The mosque of Ibn Ḥajar lies nestled mid-way along the street of Bayn al-Sayārij inside the old city walls of Cairo (Figure 1). Local residents, beholding this modern structure standing on the street that was once known for its sesame oil refineries or sayārij (sing., sīrja), like to think that perhaps the original mosque was sponsored by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (773–852/1372–1449) long ago—centuries before it was rebuilt in 1398/1978. After all, his student, the famous historian Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (830–902/1427–97), lived nearby in this dense urban core that constituted Egypt’s seat of power during the late Mamluk era. Recalling Ibn Ḥajar’s own historical contributions as a renowned traditionist, residents of Bayn al-Sayārij fondly call the mosque Gāmiʿ Abū Ḥagar, according to local idiom and pronunciation.¹ Yet the memories of Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī and other late Mamluk-era scholars resonate far beyond the old city streets of Cairo, drenched in history. Ibn Ḥajar is primarily known for his seminal scholarship in the field of prophetic traditions or ḥadīth studies. However, he was also an accomplished poet. In fact, as this article reveals, one of the poems that Ibn Ḥajar included in his carefully crafted collection from the ninth/fifteenth century struck a deep chord of Muslim memories surrounding a restored Islamic caliphate. Far from the image of complete apathy to the Cairene ʿAbbasids that has long been conventional wisdom about Mamluk Egypt and Syria, Ibn Ḥajar’s panegyric for al-Mustaʿīn (r. 808–16/1406–14) lauded the caliph’s assumption of the sultanate as a restoration of legitimate rule to the blessed family of the Prophet. And although al-Mustaʿīn’s combined reign as sultan and caliph was short-lived, Ibn Ḥajar’s commemoration of it became a famous piece of

¹ Fieldwork, July 2016.
cultural lore down through the last years of the Mamluk Sultanate and past the Ottoman conquest of Egypt.

**IBN ĦAJAR, THE POET**

On 22 Sha’bān 773 / 29 February 1372, Ibn Hajar was born in the oldest parts of Cairo that predated the Fatimids, otherwise known as Miṣr al-ʿātiqa,
as al-Sakhâwî refers to it in his biography of his teacher. Ibn Hajar, who was called by his first name Ahmad during his childhood, was raised there as an orphan, after his father Nûr al-Dîn ‘Alî passed away in his late fifties on 13 Rajab 777/ 8 December 1375. Young Ahmad had not yet reached his fourth birthday, and he had already lost his mother Nîjâr bint Fâkhr al-Dîn Abî Bakr al-Ziftâwî beforehand. Later on, the little he was able personally to remember of his father was him saying: ‘The kunyâ of my son Ahmad is Abû l-Fâdîl.’ Nûr al-Dîn ‘Alî had been a minor judge who had studied both law and literature and composed excellent poetry of his own. He was the author of multiple diwâns and even hosted the famous poet Ibn Nubâtâ (d. 768/1366) in one of his nearby houses for a spell. Ibn Nubâtâ, moreover, noted down and appreciated his poetry. Nûr al-Dîn ‘Alî had also given his son Ahmad the kunyâ Abû l-Fâdîl in emulation of the Judge of Makka during the time that they visited the holy city together. Ahmad had been born following the death of another, older son who had been studying Islamic jurisprudence, and Shaykh Yahyâ al-Ṣanâﬁrî (d. 772/1371) had consoled the bereaved Nûr al-Dîn ‘Alî that God would bless him with another boy who would grow up to be a scholar. Accordingly, before his own death, Nûr al-Dîn ‘Alî selected guardians, one a wealthy merchant and the other a jurist, who would ensure a good literary and scholarly education for his offspring.2

Ibn Hajar began his schooling at a kuttâb around the age of five and completed his memorization of the Qur’ân by the age of nine; he also memorized introductory educational texts and listened in on the lessons of scholars. His sister, Sitt al-Râkb (770–98/1369–96), who had been seven when their father died, doted on him like a mother, even though

she was only a few years older. She too received a good education at the hands of their guardians as well as multiple ijāzas procured by her father; Ibn Hajar himself later commended her intellect, character, and abilities highly. She married among the prosperous Kharrūbī mercantile elite—apparently a relative of their guardian, Zaki al-Dīn Abū Bakr b. Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī al-Kharrūbī, who was the head of a prominent family of Kārimī merchants in the profitable Red Sea trade. When Ibn Hajar was twelve, it was Zaki al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī who took the boy to Makka and (belatedly by Mamluk standards) arranged for him to lead the tarāwīh prayers in the holy sanctuary as a young memorizer of the Qur’ān. After al-Kharrūbī’s death in 787/1385, Ibn Hajar continued his education and adhered to his other scholarly guardian Shaykh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Ibn al-Qaṭṭān (737–813/1337–1411), learning from him jurisprudence, Arabic, and mathematics, among other subjects. He became interested in history and the backgrounds of narrators of the prophetic tradition, and in 792/1390 Ibn Hajar pursued the literary arts and began composing poetry of his own, especially in praise of the Prophet. Then, in Ramadān 796/July 1394, Ibn Hajar met the preeminent traditionist al-Hāfīz Zayn al-Dīn al-İrāqi (725–806/1325–1403), who kindled the twenty-three-year old’s abiding interest in hadith studies and afforded him a decade-long tutelage.

Toward the beginning of the ninth/fifteenth century, Ibn Hajar married well (with the involvement of his guardian Ibn al-Qaṭṭān) in Şa‘bān 798/May 1396 and moved at the age of twenty-five from his father’s house along the Nile in Old Cairo to the former residence of a Mamluk deputy-sultan along the Cairene lane of Bahā’ al-Dīn. Ibn Hajar’s new abode used to belong to the deputy-sultan Sayf al-Dīn Mengu-Timūr al-Husāmī, whose fortunes had risen dramatically with those of his Mamluk superior and eventual ruler al-Malik al-Manṣūr Husām al-Dīn Lājīn in the seventh/thirteenth century. Mengu-Timūr also built next to his home a college, known as al-Madrasa al-Mankūṭīyya that was completed in Şafar 698/November 1298. Within a month, however, Mengu-Timūr was assassinated in a coup, shortly after the death of the

3 al-Sakhāwī, al-Jawāhir wa-l-durar, i. 114–16.
5 al-Sakhāwī, al-Jawāhir wa-l-durar, i. 104, iii. 1207–8.
sultan Lājin. But his grand dwelling stayed in the family, and when Ibn Ḥajar married the great-great-granddaughter of Mengu-Timūr, Uns Khātūn (ca. 780–867/ca. 1378–1462), it became their marital home. Additionally, Ibn Ḥajar assumed responsibility for al-Madrasa al-Mankūṭūmūriyya next door and began giving lectures there in Jumādā al-Thānī 812/October 1409. Among the multiple anecdotes discussing Ibn Ḥajar’s activities inside the college, we know that one scribe by the name of ‘Alī b. Muhammad al-Qayyīm read back a manuscript copy of Ibn Ḥajar’s own compilation of poetry to him for approval there in the year 838/1434–5. Similarly, Ibn Ḥajar dictated his important work Ḥisān al-mizān inside al-Madrasa al-Mankūṭūmūriyya in the mid-to-late 840s/1440s. And as Ibn Ḥajar’s fame and eminence grew substantially, the college was no longer attributed to Mengu-Timūr. It eventually became known as Madrasat Ibn Ḥajar—as Nur al-Dīn ‘Alī al-Sakhāwī attests in 889/1484, a few decades after Ibn Ḥajar’s death. With even greater passage of time, the remains became known as Gāmi‘ Abū Ḥagar. The residents of Bayn al-Sayārij Street were right; Ibn Ḥajar had been intimately associated with their mosque during his lifetime—only in his

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day it was part of a series of buildings encompassing a college, a mosque, and his residence\(^{11}\) (Figure 2).

\(^{11}\) al-Sakhāwī also mentions the adjacent *masjid* in his *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi*, vii. 31.
Moreover, the street itself, where Ibn Ḥajar lived from his mid-twenties until his death in his late seventies, reflects a microhistory of Egypt. In the Fatimid era, it was named after the military contingents stationed there, originally outside Bāb al-Futūḥ: al-Rayhāniyya and al-Waziriyya.\(^\text{12}\) With the end of the Fatimid caliphate and beginning of the Ayyubid dynasty under Saladin, the caliph’s former chamberlain al-ʿAmīr Bahā’ al-Dīn Qarāqūsh b. ʿAbdillāh al-Asadi moved there and lent the avenue his name. This ʿamīr is the same figure who built the citadel for Saladin and extended the city walls of Cairo in the sixth/twelfth century—and who has been on the receiving end of popular Egyptian jokes and uncomplimentary metaphors ever since the Ayyubid era.\(^\text{13}\) Thankfully, the lane came to be known as Bahā’ al-Dīn after the respectful honorific of its high-ranking resident—and not ʿarāʿūsh in apocryphal disparagement of his judgment. In the early Mamluk Sultanate, this prestigious Bahā’ al-Dīn Lane boasted the residence and madrasa of the deputy sultan Mengū-Tīmūr.\(^\text{14}\) And by the late Mamluk era, it vaunted buildings associated with the eminent jurist Sirāj al-Dīn al-Bulqīnī (724–805/1324–1403) and his scholastic family (including their madrasa and mausoleum) as well as Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (namely his home, adjacent mosque, and madrasa), along with other important sites.\(^\text{15}\) But by the late nineteenth century, Egypt’s political and intellectual elites had moved off the street to more economically prosperous neighborhoods outside the historic city walls, and the madrasa was crumbling.\(^\text{16}\) The street’s grand sheen had worn off, and it had become populated with local refineries producing oil from sesame seeds. By the 1940s, only one small-scale refinery remained, now also shuttered, although the street continues to retain its nominal affiliation with the production of sesame oil.\(^\text{17}\)

Around the time Ibn Ḥajar moved to Bahā’ al-Dīn Lane, now known as Bayn al-Sayārij Street, he was still occupied with composing poetry. In fact, most of the poems that Ibn Ḥajar deemed as the best among his

\(^\text{12}\) al-Maqrīzī, ʾal-Mawāʾīz wa-l-iṭībar, iii. 3–6.

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid; also see, for example, the discussion in M. Soberhnheim, ‘Ḵarāḵūsh’ in EI\(^\text{2}\).

\(^\text{14}\) al-Maqrīzī, ʾal-Mawāʾīz wa-l-iṭībar, iv. 552–6

\(^\text{15}\) al-Sakhāwī, Tuḥfat al-ḥabāb, 71–5.


\(^\text{17}\) Fieldwork, July 2016.
corpus were written before the turn of the century,\(^\text{18}\) even as he continued to generate new compositions. In writing the biography of his teacher, al-Sakhawî notes how Ibn Ḥajar used to recite his poetry from the pulpits and at special occasions to the immense literary appreciation of his contemporaries.\(^\text{19}\) Taqi al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (766–845/1365–1442), for one, extols Ibn Ḥajar’s poetry as sweeter than pure water and more amazing than magic yet still licit, and Ibn Fahd al-Makki (787–871/1385–1466) describes Ibn Ḥajar’s poetry as more elegant than a spring breeze.\(^\text{20}\) Among the generation that followed, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (849–911/1445–1505) referred to Ibn Ḥajar as one of the era’s seven shooting stars (shuhub) who excelled in poetry—itself a literary pun on their shared honorific ‘Shihāb al-Dīn’.\(^\text{21}\) By his early forties, Ibn Ḥajar set about to craft a dīwān of his most eloquent poetry divided by genre, sometimes referred to by variations on the title ‘al-Sab’ al-Sayyâra al-Nayyirâ’.\(^\text{22}\) In each of seven categories—about the Prophet, rulers, members of the military and civil elite, love, various subjects (including elegies), strophic poetry (muwashshahât), and epigrams—Ibn Ḥajar included seven choice poetic specimens, or more precisely in the case of the last category, seventy epigrams as the equivalent of seven full-length poems.\(^\text{23}\) His seventh and final selection for the section on rulers, or mulûkiyyât, was the panegyric he composed to mark the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Musta’īn’s assumption of the sultanate in Cairo.

\(^{18}\) One manuscript scribe comments in the marginal notes of the best selections: ghâlib mā muṣṣīma bâhumâ mimmâ muṣṣīma qabl al-qarn; see Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalâni, Dīwān (ed. Firdaws Nūr ‘Alī Husayn), 89. Al-Sakhawî himself notes that most of Ibn Ḥajar’s poetry was written before 816 AH; al-Sakhawî, al-Jawâhir wa-l-durar, i. 126.

\(^{19}\) al-Sakhawî, al-Jawâhir wa’l-durar, i. 126; id., al-Daw’ al-lâmi’, iii. 38.

\(^{20}\) al-Maqrīzī, Durar al-‘uqūd al-faridâ, i. 199; Ibn Fahd al-Makki, Labh al-albāz, 327.


\(^{22}\) The scribes of at least two manuscripts place the completion of Ibn Ḥajar’s selective compilation around 816 AH, and a third specifies the date of Jumādâ al-akhir 815/January 1412; see Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalâni, Dīwân (ed. Firdaws Nūr ‘Alī Husayn), 79, 83, 89.

\(^{23}\) For further details in English on this recension’s structure, see Bauer, ‘Ibn Ḥajar and the Arabic Ghazal’, 36–40.
Ibn Hajar was 34 when the ‘Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil’s son, al-‘Abbās, assumed the caliphate in Cairo at the beginning of Sha‘bān a few days after the death of his father on 27 Rajab 808/18 January 1406. The new caliph had been personally named after his ancestor al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalah, who was the Prophet’s uncle and namesake of the ‘Abbasid dynasty. He was the only one of the caliphs to bear al-‘Abbās’ given name—and he likewise shared his kunyā Abū l-Faḍl. Following dynastic protocols for caliphs in Cairo, al-‘Abbās also adopted the regnal name al-Musta’in Billāh, indicating his reliance on God and his ancestral heritage. This regnal title harkened back to the twelfth ‘Abbasid caliph of Baghdad, al-Musta’in who reigned from 248/862 to 252/866, and it was first bestowed upon al-‘Abbās when he was designated his father’s caliphal successor around the year 800/1398. The renowned Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad al-Qalqashandi (756–821/1355–1418) wrote out the lengthy document of designation (‘ahd) on al-Mutawakkil’s behalf, utilizing an earlier chancery document designating al-Mustakfi’s successor in the eighth/fourteenth century as a model. Both sets of official documents frame the designation of a caliphal successor through the praise of God, following what had become Egyptian chancery practice under the Mamluk Sultanate.  

Yet al-Qalqashandi expands beyond the earlier Cairene ‘Abbasid chancery model to elaborate upon the virtuous merits of the ‘Abbasids in general, and of al-Mutawakkil and al-Musta’in in particular, and ensure the prospect of a smooth caliphal transition from father to son. The specific points of gratitude to God have multiplied from one to several. To recapitulate them in truncated form: firstly, praise is due to God for preserving the Islamic system of governance, elevating the household of the caliphate, and arranging for the appointment of a leader (‘aqd al-imāma al-mu‘azzama). Secondly, praise is due to God for placing leadership of the Muslim community among its most highly regarded and sagacious representatives. Thirdly, praise is due to God for comforting the Commander of the Faithful al-Mutawakkil with the best of heirs in his son al-Musta’in. Fourthly, praise is due to God for creating consensus around al-Mutawakkil’s choice of a successor and filling people’s hearts with love for al-Musta’in. Fifthly, praise is due to God for renewing the blessing upon the proverbial flock of believers by establishing leadership in the descendants of the chosen Prophet’s uncle.

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and engendering reverence in people’s hearts for them. Sixthly, praise is due to God who has let creation rejoice with the existence of al-‘Abbâs and elevated him through the act of caliphal designation. And lastly, praise is due to God for commanding obedience to those entrusted with authority (‘ulâl-amr) among the imams and obligated people to pledge their allegiance to an imâm and follow him. The entire passage is couched in the language of religious obligation, precedent, and reverence.

Likewise, speaking on al-Mutawakkil’s behalf throughout the rest of the document, al-Qalqashandi interweaves references to the undeniably venerable status of the ‘Abbasids and asserts the wisdom of al-Musta‘în’s designation as future caliph. For one, the ‘Abbasids have inherited the caliphate one after another. Moreover, the Prophet Muḥammad pronounced his uncle’s nobility and reportedly assured al-‘Abbâs of his progeny’s leadership. Turning to the task at hand, al-Qalqashandi elaborates how al-Mutawakkil, in his wisdom and foresight, follows the precedent of Abû Bakr in selecting a successor. And who better to assume that responsibility than his son al-‘Abbâs who fulfills all the stipulations and admirable traits of a caliph? Implicit in the document’s carefully chosen phrasing, al-Mutawakkil is comparable to the Prophet Zachariah in praying for a worthy heir, thereby also rendering al-Musta‘în comparable to the Prophet John (cf. Q. 19: 5–7). Furthermore, in crafting an overwhelming aura of approbation, the document explains how al-Mutawakkil’s appointment of al-Musta‘în stems from his kindly concern for the Muslim community—and it specifies that he undertook this course of action after consulting judges, scholars, amîrs, viziers, relatives, sons, notables, and lay people who affirmed the soundness of this designation. Furthermore, al-Qalqashandi asserts, al-Mutawakkil prayed for God to help him form the best of decisions before finally proceeding with the designation of al-Musta‘în as his caliphal successor. Al-Qalqashandi also records that al-Musta‘în accepted this designation in the presence of the leading judges and scholars of his day.

The remaining portion of this official document, consisting of fatherly advice to the presumptive heir, also reveals how contemporaries like al-Qalqashandi among the scholarly and bureaucratic elite conceived of al-Musta‘în’s personal responsibilities as caliph. Here, too, the analogy is made to prophetic precedents—al-Mutawakkil issues his advice to elicit God’s blessings the way that the prophets Abraham and Jacob advised their sons who also assumed divinely sanctioned missions from God (Q. 2: 132). The overwhelming emphasis is on personal piety that ultimately benefits al-Musta‘în as well as those under his pastoral care.

Therefore, al-Mustaʿin should be mindful of God in all his actions to be saved and prompt divine assistance, while he should also seek refuge in the truth in order to assure his success. He should hold fast to the Book of God and follow sound, upright methodology, along the straight path, through emulating God’s prophet, Muhammad. He should attend to the affairs of the country and his proverbial flock to the best of his abilities as well as select his associates wisely. Additionally, al-Mustaʿin should extend the rights of familial relations to the direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad; all acts of nobility and generosity toward them are a reflection of one’s regard for their forebear. And he should closely adhere to the way of his righteous predecessors among the caliphs, specifically the first few Rightly Guided Caliphs, in aiming to achieve the greater good. Thus, al-Mustaʿin should strive to establish justice in his reign as caliph and seek to earn the commendation and protection of God on the Day of Judgment. In short, al-Mustaʿin should conduct all matters with pure sincerity toward God combined with awareness of his accountability. As the future imām, al-Mustaʿin will bear greater responsibility for his individual actions—his potential rewards will be multiplied for the good that he achieves or, alternatively, his potential punishments will be multiplied for the evil precedents he may establish. Humility and obedience to God, as the document avers, should guide al-Mustaʿin’s actions and attitude as caliph.27

At the time that al-Qalqashandi crafted this official document of succession, he had no way of predicting that, in roughly fifteen years, al-Mustaʿin, as ‘Abbasid caliph, would also assume the position of sultan. As it happened, al-Mustaʿin was unwillingly swept up in a rebellion against the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Faraj (791–815/1389–1412) in 815/1412. Unable to achieve victory on their own or to convince the caliph to join their cause, the rebellion’s two Mamluk leaders Shaykh al-Mahmūd (d. 824/1421) and Nawrūz al-Hāfīz (d. 817/1414) resorted to a ruse. They had the caliph’s half-brother publicly declare al-Mustaʿin’s support for the revolt—thereby presenting the reluctant caliph with a fait accompli. As he joined their side of the dispute, al-Mustaʿin was elevated as a contender for the sultanate to avert competition between the two Mamluk leaders as well as to raise morale and garner broader support. Upon their ultimate victory, al-Mustaʿin assumed the office of sultan in Damascus on Monday, 27 Muharram 815/ 9 May 1412 and after reaching Cairo on Tuesday, 2 Rābiʿ al-Ākhir 815/ 12 July 1412 took up his royal residence in Saladin’s Citadel. For the first time since the bygone era of the early ‘Abbasids, al-Mustaʿin served as both caliph and sultan—combining the legitimizing authority and executive

powers of rule in one person.\textsuperscript{28} The coinage, both dinars and dirhams, were issued in his name alone, and the letters that the Mamluk state chancery prepared for al-Musta\textsuperscript{in} as sultan-caliph followed royal precedent, with the addition of further glorified titles indicating al-Musta\textsuperscript{in}’s unique embodiment of both caliphate and sultanate.\textsuperscript{29} The epigraphic inscription commissioned by al-Musta\textsuperscript{in} on ‘a marble lintel of the small eastern gate of the Great Mosque of Gaza’ declared his abolishment on 18 Rab\i\textsuperscript{1} al-Awwal 815 / 28 June 1412 of the illicit taxes that the previous sultan al-N\u{a}sir Faraj had levied on the vineyards and plantations of Gaza.\textsuperscript{30}

Described in chancery documents and inscriptions alike as ‘al-nabawi’ or from the family of the Prophet, al-Musta\textsuperscript{in} was projected as the just and righteous ruler from the prophetic household who rectified the wrongs of the past. For his part, Ibn Hajar, in his early forties by this point, was overjoyed with the end of al-N\u{a}sir’s tyrannical reign and his replacement as sultan by the Abbasid Caliph al-Musta\textsuperscript{in}. In commemoration, Ibn Hajar composed what would become his famous poetic panegyrics to celebrate the dawn of an auspicious era with the Abbasid Sultan-Caliph al-Musta\textsuperscript{in} at the helm of governance in 815/1412.

\textbf{IBN HAJAR’S POETIC THEMES}

In crafting his poem, Ibn Hajar draws upon a deep reservoir of devotional love for the Prophet’s family, embodied by al-Musta\textsuperscript{in}. Egypt had long

\textsuperscript{28} For these details and more on al-Musta\textsuperscript{in}’s caliphate and sultanate see: ibid, ii, 202–6; Ibn Hajar al-Asqal\u{a}n\i, \textit{Inb\u{a}’ al-ghumur}, vii. 1–116, 8: 213–14; al-Maqr\izi, \textit{Durar al-uq\u{a}d}, ii. 206–15; Ibn Taghibird\i, \textit{Mawrid al-la\u{m}a’}, i. 255–7, ii. 133–5; id., \textit{Manhal al-\u{s}afi wa-l-mustawei ba’d al-w\u{a}fi} (ed. Mu\u{h}ammad Muhammad Am\u{n}; Cairo: Ma\u{t}ba\u{a}t D\u{a}r al-Kutub wa-l-Wath\u{a}’i iq al-Qawmiyya, 2008), vii. 60–4; id., \textit{Nuj\u{a}m al-z\u{a}hira fi mul\u{u}k Mi\u{r} w\u{a}-l-Q\u{a}hira} (ed. Fah\u{m} Muhammad Shalt\u{u}t; Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Misriyya al-‘Amma li-l-Ta’lif wa-l-Nashr, 1970–1), xiii. 189–208, xiv. 1–3, 16–17; al-Suy\u{u}t\i, \textit{T\u{a}rikh al-khulaf\u{a}’} (Beirut: D\u{a}r al-Jil, 1994), 575–8; id., \textit{Husn al-muh\u{a}dara fi akhb\u{a}r Mi\u{r} w\u{a}-l-Q\u{a}hira} (ed. ‘Ali Mu\u{h}ammad ‘Umar; Cairo: Maktbat al-Kh\u{a}n\i, 2007), 74–7; Muhammad b. Ahmad Ibn Iy\u{a}s, \textit{Bad\u{d}i’ al-zuh\u{u}r fi waq\u{a}‘i’ al-dub\u{u}r} (= \textit{Die Chronik des Ilm Ij\u{a}s}) ed. Mu\u{h}ammad Mu\u{t}\u{a}f\u{a}; Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1975, i. 747, 823–8; Ibn al-‘Im\u{a}d, \textit{Shadhar\u{a}t al-dhabab fi akhb\u{a}r man dhabab} (eds. ‘Abd al-Q\u{a}dir al-Ar\u{m}a’\u{u}t and Ma\u{h}m\u{u}d al-Ar\u{m}a’\u{u}t; Damascus: D\u{a}r Ibn Kath\u{u}r, 1993), ix. 295–6.

\textsuperscript{29} al-Qalqashandi, \textit{Ma\’\u{a}thir al-im\u{a}fa}, ii. 206, iii. 193, 264–5.

\textsuperscript{30} L. A. Mayer, ‘A Decree of the Caliph al-Musta\textsuperscript{in} Bill\u{a}h’, \textit{Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine}, 12 (1945): 27–9, plate X.
harboured saintly descendants of the Prophet in its midst as well as their shrines. The mosque-shrines of Sayyidunā al-Husayn, the Prophet’s grandson, and Sayyida Zaynab, the Prophet’s granddaughter, were major centres of religious life in Cairo—as were those of Sayyidunā Zayn al-ʿĀbidin and Sayyida ʿĀ’isha among others. And after the Prophet’s descendant Sayyida Nafisah sought refuge in Egypt with her family in the second/ninth century; she became a major source of solace and inspiration among religious scholars and the general populace. Imam al-Shāfiʿi, eponymous founder of one of the main Sunni legal schools, was known to consult her and composed eloquent poetry of his own elaborating on the profound love due to the Prophet’s family. The emergence of the Shādhili path in the seventh/thirteenth and its subsequent development solidified this reverence for the prophetic household as essential to one’s spiritual growth. Concurrently, the resurrection and evolution of the ʿAbbasid caliphate in Cairo came to be closely associated with the mosque and mausoleum complex of Sayyida Nafisah, which the Cairene ʿAbbasids began to supervise as its official caretakers, and adjacent to which many of them were buried upon their death. As an Egyptian Shāfiʿi scholar, who esteemed the Shādhili master Muḥammad al-Ḥanafi (d. 847/1443) and lived in the late Mamluk era with its long restored and symbolic ʿAbbasid caliphate in Cairo, Ibn Hajar poetically harnesses and directs these deep currents of abiding affection for the Prophet’s family toward their contemporary descendant and exemplar, al-Mustāʿīn.

Other works that Ibn Hajar composed further indicate his general appreciation for the Cairene ʿAbbasids as the rightful caliphs of his era. In one, called ‘Ladḥat al-ʿaysh bi-ṭuruq ḥadīth al-ʿaʾīma min Quraysh’, Ibn Hajar devoted copious pages (in what al-Sahkwī noted


was *juz’ dakhm*) to trace the many chains of narrations associated with the tradition assigning communal leadership to the Prophet’s kinship group of Quraysh—*to which the ‘Abbasids eminently belonged. In another, titled ‘al-Ĭnās bi-manāqib al-‘Abbās’, Ibn Ḥajar elaborates on the merits of the ‘Abbasids’ progenitor, al-‘Abbās, who was the Prophet Muhammad’s virtuous uncle. Even though al-Sakhāwī remarks in his lengthy biography of Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Jawāḥir wa-l-durar*, that this composition remained in draft form (*mujallada fi-l-musawwada*), both al-Sakhāwī’s and al-Suyūṭī’s subsequent compositions on similar topics offer an indication of the overall tenor of veneration for the Cairene ‘Abbasids as beloved members of the Prophetic household during the late Mamluk era—which is a far different image than the total indifference projected by previous historians of the period. Academic rivalries between the two men aside, both al-Sakhāwī and al-Suyūṭī drew prestige from their associations with Ibn Ḥajar, and all three authors extolled the merits of the contemporaneous ‘Abbasid caliphs of their era. Moreover, Ibn Ḥajar’s own choice of titles, such as ‘Ladḥdhat al-‘aysh’ and ‘al-Ĭnās’, affectively convey the sense of solace and pleasure he personally derived from their exposition.

Grounding his poem in this religious and cultural wellspring, Ibn Ḥajar repeatedly draws auspicious connections between al-Musta’in and his ancestor, the Prophet’s uncle al-‘Abbās, as well as the ‘Abbasid dynasty. In a poem full of double entendres, Ibn Ḥajar omits the amatory prelude typical of the genre of panegyrics and instead launches the poem with a succinct poetic argument that he proceeds to expound upon line after line. In one reading of it, he directly begins, ‘The foundations of political rule have become sound, / with the just al-Musta’in’, and, in another reading, ‘The foundations of political rule have become sound, / with the just al-Musta’in al-Abbās’ (line 1). Here, the play is on ‘al-Abbās’ as both the caliph’s first name ‘al-Abbās’ in its genitive grammatical form and as the poetic abbreviation of his dynastic affiliation ‘al-‘Abbās’ (‘Abbasid) at the end of the first stanza. As the first word that Ibn Ḥajar symbolically selected—with both of its

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meanings—to establish the poetic rhyme or qāfiya for the rest of the poem, ‘al-Abbās’ is like a lynchpin that anchors both its structural rhyme and its deeper meaning. Or, in other words, the ‘Abbasid heritage embodied by al-Musta‘īn al-‘Abbās shapes the poem’s form as well as its content.

The second stanza then connects both al-Musta‘īn al-‘Abbās and his ‘Abbasid dynasty to the third greater meaning of al-‘Abbās—their ancestor. Here, though, the reference is indirect: ‘The rightful standing of the family of al-Muṣṭafā’s uncle / has been restored after long neglect’ (line 2). And the indirectness of the rhetorical reference elevates its prestige. Instead of attributing the caliph and his dynasty to al-‘Abbās directly through his personal name, Ibn Ḥajar connects them back to the Prophet Muhammad himself who was chosen by God. Hence, Ibn Ḥajar’s decision to describe the Prophet in this stanza as al-Muṣṭafā (the chosen one) explicitly associates al-Musta‘īn with the blessings of divine favour and envelops him in the hallowed family of God’s Messenger.

This virtuous heritage of al-Musta‘īn as an ‘Abbasid from the Prophet’s family is elaborated over the next nine stanzas as Ibn Ḥajar explains the turn of events that set political affairs aright. On Tuesday, 2 Rabī‘ al-Ākhir 815/12 July 1412, al-Musta‘īn entered Cairo victoriously as its Sultan-Caliph following the defeat of the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir (line 3). People joyously celebrated his arrival as mahdī, amīn, ma‘mūn, and tābir—in Ibn Ḥajar’s poetic descriptions (line 4)—which are not only linguistic and religious references to his salvific role, trustworthiness, protection, and purity, but also allusions to his ‘Abbasid predecessors by those regnal names in Baghdad. Moreover, al-Musta‘īn hails from the blessed household of the Prophet (ahl al-bayt) from among the pure and virtuous children of Ḥāshim (Banū Ḥāshim)—replete with botanical allusions to the paradisiacal garden (rawdā) metaphysically attained in the Prophet’s mosque between his pulpit and tomb (lines 5–6). Al-Musta‘īn descends from this noble family (usra) that is destined to lead, which Ibn Ḥajar refers to as asarā‘ al-khuṭūb (line 8) in a play on the tripartite root of usra. Their household is typified by strength and bravery, like that of lions, as well as beauty and poise, like that of gazelles (line 9). And against the backdrop of these luminous stars signifying his blessed family, al-Musta‘īn is like the full moon (al-badr) (line 10)—an analogy typically drawn for
the Prophet Muḥammad thereby strengthening the associative bonds between them.

The twelfth stanza shifts to the fourth understanding of al-ʿAbbās—connecting the personal name with its original linguistic meaning. ‘Because of his cheerfulness to the delegations [to him], he is called smiling (bāsim), / and out of reverence, he is [also termed] frownful (ʿabbās)’ (line 12). Here, al-Mustaʿān is depicted as a magnanimous ruler inspiring joy and awe in his subjects. He warmly welcomes the delegations sent to him, and is thus described as smiling or bāsim, but out of reverence for him, al-Mustaʿān is also described as grave. The poetic pun centres on the linguistic origins of the name al-ʿAbbās as the emphatic form of ʿabis or frowning—which, it should be noted, is also a common epithet for the majestic lion. From another angle, the verse also hints at deep reverence for the person of al-ʿAbbās, intertwining the meanings of the Cairene sultan-caliph, the Prophet’s uncle, and their linguistic connotations in Ibn Ḥajar’s poetry.

The next part of the poem focuses on God’s rectification of affairs in the sultanate through al-Mustaʿān and the Mamluk amīrs who supported his ascension to the throne. Gratitude is due to God who has elevated his religion through their valiant efforts after it had been in a woeful state (lines 13–14). These Mamluk leaders rightfully foreground al-Mustaʿān as their imām (in a poetic reference to the lengthy juridical tradition on leadership), similar to how one necessarily writes the basmala first on a piece of parchment (line 17). Building on this juridical tradition of the imamate, Ibn Ḥajar’s artistically asserts that placing the organization of the Mamluk dominion in the hands of a capable ruler has ameliorated its governance and alleviated people from the tyranny of the deposed Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir (lines 18–29). Recognizing divine control of affairs, Ibn Ḥajar comments how God ultimately brought al-Nāṣir to account for his oppression and transferred leadership from him as a former slave (al-malik) to al-Mustaʿān as a master (mālik) (lines 30–31).

This transition of power launches Ibn Ḥajar’s next set of poetic exaltations over news of the virtuous ʿAbbasid al-Mustaʿān’s role as head of state and its joyful reception, near and far. Makka as the mother of cities, al-Atheeb (al-Udhayb) in the east, and Fes in the west are personified in their elation (line 32). It is only the malevolent ignoramus who denies the glory and majesty of al-Mustaʿān as sultan-caliph (line 33). And in lauding that ‘the traits of al-ʿAbbās are gathered only / in his grandson, the king of humankind al-ʿAbbās’, Ibn Ḥajar once more plays on the multiple meanings of ‘al-ʿAbbās’, this time by using it as a personal name twice in the same stanza to refer to different individuals (line 34): first for the Prophet’s blessed uncle and second for his descendant the Cairene sultan-caliph. To elaborate on the latter’s
contemporary preeminence, Ibn Hajar further deploys intriguing historical poetics: al-Musta’in has assumed dominion after the cruel Mamluk Sultan al-Nāṣir shirked his moral obligations similar to how the glorious ‘Abbasids came to power after the oppressive Umayyads (lines 35–6). And lest one forget the righteous reign of the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, Ibn Ḥajar works in a comparison to him as well. Al-Musta’in has come to power the way that this most courageous of the Umayyad caliphs spread justice and redressed the wrongs of his predecessors (line 37). Thus, al-Musta’in’s auspicious reign is rendered analogous in Ibn Hajar’s poetry to ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz’s virtuous caliphate as well as to the earlier bygone days of the ‘Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad.

By way of conclusion, Ibn Hajar articulates his willing servitude toward al-Musta’in as a deserving master and patron (mawālī) (line 38). He apologizes for the brevity of his panegyrics but suggests that it is his awe of al-Musta’in’s extensive merits that has withheld him from giving the sultan-caliph his poetic due (line 39). Ibn Hajar further prays for God, the Lord of all people, to increase al-Musta’in’s glory amid divine protection and also expresses his appreciation that al-Musta’in has lent Ibn Hajar’s poetic praise a sympathetic ear (lines 40–1). Without al-Musta’in’s assuring presence, Ibn Hajar avers that he would have been tormented by anxiety—for Ibn Hajar positions himself as the sultan-caliph’s faithful servant (khādim) and slave (ʿabd) (lines 41–2). In elaborating on this willing subjugation, Ibn Hajar weaves in linguistic allusions to the sacred rites of pilgrimage and the holy sanctuary in Makka. Ibn Ḥajar is a wholeheartedly devoted servant who has raised his voice in recitation of al-Musta’in’s praises and striven to serve him readily—but the verbs in this verse, ṣafā, zamzama, and ʿaṣā, evoke the Mount Ṣafā, the waters of Zamzam, and the ritual running between the two mounts of Ṣafā and Marwa in imitation of Hagar’s emblematic quest for water and her utter reliance and dependence on God (line 42). Ibn Ḥajar’s poetic efforts are thus enveloped in the aura of sacrality. Further emphasizing the sanctity of his poetic aspirations, Ibn Hajar concludes with a Qur’ānic allusion. The breaths he exhales in praising the family of the Prophet Muhammad (al bayt Muḥammad), as represented by the ‘Abbasid al-Musta’in, are comparable to musk (miskiyat al-anfās) (line 43)—in other words, among the most precious and appealing ways to spend one’s time. As for the literary allusion embedded in this line to the Qur’ānic verse 83: 26 khitāmubu misk or ‘its seal is musk’, Ibn Hajar expressively signals that he too has reached the end of his poem.

41 Abū ‘Amr, Uns al-ḥujar, 177.
Based on many extant manuscripts, we know that copies of Ibn Hajar’s collection of poetry—and with it his panegyrical dedicated to al-Musta’īn—travelled from their point of origin in Egypt at least as far as to Spain in the west, to Mesopotamia and India in the east, to Istanbul in the north, and to Arabia further south. Some of these manuscripts were copied during Ibn Hajar’s own lifetime from his original diwān or other authorized copies of it, and additional versions were copied out by hand as late as the eleventh/seventeenth century. One of the early manuscripts copied out during Ibn Hajar’s lifetime in 14 Dhū l-Hijjah 847/ 3 April 1444 based on his 815/1412 compilation bears ownership marks from an Aleppan in 916/1511 and another proprietor in 964/1556, both before and after the Ottoman conquests, until the manuscript eventually made its way into the library collection established by the Köprüülü family in Istanbul in the eleventh/mid-seventeenth century. The stamp of the Ottoman Grand Vizier Köprüülüzade Fazil Ahmed (1045–87/1635–76), as ‘al-Wazīr Abū ʿAbbās Ahmad b. al-Wazīr AbīʿAbdillāh ’urīfa bi-Kūprüfūlī’, ensured the manuscript’s inalienable designation as a charitable endowment or waqf (Figure 3). Other copies of the manuscript continued to change hands among private owners well into the twelfth/eighteenth and thirteenth/nineteenth centuries.42

The far-reaching circulation of al-Suyūṭī’s Tārīkh al-khulafāʾ and Ibn Iyās’s Badāʾiʾ al-zuhūr, each of which incorporated Ibn Hajar’s poem into their histories of al-Musta’īn, further ensured that his panegyrical was well-preserved among a broad readership in manuscript form for centuries. Already, al-Suyūṭī indicates that Ibn Hajar’s poetic commemoration of al-Musta’īn’s reign had achieved and retained great fame

several decades after its composition. And another generation later, al-Suyūṭī’s own student Ibn Iyās (852–930/1448–1524) recorded the poem’s opening section reflecting back on al-Musta’in’s short-lived reign as both sultan and caliph even as he also chronicled the Ottoman conquest of Egypt and the Ottoman sultan’s removal of its ‘Abbasid caliph from Cairo. Numerous manuscript copies of both authors’ well-received historical works spread widely. The subsequent publication of al-Suyūṭī’s Tārīkh since 1857, Ibn Iyās’s Badāʾi’ since 1884, and Ibn Hajar’s Dīwān since 1962 has transmitted these materials in new printed

43 al-Suyūṭī, Tārīkh al-khulafāʾ, 575–7; id., Ḥusn al-muhāḍara, ii. 75–6.
44 Ibn Iyās, Badāʾi’ al-zubūr fi waqāʾi’ al-duḥūr, i. 747, 823–8.
45 Katip Çelebi goes so far as to describe al-Suyūṭī’s Tārīkh al-khulafāʾ as the best work of its genre. See his Kashf al-zunūn, i. 293.
formats for modern audiences—even as the passage of time has obscured many of its poetic references and deeper meanings.

One of these subtle references extols the critical role of the day’s foremost Mamluk officer in bolstering the ‘Abbasid caliphate of his day—and briefly its sultanate too. In avowing, ‘Without the system of rule (niḍām al-mulk) in his hand, / the situation of people in the kingdom would not be set aright’ (line 18), Ibn Hajar constructs a rather ironic double entendre. On the one hand, in the most obvious meaning of the verse, Ibn Hajar asserts that the rule of al-Musta’in has rectified people’s affairs in his dominion; al-Musta’in is the rightful caliph who meta-physically elicits and spreads divine blessings among his subjects and legitimates the state’s military and civil administration—and as deserving sultan al-Musta’in governs over it too. Yet in the less apparent reading of this poetic verse, Ibn Hajar also commends the critical role of the Mamluk amîr Shaykh al-Maḥmûdî in enabling al-Musta’in’s rule. As sultan, al-Musta’in delegated the administration of Egypt (tadbîr al-mamlaka bi-l-diyyar al-miṣriyya) to Shaykh al-Maḥmûdî and bestowed on him the title of ‘Niḍām al-Mulk’. Thus, the succeeding verses also appear to praise him as the worthy amîr (lines 19–20), equal to the occasion—who successfully deposed al-Nāṣir in favour of al-Musta’in as well as continued to facilitate the sultan-caliph’s administration.

The irony, of course, lies in Shaykh al-Maḥmûdî’s eventual usurpation of the sultanate from al-Musta’in within a matter of just six months, yet it does not end there. The honorific title of ‘Niḍām al-Mulk’ that al-Musta’in bestowed on his Mamluk atabeg Shaykh al-Maḥmûdî harkened back to that of the famous Seljuq vizier and atabeg Niḍām al-Mulk (408–85/1018–92); both powerful men served under ‘Abbasid caliphs. Yet as Imâm al-Haramayn al-Juwaynî (419–78/1028–85) had argued, it was in fact Niḍām al-Mulk who fulfilled the role of head of state or imâm of Islamic jurisprudence rather than the ceremonial caliph. Was Ibn Hajar’s play on words an even subtler allusion to this legal discourse? After all, Ibn Hajar later acknowledges, ‘In reality, he [al-Musta’in] only had the title, sermon, and gold and silver coinage in his name’. Such speculation aside, with Shaykh al-Maḥmûdî’s assumption of the sultanate, Ibn Hajar legally endorsed and validated this historical precedent that had differentiated between the distinctive roles of a blessed caliph and an executive sultan throughout the Mamluk era. As official mufti of the Court of Justice (Dar al-‘Adl), Ibn Hajar selected ‘Abû l-Naṣr’ (‘the father of victory’) as a fitting kunyâ for Shaykh al-Maḥmûdî as the new Mamluk sultan, al-Malik al-Mu’ayyad, in Sha’bân 815/ November 1412. In doing so, Ibn Hajar upheld the resumption of the centuries-old Islamic

legal tradition acknowledging the actual head of state’s duties and responsibilities in lieu of the `Abbasid caliph. 49

ARABIC POEM

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

1 The foundations of political rule (al-mulk) have become sound, with the just ‘Abbasid al-Musta‘īn;

2 The rightful standing of the family of al-Muṣṭafā’s uncle has been restored after long neglect;

3 In the second of the blessed [month of] Rabī‘ al-Ākhīr on Tuesday, was celebrated

4 the coming of the saviour of all people, their trustworthy one, safe from blemish, and pure of breath,

5 from the household (bayt) encircled by hopes (tā‘ī bibi al-rajā‘); so can any one hesitant or despondent (qāṣīd mutaraddad fi-l-ya‘ī’s) be seen?

6 A branch growing from Ḥashim in the garden (rawda), pure in origins (zākī al-manābīt), wholesome in roots (tayyīb al-aghrās),

7 with al-Murtaḍā and al-Mujtabā and al-Mushṭari adorned and cloaked in praise,

8 From a family (usrā) who captivated affairs (asārū al-khuṭūb) and are purified from the impurities (adnās) that afflict others;
9 They are lions in the presence of tumult (usdun idbâ ḥadârû al-wagba), and when they withdraw, they are gazelles in their gatherings (wa-idbâ khalaw kânû bi-majlisihim zibâ’a kinâs);

10 They are like the stars (kawâkib), and his light among them is like the full moon (badr) rising in the darkness of night,

11 In his palm is a manifest sign (‘ind al-alâmati ʿaya), a pen that illumines like the light of agarwood incense (al-miqbâs);

12 Because of his cheerfulness (bishrihi) to the delegations [to him], he is called smiling (bâsim), and out of reverence, he is [also termed] frownful (‘abbâs) [a common epithet of the lion];

13 So praise belongs to God who elevates His religion (al-Muʾizz li-dinib) after it had been in a state of despair (iблâs),

14 through the notable leaders (al-sâdat al-umarâ’), the foundations of heights (arkân al-ʿulâ), among those who avenge and console (min bayn mudrik thâʾrihi wa-muwâsâ);

15 They hoisted (nahaḍû) the burdens of virtuous traits (manâqib) and were elevated to the most Honourable, preeminent lofty station (mansîb al-ʿalây al-asham al-râsî)

16 They left behind hostility (târâk al-ʿidâ) felled on the battleground of ruin (sârâʾ bi-muṭârâk al-radâ), So God protects them from evil insinuations (al-waswâs),

17 And their leader (imâmuhum) with his majesty is put forward (mutaqaddim) the way that starting with the name of God is uppermost on a piece of parchment (al-qirâṣ);

18 Without the reins of rule (niẓâm al-mulk) in his hand the situation of people in the kingdom would not be set aright;

19 How many leaders (amîr) before him aspired to heights (al-ʿulâ) and returned with efforts rendered bankrupt,

20 Until the one equal to it approached the heights (al-maʾâlti) and it submitted to him (khâdaʿat labu) after much withholding (farṣ shîmâs),

21 the hands of kings (aydî al-mulâk) obeyed him, and from obtaining Egypt the measurements of the Nilometer (aṣâbîʾ al-miqyâs) surrendered (adḥʾanat),

22 and he removed oppression that had overwhelmed everyone wearing a turban (muʿammam) of all sorts and types (min sâʾir al-anwâʾ wa-l-ajnas),

23 for he is the one who removed from us despair (buʾs) in an age that without him would be full of detriment (bâs = baʾs),

24 from the abased one who carries a name that is the opposite of his deeds, al-Nâṣîr, who is incompatible with the foundation (al-mutanâqîḍ al-asâs) [of governance];

25 How many blessings of God did he have as if they were in exile and forgotten;
26 The secret of evil remains between his ribs (ṣulā′) like a fire or [one]
that escorts him to the grave (ṣahibathu li-l-armās);  
27 How many wrongs did he initiate for which the sins fall upon him
until the Day of Judgment; no one grieves for him (mā labu min āś);  
28 He laid the basis for schemes that were developed without
foundation because of [his] treachery;  
29 Every man forgets and remembers at times but one does not forget
evil;  
30 The Lord of humankind gave him [al-Nāṣir] leave (amlā labu) until
they captured him and the bitterness of the cup did not escape him;  
31 He transferred rule from the owned (adālānā minhu al-malik, play
on mamālik) to the owner (mālik), whose days commenced (ṣadarat)
without comparison;  
32 Makka, the mother of cities (umm al-qurā), and the earth rejoiced
in the East and the West, like al-Atheeb and Fes (al-Udhayb wa-Fās)
33 Only the insinuating ignoramus (al-jāhil al-khannās) among people
tries to deny the signs of [al-Musta’in’s] glory,  
34 And the traits of al-‘Abbās are gathered only in his grandson, the
king of humankind al-‘Abbās;  
35 Do not deny al-Musta’in’s eminence (ri’āsa) in state affairs (mulk)
after the [preceding] cruel evasion (al-juhd al-qāsī) [of duty],  
36 For after the Umayyads came the ‘Abbasids in the days of old (fī
sālīf al-dunyā),  
37 And the most courageous of the Umayyads came spreading justice
after the perditious and disgraceful (al-mubīr al-khāsī)  
38 My master, your slave has come to you full of hope in acceptance
by you, so he does not see any harm (fa-lā yārā min bās=ba’s);  
39 If it were not for [my] (being in) awe, his praises would have been
extolled at length, but they suit him with due justice;  
40 May the Lord of (all) people always increase your glory (‘izzak)
with truth, protected by the Lord of (all) people;  
41 You still (baqita) listen to the praise of a servant (khādim), who
would have been tormented by worries without you (lawlāka kāna min
al-bumūm yuqāsī),  
42 A servant (‘abd) wholeheartedly devoted, who raised his voice in
recitation, (‘abdun safā wuddan wa-zamzama ḥādiyan) and strove to
serve readily (wa-sa’ā ‘alā al-‘aynayni qabl al-rās = ra’s);  
43 His praises for the family of Muhammad among creation are the
precious fragrance among breaths (miskiyyat al-anfās).
Abstract
Although Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī is primarily known for his seminal scholarship in the field of prophetic traditions or hadith studies, he was also an accomplished poet. In fact, as this article reveals, one of the poems that Ibn Hajar included in his carefully crafted collection from the ninth/fifteenth century struck a deep chord of Muslim memories surrounding a restored Islamic caliphate. Far from the image of complete apathy to the Cairene ‘Abbasids that has long been conventional wisdom, Ibn Ḥajar’s panegyric for al-Musta’in (r. 808–16/1406–14) lauded the ‘Abbasid caliph’s assumption of the Mamluk sultanate as a restoration of legitimate rule to the blessed family of the Prophet (ahl al-bayt). In crafting his poem, Ibn Hajar draws upon a deep reservoir of devotional love for the Prophet’s family in the late Mamluk era, embodied by al-Musta’in as the descendant of the Prophet’s uncle al-‘Abbās, and upon a dynamic and evolving Islamic legal tradition on matters of governance. Even though al-Musta’in’s combined reign as sultan and caliph lasted only a matter of months, Ibn Hajar’s commemoration of it became a famous piece of cultural lore down through the last years of the Mamluk Sultanate and past the Ottoman conquest of Egypt. Through exploring the intertwined histories of Ibn Hajar, al-Musta’in, and their contemporaries, as well as analysing published and manuscript recensions of Ibn Hajar’s poetry, topographies of Cairo, Mamluk chancery documents, and treatises on Islamic law and hadith literature, this interdisciplinary article elucidates the religious and socio-political complexity of veneration for the ‘Abbasid caliphate in the late Mamluk era.