In 1937, Philip Hitti typified the opinion of his generation’s Arabists about the legacy of Mamlūk authority with the following:

Mamlūk Egypt began its history under proud and triumphant rulers who had cleared Syria of the last vestiges of Frankish dominion and had successfully stood between the Mongols and world power. By the end of the period, however, with its military oligarchy, factions among the dominant caste, debased coinage, high taxation, insecurity of life and property, occasional plague and famine and frequent revolts, both Egypt and its dependency Syria were all but ruined. Especially in the valley of the Nile persistence of outdated ancient superstition and magic, coupled with the triumph of reactionary orthodoxy, hindered scientific advance. Under these conditions no intellectual activity of high order could be expected. . . . Mental fatigue induced by generations of effort and moral lassitude consequent upon the accumulation of wealth and power were evident everywhere.¹

While chroniclers who dwelled on the Mamlūk regime’s abiding dilemmas gave a scholar of Hitti’s stature ample ammunition for such an assessment, their comments reveal a more vibrant milieu than these lines bespeak. Anyone who pores over the historians’ myriad depictions of militarist strife, abuse of the commons, and fiscal exploitation cannot but acknowledge the prevalence of “hard times” in the later Mamlūk Empire. Yet these commentators’ remarks rarely indicate a lapse in “intellectual activity of high order” or the onset of “mental fatigue.” Quite the contrary, the characters who charted the regime’s course emerge as pragmatists coping with trying conditions of state service they accepted as normative. Although their solutions to vexing challenges may
have aimed more at short-term expediency than long-range reform, their stratagems tell us much about how ambitious individuals in later medieval Egypt pursued their fortunes and guarded their realm in the face of adversity. Their behavior, therefore, merits examination on its own terms as the reasoned response persons immersed in a sophisticated non-Western society devised to transcend its crises.

This study explores overt policies and covert ploys adopted by Egypt’s military and civilian elites to shore up the Mamluk Sultanate in its final decades. Its purpose is twofold. First, it unravels the complex events of this era (A. H. 872–922/C.E. 1468–1517), beset as it was by external threats and internal dissension, to present a coherent picture of the times. So far, this pivotal episode in Egypt’s history, the country’s last phase as an independent power before the modern age, remains untold in a comprehensive way. Second, the analysis deciphers tactics adopted by the sultanate’s bureaucracy to meet its autocrats’ demands under straitened circumstances, while simultaneously fattening purses of its more adroit members. The dynamics of patron-client ties and their hidden rationales lurk behind every aspect of the inquiry.

Superficially, the work tells a tale of two monarchs: al-Ashraf Qāytbāy (r. 872–901/1468–1496) and Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī (r. 906–922/1501–1516). The author acknowledges flaws attendant in an analysis focused on autocrats at the summit of their society, for all their prominence in a lengthy roster of sovereigns over the millenia. Yet both men attained their offices by merit rather than inheritance. Each was a seasoned professional soldier who advanced to the top by a combination of martial talent, political acumen, and inscrutable fate. While the two contrasted markedly, each was a high achiever in the military caste he entered as a slave cadet. Their careers thus convey those values their peers regarded as essential for distinction. Both monarchs interacted closely with a host of associates: Mamluk comrades, civilian clients and grasping subordinates who rose from diverse levels of society and virtually all its categories. The two therefore accumulated intimate knowledge about those they admitted to their retinues. Although each can justifiably be castigated as a tyrant, neither was ignorant of burdens their policies imposed on the masses who footed their bills. Most other personalities who figured in the contemporary sources were discussed in conjunction with their ties to one of these individuals. A study centered on these rulers’ careers thus illuminates aspirations and machinations of all those who consorted with them, high or low.

The study does not claim to reconstruct the political economy of the Mamluk State in these turbulent years. Copious as they are, its data can only hint at broad trends in the economy or the regime’s responses to them. The analysis does probe, in-depth, attitudes, motives, and goals of those who plotted the regime’s economic course and set its political tone. Recovery of a mindset is sought here, the disposition of a ruling caste that regarded its realm and
all who inhabited it as an apanage, a personal possession to be tapped at will. Their mentality had a powerful conditioning effect on all social groups that came in contact with them. That arrogance, brutality, and parasitism imbued the Mamlük’s behavior, none acquainted with their legacy can deny.

Yet despite their excesses, the Mamlûks hardly disdained matters of state security, mass prosperity, public welfare, or spiritual piety. On occasion, they showed genuine compassion for suffering endured by even the meanest of their subjects. In the prospect of their own destitution, they sustained a rich program of cultural endowment. Egypt’s military caste may warrant condemnation for its legacy, but it cannot be simplistically dismissed as petty. When their facade of arrogance is pierced, these praetorians’ behavior reveals a peculiarly vulnerable coterie of officers and troops who, using standards their forebears enjoyed, saw their own integrity and well-being threatened. Moreover, this elite regarded many of the ad hoc bonds linking it with civilian dependents as egregiously compromised by the latter’s duplicity. One discerns a corrosive sentiment of mutual betrayal, a lack of trust on both sides infusing acts which, on the surface, seem wantonly cruel or irrational. The behavior of those who loom large in the following chapters suggests a deep-seated conviction that neither side was any longer fulfilling its part of a clandestine bargain. Those in positions of dominance would not curb their demands, while subordinates closeted the lion’s share of gleanings they were forced to forfeit to retain their privileges. We thus contemplate a paradox in the conduct of Egypt’s elites. An absolutist stance by the sultanate, with undisputed claims on state assets, was qualified by nagging paranoia over the trustworthiness of its own agents of exploitation. This study seeks to explain this paradox and, by so doing, expose the essence of a clandestine partnership under severe strain.

The enterprise is prefaced by brief political summaries of the two autocrats’ reigns (chapter 2). These sketches are followed by discourses on the objectives of the sultanate’s foreign policy, the performance of its military institution, the productivity of its economy, and the strategies it mounted for its survival.

The essay on foreign policy (chapter 3) addresses the sultanate’s defensive posture. Motives are offered for the regime’s obsession with maintenance of the international status quo. Aspirations of the sultanate’s foreign competitors are compared according to the disparate challenges they posed. The Mamlûk caste (chapter 4) is considered in the context of its renown for combat effectiveness and sordid reputation as a leech on society. The Mamlûks’ excesses as a self-centered interest group fully aware of their patron’s beholder dilemma are considered in light of their anger over a perceived decline in lifestyle and status. The regime’s economic sectors: agriculture, artisanship, and commerce (chapter 5) are examined according to the proclivity of each to concentrate its cre-
ative energies on concealment, hoarding, and preservation of existing assets rather than dabbling in more lucrative but higher-risk ventures. The evidence available depicts no precipitous decline in output but instead heightened attempts at extraction. The certainty of confiscation promoted a static attitude toward productivity, a conviction that higher profits merely attracted government harassment. Bedouin predation merits mention as a gauge of the regime’s waning control over its hinterlands.

The final sections form a unit on clandestine strategies. Chapter 6 addresses the Sultanate’s traditional means of coping with endemic crisis by either its circumvention, or, more likely, its manipulation for gain. It identifies the regime’s schemes for coercing service from civil clients and enhancing its revenue from subjects skilled at passive resistance. Mounting frustration on both sides explains the tensions marring ties between master and minion. Chapter 7 speculates on the sultanate’s attempts at overcoming crisis through innovation. It discerns tentative steps toward new procedures of recruiting soldiery outside entrenched bastions of Mamlük power, of exploiting adroit clients, and of garnering hidden funds. Hypotheses are submitted about the sultan’s attempts at creating a private fisc by laundering trust (waaf) properties. Inchoate as these experiments may have been, those with a vested stake in the established order rejected them vehemently as deviant and dangerous.

Many of the behavioral patterns apparent in bureaucratic or magisterial procedures of this era long outlasted their medieval progenitors. Whatever their implications for Egypt’s current problems of development, they evolved indigenously long before Europeans exerted any significant influence. However they are interpreted, these tendencies emerged from myriad references by contemporary observers steeped in traditions of their culture with no sense of inferiority before the values of another. Indeed, comments about malaise occupy much of their chronicles’ space, along with descriptions of factional rivalries and foreign affairs. Those who would discount the consequences of such patterns must also discredit the opinions of those who evaluated Egypt’s condition in their own time. These candid observers, who did not gloss over unsettling episodes, deserve serious consideration of what they had to say.

But if the following analysis dwells on seemingly short-sighted responses to adversity, it does not ignore creative impulses of actors prominent in their design. Noted historian Eliyahu Ashor, who contributed so much to our understanding of the economy in Mamlük Egypt, yet so little to why it faltered, summed up his perceived limits of inquiry: “It would however be unreasonable to claim that this change in industrial structures is a satisfactory explanation of technological decline. Sometimes great innovations are made by individuals without being helped by a powerful organisation. They are indeed historical questions which the historian can raise but not answer.”

This book aims at answering some of them.
The Sources


The first was the son of a Mamlūk amīr who died in the author's infancy. Raised in the households of his two sisters' husbands, Ibn Taghhrī-Birdī enjoyed the status of a second-generation member of the military caste and the income from his father's estates. His brothers-in-law assured him a savant's education, in which the youth excelled. Showing an early flair for history, the young man studied with the eminent chronicler/topographer al-Maqrīzī. Capitalizing on his family connections at court, Ibn Taghhrī-Birdī specialized in elucidating intricacies behind regime policies and foreign events. Although the polymath al-Sakhāwī criticized him for chronological, factual, and grammatical errors, Ibn Taghhrī-Birdī's opinions reflected sober judgments of crises and shrewd assessments of character. An author of numerous compositions, he concentrated his major efforts on a biographical dictionary of court notables: al-Manhāl al-Ṣafī wa‘l-Mustawfī ba‘d al-Wāfī (The Pure Spring and Fulfillment after the Completion [of al-Ṣafadī]); a comprehensive chronicle extending from the origins of Islam to the year 857/1453 and the death of Sultan Jaqmaq; al-Nujūm al-Zāhirī fī Muhāl Mīṣr wa‘l-Qāhirā (Stars that Shine among the Kings of Egypt and Cairo); and a continuation of Maqrīzī's history, the Kitāb al-Sulāk, beginning in 845/1441 and terminating in 873/1469, several months before the author's death: Ḥuwaḍīth al-Dubūr fī Madā‘ al-Ayyām wa‘l-Shubūr (Episodes of the Epochs which Pass in Days and Months).

The third work, despite its chronological brevity, contained Ibn Taghhrī-Birdī's observations about his own generation. It expresses musings of a mature thinker whose opinions were tinged with the cynicism of old age. A peer of Qāyṭbāy in years and stature, Ibn Taghhrī-Birdī earned the monarch's confidence as a learned adviser. Qāyṭbāy shared his aspirations, doubts, and fears openly. The historian painstakingly preserved them. Because this chronicler died early in Qāyṭbāy's reign, while the latter was still quelling opponents intent on deposing him, Ibn Taghhrī-Birdī predicted neither Qāyṭbāy's successful consolidation of power nor his longevity. He therefore dwelled on the monarch's anxieties and greed, in marked contrast with the adulation of his colleagues—who lived to see the end of a glorious reign in which largesse was copiously distributed. His interpretations of Qāyṭbāy's actions offer a rare critical view of the deportment of an otherwise venerated figure.
The second chronicler exhibited a markedly different class background. Al-Ṣayrafi’s father served as a moneychanger in the royal diwāns. He supplemented an embarrassingly meager income by trading in the Jeweler’s Market of Cairo. Al-Ṣayrafi remained acutely conscious of his father’s penury and mediocre status as a minor bureaucrat. Yet his father supervised his early education personally before sending him off to the care of more eminent authorities. Al-Ṣayrafi attracted the notice of Cairo’s learned luminary, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī. With the esteemed shaykh’s encouragement, al-Ṣayrafi tried his hand at historical writing, producing the first works of the so-called “Cairo narrative style,” a blending of colloquial and formal usages unique to the second half of the ninth/fifteenth century. Prestige eluded al-Ṣayrafi all his days. Coveting appointment to a senior Ḥanafī judgeship, he never received more than a deputy’s bench—and this in his fiftieth year at a colleague’s behest. Al-Ṣayrafi took up manuscript copying to support his growing family, selling editions of his famous mentor’s works with his own appendices and commentaries (dismissed by al-Sakhāwī as a blight on the great sage’s treatises). But al-Ṣayrafi’s judicial marginality served his journalistic bent well. Attending sessions of both the religious (Shari‘a) and appeals (Maṣālīm) courts with few magisterial duties, he took copious notes on proceedings. These he recorded for posterity in his second chronicle.

Al-Ṣayrafi produced two significant historical tracts: Nuzhat al-Nufūs wa’l-Abdān fi Tawārikh al-Zamān (A Diversion Spiritual and Corporeal in the Annals of Time) and Inhā’ al-Ḥaṣr fi Abna‘ al-‘Aṣr (Informing the Lion about Scions of the Age). The first surveyed Egyptian politics from 786/1384 to 879/1475, following a hagiographic depiction of the Prophetic era in Madīna (of which only fragments remain). The latter was conceived as a celebration of Qāyrbāy’s reign (the “Lion” in its title). The author hoped to secure a place in the sultan’s entourage by presenting his work as a gift, but no record of its completion has survived. The extant section covers only the years 873–877/1468–1473, albeit in minute detail. Portions of the years 885 and 886/1480–1481 are appended. Nonetheless, the four annals offer insights to judicial controversies available in few contemporary works. Since al-Ṣayrafi never deviated from his endorsement of the “court line,” Qāyrbāy emerges from his folios as a hero without blemish. Yet the sultan’s judicial avocation is praised in the setting of its ambivalent reception among legal authorities compelled to abide the monarch’s interference. Al-Ṣayrafi’s remarks about their discomfiture are illuminating.

The third author claimed descent from a Mamlūk house, but one rung further down than Ibn Taghri-Bīrī. Al-Malaṭī’s father occupied the vizierate in Egypt and served as a provincial governor in Syria. Although his son excelled in Ḥanafī studies, he never aspired to the legal profession. He became an eminent physician and travelled to North Africa on a Genoese galley in the 1460s. Active in Cairo’s Ṣūfī orders, al-Malaṭī “enjoyed wide influence among
the Turks and amirs," having translated numerous works into their language. In his later years, he won al-Ghawrī's favor. When he fell ill of consumption, the latter saw to his family's needs. Al-Maḥfūẓ compiled a handbook on scriptural devotions he bestowed on his patron in gratitude: Majmūʿ al-Bustān al-Nūrī li-Hadrat Mawlānā Sulṭān al-Ghawrī (Anthology of the Enlightened Arbor Presented to Our Lord Sultan al-Ghawrī). Yet his historical corpus addressed the reign of al-Ghawrī's predecessor. Al-Maḥfūẓ's large chronicle on affairs in Egypt, al-Rawd al-Bāsim fi Ḥawādith al-ʿUmr waʾl-Tarājim (Gardens Smiling upon Events of Lifetimes and Lifestories), deals with the period between 872/1468 and 890/1485. Unedited at present and complete in a single autograph, the work charts a middle course between Ibn Ṭahḥārī-Birdī's skepticism and al-Ṣayrafi's effusion.

The last member of this primary group casts a long shadow in Islamic historiography. Ibn ʿĪyās also belonged to the third generation of the Mamlūk elite. His grandfather held several viceroyships in Syria and left his progeny rights to his fief (iqṭāʿ). When Sultan al-Ghawrī attempted its expropriation, Ibn ʿĪyās fought a grueling battle in court to reclaim his patrimony. While he succeeded, his brush with destitution scarred him. He never forgave al-Ghawrī and fulminated against him repeatedly for his spoliation of the propertied classes in Egypt. But despite his bias, Ibn ʿĪyās stands as a towering figure among chroniclers of the later Middle Ages in Egypt. His vast tract: Bādāʾī al-Zuhūr fi Waqāʾī al-Dubhūr (Marvels Blossoming among Incidents of the Epoch) commences with the pre-Islamic Age but addresses specific events upon Qāytbāy's enthronement. Extending to the year 928/1522, the Bādāʾī remains the sole firsthand survey of al-Ghawrī's reign.

Our dependence on one author for an informed assessment of this controversial figure is acknowledged. While Ibn ʿĪyās wrote from personal observations, his hostility toward al-Ghawrī cannot be ignored. Dwelling at length on the sultan's altercations with his troops and counselors, Ibn ʿĪyās consistently depicted al-Ghawrī as a schemer who amply merited his subordinates' rancor and suspicion. Yet Ibn ʿĪyās never dismissed this man as a crude tyrant. The image that emerges from his castigations of al-Ghawrī's behavior is one of astute perception rather than callous brutality. Ibn ʿĪyās readily admitted al-Ghawrī's intelligence and acknowledged his capacity to innovate as often as he decried his oppression. That the chronicler found this latter propensity disturbing is apparent in the intensity of his rebukes. But the acumen of a ruler confronting, with new stratagems, dilemmas that his precursors glossed over with timeworn ploys shows throughout Ibn ʿĪyās's writing. The risks in depending on one man's point of view must qualify post hoc assessments of al-Ghawrī's reign. And yet this last chronicler to uphold an august tradition of factual objectivity during the independent Mamlūk period, at least by his own standards, did provide a foundation on which such assessments may be based.
Several other writers complement the perspectives of these chroniclers. While the names of some elude us, their works offer summations composed after the passage of decades and reflect judgments of later generations. An on-site commentator in this secondary category was Ahmad ibn Muḥammad al-Anṣārī, known as Ibn al-Ḥimṣī. 12 Resident in Damascus during Qāytbāy’s early years, Ibn al-Ḥimṣī joined the train of the sultan’s ambassador returning from negotiations with the Ottomans and relocated to Cairo. The recipient of a stipend from a trust endowed to free scholars for composition, he wrote his Hawādith al-Zamān wa-Wafayāt al-Shuyūkh wa’l-Aqrān (Events of the Age with Necrologies of Elders and Peers) in 900/1495. Conceived as an extension of Ibn Ḥajar’s Inḥā’ al-Ghumr, the chronicle is compiled in an exceedingly colloquial style bordering on the vulgar. But Ibn al-Ḥimṣī captured the ethos of Qāytbāy’s viceregal establishment in Damascus, and commented at length on the monarch’s visits. The Hawādith is a goldmine of bureaucratic carpetbaggery in this second city of the empire.

Of greater stature but comparable relevance to our topic is the polymath Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497). 13 Author of the huge biographical dictionary al-Ḍawʾ al-Lāmī, al-Sakhāwī wrote a continuation of al-Dhahabi’s history during his retirement in Mecca: al-Dhıyāl al-Ṭāmm ʿalā Duwal al-Islām (The Consummate Appendix to the Nations of Islam). While hardly duplicating the former historian’s breadth, Sakhāwī’s Appendix is valuable for its portrayal of elite doings in the holy cities of the Ḥijāz. The inerminable rebellions of Bedouin chiefs are reported with details omitted by chronicles using secondary evidence in Cairo. Sakhāwī’s descriptions of pilgrimage rites and arrivals of eminent personages from the capital read like a gossip column and recover the festive atmosphere of the Ḥajj season.

A member of the wealthy Cairoine house of Jī‘ān, Badr al-Dīn Abū’l-Baqā’ ibn Yahyā (fl. 889/1494), who served as deputy to Qāytbāy’s confidential secretary, Zayn al-Dīn ibn Muzhir, participated in the sultan’s trip through Syria to the Euphrates frontier in 882/1477. 14 His log of the journey describes conditions of rural life as well as receptions accorded the royal guests by provincial officials: al-Qawūl al-Mustazrafi fī Safar Mawlanā al-Malik al-Asrāfī (The Elegant Report Recounting the Voyage of Our Lord the Esteemed Monarch). Among the swarms of admirers eulogizing Qāytbāy was Muḥammad ibn Yusuf al-Bā’uni, who wrote in rajaz metre al-Lambha al-Asbāfia wa’l-Bahja al-Sanīya (The Noble Glow, the Sublime Resplendence). 15 Amidst its flowery verses, one can discern the pious beneficence that so endeared Qāytbāy to the ‘ulamā’ and masked his avarice. Two anonymous authors wrote précis of Qāytbāy’s reign: Ta’rīkh al-Malik al-Asrāfī Qāytbāy (History of the Honored Sovereign Qāytbāy) 16 and Jawāhir al-Sulūk fīl-Kholafa’ wa’l-Mulūk (Gems of Depolmment about Caliphs and Kings). 17 While neither yields any original information, each tallies up Qāytbāy’s military expenses according to campaigns. Their focus on vast sums
bespeaks the favorable impression made by the sultan’s defensive stance and his willingness to pay for it long after the Ottoman Conquest.

Al-Ghayri received nothing comparable to the multiple coverage granted Qāytabāy. But one tenth/sixteenth-century Syrian necrologist penned an intriguing obituary of him. Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥalabī al-Ḥanbali wrote Durr al-Ḥabab fi Таrīkh Aʿyān Ḥalab (Loving Pearls Embellishing the History of Aleppo Notables), which included his savage denunciation of al-Ghayri’s greed and love of luxury.²⁸ An unnamed courtier left a history of Qāytabāy’s hapless heir, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, which elaborates on his shabby treatment as powerful amirs maneuvered for power up to al-Ghayri’s succession: Kitāb Ithbāt Dalālāt Muḥammad ibn al-Maḥfūz al-Malik al-Asbāf Qāytabāy (A Tome Confirming Tokens of Muhammad, Son of the Deceased Monarch al-Asbāf Qāytabāy).¹⁹ The biography of al-Ghayri composed by the necrologist Abū-l-Makārim Muḥammad al-Ghazzī (977–1061/1570–1651) in his al-Kawākib al-Sāʿira bi-Manāqib Ulamāʾ al-Miʿāra al-ʿĀshira (Lingering Luminaries among the Virtues of Tenth-Century Savants) relies on earlier evidence and reveals nothing new.²⁰ Nor does the Damascene chronicler, Shams al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Ṭūlūn (884–935/1479–1529), appreciably expand upon Ibn Iyās’s comments. His Ilām al-Warā bi-mans wailliya Nāʾibān min al-ʿAtrāk bi-Dimashq (Men of Distinction among the Turks Appointed Viceroy in Damascus) focuses primarily on imbroglios confronting governors in that city.²¹ His episodic tract Mufākahat al-Khillān fi Ḥawādith al-Zamān (Boon Banter over Anecdotes of the Age) qualifies few facets of the sultan’s image as Ibn Iyās left it.²²

Archival documents analyzed as a component of the regime’s private fiscal preserve consist of several hundred trust (waqf) deeds. Investment in charitable trusts proliferated during the later Mamlūk period because of abiding fiscal dilemmas discussed in chapters 6 and 7. These pious endowments are widely recognized as one of the most important cultural institutions of the Muslim community. Waqf donations provided much of the welfare extended to the needy and supported activities of the scholastic elite in a sophisticated academic setting. Their benefits to Islamic societies are incalculable.²³ Equally important but less publicized was the trust’s function as an instrument of estate preservation.

This study utilizes data garnered from the large waqfs granted by sultans Qāytabāy and al-Ghayri, the former’s spouse, their close associates, and shorter sale deeds taken over by al-Ghayri. The massive endowments, each amended several times during their donors’ careers, list rural and urban properties yielding revenue for charities described in the other half of the wits. Such properties embraced hundreds of individual agrarian plots, shops, inns, caravansaries, manufactories, rental apartments, and so forth. The rural tracts extended from Aswān to the Delta, while the urban holdings were concentrated in Cairo. Sections outlining the charities describe the sultan’s mauso-
leum complex, comprised of his tomb (qubba or "dome"), college of law (madrasa), library (khizānat al-kutub), mystic hospice (khānqāh), orphanage (ribāṭ al-aṭām) and related institutions, plus his other foundations in Cairo or the provinces. Teaching and custodial staffs, student stipends and rations, pensions for Ṣūfī residents, and related cash benefits are minutely detailed, with salary rates and operating budgets precisely tallied. These figures, when compared against sums generated by the endowments' productive properties, support speculative analysis of the charitable trust as the source of a personal fisc subject solely to its donor's manipulation.

These and related materials issued in Egypt during the Middle Ages (primarily the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods) are housed in two Cairo repositories: the National Archives (Dār al-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmīya), classified within the Canonical Tribunal (Maḥkama Sharīʿiyah), with jurisdiction over familial and estate affairs and abbreviated as DW; and the Ministry of Pious Endowments (Wizārat al-Awqāf), classified within the Medieval (pre-Ottoman) Repository (Daftarkhānāb), abbreviated as AW. Documents in AW marked "old" (qadīm) indicate deeds classified before 1967, when a collection of some three hundred sale, substitution, and transfer writs was discovered. The latter were designated "new" (jadid). The great majority of these were appropriated by Sultan al-Ghawri. Muḥammad Amin of Cairo University inventoried all surviving pre-Ottoman deeds in his Catalogue des documents d'archives du Caire de 239/853 à 922/1516 (Cairo: IFAO, 1981), and assigned each a reference number, which accompanies all subsequent notations in chapter 7.

Notes


3. These summaries outline only prominent events in the regimes of the two sultans. For more in-depth biographies see Twilight of Majesty, as per n. 1 in the acknowledgments.

5. GAL 2, p. 41, no. 10; Dawr 10, p. 305, no. 1178; Badârî 3, p. 45, 1. 23.

6. GAL Suppl. 2, p. 41, no. 12; Dawr 5, p. 217, no. 738; Badârî 3, p. 309, 1. 23.


8. GAL 2, p. 54, no. 17; Suppl. 2, p. 52, no. 17; Badârî 4, p. 373, 1. 23.

9. GAL 2, p. 295, no. 1; Suppl. 2, p. 405, no. 1; Badârî 4, p. 47, 1. 11 (obituary of author’s father).

10. Ibn Iyâs acknowledged Qânsûh al-Ghawri’s sustained interest in literature. He mentioned the sultan’s compositions in Turkish, which remained the language of the military elite in Cairo even when many of its members originated in Circassia. Al-Ghawri compiled an anthology of Turkish poetry to which he contributed several pieces himself: Divân-i Qânsuwb al-Ghawri (ms.: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek: Or. oct. 3744), edited and translated by Mehmet Yalsin, Divân-i Qânsuwb al-Ghawri: A Critical Edition of an Anthology of Turkish Poetry Commissioned by Sultan Qânsuwb al-Ghawri (1501–1516) (Ph. D. diss., Harvard University [Inner Asian and Altaic Studies], 1993). While a work such as the Divân attests to al-Ghawri’s poetic competence, its contents reflect on literary conventions in the Mamûlûk court rather than on the regime’s economic or political policies as interpreted by those compelled to endure them. Accordingly, the unique perspective of a close observer like Ibn Iyâs remains indispensable.

11. Ibn Iyâs’ comments on the defensive posture adopted by al-Ghawri’s successor, Tûmânibây, and policies of incorporation imposed by Selim I’s governors occupy the bulk of volume five in the Badârî. There is little evidence that Ibn Iyâs recast his assessment of al-Ghawri’s actions to any significant degree either to vent his pent-up spleen with even more intensity or to curry favor with Egypt’s new authorities. See Michael Winter, Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of ‘Abd al-Wahhab at-Sha’rûnî (New Brunswick, 1982), 5–6, 13–14, 18. Winter notes that the chronicler’s dismay over the Ottoman Conquest disposed him neither to disparage deceased rulers unduly nor to exaggerate disruptions accompanying the change of government. Annemarie Schimmel focuses on Ibn Iyâs’ depiction of postconquest changes in judicial proceedings but not his castigation of al-Ghawri. See “Kalif und Kadi im spätmittelalterlichen Ägypten,” Die Welt des Islams 24 (1942): 84–93.
12. GAL Suppl. 2, p. 41, no. 12a.
13. GAL 2, p. 43, no. 1; Suppl. 2, pp. 31–32.
14. GAL 2, p. 38, no. 1; Suppl. 2, p. 26, no. 1; Dā'ūd 11, p. 8, no. 21, Not perused for this study but noted here is the account of the amīr Yashbak al-Zāhirī’s embassy to Uzun Ḥasan in 880/1475, penned by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ajā’, edited by ʿAbd al-Qādir Ahmad Tulaymāt (Cairo, 1973).
15. GAL 2, p. 54, no. 18; Suppl. 2, p. 67, no. 3; Dā'ūd 10, p. 89, no. 290.
17. GAL 2, p. 42; Suppl. 2, p. 53.
22. Edited by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1962, 1964). Another noteworthy work not utilized in this monograph bears mention. Ahmad ibn ʿAlī ibn Zunbul al-Shāfīʿī (d. 926/1520) wrote Taʾrīkh al-Sultān Ṣalīm al-ʿUthmānī maʿa al-Sultān Qānsūh al-Ghūrī (History of Sultan Selim the Ottoman and Sultan Qānsūh al-Ghūrī), a detailed log of the latter's last campaign culminating in his defeat and death at Marj Dābiq (GAL 2, p. 43, no. 19; Suppl. 2, p. 298, no. 1). Exploiting his post in the (Ottoman?) war office, Ibn Zunbul perused eyewitness versions of the dramatic battle. Because the analysis addresses al-Ghawrī’s domestic policies, it omits this manuscript. Whether Ibn Iyās knew of it remains indeterminate since he makes no mention of it.