

THE ALEXANDRIAN CRUSADE (1365) AND THE MAMLŪK SOURCES

REASSESSMENT OF THE *KITĀB AL-ILMĀM* OF AN-NUWAYRĪ AL-ISKANDARĀNĪ
(D. A.D. 1372)

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The crusade that Peter I of Lusignan, King of Cyprus and Jerusalem from 1358 until 1369,¹ embarked upon in October 1365 has already aroused a considerable number of scholarly controversies. In recent times, the works of Azīz S. Atiya² and Peter W. Edbury³ in particular were very notable in this respect. Nevertheless, several issues still remain open for research and consideration — or reconsideration —, particularly concerning the Muslim historiography on the event. One of these issues, I believe, is that of the appreciation of the most elaborate Muslim reproduction in the encyclopaedia of the eyewitness an-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī of the conquest and sack of Alexandria in 1365. This description of the last convulsions of the Crusades in Egypt was regarded by such an authority as A.S. Atiya as “the most valuable source material on the Crusade of Alexandria from the Egyptian point of view”.⁴ It is the intention of this paper to show that this is a dangerous assumption and that, though an-Nuwayrī’s contribution is indeed very valuable, it still requires a very critical approach.

King Peter I prepared his crusade against the Mamlūks of Egypt very thoroughly, travelling around in Europe from 1362 until 1365 and seeking financial and practical support at the illustrious European courts of his time.⁵ He finally gathered with his allies at the island of Rhodes in August 1365⁶ and the entire fleet set sail on the 4th of October. Only

* For the abbreviations used in the footnotes see the end of this article.

¹ See H.D. Purcell, *Cyprus* (New York and Washington, 1969), p. 133.

² A.S. Atiya, “The Crusade in the Fourteenth Century”, in *A History of the Crusades*, ed. K.M. Setton, III, *The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. H.W. Hazard (Madison, Wisc., 1975), pp. 3-26.

³ Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus*; *idem*, “Crusading Policy”, pp. 90-105.

⁴ Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*, pp. 18, 38.

⁵ Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus*, p. 161; *idem*, “Crusading Policy”, pp. 92-3; Atiya, “Crusade” (see n. 2), pp. 14-5.

⁶ Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus*, p. 166.

then, did Peter make known to his companions that their goal was an attack on Alexandria.⁷

As was persuasively suggested by Peter Edbury, this expedition had little or nothing to do with Christian motives of recovery of the Holy Land. On the contrary, its motives seem to have been purely commercial. The changing trade routes and the economic effects of the Black Death threatened Cyprus' commercial position, while the economic element at the same time favoured the Mamlūk Empire in Egypt and in particular its most important Mediterranean port, Alexandria.⁸ According to Edbury, Peter I

“hoped to achieve one of two things: to capture and hold the city so that in future he and his kingdom would derive profit from its commerce, or if... permanent occupation was not feasible, to destroy Alexandria in the naive expectation that its commercial wealth would revert to Famagusta.”⁹

What do Mamlūk sources tell us about the ensuing attack on and sack of their Mediterranean port al-Iskandarīyya, and what is the value of their accounts? After careful study, I ended up with five major historiographical sources that provide ample details. However, a comparison of their accounts made clear that only three versions of this event actually survived in Muslim historiography. These versions and their sources will be presented and analysed here and in the light of this analysis, the version that was traditionally considered the most authoritative Muslim account of the Cypriote conquest and sack of Alexandria in 1365 — i.e. that in the encyclopaedia of the eyewitness an-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī — will be reconsidered.¹⁰

As Atiya informs us in his study *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*, Muḥammad b. Qāsim b. Muḥammad an-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī lived in fourteenth-century Alexandria as a copyist of manuscripts for the rich Muslim merchants of that city, a profession which made him very familiar with the classical Arabic literature.¹¹ He died in Alexandria in A.D.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 152-3; Edbury, “Crusading Policy”, pp. 95-7; R. Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamlūk Sultanate, 1250-1382* (London, 1986), p. 145.

⁹ Edbury, “Crusading Policy”, p. 97.

¹⁰ Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*, pp. 18, 38. See also M. Müller-Wiener, *Eine Stadtgeschichte Alexandrias von 564/1169 bis in die Mitte des 9.115. Jahrhunderts: Verwaltung und innerstädtischen Organisationsformen*, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, 159 (Berlin, 1992), p. 46, where an-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī is used as the sole authority to describe the attack and sack of Alexandria in 1365.

¹¹ Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*, pp. 11-2.

1372, so he definitely was an eyewitness and contemporary of Peter's sack of his city. It was after this event that he decided to write down what he had seen and heard, under the title *Kitāb al-Ilmām bi l-I'lām fī mā ġarat bihi l-aḥkām wa l-umūr al-muqḍīyya fī waq'at al-Iskandarīyya* (The Book of Gleanings to become informed of what was entailed by the predicaments and the accomplished facts regarding the event of Alexandria). His rich background, however, made him diverge a lot from his central theme and digress on any subject known in his time, so that in the end his report of the sack of Alexandria turned out to be imbedded in a richly documented encyclopaedia of six volumes and about 2,641 pages in the Hyderabad-edition.¹² This made Atiya state that "an-Nuwayrī's work must be regarded as a storehouse, perhaps a disorganized storehouse, of valuable treasure heaped around a central event which happened to be the sack of Alexandria in 1365".¹³ In the course of his report, an-Nuwayrī informs us that his main reason for writing it was his love for the city of Alexandria and the disgust he had felt when he saw what the "Franks" had done to her.¹⁴ He provides us with a mass of data gathered from his own experience or compiled from reports of other eyewitnesses.¹⁵ Concerning the general character of his encyclopaedia, Atiya already noticed that "His approach appears to be that of a story teller with an emphasis on the dramatic and the legendary rather than a realistic record";¹⁶ an-Nuwayrī was also an almost fanatic religious Muslim, who indicated the will of God as the main cause of the sack of Alexandria.¹⁷ His fanaticism and personal involvement might clearly bias and influence his writings. Nevertheless Atiya still describes an-Nuwayrī as a foremost historical authority on the account of this crusade, not only owing to the paramount importance of his story in quantity, but also in quality.¹⁸

In an-Nuwayrī's version, 70 Venetian tradeships ("tuġġār al-Banādiqa") appeared before Alexandria on Wednesday 20 Muḥarram 767. Fourteen were manned by Venetians and two by Genoese, ten came from Rhodes, five from France and Cypriots manned the remainder. When they did not enter the harbour, the inhabitants of Alexandria felt something was wrong and panic began to spread.¹⁹ On the next day,

¹² an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*.

¹³ Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*, p. 13.

¹⁴ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, pp. 219-20.

¹⁵ Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*, p. 28.

¹⁶ Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*, p. 17.

¹⁷ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, p. 92.

¹⁸ Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*, p. 18.

¹⁹ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, pp. 136-7; 230.

Thursday 21 Muḥarram, Peter I and his fleet entered the western harbour of Alexandria, Baḥr as-Silsila, but when they tried to disembark, they were driven away by the Muslim defenders and their arrows.²⁰

On the morning of Friday 22 Muḥarram, many Muslims came out, trusting the defence of their city, and they spread on al-Ġazīra, the long peninsula in front of the city. Even merchants selling food went around among them. In their recklessness, some even insulted the “Franks”, apparently without getting any reaction.²¹ When some people protested to the governor’s substitute, the amir Ġaṅgarā, against this dangerous situation, their warnings were brushed aside.²² Meanwhile spies had informed Peter of the opportunity this situation offered him, and a first ship was sent ahead. A skirmish in the water ensued between this first ship and some Muslims, which was won by the former. This enabled the men to go ashore, followed by the rest of their crusader troops.²³

Then an-Nuwayrī informs us of the horror that ensued, the mostly unarmed Muslims panicking and trying to return to the safe city-walls, while some perished heroically defending themselves and their partners-in-distress with whatever they could lay their hands on. This complete chaos enabled the “Franks” to take the beach easily.²⁴ The amir Ġaṅgarā also had to flee back to the city, where he gathered the city treasure and sent all “Frankish” merchants who were in Alexandria to Damanhūr.

The crusaders meanwhile attacked the walls, but were driven back by the Muslim defenders and their arrows.²⁵ The crusaders then went to the eastern harbour, where they found the walls undefended and no moat to hinder the approach. Consequently they were able to force the gate at that side of the wall — the Customs Gate, Bāb ad-Dīwān. Through this gate, they were then able to climb the walls and attack the defenders.²⁶ An-Nuwayrī tells us that the reason for this easy capture of Alexandria was the fact that the Customs Gate had also been locked for the Alexandrians themselves, to protect the merchandise that was kept there. Consequently, the defenders had been unable to man this gate and its adjacent walls. Later on — so an-Nuwayrī remarks — the officer in charge of this gate would be convicted for treason and for handing the city to Peter.²⁷

²⁰ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, I, p. 112; II, pp. 137-9.

²¹ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, pp. 139-41.

²² an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, pp. 143-5.

²³ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, pp. 141-2, 146.

²⁴ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, pp. 147-51.

²⁵ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, pp. 155-6.

²⁶ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, p. 157.

²⁷ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, p. 158.

Then many inhabitants of Alexandria were murdered or captured, while others fled to the countryside through one of the gates of the city or by using their turbans to climb down the walls.²⁸ According to an-Nuwayrī, the crusaders kept killing, violating, robbing and sacking from Friday-evening until Saturday, when they moved their abundant spoils as well as five thousand prisoners to their ships. An-Nuwayrī states that when the crusaders spent the night on their ships, the city was also plundered by the Bedouins who entered it. The fleet finally sailed away on Thursday 28 Muḥarram 767, eight days after it had arrived, when they saw Yalbuḡa l-Hāṣṣakī, the commander of the Egyptian army, arriving in Alexandria with his relief force.²⁹

Badr ad-Dīn Abū Muḥammad Maḥmūd b. Aḥmad b. Mūsā al-ʿAynī was born on 21 July 1361 in ʿAynṭāb, a city close to Aleppo. In 1399, he moved to Cairo where his knowledge of Turkish gave him access to the ruling circles. He occupied several high positions in the religious administration of Cairo, where he died on 28 December 1451. His major historical work was his multi-volume *ʿIqd al-Ġumān fī Tārīḥ Ahl az-Zamān* (A Pearl Necklace of the History of the People of the Time), a universal history of the world — mostly on Egypt and Syria — from Creation until al-ʿAynī's own time.³⁰

In the course of his chronicle, al-ʿAynī mentions the conquest of Alexandria by “the lord of Cyprus” (“*ṣāḥib Qubrus*”) and 70 warships, carrying more than 30,000 “Franks”.³¹ Unfortunately, however, most of the attention in al-ʿAynī's account — which is a second version of this event — goes to the Cairene scene and the reaction of the sultan and the commander of his army, Yalbuḡa l-Hāṣṣakī.³²

Nevertheless, al-ʿAynī informs us that these “Franks” arrived near Alexandria on Friday 23 Muḥarram 767 AH/10 October A.D. 1365. They proceeded until right outside the city, where they started fighting the people of Alexandria, who had come out to stop them. However the “Franks” also attacked the Muslims from an ambush, which caused the

²⁸ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-ʿIlmām*, II, pp. 162-4.

²⁹ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-ʿIlmām*, II, pp. 166, 171-3, 178, 179, 269-70.

³⁰ W. Marçais, “al-ʿAynī”, in *EP*², I, p. 814; Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, II, pp. 52-3; S II, pp. 50-1; F. Wüstenfeld, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Araber*, Burt Franklin Research and Source Work Ser., 50 (New York, 1964), p. 489; Little, “Historiography”, pp. 437-8.

³¹ al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-Ġumān fī Tārīḥ Ahl az-Zamān*, XXIV/1, MS Cairo, National Library, 1584 *Tārīḥ*, p. 138.

³² al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, XXIV/1, pp. 138-9.

death of about 4,000 Alexandrians and the “Frankish” victory. Then the “Franks” stayed in Alexandria for four days, sacking the town, killing its inhabitants and taking many captives. When they heard that a relief force was approaching from Cairo, they left the town and returned home.³³

An almost identical copy of this account is given by al-‘Aynī’s historiographical successor, Abu l-Maḥāsin Ibn Taḡrībirdī. He was born in Cairo round about 1409 as the son of an important Mamlūk amir. He received a traditional intellectual education, as well as a military training and he was even granted a military fief. In this way, Ibn Taḡrībirdī also had his entry to the Mamlūk court, and he became quite intimate with certain sultans. It was said that he started writing history after having heard a recitation of the works of al-‘Aynī in the presence of the sultan. One of Ibn Taḡrībirdī’s most important works is his *an-Nuḡūm az-Zāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa l-Qāhira* (Resplendant Stars among the Kings of Miṣr and Cairo), a history of Egypt from the Arab conquest until his own time, arranged by the reigns of individual rulers. Ibn Taḡrībirdī died on 5 June 1470.³⁴

As indicated, his version of the sack of Alexandria seems to have been copied almost completely from al-‘Aynī’s account, except for some details on the conquest itself. He explicitly reports that the “Franks” disembarked on the beach of Alexandria (*al-barr*) on Friday 23 Muḥarram 767/10 October A.D. 1365, where they started fighting the Alexandrians. No mention is made of an ambush. Ibn Taḡrībirdī simply states that the “Franks” took Alexandria by storm. Then he explicitly says that they left after four days when they were informed of the coming of the sultan himself.³⁵

A third version of this event can be found in the annals of al-‘Aynī’s renowned contemporary Taqī ad-Dīn Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī. He was born in Cairo some four years after al-‘Aynī, in 1364. After a traditional education, he first occupied several administrative and educational functions in Cairo and Damascus, before devoting himself completely to historiography. As Rosenthal and Marçais pointed out, there seems to have been both a professional and a personal rivalry between al-Maqrīzī and

³³ al-‘Aynī, *‘Iqd*, xxiv/1, p. 138.

³⁴ W. Popper, “Abū l-Maḥāsin”, in *EI*², I, p. 142; Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, II, p. 41, S II, p. 39; Wüstenfeld, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Araber* (see n. 30), p. 490, Little, “Historiography”, pp. 439-40.

³⁵ Abu l-Maḥāsin Ibn Taḡrībirdī, *an-Nuḡūm az-Zāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa l-Qāhira*, ed. Ibrāhīm Alī Ṭarḥān, XI (Cairo [n.d.]), pp. 29-30.

his contemporary historian al-ʿAynī. Al-Maqrīzī died in Cairo in February 1442, leaving a great number of historical works of major importance. One of his most important chronicles is his annalistic history of the Ayyubids and the Mamlūks, his *Kitāb as-Sulūk li Maʿrifat Duwal al-Mulūk* (The Book of the Path of Knowledge of Dynasties and Kings).³⁶

In this chronicle al-Maqrīzī relates how Venetian fortified ships (“qilā”) were spotted by the Alexandrian watchman (“an-nāzūr”) on Wednesday morning, 21 Muḥarram 767. Eight of these ships (“tamāniya aḡribatin”) approached the harbour, followed by some 70 or 80 others (“mina l-aḡriba wa l-qarāqir”). According to al-Maqrīzī, this fleet consisted of 24 Venetian and two Genoese ships, ten vessels from Rhodes and five French ships; the remainder came from Cyprus. Following this news, the gates of Alexandria were shut, its defence was prepared and one military regiment (“ṭāʿifa”) was sent outside to guard the city.³⁷

The next morning, the inhabitants of Alexandria came outside to confront the enemy, but the “Franks” did not react during that day, nor during the following night.³⁸ However, that same night a group of them secretly disembarked with their horses and they set up an ambush, hiding in a graveyard outside the city (“kamanū fi t-turab”).³⁹

On Friday morning, 23 Muḥarram 767/10 October 1365, some Bedouins and Alexandrians gathered at the lighthouse, where they noticed one of the ships entering the western harbour of Alexandria, Baḥr as-Silsila. Consequently, a fierce fight ensued in which some “Franks” were killed and a group of Muslims was martyred (“ustušhida”).⁴⁰ Other Alexandrians then came out, some of them proceeding to the lighthouse, and others assisting their fellow-citizens to fight the infidels. At the same time, however, some youths and food sellers also left the city, seeking fun and amusement, taking no notice of the enemy. At that moment, the group of “Franks” that had been hiding in an ambush raised their trumpets and attacked the Muslims from behind, while simultaneously arrows were shot at the Alexandrians from the other ships. In this way, the crusaders managed to take the beach, while the Muslims in panic fled back to the city, where the overcrowdedness at the gates killed many.⁴¹ Then the Franks brought their ships inside the har-

³⁶ F. Rosenthal, “al-Maqrīzī”, *EI*², vi, pp. 177-8; Marçais, “al-ʿAynī” (see n. 30), p. 814; Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, II, pp. 38-41, S II, pp. 36-8; Little, “Historiography”, pp. 436-7.

³⁷ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, pp. 104, 105, 107.

³⁸ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, p. 105.

³⁹ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, p. 105.

⁴⁰ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, p. 105.

⁴¹ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, pp. 105-6.

bour, where the walls seem to have been abandoned by their defenders (“wa ḥalat al-aswār mina l-ḥumā”). With ladders, they climbed these walls, took the city and burned down the armoury.⁴² Meanwhile, the inhabitants tried to flee and got jammed at one of the gates, Bāb ar-Rašīd, which was burned. Al-Maqrīzī informs us that this jam killed an innumerable number of people (“mā lā yaqa‘u ‘alayhi ḥaṣrun”).⁴³ The amir Ġaṅgarā — at that moment in charge of the city — took the contents of the city’s treasure together with 50 imprisoned European merchants with him when he fled to Damanhūr in the Delta. And so the city was left entirely to the crusaders.⁴⁴

The King of Cyprus then entered the city and he had it sacked, destroyed and burned. The crusaders were said to have treated the remaining population very harshly (“istalama bi s-sayf”), killing many, also Christians, and capturing a great many of them. They continued doing this until the morning of Sunday, 25 Muḥarram/12 October, when they returned to their ships with their booty and 5,000 prisoners. When the commander of the Egyptian army, Yalbuḡa l-Ḥāṣṣakī, and his relief force arrived in Alexandria on Thursday (“yawm al-ḥamīs”), the crusaders sailed away with their booty and prisoners.⁴⁵

A clear echo of this account by al-Maqrīzī can be found in the chronicle of the Mamlūk historiographer Zayn ad-Dīn Abu l-Barakāt Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Iyās al-Ḥanafī, who was born on 9 June 1448 and who died in 1524, a couple of years after the conquest of Egypt by the Ottomans. His writings were also mainly historical, and although his most important chronicle *Badā’i‘ az-Zuhūr fī Waqā’i‘ ad-Duhūr* (Marvellous Blossoms among Events of the Times) concentrates especially on the decline and fall of the Mamlūk Empire, it yet also contains a short account of the sack of Alexandria.⁴⁶

His summary of events is so brief, that he forgets to mention the events of Thursday and Friday and simply antedates the complete story of the conquest of Alexandria to Wednesday 21/8, but then wrongly naming Ṣafar/November as the month concerned. He only informs us that on that day the “Franks” came to Alexandria in 70 ships under the

⁴² al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, p. 106.

⁴³ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, p. 106.

⁴⁴ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, p. 106.

⁴⁵ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, pp. 106-7.

⁴⁶ W.M. Brinner, “Ibn Iyās”, in *EI*², III, pp. 835-7; Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, II, p. 295; S II, pp. 405-6; Wüstenfeld, *Geschichtsschreiber der Araber* (see n. 30), p. 513; Little, “Historiography”, pp. 440-1.

command of the lord of Cyprus and that they took the city. The continuation of his story looks like a copied summary — almost word for word — of al-Maqrīzī.⁴⁷

After this presentation of the Mamlūk sources on the sack of Alexandria by Peter I of Lusignan and his allies in October 1365, we must undoubtedly agree with Atiya that an-Nuwayrī's version is the most elaborate one. For instance, it mentions numerous details of Muslim heroes and their fights and skirmishes with "Franks" and it lists all the major demolitions and plunderings inside Alexandria. In all 44 pages of an-Nuwayrī's encyclopaedia were dedicated entirely to the event,⁴⁸ while al-ʿAynī and al-Maqrīzī only gave two and four pages of information respectively.⁴⁹

But what is the actual value and the historiographical quality of this elaborate contemporary version? And what is the value and quality of the two other later versions? A résumé of the most important differences and similarities might help to clarify this. For an accurate assessment of the results of this comparison the issues that are here considered for comparison are also looked at from an angle independent of Mamlūk historiography: the stories of the attack and sack of Alexandria as they can be read in the chronicle *La Prise d'Alexandrie ou Chronique du Roi Pierre Ier de Lusignan* by the French musician and historiographer Guillaume de Machaut (1300-77),⁵⁰ and in the history of the Lusignan dynasty of Cyprus by Leontios Makhairas (ca. 1380-ca. 1450), i.e. the *Recital concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus entitled "Chronicle"*.⁵¹

Both al-Maqrīzī and an-Nuwayrī mention the appearance of 70 or 80 Venetian ships on Wednesday.⁵² Both mention the fact that inhabitants of

⁴⁷ Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ az-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾiʿ ad-Duhūr*, I/2, ed. M. Muṣṭafā, Bibliotheca Islamica, 5a2 (Wiesbaden, 1974), pp. 21-3.

⁴⁸ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, pp. 136-79.

⁴⁹ al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, XXIV/1, pp. 137-9; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, pp. 104-7.

⁵⁰ Guillaume de Machaut, *Prise d'Alexandrie*, pp. 56-110; *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, IV (München and Zürich, 1989), pp. 1781-2. De Machaut is even said to have been a participant in and therefore eyewitness of these events (Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*, p. 7).

⁵¹ Leontios Makhairas, *Chronicle*; on the work and the author, see the introduction, II, pp. 1-24; *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, VI (München and Zürich, 1993), p. 58. We want to make the observation here that the stories both these chronicles tell are, of course, not to be regarded as a standard of historical truth for our Mamlūk sources in the light of the following comparison; rather they are used here just like the Mamlūk sources to help us reassessing the true value of the one source that is often treated as such a standard of historical value for the Alexandrian Crusade, an-Nuwayrī's *Kitāb al-Ilmām*.

⁵² al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, p. 105; an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, p. 230; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, XXIV/1, p. 138.

Alexandria spread on the peninsula on Friday.⁵³ Another common element was the ensuing skirmish between one crusader ship and some Muslims in the surf, which actually started the conquest of Alexandria.⁵⁴ We find an echo of both these elements in al-ʿAynī's report, when he mentions the clash between the crusaders and the inhabitants of Alexandria who had come out to stop these crusaders.⁵⁵ All three versions then equally mention how many Alexandrians were killed, either during the fight or when fleeing back to the city.⁵⁶ There is also general agreement between these versions on how the Franks violated, captured and killed many, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and how they plundered and destroyed Alexandria.⁵⁷ Finally, the sources agree on the fact that after the sack of the city, the crusaders remained on their ships in the harbour for a couple of days until a relief force from Cairo approached or entered the city.⁵⁸

Clearly, all versions agree on the general line of events concerning the sack of Alexandria. Compared with the "western" version of Guillaume de Machaut and Leontios Makhairas, this general line indeed proves to be very reliable.⁵⁹ However, despite this general conformity, some major differences are also very significant. First of all, the dating of the event in these Muslim records poses a problem. Though both an-Nuwayrī and al-Maqrīzī agree that the crusader ships appeared before the Alexandrian coast on a Wednesday and that the real conquest of the city followed two days later, on Friday, they differ on the dates they give. While an-Nuwayrī clearly indicates this Wednesday as Wednesday 20 Muḥarram 767, al-Maqrīzī informs us that this day was Wednesday 21 Muḥarram 767, a dating which can also be derived from al-ʿAynī's statement that the date of the following crucial Friday was 23 Muḥarram 767. If we convert these dates to the Christian era 20 Muḥarram corresponds according to the Wüstenfeld-Mahler-tables⁶⁰ with Tuesday 7 October,

⁵³ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, p. 105; an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, pp. 139-40.

⁵⁴ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, p. 105; an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, p. 146.

⁵⁵ al-ʿAynī, *Iqd*, XXIV/1, p. 138.

⁵⁶ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, pp. 105-6; an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, pp. 146-7; al-ʿAynī, *Iqd*, XXIV/1, p. 138.

⁵⁷ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, p. 105; an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, p. 146; al-ʿAynī, *Iqd*, XXIV/1, p. 138.

⁵⁸ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, pp. 106-7; an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, pp. 162-4, 166, 171-3, 178, 256; al-ʿAynī, *Iqd*, XXIV/1, p. 138.

⁵⁹ Guillaume de Machaut, *Prise d'Alexandrie*, pp. 56-110; Leontios Makhairas, *Chronicle*, pp. 150-5.

⁶⁰ B. Spuler, *Wüstenfeld-Mahler'sche Vergleichungs-Tabellen zur muslimischen und iranischen Zeitrechnung mit Tafeln zur Umrechnung Orient-Christlichen Ären: Dritte, verbesserte und erweiterte Auflage der "Vergleichungs-Tabellen der mohammedanischen und christlichen Zeitrechnung"* (Wiesbaden, 1961), p. 17.

while 21 Muḥarram indeed corresponds with Wednesday 8 October. Then again comparing these data with the “western” versions of the event in the chronicles of Guillaume de Machaut and Leontios Makhairas, we can firmly state that, strangely enough, our eyewitness an-Nuwayrī was one day wrong. For Guillaume de Machaut informs us that the crusaders tried to disembark in the harbour of Alexandria “En un juedi, ce m’est avis, Jour de la feste St. Denis” — dated by his editor De Mas Latrie as Thursday 9 October —⁶¹ and Makhairas also gives Thursday 9 October as the day of arrival of the Franks.⁶² Consequently, the preceding Wednesday had to be 8 October or 21 Muḥarram, as attested by al-Maqrīzī and indicated by al-ʿAynī. Clearly, our eyewitness an-Nuwayrī was wrong here.

Though this minor mistake should not question the value of the content of an-Nuwayrī’s report, I believe that this false dating reveals that al-Maqrīzī and al-ʿAynī must have used other sources than the report of an-Nuwayrī regarding the sack of Alexandria. This fact makes al-Maqrīzī’s version of the events in particular at least as important as an-Nuwayrī’s. Nevertheless, al-Maqrīzī also seems partially to have used an-Nuwayrī or a common source, for although he follows his own correct dating during his entire record of the sack, he surprisingly makes the same mistake as an-Nuwayrī in the end when he informs his reader of the date on which the crusaders sailed away from Alexandria. Al-Maqrīzī — as an-Nuwayrī — gives Thursday 28 Muḥarram as this date, though 28 Muḥarram in fact corresponds with Wednesday 15 October.

Other issues that attest to the equally valuable character of al-Maqrīzī’s account, are the following:

Both authors differ considerably regarding the events of the second day, Thursday, after the arrival of the Franks in Alexandria. Al-Maqrīzī makes short work of this day, informing us that the Alexandrians came outside the walls to confront the crusaders, but these refused to react all day long and they even seemed to have remained quiet during the following night.⁶³ An-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī on the contrary states that Peter and his crusader-fleet entered the western harbour of Alexandria, Baḥr as-Silsila, on that day and that they even disembarked. But the Alexandrian defence from the walls and its clouds of arrows prevented them from approaching and eventually they were driven back to their

⁶¹ Guillaume de Machaut, *Prise d’Alexandrie*, p. 67.

⁶² Leontios Makhairas, *Chronicle*, p. 150 (Greek), p. 151 (English).

⁶³ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, p. 105.

ships.⁶⁴ Guillaume de Machaut, however, gives us a story that is very similar to that of al-Maqrīzī.⁶⁵ Leontios Makhairas' story, finally, remains somewhat blurred with regard to the days on which the different events took place, because of the relative briefness of its account (actually only three paragraphs). Nevertheless he also mentions that "then the Saracens came down to the shore, nigh ten thousand of them, horsemen and foot soldiers, to defend the harbour".⁶⁶

Consequently, it is again al-Maqrīzī's account that looks the soundest and most acceptable in this respect. Why did an-Nuwayrī write down a story that looks quite the opposite from reality. We suggest that his afore-mentioned general preference for the legendary and the dramatic⁶⁷ and perhaps also his pride as a devoted Muslim and Alexandrian played tricks on him.

Another matter which similarly questions an-Nuwayrī's reliability, concerns the tactics the crusaders used to surprise and overpower the Alexandrians when they started their fatal attack on the city on Friday. Al-Maqrīzī records clearly that a group of "Franks" had already secretly disembarked with their horses during the preceding night and that they were hiding in one of the graveyards, secretly awaiting the attack of their allies to surprise the defenders from this ambush ("kamanū fi t-turab"). On Friday then, the "Franks" started very tactically by sending one ship ahead, enticing the Alexandrians to come outside. During the following skirmish, when many Alexandrians actually did come outside to help their colleagues or to proceed without care to the lighthouse, the ambush opened up and the "Franks" launched their real attack. The hiding knights raised their trumpets and attacked the Alexandrians in the back, while arrows were shot from the approaching fleet. Panic spread among the defenceless Alexandrians, who tried to flee back to the walls. This chaos enabled the Franks to take the beach and attack the city-gates.⁶⁸ This ambush-story is summarized in al-'Aynī's version⁶⁹ and an-Nu-

⁶⁴ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, I, p. 112; II, pp. 137-9.

⁶⁵ "Or le gart cils qui fist la nue! Qu'einsois qu'eussent but ne mengié, furent li anemy logié, devant le viés port, à tel route, qu'il couvroient la terre toute Tant en y ot grant quantité qui empeschierent le descendre de ses vaissiaus et terre prendre" (Guillaume de Machaut, *Prise d'Alexandrie*, p. 67).

⁶⁶ Leontios Makhairas, *Chronicle*, p. 151; surprisingly, however, he goes on by saying "and they failed". This seems, however, to point at their general defeat rather than to a specific event on this day, as no mention is made of that and the Franks are still supposed to be on their ships.

⁶⁷ Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*, p. 17.

⁶⁸ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1, pp. 105-6.

⁶⁹ al-'Aynī, *Iqd*, XXIV/1, p. 138.

wayrī's report makes no mention of this ambush at all. According to the latter, it were spies that had informed Peter of the defenceless position of many Alexandrians outside the city, enabling him to overpower them easily. An-Nuwayrī consequently puts the loss of the city down to the incapability of the substitute-governor and his advisors, and also to the brutality of the infidel King Peter, who attacked and butchered harmless citizens.⁷⁰ When again comparing these two versions with the account of Guillaume de Machaut, we see that the latter's coincides most with al-Maqrīzī's report: Guillaume informs us that while Peter and his crusaders fought the Muslims heroically in the western harbour, the Hospitallers had secretly disembarked in the eastern harbour. From there they attacked the Alexandrians in the back, which created great panic and caused their flight back to the city.⁷¹ Makhairas refers to these tactics only in passing by saying that the Alexandrians, who had been very confident of their superiority at first, "were seized with great terror, and many Saracens fled" when they suddenly saw that horses had been landed too.⁷²

Again we see how an-Nuwayrī seems to have given his own version of reality, more befitting his own personal motives.

More examples of such dissimilarities between an-Nuwayrī and the other chronicles exist. They all point in the same direction as the before-mentioned issues. Though an-Nuwayrī's encyclopaedia provides us with an unparalleled amount of data and details, these should not be taken for granted simply because an-Nuwayrī was an eyewitness himself and because he used the testimonies of other eyewitnesses. His version of the sack of Alexandria should be treated with a lot of historical criticism, keeping in mind that he did not so much — as Atiya stated — "stands out as a foremost historical authority ... [on] the Cypriot attack on and brief occupation of Alexandria in 1365",⁷³ but on the contrary that his blind faith and "his approach ... of a story teller with an emphasis on the dramatic and the legendary"⁷⁴ certainly and clearly also extended to his

⁷⁰ an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, II, pp. 139-47.

⁷¹ "Il avoit un port à senestre, devant la cité d'Alixandre, où Dieux fist venir et descendre de Rodes le bon amiral, et les freres de l'Opital, ..., ils abillierent leurs chevaux, et issirent de leurs vaissiaus, sans avoir nul empechement; Puis se meïrent en bataille; ... Et quant li Sarazin veïrent les nostres qui les ecloïrent, en l'eure tournerent en fuie..." (Guillaume de Machaut, *La Prise d'Alexandrie*, pp. 68-77).

⁷² Leontios Makhairas, *Chronicle*, pp. 151, 153.

⁷³ Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*, p. 18.

⁷⁴ Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*, p. 17.

account of the central theme of his encyclopaedia, the sack of Alexandria. His report should certainly always be used in combination with the versions of his colleague-historians al-Maqrīzī and to a lesser extent al-ʿAynī, who seem to have based their versions of this event for the greater part on sources that were independent of an-Nuwayrī's account and which are still unknown to us today. Moreover, both al-Maqrīzī and al-ʿAynī seem to have treated these data with more regard for historical reality than did an-Nuwayrī.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES

Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist*

A.S. Atiya, *A Fourteenth Century Encyclopedist from Alexandria: A Critical and Analytical Study of al-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī's "Kitāb al-Ilmām"*, Research Monographs, 7 (Salt Lake City, 1977).

al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-ʿAynī, ʿIqd al-Ġumān fī Tārīḥ Ahl az-Zamān*, xxiv/1, MS Cairo, National Library, 1584 *Tārīḥ*.

Brockelmann, *Geschichte*

C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, 2 vols and 3 supplement vols (Leiden, 1943-49; 1937-42).

Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus*

Peter W. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusaders, 1191-1374* (Cambridge, 1991).

Edbury, "Crusading Policy"

P.W. Edbury, "The Crusading Policy of King Peter I of Cyprus, 1359-1369", in *The Eastern Mediterranean Lands in the Period of the Crusades*, ed. P.M. Holt (Warminster, 1977).

Guillaume de Machaut, *Prise d'Alexandrie*

Guillaume de Machaut, *La Prise d'Alexandrie ou Chronique du roi Pierre Ier de Lusignan*, ed. M.L. de Mas Latrie, Publications de la Société de l'Orient Latin, Série Historique, I (Genève, 1887).

Leontios Makhairas, *Chronicle*

Leontios Makhairas, *Recital concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus Entitled "Chronicle"*, ed. and transl. R.M. Dawkins, 2 vols (Oxford, 1932).

Little, "Historiography"

Donald P. Little, "Historiography of the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk epochs", in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, I, *Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge, 1998).

al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*

al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb as-Sulūk li Maʿrifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, III/1, ed. S.ʿA. Āšūr (Cairo, 1970).

an-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*

an-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām bi l-I'ām fīmā ġarat bihi l-aḥkām wa l-umūr al-maqḍiyya fī waq'at al-Iskandarīyya*, ed. E. Combé and A.S. Atiya (Hyderabad, 1968).