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Sira Culture, Hadith and the Veneration of Muḥammad in the Later Middle Period: Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimašqī (d. 842/1438) as a Case Study

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Abstract

The article investigates the social and cultural practices of Sira production and consumption in the later Middle Period. It probes into the place held by Sira regarding the veneration of the Prophet, especially in relation to Hadith. Its first part shows that in the Middle Period Sira was intended as a vast literary repository characterized by fluidity of format, diverse social fruition, and plurality of practices in transmission and consumption. It was a literary field characterized by narrative malleability and creativity, for which there was popular demand and scholarly dedication.

The life and work of the Šāfiʿī scholar and Hadith expert Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimašqī (d. 842/1438), in particular his *Ġāmiʿ al-āṭār fī l-siyar wa-mawlid al-muḥtār* (*The Compilation of Traditions on the Life and Birth of the Chosen One*) occupies the second part of the article. Here, *Ġāmiʿ al-āṭār* is taken as a written exemplification of the tight relationship between Sira, Hadith and devotion to the Prophet typical of the period, of 14th-15th century Damascus in particular.

* An earlier version of Part I of this article was presented and discussed at a roundtable in Aix-en-Provence “Le Prophète comme modèle: implications doctrinales et pratiques dévotionnelles” (24-25 October 2014). I would like to thank the conveners and participants for that opportunity. I am grateful to Renaud Soler for insisting that I produce something on the topic of post-formative period *sīras* and for his useful feedback on the first draft of this article. Equal thanks are due to the peer-reviewers whose comments helped improve the text. This article is a contribution to the DFG and ANR funded project *Muhammad in the mirror of his community in early modern and modern Islam* in which I was involved (<https://prophet.hypotheses.org/>). The final version of this article was submitted in February 2022. The bibliography has not been updated since then.

Overall, the article argues that the intended meaning and use of a text as rich as *Ġāmi' al-āṭār* can be fully grasped only when we put it in close conversation with the Hadith culture and veneration for the Prophet of the time. It suggests the existence of a pervasive “Sira culture” binding people in a relationship of meaning to their shared memories of the life of the Prophet. Such culture was nurtured by remembrance of the Prophet’s excellency and life milestones. It aimed at cultivating salvific feelings of love for the Prophet that would assure believers a secure place in the Afterlife.

Keywords

Hadith, *sīra*, post-canonical Hadith culture, Sira culture, Damascus, Prophet, love, veneration of the Prophet, spiritual attachment, memory, remembrance

Résumé

Cet article étudie les pratiques sociales et culturelles associées à la production littéraire de la Sira au Moyen Âge islamique, en particulier dans les domaines mamelouks (648/1250-922/1517). Plus particulièrement, cette étude pose des questions sur la place tenue par la Sira vis-à-vis la vénération du Prophète, notamment par rapport au Hadith. Dans la première partie, on montre que dans la période en question on entendait par Sira un vaste domaine littéraire caractérisé par une certaine variabilité de ses formats, une diversité sociale des milieux de production et une pluralité des pratiques de transmission et de consommation. C’était un domaine littéraire caractérisé par sa malléabilité narrative et sa créativité, pour lequel il y avait tout à la fois une importante demande populaire et une attention particulière des élites lettrées.

La deuxième partie de l’article est dédiée à la vie et l’œuvre du savant šāfi’ite et expert en Hadith Ibn Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Dimašqī (m. 842/1438), en particulier à son *Ġāmi' al-āṭār fī l- siyar wa-mawlid al-muḥtār* (*Recueil de traditions sur la vie et la naissance de l’Élu*). Le *Ġāmi' al-āṭār* est ici appréhendé comme une illustration textuelle de la relation intime entre Sira, Hadith et vénération du Prophète typique de l’époque médiévale, en particulier à Damas aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles.

Dans ses conclusions, l’article soutient que la signification d’un texte aussi riche que *Ġāmi' al-āṭār* ne peut être pleinement saisie que lorsque nous la mettons en relation avec la culture du Hadith et la vénération du Prophète de l’époque. Cela met en évidence l’existence d’une « culture de la Sira » liant les croyants à leurs mémoires partagées de la vie du Prophète dans une relation de sens. Une telle culture – nourrie par la mémoire de l’excellence du Prophète et des jalons de sa vie – visait à cultiver

des sentiments d'amour salvifique pour le Prophète qui assureraient aux croyants une place dans l'au-delà.

Mots clefs

Hadith, *sīra*, culture, Damas, amour, prophète, vénération, attachement spirituel, mémoire, souvenir

This study is concerned with Prophetic Sira in the later Islamic Middle Period, specifically the Mamluk domains (648/1250-922/1517).¹ This was a time exceptionally rich in literary output which witnessed an extensive growth in the veneration of the Prophet. This veneration was expressed via a variety of devotional practices and types of literary activity, including an intensification in Hadith scholarship and transmission.² Within this context, what was the place of Sira?³ How can we understand the multitude of literary manifestations as well as social and cultural practices of Sira production and consumption of the period? I shall address these questions by examining the relationship between Sira, Hadith and devotion to the Prophet as exemplified by the Šāfi'ī scholar and Hadith expert Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimašqī (d. 842/1438), in particular in

- 1 I adopt the periodization of the "Middle Period" (subdivided into early and later) from Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World of Civilization*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1974, 3 vols, especially II, p. 3-11 and p. 376-384. Not all of the features proposed by Hodgson as characterizing these centuries (ca 945-1500) are still tenable, but the idea of treating this lapse of time as a "period" maintains a broad scholarly consensus. See Jonathan Berkey, *Religion and Society in the Near and Middle East: 600-1800*, Cambridge-New York-Melbourne, Cambridge University Press ("Themes in Islamic History," 2), 2003, p. 179-183.
- 2 For an overview of topics and issues related to prophetic piety and devotion across history, see the special issue of *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 178 (2017) [*Le prophète de l'Islam : la construction d'un modèle, premiers mystiques, normalisation de la présence et de la vénération*, eds Nelly Amri, Denis Gril and Rachida Chih]; the recently published volume: Denis Gril, Stefan Reichmuth and Dilek Sarmis (eds), *The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam*, vol. 1, *The Prophet between Doctrine, Literature and Arts: Historical Legacies and their Unfolding*, Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section One, The Ancient Near East," 159/1), 2021. On prophetic piety, also the classical Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press ("Studies in Religion"), 1981.
- 3 Throughout this study, I use "Sira" to denote the genre of Muḥammad's biographies as a whole and "Hadith" to denote the literature of Prophetic traditions which assembles text-units called *ḥadīṭ* in various forms and according to various criteria. On the contrary, I use *sīra* and *ḥadīṭ* when wanting to indicate a specific prophetic biography or tradition.

his *Ġāmi' al-āṭār fi l-sīyar wa-mawlid al-muḥtār* (*The Compilation of Traditions on the Life and Birth of the Chosen One*).⁴

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimaṣqī was a highly respected Hadith specialist and transmitter in his time. His story is a local one: he lived and worked in Damascus and travelled little. Nonetheless, his work also reflects the broader trends in the Hadith culture of the period and the intense veneration of the Prophet that ran parallel to it. These two elements converge in *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, a bulky literary work which brings together the genres of Hadith and Sira. Whereas recent studies have shed light on what has been labelled post-canonical Hadith culture, scholarly engagement with post-formative period *sīras* remains minimal. For this reason and owing to the need to provide meaningful context to the work of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, the present study is divided in two parts. After briefly outlining the state of the art in Sira studies, the first part presents fresh conclusions drawn from primary sources regarding the pervasiveness of Sira writing in the later Middle Period, the range of literary forms it encompassed, the diversity of social contexts in which it was realized, and the spiritual import conferred upon it. These elements coalesce to suggest the existence of a “Sira culture,” an expression which may be used to point to a connective structure binding people in a relationship of meaning to their shared memories of the life of the Prophet.⁵ Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s *Ġāmi' al-āṭār* is a written expression of this culture and constitutes the subject of the second part of this article. First, an examination of its structure will show that this mammoth work, which appears at first glance to be a Hadith collection, was in fact intended by its author as a *sīra*. Second, an analysis of its beginning and end will show that the work was crafted as an instrument to foster intimate attachment to the Prophet. Typically, such attachment was conceived as the necessary means to attain eternal salvation and was to be cultivated by meticulously and intimately recalling the details of Muḥammad’s excellency together with the decisive moments of his life. The intended meaning and use of a text as rich as

4 Hereby shortened to *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*.

5 My debt here is to Jan Assmann, *La Memoria culturale: Scrittura, ricordo e identità politica nelle grandi civiltà antiche*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997 (German original, 1992), p. xii-xiii. In English, among many, see *id.*, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter (“Media and Cultural Memory,” 8), 2008, p. 109-118; *id.*, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in *The Theoretical Foundations of Hungarian ‘lieux de mémoire’ Studies*, eds Pál S. Varga, Karl Katschthaler, Donald E. Morse and Miklós Takács, Debrecen, Debrecen University Press (“Debrecen”), 2013, p. 36-43.

Ġāmi' al-ātār can be fully grasped only when we put it in close conversation with the intense Hadith culture and veneration for the Prophet of the time.⁶

Part 1

1.1 *Sira Studies, Sira as a Genre*

A *sira* of Muḥammad is a biographical literary work which, in its simplest form, gathers memories of the life of the Prophet into a narrative with a strong focus on chronology.⁷ *Sira* studies, the body of scholarship dedicated to this biographical tradition of the Prophet, is less developed than one would expect given the centrality of the figure of Muḥammad in that complex and highly diversified historical, religious, and human experience that we call Islam. Scholars have expended great efforts in the study of early *Sira* texts, their production and transmission, the relationship between *Sira* and the Qur'ān, the recovery of old layers of *Sira* and *maġāzī* (the accounts of Muḥammad's Medinan military campaigns), as well as issues of authenticity and the possibility of using these sources for historical reconstruction.⁸ On the contrary, relatively scarce attention has been paid to *sīras* of later periods. In this regard, three works must be mentioned: Gurdofarid Miskinzoda (2007), Tilman Nagel (2008) and Tariq Khalidi (2009). Nagel and Khalidi's books look at post-formative *Sira* writings in Arabic, considering the structure and features of a selection of texts, the themes they privilege, and points of faith conveyed by images of the Prophet. Nagel focuses on Medieval Arabic texts, whereas Khalidi embraces a broader perspective up to and including contemporary *sīras*. Both books point to the continuity of the vigorous efforts to idealize Muḥammad and highlight the

6 Readers interested in what I call Medieval "Sira Culture" can limit themselves to Part 1 of the article. Those interested in a textual study of this culture may instead opt for Part 2, together with Conclusions. The bravest can face the essay in its entirety.

7 Gordon D. Newby, "Imitating Muhammad in Two Genres: Mimemism and Problems of Genre in *Sirah* and *Sunnah*," *Medieval Encounters*, 3/3 (1997), p. 266-283. For an excellent introduction to (early) *al-sira l-nabawiyya* see Wim Raven, "Sira and the Qur'ān," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2001-2006, consulted online on 28 March 2021.

8 An overview of the issues that have preoccupied modern *Sira* scholars can be found in Andreas Görke, *Muḥammad: Critical Concepts in Religion*, London-New York, Routledge-Francis & Taylor, 2015, 5 vols, 1 [*The Sources on the Life of Muḥammad*] (1.2 in particular), pertaining only to English-language research. A seminal collection of essays is Harald Motzki (ed.), *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources*, Leiden-Boston-Köln, Brill ("Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts," 32), 2000, of which part 1 is dedicated to the development of the *Sira* tradition.

longevity of the genre as well as its tendency to grow complex over time. Both are written as highly useful broad overviews.⁹ In marked contrast, Gurdofarid Miskinzoda's unpublished PhD dissertation is a monograph study dedicated to *al-Zahr al-bāsim fī siyar Abī l-Qāsim* (*The Blossom that Smiled upon the sīra of Abū l-Qāsim*) by the Mamluk scholar Muğulṭa'ī b. Qilīğ (d. 762/1361). This work was conceived as a super-commentary upon the authoritative and widespread commentary of Ibn Hišām's *al-Sīra l-nabawiyya*: al-Suhaylī's (d. 581/1185) *al-Rawḍ al-unuf fī šarḥ al-sīra l-nabawiyya li-Bn Hišām*.¹⁰

Miskinzoda's work is more narrowly in scope but proves useful in other respects. As in Khalidi's work, the focus here moves beyond the debate about the historicity, authenticity, and reliability of early *sīras* for historical reconstruction.¹¹ Miskinzoda highlights the richness of later *sīra* works as complex literary constructions showing familiarity with a vast number of materials, playing across different fields of knowledge and engaging with an array of theological and political issues. Her reading of Muğulṭa'ī's *sīra* against the backdrop of a rich tradition of Sira production running from the 3th/9th to the 11th/17th centuries provides valuable insights into the development of the genre and its dynamics over this period. One of the study's central ideas is that even though the initial preoccupation with producing a chronological narrative of the life of the Prophet was never lost, later *sīras* tended to become elaborate literary works with a distinct concern for details and reliability.¹²

Moreover, Miskinzoda elaborates a set of formal basic features that distinguish Sira from other literary genres which are helpful for the purpose of this study. First and foremost, Sira is characterized by pronounced chronological preoccupations and as such typically contains varying accounts of

9 Tilman Nagel, *Allahs Liebling: Ursprung und Erscheinungsformen des Mohammedglaubens*, München, R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2008, especially p. 211-245 and p. 265-288 on Medieval *sīras*. On Nagel, see Gottfried Hagen, "The Imagined and the Historical Muḥammad: A review of recent publications," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 129/1 (2009), p. 97-111. Tarif Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad: Narratives of the Prophet in Islam Across the Centuries*, New York, Doubleday, 2009, p. 267-306. Another concise overview of Sira literature, with titles and names of post-tenth century Sira authors is Meir Jacob Kister, "The *Sīrah* Literature," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, eds Alfred Felix Landon Beeston, Thomas Muir Johnstone, Robert Bertram Searjant and Gerald Rex Smith, Cambridge-New York-Melbourne, Cambridge University Press ("Cambridge History of Arabic Literature"), 1983, p. 353-367, esp. p. 366-367.

10 Gurdofarid Miskinzoda, *On the Margins of Sira: Muğulṭa'ī (689-762/1290-1361) and His Place in the Development of Sira Literature*, PhD Dissertation, University of London, SOAS, 2007.

11 A useful critical discussion of the literature on the subject starting from Henri Lammens and including Soviet scholarship can be found in *ibid.*, p. 75-101.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 102-103, 233 and *passim*. The point is made also by Nagel and Khalidi.

the very same episodes from the life of Muḥammad. Another important feature is Qur'ānic quotations, which are frequently intertwined with the stories recounted. Poetry is often woven into the narrative to intensify and dramatize it. Sira also makes frequent use of documents, lists, speeches, genealogies, and letters to enhance its purported historicity. Finally, *sīras* usually provide clarification and commentary on points of grammar.¹³ Miskinzoda notes how these formal features may not all be present together in every *sīra* nor do they constitute an exhaustive list, and yet: "The presence and combination of some of these features are valid reasons for ascribing a given work to the genre of *sīra*."¹⁴ Another point she underscores is that *sīra* works maintained a high degree of changeability and individuality over time and across space according to the background, interests and aims of their authors.¹⁵

At first glance, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dimašqī's *Ġāmi' al-āṭār* resembles a Hadith collection, and while it serves in great part as Hadith, it also comprises a range of diversified materials that converge in what is, for the author, a *sīra*. The second part of the article will explore how such a determination can be made. Before that, an overview of the Hadith and Sira culture of the time is due to fully place Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's *Ġāmi'* into context.

1.2 *Hadith and Devotion to the Prophet*

The mechanics of the pervasive social and cultural phenomenon of Hadith transmission in the Middle Period have recently been seriously scrutinized. Fresh engagement with manuscripts and thus-far understudied documentary sources has come to constitute a vibrant and rich field of enquiry.¹⁶ It now

13 *Ibid.*, p. 113-147. Before Miskinzoda, but not as thorough, is Wim Raven, "Sira," *EI*² and *id.*, "Sira and the Qur'an." Also, Kister, "The *Sīrah* Literature," especially p. 357-362.

14 Miskinzoda, *On the Margins of Sira*, p. 113.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 94, 112-113, 117, 146-147 and *passim*.

16 Eerik Dickinson, "Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī and the Isnād," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 122/3 (2002), p. 481-505 and Garret A. Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition: An Intellectual and Social History of Post-Canonical Hadith Transmission*, PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2014; now a book: *id.*, *A Social and Intellectual History of Hadith Transmission across a Thousand Years*, Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Islamic History and Civilization," 160), 2020 (throughout this work reference will be made to the dissertation since I had no access to the book). Of course, it makes no sense to speak of "post-canonical" without the canon being firmly there. The formation of the Hadith canon and its implications are studied by Jonathan Brown in *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon*, Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Islamic History and Civilization," 69), 2007. On manuscripts as documentary sources, Andreas Görke and Konrad Hirschler (eds), *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*, Beirut, Orient Institute ("Beiruter Texte und Studien," 129), 2011. Stefan Leder has many articles on the subject, one of which is fully referenced in fn 24 along with his *Muḡam al-samā'āt*

comes to light that, despite the challenge posed to the indispensability of the chain of transmission (*isnād*) by the establishment of the written Hadith canon in the fourth/tenth century, the continued oral transmission of Hadith did not fade. Rather, Hadith scholars incorporated into transmission and elaborated new methods and literary genres which expressed the concerns and aims of the field in its post-canonical time.¹⁷ They devised a powerful ideology to justify transmission as a unique mark bestowed by God upon the Muslim community, thus transforming Hadith into a pervasive expression of piety and devotion and an effective (and affective) way of drawing close to Muḥammad's blessing and through him, to God. By establishing a link to the source of authority, the *isnād* not only validated the Prophet's words, but also invoked his presence. Proximity to the Prophet in the chain of transmission, called *'ulūw*, or elevation, became the quality most eagerly sought after by scholars and transmitters due to its perceived spiritual benefits and the great social prestige it carried. In sum, Hadith transmission became a precious source of social and cultural capital worthy of special investment and accumulation.¹⁸

Several of the most notable experts in the history of Hadith scholarship lived in Cairo and Damascus between the seventh/thirteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries and produced seminal reference works in the field of Hadith studies and transmission.¹⁹ Ibn Ṣalāh al-Ṣahrazūrī (d. 643/1245) and al-Nawāwī

al-dīmašqīyya. See also Konrad Hirschler, *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture: The Library of Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press ("Edinburgh Studies in Classical Islamic History and Culture"), 2020.

- 17 Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, p. 79-191 provides extensive source material analysis on the development and meaning of *ijāza* and *samā'* and the changes in post-century Hadith transmission, whereas p. 192-278 present and examine new literary genres in the field of post-canonical Hadith.
- 18 On religious knowledge as a form of social capital, see the classical works of Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press ("Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization"), 1994 and Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*, Princeton, Princeton University Press ("Princeton Studies on the Near East"), 1992.
- 19 Examples include Ibn Ṣalāh al-Ṣahrazūrī's famous Hadith textbook *Kitāb Ma'rifaṭ anwā' 'ilm al-ḥadīth*, now translated into English by E. Dickinson as *An Introduction to the Science of Ḥadīth*, Reading, Garnet Publishing ("Great Books of Islamic Civilization"), 2006; al-Mizzī's comprehensive dictionary on the transmitters of the Six Books and other minor collections (*Tahdīb al-kamāl fī asmā' al-riḡāl*) published in thirty-five volumes; al-Dahabī's *Mizān al-i'tidāl fī naqd al-riḡāl* dedicated to weak transmitters; Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī's weighty commentary on al-Buḡhārī's *Ṣaḡīḥ (Fath al-bārī)*, or his popular compendium of al-Mizzī's *Tahdīb: Tahdīb al-Tahdīb*. On the contributions of Ibn Ṣalāh al-Ṣahrazūrī and al-Dahabī to the Sunni Hadith culture of their time, Scott Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam: The Legacy of the Generation of Ibn*

(d. 676/1277) in the 7th/13th century, al-Ḍahabī (d. 748/1348) in the 8th/14th, and Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn himself in the 9th/15th century, all held the position of shaykh (*mašyaḥa*) of the Dār al-ḥadīṭ al-ašrafiyya intra-muros in Damascus. The high regard in which these scholars and their work were held and the steady growth in construction of teaching institutions dedicated to Hadith (*dūr al-ḥadīṭ*) between the 6th/12th and 9th/15th centuries point to the centrality and prestige that the study of Prophetic tradition acquired in this period.²⁰ In Damascus, the first institution dedicated to the study of the Prophet's lore was funded by the Zanḡid ruler Nūr al-Dīn (d. 569/1174), and by the time he wrote his history of the city's religious buildings at the beginning of the 10th/16th century, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Nu'aymī (d. 978/1521) recounted and described the history of sixteen such institutions.²¹

The Dār al-ḥadīṭ al-ašrafiyya intra-muros just mentioned was one of the two *dār al-ḥadīṭ* that the Ayyubid ruler al-Ašraf Mūsā (d. 635/1237) had erected. The other was located on the slope of Mount Qāsyūn and was the first of its kind outside the city walls. The latter became the preserve of Ḥanbalis from the Maqdisi family, whereas the former, near al-Ašraf Mūsā's residence, was controlled by (traditionalist) Šāfi'īs.²² Al-Ašraf decided to display the Prophet's sandal (*na'ī*), which he had received several years prior, in the intra muros Dār al-ḥadīṭ (*dār al-ḥadīṭ al-ašrafiyya l-ḡuwwaniyya*), where it attracted pilgrims and became the object of acts of ritual piety.²³

Sa'd, Ibn Ma'in, and Ibn Hanbal, Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts," 51), 2004, p. 26-61. On Ibn Šalāḥ also Jens Scheiner, "When the class goes on too long, the Devil takes part in it': *Adab al-muḥaddith* according to Ibn aš-Šalāḥ ash-Shahrazūrī (d. 643/1245)," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 129 (2012), p. 185-204.

20 On Hadith scholarship specifically in 13th century Damascus, Louis Pouzet, *Damas au VII^e/XIII^e siècle : vie et structures religieuses d'une métropole islamique*, Beirut, Dar al-Machreq ("Recherches. Langue arabe et pensée islamique," 15), 1991², p. 182-199, and on various local expressions of prophetic piety p. 357-360.

21 Al-Nu'aymī, *al-Dāris fī ta'rīḥ al-madāris*, ed. Ibrāhīm Šāms al-Dīn, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1990, 2 vols, I, p. 15-90.

22 A history of the two schools with the biographies of its teachers is reported by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn himself in the opening of his inaugural lectures there, see Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Maḡālis fī tafsīr qawli-hi ta'ālā*: "Laqad manna Llāh 'alā l-mu'minīn id ba'a'ta fī-him rasūlan min anfusi-him," ed. Muḥammad 'Awwāma, Beirut, Dār al-yusr-Dār al-minhāḡ, 1431/2012², p. 34-57.

23 Apparently, the Prophet's sandal was even the subject of specific literary compositions, see al-Saḡāwī, *al-I'lān bi-l-tawbīḥ li-man ḍamma ahl al-ta'rīḥ*, Beirut, Mu'assasat al-risāla, 1407/1986, p. 158. For a full account of the school's foundation and the importance of the sandal, see Eerik Dickinson, "Ibn al-Šalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī and the Isnād," p. 481-484 and Daniella Talmon Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria: Mosques Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and the Ayyubids* (1446-1260), Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Jerusalem Studies

Chronicles from the period offer an abundance of witnesses who attest to the belief that the Prophet's agency could be harnessed to the advantage of his community via the public recitation of Hadith, specifically of certain collections endowed with binding authority. Such was the case with the *Ṣaḥīḥān*, whose ritual use is demonstrated from the 7th/13th and 8th/14th centuries. The reading of al-Buḥārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* is documented in rain prayers (*istisqā'*) and moments of peril or to mark happy occasions such as the birth of a male heir to the Sultan.²⁴ Other than these specific instances, recent studies have conclusively demonstrated the widespread communal nature of Hadith reading and transmission in this period in both private and public contexts,²⁵ and that such practices became increasingly ritualized as they were imbued with the Prophet's spiritual authority and personal aura.²⁶ It is evident that Hadith was ubiquitous in this society.

Parallel developments associated with the towering figure of the Prophet have been detected for literary genres other than Hadith. Celebrations of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid al-nabī*) or other crucial events in his life like his

in Religion and Culture," 7), 2007, p. 203-205. An instance of Hadith reading in proximity to the sandal is recorded by al-Dāwūdī (d. 945/1538), *Ṭabaqāt al-mufasssīrīn*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar, [Cairo], Maktabat Wahba, [1972], 2 vols, II, p. 276: "He [i.e. Abū Ṭālib al-Širāzī al-Fayruzābādī, d. 817/1415] read the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim in Damascus under the guidance of Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Jahbal in three days in front of the Prophet's sandal," mentioned in Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012, p. 53, 78 fn. 39.

- 24 See al-Birzālī (d. 738/1339), *al-Muqtafi' alā kitāb al-rawḍatayn, al-ma'rūf bi-ta'rīḥ al-Birzālī*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām al-Tadmūrī, Beirut, al-Maktabat al-'aṣriyya, 2007, 4 vols, II, p. 424 and IV, p. 354 (reading al-Buḥārī during collective prayers for rain); Ibn Kaṭīr (d. 774/1373), *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya fī l-ta'rīḥ*, Cairo, Maṭba'at al-sa'āda, 1351/1932-1358/1939, 14 vols, XIII, p. 320 (reading Buḥārī under the siege of 'Akka); al-Ġazārī (d. 738/1337-1338), *Ta'rīḥ ḥawādīṯ al-zamān wa-anbā'ī-hi wa-wafayāt al-akābir wa-l-a'yān min abnā'ī-hi: al-ma'rūf bi-ta'rīḥ Ibn al-Ġazarī*, Beirut, al-Maktaba l-'aṣriyya, 1998, 3 vols, I, p. 44 (reading al-Buḥārī in the Damascus Umayyad Mosque of Damascus to celebrate the birth of a son to al-Malik al-Aṣraf). More in Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, p. 338-349.
- 25 The phenomenon of reading in public spaces is attested to by the corpus of Damascene hearing certificates published by Stefan Leder, Yāsin M. al-Sawwās and Ma'mūn al-Šāgarġī, *Muġam al-samā'āt al-dimašqiyya/Les certificats d'audition à Damas : 550-750/1155-1349*, Damascus, Institut français d'études arabes de Damas, 1996-2000, 2 vols. See also Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, p. 155-160, 176-177, 180, 215 and *passim*; Stefan Leder, "Spoken Word and Written Text – Meaning and Social Significance of the Institution of *Riwāya*," *Islamic Area Studies Working Paper Series*, 31 (2002), p. 1-18, especially 11-14; Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands*, 23-81.
- 26 On reading Hadith in specific months, see Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 74, 156, 180, 213-214; Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, p. 342-343; Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, p. 117-123.

ascension to heaven (*mi'rāğ*) fostered devotion towards his person.²⁷ These commemorations were accompanied by chanting poems praising him and his birth (*madā'ih*, *mawlidīyyāt*), or by the recitation of narratives focusing on his pre-history and birth (*mawlid*).²⁸ A growth in the production of "sober" *mawlid* texts specifically intended for ritualized public reading has been observed for 8th/14th century Damascus. According to Marion Katz, these narratives expressly avoided the fanciful cosmogonic tales typical of the period and privileged materials belonging to the mainstream scholarly tradition with a marked concern for authentication.²⁹

Other than in *mawlid*, chanting poems in praise of the Prophet at appointed times was a regular activity in teaching institutions. Preferably, the officer charged with singing such praises (*al-mādih/al-munšid*) was to be good looking and gifted with a beautiful voice (*ḥasan al-hay'a wa-l-ṣawt*). The objective of reciting poetry in praise of the Prophet was to cultivate feelings of love and delight in the audience (*al-tawāğud wa-l-ṭarab li-l-sāmī'īn*).³⁰ Such feelings, as

27 For instance, a celebration of the Prophet's ascension in the courtyard of the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus on the night of 27 Rabī' I 725 (13 March 1325) is recorded by al-Ğazārī, *Ta'riḥ ḥawādīḥ al-zamān*, II, p. 75. See *ibid.*, III, p. 1016 for a *mawlid* held in Cairo, at the Dār al-Sa'āda, by will of the vice-Sultan (Rabī' I 738/October 1337).

28 On *madā'ih* and *mawlidīyyāt*, Mohamed Thami El Harrak, "Présence du Prophète dans l'art du panegyrique (*madih*) et de l'audition spirituelle (*samā'*)," in *The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam*, vol. 1, *The Prophet between Doctrine, Literature and Arts: Historical Legacies and their Unfolding*, eds Denis Gril, Stefan Reichmuth and Dilek Sarmis, Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section One, The Ancient Near East," 159/1), 2021, p. 411-430. *Mawlid* has been at the center of recent studies: Nicolaas Jan Gerrit Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday Festival: Early History in the Central Muslim Lands and Development in the Muslim West Until 10th/16th Century*, Leiden-New York-Köln, Brill, 1993 and Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam*, London-New York, Routledge ("Culture and Civilization in the Middle East," 11), 2007; Pouzet, *Damas au VII^e/XIII^e siècle*, p. 359, addresses *madā'ih nabawiyya* as a new literary genre in 7th/13th century Damascus; Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muḥammad*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2010, chap. 2 is on the most famous devotional 7th/13th-century ode for the Prophet written by al-Buṣīrī (d. between 694/1294 and 696/1296), the "Qaṣīdat al-Burda." See also *ead.*, "From Sīrah to Qaṣīdah: Poetics and Polemics in al-Buṣīrī's 'Qaṣīdat al-Burda' ('Mantle Ode')," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 38/1 (2007), p. 1-52.

29 Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 54-61. *Mawlid* celebration in domestic spaces has been observed as well. Marion Holmes Katz, "Commemoration of the Prophet's Birthday as a Domestic Ritual in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Damascus," in *Domestic Devotions in the Early Modern World*, eds Marco Faini and Alessia Meneghin, Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Intersections," 59/2), 2018, p. 167-181.

30 See Muḥammad Amīn, *al-Awqāf wa-l-ḥayāt al-iğtimā'iyya fi Miṣr, 648-963 H, 1250-1517 M: dirāsa tāriḥiyya waṭā'iqīyya*, Cairo, Dār al-naḥḍa al-'arabiyya, 1980, p. 192-193; Tağ al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), *Mu'īd al-ni'am wa-mubīd al-niqam*, ed. Muḥammad Faṭḥī l-Nādī,

Katz perceptively highlighted, were key to nurturing a desirable connection to the Prophet.³¹ The historian Šams al-Dīn al-Ğazarī (d. 738/1337-1338) recalls the presence of “the chanters of poems in praise of the Prophet” (*al-munšidīn li-l-madā’ih al-nabawīyya*) at the completion of a reading of the Qur’ān (*ḥatm*) performed by his nephew in the mosque of Ibn Hišām in Damascus.³² It appears to have been an event of some relevance in which several of the city’s most prominent social groups took part: the Qāḏīs, the notables (*al-akābir wa-l-a’yān*), the notaries (*al-udūl*), the jurists (*al-fuqahā*), the Qur’ān reciters and finally, “the chanters of poems in praise of the Prophet.” Next to the others, the “chanters” appear to be of respectable social standing.

Ḥatms were public lectures held to celebrate the completion of a reading that had usually gone on for many sessions. Reading poetry was common during these lectures, which were normally attended by many people. *Ḥatms* often concerned the Qur’ān but not exclusively so;³³ a focus on the *Šaḥīḥān* and *sīras* spread and became quite popular as well.³⁴ Furthermore, both of the latter types of *ḥatms* gave life to specific literary works.³⁵ We will encounter one of them by the hand of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimašqī which will help us shed light on the function and place of Sira within this context of growing devotion for the Prophet.

1.2.1 Sirā’s Writerly Culture

Just as Marion Katz discovered an increase in scholarly *mawlid* texts in 8th/14th-century Syria, Tarif Khalidi has detected a boom in Sira writing for 8th/14th-century Damascus. Khalidi dwells on this literary phenomenon which he describes as a “fourteenth century renaissance,” asking “Was this ‘renaissance’ in Sira works part of a larger literary revival?” Khalidi ultimately hesitates to answer, citing a lack of studies in the literary history of the period.³⁶ To prove his point about the proliferation of Damascene *sīra* texts for the period in question, Khalidi clusters together and presents the *sīras* of Muğulṭāy, Šams

Cairo, Mu’assasat al-‘alyā’ li-l-našr wa-l-tawzī’, 2008, p. 130; Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, p. 20, 198; George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1981, p. 176.

31 Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 104-125.

32 See Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, p. 121-122.

33 Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, p. 339 and 344.

34 See al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’ fi a’yān al-qarn al-tāsi’*, ed. Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Qudṣī, Cairo, Maktabat al-Qudṣī, 1353/1934-1355/1936, 12 vols, I, p. 210, 273; V, p. 229; VI, p. 296; VIII, p. 18; IX, p. 11, 43; X, p. 236; XI, p. 3.

35 Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, p. 122.

36 Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*, p. 329-330.

al-Dīn al-Dahabī, Ibn Šākīr al-Kutubī (d. 764/1363), Ibn Katīr (d. 774/1373), and Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya (d. 751/1350).³⁷

Khalidi was correct in his conjecture, although his focus can be easily widened to the regional level. In fact, narrating the life of Muḥammad was an intrinsic component of the scholarly, religious, and devotional culture of the time, and not only in Syria. Multiple sources attest to the richness of Sira textual production in this period. One is the Epilogue (*ḥātima*) of the long and detailed biography of the jurist, historian and Hadith scholar Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449) by his colleague al-Saḡhāwī (d. 902/1497).³⁸ In order to place his work within a longstanding tradition of biographical writings, al-Saḡhāwī puts together a long list of such works which begins with *sīras* of Muḥammad. The spread and popularity of the genre is corroborated by the author's assertion that *sīras* were composed by the great scholars of every era and are impossible to count. Many, if not most, of the *sīras* he lists over the following two pages belong to the later Middle Period. Al-Saḡhāwī is precise: he notes when he did not read a work (*mā waqaftu ʿalay-hi*) and adequately conveys the variety of different modes of *sīra*-making.³⁹ Works of *mağāzī*, *dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, *mawlid*, *ḥaṣāʾiṣ* and *muʿġizāt* – that is, reports of the Prophet's campaigns, signs of prophethood, birth narratives, special prerogatives and miracles are all included in the list as part of the Sira genre.

Even more precise is the record of the most authoritative *sīra* works of his time which al-Saḡhāwī issues in his notorious defense of historiography: *al-Iʿlān bi-l-tawbīḥ li-man ḍamma l-taʾrīḥ* (*The Open Denunciation of Those Who Criticize History*).⁴⁰ There, he includes writings devoted solely to the biography of Muḥammad, biographies of his embedded in broader historiographical projects, versified *sīras*, commentaries and glosses (*ṣarḥ/hāṣiya*). Furthermore, al-Saḡhāwī includes in the Sira genre single monothematic writings dedicated to events and activities from the Prophet's life, as well as literature pertaining to his special prerogatives as Prophet, his qualities, physical traits, or specific characteristics like the fact of being born circumcised. From this evidence we can gather that in al-Saḡhāwī's time, Sira was not only a widely produced form of biographical writing, but that it had also become a versatile and open literary

37 *Ibid.*, p. 334-355.

38 Al-Saḡhāwī, *al-Ġawāhir wa-l-durar*, ed. Ibrāhīm Bāġis ʿAbd al-Maġīd, Beirut, Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1419/1999, 3 vols, III, p. 1251-1278.

39 *Ibid.*, III, p. 1251-1252.

40 Al-Saḡhāwī, *al-Iʿlān bi-l-tawbīḥ li-man ḍamma ahl al-taʾrīḥ*, p. 146-160; English translation, Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1968², p. 393-403. I thank Renaud Soler for drawing my attention to this source.

repository which was associated with all aspects of Muḥammad's person and was diverse in theme and mode of expression.⁴¹

This diversity of format is also reflected by the vocabulary used to describe the act of Sira writing in 8th/14th- and 9th/15th-century Syrian and Egyptian narrative sources. Scholars put together (*ǧama'a*), composed (*ṣannaḡa*), abridged (*iḡtaṣara*), commented (*ṣaraḡa*), versified (*naẓẓama*) and copied (*naṣaḡa*) *sīras*.⁴² Aḡmad b. Ismā'īl al-Ibšīṡī (d. 835/1432) offers a telling case of this multifarious activity. A Cairo based preacher, al-Ibšīṡī was so devoted to Sira that he not only copied frequently from it, but he also started composing a collective volume (*kitāb ḡāfil*) gathering some thirty books (*sifr*) that included Ibn Ishāq's *sīra* with al-Suhaylī's commentary, the life of the Prophet from Ibn Katīr's *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, al-Wāqidi's (d. ca 207/823) *Maǧāzī* and much else. We are told by al-Saḡāwī that he was accurate in transmitting their words (*kāna dābiṡ^{an} li-l-alfāẓ al-wāqī'a fi-hā*).⁴³ Al-Ibšīṡī's case draws attention to the fact that multiple *sīras* could be compiled in a single unit thus producing a sort of thematic 'one-volume library' which could be more practically read, studied, and consulted.⁴⁴

41 For instance Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*, p. 283, 308 or Miskinzoda, *On the Margins of Sira*.

42 A sample from Ibn ḡaḡar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina fi a'yān al-mi'a l-tāmina*, ed. 'Abd al-Wāriṡ Muḡammad 'Alī, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1418/1997, 4 vols, II, p. 242 (*wa-ṣaraḡa sīrat 'Abd al-Ġanī [...]* *wa-ṣaraḡa l-sīra l-nabawīyya llati ḡtaṣara-hā l-ḡāfil* 'Abd al-Ġanī), II, p. 253 (*wa ṣannaḡa ... al-sīra al-nabawīyya*); II, p. 237 (*wa-sami'a min ḡaṡīb mardā l-sīra li-Bn Hišām*); III, p. 70 (*wa-ṣannaḡa l-taṣāniṡ min-hā [...]* *al-sīra l-nabawīyya*); III, p. 180 (*naẓẓama [...]* *al-sīra fi biṡ' 'aṣara alf bayt ma'a ziyādāt [...]* *wa-ḡaddaṡa bi-hā bi-l-Qāhira wa-qara'a-hā 'alay-hi [...]*); III, p. 288 (*wa-ǧama'a ṣay^{an} fi l-sīra l-nabawīyya wa-ḡaddaṡa bi-hi*); IV, p. 131 (*wa-la-hu muḡtaṣar al-sīra l-nabawīyya*); IV, p. 216 (*wa-min taṣāniṡi-hi l-Zahr al-bāsīm fi l-sīra l-nabawīyya [...]* *ǧama'a l-sīra l-nabawīyya*); al-Ġazārī, *Ta'rīḡ ḡawādīṡ al-zamān*, III, p. 810 (*wa-ṣaraḡa l-sīra l-nabawīyya taṣniṡ al-ḡāfil* 'Abd al-Ġanī); al-Saḡāwī, *al-ḡaw' al-lāmi'*, III, p. 100 (*kāna yaǧma'u fi l-sīra l-nabawīyya*); x, p. 248 (*ǧama'a Buṣrā l-anām sīrat ḡayr al-kirām wa-Buḡyat al-sūl fi madḡ al-rasūl*); x, p. 5-6 (*wa-min taṣāniṡi-hi sīra nabawīyya [...]*); IX, p. 304 (*wa-min taṣāniṡi-hi sīra nabawīyya*); IV, p. 173 (*wa-min taṣāniṡi-hi l-afīyya fi l-ḡadīṡ wa-fi l-sīra l-nabawīyya [...]*); II, p. 71 (*iḡtaṣara l-sīra [...]*); VIII, p. 76 (*wa-ḡtaṣara sīrat Ibn Ṣayyid al-Nās*); III, p. 185 (*wa-qurriḡa la-hu fi-mā qila ba'd manāẓimi-hi wa-ḡiyya kaṡīra [...]* *wa-uḡrā fi l-sīra l-nabawīyya [...]*); VII, p. 114 (*wa-naẓẓama l-sīra l-nabawīyya li-l-'Alā Muǧulṡāy*); x, p. 134 (*wa-ṣaraḡa qīṡa kabīra min sīrat Ibn Hišām*); II, p. 159 (*wa-'anā l-tasabbub fi l-'iṡr bi-ba'd al-ḡawānīṡ ma'a naṣḡ kutub al-'ilm wa-l-raḡba fi taḡṣīli-hā ka-sīrat Ibn Hišām*); I, p. 244 (*wa-lahiḡa bi-l-sīra l-nabawīyya fa-kataba min-hā kaṡīr^{an} [...]*).

43 Al-Saḡāwī, *al-ḡaw' al-lāmi'*, I, p. 244.

44 Manuscript evidence can of course shed more light on this material aspect of the Sira culture of the period. I borrow the expression "one-volume library" from the recent edited volume on the subject. Michael Friedrich and Cosima Schwarke (eds), *One-Volume Libraries:*

At the same time, this case also sheds light on individual scholars who were particularly dedicated to Sira and became specialized in it. It appears that their Sira-related activity was normally connected with honoring the Prophet and celebrating his birthday.⁴⁵ These scholars were proud of their work,⁴⁶ and took special pleasure from producing massive compositions. A good illustration of the standing that such compositions enjoyed is Qāḍī Faṭḥ al-Dīn b. al-Šahīd al-Dimašqī (d. 793/1391), a man of many offices who took pride in his bulky *al-Sira al-muhammadiyya*. The Historian Ibn al-Ḥiǧǧī (d. 816/1413) related that: “Ibn al-Šahīd put together (or composed, *ǧamaʿa*) the *sira* of the Prophet from a certain number of books and turned it into poetry, three volumes in 5000 verses, to which he added some useful texts such as *al-Rawḍ* [i.e. of al-Suhaylī] and others”. Ibn al-Ḥiǧǧī continues “He showed it to me, together with the glosses (*ḥawāšīn*) he had written on it and the useful remarks and important points (*ḥawāʾid wa-nukat*) that had appeared to him. I found it an amazing book.”⁴⁷ What impressed Ibn Ḥiǧǧī was not so much the *sira*’s length, but rather the number of materials and amount of effort put into its compilation and versification.⁴⁸

Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts, Berlin, de Gruyter (“Studies in Manuscript Cultures,” 9), 2016. The editors happily explain that the expression “one-volume library” describes “an individual collection of texts in one book that contains all its scribe or patron might need for professional or other purposes” (p. 2 of the introduction) from Franz Rosenthal, “From Arabic Books and Manuscripts v: A One-Volume Library of Arabic Philosophical and Scientific Texts in Istanbul,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 75/1 (1955), p. 14-23.

- 45 Al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍawʿ al-lāmiʿ*, XI, p. 61: “He put his mind into the recitation of *sira al-nabawiyya* and applied himself with devotion to the study of *al-Rawḍ* until he became an expert in both. He [also] composed something on *mawlid*” (*iʿtanā bi-qirāʾat al-sira l-nabawiyya wa-admana muṭālaʾat l-Rawḍ ʿalay-hā ḥattā mahara bi-himā ǧamaʿa fī l-mawlid al-nabawī šayʿan*); IX, p. 282: “He had a number of writings on the Prophet’s life, among them *al-Nūr al-bāhir al-sāṭiʿ min sirat ǧī l-burhān al-qāṭiʿ*” which I read with him on the Prophet’s birthday” (*wa-la-hu fī l-sira ʿiddat tašānīf [...] qaraʿtu ʿalay-hi bi-mawlid al-nabī*); X, p. 248 (*ǧamaʿa Bušrā l-anām sirat ḥayr al-kirām wa-Buǧyat al-sul fī madḥ al-rasūl wa-l-kawākib al-ḍawīyya fī madḥ ḥayr al-bariyya*).
- 46 Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, IV, p. 113 ([...] *awqafa-nī Bn Sayyid al-Nās ʿalā l-sira llatī ʿamala-hā* [...]).
- 47 Ibn Ḥiǧǧī is quoted by Ibn Qāḍī Šuhba (d. 851/1448), *Taʾriḥ Ibn Qāḍī Šuhba*, ed. Adnan Darwich, Damas, Institut français de Damas, 1977, 4 vols, I, p. 215. The title of Ibn Šahīd’s *sira* was *al-Faṭḥ al-qarīb fī sirat al-ḥabīb* (I, p. 407).
- 48 Also, Ibn Qāḍī Šuhba, *Taʾriḥ*, I, p. 407 and al-Saḥāwī, *al-Iʿlān bi-l-tawbiḥ li-man ḍamma ahl al-taʾriḥ*, p. 152.

1.2.2 Transmitting Sira, Taking Sira: Performance, Non-elite Social Fruition, Ritualization

The materials so far consulted have unveiled that Sira was abundantly produced and often penned by dedicated scholars of different social status. Sira texts were just as abundantly transmitted.⁴⁹ Judging from their mentions and their capacity for attracting commentaries, abridgments, or versifications, certain *sīras* enjoyed far more popularity than others. Such was the case for the *sīras* of Ibn Sayyid al-Nās (d. 734/1334) and ‘Abd al-Ġanī l-Maqdisī (d. 600/1203), for instance, although Ibn Hišām’s (d. ca 218/833 or 213/828) still held pride of place.⁵⁰

Like any relevant textual tradition, Sira had its own specialized transmitters. Šihāb al-Dīn al-Abarqūhī (d. 701/1302) was a prominent transmitter of one *riwāya* (transmission) of Ibn Ishāq/Ibn Hišām.⁵¹ At the end of his life, the famous poet and prose writer Ibn al-Nubāta l-Miṣrī (d. 768/1366) remained the only depositary of this *riwāya* for which he had distinguished himself (*tafarrada bi-hā*) and was sought after.⁵² For their part, students and scholars heard *sīras* (*sami’a min*), memorized and recalled them (*ḥafiẓa/istaḥḍara/dākara*), read them under the guidance of a given teacher (*qara’a ‘alā*) or presented them to their *ṣayḥ* (*aḥḍara ‘alā*).⁵³ The fluid terminology mirrors the blend

49 *Ḥaddaṭa bi-* is the standard: Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, II, p. 81 (*wa-ḥaddaṭa ‘an [...]* *bi-l-sīra min samā’ [...]*) IV, p. 169 (*wa-ḥaddaṭa bi-ṣaḥiḥ muslim wa-l-sīra*); al-Ġazarī, *Ta’riḥ ḥawādīṭ al-zamān*, III, p. 555, 1003 (*wa-ḥaddaṭa bi-l-sīra marrāt [...]*).

50 Al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmī*, II, p. 210, 244, 250, 293, 354; II, p. 71, 88; III, p. 144, 150, 162; V, p. 256, 290, 313; VI, p. 4, 7, 101, 105, 268, 283, 288; VII, p. 14, 243; VIII, p. 18; IX, p. 253; X, p. 13, 16, 99, 134, 176, 330; XI, p. 3, 61; XII, p. 9, 81; (*sīrat Ibn Ishāq/Ibn Hišām*); II, p. 17, 282, 290, 320; III, p. 230, 234, 320; IV, p. 169-170; V, p. 284, 290; VIII, p. 18, 76; IX, p. 13; XI, p. 3 (*sīrat Ibn Sayyid al-Nās*); Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, II, p. 77, 81 (*sīrat ‘Abd al-Ġanī l-Maqdisī*); II, p. 242 (a *ṣarḥ* of ‘Abd al-Ġanī’s *sīra*); al-Ġazarī, *Ta’riḥ ḥawādīṭ al-zamān*, III, p. 810 (*ṣarḥ* of ‘Abd al-Ġanī’s *sīra*).

51 Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, III, p. 53; IV, p. 67, 135; Nagel, *Allahs Liebling*, p. 24.

52 Thomas Bauer, “Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī (686-768/1287-1366): Life and Works. Part 1: The Life of Ibn Nubāta,” *The Mamluk Studies Review*, 12 (2008), p. 1-35, esp. p. 12; Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, IV, p. 135; al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmī*, III, p. 50, 162; IV, p. 307; V, p. 54, 313; VII, p. 14; IX, p. 149; X, p. 13.

53 *Sami’a min/sami’a ‘alā fi [...]*: Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, II, p. 184 (*wa-sami’a [...]* *al-sīra min [...]*); III, p. 53 (*wa-sami’a l-sīra l-hāšimīyya min [...]*); IV, p. 43 (*wa-sami’a l-sīra ‘alā [...]* *bi-qira’at al-Mizzī*); IV, p. 68 (*sami’a min [...]* *al-sīra*); IV, p. 135 (*wa-sami’a l-sīra min [...]* *wa-tafarrada bi-hā*); al-Ġazarī, *Ta’riḥ ḥawādīṭ al-zamān*, p. 552 (*sami’a min [...]* *al-sīra bi-qira’at al-Mizzī*); al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmī*, I, p. 172, 293, 321; II, p. 17, 88, 290; III, p. 96, 150 (*wa-sami’a l-sīra li-Bn Hišām marratayni*); III, p. 144, 162, 320; XI, p. 3, 28; XII, p. 81 (*min masmū’ati-hi l-sīra li-Bn Hišām [...]*); X, p. 99 (*wa-sami’a min-hu l-sīra l-nabawīyya li-Bn Hišām [...]*); X, p. 13 (*wa-sami’a min Ibn Nubāta sīrat Ibn Hišām [...]*);

of oral and written that was typical of the textual culture of the period.⁵⁴ Auditing sessions for *sīras* (*ṣamā'ūt*) are also recorded, some of which were quite well-attended.⁵⁵ For instance, it appears that the only crowded license of transmission reading session (*iğāza*) of Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī (d. 909/1503), a late 9th/15th-century Damascene Ḥanbalī scholar from the Sāliḥiyya neighborhood of Damascus, was one in which he read *sīra* (specifically *ṣamā'il*, i.e. traditions about Muḥammad's excellent qualities) in front of some fifty people. In other words, a *ṣamā'il* reading was able to draw a number of people otherwise unattested to in Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's *iğāzāt*.⁵⁶ This scholar's private book collection also shows quite a few *sīra* works, several of them mawlid-related.⁵⁷

In narrative sources, Hadith and Sira are often mentioned together as subjects of transmission, learning, auditing.⁵⁸ A report taken from the chronicle

IX, p. 47 (*wa-sami'a min [...]*); IX, p. 43 (*wa-sami'a minnī ḥatm al-sīra li-Bn Sayyid al-Nās*); IX, p. 13 (*wa-sami'a min ba'ḍ al-sīra li-Bn Sayyid al-Nās*); IX, p. 11 (*wa-sami'a l-ḥatm al-sīra min sīrat Ibn Hišām*); VII, p. 243 (*wa-sami'a 'alā l-sīra l-nabawīyya*); VII, p. 227 (*wa-sami'a 'alā ba'ḍ al-sīra*); VII, p. 227 (*wa-mimmā sami'a min [...]* *al-sīra l-nabawīyya*); VII, p. 14 (*wa-sami'a 'alā [...]* *al-sīra li-Bn Hišām*); V, p. 2-3, 32, 54, 193, 229, 284, 299, 313; VI, p. 4, 7, 39; **Qara'a 'alā:** al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, II, p. 71, 282; III, p. 23; IV, p. 260 (*wa-lāzamanī fi qirāt al-sīra*); V, p. 256, 299, 304; VI, p. 283 (*wa-qara'a 'alayya l-sīra l-nabawīyya*); VIII, p. 186 (*qara'a 'alayya bi-mağlis [...]* *fi l-sīra l-nabawīyya li-l-Dīmyāṭī*); IX, p. 61, 149; X, p. 176 (*qara'a 'alay-hi l-ṣaḥīḥayn wa-sīrat Ibn Hišām*); XI, p. 16 (*qara'a 'alay-hi sīrat Ibn Hišām*); **Istaḥḍara:** al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, II, p. 320 (*kāna fādil^{an} [...] yastahḍiru kaṭīr^{an} min al-sīra*); VI, p. 288 (*wa-kāna yastahḍiru l-sīra li-Bn Hišām*); VII, p. 115; XII, p. 78 (*kānat mustahḍirat^{an} li-l-sīra l-nabawīyya takādu an taḍkura l-ğazwa bi-tamāmi-hā*); **Ḥafīza:** *ibid.*, IV, p. 151 (*fa-ḥafīza l-Qur'an wa-kutub^{an} min-hā alfīyyat al-ḥadīṭ wa-l-sīra li-l-'Irāqī*); VI, p. 155 (*wa-yahfazu kaṭīr^{an} min al-sīra l-nabawīyya wa-l-mutūn*), p. 296 (*fa-ḥafīza alfīyyatay al-'Irāqī fi l-ḥadīṭ wa-l-sīra*); **Dākara:** *ibid.*, VI, p. 42-43 (*kāna yuḍākuru kaṭīr min al-ḥadīṭ wa-l-ta'riḥ wa-l-sīra*). **Aḥḍara/ḥaḍara:** Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, II, p. 77 (*wa-aḥḍarat al-sīra l-nabawīyya 'alā [...]*); al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, III, p. 187, 243; IV, p. 169-170; XII, p. 9, 71 (*ḥaḍara 'alā l-'Irāqī Alfīyyata-hu fi l-sīra l-nabawīyya*).

54 Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands*, p. 12-29.

55 Al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, VI, p. 252 (*wa-lākin ra'yutu [...] fi tabaqat al-samā' al-sīra [...]*); VII, p. 176 (*wa-aḥḍara min samā' al-sīra l-nabawīyya wa-ğayri-hā min kutub al-ḥadīṭ ḥattā šāra yastahḍiru ašyā' min al-mutūn wa-l-mağāzī*); VIII, p. 175 (*ḥaḍara samā' al-sīra*).

56 Hirschler, *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture*, p. 83-85.

57 *Ibid.*, entries number: 77, 103a, 165f, 168a, 169a (*mawlid*), 192c (*mawlid*), 201e, 202a, 202b, 212c, 312, 318, 339f, 340e (*mawlid*), 3490 (*mi'rāğ*), 373g (*mawlid*), 373j (*mawlid*), 468cc, 473c (*ṣamā'il*), 514 c (*mawlid*), 514g (*mawlid*), 517e (*ṣamā'il*).

58 Al-Ġazarī, *Ta'riḥ ḥawādīṭ al-zamān*, II, p. 555 (*wa-ḥaddaṭa bi-Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim wa-l-sīra l-nabawīyya li-Bn Ishāq*). The subject is the Ḥanbalī *qāḍī al-quḍāt* of Damascus Ibn Surūr al-Maḡdisī (d. 732/1331-1332). A sampling from al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, I, p. 272; II, p. 71; III, p. 96 (Sira and Hadith from two different teachers); IV, p. 173, 307; V, p. 2-3, 256 (*wa-qara'a Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim wa-l-sunan li-Abī Dawud wa-sīrat Ibn Hišām ...*), p. 513; VI, p. 101 (*min marwīyāti-hi kutub al-sitta [...] wa-sīrat taḥḍīb Ibn Hišām*), p. 105 (*wa-qara'a l-Buḥārī wa-l-Tirmidī wa-sīrat Ibn Hišām 'alā [...]*), p. 268, 282; VII, p. 243 (*qara'a 'alay-hi Ṣaḥīḥ*

of the Syrian historian Ibn Kaṭīr not only illustrates this fact but sheds light on another aspect of the Sira culture of the time, that of its non-elite social fruition. In the events reported under the year 763/1361-1362, Ibn Kaṭīr mentions a session of Hadith drills organized after sunset prayer in the transept dome (*qubbat al-nasr*) of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. In it, a *ṣayḥ* named ‘Imād al-Dīn b. al-Sarrāğ transmitted Hadith in the presence of a large crowd (*wa-ğtama‘a ‘inda-hu ḥalq kaṭīr wa-ğamm ġafīr*) and then read something from the Prophet’s *sīra* penned by Ibn Kaṭīr himself.⁵⁹ Not only are Hadith and Sira juxtaposed here as just noted, but the Umayyad Mosque and the sizeable audience in this report also suggest that neither Hadith transmission nor Sira consumption were confined to a scholarly milieu. Minor scholarly personalities are also at times described as reading Sira to the commoners (*‘amma*).⁶⁰ We may now recall Aḥmad b. Ismā‘īl al-Ibšīṭī, the preacher who compiled a large collection of biographies of Muḥammad. Although we do not know what precisely he preached about, it is reasonable to assume that Sira was part of it.⁶¹

That Sira was often preached is corroborated by the famous question asked by an anonymous petitioner to the polemical Ḥanbalī jurist and theologian Taqī l-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328): “What do the scholars say about the storytellers who transmit the campaigns of the Prophet (*mağāzī*) and the stories of the prophets (*qiṣas al-anbiyā*) under the Citadel, in the mosques and in the markets ...”⁶² The question proves the circulation of the Prophet’s

Muslim wa-bāqī l-kutub al-sitta wa-samī‘a ‘alā sīrat Ibn Hišām); x, p. 176 (*qara‘a ‘alay-hi l-Ṣaḥīḥayn wa-sīrat Ibn Hišām*), p. 338 (*qara‘a ‘alay-hi min al-Buḥārī wa-l-Tirmidī wa-ğamī‘ Muslim wa-kaḍā sīrat Ibn Hišām ...*); xii, p. 9 (*aḥḍarat [...] qīṭ‘a kabīra min sīrat Ibn Hišām wa-min musnad Aḥmad*); p. 49 (*Zaynab [...] kānat ḥasanat al-muṭāla‘a li-l-Ṣaḥīḥayn wa-l-sīra l-nabawīyya*), p. 81....

59 Ibn Kaṭīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, xiv, p. 294: *qarā‘a fī l-sīra l-nabawīyya min ḥaṭṭī*.

60 For instance, al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, vi, p. 282: *qarā‘a ‘alā l-‘amma bi-l-Buḥārī wa-l-sīra*.

61 *Ibid.*, i, p. 244 and *id.*, *al-I‘lān bi-l-tawbīḥ li-man ḍamma ahl al-ta‘rīḥ*, p. 151. Ibn Kaṭīr (*al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, xiv, p. 171) writes of a certain Quṭb al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Nūr al-Ḥalabī then al-Miṣrī, who was a well-known Hadith scholar (*muḥaddīṭ*), that he used to talk about (*takallama*) the widely known *sīra* compiled by ‘Abd al-Ġanī l-Maqdisī (d. 600/1203). *Takallama* (‘to talk’) in similar contexts usually implies addressing and teaching a wide audience. See, Caterina Bori, “Theology, Politics and Society: The Missing Link. Studying Religion in the Mamluk Period,” in *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus? Mamluk Studies, State of the Art*, ed. Stephan Conermann, Göttingen, Bonn University Press (“Mamluk Studies,” 3), 2013, p. 57-94, esp. p. 83-84.

62 Ibn Taymiyya, *Mağmū‘ fatāwā ṣayḥ al-islām Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim al-Nağdī l-Ḥanbalī, Rabat, Maktabat al-ma‘ārif, 1981, 37 vols, xviii, p. 355-371, quotation from xviii, p. 355 and xviii, p. 351-354 on *sīra* of al-Bakrī. On

biographical narratives among the non-elite while also shedding light on the role of storytellers and preachers in such circulation and the tensions over authority engendered by their participation in the tradition. In his answer as well as in another short legal opinion (*fatwa*) on the famous *sīra* attributed to al-Bakrī (fl. second half of the 7th/13th century), Ibn Taymiyya is thoroughly dismissive of what he perceives to be the unchecked circulation of falsified narratives about the Prophet's life. He calls for the political and military authorities to punish severely those who transmit, copy, and even trust the reliability of these materials. To Ibn Taymiyya, these narratives were lies representing a grave offense to the Prophet.⁶³ An examination in detail of Ibn Taymiyya's answer is beyond the scope of this article. The relevant aspect here is that the question posed to the Ḥanbalī scholar proves that the Prophet's biographical traditions were not the sole domain of the *'ulamā'*. *Sira* narratives were composed and disseminated by preachers and storytellers in a variety of open or public spaces which were attended by all sorts of people. Jonathan Berkey has demonstrated that the activities of such popular disseminators posed a significant challenge to the scholarly elite's claim of monopoly over the transmission of religious knowledge.⁶⁴

Evidence about ritualized practices of *Sira* consumption is attested to as well. *Mawlid* celebrations included readings of *mawlid* texts in the month of Rabī' al-awwal and the completion of the reading of a given *sīra* was celebrated in final ritual lectures (*ḥatm*), as for Hadith. Like Hadith but also other lengthy works, lengthy *sīras* were read in serial gatherings in specifically appointed times. A protracted reading of Ibn al-Šahīd's versified *sīra* started in Ġumādā I 789/May 1387 and continued Sunday and Thursday of that very week in Ibn al-Šahīd's reception hall (*fī qā'ati-hi*); the reading was attended by a group of learned men (*ġamā'at al-fudalā'*). Thursday was a recommended day for Hadith reading and fasting.⁶⁵ In many prophetic traditions, Thursday is

'non-canonical' *sīra* works, al-Bakrī, see Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press ("Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization"), 2002, p. 23-39; Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 8-12; Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands*, p. 165-166.

- 63 Ibn Taymiyya, *Maǧmū' fatāwā šayḥ al-islām Aḥmad b. Taymiyya*, xviii, p. 353, 354, 371.
- 64 Jonathan Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, Seattle-London, University of Washington Press ("Publications on the Near East"), 2001. A condensed version: *id.*, "Audience and authority in Medieval Islam," in *Charisma and Religious Authority: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Preaching, 1200-1500*, eds Katherine Ludwig Jansen and Miri Rubin, Turnhout, Brepols ("Europa Sacra," 4), 2010, p. 105-120.
- 65 Talmon Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria*, p. 70, 254; Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands*, p. 39-40; Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, p. 120; Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 147, 159.

mentioned as a day of exceptional events; it is the day in which the gates of Paradise will open, the day in which human deeds will be presented to God and their sins will be pardoned, Muḥammad's preferred day of departure for travel, and finally, the day in which his health fatally deteriorated.⁶⁶ Ibn al-Šahīd's choice to gather the notables for reading his *sīra* on Thursday was surely not incidental.

There is evidence that the *Šamā'il al-muḥammadiyya* of Abū 'Īsā l-Tirmidī (d. 279/892) was read in Medina beside the Prophets' grave after the completion of the pilgrimage.⁶⁷ A ritual coloring also permeates an instance of the reading of Ibn Hišām's *sīra* in Mecca where the book was read in the direction of the Ka'ba by the preacher Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-'Usaylī.⁶⁸ Furthermore, an instance of Sira reading during the month of Ramaḍān is mentioned by Ibn Ḥaḡar, although it involves a faraway Andalusī Qur'ānic reader.⁶⁹ In sum, though to a lesser degree than Hadith, Sira reading became ritualized, entailing an intensification of meaning.⁷⁰

Conclusion

To conclude, Sira has thus far proven to be a vast literary repository characterized by fluidity of format, diverse social fruition, and plurality of practices in transmission and consumption. It also emerges as a field for which there was popular demand and scholarly dedication. Cultural and social practices revolving around Sira shared many features with those of Hadith. Yet, due to its prestige and normative import, in time Hadith and the science of Hadith came to be regulated by specific rules and protocols. On the contrary, Sira was characterized by greater narrative malleability and creativity.

The multifarious and prolific output of *sīras* thus far discussed could be interpreted as an expression of the characteristic phenomena of the 'textualization' and 'popularization' of the written word elucidated by Konrad Hirscher

66 On Thursday (and Monday), Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as seen by the Early Muslims*, Princeton, The Darwin Press ("Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam," 5), 1995, p. 191.

67 Al-Ġazarī, *Ta'rīḥ ḥawādīt al-zamān*, III, p. 946.

68 Al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, VI, p. 283.

69 See Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, IV, p. 7.

70 Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1987, p. 109-112; James W. Watts, "The Three Dimensions of Scriptures," *The Journal of Sacred Texts and Contemporary Worlds*, 2/2-3 (2006/2008), p. 135-159, reprinted in *Iconic Books and Texts*, ed. James W. Watts, Sheffield, Equinox, 2013, p. 9-32. For Hadith ritual reading, see Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, p. 119-121.

in his book, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands*. Hirschler argues that between the 5th/11th and 9th/15th centuries, the Arab lands (Egypt and Syria, precisely) experienced a breakthrough of the written word. A considerable textual florescence gave rise to new formats, textual agencies, and social participation both in the production and consumption of written works. There is no reason to exclude a similar phenomenon of textualization promoting the spread of Sira as well, but the popularity, fondness and respect for this literary genre call for deeper exploration. Specifically, the intense veneration of the Prophet and culture of Hadith transmission typical of this period cannot be ignored as factors also nurturing the Sira culture of the time. As observed by Tarif Khalidi, this was particularly discernible in 8th/14th-century Damascus. It is then to the life and work of one of its 'Prophet-centered' scholars that the second part of this study turns.

Part II

2.1 *Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dīmaṣqī: His Life, Work, and Religious Worldview*
Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was a respected Damascene scholar and prominent Ṣāfi'ī Hadith specialist of the late 8th/14th and early 9th/15th centuries. We owe to al-Saḥāwī a long biographical notice on Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn where the latter is presented as a kind, courteous and patient man of erudition, undoubtedly the foremost transmitter of Prophet traditions and specialist of the field of his time in the Damascus region (*ḥāfiẓ al-Šām*).⁷¹ Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn lived in Šāliḥiyya, the neighborhood on Mount Qāsyūn founded by the Maqdisī Ḥanbalis in the 6th/12th century. In Šāliḥiyya, scholars of this school of law typically lived, taught, and engaged in Hadith transmission.⁷² Al-Saḥāwī emphasizes how Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn and Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī were bound to one another by

71 Al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, VIII, p. 103-106. Also useful are the biographical notices by Ibn Fahd al-Makkī (d. 871/1466), *Laḡz al-alḥāz bi-dayl ṭabaqāt al-ḥuffāz*, Damascus, Maṭba'at al-tawfiq fi Dimaṣq, 1347/[1928], p. 317-322 and Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Maḡma' al-mu'assis li-l-mu'ḡam al-mufāhris*, ed. Yūsuf 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mar'aṣli, Beirut, Dār al-ma'rifa, 1410/1994, 4 vols, III, p. 285-289.

72 See the hearing certificate (*samā'*) appended to Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Tarḡīḥ li-ḥadīṭ ṣalāt al-taṣbīḥ*, ed. Maḥmūd Mamdūḥ, Beirut, Dār al-baṣā'ir al-islāmiyya, 1405/1984, p. 76. Šāliḥiyya has been at the center of recent scholarly attention. In particular, Toru Miura, "The Šāliḥiyya Quarter in the Suburbs of Damascus: Its Formation, Structure, and Transformation in the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk Periods," *Bulletin d'études orientales*, 47 (1995), p. 129-181 and the more recent book which I was unable to inspect: Toru Miura, *Dynamism in the Urban Society of Damascus: The Šāliḥiyya Quarter from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Centuries*, Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Islamic Area Studies," 2), 2016.

feelings of mutual respect and admiration. He tells us that when Ibn Ḥaḡar was in Damascus in Ša'abān 836/April 1433, the latter held a dictating session at the Umayyad Mosque at the request of Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn,⁷³ and that Ibn Ḥaḡar also attended the latter's inaugural lecture at the Dār al-ḥadīṭ al-ašrafiyya during which he gave Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn one of his books as a gift.⁷⁴ In fact, during Ibn Ḥaḡar's stay in Damascus, Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn was appointed to the prestigious position of *šayḥ* at the Dār al-ḥadīṭ al-ašrafiyya intra-muros.⁷⁵ It was Ibn Ḥaḡar, temporarily in possession of the post himself, who personally nominated Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn as *šayḥ* and attended the school together with him as long as he was in the city.⁷⁶ The year before, Ibn Ḥaḡar had also much appreciated the composition of Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn's *al-Radd al-wāfir* (see below), which had been written in Muḥarram 835/September 1431.⁷⁷ From Cairo, Ibn Ḥaḡar had endorsed the work with a dedicated statement (*taqrīz*) which he had also read when he was in Damascus as a sign of esteem for Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn.⁷⁸

Ibn Ḥaḡar also includes Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn in the list of his teachers where he declares that Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn gave him a license to transmit Hadith more than once (*wa-aḡāza la-nā ḡayr marra*).⁷⁹ On the whole, the image of Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn delivered to us by his biographical notices is that of a non-confrontational scholar truly interested in his students and in people's religious needs, but at the same time a highly respected member of the elite whose expertise in Prophetic traditions was acknowledged by the most prominent scholarly personalities of his time.

The diversified textual production of Sira, the pervasiveness of Hadith culture, and the intense devotion towards the person of Muḥammad of the period come together in the writings of Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn al-Dimašqī. In modern

73 Al-Saḡhāwī, *al-Ġawāhir wa-l-durar*, I, p. 181.

74 Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn, *Maḡālis*, p. 418.

75 According to Taqī l-Dīn Muḥammad b. Fahd al-Makkī, Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn was appointed at the beginning of 837/1433. Ibn Fahd al-Makkī, *Lahz al-alḥāz*, p. 317-325, esp. p. 319.

76 Al-Saḡhāwī, *al-Ġawāhir wa-l-durar*, II, p. 595.

77 For dating *al-Radd al-wāfir*: Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-ḡumr bi-anbā' al-'umr*, Hyderabad, Maṭba'at maḡlis dā'irat al-ma'arif al-'uṭmāniyya, 1967-1975, VIII, p. 258-259; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, VIII, p. 105; Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn, *al-Radd al-wāfir 'alā man za'ama anna man sammā Bn Taymiyya šayḥ al-islām kāfir*, ed. Zuhayr al-Šawīš, Beirut, al-Maktab al-islāmī, 1393/1973, p. 140 and MS Berlin Staatsbibliothek Ms. Or. Wetzstein I 157, fol. 73v (Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Aḡmad, *Kitāb al-radd al-wāfir 'alā man za'ama anna man sammā Bn Taymiyya šayḥ al-islām kāfir*, f. 1r-74v).

78 Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn, *al-Radd al-wāfir*, p. 144-146 (the *taqrīz*); al-Saḡhāwī, *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, VIII, p. 105.

79 Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Maḡma' al-mu'assis*, III, p. 287.

scholarship, his name is usually associated with the heated debate he had with a Ḥanafī-Matūridī scholar named ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Buḥārī (d. 842/1438), who had declared that whoever acknowledged Ibn Taymiyya’s status as a *ṣayḥ al-islām* was an unbeliever. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s written rejoinder to al-Buḥārī won him considerable renown, but the better part of his scholarly activities, texts and concerns remains essentially unexplored.⁸⁰ The only notable exception in a Western language is Marion Holmes Katz’s work on the *mawlid* where she skillfully discerns Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s attentiveness to non-elite religious needs beyond the technicalities of Hadith scholarship.⁸¹

The Prophet and his pervasive legacy are Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s chief scholarly preoccupation. The number of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s writings fluctuates between sixty and seventy, many of which have survived and have been printed in recent times.⁸² An overview of his literary output offers an idea about this scholar’s interests and religious worldview. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s most voluminous work dealing with the technical aspects of Hadith transmission is his *Tawḍīḥ al-muṣṭabih fī ḍabṭ asmā’ al-ruwāt*. The *Tawḍīḥ* is a dictionary of transmitters in which Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn claims to edit the famous 8th/14th-century historian and Hadith expert al-Ḍahabī’s *Kitāb al-Muṣṭabih fī l-riḡāl* which he finds lacking in accuracy owing to its brevity.⁸³

We are lucky to have much of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s teaching material in written form. His *Maḡālīs* gather his inaugural lecture at the Dār al-ḥadīṭ al-aṣrafiyya and consist of twenty-five sessions. In them, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn starts by recalling the history of the school, then sketching the profile of the teachers who preceded him and producing a series of reflections on different subjects derived from the Qur’ānic verse: “Allah did confer a great favor on the believers when He sent among them a messenger from among themselves” (Kor 3, 164).⁸⁴

A short work in verse titled *‘Uqūd al-durar fī ‘ulūm al-aṭar* is clearly didactic. It is a short poem (*qaṣīda*) on the science of Hadith immediately followed

80 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Radd al-wāfir*.

81 Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 96-100.

82 To my knowledge, the most informative list of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn works is that put together by Muḥammad Na’īm al-Arqsūsī which includes extant manuscripts and editions. Al-Arqsūsī lists sixty-three works. See Muḥammad Na’īm al-Arqsūsī in his *Muqaddima* to Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s *Tawḍīḥ al-muṣṭabih fī ḍabṭ asmā’ al-ruwāt wa-ansābi-him wa-alqābi-him wa-kunā-hum*, ed. Muḥammad Na’īm al-Arqsūsī, Beirut, Dār al-risāla l-‘ālamīyya, 1431/2010, 2 vols, I, p. 38-42.

83 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Tawḍīḥ al-muṣṭabih*.

84 *Id.*, *Maḡālīs fī tafsīr qawlihi ta’ālā*: “*Laqad manna Allāh ‘alā al-mu’minīn idh ba’aha fihim rasūl^{an} min anfusihim.*”

by an explanation (*šarḥ*).⁸⁵ Longer, clearer, more structured, and also in verse is a *ṭabaqāt* work titled *Badīʿat al-bayān li-mawt al-aʿyān*. The *Badīʿa* takes al-Dahabī's *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥuffāz* as its model but focuses on the death dates of excellent transmitters over time.⁸⁶ Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn equips this work too with an explanatory commentary called *al-Tibyān li-badīʿat al-bayān* where he expands on the single biographies and helps guide his reader through the chronosticon system (*ḥisāb al-ǧummal*) he employs for determining death dates.⁸⁷ In both of these writings (*ʿUqūd* and *Badīʿa*), the use of poetry is specifically didactic. More generally, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn shows a predilection for poetry as an expressive means to pair with Hadith which enhances the emotive power of his writing and dramatizes its key narrative moments. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's love for poetry as an expressive means did not go unnoticed to his contemporaries.⁸⁸

Returning to his fields of expertise, to Hadith studies belongs his short apology of al-Buḥārī's *Ṣaḥīḥān* which adheres fully to the canonical Hadith culture of the time.⁸⁹ Equally indicative of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's wholehearted commitment to Hadith transmission are several minor writings of his, many of which are today gathered in a designated *maǧmūʿa*. Some of these are simply his lectures, or the record of his transmission of authoritative collections (al-Buḥārī foremost) of which he exhibits the much sought-after elevation (*ʿulūw*), that is he boasts having short, high-quality chains connecting him to the transmitters of al-Buḥārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*.⁹⁰ Other writings report and discuss specific traditions and their histories,⁹¹ or consist in corrections of small collections of

85 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Kitāb ʿUqūd al-durar fi ʿulūm al-aṭar wa-šarḥu-hā*, eds Šubḥī l-Ḥusaynī l-Sāmarrāʾī and Muṣṭafā Ismāʿīl, Beirut, Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1426/2005.

86 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Badīʿat al-bayān li-mawt al-aʿyān*, ed. Aḥmad al-Būšī, Kuwait, Dār Ibn al-Aḫīr, 1418/1997.

87 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Tibyān li-badīʿat al-bayān*, ed. Šayḥalī ʿAbd al-Salām, Beirut, Dār al-nawādir, 1429/2008, 3 vols. On *ḥisāb al-ǧummal*, Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers*, Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 1, The Near and Middle East," 98), 2009, p. 58-59.

88 Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Maǧmaʿ al-muʿassis*, III, p. 287.

89 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ifṭitāḥ al-qārī li-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*, in *Maǧmūʿ fi-hi rasāʾil li-l-ḥāfiẓ Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dīmašqī*, ed. Mišʿal b. Bānī l-Ǧabrīn Muṭayrī, Beirut, Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2001, p. 317-350.

90 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Isnād Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*, in *Maǧmūʿ fi-hi rasāʾil*, p. 294-309. See also, the *Asānīd kutub al-sitta wa-ǧayrihā* (*Maǧmūʿ fi-hi rasāʾil*, p. 275-287) and six elevated Hadith (*ʿawālī*) that Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn recorded for himself (*Maǧmūʿ fihi rasāʾil*, p. 429-44).

91 Like the session (*maǧlis*) Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn held on the story of Ǧābir b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Anṣarī (d. 77/696 or 78/698), the companion of the Prophet who travelled one month to hear a *ḥadīṭ* on God's final justice from its only living transmitter, ʿUnays b. ʿAbd Allāh. See Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Maǧlis fi ḥadīṭ Ǧābir alladī raḥala fi-hi masīra šahr [...]*, in *Maǧmūʿ fi-hi rasāʾil*, p. 203-228.

Hadith.⁹² *Al-Intiṣār li-samāʿ al-Ḥaḡḡār* is an interpretation exercise of the technicalities inscribed on a preliminary attendance register (*awraq al-samāʿ*) of a twenty-two-session reading of al-Buḥārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* which took place in 633/1235-1236.⁹³ Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn clearly had that document at hand, which he uses in *al-Intiṣār* to register the frequency of the participants' attendance.⁹⁴ He thus argues that al-Ḥaḡḡār (d. 730/1329), a humble Damascene mason whose name appeared in the certificate, had truly heard all of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Having died very old, and having heard the whole *Ṣaḥīḥ* at a very young age, al-Ḥaḡḡār's role as the source of a prestigious elevated local chain connecting him and all those who heard the *Ṣaḥīḥ* from him to al-Buḥārī was thus confirmed.⁹⁵ Not only does this text bear witness to the Hadith transmission culture of the era, it is also a testimony to Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's involvement in this culture and his command of the field's technicalities.

Several other works are meant to encourage his audience to perform pious acts with a view to a prosperous afterlife. The idea put forth by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn is that certain historical moments witnessed extraordinary events and were thus blessed by God with special powers. Such is the case for the days of 'Arafa and 'Āṣūrā to which he dedicates two short treatises asserting that the performance of pious acts on these days brings great benefit to the believer.⁹⁶ In line with this logic, another text encourages believers to perform, at least once in their life, a prayer prescribed by a number of traditions called *ṣalāt al-taṣbīḥ*.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, focusing on "correct" practice is a rebuttal of the refusal to raise hands (*rafʿ al-yadayn*) during supplications.⁹⁸ These works are simple and agile. They mainly unfold as quotations of Hadith followed by *isnād* criticism,

92 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Nukat al-aṭariyya 'alā l-aḥādīṭ al-ḡazariyya*, in *Maḡmūʿ fi-hi rasāʾil*, p. 483-504. This text corrects point by point a small collection of Hadith (*ḡuzʿ*) which "one of the leading scholars of the day composed for himself" and which he had happened to inspect. The collection was called al-Ḡazariyya.

93 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Intiṣār li-samāʿ al-Ḥaḡḡār*, in *Maḡmūʿ fi-hi rasāʾil*, p. 398-418: *fa-waqaftu 'alā awraq al-asmāʿ* (p. 404), *qad ḥazara l-imām [...]* *Ibn al-Wānī fi awraq al-asmāʿ al-maḡkūra* [...] *wa-waḡadtu bi-ḥaṭṭi-hi* (p. 405).

94 See Saʿīd al-Ḡūmānī, "Waṭiqa ḡadida 'an naql al-'ilm fi l-ta'rīḥ al-islāmī taḥqīq awraq al-samāʿ li-sunan al-Dāraquṭnī," *Maḡallat kullīyyat al-ṣarī'a wa-l-dirāsāt al-islāmīyya*, 38/2 (2021), p. 1-57, esp. p. 28-31.

95 The case of al-Ḥaḡḡār and its significance has been noted by Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands*, p. 66 and Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, p. 63-65.

96 *Id.*, *al-Lafẓ al-mukarram bi-faḍl yawm 'Āṣūra' al-muḥarram* and *Maḡlis fi faḍl yawm 'Arafa wa-mā yata'allaqu bi-hi*, in his *Maḡmūʿ fi-hi rasāʾil*, p. 51-110, 129-184 and briefly discussed by Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 114-115, 147-149, 152-153.

97 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Tarḡīḥ li-ḥadīṭ ṣalāt al-taṣbīḥ*, discussed by Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 96-100.

98 *Id.*, *al-Radd 'alā man ankara rafʿ al-yadayn fi l-du'ā'*, in *Maḡmūʿ fi-hi rasāʾil*, p. 357-363.

although Marion Katz notes that “the author’s interests are primarily oriented towards pious action.”⁹⁹ In other words, the underlying concern is that of offering his readers or auditors a handy guide to increasing their religious merit and hence their chances of salvation. Though it is neither short nor agile, a similar approach is at work in *Ġāmi‘ al-ātār*.

Finally, and most importantly for the purposes of this study, was Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s fondness for *sīra* and *sīra*-related literature. The *sīra* of Ibn Hišām is listed among the works he had himself learnt and then transmitted,¹⁰⁰ as also testified by a *ḥatm* penned by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn himself marking the end of a multi-session reading of the text.¹⁰¹ Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s also composed three mawlid texts (including the *Ġāmi‘ al-ātār*), two books on the Prophet’s death, two on his nocturnal ascension (*mi‘rāġ*), and one *qaṣīda* on the events following the *hiġra* that is also included in *Ġāmi‘ al-ātār*.¹⁰² One of his collection of traditions devoted to the prophet’s final days (*Sabwat al-ka‘īb bi-wafāt al-ḥabīb*) enjoyed some local success. It was heard, copied, and circulated in Damascus among members of the Šāfi‘ī Ġazzī family in the 9th/15th and 10th/16th centuries from a copy whose transmission went back to the author himself.¹⁰³

On the whole, this production signals that cultivating remembrance of Muḥammad’s life milestones was an important feature of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s religious worldview. His lecture celebrating the end of the reading of Ibn Hišām’s *al-Sīra l-nabawiyya* offers a glimpse in this regard. Dated to Šawwāl 818/January 1416, the *ḥatm* consists of a collection of verses lamenting the Prophet’s death. The verses are uttered by his immediate Companions and closest female relatives: Šafiyya, Hind and ‘Ā’iša, his daughter Fāṭima. Poetry complements the verses of the *Sīra*, but also dramatizes the terrible calamity

99 Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 99.

100 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Maġmū‘ fi-hi rasā’il*, p. 282: *wa-min masmū‘ātī [...] al-sīra l-nabawiyya li-Bn Ishāq tahdīb Ibn Hišām*.

101 *Id.*, *Maġlis fi ḥatm al-sīra l-nabawiyya ‘alā šāhibi-hā afdal al-šalāt wa-l-salām*, ed. Ibrāhīm Šālīḥ, Damascus, Dār al-bašā’ir, 1419/1999. The date is that of the composition of the text (*ibid.*, p. 31).

102 For titles and manuscripts see al-Arqsūsī’s introduction to Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s *Tawdlīḥ al-muštabah*, I, p. 40 (entries n^{os} 30-37), to be updated. The short mawlid work *Mawrid al-šādī fi mawlid al-hādī* has been edited: Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Mawrid al-šādī fi mawlid al-hādī*, ed. Ibrāhīm Šayḥ Rāšid al-Murayḥī, Baḥrayn: Ġām’iyya al-Imām Mālik b. Anas Mamlakat Baḥrayn, 1429AH/2008. The work *Sabwat al-ka‘īb bi-wafāt al-Ḥabīb* (on the Prophet’s death) also: Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Sabwat al-ka‘īb bi-wafāt al-Ḥabīb*, ed. Šālīḥ Yūsuf Ma‘tūq-Hāšim Šālīḥ Mannā’, Dubai, Dār al-buḥūt li-l-dirāsāt al-islāmiyya wa-ihyā’ al-turāt, [1998].

103 *Ibid.*, p. 64-68.

that befell the community and the emotions associated with it.¹⁰⁴ The *ḥatm* also transmits a series of short traditions. These reports draw attention to the grave of the Prophet as a special space of conjunction between him and believers where the latter can make themselves heard and attain salvation. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn quotes well-known traditions on the promise of intercession to whoever visits Muḥammad's grave and on the Prophet hearing prayers uttered for him by his grave. In sum, the Prophet's grave is represented as a space of charisma, miracles (*karāmāt*) and unique prerogatives (*ḥaṣā'is*) of which Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn offers a sample. The materials he quotes encourage the veneration of the Prophet, although the author does not explicitly state this. He does say, though, that the miracles and prerogatives stemming from attendance of Muḥammad's grave can be learnt from prophetic Hadith as well as from Muḥammad's *sīra*, without differentiating between the two.

Ibn Nāṣir al Dīn closes his *ḥatm* with verses praising *sīra* as if addressing a person:

يا سيرة لحبيب / قد صار أحسن سيرة
 لما سمعناك أضحت / قلوبنا مستنيرة
 شفيت سقم فؤاد / فتحت كل بصيرة
 نشرت خير مغازي / ومعجزات خطيرة
 وكل وصف جميل / من الصفات المنيرة
 [...]

Oh *sīra* of the Beloved / verily he walked the best *sīra*
 When we hear you / our hearts become illuminated /
 You cure the malady of the heart / You open every insight
 You spread news of the best campaigns / and of excellent miracles
 Of every beautiful quality / among [his] enlightening
 Qualities
 [...]¹⁰⁵

In these verses Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn makes the function of *sīra* clear: *sīra* provides spiritual illumination and healing through the recollection of the life and qualities of the best of creatures, Muḥammad. The idea that intimacy with Muḥammad's life circumstances and special qualities provides a means for

104 *Id.*, *Maḡlis fi ḥatm al-sīra l-nabawīyya*, p. 17-27, 28-30.

105 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Maḡlis fi ḥatm al-sīra l-nabawīyya*, p. 30: "On it [i.e. *al-sīra l-muḥammadiyya*], I composed a few verses which I recited at the conclusion of *The Sīra*."

spiritual elevation also infuses *Ġāmi' al-ātār*. It was an idea that permeated *mawlid* texts and their recitation, as well as the sober sufi spirituality of local Hadith transmitters as recently argued by Arjan Post in his study of 'Imād al-Dīn al-Wāsiṭī (d. 711/1311), a Ḥanbalī Sufi who had been part of Ibn Taymiyya's circle of followers. Post draws attention to the fact that inner knowledge of prophetic Sira and Hadith was elaborated by al-Wāsiṭī as the first necessary step of the *murīd*'s spiritual journey (*sulūk*).¹⁰⁶ Although, al-Wāsiṭī's reception remains to be studied, it is unlikely that Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn did not at least partially absorb such ideas. Not only did he live in Ṣālihiyya, attend Ḥanbalīs and was attended by Ḥanbalīs, and was personally involved in Hadith transmission, but he was also the author of a short treatise on *ḥirqa* (*Itfā' hurqat al-ḥawba bi-ilbās ḥirqat al-tawba*) which speaks of his participation in a local traditionalist sufi-inflected spirituality centered on the person of the Prophet.¹⁰⁷ Keeping in mind such spirituality helps us make sense of that complex edifice which is *Ġāmi' al-ātār*, which in fact contains echoes of this sufi-inflected piety.

2.2 *Ġāmi' al-ātār fi l-siyar wa-mawlid al-muḥtār*, or The Compilation of Traditions on the Life and Birth of the Chosen One

At the intersection of Hadith, Sira and devotional literature (*mawlid* specifically) stands this remarkably bulky oeuvre.¹⁰⁸ We know that *Ġāmi' al-ātār* was compiled before Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's inaugural lecture at the Dār al-ḥadīth al-aṣrafiyya (that is before 836/1433) because his inaugural teachings there (i.e. the *Maḡālis*) mention the work.¹⁰⁹ In fact, *Ġāmi' al-ātār* may have even gotten

106 See Arjan Post, *The Journeys of a Taymiyyan Sufi: Sufism through the Eyes of 'Imād al-Dīn al-Wāsiṭī* (d. 711/1311), Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Studies on Sufism"), 2020, especially p. 145-146, 192-197. Also *id.*, "A Glimpse of Sufism from the Circle of Ibn Taymiyya: An Edition and Translation of al-Ba'labakkī's (d. 734/1333) *Epistle on the Spiritual Way (Risālat al-Sulūk)*," *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 5 (2016), p. 156-187 where Post presents the case of Zayn al-Dīn al-Ba'labakkī (d. 734/1333), a Ḥanbalī student of Ibn Taymiyya who was trained in Sufism by al-Wāsiṭī. In 718/1318, Zayn al-Dīn was tried for claiming to have experienced a spiritual state in which he had received the cloak from 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ġilānī (p. 165-166).

107 This treatise remains available only in manuscript form but can be partially studied through Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's many quotations of it. See Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Bad' al-'ulqa*, ed. 'Aṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 2008, p. 45-73. On Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's Sufism, see Hirschler, *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture*, p. 59-63; Denis Gril, "De la *ḥirqa* à la *tarīqa* : continuité et évolution dans l'identification et la classification des voies," in *Le soufisme à l'époque ottomane, XVI^e-XVIII^e siècle*, eds Rachida Chih et Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, Cairo, Institut français d'archéologie orientale ("Cahier des Annales islamologiques," 29), 2009, p. 58-81, esp. p. 67-68.

108 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-ātār fi siyar wa-mawlid al-Muḥtār*, ed. Abī Ya'qūb Naṣ'at Kamāl, al-Fayyūm, Dār al-falāḥ li-l-baḥṭ al-'ilmī wa-taḥqīq al-turāṭ, 2010, 8 vols.

109 *Id.*, *Maḡālis*, p. 25: *wa-li-l-ḥadīṭ ṭuruq ḥarraḡtu-hā fi Ġāmi' al-ātār*.

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn the *mašyaḥa* at the Dār al-ḥadīṭ, its numerous competent Hadith reviews being an erudite contribution to the field.

In Hadith literature, a *ḡāmiʿ* was an encyclopedic compilation of traditions organized by topic which was meant to be studied by browsing its contents. Al-Buḥārī, Muslim, and al-Tirmidī all wrote *Ḡāmiʿ*s.¹¹⁰ Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn titled his a collection of *ātār* (lit. “tracks or traces”), a word dear to him that points to an inclusive idea of tradition as a corpus of transmitted texts comprising not only the words of the Prophet but also those of his Companions and the early generations of his followers.¹¹¹ The word *ḡāmiʿ* echoes the comprehensiveness and authority of the famous Hadith collections Ibn Nāṣir well knew, but also points to an ambitious mode of doing Sira that was typical of the time which tended to absorb and combine together elements from other literary genres and develop rich and complex literary structures.¹¹²

2.2.1 Structure and Contents: An Overview of *Ḡāmiʿ al-ātār*

In modern scholarship, the oscillating classification of *Ḡāmiʿ al-ātār* either as a work of Hadith or Sira is suggestive of its hybrid nature.¹¹³ As a matter of fact, the structure and contents of the work help us determine the author's intentions in composing this text.

At the very end of the work's introductory pages, its author declares: “I divided this abridged compilation (*al-ḡāmiʿ al-muḥtaṣar*) into chapters divided according to well-arranged meanings, and I named it *The Compilation of Traditions on the Life and Birth of the Chosen One*.”¹¹⁴ The text is today edited

110 See Muḥammad b. ʿĀfar al-Kattānī (d. 1345/1927), *al-Risāla l-mustaṭrafā li-bayān mašhūr kutub al-sunna l-mušarrafā*, Beirut, Dār al-Bašāʿir al-Islāmiyya, 1414/1995⁵, p. 39-40, 41-42 which also provides a list of early *Ḡāmiʿ*. According to al-Kattānī a *Ḡāmiʿ* covered the following subjects: belief (*ʾaḡāʾid*), rulings, “heart-melting traditions” enticing to piety and devotion (*riqāq*), manners (*ādāb*), travelling and not (*al-safar wa-l-maqām*), *tafsīr*, history, campaigns (*siyar*), crises and seditions (*fitan*) as well as virtues and vices (of places and people).

111 See Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Maḡālīs*, p. 63-64.

112 Khalidī, *Images of Muhammad*, p. 313: “In this era of recapitulation, the Sira too began to bloat, to swallow and regurgitate its antecedents, and to lay down the groundwork for a Sira that was to last to the present day. In the process, this new premodern Sira went behind the four founding fathers to preserve for us sizable fragments from the very early layers of Sira writing, and then to organize the vast material accumulated in a manner often referred to as ‘comprehensive’ (*jamiʿ*) or ‘well arrayed’ (*madbut*).”

113 Al-Arḡūsī lists it as a work on prophetic biography, see his *Muqaddima* to Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Tawḍīḥ al-muṣṭabāh*, 1, p. 40; al-Kattānī, *al-Risāla l-mustaṭrafā* lists it among the works of Hadith (on prophetic biography).

114 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ḡāmiʿ al-ātār*, 1, p. 82: *wa-qad ḡaʿaltu ḥādā l-ḡāmiʿ al-muḥtaṣar fuṣūl^{an} mubawwaba li-maʿānⁱⁿ murattaba wa-sammaytu-hu Ḡāmiʿ al-ātār fi l-siyar wa-mawlid*

in eight volumes and scarcely resembles an abridged work at all to the modern reader. But Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn measured the text in proportion to the uncountable available materials on the Prophet.¹¹⁵ Immeasurable quantity indicates insuperable excellence. This is a ubiquitous message in *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*: the amazing quantity of Hadith and traditions on and of Muḥammad, as well as the multitude of his names, are evidence of his perfection. The awareness and recognition of such perfection is a means to foster piety and love towards his person.

The text proceeds in long sections or chapters (*faṣl/fuṣūl*) which are arranged diachronically and report materials on the various moments of the Prophet's life, starting from attestations of his coming and the Prophet's pre-existence. Each chapter thus gathers clusters of traditions thematically related to its main topic. While the chapters are titled, the respective divisions (*bāb/abwāb*) within them not always are. The array of the topics is predictably broad.

The first seven chapters are dedicated to Muḥammad's pre-corporeal history. Six of them present materials announcing his coming and special status granted by God. At their center stands the theme of attestation which, as Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn states, belongs to "the signs of prophethood" (*a'lām al-nubuwwa*).¹¹⁶ The Qur'ān, the Torah and the Gospels, Moses and Jesus, as well as soothsayers, rabbis, previous prophets and men of learning, animals, plants and stones all are called in to announce, thus recognizing and confirming, Muḥammad's coming prophethood.¹¹⁷ This is followed by a short chapter on God's preference for Muḥammad and his superiority over all other creatures, men and angels alike; a superiority that extends to his *umma*.¹¹⁸ A remarkably long string of Hadith on the Prophet's merits and prerogatives (*faḍā'il* and *ḥaṣā'is*) is then reported to sanction this idea of divine predilection and superiority and serves as the climax to these chapters.

al-muḥtār.

115 *Ibid.*, I, p. 373. See Christopher Melchert, "Bukhārī and his Ṣaḥīḥ," in *Hadīth, Piety, and Law: Selected Studies*, Atlanta, Lockwood Press, 2015, p. 61-87, esp. p. 70; originally published in *Le Muséon*, 123 (2010), p. 425-454.

116 On attestations of Muḥammad's coming in early biographical materials of the Prophet, see Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, p. 21-43. The titles of the first five *fuṣūl* respectively are: [1] *Faṣl fī l-biṣārāt al-'aẓma bi-dīkr nabī-nā Muḥammad fī kutub Allāh al-qadīma*; [2] *faṣl fī dīkr nabīyyi-nā Muḥammad fī l-Injīl*; [3] *faṣl fī dīkr al-biṣārāt al-'isawīyya bi-l-nabī Muḥammad*; [4] *faṣl fī l-kitāb allādī kāna fī l-kanz al-maḍkūr fī qawli-hi ta'alā: (wa-kāna tahta-hu [...])*; [5] *faṣl fī mā kāna fī ṣuḥuf Mūsā min dīkr nabīyyi-nā Muḥammad*.

117 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, I, p. 84-373.

118 *Ibid.*, I, p. 374-388: *faṣl fī ḥtiyār Allāh ta'alā la-hu wa-ḡtibā'i-hi wa-tafḍīli-hi 'alā l-ḥalā'iq wa-ṣṭifā'i-hi.*

Muḥammad's own voice attests his predestined mission and God's fondness for him. Time and again, the Prophet proclaims himself as the distillation of God's choice: God elected the Arabs, then the Qurayš among the Arabs, then the Banū Hāšim among the Qurayš, and finally himself among the Banū Hāšim.¹¹⁹ Equally, he attests his salvific role in the Last Day: "When the day of Resurrection comes, I will be the *imām* of the prophets, their preacher, the holder of their intercession [...]" (*idā kāna yawm al-qiyāma kuntu imām al-nabiyyīn wa-ḥaṭība-hum wa-ṣāhib šafā'ati-him [...]*).¹²⁰ He describes himself as the first to enter Paradise and the most followed prophet on the Last Day. In several traditions, Muḥammad highlights the predetermination of his mission by the fact that he was appointed prophet when Adam was between body and spirit.¹²¹ According to another *ḥadīth*, he declares "I was the first prophet to be created and the last to be sent" (*kuntu awwal al-nās fī l-ḥalq wa-āḥira-hum fī l-ba'ṭ*).¹²² Finally, God's special affection for Muḥammad is demonstrated by the Prophet's names and epithets. The fact that God addressed him by a variety of names each reflecting his best qualities whereas He had referred to his other messengers simply by their names is proof of God's predilection for his last messenger.¹²³ In sum, the first six chapters put on stage a multivocal glorification of Muḥammad centered on his pre-existence and predestination as well as a great emphasis on his eschatological salvific role.

Muḥammad's genealogical history is traced in the next *faṣl* (number 7).¹²⁴ This chapter presents the Prophet's lineage and the story of his ancestors. Muḥammad's descent from Adam is tackled by presenting the 'intermediaries' between the two. Traditions about Adam and Eve's creation and their expulsion from the Garden are reported and so is the pre-Islamic history of Mecca which converges on Muḥammad's grandfather, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, his parents and their excellence. At this point, the ground has been prepared for Muḥammad's life-story. A long new chapter (*faṣl* 8) dedicated to *mawlid* and related stories occupies an important portion of *Ġāmi'* *al-āṭār* but does not marginalize other significant moments of the Prophet's life.¹²⁵ His birth

119 *Ibid.*, I, p. 389-411.

120 *Ibid.*, I, p. 412 then in numerous variants on this very topic I, p. 412-424.

121 *Ibid.*, I, p. 461-469.

122 *Ibid.*, I, p. 452-454.

123 *Ibid.*, I, p. 482.

124 *Ibid.*, II, p. 5-406: *faṣl fī dīkr nasabi-hi l-munīf ilā Adam 'alay-hi l-ṣalāt wa-l-salām wa-ntiqāl nūri-hi l-šarīf ilā abā'i-hi l-kirām*.

125 In the only manuscript I was able to consult, the *faṣl* dedicated to *mawlid* narratives covers 73 folios out of a whole of 306, but the manuscript is incomplete; it lacks its end. See Ġāmi'a Muḥammad bin Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyya MS 5522, fol. 119v-192r. Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi'*

tales are a blending of accounts touching on his conception and his mother Āmina's pregnancy, the appearance of the miraculous light that announces something extra-ordinary about the newborn, the blessed time and place of his birth, and the wondrous events that took place on that night. This *faṣl* includes extra-*mawlid* materials such as lengthy reports about the Battle of the Elephant and ends with a lengthy section on the Prophet's naming followed by a long list with explanations of all of his other names:¹²⁶ "All his names derive from the laudable qualities that God bestowed upon him; by them He granted him praise and perfection" (*wa-asmā'u-hu kullu-hā min šifāti-hi l-ḥamīdiyya allatī manaḥa-hu Llāh ta'ālā iyyā-hā*).¹²⁷ The fact that God reserved the use of the name Muḥammad for the Prophet's coming is yet another "sign of [his] prophethood."¹²⁸

Muḥammad's childhood and youth follow.¹²⁹ This chapter (9) runs from his breastfeeding to his mission, starting with accounts of his upbringing and multiple traditions on the opening and cleansing of his breast and about the seal of prophethood. Both topics are typical variations of the broad theme of predestined election transposed onto his early years.¹³⁰ The chapter continues in neat chronological order: the death of his mother, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib's custody (*kafāla*) of Muḥammad and 'Alī, the episode of Baḥīra, Muḥammad's participation in the sacrilegious war (*ḥarb al-fiḡār*),¹³¹ the visits from angels Muḥammad started receiving at the age of twenty,¹³² his trading activity, marriage to Ḥadiḡa, the marriages and death of their daughters,¹³³ the virtues of Ḥadiḡa and her passing away,¹³⁴ the reconstruction of the Ka'ba by the Qurayš and the sanctuary's history.¹³⁵ The reader is here acquainted with Muḥammad and Ḥadiḡa's descendants and their virtues. Finally, Muḥammad's mission and revelation close this chapter.¹³⁶

al-ātār, II, p. 407-510 and III, p. 5-243: *faṣl fī ḥamli-hi wa-zuhūr dīyā'i-hi wa-ḥawādīt mawliidi-hi wa-dīkr asmā'i-hi*.

126 *Ibid.*, III, p. 106-243.

127 *Ibid.*, III, p. 135.

128 *Ibid.*, III, p. 142-143.

129 *Ibid.*, III, p. 244 to the end and IV, p. 5-161: *faṣl fī raḡā'i-hi wa-naṣ'ati-hi wa-zawāḡi-hi wa-dīkr ba'aḡati-hi muḡtaṣara wa-mi'rāḡi-hi*.

130 On the opening and purification of Muḥammad's heart as an episode of initiation and preparation to prophethood, see Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, p. 59-75.

131 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-ātār*, III, p. 411-416, 422-432.

132 *Ibid.*, III, p. 420-421.

133 *Ibid.*, III, p. 433-541.

134 *Ibid.*, III, p. 542-557.

135 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 5-52.

136 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 56-161: *faṣl ḡīrat al-nabī [...]* *ma'a nubḡa min ṣamā'ili-hi wa-šifāti-hi*.

Muḥammad's migration from Mecca to Medina (*hiğra*), occupies the next bulky chapter (*faṣl* 10) which exhibits a plenitude of laudatory materials on the Prophet's qualities and merits and on places associated with him such as Medina and his mosque there.¹³⁷ Here again, the presentation proceeds chronologically, starting with reports on the events preceding the *hiğra* followed by the Companions' migration, and ending with accounts reporting details on Abū Bakr and Muḥammad's *hiğra*.¹³⁸ In an intentional digression, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn expends conspicuous energy relating and commenting upon descriptions of the Prophet's physical and moral qualities.¹³⁹ He picks four notorious *ḥadīths* on the subject, those of Umm Ma'bad, Hind, 'Alī, and 'Ā'īša, and in typical fashion reports their different chains and textual variations.¹⁴⁰ Then he comments and explains the meaning of their wordings, seizing the opportunity to make a very long digression into a myriad of other materials on the Prophet's nature, virtues, and personal features (*ṣamā'il*).

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn had opened this digression on the Prophet's qualities with the story of Umm Ma'bad's description of Muḥammad, and he closes it by recalling it.¹⁴¹ At this point, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn can resume his *hiğra*-centered narrative. He reports traditions on the Prophets' arrival to Qubā' and then Medina, noting the building of the mosque of each city. The virtues of these places are expounded upon, as are the houses of his wives, the gifts of the *anṣār* to the Prophet, and his nostalgia for Mecca.¹⁴² The insignificant number of pages, only five in the present edition of *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, dedicated to the central years of the Prophet's Medinan life stands out. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn mentions the Prophet's missions, expeditions and military campaigns in a short, rhymed poem which covers only three pages. The poem is called *Bawā'it al-fikra fi ḥawādīt al-hiğra*, and the student (*al-ṭālib*) is obliged to memorize it. This poem is followed by a two-page discussion on variations in the number of the Prophet's expeditions (*mağāzī*).¹⁴³ Clearly, these were of little interest to the author.

137 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 162-525 and V, p. 5-391.

138 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 162-301.

139 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 351: *al-ṣifāt al-nabawiyya, al-ṣamā'il al-muḥammadiyya, al-aḥlāq al-ṣarīfa, al-awṣāf al-'āliya l-munīfa*; also V, p. 239 and 248.

140 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 302-350 (*ḥadīth Umm Ma'bad*); IV, p. 351-529 (*ḥadīth Hind*) and V, p. 5-234 (*ḥadīth Hind* and *Alī*); V, p. 239-248 (*ḥadīth 'Ā'īša*).

141 *Ibid.*, V, p. 248.

142 See for instance *ibid.*, V, p. 351-369 reporting *ḥadīths* and traditions on Medina's many names and merits and V, p. 371-375 (longing for Mecca).

143 *Ibid.*, V, p. 387-390 and 391-392.

It is the character of the final farewell pilgrimage and the dramatic moment of Muḥammad's illness and passing away that are most significant to Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, and to which the long penultimate *faṣl* (11) is dedicated.¹⁴⁴ The long *ḥadīṭ* of Ḡābir b. 'Abd Allāh about the Prophet's farewell pilgrimage (*ḥuḡḡat al-wadā'*) is taken as the foundational tradition (*aṣl*) of this section. As it unfolds, it is juxtaposed with corroborating reports and additions (*ṣawāhid* and *ziyādāt*) as well as other related useful information (*fawā'id*).¹⁴⁵ Again, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn shows great attention to structure by organizing his materials coherently and diachronically. Once done with Ḡābir, he reports other less detailed stories about the farewell pilgrimage and announces what comes next: Muḥammad's return and settlement in Medina, "According to what of the Hadith I happened to inspect" (*ḥasbamā taḍammanat-hu l-aḥādīṭ allatī waqa'at la-nā*).¹⁴⁶ Next, Ḡāmi' al-āṭār moves on with the Prophet's illness and death.¹⁴⁷ Some space is dedicated to Abū Bakr's succession (typically, the Prophet's death is the most suitable moment for stressing a strictly Sunni political worldview),¹⁴⁸ followed by the preparation of the dead and the prayer for him.¹⁴⁹ Considerable importance is given to the Prophet's burial's place.¹⁵⁰ The rest of the traditions and poetry reported in this chapter converge on the emotions stirred by the Prophet's death.¹⁵¹ Divergent opinions are presented regarding the age of Muḥammad at the time of his passing and the length of his illness, his inheritance (*mirāt*), the women he left, his wives, servants and *mawālī*.¹⁵²

The final chapter (*faṣl* 12) of the book is dedicated to "What Muḥammad left behind" (*faṣl fī mā taraka-hu l-nabī ba'd waḡāṭi-hi*): garments, a ring, weapons, accessories, objects (the banner, the stick with a crooked end, a red rounded tent ...); the animals that were dear to him.¹⁵³ The prophet's "special prerogatives" (*ḥaṣā'is*) lead Ḡāmi' al-āṭār to its end by evoking the special significance of his grave and the meaningfulness of praying for him beside it. Its visitation (*ziyāra*) is implicitly recommended as a meritorious act, and the elegies of its first visitor, Fāṭima, close this voluminous work.

144 *Ibid.*, v, p. 393-586 and vi, p. 5-265; *faṣl fī ḥuḡḡati-hi*.

145 *Ibid.*, v, p. 394-395, 397, 555; vi, p. 200-201, 218.

146 *Ibid.*, vi, p. 217-221, quotation from 221. Materials reporting the Prophets' return to Medina are covered in *ibid.*, vi, p. 267-293.

147 *Ibid.*, vi, p. 294 ff.

148 *Ibid.*, vi, p. 355-377, 490-507.

149 *Ibid.*, vi, p. 508-534.

150 *Ibid.*, vi, p. 535-574.

151 *Ibid.*, vii, p. 5-28.

152 *Ibid.*, vii, p. 53 ff.

153 *Ibid.*, vii, p. 473-505 and *ibid.*, viii.

2.2.2 Observations

The thematic richness and the mixture of elements blended in the *Ġāmi'* are now evident, the most obvious example being the intertwining of episodes from the Prophet's biography with devotional materials stressing his unique qualities. The selection of sources Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn draws upon and regularly cites is impressive. He incessantly shifts between canonical and non-canonical Hadith collections, *ta'rīḥ* (al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Šābba, al-Azraqī, Sayf b. 'Umar ...), *sīras* from the formative period as well as later ones (Ibn Sa'd, al-Wāqidi, Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hišām, al-Suhaylī, Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn al-Ġawzī ...), proofs of prophethood (al-Bayhaqī, Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, al-Māwardī ...), *šamā'il* (al-Tirmidī, al-Bayhaqī ...), and *faḍā'il* (of people as well as places), to mention just a few.¹⁵⁴ In addition, the author relies on less well-known works to which he must have had direct access. For instance, at the end of the sixth chapter he abundantly quotes from a short treatise on God's preference for Muḥammad penned by his respected Damascene Šāfi'ī colleague, Ibn 'Abd al-Salām (d. 600/1262).¹⁵⁵ He quotes from sources which today remain unlocated, such as al-Sulamī's (d. 412/1021) *Kitāb al-Mawā'iz* (*The Book of Exhortations*), or al-Bardānī's (d. 498/1005) collection of traditions about *Those Who Saw the Prophet in Dreams* (*Man ra'ā l-nabī fi manāmi-hi*).¹⁵⁶ The vastness of this source base suggests that the author owned or had access to a large number of books. It also brings into focus an important aspect of this genre, namely that the *ġāmi'* in the title alludes to a certain type of encyclopedic Hadith work, but also highlights the intended comprehensiveness of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's purposefully multi-genre *sīra* compilation.¹⁵⁷ As previously highlighted, such comprehensiveness was a typical feature of later Medieval *Sīra* which this work exemplifies.

Each chapter develops a number of related themes, typically introduced by the author in synthetic fashion and followed by clusters of traditions and other materials related to the topic in question.¹⁵⁸ Sometimes, between presenting a topic and reporting on traditions to illustrate it, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn ventures into short doctrinal presentations. For instance, he presents various types of

154 For an impressive list of his sources see the introduction: *ibid.*, I, p. 23-30.

155 *Ibid.*, I, p. 378-382; Ibn 'Abd al-Salām (d. 600/1262), *Bidāyat al-sūfi taḥḍil al-rasūl*, ed. Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, Damascus, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1986⁴.

156 On these works, see *infra* p. 44 and 45.

157 See the point made by Karen Bauer referring to the *tafsīr* genre as represented by al-Ṭabarī's *Ġāmi' al-bayān*: Karen Bauer, "Justifying the Genre: A Study of Introductions to Classical Works of *Tafsīr*," in *Aims, Methods, and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis, 2nd/8th-9th/15th centuries*, ed. Karen Bauer, Oxford-London, Oxford University Press-Institute of Ismaili Studies ("Qur'anic Studies Series," 9), 2013, p. 38-65, esp. p. 50.

158 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, II, p. 319, 389, etc.; IV, p. 173, 196, 245, 255, 260, etc.; VI, p. 294, etc.; VII, p. 367, 381, etc.; VIII, p. 5, 94, 96, 104, 110, 128, etc.

migration (*hiğra*) before dealing with Muḥammad's journey to Medina.¹⁵⁹ Or, before presenting traditions about the beginning of Muḥammad's mission, he clarifies that the Prophet was protected from error, was not following any other law or revelation before receiving the Qur'ān, that the Qur'ān is distinguished by unsurpassable literary qualities, and that it is truly the Prophet's apodictic miracle.¹⁶⁰

After such digressions, the author meticulously retrieves his discourse from where he left it, sometimes by explicitly referring to the junction of departure and thus maintaining the work's narrative fabric.¹⁶¹ A clear example is the long excursus on the Prophet's excellent qualities (*šamā'il*). The digression starts from Umm Ma'bad, who is mentioned at the beginning of the *hiğra* accounts because of Abū Bakr and Muḥammad's stopover by her camp on their way out of Mecca. After their departure, Umm Ma'bad is interrogated by her husband on the two men's visit and in replying, she delivers her description of the Prophet. This description paves the way for other traditions on Muḥammad's appearance and character, namely those conveyed by Hind, 'Alī and 'Ā'īša, as mentioned above. The ensuing commentaries and the addition of related traditions constitute a very long and detailed excursus that covers the fourth and fifth volumes of *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*'s present edition and interrupts the *hiğra* story. Nonetheless, Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn dutifully closes his *šamā'il* detour by returning to Umm Ma'bad: "[...] This Umm Ma'bad was a female companion emigrant to Medina. We said before that her full name was [...]" (*wa-Umm Ma'bad hādihi min al-šahābiyyāt al-muhāğirāt taqaddama anna sma-hā [...]*).¹⁶² Her name is then declined in full, her tent's location identified, and a possible identification of her grave's site spotted. Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn shows his great care for narrative cohesion by ending the *šamā'il*-centered section and returning to the *hiğra* precisely from where he had interrupted it.

Prophetic and non-prophetic traditions are the preponderant material of *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*. That is, Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn as a Hadith expert is constantly at work: he expends remarkable energy evaluating the chains he reports as well as the work of his fellow Hadith scholars.¹⁶³ Much attention is dedicated to establishing the transmitters' names or illustrating the different chains along which one report is transmitted. Variations in the *mutūn* (texts) and additions to them are also included. All along, the author offers his interpretation of certain words or his criteria for including a certain report. When possible, the *Šaḥiḥān* are given

159 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 162-167.

160 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 55-55, 56, 120 ff.

161 For instance, *ibid.*, VI, p. 327; VII, p. 186, 313 (*kamā qaddamā [...]*), etc.

162 *Ibid.*, V, p. 248.

163 See how he criticizes Ibn Kaṭīr, for instance, Ibn Nāšir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, III, p. 404-405, or al-Ḍahabī: *ibid.*, VIII, p. 103.

due precedence but when he has other Hadith sources at his disposal, he uses them to illustrate single episodes from the Prophets' life.

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn demonstrates a clear awareness of and attention to the distinction between Hadith (prophetic words) and *āṭār* (traditions about the Prophet from authorities other than him).¹⁶⁴ Obviously, when dealing with pre-Islamic events he is generally compelled to resort to materials other than Hadith. For instance, when introducing the Battle of the Elephant, he is adamant that the event was transmitted in detail by traditions (*āṭār*), authors of expeditions (*ṣiyar*) and exegetes. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn explains that since accounts of the battle are scattered (*mufarraqa*) he gathered them together as if they were one narrative (*‘alā siyāqat ḥadīṭ wāḥid*).¹⁶⁵

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn does not embrace a prescriptive attitude towards the traditions he reports. This means that he comments on the quality of the transmitters, flags their eventual soundness with their different ranks, reports of any disagreement with his peers, and duly signals and justifies the quotation of a fabricated *ḥadīṭ*.¹⁶⁶ In doing so, he conforms to the Hadith transmission etiquette of the time which recommended that fabricated Hadith never be transmitted unless with a statement clarifying their faulty status.¹⁶⁷ But in contrast to other Sira authors who were part of the same *milieu* and with whose work Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was familiar, he shows leniency towards his materials and works by juxtaposing reports, rather than excluding them.

To illustrate this point, let us briefly glimpse at the renowned 8th/14th century historians and authoritative Hadith experts Šams al-Dīn al-Dahabī and Ibn Kaṭīr. Like Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, both lived in Damascus. They were Šāfiʿīs and committed traditionalists in theology who were close to Ibn Taymiyya's circle. Like Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, they wrote *sīras* distinguished by a massive injection of Hadith and Hadith scholarship.¹⁶⁸ But in contrast, their *sīras* were part of bigger historiographical projects: al-Dahabī's *Taʾrīḫ al-islām* (*History of Islam*) and Ibn Kaṭīr's universal history *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya* (*The Beginning and the End*). Also, unlike Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, their concern with authentication is much

164 *Ibid.*, I, p. 101, 152, 373, 400, 477, etc.; III, p. 5, 107; VIII, p. 128, etc.

165 *Ibid.*, III, p. 4, 9.

166 *Ibid.*, v, p. 503; VII, p. 370; VIII, p. 118.

167 Ibn al-Šalāḥ al-Šahrazūrī, *ʿUlūm al-ḥadīṭ*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr, Beirut-Damascus, Dār al-Fikr, 1425/2004, p. 98: *wa-lā taḥillu riwāyatu-hu li-aḥad fī ayy ma'nā kāna illā maqrūn^{an} bi-bayān waḍ'ī-hi*.

168 Two informative introductions to Ibn Kaṭīr are Younus Y. Mirza, "Ibn Kathīr, ʿImād al-Dīn," *ET*³ and Erik Ohlander, *Ibn Kathīr*, in *Essays in Arabic literary biography*, eds Joseph E. Lowry and Devin J. Stewart, Wiesbaden, Harrasowitz Verlag ("Mizān," 17), 2009, p. 147-159. On al-Dahabī, Caterina Bori, "al-Dhahabī," *ET*³.

more pronounced.¹⁶⁹ Ibn Kaṭīr's *al-Bidāwa wa-l-nihāya* opens with a manifesto exhibiting a high degree of methodological consciousness. He declares that he will avoid the use of reputedly 'non-Islamic' narratives about biblical characters (*Isrā'īliyyāt*) apart from what agrees with the Qur'ān, and more generally that he will rely upon that which is sound and good of (*mā ṣaḥḥa naqlu-hu aw ḥasuna*), and not that which is weak, which he will warn against (*wa-mā kāna fī-hi l-ḍa'f nunabbihu-hu*).¹⁷⁰ Although ultimately he does not fully succeed in complying with this programme, his initial statement alone is revealing.¹⁷¹ As for al-Dahabī, his *sīra* is much shorter, and his style certainly less discursive than Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn. The former proceeds by reporting the relevant traditions and then peremptorily issues verdicts about their quality (*wa-hādā ṣaḥīḥ, ḥasan, jarīb, munkar, ḍa'f ...*),¹⁷² at times openly questioning the soundness of certain elements. In an account like the journey of 'Alī with Muḥammad to Syria as reported by Qurād Abū Nūḥ, al-Dahabī sounds much preoccupied with the factual veracity of the account's details,¹⁷³ an attitude rarely found in Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn.

Last, despite the fragmentary nature of Hadith, there is no doubt that Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn intended his work as *Sira*. This is demonstrated by internal and literary evidence. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn refers to his composition at its end as "this *sīra*."¹⁷⁴ Similarly, in one colophon the copyist writes: "This is the epilogue (*ḥātima*) of this *sīra*," revealing his perception of the work as belonging to this literary family.¹⁷⁵ Meanwhile, the literary features distinguishing a

169 Ibn Kaṭīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, ed. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, Cairo, Dār Ḥiḡr, 1419/1998, 21 vols. The *sīra* runs from volume 3 to volume 9 of this edition; al-Dahabī, *Ta'rīḥ al-islām wa-wafāyāt al-mašāḥir wa-l-a'lām*, ed. Baššār 'Awwād Ma'rūf, Beirut, 1424/2003, 17 vols. Muḥammad's biography covers the second half of the first volume, p. 479-853.

170 Ibn Kaṭīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, I, p. 7. For similar procedural statements: *ibid.*, III, p. 354, 620; VII, p. 404; VIII, p. 173 (*wa-qad 'ulima bi-l-tawātur anna-hu dufina [...]*).

171 According to Rebecca Williams, Ibn Kaṭīr strove unsuccessfully to apply to his *sīra* Ibn Taymiyya's programme of doing exegesis with Qur'ān and authentic Sunna only. Rebecca R. Williams, *Muḥammad and the Supernatural: Medieval Arab Views*, London-New York, Routledge ("Routledge Studies in Classical Islam"), 2013, p. 6-11. On Ibn Kaṭīr's *sīra*, also Nagel, *Allahs Liebling*, p. 282-289 and Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*, p. 334-337.

172 A sampling: al-Dahabī, *Ta'rīḥ al-islām*, I, p. 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 493, 776, 778, 779, 783, 787, 835, etc.

173 *Ibid.*, I, p. 502-503.

174 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn: "This is the epilogue of what of this *sīra* Allāh has granted" (*fa-hādā ḥātimat mā fataḥa Llāh bi-hi min ḥādīthi l-sīra*; Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, VIII, p. 181) and Abū Ya'qūb Naš'at Kamāl, *Muqaddima* of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, I, p. 33.

175 Abū Ya'qūb Naš'at Kamāl, *Muqaddima* to Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, I, p. 32 and p. 52 (colophon of the Damascus Zāhiriyya copy of the work – Damascus, al-Asad National Library MS Zāhiriyya ta'rīḥ 1894).

sīra mentioned at the beginning of this study are also present in the work. A pronounced chronological concern runs through the text. Chronology is a narrative tool that provides a continuum to an otherwise unwieldy mass of materials and is a major preoccupation of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn. Muḥammad's age is given or debated for nearly every single event; often it is the first piece of information provided and then followed by traditions discussing chronological variations. This approach renders Muḥammad's timeline visible.¹⁷⁶ What's more, the whole of the Prophet's existence unfolds consistently in the text, from the time of creation in which he is created but not yet physically in the world, to the time in which he becomes manifest in the world after his physical birth, to the time of his bodily disappearance when his grave becomes the space where his presence can still be felt.

Poetry infuses *Ġāmi' al-āṭār* and serves multiple purposes. It can highlight topical moments, explain obscure words, serve as an introduction device for stories, intensify emotions, or have a didactic purpose.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, lexical glosses are spread throughout the text.¹⁷⁸ Narratives and citations from the Qur'ān frequently intertwine as it is typical of *sīra* narratives.¹⁷⁹ Finally, genealogy serves to single out the members of the Prophet's family as individuals of special merit. The only absent feature of *Sira* among those identified by Miskinzoda is "letters to rulers and documents." In short, enhancing historicity or demonstrating authenticity was not Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's most pressing concern.

2.2.3 Purpose

Two of its key-topics further highlight the ways in which *Ġāmi' al-āṭār* was a voice for the prophetic veneration culture typical of the time.

In the list of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's works, this writing appears with the shortened title *Ġāmi' al-āṭār fī mawlid al-muḥtār*, "originally in three volumes."¹⁸⁰ Thus, the text was associated with the celebration of the Prophet's birth even

176 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, III, p. 342, 349, 384, 393, 395, 411, 415, 420, 422, 433, 450, 460, 451, 551; IV, p. 5, 59-77, etc. On the centrality of chronology in *Sira*, see Miskinzoda, *On the Margins of Sira*, p. 113-116. On the symbolic significance of chronology in Muḥammad's biographical accounts, see Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, p. 189-214 and Lawrence I. Conrad, "Abraha and Muḥammad: Some Observations Apropos of Chronology and Literary 'topoi' in the Early Arabic Historical Tradition," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 50/2 (1987), p. 225-240.

177 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, III, p. 406-409; V, p. 240; IV, p. 303-304; VIII, p. 145 ff.; V, p. 387-389, etc.

178 *Ibid.*, I, p. 403, 410; III, p. 343, 404, 431-432; IV, p. 325ff.; V, p. 373-374, 399-400, etc.

179 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 267, 269; VI, p. 85, etc.

180 Al-Saḥāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, VIII, p. 194.

though the work is not focused exclusively on *mawlid* or *mawlid*-related topics. The difficulty of defining the thematic core of *Ġāmi' al-āṭār* is reflected in the fluctuating titles of its manuscripts. These vary from *Ġāmi' al-āṭār fī mawlid al-muḥṭār* where the focus is on *mawlid*, to *Ġāmi' al-āṭār fī sīrat al-muḥṭār* where the focus is on Muḥammad's life to *Ġāmi' al-āṭār fī l-sīyar wa-l-mawlid*, where the focus is on both. One title also recites: *Ġāmi' al-āṭār fī sīrat al-nabī l-muḥṭār* and "what happened to him, his emigration and death, military campaigns, miracles, auxiliaries and companions" (*wa-mā ġarā 'alay-hi wa-ḥiġratu-hu wa-wafātu-hu wa-ġazawātu-hu wa-muġizātu-hu wa-anṣāru-hu wa-ṣaḥābu-hu*).¹⁸¹

The introduction is of use in this regard, suggesting that the work was inspired by the *mawlid* celebration:

فإنّ قلوب المؤمنين وأئمة المتقين وأرواح المحبين تحيا عند نشر الأحاديث النبوية وتبهر
بالسماع السيرة المحمدية وتتشوق إلى وصف أخلاق نبينا الشريفة وتشوف إلى نعت
أوصافه الجليلة المنيفة وتشرف ببيت آدابه الجليلة اللطيفة وترتاح في كل عام إلى سماع
حديث مولده أفضل الصلاة والسلام.

The hearts of the believers, the inner hearts of the God-fearing ones, and the souls of the lovers revive at the propagation of Hadith and lighten to the listening of Muḥammad's *sīra*, they ardently desire the description of our Prophet's noble nature and long for the depiction of his glorious exalted qualities, they are uplifted by his sublime fine manners and are pleased every year with listening to the story of his birth, may the best of prayer and peace be upon him.¹⁸²

This passage functions as an anticipation of the work's contents and draws attention to the spiritual and emotional benefits derived from listening to Hadith and Sira: revival of the soul and illumination, fulfillment of ardent desire for the Prophet, moral uplifting, pleasure.

The rest of the introduction focuses on *mawlid* celebrations, described as a "good innovation" (*bid'a ḥasana*) by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn. He writes that in his time, *mawlid* had become a yearly festivity celebrated with much delight in the lands of Islam, Mecca, Medina, Syria, and Egypt. Yet, it was also a celebration in whose observance people differed, some following the proper etiquette,

181 Abī Ya'qūb Naṣ'at Kamāl, *Muqaddima* to Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, I, p. 32-34 (last long title at p. 34). See also *ibid.*, I, p. 82.

182 *Ibid.*, I, p. 62.

others not. He then sketches a brief history of the first *mawlid* celebration in Irbil by the local ruler al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Abū Saʿīd al-Kökbürī (d. 630/1233) at the beginning of the 7th/13th century.¹⁸³ Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn describes the lavish banquet, the adorned pavilions erected expressly for the occasion, and the diffuse atmosphere of joy and delight which could sometimes lead to objectionable behavior (*rubbamā addā li-l-wuqūʿ al-mahḍūr*). A tenuous allusion to *mawlid* polemics surfaces here but remains undeveloped.¹⁸⁴ Next, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn expresses his appreciation for al-Kökbürī as a ruler who loved his people, was fond of Sufi *samāʿ* and was well-learned in Hadith.¹⁸⁵ Taking Abū Šāma (d. 665/1268) as his reference, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn closes these pages by re-stating the permissibility and the goodness of the *mawlid* celebration which, together with acts of charity and the manifestation of love for Muḥammad that they entail, is a way of thanking God for the blessing of Muḥammad's message.¹⁸⁶ Given people's attachment and love for this festivity, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn concludes:

ولما رأيتُ أحوال المؤمنين على ما وصفناه من الميل والمحبة لما ذكرناه آلفتُ هذا المختصر
المعلم من أحوال نبينا محمد وذكّر مولده ومنشئه وصفاته وأخلاقه الشريفة ووفاته ليحصل
لهم غاية مطلوبهم ويحصلوا خصال محبوبهم ويزدادوا إيماناً ومحبةً ويرتقوا بذلك أعلى رتبة
فالمرء مع من أحبّ.

When I saw the condition of the believers, according to what I described of the attachment and love for that which we have mentioned, I composed this *Compendium* which is marked by the circumstances of our Prophet Muḥammad and the recollection of his birth, origins, qualities, noble nature and death, so that the ultimate object of their desire reaches

183 *Ibid.*, I, p. 63-67, p. 67-68 on *mawlid* as *bidʿa ḥasana*. For an early history of *mawlid* celebrations, see Kaptein, *Muḥammad's Birthday festival*, especially chap. 1 and 2, and in particular p. 40-41 on al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Abū Saʿīd al-Kökbürī's *mawlid* in Irbil.

184 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmiʿ al-āṭār*, I, p. 65. For polemics on *mawlid* legitimacy, see Kaptein, *Muḥammad's Birthday festival*, p. 44-67; Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 65, 71-72, chapter 3 (*passim*) and chapter 5; Raquel M. Ukeles, "The Sensitive Puritan? Revisiting Ibn Taymiyya's Approach to Law and Spirituality in Light of 20th-Century Debates on the Prophet's Birthday," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, eds Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed, Karachi, Oxford University Press ("Studies in Islamic Philosophy," 4), 2010, p. 317-337.

185 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmiʿ al-āṭār*, I, p. 66.

186 *Ibid.*, I, p. 67. Abū Šāma was clearly an authoritative reference on *mawlid*'s legitimacy. The same passage mentioned by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn is used as representative of *mawlid* justifications by Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 63 and Kaptein, *Muḥammad's Birthday Festival*, p. 71.

them and they attain the excellent qualities of their beloved, increase in faith and love, and thanks to this ascend to the highest rank, for *man will be with whom he loves*.¹⁸⁷

This passage is decisive: by recalling the Prophet's major life-landmarks as well as his good nature (*aḥlāq*) and qualities (*ṣifāt*), Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn wants to offer a means – and what is for him the right means – for believers to draw towards the Prophet internally to the point of reaching their object of desire and attaining his excellent qualities (*yuḥaṣṣilū ḥiṣāl maḥbūbi-him*). Accordingly, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār* is meant to offer more than simple knowledge about the Prophets' life; it cultivates an intimate and inner propinquity to the person of the Prophet and fuels feelings of love for him. These feelings will win believers a special position of proximity to Muḥammad in the Hereafter, as follows from the citation “for *man will be with whom he loves*.”¹⁸⁸

The above phrase is an excerpt from a famous *ḥadīth* which touches on the crucial issue of salvation. It is narrated by Anas b. Mālik (d. ca 91/709-93/711) and gives voice to a questioner who asked the Prophet about the Afterlife (the Hour). Confronted with Muḥammad's question: “What did you prepare for it [i.e. for the Hour]?” (*mā dā a'dadta la-hā*) – the questioner humbly replied that he prepared nothing, save his love for God and the Prophet. At these words, Muḥammad asserted: “You will be with whom you love” (*anta ma'a man aḥbabta*).¹⁸⁹

The first version of this *ḥadīth* reported by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn is from al-Buḥārī and Muslim, where, following the Prophet's words, Anas b. Mālik declares not only his love for the Prophet, but also that for Abū Bakr and 'Umar: “I love the Prophet, Abū Bakr and 'Umar, and I wish I will be with them thanks to my love for them, even if my actions are not like theirs” (*anā uḥibbu l-nabī wa-Abū Bakr wa-'Umar wa-arǧū an akūna ma'a-hum bi-ḥubbī ḥyā-hum wa-in lam a'mal bi-miṭl a'māli-him*).¹⁹⁰ At the forefront of *Ġāmi' al-āṭār* stands not only the idea that familiarizing oneself with the ‘traces’ (*āṭār*) of the Prophet's life's grants spiritual elevation and salvation, but also a strong Sunni-oriented declaration of faith.¹⁹¹

187 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, I, p. 68.

188 *Ibid.*, I, p. 69-83.

189 *Ibid.*, I, p. 69. See Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 62 (*Kitāb faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba*), bāb 6 (*Manāqib 'Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb*), ḥadīth 38. <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3688> (last access 20 January 2023). Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 45 (*Kitāb al-birr wa-l-ādab*), Bāb 50 (*al-Mar' ma'a man aḥabba*), ḥadīth 208. <https://sunnah.com/muslim/45/208> (Last access 20 January 2023).

190 *Ibid.*

191 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, VI, p. 355-357, 358-360.

In what follows, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn lists the different transmitters of this *ḥadīth*, their names, identity, and degrees of reliability. Eventually he points to defects in the chain¹⁹² and reports textual variations of the tradition with similar comments upon their chains of transmission.¹⁹³ One strand of the tradition, reported in multiple chains, prioritizes love over observance: the person questioned by the Prophet about the Hour confesses that he has not prepared via prayer or fasting, and only possesses his love for him. Even in this case, the Prophet remains firm: “Man is with whom he loves, and you will be with whom you loved” (*al-mar’ ma’a man aḥabba wa-anta ma’a man aḥbabta*). Anas b. Mālik again comments upon the Prophet’s words and highlights the believers’ relief upon hearing them: “I’ve never seen Muslims rejoice at anything after [the advent of] Islam as they did on this occasion” (*mā ra’aytu l-muslimīna fariḥū ba’d al-islām faraḥa-hum [bi-hā]*).¹⁹⁴

At this point, and as he does elsewhere in his work, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn supplements the *ḥadīth* on love with extra-Hadith materials corroborating it and exemplifying its meaning. First, he recalls that the well-known sufi, Šāfi’ī scholar and traditionist Abū Nu’aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), the author of no less than *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’* and *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa* – one of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn’s favourite sources – dedicated to this tradition an entire composition (*muṣannaf*) in which he collected most (*ǧālib*) of its transmission paths.¹⁹⁵ This observation paves the way to two dream-narratives where love generates the benefit of inclusion among the loved ones in the Hereafter.

The first dream is traced back to Muḥammad al-Bardānī (d. 498/1005), a proficient Ḥanbalī *ḥadīth* scholar in Baghdad, and his book *Man ra’ā l-nabī fī manāmi-hi* (*Those Who Saw the Prophet in Dreams*). In his biographical notice of him, al-Dahabī confirms that: “He had put together a volume about prophetic dreams” (*ǧama’a muǧallad^{an} fī l-manāmāt al-nabawīyya*). This collection seems no longer extant,¹⁹⁶ but we do know that al-Bardānī’s traditions circulated in the Damascus Ḥanbalī and traditionalists circles of which Ibn

192 For instance, *ibid.*, I, p. 73 (bottom), 82.

193 For instance, *ibid.*, I, p. 70-71, 74, 80, 81.

194 *Ibid.*, I, p. 70-77. Quotation is from p. 71.

195 *Ibid.*, I, p. 78. The title of the *muṣannaf* is *Dīkr al-muḥibbīn ma’a l-maḥḥūbīn idā wāfaqa-hum fī l-’aqd wa-l-ḥāl*. This work is no longer extant. It is mentioned by al-Dahabī, *Sīyar a’lām al-nubalā’*, eds Asad al-Arnā’ūt, Šu’ayb al-Arnā’ūt and Ḥusayn Asad, Beirut, Mu’assasat al-risāla, 1982, 25 vols, XIX, p. 306; Kebira Masotta, *Les premiers ascètes en Islam d’après la Ḥilyat al-awliyā’ de Abū Nu’aym al-Iṣfahānī : entre zuhd et taṣawwuf, l’émergence du saint*, unpublished PhD Dissertation, Paris, EPHE, 2017, p. 55 mentions it without further details.

196 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ǧāmi’ al-ātār*, I, p. 79-80: *ruyyinā min ḥadīth al-ḥāfiẓ* [...]. For a biographical notice of al-Bardānī, al-Dahabī, *Sīyar a’lām al-nubalā’*, XIX, p. 219-222 and p. 220.

Nāṣir al-Dīn was part.¹⁹⁷ Al-Dahabī himself relies upon a chain going back to al-Bardānī to report the notorious *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet sanctions dreams as an extension of prophecy.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn quotes al-Bardānī once more in the first *faṣl*.¹⁹⁹

The dream narrator, a certain Abū ‘Alī glossed by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn as “perhaps he was Ibn Ḥafif (d. 371/982)” recounts having seen the Prophet in a dream in which he sat with the ‘poor’ (*fuqarā*). Observing from above and at some distance, Abū ‘Alī sees Gabriel and the angels pouring water on the hands of the group for washing. Abū ‘Alī extends his hands to receive water too, but the angels warn Gabriel: “Don’t pour water on him because he is not one of them” (*la taṣubbū l-mā’ ‘alā yadi-hi fa-laysa min-hum*). To this Abū ‘Alī replies: “Oh Messenger of God, even if I am not one of them, I truly love them” (*yā rasūl Allāh fa-in kuntu lastu min-hu fa-innī uḥibbu-hum*). At this the Prophet intervened: “Man is with whom he loves’ – so they poured water on my hand” (*al-mar’ ma’a man aḥabba fa-ṣabbū l-mā’ ‘alā yadi*).²⁰⁰ The dream also speaks of a tension between this anonymous group of renunciants – their piety being exemplified by poverty – and an important personality of classical Sufism, the traditionalist oriented Ibn Ḥafif. The Prophet sanctions Ibn Ḥafif’s inclusion in the group by dint of his love for them.²⁰¹

197 A collection of al-Bardānī’s traditions figures in Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s catalogue of his own books. See Hirschler, *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture*, p. 503. The work’s full title is *al-Fawā'id al-ḥisān al-muntaqāt al-ṣiḥāh ‘alā ṣarṭ al-imāmayn al-Buḥārī wa-Muṣlim*, supposedly a *taḥrīḡ* (selection) of Muslim and al-Buḥārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* which is today preserved in Damascus. Damascus, al-Asad National Library, MS 384771, fol. 125-140; described by Yāsīn Muḥammad al-Sawwās in *Fīhris maḡāmi’ al-madrassa l-‘umāriyya fī dār al-kutub al-zāhiriyya bi-Dimašq*, Kuwait, Ma’had al-maḡtūtāt al-‘arabiyya, 1980, p. 599.

198 Al-Dahabī, *Siyar a’lām al-nubalā’*, XIX, p. 220-221: [...] *lam yabqa min mubašširāt al-nubuwwa illā l-ru’yā l-ṣāliḥa*. Pierre Lory, *Le rêve et ses interprétations en Islam*, Paris, Albin Michel (“Sciences des religions”), 2003, p. 44-49.

199 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi’ al-āṭār*, I, p. 387-388, quot. from p. 387: “I came across a valuable question (*mas’ala*) written by (*bi-ḥaṭṭ*) the master Hadith scholar (*al-ḥāfiẓ*) Abi ‘Alī l-Bardānī in which he mentioned that the friends [of God] are superior to the angels. In it he resorted to proofs from the Book and the Sunna.” Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn then reports a whole passage from the *mas’ala*. He probably had access to the book.

200 *Ibid.*, I, p. 79.

201 On the material poverty of early renunciants, see Christopher Melchert, *Before Sufism: Early Islamic Renunciant Piety*, Berlin-Boston, Walter de Gruyter (“Islam – thought, culture, and society,” 4), 2020, p. 21-23. The Sufi Ibn Khafif has been studied by Florian Sobieroj, *Ibn Khafif aš-Širāzī und seine Schrift zur Novizenerziehung (Kitāb al-Iqtisād): Biographische Studien, Edition und Übersetzung*, Beirut-Stuttgart, Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft-F. Steiner, 1998. For reference to further studies: *id.*, “Ibn Khafif,” *ET*³.

The second story is also said to be taken from a source which is today no longer extant: *al-Mawā'iz* (*The Exhortations*) by the sufi traditionist Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), a contemporary of Abū Nu'aym and al-Bardānī.²⁰² The dream is of the early renunciant Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 163/779-780) and portrays a conversation between Ibrāhīm and Gabriel.²⁰³ Gabriel is pictured in the act of descending to earth to record the names of "those who love" (*al-muḥibbīn*), when Ibrāhīm straightforwardly asks, "Like whom?", to which the angel replies: "Like Mālik ibn Dinār, Ṭābit al-Bunānī and Ayyūb al-Saḥṭiyānī – and he listed a great many." When Ibrāhīm enquires, "Am I among them?", Gabriel refuses him straight away. No explanation whatsoever is given for this unexpected snub; as an early pious renunciant, Ibrāhīm is equal in renown to the three people mentioned, so his separation from 'the lovers' (*al-muḥibbīn*) comes across as a disturbingly arbitrary and unmotivated act. But as in the previous story, Ibrāhīm is protected 'by way of love.' He addresses Gabriel by saying: "When you write their names, write underneath: 'Lover of those who love'" [referring to himself]. He said [i.e. Ibrāhīm]: And at this, a revelation (*al-waḥy*) descended proclaiming "Write him *before* them!" (*fa-īdā katabta-hum fa-ktub taḥta-hum: muḥibb al-muḥibbīn, qāla: fa-nazala l-waḥy 'uktub-hu awwala-hum*). Thus, the revelation not only acknowledges Ibrāhīm's proper place, but also to [work to demonstrate...] changes his status.²⁰⁴ In this story, the *muḥibbīn*'s object of desire remains unspecified (is it God or the Prophet?).²⁰⁵ Be that as it may, Ibrāhīm b. Adham's love for his fellow renunciants gains him a prominent place within this group of chosen lovers.

202 *Al-Mawā'iz wa-l-waṣāyā* by al-Sulamī is a writing known only through quotations in other works. See Bilal Orfali and Gerard Böwering, *Sufi Treatises of Abū Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī*, Beirut, Dar el-Machreq ("Recherches"), 2009, p. 18. I am indebted to Jean-Jacques Thibon for this reference.

203 On Ibrāhīm b. al-Adham, Russel Jones, "Ibrāhīm b. Adham," *ET* 2; Denis Gril, "Compagnons ou disciples ? La *suḥba* et ses exigences : l'exemple d'Ibrāhīm b. Adham d'après la *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*," dans *Les maîtres soufis et leurs disciples, III^e-v^e siècles de l'hégire (IX^e-XI^e s.) : enseignement, formation et transmission*, eds Geneviève Gobillot et Jean-Jacques Thibon, Beirut, Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2012, p. 35-53.

204 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-āṭār*, I, p. 79-80. The story is also reported by Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣṭiyā'*, Cairo, Maṭba' al-sa'āda, 1932-1938, 10 vols, VIII, p. 34-35 and Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīḥ madīnat Dimasq*, ed. 'Umar b. Garāma l-'Amrawī, Beirut, Dār al-fikr, 1995-1998, 80 vols, LXI, p. 401.

205 Love for the Prophet was not a typical feature of early renunciants. See Jean-Jacques Thibon, "Transmission du hadith et modèle prophétique chez les premiers soufis," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 178 (avril-juin 2017), p. 71-88, esp. p. 71-72; Masotta, *Les premiers ascètes en Islam d'après la Ḥilyat al-awliyā' de Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī*, p. 442.

Typically, dream narratives act as vehicles of an authoritative message of truth.²⁰⁶ In this case, the message revolves around the intimate relationship between love and a special place in the next world. The people involved into the narratives are early ascetics renowned for their renunciant attitudes towards the world, and a later Sufi (Ibn Ḥafif). In both narratives, love is a glue prompting the inclusion of outsiders (Ibn Ḥafif and Ibrāhīm b. al-Adham) among the elected. It is not simply a source of salvation, but of future proximity to God and the Prophet in the Hereafter (although not explicitly specified). Together the two stories work demonstrate the Prophets' words reported by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn in many chains and variants: "Man will be with whom he loves."

The scholars from whom Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn picks his stories (al-Bardānī and al-Sulamī) and those he mentions (Abū Nu'aym's *Dīkr al-muḥibbīn*) have something in common. They lived in the same period, at the end of the 4th/10th and beginning of the 5th/11th century and were Hadith scholars. Abū Nu'aym and al-Sulamī were also both Sufis and Ṣāfi'īs – the latter scholar more committed than the former. Their famous *ṭabaqāt* works erected bridges between early Islamic renunciant piety and the *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) of their time and accommodated the latter within the mainstream Sunnism of the period. In fact, both scholars engaged in Hadith transmission and liked to stress this as their main area of scholarly activity.²⁰⁷ Their model of Islamic piety clearly attracted the pious, prophet-centered, Sunni traditionist, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimaṣqī.

A last bunch of traditions complements what has thus far been gathered. In these *ḥadīths*, love for the Prophet is further qualified and quantified. Quoting from the *Ṣaḥīḥān* and Abū Dā'ūd, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn asserts that it is not merely any love that the Prophet recommends, but a love that is greater than that which one feels for parents, children, or the self.²⁰⁸ The last tradition is again reported on the authority of Anas b. Malik, to whom the Prophet told: "Oh my son, if you are able to enter morning and evening without having deceit for anybody in your heart, so do it.' Then, he said to me: 'Oh my son, this is part of my *sunna*. And whoever vivifies my *sunna*, verily he loves me, and whoever loves me, he will be with me in Paradise" (*yā bunayy wa-dālika min sunnatī wa-man aḥyā sunnatī fa-qad aḥabbanī wa-man aḥabbanī kāna ma'ī*

206 About dreams: Lory, *Le rêve et ses interprétations en islam*, esp. p. 131-136, 145-162 and the various studies by Leah Kinberg.

207 Jean-Jacques Thibon, *L'œuvre d' Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, 325 (937)-412 (1021) et la formation du soufisme*, Damascus, Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2009, p. 131-139, 510-519; Masotta, *Les premiers ascètes en Islam d'après la Ḥilyat al-awlīyā' de Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī*, esp. p. 426-433; Christopher Melchert, "Early Renunciants as Ḥadīth transmitters," *The Muslim World* 92 (2002), p. 407-418.

208 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi' al-ātār*, I, p. 80-81.

fī l-ğanna).²⁰⁹ Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn then proceeds as he does throughout the text, first specifying where else the *ḥadīth* has been cited – in this case, in Abū ‘Īsā al-Tirmidī’s *Ġāmi‘* – then commenting upon the various links of the *isnād*.

2.2.4 Pious Action: Praying for the Prophet by His Grave

Cultivating salvific feelings of love towards the person of the Prophet was part of the vision and purpose in *Ġāmi‘ al-ātār*. This could be done not only by recollecting memories of the Prophet’s life and interiorizing his personal qualities, but also by means of pious action. This last point is well illustrated in the final *faṣl* of *Ġāmi‘ al-ātār* dedicated to “What the Prophet left behind after his death” (*faṣl fī mā taraka-hu l-nabī ba‘d wafāti-hi*). After having reported on the Prophet’s possessions, the *faṣl* seals the end of the work by returning to the theme of his death. As usual, clusters of Hadith are quoted which are thematically organized around the following special prerogatives attached to Muḥammad’s grave (*al-ḥaṣā’iṣ al-muta‘alliqa bi-qabri-hi l-šarīf*): his grave emanates signs of divine favour, such as thousands of angles circling it and praying for him; his life and death were a blessing for believers given how in Heaven the Prophet will intercede with God to ask forgiveness for men’s bad actions and to praise their good ones; Muḥammad calls upon believers to pray for him as a way to show him gratitude and affection and as a means of seeking personal salvation. Accordingly, praying for and saluting the Prophet is presented by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn as “among the most meritorious acts which draw close to Muḥammad, the purest acts of obedience and greatest good deeds” (*min afḍal al-qurbāt wa-azkā l-tā‘āt wa-a‘zam al-ḥasanāt*).²¹⁰ Believers are urged to pray by the Prophet’s grave. The author explains that “The Hadith and traditions (*ātār*) on the merit of praying and greeting our Lord and the Messenger of God are a great deal. We restricted ourselves only to some of those related to [his] noble grave”, for fear of losing concision (*wa-l-aḥādīth wa-l-ātār fī faḍl al-ṣalāt wa-l-salām ‘alā sayyidi-nā rasūl Allāh kaṭīra ġiddan iqtaṣarnā min ba‘ḍi-hā ‘alā l-muta‘alliqa bi-l-qabr al-šarīf faqaṭ*).²¹¹

What comes next is a cascade of traditions, one after another converging on the merits of *ziyāra*, the most important being intercession to the visitor on the part of the Prophet.²¹² By now, we are familiar with the author’s technique

209 *Ibid.*, I, p. 81. Tirmidī, *Ġāmi‘, Kitāb al-‘Ilm* (41), *bāb Mā gā’a fī l-aḥd bi-l-sunna wa-ğtināb al-bida‘* (16).

210 See Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ġāmi‘ al-ātār*, VIII, p. 128.

211 See *ibid.*, VIII, respectively p. 94-98, 99-100, 101-128; quotation from p. 128.

212 *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 128-141.

of reporting parallel and divergent versions of these traditions and reviewing *isnāds* with an accurate eye for his sources.²¹³ He is also keen to mention his own transmissions.²¹⁴ Finally, he is fully aware of the contentious nature of many of Hadith regarding *ziyāra*. In fact, he does not quote from the *Ṣaḥīḥān* because the traditions he reports are not sound enough to be found there. Yet, he is thoroughly willing to concede these traditions their full devotional import:

وفيما قدّمنا الترغيب في فضل الزيارة التي أقامت بها الأمة للدين شعاره فزيارة قبر النبي عليه أفضل السلام والصلاة سنة من سنن أهل الإسلام وهي قربةٌ تُجمع عليها وفضيلة مرغّب فيها مندوب إليها وأحاديثها ملتقاة بالقبول والامتنال وإن كان في بعض إسنادهما مقال ولا يتكلم فيها بما يردّها إلا كل مخذول ولا يطعن فيها بالوضع إلا كل مرتاب جهول نعوذ بالله من الخذلان والشقاوة والحرامان.

What we presented here is meant to awake desire for the merit of *ziyāra* that the community performs as the banner of its religion. In fact, visiting the grave of the Prophet – the best of prayers and peace be upon Him – is one of the *sunna* of the people of Islam, it is an agreed upon deed which draws one closer to God, a desirable and recommendable meritorious action. Its Hadith are met with approval and consensus even if in some of their chains there is contention. Nobody discusses their refutation, but the forsaken. And nobody discredits them with the charge of fabrication, but the doubtful ignorant. We seek refuge in God from abandonment, misery, and deprivation.²¹⁵

In so writing, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn once more acts in accordance with the demands of the Hadith etiquette of his time. Namely, that weak Hadith could be transmitted and acted upon in matters of *tarjīb* and *tarhīb* (tempting people with the joys in Paradise and terrifying them with the horrors of Hell) edifying stories and parables (*al-qīṣaṣ wa-l-amṭāl*), admonishments (*mawā'iz*), or reports relating the meritorious values of certain (devotional) actions (*faḍā'il*

213 For instance, when assessing the transmitter Sawwār b. Maymūn Abū Ḡarrāḥ al-'Abdī, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn draws on al-Ḍahabī. He writes: "al-Ḍahabī said in what I found written by him in his book *Visiting the Prophet* – which is a thin collection (*ḡuz' laṭīf*) [...]" then he quotes from the source and signals the end of the quotation (*intahā*). *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 131.

214 *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 132-133, 134.

215 *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 141.

al-a'māl).²¹⁶ His was a mainstream position holding that when a meritorious action was in question, the weakness of the *ḥadīth* recommending it was not an issue.²¹⁷ In other words, his position gave priority to popular devotional practices over questions of reliability and authenticity. In his own words: "Acting upon it [i.e. a weak *ḥadīth*] is considered permissible according to the majority" (*yağūzu l-'amal bi-hi 'inda l-ğumhūr*).²¹⁸

"And the first who visited the Prophet's grave – as far as we know – was his daughter Faṭīma" (*wa-awwal man zāra qabr al-nabī – fī-mā a'lam – ibnatu-hu Fāṭima*). She was perhaps also the first one to utter an elegy lamenting his death.²¹⁹ With the image of a daughter in mourning for the loss of her father, *Ġāmi' al-ātār* draws to a close.

On the whole, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn shares a language of Prophetic devotion typical of the Islamic piety of his time.²²⁰ Content-wise, there is nothing unique to it, but such language does show that *Ġāmi' al-ātār* – a Hadith-oriented *sīra* – was intended to nurture the veneration of the Prophet in practice as well.

Conclusion

Recent scholarship has engaged with both the deeply rooted and highly pervasive Hadith transmission culture of the later Middle period as well as the local intensification of sober *mawlid* writings and Hadith-injected *Sira* in 8th/14th-century Damascus. The life and work of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimašqī, born and bred in that city between the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries, display a culmination of these elements. Although often associated with Ibn Taymiyya and Ḥanbalīs because of his *Radd al-wāfir* as well as his commitment to Hadith scholarship and transmission, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn shared little with the provocative and outspoken personality of Ibn Taymiyya, nor was he a worldly and powerful man of the sort of Ibn Ḥağar al-'Asqalānī. Perhaps this explains why he has remained neglected by modern scholars working in Western languages.

216 See *id.*, *al-Tarğīḥ li-ḥadīth ṣalāt al-taṣbiḥ*, p. 36, discussed by Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 96-100; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣahrazūrī, *Ulūm al-ḥadīth*, p. 103; English translation, *id.*, *An Introduction to the Science of Ḥadīth*, p. 80.

217 See Jonathan A.C. Brown, "Even If It's Not True It's True: Using Unreliable Ḥadīths in Sunni Islam," *Islamic Law and Society*, 18 (2011), p. 1-52.

218 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Tarğīḥ li-ḥadīth ṣalāt al-taṣbiḥ*, p. 36.

219 *Id.*, *Ġāmi' al-ātār*, VIII, p. 141-142 (quotation from p. 141).

220 Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, p. 99-104 on belief in *ṣafā'a* and the merits of *taṣliya*. On *ziyāra*, the standard reference remains Christopher Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt*, Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Islamic History and Civilization," 22), 1999.

Yet precisely the fact that he was a rather mainstream scholarly personality makes of him a representative voice of the local devotional culture towards the Prophet of the later Middle Period, the key elements of which converge in his *Ġāmi' al-ātār fī siyar wa-mawlid al-muhtār*.

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was himself an expression of the intense veneration towards the Prophet that took shape in the period, of the post canonical Hadith culture of his time and the vigorous transmission of the Prophet's legacy that went along with it. In the later Middle Period, Sira, the narrative literary genre closely associated with recollecting memories of the Prophet's life and person, became a diverse repository of literary texts. Moreover, this genre was being regularly studied, transmitted, written, and consumed in a variety of spaces and by a variety of people. This article suggests that the popularity, fondness, and respect for Sira can be fruitfully put in relation with the growing devotion towards the person of the Prophet that was in turn fueled by *mawlid* celebrations, the intensification of Hadith studies, and its transmission. The scope of a rich work like *Ġāmi' al-ātār* can be grasped when read against the background of this scholarly and devotional commitment to the Prophet's legacy.

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's written output helps make sense of his scholarly interests and religious worldview in particular in relation to *Ġāmi' al-ātār*. The structure and contents of this massive work show that what initially appears to be an encyclopaedic Hadith collection was a massive collection of chronologically arranged traditions recalling the most significant phases of the Prophet's existence as well as his unique qualities. There is no doubt that the author conceived this work to be a *sīra*, as he explicitly refers to it. So too does the copyist of the Damascus Zāhiriyya manuscript used as the basis for the current edition of the text. Moreover, *Ġāmi' al-ātār* exhibits most, if not all, of the features that by the time characterized narrative memories of the life of the Prophet. Namely, a substantial preoccupation for chronology and chronological arrangement, glosses, poetry, genealogy, and Qur'anic infusion into the recounted stories. All of this is kept together by a vigilant narrative eye which defies the literary and fragmented nature of Hadith and traditions.

The discipline of Hadith intervenes substantially in this work. It is so present not only because it was Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's primary field of enquiry, but also because it was a powerful way of connecting to the Prophet, and through him to God. In brief, the *isnād* was not only a validating tool, but also a transmission of prophetic presence.²²¹ In the opening pages of *Iftitāh al qārī li-Ṣaḥīḥ*

221 Denis Gril effectively speaks of the *isnād* as: "less as a means of authentication than as a transmission of [prophetic] presence." Denis Gril, "Hadith in the work of Ibn 'Arabī: The uninterrupted chain of prophecy," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society*, 50 (2011),

al-Buḥārī, an effective picture of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's grand idea on the status of *Sunna* as well as its transmitters forcefully emerges. Here, the *Sunna* of the Prophet is presented as "an inspiration from God too" (i.e. next to the Qur'ān), and is thus given the status of the revealed word.²²² Accordingly, it was God who appointed for the *Sunna* the men (*riḡāl*) who went in search of it, collected it and validated its chains "with which God honored this community."²²³ Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn produces a hyperbolic inventory of what the *Sunna* includes:

وفيها [...] بيان مغازي رسول الله وسراياه وبعوثه وكتبه وأحكامه وأقضيته ومواعظه ووصاياه ومعجزاته وأيامه وصفاته وأخلاقه وآدابه وأحواله إلى حين مماته وذِكر أزواجه وأولاده وأصحابه ونشر فضائلهم ومناقبهم وأقوالهم في الشريعة [...].

[...] The illustration of his campaigns, expeditions, missions, writings, decisions and rulings, exhortations, recommendations, miracles, his days, qualities, nature (*aḥlāq*), manners and states (*aḥwāl*), until the time of his death; the mention of his wives, children, sons-in-law, and Companions; the spread of their merits and virtues, and their sayings on the Law [...] ²²⁴

In sum, the *Sunna* is replete with details about the Prophet's life, and as such its massive presence in a *sīra* work should not surprise us.

In parallel, and by means of Hadith, the role of transmitters is presented by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn in heavily charged terms. They are the Prophet's successors (*ḥulafā' rasūl Allāh*), those in whose favor Muḥammad supplicates, God's *abdāl* on earth, His friends (*awliyā' li-Llāh*) and those who divert affliction (*al-balā'*) from the community with their search for Hadith (*bi-riḡlat aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*).²²⁵ They will be saved on the Day of Resurrection and be the protectors (*ḥurrās*) of the earth.²²⁶ These ideas lend the plethora of Hadith criticism that populates

p. 45-76. I am here quoting from the online version available at: <https://ibnarabisociety.org/ahadith-in-the-work-of-ibn-arabi-denis-gril/>, last accessed December 14th, 2021.

222 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ifṭitāḥ al-qārī' li-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*, in *Maḡmū' fī-hi rasā'il*, p. 322 (*wa-l-sunna l-nabawiyya hiya waḥy min Allāh ta'ālā ayḍan*) and p. 321: "Gabriel – peace be upon him – used to let the Sunna descend on the Prophet as he let the Qur'ān descend on him, and he used to teach it as he taught the Qur'ān" (also quoted in *al-Radd al-wāfir*, p. 6).

223 See Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, p. 16-27; Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Ifṭitāḥ al-qārī' li-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*, in *Maḡmū' fī-hi rasā'il*, p. 322: *wa-qad naṣaba Llāh ta'ālā li-l-sunna riḡāl^{am} raḡalū fī ṭalabi-hā* [...].

224 *Ibid.*

225 *Ibid.*, p. 323-324.

226 *Ibid.*, p. 326, 328.

Ġāmi' al-ātār greater meaning. It was not only the scholarly field in which the author excelled, but also the activity through which Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn claimed his place among the prestigious men who seek the *Sunna* outlined in *Iftitāḥ al qārī*.

Ġāmi' al-ātār is a complex work: long, bulky, and replete with Hadith erudition on the one hand, filled with poetry and dotted with simple doctrinal points on the other. Primarily inspired by the affection for the Prophet which suffused *mawlid* celebrations, most likely, *Ġāmi' al-ātār* was not intended to be recited in *mawlid* festivals but studied. The author's initial statement about his purpose is an important key to comprehending the text. There, he states that recalling the main landmarks of the Prophet's life and his very unique qualities is a way of reaching him and attaining his very qualities. The author thus calls for a sort of spiritual mimesis, an inner attachment that aims at spiritual elevation and salvation by cultivating the feelings of love that assure believers a secure place near Muḥammad in the next world. Although the Prophet was no longer alive, his presence could be evoked by recalling his existence and unmatched perfection, and so much better if this was done by means of Hadith.

The reception of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's *Ġāmi' al-ātār* remains to be studied, as does his relationship to the local Prophet-centered Sufism that tenuously peeped in at various stages in this article. The affinity or divergence of this work with other Hadith-infused *sīras* and *mawlid* texts also deserve closer scrutiny. I began by asking about the place of Sira in the veneration of the Prophet in the later Middle Period, especially in relation to Hadith. I hope to have demonstrated that Sira was a form of literary and cultural memory regarding the life of Muḥammad. At least as fashioned in a text like *The Compilation of Traditions on the Birth and Life of the Chosen One*, Sira had little to do with historicity, and much more with making the Prophet alive and present by cultivating the memory of his perfection and ongoing existence.

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