



Al-Quds Al-Mamelukiyya: A History of Mamluk Jerusalem based on the Haram Documents by Huda Lutfi

Based upon the Haram collection of documents at the Islamic Museum, this study of life in the city of Jerusalem between the thirteenth and fifteenth century constitutes an important text in the Jerusalem library on a variety of levels. It draws a rich picture of the gendered social, economic and administrative life within the city itself. *Al-Quds Al-Mamelukiyya* shows how the city's main industry--pilgrimage--formed everyday life in the city, from the food prepared to the kinds of artisanal skills that flourished. It examines the kinds of relations and networks that produced and sustained the Mamluk city: the socio-

cultural world of the five-town pilgrimage cycle and the dependence on the countryside for the supply of the city's basic foodstuffs.

However, what makes *Al-Quds Al-Mamlukiyya* particularly noteworthy in the Jerusalem library is its style of presentation. Most archive-based studies detail the composition of the documents examined. Researchers generally comment at length on the relationship of the documents to other sources, the nature of the composition of the materials themselves, and especially the gaps, limits and inconsistencies of the collection. Likewise, *Al-Quds Al-Mamelukiyya* situates the Mamluk estate records upon which the study is based in relation to the canonical literary texts that inform our knowledge of Mamluk Jerusalem. It compares the developmental systematization of the Mamluk bureaucracy with that of the highly standardized subsequent Ottoman administration of the city. However, the author pushes these discussions further by engaging the reader, including the non-specialist, in the complex dynamics between the medieval sources and the process of assembling a history.

The author draws the reader into these dynamics in the first chapter of the text. By reprinting--in the original Arabic and in English translation--representative samples from the estate records themselves the reader is introduced to the modes of rhetoric of a different historical moment. This invites critical reflection upon the kinds of interventions that go into the process of translating one conceptual system into another. These problems of

translation become further underscored upon closer examination of the ethnographic detail of estate records themselves: the detailed attention given to clothes and pieces of textile in the estate records ranging from those of a water carrier at Al-Aqsa mosque to the wife of a well-to-do merchant.

Furthermore, Dr. Lutfi's history poses an extended introductory discussion examining the possible meanings associated with *nisba's* in fourteenth and fifteenth century Jerusalem. Attached to a person's name, a *nisba* theoretically points towards the geographic origin of the person or her/his family. The author suggests that the problem cannot be limited to the material difficulties faced by the medieval historian in tracing and assigning meaning to *nisba's*. Rather, the difficulties in distinguishing between 'pilgrim' and 'Jerusalemite' in the estate records, she argues, might have as much to do with radically different notions of belonging whose value and complex meaning is difficult to access by way of what counts as the historical record. *Al-Quds Al-Mamelukiyya* is an interesting text for the questions it raises about the burdens we bring to, and the ways in which we engage with, the subject of the past.