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## The *Ḥalqah* in the Mamluk Army: Why Was It Not Dissolved When It Reached Its Nadir?

### I

The *ḥalqah*<sup>1</sup> was held in high regard during Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's reign as the sultan's small elite bodyguard that was under his personal command on the battlefield.<sup>2</sup> According to Stephen R. Humphreys, there is little mention of the *ḥalqah* in the sources after Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's death until it reappears in the last years of al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb's reign (637–47/1239–49).<sup>3</sup> At that time the *ḥalqah* continued to enjoy elite status, but which units were included in it or the number of its troops is unclear.<sup>4</sup> The question of whether the Ayyubid *ḥalqah* had something in common with its immediate descendant in the Mamluk army is still open. Humphreys is of the opinion that the *ḥalqah* in its classic Mamluk form appeared no earlier than the first years of al-Zāḥir Baybars' reign (658–76/1260–77) and had little in common with the elite royal guard of Ayyubid times. Its position in the army was made secondary to the Royal Mamluks and the amirs' mamluks who comprised the new ruling elite. However, as long as the *ḥalqah* retained professional and fully trained soldiers it enjoyed a prestigious position in the army.<sup>5</sup> David Ayalon, on the other hand, argues that although certain changes occurred in the army with the transition from Ayyubid to Mamluk rule, they did not affect the continuity existing between the two armies.<sup>6</sup> During the early period of the Mamluk Sultanate the *ḥalqah* maintained a considerable part of its power and high position from Ayyubid times. It was only later that it lost its prominence to the Royal Mamluks, mainly due to the cadastral surveys conducted by al-Manṣūr Lājīn (697/1297) and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (713/1313; 715/1315). David Ayalon links the *ḥalqah*'s decline mainly with the fact that its

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<sup>1</sup> Quatremère and David Ayalon were of the opinion that the name of the *ḥalqah* is derived from its function as the sultan's bodyguard and its central position around him in battlefield. A. N. Poliak, on the other hand, thought that the name came from the battle tactics employed by Turkish warriors of surrounding their enemies. Ayalon, "Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army—II," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 16 (1954): 448.

<sup>2</sup> H. A. R. Gibb, "The Armies of Saladin," *Cahiers d'Histoire Egyptienne* 3 (1951): 305, reprinted in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (London, 1962), 74; Ayalon, "Studies on the Mamluk Army II," 448–49; Humphreys, "The Emergence of the Mamluk Army," *Studia Islamica* 45 (1977): 82–83.

<sup>3</sup> Humphreys, "The Emergence of the Mamluk Army," 82–83.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 162–65.

<sup>6</sup> David Ayalon, "From Ayyubids to Mamluks," *Revue des études islamiques* 49, no. 1 (1981): 50.



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members were not mamluks and therefore lacked their military vigor and solidarity (*khushdāshīyah*).

The sources clearly show that from the time of its inception, the *ḥalqah* was a flexible military structure, open to change according to circumstances. Political, social, and moral considerations guided the decision-makers to include military and non-military groups in the *ḥalqah*. Later, patronage had a decisive influence on the *ḥalqah*'s makeup and its division of resources. The purpose of this article is to discuss the changes the *ḥalqah* in Egypt underwent in its makeup and structure, in light of the short- and long-term processes that took place in the Mamluk military and political systems.

## II

When Baybars took power he inherited a patchwork army comprised of a large number of old and disorganized military units, both Egyptian Royal Mamluks from al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb's reign up to his own time, and former Ayyubid armies. Since Humphreys has studied Baybars' army, mention of his main points will suffice here. Baybars was the first Mamluk sultan to reorganize the army, among other state institutions in the Mamluk Sultanate, according to new principles that marked the initiation of a new central government and the Mamluks' new status as the holders of power. The Mamluk army was divided into three groups: the Royal Mamluks (*al-mamālik al-sultānīyah*), the amirs' mamluks (*mamālik al-umarā'*), and the *ḥalqah*. The Royal Mamluks included mainly mamluks from the Egyptian royal regiments, such as al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb's, al-Mu'izz Aybak's, and Baybars' own mamluks, and were to gain exclusive status. The amirs' mamluks remained under the direct command of their masters but were to be placed at the sultan's disposal when necessary, mainly on expeditions. The Egyptian *ḥalqah* included part of the former Ayyubid regiments in Syria—the freeborn Kurdish Shahrzūrīyah and the Mamluk 'Azīzīyah and Nāṣirīyah—that were permitted to remain in Egypt after the battle of 'Ayn Jālūt (the Spring of Goliath, 658/1260), and the rest were absorbed into the *ḥalqah* corps of the Mamluk armies in the Syrian provinces. It should be noted that Turkmen, Kurdish, and Arab tribesmen served as auxiliaries in the army. The masses of Ayyubid freeborn and mamluk soldiers admitted to the *ḥalqah* strengthened the army when the Sultanate was in need of a well-prepared, qualified army for its wars against the Mongols and Crusaders. No less important was the need to institutionalize these disorganized military groups, which could have otherwise turned into anarchist elements in the realm. The *ḥalqah*'s secondary status in the Mamluk army was marked by the fact that although the *ḥalqah* was under the sultan's direct control, its troopers did not share a common living quarters



financed by the sultan, as was the case with his recruits.<sup>7</sup> The *ḥalqah* troopers also had to provide their own equipment, again unlike the sultan's mamluks. Therefore the sultan's effective control over them depended on the personal authority their commanders had on them, and this was formally restricted to expeditions only. The division between these three groups was not clear-cut. In addition to his mamluks, Baybars' Sultani regiment included Ayyubid mamluks and freeborn officers, some of whom inherited their military status and *iqṭā'* according to previous Ayyubid norms.<sup>8</sup> However, the domination of the new Mamluk elite in political and military institutions was made clear by the smaller *iqṭā'āt* (s. *iqṭā'*), or fiefs, and lower ranks granted to the Ayyubid and other veterans, as well as the preference of appointing Baybars' colleagues and mamluks to the Sultani regiment and high offices.

Another group of enlistees into the *ḥalqah* were the Wāfidīyah, the thousands of Turko-Mongol tribesmen troops that had deserted the Mongol Ilkhanate for the Mamluk Sultanate since the 1260s.<sup>9</sup> The first wave of Wāfidis left the Ilkhanate, where they were stationed, in 660–62/1262–64 under the orders of their master, Berke Khan (654–65/1256–66), the ruler of the Golden Horde, as a result of an open conflict he had with Hülegü, ruler of the Ilkhanate. The first group of Wāfidis arrived in 660/1262 and included two hundred horsemen with their families. They were received in Egypt with great honor; their commanders were granted amirates, and the rest were incorporated into the Bahriyah, most probably *ḥalqah* units that at the time were assigned guarding duties in the Citadel of Cairo and other citadels in the Syrian provinces.<sup>10</sup> They embraced Islam and settled in the Lūq quarter of

<sup>7</sup> Every forty *ḥalqah* soldiers had a *ḥalqah* commander (*muqaddam al-ḥalqah*—pl. *muqaddamū al-ḥalqah*) whose commanding authority was limited to expeditions only. During war time both the *muqaddam al-ḥalqah* and his troops were stationed, together with other Sultani and amirs' mamluks, under the command of a *muqaddam alf*, an amir of one hundred who acted as commander of one thousand soldiers, or *ṭulb*, in battle order (Ayalon, "Studies on the Mamluk Army II," 450–51). The *muqaddamū al-ḥalqah* were responsible for the call-up to battle of the troops under their command.

<sup>8</sup> Humphreys, "The Emergence of the Mamluk Army," 156–58. Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, *Al-Rawḍ al-Zāhir fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Zāhir*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz Khuwayṭir (Riyadh, 1976), 96; Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Abū al-Maḥāsīn Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi wa-al-Mustawfā Ba'da al-Wāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo, 1985–93), 2:494–95; Mūsā ibn Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt al-Zamān* (Hyderabad, 1954), 3:232; Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah (Cairo, 1957–73), 1:513, 629; Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Abū al-Maḥāsīn Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1929–72), 7:146.

<sup>9</sup> David Ayalon, "The Wāfidiyya in the Mamluk Kingdom," *Islamic Culture* 25 (1951): 89–104, reprinted in idem, *Studies on the Mamluks of Egypt (1250–1517)* (London, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> David Ayalon, "Le Regiment Bahriya dans l'armee mamelouke," *Revue des etudes islamiques* 19 (1951): 134–38.



Cairo, which was built by Baybars especially for them.<sup>11</sup> In 661/1263, more than thirteen hundred of Berke Khan's warriors arrived in Egypt and again their commanders were granted amirates, but the sources do not mention that their warriors were incorporated into the *ḥalqaḥ*.<sup>12</sup> In 662/1264 a group of refugees arrived from Shiraz, headed by notables from the Khwarizmi and ancient Iraqi regimes and many chieftains of the Khafājah, the Iraqi Arab tribes. Their chief commander, Amir Sayf al-Dīn Baklak, was granted an amirate of forty, but the Arab tribesmen were sent back to their own country.<sup>13</sup> Baybars became concerned by the continuous influx of warriors from the Ilkhanate when in the same year another group of Tatars entered Mamluk territory seeking refuge. He ordered the army to keep watch until it became clear whether they were indeed refugees (*musta'minīn*).<sup>14</sup> In 675/1276, sixteen Turkmen notables defected with their families from the Seljuk vassal principality of the Ilkhanid Mongols in East Anatolia. They were not granted amirates, and in the same year they joined Baybars on an expedition to Anatolia in an attempt to establish a Mamluk vassal principality in that region.<sup>15</sup> About thirty years would elapse from the first wave of immigration in the early 1260s until another group of three hundred Tatar troops arrived in Egypt in 691/1291.<sup>16</sup> In 695/1295, during al-ʿĀdil Kitbughā's reign (694–96/1294–96), eighteen thousand Oirat families (in the Arab sources they appear as *uwayrātīyah*), or ten thousand according to another version, left the Ilkhanate and entered the Mamluk Sultanate.<sup>17</sup> Only their commanders and notables, who numbered about two hundred (or one hundred and thirteen, depending on the source), including Hülegü's son-in-law, were received with great honor and were permitted to enter Cairo. Their commander Ṭurghāy was granted an amirate of forty; another amir, Alūṣ, received an amirate of ten; and the rest were appointed as *ḥalqaḥ* commanders with *iqṭā'āt*. The thousands of

<sup>11</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:473–75; Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir, *Rawḍ*, 74.

<sup>12</sup> Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-Fikrah fī Tārīkh al-Hijrah*, ed. Donald Richards (Beirut, 1998), 84–85; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:500–1; Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-Jumān fī Tārīkh Ahl al-Zamān*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo, 1987), 1:464–65.

<sup>13</sup> Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdah*, 88; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:512.

<sup>14</sup> Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdah*, 89; idem, *Kitāb al-Tuḥfah al-Mulūkīyah fī al-Dawlah al-Turkīyah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Ṣāliḥ Ḥamdān (Cairo, 1987), 146; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:515.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:625, 627.

<sup>16</sup> Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah* (Beirut and Riyadh, 1966), 3:330.

<sup>17</sup> K. V. Zettersteen, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mamlükensultane in den Jahren 690–741 der Hi ra, nach arabischen Handschriften* (Leiden, 1919), 39; Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdah*, 309–10; Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, ed. Al-Bāzz al-ʿArīnī (Cairo, 1964–92), 31:296–97; Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh al-Duwal wa-al-Mulūk*, ed. Qusṭanṭīn Zurayq (Beirut, 1942), 8:203; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:813; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, 3:304–7; Abū Bakr Ibn Aybak al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar wa-Jāmiʿ al-Ghurar*, ed. Hans Robert Roemer, ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ ʿAshūr, and Ulrich Haarmann (Cairo, 1960–72), 8:362.



Oirats who came with them were ordered to settle on the Palestinian coast, in the environs of ‘Atlīth, and in al-Biqā‘ in south Lebanon.<sup>18</sup> These thousands of Oirats included women, children, and elderly and middle-aged men, with many of them making their way on foot. They were not allowed to enter the cities on their way from Syria to ‘Atlīth and al-Biqā‘; instead, the town markets came out to them. The sultan also ordered Amir Sanjar al-Duwaydārī, who was in charge of them, to keep them in Syria until his arrival. Under these circumstances, many of their elders died and their young sons were taken into the amirs’ service in Syria.<sup>19</sup> The rest were incorporated into the provinces’ armies, where in time they embraced Islam.<sup>20</sup> In 704/1304, another group of two hundred Tatar warriors arrived in Cairo, among them the two brothers and mother of Salār, the amir who was the power behind the nominal sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. The two brothers received amirates and *iqṭā‘āt*, and others entered the amirs’ service.<sup>21</sup> In 717/1317 another Mongol grand amir, Ṭāṭāy, reached Cairo with one hundred horsemen and their families. Up until 741/1340 the sources mention only a few Mongol soldiers who immigrated on an individual basis. A famine in the lands in 741/1341 caused multitudes to cross the Euphrates into Mamluk territories. They were allowed to stay in the vicinity of Aleppo, and only two hundred of them were allowed to enter Cairo. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad chose about eighty of them for his personal service. Some were sent to the barracks in the Citadel, some were housed in the Citadel or were allocated amirates, and the others entered the *ḥalqah* or were divided among the amirs.<sup>22</sup> This group completed the Wāfidīyah immigration into Mamluk territories.<sup>23</sup>

At first glance, the impression received from the events related to the Wāfidīyah is that there was a constant influx of Tatars into the Mamluk Sultanate over a long period. In fact, there were only two significant waves of immigration, one between 660/1262 and 662/1264, and the second in 695/1296. All other records on the arrival of Turko-Mongol warriors and notables in the Sultanate might be classified as trickles that totaled no more than a few hundred. When summing up the number of Wāfidis that immigrated to the Mamluk Sultanate according to the sources’ reports, we find that it was actually not much more than fifteen hundred commanders and warriors during Baybars’ rule.<sup>24</sup> Whereas the Turkmen and Arab tribesmen

<sup>18</sup> Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, 31:299; Ayalon, “Wāfidiyya,” 99–100.

<sup>19</sup> Zettersteen, *Beiträge*, 39; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, 31:299.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:813; idem, *Kitāb al-Mawā‘iẓ wa-al-Itibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār* (Cairo, 1987), 2:23; Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh*, 8:205.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:5–6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:515–16, 517–20.

<sup>23</sup> Ayalon, “Wāfidiyya,” 103–4.

<sup>24</sup> Ayalon maintains that three thousand horsemen entered into the Mamluk Sultanate during Baybars’ rule. Ayalon, “Wāfidiyya,” 98.



were sent back to their own territories, the Mongol Wāfidis were incorporated into the army and were even settled in Cairo. We might assume that the majority were directed to the *ḥalqaḥ*, although the sources do not explicitly indicate this. In the second wave of immigration in the 690s/1290s, the number of Wāfidis who were admitted into the *ḥalqaḥ* in Cairo was about six hundred soldiers: three hundred in 691/1291 and another two hundred in 695/1296. The number of warriors among the thousands of Oirats that immigrated in 695/1296 is unclear, for this group included the elderly, women, and children. Only one hundred thirteen of their notables reached the *ḥalqaḥ* in Cairo.<sup>25</sup> The majority of their warriors and youths were absorbed into the amirs' households in the Syrian provinces.

Another group of freeborn soldiers included in the *ḥalqaḥ* was comprised of the mamluks' sons (*awlād al-nās*).<sup>26</sup> Baybars arranged subsistence grants for orphans of soldiers, in spite of their great numbers.<sup>27</sup> It is unclear whether the custom of admitting sons of amirs into the *ḥalqaḥ* was initiated during Baybars' reign. However, during Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn's reign (678–89/1279–90) the admission of amirs' sons was done according to professional standards. This is borne out in the story related by Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), the fifteenth-century historian, about Qalāwūn's refusal to grant fiefs in the *ḥalqaḥ* to young and inexperienced sons of amirs. Al-Maqrīzī relates, without mentioning his source, that Amir Ḥusām al-Dīn Ṭuruntāy, Qalāwūn's vicegerent (*nā'ib al-salṭanah*), and Amir Zayn al-Dīn Kitbughā, the vicegerent in absentia (*nā'ib al-ghaybah*), each married their sons to the daughters of the other and petitioned Qalāwūn to grant them *iqṭā'āt* in the *ḥalqaḥ*. Qalāwūn refused their request, arguing: "By God, had I seen them striking their swords or marching in front of me on the battlefield, I would find granting them fiefs in the *ḥalqaḥ* unworthy for fear that it would be said: 'he had granted the fiefs to youths'" [*wa-Allāhi law ra'aytuhumā fī maṣāf al-qitāl yadribān bi-al-sayf aw kānā fī zahf quddāmī astaqbīhu an u'ṭiya la-humā akhbāz fī al-ḥalqaḥ khashyatan an yuqāla a'tā al-ṣibyān akhbāz*].<sup>28</sup> Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī (d. 749/1349), who was a chancery official during al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's

<sup>25</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:812.

<sup>26</sup> For more details on the *awlād al-nās* in the *ḥalqaḥ* see: Ayalon, "Studies on the Mamluk Army—II," 456–59; Ulrich Haarmann, "The Sons of Mamluks as Fief-Holders in Late Medieval Egypt," in *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed. Tarif Khalidi (Beirut, 1984), 142–44; Amalia Levanoni, "Awlād al-nās in the Mamluk Army during the Bahri Period," in *Mamluks and Ottomans: Studies in honour of Michael Winter*, ed. David J. Wasserstein and Ami Ayalon (London and New York, 2006), 96–105; idem, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History, The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn 1310–1341* (Leiden, 1995), 42–52; Jo Van Steenberghe, *Order Out of Chaos: Patronage, Conflict and Mamluk Socio-Political Culture, 1341–1382* (Leiden, 2006), 20–22.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 7:180.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 2:216.



third reign (710–41/1310–41), mentions in his account of the Mamluk army of his time that the sons of amirs were customarily allocated payment and provisions such as meat, bread, and fodder by the sultan until they became eligible for recruitment (*ta'ahhala*) into the *ḥalqah*. The more fortunate among them were granted amirates of ten or forty.<sup>29</sup> There is no reference to a similar customary track for the sons of low-ranking mamluks in the sources. However, destitute sons of mamluks were admitted to the *ḥalqah* on moral grounds. For example, out of respect for his colleagues from the Baḥrīyah, Qalāwūn inaugurated a special unit in the *ḥalqah*, called al-Baḥrīyah, for their sons who were found dallying in Cairo or made their living as artisans and craftsmen.<sup>30</sup> When, in 738/1337, there were forty *ḥalqah* members among the many soldiers who died in the battle of Āyās, a port in Lesser Armenia, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad asked for their sons and granted them fiefs in the *ḥalqah*.<sup>31</sup>

The entry of mamluks from the amirs' households into the *ḥalqah* was done in the early Mamluk period on a limited scale. There are only a few references to amirs' mamluks who were permitted to enter the *ḥalqah*, most often after their master's death but very occasionally during his lifetime. It was only in 678/1279 that an amir's mamluk received an *iqṭā'* in the *ḥalqah* because he had brought about the arrest of two criminals who had bullied the Cairenes for quite a long time.<sup>32</sup> In 719/1319 a mamluk of Amir Baktāsh al-Fakhrī was made a *muqaddam* in the *ḥalqah*.<sup>33</sup> In 733/1332–33, after the death of Baktamūr al-Sāqī, one of the most prominent amirs at the time, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad took some of his mamluks into his service as Sultani Mamluks and granted others *iqṭā'at* in the *ḥalqah*. It should also be mentioned that al-Nāṣir was accused of Baktamūr's assassination, which drove him to outdo himself to placate the latter's relatives, mamluks, and adherents.<sup>34</sup>

We have seen that during the first thirty years of its existence the *ḥalqah* was, in fact, a very flexible institution. It was dependent *a priori* on available qualified military manpower, from inside and outside the Sultanate's territories. Professionalism was the standard for admission into the *ḥalqah*, but political, social, and moral considerations also guided the sultans to include non-military groups,

<sup>29</sup> Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyá Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*, ed. Dorothea Krawulsky (Beirut, 1986), 95. See also: Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā fī Ṣināʿat al-Inshāʿ*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, 1987), 4:52–53; al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 2:216.

<sup>30</sup> Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdah*, 173; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar*, 8:303; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:658; idem, *Khiṭaṭ*, 2:217.

<sup>31</sup> Mūsá ibn Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyá al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir fī Sirat al-Malik al-Nāṣir*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥuṭayṭ (Beirut, 1986), 416; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:430.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:672–73.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, 31:227.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir*, 157; Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt* (Istanbul, Damascus, and Wiesbaden, 1931–1983), 10:196.



such as the indigent sons of mamluks and Wāfidiyah notables. This makeup of the *ḥalqaḥ* indicates that it was open to change according to circumstances; the sources do not reveal the total number of soldiers included in the *ḥalqaḥ* and do not show that a manpower quota had been determined for all units in the Egyptian or Syrian armies. No reforms were made to reorganize the *ḥalqaḥ* until al-Manṣūr Lājīn's (696–98/1296–99) cadastral survey of 697/1298, nor were any attempts made to determine the number of its troops before al-Nāṣir Muhammad's cadastral surveys of 713/1313 and 715/1315. New recruits, such as the sons of mamluks and Wāfidis, were admitted without purging the veterans from the ranks for about thirty years after the *ḥalqaḥ*'s inception. The majority of those who were admitted into the *ḥalqaḥ* at its inception were experienced soldiers, some of them adults in the middle or at the end of their military careers. This means that those who still survived in the 1290s must have been elders. Indeed, the *ḥalqaḥ*'s makeup during the 1290s reflected its problematic and anachronistic position, for it included many of “those whose contribution equaled nothing” [*man lā yughnā ‘anhu wa-lā yujdá majī’uhu shay’an*].<sup>35</sup> At the same time, new mamluk units of superior military quality had been founded—at least two of them, Baybars' Zāhirīyah and Qalāwūn's Burjīyah, were elite units—while Mamluk hegemony in the Sultanate became well established, legitimizing the diversion of more state resources into Mamluk hands. This situation came into the open in the cadastral survey initiated by al-Manṣūr Lājīn in 697/1298, which is called in the sources al-Rawk al-Ḥusāmī.

### III

Lājīn rose to power (in 696/1296) after a struggle between two factions of Qalāwūn's mamluks, broadly divided into the Burjīyah, which included mainly Circassian mamluks who supported Lājīn, and the rest of the Manṣūrīyah, Qalāwūn's veteran mamluks to which Kitbughā, the deposed sultan, belonged. In 693/1294, when Kitbughā acted as vicegerent (*nā'ib al-salṭanah*) behind al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's nominal rule, this division between Qalāwūn's mamluks erupted into an open struggle.<sup>36</sup> Most of the *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers, the Mongols, and the Shahrāsūrīyah Kurds joined Kitbughā, who was himself of Mongol origin. It was because of the Burjīyah opposition that Kitbughā allowed only the Oirats' commanders and notables to enter Cairo out of the thousands that arrived in 695/1295–96 (see above). After Lājīn's rise to power, he launched a reform in the army through a cadastral survey with the aim of building a new *ḥalqaḥ* (or according to another version, to create a new mamluk unit), as a power base for his rule, from among the unemployed soldiers (*baṭṭālūn*).<sup>37</sup> In ei-

<sup>35</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:800.

<sup>36</sup> Al-ʿAynī, *Iqd*, 3:355–56; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 8:43–45, al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:798, 799–800.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, 31:347–48; al-ʿAynī, *Iqd*, 3:397; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 8: 92, 93.



ther case the *rawk* was intended to increase mamluk hegemony in the army, for the creation of a new military unit necessitated the purchase of fresh mamluk recruits, and the *baṭṭālūn* must have been veteran mamluks of earlier sultans and amirs, such as Baybars' *Zāhirīyah* or al-Ashraf Khalīl's (689–93/1290–93) *Ashrafīyah*.

No less important was Lājīn's aim of restricting the dependence of the *ḥalqah* on the dominant *Manṣūrīyah* amirs by means of abolishing their *ḥimāyah* (protection) services on the *iqṭā'*s held by the *ḥalqah* troops, or *ajṇād*. Since the *ḥimāyah* prevailed in the army throughout the Mamluk period and had its roots in earlier periods in the Muslim world, a discussion of this practice is in order. Claude Cahen observed three kinds of *ḥimāyah* in classical Islam. One was the protection Bedouin tribes provided, with or without governmental approval, to settlers or travelers in their territories in return for payment. This procedure was identical to *khafārah* (guarding), which goes back to a nomadic pre-Islamic procedure. The more popular practice of *ḥimāyah* was related to the patronage institution that prevailed in the late Roman and Byzantine Empires and later in classical Islam. The *walā'*, the patronage relations between the Muslim conquerors and their non-Arab clients (*mawālī*), during the early centuries of Islam was one version of the *ḥimāyah*. Although Muslim jurisprudence did not recognize *ḥimāyah*, it did recognize *talji'ah*, which was an identical practice and synonym of *ḥimāyah*. It was a tacit agreement whereby small separate landed properties were put under the protection of local potentates for payment, fictively registered under their names for all dealings with tax authorities. The small estates' holders did not cede their ownership on the property to the "protectors," but at the same time the latter could inherit the right to the *ḥimāyah* fees. The *ḥimāyah* practice easily led to the creation of vast domains by those in power and the rendering of small landholders into share-croppers. In addition to the *talji'ah*, the *ḥimāyah* included, on occasion, a non-land-based fee for *khafārah* collected by the potentates for their protection of the roads and crops against bandits in the territory. With the advent of the Buyids and the enlargement of the *iqṭā'* system in the fourth/tenth century, which granted the new military aristocracy all administrative and fiscal rights on the land in their district, the *ḥimāyah* was abolished, both in terms of landed property and police work. Later, the term *ḥimāyah* continued for several centuries to designate the urban *ḥimāyah*, which was a tax levied by the chief of police of town quarters for ensuring public order. On occasion, undisciplined urban groups, such as the *futūwah* of Baghdad, imposed their protection on merchants.<sup>38</sup> Whether the *ḥimāyah* nevertheless persisted uninterruptedly into the Mamluk period is not clear. John L. Meloy addressed the issue of the power structure in Mamluk society in a focused discussion on *ḥimāyah* as a gauge of the state's control of coercive power. Meloy's main argument is that the *ḥimāyah* was

<sup>38</sup> Claude Cahen, "Ḥimāya," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 3:394; idem, "Notes pour l'histoire de la ḥimāyah," in *Melanges Louis Massignon*, vol. 1 (Damascus, 1956), 287–303.



ripe in the Mamluk sultanate during the fifteenth century in the form of a protection racket or the extortion of protection money levied from weak rural and urban sectors by powerful members of the elite. The providers of the *ḥimāyah* formed private sources of power that rendered the sultan's grip on Mamluk society and economy tenuous.<sup>39</sup> While the present author has some doubts about the criminal features attributed to the *ḥimāyah* practice (see below), she shares Meloy's opinion that the private protection services, as much as private justice and public order services, diminished the state's authority. Sources from the Mamluk period furnish evidence that the *ḥimāyah* served as a crucial vehicle for maintaining patronage networks impinging on the sultan's authority. In spite of the efforts the sultans made to curb it, it survived throughout the Mamluk period and was used by both the sultan and the amirs to amass great fortunes and build their own patronage networks.

The *ḥimāyah* in the sense of *talji'ah* and *khafārah* was ripe in Mamluk Egypt before Lājīn's cadastral survey. Al-Maqrīzī confirms that fiefs of *ḥalqaḥ* troops were registered in the amirs' bureaus and in fact became their *iqṭā'*s, so that the former gained nothing from their fiefs' income (*fa-lā yaşilu ilā al-ajnad minhā shay'*).<sup>40</sup> Thus, for example, Sayf al-Dīn Mankūtimur (d. 698/1299), the sultan's vicegerent, amassed one hundred thousand *irdabbs*<sup>41</sup> of cereal per annum from the *ḥimāyah* alone. Al-Maqrīzī also refers to the confusion that prevailed in the *ajnad*-cultivated lands when law-breakers and rabble-rousers rendered the levying of official taxes (*al-ḥuqūq wa-al-muqarrarāt al-dīwānīyah*) impossible. Therefore these taxes became prey for the amirs' guards who did the policing work and their officials (*a'wān al-umarā' wa-mustakhdamīhim*) who harmed the peasants residing on the *iqṭā'* lands. Lājīn ordered the abolition of the *ḥimāyah* in the amirs' bureaus, making Mankūtimur's own *dīwān* an example to be followed by the rest of the amirs. Al-Maqrīzī relates that in the wake of Lājīn's action, *iqṭā'āt* were returned to their original holders and the practice of the *ḥimāyah* was stopped.<sup>42</sup> The amirs' encroachment on the sultan's authority through the control over the *ḥalqaḥ* clearly stands out from this account, for the *ḥalqaḥ* troops were formally under the sultan's direct control. It was the sultan's administration that should have been expected to provide the *ḥimāyah* services and the fees levied for it to flow to the sultanic treasury.

<sup>39</sup> John L. Meloy, "The Privatization of Protection: Extortion and the State in the Circassian Period," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 2 (2004): 195–212.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 1:88. See also idem, *Ighāthat al-Ummah bi-Kashf al-Ghummah*, ed. Muḥammad Muşṭafā Ziyādah and Jamāl al-Dīn Shayyāl (Cairo, 1957), 37, 70.

<sup>41</sup> A measure of capacity used during the Middle Ages for weighing grain that 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 (1981): 479–80.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 1:88.



During the *rawk*, which took about eight months, from Jumādā I to Dhū al-Ḥijjah 697/March to October 1298, the registration of fiefs held by all sectors in the army was carried out, but since the staff was urged to conclude the *rawk* speedily, accurate registration followed by actual inspection of fiefs was only partially accomplished.<sup>43</sup> This information is significant because it indicates that the *himāyah*'s abolition was not effectively carried out. Furthermore, the *ḥalqah*'s and the amirs' shares in the cultivated lands of Egypt (*qirāṭ* pl. *qarārīṭ*) were reduced to half in this *rawk*, while the sultan's share of four twenty-fourths remained untouched. The *ḥalqah* and the amirs had each held ten twenty-fourths of the lands, while after the survey they together held ten twenty-fourths, and one twenty-fourth was kept as a reserve to compensate those who were dissatisfied with their new allocations. The remaining nine twenty-fourths were assigned for the establishment of a new *ḥalqah* that was planned to be as big as the existing army.<sup>44</sup> Mankūtimur, who is described as a strict observer of the rules and an honest amir, conducted the *rawk* stringently, not allowing any petitions regarding the new allocation of *iqṭā'*s.<sup>45</sup> There were "soldiers who were fortunate and others who were unfortunate, and there were those who were unsuccessful and others who were successful with what they got" [*fa-min al-jund man sa'ida wa-minhum man shaqiya wa-minhum man khāba wa-minhum man anjaḥa bi-mā laqiya*].<sup>46</sup> Although most of the *ḥalqah* soldiers were dissatisfied, they received their new *iqṭā'*s without protest. Only those "who still retained vigor and bravery" [*baqīyah min ahl al-quwwah wa-al-shajā'ah*] protested and threatened to move to the amirs' service or even remain unemployed.<sup>47</sup> They were imprisoned but thereafter released. This information confirms the impression that many of the *ḥalqah* soldiers, the survivors of those who had entered the *ḥalqah* during the early years of the sultanate, were in a miserable condition and unfit for service.

Lājīn's intention to initiate a new military unit was nipped in the bud when both he and his vicegerent were killed by the disaffected amirs. All the *iqṭā'*s saved by Lājīn were not returned to their original holders but were distributed among the amirs in addition to the *iqṭā'*s they already held.<sup>48</sup> The *ḥalqah* ranks were left with many unfit old soldiers with much smaller *iqṭā'* resources, about one third or one half less than those they had held earlier. This *rawk*, then, strengthened the Mamluk amirs' position through the formal registration, under their names,

<sup>43</sup> Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdah*, 320; Hassanein Rabie, *The Financial System of Egypt, A.H. 564–741/A.D. 1169–1341* (London, 1972), 52.

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 8:92; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:842.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:858.

<sup>46</sup> Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdah*, 320; al-'Aynī, *Iqd*, 3:395.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 8:95; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:846; idem, *Khiṭaṭ*, 2:387.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 8:95; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:875–76.



of the *ḥalqaḥ iqtāʿāt*, which had been previously exploited informally through the *ḥimāyah* arrangement. To add insult to injury, the *rawk* did not stop the practice of the *ḥimāyah*, but only replaced the previous prominent amirs with the emerging Burjīyah oligarchy.<sup>49</sup>

In his *rawk* of 715/1315 in Egypt, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad attained the targets that Lājīn had set for his cadastral survey, and beyond. Since updating the land registers was not successfully accomplished in the al-Rawk al-Ḥusāmī, part of the *iqtāʿ* redistribution was based on figurative lists that survived from Ayyubid times. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad determined a permanent manpower quota for the army and a correlative remuneration scale as the basis for the *iqtāʿ* redistribution.<sup>50</sup> Al-Nāṣir's manpower quota for the Mamluk army in Egypt included twenty four thousand troops organized in the following order:<sup>51</sup>

1. Twenty-four commanders of a thousand who had in their service two thousand four hundred mamluks.
2. Two hundred amirs of forty with eight thousand mamluks in their service.
3. Five hundred forty-seven prefects and inspectors in the various districts of Egypt, with five hundred sixty mamluks.
4. Two hundred amirs of ten with two thousand mamluks.
5. Seven regional prefects.
6. Forty *muqaddam mamālīk* over more than two thousand Sultani mamluks.
7. Eight thousand nine hundred thirty-two *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers, with one hundred *muqaddamūn* and twenty-four *nuqabāʿ* (commanders of one thousand troops on the battlefield).

Al-Nāṣir's manpower quota shows that the *ḥalqaḥ* was the largest body in the army, about thirty-seven percent of the army. Obviously, the resources designated to the *ḥalqaḥ*, though divided into small shares of *iqtāʿ*, amounted to a huge fortune. Al-Nāṣir started dismissing the surplus manpower already in 712/1312, when he ordered the mustering of the *ḥalqaḥ* and the Sultani mamluks. Contemporary sources from al-Nāṣir's reign report that eight hundred, or one thousand two hundred according to another version, did not pass muster, among them the elderly, those unfit for service, and youths. The elderly received an allowance sufficient for their livelihood instead of their *iqtāʿ*'s. Their fiefs were distributed among salaried (*jāmakīyah*) Sultani mamluks. In 721/1321, again more than forty-three *ajnād* were dismissed.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:875–76.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 2:218.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 217–18; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 14:70. For the detailed remuneration scale introduced in the *rawk* see: al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 2:218–19; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā*, 4:16.

<sup>52</sup> Shams al-Dīn al-Shujāʿī, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn al-Ṣāliḥī wa-Awlādihi*, ed. Barbara Schafer (Wiesbaden, 1977), 114; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar*, 9:244;



The land survey was conducted in all Egyptian districts on a basis of each and every village.<sup>53</sup> Al-Nāṣir himself spent two months in Upper Egypt to facilitate communication with the amirs who carried out the land registration.<sup>54</sup> Whereas Lājīn did not change the sultan's personal share in the *iqṭā'* division, al-Nāṣir increased it from four twenty-fourths to ten twenty-fourths. The remaining fourteen *qirāṭs* of Egypt's cultivated lands were reserved for the amirs and *ḥalqah* soldiers. Al-Nāṣir also changed the *iqṭā'* system by limiting it to cultivated lands only; all *iqṭā'*s based on non-agricultural taxes and customs, such as the tax levied on the grain stores at al-Maqs port in Būlāq, were abolished or transferred to either the state bureaus or the sultan's private treasury (*khāṣṣ*). The *muqṭa'*, or fief holder, was entitled to levy only the land tax (*kharāj*) and the poll tax paid by non-Muslims (*jizyah* or *jawālī*), while all other taxes were abolished.<sup>55</sup> All other payments that had been informally imposed on the peasants by fief holders, such as gifts (*diyāfah* or *hadīyah*), were calculated in the *'ibrah*, the formal and total revenues levied from the *iqṭā'*.<sup>56</sup> Even the *ḥimāyah* was calculated in the *iqṭā'* *'ibrah*. Formally relinquishing the *ḥimāyah* money to the amirs by including it among the taxes the fief holders were formally authorized to levy might be regarded as part of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's plan to minimize the sultanic administration's dealing with fiscal matters. More significantly, this move illustrates that it was beyond the sultan's power to mandate the abolition of the *ḥimāyah*. Therefore he resorted to directing the *ḥimāyah*'s funds to the royal treasury, for their inclusion in the *'ibrah* enabled the sultan to allocate smaller *iqṭā'*s to fief holders. As will be shown, this rivalry between the amirs and the sultan over control of the *ḥalqah*'s manpower and financial resources would last until the end of the Mamluk period and would entail changes in the *ḥalqah*'s makeup and structure.

In Dhū al-Ḥijjah 715/1315 al-Nāṣir distributed the *iqṭā'*s in person, and no advocacy of amirs on behalf of the *muqṭa'*s was permitted.<sup>57</sup> Since the *iqṭā'* was no longer based solely on the *kharāj* tax but now also included the *jizyah*, in practice the *muqṭa'*'s income became smaller. The Coptic peasants, who exploited the decentralization of tax collection, evaded the *jizyah* payment by moving from village to village, declaring that they had already paid it elsewhere. Also, the *iqṭā'* was divided in various locations in Upper and Lower Egypt in order to curb the *muqṭa'*'s influence and his regional power. While these reforms secured the sultan's grip over the amirs and eased the administrative burden connected with the collection

Zettersteen, *Beiträge*, 158; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:52.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:518; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:43.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, 32:226.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 227–28; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar*, 9:286–87; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:43–48.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 1:87, 90; *idem*, *Sulūk*, 2:150–53; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:50.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:51, 54.



of the *jizyah*, they imposed a heavy burden on the amirs' administration because they had to increase the number of clerks to deal with these new tasks. The *ḥalqaḥ* troops' income was reduced to below the *'ibrah* that had been determined in the Ḥusāmī Rawk. Before the Ḥusāmī Rawk, the *ajnād al-ḥalqaḥ* each held a full *iqṭā'*, which yielded an income of between ten thousand and thirty thousand dirhams per annum, according to rank. In addition to these incomes the *ajnād* also levied *diyāfah*, which reached five thousand dirhams in the larger *iqṭā'*s. In the wake of the Ḥusāmī Rawk, their average income was reduced to twenty thousand dirhams, and after al-Nāṣir's, it fell to ten thousand or less, which meant that several *ajnād* shared the same *iqṭā'*.<sup>58</sup> The *muqaddamū al-ḥalqaḥ* received nine thousand dirhams per annum, including fodder in the amount of nine hundred dirhams. Below them there were seven classes of *ajnād*: in the first there were fifteen hundred cavalryman with an income of nine thousand dirhams; the second included one thousand three hundred fifty *jundīs* with an income of eight thousand dirhams; the third had one thousand three hundred fifty *jundīs* with an income of seven thousand dirhams; the fourth had one thousand three hundred *jundīs* with six thousand dirhams; the fifth one thousand three hundred *jundīs* with five thousand dirhams; the sixth one thousand one hundred *jundīs* with four thousand dirhams; and the seventh one thousand thirty-two *jundīs* with three thousand dirhams.<sup>59</sup> The income of the lower-rank *ajnād* now reached a level that was insufficient for livelihood, and certainly not enough to pay for equipment.<sup>60</sup> Some of them were driven to selling their *iqṭā'*s. In 728/1328, a note was dropped in the sultan's stable condemning him for ruining the army because the *awlād al-nās* had sold their *iqṭā'*s out of need and had turned to begging. In response, al-Nāṣir ordered a review of the *ajnād al-ḥalqaḥ* in order to discover those who had no horses or had sold their *iqṭā'*s. Fourteen sons of amirs were dismissed, some *ajnād al-ḥalqaḥ* were beaten, and others were imprisoned for two months and upon their release were sent to Syria.<sup>61</sup> This incident proves that at this stage the *awlād al-nās* already constituted a weak sector in the *ḥalqaḥ*.

The arrival of the Wāfidis in Cairo in 741/1341 (see above) was another opportunity for al-Nāṣir to muster the *ḥalqaḥ*. The *ḥalqaḥ* soldiers were invited to the muster on the pretext that those who had accumulated debts would be allowed to pay them off in three annual installments. The elders and disabled were told that they would be allowed to retire and still keep their *iqṭā'*s by registering them under the names of their sons or other relatives who would fulfill their duty when neces-

<sup>58</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭat*, 1:88–90.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:219.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad*, 97–98; Ibn Abī al-Faḍā'il, *Al-Nahj al-Sadīd*, trans. and ed. by Samira Kortantamer as *Ägypten und Syrien zwischen 1317 und 1341 in der Chronik des Mufaḍḍal b. Abī l-Faḍā'il* (Freiburg, 1973), 99–100; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:517–19.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:228–29.



sary. This might well be one of the ways by which second and third generations of Mamluks entered the *ḥalqah*. Those who sold their *iqṭāʿ*'s were promised that they would be restored by paying the buyers one eighth of their value in three annual installments. All the elders, disabled, and those who had admitted to selling their *iqṭāʿ*'s—sixty-five solders altogether—were dismissed. Some of the restored *iqṭāʿ*'s were given to low-ranking Sultani mamluks and the newly arrived Wāfidis incorporated into the Sultani household, and the rest were returned to the state treasury.

The small number of those who were dismissed in 721/1321, 728/1328, and 741/1341, out of the inclusive number of the *ajnād al-ḥalqah*, indicates that the great and systematic purge in the *ḥalqah* had occurred earlier—as early as 712/1312. Most of the *iqṭāʿ*'s released from the *ḥalqah* during al-Nāṣir's reign went to the low-ranking Sultani mamluks. In fact, al-Nāṣir followed Lājīn's original policy of increasing mamluk dominance over the *iqṭāʿ*' resources. The “mamlukization” of the army was not only felt in the transferral of *iqṭāʿ*' resources from the *ḥalqah* to the Sultani mamluks, but also in the makeup of the *ḥalqah*, in which veteran mamluks of previous sultans and amirs increasingly replaced freeborn soldiers. The ensuing decrease in the income of the *ajnād ḥalqah* in the wake of Lājīn's and al-Nāṣir's cadastral surveys, and the fee they had to pay for the *ḥimāyah*, pushed them to selling or leasing their small and unprofitable *iqṭāʿ*'s. It was only al-Nāṣir's strong authority that prevented this practice, which, as will be shown below, would flourish under weaker rulers with the amirs' encouragement.

#### IV

After al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's demise (741/1341), the Mamluk Sultanate was afflicted by forty-one years of incessant struggle over effective power among the dominant amirs who held that power and acted as patrons of most of al-Nāṣir's descendants.<sup>62</sup> The sources record no less than forty-two political clashes between powerful amirs and the ensuing reshuffling of short-lived factional coalitions for power.<sup>63</sup> Important for our purposes here are the ramifications of the frequent disintegration of these power networks for the *ḥalqah* and its place in the power structure of the Mamluk army during this period.

From 741/1341 until the deposing of the house of Qalāwūn in 784/1382, the dominant amirs installed twelve sultans in the sultanate (one, al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, was in office twice, 748–52/1347–51 and 755–62/1354–61). All but one—al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl, who died of an illness—were deposed by the amirs, and seven were murdered after their removal. The short reigns of the Qalawunid sultans and their dependence on their patrons prevented the foundation of new Sultani mamluk households, while the prominent amirs' resources and households grew increasingly. Qawṣūn

<sup>62</sup> For the reasons and dynamics of these struggles see: Levanoni, *A Turning Point*, 81–132.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. See also: Van Steenbergen, *Order out of Chaos*, 130, 100–22.



(742/1342), who held executive power immediately after al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's death, had seven hundred mamluks.<sup>64</sup> Bashtāk (741/1341), Qawṣūn's rival, had at least three hundred fifty mamluks of his own.<sup>65</sup> Yalbughā al-ʿUmarī (d. 767/1365), one of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan's favorite mamluks who played a leading role in his master's murder, held a mamluk household that included over eighteen hundred recruits, *julbān* or *ajlāb*,<sup>66</sup> and it was from among them that Barqūq rose to power and deposed the Qalawunid house in 784/1382. Al-Nāṣir Ḥasan and al-Ashraf Shaʿbān (764–78/1363–77) were the only Qalawunid sultans who succeeded in recruiting mamluk households of their own, owing to their long reigns (by the standards of this period), and the executive power they exercised. Yet their mamluk households were smaller than those of the dominant amirs, and both were murdered when they attempted to rule autonomously, thus impinging on the amirs' power and patronage. Ḥasan was murdered by Yalbughā al-ʿUmarī, who then acted as vicegerent, attempting to create a counterbalance to the mamluk amirs by encouraging the advancement of *awlād al-nās* to prominent amirates and governorships in the provinces. Al-Ashraf Shaʿbān's murder came against the background of a land survey he carried out in 777/1376, in which members of the Qalawunid house, the *asyād*, were allocated *iqṭāʿāt* with rich revenues in Upper Egypt and the vicinity of Cairo.<sup>67</sup> Al-Ashraf's new distribution of state resources led to a rebellion against him by both loyalist and oppositionist Mamluks. In this context, the survey of state revenues and expenditure conducted by the amirs in 750/1349 is indicative of the power and wealth the amirs accumulated during this period. The purpose of this survey was originally to check the high expenditure of the Sultani household, which at the time reached 22,000 dirhams a day. Yet the same survey also revealed that the major part of the sultan's land revenues all over Egypt, including *iqṭāʿāt* and leased lands, were distributed as grants to the amirs or were registered in their names as beneficiaries.<sup>68</sup>

In spite of their great power, the dominant amirs were insecure in the face of the common and permanent danger of the disintegration of their support in favor of new power networks. In their bid for power expansion and the sequential conflicts over power, the amirs, who acted as patrons, placated other amirs and low-ranking mamluks with money and privileges to encourage them to shift their allegiance

<sup>64</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:588; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 3:393; idem, *Nujūm*, 10:40; al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*, 10:194; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah fi Aʿyān al-Miʿah al-Thāminah*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Jādd al-Ḥaqq (Cairo, n. d.), 3:343.

<sup>65</sup> Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*, 10:143; al-Shujāʿī, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad*, 76.

<sup>66</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:139.

<sup>67</sup> Ulrich Haarmann, "The Sons of Mamluks as Fief-holders," 141–69.

<sup>68</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:808, 810. See also: 156, 163, 760.



from one patron to another.<sup>69</sup> As a result of the intensive mobility of mamluks between the factions and coalitions, power networks were continuously being formed and dissolved, leaving the amirs uncertain regarding the support they had organized as their power base. At the head of these coalitions stood two or more amirs who would temporarily put aside personal rivalries and join forces to expand their power networks and, no less important, to limit and inspect the political and economic power of their partner-rivals. Examples of this pattern abound in the sources dealing with this period.<sup>70</sup> As to the low-ranking mamluks, in general they benefited from the reshufflings in the power networks, for they improved their bargaining power; the atmosphere of an open market for support improved their remuneration and their socio-political position vis-à-vis the decision makers. However, on the personal level, the low-ranking mamluks, like the amirs, suffered uncertainty during the frequent political reshufflings. Most of the mamluks strove towards a timely move from the waning network to the ascendant one with the expectation of obtaining higher remuneration for their support. By contrast, those associated with the defeated amirs, especially those who belonged to their households and were quite numerous during this period, were excluded from the new power networks. Some received minor positions in the army, some were expelled from Cairo, and others were left unemployed (*baṭṭālūn*). Normally, the majority of the unemployed mamluks were given minor allowances and *iqṭāʿ*s in Egypt, mainly in the *ḥalqah*. Thus, for example, in 748/1347, when two hundred mamluks who had been in the amirs' service complained about unemployment, the amirs' council (*majlis al-mashūrah*) decided to divide them among the amirs.<sup>71</sup> Before his flight to Karak in 742/1342, al-Nāṣir Aḥmad intended to recruit Qawṣūn's and Bashtāk's unemployed mamluks and place them in the Citadel as his bodyguard against his vicegerent, Ṭashtamur. According to his abortive plan, these mamluks were to be paid by *iqṭāʿāt* in the *ḥalqah*.<sup>72</sup> After the Crusader attack on Alexandria in 766/1365 by Peter I of Lusignan, the king of Cyprus who was also titular king of Jerusalem, it was decided to send an expedition to Cyprus to curb Christian piracy based in that island and Rhodes. In 767/1365–66, Yalbughā al-ʿUmarī ordered a muster of the *ḥalqah* soldiers, which was interrupted after reviewing two thirds of the troops when the rebellion against him broke out. The muster was thereupon discontinued and the *ḥalqah* soldiers were asked to join his forces against the rebels.<sup>73</sup> After Yalbughā's assassina-

<sup>69</sup> For the mechanism of power networking creation during struggles for power see Van Steenbe- gen, *Order out of Chaos*, 123–46.

<sup>70</sup> Levanoni, *A Turning Point*, 81–106.

<sup>71</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:751.

<sup>72</sup> Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 10:64.

<sup>73</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:114, 129, 131; Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿiʿ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʿiʿ al-Duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafá (Cairo, 1982–84), 1:2:28, 44.



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.<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> 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*.<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> In 782/1380, Barqūq called for the *ḥalqaḥ* and the unemployed soldiers to fight for him against his partner-rival Barkah.<sup>79</sup> 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

<sup>74</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿiʿ*, 1:2:55.

<sup>75</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:155.

<sup>76</sup> *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.

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

<sup>78</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:479.

<sup>79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> 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*.<sup>82</sup> 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 *ajnād al-ḥalqah* and encouraging them to sell their *iqṭāʿ*s that were coveted by artisans.<sup>83</sup> 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*.<sup>84</sup> In 754/1353, when the economic crisis in the Sultanate reached its worst, the *majlis al-mashūrah*<sup>85</sup> 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.<sup>86</sup> Unsurprisingly, this was also the year in which Shaykhū ordered the abolition of relinquishing and exchanging *iqṭāʿāt* in the army, and he also ordered

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

<sup>81</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:687.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 873, 780, 781.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 860.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 908; Levanoni, *A Turning Point*, 183.

<sup>85</sup> Levanoni, *A Turning Point*, 194–95.

<sup>86</sup> 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.<sup>87</sup> 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)<sup>88</sup> and to mamluks in amirs' households in addition to the incomes they already held.<sup>89</sup> 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.<sup>90</sup> In addition, the practice of collecting *ḥimāyah* fees and leases was widespread among the amirs in Egypt. Yalbughā al-Nāṣirī (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.<sup>91</sup> 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*]."<sup>92</sup> 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*,

<sup>87</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:890–91.

<sup>88</sup> 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.

<sup>89</sup> 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.

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

<sup>91</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:295.

<sup>92</sup> *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.<sup>93</sup> 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.<sup>94</sup> 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*.<sup>95</sup> 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*).<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup>

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.<sup>98</sup> Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn Iyās, the grandson of a fourteenth-century amir,<sup>99</sup> 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,

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

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

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

<sup>96</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 2:26.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 3:219.

<sup>98</sup> Al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 3:182, 285.

<sup>99</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 4:47.



it was restored to him with Allāh's help.<sup>100</sup> 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.<sup>101</sup> Al-Ashraf Barsbāy had considerable incomes from *ḥimāyah* levied on *iqṭā'* lands.<sup>102</sup> 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.<sup>103</sup> 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.<sup>104</sup>

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.<sup>105</sup> It is a tract by Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Khalīl al-Asadī, a clerk who served in *dīwān al-inshā'* (the correspondence bureau),<sup>106</sup> bearing the title *Al-Taysīr wa-al-Itibār wa-al-Taḥrīr wa-al-Ikhtibār fīmā Yajibū 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.<sup>107</sup> Although the tract

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

<sup>101</sup> Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 16:160.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

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

<sup>104</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 1:2:319.

<sup>105</sup> Meloy, "The Privatization of Protection," 198–99.

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

<sup>107</sup> 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 *ajṅād* 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.<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup>

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.<sup>110</sup> 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

<sup>108</sup> Al-Asadī, *Al-Taysīr wa-al-I'tibār*, 95–96, 136.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 136–37.

<sup>110</sup> See also: Meloy, "The Privatization of Protection," 201–2.



was doubled.<sup>111</sup> 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*).<sup>112</sup> 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.<sup>113</sup> 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*).<sup>114</sup> 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*].<sup>115</sup> 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-fārisah bi-yad fārisihā*] for the office holders.<sup>116</sup> 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

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

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 96, 136.

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

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

<sup>116</sup> 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.<sup>117</sup>

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.<sup>118</sup> In 868/1464 al-Zāhir Khushqadam cut the clothing payment for the weak *ajnād* and *awlād al-nās*.<sup>119</sup> 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.<sup>120</sup> 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.<sup>121</sup> 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.<sup>122</sup>

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.<sup>123</sup> 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

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

<sup>118</sup> Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 15:69.

<sup>119</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿiʿ*, 2:419.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21; see also 462, 470.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

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



when they reached old age and became disabled,<sup>124</sup> and mamluks' descendents, including orphans of both genders, inherited their father's *iqṭā'* or *jāmkīyah* out of moral considerations.<sup>125</sup> 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*.<sup>126</sup> 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.<sup>127</sup> 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.<sup>128</sup> When al-Muẓaffar Ḥājī intended to inspect the *ḥalqaḥ* (747/1346), Amir Aruqtāy thwarted him.<sup>129</sup> 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.<sup>130</sup>

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

<sup>124</sup> 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).

<sup>125</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 4:25

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

<sup>127</sup> 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).

<sup>128</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:830–31.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 721.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:561.



unofficial resources derived from the manipulation of *awqāf*<sup>131</sup> and the resources he cut off from *dīwān al-mufrad* and the weak sector in the *ḥalqah*.<sup>132</sup> 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*.<sup>133</sup> 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.<sup>134</sup> 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.<sup>135</sup> 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.<sup>136</sup> 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.<sup>137</sup>

## 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-

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

<sup>132</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 4:206, 368–69.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 65–66.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 285, 321–22.

<sup>137</sup> *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.



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