Mamluk Elite on the Eve of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s Death (1341):
A Look behind the Scenes of Mamluk Politics

When God made the morning rise and the muezzin announced the hour of prayer, the amir Sayf al-Dīn Qawṣūn left his house with a large retinue of his followers and sat down at his gate, thinking about the loss of his king and ʿustāḏ which had befallen him. After an hour, the amir Sayf al-Dīn Bashtak left [his house] with some of his companions. The amir Qawṣūn stood up, quickly walked over to him, and met him on the road. He embraced him, wept, and consoled him over his sultan, the like of which time will never ever allow again. After an hour, the sultan’s mamluks came out [of their barracks] and the amir Sayf al-Dīn Qawṣūn consoled them over their master, whereupon they sat down for a moment. Then, the gate of the Citadel was opened and out came the khāṣṣakīyah amirs, like Yalbughā, al-Ḥijāzī, al-Māridānī, Aqṣunqūr, and another, while they were weeping and mourning, and the amirs Qawṣūn and Bashtak consoled them. Then they [all] asked for the veteran amirs, so these entered [the Citadel, came] to them and were informed of the death of the sultan. Then, they [all] wept and they asked [the veterans’] advice on whom to appoint over them. But al-Aḥmādī said: “You, you haven’t buried the sultan yet and you are already arguing. Have you forgotten what has been decreed to you and [have you forgotten] the oaths you have sworn? By God, you are not to appoint anyone but his son Abū Bakr; if not, [I swear that I will fight until] my white hair will be colored by my blood and my head will fly from my body.” But the amir Sayf al-Dīn Qawṣūn told him: “O lord Rukn al-Dīn, don’t be angry; [I swear] we will decapitate anyone who disagrees.” And Bashtak said to them: “Whoever disagrees with me will have to make the effort to join us in our agreement to the rule of the son of our ʿustāḏ [or he will be eliminated].” So the khāṣṣakīyah, the mamluks of the sultan, and the muqaddams alf all left to fetch the amir Abū Bakr. They brought him, made him sit on the royal throne in the īwān and the army
came by, kissing the ground before him. Then he was given the royal epithet “al-Malik al-Manṣūr.” Everyone’s mind was set at rest and, thank God, contrary to what the people had been thinking, nothing [bad] happened and the issue ended well.¹

This very visual and dramatic picture of the first reactions to the demise of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (r. 1293–94; 1299–1309; 1310–41) reveals the names of some members of his socio-political elite of the highest-ranking amirs of one hundred at the end of his reign. As highly unlikely as the actual scene may be, it hints not just at the identity of these individuals, but also at the nature of their relationship with the sultan and with each other (some are inside the Citadel, others not; some take counsel on the succession, others give counsel; some take the lead through these events, others follow, etc.). As such, this story, to a certain degree, reflects the approach that will be taken in this article to establish the nature and identity of this Mamluk elite in its most consolidated form, i.e., at the very end of one of the Mamluk empire’s longest, most prosperous, and most successful sultanic reigns.

Indeed, this article’s central purpose is to identify and define this elite of highest-ranking amirs at al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s court. And as it happens, we are very fortunate to have a list of all the amirs that held the highest military rank—that of amir of one hundred—at the time of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s death in June, 1341, left to us by the obscure historian Shams al-Dīn al-Shuja’ī (d. ca. 1354):

There were twenty-five muqaddams alf in Egypt on the day of his death: Badr al-Dīn Jankalī ibn al-Bābā, al-ḥājj Almalik, Baybars al-Aḥmadi, ‘Alam al-Dīn Sanjar al-Jāwulī, Sayf al-Dīn Kūkāy, Najm al-Dīn Maḥmūd Wazīr Baghdād—these are the senior outsiders (barrānīyah kibār); the rest are his mamluks and intimates: his son Abū Bakr, Qawsūn, Bashtak, Tuquzdamur, Aqbughā ʿAbd al-Wāḥid, Aydughmish, the amīr ākhār, Ḥutmughā al-Fakhrī, Yalbughā al-Yahyāwī, Maliktamur al-Ḥijāzī, Aṭūnbughā al-Māridānī, Bahādur al-Nāṣirī, Aqsunqur al-Nāṣirī, Qumārī al-Kabīr, Qumārī, the amīr shikār, Ẓurghāy, Aranughā, the amīr jānār, Barsbughā, the ḥājib, Bulrughā ibn al-ʿAjūz, the amīr silāḥ, and Bayghārā.”²

²Ibid., 111–12. For the individual identification of each of these amirs, see the appendix to this
His son and successor Abū Bakr excepted, these twenty-four individuals were indeed the political and military elite at the end of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s regime, many of whom were to play significant roles in socio-political life in years to come. Rather than dealing with each one of them individually, the approach chosen to engage the issue of their identity and socio-political role (Who were they? What did they do?) in this article is their interaction with their “king,” “ṭustadh,” “master,” or “sultan.” This study will also attempt to establish whether such an analysis of this elite might allow for a behind-the-scenes look at Mamluk political culture at al-Nāṣir’s court and hence, narrow the wide spectrum of characterizations so far given to al-Nāṣir’s rule, from ruthlessly enforced

authoritarianism to spendthrift monarchism to well-balanced oligarchism.

It will be argued that it actually was a combination of this elite’s “mamluk,” family, and exchange relationships with al-Nāṣir Muḥammad that largely defined its composition, identity, and socio-political function at the end of his reign; furthermore, it will be suggested that these precise relationships not only characterize this elite, but also shed some light on the actual nature of al-Nāṣir’s authority.

"MAMLUK" RELATIONSHIPS

A first aspect of this elite’s identity and composition concerns their origin and subsequent status as mamluks or manumitted slaves. For when analyzing this elite’s composition in terms of the allegedly basic feature of Mamluk political culture—the relationship between a mamluk, his manumitting ustādh, and his peers—a remarkably varied patchwork of mamluk origins and status is revealed. Though an ustādh’s basis of power was supposed to be the loyalty and cohesion of his corps of personal mamluks, all acquired, trained, and manumitted in his service and all identifiable by a nisbah that was derived from his name, this group of senior amirs encompassed such a variety of mamluk “categories” in and outside his Nāṣirīyah corps of personal mamluks, that there remain surprisingly few grounds for assuming that such a bond supporting his authority really existed.

BARĀNĪYAH, NĀṢIRĪYAH, KHĀṢṢAKĪYAH

A first clear mamluk "category” of amirs of one hundred were those six that did not have the nisbah al-Nāṣirī at all. Actually, in his list al-Shuja’ī already identified these six as a separate group, labeling them "senior outsiders" (barānīyah kibār). And this clearly reflects the fact that, as suggested by their nisbajs, they had

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5See Levanoni, Turning Point, esp. 28–80.


7On the "mamluk" concept, see the classic study by David Ayalon, L’Esclavage du Mamlouk, Oriental Notes and Studies, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1951).

8Ibid.

9They are the amirs Jankali, Almalik, Baybars, Sanjar, Kūkāy, and Maḥmūd.
never been members of al-Nāṣir’s corps of personal mamluks. In fact, what most of these outsiders in the Nāṣirīyah-dominated ranks of senior amirs actually had in common was that they had entered the Mamluk empire as young mamluks long before al-Nāṣir’s third ascendancy to power in 1310, i.e., they definitely were senior amirs “who had priority in immigration” and they were therefore also occasionally referred to in the sources as “the veterans” (al-mashāyikh). Almalik, Baybars al-Ahmādī, Sanjar al-Jāwulī, and allegedly also Kūkāy were all members of the Manṣūrīyah, the corps of mamluks trained and manumitted by al-Nāṣir’s father al-Mansūr Qalāwu’n (d. 1290) more than fifty years earlier. And the remaining two, Jankalī ibn al-Baḥbā and Najm al-Dīn Mahmūd, actually were not even mamluks and therefore complete outsiders, yet with a remarkable record of service: both of them had been high ranking officials in the Ilkhanid empire before they had fled

10 According to al-Qalqashandī, the term barrānīyah was used for mamluks and amirs who did not belong to the khāṣṣakīyah; they were also called al-kharajīyah (al-Qalqashandī, Şubh al-’Asghār fī Šīrāz, [Cairo, n.d.], 3:386; 4:56). According to Rabbat, the term should also be taken literally, as the amirs who lived outside the sultan’s quarters in the Citadel’s southern enclosure (Nasser O. Rabbat, The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture, Islamic History and Civilisation, Studies and Texts, vol. 14 [Leiden, 1995], 289); this may also be derived from the following quote from al-Maqrizī: “In it, the sultan reviewed the mamluks of the barracks and the outsiders (al-barraṇīyah)” (al-Maqrīzī, Kītāb al-Sulūk il-Ma‘rifat Duwal al-Mulūk, ed. Muhammad M. Ziyādāh [Cairo, 1956–58], 2:313). Combined with the information in this article’s opening story from al-Shujā‘ī, these outsiders indeed seem to have lived outside the sultan’s quarters, unlike their colleagues.


Mamluk society generally seems to have shown these amirs respect for their long experience, veteran status, and continued loyalty to the sultan. Hence when Damurdāsh, the former ruler of Anatolian Bīlād al-Rūm, fled to Cairo in 1329 and was given an official position inferior to one of those veterans, al-Maqrīzī recorded the following telling story:

[Damurdāsh] was so upset about it that the sultan had to send the amir Badr al-Dīn Jankalī to him to apologize and [explain] that he did not want to disrespect his [royal] status, but that . . . the sultan’s father had senior mamluks who had brought up the sultan, so that he wanted to honor their status. “Therefore I make you sit next to them.”\footnote{Al-Maqrīzī, Sulūk, 2:295.}

The other eighteen amirs of one hundred are all mentioned in the sources with the nisbah al-Nāṣirī, i.e., they actually were members of al-Nāṣir’s personal corps of mamluks; yet two different “categories” in terms of mamluk status may be discerned within this group of Nāṣirīyah amirs of one hundred.

There were seven Nāṣirīyah amirs whose relationship with the sultan actually went far beyond the mere formalities of ustaḍh-mamluk loyalty. For all seven—Qawsūn, Bashtak, Aqsunqur, Maliktamur, Qumārī, Alṭunbughā, and Yalbughā—are specifically identified in one or more of the era’s sources as members of the sultan’s special private retinue of forty favorite mamluks and amirs, the khāṣṣakīyah. These were the real “insiders” among the amirs of one hundred. Very often, they had been picked for their good looks and, as such, they were all attached to the sultan by a more personal bond of sultanic favor and affection—often
even referred to as sultanic “infatuation.” Thus, al-Malik al-Nāṣir was said to have been “extremely infatuated and in love with” Qawṣūn, with Bashtak, with Alṭunbughā, with Maliktamur, and with Yalbughā, apparently to the extent that when the latter became ill, al-Šafadī says the sultan himself looked after his protegee, meanwhile not administering justice for twenty days and even neglecting his own dying son Ibrāhīm. And al-Šafadī has the following telling story about the amir Maliktamur:

I’ve seen him when he was in Cairo. . . . Because of the sultan’s love for him he would not let him go to the square to play polo on Saturday, rather he allowed him to go down on Tuesday [only] . . . and he used to say to him: “O Maliktamur, cover your head when you play so that the sun cannot harm your face.” And he would only allow him to attend the public service very occasionally, so that no one [ever] saw him.

Finally, as regards the remaining eleven Nāṣirīyah amirs of one hundred, the sources do not identify them as having a specific in- or outsider status at the time of the sultan’s demise and we may assume they were merely Nāṣirīyah, linked to the sultan by the usual ustādh-mamluk relationship.

In terms of their mamluk origins and status, clearly this elite was made up of three groups: the latter majority of common sultanic mamluks and two smaller groups of out- and insiders with a more defined status and more personal bonds with the sultan. Yet, as is often the case with such categories, they do not necessarily reflect historical realities. On the one hand, none of these groups are ever mentioned

of the mamluks of the sultan [that are] muqaddams al fattum;” see al-Shuja’ī, Tārīkh, 1:107.
18Al-Maqrīzī, Khitaṭ, 4:104.
19Ibn Hajar, Durar, 1:477; al-Yūsufī, Nuzhah, 154
20Ibn Taghrībīrdī, Al-Manhal, 3:68; al-Maqrīzī, Sulīk, 2:385; al-Yūsufī, Nuzhah, 265
21Al-Šafadī, A’yān, 5:446; Ibn Hajar, Durar, 4:358
22Al-Shuja’ī, Tārīkh, 1:60; al-Maqrīzī, Sulīk, 2:477.
24Al-Šafadī, A’yān, 5:446; see also Ibn Hajar, Durar, 4:358.
25These eleven remaining amirs were: Aqbughā ʿAbd al-Wāhid, Aydughmish, Bahādur, Qumārī al-Kabīr, Qutlūbughā, Ṭuquzdamur, Ṭurghāy, Urumbughā, Barsbughā, Burunli, and Baygharā.
as having acted as a self-consciously solidary group during the entire length of al-Nāṣir’s third reign; on the other, lines between the khāṣṣakīyah and non-khāṣṣakīyah are sometimes not as clear-cut as might be expected. Both of the so-called common Nāṣirīyah amirs Aydughmish and Qutluğbūghā can be identified fairly early in al-Nāṣir’s reign as members of the khāṣṣakīyah; it is, however, uncertain whether they retained that status in al-Nāṣir’s final years, since there is no explicit reference to it. Bahādur’s status remains quite undefined as well, because though he was not explicitly identified as a khāṣṣakī in any of the sources, he is said to have enjoyed some of the khāṣṣakīyah privileges that come with sultanic favor. Thus, all relevant sources agree with Ibn Ḥajar that

[The sultan] favored him so [much] that he came to stay with him to spend the night, as the fourth out of four: Qawṣūn, Bashtak, Tughāy Tamur, and Bahādur.  

"Veterans" and "Strangers"

Moreover, aside from these three very “mamluk” categories, there clearly were some additional distinctive features of mamluk origin and status, which were also known, or at least to some degree noticed, as they did find their way explicitly into the era’s sources. They mainly seem to have resulted from the success and length of al-Nāṣir’s rule and to some extent from his afore-mentioned personal predilection for certain types of mamluks.

Firstly, since al-Nāṣir reigned for so long, the continuous influx of new sultanic mamluks for thirty odd years resulted in serious generational differences in his final years between freshly appointed amirs and those who had managed to stay at the top for one or more decades. And though there is no clear reference to any sort of tension between those generations during al-Nāṣir’s reign, the existence of different generations (tābāqāt) in the ranks of amirs did not go unnoticed. Qutluğbūghā was said to be “from the generation of Arghūn al-Dawādār,” and al-Šafādī made the following statement, revealing to some extent the contemporary awareness of this aspect of court life:

28 There is a reference to generational tension between Bahādur and the younger Altūnbūghā as the former is said to have born the latter a grudge for his quick promotion; in 1342 this tension is said to have caused Altūnbūghā’s removal from Cairo (al-Maqrīzī, Khiṭṭat, 4:105; also to some extent confirmed in Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, Tārīkh, 2:323).
29 Ibn Taghrībirdī, Al-Manhal, 10:82; instead of using the noun tābāqah, al-Šafādī talks about “the high rank (rafas) of the amir Sayf al-Dīn Arghūn al-Dawādār” (al-Šafādī, A’yān, 4:113).
[Tuquzdamur] continued to be [the most] senior and revered, from the generation of Arghun and from those after him, until the very end; he saw three or four generations come and go, while he remained as he had been and the sultan never turned against him.\textsuperscript{30}

Thus, looking at these amirs of one hundred in generational terms, a clear distinction may be found between seniors or even “veterans” and rather freshly promoted juniors. Apart from the afore-mentioned revered “veterans” of the barrānīyah, the ranks of the common Nāširīyah count some amirs who, like Tuquzdamur and to some extent Qutluğ匕gha, had considerable years of service as amirs of one hundred. Aydughmish had been promoted about thirty years earlier, shortly after the very start of al-Nāšir’s third reign,\textsuperscript{31} and both Aqbughā and Bahādur are said to have been amirs of one hundred since the late 1320s.\textsuperscript{32} And though both Qutluğ匕gha and Turghāy were only promoted shortly before al-Nāšir’s demise, neither of them should be considered a newcomer in these ranks either: Qutluğ匕gha had been a privileged member of al-Nāšir’s elite until he had been sent off to Damascus in 1327 and Turghāy had been a long-standing amir of one hundred when he was appointed governor of Aleppo in 1338.\textsuperscript{33} On the other hand, the amirs Barsbughā, Burunl, and Bayghara had only been appointed in 1338 or even later\textsuperscript{34} and this certainly did not go unnoticed by contemporaries like al-Shujaβ, for he referred to Bayghara as “the last of the later [amirs of one hundred and] commanders of one thousand.”\textsuperscript{35}

Parallel to these common Nāširīyah ranks of amirs of one hundred, there clearly are two generations present among their khāṣṣakīyah peers. There is explicit reference to the promotions, often at a very young age, of five of these khāṣṣakīyah amirs to the rank of amir of one hundred fairly late in al-Nāšir’s reign,\textsuperscript{36} while the

\textsuperscript{30} Al-Šafād, A’yān, 2:611.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibn Taghrībirdī, Al-Manhal, 3:165; al-Shujā‘ī, Tārikh, 1:251.


\textsuperscript{33} Al-Šafād, A’yān, 2:578; Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 2:216; Ibn Taghrībirdī, Al-Manhal, 6:380; Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, Tārikh, 2:383.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, Tārikh, 2:262, 264; al-Shujā‘ī, Tārikh, 1:43, 94, 221, 223.

\textsuperscript{35} Al-Shujā‘ī, Tārikh, 1:94.

\textsuperscript{36} Àltunbughā and Yalbughā apparently were born only in the early 1320s (Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, Tārikh, 2:379; Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 4:436–37); Aqsunqur was said to have been given a rank of amir of one hundred in 1336 (Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, Tārikh, 2:515); Qumārī was promoted amir of one
promotion of the amirs Bashtak and Qawṣūn conspicuously predated them by as much as ten years.\textsuperscript{37}

A final distinctive feature related to the mamluk relationship between this elite and their sultan specifically has to do with the mamluk status of a number of the Nāṣīrīyah amirs of one hundred. For like the barrānīyah that were explicitly referred to as "outsiders," there were also some "strangers" among the Nāṣīrīyah due to certain doubts about the soundness of their claims to Nāṣīrīyah status. Thus, for instance, according to al-Ṣafādī the amir Ṭuquzdamur

only considered himself to be a stranger within the sultan’s household, because he had no peer to affiliate with.\textsuperscript{38}

This was due to the fact that this Ṭuquzdamur, and also Aydughmish, Ṭurghāy, and Bahādūr, had actually entered the ranks of the Nāṣīrīyah not directly from the slave markets, but rather from other ustādhs’ corps: Sultan al-Mu’ayyad Abū al-Fīdā’ of Ḥamāh, an amir called al-Ṭabbākhī, and the afore-mentioned king Damurdāsh respectively.\textsuperscript{39} Furthermore, Qumārī al-Kabīr allegedly had been an adult shepherd of small cattle in "the land of the Turks" before being brought to Egypt by his brother, the amir Baktamur al-Sāqī (d. 1332), which again is hardly the customary way to enter the sultanic mamluks’ ranks.\textsuperscript{40} In the case of two of the khāṣṣakīyah, this "stranger" status definitely had everything to do with the reason for their being brought into the khāṣṣakīyah, i.e., the appeal of their good looks to the sultan. Thus, there is the well-known story about Qawṣūn, who had been a young merchant from the Black Sea region, "a beautiful and tall boy, about eighteen years old," whose appearance impressed the sultan so much that he made a considerable effort to acquire him as one of his personal mamluks;\textsuperscript{41} and secondly, there was Maliktamur, originally a companion of the Baghdadi scholar al-Suhrawardi, but apparently so famous throughout the region for his beauty that hundred on 10 December 1337 (al-Shuja‘ī, Tārück, 1:29); and Maliktamur "was promoted at the end of al-Malik al-Nāṣir’s reign" (Ibn Hajar, Durar, 4:358).

\textsuperscript{37}Qawṣūn was promoted in 1326 (al-Maqrīzī, Sulūk, 2:272), Bashtak apparently in 1327 (ibid., 291).

\textsuperscript{38}Al-Ṣafādī, A’yān, 2:611; also in Ibn Taghrībirdī, Al-Manhal, 6:420–21.


\textsuperscript{40}Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārück, 2:497; al-Maqrīzī, Sulūk, 2:723.

\textsuperscript{41}Al-Ṣafādī, A’yān, 4:138; Ibn Hajar, Durar, 3:257; al-Shujā‘ī, Tārück, 1:222; al-Maqrīzī, Khīṭāṭ, 4:104 (quote).
al-Nāṣir again was determined to acquire him as a mamluk. 42 There are also the cases of the khāṣṣakī amirs Altūnbughā al-Māridānī, who allegedly had first been a mamluk of the Artuqid ruler of Mardin, sent to al-Nāṣir as a gift,43 and Yalbughā, about whom Ibn Ḥajar says that he had been born in Egypt “while his father was in the service of al-Nāṣir, and he grew up with such an extremely beautiful face and fine figure that he got promoted.”44 While the latter two especially are more contested stories,45 in the case of Qawsūn the actual fact of a perception of his being a “stranger” among the Nāṣirīyah may be seen from the reports on the political conflicts following al-Nāṣir’s death, where that specific feature was said to have been used to discredit his political appeal and to destabilize his alliances.46

This analysis of mamluk relationships, in terms of these amirs’ mamluk origins and status, provides a revealing look at the nature and identity of these elite amirs of one hundred at the end of al-Nāṣir’s reign. At the very least it gives us some insight, both into the background of the individuals, and into the nature of some of the ties that bound them to the sultan. What is striking is the small role traditional mamluk-ustaḍh bonds played in these relationships. Indeed, the general picture that emerges is of a varied elite composed of both intimates and outsiders, veterans and juniors, mamluks and non-mamluks, and real and outsider Nāṣirīyah, every one of them having a different relationship with the sultan due to their different personal histories.

**Exchange Relationships**

A second relationship which was inherent in this elite of amirs of one hundred at the end of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s reign was of a far more material character, and consisted of the exchange of benefits between the sultan and his amirs. 47 As the

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45 According to Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nāṣir “had bought [Altūnbughā] as a child” (Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 1:409); the story about Yalbughā especially seems very doubtful, since it is related regarding Yalbughā’s father Ṭābutā—even by Ibn Ḥajar, who claimed the opposite—that “he had come [to Egypt] when he heard about his son’s favored position with al-Nāṣir” (Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 2:213; also al-Ṣafadī, *A’yān*, 2:563; Ibn Ṭaghribirdī, *Al-Manhal*, 6:358).
head of a highly-centralized state bureaucracy, the sultan was the sole authority that controlled access to the military hierarchy (and its financial resources) and to the military administration, while at the same time the wealth of his treasury allowed him to bestow generous rewards on those he favored. Hence exchange relations not only defined the military, socio-political, and economic status of this Mamluk elite, but were also imperative in the absolute subordination of this elite to the sultan.

**Promotion**

The number of positions for the highest military rank in Egypt was fixed at twenty-four by al-Nāšir Muḥammad in the course of his 1315 cadastral reform, the *rawk al-Nāširī*, when financial resources were allocated for precisely that number of amirs of one hundred.\(^8\) At the end of 1326, al-Maqrīzī mentions an increase of one extra position and *iqṭāʾ*, to twenty-five, as a result of the split of the *iqṭāʾ* of the arrested amir Arghūn al-Nāʾib.\(^9\) As can be seen from al-Shujāʾī’s list, there remained twenty-five amirs up till the very end of al-Nāšir’s reign, though by then this number included one of his own sons, Abū Bakr.

One conspicuous previously-mentioned feature of this elite of amirs of one hundred is that no less than eight amirs, or one third of this elite, had been promoted to this rank within the four final years of al-Nāšir’s reign. Only six amirs of the Nāširīyah—Aydughmish, Tuqzdamur, Qawšûn, Bashtak, Bahādur and Aqbughā—had managed to maintain stability in their careers and retain their rank for more than ten years. Actually, when compared with parallel but less complete lists that are known for the years 1312 and 1332, only three (actually even just two) and twelve names respectively still remained in 1341.\(^{10}\)

The only political authority that was responsible for these bestowments and deprivations of military rank was al-Nāšir Muḥammad himself. In his position as the sultan, he was the sole official who was empowered to elevate one into the


ranks of amirs of one hundred and whose signature was required to legitimize the manshūr, the document conferring an iqṭā’ upon a new appointee.\(^{51}\) Therefore promotion to the highest rank was not only a matter of timing and circumstance, it was a result of, first and foremost, this elite’s relationship with the sultan, inevitably one of gratitude, loyalty, and subordination.

When circumstances and timing are subjected to closer scrutiny, another feature becomes apparent: the absence of any reference to strong competition for this limited number of highly desirable positions. For in those nine cases for which such information exists, three times an amir was promoted to a position left by the demise of his predecessor,\(^{52}\) while six times promotion took place after the sultan had sent the previous amir to occupy an office in Syria.\(^{53}\) Only once did this provoke any minor protest, which was resolved peacefully but firmly by al-Nāṣir:

When the sultan sent [the amir of one hundred Tashtamur al-Nāṣirī] to Șafad in the year 738, he requested exemption, implored him and demanded to be excused. . . . On Thursday, [the sultan] made him sit before him after the public service, and said to him: ‘I’m only sending you to Syria to perform a job for me.’ He made him bow his head, kissed it, and bid him goodbye.\(^{54}\)

Generally, in the few cases where an actual reason for such promotion is referred to by the sources, it either concerns exchange of promotion for loyalty and services offered to the sultan,\(^{55}\) or the sultan’s afore-mentioned infatuation with and favoritism towards some of his khāṣṣakīyah.\(^{56}\) Though the sample is admittedly limited and absence of further data renders the conclusion rather conjectural, overall these elements do seem to confirm the picture of a sultan who was all-powerful and


\(^{52}\) Al-Maqrīzī, Sulāk, 2:177, 437; al-Shujā’ī, Tārīkh, 1:28, 29.

\(^{53}\) Al-Maqrīzī, Sulāk, 2:272; al-Shujā’ī, Tārīkh, 1:43, 94, 253; Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, Tārīkh, 2:383, 538.

\(^{54}\) Al-Ṣafadī, Aʿyān, 2:588.

\(^{55}\) See al-Shujā’ī, Tārīkh, 1:93 (Qutlūbughā is re-promoted in 1340 after his active involvement in the arrest of the Syrian governor Tankiz); al-Ṣafadī, Aʿyān, 1:619; Ibn Hajar, Durar, 1:411; Ibn Taghrībirdī, Al-Manhal, 3:85 (Almalik is taken up in al-Nāṣir’s entourage in 710 after his services rendered as a trustworthy and efficient messenger between the deposed al-Nāṣir in al-Karak and the new sultan Baybars al-Jāshinkīr in Cairo).

individual amirs who, though high-ranking, had few options but to obey his orders. The same picture emerges from another example, in which case al-Nāṣir allowed himself to bend the rules of the mamluk military curriculum on a whim, promoting the highly-favored rank-and-file mamluk Bahādur directly from rank-and-file status to the rank of amir of one hundred. Again, this act is said to have provoked unsuccessful protest, in particular from the senior khāṣṣakī amir of one hundred, Baktamur al-Sāqī (d. 1332). When the latter was murdered by the order of al-Nāṣir, he is said to have felt himself obliged to promote Baktamur’s little brother Qumārī to the highest rank. Even a sultan’s whims had their limits.

**Appointment**

Appointment to high offices in the administration was also the sultan’s prerogative. This administration was designed to assist the sultan in governing his empire, and its military branch was mainly comprised of positions representing the sultan in the execution of his prerogatives.

Again, it is actually very revealing that among those military offices that had executive power in the government, that of viceroy (nāʿib), financial minister (wazīr), and chamberlain (ḥājib) are explicitly stated to have been abolished or stripped of their authority by the sultan by the end of his reign:

> When [al-Nāṣir] died, he did not have a nāʿib, a wazīr, or a ḥājib with executive authority, except for Barsbughā al-Hājjīb, who rendered justice without having been given the [ceremonial] staff of the office of ḥājib.

The sultan had simply refused to appoint a new amir in these offices when they had become vacant earlier in his reign. Actually, apart from the office occupied by this Barsbughā, the only offices awarded to high-ranking amirs toward the end of his reign were ceremonial offices of the court that managed certain aspects of

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57 This is absolutely contrary to how Clifford depicted al-Nāṣir, i.e., as a sultan who continuously had to work to balance the wishes and aspirations of the different mamluk units that served him, and whose success stemmed from his great ability to achieve this (Clifford, “State Formation,” 235–74, esp. 272–74).
58 Al-Shujāʿī, Tārīkh, 1:253.
59 Al-Ṣafādī, Aʿyān, 2:62.
60 Al-Yūsufī, Nuzhah, 157; al-Ṣafādī, Aʿyān, 4:132–33; Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, Tārīkh, 2:497.
62 Al-Shujāʿī, Tārīkh, 1:111; also ibid., 94.
life in the Citadel, like oversight of the stables and the aviary, access to the public
sessions, and management of the barracks and kitchens. According to al-Maqrizi,
there was a very specific reason not to invest his most senior amirs with any
executive power:

He wanted to be independent in the affairs of his realm and to
apply the rules single-handedly; therefore, he even abolished the
office of naib al-saltanah so that he alone would carry the burdens
of the state.64

Though this view is al-Maqrizi’s interpretation rather than an objective observation,
in this specific case it supports the information so far adduced: though they were
amirs of the highest rank and status, they were explicitly excluded from the
formal channels of government, and this again confirmed their absolute
subordination to a sultan who was the realm’s sole executive authority.

Al-Nasir Muhammad seems to have been wise enough, though, not to isolate
himself entirely from his elite in the government of his realm. On more than one
occasion, advice was sought from the mashurah, the quite informal court council
that was to advise the sultan in state affairs.65 Its membership seems to have been
limited, though, to those who indeed had enough experience to offer useful advice.
A valuable observation in this respect was made by al-Maqrizi:

In [1318] the sultan made a group of the veteran commanders of
the halqah sit [with him] during the times of the council with the
amirs, and he listened to what they had to say.66

63 Cf. al-Safadî, A’yân, 1:548, 554, 686, 2:81; Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 1:391, 394, 502; Ibn Taghribirdî,
Al-Manhal, 2:480, 497, 3:282, 479; al-Maqrizi, Sulûk, 2:202, 341, 342, 377, 508, 754; Ibn Taghribirdî,
Nujum, 10:101, 178; Ibn al-Dawâdârî, Kanz, 9:298, 374, 380; al-Shujâ’i, Târikh, 1:111, 223, 251;
Zettersteen, Beiträge, 127, 128, 158, 184, 189, 195; al-Yûsufi, Nuzhah, 230; Ibn Qâdi Shuhbah,
Târikh, 2:262, 319.

64 Al-Maqrizi, Sulûk, 2:534.

65 E.g., in 1311, two ‘masters of the council’ were among the amirs who attended a military review
(Ibn al-Dawâdârî, Kanz, 9:238–39); in 1312 there is reference to a council when Mongols threatened
to attack Syria (ibid., 246); in 1336, rumors of war at the northeast border necessitated the
organization of a council (al-Yûsufi, Nuzhah, 365–66); in 1339 the amirs of the council persuaded
the sultan to arrest his financial supervisor, al-Nashw (al-Maqrizi, Sulûk, 2:485); in the same year,
there was a council on actions to be taken after the arrest of the Syrian governor Tankiz (Zettersteen,
Beiträge, 210).

66 Al-Maqrizi, Sulûk, 2:182.
This quote implies that there was some connection between seniority of service, including experience in state and military affairs, and membership in the mashūrah. Indeed, at the end of his reign four of the barrāniyah veterans—Almalik, Baybars, Sanjar and Jankali—were said to have been members of this mashūrah; and in fact, they may well have been the only members.67

Secondly, the evidence from al-Maqrīzī also implies that there was some vague regularity in these council meetings, probably linked to the timing of the weekly public sessions in the īwān of the Citadel. For when al-Maqrīzī, in his Khīṭāt, depicts this regular public session in the Citadel (khidmat al-īwān) he makes a very specific reference, both to this council and its veteran members:

. . . and at a distance of about fifteen cubits there sat right and left of him [=the sultan] the men of age and standing, belonging to the most senior amirs of one hundred—they are called the amirs of the council. . . . 68

GRANTS, GIFTS, AND BENEFITS

Apart from promotions in the military hierarchy and appointments in the military administration, there was yet another level of exchange between the sultan and his senior amirs. This indeed was an exchange of a more material, direct, and tangible character, consisting of all sorts of benefits that the sultan dispensed from his apparently abundant wealth to his most senior amirs. And again, this mainly seems to have been one-way traffic. From the abundant income he had allocated to himself after the 1315 rawk, exceeding by far any individual amir’s share in the empire’s resources and collected by very efficient financial supervisors, al-Nāšir Muḥammad spent enormous amounts on many different things, including some of his amirs.69 In terms of defining the elite amirs at the end of al-Nāšir’s reign and their relationship with the sultan, there are a number of remarkable features that appear when one scrutinizes this kind of exchange.

First of all, there was one type of payment every sultan had to make to his amirs because it was part of state ceremonial. Among several other payments in kind, it consisted of the payment of certain sums of money (nafaqah) and the

67 Al-Shujā’ī, Tārīkh, 1:104; al-Maqrīzī, Sulūk, 2:485, 523; al-Ṣafadī, Aʿyān, 1:618, 2:467, 469; Ibn Taghrībirdī, Al-Manhal, 3:85, 6:74; Ibn Hajar, Durar, 1:411, 2:171. Moreover, if Ibn Taghrībirdī is to be believed, other senior amirs were explicitly excluded from this council (‘He [=al-Nāšir] did not incorporate them [=the amirs] in the advisory council, not even Baktamur al-Ṣāqī, Qawsūn, Bashtak, nor anyone else; rather, he would only be guided by the elderly among the amirs’ [Ibn Taghrībirdī, Nujūm, 9:174]).

68 Al-Maqrīzī, Khīṭāt, 3:339.

69 See, e.g., Levanoni, Turning Point, 53–60.
bestowal of robes of honor and the like, the value and elaborate decoration of which were related to the rank of each amir. They were bestowed by the sultan on his amirs on specific occasions or in return for specific services, like the finishing of a polo ground in 1330, when "robes of honor and golden sashes were granted to the amirs and the commanders, and a robe of honor was bestowed upon the amir Sayf al-Dīn Aqbughā ‘Abd al-Wāḥid . . . and the amir Sayf al-Dīn Almalik al-Jūkandār . . ."; the promotion of his son Aḥmad to the rank of amir in the same year; the marriage of another son in 1331, when "a robe of honor was bestowed upon . . . the amir Baybars al-Āḥamādi, upon Aydughmish, Amir Ākhūr, and also upon the remaining state officials . . ."; or in 1339, when he had the oath of allegiance to his rule renewed by the amirs, and "handed to every muqaddam alf the amount of 1,000 dinars." These grants clearly were a ceremonial expression and confirmation of an amir’s rank, status, and office, as well as a consideration for his loyalty and service to the throne, and their value was therefore quite formally weighed and determined.

There was another area of sultanic largess, however, of a completely informal and personal character and quite unrelated to any specific occasion or service. It was clearly directed to one specific group of amirs within the elite, those who, as mentioned earlier, for very personal reasons, had managed to attract the sultan’s attention and had come to enjoy the sultan’s favor: the khāṣṣakīyah amirs of one hundred. This personal expenditure by the sultan upon his khāṣṣakīyah amirs was already quite notorious in its time; in his own engaging style, al-Maqrīzī vividly describes it as "exceeding all bounds." Those khāṣṣakīyah amirs that are explicitly mentioned in the sources are Qawsūn, Bashtak, Maliktamur, Aṭṭunbughā, and Yalbughā, and they were involved in four different sorts of material exchange with their sultan, all of which made them extremely wealthy.

A khāṣṣakī amir might be granted an enlargement of his amiral iqṭā’ by the income from additional villages. Thus, for example, in 1332 Bashtak was given the iqṭā’ (and personal properties) of the murdered senior amir Baktamur al-Sāqī;"
when Maliktamur was promoted in 1338, to the īqtā‘ he inherited from his predecessor was added the village of “al-Nahrāwīyah, with an estimated monthly tax revenue of 70,000 dirhams”\footnote{Al-Maqrizī, \textit{Sulūk}, 2:467; Ibn Ḥajar, \textit{Durar}, 4:358.} and to the amir Yalbughā‘s īqtā‘ were added the village of al-Manzilah in 1338, and "the village of Sūhāy, in the Ṣa‘īd, with an estimated tax revenue of 15,000 dinars" the next year.\footnote{Al-Maqrizī, \textit{Sulūk}, 2:463, 493.} Eventually, the īqtā‘s of the most senior khāṣṣakīyah colleagues, Qawṣūn and Bashtak, were said to have exceeded 200,000 dinars in value.\footnote{Ibid., 525; also al-Kutubī, “‘Uyūn al-Tawārīkh,” Cambridge University Library MS Add. 2923, fol. 59. Amirs of one hundred were said to have been granted īqtā‘s with annual incomes that ranged from 80,000 to 200,000 dinars (Ibn Fadl Allāh al-‘Umarī, \textit{Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amsār}, ed. Ayman Fu‘ād Sayyid, Textes arabes et études islamiques, vol. 23 [Cairo, 1985], 29; al-Qalqashandī, \textit{Ṣubh}, 3:453–54; al-Maqrizī, \textit{Khiṣaṭ}, 3:350–51).}

Some khāṣṣakīyah amirs are also reported to have been fortunate recipients of al-Nāṣir’s extravagance, much to the despair of his financial managers. Thus al-Maqrizī relates how Bashtak one day got 1,000,000 dirhams in return for a lost tax district\footnote{Al-Maqrizī, \textit{Sulūk}, 2:535.} and how in the year 1337 he, Qawṣūn, Altūnbughā, and Maliktamur were given 200,000 dinars each on the same day.\footnote{Ibid., 432.} Another well-known story of al-Nāṣir’s generosity is the following:

The ḥājj Ḫusayn, his ustādār, said: ‘One day, [an amount] of 20,000 dinars was mentioned before the sultan, and Yalbughā said: ‘By God, O lord, [I swear that] I have never seen 20,000 dinars.’ So when he left from [the sultan], he [the sultan] summoned . . . the financial inspector and said: ‘Bring me at once 25,000 dinars and five honorary presents.’ . . . When he brought that, [the sultan] said: ‘Carry the honorary presents to Yalbughā and tell him to bestow them upon the jamdārīyah when they come with the gold.’ He summoned five from the jamdārīyah and made each one of them carry 5,000 dinars, saying: ‘Take this gold to Yalbughā.’ So they took it, and he bestowed those robes of honor upon them.’\footnote{Al-Ṣafadī, \textit{A’yān}, 5:585–86; also in Ibn Ḥajar, \textit{Durar}, 4:437; al-Maqrizī, \textit{Sulūk}, 2:535.}

decisions tended to favor the latter. For instance, in the year 1336 a private sugar factory that was connected to Qawṣūn was targeted by al-Nāshw’s new fiscal policies to enhance the sultan’s ever-insufficient income. In the end, however, after the confiscation of its proceeds, these were immediately forwarded by al-Nāṣir to Qawṣūn, leaving the latter perhaps even better off than he otherwise might have been. In all, the high iqṭā’ incomes these amirs already had been awarded occasionally seem to have been augmented by such huge sultanic cash gifts and benefits.

Even more than cash benefits, all sorts of valuable presents like horses, mamluks, robes of honor (and in the case of Bashtak even the wife of a murdered colleague) were quite regularly directed by the sultan to amirs like Qawṣūn, Bashtak, Maliktamur, and Yalbughā. In the case of the latter, al-Ṣafādī said that:

No one was delighted like him by the bestowals that came to him. Horses were offered to him with saddles, equipment, and accoutrements: fifteen saddles decorated with brocade and gold and inlaid with precious jewels for fifteen horses, and two hundred [trappings] for two hundred cart horses; and there were sent to him honorary presents: satin, golden sashes, brocaded embroidery, etc., which he had to give to those who brought those [presents] to him. . . . In all, [the sultan’s] grants and bestowals upon him were beyond [normal] bounds.

And finally, an extravagant example of his unbounded generosity is the huge buildings he had constructed for some of these amirs. Though these were very limited in number, the amount of money spent, the efforts made, and the ground-breaking splendor that resulted again highlight the often outlandish behavior the sultan displayed towards the handful of amirs with whom he was really infatuated. There is passing reference to some sultanic involvement in the construction of Qawṣūn’s mosque and of Bashtak’s palace, but actually, it was the amirs Altūnhūghā al-Māridānī and Yalbughā al-Yahyāwī who were the focus of this sultanic extravagance. He had a mosque built for Altūnhūghā in 1334 (even before he

83Al-Yūsufī, Nuzhah, 369–70.
85Al-Ṣafādī, A’yān, 5:585, 586; also Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārīkh, 2:438; Ibn Hajar, Durar, 4:437.
86Al-Maqrīzī, Sulāk, 2:320, 501.
became an amir), as well as a luxurious palace for each of Altünbugha and Yalbugha in 1337. And according to al-Shujaʿi, for the palace of Yalbugha alone an incredibly huge sum of money—he mentions the highly unlikely amount of 40 million dirhams—was set aside.

To sum up, five of the seven khāṣṣakīyah amirs of one hundred identified before are mentioned by the sources as recipients of occasional additional benefits in cash and kind from the sultan, who awarded them unprecedented wealth. Nowhere is it recorded that they had to return anything to their generous patron, and no mention is made of any specific reason why such lavish patronage was bestowed upon these amirs, apart from the fact that in the case of the construction of buildings, there are some faint hints of a link between sultanic infatuation and these building projects. However faint these references, it does seem very plausible to assume that in this extravagant patronage and favoritism of his khāṣṣakīyah amirs of one hundred, al-Nāšir’s infatuation with them again had an important role to play.

**Family Relationships**

Apart from “mamluk” and exchange relationships, there remains one small but fundamental issue that also conspicuously characterized a great number of the amirs of one hundred at the end of al-Nāšir’s reign—their familial relationship with the dying sultan. By an active marriage policy al-Nāšir had managed to establish links between himself and a great number of his amirs that incorporated an important part of the empire’s socio-political elite into his own family.

Eight of the amirs of one hundred at the end of al-Nāšir’s reign are mentioned at least once in the sources as married to one of al-Nāšir’s daughters. Six of these sultanic sons-in-law were again his favorites from the khāṣṣakīyah: Qawsūn, Bashtak, Maliktamur, Aqsunqur, Qumārī, and Altünbugha, and number seven...
was the afore-mentioned probable khāṣṣakīyah-nominee Bahādur. Number eight, Urumbughā, actually is a rather more doubtful case, as it was only the later historian Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah who stated that he had been married to one of his uṣṭād’s daughters. Apart from these eight, there also was the amīr Aqbughā ‘Abd al-Wāḥīd, whose sister Ṭughāy was married to the sultan, and there are two more senior or even veteran amīrs, in terms of years of service—Jankalī ibn al-Bābā and Ṭuquzdamur—that came to be father-in-law of one or more of al-Nāṣir’s sons. So in all, ten or even eleven members of this elite were related to the sultan by ties that went beyond “mamluk” or exchange relations and actually linked them to his family, hence—as the history of the years between 1341 and 1382 shows—firmly connecting his family’s future to his military and socio-political elite’s fate.

Direct reasons, however, for this marriage policy again remain largely unmentioned (or unnoticed). Only in the case of his brother-in-law Aqbughā ‘Abd al-Wāḥīd is there unambiguous information that al-Nāṣir’s marriage to Ṭughāy actually predated Aqbughā’s military career and was “the cause of his promotion by al-Nāṣir. . . .” Gaining political experience and guidance may well have been a key element in linking some of his sons to the dyed-in-the-wool amīrs Jankalī and Ṭuquzdamur, though there exists no evidence for such an assumption, and more personal or even other as yet unknown reasons may equally have been involved. The same goes for his khāṣṣakīyah sons-in-law, for it remains unclear whether he tried to enhance the loyalty to his reign and family of those men he himself had chosen to be at the very top of Mamluk society, or whether his grounds were less intentionally political, perhaps even more personal or emotional. In any event, at this point information remains too indefinite to allow any conclusive statement on al-Nāṣir’s marriage policy, except that there is a conspicuous uniformity

3:68; al-Maqrīzī, Khīṭāt, 4:105; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Ṭārīkh, 2:378; in general, also al-Shujāʾī, Ṭārīkh, 111; al-Maqrīzī, Sulūk, 2:536. So from the seven khāṣṣakīyah amīrs of one hundred, only Yalbughā was not a son-in-law of al-Nāṣir (there was a—a rather distant—link though, as he was married to a sister of one of the sultan’s wives [al-Šafādī, A’yān, 5:591; al-Maqrīzī, Sulūk, 2:473]). See al-Shujāʾī, Ṭārīkh, 111, 253; al-Šafādī, A’yān, 2:62; Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 1:498; Ibn Ṭaghrībirdī, Al-Manḥal, 3:431; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Ṭārīkh, 2:323.

93Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Ṭārīkh, 2:319.


95Zettersteen, Beiträge, 195, 199, 210, 218; al-Shujāʾī, Ṭārīkh, 1:3, 18, 29; al-Šafādī, A’yān, 2:165, 611; Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 1:540, 2:225; Ibn Ṭaghrībirdī, Al-Manḥal, 5:24, 6:422; al-Maqrīzī, Sulūk, 2:407, 417, 432, 436. Jankalī’s daughter actually already died in 1339 and the sultan had her son—his grandson—sent to Jankalī to be brought up in his household.

96Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 1:391; also in al-Šafādī, A’yān, 1:548; Ibn Ṭaghrībirdī, Al-Manḥal, 2:480.
between the list of khāššakīyah amirs of one hundred and that of the sultan’s sons-in-law.  

CONCLUSION

If we look back on this reconstruction of the Mamluk elite on the eve of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s death, it becomes clear that variety rather than any sort of uniformity is the keyword: there is an enormous variety in this elite’s histories, in their mamlik status, and in their years of service. Though all were promoted to the highest rank, reasons for this were dissimilar, and their involvement in state administration—if any—was not uniform; even in terms of financial benefit from al-Nāṣir’s renowned expenditures, it was only the khāššakīyah who benefited so handsomely, while at the same time, their ranks alone were additionally characterized by close and inclusive family connections with their benefactor, the sultan.

We have been able to show that just as this variety characterized the nature and composition of this Mamluk elite on the eve of al-Nāṣir’s death, it equally defined their relationships with the sultan. He showed some of them respect and others personal affection; he employed some to render him specific services and asked others for their advice; he bestowed regular formal benefits upon most of them, and elected others on whom to lavish occasional grants and gifts; and finally, two were chosen to be his sons’ fathers-in-law, while others were chosen to consider the sultan himself as their father-in-law.

Clearly, in dealing both with the nature of this elite and with the nature of al-Nāṣir’s socio-political relationships, these features warn us not to generalize and consider groups of people where we actually should be considering individuals. Even with a small group like the khāššakīyah, differences are noted when we take into account concepts like generations and “strangers.” The individual amir and his personal history define the socio-political context far better than any other conceptual device.

Is it then at all possible to derive from this very specific cross section of the Mamluk elite a better understanding of al-Nāṣir’s successful rule? Apart from the retrospective observation of their success, there seems to be no conclusive evidence at all on the largely invisible policies and political behavior that contributed to al-Nāṣir’s long, stable, and prosperous reign. This article rather suggests circumstantial evidence. First of all, it is clear from the varied nature of this elite that the basis of al-Nāṣir’s authority over them could not have been any cohesion resulting from his mamluks’ loyalty to their ustādh. For membership in his Nāṣirīyah was hardly a compelling argument for promotion, and certainly not for sultanic

97 There is only one son-in-law of the sultan mentioned who was not an amir of one hundred at all: Abū Bakr ibn Arghūn al-Nā’īb (al-Shujā’ī, Tārīkh, 1:111; al-Maqrīzī, Sulūk, 2:536).
favor. Moreover it was not exchange of financial benefit for loyalty either that bound this elite to their sultan, as this exchange has been shown to affect the khāṣṣakīyah only. Rather, as already suggested, many of this elite’s features imply that it was his solid, engaged, and independent position at the very top of the military hierarchy and of the government’s administration that account for the continuous subordination of this elite, which was left with no real alternative but to accept and gratefully return his patronage. There exist occasional references to plans to create an alternative order, but in an almost paranoid way the sultan always managed to have them firmly nipped in the bud. Clearly it was this “pro-active” policy of al-Nāṣir that was referred to when al-Ṣafadī stated that—as mentioned earlier—the amir ῥuqzdamur “saw three or four generations come and go, while he remained as he had been and the sultan never turned against him.” Moreover, observations regarding the sultan’s often harsh treatment of his amirs are recorded by al-Yūṣufi and al-Shuja’ī, and according to the latter, seconded by al-Maqrīzī, on many an occasion awe or even fear determined the amirs’ attitudes towards their sultan. All in all, these elements taken together make a very strong case—at least as far as his elite is concerned—for considering al-Nāṣir Muḥammad a sultan whose firm hold on his office, combined with his political experience (and even paranoia), allowed him to dominate Mamluk society’s elite. For this elite of individual amirs, with their various backgrounds, lacked any strong sense of solidarity and could pursue their self-preservation only within the parameters their sovereign set for them.

One final question needs to be asked: what was the nature of al-Nāṣir’s involvement in creating this quite successful varied composition of his elite? In a previous study on the amir Qawsūn, I agreed with Reuven Amitai that indeed al-Nāṣir Muḥammad seemed to have “created a system of balances and counter

98 Among many such references, there is the sudden eviction of the khāṣṣakī amir Qutlūbughā in 1327 (esp. Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 3:250) and of the nāʿīb Arghūn in 1326 (e.g., al-Maqrīzī, Sulāk, 2:279), the murder of the khāṣṣakī amir Baktamur al-Saqī in 1332 (e.g., al-Yūsufi, Nuzhah, 135) and of the long-standing governor of Syria Tankiz in 1339 (e.g., Zettersteen, Beiträge, 210), and there are a number of allegedly false rumors that, regardless of their high positions, time and again endangered the amirs Bashtak, Aqbughā, and Qawsūn in the period 1339–40 (al-Maqrīzī, Sulāk, 2:483–84).

99 Al-Ṣafadī, A’yān, 2:611. For a similar, though more general, remark, see al-Shuja’ī, Tārīkh, 1:113.

100 See al-Yūsufi, Nuzhah, 153; al-Shuja’ī, Tārīkh, 1:113.


balances that prevented and disabled the rise of any powerful faction against his rule.” On the basis of many features mentioned above, such a foregone conclusion may be perhaps a bit audacious. Clearly, the process of selecting his “lieutenants” and favoring some of his mamluks had as much to do with al-Nāṣir’s personal and emotional predilections as with his political insights. Actually, a combination of both may well have been responsible for the (accidental?) origin of this elite’s divergent composition and interaction with him, though again, due to its private nature this is an argument that remains conjectural.

Even though the origin of such policies remains obscure, their result is undeniable: al-Nāṣir’s success for more than thirty years is aptly epitomized in the subordination of his elite at the very end of his reign and confirmed by the succession of his son Abū Bakr. And this situation was actually very convincingly depicted at the beginning of this article in al-Shujā‘i’s highly dramatical story: one by one the elite’s many different categories of mourners enter the scene; tension rises between the lead characters; the late sultan’s will is executed; and in an overwhelming final chord of unanimity the new sultan is enthroned as al-Manṣūr Abū Bakr. Al-Nāṣir had been “victorious” one last time.

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103 Ibid., 466, referring to Amitai, "Remaking," 162.
APPENDIX: LIST OF AMIRS OF ONE HUNDRED AT THE END OF AL-NAṢIR MUHAMMAD’S REIGN

Abū Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (1322–41)
Almalik al-Jūkandār, al-Ḥājj, Sayf al-Dīn (ca. 1277–1346)
Altūnbūghā al-Māridānī al-Sāqī al-Nāṣirī, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn (ca. 1320–43)
Aqsunqūr al-Nāṣirī, Shams al-Dīn (d. 1347)
Aydughmīsh al-Nāṣirī al-Ṭabbākhī, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn (d. 1342)
Bahādur al-Damūrdāshī al-Nāṣirī, Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1343)
Barsbūghā al-Nāṣirī, al-Ḥājjīb, Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1342)
Bashtak al-Nāṣirī, Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1341)
Baybars al-ʾAḥmadī al-Jarkaṣī, Amīr Jāndār, Rukn al-Dīn (ca. 1262–1345)
   al-Ṣafādī, Aʿyān, 2:81–83; Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 1:502; Ibn Taghrībīrdī, Al-Manhal,
Bayghara al-Nāṣirī al-Mansūrí, Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1353)
al-Šafādī, A’yān, 2:100; Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 1:514–15; Ibn Taghrībirdī, Nujūm, 10:294

Burunlū (Bulurghā) al-Nāṣirī, Ibn al-‘Ajūz, Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1342)
al-Shujā’ī, Tārikh, 1:175, 221; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārikh, 2:625

Jankalī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Bābā ibn Jankalī ibn Khalīl ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-‘Ijlī, Badr al-Dīn (1276–1346)

Kūkāy al-Silāḥdār al-Mansūrī, Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1348)
al-Šafādī, A’yān, 4:162–63; Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 3:270; Ibn Taghrībirdī, Nujūm, 10:241; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārikh, 2:625

Mahmūd ibn ʿAlī ibn Sharwhīn al-Baghdādī, Wazīr Baghdādī, Najm al-Dīn (d. 1347)

Maliktamur al-Ḥijāzī al-Nāṣirī, Sayf al-Dīn (ca. 1310–47)

Qawṣūn al-Nāṣirī, al-Sāqī, Sayf al-Dīn (ca. 1300–42)

Qumatī al-Tatārī al-Nāṣirī al-Ḥasanī, Amīr Shīkār, Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1342)

Qumatī al-Nāṣirī al-Kabīr, Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1346)
al-Šafādī, A’yān, 4:132–33; al-Shujā’ī, Tārikh, 1:238; Ibn Taghrībirdī, Nujūm, 10:177; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārikh, 2:497

Qutlūbughā al-Fakhhrī al-Asḥafī al-Nāṣirī, al-Silāḥdār al-Sāqī al-Ṭawīl, Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1342)

Tuquzdamur al-Ḥamawī al-Nāṣīrī, Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1345)
   al-Ṣafādī, A’yān, 2:610–13; Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 2:225; Ibn Taghrībirdī, Al-
   Manhal, 6:420–22; Ibn Taghrībirdī, Nujūm, 10:142; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārīkh,
   2:463–65
Turghāy al-Nāṣīrī al-Ṭabbākhī, al-Jāshinkīr, Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1344)
   al-Ṣafādī, A’yān, 2:578–79; Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 2:216; Ibn Taghrībirdī, Al-
   Manhal, 6:379–80; Ibn al-Dawādārī, Kanz, 9:366; Ibn Taghrībirdī, Nujūm,
   10:107; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārīkh, 2:383
Urumbughā al-Nāṣīrī, Amir Jāndār, Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1342)
   al-Ṣafādī, A’yān, 1:480–81; Ibn Taghrībirdī, Al-Manhal, 2:335; al-Shujā’ī,
   Tārīkh, 1:251; Ibn Taghrībirdī, Nujūm, 10:99; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārīkh,
   2:319–20
Yalbugha al-Yahyāwī al-Sāqī al-Nāṣirī, Sayf al-Dīn (1319–47)
   al-Ṣafādī, A’yān, 5:584–92; Ibn Ḥajar, Durar, 4:436–37; Ibn Taghrībirdī,
   Nujūm, 10:185; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Tārīkh, 2:538–40