

The Production and Transmission of Knowledge in Islamicate Courts of the Middle and Early Modern Periods

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1) State of Research

You who believe, obey God and the Messenger, and those in authority among you. If you are in dispute over any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day: that is better and fairer in the end. (Quran 4:59)²

In this famous verse, the Quran uses the plural to instruct the Believers to obey the holders of authority (*ūlī l-amr*). If one looks for commonalities in the political cultures of the Islamicate world throughout the premodern and early modern periods, however, one soon notes the almost complete predominance— at least nominally – of monocratic rule, i.e. a single person claiming sovereignty over a given territory.³ Most premodern and early modern Muslims shared with their Christian and Jewish neighbors the experience of living in polities headed by a single man or, much less often, woman, who was often called caliph, sultan, or emir. Though only a minority of Islamicate rulers enjoyed uncontested authority, what was usually at stake was not monocratic rule *per se*, but the identity of the person who exercised it.

Against the background of near omnipresent monocratic rule, it is somewhat puzzling to see that to date courts – being the immediate social contexts of Islamicate rulers of the premodern and early modern periods – have received only

¹ I would like to thank the participants of the workshop “And the Sultan Needs to Know ...’ The Production and Transmission of Scholarly Knowledge at Islamic Courts of the Postformative Period,” held at NYU Abu Dhabi, April 2018, as well as Sebastian Günther (Göttingen), and Katrin Killinger (Leipzig) for their helpful input.

² Abdel Haleem (trans.), *Qur’an*, p. 56.

³ On monocratic and related forms of rule, see e.g. Hague, Harrop and McCormick, *Government*, pp. 86, 89–105, 137–138.

very limited scholarly attention. In her *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates* (2019) Emma J. Flatt notes that “[i]n the Muslim world more broadly, the study of courts has [...] been strikingly neglected,”⁴ while Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung, in their introduction to their groundbreaking *Court Cultures in the Muslim World* (2011), state that, compared to neighboring historical disciplines, “the study of Muslim court culture falls far behind and has so far not moved beyond the – indisputably valuable – stage of case studies.”⁵ As the existence of the works just quoted demonstrates, however, the tide is slowly turning. The past decade has seen the publication of several edited volumes dealing completely or in part with Islamicate courts,⁶ and there is a small, but steadily growing number of book-long studies on specific premodern and early modern courts.⁷

Many of these recent publications shed light on the central role of courts in the exercise and performative enactment of monocratic rule, while in part also examining related topics such as architecture, arts, and literature. However, they pay only very limited attention to the distinct roles of Islamicate courts in the production and transmission of knowledge.⁸ Consequently, the significance of princely courts for the intellectual history of the Islamicate world remains poorly understood. This applies both to what premodern Islamicate authors categorized as the Arab or tradition-based fields of learning (*‘ulūm naqliyya*), which could include religious disciplines such as jurisprudence and theology, language-specific fields such as

⁴ Flatt, *Courts*, p. 12.

⁵ Fuess and Hartung, “Introduction,” p. 2. For similar statements, see El Cheikh, “Court and Courtiers,” p. 80; eadem, “Abbasid and Byzantine Courts,” p. 517; Peacock and Yıldız, “Introduction,” p. 12; and for specific periods e.g. van Berkel *et al.*, *Crisis*, pp. 1–2; El Cheikh, “Prince,” p. 199; eadem, “Space,” pp. 335–336; Hillenbrand, “Aspects,” p. 22. For the Persianate world, the situation is partly different, see e.g. Binbaş, *Networks*, pp. 3–6; Flatt, *Courts*, pp. 10–12.

⁶ Recent examples include Fuess and Hartung (eds.), *Cultures*; Peacock and Yıldız (eds.), *Seljuks*; von der Höh, Jaspert and Oesterle (eds.), *Brokers*; Pomerantz and Vitz (eds.), *Presence*; Orthmann and Kollatz (eds.), *Ceremonial*; Canby et al. (eds.), *Court*; Duindam, Artan and Kunt (eds.), *Courts*; Çıpa and Fetvacı (eds.), *Writing*.

⁷ Recent examples include Flatt, *Courts*; Mauder, *Salon*; England, *Empires*; Naaman, *Literature*; van Berkel et al., *Crisis*; Fetvacı, *Picturing*.

⁸ Among the previously mentioned edited volumes, von der Höh, Jaspert, and Oesterle (eds.), *Brokers*; Çıpa and Fetvacı (eds.), *Writing*, shed the greatest light on questions of intellectual history. All monographs listed in the preceding footnote at least touch upon intellectual history, but none of them focuses exclusively on it.

poetry and prosody, but also history, and to the foreign, non-Arab, or rational sciences (*'ulūm 'aqliyya*), which comprised *inter alia* philosophy, medicine (both human and veterinary), and astronomy/astrology.⁹

This neglect of the role of courts in Islamicate intellectual history is problematic for at least five reasons. First, the present lack of studies of Islamicate courts results in an imperfect and skewed picture of the history of knowledge and education in Islamicate societies. Reflecting the focus of scholarly interest, this current incomplete picture privileges on the hand social groups, scholarly disciplines, and forms of knowledge production and transmission connected to more frequently examined – and primarily religious – institutions of learning such as the *madrasa* and the *dār al-ḥadīth*.¹⁰ On the other hand, it accords special attention to groups and their knowledge-related practices that took place outside of clearly specified and institutionalized social contexts, as is perhaps best exemplified by the current wave of interest in popular and “bourgeois” learned cultures during the late middle period in general and the Mamluk period in particular.¹¹ The same period, however, also provides particularly clear illustrations of the blind spots and potential problems caused by insufficient attention to courts in intellectual history. The long-lasting scholarly focus on a rather small group of established *'ulamā'* and their *madrasa*-centered activities has contributed to the perpetuation of what we now know to be an inaccurate image of the Mamluk military-political as unlettered semi-barbarians. Only sustained research efforts over the past decades have been able to correct this misrepresentation of the Mamluk military-political elite and show that many of its members were in fact closely integrated into often courtly process of primarily

⁹ Examples quoted from Biesterfeldt, “Encyclopedias,” p. 86. On premodern and early modern categorizations of fields of knowledge and their development, see in addition to this study Bakar, *Classification*; Bellion, “Classification;” Biesterfeldt, “Enzyklopädien;” de Callataÿ, “Encyclopaedism;” Endress, “Cycle;” Heck, “Hierarchy;” Melvin-Koushki, “Powers;” Vesel, *Encyclopédies*.

¹⁰ This is not to imply that the study of these social contexts is not highly valuable, as is perhaps best demonstrated by the fundamental new insights generated by classical examples of this line of inquiry such as Makdisi, *Rise*; Berkey, *Transmission*; Chamberlain, *Knowledge*; Ephrat, *Society*.

¹¹ For example, Bauer, “Anothologien;” idem, “Search;” idem, “Means;” Herzog, “Milieus;” idem, “Composition.”

religious knowledge production and transmission.¹² Moreover, especially scholars of Mamluk literature have argued that the importance of courts in intellectual and literary life diminished during the late middle period to the point of irrelevance.¹³ Such far reaching and general statements appear highly problematic given the very limited current state of our knowledge about courtly process of knowledge production and transmission during the late middle period and the almost complete absence of specialized studies on this topic, which is in part even acknowledged by the very advocates of the notion of the "irrelevance" of courts.¹⁴

Second, by largely sidelining the topic of courts, intellectual historians of the Islamicate world forego a promising opportunity for interdisciplinary and comparative exchange and research.¹⁵ While neighboring disciplines including European history have also long all but ignored the importance of courts as scholarly centers,¹⁶ the past years have seen a boom in studies on the intellectual history of especially late medieval and early modern European courts.¹⁷ Given the structural similarities between monocratic rule and the basic features of court life across the Old World, comparative analyses of Islamicate, European, and other learned courtly cultures appear most worthwhile, provided the necessary groundwork is laid by specialists in the respective geographical areas. While this argument is not meant to imply that historians of the Islamicate world necessarily have to emulate or "catch up" with their colleagues working on Europe or other regions of the world, it seeks to underline the

¹² For example, Mauder, *Krieger*; Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech;" Berkey, *Transmission*, pp. 146–160; Berkey, "Silver Threads;" Flemming, "Literary Activities;" Franssen "Amīr's Library."

¹³ For example, Talib, *Epigram*, p. 87; Bauer, "Shā'ir;" idem, "Means," p. 23; Herzog, "Culture," p. 145; Muhanna, "Century," p. 352; idem, *World*, pp. 20, 72; al-Musawi, *Republic*, pp. 81, 127, 248, 263. For critical comments on this view, see van Steenbergen, "Discourse," especially p. 3; Keegan, "Review," p. 252.

¹⁴ For example, Talib, *Epigram*, pp. 89–90.

¹⁵ On the importance of comparative court studies, see e.g. Bihrer, "Curia," pp. 268–269; Duindam, *Vienna*, p. 302.

¹⁶ Bihrer, "Curia," p. 263.

¹⁷ For example, Paravicini (ed.), *Erziehung*; Schlieben, *Macht*; Föllner, *Königskinder*; Grebner and Fried (eds.), *Kulturtransfer*; Füssel, Kuhle and Stolz (eds.), *Höfe*; Fried, "Netzen;" Heinecke, Rössler and Schock (eds.), *Residenz*; Pollnitz, *Education*; Hoffman, *Rule*; Sánchez-Molero, *Felipe*.

importance of bringing Islamicate experiences to the fore in the current development of a global history of courts.¹⁸

Third, an overly pronounced focus on religious intellectual institutions such as *madrasas* and the concomitant negligence of courts and other not primarily religious contexts of learning entails the risk of representing Islamicate societies as the quintessential “other” of medieval and early modern Europe. This is especially the case since, in the latter cultural context, the emancipation of scholarship and learning from religious control and the concomitant furthering of secularization through science are often perceived as driving forces of Western modernity.¹⁹ Moreover, the relative neglect of courts not only perpetuates the orientalist stereotype of Islamicate learning of especially later periods as inherently “religious,” it might also unintentionally buttress the image of Islamicate rulers as the profoundly unlettered and thus despotic counterparts of the “enlightened” princes of early modern Europe.

Fourth, closely connected to the previous point is the observation that, in those cases where the existence of intellectual activities in the context of Islamicate courts is too obvious to be denied or overlooked, it is often categorized – and thus implicitly dismissed – as “propaganda,” as Matthew L. Keegan’s study of learned literature during the Crusader period in the present volume illustrates with particular clarity. By attaching the overly simplistic label of “propaganda” to such activities, scholarship almost by necessity ignores the complex interplay between producers, transmitters, intended recipients, and audiences which characterizes much of the intellectual history of premodern and early modern Islamicate courts, and thus fails to embrace a promising opportunity to gain a more holistic understanding of past Islamicate societies.²⁰

Fifth, by discounting the role of courts in Islamicate intellectual history, historians and sociologists ignore valuable opportunities for developing a deeper

¹⁸ The prime example of this trend toward a global history of courts is the recent work of Jeroen Duindam, including his *Dynasties: A Global History of Power* (2015) and *Prince, Pen and Sword* (2018, edited together with Maaïke van Berkel).

¹⁹ For recent critical re-examinations of this narrative, see, e.g. Harrison, “Science;” Rectenwald, *Secularism*; Simons, “Secularization.”

²⁰ For a helpful schematic overview of such interplays, see Bauer, “Shā’ir.”

understanding of fundamental questions about the relationship of “knowledge” and “power.” For example: Is knowledge *per se* power? If not, how does it become power? Is the relationship between power and specific types of knowledge – such as religious knowledge – different from others? How can we define and refine the analytical categories of “power” and “knowledge” in order to apply them fruitfully to past societies, including Islamicate ones? Is there something specifically Islamicate about the relationship between “power” and “knowledge” in predominantly Muslim societies – and if so, what is it? Of course, no single study of the intellectual history of Islamicate courts, including those brought together in the present volume can provide definitive answers to any of these questions. Yet, not investigating the role of Islamicate role in the intellectual history means ignoring a rich heritage of past human experiences which can serve as an empirical basis toward a more nuanced understanding of the fundamental issues of human existence to which these questions point.

2) Thematic Focus and Conceptual Framework

In order to take a step toward filling the gaps in the state of research just outlined, the international workshop “And the Sultan Needs to Know ... The Production and Transmission of Scholarly Knowledge at Islamic Courts of the Postformative Period” brought together specialists in the intellectual history of the Islamicate World at New York University Abu Dhabi in April 2018. This was realized with the support of the New York Abu Dhabi Humanities Research Fellowship Program, which is gratefully acknowledged. The contributions to this workshop on the role of Islamicate courts in intellectual culture constitute the main basis for the present volume,²¹ which deals with material from North Africa, the Levant, Anatolia, Southeast Europe, Iraq, Greater Iran, and South Asia, the primary focus being on the Islamicate middle and early modern periods (c. 1050–1800 CE). By examining examples from a broad array of

²¹ Special thanks go to Evrim Binbaş, Walid Saleh, and Kurt J. Werthmuller, who participated in the workshop but for various reasons did not publish their contributions in the present volume, and to Hamid Bohloul, who co-authored one of the contributions but did not participate in the original workshop.

different topics, the contributions show that and how Islamicate courts of these periods functioned as centers of knowledge production and transmission, thereby challenging generalizing representations of courts of the time as unimportant to the intellectual culture around them. They moreover underline the importance of patronage in these processes and caution against historiographical, theoretical, and conceptual pitfalls in their study. The first five articles examine pertinent material from the *‘ulūm naqliyya* in chronological order, while the last three address the *‘ulūm ‘aqliyya*.

This volume embraces a consciously wide-ranging concept of “knowledge,” which in its breadth seeks to reflect the multiple meanings that inhabitants of the Islamicate world ascribed to the term *‘ilm* and its cognates.²² Specifically, the term “knowledge” is understood to comprise not only distinct religious and non-religious academic disciplines such as Quranic exegesis or medicine, but also poetry and other forms of literature²³ as well as administrative, practical, and artistic competences. The articles show that all of these forms of knowledge were produced and exchanged in courtly contexts.

While the originally Arabic term *‘ilm* may be considered an approximate equivalent to the English word “knowledge,” earlier research indicates that premodern Islamicate languages did not feature words that could be readily translated as “court” in the full social (as in “the members of the court”), spatial (as in “he was at court”), and performative (as in “she held court”) sense of the English word.²⁴ At the same time, the question of how to properly define “court” as an analytical category has vexed historians and sociologists for decades.²⁵ The thematic

²² The best available exploration of the broad semantic field of *‘ilm* is still Rosenthal, *Knowledge*.

²³ For an insightful exploration of the connection between the categories of “literature” and “knowledge,” see Gibson, “Literature.”

²⁴ For Arabic, see El Cheikh, “Abbasid and Byzantine Courts,” pp. 517–518; eadem, “Court and Courtiers,” p. 82; eadem, “Space,” p. 326; Brentjes, “Princes,” p. 352; Mauder, *Salon*, ch. 1.2.1; for Persian Peacock and Yildiz, “Introduction,” p. 13; Flatt, *Courts*, p. 13; and for Ottoman Turkish Peacock and Yildiz, “Introduction,” pp. 12–13; Konrad, *Hof*, pp. 28–29.

²⁵ For overviews of different approaches, see e.g. Bihrer, “Curia;” Butz and Dannenberg, “Überlegungen;” Müller, *Fürstenhof*, pp. 91–92, 96–99; Hirschbiegel, “Überzeitlichkeit,” pp. 20–23. On the problem of definition, see e.g. Hirschbiegel, “Überzeitlichkeit,” pp. 15–17, 24; Asch, *Hof*, p. 12; Asch, “Introduction,” pp. 7–10; Butz and Dannenberg, “Überlegungen,” pp. 2–6, 34; Bihrer, “Curia,” pp. 248–249; Gunn and

focus of the present volume on intellectual matters makes it seem best to build on the work of Norbert Elias, Ronald G. Asch, Felix Konrad, and others, and to understand courts primarily as interconnected social groups that are constituted by persons who have regular access to rulers.²⁶

The interrelations within courts are typically characterized by patronage, competition, and the exchange of economic, cultural, and social capital. Among these, patronage has to date by far received the most attention in the study of Islamicate societies.²⁷ Building again on Asch's and Konrad's work, we can understand patronage in courtly contexts as relations in which more powerful agents (patrons) provide protection, support, and/or capital assets to less powerful persons (clients) in exchange for loyalty and service. Such exchanges can, but typically do not have to, take place within institutionalized legal frameworks. Patronage relations are especially useful to patrons who are in control of large amounts of capital assets but require assistance in legitimating their position, or who capitalize on their clients to realize claims to supreme status. Typically bringing together at least one powerful figure and multiple persons who seek their support, courts often become patronage markets featuring complex networks of indirect clientage mediated through patronage brokers.²⁸

Given that the opportunities for patronage and the material resources rulers can provide are limited, the social relations at courts are often characterized by high levels of competition and rivalry. While it is not impossible for members of courts to

Janse, "Introduction," pp. 2, 4; El Cheikh, "Space," pp. 325–326; eadem, "Abbasid and Byzantine Courts," p. 517; eadem, "Court and Courtiers," p. 80; Fuess and Hartung, "Introduction," pp. 1–2, 4. For a detailed discussion of selected definitions and theoretical approaches regarding their usefulness in the study of premodern Islamicate societies, see Mauder, *Salon*, ch. 1.2.

²⁶ See also Asch, *Hof*, p. 14; Elias, *Gesellschaft*, p. 9; Konrad, "Überlegungen," p. 1057; idem, "Patterns," p. 237.

²⁷ The literature on patronage in Islamicate societies is too vast to be surveyed here. Important studies include Mottahedeh, *Loyalty*; Pfeiffer (ed.), *Politics*; Paul, *Herrschaft*; Bernardts and Nawas (eds.), *Patronate*; Sharlet, *Patronage*; Clifford, *State*; van Steenberg, *Order*; Eychenne, *Liens*. On the terminology of patronage in Islamicate societies, see in addition to these publications e.g. Brentjes, "Language;" Flatt, *Courts*, pp. 100–101, 105; Naaman, *Literature*, pp. 17–18; Sievert, "Family," pp. 97–98; Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, pp. 116–118; Paul, "History."

²⁸ Asch, *Hof*, pp. 18, 289–294, 308; Konrad, "Patterns," p. 237. On courts and patronage, see also e.g. Winterling, "Versuch," p. 80; Asch, "Introduction," pp. 16–17; Konrad, *Hof*, pp. 20–21; van Steenberg, *Order*, p. 60; El Cheikh, "Space," pp. 334–345; eadem, "Court and Courtiers," p. 87.

form factions, the “existential situation of competition”²⁹ they face on a continual basis typically limits the opportunities for collaboration in both the struggle for material goods and offices as well as political influence, social status, and the favor of rulers and the defense of valuable resources already obtained.³⁰ As Norbert Elias famously pointed out, rulers can make use of and actively fuel the competition among the members of their courts to control them and avoid the formation of powerful internal opposition groups.³¹

Pierre Bourdieu’s categorization of different types of capital offers a particularly valuable tool for grasping more clearly what members of courts exchange and for what they compete. Bourdieu defines “capital” as “accumulated work, either in material form or in internalized, incorporated form.”³² He differentiates between economic capital, such as money or property rights,³³ social capital that constitutes “the sum of effective and potential resources that are connected to the possession of a permanent network of more or less institutionalized *relations* of mutual acquaintance and recognition,”³⁴ and can include membership in specific groups such as courts, and cultural capital, which is the type of primary interest here. Cultural capital can have three forms: In its incorporated form, it constitutes “permanent dispositions of an organism”³⁵ which are acquired through learning and cannot be exchanged in an *ad hoc* fashion, but require time to be transferred through process of knowledge transmission. In contrast, objectified cultural capital that has the form of, say, books or apparatuses is more easily transferable. However, one typically needs incorporated cultural capital to make full use of its objectified form: While one can easily buy a book, one still has to go through the process of acquiring the literacy to read it. Institutionalized cultural capital as the third form in modern societies takes

²⁹ Daniel, *Hoftheater*, p. 34.

³⁰ Duindam, “Versuch,” pp. 380–381; Paravicini, “Alltag,” p. 19; Winterling, “Versuch.” See also Geary *et al.*, “Courtly Cultures,” p. 189; Naaman, *Literature*, pp. 2, 104–111, 280; England, *Empires, passim*; Ehlers, “Hofkultur,” p. 18; Yarbrough, *Friends*, pp. 167–172; Flatt, *Courts*, pp. 112–114.

³¹ Elias, *Gesellschaft*, pp. 105–110, 123, 126–138, 181–182.

³² Bourdieu, “Kapital,” p. 183.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 190–191.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

typically the form of educational or academic titles that label their holders as having achieved certain cultural competences. Within certain boundaries, economic, social, and cultural capital can be exchanged and transformed into other types through the investment of time and effort.³⁶ As the following articles demonstrate, Islamicate courts of the middle and early modern periods provide examples of multiple processes of exchange and transformation of cultural capital, with patronage-driven exchanges of objective cultural capital for economic capital constituting only one out of multiple forms.

3) Guiding Questions, First Answers, and Trajectories for Future Research

Given that each of the following articles is preceded by an abstract, it seems unnecessary to summarize their contents here. Instead, this section introduces the seven consciously broad and open guiding questions, one or several of which the contributors were requested to address in their articles. The section furthermore synthesizes some of the answers given to these questions in the articles and points to possible trajectories for future research.

(1) How and why did Islamicate courts become important in the production and transmission of knowledge?

Rulers were certainly not alone in initiating and exercising agency over processes of production and transmission of knowledge at courts. However, the typically rather extensive amounts of economic and other capital at their disposal enabled rulers to implement a broad array of different strategies to turn their courts into centers of knowledge production and transmission. These strategies could entail the provision of economic capital to individual poets and scholars who offered their services to rulers on a non-permanent, intermittent basis, as Matthew L. Keegan shows in his article "Rethinking Poetry as (Anti-Crusader) Propaganda: Licentiousness and Cross-Confessional Patronage in the *Ḥaīdat al-qaṣr*" through the example of the poet Ibn

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 185–198.

Rawāḥa al-Ḥamawī. However, rulers could also establish more permanent frameworks for learned exchange, as Christian Mauder's "Does a Mamluk Sultan Hold Religious Authority? Quranic Exegesis and *ḥadīth* Scholarship in Late Mamluk Courtly *maḡālis*" demonstrates in its analysis of the courtly salons regularly convened by the penultimate Mamluk Sultan al-Ghawrī. Moreover, rulers could also initiate and oversee courtly scholarly undertakings, as Anna Kollatz exemplifies in her "A Princess at Work: Historical Knowledge from Inside the Mughal Court" through her analysis of a Mughal collaborative historiographical project personally commissioned by the emperor. In their "Copies of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣūfī's *Book on the Star Constellations* as Patronage Objects and Their Properties," Hamid Bohloul and Sonja Brentjes shed light on how the personal interests and characteristics of rulers – up to and including their facial features – could impact the production and re-appropriation of scholarly material objects exhibiting distinctly courtly properties.

In addition to commissioning, rewarding, and overseeing scholarly undertakings, rulers and members of their family could also themselves become active in the production and transmission of knowledge, as three articles in the present volume illustrate. Kollatz studies the historiographical work of the Mughal princess Gulbadan Bīgum, while Mauder discusses the active involvement of the Mamluk Sultan al-Ghawrī in religious scholarship. Similarly, in his "Revisiting the Question of Literary Patronage under the Early Safavids," Theodore S. Beers addresses the case of the Safavid prince Sām Mīrzā (d. 975/1567), who authored a biographical anthology of poets. The same article also sheds light on the often-neglected question why rulers stopped or failed to support learned activities at their courts and identifies *inter alia* religious, military, and economic reasons.

As already noted, not only rulers, but also other members of courts could initiate and steer courtly processes of learned exchange. Maurice Pomerantz's article, "Local Knowledge for a Prince: A *Maqāma* on the Miracles of Water," examines how a courtly administrator used the geographical knowledge that he required for his professional duties to compose a sophisticated work of literature that he offered to a learned ruler. In his study of literature from the Crusader period, Keegan

demonstrates that the learned clients of rulers could follow agendas of their own that at times might be perceived as being at odds with those ascribed to princely patrons, as cases of Shi'ite rulers supporting Sunni poets (and vice versa) show. The contribution by Bohloul and Brentjes illustrates that even material objects, especially ones of foreign origin, could shape courtly practices of knowledge production and transmission.

Other contributions shed further light on the importance of external, transregional stimuli for the learned culture of courts. In her "A Strange Affliction from Abroad: The Ottoman Chief Imperial Physician Ḥayātīzāde's Treatise on the Polish Plait (*Plica polonica*)," Sara Nur Yıldız underscores the close entanglements between the production of medical knowledge at the early modern Ottoman court and the transimperial circulation of expertise about diseases and their treatment throughout the Mediterranean. Anna Akasoy's "Falconry at Medieval Islamicate Courts: Open-Air practice and Backstage Knowledge" situates Islamicate courtly practices of hunting with birds in their broader historical context spanning not only vast chronological, but also geographical dimensions. Among other things, Islamicate courtly knowledge about falconry built on earlier, pre-Islamic Iranian and Byzantine traditions, while also informing later transregional cultures of falconry in the Christian-ruled parts of Europe. Beers point to the significance of the transregional process of migration, which brought scholars from one part of the Islamicate world to courts in another, but also directs our attention to inter-courtly exchanges and competition within early modern Islamicate polities by highlighting the importance of regional courts for the development of Safavid literature.

In addition to economic considerations and motives related to the exercise, representation, and legitimation of rule discussed in more detail below, the articles collected here address several further reasons why members of courts engaged in learned practices. Akasoy and Yıldız elucidate the practical relevance that specialized fields of knowledge, such as human and veterinary medicine, had for the fulfillment of key social, performative, and military functions of Islamicate courts. Moreover, Keegan's, Mauder's, and Akasoy's research explores possible connections between

knowledge and courtly pastimes. While Mauder's article furthermore points to entanglements between courtly learning and the realm of religion, Keegan's contribution cautions against over-emphasizing the importance of religious motives for Islamicate court life without sufficient evidence. Kollatz's narratological analysis of Mughal historiographical writings, finally, highlights the role of courtly practices of knowledge production in the creation of meaningful representations of the past.

(II) What role did knowledge play in the exercise, representation, and legitimation of Islamicate rule?

Courtly knowledge-related objects, texts, and practices were often closely connected to the exercise, representation, and legitimation of rule in the Islamicate world. Textual representations of the behavior of rulers could help to portray them as pious, wise, just, and virtuous (Keegan, Mauder, Kollatz). Furthermore, we often note a close connection between knowledge, material objects, and the ways rulers demonstrated their command over all three types of capital discussed above through acts of conspicuous consumption (Beers, Akasoy, Bohloul and Brentjes). Embodied and performative knowledge-related practices served the dramatization of yet other qualities, such as personal prowess (Akasoy), while the collection and dissemination of medical knowledge could showcase care for the safety and prosperity of the realm (Yıldız). Collections of geographical knowledge such as the one edited by Pomerantz could be understood as textual manifestations of claims for sovereignty over the territories described therein. However, in studying such representative and legitimizing functions of courtly practices, texts, and objects, it is of paramount importance to scrutinize what exactly is communicated for which purposes, as Keegan argues in his critique of the application of overly simplistic and anachronistic categories to the courtly literature of the Crusader period.

(III) Who was the intended target audience of knowledge produced and transmitted at court?

Keegan's article also underlines the need to carefully delineate the intended audiences of courtly knowledge-related practices, texts, and objects. The examples examined in the present volume illustrate the broad array of possible answers to this question, ranging from individual figures or restricted courtly circles (Pomerantz, Kollatz), over significant parts of the courtly and learned elites within a given territory (Keegan, Mauder), to broad audiences that might lack the types of incorporated and institutionalized cultural capital constitutive for learned elites. The vernacularization processes of medical knowledge in the Ottoman realm studied by Yıldız constitute a particularly clear-cut example of such courtly processes of knowledge transmission targeting broader audiences. Moreover, Yıldız's work also highlights the importance of language as a marker of the intended audiences of learned texts produced in courtly contexts. Keegan, Pomerantz, and Mauder illustrate the similar role that literary categories such as "genre" can play in examining how authors, by situating themselves within specific literary traditions, defined and envisioned their intended audiences. Addressing a related issue, Kollatz's article exemplifies the problem of applying European genre categories to "autobiographical" text produced by members of early modern Islamicate courts. The contribution by Bohloul and Brentjes on copies of al-Şūfi's *Book on the Star Constellations* illustrates the importance of paying close attention to the properties of scholarly material objects in order to understand who the addressees were for whom they were produced, collected, and (re-)appropriated. Akasoy's study of falconry at Islamicate courts likewise sheds light on the role of richly decorated material objects as carriers of specialized knowledge intended to be perceived by courtly audiences. It moreover explores royal hunts as often very large open-air events that targeted much broader courtly audiences than most other knowledge-related practices.

(IV) What was the social role of people producing and transmitting knowledge within Islamicate courts?

The holders and transmitters of cultural capital fulfilled a broad variety of functions at Islamicate courts in addition to those of scholars and litterateurs in the narrower

sense, including those of administrators (Pomerantz), diplomats (Yıldız), military leaders (Kollatz), physicians (Yıldız), judges (Mauder), astrologers (Bohloul and Brentjes), falconers, animal keepers, and masters of the hunt (Akasoy), entertainers, boon companions, and advisers (Keegan, Mauder), copyists, illustrators, calligraphers, and craftsmen (Beers, Bohloul and Brentjes) – and even cooks and personal servants (Kollatz). Often on close terms with their respective ruler, they played an important role in the latter's self-presentation, also and especially when members of dynasties themselves took an interest in scholarship and literature and thereby caused the boundaries between the social groups to blur (Mauder, Beers, Kollatz). Although often highly dependent on their patrons for access to economic and social capital, and as a group internally divided by rivalry and competition, the status of some of these learned members of courts oscillated between that of clients and that of close personal intimates or even friends of the rulers (Keegan, Mauder), thus bringing to mind the figure of the favorite who receives so much scholarly attention in other court cultures.³⁷ While most people involved in the production and transmission of knowledge in Islamicate courts of the middle and early modern periods were of male gender, Kollatz draws attention to a female author of historiography. As her case study demonstrates, the gender dynamics of the production and exchange of cultural capital within Islamicate courts constitute a most promising topic of future research, also and especially when insights on knowledge-related practices are brought into conversation with results on how gender is constructed and performed.

(V) How precisely did rulers and people producing and transmitting knowledge engage in practices of courtly patronage?

While the concept of "patronage" has long been used to examine the relationship between rulers and scholars, it is often employed as an undertheorized and insufficiently contextualized catch-all phrase that prevents an in-depth examination

³⁷ See, for example the recent volume Raeymaekers and Derks (eds.), *Key*, and the older literature referenced therein. On the pertinent Arabic terminology, see Mottahedeh, *Loyalty*, p. 93; and on favoritism in Islamicate societies, see for example Sievert, "Favouritism."

of the pertinent personal interactions and the surrounding social, semantic, legal, institutional, economic, and cultural circumstances. The following articles demonstrate that, in addition to studying how, why, and in what terms specific sources speak about patronage relations, we also have to examine why individual actors were interested in establishing and retaining patronage relations, and what they hoped to gain from them. Studies of literary production at Islamicate courts promise to yield particularly insightful answers to these questions, as Keegan and Pomerantz exemplify in their articles. Keegan argues that poets of the Crusader period *qua* their literary activities signaled their membership in a distinct learned elite community to other members of this community, thereby substantiating their claim to a share in their patrons' economic capital. In his study of a *maqāma* of geographical content, Pomerantz raises the issue of the connection between the unusual thematic focus of this text and the shared learned interests of the author and his patron.

The contributions by Mauder, Beers, Akasoy, and Bohloul and Brentjes provide further insights into the economic dynamics of patronage relations. Mauder sheds light on the case of a scholarly client who, by threatening his patron with his immediate departure from his court, was able to negotiate a significant increase in the economic benefits he received in the form of permanent employment as a Sufi in his patron's funeral complex. Beers argues that the relative lack of literary patronage during the early Safavid period was related to the economic situation of the realm at large and furthermore underlines the need to ascertain precisely which members of the ruling courtly elite acted as patrons, rather than ascribing all patronage activities taking place during a given ruler's reign to that sovereign. Akasoy's article highlights that the patronage of falconry in its courtly form – including the production of learned literature about it – required heavy investments of all forms of capital, thus making it particularly attractive to rulers who sought to showcase their command over the necessary resources. Those transmitting and producing the knowledge necessary for hunting with birds could hope to receive appointments to permanent courtly appointments and thus enjoy a form of economic security other learned

clients of rulers typically lacked. Likewise taking economic aspects of patronage into account in their study of costly astrological manuscripts, Bohloul and Brentjes exemplify the insights to be gained from paying close attention to the material properties of courtly scientific objects. In contrast, Kollatz's comparative narratological analysis of the historiographical writings of a Mughal princess is particularly instructive by shedding light on how members of courts who, thanks to their socio-economic status, were not dependent on the patronage of others engaged with and produced knowledge about the past.

Approaching the issue of patronage from the perspective of the history of their respective fields of study, both Keegan and Beers alert us to how the grand narratives advanced by earlier generations of scholars continue to influence how we select and study our sources. Examining previous discussions of Safavid patronage, Beers presents a succinct outline of a decades-long debate and also points to important takeaways for future research, including the significance of transregional processes of migration, material factors, and the activities of regional courts in the study of patronage. Keegan's article offers a critical re-examination of the widely shared assumption that Arabic *adab* literature from the Crusader period can best be understood as "propaganda" written to buttress the image of its patrons as pious and ascetic Sunni warriors in Jihad. Based on examples from a 6th/12th century *adab* collection, Keegan demonstrates that this understanding is misleading in at least two ways, as it neither properly takes the audiences for whom the products of literary patronage were intended into account, nor does it do justice to the thematic breadth and internal diversity of the literary discourse of the time.

(VI) In what ways did the production and transmission of knowledge at courts manifest itself in objects of material culture?

The studies collected here showcase the diversity of knowledge-related material objects constituting courtly examples of objectified cultural capital. Given the text-based nature of much of historical research, it is no surprise that almost every article engages with manuscripts stemming from courtly contexts. Other objects addressed

include illustrations and calligraphies (Beers, Kollatz, Bohloul and Brentjes), globes and other scientific instruments (Bohloul and Brentjes), and falconry-related items ranging from technical equipment and smaller pieces of art to sizeable architectural complexes and hunting enclosures (Akaosy).

Three main takeaways emerge from these engagements with the material world of courts: First, material objects are particularly valuable sources of information on how courtly iconographies and practices of knowledge and power travelled over large chronological and spatial distances, as Akasoy's study of Islamicate falconry exemplifies. Second, Bohloul and Brentjes remind especially text-based historians and students of literature that past Islamicate learned practices, including courtly ones, were to a very large extent material-bound, in the sense that they were based on and resulted in physical objects such as the astrological manuscripts analyzed in their article. Hence, any attempt to study courtly knowledge-related practices that sidelines the issue of their materiality necessarily neglects an essential feature. Third, following the same line of reasoning, Bohloul and Brentjes also argue that a holistic analysis of Islamicate courtly learned cultures requires a deeper understanding of how, why, and for whom pertinent material objects were produced and re-appropriated. Such an understanding, however, requires the close study of the physical properties of extant objects.

(VII) Was there something particularly "courtly" about the ways knowledge was produced and transmitted at Islamic courts?

The articles collected here point to several characteristic features of the courtly transmission and production of knowledge that, while not necessarily exclusive to this social context, do constitute promising topics for future research. First, and connected to the discussion of the preceding question, it has become clear that Islamicate courts often operated within distinct cultural frameworks of esthetic expectations that shaped the often very costly performances and objects through which knowledge was embodied and communicated (Akasoy, Bohloul and Brentjes). Future studies will add insights about how rulers and the members of their courts, by fulfilling these

expectations, demonstrated their control over amounts and forms of capital necessary for courtly forms of conspicuous consumption, but typically unavailable in other social contexts.

Second, *adab*, in its various forms as examined by Keegan and Pomernatz, constituted a type of knowledge that, while not cultivated in courtly circles alone, nevertheless shaped Islamicate court life and its internal rivalries in ways that require further study. Particularly worthwhile at this point appear analyses of the precise functions that the cultivation of *adab* fulfilled for learned authors and litterateurs who were closely connected to rulers, of their intended audiences, and of the contributions that people who stood outside or at the fringe of these social groups rendered to their discourse.

Third, members of Islamicate courts often participated in transregional networks of exchange, through which new ideas, texts, objects, and bodies of knowledge circulated across vast distances as well as cultural and linguistic boundaries. Central figures in these networks included cultural brokers and go-betweens, including, for example, converts, translators, and diplomats (Yıldız) as well as travelling artisans and scholars (Keegan, Mauder, Beers, Bohloul and Brentjes). The role that such courtly liminal figures played for learned court life deserves further analysis, as do the character and extent of their contributions to the development of Islamicate scholarship.

Fourth, the interconnections, similarities and differences between the forms and properties of knowledge produced and transmitted within and outside of courtly contexts require further attention. This applies especially to disciplines that were studied equally in courtly and non-courtly contexts, often based on the same foundational texts. The contributions by Mauder and Kollatz highlight distinctive characteristics of courtly engagements with historiography and religious learning. These characteristics could include the types of issues examined, the perspectives from which they were approached, the sources of knowledge consulted, and the ways in which scholarly projects were initiated and managed. The available case studies, however, do not represent comprehensive comparative examinations of courtly and

non-courtly cultures of cultural capital. Such studies, however, seem necessary to gain more detailed insights into the distinctive characteristics of courtly and non-courtly forms of knowledge.

Taken together, the contributions to the present volume thus shed light on some of the key features of courts as centers in the production and transmission of knowledge. But more than anything, they underline the need for further research on this understudied field of Islamic intellectual history.

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