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Squeezing Juice from the *Fruits of the Caliphs*: Tastes, Contexts, and Textual Transplantation at a Fifteenth-Century Egyptian Court[1]

Abstract

This article concerns themes of translation, movement, and context in its examination of the intentions behind the composition of Ahmad ibn ʿArabshah's (1389–1450) mid-fifteenth-century opus of animal fables and anecdotal advice literature, the *Fakihat al-khulafaʾ wa mufakahat al-zurafaʾ* (*Fruits of the Caliphs and Witty Banter of the Stylish Folk*). With some alterations, including the introduction of a substantial amount of historical material in its ultimate and penultimate chapters, Ibn ʿArabshah's *Fruits of the Caliphs* is primarily an expanded reworking of an earlier work, the thirteenth-century *Marzban-nama* (*Book of Marzban*) attributed to Saʿd al-Din al-Warawini.[2] Like the *Book of Marzban*, the *Fruits of the Caliphs* is largely a collection of moralistic animal fables and anecdotes of wisdom, bound together within several smaller stories which comprise a larger framework story. The ten chapters of the *Fruits of the Caliphs* share much in common with the *Book of Marzban* although Ibn ʿArabshah completed significant re-writing of the original tales with historical asides, changed names, and observations unique to his own mid-fifteenth-century interpretation of the book. Because the work is primarily an Arabic translation of an earlier Persianate mirror, it proves challenging to analyze as an 'original' work.[3] Nevertheless, Ibn ʿArabshah attempted to modernize the book and in its Arabic form, update it for what we may assume must be a late medieval Cairene courtly audience. In addition to engaging with the curious title of the work and its latent meanings, this article contextualizes and explains the author's creation of the work in relation to his later career trajectory and rising reputation in the fifteenth-century Syro-Egyptian cultural milieu.

Introduction

Scholars of late medieval Arabic literature have characterized the fifteenth century – particularly the so-called 'Mamluk' period of Egypt and Syria (mid-thirteenth to early sixteenth centuries) – as one of a very high degree of intertextuality. Large groups of authors were in

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2. While employed as chief of the Ottoman chancery, Ibn ʿArabshah made many translations from Arabic and Persian into Turkish. See Woods. It is possible that Ibn ʿArabshah did not make a direct translation of the Persian *Marzban-nama* popularized by Warawini and instead rendered a late fourteenth-century Turkish translation of the work made by Sadr al-Din Sheykhoghlu into Arabic.

3. Ibn ʿArabshah's motives for translating the book are unclear from the work's introduction. We do not know whether the idea to translate the work was proposed to him by someone else, or if he volunteered to do so himself. Ibn ʿArabshah, familiar with the work and his own intellectual milieu, may have realized that the stories would resonate in the scholarly milieu of the fifteenth-century Cairo Sultanate.

dialogue with each other, referenced each other's texts, and actively sought to correct, update, and supplement previous works.[4]

4. Bauer 35; Hirschler.

The fifteenth-century Islamicate world can equally be described as a time of great movement for texts and one in which scholars had the relative freedom to move from one political sphere of influence to another, introducing new genres, ideas, and textual forms. The Ottoman court in the capital city of Edirne (Adrianople) was enriched by the migration of Iranian and Central Asian scholars in the early fifteenth century, while Cairo with its madrasas and Sufi hostels also proved a fertile intellectual climate with a powerful draw on scholars and litterateurs from the eastern Islamic world.[5]

5. On this phenomenon see Mauder, "Being Persian"; Yüksel Muslu; Atçıl.

This article concerns the traveling and transformation of one particular kind of literary form, specifically a textual template in the form of a work of advice literature comprised largely of animal fables as it moved across time, space, and language toward its ultimate transplantation from one cultural context into another, resulting in the construction of an entirely new text remade according to the specific taste, context, and socio-cultural concerns of mid-fifteenth century Cairo. Modern scholars, perhaps wary of the work's difficult Arabic *saj*ʿ prose style have given the *Fruits of the Caliphs* short shrift. Multiple manuscripts have made the text and its history difficult to establish. To date, few attempts have been made toward reaching an understanding of the text in the social context from which it emerged, to compare it closely with the *Book of Marzban*, or to mine it for the valuable commentary it provides on contemporary fifteenth-century Syro-Egyptian society as an updated version of a pre-existing text.[6]

6. One noteworthy exception in modern Arabic is Muhsin Bin ʿAmir's *al-Hikaya al-mithaliyya fi Marzuban-nama bi-tarjamat Ibn ʿArabshah*.

While medieval Arabic and Persian literature lack an indigenous name for the genre or an analogous equivalent for terms such as 'Mirrors for Princes' or 'Fürstenspiegel', the genre was well known throughout the premodern Islamicate world.[7] The work of Louise Marlow suggests that the rich cultural tradition of such works produced in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, were typically written for specific recipients or dedicatees and often reflected an author's precise political circumstances and relationship to the ruler.[8]

7. The adoption of terms familiar to scholars of pre-modern European literature such as *Fürstenspiegel* and mirrors for princes, remain somewhat contested in the field of Islamic Studies and have been subject to ongoing debate. See for example: Gutas; Van Gelder, 336; Marlow, "Advice and Advice literature"; Marlow, "The Way of Viziers" 169–70; Crone, *God's Rule* 148– 64.

8. See Marlow, *Counsel for Kings*; Marlow, "Advice and Advice literature"; Marlow, "The Way of Viziers" 169–72.

It is important to point out here that the pre-modern Islamicate world had no rigid divisions between 'Arabic' and 'Persian' cultural spheres, and that both displayed different stylistic and thematic interests. In many of the lands and courts that Ibn ʿArabshah encountered during the first decades of the fifteenth century, there was a 'Persianate' literary sphere which was politically and culturally Turkic and Turco-Mongolian particularly in Central Asia and Anatolia.

Nevertheless, a great deal of linguistic diversity and cultural overlap existed between the Arabo and Perso-Islamic traditions. Educated elites were functional in both languages, made use of them in courtly contexts, and even utilized them in the same texts. The production of Persian texts in the Central Islamic lands and, alternately, the production of Arabic texts in the Eastern Islamic lands remained a discernable feature of the Islamicate world throughout the 'middle periods' (c. 950–1800 C.E.) of Islamic history. Two such texts that call attention to such an overlap and which have received scholarly attention are: the *Sea of Precious Virtues* (*Bahr al-Fava'id*)[9] and *The Way of the Viziers* (*Minhaj al-Wuzara'*) (Marlow, "The Way of Viziers").

9. Meisami (ed.); Van Gelder.

Ibn ʿArabshah: An Author in Transit

The translator and author concerned here, Ahmad ibn ʿArabshah, was kidnapped as an adolescent when the Central Asian warlord conqueror Tamerlane (Tīmūr, or Temür-e Lang), known to medieval European literature from the later work of Kristopher Marlowe (1564–93), moved west with his armies and sacked the Syrian city of Damascus in 1401. In the aftermath of his conquest and plunder, Tamerlane took booty and slaves back to his distant capital in Samarqand (modern Uzbekistan) and among the captives was the young Ibn ʿArabshah who would later pen a scathing biography of his captor (*The Wonders of Destiny in the Calamities Wrought by Tamerlane*)[10] as well as a number of other Arabic literary works of kingly advice and panegyric in the mid-fifteenth century.

10. The work was first edited and translated in Leiden in 1636 by Jacob Golius. For an English translation, see Ahmad ibn ʿArabshah, *Tamerlane: The Life of the Great Amir*, Trans. J. H. Sanders, London: I. B. Tauris, 2018.

Following his abduction by Tamerlane, Ibn ʿArabshah spent the next twenty years (1401–21) in the medieval Persian, Turkish, and Mongol courts[11] of various Muslim rulers until at last he returned home to Syria with his wife and family in 1422.[12] Spending his formative years abroad had exposed him to a vast interregional network of scholars and literati that reached across Muslim west Asia, India, Asia Minor, the Middle East and North Africa, as well as to a wide array of texts from different linguistic and cultural traditions. Reestablishing himself in his homeland in his mid-thirties proved challenging, and Ibn ʿArabshah had difficulty finding a new position. He commuted often to the local regional capital of Cairo in hopes of entering the court of the reigning sultan, elsewhere in the religious infrastructure, or as a scribe in the chancery.

11. For an important problematization and theorization of the concept of 'court' as an analytical category in medieval Islamicate contexts, see Mauder, *In the Sultan's Salon* 28–69. See also Van Den Bossche, "Pen, Panegyric", 52–62.

12. For a study of Ibn ʿArabshah's life and works, see McChesney.

Although his florid Arabic biography of Tamerlane – finalized by

1439 and inspired by Persianate styles of courtly history – was widely consumed and copied by his contemporaries, he seems to have been somewhat unable to benefit greatly from the cultural and social capital he accrued from it.[13] Despite an invitation to visit the court of the sultan al-Zahir Jaqmaq (1438–53), for whom he attempted to write a panegyric in 1440, it was not until 1444 that Ibn ʿArabshah completed a new text that would truly cement his fame. That text, the *Fruits of the Caliphs*, would be roughly based on an earlier text, the *Book of Marzban* or *Marzban-nama*.

Beginning in 1421, Ibn ʿArabshah's mobility strategies had involved attaching himself to influential religious scholars in Syria and composing texts, such as his highly literary biography of Tamerlane which was read with great interest down to the present. But it was in his translation work: moving older texts from one language and cultural context into another that he found a calling. It seems fair to suggest that Ibn ʿArabshah, while remembered by contemporaries as a poet, religious scholar, and biographer, was also an important translator and textual broker. During his time as an Ottoman scribe, he had translated religious and literary texts for the Ottoman sultan Mehmed I (r. 1413–21) from Persian into Turkish, and later for the Cairene court of the sultan Jaqmaq from Persian into Arabic. As a cultural agent and cross-pollinator of texts Ibn ʿArabshah provided the impetus for these texts to live new lives in Cairo down to the modern age. The exchange of texts brought him into a dialogue with courtiers, religious scholars, and local people with whom he widened his immediate social network.[14]

13. To better understand the social world of someone like Ibn ʿArabshah, it may be useful to take onboard Pierre Bourdieu's notions of the different kinds of capital that can be accumulated and which represents the structures, exchanges, and practices of an environment like medieval Cairo. Cultural capital can accrue based on educational qualifications or cultural activities such as book production; while social capital is comprised of social connections (such as participation or access to a network) and may appear as appointment to office or the attainment of a title of nobility. Either can be reproduced, transmitted, or even converted into economic capital. We know less about the precise economic capital that may have been made available to Ibn ʿArabshah on the completion of his works whether through direct payments or appointment to office. See Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" 241–58; Bourdieu, *Distinction* 114.

14. Banister "Professional Mobility;" McChesney.

The *Book of Marzban*

It is unclear when Ibn ʿArabshah first encountered the text of the *Book of Marzban*, but because he most likely found and translated an existing Turkish translation dated to 1300 into his native Arabic, it is tempting to suggest that he may have come across it during his time of service in Ottoman Edirne. The *Book of Marzban* is best described as a work of advice literature based on a lost tenth-century source text. It survives today in its best-known version in the form of mostly animal fables brought together and then popularized in the Tabari dialect of Persian between 1210–25 by Saʿd-al-Din Warawini (Persian: Saʿd-i Varavini) under the patronage of Abu al-Qasim Rabib al-Din, a vizier in the service of Uzbek ibn Muhammad (607–

22/1210–25), the Ildegizid ruler of Azerbaijan.[15] As Andrew Peacock points out, much of the medieval literature produced for Saljuq rulers in Anatolia was Persian from the thirteenth century onwards and permeated "by Iranian cultural, political and literary traditions." In this context, there were other re-workings of the earlier (lost) *Book of Marzban* source text such as the one produced by Muhammad b. Ghazi al-Malatyawi shortly after 1197–1201 for the Saljuq sultan Sulaymanshah. The original work was similarly attractive to al-Malatyawi who, like Ibn ʿArabshah two centuries later, found its text "unadorned" and "in need of beatification" (Peacock 276, 278).

In his own time in the first half of the fifteenth century, Ibn ʿArabshah understood this *Book of Marzban* to be a significant work that would be attractive to a wide audience because of its entertaining animal stories with embedded moral lessons and socio-political wisdoms. The work is comprised of ten chapters enclosed in a narrative framing sequence (comparable to the *Arabian Nights*), to which Ibn ʿArabshah added Arabic poems, parables, sayings, and Quranic expressions. It is not unlike the slightly more popular and widely known animal wisdom fables of *Kalila and Dimna*, famous in the Arab world since the eighth century and itself a translation of an earlier Sanskrit text. One of the key appeals of this literary form for courtiers, is that it affords a potentially innocuous and indirect way to offer advice to the king in the guise of edifying and entertaining stories which ideally caused no offense. (It bears pointing out, however, that both Ibn ʿArabshah and the eighth-century translator of the *Kalila and Dimna* stories, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, both spent their final weeks jailed and tortured at the hands of would-be patrons).

15. Warawini's version of the text names the Sasanian-descended Marzban ibn Sharwin as the "originator of the book" in an older form of Persian from the Tabaristan region. See Kramers 632–33. However, we must be cautious when attributing fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Arabic or Persian works to lost Sasanian texts. See Marlow's comments on the problem of widespread (mis)attributions to texts of ancient wisdom, Marlow "Advice and advice literature"; Marlow *Counsel for Kings* 1 : 7– 17.

Constructing a New Text: From *Book of Marzban* to *Fruits of the Caliphs*

A decade after returning to his birthplace of Syria in 1422, Ibn ʿArabshah composed his biography of Tamerlane in the 1430s which helped establish his local reputation. To draw further attention to the work, he began making frequent trips between Damascus and Cairo. After abandoning his attempt to pen a panegyric for the reigning sultan al-Zahir Jaqmaq, Ibn ʿArabshah next sought to translate the *Book of Marzban* into Arabic and disseminate it among his contacts, but this translation was really only a first move.

Ultimately, he used the work as a textual template to create an

entirely new text of his own which he completed between 1435 and 1448 and renamed the *Fruits of the Caliphs and Witty Banter of the Stylish Folk*, which was partly a translation of the *Book of Marzban* recycling many of its animal fables, and partly a unique work shaped by the context and courtly interests of mid-fifteenth-century Cairo. Ibn ʿArabshah presents his *Fruits of the Caliphs* not as derivative of the *Book of Marzban*, but as a new and authentic stand-alone work. He took the stories and the general organization of the chapters of the original text, and arranged a new text based on what Marlow has identified as the classic ten chapter format. Among the stylistic expectations for medieval Islamic advice literature, were that it should utilize rhyming prose, synonymous word pairings, borrowing from anthologies, and perhaps most characteristically, that the text should be divided into ten chapters based on familiar themes.[16] Ibn ʿArabshah adhered to this stylistic convention of the premodern Islamic world.

16. Marlow, "The Way of Viziers" 180–84; Peacock 277.

Notably, the two final chapters increased the amount of Arabic poetry, historical anecdotes about recent political figures including past caliphs and Iranian kings, rhetoric on kingship, justice, and political wisdom. Like the *Book of Marzban*, the outer frame stories concern animals and birds, but the book also tells many stories about humans, and even includes various retellings of stories from the *Arabian Nights* including the story of the slave who lies once a year, and a version of *The Merchant and the Two Sharpers* (Irwin, *Arabian Nights* 86).

Translating works from one language to another was an important mark of courtly society in late medieval Cairo.[17] Writing to advise and benefit rulers and counselors was also an essential way to contribute to political culture in premodern Islamic societies more broadly (Marlow, "The Way of Viziers" 169). An author's personal status was equally important, especially in the cases of more eminent writers of advice texts such as the eleventh-century Saljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk or his contemporary, the scholar al-Ghazali. Ibn ʿArabshah translated the *Book of Marzban* and expanded it into a larger text at a time when he was accruing fame and cultural capital based on the reception of his biography of Tamerlane. He may have felt that drawing attention to the *Book of Marzban* was a surefire way to strengthen his reputation through the introduction and beatification of an obscure text (Marlow, "The Way of Viziers" 171–72).

17. Mauder, *In the Sultan's Salon* 568, 575; D'hulster.

Ibn ʿArabshah's relocation and repositioning of this existing text into an entirely new context based first on his translation and then his transformative augmentation, is interesting for a number of reasons. Among his most significant additions are an entirely new intro-

duction (which interestingly mentions neither the original *Book of Marzban* or its author – though it does mention earlier works in the tradition such as *Kalila and Dimna* and another text that included animal fables, the *Sulwan al-Muta᾿ fi ʿudwan al-atba᾿* (Comfort of Rulers Faced with the Hostility of their Followers), by the Sicilian author Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli (d. 1169 or 1172) which he uses to partially explain the project. The authors of such works believed the subject had a duty to counsel the ruler, along with the mutual benefit of such counselling (Marlow, "Advice and Advice Literature").

We can say with certainty that Ibn ʿArabshah, like many of his elite and educated peers in the 1440s, was interested in obtaining a salaried '*mansab*' position in the religious judiciary, the chancery, or the court of the ruler, al-Zahir Jaqmaq. It was this aim of ingratiating himself with a patron at the court, perhaps one of the viziers of the sultan to whom at least one manuscript is dedicated, that the court and its tastes influenced the author's presentation. A highly entertaining work of animal fables, one largely unknown in the Syro-Egyptian territories of the Cairo Sultanate, was likely a good bet for popularity and a wide readership that would enhance his cultural capital, raising his profile and prestige and hopefully bringing him to the attention of his next patron and source of economic capital.

The *Book of Marzban*, despite references to the Quran, reads as a more secular text, whereas Ibn ʿArabshah seems to have consciously given his *Fruits of the Caliphs* a decidedly Islamic coloring with more Quranic verses, statements by the Prophet Muhammad, and tales of Muslim caliphs and kings.

The ten chapters of the *Fruits of the Caliphs* resemble the structure, form, and content of the *Book of Marzban* with cultural modifications made by Ibn ʿArabshah to cater to the cosmopolitan Cairene society he addressed. Ibn ʿArabshah re-wrote many of al-Warawini's tales with historical asides and a few anecdotes unique to his own mid-fifteenth-century experiences and interpretation of the book. The ninth and tenth chapters of *Fruits of the Caliphs* (concerning the framing story of two partridges and an eagle king), contain a higher degree of historical content and many examples of political wisdom drawn from ancient Iranian and Islamic rulers. The *Fruits of the Caliphs* is far more than a mere 'update' of the *Book of Marzban*, however, as it includes alterations and the introduction of substantial historical data in its ultimate and penultimate chapters, including anecdotes about Tamerlane, Jaqmaq, and a survey of the history and customs of the Mongols.

Tastes of the Court

Although one manuscript of the *Fruits of the Caliphs* was commissioned by a vizier in the Cairo court of the sultan Jaqmaq, it is less clear from the work's introduction for 'whom else' Ibn ʿArabshah may have produced the book, if not the sultan himself. What, if anything, might the commissioning of such a work divulge about the discourses and discussions of the sultan's court? On the surface, its introductory section uncovers very little about the intentions of Ibn ʿArabshah apart from offering a straightforward vehicle to deliver messages about proper rule on the tongues of animals.

The introduction opens, as one might expect, with praise for God's creation of beasts and other living things as a sign (*aya*) of His existence, wisdom, power, and generosity. Moreover, one reads that each animal in its own way praises God and testifies to His existence and divine unity (*tawhid*).[18] Moving to praise for the Prophet, the introduction then lauds Muhammad's influence over the natural world, referring to incidents in which gazelles, camels, stones, clay, trees, tree stumps, and even the moon physically or verbally paid respect to the Prophet's authority or sought his assistance or protection. Indeed, it goes on, God, free from all faults and blemishes, wrote into the atoms of every created thing matters of wonder for people to contemplate, that they might be led toward correct guidance and *tawhid*. According to Ibn ʿArabshah, however:

18. Ibn ʿ*Arabshah, Fakihat al-khulafa*ʾ (Freytag edition) 1; Ibn ʿ*Arabshah, Fakihat al-khulafa*ʾ (Najjar edition) 35–36; Ibn ʿ*Arabshah, Fakihat al-khulafa*ʾ (Buhayri edition) 21. See also: Leder 51–52.

> when these signs (*ayat*) became numerous and the wisdom of their florescent garden spread out to the lowlands and highlands, and their implicit wonders and lessons began to decrease, and the appearance of their decrees became repetitive for the subjects to hear and see, and for souls to repeat to themselves; hearts became unable to attain [their lessons and meaning] and people failed to benefit from their presence and ceased to regard all of the good fortune they contained. Many of the learned men and wise people repeated their sayings but their words fell on deaf ears and thoughts did not depend on them. A group of wise people then endeavored to use the approach of animals, and among them are those who knew the ways to bring [wisdom] out upon the tongues of beasts. [...] They attributed words to these animals so that people would be inclined to listen and desire the character of the animals, because beasts, vermin, and

> livestock are unlikely sources of wisdom. Neither etiquette [*adab*], nor cleverness is attributed to them, rather animals have none of these things: knowledge, deeds, burdens, etc., because their nature is wild, harmful, predatory and corrupt. If, however, you attribute to them the best of ethical manners and if you make them interact in ways of virtue, intellect and conformity, even though [such animals] are inclined towards betrayal (which is the opposite of loyalty), […] [human] ears will listen to their reports and hearts will welcome them with feelings of goodly warmth […] Now that all these people have seen that animals can do such things, they feel at peace in their souls and cease to be melancholy and they rejoice, listening in delight to [the animal fables], inclining towards their natures.[19]

19. Ibn ʿ*Arabshah, Fakihat al-khulafa*ʾ (Freytag edition) 2; Ibn ʿ*Arabshah, Fakihat al-khulafa*ʾ (Najjar edition) 37–38; Ibn ʿ*Arabshah, Fakihat al-khulaf3a*ʾ (Buhayri edition) 24–25.

We can understand the resulting text of the *Fruits of the Caliphs* as a local take on an existing genre at a time when the author believed the tired religious and social discourses of his time were in need of reinvigoration, circulation, and refreshment. The introduction, by way of explaining the text itself, contains the author's observation that by the mid-fifteenth century, people (in this case courtiers) had grown tired of hearing the same messages and religious texts from the same class of religious scholars utilizing the same phrases, anecdotes, and formulas. He claims the repetition caused a lack of receptivity to the messages and thus required a new form through which they might be re-introduced: the mode of the animal fable.

Ultimately, Ibn ʿArabshah proposes that his readers are more apt to accept moral tales calling for righteous governance and godly piety from the tongues of likeable and clever animals than the stuffy intelligentsia or literati of his day, the so-called 'men of the turban'. The author of the *Fruits of the Caliphs* thus hopes that his audience, while contemplating lessons about justice, ethics, and good government, can recognize that they themselves "are among the people (*i.e.*, the human race) who *do* speak and are honored and noble. The fact that mankind has intellects which the animals do not, will make them increase in their vision or interest."[20] By removing human personalities from the world of mankind and inserting them into the animal kingdom to provide thinly-veiled commentary on political situations, the author wishes to make readers engage with the experience by introducing a more dynamic medium for his discourse. Indeed, "when people read of these abilities among the animals, it will make them wish to [behave in a similar manner]."[21]

20. Ibn ʿ*Arabshah, Fakihat al-khulafa*ʾ (Freytag edition) 3; Ibn ʿ*Arabshah, Fakihat al-khulafa*ʾ (Najjar edition) 39; Ibn ʿ*Arabshah, Fakihat al-khulafa*ʾ (Buhayri edition) 26.

21. Ibid.

In updating the text for its new social reality and cultural context at the mid-fifteenth-century Cairene court, one wonders how confident Ibn ʿArabshah may have been in the ability of his text to initiate discussion, and help facilitate socio-political change or cultural exchange. The literary form he brought to Cairo had survived across cultures and centuries. His update of the *Book of Marzban* was something recognizable and as a work of advice literature it certainly had its place in the author's social and cultural world.[22]

22. For a brief assessment of Ibn ʿArabshah's two texts in the wider context of medieval Syro-Egyptian advice literature, see Broadbridge, "Royal Authority" 233 n. 11.

The introduction of the *Fruits of the Caliphs* is very much a discussion of communicative strategies. Through a discussion of how individual animals communicate in unique ways, he moves on to how best an author can communicate with human beings. He writes that a 'wise group of people' realized they could bring wisdom out on the tongues of animals because such stories are better at catching people's attention and delivering memorable bits of wisdom that they will be more likely to retain.

The very fact that this work was commissioned is important and tells us about the tastes and interests of the men at court. One apparent courtly interest the author catered to and which guided part of his own presentation in the final chapter, was an abiding interest in the customary law and habits of the Mongols, who under Genghis Khan had upturned and subjugated much of the Islamic world in the thirteenth century (though notably the Mongols did not make it into Egypt after their defeat in Palestine against the sultans of Cairo). This ongoing interest in the Mongols and their successors continued in the form of Tamerlane as the great Mongol revivalist and who reigned as a towering figure of evil in much of Ibn ʿArabshah's literary output in the 1440s. Fifteenth-century members of the sultan's entourage, particularly in the reign of the previous sultan Barsbay (1422–38), were hungry for information and new perspectives on the Mongols and their customs which simultaneously enthralled and horrified them. The political elite of Cairo, many of whom had been part of a nomadic horse culture very similar to the Mongols, held some admiration for them and it influenced their reading of Islam, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, and past centuries of Islamic history.

Thus in the tenth chapter of his *Fruits of the Caliphs*, Ibn ʿArabshah presents the story of two partridges whose home is threatened and who seek the help of the King of the Birds. In the course of their discussion, the author places a lengthy digression on the Mongols, their history and customary law into the mouth of one of the birds. That Ibn ʿArabshah included such an extensive aside on Mongol cus-

tom suggests that he was likely aware that it was a topic of interest for his elite audience.

His presentation on the Mongols stressed that the Mongol law code or *törä* (also known as the *yasa*) was not compatible with Islamic law (Subtelny 15–18, 24–27). It seems likely that Ibn ʿArabshah's remarks in Sunni Muslim territory would have been more rigid whereas his attitude toward Mongol customary law might have had to be more fluid at courts in Transoxiana or Central Asia where many of the Muslim rulers traced Chinggiskhanid descent and the Mongol heritage was sensitive and mattered more (Bauden). In condemning the legal and social practices of the Mongols and later Tamerlane in texts composed for the Syro-Egyptian rulers he curried favor from, Ibn ʿArabshah might have felt the need to overcompensate and emphatically espouse widely held positions.

In both the text of the *Fruits of the Caliphs* and its introduction, the author fails to make clear who the book is dedicated to. Despite the emphasis on animals in the introduction, the first four framing narratives (spread across the earliest chapters) - in another presentist departure from the *Book of Marzban* - concern a fictional king of the Arabs (who he implies is the reason the book has been written - we might understand this as a symbolic representation of the sultan of Cairo who although of Circassian origins, still ruled over primarily Arabic-speakers in Egypt and Syria), as well as the king of the Persians in chapter 2, and the king of the Turks in chapter 3.

Ibn ʿArabshah had served Arabic, Persian, and Turko-Mongolian courts and was a functional and professional member of each of those linguistic communities. Titles he attributes to the sultan of Cairo in another work describing him as ruler of all Arabs, Persians, and Turks might also provide insight into how he viewed the sultan and transregional politics (Ibn ʿArabshah, *Sirat al-sultan* 166). We might read this as part of a call for the sultan Jaqmaq to come forward and exert his authority over all lands of Islam as a universal sovereign with legitimacy over all three of the major linguistic communities.

The *Fruits of the Caliphs*

To further hypothesize about the intentions of a premodern Arabic literary work, the title of the work and its latent meanings often hold clues for the modern researcher (Hirschler 66–76). The title of the work at hand captured the attention of this researcher for its use of

"caliphs" (*khulafaʾ*) during the mid-fifteenth century. In regard to Ibn ʿArabshah's choice of the more regal Arabic word *fakiha* to convey fruit, as opposed to the more mundane *thamr*, Sylvestre de Sacy has attempted some explanation:

> Quant à la première partie, [*Fakihat al-khulafaʾ*], je pense qu'elle signifie les fruits délicieux, ou, si l'on veut, le dessert, la collation des souverains, c'est-à-dire, livre digne d'être offert aux souverains et d'égayer leurs loisirs. Il ne faut pas croire que [*fakiha*] et son plural [*fawakih*] soient, rigoureusement parlant, synonymes de [*thamr*] et [*athmar*] : il y a cette différence que [*thamr*] signifie fruit d'une manière générale, tandis que [*fakiha*] signifie *fruit agréable au goût*, et *qu'on mange avec plaisir*. (De Sacy 603)

While De Sacy's likely observation that "Fruits" refers to choice bits of entertaining and edifying material worthy of being set before a ruler, one wonders about the possible significance in the author's choice of the term 'Caliphs', or *khulafāʾ*. It is indeed curious that Ibn ʿArabshah chose the word "caliphs" (*khulafaʾ*) as opposed to the perhaps more applicable "kings" (*muluk*) or "sultans" (*salatin*) for the title of his text. Indeed, in his panegyric for the sultan Jaqmaq, he recognizes that such sultans and kings (rather than caliphs) are the most appropriate targets of political wisdom. Jaqmaq, renowned for Islamic piety in his lifetime, had been especially fond of the three caliphs who tended to his courtly ceremonial needs. By at least the late ninth century, caliphs were no longer the holders of religious or political authority in the Islamic World. The contemporary Abbasid caliphs of Cairo were essentially ceremonial figures serving at the pleasure of the sultans. Ibn ʿArabshah himself describes the arrangement in his biography of Tamerlane, noting that the caliph was tethered powerlessly to the ruling sultan of his day in Cairo "like a donkey in the mud." (Banister, *Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo* 100).

That the author produced the text during the reign of Jaqmaq, mentioned him in some versions of the text and had earlier attempted to compose a panegyric for the same sultan, may be indicative of a unique observation embedded in the title of *Fruits of the Caliphs*. Jaqmaq was certainly a sultan, though caliphal epithets such as *khalifa* or "commander of the faithful" (*amir al-muʾminin*) were not among his many titles. 'Fruits' for the caliphs, essentially refers to the wise and beneficial stories and maxims of the text, deemed by the author to be fit to set before the highest and holiest office of classical Islam,

the caliph himself. It was perhaps Ibn ʿArabshah's intention that his new work would offer the advice capable of turning the reigning sultan and his companions into just and pious rulers on par with the earliest caliphs of Islam.

Given his proclivities for Sufism, one other option may be the Sufi usage of 'caliph' as the spiritual master of an aspiring adept. In earlier years, Ibn ʿArabshah sat at the feet of eastern masters such as Muhammad Parsa and ʿAlaʾ al-Din al-Bukhari and resided locally in Cairo at Sufi hostels such as the Saʿid al-Suʿadaʾ (Salahiyya) *khanqah* where he was ultimately buried. Understanding the title as 'fruits' of (spiritual) caliphs may also be akin to 'knowledge from the masters.'

Jaqmaq, Kingship, and Authorial Agency

As in the *Book of Marzban*, concepts of righteous kingship and justice are often alluded to throughout the text of *Fruits of the Caliphs.* Among the important qualities for kingship identified by Ibn ʿArabshah in the first chapter are: reason, civility, justice, leadership, intellect, physiognomy, virtue, and preciousness.[23] But it is the final chapter of the *Fruits of the Caliphs* which stands out for the author's elaborations on kingship and justice.

23. Ibn ʿ*Arabshah, Fakihat al-khulafa*ʾ (Najjar edition) 60.

For the edification of the king of the eagles, the tenth chapter includes a discussion of justice, the just leader (*imam*), and exemplary anecdotes of prophets, caliphs, and kings, brought forth by the supplicating partridge.[24] The chapter ends with the eagle king being impressed by the counsel and inviting the partridge into service as an advisor to help administer his state. It is in the context of the final chapter of the *Fruits of the Caliphs* that Ibn ʿArabshah delivers his own lessons on justice for kings on the importance of balance between excessive ease and severity, and how balance is at the heart of all Islamic beliefs and religious practices.

24. Ibn ʿ*Arabshah, Fakihat al-khulafa*ʾ (Najjar edition) 517–36.

It is noteworthy that Ibn ʿArabshah introduces anecdotes about Tamerlane and Jaqmaq into his *Fruits of the Caliphs* where there had obviously been no such "modern" intrusions into his translation of the original *Book of Marzban*. The stories about Tamerlane relayed by animal narrators, highlight his greed, overconfidence, and excessive anger, while the sole story of Jaqmaq concerns what the author perceives as his reestablishment of order after disruption. Broadly speaking, Ibn ʿArabshah's work intended for Jaqmaq's court sought to promote a favorable image of Jaqmaq and to project the sultan's

claims to legitimate sovereignty by invoking his military successes, his maintenance of the divine law (*shariʿa*), and his justice.

Due largely to an absence of information in the sources, it is difficult to know much about the last eight years of Ibn ʿArabshah's life between 1442–50. Although he is known to have commuted between Cairo and Damascus (where his family lived), he seems to have lived at a Sufi hostel founded by Saladin in Cairo for much of this period, despite rumors that he also held office as a chief judge in a small Syrian town (Ibn Taghribirdi 15: 549). None of his later biographers claim that Ibn ʿArabshah found a position at the ruler's court in the final years of his life, rather he was arrested by Jaqmaq for insulting one of his courtiers (Al-Sakhawi 1: 111). It is thus somewhat challenging to comment on the agency and influence of Ibn ʿArabshah and his texts during his final years. The introduction of new material, text reuse, and alterations made to the original surviving text of the *Book of Marzban* suggest that *Fruits of the Caliphs* was no mere translation or update.

Ibn ʿArabshah's authorial agency, set in its communicative context of Jaqmaq's court, grew from his overall mission to cast Jaqmaq as an ideal Muslim sovereign, or caliph, who could correct history and stand as the antithesis to the arch-villain and anti-ruler figure of Tamerlane. It is thus that Ibn ʿArabshah mobilizes his insider information on Tamerlane, along with his lengthy discussion on Mongol customary law, to demonstrate his value as an advisor capable of helping to shape the sultan of Cairo into a worthy 'caliph' and to point out the evils of unjust rule through a number of tools at his disposal: verses from the Quran, sayings attributed to Muhammad, maxims attributed to ancient Iranian kings and Muslim caliphs, and animal fables. The end result is an entirely new text, meant to call attention to Ibn ʿArabshah's skillset, past experiences, and abilities to serve as an able advisor to the ruler, like the partridge before the eagle.

Reception History as Evidence

Whereas many similarly composed books were likely deposited into a ruler's book treasury (*kutubkhana*) only to languish forgotten, we can say with certainty that Ibn ʿArabshah's *Fruits of the Caliphs* enjoyed popularity well transcending the date of its original composition. Because the *Fruits of the Caliphs* was heavily copied, it is to be expected that it was popular. Many such books were read publicly in Cairene coffee houses beginning in the fourteenth century. Perhaps

Ibn ʿArabshah envisioned it as a work for popular consumption and thus embellished it with Arabic poetry (in many cases his own) and historical anecdotes about historical figures that listeners would have wanted to hear about. The rich manuscript tradition of the *Fruits of the Caliphs* as material objects whose different lay-outs, scripts, coloring, paratexts (attached by readers or owners), illustrations, sizes, marginal notes, and traces of usage, tell us about the intended and actual audiences of this text.

Additional manuscripts were completed during the last years of the author's life, suggesting that the book circulated among the circle of courtiers associated with Jaqmaq and his successors. We know that one manuscript completed in November 1448 under the supervision of Ibn ʿArabshah himself, now housed at the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, was commissioned by the vizier Abu al-Khayr Muhammad al-Zahiri, likely one of Jaqmaq's appointees.[25]

To confirm the wide attestation of its manuscript tradition, the online "Bibliography of 15th Century Arabic Historiography (BAH)" at Ghent University has identified no fewer than sixty-five unique manuscripts of the *Fruits of the Caliphs*.[26] Numerous copies appear in the collections of the Middle East: Egypt's *Dar al-kutub wa-l-watha ʾiq al-qawmiyya* collection as well as Azhar University Library; the Ottoman collections at Topkapi, Ayasofya, Nuruosmaniye Library, and Süleymaniye Library (the latter housing two manuscripts copied during the author's lifetime); the Library of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (Saudi Arabia), and the *Maktabat al-Haram al-Makki al-Sharif* (Mecca – Saudi Arabia).

As Arnoud Vrolijk likewise claimed of the *Fruits of the Caliphs*, "any important collection of Islamic manuscripts in the Western world possesses at least several copies."[27] Indeed copies of the text exist in the Bibliothèque nationale de France BNF, Leiden University Library, the Austrian National Library and subsequent editions have appeared ever since Georg W. Freytag published his version with a Latin translation as *Fructus imperatorum et iocatio ingeniosorum* (Bonn, 1832–52).[28]

However, two manuscripts at the National Library of Egypt (Dar al-Kutub, MS Adab Taymur 764 and MS Adab ʿArabi 2202) are dated during Ibn ʿArabshah's lifetime. One modern editor of the text, Ayman ʿAbd al-Jabir al-Buhayri, believed Taymur 764 (despite being copied in two different hands) was an autograph because it included the author's own colophon dated to 1436, though Vrolijk, points out that just because a manuscript contains an author's colophon, it is

25. St. Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, MS 9172. The St. Petersburg manuscript includes Ibn ʿArabshah's writing on folio 272r: "The author has finished reading this text, all is correct – according to the will of God Most High." See: Petrosyan *et al.*, *Pages of Perfection* 192. There seems to be no further information about Abu al-Khayr Muhammad al-Zahiri in the Arabic biographical dictionaries of the era.

26. See the BAH website.

27. Vrolijk, "Review."

28. See also: Brockelmann 2: 29–30, no. 3; Suppl. 2: 25, no 3. In addition to an 1869 edition published by the Dominican fathers of Mosul, Vrolijk has numbered at least twelve Cairo editions of the *Fruits of the Caliphs* dating between 1860 and 1908. More recently Muhammad Rajab al-Najjar's edition of the Fakiha (Kuwait: Dar Suʿad al-Ṣabah, 1997) was joined three years later by that of Ayman ʿAbd al-Jabir al-Buhayri (Cairo: Dar al-Afaq al-ʿArabiyya, 2001).

not always an autograph, as Ibn ʿArabshah's colophon appears in several manuscript copies including Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, MS Petermann 295, Leiden Or. 135, and a later Cairo edition dating to 1898.[29]

29. See Vrolijk.

When we look at Ibn ʿArabshah's immediate contacts in this later period of his life, about two years before his death, many were younger scholars – petitioning to be his students in Cairo which was, for him, perhaps a new development. Up until this point, Ibn ʿArabshah had largely been in search of senior scholars to learn from in Central and Western Asia as well as Asia Minor, and now, he was the one sought after (McChesney 232). It may well have been that he was speaking to a hungry new generation of scholar-historians and aspiring courtiers interested in devouring alternative genres and forms of wisdom literature that could in turn be brought into official settings.

Thus Ibn ʿArabshah sought to use this particular literary form of animal fables interspersed with historical anecdotes to negotiate his social position *vis-à-vis* other members of the court and ruling elites. He shared it with his students and younger scholars, some of whom were better placed than he was, in the hope that it would expand his reputation. Indeed, at least two prominent late fifteenth-century Egyptian scholars Ibn Taghribirdi (1411–70) and al-Sakhawi (1427–97) sought out Ibn ʿArabshah to receive diplomas of permission (*ijazas*) from him in order to transmit the *Fruits of the Caliphs* as well as his other texts.

Although it seems Ibn ʿArabshah was unable to capitalize on the renown of his works during his lifetime, the work continued to gain fame after he died. The text was copied fairly extensively into the Ottoman period and seems even to have eclipsed his famous biography of Tamerlane as his signature work. Ibn ʿArabshah's son Taj al-Din ʿAbd al-Wahhab later wrote a biography about him and titled it, *The Life Story of My Father, Author of the 'Fruits of the Caliphs'*. It seems as though it became his most popular and recognizable work in his final years and for centuries after his death and provided his son with social and cultural capital to mobilize on the Cairene literary scene of the later fifteenth century.

Despite the existence of numerous copied manuscripts, the *Fruits of the Caliphs* has received little attention from modern scholarship. The work has been treated by only two articles. The first, Sylvester de Sacy's 1835 French review of Freytag's Bonn edition of the text, provides only a brief introduction and summary of the contents (De Sacy). In 1999 Robert Irwin published a paper focusing on the ninth and tenth chapters of the book and what new information they contained on the history and customs of the Mongols. Irwin's anal-

ysis raises questions of what the work might suggest about interest in Mongol customary law within the context of the fifteenth-century Cairo Sultanate (Irwin, "What the Partridge Told the Eagle"). In modern Arabic scholarship, the work has attracted attention in recent years. A 2000–01 Kuwaiti Master's thesis by ʿAbd Allah Ghazali, explored the possibility of linking the book's seventh chapter to slightly earlier political tensions between Tamerlane and the Cairo Sultanate (Ghazali), while a 2009 study by Ahmad ʿAlwani engaged with some of the narrative and rhetorical tools used by Ibn ʿArabshah in the work (ʿAlwani). In a book published in 2012, Samiyah al-Duraydi al-Husni examined Ibn ʿArabshah's depiction of animals in relation to earlier works of Arabic literature (al-Husni).

Conclusion

Different notions and themes of movement or mobility are central to the case study of Ibn ʿArabshah. Over a period of twenty years (1401–21) he spent time moving between at least eight courts scattered across Muslim west Asia. As a translator and textual broker, he also moved texts in and out of languages and into new social contexts - bringing Persian works into Turkish for the Ottoman court and Turkish and Persian works into Arabic for the sultans of Egypt. Like many of his fifteenth-century peers, he had to find his social footing anew and reinvent himself after the upheaval and transformation that affected many Muslim polities and societies across Asia in the wake of plague, the invasions of Tamerlane, and the breakdown of social and political order. He thus actively sought social and professional mobility at the court, the judiciary and/or the chancery of late medieval Syria and Egypt between 1422 and his death in 1450.

Ibn ʿArabshah had a specific vision of kingship and righteous rule that was cultured by his past experiences and spread across three of his texts which he tried to transmit across linguistic and cultural boundaries between 1435 and 1442. His *Fruits of the Caliphs*, the third of the three texts following his biography of Tamerlane and panegyric for sultan Jaqmaq, was essentially the grand finale of his messages on kingly justice.

The introduction to the text contains a strong commentary on the contemporary religious and intellectual scene the author was writing to – bored as they may have been by traditional religious learning while harboring an abiding interest in Mongol customs. Ac-

cording to Ibn ʿArabshah, his enhanced translation of the *Book of Marzban* spoke to a hungry new generation interested in devouring alternative literature and consuming wisdom from non-traditional sources and means. Many younger scholars then sought him out for his lauded style, his firsthand stories of Tamerlane, and his flair for simultaneously edifying and entertaining Arabic prose. If we engage with more recent conceptualizations of the court of the Islamicate ruler as a locus of literary and intellectual performance, we can say that the form of the text produced by the author was one that he thought would be successful in its new cultural context and the way it was written, reorganized, reshaped, and injected with new intertextual references and anecdotes closely reflects its cultural context.

As a work of advice literature, *Fruits of the Caliphs* was meant to entertain courtiers and political elites alike. The work is different in its style and content, though it fits within the broader genre of advice literature and serves its main purpose as a means for an author to manipulate literary forms to negotiate their social position by finding employment and expressing contemporary commentary (Marlow, "The Way of Viziers" 170).

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