

DAMIETTA AFTER 800: SOURCES, EFFECTS, PROSPECTS†

SUMMARY: This article explores the encounter between Francis of Assisi and the Ayyūbid sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil, an event that many proponents of Muslim-Christian dialogue – including Pope Francis – have invoked as a sign of hope for interreligious relations today. The first section of the article consists of a narrative summary of the encounter between saint and sultan. The second describes the effects of the voyage on Francis, particularly in transforming his understanding of the mission of the friars minor. The third discusses Arabic sources for the encounter and the effects of the event on the Sultan, arguing that the event likely left no mark on his governance, behavior, or piety. The final section explores three lenses with which to view the encounter: dialogue, friendship and kinship. The author notes the limitations of each interpretive lens but favors kinship as the key to understanding this encounter, discussing this in light of the *Document on Human Fraternity* signed by Pope Francis and Ahmad al-Tayyeb in 2019.

2019 marks the eight hundredth anniversary of a seminal event in Franciscan history: the voyage of Francis of Assisi to Egypt and his encounter with the Ayyūbid sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil. Pope Francis has repeatedly invoked this encounter in connection with his own outreach to Muslims¹ and urged the Franciscan family to celebrate the moment². The Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor, Michael A. Perry, published a letter in honor of the anniversary³, and around the world throughout 2019 there have been countless events, both inside and outside the Franciscan family, to recall this moment from the Fifth Crusade⁴. A wave of new publications, both scholarly and popular, emerged over the course of the anniversary year⁵. But before one becomes too excited about the sojourn in Egypt of the patron saint of Italy, one should acknowledge those who would urge caution regarding the history recalled. While commemorations of Damietta have been common, a number of voices – inside and outside the Franciscan family – have questioned whether such commemorations grant unmerited attention to an event that did not hold great importance in the scope of Francis’s life. One is tempted to recall William Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*, a comedy in which the action centers on the characters’ deception of each other. The characters take events of minimal concern and magnify them – through furtive manipulation – thus amplifying events that in themselves should not be important. The characters play games and tricks on each other, sometimes with good

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¹ Pope Francis, Address at the Meeting with Priests, Religious, Consecrated Persons, and the Ecumenical Council of Churches (Rabat, 31 March 2019); Address at the Meeting with the Moroccan People, the Authorities, with Civil Society, and with the Diplomatic Corps (Rabat, 30 March 2019); Homily at Holy Mass (Abu Dhabi, 5 February 2019); Address at the Interreligious Meeting at the Founder’s Memorial (Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019); Address to Participants in the International Peace Conference (Cairo, 28 April 2017).

² Pope Francis, Letter to Father Michael Anthony Perry, OFM, Minister General of the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor (9 February 2019). Francis thanks the Minister General for all of the work to commemorate Damietta and asks that the friars, whose presence among Muslims is rooted in “bonds of friendship” with them, “continue on this path of mutual esteem, free of any suggestion of proselytizing that would alienate those who do not know Christ Jesus as Lord”.

³ M.A. Perry, O.F.M., *Quae placuerint Domino: Letter of the General Minister of the Order of Friars Minor on the 800th Anniversary of the Encounter between St. Francis and Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil*, Rome, 7 January 2019. This letter can be found in a short commemorative book produced by the Order of Friars Minor in three languages (published by Franciscan Media in Cincinnati, available for download at ofm.org), containing selected writings about the encounter, passages from key church documents on interreligious dialogue and Islam, and an adaptable interfaith prayer service.

⁴ Here, one may note a special program at Centro Pro Unione in Rome in January entitled “Beyond Damietta”, a panel crafted deliberately to move from the celebration of past events to dream – concretely – about the future of Muslim-Christian relations.

⁵ For a fundamental bibliography, see F.Z. Munir and J. Welle, “Foreword”, *The Muslim World* 109.2 (2019) 12-13, which unfortunately omits some material, including: C. Frugoni, *Francesco e le terre dei non cristiani*, Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, Milan 2012; E. Scognamiglio, *Francesco e il Sultano. Lo «Spirito di Assisi» e la profezia della pace*, Edizioni Messaggero Padova, Padua 2011. In addition to several articles, some longer works published in the intervening months include: G. Buffon, *Francesco l'ospite folle*, Edizioni Terra Santa, Milan 2019; P. Blasone, F. Cardini, and C. Ruta, *Francesco d'Assisi, al-Malik al-Kāmil, Federico II di Svevia*, Edizioni di storia e studi sociali, Ragusa 2019; R. Giorgi, *Francesco e il Sultano nell'arte*, Edizioni Terra Santa, Milan 2019.

intentions, but other times for purely selfish motives. Much laughter ensues precisely from the fact that there is much ado about nothing, many people preoccupied with stuff that should not matter.

Mutatis mutandis, Shakespeare's concern about manipulating events could describe the best-known book about the encounter between saint and sultan, authored by the historian John V. Tolan. Tolan describes the encounter between Francis and al-Malik al-Kāmil as a *lieu de mémoire*. Tolan identifies the ways in which hagiographers, sculptors, painters, and others have depicted this encounter. He observes that these interpreters read their own preoccupations into the story and that their subsequent descriptions of the encounter illustrate the evolving fears and hopes inspired by the encounter between Christian Europe and the Muslim East⁶. In sum, these range from Francis the seeker of martyrdom, to Francis the colonizer, to Francis the apostle of peace, to Francis the promoter of interreligious understanding. Tolan never attempts to establish the historical facts about what happened and instead offers a narrative of the changing portrayals of the event, "a darkened and distorted image of our own worries and aspirations"⁷. Tolan subtly suggests that we can never know what happened at Damietta, because we are doomed to project our own concerns back onto that moment and we can do nothing more⁸.

Many believers today – the present author included – insist that to the contrary, this encounter can and should mean something for how Christians and Muslims approach each other. This article therefore unfolds in four parts. The first section consists of a narrative summary of the encounter; the second describes the effects of the encounter on Francis; the third discusses Arabic sources for the encounter and the effects of the event on the Sultan; and the final section addresses the consequences of this encounter for interreligious relationships today.

A Journey to Egypt

The probable facts about Damietta in 1219 are well attested in Latin Christian sources⁹. After the General Chapter of the Lesser Brothers (*fratres minores*) in 616/1219, Francis of Assisi (d. 623/1226) announced his intention to travel to Egypt. This would be his third attempt, after two prior failures, to travel among Muslims. Francis departed from Ancona, stopped in Acre en route, and eventually accompanied a contingent of crusaders through the Nile Delta, where he stayed in the Christian camp outside Damietta¹⁰. Al-Malik al-Kāmil (d. 635/1238) commanded his army just outside that Muslim stronghold, a strategic location that protected Cairo by preventing travel further upriver. The young sultan was Francis's rough contemporary in age but had been groomed for leadership from his boyhood; though he had only become sultan at the death of his father the previous year, he had already governed Egypt for most of two decades. Shortly after Francis's arrival, the crusading army undertook an aggressive assault that resulted in many crusader losses¹¹. This devastating defeat was followed by a brief period of truce. During the cessation of hostilities, Francis convinced Cardinal Pelagius (d. 627/1230) to permit him and one

⁶ J. Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: the Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter*, Oxford University Press, New York 2009, 12.

⁷ J. Tolan, "The Friar and the Sultan: Francis of Assisi's Mission to Egypt", *European Review* 16.1 (2008) 126.

⁸ I discuss the merits and limits of this approach at greater length in J. Welle, "Two Friars Who Went Among the Muslims and the Realms of their Memory: Francis of Assisi and Anselm Turmeda / 'Abdullāh al-Tarjumān", *The Muslim World* 107.3 (2017) 572-592.

⁹ The most significant are Thomas of Celano, Jacques de Vitry, the *Chronicle of Ernoul*, Henri d'Avranches, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, and Oliver of Paderborn. Most of these documents are collected in R.J. Armstrong et al. (eds.), *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* (hereafter FAED), 3 vols., New City, Hyde Park 1999. Oliver's extensive chronicle of the Fifth Crusade does not mention Francis of Assisi in the narration of the events at Damietta; a full translation (with scholarly apparatus) can be found in *The Capture of Damietta by Oliver of Paderborn*, trans. J.J. Gavigan, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1948; text reprinted without scholarly apparatus in E. Peters, *Christian Society and the Crusades, 1198-1229*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1971, 49-139, or J. Bird, E. Peters, and J.M. Powell (eds.), *Crusade and Christendom*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2013, 158-225.

¹⁰ For a frequently cited modern account of the siege of Damietta, see J. P. Donovan, *Pelagius and the Fifth Crusade*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1950, 38-68; for a revisionist account, especially regarding the role of Francis of Assisi, see J.M. Powell, *The Anatomy of a Crusade 1213-1221*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1986, 157-173; for a more recent general survey of the place of Egypt in the scope of the crusading endeavor, with a focus on material culture, see C. Tyerman, *The World of the Crusades*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2019, 234-284.

¹¹ Thomas of Celano reports that Francis prophesied this defeat. This narrative may be Thomas's coded way of expressing Francis's opposition to the bloodshed of the crusades, an opposition that Thomas could not state overtly in the midst of Louis IX's attempt – at the very moment Thomas was writing – to conscript the friars into supporting the Seventh Crusade. Thomas of Celano, *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul (Vita Secunda)*, in FAED, vol. 2, pp. 265-266 (2Cel 30); for discussion, see M.F. Cusato, "The Loneliness of Francis of Assisi: The Reception by the Franciscan Order of the Encounter of Francis with the Sultan in the First Half of the 13th Century", *The Muslim World* 109.2 (2019) 24-26 et passim; or at greater length, M.F. Cusato, "Francis of Assisi, the Crusades and Malek al-Kamil", in M.F. Cusato, *The Early Franciscan Movement (1205-1239): History, Sources and Hermeneutics*, Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto 2009, 116-121; see also Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 158-160. For a direct refutation of this approach, see A.L. Hoose, "Francis of Assisi's Way of Peace? His Conversion and Mission to Egypt", *The Catholic Historical Review* 96.3 (2010) 449-469; for additional (prior) discussion see B. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1984, 116-131; C. Maier, *Preaching the Crusades: Mendicant Friars and the Cross in the Thirteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, 9-17. Hoose's reading of 2Cel 30 has a *prima facie* force, but one must consider Thomas's narrative in light of Francis's larger understanding of the nature and use of power and of the meaning of doing penance; these factors favor Cusato's interpretation.

of his companions to cross the battle lines and engage the sultan at his court. Thomas of Celano (d. ca. 658/1260), the author of the first life of Francis, tells the story as follows:

Before he reached the Sultan, he was captured by soldiers, insulted and beaten, but was not afraid. He did not flinch at threats of torture nor was he shaken by death threats. Although he was ill-treated by many with a hostile spirit and a harsh attitude, he was received very graciously by the Sultan. The Sultan honored him as much as he could, offering him many gifts, trying to turn his mind to worldly riches. But when he saw that he resolutely scorned all these things like dung, the Sultan was overflowing with admiration and recognized him as a man unlike any other. He was moved by his words *and listened to him very willingly*.

In all this, however,
the Lord did not *fulfill* his *desire*,
reserving for him the prerogative of a unique grace¹².

That grace would be the gift of the stigmata, the wounds of the sacred passion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hagiographers who narrate the events of Damietta must reckon with the fact that – according to their presentation of Francis’s motivation for his journey to Egypt – his voyage was a failure. Francis’s surviving writings never discuss his own reasons for traveling to Egypt, but hagiographers describe two desires: the desire for martyrdom and the desire to convert the sultan through preaching. Neither of these desires were fulfilled, and in this sense, Francis’s mission can be considered a double failure. To appreciate the sting of these unfulfilled expectations, one may recall the playful words of the modern apologist G. K. Chesterton, who described this episode as part of an ironic tragedy and comedy called “The Man Who Could Not Get Killed”¹³. Thomas of Celano would likely affirm this assessment, attributing Francis’s unlikely survival to God’s providence. Despite Francis’s diligent and untiring efforts, the Poverello was unable to get himself killed because God actively protected him for a special gift to be given later.

Thomas’s account lacks an element of the narrative that would become central for later artists: the trial by fire. This enters with the *Legenda maior* of Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (d. 673/1274), the seventh minister general of the order, nearly three decades after the death of Francis.

For the Sultan, perceiving in the man of God a fervor of spirit and a courage that had to be admired, willingly listened to him and invited him to stay longer with him. Inspired from heaven, Christ’s servant said: “If you wish to be converted to Christ along with your people, I will most gladly stay with you for love of him. But if you hesitate to abandon the law of Mohammed for the faith of Christ, then command that an enormous fire be lit and I will walk into the fire along with your priests so that you will recognize which faith deserves to be held as the holier and more certain.” “I do not believe,” the Sultan replied, “that any of my priests would be willing to expose himself to the fire to defend his faith or to undergo any kind of torment.” For he had seen immediately one of his priests, a man full of authority and years, slipping away from his view when he heard Francis’s words.

“If you wish to promise me that if I come out of the fire unharmed,” the saint said to the Sultan, “you and your people will come over to the worship of Christ, then I will enter the fire alone. And if I shall be burned, you must attribute it to my sins. But if God’s power protects me, you will acknowledge *Christ the power and the wisdom of God as the true God* and the *Savior* of all.” The Sultan replied that he did not dare to accept this choice because he feared a revolt among his people. Nevertheless he offered him many precious gifts, which the man of God, greedy not for worldly possessions but the salvation of souls, spurned as if they were dirt. Seeing that the holy man so completely despised worldly possessions, the Sultan was overflowing with admiration, and developed an even greater respect for him. Although he refused, or perhaps did not dare, to come over to the Christian faith, he nevertheless devoutly asked Christ’s servant to accept the gifts and give them to the Christian poor or to churches for his salvation. But, because he was accustomed to flee the burden of money and did not see a root of true piety in the Sultan’s soul, Francis would in no way accept them.

When he saw that he was making no progress
in converting these people
and that he could not *achieve his purpose*,
namely martyrdom,
he went back to the lands of the faithful...¹⁴

The most famous image of the trial by fire narrated in the *Legenda maior* is certainly the fresco by Giotto di Bondone (d. 737/1337) in the Upper Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, but the motif appears in well-known works by Taddeo Gaddi (d. 767-8/1366), Ghirlandaio (d. 899/1494), Benozzo Gozzoli (d. 902-3/1497), as well as more recent artists like Niccolò Monti di Pistoia (d. 1280/1864). While a number of artistic representations of the encounter omit the bonfire as an element of the scene, these depictions are far outnumbered by images that either contain the flames or highlight the trial by fire.

¹² Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis*, in FAED, vol. 1, p. 231 (1Cel 57). Italics indicate Thomas’s allusions to Mk 6:20 and Ps 127:5, respectively.

¹³ G.K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1923, 148.

¹⁴ Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, in FAED, vol. 2, pp. 603-604 (ch. 9). Italics indicate Bonaventure’s allusions to 1Cor 1:24, Jn 17:3, Jn 4:42, and 2Tim 3:10, respectively.

One key historical element remains in this brief review of Francis's journey to Egypt, and it is the element that lends the most combustible fuel to Tolan's thesis: beyond the fact that Francis and the sultan met, further reliable details escape us. A number of Franciscan sources and at least four Latin non-Franciscan sources testify that Francis and the sultan met, but they do not agree about meaningful details beyond this¹⁵. What did the two men talk about? For how long? How many others were present? Who served as translator? Francis may have stayed in the Muslim camp as long as three weeks, but how many audiences did he have with the sultan himself? We simply do not know.

The Transformation of Francis

As already mentioned, Francis's purpose in this journey remains something of a mystery. When he departed Italy, what did he desire to accomplish among the Muslims? When he arrived in Damietta, what did he desire to accomplish among the Muslims? For the future life of the minorite movement, these questions carry less significance than the question of what the journey meant to Francis after his return to Europe. Apart from the goals Francis accomplished or did not accomplish, the journey left one obvious and crucial mark on the thinking of the Poverello: he became capable of imagining a non-proselytizing mission among Muslims. Upon return, he wrote the sixteenth chapter of the *Regula non bullata*, describing two ways that the friars could go on mission.

As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among the Saracens and nonbelievers in two ways. One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to *every human creature for God's sake* and to acknowledge that they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God, when they see it pleases the Lord, in order that [unbelievers] may believe in almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Creator of all, the Son, the Redeemer and Savior, and be baptized and become Christians because *no one can enter the kingdom of God without being reborn of water and the Holy Spirit*¹⁶.

This first way of mission, being subject to Muslims, was a revolution in the notion of mission not just for Francis, but for the Church¹⁷.

As for the other effects of this trip upon Francis, we enter into the realm of speculation. Methodologically, a major shift in Franciscan Studies has been to focus on the writings of Francis himself, rather than allowing hagiographical texts like Bonaventure's *Legenda maior* to dominate our understanding of the Poverello. This methodological shift has also affected contemporary interpretations of Damietta. Some scholars insist that Francis's writings manifest the profound influence this journey left upon him, while others remain reticent. Much of the attention has revolved around *The Praises of God*. This prayer of Francis consists of a long litany of names of God: "You are strong, you are great, you are the most high, you are the almighty king". Later, "You are love, charity; you are wisdom, you are humility, you are patience, you are beauty, you are meekness", and so on¹⁸. Many scholars speculate that the form of this prayer of praise reflects Muslim usage of the ninety-nine "Beautiful Names of God" (*asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*)¹⁹. The novelty of the form of Francis's prayer of praise lends support to the hypothesis that

¹⁵ Such discrepancies have led some to doubt whether the two men met at all, but applying this level of skepticism or suspicion with consistency would annul most of what historians claim to know about the crusading period. Franco Cardini's approach is instructive here. Based on the number of seventh/thirteenth century sources – inside and outside the Franciscan family – that testify to the fact of the encounter, Cardini insists that the two men did meet each other, even if one can say little beyond this. Cardini draws an interesting comparison between this story and the story of the wolf of Gubbio, another vignette in Francis's life well-attested in early sources but considered historically implausible by many modern skeptics. After a detailed analysis of the features of each narrative that mitigate in favor of or against its historicity, Cardini argues for the historicity of Damietta. F. Cardini, "Francesco e il sultano. Un incontro di otto secoli or sono, una lezione per il presente", in Blasone et al., *Francesco d'Assisi, al-Malik al-Kāmil, Federico II di Svevia*, 43-77, esp. 54-59; see also Cardini, *Nella presenza del soldano superba: Saggi francescani*, Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto 2009, 93-104, 251-282.

¹⁶ "Fratres vero qui vadunt, duobus modis inter eos possunt spiritualiter conversari. Unus modus est, quod non faciant lites neque contentiones, sed sint subditi *omni humanae creaturae propter Deum* et confiteantur se esse christianos. Alius modus est quod, cum viderint placere Deo, annuntient verbum Dei, ut credant in Deum omnipotentem, Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum, creatorem omnium, redemptorem et salvatorem Filium, et ut baptizentur et efficiantur christiani, quia *nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu Sancto, non potest intrare in regnum Dei*". Citations of Francis's writings refer to the critical edition of the Latin text by Carlo Paolazzi and the English translation in FAED. Francis of Assisi, *Scritti*, C. Paolazzi (ed.), Frati Editori di Quaracchi, Grottaferrata 2009, 266; Eng. trans. as *Earlier Rule (Regula non bullata)*, in FAED, vol. 1, p. 74. Here, italics indicate allusions to 1Pt 2:13; and Jn 3:5; cfr. Ti 3:2; 2Tm 2:14.

¹⁷ Much has been written on the importance of this chapter. The seminal study remains J. Hoerberichts, *Francis and Islam*, Franciscan Press, Quincy 1997; for further discussion, see L. Gallant, "Francis of Assisi: Forerunner of Interreligious Dialogue: Chapter 16 of the Earlier Rule Revisited", *Franciscan Studies* 64.1 (2006) 58-82; Frugoni, *Francesco e le terre dei non cristiani*, 80-90.

¹⁸ Francis of Assisi, *Praises of God*, Paolazzi (ed.), p. 112; FAED, vol. 1, p. 109.

¹⁹ For a brief overview, see S. Akkach, "Beautiful Names of God", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third edition [hereafter EI3]. Whether these elements of Francis's *Praises* should properly be considered "names" of God is a matter for ongoing debate. In his final book, Jan Hoerberichts singles out "You are humility" and "You are patience" for special discussion vis-à-vis Francis's attitude toward Islam. The first obviously does not translate one of the Islamic names for God; Francis's mention in the *Letter to the Entire Order* of God's *humilitas sublimis* and *sublimitas humilis* reflects Francis's devotion to the incarnation of the Son of God and only makes sense in this context. Humility, however, expresses not only Francis's understanding of a friar's vocation, but the humble way that friars are called to approach missionary work among Muslims,

this text manifests the influence of Francis's time among Muslims²⁰. Some scholars also see the influence of the Muslim *adān* in two texts that express Francis's encouragement that praise and thanksgiving be given to God at certain times of day. *A Letter to the Rulers of Peoples* requests "that every evening an announcement may be made by a messenger or some other sign" to call people to this praise and thanksgiving²¹, and in another letter, Francis asks that such praise and thanks be given "at every hour and whenever bells are rung"²². Obviously, the Christian Liturgy of the Hours had long been built upon certain prayers accompanying certain hours of the day, but the specific form in which Francis expresses this request has led to speculation that these texts reflect Francis's experience hearing the Muslim call to the five canonical prayers²³. Other examples could be given as well²⁴, and the scholars advancing these hypotheses, figures like Giulio Basetti-Sani, Gwenolé Jeusset, and Jan Hoerberichts, tend to be figures with extensive life experience in the Muslim-majority world. Michael F. Cusato, then, is right to observe that scholars with "actual hands-on experience of interfaith realities" are the same figures who perceive nuances within Francis's faith journey that prior scholars had failed to notice²⁵.

This presents an interesting scholarly dilemma. As a point of fact, the most prominent scholars of Francis's writings have lacked formative experiences among Muslims, and one could easily attribute their failure to appreciate the effects of Islam upon Francis to the biases of their personal and intellectual formation. I must confess my own skepticism in this regard. Perhaps prior scholars did not notice the influence of Islam upon Francis because they did not know enough about Islam to recognize the influence, but in a world with such a demonstrable need for memories, tools, and images that will facilitate healthier relations between Muslims and Christians, I wonder if the opposite is the case. Perhaps instead, proponents of interreligious dialogue are overly eager to find the marks of Islam on Francis despite the ambiguity of the data. I sense in recent years a creeping Islamization of Francis, maximizing any text that could suggest the influence of Islam upon Francis's later religiosity. This skepticism does not diminish the great effect that the journey to Egypt had on Francis – indeed, I have argued that the voyage was transformative for him and gave him a new understanding of the friars' mission in the world – but one should note the trend to see the influence of Islam in passages of Francis's writings that to a prior generation of scholars – and, as I have indicated, to me – seem perfectly Christian. One is left to shrug and mutter the phrase so often used by Muslim jurists after they summarize their opinion on a certain matter: *wa-Allāhu a'lam bi-ḍālik*. God knows better about this.

Arabic Sources for the Encounter and its Effects on al-Kāmil

What did this encounter with Francis of Assisi mean for the subsequent life of al-Malik al-Kāmil? The primary sources that address this question directly are Latin Franciscan hagiographical texts that describe al-Kāmil's desire to be baptized as a result of the preaching of the saint; in some versions of the story, friars return and visit him just

subject to them and in solidarity with every creature, according to Francis's vision of a fraternal universe. The prayer of praise "You are patience" does find parallels among *asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*: both *al-Ṣabūr* and *al-Ḥalīm* could be translated in this way. *al-Ṣabūr* is typically counted among the Beautiful Names even though the word does not occur in the Qur'ān as a name for God. The verbal root *ṣ-b-r* appears dozens of times in the Qur'ān in connection with God's behavior and with God's exhortations regarding believers' behavior. The name *al-Ṣabūr* carries the sense of patience, endurance, and steadfastness; *al-Ḥalīm*, a near-synonym, particularly connotes leniency, the repression of anger, and self-mastery. Of importance for Hoerberichts is that in Islam, each of these two divine names indicates a virtue that believers should attempt to cultivate. While many of the Latin Fathers of the Church had spoken of *patientia* almost exclusively as a human virtue, not a divine attribute, Hoerberichts sees Francis – after his contact with Muslims – retrieving something that had been temporarily lost in the Catholic tradition. According to this reading, Francis's praise of God, "You are patience", penned shortly after the event on La Verna recalled by hagiographers as the Stigmata, manifests Francis's gradual maturation over a period of years and the full flowering of his recollection of his time in Egypt as well as his other trials in leadership of the fledgling order. Francis had himself acquired the virtue of patience, and his praise of God reflects Francis's faith that God showed patience also to the Muslims Francis had met, al-Kāmil above all. Francis of Assisi, *Praises of God*, Paolazzi (ed.), p. 112; FAED, vol. 1, p. 74; cfr. Ti 3:2; 2Tim 2:14; A.J. Wensinck, "Ṣabr", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second edition; see also I. Zilio-Grandi, "La pazienza dell'Islam: la virtù detta ṣabr", in *Studia graeco-arabica* 8 (2018) 105-118; T. Hefter, "Ḥilm", EI3; cfr. Q. 2:225; 2:235; 2:263; 3:155; 4:12; 5:101; 17:44; 22:59; 33:51; 35:41; 64:17.

²⁰ Cusato, "The Loneliness of Francis of Assisi", 34. Scott Robinson's extensive sojourns among Muslims and his experience of *dīkr* has affected Robinson's own composition of music and Robinson – depending entirely on Hoerberichts' interpretation here – eagerly looks back to Francis's appreciation for the Beautiful Names of God as a medieval analog for this. S. Robinson, "To Go Among the Saracens: A Franciscan Composer's Journey into the House of Islam", *CrossCurrents* 56.3 (2006) 413-423, esp. 417-422.

²¹ "ut quolibet sero annuncietur per nuncium vel per aliud signum". *A Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples*, Paolazzi (ed.), p. 150, FAED, vol. 1, p. 58. To the list of scholars who see an Islamic influence here, one may add the translator of Francis's writings into Arabic, Capuchin friar Tony Haddad. *Kitābāt al-Qiddīs Francis wa-l-Qiddīs Klārā*, Manṣūrāt al-'Ā'ila al-Faransīsiyya fī Lubnān, Beirut 2005, 42.

²² "ut omni hora et quando pulsantur campane". *The First Letter to the Custodians*, Paolazzi (ed.), p. 146, FAED, vol. 1, p. 56.

²³ Hoerberichts, *Francis and the Sultan: Men of Peace*, 167-172; M.F. Cusato, "The Democratization of Prayer: What Francis of Assisi Learned at Damietta (1219)", *Collectanea franciscana* 85 (2015) 59-82.

²⁴ For the most comprehensive compilation of such possible influences, see Hoerberichts, *Francis and the Sultan: Men of Peace*, 163-185.

²⁵ Cusato, "The Loneliness of Francis of Assisi", 64.

before his death to fulfill his desire²⁶. There is no need to spend time on this fantastic possibility, to which serious historians lend little weight, but unfortunately, Arabic sources provide little to flesh out our understanding. The Arabic chronicles that describe the struggle for Damietta do not mention the encounter between Francis and al-Kāmil at all.

Decades ago, Louis Massignon identified a previously unnoticed possible Arabic source for this encounter: a passage from Ṣūfī pilgrimage literature dealing with a shaykh named Faḥr al-Dīn al-Fārisī (d. 622/1225). Massignon's earlier study of the great mystic al-Ḥallāḡ (d. 309/922) had led Massignon to see a Christological nexus between Christianity and Islam, and the stigmata of Francis played a special role in this. The stigmata manifest Francis's profound connection to the Lord's incarnation and passion, as well as Francis's willingness to die for his Lord. Subsequently, Massignon became interested in a later disciple of al-Ḥallāḡ, the Cairene Ṣūfī shaykh al-Fārisī, an older contemporary of al-Malik al-Kāmil. Massignon visited the tomb of al-Fārisī in 1951 and identified him as the spiritual director (*muršid*) of al-Kāmil. The French orientalist discussed a text that mentions al-Fārisī and al-Kāmil, obliquely referring to what happened with "the monk". Massignon considered this "monk" a reference to Francis and believed the unnamed elderly man described alongside al-Kāmil in Franciscan sources like Bonaventure's *Legenda maior* to be the Ṣūfī master Faḥr al-Dīn al-Fārisī²⁷.

Several points of data accord with Massignon's hypothesis. Arabic sources describe al-Kāmil as an intellectually curious man who was known to spend his evenings discussing theology and philosophy with his advisors; thus, the presence of Muslim "priests" for the encounter – as we see in the Latin sources – lines up with what one would expect from a sultan who intentionally surrounded himself with an intellectually stimulating court. Second, Bonaventure describes an elderly "priest" departing at the moment Francis proposes the trial by fire, and if al-Fārisī were present at the time, he would have been over eighty years old, fitting Bonaventure's description. Finally, Massignon speaks at length about the role of such ordeals or trials, like this trial by fire, in Arab culture. In light of this, al-Fārisī's refusal to take the trial does not manifest his fear, but his fidelity to the spiritual path of his master, al-Ḥallāḡ, which conforms to that of Jesus. Al-Ḥallāḡ refused to "put the Lord your God to the test" (Mt 4:7; Lk 4:12; Dt 6:16). Note here the interesting element of Massignon's hypothesis: while not a few historians today dismiss the idea that Francis offered the trial by fire, above all because the Fourth Lateran Council forbade such practices, Massignon places the trial by fire at the center of the encounter – for theological reasons!

In any case, Massignon's hypothesis found a welcoming ear among scholars of Franciscana, who immediately began to cite it and were usually eager to support it; some scholars regard it as an essentially settled point of history this text refers to Francis²⁸. The text that gave rise to Massignon's hypothesis appears in medieval pilgrimage guides by Ibn al-Zayyāt (d. 814/1412) and al-Saḥāwī (d. after 889/1484). During the lifetime of al-Malik al-Kāmil, the practice of *ziyāra*, visiting the tombs of famous Ṣūfī masters, rose dramatically in Cairo. The guidebooks written for use by pilgrims became a distinct literary genre, explaining the locations of graves, the itinerary to follow, the prayers to be said, and biographical notes about the holy persons buried there. Ibn al-Zayyāt's discussion of the tomb of Faḥr al-Dīn al-Fārisī includes the following line:

wa-lahu manāqib mašhūra wa-qiṣṣatuhu ma'a al-Malik al-Kāmil wa-mā ittafaqa lahu min aḡl al-rāhib mašhūra

... His glorious deeds are well known, and the story of him with al-Malik al-Kāmil and what happened to him with regard to the

²⁶ Ugolino Boniscambi di Montegiorgio, *The Deeds of Blessed Francis and his Companions*, FAED, vol. 3, pp. 491-492 (chap. 27); Fioretti, FAED, vol. 3, pp. 606-607 (chap. 24); cfr. Jacques de Vitry, "Letter VI", FAED, vol. 1, p. 581; Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Occidentalis*, FAED, vol. 1, p. 584; *Chronicle of Ernoul*, FAED, vol. 1, p. 607.

²⁷ I discuss this matter at length in the article "Arabic Sources for the Encounter between the Saint and the Sultan: Fakhr al-Fārisī's Famous Adventure with Francis, or Lack Thereof", *Collectanea* (Franciscan Center for Christian Oriental Studies, Cairo) 48-49 (2015-2016) 7-75; full documentation for much of the following section can be found there. See also an article in the same journal by Bartolomeo Pirone, with whom I find myself in near-total agreement in the interpretation of this text. "Breve considerazione in margine a un presunto *rāhib* al cospetto del sultano al-Malik al-Kāmil", *Collectanea* 48-49 (2015-2016) 433-466. The two most important sources from Massignon's oeuvre are "La Cité des Morts au Caire (Qarāfa – Darb al-Aḥmar)", *Bulletin de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale* 57 (1957) 25-79; republished in *Opera Minora*, Dar al-Maarif, Beirut 1963, vol. 3, pp. 233-285; L. Massignon, *La passion de Hallāḡ: martyr mystique de l'Islam*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris 1975, vol. 2, pp. 314-318.

²⁸ In addition to the long list of citations provided in my article on the subject, I have noticed the claim in some additional places, including a recent journalistic account of Muslim-Christian dialogue through the centuries, by Giancarlo Mazzuca and Stefano Girotti Zirotti. Their work illustrates perfectly the type of confusion that has also entered into scholarly literature on the point. It seems that no one other than Massignon ever looked back at the source text, and thus two generations of later scholars kept citing each other without understanding the nature of the original source, introducing layer upon layer of confusion. Here, Mazzuca and Girotti Zirotti compound the problem with a sloppy reading of Bonaventure: "I due frati [erano] condotti alla presenza del consigliere del sultano, il saggio Fakhr al-Din al-Farisi, che li ascoltò con ammirazione e li condusse alla presenza del suo comandante supremo". No medieval source says anything of the kind! Even Bonaventure's account does not speak about the elderly Muslim "priest" speaking to the friars personally prior to their audience with the sultan; Bonaventure's text suggests that the elderly Muslim "priest" encounters the friars at the same moment that they encounter the sultan, and describes the sultan – not the elderly "priest"! – listening to Francis with admiration. *Noi Fratelli*, Mondadori, Milan 2018, 103.

monk is well known²⁹.

This text appears at a transitional moment in Ibn al-Zayyāt's entry on al-Fārisī: Ibn al-Zayyāt has just finished narrating a vignette he lifted from an earlier biographical dictionary, and this line provides a segue for Ibn al-Zayyāt to mention al-Fārisī's date of death and the graves of al-Fārisī's family. The Arabic source text is just as ambiguous as the English translation suggests. The monk remains unidentified, and while one can find several events in al-Kāmil's life that might serve as this famous "story", one cannot be sure.

In lieu of a full analysis of this text, two summary points suffice. First, one may note the trend in publications in Franciscan circles to emphasize the influence of Ṣūfism on al-Kāmil, many of them driven by Massignon's hypothesis about this text connecting a Ṣūfī master to the sultan. Rosy portrayals of al-Kāmil's relationship with Christians occasionally slip into generalizations about Ṣūfism and its "tolerant attitude toward other religions"³⁰, as if this interest in mysticism bore fruit in al-Kāmil's just patterns of governance. Unfortunately, in the case of Ayyūbid Egypt, such a generalization is demonstrably false³¹. Charismatic Ṣūfis were not infrequently involved in policing the boundaries between Muslims and Christians, through polemics, activism, and even the destruction of churches. Al-Malik al-Kāmil earned his positive reputation among Christians as a ruler who treated Christians justly, but one should not look first to the influence of Ṣūfism as a reason for this.³² One aspect of Ṣūfism that may be relevant for the encounter with Francis is the question of spiritual poverty. Faḥr al-Dīn al-Fārisī showed a keen interest in the distinction between spiritual poverty (*faqr*) and Ṣūfism (*taṣawwuf*)³³. This sultan was known to spend his evenings meeting with scholars and clergy, discussing religious and philosophical matters. He was a patron of learning. If al-Kāmil shared this interest in asking deep questions about what it means to be poor before God – which apparently interested Ṣūfis in Cairo at the time – this may have primed the pump for the sultan's encounter with Francis. Noting this parallel interest in spiritual poverty does not imply any borrowing by one tradition from the other – Cairene Ṣūfis had known nothing of the early Franciscan movement, and vice versa – but provides another piece of evidence against the tired trope of speaking about Christian Europe and the Muslim world as if they were two completely different civilizations³⁴. Rather, the constant network of contact and connection between Muslims and Christians renders it more plausible to speak of one Mediterranean civilization, and in this case, some believers raised in that collective milieu became acutely concerned with what it means to be poor before God.

My second comment about the Arabic source referring to the monk is that Massignon's hypothesis is highly improbable. To summarize several related conclusions I have argued at greater length elsewhere, the text in question does not refer to Francis, Massignon has exaggerated the importance of al-Fārisī in the life of the sultan, no Arabic sources for this encounter survive, and the encounter probably left no mark on the mind, behavior, or governance of the sultan. For several decades now, Franciscan scholars have been in love with the idea that an Arabic source speaks about the sultan's "well known story" with the monk. Other encounters between al-Kāmil and Coptic monks are far more likely candidates for the reference in question. The search for an Arabic reference to the meeting between Francis and al-Kāmil remains fruitless and sources from the period provide little reason to assume that meeting Francis left any trace on the mind or behavior of the sultan.

As a scholar dedicated to the practice of interreligious dialogue, I must candidly admit that making this argument brings me no joy. Francis's voyage to Egypt transformed him. He returned to Italy a changed man, with a revolutionary understanding of the mission of the friars minor. As a result of his encounters with Muslims, Francis developed a different vision for how the friars could be present among Muslims. I would love to argue that the encounter also left a demonstrable mark on al-Kāmil's attitude, religious practice, or governance and that their mutual esteem left them each transformed. I would love to argue that Damietta in 1219 marked a turning point in

²⁹ Ibn al-Zayyāt, *al-Kawākib al-sayyāra fī tartīb al-ziyāra*, al-Maṭba'a al-Amīriyya, Cairo 1907, 110; cfr. al-Saḥāwī, *Tuḥfat al-aḥbāb wa-buḡyat al-ṭullāb*, Maktabat al-'Ulūm wa-l-Adab, Cairo 1937, 240.

³⁰ Hoeberichts, *Francis and the Sultan: Men of Peace*, 100. Not a small number of scholars today interest themselves in this basic claim; for one recent collection of essays that revolve around the question of whether Ṣūfis are so inclined toward religious pluralism and democratic systems, albeit in modern rather than medieval contexts, see C. Bennett and S. Alam (ed.), *Sufism, Pluralism, and Democracy*, Equinox, Bristol 2017.

³¹ N. Hofer, *The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173-1325*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2015, 97-98, 202-224.

³² In general, the biographical dictionaries and pilgrim guidebooks that mention Faḥr al-Dīn al-Fārisī never discuss his relationships with Christians, whether positive or negative; to claim that al-Fārisī, a man known for his imprudence and intemperance in speech, helped shape al-Kāmil's "tolerant attitude" toward Christians is at best an *argumentum ex silentio*.

³³ Among the manuscripts I have examined, this theme emerges most clearly in the treatise (*Kitāb*) *al-I'āna 'alā daf' al-igāna*, found in a single manuscript at the Egyptian National Library, Taṣawwuf Tal'at 935. Muhammad Helmi has finished his fine work editing this treatise and expects its publication in 2020, God willing. On the growing importance for Ṣūfis in the period of the distinction between *faqr* and *taṣawwuf*, see A. Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250-1517*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, 17-31 et passim.

³⁴ Richard W. Bulliet famously made this argument, and I gratefully recognize my colleague Adnane Mokrani, who frequently raises the point in his teaching and in public. R.W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, Columbia University Press, New York 2004.

the sultan's life, a shift in the way he looked at Christians. That argument would suffer from an utter vacuum of evidence. As far as the sources enable us to discern, meeting Francis of Assisi meant nothing at all to al-Malik al-Kāmil. This relatively young sultan met Francis at a moment when the sultan was caught in a web of other urgent and pressing concerns. Amid the intrigue of the Ayyūbid Dynasty, with its intrafamilial struggles for power, and the complex demands of military campaigns against the crusading threat, I find it reasonable to assume that six months after their encounter in Damietta, al-Kāmil no longer remembered who Francis was. At least, I have found no evidence to suggest that al-Kāmil remembered who Francis was. As far as the sources enable us to discern, meeting Francis of Assisi meant nothing at all to al-Malik al-Kāmil.

Dialogue, Friendship and Kinship

This admission about the consequences of the encounter for al-Kāmil may seem like a bucket of cold water dashed upon those who work to develop and improve relations between Muslims and Christians, but is not intended as such. Instead, it prompts us to look more closely at the nature and purpose of our interreligious encounters. Many believers today, both Muslim and Christian, have looked to this encounter between sultan and saint as a sign of hope in a dark age. And indeed it is a sign of hope. Francis wandered into the Muslim camp and somehow survived. Even during a time of truce, that was no small achievement! It demonstrates the courage of Francis, as well as the magnanimity of al-Kāmil himself and a fine instance of the hospitality that Muslims continue to see as a hallmark of Islamic cultures. All of the conditions were present to make Francis's martyrdom likely, but after he presented himself to Muslim soldiers and said (paraphrased), "take me to your leader", things went well. Damietta thus offers us at least this basic lesson: even in a world gone cold, signs of hope can still be found. Even in a world that weaponizes religion to convince believers that they should hate each other, individuals can still transcend enmity. But beyond this basic lesson, what do Francis and al-Kāmil have to teach us? Does Damietta 1219 suggest some kind of a concrete programme for *ecclesia* and *umma* eight hundred years later? A response to this question is more elusive. I would like to approach it by considering three different lenses for what occurred in Damietta: dialogue, friendship, and kinship. I have chosen these three terms in response to a pattern I see in some past reflections on this encounter: the conflation of terms for interpersonal relationships that might be better kept distinct. Words like "openness", "tolerance", "dialogue", "neighborliness", "courtesy", "brotherhood", "friendship", and "respect" may be used with precision but run the risk of bleeding together until one no longer knows precisely what has been claimed. I intend here to consider the adequacy and the limits of three of these terms for ongoing reflection on Damietta, in the hope that this key moment in the Fifth Crusade may shed the light it can and should on relationships between Muslims and Christians today.

Dialogue

Participants in interreligious dialogue today often exercise a hermeneutics of retrieval to highlight elements in their different traditions that serve to improve interreligious relations. This includes the remembrance of memorable moments of positive interaction between the communities, and the encounter between Francis and al-Kāmil has thus often been framed as a precursor for interreligious dialogue. There are reasons to commend this approach. In the decades since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has consistently embraced interreligious dialogue as an aspect of the Church's evangelizing mission³⁵. In this regard, "evangelizing mission" does not signify proselytizing and calling others to baptism. "Mission" signifies the spread of God's love, the diffusion of the *caritas* that flows from the Trinitarian God into the world. In his programmatic encyclical published during the Council, this was, in fact, the way that Pope Paul VI defined dialogue: "the internal drive of charity that seeks expression in the external gift of charity"³⁶. When love wells up and forces us out of ourselves, to encounter the other, this encounter is an event of dialogue. Franciscans find themselves intuitively drawn to Pope Paul's thought here, because Bonaventure had spoken so frequently of God as fountain fullness, *fontalis plenitudo*³⁷. Bonaventure

³⁵ The most important expression of this principle comes from *Nostra Aetate*: "The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men". Second Vatican Council, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate, Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (hereafter AAS) 58 (1966) 740-744, par. 2. The Council also identified formation "for fraternal dialogue with non-Christians" as an integral aspect of priestly training for those who will work in mission countries. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, AAS 58 (1966) 947-990, par. 16.

³⁶ Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, AAS 56 (1964) 609-59, par. 64.

³⁷ Bonaventure draws upon this foundational imagery throughout his oeuvre, but arguably the four most significant texts are the *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, the *Breviloquium*, the *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, and *The Soul's Journey Into God*. For a summary, see I. Delio, "Bonaventure's Metaphysics of the Good", *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 228-246; for a comprehensive discussion, see J.C. Kvanne, "The *Fontalis plenitudo* in Bonaventure as a Symbol for his Metaphysics", Ph.D., Fordham University 1999.

insisted that goodness diffuses itself, citing the axiom *bonum diffusivum sui*³⁸. Goodness – by its nature – spreads itself out. Thus, when Paul VI framed dialogue as the internal drive of charity that wells up and expresses itself externally, the reflexes of those infused with the Franciscan theological tradition respond in affirmation.

Paul VI considered dialogue a crucial aspect of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Pope Francis has carried this message forward with great vigor, frequently speaking about the need to create “a culture of encounter”, a central plank in his understanding of pastoral ministry in general. During his 2015 visit to the United States, he called his brother bishops to promote a culture of encounter, engaging tirelessly and fearlessly in dialogue. “Dialogue is our method, not as a shrewd strategy but out of fidelity to the One who never wearies [of proposing an] offer of love”³⁹. This culture of encounter expresses how Pope Francis understands interreligious dialogue in particular, as he insists that Christian mission eschews proselytism. He told the Christians of Rabat, “the paths of mission are not those of proselytism”. The pope then repeated himself, “Please, these paths are not those of proselytism! Let us recall Benedict XVI: ‘the Church grows not through proselytism, but through attraction, through witness’”⁴⁰.

Therefore, when one considers dialogue not as a technique to accomplish something, but as a natural overflow of charity, Damietta 1219 stands as a perfect example of dialogue. There remain problems, however, with this lens for understanding the encounter between Francis and al-Kāmil. Presuppositions about what “interreligious dialogue” means are distinctively modern, and projecting these notions onto medieval figures, even in a seminal way, can be anachronistic. What happened in Damietta in 1219 doubtlessly does not fit well with contemporary sets of guidelines for interreligious dialogue. The set of guidelines for dialogue between Christians and Muslims prepared by Maurice Borrmans – guidelines published in many editions and frequently cited in the decades following the Council – offers a case in point.

Dialogue is...a daring adventure engaged in by people desiring mutual enrichment from their different ways, fellowship in sharing common values and openness to whatever way the Lord might speak to them in the intimacy of their conscience⁴¹.

Borrmans presupposes that participants in dialogue enter dialogue due to their desire for mutual enrichment, a desire that precedes the encounter itself and drives participants to show up. Other sets of guidelines tend to strike a similar note, assuming that participants in dialogue desire to learn from each other and intend to listen to each other. An examination of the Latin sources for the Fifth Crusade do not suggest Francis’s desire to listen or learn. The sources speak only of Francis’s zeal to preach to the sultan, not of any intention to listen or to learn. Likewise, guidelines for interreligious dialogue today insist on mutual sharing. Participants come from their different traditions to share what stirs them, what motivates them, what gives them reasons for hope, what gives meaning to their lives. Medieval sources speak about al-Malik al-Kāmil willingly and respectfully listening to Francis, but no evidence of Francis’s desire to listen survives. One may easily consider Damietta a dialogue in the literal sense of *dia-logos*, a word that crosses or bisects space. One may imagine love welling up in the heart of Francis and spilling over, an interior charity reaching out to become external. According to the mind of Paul VI, Francis may be the example of dialogue *par excellence*, but if one understands dialogue to indicate that participants arrive desiring to learn from the other, one struggles to find evidence that Francis expected something of great value to be shared with him.

Friendship

Friendship provides a different lens with which to reflect upon Damietta 1219. Could this have been a moment when a Muslim leader and a Christian (spiritual) leader became true friends, and if so, what should that mean for believers today? The assumption that Christians and Muslims could or should befriend each other has been fraught with debate in some circles as of late. The controversy in Indonesia in 2017 surrounding Ahok, the former governor of Jakarta, revolved around precisely this point. One Qur’ānic verse, Sūrat al-Mā’ida 51, insists that Muslims should

³⁸ As is the case for the previous image, Bonaventure cites this axiom in a number of places, most famously in the sixth chapter of the *Itinerarium*.

³⁹ Pope Francis, Address to the Bishops of the United States, 23 September 2015. I would speculate that part of the reason Pope Francis finds the notion of a “culture of encounter” so appealing is that the idea is wed to motion. When he came to the United States, he frequently reinforced the theme of encounter, with the not-so-subtle underlying message, “Get out of the rectory! Don’t wait for the people to come to you!” In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis expressed this succinctly with the phrase “la Chiesa in uscita”. Six years later, the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization organized an international meeting in Rome with the same title, dedicated to deepening reflections on the theme Pope Francis invoked in this key document early in his papacy. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, AAS 105.12 (2013) 1019-1137, par. 20-49, esp. 20-24.

⁴⁰ Pope Francis, Address to Priests, Religious, Consecrated Persons, and the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Rabat, 31 March 2019.

⁴¹ *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, Paulist, New York 1990, 10; originally published as *Orientations pour un dialogue entre chrétiens et musulmans*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1981, 9.

not take Jews or Christians as allies⁴². The word *awliyā'*, translated here as “allies” could also be translated as “friends”, although in context, the verse seems to refer more to political alliances than to personal friendship. Ahok, who is a Christian, suggested that some Muslims were using this verse as a wedge to gain power; he was subsequently accused of blasphemy for interpreting the Qur’ān, which he as a Christian has no authority or capacity to do, and he spent time in prison for it. Beyond the exegesis of this verse and the specifics of Ahok’s case, one must obviously note also the Salafī trend of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*, “loyalty and disavowal”. Often invoked in communities in which a Muslim minority lives amid a strong non-Muslim majority, *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* gives a principled justification for why Muslims should avoid integration with the larger society surrounding them. Salafī communities argue that God and God’s Prophet commanded believers to reserve love and friendship only for Muslims and to disassociate themselves from unbelievers and despise them⁴³.

Both a wide-ranging interpretation of Sūrat al-Mā’ida 51 and the Salafī use of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* rub against centuries of history in which many Muslims saw no problem with having Christian friends. While Muslims must, of course, decide on the basis of their own tradition whether such friendships are permissible and desirable, the possibility of interreligious friendship enjoys broad support from a Christian point of view. One can certainly find sources in the Christian tradition to discourage the practice, but from Jesus’s well-known habit of inclusive table fellowship to the contemporary papal magisterium, support for such friendships is thick. Pope John Paul II told the bishops of North Africa that Muslim-Christian dialogue is in the first place a question of friendship⁴⁴, and in his meetings with Muslims, John Paul frequently returned to the theme of friendship. Pope Francis likewise has praised Catholic religious who form “bonds of friendship” with Muslims and encouraged them to continue on this path⁴⁵. That being said, the relationship between interreligious dialogue and interreligious friendship has not been consistently articulated⁴⁶. Interreligious dialogue – especially considered as the dialogue of theological exchange or the dialogue of mystical experience – does not necessarily foresee the establishment of stable, intimate relationships between participants. Thus, while some authors of works on dialogue clearly prioritize and encourage the bonds of friendship⁴⁷, others silently pass it over in favor of the mutual learning that should occur through dialogue⁴⁸. To be clear, scholarly literature about interreligious dialogue does not discourage friendship; the question is whether close personal bonds between individuals should be a goal of dialogue or not.

Turning back to Damietta, some members of the Franciscan family likewise suggest that Francis developed a true friendship with al-Kāmil during their short time together, and that Francis carried back to Italy a particular affection for his friend, praying for him until the end of his days⁴⁹. William Shakespeare’s tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* provides the classic example of “love at first sight”; could one suggest in parallel that Francis of Assisi and al-Malik al-Kāmil became “friends at first sight”, or “fast friends”? Many persons have precisely such an experience in young

⁴² “You who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are allies of each other. Whoever of you takes them as allies is already one of them. Surely God does not guide the people who are evildoers. Yet you see those in whose hearts is a sickness – they are quick (to turn) to them, (and) they say, ‘We fear that disaster may smite us.’ But it may be that God will bring the victory, or some command from Himself, and they will be full of regret for what they kept secret within themselves. But those who believe will say, ‘Are these those who swore by God the most solemn of their oaths: (that) surely they were indeed with you? Their deeds have come to nothing, and they are the losers’” (Q. 5:51-53, trans. A.J. Droge).

⁴³ Uriya Shavit offers a helpful discussion of this concept in a juristic context, comparing the *wasafī* and Salafī responses to the concept of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*. Both juristic trends accept *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* in principle, but *wasafī* jurists generally promote integration into Western societies and interpret *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* as a disavowal only of non-Muslims who fight against Muslims. U. Shavit, “Can Muslims Befriend Non-Muslims? Debating *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* (Loyalty and Disavowal) in Theory and Practice”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 25.1 (2014) 67-88.

⁴⁴ John Paul II, Address to Bishops of North Africa on their *Ad Limina* Visit to Rome, 23 November 1981.

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, Letter to Father Michael Anthony Perry, OFM; see footnote 2 above.

⁴⁶ I take up this point in a forthcoming piece, “That’s Gonna Leave a Mark: A Saint, a Sultan, and How Friendship Does (or Doesn’t) Change the Church”, in *Changing the Church*, M. Chapman and V. Latinovic (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2020, forthcoming.

⁴⁷ One recent edited volume presents a series of essays in which theologians reflect on how interreligious friendships have shaped their own thinking. J.L. Fredericks and T. Sayuki Tiemeier (eds.), *Interreligious Friendship after Nostra Aetate*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2015.

⁴⁸ *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Interreligious Dialogue* offers clear evidence of this phenomenon. Essays in the volume by Marianne Moyaert and Jeannine Hill Fletcher emphasize growth in friendship as a goal of dialogue, but a piece by editor Catherine Cornille does not mention friendship and carries a bibliography with many examples of practitioners of dialogue who do not seem to regard the bond of friendship as particularly important. C. Cornille, “Conditions for Interreligious Dialogue”, 20-33, M. Moyaert, “Scriptural Reasoning as Inter-Religious Dialogue”, 64-86, J. Hill Fletcher, “Women in Inter-Religious Dialogue”, 168-183, all in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Interreligious Dialogue*, C. Cornille (ed.), Wiley-Blackwell, Malden 2013.

⁴⁹ The strongest formulation of this hypothesis, depending primarily upon a novel interpretation of the image Francis penned on the *chartula*, is that of M.F. Cusato, “The Loneliness of Francis of Assisi”, 32-36; or at greater length, M.F. Cusato, “Of Snakes and Angels: The Mystical Experience behind the Stigmatization Narrative of 1 Celano”, in *The Stigmata of Francis of Assisi: New Studies, New Perspectives*, J. Dalarun, M.F. Cusato and C. Salvati (eds.), Franciscan Institute Publications, St. Bonaventure 2006, 29-74, esp. 53-68; for others, see Scognamiglio, *Francesco e il sultano*, 67; G. Basetti-Sani, “Chi era il vecchio famoso che incontrò San Francesco a Damietta?”, *Studi Francescani* 82 (1985) 209-244.

adulthood, meeting someone and knowing intuitively – from the first moments – that this new friend will be a formative figure in one’s life and always have a place in one’s heart.

Having already expressed my skepticism about Louis Massignon’s hypothesis, and having subsequently attempted to restrict the sense in which Damietta could be considered an example of interreligious dialogue, I must nonetheless ask the reader to indulge my skepticism once more. I find it difficult to claim that Francis and al-Kāmil were friends. The difficulty does not simply arise with Facebook’s tireless efforts to dilute the meaning of a once-beautiful word, as if I should honestly believe that I have over nine hundred friends. The difficulty lies with the loose use of a term that once described a rare relationship of greater closeness.

In a philosophical sense, “friendship” typically denotes a stable relationship marked by mutual concern for each other’s welfare and an intimacy that shapes the character of each individual involved⁵⁰. The supposed bond between Francis and al-Kāmil does not fit well into classical categories for friendship. Aristotle’s three categories of *philia* have exercised an outsized influence on philosophical reflections about friendship, among Christians as well as Muslims. Aristotle’s first category of *philia* was that of utility: persons who share a bond because it serves a certain purpose and yields a mutual advantage⁵¹. Aristotle’s second category of *philia* was that of pleasure: persons who share a bond because they enjoy each other’s company. Aristotle’s friendships of utility and friendships of pleasure share a characteristic in common: one enters them for one’s own good or one’s own pleasure, not for the good of the friend. One enjoys the company of witty people not because of what witty people are in themselves, but because one finds witty people agreeable to oneself. Aristotle’s third category of friendship, and the truest form of friendship for him, was that of virtue (*aretē*). Two people choose each other as friends because they admire each other’s virtue. Each chooses the other for the other’s own sake. This approach to friendship is admittedly elitist, because persons of virtue are in themselves rare; the number of people capable of entering into authentic friendship and the number of friends those people might have will always be relatively small⁵².

Based on this framework, if Francis and al-Kāmil became “friends”, did their bond ever move beyond utility? From the Latin hagiographical sources, one may justly presume that al-Kāmil saw utility in this relationship – this friar may have carried some kind of useful information, or seemed like a useful asset for the future and thus worth the time necessary to forge a bond. The hagiographical sources openly suggest the utility Francis perceived in al-Kāmil: if Francis had successfully converted the sultan through his preaching, al-Kāmil would have been the means to the conversion of the Muslims under his command; if Francis had preached to him and failed to convert him, al-Kāmil would have been the means to the palm of martyrdom Francis foresaw and desired for himself. For Francis, the encounter provided a win-win situation, and in either case, the sources do not give us good cause to suggest that their friendship ever moved beyond a friendship of utility. Perhaps al-Kāmil came to admire Francis due to his refusal of the lavish gifts the sultan offered him, and thus, perhaps the sultan did come to recognize true virtue, *aretē*, in Francis. But perhaps the sultan merely found Francis strange, a quaint and curious man with a wild eye whom he quickly sent on his way. Latin hagiographical sources suggest the former but, when one considers the motives of the genre, could easily be read as consistent with the latter.

The true challenge to the idea that Francis and al-Kāmil were friends is – as was the case in the earlier discussion of dialogue as a lens for the encounter – the element of mutuality. Friends shape each other. Friends transform each other. Even Aristotle’s friendships of utility and friendships of pleasure carry the assumption that friendship affects a person. Friendship leaves a mark. This condition thus leads us back into a dilemma about the evidence for Damietta and its aftermath. We have manifest evidence that indicates the transformation in Francis as a result of his time in Egypt. One can never determine with precision whether the change occurred primarily due to Francis meeting the sultan or primarily due to meeting other Muslims in the camp⁵³, but in any case, Francis’s sojourn in Egypt transformed his understanding of the mission of the friars minor. No evidence survives credibly suggesting that Francis shaped the sultan. Many people have significant relationships in which the formative element is highly asymmetrical, if not unidirectional. Especially looking back on one’s youth, one can recall teachers or coaches who had major effects on one’s life, even though one did little to affect the later lives of those same teachers

⁵⁰ B. Helm, “Friendship”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/friendship>.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156a.

⁵² Figures like Cicero and Aelred of Rievaulx (d. 562/1167), to name but two of the Western thinkers heavily indebted to Aristotle’s seminal reflections, shared this assumption of the rarity of friendship. Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) and Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023), two medieval Muslim philosophers likewise indebted to Aristotle, also shared the same assumption. Al-Tawḥīdī insists that only a relationship of disinterested care constitutes true friendship, a position he painstakingly maintains throughout *al-Ṣadāqa wa-l-ṣadīq* (*Friendship and the Friend*); unlike Miskawayh, al-Tawḥīdī rejects outright that friendships of utility or friendships of pleasure constitute “friendship” (*ṣadāqa*) at all. Al-Tawḥīdī, *Risālat al-ṣadāqa wa-l-ṣadīq*, I. al-Kīlānī (ed.), Dār al-Fikr, Damascus 1964; for discussion, see M. Bergé, *Pour un humanisme vécu: Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī*, Institut français de Damas, Damascus 1979, esp. 317-330; N.A. Alshaar, *Ethics in Islam: Friendship in the Political Thought of al-Tawḥīdī and his Contemporaries*, Routledge, New York 2015, esp. 158-214; J. Haseldine, “Friendship, Equality and Universal Harmony: The Universal and the Particular in Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De Spirituali Amicitia*”, in *Friendship East and West: Philosophical Perspectives*, O. Leaman (ed.), Curzon, Richmond 1995, 192-214, esp. 193-194.

⁵³ For a hypothesis regarding Francis’s experience observing Muslims at prayer, see Cusato, “The Democratization of Prayer”.

and coaches. In adulthood, one may think of a psychologist, a spiritual director, or a pastor, and recognize a person who greatly shaped one's life even though the same was not true in reverse. When I look back on a childhood teacher, I can say that she changed me for the good and helped make me the man I am today, but it makes no sense to call her my friend unless something has happened in our relationship since then. Likewise, an adult believer may recall the great influence of a pastor on that believer's life over the course of years in the parish, but can the same believer claim to have left a mark on the pastor? The pastor likely grew in his understanding of the nature of his ministry through his regular contact with the faithful, but the formative effect was likely asymmetrical. Acknowledging this asymmetry devalues neither the student nor the parishioner, as if the teacher or pastor somehow dishonored them by not changing. At all small town schools and churches, pupils and faithful leave some mark upon those who care for them, but only in certain cases would this effect rise to a significance that could constitute a true friendship. The obstacle to calling them friends does not reside in the imbalance in power between teacher and student or pastor and parishioner, as if the fact that because al-Kāmil commanded an army and Francis did not their friendship was *de iure* impossible. To the contrary, true friendships, marked by mutuality, are possible despite great imbalances in power. L'Arche communities offer a constant, living example of this. L'Arche assistants live with persons with intellectual disabilities and discover how their weakness and vulnerability enables the community to forge connections that are deep and real. The members with intellectual disabilities are rightly called the "core members" of the community, because theirs is the energy that drives the love within the community and enables all the members to grow. The core members lack the "power" in the community – in the way that one might initially conceive power – but their vulnerability enables the others to develop and share their gifts, to desire to love and to be loved, and to touch their common humanity. Thus, the dilemma for the friendship between saint and sultan is not an imbalance in power but the mutual formation in the relationship. If Francis left no mark on al-Kāmil, as far as we can tell, could we still call them friends in anything more substantial than the Facebook sense?

Kinship

This leads me to the third lens for the encounter, kinship. To this point, I have expressed skepticism – some might say, an exaggerated skepticism – that a visit from Francis meant anything to al-Malik al-Kāmil. There has been a method to structuring the argument in this way: even if we assume that the sultan left the encounter entirely unchanged, and even if we conclude that neither dialogue nor friendship in the most proper sense of these terms can describe what happened at Damietta, the encounter still speaks of hope to us. The evidence that survives suggests that the two treated each other in a manner one must call fraternal.

This is the predominant lens through which Pope Francis seems to see the encounter, who clearly had Damietta on his mind when he traveled to the United Arab Emirates to sign the *Document on Human Fraternity*. The pope referred to Francis of Assisi a number of times, and the spirit of Damietta is present from the first line of the document. "Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved. Through faith in God, who has created the universe, creatures, and all human beings...believers are called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need"⁵⁴. The pope eagerly embraces the language of "sister" and "brother" in his outreach to Muslims and urges the Christian faithful to approach Muslims in this spirit⁵⁵. No saint in the history of the Church is more strongly associated with this sense of universal kinship than is Francis of Assisi, and the invocation of Damietta in the context of the *Document on Human Fraternity* evokes not only the kinship Francis of Assisi forged with all of creation, but the particular bond the Poverello found with a Muslim leader in the midst of war⁵⁶.

Cusato has argued at length that in Francis's youth, the experience of showing mercy to lepers opened his heart to a vision of universal kinship. Francis came to understand that all men and women, without exception, were creatures created by the hand of the same Creator, that they, without exception, were offered grace and salvation through Christ, and that they, without exception, were *fratres et sorores* bound together in the *fraternitas* of creatures designed by God⁵⁷. This realization was the moment when Francis began to "do penance" (*facere poenitentiam*). Later, Francis explicitly incorporated the entire cosmos in this vision of universal kinship, referring to non-human

⁵⁴ Pope Francis and Ahmad al-Tayyeb, *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, 4 February 2019.

⁵⁵ In their recent book, Mazzuca and Girotti Zirotti approach Muslim-Christian dialogue through the lens of *fratellanza*, and Pope Francis explicitly thanks them "*per aver affrontato il tema della fratellanza tra cristiani e musulmani, che – come sapete – mi sta molto a cuore*". *Noi fratelli*, 11.

⁵⁶ At a 20 February 2020 event at the Lay Centre in Rome organized around the first anniversary of the *Document on Human Fraternity*, Dr. Sharon Rosen offered a Jewish reflection on the text. Rosen sharply criticized the gendered language of a document intended to deepen ties among the entire human family: particularly because "fraternity" often suggests an organization that consciously excludes persons who are not members, why was the text not called the *Document on Human Kinship*? While it seems to me that this concern is less acute in the Italian and Arabic versions of the document, Rosen's point hits the mark with the English translation. Thus, by "kinship", I intend nothing more than a gender inclusive equivalent of "fraternity" in the sense of *fratellanza/uḥuwwa*, and shall adhere as much as possible to this term, without modifying direct quotations.

⁵⁷ Cusato, "The Loneliness of Francis of Assisi", 19.

creatures as “brother” and “sister”, most famously in the *Canticle of the Creatures*, written five years after Francis’s return from Egypt.

Francis’s consciousness of his kinship with all of creation doubtlessly emerges from his mystical experience, and it seems from both his writings and his actions late in life that this kinship could not be annulled, that this kinship is a brute fact. But is the kinship of all creatures a given? One possible contrast between dialogue, friendship, and kinship is that the two former terms involve a free choice, while kinship is a given. Dialogue involves an act of the will: charity wells up within a believer and that charity extends outward in accord with the believer’s free decision. Likewise, friendship involves an act of the will, and this is where Aristotle and Facebook actually agree: two people must accept each other’s “friend request”. Friendship necessarily involves a mutuality in which two people both freely choose to say yes. Kinship, by contrast, begins as an accident of birth. In one’s biological family, brotherhood and sisterhood are brute facts. I remain an “only child” until I have a brother or sister, and I have little to no control over whether I will ever have a brother or sister. Once I have a biological brother, my brotherhood with him is something I cannot retract. Perhaps I may pretend that he is not my brother – by refusing to treat him with love or show any responsibility for his care and well-being – but I cannot annul the fact that he is my brother.

Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Pope Francis do not portray the kinship of the human family as a choice to be made, but as a fact to be recognized. We actually are brothers and sisters. Though the introduction to the *Document on Human Fraternity* presents this recognition of the other as brother or sister as a fruit of faith, the document posits human fraternity as a given. Based on the spiritual experience of Francis of Assisi, members of the Franciscan family rightfully find this argument highly attractive. Francis’s rhetoric of kinship, however, does admit of exception. People often assume that Francis saw all persons and all creatures as brother and sister – but in his language about brotherhood within the context of the order, he was perfectly willing to exclude persons who did not conform to the movement’s way of life. Here enters the tension between *fraternitas* as fact and *fraternitas* as aspiration and commitment. While Francis regarded all created beings as sisters and brothers under their Creator and assumed that no creature could annul this belonging to a universal fraternity, a friar minor could annul his status as an authentic member of Francis’s brotherhood. This possibility is linked to the centrality of doing penance. Francis expresses this most clearly in *A Letter to the Entire Order*, addressing the importance of obeying the *Rule*, celebrating the Eucharist with devotion, confessing one’s sins, and following the other counsels he has exhorted in the letter.

I do not consider those brothers who do not wish to observe these things Catholics or my brothers; I do not even wish to see or speak with them until they have done penance. I even say this about all those who wander about, having put aside the discipline of the Rule, for our Lord Jesus Christ gave His life that He would not lose the obedience of His most holy Father⁵⁸.

Friars who no longer choose to follow this way of life lose their status in Francis’s brotherhood. They are not brothers until they have done penance, which admits the possibility that they will never be brothers again. One must attend carefully here to the meaning of penance in Francis’s spiritual journey. Francis and his first brothers simply referred to themselves as “the penitents from Assisi”, their life bearing many similarities to the groups of male and female penitents in rural Italy who gathered for prayer and common ascetic practices but did not live under the tutelage of a monastic house or order⁵⁹. For Francis and his followers, *facere poenitentiam* neither signified acts of asceticism nor the sacrament of reconciliation, although penance certainly could include these. Rather, *facere poenitentiam* indicated the conscious decision to recognize and rectify one’s relationship to God and to conform one’s actions to this restored relationship to God by turning towards others, most especially the poor and vulnerable. Penitents separate themselves from the actions and attitudes that wound the kinship shared by all creatures; these actions and attitudes are the essence of sin. Francis’s spiritual journey therefore witnesses the dual nature of *fraternitas* in human life. As a point of fact, God created us all brothers and sisters, but only some of us become and remain brothers and sisters through the doing of penance.

For Francis of Assisi, the universal kinship of all creatures was a revolutionary spiritual experience in a world marked by rivalries and hierarchies that Francis perceived as disordered. The authors of the *Document on Human Fraternity* likewise perceive a widespread deficiency in humankind’s consciousness of its shared kinship. But what does it mean, concretely, for Christians to speak of each other as brothers and sisters and for Christians to speak of all human beings as brothers and sisters? Does this broader “kinship” impose a special obligation on those who

⁵⁸ “Quicumque autem fratrum hec observare noluerint, non teneo eos catholicos nec fratres meos, nolo etiam ipsos videre nec eis loqui, donec poenitentiam egerint. Hoc etiam dico de omnibus aliis, qui vagando vadunt postposita Regule disciplina, quoniam Dominus noster Jesus Christus dedit vitam suam, ne perderet sanctissimi Patris obedientiam”. Francis of Assisi, *A Letter to the Entire Order*, Paolazzi (ed.), 220; FAED, vol. 1, p. 120.

⁵⁹ The distinguishing mark of Francis’s brothers was the apostolic element of preaching penance. For a sketch of these movements and the meaning of penance for Francis, see A. Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi: The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2012, 40-49; see also Cusato, “The Loneliness of Francis of Assisi”, 18-20.

acknowledge it⁶⁰? Or is the rhetoric of “sister” and “brother” simply another way of expressing the Christian vision of being human? A young Joseph Ratzinger offered an initial reply to this question at the time of the Second Vatican Council, arguing that Christianity affirms the existence of two different ethical zones: a certain set of obligations owed to all human persons and another set of obligations owed to fellow Christians, one’s “brothers”⁶¹. Of course, Paul had instructed the Galatians to behave charitably towards all but especially to those in the household of the faith (6:10), but some reviewers nevertheless found Ratzinger’s exegesis selective. Is there another way to articulate the “priority” that a Christian should grant to other Christians, without denying the status of the non-Christian as “sister” or “brother”? This question remains unaddressed in the *Document on Human Fraternity*. While the document articulates the obligations that all human persons owe to all other human persons – i.e., their brothers and sisters – the existence of particular duties to one’s coreligionists is passed over in silence.

Even a cursory glance at Islamic literature through the centuries reveals a clear tendency to restrict language of “sister” and “brother” to fellow Muslims. Where the rhetoric of universal kinship can be seen, the special rights that a Muslim can claim from fellow Muslims are nowhere negated. Given the circumstances of early Islamic history, this does not surprise. The scarcity of the means of livelihood in seventh-century Arabia rendered the bonds of clan and tribe crucial for survival. While pre-Islamic Arabs did possess some concept of religious brotherhood, broadening the notion of *uḥuwwa* to include fellow believers, regardless of clan or tribe, was a cardinal feature of Muḥammad’s activity.

[T]he concept of religious brotherhood was one of the most important means employed by the Prophet to cement the bonds between Muslims. ... One of the Prophet’s major concerns was the establishment of social justice among all individuals (Q 57:25), which necessitated, on the one hand, the abolition of class differences and, on the other, the formation of close ties among the people. The Prophet thus promoted the principle of brotherhood in faith as the most practical way of bringing about fraternity and equality amongst all Muslims⁶².

The force of this concept gave rise to a rich literature concerning the rights of brothers in the faith, works penned precisely to articulate the special obligations Muslims have to each other and not to non-Muslims. In that light, even saying that al-Kāmil treated Francis as a brother permits of ambiguity. Al-Kāmil seems to have granted Francis the rights and dignity that al-Kāmil granted, as a matter of habit, to his Christian subjects, and beyond this – according to Latin sources – seems to have extended to Francis an extraordinary and exemplary respect and honor. Whether he used the term *aḥī* or not, al-Kāmil treated Francis as a brother in a colloquial sense, but not in the proper sense of a fellow Muslim who had the rights to make special claims upon his brother.

It may be the case that for a Christian, the claim of “human fraternity” adds no concrete duty regarding that Christian’s relationships with Muslim neighbors – it neither appends an obligation that had not bound the rightly thinking Christian before nor reduces a Christian’s duties to fellow Christians. In any case, the simplicity of the document’s rhetorical appeal here carries its own force, reminding both Muslims and Christians of their fundamentally shared vision of the nature of human life well-lived. The Bishop of Rome and Shaykh al-Azhar invite all persons who have “faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together” to create a culture of mutual respect, in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters. The declaration proceeds from the assumption that many crises of the modern world are caused by a desensitized human conscience, by hearts that have grown blind and deaf. In that regard, the document carries forward the message Pope Francis preached in his first papal trip outside Rome, when he went to Lampedusa to force the world’s conscience to face the crisis of migration. He reflected on the biblical text of the first time brother killed brother, Cain and Abel, and set before the world the ancient question, “Cain, where is your brother?” Pope Francis reminded the world – and continues to do so – that Lampedusa testifies to consciences grown cold, persons who have forgotten that that man is my brother.

From a Franciscan perspective, this movement from a desensitized conscience to a fraternal world is the true dynamic of Damietta, an example of Francis’s ongoing conversion. As the Franciscan Minister General, Michael Perry, indicated in his letter for the anniversary, Francis’s experience at Damietta is intimately linked to a moment of conversion years before, when he went among lepers. “As a youth, Francis was disgusted by lepers, but an act of mercy changed his heart and ‘what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness’⁶³. Francis’s heart had been

⁶⁰ For a survey of philosophical debates regarding the nature and proper limits of such duties, see D. Jeske, “Special Obligations”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/special-obligations>.

⁶¹ “And so at last we arrive at the Christian answer to the question of the idea of brotherhood raised at the beginning: the problem of the two zones of ethical behaviour. In contrast to the Stoics and the Enlightenment, *Christianity affirms the existence of the two different zones (of ethical behaviour) and calls only fellow believers ‘brothers’*”. J. Ratzinger, *Christian Brotherhood*, Sheed & Ward, London 1966, 81; originally published as *Die Christliche Brüderlichkeit*, Kösel-Verlag, Munich 1960.

⁶² S. Sajjadi and T. F. Negahban, “Brotherhood”, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, Brill, London 2015, vol. 5, accessed online.

⁶³ Francis of Assisi, *Testament*, 3. “quod videbatur michi amarum conversum fuit michi in dulcedinem animi et corporis”, Paolazzi (ed.), 394; FAED, vol. 1, p. 124.

opened by lepers before, and when he found himself in the presence of a Muslim he had been taught to hate, it was opened once more⁶⁴. When Francis showed mercy to the lepers, he confronted and overcame a deadened part of his own conscience and found a sweetness in his brothers, his poor, sick, leper brothers. Whatever happened in al-Kāmil's camp had a similar effect. Francis had always been told that Muslims were Godless beasts that believers should conquer, and when he went among the Muslims, when he encountered them, he learned that friars can live among them and be subject to them. His conscience was sensitized, his heart was opened, and this is the same awakening to kinship that Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Pope Francis invite from believers today.

Prudently, Pope Francis and Ahmad al-Tayyeb make this call to kinship in a document grounded in faith in God. In the name of God, they call people to kinship. It is difficult, practically speaking, to realize this high ideal of mutual care and concern without faith. The French Revolution carried the banner of liberty, equality, and fraternity, high ideals that quickly gave way to the guillotine. The Enlightenment principles that gave rise to the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights provide a sound basis for legislation but do not do much to build fraternal relationships and social cohesion. Absent a faith commitment – not implying full creedal unity, but a fundamental shared acknowledgement that we are Creatures before the Creator – people often struggle to recognize that they are sisters and brothers. The instinct of the document is that in the name of God, their hearts can be opened to it. In the name of God, people may come to see beyond frontiers: the man on the other side of the border, or the river, or the wall, or off in the hazy distance, is my brother. Faith permits one to recognize this, and herein lies the practical wisdom of the approach that Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Pope Francis have indicated.

The educated reader finds no great surprise in a Franciscan insisting that the most apt lens to read Damietta – or almost any event in the life of Francis of Assisi – is that of *fraternitas*. The dynamic of Francis's life of penance teaches that if I see my neighbor as less than a brother or sister, I will abuse my power, manipulate and use my neighbor, and fall into other patterns of sin. If I perceive the created world merely as hydrogen, carbon, and oxygen instead of Brother Sun, Sister Air, and Sister Water, I will – consciously or unconsciously – exploit them. We know that Francis came to see the Muslims as brothers. By the end of his life, and as a consequence of his sojourn among them, they became a full part of his vision of a fraternal universe, and he invited the friars to be subject to them. Likewise, we know that al-Malik al-Kāmil treated Francis with respect and with hospitality, as he had long treated the Christians he governed as persons with dignity and rights. And rightly, when Pope Francis and Ahmad al-Tayyeb endeavor to promote a robust concept of

full citizenship for minorities in a civic state, of the rights of women to education and employment, of a world without the use of religious rhetoric to promote hatred and war, of religious freedom, they ground this argument in the simple claim that God created us as brothers and sisters. Saint and sultan met in a tent and each found a brother. That is the backbone and blessing of Damietta, a sign of hope for believers around the world.

⁶⁴ Perry, *Quae placuerint Domino*.