

## Introduction

This is the story of the rise of the Qazdağlı household. To the extent that this household is familiar to readers outside the tiny circle of scholars of pre-nineteenth-century Ottoman Egypt, it is known chiefly as the group headed by the famous ‘Ali Bey, the former military slave (*mamlūk*) who in the late 1760s dared to assert Egypt’s autonomy in defiance of the Ottoman sultan. Alternatively, the household attracts notice as the party of predominantly Georgian mamluks whom Bonaparte found holding sway in Egypt at the time of his invasion in 1798. The prevalence of a regime of military slaves from the Caucasus region naturally evokes the Mamluk sultanate, which ruled Egypt before the Ottoman conquest in 1517. Thus it seems almost automatic, even to experts on the subject, to depict the regime over which the Qazdağlıs presided as a reversion to the usages of the Mamluk sultanate.

Yet the Qazdağlı household was founded by a Janissary officer toward the middle of the seventeenth century. Thus, what is missing from the foregoing appraisal of the household is an appreciation of the context within which the household emerged and developed in the century preceding ‘Ali Bey’s hegemony. This context is, in the first place, an Ottoman context, for the character of the Ottoman Empire’s administration and Egypt’s place within it underwent telling changes during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The Qazdağlıs, furthermore, participated in a provincial Ottoman military culture whose transformations prepared the ground for the Georgian preponderance of the late eighteenth century.

I attempt here to provide a sense of this context by analyzing the Qazdağlıs’ evolution within the framework of Ottoman decentralization and the emergence of an empire-wide military and administrative culture based on households. Both the redirection of the empire’s priorities and the composition and functions of households provide critical keys to understanding the course that the Qazdağlı bloc followed. But in order to place the Qazdağlıs squarely within this context, we must first place Egypt in the context of the Ottoman Empire during these critical centuries.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-57110-4 - The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlis

Jane Hathaway

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-57110-4 - The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs

Jane Hathaway

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

## I

# **The household and its place in Ottoman Egypt's history**

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-57110-4 - The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs

Jane Hathaway

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-57110-4 - The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs

Jane Hathaway

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CHAPTER I

**Egypt's place in the Ottoman Empire**

In the summer of 1516, it was evident to most observers of the Ottoman imperial palace of Topkapı in Istanbul, if not to most residents of the city at large, that Sultan Selim I (1512–20) was preparing a decisive military expedition against one of his two chief Asian antagonists. Early in the season, the sultan's campaign tent had been pitched at Üsküdar, on the eastern shore of the Bosphorus; by July, he had reached the camp of his general Sinan Pasha in the eastern Anatolian town of Malatya. Up to this point, however, which rival Selim intended to attack remained open to question. The militantly Shi'ite Safavid empire, which had swept across Iran early in the sixteenth century, posed a sharp political and ideological challenge to the Ottoman Empire. Only two years earlier, in fact, Selim had dealt the Safavids a bruising defeat at Chaldiran in northwestern Iran. It was to pursue the campaign against the Safavids that Sinan Pasha had marched to Malatya. To the south, however, the Mamluk sultans, who ruled Egypt, Syria, the Hijaz, and southeastern Anatolia, had become a major irritant to Selim. Although they, like the Ottomans, were Sunni Muslims, they refused to support the Ottoman effort against the Safavids. They were also a poor buffer against the Portuguese presence in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. Diplomatic relations between the Ottomans and Mamluks had deteriorated in recent months. Two Ottoman ambassadors to the Mamluk court at Cairo had been humiliated and abused.

Arguably, then, Sultan Selim had a *casus belli* against both the Safavids and the Mamluks. When he had joined the army at Malatya, however, instead of continuing east toward Iran, he turned south, through the Cilician Gates and into Syria. It was now obvious that Selim intended to attack the Mamluks. The swift course of the Ottoman victory is well known. Selim's forces met the army of the Mamluk sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri at the plain of Marj Dabiq, just south of what is today Syria's border with Turkey. Al-Ghuri is said to have suffered a fatal apoplectic fit on the battlefield; his body was never recovered. Legend has it that spirits, or *jinn*, carried it off.

Continuing south, Selim captured Damascus in September 1516, and entered Egypt at the beginning of 1517. In an hour-long battle outside Cairo,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-57110-4 - The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs

Jane Hathaway

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 6 The household and its place in Ottoman Egypt's history

the Ottoman army routed the forces of al-Ghuri's successor, Tumanbay, and entered the capital, thus putting an end to the Mamluk sultanate.<sup>1</sup>

Only six months after marching from Malatya, then, Selim had added thousands of square kilometers to the Ottoman Empire. Formerly a Balkan–Anatolian domain with a predominantly Christian population, the empire now encompassed the heartland of Islam, including Islam's holy places. The Ottomans had also become an overwhelming presence in the eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea. These new acquisitions gave the empire new opportunities, coupled with new responsibilities. Egypt became, as it were, the linchpin of the empire's new territories. In the first century-and-a-half of Ottoman rule over Egypt, the province served as a strategic rallying point for expeditions against the Portuguese and for conquests in the Red Sea and the eastern Mediterranean. The conquest of Yemen in 1538 was launched from Egypt, while the long, torturous struggle to take Crete from the Venetians required thousands of troops from Egypt. The Ottoman governors of Egypt during these years were predominantly military men who had come up through the Janissaries and often governed smaller provinces. Following the conquest of Yemen, in fact, Egypt appears to have enjoyed a political symbiosis with Yemen. An Ottoman governor of Egypt could often expect a subsequent posting to Yemen; meanwhile, land tenure and provincial administration in Yemen were virtually identical to those in Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

From a somewhat more mundane standpoint, Egypt also served the empire as a rich source of provisions. The province paid an annual tribute, known as *irsāliye-i ḥazīne*, to Istanbul; this tribute exceeded the revenues received from any other province.<sup>3</sup> Egypt also supplied manpower for imperial campaigns, not only those in Crete and Yemen, but expeditions against Austria and Iran, as well. Egypt's legendary grain harvests provided food for the Ottoman armies and for the populations of other Ottoman provinces in times of scarcity. Through Egypt, furthermore, the Ottomans gained access to the trade in black African slaves through the Sudan.

On defeating the Mamluks, the Ottoman Empire won control of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina, and assumed the obligations of the cities' custodian. The Ottoman governors of the province of Damascus (Shām) and

<sup>1</sup> On the Ottoman conquest of Egypt and its effects, see Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Iyas, *An Account of the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt in the Year A.H. 922 (A.D. 1516)*, trans. W. H. Salmon (London, 1921); Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Iyas, *Journal d'un bourgeois du Caire*, trans. Gaston Wiet, 2 vols. (Paris, 1955); Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, *Les Ottomans, les Safavides et leurs voisins* (Istanbul, 1987), pp. 18–99, 206–7; P. M. Holt, *Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 1516–1922: A Political History* (Ithaca and London, 1966), pp. 3–45; G. W. F. Stirling, *The Ottoman Turks and the Arabs, 1511–1574*, Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences, vol. XXVI, no. 4 (Urbana, IL, 1942).

<sup>2</sup> Shams al-Din 'Abd al-Samad al-Mawza'i, *Dukhūl al-'uthmāniyyīn al-awwal ila al-Yaman*, ed. 'Abdallah Muhammad al-Habashi (Beirut, 1986), pp. 86ff.

<sup>3</sup> On the tribute, see Stanford J. Shaw, *The Financial and Administrative Organization and Development of Ottoman Egypt, 1517–1798* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 283ff.

## Egypt's place in the Ottoman Empire 7

Egypt were each responsible for equipping an annual pilgrimage caravan. The Egyptian caravan carried grains and money for the poor of the Holy Cities, along with the *mahmil*, the symbolic litter transported each year to Mecca, and a new *kiswa*, an embroidered covering for the Ka'ba, Islam's most sacred shrine.

At the end of the seventeenth century, Egypt's place in the Ottoman Empire altered significantly. No longer was it the staging area for critical military engagements in the Red Sea and the eastern Mediterranean. The Portuguese had ceased to pose a threat to Ottoman domination of the Red Sea by the beginning of the century, when Portugal's imperial might was dwindling. Candia, the Venetian capital in Crete, was at long last taken in 1669, and although Egyptian troops still performed mopping-up operations and garrison duty on the island,<sup>4</sup> the days of urgent engagement had passed. Meanwhile, the overthrow of Ottoman rule in Yemen by the Zaydi Shi'ite imams in 1636 put an end to the symbiosis between Yemen and Egypt. To the west, the abortive Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 resulted in a massive demobilization of forces on the European front and concurrently reduced the role that Egyptian forces played in European campaigns. Henceforward, Egypt's importance to the Ottoman Empire would hinge on the province's ability to deliver revenue and grains, and to provide for the Holy Cities. Correspondingly, the Ottoman governors of Egypt shifted from veteran warriors to bureaucrats and palace cronies. Within Egypt's ruling society itself, these duties would become central concerns and bones of contention.

Egypt's incorporation into the Ottoman Empire occasioned significant demographic changes within the province. The population of Egypt, as we now know, increased under Ottoman rule, until the natural disasters and political turmoil of the late eighteenth century began to reverse the trend. Although Cairo was reduced from an imperial to a provincial capital, it nevertheless registered impressive gains in numbers of inhabitants and territorial extent. At the time of the Ottoman conquest, Cairo contained some 150,000 souls; by 1800, it was a city of 250,000.<sup>5</sup> The city expanded far to the west during these nearly 300 years, as political and commercial elites moved out of the densely populated hub centered in the old Fatimid city. In the countryside, regional market towns such as Damanhur and Minyat Zifta attained or recaptured commercial importance. Upper Egypt came to be better integrated into the provincial economy as grains from more and more southern villages were requisitioned for the growing number of imperial pious foundations (*awqāf*, s. *waqf*) supporting Mecca and Medina.

The Ottoman takeover of Egypt brought a massive and varied influx of people into the province, even as the Ottomans removed large numbers of

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Istanbul, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Mühimme Defteri 99, no. 75 (1101/1689).

<sup>5</sup> André Raymond, "La population du Caire et de l'Égypte à l'époque ottomane et sous Muhammad 'Ali," in *Mémorial Ömer Lutfi Barkan* (Paris, 1980).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-57110-4 - The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs

Jane Hathaway

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 8 The household and its place in Ottoman Egypt's history

Egyptian artisans and ulema (Muslim scholars) to Istanbul.<sup>6</sup> Large numbers of Ottoman troops remained in Egypt after the conquest to garrison the new province. These troops were a motley crew of Anatolian Turks; Balkan youths recruited through the *devşirme*, the classical Ottoman method of collecting non-Muslim boys from conquered territories; and various Turkic and Kurdish tribal levies. Meanwhile, Turkophone bureaucrats of various ethnic origins arrived in Cairo to join holdovers from the Mamluk bureaucracy, and the Ottoman governors transported their own sizable entourages to Cairo. As Egypt's role within the empire began to change in the seventeenth century, many other sorts of Ottoman subjects sought their fortunes, or at least their livelihoods, in the province. Anatolian mercenaries seeking more dependable livelihoods than could be had in their native lands enrolled in the Egyptian garrison forces as a means of securing regular salaries while plying various petty trades on the side. Victims of political upheavals in Istanbul and Anatolia sought refuge in Egypt. In the mid-seventeenth century, furthermore, eunuchs of the imperial harem began routinely to be exiled to Egypt, where they amassed wealth and attracted large followings.

Egypt's military echelons following the Ottoman conquest were obviously greatly changed from the military elite of the Mamluk sultanate. Nonetheless, they were not completely transformed. Selim I incorporated those members of the Mamluk forces who professed loyalty to the Ottomans into the administrations of Egypt and Syria. Before he returned to Istanbul, moreover, he pardoned a number of defeated Mamluks and allowed them to remain in Egypt. Selim's strategy in pursuing this policy appears to have been to balance the often rebellious Ottoman soldiery against the repentant Mamluks.

Likewise, the administration that Selim and his successor, Süleyman I (1520–66), imposed on Egypt combined effective elements of the Mamluk administration with innovations sufficient to ensure Ottoman control. Under the late Mamluk sultanate, Egypt's cultivable land was divided into twenty-four *qīrāts*, which the Mamluk sultan, emirs, and soldiery received as *iqṭāʿ*'s, or assignments of usufruct; distribution varied with changes in the financial administration.<sup>7</sup> These assignments supported the Mamluk cavalry, which was commanded by the emirs. The emirs, along with the sultan himself, were typically the manumitted slaves, or mamluks, of the sultan's predecessor. They were ranked according to the number of horsemen their *iqṭāʿ*'s could support: hence emirs of ten, forty, one hundred. The rank-and-file horsemen (*ajṅād*, s.

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un bourgeois du Caire*, vol. I, pp. 79ff.; Gaston Wiet, "Personnes déplacées," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 27 (1959), 9–21.

<sup>7</sup> On the Mamluk land regime, see Hasanayn Rabie, "The Size and Value of the *Iqṭāʿ* in Egypt, 564–741/1169–1341," in Michael Cook (ed.), *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East: From the Rise of Islam to the Present Day*, (Oxford, 1970); A. N. Poliak, "Some Notes on the Feudal System of the Mamluks," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1937), 97ff. On Mamluk slave society, see David Ayalon, *L'esclavage du mamelouk* (Jerusalem, 1951); and his "Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army," parts 1–3, *BSOAS* 15 (1953), 203–28, 448–76, and 16 (1954), 57–90.



*jundī*) were the mamluks of the emirs and the ruling sultan, who commanded them. Functionally, then, the Mamluk *iqṭāʿ* resembled the *timar* system in force in most of the Ottoman Empire's European provinces and in Anatolia before 1517; both systems in turn drew inspiration from the earlier Seljuk *iqṭāʿ*.<sup>8</sup>

On conquering Egypt, the Ottomans retained the Mamluk division of the land into thirteen subprovinces comprising twenty-four *qīrāṭs*. They discarded the Mamluk term *ʿamal* for a subprovince in favor of the Ottoman terms *vilāyet* and *nāḥiye*; the enormous subprovince of Jirja in Upper Egypt was termed an *iqṭīm*. The *Kanunname*, or law code, promulgated by the grand vizier Ibrahim Pasha in 1525 refers to the governors of these subprovinces by the title *kāshif*, a term applied to subprovincial governors during the Bahri Mamluk era (1250–1388).<sup>9</sup> Despite these retentions, however, the Ottomans made no attempt to preserve the *iqṭāʿ* system or to impose the very similar *timar* system. Instead, Selim I confiscated all *iqṭāʿ*s and replaced their holders with imperially appointed salaried administrators known as *emins*, who were to collect all land taxes. By the early seventeenth century, the post of *emin* had given way to the tax farm, or *iltizām*. Military grandees and high-ranking ulema received the right to collect the taxes of specific administrative units in return for advance payments to the governor's treasury. In this way, the revenues of all administrative units, from villages to entire subprovinces, came to be farmed by salaried officials. Meanwhile, a mélange of Ottoman and Mamluk titles came to apply to these tax farmers, or *mültezims*. By the late seventeenth century, the subprovincial *iltizāms* were often called *sancaks* in practice, much like the subdistricts of Anatolia and Rumelia under the *timar* system, while their holders were called variously *sancak*, *sancak beyi*, bey, and emir. It should be stressed, however, that these beys of the middle centuries of Ottoman rule in Egypt, despite the traditional Mamluk and Ottoman titles they bore, were not throwbacks to the old Mamluk or, indeed, to the classical Ottoman land regime. They constituted a new Ottoman-era beylicate<sup>10</sup> of tax farmers.

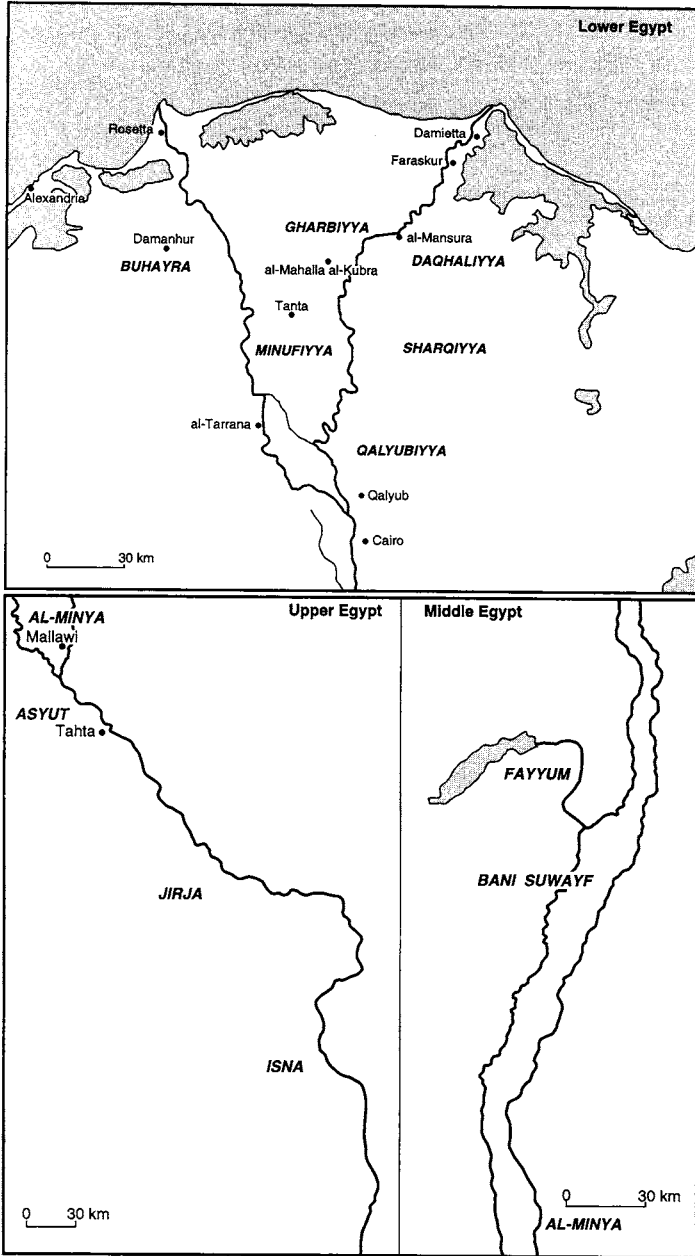
In short, the administration of Ottoman Egypt was neither a continuation

<sup>8</sup> On the Seljuk *iqṭāʿ*, see, for example, Claude Cahen, "L'évolution de l'*iqṭāʿ* du IXe au XIIIe siècle," in Claude Cahen, *Les peuples musulmans dans l'histoire médiévale* (Damascus, 1977). On the Ottoman *timar* system, see, for example, Halil İnalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300–1600*, trans. Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber (London, 1973), pp. 104–18.

<sup>9</sup> Heinz Halm, *Ägypten nach den mamlukischen Lebensregistern*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1979), vol. I, pp. 60ff. The thirteen subprovinces were Minufiyya, Qalyub, Gharbiyya, Mansura, Sharqiyya, Buhayra, Giza, Fayyum, Atfiḥ, Ushmunayn, Manfalut, al-Bahnasa, and Jirja. On Ottoman adaptation of the Mamluk system, see "Mısır Kanunnâmesi" in Ömer Lütfi Barkan, *XVve XVIInci asırlarda Osmanlı imparatorluğunda ziraat ekonominin hukukî ve malî esasları*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınlarından No. 256 (İstanbul, 1943), vol. I, chapter 105; Shaw, *Financial and Administrative Organization*, pp. 28ff., 60–2; P. M. Holt, "The Beylicate in Ottoman Egypt during the Seventeenth Century," *BSOAS* 24 (1961).

<sup>10</sup> "Beylicate" results from the addition of a Latin suffix to the Turkish *beylik*, denoting the post of bey. It is commonly used in secondary scholarship on Ottoman Egypt.

10 The household and its place in Ottoman Egypt's history



Map 1 The major regions of Egypt, showing the subprovinces