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The emergence of Gaza as a provincial intellectual centre during the Mamluk period

Or Amir 

Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Faculty of Humanities, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mount Scopus, Jerusalem, Israel

Email: or.amir1@mail.huji.ac.il

Abstract

During the Mamluk period (1260–1516), Gaza developed from a minor town into an important city in southern Bilād al-Shām, the capital of an administrative province. This prosperity was the product of substantial and continuous Mamluk investment in the town, the security and stability maintained by this regime, and Gaza's strategic location as the bridge connecting Egypt and Bilād al-Shām. This article will trace the concomitant development of Gaza as a provincial intellectual centre within this context. Combining narrative sources with epigraphic and material evidence, it will show how the growth of Gaza as an administrative centre instigated a flourishing—albeit modest—scholarly scene in the town, which, while strongly connected to and integrated with wider social and intellectual networks within the Sultanate, retained its unique character.

Keywords: Gaza; Bilād al-Shām; 'ulamā'; Mamluk Sultanate

During the twelfth and the first half of the thirteenth centuries, Gaza was a relatively minor settlement, which was affected negatively by its location between warring factions. The Mamluk takeover of the region brought a dramatic change of fortune for the coastal town. It was transformed into a provincial administrative centre (*niyāba*; *mamlaka*) and consequently enjoyed substantial investment by the new regime. Sources from the Mamluk period emphasise that, during the first half of the fourteenth century, Gaza's population grew, the necessary civilian infrastructure was founded in it, and it became a full-grown city (*madīna*).

The religious and intellectual history of Mamluk Gaza should be examined in this framework and its place within the wider political and religious circumstances of the Mamluk Sultanate considered. Due to the relative dearth of narrative sources that could shed light on those issues—we have almost no accounts of the religious life of Gazans and no local histories of the town were written during the medieval periods—the main aim of this article will be to construct, in broad lines, an account of the development of Gaza as a provincial intellectual centre within the Mamluk Sultanate.¹ This will be achieved by a thorough analysis of the written sources—biographical dictionaries, chronicles, geographical compendiums, and more—alongside the substantial epigraphic evidence that attests to the massive building activity in the town throughout the

¹ The article will focus on the activities of the 'ulamā', namely experts in *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and hadith. It will not deal with Sufi shaykhs and their presence in Gaza—a topic that will be left for another study.

Mamluk era.² An emphasis will be placed on Gaza's regional networks—that is, within Palestine or south-west Bilād al-Shām; its growing importance during the Mamluk period as a bridgehead between Cairo and Damascus, or Egypt and Bilād al-Shām; as well as on Mamluk investment in it as a provincial capital. The article will focus on Gaza's place within the intellectual networks of the Mamluk Sultanate, the activities of the local 'ulamā', the learning institutions that facilitated their activities, and the direct relationship between the ascendance of the town as a political-administrative centre and the growth of its intellectual scene. While several studies have been conducted on Mamluk Gaza,³ none has dedicated a thorough investigation into the growth of the intellectual scene of the town during this formative period.

Gaza in pre-Mamluk times

Since the Muslim conquests of Palestine in the seventh century and until the Mamluk period, Gaza was a settlement of minor importance. While under Muslim rule Gaza lost its importance as a maritime port, it retained its significance as a crucial link on the road connecting Egypt and Syria, and even gained new importance as one of the Muslim frontier posts (*thughūr, rubuṭ*) on the shore of the Mediterranean. For that reason, it became known, along with Ascalon, as one of 'the two brides [of al-Shām]' (*al-'arūsayn*), so that whoever settled there was promised divine blessing, according to a hadith.⁴ This, along with its identification as the destination of one of the two annual Qurayshī trade expeditions, the burial site of the prophet Muḥammad's great-grandfather Hāshim,⁵ and the birthplace of the king/prophet Solomon and the great jurist Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (150–204/767–820),⁶ gave Gaza a certain amount of Islamic prestige, despite

² Meticulously collected, translated, and analysed in the fourth volume of M. Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae*, seven vols (Leiden, 1997–2021) (henceforth *CIAP*).

³ 'Ārif al-'Ārif, *Ta'riḫ Ghazza* (Jerusalem, 1943); 'Uthmān Muṣṭafā al-Ṭabbā', *Ithāf al-a'izza fi ta'riḫ Ghazza*, (ed.) 'Abd al-Latīf Zakī Abū Hāshim, four vols (Gaza, 1999); Maḥmūd 'Alī 'Aṭā' Allāh, *Niyābat Ghazza fi al-'ahd al-mamlūkī* (Beirut, 1986); Mohamed-Moain Sadek, *Die Mamlukische Architektur der Stadt Gaza* (Berlin, 1991); Khalīl 'Athāmina, *Filasṭīn fi al-'ahdayn al-Ayyūbī wa-l-Mamlūkī (1187–1516)* (Beirut, 2006), pp. 315–323; H. Mahamid, 'The construction of Islamic-educational institutions in Mamluk Gaza', *Nebula* IV.1 (2007), pp. 36–40; R. Amitai, 'The development of a Muslim city in Palestine: Gaza under the Mamluks', *ASK Working Paper XXVIII* (Bonn, 2017); R. Amitai, 'Islamisation in the Southern Levant after the end of Frankish rule: some general considerations and a short case study', in *Islamisation: Comparative Perspectives from History*, (ed.) A. C. S. Peacock (Edinburgh, 2017), pp. 156–186.

⁴ Yāqūt b. 'Abdallāh al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, five vols (Beirut, 1955–1957), iii, p. 674.

⁵ Though the identification of Hāshim's burial place with Gaza was consensual in Islamic tradition from early on, there are no attestations to it becoming a pilgrimage site, or even a physical identification of it, prior to the Ottoman period. Al-Harawī, who passed through Gaza during the twelfth century, acknowledges Hāshim's burial there but does not mention his tomb as a pilgrimage site. According to Ibn Khallikān, writing in the second half of the seventh/thirteenth century, Hāshim's tomb was not visible, and its location was unknown to the locals: he claims to have asked some of them when he passed through Gaza, but they did not know anything about it. Meanwhile, travellers during the Ottoman period did visit the site and, in the thirteenth/nineteenth century, a mosque was erected, supposedly over Hāshim's tomb, by order of the Ottoman sultan Abdülmeccid: J. W. Meri (trans.), *A Lonely Wayfarer's Guide to Pilgrimage: 'Alī ibn Abī Bakr al-Harawī's Kitāb al-Ishārāt ilā Ma'rīfat al-Ziyārāt* (Princeton, 2004), p. 82; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-inbā' abnā' al-zamān*, (ed.) Iḥsān 'Abbās, eight vols (Beirut, 1968–72), i, p. 61; al-Ṭabbā', *Ithāf*, ii, pp. 160–163.

⁶ This site is also not mentioned in the sources of the Mamluk period, except for Mujīr al-Dīn, who wrote in the late ninth/fifteenth century that 'his birthplace is known and is an object for pious visitation (*ziyāra*)'. It seems that al-Shāfi'ī's birthplace was known and perhaps even venerated by the locals but, at least until the late Mamluk period, it did not become a very popular shrine—such is not mentioned by any of the geographical compendiums or travellers who mention Gaza, even though al-Ṭabbā' mentions an inscription at the site dating to 771/1369–1370 that commemorates a certain building project connected to it. During the Ottoman period, the site was already better known and visitors to Gaza, such as al-Nābulusī, even mention next to it the burial sites of

its political marginality.⁷ Yet, very little information exists in the sources regarding the Muslim community of Gaza during the early Islamic period, and rarely do we read of any scholars who hailed from it, with the exception of the aforementioned al-Shāfi'ī—who migrated at an early age to the Hijaz—and the celebrated poet, Ibrāhīm al-Ashhabī al-Kalbī al-Ghazzī (d. 524/1129), who flourished mainly in Iran.⁸

During the long period during which Egypt and Syria were mostly under the rule of competing political entities, Gaza and its vicinities became a battleground on multiple occasions—detrimental conditions for sustaining a lively intellectual community.⁹ Nonetheless, epigraphic evidence shows a fair amount of Ayyubid investment in Gaza, including the foundation of a mosque and, perhaps, a madrasa.¹⁰ Moreover, we have information on at least one qāḍī of Gaza during the Ayyubid period¹¹ and it seems plausible to assume continuity in this position into the Mamluk period.¹² At least a certain amount of intellectual activity was going on in Gaza during the Ayyubid period, as we have some information, rare as it is, on hadith transmission in the town. As will be discussed below, evidence for this is usually related to Gaza's geographical position as a bridge between Egypt and Syria, which turned it into a mandatory stopping point for scholars who were moving between the two regions. While in Gaza, some would engage in hadith study with local scholars.¹³

Gaza under the Mamluks

Whatever scholarly activity, and even rulers' patronage thereof, was going on in Gaza during the Ayyubid era, there can be little doubt that Mamluk rule opened a new chapter in the history of the town. The epigraphic evidence, backed by descriptions in narrative sources, clearly shows that the Mamluks offered Gaza the two things needed for the

al-Shāfi'ī's mother and sister: Mujīr al-Dīn al-'Ulaymī, *al-Uns al-jalīl fī ta'rikh al-Quds wa-l-Khalīl*, (ed.) 'Adnān Yūnus 'Abd al-Majīd Abū Tabāna, two vols (Hebron, 1999), ii, p. 136; al-Ṭabbā', *Ithāf*, ii, pp. 50, 54, 206; 'Abd al-Ghanī b. Ismā'īl al-Nābulusī, *al-Ḥaqīqa wa'l-majāz fī riḥlat Bilād al-Shām wa-Miṣr wa'l-Hijāz*, (ed.) Riyād 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Murād (Damascus, 1989), pp. 462–463; Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, p. 90. Al-Sakhāwī mentions a parallel tradition according to which al-Shāfi'ī was born in Ascalon: Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Buldāniyyat*, (ed.) Ḥusām b. Muḥammad al-Qaṭṭān (Riyadh, 2001), pp. 231–232.

⁷ Al-Ṭabbā', *Ithāf*, ii, pp. 31–34; D. Sourdel, 'Ghazza', *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition* (Leiden, 1950–2004), ii, p. 1056; Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns*, ii, p. 136; Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, pp. 23–24.

⁸ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, i, pp. 57–60. Yāqūt also mentions one hadith transmitter from Gaza, Muḥammad b. 'Amrū b. al-Jarrāḥ al-Ghazzī: al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, iii, p. 800.

⁹ R. Amitai, 'Gaza in the Frankish and Ayyubid periods: the run-up to 1260 CE', in *Syria in Crusader Times: Conflict and Co-Existence*, (ed.) C. Hillenbrand (Edinburgh, 2019), pp. 225–244.

¹⁰ Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, pp. 52–57. Al-Ṭabbā' (*Ithāf*, ii, p. 224) claims that al-Malik al-Kāmil erected a Friday Mosque and a madrasa in Gaza. The early Ottoman *waqf* registry contains information on substantial lands endowed for the Kamāliyya Friday Mosque (*jāmi'*), but no mention is made of a related madrasa: Muḥammad 'Īsā Ṣāliḥiyya, *Sijill arāḍi alwiya (Ṣafad, Nāblus, Ghazza, wa-qaḍā' al-Ramla) ḥasba al-daftar raqm 316 ta'rikh-hu 964h/1556m* (Amman, 1999), pp. 263–264.

¹¹ This is Bārastughān b. Abī al-Futūḥ (d. 616/1219): Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa'l-a'lām*, (ed.) 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmuri, 61 vols (Beirut, 1997), lii, p. 284.

¹² As we may infer from the biography of the Shāfi'ī qāḍī, 'Umar b. Mūsā (d. 679/1281), who seems to have held the position already during the Ayyubid period: he is mentioned as a respectable scholar during the 1250s and was close to notable emirs of the Ṣāliḥiyya regiment—a fact that probably facilitated his retaining of the office of qāḍī into the Mamluk period: Mūsā b. Aḥmad al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl mir'āt al-zamān*, four vols (Hyderabad, 1954–1961), iv, pp. 57–59; al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad al-Birzālī, *al-Muqtafi 'alā kitāb al-rawḍatayn*, (ed.) 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmuri, four vols (Beirut, 2006), i, pp. 498–499.

¹³ See, for example, al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām*, lv, p. 98; S. Aljoumani and K. Hirschler, Audition Certificates Platform (version 1), audition certificate BNF Paris, Suppl Turc 984, 134r, N. 2, ed. S. Aljoumani, <https://www.audition-certificates-platform.org/ac/447> (accessed 11 December 2023).

growth of a sustainable and lively (if not thriving) scholarly scene: long-term security and institutional patronage. This was coupled with—and in many ways was the product of—Gaza’s rise as an administrative centre and provincial capital, its relative economic prosperity, and its location on the main route connecting Egypt and Syria, or Cairo and Damascus, the two main political centres of the Sultanate.¹⁴ Indeed, in clear contradiction to the scant information on Gazan scholars during the preceding periods, during the Mamluk period, we can gather dozens of biographies of scholars who originated, grew up, learned, and flourished in Gaza.¹⁵

Mamluk patronage of religious and learning institutions in Gaza started early and reached its zenith during the prosperous third Sultanate of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (709–741/1310–1341). It seems that Sultan Baybars (r. 658–676/1260–1277), even though he frequently passed through Gaza and camped there during his reign—part of his constant campaigning against the Franks—did not establish any significant religious institutions in the town¹⁶ and the assertion that he founded in Gaza a madrasa that contained an enormous library should be dismissed.¹⁷ Nor did Baybars’s famous reform in the judiciary—the appointment of four chief qāḍīs—reach Gaza and, other than a Shāfi‘ī qāḍī, representatives of the other three *madhāhib* appear for the first time only during Barqūq’s reign, in the 780s/1380s, or even later (more on this below).¹⁸ Similarly, during the period of Sultan Qalāwūn (678–689/1279–1290) and the so-called ‘Manṣūriyya period’ (circa 1290–1310), we have no concrete evidence for the foundation of any madrasa in Gaza, although the epigraphy shows constant investment in the town, with several mosques being founded or repaired during the first five decades of Mamluk rule, through the patronage of either the Mamluk elite or local notables.¹⁹

¹⁴ Amitai, ‘Development of a Muslim city’; R. Amitai and K. Raphael, ‘Bridges and roads to Mamluk Gaza and beyond’, forthcoming in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 54 (2023), pp. 159–212.

¹⁵ One caveat to consider is that the Mamluk period in general, and particularly the ninth/fifteenth century, produced a remarkable—indeed unprecedented—amount of historical, and specifically biographical, writings, the sheer magnitude of which might be somewhat misleading when trying to compare the number of scholars active during the Mamluk period and prior to it. This chronological prejudice is somewhat mitigated by the fact that many of the biographical dictionaries produced during the Mamluk period contained biographies of prominent Muslims from earlier generations. Still, the place afforded to contemporary scholars was greater in proportions. Furthermore, even within the Mamluk period, there are disparities in the coverage afforded to different periods and regions, which is a consequence of the available sources. For example, the ninth/fifteenth century seems to be much better covered, in many ways thanks to the invaluable biographical dictionary of al-Sakhāwī devoted to notables of this century alone. On the surge in historiographical writing during the Mamluk period, see K. Hirschler, ‘Studying Mamluk historiography: from source-criticism to the cultural turn’, in *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus? Mamluk Studies—State of the Art*, (ed.) S. Conermann (Gottingen, 2013), pp. 161–163.

¹⁶ ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, *Niyābat Ghazza*, pp. 188–190. Baybars did invest in roads around Gaza, including building several bridges, and the shrine dedicated to Salmān al-Fārsī in Ashdod—not far north from Gaza—was built during his reign (and by one of his mamlūks): ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, *Niyābat Ghazza*, pp. 223–224; Sharon, *CIAP*, i, pp. 126–128; Amitai and Raphael, ‘Bridges and roads’.

¹⁷ It seems that this is first claimed, without any references, by al-‘Arif, *Ta’rikh Ghazza*, p. 144. It is then repeated by al-Ṭabbā’ (*Itihāf*, ii, pp. 117–118, 184); Sadek, *Die Mamlukische Architektur*, pp. 323–324 (referring to al-Ṭabbā’); and Mahamid, ‘Construction of Islamic-educational institutions’, p. 38 (where he refers to Sadek). This claim might have originated in some local traditions, but I could not find any support for it in the sources. Ibn Shaddād, in the chapter in his biography of Baybars dedicated to the sultan’s building activities, which enumerates dozens of such structures from all over Baybars’s realm, does not mention this. He most certainly would have mentioned such an important project, which would have probably provided significant religious capital for his protagonist. The only building activity he mentions in Gaza is a Sufi convent (*zāwiya*) dedicated to the shaykh Khidr, Baybars’s *Hausprophet*, to whom Baybars dedicated *zāwiyas* in locations scattered throughout the Sultanate: Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Ibn Shaddād, *Ta’rikh al-malik al-Ẓāhir*, (ed.) Aḥmad Ḥuṭayṭ (Wiesbaden, 1983), p. 352.

¹⁸ ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, *Niyābat Ghazza*, pp. 152–157.

¹⁹ Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, pp. 59–83. Again, there is a similar assertion that Qalāwūn also erected a madrasa in Gaza, after eradicating the traces of Baybars’s establishment and transporting his predecessor’s library to his new

While these establishments provided a certain number of paid positions for local *‘ulamā’* (such as *khaṭīb*, *imām*, etc.) and certainly would have served also as locations for scholarly gatherings, it was during the illustrious third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, and specifically under the energetic governor of Bilād al-Shām, Tankiz, and the capable governor of Gaza, Sanjar al-Jāwli, that Gaza, through significant Mamluk building activity, made the leap from a small to medium-sized town to a real city (*madīna*) and provincial centre.²⁰ Among al-Jāwli’s foundations, we should especially mention his grand Friday Mosque—favourably mentioned by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa²¹—and the Shāfi’ī madrasa he established. Al-Jāwli was himself an acknowledged Shāfi’ī scholar²² and so the madrasa he founded was surely a significant encouragement for Shāfi’ī scholarship in Gaza, providing both paid positions and a physical setting for learning.²³

madrasa. However, this is claimed by the same scholars who circulated the story about Baybars’s library and, in a way, the story of Qalāwūn’s madrasa seems to be a complementary addendum to the former: Baybars built in Gaza—‘due to his love for Gaza and compassion for its inhabitants’ (apparently since he met his wife there)—a madrasa with a library; Qalāwūn relocated it and changed its name; and then, almost two centuries later (for some unclear reason), the sultan Qā’itbāy ‘took vengeance on Qalāwūn in Baybars’ name’, returned the library to its former location, and renamed it after its original founder. It might be significant that the scholar who seems responsible for circulating this tradition is al-Ṭabbā’, who took upon himself the mission of reviving the library of the Great Mosque of Gaza in the twentieth century and seems eager to establish ancient roots for this institution. Apparently, Baybars’s library-madrasa was later identified with al-Ghusayn madrasa: al-Ṭabbā’, *Ithāf*, ii, pp. 116–118, 184.

²⁰ As al-Ṣafadī writes regarding al-Jāwli: ‘He is the one who turned Gaza into a city and urbanized it’ (*wa-huwa allādhī maddana Ghazza wa-maṣṣarahā*): Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *A’yān al-‘aṣr wa-a’wān al-naṣr*, (ed.) ‘Alī Abū Zayd et al., six vols (Damascus, 1998), ii, p. 467 (quoted and translated in Amitai, ‘Development of a Muslim city’, p. 9) and compare with al-Maqrīzī’s comment, analysed by ‘Athāmina (*Filasṭīn fī al-ahdayn al-Ayyūbi wa-l-Mamlūki*, pp. 318–319), who claims that al-Jāwli’s initiatives were solely related to found in Gaza the necessary institutions for a provincial capital (*niyāba*). In any case, this intensive building activity in Gaza should be seen as part of the wider picture, as such a building frenzy was going on throughout the Sultanate, inspired by the sultan’s policy: Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk li-ma’rifat duwal al-mulūk*, (ed.) Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyāda, four vols (Cairo, 1936–1973), ii, pp. 537–549; D. Ayalon, ‘The expansion and decline of Cairo under the Mamlūks and its background’, in *Itinéraires d’orient: Hommages à Claude Cahen*, (eds.) R. Curiel and R. Gyselen (Bures-sur-Yvette, 1994), pp. 14–15. While this was certainly most conspicuous in Cairo, it was strongly felt in Bilād al-Shām as well, especially under the governorship of Tankiz and with the patronage of several local governors who spent untypically long periods in their posts, such as al-Jāwli at Gaza, Ariqṭāy at Safed, and others about whom we know very little, such as Baktamur al-Ashrafī, governor of Ḥiṣn al-Akrād. On the latter’s impressive building projects there, completely unnoticed in the narrative sources, see M. van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum arabicarum*, four vols (Paris-Cairo, 1903–1985), ii, pp. 27–30, 33–34. On Ariqṭāy, see Abū Bakr b. Aḥmad Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ta’rīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba*, (ed.) ‘Adnān Darwīsh, three vols (Damascus, 1977–1994), i, p. 682.

²¹ Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *The Travels of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa A.D. 1325–1354*, (trans.) H. A. R. Gibb and C. Buckingham, five vols (Cambridge, 1971), i, p. 73. On the mosque, see Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, pp. 84–90.

²² We even have evidence of his involvement in the Gaza scholarly scene: the qāḍī of Gaza, ‘Imād al-Dīn Ismā’īl al-Kurdī (d. 755/1354), heard from him, the *musnad* of al-Shāfi’ī: Aḥmad b. ‘Alī ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina fī a’yān al-mi’a al-thāmina*, (ed.) Muḥammad Sayyid Jād al-Ḥaqq, five vols (Cairo, 1966), i, p. 388. On al-Jāwli’s learning, see al-Ṣafadī, *A’yān*, ii, p. 470; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, ii, p. 267. On the wider phenomenon of learned mamlūks, see U. Haarmann, ‘Arabic in speech, Turkish in lineage: Mamluks and their sons in the intellectual life of fourteenth-century Egypt and Syria’, *Journal of Semitic Studies* XXXIII (1988), pp. 81–114; J. Berkey, ‘“Silver threads among the coal”: a well-educated Mamluk of the ninth/fifteenth century’, *Studia Islamica* LXXIII (1991), pp. 109–125.

²³ For example, Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Zaynī (d. 762/1361), who was a lecturer in the madrasa: Muḥammad b. Ibn Rāfi’ al-Sallāmi, *al-Wafayāt*, (eds.) Ṣāliḥ Mahdī ‘Abbās and Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma’rūf, two vols (Beirut, 1982), ii, p. 238. Early Ottoman *waqf* records attest that al-Jāwli’s mosque provided over 30 paid positions (not all for scholars, but also for other personnel), as well as stipends for 20 orphans. See Ṣāliḥiyya, *Sijill arāḍī alwiya*, pp. 296–298. One might also mention al-Jāwli’s *bimāristān* (alternatively named *Dār al-shifā’*), which,

Mamluk investment in Gaza continued uninterrupted until the very last years of their rule. Throughout this long period, several other madrasas were founded in town.²⁴ Mahamid lists nine madrasas that were founded during the Mamluk period, mostly through the patronage of the ruling elite.²⁵ This culminated with the foundation of Sultan Qā'itbāy's madrasa—an impressive establishment supported by numerous *awqāf* (endowments).²⁶ Inspection of its building was entrusted to a local scholar, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Luddī, and his family—a notable Gazan family who originated from nearby Ludd and also held several key bureaucratic positions in town, such as *nāzir al-jaysh* (overseer of army finance) and *kātib al-sirr* (confidential secretary).²⁷

Mamluk governors and local scholars

While some Mamluk patronage was carried out by the sultans,²⁸ or the 'central government' in Cairo, most was the product of initiatives carried out by emirs who were posted to Gaza, either as governors or in other positions.²⁹ This was motivated by personal reasons—aspirations to improve their image as pious Muslim rulers or to obtain blessing (*baraka*) in the hereafter;³⁰ and conforming to the sultan's policy or a sort of *esprit de corps* inspired by him.³¹ As Lapidus stated:

In either supporting or abusing communal institutions, the behavior of the Mamluks reflected their personal concerns and interests and not the policies of the Sultan. The

though not dedicated to religious scholars per se, also provided income for some 30 personnel (at least in the tenth/sixteenth century). See *ibid.*, pp. 320–324.

²⁴ Sharon, *CIAP*, vol. iv; al-Ṭabbā', *Ithāf*; 'Aṭā' Allāh, *Niyābat Ghazza*, pp. 245–247.

²⁵ Mahamid, 'Construction of Islamic-educational institutions', pp. 37–38.

²⁶ Al-Ṭabbā', *Ithāf*, ii, pp. 239–247; Šālihiyya, *Sijill arāḍi alwiya*, pp. 268–275.

²⁷ Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, pp. 167ff.; Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi' li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi'*, 12 vols (Cairo, 1934), i, pp. 59, 74, iv, p. 91, vi, pp. 257–258. For two scholars who were brothers with paid positions in this madrasa (one a hadith teacher, the other a Quran reader), see al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, i, p. 312, iv, pp. 267–268. Evidence for the Luddī family's continuing prominence in Gaza comes from a *waqf* endowed by 'Abd al-Raḥmān's two sons, Mūsā and 'Uthmān, in 916/1510–1511 (Šālihiyya, *Sijill arāḍi alwiya*, p. 280) and another *waqf* evidently endowed by 'Abd al-Raḥmān's brother, Zayn al-Dīn Yūsuf, in 887/1482–3 (*ibid.*, p. 276).

²⁸ See also the construction in the Great Mosque of Gaza initiated by the sultan Lājīn in 697/1298 (Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, pp. 75–78) or the enlargement of that same mosque undertaken in 730/1329 by Tankiz, governor of Bilād al-Shām (*ibid.*, iv, pp. 95–99).

²⁹ For example, the emir Balabān al-Musta'ribī who was assigned with an *iqṭā'* in the coastal plains around Gaza and founded a mosque in town (Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, pp. 67–69); or the restoration of the Great Mosque undertaken by the governor of Gaza, Ṭurunṭāy al-Jūkandār around 731/1331 (*ibid.*, iv, pp. 100–101). The same Ṭurunṭāy also patronised the foundation of a certain 'blessed place', which, probably later, came to be known as the *zāwiya* of Aḥmad al-Badawī (*ibid.*, iv, pp. 105–106). Ṭurunṭāy was appointed as governor of Gaza shortly after the dismissal of Sanjar al-Jāwli, still during the reign of al-Nāšir Muḥammad. The fact that we have concrete evidence that building initiatives continued during his short tenure at Gaza is another indication that al-Jāwli's massive construction was part of a larger policy of the sultan. See also the madrasa founded by Shāhīn al-Kujukī in 786/1384 (*ibid.*, iv, pp. 124–130, 157–158); the mosque founded by the governor Āqbughā al-Ṭūlūtāmuri in 802/1400 (*ibid.*, iv, pp. 142–143); a mosque and a *ḥammām* constructed by two Chief Chamberlains of Gaza during the reign of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh, in 816/1413 and 821/1418 (*ibid.*, iv, pp. 150–156); the minaret erected by the governor Īnāl (later to be sultan) in 835/1432 (*ibid.*, iv, p. 162), and more.

³⁰ Homerin claimed that the main purpose behind the Mamluks' patronage of Sufi institutions (*khānqāhs*) was attaining their own salvation—surely an important motivation that might also be applied to patronage of other religious institutions: Th. E. Homerin, 'Saving Muslim souls: the *Khānqāh* and the Sufi duty in Mamluk lands', *Mamlūk Studies Review* III (1999), pp. 59–83.

³¹ This is implied in al-Maqrīzī's obituary of al-Nāšir Muḥammad (*al-Sulūk*, ii, p. 543). After describing the sultan's enthusiasm for building, the historian writes that '[t]he emirs followed his example in [patronising] building projects'.

governors' own funds, their willingness to help finance adjustments, and the intimacy of their relations with the *'ulamā'* were crucial individual factors in the management of public affairs In a situation where responsibility for communal needs was not entrusted to regular governmental or communal agencies, public needs were left to the self-interest of the Mamluks, their sense of duty, and their desire for legitimization in the eyes of the *'ulamā'* and the populace.³²

Later scholars, such as Kenney and Luz, saw the massive building surge during the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad as a reflection of the sultan's policy.³³ Arjomand, similarly, regarded the use of *awqāf* for philanthropic purposes by the local governors and high-ranking officials as representative of a state policy.³⁴ I would suggest that this also was to do with how those officers perceived their duties as rulers, governors, or senior officials and their sense of attachment to the localities to which they were posted, at times for substantial periods of time during which they developed intense and intimate connections with the locals, and especially the learned and administrative elites they worked with.

Naturally, it is impossible to ascertain what motivations drove individual Mamluk officers to invest in Gaza, or elsewhere, nor how strong their attachments to the towns and communities over which they governed were. This is especially problematic regarding Gaza, as we do not possess any descriptions of the relations between its governors and the local population. However, we can infer from the information that we have regarding other localities in the Sultanate. The best parallel is Safed, which experienced a very similar fortune to that of Gaza during the early Mamluk period. Like Gaza, it was a rather insignificant town prior to its seizure by the Mamluks—though a strategic military stronghold—but was turned into a provincial capital by Baybars and then, under Mamluk patronage, grew substantially until reaching a peak during the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. In fact, if the long-time governor at that time, Sanjar al-Jāwli, was responsible for 'turning Gaza into a city', then the contemporaneous governor of Safed, Ariqṭāy al-Manṣūrī (718–736/1318–1336), played a parallel role.³⁵

Luckily, we possess a local history of Safed—the *Ta'riḫ Ṣafad*, written by its qāḍī, Muḥammad al-'Uthmānī, during the second half of the eighth/fourteenth century. This text, written from the point of view of a local notable, contains some revealing information about the relations between the Mamluk governors of Safed and its population. *Mutatis mutandis*, it could teach us something about the dynamics at Gaza: after all, the same Mamluk emirs moved from one position to the other in different localities. It is notable that the locals praised and cherished governors who invested in the infrastructure of their town, founded new religious establishments, and manifested a compassionate attitude to their subjects, and some of the Mamluk governors came to be considered part

³² I. M. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 77–78.

³³ E. Kenney, *Power and Patronage in Medieval Syria: The Architecture and Urban Works of Tankiz al-Nāṣirī* (Chicago, 2009), pp. 12–13; N. Luz, *The Mamluk City in the Middle East: History, Culture, and the Urban Landscape* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 139–141.

³⁴ S. A. Arjomand, 'Philanthropy, the law, and public policy in the Islamic world before the modern era', in *Philanthropy in the World's Traditions*, (eds.) W. F. Ichman, S. N. Katz, and E. L. Queen II (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1998), pp. 116–117.

³⁵ The memory of Ariqṭāy's governorship in Safed was such that, in his history of the town, when listing its governors throughout the first 100 years of Mamluk rule, al-'Uthmānī divides them into those who held office before and after Ariqṭāy: Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Uthmānī, *Ta'riḫ Ṣafad*, (ed.) Suhayl Zakkār (Damascus, 2009), p. 148.

of the community.³⁶ Methodologically, when trying to piece together a more comprehensive history of Bilād al-Shām under Mamluk rule, and especially of southern Bilād al-Shām and its more provincial towns, the lacunae in primary sources can be somewhat compensated for by combining the evidence regarding Safed and Gaza, which is of varying natures: Safed provides us with a unique local history, representing the perspective of its local elite, while Gaza offers us an especially wide range of epigraphic evidence, incomparable to that of Safed. Indeed, the inscriptions preserved in Gaza show the scope of Mamluk investment in the town, and especially that of the local governors and other office holders.³⁷

Thus, intricate relations formed between the Mamluk governors and functionaries posted at Gaza and members of the religious and scholarly elite in the town. This reflects the conclusions of recent scholarship, which has moved away from the image of the Mamluks as a segregated caste of warlords who ruled from the citadel while keeping distance from their subjects to a more nuanced view that emphasises the intense personal relations between the Mamluks and the local elites.³⁸ For the *'ulamā'*, and especially in a rather provincial town like Gaza, forming close ties with Mamluk emirs was one of the best ways to attain paid positions, since the Mamluks were the patrons and endowers of a significantly large portion of religious and learning institutions. In this sense, the Mamluk emirs played a key role in the constant competition within the *'ulamā'* over jobs (*manṣabs*)—a dynamic explored by Michael Chamberlain regarding Damascus, though surely also in play elsewhere in the Sultanate.³⁹ Furthermore, weaving close connections with local Mamluk representatives could serve as an exit card for a scholar with higher aspirations, assuming that his patron would climb up the Mamluk hierarchy, with an eye on the centres of Damascus and, especially, Cairo.⁴⁰

An illustrative example is that of the Ḥanafī *faqīh*, 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Baghdādī al-Ghazzī (d. 867/1463)—a native of Gaza who was educated by some of the notable scholars in town. During the emir Īnāl al-'Alā'ī's tenure as governor of Gaza (831–836/1428–1433), 'Alī entered his retinue and educated his children.⁴¹ In time, 'Alī earned Īnāl's trust and the two became close associates. When Īnāl became sultan, 'Alī was brought to Cairo, appointed as one of the sultan's *imāms*, and then given the lucrative position of

³⁶ As al-'Uthmānī writes regarding one beloved governor, Uzdamur al-Khizandār (who ruled briefly in 762–763/1362–1363): 'He became one of the people of the town, even more so than the emir Sayf al-Dīn Ariqṭāy [the legendary governor of Safed], despite his short tenure in office.' When Uzdamur returned for a second term in Safed, he was joyfully received: al-'Uthmānī, *Ta'rikh Ṣafad*, p. 148. For more similar examples, see *ibid.*, pp. 138–146. Naturally, the flip side to this sympathy of the community towards good governors was their hostility to corrupt, abusive, or simply incompetent ones, as in the case of the emir Bilik al-Jamdār (r. 743–746/1344–1345): *ibid.*, pp. 136–137.

³⁷ The case of the emir Birdibak al-Ashrafi (d. 868/1464) illustrates the importance of such local attachments, or sentiments. He was purchased as a mamlūk by Īnāl (the future sultan) in 829/1426, and we may assume that he was with his master when the latter served as governor of Gaza (831–836/1428–1433). After Īnāl became sultan in Cairo, Birdibak succeeded to the highest ranks in court. While there is no mention of him ever returning to Gaza on an official appointment, he did establish a madrasa there in 859/1455 (Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, pp. 166–167) and perhaps also a mosque (al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, iii, p. 5; it might very well be that al-Sakhāwī, although he writes that Birdibak founded a Friday Mosque in Gaza, actually refers to the same building). The fact that Birdibak chose Gaza of all places for this might be related to his attachment to this locality, in which he spent several years during his formative experience as a mamlūk.

³⁸ M. Eychenne, *Liens personnels, clientélisme et réseaux de pouvoir dans le sultanat mamelouk (milieu XIIIe-fin XIVe siècle)* (Damascus, 2013), pp. 19–27.

³⁹ M. Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, 1994).

⁴⁰ Eychenne, *Liens personnels*, p. 120.

⁴¹ Specifically, he is mentioned as the teacher of Īnāl's son, and later heir to the Sultanate, Aḥmad, who was born during his father's term as governor of Gaza in 835/1431–1432: al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, i, p. 246.

Inspector of Endowments (*nāzir al-awqāf*). During Īnāl's reign, 'Alī's reputation grew, and he achieved significant influence and property.⁴² A more modest example is that of the qāḍī Muḥammad Ibn Maṣṣūr, who served in Gaza for a long period as a scribe (*muwaqqi'*) and administrator (*kātib al-jaysh*). He was later assigned to a position in Safed in 726/1326 but was unhappy there and asked to be reassigned to Gaza.⁴³ Later on, he was dismissed by the governor of Bilād al-Shām, Tankiz, and remained unemployed. At this unfortunate stage of his career, a former acquaintance from Gaza came to his rescue: the emir Sayf al-Dīn Ṭaynāl al-Ashrafī (d. 743/1342), who was the governor of Gaza for a short period in 733/1332–1333, before happily accepting a relocation to Tripoli for a second term as governor there.⁴⁴ It was during Ṭaynāl's short rule in Gaza that he worked with Ibn Maṣṣūr, who was his scribe. When Ibn Maṣṣūr found himself unemployed, Ṭaynāl appointed him as junior secretary (*kātib al-darj*) in Tripoli.⁴⁵ Thus, through the relations he formed with the governor of Gaza, Ibn Maṣṣūr was able to attain a new job when needed.⁴⁶

This story is characteristic of the social dynamics of the Mamluk Sultanate and reveals something about the day-to-day human interactions between rulers and the learned elites they employed and associated with.⁴⁷ It is also indicative of Gaza's place within the political, social, and intellectual networks of the Sultanate, being more closely entwined with the networks of Bilād al-Shām than those of Egypt. Indeed, both Ṭaynāl and Ibn Maṣṣūr moved between appointments within Bilād al-Shām—namely, Gaza, Safed, Jerusalem,⁴⁸ Tripoli, Baalbek, and Damascus.⁴⁹ This is not a coincidence, but characteristic of the careers of dozens of other emirs, and especially bureaucrats and scholars.⁵⁰

⁴² *Ibid.*, v, pp. 188–189. Two generations later, we also find the grandson of 'Alī's brother as a merchant and scholar who made several business trips to Cairo, during which he too learned hadith: *ibid.*, vii, p. 184.

⁴³ Al-Ṣafadi, *A'yān*, v, pp. 282–283. It seems that he was interested in returning to Gaza since he had a profitable business there, trading in cotton, soap, and more.

⁴⁴ On Ṭaynāl's career, see *ibid.*, ii, pp. 630–631.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, v, p. 283.

⁴⁶ Another similar example is found in the biography of Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Malaṭī (d. 888/1483): he was born in Gaza to a successful and rich father who owned many properties in town but, after inheriting his father's fortune, he lost it all and eventually found himself in Cairo, impoverished. It was then that a Mamluk emir, Tanibek Qarā, who knew him from his period of exile in Gaza, issued him an allowance. See 'Abd al-Bāsiṭ b. Khalīl al-Malaṭī, *al-Majma' al-mufannan bi'l-mu'jam al-mu'anwan*, (ed.) 'Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Kundurī (Beirut, 2011), pp. 280–281.

⁴⁷ Eychenne, *Liens personnel*.

⁴⁸ Jerusalem was not part of either Ṭaynāl or Ibn Maṣṣūr's biographies, but it was closely related to Gaza, as will be discussed below.

⁴⁹ Ṭaynāl, for example, served three times as governor of Tripoli, and also served as governor of Safed and Gaza, spending a period 'in between jobs' in Damascus. He did begin his career in Cairo, as one of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's mamlūks, served in several key posts at his master's court, and even built a mansion and a market (*qaysariyya*) in Cairo but, after being relocated to Tripoli, he never returned to Egypt: Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa'l-i'tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa'l-āthār*, (ed.) Amīn Fu'ād Sayyid, five vols (London, 2003), iii, p. 252. In fact, Ṭaynāl represents well what was written above regarding the attachment of an emir to a certain locale: al-Ṣafadi writes that 'in every town he stayed he was loved by its inhabitants' and that, when he was reinstated for a second term as governor of Tripoli, he was grateful. His attachment to Tripoli—where he governed for three terms—is also represented by the splendid mosque he founded there, furnished by a lavish endowment. It is also telling that he erected a mausoleum for himself in Tripoli (although he ended up being buried in Safed): al-Ṣafadi, *A'yān*, ii, p. 632. We may also include Ṭaynāl's activities in Tripoli as part of the overall building policy of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's third reign, mentioned above.

⁵⁰ To name just two examples: Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Dimashqī al-Sallāwī (d. 813/1410) was qāḍī in Baalbek, Gaza, Safed, and Jerusalem, with a short stint in Medina, before he died in Damascus (al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, ii, p. 81); Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Biqā'ī (d. 878/1473) served as qāḍī in Safed, Ramla, Hamat, Tripoli, Gaza, and Aleppo (*ibid.*, i, p. 192).

Gaza within the intellectual hierarchies of the Sultanate

Gaza's learned elite, be it members of the *'ulamā'* or bureaucrats, was thus well integrated into the hierarchical scholarly and administrative networks of the Mamluk Sultanate. While it might be obvious for a Mamluk emir to move only between positions within the Sultanate, this is far from taken for granted when dealing with the *'ulamā'*, who, for centuries, moved throughout the Muslim world irrespective of political boundaries —part of their personal quest in the search for knowledge and patronage. During the Mamluk period, the mobility of scholars never ceased, even in times of continuous hostilities on the north-eastern borders of the Sultanate. However, local scholars generally moved within the networks of scholarly relations and patronage that stretched from Cairo to the Euphrates. While the career of a typical Gazan *'ālim* usually took him on the mandatory journey 'in search of knowledge', this rarely went beyond Bilād al-Shām, and only on extremely rare occasions beyond the borders of the Sultanate.⁵¹ Cairo had the strongest appeal, with Damascus coming second, though the latter was apparently more accessible and much more frequented by scholars from Gaza. Perhaps the most illustrious example of a Gazan scholar who 'made it' in Damascus is that of Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abdallāh al-Āmirī al-Ghazzī (d. 822/1419). Born and raised in Gaza, he attained his primary education there before moving to Damascus, where he not only became a renowned scholar, but also established a scholarly dynasty that flourished for generations and from which hailed such illustrious scholars as his son Raḍī al-Dīn (d. 864/1460), his great-grandson Badr al-Dīn (d. 984/1576), and the latter's son Najm al-Dīn (d. 1061/1651).⁵²

The Gaza scholarly scene generally seems to have been on a par with such provincial towns in Bilād al-Shām as Safed, Tripoli, and Hebron, and somewhat below that of Jerusalem. Thus, the Holy City was usually the first stop for a Gazan scholar who was looking to further his education, which is very reasonable considering that Jerusalem was the closest intellectual centre to Gaza, as well as its long appeal for Muslim scholars through the ages (due to its sanctity) and the close economic ties between the two towns.⁵³ There are a number of cases of individuals who moved frequently between Gaza and Jerusalem. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Māzin/Mārib (d. 900/1495), an inhabitant of Gaza, first served as the Shāfi'i qāḍī there and then as the Mālikī qāḍī, after shifting to the Mālikī school. After losing his position in Gaza, he was appointed as Mālikī qāḍī of Jerusalem —a position he held for three years throughout which he continued living in Gaza while making frequent visits to Jerusalem.⁵⁴ Conversely, we hear of a low-ranking Mamluk emir, Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Jīlī, who held an emirate of 10 in Gaza but lived in Jerusalem, where he invested his capital and ended up being buried.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Cf. C. F. Petry, 'Travel patterns of medieval notables in the Near East', *Studia Islamica* LXII (1985), pp. 53–87.

⁵² On Shihāb al-Dīn, see al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, i, p. 356; and especially the detailed biography that his son, Raḍī al-Dīn al-Ghazzī, dedicated to him in his *Buḥjat al-nāzīrīn ilā tarājim al-muta'akhhirīn min al-shāfi'iyya al-bārīn*, (ed.) Abū Yaḥyā 'Abdallāh al-Kundurī (Beirut, 2000), pp. 120–131.

⁵³ For instance, the aforementioned Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ghazzī first headed to Jerusalem to further his education, before moving on to his illustrious career in Damascus: al-Ghazzī, *Buḥjat al-nāzīrīn*, pp. 122–123. Petry ('Travel patterns', pp. 65–66) argues for the salience of Jerusalem (and, on a lesser scale, of Hebron) as a meeting place for scholars within the Sultanate.

⁵⁴ Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns*, ii, p. 376. And see the careers of Khayr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ghazzī (d. 894/1489), a native of Gaza who served in several prestigious positions in Jerusalem for years, including chief Ḥanafī qāḍī: *ibid.*, ii, pp. 357–359; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ḥikrī (d. 782/1381), who served as qāḍī of Gaza and Jerusalem: Aḥmad b. 'Alī ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-ghumr bi-abnā' al-'umr fi al-tarīkh*, (ed.) Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mu'īd Khān, nine vols (Beirut, 1986), ii, p. 40.

⁵⁵ Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns*, ii, p. 259.

While Gaza may be considered a mid-tier chain in the hierarchy of learning centres within the Mamluk Sultanate, it was also important as a regional centre that catered to the needs of the villages in its province (*mamlaka*). As such, Gaza was not just the regional economic hub, well connected to the various settlements in its hinterland through a network of roads and bridges established by the Mamluk regime,⁵⁶ but also the first destination for starting scholars from those localities looking to further their education. Thus, we learn through the career of Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Kinānī al-Majdalī (d. 870/1466), a native of Majdal (a town located next to Ascalon), that a modest scholarly scene existed in this locality. Al-Sakhāwī provides a detailed list of Shihāb al-Dīn's teachers in Majdal and the curriculum he learned with them, and, while doing so, names three of his teachers who were active in Majdal during the first half of the ninth/fifteenth century.⁵⁷ Following that, Shihāb al-Dīn naturally made his way to Gaza—'his first stop after leaving his hometown'. He then continued to Jerusalem, Damascus, Cairo, and Mecca.⁵⁸ This career route well illustrates Gaza's position in the hierarchy of scholarly centres in the Mamluk Sultanate. Along the way, we also learn that Majdal had a qāḍī—probably a deputy of the qāḍī of Gaza—as did other small settlements in the province, such as Qaratayyā, in the vicinity of Bayt Jibrīn.⁵⁹

Another product of Gaza's geographic position as the bridge between Egypt and Syria was that it was frequently visited not only by military units—with the positive and negative implications of such visits—but also by travellers, pilgrims, merchants, and scholars moving back and forth. Some notable scholars, whose reputation preceded them, at times stayed in Gaza for several days, during which they might have studied hadith or other religious sciences with local scholars. By doing so, they gave local scholars the opportunity to learn from such authorities who rarely stayed at a provincial centre such as Gaza. Among the scholars who passed through Gaza during the Mamluk period, we should mention Ibn Taymiyya, who, on his route from Damascus to his infamous trial in Cairo, stopped at Gaza and held a public scholarly gathering (*majlis*) at the Friday Mosque.⁶⁰ Other notable scholars who passed through Gaza and interacted with their local peers include Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), al-Birzālī (d. 739/1339), al-Sakhāwī (902/1497), Shams al-Dīn Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429), al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), and Ibn Fahd of Mecca (885/1480).⁶¹ There is even one Shirazi scholar, Ḥusayn

⁵⁶ Amitai and Raphael, 'Bridges and roads', pp. 185–190.

⁵⁷ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, i, p. 363. Al-Sakhāwī (*ibid.*, i, p. 366), himself a close associate of Shihāb al-Dīn, writes that, when he passed through Majdal, the latter met him and presented to him several of his works.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, i, p. 363; Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns*, ii, pp. 233–234.

⁵⁹ Nāṣir al-Dīn Maṣūb b. Aḥmad b. Zayyān al-Qaratāwī (b. circa 650/1252, d. after 742/1341) was the qāḍī of Qaratayyā, as was his father before him. He succeeded his father in this post when the latter died in 675/1276–1277 and served as a deputy to the qāḍī in Gaza. He later served as the qāḍī of Gaza, Hebron, Nablus, and 'Ajlūn. As he got to learn directly in Damascus from the great Shāfi'ī authority al-Nawawī and was long-lived, he became a highly desired teacher. In 742/1341, the renowned Shāfi'ī scholar, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1369), learned from him in Gaza: 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. 'Alī al-Subkī, *Mu'jam al-shuyūkh*, (ed.) Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf et al. (Beirut, 2004), pp. 481–482. Another scholar from Qaratayyā was 'Abdallāh b. 'Alī al-Qaratāwī al-Laythī (b. before 848/1444–1445, d. after 900/1494). In 899/1494, he received in Mecca an *ijāza* from Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, a copy of which, in al-Sakhāwī's handwriting, is still extant: al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, v, pp. 32–33; 'Abdallāh al-Ḥusaynī (ed.), *Ijāza bi-khaṭṭ al-ḥāfiẓ Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (831h-902h) li-talmīdhīhi Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qaratāwī* (published by al-Alūka website). Al-Sakhāwī also mentions a scholar from Aṭriyā, a locality in the province of Gaza (perhaps a distortion of Qaratayyā), who also learned from him hadith in Mecca at the end of the ninth/fifteenth century: al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, vii, p. 244. On Qaratayyā, see Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, iv, p. 320.

⁶⁰ Ismā'īl b. 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa'l-nihāya*, (ed.) Maktab taḥqīq al-turāth, 14 vols (Beirut, 1993), xiv, p. 43.

⁶¹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, ii, p. 141, vi, p. 127, viii, p. 90; al-Subkī, *Mu'jam al-shuyūkh*, pp. 481–482; al-Birzālī, *al-Muqtaḍī*, i, p. 499; Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya fī ṭabaqāt al-qurrā'*, (ed.)

al-Shīrāzī (d. 895/1489), who went from Cairo to visit Jerusalem and, while passing through Gaza, recorded a sermon (*khutba*) that he heard at the mosque of al-Jāwī.⁶²

The learned elite of Gaza

Aside from its place in the local and regional intellectual networks of the Sultanate, Gaza also continuously hosted a lively scholarly community. Some students were natives, while others spent extended portions of their careers there and came to be associated with the town. Especially since the mid-eighth/fourteenth century, in every generation, Gaza was home to several reputable scholars, considered as the highest local authorities and responsible for educating the next generations of local scholars. Thus, we can track a distinctively ‘Gazan *silsila*’ in which every distinguished scholar left a successor, who in turn filled his place as Gaza’s leading authority in the next generation.

A few notable examples will demonstrate this continuity.⁶³ ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Khalaf b. Kāmil al-Ghazzī (709–792/1309–1390) and his brother Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad (716–770/1316–1369) were born in Gaza and attained their primary education there before moving to Damascus. ‘Alī, the elder, distinguished himself primarily in his authoritative knowledge of hadith.⁶⁴ He settled back in Gaza, where he was appointed as *qāḍī*—a position he held for several years before being dismissed and devoting the rest of his life to teaching. According to Ibn Ḥijjī, ‘Alī took pride in teaching his younger brother Muḥammad and ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Ḥisbānī but, at some point, his younger brother advanced in his scholarly career while ‘Alī lagged behind at Gaza.⁶⁵ One of ‘Alī b. Khalaf’s students,

G. Bergstraesser, two vols (Beirut, 1982), i, p. 153; Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-‘uqūd al-farīda fī tarājim al-a‘yān al-mufīda*, (ed.) Maḥmūd al-Jalīlī, four vols (Beirut, 2002), iii, p. 134.

⁶² Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, iii, p. 142.

⁶³ Further attestation to the presence of distinguished scholars, beyond that of the narrative sources, is found in the epigraphic evidence. For instance, we have at least two tomb inscriptions of scholars who lived in Gaza during the eighth/fourteenth century: one, Muḥammad b. Ṭarīf (d. 784/1383), was a *faqīh* and *muhaddith*, whose tomb shrine later came to be identified as a pilgrimage destination (*mazār*). Sharon, in his short entry on the inscription, writes that Ibn Ḥajar mentions a scholar by this name, but that the dates of his birth and death are missing from the biography (in *al-Durar al-kāmīna*, iv, p. 79; cf. Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, p. 123). However, in another work by Ibn Ḥajar, Muḥammad b. Ṭarīf is mentioned briefly as a man known for his righteousness (*kāna yudhkaru bi’l-khayr wa’l-ṣalāh*), his death date matching the one on the inscription: Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, ii, p. 117; cf. al-Ṭabbā’, *Ithāf*, ii, p. 152. The second scholar mentioned in an inscription is Muḥammad b. Khalīl al-‘Urḍī (d. 814/1411), whose elaborate tombstone, according to Sharon, is a ‘testimony to the high esteem in which he was held’. Al-‘Urḍī, whose *nisba* connects him to a village in the Syrian steppe, from where his father originated, was in fact a native of Gaza, as al-Maqrīzī, who met him there several times, states. We also have evidence that his father endowed several stalls in Gaza’s livestock market (*sūq al-ghanam*) and a house (*bayt*) in town as *waqf* for the benefit of his progeny in the year 781/1379–1380. Al-‘Urḍī was himself a distinguished scholar of *fiqh* and medicine: Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, pp. 146–147; Ṣālihiyya, *Sijill ar-rāḍī alwiyya*, p. 304; al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-‘uqūd*, iii, pp. 134–135. It is telling that, while their tomb inscriptions bear evidence to their local importance, both scholars are scarcely mentioned in the sources, surely in comparison with some of their Gazan peers (mentioned below).

⁶⁴ Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar al-kāmīna*, iii, p. 116; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, iv, p. 204, ix, p. 177; al-Fāsī, *Dhayl al-taqyid fī ruwāt al-sunan wa’l-asānīd*, (ed.) Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥawt, two vols (Beirut, 1990), i, pp. 321, 439, ii, p. 192. He also composed an abridgement of al-Dhahabī’s *Ta’rikh al-Islām*: Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi’iyya*, (ed.) ‘Abd al-‘Alīm Khān, four vols (Hyderabad, 1978–1980), iii, p. 212.

⁶⁵ Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, iii, pp. 40–41 (quoting Ibn Ḥijjī); Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi’iyya*, iv, p. 100. Indeed, Muḥammad went on to have an illustrious career in Damascus, where he became a renowned Shāfi’ī scholar, served for many years as deputy to the *qāḍī*, and held several teaching positions. He was very close to the renowned jurist, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī: the two learned together in a madrasa and remained close friends ever after. Muḥammad composed a five-volume work on Shāfi’ī jurisprudence, entitled *Maydān al-fursān*, which was evidently quite popular: it was abridged by a certain Badr al-Dīn al-Hikkārī already several years after the author’s lifetime. Al-‘Uthmānī, the *qāḍī* of Safed who authored a biographical dictionary of Shāfi’ī

Muḥammad al-Ghazzī al-Ja'farī, known as Ibn al-A'sar (763–846/1361–1442), another native of Gaza, ultimately succeeded his master as the Shāfi'ī qāḍī of the town. Interestingly, despite being a Shāfi'ī, he initially served as the Ḥanafī qāḍī, apparently after receiving Ibn Khalaf's advice to switch to the Ḥanafī *madhhab* (more on this below). He was later appointed deputy to the Shāfi'ī qāḍī and is reported to have orchestrated a spontaneous popular defence of the town before a rebel Mamluk emir.⁶⁶ In the wake of these events, he had to flee to Cairo but later returned to Gaza, this time as chief Shāfi'ī qāḍī—a position he seems to have held on and off until his death.⁶⁷

Ibn al-A'sar's student and successor as Shāfi'ī qāḍī of Gaza was Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ghazzī, known as Ibn al-Ḥimṣī (812–881/1409–1476). Also a native of Gaza, he studied in Cairo and Damascus, where he attended the lectures of Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba. Having returned to Gaza, he was appointed as Shāfi'ī qāḍī after Ibn al-A'sar's death and filled the position—with some interruptions—until 857/1453. He then spent two terms as qāḍī of Hamah before retiring from public office because of his disappointment with the corrupt habit of buying positions through bribery. He returned to Gaza and spent the remainder of his life devoted to learning and teaching, in addition to delivering sermons and exhortations (*al-wa'z wa'l-khiṭāba*). According to al-Sakhāwī, 'he became the definitive shaykh of his town' and, when he passed away, 'never had been seen such a great sight in these areas as his funeral procession, nor a greater grief. He left no equal among his peers'.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, not long passed before one of his brightest students, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ḥijāzī (840–885/1436–1480), having returned to Gaza from his own tour in search of knowledge that had included stops at Damascus, Aleppo, and Cairo, 'revived the discipline of his shaykh, Ibn al-Ḥimṣī'. To the great grief of the Gazans, al-Ḥijāzī died young, only four years after his master.⁶⁹

Last, another notable Gazan scholar who should be mentioned is Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. Bahādur al-Iyāsī (758–852/1357–1448). He was closely related to the preceding scholars—he was from the generation of Ibn al-A'sar, a fellow student of 'Alī b. Khalaf and fellow teacher of Ibn al-Ḥimṣī.⁷⁰ However, al-Iyāsī was a Ḥanafī and, although a fellow native of Gaza, he was the grandson of a mamlūk—his *nisba* relates to his grandfather's master, Iyās.⁷¹ Indeed, his Turkish origins and Ḥanafī affiliation were decisive factors in his career, and his identity was in between the local,

scholars, also writes of his close relationship with Muḥammad, which occurred when the two studied together in Damascus: 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. 'Alī al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya al-kubrā*, (ed.) 'Abd al-Fattāh Muḥammad al-Ḥilū and Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī, 10 vols (Cairo, 1964–1976), ix, pp. 155–156; Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-'Uthmānī, *Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahā' al-kubrā*, MS Princeton University Library, Garrett Collection 692, folios 136a–b.

⁶⁶ Al-Sakhāwī (*al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, ix, p. 177), who seems to be the only source to mention this intriguing episode, writes that, when a certain 'al-Raḥbī al-Khārijī' rebelled (*taḥarraka*) and tried to extort monies from the inhabitants of Gaza, it was Ibn al-A'sar who organised the opposition (which ultimately failed). It seems likely that this episode was part of the 815/1412 fighting between Mamluk factions throughout the Sultanate, which ended with al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh's ascent to the throne; 'al-Raḥbī' should be read as 'al-Rajabī' and thus that the person in question is the emir Ināl al-Rajabī, who, in 815/1412, took control of Gaza. Otherwise, it might be that different events are being conflated by al-Sakhāwī, such as the 'rebellion' of 'al-Sufyānī' mentioned by al-Maqrīzī, on which see J. van Steenberghe, 'Revisiting the Mamlūk empire: political action, relationships of power, entangled networks, and the Sultanate of Cairo in late medieval Syro-Egypt', in *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History*, (eds.) S. Conermann and B. J. Walker (Gottingen, 2019), pp. 83–85.

⁶⁷ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, ix, pp. 176–177.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, vii, pp. 61–62. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī was an important teacher in Gaza, who raised several students: *ibid.*, i, p. 312, ii, p. 178, iii, p. 157, vi, p. 259, viii, p. 286; al-Malaṭī, *al-Majma' al-mufannan*, p. 115.

⁶⁹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, ix, p. 51.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vii, p. 62, 1x, p. 91.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, ix, p. 91.

predominantly Shāfiʿī scholarly milieu of which he was an important member, the Ḥanafī scholarly milieu centred in Cairo, and the Mamluk elite. Al-Sakhāwī writes that al-Iyāsī excelled in *furūsiyya* and was deeply respected by the Mamluk governors of Gaza.⁷² Even his dress exemplifies this combination: al-Iyāsī was also a Sufi and al-Sakhāwī writes that, while ‘he kept to the Turkish manner in dressing, [that is] having narrow sleeves and clothes, his turban was wrapped with a *miʿzar* and had fringes (*adhaba*) in accordance with the Sufi custom’.⁷³ As a Ḥanafī, al-Iyāsī became the disciple of the first Ḥanafī qāḍī of Gaza, Muwaffaq al-Dīn al-Rūmī (d. 809/1406–1407), himself a disciple of Akmal al-Dīn al-Bābartī (d. 786/1384). The latter was a leading Ḥanafī authority in Cairo and an influential member of the court of Sultan Barqūq, who is said to have been responsible for the appointment of a Ḥanafī qāḍī in Gaza for the first time, in 784/1382.⁷⁴ Al-Iyāsī also learned from the Ḥanafī qāḍī of Jerusalem, Khayr al-Dīn Khalīl al-Rūmī (d. 801/1398), who was appointed to the position at the same time.⁷⁵ A renunciant Sufi, al-Iyāsī is said to have led an ascetic lifestyle and, while receiving an income, he left it entirely to his wife to deal with such material concerns. Al-Iyāsī spent his entire life in Gaza, where he evidently taught numerous students. Al-Sakhāwī calls him ‘the *mudarris* and mufti of Gaza’ and the shaykh of the Ḥanafī *madhhab* in town.⁷⁶

Al-Sakhāwī adds that al-Iyāsī founded a madrasa adjacent to his house in Gaza.⁷⁷ Indeed, while the emphasis here has been on Mamluk patronage, the local elites—wealthy merchants as well as scholars—also participated in the foundation of religious and learning institutions. The sources are ambiguous regarding these dynamics, but combining narrative descriptions, endowment documents, and epigraphic evidence suggests that sometimes rulers and local scholars cooperated in initiating and constructing religious and learning institutions. For example, al-Ṭabbāʾ suggests that al-Iyāsī’s madrasa might be the one later named al-Birdibakiyya,⁷⁸ though the inscription located above the entrance to the building today states that the madrasa al-Birdibakiyya was founded in 859/1455, a good seven years after al-Iyāsī had passed away. Sharon lists the inscription as a ‘construction or restoration’ text, so perhaps the patron, Birdibak al-Ashrafī, restored or expanded al-Iyāsī’s, probably modest, madrasa.⁷⁹ Be that as it may, we do have

⁷² A fine illustration of this is that it was al-Iyāsī who made the acquaintance between the governor Īnāl and the local Ḥanafī *faqīh*, ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Baghdādī al-Ghazzī, who went on to become Īnāl’s *imām* (on this, see above): *ibid.*, x, p. 92. It is interesting to note that al-Iyāsī had a mamlūk of his own—a certain Shams al-Dīn, evidently a learned man, as al-Sakhāwī mentions him narrating hadith to scholars who passed through Gaza on at least two occasions: *ibid.*, iv, p. 127, ix, p. 41.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, x, p. 91.

⁷⁴ Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr*, ii, p. 91; Abū al-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr waʾl-Qāhira*, 16 vols (Cairo, 1929–1972), xi, p. 228. The later source specifically states that the appointment of a Ḥanafī qāḍī to Gaza (and concomitantly to Jerusalem as well) was ‘one of the innovations of [the sultan] al-Malik al-Zāhir [Barqūq], and prior to that there was no Ḥanafī qāḍī in Jerusalem, nor in Gaza’. He also states that both qāḍīs—both of foreign, Anatolian (*rūmī*), and Persian (*ʿajamī*) origins—were appointed due to the intervention of Akmal al-Dīn al-Bābartī: he was the shaykh of the Shaykhūniyya *khānqāh* in Cairo, in which both held posts as resident students. The next Ḥanafī qāḍī appointed in Gaza was also from Anatolia, and one of the students of the Shaykhūniyya: Taqī al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Tamīmī al-Dārī al-Ghazzī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-saniyya fī tarājim al-Hanafīyya*, (ed.) ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥīlū, four vols (Riyad, 1983–1989), iii, p. 247.

⁷⁵ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʾ*, x, p. 91.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, v, p. 188, viii, p. 264, x, p. 92.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, x, p. 92.

⁷⁸ Al-Ṭabbāʾ, *Ithāf*, iv, p. 31.

⁷⁹ Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, p. 166. Another intriguing piece of information is that Birdibak was a young mamlūk of the emir Īnāl when the latter was governor of Gaza in the 830s (h.). At the time, al-Iyāsī was one of the leading Ḥanafī scholars in town, if not the most prominent one, and al-Iyāsī was certainly acquainted with Īnāl (on this, see above, notes 37, 70). The madrasa al-Birdibakiyya was endowed with substantial *awqāf*, all of which were plots of lands and real-estate holdings in Gaza and its surroundings: Muḥammad ‘Uthmān Saʿīd al-Khaṭīb, ‘The

evidence from the Ottoman registry of *awqāf* that al-Iyāsī had some real estate at his possession, as he endowed some market stalls as *waqf*, setting his own family as benefactors.⁸⁰

Another Gazan scholar who founded a mosque in his town was Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn 'Uthmān al-Khalīlī (733–805/1333–1402).⁸¹ Though he endowed his mosque with a substantial *waqf*, the mosque also features several inscriptions that bear witness to Mamluk investment, already during Ibn 'Uthmān's lifetime and for several decades after his decease.⁸² Possibly what we witness here is a dynamic in which scholars established humble religious institutions, later enlarged through Mamluk patronage.⁸³

Be that as it may, at least some scholars and merchants were wealthy enough to establish such institutions, as well as other charitable endowments, control over which was normally entrusted to the founder and his family, thus ensuring their long-term financial security and providing them with social capital.⁸⁴ For example, Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Awzā'ī (b. 860/1456) was a native of Gaza and student of some of its leading authorities in his day.⁸⁵ He was also the son of a wealthy Gazan merchant and, after inheriting his father's fortune, he used it to renovate mosques and build other unspecified institutions. He was later appointed as the *qāḍī* of Gaza.⁸⁶ Al-Awzā'ī's case illustrates that, while local scholars benefitted from Mamluk investment in new religious establishments and the paid positions attached to them, which enabled additional students to pursue a scholarly career and more senior scholars to devote their time to teaching and learning, many '*ulamā'*' still practised other professions alongside their scholarly career, especially as merchants, as is evident from several references in the sources.⁸⁷ The combination of intellectual activity with conducting trade was characteristic of the '*ulamā'*' throughout Islamic history, and certainly continued during the period of 'professionalisation' of the '*ulamā'*' class,⁸⁸ as is attested in Mamluk Gaza as well.

Islamic Awqaf (Endowments) in Palestine During Mamluki Period (648-923H/1250-1517A.D)' (unpublished MA thesis, al-Yarmūk University, 2007), pp. 311, 318, 324.

⁸⁰ According to the *waqf* registry, in 791/1389, al-Iyāsī endowed stalls (*dakākin*) in the livestock market (*sūq al-ghanam*) and in the market of al-Shajā'iyya, the revenues of which were intended for himself and his descendants: Šāliḥiyya, *Sijill arāḍī alwiya*, p. 280.

⁸¹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, ii, p. 141. Ibn 'Uthmān was probably born in either Hebron or Jerusalem, and settled in Gaza, where he spent most of his life. He gained a vast education, learning from some of the greatest authorities of his age, and evidence of his prodigious learning is that the great Ibn Ḥajar learned from him several works in Gaza on diverse topics such as hadith, Sufism, and *fiqh*. Among his students, we may also mention the Meccan scholar, Taqī al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Fāsī. Ibn 'Uthmān became extremely influential and popular and was venerated as a saint. Al-Sakhāwī (*ibid.*, ii, p. 141) accuses him of holding the controversial monist views of Ibn al-'Arabi: Aḥmad Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Majma' al-mu'assis li'l-mu'jam al-mufahras*, (ed.) Yūsuf b. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Mar'ashli, four vols (Beirut, 1992–4), i, pp. 445–450; al-Fāsī, *Dhayl al-taqyid*, i, p. 390.

⁸² Šāliḥiyya, *Sijill arāḍī alwiya*, pp. 258–259; Sharon, *CIAP*, iv, pp. 134–143, 155–156, 159–161.

⁸³ Other building activities initiated by religious scholars are also known in Mamluk Gaza: the aforementioned Ibn al-Ḥimṣī apparently established a market (*qaysāriyya*; Sadek, *Die Mamlukische Architektur*, pp. 288–292, 312); Zayn al-Dīn 'Abd al-Bāsiṭ ibn Khalīl (d. 854/1451), though not an inhabitant of Gaza, established there a madrasa, part of a network of madrasas he founded throughout the Sultanate: Daisuke Igarashi, 'Madrasahs, their *Shaykhs*, and the civilian founder: the Bāsiṭiyyah Madrasahs in the Mamlūk era', *Orient* XLVIII (2013), p. 83.

⁸⁴ The Ottoman *waqf* registry provides numerous examples of such family-oriented endowments set by members of the Gazan civilian elite, be they scholars or otherwise. See, for example, al-Khaṭīb, 'The Islamic Awqaf', pp. 215–220.

⁸⁵ He learned from Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, among others: al-Malaṭī, *al-Majma'*, p. 115.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ See, for example, al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, ii, p. 188, iii, p. 222, vii, p. 184, viii, p. 264, ix, p. 45, x, p. 237; al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, v, pp. 282–283.

⁸⁸ J. E. Gilbert, 'Institutionalization of Muslim scholarship and professionalization of the '*Ulamā'*' in medieval Damascus', *Studia Islamica* LII (1980), pp. 105–134; Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, pp. 107–113.

Returning to al-Iyāsī, his biography also demonstrates how a Ḥanafī presence was established in a provincial town such as Gaza—where it seems that the local population and the scholarly elite were overwhelmingly Shāfi‘ī—with the active encouragement and patronage of the Mamluk elite. This process is noticeable throughout the Mamluk Sultanate, especially from the second half of the eighth/fourteenth century, when Mamluk patronage of distinctively Ḥanafī institutions grew significantly.⁸⁹ While this is especially evident in Cairo, and to a lesser extent in Damascus, we may see here how a Ḥanafī presence percolated to lesser intellectual centres, such as Gaza and Jerusalem. This does not suggest that any significant portion of the population converted to the Ḥanafī *madhhab* but, among scholars, we do notice a certain drift towards Ḥanafism. This was clearly motivated by the pursuit of employment: with more patronage designated specifically for Ḥanafī scholars (be it in the madrasas or as qādīs and otherwise)⁹⁰ and with the relatively minor presence of Ḥanafī scholars throughout Egypt and Syria, it became increasingly tempting to switch *madhhab*.⁹¹ Indeed, the accusation of *taḥannuf* (outwardly pretending to be a Ḥanafī), which became a common trope in ninth/fifteenth-century biographies dedicated to ‘*ulamā*’, also applied to several Gazan scholars.⁹² Another aspect of this Ḥanafī-Shāfi‘ī tension was linguistic and ethnic. While the Shāfi‘īs were predominantly Arab and saw themselves as the traditional local elite, or ‘the salt of the earth’, the Ḥanafīs were mainly of foreign origins—namely Turkish or Persian—and their rise during the Mamluk period was clearly related to the foreign origins, and Ḥanafī tendency, of the Mamluk ruling elite.⁹³ Al-Iyāsī represents this dynamic very clearly, both since he was himself a Turk and since his Ḥanafī teachers were from the Anatolian and Persian-speaking milieux which attained growing influence in the capital, Cairo. On the other hand, al-Iyāsī was a native of Gaza, closely associated with the local

⁸⁹ L. Fernandes, ‘Mamluk politics and education: the evidence from two fourteenth century waqfiyya’, *Annales islamologiques* xxiii (1987), pp. 87–98.

⁹⁰ It is also telling that, while the Shāfi‘ī qāḍī of Gaza was an appointment of the chief qāḍī of Damascus, the Ḥanafī qāḍī was appointed directly by the Cairo court: Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā fi ṣinā’at al-insā’*, (ed.) Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn, 15 vols (Beirut, 1987), iv, p. 205.

⁹¹ For instance, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Ghazzī, known as Ibn al-Maghribī (b. 830/1427), and his brother and namesake (b. 820/1417) were sons of a Mālikī scholar who originated from the Maghreb. Both were born in Gaza and learned from al-Iyāsī, switching to the Ḥanafī *madhhab* and continuing to illustrious careers. The younger brother was also appointed as qāḍī of Gaza at some point: al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, viii, pp. 263–265.

⁹² This issue merits further study and seems more complicated than a simple matter of Shāfi‘ī scholars accusing their peers who converted to Ḥanafism (or other *madhāhib*) as pursuing paid positions. This is implied from the case of Ibn al-A’sar (mentioned above), who switched from the Shāfi‘ī to the Ḥanafī *madhhab*. As al-Sakhāwī writes, ‘the one who advised him to become a Ḥanafī was his shaykh, Ibn Khalaf’, himself a Shāfi‘ī. Scholars were also accused of switching to other *madhāhib* for the sake of gaining employment. Writers of biographical dictionaries are at times extremely critical of this tendency, even ridiculing their subjects: Ibn Taghrī Birdī writes of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ṣaltī (d. 807/1404), who served as qāḍī in several towns in Bilād al-Shām (Gaza, Damascus, Baalbek, Ḥims, and Hamah), constantly switching affiliation according to the available positions, that ‘he did not act well as qāḍī, and how could he, as every short period he would switch to another *madhhab* for the sake of gaining employment?!’ See Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm*, xiii, p. 39. In the *fatāwā* compilation of the renowned tenth/sixteenth-century Gazan scholar, Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Timurtāshī (d. 1004/1595), one *fatwā* is devoted to the question of whether it is permissible for a Ḥanafī to pray behind an *imām* who was appointed by the ruler after presenting himself as a Ḥanafī, though it turned out that he was really a Shāfi‘ī (the answer being yes, with some reservations). This legal question represents the spread of such practices, in this case already well into the Ottoman period: al-Timurtāshī, *al-Fatāwā al-timurtāshīyya min al-waqā’i’ al-ghazziyya*, MS National Library of Israel, Yahuda Collection 495, folio 4.

⁹³ A. Levani, ‘Who were the “salt of the earth” in fifteenth-century Egypt?’ *Mamlūk Studies Review* XIV (2010), pp. 63–83; K. Yosef, ‘Language and style in Mamluk historiography’, in *New Readings in Arabic Historiography from Late Medieval Egypt and Syria*, (eds.) J. van Steenberg and M. Termonia (Leiden, 2021), pp. 112–164.

Shāfi'i and Arabic-speaking elite, and in time he groomed a significant number of local Ḥanafī scholars.⁹⁴ Thus, he might be regarded as an important middleman who contributed to the growth of a Ḥanafī presence in Gaza.

Conclusions

Gaza's religious and intellectual climate was a natural part of contemporary southern Bilād al-Shām and was integrated into the social and intellectual networks and hierarchies of the Mamluk Sultanate. Gaza's location, directly on the highway connecting Cairo and Damascus, in many ways shaped its development and facilitated its integration into those wider networks. Through their massive investments and patronage, the Mamluks left their mark on the history of the region in general, and Gaza in particular, be it through the private, ad hoc endeavours of local governors and office holders or wider policies directed by the Cairo court. Under Mamluk rule, Gaza made the leap from minor town to full-grown city and provincial centre. This turn of events was accompanied by the growth of a thriving scholarly community, continuously attested especially from the early eighth/fourteenth century and throughout the Mamluk period. The foundation of religious and learning institutions provided the infrastructure for maintaining such a vital intellectual climate and this long era witnessed a succession of distinctly Gazan scholars. Many of those were born and raised in Gaza, while others spent substantial periods of time there and became part of the learned community of the town. Their careers clearly illustrate Gaza's place within the political and intellectual hierarchies of the Sultanate as a mid-tier provincial centre, below the cultural centres of Cairo, Damascus, and Aleppo, and roughly on a par with other towns of Bilād al-Shām, such as Safed, Tripoli, Hamah, and even Jerusalem. While the Mamluks seldom directly interfered in religious learning and theological controversies,⁹⁵ the 'ulamā's reliance on their patronage ensured that they had an impact on the religious and intellectual milieu, as is evident, for example, in the 'Hanafī turn' noticeable in Gaza as elsewhere in the Sultanate since the mid-eighth/fourteenth century.

The case of Gaza under the Mamluks is also indicative of centre–periphery relations within the Sultanate. In this regard, Gaza—and Palestine in general—stood at a somewhat peculiar position, since it could be seen as peripheral in its political, military, and economic importance, but central in its geographical location, which stood just at the heart of the Sultanate.⁹⁶ Surely, from a Cairene perspective, Gaza's importance laid firstly in its location on the Cairo–Damascus 'highway' and, beyond securing a swift passage of the Egyptian army northward, investing in the town served to solidify Cairo's hold over the coastal plains of Palestine. In this sense, like Safed or Tripoli to the north or alternatively a town like Qūṣ in Upper Egypt,⁹⁷ Gaza served as a regional centre that was meant to project and uphold Cairo's authority over its provinces, as well as to facilitate its

⁹⁴ Al-Sakhāwī mentions him as the teacher of at least 10 scholars, who were generally either Ḥanafīs from Gaza or scholars passing through town: al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, i, p. 49, ii, p. 162, v, p. 188, vi, p. 81, vii, pp. 203, 289, viii, pp. 170, 263–264, ix, p. 178.

⁹⁵ J. Berkey, 'Mamluk religious policy', *Mamlūk Studies Review* XIII.2 (2009), pp. 7–22.

⁹⁶ R. Amitai, 'Political and civilian elites in Mamluk Palestine (1260–1516): some preliminary comments', in *Die Interaktion von Herrschern und Eliten in imperialen Ordnungen des Mittelalters*, (ed.) W. Drews (Berlin, 2018), pp. 130–132.

⁹⁷ A comparison between the development of Qūṣ and that of Gaza under Mamluk rule is beyond the scope of the current study and I hope to conduct it elsewhere. While the two towns operated in extremely different climates (Qūṣ, for example, served as a projection of Muslim-Sunni power in a predominantly Christian region), they also had much in common. One may think, for example, of the role of the towns in keeping local nomadic tribes in check: while it does not seem that Mamluk control was challenged by such tribes in the Gaza region as it was in Upper Egypt, contemporary sources do suggest that Mamluk presence in Gaza was imperative to keep local

economic interests. But, perhaps as a side effect, Mamluk investment in those provincial capitals also created a stable, if not thriving, cultural and intellectual climate, promoted by the Mamluk officials, in close collaboration with the local civilian elites. Just like the newly founded centres of Safed and Tripoli, by the time of the Ottoman conquest, Gaza had been shaped and developed as a distinctly ‘Mamluk town’.

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tribal factions under control. On this, see the comments made by al-‘Umarī translated in Amitai, ‘Development of a Muslim city’, pp. 8–9. On Qūṣ, see J.-C. Garcin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Égypte médiévale: Qūṣ* (Cairo, 1974).

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