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Bilateral Factionalism in Ottoman Egypt

What makes a faction more than a group, a sect, or a household? In the case of the Faqaris and Qasimis, to say nothing of competing pairs of factions in numerous earlier, later, and contemporaneous societies, the defining characteristics of these factions were that there were only two of them; they opposed each other; and they divided most, if not all, of society between them. Accordingly, their identifying markers—names, colors, symbols—and the rituals in which they participated took on this same bilateral character: they were diametrically opposed, offered clear alternatives to each other, or were glaringly incompatible. This chapter illustrates this point by presenting definitive features of Egypt's factional political cultural in comparison to similar features in other bilateral factional cultures.

Breaking Out of the Mamluk Paradigm

Before we undertake this task, however, it is worth asking why the bilateralism of the Faqaris and Qasimis has received so little attention. Our understanding of the origins and functions of these two factions has, I believe, been hampered by the Mamluk historiographical framework within which historians of premodern Ottoman Egypt have habitually placed them. I contend that if we are to understand these factions on their own terms and in their own historical and social context, we must adopt a framework that gives due weight to the fact that these two factions utterly polarized Egyptian society, forcing virtually every member of the military-administrative population, as well

as merchants, artisans, and bedouin tribes, to choose one side or the other side while not allowing for any alternative.

We know very well that factions were an integral and unavoidable feature of the history of the Mamluk sultanate (1250–1517), which ruled Egypt, Syria, the Hijaz (the western Arabian peninsula), and southeastern Anatolia before the Ottoman conquest in 1516–17. Each Mamluk grandee, or emir, following his manumission, purchased large numbers of his own mamluks, or military slaves, whose education and military training he oversaw. These mamluks, whose paramount loyalty was to the patron who had nurtured them, formed the basis of the emir's faction. With the support of his faction, the emir might attain the sultanate. In that event, his faction attempted to protect his interests from the mamluks of his predecessor, who formed a separate faction. The new sultan would typically keep the mamluks of his faction near him in Cairo, while giving the mamluks of his predecessor governorships and other administrative offices in the provinces, notably Syria.¹ In this fashion, the sultan could keep his potential rivals at a reasonably comfortable distance, although he could not prevent them from building up their own power bases in the provinces. By the same token, the sultan's own mamluks, once manumitted, could establish power bases in the capital; the sultan might promote one of them to succeed him. In short, each faction was closely associated with a particular Mamluk sultan. The names of these factions derive from the regnal titles of the sultans: thus, the faction of the founder of the Mamluk sultanate, al-Zahir Baybars al-Bunduqdari (r. 1260–77), came to be known as "Zahiris" while the faction of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (r. 1412–21) were known as "Mu'ayyadis."²

Parallels to the factionalism of the Mamluk sultanate certainly existed in Ottoman-era Egypt, most notably in the great households and families of the Ottoman period. An enterprising Ottoman-era grandee established a household, either within a regimental barracks or within an elite residence, by purchasing mamluks, attracting mercenaries, and otherwise nurturing patron-client ties.³ In numerous cases, these households and followings came to be known by the names or sobriquets (*laqabs*) of their founders. This was true of the powerful households founded in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries by regimental commanders, above all the long-lived Qazdağlı (a.k.a. Qazdughli) household, founded by Mustafa Kâhya al-Qazdağlı, which came to dominate Egypt for most of the eighteenth century.⁴ Two households of the early eighteenth century, founded by the rival beys Çerkes Mehmed and Ismail b. ʿIvaz, are memorialized in Arabic

chronicles by the names of illustrious predecessors: Çerkes Mehmed's household is designated the "Shanabiyya," after his patron, Ibrahim Bey Abu Shanab; Ismail Bey's household, meanwhile, is called "Shawariba," after his father's patron's patron's father, Ridvan Bey Abu'l-Shawarib. (Coincidentally or not, then, these two competing households took sobriquets meaning "moustachioed.")⁵ In all these cases, the name of the founding father endured over several generations. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, in contrast, competing members of the Qazdağlı household formed their own followings, each of which was designated by the name of its immediate patron. Thus, the chronicler al-Jabarti refers to the followers of Mehmed (Muhammad) Bey Abu'l-Dhahab as *Muḥammadiyya*.⁶

Notwithstanding, each of the above-mentioned households and subhouseholds belonged to either the Faqari or Qasimi faction. The Qazdağlıs were offshoots of the Faqaris; meanwhile, both Çerkes Mehmed Bey and Ismail Bey b. ʿIvaz were Qasimis. Clearly, the Faqari and Qasimi factions transcended these individual households. Moreover, while the process of household formation in Ottoman Egypt resembled the formation of factions under the Mamluk sultanate, the emergence of the Faqari and Qasimi factions, to the extent it can be ascertained, was far more complex and mysterious—in a word, mythic.

The terminology employed in contemporary sources for the Faqaris and Qasimis, as opposed to that employed for single households and for the factions of the Mamluk sultanate, sheds light on the varying perceptions of these groups. A grandee's household during the Ottoman period, if centered in an actual residence, was termed *bayt* (house) in Arabic or *kapı* (door, gate) in Ottoman Turkish.⁷ A household based in the regimental barracks in Cairo's citadel, drawing much of its strength and structure from the regimental hierarchy, was typically referred to as *ṭaraf* (side), *ṭāʾifa* (guild, party, sect), or *jamāʿa* (group).⁸ In the former case, the terminology stresses the physical setting of the household in a residence, or, to take the literal meaning of *kapı*, inside an imposing doorway, in keeping with the classical Ottoman—and, indeed, ancient Middle Eastern—structuring of power according to "inner" and "outer" spaces separated by a doorway or threshold.⁹ In the latter case, the fact of the group's coalescing is stressed. By the same token, Mamluk-era chroniclers refer to an individual faction as *ṭāʾifa*, emphasizing its coherence as a collectivity of mamluks of the same sultan.¹⁰

The terminology that contemporary observers employ for the Faqaris or Qasimis, in contrast, is *fariq* or *farqa* and, to designate the

two of them, the dual forms *farīqayn* and *farqatayn*.¹¹ These words derive from the Arabic root *f-r-q*, signifying “to separate” or “to differentiate.” Thus, these terms at least implicitly emphasize not belonging and coherence, but separation and distinction. Premodern Arabic chronicles of different regions, as well as premodern Arabic literary genres, employ the word *farīq* to designate one of two sides in a contest or conflict. Today, in fact, the term *farīq* is used to denote rival sports teams, particularly in football. More to the point, *farīqayn* in premodern usage not infrequently designates two implacably opposed sides in a military and ideological conflict, such as that between the Muslims and the Crusaders or, later, the Ottomans and the Catholic Hapsburgs; that between the Mamluk sultanate, as defender of the Muslim community, and the invading Mongol hordes; or, to take an intra-Islamic example, that between the Hanafi and Shafi‘i legal rites of Sunni Islam.¹² In short, the use of *farīq* and *farīqayn*, or derivations thereof, seems to indicate two opposing sides, as opposed to the coalescing of members or a residential headquarters. Nor does *farīq* typically designate a single household or even a single faction of the Mamluk sultanate.¹³ If terminology is any guide, then, the Faqaris and Qasimis are fundamentally different from both the households of the Ottoman era and the factions of the Mamluk era.

To be sure, the Mamluk-era factions operated in much the same fashion as the Ottoman-era households in the sense that each functioned largely as an interest group attached to a particular patron, with all the internal squabbles, splits, and offshoots that one would expect within such a structure. The Faqaris and Qasimis suffered internal divisions and ruptures, as well, as the deadly rivalry between Çerkes Mehmed Bey and Ismail Bey b. ‘Ivaz most graphically illustrates. Yet these two blocs differed in character from Mamluk factions and from Ottoman-era households. They were, in the first place, much longer lived. Leaving aside for the moment the myths of their origins, their presence in Egyptian society ostensibly dates to the 1640s.¹⁴ Their collapse came nearly a century later, when a decisive confrontation in 1730 virtually wiped out the Qasimis; the Faqaris, meanwhile, were largely superseded by a powerful household, the Qazdağlıs, that arose from within their midst.¹⁵ Even so, factional sentiment, or at least suspicion of continuing factional loyalties, survived well into the 1760s, when the late Qazdağlı grandee ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir established his hegemony. Part of his strategy for consolidating power consisted of eradicating all lingering members of the defunct Qasimi faction—even those firmly allied with previous generations of Qazdağlıs.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the Faqaris’ and Qasimis’ influence was not limited to the nar-

row ruling elite that presided in Cairo. The two blocs divided virtually all of society throughout the province: bedouin tribes in different Egyptian subprovinces were affiliated with one bloc or another; subprovincial and district governors were obliged to choose sides, as were artisans in Cairo and most other towns. As we shall see, furthermore, the factional rivalry extended, to some degree, beyond the borders of Egypt.

Clearly, we are dealing with a phenomenon quite different from the relatively narrow, short-lived factions of the Mamluk sultanate. Yet secondary scholarship on pre-nineteenth-century Ottoman Egypt has persisted in interpreting these two groups as if they were part and parcel of inveterate Mamluk factionalism.¹⁷ Such an approach necessarily assumes that the forces that gave rise to the Faqaris and Qasimis were identical to those that shaped the political culture of the Mamluk sultanate and that, in fact, Mamluk paradigms are all that we need to understand these two enormous, extraordinarily long-lived groups. Yet a vital point that secondary scholarship has thus far seemed to overlook is that the Faqaris and Qasimis divided Egyptian society into two; there was no question of an independent third alternative. Perhaps the most graphic example of this reality is the case of the early eighteenth-century grandee ʿAbdurrahman Bey, the governor of the enormous Upper Egyptian subprovince of Jirja, who was assassinated because he would not remain loyal to either bloc but claimed variously to be a Faqari and a Qasimi.¹⁸ The insistent bilateralism of these two blocs, along with their social inclusiveness, is the feature that most clearly distinguishes them from the factions of the Mamluk sultanate. In this bilateralism, they resemble less the Mamluk-era factions than they do other well-known historical examples of two rival blocs that divided their respective societies, notably the Guelphs and Ghibellines of medieval Tuscany, whose enmity pervades Canto X of Dante's *Inferno*;¹⁹ the Blues and Greens of the Byzantine Empire; and the northern and southern, or Qaysi and Yemeni, Arabs whose rivalry emerged in the early centuries of Islam. A particularly sharp and intriguing comparison can be drawn, meanwhile, with the contemporary Haydari and Niʿmatullahi, or Niʿmati, factions of Iran, which originated in the followings of two rival fifteenth-century Sufi leaders but which came to polarize the cities of Iran from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries.²⁰ As we shall see, historical connections may, in fact, exist between the Blues and Greens and, on the one hand, the Qays and Yemen, and, on the other, the blocs of Ottoman Egypt.

Indeed, the political culture, as well as the surrounding mythology, of the Faqaris and Qasimis exhibits some of the same characteristics as

these earlier and contemporary episodes of bilateral factionalism. Like the Guelphs and Ghibellines, Blues and Greens, Haydaris and Ni‘matis, and above all the Qays and Yemen, the Faqari-Qasimi conflict was society wide, encompassing not simply the military-administrative cadre but large segments of the urban and even rural populations. In the case of Ottoman Egyptian factionalism, the rural element was particularly visible because of the participation of bedouin tribes in factional struggles through their allegiance to the Sa‘d and Haram, two bedouin blocs allied respectively with the Faqaris and Qasimis. In remarkably similar fashion, the Haydaris and Ni‘matis enjoyed alliances with two specific (although genealogically related) Turcoman tribes in the rural hinterland.²¹ In this regard, both the Faqari-Qasimi rivalry and that of the Haydaris and Ni‘matis strongly resemble the Qays-Yemen rivalry. We can identify other key features of the Faqari-Qasimi political culture as typical of bilateral factional rivalry—and, not incidentally, uncharacteristic of Mamluk sultanate political culture. In the remainder of the chapter, I will consider five such features—color dichotomy, fictive genealogy, origin myths centering on two brothers, competing symbols, and public ritual—before passing to a consideration of the functions that a two-faction system fulfilled.

Color Dichotomy

Color dichotomy is perhaps the most visible symptom of bilateral factionalism: that is, the phenomenon whereby each faction is identified by a distinguishing color, displayed in its members’ clothing and/or in its banners and other identifying insignia. While color distinctions may certainly figure in societies with more than two factions, a large number of factions, as in the Mamluk sultanate, tends to make color distinctions less effective as markers of factional allegiance.

The colors in question are typically quite basic, if not primary, colors. In the Byzantine Empire, for a notable example, the two dominant factions were known by the names of the colors with which they were associated: blue and green. These factions consisted of the professional performers and their fans who participated in the chariot races staged by the Roman emperors beginning roughly in the second century B.C.E. The colors were those that the rival competitors displayed on their chariots and on the banners that accompanied them into the arena, as well as in their clothing. Initially, there had been four factions that derived their colors from either the four seasons or the four elements believed in classical Greek science to comprise the

universe: earth (green), air (white), fire (red), and water (blue). Yet quite early on, factional rivalries took the form of competition between *pairs* of colors (Blue and either Red or White *vs.* Green and either Red or White), rather than among all four; in other words, Roman/Byzantine factionalism was inherently bilateral.²² Nor were the factions and factional rivalries restricted to Rome; arenas and factional competition spread to Constantinople and Alexandria and, by the late fifth century, throughout Byzantium's Asian territories.²³

Indeed, during the last millennium of Byzantine history, chariot racing, along with theatricals, displaced gladiatorial spectacles as the public entertainment of choice and remained a fixture well into the Middle Ages.²⁴ The factions played a prominent role in these public exhibitions. By this period in Byzantine history, the Blues and Greens had come to overshadow the other two factions while still maintaining the paired alliances, although these were now fixed as Blue and White *vs.* Green and Red.²⁵ The Byzantine emperor himself belonged to one of the four factions and supported the interests of either the Blues or the Greens. Like the urban brotherhoods, known to scholars as *futuwwa* organizations, of medieval Islam, the factions were dominated by young men, who were responsible for most of the violence for which the factions were blamed.²⁶

As Speros Vryonis has noted, the Blue-Green rivalry contributed to the conditions that underlay the rise of Islam and the early Muslim conquests. Factional enmities were exploited by the Sasanian Persian Empire in its conflicts with the Byzantines during the century preceding Islam's advent. The "young men" of Antioch unsuccessfully defended the city against the invading Sasanian emperor Khusrau I Anushirvan in 540 C.E., while those of Jerusalem massacred the Persian garrison after the city's conquest by Khusrau II Parviz in 614 C.E.²⁷ After conquering Antioch, however, Anushirvan transported a number of faction members to the heartland of the Persian Empire, where he built a "new Antioch" for them near his capital of Ctesiphon on the Tigris River. Here, he erected a hippodrome where the young men could carry on their chariot contests. Anushirvan supported the Greens in deliberate contrast to his enemy, the Byzantine emperor Justinian (r. 527–65 C.E.), who favored the Blues.²⁸ The factions may even have facilitated the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 640 C.E. According to John of Nikiu, the Blue and Green leaders "assieged the city of Misr [future site of Cairo] and harassed the Romans during the days of the Moslem"²⁹—meaning, presumably, that they diverted the Byzantines' attention from the invading Muslim armies. How or whether the Blues and Greens in the conquered eastern Byzantine provinces were

incorporated into the fledgling Muslim society has yet to be investigated. Certainly it strains credulity to imagine that a rivalry that had permeated societies in widely scattered Byzantine provinces for over half a millennium could disappear overnight, especially when it continued until at least the twelfth century C.E. in Byzantine territories not conquered by the early Muslims.³⁰

Of more profound consequence among the Arabs themselves was the pervasive and still inadequately understood enmity between northern, or Qaysi, and southern, or Yemeni, Arabs. Ultimately, this division is rooted in geography. Qaysi Arabs were those living in the region extending from the northernmost borders of Yemen to the deserts of what are now Jordan, southern Syria, and southwestern Iraq. Yemeni Arabs, as the name implies, inhabited Yemen and, more generally, the southern regions of the Arabian peninsula. They spoke a southern Arabian language that, while Semitic, was written in a different script from the northern dialects that would form the basis for classical and modern Arabic, and contained a number of other distinctive features.³¹ The ancient kingdom of Yemen cultivated a distinctive southern Arabian civilization that enjoyed important links to Ethiopia and, as attested in the Hebrew Bible, to the kingdoms of the Hebrews in Palestine.³²

Migrations of southern Arabs northward into the peninsula occurred periodically in connection with political upheavals and trade, particularly trade in frankincense and myrrh, produced from the resin of two species of tree that grow in what are now eastern Yemen and western Oman.³³ In the sixth century C.E., however, a series of disasters led to a wave of northward migrations of Yemeni Arabs. The late rulers of the ancient Himyarite kingdom of northern Yemen converted to Judaism in the early centuries of the Common Era and began persecuting their Christian subjects, many of whom had converted under Ethiopian influence. In retaliation, the ruler of Ethiopia, a client of the Byzantine Empire, invaded Yemen in 525 C.E.³⁴ The upheaval caused by the Ethiopian occupation was compounded by natural disaster in 550 C.E., when the ancient Ma³rib Dam collapsed, destroying the basis of Yemen's prosperous agricultural economy.³⁵ Finally, in 570 C.E., the Sasanians invaded Yemen and ousted the Ethiopians.³⁶ Cumulatively, these disasters put an end to Yemen's preeminence as the Arabian peninsula's center of commerce and high culture. The initiative now passed to the bedouin tribes farther north in the peninsula. At the same time, waves of Yemeni tribes, fleeing the turmoil in Yemen, migrated northward into the interior of the peninsula. It was perhaps during this period that the differences between northern and southern tribes became a serious source of division in the tribal politics of the peninsula.

The advent of Islam did much to sharpen and ritualize the division between northern and southern Arabs. The Prophet Muhammad was himself a northern, or Qaysi, Arab, as were most of his early converts in Mecca. His migration, or *hijra*, to Medina in 622 C.E. brought him into the midst of a largely Yemeni, and partially Jewish, agricultural community. The initial dispute over the leadership of the Muslim community following the Prophet's death in 632 C.E. pitted the Qaysi Meccan immigrants (*muhājirūn*) against the Yemeni Medinese "helpers" (*anṣār*); the choice of the Prophet's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, as first caliph, or community leader, sanctioned a Qaysi monopoly of the caliphate. Later ʿAlid and Shiʿite groups, who insisted that the caliph be a descendant of the Prophet—while taking a fundamentally different approach to the selection of the caliph—retained this Qaysi exclusivism.

This emerging division between northern and southern Arabs was exacerbated by the tribal migrations that resulted from the civil wars triggered by the apostasy of bedouin tribes on the Prophet's death, and by the early Muslim conquests. The early Muslim armies included large numbers of both Qaysi and Yemeni tribesmen, and both groups were appointed to high offices in the early caliphal administrations. As a result, the garrison towns that the early caliphs established throughout their expanding empire came to include a bewildering mixture of northern and southern Arabs; by this point, in consequence, the literal geographical significance of the "northern" and "southern" labels had become virtually meaningless.

If we accept Patricia Crone's argument, however, it was the civil war that disrupted the Umayyad dynasty in the late seventh century C.E. that gave definitive shape to Qays and Yemen as distinct factions. On the death of the second Umayyad caliph in 683, the Qays, along with certain Yemeni tribes, supported a Meccan opponent of ʿAli for caliph; the leader of a collateral branch of the Umayyads ultimately crushed this opponent with the support of the Kalb, a branch of the Yemeni grouping, and their allies. Following the civil war, Yemen and Qays, or "Mudar," as they were typically called under the Umayyads (Mudar being an ancestor of Qays), solidified into blocs and acquired the unrelenting bilateral character for which they are so well-known.³⁷ After the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate in 750 C.E. and the rise of the assimilationist ʿAbbasid dynasty, the Qays-Yemen rivalry became somewhat more muted, yet it continued unabated in certain regions, notably Egypt and Greater Syria. In Egypt, the civil war between the ʿAbbasid brothers al-Amin and al-Maʾmun from 809–13 occasioned fierce fighting between Yemeni (pro-Amin) and Qaysi (pro-Maʾmun) bedouin in the Nile Delta, exacerbated by both factions' frustration with ʿAbbasid taxation policies.³⁸ Under the Ottomans, Lebanon above

all was riven by Qaysi-Yemeni rivalry; the Ottoman central government followed a loose pattern of backing Qaysi families.³⁹ In some Syrian and Palestinian villages, the Qays-Yemen rivalry was still visible in the nineteenth and even the early twentieth century,⁴⁰ although it had acquired the character of an entrenched small-town feud.

The Qaysi-Yemeni struggle, like that of the Blues and Greens, is characterized by a pronounced color dichotomy: the Qaysi color is red, the Yemeni color white. Indeed, the tribespeople and other partisans of Qays and Yemen appear to have attached as much importance to the visual display of their colors as the Byzantine Blues and Greens. Qaysis and Yemenis wore red and white, respectively; in twentieth-century Syrian and Palestinian villages, as more than one observer has noted, a bride dressed in red would be obliged to change into white clothing if her wedding procession passed through a Yemeni village.⁴¹ Geographical Yemen even boasts place names containing the Arabic words *aḥmar* (red) and *abyaḍ* (white).⁴² Likewise, Qaysi and Yemeni tribes flew their respective colors on their tribal banners.

We do not know the source, or even the purported source, of the red and white dichotomy. In contrast to the Byzantine case, there is no tradition of colors representing primordial elements. It would, moreover, be foolhardy to speculate that Qays and Yemen drew any color traditions from the Byzantine Red and White subfactions; after all, the adoption of an identifying color is a basic strategy of group solidarity and differentiation, and red and white appear as identifying colors in a number of cultures.

Is it merely coincidental that the Faqari-Qasimi color dichotomy mirrors that of Qays and Yemen? Like the Yemeni Arabs, the Faqaris carried white banners and, if we are to believe al-Jabarti's account, not only wore white clothing but preferred to eat white food with white utensils. A similar preference for red, the Qaysi color, prevailed among the Qasimis.⁴³ I believe that a connection existed and was bound up with the two factions' alliances with the Sa'ḍ and Haram bedouin blocs, even though, as I point out in chapter 3, both groups may have originated in geographical Yemen and both seem to have been Yemeni, or southern Arab, populations.

Fictive Genealogies

Qays and Yemen do, however, exhibit a symptom of factional conflict that we do not find among the Byzantine factions: the practice of constructing genealogies linking the faction to a mythic ancestor. Given

the extraordinary weight attached to genealogy within tribal societies in general and within pre-Islamic and early-Islamic Arabian society in particular, it may perhaps seem natural that the distinction between Qays and Yemen would be predicated on descent. The two factions are believed to descend from two mythic Arab ancestors: the Qaysi, or northern, Arabs from ʿAdnan and the Yemeni, or southern, Arabs from Qahtan.⁴⁴ Identification with one or the other of these two mythic Arab figures was quite strong well into the twentieth century.⁴⁵ Ultimately, these two Arab ancestors could be traced back to Ishmael, son of the biblical and Qurʾanic patriarch Abraham, thence to Shem, one of the three sons of Noah, thence to Adam, the first man. Thus, this Arab genealogical tradition built on the ancient tradition, well-represented in medieval Islamic letters, of tracing divergent populations to the three sons of Noah—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—who were thought to have given rise to the three principal groups of peoples—what Enlightenment European science would call the “Semitic, Hamitic, and Indo-European.”⁴⁶

The Faqaris and Qasimis exploited the fictive genealogy, as well, although not in so consistent or deliberate a fashion as Qays and Yemen. In the version of the factional origin myth reported by Ahmed Çelebi and by al-Jabarti and cited in the introduction, the factions stem from the quarrel between two brothers, Dhuʿl-Faqar and Qasim. We also have evidence that faction leaders were aware of traditional Arab genealogies and willing to exploit them for their own purposes. In the most famous, although long misconstrued, example, the Qasimi leader Abuʿl-Shawarib Ridvan Bey commissioned a genealogy demonstrating his descent from the Mamluk sultan Barquq (r. 1382–99), the first of the Circassian sultans who would dominate the sultanate until its demise. Barquq, the genealogy goes on to demonstrate, can trace his descent to the Prophet’s tribe of Quraysh, thence to ʿAdnan, Ishmael son of Abraham, Shem son of Noah, and ultimately Adam.⁴⁷ This genealogy, then, takes the traditional Qaysi Arab genealogy and grafts it onto the tradition of Circassian descent from the Arabs. In so doing, Ridvan Bey’s genealogist transforms the latter tradition, which depends on an equally pervasive genealogical tradition that many populations of the Caucasus region descended from the family of the last ruler of the Yemeni Arab kingdom of Ghassan (on this, see chapter 10). This Qasimi insistence on Qaysi descent is rather striking and corresponds, in fact, to a far more muted Faqari connection to the Yemeni Arabs. The very lack of a concocted Faqari genealogy analogous to that of Abuʿl-Shawarib Ridvan Bey arguably attests to the Faqaris’ awareness that they could not possibly claim a connection to

the Quraysh. For this reason, perhaps, Abu'l-Shawarib's near contemporary Ridvan Bey al-Faqari, a Georgian mamluk whom P.M. Holt erroneously identified as the source of the genealogy cited above,⁴⁸ never emphasized his ethnicity but built his reputation solely on his lengthy service as pilgrimage commander.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the Faqaris' link to the Yemeni Sa'ḍ bedouin indicates that the Qaysi-Yemeni genealogical dichotomy played a by no means negligible part in the contrasting identities forged by the Qasimis and Faqaris.

The Qaysi-Yemeni conflict was arguably the touchstone of bilateral factionalism in Muslim societies generally. Even if they enjoyed no direct lineal connection to Arab tribes themselves, competing political and social groups within these societies retained the tribal divisions as part of their collective memory and sought legitimacy by fabricating historical links to these tribes. In their own historical imaginations, then, if not in actual fact, the Qasimis were Qaysi and the Faqaris Yemeni. This self-conceptualization must therefore account for the color dichotomy: Qaysi red for the Qasimis, Yemeni white for the Faqaris.

The "Two Brothers" Origin Myth

Fictive genealogies exploited by factions such as the Faqaris and Qasimis typically terminate in mythic factional ancestors; ḲAdnan and Qahtan, the putative sires of Qays and Yemen, respectively, are prime examples of such mythic ancestors. Yet a typical feature of factional origin mythology that even ḲAdnan and Qahtan do not exhibit is the tradition that the opposing factions derive from two brothers who unexpectedly quarreled, leading to an irreparable split. The trope of two quarreling brothers in folk mythology is, of course, virtually as old as human history. It is well-represented in the biblical stories of Cain and Abel and Jacob and Esau, as well as the Greek myth of Proetus and Acrisius, the sons of King Abas of Argolis, who were supposed to rule alternately after their father's death but, predictably, refused to follow this prescription.⁵⁰ Closer to the Faqaris and Qasimis in both time and place, the Haydari and NiḲmatullahi/NiḲmati factions in Safavid and Qajar Iran were the subject of several different origin myths, in addition to the "factual" attribution of the factions to two divergent Sufi orders; these included a myth identifying Haydar and NiḲmatullah as the overlords of two adjacent villages occupying the site of present-day Isfahan, and one insisting that they were two rival Iranian princes.⁵¹

By far the most famous fractious brothers in Islamic history, however, were not mythical figures at all but very real historical personages: al-Amin and al-Maʿmun, the two eldest sons of the caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786-809 C.E.), who is familiar to western readers from the *Thousand and One Nights*. Harun elected to divide his vast empire between his two sons on his death. Al-Amin was to succeed his father as caliph and rule the western half of the empire; al-Maʿmun was to rule the eastern half and succeed al-Amin as caliph. In the end, this scheme worked about as well as King Abas' throne-sharing plan in the Greek myth. Ignoring his late father's wishes, al-Amin named his own son to succeed him as caliph, whereupon al-Maʿmun raised a large army and attacked his brother's domain. The ensuing civil war, which lasted from 809 through 813 C.E., resulted in al-Maʿmun's seizure of the caliphate and the execution of al-Amin by his brother's general. These harrowing events scarred the Muslim community deeply and gave rise to a body of lore concerning portents of the civil war that Harun al-Rashid supposedly encountered before his death but ignored.⁵² This fraternal struggle arguably served as a point of reference for parallel fraternal struggles anywhere in the Islamic realm.

For its part, the origin myth transmitted by Ahmed Çelebi and al-Jabarti exhibits a pattern that, on the surface, bears greater similarity to the circumstances of the ʿAbbasid civil war. In this myth, Dhu'l-Faqar and Qasim are two sons of a Mamluk emir named Sudun. (Ahmed Çelebi asserts, implausibly, that this is Sudun al-ʿAjami, the commander in chief of the Mamluk sultan Qaytbay, who ruled from 1468-96.)⁵³ Following his conquest of Egypt in 1517, the Ottoman sultan Selim I (r. 1512-20) learns that Sudun has sequestered himself from the fighting and prevented his sons from participating by chaining them up in two specially built enclosures. Hearing that the two sons are champions at the equestrian exercises known as *furūsiyya*, which were widely practiced not only in the Mamluk sultanate but, with variations, in most Turco-Iranian military societies, Selim orders them to display their talents by jousting before him. In the course of the joust, the brothers fall out, thus giving rise to the two factions that bear their names.⁵⁴ This origin myth, then, combines the familiar motif of two quarreling brothers with a pattern, common to Arabic epics, of two champions confronting one another in single combat. At the same time, the myth draws on the dislocations caused by foreign conquest and occupation of a society. Several Arabic chroniclers, even those who do not transmit this particular origin myth, insist that the factions date to the Ottoman conquest of Egypt.⁵⁵ The centrality of Sultan Selim

I to the myth is not unlike the defining roles played by Alexander the Great and Khusrau I Anushirvan in accounts of the origins of many ancient customs and edifices in the Middle East and Central Asia.⁵⁶

What makes the “two brothers” motif so natural to myths of the origins of bilateral factionalism is the implication that until conflict erupted between the two brothers, a unified whole existed. Key to this motif, then, is not simply the presence of two brothers but the struggle between them. Two factions that cooperated with each other would neither lend themselves to an explanation centered on disruption and conflict, nor would they give rise to a society that was truly split in two. Likewise, a variety of volatile, short-lived factions on the model of the Mamluk sultanate would not find a satisfactory explication in a “brothers” myth. The motif itself, rooted in the most primal blood relationships—that between a father and his sons and that between brothers—bespeaks a division that is likewise primal and long-lasting, if not permanent. Such a fundamental split, the myth implies, cannot be healed by virtue of political expediency. It is a deep, enduring rift brought about by wrenching political and/or social change, such as the death of a powerful ruler or the conquest of a kingdom. The pervasiveness of this division encourages popular memory to cast it in either-or terms, or to adopt myths that cast the division in this way, and to assign each side basic, easily recognizable characteristics and symbols.

Competing Symbols

Second only to color as a marker of factional identity is the identifying symbol, which can take the form of an emblem depicted on a banner or a coat of arms. Competing family and factional coats of arms, bearing recognizable symbols and motifs, were integral to the internal divisions that plagued the city-states of medieval and Renaissance Italy, and may still be seen in that country.⁵⁷ This competing symbolism can be likened to the contrasting emblems that identify enemy armies; thus, for example, the Crusader forces emblazoned some version of the cross of Christ on their shields, banners, and tunics, while certain of their Muslim opponents deployed the crescent.⁵⁸ The Faqaris’ and Qasimis’ competing symbols were the so-called knob and disk that they carried as standards on the ends of their spears. In chapter 6, I will demonstrate that the knob and the disk were, in fact, the Ottoman *tuğ*, typically a knob from which horsetails are suspended, and the *‘alem* of the Mamluk sultanate, typically a spade-shaped metal plate, often with inscriptions worked into the metal. The fact that the

Faqaris and Qasimis carried these emblems did not, however, mean that they identified or sympathized with the Ottoman Empire and the Mamluk sultanate, respectively. By the early eighteenth century, if not before, these standards had lost their original political meanings—and thus their symbolic force—and served solely to identify the two factions and to distinguish one from the other.

Notwithstanding the diminution of the standards' symbolic force in Ottoman Egypt, the very fact that they were visible markers of the two factions' competition distinguishes this bilateral factional conflict from the multilateral rivalries of the Mamluk sultanate. In a society in which numerous parties compete for influence, the power of any single party's symbol is unavoidably diluted. For six or ten different factions to have deployed different standards would have rendered the standards far less memorable; likewise, it is easier to remember the offices designated by the blazons embossed on Mamluk glass and metalwork than which sultans or emirs deployed them.⁵⁹ In such a case, standards would become little more than logos, not unlike the stars, animals, rockets, and other designs on football jerseys. But when deployed by only two competing factions, the standards become markers of identity.

Public Rituals

The factions' identities were embedded in public consciousness and, ultimately, in collective memory through public visibility, which was in turn enhanced by the factions' participation in public rituals. Equestrian exercises are one example of such public rituals, although they took place in a relatively circumscribed space—the hippodrome—and if they were for practice, rather than in celebration of a holiday or military victory, there was no guarantee that the identifying markers of the factions would be on display. Even storytelling could be a public ritual if it took place in, say, a coffeehouse, but in this case, the space was even more circumscribed, and identifying symbols were even less likely to be visible. Official public processions, however, were another matter. These were occasions when the public could count on the factions' identifying symbols being intensely visible. Not for nothing does the Damurdashi chronicler al-Qinali point out that: "The people of Cairo recognized the Faqari and the Qasimi in processions, whether the procession of the holy *maḥfil* [more properly *maḥmil*, the symbolic litter that accompanied the pilgrimage to Mecca] or the procession of the [new] pasha":⁶⁰ at no other time were the factions so easily recognizable.

Much the same could be said of public rituals in other societies marked by bilateral factionalism. Publicly visible, ritualized factionalism also characterized the contemporary Haydari-Ni[‘]mati factionalism of Safavid Iran, which originated in two fifteenth-century Sufi brotherhoods with divergent philosophies: one Shi[‘]ite-leaning, the other staunchly Sunni.⁶¹ By the seventeenth century, nonetheless, popular memory had forgotten these historical figures and come to regard the two blocs as simply inveterate and generic rivals, much as Sa[‘]d and Haram appear in Shirbini’s *Hazz al-quhūf* (see chapter 3). The two groups seem to have fed on a form of bilateral factionalism ingrained in Iranian urban society since as early as the tenth century, when ostensibly religious competition between Shi[‘]ite and Sunni Muslims, and between the Hanafi and Shafi[‘]i legal rites, devastated entire cities.⁶² The two factions divided up every urban center in the Safavid domains between themselves: a certain number of neighborhoods would be Haydari strongholds, the rest Ni[‘]mati. Haydaris and Ni[‘]matīs periodically staged ritualized public battles, employing fists, sticks, and stones, similar to the *melées* that broke out on the Rialto in Renaissance Venice.⁶³ Like the Venetian “wars of the fists,” the Haydari-Ni[‘]mati battles were particularly visible on holidays—above all during the Islamic lunar month of Muharram, when the two factions held competing processions to commemorate the martyrdom of [‘]Ali’s son Husayn.⁶⁴ The equivalent occasion in the late Roman and Byzantine Empires was the processions of the Blue and Green factions and their respective fans into the arena to kick off chariot races, whether on holidays or not.⁶⁵ The wedding processions of Qaysi and Yemeni villagers in early twentieth-century Palestine, in which the bride wore a red or white veil according to her family’s factional allegiance, performed a similar function, if on a humbler scale.⁶⁶ All such processions ostensibly served higher, or at least different, political, social, and religious purposes, but at some level, they functioned as vehicles for public factional display. A distinctive feature of the processions in which the Faqaris and Qasimis marched, however, was that they were not competing but common processions in which members of both factions marched, although presumably not together. In these circumstances, distinguishing emblems were more important than ever.

Moreover, as the “wars of the fists” and the Haydari-Ni[‘]mati brawls suggest, those processing were not a closed elite, rigidly separated from the viewing public. In the same way that the military-administrative population included multiple social and economic strata, the processions incorporated members of these different strata, either as direct participants or as “camp followers” who caught up the end

of the procession or shouted encouragement from the sidelines. The procession thus fixed factional identity in the minds of those watching and those processing alike. Between these two groups, in any case, there was considerable fluidity. Likewise, factional identity itself was fluid and transient. The “we” of the Damurdashi chronicles who struggled to tell the factions apart could also belong to the factions, if only for the space of a morning or afternoon. Even those who only stood and watched participated in the event of the procession and gave the factions legitimacy by bearing witness to their existence.

Processions and other public ceremonies could themselves play critical roles in framing certain social institutions, factions included. When Evliya Çelebi describes Istanbul’s craft guilds in the early seventeenth century, what he is, in fact, describing is a procession of guilds (he does the same for Cairo in a later volume);⁶⁷ that is, he does not break down the institutional structure of the Ottoman Empire’s artisanal classes. One is tempted to assume that Evliya uses the procession as a convenient framework within which to present the existing guilds in some sort of logical order. Yet on closer inspection, we discover that the procession itself determines the composition of the guilds. The guilds of prostitutes and thieves, we suspect, do not exist outside of processions. This does not mean that these guilds are not “real” for the purposes of the procession; however, their reality is circumscribed by the procession. Likewise, the procession presents a certain social structure that, again, is “real” within the confines of the procession. On the other hand, other primary sources dealing with guilds, notably manuals for craft associations and market supervisors (both exploited by Evliya elsewhere in his *Book of Travels*),⁶⁸ present their own version of the guild reality: the guild as ritualized confraternity, the guild as a regulatory mechanism with responsibilities to the state. The point is not to dismiss the procession description as an “unreliable” source on the guilds but to recognize that the procession presents one facet of the institution’s multifaceted reality.

In the same fashion, the procession presents one facet of the factions’ reality. In everyday life, when one was absorbed in the myriad daily realities of living in Cairo, factional identity arguably receded into the background.⁶⁹ But the processions themselves, like publicly recited stories, created a space in which factional identity was paramount. Indeed, those members of Cairo’s population who did not belong to the military-administrative echelons may have identified with one or the other faction only during processions. The act of processing, with its color-coded flags and identifying symbols, thus contributed to factional identity.

The Functions of Bilateral Factions

Having established that the Faqaris and Qasimis were an example of bilateral factionalism and, therefore, exploited terminology, symbols, and myths in ways distinct from multifactional societies, we may ask what distinguished the *functions* of these two factions within the society of seventeenth-century Ottoman Egypt. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that while each faction strove to distinguish itself from the opposing faction, internally, each faction fostered a strongly cohesive identity. After all, how could a soldier or an artisan be inspired to stake everything on battling the enemy faction unless he had a strong sense of himself as a Faqari or Qasimi? This shared identity was no small achievement in a society that was receiving large numbers of new arrivals from many different walks of life and from a vast array of regions and countries. Egypt's military society during the early decades of the seventeenth century absorbed troops dispatched from the imperial capital, consisting largely of *devshirme* recruits from the Balkans and western Anatolia; mercenaries from central and eastern Anatolia; and mamluks from the Caucasus, purchased by already established beys and officers of diverse ethnic origins. In addition, members of the local population had begun to enroll in the Janissary regiment in particular, hoping to gain protection and relief from taxes; meanwhile, bedouin tribes were increasingly recruited for battlefield duty.

A remarkable feature of Egypt's factions during this period is that *each* incorporated members from widely divergent and often traditionally hostile ethnicities. Of particular note is the domination of the Qasimi faction during these years by a combination of Circassians and Bosnians. Assertions of Circassian identity by Abu'l-Shawarib Ridvan Bey in the 1630s gave way to the brief hegemony of Ahmed Bey Bushnaq ("the Bosniak") in the late 1650s; in the later part of the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth, Ahmed Bey's ostensible nephew, Ibrahim Bey Abu Shanab, assumed leadership of the faction in conjunction with the Circassian 'Ivaz Bey. As Metin Kunt has pointed out, hostility between "western" populations, such as Bosnians, Albanians, and other Balkan peoples, and "eastern" populations from the Caucasus and neighboring regions, was common among the Ottoman military-administrative elite in the imperial center during the seventeenth century.⁷⁰ Indeed, Ahmed Bey Bushnaq's appointment as commander of the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1656 was greeted with suspicion by the Faqaris, who deplored the assumption of authority by an "outsider" (*ajnabi*).⁷¹ That Bosnians were fully incorporated into the Qasimi faction by the following generation testifies to

the power of the faction as a unifying force: Ibrahim Bey Abu Shanab's Qasimi identity clearly overrode his Bosnian identity, and any traditional enmity toward Circassians such as his fellow Qasimi 'Ivaz Bey, in the context of Egypt's military-administrative elite. By the same token, the Faqari faction brought together Anatolian Turks and Greeks, Bosnians, Circassians, Georgians, Abkhazians, Laz, Armenians, and other ethnicities. In general terms, factional identity smoothed over the glaring differences that might otherwise have separated the motley crew that participated in Ottoman Egypt's political culture: differences of ethnicity, geographical origin, native language, occupation, wealth, age, even gender. Thus, factional identity served the role that national identity would serve in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although the faction's capacity for absorbing dissimilar groups was much greater than that of most nations, based as they were and are on considerations of ethnicity, language, and territorial origin.⁷² In that respect, it may make more sense to liken factional cohesion to that of an army, a club, a British public school, a secret society, or even a Mafia household.

We must stress the fact that, although established locals clearly joined their ranks, the Faqari and Qasimi factions were in the business of assimilating large numbers of young men and women who were more or less uprooted from their places of origin and who were utterly unfamiliar with Egypt or, at least, with Cairo. In the case of *devshirme* recruits and mamluks, they might only recently have converted to Islam and begun to learn Turkish, to say nothing of Arabic. Naturally, a new arrival's most immediate attachment was to the head of the household that he (or she) joined. But the faction of which this household was a part provided a more deeply rooted, even corporate identity, reinforced by the distinctive colors, symbols, and rituals of that faction. We might make an analogy to loyalty to a particular political candidate *versus* loyalty to that candidate's party. The latter provides the framework, the larger context, for the former. Not surprisingly, when the Faqari and Qasimi factions began to disintegrate early in the eighteenth century, key members turned to alternative sources of corporate identity; thus, for example, the Janissary officer 'Osman Çavuş al-Qazdağlı, a Faqari, crossed factional lines to aid a fellow Janissary from the Qasimi faction.⁷³

A final point about this form of bilateral factionalism is its ability to incorporate diverse households headed by grandees with potentially incompatible interests. Each of our two factions consisted of numerous households; it was not possible to belong to one or the other faction without belonging to a household within that faction.

Yet the Faqari and Qasimi factions were somehow greater than the sum of their parts. Collective factional identity overrode the ethnic compositions of specific households, as well as their particular interests. Thus, a largely Bosnian household, such as that of Ibrahim Bey Abu Shanab, was able not only to coexist but to cooperate with a heavily Circassian household, such as that of ʿIvaz Bey; by the same token, a Janissary household, such as that of the Gediks, cooperated with a beylical household such as that of Ismail Bey b. ʿIvaz.⁷⁴

This ability to override household concerns is, I think, peculiar to bilateral factionalism. In the Mamluk sultanate, each of the numerous factions was roughly equivalent to the household of a particular sultan—and, indeed, took its name from that sultan's regnal title.⁷⁵ There was no transcendent source of identity, as there was in seventeenth-century Ottoman Egypt. The use of a common term—"faction"—to describe two societies that exhibited this fundamental difference is therefore misleading and has contributed to historiographical confusion. Bilateral factionalism, though inherently divisive, was not fragmentary but assimilative; in Ottoman Egypt, it lent cohesion to a society in demographic flux. Thus, it served the same purpose as the Blues and Greens or the Qays and Yemen, and should be regarded in the same light as those factional systems.