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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/beo/955>

DOI: 10.4000/beo.955

ISBN: 978-2-35459-347-9

ISSN: 2077-4079

Publisher

Presses de l'Institut français du Proche-Orient

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 December 2012

Number of pages: 271-295

ISBN: 978-2-35159-379-0

ISSN: 0253-1623

Electronic reference

Torsten Wollina, « A View from Within: Ibn Ṭawq's Personal Topography of 15th century Damascus », *Bulletin d'études orientales* [Online], Tome LXI | décembre 2012, Online since 20 March 2013, connection on 08 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/beo/955> ; DOI : 10.4000/beo.955

A View from Within: Ibn Ṭawq's Personal Topography of 15th century Damascus

Torsten WOLLINA

This article sets out to show how the indigene court clerk Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq recorded his ways around 15th century Damascus and how he localized events within the second biggest metropolis of the Mamluk Empire. At the end of the Mamluk rule, Damascus had probably between 60.000 and 100.000 inhabitants (in the 15th century) and settlements had long spread out from the Old City.¹ In the 11th century, al-Šāġūr to the south and al-ʿUqayba, north of the old city were established. After the conquest of Damascus by Nūr al-Dīn Zankī in 549/1154, the settlement of al-Šāliḥiyya was established at the foot of the mountain Qāsiyūn. Urban expansion developed speed through the Mamluk age. New suburbs grew, first along the Sūq Šārūġā street, which started from one of the northern gates in the city walls (Bāb al-Salāma). The Mamluks gave impulses for this development.² Around the citadel a whole quarter formed for housing the military and catering its many needs (Taḥt al-Qalʿa), most noticeably in the area around the Horse Market (Sūq al-Ḥayl). The former courthouse (Dār al-Saʿāda or Dār al-ʿAdl) was transformed into a residence for the civilian governors.³ The city continued to expand to the north and northwest but was surrounded by a belt of suburbs, clockwise from al-Šāġūr in the south, through Mīdān al-Ḥaṣā, al-Qubaybāt, al-Qanawāt and Taḥt al-Qalʿa to Sūq Šārūġā and al-ʿUqayba to the north. But the immediate influence of the metropolis stretched at least as settlements such al-Šāliḥiyya (2 km to the northwest), Qābūn, Barza (both to the northeast), and the villages of the oasis (al-Ġūṭa) surrounding Damascus.

As Li Guo remarked, the journal of the Damascene court clerk Šihāb ad-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq was a promising source for urban historians of Damascus.⁴ Ibn Ṭawq's "first-hand

1. The higher estimates are from the 14th and 15th centuries. The lower counts are from 16th century Ottoman censuses ; LAPIDUS 1967, p. 79.

2. SACK 1989, p. 45.

3. SACK 1989, p. 56.

4. In this article I will rely exclusively on the edition published in four volumes by the French Institute for Middle Eastern Studies (Ifpo) in Damascus from 2000 to 2007. I will not deal with the manuscript of the text which does not only cover twenty years (885/1480 – 906/1500) but continues for either two years (foreword in IBN ṬAWQ, *Taʿlīq*, I,

descriptions of the houses, mosques, alleys, residential quarters, and other properties are valuable. [...] The journal is full of documented accounts about the buildings and grounds in Damascus and its suburbs.”⁵ Furthermore, Ibn Ṭawq wrote down itineraries, in which he listed the stopovers he deemed important. In this manner, in the entry for Tuesday, Rabīʿ II 27th 899/4 february 1494), he wrote:

“During the night and the day the sky was unclouded. I was in Qubaybāt at [the house of] šayḫ Burhān ad-Dīn al-Nāǧī, then at [the house of] šayḫ Šihāb ad-Dīn b. al-Maḥūǧab; the afternoon prayer I prayed there in the Maṅǧak Mosque and came back to the walled city (madīna). I met with our master the šayḫ at the end of the day, shortly before the evening prayer.”⁶

On Saturday of the same week (ǧumāda I 2nd 899/8 february 1494), he “went into the city, and, then, went up to [the suburb of] Šālīḥiyya, but there (‘indahum) I found no one, so I returned.”⁷ He was home before the midday prayer. There are literally hundreds of more or less exhaustive itineraries in the journal. Ibn Ṭawq’s journal “is virtually a laundry list of his showings-up, and no-shows, at countless appointments and events required by his job, his family, and his community.”⁸

As a court clerk and notary (*kātib*, *šāhid*), and a client to his mentioned “master”, the then *šāfiʿī šayḫ al-islām* Abū Bakr Ibn Qāḍī ‘Aǧlūn (841-928/1433-1521), Ibn Ṭawq went to and fro throughout the city. For over twenty years he took notes of his errands. This leaves us with plenty of material from which I intend to draw up the personal topography of Ibn Ṭawq. By this, I mean his description of places within the urban space. Which spatial entities did he take for granted and which did he feel obliged to localize in his journal? How did he localize events? By which means did he localize these places and events in a city without official street names and no street signs whatsoever? First, however, we should turn our attention towards the author and the journal he left.

The author: Šihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq

Šihāb ad-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq lived in a residential neighbourhood around the Qaṣab Mosque, situated in the quarter of Sūq Šārūǧā, just north of the walls of Old Damascus. This quarter had been established for housing the military.⁹ His house was next to a public bath (Ḥammām Burhān ad-Dīn) and not far from one of the city gates (Bāb al-Salāma).¹⁰

p. 7) or even eight more years until one year before the author’s death (foreword in BUŞRAWĪ, *Tārīḥ*, p. 11). The four volumes are distinguished by roman numbers (I-IV),

5. GUO 2008, p. 215.

6. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta’līq*, III, p. 1253.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 1254.

8. GUO 2008, p. 210.

9. ZIADEH 1953, p. 82.

10. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta’līq*, I, p. 9.

Ibn Ṭawq is mentioned in Nağm al-Dīn al-Ğazzī's biographical dictionary "*kawākib al-sā'ira bi-a'yān al-mi'a al-āšira*". His entry is only three lines long and does not go into any detail about Ibn Ṭawq's biography:

"Aḥmad b. Ṭawq: Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. Aḥmad, the *ṣayḥ*, the *imām*, the *ālīm*, the pious, the traditionary Ṣihāb al-Dīn al-Dimašqī al-Šāfi'ī, known as Ibn Ṭawq. He was born in Rabī' I of the year 834; he died in Damascus on Sunday, the 3rd or 4th of Ramaḍān in the year 915."¹¹

The entry suggests that, at some point in his life, Ibn Ṭawq has achieved full recognition among the learned men (arab. *ulamā'*; sg. *ālīm*). Al-Ğazzī calls him a *ṣayḥ*, a prayer leader (*imām*), an *ālīm* [sic!], and a traditionary (*muḥaddiṭ*) - a complete scholar so to say. However, he is not mentioned in other chronicles of his day.¹² The only other source on Ibn Ṭawq's life is the journal he wrote himself.

As a court clerk (*kātib*/*šāhid*), Ibn Ṭawq was not of high status. He was not rich nor did he hold an office or administrative post. He did not come from a renowned lineage, either. In fact, his father's family originated in the village Ġarūd, about a day's journey to the northeast. Ibn Ṭawq maintained links and paid regular visits to Ġarūd throughout his life.¹³ In Damascus, his family networks stem mainly from his mother's family who had been Damascene.¹⁴

His social standing could be considered middle class; as someone "who possessed property, a comfortable life-style, learning, good occupations, and other attributes considered desirable by [his] community."¹⁵ Indeed, Ibn Ṭawq owned at least one story of a house, a nearby orchard, and several female slaves.¹⁶ He usually was able to afford meat although it is mostly through complaints about its high price or its absence on his plate that we know that. In 904/1498-1499 he noted exasperated that his household had to cook without meat for about a week.¹⁷

On the other side, there runs a concern about the author's social and financial security throughout the journal. He vigorously followed the development of the prices of meat, wheat and barley. He took note of all his expenses. There was a reason for this scrutiny. As Yossef Rapoport points out, at one time Ibn Ṭawq was knee-deep in debts to his business partner *ṣayḥ* Zayn al-Dīn Ḥiḍr, so much so that he swore "on pain of divorce" not to take

11. AL-ĞAZZĪ, *Kawākib*, I, p. 126. Ibn Ṭawq is also mentioned in the entry on his patron; see below.

12. E.g. AL-BUṢRAWĪ, *Tārīḥ*; IBN AL-ḤIMṢĪ, *Ḥawādīṭ*.

13. He regularly receives visitors from Ġarūd : a *mubāšir* and a *ḥaṭīb* as well as one *ṣayḥ* Muḥammad, and he is still informed about social events in the village ; he also travels there himself occasionally ; Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta'līq*, I, p. 26, 64, 76 ; II, p. 543, IV, p. 1911.

14. *Ibid.* I, p. 9.

15. MARCUS 1989, p. 38.

16. In 887/1482-3, the author mentions that he rented, among other things, the part of the lower house and the story (*ṭabaqa*) which beforehand belonged to his uncle's granddaughter, for a hundred dirham a year. See IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'līq*, I, p. 206.

17. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 1697.

more loans, which at the time was one of the strongest oaths to take.¹⁸ But there was no way around again loaning money. So, in order to circumvent the consequences of the oath Ibn Ṭawq repudiated his wife in 890/1490 “in answer to her request”.¹⁹ Throughout the journal, he was married to the same woman, although he had changing concubines beside her.²⁰

To counter the dangers of descent into poverty, Ibn Ṭawq applied several strategies besides fulfilling the obligations of his job as a court clerk. He strived for salaried positions in madrasas and mosques while, at the same time, he tended to his garden which could provide emergency provisions his household would depend on in bad times.²¹ He could be considered “a peasant on the fringes of the jurists”.²²

While Ibn Ṭawq might have had a hard time avoiding social descent, he also had opportunities for social advancement. He was acquainted with several high ranking ulama; first and foremost he enjoyed some sort of patronage by the highest *‘ālim* in town, the *šayḥ al-islām* Abū Bakr b. Qāḍī ‘Aḡlūn.²³ Maybe it is due to this relationship that, in 887/1482-1483, Ibn Ṭawq was able to attain a post as a chanter of the Koran in the Zinḡiliyya school, and another one a year later in Qābūn.²⁴ When the *šayḥ*’s son was to be married in the year 891/1486-1487, it was Ibn Ṭawq who was chosen to sleep in the couple’s bed prior to the marriage.²⁵

According to the journal, the *šayḥ* was one of the most important figures in the social and political life of Damascus. He came from a distinguished family of ulama; his father had been the highest judge (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) and his brother was the *šayḥ al-islām* before him.²⁶ His teachings in Damascus and in Cairo were very well attended, and he had more students than any other scholar of his day.²⁷ For the beginning of the *šayḥ*’s travels to Cairo Ibn Ṭawq interrupted the yearly course of the journal by an inserted caption saying that the following “report is on what happened after the honourable *šayḥ* departed for Cairo. May God let him and his companions arrive in health. May He send him back in health and success and his companions in wealth and health!”²⁸

18. RAPOPORT 2005, p. 106.

19. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta’līq*, I, p. 449. This situation seems to repeat itself later on ; *ibid.* III, p. 1159.

20. Ibn Ṭawq speaks of each of them as *umm al-awlād*, a legal term which denotes a freed slave-girl who bore her master children.

21. *Ibid.* I, p. 442; III, p. 1095.

22. *Ibid.* I, p. 9.

23. Henceforth I will refer to the author’s patron as the *šayḥ* to avoid ambiguities with regard to other Damascene *šayḥ*-s.

24. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta’līq*, I, p. 197, 227-228.

25. *Ibid.* II, p. 580-581. According to an ancient Damascene custom a pious person should sleep in the bridal bed the three nights before the wedding ; GUO 2008, p. 212.

26. AL-ĞAZZĪ, *Kawākib*, I, p. 114.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

28. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta’līq*, I, p. 298.

The *šayḥ* appears in the journal as an advocate for the common people. They would turn to him to ask for his mediation in their problems with the rulers; to free people imprisoned for pressing money, to make peace in the case of social unrest, or to achieve compensation for a murder.²⁹ Meanwhile, other chronicles of the time do not grant him the same status. Al-Buṣrawī mentions the *šayḥ* only four times while Ibn al-Ḥimṣī mentions him in thirteen instances.³⁰ Ibn Ṭūlūn who wrote about a generation later depicts the *šayḥ* mostly as a collaborator with the Mamluk authorities against the Damascene populace.³¹ Al-Ġazzī mostly followed Ibn Ṭūlūn's chronicle in writing since there was scarce information on the *šayḥ*'s life.³²

Ibn Ṭawq does not depict the *šayḥ* exclusively as a public figure but also as his close acquaintance and even friend. The author visited the *šayḥ*'s households on a regular basis.³³ The text is often more a tale of the *šayḥ*'s life than of its author's. Ibn Ṭawq was usually informed about the *šayḥ*'s state of health, his marriage problems (especially with his Egyptian wife), and other of his issues.³⁴ But, it does definitely not provide a coherent picture. It is testimony to the everyday life in which it was created, which it was part of, growing day by day. The character of the text plays a great role in how the city is depicted in it. Therefore we should turn our attention to the text itself. Otherwise we would implicitly "assume that it is transparent, which means that it practically explains itself."³⁵

The *yawmiyyāt* – a little tradition

Ibn Ṭawq's journal resembles a diary in its outer form, in its lack of content-related focus and, more importantly, in the mode of its production. I argue that, in this respect, it is «the

29. To give a selection only from the first one hundred pages of the journal: the *šayḥ* freed a judge, (*ibid.*, p. 41); he remained unwavering when the governor wanted to raise money (p. 66); people seek his help because of high sugar price (*ibid.*); he wants an armistice (p. 67); the *muḥtasib* seeks his advice (p. 71); he makes an emir tear down a building he had built too high (p. 79); he takes care of some prisoners' corpses and prays for them (p. 83).

30. AL-BUṢRAWĪ, *Ta'rīḥ*, p. 77, 87, 92, 211 ; IBN AL-ḤIMṢĪ, *Ḥawādīṭ*, p. 114, 151, 192-193, 206, 221, 252-253, 312, 396, 423, 447, 557.

31. LAPIDUS 1967, p. 93. Ibn Ṭawq does not transmit this episode. At other times, he obscures the *šayḥ*'s role in freeing the riotous *šayḥ* Mubāarak. See LAPIDUS 1967, p. 106; IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'liq*, III, p. 1288-1289.

32. AL-ĠAZZĪ, *Kawākib*, I, p. 114-118.

33. The *šayḥ* lived in polygamy housing his wives in different quarters of the city.

34. Quarrels between the *šayḥ* and his wife are frequently mentioned; e.g. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'liq*, I, p. 25, 521-522, 533; II, p. 584, 587, 1049. For cases of sickness, see Ibn Ṭawq, *Ta'liq*, I, p. 91, 122-123, 126, 522-528, 541, 546; II, p. 641, 789, 1009-1019; III, p. 1107-1108, 1157-1159 ; the *šayḥ* did not go to the teaching session because he was furious with one of his sons (III, p. 1091). Furthermore, a wife of the *šayḥ* got injured (I, p. 94), another had a miscarriage (I, p. 102). A couple of days after the *šayḥ* even spoke of divorce from his Egyptian wife, Ibn Ṭawq asked him if he was going through with it (II, p. 744, 747).

35. AMELANG 2007, p. 133.

one and only known work of *yawmiyyāt* from Mamluk times”.³⁶ Historiography flourished in 15th-century Egypt and Syria, reaching new readerships, adopting new forms of writing. In Syria, the chronicle remained the first choice for historians. It was turned into a sort of diary-chronicle, a process which continued into Ottoman times.³⁷ Autobiographical notes became almost a standard ingredient of these chronicles:³⁸ “This was perhaps the symptom of a turbulent age, when individuals felt that their personal experiences of the Crusader wars, the Mongol invasions of the Black Death were worthy of record.”³⁹

As was demonstrated by Konrad Hirschler, the annalistic form of the chronicle is not necessarily based on a chronological writing process. Chronicles were often designed according to a plot.⁴⁰ So was al-Biqāʿī's chronicle “*Iḡhār al-ʿasr li-asrār ahl al-ʿasr*”, which is why I do not share Yosef Rapoport's assessment of it being a diary,⁴¹ although it was probably based on one.⁴² Al-Biqāʿī's account is an edited text, which was compiled with ‘publication’ already in mind.⁴³ It interprets past events retrospectively emphasizing the impact of events which led to the author's quasi-exile in Damascus. This is also manifest by al-Biqāʿī's use of stylistic elements, such as dream narratives.⁴⁴ As Michael Chamberlain pointed out, such narrative texts were of great importance in social competition.⁴⁵

Ibn Ṭawq's journal, on the other side, did not aim at making sense of things. It records the events of the day, but seldom explains them. While the next entry in a chronicle is determined by events, the diary continues the following day. It is the day that gives the diary its rhythm.⁴⁶ The keeping of the diary itself becomes part of an author's everyday life. Indeed, Ibn Ṭawq very often noted the date and day of week but nothing else, or he simply stated: “Today nothing happened to write down” (*lam yakun fihi mā yuktabu*).⁴⁷

36. CONERMANN 2003, p. 11. I do not intend to single out Ibn Ṭawq as the first author to write a diary in Arabic. On the contrary, the practice seems to have been widespread for centuries ; MAKDISI 1986; also CONERMANN & SEIDENSTICKER 2007.

37. WEINTRITT 2008, p. 19.

38. The tendency to record personally important events happened at the same time in renaissance Italy where traditionally historiographical chronicles were used in a new way to fix personal or family history, such as births, deaths, harvests, celebrations. HOLM 2008, p. 12.

39. IRWIN 2006, p. 160; also GUO 2001.

40. HIRSCHLER 2006.

41. RAPOPORT 2007, p. 3.

42. GUO 2001, p. 132.

43. Such works were ‘published in the context of teaching. They were read to an audience of one's students who, in turn, wrote them down again and made copies of the original text. See ROSENTHAL 1968, p. 173–174 ; ROBINSON 2007, p. 181–82.

44. For emplotment and use of stylistic elements in chronicles, see HIRSCHLER 2006, chapters 5 (p. 63–85) and 6 (p. 86–114).

45. CHAMBERLAIN 1994, p. 18–21.

46. HOLM 2008, p. 26.

47. IBN ṬAWQ, *Taʿlīq*, IV, p. 1743.

On the other days we find a wild variety of topics lined up one after the other. Weather phenomena, price lists, the author's and others' domestic affairs, and his attendances at the scholarly circles are juxtaposed with news from Cairo and Aleppo, from the front lines during the first Mamluk-Ottoman war, Bedouin raids, appointments of new officials or the punishment of criminals. Whatever the author deemed important, he took note of in his journal.⁴⁸ Ibn Ṭawq furthermore used it to give account for the manifold legal contracts he witnessed or supervised.⁴⁹ In its size and the diligence in which the author took note of events from the level of the Mamluk Empire down to the level of his household the journal is one of its kind. It is the longest chronographic account from late Mamluk Damascus. In the edition of Ġa'far al-Muḥağir, published in four volumes by the Ifpo in Damascus from 2000 to 2007, the published journal is 1,916 pages long. It makes the chronicles by al-Buṣrawī (276 pages in edition) or Ibn al-Ḥimṣī (664 pages including indices) look petite by comparison.

It cannot be ascertained, however, that Ibn Ṭawq's journal was meant to remain a private text. Al-Ġazzī mentions that it was Ibn Ṭawq who compiled the *ṣayḥ*'s legal opinions (*fatwa*) and also wrote an appendix (*ḍayl*) for this collection.⁵⁰ Is the journal this *ḍayl*? There is no indication in the text that Ibn Ṭawq was working on any other text. Moreover, it is more than a private journal. It is of a "hybrid format: a strange blend of a 'public' text, in the form of *ta'rīḥ* annals, and a 'private' journal."⁵¹ Probably it was not meant for publication in its present form but it was certainly to provide the material for something more refined.

The journal is organized by year. This is emphasized by passages which signal the beginning or the end of a year, sometimes giving extensive listings of emirs, judges and other officials. Usually, after this passage the entry for the first day of *muḥarram* follows.⁵² In addition, entries are often dated according to the Christian months, the signs of the zodiac, or the Syrian agrarian calendar. It was a tool which Ibn Ṭawq used to remember all the places he went to every day, or when he could not do any errands, he wrote down his reasons. Often enough, he only states bluntly: "I did not go to town (*lam adḥul al-madīna*)."

When he went 'to town', he usually wrote down his stopovers. He did not write about the paths taken. And why should he? His entries made sense to him. Although most of the houses mentioned could not be localized, the journal still proves an interesting study for the study of Mamluk Damascus because it can give insights into how Ibn Ṭawq perceived his city and how he appropriated its urban space.

48. There were, of course, limits to his willingness to tell about private business, especially with regard to his own wife. Her name is never mentioned, and she appears quite amorphous throughout the text.

49. For a list of contracts from the 2nd and 3rd volume, see Guo 2008, p. 216-17.

50. AL-ĠAZZĪ, *Kawākib*, I, p. 115.

51. Guo 2008, p. 210.

52. An exception is the introduction to the year 902/1496-1497 where the list of notables appears only in the entry for Muḥarram 1st. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'liq*, III, p. 1439f.

The urban space of Damascus – how to approach it?

Damascus is one of the most studied cities of the Islamic Middle East. There are studies on its architecture, its urban planning⁵³, its elites and its populace at large.⁵⁴ Mostly they deal with either the morphology of the city's physical surface or with its society.

In his 1970 "Topography of Baghdad in the early Middle Ages", Jacob Lassner proposed three ways to access a medieval city.⁵⁵ First, access is possible through the city's institutions, some of which serve practical needs, but others "expressed loftier aims and purposes, often independent from the character of any individual city and related to more universal Muslim concepts [...]"⁵⁶ Second, Lassner suggests the access through the sphere of everyday life. Third, it is possible through the architecture of the city: "In a general sense everyone knows that there were mosques, palaces, baths, markets, rich and poor houses, cemeteries, shrines, walls, and gates in almost all cities. But did all these architectural features spring up suddenly and at the same time? How did a city grow?" The access through the study of everyday life seems to be the most elusive and least studied topic among the three.

In order to analyze the relations between a society, its institutions and its buildings, the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre shifted the focus on an analysis of urban space.⁵⁷ In the introduction to his main work "la production de l'espace" (1974), Lefebvre asks the question of how (urban) space was produced in pre-modern societies.⁵⁸ According to him, no society can be understood merely as a "collection of people and things *in space*" nor out of "a certain number of texts and speeches *on space*".⁵⁹ Every society produces its own space, and this is inseparable from the society which created it.

Lefebvre proposes a three-dimensional concept of space consisting of the spatial practices, the representations of space, and the representational space. The representations of space are dominant in this triad. Such representations can be found in the institutions examined by Lassner as well as in literature, architecture, or art. They comprise all ideas on space which are expressed verbally, and can, thus, be abstracted. With regard to medieval Muslim cities, the concept of *ḥisba* (including religious and moral principles, pious lifestyle and of public behavior) was one of the strongest influences in shaping urban space which led to the establishment of the office of the supervisor of the markets (*muḥtasib*).⁶⁰ He had to enforce good, appropriate behavior in the markets, but he was also obliged to keep

53. E.g. WULZINGER & WATZINGER 1924 ; SACK 1989 ; BURNS 2005.

54. E.g. LAPIDUS 1967.

55. LASSNER 1970.

56. For this quote and the following, see Oleg Grabar's foreword in LASSNER 1970, p. 12-13.

57. Recently, Lefebvre's concept of space has been fruitfully utilised by HARITHY 2001 and LEEUWEN 1999.

58. All citations refer to a German translation of the introduction in « The Production of Space » (LEFEBVRE 2006).

59. LEFEBVRE 2006, p. 331.

60. On the *muḥtasib* and his duties, see ZIADEH, p. 118f., 122-25; see also ESSID 1995, chapter IV.

the city's main roads and the entrances to the quarters unobstructed.⁶¹ "The fundamental elements of Mamluk period social organization – the quarter, the fraternity, the religious community, and the state" – also bore their impact on the city's spatial organization.⁶²

With regard to literature, the field of geography seems promising.⁶³ With regard to the city of Damascus, I would point out the works of al-Nu'aymī (*al-Dāris fī tāriḥ al-madāris*) and Ibn 'Asākir (*Tāriḥ madīna Dimašq*) which were religious guidebooks (*ziyārāt*-literature) intended for pilgrims, presenting the city as a sacred landscape.⁶⁴ Furthermore the literature on the (religious) merits of cities should be taken into account.⁶⁵

These representations of space influenced construction and architecture, which only then is understood "as a project which is embedded in a spatial context and a texture."⁶⁶ It is obscure how much influence the patron and the architect exerted on the final design. Medieval architects conceived of it as a craft, handed down from father to son.⁶⁷

In Lefebvre's concept, the representational space is "the ruled, hence suffered space" which is dominated by the representations of space and which one's imagination tries to change, to appropriate.⁶⁸ To achieve this people make use of objects of physical space which are charged symbolically. The representational space is something that is experienced and communicated. It includes a centre of affection and localities of passion, of activity and of one's own past. It also originates in the past, in the collective as well as the individual past.⁶⁹ In the journal, it is Ibn Ṭawq's social contacts what turned certain places into affective centres.

Spatial practices connect one's time plan with the available tracks and modes of transportation, which, in turn, connect places of work, private life, leisure time, etc. It is being contested by representations of space and the representational space. This is exactly what Ibn Ṭawq kept track of in his journal. But his image of the city – or places therein – was as much influenced by predominant ideas of the city as his walks were helped and obstructed by its physical design and its organization into market streets and closed quarters. This does usually not show in the journal, since for the author it was just

61. SACK 1989, p. 45.

62. LAPIDUS 1967, p. 51.

63. There was no cohesive image of space but gives room to a lot of ideas, ranging from cosmology and astronomy through maritime literature and travel accounts to the genre of *'aḡā'ib*, fantastic accounts of far away and often legendary countries and the wonders one could see there; an interesting study is BRAUER 1995 on the role of frontiers and boundaries.

64. See AL-NU'AYMĪ, *Dāris*; IBN 'ASĀKIR, *Tāriḥ*.

65. See articles « Faḍīla » and « al-Maḥāsin wa-l-Masāwī », *E.I.*², respectively II, p. 729, and V, p. 1223. Ibn Ḡubayr emulates their perspective on Damascus in his own account of the city. IBN ḠUBAYR, *Riḥla*, p. 271–294.

66. LEFEBVRE 2007, p. 340; employed with regard to architecture in Cairo by HARITHY 2001.

67. Ibn Ṭawq mentions a couple of architects (*mi'mar*) but rarely in the context of construction works: e.g. the father of the *ṣayḥ al-mi'mar* (the architect) *ṣayḥ* 'Ubaid died; the architect al-Ṭibī whose daughter died (III, p. 1122, 1127).

68. LEFEBVRE 2007, p. 336.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 339f.

the way the city was. Still, he felt the need to localise some places within the city. These descriptions give an idea how Ibn Ṭawq experienced and spoke about Damascus, to his personal topography of the city.

This topography was not stable throughout the twenty years of record. It was subject to myriads of forces which contributed to the creation and re-creation of space, and, thus, had an impact on Ibn Ṭawq's perception of the same:

A space is thus neither merely a medium nor a list of ingredients, but an interlinkage of geographic form, built environment, symbolic meanings, and routines of life. Ways of being and physical landscapes are of a piece, albeit one filled with tensions and competing versions of what a space should be. People fight not only over a piece of turf, but about the sort of reality that it constitutes.⁷⁰

Natural forces had an impact which is not to/should not be underestimated. The weather influenced mobility *extra muros* as well as *intra muros*. Rain and mud changed conditions on the streets dramatically sometimes, sometimes hindering the author from going anywhere.⁷¹ Earthquakes rendered even the own house unsafe, so that Ibn Ṭawq had to leave it "barefoot".⁷²

More than anything, it was the recurring epidemics what changed the city and its people. The plague was "medieval man's major traumatic experience".⁷³ In more quiet years, Ibn Ṭawq took note of sixty to about one hundred deaths. In 897/1491-2, however, the plague hit Damascus hard, which led to a body count of 280 deaths in the journal. Among them were two of Ibn Ṭawq's daughters.⁷⁴ In Ramaḍān 897 (27 July-25 August 1492) alone, 117 deaths are reported. On one day, the *qāḍī šāfi'ī* had to lead the prayers for eight or nine dead at once.⁷⁵ The plague proved a major crisis for Damascus, taking a higher death toll than any riot or civil war.

Ibn Ṭawq's topography

It is understood that, to Ibn Ṭawq, Damascus was not only an agglomeration of wood, stone and tiles, of buildings and streets. Much more, it was the centre his life evolved around. Ibn Ṭawq kept notes on the erection and the collapse of houses, on the restoration of public buildings such as souks or mosques, social unrest in the suburban quarters. He wrote about many places within the city. But was the city itself an entity to Ibn Ṭawq? Did he even see Damascus as a city? Where were the boundaries of Damascus?

70. MOLOTCH 1993, p. 888.

71. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'liq*, III, p. 1252.

72. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 1560.

73. MUSALLAM 1983, p. 117.

74. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'liq*, III, p. 1121, 1136.

75. *Ibid.*, III, p. 1123.

The text provides no unmistakable answer to the first question. Ibn Ṭawq speaks of Damascus (*Dimašq*) in relation to places far away, when he writes on the itineraries of armies, emirs or notables.⁷⁶ On the local level references to the city at large are scarce. They emphasize the impact of an event, as in the case of the *fitna* (riot, revolt) of one *šayḥ* Mubārak. Mubārak had been zealous in his fight against drugs and alcohol for a time and had probably not gained the best reputation among the mamluks for confiscating and destroying loads upon loads of wine and hashish. On Ramaḍān the 2nd 899/6 July 1494, *šayḥ* Mubārak and three of his followers walked past the Madrasa al-Nuḥḥās while the *dawādār* was inside it. The latter called some of his mamlūks and caught the *šayḥ* and one of his followers. He brought them to the Bāb al-Barīd prison where they were beaten and lashed severely. But two of Mubārak's company could escape and brought word to Ibn Ṭawq's patron. The *šayḥ* and the *qāḍī šāfi'ī* both went to the governor where they had to pledge and argue until the evening, to set the *šayḥ* free again. On his way back to Qābūn, Mubārak was aching from the beating, Ibn Ṭawq reports. He and his followers were ordered not to carry a sword anymore.

But already the next day the *šayḥ* Mubārak came back from Qābūn with his entourage. They were joined by a large crowd who gathered to storm the prison in order to free a bookseller (*warrāq*). This developed, despite the ideally peaceful time of the fasting month, into a great bloodshed by the governor's *mamlūk*-s among the crowd. The *mamlūk*-s proceeded towards Qābūn and laid waste to Mubārak's house and sufi lodge (*zāwiya*).⁷⁷ Ibn Ṭawq narrates the incident with detailed information on the whereabouts of the several encounters between the mob and the *mamlūk*-s. Several spectators were killed as well. After the killing, fifteen corpses lay on the doorstep of the Madrasa al-Bādirā'iyya. Only near the end of the account the author dwells on the consequences of the tumult, saying: "the souks were shut, the whole city (*balad*) is in unrest (*iḥṭabaṭat al-balad ġamī'uhā*)".⁷⁸ This is the scale of events which provoked Ibn Ṭawq to speak of the "city" in a local context. Moreover, by referring to the city as "*balad*" instead of "*Dimašq*" this account provides us with a first hint towards how Ibn Ṭawq conceived of his city.

The first distinction Ibn Ṭawq makes within the city is between the walled city, the old centre of Damascus (*madīna*) and the city's immediate sphere of influence (*balad*). The *balad* includes the *madīna* as well as the suburbs outside the walls and outlying settlements. In this respect the denomination of the old city is ambiguous, since although it is comprised of several quarters, it is used in the journal it is often used as a reference similar to the quarters. Furthermore, in this account Ibn Ṭawq refers to the madrasa as a self-evident landmark (see below).

76. E.g., Ibn Ṭawq writes "Damascus" when news of an Ottoman offensive upset the city, or when an Anatolian woman came through on her way back from Cairo. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'liq*, II, p. 765; III, p. 1278.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 1288-89.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 1288.

Ibn Ṭawq also speaks of the surrounding oasis, the Ġūṭa, and the ring of grazing land surrounding the oasis, called al-Marġ, without explaining their relationship with the adjoining parts of the city. For him all these references were all self-explanatory, matter of fact. The same is true for the farther outlying settlements of al-Šāliḥiyya, Qābūn, Barza, Kafr Sūsā or al-Mizza. None of these settlements was marked as completely distinct from Damascus by being referred to as a village (*qura*). They were all linked to the city to a different degree. Al-Šāliḥiyya and Qābūn rather seem to have been considered part of Damascus than the other settlements. Interestingly enough, they were both situated north to the Old city as well as Ibn Ṭawq's own residential quarter Sūq Šārūġā. Mobility which was always precarious within the city could have played a role in this. But so did Ibn Ṭawq's social ties. He had family on his mother's side in al-Šāliḥiyya and went on errands for his patron in Qābūn.

15th-century Damascenes did not use city maps nor were there any street signs.⁷⁹ They had to other means to find their ways around town and to localise specific places in it. In the following, I will elaborate on three of these ways of that are used in Ibn Ṭawq's journal: the spatial entity of the quarter, the use of landmarks, and the reference to social ties. These categories are not mutually exclusive. Neighbourhoods were often designated by the name of their congregational mosque. Private houses became landmarks because Ibn Ṭawq held the owners in high esteem. Furthermore, he often used more than one reference in order to specify a place. The same method of specification can be found in Nu'aymī's book on the religious schools of Damascus (see above). With regard to the Masġid al-Qaṣab in Ibn Ṭawq's neighbourhood, Nu'aymī localises it in Dabāġa, the old quarter of the tanners, which lay outside the Thomas Gate (Bāb Tūmā), but also close to the quarter al-'Uqayba.⁸⁰ Nu'aymī relates its site to other recognizable structures as well; opposite the mill of Dabāġa, north of the Fāris-caravansarai and east of the *Baqasmāt*-caravansarai, as well as at the end of the Rummān Alley or the Šaṭrā Alley.⁸¹

Ibn Ṭawq follows the basic pattern Nu'aymī uses for the localisation of the mosque when he locates the sufi lodge (*zāwiya*) of šayḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥuṣnī which he located close to the Ḥān al-Dašāriyya.⁸² However, since Nu'aymī wrote a book on the merits of the city, his topography of Damascus appears different from the personal perspective Ibn Ṭawq provides on the city. It is shaped and biased by his social relations, social status, place of residence, occupation, gender, age, available modes of transportation, personal attitudes, hobbies and so on, which influenced the roads and alleys the author walked and the places he visited as well as the meanings he attached to them.

79. Only two city maps are known from the medieval Islamic world, one of the Tunisian city al-Mahdiyyah and one of Tinnis in the delta of the Nile. EDSON 2005, p. 107.

80. AL-NU'AYMĪ, *Dāris*, II, p. 346.

81. *Ibid.*, II, p. 346 ; I, p. 16.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 1100.

The Quarter

The spatial entities used first and foremost by Ibn Ṭawq are the quarters and the residential neighbourhoods. The quarters proved to be a valid point of reference since much of the administration was handled on their level. The imposition of taxes and the jurisdiction addressed the quarters as collectives and held them responsible accordingly.⁸³

In terms of orientation, reference to quarters was vague at best. They proved more valid in their relevance as signifiers of social, religious and political affiliation. This connotation of quarters and neighbourhoods as social entities is also explored in Richard van Leeuwen's monograph on "*Waqfs and Urban Structure*". Leeuwen investigates the role religious foundations (*waqf*, pl. *awqāf*) played in shaping and structuring the urban space of Damascus in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. In his opinion, religious buildings or complexes were "founded to express the authority of certain emirs or merchants within specific quarters, which were thus 'marked' as their personal spheres of influence, with their personal clientele."⁸⁴ This 'compartmentalization' he deemed a feature particular to Mamluk Damascus which was often founded on the whole quarters' affiliation with a religious rite (*maḏhab*).⁸⁵

Ibn Ṭawq perceived the quarters as collective actors in the urban sphere. On the basis of their alignment with the quarter, gangs of young men (*zu'ar*) fought with each other or with the authorities over control of the public space within the quarters or beyond them.⁸⁶ Men from the quarters of Šāḡūr and Mīdān al-Ḥaṣā even fought along *mamlūk* factions in an upcoming civil war (903/1497-8).⁸⁷ The entrances to the quarter were sealed and defended, if necessary. Eventually, all of Šāḡūr was ordered to be burned; even the mosques and madrasas "and all books and other things inside the [Madrasa] al-Tarābiyya burned".⁸⁸ The Bedouin moved into the deserted quarter a few weeks later.⁸⁹ The name did not change but certainly did this development Ibn Ṭawq's spatial practices. With fights and, later, fires raging in the quarter, he would have been careful not to get too close to it. From what can be learned from his record, the course life in other parts of the city was not necessarily hampered by these events.

Ibn Ṭawq's own quarter Sūq Šārūḡā is barely mentioned in the journal. Here, it was his smaller neighbourhood that was important to him, he refers to it as "our neighbourhood" (*ḥāratunā*) or "the people of the Qaṣab Mosque" (*ahl al-qaṣab*).

83. LAPIDUS 1967, p. 94.

84. LEEUWEN 1999, p. 189.

85. LAPIDUS 1967, p. 86.

86. For fights between quarters see IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'liq*, I, p. 23, 462, 504, 505, 520; II, p. 762, 770, 775, 776; IV, p. 1533-1536. See also for their interpretation according to Ibn Ṭūlūn, LAPIDUS 1967.

87. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'liq*, IV, p. 1549, 1555.

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*, p. 1569.

Neighbourhoods had mixed populations and were “communities of both rich and poor”.⁹⁰ Members of other occupations appear more often than usual in this context, such as a carpenter, two ophthalmologists, a weaver, and a wood turner.⁹¹ Also, Ibn Ṭawq received a miller and his family as guests.⁹² All those people seem to have been granted the status of “our neighbour” (*ṣārūnā*). Was it due to this characteristic that Ibn Ṭawq recorded their marriages, deaths, circumcisions and births with the same diligence he usually reserved for the ulama and high state officials? One point in case would be that when he wrote the obituary for one of his neighbours, he remarked that “I am not sure if the mother of his children was from the neighbourhood or from elsewhere”.⁹³ It seems that a person’s status changed in Ibn Ṭawq’s perception when both were neighbours. His neighbourhood held a special value for him, where his focus on the ulama was undermined by other allegiances.

To sum up, Ibn Ṭawq used reference to a quarter as a spatial as much as a social category. In some cases, a more precise specification was not possible or suitable, in others the general area was affected. Another reason was due to the motivation for writing the journal, as in the itinerary presented at the beginning of this article: “I was in Qubaybāt at [the house of] *ṣayḥ* Burhān ad-Dīn al-Nāḡī, then at [the house of] *ṣayḥ* Šihāb al-Dīn b. al-Maḥūḡab”.⁹⁴ To Ibn Ṭawq it must have been obvious where these houses were situated within the quarter, but both *ṣayḥ*-s probably owned houses in other parts of the city, as well. Thus, Ibn Ṭawq referred to the quarter because it was helpful for remembering in which houses he met them on that specific day.

In another instance, when a certain *ṣayḥ* Ibrāhīm al-Nāḡī went to the Maḡāk Mosque in Qubaybāt, mentioning the quarter again avoided ambiguity.⁹⁵ Ibn Ṭawq lived in the neighbourhood of the Masḡid al-Qaṣab which was also known under the name of Ibn Maḡāk Mosque. Only by referring to the quarter as well as to the mosque Ibn Ṭawq specified the location of the event indisputably.

Indeed, it is rather the exception that reference to a quarter disambiguates the reference to a landmark like the mosque. More often, Ibn Ṭawq referred to landmarks in order to specify a certain place within a quarter. In the case of one ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Ibn Ṭawq speculates, that he had lived in the house of someone (the name is not decipherable in the manuscript) “in the quarter below the citadel (*Taḥt al-Qal’a*), close to the hospital”, only to correct himself in the next entry, stating that he really lived close to a mosque inside Paradise Gate⁹⁶ (Bāb al-Farādīs) in the Old City.⁹⁷ In the absence of street signs or names, Ibn

90. LAPIDUS 1967, p. 87.

91. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta’līq*, III, p. 1135, 1131, 1137, 1124; IV, p. 1649.

92. *Ibid.*, III, p. 1363.

93. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 1714.

94. See above footnote 2, p. 1.

95. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta’līq*, III, p. 1260.

96. Also Gardens’ Gate, cf. ÉLISSÉEFF, *La description de Damas*, p. 329.

97. *Ibid.*, II, p. 811-812.

Ṭawq relied on landmarks as the next best thing available. They were an effective means to find one's way through the labyrinth, or to describe a location to others.

The landmarks

At first glance, mosques seem to be ideal architectural landmarks. Their minarets rise high into the air, visible from afar. From within the maze of streets they could still be recognized acoustically when the muezzin called Muslims to prayer five times a day. It was urban, social, and political factors that made the mosques ideal landmarks. Settlement as such was identified with the building/neighbourhood? of a mosque.⁹⁸

In the case of Damascus, there was no mosque more important than the Umayyad Mosque which was the epicentre of cultic and social life in Damascus.⁹⁹ Obtaining a teaching position or leading the Friday prayers in the Umayyad Mosque granted the highest prestige there was for the ulama in Damascus. A burial taking place in the Umayyad Mosque told of the high social standing of the deceased. Ibn Ṭawq always took note if prayers took place in the Umayyad Mosque.

In the first two years of the journal (885-886/1480-81), Ibn Ṭawq noted some important steps of the repairs, after a fire had destroyed large parts of the Umayyad Mosque in 884/1479. But he did not follow them as diligent as other contemporary writers.¹⁰⁰ At first the outer structure was rebuilt. Only a few days later, after the gates and the *minbar* were restored, the first sermon (*ḥuṭba*) after the fire was held. Next, two pillars of white marble were taken from a madrasa in al-Ṣālihiyya to be used in the *maqṣūra*.¹⁰¹

Moreover, Ibn Ṭawq always mentions when he performed the Friday prayer in the Umayyad Mosque. He notes when he prayed close to or even in the *maqṣūra*, a segregated room for prayers or religious tuition. Praying in this place meant much to him, since it was reserved for men of the social elite such as the *ṣayḥ* or the high ranked *mamlūk* emirs.¹⁰² Most of all, Ibn Ṭawq identified the Umayyad Mosque with his patron who even was assigned to one of its sanctuaries (*maṣḥad*). The mosque was the greatest stage to show off "his status in his community and his closeness to his patron's family".¹⁰³

As the Umayyad Mosque was synonymous for the city centre, every/each smaller mosque represented the centre of its neighbourhood. This was indicated in the naming of neighbourhoods, which were often called by the mosque's name: Ibn Ṭawq lived in the neighbourhood of the Maṣḥid al-Qaṣab, as the above mentioned 'Abd ar-Razzāq's domicile was located with reference to a mosque as well as one of the seven city gates.

98. LAPIDUS 1969, p. 70.

99. LEDER 2005, p. 237; for its importance for the Mamluks, see WALKER 2004.

100. BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF 2004.

101. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'liq* I, p. 40, 46, 55.

102. In 903/1497-1498 the governor was praying there, once to the right of the prayer niche (*miḥrāb*) (*Ibid.*, IV, p. 1619), once in "mull and linen" (*Ibid.*, p. 1626).

103. GUO 2008, p. 212.

Other buildings of the sacred landscape feature as landmarks as well. Ibn Ṭawq refers to a Sufi lodge to localise a fatal accident: “on this [day] a house in the alley of the Sufi lodge of al-Aqbāʾī dropped on a woman; she died, may God be merciful upon her.”¹⁰⁴ He refers to a Sufi lodge of one ṣayḥ Farağ when his acquaintance ṣayḥ Abū al-Faḍl al-Qudsī moved into the house of the above mentioned al-Buṣrawī.¹⁰⁵ The location of a stone bench which was to be demolished was given as “adjoining the wall of the Madrasat al-Muʿīniyya to the west”.¹⁰⁶

In a few instances, Ibn Ṭawq refers to Christian churches. He localises a bath house (*ḥammām*) with reference to one of them: “and this *ḥammām* is next to the building of his [i.e. the owner of the Ḥammām ʿĪsā al-Qārī – TW] son Muḥammad and of his uncle’s son Muḥammad, close to church of the Christians, westwards.”¹⁰⁷

As he deemed the reconstruction of the Umayyad Mosque a pious deed, Ibn Ṭawq was also in favour of the renovation of other structures. In 886/1481-1482 he was amazed as the souks of the armourers, the silk weavers and others east of the Umayyad Mosque were reopened. The buildings were «most beautiful» (*alā aḥsan mā-kānū*).¹⁰⁸ Another souk was intentionally destroyed in the same year: “They destroyed Bāb al-Barīd, I mean its souk. They decided to rebuild it more splendidous (*aḥsan*) than it was before.”¹⁰⁹ About two months later, Ibn Ṭawq observed that now the souk was torn open and “nothing [was] there but the closed shops and the alleyways and the white wash (*bayyāḍ*).”¹¹⁰

On Šawwāl 28th 906/17 May 1501 his son Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl took over a shop in the silk market (Sūq al-Ḥarīrī), which he took off one Muḥammad Ibn Šahlān for an agreed price of 560 dirhams of which he paid two hundred on the spot. He did not pay in silver coins though, for he would need the silver in order to pay the monthly amount of fifty silver pieces to the mosque.¹¹¹ Having a shop for silks tells of/bears witness of wealth and wide ranging business relations. The fee Muḥammad had to pass on to the mosque alone is telling of the splendid position his shop must have been set at. In comparison, one *raṭl* of meat cost only 4 dirhams on the same day. And meat was already considered a luxury food: “No food was more coveted, or better epitomized the balance between desires and constraints, than meat.”¹¹²

As often as Ibn Ṭawq noted that he went to one or the other souk on a certain day he rarely went into detail. He did not write about his purchases of food stuff, although

104. IBN ṬAWQ, *Taʿlīq*, II, p. 684.

105. *Ibid.*, III, p. 1229.

106. *Ibid.*, I, p. 81.

107. *Ibid.*, I, p. 125; II, p. 601.

108. *Ibid.*, I, p. 65.

109. *Ibid.*, I, p. 81.

110. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

111. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 1904.

112. GREHAN 2007, p. 95.

he regularly gave lists of prices for grain, meat, vegetables or yoghurt. In this, the author followed the literary norms of the time, making profane activities subject to «censure».

In terms of mobility gates were obvious landmarks, since they were erected at the most sensitive locations: “where the city touches the outer world.”¹¹³ Through gates, mobility between the city and the hinterland could be controlled, restricted or blocked completely. Whereas most buildings in Mamluk times were built that their façades aligned with the edges of the buildings next to it, gates arched across the street and were highly visible.

Ibn Ṭawq followed the erection and reconstruction of major gates as he did with the other great structures. But in one case Ibn Ṭawq gives the reason why the gate was erected. On the last day of Šawwāl 902/1 July 1497, “Ibn al-Dīwān constructed a gate under the large walnut tree which stands in the garden of Ibn al-‘Attār”, situated at a forking of a road in Qābūn. The construction had already been decreed by the deceased governor after one Naṣr al-Ġammāl had pleaded to the governor: “This is the road to Anatolia and Ḥurāsān; shouldn’t a gate be built there?” These regions were synonymous for the Ottoman Empire and the confederation of the Aqoyunlu. The construction of the gate had begun the week before the author wrote this entry. On that day the author witnessed, that arcs had been erected on the right and the left side.¹¹⁴

All the structures mentioned so far can be found in most accounts on Islamic cities. Descriptions of mosques, souks and gates were part of the *faḍā’il*-literature as well as many travel accounts. But Ibn Ṭawq used also private residences as landmarks in his journal. This choice might have been only due to the character of the text but it stands out as the most unusual and most personal aspect of his topography. Domestic houses usually were seen as ‘the rest of the city’, being built without space between one house and the next. As a rule, they were built not more than two stories high.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, they were surrounded by high walls. In short, they had all the features which would disqualify them as landmarks. Still, Ibn Ṭawq invested them with meaning because their owners were part of his social circles. Whereas most descriptions of Damascus concentrate on its eternal merits, Ibn Ṭawq’s topography emphasizes his social contacts, and, therefore, demarks Damascus as a social space.

SOCIAL LANDMARKS

More than anything else, it was social ties that determined Ibn Ṭawq’s topography of Damascus. The Aqbā’ī family is one case in point. As was mentioned above, Ibn Ṭawq referred to a sufi lodge belonging to one member of the family. He took note of the death of another Ibrāhīm al-Aqbā’ī in Šafar 887/1482. Ibrāhīm had commissioned the building of a public bath in the Sūq al-Aqbā’iyya which also carried the family’s name. Furthermore, at least two members of the family lived in his neighbourhood. On one of them, Ibn Ṭawq

113. LEEUWEN 1999, p. 185.

114. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta’līq*, III, p. 1501.

115. GREHAN 2007, p. 161.

comments that “he had been our neighbour for a long time”.¹¹⁶ He related several buildings throughout the city to this family which was also connected to him via his neighbourhood.

It was Ibn Ṭawq’s social ties that made him stride through the city. In many cases, he just notes that he went somewhere to meet someone. In some instances, however, he refers to the property of his associates in order to localise another place. Although Ibn Ṭawq identified the settlement of al-Ṣālihiyya very much with his mother’s side of the family, namely his two cousins Abū al-Ḥayr and Nūr al-Dīn, the one group of people that played the major role for his topography were the ulama as his network of patronage.¹¹⁷ Ibn Ṭawq’s relatives appear often in the journal, but do not play a decisive role for his topography.¹¹⁸ When the author’s mother-in-law decided to buy property, it is only stated that it was on some square in Ṣāḡūr; when she sold “her story and the stable” there is no location at all.¹¹⁹

It was his connections to the ulama that shaped Ibn Ṭawq’s topography more than anything else. Most of his appearances at mosques, madrasas, shrines and tombs were due to his attendances at social events of this group.¹²⁰ Every year he took part in the recitation of the Buḥārī at the Umayyad Mosque or in one of the schools. He went there for his job as a notary. In addition, he met with other ulama in orchards both in the city and the surrounding oasis, and in their houses. One of the ulama who were among the author’s closest acquaintances was one ṣayḥ Abū al-Faḍl. He could not be identified with certainty.¹²¹ But Ibn Ṭawq mentions regularly that he corresponded with this ṣayḥ¹²², and that his household or the ṣayḥ’s paid regular visits to each other.¹²³

Although Ibn Ṭawq’s conduct with ṣayḥ Abū al-Faḍl was frequent and friendly, the ṣayḥ’s house did not qualify as a landmark for the author. With regard to one ṣayḥ Abū al-Faḍl al-Qudṣī, Ibn Ṭawq remarked that he lived in a house that belonged to one al-Adrāī but had moved his household to the house of Ibn an-Nayrubī al-Dahabī which was situated

116. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta’līq*, I, p. 127; II, p. 702; IV, p. 1859.

117. For a study on allegiance within Mamlūk households, Henning Sievert proposed a model of four ideal types of group allegiance based on kinship, patronage, friendship or similar geographic or ethnic background. An exclusiveness of one of these types, however, is never found in Ibn Ṭawq’s journal. SIEVERT 2003, p. 104.

118. In contrast to other members of his family Ibn Ṭawq’s brothers stay almost invisible. I found only two remarks on them; once the son of his brother Šu’ayb was present at a meeting in the Ġazāliyya school, and in the occasion of his brother Ibn al-Ya’mūrī’s death. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta’līq*, p. 578, 581.

119. *Ibid.*, p. 667, 531.

120. A selection from the year 886/1481-1482 gives an idea of how often he went to such places. Excluded are his appearances for the Friday prayers; *ibid.*, I, p. 43, 46, 54, 57, 62, 65-8, 72-3, 75, 84, 87-90, 103, 107, 109, 112. These are just the denoted appearances. The frequency was probably higher in reality, judging from all the news he received from and about other ulama without naming the place where he received them.

121. In the journal five different ṣayḥ-s appear under this name. Additional attributes are not always given. Moreover, the author’s son and one son of the ṣayḥ carry the same name as well.

122. When ṣayḥ Abū al-Faḍl was away in 886/1481-1482, Ibn Ṭawq noted whenever a letter arrived. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta’līq*, I, p. 76, 91, 96, 106, 116, 121.

123. In the years 890 and 891/1485-1487 Ibn Ṭawq mentions frequent mutual sleepovers of their households which could last up to a week. *Ibid.*, p. 443, 453, 469, 479, 519, 618, 664. Also, Ibn Ṭawq and the ṣayḥ paid each other mutual visits in this time; *ibid.*, p. 430, 436-7, 447, 455, 481, 533, 538, 542, 555, 589, 624, 662.

in the Old City. He moved back to his own house a couple of days later.¹²⁴ Maybe it is due to the *šayḥ*'s status as a tenant that his dwelling was not seen fit as a landmark. Although he lived there the houses were considered as someone else's property; they were his only transitorily. Ibn Ṭawq refers to the houses of the *qāḍī šāfi'ī* Muḥibb al-Dīn, or the ones belonging to the several sons of the *šayḥ*, and he does so as if their sites were self-evident. Ibn Ṭawq mentions the murder of a gardener who had lived in the same quarter as Muḥibb al-Dīn.¹²⁵ Otherwise they rarely qualified as landmarks by which other localities could be described.

Only buildings that belonged to the *šayḥ al-islām* were used in this way. In the journal the three houses where the *šayḥ*'s households resided feature most prominently. They were called the large house (*al-bayt al-kabīr*), the new house (*al-bayt al-ğadīd*) and the Muzalliq house.¹²⁶ Only the new house was located by Ibn Ṭawq, probably because it had been in the *šayḥ*'s possession only briefly. It stood in al-Qaymariyya, a street in the heart of the Old City and close to the Umayyad Mosque.¹²⁷

To Ibn Ṭawq the *šayḥ*'s houses were as valuable as landmarks as were mosques or souks: On the 21st Rabī' I 887/10 May 1482, "I met with the *qāḍī l-quḍāt šāfi'ī* in the house of Ibn Sālīm, which is in the neighbourhood of the *šayḥ*'s house".¹²⁸ When a merchant of flour, the author knew, died, he noted the Christian quarter Bāb Tūmā as his place of work as well as his living place: he "had lived in the alley of the *šayḥ*'s house".¹²⁹ Both the alley and the neighbourhood are the *šayḥ*'s in Ibn Ṭawq's point of view. Where that neighbourhood was, or which of the *šayḥ*'s houses is meant, does not become clear.

Furthermore, the *šayḥ* is depicted as an actor in the change of the physical features of the city. He convinces an emir to tear down the excessive stories of his newly built house, he ordered the *maṣṭaba* mentioned above to be demolished, he worked on restoring an alley in his neighbourhood, he might even have had a say in the reconstruction of the bridge he and Ibn Ṭawq went to watch.

Ibn Ṭawq's own house did not qualify as a landmark. Even within its immediate vicinity he refers to it only rarely. In 897/1491-1492, he remarked that two women occupied the hall (*qā'a*) adjoining his house. A wedding was held in the garden next to his house in 890/1485-1486.¹³⁰ This does not mean that he did not write on his own dwelling though.

124. *Ibid.*, II, p. 594, 597.

125. *Ibid.* I, p. 75.

126. The house had belonged to one Šihāb al-Dīn Ibn al-Muzalliq, not to Qāḍī Šams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn al-Muzalliq mentioned by Meier and Weber, who lived in Šāğūr and died in 902 or 903 (1497). MEIER & WEBER 2005, p. 392. The *šayḥ* moved there with his Egyptian wife in 897/1491-2. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'liq*, III, p. 1129.

127. *Ibid.*, I, p. 154,

128. *Ibid.*, I, p. 157.

129. *Ibid.*, II, p. 592.

130. *Ibid.*, I, p. 498; III, p. 1147.

He noted whenever he made repairs or adjustments in the house. From the journal we know that his house had at least one *qā'a* and one *murabba'*.¹³¹ Ibn Ṭawq furnished the *murabba'* in 885/January 1481, and his household spent the following night there.¹³² Only six days later he restored parts of the roof. First he tore down the dome of the lavatory (*murtafaq*) and the roof of the corridor. The following night and day there was a thunderstorm but nonetheless Ibn Ṭawq resumed the work and repaired and covered the roof.¹³³ In the following year he hired a foreman and nineteen workers to patch the roof terraces.¹³⁴ Near the end of the year 886/1481 he again recruited seventeen carpenters for repairs.¹³⁵

In 891/1486 Ibn Ṭawq resumed work on the *murabba'*, shattered the partition wall and installed a door.¹³⁶ He does not tell where this door was leading, though. In 893/1487 the roof over the *qā'a* and the *murabba'* was leaking so badly, the family moved to their neighbours' house. Even greater damage was caused by an earthquake in 903/1497: "Shortly before the midday prayers there was a little bit of an earthquake. I felt it, and the earth below me moved (*tartaqa*) about one moment; the wife told me that the roof had screamed. We stayed in the garden, barefooted."¹³⁷

Weather put much pressure on the house. Almost every winter there were days when Ibn Ṭawq notes that his roof was leaking.¹³⁸ Ibn Ṭawq had to spend time and money on the buildings' maintenance. The greatest change in the author's domestic space came in 902/1496 when he extended the house to make room for his newly wed son and his bride. They were to get a story to themselves. Therefore, on Ša'bān 7th 901/10 April 1496 Ibn Ṭawq was working on the terrace and the railing of the respective *qā'a*.¹³⁹

Ibn Ṭawq's house is depicted in some detail in the journal. However, it did not play any role in his topography. In this case, the bath house of Burhān ad-Dīn or the Masğid al-Qaṣab proved to be the better landmarks. Most often, however, the author preferred to refer to his neighbourhood at large.

Conclusion

Since Ibn Ṭawq had lived almost all his life in Damascus, the organization of the city into public market streets and residential neighbourhoods was as obvious to him as were

131. There are only a few indications to the position of the room called *murabba'*; the small *murabba'* opened onto the courtyard (*hawṣ*); *ibid.*, I, p. 109-10, 131. Apparently this room was used for receptions: *ibid.*, p. 109-110; II, p. 689.

132. *Ibid.*, I, p. 35.

133. *Ibid.*, I, p. 36.

134. *Ibid.*, I, p. 91.

135. *Ibid.*, I, p. 107.

136. *Ibid.*, II, p. 635.

137. *Ibid.*, I, p. 739; IV, p. 1560.

138. *Ibid.*, I p. 159, 309; II, p. 738-739, 1004; IV, p. 1587, 1690.

139. *Ibid.*, III, p. 1482.

the sites of the great market streets, the Umayyad Mosque at the heart of the Old City, or the citadel at the north-western corner of the city walls. The same could be said for the seven city gates. Thus, Ibn Ṭawq referred to these spatial entities and landmarks without any specifications. He did not need them, nor did any possible contemporary readers of his text. Ibn Ṭawq's perspective was also influenced by the way his line of work was done in Mamluk Damascus. A great lot of legal transactions were not treated in courthouses but in mosques, *madrasa*, private residences or even on the author's own doorstep.¹⁴⁰

The sacred landscape played an important role in Ibn Ṭawq's topography. Mosques, shrines and madrasas featured prominently but under a different, social pretext. Ibn Ṭawq incorporated them into his topography, attached new meanings to them and, at times, gave priority to his social contacts over the sacred landscape of Damascus. By drawing connections between the sacred landscape and his social circles, how elusive they might have been, Ibn Ṭawq appropriated the city. On the other side, by doing so he integrated private houses into the sacred landscape.

It becomes evident in all references to houses as landmarks that Ibn Ṭawq based his topography on connections with people. In his topography, Ibn Ṭawq focused on the elite of the religious establishment, omitting most references to people he knew from other strata of society. But they only gained importance for his outlook on the city, when he knew them personally. He referred to meeting places as the house of such-and-such, which, for him, needed no further explanation. Thus, Ibn Ṭawq localised a mosque with reference to the *ṣayh*'s home. In this small *masjid* which neighboured his house to the west, the *ṣayh* stood down from half a teaching post he held at two madrasas.¹⁴¹ Clearly, the *ṣayh*'s residence had more meaning to Ibn Ṭawq than the nameless mosque.

Ibn Ṭawq's descriptions did not provide a 'map' of Damascus. Rather, he cited certain localities which either result from the paths he took, or authorize them.¹⁴² He omits most of his paths and concentrates on his destinations. According to his description, he perceived the urban space basically as a space of localisation which was comprised of a number of places, which were linked to a number of people he knew.¹⁴³

One promising way of further investigating the social realities of a 15th century Damascene court clerk would be to look at the necrologies included in the journal. Among others, several peasants appear there, a Turkmen horseshoer, and a Jewish ophthalmologist (*kaḥḥāl*).¹⁴⁴ Ibn Ṭawq did not deem them relevant for his topography. They just fit in between the mosques, souks, and great residences. They are granted no impact on the shape of the city.

140. *Ibid.*, I, p. 227.

141. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'liq* I, p. 30.

142. DE CERTEAU 2006, p. 347-349.

143. FOUCAULT 2006, p. 317.

144. IBN ṬAWQ, *Ta'liq*, I, p. 91, 202, 507 (for the peasants), 85; II, p. 1048.

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