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CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds  
Studies

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Panel 34 a)

## Overlapping perspectives in 15th-century Middle East Historiography: the reign of al-Zāhir Ğaqmaq (1438-1453)

The reign of Sultan al-Zāhir Ğaqmaq (1438-1453) is perhaps the opaquest of all the sultanic reigns of the 15th century. Within the context of the ERC project “The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate II: Historiography, Political Order and State Formation in 15th Century Egypt and Syria” (Ghent University, 2017–21), which focuses on the role historiography played in bringing cohesion to the rapidly changing and fragmenting political orders of the 15th century, al-Zāhir Ğaqmaq’s reign presents itself as an interesting case study for how historical memories of individual sultanic reigns were negotiated by contemporary historians. To do so, this panel presents several case studies drawn from various contemporary chronicles. Through the examination of these different representations of al-Zāhir Ğaqmaq’s reign, and by employing both distant and close reading techniques and methodologies inspired by current trends in the digital humanities, this panel wishes to emphasize the diversity of historiographical narratives that shaped the distinct history and memories of this reign. The understanding of al-Zāhir Ğaqmaq and his times which emerges from this comparative exercise reveals a plurality of faces, echoing the social, cultural, and political backgrounds of the historiographers, and reveals how their narratives were the result of their competitions for status in the Cairo Sultanate.

**Person in charge : Kenneth Goudie (University of Gand)**

**Disussant : Julien Loiseau (Aix-Marseille University)**

### Program

#### **Mustafa Banister (University of Gand)**

*Heroes and Villains: Meanings Linked to the Dichotomy of Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s Use and Re-Use of “Obedience” (al-ṭā‘a) and «Evildoers» (al-bughā) in Year One of Ğaqmaq’s Reign.*

The establishment of the sultanate of Ğaqmaq (r. 1438-1453) in Cairo was the outcome of convoluted social and political realignments. Seeking to find favor only one precarious year into the situation, the scholar and historian Aḥmad ibn ‘Arabshāh (d. 1450) composed a new panegyric chronicling the first year of Ğaqmaq’s reign which set forth the new sultan as a pious Muslim sovereign. By juxtaposing the author’s usage of the Arabic word for evildoers/tyrants (al-bughā) and tyranny (baghy) against his word for obedience and obedient (al-ṭā‘a) this paper analyses ways in which Ibn ‘Arabshāh - as a scholar eager to enter service as part of the inner circle of sultanic advisors - shaped his narrative of the first year of Ğaqmaq’s reign as an attempt to praise loyalists and shift blame onto previous protagonists (reimagined as evildoers) to better find a position of patronage in late medieval Syria or Egypt.

## **Daniel Mahoney (University of Gand)**

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### *Disassembling al-Maqrīzī's portrait of power for Sultan al-Ẓāhir Jaqmaq*

Although al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) covered only the first three years of Sultan al-Ẓāhir Jaqmaq's reign in his historiographical work *Al-sulūk li-ma'rifat duwal al-mulūk*, he gives a vivid portrayal of his political consolidation of the sultanate, providing numerous accounts of the various types of actions he undertook to secure his position. Combining various techniques of digital humanities and a close reading of the text, this paper explores the various types of vocabulary that this historian used to construct this portrait of power in practice, as well as the broader discourse of rulership and authority that underlies it.

## **Kenneth Goudie (University of Gand)**

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### *Semiotising the sultan: Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī and al-Ẓāhir Jaqmaq*

This paper will explore how Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī (d. 1480), a fifteenth-century Qur'ān exegete and historian active in Cairo, represented and gave meaning to the reign of al-Ẓāhir Jaqmaq in his chronicle, the *Izhār al-'aṣr*. Al-Biqā'ī's representation of Jaqmaq as an individual has been covered extensively by Li Guo, who notes how al-Biqā'ī excoriates the sultan and inverts the image of the "exceedingly frugal and pious man" of al-Sakhāwī, Ibn Taghrībirdī, and Ibn Iyās, revealing Jaqmaq instead to have been a debauched, fatuous, self-indulgent tyrant. Guo goes so far as to describe al-Biqā'ī's account of Jaqmaq as nothing less than character assassination. However lively and entertaining Guo's discussion is, this paper will go further by considering al-Biqā'ī's discussion of Jaqmaq more holistically. That is, it will consider the themes of order and disorder around which al-Biqā'ī orientates his discussion of Jaqmaq's reign, thinking about how and when these themes are explored and developed in the *Izhār al-'aṣr*, and how they engage with and shape al-Biqā'ī's summary of Jaqmaq's reign.

## **Rihab Ben Othmen (University of Gand)**

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### *A "Rightly-Guided" Sultan: Ideal Representations of al-Ẓāhir Jaqmaq in Ibn Taghrībirdī's Nujūm al-Zāhira*

Sultan al-Zahir Jaqmaq (r. 1438-1453) is arguably one of the most celebrated royal figures in the writings of the fifteenth century Egyptian court-historian Abū al-Maḥāsīn Ibn Taghrībirdī (1410-1470). The account of his reign in *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira* is, in effect, interspersed with laudatory images which commemorates not only a long episode of stability and prosperity in the history of the Cairo Sultanate, but above all an eulogistic representation of this sovereign. Being paralleled to the exceptional figures of early Islam, more specifically, to the « the Rāshidūn-s or the Rightly-Guided» caliphs, al-Ẓāhir Jaqmaq appears under the pen of Ibn Taghrībirdī as the incarnation of the Sunni orthodoxy and the values of asceticism. By cross-checking the apologetic account of this courtier with his individual experiences in sultan's Jaqmaq court, the present study proposes to reveal the personal and professional stakes underlying the reconstruction of the ideal memory of this sultan. In so doing, it aims to demonstrate how the intersecting trajectories of al-Ẓāhir Jaqmaq and Ibn Taghrībirdī significantly played in the shaping of an ideal conception of sovereignty.