

The Arabs

A History

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From Cairo to Istanbul

The hot summer sun beat down upon al-Ashraf Qansuh al-Ghawri, forty-ninth sultan of the Mamluk dynasty, as he reviewed his troops for battle. Since the founding of the dynasty in 1250, the Mamluks had ruled over the oldest and most powerful Islamic state of its day. The Cairo-based empire spanned Egypt, Syria, and Arabia. Qansuh, a man in his seventies, had ruled the empire for fifteen years. He was now in Marj Dabiq, a field outside the Syrian city of Aleppo, at the northernmost limits of his empire, to confront the greatest danger the Mamluks had ever faced. He would fail, and his failure would set in motion the demise of his empire, paving the way for the conquest of the Arab lands by the Ottoman Turks. The date was August 24, 1516.

Qansuh wore a light turban to protect his head from the burning sun of the Syrian desert. He wore a regal blue mantle over his shoulders, on which he rested a battle axe, as he rode his Arabian charger to review his forces. When a Mamluk sultan went to war, he personally led the troops in battle and took most of his government with him. It was as if an American president took half his cabinet, leaders of both houses of Congress, Supreme Court justices, and a synod of bishops and rabbis, all dressed for battle alongside the officers and soldiers.

The commanders of the Mamluk army and the four chief justices stood beneath the sultan's red banner. To their right stood the spiritual head of the empire, the caliph al-Mutawakkil III, under his own banner. He too was dressed in a light turban and mantle, with a battle axe resting on his shoulder. Qansuh was surrounded by forty descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, who wore copies of the Qur'an enveloped in yellow silk cases wrapped around their heads. The descendants were joined by the leaders of the mystical Sufi orders under green, red, and black banners.

Qansuh and his retinue would have been impressed and reassured by the spectacle of 20,000 Mamluk soldiers massed in the plains around them. The Mamluks—the word in Arabic means “one possessed” or “slave”—were a caste of elite slave soldiers. Young men were brought from Christian lands in the Eurasian steppe and the Caucasus to Cairo, where they were converted to Islam and trained in the martial arts. Separated from their families and homelands, they owed their total loyalty to their masters—both those who physically owned them and those who taught them. Trained to the highest standard in warfare and indoctrinated into total devotion to religion and state, the mature Mamluk was then given his freedom and entered the ranks of the ruling elite. They were the ultimate warriors in hand-to-hand combat and had overpowered the greatest armies of the Middle Ages: in 1249 the Mamluks defeated the Crusader army of the French king Louis IX, in 1260 they drove the Mongol hordes out of Arab lands, and in 1291 they expelled the last of the Crusaders from Islamic lands.

The Mamluk army was a magnificent sight. Its warriors wore silk robes of brilliant colors, their helmets and armor were of the highest craftsmanship, and their weapons were made of hardened steel inlaid with gold. The show of finery was part of an ethos of chivalry and a mark of confidence of men who expected to carry the day.

Facing the Mamluks across the battlefield were the seasoned veterans of the Ottoman sultan. The Ottoman Empire had emerged at the end of the thirteenth century as a minor Turkish Muslim principality engaged in holy war against the Christian Byzantine Empire in Anatolia (the Asian lands of modern Turkey). Over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Ottomans had integrated the other Turkish principalities and conquered Byzantine territory in both Anatolia and the Balkans. In 1453 the seventh Ottoman sultan, Mehmed II, succeeded where all previous Muslim attempts had failed when he seized Constantinople and completed the conquest of the Byzantine Empire. Henceforth Mehmed II would be known as “the Conqueror.” Constantinople, renamed Istanbul, became the Ottoman capital. Mehmed II’s successors proved no less ambitious in expanding the territorial reach of their empire. On this day in 1516, Qansuh was about to engage in battle with the ninth Ottoman sultan, Selim I (r. 1512–1520), nicknamed “the Grim.”

Paradoxically, Qansuh had hoped to avoid going to war by making a show of strength on his northern frontier. The Ottomans were engaged in hostilities with the Persian Safavid Empire. Ruling in what is now modern Iran, the Safavids spoke Turkish like the Ottomans and were probably of Kurdish ethnic origins. Their charismatic leader, Shah Ismail (r. 1501–1524), had decreed Shiite Islam the official religion of his state, which put him on an ideological collision course with the Sunni Ottoman Empire.¹ The Ottomans and Safavids had fought over Eastern Anatolia in 1514–1515, and the Ottomans had emerged victorious. The Safavids urgently sought an alliance with the Mamluks to contain the Ottoman threat. Qansuh had no particular

sympathy for the Safavids, but he wanted to preserve the balance of power in the region and hoped that a strong Mamluk military presence in northern Syria would confine Ottoman ambitions to Anatolia, leaving Persia to the Safavids and the Arab world to the Mamluks. Instead, the Mamluk deployment posed a strategic threat to the Ottoman flank. Rather than run the risk of a two-front war, the Ottoman sultan suspended hostilities with the Safavids to deal with the Mamluks.

The Mamluks fielded a great army, but the Ottoman force was greater by far. Its disciplined ranks of cavalry and infantry outnumbered the Mamluks by as much as three to one. Contemporary chroniclers estimated Selim’s army to number 60,000 men in all. The Ottomans also enjoyed a significant technological advantage over their adversaries. Whereas the Mamluks were an old-fashioned army that placed much emphasis on individual swordsmanship, the Ottomans fielded a modern gunpowder infantry armed with muskets. The Mamluks upheld medieval military values while the Ottomans represented the modern face of sixteenth-century warfare. Battle-hardened soldiers with extensive combat experience, the Ottomans were more interested in the spoils of victory than in gaining personal honor through hand-to-hand combat.

As the two armies engaged in battle at Marj Dabiq, Ottoman firearms decimated the ranks of the Mamluk knights. The Mamluk right wing crumbled under the Ottoman offensive, and the left wing took flight. The commander of the left wing was the governor of the city of Aleppo, a Mamluk named Khair Bey who, it transpired, had been in league with the Ottomans before the battle and had transferred his allegiance to Selim the Grim. Khair Bey’s treachery delivered victory to the Ottomans shortly after the start of battle.

The Mamluk sultan, Qansuh al-Ghawri, watched in horror as his army collapsed around him. The dust on the battlefield was so thick that the two armies could hardly see each other. Qansuh turned to his religious advisors and urged them to pray for a victory he no longer believed his soldiers could deliver. One of the Mamluk commanders, recognizing the hopelessness of the situation, took down the sultan’s banner, folded it, and turned to Qansuh, saying: “Our master the Sultan, the Ottomans have defeated us. Save yourself and take refuge in Aleppo.” As the truth of his officer’s words sunk in, the sultan suffered a stroke that left him half paralyzed. When he tried to mount his horse, Qansuh fell and died on the spot. Abandoned by his fleeing retinue, the sultan’s body was never recovered. It was as though the earth had opened and swallowed the fallen Mamluk’s body whole.

As the dust of battle settled, the full horror of the carnage became apparent. “It was a time to turn an infant’s hair white, and to melt iron in its fury,” the Mamluk chronicler Ibn Iyas reflected. The battlefield was littered with dead and dying men and horses whose groans were cut short by the victorious Ottomans in their eagerness

to rob their fallen adversaries. They left behind "headless bodies, and faces covered with dust and grown hideous" to be devoured by crows and wild dogs.² It was an unprecedented defeat for the Mamluks, and a blow from which their empire would never recover.

Victory at Marj Dabiq left the Ottomans masters of Syria. Selim the Grim entered Aleppo unopposed and went on to occupy Damascus without a fight. News of the defeat reached Cairo on September 14, some three weeks after the battle. The surviving Mamluk commanders gathered in Cairo to elect a new sultan. They chose Qansuh's deputy, al-Ashraf Tumanbay, as his successor. Tumanbay was to be the last Mamluk sultan, his reign lasting only three and a half months.

Selim the Grim wrote Tumanbay from Damascus, offering him two options: to surrender, and rule over Egypt as a vassal of the Ottomans, or to resist and face total annihilation. Tumanbay wept with terror when he read Selim's letter, for surrender was not an option. Fear began to grip the Mamluk sultan's soldiers and subjects alike. In a bid to preserve discipline, Tumanbay issued a proclamation forbidding the sale of wine, beer, or hashish, under penalty of death. However, the chroniclers claim, the anxious inhabitants of Cairo paid no attention to his orders and sought relief from the imminent threat of invasion in drugs and alcohol.³ When news reached Cairo of the conquest of the coastal town of Gaza, where the Ottomans had put to death 1,000 townspeople, the smell of fear swept through the city. In January 1517, the Ottoman army entered Egypt, heading for the Mamluk capital.

When Selim reached the northern outskirts of Cairo on January 22, Tumanbay's soldiers showed little enthusiasm for the fight. Many troops had failed to report for duty. Town criers were sent through the streets of Cairo threatening to hang any deserters before their own front doors. By such means Tumanbay assembled all the soldiers he could muster—a force of some 20,000 horsemen, infantry, and Bedouin irregulars. Learning from the experience of Marj Dabiq, Tumanbay dispensed with the chivalric prohibition on firearms and armed a large number of his soldiers with muskets. He also lined up 100 wagons bearing light cannon to confront the attackers. The men and women of Cairo came to the battlefield to cheer on the army and to offer prayers for their success. Unpaid, lacking in confidence, and largely unreliable, the Mamluk army approached the day of battle as a group of men fighting for their own survival rather than victory.

The battle took place on January 23, 1517, "a tremendous engagement," wrote Ibn Iyas, "the mere mention of which is enough to strike terror into the hearts of men and its horrors to unhinge their reason." The drums beat for battle, and the Mamluk cavalry mounted their horses and set off across the field. They ran into a much larger Ottoman force that "came on like locusts." Ibn Iyas claimed that the

ensuing battle was yet worse than the earlier defeat at Marj Dabiq, the Turks "coming up from every direction like clouds," the "noise of their musketry deafening, and their attack furious." Within one hour the Mamluk defenders had suffered heavy casualties and were in full retreat. Tumanbay fought on longer than most of his commanders before he too retreated from the battle, vowing to fight again another day.⁴

The victorious Ottoman troops stormed Cairo and pillaged the city for three days. The helpless civilian population, left to the mercy of the invading army, could do nothing but watch as their homes and possessions were plundered. The only refuge against the violence of the Ottoman soldiers was the Ottoman sultan himself, and the people of Cairo bent over backward to honor their new master. The Friday prayers in mosques, which had traditionally been recited in the name of the Mamluk sultan, were now delivered in Sultan Selim's honor, one of the traditional means of acknowledging sovereignty. "God save the Sultan," the preachers intoned, "son of the Sultan, King of the two continents and the two seas; conqueror of the two armies, Sultan of the two Iraqs, servant of the two sacred cities, the victorious King Selim Shah. O Lord of both worlds, grant that he may ever be victorious." Selim the Grim responded to Cairo's submission and instructed his ministers to announce a public pardon and the restoration of security.

Sultan Selim waited nearly two weeks after defeating the Mamluk army to enter the city of Cairo. This was the first chance most of Cairo's residents had to scrutinize their new master. Ibn Iyas gives a graphic portrait of the Ottoman conqueror:

As the Sultan passed through the city he was cheered by all the populace. He was described as having a fair complexion, a clean-shaven chin, and large nose and eyes, as being short in stature, and wearing a small turban. He showed levity and restlessness, turning his head from side to side as he rode along. He was said to be about forty years of age. He had not the dignity of former Sultans. He was of an evil disposition, blood-thirsty, violent-tempered, and intolerant of being answered.⁵

Selim did not rest easily in Cairo while the Mamluk sultan was still at large. So long as Tumanbay lived, the Ottomans knew that his partisans would plot his restoration. Only a very public death would dash those hopes forever. Selim the Grim was given the opportunity in April 1517, when the fugitive Tumanbay was betrayed by Bedouin tribesmen and handed over to the Ottomans. Selim forced Tumanbay to march through the center of Cairo to dispel any doubt that he was in fact the deposed Mamluk sultan. Tumanbay's procession ended at Bab Zuwayla, one of the main gates of the walled city of Cairo, where he was taken by his executioners and hanged before the horrified crowd. The hanging rope broke—some say

it broke twice—as if reflecting divine reluctance to permit regicide. “Once he surrendered his soul, a loud cry went up from the crowd,” the chronicler recorded, capturing the sense of public shock and horror at this unprecedented spectacle. “Never in the past have we witnessed such an event as the hanging of a sultan of Egypt at Bab Zuwayla, never!”⁶

For Sultan Selim, the death of Tumanbay was cause for celebration. With the termination of the Mamluk dynasty, Selim completed his conquest of their empire and the transfer of all their wealth, lands, and glory to his own dynasty. He could now return to Istanbul having added Syria, Egypt, and the Arabian province of the Hijaz to the Ottoman Empire. The Hijaz carried particular importance as the birthplace of Islam. It was here, in the city of Mecca, that Muslims believe God first revealed the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad, and it was in nearby Medina that the Prophet established the first Muslim community. Selim now added the religious legitimacy of being Servant and Protector of the Two Holy Places of Mecca and Medina to the sultan's imperial title. These gains confirmed Selim as sultan of the greatest Islamic empire in the world.

Before leaving Cairo, Selim asked to see one of the famous Egyptian shadow plays, a puppet theater performed with silhouette figures before a lit screen. He sat in private to enjoy the spectacle. The puppet master made a model of Bab Zuwayla and a figure of Sultan Tumanbay at the moment of his hanging. When the cord broke twice, the Ottoman sultan “found the spectacle very funny. He gave the artist 200 dinars and a velvet cloak of honour. ‘When we leave for Istanbul, come with us so that my son can see this,’ Selim told him.”⁷ His son, Süleyman, would succeed to the Ottoman throne three years later and inherit all Selim had conquered from the Mamluks.

The Ottoman conquest of the Mamluk Empire was a major turning point in Arab history. The fateful clash of arms between Mamluk swordsmen and Ottoman riflemen marked the end of the medieval era and the beginning of the modern age in the Arab world. The Ottoman conquest also meant that for the first time since the rise of Islam, the Arab world was ruled from a non-Arab capital. The Umayyads, Islam's first dynasty, ruled their rapidly expanding empire from Damascus between AD 661 and 750. The Abbasid caliphate (750–1258) ruled the greatest Muslim empire of its day from Baghdad. Cairo, founded in 969, served as capital to no less than four dynasties before the advent of the Mamluks in 1250. From 1517 onward, the Arabs would negotiate their place in the world through rules set in foreign capitals, a political reality that would prove one of the defining features of modern Arab history.

That said, the shift from Mamluk to Ottoman rule had proved easier than many had initially feared at the time of Selim the Grim's bloody conquests. The Arabs

had been ruled by Turkish-speaking foreigners since the thirteenth century, and the Ottomans were in many ways similar to the Mamluks. Elites in both empires came from Christian slave origins. Both empires were bureaucratic states that observed religious law and protected Islamic domains from foreign threats with strong armies. Moreover, it was too early to speak of a distinct Arab identity that would object to “foreign” rule. Before the age of nationalism, identity was linked to either one's tribe or town of origin. If Arabs thought in terms of a broader identity, it was more likely to be based on religion than ethnicity. For the majority of Arabs, who were Sunni Muslims, the Ottomans were perfectly acceptable rulers. The fact that the administrative center had moved from Arab lands to Istanbul, a city straddling the continents of Europe and Asia, seems not to have been problematic to people at the time.

The Arab peoples seem to have been pragmatic rather than ideological in assessing the change from Mamluk to Ottoman rule. They were far more concerned about questions of law and order, and reasonable taxation, than what it meant for Arabs to be ruled by Turks. The Egyptian historian 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, writing in the early nineteenth century, captured this respect for early Ottoman rule:

At the outset of their reign, the Ottomans were among the best to rule the [Islamic] community since the Rightly-Guided Caliphs.⁸ They were the strongest defenders of religion and opposers of unbelievers, and for this reason their dominions expanded through the conquests which God gave to them and to their deputies. They controlled the best inhabited regions on earth. Kingdoms far and wide submitted to them. They did not neglect the state, but guarded its territory and its frontiers. They upheld the performance of Islamic rites and . . . honoured the religious leaders, supported the maintenance of the Two Holy Cities, Mecca and Medina, and upheld the rules and principles of justice by observing Islamic laws and practices. Their reign was secure; their sway endured; kings stood in awe of them; free men and slaves obeyed them.⁹

The villagers and townspeople of Syria did not mourn the passing of the Mamluk Empire. Ibn Iyas relates that the residents of Aleppo, who had suffered from overtaxation and arbitrary rule, barred the retreating Mamluks from entering the city and “treated them worse than the Ottomans had” after their defeat in Marj Dabiq. When Selim the Grim entered the city of Aleppo, “the town was illuminated in celebration, candles lighted in the bazaars, voices were raised in prayer for him and the people rejoiced” at their deliverance from their former Mamluk overlords.¹⁰ The people of Damascus were also unperturbed by the change in political masters, according to the Damascene chronicler Muhammad ibn Tulun (1475–1546). His account of the last years of Mamluk rule is replete with references to overtaxation, the greed of officials,

the powerlessness of the central government, the unscrupulous ambition of the Mamluk amirs, the lack of security in the countryside, and the economic woes that resulted from such maladministration.¹¹ By comparison, Ibn Tulun had favorable things to say about Ottoman rule, which brought law and order and regular taxation to the province of Damascus.

The fall of the Mamluks probably changed the Ottoman Empire more dramatically than it affected the Arab world. The Ottoman heartlands were in the Balkans and Anatolia, and the capital—Istanbul—straddled the European and Asian provinces of the empire. The Arab lands were far from the Ottoman center, and the Arab peoples were a novel addition to the heterogeneous population of the empire. The Arabs were themselves a diverse people, their common Arabic language divided into dialects that grew mutually incomprehensible as one moved from the Arabian Peninsula through the Fertile Crescent to North Africa. Whereas most Arabs were (and are) Sunni Muslims like the Ottoman Turks, there were sizable minority communities of splinter Muslim sects, Christian communities, and Jews. There was also tremendous cultural diversity across the Arab world, with distinct cuisine, architecture, and musical traditions in different Arab regions. History too had divided the Arab peoples, as different regions had been ruled by separate dynasties over the Islamic centuries. The integration of the Arab lands fundamentally changed the geographic reach and the culture and demography of the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottomans faced a real challenge to devise viable administrative structures for their new Arab possessions. The Arabs entered the Ottoman Empire at a time of rapid expansion in Persia, the Black Sea region, and the Balkans. The territorial reach of the empire expanded much faster than the government's ability to train and post qualified administrators for these new acquisitions. Only those regions closest to the Ottoman heartlands—like the northern Syrian city of Aleppo—came under standard Ottoman rule. The farther one traveled from Anatolia, the more the Ottomans sought to preserve the preexisting political order to ensure the smoothest transition to their rule. Pragmatists rather than ideologues, the Ottomans were more interested in preserving law and order and collecting regular taxes from their new possessions than imposing their own ways on the Arabs. As a result, Ottoman rule in the Arab provinces was marked by great diversity and extensive autonomy in the early years after the conquest.

The first challenge facing the Ottomans in Syria and Egypt was to shape a loyal government from Mamluk administrators. Only the Mamluks had the knowledge and experience to rule Syria and Egypt on the Ottomans' behalf. Yet the Ottomans could not count on the loyalty of the Mamluks. The first decade of Ottoman rule was marked by a number of violent rebellions as key Mamluks sought to break from the Ottoman Empire and restore Mamluk rule in Syria and Egypt.

For the first few years after the conquest of the Mamluk Empire, the Ottomans left the institutions of the former state more or less intact, under Mamluk amirs, or "commanders." They divided the former Mamluk domains into three provinces based around the cities of Aleppo, Damascus, and Cairo. Aleppo was the first to come under the full instruments of Ottoman rule. An Ottoman governor was appointed over the province, which was closely integrated into the political and economic life of the Ottoman Empire. Though the populace could not have known it then, the Ottoman conquest would initiate a real golden age in Aleppo lasting through the eighteenth century, in which the city would emerge as one of the great centers of the overland trade between Asia and the Mediterranean. Though it lay some 50 miles from the coast, Aleppo attracted the offices of the Dutch, British, and French Levant companies and became one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Arab world.¹² When William Shakespeare had the first witch in *Macbeth* say of a sailor's wife "Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger" (act I, scene 3), his audiences in the Globe knew of where she spoke.

Sultan Selim chose Mamluks to serve as his governors in Damascus and Cairo. The two men he appointed could not have been more different. He named Janbirdi al-Ghazali as his governor in Damascus. Janbirdi had been a Mamluk governor in Syria and had fought valiantly against the Ottomans at Marj Dabiq. He led the Mamluk attack on Selim's forces in Gaza, where he was wounded. He retreated to Cairo with the remainder of his army to stand by Tumanbay in the defense of Cairo. Clearly Selim respected the integrity and loyalty Janbirdi had shown to his Mamluk sovereigns and hoped to turn that sense of loyalty to his new Ottoman master. In February 1518 Selim invested Janbirdi with all of the functions exercised by the former Mamluk governors of Damascus, in return for an annual tribute of 230,000 dinars.¹³ There were clear risks in transferring so much power to one person without checks or balances on his authority.

In Cairo, Selim chose Khair Bey, the former Mamluk governor of Aleppo. Khair Bey had corresponded with Selim before the battle of Marj Dabiq and transferred his loyalty to the Ottoman sultan. It was Khair Bey who broke ranks in the Battle of Marj Dabiq and left the field to the Ottomans. He was later arrested by Tumanbay and placed in prison in Cairo. Selim released Khair Bey when he captured Cairo, and then honored the former governor of Aleppo for his services. However, Selim never forgot that Khair Bey had betrayed his former Mamluk sovereign and, according to Ibn Iyas, used to pun on his name, calling him "Khain Bey," or "Sir Traitor."¹⁴

For so long as Sultan Selim lived, these administrative arrangements held without challenge. In October 1520, news spread of Selim's death and the ascension of the young prince Süleyman to the Ottoman throne. Some Mamluks believed they had given their allegiance to Sultan Selim as their conqueror rather than to his dynasty

as a whole. With the Ottoman succession, the new Sultan Süleyman faced a number of revolts in his Arab provinces.

The first Mamluk revolt broke out in Damascus. Janbirdi al-Ghazali sought to restore the Mamluk Empire and declared himself sultan, taking the regal name al-Malik al-Ashraf ("the most noble king"). He donned the clothes and light turban of a Mamluk and banned the people of Damascus from wearing Ottoman fashions. He forbade preachers in the mosques from reciting the Friday prayers in Sultan Süleyman's name. And he set about purging Ottoman soldiers and officials from Syria. The towns of Tripoli, Homs, and Hama rallied to his cause. He raised an army and set out to seize Aleppo from the Ottomans.¹⁵

The people of Aleppo remained faithful to the Ottoman sultanate. They mourned the death of Selim and recited the Friday prayers in Süleyman's name. When the governor learned of the approach of the rebel army, he set about strengthening Aleppo's defenses. In December, Janbirdi's force laid siege to the city. The rebels fired cannons at the gates of Aleppo and sent burning arrows flying over the city walls, but the defenders repaired the damage and kept Janbirdi's forces at bay. The Damascenes maintained the siege for fifteen days before withdrawing. Some 200 residents of Aleppo had been killed in the course of the siege, as well as a number of soldiers.¹⁶

As Janbirdi watched his rebellion falter, he returned to Damascus to consolidate his position and rally his forces. In February 1521, he set out to fight an Ottoman army on the outskirts of Damascus. His army was quickly routed, and Janbirdi was killed in battle. Panic swept Damascus. In supporting Janbirdi's futile bid to secede from the Ottoman Empire and to reestablish Mamluk rule, the Damascenes had forfeited the benefits of a peaceful submission to Ottoman rule.

The army that had just defeated Janbirdi's forces now turned to sack the city of Damascus. According to Ibn Tulun over 3,000 people were killed, the town quarters and neighboring villages were plundered, and women and children were taken into captivity. Janbirdi's head and the severed ears of 1,000 fallen soldiers were sent to Istanbul as trophies.¹⁷ Mamluk influence in Damascus was now at an end. Henceforth Damascus would be placed under an Ottoman governor appointed from Istanbul.

In Egypt, the Ottomans faced repeated challenges to their rule. Although Selim had questioned the integrity of his Mamluk governor in Cairo and called him "Sir Traitor," Khair Bey preserved the Ottoman order in Egypt until his death in 1522. It took the Ottoman authorities the better part of a year to name a new governor to replace him. Two provincial governors from Middle Egypt took advantage of the interregnum to launch a rebellion in May 1523, supported by a number of Mamluks and Bedouin leaders. The revolt was quelled swiftly by Ottoman troops in Egypt, with many of the Mamluk insurgents subsequently imprisoned or killed.

The next challenge came from the new Ottoman governor himself. Ahmad Pasha had aspired to be grand vezir, or prime minister of the Ottoman government. Frus-

trated by his appointment as a mere provincial governor in Egypt, Ahmad Pasha sought to satisfy his ambitions by establishing himself as an independent ruler in Egypt. Shortly after his arrival in September 1523, he began to disarm the Ottoman troops posted to Cairo and shipped many of the infantrymen back to Istanbul. He released the Mamluks and Bedouins that had been imprisoned for taking part in the previous year's uprising. Ahmad Pasha then declared himself sultan and ordered his supporters to kill the remaining Ottoman troops in the Citadel. Like Janbirdi, Ahmad Pasha had Friday prayers recited and coins struck in his name. His rebellion, however, was short-lived. His opponents attacked him and forced him to retreat to the countryside, where he was captured and beheaded in March 1524. Istanbul dispatched a new governor to Cairo with clear instructions to bring Mamluk influence to an end and to draw Egypt more fully under the central government's rule. Thereafter, Sultan Süleyman proved more than capable of commanding the loyalty of his Arab subjects, and no further rebellions threatened Ottoman rule for the rest of his reign.

Within a decade of Selim's conquest, Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz were firmly under Ottoman rule. Istanbul, the imperial capital, was home to both the decision makers and the law makers of the empire as a whole. At the top of the hierarchy was the sultan, an absolute monarch whose word was writ. He lived in the Topkapi Palace, behind great walls overlooking the imperial capital, the Straits of the Bosphorus, and the Golden Horn. Downhill from the palace walls, behind an imposing set of gates, lay the offices of the grand vezir and his ministers. This center of government came to be known by its most distinctive feature—its gates. Referred to in Turkish as the *Bab-i Ali*, or "High Gate," the expression was rendered *La Porte Sublime* in French and anglicized as the Sublime Porte, or just "the Porte." These two institutions—the royal court and the Sublime Porte—set the new terms of government for the Arab provinces, as for the empire as a whole.

With Ottoman rule came new administrative practices. Ottoman provincial government in the sixteenth century was a form of feudalism in which military commanders were awarded territory by the central government. The post holder would oversee the administration of justice and tax collection from his lands. He would also maintain a certain number of cavalrymen from the revenues of his lands and pay a fixed sum in taxes to the central treasury. Unlike feudalism in Europe, the Ottoman system was not hereditary and so did not produce an aristocracy to rival the power of the sultan. The system was ideally suited for a rapidly expanding empire, where territory was conquered faster than the state's ability to produce a trained bureaucracy to administer it. The bureaucrats were left to bookkeeping, making an inventory of the wealth of the empire. Detailed tax registers were compiled listing the number of taxable men, households, fields, and revenues for each village of a given province. These registers were supposed to be updated every thirty years, though in

the course of the sixteenth century the state began to neglect its bookkeeping; the practice died out altogether in the seventeenth century.¹⁸

The new Ottoman provinces in Syria—Aleppo, Damascus, and later the coastal province of Tripoli (in modern Lebanon)—were divided into smaller administrative units and placed under commanders. The provincial governor was given the largest fief, with a set number of troops and fixed taxes to deliver to the sultan for his campaigns and treasury. The military commander of the province was given the next largest fief, with lower-ranking commanders allotted lands in proportion to their rank and the number of troops they were expected to present for the sultan's military campaigns.¹⁹ This modified feudal system was never applied to Egypt, which continued to be ruled in an uneasy partnership between Ottoman governors and Mamluk commanders.

The men who came to fill the posts in the Arab provincial administration were appointed by the central government in Istanbul, and they tended to come from outside the Arab lands. Like the Mamluks, the Ottomans operated their own system of slave recruitment, primarily in their Balkan provinces. Young Christian boys were taken from their villages in an annual conscription known in Turkish as the *devshirme*, or "boy levy." They were sent to Istanbul, where they were converted to Islam and trained to serve the empire. Athletic boys were sent for military training, to fill the ranks of the crack Janissary infantry regiments. Those with intellectual promise were sent to the palace to be trained for civil service in either the palace itself or the bureaucracy.

By modern standards, the boy levy appears nothing short of barbaric: children sent into slavery to be raised far from their families and forcibly converted to Islam. At the time, however, it was the only means for upward mobility in a fairly restrictive society. Through the boy levy, a peasant's son could rise to become a general or grand vizier. Indeed, entry to the elite ranks of the Ottoman military and government was more or less restricted to *devshirme* recruits. The fact that the Arabs, who in their great majority were free-born Muslims, were excluded from this practice meant that they were greatly underrepresented among the power elite of the early Ottoman Empire.²⁰

One of the great innovations of Sultan Süleyman II's reign was to define the administrative structure of each Ottoman province in law. Known in the West as "the Magnificent," Süleyman was known locally by the Turkish nickname Kanuni, or "the law-giver." More than two centuries after Süleyman's death, the Egyptian chronicler al-Jabarti extolled the virtues of his legal and administrative reforms: "Sultan Süleyman al-Kanuni established the principles of government administration, completed the establishment of the empire, and organized the provinces. He shone in the darkness, lifted up the shining light of religion, and extinguished the fire of the infidels. The country [i.e., Egypt] has continued to be part of their empire and obedient to Ottoman rule from that time until now."²¹ The rules of government were set out for

each province in a constitutional document known as a *kanunname*, or "book of laws." These provincial constitutions made clear the relationship between governors and tax-payers and set down the rights and responsibilities of both sides in black and white. For its age, it represented the height of government accountability.

The first provincial constitution was drafted in Egypt in the immediate aftermath of Ahmed Pasha's rebellion in 1525. Sultan Süleyman II's grand vizier, Ibrahim Pasha, introduced the *kanunname* as a central part of his mission to restore the Sultan's authority over Egypt. The document is remarkably comprehensive, setting out the administrative framework down to the village level. It establishes the responsibilities of office holders in the maintenance of security, the preservation of the irrigation system, and the collection of taxes. The rules for land surveys, for pious endowments, for the maintenance of granaries, and for the running of seaports are clearly explained. The constitution even notes how often the governor should meet with his advisory council of state (four times each week, just like imperial council in Istanbul).²²

In order to enforce the law, Ottoman administrators needed disciplined and reliable troops. The provincial governors had under their command military forces composed of both Ottoman regulars and locally recruited irregular troops. The elite of the military were the Janissaries, whose commander was appointed by Istanbul. A city like Damascus would have an infantry consisting of between 500 and 1,000 Janissaries to uphold local order. There were also a number of cavalry forces, whose ranks were supported by the revenues of the province. According to Ottoman sources there were over 8,000 cavalrymen in the three provinces of Aleppo, Tripoli, and Damascus combined in the last quarter of the sixteenth century.²³ These forces were supplemented with locally recruited infantrymen and North African mercenaries.

The judiciary was, along with the governors and the military, the third element of Ottoman administration. The central government in Istanbul dispatched a chief justice to each provincial capital, where he would preside over the Islamic courts. Though Christians and Jews were entitled to settle their differences in their own communities' religious tribunals, many chose to pursue their complaints or to record their transactions in the Muslim courts. All imperial decrees from Istanbul were read publicly in court and inscribed in the court registers. In addition to criminal cases, the courts provided arbitration between disputing parties, served as notary public to record commercial contracts and the exchange of land, and registered the major transitions in life—marriages and divorces, settlements for widows and orphans, and the distribution of the personal effects of the deceased. All cases and transactions were duly inscribed in the court registers, many of which still survive, providing an invaluable window into the daily life of the towns and cities of the Ottoman Empire.

Sultan Süleyman II proved one of the most successful rulers of the Ottoman Empire. In his forty-six-year reign (1520–1566) Süleyman completed the conquest of the

Arab world started by his father. He took Baghdad and Basra from the Persian Safavid Empire in 1533–1538, where the Ottoman army was received by the Sunni population as liberators after years of persecution by the Shiite Safavids. The conquest of Iraq was very significant in both strategic and ideological terms. Süleyman II had consolidated his empire, adding the ancient Arab capital of Baghdad to his conquests, and halted the advance of Shiite dogma into Sunni lands.

Süleyman II's forces moved south from Egypt to occupy the southern Arabian lands of Yemen in the 1530s and 1540s. In the Western Mediterranean, Süleyman added the North African coastal regions of Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria to Ottoman domains as tribute-paying vassal states between 1525 and 1574. By the end of the sixteenth century, all Arab lands were under some form of Ottoman control except Central Arabia and the sultanate of Morocco, territories that were to remain outside the Ottoman Empire.

Each of the Arab lands came into the Ottoman Empire at a different point in time, under particular circumstances, with distinct historical and administrative backgrounds. The story of Ottoman rule in every one of these provinces is unique, shaped by the conditions under which they entered the empire.

The Ottoman conquest of North Africa was achieved more through piracy than traditional warfare—though, of course, one man's pirate is another's admiral. Sir Francis Drake used piracy to great effect in fighting England's wars against the superior Spanish fleet in the sixteenth century, yet as a knight of Elizabeth I's realm and one of her most trusted advisors he hardly conjures the image popularly held of maritime brigands. So it was with Khayr al-Din "Barbarossa"—so called by European contemporaries for his red beard—one of the greatest admirals in Ottoman history. To the Spanish he was a ruthless pirate, the scourge of their Mediterranean shipping, who sold thousands of Christian sailors captured in battle into slavery. To the inhabitants of the North African coastline he was a holy warrior carrying the jihad against the Spanish occupiers, whose war booty was an important component of the local economy. And to the Ottomans he was a native son, born around 1466 on the Aegean island of Mytilene just off the coast of Turkey.

At the turn of the sixteenth century the Western Mediterranean was the arena of an intense conflict between Christian and Muslim forces. The Spanish conquest of the Iberian Peninsula culminated in the fall of Granada in 1492, bringing to an end nearly eight centuries of Muslim rule in Spain (711–1492). Faced with life in Catholic Spain, where religious proselytism soon gave way to forced conversion, most Iberian Muslims left their native land to seek refuge in North Africa. These Muslim refugees, known as *Moriscos*, never forgot their homeland or forgave Spain. The Spanish monarchs, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, relentlessly pursued their holy war across the Mediterranean to the Muslim kingdoms in which the

Moriscos took refuge. They established a string of fortress colonies, or *presidios*, along the North African coast from Morocco to Libya and forced local leaders in the inland towns to pay tribute to Spain. Two of these colonies—Ceuta and Melilla—still survive as Spanish possessions on the Moroccan coastline.

The Spanish faced little opposition to their aggressive expansion from the Muslim mini-states of North Africa. Three local dynasties based in Fez (in modern Morocco), Tlemcen (in Algeria), and Tunis ruled in Northwest Africa. They paid tribute to the Spanish crown and dared raise no challenge to the Spanish fortresses that dominated their main ports and harbors. The Muslim rulers' cooperation with the Spanish invaders discredited them in the eyes of their subjects, and soon local zealots began to organize their own forces to rebuff the invaders. Because the *presidios* were resupplied by sea, Spanish shipping was more vulnerable to attack than the strong fortresses themselves. Local sailors who armed ships and took their jihad to sea came to be known in the West as the Barbary corsairs (the term *Barbary* derived either from the Greek for "barbarian" or, more charitably, from the indigenous Berber people of North Africa). While these corsairs took plunder and slaves from the Spanish shipping they attacked, they viewed their war as a religious conflict against Christian invaders. Their bold attacks against the Spanish made the corsairs local heroes and gained them the support of the Arab and Berber inhabitants of the coast.

Khayr al-Din was the most famous of the Barbary corsairs. He followed in the footsteps of his brother, 'Aruj, who created an independent ministate in the small port of Jijilli, to the east of Algiers. 'Aruj extended the area under his power across the Algerian coast to Tlemcen in the west, which he captured in 1517. He was killed by the Spanish the following year in a vain attempt to defend Tlemcen. Khayr al-Din understood that the corsairs would need the support of a powerful ally if they hoped to hold their gains against the might of the Spanish Empire, and he raised the corsairs' jihad to a successful war machine by entering into alliance with the Ottoman Empire.

In 1519 Khayr al-Din sent an envoy to the Ottoman court, bearing gifts and a petition from the people of Algiers, to request Sultan Selim's protection and offering to place themselves under his rule. Selim the Grim was near death as he agreed to add the Algerian coastline to the territories of the Ottoman Empire. He sent Khayr al-Din's envoy home with an Ottoman flag and a detachment of 2,000 Janissaries. The greatest Muslim empire in the world had now engaged battle with the fleet of Spain, shifting the balance of power in the Western Mediterranean decisively.

Encouraged by their new alliance with the Ottomans, the Barbary corsairs pressed their attacks far beyond the coast of North Africa. Khayr al-Din and his commanders struck against targets in Italy, Spain, and the Aegean Islands. In the 1520s he seized European ships carrying grain and, like a sea-faring Robin Hood, delivered the food to the people of the Algerian coast, who were suffering shortages from drought. His

ships rescued Moriscos from Spain and brought them back to settle in the towns under his control to join the fight against Spain.

Yet Khayr al-Din and his men were best known for their exploits against Spanish shipping. They sunk galleys, freed Muslim slaves, and captured dozens of enemy ships. Barbarossa's name provoked fear all along the coasts of Spain and Italy—with reason. The number of Christians his men captured numbered in the thousands, with nobles held for high ransom and commoners sold into slavery. For the Muslim corsairs there was a sense of poetic justice: many of them had previously been held captive and sold as galley slaves by the Spanish.

The Spanish navy needed an admiral to match wits with Khayr al-Din. In 1528 the emperor Charles V engaged the celebrated commander Andrea Doria (1466–1560) to lead the fight against him. Doria, a native of Genoa who had commissioned his own fleet of war galleys and hired his services out to the monarchs of Europe, was no less a corsair than Khayr al-Din.

Doria was a great admiral, but Khayr al-Din was greater. In their eighteen years of dueling across the Mediterranean, Doria seldom got the better of his Ottoman adversary. Their first encounter, in 1530, was a case in point. Khayr al-Din's forces had taken the Spanish fortress in the Bay of Algiers after a short siege in 1529. The Spanish captives were reduced to slaves and made to dismantle the fort, whose stones were used to create a breakwater to shelter the harbor of Algiers. Charles V was outraged by the loss of the strategic fort and convened a council of state. Andrea Doria suggested an attack on the port of Cherchel, just west of Algiers. Doria's forces landed near Cherchel in 1530 and freed several hundred Christian slaves but met with stiff resistance from the Moriscos who inhabited the town, who were spoiling for a fight with the Spanish. Khayr al-Din sent a relief force, and Doria, who did not want to risk engaging the larger Ottoman fleet, withdrew his ships—abandoning the Spanish soldiers in Cherchel. Those Spaniards who fought were killed, and those who surrendered were enslaved. Khayr al-Din had dealt two humiliations to the Spanish and secured his position in Algiers.

Barbarossa had also raised his standing in the eyes of the sultan, and in 1532 he was invited to Istanbul to meet with Süleyman the Magnificent. He set off with a fleet of forty-four ships and ravaged the coast of Genoa and Sicily along the way, seizing eighteen Christian ships—which he robbed and burned. Finally he arrived in Istanbul, where the sultan invited him to the palace. When he was ushered into the sultan's presence, Khayr al-Din prostrated himself and kissed the ground, awaiting his sovereign's command. Süleyman bid his admiral to rise and promoted him to commander of the Ottoman navy, or Kapudan Pasha, and governor of the Maritime Provinces. Lodged in a royal palace for the duration of his stay in Istanbul, Khayr al-Din met regularly with the sultan to discuss naval strategy. In a final mark of favor, Süleyman pinned a golden medal to Khayr al-Din's turban during a palace

ceremony, to demonstrate his gratitude to the Kapudan Pasha for his role in expanding the territory of the Ottoman Empire in North Africa and delivering victories against his Spanish foe.²⁴

On his return from Istanbul, Khayr al-Din set about planning his next major campaign: the conquest of Tunis. He mounted an expedition of nearly 10,000 soldiers and took Tunis without a fight in August 1534. The Ottomans were now in control of the North African coast from Tunis to Algiers, placing Charles V's maritime supremacy in the Western Mediterranean in jeopardy. Andrea Doria advised the emperor to drive the corsairs from Tunis. Charles agreed, accompanying the fleet himself. He wrote of the vast assembly of "galleys, galleons, carracks, fusts, ships, brigantines, and other vessels" that carried the Spanish, German, Italian, and Portuguese troops—some 24,000 soldiers and 15,000 horses—to Tunis. "We left [asking] for the aid and guidance of our creator . . . and with divine assistance and favour, to do that which seems most effective and for the best against Barbarossa."²⁵

As the massive fleet approached Tunis, Khayr al-Din withdrew his forces, knowing that he could not withstand the armada. Tunis now fell to Spanish forces. Charles V claimed in his letters home that the Spanish freed 20,000 Christian slaves. Arab accounts claim that the Spanish killed at least as many of the local inhabitants in the sack of Tunis. In strategic terms, the conquest of Tunis placed the Straits of Sicily, the gateway to the Western Mediterranean, firmly in Spanish hands. The only Muslim stronghold left was Algiers.

In 1541 the Spanish mounted a massive siege force to take Algiers and defeat Khayr al-Din once and for all. An armada of sixty-five galleys and over 400 transport vessels carrying 36,000 soldiers and siege machines set sail in mid-October. Sayyid Murad, the Algerian chronicler, wrote: "This fleet covered the entire surface of the sea, but I was unable to count all the vessels for they were so numerous." Against the Spanish, the Barbary corsairs raised a force of 1,500 Ottoman Janissaries, 6,000 Moriscos, and several hundred irregulars. Faced with an invasion force that outnumbered his own troops by a margin of more than four to one, Khayr al-Din's situation looked desperate. One of his officers tried to raise the morale of his troops, saying, "The Christian fleet is enormous . . . but do not forget the aid that Allah gives his Muslims against the foes of religion."²⁶ His words seemed prophetic to the local chronicler.

On the eve of the Spanish invasion, the weather suddenly turned and violent gales drove the Spanish ships onto the rocky shores. The soldiers who did manage to reach shore in safety were drenched by torrential rains, and their gunpowder was spoiled by water. The defenders' swords and arrows proved the more effective weapons in these conditions, as the drenched and demoralized Spanish were driven to retreat after 150 ships were lost and 12,000 men killed or captured. The Barbary corsairs had inflicted a decisive defeat on the Spanish and secured their position in

North Africa once and for all. It was Khayr al-Din's greatest triumph, celebrated each year in Algiers for the rest of the Ottoman era.

Five years later, in 1546, Khayr al-Din Barbarossa died at the age of eighty. He had succeeded in securing the coast of North Africa for the Ottoman Empire (though the final conquest of Tripoli and Tunis was achieved by his successors later in the sixteenth century). Ottoman rule in North Africa was unlike any other part of the Arab lands, reflecting its corsair origins. In the decades following Khayr al-Din's death, power was balanced between a governor appointed by Istanbul, an Ottoman admiral of the fleet, and the commander of Ottoman Janissary infantry. In the seventeenth century the commander of the Janissaries, who had settled and became permanent residents of Algiers, became governor of Algiers and ruled through a council, or *diwan*. Then in 1671 the power shifted again: the admiral of the fleet appointed a local civil ruler, or *dey*, who governed instead of the commander of the Janissaries. For a few years the dey exercised effective power, though Istanbul continued to appoint a pasha, or governor, whose powers were more ceremonial. After 1710, however, deys assumed the office of pasha as well, and Istanbul's control over North Africa grew ever weaker, as the deys enjoyed full autonomy in return for paying a small annual tribute to the Porte.

Long after the conclusion of the Ottoman-Spanish rivalry in the Western Mediterranean, the Porte was perfectly satisfied to leave the deys of Algiers to rule the North African coast on its behalf. Too far from Istanbul to administer more directly, and too thinly populated to cover the expense of a more elaborate administration, the Barbary Coast was typical of those Arab provinces the Ottomans chose to rule in collaboration with local elites. This allowed the Ottoman Empire to claim sovereignty over strategic Muslim territory, and to enjoy a small income stream, at little cost to the imperial treasury. The arrangement suited the deys of Algiers, who enjoyed Ottoman protection and extensive autonomy in their relations with the maritime powers of the Mediterranean. The arrangement would work to the advantage of both sides until the nineteenth century, when neither the deys nor the Ottomans were sufficiently strong to withstand a new era of European colonization in North Africa.

A very different system of autonomous rule developed in the Eastern Mediterranean. The mountains of Lebanon had long provided a refuge for unorthodox religious communities fleeing persecution. Two such communities—the Maronites and the Druzes—devised their own system of rule. Though the Lebanese highlands (known as Mount Lebanon) came under Ottoman rule along with the rest of Greater Syria at the time of Selim the Grim's conquest in 1516, the Porte preferred to leave the local inhabitants to rule themselves in their mountain fastness.

The Maronites had sought the safety of the northern Lebanese mountains in the late seventh century, fleeing persecution by rival Christian sects in what was then

the Byzantine Empire. They were supporters of the Crusaders in the Middle Ages and enjoyed close relations with the Vatican thereafter. In 1584 a Maronite College was opened in Rome to teach theology to the most gifted young Maronites, cementing ties between the Maronites and the Roman Catholic Church.

The Druze trace their origins back to eleventh-century Cairo when a dissident group of Shiite Muslims fled persecution in Egypt. In the isolation of the southern Lebanese mountains, their beliefs took the form of a distinct and highly secretive new faith. The Druze emerged as a political community as well as a religious one, and they came to dominate the political order in Mount Lebanon, with the full participation of the Maronite Christians. A Druze amir, or prince, ruled over a rigid hierarchy of Druze and Christian hereditary nobles, each attached to a particular territory in Mount Lebanon.

When Mount Lebanon came under Ottoman rule, the sultans chose to preserve the region's particular feudal order, demanding only that the Druze prince recognize the sultan's authority and pay an annual tribute. The system worked, as the Druze were sufficiently divided among themselves so as not to pose a threat to Ottoman rule. All of that was to change with the rise of Amir Fakhr al-Din II.

Fakhr al-Din II (c. 1572–1635), the prince of Mount Lebanon, was like a character from the pages of Machiavelli. His methods were certainly closer to those of Cesare Borgia than those of his Ottoman peers. Fakhr al-Din used a combination of violence and cunning to extend the territories under his control and preserve his position of power across the decades. He even appointed his own court historian to record the great events of his reign for all posterity.²⁷

Fakhr al-Din came to power in 1591 following the assassination of his father by the rival Sayfa clan, a Kurdish family who ruled over northern Lebanon from the coastal city of Tripoli (not to be confused with the Libyan city of the same name). Over the next thirty years the Druze prince was driven by the twin motives of revenge against the Sayfa clan and the expansion of the lands under his family's rule. At the same time, Fakhr al-Din preserved good relations with the Ottomans. He paid the taxes on his territory in full and on time. He traveled to Damascus and lavished gifts and money on the governor, Murad Pasha, who later was promoted to grand vizier in Istanbul. Through these connections Fakhr al-Din succeeded in extending his rule over the southern port city of Sidon, the city of Beirut and the coastal plain, the northern districts of Mount Lebanon, and the Biq'a Valley to the east. By 1607 the Druze prince had consolidated his control over most of the territory of the modern state of Lebanon as well as parts of northern Palestine.²⁸

Fakhr al-Din's troubles expanded in line with the growth of his mini-state. The territories under his control now extended well beyond the autonomous Mount Lebanon into areas under full Ottoman rule. This unprecedented expansion provoked concerns in government circles in Istanbul and jealousy among Fakhr al-Din's

regional rivals. To protect himself from Ottoman intrigues, the Druze machiavel entered into a treaty of alliance with the Medici of Florence in 1608. The Medici offered guns and assistance with Fakhr al-Din's fortifications in return for a privileged position in the highly competitive Levantine trade.

News of Fakhr al-Din's treaty with Tuscany was met with dismay. Over the next few years, the Ottomans watched the deepening of Lebanese-Tuscan relations with mounting concern. Fakhr al-Din's stature in Istanbul had been undermined when his friend Murad Pasha had been succeeded as grand vizier by an enemy, Nasuh Pasha. In 1513 the sultan decided to act and dispatched an army to topple Fakhr al-Din and dismantle the Druze mini-state. Ottoman naval vessels were sent to block the Lebanese ports, both to prevent the Druze prince from escaping and to discourage Tuscan shipping from coming to his assistance. Fakhr al-Din deftly eluded his attackers and bribed his way past the Ottoman ships. Accompanied by an advisor and a number of servants, he hired two French galleons and a Flemish vessel to carry him to Tuscany.²⁹

After a fifty-three-day journey from Sidon to Livorno, Fakhr al-Din landed on Tuscan soil. His five-year exile represented a rare moment when Arab and European princes met on equal footing and examined each other's customs and manners with respect. Fakhr al-Din and his retainers observed firsthand the working of the Medici court, the state of Renaissance technology, and the different customs of the people. The Druze prince was fascinated by all he saw, from the common household goods of the average Florentine to the remarkable art collection of the Medicis—including portraits of leading Ottoman figures. He visited the Duomo of Florence, climbing Giotto's campanile and the stairs up Brunelleschi's famous dome, completed the previous century and one of the greatest architectural achievements of its day.³⁰ Yet for all the marvels he witnessed in Florence, Fakhr al-Din never doubted the superiority of his own culture nor that the Ottoman Empire was the most powerful state of the age.

Fakhr al-Din returned to his native land in 1618. He chose his moment of return carefully: the Ottomans were at war with the Persians again and turned a blind eye to his return. Much had changed in the five years of Fakhr al-Din's absence. The Ottoman authorities had reduced his family's rule to the Druze district of the Shuf in the southern half of Mount Lebanon, and the Druze community had split into rival factions determined to prevent a single household from ever gaining such supremacy as Fakhr al-Din had enjoyed.

In no time, Fakhr al-Din confounded the plans of both the Porte and his regional rivals. From the moment he returned the Druze prince reestablished his authority over the people and the territory of Mount Lebanon to rebuild his personal empire from the northern port of Lattakia through the whole of the Lebanese highlands south to Palestine and across the Jordan River. In the past, Fakhr al-Din had secured his gains by consent of the Ottoman authorities. This time his seizure of territory represented a direct challenge to the Porte. He was confident that his fighters could

defeat any army the Ottomans might field, and over the next five years Fakhr al-Din grew increasingly bold in confronting the Ottoman authorities.

Fakhr al-Din reached the height of his power in November 1623 when his forces defeated Ottoman troops from Damascus and captured the governor, Mustafa Pasha, in the battle of 'Anjar.³¹ The Druze forces pursued their enemies up the Biqa' Valley to the town of Baalbek, with their prisoner, the governor of Damascus, in tow. While his forces laid siege to Baalbek, Fakhr al-Din received a delegation of notables from Damascus who negotiated for the release of their governor. The Druze amir dragged out the negotiations over the next twelve days and secured every one of his territorial objectives before releasing his prisoner.

When the Ottoman wars with Persia ended in 1629, however, Istanbul once again turned its attention to the rebellious Druze prince of Mount Lebanon, who had extended the borders of the lands under his control eastward into the Syrian desert and northward towards Anatolia. In 1631, in an act of pure hubris, Fakhr al-Din denied an Ottoman army rights to winter in "his" territory. From that point on, the Ottomans were determined to be rid of their insubordinate Druze vassal.

The aging Fakhr al-Din was facing significant challenges from other quarters, as well—from Bedouin tribes, his old enemies the Sayfas of Tripoli, and rival Druze families. Under the strong leadership of Sultan Murad IV, the Ottomans seized on Fakhr al-Din's growing isolation and dispatched a force from Damascus to overthrow the Druze leader in 1633. Perhaps his supporters were weary after years of constant fighting; perhaps they were losing confidence in Fakhr al-Din's judgment, as he flaunted Istanbul's writ ever more flagrantly. As the Ottoman army approached, the Druze warriors refused their leader's call to battle and left him and his sons to confront the Ottoman force on their own.

The fugitive prince took refuge in the mountain caves of the Shuf, deep in the Druze heartlands. The Ottoman generals followed him into the highlands and built fires to smoke him out of his hiding place. Fakhr al-Din and his sons were arrested and taken to Istanbul, where they were executed in 1635, bringing to an end a remarkable career and a dangerous threat to Ottoman rule in the Arab lands.

Once Fakhr al-Din had been eliminated, the Ottomans were pleased to restore Mount Lebanon to its indigenous political system. Its heterogeneous population of Christians and Druzes was ill-suited to a system of government intended for a Sunni Muslim majority. So long as local rulers were willing to work within the Ottoman system, the Porte was more than willing to accept diversity in the administration of its Arab provinces. The Lebanese feudal order would survive well into the nineteenth century without further trouble to Istanbul.

In the century following Selim II's conquest, a distinct political order developed in Egypt. Although their ruling dynasty had been destroyed, the Mamluks survived as

*Obra doada por DAVID R. SILVA
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a military caste to remain a central part of the ruling elite of Ottoman Egypt. They preserved their households, continued to import young slave recruits to renew their ranks, and upheld their military traditions. Unable to exterminate the Mamluks, the Ottomans had no choice but to draw them into the administration of Egypt.

Already in the 1600s Mamluk beys had come to take leading administrative positions in Ottoman Egypt. Mamluks were placed in charge of the treasury, were given command of the annual pilgrimage caravan to Mecca, were appointed as governors of the Arabian province of the Hijaz, and exercised a virtual monopoly over provincial administration. These posts conferred prestige and, more important, gave their post holder control over significant sources of revenue.

In the seventeenth century the Mamluk beys also came to hold some of the highest military positions in Egypt—putting them in direct rivalry with the Ottoman governors and military officers dispatched from Istanbul. The Porte, increasingly preoccupied with more pressing threats on its European frontiers, was more concerned to preserve order and to ensure a regular stream of tax revenues from its rich province than to redress the balance of power between Ottoman appointees and the Mamluks in Egypt. The governors were left to fend for themselves in the treacherous politics of Cairo.

Rivalries between the leading Mamluk households gave rise to fierce factionalism that made the politics of Cairo treacherous to Ottomans and Mamluks alike. Two main factions emerged in the seventeenth century—the Faqari and the Qasimi. The Faqari faction had links to the Ottoman cavalry, their color was white, their symbol the pomegranate. The Qasimi faction was connected to the native Egyptian troops, took red for their color, and had a disc as their symbol. Each faction maintained its own Bedouin allies. The origins of the factions have been lost in mythology, though by the late seventeenth century the division was well established.

Ottoman governors sought to neutralize the Mamluks by playing the factions against each other. This gave the disadvantaged Mamluk faction a real incentive to overthrow the Ottoman governor. Between 1688 and 1755, the years covered by the chronicler Ahmad Katkhuda al-Damurdashi (himself a Mamluk officer), Mamluk factions succeeded in deposing eight of the thirty-four Ottoman governors of Egypt.

The power of the Mamluks over the Ottoman governors is revealed in the factional intrigues of 1729. Zayn al-Faqar, leader of the Faqari faction, convened a group of his officers to plan a military campaign against their Qasimi enemies. "We'll ask the governor to furnish 500 purses to pay for the expedition," Zayn al-Faqar told his men. "If he gives them, he will remain our governor, but if he refuses, we will depose him." The Faqari faction sent a delegation to the Ottoman governor, who refused to pay the expense of a military campaign against the Qasami faction. "We won't accept a pimp as our governor," the outraged Zayn al-Faqar told his followers. "Let's

go and depose him." On their own initiative, without any other authority, the Faqari faction simply wrote to Istanbul to inform the Porte that the Ottoman governor had been deposed and that a deputy governor had been appointed to take his place. The Mamluks then strong-armed the deputy governor they had just installed to provide the funding for their campaign against the Qasami faction, drawn from the customs revenues of the port of Suez. The payment was justified in terms of the defense of Cairo.³²

The Mamluks used extraordinary violence against their rivals. The Qasami faction knew all too well that the Faqaris were preparing for a major confrontation and took the initiative. In 1730 the Qasamis sent an assassin to kill the head of the rival faction, Zayn al-Faqar himself. The assassin was a turncoat who had fallen out with the Faqari faction and joined forces with the Qasimis. He disguised himself as a policeman and pretended to have arrested one of Zayn al-Faqar's enemies. "Bring him here," Zayn al-Faqar ordered, wanting to meet his enemy face to face. "Here he is," the assassin replied, and discharged his pistol into the Mamluk's heart, killing him instantly.³³ The assassin and his accomplice then fought their way out of Faqari leader's house and escaped, killing several men along the way. It was the beginning of a massive blood feud.

The Faqaris named Muhammad Bey Qatamish as their new leader. Muhammad Bey had risen to the top of the Mamluk hierarchy and held the title of *shaykh al-Balad*, or "commander of the city." Muhammad Bey responded to the assassination of Zayn al-Faqar by ordering the extermination of all Mamluks associated with the Qasimi faction. "You have among you Qasimi spies," Muhammad Bey warned, and pointed to an unfortunate man among his retainers. Before the man had a chance to defend himself, Muhammad Bey's officers dragged him under a table and cut off his head—the first man to be killed in retaliation for Zayn al-Faqar's murder. Many more would follow before the bloodletting of 1730 came to an end.

Muhammad Bey turned to the deputy governor appointed by Zayn al-Faqar and obtained a warrant to execute 373 persons he claimed were involved in the Faqari leader's assassination. It was his license to wipe out the Qasimi faction. "Muhammad Bey Qatamish annihilated the Qasimi faction entirely, except for those . . . who had escaped to the countryside," al-Damurdashi reports. "He even took the young Mamluks who hadn't reached puberty from their houses, sent them to an island in the middle of the Nile where he killed them, then threw their bodies into the river." Muhammad Bey closed all of the Qasimi households, swearing never to let the faction take hold in Cairo again.³⁴

The Qasimi faction proved harder to eliminate than Muhammad Bey had imagined. In 1736 the Qasimis returned to settle scores with the Faqaris. They were assisted by Bakir Pasha, the Ottoman governor. Bakir Pasha's previous term as governor of Egypt had been cut short by the Faqaris, who had deposed him. He thus proved

a natural ally to the Qasimi faction. Bakir Pasha invited Muhammad Bey and the other leading Mamluks of the Faqari faction to a meeting where a group of Qasimis lay in ambush, armed with pistols and swords. No sooner had Muhammad Bey arrived than the Qasimis emerged, shooting the leader of the Faqari faction in the stomach and butchering his leading commanders. In all, they killed ten of the most powerful men in Cairo and piled their severed heads in one of the main mosques of the city for public viewing.³⁵ It was by all accounts one of the worst killings in the annals of Ottoman Egypt.³⁶

Years of factional fighting left both the Faqaris and the Qasimis too weak to preserve a commanding position in Cairo. The rival factions were overtaken by a single Mamluk household known as the Qazdughlis, who came to dominate Ottoman Egypt for the rest of the eighteenth century. With the rise of the Qazdughlis, the extreme factional violence abated, bringing a measure of peace to the strife-torn city. The Ottomans, for their part, never managed to impose their full authority over the rich but unruly province of Egypt. Instead, a distinct political culture emerged in Ottoman Egypt in which the Mamluk households continued to exercise political primacy over Istanbul's governor centuries after Selim the Grim had conquered the Mamluk Empire. In Egypt, as in Lebanon and Algeria, Ottoman rule adapted to local politics.

Two centuries after conquering the Mamluk Empire, the Ottomans had succeeded in extending their empire from North Africa to South Arabia. It had not been a smooth process. Unwilling, or unable, to standardize government in the Arab provinces, the Ottomans in many cases chose to rule in partnership with local elites. The diverse Arab provinces might have had very different relations with Istanbul and wide variations of administrative structures, but they were all clearly part of the same empire. Such heterogeneity was common to the multiethnic and multisectarian empires of the day, such as the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires.

Until the mid-eighteenth century, the Ottomans managed this diversity with some success. They had faced challenges—most notably in Mount Lebanon and Egypt—but had succeeded by a variety of strategies in entrenching Ottoman rule, ensuring that no local leader posed an enduring threat to the Ottoman center. The dynamics between this center and the Arab periphery changed, however, in the latter half of the eighteenth century. New local leaders emerged who began to combine forces and pursue autonomy in defiance of the Ottoman system, often in concert with the empire's European enemies. These new local leaders posed a real challenge to the Ottoman state that, by the nineteenth century, would put its very survival in jeopardy.

CHAPTER 2

The Arab Challenge to Ottoman Rule

A barber comes to know everything that happens in his town. His day is taken up in conversations with people from all walks of life. Judging by the record of his diary, Ahmad al-Budayri "al-Hallaq" ("the Barber") was a great conversationalist who was well informed on the politics and society of Damascus in the mid-eighteenth century. The issues covered in his diary are familiar subjects of barbershop conversations everywhere: local politics, the high cost of living, the weather, and general complaints about how things were no longer as they were in the good old days.

Apart from what he wrote in his diary, we know very little about the life of Budayri, the barber of Damascus. He was too modest a man to feature in contemporary biographical dictionaries, the "who's who" of Ottoman times. His diary is all the more remarkable for that. It was unusual for tradesmen to be literate in the eighteenth century, let alone to leave a written record of their thoughts. He told us little about himself, preferring to write about others. We do not know when he was born or died, though it is clear that the diary, spanning the years 1741–1762, was written when he was a mature man. A pious Muslim, Budayri belonged to a mystical Sufi order. He was married, with children, but had little to say of his family life. He was proud of his profession, spoke with admiration of the teacher who inducted him into the trade, and recalled the prominent men whose heads he had shaved.

The barber of Damascus was a loyal Ottoman subject. In 1754 he noted the shock felt by the people of Damascus when they heard of the death of Sultan Mahmud I (r. 1730–1754). He recorded the public celebrations marking the ascension of the sultan's successor, Osman III (r. 1754–1757), when Damascus "was decorated more beautifully than ever in public memory. May God preserve this Ottoman State," he prayed, "until the end of time. Amen."¹