

From Archive to Archival Practices: Rethinking the Preservation of Mamluk Administrative Documents

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This article proposes a new approach to the question of why so few Arabic documents have survived in their original archival context. Taking the Mamluk period as a case study it argues that the category “archive” itself needs to be reconfigured, away from the idea of fixed archival spaces, or even a Mamluk state archive, toward archival practices. These archival practices were spread across the Mamluk realm and involved numerous actors, which included the central bureaucracy in Cairo, individual secretaries, and, most importantly, the small-scale administration managed by officers. These archival practices emerge not from normative and narrative texts, but primarily from a consideration of archival traces on surviving documents.

I. INTRODUCTION

The supposed scarcity of documentary material for Arabic-speaking societies prior to the sixteenth century has been intensively discussed in the field of Middle Eastern history.¹ With the publication of Michael Chamberlain’s *Knowledge and Social Practice* in 1994 and his suggestion that the non-survival of documents reflected a social logic of how actors in medieval Middle Eastern societies decided to use and, more importantly, not to use documentary evidence, the debate gained additional fervor.² His argument found little sympathy and was described as “empirically untrue,”³ a “non sequitur,”⁴ and making “a virtue of a false necessity.”⁵ Repeatedly the critique focused on the argument that many more documents

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1. For an overview of this debate, see F. Bauden, “Du destin des archives en Islam: Analyse des données et éléments de réponse,” in *La correspondance entre souverains, princes et cités-états: Approches croisées entre l’Orient musulman, l’Occident latin et Byzance (XIIIe–début XVIe s.)*, ed. D. Aigle and S. Péquignot (Turnhout, 2013), 27–49, at 28–33.

2. M. Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, 1994), 11–18.

3. T. El-Leithy, “Living Documents, Dying Archives: Towards a Historical Anthropology of Medieval Arabic Archives,” *al-Qanṭara* 32,2 (2011): 389–434, at 391.

4. F. Bauden, “Mamluk Era Documentary Studies: The State of the Art,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9,1 (2005): 15–60, at 17.

5. M. Rustow, “A Petition to a Woman at the Fatimid Court (413–414 A.H./1022–23 C.E.),” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 73,1 (2010): 1–27, at 23.

survived than hitherto assumed and would one day be found.⁶ While this is a valid observation, it misses a crucial point concerning these societies' attitudes toward document preservation. To understand why documents have not come down to us in the form of archival collections, it is not enough to show that documents have survived—rather, we must explain the “archives’ silence.”⁷

The present article suggests a new angle for reconsidering the question of document preservation, taking the Arabic Eastern Mediterranean during the Mamluk period as point of departure. It starts from the premise that the category “archive” itself needs to be problematized and that the assumed coherence and centralized character of what might be called the “Mamluk state archive” needs to be questioned.⁸ Rejecting this idea of the centralized archive enables us to reconfigure research into attitudes toward document preservation in terms of archival practices. These practices, for their part, were inscribed in specific cultural and social fields well beyond the central bureaucracy in Cairo. Seen thus, the Mamluk “archive” is not a stable spatial entity and a product, but rather a multifaceted set of processes spread across the Mamluk realm. Against this background the article will consider the range of archival practices that existed in Egypt and Syria during the Mamluk period in order to take a fresh look at the preservation of documentary evidence in medieval Middle Eastern societies.

Reappraising the archive as a set of cultural and social practices rather than a spatial category is supported by the surging interest in the archive in historical studies at large. This focus on archives is to some extent a legacy of post-modernist appropriations of the term, such as, most famously, in Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* and Derrida's *Archive Fever*.⁹ Their largely ahistorical reading of the theoretical archive inadvertently contributed to the upswing in historical studies on the archive.¹⁰ Post-colonial studies in particular took a vivid interest in the category of the archive and decisively contributed to the turn from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject, which subsequently filtered into the study of medieval and early modern history.¹¹ One of the most enriching trends in this scholarship has been the focus on the multitude of actors involved in archival practices.¹² Homing in on administrative documents from Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Syria during the pre-Ottoman and especially the Mamluk era, this article takes up this archival turn and makes two main

6. For instance, P. Sijpesteijn, “The Archival Mind in Early Islamic Egypt: Two Arabic Papyri,” in *From al-Andalus to Khurasan: Documents from the Medieval Muslim World*, ed. P. Sijpesteijn et al. (Leiden, 2007), 163–86.

7. J. Loiseau, “Le silence des archives: Conservation documentaire et historiographie de l'État dans le sultanat mamelouk (XIIIe-XVIe siècle),” in *L'autorité de l'écrit au Moyen Âge*, Société des historiens médiévistes de l'Enseignement supérieur public (Paris, 2009), 285–98.

8. The assumption that the period's collections can be read in some way as centralized state archives has a long lineage, which tends to read premodern archival practices as part of a linear development toward the modern state. See, for example, Ernst Posner (“Twelfth Century ‘Job Descriptions’ for the Registrar and the Archivist of the Fāṭimid State Chancery in Egypt,” *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs* 25 [1972]: 25–31), who analyzed the Fāṭimid “state archives” in order to understand how “the concept of a rational government” developed (p. 25).

9. M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, tr. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972); J. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, tr. E. Prenowitz (Chicago, 1996).

10. R. C. Head, “Preface: Historical Research on Archives and Knowledge Cultures: An Interdisciplinary Wave,” *Archival Science* 10 (2010): 191–94.

11. See, for instance, A. L. Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87–109; S. McSheffrey, “Detective Fiction in the Archives: Court Records and the Uses of Law in Late Medieval England,” *History Workshop Journal* 65 (2008): 65–78.

12. See, for instance, F. de Vivo, “Coeur de l'état, lieu de tension: Le tournant archivistique vu de Venise (XVe–XVIIIe siècle),” *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 68 (2013): 699–728.

arguments on archival practices: the first, in a methodological vein, is to continue to move away from the dominance of narrative (mostly chronicles) and normative (mostly administrative handbooks) sources and focus on the documents themselves, especially notes on manuscripts;¹³ and the second is that by questioning the archive as a stable entity and reconfiguring it as a process we will be able to capture a wider array of administrative archival practices. A multitude of decentralized practices and archival actors existed not only within the central Mamluk administration in Cairo but also, and perhaps more importantly, outside the city, reflecting very different archival concerns.

II. SITES OF ARCHIVAL PRACTICES

The turn from archive to archival practices is of particular usefulness for Middle Eastern history owing to the particular contexts in which premodern Arabic documents have reached us. While there is little doubt that much documentary material has survived,¹⁴ the Middle Eastern material is special in that the organic relationship between the record and the generator of that record is almost always broken; i.e., documentary records have more often than not survived devoid of their original archival context. They are not held as part of larger collections; rather they have often been preserved, ironically, as a result of counter-archival practices, to be discussed below. This absence of original archival collections has relegated the field of Middle Eastern history to the margins of wider historical discussions on archives, yet the focus on archival practices opens new possibilities of transregional debate since it sits very well with the way documents have been preserved in the Arabic Eastern Mediterranean. Rather than searching for what was clearly of limited importance for those societies—the archive—the very rich documentary evidence calls for a rethinking of the phenomena—archival practices—that were at the very heart of many cultural and social processes. In consequence, the field of Middle Eastern history will not only be in a position to contribute to wider discussions of archival issues, but can also evolve by engaging in discussions with other regional histories.

Turning away from the fixed spatial category of the archive, in what frameworks then might the preservation of documents, and thus archival practices, have been useful and purposeful? In other words, at which social loci did institutions, groups, and individuals decide to preserve (or discard) the documents that were produced in their lifetime or that they had inherited from previous generations? In Mamluk Egypt and Syria—and arguably elsewhere in the premodern Middle East—there were five main social sites, partly overlapping, where the preservation of documents clustered and where at least temporary archival practices developed: where justice was dispensed (legal archival practices); where transactions referring to one specific kin group were documented (family-centered archival practices); where institutional experience was administered, such as endowed madrasas and monasteries (institutional archival practices); where knowledge was transmitted (educational archival practices); and where the state's resources and transactions were managed (administrative archival practices).

These archival practices are traceable despite their not always being aimed at ensuring a document's future accessibility. The most famous result of such counter-archival practices is

13. On this, see A. Görke and K. Hirschler, eds., *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources* (Würzburg, 2011). Consequently, the very rich corpus of medieval Arabic documents cited in chronicles, administrative handbooks, collections of letters (*inshāʾ*, *munshaʾāt*), etc., is not discussed here.

14. See, for instance, P. Sijpesteijn et al., "The Checklist of Arabic Documents" (available at <https://www.uzh.ch/cmsssl/ori/isap/isapchecklist.html>, last update Sept. 26, 2013, accessed June 2014).

the Geniza collection—decisively not an archive¹⁵—in the Ben Ezra Synagogue of Cairo, which was not inscribed in practices of document preservation, but in a religiously acceptable disposal of “sacred trash.”¹⁶ Such practices were widespread—the Damascus Papers from Qubbat al-Khazna in the Umayyad Mosque are the best known Syrian example in an Islamic context.¹⁷ In the same vein, other documents—as discussed below—survived owing to similar counter-archival practices, such as recycling scrap paper or reusing documents in textiles.

With regard to legal archival practices, Wael Hallaq has argued that their central site was the judge’s *dīwān*, the sum of his records.¹⁸ From the Mamluk era the most important surviving collection of legal documents is in the Ḥaram collection in Jerusalem. With their folding marks and holes these documents give an idea of the physicality of such legal recordkeeping; Ulrich Haarmann has posited that the creases on some indicate that they were sewn, bound, and filed,¹⁹ and in the same vein, holes might indicate an alternative way of storing the material by binding them together with string.²⁰ Filing notes on the documents’ margins (in the case of estate inventories indicating the name of the person concerned, the month in which the inventory was conducted, and an indication whether heirs were absent or present), as well as registration notes, also are evidence of archival practices.²¹ As Christian Müller has convincingly shown, however, the Ḥaram collection in its present state is not the remnant of an archive, as has been assumed.²² The documents show no sign of a coherent filing or binding system, and, more importantly, only a small fraction is court-certified; without this oral attestation, the rest lost validity and were thus of little interest for long-term archiving. The collection was assembled in the context of an inquiry triggered by a corruption allega-

15. As, for instance, in the title of S. C. Reif, *A Jewish Archive from Old Cairo: The History of Cambridge University’s Genizah Collection* (Richmond, Surrey, 2000).

16. A. Hoffman and P. Cole, *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza* (New York, 2011).

17. On the Damascus Papers, see A. D’Ottone, “Manuscripts as Mirrors of a Multilingual and Multicultural Society: The Case of the Damascus Find,” in *Negotiating Co-Existence: Communities, Cultures and Convivencia in Byzantine Society*, ed. B. Crostini and S. La Porta (Trier, 2013), 63–88; C. Bandt and A. Rattmann, “Die Damaskusreise Bruno Violets 1900/1901 zur Erforschung der Qubbet el-Chazne,” *Codices Manuscripti* 76 (2011): 1–20. On the Damascus Papers that are now held in Istanbul, see J.-M. Mouton et al., *Mariage et séparation à Damas au Moyen Âge: Un corpus de 62 documents juridiques inédits entre 337/948 et 698/1299* (Paris, 2013); D. Sourdel and J. Sourdel-Thomine, *Certificats de pèlerinage d’époque Ayyoubide: Contribution à l’histoire de l’idéologie de l’Islam au temps des croisades* (Paris, 2006).

18. W. Hallaq, “The *qāḍī*’s *dīwān* (*sijill*) before the Ottomans,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61,3 (1998): 415–36. On the question of ‘Abbāsīd-period legal archives, see also M. Tillier, “Le statut et la conservation des archives judiciaires dans l’Orient abbasside (IIe/VIIIe–IVe/Xe siècle): Un réexamen,” in *L’autorité de l’écrit*, 263–76; idem, *Les cadis d’Iraq et l’état abbaside (132/750–334/945)* (Damascus, 2009), 400–407.

19. Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection no. 61; see U. Haarmann, “The Library of a Fourteenth-Century Jerusalem Scholar,” *Der Islam* 61,2 (1984): 327–33.

20. D. Little, “The Significance of the Haram Documents for the Study of Medieval Islamic History,” *Der Islam* 57,2 (1980): 189–219, at 206.

21. For instance, the estate inventories Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection nos. 102, 160, 173, 261, 365, 378, 379, 418, 432, 437, 443, 493, 495, 527, 549, 635, 563, 686, 733, 750, 760, 845; the numbers refer to D. Little, *A Catalogue of the Islamic Documents from al-Ḥaram aš-Šarīf in Jerusalem* (Wiesbaden/Beirut, 1984), which should now be used in conjunction with C. Müller, *Der Kadi und seine Zeugen: Studie der mamlukischen Haram-Dokumente aus Jerusalem* (Wiesbaden, 2013). See also D. Little, “Six Fourteenth-Century Purchase Deeds for Slaves from al-Ḥaram aš-Šarīf,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 131 (1981): 297–337.

22. See, for example, D. Little, “The Use of Documents for the Study of Mamluk History,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 1 (1997): 1–13, at 11–12; Bauden, “Destin,” 29 n. 9; W. Diem, “Philologisches zu den mamlūkischen Erlassen, Eingaben und Dienstschriften des Jerusalemer al-Ḥaram aš-Šarīf,” *Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik* 33 (1997): 7–67, at 15.

tion leveled at a judge in the late eighth/fourteenth century.²³ While there is thus little doubt that archival practices existed in the legal sphere, the fact that we have lost, as it were, our main Mamluk-period legal archive shows that the matter of the legal archive is less straightforward than hitherto assumed. Surviving pre-Ottoman legal documents are thus not found in archival collections linked to the individuals or institutions that generated them; rather, they survive either because they have been preserved in the archives of their recipients (often religious minorities)²⁴ or as a result of counter-archival practices.²⁵

In contrast to pre-Ottoman legal and administrative archival practices, kinship-centered archival practices produced compact collections that have occasionally survived the centuries—elite households had a strong incentive to preserve documents relevant for legal matters, especially those relating to issues of estate ownership,²⁶ e.g., the third/ninth-century papers of the Banū ‘Abd al-Mun‘im in the Fayyūm,²⁷ the papers of the Coptic Banū Bifām in the same region from the Fāṭimid period,²⁸ the Ayyūbid paper fragments linked to the trader Abū Mufarrij and his son Ibrāhīm in the “sheikh’s house” in Quṣayr on the Egyptian Red Sea shore,²⁹ and the cartulary (*jāmi‘ al-mustanadāt*) of Mamluk deeds of the Ughulbak family of Aleppo.³⁰

Narrative sources also testify to the importance of families as important sites of long-term archival practices. The administrator and author of the most splendid manual for secretaries, al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418), refers, for instance, to an *iqṭā‘* grant purportedly written by the Prophet Muḥammad for the benefit of the Companion Tamīm al-Dārī, which was

23. C. Müller, “The Ḥaram al-Šarīf Collection of Arabic Legal Documents in Jerusalem: A Mamlūk Court Archive?” *al-Qanṭara* 32,2 (2011): 435–59; idem, *Der Kadi und seine Zeugen*, 509–27.

24. One of the few surviving Fāṭimid legal documents, for instance, was preserved in the Rabbinite Synagogue in Cairo’s Zuwayla Quarter; see R. Gottheil, “An Eleventh-Century Document Concerning a Cairo Synagogue,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* (1907): 467–539. It also needs to be stressed that other legal actors, such as the *muḥtasib*, did not leave any documents whatsoever; see K. Stilt, *Islamic Law in Action: Authority, Discretion, and Everyday Experiences in Mamluk Egypt* (New York, 2011), 7.

25. For counter-archival practices, see legal documents from the Damascus Papers: J. Sourdel-Thomine et al., “Un acte notarié d’époque bouride: Pouvoir politique et propriété immobilière dans un quartier de Damas au XIIe siècle,” *Annales Islamologiques* 29 (1995): 59–74; Mouton et al., *Mariage et séparation*. For the changes in archival practices during the early Ottoman period, most importantly the move toward a system of impersonal verification, see N. Michel, “Les Circassiens avaient brûlé les registres,” in *Conquête ottomane de l’Égypte (1517): Arrière-plan, impact, échos*, ed. B. Lellouch and N. Michel (Leiden, 2012), 225–68, esp. 253–65.

26. The boundary between family and administrative archival practices is inherently fluid when it comes to the management of *iqṭā‘*s within the framework of the Mamluk officers’ local administrations discussed below.

27. Y. Rāghib, *Marchands d’étoffes du Fayyūm au IIIe/IXe siècle d’après leurs archives (actes et lettres)* (Cairo, 1982–92).

28. C. Gaubert and J.-M. Mouton, “Présentation des archives d’une famille copte du Fayoum à l’époque fatimide,” in *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies I*, ed. M. Immerzeel and J. van der Vliet (Leuven, 2004), 505–17.

29. L. Guo, *Commerce, Culture, and Community in a Red Sea Port in the Thirteenth Century: The Arabic Documents from Quseir* (Leiden, 2004); K. Burke, “Archaeological Texts and Contexts on the Red Sea: The Sheikh’s House at Quseir al-Qadim” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 2007); A. Regourd, “Folding of a Paper Document from Quseir al-Qadim: A Method of Archiving?” *al-‘Usur al-Wusta* 20 (2008): 13–16.

30. S. Saghbini, *Mamlukische Urkunden aus Aleppo: Die Urkundensammlung (jāmi‘ al-mustanadāt) der mamlukisch-aleppinischen Familie Uğulbak* (Hildesheim, 2005). Beyond Egypt and Syria one can also mention the documents pertaining to a certain Muḥammad al-Qirbilyānī from late ninth/fifteenth-century al-Andalus; see A. Zomeño, “From Private Collections to Archives: How Christians Kept Arabic Legal Documents in Granada,” *al-Qanṭara* 32,2 (2011): 461–79, at 463–64; L. Seco de Lucena, “Un nuevo texto en árabe dialectal granadino,” *al-Andalus* 20 (1955): 153–65.

kept by the latter's descendants.³¹ We do not have a surviving, pre-1500 family archive from Egypt or Syria that was intentionally preserved as a collection of documents—though the context in which, for instance, the Banū 'Abd al-Mun'im's documents were found is so unclear that this possibility cannot be entirely excluded.³² Significantly, archival practices of families—and, as we will see, other archival practices as well—have mostly come to light through archaeological work. In the course of narrating the history of his family, the rather minor Buḥtur amirs of the Gharb region in Mount Lebanon, the chronicler Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā (d. 839/1436) clearly indicates, however, that family archives existed—he cites over two dozen documents in its possession going back to the sixth/twelfth century.³³ The preservation of this family archive might have come down to the very specific situation in which the Buḥturids, as Druze, found themselves: the documents, and arguably Ibn Yaḥyā's chronicle as well, served to demonstrate the family's loyalty to Muslim rulers and to provide evidence for its continuous stance against non-Muslim enemies.³⁴

Similarly, institutional archival practices of monasteries, synagogues, and endowed Islamic institutions such as the madrasa, the mausoleum, and *dār al-ḥadīth* have left surviving collections. These are of a larger scale and, more importantly, they are the only archival collections still in situ. In this sense they provide a much better impression of premodern archival practices, although the documents preserved at non-Muslim institutions, such as St. Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai, the Karaite Synagogue and the Coptic Patriarchal Archives in Cairo, and the Franciscan Monastery and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem, are of limited value for our purposes.³⁵ Of promise for future research on archival practices are the endowment deeds for Muslim religious institutions, which were transferred from their respective institutions to the central archives of the emerging nation states in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³⁶

31. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fī shīnā'at al-inshā'*, ed. M. H. Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, 1987), 6: 190. *Iqtā'* designates tax revenue, generally from land, that the ruler granted for military service frequently in lieu of a salary.

32. Rāghib, *Marchands d'étoffes*, 1: ix–xiii.

33. Ṣāliḥ ibn Yaḥyā, *Ta'rikh Bayrūt: Récits des anciens de la famille de Buḥtur b. 'Alī, Émir du Gharb de Beyrouth*, ed. F. Hours and K. Salibi (Beirut, 1969).

34. P. Moukartzel, "La qualité bien rare de Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyā parmi les historiens orientaux au moyen âge: Écrire l'histoire des émirs Buḥtur en utilisant les archives familiales," *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 127 (2010): 239–57, at 242.

35. For an overview of these institutional archival practices, in addition to references cited below, see Little, "Use of Documents"; Bauden, "Mamluk Era Documentary Studies"; L. Reinfandt, "Mamlūk Documentary Studies," in *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus? Mamluk Studies—State of the Art*, ed. S. Conermann (Göttingen, 2013), 285–309. On the Coptic archives in Cairo, see, in particular, K. Werthmuller, *Coptic Identity and Ayyubid Politics in Egypt, 1218–1250* (Cairo, 2010).

36. See, for example, the comments by J. Loiseau, "Les attestations de waqf de l'émir Qarāquḡā al-Ḥasanī: Documents et histoire urbaine dans l'Égypte mamlouke," in *Documents et histoire: Islam, VIIe–XVIe s. Actes des journées d'Études musée du Louvre/EPHE*, ed. A. Regourd (Geneva, 2013), 211–38. On the establishment of central archives in Egypt, see Y. Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in 20th Century Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2009); and on the centralization of waqf administrations in the nineteenth century, see M. Melcak, "The Development of *Dīwān al-awqāf* in Egypt in the 19th Century: Regulations of 1837 and 1851," *Archiv Orientalní* 78,1 (2010): 1–34. Additional documents exist in European collections, generally without information on their provenance; see, for instance, D. Richards, "A Damascus Scroll Relating to a Waqf for the Yūnusiyya," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 122,2 (1990): 267–81. Narrative sources also repeatedly refer to institution-specific archives; see, e.g., al-Qalqashandī on a deed stored in the madrasa during the Fāṭimid period (*Ṣubḥ*, 10: 466). In addition a fourth/tenth-century appointment deed for the supervisor of endowments at the caliphal court of the Abbāsids states that he was required to appoint an archivist (*khāzin*) who would store the documents of all endowments "with him" (*Ṣubḥ*, 10: 271).

Closely linked to these institutional archival practices were the educational archival practices, which documented the transmission of knowledge and thus also social and cultural capital. These practices found expression in two forms of writing—biographical dictionaries and notes on manuscripts—both housed to a large extent, though not exclusively, in libraries of endowed institutions. Chamberlain has made his case for the centrality of biographical dictionaries in contradistinction to documentary sources; this argument can be extended to consider these dictionaries as one of the central sites of archival practices in the medieval Middle East.³⁷ Notes on manuscripts have only recently started to be seen as crucial documentary evidence of archival practices.³⁸ Although these two cases are beyond the ambit of what has traditionally been considered part of archival studies, and are not discussed in what follows, the richness of these two forms of writing indicates that they will have to be included in future research.

III. ADMINISTRATIVE ARCHIVAL PRACTICES

All these archival practices—legal, family-centered, institutional, and educational—alert us to the fact that one must go beyond the “state” in order to understand attitudes toward document preservation in wider society. Nevertheless, as a case study for advancing the argument, the focus below will be on the state, the final site of archival practices in the medieval Middle East. The Mamluk state had a central bureaucracy in Cairo that produced a wealth of written documents on administrative, diplomatic, fiscal, and legal issues. The royal chancery³⁹ (*dīwān al-inshāʿ*) formed the center of this bureaucracy, closely linked with two important offices, those of the army (*dīwān al-jaysh* or *al-juyūsh*) and the royal fisc (*dīwān al-khāṣṣ*), all situated in the city’s citadel. The Mamluk bureaucracy was a formidable apparatus;⁴⁰ at this administrative nexus of political power, economic control, and social prestige, scribes produced a constant flow of documents for purposes such as entertaining diplomatic relationships, exercising internal political control, managing tax income, and dispensing (the ruler’s) justice (*maẓālim*). The centrality of written documents is also seen in the period’s administrative handbooks, such as al-Qalqashandī’s, which to a large extent are collections of template documents.

Mamluk secretaries could base their bureaucratic practices on an established tradition. In contrast to medieval Europe there is no sense that the late middle ages led to a distinct intensification of archival practices.⁴¹ It would be impossible to argue, for instance, as has been done for fifteenth-century Italy, that a growing scope of state activity entailed the rise of new

37. Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 1–26; 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 (Göttingen, 2013), 159–86.

38. Görke and Hirschler, *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*.

39. On the problems associated with using this term, which derives from the context of European medieval history, see H. El Allaoui and P. Burési, “La chancellerie almohade,” in *Los Almohades: Problemas y perspectivas*, ed. P. Cressier et al. (Madrid, 2006), 477–503.

40. On the Mamluk administration, see B. Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils et l’administration dans l’état militaire mamluk (IXe/XVe siècle)* (Damascus, 1992); L. Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan: The Career of Al-Manṣūr Qalāwīn and the Consolidation of Mamluk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678–689 A.H./1279–1290 A.D.)* (Stuttgart, 1998), 200–242.

41. For earlier periods and other regional traditions, see E. Posner, “Archives in Medieval Islam,” *The American Archivist* 35,3–4 (1972): 291–315; J. Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily: The Royal Diwan* (Cambridge, 2002); M. van Berkel, “Reconstructing Archival Practices in ‘Abbāsīd Baghdad,” *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 1,1 (2014): 7–22; eadem, “Archives and Chanceries: Pre-1500, in Arabic,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three*, Brill Online 2013.

institutions concerned not only with the exercise of governing, but also its documentation.⁴² The 'Abbāsīd administrator al-Khwārazmī (fl. 367/977) had already discussed at length in his *Mafātīḥ al-ʿulūm* the rich terminology used for registers and records in the Baghdad administration. These included registers of financial transactions on a daily, monthly, and annual basis, lists of all soldiers, registers of incoming and outgoing correspondence, and inventory lists of the financial documents kept in the administration.⁴³ Half a century earlier his predecessor Ibn al-Māshiṭa (fl. 311/923) had referred to the 'Abbāsīd archive (*khizānat al-ʿuẓmā*) when recounting an attempt to bribe the archivist to "lose" dossiers.⁴⁴ Archival practices of the late Fāṭimid period are on exhibit when the secretary Ibn al-Ṣayrafī (d. 542/1147) outlines in his chancery manual the tasks of the various office-holders in the Cairene administration, even dedicating an entire chapter to the question of archiving. The archivist is here enjoined to keep a complex set of registers on a monthly and annual basis for the correspondence, as well as for decrees, deeds, and other documents.⁴⁵

Yet in contrast to the educational, institutional, and family-centered archival practices, administrative practices—similar to the legal field—have not yielded stable collections that were transmitted to the present. Original documents emerging from administrative procedures are mostly found in collections of recipients, such as St. Catherine's Monastery, the Karaite Synagogue in Cairo, the Franciscan Monastery in Jerusalem, and European archives, in particular Venice.⁴⁶ Beyond the preservation of documents by recipients, the survival of administrative documents has mostly been a matter of counter-archival practices, especially due to the recycling of such documents for other purposes. These include the Mamluk chancery documents, including grants of *iqṭāʿ*, that al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) used for his notebook,⁴⁷ documents recycled in textiles,⁴⁸ and in particular documents preserved in the Geniza collection. These Geniza documents include, for instance, the petition for an *iqṭāʿ* and its endorsement, which was later put to new use when Hebrew poetry was copied onto it.⁴⁹ Most tellingly, the only other known surviving grant of an *iqṭāʿ* is in the modern archive

42. P. Dover, "Deciphering the Diplomatic Archives of Fifteenth-Century Italy," *Archival Science* 7,4 (2007): 297–316.

43. C. E. Bosworth, "Abū 'Abdallāh al-Khwārazmī on the Technical Terms of the Secretary's Art: A Contribution to the Administrative History of Mediaeval Islam," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 12 (1969): 113–64.

44. Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *al-Qānūn fī diwān al-rasā'il*, ed. A. F. Sayyid (Cairo 1990), 36–37.

45. Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Qānūn*, 34–39.

46. On Arabic documents in European archives, see D. Valérian, *Les sources italiennes de l'histoire du Maghreb médiéval: Inventaire critique* (Paris, 2006); F. Bauden, "The Mamluk Documents of the Venetian State Archives: Handlist," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 20–21 (2002–3): 147–56; M. Pedani, "The Mamluk Documents of the Venetian State Archives: Historical Survey," *ibid.*: 133–46; G. Curatola, "Venise et le monde musulman d'après les documents d'archives," in *Venise et l'orient, 828–1797*, ed. S. Carboni (Paris, 2006), 52–57; B. Arbel, "Levantine Power Struggles in an Unpublished Mamluk Letter of 877AH/1473CE," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 7 (1992): 92–100; S. M. Stern, "Petitions from the Ayyūbid Period," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 27,1 (1964): 1–32.

47. F. Bauden, "The Recovery of Mamluk Chancery Documents in an Unsuspected Place," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, ed. A. Levanoni and M. Winter (Leiden, 2004), 59–76; see also Bauden, "Destin," 37–38.

48. L. Reinfandt, "Recycled Documents in Textiles from Ayyūbid and Mamlūk Egypt," unpubl. paper presented at the "21st Colloquium on the History of Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyūbid and Mamluk Eras," University of Ghent, May 10, 2012.

49. D. Richards, "A Petition for an *iqṭāʿ* Addressed to Saladin or al-ʿĀdil," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55 (1992): 100–105; G. Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents in the Cambridge Genizah Collection* (Cambridge, 1993), 365–68. On further documents in the Geniza, see M. Cohen, "Geniza for Islamicists, Islamic Geniza, and the 'New Cairo Geniza,'" *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 7 (2006):

of the Ministry of Endowments in Cairo. Yet there is no evident link between this document and any endowment and it was probably preserved, for reasons unknown, in an institutional archive from where it was subsequently transferred to its modern location.⁵⁰ In the principal present-day collections of Mamluk-period documents in Cairo (the Ministry of Endowments and the National Library and Archives) the main type of surviving documents are endowment records, arguably because endowments developed a legal personality, as Doris Behrens-Abouseif has argued.⁵¹ One searches in vain, however, for the most evident type of Mamluk administrative documents, such as copies or registers of decrees.⁵²

As there is no surviving corpus of documents that reproduces the organic relationship between documents and the administration, the question as to whether a dedicated archival space existed in this Cairene bureaucracy must be discussed with reference to narrative and normative sources. The closest we get is its famed destruction as reported by al-Maqrīzī: “During the period between the end of al-Zāhir Barqūq’s reign and before it was re-established [i.e., between 784/1382 and 791/1389] many affairs came into disorder, among them the matters of the chancery’s room (*qā‘at al-inshā’*) in the citadel. It was abandoned, all the papers (*awraq*) in it were taken, sold by weight, and the information contained in them was forgotten (*wa-nusiya rasmuḥā*).”⁵³ This brief report has been taken as evidence that the papers in question constituted the “state archives of the first Mamluk dynasty”⁵⁴ and that they were plundered because “they contained tangible evidence of the regime’s claim on its subjects.”⁵⁵

Was there really a centralized archive, the destruction of which would have undermined the ruling elite’s capacity to impose its rule? In the first instance, it is noteworthy that there is no indication of a separate archival space in this report. The documents were apparently kept in the chancery, which for reasons of space alone could not have served as the single central archive, on account of the massive amount of paperwork involved. Secondly, the importance ascribed to this report is undermined by the fact that there is no mention of the entire incident in al-Qalqashandī, the other contemporary author who had beyond doubt a very keen interest in all things administrative and archival (at least as far as Cairo was concerned) and who began working in the chancery during this period.⁵⁶ The loss of a centralized state archive would presumably have been traceable in the period’s chronicles or administrative handbooks. Finally, there is no indication that the destruction of these documents had any impact on administrative procedures in the following decades—al-Qalqashandī was able to author his seminal administrative handbook, which cited many earlier documents, after this plundering took place. One gets very little sense of their availability being in any way limited.⁵⁷ The tension between the plundering of an important collection of documents and the fact that it

129–45; M. Rustow, “At the Limits of Communal Autonomy: Jewish Bids for Intervention from the Mamluk State,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 13,2 (2009): 133–59; eadem, “Petition to a Woman,” where she proposes that model-petitions were archived on purpose.

50. M. Amīn, “Manṣūr bi-manḥ iqtā‘ min ‘aṣr al-Sulṭān al-Ghawrī,” *Annales Islamologiques* 19 (1983): 1–23.

51. D. Behrens-Abouseif, “The Waqf: A Legal Personality?” in *Gottes Eigentum für alle Zeiten? Islamische Stiftungen von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. A. Meier et al. (Berlin, 2009), 55–60.

52. For an overview of the modern collection and the documents held therein, M. Amīn (*Catalogue des documents d’Archives du Caire de 239/853 à 922/1516* [Cairo, 1981]) is still useful.

53. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā‘iẓ wa-l-i‘tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l-āthār*, ed. A. F. Sayyid (London, 2002), 3: 730.

54. Bauden, “Mamluk Era Documentary Studies,” 18.

55. Rustow, “Petition to a Woman,” 18.

56. Bauden, “Destin,” 19.

57. It is nevertheless debatable whether authors of manuals such as al-Qalqashandī actually used an administrative archive when they cited documents in their works. It is possible that they used documents that were retained not

had no noticeable impact in subsequent decades leads to one of this article's main concerns, namely, the multitude of actors involved in archival practices. In what follows I will argue that this tension can be resolved by casting aside the concept of a centralized archive and taking a closer look at how administrative paperwork was preserved within the Mamluk realms.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE ARCHIVAL PRACTICES IN THE CITADEL OF CAIRO

Surviving documents as well as narrative and normative texts show that the various bureaucratic branches in Mamluk Cairo developed independent archival strategies to handle the numerous documents that passed through their offices. Establishing "general archives" for incoming documents (such as petitions and letters) and for copies of outgoing documents (such as decrees) and, for the secretaries, "personal archives" for draft versions of the outgoing correspondence was chief among these strategies. General archiving was to some extent centralized in the chancery where a dedicated post of archivist (*khāzin*) continued to exist at least until the eighth/fourteenth century.⁵⁸ This official received all incoming correspondence and copies of the outgoing correspondence, which he filed in monthly booklets (sg. *iqbāra*) according to region.⁵⁹ According to al-Maqrīzī, these archival documents were kept in the chancery in the citadel: "The incoming documents (*kutub*) and the summary (*ta'liq*) of what was written at the sultan's Porte were stored in this room (*qā'a*)."⁶⁰

The importance of archiving is noted also throughout al-Qalqashandī's manual, and individual administrative positions are repeatedly linked with archival practices in the chancery. For instance, the secretary responsible for writing the decrees (pl. *manāshīr*) had to make sure that copies were stored in the chancery;⁶¹ copies of truce agreements with other empires and lords were also to be preserved there.⁶² In contrast to the final decrees, there is little documentary evidence for the concrete form of these archival copies—the only extant one is from the Fāṭimid period, which survived in the Geniza collection owing to counter-archival practices. This copy (*nuskha*) of a caliphal decree exemplifies practices that might have survived into the Mamluk period. It shows that every effort was made to keep the copy to a small format in contrast to the generously spaced final decree. For example, formulaic language was only summarized: "At the top [of the original document] there is the motto (*alāma*) [written] in the noble hand."⁶³ Although there are few extant copies, the copying notes on Fāṭimid final decrees provide some insights into the copying process.⁶⁴ This prac-

for their content, but specifically to provide examples when similar documents had to be drafted (*Vorlagen*). In this sense these manuals could be read as literarizations of this *Vorlagen*-archive.

58. Al-Qalqashandī (*Ṣubḥ*, 1: 174) reports that the role was taken over by the *dawādār* (lit. keeper of the [royal] inkwell) when his patron Badr al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh (d. 786/1384) left office.

59. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 1: 170–71. The *iqbāra* is a booklet composed of individual documents bound with starch (ibid., 6: 349).

60. Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 3: 730.

61. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 1: 167.

62. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 14: 84.

63. Cambridge University Library, T-S Ar.40.37 (528/1133), ed. G. Khan, "A Copy of a Decree from the Archives of the Fāṭimid Chancery in Egypt," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49 (1986): 439–53; idem, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*.

64. For example, the decree by al-Zāhir, Archives of the Kairite Community (Cairo) (415/1024), ed. S. Stern, *Fāṭimid Decrees: Original Documents from the Fāṭimid Chancery* (London, 1964), 23–34: *nusikha fī diwān al-inshā'*; and that by Ṭalā'i b. Ruzzīk, St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 10 (551/1156), ed. Stern, *Fāṭimid Decrees*, 70–75: *li-yunsakh fī diwān al-majlis al-Fā'iẓī al-sa'id*. Atiya numbering refers to A. S. Atiya, *The Arabic Manuscripts of Mount Sinai: A Hand-List of the Arabic Manuscripts and Scrolls Microfilmed at the Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai* (Baltimore, 1955).

tice was still current in the Ayyūbid period—on an Ayyūbid decree from 571/1176 we find orders to copy the decree (“It shall be copied”) that other secretaries duly fulfilled (“It was copied”).⁶⁵ One of two surviving Ayyūbid and Mamluk deeds granting an *iqṭāʿ* shows that this copying process was also part of the archival practices: the first draft version was to be retained in *diwān al-jaysh*, the second was to be sent to the chancery and kept there; the final decree was handed to the recipient.⁶⁶

The Fāṭimid copy of the caliphal decree has an abstract in the top left-hand corner that probably assisted the archivist in his task: “A decree has been made concerning the protection of the shipowners in al-Nastarāwiyya and the prevention of the requisitioning of their vessels/and the prevention of the people from al-Gharbiyya/from fishing along the shore.”⁶⁷ Such features are rare, as the decrees (*manāshīr* or *murabbaʿāt*, see below) that have survived come from the institutional archives of the recipients, such as St. Catherine’s Monastery, and for obvious reasons do not carry the typical features of the archival copy, which was kept in Cairo, such as an abstract.

While it is therefore clear that a multitude of archival practices existed in the chancery, there is little evidence that a clearly defined archive existed. Despite many of the authors of Mamluk narrative and normative texts being themselves administrators, or at least closely linked to the bureaucracy in the citadel, there is little mention of a dedicated archival space in any of their texts. Consequently, the chancery should not be regarded as the central or exclusive site of archival practices, but as one among many administrative archival actors within and without Cairo.⁶⁸ Archival practices beyond the chancery existed, for instance, in the neighboring army office in the citadel. This office, which was at the very heart of the Mamluk empire’s financial structure,⁶⁹ was primarily concerned with handling documents related to the payment of army officers, either in the form of granting tax income via the *iqṭāʿ* structure or by cash payments. When a provincial governor sought consent for the appointment of a new *iqṭāʿ*-holder in his region, a decree was drafted by the provincial administration and sent to Cairo; after the sultan’s endorsement the draft was stored in the army office.⁷⁰ *Iqṭāʿ*-holders were also obliged to send to Cairo lists of the distribution of their assignment between their followers. These lists were stored in the army office as the secretaries used them for year-to-year comparisons.⁷¹ In the same vein, when an *iqṭāʿ*-holder’s representative came to collect his dues, the certification document was to be stored in the army office.⁷² It was by perusing the rich documentation kept there that al-Maqrīzī found information on the number of

65. Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum, P.15285 (571/1176), ed. S. Heidemann et al., “Un décret d’al-Malik al-ʿĀdil en 571/1176 relatif aux moines du mont Sināï,” *Annales Islamologiques* 31 (1997): 81–107, at 97. There is a similarity in a decree by al-Afdāl, St. Catherine’s, Atiya no. 12 (595/1199): *li-yunsakh fi diwān al-naẓar al-khāṣṣ al-miṣrī al-maʿmūr, nusikha*; ed. S. Stern, “Two Ayyūbid Decrees from Sinai,” in *Documents from the Islamic Chanceries*, ed. S. Stern (Oxford 1965), 9–38.

66. Amīn, “Manshūr bi-manḥ iqtāʿ.”

67. Cambridge University Library, T-S Ar.40.37; see Khan, “Copy of a Decree”; idem, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*. Here and henceforth, slashes refer to the line breaks of the original text.

68. Due to the fact that the period’s administrative handbooks tend to elaborate on documents produced in the chancery, in contrast to the more mundane business conducted in the other bureaus, and that most of the preserved documents are chancery documents, either because they referred to more important acts or because they were more expertly drafted (for which, see D. Richards, “A Mamlūk Petition and a Report from the *Diwān al-Jaysh*,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 40 [1977]: 1–14), the role of the chancery as the main administrative site has been overstated in modern scholarship.

69. In the early ninth/fifteenth century, it employed two archivists; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 3: 565 (*khāzin*).

70. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 4: 196–97 (Damascus), 4: 226–27 (Aleppo).

71. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fi funūn al-adab* (Cairo, 1923–2002), 8: 207–8.

72. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 13: 105.

Mamluk cavalry units, as the army office held the documents (*awrāq*) of the cadastral survey conducted in 715/1315.⁷³ Its archival practices competed with those of the chancery, which tended to encroach upon its documents—it was standard practice for the copy of a final decree of the sultan directly assigning an *iqṭāʿ* to be stored in the chancery rather than in the army office.⁷⁴

Though the handbooks do not refer to this practice, documentary evidence testifies to copies of decrees being preserved in various offices. The Ayyūbid decree from 571/1176 for St. Catherine's Monastery has, for instance, several notes in this regard, each followed by the secretary's confirmation: "It shall be copied in the office of supervision (*dīwān al-naẓar*) of [al-Malik] al-Nāṣir [Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn]/God willing/It was copied, God—Whose help I implore—be praised"; "It shall be copied in the office of grants (*dīwān al-iqṭāʿāt*) of [al-Malik] al-Nāṣir [Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn]/in both its main and its inspection sections; God—may He be exalted—willing/It was copied, God be praised for His bounty"; "Rely on this [to produce a copy in the chancery], God the powerful and glorious willing/It was copied, God be praised in gratitude."⁷⁵ The making of four distinct copies not only shows an almost Kafkaesque complexity within the Cairene bureaucracy, but more importantly illustrates that the existence of distinct archival sites was one of its essential features.

The wide distribution of copies arguably contributed to the efficiency of general administrative practice, as is evident from a petition from St. Catherine's Monastery from the early eighth/fourteenth century in which the monks complained that the local *iqṭāʿ*-holder illegally taxed their income from date-palms; the army office backed their complaint and the ensuing decree referred to the previous decrees for this *iqṭāʿ* in the preceding twenty years dating to 697/1298, 706/1308, 709/1310, 710/1310, and 711/1311. Like the chancery, the army office clearly had archival practices in place that allowed access to copies of relevant documents even in cases of minor grants.⁷⁶

V. REGISTER-ARCHIVES IN THE CITADEL OF CAIRO

Archival practices cannot be reduced to the preservation of documents or their copies, however. The Mamluk period testifies also to the increasing importance of registers as an archival practice. This is especially evident in the multitude of registration notes, which—judging from the documentary evidence—seem to have displaced the copying notes that were more prominent during the Fāṭimid and Ayyūbid periods.⁷⁷ In order to deal with the large number of documents that the Mamluk bureaucratic apparatus handled and to some extent stored, it established a "meta-layer" such as summary indices (sg. *fihrist*), synoptic lists (sg. *tadhkira*), and overview registers (sg. *daftar*) to keep track of incoming and outgoing correspondence. According to al-Qalqashandī, a system of separate registers (*jarā'id*) had been in place in the Fāṭimid period to organize incoming and outgoing correspondence—he described it as ideal for the quick retrieval of documents.⁷⁸ A sixth/twelfth-century Fāṭimid decree thus carried the note: "Let this decree be filed for eternity (*kh-l-d*) in the office of registration after its registration in all the administrative departments (*baʿda thubūtihi fī jamīʿ*

73. Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1: 255.

74. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 8: 2.

75. Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum, P.15285, ed. Heidemann et al., "Décret d'al-Malik al-ʿĀdil," 97.

76. St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 247 (715/1315), ed. Richards, "Mamlūk Petition," 5–8.

77. Problematically, no registers have survived. On registers, see also A. al-Miṣrī, "Maṣādir dirāsāt al-wathāʾiq al-ʿarabiyya al-islāmiyya," *Annales Islamologiques* 40 (2006): 25–50, esp. 32–33.

78. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 6: 349–50.

al-dawāwīn).⁷⁹ The importance of these registers is evident from a Fāṭimid petition from the same period where the registration note (together with the endorsement) had been initially written on a separate piece of paper, which was subsequently glued to the bottom of the document to make sure that the archival (and administrative) practice remained documented.⁸⁰

Up to the late eighth/fourteenth century, the Mamluk chancery had a secretary charged with the task of keeping these meta-documents. Besides the main summary index of all correspondence, this secretary kept a register organized according to the titles of the empire's high-ranking officers. Each officer had a page of his own that was also used to keep track of correspondence with him. Another register was kept for all correspondence translated into languages other than Arabic, the name of the translator, and a summary of the document's content.⁸¹ Additional documents in the chancery held information that at least partly overlapped with these meta-documents. For instance, the chancery kept an overview register on envoys that not only included the name of the messenger, the date of his departure, and his destination, but also the nature of his mission and thus information on the content of the correspondence.⁸² Such registers were kept also at sites other than the chancery; the army office, for instance, kept registers in order to administer the *iqṭāʿ* system.⁸³

Most important for our purposes is that as well as serving as tools for locating and retrieving archival copies, the registers also took on the role of "register-archives." Registration notes employ the terms *uthbita* and *nuzzila* to state that a document had been registered in specific branches of the administration before being sent out.⁸⁴ Yet, the borderline between copying and registering was a very fine one, and administrative handbooks such as that by Ibn al-Ṣayrafī make clear that registers should include a summary of the documents' contents.⁸⁵ This is evident in an unusually detailed endorsed petition from the early seventh/thirteenth century in which the monks of St. Catherine's complained that they had not received, as promised, a decree from the sultan. The sultan ordered his administration in writing to reproduce the decree and the chancery secretary in charge was able to do so with evident satisfaction. In describing his search for the earlier decree he interestingly did not say anything about a copy, but rather referred to the act of registration (*ithbāt*).⁸⁶ In this case the register-archive must have been identical to, or at least very similar to, a copybook.

The role of register-archives is particularly relevant for those documents that were not copied in full for archival purposes. This is true for two main sets of documents. The first are endorsed petitions that did not lead to the issuance of a separate decree, but were returned with the decree added to it. An Ayyūbid endorsed petition from 609/1212-13, for instance, bears five notes confirming the decree's registration in offices such as the *dīwān al-naẓar* (office of supervision) and *dīwān al-jaysh* (army office).⁸⁷ The same is true for Mamluk

79. Decree by al-Āmir bi-aḥkām Allāh (515/1121-2), ed. G. El-Shayyal, *Majmūʿat al-wathāʾiq al-fāṭimiyya / Corpus documentorum fatimicorum* (Cairo, 1958), 325, on the basis of al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz al-ḥunafāʾ*.

80. Cambridge University Library T-S 28.8 (first half of 6th/12th century), ed. Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, 392-98 (no. 98).

81. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 1: 168-69, who also reports (1: 174, 6: 349-50) that the practice started to change when his patron Badr al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh (d. 786/1384) left office.

82. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 1: 150.

83. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 8: 200-206.

84. The use of *nuzzila* is rarely found in Fāṭimid documents and became more common in the Mamluk period; see the notes on the documents edited in Stern, *Fāṭimid Decrees*.

85. Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Qānūn*, 35-36.

86. St. Catherine's, Atiya nos. 13 and 15 (609/1212-13), ed. Stern, "Petitions from the Ayyūbid Period," 27 l. 35.

87. St. Catherine's, Atiya nos. 13 and 15 (609/1212-13), ed. Stern, "Petitions from the Ayyūbid Period," 19-32.

endorsed petitions, so in all these cases the registration notes (“it was registered in *diwān* XY”) were de facto handed over to the recipient of the document.⁸⁸

The second set is the type of document, called *murabbaʿ* in the Mamluk period, for which no verbatim textual evidence was kept. In addition to the secretary having to preserve this *murabbaʿ* document to serve as proof (on this, see VI, below), it arguably served two further functions: (1) as an “administrative memorandum” and (2) as a minor decree sent to the recipient in lieu of a more formal (scroll) decree. To the first category belong five *murabbaʿāt* in the Ḥaram collection that were issued by the sultan.⁸⁹ These had no addressee and were probably directed to—arguably local—administrative branches and officers as open orders to take action with regard to wider issues concerning endowments in Jerusalem.⁹⁰ Four other *murabbaʿāt* in the Ḥaram collection, by contrast, fit the second category of minor decrees.⁹¹ They were issued by officers and they proclaim the appointment of a named individual to a given position within a specific endowment.⁹²

Irrespective of the different administrative functions of the *murabbaʿ*-memorandum and the *murabbaʿ*-minor decree, they are similar in that they both represent the final stage in the process of drafting documents. As comparatively minor documents they were not important enough—unlike the scroll decrees in the Ḥaram collection—to have warranted the production of an archival copy. They also did not carry registration notes, for reasons discussed under VIII, below. The royal memoranda, however, were of sufficient importance to be at least registered in Cairo, and the five specimens from the Ḥaram collection thus carry a large

88. St. Catherine’s, Atiya no. 26 (659/1261), ed. S. Stern, “Petitions from the Mamlūk Period (Notes on the Mamlūk Documents from Sinai),” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29,2 (1966): 233–76, at 248; St. Catherine’s, Atiya no. 247 (715/1315), ed. Richards, “Mamlūk Petition.” We have also examples of endorsed petitions without any registration notes, such as St. Catherine’s, Atiya no. 118 (Fāṭimid period); D. Richards, “A Fatimid Petition and ‘Small Decree’ from Sinai,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 3 (1973): 140–45. As it is very unlikely that no registration took place at all, the notes were probably written on a copy retained in the central administration.

89. Donald Richards (“A Mamlūk Emir’s ‘Square’ Decree,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 54 [1991]: 63–67) interprets the Ḥaram *murabbaʿāt* as draft documents and argues that they were possibly complemented by final decrees that were also kept in Jerusalem, but have since been lost. If the final decrees were kept in Jerusalem, however, why would the *murabbaʿāt* be sent there as well? It has also been suggested that the *murabbaʿ* was used as an inner-administrative memorandum; D. Little, “Relations between Jerusalem and Egypt during the Mamluk Period according to Literary and Documentary Sources,” in *Egypt and Palestine: A Millennium of Association (868–1948)*, ed. A. Cohen and G. Baer (New York, 1984), 73–93, at 84.

90. Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection no. 1 (866/1462), ed. K. J. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq maqdisiyya taʾrīkhiyya* (Amman, 1983), 1: 189–91 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf,” 28–32); no. 6 (766/1365?), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 183–86 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf,” 25–28); no. 304 (850/1446), Little, *Catalogue*, 34 pl. 3; no. 308 (844/1441?), Little, *Catalogue*, 34–35; no. 309 (861/1457?), Little, *Catalogue*, 35. It is probably to such memoranda-*murabbaʿāt* that the decree St. Catherine’s, Atiya no. 117 (922/1516) refers when it states that the monks “possess [...] noble *murabbaʿāt* from former rulers” (l. 11, *murabbaʿāt sharīfa min al-mulūk al-sālifa*); D. Richards, *Mamluk Administrative Documents from St. Catherine’s Monastery* (Leuven, 2011), 131–34.

91. Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection no. 3 (781/1379), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 195–96 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf,” 32–34); no. 5 (second half 8th/14th century?), ed. Y. Frenkel, “The Relationship between Mamluk Officials and the Urban Civilian Population: A Study of Some Legal Documents from Jerusalem,” in *Governing the Holy City: The Interaction of Social Groups in Jerusalem between the Fatimid and the Ottoman Period*, ed. J. Pahlitzsch and L. Korn (Wiesbaden, 2004), 91–108, at 107; no. 14 (785/1383), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 201–2 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf,” 37–38); no. 303 (708/1308), ed. Frenkel, *Relationship*, 108.

92. This is not to say that *amīrs* only used *murabbaʿāt*. The Ḥaram collection also includes scroll decrees issued by *amīrs*; see Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection no. 2 (788/1386), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 199–200 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf,” 36); no. 4 (783/1381?), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 197–98 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf,” 34–35); no. 12 (773/1371?), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 208–9 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf,” 40–42); no. 214 (776/1374), ed. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf,” 10–15.

number of registration notes, up to fourteen per document.⁹³ Here again, the registers were not just tools to facilitate the retrieval of documents, but functioned as archives. Below is a chart of Mamluk-period types of documents and archival practices.

Document type	sent in name of . . .	registration notes	archival copy
<i>murabbaʿ</i> -proof	retained by secretary	x	x
<i>murabbaʿ</i> -minor decree	amīr	x	x
<i>murabbaʿ</i> -memorandum	suḷṭān	✓	x
royal decree (ca. 650–90/1252–91 and ca. 797–815/1394–1413)	suḷṭān	✓	x
royal decree (other periods)	suḷṭān	x	✓
endorsed petition	suḷṭān	✓	x

Although endorsed petitions and royal *murabbaʿāt* are the classic examples of dispatched documents carrying registration notes, we also have scroll decrees with such notes, viz., the sultans' decrees held in St. Catherine's Monastery, the largest coherent corpus of Mamluk administrative documents and thus the most useful source for an overview of registering practices. Of the seventy-two decrees surveyed by Hans Ernst, ten carry registration notes (*uthbita*, *nuzzila*).⁹⁴ To interpret the uneven use of notes and what this means for understanding archival practices, we can turn to Samuel Stern, who in his study of Fāṭimid decrees, most of them again from St. Catherine's, argued that the omission of registration notes in some of the decrees was merely due to the secretaries' "negligence."⁹⁵ As the Mamluk decrees are all roughly identical in both content (exhortation of local authorities to uphold the monastery's rights with regard to issues such as tax exemption and security) and the identity of the issuing authority (normally a high-ranking officer in the name of the sultan), this interpretation might also seem probable for the Mamluk period.

The documents from St. Catherine's that carry notes are conspicuously clustered in two periods, however, meaning that the varying practice might not be due to individual secretaries' negligence, but rather reflects practices that changed over time. Five of the ten note-carrying decrees were issued in the early Mamluk period up to the year 690/1291.⁹⁶

93. Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection no. 6 (766/1365?, Sultan Shaʿbān), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʾiq*, 1: 183–86 (cf. Diem, "al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf," 25–28); no. 308 (844/1441?, Sultan Jaqmaq), Little, *Catalogue*, 34–35; no. 304 (850/1446, Sultan Jaqmaq), Little, *Catalogue*, 34 pl. 3; no. 309 (861/1457?, Sultan Īnāl), Little, *Catalogue*, 35; no. 1 (866/1462, Sultan Khushqadam), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʾiq*, 1: 189–91 (cf. Diem, "al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf," 28–32).

94. H. Ernst, *Die mamlukischen Sultansurkunden des Sinai-Klosters* (Wiesbaden, 1960). On this work, see the comments by Bauden, "Mamluk Era Documentary Studies," 39, and the corrections in Stern, "Petitions from the Mamlūk Period." For our purposes, Ernst's main mistake was to systematically misread orders for registration (in the jussive mood) as statements that the registration had been carried out (in the perfect).

95. Stern, *Fāṭimid Decrees*, 175.

96. St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 17 (658/1259), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 4–9; no. 18 (658/1260), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 12–17; no. 26 (659/1261), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 18–21; no. 19 (670/1272), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 22–25; no. 24 (690/1291), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 36–39. Ernst obviously missed a number of Mamluk decrees, but those that have since come to light confirm the existence of the two clusters. For instance, St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 29, from the earliest Mamluk period (651/1252, according to Q. al-Samarrai, "A Unique Mamluk Document of al-Malik al-Muʿizz Aybak al-Turkumānī al-Šālīhī, the First Mamluk Sultan of Egypt, from the Monastery of Sinai," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 21 [1990]: 195–211), has a number of registration notes.

From the same period only two decrees without any notes have been preserved.⁹⁷ The other chronological cluster starts roughly a decade after the transition to the Burjī-line of sultans in 797/1394-5 and lasts for some two decades. Of the five decrees preserved from this period, four carry notes.⁹⁸ Yet, in the remaining 190 years of Mamluk history not covered by either of the two clusters, only one of the sixty-one decrees that have been preserved carries notes.⁹⁹ The existence of these two “registration note clusters”—ca. 650–690 (1252–1291) and ca. 797–815 (1394–1413)—is to some extent confirmed by the scroll decrees in the Ḥaram collection in Jerusalem, of which nine have been preserved, eight without any notes. The eight decrees without notes were issued in periods outside the two registration note clusters;¹⁰⁰ while the scroll decree with registration notes falls in the first cluster.¹⁰¹

The fact that some administrative documents carry registration notes, e.g., endorsed petitions, royal memoranda, and royal scroll decrees issued during either of the two registration note clusters, while others have none—especially minor decrees by officers and royal scroll decrees outside the two registration note clusters—is linked to archival practices. The absence of notes on most royal scroll decrees indicates that in these cases a copy was retained in Cairo.¹⁰² As the above-discussed Fāṭimid copy shows, and as common sense suggests, the registration notes were written on this Cairene copy to document the administrative registration process for later consultation. The actual final decree that was dispatched, by contrast, in this case remained blank. The registration notes on the Cairene copy had no archival function because the archival demand had been fully met with the retention of copies. In the case of endorsed petitions and royal memoranda, however, no such archival copy was retained and the registration notes were thus written onto the original that was sent to the recipient. This same procedure was seemingly also adopted for royal decrees during the two registration note cluster periods, when the normal procedure of producing an archival copy of outgoing decrees must have been temporarily abandoned. In these cases, the main point of the registration notes was to document the archival registration process. As no archival copy was produced, the entries in the registers were the only place where archival traces were evident.

97. St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 22 (684/1285), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 28–31; no. 48 (687/1288), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 30–33.

98. St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 31 (797/1394-5), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 86–91; no. 45 (800/1398), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 90–97; no. 46 (804/1401), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 100–7; no. 49 (815/1413), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 112–23. Without notes: St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 47 (805/1403), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 106–9.

99. St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 23 (914/1508), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 234–39.

100. Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection no. 8 (701/1302), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 181–12 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarif,” 23–25); no. 375 (705/1305), Little, *Catalogue*, 28; no. 11 (710/1310), Little, *Catalogue*, 27; no. 214 (776/1374), ed. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarif,” 10–15; no. 12 (773/1371?), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 208–9 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarif,” 40–42); no. 4 (783/1381?), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 197–98 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarif,” 34/5); no. 2 (788/1386), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 199–200 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarif,” 36); no. 203 (787/1386?), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 2: 169.

101. Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection no. 34 (664/1266), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 177–80 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarif,” 21–23).

102. This is not to argue that a copy was produced of all documents issued in Cairo that are preserved as blank documents in recipients' archives. In some examples it seems more probable that the affair was so minor that the Cairene administration neither produced a copy nor bothered to register the document. This is most likely the case, for instance, with regard to a personally addressed missive (*mukātaba*) by the sultan to the Georgian monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem in response to a petition on a minor affair, which has no notes whatsoever: Greek Orthodox Patriarch (Jerusalem) VII.B.2.21 (759/1358), ed. J. Pahlitzsch, “Documents on Intercultural Communication in Mamlūk Jerusalem: The Georgians under Sultan an-Nāṣir Ḥasan in 759 (1358),” in *Diplomatics in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1000–1500: Aspects of Cross-Cultural Communication*, ed. A. Beihammer et al. (Leiden, 2008), 373–94, at 383–85.

The registration notes show that the (archival) registration of documents was such a highly complex process that one single document could be registered (and thus at least in part archived) in numerous branches of the administration.¹⁰³ Owing to its budgetary importance, the army office had its own substantial set of registers organized inter alia according to names of *iqṭāʿ*-holders and regions.¹⁰⁴ Yet, notes refer also to acts of registration in lesser administrative branches, such as the *dīwān* for Lower Egypt,¹⁰⁵ the supreme *dīwān* of supervision,¹⁰⁶ and the *dīwān* of supervision for the victorious armies.¹⁰⁷ In this sense the parallel archival practices that we have seen with regard to the preservation of documents and archival copies are reflected here. Alongside the multiple copies of important outgoing correspondence, these different administrative branches kept parallel registers for some of the less important material as well. The main point emerging so far is that the traditional concept of “the archive” as a central spatial category in the Mamluk administration is not tenable. Archival practices were spread across the different administrative branches and archival practices consisted of a variety of procedures, including producing archival copies and keeping register archives.

VI. PERSONAL ARCHIVAL PRACTICES ACROSS CAIRO

In addition to these archival practices within the citadel, another set of practices existed across Cairo in the form of “personal archives” of individual secretaries. These played a crucial role in the preservation of draft documents and registers, but they have hitherto not been sufficiently acknowledged in modern scholarship. Al-Qalqashandī devotes a long passage in his work to urging secretaries not to produce any final document without retaining proof (*shāhid*) of it in the form of the draft document that they received, especially in those matters in which the secretary might be seen to have a personal interest.¹⁰⁸ This draft document-cum-proof is repeatedly called *murabbaʿ* in administrative handbooks. Produced as a preliminary version, it was to be preserved by the secretaries (the secretary should “store this with him as proof,” *li-tukhallida ʿindahū shāhid^{an} lahu*) to show that they had issued the final decree in accordance with the orders given to them.¹⁰⁹ This mantra appears throughout, also in other administrative handbooks such as that by al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333). In consequence, the secretary was to preserve, for instance, all correspondence relating to individual petitions to the sultan (*qīṣaṣ*)—certainly owing to the necessity of petitions in acquiring ad hoc privileges.¹¹⁰ Preserving the draft notes as proof was of particular importance when other branches of the administration had recourse to the chancery for issuing documents.¹¹¹ In this

103. St. Catherine’s, Atiya no. 26 (659/1261), ed. Stern, “Petitions from the Mamlūk Period,” 248; no. 247 (715/1315), ed. Richards, “Mamlūk Petition.”

104. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 8: 200–207.

105. St. Catherine’s, Atiya no. 17 (658/1259), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 4: *al-wajh al-baḥrī*.

106. St. Catherine’s, Atiya no. 26 (659/1261), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 18: *dīwān al-naẓar ʿalā al-dawāwīn al-maʿmūra*. Same in St. Catherine’s, Atiya no. 18 (658/1260), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 12; and Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection no. 34 (664/1266), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 177–80 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf,” 21–23).

107. St. Catherine’s, Atiya no. 23 (914/1508), Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 234: *bi-dīwān al-naẓar ʿalā al-juyūsh al-manṣūra*. Same in Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection no. 1 (866/1462), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 189–91 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf,” 28–32; and no. 6 (766/1365?), ed. al-ʿAsālī, *Wathāʿiq*, 1: 183–86 (cf. Diem, “al-Ḥaram aš-šarīf,” 25–28).

108. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 6: 189. The term *shāhid* occurs also in final decrees when the recipient is encouraged to store the documents as proof for future use; see, e.g., St. Catherine’s, Atiya no. 6 (530/1136), ed. Stern, *Fāṭimid Decrees*, 59–64 ll. 32–33.

109. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 4: 196–97, 6: 192–93; al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 3: 705.

110. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 6: 197.

111. For instance, al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 13: 41 (royal fisc).

case, al-Qalqashandī not only advises the secretaries to store the documents, but he explicitly discourages them from filing them in the administration's booklets—probably fearing that the individual secretary would then lose control over this crucial evidence.¹¹² Likewise, the secretaries in other offices, such as the army office, are also admonished to preserve the drafts given to them by the office's head for producing the final decree.¹¹³

Documentary evidence of petitions gives insight into the importance for secretaries of preserving such authorized petitions. An early Ayyūbid petition for an *iqṭāʿ* by two officers, for instance, has on its verso the authorization, "It has been ordered that they be granted [the *iqṭāʿ*] immediately." This authorization must have led to the issuing of the official decree, as described in the administrative handbooks, and the petition preserved by the secretary in his personal archive as proof should he be questioned as to this specific decree. At a later stage, when the secretary could be confident that no challenge would arise in this case, he recycled the petition, copied Hebrew liturgical poetry on the largely unused verso (testifying to the likelihood of his being Jewish), whereupon it made its way into the Geniza collection.¹¹⁴

The secretaries' personal archival collections were located in their private homes, not in the citadel. This clearly emerges from the detailed narrative sources on the transition period from Mamluk to Ottoman rule as discussed by Nicolas Michel. For instance, in 930/1524 Ahmed Pasha (d. 930/1524), the Ottoman governor and "traitor," ordered the secretaries of the old administrative families to relocate the tax registers that they kept in their private homes to the citadel. The contemporary chroniclers were scandalized by this new approach and it is evident that they felt such documents—and not just draft copies—should be "archived" in private homes rather than in the citadel. Owing to the central role of the secretary's archive, large administrative families, such as the Banū Jīʿān, had treated the documents as their private property and had regarded them as a crucial element of their political bargaining power. The Ottoman push toward a more impersonal administration, however, led to a new practice where offices, not persons, came to be entrusted with recordkeeping.¹¹⁵

For the pre-Ottoman period it is thus not only evident that archival practices were spread over various offices well beyond the chancery, but that secretaries' personal archives spread documentary evidence across the urban topography of Cairo. This decentralized nature of pre-Ottoman recordkeeping might explain why so many Fāṭimid documents survived the plunder and destruction of the Fāṭimid palace after the dynasty's demise in the late sixth/twelfth century. It is clear from subsequent Ayyūbid and Mamluk narrative and normative texts that their authors had access to an ample supply of these documents.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, scholarship has marginalized these decentralized archival practices, and especially the secretaries' personal archives, in favor of more centralized archival practices. In the case of the above-discussed early Ayyūbid petition for an *iqṭāʿ* with Hebrew liturgical poetry, it was not necessarily "removed from the Army Bureau" "when its retention in the files was no longer

112. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 6: 191–93.

113. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 13: 160; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 8: 208.

114. Cambridge University Library T-S Ar.42.94 (Ayyūbid period), ed. Richards, "Petition for an *iqṭāʿ*"; Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, 365–68. The "proof" function of copies in personal archives is different from the "use" function of copies that secretaries made in their notebooks and kept in *Vorlagen*-archives or as proto-manuals, for personal use; see, for example, G. Khan, "A Document of Appointment of a Jewish Leader in Syria Issued by al-Malik al-ʿAfdāl ʿAlī in 589 A.H./1193 A.D.," in *Documents de l'Islam médiéval: Nouvelles perspectives de recherche*, ed. Y. Rāḡib (Cairo, 1991), 97–116.

115. For archival practices in the Mamluk–Ottoman transition period, see Michel, "Circassiens."

116. For chronicles, see F. Bora, "Mamluk Representations of Late Fatimid Egypt: The Survival of Fatimid-Era Historiography in Ibn al-Furāt's Taʾrīkh al-duwal wa 'l-mulūk (History of Dynasties and Kings)" (D.Phil. diss., Univ. of Oxford, 2010).

necessary,”¹¹⁷ but had more likely been deposited in the secretary’s home. The same goes for the statement that a decree “found its way into the Genizah [and that this] suggests that someone from the Jewish community carried it there from the palace.”¹¹⁸ In light of the important role of the secretaries’ personal archives, it is more probable that the decree made its way into the Geniza via a secretary’s personal collection of documents and draft copies.

VII. ADMINISTRATIVE ARCHIVAL PRACTICES BEYOND CAIRO

The archival practices discussed so far were situated within Cairo. Arguably, however, the most fascinating aspect of Mamluk archival culture is that archival practices extended beyond the confines of the Mamluk empire’s capital. In particular, the administration of *iqṭāʿ* privileges functioned in a close interplay between the Cairene administration and administrations in other parts of the empire. The salient feature with regard to archival practices, however, was that the main partners beyond Egypt were not the centers of the provincial Mamluk administrative system, such as Damascus, Aleppo, Ḥimṣ, and Ṣafad. The existence of these administrations in the provinces is beyond doubt and administrative handbooks and chronicles described them in detail.¹¹⁹ Yet, these second administrative actors were evidently not seen as an important site for archival practices. We must cast the net far and wide to discern more developed archival practices in the provincial capitals. One such example would be *Taʿliq al-dīwān* by the litterateur and poet Ibn Nubāta (d. 768/1366), an *inshāʾ*-copybook of his first year’s output of official documents and letters in the chancery in Damascus, which he entered at an advanced age. The concept of archival practices would need to be stretched considerably, however, to accommodate this work, as he included in some cases revised versions of his deeds of appointments and letters that he clearly intended to be read as aesthetic texts.¹²⁰

One important reason for the virtual absence of provincial archival practices is that, according to administrative handbooks, decrees (*manāshīr*) always had to be written in Egypt and never in Syria.¹²¹ In addition, when a provincial governor initiated the reassignment of an *iqṭāʿ*, even the draft version of the decree was to be preserved in Cairo, not in the respective province.¹²² There was thus no incentive for secretaries to keep personal archives for these documents, nor was there a need for a provincial administration to store such documents. Handbooks made provision for the governor in Damascus, e.g., to write the decrees related to his governorship himself,¹²³ and this might imply that some kind of archival practices

117. Richards, “Petition for an *iqṭāʿ*,” 105.

118. Rustow, “Limits of Communal Autonomy,” 149.

119. See, for example, J. Drory, “Founding a New *Mamlaka*: Some Remarks Concerning Safed and the Organization of the Region in the Mamluk Period,” in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, ed. M. Winter and A. Levanoni (Leiden, 2004), 163–87; J. Escovitz, “Vocational Patterns of the Scribes of the Mamlūk Chancery,” *Arabica* 23 (1976): 42–62. Martel-Thoumian (*Civils et l’administration*, 27–76) enumerates the administrative branches as far as they existed in the provinces.

120. Ibn Nubāta, *Taʿliq al-dīwān*, MS Berlin 8640, discussed in T. Bauer, “Mamluk Literature as a Means of Communication,” in *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus? Mamluk Studies—State of the Art*, ed. S. Conermann (Göttingen, 2013), 23–56, at 41–43. This work obviously contains no indications of archival practices, but the fact that most of these pieces referred to rather minor appointments indicates that the Damascene chancery most probably did not produce archival copies of them.

121. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 4: 197: *wa-laysa bi-l-Shām kitābat manāshīr aṣl^{an}*.

122. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 8: 209; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 4: 196–97 (Damascus), 4: 226–27 (Aleppo).

123. Al-Qalqashandī (*Ṣubḥ*, 4: 191) states that the governor in Damascus “writes everything related to his governorship, such as final decrees, edicts, and orders” (*wa-huwa yaktubu ‘alā kulli mā yata‘allaqu bi-niyābatihi min al-manāshīr wa-l-tawāqī‘ wa-l-marāsim al-sharīfa bi-i‘timād*).

must have existed in cities such as Damascus and Aleppo. The few surviving documents that show some involvement of provincial administrations give little specific information on provincial archival practices, however. For instance, after the monks of St. Catherine's Monastery petitioned the court in Cairo, the central administration issued a royal order (*mithāl sharīf*) to the governor to ensure the monks' protection. The governor added to this order his own decree (*marsūm*) issued to his subordinates in the name of the regional military council (*majlis al-ḥarb*).¹²⁴ The incoming document from Cairo was thus not archived, but simply sent on. There are also no notes of copying or registration on either of the two documents, which makes it probable that the document ended up in the monastery without leaving any archival trace in the provincial administration.¹²⁵ A similar picture emerges from the Ḥaram collection in Jerusalem, which has an endorsed petition regarding a scholarly appointment in Jerusalem; it was validated by the *dīwān al-waqf* in Cairo, but the final decree on the document's verso was written by the local official (*malik al-umarāʾ*), presumably in Syria. As this decree has wide margins and copious spaces between the lines¹²⁶ it resembles and clearly strives to reproduce the standard Cairene decree in the name of the sultan. Again, however, there are no registration or copying notes on this decree issued by the provincial administration and it is most likely that it did not leave any archival traces either.¹²⁷

The case was different when the central role of Egyptian archival practices for the Syrian lands had not yet fully emerged. In the Ayyūbid period, the Syrian princes still fiercely contested the political centrality of Cairo within the Ayyūbid family confederation, and Cairo was not yet able to establish itself as the uncontested center, since the Egyptian Ayyūbid sultans had to spend most of their career in Syria in order to impose their authority. Owing to their long absences from Cairo their courts were virtually itinerant courts. This might be reflected in the above-discussed case of the lost decree for St. Catherine's Monastery from the early Ayyūbid period. Although it was missing, the chancery secretary knew that the decree had been registered in both places: "This [decree] was registered (*ithbāt*) in the office of supervision [in Cairo] and the offices (*dawāwīn*) in Syria."¹²⁸ The decree itself had no relevance for Syria, as it discussed a purely inner-Egyptian affair; its registration in the Syrian administration goes back to the fact that the sultan was at this point outside Ḥimṣ on a campaign against his Syrian Ayyūbid relatives. It seemed thus natural to keep a register-copy for archival purposes that were seemingly still widespread in the Syrian principalities.¹²⁹

This situation persisted into the early Mamluk period, as reflected in the Mamluk sultans' decrees held in St. Catherine's. The only example carrying a registration note referring to Syria is one of the earliest documents, issued in 670/1272, and again the sultan was then

124. The *majlis al-ḥarb* certainly deserves more attention. As Werner Diem has shown (*Arabische Geschäftsbriefe des 10. bis 14. Jahrhunderts aus der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek in Wien* [Wiesbaden, 1995], 323–26), this term appears quite frequently in documents, yet is hardly ever mentioned in narrative or normative sources.

125. St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 28 (687/1288), ed. Richards, *Mamluk Administrative Documents*, 39–44 (no. II).

126. In contrast to decisions on endorsed minor petitions where the involvement of Cairo is unclear, such as Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection no. 310 (775/1374), ed. D. Little, "Five Petitions and Consequential Decrees from Late Fourteenth-Century Jerusalem," *al-Majalla al-Arabiyya li-l-ʿUlūm al-Insāniyya* 14,54 (1996): 348–94, at 365–72; Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection no. 305 (781/1379), ed. Little, *Five Petitions*, 372–79.

127. Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection no. 9 (781/1380), ed. Little, *Five Petitions*, 379–87.

128. St. Catherine's, Atiya nos. 13 and 15 (609/1212–13), ed. Stern, "Petitions from the Ayyūbid Period," 27.

129. One can read in a similar light the note "Let it be copied in the Egyptian Office of Private Supervision" (*li-yunsakh fi dīwān al-naẓar al-khāṣṣ al-miṣrī*) in another Ayyūbid decree: St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 12 (595/1199), ed. Stern, "Two Ayyūbid Decrees." The very unusual emphasis on Egypt is because the sultan was "outside Damascus" when issuing the decree, and implies that a similar *dīwān* existed in Syria.

campaigning in Syria where the document was issued.¹³⁰ There are some later notes showing that documents had been registered in Egypt's second city, Alexandria—for instance, in the city's "royal office," "financial office,"¹³¹ and "office of supervision of the royal fisc"¹³²—but there are few other examples of provincial archival practices to cite; it seems that the function of provincial administrations as archival actors vanished to a large extent during the seventh/thirteenth century. An expression of the low esteem in which the Cairene center held the provincial administration when it came to the preservation of documents is tellingly found in a late administrative Ayyūbid treatise. In this crucial period of increasing political and administrative centralization, its author, al-Nābulusī, pushed for original documents to be preserved in Cairo. With regard to the administration of inheritances to which the state could lay a claim, he criticized the provincial administrations for only sending copies of debt bills and retaining the originals. "The bills perpetually remain in the provinces as trash." Such documents, he argues, should instead be brought to the treasury in Cairo and only copies should be left in the provinces.¹³³

VIII. ARCHIVAL PRACTICES IN THE OFFICER'S *DĪWĀN*

In the Mamluk period Cairo's main administrative partner in terms of archival practices was thus not the provincial administrations. Rather, it was the local *iqṭāʿ*-holder's office, the *dīwān al-amīr*, or the "officer's archive." This third administrative actor in the Mamluk realm is an office that "we hardly know."¹³⁴ This is partly due to the fact that the authors of the Mamluk administrative manuals, such as al-Qalqashandī and al-Nuwayrī, were writing from a Cairene perspective. They had little to say about what went on in the lower echelons of the administrative hierarchy, except when it was directly relevant for the Cairene administration.

In his study of the *iqṭāʿ* system Tsugitaka Sato briefly mentioned this office and posited that it originated around the beginning of the Mamluk period.¹³⁵ However, its roots are certainly deeper; in Egypt, at least, the office dates to the transition period from the Fāṭimids to the Ayyūbids in the late fifth/twelfth century when administrative tasks were increasingly divided between the state administration and the officer's administrations. Despite these earlier origins, it is beyond doubt that the officer's administration became fully established in the Mamluk period as authors started in this period to clearly differentiate between three administrative actors, the offices at the center (*al-dawāwīn al-sulṭāniyya*), those in the province (*fi l-aʿmāl*), and those run by the officers (*dawāwīn al-umarāʾ*).¹³⁶ The prerogatives and importance of the officer's administration changed over the Mamluk period and its history

130. St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 19 (670/1272), ed. Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 22–25, with correction by Stern, "Petitions from the Mamlūk Period," 235.

131. St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 17 (658/1259), ed. Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 4 (*al-dīwān al-maʿmūr bi-thughr Iskandariyya*), 5 (*bi-dīwān istifāʾ al-mubāshara bi-thughr al-Iskandariyya*). In contrast to Sicily where *al-maʿmūr* is arguably identical with the Latin *curia regis* (Johns, *Arabic Administration*, 88–89), for the Mamluk administration "royal" is the most appropriate translation.

132. St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 49 (815/1413), ed. Ernst, *Sultansurkunden*, 116: *bi-dīwān al-naẓar ʿalā al-khawāṣṣ al-sharīfa bi-thughr al-Iskandariyya al-maḥrūs*.

133. Al-Nābulusī, *Kitāb Lumaʿ al-qawānīn al-muḍiyya fi dawāwīn al-Diyār al-Miṣriyya*, ed. C. Cahen and C. Becker, *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 16 (1960): 1–78, at 54: *wa-tabqā al-hujaj fi l-aʿmāl min qabil al-muḥmal ilā mā lā nihāya lahu*; see also C. Owen and C. Torrey, "Scandal in the Egyptian Treasury," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14 (1955): 70–96.

134. Michel, "Circassiens," 242.

135. T. Sato, *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam: Sultans, Muqtaʿs and Fallahun* (Leiden, 1997), 243–44.

136. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 33: 25; similarly, al-Maqrizī, *al-Sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk*, ed. M. ʿA. ʿAṭā (Beirut, 1997), 2: 338, 4: 202.

remains to be written. We have to rely on sources such as colophons for the late seventh/thirteenth and early eighth/fourteenth centuries, as the biographical dictionaries have only very limited data for this period on the secretaries in these offices.¹³⁷ Narrative sources start to have more abundant information on them in the course of the eighth/fourteenth century, however, as the prestige of serving in such an office, and thus arguably the importance of the office itself, increased. In consequence of the office's increased prestige, in 780/1378 for the first time an officer became *ustādār* (major domo) in another officer's administration¹³⁸ and in 782/1380 a *wazīr* is for the first time appointed to an officer's administration.¹³⁹

Initially, the officer's *dīwān* can best be understood as a means of centralization. By circumventing provincial administrations, which were often still controlled by local notables,¹⁴⁰ the central offices in Cairo dealt directly with those officers holding grants. The flow of information from the regions to the central administration was described by al-Nuwayrī in the early eighth/fourteenth century, and it is evident that the list of soldiers under the command of each officer with the distribution of his *iqṭāʿ* was kept in Cairo.¹⁴¹ By the early ninth/fifteenth century, however, the situation had changed, as the officer's *dīwān* had begun claiming additional prerogatives that were closely linked to an expansion in archival practices. Al-Qalqashandī wrote at this point:

The empire had been operating on the principle that the names of soldiers serving amirs (*ajṇād al-umarāʾ*) were all registered at the [central] army office (*dīwān al-juyūsh*). [The soldiers] had thus been under direct control of the office, but now what [had existed of documents] was abandoned. Rather, one contents oneself with lists (*ikṭafā bi-awrāq*) issued in the officers' offices (*dawāwīn al-umarāʾ*), [copies of] which are stored in the army office. Whenever a soldier dies or leaves service, another takes his place in the army office[']s copy]. However, the change is taken over (*ʿaraḍa*) from the *dīwān* of that *amīr*.¹⁴²

The documents held in these local offices must have been comprehensive. According to the administrative handbooks, registration certificates (*awrāq al-musajjil*) were first produced in Cairo and then sent to the office of the *iqṭāʿ*-holder, not of the relevant Mamluk governor. The documents were stored in the officer's archive and were used at harvest time to survey the land and produce a new set of land register documents (*fundāq*). The final documentary product of this process, the village's tax register (*mukallafa*), was also held in the officer's archive.¹⁴³ At the same time the army office in Cairo required the local *iqṭāʿ*-holder's office, not the provincial governors' offices, to produce annual surveys of how his assignments were subdivided among his men.¹⁴⁴ In consequence, after their conquest in the early tenth/sixteenth century, the new Ottoman rulers of Egypt turned to the officials of exe-

137. Such as the colophon in Vat. Copt. 71, fol. 169 (718/1319), where the otherwise unknown scribe Jibrāʾīl b. al-Rashīd identifies himself as *kātib Quṭlubak*.

138. Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 5: 51.

139. Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 5: 87.

140. K. Hirschler, "The Formation of the Civilian Elite in the Syrian Province: The Case of Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Ḥamāh," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12,2 (2008): 95–132.

141. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 8: 206–7.

142. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 4: 63–64, trans. based on Sato, *State and Rural Society*, 87.

143. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 3: 525. On the paperwork produced during tax collection and where it was preserved, see also R. Cooper, "The Assessment and Collection of Kharāj Tax in Medieval Egypt," *JAOS* 96,3 (1976): 365–82.

144. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 8: 206–7.

cuted Mamluk officers to draw up accounts of their *iqṭāʿ*s; i.e., they were aware that it was here that decisive fiscal information was located.¹⁴⁵

The importance of the officers' archives appears also during the Nāṣirī cadastral survey of 715/1315 when the central surveyors had to require the *iqṭāʿ*-holders in the regions to hand over the relevant deeds (*siḡillāt*) in order to gather the fiscal and cadastral information.¹⁴⁶ Some forty years later, in 755/1354, the officers' archives were again crucial when a survey of the lands endowed for the benefit of churches and monasteries in Egypt was drawn up. In order to gather the information Cairo had to turn to the officers' secretaries. The ensuing documents (*awraq*) were brought to the office of endowments (*dīwān al-aḥbās*) in Cairo, which seemingly did not have this information.¹⁴⁷ More evidence of officers being closely involved in archival practices can be found in their communications with the central administration in Cairo—for instance, in the seventh/thirteenth century an officer from the region of Tripoli petitioned the sultan in Cairo to intervene in his favor in a dispute over an *iqṭāʿ*. In his petition he refers to a series of documents in his possession, such as the royal decree (*manshūr sharīf*) granting the *iqṭāʿ* and a protocol (*maḥḍar sharʿī*) confirming the lands as his after an inspection.¹⁴⁸

The importance of the officer's administration is evident from a number of surviving documents. As noted above, officers issued the four *murabbaʿ*-minor decrees as well as four of the nine scroll decrees in the Ḥaram collection.¹⁴⁹ St. Catherine's Monastery also holds some Mamluk documents issued by officers, which Donald Richards described as having been "produced from a lower level of government," but which I argue here can be seen in more specific terms as originating from the officers' *dīwāns*.¹⁵⁰ In the Geniza collection is a decree issued in 733/1333 by an officer named Sayf al-Dīn Dilanjī for the *iqṭāʿ* he held in the Nile Delta. The document appoints a priest to a position the function of which is unclear, but the paperwork involved in the administration of an officer's *iqṭāʿ* is unmistakable.¹⁵¹

The question of the officer's archive is, however, more complex than that of the officer's administration—the Dilanjī decree, for instance, has no notes that would make it possible to establish whether this version was given to the priest or preserved in the officer's archive. As it is unlikely that a full-fledged copy was produced for such a minor affair, the present document was likely given to the priest while the secretaries found it sufficient—at most—to summarize the document in the office's register-archive. Likewise neither the St. Catherine's officers' decrees nor those in the Ḥaram collection carry archival notes. Since the royal scroll decrees do not carry any notes, their absence also on the Ḥaram collection's four officers' scroll decrees is not too surprising. We can assume that in these cases, like

145. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duḥūr*, ed. M. Muṣṭafā (Wiesbaden 1961), 5: 171 ll. 5–6: *wa-rus-sima ʿalā mubāshirī al-umarāʾ allādhina qutīlū ayḍan ḥattā yuqīmū ḥisāb iqtāʿātihim fa-aqāmū fī l-tarsīm muddat^{an}* (cited in Michel, "Circassiens," 246).

146. Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 1: 238.

147. Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 1: 185.

148. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, A.Ch. 10218 (7th/13th century), ed. W. Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe des 10. bis 16. Jahrhunderts aus der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek in Wien* (Wiesbaden, 1996), 210–16.

149. Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram Collection nos. 3, 5, 14, 303 and 2, 4, 12, 214 (see above, nn. 91 and 92, for details on editions).

150. Richards, *Mamluk Administrative Documents*, 17. Discounting doubtful cases the documents include: I (Atiya no. 140 [661/1263]), III (Atiya no. 20 [695/1296]), IV (Atiya nos. 933 and 934 [700/1301]), VI (Atiya no. 112 [8th/14th century]). Roman numbers refer to Richard's numbering.

151. Cambridge University Library, Michaelides (charta) A.81, ed. Richards, "Mamlūk Emir's 'Square' Decree," 63–67.

the central chancery, the officers' *dīwāns* were in the habit of producing archival copies that carried the relevant registration note. For the memoranda and minor decrees (*murabbaʿāt*), of which neither the central chancery nor the officers' *dīwāns* would have had an interest in producing archival copies, the case is different, however. As one might expect, the five royal memoranda each contain a large number of registration notes documenting that they entered the register-archives in Cairo. The officers' minor decrees, on the other hand, have no registration notes at all and the question thus arises as to what extent register-archives were routinely kept in the officers' *dīwāns*. The intimacy of administrative relationships within an officer's extended household, combined with the relative marginality of the affairs dealt with, apparently made it acceptable to deposit the decree with the recipient without leaving any archival trace. The only officer's decree from St. Catherine's carrying an archival note supports this argument. In this document the region's *iqṭāʿ*-holder, Sayf al-Dīn al-Raddādī, enjoins his deputy and local officials to uphold the monastery's privileges. There is a clear assumption that this document is the only copy, that it would be sent to the deputy to take appropriate action, and that the deputy would ultimately hand it over to the monastery where it would be archived: "Let this decree rest in the possession of the aforementioned [monks]/ after it has been acted upon."¹⁵²

On account of the absence of notes, the documents preserved in the archives of recipients are thus only of limited help in understanding archival practices in the officers' administrations. There are several documents that have survived in other contexts, however, and these can shed considerable light on their archival practices. For instance, it might be asked whether al-Maqrīzī's notebook comprising scrap documents was indeed sourced from recycled documents that he had purchased on the market after the Cairene chancery had been plundered. As these are final decrees one wonders why they would have been preserved in the chancery in the first place.¹⁵³ They are clearly not archival copies (which would have had less ample spacing) and the original would have been handed to the beneficiaries. It is more likely that these decrees were discarded from the archives of the beneficiaries, i.e., officers' archives.

A second and more interesting set of documents for understanding the officer's archive lies among the papyri in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, which Werner Diem edited in his *Arabische amtliche Briefe*. Many of these documents are linked to the province al-Ushmūnayn (Oxyrhynchus) in Upper Egypt and include, inter alia, decrees by *iqṭāʿ*-holders to the elders and peasants on their lands with regard to issues of taxation and to the transfer of the *iqṭāʿ*.¹⁵⁴ None of these documents has any registration or copying notes, which would give further insight into concrete archival practices, but one group of copies of official writings arguably reflects part of the holdings of a certain officer's archive.¹⁵⁵ The copies were probably made as a training exercise by a secretary who was working on his handwriting at some point after 679/1280.¹⁵⁶ The documents refer to different provinces in Egypt whereby Diem assumes that the secretary was employed in the central Cairene admin-

152. St. Catherine's, Atiya no. 20 (695/1296), ed. Richards, *Mamluk Administrative Documents*, 45–50 ll. b–c (no. III).

153. Bauden ("Recovery," 74 n. 51) rightly cautions that it "remains to be proven [whether] original documents could be kept by the chancery [. . .]."

154. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, A.Ch. 10436r (875/1470), ed. Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 7–13; A.Ch. 10219r (872–901/1467–1495), ed. Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 14–18; A.Ch. 10220 (8th–9th/14th–15th centuries), ed. Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 19–23; A.Ch. 8984r (before 842/1438), ed. Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 24–25.

155. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, A.Ch. 10681, after 679/1280 (ed. Diem, *Amtliche Briefe*, 154–63).

156. It is unlikely that these are drafts written by a secretary before producing the final versions, as the document contains copies of several reports and edicts, addressed to the officer and issued by him. It is therefore more

istration, which dealt with matters in various localities.¹⁵⁷ It is as probable, however, that the original documents were held in an officer's archive and that they pertained to various *iqṭāʿ*s that this officer was holding in Egypt.

The most interesting of these copies is a report by a secretary from Minyat Birā in the Gharbiyya province (Nile Delta). In this report the secretary gives the *iqṭāʿ*-holder¹⁵⁸ an account, inter alia, of his sugar cane fields in the region, and includes an optimistic outlook on the harvest and, unsurprisingly, a demand for authorizing expenditure on the fields. The content of another copied text is unclear, but it refers to a village in the region of Qūṣ. A third geographical reference brings us back to the Nile Delta, with the mention of the village Shībīn al-Sarī. All these letters from different parts of Egypt reached the officer's *dīwān* and must have been preserved there for some time before they were used as writing exercises. Arguably, this local archive in Ushmūnayn functioned for a while as an officer's main administrative location.

In general, it is impossible to identify physical spaces where such administrations were located in more detail. Small local offices probably conducted the day-to-day business close to the *iqṭāʿ* lands themselves; one of them is, exceptionally, mentioned in the village of Dārāyyā near Damascus, where the scribe ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Ismāʿīl al-Āmidī (d. 764/1363) held office.¹⁵⁹ Owing to the dispersal of land ownership, senior officers could easily have several such local offices.¹⁶⁰ These local offices in turn were accountable to a "central" office attached to the officer's household that moved with this household within the Mamluk realm. In most cases this central *dīwān* was not a dedicated administrative space (like the chancery in Cairo), but with regard to archival practices more a transportable collection of documents (as in *dīwān al-qāḍī*). The fact that the Mamluk officer's papers were kept in Ushmūnayn probably indicates that his career came to an end there while he was holding a local *iqṭāʿ* as his main source of income and this was his "central" *dīwān*. The same applies to why the above-mentioned seventh/thirteenth-century petition by the officer from the region of Tripoli to the sultan in Cairo found its way to Ushmūnayn. This petition was either a draft version or copy retained by that officer for his own archive or the final version that Cairo returned to him.¹⁶¹ In any case, its location in Upper Egypt is most likely again linked to the fact that this officer ended his career in this part of the Mamluk realm.

As officers could hold land throughout the Mamluk empire, their archival practices not only reflect communication with Cairo, but also include exchanges with their household, on the one hand, and with their men who were administering the lands in the local offices, on the other. An important set of documents exemplifying these internal communications within an

likely a set that served in training purposes, either for handwriting improvement or as a miniature *Vorlagen*-archive for younger secretaries (cf. nn. 57, 114, above).

157. Diem argues (*Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 3) that "most decrees published [in this volume] probably originated in the public archives of the provincial capital al-Ushmūnayn." Regarding this particular document, Diem suggests (p. 154) on the basis of internal evidence—the document itself contains no indication of where it was found—that "the writer was most likely employed in a central administration, probably located in Cairo."

158. Diem (*Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 155) argues that the term *al-ṣāhib*, with which the *iqṭāʿ*-holder is addressed, routinely refers to the vizier in Cairo. However, Mamluk chroniclers used this term also for the local landlord; see, e.g., Ibn al-Furāt, *Taʾrīkh al-duwal wa-l-mulūk* (Basra, 1967), 4,1: 78–79.

159. Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr wa-aʿwān al-naṣr*, ed. F. A. Bakkūr (Beirut, 1998), 3: 1121.

160. The officer Baktimur al-Ḥājjib Sayf al-Dīn (d. 738/1337), for instance, had "a *dīwān* in each city with his officials (*mubāshirūn*).” Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi wa-l-mustawfā baʿda l-wāfi*, ed. M. Amīn (Cairo, 1984–90), 3: 389.

161. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, A.Ch. 10218 (7th/13th century), ed. Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 210–16.

officer's household are ten petitions from Ushmūnayn, with seven endorsements by a certain Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Azkā al-Malakī al-Nāṣirī¹⁶² and three by his descendants.¹⁶³ Diem argues in his commentary on these petitions that this Jamāl al-Dīn was an official (*Beamter*) who belonged to a family of local administrators working in the local military council (*majlis al-ḥarb*) where the documents were produced. The endorsed petitions are in Diem's view thus part of the administrative archives of the city.¹⁶⁴

I regard this as rather unlikely, however, given that Jamāl al-Dīn and one of his descendants are addressed as *amīr*.¹⁶⁵ I suspect that Jamāl al-Dīn was the local *iqtāʿ*-holder and these petitions were addressed to him by those living on his lands or by his own officials. In the petitions commoners asked him to take action against perceived injustices, including ill-treatment of slaves, theft, abduction, and murder, while his men inform him of peasants refusing to fulfil their incumbent services and non-payment of taxes. In his endorsements, Jamāl al-Dīn routinely orders his local representatives (sg. *nāʾib*),¹⁶⁶ the elders of a specific region or village, and a local administrative office, the *majlis al-ḥarb*, to act. These endorsements thus reflect the internal communication between this officer, who was probably either in Cairo or on campaign, and his local representatives. The fact that the petitions circulated within the officer's extended household also offers an additional explanation for the absence of any registration or copy notes, which complements my hypothesis above that the notes' absence on officers' documents meant that comparatively minor matters were treated; since the petitions' endorsements did not address the petitioners, but rather his local representatives, the endorsed petitions never left the officer's administrative channels of communication and were retained by the officer's administrative structures, without the need to produce a copy or to register them.

This discussion of officers' archives has shown that we are dealing with a particularly pertinent example of decentering in archival practices in the Mamluk period. The administrative structure clustered around officers' households was not only a site of document production, but played an important role in their preservation. As much as archival practices were spread within the central administration in Cairo—among the various offices and in different forms, such as register-archives—they were also spread across the urban topography of Cairo (and beyond) in the secretaries' households, scattered over the Mamluk realm wherever officers resided. This crucial role of officers' archives has been largely overlooked so far, but it is here that many of the crucial documents for administering the Mamluk empire were kept.

IX. CONCLUSION

This article's focus on archival practices beyond the fixed spatial category of the archive has shown that practices concerned with preserving documents in the premodern Arabic Middle East were situated in numerous loci across the Mamluk lands. The significance of the officers' archives in particular alerts us to the necessity of taking the periphery into account

162. All the documents are dated 698–708/1299–1309; the edition refers to Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, A.Ch. 12502, ed. Diem, 240–45; A.Ch. 25677, ed. Diem, 246–50; A.Ch. 10809, ed. Diem, 251–53; A.Ch. 15499, ed. Diem, 254–56; A.Ch. 11584, ed. Diem, 257–59; A.Ch. 25676, ed. Diem, 260–62; A.Ch. 25674, ed. Diem, 263–65.

163. Dates and edition are the same as in previous note: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, A.Ch. 23075, ed. Diem, 266–28; A.Ch. 16220, ed. Diem, 269–72; A.Ch. 2007, ed. Diem, 273–76.

164. Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 3.

165. A.Ch. 12502 and A.Ch. 16220.

166. The term in the plural is found in one petition (A.Ch. 25676), making clear that it does not refer to the governor of the district, but to the officer's deputies.

in order to avoid writing archival history as an institutional history of the political center or as the history of teleological early modern state formation. One can argue that this decentered nature of document preservation ensured that the Mamluk empire was well equipped against documentary loss at the center—as the little effect the late eighth/fourteenth-century plundering of documents from the chancery’s room in Cairo had testified to. The “state archives” of the Mamluk empire certainly were located in the Cairene chancellery, but the bulk of the material was situated at hundreds of small-scale sites, most importantly the secretaries’ and officers’ households. The history of these practices still remains to be written, but we clearly must cast our net significantly wider than previously thought.

The article’s arguments are also directly relevant to the debate on the survival of pre-modern Middle Eastern documents that—often implicitly—addressed the question of archival practices. As opposed to Michael Chamberlain’s method and argument—focusing on the biographical dictionary as the main archive and seeming to sideline the importance of documents,¹⁶⁷ and explaining the non-survival of archival collections in terms of a “social logic” that could be understood to address not only a purported non-survival of documents, but also the insignificant role that documents played in their own time—the findings of this article underline the fact that documents were not only produced in high numbers, they were also preserved in high numbers. It still does not explain why so many documents were preserved owing to counter-archival practices and why only very few collections exist that can be described as archival collections. This is where the decentralized nature of document preservation in the Mamluk period is of significance and where it can be fruitfully combined with the question of the social logic of document preservation.

The highly personalized and highly decentralized nature of archival practices certainly rendered the Mamluk empire resilient against the effects of documentary loss in the center. At the same time, however, it meant that there was only a limited institutional logic of document preservation and that documents were discarded when they ceased to be of relevance for the individual, as when secretaries could be certain that they would not be challenged on a given decree’s legitimacy. It is not difficult to imagine that there were other times in a secretary’s career when he dispensed with other material, such as archival copies; upon his death or the demise of a family from service in administration, material was certainly prone to be discarded. Officers also had little incentive to keep documents of *iqṭāʿ*s when they were assigned new holdings. Furthermore, as *iqṭāʿ*s were often reassigned and the lands of which they were composed rearranged, there was also no development toward a “non-personal” *diwān* that would have been bound to a specific assignment and that the following *iqṭāʿ*-holder would have taken over. Following the death of an officer there was no reason to keep documents on grants that he had held at some point during his career.

In a wider sense, seeking out archival practices rather than archives has brought to light a series of highly informal practices. These do not easily fit the image of the central Cairene bureaucracy’s monopoly on administrative procedures that its own personnel strove to depict in their administrative manuals. Chancery secretaries such as al-Qalqashandī and al-Nuwayrī had little incentive to go beyond the neat administrative structure that they tried to inscribe in their works. Secretaries’ personal archival practices fit this rigid structure as little as the officers’ *diwāns* did. While these authors did not avoid all mention of archival practices beyond the citadel, these practices were of little interest for works that were meant to train the secretary working in the central administration. With regard to archival practices,

167. Hence the often vehement reactions to his work by colleagues who have been working with these very documents.

however, it is precisely the intimate interplay between the formal structures they depicted and the informal practices emerging from the surviving documentary evidence that allows us and requires us to move beyond the category of the central archive. Practices of document preservation in the Arabic Eastern Mediterranean in the pre-Ottoman period were much richer than hitherto thought and they allow us to view the “archives’ silence” as an opportunity, not an impediment.