Inal al-Ajrūd, al-Malik al-Ashraf

Al-Malik al-Ashraf Sayf al-Dīn Abū l-Naṣr Ināl b. ‘Abdallāh al-‘Alā‘ī al-Zāhir al-Nāṣīrī (b. c.784/1382, d. 15 Jumādā I 865/26 February 1461), known as al-Ajrūd ("the beardless"), was sultan of Mamlūk Egypt and Syria (r. 1 Rabī‘ I 837–14 Jumādā I 865/12 March 1453–25 February 1461), following a long career of military slavery and leadership, court service, and family entrepreneurship, in Egypt (Cairo) and in Syria (Gaza, Safed), southeastern Anatolia (Edessa), and the eastern Mediterranean (Cyprus, Rhodes).

Enslaved in unknown circumstances in his Circassian homeland, the adolescent Ināl—Arabised from the Turkic ınal (trustworthy), occasionally rendered incorrectly as Aynāl—is said to have been part of a batch of military slaves (mamlūk) sold in Egypt in about 799/1397 to Sulṭān al-Zāhir Barqūq (r. 784–801/1382–99). He was trained in the martial arts of horsemanship, taught the basics of Islam, and socialised into the sultanate’s norms, values, and rules of behaviour in the royal barracks of the Cairo citadel, until Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Faraj (r. 801–15/1399–1412) manumitted him and selected him for service in the royal private retinue (khaṣṣākīya). Ināl rose to military rank, income, and status in the 820s/1420s, when he was first made a “commander of ten [mamlūk]” (amīr ʾashara) (824–5/1421–2) and then a “commander of forty” (amīr tablakhānā) (825–31/1422–8). In this capacity, Ināl participated in the sultanate’s invasion, plundering, and subordination of Lusignan Cyprus in 829/1426. Eventually, he was sent to Syria as a local governor (nāʾib), in Gaza (831–6/1428–33) and later in Safed (840–3/1437–9).

In 836/1433 Sulṭān al-Ashraf Barsbāy (r. 825–42/1422–38) appointed Ināl over the town of Edessa (al-Ruḥā) in southeastern Anatolia (836–40/1433–6), in order to represent the sultan’s interests in this frontier zone with the rising Turkmen power of the Aq Qoyunlu (Akkoyunlu).
Sultan al-Zahir Jaqmaq (r. 842–57/1438–53) invited İnâl back to his court in Cairo, first as one of the dozen of his commanders of one hundred mamliks (amir mi'a) (843–57/1439–53), later also as the sultan’s senior secretary (dawâdâr kabir) (846–9/1442–5), and eventually as the court’s senior member (amir kabir) and chief commander of the armies (atâbak al-usâkir) (849–57/1445–53). In these capacities, İnâl was assigned a leading role in various military campaigns, policing operations, and punitive expeditions, such as those against the island of Rhodes (846/1442–3, 848/1444), against local Arab elites in upper and lower Egypt (844/1441, 853/1449), and against unruly elements, including mamliks recipients (jubân), in Cairo (848/1444, 854/1450). These court posts also provided İnâl with considerable control over and access to resources; this may have contributed to his gradual creation of a substantial personal fortune and his active participation in real-estate investment, both eventually culminating in the creation of two well-funded religious endowments (waqfs), for which original documents, dating to 862–3/1458–9 and 865/1460–1, have survived.

In 857/1453 the combination of resources and experience catapulted İnâl at the age of seventy-three to royal status. This happened when political opponents and financially dissatisfied mamliks of Sultan al-Manṣūr ‘Uthmān b. Jaqmaq (r. 857/1453) closed ranks behind İnâl’s leadership and violently enforced his rights to the throne. Sultan al-Ashraf İnâl’s subsequent reign was remembered primarily for its more or less constructive—an assessment that varies across the handful of detailed contemporary chronicle reports (see bibliography)—engagements with practices of coercion wielding and resource management. The latter practices resulted in the stimulation and appropriation of regular flows of taxation, forced payment, confiscation, and gift giving; the imposition of reforms in gold, silver, and copper coinage (861/1457, 862/1458, 863/1459); and investment in mamlik manpower and urban development—including a building complex in Cairo’s Northern Cemetery (al-Saḥrat), which comprises İnâl’s family mausoleum and of which impressive traces remain today [Illustration 1]. İnâl’s coercion wielding manifested itself first and foremost at the many frontiers of his royal authority. The fluidity of these frontiers was regularly illustrated by marauding royal mamlik recruits, groups of whom continued to prove keen to maximise, whenever possible, their access to cash and kind by spreading terror in Cairo. In upper and lower Egypt, local Arab elites similarly tended to test and challenge the sultan’s reach, especially in the Buṣayra region (859/1455) and the Sa’d (864–5/1460). On the remote peripheries of İnâl’s sultanate, the Qarâmânid leadership of Konya followed similar local strategies, provoking a successful military deployment of İnâl’s commanders in southern Anatolia (860–2/1456–8). Less successful attempts to intervene directly in a succession dispute amongst the ruling elites of Lusignan Cyprus (863–5/1459–61) marked Cairo’s waning influence in the eastern Mediterranean. One of the powers on the rise in that region was the Ottoman sultan, Mehmed (Mehmed) II (r. 848–50/1444–6, 855–886/1451–81), whose conquest of Constantinople in 857/1453 was welcomed in İnâl’s Cairo with much diplomatic pomp and circumstance. Meanwhile, another regional power on
Illustration 1. İnāl al-Ajrūd’s funerary complex in Cairo’s Northern Cemetery (al-Sahra’i), including the family mausoleum (turbâ), a Sūfī convent (khânah), and a mosque. Photograph courtesy of Jo Van Steenbergen and Maya Termonia.
the Aq Qoyunlu leader Uzun Hasan (r. 865–82/1461–78), continued to situate the rapid expansion of his eastern Anatolian leadership at least symbolically within the orbit of İnāl’s sovereignty.

The relatively successful regional formation of Sultan al-Ashraf İnāl’s state through the aggregation of a variety of economic, military, and political actions was the achievement of a new collective leadership in Cairo. Two clusters of courtiers have been identified as being connected by and appearing at the forefront of İnāl’s leadership and authority. The first, predating and facilitating İnāl’s enthronement, crystallised in often tense and conflict-ridden ways around the resources, practices, and skills of long-standing financial experts such as the majordomo (ustādār) Zayn al-Dīn Yahyā (d. 874/1469) and the army and privy-purse supervisor (nāzīr al-jaysh wa-l-khāṣṣ) Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf (d. 862/1458). The second, increasingly pre-eminent after İnāl’s empowerment, was formed around the relationships, wealth, and charisma of the sultan’s family, including his only wife for many decades, Zaynab b. Hasan b. Khāṣṣ Bak (d. 884/1479), their son Ahmad (d. 893/1488), and the husbands of their daughters, the senior secretary (dawādār kabīr) Yūnus al-Aqṣābī (d. 865/1461) and the second secretary (dawādār thānī) Birdībaku al-Qubrusī (d. 868/1464). It has been established that the royal scene in Cairo had been set for this latter cluster to continue to dominate the court and sultanate after İnāl’s death, but this reproductive strategy proved only partly successful, when İnāl died of illness and old age in 865/1461. The succession of his son al-Mu’ayyad Ahmad (r. 865/1461) was surprisingly quickly undone by opponents rallying around the future sultan, al-Zāhir Khushqadam (r. 865–72/1461–7). İnāl’s legacy was restored to some prominence when, from the early 870s/late 1460s onwards, family members returned to the court, where control over the endowed family assets was returned to them and remained in their hands until at least the early tenth/seventeenth century.

Bibliography

Narrative sources, in chronological order
Documents
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Studies

Jo Van Steenbergen

İnâlîds

The İnâlîds (İnâoğlu family, Yınaoğlu family), r. 488–579/1095–1183 were one of the many petty Turkish dynasties that became established in Anatolia in the decades following the Saljuq victory over the Byzantines at the battle of Malazgirt (Manzikert) in 463/1071, which resulted in the opening of that region to permanent Turkish domination. The dynasty was centred on the town of Âmid (Âmid, modern Diyarbakîr), and lasted from around 488/1095 until it was ended by Sultan Baybars in 579/1183.

Little scholarly research has been carried out on the İnâlîds, and there are only fleeting references to the dynasty in the