THE MAMLUK SULTANATE

A HISTORY

CARL F. PETRY

The Mamluk Sultanate

The Mamluk Sultanate ruled Egypt, Syria, and the Arabian hinterland along the Red Sea. Lasting from the deposition of the Ayyubid dynasty (c. 1250) to the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517, this regime of slave-soldiers incorporated many of the political structures and cultural traditions of its Fatimid and Ayyubid predecessors. Yet, its system of governance and centralization of authority represented radical departures from the hierarchies of power that predated it. Providing a rich and comprehensive survey of events from the Sultanate's founding to the Ottoman occupation, this interdisciplinary book explores the Sultanate's identity and heritage after the Mongol conquests, the expedience of conspiratorial politics, and the close symbiosis of the military elite and civil bureaucracy. Carl F. Petry also considers the statecraft, foreign policy, economy, and cultural legacy of the Sultanate, and its interaction with polities throughout the central Islamic world and beyond. In doing so, Petry reveals how the Mamluk Sultanate can be regarded as a significant experiment in the history of state-building within the premodern Islamic world.

CARL F. PETRY is the Hamad Ibn Khalifa Al Thani Professor of Middle East Studies and Professor of History at Northwestern University. He is the author of *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (1982), *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of al-Ashraf Qaytbay and Qansuh al-Ghawri in Egypt* (1993), *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamluk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (1994), and *The Criminal Underworld in a Medieval Islamic Society: Narratives from Cairo and Damascus under the Mamluks* (2012), and is the editor of *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Islamic Egypt, 640–1517* (1998). His research has been supported by the J. S. Guggenheim Foundation, the Institute for Advanced Study, the American Research Center in Egypt, and the American Council of Learned Societies.

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Carl F. Petry
Northwestern University

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To Bruce D. Craig
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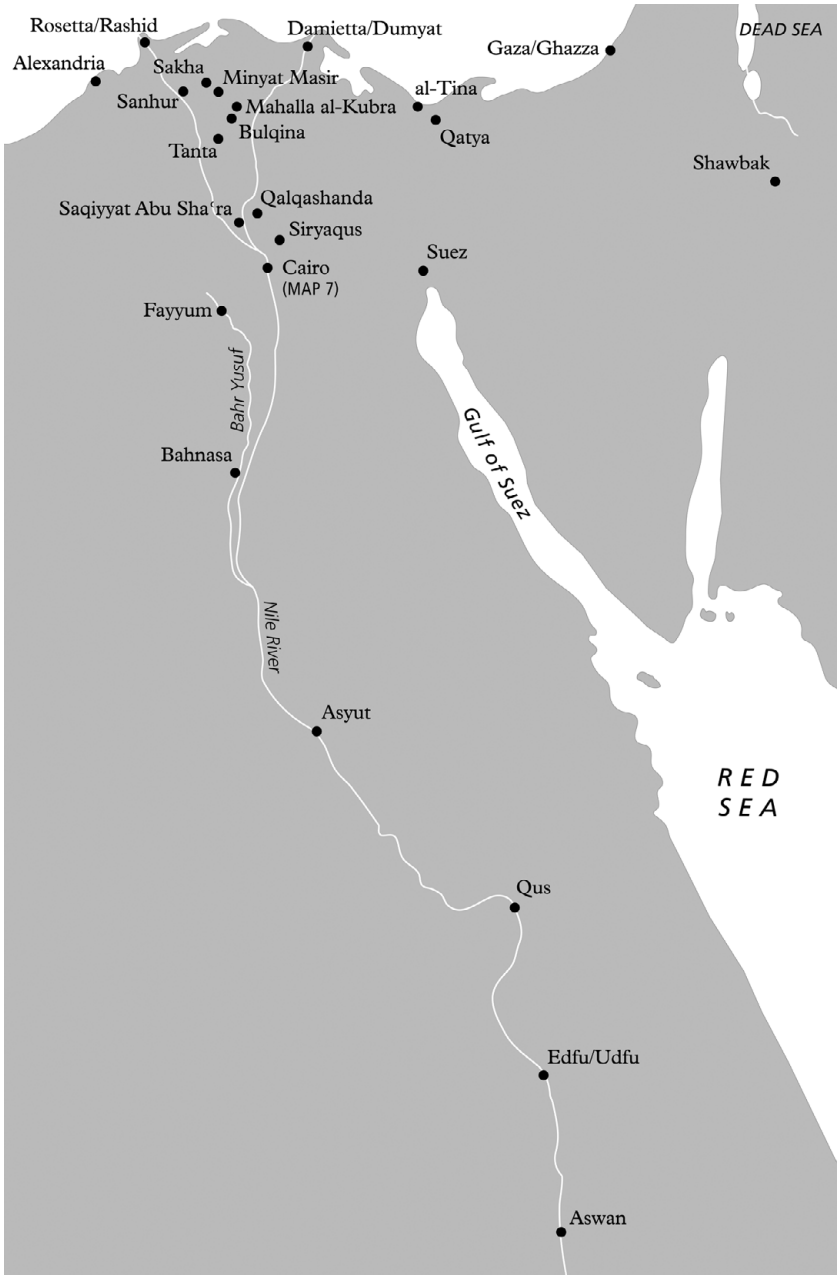

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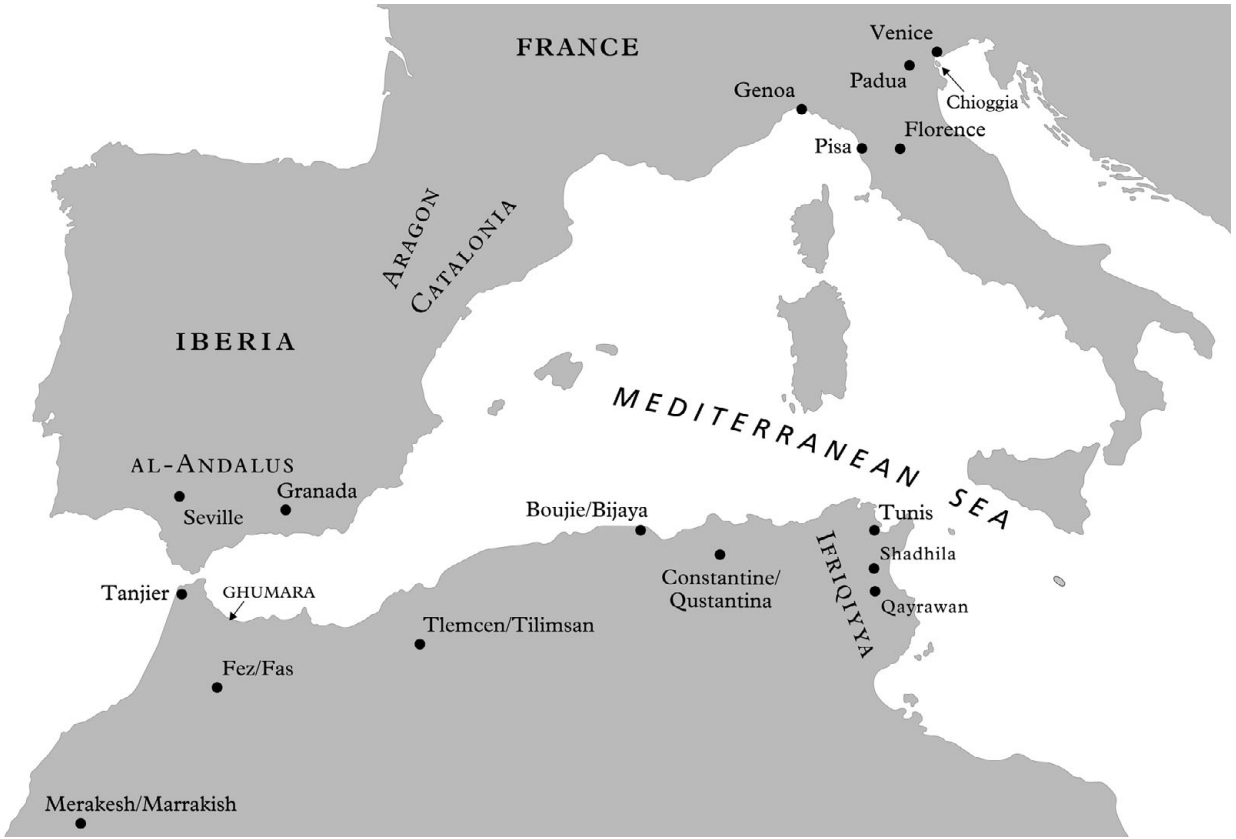

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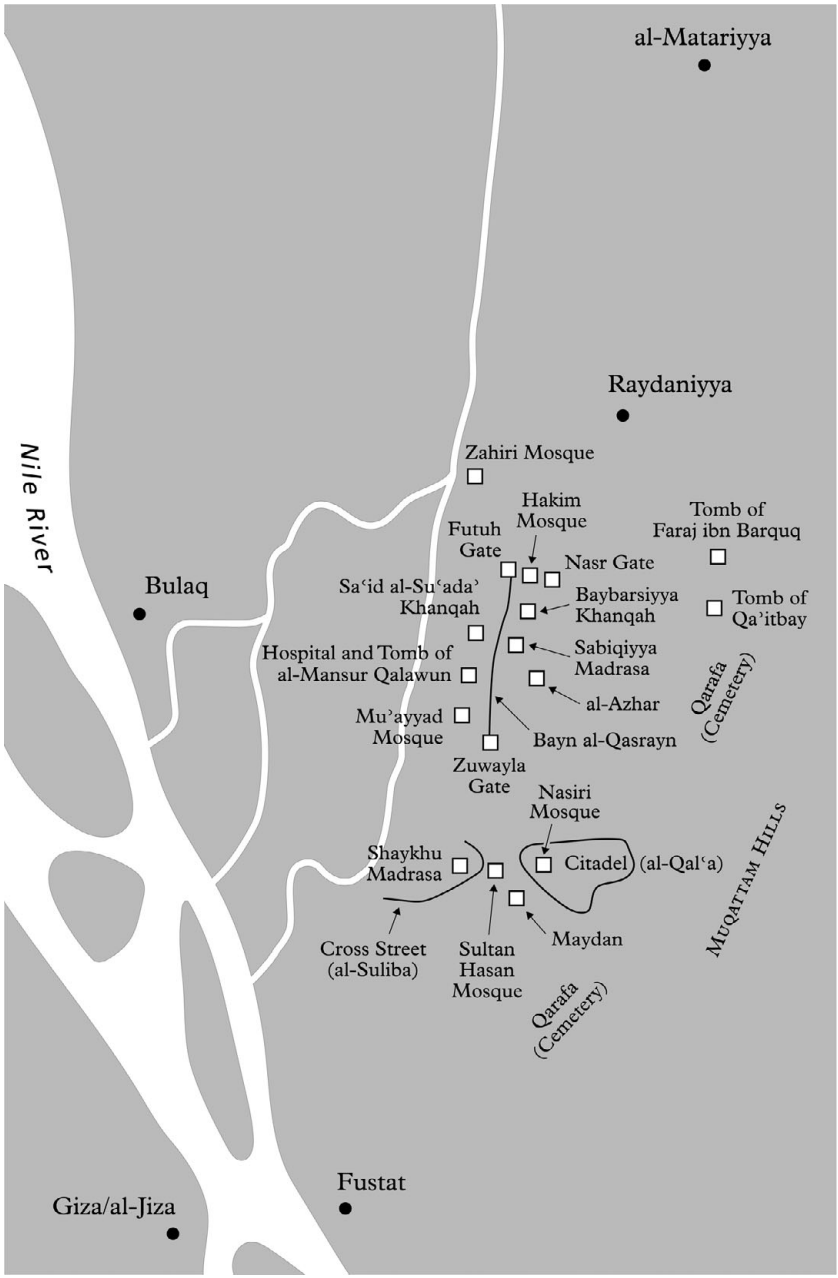

7 Cairo and environs

Introduction

In 784H/1382CE, North African historian and political philosopher Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406) arrived in Alexandria, Egypt's Mediterranean port, ostensibly on his way to pilgrimage in Mecca but in fact as a refugee from political controversy in the Maghrib. Ibn Khaldun's fame had preceded him, and the reigning Sultan, al-Zahir Barquq, appointed him senior judge of the Maliki school of Islamic law in Cairo, the first of several prestigious offices he would hold as a jurist and scholar. Ibn Khaldun spent the rest of his life in the city revising his monumental history of North Africa and the central Islamic lands, *Kitāb al-ʿibar*. Ibn Khaldun is known to the modern world primarily for his analysis of social structures in a volume titled *al-Muqaddima fi'l-taʾrīkh* (Introduction to History), which he wrote as an explanatory preamble to his larger work (cf. Chapter 6). While the *Muqaddima* overshadows the *Kitāb al-ʿibar* in contemporary scholarship, Ibn Khaldun expressed in the latter his esteem for the regime that, ironically, would grant him sanctuary years later:

> When the [ʿAbbasid] state was drowned in decadence and luxury and donned the garments of calamity and impotence and was overthrown by the heathen Tatars [the Mongols], who abolished the seat of the Caliphate and obliterated the splendor of the lands, and made unbelief prevail in place of belief, because the people of the faith, sunk in self-indulgence, preoccupied with pleasure and abandoned to luxury, had become deficient in energy and reluctant to rally in their defense, and had stripped off the skin of courage and the emblem of manhood – then it was God's benevolence that He rescued the faith by reviving its dying breath and restoring the unity of the Muslims in the Egyptian realms (*al-diyār al-Miṣriyya*), preserving the order and defending the walls of Islam. He did this by sending to the Muslims, from this Turkish nation (*al-ṭāʾifat al-turkiyya*) and from among its great and numerous tribes, rulers to defend them and totally loyal helpers. They were brought from the House of War to the House of Islam under the rule of slavery (*riqq*), which hides in itself a divine blessing. By means of bondage they learn glory and blessing and are exposed to divine providence; cured by slavery, they enter the Muslim religion with the firm resolve of true believers and yet with nomadic virtues (*akhlāq badawiyya*) unsullied by debased nature, unadulterated with the filth of pleasure, undefiled by the ways of civilized living, and with their ardor unbroken by the profusion of luxury. The slave merchants bring them to Egypt in batches, like sand-grouse to the watering places (*al-qaṭan naḥwa al-mawārid*), and

government buyers have them displayed for inspection and bid for them, raising the price above their value. They do this in order not to subjugate them, but to intensify loyalty, increase power, and strengthen zeal. They choose from each group, according to what they observe of the characteristics of the race and the tribes. Then they place them in a government barracks where they give them good and fair treatment, educate them, have them taught the Qur'an and kept at their religious studies until they have a firm grasp of this. Then they train them in archery and fencing, in horsemanship, in hippodromes, and in thrusting with the lance and striking with the sword until their arms grow strong and skills become firmly rooted. When the masters know that they have reached the stage of readiness to defend them, even to die for them, they double their pay and increase their grants (*iqṭā'*), and impose on them the duty to improve themselves in the use of weapons and horsemanship, and so also to increase the number of men of their own races (*ajnāsihim*) in the realm for that purpose. Often, they place them in service to the state and appoint them to high offices. Some of them are chosen to sit on the throne of the Sultans and direct the affairs of the Muslims, in accordance with divine providence and with the mercy of God to His creatures. Thus, one intake succeeds another and generation follows generation, and Islam rejoices in the benefit which it gains through them, and the branches of the kingdom flourish with the freshness of youth.[1]

Ibn Khaldun's praise for this cadre of slave-soldiers was not meant as effusive acclaim of utopian guardians or gratitude for sanctuary offered to a refugee. He credited these individuals for providing security to the Islamic heartland from conquest by unbelievers and salvation from moral decay on the part of indigenous Muslims themselves. The characteristics Ibn Khaldun attributed to these slave-soldiers encompass the qualities he found requisite to the revitalization of Islam as a religion and the endurance of the polity necessary for its fluorescence in his own day.

The survey that follows examines these qualities in the context of the regime in which they achieved their fullest development: the Sultanate that ruled Egypt, Syria, and the Arabian hinterland along the Red Sea from 648/1250 to 922/1517. The institution of Mamluk military slavery had its origins centuries earlier in the centralized Caliphate during the formative era of Islamic history in regions known today as the Middle East (Northeast Africa, Southwest Asia). The traits Ibn Khaldun emphasized have received attention in many contexts of scholarly inquiry for more than a century. In the past several decades, they have been subjected to revisionist approaches reflective of analytical currents prevalent in disciplines of the humanities and social sciences at the present time. The survey also takes stock of these shifting currents to indicate how they are reshaping the field of medieval Islamic history itself.

Several overviews of the Mamluk institution and its manifestation as an autonomous state centered in Cairo have appeared since the emergence of this field as a distinctive branch of premodern Islamic historiography. Notable among these in English are by Robert Irwin,[2] Linda Northrup,[3] Jean-Claude

Garcin,[4] and Amalia Levanoni.[5] Similar outlines have appeared in Arabic, French, German, Hebrew, Japanese, and Turkish. So, what justifies the publication of this survey? To date, no endeavor to depict the evolution of the Mamluk State beyond a summation of its political trajectory has appeared in a single volume. Given this regime's complexities and the range of studies devoted to its development, no analysis of this scope can credibly claim to be comprehensive. The current bibliography is vast, its subjects varied. What this work attempts to do is revisit the qualities Ibn Khaldun attributed to this cadre from the perspective of recent scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. Ibn Khaldun's own opinions about the Mamluks constitute a special aspect of historiographical inquiry into his broader worldview. As the reader will observe upon perusal of the following work, these qualities have prompted a wide range of reactions that embrace diverse approaches in several fields. Beyond historiography, the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture, gender and literary studies, education and pedagogy, politics, political economy, and religious studies are evident in the scholarship cited. While the author's own views are apparent, the survey's overriding objective has been to suggest how this scholarship has reshaped contemporary understanding of Egyptian and Syrian History during the late medieval and early modern period – and continues to do so.

The survey is presented in seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides a synopsis of events from the Sultanate's founding to the Ottoman occupation in 922/1517. Chapter 2 considers the regime's identity and sense of heritage in the era following the Mongol conquests throughout the region. It outlines procedures of training for Mamluk cadets in the Islamic religion and military arts, the hierarchy of positions held by senior officers, and the competitive ethos that pervaded the military elite's ranks. Chapter 3 addresses the Sultanate's interaction with other polities in the central Islamic world, East and South Asia, Mediterranean Europe, and Africa beyond its borders (Takrur, Abyssinia, and the Maghrib). Chapter 4 examines the Sultanate's administration, the bureaucracy that managed it, the civil judiciary and scholastic classes that presided over litigation and education, and the agents of religious service who upheld a stance of distinction from their learned counterparts. Chapter 5 appraises issues of political economy: agriculture and land use, taxation, interregional and local commerce, commodity prices, salaries and wages, and procedures of revenue extraction (formal and clandestine) imposed by the regime to address cash shortfalls. Chapter 6 considers the Sultanate's cultural legacy, its sponsorship by the military elite, the evolution of literary production (poetry and prose), and the dramatic growth of historiography. Chapter 7 examines the rural setting, issues surrounding its lack of visibility in sources, gender relations, the status of religious minorities (Christians and Jews), and diversity in religious practice, especially as measured by popular identity with Sufism.

Matters of chronology, events, persons, locales, and institutions are cited initially according to their listing in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second and third editions (*EI2*/*EI3*), as first lines of reference to a source with internationally recognized standards for accuracy and scope. Arabic diacritics conform to the Romanization Tables for Arabic of the American Library Association/Library of Congress. They are limited to terms or phrases in italics, when precise transliteration is indicated. Dates are listed as Hijri (H) and Common Era (CE).

Several individuals who are authorities on the history of medieval Egypt and Syria read chapters of this work during the drafting process: Li Guo, John Meloy, Adam Sabra, Warren Schultz, and Terry Wilfong. Their insights and criticisms were invaluable and are deeply appreciated; any errors of fact or interpretation are the author's responsibility. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Olaf Nelson of Chinook Design for drawing the maps that locate sites noted in the text.

1 Synopsis of Events

The Mamluk Institution

The regime that ruled over Egypt, Syria, and the Red Sea between the mid-seventh and early tenth Hijra / thirteenth and sixteenth CE centuries incorporated many of the political structures and cultural traditions of its Fatimid and Ayyubid predecessors. Yet, its system of governance and centralization of authority represented departures from hierarchies of power and collective rule characterizing the regimes that antedated it. The Mamluk Sultanate can therefore be regarded as an experiment in the history of state-building within the premodern Islamic world. Since the Sultanate proved durable, controlling Egypt, Syria, and the Levant for two and a half centuries – the final episode of the region's status as an independent power in premodern times – it left an indelible imprint on its Ottoman successors and the cultural legacy of the central Arab lands.

The Mamluk institution preceded the Sultanate's establishment by several centuries. Its origins can be traced to the caliphal empire created in provinces of the former Byzantine and Sassanid realms (Northeast Africa, Southwest Asia) conquered by Bedouin tribal armies in the seventh and eighth centuries CE. The Caliphate formally legitimated its authority to rule on the principle of successorship (ar. *Khilāfa*) to the Prophet Muhammad. Following the assumption of this office by the Umayyad governor of Damascus, Muʿawiya ibn Abi Sufyan, in 41/661, the Caliphate in practice functioned as a dynastic monarchy that relied on loyalty from Arab Bedouin cadres stationed in garrisons strategically located throughout these territories. When opposition to Umayyad privileging of Arab ethnic hegemony coalesced around the insurrectionary movement of the ʿAbbasids in Iraq between 96/715 and 132/750, the Umayyad Dynasty faced hostility on the part of converts to Islam from non-Arab origins (the emerging majority) that proved insurmountable. The ʿAbbasid Dynasty that succeeded to the Caliphate in 132/750 lasted for half a millennium before its own demise at the hands of Mongols invading from Central Asia in the mid-thirteenth century. It owed its longevity (if not its territorial integrity) in part to the formation of military institutions that adapted to post-Umayyad ethnic diversity in the now-global Muslim community.

The term *Mamlūk* itself is a passive participle of the Arabic root *mīm-lām-kāf* (to own/possess) and literally means "one owned." In a military context, it referred to a slave trained specifically for martial duties. While often distinguished from chattel slaves (*ʿabd*/*ʿabīd*) according to ethnicity or "race," mamluks derived in fact from a disparate range of backgrounds and should not be envisioned on a simplistic basis of "color" (i.e., "white"). Yet, following the extension of caliphal suzerainty over western Central Asia, Turkic tribal groups assumed a pronounced place among the mamluk cadres in this institution during its formative phase. Although several Umayyad Caliphs made sporadic use of mamluk slave-soldiers, the ʿAbbasids utilized them as a prominent element of their military apparatus, in particular after the reign of Caliph al-Muʿtasim bi'llah Muhammad (218/833–227/842), of partial Turkish origin himself.[1] Because descendants of the original Bedouin conquerors had largely assimilated among indigenous populations, the ʿAbbasids could not count on support from a favored regional element, as had the Umayyads. They therefore adopted a policy of reliance on cadres without ties to the original conquerors. Slaves imported from non-Muslim populations, as property of the ruling authorities were an important component of the new military order. Since in principle, these slaves owed their status and power to the ruler or oligarchy who acquired them (either by purchase or as war prisoners), their loyalty could be trusted. Such was the expected outcome in theory.

The training procedures devised for mamluk slave-soldiers were designed to emphasize their elite status in society. Their patrons sought to separate them from the indigenous population to impede their assimilation, which was presumed to stir up divided loyalties and provoke a deterioration of group solidarity. The initial rationale behind these policies of isolation from civilian society stemmed from efforts by the early Caliphs to preserve the martial spirit of their Bedouin forces by stationing them in military camps away from the conquered populace. Since the Bedouin Arabs were eventually free to settle as they wished, this objective was unsustainable. But the ideal of their pristine valor, unsullied by contact with civilian masses, remained to inspire subsequent rulers and their advisors. Distinction from the local society was more effectively achieved with corps of imported slaves.

The consequences of separation for these slaves did not promote the unequivocal dependence and reliability initially envisioned, however. The competitiveness drilled into mamluk cadets combined with their sense of isolation to encourage simultaneous feelings of disdain for civilians and vulnerability as a minority to animosity from the majority. Discouraged from identifying with local masses, mamluks often came to consider themselves a privileged caste who could lay claim to an outsized share of a state's fiscal assets in return for the security they provided. Once entrenched in a political system, their behavior soon confirmed that the implementation of a military

monopoly led to political manipulation at high levels, and even to outright control. Few regimes succeeded in restricting their slave-soldiers solely to military functions that served their patrons' interests. The histories of several regimes witnessed the effective supplanting of the ruler's independent political authority. In some instances, he became a figurehead exploited by his own slaves to mask their actual supremacy.

Ayyubid Origins (521/1127–647/1249)

The institution of mamluk slave-soldiers did not supplant alternate systems of military recruitment, especially following the political disintegration of the ʿAbbasid Caliphate into an array of autonomous principalities emerging across Northeast Africa and Southwest Asia. In particular the rise of the Saljuk Sultanate throughout the Iranian regions during the tenth and eleventh centuries CE promoted the salience of free-born soldiers, again frequently of Turkic origin. These either served princes as officers or struck out on their own to found self-governing polities. When the so-called Great Saljuk empire in Iran (431/1040–590/1194) devolved into a network of polities formally subordinate but autonomous in practice, they were often controlled by individuals formally installed as *atābak*s or governors ruling in the name of the distant Sultan. Among these polities, the regime established in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul in the twelfth century CE was destined to attain hegemony over greater Syria and the Nile Valley, and to set in motion forces that would lead to formation of the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt and Syria.

The principality in question was founded by an officer (*amīr)*: ʿImad al-Din Zangi, Atabak of Mosul (r. 521/1127–541/1146).[2] Zangi carved out an autonomous dominion inclusive of northern Iraq (*al-Jazīra*) and Syria as an offshoot of the Great Saljuk empire. He appointed a son, Nur al-Din Mahmud (r. 541/1147–569/1174), as governor of Damascus. Nur al-Din was concerned over the vulnerability of the Fatimid Shiʿi Caliphate in Egypt (297/909–567/1171) during its final decades due to internal restiveness, manipulation of the ruling dynasty by aggressive viziers, and the threat of invasion by European knights in the aftermath of the First Crusade (491–92/1098–99). He therefore sent several adjutants, of Kurdish origin, ostensibly to aid the current vizier and create a unified front against subsequent Crusades but in reality to explore the feasibility of occupying Egypt. The officer in charge was Asad al-Din Shirkuh ibn Shadhi. His nephew, Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub (the Crusaders' Saladin), assumed command of the Syrian army in Egypt upon Shirkuh's death in 564/1169.[3] Salah al-Din deposed the last Fatimid Caliph in 567/1171 and proclaimed the restoration of Sunnism as the official practice of Islam in Egypt. The Azhar Mosque, formerly center of worship for the Ismaʿili Shiʿi Mission (*Daʿwa*), was converted to Sunni orthodox service.

Salah al-Din founded a dynasty, named for his own father Najm al-Din Ayyub (Shirkuh's brother), that linked Egypt to several principalities in Syria and the Jazira as an imperial federation ruled by his descendants. During his reign (564/1169–589/1193), Salah al-Din exploited this empire to confront the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. He granted strategic garrison towns to members of his family as appanages while retaining the office of Sultan in Cairo for himself. The Ayyubid Dynasty projected an aura of unity over Egypt and Syria that lasted to the mid-seventh/thirteenth century. Salah al-Din scored several victories over the Crusaders (in particular at *Ḥaṭṭīn*, 583/1187), after which Muslim rule was restored to Jerusalem. But Salah al-Din failed to dislodge the Crusaders from Syria, and his successors in Cairo eventually adopted a policy of détente with remaining Crusader strongholds on the coast and interior. Salah al-Din presided over an ambitious building program in Cairo that included construction of the Citadel (*al-Qalʿa*) as the seat of government on the Muqattam Heights overlooking the city, and its surrounding walls. Cairo's medieval architectural profile dates from his reign.

Under the last Ayyubid Sultan, al-Malik al-Salih Ayyub (r. 637/1240–647/1249) ibn al-Malik al-Kamil Muhammad (r. 615/1218–635/1238), internal quarrels between branches of the Ayyubid Dynasty throughout Syria and ethnic tensions among factions of the army stationed in Cairo induced al-Salih to import upward of 1000 mamluk slave-soldiers from the Qipjaq Turkish Steppes in western Central Asia as his personal bodyguard. Housed in a garrison on the Nile, several units of these mamluks were subsequently known as Bahri or "Riverine." In the aftermath of al-Salih's death, a power struggle led to a coup, and foundation of a new regime, destined to preside over Egypt's final epoch as a regional power before modern times.

From Junta to Sultanate: A Tumultuous Decade (647/1249–658/1260)

Sultan al-Salih Ayyub had named the regiment of mamluks purchased and trained as his personal guard the *Ṣāliḥiyya* after himself. Al-Salih's final year (647/1249) was marked by an invasion of the Nile Delta by King Louis IX of France. The French Crusaders initially occupied the city of Damietta (*Dumyāṭ*) but were subsequently defeated by competing mamluk units, who exploited the crisis to advance their own interests. The French monarch was captured and held for ransom. Following al-Salih's death, his son and heir, al-Muʿazzam Turan Shah, departed his own base in al-Jazira to claim the Sultanate in Cairo. Turan Shah manifested his intent to supplant with his own trusted adjutants the Mamluk officers who had risen to prominence in the oligarchy surrounding his father. Alarmed over the prospect of demotion following their successful repulsion of the French, these officers assassinated Turan Shah (28

Muharram 648/May 2, 1250). Effectively presiding over a junta, the officers initially weighed offering the Sultanate to reigning Ayyubid amirs in Syria – in particular al-Nasir Yusuf ibn al-ʿAziz Muhammad of Aleppo and Damascus. But their ultimate choice devolved upon a unique claimant – al-Salih's widow, a former concubine of Armenian descent named Tree of Pearls (ar. *Shajar al-Durr*).[4]

The officers' decision was motivated by Shajar al-Durr's support for several subunits within the Salihi regiment, in particular the band known as "Riverine" (*Baḥriyya*), noted above. Having received lucrative land allotments (*iqṭāʿs*) granted by her, the Bahriyya were prepared to acknowledge Shajar al-Durr's leadership. But rival units contended that a valid succession was limited to a legitimate member of the Ayyubid Dynasty. Thus, when a senior officer named al-Muʿizz Aybak, head (*atābak*) of the Salihiyya regiment, was finally acclaimed as Sultan, he was compelled formally to share the office conjointly with a grandson of the former Ayyubid ruler al-Kamil, al-Ashraf Musa, along with al-Salih's widow, whom Aybak married. Aybak's reign (648/1250–655/1257) was plagued by factional insurgencies, intensified by the arrival in Cairo of mamluk squadrons defecting from their Ayyubid masters in Syria to seek their fortunes in Cairo. His assassination in 655/1257 was rumored to have occurred at Shajar al-Durr's instigation, when she became alarmed over the prospect of abandonment for a spouse more suited to Aybak's ambitions: a daughter of Badr al-Din Lu'lu', Atabak of Mosul (the principality that had sponsored the Ayyubid Dynasty). Within the following week, Shajar al-Durr was herself murdered, allegedly by members of Aybak's faction. Aybak's adolescent son, al-Mansur ʿAli (r. 655–57/1257–59), was installed as nominal Sultan, while one of Aybak's colleagues in the Salihiyya regiment, Sayf al-Din Qutuz, exercised actual authority.[5]

The turbulence of these events depicts the fragility of a junta devoid of stable leadership and wracked by internecine strife. A threat of invasion on the part of the Mongol occupiers of Iraq exacerbated these tensions. The Mongol Ilkhan Hulegu had sacked Baghdad, fabled seat of the ʿAbbasid Caliphate, in 656/1258. In the aftermath of his victory, which shook the Sunni Islamic world, Hulegu manifested his intention to invade the Levant and subsequently Egypt. Qutuz deposed ʿAli on grounds of juvenile incompetence in the face of a foreign menace, claimed the Sultanate, and proceeded to apprehend members of rival mamluk factions he suspected of undermining his rule. Among these members were several amirs of the Bahri unit, who had absconded to Gaza on the Sinai–Palestine border to avoid arrest as rebels. It was under these circumstances that one of the officers emerged to prominence in the historical narratives: the future Sultan, al-Zahir Baybars.

After Hulegu's forces occupied Aleppo and Damascus early in 659/1260, Sultan Qutuz defiantly anticipated their campaign against Egypt. Upon receipt

of the Khan's emissaries, who presented an ultimatum to submit, with emphasis on the Sultan's status as a former slave (despite belonging to the Khwarazmian Dynasty), Qutuz met their insult with his own and ordered their execution. Aware that his act would be interpreted as a declaration of war, Qutuz reconciled with Ayyubid princes who had not yielded to the Mongols, along with the rebel Bahri officers in Gaza, and assembled an army composed of seasoned mamluk cavalry, Egyptian conscripts, and Ayyubid horsemen to confront Hulegu's host. But the massive invasion did not occur. Upon learning of the Great Khan Mongke's death back in China (657/1259), Hulegu called off the invasion and returned to Azerbaijan to await the outcome of Mongke's succession. Qutuz exploited the opportunity to assert his authority over Syria. Joined by the previously disaffected Bahri amirs, Qutuz led his coalition forces into Palestine. The remaining Mongol detachments, commanded by Hulegu's adjutant Kitbugha, confronted his army on 26 Ramadan 658/September 3, 1260, at a site known as ʿAyn Jalut (Spring of Goliath).

Despite their depleted numbers, the Mongols fought vigorously. Their defeat was in large measure due to the adroit tactics adopted by several officers on the Mamluk side, in particular Baybars. The victory achieved at ʿAyn Jalut by Qutuz's forces did not terminate Mongol intervention in Syria. But its successful blockage of the seemingly invincible Mongol advance on a global scale conveyed a powerful message that enhanced the stature of those officers who pulled it off. In anticipation of rewards that included governorships and land grants in Syria, several of them were disappointed by Qutuz's apparent favoritism of individuals in his personal retinue. When Qutuz failed to award Baybars rule over Aleppo, he joined other disaffected amirs in a plot to assassinate Qutuz on his way back to Egypt via Gaza. Since Baybars allegedly inflicted the fatal wound (disputed in some sources), his coconspirators ultimately acclaimed him as Qutuz's natural successor according to Turkic customary law. Upon their acknowledgment, Baybars demanded their oaths (*buyūʿ*) of loyalty, which were sworn only after Baybars acknowledged their own prerogatives as peers in the future ruling oligarchy. Baybars then assumed the Sultanic office on 17 Dhu'l-Qaʿda 658/October 24, 1260, in Cairo with the honorific title (*laqab*) "Mastering" (in God: *al-Ẓāhir [bi'llāh]*).

The Reign of al-Zahir Baybars al-Bunduqdari (658/1260–676/1277)

Baybars is regarded as the architect of the imperial state that would unite Egypt and Syria over the decades following his enthronement.[6] He spent his early years enlarging the Mamluk military institution, subjecting it to rigorous training, consolidating the bureaucratic apparatus that funded its expenses via iqtaʿ property allotments (of land and urban real estate), and aggrandizing his personal household. During his seventeen-year reign, Mamluk contingents

in the army would, conservatively measured, double or possibly triple from the 10,000 cavalry troops who had served Qutuz. Although Baybars attempted to promote a dynastic succession by installing his young son Berke as co-sultan, the senior amirs in his coalition dismissed the boy as a figurehead and upheld the tradition of peer acclamation by right of proven merit and division of power by negotiation. Baybars's signal achievement in politics resulted from his success at working with a contentious oligarchy of senior officers who regarded themselves as coequals with rights to share control over the state's assets. By stabilizing the ruling oligarchy, Baybars was able to avoid the destructive insurrections that had marred the preceding decade.

With regard to foreign policy, Baybars did not immediately exploit his victory at ʿAyn Jalut by prolonging hostilities with the Mongols whose outcome was dubious for either side. Instead, he set out to arrange an expedient coexistence with the Ilkhanate in Iran, in part to impede possible collusion between the Mongols and European powers that remained committed to the Crusader enterprise. Yet, Baybars also pragmatically admitted to his service bands of Mongols who had turned renegade against the Ilkhanid regime because of internal disputes or rivalries within their own ranks. Referred to as al-Wafidiyya (in this context: "defectors," cf. Chapter 2), these bands, whose members derived from diverse tribes within the Mongol military consortium, sought asylum under the Sultanate and would figure prominently in factional politics and military operations during future reigns.

Keenly aware of his predecessors' reputation as usurpers who had supplanted a legitimate royal dynasty, Baybars capitalized on the arrival in Cairo of one Abu'l-Qasim Ahmad, who claimed to be an uncle of the last ʿAbbasid Caliph in Baghdad, al-Mustaʿsim, whom the Mongols had executed in 656/1258. Bedouin tribesmen in Syria had apprehended this individual in the Iraqi–Syrian desert and sent him to Damascus during Qutuz's reign. Baybars now summoned the refugee and installed him as Caliph with the title of al-Mustansir II. He then proclaimed the ʿAbbasid Caliphate renewed in the Mamluk capital, secure from threats by unbelievers.[7] When al-Mustansir was killed during an abortive expedition to reconquer Baghdad, Baybars raised another claimant to the ʿAbbasid house to the Caliphate with the title of al-Hakim. While subsequent incumbents who occupied the caliphal office exercised little political power, their presence lent the new regime prestige throughout the Sunni Islamic world. Their function as legitimators of the officers who gained the Sultanate countered the perceived stain of their status as military slaves and betrayers of legitimate dynasties.

Baybars remained meteorically active throughout his reign. His seventeen years of rule can be regarded as an extended campaign, interrupted by pauses primarily to reinvigorate his troops and take stock of strategic shifts in the power balance between regional competitors. While Baybars presided over a

significant consolidation of domestic administration in Egypt, he focused on realizing territorial objectives achieved by military successes abroad. Having demonstrated conspicuous military prowess and tactical skills before his arrival in Cairo and induction into al-Salih's Bahri corps, Baybars had already earned a reputation for effective leadership of troops (the nisba title *Bunduqdārī* refers to "crossbowman," although it was actually associated with Baybars's purchaser).

As Sultan, Baybars's primary goal was termination of the residual Crusader presence in greater Syria. Over a decade and a half of field battles and skirmishes, he largely realized it. Between 659/1261, when Baybars initiated his sieges of Crusader strongholds, and his death in Damascus on 29 Muharram 676/July 1, 1277, the Sultan had raided, occupied, or compelled to recognize him as suzerain the sites of: Jaffa, Acre, al-Karak, Caesaria, Arsuf, Safad, Beaufort, Tripoli, Hama, Hims, Antioch, Hisn al-Akrad (Crac des Chevaliers), Safita, Hisn al-ʻAkkar, Montfort, al-Bira on the Euphrates, and Cilician Armenia (**Fig. 1.1**). He solidified his control over Gaza, Damascus, and Aleppo during repeated visits and replenishing of garrisons there with troops of proven loyalty. In the final years of his reign, Baybars invaded southeastern Anatolia and challenged the legitimacy of regional Saljuk rulers on grounds of their vassalage to the Ilkhans in Iran. In the early 670s/1270s, expeditions under his adjutant officers confronted the Christian kingdom in Nubia and established the Sultanate's presence in ports on the Red Sea. Thus, when Baybars succumbed to a draft of (possibly poisoned) Qumiz (fermented mare's milk) in the Syrian capital, he had set the stage for a union between Egypt and Syria far more cohesive than his Fatimid or Ayyubid predecessors had achieved. His successors would finalize it.

The Qalawunid Succession and Quasi-Dynasty (676/1277–709/1310)

Baybars was succeeded by his son Berke (after his mother's Khwarazmian ancestor who had assisted al-Salih; his name is frequently given as Baraka in Arabic sources). Despite Baybars's elaborate measures to ensure his son's accession, Berke unsettled the senior amirs, who had effectively shared authority with the deceased sultan. They therefore compelled him to abdicate in Rabiʻ I 678/August 1279 and accept exile with control over the former Crusader stronghold of al-Karak east of the Jordan River. The amirs then raised his seven-year-old brother Salamish to the Sultanate with the title al-ʻAdil, his installation a stopgap measure while the ruling oligarchy determined who merited their acclamation. Their choice ultimately went to al-Mansur Qalawun al-Alfi (the *nisba*-title denoting his purchase price of 1000 dinars, the high sum due to his good looks).[8] Qalawun (r. 678/1279–689/1290) had

Fig. 1.1 Bridge with lion blazons built by Sultan Baybars
Known as the Bridge of Jindas (ar. *Jisr Jindas*), a village near modern Lod, Israel. The inscription dates from 672/1273 and glorifies Sultan Baybars for building the bridge. The inscription is flanked by two lions (or leopards), Baybars's heraldic symbols.
(Credit: by IAISI/Getty Images)

risen to prominence during Baybars's reign as one of his most influential and powerful adjutants. His accession was soon challenged by another senior amir, Sunqur al-Ashqar (on 12 Dhu'l-Hijja 678/April 26, 1280), who had received the governorship of Damascus during negotiations preceding Qalawun's enthronement. Qalawun and Sunqur belonged to the aging coterie of Salihi officers who surrounded Baybars; neither regarded the other as superior in rank. Their contestation for power might have extended indefinitely had not the Mongols intervened.

The Ilkhanids sent an expeditionary force into northern Syria in Jumada I 679/September 1280. Qalawun and Sunqur reached a rapprochement in which the former recognized the latter as overlord of several sites in northern Syria while the latter acknowledged Qalawun as Sultan in Cairo. Their agreement stemmed from necessity; the Ilkhanids planned a major campaign to restore their hegemony over the region. The battle occurred near Hims on 14 Rajab 680/October 29, 1281. Despite their inferior numbers, Qalawun and Sunqur defeated the Ilkhanids, their success due in part to the adept maneuvers of Bedouin auxiliaries. The ruling Ilkhan Abaqa planned another expedition but died the next year. His passing relieved the immediate Mongol threat.

Qalawun's military record sustained the Cairo Sultanate's hegemony in central Syria and Nubia but did not equal Baybars's exceptional accomplishments. Although relations with the Mongols stabilized during his reign, regions north of Aleppo became effectively a buffer between Damascus Province and the Ilkhanate. Residual Crusader elements and local tribal bands roamed them under semi-autonomous conditions. Qalawun's domestic administration proved more effective. The Sultan adopted policies attractive to Cairo's mercantile elite. Taxes and tariffs regarded as extortionist under Shariʿa law were rescinded. Qalawun styled himself a defender of judicial equity and religious propriety. He generously supported renovations of revered holy sites such as the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, and the Shrine of the Biblical Patriarch Ibrahim in Hebron (*al-Khalīl*). In Cairo, Qalawun built and endowed a hospital regarded as a marvel of healing, the project calculated to garner popular support (**Fig. 1.2**). With regard to the military elite, Qalawun swelled its ranks, purchasing many junior recruits from non-Turkish regions. Circassians appeared among their ranks as a significant component and formed a regiment titled "Burji" after a tower in the Citadel where they were garrisoned.

Qalawun died on 7 Dhu'l-Qaʿda 689/November 11, 1290. Upon his death, his younger son al-Ashraf Khalil (r. 689/1290–693/1293) succeeded. Qalawun had relied on his eldest son al-Salih ʿAli's assistance as effective co-ruler in Egypt during his absences in Syria. But ʿAli died in 687/1288, leaving his less admired brother unopposed despite his lack of popularity. Khalil nonetheless proved himself a forceful militarist. His agenda of rigorous training produced

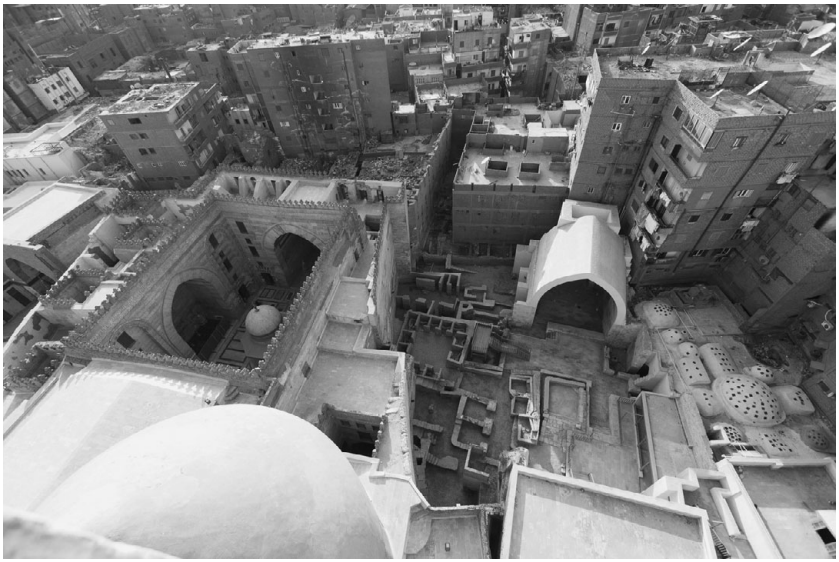

Fig. 1.2 Sultan Qalawun hospital site
A massive complex in Cairo, constructed by Sultan al-Mansur Qalawun in 682–83/1284–85. Located on the Bayn al-Qasrayn street at the center of the former Fatimid district in Cairo, the site includes a hospital (*bīmāristān)*, a madrasa, and his mausoleum (*qubba/ḍarīḥ*).
(Photo by Michel Setboun/Corbis via Getty Images)

impressive results. On 17 Jumada I 690/May 18, 1291, Khalil's army occupied the heavily fortified Crusader port and stronghold of Akko/Acre, thereby securing the Sultanate's control over central and southern Syria. Khalil laid plans for an expedition against the Ilkhanate that included the re-conquest of Baghdad. Had he survived, this project might have altered the regional balance of power. But Khalil had made enemies among several of his senior adjutants and provincial governors who considered their interests slighted, notwithstanding their service during the campaigns. During a hunting trip on 13 Muharram 693/December 14, 1293, several of these fatally ambushed him. The conspirators included his once-trusted deputy Baydara al-Mansuri, one of the most respected senior officers of the realm.

Khalil's assassination set off turmoil that was not resolved for seventeen years. Of the conspirators who had sought to seize the Sultanate, Baydara was murdered after less than a week. Ultimately, in Muharram 693/December 1293, a coterie of contending amirs enthroned Khalil's eight-year-old brother, al-Nasir Muhammad, once again exploiting the status of Qalawun's line to bide for time as they maneuvered to gain ultimate power. An officer who had

not belonged to Khalil's circle, Zayn al-Din Kitbugha (of Mongol origin, but no relation to the Ilkhanid commander), eventually won out. Kitbugha defeated his preeminent rival, the vizier ʿAlam al-Din Sanjar al-Shujaʿi, purged the army of Khalil's Ashrafi mamluks, and exiled the boy-sultan to al-Karak in Muharram 694/December 1294. Kitbugha assumed the Sultanate with the title of al-ʿAdil, but held it himself for only two years before voluntarily leaving the office to his deputy (*nāʾib al-sulṭān*), Husam al-Din Lajin.[9] An officer of Greek origin, Lajin had plotted to assassinate his superior, who resolved the dispute by abdicating and acceptance of retirement to a post in Syria. Lajin assumed the Sultanate with the title of al-Mansur in 696/1296. His own tenure was brief. When rival factions impugned Lajin's distribution of iqtaʿ allotments to his supporters, they murdered him and raised al-Nasir Muhammad to the Sultanate a second time on 11 Rabiʿ II 698/January 16, 1299.

Al-Nasir Muhammad returned to Cairo from al-Karak. Having reached the age when he could credibly assume command of the army, al-Nasir confronted the Ilkhan Ghazan at the site of Wadi al-Khazindar near Hims (28 Rabiʿ I 699/December 23, 1299). Ghazan had renewed the long-standing Mongol project of conquering the Levant and invaded Syria with a large host. Due in part to their numerical inferiority, the forces led by al-Nasir were defeated and withdrew in disarray (**Fig. 1.3**). Although Ghazan occupied Hims and Damascus, his hold over Syria remained tenuous due to foraging issues and widespread ambivalence by the local populace. In Cairo, al-Nasir Muhammad reequipped his army for a campaign to restore Mamluk rule over Syria, funded by forced expropriations from the Egyptian populace. Before the expedition set out, al-Nasir received news that Ghazan had withdrawn, leaving diminished garrisons in Damascus and Hims. Al-Nasir ultimately negotiated the submission of their commanders. Realizing that the Ilkhan remained intent on invading the Levant at a future date, al-Nasir invited the former Sultan Kitbugha back to service as governor in Hama and elevated his major-domo (*Ustādār*), Baybars al-Jashankir, to lead the Mamluk army in Syria. Further skirmishes culminated in a decisive clash at the site of Marj al-Suffar in which the Mamluks routed the Ilkhanids (2 Ramadan 702/April 20, 1303). The battle effectively terminated Ilkhanid prospects for authority in Syria. Al-Nasir Muhammad could legitimately claim sovereignty over the province.

Notwithstanding his augmented stature, al-Nasir continued to find himself buffeted by competition between several rivals, among whom his major-domo, Rukn al-Din Baybars al-Jashankir (Court Taster), and deputy-sultan, Sayf al-Din Salar (a Mongol officer of the Oirat Wafidiyya faction who rose to prominence during Qalawun's reign), stood out. Al-Nasir retreated back to al-Karak in 708/1309, while Baybars prevailed in his contest with Salar and claimed the Sultanate as al-Malik al-Muzaffar (r. 708/1309–709/1310). By this time, al-Nasir Muhammad had acquired skill in the game of factional politics.