

XIV

THE MAMLUK SULTANS

1291–1517

To divide the history of the Mamluk empire at 1291, the year of the decisive victory at Acre over the last crusaders on the Palestine littoral, is convenient, and perhaps as sound as any such choice can be, though chronologically this date demarcates two periods of most uneven length within the span (1250–1517) of Mamluk hegemony in the Near East.¹ The reason for the somewhat arbitrary choice, however, is of course Egypt's relationship to the crusades, which after 1291 went into a rather drastic decline both in and outside Europe, so that many years were to elapse before a crusading expedition on the old scale would be recorded in Mamluk annals.

The succumbing of the last strongholds of the crusaders in Syria was a momentous event, for both Europe and the Near East. It was the final termination of the "debate of the world" according to Gibbon, as well as to some later historians. Yet plenty of wars were to take place in the Near East and southeastern Europe, including several crusades and counter-crusades, while a vast diverse literature,

The Arabic chronicles of al-Maqrīzī (*Kitāb as-sulūk li ma'rifat duwal al-mulūk*, ed. M. M. Ziada [Cairo, 1956–]) and abū-l-Mahāsīn Ibn-Taghrī-Birdī (*An-nujūm az-zāhirah fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhirah*, ed. by the staff of the National Library in Cairo [11 vols., 1929–1950], portions ed. [1909–1936] and trans. [1954–1957] by W. Popper at Berkeley), used for the writer's chapter on the Mamluk sultans to 1293, which appeared in volume II of this work (pp. 735–758), remain primary source material for the period after 1291. To these must be added the chronicle of Ibn-Iyās, *Badā'i' az-zuhūr fī waqā'i' ad-duhūr* (Būlāq and Istanbul), for the last decades of Mamluk history and beyond. Modern works in European languages include those by G. Wiet, A. N. Poliak, and P. K. Hitti cited in volume II (p. 735), as well as C. Huart, *Histoire des Arabes* (2 vols., Paris, 1912–1913), and G. Wiet, *L'Égypte arabe de la conquête arabe à la conquête ottomane, 642–1517* (2nd ed., Paris, 1946). This chapter was edited after the author's death by Harry W. Hazard.

1. On the final days of the Latin states in Syria, see volume II of this work, pp. 595–598, 753–755. The Moslem chroniclers divide the Mamluk period into a Turkish (*Daulat al-Utrūk*, 1250–1382) and a Circassian (*Daulat al-Jarkas*, 1382–1517) phase.

suggesting ways and means of resuscitating the old crusading flame, was debated in various European courts.²

For the Mamluk sultanate itself, the fall of Acre was no more than another major step toward the eventual elimination of the militant, “infidel” Frank from the world of Islam. In December 1293, after destroying the other crusading strongholds in Syria, al-Ashraf Khalīl, the victor of Acre, was brutally murdered, less than three years after he had been hailed in Cairo as a liberator. As Khalīl left only a daughter, no recourse was necessary to the usual Mamluk tragedy of installing a son of the deceased sultan on the throne, until the most acceptable among the Mamluk oligarchy was ready to usurp it. Yet the Mamluk leaders proceeded to set up Khalīl’s step-brother, an-Nāṣir Muḥammad, a boy eight years of age, whom they later twice deposed, but then twice reinstated, alternately with three other sultans from the powerful Mamluk ranks, all in less than twenty years. Such strange caprice reflects the sheer inability of the Mamluk emirs to leave any one of themselves in the sultanate for long undisturbed, once a chance to oust him presented itself.

It was in the year 1310 that an-Nāṣir began his third reign, in an ugly frame of mind, understandable after the vicissitudes of the previous seventeen years. Whatever kindly traits he might have developed in his youth had been soured and embittered by his unhappy experiences, when he was used as a mere pawn in the Mamluk game of making and unmaking sultans at pleasure. “Though only in his twenty-fifth year,” wrote Lane-Poole, “he was already a cynic, a double dealer, and thirsty to revenge the miseries of his boyhood and youth, and to free himself entirely from the interference of the powerful emirs. He managed it by trickery and deceit,”³ with a technique of delaying action to strike down an enemy until the latter was least expecting it.⁴ Yet he proved himself to be an able and calculating administrator. He was especially interested in the economic development of the Mamluk empire, preferring a commercial treaty to a pitched battle, a devious diplomatic success to a victorious campaign, a thoroughbred horse to a huge sum of money, and an architectural gem of a palace to amassed gold. In some respects he could be likened to Louis XI, king of France in the fifteenth century,

2. See A. S. Atiya, *The Crusade in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1938), pp. 29–230, and above, chapter I.

3. S. Lane-Poole, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages* (London, 1914), p. 306.

4. Al-Maqrīzī, *As-sulūk* (ed. Ziada), II, part 2.

despite vast differences in background, outlook, and institutional environment.

An-Nāṣir Muḥammad ruled with a velvet-gloved but iron hand until his death in 1341, and his uninterrupted third reign might well be considered the Indian summer of the whole Baḥrī Mamluk period, especially in Egypt. This remarkable reign should not be judged merely by its length, but by its general prosperity, the absence of great wars, wide patronage of learned men, high prestige in Europe and Asia, and extraordinary luxuriance in every aspect of court life in Cairo. In his enthusiasm for architecture, art, and art objects, an-Nāṣir Muḥammad had no rival, and his Mamluk emirs vainly emulated his aesthetic tastes. This brilliance continued in an afterglow even under his puppet successors, for the next forty-nine years, during which the court remained as refined and lavish as ever, and exquisite mosques and palaces were built, thanks to vast revenues from international trade, and to improved methods in agriculture, which had been introduced into Egypt and Syria by an-Nāṣir Muḥammad himself.

Of the twelve Baḥrī successors of an-Nāṣir Muḥammad, eight were his sons, two his grandsons, and two his great-grandsons. It looked as if some hereditary principle was being progressively established, to supplant the time-honored method of keeping the son of a deceased sultan only as long as was expedient for Mamluk manipulations. These descendants of an-Nāṣir Muḥammad, not unlike the later Merovingians of early medieval France, and for the same reasons, rapidly succeeded one another on the throne of the Mamluk empire, but can not be said to have ruled. The reins of power were in the hands of the Mamluk emirs and their barrack factions of al-Baḥrīyah⁵ and al-Burjīyah,⁶ until the leader of the latter party, Barkuk by name, removed the last of the line of an-Nāṣir Muḥammad in 1390, and became the first sultan of the Burjī, or Circassian, Mamluk dynasty.

Three events of varied importance and significance took place during those forty-nine years. First was the pestilence, known as the Black Death, which, coupled with cattle murrain and fruit disease, played havoc with the population of Egypt and the entire Near East from 1348 to 1350, causing appalling loss of life everywhere. Secondly, after a long respite from crusading warfare, a considerable

5. See volume II of this work, p. 738.

6. The word "Burjī" means "of the citadel" of Cairo, where sultan Kalavun had quartered a section of his Mamluks, mostly Circassians.

fleet consisting of Cypriote, Rhodian, Venetian, and Genoese ships, carrying an army with discordant loyalties, attacked Alexandria in the autumn of 1365. It was led by Peter I de Lusignan, king of Cyprus, and founder of the Order of the Sword for the delivery of Jerusalem. Alexandria was seized, sacked, and plundered for about a week, during which neither Moslem, nor Jew, nor Christian was spared. The fleet sailed away with about five thousand men and women of all three creeds, and, according to a Moslem eye-witness account, seventy of the crusading ships were full to the brim with rich plunder.⁷ Lengthy peace negotiations ensued, which were interrupted, now and again, by Cypriote naval raids on the coasts of Syria and Egypt. These raids were intended to bring pressure upon the sultan, until peace was made between Cyprus and the Mamluk sultanate, in 1370, with the mediation of the Italian republics of Genoa and Venice.⁸ The third event concerned the Christian kingdom of Lesser Armenia, in Cilicia. This kingdom seldom failed to give valuable support to the crusaders in the east, even against the Byzantine empire, and was thus a constant target of Mamluk invasion in the thirteenth century. After the fall of Acre it became the next objective of the Mamluk sultans, and its towns, such as Adana, Tarsus, Mamistra, and Sis, the capital, were destroyed one after the other by Mamluk armies. It was finally conquered in 1375 by the emir of Aleppo in the name of sultan Sha'bān, and the country was divided among feudal lords. Its last king, Leon VI, was carried off as a prisoner of war to the citadel of Cairo, where he remained in captivity until his ransom was paid by the church, in 1382.⁹

A threat of greater magnitude than the new Burjī dynasty could easily withstand was ominously brewing in the heart of west Central Asia. Barkuk was put severely to the test, in the closing years of the fourteenth century, when the terrible Timur Lenk (Tamerlane), fresh from his stupendous conquests in India, appeared to be intent upon another bout of destruction, threatening the inhabitants of both Syria and Egypt with extermination, after having marched roughshod through Mesopotamia and sacked Baghdad. Sultan Barkuk was not found wanting in courage but rose valiantly to the impending menace, showing a firm defiance of the vituperations of the approaching invader, despite an unfavorable political situation inside the Mamluk

7. See Atiya, *op cit.*, pp. 341, 347, 349–369, and above, pp. 15–18.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 371–376.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 15; cf. C. Toumanoff, "Armenia and Georgia," in *Cambridge Medieval History*, IV-1 (1966), 637.

empire because of the recent change of dynasty. First, Barkuk joined the northern princes, including the Ottoman Bayazid I and the Turkish "Mongol" Toktamish of the eastern Kipchaks and the Golden Horde on the Volga, in a general league of resistance. He even had sufficient hardihood to give refuge, in Cairo, to the expelled sultan of Baghdad, Aḥmad the Jalāyirid. When eventually Timur sent an embassy to Egypt, to open negotiations for peace on terms of virtual Mongol supremacy, Barkuk executed the envoys, in imitation perhaps of sultan Kutuz in like circumstances on the eve of the battle of 'Ain Jālūt.¹⁰ Mamluk troops were then mustered in great numbers at Bira on the Euphrates, scene of several previous Mamluk victories over the Mongols. Timur was then fully occupied in Georgia, far to the north, against Toktamish, the most formidable of his enemies, and Barkuk died in June 1399, before proving his prowess against the Mongols.

Faraj, the eldest of Barkuk's three surviving sons, immediately succeeded to the throne. His mother was a Greek, as was the mother of his commander-in-chief (*atabek*) Taghrīberdī, the father of the historian abū-I-Maḥāsīn. Sultan Faraj was only thirteen years old, but he had to step quickly into his father's shoes, and march to Syria at the close of 1400 to check the fearful Timur, who had swooped southward, sacked Aleppo, and seemed about to seize Damascus. A fierce battle raged north of Damascus, where the Mamluk army was repulsed after some initial success, and sultan Faraj withdrew in haste to Cairo, leaving his army to its fate. Damascus surrendered on terms, which the historian Ibn-Khaldūn was instrumental in extracting from the usually unyielding Timur. Nevertheless, the Syrian capital was subjected to Mongol ferocity, and the whole of Syria was savagely ruined. Sultan Faraj, who certainly was too young to be any match for the situation, lived in mortal fear of Timur's next move in this campaign of devastation. But the Mongols were diverted, luckily for Faraj, toward Asia Minor, where Timur utterly defeated the Ottoman army at the battle of Ankara in 1402. The Ottoman power seemed, at the time, to be irreparably broken, especially as sultan Bayazid I had been captured and was thereafter dragged in the conqueror's train. Faraj, who had already taken to drinking and other unworthy pursuits, meekly consented to the terms demanded of him by Timur's envoys in 1403, and even agreed to strike coins in the conqueror's name, as proof of his subservience. Timur, however,

10. See volume II of this work, p. 745. Although Timur's hordes are referred to as Mongols for convenience, they were chiefly Turkish, though Timur claimed descent from Genghis Khan; see below, p. 544.

never went beyond Damascus in Syria, nor did his control over Egypt exceed obsequious personal protestations of the boy sultan.

These humiliating proceedings on the part of Faraj, however, cost him any chance of continuing to hold the throne. This was at best tenuous, in view of the inveterate Mamluk attitude toward sons of deceased sultans. It was solely because of the protracted struggle for power among the leading emirs, in both Egypt and Syria, that Faraj was left to his immoralities for a number of years, though his reign was interrupted by the brief sultanate of 'Abd-al-'Azīz al-Manṣūr (1405-1406). Finally he was deposed and executed, in May 1412, on substantiated charges of notorious debauchery and uxoricide. One of the two most powerful emirs, called Shaikh, after fighting so long and so violently for the throne, was ultimately able to succeed; he was a drunkard, notorious for his excesses, yet he built himself a beautiful mosque.

For the next ten years Cairo witnessed nine stormy reigns, three of which ended within the span of 1421. The year 1422 might well, therefore, be considered the beginning of established rule, being the year in which Barsbey—the strongest, though not the best, of the Circassian Mamluk dynasty—came to the throne. Needless to say, sultan Barsbey achieved the throne at the consummation of the usual Mamluk drama following a royal demise. He had witnessed the installation and brief reign (January-August 1421) of a minor sultan, Aḥmad son of Shaikh, with a leading emir named Tatar acting as regent. This had been followed by the still briefer reign of Tatar himself (August-November 1421), who was succeeded in turn by his own infant son Muḥammad, under the joint regency of two rising emirs, Barsbey and Janibek aṣ-Ṣūfī. Almost equally brief was the duration of this reign (November 1421-April 1422); the child was dethroned as usual to make room for Barsbey.

It is to be remarked, however, that despite this chronic feature of Mamluk Circassian rule in Egypt, the internal history of the country, reign after reign, was so singularly consistent that a full study of the main outline of the policy of any one sultan suffices to give a good picture of them all. Thus a sultan would signalize his accession by rewarding the emirs of the faction, or factions, upon whose shoulders he had climbed to the throne. This would entail, besides the succession largess, a series of sometimes wholesale dismissals of lukewarm or disgruntled emirs from office, to find room for the others; this in turn would lead to disaffection or rebellion, which usually lasted for many years. On his accession, too, the sultan would seek to render his position secure by purchasing new slaves and enrolling them in his

private army corps, the sultānīyah Mamluks. These new recruits (known as the *jilbān* or *ajlab*), unlike the disciplined youngsters of the previous Mamluk dynasty, were mostly adults at time of purchase, and soon became unruly pests and a public nuisance, even to the sultan himself. Their perpetual conflicts with the factions of the older Mamluks, their street fights, and their unbridled license often produced a reign of terror, and Egypt suffered grievously indeed at their ruthless hands. As a foreign soldiery, of course, neither they nor the older corps of the army had any compassion for the afflicted populace, and so debauched were these domineering slaves that even Barsbey, the strongest of the Circassian sultans, was powerless to restrain them. Moreover, the government as a whole was corrupt, and justice was sold to the highest bidder.

Yet in spite of constant conspiracy at every succession, with all the chaos it produced afterward, and notwithstanding the violence of Mamluk factions and the incurable corruption of the government, the Circassian sultans contrived not only to preserve the power of Egypt, but even to enlarge its dominions and greatly extend its foreign trade in the Red and Mediterranean seas. They continued to hold Syria as far as Melitene, and maintained a less stringent suzerainty over the Hejaz, and over the congeries of beduin tribes and Turkoman clans in Syria and along the Syrian frontier. They stood up dauntlessly to the threats and vituperations of Timur's son Shāh Rūkh, who considered himself the most powerful Moslem monarch of his time. They conquered Cyprus in 1426 with a fleet of galleys built at the port of Būlāq, recently risen from the Nile; similar attempts upon Rhodes were successfully repelled by the valiant Knights Hospitaller of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.¹¹ They fought several campaigns in Asia Minor, where for a time they secured the submission of the proud emir of Karaman. They even braved the wrath of the terrible Mehmed II, the Ottoman sultan, and during the reign of his successor, Bayazid II, they defeated the Turkish armies three times in the course of a prolonged campaign lasting from 1486 to 1491. They drew up trade agreements with most countries of southern and southwestern Europe as far as Britany, and when they launched their naval campaign against the Portuguese in India, the Venetian republic gave them moral support and all the guidance possible. Its own prosperity was then at stake, for its vast commerce with Europe depended largely on uninterrupted supplies of oriental produce, from the markets of Damascus and Alexandria.

11. See above, pp. 317–318, 372–375.

It would seem impossible to associate these achievements with a system of government at the head of which the reigning sultan, however strong or adroit, was in reality at the mercy of a factious oligarchy of envious emirs, who held all the military commands and governorships as well as the court offices, and each of whom was a veritable sultan in miniature. But the explanations of this strange anomaly are not far to seek: first, infamous as was their government, and apparently suicidal as were their mutual jealousies, the Mamluks from the sultan downward were a splendid soldiery, evidently possessed of the faculty of collective self-preservation. They knew how to keep their own quarrels to themselves, and invited neither the Egyptians, nor the beduins of the provinces, nor least of all the forces of a foreign neighbor, to intervene in their private dissensions.¹² A few rebellious emirs did break the rule by seeking refuge abroad, stirring up border troubles for the ruling sultan with the aid of foreign adventurers, but on the whole the princes of the surrounding countries refused to give countenance to such emirs, and preferred to live in peace with the occupants of the Mamluk throne.

Moreover, though the government was corrupt, and offices were sold or farmed, the sultan had at his disposal a highly developed administrative machinery, which had the virtue of continuity, and which went on working independently in spite of surrounding turmoil. Even the troubles of the reign of a minor or a feeble sultan made no great inroads on its efficiency, especially as its functionaries were Egyptians or Syrians of all creeds, who had no interest in the jealousies and petty rivalries of their quarrelsome masters. Thirdly, the mass of the Egyptian population was docile and peace-loving. Indeed, the Egyptians gave their foreign masters no serious trouble, but were reconciled to cultivating the land, paying the oppressive taxes, and manufacturing the magnificent robes and other articles of luxury which the sultan and the emirs required. Thus not only were they a positive asset and a source of revenue, but their docility enabled the sultans to embark upon schemes of foreign war and aggression. Not so docile were the law-breaking beduins of the provinces, who constituted a real danger to Mamluk rule, although, like the Egyptians themselves, they contributed to the ranks of the militia, which often accompanied the Mamluk army on foreign military expeditions. Fourthly, besides the immense revenues which the sultan drew from the various sources of taxation, his coffers were continually overflowing with vast sums of money that poured in through the customs stations between Jidda and Alexandria on the

12. Ibn-Iyās, *Badā'ī' az-zuhūr*, II, 39.

main high road of Indo-European commerce. Thus alongside the disruptive tendencies, for which the military oligarchy was responsible, the Mamluk sultanate possessed many elements of stability, which supplied it with considerable resources in money, men, and material, and made it a power to be reckoned with in southern Europe and the Near East.

It has already been remarked that every adult Burjī Mamluk sultan began his career as a slave. Sultan Barsbey was originally bought by a governor of Melitene named Dukmak, by whom he was presented as a gift to sultan Barkuk, first ruler of the Circassian line. Barsbey was thus enrolled among the Mamluks of the latter, and after his enfranchisement began to work his way up from rank to rank until he became governor of Tripoli, and some time afterward *dawatdar* (private secretary) to sultan Tatar in Cairo. Tatar died soon afterward, having designated his minor son Muḥammad for the succession, with Barsbey as *lala* (tutor), and the emir Janibek aṣ-Ṣūfī as regent. Barsbey was determined to become sultan, and after disposing of Janibek, whom he threw into prison with other enemies and doubtful friends, he deposed his benefactor's son, and ascended the throne in April 1422. Having thus completely extinguished his opponents, Barsbey felt so secure as to dispense with the distribution of the customary accession largess to the royal Mamluks, but then began, nevertheless, to play for popularity. First he ordered that persons approaching his person should only kiss his hand, or merely bow, instead of performing the elaborate genuflection and the kissing of the ground as theretofore. Then he issued an edict depriving all non-Moslem government officials of their posts, but it was soon discovered that some of the departments could not be operated without them, and the order was simply left in abeyance.

For the next year and a half quiet prevailed throughout the Mamluk empire, except for the rebellions of the governors of Safad and Behesni in Syria, who were soon routed and replaced. But in August 1423 Barsbey and his empire shook with the news of the escape of the sultan's arch-rival Janibek aṣ-Ṣūfī from his prison in Alexandria. Barsbey arrested and banished many suspected partisans of the vanished emir, and began to suspect many of his own friends, but neither persecution nor search could produce the dangerous rival; it was not till 1435 that his whereabouts became known. Even then the sultan was unable to seize him, for he had taken refuge with Turkoman enemies beyond the border.

Shortly after the escape of Janibek, Barsbey found himself con-

fronted with a menacing variety of external problems, including the rebellion of the governor of Damascus, the depredations of Frankish pirates on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt, and the denying of allegiance by the sharīf of Mecca, Ḥasan ibn-‘Ajlān. First he sent an expedition with a new governor for Damascus, named Sudun; as soon as the news reached him that the rebel was defeated and incarcerated in the citadel of the Syrian capital, he turned his attention to the other two problems. He resolved to put down the Frankish pirates by depriving them of their base, the island of Cyprus, and after two successful expeditions, he vigorously prosecuted his efforts to obtain permanent control of the island.¹³ A strong army from Egypt and Syria, supported by a formidable fleet from both countries, was dispatched in 1426. Limassol, Larnaca, and Nicosia, the capital, were seized, and the king of Cyprus, Janus de Lusignan, was taken prisoner. He was brought in triumph to the citadel of Cairo, but eventually released for a high ransom, after becoming a tributary vassal of the Mamluk sultanate. Two years earlier Ḥasan ibn-‘Ajlān, the sharīf of Mecca, was subdued and the supremacy of Egypt over the holy city and its seaport Jidda was restored. Ḥasan himself traveled to Cairo, in the company of the pilgrim caravan and the army that had been sent against him. There he assured Barsbey of his allegiance to the Mamluk throne, and consented to pay an annual tribute of 30,000 dinars; he was kept in Cairo as an honored hostage until the first instalment was paid.

Before the Mamluk army had left Mecca a convoy of Indian merchant shipping had sailed into the port of Jidda, after its captain had been assured by the Mamluk general in command that it would be accorded all facilities for trade, now that the port had come under the benign authority of Mamluk rule. Until then Aden in the Yemen had been the first Red Sea port for all Indian trade, but driven thence by oppressive treatment and eccentric exactions, oriental merchants suddenly found a better emporium at Jidda. A special office was created in Cairo, and its holder, the *shadd* (inspector) of Jidda, repaired there annually to receive the immense customs duties that were willingly paid at the rate of ten percent ad valorem on all imports. Not content with this new source of revenue, Barsbey assumed a monopoly of many sorts of commerce including all eastern spices and such home-produced articles as sugar—measures which caused prices to become prohibitive even to European merchants, who were always ready to buy the luxuries of the east. This

13. See above, pp. 372–375.

led to complaints and reprisals by the Venetian republic, as well as by the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon-Catalonia.

Besides interfering with trade Barsbey meddled with the coinage, altering the rate of exchange of gold and silver to his own advantage, and putting foreign money out of circulation so that he might buy it cheaply and then readmit it, to the extreme annoyance and loss of the merchants, native and foreign. The population, too, were galled by the sultan's rapacious methods of making money to satisfy his unbounded extravagance. The high price of sugar was most resented, because it was widely used as a remedy against the recurrent plague. But when the monopoly was extended to such necessities as meat and grain, and the free sale of cattle was forbidden, the resulting shortages led to famine in many parts of Egypt. Still worse were the outrages of the uncontrolled and wayward Mamluk soldiery, who mishandled the people and treated the women so insolently that the latter had to be forbidden to appear in the streets.

In Syria the system of monopolies brought similar hardships to both merchants and common people, but the country remained free from rebellious governors, and the people were at least spared the troublesome outrages of the soldiery. Since 1429, however, the Syrian roads had witnessed several military operations directed against the Turkomans. In the background was Shāh Rūkh, who was exasperated by the flat refusal of the sultan to allow him to share in the clothing of the Ka'bah in Mecca. He therefore supported Kara Yoluk, chief of the White Sheep Turkomans, against whose forces Barsbey had to fight continually, and even marched in person in 1432. The princes of the Dhū-l-Qadr, who were the sultan's vassals, were also a source of trouble, as they had given harbor to Barsbey's bitter enemy, the escaped Janibek. In the end, however, Barsbey was victorious: Kara Yoluk was killed in 1435 in a battle with the chief of another Turkoman tribe called the Black Sheep, Janibek was slain, and the Dhū-l-Qadr were finally subdued.

Barsbey did not long survive a success which the historian al-Maqrīzī thought to have been totally undeserved.¹⁴ He died unregretted in June 1438, after he had appointed his fourteen-year-old son Yūsuf as his successor, and an emir named Jakmak as regent. Barsbey had been a stern ruler, and the outward tranquillity of both Egypt and Syria was no proof of corresponding prosperity. His conquest of Cyprus had pleased his Mamluks, and his monopolies had filled their pockets with ill-gotten gain, but the people had suffered during the

14. Al-Maqrīzī, *As-sulūk* (Brit. Mus. MS.), IV, fol. 200B.

sixteen years of his reign, and Egypt was often in a state of famine even in years of plenty.

Yūsuf, the new sultan, occupied the throne for but ninety-four days, during which the regent Jakmak gathered all power into his hands; he was ultimately proclaimed sultan in September 1438, after his nomination to the dignity by a blundering and impetuous emir named Kirkmas, who had been plotting to obtain the sultanate for himself. The deposed Yūsuf was imprisoned at the citadel in Cairo, and Kirkmas was given the office of atabek, which Jakmak had held with the regency. Kirkmas accepted the office without apparent demur, but, unable to dissimulate longer, he seized the first opportunity which offered itself to besiege the sultan at the citadel. He was defeated, however, and after his surrender Jakmak sent him in chains to Alexandria, where he was condemned to death by the doctors of law, and publicly beheaded with a blunt sword, in December 1438. The Mamluks who had supported him in the rebellion were now seized in great numbers; some of them were imprisoned and others were banished to distant oases in Upper Egypt. Thus all opposition in Cairo was completely quelled, but soon afterward Jakmak was faced by a joint rebellion of the governors of Aleppo and Damascus, who had declared for the deposed Yūsuf only to further their own ends. Jakmak decided to march in person at the head of an expedition against them, but before he had made preparations, young Yūsuf escaped from the citadel disguised as a scullion. Jakmak was greatly disconcerted, especially as the news reached him from Upper Egypt that a part of the troops he had dispatched against the beduins there had been won over by Yūsuf's supporters. Eventually, however, Jakmak triumphed over all his difficulties, and emerged unscathed. Yūsuf was discovered in April 1439; contrary to all expectations the sultan treated him well, sending him to Alexandria, where he was kept under a mild form of custody which did not prevent him from indulging in pious studies. In the course of the following month the governors of Damascus and Aleppo were finally defeated and put to death, with many of their followers. Shortly before the arrest of Yūsuf trouble among the troops in Upper Egypt had vanished.

Like his predecessor Barsbey, sultan Jakmak wished to chastise the Christians, whose freebooters had begun again, in spite of the subjugation of Cyprus, to despoil the Egyptian and Syrian coasts. He therefore sent an expedition against Rhodes, in August 1440, but the troops returned empty-handed, as the resistance offered by the Knights of St. John, who had been well prepared, was too strong for them. The attempt was renewed with greater preparations in 1443

and 1444, but with the same result. Finally giving up the design as hopeless, Jakmak made peace with the doughty grand master of the order, John of Lastic, whose envoy to Cairo was assisted in his negotiations by an agent of Jacques Coeur, the great French merchant. For the rest of his reign Jakmak sought no quarrel with any Christian power, and though he continued the system of monopolies on oriental merchandise, his treatment of Frankish merchants, who were irked most by these restrictions, was honorable and straightforward.

Toward the Moslem countries around, Jakmak pursued a wise policy of friendliness and accommodation. Against the advice of his unbending emirs, he allowed Shāh Rūkh to send a covering for the sacred Ka'bah in 1443, thus ending, without loss of rights or prestige, a controversy which had been the source of arrogant correspondence during the reign of Barsbey. He was also on the best of terms with the Ottoman sultan Murad II, as well as the princes of Asia Minor, whom he allied to his interests by marrying two widowed ladies of their kin at the beginning of his reign.

In his domestic policy Jakmak was not quite as successful, because of the unbridled outrages of the Mamluk soldiery, whose savage treatment of obnoxious emirs and administrators fills many a page in the contemporary chronicles. Unable to restrain them from molesting women on festive days, the sultan was compelled to forbid the pretty Cairenes from enjoying an outing even on such rare occasions. Nor was Jakmak able to put a stop to the rampant mismanagement of the trade monopolies. But on the whole his government was mild and benevolent, especially when compared with that of his greedy predecessor. His personal character, moreover, was exemplary; he observed the laws of the Koran scrupulously, touched no forbidden food, prohibited wines, and suppressed profane music. He loathed gaudy apparel, and for pious reasons he ordained that his courtiers and emirs should wear short clothes and clip their long mustaches. Indeed, through his example the morals of the court improved, and many religious buildings were raised in Cairo by the leading emirs, in imitation of the sultan's zeal for repairing old mosques or founding new ones.¹⁵ His orthodoxy induced him to persecute Jews and Christians, and to enforce the old sumptuary distinctions regarding the size of turbans for non-Moslems. But he was liberal to the learned, and thought no price too high for a beautiful book. He died at the age of about eighty, in February 1453, after a long illness

15. Abū-l-Mahāsīn, *An-nujūm*, VII (Berkeley, 1926-1929), 245-247.

which he bravely suffered for a year. And despite his simple life, he left but a trifling fortune for his only remaining son 'Uthmān.

Shortly before he breathed his last, sultan Jakmak took the unprecedented step of abdicating the throne, and though he had privately intimated that he wished his son to be appointed his successor, he refrained from giving official voice to his parental predilection, and left the 'Abbāsīd caliph and the qadis and the assembled emirs, all of whom he had especially summoned to his sick bed, to make the choice themselves. "The question rests entirely with you, as regards whom you would elevate to the sultanate," he assured the assembly, knowing that they could not possibly turn his son aside.¹⁶ 'Uthmān was accordingly nominated to succeed, and homage was done to him at once.

'Uthmān was about nineteen years old at the time of his accession, and was therefore no infant, but he fared worse than previous younger sons of sultans elevated to the throne, and his reign, which lasted but six weeks and one day, was shorter than that of any former youth. The cause of his downfall was that he had rashly alienated all but the party of his father's Mamluks, and had thus roused the indignation of every other faction. He was consequently besieged at the Cairene citadel, in March 1453, and after seven days of fierce fighting with the forces of the atabek Inal, around whom the malcontents had rallied, he was forced to surrender. He had been deposed two days before, with the full consent of the same caliph who had officiated at his accession ceremony, and on the morrow of his surrender he was sent in fetters to Alexandria by the new sultan Inal.

Elevated to the sultanate at the advanced age of seventy-three, and so uneducated that he could not even write his own name, Inal nevertheless was able to maintain himself on the throne for nearly eight years. He was an easy-going, pliable old man, whose policy was to meet the exacting demands of his own Mamluks (*jilbān*) with as much financial indulgence as he could afford. Some of the leading emirs, moreover, were bound to his interests by a series of marriages, one of which was the marriage of his eldest son Aḥmad, who became sultan after him, to a daughter of his grand *dawatdar* (chief private secretary).¹⁷ Inal's good nature and pliability, however, were responsible for the shamelessness and turbulence of his Mamluks, whose

16. *Ibid.*, VII, 240-241.

17. Ibn-Iyās, *Badā'i' az-zuhūr*, II, 41, 43, 64.

violent excesses and disorders covered the length of an otherwise beneficial reign. At first the sultan was able to temporize with them, but on the eve of a punitive expedition against the beduins of the province of Beheira, in June 1455, they refused to march until camels were provided. These not being granted, they rose in armed rebellion around the citadel, and were joined by older Mamluks, who had previously persuaded the caliph al-Qā'im to support them in an endeavor to restore the deposed 'Uthmān. This, however, displeased the *jilbān* and decided them to return to their master, so that eventually the outbreak was quelled, and the caliph was sent to Alexandria as a prisoner, after being divested of the title "commander of the faithful." A handful of the older Mamluks were banished to Syria or thrown into the dungeons of the tower of the citadel, but the *jilbān* were given the camels for which they had clamored, and shortly afterwards marched with the punitive expedition.

In December 1456 Inal was again confronted with the open rebellion of his spoiled *jilbān*; this time the source of the trouble was a series of exorbitant demands which they had put forth with defiance, but which the sultan had completely refused to concede. The Mamluks were equally adamant, and when Inal came out of the citadel to admonish them in person, they pelted him with a shower of stones. Strangely, however, the sultan gave way to all their demands a few days after, much to the disgust of the chronicler abū-l-Maḥāsin, who observed with bitterness that such weak-kneed indulgence could not but sap all sense of decency from the *jilbān*, and tempt them to worse acts of violence.¹⁸ The remark was justified to the full; during the remaining five years of Inal's reign the *jilbān* became all-powerful. They had several officials dismissed and changed at pleasure; and neither sultan nor magistrate dared rebuke them for their organized robberies and arson, their lynch-law and incendiarism. In 1460, a terrible plague broke out, but the calamity failed to check the wild atrocities of the *jilbān*, who not only attacked the passing biers, but ravaged the property of the dead and the dying.

Amidst the reigning chaos, and in the teeth of strong opposition, however, sultan Inal finally carried through a reform of the currency, in 1458. The debased silver coinage which his predecessors had struck was gradually withdrawn from circulation, and improved coins were issued. Money forgers and counterfeiters were visited with harsh penalties, and on one occasion the sultan beheaded ten of them

18. Abū-l-Maḥāsin, *An-nujūm*, VII, 477.

without much ado.¹⁹ In foreign politics, too, Inal was both fortunate and successful. He was on the best of terms with the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II, to whom he sent a special embassy to offer congratulations on the conquest of Constantinople; rather than displease the great conqueror, he turned a deaf ear to the complaints of emir Ibrāhīm of Karaman against Ottoman aggression. In consequence Ibrāhīm made war on Mamluk territory, and captured several fortified places in Cilicia, but he was driven out, and forced to make peace in 1458. Shortly afterward sultan Inal was also involved in European politics by taking sides in the succession dispute in Cyprus, which had been tributary to Egypt since the reign of Barsbey. Inal championed the cause of the bastard James, archbishop of Nicosia, who came to Egypt and applied for military aid against his half-sister, queen Charlotte de Lusignan.²⁰ James returned to Cyprus with an Egyptian army, and with its help occupied the capital Nicosia, but the campaign dragged on for a few more years, and the issue was not decided in the lifetime of sultan Inal, who died in February 1461. He left a family of four, two daughters and two sons, by a single wife, who (strange exception in Mamluk history) had not even one rival, but his life was less edifying in other respects.

Only one day before his death, sultan Inal abdicated the throne in favor of his elder son Aḥmad. During his father's reign, Aḥmad had filled more than one responsible office, and had wielded considerable influence and power behind the scenes. He was thirty years old at his accession, and by age and experience he was well qualified for the sultanate. But he was too enthusiastic for reform, and in his brave attempts to check the outbursts of Mamluk violence in Cairo, and the irregularities of absentee governors in Syria, he alienated most of the leaders of his father's party, and displeased as well the older factions, all of whom joined in a conspiracy to dethrone him. A majority were in favor of a governor of Damascus, named Janim, as sultan, and immediately sent to him an invitation to come to Cairo, but other Mamluks preferred the atabek Khushkadam; their leader Janibey dexterously persuaded the former party to agree to the appointment of the atabek as a stop-gap sultan until their nominee arrived. With this agreement the citadel was attacked in June 1461, and after an unequal battle which lasted for three days, sultan Aḥmad gave up resistance and surrendered himself. He was deposed on the same day, and immediately afterward Khushkadam was proclaimed sultan.

19. Ibn-Iyās, *Badā'i' az-zuhūr*, II, 56–57, 71.

20. See above, pp. 382–383.

Aḥmad was eventually sent to Alexandria, where he remained in prison for a while, but he was released later, and spent his remaining years in peaceful retirement.

Unlike previous Mamluk sovereigns of the Burjī dynasty, who were Turks or Circassians, sultan Khushkadam was by origin a Greek. The first problem of his reign arose out of the very circumstances of his elevation to the sultanate, for no sooner had the ceremonies of his accession been concluded than the emir Janim, responding to the summons of his friends, arrived in the vicinity of Cairo to claim the throne. Khushkadam was seriously perturbed, but, with the aid of Janibey, he was able to prevent Janim from entering Cairo, and even to send him back to Syria, as governor of Damascus again. Not content with this stroke of fortune, Khushkadam arrested and imprisoned many Mamluk leaders in Cairo, a measure which raised a rebellion that nearly cost him the throne. He now determined to do away with Janim, but the latter got wind of what was in store for him, and fled from Damascus to Edessa in the territory of the White Sheep Turkomans. Khushkadam dreaded Janim's return at the head of an army to avenge himself, and an expedition was consequently prepared to pursue him, but tidings of his death in 1462 rendered its march unnecessary.

Unnatural though it might seem, Khushkadam's next step was to turn upon Janibey, to whose acumen and skill he owed not only his elevation to the throne, but the power to remain there. Janibey had been powerful enough as Mamluk leader, but when he had put Khushkadam so much in his debt, the sultan began to see in his old friend a dangerous foe, and he resolved to get rid of him. And so one day in August 1463, as Janibey was entering the citadel, he was set upon by the *jilbān*, who stabbed him to death with their spears, and then dashed out his brains with a heavy stone. Other leaders of Mamluk parties were arrested and imprisoned or banished. The sultan now felt secure, and during the remaining years of his reign he adopted toward the leaderless Mamluk factions a policy of playing off one corps against another, thus nullifying their power and opposition. This left the field free for the riotous debauchery of his own Mamluks, who murdered and ravished and plundered just as they pleased. Meanwhile the sultan enriched himself by several unrighteous means; official posts were openly sold, and innocent persons were given over to their enemies to be scourged, tortured, or executed without trial so long as the sultan's palm had previously been greased with fat gold. Worse still was the practice of the crafty Greek

of calling in state upon some wealthy grandee, and handsomely fleecing the unlucky host before the visit was ceremoniously over.

In the field of foreign politics Khushkadam's reign is to be remembered as the one in which began the struggle between the Egyptian and the Ottoman sultanates, which finally led to the incorporation of Egypt and its dependencies in the Ottoman empire. The dispute began in 1463 with a struggle over the succession in the principality of Karaman, where the two sultans favored rival claimants, and the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II supported the claim of his candidate by force of arms, obtaining as the price of his assistance several towns where only recently the suzerainty of the Egyptian sultan had been acknowledged. Open war did not, however, break out between the two states in Khushkadam's time. In Cyprus Khushkadam continued the policy inaugurated by his predecessor Inal, and sent several expeditions to the island, partly to support king James II, but mainly to be rid of the remaining dangerous Mamluk factions.

Toward the close of the reign beduin tribes caused terror and disorder not only in Upper Egypt and Syria, but in northern Arabia, where they plundered even the pilgrim caravans. While preparations were being made for the dispatch of the necessary troops, Khushkadam was seized with dysentery and rapidly became powerless. Yet he managed somehow to send an expedition to Arabia in August 1467, but when the order went out to the troops designed for Upper Egypt, the commanding general politely refused to march, preferring to tarry in Cairo to watch the impending turn of events.²¹ At last Khushkadam died in October 1467, leaving two sons, of whom the elder was called Manşūr.²²

For the next four months or so Cairo was the scene of unceasing intrigue and intermittent strife among contending factions, for during that short interval two more sultans began and terminated their rule. It should be noted first, however, that contrary to previous Mamluk usage, sultan Khushkadam had not named his son to succeed him, nor had any leading emir even troubled to learn the last wishes of the dying man upon the question. A few hours before the Greek's death the leading emirs held a meeting at which the head of the Khushkadamite party, named Khairbek, with the support of another faction leader, Timurbogha, secured the succession for the atabek Yelbey, who was known by the sobriquet of al-Majnūn (the lunatic). Yelbey was proclaimed sultan on the same day, with Timurbogha in the atabekship, almost immediately after the burial of Khushkadam.

21. Abū-l-Mahāsīn, *An-nujūm*, VII, 826, note *e*.

22. Ibn-Iyās, *Badā'i' az-zuhūr*, II, 82.

His reign lasted for nearly two months, in the course of which he soon realized that Khairbek had helped him to the sultanate only to use him as a stepping-stone to the throne. In consequence he began to plot against the formidable Khairbek, and waged war upon him, but he was foiled in his design, and paid for his temerity by being deposed and imprisoned.

With the support of Khairbek and his powerful party, the atabek Timurbogha was elevated to the throne, in December 1467, but his reign also did not exceed two months. In sharp contrast to his niggardly and unlettered predecessor, however, Timurbogha, who was also Greek by origin, was not only a munificent man, but a lover of learning and the arts, and a past master in horsemanship, lance-play, and marksmanship. Had he possessed the means of gratifying the incessant demands of the factions around him, he might have held the throne for the remaining years of his lifetime. But the treasury was empty, and without gold he was unable to win over many followers. He was deposed in January 1468 by Khairbek, who deemed the moment opportune for becoming sultan himself. Khairbek, however, had not reckoned beforehand with the forces of the new atabek Ka'itbey, and as a result of this oversight found himself besieged at the citadel before he was even proclaimed sultan. Then a battle took place between the besiegers and the besieged; it resulted in the victory of Ka'itbey, who accepted the sultanate after some apparent hesitation. Khairbek was sent in fetters to Alexandria, while with cheerful resignation Timurbogha bowed to the accomplished fact, and retired into private life to Damietta; he was not held prisoner, but was left at liberty and accompanied by some of his retinue.

Ka'itbey was proclaimed sultan in January 1468; his reign, which lasted for nearly twenty-nine years, was phenomenal, for it was not only the longest, but the most successful and warlike of the Circassian line. Much of this reign was spent in struggles with Shāhsuvār, vassal chief of the Dhū-l-Qadr Turkomans, who was ultimately vanquished and put to death in Cairo, and with Uzun Ḥasan (Ḥasan the Long), formidable prince of the White Sheep, who had been masquerading as the sultan's loyal vassal during the prolonged campaign against Shāhsuvār. Moreover, in 1482 Ka'itbey offended the new Ottoman sultan Bayazid II by entertaining his rival brother Jem in Cairo, and supplying him with means for a fruitless rising in Anatolia. Because of this, and also the unjustifiable intercepting of an Indian embassy to the Ottoman court by the agents of Ka'itbey, Bayazid II

declared war against Egypt in 1486, having flatly refused to listen to any talk of peace. One Ottoman army seized Adana, Tarsus, and other places within Mamluk territory in Cilicia, and another army besieged the outlying town of Melitene, but the Egyptian forces operated with success against both armies and drove them away with heavy losses. Adana and Tarsus were regained by the Ottomans two years later, only to be lost again after a battle with the Egyptians, in the field of Agha Chayrî, and in 1489 the emir Izbek inflicted a further severe defeat on the considerable forces of Bayazid II at Caesarea in Anatolia. Peace was not brought about until 1491, and Ka'itbey showed a wise moderation in proposing it first to the Ottoman court.

Despite his preoccupation with the campaigns of his first twenty-three years, Ka'itbey was able to exercise diplomatic sternness with the reigning queen of Cyprus, the Venetian Catherine Cornaro, who had not been punctual in paying the annual tribute due to him as overlord of the island. Ka'itbey threatened her with war if she did not dispatch the tribute for 1478, but the Venetian republic, which had a stake in the matter, persuaded the queen to avoid the sultan's anger, and the tribute duly arrived. However, the sultan's threats were not always effective; in 1487 he endeavored to assist the Moslem ruler of Granada abū-'Abd-Allāh (Boabdil) by threatening king Ferdinand of Spain with the destruction of Jerusalem, and the annihilation of all Egyptian and Syrian Christians, if Spanish hostilities against the Moslem kingdom did not cease, but king Ferdinand refused to be cowed, and went on undismayed with his successful campaign.

In domestic politics during the reign of Ka'itbey, the sultan's conduct of affairs differed in many respects from that of all other Circassian rulers, before or after him. He treated deposed sultans and descendants of former sultans with constant magnanimity and honor, and frequently invited them to play polo tournaments with him in Cairo, in royal colors. He allowed them to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, and even permitted them to visit Cairo in his absence without any suspicion or fear of conspiracy. Contrary to previous custom, too, he not only frequently left the citadel for riding and hunting excursions, but performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, visited Hebron, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Damietta, and once made a great tour of inspection to Aleppo and to the banks of the Euphrates, the frontier of the empire. And wherever he went, it must be recorded to his credit, sultan Ka'itbey left splendid traces of his progress in good roads, bridges, mosques, schools, fortifications, or other pious or

necessary works. Of these constructions the great medieval fort of Alexandria deserves special mention.

Ka'itbey could not have succeeded in the spheres of foreign and domestic politics to such an extent had he been a bad leader of men, or an incompetent weakling. Besides tact and courage, he possessed experience and knowledge of the world, and he lacked neither insight, nor energy, nor decision. His strong character dominated the immense numbers of his own Mamluks, whom he skillfully bound by self-interest to himself. They became really devoted to him, and with their unstinted aid he was able to deal, effectively and at will, with the other Mamluk factions. There were the usual outbursts from time to time, but party was so cleverly balanced against party that the government was uncommonly safe.

For his campaigns and his buildings Ka'itbey required considerable means, which he could raise only by persistent mulcting and arbitrary levies, in the absence of a regulated system of taxation. Such extraordinary contributions were necessary for the wars in which he was obliged to engage. Not only was all real estate once taxed to the amount of seven months' rental, but a very burdensome tax was levied on the sale of corn.²³ Rich Jews and Christians were correspondingly squeezed, and many high officials of the administration were remorselessly tortured, scourged, or flogged, sometimes by the sultan in person, to extort their ill-gotten treasure. On several occasions Ka'itbey stooped to the method of calling in state upon notables of the provinces, receiving from them rich gifts which were not always voluntary.

The last five years of Ka'itbey's reign were free from troubles abroad, but they were dismally clouded at home by an exceptionally virulent plague which swept over Egypt in 1492. It carried off more than 200,000 of the population, killed a third of the Mamluks, and bereaved the sultan himself of a daughter and her slave-mother in one day.²⁴ The plague was followed, two years later, by scarcity and cattle disease, while to add to the general misery a long-pent-up quarrel among the Mamluk factions broke out in 1495. The aged sultan, who was then about eighty-five years old, displayed his standard at the citadel gate, assembled his men, and without bloodshed quelled the riot for the moment, but the intrigues and jealousies between the ringleaders, Kansuh Khamsmi'ah and Akberdi, continued.²⁵ In the following year the contest was about to break out

23. The tax on corn belonged to the latter part of the reign; see *ibid.*, II, 291.

24. *Ibid.*, II, 274.

25. The name Kansuh occurs frequently in the next few pages, denoting three different men. The sobriquet Khamsmi'ah (five hundred) is applied to this Kansuh, to distinguish him

again, when the sultan, overcome by years, illness, and worry, breathed his last on July 28, 1496. The emirs and officials of the court and the entire army attended his funeral, mourning the loss of one who for more than a quarter of a century had ruled them well, and had raised the prestige of the Mamluk empire to a great height abroad.

Within the next five years Cairo witnessed five turbulent reigns, the first of which was that of Muḥammad, the fourteen-year-old only son of Ka'itbey by a freed concubine. Muḥammad was solemnly proclaimed sultan the day before his father's death, but, contrary to what was generally asserted, Ka'itbey had no say in choosing him, for he had been completely unconscious when he was approached on the matter. Nor, presumably, would Ka'itbey have sanctioned the appointment of his son to the sultanate had he been able to voice his last wishes, for he knew that the hereditary principle had proved totally alien to the conceptions of the military oligarchy.

In the case of this Muḥammad the danger came from the emir Kansuh Khamsmi'ah, whose deadly antagonist Akberdi had secretly fled from Egypt, leaving him virtual ruler of the sultanate. But Kansuh could not feel safe as long as Akberdi's supporters were at large, especially as the young sultan was strongly inclined toward them and their leader. He therefore compelled Muḥammad to banish and imprison many of them, and on one occasion (January 1497) he caused some of their leaders to be drowned in the Nile. Thinking that the time had come to bid for the throne, he seized one of the gates of the citadel on the day following the drowning of the emirs, and immediately had himself recognized as sultan by the emirs of his faction, the caliph, and the qadis. But when he attempted to seize the citadel itself, he was repulsed by sultan Muḥammad's uncle, Kansuh al-Ashrafī, and after a "reign" of three days he sought safety in hiding. He made a second attempt the following February, but failed again, and fled with most of his faction to Palestine, where, together with many of his followers, he met his death at the hands of the emir Akberdi, who had been recalled by sultan Muḥammad to Cairo. Thus reinstated, Akberdi entered Cairo amid great rejoicing, but the surviving emirs of his old opponent's faction soon found a leader in Kansuh al-Ashrafī, and Akberdi had to fly again to Syria in July 1497, this time never to return.

Meanwhile sultan Muḥammad had been declared of age, and the

from both Kansuh Khāl (uncle) al-Ashrafī and Kansuh al-Ghūrī (also found as Qanṣauh al-Ghaurī). All three men became sultans.

reins of government were formally entrusted to him. But the new burdens of responsibility failed to check, or even modify, his earlier puerile cruelties, dissipation, and lewdness. He now began to live a life of wild libertinism; male and female singers were his companions in night orgies on the Nile, and during the day he was often found in the company of the scum of the capital. With his slaves and comrades he paraded the streets, attacked men as they passed, and entered houses in the dark. On one occasion he attacked the house of an official of the department of the privy purse with the intent of seizing his wife, who was known to be a pretty woman.²⁶ And to add to this reign of terror and immorality the Mamluk factions committed untold barbarities, while organized bands of thieves robbed many houses of their riches with impunity. Wearied at last by such excesses, Kansuh plotted against his own nephew, and after an extraordinary reign of about two years, the depraved Muḥammad was finally murdered in October 1498, by the men of the emir Tumanbey, his second private secretary.

Kansuh al-Ashrafī was proclaimed sultan two days later, with the full support of his accomplice Tumanbey. He was about thirty years of age at that time, but though on several occasions he proved to be of a higher stamp than the typical run of Mamluks, and Cairo had a much quieter time than usual during his sultanate, he was able to hold the throne for only about twenty months. He lacked the power of decision, and was wanting in both moral strength and funds, without which it was impossible to cope with the chronic rapacity of Mamluk demands. In Syria he was faced with the continued rebellion of Akberdī, but fortunately for Kansuh, the veteran rebel came to terms in May 1499, shortly after which he died a natural death, at Aleppo. The sultan was soon confronted with another rebel in the person of the governor of Aleppo, Kasruh, with whom the sultan's old friend Tumanbey had entered into an agreement for the latter's own ends. Kansuh was not unaware of the conspiracy, and accordingly victualled the citadel and fortified its walls, in preparation for a siege. Meanwhile Tumanbey, who had been in Upper Egypt on a punitive expedition, returned in June 1500, and before the end of the month the citadel was stormed after three days of fierce fighting. But the attackers failed to find sultan Kansuh, for he had escaped by the women's gate (Bāb al-Harīm) in female disguise.

Cairo remained sultanless for two days after the escape of Kansuh, owing to the difficulty of agreeing upon a suitable successor to the throne. Tumanbey, who had caused the downfall of the sultan, and

26. Ibn-Iyās, *Badā'i' az-zuhūr*, II, 343–344.

was therefore the obvious candidate, cunningly waived his own claim for the time being, and in the teeth of general opposition he secured the succession for his senior in office, the atabek Janbalat. Kansuh, still in hiding, was formally dethroned and the atabek was recognized as sultan in his place, in June 1500. Ten days later the hapless Kansuh was discovered, and eventually sent to the prison of Alexandria. But the new sultan was to remain on the throne only until Tumanbey thought fit to unmask his designs. The chance presented itself when Janbalat innocently sent him at the head of an expedition for the suppression of the emir Kasruh, the rebel governor of Damascus. There Tumanbey joined forces with his old friend Kasruh, at whose suggestion he had himself proclaimed sultan. Then he marched back to Cairo, and with considerable forces advanced on the citadel, which was captured in January 1501, after seven days' siege. On the same day Janbalat was seized, and subsequently sent as a prisoner to Alexandria where, contrary to the usual lot of deposed sultans, he was beheaded by order of Tumanbey, called al-'Ādil (the Just).

As the accession ceremony at Damascus was not enough to legitimize his position, Tumanbey I was duly recognized, in January 1501, by the caliph, the qadis, and the emirs assembled. But the esteem with which the new sultan had been regarded soon turned into hatred and terror, as a result of the cruelties he perpetrated on coming to the throne. Besides his barbarous treatment of one of the chief qadis for his past loyalty to the deposed sultan, he treacherously caused the emir Kasruh, his right-hand man at Damascus and Cairo, to be strangled and buried within a few hours in the stillness of a wintry night.²⁷ Many other emirs were banished or even drowned, while those who eluded arrest were ruthlessly hunted down. At last the emirs were roused, and hearing a rumor that the sultan was about to arrest a number of them, they attacked him in the citadel, in April 1501. Tumanbey made but little resistance, because all that he had at his disposal to put against the raging emirs was a handful of his own Mamluks. Even these deserted him at the critical hour, so that nothing was left for him but to fly and seek concealment in the house of a friend.

Owing to the circumstances of the attempt to oust Tumanbey I, the emirs had had no chance to decide upon whom the mantle of the sultanate was to be conferred, with likely general consent. As a result of the consequent haste, their first choice proved unacceptable to most of the soldiery, and it was only after much deliberation that another Kansuh, surnamed al-Ghūrī, was proclaimed sultan in April

27. *Ibid.*, II, 388-389.

1501.²⁸ Kansuh accepted the dangerous honor only after considerable hesitation, no doubt because of his fear of Mamluk fickleness and caprice. He was then over sixty years of age, but still firm, cunning, and vigorous, and he soon showed the emirs that he was not to be overruled or browbeaten by any of them. By the simple method of cajoling the secret supporters of the deposed Tumanbey I, he succeeded in having the latter murdered with their connivance, and thus rid himself of the ex-sultan without arousing the hostility of his adherents. Like other sultans, however, al-Ghūrī had to face the clamor of the Mamluks for the customary accession donative, but as the treasury was empty and he himself was rapacious, he turned the occasion to his own advantage, and under pretext of collecting funds for the pressing largess, he resorted to a system of extortion and heavy taxation, the extent of which had never been known in Circassian annals. He levied ten months' rental at a stroke, laying not only the lands and shops of Cairo under contribution, but also the baths, water-wheels, mills, boats, beasts of burden, Jews, Christians, and palace-servants down to the very doorkeeper. Even the waqfs or pious endowments were pressed for the sum of a full year's returns, and, further, he debased the coinage for his own benefit.²⁹ The result was a handsome revenue with which, besides paying off the old Mamluks, he bought a considerable number of new slaves in order to create a new party, which was subsequently known as al-Ghūrīyah. It is true, however, that he also spent a great portion of the extorted money on strengthening the fortresses of Alexandria, Rosetta, and Aleppo, on improving the pilgrim road to Mecca, and on building his mosque and college in Cairo.

Yet in spite of continued extortion the country remained quiet, and beyond a few military expeditions to quell beduin risings in Egypt and Syria, there were few events to disturb the earlier years of sultan al-Ghūrī's reign. But since the landing of the Portuguese in India in 1498, and their establishment of the first European trade colony on the west Indian coast in 1500, the immense trade which had always poured into Egypt by way of Aden and Jidda had gradually been diverted to the route around the Cape of Good Hope to Europe. In consequence the excessively high cost of passing through Egyptian ports, as well as the cost of overland transit to Alexandria, were all avoided, and the profits of Indian trade now went to the Portuguese. These vast losses to the Mamluk treasury could not be tolerated by sultan al-Ghūrī, who was further infuriated

28. *Idem* (Paris MS.), fols. 117B–118B.

29. *Ibid.*, fols. 122B–123B.

by the attacks of the Portuguese upon Egyptian shipping in the Indian seas. At first, however, the sultan tried to obtain redress by peaceful means, although he might have been wiser if, as repeatedly advised by the Venetian republic, he had quickly resolved upon checking Portuguese aggression by naval force. His peace messenger reached Rome in 1504, and handed to pope Julius II a letter of complaint threatening to destroy the holy places in Palestine and Egypt, if king Manuel of Portugal did not cease from oppressing Moslem traders in India, and from conducting hostilities against Egyptian shipping. The mission failed in its object, and the sultan had, therefore, to equip a considerable fleet to fight the Portuguese in Indian waters. The first encounter took place in 1508 in the Indian harbor of Chaul, where the Mamluk fleet, in collaboration with a squadron from the Moslem state of Gujerat as well as several vessels from other Indian allies, defeated the Portuguese. But the next year the Portuguese had their revenge tenfold upon the Mamluk fleet at the battle of Diu, near Bombay, and the Mamluk carrying trade with India was doomed.

Only eight years after Diu the Mamluk empire itself was wiped out of existence by the Ottoman sultan Selim I. Since the peace of 1491 between sultans Ka'itbey and Bayazid II, Turco-Mamluk relations had been friendly, but with the accession of the warlike and ambitious Selim I in 1512, affairs assumed a serious turn. Thus, after defeating Ismā'īl, the first shah of the new Şafavid dynasty of Persia, at the battle of Chaldiran in 1514, Selim I turned his eyes southward toward Syria and Egypt. He seized the border state of the Dhū-l-Qadr, then tributary to Egypt, though Turkey and Egypt were still at peace with each other. Then Selim I resolved to conquer Egypt, and with several trifling grievances against Kansuh al-Ghūrī as a pretext for war, he met the Mamluk army at the field of Marj Dābiq, north of Aleppo, in August 1516. The Mamluks were utterly defeated, and al-Ghūrī fell fighting. The superior numbers and the artillery of the Turks, aided by the treachery of the commander of the left wing of the Mamluk army, were responsible for the rout. After Marj Dābiq, Selim I's army advanced southward, and Syria passed quickly into the possession of the Ottomans, whose advent was in many places welcomed as meaning deliverance from the Mamluks.

In Cairo, when the news of the defeat and death of al-Ghūrī arrived, the emir Tumanbey, who had been left by al-Ghūrī to manage the government in his absence, was elected sultan, in October 1516. Tumanbey II accepted the office with real reluctance, and only after the emirs had pledged themselves to absolute and unswerv-

ing loyalty to him, in the presence of a saintly recluse named shaikh abū-Su'ūd. Meanwhile the Ottomans were advancing toward Egypt, and despite the desperate efforts which were made by Tumanbey II in preparation for the impending encounter with the Turk, the Mamluk army was defeated first near Gaza, and then at Raidānīyah outside Cairo. The latter battle was fought in January 1517, and on the next day Selim I was recognized as sultan of Egypt and Syria from the pulpits of Cairo. Tumanbey II continued the struggle for some months, but was finally vanquished and, after being captured, was executed in April 1517. With his death the proud empire of the Mamluks came to an end.

It was not until sultan Tumanbey II had breathed his last, as Ibn-Iyās, the eye-witness chronicler of the period, observed, that the Ottoman Selim I became undisputed master of Egypt and its numerous dependencies.³⁰ That Egypt should have thus changed hands was accepted by the chronicler with resignation, as the unalterable decree of fate, but it puzzled him deeply that it should at the same time sink into the position of a mere province of an empire, of which Cairo itself was not to be the capital. "The incredible thing was," he noted, "that Egypt became a governorship (*niyābah*), after its sultan had always been the greatest on earth; for he was the guardian of the two holy sanctuaries, and the holder of the kingdom of Egypt, of which . . . the accursed Pharaoh himself was justly proud. . . ." Ibn-Iyās lived long enough after 1517 not only to contemplate the unthinkable calamity taking place in Egypt, but to see Egypt going sadly into one of the darkest periods of her long history.

30. A chapter on the Ottomans is planned for volume V of this work, in preparation.



16. The Near East