

**THE MAMLUK INSCRIPTION
OF THE ST. JAMES ARMENIAN MONASTERY INSIDE
THE ARMENIAN QUARTER OF THE OLD CITY, JERUSALEM**

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On the wall above the main entrance to the St. James Armenian Convent, there is an elaborately carved inscription in Arabic dating to the reign of the Mamluk Sultan, Jaqmaq (Fig. 1). Over the years, this inscription has become defaced and almost unreadable, but a copy has been inserted inside the main entrance of the monastery. The text of the inscription was published for the first time by Max van Berchem in his *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*, in 1922.¹

The inscription is inscribed on two marble stones, 5 meters above the street level. The grey marble stone, with dimensions of 54 x 54.5 cm, comprises five lines and is accompanied by a white stone placed below it, measuring 80.5 x 13 cm and bearing a single line. Both are in naskhī script.² In 1894, when Max van Berchem examined the text, the letters were painted yellow and the background was green.³ The upper marble is held to the wall by 4 iron nails; two on top, two on the sides. The lower piece of marble bearing a single line is incorporated into masonry, but a large nail was subsequently used to connect the two. The inscription records the cancellation by Sultan Jaqmaq of certain taxes imposed on the Armenian monastery and resembles another inscription recording his decree to cancel taxes found today in the Islamic Museum of Jerusalem under code number 16.⁴

¹ Max van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum, Deuxième partie, Syrie du Sud, Jérusalem*, 2v. (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 1922, 1927), vol. 1, pp. 331-336 [nos. 100, 101] (henceforth, CIA, Jérusalem).

² CIA, Jérusalem, nos. 100, 101.

³ CIA, Jérusalem, no. 100.

⁴ See below, n.40.



Fig. 1

I. The Text

1. برز مرسوم مولانا السلطان الملك الظاهر
2. ابو سعيد محمد جقمق عز نصره بابطال ما احدثه
3. ابو الخير ابن النحاس من ضمان دير الارمن مار يعقوب بالقدس الشريف
4. عاما رده سيف الدين المقر الشريفى الانصاري وسال في ابطال
5. ذلك لتسطره في الصحايف الشريفه بتاريخ سنة 854
6. من الهجرة الشريفه ملعون ابن ملعون وعليه لعنة الله تعالى من احدث ضمانا او جدد مظلمة.

1. This decree from our Lord, the sultan Malik al-Zāhir
2. Abū Saʿīd Muḥammad Jaqmaq, let his victory be glorious, ordered the cancelation of the unprecedented
3. Tax imposed by Abū'l Khayr ibn al-Naḥḥās upon the Saint James monastery of the Armenians in the Holy City of Jerusalem
4. In the year of restitution [by] Sayf al-Dīn al-Maqarr⁵ al-Sharafi⁶ al-Anṣārī and [who also] requested the cancelation of
5. That [tax], to register it in the respective documents in the year 854 (=1450)
6. Hijri, cursed be the one and may he be a son of a cursed [father] and may God the Almighty's curse be upon him whoever imposes any tax or inflicts an injustice [upon this holy place].⁷

⁵ I.e., "His excellency."

⁶ I.e., "The honorable."

⁷ Cf. CIA, Jérusalem, no. 100.

Copy of the Inscription

In the year 1743, the Armenian Patriarch, Grigor the Chainbearer (1718 – 1749), fearing that the inscription might be damaged someday and seeing that the inscription was in bad shape and almost unreadable, requested the Islamic Sharī‘a Court to permit him to insert a copy of the same inscription inside the main entrance of the monastery. The Armenian Patriarchate Archive holds the response of the Sharī‘a Court permitting the Armenian Patriarch to insert a copy of the same inscription inside the main entrance to the Monastery.⁸ It reads as follows:

خط شريف سلطاني صادر في أيام دولة ملوك الجراكسة برفع مظلمة كانت على هذا الدير الجاري في تصرف الأرمن من مدة مديدة وسنين عديدة وصورته. برز مرسوم مولانا السلطان الملك الظاهر أبو سعيد محمد جقمق عز نصره بإبطال ما أهدته أبو الخير ابن النحاس من ضمان دير الأرمن مار يعقوب بالقدس الشريف عاماً رده سيف الدين المقر الشرفي الأنصاري وسأل في إبطال ذلك لتسطره في الصحايف الشريفة بتاريخ سنة 854.

وطلب البطررك أن يأذن له بنقل هذا الخط الشريف على رخامة جديدة لتقادم الأولى وخشية انكسارها وأن يضعوها داخل الدير صوتاً لها فأذن لهم بذلك.
27 جمادى الأول سنة 1156⁹

The Royal decree of the Sultan registered in the days of the State of the Cherkes kings, to remove an injustice that was inflicted upon this monastery belonging to the Armenians since ancient days[?] and the copy of which follows: This decree from our Lord the sultan Malik al-Zāhir Abū Sa‘īd Muḥammad Jaqmaq, let his victory be glorious, ordered the cancelation of the unprecedented Tax imposed by Abū’l Khayr ibn al-Nahḥās upon the Saint James monastery of the Armenians in the Holy City of Jerusalem in the year of restitution [by] Sayf al-Dīn al-Maqarr al-Sharafī al-Anṣārī and [who also] requested the cancelation of that [tax], to register it in the respective documents in the year 854.

And the Patriarch requested to be permitted to make a copy of this Honorable decree on a new marble instead of the first one fearing that it may break and to insert it inside the monastery [in order] to preserve it and they are permitted to do so. 27 Jamadi Awwal, year 1156 Hijri.

The inscription itself (Fig. 2) is inscribed on a marble stone having dimensions of 92 x 45 cm placed two meters above floor level inside the main entrance to the monastery behind a *sabīl* or water fountain. The inscription

⁸ Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem Archive, document number HM/A/84. This document is preserved in good condition and has dimensions of 56.8 x 43.7 cm.

⁹ The Hijri date is equivalent to 19 July 1743.

comprises four lines elegantly inscribed in the naskhī script and very well preserved. Van Berchem also saw this inscription in 1894.¹⁰



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

The removal of the original inscription and the installation of its copy coincides with restoration work to the monastery that took place in 1743. An Armenian inscription placed immediately above the entrance to the monastery

¹⁰ CIA, Jérusalem, nos. 100, 101.

(Fig. 3) notes that Patriarch Grigor the Chainbearer rebuilt the western wall of the monastery together with its cells in that year as they had been heavily damaged by the rain waters on March 10, 1743. Within five months the work was completed and the main entrance to the monastery was also enlarged.¹¹ The Armenian inscription reads as follows: “With God’s help, the western wall together with the entrance, cells and passages of the Great See of Saint James was built, in the year 1192 (1743), for the Glory of God and for the pride and delight of the blessed Armenian Nation, for those who became the reason of (it), for the workers and alms-givers. You who read (this) say Lord have mercy. Amen.” Apparently, Jaqmaq’s original inscription was removed and reinserted immediately after the construction work was concluded and, on account of its deteriorated condition, the Sharī‘a Court permitted the insertion of the copy inside the monastery’s entrance.

II. Commentary

This essay is a first attempt to analyze the text of the inscription with the help of Mamluk sources and of both Armenian and non-Armenian historiographers. The basic information provided by Armenian historiographers of Jerusalem is derived from the inscription itself. However, Hanna Vardapet of Jerusalem, who, it should be noted, was unable to decipher the inscription, asserted that the original inscription was inserted during the period of Salāḥ al-Dīn. As Hanna died in the year 1733, he did not see the copy of that inscription executed in 1743.¹²

According to Sawalaneanc’, a certain Muslim official named Abū’l Khayr, “an evil man and an enemy of Christians,” used to harass the Armenian monastery and its monks by imposing different kinds of taxes on the Monastery with the purpose of confiscating its estates. The St. James Brotherhood, unable to suffer any more, beseeched Sefeddin al-Mukhiri (i.e., Sayf al-Dīn al-Maḡarrī), who was the Governor of Jerusalem at that time and a friend of the Armenians, to liberate them from the harassments of Abū’l Khayr. Sayf al-Dīn delivered the Armenians’ complaint to the Sultan, Malik al-Zāhir Abū-Maḡmūd, nicknamed Jaqmaq, inquiring if the new tax demand was instructed by him.¹³ According to Yovhannēseanc’, this same Sultan al-ḡāhir, who had previously between 1434-1439 confiscated the property within

¹¹ Tigran Sawalaneanc’, *Patmut’iwn Erusalēmi* (History of Jerusalem) (Jerusalem: St. James, 2000; orig. printed as 2v., Jerusalem: St. James, 1931), p. 746.

¹² Cf. Hanna Vardapet, *Girk’ patmut’ean srboy ew meci K’alak’is astucoy Erusalēmis ew srhoc’ Tnōrinakanac’ Telac’ Teaṛn meroy* (History of the holy and great City of God, Jerusalem, and the Holy Places of the Economy of our Lord) (Jerusalem: St. James, 1807), p. 79.

¹³ Sawalaneanc’, *Patmut’iwn Erusalēmi*, p. 539.

the Holy Sepulchre known as Golgotha from the Armenians and had conferred it to the Georgians, acted benevolently towards the Armenian monks. After he received the complaint of the Armenians sent by Sayf al-Dīn concerning the wrong-doings of Abū'l-Khayr ibn al-Naḥḥās towards the Armenians, he became enraged and, in order to set a warning for others, he commanded that the Royal Divan (Chancellery) register the cancellation of those taxes imposed on the Armenian monastery and send a copy of his decree to Jerusalem so that it could be mounted on the façade of the Main Entrance to the monastery of St. James.¹⁴ Yovhannēseanc' further notes that this decree by the Sultan showers curses upon those who dare to behave wrongly against the Armenian monastery and its monks.¹⁵ Sawalaneanc' asserts that this event took place during the tenure of Patriarch Esayi III;¹⁶ however, Patriarch Esayi III died in 1439, having served as coadjutor to Patriarch Martiros between 1427 and 1430, and as Patriarch between 1430-1431.¹⁷ In 1450, in fact, the Armenian Patriarch was Abraham V Msrc'i ("the Egyptian") (1445-1454).¹⁸

The Armenian historiographers, as we have already mentioned above, tend to quote the inscription itself; they did not consult the contemporary Mamluk sources in order to identify the persons involved, except for the Sultan al-Zāhir, whom they observed had taken Golgotha from the Armenians and given it to the Georgians. The remaining individuals mentioned in the inscription were identified as local governors or administrative officials. Max van Berchem came to the conclusion that Abū'l-Khayr was a governor or a tax official, who, however, does not appear in the chronicles of governors of Jerusalem.¹⁹ He further takes the name Sayf al-Dīn al-Maqarr al-Sharafī al-Anṣārī to refer to two people: a certain Sayf al-Dīn who brought the request to abolish the tax to al-Maqarr Sharaf-al-Dīn al-Anṣārī, Governor of Jerusalem.²⁰ Van Berchem understands Sharaf-al-Dīn's title ("al-Maqarr") to signify him as a governor of Jerusalem; but, like Sayf al-Dīn, he does not appear in the list of governors.²¹

In what follows, I attempt to more positively identify each of the individuals mentioned and to decipher more accurately certain terms in the

¹⁴ A. Yovhannēseanc', *Patmut'iw n S. Erusalēmi* (History of Holy Jerusalem) (Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1999; orig. printed as 2v. Jerusalem: St. James, 1890), p. 230.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Sawalaneanc', *Patmut'iw n Erusalēmi*, pp. 539-540.

¹⁷ Mkrtič' Aghavnuni, *Miabank' ew ayc'eluk'* (Monks and visitors) (Jerusalem: St. James, 1929), p. 130. Cf. Haig A. Krikorian, *Lives and Times of the Armenian Patriarchs of Jerusalem, Chronological Succession of Tenures* (Sherman Oaks: Krikorian, 2009), page 154.

¹⁸ Aghavnuni, *Miabank'*, p. 3; Krikorian, *Lives and Times*, p. 154.

¹⁹ CIA, *Jérusalem*, p. 334.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 336.

²¹ Ibid.

inscription than has been previously done in the light of contemporary Mamluk sources and recent studies on the Mamluk Period in Egypt and the Holy Land.

Sultan al-Zāhir Sayf al-Dīn, nicknamed Jaqmaq (1373–1453)

Armenian historiographers recall this Sultan al-Zāhir as the one who took Golgotha from the Armenians and gave it to the Georgians,²² and as the person who acted benevolently towards the Armenian monks by ordering the cancellation of taxes imposed by ibn al-Naḥḥās on the Armenian Monastery of Jerusalem.²³ He is also known as ibn ‘Abd-Allah al-‘Alā’ī al-Zāhiri, the Sultan al-Malik Sayf al-Dīn Abū-Sa‘īd, and belonged to the Burjī Mamluk dynasty; he ruled Egypt, Syria and Palestine between 1438-1453.²⁴ The Burjī Sultans derived from the guards quartered by the Baḥrī Sultan Qalā’ūn in the citadel (al-Burj) of Cairo. They were of Circassian origin and were brought from the region of the Caucasus Mountains bordering on the Black Sea.²⁵

Sultan Jaqmaq rose to power when he was 66 years old and died at the age of 80.²⁶ Sultan Al-Zāhir was a lover of education and religion; he had a particular interest in the city of Jerusalem. He did reconstruction works at the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque and reorganized the management of Jerusalem and the banquets for feeding the poor nicknamed *simāṭ al-khalīl*.²⁷ He ordered the destruction of all the new buildings in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Mt. Sion Monastery. He also removed the Tomb of David from the possession of Latin monks.²⁸ Sultan Jaqmaq ruled for 15 years and ceded his kingdom to his son, Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Uthmān after a serious illness; he died on Tuesday 3rd of Safar 857 AH / 1453 CE.²⁹

²² Yovhannēseanc‘, *Patmut ‘iwn S. Erusalēmi*, pp. 225-228.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.

²⁴ Muḥjīr al-Dīn al-‘Ulaymī al-Ḥanbalī, *Kitāb al-Uns al-Jalīl bi-Ta’rīkh al-Quds wa-al-Khalīl* (Galileans in the history of Jerusalem and Hebron), part 2 (Amman: Dandis Library, 1999), pp. 96-98.

²⁵ Abdul Ali, *The Islamic Dynasties of the Arab East: State and Civilization During the Later Medieval Times* (New Delhi: M.D. Publications, 1996), p. 61; Yūsuf ibn Taghrī-birdī, *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi wa’l-Mustawfi ba’d al-Wāfi*, v.4, ed., Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn, Nabīl Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (Cairo: al-Hay’ah ak-Miṣrīya al-‘Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 1999), pp. 275, 278, 283.

²⁶ Amalia Levanoni, “The Sultan’s Laqab: A Sign of a New Order in Mamluk Factionalism?,” in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, ed. Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 82.

²⁷ “سماط الخليل” was a kind of soup given to the poor in Hebron, arranged by the Mamluk Sultans. Sultan Jaqmaq did the same to the poor in the city of Jerusalem.

²⁸ *E.J. Brill’s First Encyclopedia of Islam, 1913-36, volume 4*, ed. Martijn Houtsma et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), p. 1103.

²⁹ Muḥjīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns al-Jalīl*, pp. 96-98; ibn Taghrī-birdī, *al-Manhal*, pp. 275, 278, 283.

Abū'l Khayr ibn al-Naḥḥās

Abū'l Khayr ibn al-Naḥḥās, known as Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maṣrī al-Shāfi'ī ibn al-Naḥḥās was raised by his father. He learned the Qur'ān and the occupation of a coppersmith. He opened a shop in Cairo's Coppersmiths' Bazaar, but burdened himself with large debts and was imprisoned during the year 851/1447. He was released in the same year and somehow succeeded in approaching the Sultan, receiving the position of a Superintendent or Treasury Minister of the Mamluk Sultanate, posted in Cairo. In 852/1448, the Sultan also appointed him as chief supervisor or Health Minister of the Medical Hospital known as al-Bīmāristān al-Mansūrī. Ibn al-Naḥḥās also became the *nāzir* (superintendent, supervisor) of the *jawālī*, a head tax imposed each year on the *ahl al-dhimma*, i.e., the Christians and the Jews, and equivalent to the *jizyah*. During the Mamluk period each individual of the *ahl al-dhimma* paid approximately 10-25 dirhams per year. The sum was collected by the *nā'ib Bayt al-Maqdis* (supervisor of Jerusalem) during the month of Ramadan, and a substantial part of it was taken to the Treasury (*bayt al-māl*) in Cairo.³⁰ Ibn al-Naḥḥās managed to accumulate considerable power and prestige, becoming appointed the minister (*wakīl*) of the Treasury and the representative of the Sultan over the economy and revenues of the Sultanate. He was considered the *Wakīl al-Sultān* (Viceroy of the Sultan),³¹ and theoretically the “*malik*” of Egypt, Bilād al-Shām (a region that included Syria, Palestine and Jordan) and Aleppo.

In the year 854/1450, however, the Nile failed to rise sufficiently in order to irrigate the agricultural lands of Egypt, and prices rose to the extent that people found it impossible to buy the basic foodstuffs such as wheat, barley, and most importantly, bread.³² The economy of Egypt greatly depended upon the abundant flooding of the Nile for its proper functioning. The failure of the Nile often led to political instability, to the hoarding by monopolist emirs in

³⁰ Ghawānimah, *Tārīkh*, p. 103.

³¹ Yūsuf ibn Taghrībirdi, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira fī mulūk Misr wa-l-Qāhira*, v.15, ed. Muḥammad Husayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1992), pp. 130-32, 134-36, 149-51, 164; idem, *Ḥawādith al-duḥūr fī madi al-‘ayyām wa-l shuhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Kamāl al-Dīn Izz al-Dīn (Beirut: Ālam al-Kutub, 1990), pp. 33, 36, 38, 44, 46, 48, 51, 53-55, 64-65. Ibn Taghrībirdi was a contemporary of Sultan Jaqmaq and the above mentioned work is the one of his most detailed works concerning the period and gives first hand information and an eyewitness testimony pertaining to the same period. This latter source can be found online at www.al-mostafa.com.

³² Ibn Taghrībirdi, *Ḥawādith*, p. 55. Idem, *al-Nujūm*, pp. 424-425; see also Adam Sabra, *Poverty and charity in Medieval Islam: Mameluke Egypt, 1250-1517* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), p. 159; see also Kirsten Stilt, “Price setting and hoarding in Mameluke Egypt,” in *The law applied: contextualizing the Islamic Sharī‘a. A volume in honor of Frank E. Vogel*, ed. Peri Bearman, et. al. (London; New York: Tauris, 2008), p. 59.

preparation for the following year, to the sacking stores and to attacks on the government.³³ The failure of the Nile in 1450 had followed upon prior calamities in the region that had strained the Mamluk Sultanate. A drought had previously hit the Middle East in the 825/1421 as a result of a lack of rain and severely effected Horan, Karak, Jerusalem, Ramleh and Gaza. Subsequently, in 833/1429 and 841/1437, “the black death” (plague) overwhelmed Syria-Palestine and claimed many lives in the cities of Jerusalem, Ramleh, Safad, Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo.³⁴

In the face of the food shortages in 854/1450, the Egyptian population turned to mass rioting, and Sultan Jaqmaq was reluctantly forced to dismiss the Jawhar al-Nawrūzī, the *muqaddam al-mamālīk* (chief of discipline) and Abū’l Khayr ibn al-Naḥḥās who was the *wakīl bayt al-māl* (minister of the Treasury).³⁵ On such occasions, the population blamed the person in charge, usually the *muḥtasib*, who was the state controller of markets. The latter’s prime duty was to control the market, its supplies, the setting of prices and, in cases when the food supply became scarce, to intervene to ensure the feeding of the capital while endeavoring to maximize the government’s revenue.³⁶ As J. Berkey concludes, since the *muḥtasib* could manipulate the price and supply of food, collect the *mushāhara* (the monthly tax paid by those practicing craft or trade in the markets³⁷), and extort money from merchants and artisans, he sat on a “potential gold mine.”³⁸

As the embodiment of all these duties and the *de facto* representative of the Sultan in all monetary and economic issues, it is not surprising that Abū’l Khayr ibn al-Naḥḥās was the target of attack and vilification and that ibn Taghrībīrdi describes him in his chronicles as the head of all evil.³⁹ His rise from “rags to riches” also stirred hatred and envy as it was built upon the fleecing of the public. Considering the magnitude of the complaints against him, he most probably imposed more than the accepted sum for taxes in order

³³ Eric Chaney, “Revolt on the Nile: Economic shocks, religion, and political power,” *Econometrica* 81.5 (September, 2013), p. 2037.

³⁴ Ghawānimah, *Tārīkh*, p. 118; see also Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-ma’rifat duwal al-mulūk* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997), pt.1, p. 609; pt. 2, pp. 822, 824, 836.

³⁵ A. Levanoni, “Rank-and-file Mamluks versus amirs: new norms in the Mamluk military institution,” in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. Thomas Philip, Ulrich Haarmann (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), p. 28.

³⁶ Jonathan Berkey, “The *muḥtasibs* of Cairo under the Mamluks: Toward an Understanding of an Islamic Institution, in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, ed. Michael Winter, Amalia Levanoni, (Leiden: Brill, 2004) p. 268.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 269-270.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

³⁹ ibn Taghrībīrdi, *al-Nujūm*, pp. 130-132, 134-136, 149-151, 164; *idem*, *Hawādith*, pp. 33, 36, 38, 44, 46, 48, 51, 53-55, 64-65.

to line his own pockets and had those who either refused or were unable to meet his demands beaten and/or thrown to jail. Moreover, the inscription from the Armenian monastery and the Armenian historiographical sources suggest that ibn al-Naḥḥās may have ignored an earlier proclamation issued by the Sultan relieving the *ahl al-dhimma* of the *jizyah*. This decree is preserved in the above-mentioned inscription housed in the Islamic Museum of Jerusalem (#16) and dates to AH 853 [=1449CE]:

1. برز المرسوم الشريف السلطان المالكي الظاهري ابو سعيد جقمق
2. عز نصره بان يبطل ما على الذمة بالقدس الشريف من الخدمة والقدم عند
3. حضور الناءب الجديد من عند (البالين) خلعة وان لا يكفلوا الجزية
4. الشرعية ومنع التقدمة (من السلاطين) من التعرض لهم وان يكون
5. ناظر الحرمين الشريفين متكلماً عليهم بتاريخ شهر جمادى الاخرة سنة ثلاث وخمسين وثمان مائة⁴⁰

1. This royal decree from the Sultan Malik al-Zāhir Abū Saʿīd Jaqmaq
2. Let his victory be glorious, ordered the cancellation of the services and congratulations by the *ahl al-dhimma* [i.e. Christians and Jews] of Jerusalem [*al-Quds al-Sharīf*]
3. upon the arrival of the new governor [i.e. coming from the Sultan] with the *khalʿa* [i.e. garment] and that not to impose the legal *jizyah*
4. And to forbid high officials from intervening [in] their [affairs] and
5. The superintendent of the two honorable mosques [*nāzir al-Haramayn*] be the speaker on behalf of them, in the month of Jumādā al-ākhir, year 853 Hijri.

Nevertheless, in the wake of the economic crisis, ibn al-Naḥḥās was attacked and beaten by the mob and his house was burned. He was then arrested by the Sultan and delivered to the chief judge (*qāḍī*), Sharaf al-Dīn Yahya al-Mannawi al-Shāfiʿī. The Sultan ordered him to be taken to the chief judge and allowed the merchant Sharaf-al-Dīn Mūsā al-Tātāʿī al-Anṣārī to present his case in front of the Sharīʿa Court against Abūʿl Khayr ibn al-Naḥḥās.

⁴⁰ This inscription is discussed by Yūsuf D. Ghawānimah, *Tārīkh Niyābat Bayt al-Maqdis fi al-ʿasr al-Mamlūkī* (History of Jerusalem under Mamluk occupation)(Amman: Dār al-Ḥayāh bi-daʿm min Jāmiʿat al-Yarmūk, 1982), p. 104; see also Michael Hamilton Burgoyne, *Mamluk Jerusalem: an architectural study with additional historical research by D. S. Richards* (London: BSAJ, 1987), p. 60.

The population of Cairo, including women and the *ahl al-dhimmah*, were relieved upon the seizure of ibn al-Naḥḥās. He was questioned by the *qāḍī* Sharaf al-Dīn and an inventory of ibn al-Naḥḥās's belongings, including his properties and all that he had accumulated—gold, rich artifacts, promissory notes totaling up to 30,000 dinars, *iqṭā'āt* (properties or landed revenues), rental properties, and many other valuables—was prepared. The Chief Judge Sharaf al-Dīn confiscated all his properties and belongings and delivered them to the Sultan. Eventually, ibn al-Naḥḥās was exiled to Tarsus in the year 854/1450. Two years later, he was released and came to Egypt to meet the Sultan and receive absolution. That was not granted and he was once again arrested in Cairo and later taken back to prison, apparently in Tarsus. According to ibn Taghrībirdī, upon witnessing his arrest, the population of Cairo cried out: “This will be the punishment for whoever lies to the kings and steals the money of the *waqf* (endowment properties)!” All the positions he held were given to Sharaf al-Dīn Mūsā al-Tātā'ī al-Anṣārī.⁴¹

“عاما رده” (*‘āmā raddahu*)

The naskhī script is a perplexing script, and in the case of our inscription, when van Berchem originally copied the inscription, he copied the first words of line 4 as “عاما رده,” a phrase which makes no sense at all. When publishing the inscription, he reproduced it as “عاما رده,” which is clearly the correct reading. In neither case, however, does he propose any interpretation of this expression.⁴²

The phrase *‘āmā raddahu* (lit., year of restitution)⁴³ must be understood in its historical context. As mentioned, mass riots occurred against the Sultan that year (i.e., 1450) because of the economic catastrophe caused by the insufficient rise of the waters of the Nile and the spiraling prices in the market⁴⁴ that resulted in the recalling of ibn al-Naḥḥās. In our estimation, then, the phrase here refers to ibn-Naḥḥās's arrest on charges of corruption, the restitution of all that he took to the Sultan, and the cancellation of all unjust taxes. As noted, ibn al-Naḥḥās's positions and land revenues were subsequently transferred to al-Anṣārī as ibn al-Naḥḥās's successor.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm*, pp. 130-132, 136, 149, 157-170, 174, 186.

⁴² CIA, Jérusalem, pp. 332-333.

⁴³ Arabic “رده” bears many meanings according to its context. It may mean “to go astray,” “to return money-belongings” or “to retribute,” “to fall into apostasy” or “to return from the Islamic faith,” “to revolt against” or “to cause a revolutionary war.”

⁴⁴ Levanoni, “Rank-and-file Mamluks,” p. 28.

⁴⁵ On the practice of the removal of *iqṭā'āt* to an official's successor, see Farouk O. Fawzi, “Arabia and the Eastern Arab Lands (al-Mashriq),” in *History of Humanity: Scientific and Cultural Development. Vol. IV: From the 7th-16th Century*, ed. Mohammad al-Bakhit, et al. (New York; Paris: Routledge, UNESCO, 2000) p. 322, and sources mentioned there. It may

Sayf al-Dīn al-Maḡarr al-Sharafī al-Anṣārī

The inscription in the Armenian monastery mentions Sayf al-Dīn al-Maḡarr al-Sharafī al-Anṣārī's application to the Sultan to cancel the unprecedented tax and to enforce the removal of ibn al-Naḥḥās from his position. According to ibn Taghrībirdi, Sharaf al-Dīn Mūsā al-Tātā'ī al-Anṣārī succeeded ibn al-Naḥḥās upon the Sultan's order. The question arises whether these two names signify the same individual? It is difficult to assert that conclusion with any confidence as the only commonality between them is their family name, which traces their lineage back to ancestors who belonged to the Anṣār, the 'helpers' of the Prophet Muhammed in Medina, who called themselves al-Anṣārī.⁴⁶ The Armenian historiographical sources, however, mention a "Sayf al-Dīn al-Mukhiri" (i.e., Sayf al-Dīn al-Maḡarr al-Sharafī al-Anṣārī) as the Governor at the time, but such a name does not exist in the list of the chronicles of the governors of Jerusalem.⁴⁷ Although the identity of Sayf al-Dīn al-Maḡarr al-Sharafī al-Anṣārī remains unknown, we propose that Sayf al-Dīn al-Maḡarr al-Sharafī al-Anṣārī should be identified with Sharaf al-Dīn Mūsā al-Tātā'ī al-Anṣārī who succeeded ibn al-Naḥḥās.

“ضمان” (Ḍamān)

The *ḍamān* was an agricultural tax for exploiting the land. Since the late ninth century, caliphs appointed leaders or emirs in the regions they ruled in order to supervise and tax agricultural lands; a position that implied financial powers. The person who collected the taxes, called the *ḍāmin*, paid a certain fixed sum to the treasury and kept the remainder of the revenue for himself. Subsequently this system developed into an "administrative *iqṭā'*" (allotment, land and/or landed revenue) owned by the State and taxed for its revenues. As a form of tax farming, *ḍamān* was practiced in Egypt for many centuries.⁴⁸

III. Conclusion

The analysis of Armenian and Mamluk historical sources enables us to restore the order of events surrounding the erection of Sultan Jaḡmaq's inscription, which in turn sheds light on the life of the Armenian community of Jerusalem in the 15th century. In 1450, during the tenure of Patriarch Abraham Msrc'i, the St. James Brotherhood of Jerusalem was harassed by the

be worth noting given the semantic range of the term, “ردء” that al-Anṣārī also tried to have ibn al-Naḥḥās brought up on the charge of apostasy on account of his corruption. The chief judge, however, dismissed the charge.

⁴⁶ Annemarie Schimmel, *Islamic Names* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1989), p. 39.

⁴⁷ al-'Arif, *al-Mufasssalu fi tāriḡh*, p. 228.

⁴⁸ Amira El Azhary Sonbol, *The New Mamluks: Egyptian Society and Modern Feudalism* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2000), p. 25.

Minister of the Treasury, Abū Al-Khayr ibn al-Naḥḥās, who imposed an unprecedented tax (*ḍamān*) on the Armenian Monastery of St. James in Jerusalem. The Armenian monks complained about this unprecedented tax to Sayf al-Dīn al-Maḡarr al-Sharafī al-Anṣārī. Listening to the complaints of the Armenians, the latter communicated with the Sultan al-Zāhir requesting further clarifications on this issue. As there were many complaints in Egypt and throughout the kingdom against ibn al-Naḥḥās and his actions, and seeing that the Egyptian population turned to mass riots against the Sultan because of food-shortages and panic, he dismissed and removed ibn al-Naḥḥās from all his positions and put him in jail in Tarsus. The Sultan transferred all the positions al-Naḥḥās had held to Sharaf al-Dīn Mūsā al-Tātā'ī al-Anṣārī who is to be identified with Sayf al-Dīn al-Maḡarr al-Sharafī al-Anṣārī. The same year, the Sultan ordered the cancellation of the unprecedented tax imposed on the Armenian Monastery of St. James and showered curses against those who dared to impose any tax or inflict an injustice upon this Holy Place.

In 1743, during the tenure of Patriarch Grigor the Chainbearer, the inscription was already found to be in bad condition. Fearing that the inscription could become irretrievably damaged, the Patriarch appealed to the Sharī'a Court to allow him to insert a copy inside the entrance of the monastery. This permission was granted on 19 July 1743. Both inscriptions exist today, although the original inscription has continued to deteriorate and is almost completely effaced.

ARMENIAN MONASTERY OF ST. JAMES, JERUSALEM