

THE KĀRIMĪ MERCHANTS

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THE IMPORTANT RÔLE which the Kārimī merchants played in Oriental trade at the end of the Middle Ages has been touched upon by some outstanding orientalists. The last to treat the subject exhaustively was W. J. Fischel in his paper “Über die Gruppe der Kārimī-Kaufleute”, published in 1937 in the series *Analecta Orientalia* (of the Pontifical Bible Institute) no. 14. The Arabic historical works of the later Middle Ages contain, however, additional material, which partly corroborates and partly modifies Fischel's conclusions. A good many of the notices on the Kārimīs to be quoted in this paper are taken from the hitherto unpublished chronicle *Inbā' al-ghumr bi-abnā al-'umr* of Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 1449), MS. Constantinople, Yeni Cami 814 and the Who's Who of the fifteenth century composed by al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497) and called *ad-Ḍaw' al-lāmi' fī a'yān al-qarn al-tāsī'* (Cairo, 1353-55).

I

Fischel compiled a list of fourteen Kārimīs. Adhering to his method of listing only those who are called Kārimī *expressis verbis* (although we may be sure that many other merchants whose biographies are contained in the Arabic historical literature belonged to the Kārimīs too) we should add the following:—

(1) Tāj al-Dīn Ibn al-Ruhā'ilī (الرهاني), not vocalized in the printed text, means surely “the man of al-Ruhā'”, a town which belonged to Syria during that period, although its population certainly spoke Turkish. This explains the Turkish suffix “lī”). Tāj al-Dīn, who died in 1331, was, according to Ibn Kathīr (*al-Bidāya wa 'l-nihāya*, 14, p. 156), the greatest Kārimī of Damascus and Cairo. The Damascene chronicler states that he was believed to have left 100,000 dīnārs in cash, besides goods, precious household effects, and real estates.

(2) Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bālīsī. Ibn Ḥajar (op. cit. f. 18b), in the list of those deceased in A.H. 777, gives his genealogy as follows: Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Yasīr al-Bālīnī. Both the genealogy and the spelling of the names are erroneous. As we read in a passage of Maqrīzī's *Khīṭaṭ* (see below), where the spelling is given, the name of the ancestor of

Shihāb al-Dīn was Basīr. In another passage of the *Inbā'*, quoted below, we read that this man was called al-Bālisī, i.e. hailing from the Syrian town of Bālis. It is the obituary notice of Shihāb al-Dīn's son Nūr al-Dīn Abu 'l-Qāsim 'Alī, who died in A.H. 799 (1396–7). His genealogy is given as follows: Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī b. Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī b. Najm al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Fakhr al-Dīn Ismā'il b. Basīr al-Bālisī. In this passage, as in the biographical notice on Shihāb al-Dīn himself, we read that his father or grandfather Muḥammad was a great merchant, but here we are told that his *laqab* was Shams al-Dīn and that he died in the year A.H. 773 (1371–2). (In another passage of Ibn Ḥajar's chronicle, f. 17a, we find that Shams al-Dīn died in A.H. 768 = 1366–7.) This remark, which is supported by Maqrīzī (see below), proves that the great merchant was Shihāb al-Dīn's father and not the son of Basīr. The genealogy in his biography is incomplete, as Ibn Ḥajar jumped over some generations and mentioned, after Muḥammad, the ancestor of the family only. Ibn Ḥajar says that Shihāb al-Dīn was born to rich and esteemed parents, but did not show great efficiency in his enterprises. He died, still young, in 1376.

(3) Rashīd al-Habbī, whose full name was, according to a marginal note on a MS. leaf of Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle (ed. Zurayk, ix, pp. 419–20), Rashīd (al-Dīn) Sa'id b. Naṣr al-Habbī. Both this chronicler and Maqrīzī in his *Sulūk* (MS. Paris, Slane 1727, s.a. A.H. 797), mention the exact date of his death, namely 13th March, 1395, without supplying us with further details.

(4) Khair al-Dīn Khidr b. Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. Yaḥyā. Al-Sakhāwī relates (in *al-Daw' al-lāmi*, iii, p. 178), that he was a great merchant like his father. He lived with his father in Aden for a long time, later on went to Mecca and from there to Cairo. When the father died in A.H. 811 (1408–9), Khair al-Dīn returned to Mecca in order to settle there, but could not stand the extortions of the local authorities and had to go back to Cairo, where he died in 1417 or 1418. He is called *al-Rūmī al-tājir al-Kārimī* by a writer quoted by al-Sakhāwī (The printed text reads, indeed, "al-Kāzimī," but this is surely a mistake: الكازمى instead of الكارمى).

(5) Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Māhūrī. Al-Sakhāwī (*al-Tibr al-masbūk*, p. 198) says that he belonged to the courtiers intimate with the Mamluk Sultan al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad Shaikh, who ruled

from 1412 to 1419, and that he discharged the task of administrator of al-Azhar. Further he mentions that he possessed a building in the neighbourhood of this famous mosque. Muḥammad al-Māḥūrī died in Mecca.

(6) Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan b. Suwaid al-Mālikī. This jurisconsult was sometimes notary public and sometimes Kārimī merchant. Ibn Ḥajar (f. 225b), whose statements are supplemented by al-Sakhāwī (in his *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, ii, p. 101), relates that in A.H. 800 (1387–8) he received a sum of money which enabled him to engage in commercial enterprises with Yemen. He travelled backwards and forwards and became very rich. He died in 1425.

(7) Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Aḥmad al-Kharrūbī. Neither Ibn Ḥajar nor al-Sakhāwī mention in the biography of this merchant which trade he followed (see *Inbā'* f. 211b and *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, vi, p. 92), but al-Sakhāwī calls him *al-khawāja al-kabīr al-tājir al-Kārimī* in the biography of his son Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad (*al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, viii, p. 246).

(8) Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan b. Ibrāhīm b. Ḥasan b. Ibrāhīm Ibn 'Ulaiba of Alexandria. He died in 1484 (Ibn Iyās ed. Kahle, iii, p. 202, and *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, iii, pp. 90–1).

(9) Faraj Allāh al-Kārimī. This name is found in a Judeo-Arabic letter which was published in the Hebrew quarterly *Kiryath Sepher* (vol. 18, pp. 199 ff, p. 201). Unfortunately the date of the letter is incomplete, as the day and the month are given, but the year is omitted. The names mentioned in the letter leave no doubt that it was written in Egypt in the Mamluk period.

II

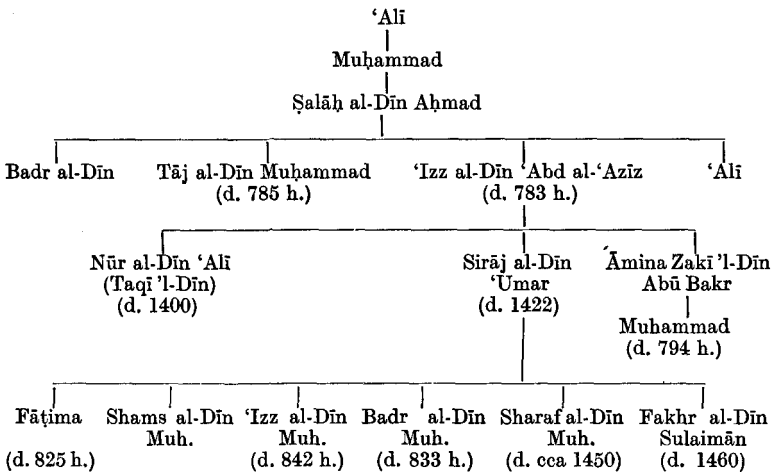
We gather from the sources that a good many of these wealthy merchants were parvenus. 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Maṣṣūr began as a poor tailor. The two Kārimīs of the greatest renown made their fortune with their own hands. Ibn Ḥajar (f. 130b) says that Burhān al-Dīn al-Maḥallī was the son of a poor man and became extremely rich. The Sultan himself charged him with the management of his commercial affairs. Zaki 'l-Dīn Abū Bakr al-Kharrūbī belonged to a family of merchants, but he himself was in his youth poor until his uncle Badr al-Dīn died and he inherited from him a great sum (*Inbā'*, f. 53a; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *al-I'lām*, MS. Paris, Slane 1599, f. 11b—who says, however, that Badr al-Dīn was his cousin). This heritage made it possible for him to engage

in great commercial undertakings. As Burhān al-Dīn al-Maḥallī he became the "merchant of the Sultan" and we read in Arabic chronicles that he was the greatest of the Kārimīs (al-'Ainī, *Iqd al-jumān*, MS. Constantinople, Carullah 1591, f. 577b).

Parvenus of other periods and other countries did their utmost to better their social standing by contracting marriages with daughters of aristocratic families. Arabic sources show that the Kārimīs and other wealthy merchants of that time preferred intermarrying within their social group. This, however, is easy to understand. In the Mamluk society there was no real aristocracy of noble families who had held a privileged position during several generations. But trade on a large scale was monopolized by certain families. Among the Kārimīs listed by Fischel there are 'Abd al-Laṭīf b. Muḥammad b. Musnad al-Iskandarī and his son Yaḥyā who lived in the beginning of the fourteenth century. Of other families we also find two members: Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Musallam and Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Musallam, Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī b. 'Umar al-Maḥallī and Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. 'Umar al-Maḥallī. Even of the family of the al-Kharrūbī Fischel listed two Kārimīs, Zakī 'l-Dīn Abū Bakr and Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī b. 'Abd al-'Azīz. Yet we read in *Khīṭat*, ii, p. 401, that Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Musallam's mother was a daughter of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bālīsī, whose name we added to the list of the Kārimīs. Nāṣir al-Dīn ibn Musallam too, is called al-Bālīsī. Again, the family of the Ibn Musallam was connected with the al-Kharrūbī by the marriage of a daughter of Nāṣir al-Dīn. This we gather from the biography of Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Kharrūbī, an unhappy member of the Kārimī group, who several times inherited great sums, but had no success in his enterprises and left many debts when he died in 1422. According to *Inbā'* f. 211b, where his story is told, he married a daughter of Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Musallam. (This is omitted in *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, vi, p. 92, but mentioned in the biographies quoted below.) She gave birth to three of his sons: Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. A.H. 833 = 1429-30), Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. ca. 1450), and Fakhr al-Dīn Sulaimān (d. 1460) (*al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, iii, p. 267, viii, pp. 246-7). In Ibn Ḥajar's chronicle f. 109a we find the obituary notice of Taqī 'l-Dīn 'Alī b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī, who is qualified as *al-tājir al-Karīmī*. Hence we have learnt that this man was the brother of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-

'Aziz ('Alī b. 'Abd al-'Azīz had two *laqabs*, Nūr al-Dīn and Taqī 'l-Dīn, and this explains the mistake of Fischel who thought that two persons are spoken of, s. p. 69 and 71). The father of 'Umar and 'Alī, 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz, who died in 783 A.H. (1381-2) (*Inbā'* f. 211b and cf. *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, vi, p. 92), was surely the brother of Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī, (s. *Khīṭat*, ii, p. 368). This Tāj al-Dīn died in Mecca in A.H. 785 (1383-4) (*al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, loc. cit.). A third brother, 'Alī, was the father of the famous Zakī 'l-Dīn Abū Bakr (op. cit., v, p. 240). Zakī 'l-Dīn had a son Muḥammad, who was a rich man and died, still young, in 1392 (*Inbā'* f. 211b).

The following is a Genealogical table of the family al-Kharrūbī :—



The al-Maḥallī were also a family of rich merchants. A certain Shihāb al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, who was the father-in-law of the Egyptian chief-judge 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Alī al-Tafahmī (d. 1432), is said to have been the greatest merchant of Egypt in his time (*al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, iv, pp. 98 ff). The father of Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan b. Ibrāhīm Ibn 'Ulaiba, Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Munawī (d. 1470), was an efficient merchant. His brother 'Abd al-Qādir was appointed by the Sultan his commercial agent in Alexandria. He died in 1485 (*al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, i, pp. 41-2, iv, pp. 259-60). These rich families built splendid houses on the shore of the Nile. It took seven years to build that of Burhān al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (*Khīṭat*, ii, pp. 368-9). The house of Zakī 'l-Dīn al-Kharrūbī was rebuilt as a Khānqāh by the Sultan al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad Shaikh in 1941 (op. cit.,

pp. 426-7). The Kārimī merchants, like the Mamluk emirs, spent considerable sums for building madrasas and provided them with the revenues of estates and houses. The Arab historians relate that Nāṣir al-Dīn Ibn Musallam founded a madrasa for Shāfi'ites and Mālikītes, with a school for boys (*Khīṭat*, ii, p. 401). Burhān al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, too, built a madrasa, but avaricious as he was, did not allow funds for the payment of teachers and students (op. cit., pp. 368-9). These madrasas were built near the houses of their founders, e.g. that of Burhān al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, or even located within the mansion of the founder, e.g. that of Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Kharrūbī (ibid).

However, no conclusions should be drawn from the reports on the great wealth of the Kārimīs as to their social and economic power. These would be exaggerated and not be in accord with the reality of the Mamluk period. Within the framework of the Mamluk state there was, in general, no place for patrician families who might have enjoyed great power and influence for a long time. The authorities would, sooner or later, have ruined them by their system of contributions and confiscation of the inheritance. As a matter of fact, we do not hear of a family of Kārimī merchants who remained rich more than two or three generations. This is strikingly substantiated by the history of the al-Kharrūbī family. There were in this family three generations of wealthy and enterprising merchants; the fourth was poor. Al-Sakhāwī is very outspoken on this point. The first generation is represented by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī, the second by 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz, the third by his nephew Zakī 'l-Dīn Abū Bakr and by his son Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī. The Arabic historians call Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī the last of the Kharrūbī merchants of Egypt—*ākhir tujjār Miṣr min al-Kharāriba* (apud Fischel, p. 71, and *al-Dar' al-lāmi'*, v, p. 240). The reports on the family of Ibn Musallam are conflicting. Maqrizī relates that the father of Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Musallam was a porter and later became a "travelling merchant" (*tājir saffār*) (*Khīṭat*, ii, p. 401). But Ibn Ḥajar says that both his father and his father's father were wealthy and successful merchants. An uncle of his was, according to *Inbā'*, f. 17a, extraordinarily rich. If that is true, there were three generations of effective and rich traders in this family too, for the sons of Nāṣir al-Dīn lost their money. The history of another famous merchant family, as outlined in the biographical dictionary of al-Sakhāwī, reveals the same picture

(see the biographies of the Damascene merchants Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Muzallaq (d. 1444), his sons Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar (d. A.H. 841 = 1437–8) and Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan (d. 1474) and his grandsons Ibrāhīm (d. A.H. 879 = 1474–5) and Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, in *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, i, p. 41, iii, p. 126, vi, p. 120, viii, pp. 173–4). It should be stressed, however, that it was not the Mamluk government, at least not directly, which brought about the downfall of the Kārimī families. They were not ruined by contributions, but by the consequences of the development of the Egyptian economy as a whole. It seems that the Mamluk government, at any rate that of the Bahrites, adopted a more lenient attitude towards the Kārimīs because it was interested in the revenues from the spice trade.

Naturally we should like to know the number of the Kārimī merchants. It surely underwent changes from time to time according to circumstances. We are indebted to Ibn Ḥajar who provides us with interesting and reliable information on this question. He says (f. 16a) that he found a note of the merchant al-Fāriqī of Zabīd that in the beginning of al-Malik an-Nāṣir's reign there were more than 200 Kārimīs in Egypt and that they had more than 100 employees who travelled overseas for them. To evaluate this report, it should not be overlooked that in the period in question (the beginning of the fourteenth century), the size of the Egyptian spice trade was limited to some extent owing to the effort of the Pope, after the capture of Acre, to weaken the economic power of Egypt by deflecting the commercial relations with the Middle East to other ports than hers.

In the Arabic sources no details have so far been discovered on the supposedly guildlike organization of the Kārimī merchants. This is a crucial point of the problem. There can be no doubt that they formed a special group of great business-men who co-operated in some way or other. But should we infer from the titles of "chief of the Kārimīs" and similar ones given to leading Kārimī merchants that there was a firm organization with grades, such as chief, simple member, etc., as does Fischel (p. 70)? Such titles found in Arabic chronicles and biographical dictionaries of the Middle Ages are perhaps not to be taken too literally. The Arabs were accustomed to bestow these titles lavishly on outstanding members of any social group. The most learned scholar of the Shāfi'ī jurisconsults of Egypt was called *ra'īs al-shāfi'īya bi-Miṣr*, and it would be erroneous to deduce from this title that there existed an organization of the

Shāfi'ī doctors. But surely this prominent scholar was consulted when a judge for the adherents of his school (*madhhab*) was appointed and even in other cases he exerted great influence. It should be borne in mind that our ideas of social organization, inherited from the Romans, were not familiar to the medieval Orient. Most of the social institutions were not built up on well defined rules, nor did one cling to rules established in practice. The *Futuwwa* associations had their rules, but they originated in a religious background which was missing in the case of the Kārimīs. Furthermore the group-life of the akhīs was a series of ceremonies and they could not help but appoint officers for celebrating them. The Kārimīs may have been a loose confederation of merchants bound together by mere professional interests. We may be sure that the richest and most esteemed Kārimī always decided on questions which gave rise to dissension, that he, with some other prominent members of the group, represented them before the government, and that his authority was recognized by all the Kārimīs. But there need not have been written statutes, such as the Westerners used to have.

III

Another question not yet solved is that of the rise and the decline of the Kārimīs. Various reports on their activities point to the period of the Bahrī Mamluks and the two decades after it as the time in which they flourished. But when did their rise begin? Fischel quotes Maqrizī who relates in his *Sulūk* (i, pp. 72-3) that the Kārimīs came to Egypt in 1181 and had to pay taxes for some years. The Egyptian historian does not say, however, that they came for the first time in that year. Due attention should be paid to a statement in Qalqashandī's *Subḥ* (iii, p. 524) where he says that the Fatimids had a fleet in the port of 'Aidhāb which was charged to protect the Kārimī ships from pirates. That the Fatimids made great efforts to divert the spice trade from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea and established commercial bases on the way to India is well known. (The place of commercial relations in Fatimid policy was discussed in a recently published paper of B. Lewis: "The Fatimids and the route to India," *Revue de la faculté des sciences économiques de l'université d'Istanbul*, 11, pp. 50-54.) At any rate, it is remarkable that the spice traders' ships are called Kārimī ships in this passage.

Under the rule of the Bahrī Mamluks, the Kārimīs apparently

monopolized the spice-trade between Yemen and Egypt or at least their preponderance was overwhelming. There was a great difference between the Indian spice trade of the Fatimid and the Mamluk periods. The small capitalists previously engaged in it were gradually supplanted by the Kārimī merchants who accumulated enormous wealth. This was the result of the economic policy of the Mamluk government, which oppressed the small traders by its system of taxes and monopolies. We do not hear, however, that in the first half of the Bahri period the Mamluk government asked the Kārimīs to raise funds in case of emergency. In the middle of the fourteenth century their economic power rose more and more. They had a great international bank in Cairo which gave, in 1351 and 1352, huge loans to a Yemenite king imprisoned by the Sultan of Egypt; they were certainly payable in Yemen (*al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, ed. Popper, v, pp. 89–90, 117). Even the Egyptian government began to apply to them for financial help. In 1352, when the Syrian governors had revolted and the Sultan needed funds for a military expedition, the vizier received orders to take a loan from the merchants. Apparently the Kārimīs opposed the government's demand, for our source goes on to relate that they bought certain products from the Sultan at their real value, thus providing him with the necessary funds (op. cit., p. 121; this passage was misunderstood by Fischel, p. 77, who speaks of a loan to the king of Yemen). Once more the Mamluk government had shown a remarkable leniency in its relations with the Kārimī merchants, since we read in our source that some state officials were laid under heavy contributions to be paid in cash. At the end of the fourteenth century, under the rule of Sultan Barqūq, the power of the Kārimīs and their influence came to their peak. At that time they played a rôle comparable to that of the great bankers of Baghdad in the Abbasid period and of the Mādharā'iyūn of Egypt. When the government, which became more and more impoverished, had to prepare a military expedition, it borrowed great sums from the Kārimīs. We hear that they lent to Barqūq a million dirhams in 1394 when an invasion of the Mongols was imminent and the Mamluk government decided to send troops to the Syrian border (*al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, v, p. 562). In 1403 Christian raiders attacked Alexandria and an expedition had to be organized to protect the chief port of Egypt. Burhān al-Din al-Maḥallī, the renowned Kārimī, contributed a great sum to its cost (*Inba'*, f. 125a).

But it seems that a short time later the riches of the Kārimīs vanished. The general breakdown of the Egyptian economy in the beginning of the fifteenth century probably ruined the Kārimīs too. The outstanding Kārimī merchants of the end of the fourteenth century are, in the Arabic sources, called “the last Kārimīs”. To the passages quoted by Fischel (p. 71) a note in al-‘Ainī’s *‘Iqd al-jumān* (f. 577b) may be added: the chronicler says that Zakī ‘l-Dīn Abū Bakr al-Kharrūbī was the last of the Kārimīs in Egypt and with him they disappeared from the scene. Again, this should not be understood literally. Five out of nine Kārimīs whom we have added to Fischel’s list lived in the fifteenth century. Further, in the chronicles of this period, we find reports on the appointment of officials charged with the collection of the Kārimīs’ taxes (*Inbā’*, f. 256a). In general there is no reason to suspect that expressions like Kārimī merchants or Kārimī trade are mere equivalents of spice traders and spice trade in sources of that period, although sometimes this may be the case. Yet the new material does not contradict Fischel’s opinion on this point. The end of the fourteenth century was the great time of the Kārimīs, whereas the merchants of the fifteenth century called Kārimī seem to have been men of moderate wealth. The economic decline of Egypt and the ever growing pressure of the Mamluk government, which controlled the spice trade and participated in it, encroached on the activities of these merchants. But even in this period the Kārimīs were not annihilated, because both public opinion and the government were aware of the importance for the economy of Egypt of their spice trade. In 1429–30 an epidemic ravaged the country and when the Sultan Barsbāy asked the leading theologians about the causes of the disaster, they mentioned, among others, the measures taken by the government against the Kārimī merchants (*Inbā’*, f. 235b).

IV

The conclusions reached so far confirm some of Fischel’s inferences and refute others. Fischel expressed the opinion that the Kārimīs were a group of merchants engaged in the spice trade between Egypt and Yemen. But, without doubt, there were also Kārimī merchants in Damascus. The first Kārimī merchant of our additional list was a Damascene and pursued his commercial activities both in Damascus and in Cairo. True, Ibn Kathīr does not say explicitly that Ibn al-Ruhā’īli died in Damascus, but this may be taken as sure, since

the chronicler does not state the contrary. We may also infer from Qalqashandī's exposé of the Mamluk administration of Syria that there was a group of Kārimī merchants in Damascus. In the list of administrative officers of the province of Damascus there appears an "inspector of the zakāt-tax (*shādd al-zakāt*) with the task of dealing with the Kārimī trade and the like" (*Ṣubḥ*, iv, p. 187). That this passage reveals the state of affairs may be gathered from the fact that such a post is not included in the tableau of the administration of Aleppo, nor in that of any other Syrian province (*ibid.*, pp. 217 ff).

Further, Fischel believes that the Kārimīs were an exclusively Moslem group of merchants. This opinion is clearly refuted by a record in a Judeo-Arabic document reading: "There departed among the Kārimīs of our comrades the Jews" (British Museum Or. 5549, iii, f. 5r, see Catalogue of Margoliouth no. 1135, pt. iii, p. 563). There was certainly no reason why the Kārimīs should not have admitted Christians and Jews to their company. J. Mann published in his work "The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs II," p. 246-7 "two Genizah documents which contain apparently lists of tax-payers or people who collected a fund. There appear in one list al-Kārimīn—50 (p. 247) and in the other list where no shares are given: al-kurrām hā-arbā'āh (the four Kārimīs). The quota 50 is remarkably greater than those of other people mentioned in the list. These are documents of the eleventh century.

Lastly, Fischel's assertion as regards the extent of the Kārimīs' business should be modified. The spice trade was their domain, as is explicitly stated in various Arabic sources (e.g. *Ṣubḥ*, 13, p. 341). But this should be taken *cum grano salis*. For besides the spice trade and banking, these great merchants were engaged in other fields. The goods bought by the Kārimīs from the Sultan in 1352 (s. above) were agricultural products of his estates. Another report on the Kārimīs' business in Maqrīzī's *Khīṭaṭ* (ii, p. 401), is not less clear. The Arab writer reports that Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Musallam had many employees and sent one of them to India, another to the Atlantic coast of Africa, a third to Abyssinia and some to other parts. We are probably not mistaken in deducing from this report that Nāṣir al-Dīn was a great slave trader. For what else did he import from Abyssinia and West Africa? Furthermore, we learn from Maqrīzī's statement that the Kārimīs did not refrain from travelling

to India or sending their employees there. The life-story of 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Maṣṣūr, as told by Arab historians, points to the same fact. This Kārimī merchant is sometimes called "al-Kūlamī", i.e. the man who travelled to Kūlam, the well-known sea-port of Malabar (*Sulūk*, ii, pp. 132–3). Some sources indicate that he made five voyages to China. Ibn Ḥajar says in his *al-Durar al-kāmina* (ii, p. 383) that he began his career as merchant with a voyage to the land of Cathay and brought a great quantity of silk from there to Aleppo. A chronicler of Yemen relates that he came to Aden in the year A.H. 703 (1303–4) on his way from Cathay and China and brought silk, moschus, porcelaine, slaves, etc., with him (al-Khazraji. *al-'Uqūd al-lūllū'īya*, i, p. 350).