

RULES OF COMMUNICATION AND POLITICS
BETWEEN BEDOUIN AND MAMLUK ELITES IN EGYPT:
THE CASE OF THE AL-AḤḌAB REVOLT, C. 1353*

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Abstract

This article deals with political culture in fourteenth-century Egypt. It focuses on the aspect of communication in the negotiation of social relations between two rival groups: the ruling Mamluks and the Bedouin elites. The revolt of the Bedouin shaykh al-Aḥḍab provides insight into this power struggle. The article argues that al-Aḥḍab employed a repertoire of communication, including symbols and symbolical actions, that was well understood by the Mamluk elite and may have helped him, as a political newcomer, to integrate himself into the Mamluk system of government.

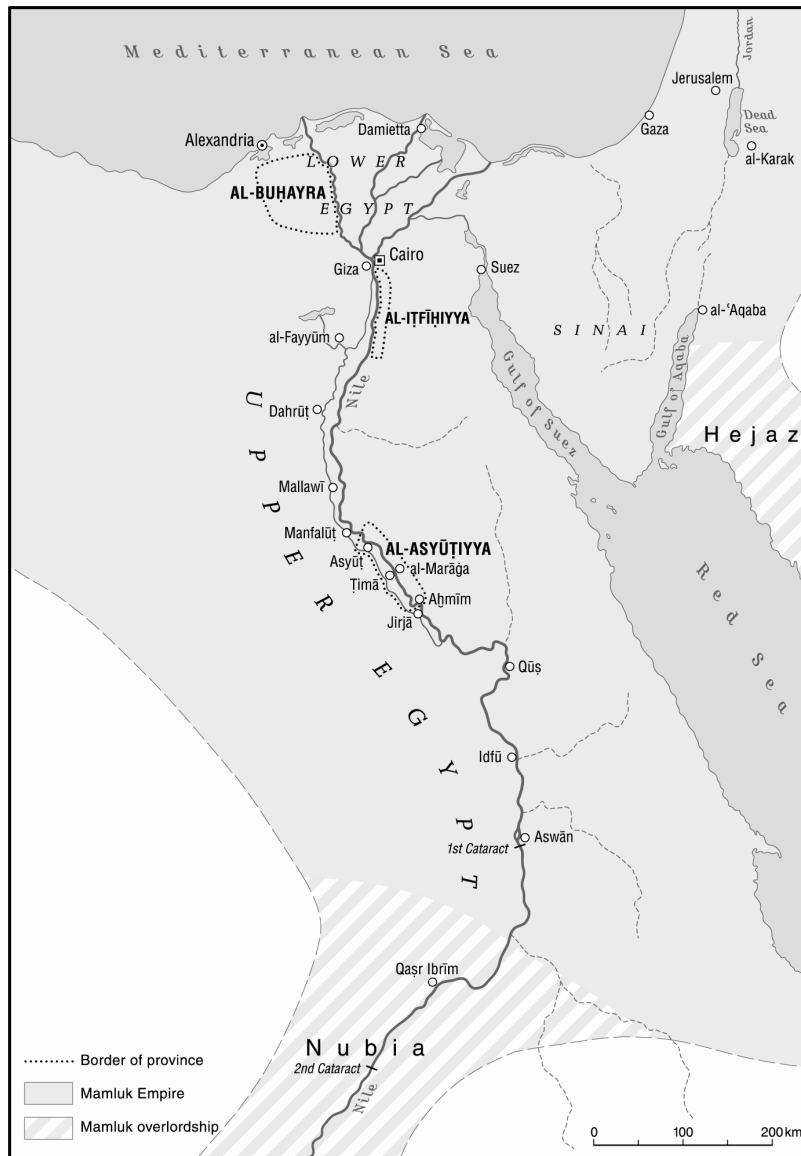
Introduction

In his mid-fifteenth-century travelogue,¹ the Venetian merchant Emmanuel Piloti divided the population of Mamluk Egypt in three parts or ‘nations’: the common people of Egypt, the ‘Arabs’ or Bedouins, who lived in the mountains and in the countryside, and the Mamluks, the rulers of Egypt since 1250, who had originally been slaves from the Caucasus region.²

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¹ Piloti, Emmanuel, *L’Égypte au Commencement du Quinzième Siècle d’après le Traité d’Emmanuel Piloti de Crète* (Incipit 1420), ed. Dopp, P.H. (Cairo: University Press, 1950).

² “[...] et premièrement, le peuple du pays d’Égypte, que sont innumérables [...]. La seconde nation si sont les Arabes, que sont de grant puissance et à cheval et à pié [...] et demeurent par les montagnes et par les champagnes. La tierce nation si sont les esclaves achetés [...], desquelx on fait mameluchs [Mamluks], armirallis [emirs], et de ceulx fait on le souldain [Sultan]. Et de ceste nation si sont fais segneurs et



The Mamluk Empire at the time of al-Aḥḍab's revolt

gouverneurs, et commande l'estat et la seignorie aux peuple du pays et alla génération des Arabes [...]" Piloti, *L'Égypte*: p.11. For an introduction to the history of the Mamluk period, see Levanoni, Amalia, "The Mamlūks in Egypt and Syria: The Turkish Mamlūk sultanate (648-784/1250-1382) and the Circassian Mamlūk sultanate (784-923/1382-1517)", in Fierro, Maribel (ed.), *The new Cambridge history of Islam, II, The western Islamic world. Eleventh to eighteenth centuries* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010): pp. 237-84.

This is not the place to discuss Piloti's classification of the population of Egypt in detail. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that he clearly identified – besides religious differences – three main ethnic groups in Egypt, which he linked to socio-political issues or claims. Thus, according to him, the Egyptian people had problems accepting the sovereignty of the Mamluks, referring to their Caucasian origin.³ And this was true also of the Bedouin people, who, according to the Venetian merchant, claimed sovereignty over Egypt for themselves on the basis that their own noble ancestors belonged to the same 'nation' as the Prophet Muḥammad,⁴ while the Mamluks, as former slaves, were of inferior status. Indeed, Bedouin leaders, the "great chiefs of the Arabs", as Piloti calls them, challenged the Mamluk Sultanate by refusing to pay taxes and dues, since they did not perceive themselves as subordinate to a Sultan they regarded as being "bought by the money of the Egyptian farmers".⁵

In fact, after taking control of Egypt in 1250, the Mamluks had to face a major uprising by several Bedouin tribes of Egypt, who claimed the leadership of the country with exactly the same arguments.⁶ They managed to quell the rebellion and up to the beginning of the fourteenth century no further Bedouin revolts of this magnitude were reported. This rebellion and its failure had lasting effects on relations between Mamluks and Bedouins. From then on, the Mamluks were aware that they needed to maintain a state of reasonably peaceful co-existence with the Bedouins to avoid a permanently state of war.⁷

In practice, the relationship between Bedouins and Mamluks oscillated between aversion and cooperation. It is important to note here that one needs to be careful when making generalisations, since each Bedouin group had its own frequently changing relations with the Mamluk Sultanate.

³ Piloti, *L'Égypte*: p. 11.

⁴ "Et les Arabes dient que le souldane [Sultan] et la seigneurie appartient à eulx, pource que Mahomet fust Arabois de la leur nation" (ibid.).

⁵ "[...] achattéz de l'argent des paysems d'Egipte" (ibid.: p. 19). I have chosen the neutral term 'farmers' here in order to avoid terms that might be understood as a statement on the social status of this social group, such as 'peasants', which is commonly associated with poor agricultural workers.

⁶ Aharoni, Reuven, *The Pasha's Bedouin: Tribes and state in the Egypt of Mehemet Ali, 1805-1848* (London: Routledge, 2007): pp. 23-4; Shwartz, Igal, *The Bedouin in Egypt during the Mamluk period* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: unpubl. PhD dissertation, 1987): I, pp. 280-2.

⁷ Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, pp. 280, 284.

In general, as Piloti writes in his travelogue, townspeople and the Bedouins each had a strong need of the other for their own welfare.⁸ The Mamluks tried to gain the loyalty of important Bedouin leaders by awarding them the title of emir (*amīr*) and other privileges.⁹ This cooptation policy seems to have been mainly directed towards Bedouin groups living in the vicinity of neighbouring powers such as the Mongols in Iraq, who were needed for the Sultanate's defence¹⁰ and, even so, relations between them were fragile and often had to be re-negotiated. Cooperation was anything but natural, and was often the result of agreements that ended power struggles between the two parties.

One such power struggle was the uprising and revolt of the Bedouin shaykh Muḥammad Ibn Wāṣil, better known as al-Aḥḍab (the hunchback), one of the leaders of the 'Arak-Bedouin in the vicinity of Asyut in Upper Egypt. He managed to gain so much power that he was able to proclaim his own Sultanate in Upper Egypt at the beginning of the 1350s, which he modelled on the Mamluk court. His increasing power could only be curtailed by one of the largest Mamluk military campaigns in the fourteenth century, which quelled the uprising and cost the lives of thousands of people. Al-Aḥḍab was able to escape, but asked for pardon a short time later. He was pardoned by Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ṣāliḥ Ibn Muḥammad (1351-4) and was given important military and administrative functions in the Mamluk Sultanate. Al-Aḥḍab's sons became powerful emirs in Upper Egypt and his descendants were prominent figures in Upper Egypt up to the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517.

Several chroniclers of the Mamluk period report the uprising, which reached its peak with a major battle in 1353. The most detailed report is that by Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (1364-1442).¹¹ In his *Kitāb al-sulūk li-*

⁸ Piloti's example is the city of Alexandria, which the Bedouins provided with animals and animal products from the "lands of the Arabs", i.e. the countryside. In Alexandria in turn they bought goods that they themselves could not produce. Piloti summarises this interaction as follows: "[...] [I]l n'est possible à nulle manière du monde que les pays des Arabes puisse vivre sans la cité d'Alexandrie, ne la cité d'Alexandrie sans le pays des Arabes" (Piloti, *L'Égypte*: p. 20).

⁹ For a discussion of 'emir' in the Bedouin context, see below.

¹⁰ Aharoni, *Pasha's Bedouin*: p. 23; Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, pp. 287-9.

¹¹ Al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Alī, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-ma'rifat duwal al-mulūk*, ed. Ziyāda, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (reprint Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 2007): II/3, pp. 843, 855-6, 896-901, 907-16; Ibn Duqmāq (Ibn Aydamur al-'Alā'i), Ṣārim al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Ibn Muḥammad, *Al-nuḥḥa al-miskiyya fī al-dawla al-turkiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Tadmūrī, 'Umar (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 1999): I, p. 173; Ibn Ḥaldūn, 'Abd al-Raḥman Ibn Muḥammad, *Tārīḥ Ibn Ḥaldūn* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāṭ al-'Arabī,

ma'rifat duwal al-mulūk (Book of the right way to the knowledge of the reigns of the kings), he ranked al-Aḥḍab's uprising and the following military campaign among "the greatest, but at the same time most horrible events in [the history of] Upper Egypt".¹²

In his article on public representation of civil rebellions against Mamluk rule, Jean-Claude Garcin ranks al-Aḥḍab's court among what he calls imitative performances (*mise en scène parodique*) as expressions of opposition that did not harm the ruling elite very much. At least in the case of the Bedouins, however, he suspects a connection between such self-confident 'performances' and their relative increase in power towards the end of the fifteenth century.¹³

Indeed, al-Aḥḍab's uprising is not only remarkable for his self-proclamation as a local lord and the Mamluk military reaction, but also as a testimony to the complexity of relations between Bedouins and Mamluks. It has not yet been established how this relationship should be characterised, or how it was constructed and re-constructed in everyday interaction. A promising approach to the study of relations between Bedouins and Mamluks is to consider the aspect of communication. Communication took place not only in words, but also in symbolic actions. When Bedouin leaders refused to pay taxes, for example, it was not only because they wanted to keep the money for themselves, but also because they wanted to convey a political message, namely that they refused to acknowledge the current political power constellation.

This article attempts to show the significance of various forms of communication for two competing groups that needed to find a *modus vivendi*. In this context, it not only deals with al-Aḥḍab's Sultanate as an example of a Bedouin rebellion against Mamluk leadership, but also reveals how rules of communication helped to turn a conflict between Bedouins and Mamluks into cooperation. It needs to be mentioned here that the current study presents preliminary results of research into this understudied topic. Many questions are still open and further investigation is needed. The first section of the article analyses the information available on the background to al-Aḥḍab's rise, as well as on his Sultanate and the Mamluk military reaction. The second part deals with the ensuing peace

1971): V, p. 450; Ibn Iyās, Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad, *Badā' i' al-zuhūr fī waqā' i' al-duhūr*, ed. Muṣṭafā, Muḥammad (Wiesbaden: Steiner 1963-75): I/1, pp. 550-1.

¹² Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 914.

¹³ Garcin, Jean-Claude, "La révolte donnée à voir chez les populations civiles de l'état militaire Mamluk (XIIIe-XVe s.)", in Chaumont, É. (ed.), *Autour du regard: Mélanges Gimaret* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003): pp. 261-78 (273, 275). For a discussion of this interpretation see below.

negotiations and al-Aḥḍab's integration into Mamluk politics. In both parts, the focus lies on the symbols, symbolical acts and other forms of communication – in particular intercession, *šafā'a* – that regulated and expressed the various stages in this development.

I. BEDOUIN UNREST,
AL-AḤḌAB'S SULTANATE AND THE MAMLUK MILITARY REACTION

The rise of al-Aḥḍab

After the death of the long-ruling Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (1310-41), a period of political instability began in the second half of the fourteenth century.¹⁴ Until the rise of Sultan Barqūq (1382-9/1390-9) in 1382, the Mamluk Sultanate saw many short-term rulers and increasing power struggles between various Mamluk factions, which made it difficult to establish a strong and efficient government.¹⁵ Weak and unprepared rulers, empty treasuries and additional events and developments, such as the outbreak of the Black Death in 1347 and the deterioration of the irrigation system, presented additional challenges to Mamluk rule.¹⁶ In this period, we increasingly read of Bedouin unrest, especially in Egypt, with the most detailed information being provided by the chronicler and scholar al-Maqrīzī, who seems to have had some interest in Bedouins in general and perhaps therefore paid more attention to them than other authors of his time.¹⁷ According to him, the disturbances began just one year after al-

¹⁴ On Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad see Levanoni, Amalia, *A turning point in Mamluk history: The third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn (1310-1341)* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

¹⁵ On the power struggles, see Steenbergen, Jo van, *Order out of chaos: Patronage, conflict and Mamluk socio-political culture, 1341-1382* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

¹⁶ For the plague in the Middle East, see Dols, Michael, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); for the deterioration of the irrigation system during the time of the Black Death and afterwards, see Borsch, Stuart, *The Black Death in Egypt and England: A comparative study* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Al-Maqrīzī also wrote a short work on Bedouin tribes that had migrated to Egypt since the Islamic conquests: Al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Alī, *Kitāb al-bayān wa-al-ī'rāb 'ammā bi-arḍ miṣr min al-a'rāb (El-Macrizi's Abhandlung über die in Aegypten eingewanderten arabischen Stämme. Aus den Handschriften zu Leyden, Paris und Wien)*, ed. Wüstenfeld, F. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1847). In his foreword, he writes that this work was written out of personal interest (ibid.: p. 6). However, it seems that al-Maqrīzī also used Bedouin unrest as an indicator of the quality of Mamluk government, an increase in revolts indicating inefficient rule (cf.

Nāṣir's death in Upper Egypt (*al-wajh al-qiblī*) and then were reported regularly over the following years.¹⁸ No further explanation of these cases of unrest is given, nor do we find specific details of the locations in which they occurred, the Bedouin groups who participated in them, or their particular themes.

Nevertheless, various explanations were suggested by contemporaries. Mamluk emirs linked the beginning of the unrest with the prolonged absence (*ḡayba*) of Sultan Aḥmad (1342) from the court in Cairo.¹⁹ Aḥmad preferred to spend his time in Karak, where he had grown up and been taught the art of *furūsiyya* (horsemanship).²⁰ The absence of a Sultan from the capital city was routinely perceived as a potential invitation to troublemakers all over the country.²¹ Without a ruling head at the centre of power, the general state of law and order seemed to be at risk. This way of thinking probably explains why the emirs quickly decided to depose Aḥmad when he did not respond to their calls to return to Cairo once unrest had been reported in Upper Egypt.²² However, subsequent governments and Sultans during the following ten years could not handle Bedouin unrest efficiently either. Another explanation is offered by the chronicler al-Maqrīzī. He found the unrest to be caused by the Bedouins' lack of respect for the Mamluk officials who were in charge of Upper Egypt, the governors (*wulāt*, sing. *wālī*) and the inspectors (*kuššāf*, sing. *kāšīf*). He connected this lack of respect with the government's lack of interest in the people living in the region.²³

below. This hypothesis is part of my current studies and needs to be further substantiated.

¹⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, pp. 617, 656, 668, 706, 728, 731, 749.

¹⁹ Ibid.: p. 617. Aḥmad was the third successor of his father Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad within one year.

²⁰ Ibid.: II/1, p. 272; see also Drory, J., "The prince who favoured the desert: Fragmentary biography of al-Nasir Ahmad (d. 745/1344)", in Wasserstein, David J. and Ayalon, Ami (eds), *Mamluks and Ottomans: Studies in honour of Michael Winter* (London: Routledge, 2006): pp. 19-33.

²¹ The fear for attack or unrest during the Sultan's absence from Cairo or Egypt was justified and protective measures were taken. See, for instance, al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/1, pp. 196-7, 300-1; II/3, pp. 707-8, 901.

²² Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, pp. 617-8. It is possible that this argument was used simply as a pretext to get rid of him. Nevertheless, it is a unique and very individual argument, since later Sultans were dismissed by allegations that they were disqualified from ruling on grounds of their youth or madness or, especially, an excessive predilection for alcohol or women. See, for instance, al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, pp. 703, 709, 731.

²³ Ibid.: II/3, p. 908.

Al-Maqrīzī saw Bedouin unrest as linked to government policies in another way too. He points out in his description of the year 1379 that Bedouins in Upper Egypt living in the region of Aswan could only react with riots when they had to face the arbitrary behaviour and arrogance of the governor of Aswan, Emir Qurūṭ. According to al-Maqrīzī this was a sign of ‘weakness of rule’ (*wahn al-dawla*).²⁴ Thus, Mamluk observers linked the uprisings to the broad state of the Mamluk Sultanate.

However, it seems probable that the reasons for Bedouin unrest lay mainly in inter-tribal conflicts. At least this seems to be likely in the case of al-Aḥḍab. Al-Maqrīzī reports the following on the background to al-Aḥḍab’s rise to power: In 1348, the Mamluk inspector for Upper Egypt, Emir Ṭuḡayh, was killed in the vicinity of Asyut, somewhere “between [the tribal groups] of ‘Arak and Banū Hilāl”.²⁵ The ‘Arak Bedouins, probably a sub-group of the Juhayna tribal confederation,²⁶ were enemies of the Banū Hilāl and the conflict between these two groups may have been the reason for most of the Bedouin unrest in Upper Egypt during these decades.²⁷

The Banū Hilāl, a large tribal confederation originally from the Najd, is well known for its migration from Upper Egypt to the Maghreb during the Fatimid period.²⁸ However, several sub-groups had remained in Upper Egypt. Their territory lay in the regions of Timā and Aḥmīm.²⁹ The Juhayna, who were reportedly the largest Bedouin group in Upper Egypt in the thirteenth century, seem to have moved for the most part to Nubia around the turn of the fourteenth century.³⁰ However, the ‘Arak sub-group had remained in Upper Egypt and lived in the district al-Asyūṭiyya, but still had ties to Nubia.³¹

²⁴ Ibid.: III/1, p. 352.

²⁵ Ibid.: II/3, p. 770.

²⁶ Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, p. 43. According to Garcin the ‘Arak may also have belonged to the Judhām confederation (Garcin, Jean-Claude, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Egypte médiévale. Qūṣ* (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1976): p. 382 and p. 382, n. 7).

²⁷ Garcin, *Qūṣ*: p. 382; Shwartz, *Bedouin*: II, p. 254, Hasan, Yusuf Fadl, *The Arabs and the Sudan: From the seventh to the early sixteenth century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967): p. 103.

²⁸ On the Banū Hilāl, see Idris, H.R., “Hilāl”, *ET*².

²⁹ Garcin, *Qūṣ*: p. 383.

³⁰ Ibid.: pp. 42; Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, pp. 258-60; Hasan, *Arabs*: p. 138. On the Juhayna confederation, see also *ibid.*: pp. 136, 154-71.

³¹ Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, pp. 43, 260; Hasan, *Arabs*: p. 159.

Since 1351, al-Aḥḍab emerged as the central figure in this confusing situation of inter-tribal war and anti-government unrest. We do not have any information on his life before that year. What we know about the subsequent events is again largely based on al-Maqrīzī's account. According to al-Maqrīzī, al-Aḥḍab was one of the Bedouin shaykhs from Upper Egypt and was called 'emir' by his followers.³² Bedouins, who probably belonged to al-Aḥḍab's group, attacked the district of Mallawī, killed about 300 men, plundered the district's sugar presses and its agricultural produce and killed its cattle. The unrest spread continuously. Numerous incidents of plunder and armed robbery, as well as many Bedouin casualties, are mentioned in al-Maqrīzī's report.³³ In addition, trade was hampered because overland routes were no longer safe.³⁴ Al-Aḥḍab now appears as the leader of the 'Arak who fought against Mamluk troops that had been dispatched to Upper Egypt to quell Bedouin unrest in 1351.³⁵ This Mamluk military campaign was initially a success. It was led by Emir Özdemir al-A'mā (the Blind) who might be called a Mamluk 'Bedouin expert'. Al-Maqrīzī writes that he "knew their affairs and their names",³⁶ and Özdemir actually mobilised the Banū Hilāl against the 'Arak, knowing that they were enemies.³⁷ He also asked for help from the Awlād al-Kanz, who seemed to be loyal to the Mamluks at that time.³⁸ Their territory was in the Aswan region, and according to the chronicler, they were supposed "to catch the 'Arak on the roads",³⁹ which probably means that they were to block their way to the south, namely to Nubia.⁴⁰

The Mamluk army managed to defeat the 'Arak. Al-Aḥḍab fled, leaving behind his movable property and his household.⁴¹ However, as soon as the Mamluk troops had returned to Cairo, the unrest resumed. Al-Aḥḍab came back and raided the territory of the Banū Hilāl. This was probably an act of

³² Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 896.

³³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, S. 850.

³⁴ At least, al-Maqrīzī mentions after the final defeat of al-Aḥḍab in 1353 that the roads were safe again. Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 915.

³⁵ *Ibid.*: pp. 839, 855-6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*: III/1, p. 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*: II/3, p. 855-6.

³⁸ From 1365 onwards, the Awlād al-Kanz are mentioned as instigators of unrest and rebellions in the region of Aswan. See, for instance, al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: III/1, pp. 109-12; 339; 352; III/2, pp. 534; 916.

³⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 855.

⁴⁰ Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, p. 260.

⁴¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, pp. 855-6.

revenge, since the Banū Hilāl had plundered his household after his defeat. According to al-Maqrīzī they had been incited by the Mamluk commander Özdemir and were joined by Mamluk soldiers:

Emir Özdemir proclaimed: ‘O Banū Hilāl, the others are your enemies!’ They turned against them, killed, and plundered the animals, the grain, the flour, and the water skins [...]. They also plundered the harem, until the Banū Hilāl and the soldiers [...] had filled their pockets with booty.⁴²

The Mamluks did not react to al-Aḥḍab’s counter-attack, probably because at that time they were busy quelling Bedouin unrest in the province of al-Itfīḥiyya.⁴³

In 1353, more and more reports arrived in Cairo that Bedouin unrest in Upper Egypt had again increased. The sources speak of plunder and robbery, ‘corruption’ (*fasād*) and ‘ravaging’ (*‘ayl*),⁴⁴ and the chronicler Ibn Ḥaldūn writes that “the responsibility for these grave sins (*kubur*) lay with al-Aḥḍab”.⁴⁵ However, these were not the only offences of which al-Aḥḍab was accused. Ibn Iyās ascribes political ambitions to him when he describes the events as a ‘revolt’ (*‘isyān*) of the Bedouins under al-Aḥḍab’s leadership against the Sultan, to which they had committed themselves by an oath.⁴⁶ This may refer to his proclaiming a Sultanate of his own and wielding power in Upper Egypt, as reported by al-Maqrīzī.⁴⁷

Al-Aḥḍab’s Sultanate and its visual signs: the parasol (jatr), the cushion (misnad), the seating order and the banquet

Al-Aḥḍab established his rule in parts of Upper Egypt⁴⁸ and was eager to communicate his new status to the common people around him as well as to the Mamluks, the actual ruling elite. In al-Maqrīzī’s description of al-Aḥḍab’s Sultanate two different levels can be distinguished: the visual signs of his reign, and his influence on various groups, expressed in

⁴² Ibid.: p. 856.

⁴³ Ibid.: p. 864.

⁴⁴ Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Tārīḥ*: V, p. 450; Ibn Duqmāq, *Nuḥḥa*: I, p. 173; Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’*: I/1, p. 550.

⁴⁵ Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Tārīḥ*: V, p. 450.

⁴⁶ Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’*: I/1, p. 550.

⁴⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 908.

⁴⁸ The extent of the territory he controlled is not known, but it probably consisted of the region of al-Asyūṭiyya and perhaps also adjacent territories such as Manfalūṭ, as it is reported that Bedouins from Manfalūṭ and al-Marāḡa were among his retinue.

administrative acts. Both the royal paraphernalia and the administrative institutions seem to have been adopted from the Mamluk court. Al-Maqrīzī describes al-Aḥḍab's proclamation as follows:

Al-Aḥḍab had the Sultanate proclaimed and sat down under a parasol (*jatr*)⁴⁹ which he had had made from the cloth from al-Ḥaḍabānī. He had the cushion (*misnad*) placed at his back, and had the Bedouin sit around him, and the banquet (*simāṭ*) was held before him.⁵⁰

The parasol (*jatr* or *mizalla*), under which al-Aḥḍab took seat, was part of the royal paraphernalia (*al-ālāt al-mulūkiyya*), which the Mamluks had adopted from the Fatimids.⁵¹ The parasol as a sign of royalty had been used long before the Fatimid period (909-1171), especially in Persia, and it was known in many different parts of the Arabo-Islamic world. It served a practical purpose: the ruler was protected from the sun during processions or public gatherings and could be easily and clearly distinguished from the other participants.⁵² However, it was also a symbol of sovereignty, reminiscent of the idea of the ruler as the shadow of God.⁵³ During the Mamluk period the parasol was used in processions, e.g. on the Feast of Fastbreaking (ʿīd al-fiṭr) or on the Feast of Sacrifice (ʿīd al-aḍḥā).⁵⁴ On these occasions, the ruler rode a horse while the parasol was held over his head by a high-ranking emir, who rode beside him.⁵⁵ In the Mamluk period, the parasol was made from yellow Atlas silk topped by a dome with a bird made of precious metal.⁵⁶

It is not certain whether, in al-Aḥḍab's case, al-Maqrīzī really meant the parasol that was used in processions, since in the scene he describes the

⁴⁹ The term *jatr* comes from the Persian *čatr*.

⁵⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 908.

⁵¹ Al-Qalqašandī, Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad Ibn ʿAlī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿšā fī šināʿat al-inšāʿ* (Cairo: Wizārat al-Ṭāqāfa wa-al-Iršād al-Qawmī, [1970]): II, p. 133.

⁵² Al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*: II, p. 133; Sims, Eleanor, "Čatr", *Elr*.

⁵³ Chapoutot-Remadi, Rachida, *Liens et relations au sein de l'élite Mamluke sous les premiers sultans bahrides. 648/1250-741/1340* (Aix-Marseille: unpubl. PhD dissertation, 1993): p. 103.

⁵⁴ Al-ʿUmarī, Ibn Faḍl Allāh, *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār: Dawlat al-mamālik al-ʿulā*, ed. Krawulsky, Dorothea (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Islāmī li-al-Buḥūṭ, 1986): pp. 97-8; al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*: III, pp. 508-9; IV, p. 46. For other, secular processions, e.g. on the Day of the Canal Opening, see al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*: III, pp. 499-518.

⁵⁵ Cf. al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*: IV, p. 46.

⁵⁶ Al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik*: p. 98.

Bedouin leader is not riding but sitting. Perhaps the author is referring to a kind of dome or baldachin under which Mamluk rulers sat.⁵⁷ The German knight and pilgrim Arnold van Harff, who during his stay in Egypt in the late fifteenth century was invited to visit the court, described the throne of the Sultan used during audiences as a tent (*getzelt*) and was impressed by its rich decoration with precious cloth.⁵⁸ Thus, it is possible that the Bedouin leader sat under a similar structure. In any case, al-Aḥḍab used an item that was reserved for rulers. The same is true of the *misnad*, a cushion that served as a backrest and was also a sign of authority.⁵⁹

Placing seating in a circle (*ḥalqa dā'ira*) around the ruler⁶⁰ was a symbol of unity and agreement with him. In general, attendance (*ḥadra*), especially by Mamluk emirs, at regular audiences or meetings (*ḥidma*) was a necessary expression of loyalty towards the Sultan. Contrariwise, not to follow his order to attend meetings was perceived as an expression of disobedience, which was to be punished.⁶¹ Thus, being in attendance was, in theory at least, an expression of obedience (*tā'a*) towards the ruler.

Another element of Mamluk court culture that al-Aḥḍab adapted in the context of the proclamation of his Sultanate was the banquet (*simāṭ*). Dining at court, be it as part of the audiences for envoys or during festive events such as an enthronement or a procession, followed a special

⁵⁷ See also Behrens-Abouseif, Doris, "The Citadel of Cairo: Stage for Mamluk ceremonial", *Annales Islamologiques*, XXIV (1988): pp. 25-79 (31, 40).

⁵⁸ "Dae sytzt der zoldain mans hoechden vnder eynen getzelt gar off eyner koestlichen tapeten, dat sijnt koestliche duecher (...)" (Harff, Arnold van, *Die Pilgerfahrt des Ritters Arnold van Harff von Cöln durch Italien, Syrien, Aegypten, Arabien, Aethiopen, Nubien, Palästina, die Türkei, Frankreich und Spanien, wie er sie in den Jahren 1496 bis 1499 vollendet, beschrieben und durch Zeichnungen erläutert hat. Nach den ältesten Handschriften und mit deren Bildern in Holzschnitt*, ed. Groote, E. von (Cologne: Verlag von J.M. Heberle, 1860 [reprint Hildesheim, 2004]): p. 89).

⁵⁹ Garcin, "Révolte": p. 269. According to recent findings by J.-C. Garcin, the *misnad* served as a sort of throne in provincial centres, but is never mentioned in connection with the Sultanate court in Cairo. Thus it may be that its use reflects a 'provincial' view of power on the part of al-Aḥḍab. I would like to thank J.-C. Garcin for sharing this insight with me.

⁶⁰ Al-'Umarī, *Masālik*: p. 101, Behrens-Abouseif, "Citadel": p. 78. The term *ḥalqa* in the sense of circle can also refer to any specific group, e.g. a study circle or the entourage of an emir or the Sultan (Chamberlain, Michael, *Knowledge and social practice in medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994]: pp. 42, 77). In addition, the term *ḥalqa* also refers to a military unit, during the Ayyubid and Mamluk period, comprised of non-Mamluk soldiers (see Ayalon, D., "Ḥalka", *EF*).

⁶¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/1, p. 131.

protocol, and even the daily meals of the Sultan and his emirs were regulated.⁶² One can imagine that festive banquets were organised in even more minute detail, from the dishes and drinks to the seating order.⁶³ The banquet had various functions. It was an opportunity not only to impress foreign guests by offering exotic meals or by displaying a particular kind of table manners,⁶⁴ but, even more importantly, to affirm solidarity between those present. In her essay on the meaning of table manners in the medieval Middle East, Paulina Lewicka argues that even eating from one bowl requires mutual acceptance. “Sharing a common bowl is, in fact [...] a highly intimate experience, in which sensitivity and being considerate of others both play an important part.”⁶⁵ A banquet then, could acquire symbolical character when it finalised a conflict resolution and peace agreement.⁶⁶

⁶² Al-‘Umarī, *Masālik*: pp. 104-5;

⁶³ See e.g. al-Qalqašandī, *Šubh*: III, pp. 510-11, 523-4; Levanoni, Amalia, “Food and cooking during the Mamluk era: Social and political implications”, *Mamluk Studies Review*, IX/2 (2005): pp. 201-22 (215, 218). The ruler’s personal preferences seemed not to have been considered. In fact, the protocol reflected the importance and significance of the guests. The Spanish envoy de Clavijo, who was attending a banquet at Timur’s court in Samarkand, reported that Timur was angry about the seating order. The Chinese envoys had been placed close to Timur, since he had to pay tribute to the Chinese Emperor. Thus, they were treated as the most important guests. However, Timur had some difficulties with China’s significance for him and did not want the Chinese envoys seated next to him (Clavijo, Gonzales de, *Embassy to Tamerlane. 1403-1406*, ed. Le Strange, Guy [London: George Routledge and Sons, 1928]: pp. 222-3. See also Kauz, Ralph, “Hofzeremoniell und Politik bei den Timuriden: Die Gesandtschaft aus China”, in Kauz, Ralph et al. (eds), *Diplomatisches Zeremoniell in Europa und im Mittleren Osten in der frühen Neuzeit* [Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009]: pp. 349-65 (359).

⁶⁴ Behrens-Abouseif, “Citadel”: pp. 44-5; de Clavijo, *Embassy*: pp. 223-5.

⁶⁵ Lewicka, Paulina, “When a shared meal is formalized: Observations on Arabic ‘table manners’ of the Middle Ages”, in Michalak-Pikulska, B. and Pikulski, A. (eds), *Authority, privacy and public order in Islam. Proceedings of the 22nd Congress of L’Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006): pp. 423-33 (430).

⁶⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/2, p. 373; Althoff, Gerd, “Demonstration und Inszenierung. Spielregeln der Kommunikation in mittelalterlicher Öffentlichkeit”, in idem, *Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter. Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997): pp. 229-57 (231). However, this is only half the truth. The banquet could be also used, precisely because it suggested a peaceful atmosphere, to eliminate unpleasant individuals or opponents. The Syrian Bedouin emir Muḥannā from the Āl Faḍl, who attended a banquet given by Sultan an-Nāṣir Muḥammad, refused to eat from the dishes offered to him, fearing that

Officials at al-Aḥḍab's court

Al-Aḥḍab used elements that were important parts of Mamluk royal paraphernalia and court ceremonies. But he went further than the adoption of visual symbols. Al-Maqrīzī also provides anecdotal evidence of al-Aḥḍab's manner of governing. In this context, it seems that he also adopted Mamluk administrative institutions. He appointed a chamberlain (*ḥājib*) and, a secretary (*kātib*), who helped him with the administrative work. Al-Maqrīzī writes:

His [al-Aḥḍab's] authority (*amruhu*) also extended to the farmers. [It happened] that a Mamluk soldier, if he had not received the whole amount of *ḥarāj* tax due to him, sought him and asked him to solve the problem with his farmers. He [al-Aḥḍab] then wrote a letter on his [the soldier's] behalf to his [the soldier's] farmers and the inhabitants of his village. With this, he [the soldier] got his right. [...] [Al-Aḥḍab] felt an urge to take possession of [the whole of] Upper Egypt. His determination grew because those in charge (*wulāt al-umūr*) were slow in responding to him, and he appointed his own chamberlain (*ḥājib*) and a secretary (*kātib*).⁶⁷

The appointment of a *ḥājib* and *kātib*, two functionaries essential for every ruler in the Islamic Middle East in the Middle Ages, probably had a symbolic character. The Mamluk chancery manuals (*inšā'*) show the importance of written correspondence between the court, the officials and power holders, for example, by informing court correspondents *en détail* how to choose different styles of writing for different addressees.⁶⁸ When al-Aḥḍab appointed a secretary or clerk, it was a sign that he was creating the institutional prerequisites for correspondence, not necessarily for negotiations with Cairo as Schwartz suggests,⁶⁹ but as a sign of visibility and accessibility and as a means of exercising power. In so doing, he strengthened his claim to lordly status. The appointment of a chamberlain also points in that direction, since the chamberlain was, among other functions, an interface between the ruling person and other people, e.g. he

they were poisoned. This suggests, by the way, that not every bowl was shared by all those present (Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/2, pp. 373-4).

⁶⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 908.

⁶⁸ For correspondence with Bedouins, for instance, see al-ʿUmarī, Ibn Faḍl Allāh, *Al-taʿrīf bi-al-muṣṭalaḥ al-ṣarīf* (Cairo: al-ʿĀṣima, 1312 [1894/5]): pp. 76-81; al-Qalqaṣandī, *Ṣubḥ*: VII, pp. 184-9.

⁶⁹ Schwartz, *Bedouin*: I, p. 295.

was a channel by which to gain access to the Sultan at court audiences.⁷⁰ To employ a *ḥājib*, i.e. a person who makes regularised access more difficult and ritualized, was therefore a sign of prominence. Thus, one leader of the most prominent Bedouin group, the Āl Faḍl, ‘Umar Ibn Nu‘ayr was said to have had three chamberlains in the year 797/1394, perhaps following a new trend that emerged in the period of Barquq of appointing up to five chamberlains.⁷¹

Al-Aḥḍab’s new role in Upper Egypt is also underlined by his influence on *iqṭā‘āt* (sing. *iqṭā‘*), land grants. The Mamluks covered their living costs with a *ḥarāj* tax paid to them by the farmers who lived on the land (*iqṭā‘*) whose income was taxed. Those who wanted to be allocated an *iqṭā‘* or to change one, passed their request to the Sultan, for all the land grants had to be made by him.⁷²

Al-Aḥḍab did not grant new *iqṭā‘āt*, however, but he did take care of the Mamluk soldiers who held *iqṭā‘āt* in his territory. They clearly complained to him about withheld taxes. This is interesting from several points of view. First, the farmers seemed, perhaps due to the new power constellation, to withhold parts of the dues (*ḥarāj*) from the *iqṭā‘*-holders. Second, it was al-Aḥḍab to whom the *iqṭā‘*-holders went for help and not the Sultan in Cairo. Finally, as would-be lord, al-Aḥḍab upheld the right of the Mamluk soldiers to receive their full dues by using administrative institutions.

The situation for farmers in Upper Egypt was harsh, especially during the period of Bedouin unrest between 1348 and 1353, for a variety of reasons. Not only did the hostilities between Bedouin groups disrupt agricultural production, but there was also the Black Death, which occurred in 1347 and lasted until 1349, followed by periodic waves of plague over the next 150 years.⁷³ One of the consequences of the Black Death was a severe demographic decline in both the cities and the countryside, and agricultural yields similarly declined. In addition, the Nile flood in three consecutive years from 1348 to 1350 was insufficient, and

⁷⁰ Bosworth, C.E. et al., “Ḥājib”, *EF*.

⁷¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: III/2, pp. 480, 838.

⁷² Al-‘Umarī, *Masālik*: pp. 109-10; Steenbergen, Jo van, “Mamluk elite on the eve of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s death (1341): A look behind the scenes of Mamluk politics”, *Mamlūk Studies Review* IX/2 (2005): pp. 173-99 (184).

⁷³ For the plague in the Middle East, see Dols, *The Black Death*; Borsch, *The Black Death in Egypt and England*. A list of plague occurrences during the Mamluk period from 1347 until the Ottoman conquest is given in Shoshan, Boaz, “Notes sur les épidémies de peste en Egypte”, *Annales de Démographie Historique* (1981): pp. 387-404 (395-400).

the irrigation system was in a state of decay.⁷⁴ Al-Maqrīzī comments that the people of Egypt, facing all this, had to endure several “unbearable things” around 1350, among them the exploitative behaviour of the Mamluks. Although the harvest yield was below the level estimated, the Mamluk government insisted on payment of the full dues.⁷⁵ According to the chronicler, this is why the farmers sympathised with the Bedouin uprising in Upper Egypt,⁷⁶ which was apparently seen as expression of opposition to the Mamluk ruling elite. The early historian of the Mamluk period, Abraham N. Poliak, who studied uprisings motivated by economic factors, also stressed the extent of cooperation between farmers and Bedouins.⁷⁷ His hypothesis is supported by the fact that the punitive expedition of the Mamluk army in 1353 was also directed against the farmers.⁷⁸ It is quite possible that the latter hoped that their situation would improve if al-Aḥḍab rose to power in Upper Egypt and that they therefore tried to withhold the full dues to the *iqṭā'*-holders. Jean-Claude Garcin has argued against Poliak’s statement. He doubts not only that uprisings were always linked to economic demands, but that farmers and Bedouin shared the same interests.⁷⁹

In fact, the farmers did not seem to be winners under the new power constellation in Upper Egypt. Although al-Aḥḍab took an interest in economic matters, he did not redistribute the resources to the farmers’ advantage, but rather supported the old Mamluk *iqṭā'*-holders.

The fact that the Mamluk *iqṭā'*-holders claimed their rights shows that Upper Egypt was still perceived as part of the Mamluk Sultanate. On the other hand, Mamluk soldiers seemed to have acknowledged the role of al-Aḥḍab as new distributor of resources. It seems that there was no Mamluk presence in al-Aḥḍab’s territory, either military or administrative. This was perhaps due to the Black Death, which caused a massive decline in the Mamluk army. Many soldiers died in their barracks, and there were also great losses among the members of the non-Mamluk units (*ḥalqa*). As mentioned above, tax revenues also declined. The high costs of a military expedition had to be assessed in relation to its benefits, particularly when the harvest was in danger from battles in the countryside. The Mamluks

⁷⁴ Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*: I/1, p. 523; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 833. For the decline of the irrigation system, see Borsch, *The Black Death in Egypt and England*.

⁷⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 833.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Garcin, “Révolte”: pp. 264-5.

⁷⁸ Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*: I/1, p. 550; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, pp. 910, 914.

⁷⁹ Garcin, “Révolte”: pp. 264, 267.

deployed their army only in reaction to offences they deemed particularly serious, e.g. the murder of or attack on a Mamluk emir. Around the time of al-Aḥḍab's reign, Mamluk military forces were concentrated in the province al-Itfīhiyya, where the local Bedouins had made raids against the local Mamluk governor.⁸⁰

But al-Aḥḍab's power did not result only from the weakness of the Mamluk government, which seemed hesitant to dispatch military units.⁸¹ He had won over thousands of Bedouins with their households, so he had access to a very strong army that buttressed his claim to power.⁸² The Mamluk soldiers therefore turned to the one who *de facto* had the power to distribute local resources. In parts of Upper Egypt around 1353, this was no longer the Mamluk Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ, but the Bedouin leader al-Aḥḍab.

To conclude this section: it is not entirely clear, what al-Aḥḍab's aspirations were or how he wanted to be perceived. Did he style himself as a would-be governor who protected the Mamluks' rights or did he actually want to present himself as a Sultan in his own right? In any case, it was certainly not to his disadvantage that al-Aḥḍab used instruments of power that the Mamluks were familiar with. The Mamluk ruling elite understood his actions, since he expressed them in their language, i.e. their symbols, ceremonies and institutions of authority and power. Al-Aḥḍab's unauthorised adoption of these features of Mamluk rule was a provocation. However, at the same time he demonstrated that he was able to rule transparently and officially. In addition, his decision to guarantee established rights and his use of Mamluk administrative institutions may have fostered bonds of loyalty between him and the Mamluk soldiers.

Provocation

Provocation is a central element in the description of al-Aḥḍab's 'Sultanate'. It is found in subtle allusions hinting at the power shift from the Mamluks to a Bedouin leader. One provocation lay in the origin of the parasol al-Aḥḍab used in his proclamation as Sultan. Al-Maqrīzī writes that this parasol "was taken from the cloth (*qumāṣ*) of al-Ḥaḍabānī." Majd al-Dīn al-Ḥaḍabānī was a Mamluk emir, who served as inspector of Lower Egypt in the time of al-Aḥḍab until 1352.⁸³ Al-Ḥaḍabānī had been attacked

⁸⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 864.

⁸¹ Shwartz also mentions that the Mamluk army did not respond effectively to this Bedouin unrest for years, in contrast to former unrest at the beginning of the fourteenth century (Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, pp. 293-4).

⁸² Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, pp. 910-11.

⁸³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 867.

and plundered, probably by al-Aḥḍab, during a military action against Bedouins in Upper Egypt sometime between 1348 and 1351. It was then that his cloth had been seized.⁸⁴

Al-Aḥḍab's greetings to the governor and inspector of Upper Egypt also appear to have been provocative. Al-Maqrīzī reports: “[Al-Aḥḍab also] delivered greetings through the Mamluks to the inspector (*kāšif*) and governor (*wālī*) and told them to tell [him]: ‘If you should have a need, I will take care of it!’”⁸⁵ The Arabic text suggests that the governor and the inspector were the same person,⁸⁶ who may have been Emir Özdemir, who held the position of inspector of Upper Egypt until the end of August 1352. After quelling the Bedouin unrest in al-Itfīḥiyya, he left this position at his own request and replaced Majd al-Dīn al-Ḥaḍabānī as inspector of Lower Egypt.⁸⁷ If we consider that al-Aḥḍab was already exercising power before 1353, when the second Mamluk military campaign against him started, his greetings to the ‘governor and inspector’ may have been to Özdemir. Emir Özdemir had replaced the former inspector, Tuḡayh, who had been attacked and killed by Bedouins near Asyut in 1348. It was Emir Özdemir, who led the expedition against the ‘Arak Bedouins in 1351 and it was also he who invited the Banū Hilāl to raid the defeated ‘Arak after al-Aḥḍab's flight. Al-Aḥḍab's greetings, which were probably directed to Emir Özedemir, can perhaps thus be interpreted as mockery. Things had changed in favour of al-Aḥḍab, and his offer to care of the Mamluk official's problems was certainly not meant seriously, but rather may have been intended to demonstrate the new power constellation in Upper Egypt.⁸⁸

The description of al-Aḥḍab's Sultanate resembles the events Jean-Claude Garcin describes in his article on the public representation of civil rebellions during the Mamluk period.⁸⁹ Garcin's example is the rebellion in Cairo in 1442-3 or 1445 of the Zanj, black slaves, who adopted parts of the Mamluk court culture and appointed a Sultan of their own to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the Mamluks. This was a rather simple spectacle and parody of the rulers, which did not concern the ruling elite in Cairo very

⁸⁴ Ibid.: pp. 843, 907.

⁸⁵ Ibid.: p. 908.

⁸⁶ “*Wa yursalu ma‘a mamālīk al-kāšif wa-al-wālī bi-al-salām ‘alayhi*” (ibid.). Indeed, the position of the inspector of Upper Egypt may also have included the position of the governor for the territory (see Steenbergen, *Order out of chaos*: p. 39).

⁸⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 867.

⁸⁸ For Schwartz, the letter to the Mamluk official(s) might be a sign for al-Aḥḍab's wish to make an agreement (Schwartz, *Bedouin*: I, p. 294).

⁸⁹ Garcin, “Révolte”.

much,⁹⁰ but Garcin also suggests that some of the revolts that led to the establishment of improvised courts did indeed bring changes. Thus, he suspects a connection between the relatively strong influence of Bedouins in Upper Egypt at the end of the fifteenth century and such performances by Bedouins.⁹¹ Besides al-Aḥḍab's rebellion, Garcin mentions the Bedouin rebellion in Upper Egypt in 1301-2,⁹² when the Bedouins called each other by the names of the then-Mamluk emirs, and chose two from among them to represent the most powerful emirs and *de facto* rulers of their time, Emir Baybars and Emir Salār. The Bedouin rebels in this case were responsible for plunder and robbery. They raided the prisons and released the prisoners, and prevented the governors from receiving their dues (*ḥarāj*). They caused so much damage that religious scholars issued a *fatwā* in support of a Mamluk military campaign against them.⁹³

However, while Garcin treats the references to the Mamluk court in both cases as 'comical performances', it appears that there were in fact crucial differences between them. The 'performance' during the rebellion of 1301-2 does seem to have been an ironical and somewhat superficial mimicking of the rulers, which arose spontaneously. Al-Aḥḍab's rebellion, however, was clearly well prepared, and the various signs of lordship were well considered and aptly placed. The aspect of strategic planning is perhaps even more important. While in the rebellion of 1301-2 the Bedouins cut off the payment of *ḥarāj* to the Mamluks, al-Aḥḍab personally took care that they continued to receive it. Indeed, al-Aḥḍab's Sultanate was more than simply an ironic adaptation, or a demonstration of his dissatisfaction with Mamluk rule. It was rather a demonstration of certain capabilities that the Mamluk ruling elite could not ignore. Thus, al-Aḥḍab presented himself as a ruler who had mastered important elements of lordship, such as justice, access to and distribution of resources, and gaining the respect of and having influence over different groups. He was supported by Bedouins and his rule was acknowledged by farmers and in a certain sense, by Mamluk *iqṭā'*-holders, too.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid.: pp. 269-72.

⁹¹ Ibid.: pp. 273, 275.

⁹² Ibid.: p. 268.

⁹³ Garcin refers to the story reported in al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: I/3, p. 920.

⁹⁴ Additional elements of lordship, such as coinage (*sikka*) and religious legitimation through reference to the ruler's name in the Friday sermon (*ḥutba*) are missing in al-Maqrīzī's description. Perhaps they were not used by al-Aḥḍab. As far as I know, there are no coins from this period that could be linked to al-Aḥḍab's 'sultanate'. It is in any case disputably whether they were of any importance for him, since he achieved acknowledgement as ruler without them.

II. THE TRIUMPH OF THE MAMLUK MILITARY CAMPAIGN AND AL-AḤḌAB'S FLIGHT

When he did not receive a response to his proclamation from the Mamluk government, al-Aḥḍab is said to have thought about extending his power. However, the situation in Upper Egypt was being observed in Cairo. When his rule became increasingly consolidated and revenues from Upper Egypt probably dropped, the government decided to react. The emirs, together with Sultan al-Šāliḥ, deliberated on taking action against al-Aḥḍab in November 1353.⁹⁵ They decided to subdue him and the rebellious Bedouins in Upper Egypt with a large military force. In addition to some high-ranking emirs, the Sultan too was involved in this campaign, although it was actually led by Emir Šayḥū al-ʿUmarī, who held a high military rank and several military offices at the same time.⁹⁶ The expeditionary army split into several groups and encircled the Bedouins at strategic places. Their escape, especially northwards to Cairo and southwards to Nubia, was to be prevented.⁹⁷ News of the approaching Mamluks caused panic among many Bedouins, who tried to flee or to hide, but they were found and caught by the Mamluks.

Al-Aḥḍab, however, could still rely on his Bedouin troops. Facing the approaching emirs, he was determined to fight them, and he made his Bedouins swear to support him.⁹⁸ Not only ʿArak-Bedouins belonged to this loyal core group, but also Bedouins from the Banū Kilāb and the Juhayna and Bedouins from Manfalūṭ and al-Marāġa.⁹⁹ The Bedouin warriors allegedly amounted to more than 10,000 men, excluding women, children and other members of their households, who put their hope in al-Aḥḍab. They all moved to the south together. Emir Šayḥū followed them and, during a rest in Asyut, gathered information about the situation and the strength of the Bedouin alliance. The ʿArak were known in this town, since they lived in the district. Emir Šayḥū and his army then moved southwards as far as the town of Idfu. There he was informed by the emirs of Aswan that al-Aḥḍab and his Bedouins were now camped in a desert region (*barriyya*) next to a certain Wādī al-Ġizlān (or al-Ġazlān), which

⁹⁵ The following passage is a summary of the events and refers to al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, pp. 908-13.

⁹⁶ For Emir Šayḥū, see Steenbergen, *Order out of chaos*: p. 186 and *passim*.

⁹⁷ See also Garcin, *Qūṣ*: p. 383.

⁹⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 911. This oath was perhaps the one, Ibn Iyās referred to. See above.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

was probably located in the vicinity of Aswan.¹⁰⁰ Somewhere between these places, both parties met. The battle, according to al-Maqrīzī, was not decided by manpower or military skills, but by a natural event, namely a sandstorm, which blocked the Bedouins' view.¹⁰¹

After this victory, the Mamluks continued the persecution of the Bedouins "until no Bedouin (*badawī*) [...] was left in Upper Egypt", as al-Maqrīzī states.¹⁰² The Mamluks were merciless, torturing children and women in order to find the hidden men. The treatment of the losers was apparently guided by only one aim: humiliation, whether they were dead or still alive. For the Mamluks, the victory over the Bedouins was a triumph that was publicly celebrated in the capital city Cairo, and demonstrated in Upper Egypt.

When Emir Šayḥū entered Cairo after the three-month expedition, the whole city was celebrating the triumph. Al-Maqrīzī describes it as a "memorable" day and mentions that at least three eulogies were composed for Šayḥū on this occasion, among them one by Emir Özdemir.¹⁰³ Besides the rich booty, Šayḥū brought about 2,000 Bedouins captive from Upper Egypt, but some 100 died from hunger and exhaustion on the way to Cairo. The remaining prisoners were used to demonstrate the Mamluks' superiority by being paraded in humiliation before the citizens.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the sources differ concerning the treatment of the vanquished. Ibn Iyās reports that the Sultan ordered the execution of all of them except the Bedouin notables (*akābir*).¹⁰⁵ However, it is more likely that the captured Bedouins were used for forced labour, as al-Maqrīzī writes.¹⁰⁶ Captured Bedouins were also used for forced labour, e.g. in the canal works, on other occasions.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, after the losses of the Black Death, manpower was too important to be disregarded. However,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.; Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, pp. 260, 296.

¹⁰¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, pp. 912-3.

¹⁰² Ibid.: p. 913.

¹⁰³ Ibid. Ibn Iyās also describes this day as "memorable", but in his account it is the Sultan who leads the triumphal procession and who alone deserves the glory. Šayḥū, although Ibn Iyās also mentions him in the context of the military campaign, does not play any role in the triumphal procession. This accords in general with Ibn Iyās's account of the rebellion and its suppression, which mainly focuses on the role of the Sultan (Ibn Iyās, *Badā' i'*: I/1, pp. 550-1.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 913.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Iyās, *Badā' i'*: I/1, p. 551. Other terms denoting Bedouin notables are discussed are discussed below.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 913.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.: II/1, p. 129.

according to al-Maqrīzī, many Bedouins died after a short time in prison, probably due to the harsh working conditions.¹⁰⁸

In Upper Egypt the Mamluks combined the demonstration of triumph and superiority over the Bedouins with deterrence. Dead Bedouins were hung in plain view on spikes along the roads.¹⁰⁹ Others were thrown into pits, over which the Mamluks erected mastabas (*maṣāṭib*, sing. *maṣṭaba*).¹¹⁰ It is also reported that these constructions were built with the heads of the dead.¹¹¹ Ibn Iyās describes the scene as follows:

They did not stop cutting off the heads of the Bedouins and the farmers who were in the villages of Upper Egypt, and built with their heads a couple of mastabas (*maṣāṭib*) and towers on the bank of the Nile, just as Hülegü did in Baghdad.¹¹²

In doing so, the Mamluks demonstrated that they had prevailed again in Upper Egypt and also delivered a warning to all potential rebels.

After the victory of the Mamluk troops, the government issued several decrees laying down further punishments and measures to prevent more uprisings. Apart from those who were responsible for the control of certain areas (*arbāb al-adrāk*), Bedouins and farmers were not allowed to own horses or weapons.¹¹³ The chronicler Ibn Duqmāq also reports that they were forbidden to buy cloth.¹¹⁴ This unusual decree may have to do with the proclamation of al-Aḥḍab's Sultanate and his use of stolen cloth as a sign of royal power.

Al-Aḥḍab managed to flee from the Mamluks in time, again leaving his family and property behind.¹¹⁵ While al-Maqrīzī does not say where he took refuge, Ibn Iyās reports that the Sultan sent Emir Šayḥū to the "Land of the Zanj", i.e. the eastern coastal territories of Africa, where al-Aḥḍab was thought to be, but a search produced no result.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.: II/3, p. 915.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.: p. 913.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.: pp. 912-3.

¹¹¹ Ibn Duqmāq, *Nuḥḥa*: I, p. 173; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*: I/1, p. 550.

¹¹² Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*: I/1, p. 550. By referring to the Turko-Mongols' practice of demonstrating superiority by using particularly cruel means of deterrence, Ibn Iyās might have attempted to stress the power of the Mamluks.

¹¹³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 914; Ibn Duqmāq, *Nuḥḥa*: I, p. 173; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*: I/1, p. 551.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Duqmāq, *Nuḥḥa*: I, p. 173.

¹¹⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, pp. 915-6.

¹¹⁶ Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*: I/1, p. 550.

III. AL-AḤḌAB'S INTEGRATION IN MAMLUK POLITICS:
BEGGING FOR PARDON AND BECOMING A MAMLUK BEDOUIN EMIR

Intercession

Al-Aḥḍab's flight marks the beginning of a new level of communication between him and the Mamluk elite. Before the battle with the Mamluks, he was presented as a strong and powerful leader, determined to extend his sphere of influence, who supported the local Mamluk *iqṭā'*-holders and ignored the Mamluk ruling elite in Cairo. This all was communicated to the common local people, as well as to the elite in Cairo, by corresponding symbols and actions. Now, after the battle was lost and the Mamluks had re-established their presence in Upper Egypt again, things changed. Al-Aḥḍab escaped and did not come back to take revenge, as he had against the Banū Hilāl in 1351. It rather seems that he recognised that he was defeated.

Nevertheless, al-Aḥḍab's political career was not over yet. According to al-Maqrīzī, some time after Emir Šayḥū's triumphal parade in Cairo in March 1354, the Mamluk emir received a letter written by a Sufī shaykh by the name of Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṭaḥāwī in which he interceded on behalf of al-Aḥḍab. Al-Aḥḍab had apparently contacted al-Ṭaḥāwī immediately after the Mamluk army's withdrawal from Upper Egypt, asking him to intervene on his behalf.¹¹⁷ In other versions of this episode, al-Ṭaḥāwī is not mentioned.¹¹⁸ However, it is unlikely that al-Aḥḍab would have asked for pardon without support, and seeking someone's intercession (*šafā'a*) was an important and promising method to use.

With intercession, al-Aḥḍab was using a new strategy of communication, not linked to symbols or to the common people, but to people with influence. The linchpin of intercession was the one who intercedes, who should be someone with the ability to do it. This ability to intercede was strongly linked with influence or, in the words of the Syrian author Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 1370), with the quality of being *maqbul al-kalima*, someone "whose word is accepted".¹¹⁹ Other Mamluk authors such as al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Abd Allāh al-'Abbāsī (d. early fourteenth century) highlighted the importance of a position close to the addressee (*jāh*), also

¹¹⁷ The term that expresses this kind of appeal seems to be *tarāmā* (to prostrate oneself). Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 916; see also *ibid.*: III/2, p. 831.

¹¹⁸ Ibn Duqmāq, *Nuḥḥa*: I, p. 173; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*: I/1, p. 551.

¹¹⁹ See Marmon, Shaun E., "The quality of mercy: intercession in Mamluk society", *Studia Islamica*, LXXXVII/2 (1998): pp. 125-39 (133); Steenbergen, *Order out of chaos*: p. 70.

‘place’ or ‘status’).¹²⁰ So a person of lower rank often asked a person who had a higher rank or enjoyed a higher level of imperial favour (*ni‘ma*) to intercede on his behalf, and he, in turn, could ask someone else with even greater influence to intercede, until the ‘right’ person directed the supplication to the addressee.¹²¹ Intercession was first and foremost practised within a patron-client relationship, so personal contacts and relations were exploited.¹²² Many intercessions reported in the chronicles were such that it was the Sultan who had to respond, for example, to pardon disloyal Mamluk emirs or to promote Mamluks to be emirs or to higher ranks.¹²³ In these cases those asked to intercede belonged to the “circle of trustees and intimates”¹²⁴ around the Sultan, so that their intercession was usually accepted by him. These mediators, it is important to note, were not always the highest-ranking emirs, but might simply be on good terms with the Sultan or have some influence on him. The Syrian Bedouin emir Muhannā, for example, seems to have been very familiar with Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad at the beginning of the latter’s third reign in 1310 and interceded on behalf of various Mamluks, even though he was not one of the highest-ranking emirs, nor was he regularly present at court.¹²⁵

People who asked mediators for help, as well the mediators themselves, had access and usually also belonged to elitist networks linked to the Sultan. Intercession was thus clearly part of the repertoire of actions available to the socio-political elite. However, its conventions were not mandated by Islamic law (*ṣarī‘a*), and it was utilised as an alternative to the *sharī‘a* courts and the ‘House of Justice’¹²⁶ (*dār al-‘adl*) of the Sultan

¹²⁰ Marmon, “Quality of mercy”: pp. 132-3.

¹²¹ Steenbergen, *Order out of chaos*: p. 68; Paul, Jürgen, *Herrscher, Gemeinwesen, Vermittler. Ostiran und Transoxanien in vormongolischer Zeit* (Beirut: Beirut Texts und Studien, 1996): p. 203. For intercession performed by local elites, see also Durand-Guédy, David, *Iranian elites and Turkish rulers: A history of Isfahān in the Saljūq period* (London: Routledge): pp. 249-55.

¹²² Steenbergen, *Order out of chaos*: p. 68; Paul, *Herrscher*: pp. 203, 205.

¹²³ Steenbergen, *Order out of chaos*: pp. 70-1.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*: p. 70.

¹²⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/1, pp. 87-8. For a discussion of emirs in the Bedouin context see below.

¹²⁶ A regular public hearing in which the Sultan administered justice. For the wider context of sultanic justice, see Nielsen, J.S., “Mazālim”, *EF²*, and Nielsen, J.S., *Secular justice in an Islamic state: Mazālim under the Bahri Mamluks, 662/1264-789/1387* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1985).

as a means of resolving conflicts.¹²⁷ It thus offered the people who successfully used intercession a kind of immunity or protection against harsh punishments and exclusion following disloyal acts or improper behaviour. Intercession often led to absolution and re-inclusion into the elitist group.¹²⁸ This immunity had its limits, but in many cases emirs were protected from permanent exclusion or dishonourable punishments by availing themselves of this option.¹²⁹

Intercession followed its own rules. As mentioned, a central figure was the one who interceded between the supplicant and the one supplicated. *Maqbūl al-kalima* and *jāh* both indicate high status and reputation, and people who were asked to intercede had a reputation for being successful in this task. The mediator was not neutral, but used his status to rehabilitate another who, for example, had fallen from grace with the Sultan. If he was successful, he was rewarded, at least symbolically, since his high status and influence was confirmed. If he failed and his intercession was not accepted, it was a humiliation that might have dramatic consequences.¹³⁰ Indeed, within the Mamluk elite context the phrase “his intercession was accepted” was a clear ‘statement of power’, as Mamluk biographies suggest.¹³¹

In al-Aḥḍab’s case, the Bedouin leader tried to beg for pardon via the intercession of a Sufi shaykh who, in turn, contacted someone with access to the Sultan, who then accepted al-Aḥḍab’s request. It seems that al-Aḥḍab had no direct personal contact either with one of the Sultan’s intimates, or with a member of the political elite who could have asked for pardon on his behalf. This is probably why he chose a Sufi shaykh to intercede.

However, in tactical terms, the decision to contact this Sufi shaykh was a good one. In general, the Mamluks sympathised with the Sufis and supported them by building *ḥānqāhs* or *zāwiyas*, i.e. Sufi lodges or religious establishments for the use of mystics and their disciples, and by

¹²⁷ Marmon, “Quality of mercy”: p. 131. Besides this, these non-formal structures helped also to balance the patron-client-relations between the Sultan and members of the political elite within formal institutions. See Levanoni, Amalia, “The al-Nashw episode: A case study of “moral economy”, *Mamlūk Studies Review*, IX/1 (2005), pp. 207-20.

¹²⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: III/2, pp. 638, 830-1.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ See for instance *ibid.*: II/2, pp. 461, 497, 499, 506-7, 509; Marmon, “Quality of mercy”: pp. 136-8.

¹³¹ Marmon, “Quality of mercy”: p. 136.

generously supplying them with food.¹³² In addition, Sufi shaykhs were regarded as powerful and influential, since they were perceived as being close to God.¹³³ The intercession of a Sufi shaykh would therefore have been highly promising. We do not know how al-Aḥḍab chose al-Ṭahāwī, but he must have been convinced that he was the right person to intercede. It is possible that al-Aḥḍab was on familiar terms with him. As member of the Bedouin elite, he may have had access to Sufi orders, as is documented with regard to other Bedouins.¹³⁴

It is noteworthy that al-Ṭahāwī wrote to Emir Šayḥū about al-Aḥḍab's situation (*fī amrihi*).¹³⁵ Also here, we can only speculate as to why the supplication was addressed to Emir Šayḥū. Perhaps there was a personal relationship between al-Ṭahāwī and Šayḥū that al-Aḥḍab knew about, since Šayḥū is said to have ordered the renovation of the Sufi shaykh's *zāwiya*.¹³⁶ Šayḥū might have felt obliged to help al-Aḥḍab because of his relation to al-Ṭahāwī. On the other hand, it seems that this *zāwiya* was renovated after the intercession and not before. Another possibility may be that, although it was officially Sultan al-Šāliḥ who would have been the addressee of the supplication for peace, al-Aḥḍab had directed it to Emir Šayḥū because he was in such a powerful position that he could make an independent decision in the affair.¹³⁷ In that case, the Sultan would then simply have given legitimacy to the decision with his signature, as van Steenbergen suggests for similar cases of intercession where requests were accepted by *de facto* ruling emirs rather than by Sultans, who were mostly of minor age.¹³⁸ Since Sultan al-Šāliḥ was a minor when he assumed the throne in 1351 – in fact through Šayḥū's efforts – this may be what happened in this case too.¹³⁹

¹³² Sabra, A., *Poverty and charity in medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250-1517* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): pp. 25, 28, 139. For Sufism in the Mamluk period, see, for instance: McGregor, R. and Sabra, A. (eds), *Le développement du soufisme en Égypte à l'époque mamelouke* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2006).

¹³³ Paul, *Herrscher*: p. 207; Taylor, Christopher S., *In the vicinity of the righteous: Ziyāra and the veneration of Muslim saints in late medieval Egypt* (Brill: Leiden, 1999): pp. 141-54.

¹³⁴ Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, pp. 213-4.

¹³⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 916.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Steenbergen, *Order out of chaos*: pp. 114-5.

¹³⁸ Ibid.: pp. 71-2.

¹³⁹ Ibid.: pp. 72, 115.

Be that as it may, al-Aḥḍab was very well informed not only about the visual signs and institutions of imperial power, but also about power constellations and the importance of intercession within the socio-political elite. He demonstrated this knowledge by using elements of the elite's repertoire of actions, as well as by choosing the right people to carry them out. Essentially, by using intercession, al-Aḥḍab followed to the rules of communication within the Mamluk elite.

The peace offer: satisfaction and negotiations

In his letter to Šayḥū, Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṭaḥāwī asked for pardon and amnesty (*ta'mīn*) for al-Aḥḍab. In return, al-Aḥḍab agreed to take on control tasks (*darak*) in Upper Egypt, collect grain for the government, cooperate with high-ranking officials and safeguard peace in the region.¹⁴⁰ The chronicler Ibn Ḥaldūn reports that al-Aḥḍab ensured that no Bedouins would use weapons or horses, in accordance with the government decree to this effect,¹⁴¹ and that they would take up agriculture.¹⁴² Ibn Iyās mentions only one offer, but a crucial one, namely "to step on the Sultan's carpet and to attend".¹⁴³ As already mentioned, loyalty could be indicated simply by attendance (*ḥaḍra*) at court, so with this offer, al-Aḥḍab declared that he would bow to the Sultan's authority and be loyal to him in future.

The conditions of peace were negotiated before al-Aḥḍab came to court. One might ask whether peace negotiations were really necessary, since the Mamluks had clearly won. What they received in these negotiations, however, was satisfaction, i.e. the rebel's symbolical acknowledgement that he had lost and was willing to subordinate himself. On the other hand, al-Aḥḍab's offer included some benefits. It was not easy for the Mamluks to maintain their grip on peripheral regions with a high Bedouin population.¹⁴⁴ They needed somebody to act as an interface in such areas, and al-Aḥḍab had perfectly demonstrated his abilities, both military and administrative. Thus, for both the Mamluks and al-Aḥḍab, this peace agreement seems to have been a win-win solution.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 916.

¹⁴¹ See above.

¹⁴² Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Tārīḥ*: V, p. 450.

¹⁴³ Ibn Iyās, *Badā' i'*: I/1, p. 551.

¹⁴⁴ On the limitations of the Mamluk rule in peripheral regions, see Levanoni, "Mamlūks": p. 244.

Al-Aḥḍab at court

Al-Aḥḍab's offer was accepted, but it was only when Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ had issued a decree of amnesty (*amān sulṭānī*) that al-Aḥḍab went to court.¹⁴⁵ The Sultan probably sent him a sign of safe conduct (*mandīl al-amān*), as Ibn Iyās reports.¹⁴⁶ According to al-Maqrīzī, he was also accompanied by al-Ṭaḥāwī, the Sufī shaykh. This was surely an additional protection for the Bedouin leader, or at least a support, since attendance at the Sultan's court had its risks. This can be seen, for example, in the case of the Syrian Bedouin emir Fayyāḍ Ibn Muḥannā, who arrived in Cairo to attend court with two companions. After these two companions had left Cairo, Fayyāḍ, still at court, was arrested.¹⁴⁷ In al-Aḥḍab's case, the Sufī shaykh did not return home before the Bedouin leader had safely returned to his territory. However, al-Aḥḍab's arrival in Cairo, like Ṣayḥū's triumphal procession, was described by al-Maqrīzī as a "memorable day".¹⁴⁸

Al-Aḥḍab's attendance at the Mamluk court, then, was a formal confirmation of what had been negotiated in advance. This confirmation was signified in symbolical acts. The emirs treated him and al-Ṭaḥāwī as honourable guests, although it is not quite sure whether they did so voluntarily, since al-Maqrīzī writes: "The emirs treated the shaykh as an honourable guest (*akrama*) and because of him (i.e. Shaykh al-Ṭaḥāwī) they [also] honoured al-Aḥḍab."¹⁴⁹ However, al-Aḥḍab seems to have been admitted to the circle of emirs, since he also received numerous favours (*in ām*) from them. By this, the Bedouin leader and the Mamluk emirs may have sealed their new togetherness and solidarity.¹⁵⁰ Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ bestowed a robe of honour (*taṣrīf*) upon him, as well as an *iqṭā'* for his future services. By bestowing robes of honour, the Sultan confirmed his supremacy, since only subordinates were granted such robes.¹⁵¹ Al-

¹⁴⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 916.

¹⁴⁶ Ibn Iyās, *Badā' i'*: I/1, p. 551; Rosenthal, F., "Mandīl", *ET*².

¹⁴⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 770. The background was an ongoing power struggle between members of this Bedouin family.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/3, p. 916.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ On the symbolic significance of gifts, see Mauss, Marcel, *Die Gabe: Form und Funktion des Austausches in archaischen Gesellschaften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990): p. 37 and *passim*.

¹⁵¹ Diem, Werner, *Ehrendes Kleid und Ehrendes Wort: Studien zu taṣrīf in mamlukischer und vormamlukischer Zeit* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2002): pp. 51-2; Steenbergen, "Mamluk elite": pp. 188, 189.

Aḥḍab also seemed to have remained shaykh of the 'Arak Bedouin,¹⁵² and certainly he was given the title and status of an emir, as indicated by symbolic acts at the court, such as the emirs' favours, as well as the bestowal of robes of honour.¹⁵³ All this emphasised the new contract-based relation between them, especially his appointment as an emir.

Integration into Mamluk politics: Becoming a 'Bedouin emir'

To be appointed as an emir was a privilege connected with specific duties and favours. It was a particular privilege for Bedouin notables, since most of them, including Bedouin leaders, were not emirs.¹⁵⁴ What did the title of 'emir' mean in the Bedouin context? As mentioned above, each Bedouin group had its own relationship with the Mamluk government. This relation was expressed, for example, in the terms used in connection with it.

First of all, the title 'emir' could only be granted by the Sultan. Thus a Bedouin notable who bore this title was linked to him and his government.¹⁵⁵ It was more than an honorary title, since the Bedouin emirs were counted among the 'men of the sword' (*arbāb al-suyūf*).¹⁵⁶ They had some duties to fulfil for which they received benefits. As the term 'men of the sword' suggests, military support was one crucial aspect of these duties.¹⁵⁷

In general, it seems, as al-Qalqašandī suggests, that a Bedouin emir ranked higher than a shaykh, at least in Mamluk contexts.¹⁵⁸ However, there were several hierarchical levels of Bedouin emirs. A distinction was made, for example, between the Syrian and the Egyptian Bedouin emirs: the latter were perceived to be less important and were therefore neglected by the government.¹⁵⁹ Another distinction was drawn between emirs of different tribes and tribal sub-groups. Such hierarchies within Bedouin emirs and notables are reflected in the *inšā'* literature. Mamluk chancery

¹⁵² Ibn Duqmāq, *Nuḥḥa*: I, p. 173; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*: I/1, p. 551.

¹⁵³ Diem, *Ehrendes Kleid*: p. 48; Steenbergen "Mamluk elite": p. 189.

¹⁵⁴ Ayalon, David, "The auxiliary forces of the Mamluk Sultanate", *Der Islam* LXV (1988): pp. 13-37 (24).

¹⁵⁵ Hiyari, M.A., "The origins and development of the Amirate of the Arabs during the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XXXVIII/3 (1975): pp. 509-24 (522).

¹⁵⁶ Al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*: VI, p. 55; Hiyari, "Origins": pp. 509, 522.

¹⁵⁷ Al-'Umarī, *Ta'rif*: p. 109.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*: IV, p. 71.

¹⁵⁹ Al-'Umarī, *Ta'rif*: p. 76; Hiyari, "Origins": p. 524.

manuals contain several forms of address for different Bedouin emirs.¹⁶⁰ As for Syria, the most important tribal group were the Āl Faḍl, whose emir was given a more honourable form of address than the emirs of other Syrian tribal groups.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, his prominent status was also demonstrated by his honorific (*laqab*), as al-Qalqašandī states.¹⁶² The emir of the Āl Faḍl usually also held the position of supreme representative of the Bedouins (*imrat al-‘Arab*). He was a sort of emir of all Bedouins of the Syrian steppe, and might also be called “king of the Bedouins” (*malik al-‘Arab*).¹⁶³ His special status is not only confirmed by the benefits he received or by his titles, which were used in written correspondence, but also by his being mentioned in chronicle obituaries after he died.¹⁶⁴ In Egypt there were several different *umarā’ al-‘Arab* for different parts of the country, but according to al-‘Umarī, who wrote during the first half of the fourteenth century, nobody seemed to be of such significance as this Syrian Bedouin emir.¹⁶⁵ In fact, no Egyptian Bedouin emir was mentioned in obituaries during this period.

Within a tribal group, the leading emir was also distinguished from the notables among his people by the form of address used for him, as the *inšā’* literature shows.¹⁶⁶ The chroniclers only rarely mention such Bedouin notables. If they do, their members are called *a’yān* or *akābir*.¹⁶⁷ *Kabīr* (sing.) and *akābir* (pl.) were probably also used within Bedouin groups to address elders and distinguished men of all ages.¹⁶⁸

The hierarchy of Bedouin emirs is less clear in the chronicles than in the *inšā’* literature, and the internal structures of Bedouin groups also remain uncertain. When chroniclers mention the Bedouins, they are often referred to as an unspecified collective (*al-‘Arab* or *al-‘Urbān*), sometimes named, but often not, but Bedouin groups become more ‘individualised’

¹⁶⁰ Al-‘Umarī, *Ta’rīf*: pp. 76-81; al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*: VII, pp. 160-3, 184-9.

¹⁶¹ Al-‘Umarī, *Ta’rīf*: pp. 79-80; Hiyari, “Origins”: pp. 522-3.

¹⁶² Al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*: VI, p. 60.

¹⁶³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/1, p. 87; Hiyari, “Origins”: p. 517.

¹⁶⁴ See for instance, al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/1, p. 258; II/2, p. 376; II/3, p. 792; III/1, p. 46.

¹⁶⁵ Al-‘Umarī, *Ta’rīf*: pp. 76-7.

¹⁶⁶ For instance al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ*: VII, p. 185; Hiyari, “Origins”: p. 522.

¹⁶⁷ For instance al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: III/1, pp. 392, 409, 410; III/2, pp. 450, 458; Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’*: I/1, p. 551.

¹⁶⁸ For the usage of these terms among the Bedouins of modern Sinai, see Stewart, Frank, *Texts in Sinai Bedouin law*. Pt 2: *The texts in Arabic, glossary* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1990): p. 240.

through their emirs. It is often only in the context of the emir's personal relations with the Mamluks that names and other aspects of Bedouin life, such as clothes, food and drink, are mentioned.¹⁶⁹

Besides Bedouin emirs, Mamluk chroniclers also use other terms for Bedouin leaders and representatives such as *shaykh*, *kabīr al-'Urbān* and *muqaddam*.¹⁷⁰ Shwartz states that the term *muqaddam* refers to a leader of a lower rank than an *amīr*, while both titles seem to indicate a military rank.¹⁷¹ Although the titles *amīr* and *muqaddam* suggest that the Mamluks integrated the Bedouins in their ruling system, they do not say anything about the titleholders' real power within their groups.¹⁷² Similarly, a *shaykh al-'Arab* might be called 'emir' by his Bedouins, although he was not a Bedouin emir in the Mamluk sense.¹⁷³

The hierarchy within Bedouin groups produced by the Bedouins themselves, as well as the hierarchy within Bedouin groups produced by the Mamluk government, is complex and difficult to discuss in retrospect because the available source basis is small. One can conclude, however, that not every Bedouin emir was also a Bedouin shaykh, and that not every Bedouin shaykh was a Bedouin emir, and that it is unclear how power and authority were distributed within tribal groups. What the sources state clearly, however, is that Bedouin emirs were regarded as officials with duties and benefits, and thus as part of the Mamluk ruling system and its elite. Nevertheless, they always ranked below the highest-ranking Mamluk emirs.¹⁷⁴

Coming back to al-Aḥḍab, it seems that before his stay at court he was a shaykh of the 'Arak, but not a Bedouin emir. His appointment is a sign for his cooption into Mamluk politics, and as his case shows, cooption was not always initiated by the Mamluks; Bedouin notables also displayed agency in seeking admission to governmental politics. In this case,

¹⁶⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: II/2, pp. 374; 528.

¹⁷⁰ See, for instance, *ibid.*: II/3, pp. 806, 896, 910; III/2: p. 544; Ibn Iyās, Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad, *Jawāhir al-sulūk fī amr al-ḥulafā' wa-al-mulūk*, ed. Zaynahum, Muḥammad (Cairo: Al-Dār al-Ṭaḳāfiyya li-al-Naṣr, 2006): p. 231; Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, p. 216; Mouton, Jean-Michel, *Le Sināi médiéval: Un espace stratégique de l'Islam* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000): p. 135.

¹⁷¹ Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, p. 216.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* This was probably the case with al-Aḥḍab before he went to court. He was called 'emir' by his followers. See above.

¹⁷⁴ Ayalon, "Auxiliary forces": p. 23; Hiyari, "Origins": p. 523. See also his comparison of the status of the various Syrian Bedouin emirs with the status of various Mamluk emirs in different cities and provinces (*ibid.*).

subordination marked the beginning of the officially legitimated power, albeit circumscribed, of a Bedouin notable. The 'Arak Bedouins may have had profited from this, but since the sources do not provide us with any information, the question what possible advantages there may have been cannot be answered. However, one may speculate that at least the other 'Arak notables were content with this development, since it would have been difficult for the government to keep certain Bedouins as privileged partners if the latter and their position were not accepted by the notables.¹⁷⁵

The 'sons of Aḥḍab' (awlād al-Aḥḍab)

After his successful visit to Cairo, al-Aḥḍab was still leader of the 'Arak Bedouins and, in addition, he had been appointed as emir and integrated in the Mamluk ruling system. Although he had to fulfil some tasks for the Mamluks, he maintained his powerful position in Upper Egypt, this time with official confirmation. This represented the founding of a new dynastic line within the 'Arak. Nothing is reported about al-Aḥḍab's further destiny after 1354, but his sons and descendants were known as important Bedouin emirs in Upper Egypt. The prominence of their status is demonstrated by the obituaries that can be found in the chronicles, taking into account that obituaries for Bedouin emirs until then were extremely rare and almost exclusively devoted to the Syrian Āl Faḍl.¹⁷⁶ In the obituaries for the 'Arak emirs, al-Aḥḍab's significance is clearly expressed in the fact that his nickname became his sons' family name. In an obituary for the year 1396-7, al-Maqrīzī writes: 'Death of Abū Bakr Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Wāṣil, known as Ibn al-Aḥḍab, emir of the 'Arak, on 20 Dū-l-Qa'ḍa, killed.'¹⁷⁷

Not only his sons and grandsons, but also the 'Arak Bedouins in general seem to have been identified with al-Aḥḍab as late as the fifteenth century, when they were referred to as *'Arab ibn al-Aḥḍab*.¹⁷⁸

At the end of the fourteenth century, things changed. Sultan Barqūq (1382-9/1390-9) resettled members of the tribal group of the Hawwāra

¹⁷⁵ For a modern example for the dismissal of a Bedouin leader by the government, who, albeit in a very different context, had lost the support of the notables of his tribe, see Büssow, Johann, 'Negotiating the future of a Bedouin polity in Mandatory Syria: Political dynamics of the Sba'a-'Abada during the 1930s', *Nomadic Peoples* (forthcoming).

¹⁷⁶ See above.

¹⁷⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: III/2, p. 883.

¹⁷⁸ Ibn Taḡrībīrdī, Abū al-Maḥāsīn, *Ḥawādiṯ al-duḥūr fī madā al-ayyām wa-al-ṣuhūr*, ed. Popper, William (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931): VIII/3, p. 502.

from the Lower Egyptian province of al-Buḥayra to several regions in Upper Egypt, namely to Aḥmīm, Girga (Jirjā) and Dahrūt.¹⁷⁹ Subsequently, the Hawwāra emirs gained more and more power in Upper Egypt, and the significance of the ‘Arak emirs declined.¹⁸⁰ The settlement of the Hawwāra in Upper Egypt can be explained by Barqūq’s Bedouin politics: He wanted on the one hand to diminish the numbers of Bedouins in al-Buḥayra, and on the other to control the tribal groups in Upper Egypt.¹⁸¹ In addition, Barqūq hoped for the Hawwāra’s support in own affairs –when he was deposed in 1389, for example.¹⁸² However, it is also possible that Barqūq, when he resettled the Hawwāra, was acting in the context of his new elite politics, which is known to have focused on the replacement of the old elite’s members by new favourites.¹⁸³ This policy may also have been applied to the Bedouin emirs. The resettlement of one Hawwāra group in the vicinity of Girga to the south of the ‘Arak in al-Asyūṭiyya, and then another Hawwāra group in the vicinity of Dahrūt, to the north of the ‘Arak, point in that direction. Al-Aḥḍab’s descendants, however, remained emirs at least until the conquest of the Mamluk Sultanate by the Ottomans in 1517.¹⁸⁴

Conclusion

This is a preliminary study and further research needs to be done, particularly regarding Bedouin power brokers and Mamluk-Bedouin relations. However, the al-Aḥḍab episode is a rare but vivid example of how a Bedouin notable was able to be integrated – or to integrate himself – into the Mamluk government and at the same time to defend his own interests. He achieved this not only through the exercise of power, but also by using certain skills. We do not know whether al-Aḥḍab followed a coherent plan to use the revolt and his ‘sultanate’ to demonstrate his skills to the court in Cairo, but this seems possible, at least in retrospect.

¹⁷⁹ Garcin, *Qūṣ*: pp. 469-70, 472.

¹⁸⁰ Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, p. 338. For the Hawwāra and their emirs, see Garcin, *Qūṣ*: pp. 468-98; Garcin, Jean-Claude, “Emirs Hawwāras et beys de Ġirġa aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles”, *Annales Islamologiques* XII (1975): pp. 245-55; Holt, P.M., “Hawwāra (also Huwwāra; now Howwāra or Hewwāra)”, *EF*².

¹⁸¹ Garcin, *Qūṣ*: pp. 469-70, 472.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*: p. 471.

¹⁸³ Behrens-Abouseif, “Citadel”: p. 29; al-Jawharī, ‘Alī Ibn Dāwud, *Nuzhat al-nufūs wa-al-abdān fī tawārīḥ al-zamān*, ed. Ḥabašī, Ḥasan (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1970-3): I, p. 213; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*: III/2, p. 618.

¹⁸⁴ Shwartz, *Bedouin*: I, p. 338; II, pp. 256, 472.

Concerning his power, al-Aḥḍab possibly wanted to demonstrate his influence over a variety of groups and his ability to mobilise troops within a short space of time to form a broad alliance of Bedouin groups. At the same time, he demonstrated his knowledge of the rules of communication and politics prevalent at the Mamluk court, although such knowledge was only useful when the court allowed and acknowledged its practice. Thus, it was ultimately the Mamluk government that decided al-Aḥḍab's destiny. The development of this relationship was communicated by symbols, actions and rules that were first and foremost addressed to the elites.

The peace agreement between al-Aḥḍab and the Mamluks in 1354 turned out to be beneficial for both parties. The Mamluks got satisfaction when al-Aḥḍab submitted himself to the Sultan and took over some tasks on the Mamluks' behalf, which relieved them and would ensure security and economic revenues, while Al-Aḥḍab benefited by continuing to be a powerful and prominent figure in Upper Egypt. His power and influence, although now more tightly circumscribed, were acknowledged and supported by the Sultan's government in Cairo and were transferred after his death to his descendants. The way in which al-Aḥḍab struggled to become part of Mamluk politics suggests that the conflict between the Bedouin leader and the Mamluks was not so much a conflict between two ethnic groups, but rather formed part of an intra-elite struggle for power.

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