

The al-Nashw Episode: A Case Study of "Moral Economy"

Contemporary Mamluk sources contain reports of the Mamluk sultans being forced to dismiss office-holders from their posts in order to placate the rioting masses. Such protests against *muhtasibs* (market inspectors) were quickly ended by their removal from office. In the event of a protest against a vizier, which is the subject of the present article, the sources depict him as the person inciting the sultan to injustice and thus his mere removal from office would not satisfy the public. Rather, the public demanded he be punished. Later, public festivities marked the meting out of punishment and the return of justice. The case of the protest against Shams al-Dīn Ibn Faḍl Allāh, known as al-Nashw, the *nāẓir al-khāṣṣ* (inspector of the sultan's private treasury) of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad between 733/1333 and 740/1339, is fully described in the sources.¹ Al-Nashw's image as villain is executed carefully and in great detail: he is accused of using *muṣāḍarah* (confiscation) against office-holders to extract money from them, forcing compulsory purchases (*ṭarḥ*, *rimāyah*) on merchants in a way that harmed the entire public, and plotting against amirs and extorting money from charities, thereby inflicting harm on the weaker sectors of the population. Therefore, his eventual removal from office and execution by torture was publicly celebrated with music and song for a whole week. Lollipops bearing the likenesses of al-Nashw and his family in humiliating scenes were sold in the markets in vast quantities.²

The characteristics of hate ritual that contemporary historians accorded the al-Nashw episode show that beyond depicting the actual event they also sought to convey a didactic message on a proper and binding sociopolitical order that must not be infringed. Indeed, the social historians Louise Tilly³ and Edward P. Thompson,⁴ who studied the food riots in eighteenth-century France and England,

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¹For this case see: Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History* (Leiden, 1995), 73–78, 149–55.

²Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Abū al-Maḥāsin Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1963), 9:139; Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ziyādah and Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Āshūr (Cairo, 1942), 2:479; Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge, 1993), 57.

³Louise Tilly, "The Food Riots as a Form of Political Conflict in France," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2 (1971): 23–57.

⁴Edward P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,"



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DOI: [10.6082/M10C4SXR](https://doi.org/10.6082/M10C4SXR). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M10C4SXR>)

DOI of Vol. IX, no. 1: [10.6082/M1TX3CF3](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1TX3CF3). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/SE2H-QY96> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

followed by Boaz Shoshan,⁵ who studied the food riots in Muslim society under Mamluk rule, have drawn our attention to the fact that food riots are not an impulsive act by a mob motivated only by an actual shortage of food, but rather “coherent political actions” expressing criticism of the government for its failure to fulfill social norms and traditional economic functions. These norms were perceived as the mob’s inherent collective right and infringing that right justified violent protest in order to motivate the government to restore order. Political sociologists and anthropologists who investigate the need to uphold sociopolitical frameworks and their *modus operandi* have termed these inherent rights “moral economy” and ascribed an important pseudo-constitutional role to them in creating equilibrium among interest groups working together within the same sociopolitical system.⁶ Winslow W. Clifford identifies moral economy as the basis for regulating relations within the Mamluk elite, which by its very nature is “conflict-oriented.” Upholding the inherent rights (*ḥuqūq*) of the Mamluks to universal and equal access to rank and economic resources ensured a “positive-sum exchange relationship” between the ruler and the amirs. This exchange policy obviated the fissionist tendencies inherent in unbridled competition among the Mamluks and set the rules for a dynamic reshuffle in government without damaging the state’s sociopolitical macrostructure and coherence.⁷

The story of al-Nashw’s rise and fall is a rather unique case of a conflict in which there was a coordinated demand from almost every sector of the Mamluk state, if not all of them, for the ruler to cancel his reform plan and restore the traditional and normative economic order. The fact that the public protest happened during the reign of a charismatic and authoritarian ruler like al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, who could have imposed his authority by military power, but rather chose to give up his reform plan, and the tactics the protest groups used to solve the conflict without the actual use of violence, proves that the sociopolitical macrostructure of moral economy preserved the Mamluk state from disintegration by unregulated violent conflict. Therefore, the al-Nashw incident can serve as an effective case

Past & Present 50 (1971): 73–136.

⁵Boaz Shoshan, “Grain Riots and the ‘Moral Economy’: Cairo, 1350–1517,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10 (1980): 459–78. See also: Ira Marvin Lapidus, “The Grain Economy of Mamluk Egypt,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 12 (1969): 1–15.

⁶William Barth and Robert Hefner, “Approaches to the Study of Social Conflict,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 1 (1957): 105–10; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Consensus and Conflict: Essays in Political Sociology* (New Brunswick and London, 1985); Ralph W. Nicholas, “Rule, Resources, and Political Activity,” in *Local Level Politics*, ed. Marc J. Swartz (Chicago, 1968), 295–321.

⁷Winslow W. Clifford, “State Formation and the Structure of Politics in Mamluk Syro-Egypt, 648–741 A.H./1250–1350 C.E.,” Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1995. This dissertation provides a very intriguing and useful survey of research in political sociology and anthropology.



study to show the moral economy, the sociopolitical macrostructure of the Mamluk state, in action.

Despite the growth in the Egyptian economy during al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's reign, signs of a deep crisis were felt as early as 729/1328 when expenditure greatly exceeded revenues and threatened to spin out of control. This economic crisis was not accidental; it resulted from al-Nāṣir's ambitious construction policy and his prodigal generosity towards his amirs, mamluks, and other important figures inside and outside his state.⁸ As a result of low revenues (*min qillat al-wāṣil*) that year, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was forced to personally oversee government expenditure on a day-to-day basis.⁹ Under his personal supervision, the state's financial situation was ameliorated to the extent that all revenues derived from the sultan's private *iqṭā'* of the Jīzah province (a province on the west bank of the Nile) were saved that year. Sources tell us that office-holders became stressed. Indeed, a few months later, al-Nāṣir reviewed the clerks who administered tax collection in the amirs' *iqṭā'*s, probably for the purpose of selecting new officials to replace those he intended to dismiss from his own administration. The two inspectors of the sultan's *dīwāns*, al-Majd Ibn Lafītah and Ibn Qarwīnah, were dismissed and fined; al-Makīn Ibn Qarwīnah, the *mustawfī al-ṣuḥbah*, who controlled the accounts of the sultan's financial revenues, and Amīn al-Dīn Qarmūṭ, the *mustawfī al-khizānah* (in charge of the sultan's treasury accountancy), Uldamur, the *wālī* (prefect) of Jīzah, Ibn Saqrūr, the *mustawfī* of Jīzah, who controlled the district's revenue account, and the *mushidds* (concerned with the collection of revenues), were all dismissed from their posts and imprisoned, and were only released after paying the fines imposed on them. Al-Nāṣir's mistrust of office-holders went as far as his carrying out new registration of the Jīzah lands, relying on local chiefs rather than his own officials. These details leave no doubt that the mistrust between the sultan and the state office-holders reached a point far beyond the normal. Al-Maqrīzī, the fifteenth-century historian, mentions that this practice "had never been heard of in the past" (*wa-lam yusma' bi-hādhā fīmā salafa*),¹⁰ emphasizing al-Nāṣir's innovative approach of giving the peasants (*fallāḥūn*) a stand in tax administration through a direct connection between himself, as sultan, and their chiefs (*mashāyikh*). Al-Maqrīzī's comment reveals, in fact, that al-Nāṣir changed the rules of the game in relations between the sultan and the state officials. It was well known that office-holders informally augmented their incomes from state resources, taking a calculated risk that their embezzlement might be discovered

⁸On this policy, see in detail: Levanoni, *Turning Point*, 53–59. For gift exchange policy see: Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (Glencoe, 1954).

⁹Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:312; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:77–78.

¹⁰Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:312–13.



and their fortunes confiscated. Furthermore, most cases of confiscation involved huge sums of money, which meant that officials accumulated fortunes during their service.¹¹ It should be noted that rivalries among the clerks over positions and their non-Muslim origin (many of them were Copts or converted Copts) facilitated the regulation of the confiscation policy.¹² The clerks' traditional professional status had never before been challenged as it was in al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's purges of that year.

While al-Nashw was still in the service of Ānūk, one of the sultan's sons, he had already raised the issue of the fiscal situation with the sultan and suggested various ways of increasing revenues, calling attention to those known habitually to disappear into office-holders' pockets. When al-Nāṣir Muḥammad appointed al-Nashw as his *nāzir al-khāṣṣ* in 732/1331, it was with the express aim that "he would obtain much money for him" (*annahu yuḥaṣṣilu lahu māl kathīr*).¹³ Upon assuming office, al-Nashw implemented a full-scale confiscation policy on such an intensive and non-selective basis that both senior administrative office-holders in Cairo and all district officials responsible for tax collection in Upper and Lower Egypt suffered equally. After al-Nashw's brother, al-Mukhlīṣ, returned from his inspection tour of the sultan's irrigation wheels and sown fields in Upper Egypt, al-Nashw incited al-Nāṣir against his officials for neglecting their duty and wasting part of his wealth. Consequently, all office-holders from the highest to the lowest—the prefects (*wulāt*), inspectors (*shāddūn*, sing. *shādd*), keepers of revenue accounts (*'ummāl*, sing. *'āmil*), keepers of daily revenue lists (*shuhūd*, sing. *shāhid*), and others—were interrogated and fined or lost all their property.¹⁴ The huge sums of money that flowed into the sultan's treasury from confiscations attest that some of them were very wealthy while others were simply well off.¹⁵

These arrests, interrogations, fines, dismissals, and the large-scale confiscations of officials in the tax collection system, which stretched continuously and in descending order from the highest-ranking officials in the center, through senior district office-holders, to the low-ranking office-holders who actually implemented registration of land and yields in the villages and who were, as we have seen, in direct contact with the village headmen, the *mashāyikh*,¹⁶ reveal a ramified system

¹¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:347–49, 361, 381, 384, 486.

¹² See for example: *ibid.*, 347.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 348.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 358, 360, 361, 370, 469.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 360, 381.

¹⁶ On the bribe relationships between officials and villagers (*nās min al-aryāf*), most probably religious scholars, see: Shams al-Dīn al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn al-Ṣāliḥī wa-Awlādihi*, ed. Barbara Schäfer (Wiesbaden, 1977), 59.



of patronage that encompassed both urban and rural sectors, far beyond the urban social system that researchers of Mamluk history have exposed thus far. Hierarchical patronage is recognizable in the practice of interrogation and punishment; when a senior Cairo office-holder was imprisoned, interrogated, and underwent confiscation, all those who had connections with him suffered a similar fate. Thus, for example, when Ibn Hilāl al-Dawlah, who was al-Nashw's predecessor and rival, was imprisoned, all his clients (*alzāmuḥ*) were incarcerated with him.¹⁷ Purges of this kind did not bring officials' careers to an end; rather they were given new positions in the system when the patronage connections changed in their favor. While this practice symbolizes the individual vulnerability of officials in the fiscal system vis-à-vis the government, at the same time it displays the durability of the patron-client structure that survived the reshuffle. The stability of the patronage system in the administration derived from the fact that it was part of a wider system of patronage that was the backbone of the Mamluk state's sociopolitical structure. It was connected to the dominant Mamluk amirs in several ways: many of the senior officials in the Mamluk administration had previously served in the Mamluk amirs' *dīwāns*. These officials attained their senior posts through the amirs' mediation, and so long as the latter's patronage was in place, they continued in these posts.¹⁸ In return for patronage, the officials safeguarded the amirs' economic interests, which put another big slice of the state's resources into their pockets, above and beyond the part to which they were legally entitled. The rules of the game entailed, therefore, informal and covert patron-client exchange relationships between the officials and the amirs, which drew their stability from the assurance of mutual material benefits, and their being a long-term and widespread practice.

In a complaint he brought before the sultan (734/1334) about the amirs' evasion of taxes on trade and land, al-Nashw claimed that "they [the amirs Qawṣūn and Bashtāk] and their like had become accustomed to bribes from the sultan's officials amounting to half of the treasury's income. . . . If he [al-Nashw] was free [of their pressure] he would fill the sultan's treasury and grain stores, but he feared that they would change the sultan's attitude towards him."¹⁹ The contemporary historian Mūsá ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Yūsufī (d. 759/1358) includes in al-Nashw's complaint details that show that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was well aware of the situation in the administration of the fiscal system but chose to ignore it, for it would not function otherwise. In the past, the amirs had exerted pressure on the sultan to dismiss any

¹⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:370, 381, 383, 385.

¹⁸ See for example: *ibid.*, 244, 383.

¹⁹ Al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh*, 46; Mūsá ibn Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyá al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāzir fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥuṭayṭ (Beirut, 1987), 179, 187; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:369.



official who intended to lay hands on their property or meddle in their business interests. Karīm al-Dīn, who had been appointed *nāẓir al-khāṣṣ* in 709/1310, was dismissed "because of the jealousy of the amirs and others at his increased control over the sultan. . . ." They simply informed al-Nāṣir that he had been using the sultan's resources for his own interests.²⁰ Al-Akuz, *shādd al-dawāwīn*, was dismissed when he investigated Qawṣūn's grain stores. Aydakīn, the prefect of Cairo, was dismissed when he tried to harm a merchant in Qawṣūn's service. When Qawṣūn complained to al-Nāṣir about his open conflict with Aydakīn and how he had conspired with al-Nashw to entrap wine-drinking nighttime revelers among the amirs and mamluks and had then used the damning evidence to extort money for the treasury,²¹ al-Nāṣir Muḥammad berated Qawṣūn in terms that revealed his weak position in his relationship with the amirs: "Whenever I appoint someone useful to me, you want him removed. But if he had been on your side [*min jihatikum*] you would be singing his praises to me."²² Several months later (Jumādā I 735/April 1335), Aydakīn was dismissed from his post and sent to Syria "because of Amir Qawṣūn's changed attitude toward him" (*li-taghayyur al-amīr Qawṣūn 'alayh*).²³

The amirs tried not to challenge al-Nāṣir's authority directly when al-Nashw submitted his plans to levy land and trade taxes, but tried old and accepted tactics to ameliorate al-Nashw's damage to their interests. Tankiz, the governor of Syria, for instance, advised the sultan to nominate Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn al-Turkmānī, a trusted clerk in Tripoli, as inspector of the flow of income to the treasury alongside al-Nashw.²⁴ Tankiz's purpose was to install his own trusted man in al-Nāṣir's administration in much the same way as al-Nāṣir installed his trusted persons in the amirs' *dawāwīn*. But when Ibn al-Turkmānī arrived in Cairo, he did not receive the post due to al-Nashw's opposition.²⁵ On the other hand, al-Nashw introduced his two brothers, Mukhlīṣ and Rizq Allāh, into Alnaq's and Maliktamur al-Ḥijāzī's *dīwāns*.²⁶ When al-Nashw levied taxes on all raw sugar produced in 732/1332, despite the tax exemption al-Nāṣir had granted the amirs on sugar production, Qawṣūn, one of the biggest sugar producers in Egypt, protested. Al-Nāṣir did not relent and resorted to solving the conflict on an individual

²⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:244, 247, 249.

²¹ Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir*, 306; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:398–99.

²² Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir*, 198; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:372.

²³ Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir*, 231; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:377.

²⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:381.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 383–84.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 369–70.



basis by compensating Qawṣūn personally.²⁷ This solution increased al-Nāṣir's authority in his relations with the amirs; sources reveal that henceforth they stopped appealing to the sultan on tax issues and al-Nashw's prestige rose.²⁸

Relations between the sultan and the amirs reflected by this stage of the al-Nashw episode expose details on how clientage relationships worked and their problematic nature. Luigi Graziano has addressed the problematic nature of such relations, indicating that this is a structure whose very nature undermines the foundations of true authority.²⁹ Therefore, both parties need to generate power from a relationship of this kind, not through their formal positioning but through indirect means, such as manipulation and intimidation. In the patron-client balance between al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and his amirs, these elements can be identified in the pendulum movement that changes the advantage that each of the parties achieves through the informal means of waiving rights, individual compensation, and indirect and mutual supervision by the parties. On the other hand, the abrogation of the sultanic decree releasing the amirs from payment of taxes on agricultural produce and income from trade, together with real tax collection, constitutes a significant change in the patron-client relationship between the sultan and the amirs, for these actions destabilize the balance that existed in their relations by reducing the conjunctive elements and expanding the institutional basis that reinforces the sultan's authority.

The relationship between the sultan and the amirs was further aggravated when al-Nashw started applying different rules by collecting damning evidence against the amirs themselves rather than their followers among the merchants and state clerks. The amirs' objections subsequently swelled into a direct protest against al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, to the extent that they set aside their internal rivalries and confronted him as a united body. Aqbughā 'Abd al-Wāḥid was accused of forging a seal bearing his and the sultan's names in order to increase his profits from glass production, over and above the quota allowed by the sultanic decree. He feared for his life for "he could not present a reasonable defense" against the charge of administrative misdemeanors in his *iqṭā'*.³⁰ The *khāṣṣakīyah* (the sultan's elite bodyguard), angered by the sultan's attitude towards their colleague, sided with Aqbughā, and it was Bashtāk, one of al-Nāṣir's most prominent amirs, who pleaded Aqbughā's case and even paid the sum Aqbughā owed the treasury. One of Aqbughā's officials responsible for public buildings admitted under interrogation that his

²⁷Ibid., 360–61.

²⁸Ibid., 361; al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh*, 58–59.

²⁹Luigi Graziano, "A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Clientelistic Behavior," *European Journal of Political Research* 4 (1970): 341–54; Clifford, "State Formation," 58.

³⁰Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:402; al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh*, 61; al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāzir*, 316, 317.



master had constructed all his private buildings using the sultan's money—he could not deny acts committed in the public eye.³¹ Moreover, al-Nashw drew the sultan's attention to five thousand head of sheep belonging to Aqbughā that had been brought from Upper Egypt to graze on sown lands. The sultan reprimanded him, and but for Bashtāk's intervention would have had him punished.³² Bashtāk himself was accused of letting a merchant use his name each year to avoid paying taxes on merchandise. The merchant was punished by having his goods confiscated by al-Nashw, despite Bashtāk's defence.³³ In 737/1336, one of Qawṣūn's officials was arrested and charged with stealing sugar and honey valued at 100,000 dirhams. Qawṣūn came to his aid and would not yield until he was released, arguing vigorously with the sultan that he would not give up to the treasury a property that was his own but had by chance been found in the possession of one of his officials. Al-Nāṣir relented and gave Qawṣūn the stolen property. Clearly, Qawṣūn intended to sound a warning that the amirs would not tolerate interference in their personal affairs, which the sultan seems to have heeded. When al-Nashw tried to incite him against another of Qawṣūn's office-holders, al-Ṣafī, al-Nāṣir accepted the fact that al-Ṣafī owed the treasury taxes but allowed Qawṣūn to levy and keep them.³⁴ The sultan's inspection of the *dīwān* of Qawṣūn, in spite of the fact that he did not confiscate the embezzled money, meant that these inspections were no longer confined to his *dīwāns* alone, but in principle to all hierarchies of the administration (see below on his attempt to interfere in the administration of *awqāf*, pious endowments). It signaled a further one-sided change in the balance of the relationship between the sultan and the amirs.³⁵

An attempt was made on al-Nashw's life in Ramaḍān 737/April 1337. Although the assailant, 'Abd al-Mun'im ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sulāmī, was not a mamluk, the sultan linked the amirs to the attempt and his fury abated only when he was assured that the injury had not put al-Nashw's life in danger. To prevent further attempts on his life al-Nāṣir assigned him an around-the-clock bodyguard. The assassination attempt was an open challenge to al-Nāṣir's authority and signaled an acceleration in the amirs' tactics from private complaints and mediation to the use of violence, but not against the sultan.

In 738/1337–38, Egypt was stricken by a series of natural disasters. A severe hailstorm that hit the Gharbiyah district caused extensive damage to crops. In Manfalūṭ, a plague of mice destroyed both field crops and produce in storage. In

³¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:446, 455–56, 475. For another example see: 391.

³² *Ibid.*, 466.

³³ *Ibid.*, 439.

³⁴ Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāṣir*, 370; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:419–20, 435.

³⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:422.



Upper Egypt, in the Qūṣ, Aswān, and Uqṣur (Luxor) areas, storms caused the destruction of homes and severe damage to date plantations. That year the Nile flood was late, but when it finally came, it was sudden and intense, and inundated grain stores.³⁶ These disasters were additional blows to the population at large, especially to the commercial sector and those effected by al-Nāṣir's fiscal policy and its tactics of confiscation and compulsory purchase. The merchants were the primary victims of this policy simply because their goods were easily accessible to the authorities in the customs stations along the roads and through the supervision of functionaries over market brokers. A more significant reason for the merchants' vulnerability was that they did not form a united front with similar interests, but rather acted on an individual basis under the patronage of strong local leaders, like Mamluk amirs, as noted above. Thus, in 733/1332, al-Nashw forced wealthy merchants to purchase quantities of cloth from the government at a price three times higher than its actual value.³⁷ In 737/1336, bean brokers were forced to sell only to the sultan, which caused financial losses to waterwheel owners on the Nile, who fed their animals beans.³⁸ By 739/1338 al-Nashw had refined the compulsory purchase system further. First he levied a real tax on a large shipment of cloth from Ba'albek, then obliged the merchants to sell the cloth to the government at a price of his own choosing, and coerced Cairene cloth merchants to re-purchase the cloth at a price three times higher than its true value.³⁹ In other instances, al-Nashw forced merchants, often by violent means, to purchase wood, iron, beans, clover, and even obsolete military uniforms and second-hand shoes from the government.⁴⁰ The rank-and-file mamluks suffered from delays in payment of their salaries and distribution of clothes, soap, and fodder.⁴¹ Al-Nāṣir could disregard complaints brought to him from the public by single mediators and even collective protests of market merchants and rank-and-file mamluks as long as they were not backed by the united action of a powerful group such as the amirs. Indeed, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad used the resources accumulated by al-Nashw to buy his amirs' loyalty by showering special grants and presents on them and granting them huge *iqṭā'āt*. Al-Maqrīzī summarized this policy in retrospect as follows: "Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad reached new heights with his munificence, generosity, benevolence, and open-handedness that exceeded all bounds" (*ghāya takhruju 'an*

³⁶Ibid., 454, 455, 456.

³⁷Ibid., 361; for other examples see: 369, 390.

³⁸Ibid., 408.

³⁹Ibid., 439.

⁴⁰Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir*, 128, 177, 350–53, 356–59, 372; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:360, 412, 413–14, 420, 435, 444, 469; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:116, 131.

⁴¹Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir*, 356–57; al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh*, 52–53; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:414.



al-ḥadd).⁴² This exchange policy could not satisfy the amirs, however, because it was unpredictable, relying on the patron's monopoly on authority.

When al-Nashw submitted a plan⁴³ to the sultan in 740/1339 that would channel a million dinars to the treasury by means that threatened the sociopolitical structure of the state, the amirs organized an open and all-encompassing rebellion coordinated with the ulama. The first part of al-Nashw's plan dealt with abrogation of the practice of government distribution of seed allotments (*taqāwī*) among the *fallāḥūn* in the *iqṭā'* for the next year's cultivation, prevalent in Egypt since the Ayyubid period. The collection of the seed allotments, permanently held (*mukhalladah*) in the *iqṭā'āt* since the days of Baybars and Qalāwūn, was to bring to the sultan's granaries one hundred and sixty thousand *irdabbs*⁴⁴ of grain in addition to that coming from the sultan's lands.⁴⁵ Had this part of al-Nashw's plan been implemented, in addition to al-Nashw's activist tax-collecting policy, it would have created in one fell swoop the sultan's uncontested monopoly over the grain supply in the country and destroyed the great grain brokers, the amirs among them.

It is worthy of note that in the *rawk* (land survey) conducted in Egypt by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in 715/1315, he increased the sultan's portion from tax revenue from four twenty-fourths to ten twenty-fourths of the Egyptian lands. He also revoked the *iqṭā'āt* granted in the past to four hundred mamluks on the grain stores at al-Maqs port in Būlāq, and transferred the taxation rights on it to the sultan. This was an extremely large source of revenue. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad also converted the emerald mines (*al-zumurrud*) into a state monopoly.⁴⁶ Such monopolies might, in turn, create an unbalanced exchange relationship not only between the sultan and the amirs, but also between all sectors of the population.

In the second part of the plan, al-Nashw proposed a new distribution of the *al-rizaq al-aḥbasīyah* (revenues from pious endowments, *awqāf*). He claimed that part of the *awqāf* lands that had amounted to 130,000 feddans (a land measure of approximately one acre) was a fraud because the pious institutions for which they had been established (such as mosques, Sufi orders, and others) had ceased to exist, and their revenues were actually used for bribing amirs, governors (or

⁴²Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:535; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:174, 211.

⁴³Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:475–76; al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh*, 59–60; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:131–32.

⁴⁴A measure of capacity used during the Middle Ages for weighing grain which varied by time and place from ca. 70 kg. See E. Ashtor, "Levantine Weights and Standard Parcels: A Contribution to the Metrology of the Later Middle Ages," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 45 (1982): 479–80.

⁴⁵Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 473, al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh*, 59.

⁴⁶Hassanein Rabie, *The Financial System of Egypt A.H. 564–741/A.D. 1169–1341* (London, 1972), 87–88; Shoshan, *Popular Culture*, 59.



judges), and rural clerics. Hence, *awqāf* lands of this kind should be transferred to the sultan's ownership. With regard to existing institutions, the revenues should be divided—half to the *waqf* and half to the sultan at a rate of 100 dirhams per feddan.

Al-Nashw's plan attests to the vast economic power that had accumulated in the hands of the ulama through the *waqf* in Egypt alone. There can be no doubt that, in addition to the significant increase in the sultan's ownership of land in the aftermath of the land survey of 715/1315, this plan was intended to make the sultan the largest landowner in the country by dispossessing the ulama of *awqāf* lands—the traditional source of their economic power by which they supported their clients and followers. In this context, it is worth noting that when the Coptic Church lost its economic assets to the government in 217/832 and again in 755/1354, it brought about mass conversion to Islam, because the Church also lost its status as a source of economic support for its faithful.⁴⁷ It is therefore no wonder that in the protest against al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, as we shall see, the two important sectors of the amirs and the religious scholars would join forces.

The third part of al-Nashw's plan touches upon the recipients of charity from the *waqfs'* money. Al-Nashw claimed that the majority of the lists of charity recipients were fabricated, and only a few people were entitled to be on them. He demanded scrutiny of the lists and their verification by the personal attendance of the recipient with his entitlement document in order to prevent office-holders from registering their wives, slaves, and servants as recipients. These bogus recipients clearly could not have been listed without the cooperation of the ulama who managed the *awqāf*.

The fourth part relates to the lands of the Nile island of Rawḍah. In the past, it had belonged to the sultans and had been divided between their sons. Over the years, the land was leased or sold to office-holders in Cairo for prices far below its real value. Now al-Nashw intended to restore the land to the sultan and collect a retroactive and appropriate rent for the years that had elapsed since it had passed into private hands.

Al-Nāṣir was adamant to implement the plan. When the plan went into force, "Upper and Lower Egypt erupted."⁴⁸ Acting in concert with the ulama, the amirs decided to exert pressure on al-Nāṣir and use all available tactics to bring about al-Nashw's dismissal and elimination. They united and sent the amirs Yalbughā al-Yaḥyawī and Maliktamur al-Ḥijāzī, who were al-Nāṣir's close associates, to

⁴⁷Ira M. Lapidus, "The Conversion of Egypt to Islam," *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): 248–62. Donald P. Little, "Coptic Conversion to Islam under the Bahri Mamluks," in idem, *History and Historiography of the Mamlūks* (London, 1986), 552–69.

⁴⁸Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:475.



ask that al-Nashw stop harming the people and leave the amirs alone.⁴⁹ Anonymous letters warning al-Nāṣir of al-Nashw's extortion were found in the palace, implying that the sultan's security could be easily breached. Al-Nāṣir did not react immediately, but sent a message to Tankiz asking for his advice.⁵⁰ Prayers offered in the mosques included a curse on al-Nashw. It was no coincidence that office-holders, orphans, widows, and cripples—a cross-section of those who depended on charity stipends—gathered at the Citadel crying and demonstrating their misery on the very day Tankiz's reply arrived from Syria (26 Muḥarram 740/3 August 1339). Clearly, these protest actions were organized and coordinated by the amirs and the ulama. The amirs sent Yalbughā al-Yaḥyawī once again, not with an implicit threat but rather a warning of impending rebellion: "The best thing is to imprison al-Nashw, for if you do not imprison him an unbidden guest will come and visit you [*dakhala 'alayka al-dākhil*], for there is not a single mamluk who is not waiting for a moment's inattention on your part [*yataraqqabu ghaflah minka*]."⁵¹ Because al-Nāṣir greatly trusted Yalbughā, he bowed to the amirs, and had al-Nashw imprisoned. But imprisonment was not enough to placate the amirs; they wanted his execution, for they feared that as long as he was still alive, the sultan would continue to avail himself of his advice. When the sultan refused to give in, the amirs began to alienate themselves from him and he from them.⁵² The amirs organized the closure of the markets in Cairo and Fuṣṭāṭ, and demonstrations of the masses at the foot of the Citadel, carrying candles and Qurans and rejoicing at the imprisonment of al-Nashw and his relatives.⁵³ The turmoil surrounding al-Nashw was further kindled by an anonymous letter found in the sultan's bed accusing Bashtāk and Aqbughā 'Abd al-Wāḥid of wanting to murder him. When the person who had actually written the letter was found, one Ibn al-Azraq, he admitted that the accusation was a fabrication. That he was released unpunished indicates that he was sent by the amirs to unsettle the sultan. The pressure reached a point where "the sultan's fears increased and he became so agitated that he could not remain seated in one place."⁵⁴ In his extreme wariness of the amirs, al-Nāṣir ordered the closure of the professional archery equipment shops and had their target ranges dismantled. He forbade the amirs and their mamluks to carry weapons.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh*, 60; Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī, "Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab," Leiden University Library Ms. Or. 19B, fol. 8a.

⁵⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:475–76, 479, 480; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:134, 135.

⁵¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:477; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:133; al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh*, 60.

⁵² Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:483; al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir*, 353; al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh*, 62.

⁵³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:479.

⁵⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:484–85.

⁵⁵ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:140–41; al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh*, 62.



Matters came to a head on 24 Rabī‘ I/19 September when at the council of the sultan and the amirs, *al-mashūrah*, al-Nāṣir accused the amirs of ingratitude towards him: “O amirs! These are my mamluks whom I have nurtured and upon whom I have bestowed great gifts [*al-‘atā’ al-jazīl*], and yet I hear improper things about them.”⁵⁶ It is worthy of mention that al-Nāṣir’s reproach to his prominent amirs on this tense occasion reveals the model he perceived as the proper one for the relationship between a sultan and his amirs. Indeed, throughout his rule, he was generous with gifts as a means to gain support. The amirs could not build their status on such an unequally-balanced relationship. It is hardly surprising that they were not impressed by his reproach, and in a polite but nevertheless threatening way, the amirs expressed their unequivocal demand that al-Nashw be executed, even if it meant that the sultan would lose his throne: “But our master the sultan knows that the caliphate was brought down by bureaucrats and that most of the sultans met their deaths because of the viziers” (*wa-ghalib al-salāṭīn mā dakhala ‘alayhim al-dākhil illā min jihat al-wuzarā’*).⁵⁷ Here the amirs invoked the Mamluk tradition since its inception during Abbasid rule as a moral basis for their demands from the sultan.

Al-Nashw’s brother killed himself the same night while in detention and his mother died shortly afterwards under torture. That al-Nāṣir Muḥammad acted under pressure from the amirs is clear from the way Barsbughā, who was in charge of administering the torture, ensured that despite being tortured al-Nashw stayed alive. Al-Nāṣir secretly ordered Barsbughā to show al-Nashw mercy, “for this situation was not of the sultan’s making but rather his desire to appease his mamluk amirs” (*li-ajl khawāṭir mamālīkihi al-umarā’*).⁵⁸ When this came to light, the amirs “were agitated [*tashawwasha khawāṭiruhum*] and their relations with the sultan became greatly unsettled [*khabṭ kathīr*] because al-Nashw was kept alive.” Only on 2 Rabī‘ II/27 September, when Bashtāk threatened Barsbughā and demanded that he change his methods, were al-Nashw and his relatives allowed to die. During al-Nashw’s interrogation and after his death, the amirs outdid themselves to show al-Nāṣir the vast property confiscated from al-Nashw and his relatives, in proof of their contention that he had been embezzling a fortune from the sultan’s treasury. Proving their point was a sort of a triumph over the sultan, implying that informal relationships and resources were part and parcel of the state sociopolitical structure.

The al-Nashw episode clearly illustrates what was previously known to us on the role of non-formal patronage relationships in organizing sociopolitical activities

⁵⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:485; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:141.

⁵⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:485; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:141–42; al-Shujā’ī, *Tārīkh*, 61.

⁵⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:485–86; al-Shujā’ī, *Tārīkh*, 62–63.



in the urban community in the medieval Middle East. However, despite its failure, al-Nāṣir's ambitious attempt to employ the authority of formal institutions as a primary means for universally organizing sociopolitical relations clearly brings into relief the formal institutions of the Mamluk state, with the non-formal structures that existed within them and motivated their activities in practice. The scope of the reforms that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad intended to enforce in the state's economy raised to the surface details about all sectors of society and the mechanisms of interaction between them. We learn from these details that the non-formal patronage relationships that functioned under the auspices of formal institutions existed on a broad state-wide scale and not only in the urban centers of the Mamluk state, linking cities and villages into one sociopolitical system. This non-formal relationship crossed borders between sectors horizontally and vertically—between the ulama and the amirs and their subordinates—and created a covert cooperation to obtain state resources far beyond those allocated to them in the formal state distribution of resources.⁵⁹ Al-Nāṣir's plan of administrating his state "by the book" signified his wish to create a real and unlimited authority for the sultan and a monopoly over the sources of power in the state. Such a change in the macrostructure of the state could not have been inaugurated without an overt conflict with the functional groups in Egyptian society. However, the conflict surrounding al-Nashw, albeit critical, shows that all parties used mediation tactics,⁶⁰ such as personal intimidation and public protests, and avoided the use of violent force. Despite his large number of rank-and-file mamluks, al-Nāṣir did not mobilize his army, nor did he punish any of his prominent amirs for their embezzlements. The voice of the ulama was heard only indirectly through public prayers and celebration. The amirs were the most active in the mediation process; actually they were the coordinators of the event and when they used violence (against al-Nashw), it was not directed at changing the ruler but rather to resume the old order. The non-violent solution of such a large-scale crisis proves that in the Mamluk polity there were codes of crisis-management and a macrostructure of moral economy (based on both formal and informal principles) that guaranteed the state's survival against changes generated by social and political actions.

⁵⁹For this issue see Carl F. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamluk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (New York, 1994), 131–89; Ira M. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984), 130–42.

⁶⁰F. G. Baily, "Parapolitical Systems," in *Local Level Politics*, 281–94; Clifford, "State Formation," 33–35.

