
The incorporation of Egypt into the Ottoman empire was a three-stage process. First was the military dominance established by Selim I’s victories over the Mamluks at Marj Dabik and al-Raydaniyya, in 1516 and 1517 respectively. Second was the viceroyalty of the former Mamluk Hayrbak, comprising essentially a sixteenth-century form of vassalage in the tradition of earlier Ottoman methods of conquest. The third stage, following Hayrbak’s death in 1522 and the revolt of Ha’in Ahmed Pasha in 1524, was the final imposition of direct rule through a series of Istanbul-appointed governors and the qanunname established by Ibrahim Pasha in 1525. Thereafter, until almost the end of the century, there were no major episodes which challenged or modified the apparent stability of Ottoman rule. Was the change of sovereignty from Mamluk to Ottoman simply that of substituting one Turkish-speaking, non-local military elite for another? To what extent was Egypt ‘Ottomanized’? Above all, how did Ottoman rule make itself acceptable?

The principal Cairene source used by twentieth-century scholars for the first and second stages of early Ottoman rule has been that of the Mamluk descendant Ibn Iyas (d. c. 1524), whose generally hostile account of rampaging Janissaries and ‘bad Muslims’ painted one view of the new occupation. Benjamin Lellouch’s Les Ottomans en Égypte offers an alternative, comparatively neutral and slightly longer perspective, that of a contemporary Turkish historian living and working in Egypt. Abdüssamed Diyarbekrî (d. after 1542) was a non-Ottoman Turk by origin, and hence was an outsider in both Mamluk and Ottoman societies. He also arrived in Cairo, co-incidentally, in 1517, probably having fled his homeland around 1507 in advance of the Safavid invasion, and having spent several years in Mecca as both a student of Hanafi law and a Qalender dervish. Gravitating towards the new ruling elite, he eventually gained appointment in the late 1530s as Hanafi qadi of Damietta. His history was presented to the Ottoman governor, Davud Pasha, some time after its terminal date of 1542. Both in his career and in his history, Diyarbekrî exemplifies the practical accommodation of old and new and provides evidence for the construction of an acceptable Ottoman identity in Egypt.1

1) See also Lellouch’s entry ‘Abdussamed Diyarbekrî’ in Historians of the Ottoman Empire at http://www.ottomanhistorians.com.
Although Diyarbekrî wrote in Turkish for an Ottoman patron, his two principal sources were recent histories produced in Arabic by Mamluk historians. For the period from the early caliphs to 1478, via Fatimids, Ayyubids and Mamluks, he translated and expanded the chronicle by Hasan b. al-Tulunî (d. 1517), and for the reign of Qaytbay (1468-96) may have used a draft continuation by al-Tulunî. The formal title of Diyarbekrî’s work, *Tercüme en-nüzhe es-seniyye fi zikri l-hulefa ve-l-müluki l-misriyye*, refers to this early section which in the main manuscript used by Lellouch covers only the first 85 folios. The more significant part of the work, Diyarbekrî’s continuation (*zeyl*) to 1542, extends to folio 364, though almost 75% of this latter part is devoted to the crucial period 1517 to 1525. His chief—though unacknowledged—written source for the *zeyl* to 1522 is known to have been Ibn Iyas. Lellouch’s close study of the text now suggests (pp. 141-59) that for 1522 to 1524 Diyarbekrî drew upon a lost twelfth part of Ibn Iyas’s history. Diyarbekrî’s work is as much an interpretation as a translation of these sources, with a view to establishing a significant continuity between Mamluk and Ottoman rule. His own observations and views temper the account, particularly from 1517 onwards where Ibn Iyas’s information is mined but his hostility filtered out.

Lellouch’s careful and systematic study is in two parts. The first comprises four main chapters: on the political and military background to the establishment of Ottoman rule, in particular the battle of Marj Dabiq, the initial ‘protectorate’ established under the former Mamluk Hayrbak and the crisis of authority after the latter’s death; on Diyarbekrî’s career and his ‘Ottomanization’ in Egypt; on the historiographical and literary context for his work; on specific aspects of the History, including cultural identity, praiseworthy aspects of the Mamluk system, and Diyarbekrî’s two accounts of the events of 1516-17. The second part contains six appendices, of which the third discusses other sixteenth-century Ottoman and Arabic sources for the period, and the last two (pp. 288-393) provide the Ottoman text in transcription and a French translation of the two accounts of the conquest.

From his standpoint of the early 1540s, Diyarbekrî could discern significant elements of Mamluk-Ottoman continuity. Lellouch analyses (pp. 207-16) his nostalgic portrayal of Mamluk education (with its implied Janissary parallels), of waqf establishment and general stability under Qaytbay, the quintessential Mamluk ruler whose status Selim I was quick to acknowledge. A more difficult task was to justify the campaigns of 1516-17 against fellow Sunni Muslims and particularly against Kansuh