, made it look like the people were celebrating “a religious holiday.”²⁵⁷ The chronicler who wrote down this sentence, cited by Grehan as the priest Burayk, seemed to connect the firing of canons and the practice of illumination with religious celebrations.

²⁵⁴ See, for instance, Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 5B-6A.

²⁵⁵ See, for instance, Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 20B, 88A-88B, 95A.

²⁵⁶ An example can be found in Al-Murāḍī, *SD*, III, 161.

²⁵⁷ Grehan, “The Legend of the Samarmar,” 108.

The illumination of markets and minarets within Damascus was common during religious holidays, as well as for celebrating royal birthdays, circumcisions, or victorious military campaigns. The practice emerges from a widespread Ottoman custom – the sultan of the Empire might use town illumination, known as *donanma*, to celebrate, for instance, the birth of his heirs, or a victory on a battlefield.²⁵⁸ Mosques and other structures would be decorated by lines supporting lanterns whose wicks burned behind lids designed to protect from the wind. Wealthier inhabitants would sometimes use multi-colored glass, granting to the city a sort of a fairytale look.²⁵⁹ Even in these present times, the mosques in Turkey are illuminated during some religious celebrations. Although only adding to the overall aesthetic effect which a twenty-first century observer might notice, in the eighteenth-century city such decorations were, undoubtedly, something incredible to behold – without electric lighting, the streets would by nightfall be completely shrouded in darkness.

The Damascenes, however, used the practice of illumination for more than just important religious holidays. Similar to cannon-fire, the markets would glow brightly during night-time on occasions when a new *qāḍī* would enter the city, following his appointment to the position. According to Grehan, the priest-chronicler Burayk reported that the Damascene Christians were required to greet the newly-appointed governors, as well as pilgrims returning from Mecca, with a procession which included candles and lanterns before the custom was abolished in 1762.²⁶⁰ The death of one governor, Aḥmad Pasha al-Jazzār (“The Butcher,” d. 1804), provides a rather interesting example. The people who lived under the rule of this particular pasha considered him a frightening tyrant, and loathed him greatly. Upon hearing rumors that he

²⁵⁸ An example could be found in al-Dimashqī, *TSWL*, 37.

²⁵⁹ Suraiya Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005), 178.

²⁶⁰ Grehan, “The Legend of the Samarmar,” 119.

passed away, the people of Damascus were at first suspicious, so they patiently waited to receive an official report. The confirmation of a new ruler being appointed in Damascus was witnessed and described by Mīkhā'il al-Dimashqī:

'Abd Allah Pasha [al-'Aẓm] took over [the governorship in Damascus] and the people's hearts were filled with joy and pleasure because this exorbitant, strict government was removed. The rejoicing of the people was such that they decorated the city in a peculiar way. Behold the candles lit in front of the stores in the middle of the day.²⁶¹

The Damascenes employed town illumination in this celebration of relief, giving also indications that they believed that this change of rulership represented a matter of the divine. Heavenly justice removed the tyrant from the position of governorship. As such, the entire celebration acquired the elements of a religious ceremony, uniting the inhabitants described by al-Dimashqī on the basis of mutual interests towards prosperity of oneself, and of the city as well.

The candles and lanterns were also lit during the celebrations of 1156/1743, organized by Sulaymān Pasha al-'Aẓm, As'ad Pasha's uncle, to honor the occasion of his son's circumcision. Ibn Budayr remembers that all of the markets of Damascus were decorated with candles and lanterns in such great numbers that he never heard of anything similar in the past.²⁶² The whole city glowed for seven days and nights, which were, it would seem, quite eventful. In addition to many of the city's officials, notables, and *aghās*, a large crowd of Christians and Jews gathered in the gardens of the al-'Amāra district. Very soon, a large number of musicians, dancers, and other entertainers showed up, and the pasha ordered them to dance and animate the crowd in

²⁶¹ *Tawallā 'Abd Allah Bāshā faḥaṣala al-farah wa al-surūr fī qulūb al-nās bi-izāla tilka al-aḥkām al-katīfa al-bāhiḍa ḥatā annahu min surūr al-nās zayyanū al-balad binū mustaghrab. Wa tanazzir al-shama' shā'il^{am} wuṣṭa al-nihār.* Al-Dimashqī, *TSWL*, 21.

²⁶² It would be reasonable to presume that similar ceremonies took place in the past. The ending statements seems to be another one of the barber's many dramatized interpretations. Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 14A.

numerous ways, which the barber describes as “lewdness.” Ibn Budayr concludes his report lamenting that “they did not stop doing this for seven days and eight nights.”²⁶³

This social ritual, classified by Van Gennep as a rite of passage to adulthood,²⁶⁴ gave an opportunity for the pasha to publicly display his generosity and other respectable traits towards his subjects, improving his image among the Damascenes. Furthermore, Ibn Budayr used this occasion to build up on his own respectable image, criticizing the immoral behavior of the population. Finally, this occasion, which was included in the wide corpus of norms set by the written religious texts, seemed a good opportunity for the barber’s Damascenes to unite regardless of their confessions and celebrate under the town illumination.

Ibn Budayr’s tone here is very reproachful, though it does not seem that his fellow inhabitants who attended the ceremony minded much. According to the common understanding, at least from the point of view of the *‘ulamā’* and other Middle Eastern upper, as well as middle-class individuals, a well-mannered person should indulge in entertainment which includes literary works, like poetry, while the arts of singing and dancing were considered more ill-mannered, and were frowned upon. The barber’s words do not convey the exact extent to which this “lewdness” progressed, though it certainly was captivating enough to surprise a man who interpreted these events as a sign of social changes within his own hometown.

Ibn Budayr’s memory of this celebration demonstrates his views that the Damascene society changed during his lifetime in several different ways. The increased liberty of the populace (as perceived by the barber, of course) allowed Sulaymān Pasha to entertain his peers

²⁶³ ... *wa lā zālū ‘alā mithla dhalika al-ḥāl saba’t ayām wa thamāniyat layāl...* Ibn Budayr, 14B.

²⁶⁴ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rights of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 71-72. See also Karen Ericksen Paige and Jeffery M. Paige, *The Politics of Reproductive Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 3, 14.

and subjects in all sorts of ways while still maintaining the ceremonial overtones of a religious celebration. In addition, members of other confessions attended the ceremony, honoring the circumcision of the pasha's son. They stood with the most powerful notables in a large procession marking the event, as well as in the row of people who brought their children to be circumcised for free under the pasha's orders. The pasha offered these services to all who are poor, "and to whomever else is willing," bestowing upon the circumcised a gift, comprised of a suit and some gold.²⁶⁵ This immense celebration, the description of which the barber provides, might demonstrate the unity of Ibn Budayr's Damascenes when it came to honoring those who represent their city, in the same time showing both religious and societal liberties which applied to all groups present within the city, regardless of their confessional affinity.

A similar ceremony was witnessed in the same year, when the treasurer of the city, Fathī al-Falāqinsī, celebrated the marriage between his daughter and his nephew. The celebration was so immense that "nobody reported to have organized anything like it,"²⁶⁶ and it lasted for seven days. The treasurer decided to pay honors to different groups in the city, assigning one of the seven days of the celebration to each of them.

He committed the first day to the governor of Damascus, His Excellency the *Wazīr* Sulaymān Pasha, the second day to the deputies, the third to the [Sufi] shaykhs, the '*ulamā*' and the *aghās*... the fifth to the Christians and Jews, the sixth for the peasants, and the seventh for the singers and the prostitutes, the people of passion.²⁶⁷

Every day he provided gifts for each of these groups, giving away gold and silver in such amounts that it "could not have been measured."²⁶⁸ The proceedings of this ceremony imply a certain level of unity and equality among the people residing in the city. The hierarchy is

²⁶⁵ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 14B.

²⁶⁶ The barber again employs a dramatized narrative. Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 13B.

²⁶⁷ ... *fa-kāna awwal yawm ilā wālī al-shām Ḥaḍrat al-Wazīr Sulaymān Bāsha wa yawm ilā al-mawālī wa yawm ilā al-'ulamā' wa al-mashāyikh wa yawm ilā al-aghawāt... wa yawm ilā al-Naṣāra wa al-Yahūd wa yawm ilā al-falāḥīn wa yawm ilā al-maghānī wa al-shlikkāṭ min ahl al-hawā...* Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 13B

²⁶⁸ The barber's hyperboles follow the same, expected pattern. Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 13B.

obvious and it must be respected – the governor was, thus, entertained during the first day of the manifestation. On the third day, the treasurer paid respect to all the members of the intellectual elite of the city - the ‘*ulamā*’ and the Sufi shaykhs *equally*. Finally, the *daftarī* did not skip the Christians and the Jews, and he brought his attention even to those frowned upon – the singers and the prostitutes. The respect for the Sufis is evident here – as already underlined, they maintained a continuous presence and represented a great intellectual and religious influence in Damascus during the eighteenth century. But the inclusion of the members of other confessions, as well as the nominally scorned elements such as singers and prostitutes, again implies a sort of a unity (one that still follows a strict hierarchy) which enveloped the barber’s city during times of celebration. Sufis and traders, Muslims and Christians, peasants and prostitutes, they were all *Damascene*, and as such eligible to partake in the joy of the Damascene *daftarī*. On the seventh day, after the ceremony had ended, the treasurer summoned “all shaykhs of the *ṭuruq*,”²⁶⁹ for the sake of performing a communal prayer, a song in praise to God.²⁷⁰

The involvement of Sufis, both dead and alive, in communal prayers was significant, and widely appreciated. These prayers, in which all inhabitants of the city, or a certain group would participate, were often employed to perform a specific function, such as to defend the populace from a catastrophe, or to create some other, magical effect. Ibn Budayr, for instance, records the words of his own Sufi shaykh, who in turn maintained that the one who repeats the words “my dear” (*yā ‘azīz*) for eighty seven times after praising the Prophet²⁷¹ at the end of the morning prayer will be awarded with a wondrous result. When such an individual calls upon the one he

²⁶⁹ This is a plural of the noun *ṭarīqa*, which literally means “a road,” or “a path.” It is used to mark a specific Sufi fraternities. The corresponding Turkish noun is *tarikāt*.

²⁷⁰ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 13B.

²⁷¹ *Ṣalā ‘alā al-Nabī*. In Islam, this is a formal phrase commonly placed after the names of the prophets. It is commonly translated as: “Peace be upon him” (in Arabic: *ṣallā Allah ‘alayhi wa sallama*).

loves, the desired individual will answer his summons.²⁷² Some prayers were led by the city's religious authorities and some by various shaykhs of a large number of Sufi orders. Sometimes it happened, however, that the prayers were led by the most unexpected of groups.

4.4. A Prayer that Opens the Sky: Public Prayers and Their Significance for the Barber's Damascenes

It was the summer of 1156/1743 when a crowd of onlookers formed in the streets of Damascus to observe a most peculiar procession. Drawn by loud singing, clapping of hands and the jingle of tambourines, they watched as the “daughters of passion,” their faces uncovered and their hair loose, marched through the markets. The prostitutes of the city carried lanterns, candles, and braziers with them, celebrating what appeared to be a miraculous event. According to the reports of the Damascene barber, a certain lady of the “daughters of sin” happened to fall in love with a young “Turkish” man, but this gentleman got sick. The lady swore that if her loved one should recover, she would offer a *mawlid* in his name at the tomb of Shaykh Arslān, “the Protector of Damascus.”²⁷³ After a number of days, the young Turkish gentleman recovered. A wave of joy brought many of the Damascene prostitutes to the most frequented places of the city where the passers-by slowed down to watch the procession, and all the barber could say was “God is the greatest.”²⁷⁴

With this unusual event, the barber illustrates well the role which religion played in the life of his city. The previous chapter has already shown the significant power which a vow could hold over an individual within the Damascene society, and it seems that it was equally valuable to all groups within the city walls. But the “daughters of sin” went a step further. Their

²⁷² Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 43A.

²⁷³ This Arabic term is usually used with regards to the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad, but it gradually came to be applied to the ceremonies honoring the birthdays of Sufi saints.

²⁷⁴ ... *wa naḥnu naqūl Allahu 'akbar*. Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 45A-45B.

appearance in public without the proper headdress demonstrated a kind of a rebellion against the adopted formalities, but the prostitute who figures as a protagonist made a powerful promise. The prayer of gratitude for the restored health of the lady's young man acquired ceremonial properties, to which an exclusive local element was added – the visitation and prayer on the grave of a Sufi saint whose tomb was located in Damascus. This prayer, along with the described public demonstration of religious behavior (for even without observing the proper dress code, these ladies were still clearly expressing deep, religious feelings during their rejoicing), thus, retains an element which is in its essence Damascene. The ceremony was powerful enough to gather a large number of prostitutes, as well as onlookers, who observed peacefully – Ibn Budayr's text does not contain any reports which should imply attempted repercussions because of this event. The fact that the procession was left in peace is in itself a demonstration of respect which people had for public prayers, as well as for the power of vows. Even the most ordinary of public prayers within the city might demonstrate more than what the normative texts might provide for the historians. The governors of the city would on certain Fridays – the first Friday following their appointment, for instance – attend the public prayer in the Umayyad Mosque, after which a procession would form and follow the governor to the neighbourhood of al-Şālihiyya and the mausoleum of Ibn 'Arabī, one of the most important saints of the Ottoman Empire. Only after the prayer at this site would the ceremony end. The importance of this site grew significantly after its renovation, commissioned by the Ottoman ruler Süleiman I (1494 – 1566),²⁷⁵ until it became considered an alternative site to the Umayyad Mosque itself. According to the legends, Ibn 'Arabī visited the sultan in his dream and showed him the conquest of Syria and Egypt. Kafescioğlu rightly notices that this legend may indicate

²⁷⁵ Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh, *The Image of an Ottoman City: Imperial Architecture and Urban Experience in Aleppo in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 38-39.

the attempts of the Ottomans to legitimize their presence in the newly conquered lands.²⁷⁶ For that purpose, a powerful local figure was used, the saint who holds a special meaning for the Damascenes.

The Damascene people, however, did not participate only in regular public prayers which were, for instance, held on Fridays in the mosques of the city. Disturbances caused by bad weather conditions could inspire people to gather and conduct a prayer, for instance, to summon rain. Sufis were extremely important for ensuring the success of this ritual, as was the case with most rituals aimed at achieving a particular magical effect. The biographer al-Murādī demonstrates the significance of a successfully performed ritual – both for the population, and the participating Sufis – on the example of Shaykh Abū al-Mawāhib al-Ḥanbalī. Close to the very end of the seventeenth century (during the winter of 1698 – 1699), Shaykh al-Ḥanbalī prepared to lead a prayer for the rain:

[The people] fasted for three days. On the fourth day, they went to the Al-Muṣallā [Mosque]. [Al-Ḥanbalī] went forth and led the prayer after sunrise as an imam. He then placed a chair in the center of the oratory, and sat on it, commencing the sermon for the rain. He started to pray, and the noise became louder with supplications directed to God Almighty. Crying was increasing. Every peasant brought a lot of beef, the meat of goats and sheep. [Al-Ḥanbalī] grabbed his beard and said, whining, “My God, do not expose this old man [to shame] in front of your worshippers.” In the same moment, black clouds appeared in the west... The people dispersed and went to their homes. With the next sunset, the gates of the sky opened [and] pouring water [came out of it], and it was raining abundantly for three days and nights...²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, “In the Image of Rūm: Ottoman Architectural Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Aleppo and Damascus,” *Muqarnas* 16 (1999): 74.

²⁷⁷ ... *fa-ṣāmū [al-nās] thalāthat ‘ayām wa kharajū fī al-yawm al-rābi‘ ‘ilā al-muṣallā ṣiyām^{an} fa-taqaddama ṣāhib al-tarjama wa ṣallā bi-l-nās imam^{an} ba‘da ṭulū‘ al-shams thumma naṣaba lahu kursī fī wasaṭ al-muṣallā fa-raqiya ‘alayhi wa khaṭaba khuṭbat al-istisqām [sic] wa shara‘a fī al-da‘ā’ wa irtafa‘a al-ḍajj wa al-ibtihāl ‘ilā Allah Ta‘ālā wa kaththara bukā’ al-ḥalaq wa kāna al-falāḥūn qad ‘ahḍarū jānib^{an} kathīr^{an} min al-baqar wa al-ma‘az wa al-ghanam wa amsaka al-mutarjam bi-lihyatihi wa bakā wa qāla yā Allahī lā tafḍaḥ al-shayba bayna ‘ubādik fa kharaja fī al-ḥāl min jihat al-maghrib suḥāb aswad... tafarraqa al-nās wa raja‘ū fa-lamā idhan al-maghrib tilka al-layla infataḥat abwāb al-samā’ bi-mā’ munhamar wa dāma al-maṭar thalāthat ayām bi-layāliahā ghazīr^{an} kathīr^{an}... Al-Murādī, *SD*, I, 68.*

In another case during the seventeenth century (during a particularly dry winter of 1662 – 1663), three consecutive prayers for rain were conducted. The crowd prayed twice at the Umayyad Mosque, proceeding then to the suburban areas of the city. Their prayers were not answered until the third time, and it seemed to the people that the reason for the first two inefficient attempts lay in their misconduct, and their failure to demonstrate enough modesty and humility.²⁷⁸

This betrays an important characteristic of communal prayers in the eighteenth-century Damascus – the power of the ritual itself is unquestionable. If the prayer does not yield immediate results, the problem must lie elsewhere. Morality would be questioned, the behavior of populace would be highlighted, and the mystical properties of the shaykhs involved in the ritual would be put to the test.

This particular understanding of a ritual conforms with studies of Legare, Sax, or Sorensen, who defined ritual practice as a learned set of actions causally related to a certain goal. This set of actions, seems to be consciously attributed with a specific result, which is expected to occur. For the sake of efficacy, icons, or charismatic individuals may be included in the ritual (in this case, the Sufi). If the desired effect does not occur, despite all of the actions involved in a ritual properly conducted, one's own piety may be questioned, as well as the belief in the ritual itself.²⁷⁹ Shaykh al-Ḥanbalī had a lot at stake when he shouted out his plea to God. His reputation, especially regarding his power over elements and other aspects of his

²⁷⁸ James Grehan, "Street Violence and Social Imagination in late-Mamluk and Ottoman Damascus (c. 1500 – 1800)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 2 (May, 2003), 218.

²⁷⁹ For the discussion, see William S. Sax, "Agency," and J. Podemann Sorensen, "Efficacy," in *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, ed., Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Micael Stausberg (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006). See also William S. Sax, "Ritual and the Problem of Efficacy," and Johannes Quack, "Bell, Bourdieu, and Wittgenstein on Ritual Sense," in *The Problem of Ritual Efficacy*, ed. William S. Sax (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Cristine H. Legare and André L. Souza, "Evaluating Ritual Efficacy: Evidence from the Supernatural," *Cognition* 24, no. 1 (July, 2012): 1-15, and Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 140-142.

piety, could have been put under scrutiny. Fortunately for him, it seems that the ensuing storms prevented this turn of events.

Other natural catastrophes also spurred the people to conduct prayers so as to improve the current set of circumstances. In the year 1171/1758, a wave of catastrophic earthquakes struck at Damascus and its surrounding regions. The first tremor was weak, but it was immediately followed by a second one, right at the time when the *mu'adhdhins* commenced with their duty in the many minarets of the city. Many of them died in the first wave, while the ensuing quakes proceeded to destroy countless structures. The inhabitants of Syria were lost in large numbers. Fear drove the Damascenes out of their houses to sleep in the alleyways, open fields, cemeteries, or in the Umayyad Mosque. Ibn Budayr records the destruction of several *khāns*, adding that the earthquakes brought down the Qubbat al-Naṣr – only half of it, according to the barber, remained standing on the Mount Qāsiyūn. A huge rock fell into the irrigation channel, blocking the water supply for eleven days, while the ensuing earthquakes proceeded to tear down buildings, towers of the citadel, and even a part of the Umayyad Mosque.²⁸⁰

The governor of Damascus of that period, 'Abd Allah Pasha Al-Shatajī (r. 1758 – 1759), who reigned over Damascus after As'ad Pasha, ordered the people to fast for three days. On the fourth day, they were to go to the Al-Muṣallā Mosque, famous for its power to make prayers answered.²⁸¹ A large crowd gathered in the mosque, and soon, the '*ulamā*' of the city assembled along with the Sufi shaykhs. The governor himself arrived in the mosque with the rest of his retinue, the judges and the *muftī*, and noise and crying filled the whole structure. For

²⁸⁰ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 91B-92B..

²⁸¹ Although this seems unusual, the order to fast and pray, according to the manuscript, came directly from the pasha. Al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 92B

three days, the prayers went on in al-Daqqāaq Mosque, while the people demonstrated humility and submission “as if it was the Judgement day.”²⁸²

It seems that the ritual preparation for the communal prayer aimed to influence the weather conditions and natural disasters did not change for more than half a century. According to Ibn Budayr, even the new pasha seemed to be aware of the correct proceedings of the ritual (the fast and the prayer). As in the report about Shaykh Al-Ḥanbalī, the ritual prayer for making the earthquakes stop required three days of fasting, after which the crowd would visit a mosque famous for its power to make prayers come true. The supplications to God were followed by loud cries as the people strove to express their own modesty and their absolute submission to the will of the divine.

Their prayer was not answered this time. Light tremors of the ground drove the crowd to disperse and return to their makeshift tents and camps in the open, where they stayed until the first snow. Devastating winds followed the catastrophe in the ensuing months, adding to the damage brought upon the fields and orchards. The prices of food immediately soared, leaving the people of Damascus in, according to the barber, unprecedented poverty.²⁸³

The supreme authority of a religious ritual in the form of a communal prayer can also be observed in the ritual summoning of Samarmar in 1747. The mystical bird did not appear that year, and during the next season the number of locusts gradually increased to outrageous proportions. The devastation they brought to the crops and orchards of Damascus brought great agony to the people. As‘ad Pasha decided to turn to more practical measures this time. As was the case with prior locust infestations, he ordered the people to collect quotas of insects (the barber does not state the exact number of insects required per person) and bring them back to

²⁸² Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 92B.

²⁸³ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 92B-93B.

him. They would then bury the locusts in the caves around the city. What is even more interesting, the pasha's orders also compelled the populace to dig holes in Christian and Jewish graveyards, so that they could bury the insects there. Finally, the exterminated locusts would be buried in wells and caves of the al-Ṣāliḥiyya neighbourhood.²⁸⁴ Soon after, the barber reported a peculiar sighting. According to *Daily Events*, joyous news reached Damascus. Samarmar came. It flew over numerous villages around the city, bringing terrible destruction to the locusts praying on the crops. The ritual *was* successful. The joy of the people made them leave their houses – shaykhs of al-Ṣāliḥiyya formed a procession, followed by the sound of drums and loud praise to God, and the people, naturally, proceeded to decorate the city with bright lights - in Samarmar's honor.²⁸⁵

But there was no end to the locusts – their numbers were still increasing “as though the people did not gather a single one.”²⁸⁶ To Ibn Budayr and, undoubtedly, to the majority of the inhabitants, it appeared that the increase in numbers of locusts followed the increase in “debauchery, bawdiness, vanity, the rising prices, and evil.”²⁸⁷ An intervention had to be made urgently, so the shaykh of the Sufi Sa‘adiyya order, ‘Ibrāhīm al-Jabāwī, organized a procession. This particular order was considered a branch of the Rifā‘iyya order – an order famous for its ability to deal with snake poison and evict snakes from people's homes. They were often called to help alleviate a certain cause of misery from the populace, and they remained even to the present day, often performing impressive demonstrations of piercing their bodies, or eating burning coals.²⁸⁸ Followed by the sound of drums and fluttering flags, the shaykh led the procession to visit the shrine of al-Sayyida Zaynab, where he asked the saint to reveal the

²⁸⁴ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 35B-36A.

²⁸⁵ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 36A-37B.

²⁸⁶ ...*ka-anna al-nās lam yajtami ‘minhu shay’*. Al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 91.

²⁸⁷ ... *wa qad zāda al-fujūr wa al-fisq wa al-ghurūr... wa al-ghilā’... wa al-shurūr*. Al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 36B.

²⁸⁸ See Itztchak Weismann, “Sufi Brotherhoods in Syria and Israel: A Contemporary Overview,” *History of Religions* 43 (2004): 306. See also Al-Budayrī, *HDY*, 91, n.1.

source of the people's misfortune. This saint seemed to be of particular value for dealing with natural calamities.²⁸⁹ The procession stayed there during the day, proceeding to circle around the city, arriving finally at the doors of the citadel. There, in the center of the city, the Sufis performed a ritual called *dawsa*.²⁹⁰ This ritual was usually performed by the Sa'adiyya dervishes to celebrate the Prophet's birthday. The dervishes would lie on their bellies, and the shaykh would ride a horse over their backs. The dervishes would remain unharmed and stand upright, which was one of the miracles of this order.

Shaykh al-Jabāwī employed every device he had at his disposal. Amidst the desperate cries and supplications, the numerous candles and lanterns shone over the shaykh's followers who called for the destruction of the insects and the final release from the city's ordeal. Two days later, a procession of the people of al-Maydān, followed by the sound of drums, entered the al-Muṣallā Mosque to pray for the destruction of locusts. Their prayer was a lament of the state of society in their city, the society in which:

...most of the women are unveiled, and the daughters of passion, who are the whores, circulate the alleys and markets during night and day, followed by the *dalātiyya* and the evildoers, and nobody says a thing... while the righteous are in grief and agony...²⁹¹

Once again, the prayer along with its result seems to be unquestionable. It was the people themselves who were guilty of improper behavior, which pollutes the ritual and prevents it from succeeding. Deeply engraved into the consciousness of the Damascenes, the many prayer rituals conducted *en masse* represented the first line of defense against natural disasters. Like the summoning of Samarmar, these rituals were employed by every resident of the city, from the common people to the highest authorities.

²⁸⁹ See Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 130.

²⁹⁰ Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 37A.

²⁹¹ ... 'akhtar al-nisā' qad bāḥat, wa banāt al-hawā wa hum [sic] al-shlikkāt dā'irāt layl^{an} wa nihār^{an} bil- 'azqa wa al- 'aswāq wa ma 'hum al-dālātiyya wa al-fusāq wa lā 'aḥad yatakallam bi-qīl wa qāl... wa al-ṣāliḥ fī hamm... Ibn Budayr, *HDY*, 37B.

4.5. Conclusion: Religion and Ibn Budayr's Eighteenth-Century Damascene

The communal religious practices which I discussed above represent a common part of the Damascenes' tradition. Indeed it might be stated that they represented an element which in part forms the definition of the barber's eighteenth-century Damascene. For the city's inhabitants this corpus of religious practices was, undoubtedly, something to take pride in. It is no surprise, therefore, that the attempt of one governor of Damascus, Ḥusayn Pasha al-Bustanjī (r. 1738-1739), to abolish certain forms of Sufi prayers called *tahlīla*,²⁹² spurred dissatisfaction of such great proportions among the population and the military that it finally became one of the factors which led to an outright rebellion.²⁹³

Religious feelings and their expression, as described by Ibn Budayr, seem to have represented a great unifying factor for the populace of Damascus, an element so common that its presence could be felt even in the midst of celebrations which cannot be fully classified as religious. During some of the greatest manifestations, sometimes organized by the highest instances of authority within the city walls, Ibn Budayr writes about a large number of the inhabitants drawn together, regardless of their social status and religious affiliation. Religious overtones are, however, perceivable even within these events.

In addition to the normative texts pertaining to religion, the barber's eighteenth-century Damascenes demonstrated a wide folklore which was accepted by all strata of Damascene inhabitants. The Damascenes fueled their prayers with the mystical charisma of saints, both those still living and those long since deceased, whose tombs now represented a miraculous source of divine blessing. Samarmar's wings hid in their shadows the mystical sites the power

²⁹² The Sufis of Damascus performed the *tahlīla* prayer in the days following an individual's death, upon the request of the mourning family. For more details about how this prayer looked like in the nineteenth century, see al-Qāsimī, *QS*, 222-223.

²⁹³ Rafeq, *The Province*, 133.

of which was more favored than others for the successful completion of a ritual, shaykhs who would not risk their authority and exposure to shame even if it came from the divine itself, and miracle-workers whose active involvement in prayers led to wondrous effects.

Even more important is that the elements of these manifestations, both those covered by the normative texts and those more informal, seem to have acquired a local character over the passage of time. The sites and individuals which provided saintly charisma for the people were ultimately local and Damascene. Veneration of a certain place or individual was sometimes inspired from the outside, as with the tomb of Ibn ‘Arabī, but this tomb stood within the territory of Damascus, providing a local character to specific rituals conducted upon it.

Some beliefs grew their roots deep within the city, shedding away the need for outside inspiration. The Samarmar’s legend represents an excellent example. As I have already mentioned, it does not seem that inhabitants of other Ottoman regions called upon the bird during locust infestations. Legends like the one about the magical spring in Persia existed within the local tradition for at least a significant part of the second millennium of the Current Era, merging into the life of the population to such an extent that they represented a reflexive reaction against an emerging threat. Such a legend represents a part of the entire corpus of beliefs which united every member of the Budayr’s Damascenes. It was as much a part of the city as were its own inhabitants.

I have, thus, shown how *Daily Events* might imply the twofold role of the public rituals and religious practices in the eighteenth-century Damascus. On the one hand, the people of the city used them to achieve a specifically set goal. Their other role was to preserve a certain sense of belonging to the city, along with the rest of the population. Comprised of applied prescriptions of normative texts, as well as of a variety of other elements of local (and

universal) folklore, they contributed to the defining of a Damascene inhabitant, and served as a symbol with the potential to unite the barber's Damascenes under one communal identity.

Conclusion

Damascus Before Modernity: Popular Religious Practices as a Part of a Damascene Tradition

The Damascene barber, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Budayr had much more to say about the state of society and government in Damascus during the period between 1741 and 1763 than became apparent in the previous pages. However, the scope of this study does not allow a thorough analysis of other reports and briefings which figure in *Daily Events*. The analysis of the barber's text is, still, of great importance for the scholarship dedicated to the Middle East, and it seems worthwhile for the barber's manuscript to remain in the focus of historians' research, uncovering more information about the city of Damascus and its eighteenth-century inhabitants.

This study offered an overview of some religious habits and practices of the barber's Damascenes. Its pages supplied the reader with information about some more peculiar and informal practices of the Damascenes which the barber wrote down and left for the future generations. The form of religion practiced by the population of Damascus in the span of years covered by Ibn Budayr's chronicle was placed within the context of everyday life, claiming for itself a position from which it would remain available for the inhabitants, if such a need presents itself.

The Damascenes could draw upon their rich religious corpus whenever they felt that such an act was necessary. Great catastrophes which shook the city required serious reactions, which often included a prayer or a ritual to summon the divine energy for salvation of the people from their misery. Often led by the Sufi shayks and saints who represented living sources of divine blessings, these ritual acts required from the inhabitants full obedience, humility, and employment of places rumored to have enough power to ensure the ritual's

success. The saints of the city offered incantations which secured an individual's success when attempting to find, for instance, a loved one, heal an injury, or increase the supplicant's monetary gain. All such practices were ingrained deep within the Damascenes' traditions – so deep that it seems impossible to detach them from the written corpus of normative texts provided by the imperial intellectual elite.

The barber Ibn Budayr serves as an excellent example of this inseparability of formal and informal religious practices. The barber maintains a traditionalist attitude towards morality and religion, and writes reports in which he informs the researcher about his own religious practices. The barber fasted during holy months, listened to preachers, and studied with *mufīīs*. In addition, he wrote about the miracles of his master, snakes that appear in freshly dug graves, and dreams of divine inspiration. The barber writes without exclusion, demonstrating through his own modes of self-representation how deeply intertwined the formal and informal religious practices were for him and his co-inhabitants.

The Damascenes would reach for their religious traditions when it would be necessary to display themselves in the best possible way. Religion had a strong significance in the acts of self-representation, as well as the depiction of other famous figures, or the writer's loved ones – Ibn Budayr quite clearly shows that. On the other hand, the people who did not enjoy much popularity within society of the barber's eighteenth-century Damascus could often find their own piety questioned as a sign of serious neglect on their part. Piety of the city's notables seemed to be of importance for the wider population – the people depicted by Ibn Budayr expected of their rulers to display traits of piety in order to become figures on whom the rest of the population could depend on.

Communal rituals and religious celebrations had the power to unite a large number of the Damascenes together. Aimed at a specific goal, such rituals would also participate in the

process of building the foundation upon which the sense of a communal identity could be formed. These practices would often draw from a vast corpus of folklore, the elements of which might have existed within and around Damascus even throughout several centuries. The entire scope of customs and practices observed by the Damascenes in the eighteenth century included many borrowed elements from other regions of the Ottoman Empire, and some of its elements seem universal – reminiscent of similar practices observed in many different geographical areas. Still, these practices would often also demonstrate a local character, through the inclusion of local saints, places of power, or other elements which originated on the territory around Damascus. The legend of Samarmar serves well to illustrate how certain legends might acquire local properties over the course of time. Samarmar was summoned in Damascus to fend off the locust infestations - for the same purpose, the inhabitants of Latakia organized communal ceremonies at the grave of a local saint, Ibn Hani, while the people of Homs formed processions carrying what was believed to be one of the original copies of the Qur’ān made under the rule of ‘Uthmān (r.644-656).²⁹⁴ Such rituals served to perpetuate local tradition and to define an inhabitant of a certain area.

Popular religious practices of the Damascenes served to perpetuate and inform the wide cultural corpus of the city’s inhabitants. The inhabitants of the city were, in a sense, united by common tradition and cultural values, which makes the research into the forms of their popular religious practices invaluable. Examinations of the various elements which constitute this cultural corpus will enable historians to assemble a clearer overview of the circumstances which prevailed in the region in the century prior to modernity.

Approximately half a century after the last years described in Ibn Budayr’s work, the Middle East and Levant witnessed an intensified contact with the European countries, which

²⁹⁴ Grehan, „The Legend of the Samarmar,“ 119-120.

gradually brought more changes to the Arab lands. Among the innovations brought to the Middle East was a wider use of the printing press, which enabled scholars and intellectuals to publish their thoughts with more ease. Newspapers, journals, and magazines appeared, and their content seems, in a sense, reminiscent of the content of the barber's chronicle. The first generations of the Arab intellectuals who employed the printing press were comprised of many Christians, who supported the unity of the Arab lands established on the basis of common language and culture. More than half a century before the rise of the Islamic reformist movement, the families like al-Bustānīs, or authors like Jurjī Zaydān who were the reforms' contemporaries,²⁹⁵ propagated the unification of the Arabs on the basis of a shared cultural heritage. The barber, along with other chroniclers of the eighteenth century, as well as those of previous periods, illuminates certain aspects of this rich cultural heritage, preserving it for future generations of scholars. The rich volumes they left behind cast light on the Middle Eastern world and all of its peculiarities out of which the nineteenth-century reforms arose. Because of Ibn Budayr, and chroniclers like him, the researcher can in the present day attempt to assemble a coherent, more complex image of the factors which precipitated the developments within the Arab World since their time and through the nineteenth century.

²⁹⁵ For the authors of the al-Bustānī family, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 99-102. For Zaydān, see Starkey, *Modern Arabic Literature*, 23, 99-100.

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