

predicament centered on agents of reprisal: upon whom could it rely to inflict penalty and reclaim property? Since the most persistent culprits were recruits, the sultan and senior amirs had little recourse but to summon line troops and veterans to curb them. Yet as noted above, assaults on recruits, particularly when sparked by grievances, weakened the solidarity that sustained the entire military system. Would trainees who felt betrayed by attacks from their superiors fight on their behalf in time of war? This quandary lurked in many of the chroniclers' depictions.

Rampages by recruits directed against markets and other large repositories of property became a fact of life in Cairo during the Sultanate's last decades. Ibn Taghrībirdī reported a ploy in Sha'abān 861/June–July 1457 that *julbān* recruits exploited to limit access to desirable produce items such as summer melons (*baṭṭikh ṣayfī*).³³ Initially offering sums in excess of what wholesalers could pay, recruits bought up the available supply and presumably hoarded it until re-sale at higher prices was feasible. Ibn Taghrībirdī chose the term “mockery” (*‘abath*) to describe this scheme, implying the recruits' disdain for the commoners' welfare. That it occurred during the reign of Īnāl, known for his nepotism and placidity, was not happenstance. Even during more forceful administrations, *julbān* assaults on property increased in frequency and severity. Several years later, the same historian detailed a riot by recruits stemming from the breach of an arrangement over horse sales.³⁴ In Jumādā II 868/February 1464, a band of “low-ranking” recruits set upon merchants in the horse market whom they believed were violating a covert agreement to sell mounts to them at prices they could afford, rather than to amirs or manumitted soldiers (*jund*) who bid more. The recruits, angered over losing out on the better stock, attacked the horse merchants with daggers. They were joined by other brigades from the barracks and began pillaging the cloth market. Ibn Taghrībirdī claimed that the recruits dared to assault notables riding horses, forcing them off and confiscating their mounts. When reports of these excesses reached Sultan Khushqadam, they “troubled him” (*shaqqa ‘alayhi*). He invited anyone abused by recruits to ascend the Citadel and inform him personally, presumably for compensation. Ibn Taghrībirdī mentioned no direct reprisal against the offending recruits, however; only a proclamation which the historian admitted did produce a “timely benefit.”

But only temporarily. Raids on markets launched to protest wages and rations the recruits found stingy continued to escalate. Despite the high marks accorded him overall by historians, Sultan Qāytbāy never dealt conclusively with these revolts. They exploded in epidemic proportions during the tenure of his ultimate successor, Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī. Perhaps the most devastating of these occurred at the height of al-Ghawrī's powers, during Muḥarram 916/April 1510.³⁵ Ibn Iyās dwelled at length

³³ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Hawādith*, 8:301, line 6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8:457, line 11.

³⁵ Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i*ʿ, 4:177, line 8.

on the circumstances behind this event. Recruits in the Citadel barracks had requested a bonus payment of 100 dinars per man (expected as their reward for training in anticipation of likely confrontations with Bedouin at home or the Ottomans abroad). When al-Ghawrī refused, and his supply master failed to deliver delayed meat rations, the recruits forced the *atābak* Qurqmās and several other officers to repeat their demands to the sultan in person. Upon his adamant rejection and threat of abdication, the recruits descended upon several of Cairo's busiest markets (in the Ṭulūn, Taḥt al-Rabʿ, and Bustiyīn districts) in a fury of pillage that lasted two days. They went so far as to confront the armaments officer, Dawlāt Bāy, at his home in al-Azbakīyah with a demand that he assume the sultanate (an ultimatum he flatly declined, instead joining al-Ghawrī in the Citadel). At the height of the riot, the recruits were joined by grooms and black slaves, indicating the propensity for indentured persons lower down the social ladder to seize upon the recruits' initiative to pillage items otherwise unavailable to them. This riot effectively shut down commerce in Cairo, since merchants in remaining markets bolted their gates and waited for eventual intervention. Ultimately, when the senior amirs rallied troops from their own companies and veterans, the *julbān* realized that they faced certain defeat and disbanded.

Now the regime faced the demands for reparations from outraged merchants. Ibn Iyās tallied the figure for despoiled shops, with damage claims totaling twenty thousand dinars. The amirs organized searches in the recruits' barracks to recover some of the stolen goods for return to their owners. Nonetheless, the sultan's accountants were called upon to make up the differences from his own resources. Whether al-Ghawrī and his personal enforcer, Zaynī Barakat ibn Mūsá, actually compensated the merchants in full Ibn Iyās did not say. He left the impression of smoldering dissatisfaction among all concerned parties (since no mention was made of al-Ghawrī acceding to the recruits' initial bonus request that sparked the disaster). The potential for incidents of this magnitude remained a reality, exercising a depressing effect over commerce in the capital (and other cities of the empire) up to the Ottoman conquest and beyond. The regime's inability to curb troop raids on property reveals limits on both its capacity and will to enforce order. Shows of reprisal were mandatory, but effective solutions may have proven unobtainable. Various interest groups in Cairo, Damascus, and Aleppo thus began to adopt their own measures of security. Jewish merchants in the Zuwaylah district of Cairo who suffered heavy property losses during riots in Dhū al-Ḥijjah 902/July–August 1497 anticipated subsequent problems. When raids by occupying Janissaries were rumored twenty-four years later, they moved their goods elsewhere and barricaded entrances to their quarter.³⁶ Other marketers reacted in similar ways.

³⁶Ibid., 3:375, line 9; 5:374, line 4.

The preceding remarks should not obscure assaults on property committed by persons outside the military hierarchy. Later discussions will analyze acts of larceny at the hands of individuals and gangs from both the civilian and military sectors. But in the context of culpability and reprisal, historians who weighed the damage in stolen goods and lost confidence clearly held the regime's recruits responsible for the worst ravages. To them, the most heinous criminality linked to theft was part and parcel of the recruits' legacy. The historians readily acknowledged the regime's difficulties as it contemplated responses to the outrages of its wayward cadets. They still made clear their skepticism over long-term efficacy.

Ibn Iyās, commenting on conditions in Cairo following the Ottoman occupation, saw few signs of improvement. He expressed his contempt for the behavior of the former officer in al-Ghawrī's service who had betrayed his cause to the Ottomans at Marj Dābiq and was rewarded for his treason with the viceroyship of Egypt. In Jumādā I 924/May–June 1518, he described the viceroy's brutal execution of a prayer caller (muezzin) for his theft of a medicinal herb.³⁷ Cultivation of this herb, *khiyār shanbar* (purging cassia), had been placed under the viceroy's control. When the prayer caller was arrested for cutting off two branches of the plant, he was turned over to the *wālī* prefect—who subsequently brought him before the viceroy. Because the muezzin violated the latter's prohibition, he ordered his bisection. The muezzin was led to the execution site with the basket containing the pilfered branches hanging from his neck. Ibn Iyās stated that the value of the stolen herb did not exceed four *aṣṇāf*, bitterly musing over the disparity between a petty loss and severe punishment (the prayer caller left behind “children, a wife, and mother”). He went on to denounce the viceroy for personal immorality (drunkenness) and a disdain for equitable rule. Yet this incident amply demonstrated the issue of affront, the continuity of readiness on the regime's part to mete out reprisal—especially following theft by civilians outside its hierarchy.³⁸ Acts that alarmed custodians of

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5:254, line 21.

³⁸ Analyses of assaults on property in other societies reveal similar patterns of reprisal. V. Gatrell and G. Parker noted that, in later medieval Europe, commercial classes increasingly demanded rigorous deterrents against theft due to the heightened production of commodities. See *Crime and the Law*, 38; J. Given discerned a tie between a demand for prosecution of theft and the rise of trade in medieval England. See *Society and Homicide in Thirteenth-Century England* (Stanford, 1977), 111–12. He also noted the development of “entrepreneurial banditry” as a skilled craft unimaginable without a growing urban setting; B. Hanawalt discussed a link between organized thievery and economic depression, a parallel with the situation in fifteenth–sixteenth-century Egypt. See *Crime and Conflict*, 238; P. Huang found the most consistent expectation of the courts in Qing China focused on protection of property against thieves. See *Civil Justice in China; Representation and Practice in the Qing* (Stanford, 1996), 15; T. Gurr also concluded that the classes benefitting from “early capitalism” in western Europe were the most ardent advocates of tougher and more consistent laws, enforcement, and punishment for property offenses. See “Development and Decay: Their Impact on Public Order in Western History,” in *History and Crime: Implications for Criminal Justice Policy*,

religious observance and accepted canons of belief posed dilemmas no less complex.

Events that riled the religious establishment in Cairo or Damascus enough to compel the regime to intervene involved disputes over Christian activism or allegations of aberrant views laid against prominent Muslims. Behavior by Christians in Egypt regarded as excessively assertive frequently stemmed from their attempts to restore churches, or complaints over religious services that impinged on Muslim sensibilities. Incidents that incited vigorous opposition from Muslim clerics sufficient to draw in the regime were clearly regarded as criminal acts, in that they entailed investigations to ascertain the veracity of the claim and subsequent imposition of a penalty. For example, al-Maqrīzī reported a petition by a delegation of Christians from the Delta province of Gharbiyah, submitted in the distant past (755/1354–55, no month given).³⁹ The delegation had requested the sultan to allow their restoration of a church, once titled al-Nahrīriyah, they claimed had been illegally converted to a mosque (*masjid*). Al-Maqrīzī did not provide details on why their suit was dismissed (possibly too remote for survival of background data). But he did state that the petitioners were evicted from the sultan's presence after being flogged, treatment usually reserved for convicts rather than failed litigants in a civil hearing. The delegates may have pressed their case belligerently, or a counter accusation from unnamed defenders of the mosque may have claimed they overstepped communal limits.

A case with known circumstances occurred a quarter century later in Jumādā I 780/August–September 1378.⁴⁰ Notorious enough for two historians to discuss, the incident focused on a claim by an unnamed Sufi esteemed for his piety, who complained of noise from hand bells (*nawāqīs*) rung at the church of Abū Numrus in Jiza province so loudly that they disrupted the Friday *khutbah* in an adjacent mosque. The Sufi alleged that the bells were sounded deliberately to drown out the Muslim sermon. The sultan, al-Ashraf Sha‘bān, found the Sufi's protest unsubstantiated. Undaunted, the Sufi proceeded to the Hijaz, from where he returned with documents certifying that he had sojourned at the Prophet's tomb pleading with God's

ed. J. Inciardi (Beverly Hills, 1980), 34; M. Perry observed a sophisticated underworld active in sixteenth-century Seville, many of whose members were out-of-service soldiers more closely paralleling the status of unemployed Mamluks than anywhere else in Europe; see *Crime and Society*, 24. Finally, G. Ruggiero identified the Venetian social category of “important people” as those having the status of property or office holders without formal membership in the nobility. As the category most vulnerable to theft, they made the most consistent demands for protection against property crime. By contrast, the nobility were, as individuals, among the most violent elements in Venetian society, since they regarded themselves as personally beyond prosecution, similar to the Mamluk elite. See *Violence*, 59–61, 65, 84, 148.

³⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:918, line 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:340, line 12; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbāʿ*, 1:177, line 1.

messenger for an endorsement of the church's demolition. Appealing to the *atābak* and future sultan, Barqūq, the Sufi persuaded him to send the current *muḥtasib* to investigate his allegations. Upon his return the market inspector confirmed the Sufi's accusation, adding that the church's congregation had lavished money on its expansion. It was on these latter grounds, as concrete violations of *sharī'ah*, that the *atābak* ordered the church demolished. Following the *muḥtasib*'s report, Barqūq had summoned the Jacobite patriarch (to whose rite the church presumably belonged) and rebuked him for transgressing established law limiting churches to existing proportions. This case is interesting because the criminal offense that achieved the demolition had nothing formally to do with the disruptive bell ringing. Irritating as it may have been, the music emanating from Christian services did not constitute as clear a violation as did the church's enlargement. The persistent Sufi got his way, but only via indirect means.

Disputes erupting over allegations of blasphemy by Muslims were potentially more explosive than reactions to Christian activism because of the dissension the former caused within the majority community. Sultans and their adjutants often found the outcome problematic regardless of how they ruled, since partisans on both sides of a case had taken obdurate stands. When sultans or grand amirs convened councils of judges to review allegations, the qadis themselves often deadlocked over a decision. Yet the authorities, as ultimate agents of enforcement, were bound to demand a decision and impose the appropriate censure. And individuals who had already attracted a devoted following before their alleged deviance was brought to the authorities' attention posed risks of widespread disorder if they were arrested summarily. Al-Sakhāwī described a manumitted black slave from Damascus called Mubārak who was accused of corrupting the faith in Ramaḍān 899/June–July 1494.⁴¹ Having previously established himself as a revered person (*mu'taqad*) in Syria with a large following, this Mubārak arrived in Cairo with a reputation for rabble rousing. Making the rounds of venerated tombs in the Egyptian capital, he was denounced for preaching blasphemous views at such strongholds of orthodoxy as the Azhar. A group of senior ulama demanded his arrest, but Sultan Qāyṭbāy and his advisors were reluctant to imprison or execute him after their interrogation. They considered the revered Mubārak more incendiary as a potential martyr than as a public nuisance. However annoying his pronouncements may have been to the clerics, removing or eliminating him was more likely to inflame the masses and incite a riot.

Alleged blasphemers did not routinely escape unscathed, however. Persons who recklessly transgressed conventions of accepted conduct were convicted more often than popular preachers. Ibn Iyās discussed several incidents of such deviance

⁴¹ Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, "Al-Dhayl al-Tāmm 'alā Duwal al-Islām," Dār al-Kutub al-Waḥīfah (Tunis) MS 6856, fol. 245, line 30.

during Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī's reign. In Sha'bān 911/December 1505–January 1506, a dervish from Upper Egypt behaved in ways that brought capital charges of atheism (*zandaqah*) and sorcery (*suhūr*) against him.⁴² Denounced for performing his ablutions with milk and other untoward acts “contrary to the *sharī'ah*,” he was turned over by the sultan to the chief Maliki qadi for questioning. After the judge found him guilty of unbelief, he was beheaded outside the Ṣāliḥīyah Madrasah, seat of the highest judicial tribunal in Cairo. This dervish's execution seems to have presented al-Ghawrī with few risks since the chronicler reported no mob of advocates who might riot in his defense.

A more complex case decided less to the sultan's liking occurred two years later in Jumādā I 913/September–October 1507.⁴³ The defendant in this incident was no fringe mendicant but a prominent Hanafi *khaṭīb*. Accused of making “impertinent remarks” about the prophet Abraham in his sermons, the *khaṭīb* was interrogated by a senior judge—who concluded that his statements did not warrant punishment for *kufr*. Al-Ghawrī thought otherwise. Partisan to the prophet Abraham, al-Ghawrī asserted that the *khaṭīb*'s comments indeed merited his execution. The sultan convened the four senior qadis and other eminent clerics to review the offensive statements. After a stormy debate, the council rejected al-Ghawrī's call for the *khaṭīb*'s beheading. According to precedents set by similar events in the past, if the accused sincerely retracted his depiction of Abraham, he should not pay the ultimate price. The council sentenced the *khaṭīb* to a jail term pending his recantation. Ibn Iyās stated that the council reached this verdict despite the sultan's demand for an execution. This case revealed tensions that often surfaced between clerical authorities charged with determining the veracity of blasphemy charges and the regime pledged to back their decisions, even if they disagreed. Incidents that the regime had presented on its own initiative were particularly galling when the ulama ruled contrary to its wishes—often to assert their own primacy in matters of religion. But regardless of whose agenda was favored, such cases were unlikely to go unprosecuted. Even if the defendant's stature mitigated against a conviction for deviance—whatever his guilt or innocence—both the regime and clerics felt obliged to subject him to a criminal investigation. The legitimacy of both groups rested on principles that required them to conduct a formal procedure. Events that shocked moral sensibilities imposed similar expectations on them.

Acts provoking hostile responses from turbulent sectors of the populace required rapid responses from the authorities to head off riots that might ignite city-wide conflagrations. While immediate reprisals were necessary, the volatility inherent in such acts presented the authorities with difficult choices. Their underlying goals were curbing further disorder and maintaining security. Their success at achieving

⁴² Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*, 4:87, line 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4:120, line 11.

them varied according to incident. Acts regarded as morally corrupt or threatening to sectarian identities were especially inflammatory. They were sufficiently notorious to warrant recording by historians long after they occurred. In Rajab 727/ May–June 1327, al-Maqrīzī discussed an incident of sexual assault alleged against a European (*fīranjī*) merchant in the port of Alexandria.⁴⁴ The merchant was apprehended in the act of soliciting a “beardless youth” to commit indecency. The intervener was an adult Muslim who charged the European with impermissible behavior. The merchant responded by striking his accoster in the face with his shoe, whereupon a mob set upon him. The European’s community immediately rose in his defense. A pitched battle with drawn weapons threatened to erupt between the two factions, until the commandant of the Alexandria garrison interceded. The Muslims insisted that the merchant had committed acts meriting his execution. Yet al-Maqrīzī simply concluded the incident by stating that he was taken before a judge for questioning. But he also noted that the resultant tension necessitated closing gates and markets—a temporary stalling of the commerce basic to Alexandria’s economy. Whether the European was actually terminated for this allegation (a response that might provoke a more serious reaction from the foreign mercantile community) remains unknown from al-Maqrīzī’s depiction.

The chronicler Ibn al-Ṣayrafī described at length an incident with more damaging potential due to its incitement of sectarian conflict. In Shawwāl 876/March–April 1472, he detailed a case of attempted conversion of Christian children.⁴⁵ A Maghribī (otherwise unnamed) residing at a mosque in the Jiza district acquired renown for evocative preaching. Too evocative for local Christians, it would seem, since some of their children fell under the Maghribī’s spell and converted to Islam. Their enraged parents fell upon the preacher, throttled him until his tongue came out, cut it off (perhaps a symbolic means of punishing the offending vehicle of speech), and then began to disembowel him. After failing to find a pit into which they might cast him, they were arrested by the Jiza inspector (*kāshif*).

At this stage, Ibn al-Ṣayrafī’s narrative becomes alert to the nuances of communal rivalries confronting the authorities. When the *kāshif* conveyed the Christians to the Cairo prefect (*wālī*), the latter decided that a senior officer should take charge of them. He therefore consigned the Christians to the *amīr akhūr al-kabīr* (grand officer of the horse), a member of the sultan’s advisory council. But even he hesitated before ordering the Christians’ execution, despite their brutal murder publicly witnessed. The amir elected to bring the offenders, who numbered six, before Sultan Qāyṭbāy himself. As the final arbiter of criminal cases, the sovereign opted for imprisonment. Seemingly convinced that the Maghribī had overstepped accepted boundaries of communal autonomy by actively proselytizing to minors and thus

⁴⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:284, line 7.

⁴⁵ Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbāʾ*, 424, line 5.

unduly provoking their parents, Qāyṭbāy ruled the Christians' behavior justifiable homicide. But his decision was not met with equanimity by his co-religionists. A mob gathered at the base of the Citadel, seized the Christians from their Mamluk guards and stoned five of them to death. Only one of them converted to Islam on the spot to save himself and was spared. Ibn al-Ṣayrafī reported Qāyṭbāy's wrath upon learning of the mob's vigilantism. He caused the *wālī* to proclaim an edict forbidding ordinary subjects to take the law into their own hands, or to "seize the Mamluks' bridles." But he took no further action. Indeed, the caution and reluctance over assuming responsibility for the fate of these Christians at progressive stages of the ruling oligarchy underscores the regime's unease over the explosiveness of a case that put Christians and Muslims at odds. None of the officers charged with apprehending the Christians displayed any sympathy for the Maghribī who had sparked the incident. Charismatics who deliberately aggravated adherents of a rival faith were the true culprits in their eyes, responsible for unleashing forces that compromised their authority.

Although hesitant to prosecute members of their caste, the ruling oligarchy could not ignore assaults committed by Mamluks who wantonly disregarded public morality. Yet neither could they allow the masses free rein to take revenge. Ibn Ṭūlūn noted the arrest of an officer described as a European from Tripoli in Ramaḍān 906/March–April 1501.⁴⁶ This individual was accused of several murders for theft, concealment of his victims, raping women after stealing their jewelry, and casually eating after his debauchery. While the *nāʿib* governor of Damascus ordered the Mamluk's dismemberment, the masses got to him first. After stabbing the Mamluk multiple times, they dragged him to the gallows district and set him on fire. Infuriated by this mob action, the *nāʿib* ordered his troops to ride the offenders down indiscriminately. Those who survived were detained and fined. He also ordered the markets temporarily closed.

Incidents of this kind were not unique to Damascus. Cairo often witnessed similar events at the hands of soldiers. Ibn Taghrībirdī mentioned their plundering and "gross atrocities" against women attending Friday prayers at the Ibn al-ʿĀṣ mosque in Fuṣṭāṭ during Ramaḍān 863/July 1459.⁴⁷ Yet chroniclers provided more lurid descriptions of shocking behavior, especially during unsettled transitions within the regime itself. Ibn Iyās, who looked askance at the deportment of Qāyṭbāy's son, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, held up the depravity of a recently promoted recruit as an example of troop excess unhindered by a lax sovereign. In Shaʿbān 903/March–April 1498, while riding a spirited horse, this recruit encountered a funeral procession. His mount bucked in alarm, throwing off his rider. Angered by the pallbearers, the recruit threatened them and they ran off, abandoning the corpse. Venting his ire

⁴⁶ Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahah*, 1:235, line 10.

⁴⁷ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 16:135, line 5.

further, the recruit struck at the body several times with his dagger until he calmed down and departed. The body was left lying where it had fallen, unburied to the end of the day. Ibn Iyās mentioned no punishment of a single recruit for this incident. But he elaborated on more devastating cases involving whole units of soldiers, particularly during the early stages of the Ottoman occupation. In Muḥarram 924/February 1519, Ibn Iyās stated that the outrages committed by the Ottoman soldiery had become unbearable. Arrogantly ignoring time limits placed on plundering, they stripped several districts of wood and metal furnishings for use as tinder and tools in the Citadel barracks.⁴⁸

Damaging as such pillage was, it was endured as the inevitable consequence of defeat. But the personal debaucheries of the occupiers were intolerable. The Ottomans were alleged to convene mass orgies in their barracks, enlivened with copious draughts of beer (*būzah*). Their assaults victimized both women and young boys. They went on drunken rampages through the town, seizing the turbans of passers-by and showering them with insults. Eventually, groups of notables petitioned the Ottoman “emperor”’s (*khandakar*) own head qadi, who now presided over the four chief justices, for redress. Upon hearing their complaints, he approached the most senior Mamluk officer remaining from the previous government, Qāyṭbāy al-Dawādār (no relation to the eminent sultan). The two ascended to the governor Khayrbak (referred to as the *malik al-umarāʾ*) and demanded an audience. The Ottoman judge accosted the governor as follows: “Pay heed to the Muslims’ condition, for if you do not, Cairo (*Miṣr*) will be ruined totally. The state of affairs has gravely worsened, and if the *khandakar* were to learn of the situation, he would order our necks cut (i.e., decapitated). He would say: ‘How have you dared to conceal from me Cairo’s state, and to neglect the condition of the Muslims so that these events have occurred?’”

The governor’s response conveyed, as a microcosm, the essence of his dilemma and political savvy. Apparently indifferent to the complaints of his civilian subjects (recall that Khayrbak was the renegade who betrayed Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī at the battle of Marj Dābiq), he could not dismiss an accusation from his patron’s justice minister. Nor could he afford to alienate the Ottoman troops on whom he relied for his own survival (the indigenous Mamluks loathed him as a traitor). Thus, Khayrbak responded with a review of both the Janissary (*al-Inkishāriyah*) and the Sipahi (*al-Isbahanīyah*) units, interrogating them as to who were guilty of these acts. But Ibn Iyās mentioned no further reprisals. Rather, he noted that the governor confined women and youths to their houses for ten days, and named the shrines of al-Sayyidah al-Nafīṣah, al-Ḥusayn, and the commercial district of Bayn al-Qaṣrayn as off-limits (possibly to the Ottomans, although this is unclear from the text). All

⁴⁸ Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ*, 5:233, line 2.

shops were to close after sundown. Khayrbak thereby sought to cool off the situation without personally penalizing those guilty of perpetrating it.

An incident at the hands of the occupiers even more repellent occurred four years later, and it disclosed Khayrbak's long memory over a slight. Ibn Iyās, in *Jumādā I* 928/March–April 1522, described a clash between Janissaries and Mamluks over the former's abuse of a Christian.⁴⁹ The Janissaries had impaled this Christian (cause not mentioned) and left him to expire. Passing by him subsequently, in the company of several Mamluks who served Qāyrbāy al-Dawādār, the Janissaries refused him a draft of water. Appalled by their callousness, the Mamluks sought to relieve the Christian's pitiable state. After taking him down, they pulled out his stake and let him drink. Affronted, the Janissaries disputed the Mamluks' mercy. One of the latter stabbed a Janissary. The Mamluks then retreated to Qāyrbāy's house, pursued by the Janissaries who threatened to set its gate on fire when the *bawwāb* barred their access. As word of the dispute spread, a full riot between Janissaries and Mamluks ensued. The *wālī* prefect sent his adjutant to re-impale the Christian, "who still breathed." The governor Khayrbak was informed of the incident the following day. Harboring his resentment of Qāyrbāy, he demanded that he turn over the Mamluks involved. Qāyrbāy sent his brother to remonstrate with him, but Khayrbak was adamant. The governor sent out an edict warning anyone who hid a guilty Mamluk in his house would be hanged "without recourse." But whoever intercepted a Mamluk who set off the riot would receive 100 dinars and a velvet caftan.

On the tenth of Ramaḍān/3 August, the governor descended to the Maydān to witness the punishment of two Mamluks arrested by the *wālī*, and the doorman who had denied the Janissaries access: bisection for all three. Khayrbak forced Qāyrbāy to witness the mutilation of his own officers and servant, "since he despised him intensely." The Citadel commandant and one other officer stood up and interceded for the *bawwāb*, noting that he had children and an aged father. But Khayrbak "did not relent from his cruelty." As for Qāyrbāy, the governor succeeded in tarnishing his prestige permanently, thus eclipsing his career. Ibn Iyās stated that Qāyrbāy attempted to mollify the Janissary wounded by his Mamluk with a compensation of 100 dinars and a silk robe lined with squirrel fur to replace his robe slashed during the dispute. Ibn Iyās depicted this episode as "one of the most cruel and odious events."

Yet his anger cannot conceal Khayrbak's ultimate victory over a popular opponent surviving from their mutual careers under al-Ghawrī. Qāyrbāy's diminution left Khayrbak in unfettered control over Cairo. His unswerving support of the occupiers cemented his own position with no meaningful opposition until his own death. Khayrbak triumphed because he understood the political necessity of maintaining

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5:445, line 19.

the support of his Ottoman troops, while Qāyrbāy met defeat as a remnant of the old, defeated order. His presence had been a nagging reminder of personal betrayal. Khayrbak's response to the Ottomans' barbarity in Cairo overall was to act belatedly when confronted by the *khandakar*'s representative. Otherwise, he remained aloof to moral outrages inflicted on the commons.

Civilians who violated moral sensibilities could be dealt with more summarily. Ibn Iyās mentioned a tomb robber in Shawwāl 903/May–June 1498, who stole the deceased's shrouds, presumably for resale.⁵⁰ The sultan, Qāyrbāy's minimally admired successor al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, ordered the thief's face flayed while he was still alive. His skin was left hanging down to his chest, the facial bones exposed. The thief was conveyed in this state to the Bāb al-Naṣr where he was hanged. Cairo's gravediggers were then warned to respect the shrouds of the deceased. Many of the sensational murders minutely recorded for their shock value by the chroniclers could be considered here as gruesome examples of moral depravity. Since these cases warrant analysis in the context of their complex motives, they are relegated to a separate discussion of homicide.

But one case of extraordinary fraud does indicate a degree of creativity so nefarious that it bemused as well as shocked. This incident was sufficiently famous that it was remembered and recorded a century after it occurred. Al-Maqrīzī discussed at length the antics of a charlatan who duped many into believing he had discovered a tomb containing several Companions of the Prophet. The incident happened in Rabī' II 744/August–September 1343, in the Lūq district outside Cairo.⁵¹ Al-Maqrīzī described the site as a rubbish heap known as the Dung Hill (*Kawm al-Zibl*). He claimed that "people of iniquity, the worst riff-raff" repaired to it. While digging into the site, remains of previous structures—some containing fragments of documents—were uncovered. One of the excavators, named Shu'ayb, whom al-Maqrīzī condemned as "a devil among the masses," claimed that he received visions while asleep confirming that these ruins sat on top of a sepulcher where the Companions were interred. He went further, proclaiming that his dreams empowered him to cure the crippled and restore sight to the blind. His fellow ruffians eagerly heeded his words and began digging down two fathoms until they reached the remains of a mosque. This discovery evoked wild rejoicing among the mob and their uproar attracted wider notice in the vicinity. By dawn, some one thousand persons had gathered, all digging away at the rubbish heap. Shu'ayb announced that the excavated ruins indeed belonged to the Prophet's Companions. His powers of persuasion were acute, it would seem, since notables of both the military and civil elites now visited the site. Al-Maqrīzī observed that women were especially taken in by Shu'ayb's therapeutic promises, stating that the sultan's mother came herself.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 3:391, line 8.

⁵¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:649, line 6.

Shu‘ayb would conduct cure seekers personally into the now-vast pit, from whence they emerged shouting, amid cries of “God is Most Great!” that their maladies were remedied, their sight regained. All, of course, willingly paid the dinars or dirhams Shu‘ayb and his comrades charged for this treatment.

As the notoriety of the alleged Companions’ tomb spread, several amirs and qadis became alarmed over the presence of such a throng now attending the site night and day. They urged the *wālī* prefect to inspect the *kawm*, their missive noting reports that the ruffians had exhumed cadavers from legitimate graves to be passed off as the Companions’ remains. When the prefect arrived at the hill, the mob greeted him with howls of “vile denunciations,” their protest so intense that his soldiers shot arrows to disperse them. Shu‘ayb and his cohort fled, leaving the *wālī*’s contingent to excavate until they reached bedrock and a sewer. No verifiable indications of a tomb were discovered and the huge pit was filled in. The mob eventually lost interest in the site and calm was restored. Nonetheless, Shu‘ayb and his fellow charlatans made off with a trove of money and apparel.

A case involving individuals at the opposite end of the social spectrum took place just after al-Maqrīzī’s lifetime, as observed by his disciple, Ibn Taghrībirdī. He reported a case following a stalled Nile flood in Shawwāl 866/June–July 1462, in which the son of a respected jurist was implicated in a sex scandal.⁵² As was customary during crises affecting Egypt’s sole source of water, the sultan (Khushqadam) enjoined the magistrates to demand abstinence of the populace “from sin” (*al-ma‘asin*). The *wālī* prefect duly rode out to Būlāq, a quarter apparently known for its looseness, to carry out his orders. After arresting revelers there, he crossed over to an island that had emerged as a result of the low level of the river. A crowd had assembled there, and the prefect rounded up a large number of men and women, seemingly engaged in unchaperoned activities. These he placed on donkeys and paraded from Būlāq to Cairo. Among them was a son of the chief qadi Shams al-Dīn al-Qāyātī. The son had attempted to mask his face in order to conceal his identity while mounted ignominiously on the donkey. His humiliation greatly incensed the juristic establishment, and a delegation confronted the prefect with a complaint of inappropriate arrest. The famous shaykh and hadith scholar Amīn al-Dīn al-Āqsarā’ī took his denunciation of the *wālī* to the sultan himself. But the pious Khushqadam replied that he had so ordered the prefect personally. The jurists refused to desist, and again accused the prefect of defaming the scion of an esteemed family. The *wālī* responded: “Why does the son of al-Qāyātī sit with his [ad-hoc] harem among commoners (*al-‘awāmm*), exposed to onlookers?” Although he did release the son, the damage to his family’s reputation had been done. The jurists remained agitated (*fī harj marj*). The sultan saw no reason to budge from his stance of probity. He granted the prefect a splendid robe and congratulated him for

⁵² Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith*, 8:424, line 9.

his resolute enforcement of public decency. A second proclamation was read out, forbidding attendance at diversions (*muftarajāt*). All subjects were to shun “moral defilements” (*al-qadhūrāt*). “Thus was the stature of the *wālī* augmented, and everyone held his tongue about him.”

This incident disclosed contention when a sweep to ensnare revelers whose behavior was deemed insulting to God unexpectedly trapped the offspring of a prominent family who had pledged to uphold morality. Quite prepared to endorse these sweeps when limited to commoners, the juristic elite, cream of the ulama, were acutely embarrassed when one of their own was exposed. They uniformly closed ranks to denounce the prefect and defend Ibn al-Qāyātī’s honor (and that of his father). Sultan Khushqadam refused to relent in this instance and threw his promotion of the *wālī* in their faces. The readiness of the sovereign, whose status as legal arbiter granted him jurisdiction over even the chief qadis, to oppose them, while simultaneously winking at his recruits’ excesses in other circumstances, suggests something of the paradox clearly evident in the regime’s application of criminal justice.

All the preceding events, despite their diversity, highlight common trends that impelled the authorities to act, but often compromised their capacity to resolve. All either posed a challenge to the authorities’ powers of control over subordinate elements, or aroused significant sectors of society by adversely affecting property rights or defying accepted canons of faith and moral conduct. Disturbances threatening public order or violating property rights repeatedly involved members of the ruling elite, notably its young recruits only recently promoted from cadet status. These troops precipitated many of the most turbulent episodes disrupting order and trade in the Sultanate’s major cities, seats of its most influential social groups and wealthiest stores of capital assets. The authorities could not allow the disruptive criminality so ubiquitously associated with their own recruits to go unchecked. Yet neither could they take definitive steps to crush the cadres from whose ranks their successors would be drawn. Every senior amir, as well as the sultan, had invested substantial sums training the soldiers on whose loyalty his political future—and often physical survival—depended. These events therefore provided intriguing insights into the dilemmas faced by the authorities as they sought to contain the violence endemic to their troops within manageable limits.

It is worth noting that these troops were virtually absent from disputes over canons of belief, and only marginally visible in affronts to public morality—at least until the Ottoman occupation. These crimes occurred, in the main, within the civilian sectors of society. But the authorities rarely found themselves freer to assert themselves decisively, or to act without regard for the sensibilities and biases of competing factions. Nonetheless, however complicated the circumstances of crimes

affecting religion or morality, the authorities could not ignore them.⁵³ Their claims to primacy over preservation of order, and the foundations of their legitimacy as defenders of a Sunni Muslim polity and arbiters of its criminal suits, demanded their intimate involvement. The civilian sectors of society, whose numeric advantage was overwhelming and whose assets, taxed or confiscated, were essential to the ruling elite's support, submitted to that elite's political supremacy in return for the latter's enforcement of judgments emanating from the legists and clerics who served as custodians of faith and definers of morality. This symbiosis was visible in every salient case stemming from conflicts over religion and probity. It was this interdependence that shaped the context of authority over criminal matters in the Mamluk Sultanate. We can discern the disparate aspects of this context repeatedly as we analyze the several categories of crime reported by the narrative sources. Their authors were uniformly sensitive to them.

⁵³ Claude Gauvard noted that the French monarchy in the later Middle Ages was expected by the clergy to intervene in morals cases, depicted by the clergy as God's punishment for sin. Even though such crimes were interpreted as divine retribution, the king was required to protect his subjects from them. See "Fear of Crime in Late Medieval France," in *Medieval Crime and Social Control*, ed. B. Hanawalt and D. Wallace (Minneapolis, 1999), 3.