Dealing with Reality: Early Mamluk Military Policy and the Allocation of Resources[1]

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The leadership of the Mamluk Sultanate that ruled Egypt and Syria for over a quarter of a millennium in the late Middle Ages (1250-1517 in Egypt, 1260-1516 in Syria) formulated a systematic military policy in its early decades. Among the factors that influenced its military policy and its implementation were: 1) perceived dangers, needs and other goals; 2) the nature of warfare, including the prevalent technologies; 3) available resources, both economic and human; and, 4) cultural and social norms.[2] In the Mamluk Sultanate we find the rare – perhaps unique – long-term identity of state and army: on the whole, the higher command of the army was also the ruling group of the state, and the sultan was usually drawn from its ranks. Therefore, the Mamluk ruling elite was generally relieved of the need to deal with serious political interference beyond the military society, and by and large was not unduly bothered by economic and social pressure groups from the civilian elites and the "public" at large. Even so, it devoted not insignificant efforts to achieve legitimacy in the eyes of its subjects. One important aspect of this attempt at legitimization was the presentation of the Mamluks as warriors defending Islam and the Muslims. This conscious role of holy warriors may have, in turn, played a certain role in the formation of military policy.

Before attempting to demonstrate that indeed the Mamluk leadership had a well-thought-out military policy, which included a generally rational allocation

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2 Cf. the words of Hans J. Morgenthau 1973, *Politics Among the Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed., New York, 144f.: "Good government, then, must start by performing two different intellectual operations. First, it must choose the objectives and methods of its foreign policy in view of the power available to support them with a maximum chance of success. […] Thus the national power available determines the limits of foreign policy. […] Once a government has brought its foreign policy into balance with the power available to it, it must bring the different elements of national power into balance with each other. A nation does not necessarily attain the maximum of national power because it is very rich in natural resources, possesses a very large population, or has built an enormous industrial and military establishment. It attains that maximum when it has at its disposal a sufficient quantity and quality, in the right admixture, of those resources of power which will allow it to pursue a given foreign policy with a maximum chance of success." For the purposes of the present paper, I suggest replacing the phrase "foreign policy" with "military policy", and "nation" with "state".

of economic and other resources, I will briefly review some salient features of the Sultanate in its early years and also the main military and political challenges that it faced at this time. First of all, we should define the chronological boundaries of our discussion, which will provide an opportunity to look at the dangers that confronted the Mamluks. I will be focusing here on the sixty-year period from 1260 to 1320, skipping the first decade of Mamluk rule in Egypt, since it was a period of political turbulence and initial crystallization of the Mamluk state. In any event, Mamluk rule was then limited to Egypt, and the main serious foreign danger was the Ayyubid princes of Syria, who refused to accept the Mamluk rise to power in Cairo at the expense of the local Ayyubid ruler; the Mamluks met the challenges from that quarter in an ad hoc but effective manner, as they did the disputation of their authority by the Egyptian Bedouin.[3]

On 3 September 1260, the Mamluks under Quṭuz defeated the Mongols at ʿAyn Jālūt in northern Palestine, leading to the advent of Mamluk control over most of Syria up to the Euphrates and its integration into a relatively centralized state based in Cairo. It also was the beginning of a sixty-year war with the Mongols, about which I will expand below. At the same time, it brought the Mamluks into direct contact with the Franks of the Syrian coast, an encounter with profound implications for the latter. The demise of the Frankish presence in the Levant in the aftermath of the Mamluk conquests of the 1260s, 1270s and 1280s, culminating in the taking of Acre in 1291, is well known.[4] In any event, the disappearance of the Franks from the Syrian coast towards the end of the 13th century on the one hand, and the rapprochement with the Mongols ca. 1320 on the other, changes the strategic situation of the Mamluk Sultanate, and therefore seems like a reasonable time to end our discussion. A full exposé of Mamluk military policy and the allocation would require us to continue our investigation into the mid-14th century and beyond, but that will have to wait for another opportunity. I should add, however, that even with the removal of the Franks from the Syrian coast, the danger from the West had not disappeared. Certainly the Mamluk leadership thought a renewed crusade was possible, even in conjuncture with the Mongols. Still, the lack of a bridgehead in the Levant made this a more difficult undertaking for the western Franks, and thus changed the strategic balance. I will be returning to this matter below.

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3 For these years, see Irwin, Robert 1986, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250-1382*, London, chapter 2, which is entitled "The Turbulent Decade".

4 For a good review of these events, see the final chapters of Prawer, Joshua 1970, *Histoire du royaume latin de Jérusalem*, G. Nahon, trans., Paris, vol. 2, as well as Ziada, Mustafa M. 1969, "The Mamluk Sultans to 1293", in: *A History of the Crusades*, Kenneth M. Setton, gen. ed., vol. 2: *The Later Crusades, 1189-1311*, Robert Lee Wolff and Harry W. Hazard, eds., 2nd ed., Madison / London, 735-758. For an interpretive essay on early Mamluk attitudes (and those of their Ayyubid predecessors) towards the Franks, see Humphreys, R. Stephen 1998, "Ayyubids, Mamluks and the Latin East in the Thirteenth Century", *Mamlūk Studies Review* 2, 1-17.

The Mamluk ruling class was composed mainly of Turkish-speaking officers who had come up the ranks of the army, many in units of royal Mamluks, i.e. the personal Mamluks of successive sultans. As youngsters, these Mamluks had arrived at the slave markets of Egypt and Syria, transported mostly from the steppe regions north of the Black Sea. They underwent years of training, military and religious, and at around the age of 18 were publicly manumitted and enrolled as mounted archers in the units of their patrons, be they sultans, senior or junior *amīr*s, i.e. officers. In spite of the fact that they officially ceased being slaves, the Mamluks proudly continued to call themselves by this name, alluding to their slave status as youngsters.[5] The Sultanate itself is usually referred to by contemporaries as *dawlat al-turk* or *dawlat al-atrāk*, that is, the "state (or dynasty) of the Turks".[6] This military class was a continually replicating one-generational elite: while sons of Mamluks could serve in the military, they almost invariably were placed in the inferior *ḥalqa* units. In order to keep the Mamluk units up to strength, let alone build up the formations of a new sultan, a massive trade in young Mamluks (and their female counterparts, it should be mentioned) was developed, with the connivance of the Mongol authorities in the Golden Horde of southern Russia and Ukraine, the activities of Muslim merchants and Genoese shippers, and the agreement of the Byzantine emperor, who controlled the Bosphorus.[7]

I will devote just a few words to the question of the resources which were available to the Mamluk elite and state: the wealth of the Sultanate, like virtually all pre-modern states,[8] was mainly derived from systematic collection of surplus from the agricultural sector via taxes. In the Mamluk Sultanate, like many Muslim states before, the mechanism of choice was the *iqṭāʿ* system, by which the officers received land allocations over which they had the right to collect land tax (*kharāj*), but this did not entail administrative control nor was this allocation passed on to one's descendents; the frequent translation of *iqṭāʿ* as "fief," is not only inaccurate, but gives the mistaken impression that we have before us some type of Mamluk feudalism, a term to be eschewed in the Mamluk (and larger

5 *Mamlūk* (pl. *mamālīk*) means literally "possessed", and is generally used to refer to white slaves purchased, trained and employed as soldiers.

6 *Dawlat al-mamālīk* and *al-dawla al-mamlūkiyya* are modern appellations only.

7 For the Mamluk army during the time of the Sultanate, see Ziada 1969, 755-758; Ayalon, David 1953-54, "Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army", I-III, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 15,2, 203-228; 15,3, 448-476; 16,1, 57-90; repr. in: Ayalon, David 1977, *Studies on the Mamluks of Egypt (1250-1517)*, (Variorum Collected Studies Series 62), London; idem 1951, *L'esclavage du Mamelouk*, (Oriental Notes and Studies 1), Jerusalem; repr. in: Ayalon, David 1979, *The Mamlūk Military Society*, (Variorum Collected Studies Series 249), London. For the institution of military slavery in Muslim societies, see Amitai, Reuven 2006, "The Mamlūk Institution, or One Thousand Years of Military Slavery in the Islamic World", in: *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age*, Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan, eds., New Haven, 40-78.

8 See the comments in Crone, Patricia 1989, *Pre-Industrial Societies. New Perspectives on the Past*, Oxford / Cambridge (Mass.), 8.

Muslim) context.[9] Other revenues were derived from taxes on the non-Muslim communities, urban economic activity, and foreign (mostly transient) commerce.[10] The sultan himself held a chunk of Egypt's land as royal *iqṭāʿ* (*khāṣṣ*), and this was the basis of much – if not most – of the military budget.[11]

The majority of senior positions in the Mamluk state were held by senior *amīr*s.[12] The administrators dealing with matters of money (the most senior being the *wazīr*, which can be translated in this context as "chief minister") and documentation and letters were civilians, many of whom were scions of long-standing bureaucratic families. Most of the financial officials in Egypt at the advent of the Mamluk period were still Copts, although this situation changed over the next few generations due to conversions among this group.[13] However, even in these traditional "civilian" realms, we see a growing militarization: by the 1290s the *wazīr* was more often than not an *amīr* (and in the early 14th century this position was abolished for a while, his responsibilities being turned over to other military and civilian office holders),[14] and over the "writing" bureaucracy was a sort of chancery "czar" known as a *dawādār*.[15] In various government departments, we find a *shādd* or *mushidd*, a kind of Mamluk commissar appointed to keep an eye on the civilian bureaucrats.[16] Given the vital (and growing) role of the army, the military provenance of the sultan himself, the central position of the senior officers in the state's administration and their control over the civilian bureaucracy, I think that we are indeed justified in seeing the almost complete identity between state and military in the Mamluk Sultanate, which I had mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

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9 Rabie, Hassanein 1972, *The Financial System of Egypt A.H. 564-741/A.D. 1169-1341*, (London Oriental Series 25), London, 26-72; for a discussion on the taxation of agricultural production, see ibid. 73-79. For the presentations of the *iqṭāʿ* system (and related matters) as a form of feudalism, see Poliak, Abraham N. 1939, *Feudalism in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and the Lebanon, 1250-1900*, (Prize Publication Fund 17), London; Ashtor, Eliyahu 1976, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages*, London, 280-331 (chapter 8: "Mamluk Feudalism").

10 Rabie 1972, 79-132.

11 Irwin 1986, 92f.; 110ff., who describes the growing size of the royal fisc in the period under discussion here, as the sultan was able to increase his proportion of *iqṭāʿ* lands (at the expense of the officers and the non-Mamluk units) through the cadastral surveys (in the singular, *rawq*), especially that of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn in 1315 and in Syria before and after. For the actual payment to the soldiers, see also Ayalon, David 1958, "The System of Payment in Mamluk Military Society", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 1,1, 37-65; 1,3, 257-296.

12 For these main offices, see Ayalon 1953-54, III, 57-66.

13 For the civilian bureaucracy, see Rabie 1972, 153-161; Holt, Peter M. 1986, *The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517*, (A History of the Near East), London / New York, 145ff.; Ayalon 1953-54, III, 66f.; Irwin 1986, 40, 110 (for the role of the Copts).

14 Ayalon 1953-54, III, 61; Holt 1986, 145.

15 Ayalon 1953-54, III, 62ff.; Irwin 1986, 39f.; Holt 1986, 146.

16 Irwin 1986, 75, 114, 117; Rabie 1972, 150-153. For the use of the terms *shādd* and *mushidd* for the clerks who collected taxes in the *iqṭāʿāt*, see ibid. 66f.

To my mind this was a unique phenomenon in the pre-modern Muslim world (and evidently beyond). Even the contemporary Mongols, with the great centrality of the army in their society and empire,[17] never reached this degree of congruence between the institutions of state and army.

What were the dangers and challenges facing the new Mamluk state? These are listed in a descending list of importance: the Mongols of Iran; the Franks on the Syrian coast and across the Mediterranean; the Bedouin tribes of Egypt and Syria; the need to strengthen Mamluk authority in the periphery of the state and to extend it beyond the usual frontiers of Egypt and Syria, in areas such as the Hejaz, Cilicia, Yemen and Nubia; and civil unrest in both rural and urban areas. Without a doubt, the Mongols were the number one foreign policy and security concern of the Mamluks. On the one hand, the Ilkhanids of Iran and the surrounding countries (modern-day Turkmenistan, northern Afghanistan, Iraq, the Caucasus and most of Turkey) represented a continual danger to the very existence of the Mamluk Sultanate from 1260. On the other hand, the so-called Golden Horde, the Mongol state centered in the steppe region north of the Black and Caspian Seas, but controlling the Ukraine and most of European Russia, was an important ally, not the least permitting the export of young Qipchaq Turkish (and occasionally Mongol) slaves. The Mamluks had no illusions about the long-term goals of the Ilkhanid Mongols, and knew that they planned to return in force to Syria in order to revenge their defeat at ʿAyn Jālūt, to take Syria and to move on to Egypt. Any doubts as to Mongol goals were dissipated by frequent Mongol raids in the frontier region and beyond, the frequent truculent missives sent by the Ilkhans to the sultans, and the many Mongol missions to the West (at least fifteen from 1262 onward) to garner support for a joint campaign against the common Muslim enemy. The Mamluks, it should be added, had at least some knowledge of these diplomatic démarches, and were aware of the danger of a joint Frankish-Mongol campaign against them.[18]

In fact, I would suggest that it was this perceived danger of Ilkhanid-Frankish cooperation, potentially leading to either having to fight on two fronts at the same time or having to confront a combined Frankish-Mongol army, which may explain the growing belligerency of the Mamluks towards the Franks on the coast. The idea would have been to weaken and ultimately eliminate the Frankish presence in Syria and thus to reduce a future bridgehead that could have served a Crusading

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17 See the comment in Morgan, David O. 1979, "The Mongol Armies in Persia", *Der Islam* 56, 81-96, at 81: "The army was the basic Mongol institution. Society was organised around it."

18 Mamluk-Mongol relations are discussed at length in Amitai-Preiss, Reuven 1995, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānid War, 1260-1281*, (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization), Cambridge, and many of the papers assembled in Amitai, Reuven 2007, *The Mongols in the Islamic Lands: Studies in the History of the Ilkhanate*, (Variorum Collected Studies Series 873), Aldershot / Burlington.

army from the West.[19] Be that as it may, from 1265 onward the Mamluks adopted a policy of systematically conquering Frankish cities and castles, and by 1291 had only to administer the coup de grâce by taking Acre. These campaigns against the Franks, as well as their Armenian allies in Cilicia (who were also allies of the Ilkhanids), of course could only take place during lulls in the war with the Mongols of Iran. In fact, one could see most of the period between 1260 and 1291 (and perhaps up to the early 1300s) as one of almost incessant campaigning by the Mamluks, alternating between the Mongols, the Franks and the Armenians in Cilicia. This has found expression in the phrase frequently present in the inscriptions of Baybars, where he is described as *mubīd al-faranj wa-l-tatar*, i.e. "the annihilator of the Franks and Mongols".[20] Such unequivocal language may jar our modern sensibilities, but in those times different approaches to international morality and its public expression were acceptable.

The Bedouin, be they in Egypt (mostly the southern part of the country) or Syria, were less of a pressing problem, but they could prove to be more than a mere bother, particularly at times of crisis brought on by other reasons. Thus in the 1250s, the tribes of Egypt refused to accept the new Mamluk political order of the country, while in 1300, the tribes there took advantage of a Mamluk defeat by the Mongols in Syria to attempt to regain their independence from the central authorities. In both cases, the Bedouin were forced to submit after extremely forceful and cruel Mamluk responses, enabled by the latter's military prowess.[21] Normally, the fear of Mamluk power, coupled with careful diplomacy and largesse, enabled the Mamluk authorities to control the Bedouin, and in the case of those in Syria, to integrate them as auxiliaries into the Mamluk military machine.[22]

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19 This idea is developed in Amitai-Preiss, Reuven 1992, "Mamluk Perceptions of the Mongol-Frankish Rapprochement", *Mediterranean Historical Review* 7,1, 50-65. See also Humphreys 1998, 16.

20 See, for example *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe (RCEA)*, Étienne Combe, Jean Sauvaget, and Gaston Wiet, eds., vol. 12, Cairo 1943, 141f. (4612, 668/1269-70 Nabī Mūsā); 193 (4690, 673/1274-75 Damascus); 195 (4692, 673/1274-75 Damascus); 226f. (4738, 676/1277-78 Damascus). Cf. *RCEA* 12, 128f. (4593, 666/1267-68 Homs): *mubīd al-faranj wa-l-arman wa-l-tatar*, i.e. "the annihilator of the Franks, Armenians and Mongols".

21 For problems with the Bedouin of Egypt in the early Mamluk period, see Irwin 1986, 27, 44f.; for the Bedouin revolt in Upper Egypt after the Mamluk defeat at Wādī al-Khaznadār in late 1299 and its suppression see Weil, Gustav 1860, *Geschichte des Abbasidenchalifats in Egypten*, vol. 1: *Das Kalifat unter den Bahritischen Mamlukensultanen von Egypten 652-729 d.H. = 1258-1390 n.Chr.*, Stuttgart, 254f. [=vol. 4 of his *Geschichte der Chalifen, nach handschriftlichen, größtentheils noch unbenutzten Quellen bearbeitet*, 5 vols., Mannheim / Stuttgart 1846-51].

22 Tritton, Arthur S. 1948, "Tribes of Syria in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 12,3-4, 567-573; Hiyari, Mustafa A. 1975, "The Origins and Development of the Amīrate of the Arabs during the Seventh/Thirteenth and Eighth/Fourteenth Centuries", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38,3, 509-524; Amitai-Preiss 1995, 64-69.

There were few examples of serious civilian unrest in the urban centers and rural areas of the Sultanate in the period under discussion. This seems to characterize a later period, especially the 15th century.[23] Yet occasionally in this early period there were problems: One example was in the countryside around Nablus in 1282, where a peasant rebellion was cruelly put down.[24] A second example was in Cairo around 1309-10, when riots took place during the brief and unpopular rule of Baybars II al-Jāshnakīr, disorders that ultimately contributed to this sultan's demise and the return of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, with whom the masses were in sympathy.[25] Probably a determining reason why the authorities were unable this time to deal effectively with the unrest was that the military elite itself was not of one mind, and the ruling sultan's support among them was weak. Normally, the complete superiority of the Mamluk forces vis-à-vis the civilian masses, combined with ongoing attempts at legitimization and the overall support of the civilian and religious elite, were more than enough to guarantee the acquiescence of the civilian population. However, occasionally part of the rural population might cause trouble that could not be ignored. In the aftermath of the Mamluk defeat at Wādī al-Khaznadār near Homs in late 1299, the mountain dwellers of present-day Lebanon (who were probably mostly Druze) wreaked havoc on retreating Mamluk troops. The Syrian Mamluk leadership was only able to reassert its authority after the immediate Mongol danger to Syria was removed in the spring of 1300 (with the withdrawal of Ghazan Ilkhan and his armies), and after the dispatch of a large army reinforced by civilian militia-like formations from Damascus. Here, too, a massive display of military power, coupled with large-scale civilian support, brought these mountain-dwelling intransigents back into line, or at least reduced them to a forced obedience.[26]

Finally, I will mention briefly on-going Mamluk attempts to extend their influence over the frontiers or into the periphery in different directions: the Armenian Kingdom in Cilicia (known as "Lesser Armenia"); Nubia; and, the Hejaz

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23 For the urban milieu, see Lapidus, Ira M. 1967, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, Cambridge (Mass.), 143-184 (chapter 5: "The Political System: The Common People between Violence and Impotence").

24 Ibn al-Furāt, Nāṣir al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, *Taʾrīkh al-duwal wa-l-mulūk* [=*Taʾrīkh Ibn al-Furāt*], vol. 7, Costi K. Zurayk, ed., Beirut 1942, 225f.; al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk*, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyāda, ed., Cairo 1934-73, vol. 1, 699f.

25 Irwin 1986, 95.

26 Ibid. 100ff.; Amitai, Reuven 2002, "Whither the Ilkhanid Army? Ghazan's First Campaign into Syria (1299-1300)", in: *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)*, Nicola Di Cosmo, ed., Leiden / Boston / Köln, 221-264; repr. in: Amitai, Reuven 2007, *The Mongols in the Islamic Lands: Studies in the History of the Ilkhanate*, (Variorum Collected Studies Series 873), Aldershot / Burlington, XV; idem 2003, "Foot Soldiers, militiamen and volunteers in the early Mamluk army", in: *Texts, Documents and Artefacts: Islamic Studies in Honour of D.S. Richards*, Chase F. Robinson, ed., Leiden / Boston, 233-249, at 242f.

(i.e., the holy cities of Mecca and Medina).[27] While most of the campaigns were not major displays of Mamluk military might (with the exception of many of those to Armenian Cilicia), they were facilitated by a well-ordered army from which the necessary contingents could be detached. It is to the creation of this "military machine" and the resources devoted to it that I now turn my attention.

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But first, some general words about the use of resources: the Mamluk leadership was confronted by an age-old problem: balancing the budget. In spite of the relative richness of the lands that they controlled and the fairly organized and centralized bureaucracy at their disposal, resources, be they cash, storable commodities (especially grains), manpower, livestock or otherwise, were limited. At the same time, as we have seen above, the strategic needs of the Sultanate were serious and multi-faceted, and could not be ignored. In addition, not all of the resources under the state's control could be devoted only to military needs: the military-political elite believed that it had certain responsibilities to society at large (primarily in the related realms of religion and education). Perhaps the most important expression of the way this duty was executed was the establishment of extensive endowments (*awqāf*, the plural of *waqf*): mosques, colleges (*madrasa*s), sufi lodges (*khānqāh*s, *zāwiya*s), hostels for pilgrims (*ribāṭ*s), baths, caravansaries, etc.[28] One side effect of these efforts was to strengthen the legitimacy of the regime in the eyes of the subjects, be they religious and civilian elites, common urban dwellers, or even the peasants and nomads.[29] At the same time, the senior members of the military-political elite had a healthy and natural

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27 For Cilicia, see Stewart, Angus Donal 2001, *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks: War and Diplomacy during the Reigns of Het'um II (1287-1307)*, Leiden / Boston / Köln, esp. chapter 1; Amitai-Preiss 1995, index, s.v. "Lesser Armenia". For Nubia, see Holt 1986, 130-137; Northrup, Linda S. 1998, *From Slave to Sultan: The Career of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and the Consolidation of Mamluk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678-689 A.H./1279-1290 A.D.)*, (Freiburger Islamstudien XVIII), Stuttgart, 98, 146-149, 179f., 184. For the Hejaz, see: Thorau, Peter 1992, *The Lion of Egypt: Sultan Baybars I and the Near East in the Thirteenth Century*, Peter M. Holt, trans., London / New York, 198f.; Irwin 1986, 56, 120; Northrup 1998, 145f.

28 For some discussion of the *waqf* institution under the Mamluks, see Denoix, Sylvie 1999, "Fondations pieuses, fondations économiques, le waqf, un mode d'intervention sur la ville mamelouke", in: *Le Khan al-Khalili et ses environs: Un centre commercial et artisanal au Caire du XIII^e au XX^e siècle*, Sylvie Denoix, Jean-Charles Depaule, and Michel Tuchscherer, eds., (Études Urbaines 4,1), Cairo, 19-26; idem 2000, "A Mamluk Institution for Urbanization: The 'Waqf'", in: *The Cairo Heritage: Essays in Honor of Laila Ali Ibrahim*, Doris Behrens-Abouseif, ed., Cairo / New York, 191-202; Amin, Mohammad M. 1994, "Waqf in the Mamluk Period: A Case Study about Waqf as Public Goods", in: *The Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Urbanism in Islam (ICUIT II), November 27-29, 1990, The Middle Eastern Culture Center*, Tokyo.

29 See the preliminary discussion of the matter of Mamluk attempts to find legitimacy in my forthcoming book: *Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260-1335)*, to be published by Brepols, forthcoming, chapter 4.

proclivity for self-aggrandizement; we should not forget the self-interests of the Mamluk elite.[30]

With the resources earmarked for military and related expenditures, the Mamluk leadership, led by the sultan and advised by civilian officials, had some hard choices to make in light of their perceived needs, their strengths and weaknesses and the available assets. They had no choice but to set priorities. I think that in retrospect they did a pretty good job: during the first generations of their rule, Mamluks bested their different adversaries in the long run and bequeathed to their successors a safe and well-organized state. What then were the strategic policy choices that the Mamluks made?

Firstly, they decided to expand and strengthen the mobile field army, composed mainly of mounted archers. In Egypt and the Levant (as well as neighboring countries), Turkish mounted archers – be they Mamluks or Turcoman tribesmen – had long been the mainstay of the armies of Muslim rulers, even before the advent of the Crusades.[31] But these pre-Mamluk-Sultanate armies had been relatively small, not the least since it was very expensive to purchase, educate and maintain slave soldiers, with all of their advantages. The army of Ayyubid Egypt probably numbered between 10,000-12,000 horsemen, and the armed forces of the Syrian Ayyubid principalities was most probably smaller altogether.[32] Under Baybars, the army of Egypt appears to have doubled; one source speaks of a four-fold expansion, but this statement stretches credibility.[33] There appears to have been a comparative increase of the Syrian army.[34] To what can we attribute this unequivocal expansion of the armed forces? First, the Mamluks perceived an overriding existential danger in the form of a renewed Mongol offensive, which could only be met with a strong cavalry army. Secondly, the Mamluk state was more organized and centralized than its Ayyubid predecessor (or rather predecessors), and therefore could collect funds in a more effective way. Thirdly, as the political power and military were one and the same, resources could be directed in a relatively easy

30 On the wealth accumulated by the senior Mamluk officers and their households, see the comments in Lapidus 1967, 50-59.

31 This is only partially the case of Fatimid Egypt (969-1071), but this exception need not concern us here.

32 For the Ayyubid army of Egypt, see the evidence of al-Yūnīnī, Quṭb al-Dīn Mūsā, *Dhayl mirʾāt al-zamān fī taʾrīkh al-aʿyān*, (Dairatu't-Maʿarifi'l-Osmania New Series VIII), Hyderabad 1954-61, vol. 3, 261f.; Ibn Wāṣil, Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Mufarrij al-kurūb fī akhbār Banī Ayyūb*, Ḥassanayn M. Rabīʿ, vol. 4, ed., Cairo 1972, 209.

33 Yūnīnī, *Dhayl*, vol. 3, 261f., cf. ibid. 355, where the number 30,000 is given.

34 For the Ayyubid army in Syria, at least at the time of Saladin, see Gibb, Hamilton A. R. 1962, "The Armies of Saladin", in: Gibb, Hamilton A. R., *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk, eds., Boston, 75-90, at 78ff. Al-Muʿaẓẓam ʿĪsā (d. 1227), who ruled from central Syria to southern Palestine, is reported to have had 3000 horsemen: Ibn Wāṣil, *Mufarrij*, vol. 4, 209. There is yet no systematic study of the size of the Syrian armies in the early Mamluk period.

way for one main purpose. A military dictatorship perhaps had its advantages, cost efficiency being one of them.

As mentioned above, this field army was mainly composed of mounted archers, mostly but not exclusively of Mamluk (i.e. slave) provenance. This represents a trend in the armies of Muslim states for centuries, accentuated by the arrival of the Mongols, with their large cavalry armies. Probably the only non-cavalry units in the field army would have been engineers, either sappers who specialized in mines and other siege operations or artillery experts who built the trebuchets and other machines of war, along with related specialists such as stone cutters. All of these non-cavalry, however, would not have joined the army when it was not heading for a siege. Infantry, such as it was, was found in the early Mamluk period mainly in fortresses and frontier regions; these may have included professional and militia-type units.[35]

The fact that the main military strength of the Sultanate was a fairly large cavalry army and was on the whole not tied down by garrison duty is related to some aspects of Mamluk fortification policy. By this I mean that a deliberate decision was made to refurbish and maintain certain fortifications, be they isolated castles, city walls or urban citadels, while many others were neglected, even willfully destroyed. Resources would have had to be allocated for several reasons: first, repair and maintenance of fortifications; secondly, keeping up the garrison (at the expense of the field army); and thirdly, providing food and military supplies. The matter was complicated by the acquisition of new fortresses by conquest. This was not only from the Franks. On the northern border, the Mamluks took over important castles, sometimes by conquest and other times by treaty, from the Armenians, but many of these had a tendency to slip back into Armenian control.[36] In Syria, Sultan Baybars spent some years bringing several recalcitrant local rulers to bay, probably the most important being the Ayyubid prince of Karak in Transjordan, who submitted in 1263. Once these castles or fortified cities had submitted, they generally were refurbished, supplied and, of course, garrisoned.[37]

Along the coast, as was pointed out by the late Prof. David Ayalon some years ago, the Mamluk policy towards the fortifications captured from the Franks – mostly well-fortified cities – was one of general destruction, although this may not have been as complete as some contemporary Arab historians would let us believe. In any event, the intent was that they could not be readily used as ports and bridgeheads in the event of future campaigns from the West. Ayalon was completely correct in showing how this reflected a clear weakness on the sea by the Mamluks (more about this below). The European Franks – probably most importantly from Genoa and Venice – could move around the Mediterranean at

35 Amitai 2003, 232-249.

36 Stewart 2001.

37 On the taking of Karak, see Thorau 1992, 134-141; see Amitai-Preiss 1995, 55, for gaining control of some other cities and castles in Syria.

will and in theory could land forces just about anywhere along the coast. The Mamluks had a choice: On the one hand, they could repair and maintain the coastal fortifications, and man them appropriately, or they could destroy them. As is well known, the Mamluks chose the latter course.[38] This was also a matter of a rational use of resources. Maintaining the fortifications would have been costly, demanding a large budget for construction, maintenance, supply, and manpower. By splitting up a large part of their army among the coastal cities, the Mamluks would have had to dissipate their power and weaken their main strategic asset: their large mobile army. The decision was thus taken, starting with the conquests of Caesarea and Arsuf in 1265, to destroy coastal fortified cities, be they ports or not, as they were taken. The implications of this policy for the demography and economy of the Syrian coast, especially that of Palestine was enormous, but this will not detain us now. In short, let us say that the Mamluk leadership looked carefully at its available resources, be they budgetary or human, and saw destruction as the more cost efficient expedient.

Yet, elsewhere, the Mamluk leadership saw fit to keep their fortresses up to scratch, and in some places extensive repairs and extensions were deemed necessary, not only in fortifications destroyed by the Mongols or during Mamluk sieges. These tended to be important city fortifications (the citadels of Damascus and Aleppo, as well as their walls),[39] major inland fortresses which served as provincial capitals, such as Karak and Safad, other major castles that fitted into the Mamluk fortification scheme vis-à-vis the Mongols and Franks (al-Ṣubayba/Qalʿat Namrūd and Crac des Chevaliers/Ḥiṣn al-Akrād), and important fortresses along the Euphrates frontier with the Mongols (al-Bīra and al-Raḥba). Not only were these fortifications repaired and in some cases significantly expanded, they were well stocked with victuals and armaments, and also properly manned.[40] Many of these garrison troops were – as said above – either professional infantrymen or militiamen, and the border between militia and local inhabitants in the frontier fortresses is not a clear one.[41] There were also some Mamluks stationed there,

38 Ayalon, David 1967, "The Mamluks and Naval Power: A Phase of the Struggle between Islam and Christian Europe", *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanties* 1,8, 1-12; repr. in: Ayalon, David 1977, *Studies on the Mamluks of Egypt (1250-1517)*, (Variorum Collected Studies Series 62), London; see also the important recent study: Fuess, Albrecht 2001, "Rotting Ships and Razed Harbors: The Naval Policy of the Mamluks", *Mamlūk Studies Review* 5, 45-71.

39 It should be noted, however, that Aleppo's fortifications were only repaired in the 1290s, perhaps due to budgetary constraints, or the fear that this city might be lost yet to the Mongols and therefore there was no point in investing seriously in its defense.

40 A comprehensive review of early Mamluk fortification policy and its execution will be found in the new book by Raphael, Kate 2011, *Muslim Fortresses in the Levant: Between Crusaders and Mongols*, London. Some brief comments are made on this topic in Amitai-Preiss 1995, 76f.

41 Thus Baybars' privy secretary and semi-officer, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir uses the term *ahl al-qilāʿ* (literally "the people of the castles"); it is unclear whether he is referring to garrison mem-

even royal ones. However, these last-mentioned were not lost to the general cause of Mamluk military might. When the Syrian army gathered for a campaign, the contingents and equipment from the fortresses, at least from those in the center of the country (Safad, Crac des Chevaliers, al-Ṣubayba, etc.) would be called to join up with the field army.[42]

Here, too, we see a rational and well-thought-out decision to use resources of various types to keep up and strengthen key fortifications, whose manned existence contributed significantly to a Mamluk strategic vision and control over the far-flung Syrian provinces. However, the Mamluk leadership could not do everything that it might have wanted: Jerusalem, for instance, was left bereft of repaired city walls, which had been destroyed by the Ayyubids in 1219, sporting only a medium-size citadel.[43] The Mamluks surely understood that the expense of renewing Jerusalem's walls, let alone keeping them up and manning them, was prohibitive: with all due respect to the religious importance of the city, its lack of military, economic and political significance mitigated against repairing the walls. Jerusalem's security was not guaranteed by a wall and garrison, but rather by the military might of the Mamluks that would keep away – at least in theory – all dangers.

I would like to add that not all that was done in the realm of fortifications can be explained only by recourse to rational decision-making by the Mamluks. For example, when one goes to al-Ṣubayba in the north of the Golan, one is struck by the ostentatious nature of some of the early Mamluk construction, well beyond the military needs of a country fortress. I can only suggest that here we have a Mamluk example of "conspicuous consumption".[44] Basically, here was Bilik – Baybars' trusted personal Mamluk and viceroy, and the literal owner of the castle and the area – showing off.[45] At al-Ṣubayba we have an example – if one was needed – that the Mamluk elite had their share of human foibles and did not always succeed in resolving contradictions between military and other needs.

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bers or local inhabitants. The confusion may reflect the military capabilities of many of the latter. See Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khuwayṭir, ed., Riyad 1396/1976, 227.

42 For mobilization of siege machinery for the campaign at Acre in 1291, see Little, Donald P. 1986, "The Fall of ʿAkkā in 690/1291: The Muslim Version", in: *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of Professor David Ayalon*, Moshe Sharon, ed., Jerusalem, 159-181, at 168-171.

43 Richards, Donald S. 1987, "The Pre-Mamlūk Development of Jerusalem", in: *Mamluk Jerusalem: An Architectural Study*, Michael Hamilton Burgoyne, with additional historical research by Donald S. Richards, London, 48f.

44 I hope that I can be forgiven for making free use of Thorstein Veblen's concept from another context. See Veblen, Thorstein 1975 [1899], *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, repr., New York, chapter 4.

45 See Hartal, Moshe 2001, *The al-Ṣubayba (Nimrod) Fortress: Towers 11 and 9*, (Israel Antiquities Authority Reports 11), Jerusalem.

I would like to go back to a matter that was briefly mentioned above. This is the question of Mamluk activity on the sea, primarily in this context in the Mediterranean. The naval capabilities of the Muslim states of the eastern Mediterranean had been deteriorating since the time of the Fāṭimids, although Saladin made some effort to reverse the trend, and the Mamluks inherited a quite dismal maritime infrastructure, let alone actual naval force.[46] Even a cursory examination shows that the efforts of the Mamluks in the arena of naval warfare early in their regime were desultory and the results were miserable and embarrassing. The example of the failed Mamluk raid to Cyprus in 1271, and the subsequent letter by Baybars to the king of Cyprus, is often cited (justly so) as an example of Mamluk disparagement of maritime pursuits.[47] This, it seems to me, is true enough, but it is more than just a matter of the cultural predisposition of a military elite of steppe provenance or of the acceptance of long-term European naval supremacy. This was also a question of the rational allocation of resources, or in this case, the decision not to allocate them. Given the limited nature of resources of various kinds, the traditional superiority of their cavalry formations, and their weakness on the sea, it made perfect sense to perfect the former and not waste money and other assets on the latter. There was no point to continue spending good money on bad investments of the past. At this time, at least, naval warfare was basically a lost cause for the Mamluks, and nothing was to be gained by dispersing resources in the realm.

Another area where resources were expended was in facilitating transportation, particularly the movement of large bodies of troops quickly through Syria to meet the dangers from the north, i.e. the Mongols. One can think of Mamluk bridges, all apparently from the period of Baybars, such as at Ludd (Lydda; the bridge is known as Jisr Jindās), Dāmiyya on the Jordan River and Yubnā (Yavneh).[48] Connected to this topic is communications. The Mamluk postal system of horse relays is well known, and required a tremendous outlay of resources to build the way-stations, to keep them supplied with horses, and to provide the necessary manpower, not the least of riders.[49] Other systems of rapid communications were the bonfires from the Euphrates frontier fortresses to central Syria, and the "pigeon-express" that connected the major cities of the Sultanate.[50] These were also sources

46 Ehrenkreutz, Andrew S. 1955, "The Place of Saladin in the Naval History of the Mediterranean Sea in the Middle Ages", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75,2, 100-116. See also the articles cited above in note 37.

47 Thorau 1992, 206f. For the letter by Baybars, see Ibn al-Furāt, Nāṣir al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, *Ayyubids, Mamlukes and Crusaders. Selections from the Tārīkh al-Duwal wa'l-Mulūk of Ibn al-Furāt*, Ursula and Malcolm C. Lyons, trans., introd. and notes Jonathan S. C. Riley-Smith, Cambridge 1971, vol. 1, 192ff. (Arabic text), vol. 2, 152ff. (translation).

48 Amitai-Preiss 1995, 75. There is no direct evidence that the bridge at Yubnā is from this period, but the similarity in building style with the bridge at Ludd leads me to think that this is more-or-less from the same time, and thus for the same purpose.

49 Sauvaget, Jean 1941, *La poste aux chevaux dans l'empire des Mamelouks*, Paris.

50 Amitai-Preiss 1995, 75.

of major expenditure, but were deemed necessary in order to convey essential intelligence from one end of the state to the other: most importantly, of course, the news of an impending attack, be it from the Franks, the Armenians or – especially – from the Mongols, which would necessitate the concentration of forces, most importantly those from Egypt.

The final area of military organization requiring a long-term expenditure of resources and efforts that I will mention is the realm of espionage and secret warfare. Obviously, the better intelligence the Mamluk leadership obtained regarding their enemies' intentions, the better they could prepare to meet them. Their "eyes" were directed towards Mongol, Frankish and Armenian enemies, although it appears that most serious intelligence efforts were devoted to the first mentioned, who were thought to be the most dangerous enemies. Muḥyī al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, the privy secretary of Sultan Baybars and the compiler of his semi-official biography wrote about this intelligence service:

> The Sultan did not cease to take interest in the affairs of the enemy. He was on guard against their tricks and resolute in all regarding them. His *quṣṣād* (secret envoys) did not stop coming from Baghdad, Khilāṭ [=Akhlāṭ] and other places in the eastern country (*bilād al-sharq*) and Persia (*al-ʿajam*). [The Sultan] spent on them much money, because whoever travels for this matter and plays loosely with his life, there is no choice but that he should take blood money (*diya*). Without this, who would risk his life? When Allah showed this good policy to the Sultan, the *quṣṣād* went back and forth, and they recognized [in the Mongol countries] those who could inform them of the [Mongol] secrets.[51]

We know the name of the officer who commanded the secret service, Balaban al-Dawādār al-Rūmī, a trusted Mamluk of Baybars. About him, Ibn al-Ṣuqāʿī, the Christian author of an early 14th-century biographical dictionary, wrote:

> [He] alone spoke with the *quṣṣād* who went back and forth [engaged] in the secret activities (*al-ashghāl al-sirriyya*), and he paid their salaries and grants. Their names were not written in the *diwān* (registry of salary recipients) and their condition was not revealed to the people [of the military class] (*al-nās*). If one came during the day, they were veiled so as not to be identified.[52]

Indeed, much money was expended on the organized intelligence service, and the results of its work gave the Mamluks an additional edge in their wars against the Mongols and other enemies.

A full discussion of Mamluk military policy would include the development of tactics and strategy, as well as matters of training and logistics. The procurement of young Mamluks also deserves some further exposition. Likewise, we would have to discuss the Mamluk foreign policy which contributed to the Sultanate's ability to

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51 Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, *Rawḍ*, 135, translation by the author. For more on Mamluk espionage, see Amitai-Preiss 1995, 139-156; Amitai, Reuven 1988, "Mamlūk Espionage among Mongols and Franks", *Asian and African Studies* 22, 173-181.

52 Ibn al-Ṣuqāʿī, Faḍl Allāh b. Abī Fakhr, *Tālī kitāb wafayāt al-aʿyān*, Jacqueline Sublet, ed. and trans., Damascus 1974, 53, translation by the author.

import young Mamluks, helped create a second front against the Ilkhanate and perhaps even assisted in the war with the Franks. Finally, the ongoing attempts at gaining legitimization in the eyes of the local population was essential for obtaining support in the military efforts – which in turn helped to achieve this support among the civilians – and made it easier to collect taxes and other resources. These important subjects, however, will have to wait for another opportunity.

I think, however, that it is clear that the early Mamluk leadership had a lucid and far-sighted policy to maximize the resources at their disposal for the greatest effect. If a policy can be evaluated by its results, then the early Mamluk sultans and their leading officers can be awarded the highest marks: the Mongols were held back, the Franks were thrown out, the Armenians were holed up in their mountain fortresses, and the Mamluk hold on Egypt and Syria was basically unchallenged in the first generations of their rule. Some contemporary leaders perhaps might want to take a leaf from their book, and learn well the lesson that in order to succeed one should maintain reasonable goals that can be achieved with available resources.

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