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## The Mamluk Barīd: Some Evidence from the Haram Documents

The classic exposition of the Mamluk official postal service, the *barīd*, remains the work of Jean Sauvaget.<sup>1</sup> In conformity with the available literary evidence, and after a survey of surviving relay stations (*marākiz*), Sauvaget maintained that Jerusalem, removed as it was from the main centres of affairs, had no role to play in the widespread communications network represented by the barid—except for its being a link in the carrier pigeon chain.<sup>2</sup> For the Fatimid period, in the 11th century, there is in certain documents from the Cairo Geniza evidence for the existence of a commercial postal service, connecting Jerusalem with Cairo.<sup>3</sup> Whether such services continued in any way after that period I have no idea. I confine myself here to speculation about the Mamluk official barid.

A closer look at the details of the general descriptions of the barid routes does suggest that the lesser administrative centres (*maqārr al-wilāyāt*), of which Jerusalem was one, could be linked into the barid system as and when that was necessary.<sup>4</sup> A small number of Haram documents<sup>5</sup> shows, however sketchily, that Jerusalem *did* have a role to play in the official overland postal system, perhaps of that secondary nature. It is difficult to decide whether the references in these documents to the barid and the couriers (*barīdiyya*) are dealing with a regular service or ad hoc arrangements. However some long-term presence of the postal organisation is suggested by the fact that an inventory of a woman's possessions (Haram no. 450, dated 15 Muharram 796/20 November 1393) describes her place of residence as 'near the Stable of the Barid (*iṣṭabl al-barīd*)' in the Banī 'Amir Quarter of Jerusalem, as though it was a regular topographical feature.

The other relevant documents refer tantalisingly to aspects of the administration of the barid. The situation as known from literary evidence<sup>6</sup> is that the postal services over certain areas between Egypt and Palestine were supplied and manned by Bedouin and their Emirs, who were rewarded by being assigned *iqṭā's*. All other areas were maintained by direct government finance. We can now see in a particular case how part of the local income of the Treasury in Jerusalem was used to support operations of the barid. In the documents being considered, that income came from escheated inheritances. Whether such sums accruing to the Treasury from the estates of persons deceased in Jerusalem were regularly used to meet expenses of the barid or whether we happen to have an example of what was rather an ad hoc application cannot, of course, be decided.

There are in the Haram collection three versions of an account submitted by an official of the Treasury in Jerusalem. The numbers are 59, 374 and 535. The first two have basically the same text with variations but 535 adds substantial extra information. The account is for the receipt of sums of money from the estates of six persons who died during the month of Shawwāl 793/September 1391, and for certain expenditure made therefrom. Incidentally, in a group of documents catalogued as Haram no. 770, there survive by chance papers preparatory, as it were, to the account. They give the details of five of the estates mentioned above. They are examples of the sort of paper-work well represented in the Haram archive, namely the itemizing of the effects of a deceased person, and frequently an account of the monies they realised, the expenses deducted therefrom (for example, administration costs, any rents or debts outstanding and burial costs), and a statement of the residue, and the sum that was received by the Treasury.

A comparison of these five inventories and the versions of the Treasury account make it clear that the responsible official was one Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Zain al-Dīn 'Umar ibn Nāṣir al-Khallā'ī. One of the recipients of a salary (*murat-tab*) is Khālīd al-Khallā'ī, no doubt Muḥammad's son, for

<sup>1</sup> J. Sauvaget, *La Poste aux Chevaux dans l'Empire des Mamelouks*, Paris, 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, *Ta'rif al-Muṣṭalāh al-Sharīf*, Cairo, 1312 A.H., p. 197.

<sup>3</sup> S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, University of California Press, 1967, I, pp. 292–4.

<sup>4</sup> al-'Umarī, *Ta'rif*, p. 194, ult. (read *maqārr* for *miqdār*) to p. 195, line 1 and lines 15–16, and p. 196, lines 9–10; cf. Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, xiv, pp. 383 (read *maqārr* for *miqdār*) and 385.

<sup>5</sup> For this collection, see D. P. Little, 'The Significance of the Haram Documents' etc., *Der Islam*, LVII, 1980, pp. 189–219; and his catalogue, now available, *A Catalogue of the Islamic Documents from al-Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem*, Beirut, 1984.

<sup>6</sup> al-'Umarī, *Ta'rif*, pp. 189–190, and cf. Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, I, p. 481, for arrangements made by Baibars at Gaza in 661/1263.



there is a 'Khālīd, his son', who appears in the list of additional expenditure.

It is tempting to identify the Muḥammad al-Khallā'ī, the man who prepared the account, with the man of the same name whose arrest had been ordered by the Qadi Sharaf al-Dīn for some unspecified misuse of the horses of the barid. The circumstance may be understood from a reply sent to the Qadi from a courier, identified only as 'Īsā.<sup>7</sup> This reply (Haram no. 272) is dated 16 Šafar 793/23 January 1391. The courier undertakes to arrest Muḥammad, the wanted man, at the provincial administrative centre of Qaqun, which was also a stage of the barid, on the latter's return from Damascus. It is difficult to imagine why the Qadi is involved at all unless the misuse was connected with the barid horses from Jerusalem. Can one infer from the apparent scenario that to travel to Damascus from Jerusalem and to return one descended to the main coastal barid route and passed through Qaqun?

Turning back to details of the account, certain technical terms occur, the most obvious being *tasfīr* and *sawwāq*. *Tasfīr* was translated by Sauvaget as 'frais de mission',<sup>8</sup> expenses provided during employment on official business via the barid. 150 dirhams is the sum paid under that heading to Saif al-Dīn Ṭashtimur, who is described (in one version) as 'mamluk of the governor of Gaza'. Note that he is not described as a regular courier. A later entry in the account is for 100 dirhams paid as *tasfīr* to Qutlubughā *al-barīdī*, the courier. But Ṭashtimur, not being a regular courier (the barid was not only a postal service but also a system for providing swift passage of personnel on official business) may well have been accompanied by a *sawwāq*. *Sawwāqs*, according to Sauvaget, were persons 'qui accompagnaient, pour pousser leur monture et les servir durant leur voyage, ceux dont il avait été ordonné qu'ils montassent les chevaux de la poste.'<sup>9</sup> As it happens, there is an item for the hire of a *sawwāq* and the hire of his mule and the cost of barley (14½ dirhams in all) immediately after the entry for the *tasfīr* of Ṭashtimur. Six dirhams was also the sum paid to 'the *sawwāq* of Bughā Timur.' That there were persons who regularly served in the capacity of *sawwāq* is suggested by the entries for 'barley of the *sawwāq* of Kerak and Gaza—10 dirhams' and for 'Nāšir, the *sawwāq* of Husban—10 dirhams' (Husban was a stage on the Damascus—Kerak route). One might also be tempted to infer from the appearance of individuals so described that there was some regular traffic on those routes—to Husban across the Jordan valley, as another way of linking up with a main route to Damascus, and perhaps—in the case of 'the *sawwāq* of Kerak and Gaza'—

via Khalīl (Hebron) to join that established east–west route.<sup>10</sup>

What is noteworthy from the other items of expenditure in the account is that runners (*su'āt*) are hired for official business (*muhimmāt*), and there is ad hoc hiring of mounts and other personnel. There are two items for 10 dirhams for the hire of mules for couriers. At least one of these may possibly refer to one of the documents in the Haram no. 770 group of papers, which is a receipt from a Muḥammad ibn 'Īsā ibn Muḥammad, 'arīf, overseer of the muleteers in Jerusalem, for 10 dirhams for the hire of a mule from Jerusalem to Hebron and back.<sup>11</sup> In this connection one may note that the Muḥammad al-Khallā'ī, who submitted the account, expressly says that he paid out certain sums 'in accordance with papers in his hand', i.e. on the authority of receipts and requisitions.

It would be wrong, however, to think that the barid was not maintaining its own horses at this time. We have already referred to the misappropriation of barid horses in the letter to the Qadi. The Treasury account also mentions 24 dirhams for 'the cost of barley for the horses of the Royal barid (*al-barīd al-mansūra* sic!)', and a later item, 11 dirhams for 'barley for the Emir Shabyūq for the horses of the barid.'

But why is the Treasury in Jerusalem dealing with these matters? The Muḥammad al-Khallā'ī who presented the account is definitely a Treasury official. In the inventories alluded to he is described as 'the responsible official on behalf of the Treasury' or 'the person in charge of the sale [i.e. of the individual's effects]', and elsewhere as 'the *mustawfī* of the Treasury.'<sup>12</sup> This would appear to suggest that there were no separate officials dealing with barid business, for otherwise one would surely expect to find in the Treasury account merely a global figure transferred to the barid for detailed disbursement there. It is also worth noting that the muleteer I have mentioned received the money owed him for the hire of his mule not from any barid official but from the Inspector of the Treasury in Jerusalem (*nāzir bait al-māl al-ma'mūr*), Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm.

This particular income from the escheated inheritances did not go to meet the expenses of the overland barid alone. There were items connected with the pigeon post, that is, sums for personnel of that service (sing. *barrāj*) and even for 'barley for the horse of the *barrāj*' and a saddle for it (*rahl*?). But in addition to that there was a much wider range of expenditure, which met payment to notaries connected with the Hospital, a salary payment (20 dirhams) to the *nāzir*, the Inspector of the Treasury mentioned earlier, another of 57½ dirhams to

<sup>7</sup> Little (*A Catalogue* etc., p. 42) incorrectly identifies the writer as 'Muḥammad b. 'Īsā z-Zaidī š-Šarafi'. For my reading, see Appendix A. The 'al-Sharafi', written below the beginning of the *basmala*, expresses subordination to the addressee, Sharaf al-Dīn, whom I identify with the Qadi Sharaf al-Dīn 'Īsā b. Ghānim al-Shāfi, whose name appears *passim* throughout the Haram documents. His career has been set forth by Little (*A Catalogue* etc., pp. 8–12). Line 3 of Haram no. 272 is doubtful but there appears to be proof in the document that Sharaf al-Dīn was Chief Qadi in 793/1391. The subject matter concerned with 'the purchase of a *dār*' is restricted to lines 8–14.

<sup>8</sup> *La Poste*, 84, note 331.

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Huda Lutfi, in her *Al-Quds al-Mamlūkiyya* etc., Berlin, 1985, p. 306, infers an occupation as courier (*barīdī*) for a certain Zain al-Dīn al-Halabī, from the fact that his inventory (Haram no. 556) includes 'three sacks for the mail (*thalāth sharārib mukaffala li'l-barīd*) and a donkey' (!) I do not know the justification for interpreting *shurrāba* as 'mail sack'. Qalqashandī (*Šubh*, xiv, p. 371) describes it as an identifying yellow silk scarf or such like, worn by a courier. I believe that *mukaffala* (meaning what here?) could be read as *mulawwana*, 'coloured'.

<sup>11</sup> Haram no. 770 (*th*). One is bound to say that the text is doubtful at this point and the mule may well have been hired for a *barrāj*, a 'tower-man' or dove-cote attendant, an agent of the pigeon post.

<sup>12</sup> Haram no. 669.

the Intendant (*shādd*), Saif al-Dīn Qarābughā, who worked alongside the Inspector and is described in Haram no. 770 (*b*) as the *amīr ākhūr* of the Governor of Jerusalem, and finally a salary payment of 118 dirhams for the month of Ramaḍān 793/August 1391 to the Shāfiʿī deputy Qadi of Jerusalem, al-ʿAsqalānī.<sup>13</sup>

It is difficult to draw conclusions on the basis of such meagre evidence. However, my general impression is that the study

of this account and the handful of other relevant documents mentioned suggests an official postal service operating towards the end of the 14th century at Jerusalem, which had previously been thought to lack any branch of that service, but one operating in a somewhat hand-to-mouth fashion. Just a few years later the whole system of the barid collapsed, as a result of the violent disruptions caused by Tamerlane's invasion, and was not re-established.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See Haram no. 770 (*t*) in Appendix C below, from which we learn that his name was Ibrāhīm.

<sup>14</sup> Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, xiv, p. 370.



## Appendix

There follow the texts of some of the documents referred to above. Practically all the diacritical points are editorial.

A. Haram no. 272: paper, length 32.5 cm, width 12.75 cm, dated 16 Safar 793/23 January 1391. Verso blank.

1. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
2. الشرفى
3. يقبل الأرض وينهى انه ليسل الله تعالى دوام أيام مولانا
4. قاضي القضاة ايده الله تعالى وينهى ورود المرسوم العالى على يد
5. بدر الدين بدر يتضمن سلامة مولانا قاضي القضاة وعافيته واما ما ذكر من جهة
6. محمد الخلاعى انه تعدا على خيل البريد المنصور فقد وجده المملوك
7. بمدينة قاقون وسلم على المملوك ولو كان مع المملوك علم كان يمسه
8. ولكن في عوده من الشام المحروس يمسه المملوك ان شا الله تعالى
- .....
14. ..... انهى المملوك ذلك
15. ان شا الله تعالى
16. كتب في سادس عشر شهر صفر سنة ثلاث وتسعين وسبعمائة
17. الحمد لله وحده وصلوته على سيدنا محمد وآله وصحبه وسلامه
18. حسبنا الله ونعم الوكيل

B. The text of the account for Shawwāl 793/September 1391, as found in Haram no. 374: paper, length 28.5 cm, width 19.5 cm, folded three times vertically with the text written in two vertical columns on the left fold only. Verso blank.

I give the variants and additions found in the other two documents:

- (i) Haram no. 535 = B.
- (ii) Haram no. 59 = H.

All the numerals are given in the originals in the *siyāqa* script. I have doubts about my interpretation of the fractions, although all the figures here given 'work out'.

1. الحمد لله رب العالمين
2. محاسبة
3. \* ما حصل من الأموال الديوانية مقابلة المواريث الحشرية<sup>1</sup> بالقدس الشريف<sup>2</sup>

4. لاستقبال شهر شوال<sup>3</sup> سنة ثلاث وتسعين وسبعمائة
5. والآخر رابع عشره...<sup>4</sup>
6. من الدراهم<sup>5</sup>
7. تركة عاتكة ثانی شوال ٢٢
8. تركة على القطان<sup>6</sup> ثانی شوال ٦ ١/٢
9. تركة على بن احمد بن خلف<sup>7</sup> تاسع شوال ٩٣٨ ١/٢
10. تركة (مصالح...؟) عدل بن حيدر العجمي<sup>8</sup> عاشر شوال ١٠
11. تركة عائشة بنت عبد الله بن يوسف زوج على شاه<sup>9</sup> عاشر شوال ٣٩ ١/٢
12. تركة بريم<sup>10</sup> بنت عبد الله ١٢٠
13. في شوال ١١٢٦ ٣/٤
14. انصرف من ذلك<sup>11</sup>
15. \* في جامكيه النظر ٢٠
16. في اجرة سعاة برسم المهمات الشريفة ٢٢
17. اجرة شهود المحضر بالمارستان ٣
18. ثمن ..... ورق<sup>12</sup> ٩
19. معلوم الحاكم الشافعي العسقلاني<sup>13</sup> ١١٨
20. جامكية الشاد سيف الدين قرابغا<sup>14</sup> ٥٧ ١/٢
21. ثمن شعير لفرس البراج<sup>15</sup> ٢٠
22. ثمن رحل \*لفرس ايضا<sup>16</sup> ١٦
23. ثمن شعير خيل البريد المنصورة [كذا] ٢٤
24. في مرتب شهاب الدين<sup>17</sup> المحتسب<sup>(٩)</sup> ٢ ١/٢
25. تفسير السيف طشتمر مملوك نائب غزة<sup>18</sup> ١٥٠
26. اجرة سواق وبغل وثمان شعير ١٤ ١/٢
27. في وفاء قرض ٥٠
28. في مرتب خالد الخلاعى ١٠
29. تسفير قطلوبغا البريدى ١٠٠
30. اجرة بغل للبريدى<sup>19</sup> ١٠
31. ..... ١/٢ ٦٢٦ بقى ١/٤ ٥٠٠

1. H: المنجم والمصرف مقابل المواريث الحشرية
2. H adds: خلد الله تعالى ملك مولانا مالکها وادام...
3. H adds: المبارك
4. H adds: مما ذلك جميعه (؟) املاء الحاج محمد الخلاعى  
B begins at this point with: ...من املاء الحاج محمد الخلاعى
5. B and H add: ١١٢٨ ٣/٤
6. See Haram no. 770 (dh).
7. H adds: بباب العامود See Haram no. 770 (b)
8. See Haram no 770 (h). There the deceased's name is al-Hājj Adl b. Rasūl b. Ḥaidar.

9. See Haram no. 770 (a).
10. Sic B and H. See Haram no. 770 (kh), which gives Nairūz.
11. B and H here give total: 626½.
12. Missing in B.
13. H: في جامكية الحاكم العسقلاني المتصرف  
B: في جامكية الحاكم الشافعي بالقدس الشريف
14. Name omitted in B and H, and figures also missing in B.
15. H: للفرس الذي للبراج
16. B: الفرس H: لفرس البريد
17. H adds: احمد
18. B: مملوك مولانا ملك الامرا بغزة اعز الله بصره. H is not clear.
19. B adds: المذكور. H is not clear. Cf. Haram no. 770 (th)

Document Haram no. 535 (=B) continues in the left margin:

1. الحمد لله.
2. ثم ذكر الحاج محمد الخلاعي ان المبلغ المرصد تحت يده  
صرف منه
3. بمقتضى اوراق بيده الى يوم تاريخه ١٥٣ ١/٢
4. تفصيله
5. ناصر سواق حسابان ١٠
6. مرتب (؟) ٣
7. شعير برسم الامير شبيبوق لخيال البريد ١١
8. براج (؟).... ٩
9. سواق بغاتمر ٦
10. عيسى البريدي (؟) ١٠
11. شهاب الدين البراج (؟) ١٠
12. كرى بغل للبريدي ١٠
13. تسفير لغزة ١٢
14. اجرة محاضر ٦
15. براج..... ١٠ ١/٢
16. ابن هلال ٣
17. شعير سواق الكرك وغزة ١٠
18. شعير (؟) الحساباني ٢١
19. ابن هلال ٢
20. خالد ولده ١٠

If this supplementary expenditure of 153½ dirhams is deducted from the 500¼ carried forward, that would leave 346¼ in hand.

C. Haram no. 770 (t): Receipt for Qadi's salary, on or after 15 Shawwāl 793 / 15 September 1391.

1. الحمد لله قبض من مباشرى بيت المال المعمور بالقدس الشريف معلوم
2. الحكم العزيز بالبلد المذكور عن شهر رمضان سنة ثلث وتسعين وسبع مائة المدفع في تواريخ آخرها
3. خامس عشر شوال سنة تاريخه تسعة وخمسين
4. كتبه ابراهيم الشافعي ١١٨

The sum of 118 dirhams was the total salary for the month.

The other figure, 59, was the latest instalment paid on 15 Shawwāl.

D. Haram no. 770 (th): Receipt for hire of mule, dated 22 Shawwāl 793 / 22 September 1391.

1. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
2. أقر محمد بن أحمد بن عيسى عريف المكارية
3. بالقدس الشريف اقرارا شرعيا في صحة منه وسلامة
4. وجواز أمره انه قبض وتسلم وصار اليه من يد
5. الصدر الاجل شمس الدين محمد بن ابراهيم
6. ناظر بيت المال المعمور بالقدس الشريف من الدراهم
7. الفضة الجيد معاملة الشام المحروس مبلغ
8. عشرة دراهم نصفها ٥ وذلك عن اجرة بغل
9. استاجره البراج (او البريدي؟) من القابض المذكور الى بلد
10. الخليل عليه السلام ورجوعه الى القابض
11. الأجر المذكور اعلاه قبض المبلغ المعين اعلاه قبضا
12. تاما وافيا كاملا.... وبه شهد عليه
13. في ثاني عشرى شهر شوال سنة ثلث وتسعين وسبعمائة
14. شهدت على القابض بذلك شهدت على القابض بذلك  
كتبه محمد بن عثمان (؟) كتب عبد الرحمن الغزى (؟)