

Cheating the Habsburgs and Their Subjects? Eighteenth-Century ‘Arabian Princes’ in Central Europe and the Question of Fraud*

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Introduction

In September 1785, the *Hohle Schule*, an academy of higher education in the town of Herborn in the present-day German state of Hesse, received a visit from a man who claimed to be the prince of Palestine Joseph Abaisy or, as his name would be more properly transliterated from Arabic today, Yūsuf Ḥubaysh. The single available source on this event strongly suggests that the occasion had none of the pomp and spectacle ordinarily associated with the arrival of an illustrious visitor of such elevated rank. For, in spite of his title, Yūsuf came to Herborn not so much as a foreign dignitary, but as a person seeking aid.¹ The alleged reason for the presumed prince’s journey to the Holy Roman Empire is summarized in a memorandum from Professor Anton Philipp Wasmuth (1726–89), the academy’s vice-chancellor (*Prorektor*), to his colleagues on the governing body.² According to this document, Yūsuf Ḥubaysh had “been forced to flee his homeland and his people because he was unable to pay the heavy tribute to the Turks since

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¹ Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Wiesbaden (Hess. HStA Wiesbaden), Abt. 95, Nr. 1980.

² On the organization of the *Hohle Schule* in this period, see Hans Haering, *Die Spätzeit der Hohen Schule zu Herborn (1742–1817): Zwischen Orthodoxie und Aufklärung* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1994), 56–74. On Anton Philipp Wasmuth, *ibid.*, 185–86; Johann Hermann Steubing, *Geschichte der hohen Schule Herborn* (Hadamar: Verlag der neuen Gelehrten-Buchhandlung, 1823), 65.

the invasion of Ali Bey had ruined his lands". In his exile, he was collecting "contributions towards the [sum of] 100,000 thalers which he must pay to the Turks". The writer left not the slightest doubt that he was convinced that this Yūsuf Ḥubaysh really was who he claimed to be and that he was deserving of assistance, not least because he "was furnished with a great number of fine certificates issued by many high-ranking persons". Wasmuth therefore requested advice on "what sum [he] should assign to this hapless man from the [academy's] coffers".³

The reply scribbled by the senate below the original memorandum, however, shows that they were less than thrilled by this opportunity to exercise Christian charity. Given Yūsuf's proclaimed status, they feared that "he will not be satisfied with a small sum", thus imposing a significant financial burden on the academy. Moreover, they were well aware that collections of alms without express permission from the territory's ruler, the prince of Orange-Nassau, were illegal. They therefore recommended that Yūsuf first apply for a collection licence. This advice was not motivated solely by the faculty's regard for the law, though. Rather, they were hoping to "get rid of him in this way".⁴ The faculty's reservations were not entirely unwarranted. Yūsuf Ḥubaysh was only one of many princes from Palestine, Phoenicia, Arabia and, most frequently, Mount Lebanon with spurious claims to such titles who travelled Europe, and particularly the Holy Roman Empire, throughout the eighteenth century. A number of them, in fact, bore very similar names. Throughout the early modern period, Christians from the Ottoman Empire went to Europe and other parts of the world in order to collect alms.⁵ In addition, the continent was visited time and again not only by pretenders to the thrones of the Ottoman vassal principalities of Moldavia, Transylvania and Wallachia or former voivodes in exile like Petru Șchiopol

³ Hess. HStA Wiesbaden, Abt. 95, Nr. 1980, all quotations from fol. 1r: *weilen er die swehren tribut an den Türcken nicht zahlen konte maßen durch den Alibeyischen einfalle seyn land ruiniert worden, von land und leüten hat flüchtn müssen; beysteuer zu den 100 000 th[alern], die er den türcken zahlen muß; mit sehr vielen und schönen attestaten von vielen hohen versehen; wie viele diesem unglücklichen ex casse assigniren soll.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 1r: *Mit wenigem wird Er nicht zufrieden; seiner so [...] los warden.*

⁵ See, for example, John-Paul A. Ghobrial, "Migration from Within and Without: In the Footsteps of Eastern Christians in the Early Modern World", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (2017): 153–73; idem, "The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory", *Past and Present* 222 (2014): 51–93; Feras Krimsti, "Arsāniyus Shukrī al-Ḥākīm's Account of His Journey to France, the Iberian Peninsula, and Italy (1748–1757) from Travel Journal to Edition", *Philological Encounters* 4 (2019): 1–43.

(r. 1574–79 and 1582–91) hoping for military and financial support,⁶ but also by fraudulent Ottoman dignitaries such as Jean-Michel Cigala (fl. 1651–69) who, in the second half of the seventeenth century, had posed as a Muslim-turned-Christian son of the famous Italian-born Ottoman admiral Cığalazade Yūsuf Sinan Pasha (c. 1544–1606), until he was exposed as an impostor.⁷ Perhaps, then, Yūsuf Ḥubaysh and other Arabian princes were not what they appeared to be, as, for instance, the theologian Stephan Schultz (1714–76) and the explorer Carsten Niebuhr (1733–1815) insisted.

Historians of poverty and crime have frequently concurred in concluding that men like Yūsuf were frauds who sought to line their pockets at the expense of the unsuspecting and the gullible.⁸ Such assessments rest on the stereotypical and repetitive nature of the stories told by most of the Arabian princes wherever they went. Elsewhere I advocate that, independently of whether these collectors' claims were true, it is useful to understand their appearances as performances combining particular narratives, recognizably 'oriental' costumes and props like the certificates mentioned by Wasmuth. For even genuine Arabian princes had to convincingly present this persona to their audiences in Europe in order to be believed. Key elements in these performances and the narratives which provided their scripts were accordingly dictated by the collective imaginations of the eastern Mediterranean.⁹ Taking the figure of Yūsuf Ḥubaysh as a starting point, this chapter focuses on the narratives of supposed Arabian princes and their contestation by critics in central Europe to explore the issue of fraud.

⁶ See, for example, Noel Malcolm, *Agents of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 359, 379–86, 330–31; Laura J. F. Coulter, *The Involvement of the English Crown and Its Embassy in Constantinople with Pretenders to the Throne of the Principality of Moldavia between the Years 1583 and 1620, with Particular Reference to the Pretender Ștefan Bogdan between 1590 and 1612* (London: unpublished PhD thesis of the University of London, 1993). Marian Coman (Bucharest) is currently undertaking a detailed study of these "wandering pretenders".

⁷ See Tobias P. Graf, "Trans-Imperial Nobility: The Case of Carlo Cigala (1556–1631)", in *Conversion and Islam in the Early Modern Mediterranean: The Lure of the Other*, ed. Claire Norton (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 12; Walter Schüller, "Ein Hochstapler im Gefolge des Fürstbischofs? Jean-Michel de Cigala, alias Mahomet Bey, am 3. Mai 1669 in Freckenhorst: Eine Spurensuche", *Freckenhorst* 16 (2004): 94–105.

⁸ Ernst Schubert, *Arme Leute: Bettler und Gauner im Franken des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Neustadt a. d. Aisch: Degener, 1983), 233; Hans Schorer, "Das Bettlertum in Kurbayern in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts", *Forschungen zur Geschichte Bayerns* 12, nos. 1–2 (1904): 191–95.

⁹ Tobias P. Graf, "'Arabian Princes' and the Imagined Eastern Mediterranean in the Eighteenth-Century Holy Roman Empire" (in preparation).

Precisely because several individuals used this particular name, the cases of the Yūsuf Ḥubayshes provide valuable insights into the question of their authenticity as high-ranking dignitaries from Ottoman Syria, which attracted the attention of several contemporary experts on the region. The matter of these migrants' social status was key to the criticism levelled against them as well as the decision-making of local authorities in the Holy Roman Empire, even though the assessments of specialists on the Levant had surprisingly little impact on the latter. But precisely because magistrates frequently sidestepped investigations of their visitors' claims, they participated in the storytelling which helped craft the Habsburg Mediterranean as an imagined space and endowed it with the power to shape lives far beyond the actual shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

This imagined Mediterranean deserves to be called Habsburg not merely because the territories under the authority of the dynasty were frequent destinations in this movement of people, but also because the Holy Roman emperors and the court in Vienna enabled this movement north of the Alps by issuing—or at least by being credited with having issued—the most important and wide-ranging of the documents mentioned by Wasmuth: passports for travel, licences to make collections of alms and orders for free transportation. Examples of such papers have survived in the archives in Vienna and the petitions by Arabian princes preserved elsewhere in Germany make frequent references to papers of this kind.¹⁰ The resulting imagined space was therefore constituted not merely through texts, images and objects as well as the sojourns of Habsburg subjects in the Levant, but also by interactions at home with individuals who at least purported to hail from the eastern Mediterranean.

Narrating Flight

It is worth taking a closer look at Yūsuf Ḥubaysh's reasons for leaving the Ottoman Empire as they were recorded by Wasmuth. The immediate trigger for his flight from Palestine, according to this summary, was his inability to satisfy the Ottomans'

¹⁰ For instance, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (HHStA Vienna), Reichshofrat (RHR), Gratia et Feudalia, Patentes und Steckbriefe box 4, bundle for letter S, file concerning *Scidid Habaisci Spade filij* (1725), fol. 1r–2v. For an example of a petition referencing such papers, see Staatsarchiv Nuremberg (StAN), Losungamt, Stadtrechnungsbelege (SRB), Bündel 1571, petition by Anton and Joseph von Haun (20 July 1765). See also Claus H. Bill, "Olivenprinzen' im Deutschland der Frühen Neuzeit: Zwischen Morgenlandfaszination und religiöser Solidarität: Zum Finanzierungstourismus maronitischer mittelneuezeitlicher männlicher Libanesen 1750–1800", *Nobilitas: Zeitschrift für deutsche Adelsforschung* 5, no. 24 (October 2002): 1193–96; also, Graf, "Arabian Princes".

demand for tribute. This is presumably a reference to the *cizye*, the poll-tax levied on non-Muslims, although the sum suggests that this was not an individual debt but rather the sum owed by the entire community as whose leader Yūsuf Ḥubaysh presented himself.¹¹ Fiscal obligations towards the Ottomans feature frequently in the narratives recounted by similar travellers from Ottoman Syria. An undated petition by the prince of Mount Lebanon Elias Abaisi (Ilyās Ḥubaysh, probably fl. 1760s) to the Holy Roman emperor, for instance, likewise proclaimed that he had been “robbed of all his properties because of the exorbitant tribute imposed on [him] by the Turks”.¹² Already in 1725, one of the first of such self-proclaimed Arabian princes to travel to the Holy Roman Empire had complained that the Maronites, a community of Eastern Christians which had formally entered into union with the Roman Catholic church in the late sixteenth century, were forced to pay an annual tribute of 10,000 scudi to the Ottomans.¹³ In spite of this, “the Turks” had “felled and spoiled 6,000 olive trees, ruined my silk factory, entered my village and palace and ruined everything, including the church”.¹⁴ In short, the Ottoman regime was presented as oppressive and hostile towards Christians, making unreasonable fiscal demands from those who had no means of protecting themselves and thus forced these so-called princes “to leave everything behind and appeal to the compassionate hearts of Christians for succour by most graciously granting alms”, as Elias put it to the emperor.¹⁵

Stories such as these catered to European notions of Turkish cruelty and oppression which had been prominent elements in the religiously charged discourse about the Ottomans for much of the early modern period. Although these negative stereotypes were replaced by more nuanced appraisals, even a veritable Turcophilia, in the eighteenth century, representatives of Eastern Christian communities from

¹¹ Halil İnalçık, “Djizya: ii.—Ottoman”, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 12 vols., eds. P. J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2004), vol. 2, 562–66, esp. 563.

¹² HHSStA Vienna, RHR, Passbriefe, box 1, fol. 46r–47v, here fol. 46r: *wegen dem von denen Türken unerschwinglich aufgetragenen Tribut aller Güter beraubtten*.

¹³ HHSStA Vienna, RHR, Patentens und Steckbriefe, box 4, bundle S, file concerning *Scidid Habaisci Spade filij*, fol. 1v. Tobias Mörike is preparing a detailed study of this man. A useful, if somewhat problematic overview of the history of the Maronite community is Matti Moosa, *The Maronites in History* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

¹⁴ Landesarchiv Thüringen, Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar (HStA Weimar), Kunst und Wissenschaft, Hofwesen, A 9105, fol. 4r–5v, quotations from fol. 5v and 4v–5r: *Princept in Monte Libano; 6000 Oliven-Bäumer abgehauen und verdorben, mein Seiden-Fabric alles ruiniret, die Feind in mein Land, Dorf und Schloß getreten, und alles samt der Kirchen ruiniret*.

¹⁵ HHSStA Vienna, RHR, Gratialia et Feudalia, Passbriefe, box 1, fol. 46r–47v, at fol. 46r: *alles zu verlassen und bey Christmitleydigen Herzen eine Huldreicheste Almosens Beyhlf zu erbitten*.

Orthodox alms-collectors to Maronite bishops continued to evoke the idea of the Muslim Turks as the enemies of Christianity and Christendom. The continued presence of this trope in texts such as the petitions by supposed Arabian princes—which were most likely written by German scribes—is perhaps a testimony to the resilience of the rhetorical antagonisms between Ottoman Muslims and European Christians shaped by Habsburg propaganda at the height of the discourse about the ‘Turkish menace’ in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁶

Destructions at the hand of undifferentiated Ottomans are notably absent from the account related by Yūsuf Ḥubaysh during his visit to Herborn. Instead, his inability to meet his financial obligations to the sultan were presented as the result of regional unrest: The brief mention of the invasion of Ali Bey is a precise reference to the military campaigns in Syria undertaken by the Mamluk leader Ali Bey al-Kabir of Egypt (r. 1760–72) in 1771–72 in an attempt to gain greater independence from Istanbul.¹⁷ The brevity of this particular passage strongly suggests that Wasmuth was not only familiar with the events in question, but was confident that so were his colleagues on the senate. In fact, German newspapers reported regularly on developments in this region. The *Münchener Zeitung*, for example, covered Ali Bey al-Kabir and his activities in no fewer than 22 of the 206 issues which appeared in the year of his Syrian campaign.¹⁸ Documents like the memorandum concerning Yūsuf Ḥubaysh’s visit to Herborn, therefore, provide

¹⁶ These Eastern Christian narratives are examined in greater detail in Graf, “Arabian Princes”. Compare Bill, “Olivenprinzen”, 1200–03. For an overview of the early modern representation of the Ottoman Empire, see Höfert, *Den Feind beschreiben*; Aslı Çırakman, *From the “Terror of the World” to the “Sick Man of Europe”: European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* (New York: Lang, 2002); Stefan Hanß, *Lepanto als Ereignis: Dezentrierende Geschichte(n) der Seeschlacht von Lepanto (1571)* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2017), 27–42; Martin Wrede, *Das Reich und seine Feinde: Politische Feindbilder in der Reichspatriotischen Publizistik zwischen Westfälischem Frieden und Siebenjährigem Krieg* (Mainz: Zabern, 2004), esp. 185–216; Joseph Croitoru, *Die Deutschen und der Orient: Faszination, Verachtung und die Widersprüche der Aufklärung* (Munich: Hanser, 2018); Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp, ed., *Europa und die Türkei im 18. Jahrhundert/ Europe and Turkey in the 18th Century* (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2011); Alexander Bevilacqua and Helen Pfeifer, “Turquerie: Culture in Motion, 1650–1750”, *Past and Present* 221 (November 2013): 75–118.

¹⁷ Caroline Finkel, *Osman’s Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1923* (London: Murray, 2005), 408–09; Kamal S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon* (New York: Praeger, 1965), 15; William Harris, *Lebanon: A History, 600–2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 120–22.

¹⁸ This figure is based on the scans of this newspaper made available by the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich. See <https://digipress.digitale-sammlungen.de/calendar/1771/newspaper/bsbmult00000003>, accessed 20 October 2019.

testimony of some readers' engagement with the newspaper reports, allowing them to recall the essentials of what they had read even more than a decade earlier.

An ability to connect one's story to what early modern Germans knew or believed to know about Ottoman Syria and the conditions of its Christian inhabitants was crucial in order for Arabian princes and other alms-collectors from this region to be taken seriously.¹⁹ In this sense, their stories were just as carefully crafted narratives as the sixteenth-century French pardon tales studied by Natalie Zemon Davis.²⁰ While these stories were fictional, they were not necessarily fictive. Like Lutheran religious refugees from the Habsburgs' counter-reformation zeal in Bohemia during the seventeenth century, even genuine alms-collectors from the Levant had to represent themselves in a particular way to meet the expectations of those they encountered.²¹

Given the often interactive nature of storytelling in which interlocutors such as scribes and magistrates participated in shaping the story either by actively contributing information, perhaps in an attempt to clarify individual aspects of the story, or through non-verbal signs which would prompt an adjustment of the narrative by the teller, the invocation of Ali Bey's campaigns in Yūsuf Ḥubaysh's story may well have been introduced by Wasmuth or others to whom Ḥubaysh had previously told his story.²² Comparable references to recent events are evident, for example, in Anton de Haggian's application for a collection licence from the city council of Cologne in 1786. Haggian presented himself as a nobleman from Jerusalem who claimed to have "been subject to the most painful persecution under the hostile princes from Egypt Abu al-Dhahab [1735–75] and Cezzar [Ahmed] Pasha, [d.1804] who followed [the former] in the government [of Syria] after his death".²³ Although this condensation of events in the council protocol

¹⁹ The question of what eighteenth-century Germans knew about the Middle East is explored more fully in Graf, "Arabian Princes".

²⁰ Natalie Z. Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

²¹ Alexander Schunka, "Immigrant Petition Letters in Early Modern Saxony", in *Letters Across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants*, eds. Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber and Suzanne M. Sinke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 271–90; Bill, "Olivenprinzen", 1206–07; Hanß, *Lepanto als Ereignis*, 527–64.

²² See Charles Goodwin and Marjorie H. Goodwin, "Participation", in *Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 222–44; Elinor Ochs, "Narrative Lessons", in *ibid.*, 269–89; Davis, *Fiction*, 15.

²³ Historisches Archiv Cologne (HA Cologne), Best. 10B Ratsprotokolle, A 233, fol. 192v: *unter dene[n] feindlichen aus Ägypten gekommenen Fürsten Abudahab und dem Thod in der Regierung folgenden Bassa Schesair [...] die härteste verfolgungen ausgestanden*. I am indebted to Ilya Berkovich and John-Paul Ghobrial for bringing this source to my attention. For

introduced various inaccuracies, the names would surely not have been recorded, if they had been meaningless to Cologne's magistrates. We also need to bear in mind that men like Haggian repeated their stories to multiple audiences and would constantly fine-tune the details of their narratives in accordance with their experiences of success and failure during previous retellings. In doing so, they may have drawn both on Middle Eastern modes of performative storytelling as well as previous expertise in representing their cases to local authorities elsewhere in Europe as well as the Ottoman Empire.²⁴ Regardless of whether the references to recent events such as wars were first introduced into their narratives by the princes themselves, the fact of their recording as well as the selection of the elements recorded in such clearly mediated settings as Wasmuth's report to his colleagues and the Cologne council protocols reflect the German reading public's engagement with the eastern Mediterranean.

Relatively precise references to recent events as those to the disturbances in Syria caused by Ali Bey al-Kabir, Abu al-Dhahab and Cezzar Ahmed Pasha represent a significant departure from the generalized stories of victimhood at the hands of nameless Turks prevalent earlier in the century. Already in 1731, a Yūsuf Ḥubaysh (transliterated as Joseph Habeich) had visited Nuremberg after he had "not only been chased from [his] country and people, [his] home and hearth, but [had] also been entirely robbed by the Turks because of [his] religion".²⁵ Even the petitions of one of the earliest self-styled princes of Mount Lebanon, Shadīd ibn Sayf Ḥubaysh (fl. 1524–27), whose account of the losses suffered at the hands of the Ottoman governor of Sidon are unparalleled in their level of detail, do not link his story to clearly identifiable developments, most likely because these would have been

the events mentioned here, see Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 408–10; Harris, *Lebanon*, 120–24; Salibi, *Modern History*, 15–17; Philip K. Hitti, *Lebanon in History: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1967), 394–97; Richard van Leeuwen, *Notables and Clergy in Mount Lebanon: The Khāzin Sheikhs and the Maronite Church (1736–1840)* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 48–49.

²⁴ Metin And, "Storytelling as Performance", in *Medieval and Early Modern Performances in the Eastern Mediterranean*, eds. Arzu Öztürkmen and Evelyn Birge Vitz (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 5–18. For an example of alterations made in retellings of essentially the same story, compare the following petitions: StAN, SRB, Bündel 1442, petition of Giovanni Zobby (16 September 1745); Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt, Ratssupplikationen, 1746, vol. 3, fol. 444r–45v.

²⁵ StAN, Losungamt, Stadtrechnungsbelege (SRB), Bündel 1332, file concerning *Prinzen vom Berg Libano* (1731), quotation from leaf 5r: *von denen Türken Religions halber, nicht allein von Land und Leuthen, Hauß und Hof verjagt, sondern auch völlig beraubt.*

meaningless to those whom he encountered in Vienna, Weimar and elsewhere.²⁶ Instead, the imaginations of the eastern Mediterranean of those who met Shadīd were dominantly influenced by reports from missionaries and Maronite clergy about the anti-Christian, and specifically anti-Catholic, activities of local Ottoman officials, which in turn perpetuated stereotypes of religious oppression coined in earlier centuries, even if these had never found universal acceptance.²⁷

Allegations of Fraud

As the examples of Arabian princes discussed above illustrate, the family name Ḥubaysh appears frequently in the documentation concerning these itinerant alms-collectors. It is no surprise, therefore, that it features prominently in Stephan Schultz's refutation of their claims. As a missionary for the *Institutum Judaicum et Muhammedicum* in Halle, which had been founded in 1728 to proselytize among Jews and Muslims, Schultz journeyed almost ceaselessly in Europe and the Ottoman Empire between 1740 and 1756. After his return to Halle, he taught Arabic and Hebrew, becoming the director of the institute in 1760. Schultz's travel account, whose five volumes appeared in print between 1771 and 1775, has been praised as highly original and a record of "the voices of local people".²⁸ According to this account, the Orientalist and founder of the *Institutum Judaicum*, Johann Heinrich Callenberg (1694–1760), had asked Schultz before his departure for the Ottoman Empire in 1752 to inquire after an Arabian prince who had travelled Germany in 1736 and whom Callenberg had met when the prince had visited Halle. Schultz claims to have discovered that this visitor had returned to Syria a wealthy man, but his newly acquired wealth was soon confiscated by the Ottoman governor of Sidon because the lifestyle which it enabled him to lead was deemed to be above his station.²⁹ The episode provided Schultz with an occasion to explain what he had been able to learn about the man's "aristocratic family, called Abassy"

²⁶ HHStA Vienna, RHR, Gratialia et Feudalia, Patentes und Steckbriefe, box 4, bundle S, file concerning *Scidid Habaisci Spade filij*; Landesarchiv Thüringen, Staatsarchiv Rudolstadt, Rudolstädter Schlossarchiv, no. 153; HStA Weimar, Kunst und Wissenschaft, Hofwesen, A 9105, fol. 4r–5v.

²⁷ This topic is explored in greater detail in Graf, "Arabian Princes".

²⁸ Quotation from Jan Schmidt, "'Guided by the Almighty': The Journey of Stephan Schultz in the Ottoman Empire, 1572–6", in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 345. Schmidt's chapter examines Stephan Schultz and his travel account published as Stephan Schultz, *Die Leitungen des Höchsten nach seinem Rath auf den Reisen durch Europa, Asia und Africa*, 5 vols. (Halle: Carl H. Hemmerde, 1771–75).

²⁹ Schultz, *Leitungen des Höchsten*, vol. 5, 157–58.

(Ḥubaysh) during his time in Jerusalem, Beirut and Damascus. As Schultz wrote, this family:

is divided into two branches. One [branch] lives properly and some of its members are employed as ministers of state and in lower positions by the grand prince of Mount Lebanon. The other branch, however, has ruined itself through gambling and wastefulness so that [its members] are unable to regain their former status, but instead have to live like other common people, as peasants and the like.³⁰

The man whom Callenberg had met in Halle belonged to this second branch and Schultz therefore identified him as a fraud. In Schultz's eyes, at least, he was not the only one.³¹

In 1768, after Schultz had returned from his travels, an alleged prince from Canaan or Palestine named Yūsuf Ḥubaysh (here rendered as Jusuph Abassy) arrived in Halle. Schultz invited him to his house where the two of them conversed in French, German and Arabic in the presence of Ḥubaysh's secretary. During this meeting, Schultz, at this point speaking Arabic, reiterated that "some members of this latter branch [of the Ḥubayshes] come to Europe, pretend to be princes, and beg from kings, princes and lords", before asking Yūsuf, "to which branch [of the family] do you belong? For neither of the two are princes".³² Thus ended the encounter because Schultz was called away to a sickbed, and the prince refused to return with his certificates to prove his status to the indignant preacher. The point of the meeting in any case had been to demonstrate to Yūsuf's secretary, a Hungarian student of Protestant theology, that he had been duped. Even as Schultz exposed these Arabian princes' as frauds, he confirmed to his readers that

³⁰ Ibid., 158–59: *adeliche Familie, Abassy genannt; theilet sich in zwey Linien ein; die eine lebt ordentlich, und warden einige davon zu Staats-Ministern, auch wol geringern Bedienten, bey dem Groß-Fürsten vom Berge Libanon [...] employret; die andere Linie aber, hat durch Spielen und Schwelgereyen, sich so ruiniret, daß sie nicht wieder aufkommen können, sondern wie andere gemeine Leut, als Bauren und dergleichen leben müssen.* On the Ḥubaysh family as local notables, also see Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: Tauris, 1988), 14, 103–04; Leeuwen, *Notables and Clergy*, 129, 136; Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la réforme catholique (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1994), 97; Constantin A. Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans, 1516–1831*, trans. Brittany Pheiffer Noble and Samuel Noble (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2016), 98.

³¹ Schultz, *Leitungen des Höchsten*, vol. 5, 159.

³² Ibid., 160: *aus dieser letztern Linie kommen einige nach Europa, geben sich für Prinzen aus, und betteln bey Königen, Fürsten und Herren. Von welcher Linie bist du? denn keine von beyden sind Prinzen.*

they really did hail from Ottoman Syria.³³ Perhaps the senate of the *Hobe Schule* were aware of Stephan Schultz's explicit warnings against Yūsuf Ḥubaysh as "a vagabond posing as a prince", which they were able to read not only in his travel account, but also in the newspapers.³⁴ Whether the men called Yūsuf in Herborn and Halle were indeed the same person is far from clear, though. The remark that the latter had recently visited England strongly suggests, though, that he is identical to Joseph Abaissy whose presence there is attested for the years 1765 and 1766.³⁵

Questions of identity already puzzled contemporaries confronted with a multitude of similar names. In the second edition of his Arabic grammar, the Göttingen Orientalist Johann David Michaelis (1717–91), for instance, devoted a lengthy footnote to this issue. Michaelis's deliberations were occasioned by the visit not of one, but two Yūsuf Ḥubayshes (both here transcribed as Joseph Abaṣi). The first of these had appeared in 1768 and had proven to be a fruitful interlocutor on questions of grammar and pronunciation whom Michaelis commended as "a noble and cultivated Arab".³⁶ This man also informed the Orientalist that his family originally hailed from Persia and that "many of them bear the name Joseph". For this reason, Michaelis explained, this Yūsuf "must not be considered identical to the Joseph Abaṣi who soon afterwards appeared in London and Copenhagen [...] and whom I later saw in Göttingen".³⁷ He went on to consider the possibility that the first of the two men he met was the same man who had visited Halle in the same year, ultimately concluding that this was unlikely on the basis of Schultz's description of his behaviour during their meeting.

³³ Ibid., 159–61.

³⁴ Ibid., 161: *als Prinzen sich ausgebenden Vagabonden*; *Augsburgische Extra-Zeitung* (11 November 1777), leaf 2v; *Bayreuther Zeitungen* (6 November 1777), 744–45; *Neue Europäische Zeitung* (7 November 1777), leaf 2r–2v.

³⁵ See, for example, John Sykes, *Local Records, or Historical Register of Remarkable Events, which Have Occurred Exclusively in the Counties of Durham and Northumberland, Town and County of Newcastle upon Tyne, and Berwick upon Tweed* (Newcastle: John Sykes, 1824), 116; *The Gentleman's Magazine* 36 (February 1766), 100–01.

³⁶ Johann D. Michaelis, *Arabische Grammatik, nebst einer Arabischen Chrestomathie, und Abhandlung vom Arabischen Geschmack, sonderlich in der poetischen und historischen Schreibart*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Boßiegel, 1781), 11.

³⁷ Ibid., 11–12n: *Viele von ihr führen den Nahmen Joseph; nicht mit einem bald hernach in London und Copenhagen erschienenen Joseph Abaṣi für einen Mann halten muß [...] und den ich nachher in Göttingen gesehen habe*. According to Ingeborg Titz-Matuszak, *Mobilität der Armut: Das Almosenwesen im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert im südniedersächsischen Raum* (Bovenden: s.p., 1988), 320, the Göttingen town records do not contain evidence of a visit by a Yūsuf Ḥubaysh (Joseph Abaṣi) until 1775.

Michaelis's discursive footnote is important because it expresses his disagreement with Schultz's sweeping assertion that all princes of Mount Lebanon were false princes and frauds. Although Michaelis accepted that this may have been true of the Yūsuf who had been to England and whom he describes as an ignorant Arab of low birth who was "extremely uncultivated", he dismissed such suspicions in the case of the namesake who had acted as his informant in 1768.³⁸ Most notably, unlike the Yūsuf Ḥubaysh in Halle, Michaelis's informant never asked him for alms "even though he had need for them".³⁹ Michaelis's opinion of Schultz was in any case mixed. Even though he considered the information provided by the latter on the Ḥubaysh family "truly important", as far as his "unmasking" of Yūsuf Ḥubaysh as a fraud is concerned, Michaelis concluded, "Schultz's judgement should not overly be trusted. For even if one reads only his own account, it seems more likely that Schultz, who is extremely insolent, is the peasant, rather than the foreigner".⁴⁰ The reactions ascribed to Yūsuf in Schultz's narrative, in fact, are consistent with the behaviour of a man of rank who had been insulted—and by a social inferior at that.⁴¹

Another towering figure of Oriental Studies, Carsten Niebuhr, was likewise critical of Schultz whom he considered not to have "enquired thoroughly enough into the Abaissy family and therefore passed judgment on them too rashly and too harshly".⁴² Like Schultz, Niebuhr had first-hand knowledge of Ottoman Syria which he had acquired during his participation in the Danish Arabia expedition (1761–67) undertaken on Michaelis's initiative. His observations on the populations, languages, customs and history as well as the geography, botany and zoology of the places he visited (published 1772–78 with a final volume appearing posthumously in 1837) are still valued by scientists and scholars today and it is in this context that Niebuhr addressed the phenomenon of what, according to him, were called "olive princes" in Arabic.⁴³ Even though Niebuhr presents a

³⁸ Ibid., 12n: *äußerst uncultivirter*.

³⁹ Ibid.: *ob er sie gleich bedurfte*.

⁴⁰ Ibid.: *Schultzens Urtheil wäre auch wol nicht viel zu trauen, denn wenn man auch nur blos seine eigene Erzählung liest, so wird einem wahrscheinlicher, daß Schultz, der äusserst grob ist, der Bauer seyn möchte, als daß der Fremdling einer ist*.

⁴¹ Schultz, *Leitungen des Höchsten*, vol. 5, 160–61.

⁴² Carsten Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Ländern*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Nicolaus Möller, 1774–78), vol. 2, 463: *sich nicht genau genug nach der Abaysischen Familie erkundigt habe, und daher zu eilig und zu hart von ihr urtheile*.

⁴³ Ibid., 459–64, quotation from 461: *Oliven-Prinzen*. On Niebuhr, his travels, and their significance to the sciences, see Lawrence J. Baack, *Undying Curiosity: Carsten Niebuhr and the Royal Danish Expedition to Arabia (1761–1767)* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2014).

more differentiated picture of these individuals which resembles the impression gleaned by Michaelis from limited contact in Germany, on the whole he concurs with Schultz that the majority of so-called Arabian princes were undeserving of Christian charity. It is worth quoting Niebuhr's explanation at some length:

[Having travelled to Europe,] the prince begs everywhere under the *pretext* that the Turks [and] Arabs [...]—in short, the unbelievers—have robbed him of his land, even that his wife, princes and princesses have been dragged away into captivity. [...] Most [of these individuals] return as soon as they have gathered enough [money] to buy a garden with mulberry and olive trees and some tracts of lands. They tell their countrymen how much they were honoured by the European kings and princes and laugh about the fact that they were frequently invited to [dine at] princely tables.⁴⁴

Imbued with the authority of first-hand knowledge of Mount Lebanon, Niebuhr's comments were particularly damaging because the narratives which he dismissed as pretexts and thus as largely made-up were only too familiar to German magistrates, who time and again dealt with repetitive and seemingly stereotypical stories of misfortune involving the destruction of property and the captivity of family members recounted in the petitions presented by these men.⁴⁵ That alms-collectors like the Yūsuf Ḥubaysh who appeared in Herborn and Anton de Haggian in Cologne attributed their plight to the upheavals caused by outside interference may have been, at least in part, a reaction to revelations such as Niebuhr's which discredited the narratives that had dominated earlier. On the other hand, loss as a result of warfare between the Ottomans and Nader Shah of Iran (r. 1736–47), for instance, had played a role in a petition presented by the brothers Anton and Joseph von Haun (presumably Aṅtun and Yūsuf 'Awn) in Nuremberg as early as 1765, that is a decade before the publication of Niebuhr's observations.⁴⁶ As suggested above, such invocations of recent events were likely prompted or at least brought to the fore as a result of interactions with European audiences who

⁴⁴ Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung*, vol. 2, 460 (my emphasis): *bettelt [...] der Prinz überall, unter dem Vorwand: daß die Türken, Araber [...], kurz, die Ungläubigen ihn seiner Länder beraubt haben: ja wohl gar, daß seine Gemahlin, Prinzen und Prinzessinen in die Gefangenschaft geführt sind. [...] Die meisten reisen wieder zurück, so bald sie so viel erübrigt haben, daß sie einen Garten mit Maulbeer- und Olivenbäumen, und einige Ländereyen kaufen können. Sie erzählen es ihren Landsleuten, wie viel Ehre sie von den europäischen Königen und Fürsten genossen haben; und lachen darüber daß man sie oft gar mit zu fürstlichen Tafeln gezogen hat.*

⁴⁵ Graf, "Arabian Princes".

⁴⁶ StAN, Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1571, petition by Anton and Joseph von Haun (20 July 1765), leaf 1r. On the events discussed here, see Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 363–64.

had some prior knowledge of these occurrences. Even more damaging than the accusation of disingenuity, though, was Niebuhr's claim that the so-called Arabian princes, after having returned home, mocked the credulity and generosity of their hosts. This added insult to injury and must have confirmed the worst fears of those who suspected that these princes were not who they claimed to be.

The Origins of Princely Status

By the middle of the eighteenth century, administrative records show an increasing scepticism towards Arabian princes.⁴⁷ Yet even when Europeans appeared accepting of these foreigners' titles, they did not necessarily apply the term *prince* in its technical sense as either a territorial ruler, an heir apparent, or someone equal in rank to the princes of the Holy Roman Empire, but more likely used it in its wider sense of an eminent person in his origin society. Despite this more pragmatic application of the title, contesting the princely rank of such Arabian princes played a significant role in attacks on their authenticity more generally.⁴⁸

Even before Niebuhr and Schultz, the bookseller Jonas Korte (1683–1756), whose journey to the Levant had been motivated by Christian piety, had claimed in his travel account published in 1741 that the “princes of Mount Lebanon” who turned up in Germany were “arch-swindlers”.⁴⁹ He relates that when he asked a priest and a monk in whose company he travelled in the Holy Land about these Arabian princes, they laughed, pointed at a peasant riding his horse, and explained, “Every Arab who is rich enough to keep a horse and carry a lance

⁴⁷ See, for instance, StAN, Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1571, resolution concerning Joseph Abaisi (15 June 1779), leaf 1r: *der angebliche Arabische Prinz*.

⁴⁸ For the technical usage of *prince* and its German equivalent *Fürst* in the German context, see Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, ed., *Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch Online* (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999–), s.vv. “Prinz” (<https://drw-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/drw-cgi/zeige?term=prinz>) and “Fürst” (<https://drw-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/drw-cgi/zeige?term=f%FCrst>), both accessed 20 October 2019. Compare also, Bill, “Olivenprinzen”, 1190, 1208.

⁴⁹ Jonas Korte, *Jonas Kortens, ehemaligen Buchhändlers zu Altona, Reise nach dem weiland Gelobten, Nun aber seit siebzehnhundert Jahren Unter dem Fluche liegenden Lande, Wie auch nach Egypten, dem Berg Libanon, Syrien und Mesopotamien* (s.l.: s.n., 1741). Quotation from the third edition published in Halle in 1751 (hereafter: Korte, *Reise*), 465: *Prinzen vom Berg Libanon; Erz-Betrüger*. On Korte and his travels, see Ralf Elger, “Blessing and Curse in the ‘Promised Land’: Jonas Korte’s Travels in the Ottoman Empire, 1737–1739”, in *The Piety of Learning: Islamic Studies in Honor of Stefan Reichmuth*, eds. Michael Kemper and Ralf Elger (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 227–49. I am grateful to Feras Krimsti for bringing Elger’s chapter to my attention.

is mocked as a prince”.⁵⁰ The title, therefore, was not a genuine reflection of social rank. In fact, Korte continued, “these Maronites do not have princes”.⁵¹ Writing three decades later, Niebuhr likewise explained that the princes of Mount Lebanon were simply local notables (*sheikhs*).⁵² Korte added that the princely title was based on “false testimony from their patriarch and bishop”,⁵³ while Niebuhr identified it as an invention by “the European monks [...] on Mount Lebanon” who communicated it to Europe in their letters of recommendation.⁵⁴ Although the precise attribution varies, both authors, placed the responsibility for the misrepresentation of status squarely on what were ultimately Catholic clergy.

Yet the documentary evidence sheds doubt on these allegations. In this respect, the autograph signature of Shadīd ibn Sayf Ḥubaysh in a letter to Duke Eberhard Ludwig of Württemberg (r. 1693–1733) from 1727 is particularly noteworthy (fig. X.1). Written in Italian and Arabic, the Arabic portion styles Shadīd *amīr min jabal Lubnān* (*amīr* from Mount Lebanon), which is rendered as *brencibe del Monti Libano* (prince of Mount Lebanon) in the Italian part.⁵⁵ When another Yūsuf Ḥubaysh, who, as a ‘prince of Palestine’ may be identical to the person from Herborn, petitioned the city council of Nuremberg in 1779, his Arabic signature identified him as *amīr ‘alā bilād al-sharq* (*amīr* over the Eastern countries; fig. X.2).⁵⁶ The use of the Arabic title *amīr* is key here. While this term is indeed commonly translated into European languages as *prince*, the claim of title is spurious in light of what we know about the social structure of Mount Lebanon and the place of the Ḥubaysh family in it. For, according to the historian Kamal Salibi, the Ḥubayshes “merely” ranked as “great *sheikhs*”,⁵⁷ while the title of *amīr* was reserved for higher-ranking families like the Shihābs who had ruled the region since 1697. But at least before the publication of Korte’s account, and more likely for decades afterwards, local authorities in Germany had very little information about the organization of societies in this region. As in other

⁵⁰ Korte, *Reise*, 465: *man nennet einen ieden Araber schertz- oder spottweise einen Printzen, der so reich ist, daß er ein Pferd halten kan, und der eine Lantz auf der Achsel traget.*

⁵¹ Ibid.: *Diese Maroniten [...] haben gar keine Printzen.*

⁵² Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung*, vol. 2, 459. Compare Salibi, *Modern History*, 8–10.

⁵³ Korte, *Reise*, 465: *bekämen von ihrem Patriarchen und Bischof solch ein falsches Zeugnis als Printzen.*

⁵⁴ Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung*, vol. 2, 459: *die europäischen Mönche [...] auf dem Berge Libanon.*

⁵⁵ Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart (HStAS), A6, Bü 194, Shadīd ibn Sayf Ḥubaysh to Duke Eberhard Ludwig of Württemberg (Stuttgart, 24 August 1727), leaf 1v.

⁵⁶ StAN, Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1571, petition of Joseph Abaisi (18 June 1779), fol. 1v. I owe this transcription and translation to Feras Krimsti and Henning Sievert.

⁵⁷ Salibi, *Modern History*, 7–10.

situations of cultural translation, the knowledge asymmetries between these self-styled princes and those they met in Europe thus opened up opportunities for the former's self-fashioning.

Shadid ibn Sayf Ḥubaysh
Monti Libano

شاديد ابن سيف حبيش أمير جبل لبنان

Fig. X.1: Signature of Shadid ibn Sayf Ḥubaysh in Italian and Arabic. HStAS, A6, Bü 194, Shadid ibn Sayf Ḥubaysh to Duke Eberhard Ludwig of Württemberg (Stuttgart, 24 August 1727), leaf 1v. Reproduced with permission from Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.

Joseph Apaisi
Prins de. Palastin

يوسف امير فلسطين
الشرق

Fig. X.2: Signature of Yūsuf Ḥubaysh (Joseph Abaisi). StAN, Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1571, petition by Joseph Apaisi (19 July 1779), leaf 2r. Reproduced with permission from Staatsarchiv Nuremberg.

Having said this, the letters of recommendation presented by Shadīd ibn Sayf Ḥubaysh in Vienna in 1725 actually contradict his self-appellation as a prince and *amīr*. The Capuchins in Tripoli, for example, identified him as “the *sheikh* Shadīd, that is to say in French, an eminent gentleman”,⁵⁸ confirming Niebuhr’s statement about the social rank of these princes. Admittedly, Michelangelo Tamburini (1648–1730), the superior-general of the Society of Jesus, used the Latin word *princeps* in his reference but he neither applied it to Shadīd himself, nor did he necessarily use it in the technical sense of *prince* when he called him “*filius Domini Spadæ Habascii Castri Gaziri in Antilibano Principis*”, which means little more than that Shadīd’s father Sayf Ḥubaysh (Spada Habascius) was the most notable person in the fortified town of Ghazir situated roughly 27 kilometres north of Beirut in the Kisrawan district of Mount Lebanon.⁵⁹ The Latin translation of the letter of recommendation provided by the Maronite patriarch Ya‘qub IV Awaad (in office 1705–33) likewise gives no indication that the Ḥubayshes were anything more than “among the leading men of Kisrawan province”.⁶⁰ Against this background, the Habsburg court was wary of supporting Shadīd’s misleading self-fashioning and decided to entirely delete the description of him as “the so-called prince” (*sic nuncupatus princeps*)—a phrase which already conveys scepticism—initially contained in the draft of the collection licence granted to him by Emperor Charles VI (r. 1711–40).⁶¹ What this examination makes clear, then, is that, contrary to Korte’s and Niebuhr’s allegation that the fiction of princely status was created or even condoned by either Maronite clergy or the Catholic missionaries in Syria, it originated with those who claimed the title themselves, who insisted on it even when their official papers contradicted it. In fact, the travel account of the Maronite monk (and later bishop of Aleppo) Arsāniyūs Shukrī (1707–86)

⁵⁸ HHStA Vienna, RHR, Gratialia et Feudalia, Patentes und Steckbriefe, box 4, bundle S, file concerning *Scidid Habaisci Spadæ filij*, enclosure B, leaf 1r: *le Scaih Chodid, ce qui veut dire en français le gentilhom[m]e fort*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, enclosure C, leaf 1r. Compare, for example, Paul E. Layritz, *Lexicon Manuale: Oder Lateinisch-Teutsches und Teutsch-Lateinisches Wörter- und Phrases-Buch, zum Gebrauch der Anfänger* (Halle: Verlag des Waisenhauses, 1760), 194, s.v. ‘Princeps’.

⁶⁰ HHStA Vienna, RHR, Gratialia et Feudalia, Patentes und Steckbriefe, box 4, bundle S, file concerning *Scidid Habaisci Spadæ filij*, enclosure A, fol. 1r: *Primoribus Provinciæ Kesroanim monte Libano*.

⁶¹ HHStA Vienna, RHR, Gratialia et Feudalia, Patentes und Steckbriefe, box 4, bundle S, file concerning *Scidid Habaisci Spadæ filij, Patentes pro Collectura per S. Rom. Imperium, et Italiam pro Scidid Habaisci Spadæ filij, natione Maronita, sic nuncupate principis Castri Gaziri* (12 December 1725), fol. 1r.

indicates that fellow Maronites harboured resentment against what he called the “trickery” of Arabian princes in Europe.⁶²

The petitions submitted to authorities in the Holy Roman Empire provide clues to the fact that the scribes and notaries who wrote these documents likewise either disbelieved the assertions of princely rank or did not take them literally, even as their professional obligations required them to spell out the titles assumed by their clients. A good example of such internal contradiction is the petition to the Nuremberg city council submitted by Joseph Mathias Abaisy (presumably Yūsuf Maṭyās Ḥubaysh) in 1763. While his claim that he was a prince of Palestine was evidently believed by the councillors and the mayor, the language used in this document is much more submissive than one would expect from such a high-ranking person, even in a request for support.⁶³ The document closes with an unmistakable verbal gesture of subordination: “Your most praiseworthy and wise council’s [...] most submissive and harried Prince Joseph Mathias Abaisy, prince of Palestine”.⁶⁴ This places Joseph Mathias in a position of social inferiority to the government of the Free Imperial City of Nuremberg which, despite its political and economic importance, ranked lower than those recognized as princes of the Holy Roman Empire.⁶⁵

The message was visually reinforced by what Juan Luis Vives’s 1534 manual of letter-writing calls the honorary margin (fig. X.3): the scribe left a gap of at least four lines between the salutation of the council and the beginning of the petition’s text, and about six lines between the invocation of the council in the letter’s valediction and the signatory’s name written by the scribe. As a general rule, the larger these margins the lower was the signatory’s status in relation to the addressee.⁶⁶

⁶² Krimsti, “Arsāniyus Shukrī”, 8.

⁶³ This case is investigated in greater detail in Graf, “Arabian Princes”.

⁶⁴ StAN, Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1571, petition by Joseph Matthias Abaisi (November 1763), leaf 3v: *Deines Hochlöbl. Hochwohlgebornen auch wohlweissen Rath p. devotesteer und auserst betrangter Printz.*

⁶⁵ Peter H. Wilson, *The Holy Roman Empire, 1495–1806*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 12–13, 64–66. Compare Bill, “Olivenprinzen”, 1198–99.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Gibson, “Significant Space in Manuscript Letters”, *The Seventeenth Century* 12 (1997): 2–3. Quotation from Juan Luis Vives, *De conscribendis epistolis*, trans. and ed. Charles Fanzatti (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 113, as quoted in Gibson, “Significant Space”, 2. I am indebted to Tracey Sowerby and Ruggero Sciuto for drawing my attention to this literature.

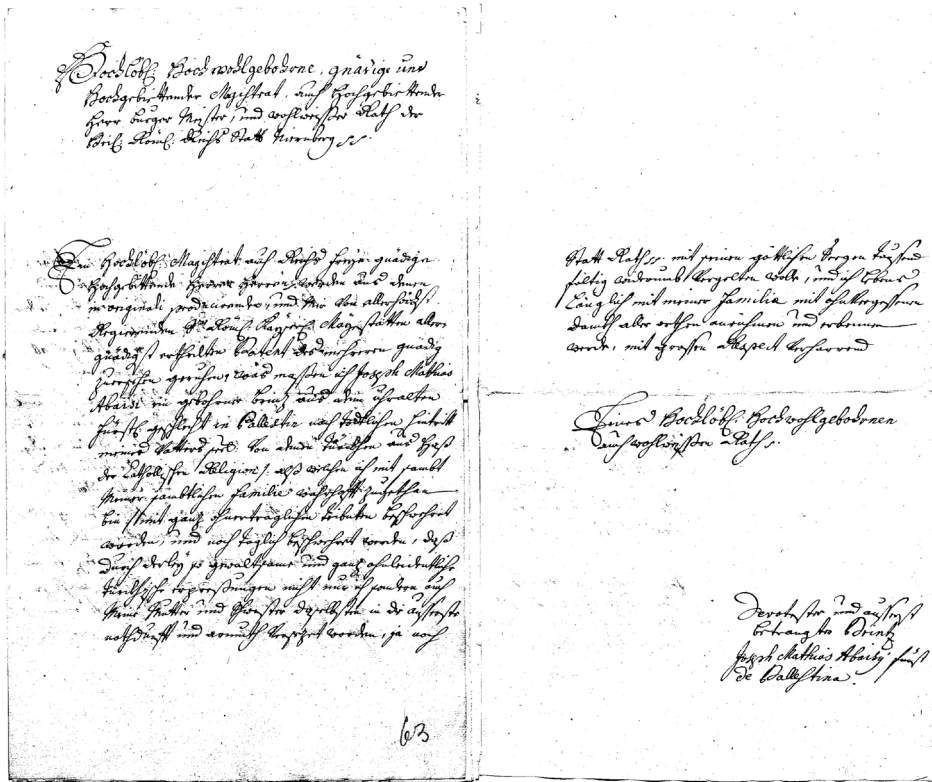


Fig. X.3: The first and last pages of the petition presented by Joseph Mathias Abaisi (presumably Yūsuf Matyas Ḥubaysh) to the mayor and council of Nuremberg in 1763. StAN, Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1571, petition by Joseph Matthias Abaisi (November 1763), fol. 1r and 3v. Reproduced with permission from Staatsarchiv Nuremberg.

The significance of the layout of Joseph Mathias Abaisi's petition is put into focus when it is compared to the supplication submitted by Yūsuf Ḥubaysh to the same body in 1731 (fig. X.4). The smaller margins here are mirrored in a language which does not indicate a significant status gap between petitioner and addressee.⁶⁷ In all likelihood, this shift over time reflects changing attitudes towards the self-styled Arabian princes as a result of several decades of exposure to similar visitors.

⁶⁷ StAN, Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1332, file concerning *Prinzen vom Berg Libano* (1731).

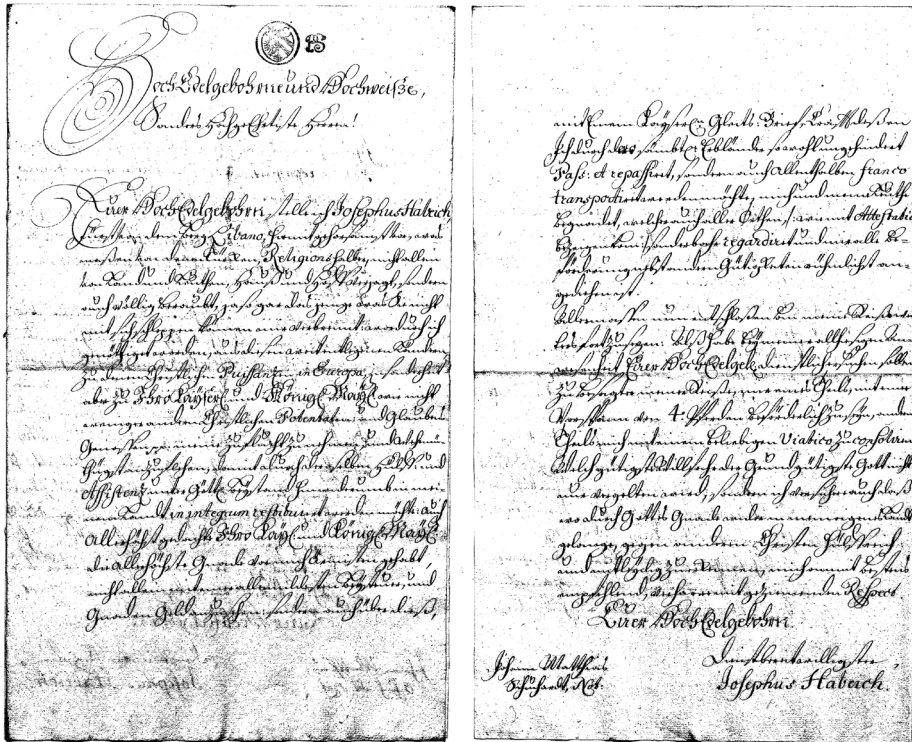


Fig. X.4: The first and last pages of the petition presented by Josephus Habeich (Yüsuf Hubaysh) to the mayor and council of Nuremberg in 1731. StAN, Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1332, file concerning *Prinzen vom Berg Libano* (1731), fol. 5r–5v. Reproduced with permission from Staatsarchiv Nuremberg.

From Discourse to Policy?

When we compare the reluctance of the *Hohe Schule's* governing body to give alms to Yüsuf Hūbaysh in 1785 to the reception of his namesake in Nuremberg in 1731, it is tempting to assume a connection between the authorities' responses and the discourse which claimed to unmask such Arabian princes as frauds. At the beginning of the century, Nuremberg paid not only room and board for Yüsuf and his two servants but also a substantial travel allowance. According to the city's account books, the sum expended on him amounted to just over 60 florins, not including the grant of free transportation.⁶⁸ Using the prices given in the invoice

⁶⁸ StAN, Losungamt, Stadtrechnungen, no. 128, fol. 87v (25 September 1731); StAN,

of the inn which had hosted him for comparison, this sum was equivalent to a staggering 1,200 mugs of beer costing 3 Kreuzer (corresponding to 0.05 florins) each. Even a typical lunch for Yūsuf and his entourage (consisting of soup, a roast and salad) cost between 54 and 56 Kreuzer (0.90–0.93 florins) and the innkeeper charged the same price for the three roast chickens and some bread provided as food for the journey out of Nuremberg.⁶⁹ When Moyses Hebesch (presumably Mūsā Ḥubaysh) visited the same city in 1780, however, this “alleged prince of Phoenicia” received just 1 ducat (equal to 3 florins, or one twentieth of what Yūsuf had been given) and was told “to continue his journey soon”, for which purpose Moyses, too, was granted free transportation.⁷⁰

The documentation of the decisions of the Nuremberg council is particularly relevant to studying changes in official practices. They show that the initially enthusiastic welcome extended to so-called Arabian princes in the 1730s cooled down long before Schultz’s and Niebuhr’s comments appeared in print. Already in 1745, “Giovanni Zobby, displaced prince from the Holy Land in Arabia” was given a mere 3 ducats (9 florins) and told “not to be a burden to anybody else here, but instead to seek his luck elsewhere the sooner, the better”.⁷¹ Although the timing does not exclude the possibility that such a decrease in generosity had been influenced by Korte’s travel account printed four years earlier, the fact that Zobby’s princely status was not called into question by the Nuremberg councillors makes it unlikely that their decision was related to Korte’s assessment of the Arabian

Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1332, file concerning *Prinzen vom Berg Libano* (1731), resolution concerning Josephus Habeich (18 September 1731).

⁶⁹ StAN, Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1332, file concerning *Prinzen vom Berg Libano* (1731), invoice from the inn *Zum wilten Mann* (20 September 1731). Conversions from Kreuzer to florin are based on Fritz Verdenhalven, *Alte Meß- und Währungssysteme aus dem deutschen Sprachgebiet: Was Familien- und Lokalgeschichtsforscher suchen* (Neustadt a. d. Aisch: Degener and Co., 1998), 101. The conversion rate given there for southern Germany in general is supported by the invoice. On the difficulties of converting and comparing historical currencies, see Hans-Jürgen Gerhard and Alexander Engel, *Preisgeschichte der vorindustriellen Zeit: Ein Kompendium auf Basis ausgewählter Hamburger Materialien* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), esp. 45–52.

⁷⁰ StAN, Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1571, resolution concerning Moyses Hebesch (15 January 1780), leaf 1v: *angeblichen Fürsten aus Phoenicien; sich in balden weiter zu begeben*. The conversion from ducat to florin is based on Johannes Burkhardt, *Vollendung und Neuorientierung des frühmodernen Reiches 1648–1763*, vol. 11 (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 2006), 463.

⁷¹ StAN, Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1442, petition of Giovanni Zobby (16 September 1745), leaf 2v: *Giovanni Zobby vertriebenen Printzens auß Heil. land in Arabien*; *ibid.*, resolution concerning Giovanni Zobby (16 September 1745), leaf 1r: *Ichme jedoch dabey vermelden, Niemand weiters allhier beschwerlich zu seyn, sondern sein Glück je eher je besser weiters zu suchen*.

princes as frauds. Rather, it must have owed to the particularly large number of princes who passed through Nuremberg that year. Zobby's visit in September had been preceded by that of Nassivo Gasseno in August and was followed, less than ten days later, by that of "the prince Victoria [sic] Nesser from Syria".⁷² Moreover, the resolution passed in response to Gasseno's request emphasized that he was to be given the same amount handed out "to one of his relatives" in 1744.⁷³ By the time of Nesser's visit, the council must have been so weary of hearing the same story that they reduced the sum to 2 ducats and informed him "that similar persons with similar requests have already been here".⁷⁴ In October 1746, the travel allowance given to Galifus Gazenus de Monte Libano (possibly the returned, but unrecognized Nassivo Gasseno) was further reduced to 1 ducat.⁷⁵ When yet another prince of Palestine Yūsuf Ḥubaysh (recorded as Joseph Abesse) came to Nuremberg in 1770, the council resolved that he be "dispatched with 1 ducat, taken away by coach the same afternoon, and told not to burden the citizens here".⁷⁶ A concern with protecting the citizens' finances appears time and again after the 1740s.

While the Nuremberg council generally adhered to the precedent established by previous visitors, it seems never to have formulated a general policy—unlike the government of Nassau-Diez, which had jurisdiction over Herborn. Since Prince William V of Orange-Nassau (r. 1751–1806), as Stadtholder of the Dutch Republic (r. 1751–95), resided in The Hague, the administration of the territory fell to the governing council in Dillenburg, which saw itself confronted with another Yūsuf Ḥubaysh (Joseph Aberisei) in 1774. Debating his request for a financial contribution and for free lodgings, the councillors concluded frankly:

Since noble beggars like the present supplicant are too costly and too much of a burden not to try and rid oneself of them as soon as possible, [...] he should be granted a contribution of around 20 florins from the princely

⁷² Ibid., resolution concerning Victoria Nesser (24 September 1745), leaf 1r: *Fürsten Victoria Nesser aus Syrien*.

⁷³ Ibid., resolution concerning Nassivo Gasseno (11 August 1745), leaf 1r: *einem seiner Anverwandten*.

⁷⁴ Ibid., resolution concerning Victoria Nesser (24 September 1745), leaf 1r: *daß dergleichen Personen, mit dergleichen gesuch schon allhier gewesen*.

⁷⁵ Ibid., resolution concerning Galifus Gazenus (21 October 1746), leaf 1r.

⁷⁶ StAN, Losungamt, SRB, Bündel 1571, resolution concerning Joseph Abesse (27 April 1770), leaf 1r: *mit einem Ducaten abzufertigen, nachmittags mittels eines Fuhrwercks fortzubringen und ihm auch zu bedeuten dem hiesigen Burgerschaft nicht beschwehrlich zu fallen*. For further examples, see *ibid.*, resolution concerning Elias Abaisci (6 September 1763); *ibid.*, resolution concerning Joseph Abaisy (27 January 1778).

coffers but should at the same time be told that he must depart hither without delay and abstain from engaging in the prohibited collection [of alms] in this territory.⁷⁷

The parallels to the decisions taken by the Nuremberg council are unmistakable, even if Nassau-Diez was financially more generous. But—surprisingly in light of the revelations of the authors discussed above—fears of fraud and imposture played no obvious role in the attempt to make these Arabian princes somebody else’s problem. Instead, the primary concern was the perception that the community’s limited resources would be unable to sustain such dignitaries in need.⁷⁸

In this context, the decisive factor in whether or not such Arabian princes were granted aid was not the persuasiveness of their narratives of suffering, but rather their general ability to convincingly demonstrate their social status with the aid of references and certificates. This was precisely why it was so important not to let them settle, as another memorandum written in connection with Yūsuf Ḥubaysh’s visit to Dillenburg makes clear: “[I]f [the prince] stays longer, he will get stuck here and, because of the certificates which he has shown, there will be reservations against expelling him from this town by force”.⁷⁹ Therefore, what was at stake from the point of view of these local authorities was not the possibility of fraud, but the anticipated financial and moral obligations—however exaggerated they may have been—stemming from claims which, by all appearances, were legitimate. Since there is nothing in the requests presented by these Arabian princes to suggest that they had any intention of permanently staying in central Europe, such pragmatic responses played into their hands and, by ostensibly accepting their stories, supported a narrative which made these migrants key players in the imagined space that was the Habsburg Mediterranean.

⁷⁷ Hess. HStA Wiesbaden, Abt. 172, Nr. 2580, leaf 10r: *Da dergleichen galante Bettler, wie der Supplicant ist, zu kostbar und zu lästig sind, als daß man sich ihrer nicht, so geschwind als möglich, wieder loszumachen suchen sollte: so wäre [...] dem Supplicanten eine Steuer von etwa 20 f. aus der herrschaftl[ichen] Kasse zu verwilligen, jedoch aber ihm zugleich zu bedeuten, wie er nicht nur seine Abreise von hier ungesäumt zu veranstalten, sondern auch alles verbotenen Collectirens in den hiesigen Landt[schaften], zu enthalten habe.*

⁷⁸ Bill, “Olivenprinzen”, 1199–1200 speculates about this point but without access to supporting evidence.

⁷⁹ Hess. HStA Wiesbaden, Abt. 172, Nr. 2580, leaf 6r: *dann wann er länger bleibet, so fährt er sich fest, und man würde doch Bedencken tragen, ihn in Betracht der begebenen Testimonien, mit Gewalt aus der Stadt zu weisen.*

Conclusion

Recalling the comments of contemporary experts, the frequency of visits of self-styled Arabian princes to cities like Nuremberg, and the evidence which points towards exaggerated claims of social rank, even the most sympathetic reader will find it difficult to avoid the impression that they were con artists. Their narratives, performances, collecting activities and geographical movements, in fact, are reminiscent of the so-called Thieves of the Cross, a group of apparently fraudulent Eastern Christian alms-collectors between the 1850s and the 1940s from what is now eastern Turkey, who took advantage of global evangelical networks to travel all over the world and gather enormous sums of money.⁸⁰ Successful performances of the roles of ‘princes of Palestine’, Phoenicia, Mount Lebanon and Arabia could likewise be lucrative when local authorities could be convinced to at least provide free transportation, lodgings and sustenance. In such cases, even occasional and relatively modest travel allowances would add up—especially if the wish of magistrates to rid themselves of the responsibility for such a prince in question resulted in a quick onward journey. Niebuhr had good cause to jest that “hardly anyone travels [through Germany] as quickly as a Maronite prince”.⁸¹ Yet he may well have underestimated the financial benefits of a swift tour through major centres with regular gifts of money given by local authorities versus a much slower journey involving private collections in the countryside. Even though all four contemporary authors—Jonas Korte, Stephan Schultz, Carsten Niebuhr and Johann David Michaelis—took it for granted that these Arabian princes really were Christians from Ottoman Syria, it would be surprising, indeed, if individuals of European origins had not attempted to cash in on the phenomenon, especially because the stereotypical petition narratives were so easy to replicate, could be spiced with information publicly available in the newspapers and, as individual stories, were and still are notoriously difficult to verify.⁸²

Although it is fair to say that some, but by no means all, elements of the stories of Arabian princes were fabricated, the sweeping allegations of fraud made by Korte and Schultz were extreme positions. For all his suggestions of foul play, Niebuhr was ready enough to admit that he had met one person whose

⁸⁰ Andrew MacDonald, “The Thieves of the Cross: Assyrian Charity Collectors and World History, 1860s–1940s”, *Past and Present* 229 (2015): 161–200.

⁸¹ Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung*, vol. 2, 461: *reist wohl selten einer so geschwind, als ein maronitischer Prinz.*

⁸² See also Bill, “Olivenprinzen”, 1203–05.

claims he considered to have been truthful.⁸³ Moreover, magistrates addressed the possibility of fraud only infrequently. As we have seen, they were much more concerned with conserving the resources of their communities. Perhaps paying a small amount of money to such Arabian princes passing through their territory and quickly sending them on their way was cheaper than investigating their claims, which was bound to take time and might introduce all sorts of other problems such as the difficulty of expelling the prince in question once he had settled. In doing so, local authorities thus not only facilitated, but even effectively encouraged the movements of the likes of Yūsuf Ḥubaysh, which in no small way made the Mediterranean an integral part of the perhaps not entirely ordinary lives of Habsburg subjects in the eighteenth century by giving them occasions to marvel at and pity exotic strangers from the Levant or, alternatively, worry about and get upset over their presence in central Europe.

⁸³ Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung*, vol. 2, 461–62.