

Sultan al-Zāhir Barqūq as seen by his contemporaries Ibn Khaldūn and Bertrando de Mignanelli

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The reign of sultan al-Zāhir Barqūq brought more stability after a long period of revolts and regime changes in Egypt and Syria.² Many chroniclers and historians have registered the events of his eventful life, but only two of them had first-hand knowledge and were witnesses of his deeds: the Tunisian Ibn Khaldūn and the Italian Bertrando de Mignanelli.³ Their portraits of Barqūq, although perhaps not completely balanced and correct, have the attractiveness of being the oldest. The purpose of this article is an investigation of the literary means the authors used in portraying sultan Barqūq, how their oral sources possibly influenced them and how their cultural outlook and theoretical concepts played a role in the selection of the data they chose to report.

Ibn Khaldūn

Ibn Khaldūn spent almost a third of his life in Egypt, and almost half of his professional career. When he arrived in Egypt in 784/1382, he was just over 50 years old, and could look back on a vivid professional and political career in all the North African countries and al-Andalus, alternating with quiet periods of studying and writing in isolated places, even more or less in exile. In all the positions he held he got into trouble, and he used to blame others for his misfortunes. The world as he experienced it was a grim place, full of treason, conspiracy, slander and violence.⁴ For a time out from the strained relation with his employer the Tunisian sultan Abū l-ʿAbbās, he asked and got permission to perform the pilgrimage and sailed to Alexandria never again to return; he left Egypt only, some years later, for the pilgrimage, and for short visits to Jerusalem and Damascus. The moment he arrived in Egypt, its population was celebrating the installation of a new sultan, al-Zāhir Barqūq, who replaced the last powerless descendant of the great sultan Qalāwūn. By the intervention of a highplaced official, al-Ṭunbughā al-Jūbānī by name, Ibn Khaldūn was welcomed by Barqūq and endowed with teaching positions at prestigious chanqā's. He was even nominated Chief Judge for the Mālikite lawschool, a position he lost soon because he followed a stern line, refusing to conform to current practices and so rousing the hatred of his fellow-judges. At the same time he experienced a great personal tragedy. He had left behind his wife and children in Tunis, and Barqūq mediated to obtain permission from the Tunisian sultan for their reunion. But in sight of

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² For that period see Jo Van Steenberghe, *Order out of chaos. Patronage, Conflict and Mamluk Socio-political Culture, 1343 - 1382*. (The Medieval Mediterranean 65), Brill, Leiden-Boston 2006.

³ A list of many of these chroniclers is given in Walter J. Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn in Egypt. His Public Functions and His Historical Research (1382 - 1406) A Study in Islamic Historiography*. Univ. of California Press, Berkeley 1967, 10-12. For the view of a dissenting historian see Sami G. Massoud, "Al-Maqrīzī as a historian of the Reign of Barqūq", in: *Mamluk Studies Review* 7/2 (2003) 119-136.

⁴ M.Redjala, "Ibn Khaldūn devant la torture et la mort violente", in: *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 40 (1985) 2, 155-171.

the harbour of Alexandria the ship that carried his family and personal belongings, his books among other things, capsized and sank.⁵

When Ibn Khaldūn arrived in Egypt, he had already published the work that made him famous, in both East and West: the *Muqaddima*.⁶ He continued studying and working on his great worldhistory, the *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*, profiting from the many new books he found in Cairo.⁷ Another project was his *Autobiography*, as we now usually call it.⁸ That these three works had a relation with each other and with his personal history has already been argued in 1979 by Ali Oumlil.⁹ A recent work by Gabriel Martinez-Gros made perfectly clear how Ibn Khaldūn used the concepts he had developed in the *Muqaddima* to construct the *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*.¹⁰ So what I tried to do is to compare these works to get insight in the construction of the biography of Barqūq.

The biography of Barqūq is part of the history of the Mamluks in the *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*. It has not been conceived as a biography in the modern sense but is part of a very detailed report about the events that took place, with a chapter about the personal history of Barqūq when he was nominated sultan. The book ends in 796/1394, so that the last years of the reign of Barqūq and his death are not included.¹¹ In his *Autobiography* Ibn Khaldūn made many times mention of Barqūq, covering his later years and death.¹² He devoted a long section (a short and a much longer chapter) to the story of his appointment as director of the Baybarsiyya-khanqā, and how he lost that position. To explain what happened he inserted a short presentation of his theory about the way dynasties follow each other, a condensed history of the Mamluk rulers and a report on the revolt of al-Nāṣirī against Barqūq and his own role in it.¹³ In doing this, Ibn Khaldūn himself gave a

⁵ Ibn Khaldūn lost his wife and five daughters, his two sons survived; see Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn in Egypt*, 165.

⁶ Abdessalem Cheddadi published a French translation of the *Muqaddima* in: Ibn Khaldūn, *Le Livre des Exemples*, Vol. I, Gallimard, Paris 2002, and a new edition of the *Muqaddima* in 3 vols, Casablanca 2005. For the English translation see Franz Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah, An Introduction to History*, 3 vols., Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton 1958, 1967². (My citations are from the condensed version edited by N.J.Dawood, Princeton 1969).

⁷ *Taʿrīkh Ibn Khaldūn (Kitāb al-ʿIbar)*, 7 vols., Būlāq 1867; a newer more readable but not better edition, also in 7 vols., Bayrūt 1966-1968.

⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-taʿrīf bi-Ibn Khaldūn wa-rihlatuhu gharban wa-sharqan*, ed. by Muḥammad b. Tāwīt al-Ṭanjī, Cairo 1951, 246-350. French translation in Ibn Khaldūn, *Le Voyage d'Occident et d'Orient. Autobiographie* présentée et traduite de l'arabe par Abdessalam Cheddadi, Sindbad, Paris 1980², 148-215. A revised version in Cheddadi, *Le Livre des Exemples*. For the problems connected with this autobiography see Ali Merad, "L'Autobiographie d'Ibn Khaldūn", in: *IBLA* 19 (1956) 53-64, and Walter J.Fischel, "Ibn Khaldūn's *Autobiography* in the light of external Arabic sources", in: *Studi Orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi della Vida*, Rome 1956, vol. I, 287-308; almost the same information in Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn in Egypt* Part Three, 159-165. For more personal data, see Maḥmūd al-Khalīlī, "Tarjamāt Ibn Khaldūn lil-Maqrīzī", in: *Majallat al-majmaʿ al-ʿilmī al-ʿirāqī* 13 (1385/1966) 215-242, followed on 243-246 by a short article by the same author: "Maraḍ Ibn Khaldūn wa-taʿthīrihi ʿala taʿālīfihi".

⁹ Ali Oumlil, "Ibn Ḥaldūn: sens d'une autobiographie", in: *Studia Islamica* 49 (1979) 123-134.

¹⁰ Gabriel Martinez-Gros, *Ibn Khaldūn et les sept vies de l'Islam*, Sindbad/Actes Sud, Arles 2006

¹¹ *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* edition Būlāq 1867: vol. V 452-514, in the edition Bayrūt 1967: vol.V 971-1085.

¹² *Taʿrīf* 246 - 347 contains references to Barqūq.

¹³ *Taʿrīf* 312 - 335; Cheddadi, *Voyage* 189-204; idem, *Le Livre des Exemples* 198 -215 and 1289 -1290 (notes)

clue to his way of seeing the relation between theory and practice. When he presented a copy of the *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* to sultan Barqūq, the *Autobiography* was part of it, but without these chapters, that he added later when the *Autobiography* developed into a separate book.¹⁴

Bertrando de Mignanelli

What is known about Bertrando de Mignanelli is almost only based on what he himself mentions in his work. He was born in 1370 in Siena, in a respectable family of noble descent. His works testify to a good training in Latin and classical authors, but he does not refer to the schools he attended. He left Italy in his youth, travelled extensively in the Middle-East and settled as merchant in Damascus, where he became rich. He learned Arabic and translated diplomatic correspondence between the sultan and the Duke of Milan from and into that language. How long he stayed in Syria, and when he returned to Europa is unknown, but in 1416 he was in Constance, where the famous Council to restore the unity of the Catholic Church was held. It was a big affair, with tens of thousands of participants. For what purpose he was there is not known. With so many people around, princes, officials and delegates from every corner of the Christian world, inside and outside Europe, and even representatives of non-Christian rulers, the atmosphere must have been very stimulating, whereas much time had to be killed waiting for things to happen.¹⁵ The request of friends inspired him to write two important Latin treatises, one about Barqūq, called *Ascensus Barcoch* and the other one about Tamerlane, entitled *Vita Tamerlani*.¹⁶ What concerns us here is the *Ascensus Barcoch*. The story is divided into 14 chapters of varying length, and covers the life of Barqūq from the beginning as Christian boy sold as slave to his death as sultan.

Biography of Barqūq in a nutshell

He was born (as Christian) in Circassia around 737/1338, kidnapped by pirates and sold as slave at an early age; educated in the house of the *ḥājib* Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī; after the dissolution of the Yalbughāwiyya-mamluks prisoner in al-Karak; service in the house of Manjak in Damascus; transfer to Cairo, to the service of the son of the sultan Shaʿbān al-Ashraf; death of Shaʿbān al-Ashraf 778/1377, succession of ʿAlī al-Manṣūr, reign in the hands of al-Nāṣirī, Barqūq and Baraka; elimination of al-Nāṣirī, then Barqūq and Baraka together; murder of Baraka by Ibn ʿArrām inspired by Barqūq; death of ʿAlī al-Manṣūr, succession of al-Ṣāliḥ Ḥājji; Barqūq nominated sultan, first reign 784-791/1383-

¹⁴ Cheddadi, *Voyage* 27-28.

¹⁵ Michael Richard Buck (ed.), *Ulrichs von Richental Chronik des Constanzer Concils 1414 bis 1418*, Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart Bd 158, Tübingen 1882; English translation in Louise Ropes Loomis, *The Council of Constance. The Unification of the Church*, Columbia Univ. Press, London/New York 1961.

¹⁶ Walter J. Fischel, "Ascensus Barcoch. A Latin biography of the Mamlūk sultan Barqūq of Egypt (d.1399) written by B. de Mignanelli in 1416", in: *Arabica* 6 (1959), 57-74, 152-172; idem, "A new Latin source on Tamerlane's conquest of Damascus (1400/1401) (B. de Mignanelli's "Vita Tamerlani" 1416)", in: *Oriens* 9 (1956) 201-232; see also his *Ibn Khaldūn in Egypt Part Two*, 71-108.

1389; revolt of al-Nāṣirī and Miṭāsh; al-Ṣāliḥ Ḥājjī back on the throne; Barqūq saved either by al-Nāṣirī or al-Ṭunbughā al-Jūbānī; imprisoned in al-Karak; escape from al-Karak, collected army of locals and Bedouins in Syria; siege of Damascus; Barqūq defeats Miṭāsh; Cairo taken over by faithful mamluks who had escaped from prison; Barqūq back on the throne, second reign 792-801/1390-1399; numerous revolts and uprisings in Cairo; war on Miṭāsh in Syria, supported by Nuʿayr, the chief of the Bedouins, his father-in-law; Miṭāsh betrayed by Nuʿayr and decapitated; Tamerlane in Syria, retired after expedition led by Barqūq; uprisings in Cairo, financial problems; last years in seclusion, death in 801/1399. ¹⁷

Comparison

1 *Literary methods and style*

A comparison of the texts shows that they tell more or less the same story of a gifted boy who reaches the position of sultan by his cleverness and talents. A remarkable similarity is that both authors mention divine intervention. De Mignanelli records a dream the young Barqūq had when in the service of Minjak. He saw a loaf of bread hanging over his head that he seized and ate. An old hermit knew about the dream without being told and understood its meaning. Astronomers agreed that this dream foretold that he was the future ruler of Egypt and Syria. It was his lifelong inspiration. Ibn Khaldūn tells that the five year period in prison in al-Karak was a God sent test that strengthened him to fulfill the task of serving God that God had ordained for him. ¹⁸

The difference in style between these stories is very outspoken. Bertrando de Mignanelli could profit from the methods to describe persons developed by classical authors. His knowledge was up to date, he refers to Titus Livius and Valerius Maximus, who had not so long before been added to the medieval curriculum. ¹⁹ So he could make use of fictional elements, visions and their predicting explanation, dialogues, interior monologues, orations and anecdotes to sketch a psychological portrait. Approvingly he recorded the first period of good governance, seven years long, an almost Biblical period. ²⁰ The cruelty and misbehaviour of the second period he left to speak for themselves, without moralistic comment. Renaissance princes in Italy did not behave very differently, after all. For that is the impression his portrait of Barqūq makes: the portrait of a Renaissance prince in an exotic setting.

The two texts that Ibn Khaldūn wrote with Barqūq as protagonist have different purposes. The *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* is meant as a chronological report of the period that Barqūq played a role in the Mamluk state. A political history, not in the current analistic way of the chroniclers, but written as a continuous story in the third person, with changing focus and details of the main characters. As Fischel stated: "He looked at Mamlūk Egypt with the eyes of an historian and tried to present an objective and factual picture of the "men who

¹⁷ See for the standard biography *EP* 1:1050a, s.v. Barqūq, by G.Wiet.

¹⁸ *Ascensus Barcoch* 65-67; *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* vol. V 472/1012.

¹⁹ B.Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident Médiéval*, Paris 1980, 304; description of the development of the schools after 1300: "Mais surtout Tite-Live commençait à jouir d'une faveur prodigieuse, et plus encore Valère-Maxime dont les *Faits et dits mémorables* offrait à enfants et adults l'inépuisable arsenal de ses anecdotes."

²⁰ *Ascensus Barcoch* 74.

made history" in his own time."²¹ In the *Autobiography* Ibn Khaldūn presented his personal history, written in the first person singular, to serve his own (sometimes for us now concealed) interests.

The method Ibn Khaldūn used in the *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* to portray Barqūq was the use of contrast. By putting much stress on the bad character or evil behaviour of opponents, he showed Barqūq as clement and mild. It was always the opponents who were the cause of a problem, driven by jealousy, ill-will or self-interest, the reaction of Barqūq was often to remove them to Syria, not to kill them. Old comradeship might have been the reason for this behaviour. An exception is the way he eliminated, after a provoked quarrel Baraka, and later in much the same way al-Nāṣirī.²² Ibn Khaldūn held the governor of Alexandria Ibn ʿArrām responsible for the death of Baraka, but this is an example of an at least incomplete story. De Mignanelli used this episode to expose the cunning of Barqūq, and also his ruthlessness, in manipulating both Baraka and Ibn ʿArrām, until they both were dead. To the honour of Ibn Khaldūn must be remarked that he added a few words that give to understand that a different view was possible. It should not be forgotten that he wrote during Barqūq's lifetime. A critical attitude is not to be expected under such circumstances, and could even have endangered him.²³

In the *Autobiography* Ibn Khaldūn inserted a report about the al-Nāṣirī-revolt to explain a mistake he had made. Forced, as he said, by Miṭāsh, who had taken over the government in the name of the minor boy al-Ṣāliḥ Ḥājjī, he had signed a *fatwā* that aimed at the death of Barqūq. He added the text of the poem in which he excused himself for this behaviour.²⁴ It should not surprise us, then, that Miṭāsh is portrayed by him as the absolute evil, the real bad guy. De Mignanelli's opinion about him is mixed. This former Tatar slave of Barqūq, bought for 3000 ducats, "was bold and wild, very proud, virtuous and manly", and also "full of bitterness day and night. He was luxurious and took no care of money. He felt nothing but vengefulness." But "despite the weakness of his intelligence, [he] governed with justice".²⁵

2 Sources

Writing the *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* Ibn Khaldūn made use of many written sources, but not in the part about the period of Barqūq.²⁶ But as he was not yet in Egypt during the earlier years of Barqūq's career, he must have had oral sources. One of them he reveals by quoting him in direct speech, telling him how Barqūq had been transferred from the service of Manjak in Damascus to that of the sultan Shaʿbān al-Ashraf's son in Cairo. That source was al-Ṭunbughā al-Jūbānī, who had been one of Barqūq's brother-mamluks in the Yalbughāwiyya-time. And who was Ibn Khaldūn's go-between to Barqūq.²⁷

²¹ Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn in Egypt*, 73.

²² *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* vol. V 501-504/1071-1076; *Ascensus Barcoch* 160-162.

²³ *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* vol. V 471/1009-1010; *Ascensus Barcoch* 70-73.

²⁴ *Taʿrīf* 330-331; Cheddadi, *Voyage* 204; idem, *Le Livre des Exemples* 211. More about the poem later.

²⁵ *Ascensus Barcoch* 152, 153, 155.

²⁶ Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn in Egypt*, 74. "[...] conspicuous by the absence of any quotation from or references to any written sources [...]."

²⁷ *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* vol V 462/991.

De Mignanelli also had oral sources, all of them Syrian, as Damascus was the city where he lived. He knew the sons of Manjak, who had been Barqūq's employer. Then the Bedouin-chief Nu^cayr and his sons, important contacts as they protected the trade routes in Syria. And he mentions Tanbak al-Ḥaṣanī al-Zāhirī, known as Tanam, who was governor of Damascus.²⁸ Fischel has suggested that De Mignanelli might have had access to written Arabic sources, and as the earliest written source was Ibn Khaldūn's work, that he might have known it. That cannot be excluded, but as the similarities are few, my opinion is that they rather drew upon the same reservoir of stories and rumours that circulated in Damascus and Cairo.²⁹

A few examples show the effect of the source upon the work. The Bedouin-chief Nu^cayr wedded his daughter to Miṅtāsh and later betrayed his son-in-law to partisans of Barqūq, who then ordered his execution. The story of Ibn Khaldūn about this event differs in details, but not in essence from De Mignanelli's, but the latter's story is much more detailed and colourful.³⁰

When al-Nāṣirī and Miṅtāsh took over the government in Cairo, Barqūq fled and went into hiding. Especially Miṅtāsh was after his death, but he was saved by al-Ṭunbughā al-Jūbānī if we believe Ibn Khaldūn, but by al-Nāṣirī according to the Syrian sources of De Mignanelli. The stories about Barqūq's liberation from al-Karak also differ. De Mignanelli told a romantic story about the messenger of al-Nāṣirī with the order to set him free arriving just a few hours before the messenger with Miṅtāsh's order to kill him., so it was again al-Nāṣirī who saved Barqūq's life. According to Ibn Khaldūn the governor of al-Karak asked for a written consent of the four *qāḍī's* when Miṅtāsh's order to kill Barqūq arrived, and so gave Barqūq's followers the time and opportunity to liberate him; Barqūq had bought the sympathy of the inhabitants with liberal gifts.³¹

3 Theory

This section is mainly about Ibn Khaldūn, because about De Mignanelli's theoretical concepts nothing is known, besides his classical education and his experience with the behaviour of European princes, lively demonstrated during the Council of Constance. In the *Muqaddima* Ibn Khaldūn developed his theory of history. History is a sequence of dynasties that last three generations, between 120 and 150 years. That is the basic rhythm. A strong group of outsiders, used to a hard life and good fighters, bound together by their group-spirit (*ʿaṣabiyya*), inspired by their belief (*dīn*), seize power in a civilized country, they correct the abuses of their predecessors and bring order in the financial situation. But once in the grip of civilized habits and luxury, they commit the same faults, and after the third generation a new dynasty takes over. It is a linear movement, not a cyclic repetition. The *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* is the history of a nation, the Arabs, organised according to their generations.³² Although Ibn Khaldūn had written repeatedly

²⁸ *Ascensus Barcoch* 65, 164, 159 n.4.

²⁹ *Ascensus Barcoch* 62, 63 n.1.

³⁰ *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* vol V 504-505/1076-1078; *Ascensus Barcoch* ch. 9-10.

³¹ *Taʿrīf* 327-329; *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* vol. V 489-490/1046-1048; *Ascensus Barcoch* 155.

³² Martinez-Gros, *Les sept vies de l'islam*, (Le plan du *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*) 108. English has no good translation voor "people", nation is not the same idea.

that Mamluk Egypt did not quite fit this pattern³³, when he arrived there he was witness to an accession to the throne that he came to consider as the start of a new dynasty. The Banu Qalāwūn had made a mess of the state, spending too much money on luxury, and Barqūq started to correct that.³⁴

In this light we should consider the story as Ibn Khaldūn told it. He was interested in the legal aspects and in the roles that princes played, not so much in their personality. To quote him: "The interest subjects have in their ruler is not interest in his person and body, for example in his good figure, handsome face, large frame, wide knowledge, good handwriting, or acute mind. Their interest in him lies in his relation to them." ³⁵

De Mignanelli showed interest in Barqūq's age, his looks and his behaviour, but not so much in the dynastic aspects. Although he reported that Barqūq married the widow of Sha^cbān al-Ashraf, the mother of al-Šāliḥ Ḥājī, a detail that Ibn Khaldūn did not mention.³⁶ But Ibn Khaldūn recorded in the biographical chapter that Barqūq had his father Ānas move to Cairo, where he very was received with much honour. Mamluks seldom have a known ancestry, it made him more respectable.³⁷ To stress that it was really a new dynasty Ibn Khaldūn paid much attention to its Circassian background, he enobled the Circassians by placing them in the line of pure Arab descent by connecting them with the Ghassānids.³⁸ De Mignanelli reported also that Barqūq favoured fellow-Circassians and Greeks, so that was possibly how contemporaries talked about the change. But only later it became common to speak of the Circassian dynasty, although the importance of the Circassian element has been subjected to modification recently.³⁹

In the *Muqaddima* a chapter is devoted to the qualities of a ruler. "Whenever we observe people who possess groupfeeling (*ʿaṣabiyya*) and who have gained control over many lands and nations, we find in them an eager desire for goodness and good qualities [...]" Follows a catalogue of virtues, among which generosity, tolerance toward the weak, hospitality, support for dependents, patience in adverse circumstances, respect for religious law and religious scholars. So it is no to wonder that Barqūq displayed all these qualities, they were the legitimation of his authority. But the medal had a reverse: "Vice versa, when God wants a nation to be deprived of royal authority, he causes (its members) to commit blameworthy deeds and to practice all sorts of vices. This will lead to the complete loss of their political virtues, which will continue to be destroyed until they no longer exercise royal authority. Someone else will exercise it in their stead."⁴⁰

Ibn Khaldūn chose to ignore certain aspects of the al-Nāṣirī-revolt. That revolt was not a sudden whim of his opponents. Barqūq had lost support, why else did a considerable part of his troops defect to al-Nāṣirī? Ibn Khaldūn reported that without giving an explanation. Accusations for his vicious life-style, that are to be found in the work of al-Maqrīzī, the

³³ Cheddadi, *Muqaddima* chapter III par.9, vol. 278-279; Dawood, 131-132.

³⁴ *Taʿrīf* 325; Cheddadi, *Voyage* 199; idem, *Le Livre des Exemples* 207.

³⁵ Cheddadi, *Muqaddima* chapter III par. 22, vol. I 323; Dawood 152-153.

³⁶ *Ascensus Barcoch* 156, 158, 159, 73.

³⁷ *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* vol.V 473/1014.

³⁸ Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn in Egypt*, 74; *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* vol.V 472/1011.

³⁹ Amalia Levanoni, "Al-Maqrīzī's account of the transition from Turkish to Circassian Mamluk Sultanate: history in the service of faith", in: *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 850-1800)*, ed. Hugh Kennedy, Brill, Leiden 2001, 93-105; section II.

⁴⁰ Cheddadi, *Muqaddima* chapter III par.19, vol. I 233-236; Dawood 112-113.

only historian with - for his own reasons - a negative view of Barqūq, might give a clue.⁴¹ Also De Mignanelli hinted at this behaviour, and at grudges that had upstood.⁴² Following his own theory, the devout muslim Ibn Khaldūn might have been convinced that the flight and surrender of Barqūq and his legitimate replacement by another sultan was God's will, and that might also be the explanation why he did not resist Miṅtāsh's pressure to sign the *fatwā*. When the consequences of this deed turned out to be severe after Barqūq's return and restored legitimacy, he tried to repair the damage by offering him a long apologetic poem through the intermediary of his old friend al-Ṭunbughā al-Jūbānī. He minimized his own rôle by sheltering in the collectivity and by referring to the vagueness of the *fatwā*. But without succes, he remained almost ten years without official functions.⁴³

That at a second occasion that Ibn Khaldūn failed Barqūq underscores this interpretation of an enigmatic act. On his deathbed Barqūq had nominated a tutor for his minor son Faraj who was to succeed him. But once installed on the throne, Faraj, under the influence of an atābik lusting for power, announced that he could do without the tutor. The committee of the four *qādī*'s, among whom again Ibn Khaldūn, who had for the second time been nominated Chief Mālikite Judge by Barqūq shortly before his death, honoured his will and declared that he had attained his majority. Here again, the will of the legitimate sultan had more weight for Ibn Khaldūn than loyalty to a (deceased) benefactor.⁴⁴

A last example. The *ustādār* Maḥmūd, a financial genius and the pillar on which Barqūq's success rested, did what he was expected to do according to the scheme: he sanitized the finances. Ibn Khaldūn wrote about him that he was a man to Barqūq's taste: "a collection of capacities, a diver to get the sultan's rights to the surface, a Croesus (Qārūn) for the treasury, a philosopher's stone (elixir) for coins, a magnet for property, competing with the quills of the clerks, presenting very detailed accounts with inspired intelligence, with a sound fantasy, possessing a sharp intuition neither based on the cleverness of scribes nor on love of easy work, but a person that confronted difficulties to overcome them, and cherished far-off goals to reach them, showing brightness in sciences so that he had insight into their problems and understood great scholars, as a special gift from God and a favour bestowed upon him."⁴⁵ But not everybody shared this enthousiasm. De Mignanelli was outspokenly negative, "[Barqūq] relaxed the reins of [...] Maḥmūd so that he could collect. This he did gladly; by fair and foul means he collected. [...] Within a short time Maḥmūd had accumulated an enormous treasury." He was "not a man but a devil", as they said in Damascus.⁴⁶ Al-Maqrīzī wrote a treatise in which he criticized his financial policy.⁴⁷ And even Ibn Khaldūn himself knew better, in

⁴¹ Sami G.Massoud, "Al-Maqrīzī as a historian of the Reign of Barqūq", in: *Mamluk Studies Review* 7/2 (2003) 119-136.

⁴² *Ascensus Barcoch* 152

⁴³ *Taʿrīf* 331-335. Cheddadi, *Voyage* had no translation, but in the revised version in *Le Livre des Exemples* 211-215, 1290 (notes) he included an elegant rendering in French.

⁴⁴ *Taʿrīf* 347-348; Cheddadi, *Voyage* 213.

⁴⁵ *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* vol.V 497/1063.

⁴⁶ *Ascensus Barcoch* 166-167, 170.

⁴⁷ Anne F.Broadbridge, "Royal Authority, Justice, and Order in Society: The Influence of Ibn Khaldūn on the Writings of al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrībirdī", in: *Mamluk Studies Review* 7/2 (2003) 231-245; 237-239.

the *Muqaddima* is a reference to the enormous personal capital Maḥmūd had gathered and that was confiscated at his downfall.⁴⁸ So even this positive portrait demonstrates that the theory directed the choice.

Conclusion

I repeat what Fischel wrote in his chapter on Ibn Khaldūn as biographer of Barqūq: "He looked at Mamlūk Egypt with the eyes of an historian and tried to present an objective and factual picture of the "men who made history" in his own time." With the help of Bertrando de Mignanelli's entertaining *Ascensus Barcoch*, parts of the *Autobiography* that did not come under the eyes of Barqūq, his own concepts of the exercise of power and a few quotations from al-Maqrīzī I hope to have demonstrated that this is not quite true, in any case not for this exceptional part of the admirable *Kitāb al-Ibar*. The possibility of writing objective history is a 19th century concept that has no validity for earlier historywriting. Objectivity was not Ibn Khaldūn's aim in recording the history of the world, it was to demonstrate God's hand in human affairs. His selection of facts was in accordance with his conception of history. And in the recording of his personal history the bias is obvious. What Bertrando de Mignanelli wrote was not objective either, but demonstrates the vicissitudes of the exercise of power and the ensuing use of both clemency and violence. A mirror for princes, oriental or western. Entertainment with a lesson.

⁴⁸ Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn in Egypt*, 79-80; Cheddadi, *Muqaddima* Ch. III par. 16, vol. I 309.