

“Is anyone my guardian . . . ?” Mamlūk Under-age Rule and the Later Qalāwūnids

JO VAN STEENBERGEN

ABSTRACT *Succession to the Mamlūk sultanate is one of those thorny issues that keep bothering historians. Within an environment that did not generally favour heredity of military/political status, a frequent tendency towards dynasticism remains difficult to explain, the Qalāwūnids (678–784/1279–1382) offering a case in point. This article analyses the age of accession of the later Qalāwūnids (741–784/1341–1382) and challenges the generally accepted view that they were mostly politically weak minors and mere stopgaps to a failing political system. It argues that there was a dynastic reflex at work, which combined with the specific political circumstances of the mid-fourteenth century and which resulted in the paradox of a very active, but continuously contested Qalāwūnid sultanate.*

Keywords: Mamlūk sultanate; Rulership – underage rulers; Egypt – politics; Qalāwūnid dynasty

One Saturday in December 1350, when he was about fourteen years old, al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ḥasan (r. 748–752/1347–1351 and 755–762/1354–1361), Mamlūk sultan of Egypt and Syria, is claimed to have acted as follows:

He summoned the *qādīs* and the *amīrs*, and when they gathered in the audience hall, he said to them: “o *amīrs*, is anyone my guardian (. . .), or can I take my own decisions?” All replied: “O lord, there is no one who can decide for our master, the sultan, as he is the owner of our lives”. Then, he said: “If I would tell you something, would you give heed to it?” And they all replied: “we are to obey the sultan and to execute his orders”. So [the sultan] turned to his chamberlain, and said: “take the sword of this one”, and he pointed at . . . [one of his guardians], whose sword was taken and who was removed and put into chains.¹

Correspondence: Jo Van Steenberghe, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, University of Ghent, Sint Pietersplein 6, B-9000, Belgium. E-mail: Jo.VanSteenbergen@UGent.be

¹al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk*, eds. M.M. Ziaḍah & S.A. Ashur, volumes I–IV (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1956–1973), II/3: 822. Similar account in al-Safadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿasr wa-Aʿwān al-nasr*, eds. A. Abū Zayd, N. Abū Umsha, M. Muwʿad & M. Salim Muhammad, volumes I–VI (Beirut-Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1998), II: 248.

This episode in Mamlūk history, when the young Ḥasan “declared himself of age and took his rule into his own hands (*tarashshada* [...] *wa istabadda bi-amrihi*)”,² is not untypical of the often tense relationship between many young Mamlūk sultans and their entourage in the period between the death of sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (693–694/1293–1294; 698–708/1299–1309; 709–741/1310–1341) in June 1341, and the first deposition from the sultanate of his twelfth and last succeeding descendant, the minor Ḥājī b. Sha‘bān b. Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (783–784/1381–1382; 791–792/1389–1390) in November 1382. The deposition of Ḥasan in August 1351 and his replacement by one of his younger brothers, only seven months after his public coming of age, is equally illustrative of this tense process in which young Qalāwūnids i.e. descendants of sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (r. 678–689/1279–1290) via his son al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, repeatedly lost the sultanate as individuals but without ever being ousted from the sultanate as a kin-group, or at least not until November 1382. In the Mamlūk political environment, which was not at all geared towards the hereditary transfer of political rank and status, this situation seems somewhat paradoxical, especially when one considers that it was often the Qalāwūnids themselves whose unruly behaviour had caused the very conflicts that led to their repeated replacements.³ In part, it is this paradoxical situation of the Qalāwūnid sultanate that will be explored in this article, from the thematic perspective of the age upon which Qalāwūnids acceded to the throne in particular.⁴ That is to say, was their age, or even their minority, indeed a political issue, as suggested by the case of Ḥasan? And if so, does this shed any light on how the Qalāwūnid paradox came to be maintained for so long?

Whenever the Qalāwūnids have been deemed worthy of academic interest, their young age has been one of the things which has attracted scholarly attention. In the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Peter Holt remarked in a rather generalising way that, “they were mostly young and inexperienced, some of them mere children, who lacked the essential power base of Mamlūk households”.⁵ Without doubt, a sultan’s age and his ability to gather effective power in the regime were closely linked. The beneficiary nature of a sultan lacking such power for the ambitions of his political environment also stands beyond doubt. In fact, as this political environment, the military commanders (*amīrs*) to begin with, continued to play a key role in the appointment of a new Mamluk sultan, one of the main explanations that is generally given for the remarkably frequent occurrence of heredity – and

²al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā‘iz wa l-I’tibār bi-dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa l-āthār*, s.e., volumes I–IV (Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, 1996), IV: 119.

³On those conflicts, their lead actors and their motives, see J. Van Steenbergen, *Order out of Chaos. Patronage, Conflict and Mamlūk socio-political Culture. 1341–1382* [The Medieval Mediterranean 65] (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 123–168.

⁴This topic is also touched upon in Van Steenbergen, 23–26, 29–30, 134–136, 172–173.

⁵P.M. Holt, “Mamlūks”, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), volumes I–XII (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2004), VI: 323; repeated in P.M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades. The Near East from the eleventh century to 1517* [A History of the Near East] (London - New York: Longman, 1986), p. 121. See, e.g., also R. Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages. The Early Mamlūk Sultanate* (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 125.

under age rule—in the institution of the Mamlūk sultanate is exactly the ambition of those *amīrs*. As Holt again put it:

The death of a [...] sultan is followed by the accession of his son, who during a brief reign serves as a stopgap (and formal linchpin of government) until the throne is again usurped by one of the magnates.⁶

A variety of scholarship has tried to explain the Qalāwūnid sultanate from this standard Mamlūk accession pattern, focusing on issues of heredity and usurpation. Studies by two scholars in particular best epitomise this approach. Robert Irwin admits that in the fourteenth century “no one questioned the rights of the descendants of Qala’un [*sic*] to the throne”, but he also notes that this happened “without developing any explicit theory of hereditary succession, still less of primogeniture”. Amalia Levanoni takes the argument further, claiming that in being dynastic, Qalāwūnid rule was nothing but a dysfunctional façade, a flaw in the Mamlūk oligarchic conception of the sultanate, used as a tool to empower “unsteady coalitions behind ephemeral sultans of Qala’unid [*sic*] descent”. Hence, by general agreement the Qalāwūnids are considered a dynasty by accident and, indeed, nothing but a weak and prolonged stopgap.⁷

In the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, the standard accession pattern was perhaps even more subtle than that depicted by Holt, and the Qalāwūnid sultanate more dynamic and complicated than that suggested by Irwin and Levanoni. Accession to the Mamlūk sultanate was in fact neither a consequence of heredity, nor of usurpation. First and foremost, it was the result of generating sufficient support among the political elite of the day, the high-ranking *amīrs* in particular, whose oath of allegiance (*bay‘a*) was a *sine qua non* among a new sultan’s public accession observances, whether he were a so-called usurper or the heir of the former sultan.⁸ As mentioned, those kingmakers— that political entourage of the new sultan to be— were most likely to favour a candidate who was the least likely to jeopardise the interests they had carefully managed to establish by the end of the

⁶See, e.g., Holt, *Age of the Crusades*, 143 (though mainly referring to fifteenth-century succession practices).

⁷Irwin, 125–151; A. Levanoni, “The Mamlūk Conception of the Sultanate”, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 26 (1994): 373–392, esp. 373–374 for a survey of the discussion by Ayalon, Holt, and Irwin. See also W.M. Brinner, “The Struggle for Power in the Mamlūk Sultanate”, in *Proceedings of the 26th International Congress of Orientalists, New Delhi, 4–10 January 1964* (New Delhi: Organizing Committee: 26th International Congress of Orientalists, 1970), pp. 232–233; J. Wansbrough, “Hasan”, in *EF²*, III: 239; A. Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamlūk History. The third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (1310–1341)*, [Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts vol. 10] (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 114–116; L.S. Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan: the career of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and the consolidation of Mamlūk rule in Egypt and Syria (678–689 AH/ 1279–1290 AD)*, [Freiburger Islamstudien vol. 18] (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998), pp. 243–244; U. Haarmann, “The sons of Mamlūks as Fief-Holders in Late Medieval Egypt”, in *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed. T. Khalidi (Beirut: American University in Beirut, 1984), pp. 156–157, 163.

⁸See Van Steenbergen, 24; Holt, *The Age of the Crusades*, 141; P.M. Holt, “The Position and Power of the Mamlūk Sultan”, *Bulletin of the School for Oriental and African Studies*, 38 (1975): 238, 241–245; P.M. Holt, “The Structure of Government in the Mamlūk Sultanate”, in *Eastern Mediterranean Lands in the Period of the Crusades*, ed. P.M. Holt (Westminster: Aris and Philips, 1977), p. 46; P.M. Holt, “Succession in the early Mamlūk Sultanate”, in *XXIII. Deutscher Orientalistentag: Ausgewählte Vorträge*, ed. E. von Schuler [Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft Supplement VII] (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989), pp. 144–148.

preceding sultans' rule. That is to say, it was deemed wiser to support a candidate who represented continuity rather than to advocate precipitous change in the regime's fragile balance of individual interests. Hence, sons tended to be put on their fathers' throne, especially when those fathers had carefully managed to construct and maintain a balance of powers and interests that had enabled their prolonged rule as Mamlūk sultans. In the fourteenth century, this conservative attitude among the political elite contributes significantly towards explaining the smooth transition from al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's long rule of more than thirty years to that of his son al-Manṣūr Abū Bakr (741–742/1341) in June 1341.

But the general pattern of Mamlūk succession policies did not end there, as shown by two occasions in the later thirteenth century and again with Abū Bakr in August 1341,⁹ when after a while the mature, succeeding son would demonstrate his unwillingness or incapacity to maintain his father's balance of interests, and would be summarily deposed. In fact, only then the political elite enthroned a real stopgap, a minor brother—the little al-Ashraf Kuçuk (742/1341–1342) in August 1341—whose temporary accession was to pave the way for a new balance to appear and for a new strongman to emerge. In early 1342, however, this process did not come full circle, as the balance was shattered before the new man, the *amīr* Qawṣūn (ca. 700–742/ca. 1300–1342), managed to consolidate it via his enthronement.¹⁰ In the chaos that ensued, conservative attitudes regained the upper hand and the Qalāwūnid sultanate was born.¹¹ Moreover, despite the fact that its commencement was indeed an accident, due to Qawṣūn's failure and the chaos he left behind, the Qalāwūnids soon came to be much more than just that, and, their age was one of the issues that attest to that.

Certainly, not all of those Qalāwūnids were minors like the infant Kuçuk when they acceded to the throne. If the aforementioned case of the fourteen-year-old Ḥasan's coming of age in 1351 is taken as a guideline for the age as of which intellectual, or legal, majority (*rushd*) was considered appropriate, only a minority had not yet reached that status upon accession. Out of a total of thirteen enthronements of twelve Qalāwūnids between June 1341 and November 1382 (Ḥasan was put on the throne twice, in 1347 and again in 1355), only five times this clearly and deliberately involved the accession of minors.¹² Apart from two aforementioned minors – Ḥasan, who was eleven at his enthronement in 1347, and the infant Kuçuk, presumably between five and eight in 1341 – they were al-Ashraf Sha'bān (764–778/1363–1377), who was ten in 1363, and his sons 'Alī (778–783/1377–1381) and Ḥājī, both only six or seven years old upon their accession to the throne, in 1377 and in 1381 respectively. And for most of these Qalāwūnids, explicit source references clearly suggest that there was a public awareness of this minority and the limits it imposed upon their reigns. Ibn al-'Irāqī (1360–1423),

⁹On the thirteenth century, see Angus Stewart's contribution "Between Baybars and Qalāwūn: under-age rulers and succession in the early Mamlūk Sultanate" in *Al-Masāq*, 19, i (2007): 47–54.

¹⁰On how things went wrong for the *amīr* Qawṣūn in late 1341, see J. Van Steenberghe, "Caught between Heredity and Merit: Qawṣūn (d. 1342) and the legacy of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn", in *The Mamlūk Sultanate: Political, Military, Social and Cultural Aspects*, eds. A. Levanoni & R. Amitai, forthcoming.

¹¹See Van Steenberghe, *Order out of Chaos*, 25–26, 123–168, 172–173.

¹²For age estimates of all Qalāwūnids, see the appendix to this article.

for instance, expressed such general awareness when he confirmed that of the latter two, 'Alī and Hājji, that "neither of the two had attained puberty [during their reigns] (*kilāhumā lam yabluḡh al-ḥulūm*)".¹³ Al-'Aynī (1360–1451) even went a few steps further and remarked with respect to the accession of the infant Kuçuk in August in 1341 that "the *amīrs* installed as the sultan a minor who does not understand what is being said and who does not give an answer" (*qāmat [sic] al-umarā' al-sultān ṣaḡhīr [sic] lā yaḡham al-khaṭāb wa-lā yu'tī al-jawāb*).¹⁴ In fact, for the year 1382, the same historian made a strikingly parallel reference to the infant sultan Hājji, when he stated that, "the time is in need of a mature sultan who understands what is being said and who gives an answer, who can handle both the tongue and the sword, and [who is able] to understand and to be understood" (*al-waqt mukhtāj ilā sultān kabīr yaḡham al-khaṭāb wa yarudd al-jawāb wa yakūn ṣāhib lisān wa ḡṣām wa faḡm wa ifḡām*). Another formidable recorder of contemporary sentiments, Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), similarly claimed in the course of his report on the preceding year, 1381, that "the *amīr* Barqūq was made [sultan Hājji's] legal guardian with respect to [procedures of] appointments and jurisdiction over the Muslims, as [Hājji] was at the time too young to perform this responsibility" (*ju'īl al-amīr Barqūq kāfilahu fī l-wilāya wa l-naẓr li-l-muslimīn li-ṣuḡhrihi ḡn'idh 'an al-qiyām bi-hādhihi al-'uhda*).¹⁵

As already mentioned however, such dependent minority did not apply to every Qalāwūnid sultan. Three of them seem to have just about come of age when they were acclaimed sultan, namely: Hājji (747–748/1346–1347) and Ṣāliḡ (752–755/1351–1353), both just fifteen or about to become fifteen when they were enthroned, in 1346 and in 1351 respectively, and Muḡammad (762–764/1361–1363), who was said to have been either fourteen or sixteen at the time of his accession in 1361. In fact, no explicit references to any minority issues were found in their case. For instance, all Ibn Kathīr (ca. 1301–1373), had to say on Muḡammad was that, by 1362, he was "a young man, less than twenty years old (*ṣḡabb dūn al-'iṣhrīn*)". With these three cases, and with the remaining five enthronements of Qalāwūnids, age does not actually seem to have been a major issue at all. Though all undoubtedly still quite young (the oldest of them all, Aḡmad (r. 742–743/1342), was about twenty-four during his short term of office; Abū Bakr (r. 741–742/1341), al-Kāmil Sha'bān (r. 746–747/1345–1346) and Ḥasan, in second instance, were all about nineteen, and Ismā'īl (r. 743–746/1342–1345) was about seventeen), they were clearly not chosen because of any mouldable age, to act as minor stopgaps to an oligarchic system. As a result, however, upon enthronement, most of these eight mature sultans actually became deeply and actively involved in the power politics of their reigns, just as with Ḥasan as he came of age in 1351.¹⁶

The Qalāwūnid paradox, as referred to above, was therefore taken even further. Not only did Qalāwūnids continue to be put on a throne that was almost always

¹³Ibn al-'Irāqī, *al-Dḡayl 'alā al-'ibar fī khabar man ḡhabar*, ed. S.M. Abbas, volumes I–III (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1989), II: 506.

¹⁴al-'Aynī, *Iqd al-jumān fī tārikḡh ahl al-zamān*, MS. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub), 1584 *tārikḡh*, p. 51.

¹⁵Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-'Ibar wa dīwān al-mubtadā wa l-khabar fī ayyām al-'Arab wa l-'Ajam wa l-Barbar wa man 'aṣarahum min dhawī l-sultān Al-akbar*, ed. N. al-Haruni, volumes I–VII (Cairo: Bulaq, 1867–1868) V: 471.

¹⁶For a descriptive list of the political conflicts in which many a mature Qalāwūnid sultan was involved, see Van Steenberghe, *Order out of Chaos*, 189–196; for their analysis, see pp. 123–168.

taken by force from one of their unruly own, but also did the king-making elite not prevent such unruliness from immediately re-appearing when they decided, in the majority of cases, not to opt for a more docile youngster. And, considering the sheer number of Qalāwūnid sultans, they were surely not short of options. On the one hand, up till the early 1360s, even the gradually diminishing number of sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad continued to offer possibilities for choice. On the other hand, the growing number of their descendants soon came to enlarge that pool of recruitment, especially after 1361. In 1361, for instance, Muḥammad only seems to have been chosen after a lively debate over a range of candidates, who for the first time came to include grandsons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. This is what would have happened in the version of al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442):

[The *amīrs*] discussed who should be appointed in the office of sultan; some of them mentioned the *amīr* Husayn b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, the last remaining of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's sons. But they did not agree on him out of fear that he might take the rule into his own hands, without them. Then, none of the [sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad] was left. The *amīr* Aḥmad, son of sultan Ḥasan, was mentioned. Yet, they thought that proposing him— after what had happened to his father— would be wrong, since the situation urged him to take revenge for his father. So they discarded him, and agreement was reached on Muḥammad b. al-Muzaffar Ḥājjī.¹⁷

Clearly, the *amīrs* were concerned about their relationship with the new sultan. But age was not automatically considered a lever to safeguard or enhance that relationship.

One remarkable, final issue that demonstrates the puzzling, paradoxical nature of Qalāwūnid rule between 1341 and 1382 concerns its chronology. When the sequence of Qalāwūnid sultans is compared with the sequence of their years of birth, especially from Qawṣūn's failure to end Qalāwūnid rule in January 1342 until the last enthronement of a son of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in 1354, it seems that time and again the oldest of remaining candidates was put on the throne. Aḥmad, born in 718/1318, was succeeded by Ismā'īl, born in 725/1325. When Ismā'īl died, his full brother Sha'bān, born in 727/1327, was enthroned. Then Ḥājjī, born in 732/1332, acceded to the throne, followed by Ḥasan, born in 737/1336–1337. Ḥasan was succeeded by his younger brother Ṣāliḥ, born in 738/1337–1338, and upon the latter's deposition in 755/1354, the older Ḥasan was returned, to remain and both reign and rule until 762/1361.¹⁸ And though this pattern seems to have been broken in 762/1361, when, as seen, Muḥammad was preferred over al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's last remaining son Husayn (d. 764/1363), it seems to have re-emerged in 778/1377. Despite their young age, both 'Alī and Ḥājjī were again claimed to have been the oldest among their remaining brothers. Hence, when al-Ashraf Sha'bān left for his ominous pilgrimage in Dhū l-Qa'da 778/March 1377, his oldest son 'Alī was left in Cairo as the heir apparent, arousing the ambitions of

¹⁷ al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1: 64.

¹⁸ It has to be admitted that it is unknown when exactly the three sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad that never made it to the throne (Ramaḍān, Yūsuf and Husayn) were born. Yet, even despite this shortcoming, the argument still stands that the younger candidate was never preferred over an older one.

his own entourage and initiating the end of his father's reign. And the procedure that led to Ḥājji's enthronement in 783/1381 was described by al-Maqrīzī as follows:

Barqūq gathered the *amīrs*, the *qādīs* and the caliph [...] at Bāb al-Sitāra, in the citadel of Cairo, and he discussed with them the enthronement of one of al-Ashraf Sha'bān's sons [...]. So they summoned them [to come] from the sultan's residences, and all brothers came, including this *amīr* Ḥajj. They found out that one was weak because of smallpox and that another still was an infant, so the choice was made to enthrone this *amīr* Ḥajj, because he was the oldest [...].¹⁹

If age was a criterion at all for the enthronement of this or that Qalāwūnid, it seems actually to have been the older candidate that was preferred. Only rarely was this rule not abided by, in 742/1341, when Qawṣūn followed the more traditional Mamlūk succession pattern and put the little Kuçuk on the throne, and perhaps also in 764/1363, when another strongman, Yalbughā al-Khaṣṣakī (d. 768/1366), replaced Muḥammad with his minor nephew al-Ashraf Sha'bān. In 748/1347, moreover, the minor Ḥasan had been preferred over his brother Ḥusayn – whose age remains unknown – enabling a guardian council of six *amīrs* to rule in Ḥasan's name until his coming of age.²⁰ This was, however, again not so much the result of Ḥasan's convenient minority, but rather of Ḥusayn's pronounced antagonism towards the *amīrs*, an attitude that would, as mentioned above, continue to discredit his suitability as a candidate for the sultanate until his death in 764/1363.²¹ In all, therefore, and in hindsight, a surprising phenomenon in the majority of Qalāwūnid succession practices seems to have been the application of a criterion that came remarkably close to primogeniture.

As I demonstrated elsewhere, it was a combination of the failure to consolidate one's power, as with Qawṣūn in late Rajab 742/January 1342 and as with several other *amīrs* after 755/1354, and of the prolonged fragmented nature of the regime's political elite, between 742/1342 and 755/1354 in particular, that accounted to a large degree for the Qalāwūnid paradox identified at the beginning of this article.²² Reasons for the even more peculiar age-related nature of this paradox with an elite that favoured the enthronement of older Qalāwūnids and made the installation of minors under their guardianship rather an exception to that rule, remain a matter for speculation. Nevertheless, the latter issue does clearly suggest that nothing less than a dynastic reflex continued to favour these Qalāwūnids whenever the sultanate demanded a new consensus from that fragmented or leaderless political climate. It was not just opportunism or lack of any better options that had resulted in a Qalāwūnid sultanate. The long, prosperous and successful reigns of al-Manṣūr

¹⁹al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/2: 439; also in Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa l-Qāhira*, ed. I.A. Tarkhan, volumes I–XVI (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1963–1972), XI: 207.

²⁰See e.g. al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1: 744, 745, 746, 751. See also Levanoni, "The Mamlūk Conception", 382.

²¹al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II/3: 744, 745, 751; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, X: 173, 187, 190; Ibn Qādī Shuhba, *Tārīkh Ibn Qādī Shuhba*, ed. A. Darwich, [Publications de l'Institut Français de Damas, volumes 101, 145, 146] (Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1977–1994), III: 227.

²²See Van Steenberghe, *Order out of Chaos*, 171–172.

Qalāwūn and his son al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in particular seem to have provided the Qalāwūnids with a historic right to the Mamlūk throne that was not easily denied, that at the time was best suited to create such a consensus, and that made them more, often much more, than just stopgaps.²³

Hence, entirely in line with these assumptions, the following incident was recorded as to have taken place in July 1377 between the strongman of those days, Aynabak al-Badrī (d. 780/1378), and the ‘Abbāsīd caliph:

[Aynabak] requested from the caliph to appoint Aḥmad b. Yalbughā in the sultanate, because Aḥmad’s mother was under his control. But [the caliph] said: “I will not depose a king, son of a king, and appoint the son of an *amīr*!” Thereupon, [Aynabak] said to him: ‘But Aḥmad is none but the son of sultan Ḥasan, because his mother was pregnant with him from [Ḥasan] when he was killed and Yalbughā had taken her [to be his wife], without realising that. That is how Aḥmad came to be born in his bed.’ But the caliph said: “this is not attested to”.²⁴

Whenever the leaderless, fragmented political arena between 742/1341 and 784/1382 had to establish a consensus on a new candidate for the throne, a conservative, Qalāwūnid dynastic reflex sprang into operation and the Qalāwūnid paradox of enjoying the *amīrs*’ favour and dismay was furthered. Moreover, despite the fact that those Qalāwūnids were surely to serve as a stopgap for others’ interests, those others did not automatically have the complete freedom to use or interpret that reflex to their own benefit, whether by inventing genealogical claims or by enthroning minor mock sultans. The Qalāwūnids’ prolonged reign, dominating the political spectrum of Egypt and Syria for more than a century (678–784/1279–1382), was not a mere accident of a failing political system, but had become an established public factor of Mamlūk political society in its own right. Within the non-hereditary institutional environment of the Mamlūk sultanate, the Qalāwūnid reflex was as close as it could come to constituting a dynastic principle.

Appendix

Qalāwūnid sultans and explicit references to their age (in order of reign)

1. al-Malik al-Manṣūr Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 742/1341; r. 741–742/1341)

* about 20 when he died in Jumādā II 742/November 1341 (see al-Ṣafadī, *A’yān al-‘Aṣr wa A’wān al-Naṣr*, eds. A. Abū Zayd, N. Abū Umsha,

²³This social significance of and public veneration for the house of Qalāwūn is equally visible from the fact that the mausoleum in Bayna al-Qasrayn, Cairo, where Qalāwūn and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad were buried continued to be used as one of the regime’s most important ceremonial settings until the end of the Qalāwūnid sultanate (see e.g. al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭat*, IV: 228).

²⁴Ibn Hajar, *Inbā’ al-ghumr bi abnā’ al-‘umr*, ed. M. Abd al-Mu‘īd Khān, volumes I–IX (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1986), I: 231; similar episodes in al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1: 309; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, III: 543.

M. Muw‘ad & M. Salim Muḥammad, volumes I-VI (Beirut-Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1998), I: 720–723; al-Kutubī, *‘Uyūn al-Tawārīkh*, Ms. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library), Add. 2923 (9), fol. 58v; al-Husaynī, *Dhayl al-‘Ibar fī Khabar man Ghabar*, ed. M.S. Basyuni Zaghlul, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiya, 1985), p. 124; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa l-Qāhira*, ed. I.A. Tarkhan, volumes I-XVI (Cairo: al-Hay‘a al-Miṣriya al-‘Āmma Li-l-Kitāb, 1963–1972), X: 18; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Tārīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba*, ed. A. Darwich [Publications de l’Institut Français de Damas, volumes 101, 145, 146] (Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1977–1994), II: 255)
→ about 19 at time of accession (Dhū l-Hijja 741/June 1341)

2. al-Malik al-Ashraf Kuçuk b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 746/1345, r. 742/1341–1342)

* about 5 at time of accession (Ṣafar 742/August 1341) (al-Ṣafadī, 4: 148–149; al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma‘rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, eds. M.M. Ziadah & S.A. Ashur, volumes I-IV (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1956–1973), II/3: 571; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, 2: 472)

* about 5 according to some, almost 7 according to others, at time of accession (Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 10: 21)

* 6 years and 4 months at time of accession (Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, 2: 207)

* about 8 at time of accession (Ibn al-Wardī, *Tatimmat al-Mukhtaṣar fī akhbār al-bashar*, in al-Malik al-Mu‘ayyad Abū l-Fidā’, *Tārīkh Abū l-Fidā’ al-musammā al-Mukhtaṣar fī akhbār al-bashar*, ed. M. Dayyub, volumes I-II (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiya, 1997), II: 496; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Tadhkirat al-Nabīh fī ayyām al-Manṣūr wa banīh*, ed. M.M. Amin, volumes I-III (Cairo: al-Hay‘a al-Miṣriya al-‘Āmma Li-l-Kitāb, 1976–1986), III: 26; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawwā‘iz wa l-‘itibār bi dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa l-Āthār*, s.e., volumes I-IV (Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, 1996), III: 389; Ibn al-Shihna, *Rawḍat al-Manāẓir fī ‘ilm al-awwāl wa l-awākhir*, Ms. (London: British Library), Oriental and India Office Collection or. 1618, fol. 129v)

* 12 when he died (746/1345) (Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 10: 49, 122)

* about 10 at time of accession (al-‘Aynī, *Iqd al-ḥumān fī Tārīkh ahl al-zamān*, Ms. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub), 1584 *tārīkh*, p. 51)

→ between 5 and 8 at time of accession (Ṣafar 742/August 1341)

3. al-Malik al-Nāṣir Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 745/1344; r. 742–743/1342)

* 26 when he died (Rabī‘ I 745/July 1344) (Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, 2: 423)

→ about 24 at time of accession (Shawwāl 742/March 1342)

4. al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā‘īl b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 746/1345; r. 743–746/1342–1345)

* about 20 when he died (Rabī‘ I 746/July 1345) (Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, 2: 457)

- * 17 at time of accession (Muḥarram 743/June 1342) (al-Ḥusaynī, 128; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, 2: 299)
→ 17 at time of accession (Muḥarram 743/June 1342)
- 5. al-Malik al-Kāmil Shaʿbān b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 747/1346; r. 746–747/1345–1346)
 - * about 20 when he died (Jumādā II 747/September 1346) (Ibn Ḥabīb, 3: 90; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, 2: 490)
 - about 19 at time of accession (Rabīʿ II 746/August 1345)
- 6. al-Malik al-Muzaffar Ḥājji b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 748/1347; r. 747–748/1346–1347)
 - * born in 732/1332 (al-Ṣafadī, 2: 176–180; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar al-Kāmina fī aʿyān al-mīʾa al-thāmina*, ed. H. al-Nadawi, volumes I–IV (Beirut: Dār al-Jayl, 1993), II: 3–5)
 - * 15 at time of accession (Jumādā II 747/September 1346) (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II/3: 714)
 - * 20 when he died (Ramaḍān 748/December 1347) (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II/3: 744)
 - about 15 at time of accession (Jumādā II 747/September 1346)
- 7. & 9. al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 762/1361; r. 748–752/1347–1351, 755–762/1354–1361)
 - * 20 when he died (Jumādā I 762/March 1361 (al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 4: 118–120; al-ʿAynī, 127; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, 3: 191), but virtually impossible since his father died in Dhū l-Ḥijja 741/June 1341 and Ṣāliḥ (see no. 8) is said to have been his younger brother
 - * 11 at time of first accession (Ramaḍān 748/December 1347) (al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 3: 390; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II/3: 745; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 10: 187)
 - * 13 at time of first accession (al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 4: 118; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, 2: 509)
 - * 14 at time of first accession (al-ʿAynī, 83)
 - * 30 when he died (Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Manhal al-Sāfi wa l-Mustawfi baʿda al-wāfi*, ed. M.M. Amin, volumes I–(X) (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣrīya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1986–[2002]), V: 132)
 - about 11 at time of first accession (Ramaḍān 748/December 1347), about 18 at time of second accession (Shawwāl 755/October 1354)
- 8. al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ṣāliḥ b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 762/1360; r. 752–755/1351–1354)
 - * born ca. 737/1336–1337 (Ibn Ḥabīb, 3: 241)
 - * born Rabīʿ I 738/September 1337 (Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, 3: 192)
 - * 14 at time of accession (Jumādā I 752/August 1351) (Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa l-Nihāya*, s.e., volumes I–XIV (Beirut: Maktabat al-Māʿarif, 1990), XIV: 240; al-Kutubī, 122; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, 3: 20)
 - 14 at time of accession (Jumādā I 752/August 1351)

10. al-Malik al-Mansūr Muhammad b. Hājji b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 801/1398; r. 762–764/1361–1363)

- * 12, 14 or 16 at time of accession (Jumādā I 762/March 1361) (Ibn Kathīr, 14: 278)
- * ca. 14 at time of accession (al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭat*, 3: 390; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1: 64)
- * 14, or 16 at time of accession (Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11: 3)
- * 16 at time of accession (al-‘Aynī, 122)
- about 14 at time of accession (Jumādā I 762/March 1361)

11. al-Malik al-Ashraf Sha‘bān b. Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 778/1377; r. 764–778/1363–1377)

- * born in 754/1353 (Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Ḥawthar al-Thamīn fī siyar al-Khulafā wa-l-mulūk wa-l-salātīn*, ed. S. ‘Abd al-Fattah ‘Ashur, (Mecca: Umm al-Qura University, 1982), pp. 346–347; Ibn al-‘Irāqī, *al-Dhayl ‘alā al-‘Ibar fī Khabar man Ghabar*, ed. S.M. ‘Abbas, volumes I–III (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1989), II: 448; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II/3: 903; III/1: 282; al-‘Aynī, 214)
- * 10 at time of accession (Sha‘bān 764/May 1363) (Ibn Kathīr, 14: 302, 305, 313; Ibn Duqmāq, *Nuzhat al-Anām fī tārikh al-Islām*, Ms. (Oxford: Bodleian), Ms. Marshall 36, fol. 113); al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1: 83; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11: 24; Ibn Qādī Shuhba, 3: 220
- * 24 when he died (Dhū l-Qa‘da 778/March 1377) (Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Ḥawthar al-Thamīn*, 346; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1: 282; Ibn Hajar, *Inbā al-Ghumr*, 1: 210; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11: 83; Ibn Qādī Shuhba, 3: 525)
- 10 at time of accession (Sha‘bān 764/May 1363)

12. al-Malik al-Mansūr ‘Alī b. Sha‘bān b. Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 783/1381; r. 778–783/1377–1381)

- * born in Ramaḍān 771/April 1370 (Ibn Qādī Shuhba, 1: 74)
- * about 7 at time of accession (Dhū l-Qa‘da 778/March 1377) (al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭat*, III, p. 391; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11: 149)
- * about 8 at time of accession (Ibn Hajar, *Inbā al-Ghumr*, 1: 195)
- * about 12 when he died (Safar 783/May 1381) (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III/1: 412; al-‘Aynī, 264; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 11: 188)
- about 7 at time of accession (Dhū l-Qa‘da 778/March 1377)

13. al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Hājji b. Sha‘bān b. Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 814/1412; r. 783–784/1381–1382, 791–792/1389–1390)

- * born in Dhū l-Qa‘da 776/April 1375 (Ibn Qādī Shuhba, 1: 58)
- * 6 years and 4 months at time of accession (Safar 783/May 1381) (Ibn Qādī Shuhba, 1: 58)
- 6 at time of accession (Safar 783/May 1381)