

OTTOMAN'S PRESENCE IN EGYPT (923/1517) AND ITS POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS: AN OVERVIEW

KAMARUZAMAN YUSOFF

Relations between the Ottoman empire and the Mamluk sultanate of Egypt can be traced back to the first reign of Murad II when he sent his felicitations to al-Ashraf Barsbay when the latter was proclaimed as the new Mamluk sultan in 825/1423.¹ Later, when Mehmet al-Fatih captured Constantinople in 857/1453, the Egyptians welcomed the news with great festivities.² However, this cordiality did not endure and during the second half of the fifteenth century, the Ottomans, under the leadership of Mehmet II, and the Mamluks became involved in a dispute regarding a buffer state, Dhu'l-Qadr³ with its capital Elbistan.⁴ In 870/1465, the ruler of Dhu'l-Qadr, Arslan Bey, (858/1454-870/1465) was murdered, leaving his two brothers, Budaq and Shahsuwar,⁵ to compete for power. The struggle finally resulted in the former succeeding to the throne with the help of the Mamluk sultan, Khushqadam.

In Rabi' II 870/December 1465, Shahsuwar, aided by Mehmet II who was married to a princess of Dhu'l-Qadr, drove Budaq out of power. The victorious Shahsuwar, no longer inclined to be dependent on Mehmet and his allies, took measures to free himself from Ottoman protection. Not very long after that, in 877/1472, Qa'itbay captured Shahsuwar in Cairo and he was executed. Budaq was then sent to run the state as a Mamluk vassal. For a few years, peace reigned in the area. In 884/1479, Mehmet II intervened in the internal affairs of Dhu'l-Qadr when he chose to establish another leader, 'Ala' al-Daula, on the throne.⁶

When Mehmet II died in 886/1481, two princes, Bayazid and Jem, contended for power. Jem was defeated in the battle of Yeni Shehir in Rabi' II 886/June 1481 and took refuge in Syria and then Egypt where he was warmly welcomed by Sultan Qa'itbay. The Mamluk sultan's action aggravated further the already deteriorating relations⁸ between the Ottomans and the Mamluks. In 887/1482 and 897/1491, Bayazid II went to war with the Mamluks but he was defeated.⁹

During the early reign of Qansuh al-Ghuri (Shawwal 906/April 1501-Dhu'l-hijja 922/August 1517), the Mamluk state was threatened by three different powers, the Portuguese from the sea,¹⁰ Shah Isma'il, (907/1501-930/1524) the Safavid ruler of Persia, and Sultan Bayazid II from the north. The Mamluk sultan then contrived to establish better relations with Bayazid II which apparently was reciprocated when, in Shawwal 916/January 1511,¹¹ the Ottoman ruler sent naval artillery to Egypt to fight the Portuguese. Nevertheless, this alliance took a different turn when Selim I¹² (918/1512-926/1520) succeeded to the throne and launched a new round

of hostilities not only with the Mamluks but with Persia and all its neighbouring areas. As a shrewd leader, Selim I was always cautious not to appear to start a war without provocation. Under the pretext of pursuing Murad, the son of his rival brother, Ahmad,¹³ Selim attacked Persia. Thereafter, a large number of his own Shi'i subjects were executed by Selim.

During the reign of Selim, the Mamluk ruler sent his ambassador to Istanbul. In view of the emergence of Shah Isma'il of Persia as an imminent threat to both governments, it was perhaps prudent to joint forces to counter his attacks. An aspect of the shah's belligerent stance towards the Sunni powers, the Ottomans and the Mamluks, was his public espousal of the Twelver Shiite *madhhab*.¹⁴ The shah began his aggression in the first decade or so of the sixteenth century by conquering most of Kurdistan and Iraq. In 913/1507, he made further inroads when his army fought 'Ala' al-Daula of Dhu'l-Qadr¹⁵, the buffer state to which both the Ottomans and the Mamluks were staking a claim.

In Safar 920/April 1514, Selim started a new campaign against the shah, probably after an overture by the Mamluks. In August, the two armies clashed on a plain in the battle of Chaldiran.¹⁶ Shah Isma'il was defeated by the Ottomans. This defeat was a turning point for the Persians. Shah Isma'il, desperately in need of new allies, sent officers to Qansuh, 'Ala' al-Daula and some European powers,¹⁷ signed an agreement not to maintain any diplomatic relations with the Ottomans and to help to crush the Ottomans. In retaliation, Selim I acted against those who were in alliance with the Shah. His first step was to send his army to Dhu'l-Qadr. In Rabi' I 921/June 1515, 'Ala' al-Daula of Dhu'l-Qadr was defeated and the state was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire.¹⁸ When Qansuh heard this news, he promptly broke his treaty with Persia and sent his ambassador to Selim I in 921/1515.

In Jumada I 922/June 1516, Sultan Selim I left for a new campaign in southern Anatolia while his commander-in-chief, Sinan Pasha, waited until Rabi' II/ May 1516 for him with reinforcements in Elbistan.¹⁹ Qansuh did not move when he knew of Selim's advance towards Persia. He started to move his army towards Syria²⁰ but, because of lack of sufficient funds and low morale among the soldiers, the Mamluk army could only set forth two weeks behind schedule. By that time, however, the Turks had made further advances close to the border. An Ottoman ambassador²¹ was sent to meet the sultan to inform him that Ala' al-Daula had been killed as a rebel and to give the sultan an ultimatum in order to improve the relations between them. On the other hand, Qansuh received different information on what was going on from his own *amir*, Inal Bey, who was sent to investigate Selim's movements. Qansuh not only rejected Selim's proposals but also demanded that Selim hand Dhu'l-Qadr back to the son of 'Ala' al-Daula.²² He then condemned the ambassador to prison. Thereafter, Selim I joined Sinan Pasha's army in Elbistan on 22 Jumada II/23 July because originally Selim and his army were actually going to attack Persia and not Egypt. Two days later, an emissary was sent to Selim in Elbistan

to request that he should not continue the war against Persia.

During this critical period, Selim heard that the sultan had moved his army towards Aleppo. The soldiers of Aleppo, led by Khair Bey, refused to fight the Ottomans but it was too late to retreat. On 24 Rajab 922/24 August 1517, the Mamluk and Ottoman armies fought against each other in the battle of Marj al-Dabiq, near Aleppo. The Egyptians were completely routed in this short battle.²³ Then Selim entered Aleppo without bloodshed.²⁴ After about three weeks, Selim continued his campaign to Damascus. After two months of encampment in Damascus, news spread of the enthronement of a new Mamluk sultan, Tuman Bey (Ramadan 922/October 1516-Rabi' I 923/September 1517).²⁵ Envoys were sent to Cairo to offer peace but this initiative failed.²⁶ By the end of October, another clash between the two armies took place near Gaza. Janberdi al-Ghazali who led the Mamluk forces was routed.

In Muharram 923/January 1517, Tuman Bey was dealt the final blow when the Egyptian army suffered a humiliating defeat at Ridaniyya near Cairo.²⁷ The sources suggest that Janberdi al-Ghazali's treachery sped up the process when he conspired with Khair Bey to give way to the Ottomans. Ultimately, Tuman Bey was surrendered by his Bedouin allies. It was again, through the influence of Khair Bey and other *amirs*, that Tuman Bey, the last Mamluk sultan, was then executed.²⁸ Altogether, Selim I stayed in Cairo for four months before he left for Damascus in Sha'ban 923/September 1517, bringing with him the last Abbasid caliph, al-Mutawakkil. At this juncture, Sharif Barakat Musa sent his son, Nami, to submit his oath of allegiance to Sultan Selim.²⁹ Consequently, the *sharif's* power over al-Haramain was reconfirmed by the Ottomans. Thus Egypt became part of the Ottoman empire.

During the early stages of Ottoman control, many of the existing administrative aspects of this new Ottoman province were retained. Khair Bey and al-Ghazali³⁰ who were stationed in Cairo and Damascus respectively played key roles in the continuity of the Mamluk pattern of administration. Although there were some attempts by the *mamluks* to break free from Ottoman control, such as the attempt by al-Ghazali to gain independence in Syria in 925/1520³¹ and an uprising by Janim and Inal in Egypt during the rule of Mustafa Pasha (968/1560-61-971/163-64, these undertakings were easily suppressed.

Eight years later, probably feeling that it was the right time to regulate the administrative system of Ottoman Egypt, Sultan Sulaiman the lawgiver sent his grand vizier, Ibrahim Pasha, to promulgate the *Kanun nama*³² for Egypt in 931/1525. Egypt was then divided into several provinces. Each of them was governed by a provincial governor called *kashif*.

At this point, some new developments took place in the financial system of the state. The position of *al-muqatta'*, whose duty had been to be in charge of the *iqta'* system during Mamluk times, was gradually abolished and was replaced by tax collectors (*multazims*), those who collect taxes (*iltizam*) from the subjects.³³

Ottomans as well as *mamluk* grandees were eligible for this new status.

The Ottoman presence in Egypt brought about changes in the military structure as well as in the social strata of society. Selim I, before his departure, left behind some garrison troops: two groups of infantry, i.e., the Janissaries (*mustahfizan*) and 'Azaban (bachelors) and two groups of cavalries, i.e., the *Gonüllüyan* (volunteers) and *Tüfengjiyan* (riflemen). In 930/1524, two more cavalry corps were stationed in Egypt; *Çerakisa*³⁴ (Circassians) and *Çavuşhan* (messengers). Later on, the governor's band of body guards, the *Mutaffariqa*, was added to other forces in Cairo.³⁵ The last three groups of the army were called the *sipahis*.

Selim who had a relatively smooth ride in gaining advantage over vast parts of the Arab lands as far as Yemen and the Hijaz chose to recognise Banu 'Umar, a fraction of *Hawwara*³⁶, a Berber tribe, as the ruling clan in Upper Egypt.³⁷ This practice was upheld by the next-sultan-in-line, Sulaiman, when he excluded Upper Egypt, in his *Kanun nama*, from the list of districts administered by provincial governors. However, in 983-4/1576, the Bedouin lost their political control and were then put under direct rule of an appointed governor.³⁸ Among the first governors to venture into this remote area of the province was Ibrahim Pasha (991/1583-992/1584). It was recorded that there he mined emeralds and brought back some of them to Cairo.³⁹ This Berber tribe did not, however, accept their subjugation without a fight and were constantly out to defy the authority of their masters.

Ottoman rule in the Arab lands was also challenged by other Arabs and Bedouins in many parts of Egypt such as on the Syrian border and in the north-east of Egypt. These groups repeatedly caused trouble for the government. Although they did not start their activities until towards the end of the sixteenth century,⁴⁰ governors and officials of Ottoman Egypt experienced constant challenge from them. This series of disturbances cost a lot of money and effort for the government and it became worse as such rebellious activities became more frequent in the seventeenth century when the governors were beginning to lose control of the government.

Early indications of the weakening control of the governors in Egypt began when certain factions in the army started their rebellion against the government. The first recorded such incident happened in 994/1586. Three years later, successive attacks displayed more aggression when a clash claimed some casualties, among them, the governor's officials.⁴¹ The worst incidents occurred when, in the early seventeenth century, governors became victims of the rebels.

In conclusion, the Ottoman occupation of Egypt and Syria changed the political map of the Islamic world. Governors were sent to Cairo from time to time to enforce Ottoman rule in Egypt. Istanbul became the nucleus of the Muslim world for more than three hundred years. As was mentioned above, new developments ensued in this new province during the early period of the Ottoman subjugation of Egypt. After a short spell of peace and harmony in Ottoman Egypt, governors and officials again, as expected, faced serious challenges from different components of the society. As a result, this inevitably affected the smooth running of the government.

¹Cf. Ahmad Haran, *Bilad al-Sham fi 'alaqa al-Mamalik wa 'l-'Uthmaniyyin in al-Mu'tamar al-dauli li Tarikh bilad al-Sham*, Amman, 1974, p. 419.

²Ibn Iyas mentions that Sultan Inal sent his ambassador to congratulate the Ottomans. cf., Ibn Iyas, *Badai' al-zuhur fi waqai 'al-duhur*: Wiesbaden, 1972. vol. II, p. 316; Muhammad Anis, *al-Daula al-'Uthmaniyya wa 'l-sharq al-'Arabi*, Cairo, n.d, p. 109.

³EI(2), art. *Dhu'l-Kadr*, vol. ii, pp. 239-40; cf., also 'Abd al-Karim Rafiq, *al-Sham wa Misr min al-fath al-'Uthmani*, Damascus, 1968, pp. 44-5.

⁴EI(2), art. *Elbistan*, p. 693.

⁵Ibn Iyas, *op.cit.*, p. 435; Selahettin Tansel, *Fatih Sultan Mehmet'in*, Ankara, 1953, pp. 332-3; V.J. Parry, 'The Reigns of Bayazid II and Selim I, 1881-1520' in M.A. Cook (ed.), *A History of The Ottoman Empire to 1730*, Cambridge, 1976., p. 58-9.

⁶cf., Rafiq, *op.cit.*, p. 45; Tansel, *op.cit.*, p. 340; Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

⁷EI(2), art. *Bayazid II*, p. 1119; Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 56; S. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Cambridge, 1976, p. 71.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 71; Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 60; EI(2), art; *Djem*, pp. 529-31. This hostility is discussed by Ahmad Darraj in greater detail. cf. Darraj, 'Jem sultan wal dibilumassiyya al-dauliyya, in *al-Majalla al-tarikhiyya al-Misriyya*, VIII/1959, pp. 201-42; Abd Malik b. Husain al-'Isami al-Makki, *Samt al-nujum al-'awali fi anba' al-awali wa 'l-Tawali*, vol. iv. Egypt., 1380 A.H. p. 68; M. Adnan Bakhit, *The Ottoman Province of Damascus in the Sixteenth Century*, Beirut. 1982, p. 1; A.H. Lybyer, "The Ottoman Turks and the Routes of Oriental Trade", *The English Historical Review*, vol. 30, October 1915, p. 583.

⁹EI(2), art. *Bayazid II.*, p. 1119. cf., also G.W.F. Stripling, *The Ottoman Turks and the Arabs 1511-74*, Urbana, 1942, p. 38; Muhammad Anis, *op.cit.*, p. 109; Rafiq, *op.cit.*, p. 47; Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 60; Ottoman Empire, p. 71; Lybyer, *op.cit.*, p. 583.

¹⁰cf., Stripling, *op.cit.*, pp. 29-33. On the naval wars between the Portuguese and the Ottomans, cf., A.C. Hess, 'The Ottoman Conquest of Egypt (1517) and the Beginning of the sixteenth Century World War', *IJMES*, vol. iv, 1973, pp. 55-76. Salih Ozbaran, "The Ottomans in Confrontation with the Portuguese in the Red Sea after the Conquest of Egypt in 1517", *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations*, 1986, pp. 207-14; R.B. Sergeant, *The Portuguese off the South Arabian Coast*, Oxford, 1963, pp. 13-21.

¹¹Ibn Iyas, *op.cit.*, vol. IV. p. 201; EI(2), art; *Qansawh al-Ghawri*, p. 552. cf; Stripling, *op.cit.*, p. 3; cf., Ahmad Harran, *op.cit.*, p. 418; Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

¹²EI(1), art; *Selim I*, pp. 214-7.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 214.

¹⁴Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁵EI(2), art; *Dhul Qadr*, p. 240; Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁶Holt, *Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 1516-1922*, London, 1966, p. 36. Henceforth called Egypt. Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

¹⁷EI(2), art; *Isma'il I*, p. 186; Stripling, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁸Egypt, p. 37; Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

¹⁹cf., EI(2), art; *Selim I*, p. 215.

²⁰Kramers argues that Qansuhs intention was to support Shah 'Isma'il who was about to be ambushed by Selim I. cf., EI(1), art; *Selim I*, p. 215; Egypt, p. 37.

²¹Ibn Zunbul, *Tarikh Ibn Zunbul*, Cairo, 1861, p. 10; Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 72; Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²²Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

²³W.M. Muir, *The Mameluke Dynasty of Egypt*, London, 1896, p. 199; cf., 'Abd Malik al-Makki, *op.cit.*, p. 52; Rafiq, *op.cit.*, p. 99; Ibn Zunbul, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-5; Ahmad Zaini Dahlan, *al-Futuh al-Islamiyya*, Cairo 1905, vol. II., p. 90; Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 74; Egypt, p. 38.

²⁴Ibn Iyas, *An Account of the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt in 922/1516*, (translated by W.H. Salmon, London, 1921. p. 46; Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 75; Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²⁵EI(1), art. *Tumanbai II*, pp. 836-7.

²⁶Muir, *op.cit.*, p. 203; Ibn Zunbul, *op.cit.*, p. 27; Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

²⁷Muir, *op.cit.*, 205; E(1), art. *Tumanbai II*, p. 837, art. *Misr*, p. 177.

²⁸EI(1), art: Selim I, p. 215, *Tumanbai II*, p. 837; Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

²⁹Zaini Dahlan, *op.cit.*, p. 91-2; Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 84; Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

³⁰al-Ghazali was established by Sultan Selim as the new governor in Safar 924/February 1518. cf. Bakhit, *op.cit.*, p. 19; cf. EI(2), art. *al-Ghazali*, p. 1042; Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 43. cf. Ibn Juma'ah, *al-bashat wal-qudat fi Dimashq and al-Qari, al-wuzara alladhina hakamu Dimashq in Munajjid, S. wulat Dimashq fi 'ahd al-Uthmani li Ibn Juma'ah wa Ibn al-Qarri*, Damascus, 1949, pp. 2. and 73.

³¹EI(2), art. *al-Ghazali*, p. 1042; Cook, *op.cit.*, p. 80; Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 43; Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

³²Anon, Kanun name Sultan Selim Khan fi Misr al-Qahira, *MS. Ancien Fonds Turc*. 82. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. Although this *qanun* bore the name of Sultan Selim, it was actually during the reign of Sultan Sulaiman that this *qanun* was promulgated. cf., Egypt, p. 51; EI(2), art. *Misr*, p. 177; A.H. Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the time of Suleiman the Magnificent*, London, 1913, pp. 159-69. Stripling has translated some of these laws from French. cf. Stripling, *op.cit.*, pp. 71-75. Kanun name is a general term used to reorganise newly conquered lands. cf. H. Inalcik (ed.), *The Ottoman Empire: Conquest, Organisation and Economy*, London, 1978, pp. (I) 103-128, (VII), pp. 104-138.

³³EI(2), Art. *Misr*, p. 177; cf. also Hasan Saab, *The Arab Federalists of the Ottoman Empire*: Amsterdam, 1958, p. 111; Galal H. El-Nahal, *The Judicial Administration of Ottoman Egypt in the seventeenth Century*, Chicago, 1979, p. 7; S. Shaw, *The Financial and Administrative Organisation and Development of Ottoman Egypt, 1517-1798*, Princeton, 1962, p. 31. EI(2), art. *Misr*. p. 177; H.A.R. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, London, 1950, pp. 259-61.

³⁴All Mamluk grandees were organised into this separate regiment. cf. Ahmad al-Damurdashi, *al-Damurdashis chronicle of Egypt* (translated and annotated by G. Crecelius and 'Abd alWahhabBakr), Leiden, 1991. vol. II, p. 1. The Mamluks continued to survive in this new administration. cf. D. Pipes, "Mamluk Survivals in the Ottoman Egypt", *Journal of Turkish Studies*, vol. 7. 1983, pp. 329-331.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 177. The Kanun name added another group. cf., Kanun name, fols 17b-22a; Shaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-94. EI(2), art. *Misr*, p. 177. Winter, *op.cit.*, p. 37; cf. Jurji Zaidan, *Tarikh Misr al-Hadith*, vol. 2, Cairo, 1911, pp. 11-12.

³⁶On Hawwara in Egypt, cf. EI(2), art; *Hawwara*, pp. 299-300.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 299. Holt, "Egyptian Political History from 1517-1798", dalam P.M. Holt (ed.), *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt*, Oxford, 1968, p. 81.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Anon., *Paris Fragment*, Bibliotheque Nationale, MS. arabe. 1855. fol. 35a. Henceforth called *Paris*.

⁴⁰The first recorded uprisings was during the time of Ahmad Pasha (999/1591-1003/1594-5), when a group of Bedouin, Ghazzala, started their campaign. *Paris*. fol. 36a.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, fol. 35b; P.M. Holt (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 82.