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# The Civilian Ruling Elite of the Tūlūnid-Ikhshīdid Period

**Abstract:** This paper examines the participation of the civilian elite of the Ikhshīdid period during the succession crises of 946 and 961. The discussion of these events is preceded by a review of terminology referring to the elite and its composition.

**Keywords:** *ʿaqd*; al-Balawī; al-Kindī; Ibn Zūlāq; al-Maqrīzī; Roy P. Mottahedeh

## Obscure Beginnings

One can argue that the Muslim elite in post-conquest Egypt evolved from the several-thousand-strong Arab army that conquered the country and settled in Fuṣṭāṭ. The most renowned of these conquerors was ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ who led the conquest of the country and later served as the governor of Egypt under ʿUmar I and during the early years of ʿUthmān’s rule (r. 644–656).

In 28 H/648–649 CE ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ was apparently dismissed from the governorship. His re-emergence on the political scene and return as governor of Egypt (38 H/658–659 CE) was the result of what has been described by Nabia Abbott as a deal made between him, his sons (ʿAbdallāh and Muḥammad) and Wardān (the family’s protégé and confidant), and Muʿāwiya. Through it, military and political support was traded for the governorship and revenues of Egypt. After heavy fighting, ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ conquered Egypt with troops drafted from Syria and took back the area’s governorship. Al-Kindī (897–961) writes that Egypt became ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ’ personal source of income (*tuʿma*) and that he kept its revenues for himself after paying the troops and covering other expenses involved with ruling the country.<sup>1</sup>

ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ governed Egypt until his death in 43 H/663–664 CE and was briefly succeeded by his son ʿAbdallāh, whom Muʿāwiya immediately dismissed and replaced with his own brother ʿUtba b. Abī Sufyān. This move marked the return of Egypt from private patrimonial rule to the direct control of the ruling family, or one should perhaps say its return to direct state control.

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<sup>1</sup> Abbott 1972, III, 47–53; al-Kindī 1912, 28–9, 31, 34. For ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ’s self-enrichment, see Lecker 1989, 24–37. CE dates are used when dating is securely established, while Hijrī dates are used when events referred to in the sources are discussed.

In 667, Muslama b. Mukhallad was appointed governor of Egypt and it seems he fulfilled all of Mu‘āwīya’s expectations for smooth and profitable governance of the province. It is claimed that he made yearly payments to 40,000 people who were entitled to cash stipends (‘*aṭā*) and food allocations (*arzāq*). This number included troops and their families, of which 4,000 received the highest remuneration of 200 *dīnārs*. Muslama b. Mukhallad also maintained the military and civilian administrative apparatus, shipped grain to Arabia, and transferred 600,000 *dīnārs* to the caliph, apparently on a yearly basis.<sup>2</sup>

Passing on to larger issues from the personal vicissitudes of people for whom participation in the conquest was instrumental in amassing huge (though occasionally short-lived) family fortunes, a question arises: what were the driving forces behind the stratification process within the conquering society? A reasonable conjecture would be that the process was driven by ownership of urban and/or agricultural land, success in commerce, or appointments to posts in the early Muslim state. 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup>-century sources depict the conquering society as vast rentier class. Stipends were, however, paid according to certain criteria, with some receiving as much as 200 *dīnārs* per year and most far less. This system was known as *dīwān* and recipients of its benefits as *ahl al-dīwān*. One can assume that the significance of the *dīwān* system diminished over time, especially as the payroll was constantly re-drawn to include new tribal and military groups. The system was abolished in 833.<sup>3</sup>

Sources in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries provide examples of lively discussions regarding whether Egypt was conquered by force or treaty and the tax consequences of the two different forms of conquest.<sup>4</sup> The sources do agree that the conquerors were not permitted to settle on Egyptian land and were instead maintained by the *dīwān* system.<sup>5</sup> This depiction is highly schematic, and contradicted by scattered references to settlement outside Fuṣṭāṭ and more frequent references to efforts to gain access to land. One can, for example, only wonder at the presence and subsequent history of 10,000 Arab troops in Kharibta in the Delta on the western branch of the Nile in 37 H/657–658 CE. Al-Kindī refers to them as *wujūh ahl Miṣr*, *ashrāf*, and *ahl al-ḥifāz*, which must be not taken literally but as an indication of their status as a privileged veteran military group. Their entitle-

<sup>2</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, 102; al-Kindī 1912, 38–40; Ibn Zūlāq 2000, 90–91; al-Maqrīzī 1991, VI, 410–411. For the caliph ‘Umar I’s financial demands on ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ, see al-Maqrīzī 1991, VII, 260–261.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Kindī 1912, 193.

<sup>4</sup> This subject has been extensively discussed by Noth 1994, 182–189.

<sup>5</sup> For the most explicit statement on this subject, see Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, 162.

ment to cash stipends and food allocations is explicitly mentioned; they must have participated in the conquest of Egypt.<sup>6</sup>

Grants of land are referred to by Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (798–871) using the term *iqṭā’*. Whether this meant full ownership of the land or merely enjoying rights of usufruct remains vague. In Egypt, the first recorded grant of *iqṭā’* was made by the caliph ‘Umar I (r. 634–644). Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam gives the impression that such grants were rare while other sources throw no additional light on how widespread the practice was. Ibn Yūnus (894–958), for example, notes that Mu‘āwiya’s military and naval commander in Egypt received an *iqṭā’* grant from the caliph.<sup>7</sup> Urban grants of land were known as *qaṭā’i* and involved full ownership. These played a role in the development of Fustāṭ after Mu‘āwiya’s reign.<sup>8</sup>

Another factor that drove urban development were direct investments made by the Umayyad governors of Egypt and the caliphs. The governor ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 685–705), the son of the caliph Marwān I (r. 684–685), built several covered markets (*qaysāriyyas*). Each was dedicated to the trade of a specific product such as honey, cloves, or robes and textiles. The caliph Hishām (r. 724–743) also built a *qaysāriyya* in Fustāṭ in which textiles were traded or produced.<sup>9</sup> It can be argued that these investments by members of the royal ruling family benefited the local economy but were detrimental to the local financial elite and its opportunities for investment. That ownership of urban properties was widespread is indicated by numerous references to familial pious endowments and other endowments made for the benefit of Muslims in general or the poor in particular.<sup>10</sup> Such pious endowments were often an instrument used to transfer property and maintain wealth within a family.

Allusions to enrichment achieved through any type of local, trans-regional, or international commerce are entirely absent in the literary sources. Papyrological evidence indicates that a Muslim landowner in the Fayyūm of the 730s went

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6 Al-Kindī 1912, 20–21. For Arab settlement in the Egyptian countryside, see Sijpesteijn 2013, 81–85.

7 Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, 136–138; Ibn Yūnus 2000, I, 345–346, 470, 471.

8 Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, 132–133. For urban and rural *qaṭā’i* grants in Iraq, see Kennedy 2004, 13–29; Kennedy 2014, 159–182.

9 Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, 136–137.

10 For references to *waqfs* in favor of the Muslim community in Egypt, see Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, 89 (attributing the first *waqf* of this type to ‘Umar I), and 107, referring to the endowment of ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ’s house in Fustāṭ. For familial *waqfs*, with and without charitable stipulations, see Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, 100–101, 104, 135–136; Ibn Yūnus 2000, II, 138–139, regarding an early 9<sup>th</sup>-century familial *waqf*. For *waqfs* in early Muslim Egypt, see Bouderbala 2013, 37–56, including French translations of some key accounts.

on commercial trips to Alexandria, but how widespread commerce was along the Nile in Upper and Lower Egypt remains unknown. Information about the salaries of governors, tax officials, and scribes is also sparse. A documentary fragment from 748 indicates that the monthly salary of one *qāḍī* was ten *dīnārs*. Salaries of other *qāḍīs* increased to 30 *dīnārs* per month during the early ‘Abbāsid period, but how this data relates to a broader picture of prices and salaries remains unknown.<sup>11</sup>

As important as stratification driven by economic forces might have been, we know next to nothing regarding *‘ilm* (knowledge) as a factor in social and economic mobility. How rewarding learning was in terms of social prestige and economic position within society is rarely mentioned in the source material. The most important information is provided by Ibn Yūnus’s account of the success of the Iraqi storyteller Maṣṣūr b. ‘Ammār b. Kathīr al-Sulaymī, who practiced his craft in 8<sup>th</sup>-century Fustāṭ for some time. He impressed the two most prominent scholars of that time, Layth b. Sa‘d (713–792) and Ibn Lahī‘a (715–791), who bestowed land grants (*iqtā‘*) and money on him.<sup>12</sup> The inescapable though unsurprising conclusion is that in this agricultural pre-modern society, access to land was the main source of wealth and the underpinning factor in the fortunes of any type of contemporary social elite.

## Terminology

The sources for Egypt’s history during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries offer abundant information on the socio-political evolution of the country and the formation and functions of civilian elites. A pre-requisite for any meaningful discussion of these developments is an understanding of the reference terminology used. Although the terms ‘elite’, ‘class’, and ‘social stratification’ reflect modern sociological concepts, these notions were not foreign to medieval sages or commoners. However, medieval sociological terminology was not well-defined and lacked precision. The notion of an elite group as expressed by the term *khāṣṣa*, which meant a social class vital to the proper functioning of a state and society, permeated medieval Muslim thinking about a social order which they viewed as basically divided into the elite and the common people (*‘amma*). Social classes,

<sup>11</sup> Al-Kindī 1912, 354; Tillier 2012, 114, and al-Kindī 1912, 317, 377, 421, 435; al-Qadi 2009, 9–10, 22, 28.

<sup>12</sup> For modest payments (three *dīnārs* per month) rendered to Qur’ān reciters in the early ‘Abbāsid period, see Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, 117. For Maṣṣūr b. ‘Ammār, see Ibn Yūnus 2000, II, 237–238. For both scholars, see Guest’s introduction (29–32) to his edition of al-Kindī 1912.

or in modern parlance the notion of stratification, were referred to by terms such as *ṣinf* (pl. *aṣnāf*), *firqā* (pl. *fīraq*), and *ṭāʿifa* (pl. *ṭawāʿif*). The term *fīraq* also had a narrower meaning of ‘faction’, while *ʿawwām* (the plural form of *ʿamma*) had negative connotations of an unruly crowd or mob. Each of these terms had a wide range of meanings and they were used loosely and dynamically, reflecting place and time.

One of the most pertinent texts for the discussion of medieval sociological terminology is the description of Aḥmad b. ʿUyūnī’s funeral by his 10<sup>th</sup>-century biographer al-Balawī. This was an impressive and carefully staged event and al-Balawī uses two terms (*ṣinf/aṣnāf* and *fīraq/fīraq*) to describe the various groups that attended it. He states that the different groups (*fīraq*) did not mingle and that each group paraded separately and kept to itself (literally, “kept its boundaries”). The different categories (*aṣnāf*) referred to by al-Balawī consisted of Aḥmad b. ʿUyūnī’s military slaves, the officers of his army, the scribes, and various groups of people that served him. The presence of women at the funeral was massive and somewhat surprising. Several female groups are mentioned, among whom were Aḥmad b. ʿUyūnī’s womenfolk, the wives of the military commanders, the wives of military slaves, the wives of scribes, and the wives of the people close to him, with each group making a separate appearance. Black women who were on a monthly pay-list of the deceased ruler also attended the funeral as well as the urban poor of both genders on whom Aḥmad b. ʿUyūnī had bestowed charity. In addition, people of the religious class (low- and high-ranking *ʿulamāʾ*; literally, *ṣaghīr* and *kabīr*), *qāḍīs*, and court witnesses were also present at the event.<sup>13</sup>

The recipients of Aḥmad b. ʿUyūnī’s charities and payments who attended the funeral appear in the text in separate groups. The terminology that refers to the poor is derived from the Qurʾān and involves terms such as *fuqarāʾ*, *masākīn*, and *ḍuʿafāʾ*. Muslim jurists debated how to distinguish between the *fuqarāʾ* and *masākīn*. They reached the conclusion that a *faqīr* is defined as a destitute person, one who neither owns anything nor earns a livelihood, while *miskīn* is defined as a poor person who has some possessions although not enough to sustain himself. Other terms that are relevant for the discussion of poverty are *sitr* and *ahl al-sitr*; the term *sitr* had a broad meaning referring to piety and denoted adherence to a strict code of privacy, while *ahl al-sitr* referred to people living in seclusion. In medieval Jewish Middle Eastern society the term *ahl al-sitr* alluded to the “shame-faced poor” or the “deserving poor”, or in modern parlance the conjectural poor in contrast to the structural poor. Both terms are widely used

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13 Al-Balawī 1939, 344–345.

in discussions about the poor and poverty in medieval Europe and were introduced into medieval Middle Eastern studies by Mark R. Cohen.<sup>14</sup>

To what extent al-Balawī's terminology is a reflection of 10<sup>th</sup>-century 'Abbāsīd concepts of social stratification is difficult to assess. Roy P. Mottahedeh's study of the political life of 'Abbāsīd-Būyīd Baghdād constitutes the most important reference in studying it. Mottahedeh defines the term *ṭabaqa* as referring to "a professional category", but the term also had a broader meaning of a social class or layer and a narrower meaning of a vertically stratified group of courtiers. This term is rarely used by al-Balawī, who usually employs the terms *firqā* and *firaq*. His use of these terms conveys no sense of hierarchy. According to Mottahedeh, the term *ṣinf* conveyed a loose meaning that referred to broad social categories and was also used when referring to ethnic groups.<sup>15</sup> Medieval sociological terminology was, however, flexible, and in documentary and literary sources of the Mamlūk period the term *ṭā'ifa* was used when referring to European nations.

Although al-Balawī's use of the term *ṭabaqa* appears in a different context from the one discussed by Mottahedeh, it retains the same meaning. Al-Balawī states that Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn was fascinated by the *ahl al-sitr*, who are described as upright poor men and women to whom the ruler gave large monthly donations. In another section of al-Balawī's text they are described as meritorious religious people living according to a strict code and avoiding the impermissible (*wara'*). Perhaps the most significant aspect of al-Balawī's description of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn's interest in this group is the fact that he regarded them as a *ṭabaqa*. This means he saw them as a normative social class within the overall social model, not as members of the pitifully wretched poor underclass. The medieval notion of poverty, like that of the elite, was a nuanced concept referred to by a number of terms that conveyed economic status but also referred to piety and different modes of life.

## A Local Elite: Meaning and Formation

Al-Kindī refers to the Arab elite of early Muslim Egypt by the term *wujūh*, a common appellation used for the elite in both Arabic and Hebrew. The term also appears in a military context. The Arab military force in Egypt is referred to by al-

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<sup>14</sup> For al-Balawī's references to Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn's relations with *ahl al-sitr*, see 184. For other 9<sup>th</sup>-century luminaries who supported *ahl al-sitr*, see Bruning 2012, 102; Cohen 2005, 34–53, 70–71.

<sup>15</sup> Mottahedeh 1980, 105–106.

Kindī using three terms: *ahl al-dīwān*, *jund Miṣr*, and *ahl Miṣr*, all of which allude to the paid Arab military force stationed in Fustāṭ. For example, when referring to the Coptic rebellion of 150 H/767 CE in the Ṣakhā area of the south-central Delta, al-Kindī states that the Arab force dispatched from Fustāṭ (*ahl al-dīwān*) was led by *wujūh ahl Miṣr*. This reference may be interpreted in two different ways. In a broad sense, the phrase can be understood as meaning the force was commanded by elite members of the Arab population of Egypt and that such an unusual mobilization reflected the gravity of the situation. But it can also be argued that in this context the term *ahl al-dīwān* stands for *ahl Miṣr* and that the force was led by high-ranking officers. The second interpretation is possible, since in al-Kindī's narrative the term *wujūh* appears mostly (if not exclusively) in a military context. Al-Kindī, for example, describes the war of 65 H/684–685 CE, when the force led by the caliph Marwān, fought Ibn al-Zubayr's supporters in Egypt, as having been fought between *ahl Shām* and *ahl Miṣr* and states that there were many casualties among *ahl al-qabā'il min ahl Miṣr* which reflected the tribal composition of the force.<sup>16</sup>

The military also played a key role in the politics of the country, or to put it differently, governors had to be attentive to their demands. In 141 H/758–759 CE, for example, upon the arrival of a new governor (Mūsā b. Ka'b) a power struggle immediately unfolded between him and the *wujūh al-jund*, the force stationed in Fustāṭ. In this context that means the prominent commanders of the *jund*. This understanding of the term *jund* is supported by other references to *wujūh al-jund bi-Miṣr* appearing in the description of the struggle between al-Ma'mūn and al-Amīn and its impact on Egypt.<sup>17</sup> Only once can the phrase *wujūh ahl Miṣr* be understood as alluding to the local elite. In 137 H/754–755 CE, the governor of Egypt went to Palestine with a number of *wujūh ahl Miṣr* (al-Kindī provides their names). This term can be considered as equivalent to *ashrāf ahl Miṣr* (to whom al-Ma'mūn wrote seeking recognition and support).<sup>18</sup>

Going beyond terminology, Maged S. S. Mikhail has approached al-Kindī in his search for prosopographical data about elite families in early Muslim Egypt with some success. The Tujībī family, for example, held posts in the local government from 655 to the 720s. From the 720s onwards members of the Fahm family were frequently appointed to the post of *ṣāhib al-shurṭa* in Fustāṭ, a military force that combined the functions of the police and garrison. Al-Kindī's text, however,

<sup>16</sup> Al-Kindī 1912, 44.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Kindī 1912, 107, 168.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Kindī 1912, 105, 148.

yields little and neither the Tujībīs nor the Fahmis appear on the list of *wujūh ahl Miṣr* for 137 H/754–755 CE.<sup>19</sup>

This discussion can be concluded by saying that although al-Kindī expands our understanding of the terminology referring to the elite, he offers no insight into the meaning and formation of Egypt's local elite.

## A Local Elite and the Politics of Succession

The information and insights into Egypt's social history that al-Kindī fails to provide are to be found in other 10<sup>th</sup>-century chronicles of the Ṭūlūnid-Ikhshīdid period which have been preserved and cited by Mamlūk historians. The civilian elite of the Ṭūlūnid period consisted of administrators brought from Iraq, who not only managed Egypt's agricultural wealth but were also involved in the financial affairs of Syria. They additionally maintained connections with the 'Abbāsīd court and viziers. The fortunes of these elite families are exemplified by the Mādharā'ī family, which attained great wealth, displayed a considerable degree of cohesion, and survived the political shifts that took place in Egypt during the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The rise of this family followed the demise of the powerful administrator Ibn al-Mudabbir, whom Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn had killed in 270 H/883–884 CE.<sup>20</sup>

The first member of the Mādharā'ī family to make a career in Egypt in the service of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn was Abū Bakr al-Uṭrāsh. Another, Abū Zunbūr (232–317 H/846–929 CE), served as a tax collector in Syria and eventually in Egypt during the rule of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn. He survived the overthrow of the Ṭūlūnid dynasty by the 'Abbāsīds.<sup>21</sup> Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Mādharā'ī (258–345 H/871–956 CE) is perhaps the best-known member of his family and signifies their pivotal role in Egypt. He became famous for his extraordinary wealth, charities, and piety, all of which were symbolized by his twenty-two pilgrimages to Arabia and the massive support he provided to commoners and members of the elite in Mecca and Medina. His charitable deeds in Egypt were no less extensive and involved the ransom of captives and the distribution of

<sup>19</sup> Mikhail 2014, 140-1. For other *wujūh* families in Umayyad Egypt, see Kennedy 1998, 86; Kennedy 1981, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Kutubī 1973, V, 132.

<sup>21</sup> The family's history has been discussed by Gottschalk (1931, 22–117), using a wide range of sources. He was also the first to publish biographies of members of the family, using those manuscripts of al-Maqrīzī's *Muqaffā* available to him at that time. My references go to the fuller 1991 edition of the text. Al-Maqrīzī 1991, I, 343–344; III, 466–481.

food, while his standing in local society and politics is illuminated by the events that took place following Muḥammad b. Ṭughj's death in 946.

The Ikhshīdīd dynasty barely survived the death of its founder. Only the involvement of the civilian elite in Fustāṭ during the succession ensured the smooth transfer of rule to Unūjūr, Muḥammad b. Ṭughj's sixteen-year-old son, and the appointment of his uncle as regent. This disposition of power was shaped in two consecutive meetings (5–6 Muḥarram 335 H/5–6 August 946 CE) and formalized in a signed document (*'aqd*) that was in fact a pact between the various people and groups involved in the negotiations.

Al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442) states that the participants in the first meeting were the vizier Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Muqātil, the people of the court (*ahl al-dawla*), and *wujūh al-balad*. In this context (and in contrast to al-Kindī's text), *wujūh al-balad* unequivocally means the notables of Fustāṭ. The first meeting failed to reach a decision on the implementation of the succession as envisioned by Ibn Ṭughj; in 934 he had proclaimed that Unūjūr was his successor and added his son's name to the Friday sermons delivered in Egypt and Syria. The public announcement of the intended succession was followed by a declaration of allegiance to Unūjūr by high-ranking officers (*quwwād*) when he was twelve years old.

In the second meeting, which took place on 6 Muḥarram/6 August in the presence of Abū Bakr Muḥammad, Unūjūr was proclaimed ruler and his uncle installed as regent. The vizier was arrested and required to pay a sum of money, Abū Bakr Muḥammad was recognized as the strong man in the state, and his son Abū 'Alī l-Ḥusayn was appointed vizier. Al-Maqrīzī provides a long list of the people (referred to as *wujūh al-nās bi-Miṣr wa-ahl al-ra'y*) who witnessed this and were most likely actively involved in the shaping of the *'aqd*. These participants belonged to several clearly discernible groups, including members of the three administrative families of the Ṭulūnid-Ikhshīdīd period (the Madharā'īs, the Furāts, and the Rūdhābārīs) as well as people belonging to the two long-established Shī'ī families in Egypt (the Ṭabāṭabās and the Rasīs, referred to as *ashrāf*). Other individuals involved included the people of the court (*ahl al-dawla*), the administrators (*wujūh al-kuttāb*), and the military (referred to as *ḥujariyya*, i. e. the former cadets of the *ḥujra* [barracks] where military slaves were trained).

Another group of people associated in some unspecified way with the *'aqd* were the *qāḍīs*, among them the *qāḍīs* of Mecca and Fustāṭ who also served as the *qāḍīs* of the towns of Ramla and Tiberias in Palestine. These *qāḍīs* remained in Fustāṭ and sent representatives to the towns under their jurisdiction. Several prominent members of the corps of witnesses associated with the *qāḍī's* court in Fustāṭ are also mentioned as involved in some way with the *'aqd*. The integration

of the judicial system into the state structure was a typical medieval phenomenon. By that time, the position of *qāḍī* had acquired respectability and a religious aura. Both were instrumental in bestowing legitimacy on the pact, which preserved both the political status quo and the vested interests of the groups and people involved.

The disposition of power was publicly proclaimed on Friday when Unūjūr, accompanied by his uncle Abū Bakr Muḥammad and his cousin the vizier, marched in a procession to the Ancient Mosque in Fuṣṭāṭ. Meanwhile, letters announcing the political deal forged in Egypt were sent to Damascus. The most important endorsement came from the black eunuch Kāfūr, when he arrived in Fuṣṭāṭ with the Ikhshīdid army from Damascus at the beginning of Ṣafar. Only when this took place did Unūjūr feel secure enough to show himself to the people, in a carefully orchestrated appearance attended by poets including the renowned al-Mutanabbī, who was in Egypt at that time.<sup>22</sup>

Following Unūjūr's death in 961, rule was usurped by Kāfūr. He enjoyed the cooperation of many but still relied on his private army. Upon Kāfūr's death in 968, a new succession and disposition of power were arranged. These were formulated in a document devised by the vizier Ja'far b. Faḍl b. al-Furāt and the Shī'ī notable Abū Ja'far Musallam and signed by Kāfūr's leading military commanders. The document details the division of responsibilities among the people involved and alludes to the exchange of oaths of obedience to God, to His messenger, and to the Qur'ānic dictum of commanding good and forbidding wrong. The document proclaims a political program promising to uphold justice, help the oppressed against the oppressor, care for the holy cities in Arabia and frontier towns, and conduct holy war. In practical terms the dynastic claims of the Ikhshīdid family as the legitimate rulers of Egypt were acknowledged and the minor Ikhshīdid prince Abū l-Fawāris Aḥmad installed as the nominal ruler. Shamūl al-Ikhshīdī was vested with the command of the army and financial affairs entrusted to Ja'far b. al-Furāt.

The document also guaranteed the preservation of the vested interests of the different military groups according to their ranks (*ṭibāq*). The composition of the army was complex. While the main military groups consisted of the military slaves (*ghilmān*) of the Ikhshīdid rulers, the army also included Kāfūr's military slaves and the infantry and cavalry. The ethnic factor in the composition of the army must also be taken into account. The black servile infantry were lowest in terms of military prestige and pay while the white-skinned servile cavalry were

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22 Al-Maqrīzī 1991, II, 313–314.

highest in the military structure. Shamūl al-Ikhshīdī faced a tremendous challenge in his efforts to balance the interests of all these military factions.

Unsurprisingly, this elaborate disposition of power, shaped by the civilian elite and endorsed by the military, failed in its implementation. Members of the Ikhshīdī ruling family, the administrators, and the military factions remained suspicious of each other. This suspicion turned into violence and the situation deteriorated into the chaos that led to many welcoming the Fāṭimid conquest of the country in 969.<sup>23</sup>

## A Local Elite: An Outsider's View

The political arrangements shaped after Kāfūr's death were observed and commented upon by Sībawayhi the "wise fool". Ibn Zūlāq's *History of Sībawayhi* is an important contemporary testimony; the work was modeled on Iraqi books devoted to "wise fools" (*'uqalā' al-majānīn*). Sībawayhi was very critical of the nomination of Abū l-Fawāris Aḥmad as ruler and mocked his immaturity, deficient education, and lack of military skills. One wonders how much of Ibn Zūlāq's own voice and criticism is grafted upon Sībawayhi's remarks (real or invented). That question can be expanded into the broader query of whether Ibn Zūlāq's work is a reflection of the views of the wider circles of the *'ulamā'* class observing the deals concluded between the military and the civilian elite. To put it differently, was public opinion, subdued as it might have been, echoed in the *History of Sībawayhi*?

Sībawayhi's sarcastic remarks are directed at the main players in the political drama unfolding before his eyes. He mocks the changing fortunes of the vizier Ja'far b. al-Furāt, who had had to hide himself from the military (literally, the Turks) that looted his house and humiliated him. Sībawayhi, however, saw him at the moment of his triumph, marching in a parade accompanied by a large entourage of his clerks with men and the army behind him, and expresses wonder at the reconciliation between the vizier and the army. Other of his remarks focus on the political program proclaimed in the *'aqd* document; Sībawayhi cynically asks whether the army marching behind the vizier is marching to defend Islam or protecting the Ka'ba sanctuary?<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Al-Maqrīzī 1991, I, 536–538. For a French translation of the text, see Bianquis 1974, 263–269, esp. 264–265.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Zūlāq 1933, 52–53. For quotes from *Kitāb Akhbār Sībawayhi*, see al-Ṣafādī 1979, XII, 119; Bianquis 1972, 55–56. For the vicissitudes of the vizier, see al-Kutubī 1973, V, 293. While Sībawayhi was critical of the political scene, Abū Bakr b. 'Utayba (d. after 957), who is described as be-

Sibawayhi was a highly educated person, who in his youth received a comprehensive education in the traditional Arabic-Islamic sciences: Qur'ān, the Prophetic tradition, jurisprudence, theology, and, of course, grammar. His nickname, derived from the great 8<sup>th</sup>-century grammarian Sibawayhi, testifies to his linguistic skills. The purpose of the political program published by the regime was to win over the 'ulamā' class, who were also the great protectors of Sibawayhi from occasional persecutions by powerful members of the civilian elite. Although Sibawayhi's life oscillated between periods of clarity and delusion, he clearly belonged to the 'ulamā' class with whom the civilian elite shared a set of common religious and cultural values. The Ṭūlūnid and Ikhshīdid rulers also shared this set of values, or to put it more cautiously, were not strangers to them. Since the dividing line was drawn between the military and civilian elite and the 'ulamā' class, it was up to the rulers to create working cohesion between them—and most of the time this was something that the Ṭūlūnid and Ikhshīdid rulers did successfully.

## Conclusions

Medieval Arabic terminology referring to social groups and classes is rich and involves four basic terms: *ṣīnf* (pl. *aṣnāf*), *fīrqa* (pl. *fīraq*), *ṭā'ifa* (pl. *ṭawā'if*), and *ṭabaqa* (pl. *ṭibāq*). The meaning of these terms varies and must be ascertained by context. Although the primary concept of society was polarized between *khāṣṣa* and 'amma, practically speaking terminology referring to the elite and the common people consisted of several terms of which *wujūh*, *fuqarā'*, *masākīn* (*du'afā'*), *ahl al-sitr*, and 'awwām appear in the sources discussed in this paper. There are also other terms referring to the elite, common people, the poor, and the underclass, not attested to in these sources but quite common in other contexts.

The events discussed in this paper pertaining to the involvement of the civilian elite in the political life of the Ikhshīdid period are narrated through al-Maqrīzī's prism. It must be pointed out that the terminology he uses, such as *ahl al-dawla*, *wujūh al-balad*, and *wujūh al-nās bi-Miṣr wa-ahl al-ra'y*, is his own, a reflection of his understanding and interpretation of events and intended for contemporary readers. It is not the terminology of the original 9<sup>th</sup>- and 10<sup>th</sup>-century sources. The term *ahl al-dawla*, for example, is al-Maqrīzī's understanding of

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longing to *ahl al-'ilm wa-l-adab*, served as go-between for the main political figures in Fustāṭ. See al-Maqrīzī 1991, VII, 69–70.

the Ikhshīdīd dynasty and period as *dawla* and reflects a natural evolution of political-administrative vocabulary. The same applies to al-Maqrīzī's creation of the term *wujūh al-balad*; in al-Kindī's narrative *wujūh* appears in a military context in conjunction with *jund*.

Al-Maqrīzī's modification of terminology does not undermine the value of his narrative, which is rich in detail and derived from lost 10<sup>th</sup>-century works. It must be read carefully, with an awareness of the problem of terminology, but it depicts a rich socio-political world that became extinct under the far more authoritarian Fāṭimid regime, when the *imām*'s claims to divine guidance left no place for any other type of elite in the political life of the country.

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