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JO VAN STEENBERGEN, MAYA TERMONIA[*]

Historiography and the Making of the Sultan's Court in 15th Century Cairo

The case of the court office of 'the Chief Head of the Guards' (ra's nawbat al-nuwab)[**]

◆ **ABSTRACT**

This article addresses the changing organization of the leadership of the Syro-Egyptian sultanate of Cairo between the late 14th and the early 16th centuries. Our aim is to further the understanding of how Arabic manuals of courtly protocol and texts of history from the 15th and early 16th centuries were active participants in a contested discourse of state formation that was directly involved in this changing organization on the one hand and that, on the other hand, mediated all medieval and modern encounters with it. Representations of the office of 'the Chief Head of the [sultan's] Guards' (ra's nawbat al-nuwab) are foregrounded here as a case study and a representative example of these discursive agencies. Exploring the representation of 'the Chief Headship' by 15th- and early 16th century scribes and historians as well as by modern scholars, this article demonstrates how they all, one way or another, participated in the sultanate's complex processes of courtly configuration and state formation.

Keywords: (Mamluk) Cairo Sultanate, court, State formation, Arabic historiography, 15th century, discourse, chief head of the guards

◆ RÉSUMÉ

Historiographie et fabrication de la cour du sultan au xve siècle au Caire.
Le cas du poste de « chef capitaine des gardes » (*ra's nawbat al-nuwab*)

Cet article s'intéresse à l'organisation changeante du leadership du sultanat syro-égyptien du Caire entre la fin du xive et le début du xvie siècle. Notre objectif est d'approfondir la compréhension de la manière dont les manuels arabes de la cour et les textes d'histoire du xve et début du xvie siècle ont été des participants actifs à un discours contesté sur la formation de l'État qui était directement impliqué dans cette organisation changeante d'une part et qui, d'autre part, canalisait toutes les rencontres médiévales et modernes avec elle. Les représentations du poste de « chef capitaine des gardes [du sultan] » (*ra's nawbat al-nuwab*) sont présentées ici comme une étude de cas et un exemple représentatif de ces agences discursives. Explorant la représentation du « chef capitaine » par les scribes et historiens du xve et du début du xvie siècle ainsi que par les savants modernes, cet article montre comment ils ont tous, d'une manière ou d'une autre, participé aux processus complexes de configuration courtoise et de formation de l'État du sultanat.

Mots-clés : Sultanat (mamelouk) du Caire, cour, formation de l'État, historiographie arabe, xve siècle, discours, chef capitaine des gardes

◆ ملخص

التأريخ وتكوين بلاط السلطان بالقاهرة في القرن الخامس عشر ميلادي.
دراسة حالة منصب البلاط رأس نوبة النوب

يركز المقال على التنظيم المتغير لقيادة السلطنة السورية المصرية في القاهرة بين نهاية القرن الرابع عشر وبداية القرن السادس عشر. هدفنا هو تعميق فهم الطريقة التي كانت كتب البلاط العربية ونصوص التاريخ من القرن الخامس عشر وأوائل القرن السادس عشر تشارك بها فعليا في خطاب متنازع عليه حول تكوين الدولة، من جهة شارك هذا الخطاب بنفسه في هذا التكوين المتغير ومن جهة أخرى كان هذا الخطاب الوسيلة لجميع اللقاءات معه في القرون الوسطى والحديثة. تعرض هنا تمثيلات منصب «رأس نوبة النواب» كدراسة حالة ومثال لهذه الوكالات الخطابية. باستكشاف تمثيل «رئاسة النوبة» من قبل كتبة ومؤرخي القرن الخامس عشر وأوائل القرن السادس عشر وكذلك من قبل العلماء المعاصرين، يوضح هذا المقال كيف شاركوا جميعًا، بطريقة أو بأخرى، في العمليات المعقدة لتنظيم البلاط وتشكيل دولة السلطنة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سلطنة (المماليك) القاهرة، البلاط، تكوين الدولة، التأريخ العربي، القرن الخامس عشر، خطاب، رأس نوبة النوب

1. Introduction

Perceptions of a longstanding sovereign order that dominated late medieval Egypt and Syria as the (Mamluk) sultanate of Cairo (ca. 1250–1517) are widespread. They are closely related to equally widespread explorations and explanations of this sovereign order's organization as that of a well-structured bureaucratic apparatus of central power. This perspective of bureaucratic order—with its assumption of a concentration, multiplication and performance of power along a strict hierarchy of administrative entities ('bureaus'), procedures and officials—acquired paradigmatic status in the course of the 20th century, whereupon most discussions and debates in modern scholarship about the organization of the sultanate's leadership remained limited to relatively minor issues of filling in or revisiting details regarding particular "offices" (*waẓīfa*, pl. *waẓāʾif*) and "salaried positions" (*manṣib*, pl. *manāṣib*) that pertained to this apparatus.[1] In more recent years, this bureaucratic line of enquiry has continued to be pursued, with the addition of particular new insights regarding the many substantial changes—mostly now framed as institutionalization, militarization, restoration, redistribution, commercialization, waqfization, etc.—that affected that apparatus of central power from the end of the 14th century onwards.[2] In this article, we wish to continue these enquiries into the changing organization of the sultanate's leadership between the late 14th and the early 16th century. However, we also wish to move beyond the traditional structuralist frameworks of rational bureaucratic order that, in our view at least, continue to burden many current debates with the assumption that, all things considered, the sultanate's locus of power, leadership, and political history continued to lie in a longstanding hierarchy of administrative entities, procedures, and officials. For this reason, the sultan's court will be foregrounded here as an alternative perspective to consider the complex relationship between the sultanate's organizational changes and their perceptions in modern and, especially, late medieval historiography.

In late medieval Syro-Egyptian studies, the full historical and historiographical complexity of the notion of the sultan's court, as an interpretive tool, has only very recently been introduced and employed.[3] This is above all the achievement of Christian Mauder, in a book-length publication on the court of the sultanate's penultimate ruler, Qānịṣawh al-Ġawrī (r. 1501–1516).

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1. See e.g. Levanoni, "Atābak (Atabeg)", *EI³*, 2010, online; Schultz, "Amīr majlis", *EI³*, 2009a, online; "Amīr silāḥ", *EI³*, 2009b, online; Holt, 2008; al-Ašqar, 2003; 1999; Northrup, 1998, pp. 200–242 ("The Bureaucracy"); Chapoutot-Remadi, 1993, pp. 193–207 ("Les fonctions émirales"); Martel-Thoumian, 1991, pp. 35–76 ("Les structures administratives"); Tarawneh, 1987, pp. 6–48 ("The Mamlūk Administration of the Province"); Holt, 1986, pp. 138–154 ("Institutions of the Mamluk Sultanate"); Petry, 1981, pp. 19–25 ("The Administration of the Circassian Sultans"); Humphreys, 1977; Holt, 1977; Brinner, 1970; Popper, 1957; Ayalon, 1953; 1954; Ziadeh, 1953; Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 1923.
2. See e.g. Igarashi, 2014; 2015; 2017; Onimus, 2019, pp. 65–86 ("Enjeux institutionnels de la compétition amirale"); Onimus, 2016; D'hulster, 2020; Van Steenbergen et al., 2016a; 2016b; Elbendary, 2015, pp. 19–43 ("The Mamluk State Transformed"); Loiseau, 2010, pp. 179–214 ("Refondation de l'État, redistribution du pouvoir: vers un nouvel ordre mamelouk"); Apellániz, 2009.
3. For earlier publications that have considered the sultan's court a useful category to study the sultanate's leadership, operationalizing it as a descriptive rather than as an analytical tool, see Stowasser, 1984;

In a comprehensive theoretical and empirical reflection on the court phenomenon, Mauder explicitly chooses to consider the court not a bureaucratic infrastructure or an institutional structure that determines leadership organization and transformation. In other words, he proposes "to see the court [not] as an administrative institution consisting of a hierarchy of posts and offices", and he therefore refrains from engaging in "an institutional analysis of Mamluk court offices or the administrative structure of the Mamluk ruling apparatus".[4] Mauder's *In the Sultan's Salon* rather considers the court phenomenon a socio-cultural construction around the ruler, constituted by, and constituting, particular sets of "communicative events", "social groups", and performative strategies of both integration and distinction.[5] However, as also suggested by the persistence of the framework of bureaucratic order in the study of the Syro-Egyptian sultanate's organization, the "hierarchy of posts and offices" mattered enormously in any medieval as well as modern description of the wider social and cultural environment of leadership (the 'state') within which the sultan's court operated as the center of gravity. In fact, the long 15th century is generally considered to have witnessed an expansion of this "hierarchy of posts and offices", as in a process of state formation.[6] The socio-cultural construct of the sultan's court is therefore considered here a specific central component in the wider category of social and cultural constructed-ness that was the sultanate's state (*dawla*); the court, the state, and the "hierarchy of posts and offices" that connected both, are viewed in this article as not existing historically in and of themselves, but rather in the format of deeply entangled historical functions, or effects, of social and cultural practices of leadership, which were in continuous formation and mutual constitution.[7]

Indeed, even when one chooses not to think of the court "as an administrative institution", it is still worth considering how particular "posts and offices" also acted as some of the many constituents of its social and cultural construction. The current study is part of a wider publication project that critically explores the case of the office of 'the Head of [the sultan's] Guard' (*ra's nawba*)[8] as one of such constituents of the sultan's court and state, and as one of

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Behrens-Abouseif, 1988; Bacharach, 1989; Rabbat, 1995; Holt, 1998; Van Steenbergen, 2006, pp. 40–45; Fuess, 2011; Eychenne, 2013, pp. 489–494; Flinterman, Van Steenbergen, 2015.

4. Mauder, 2021, I, pp. 14–72 (quote 13-4). See also Van den Bossche (2019, pp. 52–62) on this "social phenomenon" of the sultan's court's constructed-ness and on the "*habitus* of courtly practice" (p. 53), referring also to the performance and negotiation of courtliness; Naaman, 2016, pp. 21–24.

5. Mauder, 2021, I, p. 14: "This definition", Mauder explains, "understands courts on the one hand as performatively constituted through sequences of spatially manifested communicative events performed by, in the presence of or on behalf of rulers, and on the other hand as social groups made up by those who usually participate in these events and thus enjoy regular access to their rulers".

6. Cf. Van Steenbergen et al., 2016b.

7. Dumolyn, Van Steenbergen, 2020; Van Steenbergen, 2016; Piterberg, 2003, pp. 135–162; Mitchell, 1999.

8. This and similar English renderings of Arabic institutional titles are inspired by Popper, 1957; we have decided to favor the use of these English renderings in this article for practical reasons of accessibility and readability, but we fully acknowledge that they can never entirely represent the specific meanings of these Arabic titles; we therefore always include them in inverted comma's ('…'), to remind readers of the inevitably inaccurate and biased nature of any English renderings.

the historical manifestations of complex social and cultural practices of leadership. As far as we know this office has never been the object of any in-depth study, and it is the only one from a handful of senior positions "in the sultan's presence" (*bi-ḥaḍrat al-sulṭān*)—as some of the sultanate's authors identify the courtly environment of "posts and offices"[9]—that appeared in an entirely new format in the course of the 15th century, as 'the Chief Head of the [sultan's] Guards' (*raʾs nawbat al-nuwab*).[10] This case study is therefore well-positioned to inform not just about the interlocking social and cultural constructed-ness of the sultanate's offices, court and state, but also about the complex historical process of its organizational transformation in the long 15th century, from sultan al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Barqūq's (r. 1382–1399) new leadership dispensation of the 1380s and 1390s and its violent disintegration in the 1400s, to various successive reigns and their multivalent trajectories of organizational restoration and state formation from the 1410s onwards, and to the Ottoman annihilation of the sultanate's central leadership in the mid-1510s. The reconstruction and evaluation of the social (and economic) aspects of the historical relationship between this office, "the sultan's presence", and the sultanate's regularly changing leaderships is undertaken in a companion publication.[11] The exploration of this relationship's cultural dimensions is the subject of the current article. It studies in detail how between the 1400s and the 1510s 'the Chief Headship of the Guards' and its context of "the sultan's presence" more in general were constituted through specific "communicative events" that, following Mauder, promoted courtly meanings and effects. This article calls attention especially to how the textual manifestation of these diverse events represents a complex discursive layer that mediates, on the one hand, all modern encounters with these events, and that is, on the other hand, directly plugged into the high stakes of their late medieval appreciations.

Our aim with this case study of the communicative constitution, or effective textual representation, of 'the Chief Headship of the Guard' "in the sultan's presence" is therefore both to problematize and to further current understandings of our main textual sources for these "events" and of their courtly (rather than bureaucratic) meanings. These sources include not just, as to be expected, a handful of court-related didactic manuals that consisted of "mostly prescriptive and normative […] vademecums"[12] of scribal theory and practice "in the sultan's presence", but also a diverse set of Arabic texts of history from the 15th and early 16th century. Traditionally, this period is viewed as one in which the expanding genre

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9. On the complex relationship between the notions of *ḥaḍra* ("presence") and "court", see Mauder, 2021, I, pp. 18–19; Van den Bossche, 2019, pp. 52-53; Naaman, 2016.

10. Popper, 1957, p. 91; Ayalon, 1954, pp. 60–61; Onimus, 2016, pp. 371–372.

11. Van Steenbergen, Termonia (2022), which engages for the very first time with this office's sixty known performers between the 1380s and the 1510s, discussing in detail who these social actors were and what they did, and explaining how the majority of these 'Chief Heads' engaged not just in long careers of service in the shadows of the sultanate's shifting limelight, but also in equally long trajectories of building the personal entourages, connections, expertise and resources required to survive and eventually thrive as one of the happy few "Lords of the Offices".

12. Bauden, 2019, p. 28.

of Arabic history writing was "culminating in the Mamlūk 'imperial bureaucratic chronicle'".[13] In an interpretive context defined by the socio-communicative construct of the sultan's court instead of bureaucratic order, this "imperial bureaucratic" interpretation of course becomes a meaningless perspective. It nevertheless suggests the strong connection between these texts and the organization of the sultanate's leadership, as well as the continuing challenges that mark current understandings of that connection. For this reason, this article's case study aims to inform especially about the agency of these textual sources and their authors in the construction of the courtly space of "the sultan's presence" in the 15th and early 16th century. It is argued that these late medieval narrative sources were as "prescriptive and normative" as the period's chancery manuals were, and that both were somehow involved in textual pursuits of particular interests with constitutive effects for appreciations of the sultanate's "hierarchy of posts and offices", including of courtly offices such as that of 'the Chief Headship of the Guards'. In other words, this article aims to further understandings of how exactly 15th and early 16th century scribes and historians all were anything but outsiders to the sultanate's complex processes of courtly configuration and state formation. Obviously, such an appreciation of the agencies of these authors can, and should, be approached from various perspectives, including especially from that of their own individual historical contexts.[14] In this article, however, we choose to open such a debate from another, more collective, but arguably equally relevant, perspective. We argue that understanding the interaction between historiographical representations such as that of 'the Chief Headship' on the one hand and, on the other, courtly configuration or even state formation offers insights that provide new keys to unlocking the many secrets not just of historiography, but also of the sultanate's regularly changing leadership organization.

This article's main part lays out the different dimensions of these textual agencies and their effects on the sultanate's leadership organization. First it engages critically with the current state of relevant scholarship on 'the Chief Headship'. It presents and analyses the remarkably incongruous representations of courtly order and 'the Chief Headship of the Guards' by three court scribes as well as by a handful of pioneering modern scholars, whose writings both derive from those scribal sources and continue to define today's bureaucratic understandings. Secondly, it identifies in a selection of the era's major texts of history some of the most meaningful "communicative events" in these texts' representation of courtly order and 'the Chief Headship' (office titles and leadership lists), and it explores the historical processes of leadership formation that these textual occasions both represented and contributed to. This article then concludes by arguing for a more discursive and political understanding of the participation of 'the Chief Headship', the sultanate's "hierarchy of posts and offices", and, especially, their textual representations, in the sultanate's contested processes of courtly configuration and state formation during the long 15th century.

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13. Little, 1998, p. 413, quoting Khalidi, 1994, p. 183.
14. See especially Hirschler, 2006; 2012; 2013; Van Steenbergen et al., 2020.

2. 'The Chief Head of the Guards' and the textual politics of its late medieval and modern specialists

2.1. *15th century courtly representations of order and the* ra's nawba

The main specialists of the sultanate's organization obviously were its own administrators, classified by many late medieval observers as the scribal community of the "Lords of the Pen" (*arbāb al-aqlām*). Some of the most impactful products of the pens of these scribal lords pertained to the long-standing genres of epistolographic manuals, political geographies and mirrors for princes. A remarkable set of such Arabic texts of varying sizes, scopes, and purposes were produced in Cairo in the course of the 14th and 15th centuries.[15] For the latter century, three texts appear today as some of the most successful extant specimens of these genres, written by experienced courtiers-administrators and completed in the 1410s, 1440s, and 1450s respectively: the monumental and multi-volume *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿšā fī Ṣināʿat al-Inšāʾ* ("Dawn for the night-blind: on the art of epistolography") by the chancery scribe and deputy judge Šihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Qalqašandī (d. 1418); the more condensed but no less ambitious *al-Ṯaġr al-Bāsim fī Ṣināʿat al-Kātib wa-l-Kātim* ("The Smiling Access: on the art of the scribe and the secretary") by the chancery scribe Šams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Saḥmāwī (d. 1464); and the abridgment (*Zubda* – "the Quintessence") of the similarly monumental but now lost encyclopedic text of the *Kašf al-Mamālik wa-bayān al-Ṯuruq wa-l-Masālik* ("The Disclosure of the Realms and the Explanation of the Roads and Routes"), by the royal agent and advisor Ġars al-Dīn Ḫalīl b. Šāhīn al-Ẓāhirī (d. 1468). Just as some of their 14th century predecessors had done for their own time, these texts, both in full and as easier to handle abridgments (as also with al-Qalqašandī's *Ḍawʾ al-Ṣubḥ* ['The Light of Dawn'], completed in 1418, and al-Saḥmāwī's *al-ʿUrf al-Nasīm* ['The Gentle Fragrance'], completed *c.* 1445), represented the leadership relationships and hierarchies of their time in a neat textual framework that generated interesting impressions both of the organization of the sultanate's leadership in general and of how the *ra's nawba* fitted in with this organization.[16]

Al-Qalqašandī in his *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿšā* famously explains how "the arrangement of the realm" (*tartīb al-mamlaka*) in his days included twenty-five "Lords of the Offices among the Lords of the Swords" (*arbāb al-waẓāʾif min arbāb al-suyūf*) who were distinguished from others by their service "in the sultan's presence" (*bi-ḥaḍrat al-sulṭān*) and who were one among several groups who were jointly considered "the Leaders of the Realm and the Lords of the Salaried Positions who make for the order of the realm and the performance of kingship" (*aʿyān al-mamlaka wa-arbāb al-manāṣib allaḏīna bihim intiẓām al-mamlaka wa-qiyām al-mulk*).[17] In these particular paragraphs of the text of al-Qalqašandī's *Ṣubḥ*, the "office of the ras's nawba" (*waẓīfat ra's nawba*) is summarily identified as "the third [office]" (*al-ṯāliṯa*) among those twenty-five offices, as responsible for

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15. See Van Berkel, "Archives and Chanceries: pre-1500, in Arabic", *EI³*, 2013, online; Veselý, "Chancery manuals", *EI³*, 2014, online; Bauden, 2019, pp. 28–35.

16. See Van Berkel, 2009; Bauden, 2019, pp. 30–34.

17. al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ* IV, pp. 16, 14, 5.

discipline, law, and order among the sultan's *mamlūks* ("it was in charge of passing judgement among the sultan's *mamlūks*, and of maintaining discipline among them" [*mawḍūʿuhā al-ḥukm ʿalā al-mamālīk al-sulṭāniyya wa-l-aḫḏ ʿalā aydīhim*]) and as "traditionally" (*qad ǧarat al-ʿāda*) being performed by four military commanders of different high military ranks.[18] In another volume of the same text, al-Qalqašandī presents a systematic discussion of the categories, semantics, and epistolographic rules determining the uses of names and titles. Among "the titles that are particular to the Lords of the afore-mentioned Offices, which make for the order and structuring of the affairs of the realm" (*al-alqāb al-ḫāṣṣa bi-arbāb al-waẓāʾif al-muʿtabara allatī bihā ntiẓām umūr al-mamlaka wa-qiwāmuhā*) the title of *raʾs nawba* is listed as "the second" (*al-ṯānī*) of seven titles in the category of composite titles "that are exclusively composed with Arabic nouns" (*mā tamaḫḫaḍa tarkībuhu min al-lafẓ al-ʿarabī*).[19] Al-Qalqašandī then summarily repeats that "it is the title for the one who is responsible for the *mamlūks* of the sultan or amir, and for the execution of what he commands regarding them" (*wa-huwa laqab ʿalā llaḏī yataḥaddaṯ ʿalā mamālīk al-sulṭān aw al-amīr wa-tanfīḏ amrihi fīhim*); he briefly reviews the meanings of *raʾs* and *nawba* respectively; and he exposes the semantically faulty nature (*wa-huwa ḫaṭaʾ*) of the popular title of *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* for the court's chief *raʾs nawba*, arguing that "the correct way is to refer to him as *raʾs ruʾūs al-nuwab*" (*wa-l-ṣawāb fīhi an yuqāl raʾs ruʾūs al-nuwab*).[20]

Al-Saḥmāwī's *al-Ṯaġr al-Bāsim* has a fifth chapter that similarly explains "the arrangement of the realm of Egypt, including what is particular to its sultan, to its amirs, and to the matter of its offices" (*fī tartīb mamlakat al-diyār al-miṣriyya wa-mā yaḫtaṣṣ bi-sulṭānihā wa-umarāʾihā wa-mawḍūʿ al-waẓāʾif bihā*).[21] In its presentation of "the Lords of the Offices in the [sultan's] presence, pertaining to the [highest-ranking] amirs commanders" (*arbāb al-waẓāʾif bi-l-ḥaḍra min al-umarāʾ al-muqaddamīn*),[22] however, it substantially diverges from the image that had been constructed by al-Qalqašandī some three decades earlier. For al-Saḥmāwī there were only twelve such offices, the office of "amir chief head of the guards" (*amīr raʾs nawbat al-nuwab*) ranking eleventh (*al-ḥādī ʿašar*) only, and the relevant paragraph has much more to say about the office's particular, even highly privileged, position "in the sultan's presence". The paragraph echoes al-Qalqašandī's reference to the relationship between the *raʾs nawba* and the sultan's *mamlūks*, but it provides more detail and it pictures the former more as an effective intermediary for the sultan than as any kind of military administrator:

> He is in charge of the sultan's *mamlūks*: he is their point of reference in matters of counsel and resolution, since he is the go-between between them and the ruler, for consultation and for the achievement of objectives (*wa-lahu l-amr ʿala l-mamālīk al-sulṭāniyya wa-ilayhi marǧaʿuhum fī l-šawr wa-l-muḥākamāt wa-huwa l-safīr baynahum wa-bayna l-malik fī l-šawr wa-bulūġ al-maqāṣid*).[23]

18. al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ* IV, p. 18.
19. al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ* V, pp. 444, 455.
20. al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ* V, p. 455.
21. al-Saḥmāwī, *al-Ṯaġr al-Bāsim* I, p. 377.
22. al-Saḥmāwī, *al-Ṯaġr al-Bāsim* I, p. 387.
23. al-Saḥmāwī, *al-Ṯaġr al-Bāsim* I, pp. 392–393.

The paragraph also echoes al-Qalqašandī's in explaining that there are actually four officials of different military ranks grouped under this office, three of whom are "subordinates" (*atbāʿ*) of the amir head of the guards: the "second head of the guards, also known as the head of the guard of the left wing" (*raʾs nawba ṯānī wa-yuqāl fīhi raʾs al-maysara*) and "then a third and a fourth one" (*ṯumma ṯāliṯ wa-rābiʿ*). Al-Saḥmāwī, however, adds that the list continued "up to a twentieth amir who all attended to the realm's chores" (*ilā l-ʿišrīn amīr yataṣarrafūna fī ašġāl al-mamlaka*). Unlike al-Qalqašandī, this paragraph furthermore lists an interesting range of court privileges for 'the Chief Head of the Guard', such as that

> he was the first to enter with the ruler at the time of the audience, the performer of the arrest of anyone whose arrest had been ordered, and the one who sprinkled with sand when the royal signature was taken (*huwa awwal man yadḫul ʿalā l-malik fī l-ḫidma wa-l-qāʾim ʿalā mask man yuʾmar bi-maskihi wa-yurammil ḥīn aḫḏ al-ʿallāma*).[24]

The passage finally ends with another new, entirely different, piece of information that explains that "the financial supervision over the Šayḫūniyya, the Ṣarġitmišiyya, the Ḥiǧāziyya, the Green Mosque, etc., was vested in him" (*wa-ilayhi yusnad al-naẓar ʿalā l-Šayḫūniyya wa-l-Ṣarġitmišiyya wa-l-Ḥiǧāziyya wa-l-Ǧāmiʿ al-Aḫḍar wa-ġayr ḏālika*).[25]

Al-Ẓāhirī's *Zubda*, being an abridgment of a much larger but now lost text, merely makes passing references to offices such as that of the *raʾs nawba*. Despite this lack of any particular explanation, however, these references are yet also insightful. In the sixth chapter of the *Zubda*'s brief but, again, very systematic placement and description of the trappings of the sultan's authority, of his officers, and of the management of their interests in and beyond Cairo, a "description of the Lords of the Offices" (*waṣf arbāb al-waẓāʾif*) is included. The relevant passage begins by explaining that it concerns "offices that require their lords to belong to the group of [highest-ranking] commanders of 1,000 [troopers]" (*al-waẓāʾif allatī taqtaḍī arbābahā an yakūnū min ǧumlat muqaddamī al-ulūf*), and then it goes on to state that "we will mention them along the order of their station" (*naḏkuruhum ʿalā ḥasab manāzilihim*), presenting the following neat list:

> The senior amir (*al-amīr al-kabīr*); second to him is the amir of arms (*ṯumma yalīhu amīr silāḥ*); then the amir of the council (*amīr maǧlis*); then the chief amir executive secretary (*amīr dawādār al-kabīr*); then the chief amir of the horse (*amīr āḫūr al-kabīr*); then the amir chief head of the guards (*amīr raʾs nawbat al-nuwab*); then the amir grand chamberlain (*amīr ḥāǧib al-ḥuǧǧāb*); then the amir grand treasurer (*amīr ḫāzindār al-kabīr*); then the amir of the noble ḥaǧǧ (*amīr al-ḥāǧǧ al-šarīf*).[26]

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24. al-Saḥmāwī, *al-Ṯaġr al-Bāsim* I, pp. 392–393.
25. al-Saḥmāwī, *al-Ṯaġr al-Bāsim* I, pp. 392–393.
26. Ẓāhirī, *Zubda*, p. 114.

Further down the hierarchy of courtly rank and status, al-Ẓāhirī also identifies "the second head of guard" (ra's nawba al-ṯānī) as one of the amirs of middle rank, and "the third head of guard" (ra's nawba al-ṯāliṯ) and another "ten heads of guards" (ʿašara ruʾus nuwab)" pertaining to the group of low-ranking amirs.

Al-Ẓāhirī thus prioritizes in his explanation of the functionality of offices such as those of ra's nawba their active, performative contribution to the hierarchical appearance of the author's reconstruction of the sultan's courtly environment. In all of this, the Zubda actually communicates an impression of coherence and order that mirrors issues of rank, status, and correct organization that also permeate the Ṣubḥ and al-Ṯaġr. These are all in a way different texts—the Zubda is primarily concerned with political geography, the Ṣubḥ and al-Ṯaġr with epistolography—, produced in rather different historical contexts by royal agents of distinct backgrounds and careers, and they demonstrate ample variations in what they actually have to say about offices such as that of the ra's nawba. At the same time, however, they all display parallel concerns for making sense of life in "the sultan's presence" through a very active engagement with titles, ranks, numbers, and privileges. In connecting these, and awarding courtly meanings to the abstract hierarchies that emerge from them, these parallel concerns arguably represent a particular innovation of the 15th century, that may not be found in any similar form with their 14th century predecessors.[27] As far as the office of ra's nawba is concerned, the overall message seems clear: originating in the ruler's household and the management of its mamlūk manpower, this was one of many similar positions that had moved into the more public domain of "the sultan's presence", and that eventually—at least in the writings of al-Qalqašandī, al-Saḥmāwī, and al-Ẓāhirī—had itself become one of the constituent factors of the order of leadership that, as "the Lords of the Offices", defined the sultan's court.

2.2.   *Modern bureaucratic imaginations of order and the* ra's nawba

These specific sets of texts, especially al-Qalqašandī's, and their varying performative structuration of the 15th century sultanate's leadership, have struck many chords in modern scholarship. Above all, their coherent and convenient arrangements of various kinds of knowledge about that order of central leadership boosted their status to that of ready-made manuals and guidelines for modern historians. In the latter historians' longstanding attempts to make sense of the sultanate's extant high number of extremely complex chronographical narratives, full of names, titles, and terminologies, these manuals seemed to prove extremely useful. In fact, it was the confrontation of these detailed historiographical narratives with manuals such as al-Qalqašandī's by pioneering modern scholars such as Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes

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27. On top of the fact that the 14th century's main scribal manual, by Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī (1301–1349), features no reference to any ra's nawba in the description of the most important (aʿyānahum) among "all the offices that are in the sultan's presence" (ǧamīʿ al-waẓāʾif allatī fī ḥaḍrat al-sulṭān), this surveying description does not display any explicit interest in numbers, ranks and hierarchies either (Ibn Faḍl Allāh, *Masālik*, pp. 53, 55–59).

(1862–1957), William Popper (1874–1963), Walther Björkman (1896–1996) and David Ayalon (1914–1998) that seemed to have resolved the question of this political complexity once and for all. Since the publication of their work between the 1920s and the 1950s, the interpretive value and validity of the grand bureaucratic edifice of Björkmann's "Staatsverwaltung", Gaudefroy-Demombynes's "organisation gouvernementale", Popper's "Mameluke Government" or Ayalon's "Structure of the Mamluk Army" appear therefore to have been taken for granted.[28]

The elephant in this relatively quiet room of understanding the organization of the sultanate's leadership, however, is the active but apparently unconscious participation of that 20th century scholarship in performative communicative acts of interpretation and representation that paralleled what these late medieval texts were meant to do. David Ayalon already complained that "though some of their definitions and descriptions come near to the truth, the present writer has found none of them to be completely accurate".[29] In many ways this "truth" of the sultanate's organization seems to have proven as elusive for 15th century scribes as it still turned out to be for Gaudefroy-Demombynes, Ayalon, Popper, Björkman or for any scholar after them. There are therefore many parallels between, on the one hand, how these scribes' 15th century texts were constructed around their authors' and audiences' incongruous imagination and communication of that "truth" and, on the other hand, how Gaudefroy-Demombynes, Popper, Björkman and Ayalon constructed their own models on the basis of their particular, early-to-mid-20th century, readings of these texts.

The more detailed discussions by Popper and Ayalon of the office of the *ra's nawba* offer a revealing case in point of how these textual politics developed in parallel ways around the "truth" of the sultanate's organization. Both modern historians make explicit how they relied first and foremost on al-Qalqašandī's relevant paragraphs to define and describe what they, respectively, identified as the "Chief Head of the Guards" or as the "Chief of the Corps of Mamluks". To their parallel evocations of al-Qalqašandī's references to household functionality, semantics, and court numbers, they actually only managed to add one very specific detail each, culled from narrative sources such as—in Popper's case in particular—the chronicles of the courtier-historian Ǧamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Ibn Taġrībirdī (1411–1470): Ayalon suggested that "he was also responsible for the parades held by the army before it set out on an expedition", and Popper claimed that "under [sultan] Faraj [r. 1399–1412] the number of heads of guards was increased to seven; in 855 AH there were seven who were emirs of the second class and many of third class."[30]

Both scholars also tried to explain some of the aforementioned incongruous variety in the available scribal material from the perspective of an evolutionary model of change. In doing this, Popper and Ayalon both tried to align the particularly 15th century office of *ra's nawbat al-nuwab*

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28. Popper, 1957, p. 81; Ayalon, 1953; 1954; Björkman, 1928, p. 1; Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 1923. On this point, see Dumolyn, Van Steenbergen, 2020 (pp. 115–117, 125–127), and in a related manner (referring to a long perseverance of essentialist "Reification" and "idealist Statism" in early modern Ottoman studies), Piterberg, 2003, pp. 146–158.

29. Ayalon, 1953, p. 203.

30. Popper, 1957, p. 91; Ayalon, 1954, pp. 60–61. For further critical exploration of these duties and privileges, see, as mentioned above, Van Steenbergen, Termonia, 2022.

with the—less well-known—office of the *raʾs nawbat al-umarāʾ*. They basically suggested that the court position of the 'Headship of the Guard' (*raʾs nawba*) appears in the historical records of the sultanate as pursuing a specific historical trajectory of formal transformations: the office emerges from the mid-13th century onwards as an increasingly prominent marker of power and authority in the sultan's entourage; in the second half of the 14th century it diversified in a handful of related court positions, including that of the "Second Head of Guard" (*raʾs nawba ṯānī*) and that of the more enigmatic "Head of the Guard of the Amirs" (*raʾs nawbat al-umarāʾ*); and from the turn of the 15th century onwards ever more unambiguous priority was given among this particular set of court positions to the "Chief Head of the Guards" (*raʾs nawbat al-nuwab*).[31] The latter thus represented for them the distinctly 15th century format in which leadership of the court position of the 'Headship of the Guard' (*raʾs nawba*) is performed.

Where Popper and Ayalon appear to differ majorly in their understandings of this office, is in the discussion of status, ranking and the nature of their changes. As Popper explains, "the relative importance of any position at any given time was indicated by the seat assigned to an official at the court ceremonies, i.e., by its nearness to that of the sultan, at his right and left".[32] Both Popper and Ayalon in fact alluded in this context to a more general process of the gradual establishment of a particular 15th century arrangement "in the order of [offices'] importance" so that "the office roster of the early Mamluk period differs greatly from that of the Circassian period", when the "order of offices […] stabilized".[33] In Popper's subsequent "list of officials […] arranged in the order of their importance at the end of the 8th century AH (beginning of the 15th century AD)", he enumerates no less than 46 "regular officials" and awards position number "7. (or 6)" to the 'Chief Head of the Guards' (and position number "2.a." to the "Head of the Guard of Emirs").[34] Ayalon lists only seventeen "office-holders" among "the Men of the Sword", and he explains that

> the sources usually mention seven offices in a fixed order: *atābak al-ʿasākir, amīr silāḥ, amīr maǧlis, amīr akhūr, raʾs nawbat an-nuwab, dawādār kabīr, ḥāǧib al-ḥuǧǧāb*. The order of the first four offices was fixed for the whole of the Circassian period, and the office of *ḥāǧib al-ḥuǧǧāb* generally, though not always, retained its seventh place. There was competition between the offices of *raʾs nawba* and *dawādār kabīr* for the fifth and sixth places, possession of which alternated irregularly between them.[35]

In fact, none of these numerical models correspond exactly to any of the equally incongruous ones that were professed as representative for the organization of "the sultan's presence" (*ḥaḍrat al-sulṭān*) in the texts of al-Qalqašandī, al-Saḥmāwī, and al-Ẓāhirī. Late medieval variations about this organization, and about officials' roles in it, are therefore continued in

31. Popper, 1957, p. 91; Ayalon, 1954, pp. 60–61; parts of this trajectory have also been discussed in Van Steenbergen, 2006, p. 44; Onimus, 2016, pp. 371–372.
32. Popper, 1957, p. 91.
33. Ayalon, 1954, pp. 67–79, p. 68; Popper, 1957, p. 91.
34. Popper, 1957, p. 91.
35. Ayalon, 1954, pp. 67–79, quote 68.

modern scholarship, as in an ongoing process of the textual construction of the sultanate's order of central leadership. In the 20th century, this structuring process obviously served different goals than it did in the 15th century. Ayalon passingly refers in this context to this order as "the Mamluk kingdom", and Popper appreciates it in parallel ways as "an absolute, military, monarchy" that entirely depends upon "the choice of the military oligarchy" for the election of a new sultan from their ranks and, thereafter, upon "the Sultan" as the "absolute head, after enthronement, of all branches of the government".[36] For Ayalon, key issues to understand this top-down power apparatus are the "structure of the Mamluk army and the units from which it was composed", which included the "Holders of Offices connected with the Army".[37] Popper speaks of it as a coherent "'Mameluke' […] system of government", which consisted of "The Caliph", "The Sultan", "The Emirs", "The Sultan's Mamluks and the armies", and "Office Holders", performing, as "Officials of the government", "their functions" "at Cairo", "in the Egyptian Provinces", and in "the Syrian Provinces".[38] All in all, then, the common underlying assumption about the nature of this political order appears to waver between its imagination as, on the one hand, a militarist, centralized, and autonomous bureaucratic structure that transcends, dominates, and controls the entirety of Syro-Egyptian society—"an elaborate and highly centralized administrative machine", as Peter Holt still put it in 2005[39]—, and as, on the other hand, a patrimonial-bureaucratic system that mainly serves the interests of the ruler and his household and that is organized as a complex, widespread, and pyramid-like military and administrative apparatus to circumscribe and subordinate society.[40] Against the background of this particular "truth" claim about the organization of Syro-Egyptian leadership, modern understandings of offices such as that of the *ra's nawba* continue from where late medieval scribal imaginations had left off: it is considered not just a household position that moved into the more public domain of the sultan's court, but also a functional component in an a-historic and idealized bureaucratic system, in which change basically consisted of the effects of the ruler's discretion and of offices and their government roles filling structural gaps left by other dysfunctional, downgraded or abolished offices.

36. Ayalon, 1954, pp. 57, 67, 89; Popper, 1957, p. 81, 83. See also Holt, 1977, p. 60: "a wealthy and sophisticated medieval monarchy"; 2008, p. 169: "a militarized Turkish state implanted on Egyptian soil".
37. Ayalon, 1953, p. 203; 1954, p. 57.
38. Popper, 1957, pp. 83–103.
39. Holt, 2008, p. 169.
40. Popper makes this patrimonial understanding most explicit when he acknowledges that for him "the distinction between the affairs of government (particularly in regard to the executive-military branch) and the personal affairs of the Sultan is hard to make." (Popper, 1957, p. 83). Critical variations of this dichotomous (state vs society; public vs private) patrimonial approach have continued to be favored in, e.g., Lapidus, 1984; Clifford, 2013; Van Steenbergen, 2006; 2013; Onimus, 2019.

3. 'The Chief Head of the Guards' and the textual politics of history writing

As suggested, Popper and Ayalon derived their particular "truth" about 'the Chief Headship of the Guard' and the 15th century organization of the sultanate not only from al-Qalqašandī's *Ṣubḥ*, but also from references in a limited number of late medieval chronicles, especially from those by the mid-15th century Egyptian courtier-historian Ǧamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Ibn Taġrībirdī (1411–1470).[41] In fact, many more Arabic historiographical texts, written within the wide circle of social and cultural gravity that pulsated from the sultan's court at the Citadel of the Mountain in Cairo, contain references to 'the Headship of the Guard'. The second part of this article aims to demonstrate how also different generations of these texts' historians used these as well as many similar references to make their own particular "truth" claims about the organization of Syro-Egyptian leadership. In fact, such claims were arguably made above all in those references in 15th and early 16th century texts of history that paralleled Popper's interest in "lists of officials", Ayalon's attention for "the office roster", and court scribes' concerns for "the arrangement of the realm". This part therefore considers in extensive empirical detail marked changes and differences in historiographical references to the office title of the 'Headship of the Guard' and to the 'Headship's positioning within annual office listings. It considers the detailed set of these changes and differences among these texts most instructive material for identifying and understanding wider changes and differences in the representation of, and historiographical truth claims about, the organization of Syro-Egyptian leadership.

3.1. History writing and changing 'Headship' titles in the 15th and early 16th century

Ibn Taġrībirdī's two chronicles (the dynastic chronicle of Egyptian history *al-Nuǧūm al-Zāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira* ['The Stars Shining over the Rulers of Egypt and Cairo'] and the annalistic chronicle of contemporary history *Ḥawādiṯ al-Duhūr fī Madā l-Ayyām wa-l-Shuhūr* ["The Events of Time Along the Passage of Days and Months"]) as well as Ibn Taġrībirdī's biographical dictionary of, especially, his and his father's peers and contemporaries (*al-Manhal al-Ṣāfī wa-l-Mustawfā baʿda l-Wāfī* ["The Pure Pool and Completion after (al-Ṣafadī's [d. 1363]) al-Wāfī"] mostly refer to 'the Chief Headship' with the title of *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* ('Chief Head of the Guards'), which is exchanged only very occasionally for those of *raʾs nawba* ('Head of Guard') or *raʾs nawba kabīr* ('Senior Head of the Guards') (fig. 1).[42] Overall, the same titular

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41. See also Ayalon's explanation that his study was a preliminary one only and that "data on this subject were not systematically gathered" (Ayalon, 1954, p. 68).
42. For *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab*, see almost 300 references in Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Nuǧūm*, Ṭarkhān, IX, p. 122; X, pp. 190, 232; XI, pp. 33, 44, 55, 63, 106, 147, 149–150, 165, 180, 208, 227, 247, 320, 329, 338, 351; XII, pp. 5, 9, 55, 59, 70, 72, 76, 77, 90, 129, 170, 173, 174, 175, 177, 178, 187, 229, 299, 305, 323, 324; XIII, pp. 56, 59, 68, 71, 74, 102, 108, 115, 122, 172, 185, 203; XIV, pp. 4, 8, 24, 34, 38, 48, 100, 116, 128, 129, 135, 151, 158, 159, 172, 177, 181, 189, 196, 201, 212, 213, 221, 229, 239, 240, 249, 255, 264, 282, 283, 300, 302, 307, 321, 354;

practice of a preference for the *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* title prevails in the multivolume annalistic chronicles of Ibn Taġrībirdī's Cairene colleague historians, such as the smalltime Ḥanafī scholar, copyist and deputy judge ʿAlī b. Dāwūd al-Ǧawharī al-Ṣayrafī (1416–1495) and the highly successful Šāfiʿī scholar and *ḥadīṯ* specialist Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Saḫāwī (1427–1497),[43] as well as of their successors, the Šāfiʿī scholar, preacher and deputy judge from Damascus Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥimṣī (1437–1527) and the Ḥanafī scholar, scion of an old *mamlūk* family and beneficiary of its longstanding prebendal resources (*iqṭāʿ*) Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Iyās (1448–*c.* 1524) (fig. 2).[44]

XV, pp. 8, 19, 90, 117, 122, 157, 179, 211, 223, 229, 244, 250, 251, 262, 268, 290, 295, 305, 306, 318, 330, 351, 392, 412, 413, 450, 460, 469, 535, 536, 541, 543, 555; XVI, pp. 32, 40, 48, 49, 60, 73, 75, 87, 91, 105, 162, 176, 221, 222, 261, 263, 279, 287, 289, 294; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, pp. 1, 22, 27, 29, 44, 53, 54, 58, 64, 166, 248, 257–258, 273, 281, 308, 328, 343, 352, 408, 411, 415, 418, 422, 430, 433, 471–472, 498, 503, 524, 544, 551, 595, 612, 613, 618, 620, 622, 625, 635, 646, 666, 670, 703, 728, 730, 731, 734; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Šaltūt, I, pp. 59, 106, 121, 123, 156, 157, 171, 173, 180, 183, 185, 195, 201, 215, 254, 328, 333–334, 342, 347–348, 396–397; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *al-Manhal* II, pp. 329, 339, 346, 437, 440, 482; III, pp. 63, 66, 82, 144, 197, 202, 204, 206, 250, 262, 268, 318, 366, 392; IV, pp. 13, 36, 51, 52, 62, 91, 92, 144, 148, 169, 224, 273, 280, 285, 290, 303; V, p. 8; VI, pp. 118, 125, 141, 147, 148, 150, 160, 287, 291, 301, 305, 308, 313, 376, 398, 400, 401; VII, p. 353; VIII, pp. 247, 254, 380, 392; IX, pp. 15, 18, 19, 32, 50, 53, 69; XII, pp. 34, 131, 134, 181, 329. For *raʾs nawba*, see Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Nuǧūm*, Ṭarkhān, XI, p. 215; XII, pp. 27, 83, 203; XIV, p. 321; XVI, p. 260; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, VIII, p. 418; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *al-Manhal* II, p. 218; III, pp. 218, 292; VIII, pp. 248, 402; IX, p. 54. For *raʾs nawbat kabīr*, see Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Nuǧūm*, Ṭarkhān, X, pp. 188, 219, 220, 268; XI, pp. 51, 149, 153, 154, 161, 163, 180, 226, 237, 329, 332; XIII, p. 12.

43. The few remaining parts of al-Ǧawharī's chronicle *Inbāʾ al-Ḥaṣr* (873-877 AH) have no references to *raʾs nawba kabīr*, only one to *raʾs nawba* for the 'Chief Head' (rather a variant, which could also be a typo: *raʾs al-nuwab*) (al-Ǧawharī, *Inbāʾ*, p. 110) and a clear majority of thirteen references to *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* (al-Ǧawharī, *Inbāʾ*, pp. 2, 25, 27, 49, 57, 109, 116, 160, 184, 325, 363, 367, 469). In al-Ǧawharī's other chronicle, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, the edited parts of which engage, however, only with the sultanate's history for the annals for 784-849 AH, *raʾs nawba* appears fifteen times to refer to the 'Chief Head' (next to many more times to refer to other, lower-ranking or amiral 'Heads') (al-Ǧawharī, *Nuzha*, I, pp. 94, 308, 376; II, pp. 235, 251, 413; III, pp. 52, 86, 89, 92, 144, 246, 258, 271; IV, p. 147); *raʾs nawba kabīr* appears 52 times in all (especially in volume 2): four times in volume 1 (784-801 AH), 33 times in volume 2 (801-25 AH), fourteen times in volume 3 (825-842 AH) and only once in volume 4 (842-9 AH) (al-Ǧawharī, *Nuzha*, I, pp. 46, 351, 470, 471; II, pp. 11, 16, 48, 65, 79, 110, 166, 167, 199, 210, 213, 246, 250, 263, 298, 314, 318, 321, 328, 344, 345, 347, 351, 352, 356, 408, 415, 505, 508, 514, 519, 521, 524; III, pp. 8, 17, 47, 48, 51, 60, 64, 84, 96, 98, 109, 113, 117, 134; IV, p. 319); *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* appears 24 times in all (but especially in the mid-century volume 4): five times in volume 1, only once in volume 2, seven times in volume 3 and eleven times in volume 4 (al-Ǧawharī, *Nuzha*, I, pp. 37, 103, 253, 254, 345; II, p. 314; III, pp. 96, 310, 314, 364, 400, 425, 447; IV, pp. 25, 72, 145, 189, 205, 212–213, 254, 255, 267, 271, 309). Al-Saḫāwī's annalistic chronicle of mid-9th/15th century Egyptian history, *al-Tibr al-Masbūk*, covering the years 845-857 AH (1441–1453), does not use *raʾs nawba* at all to refer to the 'Chief Head' (but rather to identify lower-ranking 'Heads') and it uses *raʾs nawba kabīr* three times only (al-Saḫāwī, *al-Tibr*, I, pp. 156, 220, 251); the title of *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab*, however, appears thirteen times (al-Saḫāwī, *al-Tibr*, I, pp. 40, 200; II, pp. 61, 162, 178, 198, 199, 207; III, pp. 7, 58; IV, pp. 6, 36, 81).

44. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī' early 10th/16th century chronicle has more than 30 references to the title of *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* (Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, pp. 190, 201, 279, 280, 286, 291, 300, 329, 330, 347, 363, 375, 376, 378, 389, 392, 403, 422, 450, 465, 467, 470, 482, 490, 499, 509, 517, 520), only one to *raʾs nawba kabīr* (Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, p. 505), and none to *raʾs nawba*. Ibn Iyās' comprehensive chronicle of Egyptian history until the annal for 928 AH (December 1521-November 1522) displays a similar pattern: apart from thirteen cases in
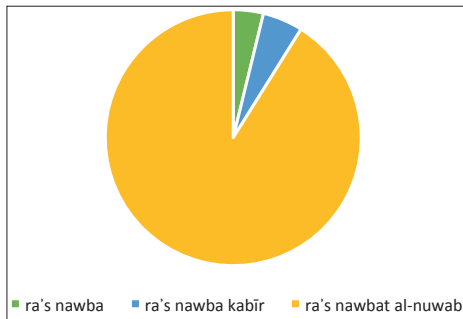
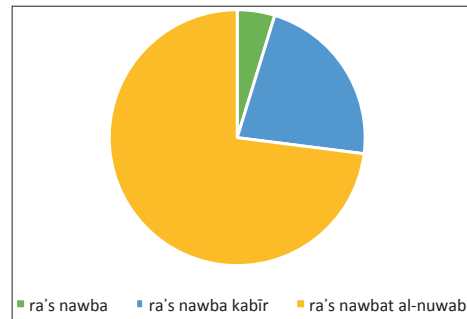Fig. 1. # Raʾs title references
in Ibn Taġrībirdī's texts.

Fig. 2. # Raʾs title references
in Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's and Ibn Iyās' texts.

Ibn Taġrībirdī's main Cairene predecessors—the leading ḥadīth scholar, teacher and Shafiʿī chief judge Aḥmad Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsqalānī (1372–1449), his Ḥanafī peer Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-ʿAynī (1361–1451), and their professionally far less successful but historiographically peerless Shafiʿī colleague Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī (1365–1442)—favor rather different titular orders in their annalistic chronicles of contemporary events. Al-ʿAynī prefers the use of the title *raʾs nawba kabīr*; he refers to the ancient, simple format of *raʾs nawba* only very occasionally, and he does not mention at all the *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* title (fig. 3).[45] Ibn Ḥaǧar uses both titles *raʾs nawba* and *raʾs nawba kabīr* in parallel and interchangeable ways, and he has one reference only to *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* (fig. 4).[46] Al-Maqrīzī prefers—in textual passages that

which *raʾs nawba* is used to refer to the 'Chief Head' (next to many more in which it was used to refer to lower-ranking 'Heads') (Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ* I/2, pp. 503, 513, 520, 540, 626, 699, 702, 728, 764, 769; V, pp. 252, 294, 301), in about 60 cases *raʾs nawba kabīr* was used, especially in the annals up to the middle of the 9th/15th century (volumes I/2 and II) (Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ* I/1, p. 581; I/2, pp. 33, 75, 373, 387, 392, 399, 406, 409, 411, 435, 452, 543, 670, 731, 736, 785, 801, 812, 826; II, pp. 8, 22, 25, 32, 72, 77, 91, 113, 121, 136, 175, 180, 200, 211, 238, 262, 273, 305; III, pp. 41, 90, 190, 249, 265, 316, 339, 357, 378, 391, 431, 453, 454, 470; IV, p. 434) and in more than 170 cases *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* was used, especially in the annals from the middle of the 9th/15th century onwards (volumes II, III, IV, V) (Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ* I/1, pp. 324, 374, 516, 544, 548, 555, 558; I/2, pp. 5, 26, 27, 58, 82, 86, 95, 102, 103, 112, 116, 117, 176, 178, 190, 200, 203, 213, 225, 230, 264, 265, 266, 295, 298, 321, 346, 407, 413, 503, 507, 539, 564, 568, 602, 648; II, pp. 192, 246, 286, 309, 371, 381, 385, 388, 397, 410, 429, 442, 443, 451, 460, 462, 465, 467, 468, 469; III, pp. 2, 6, 11, 21, 24, 33, 42, 49, 99, 105, 126, 127, 138, 159, 179, 195, 197, 203, 206, 211, 212, 215, 218, 246, 248, 287, 292, 302, 305, 309, 310, 314, 324, 351, 356, 362, 364, 380, 383, 386, 398, 402, 404, 406, 412, 418, 421, 441, 448, 467; IV, pp. 2, 7, 8, 16, 17, 39, 51, 87, 94, 100, 105, 109, 111, 117, 128, 177, 198, 208, 214, 217, 237, 262, 265, 267, 330, 362, 366, 382, 384, 392, 427, 447, 475; V, pp. 3, 20, 29, 38, 40, 44, 85, 97, 106, 109, 138, 140, 159, 169, 337).

45. For *raʾs nawba kabīr*, see al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd* I, pp. 132, 134, 136, 146, 169, 206, 218, 231, 232, 239, 280, 294, 312, 320, 375, 384; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd* II, pp. 85, 123, 140, 144, 163, 164, 166, 173, 182, 191, 225, 227, 241, 245, 273, 288, 292, 305, 309, 313, 314, 336, 338, 350, 394, 399, 419, 425, 439, 441, 479, 493, 504, 513, 516, 540, 544, 557, 561, 565, 569, 591, 594, 630, 638, 651. For *raʾs nawba*, see al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd* I, p. 317; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd* II, pp. 231, 277, 279, 280, 282, 283, 284, 400.

46. For *raʾs nawba kabīr*, see Ibn Ḥaǧar, *Inbāʾ* I, p. 368; II, pp. 19, 234, 291, 317, 320, 358, 386, 395, 398, 405, 434, 538; III, pp. 51, 75, 329, 330; IV, p. 111. For *raʾs nawba*, see Ibn Ḥaǧar, *Inbāʾ* I, pp. 38, 153, 155, 160, 171, 211, 257, 435, 512; II, pp. 11, 48, 98, 101, 316, 364, 402, 481, 518; III, pp. 4, 12, 37, 51, 64, 71, 132, 167, 223, 254, 274, 324, 325, 412, 548. For *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab*, see Ibn Ḥaǧar, *Inbāʾ* III, p. 407.

otherwise mostly parallel the others' narratives—*raʾs nawba*, although he often also speaks of the *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* and the *raʾs nawba kabīr* (fig. 5).[47]
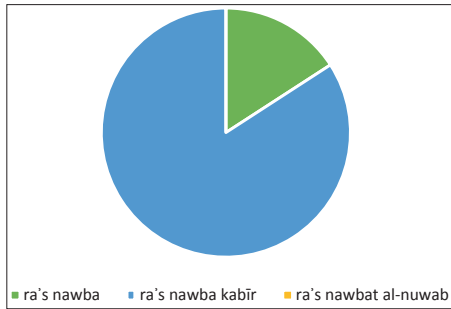

Fig. 3. # Raʾs title references
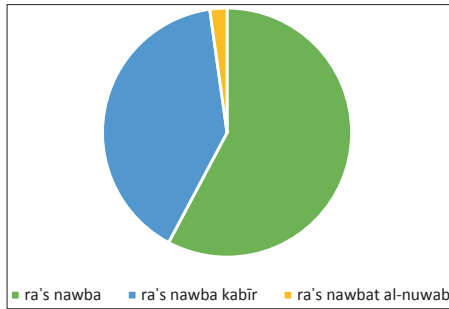in al-ʿAynī's *ʿIqd*.

Fig. 4. # Raʾs title references
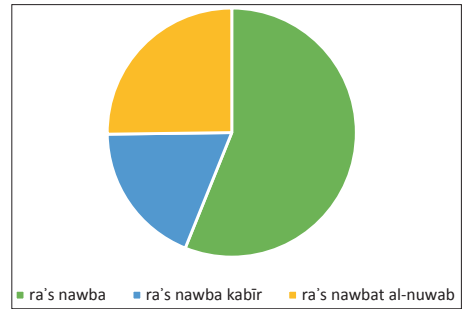in Ibn Ḥajar's *Inbāʾ*.

Fig. 5. # Raʾs title references
in al-Maqrīzī's *Sulūk*.

These titular variations in the 15th and early 16th century's major specimens of the sultanate's many chronicles and biographical collections certainly suggest how, just as scribal explanations, also these references appear in a variety of interrelated narrative texts that were produced in an equal variety of historical contexts by authors of diverse backgrounds. In fact, a generational chronology becomes apparent from this incongruent usage, since al-Maqrīzī, al-ʿAynī and Ibn Ḥaǧar represent a particular generation of early to mid-15th century scholars-historians that preceded (and often also trained) the subsequent generations of Ibn Taġrībirdī and his younger colleagues. In the transition from the former to the latter generations a more uniform preference for the title of *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* ('Chief Head of the Guards') appeared, and this can be linked to the afore-mentioned changing scribal explanations by al-Qalqašandī, al-Saḥmāwī and al-Ẓāhirī in the 1410s, 1430s and 1450s respectively. They may all be interpreted as different illustrations of the slow process by which the title of the 'Chief Head of the Guards' transformed into the default format to identify this position of leadership. It may even be argued that in the early years of the 15th century, at the time of al-Qalqašandī's scribal activities, *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* still seemed sufficiently novel (or of "popular" usage, as al-Qalqašandī described it scathingly) for this scribe to question its correctness and to suggest the semantically

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47. For *raʾs nawba* see al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, pp. 245–246, 265, 285, 325, 326, 380, 413, 425, 477, 517, 572–573, 616, 654, 660, 677, 704–705, 706, 719, 742, 763–764, 784, 879–880, 890–891, 902, 1057, 1199–1200; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿAṭā, V, pp. 130, 142, 164, 187, 211, 265, 267, 293, 299, 308, 309, 314, 347, 353, 384, 398, 408, 418, 420, 429, 435, 437, 451, 452; VI, pp. 61, 91, 115, 117, 138, 139, 176, 181, 226, 249, 285, 289, 296, 313, 365, 392, 445, 452, 489, 516; VII, pp. 7, 16, 44, 46, 51, 62, 91, 95, 109, 127, 128, 136, 150, 151, 167, 180, 243, 250, 259, 457. For *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* see al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, pp. 286, 298, 451, 537, 547–548, 565–566, 578–579, 628, 733–734, 936–937, 940, 989–993, 1026, 1089, 1113, 1122–1123, 1136–1138, 1213; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿAṭā, V, pp. 239, 255, 285, 287; VI, pp. 203, 221, 258, 304, 331, 340, 375, 403, 470; VII, pp. 25, 29, 38, 73, 155, 282, 285, 321, 346, 381, 383, 399, 407, 416, 431, 465, 474. For *raʾs nawba kabīr* see al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, pp. 336, 413–414; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿAṭā, IV, pp. 123, 154, 215, 255, 289, 306, 318; V, pp. 16, 27, 30, 35, 36, 50, 86, 288, 329, 455; VI, pp. 140, 144, 289, 310, 398; VII, p. 46.

more correct alternative of "Head of the Heads of the Guards"—*raʾs ruʾūs al-nuwab*.[48] At
the same time, however, messy practice turns out to have prevailed over scribal rectitude, and
"Chief Head of Guards" (*raʾs nawbat al-nuwab*; literally "Head of the Guard of the Guards")
is the maladroit title that seems to have remained dominant throughout the remainder of the
century, as is confirmed by its re-appearance as such, without any similar semantic criticism,
in al-Saḥmāwī's *al-Ṯaġr al-Bāsim* and in al-Ẓāhirī's *Zubda*, as well as in the historiography of
Ibn Taġrībirdī and his younger colleagues.

In fact, Ibn Taġrībirdī, and Ibn Iyās after him, explicitly looked back upon this process of
early to mid-15th century titular transformation, and they formulated a particular vision of how
they saw it fitting in with a wider historicizing trajectory of the organization of the sultanate's
leaderships. Ibn Taġrībirdī claimed that towards the later 14th century the position of *raʾs
nawbat al-umarāʾ* ("Head of the Guard of Amirs") had had priority, until "it was abolished
during the reign of al-Nāṣir Faraj b. Barqūq (r. 1399–1405; 1405–1412)", and that simultaneously
the position and title of *raʾs nawba ṯānī* ("Second Head of the Guard") had transformed to
become the *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab*, generating a new hierarchy that, according to the author,
continued until "now" (*al-āna*), "in our time" (*fī zamāninā*).[49] As noted above, this rather
confusing titular transformation at the start of the 15th century had not at all appeared similarly
obvious and relevant for Ibn Taġrībirdī's predecessors al-Maqrīzī, al-ʿAynī and Ibn Ḥaǧar.
For Ibn Taġrībirdī, however, it clearly was important to explain specific differences in the
sultanate's organization between his own mid-15th century time and earlier eras.

After Ibn Taġrībirdī, the specifics of this re-arrangement seem to have been of no remaining
historiographical concern. At the same time, some awareness remained, as in a passage in which
Ibn Iyās went even further back in history to explain more generally how, in his view, the sultanate's
leadership organization was rooted in both long-standing precedent and empowering origins:

> In [673 AH (1274–1275)] al-Malik al-Ẓāhir [Baybars (r. 1260–1277)] wished to proceed in his realm
> along the model of the rulers of the Mongols (*ṭarīqat mulūk al-tatār*) with respect to the trappings
> of kingship that involve "the Lords of the Offices" (*fī šaʿāʾir al-mamlaka min arbāb al-waẓāʾif*);
> he did what he could in this respect, and he arranged (*rattaba*) many things that had not yet
> been before in Egypt. Among them are that he newly introduced (*aḥdaṯa*) 'the Amirate of Arms'
> (*imrīyat al-silāḥ*) […], 'the Amir of the Council' (*amīr maǧlis*) [… and] 'the Chief Head of Guards'
> (*raʾs nawbat al-nuwab*), which is a powerful office more important than (*waẓīfa ʿaẓīma akbar min*)
> 'the Amir of Arms' and 'the Amir of the Council'; [at the time, this official] used to be called 'Head
> of the Guard of Amirs' (*kāna yusammā raʾs nawbat al-umarāʾ*) and sit on the sultan's left, above 'the
> Amir of the Council'. He newly introduced (*aḥdaṯa*) 'the Amir of the Horse' (*amīr āḫūr*) […], the
> office of 'the Amir of the Armor Bearers' (*waẓīfat amīr ǧāndār*) […], the office of 'the Adjutancy of
> the Armies' (*waẓīfat niqābat al-ǧuyūš*) [… and] the office of 'the Amir of the Banner' (*amīr ʿalam*).[50]

48. al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ* V, p. 455.
49. Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Nuǧūm*, Ṭarḫān, XI, pp. 63, 149–150, 165, 180, 208, 329.
50. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ* I/1, pp. 323–324.

Even though Ibn Iyās' suggestion of a direct titular connection between the *raʾs nawbat al-nuwab* and the *raʾs nawbat al-umarāʾ* counters Ibn Taġrībirdī's more indirect explanation, his early 16th century analysis is clearly echoing that of Ibn Taġrībirdī. In one of the earlier volumes of his dynastic chronicle, Ibn Taġrībirdī had also explained that the position of 'Headship of the Guard' was of Mongol origins and that "al-Malik al-Ẓāhir [Baybars] had been the first to introduce it (*awwal man aḥdaṯahā*) into the realm of Egypt", as one of a series of court positions which had newly distinguished "the Lords of the Offices among the amirs and troopers (*arbāb al-waẓāʾif min al-umarāʾ wa-l-aǧnād*)" and which, "even if some had been around before, had never appeared in this format".[51] The reason for this, Ibn Taġrībirdī claimed, emphasizing the originality of his explanation, was that "al-Malik al-Ẓāhir—may God have mercy upon him—used to follow the model of the Mongols (*qāʿidat al-tatār*) as well as most of the rules (*ġālib aḥkām*) of Genghis Khan concerning the *yasaq* and the *tūrā*—*yasaq* meaning arrangement (*al-tartīb*) and *tūrā* doctrinal path (*al-maḏhab*) in the Turkic language".[52]

All of these titular differences, as well as these claims about origins and transformations, demonstrate how references in late medieval historiographical narratives are not just revealing a standardization of the title of 'Chief Head of the Guards' from one generation of historians to another. As with Ibn Taġrībirdī's and Ibn Iyās' visions of the almost mythical organizational roots of the sultanate's leadership organization, such references are also informative about the engagements of these historians in different constructions of their own meaningful "truth" about "the arrangement" of that leaderships. In fact, especially in the formulation of Ibn Taġrībirdī's and Ibn Iyas' long-term visions, these references partake in "communicative acts" that were as effective as any scribal explanations were, by taking stock of confusing organizational realities as well as by making some sense of them.

3.2. Representations of leadership order and the ra's nawba in 15th century history writing

The regular inclusion of the 'Headship' title in wider listings of those "Lords of the Offices" and other men of power whose hierarchies pertained, as Ibn Iyās suggested, to "the trappings of kingship", tell a similar story of historiography's textual politics and its diverse participation in the representation of a particular order of leadership. The most detailed and systematic of these listings in a particular set of seven chronicles actually made for coherent textual units that opened annalistic narratives and represented even more effective "communicative acts".[53]

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51. Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Nuǧūm*, Ṭarḫān, VII, p. 183, 185.

52. Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Nuǧūm*, Ṭarḫān, VII, pp. 182–183. Ibn Taġrībirdī emphasizes that this is his own mid-15th century analysis, and not reproduced from any predecessors' texts, by typically introducing these sections with the formula "I said" (*qultu*).

53. On these lists, see also Haarmann, 1970, pp. 181–182 (very briefly); Van Steenbergen, 2016, pp. 55–63. Apart from the seven chronicles discussed here, five more chronicles from this period (15th-early 16th century) have similar regular leadership lists, but they are of a more limited or less relevant character to be engaged

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(ra's nawbat al-nuwab)

3.2.1. Al-Maqrīzī's and al-ʿAynī's representations of leadership order and the raʾs nawba

In Arabic historiography of the early to mid-15th century opening lists of men of power appear especially prominently and increasingly consistently in the historiographical texts of al-ʿAynī and al-Maqrīzī.[54] For the start of the year 818 AH (March 1415) the opening section in al-Maqrīzī's chronicle of the history of the sultanate in Egypt, the *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Maʿrifat Duwal al-Mulūk* ("The book of the Path leading towards Knowledge of the Kings' Reigns"), consists of the following list:

> [The year] began, the caliph of the era being al-Muʿtaḍid bi-llāh Abū l-Fatḥ Dāwud; the Sultan in Egypt, Syria and the two sacred places [Mecca and Medina] al-Malik al-Muʾayyad Abū l-Naṣr Šayḫ al-Maḥmūdī al-Ẓāhirī; 'the Commander of the Armies' (*atābak al-ʿasākir*) the amir Alṭunbuġā al-ʿUṯmānī; 'the Amir of the Horse' (*amīr āḫūr*) the amir Alṭunbuġā al-Qirmišī; 'the Executive Secretary' (*al-dawādār*) the amir Aqbāy al-Muʾayyadī; 'the Chief Head of the Guards' (*raʾs nawbat al-nuwab*) Tanbak Miyyiq; 'the Amir of the Council' (*amīr maǧlis*) Ġānibak al-Ṣūfī; 'the Majordomo' (*al-ustādār*) the amir Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan b. Muḥibb al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṭarābulusī; the chief Šāfiʿī *qāḍī* the Šayḫ al-islām Ǧalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Bulqīnī; the chief Ḥanafī *qāḍī* Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Ibn al-ʿAdīm; the chief Mālikī *qāḍī* Ǧamāl al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh b. Miqdād b. Ismāʿīl al-Aqfahsī; the chief Ḥanbalī *qāḍī* Maǧd al-Dīn Sālim b. Sālim b. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Maqdisī; 'the Confidential Secretary' (*kātib al-sirr*)…; 'the Vizier'…; 'the Controller of the Privy Funds' (*nāẓir al-ḫāṣṣ*)…; 'the Controller of the Army' (*nāẓir al-ǧaysh*)…; 'the Viceroy' of Alexandria…; 'the Viceroy' of Gaza…; 'the Viceroy' of Damascus…; 'the Viceroy' of Tripoli…; 'the Viceroy' of Ḥamā…; 'the Viceroy' of Aleppo…; the amir of Mekka…; the amir of Medina…; the [Rasūlid] ruler of Yemen…; the [Ottoman] ruler of Rum… When the year started, they were [arranged] like this (*ahhalat hāḏihi l-sana wa-hum ʿalā hāḏā*).[55]

818 AH (March 1415–March 1416) was the first year in which al-Muʾayyad Šayḫ's sultanate (1412–1421) was securely established both in Egypt and in Syria. It is also one of the first of twenty-one annals, going up to the opening section of the chronicle's last annal for the year 844 (June 1440–June 1441), which all begin in the same systematic manner with this kind of arrangement of offices and names spreading in different directions from "the sultan's presence" in Cairo.[56] For example, the opening section of the year 819 AH parallels in many

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with in the same kind of detail; further explanations of these five cases will therefore be restricted to footnote references.

54. No similar lists appear in Ibn Ḥaǧar's annalistic chronicle *Inbāʾ*, nor in the historiographical works of the main Syrian historian of this generation, Ibn Qāḍī Šuhba [1377–1448]).

55. al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, p. 298.

56. There are experimental attempts at this kind of initial annual 'state-of-the-political-order' listing in al-Maqrīzī's chronicle for preceding annals, from the opening of volume four and the annal of 809 AH (June 1406-June 1407) onwards; due to the actual lack of political order for much of the reign of Faraǧ this never happens in the kind of systematic, orderly, and comprehensive arrangement that appears from the

ways that of 818 and it even links up explicitly with the latter's arrangement when it explains that "the chief *qāḍī*s are as has been mentioned for last year, apart from the Ḥanbalī one" and that "the agents of the *dawla* (*mubāshirī al-dawla*) are as preceded in last year's annal, except for 'the Vizierate', for that is vacant."[57] However, just as is true for this 'Vizierate' and for the Ḥanbalī chief *qāḍī*-ship, this 819 list also displays some interesting variations, not only in the names of office holders (Alṭunbuġā l-Qirmišī has moved to the office of 'Commander of the Armies' and Tanbak Miyyiq to that of 'Amir of the Horse'; new names have appeared in the other offices) but also in the arrangement of the offices themselves. The sultan is mentioned before the caliph; in the list of offices that follows 'the Chief Head of the Guards', "the amir Birdibak", is mentioned before "'the Chief Executive Secretary' (*al-dawādār al-kabīr*), the amir Ğaqmaq"; and further reference is made to "'the Grand Chamberlain' (*ḥāǧib al-ḥuǧǧāb*) the amir Sūdun Qarā Ṣuqul" only, and not to any 'Amir of the Council' or 'Majordomo'.[58] This variation is repeated for the annal of the following year, 820 AH, where the similar opening listing now moves from "the ruler (*mutamallik*) of Egypt, Syria and the Ḥiǧāz Sultan al-Malik al-Muʾayyad Abū l-Naṣr Sayf al-Dīn Šayḫ al-Maḥmūdī al-Ẓāhirī", the offices of "'the Senior Amir' (*al-amīr al-kabīr*) Alṭunbuġā al-Qirmišī, 'the Amir of Arms' (*amīr silāḥ*)…, 'the Amir of the Council' (*amīr maǧlis*)…, 'the Amir of the Horse' (*amīr āḫūr*) Tanbak Miyyiq, 'the Chief Executive Secretary' (*al-dawādār al-kabīr*) the amir Ğaqmaq, 'the Head of Guard' (*raʾs nawba*) Birdibak, and 'the Amir of the Armor Bearers' (*amīr ǧāndār*)…", and the enumeration of viceroys, to the statement that "the chief *qāḍī*s in Egypt, 'the Confidential Secretary', and the remainder of the agents of the *dawla* (*mubāširī l-dawla*) were in the same [arrangement] that has been mentioned before (*ʿalā ḥālihim kamā taqaddama*)."[59] This variation is actually a recurring feature in each of the fourteen subsequent opening sections in al-Maqrīzī's chronicle, with names as well as titles—including always also those of 'the Head of Guard'—regularly swapping places.[60] In a handful of cases, moreover, this annual presentation of current Syro-Egyptian leadership is explicitly situated at the center of a trans-regionally imagined West-Asian or even wider order of sovereignty.[61]

At the same time, and despite all these changes from one annal to another, that multivalent political order of al-Maqrīzī's historiographical imagination appears as acquiring a more uniform dynamic outlook from the annal for 818 onwards, especially as far as the placement of the office of 'Chief Head of the Guards' and similar offices is concerned. From then until

annal of 814 AH (April 1411-April 1412), and especially that of 818 AH onwards (see al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, p. 27 [809], 51 [810], 67 [811], 90 [812 AH], 131 [813 AH]); only ten annals in volume four (821 AH, 832-5 AH, 838-9 AH, 841-3 AH) do not have this kind of opening list (which moreover never appear in any of the preceding annals in volumes 1 to 3 of al-Maqrīzī's chronicle).

57. al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, p. 241.

58. al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, p. 241.

59. al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, p. 380.

60. al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, pp. 477, 517, 518, 601, 628, 654, 677, 704–705, 733–734, 763–764, 1199–1200.

61. Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, pp. 547–548, 879–880, 902, 989–993, and also pp. 172–173, 203–204, 298–299.

the chronicle's last annal for 844, the title of *ra's nawba* always appears within the same group of similar positions of leadership at the top of this annual 'state-of-the-political-order' listing. These positions and their incumbents of senior military rank are always listed immediately after the identification of the year's sultan and caliph, and before that of the sultanate's financial and chancery leaderships, the leaders of Egypt's four communities of judges and legal scholars, the sultan's agents who were to maintain his order in the urban centers, towns, and strongholds of Egypt, Syria, southeast Anatolia, and the Hejaz, and, as mentioned, occasionally also rulerships north, east, west, and south of Egypt. In most cases, as already surmised by Popper and especially Ayalon, seven titles return in this group as an increasingly coherent set.[62] These titles' particular positions in the lists continue to regularly swap places or change incumbents, as is well exemplified by the 'Chief Head's regular moving up and down these lists (see fig. 6).[63] In some cases the ranks of these seven titles are also expanded by the addition of the name and titles of a sultan's son.[64] In the extended opening list of the annal for 840 AH (July 1436–July 1437), five names of senior amirs without offices are added, as well as the author's remark that there were then only thirteen amirs of this leading military rank, whereas there used to be twenty-four.[65] For all this variety and juggling of figures, however, as a whole this returning set of seven offices was presented by al-Maqrīzī in an increasingly systematic fashion. They therefore gradually started to represent a recognizable leadership collectivity, as that appears as being set up under sultan Barsbāy (r. 1422–1438) and as being continued under his successor Ǧaqmaq (r. 1438–1453) in the 1420s, '30s, and beyond.[66]

62. 'The Commander of the Armies' (*atābak al-ʿasākir*)/'the Senior Amir' (*al-amīr al-kabīr*); 'the Amir of Arms' (*amīr silāḥ*); 'the Amir of the Council' (*amīr maǧlis*); 'the Amir of the Horse' (*amīr āḫūr*); 'the Executive Secretary' (*al-dawādār*); 'the Grand Chamberlain' (*ḥāǧib al-ḥuǧǧāb*); 'the Chief Head of the Guards' (*ra's nawbat al-nuwab*).

63. Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, p. 298 (818 AH: *ra's* is 4th of six, after 'the Commander of the Armies', 'the Amir of the Horse' and 'the Chief Executive Secretary', and before 'the Amir of the Council' and 'the Majordomo'), p. 341 (819 AH: *ra's* is 3rd of five), 380 (820 AH: *ra's* is 6th of seven), p. 477 (822 AH: *ra's* is 4th of six), p. 517 (823 AH: *ra's* is 7th of eight), p. 547 (824 AH: *ra's* is 3rd of eight), p. 601 (825 AH: *ra's* is 6th of six), p. 628 (826 AH: *ra's* is 6th of seven), p. 654 (827 AH: *ra's* is 6th of seven), p. 677 (828 AH: *ra's* is 6th of eight), p. 704 (829 AH: *ra's* is 6th of eight), p. 733 (830 AH: *ra's* is 2nd of eight), p. 763 (831 AH: *ra's* is 5th of eight), p. 879 (836 AH: *ra's* is 4th of six), p. 902 (837 AH: *ra's* is 4th of eight), p. 989 (840 AH: *ra's* is 6th of eight), p. 1199 (844 AH: *ra's* is 8th of eight).

64. Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, p. 477 (822 AH: "the *atābak al-ʿasākir* is *al-maqām* al-Ṣārimī Ibrāhīm, son of the Sultan"), p. 517 (823 AH: "the *atābak al-ʿasākir* is *al-maqām* al-Ṣārimī Ibrāhīm, son of the Sultan"), p. 989 (840 AH: "*al-maqām* al-Ǧamālī Yūsuf, the son of the Sultan, is 'Head of the Left Wing' [*ra's al-maysara*]"), p. 1199 (844 AH: "[…] 'the Amir of the Council' is the amir Ǧarbāš al-Karīmī Qāšiq; *al-maqām* al-Nāṣirī Muḥammad, the son of the Sultan, is one of the commanders of 1,000 [troopers]; 'the Chief Executive Secretary' is the amir Taġrī Birdī al-Baklamišī, known as al-Muʾḏī […]").

65. Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, p. 989.

66. Compare al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ʿĀšūr, IV, p. 989 (840 AH = the last list for Barsbāy's reign) and V, p. 1199 (844 AH = the first and only list for Jaqmaq's reign) with their—structurally unchanged—opening line-ups.
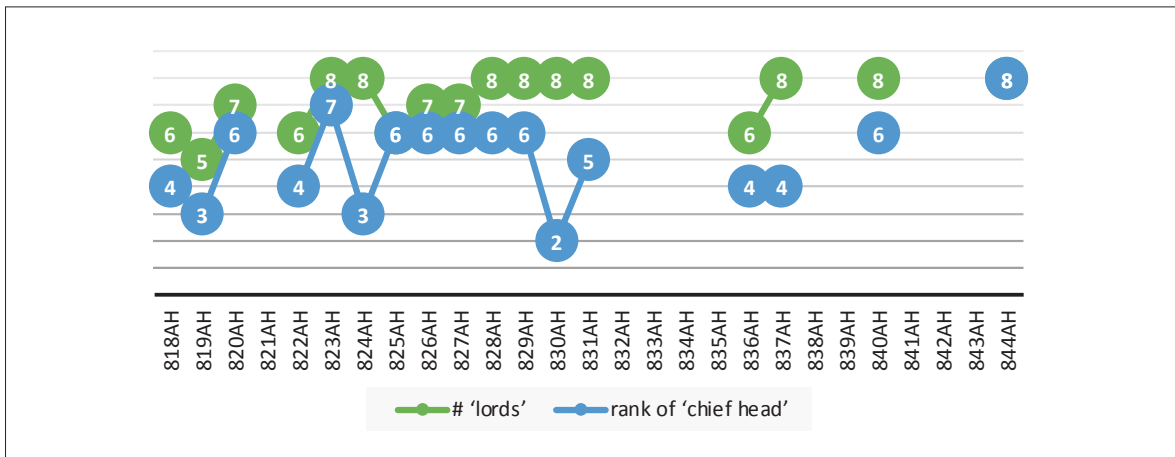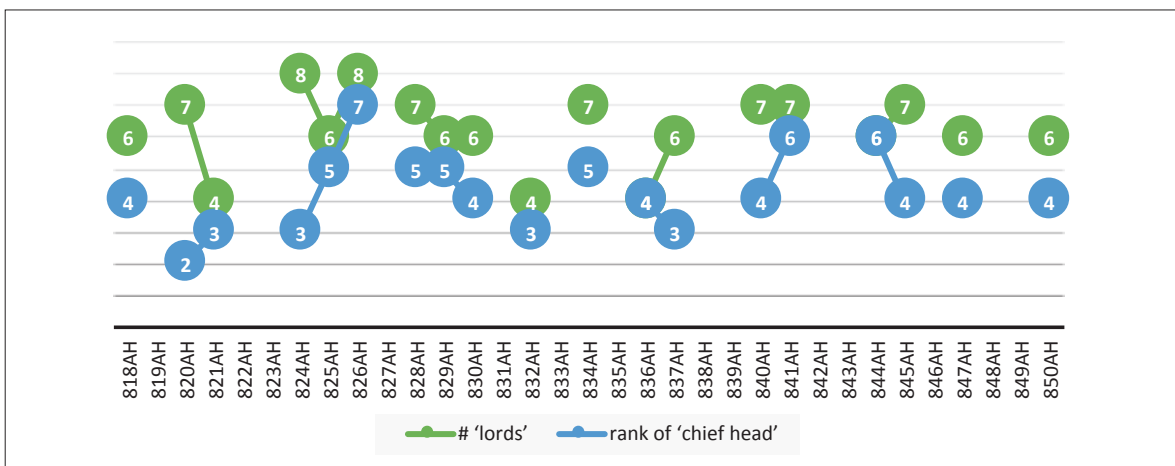
Fig. 6. 'Lords' and 'Chief Heads' in al-Maqrīzī's Sulūk.

Fig. 7. 'Lords' and 'Chief Heads' in al-ʿAynī's ʿIqd.

Very similar observations can be made about the opening sections of the annals in al-ʿAynī's chronicle *ʿIqd al-Ǧumān fī tārīḫ ahl al-zamān* ("The Necklace of Pearl on the History of the Era's People"). This work of annalistic chronography parallels the approach and coverage of al-Maqrīzī's *Sulūk* and complements it with annals up to the year 850 AH (March 1446–March 1447). Al-ʿAynī's structuring approach actually appears as even more systematic than al-Maqrīzī's, producing not a single 15th century annal that was not somehow introduced by an update of the state of the sultanate's order of leaderships. At the same time, these opening sections were equally marked by endless variations of names, of titles and their arrangements, and of spatial coverage, along particular dynamics that made al-ʿAynī's lists in many ways distinct from al-Maqrīzī's.[67]

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67. al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd* I, pp. 87, 160, 196, 218 (listing e.g. six senior officials: 'the Senior Amir', 'the Chief Amir of the Horse', 'the Chief Executive Secretary', 'the Senior Head of Guard', 'the Amir of the Council' and 'the Majordomo'), pp. 254, 280, 312, 341, 370; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd* II, pp. 85–87 (listing e.g. eight senior officials: 'the Senior Amir', 'the Chief Amir of the Horse', 'the Senior Head of Guard', 'the Chief Chamberlain', 'the Amir

As far as the office of 'Senior Head of Guard' (ra's nawba kabīr) and its peers at the sultan's court are concerned, however, this multivalent political order of al-ʿAynī's own annalistic imagination also appears as increasingly acquiring a more uniform outlook, especially from the annal for 824 AH (1421) onwards.[68] al-ʿAynī's systematic listing thus strongly reminds us of al-Maqrīzī's stabilizing representations, even despite the very distinct nature of each (see fig. 7). From al-ʿAynī's annal for 824 (1421) until the chronicle's last annal for 850 (1446–1447), the title of "Senior Head of Guard" (ra's nawba kabīr) almost always appears when other similar positions of court leadership are referenced, and it always does so in changing arrangements with some or all of the six other office titles that came to mark al-Maqrīzī's lists for the years between 818 and 844.[69]

For the opening sections of a handful of years only al-ʿAynī reduces his annual survey of the positioning of the "Senior Head of Guard" and his colleagues in the sultanate's political order to a mere cross-reference, which connects the new annal with the preceding annal's narrative structure.[70] Some of these cross-references are highly revealing about the author's conceptualization of this group of titles and offices as a distinct and coherent set of court positions. In the first paragraph of the annal for the year 846 (May 1442–May 1443), al-ʿAynī summarily explains that "the caliph is al-Mustakfī bi-llāh, the sultan is al-Ẓāhir, the amirs of Egypt are as before (umarāʾ miṣr ʿalā ḥālihim), as are the four qāḍīs, 'the Viceroys' of the cities (nuwwāb al-bilād), and 'the Officials' (al-mubāshirūn)."[71] In a similarly brief opening paragraph of the annal for 848 (April 1444–April 1445), the author is a bit more specific in the terminology used for this type of cross-referencing, when he states "that the caliph and the sultan are as before (ʿalā ḥālihimā), 'the Commander of the Armies' (atābak al-ʿasākir) is the amir Yashbak […] and the rest of the senior amirs (baqiyyat al-umarāʾ al-kibār), the qāḍīs, the muḥtasib, and

of Arms', 'the Amir of the Council', 'the Chief Executive Secretary' and 'the Majordomo'), pp. 173, 191, 217, 245, 293, 309, 327, 351, 369, 399, 413, 425, 441, 453, 465, 479, 493, 509, 543, 557, 569, 577, 591, 619, 635, 651. The substantial range of variety is also illustrated by the contrast between the list of 835 AH, simply suggesting that the caliph and sultan remained as before, and the extremely long list of Afro-Eurasian dimensions for 840 AH (al-ʿAynī, ʿIqd II, pp. 413, 479–481).

68. al-ʿAynī, ʿIqd II, pp. 85–94.

69. al-ʿAynī, ʿIqd II, pp. 85–87 (824 AH: the ra's is listed 3rd of eight, after 'the Commander of the Armies' and 'the Senior Amir of the Horse' and before 'the Chief Chamberlain', 'the Amir of Arms', 'the Amir of the Council', 'the Executive Secretary' and 'the Majordomo'), p. 173 (825 AH: ra's is 5th of six), p. 191 (826 AH: ra's is 7th of eight), p. 245 (828 AH: ra's is 5th of seven), p. 293 (829 AH: ra's is 5th of six), p. 309 (830: ra's is 4th of six), p. 351 (832 AH: ra's is 3rd of four), p. 399 (834 AH: ra's is 5th of seven), p. 425 (836 AH: ra's is 4th of four), p. 441 (837 AH: ra's is 3rd of six), p. 479 (840 AH: ra's is 4th of seven), p. 493 (841 AH: ra's is 6th of seven), p. 557 (844 AH: ra's is 6th of six), p. 569 (845 AH: ra's is 4th of seven), p. 591 (847 AH: ra's is 4th of six), p. 651 (850 AH: ra's is 4th of six). Only in three out of the nineteen full lists in the annals 824-850 AH no mention is made of 'the Headship of the Guard' (al-ʿAynī, ʿIqd II, pp. 217, 465, 509); for the annals 815-823 AH, by contrast, only three opening sections out of nine include a reference to this title and its bearer (al-ʿAynī, ʿIqd I, p. 218 [818 AH: ra's is 4th of six], p. 280 [820 AH: ra's is 2nd of seven], p. 312 [821 AH: ra's is 3rd of four]).

70. al-ʿAynī, ʿIqd II, pp. 327, 369, 413, 453, 543, 577, 619, 635.

71. al-ʿAynī, ʿIqd II, p. 577.

'the Agents' are as before, except for 'the Viceroy' of Alexandria [...]."[72] In the annal of 849 (April 1445–April 1446), finally, al-ʿAynī's cross-reference appears in its most explicit and meaningful format, when he repeats earlier statements that "the caliph and the sultan are as before (ʿalā ḥālihimā) and 'the Commander of the Armies' (atābak al-ʿasākir) is the amir Yashbak" and when he then continues that also "the rest of the Lords of the Offices among the amirs (baqiyyat aṣḥāb al-waẓāʾif min al-umarāʾ), the qāḍīs, and 'the agents' are as before".[73] For al-ʿAynī, 'the Commander of the Armies', 'the Senior Head of Guard', and their colleagues were not just "Egyptian amirs" (umarāʾ miṣr) nor mere "senior amirs" (al-umarāʾ al-kibār); they were "the Lords of the Offices" (aṣḥāb al-waẓāʾif) among these high-ranking amirs. These titles, their systematic priority placement in these listings, and these cross-references therefore mark out, for al-ʿAynī just as for al-Maqrīzī, a distinct and coherent group of military leaders as a separate social category and as an essential, prime component of a hierarchical order of different elite groups that was topped by the caliph and the sultan and that integrated a wide range of local and regional leaders and rulers. These titles thus distinguished the leaderships that were contemporary to these authors' textual constructions and that made for the very cores of the sovereign courts of the sultans al-Ašraf Barsbāy (1422–1438) and al-Ẓāhir Ǧaqmaq (1438–1453).[74]

3.2.2. *Ibn Taġrībirdī's and al-Ṣayrafī's representations of leadership order and the* ra's nawba

In Ibn Taġrībirdī's annalistic continuation of al-Maqrīzī's *Sulūk*, the *Ḥawādiṯ al-Duhūr fī Mada l-Ayyām wa-l-Šuhūr* ("The Events of Time Along the Passage of Days and Months"), starting with the annal for 845 AH (May 1441–May 1442) and ending with the beginning of the annal for 874 AH (July 1469), similarly systematic attention was awarded to structuring every annal's narrative by opening it with an annual update of the state of the sultanate's order of leadership, at least as the author and his audiences chose to imagine it.[75] As far as the office

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72. al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd* II, p. 619.
73. al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd* II, p. 635.
74. An anonymous, untitled and only incompletely preserved Syrian annalistic chronicle contains similar leadership lists for four of its six (partly) extant annals, suggesting that this listing practice was part of the structure of this 15th century text too. The first part of the annal for 836 AH, however, has not been preserved. In the opening lists of the annals for 835 AH and 838 AH the same five senior officials are mentioned, in a stable order that lists the 'Head of Guard' as the 4th of five, after 'the Commander of the Armies', 'the Executive Secretary', and 'the Amir of the Horse' and before 'the Majordomo'. The opening list for 837 presents the same order, but lists six senior officials, adding 'the Grand Chamberlain' after 'the Head of Guard' and before 'the Majordomo'. The lists of 835 and 837 furthermore use the title of 'the Head of Guard' (ra's nawba), while 'the Chief Head of the Guard' (ra's nawbat al-nuwab) appears in that of 838 (*Ḥawliyyāt*, pp. 14, 75, 113).
75. Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Šaltūt, pp. 27–32, 42, 58, 71, 83, 94, 106–107, 120, 151, 195–197, 258, 294, 333–334, 409–410, 442, 489; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, I, pp. 1–3, 4, 8, 11, 16, 20, 22–24, 27, 41, 58-60, 100, 121; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, II, pp. 199–200, 220, 247–248, 281–291, 308, 319, 327–328, 343–345; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, III, pp. 411–413, 433–434, 439, 480, 503–506, 526, 544–546, 670–672, 734–735. Ibn Taġrībirdī's other major chronicle, the *Nuǧūm*, which is mainly dynastically instead

of 'Chief Head of the Guards' and its peers of "the Lords of the Offices" are concerned, the
Ḥawādiṯ's own particular textual dynamics in this respect appear again to coalesce consistently
around the more uniform outlook that had also come to mark al-Maqrīzī's and al-ʿAynī's
later annals. 'The Chief Head of the Guards' always appears in changing arrangements with
six other "Lords of the Offices" (even though in the Ḥawādiṯ they always do so only after the
sultan, the caliph and the four chief qāḍīs), to which very often also a royal son was added.[76]

of annalistically organized, has a handful of similar leadership lists only, just one of which is contemporary
to the author's own lifetime, at the start of the narrative for the extremely brief reign of sultan al-ʿAzīz
Yūsuf b. Barsbāy (r. 1438); after identifying the caliph and four qāḍīs, this list includes 'the Chief Head of the
Guard' as one of the "amirs Lords of the Offices belonging to 'the Commanders [of 1,000 troopers]'" (min
al-umarāʾ aṣḥāb al-waẓāʾif min al-muqaddamīn) and it explains that there were "in all […] thirteen amirs who
belonged to the 'Commanders' (ǧumlat […] ṯalāṯat ʿašara amīran min al-muqaddamīn), before continuing its
leadership survey with "those from among the Lords of the Offices who belonged to the amirs of forty and
ten (man kāna min aṣḥāb al-waẓāʾif min umarāʾ al-ṭablaḫānāt wa-l-ʿašarāt.) (Ibn Taġrībirdī, Nuǧūm XV, 223).
76. Ibn Taġrībirdī, Ḥawādiṯ, Šaltūt, p. 27 (845 AH: the raʾs is listed 5th of eight, after 'the Commander of
the Armies', 'the Amir of Arms', 'the Amir of the Council' and 'the Chief Amir of the Horse', and before 'the
Grand Chamberlain', 'the Senior Executive Secretary' and "'the Head of the Commanders of 1,000 [troopers]',
al-Nāṣirī Muḥammad, the son of the Sultan"), p. 106 (851 AH: raʾs is 6th of seven), p. 195 (854 AH: raʾs is
6th of seven), p. 333 (857 AH: raʾs is 6th of eight), p. 409 (858 AH: raʾs is 5th of eight), p. 489 (860 AH:
raʾs is 7th of seven) (idem in Ibn Taġrībirdī, Ḥawādiṯ, Popper, I, pp. 1, 22, 58; Ibn Taġrībirdī, Ḥawādiṯ,
Popper, II, pp. 247–248); Ibn Taġrībirdī, Ḥawādiṯ, Popper, II, p. 281 (861 AH: raʾs is 6th of seven), p. 308
(862 AH: raʾs is 6th of seven), pp. 327–328 (864 AH: raʾs is 6th of seven), p. 343–344 (865 AH: raʾs is 6th
of seven); Ibn Taġrībirdī, Ḥawādiṯ, Popper, III, p. 411 (866 AH: raʾs is 6th of seven), p. 433 (867 AH: raʾs
is 6th of seven), p. 503 (870 AH: raʾs is 5th of eight), p. 544 (872 AH: raʾs is 6th of eight), p. 670 (873 AH:
raʾs is 5th of seven), p. 734 (874 AH: raʾs is 5th of seven).
For royal sons who are included in these lists, see Ibn Taġrībirdī, Ḥawādiṯ, Šaltūt, p. 27 ("'the Head of the
Commanders of 1,000 [troopers]', al-Nāṣirī Muḥammad, the son of the Sultan"), p. 106 ("the remainder of
the amirs of 1,000 [troopers] includes al-Fakhrī ʿUthmān, son of the Sultan"), p. 195 (idem), p. 333 ("al-maqām
al-Fakhrī ʿUthmān, son of the Sultan" is listed second, after 'the Commander of the Armies' and before 'the
Amir of Arms'), p. 409 ("the greatest of 'the Commanders of 1,000' [aʿẓam muqaddamī l-ulūf] is al-maqām
al-Šihābī Aḥmad, son of the Sultan, 'Head of the Left Wing'"), p. 489 (idem) (idem in Ibn Taġrībirdī,
Ḥawādiṯ, Popper, I, pp. 1, 22, 58; Ibn Taġrībirdī, Ḥawādiṯ, Popper, II, pp. 247–248); Ibn Taġrībirdī, Ḥawādiṯ,
Popper, II, p. 281 ("the remainder of 'the Commanders of 1,000 [troopers]' includes al-maqām al-Šihābī
Aḥmad, son of the Sultan, 'Head of the Left Wing' in the seating order [fī l-ǧulūs]"); p. 308 (idem), p. 328
(al-Šihābī Aḥmad is now 'Commander of the Armies' and "the remainder of 'the Commanders of 1,000'
includes the son of the Sultan, al-Nāṣirī Muḥammad"), p. 344 (idem).
The chronicle's default range of seven offices is expanded to eight in three cases when a sultan's son is explicitly
inserted (Ibn Taġrībirdī, Ḥawādiṯ, Šaltūt, pp. 27, 333, 409) and twice when the office of 'Amir of the Armor
Bearers' is added (Ibn Taġrībirdī, Ḥawādiṯ, Popper, III, pp. 503, 544).

AnIsl 56 (2022), p. 255-296   Jo Van Steenbergn, Maya Termonia
Historiography and the Making of the Sultan's Court in 15th Century Cairo. The case of the court office of 'the Chief Head of the Guards'
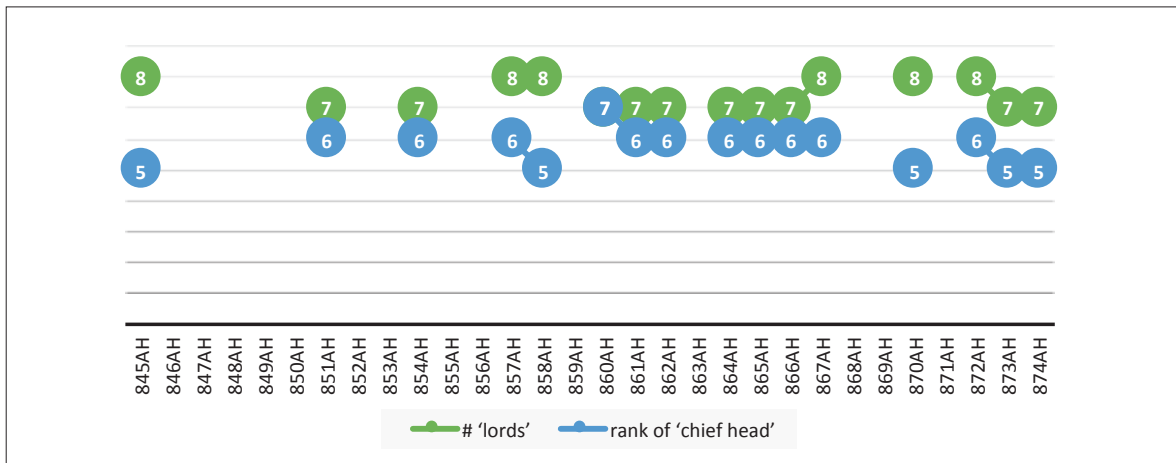(raʾs nawbat al-nuwab)

Fig. 8. 'Lords' and 'Chief Heads' in Ibn Taghrībirdī's Ḥawādith.

As with al-ʿAynī's increasingly consistent listing of these "Lords" (and given that the *Ḥawādiṯ*'s lists also directly informed Ayalon's afore-mentioned appreciation of the stabilization of the "order of offices") the *Ḥawādiṯ*'s structuration of this list appears even more systematic and stable than that of its predecessors (see fig. 8). Amid Ibn Taġrībirdī's regular variation, from one annal to another, of the internal arrangement of these seven titles there also emerges this arrangement's construction along, or its determination by, an internal hierarchy of two distinct sets of interchangeable court offices. The office of the 'Chief Head of Guard' appears as regularly swapping places with the offices of "the Senior Executive Secretary" (*dawādār kabīr*) and of "the Grand Chamberlain" (*ḥāǧib al-ḥuǧǧāb*), but never with those of the "Commander of the Army", "the Amir of Arms", "the Amir of the Council", or the "Amir of the Horse". In this specific section of the list, the latter set of four is actually always mentioned first, in varying arrangements, before the former three.[77] Some of the opening sections for the *Ḥawādiṯ*'s annals also consist, entirely or partly, of summarizing cross-references to the listing in preceding annals. These references identify this particular group of titles not just, again, with the label of "the Lords of the Offices" (*arbāb al-waẓāʾif*), but also as a particular, separate leadership body within the larger formation of the "Lords of the *dawla*" (*arbāb al-dawla*) that was different from

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77. For the order 'Chief Head of the Guard' – 'Grand Chamberlain' – 'Senior Executive Secretary', see Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Šaltūt, pp. 27, 409; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, III, p. 670. For the order 'Chief Head of the Guard' – 'Senior Executive Secretary' – 'Grand Chamberlain', see Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Šaltūt, p. 333; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, III, pp. 503, 734. For the order 'Grand Chamberlain' – 'Chief Head of the Guard' – 'Senior Executive Secretary', see Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Šaltūt, pp. 106, 195. For the order 'Senior Executive Secretary' – 'Grand Chamberlain' – 'Chief Head of the Guard', see Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Šaltūt, p. 489. For the order 'Senior Executive Secretary' – 'Chief Head of the Guard' – 'Grand Chamberlain', see Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, II, pp. 281, 327, 343; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, III, pp. 411, 544. For two exceptions to this two-tiered order, see: Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, II, p. 308; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, III, p. 433 (where in both cases 'the Secretary' appears before the 'Grand Amir of the Horse', followed by 'the Chief Head' and 'the Chamberlain').

but not unrelated to the equally distinct trans-regional leadership categories such as that of "the Rulers of the Regions" (*mulūk al-aqṭār*).[78] In most cases, furthermore, the *Ḥawādiṯ* also systematically distinguishes these "Lords of the Offices" from other "Lords" by their membership of the slightly larger group of 'Commanders of 1,000 (troopers)'.[79] Occasionally substantial importance is attached to mentioning the actual number of amirs in this select group as well as how this number compares to this group's size in a vague past. In the chronicle's first annal, for 845 AH, it is stated that "all the afore-mentioned Lords of the Offices as well as the other amirs of 1,000 [troopers] numbered twelve amirs, which is half of how it used to be in the old days (*ʿalā l-niṣf mimmā kāna fī sālif al-aʿṣār*)."[80] For 861 AH, it is explained that they are, "in all, eleven, which is less than half of how it used to be."[81] For both 864 and 865, it is added that they are "twelve, which is half of how it used to be."[82] For 866, finally, Ibn Taġrībirdī explicitly links this distinct group of 'Commanders' and its presentation in the *Ḥawādiṯ* to the courtly organization of leadership "in the sultan's presence". After identifying the year's seven "Lords of the Offices" as well as its six "remaining 'Commanders of 1,000'", the text explains that "they are thirteen amirs, [mentioned] in the order of their stations and their seating positions in the sultan's council (*bi-ḥasab manāzilihim wa-ǧulūsihim bi-maǧlis al-sulṭān*)."[83]

In the published parts of the *Nuzhat al-Nufūs wal-abdān fī tawārīḫ al-zamān* ("A Refreshing Stroll of Minds and Bodies through the Annals of Time") Ibn Taġrībirdī's contemporary al-Ǧawharī al-Ṣayrafī (1416–1495) also relies on leadership lists to open most of his annals, covering the years 784 AH (1382–1383) to 849 AH (1445–1446). From the opening of the annal for 814 AH (April 1411–April 1412) onwards, the position of 'Head of Guard' again appears increasingly consistently amid a coherent group of six or seven "Lords of the Offices" (see fig. 9) that were eventually also represented as members of the small but exclusive group of 'the Commanders'.[84]

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78. For *arbāb al-waẓāʾif*, see Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Šaltūt, pp. 71, 94, 294, 442. For *arbāb al-dawla*, see Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Šaltūt, pp. 42, 58, 94, 120, 151, 258, 294 (e.g. "the remainder of the lords of the *dawla*, from the *qāḍī*s to 'the Viceroys' to the Lords of the Offices, are the same as at the beginning of the previous year, except for…"); Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, II, p. 319. For *mulūk al-aqṭār*, see Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Šaltūt, pp. 106–107, 195–197; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, II, p. 282; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, III, p. 505.

79. Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Šaltūt, pp. 27, 106, 195, 333, 409, 489; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, II, pp. 281, 308, 328, 344; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, III, pp. 411, 433, 503, 544, 670, 734.

80. Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Šaltūt, p. 27.

81. Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, II, p. 281.

82. Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, II, pp. 328, 344.

83. Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, III, p. 411. See also a concise parallel explanation in Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, Popper, II, p. 281 ("the remainder of 'the Commanders of 1,000 [troopers]' includes *al-maqām al-Šihābī* Aḥmad, son of the Sultan, 'Head of the Left Wing' in the seating order [*fī l-ǧulūs*]").

84. al-Ǧawharī, *Nuzhat* II, p. 282 (814 AH: the *raʾs nawba kabīr* is preceded by references to the sultan, the caliph, 'the Commander of the Armies', the four *qāḍī*s, 'the Confidential Secretary', 'the Controller of the Army', 'the Vizier', 'the Majordomo' and 'the Senior Executive Secretary', and it is followed by 'the Grand Chamberlain'), p. 302 (815 AH: the *raʾs nawba kabīr* is 4th of six, with an additional reference as 5th in the list to a *raʾs nawba kabīr li-l-mamālīk*), p. 347 (818 AH: (*raʾs* is listed 4th of five, after 'the Senior Amir', 'the Senior Amir of the Horse' and 'the Senior Majordomo' and before 'the Amir of the Council'),

From the annal for 826 AH (1421) onwards this group is also always presented as consisting of two parts, with a set arrangement recurring for the first three positions ("Commander of the Army", "the Amir of Arms", "the Amir of the Council") and a regular reshuffle for the other ones ("Senior/Chief Head of the Guard", "Chief Executive Secretary", "Amir of the Horse", plus occasionally the "Grand Chamberlain").[85] In two cases the name of the sultan's son and heir is once again inserted in the middle of these lists: Barsbāy's son Ğamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf for the annal of 840 (July 1436–July 1437) and Ğaqmaq's son Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad for that of 844 (June 1440–May 1441).[86]
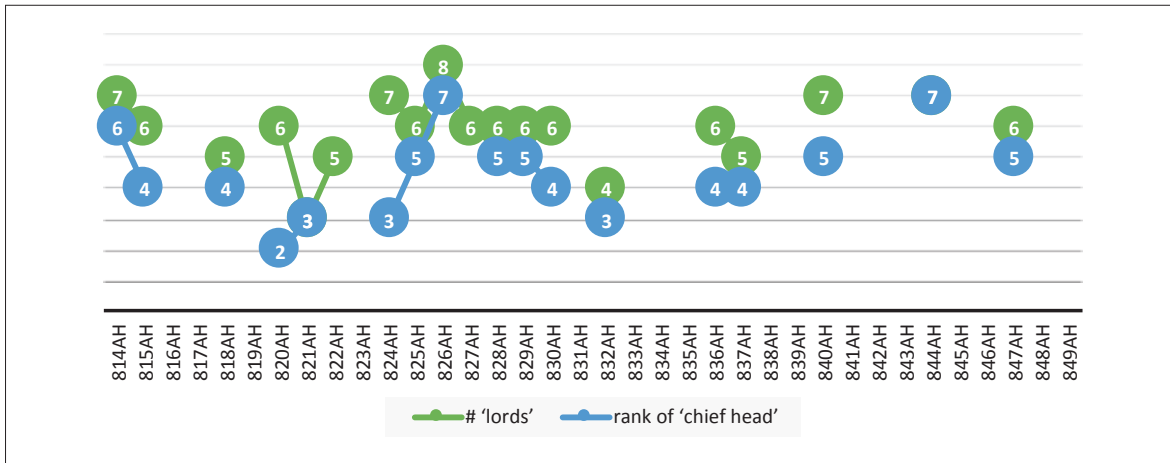

Fig. 9. 'Lords' and 'Chief Heads' in al-Jawharī's Nuzhat al-Nufūs.

pp. 382–383 (820 AH: raʾs is 2nd of six, preceded by "the Commander of the Armies in Egypt" only, and both immediately following opening references to the sultan and the caliph—the latter arrangement of sultan-caliph-'lords', etc. is standard practice from this annal onwards), p. 408 (821 AH: raʾs is 3rd of three 'lords'), pp. 435–436 (822 AH: five 'lords', but no raʾs), p. 485 (824 AH: raʾs is 3rd of seven), p. 524 (825 AH: raʾs is 5th of six); al-Ğawharī, *Nuzhat* III, p. 17 (826 AH: the raʾs nawba kabīr is listed 7th of eight), p. 40 (827 AH: six 'lords', but no raʾs), p. 64 (828 AH: raʾs is 5th of six), p. 98 (829 AH: raʾs is 5th of six), p. 113 (830 AH: raʾs is 4th of six), p. 144 (832 AH: raʾs is 3rd of four, but now exceptionally preceded by caliph, sultan and six 'Governors' in Alexandria and Syria), p. 246 (836 AH: raʾs is 4th of six), p. 271 (837 AH: raʾs is 4th of five), p. 364 (840 AH: raʾs is 5th of seven, including in second order, after 'the Senior Amir'-'Head of the Right Wing', "*al-maqām al-Ğamālī* Yūsuf, son of *al-maqām al-šarīf*, 'Head of the Left Wing'"); al-Ğawharī, *Nuzhat* IV, p. 189 (844 AH: raʾs is 7th of seven, including in 4th order "*al-maqām al-Nāṣirī* Muḥammad b. al-Sulṭān al-Malik al-Ẓāhir, one of the amirs of 1,000"), p. 267 (847 AH: raʾs listed 5th of six). For explicit references to "the Lords of the Offices" see al-Ğawharī, *Nuzhat* II, pp. 362, 464; III, pp. 127, 143; IV, p. 315; to 'the Commanders', see al-Ğawharī, *Nuzhat* II, p. 464 ('the Senior Amirs' [*al-umarāʾ al-kibār*]); III, p. 364 (incl. "their number is thirteen 'Commanders' whereas they used to be twenty four 'Commanders'"); IV, p. 267 ("the remaining amirs 'Commanders' complete the list of thirteen individuals [*nafs*], just as we have mentioned them"), p. 297.
85. See al-Ğawharī, *Nuzhat* III, pp. 17, 40, 64, 98, 113, 246, 271, 364; IV, pp. 189, 267.
86. al-Ğawharī, *Nuzhat* III, p. 364; IV, p. 189.

The few extant annals from al-Ǧawharī's other chronicle, the *Inbāʾ al-Ḥaṣr bi-Anbāʾ al-ʿAṣr* ("Information about [sultan Qāyitbāy] the Lion with respect to the Tidings of the Era") display a similar pattern that aligns even more consistently with that in Ibn Taġrībirdī's *Ḥawādiṯ*. Beginning with the annal for 873 AH (July 1468–July 1469) and thus complementing the *Ḥawādiṯ*'s coverage with the further history of the reign of sultan al-Ašraf Qāyitbāy (r. 1467–1496 CE), the *Inbāʾ* has a handful of extant opening sections that all mention after the caliph, the sultan and Egypt's chief judges a fixed set of four offices ('Commander of the Armies', 'Amir of Arms', 'Amir of the Council', 'Amir of the Horse') and a more dynamic set of three ('Chief Head of Guard', 'Senior Executive Secretary', 'Grand Chamberlain').[87] In the list for 877 (June 1472–May 1473) al-Ǧawharī actually explained directly that "these are the seven amirs [who are] the lords of the offices" (*hāʾulāʾi sabʿa umarāʾ aṣḥāb waẓāʾif*) and he also groups them with, and distinguishes them from, "the amirs 'Commanders of 1,000' who are without offices".[88] In the list for 873 AH (1468–1469) he also clarified that "in all they were fourteen amirs 'Commanders', whereas they had been twenty-four 'Commanders' in the *dawla* of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn [r. 1293–1294, 1299–1309, 1310–1341] so that they were ten [men] short (*fa-ʿaǧazū ʿašara*)."[89]

In all, just as had been the case with al-ʿAynī and al-Maqrīzī, these titles of "the seven amirs [who are] the lords of the offices", their systematic placement in these listings by both Ibn Taġrībirdī and al-Ǧawharī al-Ṣayrafī, and their explicit connection by Ibn Taġrībirdī with the hierarchical arrangement of "the sultan's council", all mark out, for Ibn Taġrībirdī as well as for al-Ǧawharī al-Ṣayrafī, a distinct and coherent group of military leaders as a separate social category and as a constitutive component of an explicitly courtly order that would have defined the reigns of the sultans al-Ašraf Barsbāy (1422–1438), al-Ẓāhir Ǧaqmaq (1438–1453), al-Ašraf Īnāl (1453–1461), al-Ẓāhir Ḫušqadam (1461–1467) and al-Ašraf Qāyitbāy (1467–1496). Topped by the caliph, the sultan, Egypt's chief *qāḍī*s and these seven "Lords", and identifiable through different numerical references and comparisons, this order's specific representations by Ibn Taġrībirdī and al-Ǧawharī al-Ṣayrafī furthermore present a range of graphic claims, that certainly also echo in Ibn Taġrībirdī's afore-mentioned statements about this order's almost mythical origins and clearly identifiable transformations. These claims range from the stability of this order's organization to its relatedness, across time and space, with an original ideal from "the old days" and with the wide variety of other local and regional leaders and rulers whose names were occasionally added to these lists.[90]

87. al-Ǧawharī, *Inbāʾ*, pp. 1, 115, 183, 469–470.
88. al-Ǧawharī, *Inbāʾ*, p. 470.
89. al-Ǧawharī, *Inbāʾ al-Ḥaṣr*, p. 3.
90. Among this generation of historians, opening lists may also be found in the annalistic chronicles of al-Saḫāwī, but in this case these lists are far more limited and far less informative; instead of providing full surveys, they focus mainly, if at all, on listing major leadership changes from one year to another only (al-Saḫāwī, *al-Tibr*, I, pp. 100, 153, 198, 246, 293; II, pp. 7, 61, 156; III, pp. 7, 85; IV, pp. 5, 78; al-Saḫāwī, *Waǧīz*). The sole exception to this rule is the list at the beginning of the *Tibr*'s annal for 845 AH (which is also the beginning of this chronicle in general); this list consists of a complete and long survey of local and

3.2.3. *Ibn Iyās' and Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's representations of leadership order and the* ra's nawba

Among the last generation of the sultanate's Syro-Egyptian historians, finally, similarly informative opening lists occurred in the annalistic chronicles of the afore-mentioned Muḥammad Ibn Iyās (1448–ca. 1524) and Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥimṣī (1437–1527). In the latter's continuation of Ibn Ḥağar's *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr*, the *Ḥawādiṯ al-Zamān wa-wafayāt al-shuyūkh wa-l-aqrān* ("The Reports of Time and the Obituaries of Teachers and Fellows") and in the former's *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾiʿ al-Duhūr* ("Marvels Blossoming among Incidents of the Epochs"), Ibn al-Ḥimṣī and Ibn Iyās joined their predecessors to construct through these lists a coherent courtly collectivity in the sultanate's leadership and to represent that leadership as a dominant feature of the order of things. In both cases, however, this practice only sets in in the later parts of the edited versions of their chronicles, with the annals for the 900s (later 1490s and 1500s) and, especially, the reign of sultan Qānṣawh al-Ġawrī (r. 1501–1516 CE). Ibn Iyās strictly follows the stabilized model of seven senior amirs who are "lords of the offices" and "amirs 'Commanders'", presenting them repeatedly in the same strict line-up that lists 'the Chief Head of the Guards' (*ra's nawbat al-nuwab*) as the fifth of these seven officials (see fig. 10).[91] Ibn Iyās' listings furthermore display yet again a marked interest in the hierarchies and numbers that make for this courtly order. For the annal of 908 AH this order is said to be made up of "twenty-four amirs 'Commanders of 1,000', including the Lords of the Offices (*arbāb al-waẓāʾif*)", "seventy-five amirs of forty", "185 amirs of ten" and "800 *ḫāṣṣakiyya*" *mamlūk*s, in addition to "the viceroys of the Syrian lands" and the "Lords of the Offices among the turban-wearers" (*arbāb al-waẓāʾif min al-mutaʿammimīn*). This exceptionally detailed list with the names of many of these members of the sultanate's elites is then identified explicitly as representing "the arrangement of the *dawla* of [sultan Qānṣawh]

regional leaderships, topped by the caliph, the sultan, the chief *qāḍī*s and the *muḥtasib*, and it presents 'the Chief Head of the Guards' as the 5th of seven offices, after the standard group of four ('the Commander of the Armies, 'the Amir of Arms', 'the Amir of the Council' and 'the Senior Amir of the Horse'), and before 'the Senior Executive Secretary' and 'the Grand Chamberlain'; to this list of seven, al-Saḫāwī also again added "'the Head of the Commanders of 1,000' (whose number at that time—including 'the Lords of the Offices'—is twelve) al-Nāṣirī Muḥammad, the son of the Sultan" (al-Saḫāwī, *Tibrī* I, p. 40).

91. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ* III, pp. 386–387 (904 AH: the *ra's nawbat al-nuwab* is listed 6th of seven, after 'the Senior Amir', 'the Amir of Arms', 'the Amir of the Council', 'the Senior Amir of the Horse', and 'the Senior Executive Secretary' and before 'the Grand Chamberlain' and "the remaining amirs 'Commanders'"); IV, p. 30 (908 AH: the *ra's* is 5th of seven), p. 111 (913 AH: the *ra's* is 5th of seven), p. 434 (921 AH: the *ra's nawba kabīr* is 5th of seven); V: p. 3 (922 AH: the *ra's* is 5th of nine positions, occupied by only six "lords of the offices").

For explicit "Lords of the Offices" and 'Commanders' references, see Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ* III, p. 415 ("the amirs 'Commanders' Lords of the Offices"); IV, p. 30 ("twenty-four amirs 'Commanders of 1,000', including the Lords of the Offices", "These [seven] are the Lords of the Offices; as for the amirs 'Commanders' who are without offices, they are: […]"), p. 111 ("the amirs Lords of the Offices among 'the Commanders' are […]"), p. 357 ("the amirs 'Commanders' are […]"), p. 435 ("the rest of the amirs 'Commanders', without offices, are […]"); V, p. 3 (see below).

al-Ġawrī (*tartīb dawlat al-Ġawrī*) at the beginning of the year 908 [July 1502]".[92] In the list for the annal of 920 AH (February 1514–February 1515) it is explained that "the number of amirs 'Commanders' amounted to twenty-seven 'Commanders of 1,000'" and in that of the last full year of the sultanate's existence, 922 AH (February 1516–January 1517), it is stated that "their number at that time was twenty-six amirs 'Commanders of 1,000', including six Lords of the Offices (*arbāb al-waẓāʾif*)".[93]
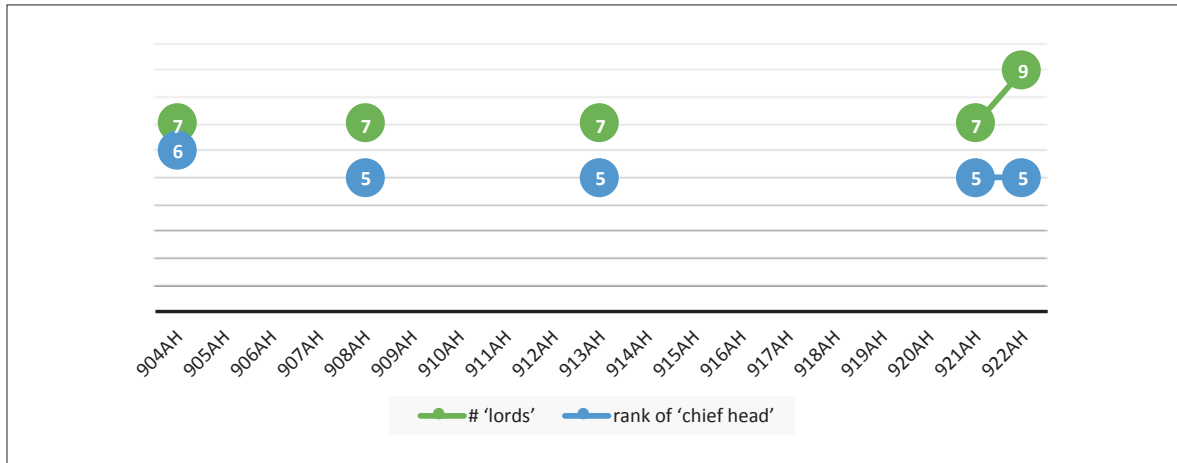

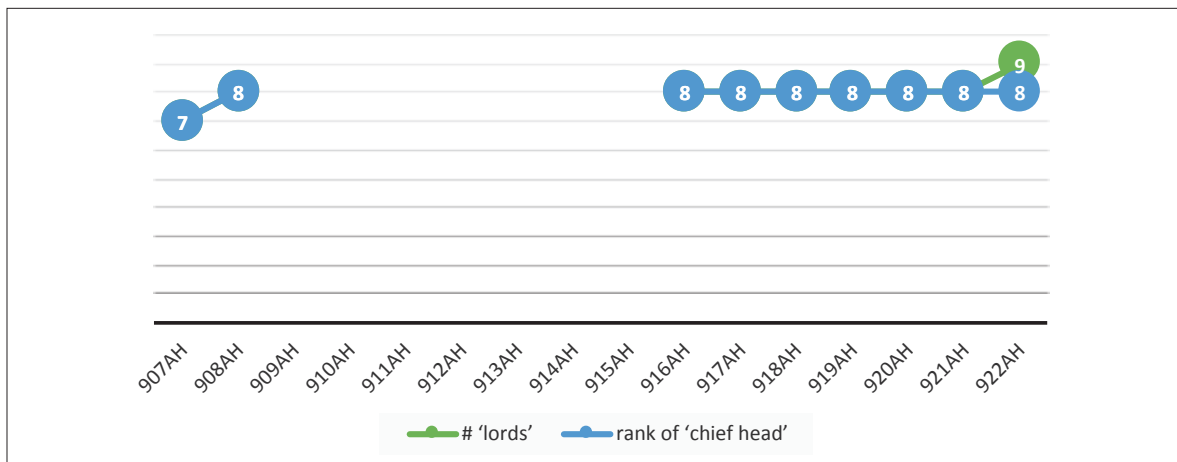**Fig. 10.** 'Lords' and 'Chief Heads' in Ibn Iyās' Badāʾiʿ.

Fig. 11. 'Lords' and 'Chief Heads' in Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's Ḥawādiṯ.

92. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ* III, pp. 30–35.
93. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ* IV, p. 358; V: 3. For 921 AH it is also repeated that "their number at that time was twenty-seven amirs 'Commanders of 1,000'" (IV, p. 434). For 922 AH, it is furthermore claimed that there were "1,200 ḫāṣṣakīs from [the sultan's] newly bought [mamlūks] (*min mushtarāwātihi*), many of whom were appointed as Lords of Offices" and that "the amirs of forty and ten in this year amounted to more than 300 amirs" (V, p. 6).

For Ibn al-Ḥimṣī the "arrangement" that marked out that collective leadership in the same era of sultan al-Ġawrī's sultanate turns out to have appeared slightly differently, with the addition and omission of some offices compared to those mentioned by Ibn Iyās and his predecessors. In Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's chronicle, most of the times the incumbents of eight offices are listed after the sultan in a fixed order that always includes 'the Chief Head of the Guards' (raʾs nawbat al-nuwab) as the last one before moving on to listing the Syrian 'Viceroys', the rulers of Mecca, Anatolia (al-Rūm) and North-Africa (al-Ġarb/al-Maġrib) and the qāḍīs and administrative leaders in Egypt and Damascus (see fig. 11).[94]

Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's annal for the final year of Qāniṣawh's reign, 922 (February 1516–January 1517), opens with a highly representative as well as an effective example of such a list. It includes references to six senior court officials (and their nine offices), but with some substantial differences from Ibn Iyās' "arrangement".

> [The year] began and the sultan of Egypt, Syria and the Hejaz is sultan al-Malik al-Ašraf Abū
> l-Naṣr Qāniṣawh al-Ġawrī, the 46th of the rulers of the Turks and their sons in Egypt and the
> 20th of the Circassians. 'The Senior Amir' is Sūdūn al-ʿAǧamī. 'The Chief Executive Secretary'
> is Ṭūmān Bāy, a relative of the sultan, and he also is 'Vizier Majordomo'. 'The Amir of Arms' is
> Urkumās. 'The Grand Chamberlain' is Unusbāy and 'the Amir of the Council' and 'Chief Head
> of the Guards' is Sūdūn al-Dawādārī. 'The Senior Amir of the Horse' is the scion of the August
> Majesty (najl al-maqām al-sharīf) [Muḥammad b. Qāniṣawh al-Ġawrī]. 'The Viceroy' of Syria…;
> 'the Viceroy' of Aleppo…; 'the Viceroy' of Tripoli…; 'the Viceroy' of Hama…; 'the Viceroy' of
> Hims… The lord of Mecca is the sharīf Barakāt. The lord of al-Rūm is Salīm Šāh Muḥammad
> b. Bāyazīd. The lord of the Maghreb is Muḥammad b. Yūsuf. The ruler of the East is Ismāʿīl Šāh,
> the Ḫarijite and Sufi. The qāḍīs in Egypt are… The qāḍīs in Damascus are…[95]

94. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, Ḥawādiṯ, p. 65 (857 AH: the raʾs nawbat al-nuwab is listed 4th of five, after the 'the Senior Amir Commander', 'the Senior Executive Secretary' and 'the Amir of the Horse' and before 'the Majordomo'), p. 403 (907 AH: the raʾs nawbat al-nuwab is listed 7th of seven, after 'the Senior Amir', 'the Vizier/Majordomo/Senior Executive Secretary', 'the Amir of Arms' 'the Grand Chamberlain'), pp. 421–422 (908 AH: the raʾs nawbat al-nuwab is listed 8th of eight, after 'the Senior Amir', 'the Vizier/Majordomo', 'the Senior Executive Secretary', 'the Amir of Arms', 'the Grand Chamberlain', and 'the Amir of the Council'), pp. 449–450 (916 AH: the raʾs is listed 8th of eight, after 'the Senior Amir', 'the Vizier', 'the Majordomo', 'the Senior Executive Secretary', 'the Amir of Arms', 'the Grand Chamberlain' and 'the Amir of the Council'), p. 465 (917 AH: 8th of eight), p. 482 (918 AH: 8th of eight), p. 490 (919 AH: 8th of eight), p. 499 (920 AH: 8th of eight), p. 509 (921 AH: 8th of eight, after 'the Senior Amir', 'the Senior Executive Secretary/Vizier/Majordomo', 'the Amir of Arms', 'the Chamberlain' and 'the Amir of the Council'), p. 517 (922 AH: 8th of nine).
95. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, Ḥawādiṯ, p. 517. In Ibn Iyās' list, not just the order of these offices is entirely differently represented, along the model of four and three offices that was set in Ibn Taġrībirdī's Ḥawādiṯ ('Commander of the Armies', 'Amir of Arms', 'Amir of the Council', 'Senior Amir of the Horse' / 'Chief Head of the Guard', 'Grand Chamberlain', 'Senior Executive Secretary'), but also the names of several officeholders diverge, as with the amir Sūdūn al-Dawādārī, who is listed by Ibn Iyās as 'Chief Head of the Guards' only, and not as 'Amir of the Council'; the latter position's holder is named as Urkumās by Ibn Iyās, whereas Ibn al-Ḥimṣī identifies this Urkumās as 'the Amir of Arms'; according to Ibn Iyās, the position of 'the Amir of Arms' was vacant (šāġira) (Ibn Iyās, Badāʾiʿ V, p. 3).

Just as had been the case with al-ʿAynī, al-Maqrīzī, Ibn Taġrībirdī and al-Ǧawharī al-Ṣayrafī, these seven, eight or nine titles of "Lords of the Offices", their systematic placement in these listings, and their explicit connection by Ibn Iyās with the "the arrangement (*tartīb*) of the *dawla* of [sultan Qānisawh] al-Ġawrī", all mark out, for Ibn Iyās as well as for Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, a distinct and coherent group of military leaders as a separate social category and as a constitutive central component of a stable leadership order that would have marked the reign of sultan Qānisawh al-Ġawrī (1501–1516). The great importance that Ibn Iyās attached to recording the numerical values of this order's main central components again presents a strong claim to its controlled and well-organized hierarchical set-up. This claim even connects in interesting ways with Ibn Iyās' afore-mentioned repetition of Ibn Taġrībirdī's assertions about the origins of the "Lords of the Offices" in this stable courtly order, as well as with his identification of them as pertaining to "the trappings of kingship". Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's tendency to always add major local and regional leaders before finishing with a survey of chief *qāḍī*s in Egypt and Damascus reads as another graphic claim to this Syro-Egyptian order's integration of these local and regional elites. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's practice to only name the sultan at the top of this order, without any reference to the Abbasid caliph, and other marked differences in his list from Ibn Iyās' "arrangement", suggest first and foremost the specificity of the perspective of Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, as the only one among these six chroniclers to write from Damascus rather than Cairo. His early 16th century Damascene information and understanding clearly somehow diverged from how his Cairene colleagues perceived the organization of Syro-Egyptian leadership.[96]

What is arguably first and foremost at stake for all these opening lists in these seven texts of history, however, has little to do with the many differences that distinguish not just Ibn Iyās' lists from those of Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, but also most of the other chroniclers' lists from each other. Just as with scribal manuals' incongruous descriptions, these textual practices are ill suited for modern tendencies—in the footsteps of Ayalon, Popper, and many others—to decide whether Ibn al-Iyās' Cairene perspective would be more authentic than that of Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, or whether more generally any reconciliation is possible between the many variations in the listing practices of these seven annalistic chronicles. What really matters is that these lists all assigned similar meanings to senior court positions such as that of the 'Chief Head of the Guards', and that these meanings had little to nothing to do with any precise tasks of government, administration, or bureaucracy that these positions would have been expected to perform. These meanings are rather related both to the construction of these texts as texts and to their elite-oriented communicative purposes. On the one hand, as regular updates on the continuously changing line-ups of the main actors of a chronicle's chronographic narratives, these opening lists represent strategic textual tools to ensure the success of its narrative communication with its readers. On the other hand, textual line-ups of offices, actors,

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96. The other major Damascene historian from the early 16th century, Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 1546), also includes opening lists in his annalistic chronicle *Mufākahat al-Ḫillān*, but these are mainly organized around the representation of the leadership organization of Damascus, as agents of the caliph and sultan in Egypt, and they include no reference to 'the Chief Head of the Guards' in Cairo.

numbers, and hierarchies that were topped by the Abbasid caliph and the sultan of Cairo also perform the communicative act of not just observing and recording, but also making sense of the fickle social realities that were defining the sultanate's central leadership in the 15th and early 16th century. Regardless of the fact that at regular occasions—as Ibn Iyās remarks in his list for the annal of 904 (1498–1499)—"the circumstances of [these elites] tended to be extremely volatile due to the occurrence of all kinds of clashes and killings […]",[97] these lists continued to identify those who should be counted upon to provide the sultanate with legitimate leadership. In fact, regardless of the many changes and volatility that affected both these elites and these lists, they always made this leadership appear as a well-organized and distinct collectivity of "lord-commanders", defined by—as Ibn Taġrībirdī suggested—"their stations and their seating positions in the sultan's council" and contributing to the continuous performance of—as Ibn Iyās explained—"the trappings of kingship" and "the arrangement of the *dawla*". In other words, whatever their differences these lists always generated the significant effect that even such volatile "circumstances" could continue to be experienced as though leaving the structured and longstanding courtly order of things unaffected.

4. Concluding Observations

This study of specific textual moments in the representation of 'the Chief Headship of the Guards' reveals how not only modern historians have been choosing to tell a very particular "truth" about the organization of the sultanate's leadership. Late medieval historians such as al-ʿAynī, al-Maqrīzī, Ibn Taġrībirdī, al-Ǧawharī al-Ṣayrafī, Ibn Iyās and Ibn al-Ḥimṣī were also engaged in similar searches for meaningful representations of complex social realities. Their stakes in this game of truth were however more aligned with late medieval scribal interests in leadership titles, hierarchies, numbers, and order than with any modern concerns for bureaucratic consistency and rationality. Taken together, this variety of references to "Lords of the Offices" listings and 'Head of the Guards' ranks and titles informs first and foremost about the active involvement of our main narrative sources and their authors in the regularly contested construction of "the sultan's presence" (*ḥaḍrat al-sulṭān*) as though a historically grounded and well-organized central component of its apparatus of 15th and early 16th century central leadership.[98]

The scribal as well as historiographical references that have been reviewed in this article explain indeed what, rather than how, the 'Head of the Guards' was meant to perform in "the sultan's presence". They all suggest in what way this position and its actors were meant to fit into the appearance of an organized hierarchy of legitimate power, distinction and integration that connected "the sultan's presence" to the agents and representatives that pursued its interests.

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97. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ* III, p. 386 (*fa-qad taqallabat aḥwāluhum bi-mūǧib mā ǧarā min al-fitan wa-l-qatl*).
98. For highly relevant parallel understandings of the direct relationship between Ottoman historiography and Ottoman leadership formation, see Kafadar (1996) and Piterberg (2003) (who interestingly argued in much theoretical detail how 17th century Ottoman historiography, "composed in such proximity to the events it represents, simultaneously reflects and constitutes the struggle over the redefinition of the state" [p. 175]).

This hierarchical construction of "the sultan's presence" and his state (*dawla*) was therefore never simply perceived, observed, or recorded as some pre-existing social reality. These acts of perceiving, observing, and recording were rather always deeply involved in this construction and its courtly interpretation, including through the differing textual representations of an orderly, coherent, and long-standing arrangement of courtly constituents such as 'the Chief Headship'.

This strong didactic and performative relationship between not just scribal but also historical writings and the organization of the sultanate's leadership in this long century certainly invites for much more research. This research should engage in much more detail with individual authors, their textual strategies, and the precise nature of their different stakes in this game of courtly truths and constructed-ness. It should also account for the wider frameworks in which, and with which, the writing of history was operating, from constructions of the sultan's court to wider arrangements of the sultanate's state (*al-dawla*). This article's very specific insights into the major textual strategies of representing 'the Chief Headship of the Guards' certainly already make evident that these wider frameworks were all not just social phenomena, but also key components in a discursive apparatus of power that contributed to the constitution of, and that was simultaneously constituted by, those social phenomena.[99] This apparatus always revolved around the production and reproduction of perceptions of order, stability, and legitimacy in the complex or even messy social realities of the sultanate's leadership, and it thus had structuring, orderly effects on any interpretations of those realities, and even on those realities themselves. This discursive apparatus of power should therefore be considered a so-called "ideological state apparatus"[100] or a hegemonic discourse of state formation, and all who were engaged in these textual communications should be considered as taking position in this discourse in active, strategic, and performative ways.

The diachronic and synchronic differences between many textual representations by courtly agents and historians certainly also relate to differences between them in this inevitable position taking. To date this strategic discursive positionality of each of these authors of diverse backgrounds and interests continues to be insufficiently understood in any study of their texts. Given the longstanding (but always bureaucratically informed) interest in these texts' representations of the organization of "the sultan's presence", the lack of modern appreciations of that discursive positionality, and of its specific courtly and statist effects, in any discussions of that organization appears as remarkable, if not problematic.[101] Hopefully, this can begin to change with the current article's advocacy to finally forego the discipline's traditional prioritization of the requirements of some kind of autonomous bureaucratic intentionality, and to rather explore the agency of this discursive positionality in any interpretations of the continuously changing organization of the sultanate's leadership. For the case of the

99. On this, see also relevant parallels in Ferguson (2018), which develops the argument "that, as a discourse and a practice of alignment, proper order was thus a structure or grammar of rule both formed by historical processes and the frame by which these processes were interpreted within Ottoman bureaucratic and literary productions." (p. 17).
100. See Althusser, 2014; 1971.
101. See Van Steenbergen et al., 2020, pp. 40–45; Van Steenbergen, 2021, pp. 15–19.

'Headship of the Guard', this means that its diverse extant definitions—as a household position that moved into the more public domain of the sultan's court, as a functional component in an a-historic and idealized bureaucratic system, or as an office of almost mythical organizational origins that underwent specific titular transformations—should never be simply collapsed into a new definition nor marked as more or less authentic. Rather, these and other definitions should always be related back to the discursive positionality of those who formulated them, given that they inform about, and were informed by, the textual politics of that positionality first and foremost.

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