Wood and Woodworking in Late Ottoman Damascus:

An Analysis of the Qāmūs al-ṣināʿāt al-Šāmiyya

*Le bois et l'artisanat du bois à Damas à la fin de l'époque ottomane : une analyse
du Qāmūs al-ṣināʿāt al-Šāmiyya*

الخشب وحرفة الخشب في دمشق في نهاية العصر العثماني: تحليل
لقاموس الصناعات الشامية

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Wood and Woodworking in Late Ottoman Damascus: An Analysis of the *Qāmūs al-ṣināʿāt al-Šāmiyya*

Marcus MILWRIGHT

Woodworking has flourished in Greater Syria throughout the Islamic period. The carved console panels of the Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem illustrate the high quality of workmanship available in the region during the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods.¹ This building, and the others located on the Ḥaram al-Šarīf retain example of exceptional wooden ornamentation from all phases of Islamic history through to the late Ottoman period.² The 12th and 13th centuries mark a particular highpoint in the production of decorative woodwork in Syria. Perhaps the most famous example was the monumental minbar commissioned by Nūr al-Dīn and completed in Aleppo in 564/1168-69. This masterpiece was finally installed in the Aqṣā mosque by Saladin after the conquest of Jerusalem in 583/1187, and stood in the building until its destruction in 1969 (a replica commissioned by the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan was placed in the same location in 2007).³ Aleppo appears to have been a major centre for the production of elaborate, inlaid woodwork, and several wooden *miḥrāb*-s, *minbar*-s, and other features survive in the city from this period. Other comparable pieces of architectural furniture have been identified in religious buildings elsewhere in Syria and Palestine.⁴

Wood was required for more mundane purposes from the construction of houses, commercial building, waterwheels (norias), and boats to the manufacture of furniture, tools, and smaller domestic items such as boxes, wicker baskets, clogs, and combs. Naturally, this diversity of use encouraged considerable craft specialization during the Islamic centuries, and some of these traditional activities have survived through to the present in the urban souks of Greater Syria. Even the practice of constructing and repairing wooden, sea-going boats continues in coastal locations such as the island of Arwād, off the coast from Tartus (**fig. 1**). Walking through the older districts of Damascus one frequently encounters examples of well constructed, and attractively decorated woodwork dating from the 19th and early 20th centuries, including doors, window grilles, painted ceilings, and balconies

1. HILLENBRAND 1999.

2. ALLAN and ABU KHALAF 2000; FLOOD 2000.

3. AULD 2009a and 2009b. On the new *minbar*, see contributions in SINGER 2008.

4. BLOOM 2009.

(fig. 2), while the antiques shops to the south of the Umayyad Mosque and along Straight Street often sell chests and other wooden items ornamented with marquetry and mother-of-pearl inlay. These examples attest to the continued vibrancy of Damascene woodworking in the last decades of Ottoman rule. This article aims to contribute to the knowledge of this phase through an analysis of some of the chapters devoted to woodworking crafts in a book entitled, *Qāmūs al-ṣināʿāt al-šāmiyya* (“Dictionary of Damascene Crafts”, and from now on referred to as the *Qāmūs*).

Composed between about 1890 and 1905 or 1906, this encyclopaedic work was written by two Damascene scholars, Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Qāsimī (d. 1900) and Ğamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914) with a third collaborator, Ḥalīl al-ʿAẓm.⁵ It was published in a two-volume Arabic edition by Zāfir al-Qāsimī as *Dictionnaire des métiers damascains* (1960). Containing descriptions of some 437 different “crafts” (*ṣināʿa* or *ḥirfa*⁶) operating in the Syrian capital and the immediate vicinity, it offers an invaluable insight into the economic and social life of Damascus in the last decades of Ottoman rule.⁷ The book is arranged alphabetically according to the name of the activity or craft. The chapters in the *Qāmūs* vary in length, and in the degree (and accuracy) of the technical data. It should also be noted that the two principal authors, Muḥammad Saʿīd and his son Ğamāl al-Dīn, were Sunni jurists and connoisseurs of literature.⁸ They often exhibit more concern for ethical aspects of craft production (following the tradition of manuals of *ḥisba*, or market law) and for poetic references to given activities or artefacts.⁹ In the case of the information about woodworking discussed below, I will supplement the entries in the *Qāmūs* with more detailed and accurate 20th-century accounts, mainly drawn from ethnographic research in Iran.¹⁰ A final challenge presented by the *Qāmūs* is its vocabulary; while the prose style is relatively straightforward the authors make use of Syrian dialect words and technical terms the meanings of which are not always easy to recover.¹¹

5. On the date and authorship of the work, see Zāfir al-Qāsimī’s notes in the French introduction in volume 1 of the published edition. *Qāmūs*, I, p. 13–15 (French text). Also COMMINS 1990, p. 86.

6. *Ṣināʿa* and *ḥirfa* are generally used in the *Qāmūs* to describe crafts or activities. These words could also carry the sense of a more formally constituted guild, however. For instance, Elias al-Qudsi’s discussion of the history and structure of the guilds of Damascus describes them as *ḥirfa* (QUDSI 1885). In 19th-century Egypt *ṣināʿa* and *ḥirfa* had largely replaced the traditional words used to describe guilds (*ṭarīq*, *ṭarīqa*, and *ṭāʾifa*). See BAER 1964, p. 16–17.

7. For the crafts still operating in 1927, see MASSIGNON 1953.

8. Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Qāsimī was a Šafiʿi jurist who served as preacher in the Ḥasan and Sināniyya Mosques of the city, and also taught in the latter. His son, Ğamāl al-Dīn, was also educated in the Šafiʿi school, and took over his father’s posts at the Sināniyya mosque in 1900. From the 1890s until his death in 1914 Ğamāl al-Dīn was affiliated to Salafism and championed the adoption of new (Western) technology in Islamic culture. His writings made him an influential figure among the group of Syrian radicals often known today as the Arabists. See COMMINS 1990, p. 42–46.

9. For a recent study of *ḥisba* as a source for the study of Islamic crafts, see GHABIN 2009.

10. WULFF 1966; FLOOR 2006. I will also refer to the discussion of woodworking in Pierre Bazantay’s (BAZANTAY 1936, p. 20–24) study of the crafts of Antioch.

11. For Syrian dialect words I have consulted STOWASSER and ANI 2004. Where the meaning and/or the precise vowel of an Arabic term are unclear, I have marked the word with a question mark.

Timber Resources in Syria and the surrounding Regions

In previous articles I have addressed the presentation in the *Qāmūs* of the crafts of pottery and metalworking.¹² In the former case, one can presume that the clays, tempers, and glaze materials employed by potters were mainly gathered from the vicinity of Damascus.¹³ Metalworking presents a much more complex picture with the employment of both scrap and newly processed metal (in sheets or ingots). Scrap and coinage (for gold and silver) presented a significant local resource, but by the late 19th century relatively little metal ore was being mined and smelted in Syria. There is, however, abundant documentary evidence for the importation of metals – particularly iron/steel, copper, zinc, and tin – from Europe during the 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁴ Wood is another area where craftsmen and consumers in Damascus were faced with the twin difficulties of limited local resources and the need to import the remainder from other parts of the Middle East, and beyond. (Certainly, Medieval European travellers note the scarcity of wood in Damascus, and the high price even of firewood in the markets of the city.¹⁵) Also significant is that wood is not merely required for the making of things, but as a fuel; wood was used for heating and cooking while charcoal was employed for additional industrial functions such as furnaces and forges). Some trees were harvested for their crops. In the *Ġūṭa*, the agricultural areas surrounding Damascus, these consisted principally of olive, almond, pistachio, and apricot. Branches from such species could be removed periodically for sale as firewood, but generally-speaking only dead trees would be cut down and reused.

In common with much of the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin, Syria had been denuded of its major forests centuries before the coming of Islam. The region boasts a surprisingly extensive range of trees, however, in its arid, Mediterranean, riparian, and semi-tropical zones, though only a few of these species would have been suitable for commercial woodworking. The chapters dealing with woodworking in the *Qāmūs* mention the following indigenous species: willow (*ṣafṣāf*), walnut (*ġawz*), holm oak or evergreen oak (*sindiyān*, Latin: *Quercus ilex*), white poplar (*ḥawar*), almond (*lawz*), and apricot (*mišmiš*). Other types of trees were also cut for firewood (see below). Leaving aside the *Ġūṭa*, the nearest significant resources of wood were in the Anti-Lebanon mountains to the west. Timber could have been brought from further afield, though the high costs of land transport must have limited the extent of commercial traffic coming from such regions as Northern Jordan, Lebanon, Northern Syria, and Southern Anatolia to the Syrian capital. Sir John Bowring (d. 1872) discusses the port of Scanderoun (Iskenderun in Southern Turkey) in detail in his commercial report on Syria (published, 1840), noting that it had the most important role in

12. MILWRIGHT 2009 and 2012.

13. The production of underglaze-painted stonepaste wares had ceased by the late 19th century. This sort of high quality decorated pottery often required imported glaze colours and other materials. This is well illustrated in the treatise written by the Persian craftsman, Abū l-Qāsim. Translated with extensive annotations in ALLAN 1973.

14. The total value of the metals (copper, iron, tin, lead, and zinc) imported into the *wilāya* of Syria from Europe is given as 2,500,000 francs. See CUINET 1896, p. 67-68, 380; MILWRIGHT 2012, p.166.

15. ZIADEH 1964, p. 46.

the shipping of wood, particularly oak, from the Taurus mountains to Egypt (where it was used by Muḥammad ʿAlī Bāšā principally for equipping his navy).¹⁶ Presumably, given the virtual monopoly operated by the state, very little of this high quality timber found its way to the markets of Damascus and other Syrian cities.

Vitale Cuinet (d. 1896) is perhaps the best source on the commercial forestry of Syria in the late 19th century.¹⁷ These data are recorded according to the administrative regions (*sanḡaq*, *caza*, and *nāḥiyya*) within the *wilāya* of Syria and Beirut, with a shorter section also devoted to the *muteṣarrifiyya* of Jerusalem. In Cuinet's time the *wilāya* of Syria was made up of the *sanḡaq* of Damascus, Ḥamā, Ḥawrān, and Maʿān. In the *sanḡaq* of Damascus Cuinet identifies significant areas of forest in the *cazas* of: Baʿalbak, particularly around Sahur; Wādī al-ʿAḡam between Qaṭanā and Ġibbata; and Ḥasbiyya. Cuinet draws attention to the plantations of poplar and oak in the *cazas* of Wādī al-ʿAḡam and Ḥasbiyya. The *sanḡaq* of Ḥamā was evidently less extensively forested, though it contained numerous poplar trees. The author claims that the average annual revenue from the wood felled within the *sanḡaq* of Damascus was 1,840,000 francs compared to 460,000 francs for Ḥamā. The rich forest of the Ġabal ʿAḡlūn in Northern Jordan was divided between the *caza* ʿAḡlūn in the *sanḡaq* of Ḥawrān and the *caza* of Salt in the *sanḡaq* of Maʿān. While Cuinet praises the oak trees of the area, he notes that the Ġabal ʿAḡlūn had since time immemorial been abusively exploited by the inhabitants of the local villages.¹⁸ The *wilāya* of Beirut did not contain true forests though near to the mountains the gardens of orange and lemon trees alternated with areas of pine and conifers. He also mentions the presence of «arbres résineux» (cedars?), oak, plane, mulberry, and diverse wild fruit trees. He is struck by their beauty but makes no mention of the commercial exploitation of the trees for timber.¹⁹ The region around Jerusalem also contained small patches of relatively diverse woodland – olive, cypress, oak, plane, beech, and fruit trees – but nothing that could generate significant revenue.²⁰

The cities of the Islamic Middle East had always been markets for exotic imported woods, used both for the purposes of construction and for decoration. Teak (*sāḡ*) was particularly valued, being employed in Abbasid Iraq for roofing, windows, and doors. The 10th-century writer, al-Waṣṣāʿ reports seeing a house with a raised platform (*dukkān*) of teak lavishly ornamented in painted inscriptions.²¹ Teak also appears in the documents of the *Geniza*

16. BOWRING 1973, p. 10-13, 66, 68, 114. The report offers an estimate of 40,000 oak and mountain pine trees felled annually, mainly for use in ship-building.

17. CUINET 1896. His observations correlate well with data provided in British Naval Intelligence reports for Syria (NID 1943a, p. 87-98; 273-75, 407-11); and Palestine and Transjordan (NID 1943b, p. 61-78). It seems likely that the extent of the woodlands of areas such as the Anti-Lebanon mountains was much reduced by the second half of the 20th century. Considerable cutting of wood was undertaken by the Turkish army during World War I. See NAVAL INTELLIGENCE DIVISION 1943a, p. 273; NYROP *et al.* 1971, p. 15-16.

18. CUINET 1896, p. 324-25.

19. CUINET 1896, p. 28-29.

20. CUINET 1896, p. 588.

21. AHSAN 1979, p. 176, 179-80. Other references to teak as a building material may be found in QADDUMI 1996, paragraphs 162, 268 (p. 150-54, 198-99).

archive in relation to chests (*dakka*, sometimes placed together in threes to provide the platform for a mattress) and wardrobes in the houses of members of the Jewish community of the Egyptian capital.²² Archaeological research at Siraf confirms the information on domestic architecture recorded in the written sources; the wood used in the construction of houses and other buildings at this Persian Gulf port appears to have been transported from East Africa.²³ Boats were assembled by Omani craftsmen from trees in the Maldiv Islands and taken back to Oman for sale.²⁴ Al-Ta'alibī (d. 1038) identifies teak, aloes-wood (ʿūd) and white sandalwood among the chief exports of India, and also mentions the trade in a hardwood called *ḥadang* or *ḥalanġ* (perhaps birch) from Turkish lands.²⁵ According to the 11th-century *Kitāb al-hidāyāt wa-l-tuḥāf* ("Book of Gifts and Rarities"), aloes-wood appears to have been a fairly standard component of diplomatic gifts sent by Indian monarchs to Sasanian and early Islamic rulers.²⁶ Ibn Ġubayr (d. 1217) reports that Aleppo supported a craft (he calls it *qarnasiyya*) devoted to working with ebony.²⁷

It is noticeable that the chapters from the *Qāmūs* analyzed in the remainder of this article make no mention of tropical hardwoods; the only possible reference to an imported type is to "Persian white poplar" (*al-ḥawar al-farsī*) in the discussion of the activities of the sawyer (*naššār*).²⁸ It is apparent that other woods were being imported into Syria during the 19th century, however. For instance, Bowring reports on the annual consumption of imported dye woods (used both in dyeing and marquetry) in Aleppo and Damascus in the 1830s. According to his figures these are: brazil wood (Aleppo=35-40 *qinṭār*; Damascus=25-30 *qinṭār*); Nicaragua or St Martha wood (also known as Peach wood, Aleppo=15-20 *qinṭār*; Damascus 40-50 *qinṭār*); and logwood or Campeachy wood (Aleppo=25-30 *qinṭār*; Damascus=40-50 *qinṭār*). The first two came from South America and the West Indies, while the last was a native of Europe. Damascene dyers also made use of two dye woods from the east, given by Bowring as "Zarbad" and "Genghel", that were brought to the city via Baghdad.²⁹ Logwood and St Martha wood are listed as commodities sent from Damascus and Aleppo to Baghdad.³⁰

22. GOITEIN 1983, p. 114, 131. There is also a reference to an incense burner made of ebony decorated with silver (see 137).

23. WHITEHOUSE 2001, p. 416-417. For references to wood in house construction in other regions of the Islamic East, see AHSAN 1979, p. 180.

24. WHITEHOUSE 2001, p. 415.

25. AL-TA'ALIBĪ 1968, p. 139, 142. The best specimens of this fine-grained wood were from the region of Tabaristan, and were often made into large bowls (*jaḍāra*). See AHSAN 1979, p. 124.

26. QADDUMI 1996, paragraphs 2, 29, 39 (p. 62, 73, 80-81) *et passim*. On the burning of aloes-wood as a domestic incense, see GOITEIN 1983, 138.

27. IBN ĠUBAYR, *Riḥla*, p. 262-63. Also: AULD 2009a, p. 72.

28. *Qāmūs*, p. 482 (chapter 412).

29. BOWRING 1973, p. 36. Also p. 122. A Syrian *qinṭār*=256.4 kg. Beirut was also taking consignments of brazil wood. A record from 1813 gives the price of this commodity as 550 piastres per *qinṭār*. See ISMAIL 1975-83, III, p. 111.

30. BOWRING 1973, p. 46.

Manufactured goods were also sent from the Syrian capital to Baghdad. According to a report written by one Colonel Campbell in 1836 the reciprocal trade from Iraq to Damascus brought with it “silk, drugs from Persia, saffron, gums, shawls, pearls, ingots of gold and silver, gall-nuts, and a great quantity of timber”.³¹ Unfortunately, he does not specify the types of timber, though it seems likely that land transport would have favoured relatively small loads of expensive wood for purposes such as dyeing and marquetry. Describing the situation in the 1830s, Bowring notes that branches of cherry wood were sent from Baghdad to Damascus for making the stems of tobacco pipes.³² At this time there was evidently a substantial import trade from Europe in wood for construction; according to French consular records, the duties on this commodity in Beirut generated a revenue of 11,000 piastres *per annum*.³³ By the 1890s relatively large consignments of lumber coming through ports on the Syrian littoral (for instance, loads with a total value of 178,040 francs are documented for the port of Haifa in 1893).³⁴

Woodworking and related Crafts in the Qāmūs al-ṣināʿāt al-Šāmiyya

Unsurprisingly, wood is frequently mentioned in the *Qāmūs*. It is beyond the scope of this article to deal with all of these references, but a few examples can be given to illustrate the importance of the material in the economic life of the Syrian capital. The shadow puppeteer (*karakūzātī*) made use of a wooden frame to support the textile screen and curtains needed for his performances.³⁵ The *qīṭaʿī* (?) made his living by engraving *ḥadīṭ* of the Prophet onto plaques of various materials including crystal glass (*ballūr*) and gilded wood (*al-ḥašb al-muḍahhab*).³⁶ The makers of mirrors (*marāyātī*) created wooden frames to contain the reflective glass panel. Decorative work was provided by the use of marquetry (from different kinds of wood) or the addition of carved stucco (*ḡiṣṣ*) with painting and/or water gilding (*māʾ al-ḍahab*).³⁷ In their account of the mason (*bannāʾ*), the authors describe how clay was formed into bricks using a four-sided wooded matrix (*qālīb min ḥašb murabbaʾ*). The same technique, with matrices allowing for the formation of four or six bricks of various dimensions, is still employed by workers at the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities brick factory at Hiraqla, near Raqqā (**fig. 3**). The same chapter mentions the use of wood in construction and tools, such as the heavy pounders or pestles (*midaqqā*) used for crushing materials used for making bricks and mortar.³⁸

31. BOWRING 1973, p. 135 (appendix D).

32. BOWRING 1973, p. 46.

33. ISMAIL 1982-93, I, p. 377 (the consular document is dated 7 March 1835).

34. ISMAIL 1982-93, VI, p. 334.

35. *Qāmūs*, p. 384 (chapter 310).

36. *Qāmūs*, p. 359 (chapter 283). Translated in MILWRIGHT 2011, p. 61-62.

37. *Qāmūs*, p. 428 (chapter 350).

38. *Qāmūs*, p. 52 (chapter 19).

This article will concentrate, however, upon crafts in which wood (in all its forms) is the only, or the principal material of manufacture. These comprise: the *naššār* (sawyer); the *ḥawāṣilī* (supplier of wood); the *nağğār* (carpenter); the *nuwā'irī* (maker of norias); the *ḥarrāṭ* (woodturner/lather); the *qabāqībī* (clog-maker); the *ṣanādīqī* (box or cabinet-maker); the *'ulabī* (? , box-maker); the *qaṣībātī* (maker of stems for chibouk pipes); the *mašīṭātī* (comb-maker); the *manāfīḥī* (bellows-maker); the *ša'ār* (maker of wooden screens/trellises); the *sallāl* (basket-maker); and the *mikabbātī* (maker of lids for food). In most of these accounts wood is mentioned generically as *ḥašb*, or more specifically according to the species. In cases where wood is not mentioned explicitly (such as the maker of bellows), I have inferred the employment of the material through reference to other descriptions of the craft. Also considered is the *ṣadaḡḡī* (dealer in mother-of-pearl) because of his importance in providing materials for inlaywork. In addition, I include sections dealing with those who gathered and brought wood to the craftsmen and inhabitants of Damascus, or converted wood into charcoal for use in industrial and domestic settings. This group comprises: the *kassār* (or *kissār*, wood cutter); the *ḥaṭṭāb* (gatherer of firewood); and the *fahḥām* (charcoal burner).

The woodworkers of Damascus largely relied upon two groups to supply them with the materials they needed. The *naššār* (sawyer) would prepare planks of various dimensions,³⁹ while the *ḥawāṣilī* (supplier of wood) operated the warehouses (*ḥāṣil*) that sold both wood and tools (*āla*) needed for woodworking.⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, these two groups worked in close proximity, in the part of the Damascus known as the “warehouse area” (*ḥawāṣiliyya*).⁴¹ The *naššār* cut different types of wood, particularly walnut, willow and white poplar. Logs and branches were cleaned of their extremities and sawn into lengths of three or four *ḍirā'* (cubits). Planks or other forms of timber were then made from these pieces according to the demands of the *ḥawāṣilī*. Two sawyers would work using a wooden scaffold (*saqāla*) and a large steel saw (*minšār*).⁴² One man would be on the ground (probably sitting) with the other standing upon the scaffold. This arrangement was also observed by Wulff in Iran.⁴³ Sawyers in the region of Alexandretta would work with two men below and one above; Bowring records that such teams were able to saw a tree of 25–30 feet in about two days for a wage of three piasters a day per man.⁴⁴ Before sawing the Damascene artisans would have to establish the lines along which they would cut the log. This was done by pulling over the surface a cotton thread (*ḥayṭ*) covered with powdered chalk or gypsum. The thread was

39. *Qāmūs*, p. 481–82 (chapter 412).

40. *Qāmūs*, p. 116–17 (chapter 79).

41. *Qāmūs*, p. 481. In the chapter devoted to the maker of needles (*abbār*), it is noted that, with the decline of demand for handmade needle, their market, known as the *Sūq al-Abbārīn*, had closed down and had been replaced by warehouses for wood and other items. See *Qāmūs*, p. 215 (chapter 142). In the Medieval period the wood merchants (*ḥaššābīn*) operated in the intramural area of Kušk, between Straight street and Bāb Kīṣān, see ÉLISSÉEFF 1956, p. 68, n°15.

42. This saw could be three cubits or more in length.

43. WULFF 1966, p. 79, fig. 112.

44. BOWRING 1973, p. 13.

then sharply snapped back to leave a line of powder which would act as a guide for sawing.⁴⁵ The concluding sentences of the chapter on the *naššār* read, “And the majority of those engaged in this activity are people from the villages of al-Tall and Minīn.⁴⁶ They also move around the villages and they saw quantities of wood according to the needs of the villagers. It is an activity that brings forth a middling wage (*uğra*)”.

The *ḥawāšilī* sold the wood sawn by the *naššār*, as well as woodworking tools. The different types of wood appear to have been available as veneer, planks, and beams.⁴⁷ Other warehouses sold lime (*kils*), baked bricks (*āğurr*), and related supplies. There was evidently much money to be made as a *ḥawāšilī*; his main business was probably supplying the carpenter (*nağğār*) and this too was a successful activity at the time the *Qāmūs* was written (see below). Another supplier of materials for the woodworking crafts – particularly the *qabāqībī*, the *šanādiqī*, and the *‘ulabī* – was the dealer in mother-of-pearl (*ṣadafġī*).⁴⁸ The *ṣadafġī* dealt in different types of mother-of-pearl, buying supplies from Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and other localities. The mother-of-pearl sold by the Damascene *ṣadafġī* was evidently much in demand in the Syrian capital itself, in other parts of the Ottoman empire, and further afield. It is described in the *Qāmūs* as a noble (*šarīf*) craft, not bettered anywhere in the world.

Probably the most important woodworking craft in Damascus was that of the *nağğār* (carpenter).⁴⁹ Working a variety of woods, these artisans were responsible for architectural commissions, such as the erection and repair of wooden roofs/ceilings (*saqf*), and the manufacture of doors and *šaršāwāt li-l-nawāfiḍ* (balconies? with openings/doors; possibly a reference to *mašrabiyya*).⁵⁰ For the upper stories of houses, Damascene clients desired two architectural features – known as *al-faranka* and *al-šūfa* (presumably similar to *mašrabiyya*) – which were made from strips of wood, covered with clay, painted with limewash (*kallasa*), and then varnished. The *nağğār* would also make objects needed within the house, including boxes and cabinets. The authors of the *Qāmūs* pay particular attention to the *namliyya* (food safe), the increasing popularity of which was leading to the decline of the craft of making a type of wicker lid known as a *mikabba* (see below). This cabinet had beautiful pierced sections to allow the circulation of air which would keep cool food contained within it. Carpenters were responsible for the manufacture of part of wagons, including the wheel (*‘ağala*), spokes (*barmaq*), carriage poles (*‘arīš*), and what may be the

45. On this technique, see also: WULFF 1966, p. 80; FLOOR 2006, p. 162. Wulff notes that the thread would be coloured with a red powder made from hematite (iron oxide) or a yellow one made from limonite brought from Armenia.

46. These two villages are located north of Damascus on the road to Saydnaya.

47. The words used here are: *daff*, *ṭabaq*, and *uṣṭuwāna*.

48. *Qāmūs*, p. 270 (chapter 194).

49. *Qāmūs*, p. 478-79 (chapter 407). Cf. BAZANTAY 1936, p. 21-22; WULFF 1966, p. 80-90; FLOOR 2006, p. 162-66.

50. The authors also give another term, *al-ṭawāna*, that I have been unable to decipher. Perhaps this is a reference to the wooden frames (*carcass*) of houses that are then filled in with bricks or rammed earth? Cf. BAZANTAY 1936, p. 21, pl. 4 (top).

cab or the container for the load (*ṣundūq*).⁵¹ Smaller items included shovels (*miğraf*), and other tools for agricultural use.⁵² Given the diversity of activities evidently performed by the *nağğār*, it seems likely that there was some degree of specialization with individual carpenters concentrating upon the manufacture of a relatively small number of items. The chapter concludes, «it is an activity that is necessarily thriving, [and] it generates very good profits, and there are many people making a living from it».

The other artisan responsible for making large constructions from wood was the *nuwā'irī* (maker of norias).⁵³ The best known surviving norias are located in and around the town of Ḥamā, but they were also an important irrigation feature of the region of Damascus in the late Ottoman period. The chapter devoted to their activities is mainly concerned with the distribution of norias and waterways in the gardens and plantations of Damascus and the Ġūṭa, though the authors make some brief comments concerning the construction of the wheels themselves. The authors write that the buckets (*saṭl*) were made of wood, and that they were tied onto the wheel with palm fibres (*līf*). This was evidently a significant and profitable activity at the time of writing. Pierre Bazantay makes further comments about this craft in his book on the economic life of Antioch in the early 20th century. He notes that the wheels required constant maintenance, with replacements for spokes and other features usually needed each year.⁵⁴ Thus, one may infer that it was the repair of existing wheels rather than the manufacture of new norias that constituted the bulk of the work performed by the *nuwā'irī*. His work must have been done in collaboration with other artisans responsible for the building and maintenance of water channels.⁵⁵

The turning of wood on a lathe was the responsibility of the *ḥarrāṭ*.⁵⁶ He would peel off the bark from the branch (*'ūd*) and then lathe it smooth such that it becomes perfectly round. Although there were many different types ("beyond enumeration") of artefact manufactured by the *ḥarrāṭ*, the most common appear to have been balusters (*barmaq*) for banisters, the middle sections (*qalb*, or heart) of narghiles (*arkīla/argīla*, or *ğawza*),⁵⁷ chess pieces and pieces for another game called *burğīs*, chairs of various sizes and designs, and basins/jars (*ğurn*) for holding garlic. Balls would also be carved from a "special wood". Observations of wood turners in Antioch and Iran show how the objects could be revolved by hand using a bow; in the hands of master craftsman this simple tool provided the necessary speed for accurate shaping of wooden artefacts.⁵⁸ The authors of the *Qāmūs* note

51. The wheelwright appears to have been a distinct activity in Iran. See WULFF 1966, p. 88-90 (with a detailed list of the vocabulary employed for different elements of a cart). See also BAZANTAY 1936, p. 22.

52. The translation of the other terms listed in this section is unclear, though they all appear to be connected to agriculture.

53. *Qāmūs*, p. 489-90 (chapter 423).

54. BAZANTAY 1936, p. 23-24.

55. On the activities of the digger of canals (*qanawātī*), see *Qāmūs*, p. 364-65 (chapter 292).

56. *Qāmūs*, p. 122 (chapter 86). Cf. BAZANTAY 1936, p. 22.

57. On the makers of narghiles, see *Qāmūs*, p. 37 (chapter 5).

58. BAZANTAY 1936, p. 22; WULFF 1966, p. 90-92; FLOOR 2006, p. 166-68. European travellers to Iran did not find that the fairly simple technology employed by Persian turners did not allow them to create ovoid shapes. See John Chardin

the meticulous finishing of items with drilled ornament and painting, according to the wishes of the patron. Narghile, or water pipe sections are particularly singled out for their beauty. The craft was widespread and famous in Damascus, possessing its own souk, known as «al-Ḥarrāṭīn», on the main street of al-Darwīšiyya.

Wooden clogs (*qabqāb*) were manufactured by the *qabāqībī*.⁵⁹ These items of footwear were made from types of willow and walnut wood, with a leather strap or thong (*ṣayr*) attached to it. This strap was supplied by the belt maker (*suyūrī*).⁶⁰ Blanks of wood would be cut to a length of half a cubit (*ḍirāʿ*, Syrian cubit=0.68m) or shorter and a width of eight *qirāt* (about 0.18m). The outline of the person's foot would be drawn onto the blank, and then the masters of the craft would take over carving the clog. Depending upon the design, a heel of up to three *qirāt* in height could be added. The clogs might also be inlaid mother-of-pearl (*ṣadaḥ*) or inset with decorative stones (*faṣṣ*). The authors list the main types of clogs available in Damascene markets. Two types that had formerly been popular – one called “*al-šibrāwī*” and the other, a shorter type known as “*nuṣḥkursī*” (literally, “half a chair/throne”) – were, at the time of writing, no longer sold. What had replaced these types was a clog known as “*al-muhāğirūn*”, presumably because it was made in that Northern district of the Syrian capital. Much of this work appears to have been done by Circassians.⁶¹ Another type, known as “*al-kundura*” (perhaps indicating a more Westernized style), and somewhat similar in form to “*al-muhāğirūn*”, was much used in the public baths. It was also worn by the poor in winter to protect themselves from the muddy streets. There was a considerable demand for these items in villages and among urban women and little children for wearing in the home. This craft had its own market, known as the “*Sūq al-Qabāqībīyya*”, as well as many shops dispersed among the streets of Damascus. The authors note that clog-making was known in other towns and cities – notably Ḥamā, Homs, Beirut, and Istanbul – but that Damascus was preeminent among them for the perfection of their products (no other centre specialized in mother-of-pearl inlay). They conclude: “it is an important activity generating middling profits, and many [are employed] in it”.

The *qabāqībī* also supplied ring-shaped pieces of wood that were employed by the *ṣāğirğī* (maker of leather tumblers, or drinking cups) for making tambourines (*ṭār*). Tumblers (*kūba*) made of wood, rather than leather were apparently supplied by the *ṣanādiqī* (cabinet-maker).⁶² The main work of the *ṣanādiqī* was, however, the decoration of boxes, and furniture.⁶³ The chapter states that the *ṣanādiqī* principally worked on boxes (*ṣundūq*), including types such as “*al-bayriyāt*” (? a chest for holding folded clothes) and “*al-sakamlāt*” (?). Walnut appears to have been the preferred wood, though others were also employed. Extensive use was made of mother-of-pearl and decorative woods for ornamenting chests,

quoted in FLOOR 2006, p. 166.

59. *Qāmūs*, p. 348-49 (chapter 271).

60. On the *suyūrī*, see *Qāmūs*, p. 242-43 (chapter 167).

61. The traditional Circassian district of Šarkasiyya is located directly south of al-Muhāğirīn.

62. *Qāmūs*, p. 265 (chapter 189).

63. *Qāmūs*, p. 271-72 (chapter 196). Cf. BAZANTAY 1936, p. 20-21 and pl. 6; WULFF 1966, p. 87-88.

wardrobes (*ḥizāna*),⁶⁴ boxes, mirrors, sofas (*kanaba*), chairs, and two other items, known as, *barāwīr* (?) and *sakmāḥayāt* (?), that I have been unable to identify. Once the carpenter had completed the construction of an item, the *ṣanādiqī* would engrave/excavate (*ḥafara*) into it using a range of steel tools,⁶⁵ including a sharp point (*rīša*, literally a pen) and a rasp (*mibrad*). Pieces of mother-of-pearl were then placed into the excavated areas and fixed with glue. The authors also mention painting the inlaid areas with a substance called “*al-barādaḥ*” (?). Once dry, the inlaid areas were planed, varnished, and wiped down.⁶⁶

The craft of the *ṣanādiqī* was widespread in Syria because of the great desire among townspeople and prosperous villagers for decorative work in wood and mother-of-pearl. Ornamented furniture, wardrobes, chests and mirrors were popular wedding gifts (fig. 4, 5). The final part of the chapter strikes two rather divergent notes (perhaps reflecting the fact that they were written at different times, or by different hands). Firstly, it is stated that, since the profits from this activity – possibly meaning specifically the production of ready-made wedding furniture – would not make one rich, some of the practitioners were leaving the craft. By contrast, the next sentence remarks that most of the demand for the works of the *ṣanādiqī* came from Europeans (*al-afranġ*, presumably also meaning North Americans) with dealers travelling from many regions to buy objects made in Damascus. The authors conclude that it is an ubiquitous and beautiful craft than earns good profits, particularly because it is not commonly encountered outside the Syrian capital.

Wooden vessels (*āwānī*) were made by the ‘*ulabī*’.⁶⁷ This was a very marketable activity – due to the enduringly high level of demand – with its own souk in Damascus (Sūq ‘*Ulabiyya*).⁶⁸ Some of their products seem to have been small, ornamental boxes (‘*ulba*’), while others were larger and more utilitarian in character. Among those listed in the *Qāmūs* are: *al-maġāmi*‘ (for storing sweetmeats), *al-maḥāmīr* (? for camel and cattle feed), and *al-maṣāwīl* and *al-taṣwīl* (for grapes and other foodstuffs). There were also tall wooden containers with a capacity up to one *madd* (eighteen litres) for the storage of milk and yogurt. Boxes were used for holding perfume, and those holding sweetmeats were popular gifts for weddings and circumcisions. The chapter concludes by commenting that the ‘*ulabī*’ was an important craft that allowed one to eke out a living. The craft generated «adequate» profits.

64. The precise meaning is indicated later in the chapter where it is stated that clothes were hung inside the *ḥizāna*. On the Persian makers of trunks and chests, see FLOOR 2006, p. 170-71.

65. The chapter employs the phrase, ‘*āla ḥadīdiyya*’, but it seems likely that the tools of the *ṣanādiqī* were made of steel. The discussion of metalworking in the *Qāmūs* makes no use of the Arabic word for steel (*fūlād*), making the distinctions between iron and steel objects fairly apparent by context. See MILWRIGHT 2012, p. 266, 273-276.

66. For a more detailed discussion of inlay technique, see WULFF 1966, p. 92-97. Also FLOOR 2006, p. 172-73.

67. *Qāmūs*, p. 318 (chapter 238).

68. In Medieval Damascus the ‘*ulabī*’ had a market on Straight Street near to al-Masallāt. See ÉLISSÉEFF 1956, p. 73 no. 44.

The *qaṣībātī* made the pipe stems used in the traditional three-part tobacco pipe commonly known as a chibouk (Turkish: *çibuk*).⁶⁹ Most often the pipe bowl itself was formed from baked ceramic (other materials such as meerschaum have also employed), and in Damascus this was the job of the *ḡalāyīnī*.⁷⁰ The chapter mentions the use of mouthpieces shaped from animal horn (*qarn*), though other accounts also speak of such materials as amber, semi-precious stones such as agate, and precious metal.⁷¹ According to the *Qāmūs*, the *qaṣībātī* worked principally with sticks of almond wood brought from a nearby village (*qarya*), with holm oak and reed (*ḥayzurān*, possibly bamboo) sometimes used for shorter pipe stems. French consular records from the early 19th century report on an active export trade in cherry wood (*cerisier*) pipe stems, but no mention of this material appears in the *Qāmūs*.⁷² The manufacturing process for the longer almond wood pipes was evidently painstaking, requiring turning on a lathe, drilling through the length of the branch, and embellishment with painting and other forms of ornamentation (these are not stated in the chapter, but, to judge by other broadly contemporary descriptions, would have included inlay with mother-of-pearl and other materials).⁷³ The authors note the excessive price of these rich items, and that with the reduced level of demand at the time of writing, the *qaṣībātī* often made a shorter, but still elaborately painted pipe stems of various types including one known as “*al-bāstūn*”, and another with the unusual name of «*buzz* (or *bazz*) *al-sīkāra*».⁷⁴ The latter may have functioned as a cigarette holder, reflecting the changing tastes in smoking in Syria at this time.⁷⁵ Certainly, this seems to have been a difficult time for the *qaṣībātī*, for the *Qāmūs* concludes by noting that, “in these times it is an activity that few practise professionally”.

Other Damascene woodworking crafts were struggling in the last decades of Ottoman rule. The *maṣīṭātī* made cheap combs (*miṣṭ*) from apricot wood;⁷⁶ their relatively low price provided a market for these items in the countryside, and among less wealthy women in

69. *Qāmūs*, p. 356 (chapter 280). For a photograph of the drilling of a pipe stem in Iran, see WULFF 1966, p. 92, fig. 135.

70. *Qāmūs*, p. 330 (chapter 252). This chapter is translated in: ISSAWI 1988, p. 389–90; and MILWRIGHT 2009, p. 43–44. Issawi is, however, mistaken in his identification of the *ḡalyūn* as a water pipe; the description in the *Qāmūs* makes clear that it is a chibouk. On the study of Ottoman-period tobacco pipes, see ROBINSON 1985; SIMPSON 1995; BARAM 2000; MILWRIGHT 2000, p. 199–200.

71. Amber (*kahrabā'*), gold and silver are mentioned specifically in the chapter devoted to the *ḡalāyīnī*. See *Qāmūs*, p. 330. On these and other materials, see ROBINSON 1985, p. 151–56; SIMPSON 1995.

72. ISMAIL 1975–1983, III, p. 113 (4,000 cherry wood pipes valued at 12,000 piastres exported from Beirut to Malta, Tunis, Damietta, and Cyprus in 1813).

73. Mother-of-pearl inlay is mentioned in the discussion of the *ḡalāyīnī*. See *Qāmūs*, p. 330; MILWRIGHT 2009, p. 43–44.

74. This may be translated as «nipple of the cigarette». *Bazz* is also the name for a type of cloth sold in Damascus.

75. Cf. *Qāmūs*, p. 330 (chapter 252). See also: BARAM 2000, p. 152; MILWRIGHT 2009, p. 43–47. The habit of smoking cigarettes was observed in Aleppo in the 1850s. See AL-ĞAZZĪ, *Naḥr*, p. 87.

76. In his *ḥisba* manual, the 14th-century jurist, Ibn al-Uḥuwwa, states that the only wood suitable for combs was Greek box wood. He also condones the use of tortoiseshell for this purpose. See IBN AL-UḤUWWA, *Ma'ālim*, p. 91 (English text), 280 (Arabic text).

Damascus.⁷⁷ These craftsmen would also mend broken teeth (*sīn*) on the combs, with a fixed rate (not specified) according to the work to be done.⁷⁸ Competition from imported combs, known as “*al-sīn samak*” (“the tooth of a fish”), was reducing the viability of the craft, and the authors of the *Qāmūs* conclude that, “it is an activity in which some eke out a living..., but they are few in number”. Hans Wulff makes similar observations concerning the comb makers he saw in Iran in the mid 20th century.⁷⁹ The *Qāmūs* also reports that the makers of bellows (*manāfīhī*) were only able to generate little profit from their craft in the short chapter devoted to their activities.⁸⁰ The authors do note, however, that it was widespread in Damascus and that bellows remained an essential item (they must have been extensively used by craftsmen operating forges and furnaces, as well as for domestic braziers).

The maker of wooden trellises (*ša‘ār*) was another craft that appears to have been in decline in the last years of the 19th century.⁸¹ These artisans made use of thin strips (*šarīt*) of wood, known colloquially as “*ša‘īriyya*” (vermicelli). These strips would be intertwined to create interstices in various shapes – squares, oblongs, and stars. The ends of the strips were tied around a wooden frame called a *barwāz*. The authors emphasize the difficulty of this craft, combining “the precision of carpentry with skillfulness”. The chapter devoted to their activities concludes that “it was previously very much in demand. However, now it is said that nobody seeks it out [or] cares for it, and few practise it. And in summary, it is an important craft, from which a living is generated by being occupied with it”.

In addition to their role in the provision of timber, willow trees were exploited by the makers of wicker artefacts. The workers in this material were divided into basket makers (*sallāl*) and the makers of lids for protecting food (*mikabbātī*). The *sallāl* would make baskets from either branches of willow or the strong sections of reeds.⁸² The authors outline the processes involved in the preparation of these two material for wickerwork. Willow branches were stripped of their leaves and bark, then cut into four strands, and finally soaked in water. The soaking ensured that the willow strands were sufficiently flexible to be plaited. Reeds were divided into two rather than four, but were also soaked in water. The masters (sing. *ṣāhib*) of this craft were apparently mainly from rural areas and among the urban poor; the low status of the craft being partly explained by the minimal profits generated from it. Nevertheless, it was a widespread activity in Damascus and the

77. *Qāmūs*, p. 444 (chapter 367). Cf. BAZANTAY 1936, p. 22-23, pl. 14. Bazantay notes that combs would also be made from bone or the horns of sheep and goats. A comb maker could produce 100 combs in a twelve-hour day, for a profit of 4 francs. The combs made in Antioch were exported to the villages of Northern Syria, Palestine, and Egypt.

78. The sentence dealing with the prices of combs seems to indicate that the cost for a dirham (weight) from sixty *pāra* and two piasters.

79. WULFF 1966, p. 99-100, fig. 148-49. By the mid 20th century the Persian comb makers were finding themselves unable to compete with cheap plastic combs.

80. *Qāmūs*, p. 472 (chapter 400). The chapter does not provide a physical description, though they presumably corresponded to the types described by Wulff in Iran, in which the upper and lower sections were made of sheets of wood, with the leather bellows contained between them. He notes that their craft was facing competition from (imported?) foot pumps. See WULFF 1966, p. 101.

81. *Qāmūs*, p. 256 (chapter 177).

82. *Qāmūs*, p. 238 (chapter 160).

surrounding lands, particularly because of the demand for baskets to carry apples and greens. The chapter concludes that “it is an activity providing a living for many people”.

The *mikabbātī* also worked with willow branches or reeds (using the same techniques employed by the *sallāl*) and concentrated upon the production of a special type of lid, known as a *mikabba*, for protecting food.⁸³ These artisans would move around the souks and lanes selling their wares by shouting out, “*al-mikabbāt*”. The makers of these protective lids were mainly “poor Kurds and fellahin”, and, while the profits made from the sale of the *mikabba* were limited, it was a craft from which poor people could make a living. While the baskets made by the *sallāl* remained much in demand, the *mikabbātī* faced a emerging challenge; the authors of the *Qāmūs* report that many households in Damascus had abandoned these lids in favour of a wooden cabinet, or food safe, made by the *nağğār* (see above).

Two groups of artisans were responsible for collecting and selling firewood in Damascus: the woodcutter (*kassār* or *kissār*)⁸⁴ and the wood gatherer (*ḥaṭṭāb*).⁸⁵ These two activities were closely linked, and the authors of the *Qāmūs* observe that the *ḥaṭṭāb* would often follow behind the *kassār* collecting whatever the latter tolerated to be picked up. The blurring of the two categories meant that increasingly the term, *kassār* was being used for both in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries. The wood gathered by the *kassār* and the *ḥaṭṭāb* came principally from the cutting of dead trees (or dead branches from living trees) in plantations in villages, and presumably also in the Ġūṭa. The tenant of the plantation (*musta’jir al-bustān* or *ḍammān*) in which these artisan worked would establish the area in which they operated and would impose a “firm and binding condition” that only dried out trees (*al-šaḡar al-yābis*, i.e. dead) could be harvested. The *Qāmūs* mentions the sum of 100 *pāra* as the sort of sum paid by the *kassār* for access to the plantations, but does not specify what area of land (or number of trees) this would encompass. These conditions appear to have been often flouted by the *ḥaṭṭāb*, at least. If caught, transgressions upon the initial agreement were to be repaid to the owner (*mālik*) according the value of the additional firewood gathered. Olive wood was the preferred firewood among Damascene consumers, with walnut, apricot willow, and apple (*tuffāḥ*) all also in demand. The wood from fig (*tīn*) and Neapolitan medlar (*zu’ūr*, Latin: *Crataegus azarolus*) trees was also sold, but at the lowest price because of its poor quality.

Starting with the chapter devoted to the *kassār*, it is clear that this was regarded as an essential activity because every class in Damascene society relied upon firewood for “cooking and washing, and stoves in the winter”. Equipped with a sharp axe (*fa’s*), the *kassār* would tear dead trees from the ground, or cut off branches and transport the wood in bundles on the backs of donkeys. These “strong and illiterate” men would then travel the lanes and markets, removing firewood from the bundles and cutting it according to the amounts required by the consumers. The authors of the *Qāmūs* emphasize the toil involved

83. *Qāmūs*, p. 468 (chapter 392).

84. *Qāmūs*, p. 386-387 (chapter 312). Cf. FLOOR 2006, p. 160-162. On the woodcutters operating in the forests around Alexandretta in the 1830s, see BOWRING 1973, p. 10-13.

85. *Qāmūs*, p. 99-100 (chapter 66).

in collecting a *qinṭār* of firewood, noting that it was mainly done by fellahin (the most skillful of whom came from the village of Ġawbar, to the west of the Old Town), and in earlier times by poor Circassians. The *kassār* could also supplement his income by pruning trees. The *ḥaṭṭāb* made his living from collecting and selling wood that otherwise had no value from plantations and carrying them on the backs of camels, horses, and donkeys for sale in the Syrian capital. There was evidently sufficient work to allow many wood gatherers to support themselves. They were adept at cutting the dead material from the outer parts of trees.

Lastly, the *faḥḥām* was responsible for the production of charcoal. The charcoal was burned from holm oak, which had been cut from plantations.⁸⁶ The branches were placed into a large pit (*wahda*), ignited, and then covered over with earth (*turrāb*, perhaps in this case meaning turf). The creation of this type of covered fire (i.e. a clamp) would have encouraged the reducing atmosphere needed to make charcoal. Having left the pit until the contents were extinguished, the *faḥḥām* loaded the contents into cloth sacks (sing. *kīs*) for sale in Damascus.⁸⁷ The authors note that there was a very good market for the fuel in the city, particularly in autumn and winter, when it would be used for cooking and the braziers that warmed houses. It is clear also that charcoal was much in demand among metalworkers and the makers of glass wares. It was «an activity earning plentiful profits». A *qinṭār* of unadulterated charcoal could fetch in the region of 150 *qarš* (piasters), and this high price evidently encouraged unscrupulous vendors to add stones, or powdery charcoal by the name of “*al-daqq*” («the crushed») to the loads they sold.

The chapters of the *Qāmūs* discussed in the previous section suggest that woodworking was a diverse and vibrant craft sector in the late 19th and early 20th century. Comparing these data with references to woodworkers in earlier centuries, there is evidence for considerable continuity, both the objects they made and the places where they worked. That there should be strong links to past practices is to be expected, but there are also important signs of change, both social and economic, reflecting the specific character of Damascene life in the last decades of Ottoman rule. In his study of the furnishings of houses in the city during the second half of the 17th century, Jean-Paul Pascual notes the paucity of portable wooden furniture (the chest, or *ṣundūq*, being the only commonly occurring item).⁸⁸ This may be contrasted with the range of furniture evidently being produced by carpenters and other woodworkers at the time of the composition of the *Qāmūs*. A vogue for a given item of furniture could have consequences for other artisans, as is demonstrated in the case of the food safe (*namliyya*) and the wicker cover (*mikabba*). The makers of ornamented woodwork had to cater not only for a local demand, but also for the tastes of foreign consumers in Europe and North America.

86. *Qāmūs*, p. 336 (chapter 257).

87. The same situation probably pertained all over Syria. The estimated annual production of charcoal in Syria through the 1930s was 1,200 tonnes. See NAVAL INTELLIGENCE DIVISION 1943a, p. 275.

88. PASCUAL 1990, p. 199-201.

The chapters of the book dealing with media such as metalwork, pottery, and textiles frequently allude to the challenge of competing against industrially manufactured items imported from Europe. For instance, the authors of the *Qāmūs* note that traditional crafts such as the maker of needles (*abbār*) and the mender of porcelain and fine glass (*muḥarris*) were either struggling or recently extinct.⁸⁹ The formerly renowned activity of making of stonepaste pottery (*qāṣānī*) does not receive a chapter in the *Qāmūs* having disappeared before even Nuʿman al-Qaṣṣīlī (d. 1920) wrote his description of Damascus in the 1870s.⁹⁰ Decline is not, however, the dominant theme in the discussion of the woodworking crafts; although the profits accruing from the different activities were, with some exceptions, no more than “middling” or “satisfactory”, the authors often note how many practitioners existed in the Damascus region.⁹¹ Indeed, at an economic level woodworking was clearly significant for the fact that it provided gainful employment to many from the poorer classes in the city. The actual prices for objects and daily pay of woodworkers are not recorded in the *Qāmūs*. For carpenters, at least, one can get a sense of their average wages in the latter part of the 19th century. For instance, figures for Syria from the 1850s to the 1880s suggest a broad parity between masons and carpenters, with both usually receiving approximately double the daily wage of a common labourer.⁹²

Although there are references to the ethnic groups (such as Circassians) and the occupants of named villages or urban districts specializing in a given activity, one gets little sense in the *Qāmūs* that aspects of woodworking were dominated by specific confessional groups. Elsewhere in the book one finds observations of this nature: for instance, masons and goldsmiths were mainly Christians and tinnery and copper engravers mainly Jewish. If we are to judge by the *Qāmūs* activities such as tinning and blacksmithing also carried with them a social stigma.⁹³ Clearly some woodworking activities enjoyed a relatively low social status, but none appears to have been stigmatized.⁹⁴ Only charcoal burners are the subject of the authors’ opprobrium (for their dishonesty). Lastly, one of the most interesting features to emerge from an analysis of the woodworkers of the Syrian capital is the extent to which their activities were integrated with those of other artisans in the city. The makers of narghiles relied upon woodturners to produce the decorative wooden shafts of their water pipes, while those who made clogs had to buy the leather straps from the *suyūrī* and mother-of-pearl from the *ṣadafgī*. Mother-of-pearl was, of course, required by other

89. *Qāmūs*, p. 215 (chapter 142), 422-23 (chapter 343). On these crafts, see MILWRIGHT 2009, p. 41; 2012, p. 275-276.

90. QASAṢILĪ 1876, p. 161.

91. Many of the woodworking crafts described in the *Qāmūs* were still operating in the city in 1927. See MASSIGNON 1953, p. 48-49.

92. See data collected in: ISSAWI 1988, p. 89-91. The range is between about 150% and 300% of a labourer’s wage. The latest entry to contain information on carpenters deals with the situation in Beirut in 1886. At this time both masons and carpenters received 16-26 piasters per day and labourers 11-17 piasters. For the wages of woodcutters, trimmers, transporters of timber, and sawyers in the 1830s, see BOWRING 1973, p. 11-13.

93. *Qāmūs*, p. 239 (chapter 162), 93-94 (chapter 58). On the social status of metalworking, see also MILWRIGHT 2012, p. 277.

94. On the social status of urban crafts, see SERJEANT 1980.

woodworkers in the city.⁹⁵ Charcoal burners enjoyed a good business supplying houses, but their product was also vital to the high temperature crafts of Damascus. These networks of reliance meant that no activity stood alone. Thus, wider economic and social shifts in the production and consumption registered, in sometimes unexpected ways, throughout the craft sector of late Ottoman Damascus.

95. Woodworkers must also have made and decorated (often with mother-of-pearl inlay) the butts of rifles. For examples of 19th-century pistols and rifles made in the Middle East, see ELGOOD 1995, fig. 1, 2, 6, 14-24, 29-31.

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Fig. 1 - Constructing wooden boats, Arwād island, Syria. Photograph: Milwright, 1996.

Fig. 2 - Wooden balcony in a Damascus hotel, probably early 20th century.
Photograph: Milwright, 1996.

Fig. 3 - The forming of bricks using a wooden matrix, Hiraqla, Syria. Photograph: Milwright, 2000.

Fig. 4 - Workshop in the Old Town of Damascus engaged in the production of inlaid wooden furniture. Photograph: McPhillips, 2010.

Fig. 5 - Using a stencil as a guide for carving of sections of furniture (in preparation for the addition of bone and mother-of-pearl inlay). Photograph: McPhillips.