

**RELIGION AND THE BARBERSHOP:
PRACTICED RELIGION THROUGH IBN BUDAYR'S EYES IN THE
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DAMASCUS**

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Keywords: *Religion, daily life, microhistory, urban studies, Sufism, Islam, religious dialectic*

Introduction

Much of the older historiography focused on the Ottoman Empire (for instance, Jennings, 1986; Wittek, 1938; Gibb&Bowen, 1950) approached the study of religious practices within its borders with the Orientalist notions of Islamic orthodoxy. This approach to the study of the Ottoman Empire was further encouraged by the non-critical analysis of source narratives which sometimes tended to depict the imperial subjects' religious practice in terms of normative Sunni doctrine. Previously, the scholars of the Middle East displayed a tendency to assume that religion within the Empire may be studied only through the normative written texts conveying the sets of rules and practices prescribed by the religious authorities of the Muslim community – the texts which establish allowable sets of practices pertaining to one's religion. This simplified attitude may facilitate the creation of a schematic historiographical narrative of the overall development of Middle Eastern religious practices, but it contains many flaws. Reality seems to have been much different and far more complex, as more recent scholarship shows. In a manner similar to the histories of the

early Islamic Empires, as well as in many other regions of the world, the developments within Islamic Sunnism under the Ottoman government were paralleled by emergences within the corpus of religious practices and beliefs which were not always conforming to the normative written tradition, and which changed through the passage of time, flourished and became more nuanced. Sufism, a term used to combine the various Islamic mystical doctrines and traditions, spread and developed from the twelfth century onwards. It blossomed under the Ottomans (as well as under the Mamluks, and even in earlier periods). The Ottoman sultans were quite open for such traditions, and that the population of the Empire seemed eager to accept it (Kafadar, 1995: 52). This went on to such an extent that the Empire's rulers used mystical tropes to depict the sultan's charisma and authority – the appropriation of the Sunni doctrine and the incorporation of *shari'a* into the official codes of law is more rightly described as a means to justify jihads against rival neighbouring states and local rebels than as a proof of Ottoman "orthodoxy." A curious development in the Safavid Empire led to the gradual adoption of Ši'ism during the same period, much for the same reasons. (Dressler, 2005: 171; Faroqhi, 1999:9). The Ottomans, in fact, supported the development of these mystical orders so much that in the second half of the seventeenth century it became truly hard to distinguish between a member of a Sufi order and the rest of the population. It might, indeed, be suggested that in the early modern Ottoman Empire there were not many individuals who did not belong to a Sufi order (Karababa&Ger, 2010; Grehan, 2007: 21-55).

1. Rediscovering Ottoman Piety: Religious Dialectic in the Sources

Older scholarship does not fail to recognize trends parallel to the development of institutionalized Sunni practice, but suggests an approach to studying these forms of religion through applying a bi-polar

system of categories expressed as orthodox and heterodox. My belief is that, through a more critical reinterpretation of sources, one might discover a convergence, or rather, an *overlap*, between these two categories expressed both in writings pertaining to religion as well as practiced customs of the Ottoman Empire. In the eighteenth century, as well as in previous centuries, such overlaps become obvious if one brings to mind figures such as Šayḥ ‘Abd al-Ġanī al-Nābulṣī, who operated both as Sufi mystics proclaimed saints, as well as religious officials with high court positions, whose writings were reflected even in public *fatwas* of the period (Sirriyeh, 2005). I believe that, instead of a supposed dualistic nature of the Ottoman Levantine religion, the reality of religious practices in the eighteenth century demonstrates the existence of a complex and dynamic religious dialectic present at all levels of society. It is my hypothesis that the members of the eighteenth-century Levantine urban communities had a vast corpus of religious tradition to refer to, and that they “wore different hats” in different instances pertaining to their everyday lives.

It would be wrong, however, to believe that religion represented an exclusive guiding line for the subjects of the Empire. Religion was indeed present among the population, but was not necessarily a dominant force in all domains of life at all times. Certain scholars (for instance, Krstić, 2011: 121-164; Rothman, 2012: 29-34; Pierce, 2003: 176-208, 251-310; Schilling&Tóth, 2006: 41) demonstrate that the subjects of the Ottoman Empire, regardless of gender or confession, sometimes tended to utilize religious tropes and notions for the sake of achieving quite mundane goals, like defending their cases at court, advancing their social status, or enhancing their material conditions. In her work on eighteenth-century Ottoman Aleppo, Meriwether shows through court cases that the norms prescribed by religious law,

especially with regards to marriage and inheritance, did not always have absolute authority (Meriwether, 1999: 3-6). Bruce Masters further points out that the use of religion as a political ideology made the rule over the Arab lands easier for a sultan, proceeding to show that religion in everyday context did not seem to have such a meaningful role (Masters, 2013: 10, 81-82). Masters rightly states that it is, perhaps, the preeminent role of the *‘ulamā* in the process of creating historical sources that led previous researchers to think otherwise. However, Bruce Masters, as indeed, many other authors seem to have relied on using the same “orthodox/heterodox” bipolarity and even the newest works, such as James Grehan’s *Twilight of the Saints*, do little but to invert this dichotomy, arguing for a mainstream “agrarian” (that is – mystical) against the normative religious tradition (Grehan, 2014). I believe that the solution lies elsewhere, as the sources show that the orthodox/heterodox categories are continuously interacting, exchanging and overlapping, being, as such, available to the population to, as Masters maintains, give “structure and meaning to those who inhabited Arab provinces in the Ottoman centuries and [inform] their culture” (Masters, 2013: 105).

1.1 Piety in the Barbershop: Religion in *Daily Events of Damascus*

This paper will focus on the analysis of practiced religion in the eighteenth-century Damascus through the eyes of one barber-turned-chronicler, Šihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Budayr, who wrote between 1741 and 1763. Along with the Damascene barber’s *Daily Events of Damascus*, many non-*‘ulamā* city diaries appeared in the Ottoman Empire of the eighteenth century – the practice of chronicle-writing was adopted by many imperial subjects of different allegiances, religious beliefs, origins, and cultural traditions. In the eighteenth-century Levant, these chroniclers included the barber, an Orthodox Christian

priest, a Ši‘ī farmer from Ġabal ‘Āmil and his son, a Samaritan from Nablus, a clerk from Homs, a Damascene soldier, and a janissary warrior. All of these chroniclers speak from different vantage points – some as soldiers, others as clerks who meticulously wrote down everything that transpired in courts of their cities, and some as priests or craftsmen (Sajdi, 2013: 77-114). The study of their texts is very important if a researcher desires to obtain a clearer understanding of this age and region, seen from different points of view. In addition to the voice of the scholarly elite, this variety of points of view is invaluable for piecing out the history of the eighteenth-century Levant.

In a sense, the barber represents a Middle Eastern counterpart of the Italian miller, Menocchio (see Ginzburg, 1980). It is highly doubtful that the barber led a life which was common for the population of the eighteenth-century Damascus. Both he and the Friulian miller seem to represent *exceptions* within their societies, but the reasons for their exceptionality are different. Not every miller, or every inhabitant of Italy, had an urge to read, purchase, distribute, or make known the heretic texts and engage in fervent discussions about religion. In a similar manner, not every barber, or indeed – every Damascene inhabitant, had the opportunity to gain contact with some of the city’s most prominent figures and acquire the leverage which Ibn Budayr possessed. On the other hand, while Menocchio was engaged in reading heretic vernacular works, seemingly not able to stop himself from proclaiming his feelings and attitudes publicly, the barber appears as (or at least fashions himself to appear as) more conservative about his religious attitudes. This ever-present claim to traditionalism differentiates the barber from Menocchio the miller, although as I will show, the barber mostly uses his religious tradition as a literary tool aimed at fashioning him as an ideal Ottoman-Damascene subject – ideal,

at least, according to the normative writings of the religious authorities of the period. Finally, both Menocchio and Ibn Budayr wished their voices to be heard in society, and it seems that they were successful in carrying this mission out. Because of this wish for publicity Menocchio was executed on the stake. Of Ibn Budayr's fate, however, historians do not know, although he does not seem like a "troublemaker" – it is doubtful that he was punished by execution like the Friulian miller.

Through his peculiar social criticism, Ibn Budayr exposes many interesting events which transpired in Damascus of his time, providing for this study an invaluable pool of information. It is of utmost importance to notice, however, that Ibn Budayr is a complainer. His events more often than not begin with standard phrases describing his time as a volatile period during which the society is changing for the worse. However, when contextualized within the secondary literature, it becomes clear that such statements represent the barber's own attempt at creating an ideal society within his city, the city he shared with the rest of the Damascenes, romanticized somewhat in his text through the narratives of a "golden age" now almost lost. It might be inferred that the barber wished to preach to his neighbours – in the eighteenth-century Damascene society, scribal works would usually be read aloud at places of leisure (Khuri-Makdisi, 2010: 36-37), and the barber's acquaintance with the common habits and pastimes of the city leads one to presume that his *Daily Events* might have been read and discussed in the many Damascene coffeehouses and other public spaces (importance of such oral transmissions is highlighted in Aymes, 2007). Regardless of its actual impact on the behavior of his neighbours, which cannot be assessed due to the lack of other resources pertaining to the period, if the text is stripped of the stylistic means through which the barber attempted to both shape his vision of an ideal society and negotiate his own place between the famous of the city, his reports help

perceive a communal body of the Damascenes, deeply connected to their city by customs, tradition, public displays and many other means which are ceaselessly exchanged through channels emerging from a particular outdoor culture common for the residents of Ottoman Middle Eastern cities of the eighteenth century.

The barber's profession at the time offered many possibilities for an insight into what was in vogue within an urban environment. In addition to coiffing, these men also performed select healing services, bloodletting, cupping, and circumcision. According to the *Dictionary of Crafts* compiled by al-Qāsimī, barbers who would be capable of opening their own shops counted above the "peasant barbers" who worked outdoors, in the streets. The barbershops were favored places for gossip, where the barbers could operate both as collectors and distributors of "hearsay" information among the inhabitants (Qāsimī, 1988: 103-104). This fact might serve to enforce the inference that the barber was well-informed about the events transpiring in the city – as retold by these other inhabitants. Ibn Budayr did not waste the valuable opportunity for networking.

The barber complains, quite emotionally, about the social order of his period, listing for historians a whole set of social practices and customs which make possible the research into the culture of the Damascene eighteenth-century inhabitants. In addition, the barber writes with diligence about strange occurrences within the city, leaving behind a detailed report which enables the examination of a wide variety of beliefs which constituted the folklore of the eighteenth-century Damascenes. As I will show, it might be presumed that the barber sometimes utilized religious tropes and integrated them in his narrative so as to dramatize certain events in his chronicle.

The discovery of the barber's manuscript is owed to Dana Sajdi's *The Barber of Damascus*. Due to her work, it is possible to find out that the existing edition of the text which was first published in 1959, seems to coif the barber's words as much as he, undoubtedly, coiffed his customers in the middle of the eighteenth century. The second edition of the bowdlerized chronicle was published by the Dār Sa'ad al-Dīn in Damascus, in 1997. These editions correspond to the barber's manuscript which is at present located in a Dublin manuscript collection, Ar 3551/2. I will use the unpublished manuscript for the purposes of this article.

The barber indeed served many famous figures of eighteenth-century Damascus, at the same time learning from them, becoming an auto-didactic individual who dared to write a work of his own and attempt to enter the circles shared by the scholarly elite of this eighteenth-century city. The barber, indeed, made many peculiar claims for himself and his family, using his writing as a device for mediation.

2. The Barber's Dialectic: Religion and Self-Representation

Ibn Budayr does not hesitate to demonstrate his own piety. His manuscript is full of supplications directed to God, often both in his, and all the Muslims' name. While relating the events of the months of Ramaḍān, for instance, the barber provides clear reports of his own fasting throughout the holy month (Ibn Budayr: 5B-6A). The barber does not stop there, however. Indubitably seeing his chronicle as a means to fashion a self-image which would provide elevation in the Damascene society, the barber describes himself as a receiver of saintly blessings and charisma – *baraka* – carving for himself a higher vantage point from which he will be seen as a critical authority to his peers and fellow Damascenes.

2.1. Me, the Sayyid, the Blessed: Ibn Budayr's Self-Image in Daily Events

This claim to divine grace seems to be a product of Ibn Budayr's contacts. Ibn Budayr's clientele is reflected through one of his most efficient tools – the *tarjama*, an obituary containing several sentences describing the deceased. Ibn Budayr wrote *tarjamas* almost exclusively for the individuals he communicated with, at least briefly, embarking on the opportunity to brag about his contacts and justify his own mystical experiences, for as I will show, the barber served numerous individuals popular in the Damascene society as saints and miracle workers, many of which also held high positions of authority in the eighteenth-century provincial capital.

Out of reasons unknown, Ibn Budayr developed a relationship with a professional Damascene barber known as Ibn Ḥashīsh, of which he seems exceptionally proud. It would seem that this relationship brought necessary connections to Ibn Budayr. Ibn Ḥashīsh himself had a powerful clientele which included Shaykh Murād Efendi al-Naqshibandī, Shaykh Muḥammad al-ʿAjlūnī, and “the axis (*qutb*) of his time,” the famous Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ġanī al-Nābulī (Ibn Budayr: 6A-6B. For more information about al-Nābulī see Sirriyeh, 2005; Toussulis, 2011: 231; Masters, 2009: 415). For the Levantine society (as well as in other regions under the Ottoman rule), these individuals were important as carriers of divine benevolent force – *baraka*, saintly charisma that would carry over to the ones communicating with them. Touching was an important medium - Ibn Ḥashīsh provided services for these prominent figures, ensuring for himself a source of *baraka*. The obituary of Ibn Budayr's master barber, Ibn Ḥashīsh, seems a good illustration. The barber writes:

And a pious man, Hajji Aḥmad Ibn Ḥashīsh the barber, died on Tuesday, the twenty third of the blessed month *Ramaḍān*, 1155 [November 20th, 1742]. He was a pious, temperate man who saw many things and traveled to many lands... He did good in his profession. Never did he place his hand on the sick, ailing, or those suffering from the pain in the eyes without healing them... He coiffed the poor and students [for free]... I received blessings from him, may God have mercy upon his soul. Amen (Ibn Budayr: 6A-6B).

Ibn Budayr first establishes that his deceased mentor was a pious man. As the *tarjama* progresses, the audience becomes introduced to the impressive healing techniques of the old barber. In addition to cutting and trimming hair and beards, the barbers of the eighteenth-century Middle East also circumcised and provided healing services. Ibn Budayr, however, weaves his narrative as if he wishes to imply that the healing skills of his late mentor had a distinct miraculous quality. Touching a saint meant receiving these divine blessings, and a man as pious as Ibn Ḥashīsh (as portrayed by Ibn Budayr) could then utilize this blessing to gain benefits for his own healing techniques (for more about *baraka* see Sajdi, 2013: 62-63; Ali Khan&Ram, 2003: 125, 147, 275). Additionally, Ibn Budayr obtains a portion of divine grace for himself through his relationship with his master, albeit indirectly.

Other, more direct sources of *baraka* soon became available for the barber. Providing service to the famous Shaykh al-Ṭabbākh, Ibn Budayr takes pride in his opportunity to speak with the holy man, joke with him, trim his hair and beard, and “make use of his blessings” (Ibn Budayr: 27B). Similar narrative can be observed in the *tarjama* of Shaykh Jabrī – the barber is proud to proclaim that he barbered the deceased several times, “claiming some of the shaykh’s blessings and [mystical] secrets” (Ibn Budayr: 56B). Within both accounts, the barber

directs praises to God several times for being granted such a glorious opportunity.

Ibn Budayr must have striven to achieve an elevation of his social status with such narratives. Spending time in company of these two, as well as many other Sufis and saints, enabled him to claim significant authority, for he had direct access to the saints' divine blessings. The influence of prominent figures on the barber's life seems to have been very powerful. Ibn Budayr's relationship with Shaykh Aḥmad al-Sābiq led to the barber's initiation in the Sufi Qādiriyya order (Ibn Budayr: 15B), and his relationship with one of the important scholars of the al-ʿAjlūnī family probably made him opt for the Shafīʿī *madhab* of Islamic jurisprudence (Ibn Budayr: 76A). Ibn Budayr's friendship with one of the popular local storytellers, (*al-ḥakawī*) whom the barber describes as his friend, teacher, and father, might have provided Ibn Budayr with some of the other literary forms he introduces to his chronicle (Ibn Budayr, 10B).

The influence of Ibn Budayr's clientele might also become apparent from the fact that he refers to himself and his offspring as *sayyids*. Upon losing his fourteen-year old son, al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mahdī, to the plague of 1744, Ibn Budayr wrote a lengthy *tarjama*. The barber praises the boy's religious fervor and respect for the Qur'ān. Justifying the decision to give his son a title which was during his time reserved for the descendants of the Prophet (see Canbakal, 2007: 77-83), Ibn Budayr claims he got an "inspiration from God" to do so during a dream (Ibn Budayr: 24B-25A). Such direct contacts with the divine in dreams or dream-like states represented an achievement toward which many Sufis aspired, and the barber's claims strove to enable him to enter their territory. Further praise to God is given in this instance, re-ascertaining

the barber's piety during his attempt to, no doubt, comfort himself because of his loss.

Justifying, therefore, the *sayyidization* of his family through reports of receiving a mystical dream, Ibn Budayr strives to gain place among the spiritual figures of the eighteenth-century Damascus. He also expands on his own image, fashioning himself as a receiver of divine instructions for himself and his family. Ibn Budayr thus combines his mystical experience with stylistic expressions reflecting his acute awareness of the normative Sunni doctrine, the symbols of which are carefully embroidered in the narrative of *Daily Events*.

Inclusion of religious tropes and notions, if only on the rhetorical level, had the potential to attract respect from the rest of Ibn Budayr's society. *Daily Events* reflect, furthermore, the current trends of Damascus in the middle of the eighteenth century (as the barber perceived them), illuminating a specific kind of piety which Ibn Budayr's Damascenes praised – the one comprised of living saints, divine grace, and dreams of divine inspiration which dazzled the population.

2.2 My World, My Saints, My Miracles: The Barber's World of Saints and Omens

Ibn Budayr's obituaries (*tarjama*) are, thus, filled with praise for particular Damascene shaykhs and Sufis, but also of others who lived in the city. In 1742, Ibn Budayr records a *tarjama* of Shaykh Muṣṭafā al-Mugharbil, stating that "he was a pious man [who followed the teachings] of Shaykh Yūsuf al-Ṭabbākh al-Khalwatī." This example tells of a specific sort of piety which Ibn Budayr recorded among the Damascenes. Popular Sufi orders had their followers and saints who spread their teachings around the city (and the whole region in some cases). The piety of some of them would manifest through saintly

powers which Ibn Budayr recorded, sometimes with obvious pride, in his diary of Damascus.

Shaykh al-Ṭabbākh's own tarjama can be located in Ibn Budayr's work, and according to it, the shaykh himself was a well-known and respected person among both the small and the great. Ibn Budayr takes great pride in the fact that he personally cut the hair of this man, of whom al-Murādī says that he was celebrated as one of the eighteenth-century saints whose hands the people rushed to kiss, requesting his blessings. Another very representative example is the tarjama of Muḥammad Jabrī, whom the barber describes as a person capable of performing miracles and enter altered states of mind. Besides being depicted as a modest man who was equally respected by both the small and the great, Jabrī drank "the wine of the Greatest King," acquiring many divine blessings through his meditations. The piety of the Sufi was rewarded with a mystical charisma, bestowed upon him from the divine, and his ability to enter a spiritual trance earned him a high level of respect among the inhabitants.

Religion seems an integral element of Ibn Budayr's tarjamas. The barber feels necessary to underline that a deceased person was pious, and in the case of obituaries such as the one committed to Jabrī, the main part of the narrative is committed to the divine blessings which the deceased received throughout his lifetime. The examples stated above serve well to demonstrate the characteristics of piety which were apparently praised within the Damascene society – this form of piety is comprised of Sufi asceticism, capability of performing miracles and wonders, as well as passing divine blessings on to the rest of the population. The inseparability of these elements from the institutionalized religious tradition of Ibn Budayr's eighteenth-century city seems evident in these reports.

Ibn Budayr is, at times, a stern critic of his society. Writing about undesirable individuals, the barber does not hesitate to employ religious tropes to add to their overall image. For instance, after the execution of the Damascene treasurer Fathī al-Falāqinsī which the Damascene governor ordered in July 1746, Ibn Budayr wrote about the man's vile nature which led to corruption and evil deeds. On the list of misdeeds, wine-drinking suddenly appeared (Ibn Budayr: 32A-32B). Superstition might enter the barber's narrative to complete the description. A good illustration is the *tarjama* of one Mustafā Agha Ibn al-Qabbānī, who died in 1746. It would appear that this man had a tendency to hoard supplies within the premises of his estates, even in times when the prices were disastrous for the majority of the Damascene population. In addition, it seems that he wished to sell his goods to the population under steep prices. Ibn Budayr reports:

... and they [the people] informed me about him. When they dug a grave for him and wished to place him [in it], they saw a giant snake inside, so they filled the grave [with earth] and dug another one, where they also saw [a snake] and thus they dug several graves... This [appearance of the snake] followed his vileness... (Ibn Budayr: 28B)

Daily Events warn and reward the Damascenes through natural phenomena. An eclipse, for instance occurs shortly after a revolt which led to severe casualties in front of a Damascene court (although the NASA database seems to be in disagreement with such events – an eclipse indeed happened that year, but was not visible from the Middle East, and it occurred several months after the incident which took place in 1746), thunderstorms threaten to split the sky above the governor's campaigning forces which drain the country of resources (Ibn Budayr: 37B), and comets rise as messengers of rich, benevolent years (Ibn

Budayr: 3B) - for the barber, every such instance is a “lesson for those who pay heed” (Ibn Budayr: 37B).

3. Taboo and the Everyman: The Everyday Damascene Life in Daily Events

At times when his mind is focused on chronicling events which need not be emphasized through religious tropes, Ibn Budayr rarely casts religion a second glance. Such events give an insight into what barber considered a part of everyday routine. The barber’s Damascus provides, for instance, many spaces in which the population would congregate, displaying, unsurprisingly, a high level of social intermingling, regardless of gender, occupation, or religious confession. The city’s many graveyards, as well as the open, green spaces of the the al-Ghūṭa Oasis were the opportunity for the population to gather, drink alcohol and enjoy in coffee while freely mixing with each other (Sajdi, 2013: 30).

The people of the city had the opportunity to spend their time in numerous coffeehouses in which they would be entertained by storytellers and musicians while enjoying their cups of coffee and their hookahs - sometimes until late hours of the night (Grehan, 2007: 142-146). They would at times become so fascinated with the traveling entertainers, such as musicians, or street performers to whom they gave money that some Damascenes attempted to imitate their acts (Ibn Budayr: 59A). In some cases, the popularity of the coffeehouse surpassed the popularity of the mosque during Friday prayers, and even the most restrictive governors do not seem to have been able to prevent them from operating (Grehan, 2007: 145). Most of the Damascene people, of course, went about their business with a somewhat relaxed understanding of prescribed norms and regulations. They enriched their

free time with pleasures like coffee and tobacco, enjoying in socializing and gossiping in these establishments. Even Ibn Budayr, who strives to maintain a well-mannered pious attitude gives himself away with his decisions that the news of newly-opened coffeehouses is significant enough to enter his chronicle, or when providing a location of a coffeehouse in order to situate an event geographically (Ibn Budayr: 77B, 80B). The official attitude of religious authorities, however, remained clear – spending leisure time in coffeehouses was connected to all manners of immoral entertainment including bad behavior, vulgarity, and illicit sex.

In 1744, Shaykh Ḥassan Ibn Yūsuf al-Rifāʿī committed suicide by jumping off a minaret in the district of al-Qubaybāt. Ibn Budayr writes:

I asked what the reason for this was and I was told that the brother of [Shaykh Ḥassan's] wife brought a prostitute to his house. He found out about it... and [his brother in law] scolded him and wanted to beat him, he was a fool. [The shaykh] went to the notables of his neighbourhood and informed them about this matter, but they criticized him and talked him off, cause all of them are down to their ears [deeply engaged in similar matters]. [The shaykh] then went to the Al-Daqqāq Mosque, where he finished his morning prayer with the imam. He then conducted the death prayer in his own name and climbed up the minaret, where he shouted: “Oh, Community of Islam, it is either death or pimping here under this government today,” and he threw himself off [the minaret], may the Exalted God grant him mercy and forgiveness. (Ibn Budayr: 21B)

In many instances, the chronicle of the barber shows Ibn Budayr's great concern with prostitution in eighteenth-century Damascus. Even though the written law prescribed severe penalties for cases of illicit sex, it seems that the appliance of these regulations was not much different

in Damascus than in Aleppo of the same period (Semerdjian, 2008: 94-137). In most cases of prostitution, the women accused would either be approached and reprimanded by their neighbours, or expelled from the quarter they were living in (Semerdjian, 2008: 84; Rafeq, 1990: 182).

If religion would come to play, however, it was usually respected. Thus, when a certain Damascene prostitute vowed to offer a prayer on the tomb Shaykh Arslān, “the Protector of Damascus,” if the young man she fell in love with would recover from his sudden illness, onlookers gathered to peacefully observe a procession of the “daughters of passion” as they strode, their heads bare, their hair loose, down the city’s markets, celebrating the miraculous recovery with many colorful lanterns in their hands. No governmental repercussions were remembered by Ibn Budayr, though he hedges from the whole event, expressing his amazement through the simple formula, “Allahu akbar” (Ibn Budayr: 45A-45B).

That the official authorities themselves would assemble ceremonies which display a convergence between different trends of religious practices becomes obvious at numerous places in *Daily Events*. Pressured by the great plague of locusts in 1747, the Damascene governor himself sent Sufi “experts” to retrieve the water from a magical spring that will summon Samarmar, a mystical insect-devouring black bird (Ibn Budayr: 31B-33A). In 1758, during massive earthquakes which raised many buildings within the city and drove the population to sleep under the open sky, the governor himself ordered a fasting and a Sufi prayer within the Bab al-Muṣallā Mosque, where the rain-summoning prayers were also held due to the power of this mosque to make prayers come true (Ibn Budayr: 91B-92B). For the population of the eighteenth-century Damascus, religion, it seems, played a significant role – but not predominant. Religion, an overlapping set of practices comprised of

normative *‘ulamā* writings and Sufi philosophies, remained available for the Damascenes in times of need, but was easily overlooked during fortunate times, free of such dire occasions.

4. Conclusion

The *Daily Events* of Ibn Budayr show the utility of religious tropes as means of self-representation and negotiating one's position in society, at least on a rhetorical level. Furthermore, the barber succeeded, through his text, to display his acute awareness both of written religious tradition expressed through *shari'a* and *fiqh*, as well as the teachings promulgated by the many prominent saintly figures of his day. The barber combines both to the effect of carving for himself a niche where he will assume a position of a social critic who follows the footsteps of his many teachers – his clientele.

This point seems highly important, as it is clear that the barber uses his claims to traditionalism as a screen to shield his persona from any potential unwanted behavior, proceeding after paying respect to the norm, to write freely and inform us about myriads of different customs which constantly filter into the cultural mainstream. In many respects, Ibn Budayr follows the same pattern as numerous Ottoman institutional scholars, who do not fail to demonstrate the whole depth of their practiced customs after the initial references to the written standard. To my mind, thus, it seems reasonable to approach all these categories of practices at once as overlapping parts of one whole unit of investigation, instead of applying the classic and somewhat redundant orthodox/heterodox binary which reduces the realism of the scholarly narrative.

Describing the events of his chronicle, Ibn Budayr conveys a depiction of the Damascenes who value their religion as a meaningful tool of social engagement, but not as a predominant obligation. Religion

remains for them to be used in times of need, but might be completely overlooked in everyday life. This religion seems to represent a convergence between the institutionalized norms and many trends present in the cultural corpora of the Damascene, as well as Syrian society, both of the eighteenth century, and the previous ages.

In cases when the barber writes about himself, as well as when he writes about events he was not engaged with personally, one can witness how different religious tropes pertaining to different traditions are engaged, informing the scholarly mind about the awareness of religious tropes widespread among the Damascene population. The Damascenes of the eighteenth century seem capable of multiple modes of self-representation, aware of the gains and consequences generated when each one of them is used in a particular social setting.

Such a vision of everyday life in the eighteenth-century Damascus allows for an altered narrative about the predominant cultural, intellectual, and religious trends in the region, introducing more complexity to the scientific study of the regions of the Ottoman Empire a century before the modern reforms which took place in the Middle East. To study, that is, the forms of practiced religion present with Ibn Budayr, or indeed with many other individuals inhabiting the Levantine cities in the eighteenth century, one must not place focus only on the writings of the official religious authorities, or the works of mysticism. *Overlap* seems the keyword to a successful study, the complexity of which is attained when the source material from all these various traditions is taken into consideration as multiple elements of a whole.

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ԿՐՈՆԸ ԵՎ ՍԱՓՐԻՉԻ ԱՐՇԵՍՏԱՆՈՑԸ. ՊՐԱԿՏԻԿ
ԿՐՈՆԸ ԻԲՆ ԲՈՒԴԵՅՐԻ ԱԶՔԵՐՈՎ ՏԱՍՆՈՒԹԵՐՈՐԴ ԴԱՐԻ
ԴԱՄԱՍԿՈՍՈՒՄ

Ամփոփում

Նիկոլա Պանտիչ

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Բանալի բառեր՝ կրոն, առօրյա կյանք, միկրոպատմություն, քաղաքային ուսումնասիրություններ, Սուֆիզմ, իսլամ, կրոնական դիալեկտիկա

Սույն հոդվածում ներկայացվում են Դամասկոսի ամենօրյա իրադարձություններն ըստ դամասկոսյան սափրիչ Իբն Բուդեյրի կողմից 1741-1763 թթ. գրված ժամանակագրության՝ նպատակ ունենալով վերլուծել սափրիչի մոտեցումը 18-րդ դարի կրոնական կյանքի նկատմամբ: Հոդվածը ցույց է տալիս, որ կրոնի դավանումը Դամասկոսի բնակչության առօրյա կյանքում շատ ավելի բարդ է, քան այն, ինչ ցույց են տվել դասական ուղղափառ/ոչ ուղղափառ

երկվության վրա հիմնված մյուս տեսությունները: Մափրիչի նկարագրությունը ցույց է տալիս կրոնական դիալեկտիկ իրականության առանձնահատկությունները դամասկոսյան հասարակության բոլոր խավերում և հիմք է տալիս ենթադրելու, որ վաղ ժամանակաշրջանում Օսմանյան կայսրության և նրա քաղաքների կրոնը պետք է դիտարկել նոր մոտեցմամբ՝ ավելի ճշգրիտ պատկեր ստանալու համար:

**RELIGION AND THE BARBERSHOP: PRACTICED
RELIGION THROUGH IBN BUDAYR'S EYES IN
THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DAMASCUS**

Abstract

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Keywords: *religion, daily life, microhistory, urban studies, Sufism, Islam, religious dialectic*

In this paper I trace the daily events in Damascus in the chronicle of Damascene barber, Ibn Budayr written between 1741-1763, with the aim to analyze the barber's take on 18th-century practiced religion. The paper demonstrates that the practiced religion in daily life of the Damascene population seems far more complex than what previous theories focused on the classic orthodox/heterodox dichotomy have shown. The barber's text demonstrates a peculiar religious dialectic present at all levels of the Damascene society and provides reasons to believe that religion in the early modern Ottoman Empire and its cities might need new approaches to be described more accurately.

**РЕЛИГИЯ И ЦИРЮЛЬНЯ
ПРАКТИКУЕМАЯ РЕЛИГИЯ ГЛАЗАМИ ИБН БУДАЙРА В
ДАМАСКЕ ВОСЕМНАДЦАТОГО ВЕКЕ**

Резюме

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Ключевые слова: религия, быт, микроистория, урбанистика, суфизм, ислам, религиозная диалектика

В статье отслеживаются ежедневные события в Дамаске, описанные между 1741-1763 гг. дамаским цирюльником Ибн Будейром, с целью анализа подходов цирюльника к религиозной практике 18-го века. В статье показано, что повседневная религиозная практика населения Дамаска представляется гораздо более сложной, чем то, что представляли теории, основанные на классической ортодоксальной/неортодоксальной дихотомии. Текст цирюльника демонстрирует особенности религиозно-диалектической реальности во всех слоях дамасского общества и дает основания полагать, что религиозная жизнь Османской империи и ее городов в ранний период, возможно, нуждается в новых подходах к описанию для получения более точной картины.