

Said Aljoumani and Konrad Hirschler: *Owning Books and Preserving Documents in Medieval Jerusalem: The Library of Burhan al-Din*

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Adam Sabra

University of California, Santa Barbara, CA, USA

Email: asabra@history.ucsb.edu

The work under review is a valuable contribution to two burgeoning sub-fields in the history of the pre-modern Middle East: the history of the book and the history of archival practices. The authors have already made important contributions to these fields, including studies of the Damascus Ashrafiya madrasa library and the library of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, a fifteenth-century Damascene scholar. If the first study focused on a large institutional library and the second dealt with the library of a well-known scholar of Prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*), this third instalment in the trilogy is concerned with the library and estate of a minor scholar who lived in fourteenth-century Jerusalem. The library is known to us through a series of court documents from Jerusalem assembled after Burhān al-Dīn’s death in 1387.

The documents in question form part of a corpus known as the Ḥaram documents because they were discovered in the Islamic Museum located in al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf in Jerusalem. The vast majority of these 950 documents pertain to the tenure of one Shāfi‘ī judge in Jerusalem who was accused of misappropriating funds from pious endowments, leading to an investigation. They were first catalogued by Donald Little and previously utilized by Huda Lufti for a study of Jerusalem society in the fourteenth century and by Christian Müller to study judicial practice. There are quite a few estate inventories in this corpus of documents, but the documentation of Burhān al-Dīn’s library, including an extensive inventory that the authors call a sales booklet, is unique. The authors point out that this is the earliest library in Greater Syria for which we have detailed documentation.

Burhān al-Dīn is an interesting figure precisely because he would otherwise be unknown to us. He was not important enough in his contemporaries’ eyes for them to include him in a biographical dictionary. He made a career as a Quran reciter in a variety of different institutions in Jerusalem, eventually cobbling together enough sources of income to accumulate modest wealth. He wrote nothing and was not sufficiently learned to merit a teaching position. He was married and divorced several times and his financial affairs provide a fascinating case study on the economics of marriage in this period. It is unusual, therefore, that someone whose accomplishments were so modest would accumulate a library so large. At the time of his death, Burhān al-Dīn’s library contained 273 books, which is quite large for a medieval library. One possibility not mentioned by the authors is that Burhān al-Dīn was not only a book collector, but also a dealer. This hypothesis would explain how he was able to support himself from what initially were limited earnings from reciting in endowment institutions and on behalf of low-ranking military officers. On the other hand, the absence of sales documents involving books undermines this hypothesis. The authors interpret Burhān al-Dīn’s library as an indication of his accumulation of social and material capital in the latter part of his life.

The principal contributions of this volume are in its reproduction, edition, and translation of all the documents relevant to Burhān al-Dīn’s library, and in the authors’



detailed study of archival practices. The editions are carefully prepared, and the translations help to make them accessible to non-specialists and comparativists. The study includes essays on Burhān al-Dīn's life, archiving practices, the sales booklet as a form of documentation, the library contexts, and book prices.

Recent studies on archival practices in the medieval Middle East, here understood as the period preceding the Ottoman conquest of Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz, emphasize the ubiquity of written documents and the paucity of state archives. The highly developed legal culture of the period produced endless streams of documentation, but notaries did not necessarily keep copies of the documents they drafted and comprehensive court archives did not exist until the middle of the sixteenth century. Legal documents were archived by families, endowment institutions (both Muslim and Christian), and the households of military slaves. When a judge wanted to review a prior legal decision, he instructed the parties to submit their documents and identify witnesses who could testify in their favour.

The disposition of Burhān al-Dīn's estate was one such legal procedure in which the deceased's personal archive was submitted to the judge who had a series of documents compiled concerning the sale of the deceased's library. The beneficiaries were Burhān al-Dīn's orphans, and the authors might have given more thought to the way in which the judge managed the orphans' property during their minority.

A substantial part of the study is devoted to reconstructing the relationship between different documents and the manner of their composition, down to the level of how they were folded and the orthography of numerals. These details will fascinate specialists in medieval archival practices and suggest ways for historians working on other documents to reconstruct and interpret private archives. For non-specialists, this material may be too detailed, and the earlier chapters are likely to be of greater interest.

Although the authors make an effort to engage with the secondary literature on Ottoman libraries and estate inventories, it is clear that more discussion is needed between specialists in the medieval and early modern periods. Although the Ottomans introduced important changes in archiving practices in the lands they conquered, there were also significant continuities in the production of legal documents. The survival of so much evidence from the Ottoman period could assist medievalists in interpreting the more fragmentary evidence available to them. For their part, Ottomanists might discover that some practices with which they are familiar have deeper roots than they realize.

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**Bernard O'Kane, A.C.S. Peacock
and Mark Muehlhaeusler (eds): *Inscriptions of the
Medieval Islamic World***

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Konrad Hirschler

University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
Email: konrad.hirschler@uni-hamburg.de

This volume is a splendid milestone in the study of epigraphy in the medieval Islamic world, bringing together an impressively diverse set of authors. Its over 700 pages are