

## On the Brink of a New Era?

### Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī (d. 1366) and the Yalbughāwīya

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#### 1. Introduction

In the winter of the year 1366, the Mamluk political scene was all set for the rising star of the amir Sayf al-Dīn Yalbughā al-ʿUmarī al-Nāṣirī al-Khāṣṣakī (d. 1366) to reach its zenith.<sup>1</sup> The adolescent Qalāwūnid sultan, al-Malik al-Ashraf Shaʿban (1353-1377; r. 1363-1377), was firmly patronized by this former mamluk of Shaʿban’s uncle, the sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ḥasan (d. 1361; r. 1347-1351 & 1354-1361).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in February 1366, Yalbughā’s gradual empowerment after Ḥasan’s violent deposition in 1361 had reached a final stage when he managed to finish off the amir Ṭaybughā al-Ṭawīl (1325-1368), the last of his rivals for effective power behind the Qalāwūnid throne.<sup>3</sup> Finally, a major setback to Yalbughā’s increasing success, which had suddenly and quite unexpectedly emerged from the Latin West in October 1365 — the ‘Alexandrian crusade’ of Peter I of Lusignan, king of Cyprus— had been turned to his own advantage by late November 1366.<sup>4</sup> In that month, a large revenge fleet’s construction was completed, manned and equipped for war against the island of Cyprus, and on Saturday 28 November its formidable combat capacities were demonstrated on the Nile outside Cairo, in a

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account, analysis and assessment of Yalbughā’s career, within the larger remit of the Qalāwūnid sultanate and of Qalāwūnid political culture, see Jo Van Steenbergen, “The Last of the Qalāwūnid Magnates? Qalāwūnid Politics and the Case of the Amir Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī (d. 1366)”, in preparation.

<sup>2</sup> See Van Steenbergen, “The Last of the Qalāwūnid Magnates?”; Jo Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos. Patronage, Conflict and Mamluk Socio-Political Culture. 1341-1382*, The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1500, vol. 65 (Leiden, 2006), 117, 158-160.

<sup>3</sup> See Van Steenbergen, “The Last of the Qalāwūnid Magnates?”; Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 159.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Irwin, on the other hand, considers this event a major cause behind Yalbughā’s downfall (Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: the early Mamluk Sultanate 1250-1382* [London, 1986], 145). On this crusade, see Peter Edbury, “The Crusading Policy of King Peter I of Cyprus, 1359-1369”, in *The Eastern Mediterranean Lands in the Periods of the Crusades*, ed. Peter M. Holt (London, 1977), 90-105; Peter Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191-1374* (Cambridge, 1991); Martina Müller-Wiener, *Eine Stadtgeschichte Alexandrias von 564/1169 bis in die Mitte des 9./15. Jahrhunderts: Verwaltung und innerstädtische Organisationsformen* (Berlin, 1992); Jo Van Steenbergen, “The Alexandrian Crusade (1365) and the Mamluk Sources : reassessment of the *Kitāb al-Ilmām* of an-Nuwayrī al-ʿIskandarānī (d. 1372 AD)”, in *East and West in the Crusader States. Context - Contacts - Confrontations, III. Acta of the congress held at Hernen Castle in September 2000*, eds. K. Ciggaar & H.G.B. Teule, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*, vol. 125 (Leuven, 2003), 123-137 (however, this paper should be treated with some caution [I consider it to demonstrate my callowness at the time!] in light of Otfried Weintritt, *Formen spätmittelalterlicher islamischer Geschichtsdarstellung: Untersuchung zu an-Nuwayrī al-ʿIskandarānīs Kitāb al-Ilmām und verwandten zeitgenössischen Texten*, [Beirut, 1992]).

massively attended and awe-inspiring enactment of sea warfare, described by al-Maqrīzī as follows:

The sultan, the amir Yalbughā and all the regime's amirs and notables rode out to view the warships (*al-shawānī*). They had been successfully completed and their crews were ready. .... The sultan led his armies from the citadel to the island of Urwā [or Jazīrat al-Wuṣṭā, between the islands of Rawḍa and Ḥalīma], and boarded the “fire ship” (*al-ḥarrāqa*), while the banks were filled with people. The war ships (*al-shawānī*) came and its crews played with the war equipments, as one would do in an engagement with the enemy, with their drums being beaten, their trumpets being blown, and the naphtha bombs being released. It was a frightening but beautiful spectacle, and a good thing if it would have served its purpose (*law tamma*).<sup>5</sup>

Commissioned by Yalbughā and constructed—as one contemporary author testified—“in less than a year, despite the lack of wood and material”<sup>6</sup>, this fleet of 100 warships—each manned by some 150 sailors<sup>7</sup> as well as by a handful from each of the amirs' mamluks, geared for war<sup>8</sup>—generally must have been considered a remarkable feat and a clear token of Yalbughā's promising capacities. Hence, its spectacular public presentation in late November 1366 washed off any stain left by the Alexandrian crusade on Yalbughā's public image as legitimate powerholder behind the ephemeral Qalāwūnid sultan Sha'ban. When Yalbughā thereupon proceeded to go hunting on the Nile's West bank, near Gizeh, there was nothing and no one left to vie with his status and authority. At least, that is what things looked like. But Yalbughā was soon to experience how appearances can be misleading! As al-Maqrīzī suggested from hindsight, Yalbughā's fleet would never really serve its purpose. On the contrary: instead of setting sail to Cyprus, it remained on the Nile, between Cairo and Bulāq al-Takrūrī on the West bank, and was probably for the most part

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<sup>5</sup> Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. M.M. Ziyādah et al. (Cairo, 1934-72), 3:129-30. For a detailed contemporary description of this public inauguration ceremony and of the strong impression it left, including on Catalan envoys, see Muḥammad al-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī, *al-Ilmām bi-mā jarat bihi al-Aḥkām wa l-Umūr al-muqḍīya fī waq'at al-Iskandarīya sanata 767 h.*, ed. A.S. Atiya (Hyderabad, 1986-73), 3:231-4. On the types of ships mentioned here, see Dionisius A. Agius, *Classic Ships of Islam. From Mesopotamia to the Indian Ocean*, Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 1 the Near and Middle East, vol. 92 (Leiden, 2008), 343-8. For the exact location of the island of Urwā, see the map in André Raymond, *Cairo. City of History*, (Cairo, 2001), 150; on its whereabouts in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, see Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Mawā'iz wa l-'tibār bi dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa l-Āthār*, (Beirut, 1998), 3:326.

<sup>6</sup> Aḥmad al-Bayrūtī, [unknown title], Oxford, Bodleian Ms. Marshall (or.) 36, fol. 2r. (See also fn. 10 on this manuscript).

<sup>7</sup> See Dionisius A. Agius, “The Arab *Šalandī*”, in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras-III*, eds. Urbain Vermeulen and Jo Van Steenberghe, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*, vol. 102 (Leuven, 2001), 58-9.

<sup>8</sup> See al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3: 129.

left to rot.<sup>9</sup> This, however, would only happen after it was deployed there one more time, about a fortnight after its promising inauguration. At this one occasion, instead of being deployed as a mighty instrument of muslim revenge against crusading infidels, it was used against fellow muslims, the latter ironically including Yalbughā himself! On Tuesday 8 December Yalbughā narrowly escaped his attempted murder at his hunting camp near Gizeh, only managing to cross back to his residence near Cairo in the course of the following day. Subsequently, he tried to undo this rebellion by isolating it and preventing his opponents from crossing the Nile and returning to Cairo. But when the latter obtained part of their opponent's revenge fleet, the Nile between Cairo and Gizeh again witnessed an enactment of sea warfare, but now for real and between two groups of amirs and mamluks, one supportive of Yalbughā on the East side and on the island of Urwā, and another opposing him on the West bank, featuring the sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Sha'bān as well as large numbers of Yalbughā's own mamluks, the Yalbughāwīya. This spectacle surely must have been as impressive as the one that was staged two weeks earlier, at least according to historical reports like the following one by the mysterious contemporary chronicler Aḥmad al-Bayrūtī:

[Yalbughā] remained on the Jazīrat al-Wuṣṭā [/Urwā] while al-Malik al-Ashraf and his company were on the bank of [Bulāq] al-Takrūrī. Someone known as Muḥammad b. Bint Labṭa, the captain (*al-rāyīs*), then came to al-Malik al-Ashraf, offered him about thirty of the newly built ships, with crew, and he broke the ships' rigging (*burūq al-marākib*), thus flattening them in order they could cross over. A number of the amirs and of the mamluks of Yalbughā embarked upon them for the crossing, but Yalbughā shot naphtha bombs at them. Thereupon, they made the ships' crews bring them close to the river bank, shooting arrows at Yalbughā so as to hit his companions and drive them back to where they came from. But Yalbughā and his companions shot at them with arrows and naphtha, without, however, impressing them.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In fact, one of these ships is explicitly reported to have been used, in the course of 1368, by a sea captain (*rāyīs al-bahr*) known as Muḥammad al-Tāzī al-Maghrabī in a successful corsairing campaign against a ship of the 'Franks' (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:159). Most of this Egyptian fleet's whereabouts, however, remain unknown, but it may indeed have shared in the fate of its Syrian counterpart, which was left to rot near Beirut (see Albrecht Fuess, "Rotting Ships and Razed Harbors: The Naval Policy of the Mamluks", *MSR* 5 [2001]: 52-53; on rotting ships, see also Agius, *Classic Ships of Islam*, 253-4, 260-2).

<sup>10</sup> al-Bayrūtī, fol. 3r (for a single, extremely brief reference to this so far untraceable chronicler and the unique, 788 AH [1386 CE] manuscript [in 131 folia] of his very valuable chronicle for the years 769-779 AH, see Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur. Zweite den Supplementbänden angepasste Auflage*, [Leiden, 1943-9], 2:61 ["A. al-Bairūtī schrieb: Eine Geschichte der J. 768-80/1366-78 (*sic* !) mit Nekrologen"]). Another account of this engagement, with even more detail, may be found in al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:133-5. Thanks are due to Dionisius A. Agius for helping me with the translation of this passage.

Thus, Yalbughā tried to regain control of the situation with a host of impressive strategic, military and institutional measures. These included not only his blockade of the Nile and his engagement in sea warfare, but also such remarkable measures as the installation of yet another Qalāwūnid sultan instead of the recalcitrant and absent Sha‘bān: al-Malik al-Manṣūr Ānūk b. Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 1391), mockingly referred to by commoners and chroniclers alike as ‘*sulṭān al-jazīra*’, since he only held court for one day on the above-mentioned island.<sup>11</sup> When, however, on Saturday 12 December al-Ashraf Sha‘bān and his supporters eventually managed to cross the Nile and catch up with their Cairene supporters, Yalbughā’s attempts to revert the situation proved futile, and after his arrest the conflict ended in the following gruesome manner:

“[Yalbughā’s] mamluks came, took him from the prison and brought him down from the citadel. When he went through the Bāb al-Qal‘a and waited at the wall, they brought him a horse to ride. But when he intended to mount, a mamluk called Qarātamur hit him [with his sword], decapitating him, whereupon [others] jumped at him with their swords, cutting him to pieces. They took his head and held it in a burning torch for the bleeding to stop, though some of them refused to have anything to do with that. When they removed the torch, the bleeding had stopped and they wiped [the head] clean. They could no longer recognize him [in it] but for the scar he had under his ear. Then, they took his body and brought it to al-‘Arūsātayn to hide it there. But under cover of the night[’s darkness], Ṭashtamur, [Yalbughā’s] *dawādār*, came and took the head from them, and he looked for the body until he found it. He had it stitched, and then he buried it in the mausoleum which [Yalbughā] had constructed near the mausoleum of Khwand Umm Ānūk, at al-Rawḍa, outside Bāb al-Barqīya.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:133-4, 135; Aḥmad b. Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-Kāmina fī A‘yān al-Mī‘a al-Thāmina*, ed. H. al-Nadawī (Beirut, 1993), 1:418-9; Abū I-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf b. Taghrī Birdī, *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi wa l-Mustawfi ba‘da l-Wāfi*, ed. M.M. Amīn (Cairo, 1986-), 3:107-8.

<sup>12</sup> al-Bayrūtī, fol. 3v; similar story in al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:136.

## 2. An Assessment of Historiography

When Mamluk studies have awarded any attention at all to this drawn-out military engagement in early December 1366, it was indifferently done quite briefly within a larger historical or conceptual framework. Moreover, in their summary reconstructions, such studies invariably identified either al-Ashraf Sha‘bān, or a nameless mass of the Yalbughāwīya, or both, as the culprits for this remarkable and abominable turn of events. Thus, in the 1960s, in William Brinner’s preliminary attempt to make sense of late 14<sup>th</sup> century power struggles, he entirely blamed the sultan, claiming that he was “determined to be ruler in fact as well as in name”.<sup>13</sup> In the early 1980s, Werner Krebs’s chronological reconstruction of Mamluk history between 1341 and 1382 accused first and foremost Yalbughā’s mamluks, identifying them as “die Masse seiner namenlosen Mamluken”.<sup>14</sup> In their historical surveys of ‘medieval’ islamic history, both published in 1986, Robert Irwin and Peter Holt generally agreed with this view, adding some more nuances. The former stated that “Yalbughā was killed in 1366 by some of his own mamluks who had been unable to endure their master’s harsh discipline any longer”, adding that “though the sultan approved their action, he was not fully master of the changed situation”.<sup>15</sup> Agreeing with the Yalbughāwīya’s involvement, Holt, however, conversely also repeated Brinner’s accusation against Sha‘bān, claiming that “al-Ashraf Sha‘bān, now old enough to take a hand in politics, gave his patronage to a faction of malcontent Mamluks”.<sup>16</sup> The last scholar who dealt with this conflict in any serious fashion was Amalia Levanoni, who in 1995 followed the arguments put forward by Krebs and Irwin, stating that

when the Yalbughāwīya mamluks rebelled against their master, Yalbughā al-‘Umarī, the idea of the rebellion had originated with the mamluks, and they were the ones who forced the senior amirs to join them, threatening those who would not unite with them with dire consequences. Following the success of the rebellion, the mamluks

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<sup>13</sup> William M. Brinner, “The Struggle for Power in the Mamlūk State: Some Reflections on the Transition from Bahrī to Burjī Rule”, in *Proceedings of the 26<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Orientalists. New Delhi, 4-10 January 1964* (New Delhi, 1970), 233.

<sup>14</sup> Werner Krebs, “Innen- und Außenpolitik Ägyptens, 741-784/1341-1382” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Universität Hamburg, 1980), 101-2. At about the same time, Ḥayāt Nāṣir al-Ḥajjī came to a similar conclusion, see his “al-Aḥwāl al-Dākhiliya fī Salṭanat al-Ashraf Sha‘bān b. Ḥusayn f. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn. 764-778 h/ 1362-1376m”, *‘Ālam al-Fikr* 14/3 (1983): 782-4.

<sup>15</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 148

<sup>16</sup> Peter M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades. The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517*, A History of the Near East (London, 1986), 127; repeated in Peter M. Holt, “Miṣr,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 7:171, & in Peter M. Holt, “Sha‘bān. 2. al-Malik al-Ashraf”, *ER*, 9: 155.

insisted that the sultan, al-Ashraf Sha‘bān, hand over to them their defeated master whom they then murdered.<sup>17</sup>

From all this, it has to be acknowledged that the analysis of this conflict has not really been furthered much beyond the eye-brow-raising views that were already formulated by the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century orientalist William Muir. In his “The Mameluke or Slave Dynasty of Egypt”, he stated that

Yelbogha [...] was at first the dominant Emir; but his atrocities so transcended even the barbarous precedents of the age as to arouse the hatred of the people, who rallied to the support of the young sultan when Yelbogha rebelled and would have raised another brother to the throne. The tyrant was defeated, and his head exposed upon a burning torch. His memlukes, however, remained dominant and in their wild excesses had the city at their mercy.<sup>18</sup>

Despite a flavor of historical inaccuracy in the latter statement, Muir’s reading of the conflict, implicating the Yalbughāwīya, clearly has remained the bottom line of scholarly consensus until this day. Moreover, just as Muir implied that “the tyrant” really had it coming, this idea of Yalbughā’s harsh attitude towards his mamluks triggering their actions has remained the prevalent explanation for such remarkable and radical breaking of the mutually beneficial bonds that tied rank-and-file mamluks to their master. Whereas the passing references to such harshness by Irwin and Holt suggested that like Muir they simply considered Yalbughā unfit for the job, Levanoni in 1995 took this moral argument one step further, by linking it to a “remamlukisation” project endeavored by Yalbughā in order to stem the tide of moral laxity in the military ranks, which allegedly had set in during the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.<sup>19</sup> Hence, she not only blamed Yalbughā and “his crass attitude towards [his mamluks], the humiliations they suffered at his hands, and the excessive punishments he meted out”, but also the Yalbughāwīya, who “had become too

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<sup>17</sup> Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History. The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn. 1310-1341*, Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts, vol. 10 (Leiden, 1995), 119-120; also 89. Repeated in her “Rank-and-file Mamluks versus amirs: new norms in the Mamluk military institution,” in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, eds. Thomas Philipp & Ulrich Haarmann, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge, 1998), 25.

<sup>18</sup> W. Muir, *The Mameluke or Slave Dynasty of Egypt. A History of Egypt from the fall of the Ayyubite Dynasty to the Conquest by the Osmanlis. A.D. 1260-1517*, (London, 1896; repr. Amsterdam, 1968), 97.

<sup>19</sup> For an earlier passing reference to this ‘remamlukisation’-thesis, see Holt, “Miṣr”, 171. It was also repeated and elaborated by Linda S. Northrup in her “The Bahrī Mamlūk sultanate, 1250-1390,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, Volume 1, Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge, 1998), 286-9. For a critical approach to such a concept of an ideal, normative ‘mamlūk phenomenon’, as originating in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, see Peter Thorau, “Einige kritische Bemerkungen zum sogenannten ‘mamlūk phenomenon’,” in *Die Mamlūken. Studien zu ihrer Geschichte und Kultur. Zum Gedenken an Ulrich Haarmann (1942-1999)*, eds. Stephan Conermann & Anja Pistor-Hatam, Asien und Afrika. Beiträge des Zentrums für Asiatische und Afrikanische Studien (ZAAS) der Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, Band 7 (Hamburg, 2003), 367-78.

reliant on conditions of material permissiveness” and who were characterized by “disloyalty, lack of restraint, and greed”.<sup>20</sup>

However, in limiting themselves to such dismissive, negative appreciations of this episode and its protagonists —Yalbughā wronged his own mamluks, and they were all rogues and up to no good—, all modern studies alike demonstrate first and foremost how deeply embedded they are in the value judgements of near contemporary historians (and it has been sufficiently demonstrated in recent years how such an approach entails many pitfalls<sup>21</sup>). Thus, Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) —who had access to inside information on this as well as subsequent episodes because of his close friendship with the Yalbughāwī Alṭunbughā al-Jūbānī (ca. 1341-1389)<sup>22</sup>— very succinctly assesses the background of the 1366-revolt as follows:

“Yalbughā’s autocracy (*istibdāduhu*) had been lasting long for the sultan, and his cruelty (*waṭ’atuhu*) had been hard to bear for the amirs, for the regime’s employees, and especially for his mamluks. He had been increasing the number of mamluks, disciplining them in an extreme fashion and overstepping all bounds when he beat them with the stick, until their noses were cut off and their ears were severed (*tajāwaza al-ḍarb fihim bi-l-‘aṣā ilā jad’ al-unūf wa ṣṭilām al-ādhān*). ... [That is why] they harbored [feelings of] disloyalty (*al-ghishsh*).”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History*, 88-89, 90, 103.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Amalia Levanoni, “Al-Maqrīzī’s account of the Transition from Turkish to Circassian Mamluk Sultanate : History in the Service of Faith”, in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950-1800)*, ed. Hugh Kennedy, *The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1453*, vol. 31 (Leiden, 2001), 93-105.

On top of that, it can also be convincingly suggested that this pervasive uncritical and negative approach to the 1366 conflict owes an equal lot to the wide-spread tendency to assess Mamluk political history through a modern, Marxist and/or system’s analysis prism, anachronistically applying modern conceptions of class, class consciousness and solidarity, and class struggle to a premodern society (i.e. the mamluk proletariat struggling for their emancipation from their control by the bourgeois amirs!). In this respect, see, for instance, Winslow W. Clifford’s apt and stimulating analysis in his “*Ubi Sumus? Mamluk History and Social Theory*,” *MSR* 1 (1997): 45-62.

<sup>22</sup> See Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘Ibar wa Dīwān al-Mubtadā wa l-Khabar fī ayyām al-‘Arab wa l-‘Ajam wa l-Barbar wa man ‘āṣarahum min dhawī al-sultān al-akbar*, ed. N. al-Haruni (Cairo, 1867-1868), 5:476.

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘Ibar*, 5:456.

Al-Maqrīzī, a student and well-known admirer of Ibn Khaldūn<sup>24</sup>, later repeated this general negative stance, claiming that this Yalbughā character would beat his mamluks with a whip and cut off their tongues.<sup>25</sup>

However, what has not been picked up so far, and what is very striking in this context, is that all other Mamluk chroniclers that discuss this episode in Mamluk history, including the contemporaries al-Bayrūtī (fl. latter half 14<sup>th</sup> c.) and Ibn Duqmāq (ca. 1350-1407) refrain from making such value judgements. This ‘depreciation’ of Yalbughā in particular is only present with Ibn Khaldūn, and with al-Maqrīzī after him, actually justifying in unmistakable fashion the Yalbughāwīya’s actions against their master. Was this perhaps primarily how surviving Yalbughāwīya, like Ibn Khaldūn’s source Alṭunbughā or like Ibn Khaldūn’s patron, the sultan Barqūq (r. 1382-89, 1390-99), preferred to remember this black page in their history?

Nevertheless, it would be otiose to doubt that there may well be a kernel of truth in these assertions, that Yalbughā was an unpleasant man to work for, that there was a general feeling of physical maltreatment among Yalbughā’s mamluks, and that the December 1366 revolt had much to do with that. Even so, it remains puzzling that these disgruntled mamluks had chosen to support Yalbughā on several earlier occasions, until just a few months earlier, in February 1366, against his peer Ṭaybughā, who at the time could count on a lot of support among the amirs and also among the commoners.<sup>26</sup> Why, or perhaps more appropriate, how did they change their mind and eventually turn against him, in December 1366? Was there more at stake, triggering these harbored feelings of disloyalty to erupt at this specific moment?

In all, this is one episode from a long list in Mamluk history that continues to generate many more questions than those that have been considered so far. Especially from a long-term historical perspective, it becomes increasingly relevant to pursue such questions and start digging beyond today’s surface of Mamluk history. In the present context, for instance, the underlying assumption in modern historiography’s face-value acceptance of Ibn Khaldūn’s views seems to be that for nearly two centuries decline from an initial late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth century point of success was predominant in the sultanate’s

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<sup>24</sup> See for instance Robert Irwin, “Al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Khaldūn: Historians of the Unseen”, *MSR* 7/2 (2003): 217-225; Anne F. Broadbridge, “Royal Authority, Justice, and Order in Society: The Influence of Ibn Khaldūn on the Writings of al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrībirdī”, *MSR* 7/2 (2003): 231-245.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:130. See also Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11: 36.

<sup>26</sup> See Van Steenbergen, “The Last of the Qalāwūnid Magnates?”.



history. More precisely, the above perception of the December 1366 conflict as a total breakdown of the 'natural' relationship between mamluks and their master turns it into a telling exception to the alleged rule that there was a 'Mamluk system' of unconditional loyalty to one's master (*ustādh*) and to one's peers (*khushdāsh*) dominating Mamluk politics at large, which had been responsible for the sultanate's initial successes, but which got increasingly strained thereafter.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the conflict's perception as the breaking of this crucial taboo and normative code perfectly confirms and illustrates the idea of crisis and of the breakdown of norms and behavior in the quagmire of what must have been a horrible fourteenth century, from which the sultanate would never really manage to escape again, despite any attempts at 'remamlukisation'.

But does such a linear, comparative approach really do justice to what actually happened in that fourteenth century, let alone to what happened thereafter? As said, time has definitely come to start delving beyond such static, judgmental and negative views of Mamluk history, moving away from a focus on "what went wrong" and towards an appreciation of the many dimensions of Mamluk historical change in their own right. Therefore, in the second part of this article, the December 1366 conflict will be analyzed from one among quite a few possible alternative angles.<sup>28</sup> It will be claimed that prosopography, and a more accurate identification of Yalbughā's opponents and of their relationship with Yalbughā in general, opens up very interesting new perspectives. This will eventually allow for a more positive reading of the causes and consequences of this conflict, moving away from the depressing 'Khaldūnian' 'decline paradigm' that has perverted Mamluk studies for far too long now, and towards an understanding in its own right of the process of change and transformation which the Mamluk sultanate clearly was

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<sup>27</sup> On this 'Mamluk system', as the static backbone of the Mamluk political economy, see especially the various pioneering works by David Ayalon (mainly republished in his collected volumes: *The Mamlūk Military Society: Collected Studies*, [London, 1979]; *Outsiders in the Lands of Islam: Mamluks, Mongols, and Eunuchs*, [London, 1988]; *Islam and the Abode of War*, [Aldershot, 1994]; and neatly summarised in Reuven Amitai, "David Ayalon, 1914-1998," *MSR* 3 (1999): 1-12. For an updated, more dynamic (in a negative sense, though [see fn. 29]) version, see Levanoni, *Turning Point*, esp. 4-27.

<sup>28</sup> Inspiration for these angles may (in fact, should) certainly be searched for in concepts, views and ideas as developed in related fields of pre-modern historical research, such as (among others) in the works of Gerd Althoff (eg. his *Die Macht der Rituale: Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter*, [Darmstadt, 2003]), Marco Mostert (eg. *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, [Turnhout, 1999]), and Geoffrey Koziol (eg. *Begging pardon and favor: Ritual and political order in early medieval France*, [Ithaca, 1992]).

undergoing by the latter half of the fourteenth century, and which were to ensure its continued existence well into the sixteenth century!<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For the identification of a notion of 'decline' permeating Levanoni's *Turning Point*, see the review by Winslow W. Clifford in *MSR* 1 (1997): 179-82. For a very stimulating survey of modern Ottoman historiography's recent move away from its 'decline paradigm', see Donald Quataert, "Ottoman History Writing and Changing Attitudes Towards the Notion of 'Decline'", *History Compass* 1 (2003): 1-9. The conceptual and practical parallels with Mamluk historiography, both modern and contemporary, are extremely striking, and call for a similar revision that may "offer a more nuanced view of the [Mamluk] experience, ... discussing the realities of those experiences rather than [Mamluk] failures to follow particular patterns of change" (p. 3); if gradually implemented in Mamluk studies, also in light of a larger perspective offered by comparative and global history, such a revision will undoubtedly be as revealing as in the Ottoman case, where Quataert describes how "the emerging new scholarship is revealing an Ottoman state (society and economy) in the process of continuous transformation, rather than a decline or fall from idealized norms of the past.... In this new understanding, the Ottoman state underwent continuous modifications in its domestic policy, an ongoing evolution in which there is no idealized form, since change itself is understood as the norm." (p. 4)

### 3. The Yalbughāwīya: veteran amirs and junior mamluks

If one takes a closer look at the December 1366 conflict, and at Yalbughā's opponents in particular, there certainly are a number of factors that deserve much more attention than hitherto awarded. As far as causes and consequences of the rebellion are concerned, the most important aspect among these factors concerns the sliding scale of multiple relationships between Yalbughā and his opponents, revealing how in many modern studies the latter so far have been unjustly reduced to generic terms such as "the Yalbughāwīya mamluks". Certainly, Yalbughā's mamluks were deeply involved, but not all of them at the same time, nor for the same reasons, nor in similar fashion. There was indeed much more at stake than malcontent mamluks simply breaking up with their master!

#### Veteran amirs

Continuing his above-mentioned account of the rebellion, Ibn Khaldūn actually explains how one amir's brother one day fell victim to Yalbughā's notorious tempers, enjoining that amir, Asandamur al-Nāṣirī (d. 1368), to conspire with his peers and the sultan against Yalbughā.<sup>30</sup> The other extant contemporary accounts, by Ibn Duqmāq and al-Bayrūtī, give more details on this aspect of the rebellion. In almost identical wording, they both claimed that

"there was agreed [to revolt] by the mamluks of Yalbughā who had been promoted amir by him, by their 'brothers', and by the leading *ḥalqa* chiefs (*mamālik Yalbughā alladhīna ammarahum wa ikhwatuhum wa ru'ūs al-bāshāt*)<sup>31</sup>, including Aqbughā al-Aḥmadī, known as al-Jalab, Asandamur al-Nāṣirī, Qajmās al-Ṭāzī, Taghrī Birmish al-'Alā'ī, Aqbughā Jarkas Amīr Silāḥ, and Qarābughā al-Ṣarghitmishī, as well as those that had allied with them. They geared up [for combat], rode out and attacked

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<sup>30</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-'Ibar*, 5:356.

<sup>31</sup> On the latter title, rarely encountered and therefore less well-known, see Khalīl b. Shāhīn al-Zāhirī, *Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik fī Bayān al-Ṭuruq wa l-Masālik*, ed. Paul Ravaisse (Paris, 1894), 116: "every one hundred from a thousand [*ḥalqa* troopers] have a chief (*bāsh*) and a superintendent (*naqīb*)."

their *ustādh*, the honourable *atābak* Yalbughā al-‘Umarī, raiding his encampment [at Gizeh] and intending to kill him.”<sup>32</sup>

Al-Maqrīzī, for his part, agreeing on the identity of these six as leaders of the revolt, explains their action further, incorporating these contemporary accounts and at the same time implementing, as it would seem, an expanded version of Ibn Khaldūn’s moralizing story line. He claims that the young recruits got fed up with Yalbughā’s harsh treatment of them, whereupon these six amirs went to Yalbughā to plea their case, asking him to relent and to show them some mercy. Thereupon, however, Yalbughā would have insulted and threatened these amirs, which ultimately convinced them to attack Yalbughā’s encampment in conjunction with those malcontent mamluks.<sup>33</sup>

Whatever the truth of the matter, this ‘gang’ of six Yalbughāwī amirs clearly constituted a major factor in the conflict’s initial phase, and, as it would turn out, they were also to figure prominently among its political and institutional beneficiaries. The morning after Yalbughā’s murder, four amirs—including three out of these six initiators: Aqbughā al-Aḥmadī al-Jalab (d. 1367), Asandamur al-Nāṣirī (d. 1368) and Qajmās al-Ṭāzī (fl. 1360s)<sup>34</sup>— were even reported to have been “installed as the spokesmen for the untying and tying [of the

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted from al-Bayrūtī, fol. 2v; also in Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Aydamur b. Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām fī Tārīkh al-Islām”, Forschungs- und Landesbibliothek Gotha MS Orient A 1572, fol. 2v. (in fact, this passage’s version in the latter autograph manuscript, dated 784 AH/1382 CE, shows only 3 slight but reductive modifications to al-Bayrūtī’s text, as it appears in the Bodleian manuscript from 788 AH/1386 CE: Ibn Duqmāq’s text collapses the phrase (*wa ru’ūs al-bāshāt minhum* - “by the leading halqa chiefs, including...”) into a less enigmatic variant (*wa ru’ūsum* ... - “and their leaders were...”) and drops altogether the attributive relative clause (*al-ma’rūf bi* - “known as”) after the name of Aqbughā al-Aḥmadī, as well as the verb (*labisū* - “they geared up”).

An identical fragment, equally with slight modifications (but not as reductive as Ibn Duqmāq’s), is in the 15<sup>th</sup> c. chronicle of Maḥmūd al-‘Aynī, “Iqd al-Jumān fī Tārīkh Ahl al-Zamān”, Dār al-Kutub MS 1584 *tārīkh*, fol. 144r (in this version, the initial verb is put in the third person feminine singular (*ittafaqat*) instead of the third person masculine plural (*ittafaqū*) in al-Bayrūtī and Ibn Duqmāq; the verb *kabasū* (“they attacked/raided”) is dropped (and not *labisū* as in Ibn Duqmāq); there are minor adjustments to certain names (twice adding al-Khāṣṣakī to Yalbughā’s name, once changing his title from the official form of address (*al-maqarr al-atābakī* - “the honourable *atābak*”) to the more functional (*al-atābak*), and once specifying that “Aqbughā al-Aḥmadī, known as Jalab, [was] *ra*’s *nawba* [a mamluks’ chief]”). On the problematic identity of this manuscript in relation to other extant copies of the work of this author, see my discussion with Sami Massoud as reconstructed in his *The Chronicles and Annalistic Sources of the Early Mamluk Circassian Period*, Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts, vol. 67 (Leiden, 2007), 41-5.

An adjusted, but clearly related version of this passage may be found in the *Jawhar al-Thamīn*, the summary chronicle of Islamic history by the same Ibn Duqmāq, interestingly now denoting these six amirs as chiefs [*bāshātuḥum*] (Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Jawhar al-Thamīn fī siyar al-Khulafā’ wa l-Mulūk wa l-Salāṭīn*, ed. S.‘A. ‘Āshūr (Mecca, 1982) 415).

Finally, also the version of Ibn Taghrī Birdī clearly represents similar substance, demonstrating obvious textual traces of a contemporary original (Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa l-Qāhira*, ed. I.‘A. Ṭarkhān (Cairo, 1963-72), 11:36).

<sup>33</sup> al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:130-1.

<sup>34</sup> The fourth amir, Ṭughāytamur al-Nizāmī, a high-ranking member of the political elite for several years, had been siding with Yalbughā for most of the December 1366 conflict, but he had changed camps just in time not to be discredited by Yalbughā’s downfall (al-Bayrūtī, fol. 3r-3v; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:74, 75, 134-5); his (brief) leadership after Yalbughā’s murder is confirmed from his biography in Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 2:223.

regime's business], for the giving and taking [of the regime's wealth], and for the appointment and the dismissal [of the regime's functionaries].”<sup>35</sup> Soon thereafter, this shift was confirmed institutionally, when these “spokesmen” reshuffled al-Ashraf Sha‘bān’s entourage of courtiers.<sup>36</sup> On the one hand, this re-organization of the court conspicuously benefited a handful of amirs and officials with clear pre-Yalbughā credentials, like Qashtamur al-Manṣūrī (ca. 1310-1369), a long-standing veteran of the Qalāwūnid era<sup>37</sup>; Aydamur al-Shāmī, a veteran from al-Nāṣir Ḥasan’s reign<sup>38</sup>, and Muḥammad b. Qumārī (d. 1377), whose father had been a leading amir in the 1330s and 40s<sup>39</sup>. On the other hand, upon gaining pre-eminence, the new “spokesmen” obviously also made sure to cash in and to include themselves in this round of promotions and new entries into al-Ashraf Sha‘bān’s court. Thus, Qajmās al-Ṭāzī, an amir of forty since March 1366, was appointed

<sup>35</sup> See al-Bayrūtī, fol. 4r; al-‘Aynī, “Iqd”, 147. Again in a reductive version in Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 4r (the fourth ‘odd’ amir, Ṭughāytamur al-Niṣāmī, is not mentioned, the verb (*istaqarra* - “to install”) is missing, and they were “spokesmen for the untying and tying” only). Clear traces of a contemporary original may again be found in Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11: 40-1 (including reference to Ṭughāytamur and use of the verb *istaqarra* - “to install”). A different version, but equally referring to the three Yalbughāwī amirs, is in al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:137 (“they started managing the affairs of the regime [*akhadhū fi tadbīr umūr al-dawla*]”).

<sup>36</sup> al-Bayrūtī, fol. 4r-4v; al-‘Aynī, “Iqd”, 147. Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 4r-4v. Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3: 138-9. Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11: 41. On the classification of Mamluk military offices, see Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 38-41; in this case, the ‘local’ nature of the December 1366 conflict, as well as power politics—including direct access to and influence with the sultan—being its main issue, is borne out by the fact that this re-organization only involved court offices and high military ranks “in the sultan’s vicinity”, leaving the executive offices and the administration of the realm untouched.

<sup>37</sup> He was a mamluk of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, promoted amir by Muḥammad’s son and successor al-Manṣūr Abū Bakr (r. 1341), who between 1341 and 1366 performed a host of minor and major executive functions in Egypt and Syria; on 15 December 1366, he was made *ḥājib al-ḥujjāb* (chief chamberlain) (see Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi l-Wafayāt*, Bibliotheca Islamica, vol. 6 (Wiesbaden, 1949-[1999]), 24:246; Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 3: 249; Abū Bakr b. Aḥmad Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba*, ed. Adnan Darwich, Publications de l’Institut Français de Damas (Damascus, 1977-1994), 3: 353-4; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:138; al-Bayrūtī, fol. 4r; al-‘Aynī, “Iqd”, 147; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 4r; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:41). On the office of *ḥājib al-ḥujjāb*, see the references in Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 40, fn. 65.

<sup>38</sup> He had been made high-ranking amir and senior *dawādār* (personal secretary) in the latter half of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan’s reign; on 15 December 1366, he was again made high-ranking amir and senior *dawādār* (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:43, 138; al-Bayrūtī, fol. 4r; al-‘Aynī, “Iqd”, 147; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 4r; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:41). On the office of *dawādār*, see the references in Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 40, fn. 65.

<sup>39</sup> Muḥammad, an amir of forty since October 1363, was appointed *amīr shikār* (‘master of the hunt’) on 15 December 1366 (see al-Bayrūtī, fol. 4v; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 4r [“*amīr shikār al-sultān*”]; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:138; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:534). On the office of *amīr shikār*, see Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A‘shā fi Ṣinā‘at al-Inshā‘*, (Cairo, 1913-1919), 4:22, 5:461; al-Zāhirī, *Zubda*, 114, 126. On his father, Qumārī al-Nāṣirī al-Kabir (d. 1346), see Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *A‘yān al-‘Aṣr wa A‘wān al-Naṣr*, eds. ‘A. Abū Zayd, N. Abū ‘Umsha, M. Muw‘ad & M. Sālīm Muḥammad (Beirut-Damascus, 1998), 4:132-3; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, 24:275.

*amīr silāh* ('master of weaponry')<sup>40</sup>; Aqbughā al-Aḥmadī al-Jalab, an amir of 100 since March 1366, was awarded —according to at least one report— the title and senior status of *amīr kabīr*, “sitting in the audience hall above Asandamur al-Nāṣirī”<sup>41</sup>; and the latter, equally an amir of 100 since March 1366, at first remained a “spokesman” without an official title, but with court privileges concomitant with his newly acquired status, including, as just mentioned, the right to sit down in the sultan’s presence. Furthermore, still in December 1366, a fourth member from that ‘gang’ of six, the amir Qarābughā al-Ṣarghitmishī was promoted to the highest rank —a very exceptional feat, as indicated by the explicit contemporary addendum that this happened ‘from the rank of amir of ten (*mina l-‘ashra*)’.<sup>42</sup> Finally, other new or transferred court officers were the amir of 100 Ṭaydamur al-Bālisī (d. 1377), the amir of 40 Asanbughā al-Qawṣūnī (d. 1374), and Qarātamur al-Muḥammadī, an amir of 40, but again only since March 1366.<sup>43</sup> In all, this new, variegated composition of the court is certainly also indicative of the fact that there were more amirs than just that ‘gang of six’ actively involved in the preceding conflict, as equally suggested in the following obituary notice of an amir known as Uzdamur al-‘Izzī (d. 1367), promoted amir of 10 by Yalbughā in March 1366: “he belonged to those that agreed to kill Yalbughā,

<sup>40</sup> al-Bayrūtī, fol.4v; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 4v; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:117, 138; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:41. On the office of *amīr silāh*, see the references in Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 40-41, fn. 66.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3: 298; his having been appointed *amīr kabīr* is confirmed from his biography in Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 1:391. On the position of *amīr kabīr*, see Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, p. 44, with additional references in fn. 82.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Bayrūtī, fol. 4v; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 4v; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:139; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:41 (making this comment even more explicit: “at once from the rank of amir of ten [*daf‘atan wāhidatan min imrat ‘ashra*]”; also Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 36-7. As for the two remaining members of the ‘gang’ of six, nothing further is mentioned in any source about the amir Aqbughā Jarkas Amīr Silāh, but Taghrī Birmish al-‘Alāī, equally obscure, suddenly pops up once more in the accounts of March 1367, three months after the December 1366 conflict, when this “Taghrī Birmish put on his war gear and rode out; but the amirs rode against him and caught him”, whereupon he was sent off to Alexandria (al-Bayrūtī, fol. 5r; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 5r [now with surplus (!) variant reading, and arguably more correct dating than al-Bayrūtī’s]; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:42 [which is his own enhanced version of the same story, linking this to the preceding arrest of ‘gang’ member Qarābughā al-Ṣarghitmishī]). It seems that the latter three amirs actually served in a more subordinate capacity as the ‘henchmen’ of this ‘gang’, considering the far less prominent role they were awarded in the conflict’s aftermath, including their very direct, even brutal involvement therein, as with Qarābughā’s bullying of one of Yalbughā’s former civil servants to extract money from him, or with Taghrī Birmish’ supervising the transfer of a group of arrested amirs to the prisons of Alexandria (al-Bayrūtī, fol. 4v; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 4v; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:139).

<sup>43</sup> Ṭaydamur, an amir of 100 since 1363 and formerly *amīr silāh*, was transferred to the office of *ustādār* (majordomo); Asanbughā, an amir of forty since 1365, was made the sultan’s *lālā* (tutor); Qarātamur was made the sultan’s *khāzindār* (treasurer) (al-Bayrūtī, fol. 4v; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 4v; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:139; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:41. For biographies of these amirs, see Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Manhal*, 7:39; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:456, 525-6. On the offices of *ustādār* and *khāzindār*, see the references in Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 40-41, fn. 66.

and after his murder, he was given a rank of amir of 40".<sup>44</sup> Surely, this allegation similarly applied to more than just a handful of Yalbughāwī amirs for December 1366 !

In due course, the amir Asandamur al-Nāṣirī, left without a functional court position at this occasion, also managed to acquire for himself a more formally defined stake in the sultan's court, for in the accounts for the summer of 1367 he starts appearing in the top office of *atābak al-ʿasākir* (commander of the army), formerly executed by Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī.<sup>45</sup> This, however, had everything to do with the fact that by that summer, the amir Asandamur had succeeded to overcome and eliminate these former Yalbughāwī associates of his, as well as other peers and contenders for influence and authority. More precisely, two further political conflicts, one in March and one in June 1367, enabled Asandamur to finish off the authority of any other "spokesman" and, indeed, to "acquire the status of his *ustādh* Yalbughā, managing the affairs of the regime, issuing the appointments and dismissals of its officials, and living in Yalbughā's residence at al-Kabsh."<sup>46</sup>

Clearly and whatever the motives of each of those who stood up against Yalbughā in December 1366, it were amirs that took a leading role in and that benefited most prominently afterwards from this conflict. Moreover, as most sources did not fail to notice, most of these amirs, the 'gang' of six in particular, were of conspicuous Yalbughāwī signature, having Yalbughā's patronage and that they "had been promoted amir by him" in common.<sup>47</sup>

Surprisingly, perhaps, the latter rather enigmatic source quotation turns out to be extremely helpful in reconstructing the background of the December 1366 conflict. Indeed, almost each of the above-mentioned amirs owed his last promotion to Yalbughā and to his total re-organization of the regime's elites less than a year before!

At that time, in late February 1366, Yalbughā had managed —as mentioned at the beginning of this article— to remove one of the last remaining obstacles for his absolute pre-eminence, the amir Ṭaybughā al-Ṭawīl. After a violent confrontation outside Cairo between the supporters of both grandees, Ṭaybughā was sent to the prisons of Alexandria. As Ibn Kathīr put it, recounting how this "clash (*waqʿa*) between the amirs in Egypt" was conceived of in contemporary Damascus, "there was enormous uproar (*khabṭa ʿazīma*) in

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<sup>44</sup> Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3: 326.

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. al-ʿAynī, "Iqd", 150; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:46; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Manhal*, 2:440.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:141. On these conflicts, see Van Steenberghe, *Order Out of Chaos*, 161-2, 194.

<sup>47</sup> al-Bayrūtī, fol. 2v; al-ʿAynī, "Iqd", 144.

Egypt, during which the *amīr kabīr* Yalbughā managed to keep his strength, support and backing.”<sup>48</sup> Most importantly in the present context, Yalbughā’s supporters were rewarded for their backing. Early March 1366, therefore, after the arrest of dozens of Ṭaybughā’s associates, Yalbughā appointed a host of new court officials, including the amir Ṭaydamur al-Bālisī, and at the same time he promoted two trusted fellows to the rank of amir of 100: Aqbughā al-Aḥmadī al-Jalab and Asandamur al-Nāṣirī.<sup>49</sup> In the case of Aqbughā, this was his very first appearance in the sources, suggesting that he was promoted to the regime’s highest ranks from very humble origins, which was later explained as a result of “his belonging to Yalbughā’s mamluks and of his having a privileged status with him”.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the sources describe how a few days later many mamluks and amirs were “all given a robe of honour and dressed with the sashes, upon which all came down from the *Dār al-‘Adl* in the citadel [proceeding] to the *Manṣūrīya madrasa*, in Cairo’s Bayna al-Qaṣrayn, where they were made to swear, as is the custom [for the promotion of amirs].”<sup>51</sup> In fact, both al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrī Birdī list with remarkable and conspicuous detail the names of all amirs that were thus rewarded:

“On Monday 9 March 1366, 38 amirs were promoted, among whom [the following were made] amirs of forty: Aqbughā al-Jawharī, Arghūn al-Qashtamurī, Aynabak al-Badrī, ‘Alī al-Sayfī Kashlā (the *wālī* of Cairo), Ṭughāy Tamur al-‘Uthmānī, Alṭunbughā al-‘Izzī, Qajmās al-Sayfī Ṭāz, Arghūn al-‘Izzī Kunuk, Qarātamur al-Muḥammadī, Urūs Bughā al-Khalīlī, Ṭājār min ‘Awaḍ, Quṭlūbughā al-‘Izzī, Aqbughā al-Yūsufī, Alṭunbughā al-Māridānī, Raṣlān al-Sayfī [Shaykhū] (who was established as *ḥājib* of Alexandria), ‘Alī b. Qashtamur, Sūdūn al-Quṭluqtamurī, Quṭlūbughā al-Sha‘bānī, Ṭughāy Tamur al-‘Izzī and Muḥammad al-Tarjumān [al-Turkumānī]. The remainder [were made] amirs of ten; they were: Kakbughā al-Sayfī [Baybughā], Ṭanbak al-Azqī, Arghūn al-Aḥmadī, Arghūn al-Arghūnī, Sūdūn al-Shaykhūnī, Uzdampur al-‘Izzī, Urūs al-Niḏāmī, Yūnus al-‘Umarī, Durtbughā al-Bālisī, Ṭūr Ḥasan,

<sup>48</sup> Ismā‘īl ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa l-Nihāya*, (Beirut, 1990), 14:318-9; detailed accounts in al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:115-6; al-‘Aynī, “Iqd”, 139-140; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:31; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:274-5.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:117.

<sup>50</sup> See Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:298.

<sup>51</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:118.



Qarābughā al-Şarġhitmişī, Ṭāz al-Ĥasanī, Qumārī al-Jamālī, Yūsuf Shāh, Ṭaqbughā al-‘Alā’ī, Fīr ‘Alī, Qurqumās al-Şarġhitmişī, and Ṭājār al-Muĥammadī.”<sup>52</sup>

Comprehensive lists such as this one, with details one would normally only expect in the regime’s administrative registers, are only rarely encountered in the era’s chronicles.<sup>53</sup> In the case of this list, its survival is extremely fortunate, as it offers an unusual, but insightful glimpse into the lower strata of the regime’s military hierarchy and its socio-political allegiances. Many of the names mentioned here soon faded back into historiographical oblivion, in token of the distorting top-down view dominating Mamluk narrative source material.<sup>54</sup> A handful of amirs, like Aqbughā al-Jawharī (1341-1390), Aynabak al-Badrī (d. 1378), ‘Alī b. Qashtamur (d. 1381), Arġhūn al-Aĥmadī (d. 1374) and Sūdūn al-Shaykhūnī (d. 1396) were to surface again as leading characters in the 1370s and beyond, and they are encountered here for the very first time.<sup>55</sup> Finally, as seen above and similar to their fortunate high-ranking colleagues Ṭaydamur, Aqbughā and Asandamur, there was a last group, including the fresh amirs of 40 Qajmās al-Ṭāzī and Qarātamur al-Muĥammadī and the new amirs of 10 Uzdampur al-‘Izzī and Qarābughā al-Şarġhitmişī, whose names were to resurface much quicker and much more prominently than anyone at the time might have

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<sup>52</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:117-8; also Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:33-4. This round of promotions is also referred to in Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘Ibar*, 5:455. No contemporary accounts of this conflict and its aftermath have survived, as extant fragments from the detailed chronicles of al-Bayrūtī and Ibn Duqmāq only start with the report for the *hijrī*-year 768 (starting in September 1366). Ibn Duqmāq’s summary world history only mentions the arrest of “about twenty amirs”, but not their replacement (Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Jawhar al-Thamīn*, 413).

<sup>53</sup> On the administrative registers, large parts of which consisted of the detailed listings of the names of *iqṭā’* holders, i.e. primarily of amirs, see Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī funūn al-Adab*, (Cairo 1931-1977), 8:200-13. For other examples of similar extant lists, see below, for the discussion of the June 1367 list and for the reference to later lists (fn. 69, 108).

<sup>54</sup> No further references in any of the contemporary sources was found to any of the following twelve amirs: ‘Alī al-Sayfī Kashlā, Arġhūn al-‘Izzī Kunuk, Raşlān al-Sayfī, Sūdūn al-Quṭluqtamurī, Ṭuġhāy Tamur al-‘Izzī, Muĥammad al-Tarjumān, Ṭūr Ḥasan, Qarābughā al-Şarġhitmişī, Ṭāz al-Ĥasanī, Ṭaqbughā al-‘Alā’ī, Fīr ‘Alī and Ṭājār al-Muĥammadī.

<sup>55</sup> Aqbughā would serve as a governor in several Syrian cities in the late 1370s and 1380s (Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 1:391; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Manhal*, 2:474-6); Aynabak was party to the rebellion against al-Ashraf Sha‘bān in 1377 and briefly held power shortly thereafter (Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Manhal*, 3:221-4; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:558); ‘Alī was an amir of 100 and court official between 1377 and 1381 (Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 3:96); the same goes for Arġhūn, but from 1368 until 1374 (Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 1:351) and for Sūdūn, between 1381 and 1394 (Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Manhal*, 6:104-9; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 1:596-7).

expected.<sup>56</sup> Most importantly, it becomes clear from all this that most of those Yalbughāwī amirs that instigated the December 1366 conflict did not only share the fact that they were all promoted thanks to Yalbughā's patronage, but also that this had only happened very recently, in March 1366.

Moreover, apart from Yalbughā's mamluk Aqbughā, the other rather striking feature common to those amirs that were opposing their patron in December 1366, is that despite such patronage none of them really had Yalbughā as his *ustādh* or original mamluk master, and that none of them therefore technically was a true member of the Yalbughāwīya.<sup>57</sup> Thus, Asandamur's mamluk origins lay with a further unknown Qalāwūnid, Mūsā b. al-Qardamīya b. al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, from whom sultan al-Nāṣir Ḥasan had acquired him, turning him into one of his own mamluks (hence his *nisba* al-Nāṣirī); only after the latter's deposition in 1361 had he been added to Yalbughā's mamluks, who therefore technically was no more than Asandamur's patron or *makhdūm*, as well as his Nāṣirī peer (*khushdāsh*), instead of his master or *ustādh*.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, as their *nisbas* suggest, the other afore-mentioned 'gang' members Qajmās al-Ṭāzī and Qarābughā al-Ṣarghitmishī originally had been mamluks with the great political rivals of the early 1350s, the amirs Sayf al-Din Ṭāz al-Nāṣirī (d. 1362) and Sayf al-Din Ṣarghitmish al-Nāṣirī (d. 1358) respectively.<sup>59</sup> Finally, also in the case of most of the other known participating amirs in the December 1366 rebellion and its aftermath, like Uzdamur al-

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<sup>56</sup> Apart from Qajmās, Qarātamur, Uzdamur and Qarābughā, whose whereabouts have been mentioned, there were the amirs Arghūn al-Qashtamurī (d. 1368), who was an amir of 100 for a few months in 1367 (Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 1:353-4), Ṭughāy Tamur al-'Uthmānī (d. 1377), again amir of forty and then court official from 1368 onwards (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:228, 258, 161, 183), Ṭājār min 'Awaḍ, arrested with Qarātamur al-Manṣūrī in June 1367 (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:143), Kakbughā al-Sayfī, briefly promoted amir of 40 and court official in the summer of 1368 (al-Bayrūtī, fol. 40r; Ibn Duqmāq, "Nuzhat al-Anām", fol. 42v), and Ṭanbak (also referred to as Ṭanaybak) al-Azqī (d. 1369), similarly an amir of 40 and court official, between 1368 and 1369 (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:161, 187).

<sup>57</sup> On the bond between mamluks and their *ustādh* (coined 'ustādhīya'), see Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 88-92; for the classic study on the subject, see David Ayalon, *L'Esclavage du Mamlouk*, (Jerusalem, 1951).

<sup>58</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 1:386.

<sup>59</sup> Biographical information on Qajmās and Qarābughā is very obscure, since they were not deemed important enough to be awarded individual entries in any of the era's biographical dictionaries, nor an obituary in any of the era's chronicles. Their names are therefore all there is to reconstruct some biographical information from (on Mamluk *nisbas* and their uses, see D. Ayalon, "Names, Titles and 'Nisbas' of the Mamlūks," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975): 189-232, esp. 213-223).

‘Izzī, Asanbughā al-Qawṣūnī and Ṭaydamur al-Bālisī, it is attested that they conspicuously shared similarly twisted Yalbughāwī origins.<sup>60</sup>

Interestingly, the same may also be inferred for most of those on the March 1366 list of Yalbughā’s newly promoted amirs. In most cases specific information on an amir’s origins remains wanting and linking the various *nisbas* in that list to those origins, as could be done for Qajmās and Qarābughā, quickly turns into an extremely hazardous exercise.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, such great variety already suggests that for the majority, just as for Qajmās and Qarābughā, their entry into Mamluk society has to be situated beyond the confines of Yalbughā’s household, most probably in the secondary households of preceding amirs of lower profile, rank or status. Nevertheless, for a handful of these amirs information on those mamluk origins has been preserved, indeed again confirming, as in the case of Uzdampur al-‘Izzī, such non-Yalbughāwī background. It are more precisely the great households of Yalbughā’s political predecessors from the 1350s that emerge again as the cradles of the latter amirs’ careers, most notably those set up by Qalāwūnid magnates like Baybughā Rus al-Nāṣirī (d. 1353), Shaykhū al-‘Umarī al-Nāṣirī (ca. 1303-1357), the aforementioned Ṣarghitmish, and, once again, the Qalāwūnid sultan who managed to free himself from those magnates’ reins in the late 1350s, Yalbughā’s own master al-Nāṣir Ḥasan.<sup>62</sup>

Apparently, in the 1360s there was a considerable pool of veteran mamluks available, stemming from a variety of high and low profile households that had dominated the

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<sup>60</sup> Uzdampur’s *ustādh* was the amir Baktampur al-Mu’minī al-Wishāqī (d. 1370) (Ibn Hajar, *Durar*, 1:355); Asanbughā was linked to the mamluk corps of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:456); Ṭaydamur’s precise mamluk origins remain unknown, but the fact that he is said to have been “transferred in the executive offices before he became an amir of 100 and commander of 1000 in the year 65 (1363)” suggests that his origins similarly lay beyond the Yalbughāwīya (Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:525)

<sup>61</sup> These many *nisbas*, derived from either the title (*laqab*) or the proper name (*ism*) of a mamluk’s master (or occasionally of his slave dealer) (see Ayalon, “Names, Titles, and Nisbas”, 213), are: al-Jawharī, al-Qashtamurī, al-Badrī, al-Kashlāwī, al-‘Uthmānī, al-‘Izzī, al-Muḥammadī, al-Khalīlī, al-Yūsufī, al-Quṭlūqtamurī, al-Niẓāmī, al-Bālisī, al-Ḥasanī, al-Jamālī, al-Sha’bānī, al-Azqī, al-Aḥmadī, al-Argḥūnī and al-‘Alā’ī. They are all either too common or too vague to allow for any positive identification of the masters they were referring to.

<sup>62</sup> Three amirs, Raslān al-Sayfī, Yūnus al-‘Umarī, and Sūdūn al-Shaykhūnī, may be positively linked to the household of Shaykhū al-‘Umarī (al-Bayrūtī, fol. 40v; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 1:596-7; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:33; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Manhal*, 6:104-9); apart from Qarābughā, also Qurqumās’ *nisba* unequivocally suggests that he originated in Ṣarghitmish’ mamluk corps; Kakbughā al-Sayfī, also referred to as al-Sayfī Baybughā and al-Baybughāwī, originated most probably from among the mamluks of Baybughā Rūs (al-Bayrūtī, fol. 40r; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:161, 223); Alṭunbughā al-Māridānī was said to have been a mamluk of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan (Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:417-8); and, finally, the amir Arghūn al-Aḥmadī is suggested to have had a career of some sorts predating Yalbughā by the statement that “he was transferred [in the services] until Yalbughā appointed him [in 1363] in the sultan’s service” (Ibn Hajar, *Durar*, 1:351; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:438). On these Qalāwūnid magnates and their whereabouts in the 1350s, see Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 153-8.

preceding decades, but that all had ceased to exist one way or another in one of the several purges of Qalāwūnid magnates in the 1340s and 50s, or of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan in 1361.<sup>63</sup> Whereas by the 1360s their masters had thus disappeared and their direct access to the regime's resources and to rank and status had therefore been blocked, these mamluks were obviously still around, undoubtedly looking for alternative avenues of subsistence and socio-political participation. In later times, the standard pattern for this would have been their re-employment in a secondary unit of the sultan's mamluks.<sup>64</sup> In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, however, such a formalized procedure is not yet attested to and, considering the ephemeral status of the Qalāwūnid sultans of the 1360, it is easy to imagine how at that time they yet ended up in the fresh but rapidly expanding corps' of this decade's new magnates, including Yalbughā's, that were only being established in the wake of the ascendance of the latter in the late 1350s and early 1360s.<sup>65</sup> The by then supposedly still substantial numerical strength of these leaderless mamluks, stemming from regiments numbering a handful to many hundreds of mamluks<sup>66</sup>, and their status as "time-tested and battle-tried veterans" —as half a century later the sultan Mu'ayyad Shaykh (1412-21) was to explain his employment of similar uprooted mamluks in his service<sup>67</sup>— undoubtedly made that their new masters welcomed them with open arms. They must have seemed extremely useful to these 1360s magnates to make up for the evident lack of military and political experience in their own relatively fresh mamluk corps'. These qualities were then clearly put to good use by these magnates to settle the new scramble for pre-eminence between 1361 and 1366, compensating those veteran mamluks for their support with promotions to military rank and status. Such is clearly borne out by one of the eventual outcomes of that scramble, the afore-mentioned March 1366 list naming Yalbughā's supporters that were thus compensated. That this pragmatic utilization and compensation of veteran mamluks in the 1360s was a general policy, practiced also by patrons other than Yalbughā, may be further derived from the names that were mentioned at that same occasion for the arrested supporters of Yalbughā's opponent Ṭaybughā al-Ṭawīl and that again hint at most of these associates' variegated pre-1360s origins.

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<sup>63</sup> See Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 153-8.

<sup>64</sup> On this 15<sup>th</sup> century fate of an amir's mamluks after his disappearance from the Mamluk scene, see David Ayalon, "Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army, I," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 15 (1953): 204, 220-2, referring to al-Ẓāhirī, *Zubda*, 116.

<sup>65</sup> See Van Steenbergen, "The Last of the Qalāwūnid Magnates?"

<sup>66</sup> See Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 89.

<sup>67</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 14:112; quoted here from a paraphrase of this text in Ayalon, "Studies-I", 220.

[Ṭaybughā] was caught, as were his associates among the amirs, including Arghūn al-Is‘ardī, Urūs al-Maḥmūdī, Kūkandāy, brother of Ṭaybughā al-Ṭawīl, Jariktamur al-Sayfī Manjak, Arghūn min ‘Abd Allāh, Jumaq al-Shaykhūnī, Kilim, brother of Ṭaybughā al-Ṭawīl, Tulak, brother of Baybughā al-Ṣāliḥī, Aqbughā al-‘Umarī al-Bālisī, Jirjī b. Kūkandāy, Uzramuk min Muṣṭafā, and Ṭashtamur al-‘Alā’ī.<sup>68</sup>

Even after Yalbughā’s removal and the ascent to power of veteran mamluks from his corps in December 1366, this pool continued to prove extremely apposite and appealing to these new patrons, lacking more than ever the time and means to set up proper corps that could be of any value in the power struggles that immediately ensued. Eventually, as mentioned, by June 1367 the veteran amir Asandamur al-Nāṣirī emerged victoriously and the radical change he once more is reported to have instilled on Egypt’s military hierarchy at this occasion, rewarding his supporters, reflects again the very similarly variegated and predominantly pre-1360s, non-Yalbughāwī background of the latter.

On 10 June 1367, a robe of honour was bestowed upon the following [newly promoted] amirs *muqaddams alf*: Uzdamur al-‘Izzī Abū Daqṇ, appointed *amīr silāḥ*, Jariktamur al-Sayfī Manjak, appointed *amīr majlis*, Alṭunbughā al-Yalbughāwī, appointed *ra’s nawba kabīr* [and promoted] from the rank of amir of ten (*mina l-‘ashra*) [to the rank of *muqaddam alf*], Quṭlūqtamur al-‘Alā’ī, [appointed] *amīr jāndār*, Sulṭān [Shāh] b. Qārā, [appointed] *ḥājib thānī*, Bayram al-‘Izzī, [appointed] *dawādār* [and promoted to the rank of] *muqaddam alf* from the rank-and-file (*mina l-jundīya*), and he was granted the *iqṭā’* of Ṭughāytamur al-Nizāmī, as well as all the horses, textiles, mamluks, money, grain etc. that had been the latter’s. The following were made members of the sultan’s *jūkāndārīya* (‘masters of the polo mallet’): Qarāmish al-Ṣarghitmishī, Mubārak al-Ṭāzī, and Īnāl al-Yūsufī. Tulaktamur al-Muḥammadī was confirmed as *khāzindār*, as usual, and Bahādur al-Jamālī was made *shādd al-dawāwīn*, instead of Khalīl b. ‘Arrām. Khalīl b. Qawṣūn was offered the rank of *muqaddam alf*, and Qunuq al-‘Izzī and Arghūn al-Qashtamurī were [also] granted the rank of *muqaddam alf*.[...] Muḥammad b. Ṭayṭaq al-‘Alā’ī, servant of Asandamur al-Nāṣirī, was granted a rank of *muqaddam alf*. The following were

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<sup>68</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:31; also listed with slight variations in al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:116-7. For most of these 12 amirs, any further prosopographical information again remains wanting; only the pre-1366 whereabouts of Urūs (d. 1373) and Jariktamur (d. 1375) are known, originating indeed in the corps’ of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan and of the long-standing amir Manjak al-Yūsufī (ca. 1315-1375) respectively (Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:438, 490); additionally, it may be safely assumed that Jumaq’s *nisba* indicates that he stemmed from the household of the amir Shaykhū (d. 1357).

promoted to the rank of amir of forty by the sultan: Arghūn al-Muḥammadī al-Ānūkī al-Khāzin, Buzlār al-‘Umarī, Arghūn al-Argḥūni, Muḥammad b. Ṭaqbughā al-Mājārī, Bākīsh al-Sayfī Yalbughā, Sūdūn al-Sayfī Shaykhū, Aqbughā Āṣ al-Shaykhūnī, Kubak al-Ṣarghitmishī, Julbān al-Sa‘dī, Īnāl al-Yūsufī, Kumushbughā al-Ṭāzī, Qumārī al-Jamālī, Baktamur al-‘Alamī, Arslān Khujā, Mubārak al-Ṭāzī, Maliktamur al-Kashlāwī, Asanbughā al-‘Izzī, Quṭlūbughā al-Ḥalabī and Ma’mūr al-Qalamṭāwī. [The following were promoted to] the rank of amir of ten: Alṭunbughā al-Maḥmūdī, Qarābughā al-Aḥmadī, Kizil al-Argḥūnī, Ḥājī Bak b. Shādī, ‘Alī b. Baktāsh, Rajab b. Khidr and Ṭayṭaq al-Rammāḥ.”<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, the employment of veteran mamluks also entailed some serious disadvantages. As suggested by Ibn Taghrī Birdī on a similar, but much later situation, they are as nothing, for they generally follow the majority; none of them is tied to any particular ruler, but they serve whoever happens to ascend the throne much in the

<sup>69</sup> Al-Bayrūtī, 5v-6. With only slight variation, indicating again an obvious textual interdependence, in Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, 5v-6. Also very similar listings in al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:144-5; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:44-5. Also present in al-‘Aynī, “Iqd”, 149, but in a summary format (referring only to the first three high-ranking amirs and their new positions). On the court offices of *amīr silāḥ*, *ra’s nawba kabīr*, *amīr jāndār*, and *khāzindār*, see the references in Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 40-41, fn. 65 & 66; on the secondary court positions of *ḥājib thānī*, *shādd al-dawāwīn*, and *jūkāndār*, see Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A’shā fī Ṣinā’at al-Inshā’*, (Cairo, 1913-19), 4: 22, 5:458; al-Zāhirī, *Zubda*, 114, 115. This June 1367 list indeed looks very similar to the March 1366 list as far as the diverse, pre-1360s background of the majority of these amirs is concerned. Both lists have lots of different pre-1360 *nisbas* in common (besides the most conspicuous and suggestive *nisbas* al-Ṣarghitmishī, al-Ṭāzī and al-Shaykhūnī, these are al-Qashtamurī, al-Kashlāwī, al-‘Izzī, al-Muḥammadī, al-Jamālī, al-Aḥmadī, al-Argḥūnī and al-‘Alāṭī); they moreover also share the amirs Uzdāmūr al-‘Izzī, Arghūn al-Argḥūni, Sūdūn al-Shaykhūnī, Qumārī al-Jamālī and Jariktamur al-Sayfī Manjak, whose veteran status has been discussed before. Apart from all this, the origins for six more amirs on this list can moreover be positively located in preceding, vanished households; they are Bayram al-‘Izzī (a former mamluk of the amir ‘Izz al-Din Tuqtay al-Nāṣirī (1319-1358) who was now not just granted high rank, but also the household means to perform that rank’s demands [see Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 1:514; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:327]), Mubārak al-Ṭāzī (as his *nisba* indicates, he stemmed from the household of the afore-mentioned Qalāwūnid magnate Ṭāz al-Nāṣirī [see Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-Ghumr bi Abnā’ al-‘Umr fī Tārīkh*, ed. M. ‘Abd al-Mu’īd Khān (Beirut, 1986), 1:287], Bahādūr al-Jamālī (whose mamluk origins went back to the household of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn [Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 1:496], Khalīl b. Qawṣūn (son of the illustrious Qawṣūn al-Nāṣirī [d. 1342], who made career in the reign of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan [Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Manhal*, 5:280]), Arghūn al-Muḥammadī al-Ānūkī (as his *nisba* indicates, he had been a mamluk of Ānūk b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn [d. 1340] [Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:489]), and Buzlār al-‘Umarī (a former mamluk of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan [Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 1:476; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Manhal*, 3:361]). In all, this list of 39 beneficiaries of the June 1367 round of promotions still only mentions four genuine members of the Yalbughāwīya (Alṭunbughā al-Yalbughāwī, Īnāl al-Yūsufī, Bākīsh al-Sayfī Yalbughā and Ma’mūr al-Qalamṭāwī [on their unambiguous Yalbughāwī origins, see Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Manhal*, 3:70, 190; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 12: 122; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 1: 362, 3:327; Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-Lāmi’ li Ahl al-Qarn al-Ṭāsi’*, (Beirut, 1992), 2:320]).

manner of the popular dictum: 'Whosoever marries my mother, to him I cry: "O my father"'.<sup>70</sup>

The pragmatic, opportunist and second-hand nature of the ties that bound most of these veteran mamluks and amirs to their new households seriously conditioned their loyalty to their patrons. Most importantly, new opportunities and a change of fortune were bound to affect those ties. Thus, one might speculate, there was little to prevent some from not trying their luck against Yalbughā in December 1366, when differences of opinion on the treatment of his mamluks were emerging and an opportunity arose near Gizeh to attack him by surprise. Certainly, most amirs at first decided to join forces with Yalbughā to quell a rebellion that only a handful of them had started anyway and that seemed too remote and isolated to succeed. There even were a handful of rebellious amirs who regretted their initial actions against Yalbughā and who still managed to cross over to Cairo, including "some of his mamluks whom he had made amir, like Aqbughā al-Jawharī, Kumushbughā and Yalbughā Shuqayr".<sup>71</sup> But when the rebels managed to involve the sultan and, quite unexpectedly, to return to the citadel with him and turn the conflict's tide, there similarly was little to prevent the great majority of amirs from changing sides, so that sources observed how eventually

Yalbughā's associates slipped away, batch after batch, and Yalbughā was forced to flee. [...] He mounted his horse and left for his residence at al-Kabsh [...] while the common people were making fun of him and were calling him names, all the way until he reached his residence.<sup>72</sup>

### Junior mamluks

While a composite group of freshly promoted veterans clearly took the lead in the December 1366 rebellion and its aftermath, this surely does not invalidate the assertion most commonly found that it were Yalbughā's non-promoted mamluks that stood up against their master. Most importantly, all source descriptions of the conflict agree that it

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<sup>70</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Extracts from Abū 'l-Maḥāsīn ibn Taghrī Birdī's Chronicle Entitled Ḥawādith ad-Duhūr fī Madā 'l-Ayyām wash-Shuhūr*, ed. William Popper, University of California Publications in Semitic Philology, vol. 8 (Berkeley, 1930-42), 3:443; translation quoted from Ayalon, "Studies-I," 220.

<sup>71</sup> See al-Bayrūtī, fol. 3r; Ibn Duqmāq, "Nuzhat al-Anām", fol. 3r; al-'Aynī, "lqd", 145. Aqbughā was a member of the Yalbughāwīya (see Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Manhal*, 2:474), as was Kumushbughā said to have been, though his mamluk origins really lay elsewhere (see al-Sakhāwī, *Daw'*, 6:230 "the son of the lord of Ḥamā had bought him when he was a young boy; he raised him and then presented him to al-Nāṣir Ḥasan; after Ḥasan's murder Yalbughā al-'Umarī took him and made him a *ra's nawba* with him"). No further information has survived on Yalbughā Shuqayr.

<sup>72</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:135-6. Variant reading in al-Bayrūtī, fol. 3v; Ibn Duqmāq, "Nuzhat al-Anām", fol. 3v.

were mamluks that bore the brunt of the action, including Yalbughā's eventual lynching, and, as suggested above, Yalbughā's harsh disciplining undoubtedly convinced many of them to go along with those bold and defiant amirs and act against their master.

But as with the amirs above, and even more so in this context of Yalbughā's numerous mamluks, the question that remains to be answered is whether such an unusually insubordinate attitude was similarly adopted by all of them at the same time, for the similar reasons, or in similar fashion. In fact, a detailed analysis of the sources' representations of the role those mamluks really played in the December 1366 conflict and its aftermath adds a number of significant nuances to the overall picture.

After Yalbughā had barely escaped the amirs' attack while he was encamped at Gizeh, al-Maqrīzī details the reaction of his mamluks in particular as follows:

when they learned about Yalbughā's escape, they announced that 'whoever wants his *makhdūm* Yalbughā, should follow him, and who wants the sultan, should stay with us.' So a group (*ṭā'ifa*) followed Yalbughā, while most of them remained behind. The latter then hastened towards those who had defected them and they overcame and enchained them, dividing everything they had brought with them among each other.<sup>73</sup>

Clearly, not all of Yalbughā's mamluks had been equally ill disposed towards their master at the start of the conflict, at least according to the later historian al-Maqrīzī. Furthermore, this author suggested in a similar vein that thereafter "a group of his intimates" (*naḥar min khāṣṣatihi*) escaped to Cairo with him and that he then managed to rally "amirs and rank-and-file" (*mina l-umarā' wa l-ajnād*) around him in Cairo, spending the night with this "troop of his" (*bi-jam'ihī*) in his residence at al-Kabsh.<sup>74</sup>

Suggestions like these that at least some of Yalbughā's mamluks maintained their loyalty certainly gain in credibility when in the hours and days following the outbreak of the conflict Yalbughā's manifest and impressive resilience—including the enthronement of a new sultan—is taken into consideration. In the volatile Mamluk political climate of this era, where "shortage of men" was considered "the worst possible merchandise" (*qillat al-rijāl*

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<sup>73</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:132.

<sup>74</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:131, 132. Very tellingly, Ibn Taghrī Birdī explains the enigmatic "a group of his intimates" by clarifying that they were "his intimates from among his mamluks" (Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:36).



*akhass biḍā'a*)<sup>75</sup>, this would have been extremely difficult for anyone to materialize without any numerically persuasive support from one's own mamluk regiment.

Finally, the same consideration similarly lends validity and weight to al-Maqrīzī's detailed representation of the conflicts' final hours on Saturday 12 December 1366. Whereas, as referred to above, most sources flatly claim that Yalbughā's end was drawing nigh when all amirs fled his party and "there was no one left with him"<sup>76</sup>, al-Maqrīzī adds that also "his mamluks fled one after the other (*farra mamālikuhu shay'an ba'da shay'in*)" and that in spite of this "a mere 100 horsemen yet remained with him (*wa lam yabqa ma'ahu illā dūna l-mī'a fāris*)" until he got arrested.<sup>77</sup>

It may therefore be convincingly argued that in December 1366 Yalbughā was not just opposed by, amongst others, mamluks who all identified themselves as members of his Yalbughāwīya, but that at the same time a substantial number of rank-and-file maintained their loyalty, and that the latter group undoubtedly equally included such Yalbughāwīya. Only in the course of the four days this conflict lasted, therefore, and in particular when al-Ashraf Sha'bān decided to join the rebels' cause and managed to return to Cairo, Yalbughā's chances to emerge victoriously evaporated and most of his supporters from the Yalbughāwīya left him, as did the amirs, deciding the conflict to the detriment of their patron.

Unlike those promoted veterans, however, Yalbughā's non-promoted mamluks did not benefit at all from the conflict's outcome, whatever their initial stand. Actually, the precipitate fall of their patron may have done them more harm than good, for with his decapitation, they may have solved the alleged problem of their maltreatment, but at the same time a new, much bigger problem appeared. Since Yalbughā, as their employer, had been the guardian of their access to income and further resources, their killing of him, almost as in a moment of insanity, had in fact deprived them of legitimate leadership, social status and secure income. They, as it were, had severed the links that had embedded them within Mamluk society and that had offered them warrants for their own future. There is a hint at a new round of promotions a few weeks after Yalbughā's death, when al-Maqrīzī, just as in March 1366, describes how "on Thursday 21 January 1367, the

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<sup>75</sup> Shams al-Dīn al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn al-Ṣāliḥ wa Awlādihi*, ed. B. Schäfer (Wiesbaden, 1977), 1:173; Van Steenberghe, *Order Out of Chaos*, 91.

<sup>76</sup> Al-Bayrūtī, fol. 3v; Ibn Duqmāq, "Nuzhat al-Anām", fol. 3v; al-'Aynī, "'Iqd", 146; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:39.

<sup>77</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:135, 136.

group of amirs came down from the citadel [proceeding] to the Manṣūrīya *madrasa*, where they were made to swear and [where] they were dressed with the sashes, as is the custom [for the promotion of amirs].”<sup>78</sup> Unfortunately, in this case no names are mentioned. Yet, considering the afore-mentioned pattern of promotions on similar occasions, as well as the corps’ subsequent history, only a handful of Yalbughā’s mamluks, if any at all, may have benefited from this round.

In the months after December 1366, therefore, the majority of Yalbughā’s non-promoted mamluks were forced to try and find ways to overcome a certain destiny on the edge of Mamluk society, either spreading terror in Cairo’s streets and looting what they could no longer legitimately acquire, or seeking new employment and hiring their services to new patrons, hoping for suitable rewards.<sup>79</sup> Thus, to mention but one example, immediately after the conflict, on 16 December 1366, one close companion of Yalbughā, the amir Aynabak al-Badrī, avoided his arrest and obtained rehabilitation, not just by “sending a lot of money to the amirs”, but also by “offering to every one of [Yalbughā’s] mamluks 1000 silver dirhams, which at that time was equivalent to more than 50 *mithqāl* in gold”, in token of their aggressive, fearful reputation in those days, but also of the opportunities their precarious position offered.<sup>80</sup>

Eventually, the one who according to all sources best managed to make use of those opportunities was the afore-mentioned veteran Asandamur al-Nāṣirī, who succeeded more than any of his peers to portraying himself a credible substitute for the Yalbughāwīya mamluks’ murdered *ustādh* and patron. Hence, by early June 1367, when this evolution of re-grouping and re-employment came full circle, Yalbughā’s mamluks are all presented as playing a key role in Asandamur’s afore-mentioned ousting of his veteran peers.<sup>81</sup>

Now, it has already been established that an important part within those Yalbughāwīya ranks was reserved for mamluks of a veteran status, either gaining rank and status in the course of the years 1366 and 1367, or being forced once again to seek new employment after December 1366, in both cases surely losing their Yalbughāwī-status for reasons of

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<sup>78</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:140.

<sup>79</sup> For ample source references to their violent engagements in Cairo in the course of 1367, see al-Bayrūtī, fol. 5r-5v, 37r-38r, 42; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 5r-5v, 40r-41r; Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibar*, 5:457, 458, 461-2; al-‘Aynī, “Iqd”, 148-9, 152-3, 154; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:141, 142-3, 150-1, 153-4; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3: 295, 296, 309-11, 326, 327; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:42-4, 47-9, 103.

<sup>80</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:139.

<sup>81</sup> See al-Bayrūtī, fol. 5r-5v; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 5r-5v; Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibar*, 5:457; al-‘Aynī, “Iqd”, 148-9; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3: 142-3; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11: 42.

irrelevance. What is very interesting in the same context, however, is that source reports for what happened after the December 1366 rebellion hint with increasing explicitness at a crucial common identifying feature for those Yalbughāwīya that continued to be labeled as such, even after their *ustādh*'s demise. In his account of the December 1366 rebellion, al-Maqrīzī, in fact, already defined the rebellious mamluks very precisely as Yalbughā's "*ajlāb* mamluks (*mamālīkuhu al-ajlāb*)", even clarifying at one point that their number had been no less 1800.<sup>82</sup> To my knowledge, this is in fact the very first time the sources generically apply the term '*ajlāb*', which is well known from 15<sup>th</sup> century Mamluk history to denote a royal corps' last import of mamluks, but quite unusual for preceding periods. Al-Maqrīzī, however, is the only one among the chroniclers to use the term in the context of this December 1366 rebellion, which suggests that it may well be an anachronism from the first half of the fifteenth century, when this historian was writing his chronicle and when use of the term, especially in the context of multifarious local problems with the sultan's junior mamluks, indeed became ubiquitous in the era's historiography.<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless, also in his description of Yalbughā's mamluks' continued search for alternative patronage after December 1366, al-Maqrīzī persists in frequently applying the term '*ajlāb*'.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, from the accounts on early June 1367 onwards, when as mentioned this search ended in Asandamur employing these mamluks' services to impose his authority, the term '*ajlāb*' gradually comes to be used by all sources alike. At first, in the course of that June 1367 actions of Asandamur against his peers, the contemporaries al-Bayrūtī and Ibn Duqmāq, and Ibn Taghrī Birdī with them, still used the common denominator "Yalbughā's malicious mamluks (*mamālīk Yalbughā al-ashrār*)" for those whom al-Maqrīzī grouped in the same context under the term '*ajlāb*'.<sup>85</sup> After that point in the sources' historical chronologies, however, '*ajlāb*' seems the appropriate term, applied by all sources alike to denote Asandamur's new rank-and-file supporters who continued to

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<sup>82</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:130, 139.

<sup>83</sup> See Ayalon, "Studies-I," 204, 206-13 (207: "In the Circassian period, a new name for the mamluks of the ruling sultan appears which becomes more frequent than *mushtarawāt*, without displacing it entirely, viz. *ajlāb*, or *julbān*, sing. *jalabī* or *jalab*"); Amalia Levanoni, "The Mamluk Conception of the Sultanate", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994): 386-7; Jean-Claude Garcin, "The Regime of the Circassian Mamluks," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, Volume 1, Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge, 1998), 295, 300-2, 309-10; Amalia Levanoni, "The Sultan's *Laqab* - a sign of a new order in mamluk factionalism", in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, eds. Michael Winter & Amalia Levanoni, The Medieval Mediterranean, vol. 51 (Leiden, 2004), 79-116.

<sup>84</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:141, 142, 150, 152, 153-5.

<sup>85</sup> al-Bayrūtī, fol. 5r; Ibn Duqmāq, "Nuzhat al-Anām", fol. 5r; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:42.

prove extremely difficult to control.<sup>86</sup> Even Ibn al-Furāt (1134/5-1405), for instance, mentions how eventually “al-Ashraf Sha‘bān was victorious over the ‘*ajlāb*’ mamluks of the amir Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī (*al-ajlāb mamālīk al-amīr Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī*) and arrested the amir Asandamur al-Nāṣirī.”<sup>87</sup> Another contemporary, al-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī (d. 1372), also used this term in a similarly telling way in his passing reference to these events of late 1367:

the common people had come to the aid of the sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Sha‘bān during the operation of the *ajlāb* mamluks (*fi ḥarakat al-mamālīk al-ajlāb*) [...], when they intended to cause trouble for the sultan, in conjunction with the amir Asandamur al-Khāṣṣakī [...]. But the common people were mobilized, killing the *ajlāb* and making them bite the dust.<sup>88</sup>

In a very curious and puzzling addendum, the same author even explains such disturbing events by claiming that upon examination of these defeated ‘*ajlāb*’, it turned out that

they had their foreskins intact and were not circumcised (*wa hum ghulf bi-ghayr khitān*), by which it became known that they were Christians who keep away from the true faith (*naṣārā ba‘dūn ‘an al-īmān*).<sup>89</sup>

It has been convincingly argued before how one should be very wary of treating al-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī and his literary compendium as a historical source, on its key event of the Alexandrian crusade as much as on any other contemporary occurrence.<sup>90</sup> This ‘islamicized’ and at once also surprising explanation for the turmoil of the year 1367 certainly warrants this kind of historiographical wariness. At the same time, however, it is doubtful that such an explanation has no bearing whatsoever with the historical reality of the late 1360s which its author was living and writing in; it should certainly not be excluded that in essence it represents one way or another a version of the story of these ‘*ajlāb*’ as that was being told and retold in contemporary Alexandria.<sup>91</sup> At the very least, al-Nuwayrī’s

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<sup>86</sup> Al-Bayrūtī, fol. 40r; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 40r; Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-Ibar*, 5:457, 458, 472; al-‘Aynī, “Iqd”, 152; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:47.

<sup>87</sup> Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt*, eds. Quṣṭanṭīn Zurayq & Najlā ‘Izz al-Dīn (Beirut, 1936-1942), 9: 319.

<sup>88</sup> Al-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī, *Kitāb al-Ilmam*, 6: 18.

<sup>89</sup> Al-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī, *Kitāb al-Ilmam*, 6: 18.

<sup>90</sup> Weintrit, *Formen spätmittelalterlichen islamischer Geschichtsdarstellung*.

<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, in the context of literary *topoi*, there seems to exist an intriguing degree of similarity between this contemporary assessment of the ‘*ajlāb*’ as Christians and reports by European travellers to the Mamluk sultanate that portray all mamluks as Christian renegades (cfr. Ulrich Haarmann, “The Mamluk System of Rule in the Eyes of Western Travellers”, *MSR* 5 (2001): esp. 6-16).

remark hints at the extremely negative perception of these ‘*ajlāb*’ by contemporaries by the time he was writing up his work.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, in conjunction with the other contemporary and later authors’ common use of ‘*ajlāb*’ in their accounts of the events of the summer and autumn of 1367, there can be no doubt that there was at the time a distinctive body at work in Cairo that was identifiable by a generic term that explicitly linked them to Yalbughā’s leaderless junior mamluks and to the December 1366 rebellion and its chaotic aftermath.

In general, it should come as no surprise that the 1360s did not only provide contenders for power with a recruitment pool of ready-made veteran mamluks of various stock, but also with sufficient opportunities to acquire the usual junior rank-and-file recruits, firmly tied to their own *ustādh*’s patronage only.<sup>93</sup> However, as far as Yalbughā is concerned this traditional building block of a magnate’s Mamluk household was expanded to a giant scale, reaching massive dimensions of, allegedly, 1500 to 1800 juniors.<sup>94</sup> Numerically, therefore, his personal corps of mamluks, including veterans as well as these *ajlāb*, surely outdid any of his contemporaries, with the later historian Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba claiming that “one of [the contemporary historians<sup>95</sup>] stated that it was said that he had three thousand mamluks”.<sup>96</sup> In fact, this more than anything else is what Yalbughā continued to be remembered for long after his death, so that eventually Ghars al-Dīn al-Zāhirī (d. 1468), in his administrative manual, considered it still apposite to include a reference to that rather

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<sup>92</sup> Quite intriguingly, Robert Irwin, in his article “Mamluk Literature” (*MSR* 7/1 [2003]: 12), stated that the term *ajlāb*, or rather its variant *julbān*, already occurred earlier, for the reign of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, in the context of which it would have been used by the “jack-of-all-literary-trades” Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Abī Ḥajala (1325-1375) in his “account of the revolt of the *julbān* (newly imported mamluks) against that sultan”. Closer inspection, however, revealed that this account, ominously entitled “Dawr al-Zamān fī Ṭaḥn al-Julbān”, does not concern the reign of that sultan, but indeed, as would be expected from the argument presented here, Yalbughā’s junior mamluks and their disturbing behaviour in the timeframe between December 1366 and October 1367. In fact, this brief account as preserved in its Dār al-Kutub manuscript (5664 Adab)—contained in 9 folia, only 5 of which were actually used for this text—was according to the colophon written down by one ‘Umar al-Dumyātī al-Shāfi‘ī in 1465-6 (870AH) and annotated by a Muḥammad b. Zayn al-Dīn al-Ḥamawī on Sunday 17 July 1611, and it was therefore only indirectly a text by Ibn Abī Ḥajala, as suggested in the beginning of the text (“the high-minded *shaykh*, the *imām* Shihāb al-Dīn b. Abī Ḥajala said...). Most importantly in the present context, in its berating, even vituperative anti-‘*ajlāb*’ language, this short treatise in rhymed prose by an author who, like al-Nuwayrī, died before these juniors’ partial rehabilitation in the second half of the 1370s, clearly also presents the same extremely negative perception of them as still in vogue at the time.

<sup>93</sup> On the links between junior mamluks and their *ustādh*, see Van Steenberghe, *Order Out of Chaos*, 88-92; for the classic study on the subject, see Ayalon, *L’Esclavage du Mamlouk*, esp. 27-9.

<sup>94</sup> al-Bayrūtī, fol. 37v; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 37v; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:151 (1500), 139 (1800).

<sup>95</sup> This may well refer to Ibn al-Furāt (d. 1405), whose chronicle for these years is lost, but who was a well-attested source for Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba (see David Reisman, “A Holograph MS of Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah’s “*Dhayl*”, *MSR* 2 (1998): esp. 29-42.)

<sup>96</sup> Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:306.

than to any other historical number of mamluks, claiming that Yalbughā even had had “3500 mamluks in his service, one of them being al-Malik al-Zāhir Barqūq who was still a junior (*saghīran*) at the time”.<sup>97</sup>

This quote equally reminds once more of the fact that by 1366 these Yalbughāwīya ranks were still made up in large part by juniors like Barqūq. In view of this junior status, not yet having completed their training, most of his corps surely was still more of a liability than an asset to Yalbughā, even despite its numerical strength. Hence, as detailed above, his and his colleagues’ pragmatic employment of veterans in the same ranks. In fact, the questionable political and military usefulness of the junior mamluks that made up those ranks may be further inferred from the fact that many seem to have been acquired only quite shortly before 1366. Thus, according to one biographical note, Barqūq was only imported and bought from a slave merchant in the course of the year 1363.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, the generic term ‘*ajlāb*’ (recent imports) by which this Barqūq and the many hundreds of his consorts eventually became known in the streets of Cairo and beyond suggests that his was not a unique case.

At the same time, however, this Barqūq and the other ‘*ajlāb*’ whose biographies have survived (like Ibn Khaldūn’s eyes and ears Alṭunbughā al-Jūbānī, or the patron of today’s famous Khān al-Khalīlī in Cairo, Jarkas al-Khalīlī) were surprisingly older than one would expect of junior mamluks like this, as they were all said to have been born around the year 1340 and therefore already in their twenties when they became mamluks.<sup>99</sup> In view of the career of their *ustādh* Yalbughā and his quickly rising political star, especially after the murder of sultan Ḥasan in 1361, it can be quite convincingly suggested that it must have been for reasons of impatient ambition, peer rivalry, and concomitant time pressures, that Yalbughā acquired his own mamluks at such an advanced age, attempting to transform them into a useful army in the shortest time possible by subjecting these novices to spartan training methods and relentless discipline. Undoubtedly, Yalbughā’s intentions and his *ajlāb*’s training were cut short by the December 1366 conflict. This policy’s partial success would nevertheless show again when the survivors among these ‘*ajlāb*’, including

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<sup>97</sup> Al-Zāhirī, *Zubda*, 113, also repeated on 148.

<sup>98</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:223.

<sup>99</sup> See, for references to their age, al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:476; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 12:120; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 1:308. On the issue of a mamluk’s age, see Ayalon, *L’Esclavage du Mamlouk*, 13-4.

Barqūq, were allowed to return to Cairo in 1373 “to train [al-Ashraf Sha‘bān’s] mamluks.”<sup>100</sup>

Overall, however, by 1366 their training and experience were still deemed insufficient, despite their numerical usefulness for Yalbughā’s political muscle. When therefore in the course of Yalbughā’s struggle for pre-eminence support and loyalty had to be rewarded and ranks redistributed, as in March 1366, it were in general not these junior Yalbughāwīya that benefited. As detailed above, in view of their expertise of considerable years, their more veteran status and perhaps also their much more artificial household membership, it were Yalbughā’s veteran mamluks that were almost automatically preferred for promotion. Only in a very few cases, juniors already managed to break into the military ranks, but these are exceptions that rather seem to confirm the general rule. As mentioned before, Aqbughā al-Aḥmadī (quite tellingly nicknamed ‘al-jalab’), for instance, was made an amir of 100 in March 1366, but this seems primarily to have been the result of “his having a privileged status with Yalbughā”.<sup>101</sup>

When this factor of numerous very junior Yalbughāwīya mamluks is taken into consideration for the December 1366 conflict and its background, it becomes clear that dissatisfaction with their harsh training played an important role in inducing these ‘*ajlāb*’ to take part in it. Moreover, so did surely also frustrations with what those veterans in their corps were already achieving while, despite their mature age, most of the ‘*ajlāb*’ were still reckoned too junior for that.<sup>102</sup>

All in all, however, whatever the role of such ‘*ajlāb*’ frustrations, it seems that all sorts of practicalities, including even the Nile, were surely as much of a decisive factor in the course the conflict took for the Yalbughāwīya, as Yalbughā’s relentless and selective

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<sup>100</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘Ibar*, 5:462.

<sup>101</sup> See Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh*, 3:298.

<sup>102</sup> In this context, it is worthwhile to compare with the case of, for instance, the amir Uljbughā al-Muzaffarī al-Khāṣṣakī, who was said to have been only nineteen when he died in 1349, and who despite that young age already had been a leading amir in Cairo and a governor of the province of Tripoli (al-Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 1:594-8; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 10: 216 [“his moustache had not yet come out”]); a less extreme, more mainstream and equally interesting example concerns that of the amir Maliktamur al-Hijāzī (d. 1347), who was already mentioned as an amir in Cairo in 1333 (see Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāzir fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir*, ed. A. Ḥuṭayṭ, [Beirut, 1986], 179) that is, when he was in his early twenties, as suggested by paleopathological investigations of his remains in his burial crypt in Cairo (“These bones belong to the male of massive morphological structure in good state of health, most probably of the White Variety, 173 cm tall. His age at death was 35-40 years.” [Tadeusz Dzierzykray-Rogalski, Jerzy Kania & Medhat al-Minabbawi, “The investigations of burial crypts in the mausoleum of princess Tatar al-Ḥiḡāziyya in Cairo,” *Annales Islamologiques* 23 (1987): 83, 84]). That these examples date back two to three decades from the situation of the ‘*ajlāb*’ is, in fact, revealing for the profound changes that are occurring (see below).

patronage may have been. First of all, considering that Yalbughā had only gone to al-Gizeh in December 1366 for a hunting party, it is highly unlikely that his entire corps of mamluks crossed the Nile with him, especially in view of its infamously giant size. Obviously, sufficient numbers had been left in or near his residence at al-Kabsh to prove extremely useful when, after the failed attempt against his life, he hastily returned with only a handful of his intimates. Secondly, changing camps was not made easy for those Yalbughāwīya mamluks that had been left near Gizeh, considering Yalbughā's instant blockade of the Nile; as mentioned earlier, some amirs and "mamluks he had promoted" still did manage to cross and switch back to Yalbughā's side on Friday, but most that tried failed and, as stated by al-Maqrīzī, fell in the hands of their rebellious peers.<sup>103</sup>

In all this, however, fear for Yalbughā's retaliation rather than any type of maltreatment seems to have been the driving force behind these and most other actions of the latter. Anxieties about their treatment may have easily tricked many of the Yalbughāwīya-mamluks in Gizeh into their promoted veteran colleagues' scheme, but when this failed and Yalbughā escaped, leaving them cut off from the centre of power on the Nile's 'wrong' side, the following painful observation by one later historian may indeed have guided their further actions:

When they realized that their *ustādh* had saved himself and [that] he had fled, they became extremely worried (*ishtadda takhawwufuhum*) that when he would overcome them thereafter, he would not leave any of them alive (*lā yubqī minhum aḥadan*).<sup>104</sup>

Such fears, undoubtedly most vivid among those of Yalbughā's '*ajlāb*' who had been at Gizeh with him, obviously did not materialize. Nevertheless, they eventually did to some extent become a reality for all of Yalbughā's '*ajlāb*'. With the loss of their *ustādh* and their training incomplete, they did as a matter of fact experience death in financial, social and political terms. When this was realized by them, and when hiring their numerically useful services to Asandamur and to his peers in 1367 did not seem to result in any lasting change of fortune nor again in sufficient tangible rewards, unlike once more for the veteran mamluks, the consequences were dearly felt in Cairo's streets and palaces. Going totally out of control, especially after June 1367 and another missed round of rewards and promotions, they started looting and attacking whatever and whoever they could lay their hands on, and no one, not even Asandamur, seemed willing or capable to revert that situation. It is this process which goes a long way to explaining how there gradually was

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<sup>103</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:132.

<sup>104</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11:36.



generated a public and very negative awareness of their distinctive identity as Yalbughā's junior mamluks, or his '*ajlāb*', as attested to by source reports. The immediate outcome of this parallel formation of a hateful public opinion of them surely can be read in the remarkable bad press they received from al-Nuwayrī.<sup>105</sup> In the longer run, however, this abusive tone was moderated, reflecting in fact the lasting change of fortune which a number of these '*ajlāb*' did eventually experience. Hence, in a much milder and rather functional account, al-Maqrīzī (once more inspired by the very similar remarks of Ibn Khaldūn) presents the final, but in his version also rather purifying, whereabouts of Yalbughā's junior mamluks as follows:

“On Thursday 14 [October 1367], the sultan drowned a group from the Yalbughāwīya mamluks, who had agreed to kill him, in the Nile [...] In the morning of this Thursday, 100 of the notables of these *ajlāb* Yalbughāwīya (*al-ajlāb al-Yalbughāwīya*) were nailed and cut in two. A group of them were drowned. The remainder of them were banished to Syria and to Aswan. Among those of the Yalbughāwīya that were banished were Barqūq, Barka, Alṭunbughā al-Jūbānī, Jarkas al-Khalīlī and Aqbughā al-Māridānī. The *sharīf* Baktamur, *wālī* of Cairo, took them and detained them in his house, their hands fixed in wood. His lunch came, but he did not give them anything to eat. He assigned over them someone to take them to Qaṭyā. The *wālī* of Qaṭyā took them and sent them to Ghazza. Its governor sent them to al-Karak. They were imprisoned in a dark pit, in its citadel, for several years. Then they were released and they went to Damascus, where they served the amir Manjak, *nā'ib al-Shām*, until the sultan called for the Yalbughāwīya mamluks to employ them in the service of his two sons. So Barqūq served amongst the others that were in the service of the two sons of the sultan, until the sultan got killed after his return from 'Aqabat Ayla. Then, the amir Aynabak led the regime, Barqūq becoming one of the amirs of forty. Thereupon, he took hold of the stable and remained there until he became sultan.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> And from Ibn Abī Ḥajala (see fn. 92)

<sup>106</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:154-5; see also Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-'Ibar*, 5:458, 472.

## On the brink of a new era?

In sum, in the course of the four days this conflict lasted two clear-cut but fluctuating parties appear as opposing each other, including Yalbughāwīya mamluks and amirs on both sides. This already seems quite surprising from a modern historiographical perspective, but even more surprising is the general observation that the friction between these two multifarious parties seems less to have been caused by any lack of morality and of respect for traditional values in either camp, and rather to have been closely tied up with the actual composition of the Yalbughāwīya, and, by extension, with the subtle but irrevocable changes the Mamluk political scene was undergoing. From this perspective, modern historiography was right after all to implicate the Yalbughāwīya, but has failed so far to grasp the actual background and the deeper meaning of that allegation!

Most importantly, one of the more conspicuous lines along which friction developed in the 1360s was a generational one, with on one end mamluks of veteran status, stemming from households long gone and yet increasingly managing to improve their status, and on the other end their junior colleagues, recently imported and firmly tied to their *ustādhs'* current successes, but despite that only left with crumbs of benefit. Undoubtedly, the actual picture was less black and white than stereotyping like this allows for. Nevertheless, from the above discussion it is clear that at the time there generally were such pragmatic processes at work in the Mamluk sultanate, from veteran re-employment and rewarding to junior acquisition and frustration. Most importantly, the friction caused by the more striking extremes of these processes was a reality that should not be questioned and that became particularly apparent and relevant as time elapsed. Thus, in December 1366, Yalbughā I-Khāṣṣakī became the victim of a remarkable coinciding of these processes in the course of a rather classical Mamluk struggle for power. At that occasion, veteran ambitions concurred with junior frustrations to ignite a rebellious spark, and geographical circumstances, including the young sultan's presence on the rebellious side of the river, encouraged that spark to turn into a blaze which even the almighty Yalbughā proved not capable of fighting.

As seen above, this outcome did not mean the end of those processes, nor of the subsequent friction. Much to the contrary: whereas the former were simply continued throughout 1367, the latter even came increasingly to the forefront in the new struggles for power that ensued after Yalbughā's murder. In the end, Yalbughā's '*ajlāb*' themselves very

prominently fell foul of that friction, when al-Ashraf Sha‘bān’s survival got at stake again and his reaction proved surprisingly astute (with due assistance, as all sources did not fail to notice, of Cairo’s populace, fed up as they were with the havoc).

In the short run, therefore, the new social and political reality that emerged from this seriously advantaged once more veteran mamluks, when from the end of 1367 onwards al-Ashraf Sha‘bān turned —either deliberately, or simply by lack of any serious alternative, or perhaps even as a result of both— to such veterans to sustain his reign. Thus, in the course of the next few years, he signed up veterans to become the executive pillars of his regime, as with the amirs Uljāy al-Yūsufī (d. 1373), Manklī Bughā al-Shamsī (ca. 1320-1372), ‘Alī al-Māridānī (ca. 1310-1370), and Manjak al-Yūsufī (ca. 1315-1375).<sup>107</sup> Even more striking, however, is the fact that Sha‘bān also chose to continue the more general line of policy vis-à-vis veterans that had been favored by Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī and his peers before, singling out mamluks with a clear pre-1360 background rather than his own recruits in any round of promotions, as may be gathered once more from another set of detailed lists of promoted amirs that has been preserved for the remainder of his reign, even until its final year 1377.<sup>108</sup> Clearly, in the 1360s and 1370s power and authority remained closely linked to the fate and status of the many mamluks who had entered the regime in the 1350s, in the 1340s, and even before.

In the long run, however, this situation did not last, and this was surely not just due to those veterans’ natural life cycle. As summarized by al-Maqrīzī above, in March 1377 rehabilitated survivors from Yalbughā’s ‘*ajlāb*’ in particular suddenly managed to successfully engage with a process of estrangement between Sha‘bān and his supporters, generating finally their own access to rank and status and eventually culminating, in November 1382, in the dissolution of the Qalāwūnid sultanate and the enthronement of one of their own, Barqūq.

Surely, friction between on the one hand veterans and their established interests and on the other juniors and their hunger for change is nothing new in history, and this qualification is all the more valid for the Mamluk sultanate, in the era of the Qalāwūnid sultanate between 1279 and 1382 as well as in general. What is, however, remarkable in this respect, offering insight into another conspicuous line along which that friction

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<sup>107</sup> See Van Steenberghe, *Order Out of Chaos*, 109, 162-3.

<sup>108</sup> For these lists, see al-Bayrūtī, 40r-40v, 52v, 56v-57, 80-80v, 82, 84, 100, 107; Ibn Duqmāq, “Nuzhat al-Anām”, fol. 43r, 60r, 83v, 85, 110v-111r; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:161-2, 176-7, 185, 216, 219, 225-6, 255, 270, 387-8.

developed in the 1360s, is that these processes and the conflicts they fed into no longer took place within the confines of one, royal, household, be it 14<sup>th</sup>-century Qalāwūnid or 13<sup>th</sup>-century Ayyubid/Şāliḥīd. This was not a friction which involved that royal household and its members in any meaningful manner, despite the political nature of what was at stake. Rather, in the 1360s things revolved increasingly around the household of the amir Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī, without any royal involvement, but also, however, without strictly being limited to Yalbughā's assorted environment. This was in fact not even a friction that took place within the confines of any one household, between its senior and junior members, as had happened so often in the past, from the Bahrīya's actions against Tūrān Shāh to al-Nāṣir Ḥasan's collisions with his father's mamluks and, eventually, with some of his own. Rather, there were two broad generational social categories at work that, especially as far as veterans are concerned, had little more in common than the insecure fate they were sharing and the pragmatic approach they took to circumventing that problem. As such, the December 1366 conflict and its aftermath was one of the very first political conflicts of substance in the 14<sup>th</sup> century that were fought outside of the umbrella of the Qalāwūnid sultanate, that is by a majority of contenders for authority and status that had at most only very limited ties with the royal house. This was therefore a first, but ominous breach of the Qalāwūnid political monopoly, originating in the fissioning of great households under the Qalāwūnid umbrella in the 1340s and 1350s.<sup>109</sup>

Moreover, this was also a first and ominous breach in Qalāwūnid household politics, when the conflict and the friction it resulted from no longer were about realigning loyalties within the Qalāwūnid house or its offshoots, but about gaining support and status by a majority of outsiders to any such traditional framework of reference. In such a transforming environment, new political strategies had to be devised, including the tendency to give absolute priority to the alignment of those outsiders through material rewards, as opposed to the more traditional preference that used to be shown to those that were already firmly tied to one's social and political success anyway.

The far more tiered and friction prone political system which such strategies automatically give rise to, with veteran amirs on one side of the political spectrum and junior mamluks or

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<sup>109</sup> For more details on this fission, see Van Steenbergen, *Order Out of Chaos*, 147-158. On the origins of this process, and its consequences for the Qalāwūnids, see Jo Van Steenbergen, "Caught between Heredity and Merit: the amir Qawṣūn and the Legacy of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 1341)," in *The Mamluk Sultanate: Political, Military, Social and Cultural Aspect*, eds. Reuven Amitai & Amalia Levanoni, forthcoming. For an assessment of the life and times of the Qalāwūnid political monopoly in general, see Van Steenbergen, "The Last of the Qalāwūnid Magnates?"

'*ajlāb*' on the other, tied through quite distinct sets of alliances to the political leaders of the day, is actually quite reminiscent of Mamluk politics as it has been described for the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, similarities are so striking that Jean-Claude Garcin's description of this aspect of that next century's political system in the *Cambridge History of Egypt* reminds immediately of the historical processes described above for the December 1366 conflict and its aftermath:

From 1428... the problem first appeared of recruits who were unruly, not because they ... would not have had a political future in the framework of their integration into the system, but because that integration could not happen fast enough. Faced with the recruits, the amirs, now with fewer mamluks, found themselves at a loss. The rift between the old troops and newcomers brought about a corresponding strengthening of the move to form the older ones into an aristocracy. ... So a new political mechanism had gradually been imposed: any amir who rose to be sultan had first to remove his predecessor's recruits, relying on the previous age group that had been kept in the wings until that point, which marked their genuine entry into the political arena. The initial rhythm of Mamluk political life was thus much slowed down.<sup>110</sup>

Clearly, "the problem ...of recruits" and the "new political mechanism" did not first appear in 1428 or thereabout, but became increasingly apparent already from the December 1366 conflict onwards, filling the vacuum left by the slowly disintegrating Qalāwūnid house.

Viewed from this perspective, however, the take-over by the *ajlāb*, Barqūq's ending of the Qalāwūnid sultanate in November 1382, and his deliberate attempt to impose his own Zāhirī household, including his own lineage and his own mamluks, as the new framework of social and political reference instead of the defunct Qalāwūnid one, actually suspended the emergence of such an entirely new political system. As such, the sultanates of Barqūq and his sons (1382-1412) were not so much a radical break from the past, as traditionally references tend to portray them, but rather an attempt to link up again with that past and to restore once more to pre-eminence the traditional royal household, as a comprehensive political unit that firmly monopolized the regime, its political economy and Mamluk society at large, far beyond the limits of generational pragmatism.

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<sup>110</sup> Garcin, "The Regime of the Circassian Mamluks," 300-1. The workings of this "mechanism", including the new types of alliances between non-promoted *julbān* and promoted amirs, were further explored by Amalia Levanoni in her very insightful "The Sultan's *laqab*"; on p. 115, she in fact already seems to hint at earlier precedents for this "new order", without however naming them. This "rift between the old troops and newcomers" as a typical feature of 15<sup>th</sup>-century Mamluk politics was first fully formulated by Amalia Levanoni in her "The Mamluk Conception of the Sultanate", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994): esp. 386-7.

Despite the fact that the latter observations and their background obviously need further qualification, it is already clear that this attempt at a reversal of historical processes that had first come to the surface in the 1360s did not, in the long run, manage to eradicate those processes. This was surely as much due to their innate resilience and embryonic presence in traditional Mamluk political practices (as in the cyclical or “generational” nature of rank-and-file acquisition, training and employment, as well as in the afore-mentioned reliance on numerical strength), as to the many crises which the turn of the century witnessed. From 1412 onwards, therefore, change did eventually re-emerge, when a tiered, exclusive system of veteran amirs, junior mamluks and political (and financial!) pragmatism gradually came to supersede a more inclusive household system, and an overall process set in which unmistakably should be identified as one of Mamluk state formation, at the cost of traditional household politics.<sup>111</sup>

Processes of historical change like these, then, originating in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, catching momentum from the 1360s onwards, and only temporarily suspended towards the end of the century, led the sultanate towards its own version of early modernity in the course of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Clearly, no one in particular, not even Yalbughā or his mamluks, can or should be blamed individually for generating transformations which they were all subject to. They are rather a token of the dynamic nature of Mamluk history, as they were gradually yet irrevocably heralding a new era!

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<sup>111</sup> A pilot research project is currently being set up under my supervision at Ghent University (financed by the university’s Research Foundation, 2009-2012) to start with the detailed reconstruction and assessment of these transformations on the basis of prosopographical research. The overarching project’s title is “The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate. Political Traditions and State Formation in 15<sup>th</sup> Century Egypt and Syria.”