

Urban Agency and the City Notables of Medieval Anatolia

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Scholarship on the city in the Islamic world has generally played down the autonomy and collective agency of cities. This article explores the case of Anatolia, usually neglected in discussions of Islamic urbanism, focusing on the Seljuq period of the 13th century. While much scholarship on Anatolia acknowledges the role of *futuwwa* (trade-based confraternities somewhat analogous to guilds), I argue the independence of these organisations has been overestimated, for many were closely linked to sultanic power. The paper suggests that in fact power was negotiated between rulers and urban notables (*a'yān*), who had considerable autonomy and who brokered binding contracts (*sawgandnāmas*) with sultans that expressed their rights and obligations. *A'yān* played a crucial role in decisions such as the surrender of their cities to conquerors and in negotiating terms, a role for which analogies can be identified elsewhere in the Middle East. Finally, the article makes some preliminary suggestions as to the identities of these *a'yān*.

Keywords: Anatolia, Seljuq, urbanism, notables

Scholarship on the city in the Islamic world has generally played down the autonomy and collective agency of cities. Notwithstanding recent interest in the role of patricians or notables in urban life, the general tendency has been, following a trajectory set by Max Weber nearly 100 years ago, to emphasise that the inhabitants of the Islamic city – if we can use such a term¹ – enjoyed significantly less power compared to those of medieval Europe, with the management of their affairs largely determined by their rulers. As Boaz Shoshan put it,

Why is it that despite the uninterrupted existence of urban life in the house of Islam, town dwellers were not entitled nor were they able to claim the right to handle their own finances and taxation, to supervise public works, to decide about matters such as fortifications and food provision, to control weights and measures in the markets, and above all to make war and conclude peace?²

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This article is part of the themed section *Urban Agencies: Reframing Anatolian and Caucasian Cities (13th-14th Centuries)*, guest editors: Bruno De Nicola and Matthew Kinloch. To read all related articles, please access: dx.doi.org/10.1553/medievalworlds_no14_2021.

- 1 Here I do so purely in the sense of cities under Muslim rule; it is probably the case that the majority of the inhabitants of the cities under discussion here, Konya, Kayseri, Ankara and Sivas, were non-Muslim, but nonetheless Muslim political culture was dominant. Clearly such cities were far removed from the patterns of the medieval Maghrib where French scholarship of the early twentieth century first identified an allegedly quintessential »Islamic city«.
- 2 Shoshan, *The »Politics of Notables«*, 210

Even though this statement was made some forty years ago, the general assumptions still hold. Although some scholarship on the eastern Islamic world has drawn attention to the factional conflicts between city patricians,³ these have rarely been seen as a force for urban autonomy that could rival or trump that of the sultan and his amirs; at best the notables or »patricians« are seen as an intermediary between ruler and ruled. Thus Michael Chamberlain's study of medieval Damascus may be taken to represent a broader trend in scholarship. According to Chamberlain, its amirs stifled the existence of urban autonomy and, along with the internecine competition between elites, prevented the emergence of a corporate city identity as a legal entity which he takes to characterise European cities and explain their different status.⁴

The extensive scholarship on political and social structures of the medieval Islamic city has not to date taken account of Anatolia.⁵ Yet in contrast to the rest of the Islamic world, in scholarship on medieval Islamic Anatolia, the idea of urban autonomy is in fact quite entrenched, in particular because of the Sufi urban fraternities known as *futuwwa*, and their leading figures, called *akhīs*.⁶ These have been seen as a distinctively Anatolian form of city organisation at least since the fourteenth century, when the Maghrebi traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa singled them out for comment. Writing of his travels in the 1330s, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa went to some lengths to explain what was evidently an unfamiliar organisation to his readers:

They are in all of the Turkmen, *Rumi* land, in every town, city and village. There is no one in the world like them for great kindness to strangers, nor anyone quicker to offer food and satisfy [the traveller's] needs, or to admonish the oppressors, kill the police and their evil accomplices. The *akhī* among them is a man whom artisans and other unmarried, single young men make their leader. This is also [called] »*futuwwa*«. He builds a lodge [*zāwiya*] and places there furnishing and lamps and other necessary equipment. He serves his companions during the day while they seek their living, and in the afternoon they bring him what they earned and buy with it fruit and food and other such things which are used in the *zāwiya*. If a traveller comes that day to a city, they put him up with them, which is their hospitality, and they do not leave him till he departs. If no one comes, they gather together over food, and they eat, sing and dance, and leave to do their trades the next day. In the afternoon they bring their leader what they have earned. They are called the *fityān*, and their leader is called the *akhī*, as we mentioned.⁷

3 Bulliet, *Patricians of Nishapur*.

4 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 4, 47-48.

5 A full bibliography cannot be given here, but examples of important edited volumes include Hourani and Stern, *The Islamic City*; Bennison and Gascoigne, *Cities in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*. One exception that should be mentioned dealing with Anatolia is Wolper, *Cities and Saints*, but her focus is primarily on the architectural development of Anatolian cities and the links of this process with Sufi communities. She does not, however, offer an extended analysis of the political and social structures underpinning the Anatolian city. Her work forms part of a broader trend in scholarship, where research on Anatolia has concentrated on the urban fabric rather than the socio-political aspects, and thus has been undertaken by architectural historians. For other examples see Blessing, *Rebuilding Anatolia*; Redford, *City Building*.

6 For a study of Anatolian *futuwwa* with references to recent scholarship, see Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, Chapter 3; my discussion in the first part of this essay draws on this.

7 Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Rihla*, 285-286.

Elsewhere, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa underlines the violent rivalries between different *futuwwa* groups that often resulted in public violence. The influence of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's description can hardly be overestimated. His notion of *futuwwa* as a distinctively Anatolia phenomenon, of armed Sufi communities operating beyond the state, and indeed in outright opposition to it, has long proved appealing to scholars in Turkey and beyond as a way of making sense of the structure of politics in a period when centralised political power was waning with the demise of the Seljuqs and the fragmentation of Anatolia into multiple principalities or *beyliks*.⁸ For example, a recent essay by Rıza Yıldırım argues that,

the akhi-fotovvat phenomenon is the result of the decentralisation and localisation process that took part in the cultural environment of a politically fragmented Anatolia. The lack of a powerful central authority paved the way for the *akhīs* to cultivate autonomous spheres of political and military influence.... Decentralisation and autonomy vis-à-vis the political authorities were two distinctive features of akhi-fotovvat.⁹

So, if we are looking for collective agency in medieval Anatolian cities, *futuwwa* seems the obvious place to start. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa himself suggests this, writing that,

It is one of the customs of this land that in places that do not have a sultan, the *akhī* is the ruler. It is he who gives a mount to the incoming traveller, gives him clothes of honour and is good to him as far as he is able. In commanding and forbidding and riding, he is like a sultan.¹⁰

As a result, *futuwwa* brotherhoods are widely considered at least in Turkish historiography not merely to have challenged state power but even to have supplanted it, most famously in Ankara which has been branded an »*akhī* government« (Ankara Ahiler Hükümeti) or even an »*akhī* republic« (Ahi Cumhuriyeti) in the 14th century,¹¹ presumably in an effort both to assert Ankara's ancient republican credentials and to draw parallels with the city-states of contemporary Italy. Even though the notion of Ankara as an *akhī* state, a contention for which no evidence exists, was disproved by Paul Wittek in 1932,¹² it continues to feature prominently in Turkish historical writing.

In this paper I wish to take issue with the contentions that underlie this, namely that *futuwwa* represents some kind of non-governmental collective urban agency. After removing *futuwwa* from its pedestal, I shall then assess the evidence that we do have for forms of urban collective agency. In particular, I shall draw attention to the decisive but hitherto unnoticed role of city notables or *a'yān* in medieval Anatolian cities, drawing on evidence from the 13th and 14th centuries. I shall argue that the *a'yān*, not *futuwwa*, constituted a

8 For some examples from early twentieth century Turkish scholarship, see Günaydın, *Ahilik Araştırmaları*, 33-55.

9 Yıldırım, *From Naserian Courtly-Fotovvat*, 86-87.

10 Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Rihla*, 296.

11 For the early historiography of this idea, see Günaydın, *Ahilik Araştırmaları*, 16-55; for the *akhī* republic, see also Arı, *Ahiliğin Siyasal Boyutları*, 51-2.

12 Wittek, *Zur Geschichte Angoras*.

genuinely independent force that played a crucial role in decisions about war, peace and political succession with whom sultans were obliged not merely to negotiate but even to draw up formal written contracts. Finally, I shall suggest that the notion of an Anatolian exceptionalism which still predominates in scholarship is misguided, and in fact the autonomous role of *a'yāns* in medieval Islamic Anatolia strongly resembled that in other parts of the Middle East such as Iran.

While the predominant tendency in scholarship has been to identify *futuwwa* with »decentralisation and autonomy«, the French scholar Claude Cahen in fact drew attention to the fact that *futuwwa* was often closely linked to political authority.¹³ Elsewhere Cahen remarked that the »quasi-autonomous« nature of *akhī* government could not be compared to the situation of the city-states of medieval Italy.¹⁴ We can get a better impression of the political role of *futuwwa* if we look beyond Ibn Baṭṭūṭa to some of our local Anatolian sources which may offer less detail but a more nuanced perspective. *Futuwwa* also appears in passing in the surviving chronicles and hagiographies, but perhaps for our purposes the most useful source is the anonymous Persian history of the Seljuq dynasty composed in Konya in the 14th century, probably by various hands.¹⁵ The value of this work for our purposes is that while most of the text does indeed provide an overview of the dynastic history, its final portions are largely devoted to the events in Konya in the late thirteenth century. Given that one of the distinctive features of Anatolian historiography is the lack of any local chronicles, in striking contrast to the situation elsewhere in the Middle East, this goes some way to plugging this gap and allows us for once a local perspective. *Akhīs* and *futuwwa* feature prominently in this text.

Through the anonymous chronicle, *akhīs* appear working in conjunction with the representatives of state power. For example, when Konya was faced with a concerted attack by Karamanid, Eşrefid and Menteşe Turkmen in 1278, the *akhīs* formed part of a group that also comprised the sultan's deputy as well as local dignitaries such as the town *ra'īs* and notables who went before the Mongol governor Amīn al-Dīn to demand he take action.¹⁶ The following year when the Turkmen besieged the city in the absence of the sultan, the *akhīs* formed the main opposition.¹⁷ Indeed this forms a repeated pattern. As the chronicle puts into the mouth of the notables (*buzurgān*) who are allied with the *akhīs*: »It is in our interests to protect the city because the sultan is occupied with the Turks and is unable to help us.«¹⁸ The leading *akhī* of late thirteenth century Konya, Akhī Aḥmad Shāh, is said to have commanded several thousand soldiers and irregulars (*junūd wa runūd*).¹⁹

13 E.g. Cahen, *Mouvements populaires*, 243.

14 Cahen, *La Turquie*, 321.

15 *Tārīkh-i āl-i Saljūq*; for a discussion of its composition, see Melville, *Early Persian historiography*.

16 *Tārīkh-i āl-i Saljūq*, ed. Jalālī, 104.

17 *Tārīkh-i āl-i Saljūq*, ed. Jalālī, 110.

18 *Tārīkh-i āl-i Saljūq*, ed. Jalālī, 125.

19 Aflākī, *Manāqib al-'arīfīn*, 2, ed. Yazıcı, 611; trans. O'Kane, *Feats*, 419; *runūd* is a negative term often attached to adherents of *futuwwa*.

Sometimes, then, the *akhīs* and the notables do indeed give the impression of filling a gap left by absent state power, and indeed the command of such men and resources suggest the *akhīs* almost represent a state within a state. However, the *akhīs*' military role in defending the city is not a result of decentralisation or political collapse but simply because the sultan is physically absent; there is, in other words, a void of authority and the *akhīs* and urban notables fill it. On other occasions, the very close links between the Seljuq authorities and the *akhīs* are evident. For instance, the chronicle records that in 689/1290 »All the *jawānān* [i.e. *fityān*, members of *futuwwa* brotherhoods] put on armour at the sultan's deliberation... the sultan honoured all the *akhīs* and *jawānān*,«²⁰ and indeed *akhīs* evidently carried out a role as assassins or executioners for the sultan. In 698/1299 the killing of the *sharābsālār* was ordered by the sultan, and it was carried out by the hand of Akhī Jarūq.²¹ The chronicle also records how the *akhīs* acted as intermediaries between holders of power and the local population. For example, when the Mongol governor Fakhr al-Dīn Qazwīnī tried to regulate the sale of salt and confiscated sheep, riots broke out. We are told that »The leaders of the town, Akhī Aḥmad Shāh, went with a group of officials and *jawānān* to Şāhib Qazwīnī to tell him of their situation and the wrong innovations [*bid'athā*] he had introduced.«²²

The Konya chronicle generally underlines the alliance between the Seljuq sultan and the *akhīs* against the Mongols and the Turkmen. This doubtless reflects at least one of the chroniclers' own perspectives as a Seljuq loyalist, as is suggested by the fact that the last event recorded in the chronicle is the death of an otherwise unknown member of the dynasty in 765/1364, more than half a century after it had lost the last vestiges of power.²³ Yet elsewhere we also find *akhīs* and *futuwwa* guilds tightly bound into Mongol governing structures. In Aksaray, for example, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa records that the local deputy of the Ilkhanid ruler was a *futuwwa* adherent: »We stayed there [in Aksaray] in the *zāwiya* of Sharīf Ḥusayn, the deputy of the amir Eretna. This latter is the deputy of the king of Iraq [the Ilkhan] in the parts of Rum he controls. This Sharīf is one of the *fityān*, and has a large following.«²⁴ Similarly, in the late fourteenth century, the close ally of the ruler of Sivas and Kayseri, Burhān al-Dīn Aḥmad (r. 1381-1398) was the local *akhī* chief, Akhī 'Isa, who served him as ambassador and deputy.²⁵

Generally speaking, *akhīs*' power seems to have been informal, although we do have evidence that lists of members of *futuwwa* organisations were kept by the qāḍī of Konya.²⁶ However, there are no official decrees surviving that indicate appointment as chief *akhī* was made by the state, in contrast to the mysterious parallel urban organisation, the *akādisha* (Turkish *iğdiş*), whose chief does seem to have been appointed by the government.²⁷ *Futuwwa* was thus organisationally autonomous, up to a point, but was frequently allied to state power, and we sometimes find *akhīs* holding other official positions, such as one who is mentioned

20 *Tārīkh-i āl-i Saljūq*, ed. Jalālī, 117.

21 *Tārīkh-i āl-i Saljūq*, ed. Jalālī, 132.

22 *Tārīkh-i āl-i Saljūq*, ed. Jalālī, 118.

23 *Tārīkh-i āl-i Saljūq*, ed. Jalālī, 134.

24 Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla*, 295.

25 Astarābādī, *Bazm u Razm*, ed. Rifaat, 228.

26 Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, 138-139.

27 See the appointment decree for the *amīr-i ikdīshān* in el-Hoyi, *Gunyetu'l-Katib* ed. Erzi, 32-33.

as *shihna* or military governor of Malatya.²⁸ Moreover, it is also clear that on occasion *futuwwa* groups' relations with the populace were extremely negative. The anonymous chronicle records how in 688/1289-90, *futuwwa* groups (here described as *runūd*) were involved in riots in which they came off victorious, »seizing houses and tormenting the people« (*mardum-rā mu'adhhab mīdāshtand*), such that people were too afraid even to go to their gardens for fear of them.²⁹ It thus seems difficult to see *futuwwa* as an expression of urban agency in a meaningful sense; rather, if anything, it was an extension of state power.

However, there were other means by which urban agency and autonomy were articulated. The anonymous chronicle frequently refers to the town notables, variously described as the *buzurgān*, *a'yān* or *mu'tabarān*. For example, on recording Akhī Jarūq's killing of the *sharābsālār* at the sultan's order, the chronicle notes that it was done »with the consent of the city notables« (*bi-ittifāq-i a'yān-i shahr*).³⁰ For the sultan's order to be implemented, then, the agreement of the local town notables was required, who are clearly a separate group from the *akhīs*. It is evident from the major history of Seljuq Anatolia, Ibn Bibī's *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'iyya*, that this event was not an exception, but rather the townsmen and their leading figures played an active political role with which sultans were obliged to compromise. It should be emphasised that we have no independent sources against which to test Ibn Bibī's account of events as far as the role of the townsmen goes, and it would be naïve to read this notoriously problematic chronicle as a repository of factual information.³¹ At the same time, for his history to achieve its literary and political aims, it must have seemed credible to its audience. Therefore even if we cannot vouch for the literal accuracy of every aspect of what follows, we can be reasonably sure that it represents a pattern of behaviour by town notables that did indeed happen in some times and places and which his audience could believe.

The most striking example of the role of city notables occurs in Ibn Bibī's account of the disputes over the succession to Qilij Arslān who died in 1192. His two sons, Rukn al-Dīn Sulaymanshāh and Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw I fought over the throne; when Rukn al-Dīn advanced on Konya, »its people responded [by donning] the shield of defiance and defence and busied themselves with fighting and battle.«³² According to Ibn Bibī's doubtless exaggerated figure Rukn al-Dīn's army was some 60,000 strong, and the siege of Konya drew on for four months. It seems the reason for the people's willingness to resist was that they had sworn binding oaths to Ghiyāth al-Dīn on his accession, but eventually, it was the town's »leaders and *iğdişes* whose words were respected« who sent a message to Rukn al-Dīn offering him either an enormous payment to withdraw from the siege or else proposing to surrender the city if he guaranteed Ghiyāth al-Dīn's safety; the deposed sultan would be allowed to go into exile. Rukn al-Dīn readily agreed to this latter proposition, preparing a legal document of oath (*sawgandnāma*) which was registered in the presence of all the figures of the state and then sent to the people of Konya, along with decrees of appointment to land and positions for their leaders.³³ It is noteworthy that Ghiyāth al-Dīn himself plays no part in these negotiations; rather, the result is presented to him as a *fait accompli* by the leading townsmen.

28 *Manaqib Awhad al-Dīn Hamid Kirmani*, ed. Furunzafar, 140.

29 *Tārikh-i āl-i Saljūq*, ed. Jalālī, 116.

30 *Tārikh-i āl-i Saljūq*, ed. Jalālī, 132.

31 On Ibn Bibī and his agenda, see Yıldız, *Mongol Rule in Seljuk Anatolia*.

32 Ibn Bibī, *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'iyya*, ed. Muttahidīn, 32; ed. Erzi, 32.

33 Ibn Bibī, *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'iyya*, ed. Muttahidīn, 34; ed. Erzi, 34.

The autonomy of the townsmen of Konya can also be observed on the return of the exiled Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw I to Konya in 1204. Having lost his throne to his brother Rukn al-Dīn Sulaymanshāh, Ghiyāth al-Dīn had been forced into exile in Constantinople. On Rukn al-Dīn's death he returned to Anatolia to take up his throne. However, his accession was strongly opposed by the townsmen of Konya, and Ghiyāth al-Dīn was forced to besiege the city. Ibn Bibī describes how,

When the people of Konya heard of the auspicious coming of the sultan, they prepared to resist out of loyalty to sultan Rukn al-Dīn and to protect his son 'Izz al-Dīn Qilij Arslan b. Sulaymanshāh. They readied the steed of war and the stallion of fighting and defence. They sent a message saying, »We have sworn an oath with sultan Rukn al-Dīn that [we recognise] his son as heir, and there are binding pledges accompanied by oaths and promises to this effect. The sultan should understand that we cannot break our agreement nor can that contract that we concluded be reopened.«³⁴

Unsurprisingly, Ghiyāth al-Dīn was unimpressed at this message and responded by destroying the orchards and houses that lay outside the city walls. There followed, however, a protracted series of negotiations between Ghiyāth al-Dīn and the townsmen of Konya. First, Ghiyāth al-Dīn sent a message offering material benefits and wealth if he was given safe conduct to enter the city (*agar marā bih jān amān dihad, ni'matī-yi hanī wa ghanīmatī-yi sanī bāshad*).³⁵ The townsmen replied, reminding Ghiyāth al-Dīn how earlier, when he had fought his brother for the throne, they had »donned weapons of war and fighting in your interests« to protect the inheritance they had pledged to uphold, and had ensured his safety when he was forced into exile. However, as on the previous occasion, in reality the townsmen proved flexible in their adherence to the binding oaths they had sworn, agreeing to surrender the city in return for safe conduct for Rukn al-Dīn Sulayman's son.

The conduct of the people of Konya was not unique. On Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw's death in 1211, his sons 'Izz al-Dīn Kaykā'ūs I and 'Ala' al-Dīn Kaykhusraw I fought over the succession. 'Izz al-Dīn besieged 'Ala' al-Dīn in Ankara, and again the outcome was decided by the townsmen of Ankara, who wearied of the siege.³⁶ Their notables (*mu'tabarān-i shahr*) informed 'Ala' al-Dīn of their decision to hand the town over, and then sent a messenger to 'Izz al-Dīn offering to surrender as long as he,

swore tight and binding oaths that in no way would his men harm young or old, noble or humble, Turk or Tajik, near or far, and his supporters would not lay their hands on *malik* 'Alā' al-Dīn ... and that the townsmen would not be punished for their resistance and defence and the thing they regretted, i.e. their partisanship for *malik* 'Alā' al-Dīn. And contracts (*'ahdnāma-hā*) to this effect were written down after the oath had been pronounced to the blessed sultan and were entrusted to the messenger.³⁷

34 Ibn Bibī, *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'īya*, ed. Muttahidīn, 84; ed. Erzi, 84.

35 Ibn Bibī, *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'īya*, ed. Muttahidīn, 84-85; ed. Erzi, 85.

36 Ibn Bibī, *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'īya*, ed. Muttahidīn, 135-136; ed. Erzi, 134-136.

37 Ibn Bibī, *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'īya*, ed. Muttahidīn, 137; ed. Erzi, 138.

The exchange of oaths was thus a two-way process. The populace swore allegiance to the sultan on his accession, and might also swear to recognise his appointed heir. It is evident from Ibn Bibī's account of this oath-swearing ceremony in Konya on the accession of 'Izz al-Dīn Kaykā'ūs I that this oath-swearing was accompanied by the renewal of land grants (*iqṭā'āt*) and appointment to positions.³⁸ However, the sultan was himself obliged to make guarantees to the townsmen. These oaths were recorded in formal written documents called *sawgandnāmas* or *'ahdnāmas*.

The tradition of the public swearing of allegiance to the ruler by the townsmen continued into the fourteenth century, where Burhān al-Dīn Aḥmad, the qāḍī-sultan of Sivas and Kayseri, similarly rewarded the allegiance (*bī'at*) of the people of Sivas in 782/1380-1 with rich presents.³⁹ Such contracts might also be made not just between the people and the sultan, but between a ruler and his officials for the purpose of validating them in the court of public opinion, as we can see from a case from the late fourteenth century. Burhān al-Dīn Aḥmad appointed as governor of Sivas a certain Qilij Arslān. This was done by summoning a meeting (*anjuman*) of the people of Sivas, who assented to his appointment, and both sides exchanged oaths for the conditions of his appointment.⁴⁰ Later, Burhān al-Dīn decided to execute Qilij Arslān for attempting to assassinate him, and so »he showed to the 'ulama and the men of rank who were present the documents of oath (*sawgandnāma*) which Qilij Arslān had made with various conditions, which he had sworn upon and written with his own hand-writing and had then broken, so that they were aware of them.«⁴¹ The aim was to prove Qilij Arslān's misconduct to the people: »When the notables (*mawālī*) and imams of the town read the contents of the *sawgandnāmas* and understood the attempted treason to the sultan [Burhān al-Dīn], they held the sultan excused from the ill-treatment that befell [Qilij Arslān] from his actions, and held Qilij Arslān blameworthy.«⁴² Revealing the content of the *sawgandnāmas* was thus a crucial step in securing public assent for Qilij Arslān's execution, just as public assent had been required for his appointment.

The agency of cities was not restricted to those under Muslim control, if we are to credit Ibn Bibī's account of the fall of Sinop to the Seljuqs in 1214.⁴³ The city had formed part of the Empire of Trebizond, and as 'Izz al-Dīn Kaykā'ūs's forces advanced on the city, they managed to capture the Comnenian ruler, Alexios, who was on an out-of-town hunting expedition. They attempted to use the captured ruler to persuade the besieged city to surrender. However, the townsmen responded uncompromisingly to his messenger: »If lord Alexios has been taken prisoner, he has elder sons who are fit to rule in the land of Janit.⁴⁴ We should make one of them king but we will not surrender this kingdom to the Muslims.«⁴⁵ The Seljuqs then had Alexios taken to the town walls and tortured, threatening to kill the ruler unless the town surrendered:

38 Ibn Bibī, *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'īya*, ed. Muttaḥidīn, 118; ed. Erzi, 120.

39 Astarābādī, *Bazm u Razm*, ed. Rifaat, 222.

40 Astarābādī, *Bazm u Razm*, ed. Rifaat, 188-189.

41 Astarābādī, *Bazm u Razm*, ed. Rifaat, 217.

42 Astarābādī, *Bazm u Razm*, ed. Rifaat, 218.

43 In Byzantium, bishops often fulfilled a function similar to that of the *a'yān*, using their status to represent and advocate for the city. For a discussion of the earlier medieval period see Guillot, *L'évêque dans la société méditerranéenne*.

44 Janit refers to the Anatolian Black Sea coast, in other words the domains of Trebizond.

45 Ibn Bibī, *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'īya*, ed. Muttaḥidīn, 148; ed. Erzi, 150.

The executioners tortured Alexios and he cried out. The townsmen [*shahriyān*] looked on from the battlements. He said to the townsmen, »O men without religion, why do you keep the town? What good will this resistance do me or you, when they kill me and bind you in the fetters of captivity and loss and they make your women and children servants and slaves?« And his effect on them was like that of a soft breeze on hard rock.⁴⁶

The next day, however, the sultan ordered the unfortunate Alexios to be hung upside down outside the walls. Eventually, the townsmen decided resistance was useless, and a group of *a'yān* sent the following message to the Seljuq camp:

If the sultan swears an oath that he will not kill the *tekfur* [Alexios] and he will allow him to go to his land in peace, and he issues an order that we, with our possessions, children and wealth, can go to any place we wish, we will surrender the town.⁴⁷

The sultan consented to these terms and in the presence of his amirs and Alexios swore an oath to this effect, which was also recorded in written form. Messengers brought the *sawgandnāmas* to the city. The sultan's flag was then ceremonially brought into Sinop, whose notables (*a'yān* and *mu'tabarān*) paid homage to the sultan and surrendered to him the keys of the city.

In all these instances, the urban notables take key decisions about whether to surrender and if so on what terms; on occasion, as at Sinop and Ankara, their nominal rulers are reduced to spectators while the notables take charge. It is evident that while *sawgandnāmas* were regarded as crucially important documents in establishing mutual obligations between rulers and subjects, they could also be broken by either side. Ibn Bibī suggests that the townsmen of Konya felt able to extricate themselves from inconvenient oaths, although admittedly, they only did this under duress. In Sivas, meanwhile, Qilij Arslān's infringement of his *sawgandnāma* constitutes the main public justification for his execution. Oaths, then, were not to be broken lightly.

It is evident from the foregoing, that far from being passive spectators, the townsmen and their leaders, the notables, constituted a major and independent political force with which sultans had to reckon. Unfortunately, the sources rarely give us firm information about the identity of the notables.⁴⁸ It seems likely they were largely comprised of the religious classes. Astarābādī specifically refers to the imams being present for the disgrace of Qilij Arslān in the passage cited above. Moreover, other events show the key role of the ulama in city life. For example, after the Seljuq defeat by the Mongols at Kösedağ in 1243, religious figures play a key role. The Qāḍī of Sivas, Najm al-Dīn Qirshahri, who had already rendered homage to the Mongols some ten years before, played a key role in ensuring that the surrender terms of the city were comparatively light, paying homage in person to the victorious Mongol commander Baiju with the other notables (*mu'tabarān*) of the town.⁴⁹ Muhadhhab al-Dīn, the minister

46 Ibn Bibī, *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'īya*, ed. Muttahidīn, 148; ed. Erzi, 151.

47 Ibn Bibī, *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'īya*, ed. Muttahidīn, 149; ed. Erzi, 151.

48 A similar problem is noted in Wolper, *Cities and Saints*, 12, who describes the local aristocracy as »difficult to classify« but suggests vaguely that they comprised »descendants, relations or freed slaves of the members of the house of Seljuq or were connected with the Mongols«. Unfortunately, her book does not contain any subsequent discussion of this group, so it is unclear what the basis for this statement is.

49 Ibn Bibī, *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'īya*, ed. Muttahidīn, 463; ed. Erzi, 527-528.

who was left in effective charge after the sultan's flight from Köseadağ, as his first step for seeking terms of surrender to Baiju, enlisted the support of the Qāḍī of Amasya, Fakhr al-Dīn.⁵⁰ Similarly, when the Mamluk sultan Baybars conquered Kayseri in 1277, he was welcomed into the city by its leading dignitaries, who comprised the local sharif, followed by the qāḍī, the *fuqahā'*, the ulama, the Sufis and those religious functionaries who received salaries according to Seljuq custom.⁵¹

The religious classes gained cohesiveness through their blood ties and the existence of dynasties of religious scholars. The Qāḍī of Niğde in the early fourteenth century, Aḥmad, who composed an encyclopaedic work in Persian entitled *al-Walad al-Shafīq*, was a member of one such dynasty, who originated from Khotan in Turkestan.⁵² In Aksaray, the descendants of Ghazzālī were settled.⁵³ In Akşehir, a local scholarly family of Bukharan origin held an important place in local society.⁵⁴ We are also aware of the existence of families of descendants of the prophets, sayyids and 'Alids, who are mentioned, for example, in the waqfiyya of the Gökmedrese in Sivas.⁵⁵ These seem likely candidates for the vague *a'yān* of our sources, especially given the custom of rewarding the *a'yān* with *manāṣīb* (appointments), of which positions such as qāḍī would have been in the sultan's gift. Only rarely can we trace the details of their activities, but one example is the family of Qāḍī Burhān al-Dīn. His grandfather, Ḥusām al-Dīn, and his father, Sirāj al-Dīn, had both held the position of qāḍī of Kayseri before him, and occasional references in the sources suggest their political involvement. Ḥusām al-Dīn personally converted senior Mongol amirs to Islam,⁵⁶ while his father, Sirāj al-Dīn, in the years around the collapse of Mongol power in the 1330s, had brokered an agreement with the Mamluks whereby the name of the Mamluk sultan al-Nasir Muhammad was mentioned in the khutba in Kayseri and was struck on the coins.⁵⁷

We may also assume that merchants formed part of the *a'yān* class; from Konya we know of a number of émigré merchants from Tabriz who had settled in the city and disposed of sufficient resources to found a caravanserai.⁵⁸ The wealthy Christian doctor, Abū Salīm b. Abū'l-Ḥasan, who endowed the Hekimhan caravanserai outside Malatya, may have been another such influential individual, although we know nothing of him beyond the scanty information given in the building's trilingual Arabic, Syriac and Armenian endowment inscriptions.⁵⁹ At present our information is too scanty to be able to speculate much further as to the identity of the *a'yān*. However, it seems evident that these *a'yān* must have been able to dispose of military force in order to be able to make the decisions about war and peace that they are regularly shown as doing in the sources.

50 Ibn Bibī, *al-Avāmīr al-'alā'iya*, ed. Muttahidīn, 466; ed. Erzi, 532.

51 Sümer, *Yabanlu Pazar*, 123/ Qalqashandī, *al-Ṣubḥ' al-A'shā*, 155.

52 On him and his family see Peacock, Aḥmad of Niğde's *al-Walad al-Shafīq*.

53 Oral, Aksaray'ın Tarihi Önemi, 227; *Niğdeli Kadı Ahmed'in el-Veledü's-Şefik* 2, ed. Ertuğrul, 233.

54 See Leiden, University Library, MS Or 1094, comprising a *majmu'a* of poems by a member of this family. I will discuss this manuscript further in a subsequent publication.

55 Bayram and Karabacak, Sahib-Ata Fahrü'din Ali'nin Konya, İmaret, 56.

56 Astarābādī, *Bazm u Razm*, ed. Rifaat, 45; Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, 65-6.

57 Al-'Umari, *Masālik al-abṣār*, 3, ed. al-Juburi, 238; Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, 61.

58 For a discussion of the Tabrizi immigrants in Konya, see Peacock, *Islamisation in medieval Anatolia*.

59 Ertuğrul, Hekim Hanı.

How unusual was the behaviour of the *a'yān* of Anatolia? If we look at the history of Iran in the earlier medieval period – which is, of course, where many of these families of *a'yān* had their origins, even if there were also local, Anatolian precedents for urban autonomy⁶⁰ – we can see a similar pattern of leading citizens making decisions about fighting or surrender. To take the example of the Seljuq conquests of the eleventh century: it was the populace of Marv who took the decision to surrender the city to Tughril and Chaghri in 1037, and negotiations were carried out by three members of the local ulama. These same ulama also informed the Ghaznavid commander in Khurasan that the people preferred Seljuq rule.⁶¹ We find a similar situation at Nishapur, which was occupied twice by the Seljuqs. The first time, the Seljuqs were driven out by the populace. However, a subsequent council of war between the town notables and the town qāḍī decided to accept Seljuq reoccupation.⁶² Again, we have city notables who do not simply make decisions about whether or not to surrender, but clearly dispose of military force to give these decisions effect – just as we have in Seljuq Anatolia a couple of centuries later. A similar pattern of urban agency can be traced in later periods, where the *a'yān* are the key figures negotiating the surrender of cities to Timur.⁶³

It is perhaps not coincidental that those families we can identify as potential candidates for *a'yān* in medieval Anatolia originate from the Iranian world. In some ways, they perhaps simply continued a model of urban agency that was familiar to their ancestors. Yet it was also a model that was familiar to Anatolia's non-Muslim inhabitants. At any rate, while urban communities in medieval Anatolia certainly did not enjoy the same privileges as their counterparts in Europe, especially Italy, over taxation or weights and measures, regarding the most crucial element of all identified by Shoshan, decisions over whether to wage war or make peace, they did indeed enjoy autonomy and agency. Indeed, while the city may not have constituted a legal entity in the European sense, its notables did act and were recognised as acting collectively on behalf of the city in the crucial matter of being party to legally binding contracts. This is not a million miles away from constituting a corporate legal body. Moreover, this was a pattern that obtained across the eastern Islamic world. I would, therefore, suggest that the *futuwwa* groups are something of a red herring in the search for urban agency, as they were too closely associated with state power, even if on occasion they may have aligned themselves with the notables. There is no need to look for some form of Anatolian exceptionalism in its city politics, for they followed a pattern attested across the medieval Islamic *mashriq*. The real challenge for future research is to find ways to study and identify the shadowy but crucial group of urban notables that has so far largely been missing from the historiography on medieval Islamic Anatolia.

60 See Guillot, *L'évêque dans la société méditerranéenne*.

61 Peacock, *Early Seljuq History*, 91.

62 See Paul, *The Seljuq conquest(s) of Nishapur*, passim.

63 Mahendrarajah, *Tamerlane's conquest of Herat*.

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