

tion, those who were dismissed from the *ḥalqaḥ* during the muster were reinstated by the new holders of power, and their *iqṭāʿ*s were restored.⁷⁴ During al-Ashraf Shaʿbān's reign, a large number of mamluks from previous amirs' households were employed as *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers in the service of royal family members (*asyād*). Barqūq, the future sultan al-Zāhir, and his coalition partner Barkah, were among the Yalbughāwīyah mamluks who had been exiled to Syria in 769/1368 for their part in the rebellion against their master and his murder.⁷⁵ They were summoned to Cairo by al-Ashraf Shaʿbān to serve under his sons for *iqṭāʿ*s in the *ḥalqaḥ*. It was from this position that Barqūq would take part in future rebellions and pave his way to rule.⁷⁶ Qurtāy al-Ṭāzī, Asandamur al-Dhabbāḥ al-Sirghitmushī, Balāṭ al-Ṣaghīr al-Sayfī, and Yalbughā al-Nizāmī were all mamluks of amirs who rose to high rank from the position of *mufraḍī* (pl. *mafāridah*), i.e., *iqṭāʿ* holder in the *ḥalqaḥ*.⁷⁷ In 784/1382, al-Zāhir Barqūq (784–801/1382–99) surveyed al-Ashraf Shaʿbān's mamluks with the intention of purging them from the army; those of them who held large *iqṭāʿ*s were made *muqaddamūn* in the *ḥalqaḥ*, while the rest were reduced to simple *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers. Then Barqūq inquired about other Ashrafi mamluks who earned ten thousand dirhams per annum, i.e., the largest *iqṭāʿāt* in the *ḥalqaḥ*. He found that four hundred such mamluks had been admitted to the *ḥalqaḥ* after their master's death; he also found one hundred mamluks who had held *jāmikīyah*, or an allowance, of this same amount of ten thousand dirhams in the sultan's bureau. The holders of *jāmikīyāt* were dismissed and their allowances were given to Barqūq's mamluks; the *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers were relieved of their duties, although they were allowed to keep their fiefs for their livelihood.⁷⁸ In 782/1380, Barqūq called for the *ḥalqaḥ* and the unemployed soldiers to fight for him against his partner-rival Barkah.⁷⁹ During this period, then, the *ḥalqaḥ* was under the amirs' control and served as a sort of temporary occupation for many young mamluks from defeated factions until their fortunes changed and brought them back into an effective power network.

As was mentioned earlier, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad prevented the protection of amirs over *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers and dealt severely with *ḥalqaḥ ajnād* who had sold their *iqṭāʿ*s. By contrast, the prominent amirs who held effective power during this

⁷⁴ Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿiʿ*, 1:2:55.

⁷⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:155.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 3:305, 308; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 3:286; idem, *Nujūm*, 11:72, 159; ʿAlī ibn Dāwud al-Ṣayrafī (al-Jawharī), *Nuzhat al-Nufūs wa-al-Abdān fī Tārīkh al-Zamān*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1970), 1:34–35.

⁷⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:287–88; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 11:149–50. For *mufraḍī* in the *ḥalqaḥ* see: al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:87.

⁷⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:479.

⁷⁹ Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿiʿ*, 1:2:258.

period often allowed the selling and exchanging of *iqṭāʿ*s in the *ḥalqah* for money. As early as 744/1343, the vicegerent ʿAlī Malik al-Ḥājj, a man of moral integrity, forbade the relinquishing of *iqṭāʿāt* (*al-nuzūl ʿan al-iqṭāʿāt*) by *ḥalqah* soldiers or exchanging (*al-muqyādāt*) them for money. The practice of exchanging fiefs in the *ḥalqah* ceased for a while when ʿAlī Malik demanded that monies paid in these transactions be transferred to the state treasury instead of the amirs' and clerks' pockets.⁸⁰ Only two years later, when a new power network was formed, the amir Ghurlū, who was in charge of the tax bureaus (*shādd al-dawāwīn*), introduced the norm of paying the state treasury for posts and for relinquishing or exchanging *iqṭāʿ*s.⁸¹ Lack of strong control by the central government reached its peak during the Black Death (748–49/1348–49), allowing the admittance of civilians to the *ḥalqah*. A large number of *ḥalqah* soldiers were decimated in the Black Death, so much so that within a week an *iqṭāʿ* would move between six soldiers consecutively. This confusion was exploited by commoners who bought vacant *iqṭāʿ*s in the *ḥalqah*.⁸² In 753/1352, when the amir Qublāy emerged as vicegerent of a newly formed power coalition, the phenomenon of *iqṭāʿ* sale and exchange reached a level whereby even the *muqaddamū al-ḥalqah* sold their commandership. A group of about three hundred agents (*muhayyisūn*) was formed during these years, moving among the *ajṅād al-ḥalqah* and encouraging them to sell their *iqṭāʿ*s that were coveted by artisans.⁸³ Worthy of mention is that between 744/1343 and 754/1353 the wars between the Bedouin tribes of the ʿArak and Banū Hilāl over hegemony in Upper Egypt made travelling in the region impossible, damaged agriculture, and prevented the levying of land tax. The weakness of the government vis-à-vis the Bedouin reached such a level that Muḥammad Ibn Wāṣil came to depend on al-Aḥḍab, the chief of the ʿArak tribe that controlled Upper Egypt, to collect the *kharāj*.⁸⁴ In 754/1353, when the economic crisis in the Sultanate reached its worst, the *majlis al-mashūrah*⁸⁵ authorized the amir Shaykhū, who acted as *al-amīr al-kabīr*, to take drastic measures to put an end to the disorder prevailing in the government. It was during this year that the Sultani harem that squandered the sultan's private treasury was eliminated, the Coptic clerks were purged from the state administration, the Coptic Church's estates were confiscated, and the Bedouin in Upper and Lower Egypt were dealt a heavy blow.⁸⁶ Unsurprisingly, this was also the year in which Shaykhū ordered the abolition of relinquishing and exchanging *iqṭāʿāt* in the army, and he also ordered

⁸⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:643; idem, *Khīṭaṭ*, 2:219.

⁸¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:687.

⁸² Ibid., 873, 780, 781.

⁸³ Ibid., 860.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 908; Levanoni, *A Turning Point*, 183.

⁸⁵ Levanoni, *A Turning Point*, 194–95.

⁸⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:908, 910–11, 913; Levanoni, *A Turning Point*, 173–96.



that clerks in the army bureau (*dīwān al-jaysh*), who amassed great fortunes from the frequent transactions of fiefs, would levy only three dirhams instead of twenty for issuing fief allocation decrees.⁸⁷ Shaykhū's measures terminated some fifteen years of disorder in the *ḥalqaḥ* administration that was used by amirs and clerks to amass great wealth. After Shaykhū's murder, the amirs' grip over the *ḥalqaḥ* was gradually renewed.

It was during the reign of al-Zāhir Barqūq that *ḥalqaḥ iqtā'*s were shared formally between the sultan and the amirs, probably as part of the arrangement he made to placate the amirs after deposing the House of Qalāwūn. That is to say, the *ḥalqaḥ* was manned mainly by mamluks from the sultan's and the amirs' households. *Ḥalqaḥ iqtā'*s were allocated to recruits from the sultan's mamluk household registered in the *dīwān al-mufrad* (the bureau established by him especially for payment of the sultan's mamluks)⁸⁸ and to mamluks in amirs' households in addition to the incomes they already held.⁸⁹ In this way, considerable disparities in income level became widespread in the *ḥalqaḥ* between increased income holders, who had a double and triple income, and others whose *iqtā'* income remained so low that it was unfeasible to levy it.⁹⁰ In addition, the practice of collecting *ḥimāyah* fees and leases was widespread among the amirs in Egypt. Yalbughā al-Naṣirī (d. 817/1414) was outstanding in abstaining from levying them, so much so that al-Maqrīzī thought it was an important piece of information to be included in his obituary.⁹¹ During the twelve-year civil war that prevailed in the sultanate after Barqūq's death, the amirs' patronage was also instrumental in the inclusion of their protégés in the *dīwān al-mufrad*. For example, in 805/1403, al-Nāṣir Faraj, Barqūq's son, decided to cut the salaries and fodder payments of twelve hundred mamluks who had been registered in the *dīwān al-mufrad* since his father's death. Due to the amirs' advocacy, they were reinstated, except for two hundred thirty "who had no one to protect them [*lam yūjad man ya'tanī bi-him*]."⁹² In 821/1418, when al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (815–24/1412–21) was preparing for an expedition against Qārā Yusūf, the Turkmen chieftain who then ruled northern Iraq, he used the *ḥalqaḥ* survey as an opportunity to renew the separation between the amirs' households, the *ḥalqaḥ*,

⁸⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:890–91.

⁸⁸ For *Dīwān al-Mufrad* establishment and development see: Igarashi Daisuke, "The Establishment and Development of al-Dīwān al-Mufrad: Its Background and Implications," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 10 (2006): 117–40.

⁸⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:462; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 14:71; Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-Ghumr bi-Abnā' al-'Umr* (Hyderabad, 1967), 3:169. See also: Igarashi, "Dīwān al-Mufrad," 136.

⁹⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:462; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 14:71.

⁹¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:295.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 3:1103.



and *dīwān al-mufrad*. Consequently the amirs' mamluks had to choose between service in their masters' households or the *ḥalqah*. Those who chose the *ḥalqah* but still complained about low income had their *iqṭā'*s increased, probably to prevent *ḥimāyah* payment to the amirs.⁹³ However, al-Mu'ayyad's reforms did not last long, for the historians al-Maqrīzī and Abū al-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470) contend that the double position practice was the reason for the diminished number of soldiers in the army in their days, i.e., after al-Mu'ayyad's reign.⁹⁴ The sources do not show that mamluks in the amirs' households held *iqṭā'*s in the *ḥalqah*, but they do show that many Sultani mamluks continued to hold both a *jāmikīyah* from the *dīwān al-mufrad* and an *iqṭā'* in the *ḥalqah*. While distributing salaries to Sultani mamluks in 827/1424, al-Ashraf Barsbāy (825–42/1422–38) decided to cut the *jawāmik* of those who also held *iqṭā'*s in the *ḥalqah*.⁹⁵ In 873/1468, *ḥalqah* soldiers who held both *jāmikīyah* and *iqṭā'* could choose between going on the expedition organized against Shāh Suwār, the rebelling Turkmen chief of the Dhū al-Qādirid vassal principality in eastern Anatolia, or paying one hundred dinars to cover the expenses of a substitute (*badīl*).⁹⁶ In 890/1485, when news of the Ottoman invasion into Mamluk territories in eastern Anatolia arrived, the veteran mamluks (*qarāniṣah*) and *awlād al-nās* who were unable to go on the expedition were required to bring a fully-equipped substitute and a horse, and those who held a *jāmikīyah* and *iqṭā'* had to pay one hundred dinars in case they could not provide the substitute for the expedition.⁹⁷

The exclusion of the mamluks in the amirs' service from the *ḥalqah* and *dīwān al-mufrad* obviously did not influence the amirs' informal patronage over the *ḥalqah* and Sultani mamluks. The sources reveal some personal testimonies of amirs' patronage in the *ḥalqah* and the *dīwān al-mufrad*. 'Alī ibn Dāwud al-Ṣayrafī (d. 900/1495), a fifteenth-century historian and a grandson of a *ḥalqah jundī*, testifies that in 833/1430, when he was fifteen years old, the amir 'Alā' al-Dīn Āqbughā al-Jamālī (d. 837/1434) arranged a position in the official mint (*ṣarrāf*) for his father, and a *jāmikīyah* in the *dīwān al-mufrad* for 'Alī himself, which he held until Āqbughā's death.⁹⁸ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn Iyās, the grandson of a fourteenth-century amir,⁹⁹ mentions that in 914/1508 he was among the *awlād al-nās* whose *iqṭā'*s in the *ḥalqah* were cut and given to the sultan's mamluks. His *iqṭā'* was allocated to four mamluks, which means that it was not a small one, but, he contends,

⁹³ Ibid., 4:462; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 14:69–71.

⁹⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:462; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 14:71.

⁹⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:661; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 2:92.

⁹⁶ Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 2:26.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 3:219.

⁹⁸ Al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 3:182, 285.

⁹⁹ Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 4:47.



it was restored to him with Allāh's help.¹⁰⁰ A more vital indication of the amirs' patronage over *ḥalqaḥ* and Sultani mamluks is borne out by the evidence that the practice of *ḥimāyah* was enlarged in the fifteenth century by both the increase in the number of fees levied for protection (*ḥimāyāt*) and its diffusion throughout most parts of Egypt, probably in reaction to the closing of the *ḥalqaḥ* ranks to mamluks in the amirs' service. Ibn Taghrībirdī testifies that after al-Mu'ayyad's reign the *ḥimāyah* increased in Egypt and became a norm (*sunnah*), reaching an unprecedented degree during al-Ashraf Īnāl's reign (857–65/1453–60) and bringing about the destruction of the cultivated lands in the country.¹⁰¹ Al-Ashraf Barsbāy had considerable incomes from *ḥimāyah* levied on *iqṭā'* lands.¹⁰² Both Barsbāy's son, al-'Azīz, and Īnāl's son, Aḥmad, amassed during their fathers' reigns a fortune from their *iqṭā'*s, *ḥimāyah* payments, and the leasing of estates.¹⁰³ In 919/1513, the whole army, except the fifth corps that was manned with very low-salaried soldiers equipped with firearms, was dissatisfied with Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī's (906–22/1501–16) payment policy, while the amirs considered deposing him. All the mamluks complained not only about the cuts in payment for fodder and meat, but more so about the ruin of their *iqṭā'*s because of the *ḥimāyāt* payments and the oppression of the tax officials and the local Bedouin chieftains.¹⁰⁴

Except for al-Maqrīzī's aforementioned description of the *ḥimāyah* in the context of the thirteenth century, fifteen-century chronicles do not provide details on the nature of the new *ḥimāyāt*. Meloy brought to our attention a forgotten source from the fifteenth century, which was published already in 1968, that shed light on this issue.¹⁰⁵ It is a tract by Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Khalīl al-Asadī, a clerk who served in *dīwān al-inshā'* (the correspondence bureau),¹⁰⁶ bearing the title *Al-Taysīr wa-al-Itibār wa-al-Taḥrīr wa-al-Ikhtibār fīmā Yajibu min Ḥusn al-Tadbīr wa-al-Taṣarruf wa-al-Ikhtiyār*, which might be loosely translated as "The quest for and investigation about the right management, conduct, and experience of rulership." The tract advocates economic and administrative reform in line with Islamic principles to remedy the prevailing dire economic situation.¹⁰⁷ Although the tract

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 4:136, 172; al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 3:336.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 16:160.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:1139; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 16:225. See also: al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 3:199.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 1:2:319.

¹⁰⁵ Meloy, "The Privatization of Protection," 198–99.

¹⁰⁶ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Khalīl al-Asadī, *Al-Taysīr wa-al-Itibār wa-al-Taḥrīr wa-al-Ikhtibār fīmā Yajibu min Ḥusn al-Tadbīr wa-al-Taṣarruf wa-al-Ikhtiyār*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Ṭalaymāt (Cairo, 1968), 5–12.

¹⁰⁷ Meloy, "The Privatization of Protection," 199–200.



represents a moralistic and ideological outlook, it still provides vital information about how the economic patronage networks functioned and the role the *ḥimāyāt* played in them. Al-Asadī counts the *ḥimāyāt* among the defects resulting from the inadequate salaries paid to administrative officials and the purchase of government positions that had become a norm since the middle of the fourteenth century. Since offices were obtained by payment to the sultan and reshufflings in state administration to increase the sultan's income became frequent, office holders resorted to regain their investment to a harsh tax collection from the lower sectors of the population in both urban centers and villages. To repel complaints charged against them for their misconduct and to secure their interests, the office holders sought the protection of powerful patrons close to the ruler. On the other hand, the weak villagers and many *iqṭā'* holders and *ajnād* also sought the protection of influential elite members, marking their lands as *ḥimāyāt* (*wasamū bilādahum bi-al-ḥimāyāt*) for a sum of money (*jumlah min al-māl*) to relieve themselves of the administrators' oppression.¹⁰⁸ Al-Asadī contends that several kinds of *ḥimāyāt* were invented in arable lands and villages in accordance with the taxes the prefects in the provinces (*wulāh*, s. *wālī*) and inspectors in cultivated lands (*kushshāf*, s. *kāshif*) imposed on the villagers. For example, when the maintenance of the irrigation system was thrust upon the prefects and inspectors by the sultans, taxes were imposed on the peasants for cleaning the canals and conduits and repairing the dams in their districts. In reaction, the villagers and holders of small *iqṭā'*s were obliged to seek protection with prominent amirs, viziers, and others who held sway as men of influence with the sultan (*ahl al-shawkah*). Since *ḥimāyah* in urban centers is beyond the scope of the present article, it is sufficient to mention that protection fees were paid to the same top military and civilian elites by business owners such as millers, bakers, and brokers against the sultan's administrators. Under the protection of these potentates, business owners evaded paying taxes, escaped the inspection of *muhtasibs* (who also paid for their own protection), raised prices, and hoarded cereals and other vital staples in order to make high and easy profits from price fluctuations they created in the market.¹⁰⁹

While the *ḥimāyah* practice was admittedly immoral in terms of Islamic principles, which call for equity and universal and equal access to the state resources, it was not considered a criminal activity such as racket protection.¹¹⁰ It was a formalized and widely recognized arrangement, encompassing most sectors in society and, as in classical Islam, it was considered the protector's (*ḥāmī*) right once it was agreed upon. Al-Asadī confirms that when the prefect and inspector were stronger than the protector, the latter was ignored and the oppression of the weak

¹⁰⁸ Al-Asadī, *Al-Taysīr wa-al-ʿtibār*, 95–96, 136.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 136–37.

¹¹⁰ See also: Meloy, "The Privatization of Protection," 201–2.



was doubled.¹¹¹ The protector then would neither listen to the peasants' complaints nor protect them. Nevertheless, he would levy the *ḥimāyah* because it became an obligatory custom (*ʿādah maqḍīyah*).¹¹² Al-Asadī's testimony proves that *ḥimāyah* providers did not come as a rule from among the most potent elite members of society, nor did they always hold coercive power sufficient to enforce protection rackets. Al-Asadī also testifies that in spite of the wide dispersion of the *ḥimāyāt*, there were areas that were not protected by the *ḥimāyāt* and therefore their populations were oppressed without hindrance by government officials.¹¹³ Clearly traceable in al-Asadī's account is the rivalry that prevailed in the fifteenth century over the landed revenues between the Sultani tax collectors and the *ḥimāyah* providers, a situation reminiscent of the tension that had existed over the *ḥimāyah* between the sultan and the amirs in the early days of the sultanate.

Musters of the *ḥalqaḥ* in the fifteenth century prove that many of its members were protégés of strong elite figures. Ibn Taghrībirdī relates that in 839/1435, the amir Arkamās unwisely conducted the *ḥalqaḥ* muster, held in preparation for an expedition to Syria, wherein he instructed the soldiers to contribute each according to his ability without examining their true economic situation. As a result, those who held large *iqṭāʿ*s were untouched because they were protected by men of power (*ahl al-shawkah*) or paid for their *iqṭāʿ*, while the poor who had low-income *iqṭāʿ*s "had no zealous supporter" [*lā ʿaṣabīyah la-hu*] to protect them from getting into trouble (*tawarraṭa*).¹¹⁴ When the amir Ibn Taghrībirdī surveyed the *ḥalqaḥ* in 844/1440 in order to form a force to be stationed in the Egyptian Mediterranean ports of Rashīd and al-Ṭīnā against anticipated Christian piracy, it was decided to choose only soldiers whose *iqṭāʿ* income was thirty thousand dirhams or more, i.e., the stronger *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers. However, soon they were exempted from the expedition because of the widespread belief that "whoever stood against the *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers, his rule would be terminated" [*man taʿarraḍa li-ajṅād al-ḥalqaḥ zālat dawlatuhu*].¹¹⁵ These cases clearly show that musters of the *ḥalqaḥ* were normally designated for its weak and helpless members, those who were easy prey [*ka-al-fārīṣah bi-yad fārīṣihā*] for the office holders.¹¹⁶ This might be the reason for the small numbers indicated in the sources for the soldiers reviewed during fifteenth-century *ḥalqaḥ* musters. Thus after al-Muʿayyad's purge of the amirs' mamluks from the *ḥalqaḥ* in

¹¹¹ Al-Asadī, *Al-Taysīr wa-al-Iʿtibār*, 136–37, 144–45.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 136.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 96, 136.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 15:69; al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 3:306, 336.

¹¹⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:1228. See also: *ibid.*, 2:721; 3:561; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 16:82–83.

¹¹⁶ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 15:69.



821/1418, the number of its troopers was about one thousand. Only four hundred of them were mustered, most of whom were poor and unfit.¹¹⁷

The musters were used as opportunities for sultans to get rid of those who were not protected, the main group among them consisting of *awlād al-nās*. In the muster of 839/1435, mentioned above, among the penniless soldiers surveyed were elders, infants, and the blind.¹¹⁸ In 868/1464 al-Zāhir Khushqadam cut the clothing payment for the weak *ajnād* and *awlād al-nās*.¹¹⁹ In Ṣafar 873/October 1468, al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy suspended payment of allowances to *awlād al-nās* until they proved their military ability in archery using a heavy bow. They were humiliated, and the *jāmikīyah* of a number of them was cut.¹²⁰ In Rabīʿ I/November, when Qāyṭbāy prepared for the expedition against Shāh Suwār, the *awlād al-nās* were put to an archery test again, this time with the test including three bows, each offering a different challenge. The *jāmikīyahs* of some of those who were incapable of shooting the bows were cut, and others were required to pay one hundred dinars each for a substitute who went into battle in his place. Some of the amirs interceded with the sultan on behalf of those who held a *jāmikīyah* of one thousand dirhams—which was a very low annual income—to retain their posts and others to pay fifty instead of one hundred dinars.¹²¹ It might well be that the amirs' advocacy made Qāyṭbāy change his demands on the *awlād al-nās* in the following muster he held in Jumādā II/January 1468. Those who held both *jāmikīyah* and *iqṭāʿ* could choose between going on the expedition or paying one hundred dinars to cover the expenses of a substitute, and those who held a *jāmikīyah* of one thousand dirhams to pay twenty-five dinars.¹²²

As we have seen, the majority of the *ḥalqah* troops were in fact either Sultani mamluks or the amirs' protégés, while the weaker ones, including many of the *awlād al-nās*, formed only a small part of the *ḥalqah*. The latter were not true soldiers but rather the weaker members of the Mamluk elite that were kept in the *ḥalqah* with very low monthly wages out of charity instead of being given alms (*ṣadaqah*) from the sultan's treasury.¹²³ Since the early days of the Mamluk sultanate the *ḥalqah* had served as the framework for absorbing the weaker sectors of the Mamluk elite. Veteran mamluks ended their military careers in the *ḥalqah* even

¹¹⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:63, 65; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿiʿ*, 2:40.

¹¹⁸ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 15:69.

¹¹⁹ Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿiʿ*, 2:419.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20–21; see also 462, 470.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 26.

¹²³ ʿAlī ibn Dāwūd al-Jawharī (al-Ṣayrafī), *Inbāʿ al-Ḥaṣr bi-Abnāʾ al-ʿAṣr*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Caro, 1970), 501–2.



when they reached old age and became disabled,¹²⁴ and mamluks' descendents, including orphans of both genders, inherited their father's *iqṭā'* or *jāmkīyah* out of moral considerations.¹²⁵ As mentioned above, destitute sons of Baḥrīyah mamluks were admitted to the *ḥalqaḥ* by Qalāwūn on moral grounds. The sons of forty *ḥalqaḥ* members who died in the battle of Āyās in 738/1337 were granted fiefs in the *ḥalqaḥ*.¹²⁶ Providing for the needs of the poor was one of the traditional functions of government in Islam and fell into line with the Mamluk ethos of factional solidarity and the right of equal access to economic resources.¹²⁷ The sultans' fear of criticism for infringing upon that right of the poor and weak was the main reason for the measured purges of the unfit from the *ḥalqaḥ* and the cuts in their meager payments. In 751/1350, al-Nāṣir Ḥasan wanted to get rid of the children and artisans who had purchased *iqṭā'āt* in the *ḥalqaḥ*, and he ordered the amir Baybughā Ṭaṭar to survey the *ḥalqaḥ*. A group of artisans, babies carried by their mothers, children, and youths pleaded for mercy. After a consultation among the amirs, it was decided to abolish the muster.¹²⁸ When al-Muẓaffar Ḥājī intended to inspect the *ḥalqaḥ* (747/1346), Amir Aruqtāy thwarted him.¹²⁹ On Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar al-Bulqīnī's advice, al-Zāhir Barqūq cancelled the *ḥalqaḥ* survey he had decided upon and even began to implement in 789/1387.¹³⁰

Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī departed aggressively from those principles of protecting the poor when he started persecuting the weak members in the *ḥalqaḥ*, diverting their resources to his plan for the introduction of firearms into the Mamluk army. Particularly notable is the absence of cases in which al-Ghawrī cut the income of the high-income members of the *ḥalqaḥ*. Al-Ghawrī was confronted by the strong opposition of the Mamluk elite when he established the corps of harquebusiers, known in the sources as the "Fifth Corps." Therefore it was financed largely from

¹²⁴ See for example the reasons the amir Ṭaṭar gave his rivals for the inclusion of his old veteran mamluks in the *ḥalqaḥ* (Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 14:184–85).

¹²⁵ Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 4:25

¹²⁶ Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir*, 416; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:430.

¹²⁷ For the issue of the inherent right of all sectors working in the same community to equal access to rank and economic resources see: William 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. M. Swartz (Chicago, 1968), 295–321; Winslow 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).

¹²⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:830–31.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 721.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:561.



unofficial resources derived from the manipulation of *awqāf*¹³¹ and the resources he cut off from *dīwān al-mufrad* and the weak sector in the *ḥalqah*.¹³² In 907/1501 al-Ghawrī surveyed the holders of *jawāmik* from among the *awlād al-nās*, including orphans and women, and cut their wages. Later al-Ghawrī cut the salaries of many of the most respectable among the *awlād al-nās*.¹³³ In 910/1504, the sultan surveyed again a group of the same *awlād al-nās* and *sayfīyah* mamluks (mamluks of deceased amirs) whose *jawāmik* had been taken; part of them retained their *jawāmik* and others were given only half of their allowance.¹³⁴ In 914/1508, al-Ghawrī increased the scope of his purges when he cut off, for no obvious reason as Ibn Iyās reports, four hundred *iqṭā'āt* and *waqf* allowances, most of them held by *awlād al-nās* serving in the *ḥalqah* and women supported by charitable trusts. In this event, the *awlād al-nās* were humiliated by the sultan's mamluks who attacked them in their homes.¹³⁵ While distributing the *jawāmik* in 918/1512, al-Ghawrī cut one third of the clothing allocation given to *awlād al-nās* and the elderly among the mamluks.¹³⁶ The allowances and *iqṭā'āt* that had been saved were directed to the Fifth Corps, manned again by *awlād al-nās*, the sultan's mamluk recruits, and foreigners such as Turkmens and North Africans. Unlike the *ḥalqah* or *dīwān al-mufrad* in which the *iqṭā'āt* and *jawāmik* had been allocated until al-Mu'ayyad's reign as a second income, mainly to mamluks from the sultan's and amirs' households, payment in the Fifth Corps was the only allowance given to its members. Their allowances were low and reached only one thousand five hundred dirhams, approximately the same as the *jawāmik* that had been cut from the weak and poor *ḥalqah* soldiers.¹³⁷

CONCLUSION

At its inception in the early 1260s, the *ḥalqah* was already characterized as a flexible and diverse military body, comprised of individuals from many backgrounds. Their secondary status in the Mamluk army was reflected by the smaller fiefs they were granted. At the same time the *ḥalqah* was the biggest body in the army, and the total sum of the relatively small fiefs held by its members was identical to the amirs' share of the state resources. The weakness of the *ḥalqah* soldiers induced the involvement of powerful patrons and clerks in the military administration, especial-

¹³¹ Carl F. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamluk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (New York, 1994).

¹³² Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 4:206, 368–69.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 285, 321–22.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 324, 368–69, 436, 459, 460, 467.



ly in the absence of a strong central government. The *ḥimāyah* was used by amirs to include *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers in their patronage network and lay their hands on part of their income. Since the amirs encroached on the sultan's control and authority in the *ḥalqaḥ*, the *ḥimāyah* became an object of tension between the sultan and the amirs. From the amirs' perspective, denying them *ḥimāyah* over *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers meant not only preventing them access to landed incomes but also harming their prestige as patrons of power networks, i.e., as their clients' advocates with the authorities. It is in this context that al-Manṣūr Lājīn's cadastral survey of 697/1298 should be viewed. Through this survey Lājīn intended to reclaim state resources from the power network that rivaled his own. He intended to stop the amirs' *ḥimāyah* and restore the sultan's control over the *ḥalqaḥ*. This round in the conflict between the sultan and the amirs ended with the strengthening of the latter's power, since with Lājīn's murder all the *iqṭā'*s taken from the *ḥalqaḥ* formally went to the amirs. The *ḥimāyah* was not abolished, but the old patrons of power networks were replaced by new ones. As a weak, unorganized military group, the *ḥalqaḥ* remained with numerous unfit old soldiers with far fewer *iqṭā'* resources. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad attained the targets that Lājīn had set for his cadastral survey, not only because of his strong authority but also because he determined, for the first time in the Mamluk state, a permanent manpower quota for the army and a correlative remuneration scale as the basis for the *iqṭā'* distribution. The *ḥalqaḥ*'s size was fixed as one third of the army, over eight thousand soldiers out of twenty-four thousand, and it held about thirty percent of the *iqṭā'* resources.

The frequent reshufflings of power after al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's death, and the ensuing creation and disintegration of power networks headed by prominent amirs, tipped the balance in the tension between the sultan and the amirs over control of the *ḥalqaḥ* in the amirs' favor. The *ḥalqaḥ*'s makeup was changed when, in addition to the old members and artisans who bought *iqṭā'*s in the *ḥalqaḥ* in the wake of the Black Death, it became a temporary haven for many young mamluks from defeated factions until their fortunes changed and brought them back to an effective power network. Thus the *ḥalqaḥ* was again open to the patronage of powerful amirs and its involvement in power struggles over rule increased. The amirs' control over the *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers reached its peak when al-Zāhir Barqūq formalized their patron-client status by allowing the registration of mamluks from the amirs' households as *iqṭā'* holders in the *ḥalqaḥ* together with his own Sultani mamluks. Control over the *ḥalqaḥ* was, in fact, divided between the sultan and the amirs, although the form of this division is unclear. Al-Mu'ayyad restored the sultan's control over the *ḥalqaḥ*; the amirs' mamluks were denied access to the *ḥalqaḥ*, while Sultani mamluks continued to be numbered among the *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers. Yet the amirs' patronage over the *ḥalqaḥ* members and Sultani mamluks was not curbed but rather increased because in the fifteenth century their households played a central part in the state's econom-



ic, military, and political power networks. Thus, due to the dire economic situation, the sultans employed oppressive tax policies to increase their income, while the amirs and some civilian elite members provided protection, *ḥimāyah*, to the lower military and civilian sectors against the state officials, encroaching on the sultan's authority. The *ḥalqah*'s makeup reflected the Mamluk patronage system and power structure. In the main, it was manned by strong, protected persons: mamluks from the sultan's household and the amirs' protégés. In contrast, the weak and oppressed *ḥalqah* soldiers, who constituted a small part of the *ḥalqah*, remained unprotected. They were the soldiers who were mustered before expeditions, to go into battle or to pay a part of their already low salary, and dismissals from the *ḥalqah* were from their number. They were the soldiers to whom the seemingly sorry plight of the *ḥalqah* in the fifteenth century can be attributed.

