

become, a fact from which it can be inferred that he had probably not seen him for a long time.⁷⁵ In an attempt to redress Aḥmad's leaning towards men, he married him to the daughter of one of his senior amirs, Ṭāyirbughā, whose health was declining. The contract was concluded on the same day as one for his brother Ibrāhīm.⁷⁶ The consummation took place a few weeks later, unusually without any special ceremony.⁷⁷ Aḥmad was sent back to al-Karak, burdened with a wife and gifts received from his father. Eventually, Aḥmad succeeded in regaining al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's favor: he protested against his stepfather, the governor of al-Karak, which demonstrates that their relations were far from cordial, or rather, that Aḥmad was able to manipulate his entourage. Maliktamur al-Sarjuwānī was discharged from his office and al-Karak was given to Aḥmad.⁷⁸ The unique source which reports this fact is not explicit and goes on to report that an amir was appointed as the mentor of Aḥmad in al-Karak.⁷⁹ From this, it might be inferred that this amir was the new governor, but it actually seems that Aḥmad was appointed as governor of al-Karak—a fact generally ignored—with an amir who received instructions to supervise Aḥmad. This is supported by the evidence provided in the copy of the “deed of appointment to the governorate of al-Karak written down on behalf of the Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn for his son al-Malik al-Nāṣir Aḥmad.”⁸⁰ Once stripped of its rhetorical metaphors, the text is very informative about al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's feelings towards his son. The document stresses God's blessings that favored the family

⁷⁵Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:432; idem, *Al-Muqaffá*, 1:384.

⁷⁶See al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi*, 8:86. On 20 Rabī' I 738/16 October 1337, according to al-Maqrīzī (*Al-Muqaffá*, 1:384), or in Rabī' II 738/November 1337, according to al-Shujā'ī (*Al-Tārikh*, 18) and al-Maqrīzī (*Al-Sulūk*, 2:432, who fixes it on the same day as in *Al-Muqaffá* (20 Rabī' II 738/15 November 1337). Ṭāyirbughā died a short time later (28 Jumādā I 738/22 December 1337). See al-Shujā'ī, *Al-Tārikh*, 28. Ibrāhīm was married to the daughter of Jankalī ibn al-Bābā. See al-Shujā'ī, *Al-Tārikh*, 18.

⁷⁷On 4 Jumādā I 738/28 November 1337. See al-Shujā'ī, *Al-Tārikh*, 18.

⁷⁸It is not easy to understand whether this event took place on the same occasion of the marriage or during another visit to Cairo. Al-Shujā'ī (*Al-Tārikh*, 18) doesn't say a word about the ruffraff episode, but places his nomination on the occasion of his marriage. On the contrary, al-Ṣafadī (*A'yān al-ʿAṣr*, 1:370–71) speaks of two visits for each event. He reports that things started to go wrong between Aḥmad and his stepfather and that they were both conveyed to Cairo. The sultan got annoyed with his son, and he let him reside in Cairo for a while until he sent him back alone to al-Karak, without any governor (*waḥdahu bi-lā nā'ib*). This last element is in contradiction with the evidence provided in what follows.

⁷⁹Al-Shujā'ī, *Al-Tārikh*, 18: *wa-a'tá al-Karak li-Aḥmad wa-a'tá 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Ṭaybars al-Zumurrudī arba'in fāris wa-ja'alahu nā'ib Aḥmad bi-al-Karak*. Al-Zumurrudī was in fact his steward (*ustādhār*). See *ibid.*, 47.

⁸⁰Found in al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā*, 12:226–32. The text adds: “before he was made sultan.” This is a later addition referring to his rule as sultan after the death of his father.

with rule,⁸¹ securing it in the genealogical tree of Qalāwūn through his son Muḥammad.⁸² Allusion is then made to Aḥmad through a pun on his *laqab* (Shihāb al-Dīn), where he is compared to a star (*shihāb*) equal in perfection and beauty to the moon. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's treatment of his son resulted from a divine order to behave kindly to the reverent son. Consequently, he decided to offer Aḥmad what God had granted al-Nāṣir himself: a place in which to rule.⁸³ By this act, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was following the righteous example of Abraham, who had worked together with his son Ismā'īl to build the Temple. God had shown the sultan how lovely and commendable this design was, and this was why he settled Aḥmad in al-Karak during that period.⁸⁴ Now, the decision was taken to make him the ruler of this place with which he was familiar and whose population showed him their affection.⁸⁵ Thus, the order was decreed that he be appointed governor of al-Karak and al-Shawbak.⁸⁶ The sultan's intuition (*firāsah*) would have to be confirmed by the results, but how could it go wrong, given that Aḥmad was the son and the grandson of noble rulers, the one on whom hopes had been pinned to perfect the rulership before he would completely take charge of it?⁸⁷ The deed then goes on with recommendations and advice addressed to Aḥmad for good ruling practices as well as for good manners (undoubtedly an allusion to his preference for boys). The document is revealing in that, at that date, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad still had trust in Aḥmad: this appointment appears to have been a test which could have been decisive in case the succession had to be modified, i.e., if the preferred son, Ānūk, were to die in al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's lifetime. It seems that Aḥmad did not seize the opportunity, either because he failed to realize the importance of this test, or because he did not want to do it. Aḥmad behaved badly, at least in the eyes of his steward, al-Zumurrudī, and consequently in the eyes of his father. Al-Zumurrudī sent a letter to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad informing him that Aḥmad had

⁸¹Ibid., 227: “*wa-wahabanā fi al-mulk al-nasab al-‘alī al-‘arīq wa-al-ḥasab alladhī huwa bi-al-taqdīm wa-al-taḥkīm ḥaqīq.*”

⁸²Ibid.: “*fa-fayya’anā min shajarah hādihā al-bayt al-sharīf al-nāṣiri al-manṣūri kull ghuṣn wariq.*”

⁸³Ibid.: “*wa-awda’nā ladayhi mā awda’ahu Allāh ta’ālā ladaynā: mamlakah murtafi’ah muttasi’ah li-yartafi’ maḥalluhu wa-yattasi’ amaluhu wa-lā yaḍīq.*”

⁸⁴Ibid., 228.

⁸⁵Ibid., 229: “*ḥakkamnāhu fi hādhihi al-niyābah allatī alifahā wa-darrabahā wa-‘arafa umūrahā wa-jarrabahā wa-istamāla khawāṭir ahliahā wa-istajlabahā.*”

⁸⁶Both fortresses were part of this *mamlakah*. For its geographical limits, see Maurice Godefroy-Demombynes, *La Syrie à l’époque des Mamelouks d’après les auteurs arabes* (Paris, 1923), 125–34.

⁸⁷Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A‘shā*, 12:230: “*wa-firāsātunā talmaḥ natā’ij al-khayr min hādihā al-taqdīm wa-siyāsātunā tuṣliḥ mā qaruba minnā wa-mā ba’uda bi-ta’rif aḥkām al-taḥkīm wa-kayfa lā wa-huwa al-karīm ibn al-karīm ibn al-karīm al-mu’ammal li-tamām al-su’dud qabla an yu’qad ‘alayhi al-tamīm.*”

fallen in love with a young Bedouin boy named Shuhayb and that he spent most of his time with him, drinking and dressing like an Arab. Aḥmad was summoned to Cairo where he arrived, together with Shuhayb, in Shaʿbān 739/March 1339. He was coldly received by his father and then sent to the palace. Orders were given to imprison Shuhayb and to recover the amount of money that he and his father had received from Aḥmad. Aḥmad's reaction was to sequester himself in his room and refuse to eat. In the meanwhile, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad had tried to dissuade his son from continuing his relationship with Shuhayb, his envoys in this delicate case being his two senior amirs Bashtāk and Qawṣūn. Both of them tried to convince the rebellious son, threatening him with warnings of his father's determination, but to no effect. Aḥmad preferred to stay with his boyfriend, even rejecting his father's proposal that he take one hundred of his own mamluks. In the end, conscious of Aḥmad's stubbornness, al-Nāṣir bowed to the arguments of his two senior amirs. Firm in his judgment that nothing good would come of this son, he decided to resign himself: Aḥmad was made an amir of forty, but he had to remain in Egypt, his brother Abū Bakr being sent to al-Karak in his place.⁸⁸

For the next two years, Aḥmad seems to have kept a low profile, with Shuhayb still in his close entourage, until 741/1341, when the latter was involved in a conflict with a eunuch over a frivolous case of bird competition. Aḥmad championed his cause and the case reached the ears of the sultan, who confronted his son once again by means of Bashtāk and Qawṣūn. The mediation ended in the same way as in 739/1339: Aḥmad refused to abandon Shuhayb. He was thus exiled by his father to the fortress of Ṣarkhad,⁸⁹ but before he reached it, amirs, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's wives, and the harem spoke in his favor. Aḥmad was called back to Cairo, but in the meanwhile his father had ordered that his horses be sold, and in the end he decided to send him back to al-Karak with al-Sarjuwānī as governor.⁹⁰ Clearly, in al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's mind, Aḥmad was not to play any

⁸⁸Al-Shujāʿī, *Al-Tārīkh*, 47–48; al-Maqrizī, *Al-Muqaffá*, 1:384–85. Although the sources remain silent about the appointment of Abū Bakr as governor of al-Karak on that occasion, it is highly probable that he took the place of Aḥmad not only as resident but also as governor. Both he and his brother Ibrāhīm had been amirs of forty since 738/1337–38, a year before Aḥmad. See below under Ibrāhīm and Abū Bakr.

⁸⁹He was accompanied by Maliktamur al-Sarjuwānī, his stepfather, and al-Dāwūdī, his *lālā*. See al-Shujāʿī, *Al-Tārīkh*, 97; al-Maqrizī, *Al-Muqaffá*, 1:385. In another source, it is established that his father reached this decision because of indisputable evidence (*bayyināt*) he found; one must understand this to mean documents. Unfortunately, their nature is not explicated, but the prospect of a coup should not be rejected. See al-Maqrizī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:515. By that time, Abū Bakr had already been nominated as heir to the throne (see below).

⁹⁰At the beginning of 1 Ramaḍān 741/18 February 1341, according to al-Shujāʿī, *Al-Tārīkh*, 97, or in Ṣafar 741/August 1340, according to al-Maqrizī, *Al-Muqaffá*, 1:385. Meanwhile, Abū Bakr had been called back to Cairo, hence the appointment of al-Sarjuwānī as new governor. Al-Maqrizī,

future role, at least not in his own lifetime; the order was given not to let him make any decisions.⁹¹ Aḥmad did not leave his place of exile, enjoying life with Shuhayb, not even when his father was at death's door.

On his deathbed, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was urged—according to the sources—by his amirs to designate his heir to the throne, as though he had not prepared his successor. On that occasion, he is said to have rejected any solution in favor of Aḥmad, though he was his eldest surviving son:⁹² “As for Aḥmad, who is in al-Karak, do not let him cross [the soil of] Egypt; do not put him in charge of anything, because he would cause the ruin of the state!”⁹³ Whether by intuition or paternal feeling, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was convinced that Aḥmad would not be fit for the sultanate; on several occasions, he gave him opportunities to show his mettle and in each case he was found lacking.

IBRĀHĪM THE PRODIGAL⁹⁴

Younger than Aḥmad and older than Abū Bakr,⁹⁵ Ibrāhīm was born between 719/1319 and 721/1320.⁹⁶ The sources remain silent on him until he reached his teens: in 731/1331, on 11 Rajab/11 July, he was sent by his father to al-Karak accompanied by some amirs, among them the newly appointed governor, Maliktamur al-Sarjuwānī.⁹⁷ Chroniclers are more laconic in his respect than with Aḥmad, as they do not explain why his father decided to send him there,⁹⁸ but it can be understood that his purpose was to provide Ibrāhīm with the same military training as Aḥmad. Ibrāhīm's younger brother, Abū Bakr, joined him some time later, and al-Ṣafadī indicates that the residence of the three brothers in al-Karak continued until they grew up (*tara'ra'ū*).⁹⁹ In 735/1335, Ibrāhīm was

Al-Sulūk, 2:515.

⁹¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:515: “*wa-awṣāhu al-sultān allā yada' li-Aḥmad ḥadīth wa-lā ḥukm bayna ithnayn.*”

⁹² Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Al-Tārīkh*, 2:133. It was Bashtāk who pronounced Aḥmad's name. In some way, the competition between Bashtāk and Qawṣūn was already visible, each one having a favorite candidate.

⁹³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Muqaffá*, 1:389: “*wa-ammā Aḥmad alladhi bi-al-Karak fa-lā tada'ūhu ya'bur Miṣr wa-lā tuwallūhu shay'an fa-yakūn sabab li-kharāb al-mamlakah.*” See also Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:315. Al-Maqrīzī (ibid.) adds that the father's intuition (*firāsah*) was right and imputes to Aḥmad, when he was made sultan, the deterioration and the ruin of both the lands of Egypt and Syria.

⁹⁴ His prodigality, for which his father used to blame him, is reported by al-Shujā'ī, *Al-Tārīkh*, 34.

⁹⁵ Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi*, 6:138.

⁹⁶ The name of his mother is ignored in the sources.

⁹⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:332–33.

⁹⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, ibid., uses the verb “*aqarra*” (to establish).

⁹⁹ Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi*, 6:138; Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*, 2:159. In 732/1332, when al-Nāṣir

conveyed to Cairo at his father's request.¹⁰⁰ It seems that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad had decided that Ibrāhīm was to remain with him at the citadel, together with his brother Abū Bakr, who had also arrived in Cairo in the meanwhile, while Aḥmad had to remain alone in al-Karak.¹⁰¹ A year later, on 9 Ramaḍān 736/21 April 1336, Ibrāhīm received the title of amir, and the two preferred amirs of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, Qawṣūn and Bashtāk, organized the cortège and ceremony associated with such an appointment for a sultan's son.¹⁰² In 737/1336, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad proceeded further with his policy of creating a web of relationships between his amirs and his children, both male and female. On 17 Muḥarram/26 August, a marriage contract was concluded between his son Ibrāhīm and Ṭuquzdamur al-Ḥamawī's daughter.¹⁰³ A year later, two similar contracts were made on the same day, one for his brother Aḥmad, and another for himself; this time, he was to get married to Jankalī ibn al-Bābā's daughter.¹⁰⁴ A few weeks after the consummation, his father decided that a third tie could be useful, and another marriage was arranged with another of Ṭāyirbughā's daughters.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Ibrāhīm had just been promoted to the rank of amir of forty together with his brother Abū Bakr.¹⁰⁶ This promising career was suddenly interrupted by smallpox; isolated from his brothers for fear of contagion, and without a last visit from his father, he died on 25 Dhū al-Qa'adah 738/14 June 1338.¹⁰⁷ With his death, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad lost a possible candidate to succeed him.¹⁰⁸

stopped in al-ʿAqabah on his way to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage, Ibrāhīm is not mentioned among the sons who were brought there by al-Sarjuwānī; only Aḥmad and Abū Bakr were meant to take part in the trip. See al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:355.

¹⁰⁰Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāzir*, 272; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:387. According to al-Maqrīzī, Ibrāhīm arrived in Cairo on Monday 3 Dhū al-Ḥijjah/25 July 1335, but this day fell on Tuesday, not Monday.

¹⁰¹Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi*, 6:138; al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāzir*, 272; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:387.

¹⁰²Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāzir*, 290; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:392. He was probably made amir of ten at that time, because he received the higher rank (amir of forty) later.

¹⁰³The marriage was consummated on 1 Rabīʿ I/8 October of the same year. See al-Shujāʿī, *Al-Tārikh*, 3.

¹⁰⁴In Rabīʿ II 738/October–November 1337 (consummated on 20 Shaʿbān 738/13 March 1338). See al-Shujāʿī, *Tārikh*, 18 and 29. For Aḥmad, see above (the dates do not really tally). It is interesting to note that another of Ibrāhīm's brothers, Yūsuf, was married during the same year to another daughter of the same amir. See al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:436.

¹⁰⁵The marriage, probably never consummated, took place just before Ibrāhīm died. See al-Shujāʿī, *Tārikh*, 34 and 33.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 34.

¹⁰⁷He was buried in his uncle al-Ashraf Khalil's mausoleum. Ibid.; al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi*, 6:138; Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:68.

¹⁰⁸If the following words are to be trusted, Ibrāhīm was aware that he could have ruled at some

THE LAST RESORT: ABŪ BAKR

When Abū Bakr was put on the throne, on 21 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 741/7 June 1341, it is said that he was about 20, from which it may be inferred that he was born around 721/1320. His mother, Narjis, gave her husband two other sons (Yūsuf and Ramaḍān) who were Abū Bakr's younger brothers. Nothing is known of his childhood, either in the harem or after he left it. However, in 732/1332, he was already in al-Karak with his brothers Aḥmad and Ibrāhīm, whom he probably joined in 731/1331 (the same year in which the latter arrived there). He thus left Cairo at the age of about 10 to receive the same military training as his brothers. These years are shrouded in mist; unless events that occurred there had an echo in the capital, as with Aḥmad's debacle for instance, chroniclers ignored what happened in this peripheral place. It seems that Abū Bakr's teenage years were different from those of his elder brother, as nothing is reported regarding him before 735/1334. On 4 Rabī' I/4 March, Abū Bakr, who like his brother Ibrāhīm had been brought back to Cairo, was granted the title of amir a year before the latter was to receive this title.¹⁰⁹ On that occasion, Qawṣūn led a procession from his stables up to the citadel, during which all the royal mamluks rode in attendance of Abū Bakr, who was wearing the *sharbūsh*. Apparently, Abū Bakr remained in Cairo with Ibrāhīm, at which point his father made another decision that would have an enormous impact on his career: he decided to marry him to Ṭuquzdamur al-Ḥamawī's daughter. This was indeed a profitable day for this amir, as the contract was concluded on the same day as Ibrāhīm's with Ṭuquzdamur's other daughter.¹¹⁰ Incidentally, by that time, Ṭuquzdamur was probably already married to Abū Bakr's mother and one of his other wives was one of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's daughters.¹¹¹ The place where the contract was concluded (Qawṣūn's house) demonstrates once more that these marriages between the sultan's children and his amirs and their children had implications beyond what is generally believed. A few months later (12 Ramaḍān 737/14 April 1337), Abū Bakr was poised to play a significant part in an attack against al-Nashw which could have cost the latter his life. Abū Bakr's name is mentioned as one of the potential enemies engaged in the affair, but in the end, al-Nashw was not harassed.¹¹²

It has been noticed that Ibrāhīm and Abū Bakr had almost parallel careers in their appointments and relationships. This was again true when Ibrāhīm was

time after his father: "*anā amūt qablak aw atamallak ba'dak.*" See al-Shujā'ī, *al-Tārīkh* 34.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir*, 236; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:379.

¹¹⁰ Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī*, 10:252; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:407. For Ibrāhīm, see above.

¹¹¹ For the latter marriage, see al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:698.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 422. The name provided is Abū Bakr ibn al-Nāṣirī Muḥammad. See also Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History*, 75.

made amir of forty: Abū Bakr was promoted to the same rank in the same year (738/1337–38). During the following year (739/1339) al-Nāṣir Muḥammad lost any hope for Aḥmad; he had been called back to Cairo and admonished to abandon his boyfriend, but had refused and was ready to commit suicide if he was not left in peace. In view of this, his father made the decision not to waste any more time with this son and to send Abū Bakr in his place.¹¹³ As had been the case with Aḥmad, this settlement in al-Karak, at a time when their father was already an old man, can be considered a test. Ānūk was still the first choice for succession, but he needed a backup. The experiment does not seem to have been concluded: in 740/1339, after his brother Ānūk had disappointed his father with his infatuation for a singing slave-girl, Abū Bakr was invited to visit al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. He brought along a gift of more than two hundred thousand dirhams, but it soon was discovered that this amount had been taken from the people of al-Karak in the form of an unrefusable loan—those who opposed it had been killed.¹¹⁴ Later, Bashtāk was asked to bring Ānūk and Abū Bakr to al-ʿAbbāsah, where they all stayed a few days before coming back to the citadel: no reason is given for this retreat,¹¹⁵ but in the end, Abū Bakr turned back to al-Karak, now his residence. He remained there until 20 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 740/17 July 1340, when he returned to Cairo at his father’s request, and the latter gathered his amirs and asked them to take an oath in the form of a sworn covenant to support him (*ḥilf*) personally and his son Abū Bakr, after his death.¹¹⁶ The oath was augmented by generous gifts of money to each amir according to his rank. The news of this official designation put the city in a state of agitation.¹¹⁷ Interestingly, Ānūk was still alive at that time (he died a month and a half later), but it is reasonable to think that he was not in good health. Backed up by an official appointment, Abū Bakr rode back to his stronghold at al-Karak, expecting news of his brother’s impending death. The order to present himself at the citadel of Cairo arrived in Rajab 741/January 1341; Abū Bakr’s arrival, on the 24th/13th of the same month, was accompanied by another gift of one hundred thousand dirhams for his father. On that occasion, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad gave orders to bring Abū Bakr’s units (his *ṭulb* and mamluks) from al-Karak to Cairo, as well as all the revenues held in al-Karak.¹¹⁸ Aḥmad, on his

¹¹³Al-Shujāʿī, *Al-Tārīkh*, 49.

¹¹⁴Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:492.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 2:493.

¹¹⁶On the oath as a form of designation in the Mamluk period, see Holt, “The Position and Power of the Mamlūk Sultan,” 241. The case is quite different here, as it took place before the sultan’s death and in presence of the army (the amirs first, then the soldiers). Moreover, as shown by the sources, they were paid for taking that oath.

¹¹⁷Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:499.

¹¹⁸He also received the *iqṭāʿ* of a Mamluk whose charge had been modified (Bahāʾ al-Dīn Aṣlam

way to his exile in Şarkhad, was finally directed to al-Karak, where he was likely to remain quiescent under the supervision of Maliktamur al-Sarjuwānī, the newly appointed governor.¹¹⁹ Clearly, Abū Bakr had to remain in residence in Cairo out of necessity, as his elder brother was not to play any role in the succession. The following months were marked by new signs of Abū Bakr's preparation to succeed his father: he was granted the fief of an amir, Bashtāk was asked to look after his interests and, consequently, the *wāfidiyah* of Aleppo were put in his service, along with other troops. The reason for all of this was clear: the old sultan wanted his son to be prepared to rule.¹²⁰ The effective nomination took place when al-Nāṣir became convinced that he would not survive his illness. On 18 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 741/4 June 1341, on his deathbed, al-Nāṣir convened his senior amirs and his royal mamluks and asked them to swear the covenant in favor of Abū Bakr. He gave him his grandfather's sword and conferred upon him the latter's *laqab* (al-Malik al-Manṣūr).¹²¹ His last will was fulfilled three days later: the transfer of power went smoothly, to the greatest surprise of the populace.¹²²

“I AM AWARE THAT NOT ONE OF MY CHILDREN IS FIT [FOR THE SULTANATE]”

The starting point of my investigation was to consider whether al-Nāṣir MuḤammad, who had a greater progeny than any other Mamluk sultan, consistently planned to prepare his sons to succeed him on the throne. Given that Qalāwūn himself was succeeded by two of his sons (without taking into account a nominated son who died well before he could rule), it is legitimate to ask whether al-Nāṣir MuḤammad ever thought of being succeeded by one of his sons, and if so, whether he did anything in order to facilitate his accession to the throne and to compel his own mamluks to accept an heir on the basis of genealogy.

Conscious of being the son of a mamluk himself, and thus a member of the *awlād al-nās* (sons of the elite), al-Nāṣir MuḤammad was fully aware that, in a self-defining non-hereditary system such as the Mamluk sultanate, where legitimacy lay more in merit than in genealogy, his desire to see one of his sons succeed him on the throne would remain a vain wish if he failed to plan carefully. Preparation, i.e., education and training (from a military point of view), but also the creation of a network of faithful supporters, could constitute a decisive element in this respect. Considering the biographical elements gleaned from what historians and

received the governorship of Şafad instead) on 18 Ramaḍān 741/7 March 1341. See al-Shujā'ī, *Al-Tārikh*, 97.

¹¹⁹Ibid.; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk* 2:515.

¹²⁰Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:517. Interestingly, it must be noted that Abū Bakr also married Ānūk's widow during this period.

¹²¹Ibid., 2:523; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Al-Tārikh*, 2:133; al-Shujā'ī, *Al-Tārikh*, 104–5.

¹²²Al-Shujā'ī, *Al-Tārikh*, 107.

chroniclers have deemed worthy of mention, we notice that several concordant elements concern the sons who received such training (Aḥmad, Ibrāhīm, and Abū Bakr): residence in al-Karak, promotion, and marriages.

Ever since it was seized by the Ayyubids, the fortress of al-Karak had been linked to the ruling sultan in Egypt. In the Mamluk sultanate, during the Turkish period, this link was not weakened; on the contrary, several members of the Qalāwūnid family resided in the fortress on several occasions and under various circumstances. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad himself was well acquainted with it—he resided there on two occasions when his power was usurped by a rival. When he regained power the first time, he had spent most of his teens in that place, consolidating his ties with the inhabitants and the neighboring Bedouins, among others. It is thus no surprise that he decided to send the sons who were the most likely to succeed him to al-Karak, once they came out of the harem; their age was between 8 and 10 and their stay there, far from the court, the harem, and the intrigues, was meant as a formative exile during which each son must be trained in horsemanship and hunting, according to the sources, and also educated in the Mamluk way.¹²³ As *awlād al-nās*, they would always lack *khushdāshīyah*, the fraternal ties that characterized the mamluks raised in the barracks, but at least they could develop relationships with the mamluks put in their service. Among the three sons, the one who best succeeded in creating a network of relationships was Aḥmad. However, his network relied not on the mamluks, but on the Bedouins of the surrounding area: he dressed like them, he hunted with them, and he even loved one of them. His link with al-Karak was so strong that he even refused to leave it once he was chosen as sultan, and in the end, when he did leave it, it was for a short period of two months, before he went back to the place where he had grown up.¹²⁴ Instead of *khushdāshīyah*, Aḥmad had developed *‘aṣabīyah*!¹²⁵ This tribal network worked for several years, even after his deposition, but in this context, it was the wrong type of network.

During his long reign, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad is reputed to have introduced an innovation generally regarded as detrimental to the Mamluk system: promotion of

¹²³This formative role played by al-Karak had already been noted in 1976 by Muḥammad ‘Adnān al-Bakhīt. The original work in Arabic was not available to me. The quote is from the German translation: Alexander Scheidt, *Das Königreich von al-Karak in der mamlūkischen Zeit* (Frankfurt, 1992), 84–85. On al-Karak, see now Marcus Milwright, *The Fortress of the Raven: Karak in the Middle Islamic Period (1100–1650)* (Leiden, 2008).

¹²⁴Once deposed, he proposed to remain in al-Karak as governor, considering the fortress as a heritage received from his grandfather and father, where his brothers, sent in exile to Qūṣ by Qawṣūn, had to be sent in order to live with him. See al-Shujā‘ī, *Al-Tārīkh*, 147 (“inna hādhihi qal‘at al-Karak hiya wirāthah la-nā min abī wa-jaddī”).

¹²⁵Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Muqaffá*, 1:385 (“fa-kathurat qālat al-Karakīyīn wa-tajamma‘ū khawfan ‘alá Aḥmad wa-‘aṣabiyatan ‘alayhi”).

the *awlād al-nās*, a rather new category in Mamluk society, in the army. Promotion regarding his own sons must thus not be considered an unusual practice. In each case, with the exception of his preferred son, Ānūk, who was presented as the designated heir and immediately made amir of one hundred, they started their career in the hierarchy at the lowest rank, i.e., amir of ten. They were then promoted to the intermediary rank of amir of forty, but never to the highest rank. These promotions must be seen in the light of the training mentioned earlier, but also as answering to the necessity to link the eldest sons to the army, the senior amirs, and the royal mamluks. The ceremonies that took place on each occasion were orchestrated by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's closest amirs (Qawṣūn and Bashtāk). In every instance, the sons wore a symbol of power, albeit one associated with a previous ruler: the emblem of the grandfather, Qalāwūn, whose mausoleum was always the meeting point for the procession through the city. On the other hand, it is reported that none of these four sons received a *malik* title. As a young father, at the beginning of his reign, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad had followed his own father's practice in attributing such a title to more than one son; his first two sons were thus known to have received such titles. However, they died in infancy, and it seems that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad never applied this practice again. When a contemporary chronicler, al-Ṣafadī, mentioned that Abū Bakr and Ibrāhīm were made amirs of forty, he stressed that they received neither a *malik* title nor a *laqab*—they were just called “Sayyidī Ibrāhīm or Sayyidī Abū Bakr, the amirs.”¹²⁶ From this, it may be inferred that, in the eyes of a contemporary witness who was fully acquainted with the Mamluk system by origin, a logical link existed between such a promotion and the attribution of such a title to a sultan's sons. The reason why al-Nāṣir Muḥammad no longer conferred the *malik* title is unknown, but it might be for fear of losing his own power, or out of superstition (as already stressed, two sons who received it died in infancy).

Marriages undoubtedly played another important part in preparing the way for his sons to succeed him. “Al-Malik al-Nāṣir's ingenious marriage policy, reminiscent of the dynastic manoeuvrings of the house of Habsburg in fifteenth century *Felix Austria*, created a network of dependencies and loyalties between the sultan and his sons and daughters, on the one hand, and the senior amirs and their offspring, on the other.”¹²⁷ The effects of this marriage policy have been considered questionable because the fathers-in-law of his sons were “outsiders,” and as such they were devoid of *khushdāshīyah* and thus unable to lead a faction

¹²⁶ Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī*, 6:138: “*wa-lam yusamma aḥad minhumā bi-Malik wa-lā luqqiba bal kāna al-nās kulluhum yaqūlūna Sayyidī Ibrāhīm aw Sayyidī Abā Bakr al-umarāʾ.*”

¹²⁷ Ulrich Haarmann, “Joseph's Law—The Careers and Activities of Mamluk Descendants before the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt,” in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Ulrich Haarmann (Cambridge, 1998), 66.

powerful enough to impose itself on Mamluk politics.¹²⁸ Whatever these effects might have been if they were ever weighed, it remains that they created strong ties in most cases which proved beneficial after al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's death.¹²⁹ One can take the case of Ṭuquzdamur al-Ḥamawī, who crafted numerous links with the sultan; he was not only the husband of Narjis, the former concubine of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and mother of Abū Bakr,¹³⁰ but he later married a daughter of his master,¹³¹ and two of his own daughters were married to the sultan's sons Abū Bakr (now his stepson),¹³² and Ibrāhīm.¹³³ It is no wonder that he became Abū Bakr's *nā'ib al-saltānah* when the latter was enthroned, as well as his strongest supporter. One may wonder, once again, if these ties were not created to strengthen the position of the sultan's sons and to substitute for the lack of links between these sons and the mamluks.¹³⁴

What went wrong? On his deathbed, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad is said to have advised his mamluks to obey his designated heir Abū Bakr on the condition that he acted as a good ruler. If this proved not to be the case, they were urged to depose him and replace him with any of the surviving sons (referred to as minors, which they were), but under no circumstances should Aḥmad be brought to Egypt and put on the throne.¹³⁵ Though the historian must remain cautious with the sources, especially with alleged oral reports, it appears that in this particular case, the substance of this advice was more than likely part of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's last will. The fact that this advice was repeatedly followed by mamluks who were present on that occasion, when one of his sons had to be deposed, even twenty years later, corroborates its historicity.¹³⁶ In pronouncing these words, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad put in the mamluks' hands a double-edged sword. They were indeed authorized to depose those sons who disrespected the mores of proper rulership, but on the other hand, they were exhorted subsequently to enthrone

¹²⁸Holt, "An-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (684–741/1285–1341): His Ancestry, Kindred and Affinity," 320–23.

¹²⁹See Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 82–85.

¹³⁰Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:551.

¹³¹Ibid., 2:698. At al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's death, eight of his daughters were already married. See al-Shujā'ī, *Al-Tārīkh*, 111.

¹³²Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi*, 10:252; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:407.

¹³³Al-Shujā'ī, *Al-Tārīkh*, 1:3.

¹³⁴Later on, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's scions by his daughters could even be considered as eligible for rule. See Amalia Levanoni, "Awlad al-nas in the Mamluk Army during the Bahri Period," in *Mamluks and Ottomans: Studies in Honour of Michael Winter*, ed. David J. Wasserstein and Ami Ayalon (London and New York, 2006), 100.

¹³⁵Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Al-Tārīkh*, 2:133.

¹³⁶Al-Shujā'ī, *Al-Tārīkh*, 163; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:709; Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 2:289.

another son. It would take forty years for this cycle to be broken. Aside from the various reasons that could be invoked to try to explain why one faction could not prevail over another and consequently seize power to the detriment of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's scions, it must be acknowledged that his last decision was his most successful, the apex of a long and perhaps Machiavellian reign: he managed to keep power within his family. In most cases, when one of his descendants was deposed, whatever the reasons put forward, the mamluks routinely chose the elder rather than the younger candidate, thus demonstrating that they were hoping for a promising sultan rather than a puppet.¹³⁷ Moreover, for several decades, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's progeny supplied an almost endless reservoir of suitable candidates to the sultanate; among the *awlād al-nās*, they constituted a separate, privileged category, the *asyād*, the descendants of a sultan, the family of a ruler, the members of a *bayt*, who not only formed a special unit inside the *ḥalqah*,¹³⁸ but also had the right to reside at the citadel.¹³⁹ It was not until almost a century later, during Barsbāy's reign (in 836/1433), that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's scions were finally ousted from the citadel, together with the idle mamluks.¹⁴⁰ Even in

¹³⁷See Van Steenberghe, "Is anyone my guardian . . . ?" Mamlūk Under-age Rule and the Later Qalāwūnids." See also, for instance, al-Shujā'i, *Al-Tārīkh*, 140 (Baybars al-Aḥmadi's reaction at the nomination of Kujuk, still a child: "*lā yaṣluḥ illā man yakūn rajul kabīr ya'rif tadbīr al-mulk*").

¹³⁸Ulrich Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33 (1988): 103; idem, "Joseph's Law—The Careers and Activities of Mamluk Descendants before the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt," 64.

¹³⁹See al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Daw' al-Lāmi'*, 3:87, regarding Ḥājji ibn al-Ashraf Sha'bān: "*wa-amarahu bi-iqāmatihī fī dārihi bi-qa'at al-jabal jaryan 'alā 'ādāt banī al-asyād*." According to al-Maqrīzī, there were more than 600 of them living in the citadel in the twenties of the ninth/fifteenth century. They got revenues from various sources (salaries from the sultan and fiefs). See al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-Uqūd al-Farīdah*, ed. Maḥmūd Jalīlī (Beirut, 2002) 1:572–73 ("*wa-aqāma fīman aqāma min Banī Qalāwūn bi-qa'at al-jabal wa-la-hum fuḍūl amwāl wa-murattabāt sulṭānīyah wa-iqtā'āt wa-kāna yuqāl la-hum al-asyād wa-balaghat ziyādatuhum 'alā sitt mi'ah fa-lam yazal 'adaduhum yaqillu wa-māluhum yanquṣu wa-sa'duhum yadburu wa-jāhuhum yaḍmaḥillu ḥattā sārū ilā ḍiq ba'd jāh 'arīḍ wa-dawālīb kathīrah li-i'tisār qaṣab al-sukkar bi-bilād al-ṣa'id wa-maṭābikh lil-sukkar bi-madīnat Miṣr wa-khuddām ṭawāshīyah la-hum 'adad kathīr wa-amwāl jammah wa-takhdimuhum 'iddat mubāshirīn yu'rafūn bi-mubāshirī al-asyād li-kull kabīr min al-asyād dīwān mufrad.*") Besides this, the *asyād* were awarded amirate ranks with suitable *iqṭā'āt*. See Levanoni, "Awlad al-nas," 100–1. The lands they held were reintroduced in the *iqṭā'* system when Barqūq instituted the *dīwān al-mufrad*. See Ulrich Haarmann, "The Sons of the Mamluks as Fief-Holders in Late Medieval Egypt," in *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed. Tarif Khalidi (Beirut, 1984), 142–44.

¹⁴⁰See al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 4:889–90 : "*wa-muni'a man baqiya min al-asyād awlād al-mulūk min dhurriyat al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn min suknā al-Qāhirah wa-ṭulū'ihā wa-ukhrijū min dūrihim bi-hā wa-kānū lammā muni'ū min sinīn sakana aktharuhum bi-al-Qāhirah wa-ḥawāshīyah fa-dhallū ba'd 'izzihim wa-tabadhdhalū ba'd taḥajjubihim wa-baqiya min a'yānihim ṭā'ifah muqīmah bi-al-Qa'ah wa-tanzil bi-al-Qāhirah li-ḥājātihā thumma ta'ūd ilā dūrihā fa-ukhrijū bi-ajma'ihim fī hādhihi al-ayyām*

801/1398–99, some of them had been granted a stipend by Barqūq on the sole basis that they were part of the late sultan’s progeny.¹⁴¹

In conclusion, we have seen that the issue of succession inside the Qalāwūnid house had been considered by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad at a very early date. In order to prepare his most promising successors for the throne, he chose to adopt a series of measures that concerned most of these sons, measures mostly echoed by a “mirror for princes” written contemporarily with these events. The main motive for such preparation was the notion that, being sons of the ruler and thus *awlād al-nās*, they would lack relationships, ties, and links with the most powerful mamluks, a network of supporters, and qualities needed for rulership. If preparation was not a guarantee of success, it should have helped these sons in any case. What al-Nāṣir Muḥammad probably failed to realize was that experience was also required to be an effective ruler.

wa-muni‘ū min al-qa‘ah fa-tafarraqu shadhar madhar kamā fa‘ala abūhum al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn bi-awlād al-mulūk Banī Ayyūb wa-kadhālik fa‘ala Allāh bi-Banī Ayyūb kamā fa‘ala abūhum al-Kāmil Muḥammad ibn al-‘Ādil Abū Bakr ibn Ayyūb bi-awlād al-Khulafā’ al-Fāṭimīyīn ‘wa-la yazlim rabbuka aḥadan’ [al-Kahf, 49].” The reference to a previous partial expulsion must be dated to the end of 825/1422, at the beginning of Barsbāy’s rule. See al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍaw’ al-Lāmi‘*, 8:184.

¹⁴¹ See al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍaw’ al-Lāmi‘*, 7:216, regarding Muḥammad ibn Ḥājji: “*ṣallā ‘alayhi al-Zāhir Barqūq bi-al-ḥawsh al-sulṭāni min al-qa‘ah wa-qarrara li-awlādihi wa-hum ‘asharah rātiban.*”