

THE POSITION AND POWER OF SULTĀNS, AMĪRS AND THE MAMLŪK ARMIES DURING THE CIRCASSIAN MAMLŪK PERIOD (872-922/1468-1517)

By:

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Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan membincangkan kedudukan dan kuasa para sultan, amir dan tentera Mamlūk kira-kira setengah abad sebelum kejatuhan kerajaan Mamlūk. Di samping itu, ia juga meninjau keadaan atau suasana politik ketika itu. Isu-isu ini perlu diketengahkan kerana ia masih kurang dibicarakan dan tidak banyak penulisan yang dibuat mengenainya terutama kedudukan politik ketiga-tiga kumpulan ini sebelum berakhir kesultanan Mamlūk. Artikel ini menjelaskan bahawa kerajaan Mamlūk tidak mempunyai sistem atau kaedah yang tetap dalam perlantikan seseorang sultan dan jawatan ini adalah terbuka kepada kumpulan Mamlūk yang paling dominan. Seseorang sultan boleh digulingkan bila-bila masa sekiranya ia lemah dan tidak lagi dapat menjaga kepentingan kumpulan Mamlūk yang diwakilinya. Kuasanya juga kadang-kala terbatas mengikut kehendak ahli-ahli kumpulannya. Dalam tempoh yang dikaji, terdapat seramai 7 orang sultan yang memerintah dan pertikaian politik sering kali berlaku sama ada disebabkan faktor dalaman mahupun luaran. Kumpulan amīr pula kerap kali bertelagah untuk merebutkan pangkat dan mendapatkan kuasa. Amīr yang menjadi sultan akan cuba memperkukuhkan kedudukan dan kekuasaannya dengan menambahkan tentera peribadinya dan meminggirkan amīr lain yang berpengaruh. Manakala tentera Mamlūk yang terdiri daripada pelbagai kumpulan, mempunyai kedudukan yang berbeza-beza. Kumpulan Julbān yang merupakan sayap kanan seseorang sultan lebih tinggi kedudukannya dan kuasanya berbanding kumpulan lain yang dianaktirikan. Ini juga menjadi punca kepada ketidakstabilan politik ketika itu.

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INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the position and power of some groups who played important roles in Circassian Mamlūk¹ politics, namely, the *sultāns*, the *amīrs* and the Mamlūk armies. In addition, it also analyses the political situation during that time.

THE SULTĀNS

The position of *sultān* in the Mamlūk kingdom was unique in the sense that during its history of more than two and half centuries, formal and permanent regulation for the installation of the *sultān* were not existed. The election of *sultān* involving the *amīrs* was only a tradition in the Mamlūk kingdom. The leading *amīrs* from the dominant faction played an important role in determining who would be enthroned as *sultān*.² Unsurprisingly, they appointed one of them as *sultān* in order to protect their own interests. If the *sultān* could no longer protect their interests and provide for them benefits, they would easily overthrow and replace him.³ Normally the *sultān* would be elected from among the Mamlūks

¹ In Islamic history the word Mamlūk means a slave, more specifically a white slave, used in the military establishment. In the Ayyūbid kingdom, the Mamlūks served as the armies and later took the throne and appointed themselves as the *sultāns*. For more than two hundred and fifty years they ruled Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. The era of Mamluk rule can be divided into two periods. The first is from 648/1250 until 783/1381 and is known as the 'Turkish Mamlūk' (Baharī) period. The second period covers 784/1382 to 922/1517 and is known as the 'Circassian Mamlūk' (Burjī) period. The Turkish Mamlūk dynasty was established by Sultān Aybak and the Circassian Mamlūk dynasty were founded by Sultān Barqūq. It is widely accepted among historians that the Mamlūk kingdom reached its zenith under the Turkish *sultāns* and then fell into a prolonged phase of decline under the Circassians.

² P.M. Holt (1989), "Succession in the Early Mamlūk Sultanate", in E. Von Schuler (ed.). *XXIII Deutscher Orientalistentag: Ausgewählte Vorträge*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, pp. 146-148. The discussion and the decision made by the *amīrs* regarding the installation of Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī as *sultān* are the best examples of how they acted as the determiners. See Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Iyās al-Ḥanafī (1960), *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr fī Waqā'i' al-Duhūr*, vol. 4. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (ed.), Cairo: n.p., pp. 3-4.

³ Amalia Levanoni (1994). "The Mamlūk Conception of the Sultanate." *The International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 26, pp. 375-376.

who possessed a high rank in the government, and might be, for example a *Nā'ib al-Saltāna* (a deputy sultān, or viceroy), an *Atābak al-'Asākir* (a commander-in-chief of the armies), an *Ustādār* (grand major domo; official in the imperial court) or a *Dawādār* (executive secretary of the imperial court).⁴

The sultanate in the Mamlūk kingdom was neither based on a monarchy system nor hereditary.⁵ Some of the *sultāns* such as al-Zāhir Baybars, al-Manšūr Qalāwūn and al-Zāhir Barqūq successfully put their sons on the throne due to the consent of the leading amīrs. On the other hand, the *Waṣiyya* (will) left by a *sultān* for his son to inherit the throne was not necessarily obeyed by the *amīrs* and did not have any guarantee that it would be carried out. In fact, when the *sultāns* descendents acceded to the throne, most of them ruled for only a short time. For example, during the period under consideration, Sultān Qāyrbāy's heir, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, reigned for only three years while the exact power was exercised by the leading amīrs.⁶

After the dismissal or assassination of a *sultān*, a *Majlis al-Mashūra* (consultative council) would normally held by the leading *amīrs* from the dominant faction to discuss the appointment of a new *sultān*. After a collective decision had been reached and the *sultān* was chosen, the caliph and the *amīrs* would give their *Bay'a* (oath of allegiance) to him.⁷ The accession of a new *sultān* was not accomplished and valid without the *Bay'a* or the diploma of investiture from the caliph. Regarding the appointment of a new *sultān*, the *amīrs* sometimes took a longer period to select the most suitable person as *sultān* due to the strife and disagreement among the Mamlūks. Thus the Circassian Mamlūks did not have a *sultān* for a certain period. For example, there was no *sultān* for

⁴ Maḥmūd Razq Salīm (1965). *'Aṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālik wa Nitājuḥu al-'Ilmī wa al-Adabī*, vol. 1. n.p.: Dār al-Ḥamāmī, p. 65.

⁵ P.M. Holt (1975), "The Position and Power of the Mamlūk Sultān", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, no. 38, p. 240; Carl F. Petry (1981), *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 19.

⁶ Ibn Iyās (1960). *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 332-403.

⁷ The caliph also would bestow *al-khil'a al-khalifatiyyah* (the caliphal robe) upon the new *sultān*. Examples of this event can be clearly seen in the installation of Qāyrbāy, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, al-Zāhir Qanṣūh, al-Ashraf Jānbalāt, Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī and al-Ashraf Ṭumānbāy. See Ibn Iyās (1960). *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 4, 333, 405 & 439, vol. 4, p. 4, vol. 5, p. 105.

two days after the defeat and flight of Sulṭān al-Zāhir Qanṣūh, until al-Ashraf Jānbalāt was enthroned as a new *sulṭān*. In addition, non existence of *sulṭān* took place for fifty days between the death of Sulṭān Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī in the battle of Marj Dābiq and the installation of al-Ashraf Ṭūmānbāy.⁸

The *sulṭān* was the absolute head of the government. He appointed and removed the principal officials of all branches of government at will, including the caliph. He also commanded the armies in vital campaigns and signed important documents or decrees. As the final authority, he would personally hear all kinds of petitions or complaints from any subject of the empire, or would occasionally appoint someone to stand in for him.⁹ Nonetheless, as noted above, it was not unusual for the *sulṭān* to be under the influence or supervision of the *amīrs* upon making a decision or formulating a policy. This was especially the case when the *sulṭān* was lacking in ability or was still young and thus became a puppet of the great *amīrs*. During the reign of the young Nāṣir Muḥammad, exact power laid in the hands of al-Zāhir Qanṣūh.¹⁰ Meanwhile, during the reign of al-Ashraf Jānbalāt, who was not competent as a *sulṭān*, Amīr Ṭūmānbāy controlled and dominated him.¹¹

The *sulṭān* resided in the palace at the Citadel which had been the official residence of the rulers since the early years of the Mamlūk kingdom. This palace was also the site of the central government.

As far as the *sulṭān's* income is concerned, in 715/1315 the *sulṭān* was assigned five-twelfths of the fiefs of Egypt and also received certain taxes and revenues. During the reign of the Circassian Mamlūks, Sulṭān Barqūq took over additional fiefs and established new financial bureaus to provide his Mamlūks (the special bureau, *Mufrad*), in addition to the privy bureau (*Dīwān Khāṣṣ*) and the bureau of his personal property

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 439, vol. 5, p. 105.

⁹ William Popper (1955). *Egypt and Syria Under the Circassian Sulṭāns 1383-1468 A.D. - Systematic Notes to Ibn Taghrī Birdī's Chronicles of Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 83.

¹⁰ Ibn Iyās (1960), *op.cit.*, vol. 3, p. 335.

¹¹ The domination of *sulṭāns* by *amīrs* also occurred during the period of the Turkish Mamlūks, such as the control of Amīr Kitbughā over Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn who was still young and the mastery of Atābak Barqūq over Sulṭān al-Šāliḥ Ḥājji. See Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī (1972), *Kitāb al-Sulūk li Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, vol. 3. Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Ashūr (ed.), Cairo: Maṭba'āt Dār al-Kutūb, p. 474.

(*Dīwān al-Amlāk*). These additional fiefs and the bureaus were then maintained by the later Circassian *sultāns*.¹²

The position and role of the *sultāns* during the Circassian period were not much different to that of the previous *sultāns* during the Turkish period. This can be seen in the accounts of contemporary historians reported in the chronicles and royal biographies. Similar to the Turkish period, this period was partly characterized by its political instability. As mentioned above, one of the main causes of this instability was the non-existence of a fixed precedent for the succession of a new ruler. The post of *sultān* was opened to the leading *amīrs* from the dominant faction, and infact were sometimes challenged by other factions. Only a few *sultāns* successfully inherited the throne to their heirs, but still the heirs were not independent rulers but were rather supervised by the *amīrs*.¹³

According to Mamlūk sources, a few of the strong and competent *sultāns* had the opportunity to put the *amīrs* under their control and supervision. Among them were al-Zāhir Baybars, al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn, al-Ashraf Barsbāy, Ashraf Qāyṭbāy and Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī. They undertook various steps to safeguard their positions from interferences by the *amīrs*. They arrested and put the *amīrs* in prison, sent them into exile, and even murdered them. On the other hand, less violent actions taken by the *sultāns* were to award the *amīrs* promotion or assign them more fiefs.¹⁴

Within 872/1468 till 922/1517, seven individuals were installed as *sultāns*. Two of them ruled for a combined total of fourty-four years while the remaining five reigned for only five years. Indeed, there was a good deal of political turmoil during the reign of the latter, even while under the rule of the two longest reigning *sultāns* there were internal and external problems. The cause of this instability was obviously the frequent strife and *coup d'états* to usurp the throne by the *amīrs* during the period 901-906/1495-1501. This period also witnessed the reign of incompetent *sultāns* that worsen the political situation. The above events were recorded

¹² Popper (1955), *op.cit.*, p. 83.

¹³ P.M. Holt also states that the concept of hereditary monarchy failed to establish itself in the Mamlūk sultanate. Instead, the state was viewed as a "crowned republic", an "oligarchy of magnates" in which one of the *amīrs* would gain the throne by either election or usurpation. See P.M. Holt (1975), *op.cit.*, p. 240.

¹⁴ Anṭawān Khalīl Dūmīṭ (1980), *al-Dawla al-Mamlūkiyya - al-Tārīkh al-Siyāsī wa al-Iqtisādī wa al-'Askarī*. Beirut: Dār al-Ḥadātha, p. 21.

by historians of that time such as Ibn Taghrī Birdī (d. 874/1469), ‘Abd al-Basīṭ (d. 920/1514), al-Şayrafī (d. 900/1495) and Ibn Iyās (d. 930/1524).

The following is a brief description of the sultans who ruled from 872/1468 until 922/1517 and the political situation during their reigns:

i) Al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy (872-901/1468-1495)

Abū al-Naşr Sayf al-Dīn al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy al-Maḥmūdī al-Zāhirī was enthroned as *sultān* on 6 Rajab 82/31 January 1468 at the age of fifty-five years. His early history in Egypt began when a rich merchant, Khawājā Maḥmūd brought him as a slave to that country in 839/1435, and he was then purchased by Sultān al-Ashraf Barsbāy for the price of fifty *Dīnārs*. Sultān Jaqmaq, the successor of al-Ashraf Barsbāy made Qāyṭbāy a free man and appointed him as *Khāṣṣakī* (bodyguard) and then as *Dawādār Saghīr* (assistant to the executive secretary of the imperial court). Under Sultān al-Ashraf Īnāl, Qāyṭbāy was promoted to *Amīr ‘Ashara* (*amīr* of ten) and at the end of Sultān Khushqaddam’s rule, he was appointed as to *Muqaddam Alf* (commander of a thousand). His career was subsequently prospered as he held the post of *Ra’s Nawbat al-Nuwwāb* (chief of the guard) during the reign of Sultān al-Zāhir Yalbāy. His highest post was *Atābak al-‘Asākir* (commander-in-chief), which he attained during the rule of the incompetent Sultān al-Zāhir Timurbughā.¹⁵ It was common especially in the Circassian period that the holder of this post being a successor of the *sultān*. Within his services of more than 20 years, Sultān Qāyṭbāy gained wide experience in Mamlūk politics which enabled him to perpetuate his rule for more than a quarter of a century.

There was, however, some political instability during Sultān Qāyṭbāy’s reign due to internal and external problems.¹⁶ Among the challenging

¹⁵ Ibn Iyās (1960), *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶ Although some modern scholars, such as John L. Meloy, have stated that Qāyṭbāy had started to experience political and economic difficulties in the 1480’s, he had, in fact, already faced political and economic problems shortly after his enthronement. The historians of the time mention that in the first year of his reign he had to face a threat from Shāh Suwār and encountered difficulties in acquiring money to cover military campaigns. See John L. Meloy (2001). “Copper Money in Late Mamlūk Cairo: Chaos or Control”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, no. 44 (3), p. 294. See also ‘Alī b. Dāwūd al-Jawharī al-Şayrafī (1970), *Īnbā’ al-Ḥaşr bi Abnā’ al-‘Aşr*. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (ed.), Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Madānī, pp. 28-30; ‘Abd al-Basīṭ b. Khalīl b. Shāhin al-Malaṭī, *Nayl al-Amal fi Dhayl al-Duwal*, (Ms. Huntington 610), ff. 237b-245b.

internal problems were the chaos and hostility created by his own Mamlūks, namely, the *Julbān* (the Mamlūk of the ruling sulṭān). In addition to this, the Bedouin in the Upper and Lower Egypt revolted against him by plundering the towns and villagers as well as disturbing agricultural and commercial activities. This condition forced Sulṭān Qāyṭbāy to send a number of military expeditions to stop the revolt.¹⁷

In term of the external problems faced by Sulṭān Qāyṭbāy, a revolt was launched by Shāh Suwār of Dhū al-Ghādir in Southeastern Anatolia whom the Ottomans secretly supported. After several campaigns, Sulṭān Qāyṭbāy finally defeated him in 876/1472.¹⁸ Conflict with the Ottomans had caused several wars started from 888-895/1483-1489 and it was only in 897/1491 that the wars came to an end when a peace treaty was signed. This was the consequence of the Ottoman's defeat at Kaysariyya in 896/1490.¹⁹

The above problems, especially the external ones, had caused economic difficulties to Sulṭān Qāyṭbāy since large amounts of money had been used to cover the military expenses.²⁰ Historians of that time report that the treasury was lacking of sufficient funds and consequently new policies were introduced to overcome the monetary crisis such as *Muṣādara* (confiscation), increasing taxation and reducing wages. Furthermore, Sulṭān Qāyṭbāy also tried to use the *Waqf* (pious endowment) for the above purpose. Sulṭān Qāyṭbāy died in 901/1495 when he was eighty-five. He ruled for nearly thirty years, the longest reign in the Circassian Mamlūk period.²¹

¹⁷ For example, see Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Mahāsīn Yūsuf b. Taghrī Birdī al-Atābakī (1932). *Ḥawādith al-Duhūr fi Madā al-Ayyām wa al-Shuhūr*, vol. 3. William Popper (ed.), California: University of California Press, pp. 696 & 78.

¹⁸ Carl F. Petry (1993). *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamlūk Sulṭāns al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy and Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī in Egypt*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, pp. 57-72.

¹⁹ Jean-Claude Garcin (1998). "The Regime of the Circassian Mamlūks," in Carl F. Petry (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Egypt - Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 296.

²⁰ *Tārīkh al-Mālik al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy*, (Or. 3028), ff. b, 8a, 9a & 10a.

²¹ Ibn Iyās (1960), *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 14-15, 24 & 324-325; Abū al-Falāḥ 'Abd al-Ḥayy b. al-'Imād al-Ḥanbalī (n.d.). *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār Man Dhahab*, vol. 8. Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijārī, p. 9.

ii) Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy (901-904/1495-1498)

Abū al-Sa'ādat Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy was born in 887/1482 and was installed as *sulṭān* on 26 Dhū al-Qa'da 901/6 August 1495, a day before his father's death and he was fourteen years old.²² Since he was too young, his reign was troubled with conflicts and wars among the Mamlūks determined to usurp the throne. The exact power was in the hand of Atābak Qanṣūh Khamṣi'a, who subsequently dethroned al-Nāṣir. Atābak Qanṣūh Khamṣi'a sat on the throne for only a few days and later fled to Syria after being defeated by al-Nāṣir's uncle, al-Zāhir Qanṣūh.²³ For the second time, the young *sulṭān* had no power due to the domination of al-Zāhir Qanṣūh over him.

A chaotic and disorderly political situation re-arose when one of the *amīrs*, namely Aqbardī al-Dawādār, attempted a *coup d'état* in Ramaḍān 902/May 1497. He persuaded the tribes of Banū Wā'il and Banū 'Azzāla to support his uprising. Meanwhile, al-Zāhir Qanṣūh with support from the tribe of Banū Hirām defended themselves from the attack of Aqbardī. According to Ibn Iyās, weapons such as firearms and artillery were used in the war between the two sides. Aqbardī al-Dawādār was finally defeated and fled to Syria. Consequently, the position of al-Zāhir Qanṣūh became stronger and he was then appointed to various posts such as *Dawādār* and *Ustādār*.

The reign of Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ended when one of the *amīrs*, namely Tūmānbāy, assassinated him in Rabī' al-Awwal 904/October 1498, when he was seventeen years old.²⁴ Sulṭān al-Nāṣir's reign which lasted for three years and three months did not present any point of interest except the hostility and conflict between the Mamlūks. Some of the historians referred to him as a brutal and cruel ruler²⁵ since he extorted money by whipping and torturing in order to meet the wild demands of the Mamlūks around him. During his reign, the *Julbān* was

²² Ibn al-Ḥanbalī (1972). *Ḍurr al-Ḥabab fī Tārīkh A'yān Ḥalab*, vol. 2. Maḥmūd Ḥamd al-Fākhūrī & Yaḥyā Zakariyā 'Abbāra (eds.), Damascus: Manshūrat Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, p. 56.

²³ Ibn Khalīl Shāhīn al-Malaṭī (1987), *Nuzhat al-Asāṭīn fī Man Waliya Miṣr min al-Salāṭīn*. Muḥammad Kamāl al-Dīn 'Izz al-Dīn 'Alī (ed.), Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, pp. 148-149.

²⁴ Ibn Iyās (1960), *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 335, 365-371 & 401-403.

²⁵ *Nuzhat al-Nāzirīn fī Asmā' al-Khulafā' wa al-Salāṭīn*, ff. 88b-89a.

also reported to have created havoc by stealing clothes from shops and goods from the market.²⁶

iii) Al-Zāhir Qanṣūh (904-905/1498-1499)

Al-Zāhir Abū Sa'īd Qanṣūh b. Qanṣūh, uncle of the previous ruler, was installed as the new *sultān* in Rabi' al-Awwāl 904/October 1498 at the age of thirty years old.²⁷ The acceleration of his promotion from ordinary soldier to the throne was unusual since it took only six years. He faced a lot of difficulties in his short reign and lacked necessary experience in politics to resolve the situation. The first action taken after his enthronement was to send a military expedition to crush his opponent, Aqbardī al-Dawādār, in Aleppo. Aqbardī al-Dawādār finally agreed to submit to al-Zāhir Qanṣūh and served as his viceroy in Ṭarāblus. In Egypt, Sultān al-Zāhir Qanṣūh sent several expeditions to crush the Banū 'Azzāla at Buḥayrā because of their misdeeds and rebellions against the *Kāshif* (inspector-governor) of that province. The political situation worsen when Sultān al-Zāhir Qanṣūh faced an uprising from another of his viceroys in Shām, Amīr Qaṣruwah. Sultān al-Zāhir Qanṣūh failed to defeat him because simultaneously, his two *amīrs* in Egypt named Atābak Jānbalāṭ and al-Dawādār Ṭūmānbāy, revolted with a determination to usurp the throne. The reign of Sultān al-Zāhir Qanṣūh ended when he was defeated by Atābak Jānbalāṭ and he then escaped and went into hiding.²⁸

iv) Al-Ashraf Jānbalāṭ (905-906/1500)

Al-Ashraf Abū al-Nāṣir Jānbalāṭ b. Yashbak al-Ashrafī was enthroned as the new *sultān* in Dhū al-Qa'da 905/May 1500, a day after the end of al-Zāhir Qanṣūh's reign, at the age of forty years old. During his short reign, he was supervised and controlled by Amīr Ṭūmānbāy. The main problems faced by Sultān al-Ashraf Jānbalāṭ were the rebellions of Qaṣruwah, the viceroy of Shām, and Dawlat Bāy, the viceroy of Aleppo. Sultān al-Ashraf Jānbalāṭ committed a big mistake when he sent Amīr Ṭūmānbāy to crush the revolt since the latter had his own hidden political agenda.

²⁶ Ibn Iyās (1960), *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 388-395.

²⁷ Ibn Khalīl Shāhīn al-Malaṭī (1987). *op.cit.*, p. 150.

²⁸ Ibn Iyās (1960), *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 406-408, 414-416, 420-426 & 433-437.

Amir Tūmānbāy on the other hand, affiliated himself with the rebels and declared himself *sultān* with the title al-‘Ādil,²⁹ and later proceeded to Egypt with his armies and besieged the Citadel. A battle took place between the two parties which resulted in a defeat of Sultān al-Ashraf Jānbalāt, after a reign of only six months and six days. He was made prisoner at Alexandria and eventually killed in 906/1501. According to Ibn Iyās, Sultān al-Ashraf Jānbalāt’s policies were very cruel. For example, in order to cover his military expenses, he confiscated properties belonging to the magnates, merchants, Jews, Copts and others.³⁰

v) Al-‘Ādil Tūmānbāy (906/1500-1501)

Al-‘Ādil Abū al-Naṣr Tūmānbāy al-Ashrafī was declared *sultān* in Jumādā al-Akhīr 906/December 1500 after defeating al-Ashraf Jānbalāt and took control over Cairo.³¹ His life before the enthronement was full of evil deeds and crimes. He was the one who murdered Sultān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and committed fraud on the former *sultān* in order to usurp the throne. In the early part of his reign, Sultān al-‘Ādil Tūmānbāy pretended to be kind, but later began to pursue open brutal policies. Qaṣruwah, who had fully supported the rebellion in Shām, was arrested and murdered. The same action was taken against those being suspected against him. Consequently, some *amīrs* launch an uprising in Ramaḍān 906/March 1501 and successfully defeated Sultān al-‘Ādil Tūmānbāy, who was arrested and murdered. The reign of Sultān al-‘Ādil Tūmānbāy lasted for only one hundred days and was characterized by cruelty, extortion and continual riot.³²

vi) Al-Ashraf Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī (906-922/1501-1516)

Al-Ashraf Abū al-Naṣr Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī was installed a new *sultān* on 1 Shawwāl 906/20 April 1501 when he was sixty years old.³³ He had wide experience in Mamlūk politics and administration as he had previously

²⁹ On hearing of Tūmānbāy’s revolution, al-Ashraf Jānbalāt in Egypt promptly took oaths from the *amīrs* in the presence of the caliph and *qādīs* to obey and not betray him. See Ibn Iyās (1960), *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 436, 446-454 & 463.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 443 & 456-463.

³¹ Ibn Khalīl Shāhīn al-Malaṭī (1987), *op.cit.*, p. 154.

³² Ibn Iyās (1960), *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 465-466, 476-477, vol. 4, p. 9.

³³ Ibn Khalīl Shāhīn al-Malaṭī (1987), *op.cit.*, p. 155.

served in Egypt or Syria during the reign of Qāyrbāy. This was an advantage that helped him to maintain his rule for more than fifteen years until the fall of the Mamlūk kingdom. The posts that he had held were *Kāshif* (inspector or governor) of Upper Egypt (in 886/1481-2), *Amīr 'Ashara* (amir of ten) (in 889/1484), governor of Tarsus, *Ḥājib al-Ḥujjāb* (grand chamberlain) of Aleppo (in 894/1489), governor of Malatya, *Taqdīmāt Alf* (amīr of a thousand), *Ra's Nawbāt al-Nuwwāb* (commander of the guard) (in 905/1499), *Dawādār* (executive secretary of the imperial court) (in 906/1501) and *Ustādār* (major-domo; official in the imperial court) (in 906/1501).³⁴

Sulṭān al-Ghawrī's rule was interrupted by internal and external problems. One of the internal problems that he encountered was the conspiracy of his *amīr*, Miṣrbāy whom the *Sulṭān* exterminated on 12 Ramaḍān 907/21 March 1502 is another *amīr*, Qāy al-Rajabī, made a secret pact with Sībāy, the viceroy of Aleppo, to overthrow him but the plan was aborted in 910/1505 when Qāy al-Rajabī was arrested.³⁵ Another important event during Sulṭān al-Ghawrī's reign was the riots and threats from the *Qarānīṣ* (the Mamlūks of the former *sulṭāns*) who were dissatisfied when their privileges were reduced following the appointment of the *Julbān* replacing them. At the same time, the *Julbān* took the opportunity to demand high payment and constantly caused disturbances.³⁶ This pressure led Sulṭān al-Ghawrī to use the *Waqf* and impose heavy taxes on the people to cover the expenses of the *Julbān*. Sulṭān al-Ghawrī also encountered threats from the Bedouin who continually created havoc and disorder.

Besides the above problems, Sulṭān al-Ghawrī's reign also faced external threats from the Portuguese and the Ottomans. The emergence of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean after their success in circumnavigating the African continent affected the Mamlūk's income. The Portuguese took over the commerce and spice trade which had previously been monopolised by the Mamlūks. Sulṭān al-Ghawrī spent a lot of money³⁷ in blocking the control and the advancement of the Portuguese, but his

³⁴ Ibn al-Ḥanbalī (1972). *op.cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 46-47.

³⁵ Ibn Iyās (1960). *op.cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 17, 27, 73.

³⁶ P.M. Holt (1978). "Kānṣawh al-Ghawri," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam (New Edition)*. E. Von Donzel *et.al.* (eds.), Leiden: E.J. Brill, vol. 4, p. 552.

³⁷ Ibn Iyās (1960). *op.cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 5-16, 79 & 84.

attempts were in vain.³⁸ In northern Syria, Sulṭān al-Ghawrī was confronted by the threat of Sulṭān Salīm who planned to extend his power. After Sulṭān Salīm defeated Shāh Ismā‘īl of Şafawid in the battle of Jaldīrān on 2 Rajab 920/23 August 1514, he attacked and defeated ‘Alā’ al-Dawla of Dhū al-Ghādir, supporter of the Mamlūk sultanate, in Rabī‘ al-Thāni 921/June 1515. The reason given by Sulṭān Salīm for attacking ‘Alā’ al-Dawla was the refusal of the latter to help him in the war with Shāh Ismā‘īl.³⁹

Sulṭān al-Ghawrī spent a large amount of money on preparing the military campaign against the Ottoman armies. Since the state was facing financial problems,⁴⁰ necessary funds were obtained by various means such as confiscation, extortion, reduction of stipends or requiring some individuals to cover the expenses of the armies. Sulṭān al-Ghawrī with his armies embarked from Cairo on 15 Rabī‘ al-Thāni 922/18 May 1516 and on 10 Jumādā al-Thāni/11 July, the Mamlūk troops reached Aleppo. Al-Ashraf Ṭūmānbāy was appointed as *Nā’ib al-Ghayba* (the acting sultan during the sovereign’s absence) in Egypt. Negotiations between the two parties failed and war broke out at Maraj Dābiq on 25 Rajab 922/24 August 1516. The Mamlūks were severely defeated due to the defection of some *amīrs* and the superiority of the Ottomans’ weapons.⁴¹ Sulṭān al-Ghawrī died in the battle after ruling the Mamlūk kingdom for more than fifteen years.

³⁸ This can be seen in the battle of Diu in Dhū al-Qa‘da 914/February 1509 where the Mamlūk navy was severely defeated by the Portuguese. See Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Ṭūlūn al-Şāliḥī al-Dimashqī (1973). *I’lām al-Warā bi Man Waliya Nā’iban min al-Atrāk bi Dimashq al-Shām al-Kubrā aw Tārīkh al-Shām min Qiyām Dawlāt al-Mamālik fī Mişr ilā Şadr al-‘Ahd al-‘Uthmān*. ‘Abd al-‘Azīm Ḥāmid Khaṭṭāb (ed.), Cairo: Maṭba‘at Jāmi‘at ‘Ayn Shams, p. 17.

³⁹ There were other reasons led the Ottomans to extend their power over Syria and Egypt, such as the economic, military and strategic importance of the two countries. See Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Mun‘im al-Sayyid al-Rāqid (1968). *Al-Ghazw al-‘Uthmānī li Mişr wa Natā’ijuh ‘alā al-Waṭan al-‘Arabī*. Cairo: Mu‘assasāt Shabāb al-Jāmi‘a, pp. 83-138.

⁴⁰ Al-Shaykh Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī (1945). *al-Kawākib al-Sā’ira bi Manāqib al-‘Ulamā’ al-Mi’a al-‘Ashira*, vol. 2. Jibrā’īl Sulaymān Jabbūr (ed.), Beirut: al-Maṭba‘ah al-Amīrikāniyya, pp. 294-300.

⁴¹ For the further information about the use of advance weapons by the Ottomans in the battle of Marj Dābiq, see David Ayalon (1978). *Gunpowder and Firearms in the Mamlūk Kingdom*. Great Britain: Frank Cass and Company Limited, pp. 135-144.

vii) Al-Ashraf Ṭūmānbāy (922/1516-1517)

Al-Ashraf Abū al-Naṣr Ṭūmānbāy was the last Mamlūk *sultān* who had been purchased as a Mamlūk by Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī to serve under Qāyṭbāy and was then freed by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. Previously, during the reign of Sultān al-Ghawrī, he had been appointed as a *Dawādār* and *Nā'ib Ghayba*. After the news of al-Ghawrī's death was confirmed, the *amīrs* unanimously agreed to elect him as *sultān* and was enthroned on 14 Ramaḍān 922/11 October 1516. He ruled during the last days of the Mamlūk kingdom which saw previous *sultān* being killed and the Ottomans marching towards Egypt. He made an initial attempt to block the Ottomans' advance by sending troops under the command of Jānbirdī al-Ghazālī but was defeated by Sinān Pasha, the commander of the Ottoman army at Baisān.⁴²

Sultān al-Ashraf Ṭūmānbāy then endeavoured to take initiative by advancing to the frontier although was disagreed by his *amīrs*. They proposed that he waited for the advancement of Ottoman army at Raydāniyya. A battle between both parties broke out at Raydāniyya on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijja 922/22 January 1517 and the Mamlūks were defeated by the far superior firepower of the Ottomans. Sultān al-Ashraf Ṭūmānbāy fled and Sultān Salīm entered Cairo on 4 Muḥarram 923/26 January 1517. Later, Sultān al-Ashraf Ṭūmānbāy tried to make a pocket of resistance at Būlāq, but he retreated to Gīza after receiving a big assaultment from the Ottomans. It was at this place that the Mamlūks tried to defend their kingdom for the last time but were defeated on 10 Rabī' al-Awwāl 923/2 April 1517. Sultān al-Ashraf Ṭūmānbāy then fled to the Bedouin of Buḥayra but was eventually handed over to Sultān Salīm on 2 Rabī' al-Thāni 923/23 April 1517 and he was hanged.⁴³ With his death, the Mamlūk sultanate came to an end and marked the beginning of the Ottomans rule over Syria and Egypt. This event also witnessed the end of the title of *sultān* in Egypt in the Middle Ages.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibn Iyās (1960). *op.cit.*, vol. 5: 102-105 & 129.

⁴³ Al-Rāqid (1968). *op.cit.*, pp. 188-198.

⁴⁴ J.H. Kramers & C.E. Bosworth (1997). "Sultan, 1. In Early Usage and in the Central Land of Islam," in C.E. Bosworth *et.al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam - New Edition*, vol. 9. Leiden: Brill, p. 851.

THE AMĪRS

Officers of the Mamlūk army were called *amīrs*. Prior to their appointment, they were the ordinary Mamlūks who had received their training in the barracks and were then manumitted. After manumission they would normally be awarded the rank of *Amīr 'Ashara* (*amīr* of ten) and were also given horses, clothes, some money and *Iqtā'* (fief) in commemoration of this appointment.⁴⁵ An *amīr* who worked hard would be promoted to a higher position by the wish of the *sultān*. In general, only Mamlūks, or sometimes sons of Mamlūks, became *amīrs* and the number of *amīrs* was variable and was subject to change at the will of the *sultān*.⁴⁶ It is worth noting that the *amīrs* were not only the commanders of the armed forces but also holders of great households and administrative offices. Indeed, during the Mamlūk period, the highest ranking *amīrs* played an important role in Mamlūk politics due to the power they held, and *sultān* was elected from among them. The senior *amīrs* also acted as the *sultān's* advisory council or cabinet.⁴⁷

The position of *amīrs* witnessed a little change from the beginning of Mamlūk kingdom until its final downfall. The *amīrs* from the strongest faction became rulers and took control of military activities as well as the executive authority.⁴⁸ They maintained their interests by dominating and supervising the *sultān* and might overthrow him if he could not maintain their interests. After all, the *sultān* had been an *amīr* previously and was enthroned merely as their representative.⁴⁹ As mentioned above, among the *sultāns* who were deposed by the *amīrs* were al-Zāhir Qanṣūh, al-Ashraf Jānbalāt and al-Ādil Ṭūmānbāy. The political situation from 901/1495 till 906/1501 was very unsettled as the struggle of the *amīrs* for the throne intensified. They were always awaiting an opportunity to seize the highest position and this led to internal strife and rivalry.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Salīm (1965). *op.cit.*, vol. 1, p. 85.

⁴⁶ Dūmiṭ (1980). *op.cit.*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ P.M. Holt (1977). "The Structure of Government in the Mamlūk Sultanate", P.M. Holt (ed.), *The Eastern Mediterranean Lands in the Period of the Crusades*. England: Aris & Phillips, p. 51.

⁴⁸ Robert Irwin (1986). "Factions in Medieval Egypt", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. pp. 231 & 232.

⁴⁹ Levanoni (1994). *op.cit.*, p. 375.

⁵⁰ Petry (1981). *op.cit.*, pp. 19 & 20.

The Mamlūk sources mention that during the Turkish period there had already been competition among the *amīrs*. For example, in the reign of Sultān al-Şāliḥ Ḥājjī, the power rested in the hands of Barqūq and Birkat al-Jūbānī. It seems that both of them shared power in order to rule the state. However, Barqūq finally gained full power after defeating Birkat al-Jūbānī and then took the opportunity to get rid of his other rivals. When he felt that his position was secure and the time had come for him to be a *sultān*, he told the *Umarā'*, the caliph and the four chief *Qādīs* that the government now needed a strong and competent *sultān* to solve the current problems in the state caused by the chaos of the Bedouin and the rebellion of the *amīrs* in Syria. Finally, he was successful in convincing them and they agreed to depose Sultān al-Şāliḥ Ḥājjī and install Barqūq as the new *sultān*.⁵¹

When a *sultān* was still an infant or young, the *amīrs* from the dominant faction ran the state and took over the administration. For instance, during the reign of Sultān al-Nāşir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (693-694/1293-1294) power was exercised by Amīr Kitbughā, who was a *Nā'ib Saltāna* at the time. Amīr Kitbughā then dethroned the *sultān* and took his place.⁵² When al-Manşūr Muḥammad b. Ḥājjī was the *sultān* in the period 762-764/1361-1363, Amīr Yalbughā controlled the government and the infant *sultān* ruled in only name. Other examples include al-Muzaffar Aḥmad (824/1421), the son of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh, al-'Azīz Yūsuf (842/1348), the son of al-Ashraf Barsbāy, al-Manşūr 'Uthmān (857/1453), the son of al-Zāhir Jaqmaq, and al-Mu'ayyad Abū al-Faḥ (865/1460-1461), the son of al-Ashraf Īnāl, all of whom were young *sultāns*. Their reigns were regarded as temporary or transitional periods until dominant *amīrs* seized the sultanate.⁵³ The same situation can be seen in the period 901-904/1495-1498, when al-Zāhir Qanşūh took control of the state because the *sultān* was only fourteen years old when he ascended the throne. When a *sultān* was incapable or incompetent, the *amīrs* would take the opportunity to supervise him. This can be seen in the reign of Sultān al-Ashraf Jānbālāt, when power was in the hands of Amīr Tūmānbāy.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Al-Maqrīzī (1972). *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 388-389 & 474-475.

⁵² Ḥakīm Amīn 'Abd al-Sayyīd (1966). *Qiyām Dawlat al-Mamālik al-Thāniyya*. Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmiyya lil Ṭibā'at wa al-Nashr, p. 18.

⁵³ Levanoni (1994). *op.cit.*, p. 385.

⁵⁴ Ibn Iyās (1960). *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 335, 446-447 & 463.

The important post in the Mamlūk administration with responsibility for the army, namely *Atābak al-‘Asākir*, was often the target of the *amīrs* and they competed to occupy this post because through it they could acquire greater power. Indeed, it was common, especially in the Circassian period, for the *Atābak al-‘Asākir* to succeed the *sultān* on the throne.⁵⁵

The Mamlūk sources occasionally report that in order to strengthen their own position and to win in their struggle with other *amīrs*, the *amīrs* increased the number of their Mamlūks (*Mamālik al-Umarā’*). For example, during the period 742-815/1341-1412 the *amīrs* had many Mamlūks in their service. For example, Qarāsunqur had six hundred Mamlūks, Asandumūr, governor of Tripoli, had five hundred, and Qawṣūn al-Nāṣirī had seven hundred. The grandest of all *amīrs* with respect to the number of his Mamlūks was Yalbughā al-Nāṣiri al-Khāṣṣaki who, according to some sources, had 3,500 Mamlūks.⁵⁶ The number of Mamlūks that *amīrs* had was also a symbol of their strength and a source of pride.⁵⁷

The habit of fighting against adversaries was common among the *amīrs*. This was caused by selfishness, egotism and jealousy of other *amīrs* who had higher rank and were closer to the *sultān*.⁵⁸ From the political history of the Mamlūks it is apparent that the *amīrs* could only be controlled by strong *sultāns* such as Baybars, Qalāwūn, Mu’ayyad Shaykh and Barsbāy. During the period 872-922/1468-1517, only Sultān al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy and Sultān Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī had the ability to keep the *amīrs* in order, even though sometimes they rebelled. Various actions were taken by *sultāns* to prevent the *amīrs* rebelling or usurping the throne. For example, the *sultāns* would appoint them to higher posts or assign them larger fiefs. During the period 872-922/1468-1517, on the other hand, the *sultāns* tended to kill the *amīrs* who were their rivals. This can be seen during the reigns of al-Zāhir Qanṣūh, al-Ashraf Jānbalāt, al-‘Adil Ṭūmānbāy and Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī.

⁵⁵ David Ayalon (1954). *op.cit.*, no. 16, p. 58.

⁵⁶ Gharas al-Dīn Khalīl b. Shāhīn al-Zāhirī (1894). *Kitāb Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik wa Bayān al-Ṭuruq wa al-Masālik*. Paul Ravaisse (ed.), Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, p. 148.

⁵⁷ ‘Abd Mun’īm Mājid (1964). *Dawlat Salāṭīn al-Mamālik wa Rasūmuhum fī Miṣr - Dirāsa Shāmila li al-Nuzum al-Siyāsiyya*, vol 1. Cairo: Maktabāt al-Anjlū al-Miṣriyya, p. 148.

⁵⁸ Dūmiṭ (1980). *op.cit.*, pp. 18, 66-67 & 74.

It is worth noting that during the Circassian period some *amīrs* did not have enough experience to be proficient in military matters or administration. Nevertheless, because of their relation with the *sultān*, they were frequently and rapidly promoted. For example, it only took al-Zāhir Qanṣūh six years to become *sultān* from being an ordinary mamlūk, whilst other *sultāns* sometimes served for more than twenty years before their enthronement.⁵⁹ The Mamlūk sources report that the *sultāns* in the Circassian period did not really follow the fundamental principles of the Mamlūk system such as existed during the Turkish period, in which the training of Mamlūks was very tough and the system of selecting and appointing them to *amīrs* was very strict. Promotion in the earlier period was also very slow and rare.⁶⁰

Each of the *amīrs* would be awarded a fief based on his rank. They managed the fief on their own and the income from it would be used to cover their Mamlūks' expenses.⁶¹ When an *amīr* died, his fief would not be inherited by his son, but rather the *sultān* would take it and assign it to another *amīr*.⁶²

THE MAMLŪK ARMIES

The Mamlūk armed forces played a very important role in the continuity of the kingdom because they were the actual strength of the empire,

⁵⁹ For example, Sultān al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and Sultān Qāyṭbāy. See Kamaruzaman Yusoff, 'The Reign of the Mamlūk Sultān, Qalāwūn, (678/1279-689/1290)', (M.Litt. Thesis, University of Edinburgh), pp. 29-40; Ibn Iyās (1960), *op.cit.*, vol. 3, p. 3.

⁶⁰ David Ayalon (1953). *op.cit.*, no. 15, p. 475.

⁶¹ For further information about *amīrs*' households, see Donald S. Richards (1998), "Mamlūk Amīrs and Their Families and Households", in Thomas Philip & Ulrich Haarmann (eds.). *The Mamlūks in Egyptian Politics and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 32-54.

⁶² Felix Fabri and Arnold Von Harff, the travellers to Egypt and Holy Land saw that the *awlād al-nās* could not succeed the father in any position which included the fief. Arnold Von Harff (1967). *The Pilgrimage of Arnold Von Harff, Knight from Cologne, through Italy, Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Ethiopia, Nubia, Palestine, Turkey, France and Spain, which he accomplished in the years 1496 to 1499*. Nendeln: The Hakluyt Society, p. 122; Ulrich Haarmann (1998), "Joseph's Law: The Careers and Activities of Mamluk Descendants Before the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt", in Thomas Philip & Ulrich Haarmann (eds.). *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, pp. 57-58.

expanding Mamlūk authority and defending the state from internal and external enemies. Their number was not fixed and varied from one reign to another, based on the political and economic situation of the time. However, Mamlūk sources report that the number of soldiers decreased during Circassian times. In this period, the Mamlūk armies did not maintain high discipline and demonstrated less respect for their lords and masters. This necessarily affected the stability and the effectiveness of the armies. Relying on information from the Mamlūk chronicles, the Mamlūk armies, especially in Egypt, can be divided into three main categories, as follows:⁶³

I) *Al-Mamālik al-Sultāniyyah* (The Royal Mamlūks)

Al-Mamālik al-Sultāniyyah were the spine and main strength of the Mamlūk army and each of them was trained in the barracks. They were responsible for engaging in important military expeditions or in main battles. During the Circassian period, they could number up to 10,000 men, while in the Turkish period there were more than that. According to al-Qalqashandī, they were the most significant and respected soldiers, and the nearest to the *sultān*. They were also owners of large fiefs. The *amīrs* of various ranks were elected from this group. Most of the *Mamālik al-Sultāniyyah* were stationed in the capital and it was very rare for them to stay out of Cairo except for military purposes.⁶⁴ The works of contemporary historians contain abundant information about the conflict and strife among the groups in the *Mamālik al-Sultāniyyah*. These were factors behind the disorder in internal politics, especially at the end of the Circassian period. The *Mamālik al-Sultāniyyah* was subdivided into two categories: the *Julbān* and the *Mustakhdamūn*, as follows:

i) *The Julbān* (The Mamlūks of the Ruling Sultan)

The *Julbān* were those Mamlūks who were purchased and manumitted by the ruling *sultān*. They constituted the most important army of the *sultān* and served to strengthen his position as ruler. Besides the term *Julbān*, they were also called *Mushtarawāt* and

⁶³ For example see Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Qalqashandī (1987). *Ṣubḥ al-A‘shā fī Ṣinā‘at al-Inshā*, Muḥammad, vol. 4. Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, p. 16.

⁶⁴ David Ayalon (1953), *op.cit.*, no. 15, pp. 204 & 205.

Ajlāb.⁶⁵ Historians of the later period, however, such as ‘Abd al-Basīṭ b. Khalīl and Ibn Iyās, use the appellation *Julbān* most often. The *Julbān* and the *sultān* had a tightly-knit association, being united by strong bonds of solidarity. The *Julbān* were loyal to the *sultān*, regarding him as a master and liberator. They needed each other because the *Julbān* would only continue to receive their privileges as long as the *sultān* was on the throne. On the other hand, the *sultān* would only possess sovereignty as long as the *Julbān* had power and supported his rule. Normally, the *sultān* selected his *Khāṣṣakiyya* (bodyguards) and his *amīrs* from among the *Julbān*.⁶⁶

After his enthronement, the new *sultān* would attempt to increase the number of his Mamlūks as much as he could with the purpose of reducing the influence and power of the *Mustakhdamūn*.⁶⁷ This was what Sultān Qāyṭbāy did when he purchased hundreds of Mamlūks after his accession to the throne.⁶⁸ The *Julbān* would be appointed as *Amīr ‘Ashara* and gradually promoted to the higher ranks to replace the *Mustakhdamūn*. The same happened in the administration offices where the *Julbān* slowly replaced the *Mustakhdamūn*.

The Mamlūk sources report that the *Julbān* were helpless in combat and were unenthusiastic or unwilling to fight, showing no chivalry and no bravery in war. They were lacking in military spirit and their training was most ineffective. In 909/1503, during Sultān al-Ghawrī’s reign, they were scorned by the *Mustakhdamūn* for the poor quality of their lance play (*li‘b al-rumḥ*).⁶⁹ One of the reasons why they did not make good soldiers was that they were already mature when the *sultān* purchased them. The *sultān* preferred to acquire this kind of Mamlūk because their price was lower than that for young Mamlūks. This was particularly the case in the later Circassian period due to financial difficulties. It was hard to discipline and train older Mamlūks in the art of war than it was to train young Mamlūks, nor was it easy

⁶⁵ Ibn Shāhīn al-Zāhirī (1894). *op.cit.*, p. 116.

⁶⁶ Ibn Iyās (1960). *op.cit.*, vol. 3, p. 82.

⁶⁷ See the explanation of *mustakhdamūn* below.

⁶⁸ Ibn Iyās (1960). *op.cit.*, vol. 3, p. 18. Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī actively taught his *julbāns* the art of war to enable them to break the power of the *mustakhdamūn*. See Ayalon (1954). *op.cit.* p. 78.

⁶⁹ Ibn Iyās (1960). *op.cit.*, vol. 4, p. 60.

to instill in them an *esprit de corps* and a duty to obey the law. This led to their lacking good discipline and training.⁷⁰ In the later Circassian period the *Julbān* were infamous for their chaotic and political conspiracies. After the death or dismissal of the ruling *sulṭān*, their position and status changed and they would be classified as *Mustakhdamūn* under a new *sulṭān*.

ii) *Mustakhdamūn*

The *Mustakhdamūn* were the Mamlūks who passed into the service of the ruling *sulṭān* from the service of another master. They can be divided into two categories the *Qarānīs* and the *Ṣayfiyya*:

a) *Qarānīs*

The *Qarānīs* were the Mamlūks who passed into the service of the reigning *sulṭān* from that of former.⁷¹ This group or faction still used the surname of their former master who had purchased and freed them. For example, the *Zāhiriyya* owned their name to al-Zāhir Barqūq, the *Nāširiyya* to al-Nāšir Faraj, the *Mu'ayyadiyya* to Mu'ayyad Shaykh, and the *Qāyṭbāyiyya* to Qāyṭbāy. After the accession of a new *sulṭān* they would be transferred to serve under the newly appointed *sulṭān* as one of the components of the *Mamālik al-Sulṭāniyya*. This was the tradition in the military system in the Mamlūk kingdom. Thus we can see various factions of *Qarānīs* during the reign of each *sulṭān*. For instance, in the reign of Sulṭān Barsbāy, there were the factions of the *Zāhiriyya*, the *Nāširiyya* and the *Mu'ayyadiyya* in his service, whereas, during the reign of Sulṭān Qāyṭbāy, there were the factions of the *Ashrafiyya*, the *Khushqaddamiyya* and the *Īnāliyya*.⁷²

According to Ibn Iyās, in addition to serving in major wars, one of the duties of the *Qarānīs* was to maintain security in all parts of Egypt including some sectors of the Red Sea coast.⁷³ They were also sent out to Sharqiyya, Gharbiyya, Buḥayra, Ṣa'īd and other places to keep

⁷⁰ Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Āshūr (1977). "Al-Tadahhūr al-Iqtisādī fī Dawlāt Salāṭīn al-Mamālik (872-923H/1468-1517M) fī Daw' Kitābat al-Mu'arrikh Ibn Iyās", in Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Āshūr (ed.), *Buḥūth wa Dirāsāt fī Tārīkh al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā'*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḥad, pp. 355 & 356.

⁷¹ Majīd (1964). *op.cit.*, vol. 1, p. 148.

⁷² Ibn Iyās (1960). *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 5 & 8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 448, 453, 479 & 480, vol. 5, pp. 23, 28 & 45.

the Bedouin at bay. Sometimes they were ordered to stop the dams from being destroyed by the Bedouin. As the Mamlūks of the former *sultāns*, the *Qarānīs* were veterans and had more experience in war and politics than the *Julbān*. Nevertheless, the *sultān* ignored and was careful not to promote them into positions which could give them too much influence and power. Instead, he gave priority and privilege to the *Julbān*. The reason for this was that the *sultān* saw the *Qarānīs* as factions who would not give him total loyalty because he was only their second master, and thus they always remained potential rivals to the throne. Indeed, it was said that the stability of the reign of any *sultān* depended on how far he could control the dominance and the power of the *Qarānīs*.⁷⁴

At the end of the Mamlūk kingdom, the status of the *Qarānīs* became progressively worse and they remained second only to the *Julbān*. There are some accounts indicating that the *sultān* discriminated against the *Qarānīs*. For example, the *sultān* preferred to send them into battle instead of his *Julbān*. Thus, Sultān Qāyṭbāy sent the Khushqaddamiyya, and Sultān al-Ghawrī sent the Mamlūks of al-Zāhir Qanṣūh, al-Ashraf Jānbalāṭ and al-ʿĀdil Ṭūmānbāy into most battles. In fact, the participation of *Qarānīs* in military campaigns was considered a substitute for banishment and exile.⁷⁵ Another purpose for sending them into battle was to reduce their numbers. The *sultān* also dismissed them from the posts that they held, imprisoned, exiled or even killed them.⁷⁶

Payments to the *Qarānīs* also showed discrimination. Although they were senior, veterans and had more experience, the emoluments they received were often less than that of the *Julbān*. For example, in 891/1486, the bonus given to each *Qarānīs* was five *Dīnārs*, while the *Julbān* received ten *Dīnārs* per person. The distribution of fiefs to *Qarānīs* was also unfair: they received a small fief compared with what the *Julbān* received. Ibn Iyās reports that in Dhū al-Qa'da 912/March 1507 one of the *Julbān* killed one of the *Qarānīs* to obtain his fief. The *sultān* was reported to have done nothing to the *Julbān* and not even to have charged him.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ayalon (1953). *op.cit.*, pp. 209.

⁷⁵ *Idem* (1949). *op.cit.*, no. 69, pp. 145 & 146.

⁷⁶ For example, see Ibn Iyās (1960). *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 7 & 8.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 231, vol. 4, p. 107.

The Mamlūk sources continuously report the strife and rivalry that existed between the *Qarānīs* and *Julbān*, especially during the Circassian period. It seems that the *Qarānīs* were antagonistic towards the *Julbān* because they were junior but usurped their positions or privileges. At the same time, the *Julbān* took every opportunity to oppress the *Qarānīs* using the power they had as the group with the highest status in the *Mamālik al-Sulṭāniyyah*. Occasionally, hostility from the *Julbān* and the ruling *sulṭān* made the various factions in the *Qarānīs* unite against them.⁷⁸

b) *Ṣayfiyyah*

The *Ṣayfiyyah* were those Mamlūks who passed from the service of the *amīrs* to the *sulṭān* due to their master's death or dismissal.⁷⁹ Generally their position or status was lower than that of other groups in the *Mamālik al-Sulṭāniyyah*. When they were transferred into the *Mamālik al-Sulṭāniyyah*, they were indifferent or antagonistic toward the *Julbān*, the *Qarānīs* and the *sulṭān*. Their feeling of loyalty towards the *sulṭān* was also less or totally lacking because he was only their second master. It was very rare for this group to obtain a better status from the *sulṭān*. Towards the end of the Mamlūk period, the *Ṣayfiyyah* were treated with cruelty. *Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy* is reported to have sent the *Ṣayfiyyah* back to serve under other *amīrs* after the *Julbān* threatened to kill them. The *Ṣayfiyyah* were sometimes allied with the *Qarānīs* in their struggle to improve their position.⁸⁰

II) *Mamālik al-Umarā'* (The Mamlūks of the Amīrs)

The *Mamālik al-Umarā'* were those Mamlūks who served under the *amīrs*. The number of these that could be kept by *amīrs* was fixed. Nevertheless, some of the *amīrs* added to the number of their Mamlūks without concern for such regulations.⁸¹ The *Mamālik al-Umarā'* received their payments from the fief belonging to their masters. Usually, the income from the fief would be divided as follows: one third to the *amīrs* and two thirds to the Mamlūks. However, sometimes the *amīrs* did not

⁷⁸ Ayalon (1954). *op.cit.*, pp. 73, 75 & 76.

⁷⁹ Ibn Shāhīn al-Zāhiri (1894). *op.cit.*, p. 116.

⁸⁰ Ayalon (1953). *op.cit.*, pp. 220 & 222.

⁸¹ Dūmiṭ (1980). *op.cit.*, pp. 62-65.

follow this division and took one half for himself.⁸² The *Mamālik al-Umarā'* did not constitute a serious political factor in the Mamlūk army and were rarely involved in rebellion. Normally, they followed their masters and participated in battle if they were ordered to do so. They were also not well-trained like the *Şayfiyyah*.⁸³

III) *Halqa* (A Free Corps)

The *Halqa* or the *Ajnād al-Ḥalqa*, as it was sometimes called, was the non-Mamlūk army.⁸⁴ It was composed of the *Awlād al-Nās* (sons of the *amīrs* and of the Mamlūks).⁸⁵ Besides participating in battle, other duties of the *Halqa* in the Circassian period included guarding the Cairo Citadel, the gates of Cairo, the old city and the suburbs in the absence of the main forces.⁸⁶ In the early Turkish period, the *Halqa* held exalted positions and received sufficient fiefs. Their income was, however, greatly affected after the land redistribution in the Mamlūk kingdom at the end of the seventh century and the cadastral survey conducted in Egypt in the early eighth century. Their fiefs became fewer after a large number of them were allotted to the *sultān*.⁸⁷ Among the reasons that led to the fall of the *Halqa* was the fact that they were not Mamlūks and did not have any military ability. In addition, it cost a great deal to maintain them and this resulted in their numbers being reduced and their position becoming less important.⁸⁸

⁸² Ayalon (1953). *op.cit.*, pp. 459-460.

⁸³ Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf b. Taghrī Birdī al-Atābakī (n.d.). *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhira fī Mulūk Mişr wa al-Qāhira*, vol. 14. n.p: al-Mu'assasa al-Mişriyya al-'Āmma li al-Ta'līf wa al-Tarjama wa al-Ṭibā'a, p. 70.

⁸⁴ Al-Qalqashandī mentions that the *halqa* is the non-military people. See al-Qalqashandī (1987). *op.cit.*, vol. 4, p. 16.

⁸⁵ Sometimes *Mamālik al-Umarā'* were transferred to *halqa* after the death or dismissal of their masters. The Bedouins, Kurds and Turcomans were also regarded as groups within the *halqa* when they were sent out to participate in battle. See Ibrāhīm 'Alī al-Turkhān (1960). *op.cit.*, p. 235.

⁸⁶ Ibn Shāhīn al-Zāhiri (1894). *op.cit.*, p. 116.

⁸⁷ Ayalon (1953). *op.cit.*, pp. 451-452.

⁸⁸ At the end of Circassian period, they were not involved in many wars. During the reign of Qāyṭbāy, he gave them a choice either to participate in battle or to pay 100 *dīnārs*. See al-Şayrafi (1970). *op.cit.*, p. 6.

CONCLUSION

The sultanate in the Mamlūk kingdom was neither based on a monarchy system nor hereditary. Normally, the leading *amīrs* from the dominant faction played an important role in determining who would be enthroned as *sultān*. If the *sultān* could no longer protect their interests and provided them benefits, they would easily overthrow and replacing him. Even though the *sultān* was the absolute head of the government, it was not unusual for the *sultān* to be under the influence or supervision of the *amīrs* upon making a decision or formulating a policy. This was especially the case when the *sultān* was lacking in ability or was still young and thus became a puppet of the great *amīrs*. The period under consideration witnessed to political conflict within the kingdom during the reign of five incompetent *sultāns* (901-906/1495-1501). A major factor behind this was the lack of any stable procedure for the installation of a new ruler.

During the Mamlūk period, *amīrs* were not only the commanders of the armed forces but also holders of great households and administrative offices. Indeed, the highest ranking *amīrs* played an important role in Mamlūk politics due to the power they held and *sultān* was elected from among them. They maintained their positions and interests by dominating and supervising the *sultān* to the extent of overthrowing him if their interests were not being met. The political situation from 901/1495 till 906/1501 was very unsettled as the struggle of the *amīrs* for the throne intensified. They were always awaiting an opportunity to seize the highest position and this led to internal strife and rivalry.

The Mamlūk armed forces (i.e. the *al-Mamālik al-Sultāniyyah*, the *Mamālik al-Umarā'* and the *Ḥalqa*) played a very important role in the continuity of the kingdom because they were the actual strength of the empire, expanding Mamlūk authority and defending the state from internal and external enemies. During the period under review, however, the Mamlūk sources often report the strife and rivalry that existed between the groups in the Mamlūk armies in order to strengthen their position and power. For example, the *Qarānīs* were antagonistic towards the *Julbān* because they were junior but usurped their positions or privileges. At the same time, the *Julbān* took every opportunity to oppress the *Qarānīs* using the power they had as the group with the highest status in the *Mamālik al-Sultāniyyah*. This militated against the effectiveness of the armies and was another cause of disruption in internal politics.