

MAHMOOD IBRAHIM

CAL POLY POMONA

The 727/1327 Silk Weavers' Rebellion in Alexandria: Religious Xenophobia, Homophobia, or Economic Grievances

In Rajab 727/May 1327, Alexandria rebelled against the wali Rukn al-Dīn al-Karakī. This rebellion lasted nearly two months, and the sources describe it as a *fitnah*. Ibn Baṭṭūṭah says that he came to know of it when he was in Mecca that year. News of this event spread to other parts of the Islamic world.¹ The most detailed accounts of this rebellion are found in al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab* and al-Maqrīzī's *Al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, two of the most important sources for the Mamluk period in Egypt.² At first glance, this rebellion seems to have been no more than a scuffle between Egyptians and Europeans on the corniche. However, a third report that sheds new light on this incident was recently found in al-Jazarī's *Ḥawādith al-Zamān*.³ This report turns out to be an account of the events told to al-Jazarī by two merchants who had been in Alexandria during the rebellion and were interviewed by al-Jazarī in Damascus about five months later. Because they had lived through the event, and because they themselves were merchants, they provide significant details that are not mentioned elsewhere, and they shed more light on an episode which scholars,

© The Middle East Documentation Center. The University of Chicago.

Initial research for this paper was done while on a grant from the American Research Center in Egypt and the National Endowment for the Humanities (2005). An earlier version was delivered at the American Research Center in Egypt Annual Conference, New York, NY (2006).

¹See Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Iskandariyah fī al-ʿAṣr al-Islāmī* (Cairo, 1966), 107. I have found that there are too few sources, other than the ones cited in this study, that deal specifically with Alexandria during the Mamluk period, even though the city played a major part in that history.

²Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, ed. Muṣṭafā Hijāzī (Cairo, 1997), 33:232–36; Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, vol. 2, part 1, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah (Cairo, 1934), 284–86. Al-Maqrīzī provides another account in his *Al-Mawāʿiz wa-al-Iʿtibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār* (Bulaq, 1270 A.H.), 1:326–27. Other primary sources give a brief notice of the incident, such as Zayn al-Dīn ibn Muzaḥfar Ibn al-Wardī, *Tārīkh* (Beirut, 1996), 2:272–73; Faḍl Ibn Abī al-Faḍāʾil, *Al-Nahj al-Sadīd wa-al-Durr al-Farīd*, ed. Samira Kortantamer as *Agypten und Syrien Zwischen 1317 und 1341 in der Chronik des Mufaḍḍal b. Abī l-Faḍāʾil* (Freiburg, 1973), 37–38, where he refers to his source as *al-muʿarrikh*, most likely referring to al-Jazarī since his report about the incident seems to be a short summary of al-Jazarī's account, often using the same vocabulary; Ibn Aybak al-Dawādārī, *Die Chronik des Ibn ad-Dawādārī*, ed. Hans Robert Roemer (Cairo, 1960), 1:342.

³Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Jazarī, *Ḥawādith al-Zamān wa-Anbāʾihi wa-Wafayāt Akābir wa-al-Aʿyān min Abnāʾihi*, ed. ʿUmar Tadmurī (Beirut, 1998), 2:185–89.



©2012 by Mahmood Ibrahim.

DOI: [10.6082/M1CV4FWD](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1CV4FWD). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1CV4FWD>)

DOI of Vol. XVI: [10.6082/M14747X0](https://doi.org/10.6082/M14747X0). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/KZWC-NV35> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

relying on al-Nuwayrī and al-Maqrīzī, have described as a brawl between Europeans and Egyptians.⁴ What is fascinating in these accounts is not that there are discrepancies in their story; variants are quite common in the sources and are to be expected, given that authors often provided brief and selective summaries and notices of what they chose to include in their chronicles. It is, however, the nature of those differences that proves to be unusual. Al-Nuwayrī offers religious grounds for the scuffle that marked the rebellion, while al-Maqrīzī provides a homophobic pretext for the same incident. It will be demonstrated in the following discussion that, according to the merchants' account, the rebellion was rooted in grievances held by the silk-weavers in Alexandria against economic policies imposed by al-Karakī. Further, while al-Nuwayrī and al-Maqrīzī reduce their narrative to an isolated incident, al-Jazarī's account shows that the scuffle is one of a series of related events. It will also be demonstrated that religious and homophobic grounds merely provided convenient tropes to justify the Egyptians' reaction and to lay the responsibility for this *fitnah* and its disastrous consequences squarely on the shoulders of the Europeans.

Alexandria's role in Mediterranean commerce cannot be overstated. Alexandria gradually assumed a greater role in the context of the increased volume of Mediterranean trade after the year 1000 and in the context of the competition between European and Muslim merchants in the following period. The hostilities of the Crusader era at once hindered and spurred commerce and competition. Saladin, for example, forced European merchants to evacuate from the Red Sea (ʿAydhāb) and Cairo and restricted their operations to Alexandria, especially after Reynald de Chatillon's 1183 failed naval expedition.⁵ Commerce and cultural contacts in Alexandria must have peaked again after Damietta was demolished early in the Mamluk period due to repeated European attacks against it. Alexandria thus became Egypt's major outlet to Mediterranean trade. After the fall of Acre in 1291, commercial treaties with European powers were renewed and new ones were concluded that made Alexandria the principle port in the eastern Mediterranean for the exchange of goods brought from the East, especially by the Kārimī merchants.⁶ In 1310 the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad reconnected Alexandria

⁴Eliahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Latter Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1983), 52–54. Following Ashtor, see also Linda Northrup, "The Bahri Mamluk Sultanate," in *Cambridge History of Egypt: Islamic Egypt 640–1517*, vol. 1, ed. Carl Petry (Cambridge, 1998), 285. The best current treatment of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's reign is Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History: The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn* (Leiden, 1995), 151–52. Curiously, Levanoni does not mention this incident, even though it is a prime example al-Nāṣir's policy of confiscations.

⁵Subhi Labib, "Iskandariyya," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-ROM edition; Claude Cahen, "Ayyubids," *ibid.*

⁶Eliahu Ashtor, *Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1976), 299.



with the Nile by digging what came to be known as al-Khalij al-Nāṣirī to facilitate trade and other economic activity in and around Alexandria.⁷ Textiles were among the most important products of Alexandria, whether manufactured in the government's Dār al-Ṭirāz or produced on private looms.⁸ Textiles were made of various materials, such as wool, cotton, linen, flax, and silk. The silk industry flourished in Alexandria during the Mamluk period, especially the Bahri period. The ownership of the silk industry at this time was mixed: privately owned looms churned out their products alongside government-owned workshops, such as Dār al-Ṭirāz.⁹ Much of the trade in these commodities was conducted with European merchants and reached various parts of the world.¹⁰ It is perhaps due to these extensive commercial contacts that the Alexandria mint, according to Schultz, produced at this time only gold coins.¹¹ Therefore, the immediate and wider historical background of the *fitnah* of 1327 was increased commercial and cultural contacts between Europeans and Muslims in Alexandria, a thriving market in which textiles figured prominently. It was al-Karakī's decree to restrict the sale of silk to the government's warehouse, as shown only by al-Jazarī, that caused the initial grievance: imposing a state monopoly on the sale of silk and other items had deleterious consequences for the fortunes of the merchants and textile producers of Alexandria at a time when the market was brimming with trade activity. Local grievances mounted against this policy as the Egyptians became more impoverished, to the extent that some textile producers could not repay European merchants for money they had either borrowed or received as advance on their goods. This, then, is the volatile environment in which the *fitnah* took place.

The following examination will help us reconstruct the rebellion of 1327. There is much agreement between the three authors, yet each account has its own nuanced retelling of the story, especially in the choice of terms used to identify the participants, in the specific event that sparked the discontent, and in the associated actions that the authors chose to include in their account, especially those taken by the central government. Taken altogether, it should be noted that the three accounts complement one another in the sense that they share cer-

⁷ Al-Shayyāl, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Iskandarīyah*, 104–6.

⁸ For references to the textile industry in Alexandria, see Muhammad Abdelaziz Marzouk, *History of Textile Industry in Alexandria: 331 B.C.–1517 A.D.* (Alexandria, 1955), 61 ff; See also Bethany Walker, "The Social Implications of Textile Development in Fourteenth-Century Egypt," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 4 (2000): 167–217; Louise Mackie, "Towards an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations," *Muqarnas* 2 (1984): 127–46.

⁹ Mackie, "Towards an Understanding of Mamluk Silks," 127; Walker, "Social Implications of Textile Development," 171 ff.

¹⁰ Marzouk, *Textile Industry*, 79.

¹¹ Warren Schultz, "The Monetary History of Egypt," in *Cambridge History of Egypt*, 333.



tain events and settings, albeit not always in the same order, and provide details that fill in the gaps created by the selective summarizing. This examination, then, should provide a wider view of an expression of social discontent that, even though it appears limited, anticipates a larger turn in Mamluk economic policies and practices.

Of the three authors, al-Nuwayrī was the closest to the event; he was writing in Cairo, where he died five years later, in 1332. The similarities and differences between these authors, however, are not dictated by time or space; al-Jazarī interviewed the eyewitnesses in Damascus five months later, while al-Maqrīzī wrote his account more than a century later. As such, al-Maqrīzī had a larger pool of sources, perhaps even al-Nuwayrī's and al-Jazarī's, and was more selective in reconstructing his account. In order to appreciate the distinctive features of each account, the following analysis will examine the main points in the story: the reason for the rebellion and the government's reaction to it.

THE REASON FOR THE FITNAH

Al-Nuwayrī says:

And on Thursday the 5th of the month of Rajab, of the year 727, a huge *fitnah* occurred in the port (*thaghr*) of Alexandria between the people of that city and its governor (*mutawallih*), Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Karakī. And the cause of this *fitnah* is that a group of common folks (*jamā'ah min 'awāmm al-thaghr*) gathered on that day for sightseeing as they habitually do (*li-yatafarrajū 'alá 'adatihim*). They stood at a storyteller's circle outside the port, between the two gates, the Green and the Sea Gate. In the circle there was a *Firanjī* who belonged to the emissaries of the Byzantine ruler (*rusul šāhib Iṣṭanbūl*), and whenever the storyteller mentioned the Prophet (prayer and peace be upon him) the people raised their voice in prayer as Muslims habitually do in that case. One of them said: get this *Firanjī* away from among us for we pray for the Prophet (prayer and peace be upon him) and he does not pray for him. So they wanted to get him away from the circle but he refused to leave. So he was pushed away from it. A foot soldier from the governorate of the city came to his aid (*fa-a'ānahu ba'd rajjālat al-wilāyah bi-al-thaghr*) and said that he belongs to the emissaries who had just arrived to [meet] the sultan. Some of the commoners beat the foot soldier who then sought help from a group of his comrade foot



soldiers. The commoners outnumbered them and beat them and thereafter the *fitnah* rose up.¹²

At least two points relevant to the discussion should be noticed in al-Nuwayrī's description of this event. First, he uses the word *'awāmm* to describe the Egyptians who were sightseeing on that Thursday afternoon, and he uses the word *Firanj* to denote Europeans or Byzantines. Second, he reports that the incident around the storyteller's circle originated as a religious dispute, namely suspicion or misunderstanding of the European's failure to participate in the prayer. The suspicion aroused by the presence of the European at the storyteller's circle could be understood within the context of religious xenophobia. The perceived lack of respect for the Prophet, and as such also for Muslims, led to the desire to exclude him from the circle. The audience, or at least one in the crowd, wanted to remove the European from the circle on the grounds that he did not share in the blessing for the Prophet. This would seem to suggest that if the European willingly excluded himself from the circle, nothing would have happened. But since he had to be removed forcibly, the fault and the responsibility for the ensuing problems, the source would suggest, lies with the European.

Al-Maqrīzī reports on this incident in two of his works. In the *Sulūk* version, he does not mention the storyteller or the sightseeing activity, because, as he insists, he was giving a summary account (*mulakhkhas*) of the incident. He says:

On Thursday the 5th of the month [of Rajab] the *fitnah* took place in Alexandria and its summary [account] is that a *Firanjī* merchant had an exchange (*fāwaḍah*) with a Muslim and had hit him. And that [happened] because the *Firanjī* stood near a beardless youth (*ṣabī amrad*, a minor) to take him and do with him that act (*li-yakhudhahu wa-yaf'ala bi-hi dhālika al-fi'l*). A Muslim man forbade him and told him: "that is not lawful." The *Firanjī* then hit the [Muslim's] face with a shoe. Other Muslims rose up against the *Firanjī* whose companions rose up to protect him. Evil fell between the two groups and they fought [each other] with weapons. The governor of the city, al-Karakī, rode [to the scene] to find that the people had banded together and [that they] had brought out their weapons. The people testified against the *Firanjī* with what necessitated his execution (*shahidū 'alā al-firanjī bi-mā yūjību qatlahu*) and they carried him off to the qadi. The markets of the city and its gates were shuttered.¹³

¹²Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 33:232–33.

¹³Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 284.



In his version in the *Khiṭaṭ*, which is even more truncated, al-Maqrīzī mentions this incident with some modification and says that a *Firanjī* merchant went to the place by the sea where common folks go sightseeing. There, the European merchant approached a beardless youth and solicited sexual acts, as understood from al-Maqrīzī's words "*ta'arraḍa ilā ṣabī amrad yurāwiduhu 'an nafsihi.*"¹⁴

Al-Maqrīzī, as we have read, is consistent in his reference to the *Firanj* as a party to the incident. However, he refers to them as merchants, not as emissaries. And instead of using the word *āmmah* to describe the Egyptians, al-Maqrīzī described them as Muslims. We know, of course, that the emissaries could be merchants and vice versa and we know also that at the time the majority of the inhabitants of Alexandria were Muslims. Neither of the accounts is fundamentally flawed, but it is the choice of words and how they color the story that should be noted here. The most serious difference between the two accounts is the point of interaction between the two parties. Al-Nuwayrī describes a cultural scene: people sightseeing, a storyteller's circle on the corniche, and a fight motivated, as we have seen, by religious sentiments. Al-Maqrīzī cites inappropriate sexual advances towards a boy as the cause of the fight. This introduces a more nuanced conflict between the two sides, one that includes other issues, such as honor, morality, and cultural values, especially regarding homosexuality. This is problematic, given that contemporary Arabic sources speak of homosexuality as a practice recognized in certain social circles.¹⁵ But although acknowledged in the literature, the practice was not necessarily condoned. It was also considered a serious crime to attack young boys. Al-Jazarī reports several cases that resulted in the castration and death of those accused of assaulting young boys.¹⁶ Therefore, when the *Firanjī* merchant solicited the boy, it was regarded as an affront towards religious as well as cultural and moral sensibilities. Not only was it considered a "sinful" act (not *ḥalāl*); the objection could have been also on the grounds of homophobic reactions or even against pedophilia. That this exchange was perceived by the Muslim as an insult, perhaps even to his own honor, is reinforced by the

¹⁴Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:326. For a more famous example, the expression, *yurāwiduhu 'an nafsihi* is mentioned in the *Quran*, 12:23–61, in reference to the attempted seduction of Joseph.

¹⁵See, for example, Everett Rowson, "Two Homoerotic Narratives from Mamlūk Literature: al-Ṣafadī's *Law'at al-Shākī* and Ibn Daniyāl's *al-Mutayyam*," in *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*, ed. J. W. Wright and Everett Rowson (New York, 1997). For a review of other recent literature on the subject of homosexuality see S. Schmidtke, "Homoeroticism and Homosexuality in Islam: A Review Article," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 62, no. 2 (1999): 260–66.

¹⁶See al-Jazarī, *Ḥawādith*, 3:677, where a black slave was castrated in Cairo because he used to "*yata'arraḍu li-awlād al-nās.*" Two other cases involved young boys, but the executions resulted from their murder. See, for example, *ibid.*, 2:346, 386.



account that the European hit the Egyptian's face with his shoe, a decidedly disrespectful thing to do to a Muslim.

For all we know, such effrontery as reported by al-Nuwayrī or as reported by al-Maqrīzī may or may not have occurred at all. But we are faced with two different versions for the same event. Could these variant explanations have been rumors circulated in the aftermath of Alexandria's troubles? Or could the religious and the sexual explanations serve as convenient tropes to describe "triggers" for social uprisings? Both authors reported what they deemed a sufficient pretext to explain or to justify people's anger against the European's perceived transgression, whatever it may have been. In the absence of any context other than that provided by al-Nuwayrī and al-Maqrīzī, these authors seem to suggest that the Egyptians were reacting to this or to that provocation only. Isolated and out of context, these versions of events could have misled modern historians to describe this incident merely as a brawl.

However, a brawl it was not, for "brawl" suggests a brief noisy quarrel that may involve a number of people. Al-Jazarī supplies information that points to city-wide and long term discontent and resentment based on specific economic grievances. And far from the price one pays for a brief quarrel, the people of Alexandria endured a month-long government extortion that severely punished the town.

Al-Jazarī, in the course of listing notable events of the year 727, says that he had a conversation with Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Tānī, a traveling merchant (*tājir saffār*) and resident of Alexandria, along with Aḥmad ibn al-Ṣabbāb al-Ḥarrānī, also a traveling merchant who had been in Alexandria when the *fitnah* took place. They told him:

When it was in the afternoon, on Thursday, the 6th of Rajab, emissaries on behalf of the *Firanj* had arrived and were staying inside the Sea Gate, between the two gates, where people (*al-khaliqu*) pour in for sightseeing. One of the *Firanj* went out sightseeing [also] and stood next to a group of people. There [among them] stood a beardless youth (*ṣabī amrad*) and [the *Firanjī*] stood next to him and stepped on his foot [intending that] as signal to him (*fa-da'asa 'alā rijlihi ishāratan ilayhi*). A man said to the *Firanjī* "this is not lawful." The *Firanjī* was carrying a leather shoe with which he hit the face of the man who disapproved [of his intent]. Another man came forth and disapproved [of what the European did] and then the talk widened. The discord intensified and there was much hitting [between them]. The news went to the governor, who rode out with his men and ordered the gates of the city shut. He sought those who



caused the disturbance, but the people fled from his clutches. The wali then brought the *Firanj* [back] to the place of their residence and he returned to his own.¹⁷

So far, this is not much different from the previous accounts, except that the merchants supply a more exact location where the altercation took place, on the corniche and in the span between the two gates facing the sea. However, an important additional element in the merchants' account is the actual physical contact that was understood to be the solicitation when the *Firanjī* stepped on the boy's foot, intending it as a signal. A signal to do what, they did not say, but it is implied that he was seeking sex with the boy. It is not clear why stepping on the boy's foot was meant to be a signal for what al-Maqrīzī referred to in one instance as "to do with him that act" and in another "*yurāwiduhu 'an nafsihi*." Here again, the *Firanjī* hit the man's face with a shoe, now of leather, before others joined in the melee. Once again, the sexual trope is used as the basis of the quarrel, albeit taking place in an environment that combines al-Nuwayrī's location (now more precise) and al-Maqrīzī's sexual solicitation. As we shall see below, however, the Egyptians were reacting to more than hearsay "triggers" for their grievance against the Europeans and the government.

THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH: FRIDAY 6TH OF RAJAB

Matters did not come to an end after al-Karakī secured the safety of the Europeans by taking them to their quarters. Al-Karakī had to deal with an angry town on the verge of insurrection. Yet, no further action against the Europeans is reported by any of the accounts. Resentment, discontent, and violence were directed, from now on, at al-Karakī and his aids. Armed clashes took place and resulted in death and injury. The government was on the retreat and al-Karakī seemed to lose his grip on the situation, prompting him to seek aid from Cairo. In reporting on this, here too the three reports are nuanced.

Al-Nuwayrī says that when al-Karakī rode out to repulse the people after they had overpowered the troops, the people stoned him and his aides, whereupon he ordered the city gates closed, preventing many people outside from going back home. An official with the title of *rayyis al-khilāfah* came around the corniche in a boat loaded with archers and began to shoot at the crowd, killing many of them. The chief judge of Alexandria, 'Imād al-Dīn al-Kindī, counseled al-Karakī to cease and desist (*ashāra 'alā al-mutawallī bi-al-kaff*), but al-Karakī refused to listen. Al-

¹⁷Ibid., 2:185–86. According to calculations based on Freeman-Granville the 5th of Rajab falls on Thursday (G. S. P. Freeman-Granville, *The Muslim and Christian Calendars: Being Tables for the Conversion of Muslim and Christian Dates from the Hijra to the Year A D 2000*, 2nd ed. [London, 1977], 37, 62).



Nuwayrī adds here that “it was said” that ‘Imād al-Dīn told the populace that it was therefore lawful to fight the government, fanning the flames of the *fitnah* to the extent that al-Karakī and his aides were besieged in their residences. In the meanwhile, a group of people attacked the residence of the *rayyis al-khilāfah*, where arms were stored, and looted everything in it. Another group went to the prison and broke its doors and let prisoners out. Al-Nuwayrī adds, in what seems to be an afterthought, that the people had intended to free the Mamluk commanders imprisoned there, but the latter refused to leave. This last act prompted al-Karakī to relay the news to the sultan in Cairo.¹⁸

Al-Maqrīzī does not mention any of this at all. Rather, he says that trouble started again after the late evening prayer, when al-Karakī opened the gates to let in those who had been locked out since the afternoon. He says that, in the crush of the people coming in, ten people perished and many others were injured, in addition to some loss of property. In a curious twist, al-Maqrīzī says that it was then that al-Karakī recognized the extent of the people’s resentment against the Europeans. And, never mind that it was late at night and the Europeans were safely tucked away, al-Maqrīzī says that it was then that al-Karakī rode against the people but they stood their ground until they forced him to retreat after much blood was shed on both sides. In response, al-Karakī dispatched carrier pigeons to Cairo to inform the sultan of the news.¹⁹

The story as related by al-Jazarī seems to indicate that some calm was restored after al-Karakī delivered the Europeans to their quarters, except of course for those who were locked out of the city and were becoming increasingly anxious at the late hour. A group of city notables went later that night to al-Karakī requesting that he open the gates. Al-Karakī obliged and had the gates opened, and, according to the merchants, he also deployed a group of archers right then and there who proceeded to shoot at the people coming in and assaulted them, even with swords, so that more than ten people were killed and many were wounded. Thereafter, that is on Friday morning the 6th of Rajab, the people of Alexandria woke up lamenting the death and injury to their kin and slapping their faces in grief. Al-Karakī, coming to inspect the scene in the morning, faced a hostile crowd who stoned him all the way back to his residence, where he shut himself off from the angry crowd.²⁰

But the merchants broke off their narrative here to say that problems had actually started twenty days earlier. They said:

¹⁸ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 33:233.

¹⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 284–85.

²⁰ Al-Jazarī, *Hawādith*, 2:186.



Before all of this by about twenty days, there came to the governor two middlemen (*samāsirah*, sg. *simsār*) from the storehouse known as the Qaysāriyah of the ‘Ajam and said: The middlemen of the *qaysāriyah* have agreed with the silk weavers, and likewise with the criers (*dallālīn*, sg. *dallāl*) that they would buy [the silk] from them [directly] and take their commission from the merchants (*ya‘tābūna min al-qazzāzīn wa-yakhudhū min al-tujjār al-samsarah*). The additional charge [thus] will fall on the strangers, especially the foreigners (*wa-an yaqa‘u al-ḥayf ‘alā al-gharīb, khuṣūṣan al-‘ajam*). [Accordingly] they had made most of the selling of goods, the buying of textiles, and the selling of crops in [other] bazaars and storehouses, and thus the revenue of the sultan and the people was lost in those [transactions]. So the governor decreed that nothing will be bought or sold except in the Qaysāriyah of the ‘Ajam, and any one who sells in [other] storehouses will be disciplined.

Ibn al-Ṣabbāb continued: [Thereafter] the affairs of the silk weavers were ruined. So, before this incident, they had gone [then] to the aforementioned gate and threw stones at the governor and he ordered it shut between him and the people, fearing [more] stoning and [further] disturbance. In the meanwhile, a man from Alexandria named Ibn Ruwāḥah came to the governor and apologized for those of the ignorant and of the silk weavers who acted in such a manner, and secured [from the governor] his decree that the [silk weavers] could conduct their business as they had done before. And the affair was settled. But [some informants] kept giving the governor information by saying [the proverb]: “*Oil is only extracted in the presses,*” and similar talk.²¹

Having given us the *casus belli*, the merchants resumed their account regarding the Friday morning events. They said that having driven al-Karakī back to his residence once more, two individuals set the gate that protected him on fire and broke the prison door, which happened to be adjacent, and let some prisoners out. The cells in which the Mamluk commanders were imprisoned were located on the second floor. When fire and smoke reached them they began to cry out for help. Al-Karakī and his archers climbed to the roof top and began shooting again at the people below, forcing them to retreat. From there, the people proceeded towards some official buildings, including the secretary’s residence, and looted them. It was then that al-Karakī summoned help from Damanhūr, among other areas

²¹Ibid., 2:187.



around Alexandria, including Bedouin auxiliaries. He also wrote to the sultan informing him of the events. The merchants add that al-Karakī misrepresented the people and exaggerated their actions when he described them as declaring their disobedience to the sultan (*wa-ḥarrafa ‘alayhim wa-fakhkhama, wa-anna ahl al-balad kharajū ‘an al-ṭā‘ah*). The secretary who wrote the letter, the merchants add further, is the one whose house was looted.²²

Some observations are warranted here due to the issues raised and the discrepancies found among the three authors. Al-Nuwayrī’s account leads one to believe the fighting was done on the outside, during the same afternoon, and that the flames of the *fitnah* were fanned by the qadi ‘Imād al-Dīn after he deemed it lawful to fight the government. This *fatwā* emboldened the people, who besieged al-Karakī and then proceeded to loot *dār rayyis al-khilāfah* and to break the prison door. Clearly these were acts of civil disobedience, and al-Nuwayrī seems to blame ‘Imād al-Dīn and the people for this turn of events. His interjection that the people had intended to set free the imprisoned Mamluk commanders reflects, as he once was a government official, the concerns of the central government, who, as we shall see below, took immediate steps to secure itself against a possible conspiracy. Al-Karakī, on the other hand, seems to be carrying out his official duties, however badly. Al-Maqrīzī also leans favorably toward al-Karakī, regardless of the discrepancies in his version. Al-Maqrīzī says that al-Karakī, without the intercession of the notables, had the gate opened. The death and injury that followed resulted from the crush of the people coming in and was not the fault of al-Karakī. The merchants’ account, however, gives us the distinct impression that death and injury at the gate were not only unnecessary but also that they were due to the treachery of al-Karakī. They also clearly blame him for his lies and exaggeration in describing the people’s actions. Thus, while al-Nuwayrī and al-Maqrīzī could blame the Europeans for starting the initial troubles, albeit based on hearsay and altogether different grounds, the two seem to cast their blame on the people for the ensuing trouble, not the state.

The merchants’ account, as related to us by al-Jazarī, is decidedly on the side of the people. First and foremost, trouble had been brewing because of the economic loss that the people of Alexandria had endured due to the restrictions imposed by al-Karakī. Therefore, the initial grievance that created the resentment against the European merchants lies here, and it is the only concrete reason, from what had been reported, that may have led to the altercation on the cornice. For, as today the cornice in Alexandria is a very busy place, one can imagine that it was also a busy place on that Thursday afternoon, as understood from the choice of words in the merchants’ account, *tansabbu al-khaliq lil-furjah*, “the throngs pour in for sightseeing.” Could it be expected that the European should have been fluent in

²²Ibid.



Arabic so as to recognize every mention of the Prophet by the storyteller? Could the European have been pushed out simply because the Egyptian was already ill-disposed to his presence because of the economic grievance? Also, could the European have accidentally stepped on the boy's foot, given the comings and goings on the cornice on Thursday afternoons? Is it possible to see that the ambiguity of this act is reflected in the ambiguity of the report, which said only that stepping on the foot was a "signal"? Was it this lacuna that prompted al-Maqrīzī to fill in his clarifications nearly a century later by explaining that the signal was "to do with him that act" or by adding the more unmistakable phrase "*yurāwiduhu 'an nafsīhi?*"²³ Furthermore, the religious and the sexual are *sui generis* explanations of the same incident. We understand that they are tropes because it is taken for granted that such reasons were sufficient to cause popular discontent. No doubt, it is possible that both explanations were mere rumors that began to circulate after the scuffle. Of course, rumors themselves could lead to misunderstandings and suspicion, among other reactions, including the action described above, whether based on this or that trigger. The inclusion of the sexual trope in the merchants' account supports this also, even though they were the source of the initial grievance. These merchants stayed in Alexandria for the next five months and were in touch with the people in its market place and thus picked up, so to speak, the talk of the town.

It is thanks to them that they provided a context when they rooted their story in a sequence of events beginning with the grievance of the silk weavers, a grievance that led then to similar social action played out in the same geographic location and with a similar pattern. If not for the merchants, the state's responsibility for the rise of popular discontent, at least in this case, would have remained unknown. Thus, the rebellion was based on concrete reasons, i.e., the effects of the tax/monopoly policy on the textile sector, especially the silk weavers. What amounts to a brawl in these accounts seems to have been one in a series of confrontations over a period of two months in the spring of 1327.²⁴ The great extent of the popular grievance could perhaps be gauged by taking into account that in 1380 fourteen thousand active looms were in Alexandria.²⁵ We do not have a figure for 1327 but we do for 1295, prior to the famine that devastated many areas in Egypt, including Alexandria. Al-Jazarī says that the number of looms then

²³It is very likely that al-Maqrīzī was summarizing from *Ḥawādith al-Zamān* and from *Nihāyat al-Arab*.

²⁴The summary provided by Ibn Aybak al-Dawādārī, who provides a paraphrased account, also suggests this continuity. *Chronik*, 1:342.

²⁵Mackie, "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks," 127. The same figure for 1388 is given in Marzouk, *Textile Industry*, 79, and the same figure for 1394 is given in Walker, "Social Implications of Textile Development," 171.



was 12,000, a number that was severely reduced due to the disease and famine that caused so many deaths that year.²⁶ Alexandria's economy, however, recovered quickly, especially after 1310, and throughout al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's third reign. In 1324, Symon Simeones admired the fine quality and enormous quantity of silks, linens, and cottons that were being produced in Alexandria.²⁷ Thus, the number of looms in 1327 must have become high enough again to employ a wide social base, since the demand for the city's silks and other textiles was high. Furthermore, the fact that Egyptians had been dealing with Europeans before this event without incidents of this nature suggests that the resentment harbored by the Egyptians was not against Europeans per se. Rather, they were against dealing with those merchants (and they could have been of any origin) under the unfavorable conditions created by al-Karakī's decree, which was the source of the ill feeling in the first place.

THE RESPONSE OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Cairo stepped in roughly three days after the scuffle on the corniche. Al-Maqrīzī says that the carrier pigeons arrived in Cairo the following Sunday morning. The sultan became angry and very anxious, especially regarding the Mamluk commanders. According to al-Jazarī, he immediately convened a council which included judicial representatives, to give their *fatwās* regarding subjects who rebel against the sultan. The sultan indeed suspected that this affair may have been a conspiracy and took immediate precautions in Cairo; the three sons of the imprisoned Mamluk commander Sayf al-Dīn al-Abū Bakrī were arrested. It is possible to reconstruct the reaction of the central government using the three accounts, keeping in mind that each author had his own biases and concerns. For example, the affair of the imprisoned Mamluk commanders seems to be the overriding concern of al-Nuwayrī and al-Maqrīzī. Between them, we have a list of the imprisoned commanders who were transferred to the citadel prison in Cairo, as well as the locations where they were eventually incarcerated. This attention to detail is contrasted with their vague references to the population. They use general designations like *jamā'ah*, *nās*, *āmmah*, or *ahl al-thaghr*. As for the money extracted, they shared terms such as *ṣādara*, *akhadha*, *faraḍa*. Yet they give two different totals for the fines that were collected. Al-Jazarī does not mention anything regarding the Mamluk prisoners. Rather, attention is paid here to the extortions imposed on Alexandria and how the population suffered. Differences in their emphasis and detail notwithstanding, these accounts provide us a glimpse at the state in action and a measure of what happened after Cairo weighed in.

²⁶ Al-Jazarī, *Ḥawādith*, 1:282.

²⁷ See Marzouk, *Textile Industry*, 79.



Command was promptly assigned to 'Alā' al-Dīn Mughaltāy al-Jamālī, whose titles are given as *wazīr*, *mudabbir al-dawlah*, and *ustādh al-dār al-āliyah*, and he was immediately dispatched to Alexandria. Mughaltāy was accompanied by Sayf al-Dīn Aldamur (*amīr jandār*) and Sayf al-Dīn Ṭughān (*mushidd al-dawāwīn*). There was also Tāj al-Dīn Abū Ishāq, *wakīl* and inspector of the privy purse (*wakīl al-sulṭān* and *nāzīr al-khawāṣṣ al-sharīfah*) who either came along or, according to al-Jazarī, came a week later. They left "in what remained of Sunday" and must have marched continuously, for they were ready to tackle the issues before them by Tuesday morning. According to al-Maqrīzī, this party left with *tadhākīr*, memoranda regarding what to do in Alexandria. More instructions came later as communication with the central government continued for the next three weeks.

Mughaltāy and his party took up their post in Dīwān al-Khums, the government's warehouse where it collected the duty of 1/5 (*khums*) from European merchants. Starting on Tuesday morning, Mughaltāy took command of the situation and proceeded to undertake several measures to accomplish the tasks with which he was charged. In the following reconstruction, I will explain his actions in each area separately.

1. THE QADI 'IMĀD AL-DĪN AL-KINDĪ

All three accounts mention the punishment meted out to the qadi with some details added here and there. Al-Nuwayrī says that Mughaltāy summoned the qadi, insulted him, declared him to be incompetent (*akhraqa bi-hi*), and then removed him from his post. Al-Nuwayrī added that the post was given to 'Alam al-Dīn al-Ikhnā'ī. He recognized that 'Alam al-Dīn was the first Shafī'i ever to hold the post. Furthermore, the qadi and one of his deputies, Shams al-Dīn al-Mudhdhin al-Bulbaysī, who was also removed from his post, had to pay a fine. Al-Nuwayrī does not specify how much the fine was, but rather lumps it with the rest of the population and the Kārimī merchants. He says that the total collected here equaled 50,000 dinars, of which 20,000 dinars came from the Kārimī merchants.²⁸ Al-Maqrīzī does not mention any of this. His reference to the qadi is brief, mentioning only that he was about to be executed when Mughaltāy changed his mind at the last minute, informing the sultan that he investigated the accusations against the qadi and found them to be false.²⁹

The implied charges of sedition against the qadi were serious and it is from al-Jazarī's account that we get more information, including an exchange between Mughaltāy and the qadi. When the qadi and his deputies were summoned, they were humiliated by having been brought over to Mughaltāy in chains. Mughaltāy

²⁸Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 33:234.

²⁹Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 286.



proceeded to berate the qadi and his deputies and charged them with dereliction of their duty, since they did nothing to calm the situation even though the cry went out in Alexandria that “whoever wants to fight in the path of Allah should come.” The implication here is that there was a declared rebellion against the state since fighting against it was tantamount to fighting in (the ever legitimate) “path of Allah.” Acquiescing to such a cry, or not responding to it, made the qadi and his deputies, according to Mughaltāy, accomplices in such action. The qadi, however, responded that the rebellion took place without their orders or involvement and that even had they wished to stop it, they would not have been able to repulse the great masse of participants (*mā naqdiru narudda al-sāwad al-aʿzam*). Mughaltāy, nonetheless, removed the qadi and his deputies, and the Malikis never recovered the post after that. The qadi’s deputies each had to pay a fine; al-Bulbaysī paid five hundred dinars and Ibn al-Tinnīsī paid six hundred dinars.³⁰

This must have been a serious setback for the Malikis. According to Jonathan Berkey, the latter Fatimids allowed the Maliki jurist al-Ṭurṭūshī to establish the first Sunni madrasah in Alexandria.³¹ The post of chief qadi must have remained in their charge until this incident. Al-Ikhnāʿī, we know from a different context, was soon promoted to chief judge of Damascus.³²

2. IBN RUWĀḤAH, CHIEF OF DĀR AL-ṬĪRĀZ

Once again, all three authors mention Ibn Ruwāḥah in the course of their reports. Al-Jazarī, however, mentions him only in the context of the early disturbances, when he intervened on behalf of the silk weavers after they expressed their discontent regarding al-Karakī’s decree to limit the sale of goods to the government’s warehouse. Al-Nuwayrī and al-Maqrīzī imply serious charges of sedition and incitement against him. Al-Nuwayrī says that Ibn Ruwāḥah had come to Mughaltāy and promised that he, along with his men (about four hundred strong), would protect the port with no additional stipend. However, all withdrew to a place called Munyat Murshid and sought the protection of a holy man, Muḥammad al-Murshidī. Thereafter, Mughaltāy sought him out and brought him back to Alexandria, where he was executed along with others who met the same fate. Mughaltāy informed the sultan that Ibn Ruwāḥah was the head of the rebellion

³⁰ Al-Jazarī, *Hawādith*, 2:188

³¹ Jonathan Berkey, “Culture and Society during the Late Middle Ages,” *Cambridge History of Egypt*, 400–1. See also idem, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo* (Princeton, 1992), 131, where he says that Riḍwān ibn al-Walakhshī, a Sunni vizier for the latter Fatimids, founded a Maliki madrasah in Alexandria in 1137–38 and another vizier, Ibn al-Sallār, followed with a Shafīʿi madrasah a decade later.

³² Mahmood Ibrahim, “Practice and Reform in Fourteenth-Century Damascene Madrasahs,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2007): 75.



(*ras fitnah*). Al-Maqrīzī adds that Ibn Ruwāḥah gave weapons and other provisions to the people, inciting them against the Europeans.³³

3. CONFISCATIONS, FINES, AND OTHER ACTS OF EXTORTION

Al-Nuwayrī and al-Maqrīzī do not give precise figures regarding these activities even though they mention specific numbers, albeit different totals. Al-Nuwayrī, as mentioned above, says that Mughaltāy collected a sum of 50,000 dinars from various people, including the qadī, his deputies, Kārimī merchants (20,000 dinars), and other townsmen. Al-Maqrīzī reports that Mughaltāy imposed a fine of 500,000 dinars (could a zero have been added in error, or in exaggeration?) and proceeded to confiscate money for the next 20 days until he collected the lower figure of 260,000 dinars. Ibn al-Dawādārī puts the figure at 1,070,000 dirhams.³⁴

Al-Jazarī provides more detail and specific information regarding Mughaltāy's actions in this regard, although he does not give a final figure. The fines imposed on the qadī and his deputies have already been mentioned. Mughaltāy then sought out the Kārimī merchants, the town notables, the silk weavers, and those who had property inside and outside of the town. Mughaltāy took from each category of people an amount commensurate with their means. For example, Tāj al-Dīn ibn al-Kuwayk, the Kārimī merchant, paid 2000 dinars. Each silk loom paid a fine of 100 dinars. Each linen loom paid 50 dinars. Each *funduq* paid 3 months rent in advance.³⁵ Each orchard paid an amount commensurate with its produce. Although no final figure is given, al-Jazarī says that fines, confiscations, and loss affected everyone in Alexandria, "the large and the small, the high and the lowly. Calamity and harm spread to all the people of Alexandria so that no one was spared the loss, and many became impoverished, especially the silk weavers who could not pay back the European merchants their due."³⁶

4. EXECUTIONS

We have already seen that Ibn Ruwāḥah was executed along with others. There were many who were executed, in addition to the ten individuals who died at the gate earlier or during the fighting that ensued after the initial incident. Al-Nuwayrī says that Mughaltāy executed (literally *waṣṣaṭa*, split in half) a group of

³³ See al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 33:234–35; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 285; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Chronik*, 1:342.

³⁴ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 33:234; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 286; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Chronik*, 1:342.

³⁵ For a discussion of some of these *fanādiq* and other commercial and artisan establishments, see Niall Christie, "Reconstructing Life in Medieval Alexandria from an Eighth/Fourteenth-Century *Waqf* Document," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 8, no. 2 (2000): 163–90.

³⁶ Al-Jazarī, *Hawādith*, 2:188.



commoners. Al-Maqrīzī says that Mughaltāy arrested a group of *ardhāl* (lowly) and split them in half. Others had their hands or legs cut off.³⁷

Al-Jazarī gives a few more details regarding these executions. Apparently the town was under some sort of lockdown (*mahbūsīn fī al-balad*) and no one was allowed to leave the town except those who performed necessary functions, in addition to the Bedouins, perhaps the auxiliaries who had been summoned earlier. Tension and suspicion of Mughaltāy's actions must have been high given the confiscations and other punitive measures. On Friday the 20th of Rajab Mughaltāy executed 30 individuals outside the city gates, just before the Friday prayers. The news of this calamity spread quickly to the mosque and all the congregants began to flee in panic, fearing that they were to be attacked next. In their panic, many fled without their shoes and other property. Some merchants lost the gold coins that they had in their possession. It was a chaotic scene that was described as the "end of days" (*wa kānat ka-qiyāmah qad qāmat*). The tense atmosphere was eased somewhat when, according to al-Jazarī, Tāj al-Dīn, the sultan's *wakīl*, arrived and began to calm the people down and allowed them to move about.³⁸

5. MISCELLANEOUS ACTIONS

There were other acts that only al-Nuwayrī and al-Maqrīzī report. Al-Nuwayrī says that the storehouse of the archers (Ibn Ruwāḥah's men) was emptied of its contents. He adds that Mughaltāy arrested nearly 90 men, slaves and freemen, who were pressed into chain gangs and were later used for construction work.³⁹ Al-Maqrīzī says that Mughaltāy counted the suits of armor usually stored in the town to be used in its defense in case of a foreign attack and found that there were six thousand pieces. He had them stored in a warehouse and sealed it.⁴⁰

6. THE MAMLUK PRISONERS

Only al-Nuwayrī and al-Maqrīzī report on the fate of the Mamluk prisoners at this time, and their lists are nearly identical.⁴¹ According to al-Nuwayrī, these

³⁷ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 33:234; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 285.

³⁸ Al-Jazarī, *Hawādith*, 2:188–89.

³⁹ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 33:234

⁴⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 286.

⁴¹ These Mamluks were arrested and released several times starting in 710, after al-Nāṣir Muḥammad came to power for the third time. Some of them were involved in the conspiracy of Baybars al-Jashnikir against him; others were involved in later conspiracies or seem to have abused their authority. See Abū al-Maḥāsīn Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1963), 8:232 ff., 9:12–15; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 32:165, 169, 175, 196, 199, 220–21. See also Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250–1382* (Carbondale, IL, 1986), 106–8.



prisoners were packed off to Cairo with a contingent to guard them, and everyone arrived on Sunday the 22nd of Rajab, 12 days after they were sent off. Al-Maqrīzī says that they arrived on the 18th of Rajab. These prisoners include:

- Sayf al-Dīn Baktamur al-Abū Bakrī (whose three sons had been arrested earlier). Al-Abū Bakrī was eventually sent to al-Karak to be imprisoned there.⁴²
- Sayf al-Dīn Tamur al-Sāqī, former governor of Tripoli. He was also packed off to al-Karak, but may have been transferred back to Alexandria some time later.
- ʿAlam al-Dīn Sanjar al-Jāwili. He was imprisoned in the Lions' Tower in the Cairo Citadel.
- Sayf al-Dīn Bahādur al-Maghribī. He was also imprisoned in the Lions' Tower.
- Sayf al-Dīn Tughluq.
- Ghānim ibn Atlas Khān.
- Sayf al-Dīn Qutlubak al-Miʿlāʾī, known also as al-Awshāqī.
- ʿIzz al-Dīn Aydamur al-Yūnisī.
- Sayf al-Dīn Kajkan.
- Fakhr al-Dīn Ayāz, formerly governor of Qalʿat al-Rūm, also called Qalʿat al-Muslimīn.

The last six commanders were thrown into the dungeons in the Cairo Citadel, but Fakhr al-Dīn Ayāz was later freed due to his advanced age and frailty.

Al-Maqrīzī adds a few more names to those who were thrown in the dungeons. These were Sayf al-Dīn Balāṭ al-Jūkandār, Sayf al-Dīn Burulghī al-Ṣaghīr, Ḥusām al-Dīn Lajīn Zīrbāj al-ʿUmarī, Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-ʿAlamī, and Sayf al-Dīn Ṭushtumur, brother of Batkhās (or Banhās) al-Manṣūrī. According to al-Nuwayrī, however, these men were held back in Alexandria's prison. Indeed, al-Jazarī says in the context of the events of 735 (8 years after the rebellion) that he received a letter from his colleague in Alexandria, Najm al-Dīn ibn al-Miḥaffdār, saying that 13 Mamluk commanders, among whom the above disputed names were mentioned, were transferred to Cairo, where they were set free.⁴³

Mughaltāy and his company returned to Cairo at the end of Rajab loaded with gold. He took up residence in the vizierate hall in the Citadel, which was newly

⁴²According to Ibn Taghrībirdī, Baktamur died a year later in the Citadel prison; see: *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, 9:274.

⁴³The lists appear in al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 33:235–36, and in al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 286. Al-Jazarī reports on their freeing in *Ḥawādith*, 3:764.



built opposite the Dār al-Inshāʾ (chancellery). Other officials came along that day and sat according to their rank in places that had been prescribed for them, and proceeded to execute the affairs of the state. According to al-Jazarī, the sultan Muḥammad did not take any of the confiscated money. Rather, he distributed it among his loyal commanders.⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

The penchant of some Mamluk chroniclers to copy from one another, to summarize lengthy accounts according to their own interests, and to often reduce complex events to simple and brief descriptions poses a potential source of confusion and misunderstanding. The writing of history becomes, in part, a process of deconstruction and reconstruction. We are fortunate that bits and pieces of information can still be found to allow us a closer look at society, to recreate a fuller account of events under investigation, as we have learned from the above, and to correct false impressions that may have been constructed earlier. The three accounts, put together, give us a glimpse at a moment in the life of Alexandria under Mamluk rule, a moment rich with detail when the townspeople were up in arms against the state. These accounts, infused with realism, breathe life into that moment of social action. At first glance, this action could be described as a riot, brawl, or some similar term implying that the action was haphazard and based on a flimsy rationale. But upon further investigation, thanks to the merchants' reports related by al-Jazarī, we find that this social action, an uprising of sorts, was based instead on concrete economic grievances against a specific state policy. Rather than being haphazard or spontaneous, this rebellion reveals a degree of awareness which implies conscious and deliberate, rather than passive, participation. This was also a sustained social action that went on for a period of two months before the state brought its full weight to bear and crushed the uprising.

The state employed what seems to have been a disproportionately severe set of punitive measures that included the arrest and execution of many people, in addition to financial exactions that heavily burdened the economy and the people's livelihood. This was no punishment for a brawl, unless the brawl is seen as only the cover for the response to this heavy-handed appropriation of surplus wealth for the state's own ends (the government was then nearly bankrupt). Moreover, this was no isolated incident. Indeed, this attack on Alexandria could be considered the watershed that allowed al-Nashw, the sultan's new *wakīl*, to continue a feverish confiscation policy from 1332 to 1339 that damaged several sectors of the

⁴⁴Al-Jazarī, *Hawādith*, 2:189.



economy, not to mention those who were flogged to death in an effort to extract money from them.⁴⁵

The Mamluk state, after the end of the Crusades and the disappearance of the Mongol threat, developed an apparent sense of insecurity. We have seen that the central government's immediate reaction was to treat the event as a conspiracy, as indicated by the arrest of the sons of al-Abū Bakrī. Conspiracies against the reigning sultan were in fact not unusual; indeed, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad had a long history of facing such conspiracies. He also became the subject of an assassination attempt a few years later, but he survived the assassin's dagger.⁴⁶ The Mamluks, having lost—or one might say fulfilled—their initial *raison d'être* as a military elite that defended the lands of Islam under their rule (largely the Arab Middle East), later shifted their energy inward and turned against each other, causing political instability at a time when greater powers were arising around them.⁴⁷ Attacks against the textile producers and the Kārimī merchants, among other productive sectors, would eventually undermine their whole economy. The third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad represented at once the pinnacle of peace and the point at which the Mamluk system of government became redundant.⁴⁸ This must be one of the reasons that contributed to the eventual demise of the Mamluk system of governance.

⁴⁵Almost every year in that period one or another sector of the market was attacked. For an accounting of what was extracted see Levanoni, *Turning Point*, 150–54.

⁴⁶Al-Jazarī, *Ḥawādith*, 3:673.

⁴⁷For an interesting analysis of how political violence served the Mamluk system, see Daniel Beaumont, "Political Violence and Ideology in Mamluk Society," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 8, no. 1 (2000): 201–25.

⁴⁸This was raised by Linda Northrup, "The Bahri Mamluk Sultanate," 262, and it is the main point of Levanoni's *Turning Point*.

