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In Search of the True Political Position of the 'Ulama: An Analysis of the Aims and Perspectives of the Chronicles of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti ... OF THE DANISH INSTITUTE AT DAMASCUS)

Lars Bjorneboe

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In Search of the True Political Position of the 'Ulama: An Analysis of the Aims and Perspectives of the Chronicles of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti ... OF THE DANISH INSTITUTE AT DAMASCUS) Lars Bjorneboe
This volume establishes the interrelations among the three known works of the Cairene historian al-Jabarti: namely, Ta'rikh muddat al-Faransis bi-Misr mn sanat 1213 ila' sanat 1216 (composed 1799), Mazhar al-tagdis bi'zawal dawlat al-Faransis (composed 1801) and Aja'ib al-Athar fi'l tarajim wa'l akhbar (composed 1805-6). These chronicles, particularly the last two, are the best known narrative sources in Arabic for the entire period of Ottoman rule in Egypt (1517-1798) until the rise of Mehmet Ali Pasha . They have been widely published, edited and translated into European languages, but in spite of this, no systematic analysis of their textual relationships has been undertaken, until now.

Through a textual approach, the author seeks to discover al-Jabarti's underlying political ideology, as well as the intellectual and political context within which he worked. Mr Bjorneboe concludes that the first of al-Jabart'is chronicles, the MS Mudda (1799), constitutes a contribution to a debate among Cairene 'ulama as to how the 'ulama should respond to the new French masters. This and the following editions were written under the patronage of the shaykh al-Sadat, one of Egypt's leading 'ulama at the time. Al-Jabarti promotes the view that the 'ulama should cooperate with the French only when absolute necessary, in contrast to the self-serving conduct of other top 'ulama, notably shaykh 'Abdallah al-Sharqawi. The MS Mazhar (1801) reflects the situation when the returning Ottomans were meeting serious opposition in their attempt to bring Egypt back under direct Ottoman rule, while the MS Aja'ib (1805) should be seen as a plea for an ideal government with Mehmet 'Ali as the just ruler who governs in consultation with the 'ulama.

It is thus possible to demonstrate that the different versions of al-Jabarti's text all had their separate, specific purpose and were revised to accommodate changing political circumstances. But throughout the twenty years al-Jabarti

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