

The “Lamp of Hind” in Cairo: How an Indian Jurist Became the Chief Hanafi Judge of the Mamluk Sultanate in the Fourteenth Century

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Abstract

This article explores scholarly exchange across the Arabian Sea in the fourteenth century with respect to Islamic law. It connects legal contexts from the Delhi Sultanate to the Cairo Sultanate and shows how the Sunni legal schools (madhhabs) and the recently emergent system of legal pluralism shaped transoceanic exchanges of scholarship. In particular, this article focuses on the career of Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī (d. 773/1372), an Indian scholar who traveled from Delhi via Mecca to Cairo, and then built an accomplished career that culminated with him as chief Hanafī judge in Cairo. It examines his relationships with Turkish mamluks and sultans as well as his prolific writings to uncover their shared investment in the Hanafī madhhab and the significance of ongoing transregional debates between the Hanafī and Shafī‘ī legal schools. In so doing, this article sheds light on a missing history of how Mamluk initiatives towards expanding legal pluralism between the madhhabs created new opportunities across the Indian Ocean for Hanafī jurists like Sirāj al-Dīn. Hence, it widens our understanding of premodern Islamic intellectual exchange between South Asia and the Middle East, showing how South Asia also served as an exporter of Islamic scholarship and legal expertise rather than as its peripheral recipient.

Of the four Sunni legal schools (*madhhabs*), the Shafī‘ī school is considered to have been the most predominant in the Indian Ocean since medieval times. Given that the Shafī‘ī school spread across much of the Indian Ocean littoral, from East Africa and South India to the Indonesian archipelago, this idea is not particularly controversial or contested.¹ Yet, many littoral societies did in fact have a strong presence of the Hanafī school, such as in Sindh, Gujarat, and even in medieval Yemen (particularly the Tihamah). Furthermore, the Indian Ocean was integrated within trade and scholarly networks extending further inland, such as in South Asia and Afghanistan where the Hanafī school was predominant. The role of the non-Shafī‘ī Sunni legal schools within the Indian Ocean, and their interactions therein with the Shafī‘ī school, has not yet been seriously explored.²

1. Andre Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol. 1, *Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam, 7th–11th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 69; Mahmood Kooria, *Islamic Law in Circulation: Shāfi‘ī Texts across the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

2. See Sohaib Baig, “Indian Hanafis in an Ocean of Hadith: Islamic Legal Authority between South Asia and

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Consider, very briefly, the portrait that emerges from the voluminous biographical dictionary of the famous Mamluk hadith scholar and historian Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497).³ Al-Sakhāwī lists about sixty-five scholars and traders who traveled *from* Mamluk domains, mainly the Hijaz and Egypt, *to* “Hind.” He describes most of the scholars as Shafi‘ī (at least twenty-four), but he also lists several from the Maliki, Hanafi, and even Hanbali schools. In the reverse direction, he names several dozen scholars from South Asia (with the “al-Hindī” affiliation) who traveled to or were active in the Hijaz, Cairo, and other parts of the Mamluk Sultanate. They, in contrast, were overwhelmingly Hanafi. Only two such individuals are explicitly identified as Shafi‘ī (in addition to one Maliki).⁴ Hence, the majority of the Indians in his biographical dictionary who traveled to or settled in the Mamluk Sultanate were Hanafis; whereas most of the scholars who traveled from the Mamluk lands to South Asia were Shafi‘īs.

Whereas contemporary scholarship has recognized the Shafi‘ī jurists in al-Sakhāwī’s dictionary who would find employment as judges and imams along the Indian Ocean littoral, it has not yet reckoned with the Indian Hanafis who found employment in the Mamluk Sultanate as scholars and legal officials. This article analyzes the career of one such prominent Indian Hanafi scholar, Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī (also, Sirāj-i Hindī) (d. 773/1372), who studied in Delhi before making his way to Mecca, then Cairo, and eventually achieved the powerful position as chief Hanafi judge in Cairo. Besides serving as a judge, Sirāj al-Dīn also composed many texts and commentaries on Hanafi legal doctrine. In examining his career and scholarship, the article reveals the transregional history of the Sunni madhhab-system and its role in enabling such legal connection and exchange from medieval Delhi to Cairo (and beyond).

The significance of such legal and juristic connections between South Asia and the Middle East from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries has not yet been studied within the historiographies of the Hanafi madhhab, the Delhi Sultanate, the Mamluk Sultanate of Cairo, or the Indian Ocean. Historians of the Delhi Sultanate have discussed the role of the Delhi political elite in patronizing scholars, the nature of sultan-jurist relationships, as well as the commissioning of major legal compilations such as the fourteenth-century *Fatāwā-yi Tātārkhāniyya*.⁵ Yet, there is not much exploration of how Hanafi jurists in the Delhi Sultanate negotiated and built upon Islamic legal traditions within a transregional context beyond Central Asia.⁶

the Arabian Peninsula, 16th–20th Centuries” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2020).

3. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi‘ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi‘* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992).

4. For the Maliki, see *ibid.*, 3:257, “Sa‘īd al-Hindī al-Mālikī.” For the Shafi‘īs, see *ibid.*, 6:36, 10:140.

5. Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Sunil Kumar, *The Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate, 1192–1286* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), 192–238; Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Salāṭīn-i Dihlī ke mazhabī rujhānāt* (Delhi: Idārah-yi Adabiyāt-i Dillī, 1981).

6. For some relevant works, see Zafarul Islam, *Fatawa Literature of the Sultanate Period* (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2005); Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, “The Impact of Ibn Taimiyya on South Asia,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 (1990): 120–49; Muhammad Qamaruddin, *Crime and Punishment in the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526)* (Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributors, 1992).

Similarly, the activities of Indian scholars in the Mamluk Sultanate has not drawn much attention in the historiography on the Mamluk Sultanate, although scholarship on Indian-Mamluk diplomatic and commercial connections has been growing.⁷ Historians have recognized other transregional scholarly connections, such as the influx of Maliki jurists from West Africa and Andalusia to Mamluk Cairo, fueled by the decline of Muslim rule in Andalusia and the Sunnification of Egypt under the Mamluk Sultanate.⁸ Likewise, the influx of overland Anatolian and Central Asian Hanafis to Mamluk (and Ayyubid) lands, on the heels of the Mongol invasions, is also relatively well-known.⁹ The lack of attention towards Indian scholars may reflect the relatively lower number of Indian scholarly migrants to Cairo.¹⁰ It also likely reflects a perception of South Asia as being primarily the recipient of Islamic scholarship, at the periphery of the Islamic heartlands of the Middle East.¹¹ For instance, while the Maghribi traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's (d. 770/1368 or 779/1377) stints as a judge in Delhi and the Maldives are well-known, there is virtually no attention given to Sirāj al-Dīn's appointment as chief Hanafi judge in Cairo in the same century.¹²

By exploring the juristic and scholarly connections between the Delhi and Cairo Sultanates, this article makes a broader intervention regarding the histories of Islamic transregional intellectual exchange. It foregrounds the madhhab-system (and the idea of four-madhhab pluralism, whereby four madhhabs were recognized as the canonical schools of Sunni law) as a pillar of legal connectivity, an overlapping legal framework recognized by diverse historical Muslim societies. The madhhab-system's significance for transregional connections is often lost in the attention to other forms of connection in Islamic scholarship such as hadith and Sufi networks as well as the politics of courtly patronage.

7. See, for instance, Mustafa Banister's article in this issue. See also Stephan Conermann and Anna Kollatz, "Some Remarks on the Diplomatic Relations between Cairo, Delhi/Dawlatābād, and Aḥmadābād during the Eighth/Fourteenth and Ninth/Fifteenth Centuries," in *Mamluk Cairo: A Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics*, ed. Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche, 621–37 (Leiden: Brill, 2019); John L. Meloy, "Aggression in the Best of Lands': Mecca in Egyptian-Indian Diplomacy in the Ninth/Fifteenth Century," in *ibid.*, 604–20; Meia Walravens, "Arabic as a Language of the South Asian Chancery: Bahmani Communications to the Mamluk Sultanate," *Arabica* 67 (2020): 409–35. Though not on Mamluk/Cairene-Indian connections, the following chapter on Rasulid Yemen and India in the thirteenth century is also relevant: Elizabeth Lambourn, "India from Aden: *Khuṭba* and Muslim Urban Networks in Late Thirteenth-Century India," in *Secondary Cities and Urban Networking in the Indian Ocean Realm, c. 1400–1800*, ed. Kenneth R. Hall, 55–97 (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2008). See also Carl F. Petry, "The Mamluk Sultanate from a Global Perspective," in *The Mamluk Sultanate: A History*, 80–128 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

8. For instance: Maribel Fierro, "Mālikī Jurists from the Maghrib and al-Andalus in Post-Fāṭimid Egypt," in *The Maghrib in the Mashriq: Knowledge, Travel and Identity*, ed. Maribel Fierro and Mayte Penelas, 411–35 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021).

9. See several works by Tuncay Başoğlu, including *al-Fiḥḥ fī al-ʿahdayn al-Ayyūbī wa-l-Mamlūkī: khaṣāʾiṣ al-taʾlīf wa-sard al-muʾallafāt* (Amman: Dār al-Rāyāḥīn, 2022).

10. Carl F. Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 77.

11. See Mahmood Kooria, "Un agent abyssinien et deux rois indiens à la Mecque: Interactions autour du droit islamique au XVe siècle," trans. Thibault Le Texier, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 74, no. 1 (2019): 75–103.

12. Barbara D. Metcalf, "Ibn Battuta as a Qadi in the Maldives," *Islam in South Asia in Practice*, ed. Barbara D. Metcalf, 271–78 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Yet, itinerant Muslims jurists would very much draw upon the legal infrastructure of the societies they visited, including their foundational commitment to and support for the madhhabs and madhhab pluralism. An affiliation with a given madhhab, which could be further demonstrated through engagement with its scholarship and canonical authorities—such as by writing legal commentaries—could hold special political and social importance in building a network and gaining employment or patronage. Hence, newcomers from a different political regime could make inroads and connections through their participation in the shared legal tradition of the madhhab.

This article begins with an exploration of the histories of the madhhabs, and in particular, the idea of four-madhhab pluralism, in the Delhi Sultanate, which was strongly Hanafi in the fourteenth century. It then examines Sirāj al-Dīn’s early years in Delhi and his subsequent journey to Mecca and Cairo, piecing together clues from each of these cities about his intellectual development and his opportunities as a Hanafi in their judicial systems. It proceeds to unpack his standout career in Cairo, exploring his steady rise in the judicial bureaucracy, despite occasional setbacks, to the position of chief Hanafi judge. Finally, the last section analyzes Sirāj al-Dīn’s writings and scholarship, showing how he addressed questions related to Mamluk rule and the Hanafi madhhab (in conversation with Shafi‘i critiques), and why this was significant in the diverse legal arena of the fourteenth-century sultanate.

The Four Madhhabs in Medieval Delhi

Sometime between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, a profound Sunni consensus emerged especially around Baghdad, Cairo, and Greater Syria that recognized the validity of four legal traditions: the Hanafi, Shafi‘i, Hanbali, and Maliki schools. Yet, relationships between madhhabs did not remain static or neutral. The creation of new chief judge positions for each madhhab at Cairo in 663/1265 by the Mamluk sultan Baybars (r. 1260–77), recognized as a watershed moment in Islamic legal history, did not end inter-madhhab influence, critique, or debate.¹³ Relations between madhhabs varied across regions, depending on state patronage and the legal affiliations of the local populations. As such, inter-madhhab relations and differences continued to matter, as intellectual debates and pedagogical tools regarding legal doctrine and reasoning, and as important elements of a scholar’s identity with potential political and social ramifications.

In fourteenth-century Delhi, the idea of the four madhhabs constituting Sunni legal orthodoxy was referenced even though not all of them had a strong presence there. The famed historian Ṣayyid al-Dīn Baranī (d. 758/1357), a contemporary of Sirāj al-Dīn, would write about considering the opinions of “the ‘*ulamā*’ of the four madhhabs” in his famous

13. For some seminal articles on this development, see Sherman A. Jackson, “The Primacy of Domestic Politics: Ibn Bint al-A‘azz and the Establishment of Four Chief Judgeships in Mamlūk Egypt,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 1 (1995): 52–65; Yossef Rapoport, “Legal Diversity in the Age of *Taqīd*: The Four Chief *Qāḍīs* under the Mamluks,” *Islamic Law and Society* 10 (2003): 210–28; Joseph Escovitz, “The Establishment of Four Chief Judgeships in the Mamlūk Empire,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102, no. 3 (1982): 529–31.

work on political theory and statecraft, the *Fatāwā-yi jahāndārī*.¹⁴ This sentiment was also seen in the famous discussion he recorded between Sultan ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khiljī (r. 1296–1316) and his Hanafi judge regarding accepting *jizya* (capitation fee) from Hindu subjects. In his account, the judge informed the sultan of his concerns that all the madhhabs, apart from the Hanafis, did not view Hindus as legitimate members of the protected category of *ahl-i kitāb* (people of the Book) and as eligible to pay the *jizya* (and hence that they, as Hanafis, had adopted a minority opinion as compared to the other madhhabs).¹⁵ Later, Sultan Firūz Shāh Tughluq (r. 1351–88) was praised by a biographer in 1371 as being learned in law according to the “four madhhabs.”¹⁶

Despite these references to “four madhhabs,” Delhi in the fourteenth century appears to have been an overwhelmingly Hanafi city (in comparison to the other Sunni schools). Sources do occasionally mention visitors from other madhhabs, such a Maliki scholar from Baghdad.¹⁷ Ibn Baṭṭūṭa also mentioned several in his travelogue whom he encountered during his visit.¹⁸ We also know that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was himself appointed briefly as a judge in 1333, due to the positive impression he had made upon Sultan Muḥammad b. Tughluq (r. 1324–51), even as he protested that he was a Maliki and that the local population was Hanafi.¹⁹ Although several Shafi‘i jurists were mentioned as being born or having lived in Delhi in the thirteenth century, they appear to have receded from Delhi by the fourteenth century.²⁰

Relations between Hanafis and Shafi‘is did have a more colorful and contentious past. One particular trope, which surfaced across multiple centuries in different contexts, concerned the alleged disregard by Hanafi jurists for hadith literature. One of the earliest instances close to the South Asian context concerned the eleventh-century sultan Maḥmūd al-Ghaznawī (r. 998–1030), who reportedly switched from the Hanafi to Shafi‘i madhhab.²¹ In

14. Ziyā’ al-Dīn Baranī, *Fatāwā-yi jahāndārī (Rulings on Temporal Government)*, ed. Afsar Salīm Khān (Lahore: Idārah-ī Taḥqīqāt-i Pākistān, Dānishgāh-i Punjāb, 1972), 200.

15. Ziyā’ al-Dīn Baranī, *The Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī of Ziaa al-Din Barni*, ed. Saiyid Ahmad Khan (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1862), 291; idem, *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, trans. Ishtiyāq Ahmad Zilli (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2015), 177.

16. S. H. Askari, *Sīrat-i Firūz Shāhī: Translation of a Unique Manuscript* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 2019), 393.

17. Muḥammad Amīr Khurd Kirmānī, *Siyar al-awliyā’* (Delhi: Maṭba‘yi Muḥibb-i Hind, 1885), 266–67.

18. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭa*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Mun‘im al-‘Iryān (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-‘Ulūm, 1987), 2:463–69.

19. Ibid., 523–24.

20. See Kumar, *Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate*, 222–23. There are no Shafi‘i scholars from/in Delhi listed in the famous biographical dictionary *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir* for the fourteenth century. See also the biography of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Armawī (d. 715/1315), a Shafi‘i scholar born in Delhi in 644/1246 who eventually moved to Yemen and the Hijaz, and beyond: ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī, *al-I‘lām bi-man fi tārīkh al-Hind min al-a‘lām al-musammā bi-Nuzhat al-khawāṭir wa-bahjat al-masāmi‘ wa-l-nawāzīr* (hereafter *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*) (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1999), 2:200. See also the entry for Farīd al-Dīn al-Shāfi‘ī of Awadh, likely from the late thirteenth century, and his students in Awadh in the fourteenth century: ibid., 187.

21. Sultan Maḥmūd’s conversion to the Shafi‘i madhhab may be better understood, as mentioned by others, within the context of the politics of the Karrāmiyya, a legal-theological group active in the tenth to thirteenth

an anecdote related by the renowned Shafi‘i scholar al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), who himself cited the Shafi‘i scholar Qaffāl al-Marwazī (d. 417/1026), the learned Sultan Maḥmūd would invite scholars to relate and discuss hadith in his presence.²² Gradually, according to the anecdote, he began to notice most hadiths would support the Shafi‘i school, which unsettled his own convictions in the Hanafi school. He then asked the scholars of his court to hold a prayer demonstration according to both schools for his observation (though it is not mentioned how this would answer his concerns regarding hadith). Al-Marwazī first performed the prayer according to the Shafi‘i school with utmost purity and perfection, and with full attention to all the requisite etiquettes and obligations. He then performed prayer according to the Hanafi school in the most outrageous manner: he prayed while wearing tanned dog skin, with about a quarter of his clothes soiled in impurity (*najāsa*); he also made ablution with a drink made from dates (*nabīdh*), attracting flies and mosquitoes in the heat of summer; and he recited the Qur’anic verses in Persian as opposed to Arabic, among other issues. In this story, Sultan Maḥmūd was enraged and declared he would have killed him had not Imām Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) authorized this prayer. The Hanafis protested that this was not an accurate depiction of their school, so al-Marwazī gathered the books of the school, and the sultan had a Christian scribe read them out (presumably to remain impartial); the sultan, according to this account, found that the prayer did indeed accord to the Hanafi school, and he thus switched to the Shafi‘i school.

This story does not appear to have been recounted by historians in Delhi or Central Asia, such as the eleventh-century Gardīzī²³ (who was present at the sultan’s court), al-‘Utbī²⁴ (also in his employment), or al-Bayhaqī²⁵ (who discusses the sultan’s patronage of Hanafi and Shafi‘i notables), the thirteenth-century al-Jūzjānī²⁶ (who does not mention

centuries in Khurasan, which developed strong conflicts with the Shafi‘i-Ash‘ari theological school (and the Hanafi school as well). Sultan Maḥmūd was initially supportive of the Karrāmiyya before turning away from them. The Karrāmiyya would be severely weakened in 595/1199, when the Ghurid sultans abruptly converted from the Karrāmiyya to the Hanafi and Shafi‘i madhhabs. See Muhammad Khalid Masud, “Religion and State in Late Mughal India: The Official Status of the *Fatawa Alamgiri*,” *LUMS Law Journal* 3, no. 1 (2016): 32–50, at 34–36; Margaret Malamud, “The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan: The Karramiyya in Nishapur,” *Iranian Studies* 27, no. 1–4 (1994): 37–51; Finbarr Barry Flood, “Ghurid Monuments and Muslim Identities: Epigraphy and Exegesis in Twelfth-Century Afghanistan,” *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 42, no. 3 (2005): 263–94.

22. ‘Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī, *Mughīth al-khalq fī tarjīh qawl al-ḥaqq* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Miṣriyya, 1934), 57–59.

23. Abū Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Ḥayy b. Daḥḥāk Gardīzī, *Tārīkh-i Gardīzī*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥabībī (Tehran: Dunyā-yi Kitāb, 1984), 386–419.

24. Al-‘Utbī did mention, however, that Sultan Maḥmūd’s brother Abū al-Muẓaffar Naṣr was a strong supporter of the Hanafis. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-‘Utbī, *al-Yamīnī fī sharḥ akhbār al-sulṭān yamīn al-dawla wa-amīn al-milla Maḥmūd al-Ghaznawī*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Thāmīrī (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī‘a li-l-Ṭibā‘a wa-l-Naṣr, 2004), 435.

25. See Bosworth’s discussion on this topic, drawing from al-Bayhaqī and other sources: C. E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern India, 994–1040* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1992), 174–79.

26. Minhāj al-Dīn ‘Uthmān al-Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, ed. Captain William Nassau Lees, Mawlawī Khādīm Ḥusayn, and Mawlawī ‘Abd al-Ḥayy (Calcutta: College Press, 1864), 8–11.

Sultan Maḥmūd's legal affiliation), or the fourteenth-century Baranī (who describes the sultan as a Shafi'ī).²⁷ However, it did have a long afterlife in the Mamluk and even the Ottoman context. It was approvingly quoted and referenced by many Shafi'ī historians after al-Juwaynī, including Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), and al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) (though it is not mentioned by the twelfth-century Ibn al-Jawzī, d. 597/1201).²⁸ The fifteenth-century Cairo-based Hanafi historian al-Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470) rejected this story, arguing that the sultan was well-learned in jurisprudence and had no need for an explanation about such basic differences between the madhhabs that were well-known to even the most junior of jurists and students.²⁹ In the late sixteenth century, the Mecca-based Afghan Hanafi Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1606) would write a detailed legal response to the issues raised in this story.³⁰ Even as late as the twentieth century, the Ottoman Hanafi scholar Zāhid al-Kawtharī (d. 1952) would write another response to the legal claims in the story.³¹

Given Hanafi dominance in Delhi, it is not surprising that this anecdote does not appear to have resurfaced in the Delhi sources. Yet, the trope of the low regard by Hanafi jurists for hadith—which, in the anecdote, had triggered Sultan Maḥmūd's anxieties and eventual conversion to the Shafi'ī madhhab—would reappear in other instances. One example is the famous debate about *samā'* (Sufi auditions) in Delhi, which occurred when Sirāj al-Dīn was likely still around in the city.³² A group of judges petitioned the sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughluq (r. 1320–25) to prohibit the Sufi master Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' (d. 725/1325) from engaging in this practice, arguing, among other things, that it was not permitted by Abū Ḥanīfa. In response to their pressure, the sultan held lengthy debates at his court between the two camps. At the debates, Nizām al-Dīn was reported to have been deeply disappointed and perplexed by the opposing camp's refusal to even listen to hadith traditions in favor of *samā'*. Instead, driven by their jealousy towards Nizām al-Dīn, they prioritized their jurisprudence over the “sound” (*ṣaḥīḥ*) hadith and dismissed those that were cited in support of *samā'* as being associated with Imām al-Shāfi'ī, whom they called an “enemy of our scholars” (*dushman-i 'ulamā'yi-mā-ast*).³³

27. Baranī, *Fatāwā-yi jahāndārī*, 18.

28. Shams al-Dīn Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977), 5:180; Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-kubrā*, ed. Maḥmūd Aḥmad et al. (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, n.d.), 5:316; Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arnā'ūṭ and Muḥammad Na'im (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1996), 17:486–87; Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī tawārīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā' and Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā' (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1992), 15:211–12. See also al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, 1:72.

29. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1969), 4:273.

30. Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī, *Tashyī' al-fuqahā' al-Ḥanafīyya bi-l-tashnī' 'alā sufahā' al-Shāfi'iyya*, Maktabat Makka al-Mukarrama, MS 109/Fiqh Ḥanafī.

31. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq bi-ibṭāl fī Mughīth al-khalq* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li-l-Turāth, n.d.), 58–64.

32. Kashshaf Ghani, *Sufi Rituals and Practices: Experiences from South Asia, 1200–1450* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 87–115.

33. Kirmānī, *Siyar al-awliyā'*, 531.

Although enveloped in many idiosyncrasies, including a perceived personal jealousy towards Niẓām al-Dīn, this account contained the familiar trope of how outrageously far Hanafi jurists could go in their dismissal of sound hadith. Yet, there was a slight variation here. The pro-*samāʿ* camp was not actually Shafīʿi but, for official purposes, Hanafi—which is why the jurists had specifically invoked Abū Ḥanīfa’s opinion against *samāʿ*, arguing that “in our city, acting in accordance with legal tradition is prioritized (*muqaddam*) over hadith.”³⁴ In response, the pro-*samāʿ* camp refused to be bound to exclusive conformity (*taqlīd*) to the Hanafi madhhab and argued for drawing upon sound hadith outside their madhhab. This was propounded at length by Niẓām al-Dīn’s senior disciple Fakhr al-Dīn Zarrādī (d. 748/1347–48), who also participated in the courtly debates. In a treatise on *samāʿ*, Fakhr al-Dīn argued that following one fixed madhhab (*muʿayyan*) led to things like narrowness and rigidity (Ar. *tadyīq*, Pers. *tangī*).³⁵ Instead, Sufis had no fixed loyalties to madhhabs and practiced law on the direct basis of revelation. Fakhr al-Dīn hence devoted separate chapters discussing proofs from Qurʾanic verses, hadith reports, and the practices of early Sufis and Islamic figures—all of which, he argued, supported the permissibility of *samāʿ* (or its status as *mubāḥ* within certain parameters).

Fakhr al-Dīn’s critique against exclusive conformity to the madhhabs is an important measure of how deeply the madhhabs—and jurists associated with them—had come to direct legal practice in this period. Some have noticed a similarity with the famous critiques against *taqlīd* produced by the contemporaneous Damascene scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1327), who also wrote against exclusively following one madhhab (though he was firmly opposed to *samāʿ*).³⁶ Another opinion instead places Fakhr al-Dīn in the tradition of the Sufi master Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) and in contrast views his Hanafi opponents as being influenced by Ibn Taymiyya due to their common criticism of *samāʿ*.³⁷ In all, it reflected a self-declared Sufi independence from the madhhabs that would be articulated by several contemporaneous Sufis in neighboring regions and would continue to find expression in the following centuries.³⁸

By the time of Sirāj al-Dīn, then, the Hanafi madhhab was unmistakably dominant in the capital of Delhi, enough to elicit a Sufi reaction against exclusive conformity to the madhhab. Alongside Hanafi dominance, there was a general recognition of Sunni legal pluralism, or the idea that four madhhabs constituted the authoritative Sunni legal tradition, and sources discussed, to a limited extent, the scholars from other legal schools such as the Maliki school who visited Delhi from abroad. Yet, there was likely a veritable decline in the local Shafīʿi juristic presence in Delhi from the previous century. Hints of the earlier, more

34. Ibid.

35. Fakhr al-Dīn Zarrādī, *Risālat uṣūl al-samāʿ ʿArabī* (Delhi: Maṭbaʿyi Muḥibb-i Hind, 1889), 11.

36. See Nizami’s discussion of this, as well as his reference to Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān’s views in “Impact of Ibn Taymiyya on South Asia,” 125.

37. Ghani, *Sufi Rituals and Practices*, 85–86.

38. See Muzaffar Alam’s discussion of how a seventeenth-century Chishti scholar drew upon fourteenth-century Sufis ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 736/1336) and Sharaf al-Dīn Manerī (d. 782/1381), among others, to reject being affiliated with a madhhab: Muzaffar Alam, “The Debate Within: A Sufi Critique of Religious Law, *Tasawwuf* and Politics in Mughal India,” *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 138–59.

intense periods of Hanafi-Shafi'i factionalism in Central Asia and Khurasan also erupted in moments of courtly debate, as in the comments about Imām al-Shāfi'i constituting an enemy to the Hanafis. The trope concerning Hanafi juristic prioritization—or perceived lack thereof—of hadith was also found here, though to a lesser degree than in Mamluk Cairo, where the Shafi'is had a much stronger and longer presence and transmitted stories about Sultan Maḥmūd's conversion to the Shafi'i madhhab. Sirāj al-Dīn would confront all of these differences over the course of his career from Delhi to Cairo.

Sirāj al-Dīn in Delhi: Teachers and Affiliations

Born in 704/1304–5, Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar b. Ishāq was a man who would be known by several affiliations (*nisbas*).³⁹ In his own writings, he appears to have mostly used the *nisba* "al-Ḥanafī" (identifying with the Hanafi school) and "al-Shiblī," and less frequently, "al-Ghaznawī" or "al-Hindī" (identifying himself from Ghazni or Hind, respectively).⁴⁰ Yet, the famous Mamluk historian Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī (d. 749/1349), who met and quoted his conversations with Sirāj al-Dīn extensively (most likely before the latter wrote his books), used the affiliation "al-'Awaḍī," stating explicitly that Sirāj al-Dīn was from Awadh.⁴¹ Furthermore, a manuscript copy of one of Sirāj al-Dīn's works, which was produced from his own personal copy, described him in the title page as "al-Dawlatābādī" (from Dawlatabad).⁴² A contemporary in Damascus, Ibn Rāfi' al-Sallāmī (d. 774/1372), described him only as "al-Hindī."⁴³ Nonetheless, Mamluk scholars in the next century, such as Walī al-Dīn b. al-'Irāqī (d. 826/1422), Nasīm al-Dīn al-Murshidī (d. 833/1430), Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), Qāsim b. Quṭlūbughā (d. 879/1474), and al-Sakhāwī, all began to use the *nisbas* "al-Hindī" and "al-Ghaznawī" to refer to him.⁴⁴ This latter affiliation completely replaced the earlier reference to Awadh mentioned by al-'Umarī.

39. For a comprehensive biography, see Ṣalāḥ Abū al-Ḥājj, "Tarjamāt al-Sirāj al-Hindī," in Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī, *al-Ghurra al-munīfa fī taḥqīq madhhab Abī Ḥanīfa*, ed. Ṣalāḥ Abū al-Ḥājj, 257–89 (Amman: Dār al-Fārūq, 2019); Sayyid Riyāsat 'Alī Nadwī, "Sirāj-i Hindī: Hindustān kā aik gumnām mashhūr 'ālim jis nay 'ālam-i Islām mein nām paida kyā," *Māhnāma-yi Nadīm* (June–October 1939): 370–87. I am most grateful to Saif ul Hadi for providing me access to this latter article.

40. This is in terms of manuscript evidence: most manuscripts of his works, including those copied during his lifetime, include "al-Shiblī" in the preface where he introduces his name; only a few contain "al-Hindī" or "al-Ghaznawī."

41. Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*, ed. Kāmil Salmān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2010), 3:38.

42. It is not clear who may have added this affiliation to the manuscript and when. Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī, *Sharḥ al-Mughnī*, Berlin State Library, MS Landberg 55, fol. 1.

43. Muḥammad b. Rāfi' al-Sallāmī, *Wafayāt* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1982), 2:389.

44. Walī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Irāqī, *al-Dhayl 'alā al-'Ibar fī khabar man 'abar*, ed. Ṣāliḥ Mahdī 'Abbās (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1989), 2:336–38; Nasīm al-Dīn al-Murshidī, *Tadhayl al-dhayl*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Sattār (Cairo: Dār al-Dhakhā'ir Iḥyā' li-Turāth al-A'imma, 2019), 295; Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk li-ma'rifat duwal al-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aḥā' (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), 4:348; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina fī a'yān al-mi'āt al-thāmina*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mu'īd Khān (Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'arif al-'Uthmāniya, 1972), 4:182; Qāsim Ibn Quṭlūbughā, *Tāj al-tarājim*, ed. Muḥammad Khayr Ramaḍān Yūsuf (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1992), 223.

Whether from Ghazni, Dawlatabad, or Awadh (or perhaps having connections to all three, which is quite possible), it is clear that Sirāj al-Dīn was given in Cairo an Indian identity during his lifetime.⁴⁵ This not only reflected an ethnic identity but also his substantial training at the hands of scholars in Delhi. Sirāj al-Dīn was recognized as a scholar in his own right upon his arrival to Cairo, with his teachers in Delhi named as part of his scholarly pedigree. The Cairene scholar ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Qurashī (d. 775/1373), who referred to Sirāj al-Dīn as “our friend and our teacher,” listed several of Sirāj al-Dīn’s teachers, including Wajīh al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Wajīh al-Dīn al-Pā’ilī (who may be the same person), Sirāj al-Dīn al-Thaqafī, Shams al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, Rukn al-Dīn al-Badāyūnī, and Fakhr al-Dīn Mubārak b. al-Ḥasan.⁴⁶

Details about these teachers are sparse and conflicting, and the Mamluk sources all essentially restate information provided by al-Qurashī. Al-Qurashī described most as the students of a mysterious Abū al-Qāsim al-Tanūkhī, who also appears as Sharaf al-Dīn al-Tanūkhī and al-Naṣūḥī. This figure is described as being the student of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Ḍarīr (d. 666–67/1267–68), a Bukharan scholar who wrote several glosses and commentaries on Hanafi texts. Al-Ḍarīr was in turn the student of Shams al-A’imma al-Kardārī (d. 642/1244), another famous Bukharan scholar who was the direct student of the renowned Imām Burhān al-Dīn al-Marghīnānī (d. 593/1197), author of the Hanafi law compendium *al-Hidāya*.⁴⁷

This genealogy established Sirāj al-Dīn’s strong link to Transoxanian Hanafi scholarship. As a Hanafi scholar in Cairo, this would mark an important element of his scholarly pedigree. Genealogies from al-Marghīnānī were quite renowned and extended through to other contemporaneous scholars to Mamluk Cairo, such as Akmal al-Dīn al-Bābartī (d. 786/1384), another migrant Hanafi scholar (likely from Anatolia) who listed out his own chain to al-Marghīnānī in his commentary on the *Hidāya*.⁴⁸ The *Hidāya* was perhaps the

45. This also suggests that Cairene scholars in the fourteenth century had greater awareness of Indian cities than previously suggested. Christopher Bahl has observed a trend in late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Mamluk biographical dictionaries that demonstrates greater specificity regarding Indian *nisbas* due to growing connections with Indian cities. The change in *nisba* from Awadh or Dawlatabad (in the fourteenth century) to Ghazni (in the fifteenth century) does not match that pattern. In particular, al-‘Umari’s usage of “al-‘Awaḍī” points to a specificity beyond “al-Hindī” in the fourteenth century well before Sirāj al-Dīn established himself as an author and a judge—and it reflects al-‘Umari’s careful attention to listing individual provinces of South Asia elsewhere in his chronicle. Christopher D. Bahl, “Eunuch and Scholar—Two Ways To Be ‘Indian’: Socio-Cultural Significances of the Category ‘al-Hindī’ in the Late Mamlūk Period,” in *Islamische Selbstbilder: Festschrift für Susanne Enderwitz*, ed. Sarah Kiyarad, Rebecca Sauer, and Jan Scholz, 25–37 (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2020).

46. On Wajīh al-Dīn al-Pā’ilī, see ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Qurashī, *al-Jawāhir al-muḍiyya fī ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyya* (Karachi: Mīr Kutubkhāna, 2010), 2:286; on Wajīh al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *ibid.*, 309; Mubārak b. al-Ḥasan, *ibid.*, 151; Rukn al-Dīn, *ibid.*, 288; and the rest, *ibid.*, 308. On both “Wajīh al-Dīn”’s being the same person, see the arguments presented by Nadwī, “Sirāj-i Hindī,” 374. The twentieth-century biographical dictionary *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir* assigns them separate entries, treating them as separate individuals: al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, 2:217.

47. Al-Qurashī, *al-Jawāhir al-muḍiyya*, 2:82.

48. Akmal al-Dīn al-Bābartī, *al-‘Ināya sharḥ al-Hidāya*, ed. ‘Amr b. Maḥrūs (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2007), 1:9.

most prolifically glossed and commented upon Hanafi text in this period, including by other chief Hanafi judges in the Mamluk Sultanate.⁴⁹ Sirāj al-Dīn himself would go on to write a commentary on this text.

Of these named teachers, we can only find a few with some certainty in the Delhi sources. Wajīh al-Dīn al-Pāʿilī was a senior disciple of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ and appears within the Sufi texts *Fawāʾid al-fuʾād* of Amīr Ḥasan Sizjī (d. 738/1337) and the *Siyar al-awliyāʾ* of Amīr Khurd Kirmānī (d. 770/1368–69).⁵⁰ In addition, he was also known for his mastery of law and theory.⁵¹ Wajīh al-Dīn al-Rāzī appears within Baranī's list of forty-six scholars from the reign of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Khiljī.⁵² Rukn al-Dīn al-Badāyūnī may have been the same Rukn al-Dīn listed by Baranī as belonging to a prestigious family of judges who served at times at Budaun, Awadh, and other places.⁵³ Similarly, there are other individuals with the names Sirāj al-Dīn and Shams al-Dīn listed for this time period in Delhi that could possibly represent the same individuals noted as his teachers in the Mamluk sources. However, the Delhi sources do not describe any with the pedigree linking him back to al-Marghīnānī.

From the Delhi sources, we thus obtain the additional information that Sirāj al-Dīn's teachers included a senior Chishti shaykh as well as a Hanafi judge. This was not an unusual pairing, but it helps contextualize Sirāj al-Dīn's lifelong interest in Sufism as a judge who does not appear to have been affiliated with an established Sufi order. Sirāj al-Dīn would write at least two texts on Sufi topics, and the famous Mamluk historian and scholar Ibn Ḥajar later described him as having a strong partisanship (*taʿaṣṣub*) for monistic Sufism (*ittiḥādīyya*), referring to the tradition of Sufism that promoted the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being).⁵⁴ At the same time, his Sufi perspective did not lead to a rejection of exclusive conformity to the madhhab (*taqlīd*), as it did for the aforementioned Zarrādī: as we shall see below, as a mufti himself, Sirāj al-Dīn expressed his firm convictions in the authority of the madhhab and the importance of complying with the rulings of a Hanafi mufti.

Other details of Sirāj al-Dīn's life and times in India are very sparse. From the Mamluk chronicler al-ʿUmārī, we learn that Sirāj al-Dīn witnessed the emergence of Tughluq power over Delhi, as Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughluq and later Muḥammad b. Tughluq established their political dynasty. He may have also been present when Muḥammad b. Tughluq moved the capital from Delhi to Dawlatabad in 727/1327, if we accept the aforementioned manuscript

49. Tuncay Başoğlu, "Eyyûbîler ve Memlûkler Dönemi Fıkıh Yazımı," *İslam Tetkikleri Dergisi* 10, no. 1 (2020): 229–332.

50. Amīr Ḥasan ʿAlāʾ Sijzī, *Fawāʾid al-fuʾād*, ed. Muḥammad Laṭīf Malik (Lahore: Nashriyāt-i Malik Sirāj al-Dīn Īnd Sanz, 1966), 18; Kirmānī, *Siyar al-awliyāʾ*, 296–97.

51. Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, 2:217.

52. Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, 353.

53. Ibid., 347–49. See also al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, 2:160; Nadwī, "Sirāj-i Hindī," 375.

54. Aḥmad b. Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr bi-abnāʾ al-ʿumr*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabshī (Cairo: al-Majlis al-ʿAlāʾ li-l-Shuʿūn al-Islāmiyya, 1969), 1:29. For further analysis of this reference with respect to Ibn Ḥajar's own politics, see Zacharie Mochtari de Pierrepont, "Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī's Texts and Contexts: Producing a Sufi Environment in the Cairo Sultanate," in *New Readings in Arabic Historiography from Late Medieval Egypt and Syria*, ed. Jo Van Steenberghe and Maya Termonia, 291–318 (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

description of him as being from Dawlatabad at face value. Al-ʿUmarī mentioned that Sirāj al-Dīn was from the distinguished class of jurists (*aʿyān al-fuqahāʾ*), would attend the sultan’s court in Delhi, and accompany him in his travels with scholars.⁵⁵ He quoted Sirāj al-Dīn’s descriptions of Muḥammad b. Tughluq, discussing the latter’s learning, piety, and generous support for scholars.⁵⁶ Al-ʿUmarī also directly transmitted information from Sirāj al-Dīn about the Delhi Sultanate, including descriptions of a very efficient postal and intelligence system where couriers throughout the empire would rapidly relay news to the sultan (his contemporaries such as Baranī would also describe this “*ulagh/ulaq*” courier system instituted in the reigns of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Khiljī and Ghiyāth al-Dīn).⁵⁷ Al-ʿUmarī quoted Sirāj al-Dīn in enumerating and describing twenty-three provinces within the sultanate, the prices and qualities of slaves in Delhi’s markets, the practices of betel consumption, the intelligence and poetry of the people of Delhi, the general prosperity of the sultanate, and the veneration in the hearts of the people towards the sultan, among other topics.⁵⁸ All of this suggests that Sirāj al-Dīn enjoyed a high status—or at least access to elite spaces—in Delhi. It also suggests that he left Delhi on positive terms with the sultan.

From the Mamluk sources, thus, we read that Sirāj al-Dīn studied with a group of top scholars in Delhi who belonged to a tradition that extended to the Transoxanian author of the most popular compilation of Hanafī law, namely, al-Marghīnānī’s *Hidāya*, which was studied deeply in Cairo. They also indicate that Sirāj al-Dīn himself had an elite standing since he frequented the sultan’s assemblies, joined his entourage of scholars in his travels, and had direct information about the sultan, the provinces of the sultanate, and its imperial system of communication. The Delhi sources reveal that one of his teachers was actually a senior Chishti shaykh with mastery in law and theory, and another was likely a judge, but do not offer much corroborating information. The overall picture, thus, is one that emphasizes Hanafī law as the primary focus of his education in Delhi and the foundational basis of his career, alongside a firm grounding in Sufism.

Sirāj al-Dīn in Mecca

From Delhi (or Dawlatabad), Sirāj al-Dīn made his way in unclear circumstances to Mecca. Almost certainly Sirāj al-Dīn traveled by sea, as did many of his contemporaries who took a maritime route from South Asia for hajj, and thereafter to different cities. For instance, Fakhr al-Dīn Zarrādī also left Delhi, performed hajj, went to Baghdad, but drowned in a shipwreck on his way back from Baghdad to India.⁵⁹ Here, the role of the pilgrimage—and by extension the Hijaz—in serving as a conveyor for scholars between Delhi and the Indian Ocean and cities such as Cairo, Baghdad, Jerusalem, and Damascus should be highlighted.

55. Al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār*, 3:38.

56. Ibid., 63, 68. See also idem, *al-Taʿrīf bi-l-muṣṭalaḥ al-sharīf*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1988), 72–73.

57. Al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār*, 3:77–78; Sunil Kumar, “The Ignored Elites: Turks, Mongols and a Persian Secretarial Class in the Early Delhi Sultanate,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 45–77, at 64–66.

58. Al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār*, 3:77–84.

59. Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, 2:185–86.

For many travelers such as Sirāj al-Dīn and Fakhr al-Dīn, the Hijaz formed a stopping point—even if for multiple years—within a longer journey that would take them further up north.

Details of Sirāj al-Dīn's stay in Mecca are limited. His time here roughly overlapped with Muḥammad b. Tughluq's overtures towards the Abbasid caliph in Cairo through several delegations, but there is no indication that Sirāj al-Dīn was involved in any diplomatic efforts.⁶⁰ Sirāj al-Dīn would later write in one of his books about how it was the pursuit of knowledge from "senior scholars" that led him to travel and leave behind his family, friends, and homeland (*ḥattā ḥubbiba ilayya muḥājarat al-aṣḍiqā' wa-l-ikhwān...wa-l-tagharrub 'an al-awṭān wa-muwāḏabat al-asfār li-iqtibās al-'ulūm min al-mashāyikh al-kibār*).⁶¹ The reference here to "senior scholars" may indicate a greater estimation of scholarship in the Mamluk Sultanate, though it could also refer more generally to his adopted lifestyle of traveling in the pursuit of knowledge, including any travels he may have taken between cities in South Asia.

In Mecca, the only exchange of knowledge mentioned is that he heard the famous *'Awārif al-ma'ārif*, the central text of the nascent Suhrawardi tariqa, from Shaykh Khiḍr, the head of the Ribat Sidra (one of the first endowed ribats to be established in Mecca in 311/924 during the Abbasid period).⁶² Although merely a passing reference in biographical sources, this is a significant piece of information which reveals several things. First, the Shaykh Khiḍr mentioned was most likely Khiḍr b. Muḥammad al-Irbilī al-Ṣūfī (d. 730/1329–30), who is reported by the Meccan historian Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī (d. 832/1429) to have served as the shaykh of this same ribat.⁶³ This would mean Sirāj al-Dīn was in Mecca before Shaykh Khiḍr's death in 730/1329–30, when Sirāj al-Dīn was about twenty-five or twenty-six years old. This would also mean that Sirāj al-Dīn had an unaccounted seven to eight years that he spent in the Hijaz or elsewhere until 738/1338, when we can affirm that he would be in Cairo.

Second, that Sirāj al-Dīn is described as hearing this famous text here, at Mecca, rather than in Delhi where it was also heavily circulated and taught, merits further attention. It is possible, perhaps, that Sirāj al-Dīn may have "heard" portions in Delhi—maybe excerpts quoted here and there during the course of Sufi assemblies—but did not focus on the full text back in Delhi. It is also possible that his biographers mentioned this particular chain simply because they were more familiar with Shaykh Khiḍr in Cairo: they mentioned that Shaykh Khiḍr transmitted this text from Ibn al-Qaṣṭallānī (d. 686/1287), one of the more famous disciples of Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), the famous author of this text. Ibn al-Qaṣṭallānī played a key role in teaching and transmitting this text in Cairo, where he was known as a successor of al-Suhrawardī.⁶⁴

60. Conermann and Kollatz, "Diplomatic Relations," 526–27.

61. Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī, *Sharḥ al-Mughnī fi al-uṣūl*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Fatih no. 13181, MS 22905, fol. 1.

62. Ḥusayn 'Abd al-'Azīz Shāfi'ī, *al-Arbiṭa fi Makka al-mukarrama mundh al-bidāyāt ḥattā nihāyat al-'aṣr al-Mamlūkī*, ed. 'Abbās Ṭāshkandī (Riyadh: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2005), 29–38.

63. Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī, *al-'Iqd al-thamīn fi tārīkh al-balad al-amīn*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā' (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1998), 4:43.

64. Erik S. Ohandler, *Sufism in an Age of Transition: 'Umar al-Suhrawardī and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 318–20.

Third, the reference to the Ribat Sidra is demonstrative of the role of such Hijazi ribats in facilitating the movement of scholars and the proliferation of Sufi teaching in the Indian Ocean region. As the Mamluk historian al-Maqrīzī described Cairene ribats in the fifteenth century, they were not only hospices for traveling or destitute pilgrims but also places of Sufi teaching and practice.⁶⁵ The Mamluk state and society’s upkeep of these ribats thus unmistakably shaped urban and scholarly life not only within Mecca but within a transregional arena.

Although there are no further details of his sojourn in Mecca, it is likely that Sirāj al-Dīn used his time there to become acquainted with other scholars in the Hijaz. In fact, Sirāj al-Dīn would later write a treatise, most likely in Cairo, in response to a question about the theological validity of a couplet composed by the contemporaneous Yemeni Shafi‘i jurist and mystic ‘Abdullāh b. As‘ad al-Yāfi‘ī (d. 768/1367), who spent extensive periods in Mecca and Medina and performed the pilgrimage repeatedly during his life.⁶⁶ Sirāj al-Dīn praised him profusely as someone who combined mastery of substantive law and legal theory, and as an authority in the rational and transmitted sciences. Although he did not mention meeting him, it is evident that he was closely familiar with and deeply appreciative of his work. This familiarity likely would have emerged during or since his time in Mecca.

Sirāj al-Dīn may have considered remaining in Mecca and pursuing a position as a judge or an imam at the Grand Mosque. Yet, in the 730s/1330s, there was little room for a visiting Indian Hanafi scholar in the judicial bureaucracy. Up to this point, Mecca’s judges were primarily appointed by the (Shafi‘i) Rasulids of Yemen, consisted of Shafi‘is (and at times some Zaydis appointed by the Zaydi Imam in Yemen), and drew from well-established local families.⁶⁷ The first Hanafi judge would not be appointed until 806/1403–4, after the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Faraj b. Barqūq (r. 1399–1412) established positions for four chief judges in Mecca, as there already were in Cairo and other cities.⁶⁸ (That judge too would be of Indian descent.⁶⁹)

Sirāj al-Dīn’s path thus eventually led him to the Mamluk capital in Cairo, where migrant Hanafi scholars like him had greater opportunities to study, teach, and work. Although the significance of such a seemingly minor detail can easily be overlooked, it reveals the central role of the madhhab in shaping transregional connections. This is often overshadowed within Indian Ocean histories in favor of other kinds of scholarly connections, like Sufi and hadith networks. Yet, as this example demonstrates, the legal infrastructure of a given city, including its judicial bureaucracy, its law colleges, and support for legal pluralism, could be highly significant in shaping the demographics of its scholarly population. As we shall

65. Al-Maqrīzī, cited in Richard T. Mortel, “Ribāṭs’ in Mecca during the Medieval Period: A Descriptive Study Based on Literary Sources,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61, no. 1 (1998): 29–50, at 29–30.

66. Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī, *Lawā’ih al-anwār fī al-radd ‘alā man ankara ‘alā al-‘ārifin laṭā’if al-asrār*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Carullah 02070-005.

67. John L. Meloy, “The Judges of Mecca and Mamluk Hegemony,” in *Trajectories of State Formation across Fifteenth-Century Islamic West Asia*, ed. Jo Van Steenberg, 286–92 (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

68. Ibid.

69. See the discussion of this judge in the conclusion of this article.

see below, as the Mamluks sought to expand legal pluralism and thereby challenge Shafi'i dominance in the sultanate, they created new opportunities for Hanafi migrant scholars like Sirāj al-Dīn.

Sirāj al-Dīn in Cairo: An Overview of His Appointments

Sirāj al-Dīn likely arrived in Cairo sometime before 738/1338, while in his early thirties.⁷⁰ Little did he know that the next several decades of the Mamluk Sultanate, after the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 1310–41), would be viewed by modern-day historians “primarily as an episode of social, economic, and political chaos and upheaval,” with “failed harvests, famines, pestilence and plague on the one hand, and of seemingly endless conflicts in the cities and the countryside on the other.”⁷¹ He would witness the ascension of eleven sultans until his death in 773/1372. Yet, even without having roots within Mamluk networks in Cairo to support him, or the deep pockets of a regional merchant, he managed as a complete newcomer to this city to have a very successful career and reach the upper echelons of scholarly hierarchy as the chief Hanafi judge.

How did Sirāj al-Dīn manage to achieve such success? There has been brief reference to Sirāj al-Dīn's own political ambitions and his cultivation of close relationships with the Mamluk elite.⁷² Sirāj al-Dīn certainly had ambitions, and unlike others, such as his Hanafi contemporary al-Bābartī, he actively sought out high positions in the judiciary.⁷³ Yet, this alone does not explain his success and overlooks the significance of a Mamluk intellectual and social context that saw a substantial demand for his acumen and judicial expertise. As Escovitz noted, many Hanafi chief judges in this period had to be summoned from Damascus, indicating a probable lack of Egyptian Hanafis willing or qualified to serve as chief judges.⁷⁴ Furthermore, as mentioned previously, numerous Hanafi scholars migrated to Cairo at this time from Anatolia and Central Asia.⁷⁵ Certainly, as Mamluk historians described, Sirāj al-Dīn's reputation grew quickly after his arrival in Cairo. Below is an account of his activities and appointments in Cairo, followed by an exploration of the larger sociopolitical and intellectual context of his career.

70. This was before the death of the hadith scholar Aḥmad b. Maṣṣūr al-Jawharī (d. 738/1338), from whom he is reported to have heard hadith. Nadwī, “Sirāj-i Hindī,” 376. On al-Jawharī, see al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, 1:377.

71. See Jo Van Steenberghe's critique of this description in *Order out of Chaos: Patronage, Conflict and Mamluk Socio-Political Culture, 1341–1382* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1–2.

72. See Joseph H. Escovitz, “Patterns of Appointment to the Chief Judgeships of Cairo during the Bahri Mamlūk Period,” *Arabica* 30, no. 2 (1983): 156. Escovitz incorrectly relates that Sirāj al-Dīn went on a pilgrimage with the sultan.

73. Al-Bābartī was reportedly offered positions as judge several times but refused and remained content as the shaykh of the Shaykhūniyya lodge. Al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr*, 1:298.

74. Escovitz, “Patterns of Appointment,” 158.

75. For an overview of some migrant scholars who wrote on legal theory, see Hasan Tuncay Başoğlu, “Memlûkler Dönemi Hanefî Usul Literatürü,” in *Memlûkler Dönemi İlim Geleneği (13.-14. Yüzyıllar)*, ed. Halil İbrahim Hançabay, Muhammed Enes Buluş, and Mustafa Taş, 71–108 (Istanbul: Istanbul University Press, 2023).

Although a scholar in his own right, Sirāj al-Dīn continued to study in Cairo specifically in the fields of hadith and law. One of his hadith teachers, Maṣṣūr al-Jawharī, was reported to have been supported by Sultan Maṣṣūr Qalawūn (r. 1279–90), since the former’s brother was closely associated with the sultan.⁷⁶ The study of hadith had special resonance in the Mamluk legal context: the trope of a poor Hanafi commitment to hadith was much more pronounced here in Cairo, within its entrenched Shafi‘i scholarship, than it was in Delhi (which is why the story about Maḥmūd Ghaznawī’s conversion was related so actively here). The fourteenth century also marked when Mamluk Hanafis began to grapple more seriously with the canonization of the hadith compilations, and several Hanafi scholars in Cairo such as his own teacher ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Turkmānī (d. 750/1349), the Somali Jamāl al-Dīn al-Zayla‘ī (d. 762/1361), al-Bābartī, and others wrote large commentaries and tomes on the topic.⁷⁷ As we shall see below, Sirāj al-Dīn too would participate in this effort to defend the Hanafi madhhab through hadith.

Sirāj al-Dīn also attended the lessons of several chief Hanafi judges in Cairo, and these connections enabled his participation within the Mamluk judiciary. These included Zayn al-Dīn al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 771/1370), who served as chief Hanafi judge from 742/1341 to 748/1347, and after his dismissal, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Turkmānī, who served from 748/1347 until his death. ‘Alā’ al-Dīn authorized Sirāj al-Dīn to officiate marriages and inheritances, which marked his first official legal work.⁷⁸ Alongside such judicial responsibilities, Sirāj al-Dīn was evidently a teacher at the Madrasa al-Baydamuriyya in these early years, as described by al-‘Umarī (who died in 749/1349).⁷⁹ After ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s death in 750/1349, his successor and son, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Turkmānī (d. 769/1368), appointed Sirāj al-Dīn as his sole deputy judge. This marked a major breakthrough for Sirāj al-Dīn, since deputyship constituted one of the main pathways to the position of chief judge.

Later, after the death of the Hanafi military judge ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Aṭrūsh opened up this position, Sirāj al-Dīn requested the appointment from Mamluk amir Shaykhū (d. 758/1357). Shaykhū refused and instead granted him an *iqṭā‘*, or a land grant typically awarded to Mamluk military officers.⁸⁰ Yet, Sirāj al-Dīn persisted and asked another powerful Mamluk amir, Sayf al-Dīn Ṣarḥitmish (d. 759/1358), with known pro-Hanafi and pro-Persian sympathies who also established a Hanafi madrasa and recruited other Hanafi migrant scholars.⁸¹ Ṣarḥitmish granted him this position in 758/1357 (reportedly upsetting

76. Al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, 1:377.

77. Sohail Hanif, “Hadith and *Fiqh* in the Ottoman Period between Egyptian and Rumelian Ḥanafīs, 9th–11th Centuries A.H.,” in *Osmanlı’da İlm-i Hadis*, ed. Zekeriye Güler, Bekir Kuzudişli, and Mustafa Celil Altuntaş, 232–33 (Istanbul: İsar Yayınları, 2020); Yusuf Acar, “Hanefi Hadis ve Sünnet Anlayışının 8./14. Asırda Hadis İlimleri Açısından İhyası Çabaları: İbnü’t-Türkmânî ve Öğrencileri,” in *Memlûkler Dönemi İlim Geleneği*, 181–204.

78. Al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, 1:27.

79. Al-‘Umarī, *al-Ta’rîf*, 73. This madrasa was affiliated with the Mamluk Sayf al-Dīn Baydamur al-Badrī (d. 748/1347); see al-Taghrîbirdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 10:180.

80. Al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, 1:28.

81. Leonor Fernandes, “Mamluk Politics and Education: The Evidence from Two Fourteenth Century Waqfiyya,” *Annales islamologiques*, 23 (1987): 87–98; ‘Abd al-Laṭîf İbrāhîm ‘Alī, “Min al-wathā’iq al-‘arabiyya fī al-‘uṣūr al-wuṣṭā: naṣṣān jadīdān min wathīqat al-amīr Ṣarḥitmish,” *Majallat Kulliyat al-Ādāb* 27, no. 1–2

Shaykhū, who was nevertheless killed soon thereafter).⁸² Sirāj al-Dīn would actually be only the second Hanafi (after al-Aṭrūsh) to assume this role alongside the Shafīʿi army judge.⁸³ He likely recognized this position from Delhi, since it existed there as well—and we can only speculate that this prior familiarity may have motivated him to pursue this appointment. As military judge, Sirāj al-Dīn would have opportunity to accompany Mamluk sultans and senior officials on military expeditions and build even closer relationships.

In all, it took about two decades in Cairo for Sirāj al-Dīn to become the second-most powerful Hanafi judge in the sultanate. His ascent did not go uncontested; as he rose through the ranks, he also gained an enemy. This was Quṭb al-Dīn Hirmās (d. 769/1367–68), a Shafīʿi imam who had a rapid ascent (and equally rapid decline) in the court of Sultan al-Nāṣir Ḥasan (r. 1347–51 and 1354–61), after he deceptively claimed to have seen spiritual visions predicting the sultan’s ascension.⁸⁴ As Hirmās angled to get closer to the sultan, he sought to remove others in his way: after the death of Sirāj al-Dīn’s benefactor, the aforementioned Ṣarḡhitmish, Hirmās conspired in 759/1357–58 to have Sirāj al-Dīn dismissed from his position as deputy judge.⁸⁵ Sirāj al-Dīn, it is reported, then began teaching from his home, where people began to crowd his lessons, but this period did not last long. When Hirmās left for pilgrimage the following year, in 760/1359, Sirāj al-Dīn and another ally, Ibn al-Naqqāsh (a Shafīʿi mufti whom Hirmās had also attacked and gotten his privileges to issue fatwas revoked), took the opportunity to disillusion the sultan about Hirmās.⁸⁶ Soon thereafter, the sultan decided to exile Hirmās, demolish his house, and went so far in 761/1360 as to attempt to nullify an endowment established for the Ḥākīm Mosque, in which Hirmās’s own children also stood to gain a portion.⁸⁷ Sirāj al-Dīn was present at these high-level proceedings with muftis from other madhhabs and argued along with most of them for the voiding of this endowment.⁸⁸

Sirāj al-Dīn then began to accompany and ride with Sultan Ḥasan, and enjoy his close company in public events and trips without even being chief judge, until the sultan was killed in 762/1361. As the victorious Mamluk amir Yalbughā al-Khaṣṣakī (d. 768/1366) flexed

(May–December 1965): 121–58. An example of a migrant scholar Ṣarḡhitmish recruited to teach Hanafi law at his madrasa is the jurist Qiwām al-Dīn al-Fārābī al-Itqānī (d. 758/1357), who was born in Farab (Central Asia), and made his way to Baghdad and Damascus, serving variously as teacher and judge, and eventually moved to Cairo, where he died. Ahmet Akgündüz, “İTKĀNI,” *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* 23 (2001): 464–65.

82. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:231; al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr*, 1:28.

83. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:80.

84. Al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, 6:4–5.

85. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:238; al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr*, 1:27.

86. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:242.

87. Setting an endowment was a strategy used by individual Mamluk elites to transmit wealth to their children and protect against state confiscation. However, Hirmās was not a Turkish Mamluk. Lisa Blaydes, “Mamluks, Property Rights, and Economic Development: Lessons from Medieval Egypt,” *Politics & Society* 47, no. 3 (2019): 395–424. See al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:246.

88. Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-l-iʿtibār bi-dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l-āthār*, ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1998), 4:60–63. For a discussion of this episode, see Leonor Fernandes, “**Between Qadis and Muftis: To Whom Does the Mamluk Sultan Listen?**,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 6 (2002): 95–108, at 102–5.

his power, Sirāj al-Dīn’s stature declined for the next few years, likely due to his association with the deposed sultan Ḥasan.⁸⁹ However, he was eventually reappointed as the army judge in 764/1363 (just three years before Yalbughā was also killed).⁹⁰ Yalbughā was another Mamluk amir who was known to have a predilection for supporting Hanafis.⁹¹ In fact, Yalbughā appointed another Indian scholar to teach Hanafi law in Mecca in 763/1362.⁹²

After Yalbughā’s death, it is reported that Sirāj al-Dīn began to accompany and find support from other powerful Mamluk amirs, such as Mankālī Baghā al-Shamsī, Amīr ‘Alī al-Mardīnī, Arghūn Shāh, and Uljay al-Yūsufī (d. 775/1373), among others.⁹³ He was then appointed as the chief Hanafi judge after the death of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Turkmānī on Sha‘bān 21, 769 (April 11, 1368), at the expense of Jamāl al-Dīn’s son, who took Sirāj al-Dīn’s former position as army judge.⁹⁴ In this way, Sirāj al-Dīn interrupted the Turkmānī family’s hold on the Hanafi chief judge position.

After having assumed this top position, Sirāj al-Dīn continued to take upon new roles and expand his spheres of influence. He began to teach *tafsīr* at the Ibn Ṭūlūn Mosque, another prestigious position, after the death of his teacher Zayn al-Dīn al-Biṣṭāmī (a former Hanafi chief judge). He also appointed loyal allies to positions, drawing criticism from others.⁹⁵ When the amir Uljay gained control of the endowments and restricted the stipends of teachers at Ibn Ṭūlūn and other institutions, Sirāj al-Dīn famously stood up to him defiantly and sternly exclaiming, as described by Ibn Ḥajar:

“Your land grant (*iqṭā‘*) yields you two million dinars, and yet you consider this amount too much for the poor jurist (*al-faqīh al-miskīn*)!”

Uljay responded: “I take the grant to protect the lands of the Muslims (*li-ḥifẓ bilād al-muslimīn*).”

Al-Hindī retorted: “And who taught you jihad, except the scholars?”

Uljay was then silent and left everything as it was.⁹⁶

This marked a rare instance of conflict with the Mamluk elites, one that earned him admiration from later scholars like Ibn Ḥajar. For the most part, as detailed in the section below, Sirāj al-Dīn’s work would align well with their interests.

89. Al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, 4:182.

90. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:274.

91. Jo Van Steenberg, “The Amir Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī, the Qalāwūnid Sultanate, and the Cultural Matrix of Mamlūk Society: A Reassessment of Mamlūk Politics in the 1360s,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131, no. 3 (2011): 437–63, at 440–41.

92. This was Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn al-Ṣāghhānī al-Hindī (d. 780/1378). See al-Fāsī, *al-‘Iqd al-thamīn*, 2:362.

93. Al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, 4:182.

94. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:317.

95. For an account of criticism, see al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā‘iẓ*, 3:139.

96. Al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, 1:27–28.

Most controversially, Sirāj al-Dīn strove to gain parity with the Shafī‘ī chief judge, who held greater power over the other chief judges and controlled endowments for orphans, among other privileges. During his tenure, he petitioned for and received permission in Jumād al-Ūlā 773 (November/December 1371) to wear the headgear reserved for Shafī‘ī judges in official ceremonies, appoint deputies, and take over administratorship of endowments for Hanafi orphans (and hence draw funds away from the Shafī‘ī judiciary’s control).⁹⁷ Yet, as some chroniclers observed as a sign of Imām al-Shāfi‘ī’s spiritual power, he developed a sickness that left him bedridden and unable to actualize these controversial changes until he passed away about two months later in Rajab 773 (January 1372).⁹⁸

There are scant details about Sirāj al-Dīn’s family and children, and hence, about his ability to establish a new family dynasty to succeed him in the judgeship. We do learn that he had a son-in-law by the name of Jalāl al-Dīn Jār Allāh (d. 782/1380), who excelled in medicine, likely traced his origins to Nishapur, and at one point was the head of the Sa‘īd al-Su‘adā’ Sufi lodge in Cairo.⁹⁹ Sirāj al-Dīn appointed him as his deputy judge, and in fact Jār Allāh became the chief Hanafi judge several years after Sirāj al-Dīn (from 778/1376 to 782/1380) and also took his teaching position at the Manṣūriyya college.¹⁰⁰ Most interestingly, he revived Sirāj al-Dīn’s efforts to achieve parity with the Shafī‘ī chief judge: he too received permission to wear official headgear and to manage endowments for Hanafi orphans. This created such a backlash that the sultan had to backtrack.¹⁰¹

Overall, Sirāj al-Dīn’s rise to the top contained familiar factors seen in other cases, including, most importantly, his close connections to the previous Hanafi chief judges. He also had a remarkable ability to befriend Mamluk elites, one after the other, even as they battled each other. At one point, as chief judge, he made a passing comment that he had “accompanied [the Turkish Mamluk] kings (*mulūkahum*) for forty years, in cities and in travel, in private and public.”¹⁰² He somehow managed to keep himself safe from their crossfire, though he faced brief setbacks after the deaths of his benefactors Ṣarḡhitmish and Sultan al-Nāṣir Ḥasan. We may speculate that his early experiences in the courts of the Delhi Sultanate helped him in successfully navigating Mamluk politics in Cairo. Most fundamentally, it appears that he—along with Hanafi migrants from other regions—found common cause with these Mamluks due to their shared interests in the Hanafi madhhab. This kind of success and resilience depended upon a deeper investment and commitment by the parties involved. To understand this, we now turn to Sirāj al-Dīn’s scholarship.

97. On the significance of this development, see Evan Metzger, “Orphans’ Property and the Judicial Treasury in Medieval Islam” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2023), 47–62.

98. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:345.

99. Al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, 1:229; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:347. See also regarding his nephew Shams al-Dīn b. Akhī Jār Allāh (d. 791/1389): al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, 1:389.

100. See also Escovitz, “Patterns of Appointment,” 156–57.

101. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 5:67; al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, 1:193–94. For a detailed analysis of this episode, see Metzger, “Orphans’ Property,” 47–62.

102. ‘Abd al-Majīd b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Bajawī, “Risālat al-kafā’a li-qāḍī al-quḍāt ‘Umar b. Ishāq b. Aḥmad Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī al-Ḥanafī (d. 773) taḥqīqan wa-dirāsatan,” *Majallat Kulliyat al-Sharī’a wa-l-Qānūn* 28, no. 2 (2024): 618–74, at 656.

Sirāj al-Dīn’s Writings and Rulings

Like many of his teachers and judges in Cairo (and seemingly unlike judges in Delhi who have not left us many books), Sirāj al-Dīn exerted himself in producing written works. As described below, some comprised commentaries on well-known legal texts on theory and substantive law; others included works and commentaries on theology and Sufism; and still others consisted of treatises addressing specific questions. Given their extensive and voluminous nature, it is not possible here to examine them in detail. This section will provide a brief survey, proceeding as possible in chronological order. It will first examine several commentaries he appears to have written in the earlier part of his career; then two works dedicated to Ṣarḡhitmish, who appointed him as military judge; and finally, a treatise he wrote in his capacity as chief judge wherein he defended Mamluk interests and status in society. Altogether, it will examine in broad strokes how these works fit into the intellectual context of Mamluk scholarly society, as well as how Hanafism bolstered his relationships with the Mamluk elite. Furthermore, it will uncover hints of lingering influences from Delhi.

The first set of works Sirāj al-Dīn wrote were commentaries on texts of law and legal theory. In short, these established his standing as a learned expert of the Hanafī madhhab (including theory and substantive law) and addressed a certain demand in Mamluk society for understanding intricate points of difference within Hanafī law as well as for responding to criticisms made by Shafī‘ī scholars. One early commentary was on *al-Mughnī* by ‘Umar al-Khabbāzī (d. 691/1291), a text on Hanafī legal theory (*uṣūl*), which he appears to have completed in 746/1345, about seven to eight years after his arrival in Cairo.¹⁰³ This commentary gained immediate circulation; several copies of this manuscript were made during his own lifetime, including one in 763/1362 in Jerusalem.¹⁰⁴ It also continued to be studied by students in the next century.¹⁰⁵ In the preface of this work, he wrote about his motivations for leaving behind his homeland, as if introducing himself for the first time to a larger audience.¹⁰⁶ He also wrote that he was requested to compose this commentary since he had spent time focusing on the science of *uṣūl*—which suggests he had already gained a reputation for being a specialist in this subfield of law.

While this work did not outright contribute to the project of defending Hanafī legal tradition against critics from other schools, a further commentary Sirāj al-Dīn wrote, likely in this period, was motivated by a more explicitly pro-Hanafī agenda. This was a commentary on another text of legal theory by Muṣaffar al-Dīn Aḥmad b. al-Sā‘ātī (d. 694/1295), a Baghdad-based Hanafī scholar, concerning legal differences within and beyond the Hanafī school.¹⁰⁷ Sirāj al-Dīn wrote in his introduction how many commentaries of this

103. A manuscript in the Berlin State Library (itself copied a few decades later) includes this date of authorship in the colophon. Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī, *Sharḥ al-Mughnī*, Berlin State Library, MS Landberg 55, fol. 233. My sincere thanks to Thoralf Hanstein for providing images of this manuscript.

104. Al-Hindī, *Sharḥ al-Mughnī fī al-uṣūl*.

105. See, for instance, al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 10:30.

106. Al-Hindī, *Sharḥ al-Mughnī*, fol. 1.

107. Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī, *Kāshif ma‘ānī al-badī‘ bi-bayān mushkilihi al-manī‘*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Hasan Hüsnü Paşa no. 00531, MS 270325.

text had been written by Shafi'is, and some contained errors in transmitting the opinions of the Hanafi madhhab, so a group of distinguished nobles (*a'yān al-fuḍalā'*) requested him to write a commentary. This commentary was also well-received and is listed in biographical dictionaries as one of his main works.

Another significant commentary Sirāj al-Dīn wrote was on the *Hidāya* of al-Marghīnānī, which, as mentioned before, was one of the most common texts in this period to be glossed or commented upon.¹⁰⁸ In his preface, Sirāj al-Dīn wrote about his aim to substantiate the soundness of the hadith in the main text. This reflected a concern addressed by his teacher, the chief judge 'Alā' al-Dīn b. al-Turkmānī, who pursued a more substantial project in this area.¹⁰⁹ Sirāj al-Dīn also began with a lengthy discussion on the life and virtues of the eponym Imām Abū Ḥanīfa, his teachers and students, and his principles, defending him from critics.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, Sirāj al-Dīn made it his focus to expand on the points of inter- and intraschool disagreement (*ikhtilāf*) on each ruling mentioned in the *Hidāya*. In writing this commentary, Sirāj al-Dīn exhibited his command not only of the theory of law but also substantive law.

Sirāj al-Dīn further demonstrated his knowledge of other madhhabs in another work he composed in the long-established *ikhtilāf* genre.¹¹¹ In it, he compiled verdicts from the four schools without evaluating or disputing their evidences, possibly drawing upon an earlier work by a Hanbali scholar.¹¹² And although there was no normative privileging of a certain school's verdicts, Sirāj al-Dīn introduced the Hanafi verdicts first.

Collectively, the detailed commentaries on legal theory and substantive law, along with the primer on intraschool difference, cemented Sirāj al-Dīn's impressive standing as a well-rounded authority on law.¹¹³ These works were particularly well-suited for the Mamluk context, where there was an increasing growth of Hanafi writings on legal theory, and where other Hanafi scholars were also pursuing similar projects to defend the madhhab. The work on *ikhtilāf* would also be far more useful as an introductory text or a quick legal reference amid the pluralism of Mamluk Cairo than in Delhi. Altogether, these works reflect how quick Sirāj al-Dīn was to respond to the needs of a legal readership in Cairo. In fact, there is far less evidence of jurists in the Delhi Sultanate composing such commentaries on Hanafi texts (or works in the *ikhtilāf* genre).¹¹⁴ There, the most notable or popular form of legal writing seems to have been fatwa compilations, which Sirāj al-Dīn does not appear to

108. I have only come across one manuscript of this work thus far. It contains Sirāj al-Dīn's name on the title page, and not within the text's introductory or ending portion. Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī, *Baḥr al-riwāya wa-l-dirāya fī tawshīḥ al-Hidāya*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Kadızade Mehmed no. 00208, MS 290432.

109. See 'Alā' al-Dīn Ibn al-Turkmānī, *al-Tanbīh 'alā aḥādīth al-Hidāya wa-l-Khulāṣa* (Damascus: Dār al-Minhāj al-Qawīm, 2020).

110. Al-Hindī, *Baḥr al-riwāya*, fols. 1–41.

111. Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī, *Zubdat al-aḥkām fī madhāhib al-a'imma al-arba'a al-a'lam*, ed. 'Abdullāh Nazīr Aḥmad Mizzī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Rayyān, 2001).

112. Mizzī, introduction to *ibid.*, 8–13.

113. Sirāj al-Dīn also wrote several other commentaries and texts in matters of law and Sufism; the texts discussed above are not exhaustive.

114. Islam, *Fatawa Literature*, 7–13.

have composed. In contrast, his commentaries had a strong didactic function of explaining and sifting—in encyclopedic fashion—across the expanse of Hanafī discourse, reflecting his early role in Cairo as a teacher of Hanafī law.

In these works, Sirāj al-Dīn did not mention any Mamluk patrons; this may possibly represent their completion before his rise in Mamluk circles. In contrast, Sirāj al-Dīn dedicated two additional works to the aforementioned Mamluk amir Ṣarḡhitmish. These are revelatory in terms of their relationship and intellectual interests. One was a commentary on *al-‘Aqīda al-Ṭaḥāwiyya*, a famous primer on Sunni theology.¹¹⁵ Sirāj al-Dīn wrote in his introduction that he spent a period of time contemplating to whom he should dedicate this work, and after some deep soul searching, he received divine inspiration to dedicate it to Ṣarḡhitmish.¹¹⁶ He showered Ṣarḡhitmish with lengthy and elaborate praise, such as for being “the pride of all the world leaders,” the “holder of sword and pen,” someone who had been entrusted with training and supporting scholars, and as someone who deeply valued knowledge and learning himself.¹¹⁷ At the end, Sirāj al-Dīn made a commitment to compile

115. Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī, *Sharḥ ‘Aqīdat al-imām al-Ṭaḥawī*, ed. Ḥāzīm al-Kilānī al-Ḥanafī and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir Naṣṣār (Cairo: Dārat al-Karaz li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 2009). This same text by Sirāj al-Dīn has recently been published and misattributed to al-Bābartī by several presses. However, I have not seen any evidence from premodern biographical or bibliographical sources that al-Bābartī wrote such a commentary.

116. *Ibid.*, 23.

117. *Ibid.* Here is the translation of the full excerpt by Amjad Mahmood: “When it reached the pinnacle of excellence and beauty, and the height of subtlety and allusion, I thought for a while as to whose name I should dedicate it, so that it remains forever in his legacy. As I vacated my heart of all misgivings and turned it to the Madyan of the Unseen, I thereby received inspiration in the recesses of my soul from the holy realm (*‘ālam al-quds*), hidden [even] from my shirt buttons, to present it as a gift to the assembly of the one who ascended from the constellation of felicity as a full moon shining with light and filling the hearts with joy and ebullience, and who became the beauty of the hearts (*ghurrah al-jinān*) in delight and radiance, and the continuous rainfall from the skies in elevation and splendour. The marks of blessings appeared on him; prosperity and divine providence accompanied him in his movements; the traces of felicity glistened on him; and the fragrances of pre-eminence effused from him. He is the venerable, the exalted and sublime amir, the pride of all the world leaders, the sanctuary for the poor and the destitute, the peerless one of his age and the adornment of Egypt, the benefactor, the holder of the sword and pen, who combines both the virtues of knowledge and practice, who has attained both religious and worldly felicity, the one from whose forehead shines the light of guidance and in whose right hand the flags of God-consciousness are raised, who puts the vast oceans to shame with his benevolence, and the early morning clouds with his goodness and generosity, the august amir, Sayf al-Dīn Shaykh al-Malikī al-Nāṣirī Ṣarḡhatmush al-Malikī al-Ṣāliḥī. May Allah maintain his honour, make his treasure abound with blessings, preserve his life from others, and perpetuate his joy and happiness! He has been entrusted in this age with training scholars, dedicated to assisting the virtuous. All praise be to Allah, who has let loose the tongues of the people to proclaim his praise, and girdled the necks of scholars with the burdens of his munificence. It is befitting for the introduction of a book to be honored by the appellations of such a person who encompasses the aforementioned qualities and virtues like how the skies encompass the stars and planets; and to be ascribed to his excellency, so that his honourable name remains in books and records among people throughout the alternation of nights and days and the passing of aeons and years. I found everyone orientated by his aspiration to ingratiate himself [to him] by serving him with a generous gift. However, [when I found that] my state was inhibiting me from offering a gift that corresponds to his generous treasure, or resembles the matchless gems therein, I recalled the words of al-Mutanabbī: [If] you have neither the steeds nor wealth to give / Then let [your] words cheer [him] if [your] state cannot. When I realized that knowledge is the most desired thing and the most precious gift to him, I chose to present him with the aforementioned commentary in

a book on law in dedication to him: “If my life is long and I am assisted in achieving [my] goals, I shall compile a book for him in jurisprudence that incorporates a lucid summary of what is in the extensive works.”¹¹⁸

The dedication is significant for demonstrating not only their deep relationship but also Sirāj al-Dīn’s appreciation for Ṣarḡhitmish’s intellectual investments in learning. The last sentence about his wish to compile a legal book in the honor of Ṣarḡhitmish could also be indicative of something else. It may reflect an aspect of juristic-court relations from Central and South Asia, where there was an active tradition of producing *legal* compilations in honor of specific sultans or notables, with lengthy eulogies and praises in their prefaces (and sometimes having the works named after them).¹¹⁹ Dedicating texts (with a preface replete with praises) to local sultans or elites was a practice with a longer history from at least Abbasid times.¹²⁰ In the Mamluk context, many dedications are found in historical chronicles, panegyric poetry, or other disciplines such as astronomy, rather than legal or theological commentaries.¹²¹ There is no indication, for instance, that Sirāj al-Dīn’s contemporary al-Bābartī felt the need to dedicate his legal or theological commentaries to a Mamluk leader.

Sirāj al-Dīn composed another book at the direct request of Ṣarḡhitmish himself. This was the *al-Ghurra al-munīfa fī tarjīḥ madhhab Abī Ḥanīfa*, a response to an earlier critique of Hanafī doctrine reportedly made by the famous Shafī‘ī polymath Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), which, as mentioned in Sirāj al-Dīn’s introduction, was dedicated to Bahā’ al-Dīn Sām II (d. 603/1206), the Ghurid ruler of Bamiyan.¹²² Sirāj al-Dīn’s work served two functions: first, as a translation of the original text attributed to al-Rāzī from Persian to Arabic; and second, as a response to his critiques of Hanafī doctrine. Sirāj al-Dīn proceeded in systematic fashion, listing the issue of contention, the Hanafī and Shafī‘ī evidence, respectively, and his counter-responses in turn to the Shafī‘ī evidence. For each issue, his mode of reasoning and choice of evidence would change, but it encompassed everything from citing hadith reports to more rational (*‘aqlī*) reasoning. For instance, in the very first issue pertaining to the removal of impurity with pure liquids besides water, he critiqued al-Rāzī’s claim that the Hanafīs only had analogistic evidence (*qiyās*) for their position and showed how the Hanafīs relied upon several source texts from the hadith and Qur’an.¹²³

writing. I hope from his utter compassion that he receives it with goodly acceptance, as that is my utmost wish.” Abū Ḥafs Sirāj al-Dīn al-Ghaznawī, *Imām al-Ṭaḥāwī’s Creed of Islam: An Exposition*, trans. Amjad Mahmood (Birmingham: Heritage Press, 2020), xxi–xxiii.

118. Ibid.

119. Islam, *Fatawa Literature*, 7–13.

120. Houari Touati, “La dédicace des livres en Islam médiéval,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 55, no. 2 (2000): 325–54.

121. See, for instance, the dedications by the Syrian scholar and historian Ibn Wāṣil (d. 697/1298): Konrad Hirschler, “Ibn Wāṣil,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three* (Leiden: Brill Online, 2016).

122. Al-Hindī, *al-Ghurra al-munīfa*. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate a copy of *al-Ṭarīqa al-Bahā’īyya* (also apparently known as *al-Barāhīn al-Bahā’īyya fī al-farq bayn al-Ḥanafīyya wa-l-Shafī‘īyya*), the original text by al-Rāzī. See ‘Alī al-Riḍā Qarabulūṭ and Aḥmad Ṭūrān Qarabulūṭ, *Mu‘jam al-tārīkh al-turāth al-Islāmī fī maktabāt al-‘ālam (al-makḥṭūṭāt wa-l-maṭbū‘āt)* (Kayseri: Dār al-‘Aqaba, 2001), 4:301–2.

123. Al-Hindī, *al-Ghurra al-munīfa*, 303–8.

Sirāj al-Dīn included an epilogue where he made a case, somewhat reminiscent of Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭarasūsī (d. 758/1357), the Hanafi chief judge of Damascus, to “sell Hanafism to the Mamluk Sultanate” just a few years earlier in 753/1352.¹²⁴ Yet, instead of writing about how it would benefit the Mamluk class or be more “government friendly” per se, as had al-Ṭarasūsī, he wrote about how the Hanafi school was much more favorable and practical for judges, witnesses, the dead, and the general public, since it legitimated a wide variety of everyday transactions and issues that were (allegedly) invalid in the Shafi‘i school and would subject everyone to immense difficulty, impossibility, or sin if actually followed.¹²⁵ (A later treatise written by al-Bābartī in 776/1374 would also share this theme.¹²⁶) It is difficult not to imagine Sirāj al-Dīn thinking back to his roots in Hanafi Delhi as he made these arguments.

Texts such as these likely opened doors for Sirāj al-Dīn in Cairo and strengthened his relationships with the Mamluk elites. As mentioned before, Ṣarghitmish granted Sirāj al-Dīn’s request to be appointed as the military judge after Shaykhū had refused. Simultaneously, they also reveal Ṣarghitmish’s deeper investments in both Hanafi scholarship and patronship. Sirāj al-Dīn’s dedication to Ṣarghitmish in this refutation now overlay (or paralleled) al-Rāzī’s dedication to Sultan Bahā’ al-Dīn, and this may also represent Ṣarghitmish’s ambitions to be seen in this longer Central/South Asian model of patronship. That Ṣarghitmish was aware of and concerned by the text attributed to al-Rāzī (which itself appears to have been an obscure text) may represent his deep exposure to such legal discourse. In fact, Ṣarghitmish’s interest in individual texts can also be seen in the array of manuscripts he endowed (as *waqf*) for his madrasa’s library collection.¹²⁷

Ṣarghitmish was jailed and died soon thereafter (due to suspicions that he would unseat the sultan), but, as mentioned in the previous section, Sirāj al-Dīn’s career would continue to grow. His relationship with the Mamluk elite was further strengthened as he used his legal skills to directly justify decisions favorable to them. We get an insight, within a treatise Sirāj al-Dīn wrote late in his career, in his official capacity as chief judge, into the question of *kafā’a* (suitability) within marriage.¹²⁸ At a grand wedding held at the royal palace, and attended by all the chief justices, Sirāj al-Dīn had the honor of officiating the marriage ceremony of the Mamluk Biktāsh (d. 771/1370), captain of the sultan’s guard (*ra’s nawba*),

124. Baki Tezcan, “Hanafism and the Turks in al-Ṭarasūsī’s Gift for the Turks (1352),” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 15 (2011): 51–78, at 68.

125. Al-Hindī, *al-Ghurra al-munīfa*, 541–44.

126. Ahmet İnanır, “Ekmelüddin Bâbertî’nin ‘en-Nüketü’z-Zarīfe fî Tercîhi Mezhebi Ebî Hanîfe’ Adlı Risalesinin Metni ve Tercümesi,” *İslam Hukuku Araştırmaları Dergisi* 21 (2013): 71–93.

127. Ṣarghitmish’s curated collection of titles for his madrasa library (bearing his personal endowment statements) deserves further study. One such manuscript in his library was the *Kitāb al-aşl* by Imām al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805), one of the most important texts of the Hanafi school. See Muḥammad Būynūkālīn, *al-Aşl li-l-imām Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī: al-muqaddima* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm and Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu’un al-Islāmiyya Dawlat Qaṭar, 2012), 157–58.

128. An edited version has been published as Bajawī, “Risālat al-kafā’a.” Another manuscript, not consulted in the edited version, is Sirāj al-Dīn al-Hindī, *Risāla fî al-kafā’a*, Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyyuddin Efendi V3288/9, MS 548612, fols. 142b–153b.

with Khāwand Sāra, sister of the Mamluk sultan.¹²⁹ Yet, this marriage to the sultan's sister was seen by some jurists as invalid, due to the lack of compatibility (*kafā'a*) between a freed man and freeborn woman.¹³⁰

In response, Sirāj al-Dīn penned a detailed treatise exploring the conditions of *kafā'a* in multiple schools. He argued for the importance of evaluating compatibility by considering changes in time and place, and that a freed person (former slave) could marry a freeborn woman if he had proportional prestige, wealth, intelligence, and other such qualities. For instance, some scholars in Central Asia ruled that Hanafis should not marry their daughters to non-Hanafis, but this, Sirāj al-Dīn argued, did not apply in regions where followers of different schools intermingled.¹³¹ Similarly, in Egypt, it had become customary for kings to marry their daughters to high-ranking officials, without inquiring about their lineage (*nasab*). This applied to marrying Turkish Mamluks, since the Turks had gained distinctive prestige after taking hold of power throughout Muslim lands in the aftermath of Genghis Khan's invasions.¹³² Sirāj al-Dīn wrote at length in praise of the Mamluk Turks, downplaying and even questioning their background as slaves. As he wrote: "[The Turks] established the foundations of justice and fairness, eliminated the innovations of oppression and tyranny, supported the religion during its periods of decline... built mosques and schools... quelled the flames of discord, closed the doors of tribulation, took upon themselves the cultivation of knowledge and scholars."¹³³ Some scholars, he added, had even recommended caution in regards to holding Turkish women as slaves, as many of them were actually free women who had wrongfully been sold into slavery.

This treatise encapsulated the symbiotic relationship between mobile Hanafi jurists such as himself and the Mamluk elite who sought to establish their authority in society. It is also likely that his comments and high praise extended to the Turks of the Delhi Sultanate as well, given the positive comments al-ʿUmarī quoted from him about the sultanate. As someone with the unique perspective of having intimate access to Turkish elites in both Delhi and Cairo, Sirāj al-Dīn's high praise for Mamluk contributions to society and patronage of religious scholarship contrasted with a cooler reception among many local Arab scholars.¹³⁴

Sirāj al-Dīn's expertise was thus in high demand at the precise moment when a series of Mamluk amirs also pushed for more pro-Hanafi (and pro-Mamluk) initiatives. With his pedigree that included detailed commentaries on well-recognized Hanafi texts on law and theory, and an ability to defend Hanafi rulings against Shafi'i critiques through a variety

129. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:326.

130. Ibid.

131. Bajawī, "Risālat al-kafā'a," 655.

132. Ibid.

133. Ibid., 663.

134. Ulrich Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 23 (1988): 81–114; Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 128–60.

of legal sources, Sirāj al-Dīn exhibited deep knowledge of Hanafi law for a wider Mamluk readership and students. Sirāj al-Dīn’s relationship with the Mamluk elite was strengthened by their joint investment in Hanafi texts (including evidently Persian texts), as marked most vividly by his text in dedication to his Mamluk benefactor Şarġhitmish. Later, after achieving the chief judge position, he was likely fueled by his initial decades in Hanafi Delhi to continue to strive and achieve greater parity with the Shafi‘i chief judge rather than accept a secondary role. Furthermore, given active Mamluk support for scholars in Cairo, he praised them abundantly and defended their social status. The Mamluks certainly found a grateful and capable ally in the Hanafi jurist from Delhi.

Conclusions

The Hanafi madhhab was the most critical institution that shaped and facilitated Sirāj al-Dīn’s career in Mamluk Cairo. Here, as a newcomer with no established links to the Mamluk elites, he found common cause and support from a series of Hanafi judges and Mamluk amirs. Yet, this was not an effortless or inevitable collaboration based on a shallow notion of a shared affiliation with the Hanafi school. Nor was it simply a result of having good relationships with a select number of influential elites. Unlike Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s mostly ceremonial role as a Maliki judge in Hanafi Delhi, Sirāj al-Dīn worked his way in Cairo to the top of the judicial hierarchy by studying with chief judges and writing voluminous works on relevant issues in Mamluk intellectual discourse that addressed larger concerns. His training and scholarship—expressed in his commentaries, treatises, and refutations—converged with the pro-Hanafi interests and deeper familiarity with Persian legal literature of the Mamluk amirs to defend the Hanafi school’s standing in the competitive legal arena of Mamluk Cairo.

The juristic connections across this zone of scholarship in the Arabian Sea from South Asia to the Mamluk Sultanate in the fourteenth century must therefore be taken more seriously.¹³⁵ The foundation of these links was the madhhab-system, a transregional legal tradition that connected jurists from different Muslim societies and polities, including across the Indian Ocean. Existing scholarship has considered how the Shafi‘i madhhab spread to different corners of the Indian Ocean; in contrast, this article has shown a remarkably different story where Hanafism was effectively imported from South Asia (among other places) to bolster Mamluk Hanafi positions in the sultanate. As such, it reverses the flow of intellectual circulation and exchange usually considered in the literature on Islamic scholarship in the Indian Ocean.

As the Mamluks sought to create more opportunities for other madhhabs and chip away at the predominance of the Shafi‘i leadership, they created new positions for Hanafi judges and teachers at local madrasas, both in Cairo and other cities in their sultanate.

135. Future scholarship that dives deeper into Sirāj al-Dīn’s work may reveal how his writings in legal theory and doctrine brought together rulings or theories from South Asia to Cairo. As an example from a different field, in a discussion on gnosticism (*ma‘rifa*), Sirāj al-Dīn listed the viewpoints of diverse groups, including what he termed the “madhhab of the Sufis,” the sages of Hind (*ḥukamā’ al-Hind*), people of education (*ahl al-ta‘lim*), and the Ash‘aris and Mu‘tazilis. Al-Hindī, *Lawā’ih al-anwār*, fols. 45–73.

The expansion in legal pluralism thus opened new opportunities for scholars of different madhhabs across the Indian Ocean. In a broader perspective, Sirāj al-Dīn paved the way for other Hanafis from South Asia to find employment in such positions after him. In the next century, another Indian, Saʿd Allāh al-Hindī (d. 890/1485), served as an imam in Jerusalem and a Hanafi deputy judge in Damascus.¹³⁶ Sirāj al-Dīn's contemporary Ḍiyā' al-Hindī al-Ṣāghhānī (d. 780/1379), who had Indian roots and claimed ties to the renowned thirteenth-century hadith scholar and Lahore-born Raḍī al-Dīn al-Ṣāghhānī (d. 650/1252), in fact left a much more enduring family legacy in Mecca.¹³⁷ After initial turmoil, Ḍiyā' al-Hindī settled in Mecca with an appointment as a teacher of Hanafī law by the Mamluk amir Yalbughā. Thereafter, he became the progenitor of the famous Banū Ḍiyā' family in Mecca. Beginning with Ibn al-Ḍiyā' al-Ṣāghhānī (d. 825/1422), appointed as the first independent Hanafi judge in Mecca in 806/1403–4, several generations of this family would serve as Hanafi judges and imams in Mecca.¹³⁸

Later, even the Ottomans would initially continue the Mamluk precedent of appointing Indian and Indian-origin muftis from across the Arabian Sea to bolster the Hanafi madhhab in the Hijaz. A jurist of Gujarati origin, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Nahrawālī (d. 990/1582), was appointed the Hanafi mufti of Mecca and the professor for Hanafi law at the newly established Madrasa Süleymaniye adjoining the Grand Mosque.¹³⁹ Furthermore, these intellectual links encompassed not only the movement of people but also of texts. Manuscript copies of the *Fatāwā-yi Tātārkhāniyya*, a major fatwa collection composed in fourteenth-century South Asia, abounded in collections in Istanbul.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, there was significant exchange of Arabic grammar texts between South Asia and Ottoman Istanbul.¹⁴¹

The Mamluk Sultanate was thus not only host to a great diversity of African, Anatolian, Persian, and Central Asian scholars but also Hanafi scholars traveling across the Arabian Sea from South Asia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Sirāj al-Dīn's example reveals the underlying legal framework of madhhab pluralism that encompassed and organized the legal activities of such jurists, which made it possible for newcomers without a deep scholarly network to ascend the ranks and achieve upward social mobility. By focusing on these histories, we recover a missing chapter of Indian intellectual and juristic activity in the Mamluk Sultanate as well as the shared legal system that brought and organized them together in a meaningful way.

136. ʿAbd al-Bāsiṭ al-Malaṭī, *Nayl al-amal fi dhayl al-duwal*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 2002), 7:414.

137. Al-Fāsī, *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn*, 2:362; al-Malaṭī, *Nayl al-amal*, 2:150.

138. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʿ al-lāmiʿ*, 7:84; al-Fāsī, *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn*, 3:107.

139. Baig, "Indian Hanafis," 58–59.

140. Sohaib Baig, "The Textual Landscapes of Hanafi Eurasia: South Asian Scholarship in Turkish Manuscript Collections (Part 1 of 2)," *Islamic Law Blog*, August 10, 2023.

141. Christopher D. Bahl, *Mobile Manuscripts: Arabic Learning across the Early Modern Western Indian Ocean* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2025).

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