

# Imagining Rūm in Mamluk Cairo: ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ al-Malaṭī and the Ottoman Domains

Master’s thesis by Ömer İlgezdi  
Princeton University  
oilgezdi@princeton.edu

Submitted to Sabancı University in August 2020, this master’s thesis delves into the dynamics of social and intellectual interactions between the Mamluks and Ottomans prior to the Ottoman conquest of Egypt and Syria, with a particular focus on the neglected late Mamluk figure, Ḥanafī jurist, historian, and physician, ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ al-Malaṭī (d. 920/1514). At the core of this thesis lies the depiction of the Ottomans and their scholarly patronage in al-Malaṭī’s historical works, notably his biographical dictionary, *al-Majma‘ al-mufannan bi al-mu‘jam al-mu‘arwan* (henceforth: the *Majma‘*). Completed in 1498, al-Malaṭī devoted six pages to the contemporary Ottoman ruler, Bāyezid II (r. 1481–1512), in which he recounted a remarkable narrative about the Ottoman sultans, emphasizing their sympathy for scholars. He even presents the Ottoman sultan as one of the preeminent scholars of his era. Al-Malaṭī’s insights regarding the Ottomans extend beyond just the sultans. His works, including his chronicles *Nayl al-amal fī zayl al-duwal* and *al-Rawḍ al-bāsim fī ḥawādith al-‘umr wa al-tarājim*, illuminate the movements of late fifteenth-century scholars, merchants, and statesmen who traversed the Ottoman-Mamluk border for various reasons such as pilgrimage, employment, trade, seeking political refuge, or even enduring captivity. By synthesizing multiple Arabic and Ottoman Turkish sources, this thesis endeavors to introduce al-Malaṭī and his body of work, place his historical works within their contextual framework, and unravel the means through which he acquired knowledge about the *Rūmī* sultans.

To the readers of Ottoman and Mamluk studies, it might seem natural that the author provides considerable coverage of the Ottomans, who had piqued the interest of Cairene circles for at least a century. However, repeated references to Ottoman patronage in various biographical entries raise questions about the intellectual and political landscape of these two regions during the fifteenth century. Why did a scholar who primarily resided in Cairo and other North African regions place such significant emphasis on the sultans of Rūm and their patronage? What revelations can we glean from the *Majma‘* regarding the scholarly networks that spanned between Cairo and Istanbul in the late fifteenth century? How did al-Malaṭī come to acquire knowledge about Bāyezid II and the intellectual circles of the Ottomans?

Addressing these research questions, the thesis contextualizes al-Malaṭī’s observations about *Rūmī* scholars and Bāyezid II’s patronage. My analysis of al-Malaṭī’s works, specifically the *Majma‘*, is intended to reassess late fifteenth-century Ottoman patronage by emphasizing its transregional character. Expanding on these points, the thesis posits that al-Malaṭī’s trouble with contemporary Mamluk patronage led him and some prestigious Mamluk-based scholars to adopt a pro-Ottoman attitude amid

the power struggle between the Mamluks and the Ottomans in the eastern Mediterranean. This observation also prompts a critical examination of the widely held notion that Ottoman territories held marginal significance in the realm of Islamic learning before their conquest of Greater Syria and Egypt in 1517. A meticulous examination of al-Malaṭī and his milieu suggests that Ottoman scholarly life was appreciated in Mamluk scholarly circles in the late fifteenth century, already before the Ottoman expansion into the Arab lands. Furthermore, the thesis demonstrates that informal networks between these two regions played a pivotal role in al-Malaṭī's depiction of Ottoman patronage. By 'informal networks' here, we refer to al-Malaṭī's interactions with various scholars, merchants, emigrants, and captives from the Ottoman lands outside the formal channels of diplomacy and scholarly activities.

Since al-Malaṭī's works have not yet been subject to analysis in the framework of Mamluk-Ottoman relations, this thesis is an attempt to construct his intellectual biography and incorporate him into the existing scholarship on Mamluk-Ottoman interactions by introducing his works and by providing an in-depth analysis of the *Majmaʿ*. The thesis begins with al-Malaṭī's biography and an analysis of his network before elaborating on a discussion of the Mamluk-Ottoman context. The second chapter discusses the importance of his works in the broader framework of fifteenth-century Mamluk scholarly life. While doing this, the chapter has a special emphasis on the Ottomans and the concept of *Rūm* in al-Malaṭī's works. Al-Malaṭī's favorite shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Kāfiyaji (d. 879/1474), stands out as an important character who provide insights into both al-Malaṭī's intellectual make-up and his conceptualization of Ottoman patronage. The third chapter offers a brief reflection on our scholar's connection to *Rūm* and contemporary Ottoman patronage before moving on to a more detailed assessment of the Ottoman image in the *Majmaʿ*. The fourth chapter finally provides an intertextual analysis that contextualizes al-Malaṭī's attitude to the *Rūmī* sultans, primarily to Bāyezid II.

When the connections of the Ottoman empire with the larger Islamic world are taken into consideration, the general tendency among scholars has been to search for these connections in the Seljuq East and the larger Persianate World instead of the Arabic-speaking lands. More recent scholarship has also supported this perspective regarding the transmission of books from one region to the other. Despite the innovative studies on the Mamluk-Ottoman front, the vertical axis between the Arabic-speaking lands and Rumelia/Anatolia has been secondary to 'the Balkans-to-Bengal-Complex' in recent scholarship. Al-Malaṭī's oeuvre is not enough to challenge this well-grounded perspective that associates Ottoman intellectual history with the Persianate east. However, it can be considered another source that calls for further research into the Mamluk-Ottoman line. The thesis also offers a pre-conquest perspective on Mamluk-Ottoman interactions, while a larger portion of the studies on the relations has concentrated on the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517 and the post-conquest period.