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MMS-II
Summary Description of the Action

Project Acronym: MMS-II
Project number: 681510
Project Title: The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate II: historiography, political order and state formation in fifteenth-century Egypt and Syria
Principal Investigator: Jo Van Steenbergen
Host Institution: Universiteit Gent

Focus and key objectives of the project

This project offers the first comprehensive survey and collective historical interpretation of the diverse and voluminous range of Arabic historiographical texts that were produced in the Syro-Egyptian Mamluk sultanate between 1410 and 1470 and that have continued to define historical imaginations to this very day. This project is ground-breaking in that it will consider and question those imaginations in both conceptual and empirical ways that hitherto have not been explored in the field. This will have a profound impact on current understandings of late medieval Islamic cultural, social and political history.

The main research question of this project concerns an understanding of the particular relationships between this historiographical material and the regularly changing social orders that were produced by and around the different sultans and their courts reigning and ruling from Cairo in the decades between 1410 and 1470. The main hypothesis of the project is that of the invention of a tradition of one political order, a cultural process captured by the neologism 'Mamlukisation' and referring to the construction of a particular social memory of one, longstanding and continuous sultanate of military slaves (*mamlūk*s) that connects and explains a socio-culturally fragmented 15th-century present through the memory of a shared and glorious 13th- and 14th-century past. MMS-II claims that this social memory of the Mamluk state was discursively produced and reproduced in various forms that include contemporary claims to historical truth.

MMS-II has the following specific objectives.
1. It aims to create a reference database of metadata for the production, reproduction and consumption of all Arabic historiographical texts from the period 1410-1470.
2. It will consist of the in-depth contextualized study of particular sets of these texts, deconstructing their structures and meanings through historicizing narratological and social semiotic methodologies.
3. It will identify and explore the political vocabularies that were deployed in these texts, as signifiers of a particular political discourse that informed these texts and that, at the same time, materialized through them.

Generating an entirely new understanding of this historiography as part and parcel of a particular inter-subjective political dynamic, MMS-II will make a vital and groundbreaking contribution to current understandings of late medieval Islamic social and cultural history. This project will generate better understandings of the booming business of the period's main textual source material as well as of their complex socio-cultural contexts and it will show an entirely new way forward in deconstructing both the problematic structuralism of a Mamluk state model and the disciplinary boundaries that continue to separate Mamluk social history's study of relations from Mamluk cultural history's study of meanings.

Moving beyond the State of the Art: Mamluk political history, Arabic historiography & the production of historical truth and political order between 1410 and 1470

1. Re-writing Mamluk Political History

The Arabo-Islamic world of the later medieval period (13th-15th centuries) witnessed the production, reproduction and consumption of Arabic literary texts in unprecedented quantitative, qualitative and socially meaningful ways. Disengaging from old but widespread paradigms of a 'post-classical' literary field in fossilizing decline, scholars such as Bauer and Hirschler are showing how texts came to represent a crucial channel of communication and identity-formation for all educated elites in the region, how this went hand-in-hand with a marked expansion in the sheer number of texts that were produced and widely consumed, and how from at latest the fourteenth century onwards increasing numbers of members from other social groups participated actively in this process by not just reading but also producing texts. (Bauer-2005; Bauer-2007; Bauer-2013; Hirschler-2012). As participants in a self-conscious literary genre of pioneering socio-cultural importance Arabic historiographical texts were part and parcel of this remarkable late medieval cultural and social transformation, experiencing indeed an unprecedented explosion in the sheer volume and variety of texts that were produced (Hirschler-2013). At the same time, this booming business of historiographical production has since many years been identified as experiencing substantial qualitative changes as a genre, affecting the nature of the texts as well as the identities of their producers in highly interconnected ways. Khalidi identified these changes by introducing the term *siyāsa* historiography, referring to late medieval Arabic historiography's production in the close proximity of the region's many different and often competing courts, and to its particular presentist concerns for contemporary *siyāsa*, for local politics and political elites. Over time rather straightforward chronographical or biographical listings of politically relevant issues and of elitist concerns surely gave way to more entertaining narratives, and even these lists may actually have been constructed in more complex literary ways than tends to be appreciated. Nevertheless, *siyāsa* priorities continued to inform the majority of Arabic historiographical texts into the early modern period (Khalidi; also Robinson; Hirschler-2013, Hanna-2001). As a result of these late medieval texts' riches and detail, of their highly accessible *siyāsa* priorities, and of the —in comparison— relative scarcity and complexity of other types of sources, today's research on the late medieval Middle East continues to rely heavily on this rich historiographical production, and, as a result, has for a long time primarily been concerned with the history of local and regional power elites. Since a number of years this problematic political bias, reducing the history of the region to that of it's elites in function of their political relevance and as reproduced in these texts only, is gradually beginning to be overcome through the adoption of new methodologies and approaches and through the extension of the range of sources being examined (as surveyed in Hirschler-2013). At the same time, however, this is an approach that first and foremost tries to find ways to circumvent or neutralise the frames, narrative engagements, and related subjectivities of this historiographical material. Valuable as that is, it also means that the particular nature, impact and value of this politically informed historiography remains hugely underexplored and significantly underestimated. As a particular type of active participants in the social communication, identity-formation and cultural production that became such powerful and widespread effects of textual practices in the social worlds of late medieval Egypt and Syria, historiography remains thus remarkably poorly understood.

This project aims to remedy this situation, by arguing with and beyond instead of against or outside of this historiographical production's vexed interests and related subjectivities. In doing so, this project consciously positions itself at the forefront of only recently identified new lines of research for late medieval Mamluk cultural and social histories and for Arabic literature in particular (see e.g. Bauer, 2011). The potentials of these lines have been sketched out most explicitly in two contributions to a highly stimulating and seminal recent survey publication of Mamluk studies, edited by Conermann (Conermann-2013). Hirschler succinctly called for implementing the archival and wider cultural turn in the study of historiography, and of biographical dictionaries in particular (Hirschler-2013). Herzog formulated a more specific but equally brief suggestion of reading non-elitist Arabic literary texts (including the epic *siyar* genre) from the period "as having existed in a historical field of power relations, in which they seem to have challenged the authorities' claim to determine moral and historical truth" (Herzog-2013, p. 149). The proposed project follows up from this identification of new ways forward in the field's research, taking inspiration from these suggestions and starting above all from a thorough and even more nuanced problematisation of that "historical field of power relations" and the related politics of historical truth. By doing so, it wants to establish a new understanding of late medieval Arabic historiography as both a unique multifaceted remnant of particular socio-cultural

practices that defined such relations and their truth-claims and, at the same time, as a particular type of actor within such practices.

Given the political nature of both the historiographical material and my research so far, state formation will be prioritized analytically in this project as one extremely relevant patterned set of such relations and claims. In this respect, this project moves beyond the traditional institutionalist, structuralist and dichotomous approach of a Mamluk state and society that would have produced each other as Mamluk analytical subjects and descriptive categories through simple bipolar autocratic, oligarchic or symbiotic interactions that were rooted in an unchanging normative practice of the political priority of the institution of military slavery (a traditional approach surveyed in Humphreys-2005; and summarised most recently in Loiseau-2014). This project rather adopts Middle East historian Timothy Mitchell's careful socially internalised understanding that prioritises social practices and the circulation of power, including the 'disciplinary' production of order and the semiotic process of externalising explanations of power relations, and that understands these practices as constantly reproducing a set of incoherent structural effects that are then identified (even continuously re-invented) as the normative order of the state and its agents, institutions, sites, value systems, and resources (Mitchell-1991, as a correction to Foucault-1977). I have argued that this is a highly valuable conceptualisation that is not at all specific to Mitchell's modern state (also Mitchell-1988) but enables the today by far most advanced and meaningful analytical approach to state formation as a historical and socio-cultural phenomenon (Van Steenbergen—2015b). This project will therefore situate its subjects of late medieval Arabic historiography, power relations and truth claims within this analytical framework of the state as a structural effect of social practices, and within the resultant understanding of 15th-century state formation as transformations affecting statist structural effects produced by a range of social orders that were particular to the first half of the 15th century.

For the latter understanding, MMS-II builds —in these very different and innovative cultural ways— on the main conclusions of the ERC-project MMS: 'The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate. Political Traditions and State Formation in fifteenth-century Egypt and Syria' (ERC Starting Grant 240865, 2009-14, UGent, PI Jo Van Steenbergen). This Starting Grant project terminated in September 2014 with a concluding comparative international conference on 15th-century state formation: "Whither the early modern state? State formation and political traditions across Eurasia. Divergences, Comparisons and Connections". Between late 2009 and 2014 MMS team members (PI, 2 postdocs, 1 PhD-student, 1 halftime research assistant) focused on the reconstruction of the social practices (defined in MMS as political traditions) that organise the interplay between powerful individuals, political institutions and social interactions in 15th-century Egypt and Syria. Basically, it looked at two questions: 'What were the rules of the game of 15th-century politics, and how did these rules change over time?' MMS tackled these questions from the methodological perspective of prosopo- and sociographical research, as operationalised via the development of a complex remote access database-system in Filemaker Pro 12 —MP3 (the Mamluk Political Prosopography Project)— that connects many tens of thousands of factoids (relevant isolated source data from contemporary chronicles, biographical dictionaries and administrative manuals) to detailed analytical categories that identify groups, types and units of particular characteristics for political actors, positions (*manṣab*s), and their multiple relationships between the 1400s and 1460s (www.mamluk.ugent.be/prosopography). On this methodological basis, research was pursued on three different scales of social analysis: the micro-history of actors and events, with a particular focus on the period 1412-68 (mainly the reigns of the sultans Shaykh [r. 1412-21], Ṭaṭar [r. 1421], Barsbāy [r. 1422-38], Jaqmaq [r. 1438-53], Īnāl [r. 1453-61] and Khushqadam [r. 1461-7]); the meso-history of this period's social practices (identity, kinship, patronage, competition, governance & political functions); the macro-history of political organisation and state transformation in the Cairo sultanate, from internal as well as from comparative perspectives. On the basis of this research, MMS identified in qualified ways the individual and social identities of the main political agents operating in the period 1412-1468; it reconstructed how dynamic agencies, practices and institutions interacted in the formation, transformation and disintegration of various local and trans-local power networks; and it defined the Cairo sultanate's process of state formation beyond the narrow framework of ongoing institutionalization, as a social product or structural effect of the continuous integration, expansion and fragmentation of central power networks (see e.g. Adriaenssens & Van Steenbergen-2016).

The most important conclusions of MMS for the current project are concerned with this reframing of the conceptualisation of the sultanate as a polity produced by particular and changing social contexts rather than by a timeless institution of military slavery. This conclusion and its importance actually follow from MMS's developing anew an overarching analytical model of Syro-Egyptian state formation that enables a far more

nuanced understanding of the changes that defined the sultanate's political history. We combined in our analysis Mitchell's dynamic model of the state as a set of structural effects of particular social practices with a 'flux-and-reflux' model of endless social transformation on a continuum between three ideal types of authority and social order and resulting from a dominant tanistic mode of reproduction (that is, the practice of organising succession through usurpation rather than through primogeniture). This enabled a new explanation of the fact that the appearance of the sultanate's long and continuous history between 1250 and 1517 paradoxically went hand in hand with a remarkable similarity in the repeated disintegration and fragmentation of successful social orders around particular constellations of households and networks. Despite this generally accepted appearance of unchanging structural realities due to some form of discontinuous social reproduction (also referred to in the literature as the principle of 'one-generation nobility'), it has transpired from our research that particular historical conditions made 15th-century politics very distinct from what they had been like before. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the process of social organisation witnessed remarkable imperial moments of powerful central rule, such as with the long reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (r. 1293-4; 1299-1309; 1310-41), and in general an equally remarkable series of successes of dynastic agents and ideas manifested itself in on-going tanistic competition (e.g. Van Steenbergen-2015a). Throughout this period, therefore, these dynastic contingencies repeatedly managed to bind the social process of regular elite fragmentation and re-orientation into one more or less coherent political order, operating as a more transcendent normative effect of the widely shared reproduction of particular dynastic legitimacies (as identified in Van Steenbergen-2013b, esp. 258-66; Loiseau-2014, esp. 112-32; Broadbridge-2008, esp. 145-8). The 15th century, however, was very different, and this was not in the least due to a complete failure of dynastic tendencies. Between 1412 and 1468, different sets of new and exclusively *mamlūk* political elites were repeatedly produced as agents of a relatively quick succession of no less than 5 sultans and their courts (with a modest lifespan ranging between six and sixteen years only), and so were —in the turnover of sultans and the rapid disintegration of their elites— old elite groups and individuals, many of whom were often first marginalised due to a particular court's fragmentation, only to be recycled later on in subsequent new political contexts. The increasingly advanced age at which the period's sultans ascended the throne, after long but also winding political careers in and out of the limelight, surely is one of the better known illustrations of this process (Barsbāy was in his forties in 1422, Jaqmaq was in his sixties in 1438, and Īnāl was 73 in 1453). MMS identified and explained this as a 'flux-and-reflux' process of elite integration, produced by its own internal social dynamics rather than by any external agency of the 'state', and 'mamlukising' as the social outcome of dynastic failure rather than due to any normative practice.

The mapping of this social production, reproduction and recycling in a succession of new social orders of power elites and networks of predominantly *mamlūk* but socially unusually disconnected background and origins was the alpha and omega of MMS. Building on these results and the insights gained, the MMS-II project wishes to make an entirely different, cultural turn by claiming that this particular on-going process of elite integration and fragmentation between 1412 and 1468 happened increasingly in a normative context in which governmental growth and the failure of any dynastic continuities created room for alternative symbolic narratives of order, distinction, legitimacy and truth. Next to the often short-lived normative power of a sultan's actual authority, fragmented elite groups and individuals were invited to construct more transcendent layers of political community and social identity, and of legitimating continuity, which enabled to connect different social orders and their varying roles within them in non-dynastic ways. Whereas MMS argued that 'mamlukisation' was first and foremost a social phenomenon, MMS-II takes this many steps further by claiming that 'Mamlukisation' was one of these new layers of social meaning. For MMS-II this was a cultural phenomenon of much deeper impact than ever imagined, in the format of the discursive claiming of a particular historical truth and of the invention of a genealogical tradition of one, long-standing and continuous Mamluk political order that connected and explained a socio-culturally fragmented political present through the memory of a shared and glorious political past of *mamlūk* sultans.

2. Re-historicising 15th-century Arabic historiographical texts

This understanding of the cultural production of the 'Mamluk' state as an ideological construction of a particular time, place and social group and as a structural effect of particular 15th-century social practices, which partook in the on-going reproduction of the Cairo sultanate against the background of repeated social fragmentation, will be explored in MMS-II. This project will do this by implementing a particular focus on one set of discursive agents of the political order that represented this invented tradition (actually the main one from a modern heuristic perspective): the contemporary producers of historical truth. Between the 1410s and the 1460s two highly interconnected and politically deeply engaged generations of Egyptian, Syrian and Meccan scholars, administrators and courtiers such as al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442), al-ʿAynī (d. 1451), Ibn Ḥajar al-

ʿAsqalānī (d. 1449), Ibn Taghī Birdī (d. 1470), Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba (d. 1448), al-Biqāʿī (d. 1480), al-Fāsī (d. 1429), Ibn Fahd (d. 1480) and their like participated actively in the booming business of late medieval literary communication and political historiography, writing dozens of texts that explained the complex present of their elite audiences by formulating discursive claims about their rich political, cultural and social pasts. Their collective historiographical engagements in this timeframe created a remarkable amount of historiographical works, often stretching across multiple volumes, mostly integrating detailed local or regional historical accounts into larger temporal or spatial frameworks, and all applying long-standing annalistic and biographical organisational structures. In the majority of cases substantial inter-textualities moreover connected these texts with the works of predecessors and peers. All of this had remarkable and long-lasting effects on their establishment as proponents of historical truth for their own and for preceding times. Many of these multi-volume texts had, and continue to have, an unparalleled impact on the historical knowledge of their authors' own time and space (as well as of preceding times or of other regions and localities). Modern research's continued heavy reliance on the rich detail of these texts —even in its growing combination with other texts and materials— for the study of 13th to 15th-century Syro-Egyptian and other realities actually makes that their 15th-century discursive perspectives continue to impose their paradigmatic meanings on the historical understanding of much of the Islamic Middle Period (10th-15th centuries)!

This important body of Arabic historiographical texts has so far however only partially and haphazardly been identified and studied from any textual perspectives (for one of the very few and equally partial surveys, see Little-1998, esp. 436-40). In fact, Little's observation, made more than fifteen years ago, that "critical analysis of the originality, sources, and possible interdependence of these and other [fifteenth-century] historians has not yet approached the level of scholarship on the [thirteenth- and fourteenth-century] historians" (Little-1998, 433), remains remarkably valid for the majority of these texts. Since Little penned down his assessment more studies about a handful of relevant texts and authors surely have been published, but these remain rather circumscribed and dispersed, and they are at best only partly concerned with the full scope of an author's texts, and not at all with the whole body of historiography produced in this period (see e.g. Kamāl al-Dīn ʿIzz al-Dīn-1987; Guo-2001; Guo-2005; Broadbridge-1999; Broadbridge-2003; Meloy-2010; Perho-2013; Massoud-2007; Massoud-2009; Little-2003). A marked exception is the historian al-Maqrīzī, whose extremely wide-ranging and impressive historiographical production received substantial attention over the years, including in an Arabic collected volume edited by Ziyāda (Ziyāda-1971), in detailed studies by ʿĀshūr and by Kamāl al-Dīn ʿIzz al-Dīn (ʿĀshūr-1983, Kamāl al-Dīn ʿIzz al-Dīn-1990), in various contributions to a 1997 conference volume *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt* (Kennedy-1991), in a separate issue of *Mamlūk Studies Review* (vol. 7/2, 2003), and in many articles, chapters and a monograph by Frédéric Bauden (Bauden - various). Al-Maqrīzī truly stands out, however, as an exception to a more general rule of a remarkable dearth in relevant scholarship, making for an unbalance that goes back to Quatremère's pioneering French translations of parts of al-Maqrīzī's contemporary chronicle in the mid-19th century (Quatremère-1837-42) and that was only very partly redressed by Wiet's and Popper's work on Ibn Taghrī Birdī in the mid-20th century (Wiet-1932; Popper-1954-63; Popper-1955-7). As a result, many questions remain to be asked, a truism that even applies to al-Maqrīzī's atypical case. These questions include the issue of the effects on current historical understandings of this unbalanced quantitative relationship between scholarship on al-Maqrīzī and that on his peers and successors. They also concern the critical nature, academic status and textual relationships of many editions of al-Maqrīzī's and many others' texts that have appeared in recent decades, and that continue to be published and republished, especially by various publishing houses in the Middle East. These many unresolved questions finally certainly also concern the impact on historical knowledge of the positioning of this body of texts at the interface between the above detailed issues of the high social importance and functionality of late medieval Arabic texts in general on the one hand and of normative claims to historical truth, the production of political order, and the reproduction of the Cairo sultanate in a fragmented socio-political context on the other hand.

The agency of Arabic historiographical texts at this practical interface between textual communication and state formation to reproduce and even produce power relations and political meanings of truth, order and authority has so far not been challenged or problematised in any serious fashion. In the majority of cases in which such texts are explored and used, longstanding heuristic traditions rooted in the philological origins of modern studies of medieval Islam are upheld and the detailed narratives of these texts are taken for granted as mere descriptive and at worst only selective or biased containers (as opposed to re/producers) of forms of (as opposed to claims to) historical truth. One recently published book-length study of legal policies and practices in the sultanate aptly illustrates these pervasive positivist attitudes, in its treatment of narratives of cases involving the law in historiographical texts as "evidence" of a social reality making up for the lack of court records and without any need to consider the impact of authorial or wider socio-cultural subjectivities

(Stillt-2011, esp. 7; for a more nuanced related approach, acknowledging authorial subjectivity, but again as a problem rather than as an opportunity, see Martel-Thoumian-2012, esp. 36-7, 301-2). The focus of most research of the booming business of Arabic historiography between the 13th and 16th centuries has in the same positivist vein stuck to the study of technical and factual issues of composition, preservation, categorisation and inter-textuality (Haarmann-1969; Little-1970; Ziyāda-1971; Kamāl al-Dīn ʿIzz al-Dīn-1992; Massoud-2007). A general preference is thus maintained for what Little in his 1998 survey indeed identified as a need for "critical analysis of the originality, sources, and possible interdependence" of texts only. All this remains far removed from the wider approach that in the early 1990s Humphreys already called for —an analysis of "the interplay between the life and career of a historian, the cultural currents in which he was immersed, and the development of his thought and writing" (Humphreys-1991, 135; repeated in Guo-1997, 27)—, and it remains even farther removed from this project's concern for understanding historiographical texts as participating in social practices that engaged with power relations and political meanings. The prevailing technical and factual focus is of course extremely important and valuable, but it leaves the above-mentioned questions unanswered and thus fails to fully account for the epistemological validity and value of the historical knowledge that these texts claim to reproduce. There are only very few exceptions in today's historiographical scholarship to this general rule, and then mainly for the much earlier 13th century, where above all Hirschler and Guo have shown important ways forward towards understanding both the reproductive agencies of Arabic historiographical texts in social practice and the related politics of historical truth and order (Hirschler-2006; Guo-2006; Guo-2011; also relevant in this respect are the examples presented and suggestions made in Levanoni-2001 and Conermann-2008). For historiography's wider context of late medieval cultural production, reproduction and consumption in Syria and Egypt, key social practices such as patronage, competition, knowledge construction and institutions have furthermore been qualified in a number of highly inspiring and innovative ways in the works of Chamberlain and Berkey (Chamberlain-1994; Chamberlain-1997; Berkey-1992; Berkey-2001; also applied in Broadbridge-1999). At the same time, however, the issue of political meanings and the wider discursive contexts of those practices have remained almost entirely unexplored, the prevailing assumption being that despite this general acknowledgement of deep social entanglement cultural meanings and knowledge production itself remained and acted as mere outsiders to power relations involving political order (see esp. Petry-1993; a marked exception would be Berkey-1995, but in this case the total absence of the political order of things in the analysis is equally remarkable). MMS-II seeks to remedy these fundamental epistemological and even ontological shortcomings for some of the most influential Arabic historiographical texts produced in the medieval period. It will do so by situating their construction at the interface between social practices of patronage, competition, other power relations and textual communication on the one hand and political discourses of truth, order, distinction, and 'Mamlukisation' on the other.

3. Claiming historical truth and political order between 1410 and 1470

At the very heart of this project is the rethinking of this underexplored and underestimated historiographical material from these reflexive perspectives of contested claims to historical truth in general and to political order in particular, viewing these texts more generally as discursive constructions of power continuously reproduced in a particular social practice where literary texts, discursive signification and social fragmentation mattered enormously. The main research question of this project concerns the particular relationships between this high-profile historiographical material and the regularly changing social orders that were produced by and around the different sultans and their courts reigning and ruling from Cairo in the decades between 1410 and 1470. This is an approach that follows up from the above-mentioned pioneering work of Hirschler and Guo for earlier period writings (Hirschler-2006; Guo-2006) as well as from our own pioneering work in MMS. It is moreover an approach that is at the same time entirely different from the latter, and much more ambitious than the former, both in the timing and scope of its texts and in the conceptualisation of its questions, socio-cultural contexts and research hypotheses. It is finally an approach that is deeply indebted to highly advanced theoretical approaches in cognate fields of medieval history, which were inspired by the historical thought of, amongst others, Foucault (Foucault—1972; Foucault—1980; see also Hirschler—2013, p. 176) and which were brought to careful and critical fruition by medievalists such as Spiegel (Spiegel—1990; Spiegel—1997, Spiegel—2001). All these different lines of existing and proposed research then join together in the project's main hypothesis of the invention between 1410 and 1470 of an empowering (or 'disciplining') tradition of one political order, captured by the phrase 'Mamlukisation'. Discursively produced and reproduced as a structural effect of various practices that include contemporary literary claims to historical truth, this invention stands for the construction of a particular genealogical social memory of one, longstanding and continuous sultanate of military slaves (*mamlūk*s) that connects and explains a socio-culturally fragmented 15th-century present through the memory

of a shared and glorious past. Testing this hypothesis of the 15th-century cultural production of the order of the 'Mamluk state' is in fact the ground-breaking overarching goal that informs MMS-II's three main specific objectives. It acts as their common epistemological framework of operation and as a shared reflexive touchstone to pursue particular and general conclusions. These objectives actually represent the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of this reflexive exercise, responding each to a particular subject that has appeared from the preceding survey as in urgent need of academic action.

[1] Basic research tools are still lacking for late medieval Arabic historiography, including dedicated reference works taking stock of all historiographical texts, of the status of their textual preservation, of the contexts of their production and consumption, and of completed and ongoing relevant research. In the 20th century, Brockelmann's *GAL* meant a huge breakthrough in this respect for the full scope of Arabic literature, but it is hopelessly out-dated by now (Brockelmann—1937-49). *Christian-Muslim Relations, a bibliographical history, vol. 5 (1350-1500)* offers a much needed, extremely rich and very useful upgrade, but takes a very specific approach to the subject (Thomas & Mallet—2013). Online resources such as the *Mamluk Bibliography Project* (University of Chicago Library, http://mamluk.lib.uchicago.edu) finally offer access to a comprehensive set of bibliographical metadata on Mamluk research published in any language of scholarship, but its ambitions, scope and organisation are very different from being a research tool for late medieval Arabic historiography. Combining all these and related data sets (e.g. http://ottomanhistorians.uchicago.edu/en, http://www.fihrist.org.uk) and enriching them with other relevant metadata in an online and open access reference tool is therefore the first objective of this project. This will create a comprehensive survey of Arabic historiographical texts (in the widest sense) produced in the period 1410-1470, with particular attention for questions of authorship, patronage and inter-textuality, of textual production, consumption and reproduction, and of modern research.

[2] As detailed above, with the exception of al-Maqrīzī and his many historiographical texts, this important body of Arabic historiographical texts has so far only partially and haphazardly been studied, if at all. The project will address this issue via the set-up of in-depth case studies of discrete sets of Arabic historical works from the period 1410-1470, with the precise aim of understanding and situating these texts at the performative interface between power relations involving author, audience and others and discursive meanings including claims to historical truth and to particular political orders. The aim is not to publish new critical editions or annotated translations of these texts, but rather to push their understanding beyond mere positivist assumptions and thus to enable an entirely new and genuine assessment of the historical value of their inter-subjectivities.

[3] There exists to this day no systematic study of the vocabulary that these texts, their authors and their audiences employed to construct their historical narratives of truth and order (and of their opposites). The field continues to have to rely on the standard lexicographical tools produced in the 14th and 15th centuries and in the 19th and 20th centuries (e.g. Lane-1863-93) and after Popper's technical lists for Ibn Taghrī Birdī's chronicles (Popper—1955, 1957, 1963), nothing comparable has ever been endeavoured (with the noted exception of some individual and particular studies, such as Rabbat-2001). The third objective of the project will therefore consist of engaging in a discourse-analytical study of the political vocabularies of Arabic historical works from the period 1410-1470, with a particular focus on identifying and explaining the semantics of signifiers of particular discourses of political order that informed these texts and that, at the same time, materialised through them. The aim is to take stock of and to better understand these vocabularies, and also to inform the preceding second textual objective, allowing both to fully engage with MMS-II's main research question (the relation between constructions of historical truth and of order in 1410-70) and hypothesis (the Mamluk sultanate as a particular product of that relation).

The dialectic interaction between these three levels of socio-culturally informed historiographical analyses is meant to enable the writing of a synthesizing conclusion for the entire project. For the very first time this cultural history of political order in 15th-century Egypt and Syria will be entirely constructed around some of the most informative extant cultural actors (historiographical texts) and around their reproduction of that order in their vocabularies, narrative constructions and wider inter-subjectivities, rather than around any dogmatic structural framework of state, society and culture.

4. Impact: from the exceptionalism of the Mamluk State to a cultural *histoire croisée*

My proposed research will help to redefine the full complexity of the late medieval Syro-Egyptian sultanate's socio-cultural dynamism and wider historical place and meaning from more nuanced and more sophisticated perspectives than have ever before been considered. This project will put a final end to traditional understandings of and socio-cultural explanations from an autonomous Mamluk state perspective

and it will do away with late medieval Syro-Egyptian history as simply rooted in military slavery, physical violence and leviathan statehood and as doomed to cultural, social and political decline and demise. Instead of the reductionist and essentialist pitfalls entailed by that top-down structural model, validation of the project hypothesis of 'Mamlukisation' and of contemporary Arabic historiography's performative engagement with ideas of truth and political order in a context of social fragmentation will promote an innovative, more egalitarian and segmented, and more dynamic conceptual framework of late medieval Syro-Egyptian social practice. Today's many textual and other remnants of contemporary claims to truth, order and legitimate authority will only then be awarded their full historiographical value, within an inter-subjective context of particular power relations and their performative significations by *mamlūk*s and by many other actors, and of the endless and diverse social and cultural re/production of structural effects such as the Cairo sultanate's state. The project's more concrete outcomes such as the reference tool containing a comprehensive 1410-70 Arabic historiography dataset, the case studies of set texts, and the qualification of political vocabularies will then not just fill in highly discomforting gaps in current Mamluk knowledge practices. They will all also be able to be put to further use by me and by others to pursue and stimulate ongoing research along similar and related lines of cross-disciplinary socio-cultural inquiry of actors and power relations, of processes of discursive signification, and of all kinds of structural effects, in 15th-century synchronic as well as in longer-term diachronic perspectives. This will allow to further coming to much better terms with all kinds of well-known but little understood social and cultural phenomena at one of the main global crossroads of late medieval and early modern routes of flows and circulations of rich varieties of people, goods, valuables, and ideas, all of which continue until today to be identified in awkward and unjust ways as mere products of a unique Mamluk State.

Beyond the narrow limits of late medieval Syro-Egyptian history, the results of my research will also open up new dimensions and horizons for trans-cultural and comparative history, generating extremely important avenues for new research into a *histoire croisée* of late medieval Islamic West-Asia and even of the Eurasian region. From the early 15th century onwards, and parallel to the Syro-Egyptian sultanate, the Ottoman sultanate in Anatolia and on the Balkans managed to re-emerge from a status of near annihilation, to become for the next five centuries one of the world's great powers. It will be extremely relevant to compare the cultural production of the successful Ottoman case (and of other West-Asian Turco-Mongol polities) with that of its Mamluk contemporary, considering that the cultural elites in both regions (and in fact throughout West-Asia) were deeply interconnected in the 15th century (as opposed to the 16th century and beyond!). They therefore certainly deserve to be explored from the perspective of constituting one community of political and cultural discourse (see e.g. Voll-1994).

It is finally a truism that the study of medieval European (and other, such as Byzantine) historiographies have by now achieved a level of complexity in the questions that are being asked and in the problems that are being pursued that have no parallels in the study of late medieval Arabic historiography. This creates an analytical imbalance that forfeits any serious comparative research. This project will also substantially contribute to overcoming such an obstruction, enabling further research into the particularities and connections of historiographical as well as of wider discursive traditions, all being built on parallel late antique roots as well as on varieties of connectivities on all sides of the Mediterranean (Horden & Purcell—2000).

MMS-II Methodology

MMS-II turns dominant methodological approaches to late medieval Syro-Egyptian history upside-down, by putting the extant narrative sources at the centre of historical action, rather than by seeing them as mere elitist mediators between that action and the historian (see also Hirschler-2006). This project furthermore combines these innovative, but much needed, corrections to traditional scholarship practices in the field of late medieval Islamic history with an inclusive definition of the textual sources that are considered relevant for this project. The project wishes to include in its analyses any Arabic literary text produced between ca. 1410 and 1470 (roughly from the execution of sultan al-Nāṣir Faraj in 1412 to the accession of sultan Qāytbāy in 1468) in any locality touched by the political gravity of the Cairo court (including Egyptian, Syrian, Anatolian and Hijazi domains) making any kind of explicit or implicit claims to engaging with contemporary historical truths. This includes all the grand narrative annalistic chronographies and biographical dictionaries that have traditionally informed —and continue to do so— most research of Syro-Egyptian society and culture between the 13th and mid-15th centuries. This also includes many other texts, such as panegyrics, individual biographies, treatises and other specimens of Arabic prose and poetry, as well as more 'marginal' historiographical texts, produced in the many peripheries of the sultanate. Rough estimates of known texts that meet this definition range between 50 and 80 titles. Quite a few of these consist of multiple volumes, and most of them have been preserved in part or in full in manuscript copies kept in major library collections around the world (especially in Egypt, Turkey, Europe and the US) and have been published at least once in more or less critical editions.

MMS-II's three specific objectives, operating on three interlocking levels of macro-, meso- and microanalysis of survey, textual study and political vocabulary, also represent three overlapping stages in the project's organisation. This ensures that a pragmatic balance can be struck between that wide heuristic approach towards the project's textual sources and equally much needed detailed analyses of the constituents of this inclusive textual corpus.

1. Survey: unlocking late medieval Arabic historiography

In the first stage (Months 7 to 30) a publicly accessible dataset of all known Arabic historiographical texts — as defined by the above inclusive criteria of time, space, and genre— will be created. Twelve authors have already been identified as having produced a relevant and substantial range of historiographical texts in the 1410-70 timeframe. These authors are the following: al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442), al-ʿAynī (d. 1451), Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 1449), Ibn Taghī Birdī (d. 1470), al-Maqdisī (d. 1483), Ibn al-ʿIrāqī (d. 1423), Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba (d. 1448), al-Biqāʿī (d. 1480), Ibn ʿArabshāh (d. 1450), Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā (fl. 1424-37), al-Fāsī (d. 1429) and Ibn Fahd (d. 1480). More authors and texts will be added to this list in the course of this first stage, considering that many late medieval Arabic literary texts remain to be studied and even to be rediscovered in manuscript collections around the world (Bauer—2005). The aim of the dataset will be to become as comprehensive as possible, to remain open-ended, and to create a 'cultural biography' for each text (taking inspiration from Kopytoff—1986), providing a complete set of the following metadata in a bi-lingual Arabic-English format:

- authorship, title(s), genre, period covered
- dedication(s) & patronage
- inter-textual relations
- textual production, consumption and reproduction = detailed descriptions of
    o manuscripts, incl. marginal manuscript notes of reader- and ownership
    o editions
    o translations
    o studies & research projects

This dataset will be integrated in the relational database that was built for MMS (MP3), and that already included a separate source file (currently containing a more limited set of metadata for 27 historiographical texts and informing 9,256 distinct narrative reports of Arabic text with English summaries); this file will be further developed, expanded and adapted to cater for the historiographical needs of MMS-II, thus also contributing to the further development of MP3 into a full-fledged highly advanced research tool. Exploring opportunities of OCR-software to digitize Arabic texts and of encoding Arabic texts for data analysis (TEI) will also be pursued at this stage (this can however at this stage only be presented as an exploration, because previous experiences learned that such tools are in general less well developed for material in the cursive Arabic script).

We will furthermore set up a co-operation with the *Mamluk Bibliography Project* (University of Chicago

Library, http://mamluk.lib.uchicago.edu), pursuing the exchange of data between MBP and MP3, to both datasets' mutual benefit. This will also include providing accessibility on the Internet to the wider scholarly community, via —next to our own web-access www.mamluk.ugent.be/propopography— cooperation with the well-established Mamluk Studies Resources web-services of the *Middle East Documentation Center* of the University of Chicago (http://mamluk.uchicago.edu). An important local partner for the development and creation of this dataset will be the Library Lab of the Faculty Library of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of UGent (www.flw.ugent.be/bibliotheek/librarylab), which offers digital facilities and expertise to members of the faculty. This will also be true for the Ghent Centre for Digital Humanities (www.GhentCDH.ugent.be), set up to support DH projects across the university, and for the newly established regional research network Digital Humanities Flanders. A specialist external developer will furthermore be engaged for the actual technical development and maintenance of the dataset's technical infrastructure within the larger framework of MP3.

The particular MMS-II database file of relevant texts and their cultural biographies will then in the best of circumstances be able to become the first reference tool of its kind in the field of late medieval Arabo-Islamic history, and it will allow the wider scholarly community quick and easy access to these cultural biographies, which may then be mined for a variety of academic purposes.

2. Texts: Historicising contexts, structures and meanings

In the second stage of MMS-II (Months 13 to 60) the mining of this dataset will be directed towards the particular exploration and analysis of discrete sets of texts. This cannot and will not be a comprehensive exercise for all the texts identified as relevant in the first stage; a selection of cases will be made, but imposing any such a selection at this point involves substantial risks of inscribing reductionist or functionalist assumptions into the project. Selection will therefore be left to depend on the expertise of the postdoctoral members of the team that the PI will be able to set up for MMS-II and on quantitative and qualitative criteria derived from the metadata in the dataset (incl. an author's relative importance, manuscripts, inter-textual references, etc…). At this point it is nevertheless already clear that a reasonable spread in time and space will have to be pursued, and that there is an obvious select list of more likely candidates for such case studies (al-Maqrīzī[1], al-ʿAynī, Ibn Taghrī Birdī and Ibn Ḥajar for Egypt; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, Ibn al-Shiḥna and al-Biqāʿī for Syria; Ibn Fahd and al-Fāsī for the Hijaz). These case studies of discrete sets of texts by different members of the MMS-II team will take their inspiration from a similar study that the PI is currently finalising on a text by al-Maqrīzī (Van Steenbergen—2016). Methodologically, they will be informed by research approaches, insights and tools developed within the overlapping contexts of New Historicism (as a combined interest in the textuality of history and the historicity of texts) (see e.g. Gallagher & Greenblatt—2000), Narratology (the study of narrative structures, with a particular emphasis on current trends of contextualist and cultural narratological approaches) (see e.g. Nünning-2009) and Social Semiotics (the study of signification, or the awarding of meaning to 'signs' [in this case historiographical texts], as a highly dynamic communicative process that is never fixed in form and content, as it is 'multimodal' and defined and continuously redefined by specific discursive and social realities, in particular by the complex power relationships of those involved in the communicative act) (see e.g. Van Leeuwen—2005). Informed by these approaches and carefully deploying the heuristic and epistemological tools that they offer, key issues that will be developed in each of these case studies will be the following:

A. establishing and revealing the contexts of these set texts: Each case study will reconstruct the relevant socio-economic, cultural and political dynamics of continuity and change, and the author's positioning within them, his engagement with them through social practices such as competition and patronage, and the studied texts' relations with these practices.

B. analysing the texts: Each case study will pursue a detailed analysis of the textual narratives from the perspective of structures such as story and plot, will reconstruct textual strategies such as narrative modes, time, narrator and focalisation, and will identify inter- and para-textual relations.

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[1] It needs to be noted here that the quantitative preponderance of al-Maqrīzī's texts in academic research has recently culminated in a collaborative publication project —the Bibliotheca Maqriziana series, ed. F. Bauden (Leiden: Brill)— organized around set texts of this prolific author and engaging with some of this project's questions, even though mainly from a more technical perspective of critical text edition and annotated translation. MMS-II will therefore focus on other authors and texts first and foremost, trying to remedy some of the persistent imbalances that disfavour al-Maqrīzī's peers and successors and seeking above all complementarity with this Bibliotheca Maqriziana (in which the PI is already actively involved), but without ever loosing sight of al-Maqrīzī's impact and importance and while remaining open to the pursuance of our own questions of textual agency for al-Maqrīzī's textual production too.

C. unravelling meanings: Each case study will define textual themes, didactic purposes and layers of meaning communicated by or via the text or texts and it will reconstruct the text or texts as communicative acts and as social performance in complex discursive contexts of power relations.

Individual team members will give shape to the results of their research via regular publication of research articles and of book-length studies. Three workshops with invited specialists in years 2, 3 and 4 of the project, dedicated to these three key issues of contexts, texts and meanings respectively, will contribute to this stage, resulting also in the publication of three collected volumes.

3. Vocabularies: Textualising historical truth and political order

In the third stage (Months 31 to 60) MMS-II will zoom in on the political vocabularies that were employed in the texts that are surveyed in stage one and that are studied in stage two. These vocabularies will be culled from the ca. 100,000 'factoids' about political individuals and their interactions that have currently already been recorded in the MP3-database, complemented with the material and particular vocabularies that will become available or that will be identified in the project's stages one and two. These vocabularies of order, power, status, distinction, entitlement and legitimacy (and 'Mamluk'-ness) will be approached through the prism of Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA is an interdisciplinary approach that consists of a number of methods and techniques that have been developed in pragmatics, sociolinguistics, intellectual and conceptual history and political sociology (Fairclough—2014). It offers a theoretically grounded toolbox for decoding texts and exposing among other things their political-ideological contents. Through a close reading it becomes possible to reveal paradigmatic 'chains of signifiers', to study denotation and connotation within historical lexicography and historical semantics, and to scrutinize implicit presuppositions, oppositions and contradictions in the discourses. In the project the implementation of the approach of CDA will be aimed at identifying and explaining paradigmatic 'chains of signifiers' of political order and at linking these textual political discourses to wider discourses that emerged from contemporary social practice. This will have to be done in on-going dialectic interaction with the other two levels of analysis and their respective collective and textual engagements with the era's social practices and political discourses. A monograph-length study on the politics of historical truth and order in the Syro-Egyptian sultanate between 1410 and 1470 will bring together the results of this third stage, as a synthesis that will simultaneously conclude stage three, weigh the validity of the 'Mamlukisation'-hypothesis, and formulate conclusions for the entire project.

Research calendar and key intermediate goals (KIG)

The following research calendar has been devised to ensure timely achievement of envisaged objectives.

Preparatory Phase:

January - June 2017 will be dedicated to **setting up the project**:
- the PI and the research coordinator will develop a concrete **plan of action** (team organisation, project calendar, project website, organisation of project meetings and workshops, reporting arrangements, allocation of budget etc...);
- the PI and the research assistant & co-ordinator will organise the technical upgrade and **expansion of the MP3-FileMaker-database** with an external developer (selected through public tender procedures) and they will set up co-operation with Chicago and with local DH-partners;
- they will jointly draw up a r**eading list of key project texts** and **a preliminary bibliography of relevant historiographical texts**, and they will identify library acquisition priorities;
- the PI will begin procedures for the **employment of the postdoc** team members.

Stage 1:

Starting in **July 2017**, **the first stage** of the project, the dataset (Survey), will be completed by **June 2019** (2 years) (**KIG 1**). The PI and the first research assistant (half-time) collaborate on this.

Stage 2:

The second stage of the project (Texts) will begin in **January 2018** and end in **December 2021** (4 years). Three postdocs will carry out studies of discrete sets of texts under the PI's supervision:
- Two will pursue individual research projects on Egyptian texts, one on non-Egyptian texts.
- The team will organize 3 workshops (**KIG 2-3-4**), in 2018 (contexts), 2019 (texts) and 2020 (meanings), with invited specialists, pre-circulated papers, and the publication of 3 volumes of conference proceedings (**KIG 5-6-7**).
- The postdocs will furthermore publish every year at least one article on their individual research in an international peer reviewed journal (**KIG 8-9-10-11**) and they will each work on a book length study that will be prepared for submission for publication with an established international publisher in 2021 (**KIG 12**).
- They will also be stimulated throughout these years to apply for additional and follow-up grants, and to encourage and enable selected graduate students to apply for extra funding for the participation in MMS-II with additional individual research projects on set Egyptian and non-Egyptian texts.

Stage 3:

The third stage of the project will begin in **July 2019** and end in **December 2021**. The PI and the second research assistant will collaborate on this.
- The first two years (**July 2019-June 2021**) will be dedicated to the identification of vocabularies and their analysis via CDA. Results of this will be published in the format of two research articles (**KIG 13-14**).
- The final six months (July-December 2021) will be entirely dedicated to the writing of the project's concluding monograph, consisting of an entirely new **cultural history of political order in 15th-century Egypt and Syria** (**KIG 15**).

In the final month (**December 2021**) a **closing** international and trans-disciplinary conference will furthermore be organised by the MMS-II team on cultural histories of political order in 15th-century Eurasia. The aim will be to disseminate project results to the wider academic community, to engage with their impact for Mamluk and for wider late medieval and early modern studies, and to provide inspiration for the development of a related *histoire croisée* approach with a focus on cultures of political order. (**KIG 16**) Proceedings of this conference will also be prepared for publication (**KIG 17**). In this integrated and clearly organised manner MMS-II will present the first comprehensive survey and collective historical interpretation of the rich and defining Arabic historiographies that were produced in the Syro-Egyptian sultanate between 1410 and 1470, from the reflexive perspective of historical truths that are discursive constructions of power continuously reproduced in social practices generating political order, state formation, 'Mamlukisation', or any other structural effects.

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