The Term Mamlūk and Slave Status during the Mamluk Sultanate

El término mamlūk y la condición de esclavo durante el sultanato mameluco

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Los estudiosos del sultanato mameluco generalmente sostienen que todos los mamlūks formaban parte de una élite que se sentía orgullosa de su origen esclavo incluso después de ser liberados. En este artículo se argumenta que esas afirmaciones están basadas en una interpretación errónea del término mamlūk según su uso en las fuentes mamelucas. El término mamlūk tiene un doble significado: esclavo y sirviente, y expresa frecuentemente subordinación, obediencia y servidumbre. Nunca se utiliza como expresión de orgullo de la condición de esclavo o de un origen esclavo. No hay evidencias de que los mamlūks liberados se sintieran orgullosos de su anterior condición de esclavos; por el contrario, los esclavos liberados con aspiraciones hicieron grandes esfuerzos para borrar su pasado servil pretendiendo un origen elevado o creando lazos matrimoniales con las familias más tradicionales. Los mamlūks eran considerados como «propiedades» y carecían de una identidad legal en sí mismos. Por lo general eran liberados solo tras la muerte de su amo y se veían a sí mismos como esclavos por carecer de lazos familiares con sus amos. Solo unos pocos, excepcionalmente, conseguían una liberación completa de su estatus y conseguían convertirse en miembros de una élite dirigente con lazos familiares. Parece que desde el tercer reinado de al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, la esclavización de los mamlūks turcos que habían sido vendidos por sus familias se convirtió en una

Scholars of the Mamluk Sultanate generally maintain that the status of all the mamlūks was that of an elite, and that the mamlūks were proud of their slave origin even after manumission. It is here argued that these assertions are based on a misconception of the term mamlūk as used in Mamluk sources. The term mamlūk has a double meaning: slave and servant, and it frequently expresses subordination, obedience and servitude. It is never used to express pride in slave status or slave origin. There is no evidence that manumitted mamlūks were proud of their slave status. On the contrary, manumitted slaves with aspirations made great efforts to repress their servile past by claiming an exalted origin or by creating marital ties with established families. Mamlūks were considered property and they lacked a legal identity of their own. They were often manumitted only upon their master’s death. They perceived themselves as slaves for lacking family ties. Only an outstanding few succeeded in completely freeing themselves of their slave status and become members of a ruling elite with family ties. It seems that starting from al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn’s third reign the enslavement of Turkish mamlūks who had been sold by their families became more of a formality. On the other hand, non-Turkish mamlūks, who were generally Christian war captives, were subject to discrimination. They were disdained, manumitted at a later age and prevented from establi-
formalidad. Por otro lado, los mamliūk que no eran turcos, generalmente cautivos de guerra cristianos, eran discriminados y despreciados; solo se les liberaba cuando eran ancianos y se les impedia establecer lazos matrimoniales con los Qalawunies así como crear sus propias familias siendo jóvenes. Eran percibidos por sus contemporáneos como «más esclavos» que los turcos mamliūk.

Palabras clave: mameluco; Sultanato mameluco; condición de esclavo; esclavitud militar; élites de esclavos.

Mamluk authors almost always refer to the political regime that ruled Egypt, Syria and adjacent areas for two-and-a-half centuries (648/1250-923/1517) as “the state of the Turks” (dawlat al-atrāk/dawlat al-turk/al-dawlah al-turkiyah). They seem to be aware of the fact that the reign of the “Turks” is divided into two periods – the rule of the Turks (dawlat al-atrāk) and that of the Circassians (dawlat al-jarākisah), and they clearly emphasize the ethnic origin or language of the ruling elite. Only rarely, and only in the Circassian period of the Sultanate (784/1382-923/1517), do they explicitly refer to the Sultanate as being ruled by slaves. Despite this fact, modern scholars almost without exception use the term “the Mamluk Sultanate” (dawlat al-mamliūk), that is, an appellation that emphasizes the elite’s and rulers’ slave status or slave origin.¹ This appellation distorts Mamluk writers’ perceptions of their ruling elite and its defining characteristic, and reflects a view propagated by David Ayalon and still held among modern scholars, that in that period the right to rule and hold key positions in the Sultanate was reserved almost exclusively for mamliūk; that the ruling elite’s main characteristic was mamliūk descent; that the status of all the mamliūks was that of an elite; and that the mamliūks were proud of their slave origin even after manumission.²

¹ For a detailed discussion, see Yosef, “Dawlat al-Atrāk or Dawlat al-Mamālīk?”.
² Ulrich Haarmann, Amalia Levanoni and D.S. Richards, among others, drew attention to the important role of non-mamliūk elements in Mamluk society, see for example Haarmann, “Joseph’s Law”; Haarmann, “The Sons of Mamluks as Fief-holders”; Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage”; Levanoni, “Awllād al-Nās in the Mamluk Army”; Richards, “Mamlūk Amirs and Their Families”. This, however, is less relevant to the matter at hand, namely, the meaning of the term mamliūk and slave status in the Mamluk Sultanate.
Although D. S. Richards maintained that “Mamlūks entered no charmed circle, no special caste” and that it is “absurd to think that any mamlūk, merely by virtue of that legal status, had a real expectation of power, wealth and influence”, and Robert Irwin argued that most mamlūks cannot be regarded an elite, generally, scholars of the Mamluk Sultanate are still of the above-mentioned opinion. For example, Linda Northrup maintains that “having been a slave was a condition for eligibility to the highest ranks of military society”, and that even after manumission “the recruit, now free, retained his mamlūk and, therefore, elite status”. In a similar manner, Reuven Amitai holds that “even after official manumission at around the age of twenty or younger, at the ceremony known as kharj, where the trainees received a certificate of release, the soldiers still proudly regarded themselves as mamlūks, jealously guarding their status…”, or that “officially free Mamluks still overtly referred to themselves as mamālik, proud of their special slave origins”. It will be argued below that these assertions are based on a misconception of the term mamlūk as used in Mamluk sources. Servile status was not considered a source of pride; on the contrary, it seems to have been considered degrading and manumitted slaves with aspirations made great efforts to repress the servile phase of their life.

1. The meaning of the term mamlūk

We often come across declarations of manumitted slaves to the effect that they are “the mamlūks of the sultan” (nahnu mamālik al-sulṭān). However, when checking the context in which these expressions appear, we find that they are meant to express obedience and subordination to the ruler and not slave status or pride in slave (mamlūk) descent. Often, when a Mamluk amir rebels or is suspected of being disloyal, he expresses his (real or dissimulated) subordination to the ruler with the words “I am a mamlūk of the sultan and obey him” (anā mamlūk al-sulṭān wa-taḥta ṭāʾatiḥ). The connection between the ex-

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1 Richards, “Mamlūk Amirs and Their Families”, p. 33.
2 Irwin, “Factions in Medieval Egypt”, p. 240.
pression mamlūk/mamālīk al-sultān and obedience (tā’ah) is clear in many other cases. A Mamluk amir might also designate himself the mamlūk of a fellow khushdāsh in order to express subordination and obedience to him. For example, after al-ʿĀdil Kitbughā (d. 702/1302) was deposed by al-Mansūr Lājin (d. 698/1299), he is quoted as saying of Lājin that “he is my comrade and I am his mamlūk who obeys him” (huwa khushdāshī wa-anā mamlūkuhu wa-taḥta amrīhi). In other cases it is clear that mamlūks expressing obedience and subordination with the expression “we are your mamlūks who obey you” (nahnu ma-mālīkuka wa-ʾalā tāʾatiqa) do not address their master, but rather a patron whom they serve. Moreover, even free persons might express obedience by using the expression “we are mamlūks” (nahnu mamālīk).

Al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441) provides a very clear example of the link between the expression nahnu mamālīk and total subordination. When the rebel Jukam min ʿAwāḍ (d. 809/1406) claimed the title of sultan in the year 803/1400 he tried to reassure al-Nāṣir Faraj (d. 815/1412) that he and his followers were not opposing him but the amir Nawrūz al-Ḥāfīzī (d. 817/1414), saying: “We are the mamlūks of the sultan… had he wanted to kill us we would not have opposed his command” (nahnu mamālīk al-sultān… wa-law arāda qatlanā mā khālaf-nāhu). While such expressions are clearly hyperbole (or even plain lies), the phrase “we are mamlūks” (nahnu mamālīk) is almost always meant to express subordination and obedience. It often appears in the course of revolt or when an amir is suspected of planning one. It never expresses pride in mamlūk status or origin.

Many times the term mamlūk is used to convey the fact that a person is a ruler’s or a patron’s servant, and not his slave. In the same manner, the term ustādīh is used to denote a patron and not a master. For example, the Khawārizmiyāh, a group of free mercenaries, ad-

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9 Zeitvertreten, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mamlûkensultane, p. 42.

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dressed the Ayyubid sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb (d. 647/1249) as his mamlūk. Qaraṭāy al-‘Izzi al-Khāzīndārī (d. after 708/1308) mentions that al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb “enslaved them with money” (ista’badahum bi-l-amwāl), and the context makes it clear that al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb bought their services and that Qaraṭāy al-‘Izzi al-Khāzīndārī is referring to patron-client ties based on exchange relationships: favors of the patron (ni’mah/ihšān) in return for service (khidmah). From the above-mentioned example it is clear that this usage of the term mamlūk was not unique to the Mamluk period. The same Khawārizmiyyah make it clear that the usage of the term mamlūk is strongly related to service (khidmah) and obedience (tā’ah), when they say to al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb: “We came to serve you and we are your obedient mamlūks” (nahnu qad ḥadarnā ilā khidmatika wa-nahnu mamalikuka wa-tahta tā’atika). They highlight the metaphorical meaning of the term mamlūk in this case, denoting servitude and not slavery, by adding that they are “slaves of the Ayyubids” (ʿabīd il-Ṣāni Ayyūb). In a similar manner, the free Turkmen amir, Qarājah bin Dhū l-Ghādīr (d. 754/1353), who aspired to the post of governor of al-Abulustayn in the year 738/1337, expressed his request by saying that he “wishes to be the

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15 We can find another example for the usage of the term mamlūk related to service (khidmah) given in return to favors (ihšān) in the words of the Bahriyyah to the ruler of Anatolia (ṣāḥib al-rum): “If you will be pleased of us and give us from your favors we will be your mamlūk’s” (fa-īn ahsanta ilaynā wa-radīta binā fa-nahnu mamalikuka), Qaraṭāy al-‘Izzi al-Khāzīndārī, Ta’rikh Majmūʿ al-Nawādir, p. 145; and see also Ibn Qāṭī Shuhbah, Ta’rikh Ibn Qāṭī Shuhbah, vol. 4, p. 302; for the connection between the term mamlūk, favors and total subordination, see Mufaḍḍal b. Abl al-Faḍīl, al-Najj al-Sāhid, p. 379; for the importance of patron-client relationships, ihšān and ni’mah in the Mamluk Sultanate, see Van Steenbergen, Order out of Chaos, pp. 57-75; for their importance prior to the Mamluk period, see Mottahedeh, Loyalty and Leadership, pp. 40-42, 72-93.

16 For another example of a usage of the term mamlūk expressing obedience and service concerning the Ayyubid period, see Qaraṭāy al-‘Izzi al-Khāzīndārī, Ta’rikh Majmūʿ al-Nawādir, p. 78. In a similar manner, during the ‘Abbāsid period, servile terminology (mawlā, ghulām, and more rarely ‘abd) was used to express servitude and loyalty, see for example Golden, “Khazar Turkic Ghulāms”, pp. 285-287 (especially page 286); Beckwith, “Aspects of the Early History”, p. 38; Pipes, “Mawlas”, p. 224; Crone, “Mawla”, p. 881; and see also Golden, “The Terminology of Slavery”.

17 Qaraṭāy al-‘Izzi al-Khāzīndārī, Ta’rikh Majmūʿ al-Nawādir, p. 94; for another example of the link between service (khidmah) and obedience (tā’ah), see al-Kutubi, ‘Uyūn al-Tawārīkh, p. 223.

18 For a similar case, see Qaraṭāy al-‘Izzi al-Khāzīndārī, Ta’rikh Majmūʿ al-Nawādir, p. 155.

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sultan’s servant (mamlûk) in that land” (yas’alu an yakûna mamlûk al-
sultân fî tilka al-ard).\(^{19}\)

We also come across instances in which mamlûks, after being man-
unmitted, offer their service to persons other than their masters, in words
similar to those of Qarâjah bin Dhû al-Ghâdir.\(^{20}\) In both the Turkish
and the Circassian periods, it was common enough that sons of mamlûks,
Mongol immigrants (wâfîdiyyah) or other free persons, were listed
among the members of the sultan’s mamlûks (mâmlûk al-sultân) or
that of an amir.\(^{21}\) We also find references to Christian bureaucrats
who converted to Islam as servants (mamlûks) of the sultan.\(^{22}\) Sometimes
the sultan’s khushdâshiyyah refer to themselves as his mamlûks (ma-
mâlûk al-sultân), and in these instances it is clear that the term mamlûk
denotes servitude rather than servile status.\(^{23}\) In addition, the term mam-
lûk was frequently used as part of the protocol of the civilian and mil-
itary elite, in order to express subordination and low rank. We have
evidence that at times civilians found this term degrading and refused to
use it.\(^{24}\) According to Nasser Rabbat the meaning of the term mamlûk
was transformed in the beginning of the Mamluk period from a war-
rior-slave who was subjugated all his life to his master, to one destined
to be manumitted and promoted in the ranks of the military.\(^{25}\) It turns
out that the term, even prior to the period of the Mamluk Sultanate,
also simply denoted a servant.

\(^{19}\) Al-Shu’â’i, Ta’rikh al-Malik al-Nâṣir Muḥammad, p. 22; for a similar case, see al-

\(^{20}\) See for example Qarâjah al-I’zzi al-Khâzîndârî, Ta’rikh Majmû’ al-Nawâdîr, p. 164.

\(^{21}\) See for example Qarâjah al-I’zzi al-Khâzîndârî, Ta’rikh Majmû’ al-Nawâdîr, pp.
p. 390; Ibn al-Furâat, Ta’rikh Ibn al-Furâat, vol. 7, p. 146; al-Nuwayri, Niḥâyat al-
Arab, vol. 32, p. 236; Ibn Qâdî Shuhbâh, Ta’rikh Ibn Qâdî Shuhbâh, vol. 1, p. 368; Ibn Duqmâq,
al-Nafhâr al-Miskiyah, p. 75; Ibn Duqmâq, al-Jawhâr al-Thâmin, p. 447; al-Maqrizî,
p. 219; Zetterstêen, Beiträge, p. 144; Baybars al-Mansûrî, Zubdat al-Fikrâh, p. 231;
al-Yûsûfî, Nizhat al-Nâṣir, p. 234; al-‘Aynî, al-Sultân Bârqûq, p. 496.

\(^{22}\) See for example al-Yûsûfî, Nizhat al-Nâṣir, p. 130.

\(^{23}\) Al-Yûsûfî, Nizhat al-Nâṣir, p. 166.

\(^{24}\) See for example Ibn Taghribirdî, al-Manhal al-Šâfî, vol. 8, p. 163; al-Šafâdî, A’yan
al-‘Asr, vol. 4, p. 504; at times the protocol’s terms infiltrated into the spoken language,
see for example al-Šafâdî, A’yan al-‘Asr, vol. 4, p. 197.

\(^{25}\) Rabbat, “The Changing Concept of Mamlûk”, p. 97; I will discuss below the issue
of manumission more thoroughly.

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By now it should be clear that the term *mamlāk* denotes obedience, servitude and subordination at least as much as it denotes slave origin and slave status. It is never used to express pride in slave origin. A misinterpretation of the term *mamlūk al-sulṭān* led scholars to argue that free immigrants (*wafīdīyah*) were refused promotion to high ranking offices because they were not slaves. Al-Maqrizī has Baybars al-Jāshankīr (d. 709/1310) address an immigrant amir (*wafīd*) by the name of Sanjar al-Barawānī (d. 731/1330) as follows:

> You are a person who was expelled, an immigrant. How can you think that your status and that of *mamlūk al-sulṭān* is equal? (“anta wāhid manfi, wafidi, ta’alu naṣaka mithla mamliik al-sulṭān?”).

David Ayalon saw in this text evidence that the *wafīdīyah* were discriminated against for not being slaves; however, as already mentioned, the term *mamlūk al-sulṭān* denotes servitude, subordination and obedience, and not only slave origin. Al-Maqrizī emphasizes that the immigrant is an expelled person, that is, one who abandoned his previous master, and so betrayed him. In this context, the meaning of the expression *mamlūk al-sulṭān* is “the obedient servants of the sultan”.

The *wafīdīyah* were perceived as a treacherous, disloyal and untrustworthy element in the Mamluk society. They were accused of conspiring against Kipchak Sultans, of collaborating with the Mongol Ilkhan, or of trying to escape to the Ilkhan’s territories. They were denied promotion because they had betrayed their previous masters, by immigrating to the Sultanate, and not because they were not slaves. In a similar manner, al-Maqrizī mentions that when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 741/1341) decided to promote Oirat immigrants, who had served the amirs before abandoning them and becoming his servants, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s *mamlūk al-sulṭān* made him change his mind after protesting: “They harshly criticized and condemned them for betraying their masters, and said that they are no good” (aktharu

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26 Al-Maqrizī, *al-Sulṭān*, vol. 2, p. 22; and see also David Ayalon, “The Wafidiya in the Mamluk Kingdom”, p. 93; Ayalon maintains that Sanjar al-Barawānī was not an immigrant, but there is evidence that he might have been a *wafid* from Anatolia, al-‘Ayni, *Iqd al-Jumān*, vol. 2, p. 166.

min dhammihim wa-l-ayb 'alayhim bi-kawnihim khāmarū 'alā asāti-dhahum wa-annahum lā khayr fihim). Also in this case, the wāfidiyyah were accused of being disloyal and untrustworthy (this time in the territories of the Sultanate), and hence unworthy of promotion. On another occasion, when al-‘Adil Kitbughā decided to promote the Oirat immigrants, he was accused of promoting them “not according to the norms [of promotion], for he promoted them over the senior amirs of the state” (‘alā ghayr al-qiyās, fa-qaddamahum ‘alā akābir al-dawlah). In this case the complaint was that the immigrants served too short a period for being promoted. Nowhere it is mentioned that their not being slaves was problematic, an assertion that could only arise through a misinterpretation of the term mamālīk al-sulṭān.

2. Was slave status an elite status and a source of pride?

That said it should still come as no surprise that none of the mamālīk sultans saw fit to boast of his slave origin, or to claim that his legitimacy to rule was based on such an origin. To the contrary, mamālīk sultans were in great pains to rid themselves of the negative connotations attached to their servile past, by associating themselves with established dynasties or by claiming an exalted origin. The mamālīks were criticized for their servile origin by the local population and by their external enemies. The Ilkhans treated the mamālīk sultans as inferiors for the latter’s humble descent (nasab). In response, the mamālīks tried to highlight their relative advantage over the Ilkhans – their being Muslims and defenders of Islam (jihād). In general, the local population was also not pleased with mamālīk rule (“they generally did not want that one of the mamālīks will be the ruler” – kāna ‘ādatuhum an lā yūridūna an yaliya al-mulk aḥad min al-mamālīk),

31 Broadbridge, Kingship and Ideology, pp. 12-13, 27-28, 65, 74; Broadbridge shows how the Mamluk ideology changed in response to the ideological challenge set by the Ilkhans, and how each side tried to utilize his relative advantage in each phase of the struggle, see for example Broadbridge, Kingship and Ideology, pp. 38-42; for Franks’ criticism of the mamālīks for deposing a king’s son, see al-Dhahābī, Duwāl al-Īslām, pp. 154-155.
and there is evidence that they supported (sometimes physically) the Qalawunids against *mamlūk* amirs trying to take the reins of power from them.\textsuperscript{32} The *mamlūks* could not ignore such perceptions.\textsuperscript{33}

Al-Mu’izz Aybek (d. 655/1257), the first *mamlūk* sultan, based his legitimacy on his marital ties with Shajar al-Durr, al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb’s widow. Shajar al-Durr even claimed that she was the one who gave Aybek the reins of power.\textsuperscript{34} In early Mamluk sources, al-Mu’izz Aybek and his son al-Manṣūr ‘Ali are considered to be Ayyubid kings.\textsuperscript{35} In later sources, it is mentioned that Aybek had to spend great sums of money in order to convince the local population, that said to him “we want only a sultan from an established house, born as a leader” (*lā nurīdū illā sulṭānān ra’īsan mawālūdān ‘alā fiṭrah*), to comply with the rule of a *mamlūk* sultan (*man massahu al-rigq*).\textsuperscript{36}

Al-Muṣaffar Quṭuz (d. 658/1260), the second *mamlūk* sultan, claimed that he was a relative of the Khawarizmian king Jalāl al-Din Khawārizm Shāh. In a biographical anecdote it is related that one day Quṭuz’ master beat him and cursed his fore-fathers. Quṭuz, who burst into tears, explained that he was not crying because of the beating, but because his fore-fathers were cursed. When told that he had no reason to cry on account of his fore-fathers, for he was just “a Turkish *mamlūk*, infidel son of infidels” (*mamlūk turkī kāfir b. kāfīrin*), he replied that

\textsuperscript{32} Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*, pp. 52-65; Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujām al-Zāhirah*, vol. 8, pp. 170-175.

\textsuperscript{33} Al-Šafādi provides us with an anecdote that illustrates how Mongol attitudes affected the Mamluks. When Qawsūn al-Nāṣirī deposed Abū Bakr b. al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, the amir Taḥtāmūr al-Sāqi is quoted saying that the amirs pledged loyalty to al-Nāṣir Muhammad and his descendants, so how do they now depose his son and expel his other descendants. He concludes by saying: “what will the enemy think of us?” (*aysh yaqūlu al-‘adī ‘annā*), al-Šafādi, *al-Waṣī bi-l-Waṣīyāt*, vol. 16, p. 440; prior to that, when Baybars al-Jāshānkīr deposed al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, Ibn Taghribirdi has al-Nāṣir Muḥammad threat to escape to the Tatārs and complain of his deposition, Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujām al-Zāhirah*, vol. 8, p. 244. The Mongols criticized the Mamluks for deposeing sultans too frequently, Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, pp. 74, 79.

\textsuperscript{34} Al-Makīn, *Akkhār al-Ayyūbīyīn*, p. 43; when the senior amir al-Fāris Aqṭāy (d. 652/1254) married an Ayyubid princess people found this improper, Ibn al-Dawāḏārī, *Kanz al-Durar*, vol. 8, pp. 30-31; this marital tie strengthened Aqṭāy’s claim for power on the one hand, but on the other it made al-Mu’izz Aybek suspicious of him, what eventually led to his murder by Aybek, Ibn al-Dawāḏārī, *Kanz al-Durar*, vol. 8, p. 25; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, vol. 29, p. 430.


\textsuperscript{36} Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujām al-Zāhirah*, vol. 7, p. 13; for Bedouin opposition to *mamlūk* rule in the days of Aybek, see al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 1, p. 386.
he was the relative of Khawārizm Shāh.\textsuperscript{37} This anecdote illustrates that mamliḵ origin was far from being a source of pride, and that mamliḵs tried to repress such an origin and replace it with a more exalted one.\textsuperscript{38}

Al-Ẓāhir Baybars (d. 676/1277), who was criticized for being a slave by the local population and by the Sultanate’s external enemies,\textsuperscript{39} tried to associate himself to established dynasties in several ways: he asked the Qāḍī Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) to forge a Genghisid genealogy for him;\textsuperscript{40} he married a Khawarizmian princess whose family was related by marriage to al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb,\textsuperscript{41} his relative, Baysarī al-Shamsī (d. 698/1298), also established marital ties with the Ayubids;\textsuperscript{42} Baybars also related himself to al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb by adopting his nisbah;\textsuperscript{43} he established marital ties with families of senior Mongol immigrants;\textsuperscript{44} and he connected himself symbolically to the Saljuqs.\textsuperscript{45} In the popular treatise Sīrat Baybars, Baybars is said to be the son of the king of Khurasan, born as a Muslim by the name of Maḥmūd, sold into slavery, adopted by al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb and designated his heir. According to Thomas Herzog, the purpose of this treatise was to legitimize the rule of mamliḵs.\textsuperscript{46}


\textsuperscript{38} Holt maintains that young mamliḵs with aspirations tried to legitimize these aspirations by forging an exalted genealogy. He adds that it might be that Qūṭūz’ story circulated among his comrades, and when he ascended the throne it became a legitimizing propaganda, Holt, “Prediction or Propaganda?”, p. 136.


\textsuperscript{40} Al-Ṣafādī, al-Wafī bi-l-Wafayāt, vol. 7, p. 311.


\textsuperscript{42} Al-Ṣafādī, al-Wafī bi-l-Wafayāt, vol. 21, p. 339.

\textsuperscript{43} Clifford, “State Formation and the Structure of Politics in Mamlik Syro-Egypt”, p. 130; on the importance the mamliḵs ascribed to al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb as a legitimizing figure, see for example Stewart, “Between Baybars and Qalāwūn”, p. 48; Thorau, The Lion of Egypt, p. 98.


\textsuperscript{45} Broadbridge, Kingship and Ideology, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{46} Herzog, “Legitimität durch Erzählung”, pp. 251-252; and see also Elbendary, “The Sultan, The Tyrant, and The Hero”, pp. 151-152.

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Al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (d. 689/1290) boasted of his exalted ethnic origin and his marital ties to the family of al-Zāhir Baybars.\(^47\) Al-Manṣūr Lājin (d. 698/1299) made use of the fact that he was married to al-Zāhir Baybars’ daughter, and therefore also indirectly related to the Qalawunid dynasty, in order to legitimize his rule. Al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333) mentions that shortly after becoming sultan, he brought the exiled Khidr b. Baybars and his mother from Constantinople to Egypt, because he was married to the daughter of Baybars.\(^48\) He also brought to Egypt the coffin of Salāmish, al-Zāhir Baybars’ exiled son. Al-Muẓaffar Baybars al-Jāshankīr (d. 709/1310), the relative of Al-Manṣūr Lājin, also emphasized his indirect tie to the family of al-Zāhir Baybars. In his days, Khidr b. Baybars was allowed to leave the fortress and live in the palace of the amir Aqsh al-Afram, a relative of Baybars al-Jāshankīr.\(^49\)

Al-Zāhir Barqūq (d. 801/1399), who after al-Muẓaffar Baybars al-Jāshankīr was the first mamlūk sultan to hold the reins of power in about a hundred years, was criticized from all sides for being a slave.\(^50\) In response he attached himself to the Qalawunid dynasty\(^51\) and boasted of his ethnic origin.\(^52\) Other Circassian mamlūk sultans, such as al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh (d. 824/1421) and al-Zāhir Taṭār (d. 824/1421), boasted of an exalted ethnic origin, and Shaykh even claimed to be a descendant of Circassian kings.\(^53\) In some of the biographies of mamlūk amirs in the Circassian period it is mentioned that they were of inferior origin (radi’ al-asl).\(^54\) From this we learn that a mamlūk’s descent was a matter of importance, and that an exalted origin was a source of pride.


\(^{52}\) Broadbridge, Kingship and Ideology, p. 184; Ibn Iyās, Badā’ī’ al-Zuhūr, vol. 1, p. 223.


\(^{54}\) See for example al-Sakhāwī, al-Daw’ al-lāmi’, sec. 10, pp. 345-346.

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Like mamlūk sultans, mamlūk amirs did not boast of their servile origin and tried to claim for themselves an exalted descendent. Qawsūn al-Nāṣiri (d. 741/1341) was proud of not being a real slave (mamlūk) and for not having had to undergo the normal route of training in the barracks and slow promotion. Sources of the Turkish period mention the high ranking position of the fathers of Mongol war captives who became senior amirs in the Sultanate. For example, Salār al-Mansūrī’s (d. 710/1310) father was in charge of the hunt (amīr shikār) in the court of the ruler of Anatolia (ṣāhib al-rūm), and we know that when Qibjaq al-Mansūrī (d. 710/1310) fled to the Ilkhanid territories he met his father and brothers who served at the court of the Mongol khan. We also know that Aytağamush al-Muhammadī (d. 736/1336), a high ranking Mongol amīr, was descended from an exalted Mongol lineage (the circumstances of his arrival into the Sultanate are not mentioned in the sources). It is certainly reasonable that these amirs were proud of their exalted origin, which was quite likely taken into consideration when they were promoted. Muslim (‘free’) origin was also a source of pride, and we have evidence that some mamlūks (like Qūṭuz) claimed to be Muslim war captives. Some of the mamlūks even claimed to be descendants of the Prophet (ṣahrāf). At times the status of the mamlūks in their homeland was remembered, and mamlūks who came from a humble background were ridiculed. Even in the “more mamlūk”

55 See for example Ibn Taghribirdī, al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah, vol. 10, p. 47; Ibn Duqmāq, al-Nafṣah al-Miskiyah, p. 143. Interestingly, when Qawsūn wanted that mamlūk al-sultān will serve him, he faced a strong objection from the mamlūk who claimed that they are not willing to serve someone who is a mamlūk like themselves, Ibn Taghribirdī, al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah, vol. 10, p. 25. From this we learn that, at least during the long reign of the Qalawunids, the perception was that the ruler should be a member of an established family.

56 We also know that some of the captives were high ranking officers in the Mongol army, al-Maqriẓī, al-Sulūk, vol. 2, p. 162.


58 Little, “Notes on Aitamiṣ, a Mongol Mamlūk”, p. 391.

59 In a similar manner, in the Circassian period we are informed that Bujās al-Nawrūzī (d. 803/1400), the high ranking Circassian amīr, was a respected man in his homeland, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, Inbā’ al-Ghumr, vol. 4, p. 270.


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Circassian period, service in the barracks as a mamlūk was certainly not a source of pride. We hear, for example, that when the Sultan al-Zāhir Jaqmaq (d. 858/1453) bought the grandson of the brother of the senior amir Yashbak min Salmān Shāh al-Mu’ayyadi (d. 878/1473), he exempted him from service in the young mamlūks’ barracks out of respect for his uncle (“raqqāhu ‘an dhālika ikrāman li-‘anmīhi”).

Far from being a source of pride, there is evidence that being a slave was in fact considered degrading. When al-Ashraf Khalil b. Qalāwūn (d. 693/1293) wanted to humiliate the amir Lājin al-Mansūrī, he made him a mamlūk of the amir Baydarā al-Mansūrī (d. 693/1293). According to Baybars al-Mansūrī (d. 725/1325), Lājin became Baydarā’s slave and not his servant (wahabtuka lahu ḥaqqa li-taṣira mamlūkan rigqa). Mamlik writers usually differentiate quite clearly between rank-and-file mamlūks and amirs, and the expression “the amirs and the mamlūks” (al-umāra‘ wa-l-mamālik) is quite common in Mamlik sources. Whereas amirs, who were generally manumitted slaves, were respected, we come across expression of contempt towards simple mamlūks. For example, when the amir Aqābāy al-Ḥājib (d. 805/1402) beat one of the amir ‘Alibāy al-Ẓāhirī’s (d. 800/1397) mamlūks, ‘Alibāy complained to al-Ẓāhir Barqiq, but Barqiq dismissed the complaint with the words “am I supposed to beat Aqābāy on account of a [simple] mamlūk?” (adribu Aqābāy li-ajli mamlūk?).

According to Shaun Marmor, “…the enslaved individual suffered a kind of legal and social metamorphosis. He left the realm of human beings and entered the realm of commodities thus losing his legal capacity to act of and for himself”. Mamlik is referring to household slaves, but it seems that the status of the military slaves (mamlūks) was not much different. At times, it is implied that, unlike amirs, mamlūks were not considered human beings. When the amir Al’akuz al-Nāṣirī (d. 738/1337) cursed another amir, al-Nāṣir Muhammad is quoted as saying to him: “How do you allow yourself to call an amir, like you, a pimp? You were just a page in the stables until I promoted you and

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64 Baybars al-Mansūrī, Zabdat al-Fikrah, p. 310.
65 See for example Ibn Ṣaṣṭā, al-Durrāh al-Mudi‘ah, p. 67.
67 Marmor, “Domestic Slavery in the Mamlik Empire”, p. 3.
made you a human being” (taqīlū li-amīr mithlakā qāwād? wa-aysh kunta anta fi-l-istabl aišhāqī, ṭalla’ tu bi-ka wa-‘amaltuka b. ʿĀdam). Military slaves (mamlūk) are quite often mentioned as part of a deceased amir’s estate. When the Circassian amir Qarā Sunqur al-Manṣūrī (d. 728/1327) was pursued by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, he was advised to turn himself in. He refused, claiming that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad would surely kill him, for he was originally just “a piece of Circassian slave… that was not even worth 300 Dirhams” (qiṭ’at mamlūk jarkasī… mà yaswū 300 dirham). This is yet another indication that a slave, not to mention a Circassian slave, was perceived as property and not as a human being.

The master’s domination over his mamlūk was total. Masters had the right to prevent their mamlūk from marrying or to arrange a marriage as they wished. Cases of disobedience by mamlūk were considered a severe breach of the master’s honor. We hear of mamlūk who fled from their masters out of fear. At times, amirs are praised for not cursing their mamlūk; we may thus assume that cursing, humiliation and even beating of mamlūk were not that rare (and see above the story of Qutuz). It is even implied that the master had the right to take his mamlūk’s lives. A slave’s manumission is occasionally compared to release from imprisonment or captivity. For example, when al-Ashraf Khalīl b. Qalāwūn (d. 693/1293) released Baysari al-Shamsi after a long period of imprisonment, Baysari took on Khalīl’s nisbah (al-ashrafi), like a manumitted slave, and the son of the Armenian king, who was released from captivity, is called `āṭīq (manumitted slave). Mamlūk had no separate legal identity and no legal capacity to act on their own; their actions were attributed to their masters. For example, Baybars al-Manṣūrī refers to Kitbukhā’s mamlūk

69 See for example al-Birzālī, Taʾrīkh al-Birzālī, vol. 4, p. 139.
73 See for example al-Kutubi, Fawātīr al-Wafayāt, vol. 1, p. 115.
74 See for example Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, Taʾrīkh Ibn Qādī Shuhbah, vol. 1, p. 682.
77 Al-Dhahabi, Taʾrīkh al-Islām, vol. 53, p. 120.

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as “his slaves, whose actions are attributed to him” (mamālikuḥu, al-
mansūb ṣāniʿuhum ʿilayhi).

At times a mamlūk acting on behalf of his master is called ‘abd maʿmūr (a legal category that relates to slaves em-
powered by their masters to act on their behalf),

thus accentuating the mamlūk’s lack of legal capacity.

Orlando Patterson defined a slave as a powerless, violently dom-
ninated, natally alienated and generally dishonored person, who has no ex-
istence without his master.

According to Dror Ze’evi, the near-ab-

olute power of the master was softened by the fact that the relationship

between slave and owner sometimes resembled family relations, and

especially in the case of elite slavery, integration into the family of the

master was a necessary phase.

However, as Richards has already ar-

gued, only few especially favored mamlūks were treated as quasi-kin

by their masters and his relationship with the mass of them must have

been of a more material nature.

Elsewhere I have argued that mamlūks

perceived themselves as slaves because of the absence of family ties,

and that only an outstanding few succeeded in completely freeing

themselves of their slave status and become members of a ruling elite

with family ties. It would thus seem that Patterson’s definition fits

military slaves (mamlūks) quite nicely.

3. Slave status and manumission

Modern scholars have commonly argued that the servile phase in

the life of a mamlūk was only formal and quite limited in time. It is


Patterson, Slavery and Social Death, pp. 4-13.

Ze’evi, “My Slave, My Son”, pp. 75-77; and see Forand, “The Relation of the

Slave and the Client to the Master or Patron”, pp. 59-66.

Richards, “Mamlūk Amirs and Their Families”, pp. 34-35. I am preparing now a

paper on the relationship between a master and his slaves during the Mamlūk Sultanate

(generally called by modern scholars ‘pseudo-kinship ties’). I will argue that only few fa-
favored mamlūks enjoyed a special status in their master’s household and, generally, they

could enjoy such a status only when the master had no sons.


Amitai maintains that the well-known passage in Ibn Khaldūn’s Kitāb al-ʿIbar prai-
sing the virtues of military slavery indicates that “a positive view toward the phenomenon

of military slavery was not unknown in the medieval Islamic world”, and that it also “would

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usually maintained that *mamlūks* were manumitted automatically by
the end of their religious and military training, at the age of twenty or
less.\(^{85}\) This is consistent with the claim that military slaves were not
slaves in the full sense of the word and that slave status was that of
elite. However, at least with respect to the Turkish period, our know-
ledge about manumission is quite limited, and the commonly held view
may well reflect only the situation in the Circassian period. Rabbat is
the only scholar who elaborates on the matter (Ayalon did not explore
the issue of manumission in any great depth). According to Rabbat, it
seems that until the Ayyubid period *mamlūks* remained slaves even
after becoming high ranking military commanders. There is no
unequivocal evidence that during the Ayyubid period *mamlūks* were
manumitted automatically at the end of their training. Rabbat assumes,
but does not prove, that in the days of al-Ẓāhir Baybars or al-Manṣūr
Qalāwūn automatic manumission at the end of the training period be-
came the norm.\(^{86}\)

There is some evidence that at least until al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b.
Qalāwūn’s third reign (709/1310-741/1341) *mamlūks* were not manu-
mitted automatically. Qalāwūn, who was originally the *mamlūk* of the
Ayyubid amir Qārā Sunqur al-Ḵāmīlī (d. 647/1249), became upon the
latter’s death in the year 647/1249 the slave of al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb. He was
manumitted later in the same year, shortly before his new master died.\(^{87}\)
Qalāwūn died in the year 689/1290, at the age of more than sixty or
seventy (most sources claim that he was more than sixty years old).\(^{88}\)
If we estimate his age as sixty-five, then he was manumitted when he

appear to belie somewhat the suggestion of Orlando Patterson that ‘social death’ was also
the status of the military slave of the Islamic world”, Amitai, “The Mamluk Institution”,
pp. 67-68. However, Ibn Khaldūn puts more emphasis on the benefits that the institution
has for Islam rather than for the slaves themselves (“Islam rejoices in the benefit which it
gains through them”). Moreover, even when *mamlūks* who became sultans make a link
between their enslavement and their ascendance to power, they clearly regard themselves
as being redeemed from slavery, and they consider the servile phase of their lives as a dif-
ficult one, see for example al-Nuwayrī al-Iṣkandarānī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, vol. 4, p. 79; for a
detailed discussion, see Yosef, “Mamluks and Their Relatives”, pp. 67-69.

\(^{85}\) See for example Ayalon, *L’esclavage du Mamelouk*, p. 9; Amitai, “The Mamluk Institution”,


\(^{87}\) Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 7, pp. 325-326; Ibn Iyās, *Badā‘ī al-
Zuhūr*, vol. 1, p. 95.

\(^{88}\) Al-Dīhabī, *Duwal al-Īlām*, p. 189; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 1, p. 755; Ibn Tagh-

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was about twenty-three. Significantly, he was not manumitted automatically but only upon his master’s death.\footnote{For other instances of such manumission, see for example al-Birzâli, Ta’rikh al-Birzâli, vol. 3, p. 361; Ibn al-Mughayzâl, Dhayl Mufaqirî al-Kurâb, p. 103.} Salâr al-Mansûrî, who was captured in the year 675/1276, was bought by Qalâwûn for his son ’Ali. Upon ’Ali’s death in the year 687/1288, he became Qalâwûn’s property once again. Salâr died in the year 710/1310 at the age of fifty or little less.\footnote{Ibn Taghribirdî, al-Manhal al-Sâfi, vol. 6, pp. 5-13; al-Dhahabi, Dhayl Ta’rikh al-Islâm, p. 94.} If we estimate his age at death as forty-eight, then he was still a slave when he was about twenty-five. He was probably manumitted upon Qalâwûn’s death in the year 689/1290, when he was about twenty-seven years old, for his nisbah indicates that Qalâwûn manumitted him.

We know that before al-Nâṣîr Muḥammad b. Qalâwûn’s third reign some ḥalqâl members holding a military estate (iqtâ‘) were still slaves (mamlûk ariqqa).\footnote{Ibn al-Mughayzâl, Dhayl Mufaqirî al-Kurâb, p. 103.} These were probably low-ranking mamlûks or mamlûks of amirs, on whom we generally have little information. We have to take into consideration the possibility that such mamlûks were manumitted at a later age.\footnote{Ibn Taghribirdî, al-Manhal al-Sâfi, vol. 6, pp. 5-13; al-Dhahabi, Dhayl Ta’rikh al-Islâm, p. 94.} We also know that in the year 670/1272, al-Zâhir Baybars bought two amirs; therefore, in his time amirs could still be slaves.\footnote{Al-Nuwayrî, Nihâyat al-Arab, vol. 33, p. 42.} Ibn Taghribirdî (d. 874/1470) writes in the biography of the amir Baktamur al-Sâqî al-Nâṣîrî (d. 733/1332): “Originally, Baktamur was the slave of the Sultan al-Muẓaffâr Baybars al-Jâshankîr, but then he passed into the hands of the Sultan al-Nâṣîr Muḥammad b. Qalâwûn. Perhaps he only became his servant [and not his slave], for his master, al-Muẓaffâr Baybars, made him an amir of ten at the end of his reign, and had he not manumitted him he would not have made him an amir” (kâna aṣl Baktamur min mamlûk al-malik al-Muẓaffâr al-Nâṣîrī ḥâlqâl).
Baybars al-Jāshānīr, thumma intaqala ilâ-l-malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, la’allahu bi-l-khidam fa-inna ustāḏahu al-Muẓaffar Baybars kāna ammarahu ‘ashra fī awākhir dawlatihi wa-lawlā annahu a’taqahu mā ammarahu). Ibn Taghribirdi’s account makes it clear that in the Circassian period a slave yet not manumitted could not have become an amir. But apparently he projects this state of affairs onto the Turkish period as well. Baktamur’s nisbah is al-Nāṣirī, and the nisbah normally goes by the manumitter. Apparently, Ibn Taghribirdi had some further indications that Baktamur was the slave of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, for he finds this worthy of comment.

We have some evidence that starting from al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn’s third reign the enslavement of some of the mamlūks was a mere formality. This might be related to the fact that starting from this period the Turkish mamlūks were generally sold by their families, who knew about the fine treatment that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad gave his mamlūks. Certainly, the enslavement and the conditions under which these mamlūks lived were less traumatic than those of war captives, and it is possible that the servile phase in their lives was considered more formal or more limited in time.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence that until Barqūq’s reign at least some of the mamlūks were not manumitted automatically at a young age. Shāhīn al-Shaykhī (d. 834/1430) was originally a mamlūk of Shaykh al-Šafawī (d. 801/1398), but upon his master’s death he was bought by Barqūq. Shāhīn was about eighty years old when he died, and therefore he was still a slave at the age of about forty-six. In the year 785/1383, Aytamush al-Buǧāṣī (d. 802/1399) was bought by Barqūq and immediately manumitted when the latter discovered that he

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95 The best example of such a formal enslavement is that of Qawṣūn al-Nāṣiri. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad insisted to buy him, even though he was not legally a mamlūk. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad sent money to his family and shortly after his “enslavement” Qawṣūn was promoted and married to one of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s daughters. As mentioned, Qawṣūn used to boast of this fact. See for example al-Šafadī, A’yūn al-l-ʿĀṣr, vol. 4, p. 138; and see page 18 above.
97 Prior to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn’s third reign many of the mamlūks were war captives.
98 It is usually difficult to estimate the mamlūks’ manumission age. Part of the difficulty stems from the fact that the word mamlūk has two meanings: slave and servant.

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was still a slave, for his original master, Jurji al-Idrisi (d. 772/1370), had not manumitted him. After the latter’s death the amir Bujas al-Nawruzi (d. 803/1400) apparently took him from his heirs and manumitted him illegally.\(^{100}\) We know of other instances in which an adult 

\textit{mamluk} (sometimes on the verge of a natural death from old age) was still legally a slave, usually due to illegal buying or selling. From such cases we cannot draw any conclusions about 

\textit{mamluks}’ manumission age.\(^{101}\) Nevertheless, the sources provide us with hints as to the supposed time of Bujas’ manumission. Ibn Hijji (d. 816/1413) comments that it is strange that Aytamus was not manumitted, for his master died in the year 772/1370 and Aytamus had been acting as a free person (\textit{yataṣṣarrafu ṭaṣṣarraf al-ahrār}) for a long time.\(^{102}\) Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449) also found it strange (\textit{min al-gharāʾib}) that when he was bought by Barqiq in the year 785/1383 Aytamus was still a slave, because his master “Jurji died in the year 772/1370, and Aytamus was acting as a free person for 17 (!) years, although he was still [legally] a slave” (\textit{Jurji māta sanat 772, fa-aqāma Aytamus 17 sanah fi l-riqq yataṣṣarrafu ṭaṣṣarraf al-ahrār}).\(^{103}\) These reports indicate that Aytamus was a slave while his master was alive, but was supposed to be manumitted upon Jurji’s death. Apparently his master did not have the chance to do this, or he did it in an illegal manner. When Aytamus died he was almost sixty years old.\(^{104}\) If we estimate his age as about fifty-eight, then he was still a slave at the age of twenty-eight. Note that here once again a \textit{mamluk}’s manumission is linked to the death of a master. It seems that, at least during the Turkish period, manumission upon the master’s death (probably by a testament) was a common occurrence, and that at least some \textit{mamluks} were not manumitted automatically upon the termination of their training period.

The fact that Shāhin and Aytamus were originally \textit{mamluks} of amirs might explain their late manumission (see page 23, footnote 92 above). Another explanation, that does not contradict but rather complements the above-mentioned explanation, is that the late age at which Shāhin and Aytamus were manumitted was due to the fact that they

\(^{101}\) See for example al-Yūnūnī, \textit{Dhayl Mirʾūt al-Zamān}, vol. 4, pp. 174-175, 195.
were not Turks – Aytamush was a Circassian and Shāhīn was probably a Rūmī.\textsuperscript{105} There is evidence that during the Turkish period non-Turkish 
mamlūk (mainly Circassians and Rūmis) did not enjoy the same 
treatment as their Turkish counterparts. Generally, the former were originally 
Christians, as were many of the Sultanate’s enemies, and therefore 
they were described in negative terms and were subject to discrimination.\textsuperscript{106} Since there is no evidence for the sale of non-Turkish mamlūks 
by their families during the Turkish period, we may assume that most of 
them were war captives and therefore their enslavement was more 
traumatic than that experienced by Turkish mamlūks.\textsuperscript{107} There is also 
some evidence that non-Turkish mamlūks started families at a later age 
than their Turkish peers, maybe due to the fact that they were manumitted at a later age. Moreover, as soon as the non-Turkish mamlūks entered the Sultanate, their connection to their families was severed forever. Whereas the Turkish mamlūk had the option of becoming a 
foresored mamlūk, marrying into the Qalawunid family, establishing a family while still young, and of bringing his relatives into the Sultanate, 
this option was almost totally closed to non-Turkish mamlūks. Since the 
creation of a family was the only way to ultimately shed one’s slave status, the non-Turkish mamlūks could not fully leave behind this status 
even after manumission, and were perceived by their contemporaries as being “more slaves” than the Turkish mamlūks.\textsuperscript{108} 

Beginning in Barqūq’s reign a drastic change took place in mamlūk 
manumission practices. There is evidence that Barqūq was in the habit (”ka-mā hiya ‘ādatuhum”) of buying mamlūks and immediately manumitting them, and apparently this was an innovation.\textsuperscript{109} Indeed, starting 
his days, it seems that the mamlūks’ period of slavery was limited in time, and mamlūks were manumitted automatically upon the termination of their training, or even immediately after being bought. The ex-

\textsuperscript{105} Ibn Taghibirdi, \textit{al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah}, vol. 12, p. 187; Yosef, “The Names of the 
Mamlūks”; Yosef, “Ethnic groups”, p. 97. 
\textsuperscript{107} For evidence that during the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muhammad non-Turks were 
enslaved in war while Turks were sold by their families, see al-Maqrizi, \textit{al-Sulūk}, vol. 2, p. 525; al-Umari, \textit{Kitāb Masa’il al-Abṣār}, pp. 69-72. Al-Umari states explicitly that the 
Circassians were war captives. 
\textsuperscript{108} Yosef, “Mamluks and Their Relatives”, pp. 56-60; Yosef, “Ethnic groups”, pp. 
\textsuperscript{109} Al-Jawhari, \textit{Nuzhat al-Nufūs}, vol. 1, p. 117.

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pression “bought him and manumitted him” (ishtarāhu wa-a’taqahu) is quite common in sources from the Circassian period.110 Another common expression, which, as far as I know, does not appear in texts from the Turkish period, is “manumitted him and made him one of his mamlūks” (a’taqahu wa-ja’alahu min jumlat mamālīkīhi).111 As noted above, already in the Turkish period the term mamlūk had a double meaning: slave and servant. It seems, however, that in the Circassian period the servile phase in the life of a mamlūk was more formal, and he was perceived more as a servant than as a slave. Paradoxically, the expression “manumitted him and made him one of his mamlūks” (a’taqahu wa-ja’alahu min jumlat mamālīkīhi) implies that until manumission, the mamlūk (slave) was not considered a mamlūk (servant).

4. Conclusion

Even though Mamluk authors emphasize the ethnic origin or language of the Sultanate’s ruling elite, modern scholars emphasize its slave status or origin. The commonly held view by modern scholars is that the status of all the mamlūk was that of an elite, and that the mamlūks were proud of their slave origin even after manumission. I have argued that this view is in need of modification.

There is no evidence that manumitted mamlūks were proud of their slave status. On the contrary, it seems to have been considered degrading and manumitted slaves with aspirations made great efforts to repress their servile past by claiming an exalted origin or by creating marital ties with established families. The term mamlūk has a double meaning: slave and servant, and it frequently expresses subordination, obedience and servitude. When manumitted slaves refer to themselves as “mamlūks of the sultan” they do not express pride in their slave status, but rather their subordination and obedience to the ruler.

111 See for example Ibn Taghibirdi, al-Manhal al-Sāfi, vol. 3, p. 506; Turkish-period sources usually refer to the process of the mamlūk’s enslavement and manumission by expressions such as “he remained his mamlūk until he was manumitted” (wa-lam yazal fi jumlat mamālīkīhi ilā an a’taqahu), see for example al-Nuwayri, Nihāyat al-ʿArab, vol. 33, p. 291.

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At least until al-Nāšir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn’s third reign *mamlūks* were not manumitted automatically, and the servile phase of their life was not a mere formality. Until that period many of the *mamlūks* were war captives, and we may safely assume that their enslavement was a traumatic event. Military slaves were considered property and they lacked a legal identity of their own. They perceived themselves as slaves for lacking family ties. The master’s domination over them was total and their manumission is sometimes compared to a release from imprisonment or captivity. They were often manumitted only upon their master’s death.

It may be that starting from al-Nāšir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn’s third reign the enslavement of Turkish *mamlūks* who had been sold by their families became more of a formality or more limited in time. On the other hand, non-Turkish *mamlūks*, who were generally Christian war captives, were subject to discrimination. They were disdained, manumitted at a later age and prevented from establishing marital ties with the Qalawunids and creating their own families at a young age. They were perceived by their contemporaries as being “more slaves” than the Turkish *mamlūks*.

Only in the days of Barqūq a norm of automatic manumission emerged, and in the Circassian period the servile phase in the life of a *mamlūk* became more of a formality and limited in time. The *mamlūk* was perceived more as servant rather than slave. Still, slave status never became a source of pride.

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