

1412: al-Qalqašandī Describes the Iberian Christian Realms of his Time

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Abstract: A short fragment devoted to the situation of the Christian kingdoms on the Iberian Peninsula in *Ṣubḥ al-a‘šā*, the most famous work of the Egyptian chancery secretary, al-Qalqašandī (d. 821/1418), has been criticised by Spanish historiography for containing inaccurate and outdated information. Looking at this text from the broader perspective of Mamlūk encyclopedism, this article investigates why, how, and for which purpose this passage was actually written. This makes it possible to contextualise it within a scholarly debate revolving around the Arabic-Islamic documentation of Christian Europe and the interest Arabic-Islamic scholars displayed in European-Christian societies.

Source

Abū l-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Qalqašandī, *Kitāb Ṣubḥ al-a‘šā*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Rasūl Ibrāhīm, 14 vols, Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Amīriyya, 1913–1922, vol. 5, pp. 269–271, trans. Alejandro Peláez Martín.

قلت: والممالك القائمة بجزيرة الأندلس الآن من ممالك النصرانية أربع ممالك.	The Christian kingdoms now existing in the Peninsula of al-Andalus are four kingdoms.
[المملكة الأولى (مملكة قشتالة)]	The first kingdom: “the Kingdom of Castile”
التي عليها سياقة الحديث إلى أن صارت إلى بطرة بن دن جوان المتقدم ذكره.	Of this it is generally said that it fell to Baṭra b. Dun Ġuwān [Henry III of Castile (r. 1390–1406)], who has been mentioned previously.
وهي مملكة عظيمة وعمالات متسعة تشتمل على طيطلة، واشبيلية، وقشتالة، وغليسية والقربيرة وهي بسط من الغرب إلى الشرق ويقال لملكها الأدفونش والعامه تسميه الفنش.	It is a mighty kingdom, and extended provinces comprise Toledo, Seville, Castile, Galicia (<i>Ġalīsiya</i>) and al-Quranbayra (the plain of Cordoba), extending from the west to the east. Its king is called al-Adfūnš, but the common people call him Alfunš.
[المملكة الثانية (مملكة البرتغال)]	The second kingdom: “the Kingdom of Portugal”

<p>وهي في الجانب الغربي من قشتالة، وهي عمالة صغيرة تشتمل على أشبونة وغرب الأندلس، وهي الآن من أعمال جليقية، إلا أن صاحبها متميز بسمته وملكه.</p>	<p>It is located in the western part of Castile and is a small territory, comprising Lisbon and the west of al-Andalus. It now belongs to the provinces of Galicia, but its lord is distinguished by his title and power.</p>
<p>[المملكة الثالثة (مملكة برشلونة)]</p>	<p>The third kingdom: “the Kingdom of Barcelona”</p>
<p>وهي بجهة شرق الأندلس، وهي مملكة كبيرة، وعمالات واسعة، تشتمل على برشلونة، وأرغون، وشاطبة، وسرقسطة، وبلنسية، وجزيرة دانية، وميورقة وكان ملكهم بعد العشرين والسبعمئة اسمه بطرة وطال عمره، وهلك سنة سبع وثمانين وسبعمئة، وانفرد أخوه الدك بملك سرقسطة مقاسما لأخيه ثم سار بعد ذلك في أسطول فملك جزيرة صقلية من أيدي أهلها وصارت داخلية في أعمالهم.</p>	<p>It is located on the eastern side of al-Andalus. It is a large kingdom with extensive provinces. It includes Barcelona, Aragon, Xàtiva, Zaragoza, Valencia and the peninsula of Dénia and Mallorca. After [the year] 1320–1321/720, their king was named Baṭra [Peter IV (r. 1336–1387)] and lived for a long period. He died in 787/1385–1386. His brother, the Duke (<i>al-duk</i>), was left alone to rule Zaragoza, so far shared with his brother. After that, he set out with a fleet and wrested the island of Sicily from the hands of its people, which was then incorporated into his provinces.</p>
<p>[المملكة الرابعة (مملكة نبرة مما يلي قشتالة من جهة الشرق، فاصلا بين عمالات ملك قشتالة وعمالات ملك برشلونة)]</p>	<p>The fourth kingdom: “the Kingdom of Navarre, which is contiguous to Castile on the eastern side, thus separating the territories of the realm of Castile and the territories of the realm of Barcelona”</p>
<p>وهي عمالة صغيرة، وقاعدتها مدينة يبلونة، وملكها ملك البشكنس. أما ما وراء الأندلس من الفرنج فأمام لا تحصى، وسيأتي الكلام على ذكر ملكهم الأكبر ريدفرنس فيما بعد إن شاء الله تعالى.</p>	<p>It is a small territory and its capital is the city of Pamplona. Its king is the king of the Basques. With regards to the Franks, beyond al-Andalus, the peoples are innumerable. We will come to mention their greatest king, <i>Raydafrans</i> [cf. <i>Roi de France</i>], later, God the Most High willing.</p>

Authorship & Work

[§1] Šihāb al-Dīn Abu l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Fazārī al-Šāfi‘ī al-Qalqaṣandī (d. 821/1418), one of the best known jurists and secretaries of the Mamluk chancery, was the author of numerous books. We do not know much about his early years, his education, and his private life beyond the highlights and dates of his official career. He was born in Qalqaṣanda (756/1355), a small town north of Cairo, into a family of scholars. He was educated in Alexandria, where he concentrated on the study of literature, tradition, and law to become a *qāḍī* of the Šāfi‘ī school of law. In 778/1376–1377, he was granted his *iḡāza* (license to issue judicial rulings and lecture on classical collections of traditions). After thirteen years of teaching, he joined the Mamluk chancery (*dīwān al-inšā’*) in Cairo as assistant secretary

(*kātib al-dast*) to the chief secretary (*kātib al-sirr*) of the sultan. He died at the age of 65 in 821/1418.¹

[§2] The compositions of al-Qalqašandī can be classified into four categories: law, literature and humanities (*adab*), secretarial art (*kitāba*), and genealogy and history. The writings of most interest here, however, are his secretarial works and, in particular, his masterly *Ṣubḥ al-a šā fi šinā ‘at al-inšā’* (“Daybreak for the Night-Blind Regarding the Composition of Chancery Documents”), a composition completed in 814/1412. As Clifford E. Bosworth rightly points out, it represents the culmination of secretarial manuals, the encyclopaedias of the Mamluk period, and, indeed, the entire *adab al-kātib* literature in Arabic. Its seven volumes constitute a detailed manual on the knowledge and skills required of a secretary dealing with official correspondence, from technical information on ink, pen, calligraphy, correct forms of address in letters, and the art of correspondence, to geography, history, and literature. It is for this reason that the work contains copies of a large number of chancery and diplomatic documents (treaties, diplomas, letters, texts of investiture and appointment, oaths of allegiance, etc.). Moreover, *Ṣubḥ al-a šā* is also notable for the enormous number of disciplines covered: grammar, rhetoric, calligraphy, Qur’ānic reading, legal sciences, physical sciences, geometry, astronomy, arithmetic, politics, ethics, geography, and history, among many others. Last but not least, this work is also a key source of information on the administrative organisation of the Islamicate sphere in the early fifteenth century.²

Content & Context

[§3] The excerpt presented here should be placed within al-Qalqašandī’s general view of Christian Iberia. The following paragraphs first give a general overview on what kind of information about the Iberian Peninsula the secretary provided in his work. In a second step, they describe the passage quoted above with its contents, and, finally, evaluate it in terms of historical accuracy.

[§4] The *Ṣubḥ al-a šā* contains a number of treaties concluded by Muslim powers with the Christian polities of the Iberian Peninsula. These treaties were included by al-Qalqašandī for pedagogical reasons and served to illustrate how such treaties were and should be written. Al-Qalqašandī quotes the Arabic versions of a peace treaty (*‘aqd al-ṣulḥ*) between the Almohads of Murcia and “Dūn Farānda” (maybe Ferdinand III of Castile, r. 1217–1252), lord of Castile (*ṣāhib Qištāla*) or, more concretely, “king of Castile, Toledo, Córdoba, León, and Valencia” (*malik Qištāla wa-Ṭulayṭula wa-Qurṭuba wa-Liyūn wa-Balansiya*).³ This is followed by a peace treaty concerning the possession of Valencia and other localities in the east of al-Andalus, in 10 Dū l-Qa ‘da 621 / 24 November 1224, between “the Muslims” (*al-muslimūn*) and “Ḥāfiẓa b. Baṭra b. Adfūnsh Ibn Raymūd” (maybe James I, the Conqueror, r. 1213–1276), “king of Aragon” (*al-malik Aragūn*), count of Barcelona (*qūmṭ Barġalūna*) and, if this reading is correct, “prince of Montpellier” (*birinsib Munt Ballī*).⁴ Finally, al-Qalqašandī quotes a treaty negotiated by the Mamluk Sultan al-Asraf Ḥalīl (r. 689–693/1290–1293) and “Dūn Ḥākīm,” *al-rayd Aragūn* (James II of Aragon, r. 1291–1327), in 19 Ṣafar 692 / 29 January 1293.⁵

¹ Bosworth, al-Qalkašandī.

² Bosworth, al-Qalkašandī; Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *La Syrie*, p. v; Fierro, *El saber enciclopédico*, p. 98; Berkel, *Attitude*; Berkel, *A Well-mannered Man*; El-Toudy and Abdelhamid, *Selections*, pp. 1–21.

³ Al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a šā*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 14, pp. 24–26.

⁴ Al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a šā*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 14, pp. 26–29; König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, p. 320.

⁵ Al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a šā*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 14, pp. 63–70; Smarandache, 1293. *Rayd Aragūn* possibly derives from the Catalan *Reis d’Aragó* or the French *Roi d’Aragon*, see König, *Latin-Arabic Entanglement*, p. 69.

[§5] Al-Qalqašandī also collected official correspondence to and from Christian Iberia in his manual. On the basis of a letter written to a certain “Atfūnsh Dūn Ḥākīm” (Don Jaime?), ruler of the small kingdom of the Catalans (*tāʾifat al-Kīlān*), the secretary establishes that the titles used to address the kings of Aragon were “King of Aragon” (*al-rayd Araġūn*), “Lord of Barcelona” (*ṣāhib Barġalūna*), and “Supporter of the pope” (*ṣahīr bābā Rūmiyya*). He also discusses the manner of writing to the “Frankish kings of al-Andalus” (*mulūk al-Farang bi-l-Andalus*).⁶

[§6] Alongside the sections presenting Iberian treaties as well as letters to and from Christian Iberian sovereigns including details on their titles and forms of address, the *Ṣubḥ al-aʿšā* also provides information on the Christians of Iberia in the geographical-historical sections that form part of volumes III, IV, and V. In these passages, al-Qalqašandī describes the different realms as pertaining to “al-Andalus.” As Alejandro García Sanjuán has remarked, this term was thus used as a way of referring to the Iberian Peninsula even after great parts of it had succumbed to Christian forces.⁷

[§7] The passage presented here is taken from volume V, from a chapter dealing with the realms of the Iberian Peninsula (*al-Andalus*). It begins with a geographical description of the territory and its main cities that is followed by a brief account listing the monarchs of al-Andalus from the Deluge to the Naṣrid ruler of Granada, Muḥammad VII (r. 794–810/1391–1407). Al-Qalqašandī then provides a brief overview of the history of the Christian kingdoms of León and Castile as well as some information on Aragon. The chapter concludes with a sketch of the situation of the four Christian polities in Iberia at the end of the fourteenth century, around 1380.⁸

[§8] Al-Qalqašandī’s description follows a particular pattern. He moves from west (Castile and Portugal) to east (Barcelona and Navarre) and first mentions the larger, then the smaller realm. The first is Castile (*mamlakat Qištāla*), whose history he had already narrated until Baṭra b. Dun Ğuwān (Henry III, r. 1390–1406) in his list of monarchs. Castile, he claims, was the most powerful kingdom, “extending from the west to the east” (*wa-hiya basaṭa min al-ġarb ilā l-šarq*) and its king, called *al-Adfūnš*, was generally known as *Alfūnš*. Portugal (*mamlakat al-Burtuġāl*), on the contrary, was smaller, located in the western part of Castile (*wa-hiya fī l-ġānib al-ġarbī min Qištāla*) and formed part of the provinces of Galicia (*wa-hiya al-ān min aʿmāl Ğillīqiyya*) encompassing Lisbon and western al-Andalus. Yet its lord was respected for his distinctiveness and power (*illā an ṣāhibahā mutamayyiz bi-simatihī wa-mulkihi*). Another large and important kingdom was that of Barcelona (*mamlakat Baršalūna*, alias the Crown of Aragón),⁹ located to the east and consisting of extended provinces including Barcelona, Aragón, Jativa, Zaragoza, Valencia, Denia, and Mallorca. After the death of Baṭra (Peter IV) in 787/1385–1386, it was ruled by his brother, the duke (John I, Duke of Gerona) alone, who sent a fleet to Sicily to take control of the island.¹⁰ Finally, al-Qalqašandī describes Navarre (*mamlakat Nabarra*), ruled by the “king of the Basques” (*malik al-Baškuns*) from Pamplona

⁶ Al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿšā*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 8, pp. 36 and 123.

⁷ Ducène, *L’Europe et les géographes arabes*, p. 329; García Sanjuán, *El significado geográfico*, pp. 3–36; García Sanjuán, *La caracterización de al-Andalus*, pp. 43–59.

⁸ Björkman, *Beiträge*, p. 107; König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, p. 319.

⁹ “Kingdom of Barcelona” was an established way of addressing the Crown of Aragón as we can see in other works. See Chalmeta Gendron, *Araghūn*.

¹⁰ Indeed, John I sent an expedition to Sicily in 1392 that was led by his brother, the Infante Martin, Duke of Montblanc. Although he managed to take control of the island very quickly, the outbreak of a widespread rebellion among the nobility did not allow him to fully establish his rule until 1398. See Claramunt Rodríguez, *Juan I de Aragón*; Claramunt Rodríguez, *Martín I*; Ryder, *Juan I*, p. 447; Abulafia, *Western Mediterranean Kingdoms*, p. 160.

(*Yanblūna*), a small kingdom east of Castile and separating it from the kingdom of Barcelona (*mimmā yalī Qištāla min ġihat al-šarq fāšilan bayna ‘amālāt mulk Qištāla wa-‘amālāt mulk Baršalūna*). The regions “beyond al-Andalus” (*warā’ al-Andalus*), i. e. beyond the Pyrenees, were inhabited by the Franks (*al-Farangġ*), whose peoples were uncountable (*fa-umam lā tuḥṣā*), and who were led by the important and powerful figure of the *Roi de France* (*Raydafrans*).¹¹

[§9] Al-Qalqašandī’s account contains various inaccuracies and errors, e. g. regarding the situation of the Crown of Aragon (which he refers to as the “Kingdom of Barcelona”). Peter IV (Baṭra), for instance, died in 1387, not a year earlier as the secretary claims. He also recounts that after this event, Peter’s brother, the duke (John I of Gerona) was left alone to govern Saragossa, until then shared with Peter (*wa-anfarada aḥūhu al-Duk bi-mulk Saraqūṣta muqāsīman li-aḥīhi*). John (*al-duk*), however, was Peter’s first-born son, not his brother. The statement that the two shared power may refer to the fact that John acted as the monarch’s lieutenant (*muqāsīm*, i. e. “partner”) in his capacity as heir to the throne.¹² However, the scribe’s errors are most notable with regard to Portugal. In 1412, this kingdom was not a province of Galicia, nor was its area smaller than that of the Crown of Aragon. We must therefore ask ourselves why this excerpt, in fact a summary, does not represent the entire knowledge al-Qalqašandī had about the Iberian Peninsula?

Contextualisation, Analysis & Interpretation

[§10] Spanish historiography has traditionally considered al-Qalqašandī’s report on Christian Iberia inaccurate and, consequently, of little value. In his introduction to the first and so far only translation of al-Qalqašandī’s text on the geography and history of the Iberian Peninsula, Luis Seco de Lucena stated:

“al-Qalqašandī’s study of Spain does not contain any unpublished news of real importance. What differs from the information hitherto accepted as accurate must, in my opinion, be regarded as errors born of misleading or faulty documentation.”¹³

[§11] But why translate a text that lacks interest? Seco de Lucena himself responded to this apparent contradiction:

“It is, however, of interest to provide us with a synthetic overview of Spain at the beginning of the fifteenth century and an extract from its history conceived as a brief work of dissemination.”¹⁴

[§12] Later researchers such as Felipe Maíllo Salgado and Juan Martos Quesada have followed this line of interpretation, confirming that al-Qalqašandī’s text lacked novelty.¹⁵ Shall we

¹¹ The title was in use in Arabic-Islamic sources since Ayyūbid times. See al-Qalqašandī, *Šubḥ al-a‘šā*, ed. Šams al-Dīn, vol. 8, p. 37, n. 5; König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, pp. 222–225.

¹² Claramunt Rodríguez, Pedro IV de Aragón; Claramunt Rodríguez, Juan I de Aragón; Ryder, Juan I, p. 447.

¹³ Al-Qalqašandī, *Šubḥ al-a‘šā*, trans. Seco de Lucena, p. 10: “El estudio de Qalqašandī sobre España no contiene ninguna noticia inédita de verdadera importancia. Las que difieren de la información aceptada hasta ahora como veraz deben considerarse, a mi juicio, como errores nacidos de equívoca o defectuosa documentación.”

¹⁴ Al-Qalqašandī, *Šubḥ al-a‘šā*, trans. Seco de Lucena, p. 10: “Reviste, sin embargo, el interés de ofrecernos en forma sintética una visión de conjunto sobre España a principios del siglo XV y un extracto de su historia concebido a la manera de breve trabajo de divulgación.”

¹⁵ Maíllo Salgado, *De historiografía árabe*, pp. 168–169: “Su relato sobre la historia de al-Andalus no contiene ninguna noticia inédita de verdadera importancia; su interés radica en ofrecernos de forma resumida una visión de conjunto sobre la Península a principios del siglo XV y un extracto de su historia –incluso sobre los reyes cristianos– a manera de breve trabajo de divulgación;” Martos Quesada, *Historiografía andalusí*, vol. 2, p. 333: “En realidad, no aporta ninguna novedad en cuanto a al-Andalus, pero tiene a su favor que nos ofrece una visión de la Península a principios del siglo XIV y una historia resumida andalusí.”

conclude, then, that this brief fragment, which the Mamluk scribe devoted to the situation of the Iberian Christian kingdoms, is of no interest to historians? The way these researchers have approached the geographical-historical sections of the *Šubḥ al-a‘šā* deem problematic. Merely stating that this passage is of “inferior” quality does not answer key questions, such as why an Egyptian secretary should have included a summary of the history of the Iberian Christian kingdoms in his work? Rather than stating that the passage contains inaccurate information, we should ask why this information is inaccurate, given that the treaties and letters cited by al-Qalqašandī obviously show that he had much more information at his disposal.

[§13] To answer these questions we must explain how the interpretation of older Spanish scholarship fits into older patterns of evaluating the Arabic-Islamic documentation of Europe in general, and late Mamlūk encyclopedism in particular. In view of the recent re-evaluation of the Arabic-Islamic documentation of Europe and a corresponding reassessment of Mamlūk encyclopedism as a phenomenon, it is possible to regard al-Qalqašandī’s fragments from a fresh angle and to explain their quality with an eye to the genre which frames them.

[§14] Traditional evaluations of the Arabic-Islamic documentation of Christian Europe, including Spanish versions thereof, regarded this documentation as uninterested, ideological, false. They assumed that Islamic societies in the medieval period viewed their northern neighbours with little interest due to a characteristic sense of superiority in terms of religion and civilisation. In this view, Arabic-Islamic arrogance translated into a general lack of interest in the affairs of the northern world. This then explained the fragmentary state and characteristic distortions of the Arabic-Islamic records on the Latin-Christian sphere.¹⁶ This paradigmatic view is also in line with the traditional understanding of the late Mamluk period as a time of cultural and intellectual decline as manifest in compilatory encyclopedism, a literary form of production regarded as lacking innovation. Older scholarship maintained that Islamic civilisation had lost its “genius” in this period, became incapable of producing further innovations, and consequently resorted to producing works that merely compiled older material.¹⁷

[§15] This traditional negative view of the Arabic-Islamic documentation of Europe has been systematically deconstructed from a literary, historiographical, and geographical perspective by Nizar Hermes, Daniel G. König, and Jean-Charles Ducène. Their approach traced how this documentation evolved over the centuries and thus allowed to demonstrate how much information on Europe was in fact available to Arabic-Islamic scholars. Moreover, these scholars refused to explain inaccuracies, outdated information, and mistakes in the extant documentation on the basis of an allegedly “Muslim” mental disposition. Instead, they pointed to the obstacles of information transfer and the fact that, as opposed to their informants, the scholars writing these works were generally not in direct contact with European Christians.¹⁸

[§16] Important precedents show that, in al-Qalqašandī’s times, Arabic-Islamic interest in the history and geography of European-Christian societies already had a long tradition. In the case of Christian kingdoms and counties of Iberia, this interest dates back at least to the fourth/tenth century, when Eastern scholars such as al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 345/956), al-Iṣṭaḥrī (4th/10th cent.), and Ibn Ḥawqal (d. after 378/988), dedicated smaller passages to these realms.¹⁹ The foundations

¹⁶ Lewis, *Muslim Discovery*; Gabrieli, *Arabic Historiography*; Ashtor, *Che cosa sapevano*; Jahn, *Das christliche Abendland*; Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*; Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery*; Ziyāda, *Taṭawwūr al-naẓra*; Thabit, *Arab Views*; Lewis, *What Went Wrong?*; Waardenburg, *Muslims*.

¹⁷ Nicholson, *Literary History of the Arabs*, p. 448; Goldziher, *A Short History*, pp. 141–142; Gibb, *Arabic Literature*, p. 142. Gabrieli, *Storia*, pp. 255–76.

¹⁸ Hermes, *The [European] Other*; König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*; Ducène, *L’Europe et les géographes arabes*.

¹⁹ König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, pp. 300–301; Hermes, *The [European] Other*, pp. 55–56.

for a more substantial history of the Christian territories were laid by local-regional historiography in the fourth–fifth/tenth–eleventh centuries, written in particular by Aḥmad al-Rāzī (d. 344/955) and his son ʿĪsā (d. 368–9/980). Their works were integrated into the great, but unfortunately fragmentary history of al-Andalus (*al-Muqtabis* or *al-Muqtabas*) by the Cordovan historiographer Ibn Ḥayyān (d. 469/1076), which gives an overview on the history of al-Andalus until the end of the Umayyad period. The geographer al-Bakrī (d. 487/1094), in contrast, offered a more eclectic treatment of the subject.²⁰ This Arabic documentation of Christian Iberia spread to the east of the Arabic-Islamic sphere, as shown by Ibn al-Aṭīr (d. 630/1233) in his universal history (*al-Kāmil fī l-tārīḥ*), which contains a considerable amount of information on the Christian polities of the Iberian Peninsula.²¹ At the same time, information on Christian Iberia continued to be updated in Arabic-Islamic writings from the Islamic West, e. g. in the geography of al-Idrīsī (d. ca. 560/1165), the history of the Maḡrib and al-Andalus by ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākuṣī (d. 7th/13th cent.) and that of the Andalusī geographer Ibn Saʿīd al-Maḡribī (d. 685/1286).²²

[§17] In the eighth/fourteenth century, Andalusī and Maḡribī Arabic-Islamic historiography finally produced complete chapters on Christian Iberia, recording the changes in peninsular geopolitics that had been produced by the expansion of Castile, Aragón and Portugal. The Granada-born Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb (d. 776/1375) and the North African Ibn Ḥaldūn (d. 808/1406) both gave an account of the main events in the history of León and Castile, their expansion, as well as their repeated conflicts, unifications, and divisions. They also commented on the interaction with Navarre, the independence of Portugal, and important details of the history of Aragón and Catalonia, mentioning the most important Christian–Muslim battles (Sagrajas, 479/1086, Alarcos, 591/1195, and Las Navas de Tolosa, 609/1212) along the way. Finally, they turned to the Castilian-Aragonese expansion of the thirteenth century and the first Castilian civil war— Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb concluding with Henry of Trastámara (r. 1369–1379), and Ibn Ḥaldūn with Peter IV of Aragón (d. 1387) and the accession to the throne of the young Henry III of Castile in 1390.²³ The writings of Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb and Ibn Ḥaldūn illustrate that it was possible for Arabic-Islamic scholars of the fourteenth century to write a substantial history of the Iberian Christian kingdoms.²⁴

[§18] Due to Ibn Ḥaldūn’s move from the Maghreb to Egypt, his works, including his chapter on the Iberian Peninsula, were read in Egypt and Syria, where the Mamlūks, a military elite of slave soldiers of Turkish and Circassian origin, ruled from 1250 to the Ottoman takeover in 1517. The early Mamlūk period was a time of great prosperity. The Mamlūks gained enormous prestige thanks to their military victories against the crusader forces of Louis IX of France in Damietta (1250) and the Mongols at ʿAyn Ḡalūt, 658/1260). After the fall of Baghdad (656/1258), they restored the ʿAbbāsīd caliphate in Cairo, and eventually destroyed the last crusader stronghold in Acre (690/1291). For much of its long history, the Mamlūk regime maintained a monopoly on maritime relations with the East via the Red Sea, thus procuring important resources and benefits. Egypt became a great artistic and intellectual centre that

²⁰ König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, pp. 302–309, with a full summary; Münzel, *Feinde*, pp. 121–324, with an extensive analysis of Ibn Ḥayyān; Hermes, *The [European] Other*, pp. 63–65.

²¹ König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, pp. 170, 310.

²² Al-Idrīsī, *Kitāb nuzhat al-muštāq*, ed. al-Zāhir, vol. 2, pp. 725–734; al-Idrīsī, *Al-Andalus*, trans. Dubler, pp. 144–151. On the geographers who wrote about al-Andalus, see Tixier du Mesnil, *Géographes d’Al-Andalus*; König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, pp. 205, 272, 315–316; Ducène, *L’Europe et les géographes arabes*, pp. 272–280.

²³ Stearns, *Two Passages*, pp. 157–182; König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, p. 317; Martínez Antuña, *Una versión árabe*, pp. 105–154; Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Zakkār; Ṣaḥāda, vol. 4, pp. 229–236; Dozy, *Investigaciones*, vol. 1, pp. 149–180; Stearns, *Two Passages*, pp. 168–171; König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, pp. 317–318; Martínez-Gros, *L’histoire de l’Espagne chrétienne*, pp. 77–86.

²⁴ König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, pp. 318–319.

maintained intense diplomatic contacts with its Mediterranean surroundings.²⁵ By the early ninth/fifteenth century, the picture had changed as a result of the Great Plague of the mid-eighth/fourteenth century, the westward expansion of Tamerlane (*Tīmūr Lang*, r. c. 771–807/1369–1405), and a severe economic recession. Mamlūk rule came to an end when the Ottomans eventually occupied Syria and Egypt in 922/1517.²⁶

[§19] The boom in encyclopedism that characterised the later Mamlūk period, i. e. the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, cannot necessarily be regarded as an effect of this complex and troublesome economic, social, and political situation, but certainly reacted to it. The Mongol invasion of the Islamic sphere in the thirteenth century with its destruction of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate produced a fear of loss and the need to preserve the cultural legacy of Arabic-Islamic civilisation in a safe space. The fall of Baghdad also produced a westward flow of refugees, including a large number of intellectuals. This certainly contributed to shifting the cultural centre of the Islamic Middle East from Baghdad to Cairo. The prosperity, stability, and cosmopolitanism of Mamlūk Egypt began to attract intellectuals from all over the Islamicate sphere, including from al-Andalus, where the Christian kingdoms were expanding southward, and from the Maghreb, where the political situation failed to stabilise.²⁷ In this atmosphere, Arabic-Islamic historians and geographers working in Egypt saw the need to engage with the entire Arabic-Islamic sphere (and beyond). Rather than focusing on their own region, they developed a more universal approach to history and geography in huge encyclopaedic works.

[§20] At the same time, this era witnessed a remarkable growth of the number of educational institutions in and beyond Mamluk Egypt. One reason for this was that Mamlūk sultans produced no royal heirs, but were replaced by the next generation of imported slave soldiers. Consequently, they invested much of their wealth into pious endowments (*waqf*, pl. *awqāf*).²⁸ In view of this, contemporary Arabic-Islamic scholars in Egypt were confronted, not only with a huge written heritage, but also with a highly prolific scholarly scene. Forced to engage with an excess of books circulating in the academic networks of the time and wishing to keep track, contemporary scholars began producing summaries, i. e. encyclopaedic syntheses that would help the initiated to “navigate” this immense world of knowledge. The main recipients of such literature were the administrative secretaries (*kuttāb*) for whom a good general education (*adab*) was essential.²⁹

[§21] Given the importance of their work, the *kuttāb* were required to have an impeccable command of the Arabic literary culture (*adab*) and were trained to thoroughly master classical Arabic poetry and prose, the art of secretarial work, and the religious sciences. Since firm knowledge of history and geography was necessary for those in charge of writing official correspondence, these subjects also appear in the manuals for scribes.³⁰ It is for this audience that al-Qalqašandī wrote. He organised his seven volumes and what content appears in it according to the needs of scribes, not of geographers or historiographers. After an introduction on the art of writing and the scribe, the work is divided into ten sections (*maqālāt*). These are devoted to essential knowledge for the secretary; geography and history; writing protocols;

²⁵ Holt, *Mamluks*; Ayalon, *Studies*, pp. 41–59; Winter and Levanoni, *The Mamluks*; Hassan, *Longing*; Levanoni, *Egypt and Syria*; Bauden and Dekkiche, *Mamluk Cairo*.

²⁶ Holt, *Mamluks*; Christ, *Economic Decline*, pp. 190–223; Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, p. 39.

²⁷ Chapoutot-Remadi, *Les encyclopédies arabes*; Blachère, *Quelques réflexions*; Pellat, *Mawsū‘a*; Muhanna, *Arabic Encyclopaedism*, pp. 343–356; Fierro and Penelas, *The Maghrib in the Mashriq*.

²⁸ Antrim, *Place and belonging*; Baer, *The Muslim Waqf*; Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*; Pedersen, *Madrasa*; Berkey, *The Transmission*; Chamberlain, *Knowledge*.

²⁹ Muhanna, *Arabic Encyclopaedism*, pp. 343–356; Muhanna, *World in a Book*; Fierro, *El saber*, pp. 83–104; Lowry and Steward, *Essay*.

³⁰ Gully, *The Culture*; Soravia, *Les manuels*; Soravia, *Un traité*; Ramírez del Río, *Documentos*, pp. 365–366.

finally different genres of writing that a scribe must know how to handle, including diplomatic correspondence, letters of appointment, special letters, letters of adjudication of fiefs, oaths, treaties, and various other forms of correspondence. The work ends with different ways of transporting correspondence.³¹ Al-Qalqašandī's colleagues in the profession needed a wholesale, general, and encyclopaedic overview of geography and history, but they were not going to be professional geographers or historians. All this explains why, subconsciously, al-Qalqašandī subsumed historical accuracy to the real purpose of teaching (future) secretaries how to write treaties and letters, and how to name and address the rulers involved.³²

[§22] In short, scribes in the Mamlūk administration had at their disposal a heterogeneous range of sources of information on Iberian Christian political formations, from Arabic chronicles to treaties and correspondence with these powers. Al-Qalqašandī did not assemble all these materials into a coherent picture. His aim was different: Rather than grouping his material chronologically or geographically as a historiographer or geographer would do, he grouped his material to illustrate how a particular text should be written, thus bringing together documents from different historical constellations. To illustrate how to write a letter to an Iberian Christian king or to write a peace treaty involving such a ruler, al-Qalqašandī produced an example without contextualising it historically.

[§23] To write a summary of the history of the Iberian Peninsula, however, the secretary turned to other sources, in this case to Arabic-Islamic chronicles. Ibn Ḥaldūn's account seems to have been the main source used by al-Qalqašandī to compose his synthetic history of the Iberian Christian kingdoms. Although he does not mention the Tunisian historian, while explicitly quoting Ibn Ḥayyān, the similarities of Ibn Ḥaldūn's and al-Qalqašandī's texts lead to this conclusion.³³ Ibn Ḥaldūn had settled in Egypt in 784/1382, contributing, as did other Mağribī scholars, to the dissemination of scholarly literature composed in the Islamic West. His prestige brought him a warm welcome, including a teaching post at the Grand Mosque of al-Azhar and the post of the Mālikī *qādī* in Egypt.³⁴ Considering his reputation and the acknowledged quality of his work, it is not surprising that his peer, al-Qalqašandī, used it as his main source for his account of the Iberian Christian kingdoms.³⁵ It was, after all, the most recent description of the subject available in Egypt.

[§24] Comparing Ibn Ḥaldūn's introduction to his chapter on the Christians with the passage from al-Qalqašandī discussed in this article produces the following results:³⁶ The provinces of Castile, described by both as powerful (*‘aẓīma*) and spacious (*muttasi‘a*), are mentioned in a very similar order,³⁷ and they both highlight that Castile stretches from west to east.³⁸ The next kingdom is Portugal, considered by both as a small territory (*ṣaġīra*) around Lisbon (*Ašbūna*)

³¹ Björkman, *Beiträge*; König, 1412.

³² König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, p. 10.

³³ Al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 5, pp. 263–269; König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, p. 319.

³⁴ Manzano Rodríguez, Ibn Ḥaldūn.

³⁵ König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, p. 177; Björkman, *Beiträge* (1928), p. 83. However, *al-‘Ibar* was not the only source that al-Qalqašandī employed for his history of the Iberian Christian kingdoms, for one can also note the use of Abū l-Fidā's (d. 732/1331) *Taqwīm al-buldān*, of Ibn ‘Abd al-Mun‘im al-Ḥimyarī's (d. after 726/1325–1326) *al-Rawḍ al-mi‘tār fī ḥabar al-aqtār*, of Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-‘Umarī's (d. 749/1349) *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*, and even of “Harūšiyūš, historian of the Rūm”, the latter also cited by Ibn Ḥaldūn. See Penelas, *El reino de Castilla*, p. 4.

³⁶ Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Zakkār and Ṣaḥāda, vol. 4, pp. 229, 234–235; al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 5, pp. 269–271.

³⁷ Ibn Ḥaldūn: Castile, Galicia, al-Qurantayra, Seville, Toledo and Jaén; al-Qalqašandī: Toledo, Seville, Castile, Galicia, and al-Quranbayra.

³⁸ Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Zakkār and Ṣaḥāda, vol. 4, p. 229: “min al-mağrib ilā al-mašriq”; al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 5, p. 270: “min al-ğarb ilā l-šarq”.

which currently belonged to Galicia (*wa-hiya min a‘māl Ğillīqiyya*)³⁹ and whose lord was distinguished by his distinctiveness (*ṣāhibuhā mutamayyiz bi-simatihī*).⁴⁰ The description of the “kingdom” of Barcelona is the one that coincides most in the two works: it is described as being located on the eastern side of al-Andalus (*bi-ġihat šarq al-Andalus*) and as being a large kingdom (*kabīra*) that includes (*taštamilu alā*) Barcelona, Aragón, Zaragoza, Valencia, Denia, and Mallorca. The wording in the passage on Navarre is slightly different, but identical in terms of content: the kingdom lies east of Castile;⁴¹ it is small and separates Castile and Aragon;⁴² its capital is Pamplona (*madīnat Yanblūna*), and its monarch is the king of the Basques (*malik al-Baškuns*). It is clear, therefore, that al-Qalqašandī used Ibn Ḥaldūn, reproducing his words verbatim in some cases, and organising the information in the same way when he employed a slightly different wording.

[§25] This use of Ibn Ḥaldūn’s history, with its own errors, may offer one explanation for al-Qalqašandī’s inaccuracies in dealing with the history of the Christian kingdoms. We should consider, however, that his knowledge of Christian Iberia was partly even wider than that of Ibn Ḥaldūn’s work and what is shown in the excerpt quoted at the beginning of this article. Other parts of the *Ṣubḥ al-a‘šā* contain more data on the origins, formation, and the Mediterranean expansion of the Crown of Aragón, as well as letters and peace treaties.⁴³ Dealing with the same regions in different parts of his extensive work, al-Qalqašandī may have failed to reconsult what he had already written about a certain region in an earlier part, thus failing to bring different strands of information together. It can certainly not be doubted that al-Qalqašandī had some problems with the information at his disposal: he found it difficult to place the rulers of Galicia into the historical development of al-Andalus and was confused by what he regarded as the title (!) “Alfonso” (*Adfūnš, Alfūnš*), applying it to different rulers.⁴⁴ The errors in connection with Portugal can be related to the scarce information about this territory that was available to him, given that relations between Lisbon and Cairo appear to have been rare.⁴⁵

[§26] That said, al-Qalqašandī’s errors and difficulties can be explained by a number of factors. First, al-Qalqašandī obviously had problems organising and synthesizing the disparate information at his disposal in a coherent manner, in particular because this information described the Christian kingdoms in question in different periods. The language barrier, the different chronological system of the Latin-Christian world, and his lack of knowledge of certain aspects of pre-Islamic and contemporary history also gave rise to errors of interpretation. Second, these difficulties of pulling this information together to produce a coherent historical picture of the Iberian Christian north clearly had to do with the fact that a chronological organisation of this information was not a priority during al-Qalqašandī’s composition of the *Ṣubḥ al-a‘šā*. He drew on chronicles and geographical works to describe their history and geography, and then added treaties and letters he found in the Mamlūk archives in a second step. The intended audience of his manual did not need to be experts on history and geography,

³⁹ Al-Qalqašandī only adds to this phrase the word “now” (*al-ān*), see al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 5, p. 270.

⁴⁰ Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Zakkār and Šahāda, vol. 4, p. 235, adds “for this time” (*li-hādā l-‘ahd*).

⁴¹ Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Zakkār and Šahāda, vol. 4, p. 229: “wā-yalī mulk Qištāla hādā min ġihat al-šarq”; al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 5, p. 271: “mimmā yalī Qištāla min ġihat al-šarq.”

⁴² Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Zakkār and Šahāda, vol. 4, p. 229: “fāšila bayna ‘amālāt Qištāla wa-‘amālāt mulk Baršalūna”; al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 5, p. 271: “fāšilan bayna ‘amālāt mulk Qištāla wa-‘amālāt mulk Baršalūna.”

⁴³ König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, pp. 319–321.

⁴⁴ König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, pp. 319–321.

⁴⁵ Lopes de Barros, *In the Name of Minorities*, pp. 711–724.

but needed a basic amount of geographical and historical background knowledge to compose treaties and letters in a correct manner.⁴⁶

[§27] To conclude, it makes little sense to merely criticise al-Qalqašandī's passage on the Christian kingdoms for its inaccuracies. Rather, these inaccuracies give testimony to the historical context, in which they were produced. The *Ṣubḥ al-a'šā* of al-Qalqašandī is, like many other texts of this era, an expression of the ideal and necessary education of the bureaucrat, the scope of which was to be encyclopaedic.⁴⁷ He compiled data on the Christian kingdoms of al-Andalus from different sources, trying to give the scribes of the Mamluk chancery an approximate idea of what Castile, Aragón, Navarre, and Portugal were and what their historical trajectory had been. This rudimentary geographical and historical background information was necessary for them to allow them to address the rulers of these realms correctly in case the need to formulate correspondence with them arose. It is logical that al-Qalqašandī knew more about Castile and the Crown of Aragón than about Navarre and Portugal. After all, Castile and, in particular Aragón, maintained comparatively frequent diplomatic relations with the Mamlūk sultans.⁴⁸ König suggests that Mamlūk authors after al-Qalqašandī did not only stop following the historical trajectory of Christian Iberia because their writings increasingly focused on events in Egypt and Syria, but because the heyday of Aragón's Mediterranean expansion was over by the mid-fifteenth century.⁴⁹ Ducène, in turn, underscores that al-Qalqašandī did not produce a coherent picture of any region he described because he always drew back on works from different periods pertaining to different genres simultaneously. His "failure" to produce a coherent account of Christian Iberia was due to the genre of his work, which did not prioritise producing a coherent historical account of the realms to be described, but sought to compose an encyclopaedic summary for non-historiographical purposes.

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⁴⁶ König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, pp. 83–113, 105–112, 273–275.

⁴⁷ For these reflections, see Keegan, Review. *The World in A Book*, pp. 176–177.

⁴⁸ Martínez Montávez, Relaciones de Alfonso X de Castilla, pp. 343–376; Alarcón y Santón and García de Linares, *Los documentos árabes diplomáticos*, pp. 335–390

⁴⁹ König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, pp. 321–322.

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