



# ASK Working Paper 22

Jo Van Steenbergen

**‘Mamlukisation’ between  
social theory and social  
practice:**

**An essay on reflexivity,  
state formation, and the  
late medieval sultanate of  
Cairo**

ASK Working Paper, ISSN 2193-925X  
Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg  
History and Society during the  
Mamluk Era (1250-1517)  
Heussallee 18-24  
53113 Bonn  
Editor: Stephan Conermann

**Author's address**

Jo Van Steenbergen

Department of Languages and Cultures  
Ghent University  
Blandijnberg 2  
B-9000 Gent, Belgium  
Phone: ++32 (0)9 264 38 05  
Fax: ++32 (0)9 264 42 71  
Website: <http://www.neareast.ugent.be/staff/JVS>  
Mail: [jo.vansteenbergen@ugent.be](mailto:jo.vansteenbergen@ugent.be)

‘Mamlukisation’ between social theory and social practice:  
An essay on reflexivity, state formation, and the late medieval sultanate of Cairo

by Jo Van Steenbergen

Jo Van Steenbergen (PhD KULeuven [Belgium], 2003) is research professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Ghent University (Belgium). He engages with the social and cultural history of the pre-modern Islamic world, with a particular focus on the Islamic middle period (ca. 1000-1500), on Egypt and Syria, on the practices, discourses and structures of power elites in the sultanate of Cairo (ca. 1200-1517), and on the de/construction of grand narratives in Mamluk/Islamic history. He was a research fellow of the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo (NVIC, 1997-8, 2003), a research assistant at KULeuven (Belgium) and the Flemish Science Foundation (FWO) (1998-2003), a lecturer at the University of St Andrews (2004-7), a senior research fellow at the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg: History and Society during the Mamluk Era (1250-1517) (Bonn, 2014-15), and a visiting lecturer/professor at the British Museum and at the School of Oriental and African Studies (London), at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris), and at the National University of Malaysia. Between 2009 and 2014 he was principal investigator of the ERC Starting Grant Project ‘The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate. Political Traditions and State Formation in 15th-century Egypt and Syria’. Jo Van Steenbergen is general editor of *al-Masāq: the Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean* (Routledge/Society for the Medieval Mediterranean), member of the programming committee of the IMC (Leeds, UK), and editorial board member of *Mamluk Studies* (Bonn UP/ASK), *The Medieval Mediterranean* (Brill) and *Annales Islamologiques* (IFAO).

His recent publications include:

- “Chapter Nine: Ritual, Politics and the City in Mamluk Cairo. The *Bayna l-Qaṣrayn* as a dynamic ‘lieu de mémoire’ (1250-1382).” In *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean. Comparative Perspectives*, eds. A. Beihammer S. Constantinou, M. Parani (The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1453 vol. 98) (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 227-276.
- “The Mamluk Sultanate as a Military Patronage State: household politics and the case of the Qalāwūnid *bayt* (1279-1382).” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 56 (2013), pp. 189-217.
- (with W. Flinterman) “Al-Nasir Muhammad and the Formation of the Qalawunid State”, in *Pearls on a String: Art in the Age of Great Islamic Empires*, ed. A. Landau (Baltimore and Seattle: The Walters Art Museum and Washington University Press, 2015), pp. 101-127.
- “Mamluk authorities and Anatolian realities: Jānibak al-Şūfī, sultan al-Ashraf Barsbāy, and the story of a social network in the Mamluk/Anatolian frontier zone, 1435-1438.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (2015) (in press).
- *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras – VIII* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta), eds. U. Vermeulen, K. D’hulster and J. Van Steenbergen (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2015) (in press).

## Table of contents:

Abstract	1
1. Introduction	2
1.1. Whither Mamluk Studies?	2
1.2. Whither the Mamluk State?	7
2. Contemporary notions of <i>dawla</i>	10
2.1. <i>Dawlat al-Atrāk</i> : narratives of order, continuity and agency	11
2.2. From one <i>dawla</i> to another <i>dawla</i> : narratives of discontinuity and agency	16
3. Toward an alternative approach: social practice, disciplinary power, and the state as a structural effect	23
4. An alternative approach	27
4.1. Reproduction, segmentation and integration, and their structural effects	27
4.2. Transformation, the taniatric mode of reproduction, and political order as process in late medieval Egypt and Syria	31
5. Epilogue: the Cairo Sultanate between dynastic and Mamluk political orders	35
Bibliography	38

## Abstract

This working paper is a reflexive essay that tries to think with and beyond one of the basic assumptions upon which the field of late medieval Syro-Egyptian ‘Mamluk’ studies is built: the idea that all late medieval Syro-Egyptian objects of study are by default first and foremost connected, circumscribed and distinguished by some agency of dominant military slavery, of Mamluk-ness. Acknowledging that there may be different ways to pursue such an epistemological exercise, this essay opts for re-imagining the historical agency of what traditionally tends to be subsumed under the phenomenon of the Mamluk state. It is argued that the notions of state in modern research and of *dawla* in contemporary texts remain an issue of related analytical confusion. Engaging with this confusion in the generalising fashion of a historical sociology of late medieval Syro-Egyptian political action, this essay proposes an alternative analytical model that is inspired by Michael Chamberlain’s prioritisation of social practices of household reproduction and by Timothy Mitchell’s related understanding of the state as a structural effect of practices of social differentiation. The proposed model sees sultanic political order —the state— as process, in constant flux as the structural effect and structuring embodiment of constantly changing practices of social reproduction, of elite integration and of political distinction, in contexts that range between multipolar and unipolar social organisation at and around Cairo’s court and its military elites. The essay ends with summarily suggesting from this model how the socio-culturally structured and structuring memories of dynastic political order that had remained politically dominant for most of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were all but obliterated in the fifteenth century by a new layer of particularly ‘Mamluk’ socio-political meaning.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Before transforming into a ASK-Working Paper earlier versions of this essay were developed within the context of the project “The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate (MMS): State Formation and the Structure of Politics in Fifteenth-century Egypt and Syria”, a research project financed by the European Research Council (ERC-Starting Grant, 2009-14, ERC StG 240865 MMS, Ghent University). We wish to thank the MMS-team members —Dr Kristof D’hulster and Dr Patrick Wing in particular— for useful discussions, suggestions and feedback. Earlier versions were presented as a seminar paper in the “Eurasian Empires Program” at Leiden University in January 2013, as a conference paper at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association in October 2013 (New Orleans), and as a discussion paper at various occasions in Paris, Bonn (Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg) and Cairo (American University in Cairo) in January, February and March 2015; I am grateful to all who engaged with it in any manner for constructive comments and feedback.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. *Whither Mamluk Studies?*

In the early sixteenth century the Florentine scholar and diplomat Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) explained the political organisation of the sultanate of Cairo up to his time in somewhat surprising papal terms:

“The kingdom of the sultan (*el regno del Soldano*) [...] being entirely in the hands of soldiers (*soldati*), it follows [...] that, without regard to the people, he must keep them his friends. But you have to note that the sultan’s state (*stato*) is formed unlike all other principalities because it is similar to the Christian pontificate, which cannot be called either a hereditary principality or a new principality. For it is not the sons (*figliuoli*) of the old prince who are the heirs (*eredi*) and become the lords, but the one who is elected (*eletto*) to that rank by those who have the authority (*autorità*) for it. And this being an ancient order (*ordine antiquato*), one cannot call it a new principality, because some of the difficulties in new principalities are not in it; for if the prince (*principe*) is indeed new, the orders of that state (*li ordini di quello stato*) are old and are ordered to receive him as if he were their hereditary lord (*signore ereditario*).” (Machiavelli, Chapter XIX)

In this paragraph from Machiavelli’s manual for rulers, *il Principe*, the workings of politics in the sultanate are described in what may be defined as structuralist terms, as operating within a unique and socially transcendent political structure run by and for ‘the soldiers’ and upheld by the meritocratic ‘orders of the state’. In many ways, this early modern papal understanding’s genealogy of “the sultan’s state [that] is formed unlike all other principalities” goes back to late medieval European travellers’ varying representations of an exotically unique Egypt where the natural order of things would be standing upside down and where the Biblical story of the outsider Joseph’s rise from captivity and servitude to power would have remained a cherished political model.<sup>2</sup> In the later eighteenth century Edward Gibbon (1737-94) reformulated these understandings in the stark orientalisising discourse of his time and class by summarily claiming that “a more unjust and absurd constitution cannot be devised than that which condemns the natives of a country to perpetual servitude under the arbitrary dominion of strangers and slaves”.<sup>3</sup> Finally, in the early twenty-first century, American political scientist Francis Fukuyama repeated this assessment in somewhat more neutralised synthesising terms, explaining that his readings into the contemporary field of study of the political history of the sultanate suggested to him that “the Mamluks ran a real state, with a centralized bureaucracy and a professional army — indeed, the army *was* the state, which was both a strength and a weakness.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> See especially Haarmann, “The Mamluk System of Rule in the Eyes of Western Travellers”; idem, “Joseph’s Law”, esp. 55-62; on the Joseph narrative being not just an external topos but also internal to Syro-Egyptian discursive realities, see Yosef, “Mamluks and their Relatives in the Period of the Mamluk Sultanate”, esp. 63-9 (“Joseph’s Law”: a Reassessment”).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Irwin, “Under Western Eyes”, 27; see E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J.B. Bury (London, 1912), 6: 377-8.

<sup>4</sup> Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order*, 206.

Today, scholarly approaches to the formation and transformation of Syro-Egyptian social and cultural organisation between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries have of course little to nothing to do with the particular writings of Machiavelli, of Gibbon, or even of Fukuyama. Nevertheless, as Fukuyama was keen to notice when reading into this particular strand of history, structuralist understandings such as Machiavelli's arguably have remained the bottom line of most descriptive and analytical narratives within which scholarship on late medieval Egypt and Syria has operated. As both Gibbon's and Fukuyama's remarks suggest, that scholarship has somehow even remained indebted not just to variations of Machiavelli's structuralism, but also to that long-standing meta-narrative of a historically unique polity of military slaves, the *mamlūks*, dominating in Joseph's footsteps the ranks of Machiavelli's 'soldiers' and his transcendent 'orders of the state' at the same time. In this timeless Mamluk meta-narrative the sultanate is actually assumed to have thrived on the remarkable combination of a continuous mercantile influx of new generations of *mamlūks*, a particular patrimonial bureaucratic (*stato*) and military (*soldati*) superstructure that favoured those *mamlūks*, and the normative practice of the political domination of those continuously rejuvenated ranks of slave soldiers (a practice also referred to as 'one-generation-nobility'); in the same meta-narrative the sultanate is explained to have entered into crisis and decline when the success of that particular combination of mercantile entrepreneurship, patrimonial structures, and political norms was gradually undermined by radically changing socio-economic and geopolitical circumstances. It may furthermore be argued that the gradual emergence in recent decades of a self-consciously distinctive field of 'Mamluk Studies' (also sometimes referred to as 'Mamlukology') is really above all a symptom of the long-standing, widespread and ongoing dominance of that Mamluk meta-narrative in late medieval Syro-Egyptian social and cultural history.<sup>5</sup>

Today this multifaceted and relatively young field of Mamluk Studies undoubtedly proves to be a highly successful and important contributing partner in the larger conglomerate of social and cultural studies of the pre-modern Islamic world. Compared to many other partners in this particular niche in the humanities, it does extremely well, both in terms of the continued growth of 'Mamluk' (written and non-written) sources and output (books, articles, web resources, theses, projects, conferences and meetings) as well as in terms of the ongoing sophistication of 'Mamluk' research tools, questions and insights that are being deployed, defined and reformulated. To pre-modern Islamic history standards Mamluk studies continues to be a booming field indeed, for which it becomes increasingly difficult and hazardous to make any claims of fully mastering it, of being a 'Mamlukologist' in the true generalising and comprehensive sense of this neologism.

---

<sup>5</sup> This academic process of the rise of a separate Mamluk field that encompasses the study of all late medieval Syro-Egyptian social, cultural, political and economic phenomena (and willy nilly distinguishes these phenomena epistemologically by suggesting a Mamluk common denominator) has more or less culminated in well-known, very successful and highly commendable academic initiatives such as the Chicago-based *Mamluk Studies Resources* web-environment and its journal *Mamlūk Studies Review* (since 1997, and including an enriching and ongoing variety of survey publications on "Mamluk" art and architecture, archeology, historiography, numismatics, literature, society, religious policy and politics; on "Mamluk" Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Jerusalem and Cairo; and on "Mamluk studies" in general) ([www.mamluk.uchicago.edu](http://www.mamluk.uchicago.edu)), the Bonn-based series *Mamluk Studies* and its wider institutional Mamluk research context, or various collective survey publications that present most useful stocktakings of a field that has been "booming" for more than two decades (e.g. Conermann, "Es Boomt!"; *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus?*).

Important, rich and inspiring as this simultaneous expansion and specialisation of ‘Mamluk’ studies may be, however, these two very welcome developments also tend to manifest themselves first and foremost in the shape of cumulating, accelerating, compartmentalising and forward-looking research dynamics that expand and enhance insights into ever more and ever more complex historical phenomena. In general, however, the basic assumptions upon which the field, these developments and their newly produced knowledge are built have never really been the object of any similar process of ongoing reflection.<sup>6</sup> At least, this has never really happened, I would argue, for one of the most basic and fundamental among these assumptions: the ancient Mamluk meta-narrative and its intrinsic presupposition that all late medieval Syro-Egyptian objects of study are by default first and foremost connected, circumscribed and distinguished by some agency of dominant military slavery, of Mamluk-ness.<sup>7</sup> It is of course not necessarily problematic that the great majority of today’s late medieval Syro-Egyptian research continues to situate itself comfortably within such an —explicit or implicit— Mamluk framework. But some more critical reflection is certainly in place as to why this should not be problematic, and why it would remain a historically valid reflex for the expanding range and increasingly specialist nature of related research output to continue to try and square even the most careful and nuanced scholarly approaches to an ever more complex variety of social, economic, cultural and political phenomena with an overarching meta-narrative of Mamluk ‘soldiers’ and ‘orders of the state’. It is therefore argued here at the start of this essay that it is about time for Mamluk studies to also pursue some inward-looking and some critical thinking of what its object of study has been, is and may be, or rather of how the field has been, is and may be framing and defining both that object and itself; that the time has come to make more explicit the relationship between itself as a booming, expanding and specialising field of modern research and the plethora of phenomena that are being studied under its *aegis*; that time is overdue for some form of Mamluk reflexivity.

This essay will therefore pursue such a reflexive exercise, not by adding to that expansion from or engagement in ever more specialised ways with the substantial corpus of empirical data, but rather by trying to think with and beyond the ever more populous and accelerating treadmill of Mamluk exploration. Thinking critically about the fundamental presuppositions, frameworks, parameters and paradigms that are being used to acquire knowledge from that empirical corpus, this essay hopes to contribute one way or another to the modest shift that is slowly occurring in the space that that treadmill has been occupying for so long now.<sup>8</sup> It will not do so in order to make any head-on absolute claims about the intrinsic positive or negative value of any one way to pursue and acquire historical knowledge about late medieval Syro-Egyptian social and cultural organisation. It rather wishes to work from the assumption that there are always multiple ways and various outcomes possible, and it merely hopes to present its arguments in favour of one such a way. This will be done in the spirit that it is always worthwhile to consider such alternatives, or at least that it

---

<sup>6</sup> With —to a certain extent— the notable exceptions of late W. Clifford’s “Ubi Sumus?”; of Irwin’s more descriptive “Under Western Eyes”; and of St. Conermann’s call to redefine the discipline of “Mamlukology as Cultural Studies” and as “Historical Anthropology”, as explained in his “Quo Vadis, Mamlukology?”.

<sup>7</sup> With the very meaningful exception of Thorau, “Einige kritische Bemerkungen zum sogenannten ‘mamlūk phemonenon’”.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Conermann, “Quo Vadis, Mamlukology?”.



is enriching, even essential, to remain conscious of the fact that any of these alternatives' knowledge outcomes always involves the making of well-informed choices that deserve to be made explicit, even at the very basic level of the choice in favour of the Mamluk meta-narrative.

The working hypothesis that will serve as a (falsifiable!) premise for this essay's argument is that late medieval Syro-Egyptian scholarship's comfortable embeddedness in the Mamluk meta-narrative indeed involves such a choice, and that the, often vaguely and unconsciously adopted, act of choosing the Mamluk way is always externally imposed upon rather than internally derived from this scholarship's extremely diverse objects of study. It is argued here then that there always has been, and that there continues to be, a 'Mamlukisation' of both scholarship and objects of study, that both one way or another always tend to be constructed as 'Mamluk' subjects and objects of research from a Mamluk *a priori*. The point is then not that this process of 'Mamlukisation' would be necessarily wrong, but rather that it may well be extremely liberating and revealing to scratch beyond the surface of that Mamluk meta-narrative, to think outside of its pervasive frameworks and paradigms, and to try and reach for its objects of study along different pathways.

It is furthermore proposed here that this reaching for different pathways may benefit from understanding the process of 'Mamlukisation' more precisely as scholarship's choice to presuppose a bipolar Mamluk state-society construct as the defining framework for all late medieval Syro-Egyptian research, as though state and society are connected in a dichotomous and time-less 'Mamluk'-ness. In general, imaginations of the state-society relation in late medieval Syro-Egypt have certainly moved on from Machiavelli's and Gibbon's simple one-directionality to descriptive or analytical acknowledgements of a more complex symbiosis.<sup>9</sup> But the basic idea has always remained that of a mutually exclusive structural bipolarity of, on the one hand, a Mamluk State (or Empire, or Sultanate, or 'order of the state') —thought of as a socially transcendent, coherent and hegemonic political superstructure that was mainly manned and dominated by a 'one-generation nobility' of 'soldati', by *mamlūks*— and, on the other hand, a Mamluk Society —considered as a similarly bounded, organised and coherent separate structure of varieties of social groups that were unified in their domination, even their production, as some kind of Mamluk (but not *mamlūk*) subjects, by some external agency of that State of 'the' (predominantly *mamlūk*) 'Mamluks'.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Lev, "Symbiotic Relations"; Denoix, "Les sultanats".

<sup>10</sup> This reminds also of Donald Richards' regularly cited acknowledgement, published in 1998, that "throughout this piece I have used *mamlūk* to denote an individual who has that legal and social status and distinguished it from the adjective Mamluk (with a capital 'M' and without italics), which is used to describe *the totality of the state, society and culture* etc." (Richards, "Mamluk amirs and their families and households", 40), and his —to me at least— quite puzzling explanation for that distinction by the fact that "there is, of course, *a social and cultural reality* which we call Mamluk, which is far from being dependent on the input of those who were in the strict sense *mamlūks*." (p. 33) (italics mine) Following Richards, this Mamluk totality now tends to be very easily defined from this perspective of what it is not, ie. *mamlūk*, all too easily forgetting to explain what a connecting and typifying Mamluk factor in social and cultural reality then actually would stand for, or at least what justifies the continued use of such a factor to group and explain realities which are "far from dependent" on a *mamlūk* input. The assumption seems to be that a valid meaning and justification derive from this particular Mamluk state-society dichotomy, where some socially transcendent Mamluk phenomenon —either the 'Mamluk' State or its ruling elite, 'the Mamluks'— made for a Mamluk social and cultural reality; however, both Mamluk State and ruling elite again only appear here as existing as coherent historical categories in their construction through some residual factor of the same problematic *mamlūk* denominator ("Perhaps at times there is a tendency to confuse the *mamlūk* element with the Mamluk state as a whole" [p. 40]), which makes for a, indeed, quite puzzling circular argument.

Again, the point is not that this dichotomous State-Society conceptualisation is necessarily wrong or invalid, but rather that it involves a particular hermeneutic choice that has fed directly into and has been fed by the process of ‘Mamlukisation’. Any intentions of reflexivity and of attempting to transform basic choices such as these into explicit instead of implicit acts of scholarship therefore have to start not just with trying to operate beyond this Mamluk *a priori*, but also with trying to think beyond this decisive structural bipolarity. There undoubtedly are quite a number of epistemological turns that may be taken to pursue this kind of problematisation.<sup>11</sup> The one that will be taken by this reflexive essay aims at understanding differently the historical agency, or agencies, of what traditionally tends to be subsumed under the extremely vexed phenomenon of that Mamluk State.

---

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Conermann, “Quo Vadis, Mamlukology?”; Von Hees, “Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology”.

## 1.2. *Whither the Mamluk State?*

It can be argued that also in its imagination of the Mamluk State the field of Mamluk studies tends to continue to adhere in explicit and implicit ways to some adapted form of Machiavelli's (and, for that matter, Gibbon's) understanding of the autonomous, transcendent and enduring nature of 'the kingdom of the sultan': "this being an ancient order (*ordine antiquato*), one cannot call it a new principality". Similar understandings of the Mamluk State continue to prevail, as though it was some ancient, solid and grand manor with clearly arranged halls, corridors and rooms, but also with many annexes and an impressive demesne and with all kinds of inhabitants, tenants, servants and visitors. Today, the booming study of a growing body of available source material makes this manor look more like an intricate palace complex, for which extensions, renovation works, reorganisations of rooms and functions, changes in decoration and techniques, and phases of dilapidation have been and continue to be minutely recorded. In recent years, scholarly attention has moreover shifted from detailing this structural complex to prioritising the identification of inhabitants and their patterns of occupation. In general, however, the basic layout of this grand house of State —some systemic form of that combination of a patrimonial power structure (army and bureaucracy), a permanent influx of *mamlūk* military manpower, and a political culture organised around a Mamluk 'one-generation-nobility'— is considered to have stood the test of time, even when its outlook and inhabitants regularly transformed.<sup>12</sup>

Again, this longstanding understanding of the Mamluk State should not necessarily be problematic. It does however involve once more a particular hermeneutic choice that is highly interconnected with the Mamluk meta-narrative that this essay is trying to escape from. More importantly, perhaps, Mamluk studies generally tends to situate itself one way or another within a rather hazy theoretical framework for explaining what justifies the choice for that comfortable and familiar house of state. This tendency to awarding a truly defining historical agency (both in the Mamluk meta-narrative and in the bipolar state-society construction, and thus in all social and cultural realities that tend to be approached mainly through these prisms) to a phenomenon —the state— that carries a great variety of modern and pre-modern meanings, without really making presuppositions and choices of meanings explicit or without clearly accounting for the validity and complexity of implied causalities, can obviously be highly problematic.<sup>13</sup>

Since the early 1990s (with roots going back to the late 1960s) there have been published a handful of very interesting and inspiring contributions to the political sociology of late medieval Egypt and Syria. Amid this general rule of theoretical vagueness they stand as important exceptions, which have been taken seriously by some and refuted by others. At the same time the complex particularities of their suggestions unfortunately also tend to be neglected by many. These rich engagements with the social theory of power relations, by Winslow Clifford and by Michael Chamberlain above all, share a prioritisation of patronage and negotiation or competition as key

---

<sup>12</sup> For most useful surveys and representatives of this approach, see Fuess, "Mamluk Politics"; Humphreys, "The Politics of the Mamluk Sultanate"; Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*.

<sup>13</sup> See Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State*.

social practices for their understandings of socio-political and cultural organisation.<sup>14</sup> However, for all the important subtleties and novelties of their insights, they continue to operate one way or another within that same basic layout of this ancient Mamluk house of State, which persists in their understandings as some more or less abstract patrimonial structure within which historical action is to be situated.

In *State Formation and the Structure of Politics in Mamlūk Syro-Egypt* Clifford approaches the state from the normative functionalism of “a widespread hierarchical administration of patronage ...[that] contemporary Mamluk chroniclers referred to as the constitutional order (*nizām*) of the state”.<sup>15</sup> In this analysis, the State stands as a structuralist Leviathan, dynamic on the microsocial level of elite interactions, but contained by a macrostructural context of an unchanging constitutional order (*nizām*), imagined by Clifford as the hierarchical order of one coherent patrimonial power structure of “the Classical Mamluk state” and its ruling caste, “the Mamluks”.<sup>16</sup>

In *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus* Chamberlain takes a more practical and far more minimalist approach, because for him the state is merely an “abstraction” for an *ad hoc* apparatus —“the bureaucracy, [...] such entities as the sultanate and the caliphate, [...] the legal and ‘public’ aspects of power”— that is one among several instruments of control and organisation for the real agents in the political process: the military leaders (amirs) and their households.<sup>17</sup> In this capacity, Chamberlain presents a tantalising line of thought, in which an

---

<sup>14</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*; Clifford, “*Ubi Sumus?*”; idem, *State Formation*. See also the integration of similar patronage-oriented approaches in the general surveys of Jonathan Berkey: “Culture and Society during the Late Middle Ages”, esp. 377-379; *The Formation of Islam*, esp. pp. 203-215 (“Common Patterns of social and political organization”); and in Sievert, “Family, friend or foe?”.

<sup>15</sup> Clifford, *State Formation*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> See esp. Clifford, *State Formation*, pp. 46-47, 54-62. “The Classical Mamluk state” returns repeatedly as a particular, structuralist and coherent category of analysis and of steadfast historical reality throughout the book, as on p. 46 (“The Classical Mamluk state was in essence a vast clientelistic structure or patronate”), p. 216 (“the balance-of-power-oriented Classical Mamluk state”), and p. 220 (“the early Classical Mamluk state evolved as a dynamic but coherent political structure based on sociopolitical assumptions that were egalitarian yet hierarchical, collective yet utilitarian, and non-ascriptive as well as kin-oriented.”); “the Mamluks” equally make their appearance on numerous occasions as a coherent category of analysis and of some vague reality of collective action, as on p. 17 (“This collective sense of moral economy, guaranteed by the operation of *nizām*, acted on the Mamluks as a macrostructural constraint, legitimating certain issues in the structuring of social power while limiting the degree and form of conflict over them”), p. 19 (The way in which the Mamluks structured their social power...”), p. 46 (“The Mamluks, however, avoided in their turn pre-state fissioning...”), and p. 47 (“For among the Mamluks the principal purpose of the state was similarly to mediate the downward flow of patronage and the upward flow of loyalty among multiple networks of paramilitary groups in order to neutralize unrestrained factional competition for resources and, thus, maintain state structure.”). The Leviathan parallel is suggested by Clifford himself, when he concluded that “Like Hobbes’ Leviathan, then, it might be said of the Mamluks that they craftily avoided disintegration through the same ‘introduction of that restraint upon themselves ... (which) is the foresight of their own preservation’” (p. 220, quoting Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Macpherson [London, 1987], p. 223.)

<sup>17</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, pp. 44-51, 60 (“The state in this period was not an impersonal entity, possessing specialized agencies, capable of formulating long-term strategies to pursue political goals. The politics of the city consisted of continuously renegotiated relationships among the ruling household, the important amīrs and their households, and civilian elites with specialized knowledge or religious prestige. If we are to speak of the state at all, it is as an abstraction of the personal ties of alliance, dependence, and dominance among these three groups. Rather than look for the mechanisms by which the state, as the primary embodiment and agent of power, diffused power from the top down, we need to understand a more complex situation. Studies of the bureaucracy, of such entities as the sultanate and the caliphate, of the legal and ‘public’ aspects of power, are undeniably useful in themselves. These, however, do not cover the entirety, or even perhaps the most important part, of relations among power, cultural practices, and the

absolute analytical prioritisation of elite households and their urban practices of social reproduction reduces the state to no more than a mere historiographical abstraction of particular and partial sets of social relations. The analytical simplicity of the traditional state-society bipolarity is thus exchanged for the complex agency of one multipolar local or regional system of urban social practice. However, simultaneous with this disappearance of the Mamluk state as a category of historical action, it makes its re-appearance in surprising ways as a category of social identification and periodisation. Throughout the book Chamberlain resorted to the random use of such generalising categories as “Ayyūbids and Mamlūks”, “Ayyūbid and Mamlūk warrior households”, and the “Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods”.<sup>18</sup> Almost inadvertently, then, a residual, indeed ‘abstracted’, characteristic of that one Mamluk house of State —identified as though on a par with its alleged Ayyubid (lineage-based) dynastic predecessor— was arguably retained, the Mamluk meta-narrative continued to loom at the background of Chamberlain’s analyses, and the process of ‘Mamlukisation’ also affected his thinking from social practice in ways that demonstrate parallels with how it impacted on Clifford’s structuralist approach, and on Mamluk studies’ approach of the state in general. In this essay’s search for reflexivity, for widening up the available options to choose from, and for exploring a different understanding of the historical agency, or agencies, of phenomena that traditionally tend to be subsumed under that unitary model of the Mamluk house of State, important theoretical advances, such as Clifford’s and Chamberlain’s, certainly have to be incorporated. But at the same time this essay will also need to try and move beyond them to achieve its purpose.

---

social strategies of groups. Such approaches have been useful in medieval Islamic history only with so much qualification that they lose the very precision they are intended to introduce.”)

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, p. 11 (“There is perhaps more literary, epigraphic, and material evidence on Damascus in the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods than on any other city of the high medieval Middle East, with the possible exception of Cairo.”), p. 37 (“Damascus from Nūr al-Dīn through the Mamlūks”), p. 38 (“Ideologically, Zangīds, Ayyūbids, and Mamlūks claimed the loyalties and resources of the cities as leaders of *jihād*..., agents of the caliph, and supporters of Islam.”), p. 40 (“Ayyūbid and Mamlūk rulers in principle denied their military supporters any autonomy or derived sovereignty.”), p. 44 (“Rule by warrior households and competition among them characterized both the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods.”), p. 48 (“Ayyūbid and Mamlūk urbanism was largely an intrusive and opportunistic architecture of single buildings.”), p. 60 (“Ayyūbid and Mamlūk warrior households brought few new political or administrative practices to Damascus.”).

## 2. Contemporary notions of *dawla*.

A useful starting point to both benefit from and move beyond these modern Mamluk, or ‘Mamlukised’, narratives of political power and authority in late medieval Syria and Egypt may actually be found in late medieval usages of a key signifier for notions of political power and authority: *dawla*. In the course of the many centuries of Arabic and Islamic history the Arabic noun *dawla* has appeared as a generic qualifier in many different contexts of rule, with complex meanings that are not always easily rendered in other languages. In its essence, in these contexts of rule *dawla* is always —and continues to be— meant to refer to a particular political formation’s temporary local monopoly of violence and of access to resources.<sup>19</sup> Often translated as “state”, this intended meaning reminds indeed of modern Weberian definitions of the concept of the state, focussing on issues of violence, of legitimacy, and of territoriality.<sup>20</sup> But *dawla* is always also imbued with the transcendent, religious meaning of a God-given ‘turn’ —the literal translation of the Arabic noun *dawla*— or term of rule in the monotheist trajectory of human history.<sup>21</sup> “In the mental structures and categories of perception and thought”<sup>22</sup> of those who deal with *dawla*, and in the multiple subjectivities of their meaningful uses of and encounters with it, *dawla* therefore appeals to the idea of a universal “empire” as much as to that of a territorial “state”.<sup>23</sup> Late medieval Syro-Egyptian communication, at least, entirely subscribes to these complex binary meanings. In fact, it operationalises *dawla* on two even more distinct semantic levels, the one appealing to some

---

<sup>19</sup> As the lexicographer Ibn Manẓūr repeated in the later thirteenth century in his *Lisān al-‘arab*, “*al-dawla* and *al-dūla* similarly [mean] a turn [to share] in wealth, and [to prevail] in war; some say that *al-dūla*, with *u*, [refers to a turn to share] in wealth, and that *al-dawla*, with *a*, [refers to a turn to prevail] in war; some say [that] they are both [meaning] the same in both [cases], whether they be constructed with *u* or with *a*; some say [that] with *u* [the noun refers to a turn to share in wealth and to prevail war] in the hereafter, and with *a* in this world [...]

 (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘arab*, 11:252); see also Lane’s similar rendering of wider discussions of the term *al-dawla* by Arabic lexicographers: “[...] and [particularly] ... a turn (عُقْبَة) [to share] in wealth, and [to prevail] in war; as also دَوْلَة ... or each is a subst. [in an absolute sense, app. as meaning a turn of taking, or having, a thing] ... or دَوْلَة is in wealth; and دَوْلَة is in war ... this latter being when one of two armies defeats the other and then is defeated; or when one party is given a turn to prevail ... over the other; ... or دَوْلَة relates to the present life or world; and دَوْلَة, to that which is to come: ... and it is said that the former of these two words signifies *prevalence, predominance, mastery, or victory*; and the latter, the *transition of wealth, blessing or good, from one people, or party, to another* ... — [In post-classical works, it signifies also *A dynasty: and a state, an empire or a monarchy.*] [...] (Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, p. 934-5)

<sup>20</sup> See Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State”, 4 [“I would say, using a variation around Max Weber’s famous formula, that the state is an X (to be determined) which successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical and symbolic (*sic*) violence over a definite territory and over the totality of the corresponding population”]; Bourdieu’s reformulation was adopted and referred to in Karen Barkey’s *Empire of Difference*, in an equally highly relevant passage defining the notion of the state in an analytical context of Ottoman state formation (p. 32: “I adopt a Weberian definition of the state in which it is an organization that successfully claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force over a given territory, with the accent on ‘legitimate’.”).

<sup>21</sup> Lassner, *The Middle East Remembered*, 64-94 (“Chapter 3: *Dawlah*: Transformative Politics and Historical Memory”, concluding that “the medieval concept of *dawlah* can mean both a revolution that results in transformative change and a dynastic polity of truly imperial dimensions. ... Because, from the very outset of Islam, the *ummah* was to have embraced all Muslims regardless of geographical setting or linguistic and ethnic background ... a true *dawlah*, by its very nature, had to transform governance and reinforce proper religious practice at both the center and margins of Muslim rule, much as the Prophet attempted to do with his ‘revolutionary’ call.” [p. 89]). See also Lane, *Lexicon*, 934 (“A turn, mutation, change, or vicissitude of time, or fortune ... from an unfortunate and evil, to a good and happy, state or condition”) and his remark that “[In post-classical works, it signifies also *A dynasty: and a state, an empire or a monarchy.*]” (p. 935); Rosenthal, “Dawla”.

<sup>22</sup> Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State”, 4.

<sup>23</sup> For “universal empire” as “an elusive and much coveted prize among monarchs in history”, see Bang & Kolodziejczyk., *Universal Empire*.

universalising notion of structural continuity and the other to a particular reality of endless practical change.

### 2.1 *Dawlat al-Atrāk: narratives of order, continuity and structure*

It hardly needs any repetition that the late medieval Syro-Egyptian polity that today tends to be referred to as the Mamluk sultanate was identified by contemporary historians and observers above all as the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*, the *Dawlat al-Turk*, or the *Dawla al-Turkiyya*.<sup>24</sup> There were obviously substantial variations across authors, texts and genres about what that designation with *Dawlat al-Atrāk* actually stood for, in temporal as well as in spatial terms. Notwithstanding these variations in the detail, however, it is clear that all who used the label of *Dawlat al-Atrāk* meant it to evoke one way or another the correlation between the transcendent political continuity of a *dawla* and the Syro-Egyptian social order topped by a distinct military identity of *Atrāk*.<sup>25</sup> In many ways this vague contemporary notion of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* therefore parallels the equally vague modern conceptualisations of that Mamluk house of state as the “ancient order” of “the kingdom of the sultan ... being entirely in the hands of soldiers”.

Just as for many modern observers, also for contemporaries these vague meanings of the political order and legitimate continuity of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* appeared in their most tangible and distinctive shapes when they were clearly arranged as the halls, corridors and rooms of the house of state. A telling illustration of how that vague idea of one, transcendent, and continuous political order was considered to materialise in concrete structural forms may be found in the political chronicle *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk miṣr wa-l-qāhira*, by one of Egypt’s foremost historians of the fifteenth century, the courtier-scholar Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Ibn Taghrī Birdī (1411-1470). One of the many descriptions of an accession to the throne of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* in this chronicle concerns the beginning of the reign of al-Mu’ayyad Aḥmad (ca. 1431-1488), who briefly succeeded his father, sultan al-Ashraf Īnāl, in 1461.

He is the 37th sultan among the rulers of the Turks and of their offspring (*min mulūk al-Turk wa-awlādihim*) in the Egyptian domains, and [he is] the thirteenth [sultan] among the Circassians and their offspring. He was made sultan on Wednesday 14 Jumādā I-Ūlā of the year 865 [25 February 1461].... In the early morning of this day, al-Zaynī Khushqadam al-Aḥmadī al-Ṭawāshī al-Sāqī al-Zāhirī descended [from the Cairo citadel] to summon the four [chief] judges to the citadel, while somebody else descended to summon the caliph, al-Mustanjid bi-llāh Yūsuf. Each of them hurried to ascend to the citadel, until all had ascended and taken a seat in the vestibule of al-Duhaysha palace at the Citadel of the Mountain. The

---

<sup>24</sup> Ayalon, “Baḥrī Mamluks, Burjī Mamlūks”. See also Ayalon, “The European-Asiatic Steppe”, 47-48; Lewis, “Egypt and Syria”, 214; and most recently Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*, 182 (“Le sultanat mamelouk d’Egypte et de Syrie n’a cessé d’être la ‘dynastie des Turcs’ (*dawlat al-turk*, *dawlat al-atrak*) aux yeux de ses sujets de langue arabe.”)

<sup>25</sup> This identity is explained today either as a discursively constructed and inclusive identity of political distinction through some form of ‘Turkishness’ (Richards, “Mamluk amirs and their families and households”; Van Steenbergen, “Nomen est Omen?”), or as an exclusive political identity derived from shared Turkic ethno-linguistic and servile origins (Ayalon, “Baḥrī Mamluks, Burjī Mamlūks”; Yosef, “*Dawlat al-Atrāk* or *Dawlat al-Mamālīk*?”); Julien Loiseau recently formulated a medial position, arguing for a more inclusive “ethnicisation” from the end of the fourteenth century onwards of an essentially exclusive identity, the basic ingredients of which were, according to him, “conversion to Islam, professional ‘turkishness’, *mamlūk* filiation” (Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*, 196-200, 205).

caliph and His Excellency, the commander-in-chief Aḥmad, sat down at the head of the council, while the judges were each seated according to their ranks. They discussed the accession to the sultanate of al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad [Aḥmad], because his father, al-Malik al-Ashraf Īnāl, had not yet designated him as his successor in the sultanate. The *qāḍī* Muḥibb al-Dīn b. Shihna, the head of the royal chancery, said that he should be appointed in the sultanate representing his father as long as the latter was alive and independently after his demise. Those present did not approve of this. All then stood up and entered the Duhaysha palace, in which al-Malik al-Ashraf Īnāl was lying, in order to hear what he had to say regarding the installation of his son Aḥmad. The *amīr* Yūnus, the executive secretary, addressed him more than once concerning the succession, but [the sultan] was unable to respond. They all stood beside him for quite some time, while he said nothing. Then all left the palace and returned to his son, al-Mu'ayyad, who was sitting at the window in the vestibule of al-Duhaysha. They explained the situation to him, and then they returned to al-Malik al-Ashraf a second time, and repeated the question to him. The sultan kept silent, until, after some time, he spoke, saying in Turkish, 'Ughlim ughlim!', meaning, 'My son, my son!' Those present said that this was a sign of the vesting of his son, and that he was not capable of saying any more than this. They then immediately left and returned to the [vestibule of] the Duhaysha, where the head of the royal chancery occupied himself with the oath-taking from the *amīrs*. Those *amirs* who were present swore clear and binding oaths, and none of them undertook it to pretend to swear or to cheat, as they were not capable of that, and also [because] the one whom allegiance was sworn to was intelligent and the head of the royal chancery was a knowledgeable man. Among the things that were sworn there was that they would once perform the *ḥajj* on foot in these or those circumstances, divorce [their wife], manumit [their slaves], *etcetera*.

Once the oath-taking was done and [once] allegiance was sworn, every one of the *amīrs*, of the favourites, and of the notables stood up and hurried to put on the *kalaftā*[-hat] and the white *tatarī*[-coat], as was the custom. The black caliphal robe of honour for the sultanate was then brought forward, and a black silk turban was winded for him. Then his Excellency al-Shihābī rose to his feet, he immediately donned the robe and the turban, and he mounted the ceremonial horse with a golden saddle and a brocaded headgear at the gate of al-Duhaysha. The amirs and the notables walked in front of him through the al-Ḥawsh gate, until they passed by the gate of the Sultan's Palaces. There, he was met by the royal chanters (*jāwūshiya*) and by the warden of the armoury (*zardkāsh*) bringing the royal sunshine ("the dome and the bird" - *al-qubba wa-l-ṭayr*) and the [other] emblems of sovereignty with him. With the sultan's permission, the *amīr* Khushqadam al-Nāṣirī al-Mu'ayyadī, the *amīr* of arms, took the royal sunshine and carried it over his head while walking. The sultan proceeded in a royal procession of great and extraordinary grandeur, with all the *amīrs* and the *qāḍīs* walking in front of him, except for the caliph, al-Mustanjid bi-llāh (he [did not walk but] mounted one of the sultan's horses and he proceeded with it for some strides; then he had to dismount, for it was too strong for him). [The sultan] proceeded thus, until he dismounted at the gate of the Sultan's Castle of the Citadel of the Mountain. He entered and he sat down on the royal throne [inside the Castle]. Never have [my] eyes witnessed someone prettier and more handsome than he was in his black robe of honour, for he was of a blond complexion while the robe was black, [leaving an impressive impression] in combination with his attractive bearing\* and his tall stature (it may well be that there was nobody of the troops at that time



who came close to him in tallness of stature). When he had taken a seat onto the royal throne, the amirs kissed the ground before him and the drums were beaten. Instantly it was proclaimed in the streets of Cairo that one should pray for al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad Abū l-Faṭḥ Aḥmad. Simultaneously, he bestowed a robe of honour with a white-and-green double-sided silken overcoat with bands of embroidered decoration upon the caliph, and he gave him a horse with golden saddle and embroidered headgear, and he donated him [as *iqṭā'*] the village of Minbāba in al-Jīza.<sup>26</sup>

Different sets of basic structural forms that made for the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*—including these officials, places, customs, apparel and rituals that performed in Ibn Taghrī Birdī's narrative the transformation of Aḥmad from royal son into the 37th sultan of the *dawla*'s memory—appeared in varieties of ways in all of the era's historiographical texts, often structuring key moments in the narratives, as in the case of Aḥmad's and of many others' successions to the sultanate, but also at times of political conflict and of other transitions and transformations of power. Often, these structural forms even appeared at key moments in the texts themselves, such as at the beginning of particular textual units, especially those covering an annal or a reign, as in one of the most important works of Syro-Egyptian history, the *kitāb al-Sulūk li-ma'rifat duwal al-mulūk* by the Egyptian scholar Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī (ca. 1363-1442). In the last of the four volumes of this foremost annalistic chronicle of late medieval Egypt's political and socio-economic history almost every year's chronographic narrative opens with explicitly identifying some of these more concrete forms of political order and continuity, structuring the text as much as the social realities that it was claiming to represent. By way of example, the following description of the year's hierarchies of power open the annal for the year 837 (1433-1434):

“At the beginning of this year the caliph of the time is al-Mu'taḍid bi-llāh Dāwud; the sultan of Islam in Egypt, Syria, the Hijaz and Cyprus is al-Malik al-Ashraf Barsbāy; and the grand *amīr* is Sūdun min 'Abd al-Raḥmān; the *amīr* of arms Aynāl al-Jakamī, the *amīr* of the council Aqbughā al-Timrāzī, the head of guards the *amīr* Timrāz al-Qirmishī, the *amīr* of the horse Jaqmaq, the executive secretary Urkumās al-Zāhirī, the grand chamberlain Qurqmās, the vizier and major-domo Karīm al-Dīn 'Abd al-Karīm Ibn Kātib al-Manākh, the confidential secretary Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn al-Bārīzī, the controller of the army the *qāḍī* Zayn al-Dīn 'Abd al-Bāsiṭ—he is the mighty effective manager of the *dawla*—, and the controller of privy funds Sa'd al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Ibn Kātib Jakam. The chief judges remained [as before], and the viceroys and the rulers of the different regions are as they have been mentioned for the preceding year.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 218-220. For the English translation of Arabic names for official positions and places in this and in subsequent text fragments, I followed Popper, *Egypt and Syria under the Circassian Sultans*, esp. 115-120.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:902. The first occurrence of this type of political list in the *Sulūk* is at the beginning of the annal for the year 809 (1406-1407) (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:27), which is the first full annal in book four (which only begins in Rabī' I 808 [September 1405], with the accession of sultan 'Abd al-'Azīz).

The same structuring technique had been applied about a century earlier in another grand annalistic work of Syro-Egyptian history, the multi-volume *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmi‘ al-ghurar* by Ibn Aybak al-Dawādārī (fl. 1309-1335). In this literary chronicle’s eighth and final volume — entirely dedicated to the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (r. 1310-1341), “the one with whom the throne of kingship was honoured and whom the *dawlat al-turk* had the good fortune of receiving”— the annals reproduce similar opening hierarchies of power, as in the case of the annal for the year 735 (1335), which begins as follows:

“The caliph is the *imām* al-Mustakfī bi-llāh Abū l-Rabī‘ Sulaymān, Commander of the Faithful, and our lord the most powerful sultan, al-Malik al-Nāṣir, is the sultan of Islam — may God prolong his days until the end of time [...]. The *amīr* chamberlain is the *amīr* Badr al-Dīn Amīr Mas‘ūd b. Khaṭīr —may God be good to him and may He augment his beneficence towards him—, his brother the *amīr* Sharaf al-Dīn Maḥmūd being a chamberlain, just as the *amīr* Sayf al-Dīn Jārīk; the *amīr* of the adjutants is the *amīr* Shihāb al-Dīn Ṣārūjā, and the speaker for issues of the vizierate that concern the collection of funds from the departmental bureaus is the *amīr* Sayf al-Dīn Alakuz al-Nāṣirī, with the assistance of Badr al-Dīn Lu’lu’; and the *amīr* Rukn al-Dīn al-Aḥmadī is an *amīr* of the armour bearers, just as the amir Sayf al-Dīn Urum Bughā and the *amīr* Sayf al-Dīn Balabān al-Ḥasanī; the *amīr* Sayf al-Dīn Āqbughā ‘Abd al-Wāḥid is a major-domo, with the command over the sultan’s *mamlūks* —may God almighty bless them— being joined to him after the dismissal of the eunuch ‘Anbar al-Saḥratī; and the controller in the victorious departmental bureau for the victorious armies is the *qāḍī* Makīn al-Dīn b. Qarwīna. The viceroys in Syria are the amir Sayf al-Dīn Tankiz, the lord of the *amīrs*, in well-protected Damascus, ...; the amir ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Alṭunbughā in Aleppo, the amir Jamāl al-Dīn Āqūsh Nā’ib al-Karak in Tripoli, the *amīr* Sayf al-Dīn *al-ḥājj* Aruqtāy in Safed, and the amir Sayf al-Dīn Ṭaynāl in Gaza. The rulers of the different regions are, in Mecca, ..., and the lord of Medina, ... and the lord of Yemen ... , and the lord of Mardin ..., and the lord of Ḥamā ..., and the lord of the region from Iraq up to Khurasan is the king [Ilkhan] Abū Sa‘īd ... and the lord of the lands of Barka [of the Mongol Golden Horde] is the king Uzbek ... and the other kings of the Mongols are as they and their names have been mentioned for the preceding years.”<sup>28</sup>

Almost two centuries later, in the early sixteenth century, in one of the sultanate’s last Egyptian chronicles, the *Badā’i‘ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i‘ al-fuhūr*, by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Iyās (1448-ca. 1524), the same type of hierarchies of power again provided some years’ reports with the appearance of textual and historical order and continuity, as in the opening lines of the annal for the year 922 (1516), the year of the *dawla*’s succumbing to military conquest from the Ottoman north.

The first day of Muḥarram was on a Monday. On that day, the caliph of the time was the Commander of the Faithful al-Mutawakkil ‘alā llāh Muḥammad, son of the Commander of the Faithful al-Mustamsik bi-llāh Ya‘qūb —may both their glory become high; on that day,

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Aybak al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar*, 9: 379-380; for the *dawlat al-turk* citation, see 8: 7 (I am grateful to Reuven Amitai for drawing my attention to a similar passage in this chronicle).

the sultan of Egypt was al-Malik al-Ashraf Abū l-Naṣr Qānṣawh min Baybirdī al-Ghūrī — may his victory be great. As for the four lord *qādīs*: the Shafī'i *qādī* was the chief judge Kamāl al-Dīn al-Ṭawīl, the Hanafī *qādī* was the chief judge Ḥusām al-Dīn Maḥmūd, son of the chief judge Saray al-Dīn 'Abd al-Barr b. al-Shiḥna al-Ḥalabī, the Malikite *qādī* was the chief judge Muḥyī l-Dīn Yaḥyā, son of the chief judge Burhān al-Dīn al-Damīrī, and the Hanbali *qādī* was the chief judge Shihāb al-Dīn al-Futūḥī —may God strengthen Islam with them. As for the number of the *amīrs* commanders, their number on that day was twenty-six *amīrs* commanders of 1,000, including six holders of office; they were the *atābak* Sūdūn min Jānī Bak al-'Ajamī as grand *amīr*, (the position of *amīr* of arms was vacant on that day) the *amīr* Urkmās min Ṭurabāy as *amīr* of the council, the noble al-Nāṣirī Muḥammad —scion of the august prince— as *amīr* of the horse, the *amīr* Sūdūn b. Yashbak al-Dawādārī as head of guards, the *amīr* Anaṣbāy min Muṣṭafā as grand chamberlain, and the amir Ṭūmān Bāy min Qānṣawh, the sultan's nephew, as grand *amīr* executive secretary, combining the grand executive secretaryship with the grand major-domoship, and as grand inspector of the provinces. As for the *amīrs* commanders not holding an office, they were: .... As for the viceroys in the regions of Syria and Aleppo: the noble al-Sayfī Sībāy min Bukhtujā was viceroy of Damascus, the noble al-Sayfī Khāyir Bak min Malbāy was viceroy of Aleppo, Timrāz al-Ashrafī was viceroy of Tripoli, Jān Birdī al-Ghazzālī was viceroy of Hama, Yūsuf —who had been viceroy of Jerusalem— was transferred to the viceroyship of Safed, and the viceroy of Gaza was Dūlāt Bāy —the viceroyship of Jerusalem had been added to it—, and al-Karak was part of the viceroyship of Gaza. As for the *amīrs* of forty who were holders of office, they were ... As for the *amīrs* who were heads of guards, they were many and we will not detail them here for fear of length. As for the holders of office from the leading officials and turban-wearers, they were the lord and *qādī* al-Muḥyī Maḥmūd b. Ajā al-Ḥalabī, the noble confidential secretary and the controller of the bureau of documents —may God the Exalted strengthen him—, his assistant the lord al-Shihābī Aḥmad b. al-Jī'ān, the lord and *qādī* Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Qādir, known as al-Qaṣrawī, the controller of the noble army, al-Zaynī 'Abd al-Qādir and his brother Abū Bakr, the sons of al-Malikī, the two accountants of the bureau of the noble army, the lord al-'Alā'ī 'Alī b. al-Imām, controller of the noble privy funds and controller of pious trust foundations, and the vizierate was vacant at this time, due to the dismissal of Yūsuf al-Badrī ... and other such officials and notables of the *dawla*. As for the notables from among the eunuchs ... During this year the sultan's private retinue grew to about 1,200 favourites, [chosen] from among his purchased [*mamlūks*]; a large contingent from them were established as holders of offices, including as executive secretary assistants, as arms bearers, as armourers, as equerries, as cup bearers and in all kinds of similar offices. During this year the number of amirs of forty and of ten grew beyond that of 300 amirs. The army had grown, but the regular income from fiscal tribute was low.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr*, 2-5.

These recurrent engagements with a particular political order by al-Maqrīzī, Ibn al-Dawādārī, and Ibn Iyās, by many of their colleagues,<sup>30</sup> and by their fourteenth-, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Arabic readerships, bespeak the shared imaginations of hierarchies of power that structured not just their wider Muslim worlds, but also their closer Syro-Egyptian surroundings.<sup>31</sup> These local hierarchies are presented as having the potential of a substantial staff turnover from one year to another, and thus as requiring regular informational updates. They also appear as acquiring new and substantially adapted guises between the early fourteenth and the early sixteenth centuries. But all three randomly chosen lists, as well as Ibn Taghrī Birdī's re-enactment of Aḥmad's enthronement in 1461, also display continuities that may be interpreted as the basic contours of the forms that embodied, for contemporary historians and observers, the *longue durée* of that particular political order of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*. The supreme sultanate and the military amirate appear thus time and again as this order's key institutions of politico-military leadership, while the Cairo caliphate and the Shari'a, as upheld by *qāḍī*-representatives of the four 'schools' of Sunni Islam, appear as its key value systems. With some imagination, these key structural forms may even be expanded with Cairo's Citadel of the Mountain and its many local offshoots in Damascus, Aleppo and elsewhere as key sites of power, with tributary agricultural production and trans-regional trade (including in *mamlūks*) as defining, politically crucial economic and military resource flows, and with narratives of religious championship and military victory as informing the legitimating myths of this particular political order's origins and continuity.

It may actually even be argued that certain combinations of these key features were reproduced as a subtext of structuring political and textual order not only for contemporary historiography and related writings, but also for important parts of some of the gigantic encyclopaedic and administrative normative texts of the era, such as the *Masālik al-abṣār* by Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī (d. 1349), the *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā* by al-Qalqashandī (d. 1418), and perhaps even the *Nihāyat al-arab* by al-Nuwayrī (d. ca. 1332).<sup>32</sup> Many of these texts' components were informed by the same sets of structural forms, from the symbolic bodies of sultanate and amirate, over geographies of power, mechanisms of resource management, and narratives of championship and victory, to local

---

<sup>30</sup> Hierarchically structured (and structuring) shorter, longer and summary opening lists such as these may be found in a variety of other annalistic chronicles, such as in the Damascene scholar Ibn Kathīr's *Bidāya wa-l-nihāya* (Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 14: 2, 49, 60-1, 111, 176, 180, 184, 187, 191, 201, 209, 212, 218, 221, 225, 229, 233, 237, 241, 247, 249, 251-2, 253, 256-7, 258, 264, 267, 275, 290, 297, 305, 313), in al-'Aynī's *'Iqd al-jumān* (al-'Aynī, *'Iqd al-jumān*, 85-94, 173-4, 191-2, 217-9, 245-7, 293-4, 309-10, 351-3, 399-400, 425-6, 441, 453, 465, 479-81, 493-4, 509, 543, 557-8, 569-70, 591-3, 619, 635, 651), or in al-Ṣayrafī's *Nuzhat al-nufūs* (al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-nufūs*, 3: 17-8, 40-1, 64-5, 98-9, 113-5, 143-4, 246-7, 271, 364-6).

<sup>31</sup> It is useful in this context to remind of Khalidī's characterisation of later medieval Arabic historiographical writings as *siyasa*-historiography, as taking a much more particular interest in local politics and their presentist concerns than before, (Khalidī, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 182-231); Khalidī even went so far as to claim that late medieval "History as *Siyasa* meant history as an imperial bureaucratic chronicle, authoritative, comprehensive, and designed primarily for administrative use" (p. 233).

<sup>32</sup> For the interesting argument "that the rise of encyclopaedism in this period was emblematic of a certain intellectual ethos, a systematic approach to the classification of knowledge which emerged in the discursive context of a rapidly centralizing imperial state", focusing on al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāya* in particular, see Muḥannā, "Encyclopaedism in the Mamluk Period"; for al-Qalqashandī, see Van Berkel, "The Attitude towards Knowledge in Mamluk Egypt"; idem, "A Well-Mannered Man of Letters or a Cunning Accountant".

manifestations of caliphate and Sunni Islam, all creating appearances of normative order and continuity in such texts as much as in the realities that they alleged to circumscribe.

Reaching for and at the same time claiming to explain or prescribe these social realities, historiographical and related texts obviously meant those extremely detailed literary reproductions of the structural forms of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* to have some bearing on this *dawla*'s formal manifestations in all kinds of other (non-literary) socio-cultural contexts, including in political ceremonies and in practices of social distinction. However, it also has to be acknowledged that we mainly know about the latter contexts by way of the particular lens of the former only, from Ibn Taghrī Birdī's detailed transition accounts, over the functional listing of political hierarchies in all kinds of texts, to al-Nuwayrī's sub-chapter "on secretaryship and its different branches of duties and writings". Assessing the level of success in a particular literary work's —or in a particular set of literary works'— reaching for social reality appears then as a sheer impossible task, for the simple reason that the choice of deciding where the structuring order of the *Dawla* began and where that imposed by the author ended appears as extremely vexed. This should not, however, necessarily be framed as a problematic opposition between social realities and their textual representations, between actors and authors, or between fact and fiction. Both perspectives are actually highly interconnected in the meanings that were ascribed to the forms that were deployed for structuring social order in texts and in these texts' wider social contexts alike. These are two sides of the same coin of contemporary political discourse, of seeing, making and representing the proper social order of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*.

In fact, in spite of many texts' keen eye for details in the representation of the structural forms of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*, the limits of that structuring order simultaneously seem to appear as rather vague and elusive in its descriptive and prescriptive as well as in its related manifestations. The views of hierarchy and order that transpire from al-Maqrīzī's, Ibn Aybak's and many others' structuring listings do not in fact impose any strict boundaries between this Syro-Egyptian *Dawlat al-Atrak* and its wider West-Asian (or even wider) environment of multiple local and regional "rulers" (*mulūk*). The latter are surely no incompatible "Other" in this particular discursive corner of contemporary writings. All were rather subsumed into one imagined trans-regional hierarchy of (West-Asian or even wider) legitimate political leadership, which included Syrian viceroys as well as all kinds of Mongol, post-Mongol and other leaders, and which was topped by the royal *persona* of the sultan. In its very essence the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* appears thus as an avatar of how late medieval Syro-Egyptian authors and their courtly audiences thought about their wider political world, and of how they tried to reach for, to structure, to order and to claim a place for themselves in that world, in their texts as well as in the realities in which these texts, authors and audiences participated. As this manifestation of a highly interconnected particular way of seeing, saying, doing and meaning things on an imagined canvas of the wider political world, the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* appears as existing first and foremost as an important marker for and participant in a particular contemporary discourse of late medieval Syro-Egyptian political order, which imposed, performed and accommodated itself in changing varieties of ways through the structural forms by which it was pre- and described in any type of cultural and social media.

Given the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*'s almost self-evident trans-regional dimensions this contemporary political discourse presents itself in remarkably self-evident ways as participating in widely shared leadership practices and value systems. Obviously, in the wider world of Mongol and post-Mongol West-Asia Syro-Egyptian recruitment of slave soldiers appeared as pertaining to the order of much

wider things —the regular employment of military outsiders—, and political leadership was almost always acquired, whatever one’s origins and background. The Syro-Egyptian *Dawla* was therefore not really singled out in this particular discourse for the servile origins of substantial parts of its manpower and leadership, and the (acclaimed or real) distinctive Turkish identity of the latter leadership was not fundamentally different from that of other West-Asian political elites.<sup>33</sup> This *Dawla* was rather considered to stand out and to legitimately top the region’s political hierarchies for its continued emanation from one political centre, represented as organised around the caliph, the sultan and his ‘Turkish’ court, as territorially rooted in the Cairo citadel, and as deploying particular and evolving sets of institutions, identities, resources, sites and value systems that all remained in some coherent manner connected to this late medieval regional centre of political continuity and gravity. In the discursive political order of things, as imagined, created and recreated by late medieval Syro-Egyptian authors as well as by their courtly audiences, the vague meanings of the political order and legitimate continuity of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* did not just appear in participants’ textual, symbolic, physical, or otherwise, arranging and re-arranging of the halls, corridors, rooms and other structural forms of the house of state. They also derived from these varying structural arrangements’ combination with the *Dawla*’s successful claim of being the Sultanate of Cairo. In this claim, Cairo does not just represent the largest and most densely connected urban crossroads in the highly segmented political realities of late medieval West-Asia and North-Africa. It also represents the far more universalist idea of a subjugating centripetal force pulsating from an unrivalled urban landscape and appearing as capable of transcending all possible boundaries, whether imagined or real. This impression of a transcendent socio-cultural quality certainly emerges from contemporary testimonies, such as by the North-African scholar and official ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), who arrived in Egypt in late 1382. In his autobiographical travelogue, *al-Ta’rīf bi-Ibn Khaldūn wa-riḥlatihi gharban wa-sharqan*, his reconstruction of the memories of his and his contemporaries’ first impressions of Cairo reproduces indeed that imposing and intimidating character of this metropolis as existing far beyond any local realities and imaginations.

Coming to Cairo on 1 Dhū l-Qa‘da [6 January 1383], I saw the metropolis of the world, the garden of the earth, the hive of nations, the anthill full of people, the portal of Islam, and the seat of royalty, with palaces and portals marking out its skyline and with *khānqāhs* and *madrasas* providing light over its hinterland; [I saw how] it illuminates the moons and the

---

<sup>33</sup> This also reminds of the related comparative observation made by Chamberlain that “the difference between the political-military organization of the Middle East and the Latin West was not so much the employment of slave soldiers that scholars have seen as emblematic of high medieval Middle Eastern politics. It lay rather in the relatively greater preponderance in the Middle East of garrisoned commands of ethnic outsiders who were recruited with cash. The recruitment of slave soldiers in large numbers —as original and distinctive as it is— may thus be a special case of a wider phenomenon. The long history of Europeans’ horror at slave rule may have reflected an even greater terror —the uncoupling of descent and status in a society more monetized than their own.” (Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, pp. 45-46). See also Loiseau, who presents a similar analysis (“les Mamelouks partageaient dans une certaine mesure l’habitus de la plupart des sociétés politiques qui dominaient à la même époque l’Orient de l’Islam, celui d’aristocraties militaires de cavaliers, retranchées dans des citadelles urbaines, étrangères par la langue comme par l’ethnie à la majorité de leurs sujets, n’ayant guère en commun avec eux que la pratique de la religion musulmane.”) (Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*, p. 144)

stars by means of its scholars, [and how] it has made the shore of the Nile look like the river of paradise and like the stream of the waters of heaven, its running water quenching their thirst a first time and a second time and its torrent gathering fruits and benefits for them. I walked around in the overcrowded alleys of the town centre, packed with pedestrians, and in its markets, abounding in livestock. [Long before my visit] we had already regularly been talking about this city, about its long reach in human history, and about the wide impact of its whereabouts. Many various things had been said about it by those whom we met among our masters and friends and who [had visited it] as pilgrims and as merchants. [Once] I asked our friend, the communal judge in Fez and the chief scholar in the Maghreb Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Maqqarī [about it], saying: ‘What is this Cairo like?’; he said: ‘One who has not seen it cannot know the splendour of Islam’. I asked the same question to our master Abū l-‘Abbās b. Idrīs, chief scholar in Béjaïa; he said: ‘It is as though its population has done away with counting’, pointing at the multitude of its nations and the fact that they feel secure from the consequences. Our friend, the army judge in Fez, the jurisprudent and the scribe Abū l-Qāsim al-Burjī appeared in the public session of the sultan Abū ‘Inān, upon his return from an embassy on [the sultan’s] behalf to the rulers of Egypt, to see that his prophetic letter got to the noble tomb [in Medina], in the year [7]56 (1356). Being asked about Cairo, he said: ‘For the sake of shortness, I will only say about it that any man who tries to imagine it, will experience it unlike the picture that he had imagined, as a result of the fact that a very wide range of things that are perceptible to the senses may be imagined, but not Cairo, which really transcends anything that may be imagined about it.’ The sultan and those present were highly impressed by that.<sup>34</sup>

## 2.2 From one dawla to another dawla: narratives of discontinuity and agency

From this “seat of royalty” defying imaginations East and West the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* emanated as an equally transcendent way of thinking, seeing, performing and experiencing the universal and timeless political order of the Sultanate of Cairo, and of generating welcome appearances of structure, social order and legitimate continuity in unwieldy narratives as well as in the complex socio-cultural realities which these narratives claim to represent. But in contemporary texts the concept of *dawla* was also used in different, far less continuous contexts of political order. A cursory identification of many dozens of contemporary epigraphic and historiographical cases in which the noun *dawla* was very differently used, without being discursively tagged by the qualifier *al-Atrāk* and its variants, suggests that it was in most of these cases simply —and almost always without any further explanation— used in combination with a sultan’s name for the sake of periodisation, for explaining that something happened when sultan X or Y was in power.<sup>35</sup> This

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Rihlat Ibn Khaldūn*, 285-6.

<sup>35</sup> We retrieved 191 historiographical reports containing the noun *dawla* in our MP3-database (consisting of a range of full textual material from the major historiographical texts for the period 1382-1467; see <http://www.mamluk.ugent.be/prosopography>). Next to that textual corpus we also consulted the *Thesaurus d’Epigraphie Islamique*, which provided us with a handful of further references.

temporality, clearly related to the basic semantics of *dawla*,<sup>36</sup> is illustrated in the inscription band on the western façade of al-Şāliḥ Ayyūb’s *madrassa* in Cairo, acclaiming “By God, may the *dawla* of our lord the sultan al-Malik al-Şāliḥ last long”<sup>37</sup>; this meaning of temporal particularity also speaks from a commemorative inscription recording another monument’s construction in the course of 1496 “in the *dawla* of [...] sultan Qāyṭbāy”.<sup>38</sup> From this temporal perspective, there were thus as many *dawlas* as there were sultans, ascribing to the word a meaning of endless micro-historical discontinuity —some sixty different *dawlas* of some sixty sultans reigning for some sixty periods of varying duration between the thirteenth and the early sixteenth centuries— that appears as the exact opposite of the discursive meanings that the notion of *Dawlat al-Atrāk* represented.

In the relatively long list of this discontinuous type of *dawla*-references there may also be found a few atypical notes, especially in Ibn Taghrī Birdī’s dynastic chronicles, that offer some insight into the very different intended meanings of these references. When describing the usurpation of the sultanate by the amir Ṭaṭar in 1421, Ibn Taghrī Birdī suggests that this particular change of a ruler and his *dawla* involved a more substantial transformation indeed, when he claimed that in his view Ṭaṭar’s heroic achievement concerned the fact that “he quickly and easily transformed one *dawla* into another *dawla* (*wa-aqlaba dawlatan bi-dawlatin ghayrihā fi aysari muddatin wa-ahwani tarīqatin*)”.<sup>39</sup> What this *dawla* then actually consisted of, if not merely the sultan or his term in office, is partly suggested elsewhere, when the same historian explained how the junior *mamlūks* of Ṭaṭar’s predecessor were re-integrated into this transformation, by

“bringing them closer, drawing them near, and calming their fears, until each of them attached himself to someone from the courtiers of Ṭaṭar (*ḥawāshī Ṭaṭar*), as is the custom with unfortunate armies whose *dawla* has come to an end and whose power has gone (*kamā hiya ‘adat al-‘asākir al-maflūla mimman zālat dawlatuhum wa-dhahabat shawkatuhum*).”<sup>40</sup>

This specific understanding of the connection between particular social groups and a particular *dawla* is even more clearly explained in another work of history by Ibn Taghrī Birdī, when the author tries to elucidate how unexpected the quick deposition of the afore-mentioned sultan al-Mu’ayyad Aḥmad b. Īnāl (r. 1461) was:

Al-Mu’ayyad’s *dawla* came to an end most quickly, as if it had never been. [...] This happened in spite of the large number of his courtiers (*ḥawāshīhi*), the vastness of his possessions (*amwālihi*), and the impact of his charisma (*‘uẓmatihī fi l-nufūs*). This was very

---

<sup>36</sup> See Rosenthal, “Dawla”. This temporal meaning is also implied in the title of al-Maqrīzī’s grand history of Egypt and its wider world from the time of Saladin until his own days, the *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma’rifat Duwal al-Mulūk* (“The Path to Knowledge of the *Dawlas* of the Rulers.”), and also in the title of Ibn Ṣaṣrā’s history dedicated to sultan al-Ẓāhir Barqūq (r. 1382-99), *al-Durra al-Muḍī’a fi l-Dawla al-Ẓāhiriyya* (“The Pearl Shining over the *dawla* of al-Ẓāhir [Barqūq]”).

<sup>37</sup> See Kalus, *Thesaurus d’Epigraphie Islamique*, fiche n° 2678; *Répertoire Chronologique d’Epigraphie Arabe*, 11: n° 4220.

<sup>38</sup> See Kalus, *Thesaurus d’Epigraphie Islamique*, fiche n° 12180; Van Berchem, *Matériaux*, p. 547, n° 364); the inscription texts adds with eloquent detail how Qāyṭbāy’s armies had gained victory over the *mamlakat al-Rūm*, the Ottomans.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 6:517.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 6:507.



different from [the qualities displayed by] the other sons of rulers who had become sultan. These [benefits] were mainly due to [the following factors:] his advanced age, as he was in his thirties when he became sultan; the fact that he had already been awarded power (*li-taḥakkumihi*) during that long period of his father's days [of ascendancy], enjoying much respect (*ḥurma zā'ida*), charismatic appeal (*muhāba fī l-nufūs*), and authority (*kalima nāfidha*) so that the people kept knocking at his door in order to have their matters settled; the fact that he had been *atābak* in the days of his father, for all sons of rulers that were deposed [from the sultanate] were time and again overcome by [the one who occupied] the position of *atābak*, and this [man's] father had not had any other *atābak* than his son; the fact that the people were acquainted with him, in the cities and towns and in the countryside (*ma'rifat al-nās lahu bi-l-aqtār wa-l-bilād wa-l-aryāf*), [on the one hand] because he had traveled as *amīr ḥājj maḥmal* [...] and on many a trip to the pasture and elsewhere, [and on the other hand because] he was well-informed about the Syrian domains and its conditions, from the days that his father had held office in those lands; [his beneficial position was also due] to the fact that he had many partners, courtiers and *mamlūks* (*li-kathrat khujdāshiyyatihi wa-ḥawāshīhi wa-mamālīkihi*) —but perhaps this trait of his was shared by the sons of the former rulers as well.<sup>41</sup>

Not only is this type of particular *dawla* in the eyes of Ibn Taghrī Birdī the result of transformative change from one sultan to another; the term is also meant to represent a very dynamic relational construction of “partners, courtiers and *mamlūks*” and their resources, created around a “charismatic” centre of power, and tied to that centre's peripheries “in the cities and towns and in the countryside”.<sup>42</sup> *Dawla* in this context refers to a social construction, which was built around a relational core of individual agents that preceded its own historical appearance as a *dawla* (as in this case of Aḥmad, who is credited with the construction of his own effective base of power during the reign of his father, sultan al-Ashraf Inal [r. 1453-61]), and which mainly acquired that *dawla*-appearance by integrating, “drawing near” and “attaching” different people in Cairo, Syria and beyond and by inspiring them to accept the political authority and legitimacy that this particular relational construction claimed to possess.<sup>43</sup> The widespread temporal meaning of the particular type of *dawla* appears thus as the residual of more complex, social meanings, with the succession of

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Hawādith*, 396-7.

<sup>42</sup> In one unique case (at least in so far as cases have until now been identified in his vast historiographical corpus) the historian al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) identifies in similar but less explicit terms this particular social dimension of *dawla*; in a story constructed around the deposition of sultan al-'Azīz Yūsuf b. Barsbāy (r. 1438), al-Maqrīzī connects the fall of Yūsuf's *dawla* (“This is the beginning of the end of the *dawla* of al-'Azīz”) to the fate of his and his father's royal household (*bayt*), in a dramatic exclamation of remorse ascribed to the later sultan Īnāl, here portrayed as acting as an opponent of Yūsuf and as a former *mamlūk* of his father: “How can it be a recompense from me to al-Malik al-Ashraf [Barsbāy] that he bought me, raised me, taught me the Quran, and bestowed benefits upon me, and that I personally bring about the destruction of his household (*akhraba baytahu bi-yadī*)?” (Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 1077)

<sup>43</sup> This socially constructed nature of a *dawla* reminds also of Ibn Khaldūn's conceptualisation of political power as socially produced, as summarised in the title of the first section in the third chapter of the introduction to his work of history, his *Muqaddima*: “Royal authority (*al-mulk*) and large-scale dynastic power (*al-dawla al-'amma*) are attained only through a group (*al-qabīl*) and group feeling (*al-'aṣabiyya*).” (Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 123; idem, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, 193).

various *dawlas* in historiographical narratives being thought of as the outcome of processes of discontinuous social reproduction and of substantial social transformations in regionally dominant relational power constellations, emerging around individual agencies and temporarily managing to claim their local appearance as a *dawla*.

Of course, Ibn Taghrī Birdī's opinions and explanations of his time's processes of regular political transformation cannot claim any representative status for how any of his contemporaries, predecessors or successors thought about them, nor for how these processes actually evolved. These references do no more than express particular claims to a particular social and historical truth, about al-Mu'ayyad Aḥmad or about any other moment of social transformation. As partners in communicative acts these historiographical claims are nevertheless again discursively embedded in more widely shared sets of forms and their meanings about the order of things. In this envisioning and representing of the near and fluid world of everyday political life through the notion of *dawla*, these claims were obviously at the same time also semantically related to the afore-mentioned statements about the structural universalities of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*. In the discursive-semiotic context of the construction of social order about the near as well as the wider world, the concept of *dawla* appears as one of those widely used, appreciated and understood contemporary signifiers to explain, organise and control not just claims to regional authority and social memories of legitimate hierarchy and order, but also time, history and particular relations of power.<sup>44</sup> The powerful contemporary semantics of *dawla* and their discursive uses and users obviously, and whatever their precise intentions, thus all met on this continuum of political meanings of social power, legitimate sovereignty, and orderly authority. For Ibn Taghrī Birdī as well as for most of his contemporaries these discursive meanings ranged more precisely between the social memory of a universal political order embodied in the structural forms of the Sultanate of Cairo on the one hand, and the short-lived

---

<sup>44</sup> Loiseau brings up another passage by Ibn Khaldūn, from his autobiography, that details in unequivocal terms the reality of his understanding of the notion of *dawla* along lines of particular relations of power when explaining the rise of the *dawla* of his patron, sultan al-Zāhir Barqūq, in 1382: “Ayant abandonné leur rudesse pour une vie d’aisance et de bien-être, les hommes de la *dawla* ont perdu du même coup beaucoup de leur esprit guerrier. C’est alors que l’un de leurs chefs, soucieux de réparer le mal, cherchera à s’emparer du pouvoir, en s’appuyant sur ce qui lui reste de rudesse et en invitant les autres à renoncer à l’opulence. Pour arriver à ses fins, il en appelle à la solidarité de son clan ou de ceux qu’il rallie dans ce but. Après avoir pris en main la *dawla*, il travaille à la guérir de ses maux; il acquiert ainsi plus de droits que d’autres au trône et s’en trouve le plus proche. De la sorte, le trône lui revient et est gardé dans sa famille. C’est alors comme s’il fondait une nouvelle *dawla*, qui passera par les mêmes étapes, connaîtra les mêmes vicissitudes, avant qu’un nouveau venu s’empara du pouvoir, jusqu’au jour où la *dawla* entière s’éteindra ainsi que le pouvoir de tous ceux qui l’avaient fondée. Une autre *dawla* sera alors établie, dont l’esprit de corps sera fondé sur des liens de sang ou de clientèle complètement différents.” (Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*, 125-6; from Cheddadi’s translation of Ibn Khaldūn’s *Ta’rīf*: Cheddadi, *Le livre des exemples*, 199-200. Despite this evocation of regular substantial social transformations Loiseau explains that for Ibn Khaldūn the emergence of the *dawla* of Barqūq and his sons only gave the impression of being a new *dawla*, whereas in fact it represented only a brief moment of resuscitation in the history of the same old *dawla* (“cet ultime sursaut ne constituait pas aux yeux d’Ibn Khaldun la fondation d’un nouvel état: ‘c’est comme [sic] il s’agissait d’une nouvelle *dawla*’ [wa-taṣīru ka-annahā dawlatun ukhrā], ‘comme la mèche d’une lampe qui, avant de s’éteindre, donne une flamme qui fait croire qu’elle va se rallumer’.” [Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*, 126, 322]). It may be suggested then that this attempt to imagine Barquq’s *dawla* as part of a continuous political project, despite all its changes and despite its being “fondé sur des liens de sang ou de clientèle complètement différents”, is a very useful illustration of the semantic uses of *dawla*, of the necessary and ongoing strategy to align socially newly produced *dawlas* such as Barqūq’s in the mental structures and categories of perception and thought with the structuring and legitimating transcendent political order of the Sultanate of Cairo, and of the priority awarded to the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* as a historical actor in modern historiographical discourse (see below).

effect of a particular set of patrimonial relations and of their individual agencies on the other. For all this appeared as a self-evident complexity of various forms of *dawla*, which were as distinct and yet interlocking as the vexed age-old concepts of social structure and agency.

### 3. Toward an alternative approach: social practice, disciplinary power, and the state as a structural effect

In the worlds of Ibn Taghrī Birdī, his colleagues and their court audiences *dawla* occupied a semantic field of power relations that stretched between a universal (as in the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*) and a particular (as in al-Mu'ayyad's *dawla*) set of claims to political sovereignty, social order and elite identity. The relationship between these two appearances of *dawla*, however, and especially their mutual causalities, remain an issue of analytical confusion. Contemporary historiographical discourse of political order, such as represented by Ibn Taghrī Birdī, seems to suggest a priority for the latter, when the temporality of a sultan's socially constructed *dawla* is stressed, lamented or used for organising time and for explaining socio-political change. Modern historiographical discourse on the contrary tends to stress the priority of the former, the basic layout of that ancient Mamluk house of State and its structural forms persisting in its understandings as some more or less abstract continuous patrimonial structure within which historical action and order are to be explained.<sup>45</sup> A substantial analytical discrepancy thus divides these two discourses, and this opposition remains largely unacknowledged even despite the overwhelming dependency of the latter on the representations of the former. As suggested above, however, at the same time there should be no doubt about the, at least discursive, historical reality in the production and reproduction of late medieval Syro-Egyptian political order by both particular social agencies and universalising structural forms. It appears as very relevant therefore to try and escape from both discourses, to search for another analytical model for imagining the historical relationship between these two appearances of *dawla* in the reality of things, and to prioritise an understanding of the nature of these appearances' interlocking connectivity rather than to work from an exclusive *a priori* of either a particular *dawla*'s agency or the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*'s structure.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> This assumption of the *Dawla al-Atrāk*'s prime historical causality certainly informed the detailed reconstructions of these structural forms from an impressive range of various kinds of historiographical materials in the pioneering works of David Ayalon (Ayalon, "Studies") and of William Popper (Popper, *Egypt and Syria under the Circassian Sultans*). See also the preceding footnote on the confusion generated by Ibn Khaldūn's movement up and down *dawla*'s semantic continuum.

<sup>46</sup> In (late) medieval European history similar confusions and related discussions of the relation between state structures and other historical agencies have been resolved by some scholars by simply getting rid of the category of 'state' (see Davies, "The Medieval State: the Tyranny of a Concept?"; Watt, *The Making of Polities*). John Watt explains in an inspiring passage that "it is not necessary to frame —one might almost say burden— the structural history of politics with the notion of the state. [...] there were many political forms, practices and processes besides those that fostered the state or are commonly associated in historians' minds with its operations. Nor were structures of authority, or of power, or even of government, necessarily or consistently co-ordinated in the way that a term like 'state' implies. Even if states emerged during the period, as some historians would wish to argue, it is not clear that that process is a helpful centre for a political history; indeed, organising an account that way may make the task of explaining the emergence of states harder, rather than easier. A more open-ended perspective on the changing political structures of the period is more likely to deliver not only a new and plausible narrative, but also a better explanation of the period's developments." (p.

The latter analytical perspective actually tallies very well with the prioritisation of social practice that, following Pierre Bourdieu's social theories, was advocated by the afore-mentioned Michael Chamberlain in his *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*.<sup>47</sup> For Chamberlain, the historical interaction of (objective) structure and (subjective) agency can best be understood through the study of social practices, which were imagined by him as world-making strategies “by which people seek to understand the world and shape their futures in it”.<sup>48</sup> In particular, Chamberlain claimed the priority of household strategies of social reproduction, that is, of “practices [...] by which lineages invest time, labor, and experience to acquire the symbolic and social ‘capital’ that becomes expendable currency in the struggle for household survival”.<sup>49</sup> Following from this prioritisation of practices of social reproduction, for Chamberlain “rule by warrior households and competition among them [...] defined the political arena”.<sup>50</sup> Chamberlain's overall model of analysis is that of a particular political arena —spatially circumscribed by the city of Damascus in a [very] long thirteenth century— “of continuously renegotiated relationships among the ruling household, the important amīrs and their households, and civilian elites with specialized knowledge or religious prestige”.<sup>51</sup> Chamberlain thus suggests that understandings of social and political order should begin with studying practices of social reproduction, including practices of continuous negotiation among rulers, amīrs and non-military leaders for their places in that order. However, as explained above, in this model any form of state at best only represents “an abstraction of the personal ties of alliance, dependence, and dominance among these three groups”, so that the full weight of historical explanation remains with the particular, relational *dawla* of contemporary historiographical discourse, and the complex realities of the *dawla*'s structural forms disappear under the rubric of “abstraction”.<sup>52</sup> Even though this may well be relevant for thirteenth-century Damascus, making similar abstraction of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Sultanate of Cairo appears as more problematic, even if only, as discussed above, from the perspective of contemporary historiographical discourses of political and social order.

Operating in a very different but analytically immensely relevant context, Middle East historian Timothy Mitchell presents another strong case for the prioritisation of social practice in understanding constructions of political order.<sup>53</sup> Unlike Chamberlain, however, Mitchell combines this prioritisation with an acknowledgement of the historical reality of structural forms akin to those

---

35) (For the analytical problems that such an “open-ended” approach may entail, see the discussion of Tim Mitchell's work below). In Ottoman history Karen Barkey arguably engaged with a similar problem in a similar way in her *Empire of Difference* (even though she did continue to try and award some role to the structural forms of the Ottoman state in her analyses). Identifying the state as “an organization that successfully claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force over a given territory”, Barkey explained that she was “much more interested in understanding how this organization and its legitimacy is initially constructed by actors taking steps to convince different populations, soldiers, and elites to mobilize and join their efforts” (Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 32).

<sup>47</sup> On the relationship between Chamberlain's thought and Bourdieu's social theory, see especially Clifford, “*Ubi Sumus?*”, esp. 57-61.

<sup>48</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 22.

<sup>49</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 47.

<sup>51</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 60.

<sup>52</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 60.

<sup>53</sup> Mitchell, “The Limits of the State”.

of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*. He actually proposes “an alternative approach” to “the state” in a manner that tries to avoid certain analytical problems, which Mitchell sees as inherent in structuralism and in its prioritisation of those forms in socially transcendent ways,<sup>54</sup> and that at the same time can accommodate the complex social reality of contemporary discourse and action. “This approach can account for the salience of the state phenomenon”, Mitchell explains in a passage that looks at post-1945 American political sciences but fits our present analytical predicament surprisingly well, “but [it] avoids attributing to it the coherence, unity, and absolute autonomy that result from existing theoretical approaches.”<sup>55</sup> Mitchell’s approach agrees with Chamberlain’s in its analytical prioritisation of practices of social production and reproduction, and of the circulation of power among multiple actors. Mitchell even formulates echoes of Chamberlain’s idea of the state as a mere abstraction of particular power relations:

“Conceived in this way, the state is no longer to be taken as essentially an actor, with the coherence, agency, and subjectivity this term presumes. We should not ask ‘Who is the state?’ or ‘Who dictates its policies?’ Such questions presume what their answers pretend to prove: that some political subject, some *who* [sic], pre-exists and determines those multiple arrangements that we call the state. *The arrangements that produce the apparent separateness of the state create the abstract effect of agency, with concrete consequences.* [italics mine] Yet such agency will always be contingent upon the *production of difference* —upon those practices that create the apparent boundary between state and society [italics mine]. These arrangements may be so effective, however, as to make things appear the reverse of this. The state comes to seem a subjective starting point, as an actor that intervenes in society. Statist approaches to political analysis take this reversal for reality. (pp. 90-1)<sup>56</sup>

As is clear from this passage, Mitchell’s “abstract effect of the state’s agency” repeats Chamberlain’s “abstraction”, but Mitchell, expanding from Michel Foucault’s epistemological theories, does so in ways that continue to situate the state phenomenon within the historical action of social practice and of the related “production of difference”, rather than somewhere outside of any such practice. To this purpose Mitchell stresses first the internal nature of power, emerging “from within, not at the level of an entire society, but at the level of detail, and not by constraining individuals and their actions, but by producing them”.<sup>57</sup> Secondly, Mitchell also stresses that this productive and internal nature of power tends to manifest itself through particular methods for the organisation and articulation “of space, movement, sequence and position”, and more generally through “detailed processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, and supervision and surveillance”. These methods for the creation of some form of order reveal how power is at the same time internal and productive, and “localized” and “disciplinary” in

---

<sup>54</sup> For Mitchell, “Structuralism takes for granted the idea of structure —an actual framework that somehow stands apart from physical reality as its dimension of order— and does not ask how this apparently metaphysical separation is brought about” (Mitchell, “The Limits of the State”, 94).

<sup>55</sup> Mitchell, “The Limits of the State”, 78.

<sup>56</sup> Mitchell, “The Limits of the State”, 90-91.

<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, “The Limits of the State”, 93.

nature.<sup>58</sup> Thirdly, for Mitchell the manifestation of this disciplinary type of power also involves a process of externalising explanations for internally produced power relations, “which create the appearance of a world fundamentally divided into state and society.”<sup>59</sup> Disciplinary power shapes order through the organisation, the articulation and hence the production of social difference, so that “at the same time as power relations become internal in this way, and by the same methods, they now appear to take the novel form of external structures”.<sup>60</sup> Mitchell therefore understands the social practices of disciplinary power as also capable of producing a set of incoherent but powerful and above all meaningful structural effects that tend to be identified as pertaining to the normative order of the state and its agents, institutions, sites, value systems, resources and narratives. “The state”, Mitchell concludes, “needs to be analyzed as such a structural effect. That is to say, it should be examined not as an actual structure, but as the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist.”<sup>61</sup> Only thus, according to Mitchell, the complex relationship between the phenomenon of the state, social difference, and the practices that produce both can be properly accounted for.

For Mitchell disciplinary power and its structural effects of the state are particular, even exclusive, to the modern world.<sup>62</sup> The preceding discussions of modern and late medieval discourses of power have shown, however, how much the appearance of political order was an issue of high social and symbolic value in the worlds of late medieval Syria and Egypt too, when late medieval Syro-Egyptian authors and actors alike attempted to apply their own methods of order and to discipline their variegated subjects under rubrics such as that of *dawla*. Mitchell’s conceptualisation appears therefore as underestimating pre-modern appearances of the state (or, perhaps, as overestimating the disciplinary shift of modernity). In pre-modern contexts, such as that of late medieval Syria and Egypt, disciplinary power as generated in social practice through “microphysical methods of order” was obviously very different and displayed less infrastructural complexity than in the modern world. But it surely had similar effects of the localised production of difference and of the appearance of a structurally external agency of a *dawla*. In the search for an alternative model that allows for thinking particular social agencies and universalising structural forms together, Mitchell’s correlation of social practice, disciplinary power and the state as a set of structural effects therefore shows a valid and valuable way forward for the integration of late

---

<sup>58</sup> Mitchell, “The Limits of the State”, 92-93, 95. The concept of disciplinary power refers to “those [...] microphysical methods of order that Foucault calls *disciplines*” (p. 92, referring to M. Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* [New York, 1977]).

<sup>59</sup> Mitchell, “The Limits of the State”, 95.

<sup>60</sup> Mitchell, “The Limits of the State”, 93-94.

<sup>61</sup> Mitchell, “The Limits of the State”, 94.

<sup>62</sup> Mitchell, “The Limits of the State”, 94; this follows from the reliance on Foucault’s identification of *disciplines* as strictly “modern metaphysical methods of order”, as further explained by Mitchell in the following passage: “None of these new methods appeared overnight. The French military reforms of 1791, for example, were developed from earlier reforms in Prussia, which had their own antecedents elsewhere in Europe. Nor were they confined to the army. As Foucault has shown, similar methods of enclosing and partitioning space, systematizing surveillance and inspection, breaking down complex tasks into carefully drilled movements, and coordinating separate functions into larger combinations were developed around the same period in factories, schools, prisons, hospitals, commercial establishments, and government offices. The spread of such methods from field to field in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries represented a new, localized, yet enormously productive technology of power.” (p. 92)

medieval and modern discourses of power as well as Chamberlain's pivotal thinking into one alternative model.

#### 4. An alternative approach

##### *4.1 Reproduction, segmentation and integration, and their structural effects*

Up to this point, this reflexive essay has argued that there exists a remarkable discrepancy between modern Mamluk and contemporary *dawla* discourses of political power and authority, which may be summarised as structure-driven and as agency-driven respectively. This essay has also argued that an appealing alternative approach to step outside of these discourses' mutually exclusive explanatory frameworks, without ignoring their analytical value, may be found in Chamberlain's prioritisation of social practices of household reproduction, and in Mitchell's related understanding of the state as a structural effect of practices of social differentiation, more in particular as an appearance of political order and social difference produced in social practice by various sets of disciplinary arrangements. Given the relative success of Chamberlain's notion of the social practice of reproduction —patronage, competition, kinship, household formation, factionalism, circulation of people and ideas, knowledge, education and wider practices of socialisation,...— in the expansion and specialisation of modern late medieval Syro-Egyptian historiography, it is furthermore not necessarily social reproduction that requires much more elaboration as an analytical category for historical research.<sup>63</sup> Social differentiation, however, has so far largely remained unexplored as an analytical category of social practice, in its capacity both of the production of apparent boundaries between groups —segmentation— and of the creation of coherent groups —integration.<sup>64</sup> The wide range of structural effects of these interlocking practices of social reproduction, integration and segmentation, and the impact of those effects on “the mental structures and categories of perception and thought” and from them in reciprocal fashion on the

---

<sup>63</sup> Representative recent examples of this relative growth of (explicit or implicit) analytical engagements with the wide variety of late-medieval Syro-Egyptian practices of social reproduction include various contributions to *Everything is on the Move*; Eychenne, *Liens personnels*; Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography*; Fancy, *Science and Religion in Mamluk Egypt*; Stilt, *Islamic Law in Action*; Christ, *Trading Conflicts*.

<sup>64</sup> On the politics of difference and of negotiating social boundaries and on the analytical relevance of studying practices of segmentation and integration for understanding the historical dynamics of political power and authority, see Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, esp. 17-22. The notion of social differentiation has off-course played its part in late medieval Syro-Egyptian social history, but then as a descriptive category rather than as a social practice (see e.g. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*; Petry, *Civilian Elites of Cairo*). Three extremely relevant exceptions to this generalising observation are Berkey's study of the negotiations of religious authority and social hierarchy in the field of (popular) preaching in late medieval Egypt (Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority*), Loiseau's discussion of fifteenth-century Circassian ethnicity as part of the construction of new political identities and of the negotiation of new elite social boundaries (Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*, 173-200), and —even though slightly earlier in temporal focus yet highly relevant from an analytical perspective— Ackerman-Lieberman's challenge to standard scholarship on Jewish socio-economic participation and identity formation in Egypt and the wider Mediterranean by focussing on distinctive trading procedures as strategies of social differentiation and of the negotiation of Jewish communal identity (Ackerman-Lieberman, *The Business of Identity*); it is finally also relevant to refer here to Richardson's discussion of the cultural construction of physical difference and disability in her *Difference and Disability*.

transient disciplinary arrangements of that social practice have, by and large, so far remained unnoticed.<sup>65</sup>

These structural and structuring effects are as wide-ranging indeed as late-medieval Syro-Egyptian social action was, spanning the modern categories of society, culture, economy and politics and the full spectrum of contemporary processes of organising the near and wider world, of making it a meaningful space and place, and of shaping one's future in it. Only one set of these multiple, varied, and overlapping effects will be explored here further, related to the appearances of a political order in late medieval Egypt and Syria that has been identified variously as the Mamluk State, the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*, a sultan's *dawla*, and the Sultanate of Cairo. In this final analysis, it will not just be argued that these appearances of forms of state were related in complex ways to a particular set of social practices and methods of order. It will also be argued that in this context disciplinary arrangements of political integration and segmentation were repeatedly obstructed by another, competing set of methods of social reproduction. Both originated in social practice and closely interacted, but both also moved at different speeds and engaged with different ideas of order and with different structural effects, giving shape to a particular dynamic of political continuity and discontinuity in late medieval Syro-Egyptian history that tends to be underrated.

From the perspective of an internalised, localised and disciplinary understanding of power as social practice, late medieval Syro-Egyptian political history emerges first and foremost from particular sets of patrimonial relations and reproductive patterns around local leaders.<sup>66</sup> As Chamberlain suggested, in thirteenth-century Damascus this created a highly segmented and multipolar political environment, with rulers, amirs and cultural elite groups competing for the distribution of local political, social, economic and cultural resources and producing the effect of a fragile and temporal local political equilibrium at best. Moving to mid-fifteenth-century Cairo and the case of al-Mu'ayyad Aḥmad b. 'Īnāl's short-lived *dawla* as remembered by Ibn Taghrī Birdī, a similar appearance of locality, multipolarity and fragility remains. Even though the young sultan and his entourage appeared as endowed in great pomp with all the structural forms of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*, any structural effects of universalising authority surely remained as limited in space and place as they turned out to be in time. In fact, many local political realities co-existed with that of this sultan and his court in the Citadel of Cairo, as had been the case in thirteenth-century

---

<sup>65</sup> This reciprocate interaction between structures and agents, both constituted in social practice in mutually productive and reproductive fashions, is a core insight of Structuration Theory (Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, eg. p. 28 ["Actors draw upon the modalities of structuration in the reproduction of systems of interaction, by the same token reconstituting their structural properties."]). This also reminds of Bourdieu's integration of the notions of (objective) structure and (subjective) agency into one model of social practice, through his development of the practical tools of *habitus* and field; in the specific context of state formation, this reflexive interaction was reformulated by Bourdieu as follows: "[The state] incarnates itself simultaneously in objectivity, in the form of specific organizational structures and mechanisms, and in subjectivity in the form of mental structures and categories of perception and thought. By realizing itself in social structures and in the mental structures adapted to them, the instituted institution makes us forget that it issues out of a long series of acts of *institution* (in the active sense) and hence has all the appearance of the *natural*." (Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State", 3-4).

<sup>66</sup> Some of these particular sets of patrimonial relations and patterns of reproduction have been surveyed, analysed and/or applied to understandings of their particular historical manifestations in Sievert, "Family, friend or foe?" (with further references to many other relevant publications, especially from German and anglophone scholarship); Eychenne, *Liens personnels* (with further references, especially also from French scholarship); Van Steenberg, "The Mamluk Sultanate as a Military Patronage State".



Damascus, escaping from the limited reach of his radar, existing in their own parallel political realities, or even promoting similar but alternative political orders. In the latter competition, the structural forms of the Sultanate of Cairo surely provided a leader such as al-Mu'ayyad Aḥmad with advantageous and distinctive tools to deploy physical and symbolic violence. But these forms simultaneously also channelled and limited his options, and heightened his and his entourage's stakes. When the claim to political order disagreed with the social orders of things, political authority remained challenged and its reproduction in local relationships remained a vexed issue. In historical contexts such as these, paraphrasing Ibn Taghrī Birdī, “one *dawla* can quickly and easily transform into another *dawla*” —they may even co-exist in competing ways—, and the structural effects of state and sultanate tend to appear in very vague, fickle, and, yes, even abstract terms indeed.

As suggested above, however, these structural effects did not always present themselves in such abstract terms. At times, they appeared so forcefully that those who performed, produced or reproduced them could and did meaningfully project them on an impressive canvas of the sultanate's wider world. Throughout the long history of the Sultanate of Cairo there actually occurred particular moments of rule at which the appearances of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* and its structural forms truly seem to have managed to transcend this level of abstraction.<sup>67</sup> This was the case towards the ends of the reigns of al-Malik al-Zāhir Baybars (1260-77) and of al-Malik al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (1279-90), often credited as a result with establishing the traditional, normative appearances of those structural forms.<sup>68</sup> This was certainly also the case during the thirty-years reign of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (r. 1310-1341) and to a large extent also during its continuance under some of his Qalāwūnid descendants (r. 1341-82), when many structural forms —from the amirate of the Syrian bedouin over the cadastral organisation of Syria and Egypt to the dynastic, Qalāwūnid appearance of the sultanate itself— were newly introduced or provided with a

---

<sup>67</sup> For practical reasons we will not include in this essay any reflection on the structural contributions of Ayyūbid rulers such as Saladin, al-Malik al-ʿĀdil and al-Malik al-Kāmil, and al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, even though there are good reasons to consider (and to appreciate contemporaries' considerations of) their reigns between the later twelfth and mid-thirteenth century as integral to the history of the Sultanate of Cairo, if only because not just its social practices (see Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*), but also many of its structural forms, including the sultanate and the citadel of Cairo, originated or were fundamentally redefined in the course of their reigns (the best analytical survey of Ayyūbid politics remains to date Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*; for the most recent general survey approach, see Eddé, “Ayyūbids”). This question of thirteenth-century continuities, of course, goes back to an old debate between David Ayalon and Stephen Humphreys, summarised by the latter a decade ago as follows: “Ayalon [in “From Ayyūbids to Mamlūks”] insists on the fundamental identity of the Ayyubid and Mamluk political and military systems. As always, his arguments are enlightening and richly documented; in spite of his criticisms, however, I still adhere to the main conclusions in my “The Emergence of the Mamluk Army,” *Studia Islamica* 45 (1977): 67-99 and 46 (1977): 147-82, [that they were fundamentally different on the deeper level of the often unspoken values, attitudes, and assumptions which shaped political conduct]”; in many ways, the key issue around which this debate revolved may again be re-imagined as one of prioritising either the structures of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* (Ayalon) or rather the practices that coalesced around the varying agencies of particular *dawlas* (Humphreys). On contemporary historiographers' engagement (or rather non-engagement) with the so-called Ayyūbid-Mamlūk transition in the mid-thirteenth century, see Lev, “The Transition from the Ayyūbids to the Mamlūks”).

<sup>68</sup> Thorau, *The Lion of Egypt*; Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan*; Thorau, “Einige kritische Bemerkungen zum sogenannten ‘mamlūk phenomenon’”.

new outlook for decades to come.<sup>69</sup> Another, similar, moment occurred under the charismatic leadership of sultan Barqūq (1382-1399), when amongst many other things court offices multiplied and new fiscal arrangements were set up.<sup>70</sup> Then there were the successive reigns of sultans al-Malik al-Ashraf Barsbāy (r. 1422-1438) and of al-Malik al-Zāhir Jaqmaq (r. 1438-1453), when the institutional relationships between Cairo's court and varieties of local communities in Egypt, Syria, the Hijaz, Anatolia and Cyprus were radically reconfigured.<sup>71</sup> This was, among many other structural adaptations, repeated in the long-lasting days of sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy (r. 1468-1496), and then again during the creative reign of sultan Qansawh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501-1516).<sup>72</sup>

These moments of structural adaptation and efflorescence seem to appear as coinciding with particularly successful moments of rule as far as military conquest, charismatic authority or longevity in royal office were concerned. From the perspective of patrimonial leadership practices that produced these particular structural effects, it may then be argued that next to that fragile, local and multipolar type of political authority, as that existed in Chamberlain's thirteenth-century Damascus or in al-Mu'ayyad Aḥmad's fifteenth-century *dawla*, there also emerged at regular historical intervals another more coherent, trans-local and unipolar type of political authority in late medieval Egypt and Syria. In the case of this type of power and authority, the range of methods that produced and reproduced political authority, order and power had expanded and had managed to integrate almost all politically relevant social groups and communities from a wide variety of local contexts into the appearance of one structural whole of, simultaneously, a particular sultan's *dawla* and the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*, as embodied in that sultan's *dawla* and its particular arrangements in favour of that sultan's political order. In this context, ever more diverse sets of these disciplinary methods of order appear to have ensured the continued practical production of an apparent social boundary in favour of the ruler's, his court's and their local partners' order of things, and of ever more complex patterns of similar structural effects that appeared to converge in his hegemonic authority. These disciplinary methods were shaped by and continued to give shape to old and new

---

<sup>69</sup> Flinterman & Van Steenbergen, "Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the Formation of the Qalāwūnid State"; Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*; on the amirate of the Arabs, see Hiyari, "The Origins and Development of the Amirate of the Arabs"; on the cadastral survey *al-rawk al-nāṣirī*, see especially Sato, "The Proposers and Supervisors of al-Rawk al-Nāṣirī"; on Qalāwūnid dynasticism, see amongst others Van Steenbergen, "Qalāwūnid Discourse, Elite Communication and the Mamluk Cultural Matrix"; on other Qalāwūnid structural forms, see amongst others Flood, "Umayyad Survivals and Mamluk Revivals"; Eychenne, *Liens personnels*; idem, "Réseau, pratiques et pouvoir(s) au début du XIVe siècle"; and (although interpreting the emergence of these Qalāwūnid structural forms more negatively, as a breakdown of traditional social and cultural orders) Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History*; idem, "Rank-and-File Mamluks versus Amirs".

<sup>70</sup> Loiseau, *Reconstruire la Maison du Sultan, 1350-1450*, esp. 179-214, 287-330; Onimus, "Les émirs dans le sultanat mamelouk sous les sultans Barqūq et Faraḡ (1382-1412)", esp. 166-311, 389-512.

<sup>71</sup> Loiseau, *Reconstruire la Maison du Sultan*, esp. 179-278; Meloy, "Imperial Strategy and Political Exigency"; idem, "Economic intervention"; idem, *Imperial Power and Maritime Trade*, esp. 81-170; Wing, "Indian Ocean Trade and Sultanic Authority"; idem, "Submission, Defiance, and the Rules of Politics on the Mamluk Sultanate's Anatolian Frontier"; Adriaenssens and Van Steenbergen, "Mamluk Authorities and Anatolian Realities"; and (although rather outdated in its general approach still of interest in some of its detail) Darrag, *L'Égypte sous le règne de Barsbay*.

<sup>72</sup> See, amongst others, Petry, "The Military Innovations of Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī"; idem, *Protectors or Praetorians?*; idem, "The Military Institution and Innovation in the Late Mamlūk Period"; Behrens-Abouseif, "Qāyṭbāy's Investments in the City of Cairo"; idem, "Qāyṭbāy's Foundation in Medina"; idem, "Qāyṭbāy's Madrasahs in the Holy Cities"; idem, "Sultan al-Ghawrī and the Arts"; Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East*; Meloy, *Imperial Power and Maritime Trade*, esp. 171-232.

structural forms of the Sultanate of Cairo, as these were also reproduced in various discourses of power: from the symbolic bodies of sultanate and amirate, over particular geographies of power, mechanisms of resource management, and narratives of championship and victory, to local manifestations of caliphate and Sunni Islam, all creating appearances of continuous normative order. A token of the success of these disciplinary methods would then be the widening of the apparent social distance between the ruler, his court and other relevant groups to the extent that the agents that performed the reproduction of the ruler's order and, hence, of his authority—in these agents' diverse and particular interactions with various local political, social, economic and cultural groups in Egypt, Syria or beyond—acquired an appearance of political autonomy, of representing and reproducing a depersonalising state of trans-local dimensions in the centre and in the many peripheries of the sultanate. In this process, the ruler himself might eventually even disappear behind the curtain of his audience room, leaving only an abstract impression of the practical bonds that tied him to the circulation of power: he might vanish entirely from social practice, cross to the other side of the imagined boundaries that staked out his state from its so-called subjects, and he (or his descendants) might then re-appear only in the structural effects of his royal persona wherever the disciplinary methods of social order and political authority required him to.

#### *4.2 Transformation, the taniatric mode of reproduction, and political order as process in late medieval Egypt and Syria*

In the latter unipolar moment of political organisation, as in the former multipolar one, the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* was continuously recreated by and reinvented from the disciplinary necessities of particular times and contexts. Whatever the complexity of its forms and whatever its necessary appearance as projecting an image of orderly structural continuity, the Sultanate of Cairo appeared always also as different and adapted to the needs of particular rulers, reigns, elite constellations and their practical arrangements. This explains how the structural effects of the above-mentioned moments of unipolar authority from Baybars to al-Ghawrī can be referred to in singular terms, and this also reminds of how local hierarchies are presented in contemporary historiography as requiring regular informational updates and as acquiring new and substantially adapted guises between the early fourteenth and the early sixteenth centuries. This finally also subscribes to the notion that rulers' reigns were considered as sufficiently distinct in historiographical and related discourses to serve for the structuration and organisation of political time and space, and for explaining that something happened in the *dawla* of ruler X or Y. The state always being a product of a particular ruler's political success means that it was in its very essence always discontinuous, whatever its continuous appearances. This political discontinuity, however, was again not structural, but inscribed in social practice, where disciplinary methods developing from practices of social reproduction and differentiation continuously had to compete with opposite social practices and their effects.

Contrary to the afore-mentioned common 'one-generation'-assumptions, it is by now widely acknowledged that dynastic aspirations appeared regularly as a rule of thumb in the Sultanate's

reproductive practices of royal succession.<sup>73</sup> As will be elaborated below, however, dynasticism was really again only one particular structural effect (as were appearances of that ‘one-generationalism’) of particular arrangements in social practice.<sup>74</sup> This practice has been referred to—in perhaps more structuralist terms than it deserves—as tanistry, or as the recurrent phenomenon of usurpation and of succession to rule by the most capable male member of the ruling clan as decided by the sword.<sup>75</sup> In the particular practical context of competition for power and authority in late-medieval Egypt and Syria, the legitimating contours of this ruling clan were open to constant negotiation and interpretation by different dynastic and non-dynastic stakeholders, who always tended to organise themselves in opposing power groups and factions when succession had to be negotiated.<sup>76</sup> This tanistic mode of socio-political reproduction, this recurrent tendency of the region’s political order to completely fragment into various groups of claimants for legitimate leadership, is a major causal factor in the transformative character of power, authority and the appearances of the state in the Cairo Sultanate. It causes the repeated total disappearance of formerly powerful household constellations and their leader or leaders, the regular disruption of carefully negotiated balances between particular elite groups in the centre and in the peripheries of royal power, and the constant re-imagining of social order and its political structuration.

The particular alternative model of late medieval Syro-Egyptian political (trans-)formation that can be developed from all this is not meant to represent any historical or descriptive model for writing the political history of the sultanate. It is not entirely new in any of its components either.<sup>77</sup> It is rather formulated here as an open-ended and dynamic theoretical toolkit that may be used for trying to appreciate and understand in different, perhaps even new ways the history of late medieval Syro-Egyptian political power as that was continuously emanating more or less successfully from the Citadel of Cairo. As an alternative way for thinking about issues of political sovereignty,

---

<sup>73</sup> Ayalon, “The Circassians in the Mamluk kingdom”; idem, “From Ayyūbids to Mamlūks”; Haarmann, “Regicide and the ‘Law of the Turks’”, esp. 128-30; idem, “The Mamluk System of Rule”, esp. 22-4; Van Steenbergen, “The Mamluk Sultanate as a Military Patronage State” (which concludes that “Qalāwūnid dynastic trends were...the public and symbolic representation of the wide-ranging spread of that Qalāwūnid *bayt*’s multifarious tentacles into Mamluk society at large, resulting in such a momentum that this household managed to outlive its gradual loss of political relevance and retained some special, royal status until 1433” [p. 212]); Fuess, “Mamluk Politics”, 99-102 (who introduces the chronology of a “Qalāwūnid dynastic phase (1310-1382)” and of a “Mixed dynastic and meritocratic phase (1382-1412)”; Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*, 106-12 (who concludes more in general that “de 1250 à 1517, des solutions politiques différentes furent ainsi trouvées à la tension constitutive du régime entre le caractère non héréditaire des charges et des honneurs militaires, défendu avec plus ou moins d’exclusivité par les Mamelouks, et la volonté de chacun de s’établir et de transmettre un peu de sa position et de sa fortune à ses enfants, que certains sultans cherchèrent à consolider dans un véritable projet dynastique” [111-2]).

<sup>74</sup> This point was similarly made on the basis of very particular empirical findings, rather than—as will be done here—of generalising theoretical analyses, in Van Steenbergen, “Caught between heredity and merit”.

<sup>75</sup> Fletcher, “Turco-Mongolian monarchic tradition in the Ottoman empire”, esp. 236-42.

<sup>76</sup> Van Steenbergen, “Caught between heredity and merit”, 21-2; Sievert, “Family, friend or foe?”, esp. 105-17, referring also to Irwin, “Factions in Medieval Egypt”, and to Levanoni, “The Sultan’s Laqab”.

<sup>77</sup> It is pertinent to explain that this model strongly reminds of Ibn Khaldūn’s generational stages of a *dawla*, but then without wishing to posit the historical, natural, evolutionary and structurally cyclical programme that these stages are considered to follow in Ibn Khaldūn’s writings (cfr. Ibn Khaldūn, section fourteen of chapter three: “Dynasties have a natural life span like individuals (*fī anna al-dawla lahā a’mār ṭabī’iyya kamā li-l-ashkhāṣ*)” Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 136-8; Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, 213-5. It is equally pertinent to explain that this model was inspired by Ernest Gellner’s “Flux and Reflux in the Faith of Men”, his Khaldunian interpretation of human religious ‘oscillation’ between polytheism and monotheism.

political agency and the state it stands as a practical model of social transformation that imagines the political order that was emanating from Cairo's citadel as oscillating to and from between two ideal types of *dawla*-producing socio-cultural practices and relations around patrimonial leaders, as in a constant state of flux on a continuum of increasingly connected and wide-ranging practices of social reproduction, elite integration and political segmentation that organised the circulation of power in particular ways and that, as disciplinary arrangements, created various sets of local and trans-local appearances of political order and social distinction, of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*, and of the Sultanate of Cairo. Viewed through the prism of this model of political order as process, as continuously in the action of becoming between multipolar and unipolar arrangements and their interlocking effects, it transpires that the sultanate's long history of political order experienced above all—as did any other West-Asian political formation in the later medieval period—regular moments that approached the multipolar type, when power constellations around patrimonial leaders time and again were jostling for pre-eminence. The prevalent practice of the tanistic mode of reproduction meant that any political order in late medieval Egypt and Syria easily tended to disintegrate and to have to be rebuilt from this multipolar type of socio-political organisation. The relatively undistinguished and sometimes extremely short-lived reigns of no less than fifty odd sultans in Cairo—including the reigns of Ṭaṭar in 1421, of Mu'ayyad Aḥmad b. Īnāl in 1461, and even of the latter's father Īnāl between 1453 and 1461—were always due to their inability, rashness, or simple failure to accomplish their own political orders, applying their own methods of integration, segmentation, and social reproduction—such as those concerning Aḥmad's "partners, courtiers and *mamlūks*", the "vastness of his resources" and "the impact of his charisma"—with limited success only, if any at all. Moments of rule that tended towards the unipolar type only emerged in specific contexts, of successful, relatively long and charismatic authority, as in the afore-mentioned diverse cases of the reigns of the sultans Baybars, Qalāwūn, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, Barqūq, Barsbāy, Jaqmaq, Qāyrbāy and Qansawh, when more successful practical arrangements of integration, segmentation and reproduction enabled these rulers and their entourages to steer the local circulation of power in particular monopolising ways. As suggested above, however, the latter unipolar moments always generated such distinctive structural effects that they also affected the political, social, economic, and cultural arrangements of reproduction, integration and segmentation of subsequent moments, that they even affected the very idea of whatever local and global political order the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* was meant to represent. Certain old and new particular methods of order always indeed tended to prove more resilient than others, to prove capable of accommodating and at the same time also channelling substantial and beneficial changes in the circulation of power. Originating from local practices of power within the sultanate's courtly elite circles, such successful methods regularly managed to stimulate their own reproductions in ever changing disciplining arrangements. These always contributed to the appearance of belonging to one coherent political order topped by the sultan, and they were always organised around related sets of highly symbolic sites, identities and discourses as well as around particular flows of human and economic resources. From the symbolic bodies of sultanate and amirate, over particular geographies of power, mechanisms of resource management, and narratives of universality, championship and victory, to the local manifestations of caliphate and Sunni Islam, all constantly re-appeared in similarly structuring but formally diverse ways from the practical arrangements embodied in ever changing power relations that emanated from the royal court in Cairo. Amid the multiplicity of voices and actions in which each and every one of these incoherent arrangements were continuously

manifested, even contemporary discourses of order emerged as one particular set of effects, generating structuring appearances of normative political order, of legitimate continuity and of statist authority throughout the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries in Egypt, Syria and beyond.

An alternative model for understanding late medieval Syro-Egyptian political organisation that emerges from all this is then one of sultanic political order —the state— as process, in constant flux as the structural effect and structuring embodiment of constantly changing practices of social reproduction, elite integration and political distinction, in contexts that range between multipolar and unipolar social organisation at and around Cairo’s court and its military elites.<sup>78</sup> Appearing as structurally united and coherent, these practices and their formal and discursive effects deserve to be studied in the particularity of their implementation and appearance, accepting that any view of them as a structural whole endowed with a particular historical agency equals participating in contemporary discourses of their construction as such agents first and foremost.

In many ways, this alternative model of political organisation stands out as analytically liberating from the imposition of any structural *a priori* on any object of late medieval Syro-Egyptian study. If the state is no longer considered an actor in the traditional sense, but rather a structural and structuring set of effects of particular practical methods of social reproduction, integration and segmentation, historical phenomena such as texts, objects, people, events, practices, institutions and relations no longer necessarily have to be approached through the direct or indirect prism of any more or less successful monopolising, hegemonic or other form of state, even when these phenomena participate one way or another in the production or reproduction of those structural and structuring effects of political order and state. In the same vein, the traditional state-society construct that tends to act as the defining framework for all late medieval Syro-Egyptian research takes on entirely new meanings in this model, both state and society in fact appearing as structural and structuring effects of related practical methods of order, including as reproduced in contemporary and in modern historiographical discourses imagining Cairo’s near and wider worlds. Those worlds were far more segmented in incoherent practical ways than they appeared from these discourses, and it is in their segmentation and fragmentation that they need to be understood before any claims can be made about their appearances as socially and politically meaningful structural wholes.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> In an adaptation of the afore-mentioned traditional Weberian definitions of the state this process of political order that is meant by the notion of the state, or of the *dawla* of contemporary usage, may then be defined for the present purposes as: the structural appearance of political order and of social difference that was re/produced by/for an elite social formation that successfully claims the hegemony of the legitimate use of (physical and symbolic) violence and of legitimate surplus extraction in a particular territory, through the concentration in its hands of interdependent mechanisms, instruments and strategies of reproduction and differentiation (see fn. 20).

<sup>79</sup> This perspective of many social realities existing side by side, in constantly changing and overlapping, intersecting or fully segmented ways, while the categories of ‘state’ and ‘society’ are first and foremost abstractions and ideational projections (with a potential structuring impact on those realities) made by in- and outsiders (both contemporary and modern), reminds in a somewhat more revisionist and less structuralist fashion of Conermann’s introductory words to the ASK Network Conference Proceedings, that “in this volume, we try to understand the ‘Mamluk Empire’, not as a confined space but as a region where several nodes of different networks existed side-by-side and at the same time. In our opinion, these networks constitute to a great extent the core of the so-called Mamluk society; they form the basis of the social order.” (Conermann, “Networks and Nodes in Mamluk Times”, 9).

## 5. Epilogue: the Cairo Sultanate between dynastic and Mamluk political orders

By way of concluding observation and illustration, it is relevant to summarily evoke here one set of these meaningful structural appearances, as originating in, deriving from and disciplining more or less successfully but in fundamentally distinct ways a segmented and regularly fragmenting late medieval Syro-Egyptian world of social practice. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the process of social organisation around patrimonial leaders and their practices of reproduction, integration and segmentation witnessed remarkable moments of unipolar hegemonic complexity, especially, as mentioned above, in the long reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (1293-4, 1299-1309, 1310-1341). In general, an equally remarkable series of successes of dynastic agents and ideas manifested itself in ongoing competition during and after al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's long reign.<sup>80</sup> Throughout this period, therefore, these dynastic contingencies repeatedly managed to bind and discipline the practices of tanistic reproduction and of subsequent regular elite fragmentation into one more or less transcendent normative effect of the apparent reproduction of particular groups of agents and ideas. When the political order of most of the fourteenth century was marked by the reign of the descendants of the late-thirteenth-century *mamlūk* and sultan Qalāwūn (r. 1279-1290), that made for a longstanding, meaningful and very real structural effect of a particular dynastic political order, with substantial impact “in the mental structures and categories of perception and thought” of the time. This normative appearance of one particular dynastic order in turn percolated back into the diverse methods that were deployed in the citadels, palaces, mosques, *madrasas*, markets, monuments, texts, and objects of the era to reproduce, integrate, distinguish and discipline various agents and agencies, giving particular, dynastic shapes and meanings to the symbolic bodies, political geographies, resource flows, and discourses of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk* every time they were re-enacted in social practice.<sup>81</sup>

The appearance of political order in the fifteenth century, however, was very different, and this was not in the least due to a complete failure of social practices of tanistic reproduction to acquire similar dynastic forms of social differentiation and to be disciplined by similar structuring impacts of dynastic order. Between 1412 and 1468 in particular, different combinations of new and mainly *mamlūk* political elites were repeatedly reproduced as the increasingly complex web of agents of a relatively quick succession of no less than five sultans and their *dawlas* (sultans al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh [r. 1412-21], al-Ashraf Barsbāy [1422-38], al-Zāhir Jaqmaq [1438-53], al-Ashraf Īnāl [1453-61] and al-Zāhir Khushqadam [1461-7]). In the turnover of sultans and the rapid disintegration of their networks of courtiers, agents and supporters in tanistic competition, however, also old elite groups and individuals remained deeply involved in the circulation of power, and many of them were often first marginalised due to a particular court's fragmentation,

---

<sup>80</sup> See the references above, in footnotes 69 & 73, and Van Steenbergen, “Caught between heredity and merit”.

<sup>81</sup> This point of the dynastic normative and therefore also cultural formation of fourteenth-century political organisation in Egypt and Syria is illustrated in, respectively, some more particular textual and art-historical detail in: Van Steenbergen, “Qalāwūnid Discourse, Elite Communication, and the Mamluk Cultural Matrix”; Flinterman & Van Steenbergen, “Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the Formation of the Qalāwūnid state”.

only to be recycled later on in subsequent new political contexts.<sup>82</sup> The increasingly advanced age at which the period's sultans ascended the throne, after long but also winding political careers in and out of the limelight, surely is one of the better known illustrations of this process (Barsbāy was in his forties in 1422, Jaqmaq was in his sixties in 1438, and Īnāl was 73 in 1453).

As argued above, this production, reproduction and recycling of elites and practices in a succession of changing social orders is of course not entirely different from what went on before. But in the first decades of the fifteenth century this process of ongoing social transformation and segmentation involved power elites, households and networks of predominantly *mamlūk* background that were socially and culturally unusually disconnected. Before the turn of the fifteenth century socialisation of outsider *mamlūks* had predominantly happened in contexts of dynastic differentiation, shaped by the effects of the disciplinary arrangements of the sultans al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb, Qalāwūn or Barqūq and their entourages and successors, which had integrated these outsiders of servile origins automatically into webs of social practices and cultural meanings that appeared as dynastically connected.<sup>83</sup> Between 1412 and 1468 the lack of structural dynastic effects to appear from social practice precluded similar social boundaries from being created across generations, affiliations, ethnic categories, kinship ties, and related identities. The ongoing practical process of elite reproduction, integration, segmentation, and fragmentation thus happened increasingly in a context in which the absence of any dynastic appearances created room for alternative symbolic narratives that could produce the structuring boundaries of political order, social distinction and legitimate sovereignty in the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*. Next to the often short-lived arrangements and structural effects of a sultan's actual power, authority and claims to political order, fragmented elite groups and individuals were invited to construct, produce and reproduce arrangements that created more transcendent effects of political community and social identity, and of legitimating continuity, which enabled to connect different social orders and their varying roles within them in non-dynastic ways.<sup>84</sup> In this particular context the practical disciplinary arrangements of the time enabled the discursive claiming of new particular historical truths and the invention of adapted genealogical traditions of one, long-standing and continuous political order that connected and explained a socio-culturally fragmented political present through the memory of a shared and glorious political past. In this endless process of structuring the near and wider world as a meaningful place and space, the memories of the dynastic orders that had been predominant in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (and that remained so anywhere else in West-Asia) were all but obliterated. At the same time, one of these new truths and traditions may well have been created in the format of a new layer of Mamluk socio-political meaning, of a shared and glorious

---

<sup>82</sup> See the references above, in footnotes 71 & 76, and especially Sievert, *Der Herrscherwechsel im Mamlukenreich*; summarised in idem, "Der Kampf um die Macht im Mamlukenreich des 15. Jahrhunderts"; idem, "Family, friend or foe?", 109-17.

<sup>83</sup> For an example of this dynamic dynastic 'socialisation' in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, see Van Steenbergen, "Ritual, Politics and the City in Mamluk Cairo". In this context, it is relevant to also refer to the fact that Loiseau captured the —for him— political essence of the period 1250-1290 under the title "Le règne de la maison d'al-Salih" and that of the period 1290-1382 as "Le temps des Qalawunides" (Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*, 112, 118).

<sup>84</sup> A good example of this is the process of Circassian 'ethnisation' of political identities that was posited by Loiseau as appearing and growing more and more powerful from the turn of the fifteenth century onwards (Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*, 173-200; see also above, footnote 64).



past rooted in servile origins and successful thirteenth-century *mamlūk* leaderships. This ‘Mamlukisation’ of fifteenth-century Syro-Egyptian political order emanating from the Cairo citadel may even have proven so powerful a structural effect of those arrangements that created the continued appearance of the *Dawlat al-Atrāk*, that even modern scholarship was affected by it.

## Bibliography

### *Sources*

- al-‘Aynī, Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Aḥmad (1361-1451), *‘Iqd al-jumān fī tārikh ahl al-zamān*, ed. ‘A. al-Ṭanṭāwī al-Qarmūt, (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Zahrā’ li-l-‘I‘lām al-‘Arabī, 1989)
- Ibn Aybak al-Dawādārī, Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh (fl. 1309-35), *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmi‘ al-ghurar*, vols. 1-9 (Cairo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1960-1992), vol. 9. *al-Durr al-fākhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir*, ed. H.R. Roemer, pp. 379-380; for the *dawlat al-turk* citation, see vol. 8, *al-Durr al-zakiyya fī akhbār al-fawla al-turkiyya*, ed. U. Haarmann
- Ibn Iyās, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad (1448-ca. 1524), *Badā’i‘ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i‘ al-duhūr*, ed. M. Sobernheim, P. Kahle & M. Mustafa, *Die Chronik des Ibn Ijās. Fünfter Teil A.H. 922-928/A.D. 1516-1522 (Bibliotheca Islamica 5e)* (Leipzig & Istanbul: F.A. Brockhaus, 1932)
- Ibn Kathīr, Abū l-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar (ca. 1300-1373), *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 14 vols. (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 1990, 2nd ed.)
- Ibn Khaldūn, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (1332-1406), *Riḥlat Ibn Khaldūn*, ed. M. Ibn Tāwīt al-Ṭanjī (Abū Zabī and Beirut: Dār al-Suwaydī li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘ and al-Mu‘assasa al-‘Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2003)
- , A. Cheddadi (transl.), *Le livre des exemples, I. Autobiographie. Muqaddima* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002)
- , *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, ed. Kh. Shaḥāda (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2001)
- , F. Rosenthal (transl.), N.J. Dawood (ed.), *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967, abridged edition)
- Ibn Manẓūr al-Anṣārī al-Ifriqī, Muḥammad b. Mukarram b. ‘Alī (d. ca. 1312), *Lisān al-‘Arab*, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1993-4)
- Ibn Ṣaṣrā, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad (fl. 1389-97), *al-Durra al-muḍī‘a fī l-dawla al-zāhiriyya*, ed. Kh. al-Dhahabī (Damascus: Manshūrāt al-Hay’a al-‘amma al-Sūriyya li-l-Kitāb, 2008)
- Ibn Taghrī Birdī, Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf (1411-70), *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*, vol. 16, eds. J. al-Shayyāl & F.M. Shaltūt (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1972)
- , *Extracts from Abū ‘l-Mahāsin ibn Taghrī Birdī’s chronicle, entitled Ḥawādith al-Duhūr fī madā l-ayyām wa-sh-shuhūr*, ed. W. Popper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930-42)
- al-Maqrīzī, Aḥmad b. ‘Alī (1363-1442), *kitāb al-Sulūk li-ma‘rifat duwal al-mulūk*, eds. M.M. Ziyāda; S. ‘A. ‘Āshūr, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah and Lajnat al-Ta’līf wa-l-Tarjamah wa-l-Nashr, 1934-1958 & 1970-1973)
- al-Ṣayrafī, ‘Alī b. Dāwud (1416-95), *Nuzhat al-nufūs wa-l-abdān fī Tawārīkh al-zamān*, ed. Ḥ. Ḥabashī, 4 vols. (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1970-94)

## Literature

- Abou-El-Haj, R.‘A., *Formation of the Modern State. The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005, Second Edition)
- Ackerman-Lieberman, Ph.I., *The Business of Identity. Jews, Muslims and Economic Life in Medieval Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014)
- Adriaenssens, V., and J. Van Steenberghe, “Mamluk Authorities and Anatolian Realities: Jānibak al-Ṣūfī, sultan al-Ashraf Barsbāy, and the Story of a social network in the Mamluk/Anatolian frontier zone, 1435-1438”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (in press)
- Ayalon, D., “The Circassians in the Mamluk kingdom”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 69/3 (1949): 135-47
- , “Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 15; 16 (1953; 1954): 203-28, 448-76; 57-90
- , “The European-Asiatic Steppe: A major reservoir of power for the Islamic World”, in *Trudy XXV. Mezhdunarod-nogo Kongressa Vostokovedov, Proceedings of the 25<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Orientalists, vol. 2, Section 6: History of Arab Countries, Moscow, 9-16 August 1960* (Moscow, 1963), pp. 47-52
- , “From Ayyūbids to Mamlūks”, *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 49 (1981): 43-57
- , “Baḥrī Mamluks, Burjī Mamlūks — Inadequate Names for the Two Reigns of the Mamlūk Sultanate”, *Tārīkh* 1 (1990): 3-52
- Bang, P.F., & D. Kolodziejczyk, eds., *Universal Empire. A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)
- Barkey, K., *Empire of Difference. The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)
- Behrens-Abouseif, D., “Qāyṭbāy’s Investments in the City of Cairo: Waqf and Power”, *Annales Islamologiques* 32 (1998): 29-40
- , “Qāyṭbāy’s Foundation in Medina, the Madrasah, the Ribāṭ, and the Dashīshah”, *Mamlūk Studies Review* 2 (1998): 61-71
- , “Qāyṭbāy’s Madrasahs in the Holy Cities and the Evolution of Ḥaram Architecture”, *Mamlūk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 129-47
- , “Sultan al-Ghawrī and the Arts”, *Mamlūk Studies Review* 6 (2002): 71-94
- Berkey, J.P., “Culture and Society during the Late Middle Ages”, in *The Cambridge History of Egypt. Vol. 1: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, ed. C.F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 375-411
- , *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001)
- , *The Formation of Islam. Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

- Bierman, I., & S. Denoix, eds., *Annales islamologiques* 46, *Dossier: L'exercice du pouvoir à l'âge des sultanats. Production, manifestation, réception* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2012)
- Bourdieu, P., L.J.D. Wacquant, S. Farage "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field", *Sociological Theory* 12/1 (1994): 1-18
- Chamberlain, M., *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Christ, G., *Trading Conflicts. Venetian Merchants and Mamluk Officials in Late Medieval Alexandria* (Leiden: Brill, 2012)
- Clifford, W., "Ubi Sumus? Mamluk History and Social Theory", *Mamlūk Studies Review* 1 (1997): 45-62
- , *State Formation and the Structure of Politics in Mamluk Syro-Egypt, 648-741 A.H./1250-1340 C.E.*, ed. St. Conermann (Mamluk Studies vol. 3) (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2013)
- Combe, E., J. Sauvaget & G. Wiet, *Répertoire Chronologique d'Epigraphie Arabe*, 19 vols. (Cairo: Institut Français d'archéologie orientale, 1931-91),
- Conermann, St., & A. Pishtor-Hatam, eds., *Die Mamluken: Studien zur ihrer Geschichte und Kultur. Gedenken an Ulrich Haarmann (1942-1999)* (Hamburg: EB-Verlag, 2003)
- Conermann, St., "Es Boomt! Die Mamlukenforschung (1992-2002)", in *Die Mamluken*, pp. 1-69
- , ed., *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus? Mamluk Studies-State of the Art* (Goettingen: V&R unipress/Bonn University Press, 2013)
- , "Quo Vadis, Mamlukology? (A German Perspective)", in *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus?*, pp. 7-23
- , ed., *Everything is on the Move. The Mamluk Empire as a Node in (Trans-)Regional Networks* (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2014)
- , "Networks and Nodes in Mamluk Times: some introductory remarks", in *Everything is on the Move*, 9-24
- Darrag, A., *L'Égypte sous le règne de Barsbay, 825-841/1422-1438* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1961)
- Davies, R., "The Medieval State: the Tyranny of a Concept?", *Journal of Historical Sociology* 16 (2003): 280-300
- Denoix, S., "Les sultanats. Des pouvoirs absolus, en interaction avec les sociétés qu'ils gouvernent", in *Annales islamologiques* 46 (2012): 3-12
- Eddé, A.-M., "Ayyūbids", in *EF<sup>3</sup>* <[http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/ayyubids-COM\\_0164](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/ayyubids-COM_0164)>
- Eychenne, M., "Réseau, pratiques et pouvoir(s) au début du XIVe siècle. L'exemple de Karīm al-Dīn al-Kabīr, un administrateur civil dans le système mamelouk", *Annales islamologiques* 46 (2012): 45-66
- , *Liens personnels, clientélisme et réseaux de pouvoir dans le sultanat mamelouk (milieu xiie-fin xive siècle)* (Beirut: Institut Français du Proche Orient, 2013)

- Fancy, N., *Science and Religion in Mamluk Egypt. Ibn al-Nafīs, Pulmonary Transit and Bodily Resurrection* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013)
- Fletcher, J., “Turco-Mongolian monarchic tradition in the Ottoman empire”, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3-4/1 (1979-80): 236-51
- Flinterman, W., & J. Van Steenbergen, “Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the Formation of the Qalāwūnid State”, in *Pearls on a String: Art in the Age of Great Islamic Empires*, ed. A. Landau (Baltimore and Seattle: The Walters Art Museum and University of Washington Press, 2015), pp. 101-27
- Flood, F.B., “Umayyad Survivals and Mamluk Revivals: Qalawunid Architecture and the Great Mosque of Damascus”, *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World* 14 (1997): 57-79
- Fuess, A., “Mamluk Politics”, in *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus*, pp. 95-117
- Fukuyama, F., *The Origins of Political Order. From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (London: Profile Books LTD, 2012 [pb])
- Gellner, E., “Flux and reflux in the faith of men”, in E. Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 1-85
- Giddens, A., *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984)
- Haarmann, U., “Regicide and the ‘Law of the Turks’”, in *Intellectual Studies on Islam, Essays written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*, eds. M. Mazzaoui and V.B. Moreen (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), pp. 127-35
- , “Joseph’s Law—The Careers and Activities of Mamluk Descendants before the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt”, in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, eds. Th. Philipp & U. Haarmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 55-84
- , “The Mamluk System of Rule in the Eyes of Western Travellers”, *Mamlūk Studies Review* 5 (2001): 2-24
- Har-El, Sh., *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East: The Ottoman-Mamluk War, 1485-91* (Leiden: Brill, 1995)
- Hirschler, K., *Medieval Arabic Historiography. Authors as Actors* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006)
- Hiyari, M.A., “The Origins and Development of the Amīrate of the Arabs during the Seventh/Thirteenth and Eight/Fourteenth Centuries”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38 (1975): 509-24
- Humphreys, R.St., *From Saladin to the Mongols: the Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193-1260* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977)
- , “The Emergence of the Mamluk Army,” *Studia Islamica* 45 (1977): 67-99 and 46 (1977): 147-82
- , “The Politics of the Mamluk Sultanate: A Review Essay”, *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9/1 (2005): 221-231
- Irwin, R., “Factions in Medieval Egypt”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 118/2 (1986): 228-46
- , “Under Western Eyes: A History of Mamluk Studies”, *Mamlūk Studies Review* 4 (2000): 27-51

- Kalus, L., & F. Soudan, *Thesaurus d'Epigraphie Islamique* (Paris-Genève: Fondation Max van Berchem, 2009)
- Khalidi, T., *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Lane, E.W., *Arabic-English Lexicon: Book I*, 1 vol. in 8 pts. (New York, Ungar, 1955-6)
- Lapidus, I.M., *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967)
- Lassner, J., *The Middle East Remembered. Forged Identities, Competing Narratives, Contested Spaces* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000)
- Lev, Y., "Symbiotic Relations: Ulama and the Mamluk Sultans", *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13/1 (2009): 1-26
- , "The Transition from the Ayyūbids to the Mamlūks: Ibn Wāṣil's Account", in *Egypt and Syria in the Fāṭimid, Ayyūbid and Mamlūk Eras — VIII*, eds. U. Vermeulen, K. D'hulster & J. Van Steenbergen (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), pp. 245-70
- Levanoni, A., *A Turning Point in Mamluk History. The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (1310-1341)* (Leiden: Brill, 1995)
- , "Rank-and-File Mamluks versus Amirs: New Norms in the Mamluk Military Institutions", in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. Th. Philipp & U. Haarmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 17-31
- , "The Sultan's Laqab — A Sign of a New Order in Mamluk Factionalism?", in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, 79-115
- Levanoni, A., & M. Winter, eds., *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2004)
- Lewis, B., "Egypt and Syria", in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, eds. P.M. Holt, A.K.S. Lambton, & B. Lewis, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 1: 175-230
- Loiseau, J., *Reconstruire la Maison du Sultan, 1350-1450: ruine et recomposition de l'ordre urbain au Caire* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2010)
- , *Les Mamelouks (xiii<sup>e</sup>-xv<sup>e</sup> siècle): Une expérience de pouvoir dans l'islam médiéval* (Paris: Seuil, 2014)
- Meloy, J., "Imperial Strategy and Political Exigency: the Red Sea Spice Trade and the Mamluk Sultanate in the Fifteenth Century", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123/1 (2003): 1-19
- , "Economic intervention and the political economy of the Mamluk State under al-Ashraf Barsbāy", *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9/2 (2005): 85-103
- , *Imperial Power and Maritime Trade: Mecca and Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2010)
- Mitchell, T., "The Limits of the State: beyond statist approaches and their critics", *The American Political Science Review* 85/1 (1991): 77-96

- Muhannā, E., “Encyclopaedism in the Mamluk Period: The Composition of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī’s (d. 1333) *Nihāyat al-arab fī Funūn al-Adab*”, PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 2012
- Northrup, L.S., *From Slave to Sultan: The Career of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and the Consolidation of Mamluk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678-689AH/1279-1290AD)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998)
- Onimus, C., “Les émirs dans le sultanat mamelouk sous les sultans Barqūq et Farağ (1382-1412)”, PhD Dissertation, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris) & Ghent University, 2013
- Petry, C.F., *The Civilian Elites of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981)
- , “The Military Innovations of Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī: Reforms or Expedients?”, *Al-Qanṭara: Revista de Estudios Arabes* 14/2 (1993): 441-67
- , *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt’s Waning as a Great Power* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994)
- , “The Military Institution and Innovation in the Late Mamlūk Period”, in *The Cambridge History of Egypt. Vol. 1: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, ed. C.F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 462-89
- Popper, W., *Egypt and Syria under the Circassian Sultans. 1382-1468 A.D. Systematic Notes to Ibn Taghrī Birdī’s Chronicles of Egypt (University of California Publications in Semitic Philology, vol. 15 & 16)* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955 & 1957)
- Richards, D.S., “Mamluk amirs and their families and households”, in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, pp. 32-54
- Richardson, K., *Difference and Disability in the Medieval Islamic World: Blighted Bodies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012)
- Rosenthal, F., “Dawla”, *EI<sup>2</sup>* <[http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/dawla-SIM\\_1748](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/dawla-SIM_1748)>
- Sato, T., “The Proposers and Supervisors of al-Rawk al-Nāṣirī in Mamluk Egypt”, *Mamlūk Studies Review* 2 (1998): 73-92
- Sievert, H., *Der Herrscherwechsel im Mamlukenreich: Historische und historiographische Studien zu Abū Ḥāmid al-Qudsī und Ibn Taghrībirdī* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag)
- , “Der Kampf um die Macht im Mamlūkenreich des 15. Jahrhunderts”, in *Die Mamlūken*, pp. 335-66
- , “Family, friend or foe? Factions, households and interpersonal relations in Mamluk Egypt and Syria”, in *Everything is on the Move*, pp. 84-125
- Stilt, K., *Islamic Law in Action. Authority, Discretion, and Everyday Experiences in Mamluk Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)
- Thorau, P., *The Lion of Egypt: Sultan Baybars I and the Near East in the Thirteenth Century*. Transl. P.M. Holt (London and New York: Longman, 1992)
- , “Einige kritische Bemerkungen zum sogenannten ‘mamlūk phemonenon’”, in *Die Mamluken*, pp. 367-378

- Van Berchem, M., *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum; première partie: Egypte; tome I: le Caire* (Cairo-Paris: Institut Français d'archéologie orientale, 1894-1903)
- Van Berkel, M., "The Attitude towards Knowledge in Mamluk Egypt: Organisation and Structure of the *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā* by al-Qalqashandī (1355-1418)", in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts*, ed. P. Binkley (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 159-68
- , "A Well-Mannered Man of Letters or a Cunning Accountant: Al-Qalqashandī and the Historical Position of the *Kātib*", *al-Masāq* 13 (2001): 87-96
- Van Steenbergen, J., *Order Out of Chaos. Patronage, Conflict and Mamluk Socio-Political Culture. 1341-1382* (Leiden: Brill, 2006)
- , "Qalāwūnid Discourse, Elite Communication and the Mamluk Cultural Matrix: interpreting a 14th-century panegyric", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43/1 (2012): 1-28
- , "The Mamluk Sultanate as a Military Patronage State. Household Politics and the Case of the Qalāwūnid Bayt", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 56/2 (2013): 189-217
- , "Ritual, Politics and the City in Mamluk Cairo: the Bayna l-Qaṣrayn as a dynamic 'lieu de mémoire' (1250-1382)", in *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. A. Beihammer, St. Constantinou & M. Parani (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 227-77
- , "Caught between heredity and merit: the amir Qūṣūn and the legacy of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 1341)", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (2015): 1-22 (FirstView Article).
- , "Nomen est Omen? David Ayalon, the Mamluk Sultanate, and the Rule of the Turks", in *Egypt and Syria under Mamluk Rule: political, social and cultural perspectives*, ed. A. Levanoni (in press)
- von Hees, S., "Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology. State of the art and future perspectives", in *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus*, pp. 119-130
- Watt, J., *The Making of Polities. Europe, 1300-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- Wing, P., "Indian Ocean Trade and Sultanatic Authority: the nāṣir of Jedda and the Mamluk Political Economy", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 57/1 (2014): 55-7
- , "Submission, Defiance, and the Rules of Politics on the Mamluk Sultanate's Anatolian Frontier", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25/3 (2015): 377-88
- Yosef, K., "Mamluks and their Relatives in the Period of the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517)", *Mamlūk Studies Review* 16 (2012): 55-69
- , "*Dawlat al-Atrāk* or *Dawlat al-Mamālīk*? Ethnic origin or slave origin as the defining characteristic of the ruling élite in the Mamluk Sultanate", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 (2012): 387-410