

**AN ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPT ON CHIVALRY
FROM THE LATE CIRCASSIAN MAMLUK PERIOD (*)
(A Preliminary Report)**

By

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In March 1969, on the occasion of the Cairo Millenary, I gave a brief description of this manuscript. The purpose of my contribution was but the presentation of a document which seemed to me as being of significance for our knowledge of the late Circassian Mamluk military history.

At that time I reported that known to me were only *eight* of the 46 coloured miniatures illustrating this valuable text. Thus I appealed to libraries, museums, and owners of private collections to assist me in tracing all the folia of the manuscript in view of its publication.

I am very happy to announce that Dr. Edmund de Unger, owner of a distinguished private collection of Islamic objects of art, has kindly complied to my request. He came to Cairo in the beginning of January 1970 and brought me 25 photographs of the miniatures illustrating the pages of the manuscript being in his possession. He informed me that these pages he acquired from other collections in Switzerland, Paris, and elsewhere. His aim is to obtain as much as possible of the manuscript, of which he at present owns the major part of both text and illustrations.

I want here to acknowledge this courtesy which will enable me to publish the manuscript in the near future.

Meanwhile I can say that the document deals with chivalry, a subject already dealt with by a great number of other manuscripts. The first reference work giving the titles of these manuscripts is probably Alois Sprenger's book in Arabic : "Fihrist el-kutub allati narghab an nabta'aha," published in London in 1840 which is better known as "*Munster Fihrist*," after Lord Munster,

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a British official in India, who commissioned the work. Sprenger cites therein more than 700 titles of manuscripts on chivalry.

— In 1848, *M. Reinaud* published in the *Journal Asiatique* an essay "De l'Art Militaire chez les Arabes au Moyen âge".

— 1850, and in the same periodical, *Quatremère* published another study on the subject.

— In the 20th century, among other works indicating the titles of manuscripts on chivalry, we may quote :

Louis Mercier, "La Parure des Cavaliers et l'Insigne des Preux," Paris, 1922-24, being a translation and publication of the manuscript by Ali ben 'Abdel-Rahman ben Huzail al-Andalusi, written in the second half of the 14th century A.D., upon request of Mohamed V., Sultan of Granada.

— *L. Mercier* also published another book under the title "La Chasse et les Sports chez les Arabes," Paris 1927.

— In "Der Islam" *Helmut Ritter* commented on *Mercier's* first book in 1929 in an article : "La Parure des Cavaliers und die Literatur der ritterlichen Künste" where he mentioned the titles of about sixty other manuscripts which were till then unknown and which he detected in Istanbul libraries.

— *Brockelmann* added to the list in his encyclopaedia "Geschichte der arabischen Literatur."

— *Aziz Suryal Atiya* published in London in 1938 his book "The Crusades in the Later Middle-Ages" and delivered at Chicago University in 1951 two other lectures on "The Crusades, old Ideas and new Conceptions."

— In 1955, *Abdel Rahman Zaki* published in "Cahier d'histoire Egyptienne" his article on "Military Literature of the Arabs." The same author, in 1963, published in "Glaudius," Madrid, his "A Preliminary Bibliography of Medieval Arabic Military Literature," while a chapter under the title "The Art of War" deals with the same subject in his last book in Arabic "Turath al-Kahira al'ilmi wa'l fanni" published in 1969.

— In 1957, *Gerhard Zoppoth* published in "Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes" an article "Mohamed ibn Mangli, ein ägyptischer Offizier und Schriftsteller des 14. Jahrhunderts." *Zoppoth* had obtained his Ph.D. from Vienna Univer-

sity through a thesis hitherto unpublished, analysing a manuscript with the title "An Introduction to Chivalry or War Policy by Aristotle."

— *David Ayalon* published among other works in London in 1956 his book "Gunpowder and Firearms in the Mamluk Kingdom. A Challenge to a Medieval Society." In 1961 he also published "Notes on Furusiyya. Exercises and Games in the Mamluk Sultanate," and he is the contributor of the item "Furusiyya in the Mamluk State" in the "Encyclopaedia of Islam" Vol. II, 1965.

— Finally I refer to *George T. Scanlon's* book "A Muslim Manual of War" (American University Press, Cairo, 1961) being the translation and publication of the book "Tafriḍj al-kurub fi tadbir al-hurub" by Omar ben Ibrahim al-Ausi al-Ansari, who died in 1408 A.D. Scanlon also delivered a contribution at the Congress of Orientalists held in Moscow in 1960 on "Source Material for a History of Medieval Moslem Warfare" published in 1963.

— Further I quote also the article of *J.D. Latham* "Notes on the Mamluk Horse-archers" in BSOAS, 1969.

All the manuscripts mentioned in all these works are of different periods starting from the crusades at the end of the 12th century A.D. The Arabs had then shown a new interest in the organization of their armed forces, of their arms and of their fighting and blockade techniques in order to repel their invaders, the crusaders.

Thereafter, warfare and chivalry became a regular teaching subject in the Mamluk age. To this epoch dates back the book "*Al-furusiyya bi-rasm al-djihad*" by Najm ad-Din Ayub al-Ahdal, who died in 1294 A.D., and which became a reference work in this connection.

It is known that most of the manuscripts at hand deal with a single subject of the military art such as : arrow-shooting, the use of sword and shield or of the lance. Training in lance-fighting was the subject of many a book, of which I would like to quote "*Al-furusiyya wa'ilm al-rumh*" by Badr el-Din Baktut al-Rammah al-Khazindari, who died in 1311 A.D.

Among manuscripts dealing with chivalry and warfare as a whole subject, one of the most important is "*Nihayat al-so'l wal umniya fi ta'lim a'mal al-furusiyya*" by Mohamed ben Issa ben

Ismail al-Hanafi al-Aksuray, written in the last quarter of the 14th century A.D. and divided into 12 chapters. This manuscript was studied by the Pakistani student Abdel-Laith Sayed Mohamed Lutf al-Haqq, in a thesis which was awarded the Ph.D. by London University in 1955 but which has not been published hitherto.

From the forementioned reference works and titles contained therein, we know that there are numerous manuscripts on warfare techniques and chivalry preserved in the libraries and museums of the world, including the Egyptian National Library and the Manuscript Section of the Arab League in Cairo.

This is an abundant wealth, but we state that of this great number of manuscripts only four have hitherto been studied or published :

1. *Heliat al-fursan wa shi'ar al-shug'an*, written in Andalusia in the 14th century A.D. (8th cent. A.H.) and published by Mercier in Paris in 1922-24.
2. *War Policy* by Aristotle, copied in the 17th century A.D. by order of the Ottoman Sultan Mohamed, son of Sultan Murad. This copy has been studied by Gerhard Zoppoth in a thesis which was awarded the Ph.D. degree by Vienna University in 1952, but which is not yet published.
3. *Nihayat al-so'l wal umniya fi ta'lim al-furusiyya*, written in the last quarter of the 14th century A.D., studied by the Pakistani Abdul Laith Sayed Mohamed Lotf al-Haqq in a thesis awarded the Ph.D. by London University in 1955, and which is not yet published.
4. *Tafriidj al-kurub fi tadbir al-hurub*, whose author died in 1408 A.D. This work has been translated and published by George T. Scanlon (American University Press, Cairo, 1961).

This means that in the field of studies of manuscripts dealing with warfare and chivalry there still are big gaps :

1. We need first a general bibliography of all available manuscripts indicating the title, a summary of the contents, the author, the place where the manuscript is preserved, the references where it is cited, the other copies made out of the original and the places where they are preserved, etc.

2. We need a study and a publication of some of these manuscripts having particular importance for the recording of Arab history in general, and the history of the Mamluk period in Egypt in particular. May we recall here that, owing to their excellent military techniques, the Mamluks repelled both the Mongols and the Crusaders.
3. We further need a study of the arms and warcrafts quoted in the texts, and of how they were used and how their use developed and changed with time.
4. We lack a technical study of the coloured illustrations decorating these texts and which are likely to supply precious data on fashions, costumes and traditions prevailing at different epochs, and about the art of painting itself and a study about the artistic style and its evolution.
5. The manuscripts contain expressions and terms which are unknown to us and not to be found in the dictionaries we have. This opens an interesting field for linguistic research.

There is no doubt that the attempts which could be made to fill these gaps would open new horizons in our knowledge in such various fields as history, arts, sciences, military techniques and technical terminology.

Quite naturally all these manuscripts have one common feature : they contain no allusion to firearms. Under firearms we understand here cannons and rifles which shoot bullets. A lot of the manuscripts have been written at the beginning or the end of the Mamluk Circassian period, but still they make no reference to firearms.

It is known that the Mamluks used firearms at the beginning of the seventies of the 14th century A.D. and Egypt was the first country of the Middle East using this type of weapon with unquestionable superiority and skill. In the Military Museum of Istanbul there is a cannon bearing the name of the Sultan Kait-bay. (Pl.XX).

But still the Mamluks did not lend much interest to the training in the use of firearms. It seems that they, for themselves, were reluctant to use them and left this "inferior art of warfare"

to their soldiers, Turkomans, Maghrabins, and black slaves. In their belief other weapons than firearms offered a better opportunity for gallantry, skill and chivalry. This was the basic cause of the Ottomans' victory over the Mamluks and of the subsequent Turkish occupation of Egypt. The brave and gallant Mamluks remained helpless against the firearms of the Turks.

The German traveller Arnold von Harff, who visited Cairo on his way to Jerusalem in 1497 A.D. and saw the revolt of the Emir Qansuh Khamsumea against Sultan el-Nasser Mohamed ben Kait-bay, reports that Qansuh had a small cannon which did not enable him to assail the citadel, and "that, if he had other guns as those we have (in Germany), he would have quickly achieved victory." (1) This is confirmed by the historian Ibn Iyas in his book "*Bada'i el-Zuhur fi waka'i el-duhur*" where it is reported that Qansuh installed a *Makhale* on the Mokattam Hills opposite the Citadel and cast with it projectiles on the yard of the Sultan but to no avail. (2)

But though being mute on firearms, the manuscripts speak of other inflammable or explosive materials like naphta and salt-petre and describe how to use them. (see description of Pl. VIII in the List of Plates).

As for our manuscript it agrees with other manuscripts in all these matters, but it has, upon all of them, the privilege of being a detailed treatise of all subjects related to warfare and chivalry, and by its numerous coloured miniatures explaining the text. Such a number of illustrations is, to our knowledge, not to be found in any other manuscript.

In 1928 Issa al-Ma'luf described the manuscript as it was at that time, i.e. before being scattered over several countries as it is to-day. He said: "I know many works on warfare art, chivalry and games of the Arabs, I have acquired some of these works, also illustrated, but I consider that this book is the most important of them all." He adds that the manuscript he thus praises was composed of 184 pages with 16 diagrams for the mobilization of troops, and 46 splendid coloured miniatures illustrating the text. However, even at that time, the book was in the shape of loose pads which had been bound and covered without order, with missing sheets and holes in the folia.

(1) Die Pilgerfahrt des Ritters Arnold von Harff in den Jahren 1496 bis 1499. Cöln 1860, S. 87 — 88.

(2) Ibn Iyas, ed. M. Mostafa, Vol. III, p. 343.

We are grateful to Mr. Ma'luf that by his description the knowledge of a valuable Arabic-Egyptian manuscript has been transmitted to us. In fact, what he wrote is the only description I was able to find referring to the condition of this manuscript in 1928. I don't want to discuss here what else he wrote as commentary and explanation and I leave this for another occasion.

The manuscript has been purchased by an antiquities dealer in 1928. In 1955 and 1956 he sold to the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo three sheets (1) of it, each of which contained a coloured miniature. He then sold three other miniatures (2) to a private collector. When I became aware of these transactions, the dealer had only two miniatures and some sheets left. As for the rest, he said, he had sold it in several countries. He gave me permission to photograph and publish the two miniatures (Pls. XV and XVI). Thus I knew of only eight of the coloured miniatures illustrating the chapters of the manuscript.

Owing to the loss of some sheets, I have so far been unable to know either the name of the author or the title of the book, and I could not find these informations in any reference book.

The measurement of a sheet is 16,5 × 24 cms and each page contains 15 lines. The headlines are written in red ink, the text itself in black. The writing is in Mamluk Naskhi and very clear and easy to read, yet the calligrapher uses punctuation generously and without any reason and he does not care for orthographical or grammatical rules.

Among other chapters of this manuscript I cite : Horse and colt riding and training, — the game of the stake, — foot-bow shooting on horseback, — classification of bows, — sword bearing, — lance-bearing, — shield game on foot and on horseback, —

(1) These three pages are registered at the Museum under Nos. 18019, 18235 and 18236. I have published them in 1958, cf. Mohamed Mostafa, Guide to the Exhibition "Unity in Islamic Art", p.26, pls.16, 17 and 18. In April 1969 a description of the miniatures 18019 and 18235 was published in the Guide to the Islamic Art Exhibition, held at the Semiramis Hotel on the occasion of the Cairo Millenium. The description indicates that the drawings are taken from a manuscript on chivalry and that the figures wear Zumut on their heads. It however states that these miniatures are from the 8th century H. (XIV. cent. A.D.). cf. Exhibition of Islamic Art in Egypt, 969-1517, 4.-30. April 1969, Semiramis Hotel, No. 279a and 279b, pp. 292 and 293.

(2) One of them has been published in 1960 in the Periodical "Bustan" cf. Mohamed Mostafa, Darstellung des täglichen Lebens in der islamischen Kunst, in "Bustan", Heft 2, S.33-48. Abb.23. Wien 1960.

“kobok” throwing from a galloping horse, — lance throwing, — riding a horse without saddle, — the manufacture of helmet-breaking stakes, — arrow-shooting and defects of the bow.

The author also speaks of the art of using naphta, saltpetre and cannons. He gives numerous descriptions of various arms, of their use, of the ways of training in such a use and of the methods of the maintainance of the arms. Illustrations accompany this literature.

An inspection of the available sheets and illustrations of the manuscript convinced me that it has been written in Egypt in the late Circassian Mamluk period, probably in the reign of Sultan Qansuh el-Ghuri at the time of the Ottoman invasion. To this opinion I was led by the following reasons :

1. The technical terms and other expressions used in the text are already known to us from historians who wrote about Egypt in the late Mamluk period.
2. The linguistic style, interspersed with colloquial expressions, is identical to that of Ibn Iyas, the historian of that period.
3. The rules of handwriting are similar to those which prevailed in manuscripts at that time.
4. The artist who painted the miniatures was keen to reproduce the costumes of his time, and to colour them with the original colours. Mamluks still under training at the late Circassian period wore, during their military exercises in barracks, a garment called “*kibr*” while their dress for going out was the “*malluta*” (plural : *malalit*). Their head-gear was the red “*zamt*” (pl. *zumut*).

We know that the *zamt* was reserved to the Mamluks as of the second half of the 9th century H. (15th cent. A.D.) by order of Sultan Barsbay, as reported by Ibn Iyas in “*Bada’i al-Zuhur*” (Ed. Bulaq, vol. 2, p. 21) issued in the year 841 H. (1438 A.D.) prohibiting the common people and the peasants from wearing the *zamt* which henceforth became a privilege for the Mamluks.

Ibn Iyas also reports in his book that the Ottoman Governor issued in the month of Ramadan 923 H. (1517 A.D.) an order forbidding the Mamluks from wearing the Ottoman soldiers’ uniform, and enjoining them to put on the red *zamt* and the

malluta while walking in the streets of Cairo. (Ibn Iyas, Ed. M. Mostafa, vol. 5, p. 213).

The Mamluks have *zumut* on their heads in a painting preserved in the Louvre Museum by a disciple of Gentile Bellini, representing the reception by Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri in the yard of Cairo Citadel, of a Mission from Venice headed by Domenico Trevisiano which had come to Cairo in 1512 to make apologies to the Sultan of Egypt. (Pl. XVIII).

The traveller Arnold von Harff (in his book p. 104) gives also a sketch of a standing Mamluk wearing the *zamt* on his head (Pl. XVII). In our manuscript this head-dress is illustrated in the conventional shape : it is red and downy. The Coptic Museum in Cairo owns a *zamt* (Pl. IXX) (published by Leo Mayer in his book "Mamluk Costume" p. 33, Pl. XI, 2).

From this preliminary report we can conclude that we are confronted with a manuscript of major importance for the study of the military art of the Mamluks, of their costume, their arms, their horses, their methods of mobilizing troops, their general military position at the eve of the Ottoman conquest.

This is the only manuscript of its kind known to us. It complements the data, historic as well as linguistic and military contained in Ibn Iyas book "Bada'i al-Zuhur" and in Ibn Tulun al-Salihi's book "Mufakahat al-Khillan fi Hawadith az-Zaman" (ed. M. Mostafa) as well as in the book by Ibn Zunbul on the Ottoman conquest of Syria and Egypt.

NOTES AND LIST OF PLATES

Plates I — XIV are drawings or miniatures illustrating the pages of this manuscript in the part preserved in the Collection of Dr. Edmund de Unger in London.

Plate I :

"Maidan Siadj Al Muluk wa Siradj al Muluk, sunnifa bi-Khurasan," being a plan for mobilizing troops in view of a battle. The author of the manuscript describes the position of the forces : the Sultan in the centre, surrounded by rows of soldiers, each row has a commander or "bash." In this plan there are 16 "bash." The expression "sunnifa bi-Khurasan" which means "written in Khurasan" indicates that the plan is transcribed from a book written in Khurasan.

Plate II :

"Maidan halazon hindi, sunnifa fil hind," being a plan for mobilizing troops in view of a battle, from a book written in India.

The manuscript contains other plans for mobilization, probably transcribed from other books on chivalry and warfare, e.g. "Maidan al-Durr al-Manzum, Futuh Antakiyah," — "Maidan halazon murabba' turki," — "Maidan al-Karr wal Farr wal Dukhul wal Khurudj," — "Al-Midjrat tasnif al-Adjam."

Plate III :

"Buttiya mansuba 'ala Qundaq," meaning a cask on a bearer, for arrow-shooting exercises. The arrow should hit a hole in the front of the cask.

Plate IV :

Spearheads, a bow and arrows of different types. The author explains how they are made, and the use of each type.

Plate V :

Exercise on lance use. The target is a "buttiya" i.e. a cask, placed on a bearer ("qundaq"). The riding warrior should hit a hole in the cask.

Note that in all the miniatures the tails of the horses are tied up, as was the current practise under the Mamluks in Egypt. Garments and other objects are also adorned in the Mamluk style. All the Mamluks in these miniatures wear the headgear known as "zamt," which was red and all covered with long filaments giving it a furlike appearance. As for the "bash" his headgear was a small turban, the *takhfifa*. The dress of the Mamluks was a short robe, falling until the knees, called "*kibr*," or a long one reaching to the feet, according to their rank. Most of the Mamluks were bearded. The beard was an indication of age, young apprentices, still training in the use of arms, are beardless. Ibn Iyas reports that Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri had a round beard (cf. Bada'i al-Zuhur," ed. M. Mostafa, vol. 5, p. 87).

All this shows the importance of the manuscript, as casting light on the decorative elements, the style, the fashions, the weapons, the customs, the vocabulary, etc. of the Late Circassian Mamluk period.

Plate VI :

Using a lance having a hole into which is fastened a strong rope ending by a hook. The weapon is thrown at the neck of the riding opponent, it grips him by the collar and draws him aground. This picture confirms the date we have assigned to this manuscript, i.e. the Late Circassian Mamluk period, as it appears that this weapon was unknown to Ibn Iyas, the historian of this period. Ibn Iyas described the entrance of Ottoman troops into Syria and Egypt and mentioned their weapons, among which, so he said, "were lances with iron hooks with which, when they drew near the horseman, they snatched him from his mount and threw him aground" ("Bada'i al-Zuhur, ed. M. Mostafa, vol. V, p. 131).

Plate VII :

Two Horsemen wrestling and trying each to throw his opponent. Their lances have fallen to the ground, and each warrior is holding his opponent by the arms and trying to throw him from his horse. Their looks are obviously challenging. The author of the manuscript says "This is an art that the horseman must learn. The encounter is the first step in the fight"... He then describes how to wrestle on horseback.

Plate VIII :

The "Naftiya" or Naphtamen who used this oil as war material. The author describes their garments, their lances, the fires they kindled to scare off the enemy's horses and thus turn his assault into rout, the inflamed darts they threw to burn ships.

It is known that the Mamluks left the use of firearms to their Turkmen, Maghrebins and black slaves. Ibn Iyas refers to that on several occasions (e.g. op. cit. vol. 3, p. 343 and vol. 5, pp. 81, 103 and 131).

Plate IX :

The "Matraq" game. This was a kind of joust on foot or on horseback. The author explains the rules of the game and illustrates them with several pictures.

Plate X :

Striking clay with a sword to acquire striking power. The author describes the practice by indicating the weight of the

swords, their model, and the way of striking a wooden plank placed on a heap of sandy clay.

Weights are indicated in Egyptian "ratls," which confirms that the manuscript has been written in Egypt.

Plate XI :

Lance-fight training. The two jousters here have the lance-head covered with a ball, in order not to wound the partner.

Plate XII :

A rider training in the use of the lance. Here is his opponent a wooden statue, also riding and borne by a mobile "qundaq" or bearer. In the hand of the statue is a mace, to remind the rider that any mistake is likely to bring about a drastic retort. The rider therefore seems fully aware of the threat.

Plate XIII :

The method to make a mace. The manuscript describes the materials used for its making and the properties of the mace. The instrument is intended to break the helmet of the opponent, but in this miniature it has detached the whole head from the body.

Plate XIV :

Arrow-shooting from a galloping horse. Here two riders are competing in hitting a target mounted on a long bearer.

Plates XV and XVI are two pages from the manuscript. They belonged to the collection of Mr. Jacob Achérof, in Paris.

Plate XV :

A whole page including the miniature of two Mamluks training in the use of bow and arrow. The Mamluk to the right steps forward while holding his weapons, while his companion is beckoning as if he had understood some instruction.

Plate XVI :

A whole page also including the miniature of two Mamluks exercising with bow and arrows. The one at the right is on foot, the companion is on horseback and between them are arrows tucked into a holder.

Plate XVII :

A Mamluk wearing a zamt on his head. The zamt is covered with long downy threads. The sketch is made by Arnold von Harff as he had seen the Mamluk in Cairo in 1497 A.D. (reproduced from his book "Die Pilgerfahrt...", S. 104).

Plate XVIII :

Sultan el-Ghuri receiving a delegation from Venice in the year 1512 A.D. Standing around are Mamluks wearing "zumut" on their heads. This painting is the work of a disciple of the school of Gentile Bellini. The original is preserved in the Louvre in Paris.

Plate XIX :

The headgear known as "zamt." It is a hairy tissue, preserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. Reproduced from L.A. Mayer "*Mamluk Costume*," Pl. XI,2.

Plate XX :

A cannon bearing the name of Sultan Ashraf Abu'l Nasr Kaitbay (1468-1495 A.D.) kept at the Military Museum in Istanbul. It is 120 cms long. Reproduced from D. Ayalon, *Gunpowder*,