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MADDE YAYIMLANDIKTAN
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The Life and Times of the Ayyūbid Vizier al-Şāḥib b. Shukr

Eyyubiler

051139

In memory of Prof. Speros Vryonis, Jr. (1928–2019)

<https://doi.org/10.1515/islam-2020-0005>

Abstract: This is a description and assessment of the career of al-Şāḥib b. Shukr (548–622/1153–1225), the most important vizier of Ayyūbid Egypt. Born in the Delta, and raised in an influential family, he studied to become a jurist. After serving as a judge (*qāḍī*), he entered the administration of Saladin and subsequently became the vizier of two Ayyūbid sultans, al-ʿĀdil and his son al-Kāmil. His ruthlessness in raising money for them by transforming the Egyptian vizierate into a fund raising institution was a critical factor in their ability to stay in power, and in saving Egypt from the Fifth Crusade. At the same time he patronized the religious class and built the first Mālikī law school (*madrasa*) in Cairo. His vizierate represented a nexus of administrative and religious authority in Egypt.

Keywords: Ibn Shukr, Ayyūbid, Egypt, al-ʿĀdil, al-Kāmil, Fifth Crusade, vizier

Introduction

On a sweltering summer day in Cairo, 8 Shaʿbān 622/15 August 1225, al-Şāḥib b. Shukr died at the age of 72 in his residence (*dār*) in the presence of his family. Thus passed from the scene the most important vizier of Ayyūbid Egypt and one of the most remarkable viziers in the history of that country. Praised for being scholarly and generous to the religious class and damned for being ruthless and sadistic in pursuit of raising government revenue, he left an indelible mark on Egypt. Indeed, as we will see, he played a critical role in keeping two Ayyūbid sultans, al-ʿĀdil (r. 596–615/1200–1218) and al-Kāmil (r. 615–35/1218–1238), in power and in saving Egypt from the Fifth Crusade. Thus, he is mentioned to a greater or lesser degree in every medieval Arabic historical work dealing with

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238. Ibn al-Athir, *Al-Kamil*, Vol. 10, p. 636.
 239. *Ibid.*, p. 678.
 240. Ibn al-Athir, *Al-Kamil*, Vol. 11, pp. 106, 486.
 241. Al-Suyuti, *Akam al-'Iqyan*, ms. no. 4991/82.

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MADDE YAYIMLANDIKTAN
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The Ayyubids: Their Two Queens and their Powerful Castrated Atabegs

01 Ekim 2020

I travelled to Cairo from Aleppo as an ambassador to the king of Egypt, to request his permission to allow his aunts to travel to see their sister, al-Malika Dayfa, in Aleppo. King al-Salih Ayyub received me and passed this message to Dayfa: 'You kiss the ground before the queen, and tell her that al-Salih is her *mamluk*, and her status is like that of my late father, King al-Kamil. I offer myself fully to her service, and will follow her orders in any matter.'¹

These words were written in 1240 by the Aleppan historian, Ibn al-'Adim (d. 1261), who was not only a contemporary of the first publicly acknowledged Sunni queen consort in medieval Islam, Dayfa, daughter of al-'Adil I the Ayyubid, but he was also her trusted advisor, diplomat and negotiator. This was in addition to his original job as chief judge of her realm. The anecdote above is not just telling us about a queen ruling in Aleppo; it also described how the king of a powerful country, such as Egypt, was representing himself as her slave (*mamluk*).

The Ayyubids, who ruled Egypt from 1171 to 1250 and to 1260 in Syria, were ethnic Kurds with a heavy Turkmen influence inherited from their Zengid lords. As regards the military, they could be described as Turkicised Kurds, and in relation to culture, they could be considered to be Persianised. The founders, Najm al-Din Ayyub and his brother Shirkuh, descended from the Ruwadiyya clan, part of the Hadhbaniyya tribe from the suburbs of the Georgian capital Tbilisi in the north-west Caucasus.² Ayyub joined the service of Zengi I in Iraq as a *mamluk*, and became very loyal to him and his son, Nur al-Din.