

The Term *Mamlūk* and Slave Status during the Mamluk Sultanate

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

Koby Yosef

Bar Ilan University, Israel

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 *mamlūks* que no eran turcos, generalmente cautivos de guerra cristianos, eran discriminados y despreciados; solo se les liberaba cuando eran ancianos y se les impedía establecer lazos matrimoniales con los Qalawuníes así como crear sus propias familias siendo jóvenes. Eran percibidos por sus contemporáneos como «más esclavos» que los turcos *mamlūks*.

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

shing 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*.

Key words: Mamlūks; The Mamluk Sultanate; Slave status; Military slavery; Slave elites.

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-turkīyah*). 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-mamlūk*), 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 *mamlūks*; that the ruling elite’s main characteristic was *mamlūk* descent; 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.²

¹ For a detailed discussion, see Yosef, “*Dawlat al-Atrāk* or *Dawlat al-Mamlūk*?”.

² Ulrich Haarmann, Amalia Levanoni and D.S. Richards, among others, drew attention to the important role of non-*mamlūk* 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, “*Awlād 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 *mamlūk* 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”,³ and Robert Irwin argued that most *mamlūks* cannot be regarded an elite,⁴ 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”.⁵ 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 *mamālīk*, proud of their special slave origins”.⁶ 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” (*naḥnu mamālīk 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 ṭā’atihi*).⁷ The connection between the ex-

³ Richards, “Mamlūk Amirs and Their Families”, p. 33.

⁴ Irwin, “Factions in Medieval Egypt”, p. 240.

⁵ Northrup, “The Bahri Mamlūk Sultanate”, pp. 245, 251.

⁶ Amitai, “The Mamlūk Institution”, p. 62; Amitai, “Military Slavery in the Islamic World”, p. 10.

⁷ See for example al-Ṣafadī, *A’yān al-‘Aṣr*, vol. 1, p. 640.

pression *mamlūk/mamālik al-sulṭān* and obedience (*tā'ah*) is clear in many other cases.⁸ 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-Manṣūr Lājīn (d. 698/1299), he is quoted as saying of Lājīn that “he is my comrade and I am his *mamlūk* who obeys him” (*huwa khushdāshī wa-anā mamlūkuhu wa-taḥta amrihi*).⁹ In other cases it is clear that *mamlūks* expressing obedience and subordination with the expression “we are your *mamlūks* who obey you” (*naḥnu mamālikuka wa-ʿalā tāʾatika*) do not address their master, but rather a patron whom they serve.¹⁰ Moreover, even free persons might express obedience by using the expression “we are *mamlūks*” (*naḥnu mamālik*).¹¹ Al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441) provides a very clear example of the link between the expression *naḥnu mamālik* and total subordination. When the rebel Jukam min ʿAwaḍ (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-Ḥāfiẓī (d. 817/1414), saying: “We are the *mamlūks* of the sultan... had he wanted to kill us we would not have opposed his command” (*naḥnu mamālik al-sulṭān... wa-law arāda qatlanā mā khālaf-nāhu*).¹² While such expressions are clearly hyperbole (or even plain lies), the phrase “we are *mamlūks*” (*naḥnu mamālik*) 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 *ustādh* is used to denote a patron and not a master.¹³ For example, the *Khawārizmīyah*, a group of free mercenaries, ad-

⁸ See for example Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 8, pp. 11, 180; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 2, p. 35 (*mamālikuhu wa-fi tāʾatihi*); Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr*, vol. 2, p. 333 (*mamlūkuka muʿī amrika*); and see also al-Ṣafādī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAsr*, vol. 2, p. 257 (*ghulām mawlānā al-sulṭān wa-nāʾibuhu*); Ibn ʿĀjā, *Taʾrikh al-Amīr Yashbak al-Zāhirī*, p. 137.

⁹ Zetterstéen, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mamlükensultane*, p. 42.

¹⁰ Qaraṭāy al-ʿIzzī al-Khāzindārī, *Taʾrikh Majmūʾ al-Nawādīr*, p. 273.

¹¹ See for example Qaraṭāy al-ʿIzzī al-Khāzindārī, *Taʾrikh Majmūʾ al-Nawādīr*, p. 233; al-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, vol. 6, p. 382.

¹² Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 3, p. 1062.

¹³ See for example Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 15, p. 521.

dressed the Ayyubid sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb (d. 647/1249) as his *mamlūks*. Qaraṭāy al-ʿIzzī al-Khāzindārī (d. after 708/1308) mentions that al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb “enslaved them with money” (*istaʿbadahum bi-l-amwāl*),¹⁴ and the context makes it clear that al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb bought their services and that Qaraṭāy al-ʿIzzī al-Khāzindārī is referring to patron-client ties based on exchange relationships: favors of the patron (*niʿmah/iḥsān*) in return for service (*khidmah*).¹⁵ From the above-mentioned example it is clear that this usage of the term *mamlūk* was not unique to the Mamluk period.¹⁶ The same *Khawārizmīyah* make it clear that the usage of the term *mamlūk* is strongly related to service (*khidmah*) and obedience (*ṭāʿah*), when they say to al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb: “We came to serve you and we are your obedient *mamlūks*” (*naḥnu qad ḥaḍarnā ilā khidmatika wa-naḥnu mamālīkuka wa-taḥta ṭāʿatika*).¹⁷ 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 li-Banī Ayyūb*).¹⁸ In a similar manner, the free Turkmen amir, Qarājah bin Dhū l-Ghādir (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

¹⁴ Qaraṭāy al-ʿIzzī al-Khāzindārī, *Taʾrīkh Majmūʿ al-Nawādir*, p. 65.

¹⁵ We can find another example for the usage of the term *mamlūk* related to service (*khidmah*) given in return to favors (*iḥsān*) in the words of the *Baḥrīyah* to the ruler of Anatolia (*ṣāḥib al-rūm*): “If you will be pleased of us and give us from your favors we will be your *mamlūks*” (*fa-in aḥsanta ilaynā wa-raḍita binā fa-naḥnu mamālīkuka*), Qaraṭāy al-ʿIzzī al-Khāzindārī, *Taʾrīkh Majmūʿ al-Nawādir*, p. 145; and see also Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Taʾrīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah*, vol. 4, p. 302; for the connection between the term *mamlūk*, favors and total subordination, see Mufaḍḍal b. Abī al-Faḍāʾil, *al-Nahj al-Sadīd*, p. 379; for the importance of patron-client relationships, *iḥsān* and *niʿmah* in the Mamluk Sultanate, see Van Steenberghe, *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-ʿIzzī al-Khāzindārī, *Taʾrīkh Majmūʿ al-Nawādir*, p. 78. In a similar manner, during the ʿAbbāsīd period, servile terminology (*mawlā*, *ghulām*, and more rarely *ʿabd*) 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, “Mawlā”, p. 881; and see also Golden, “The Terminology of Slavery”.

¹⁷ Qaraṭāy al-ʿIzzī al-Khāzindārī, *Taʾrīkh Majmūʿ al-Nawādir*, p. 94; for another example of the link between service (*khidmah*) and obedience (*ṭāʿah*), see al-Kutubī, *ʿUyūn al-Tawārikh*, p. 223.

¹⁸ For a similar case, see Qaraṭāy al-ʿIzzī al-Khāzindārī, *Taʾrīkh Majmūʿ al-Nawādir*, p. 155.

sultan's servant (*mamlūk*) in that land" (*yas'alu an yakūna mamlūk al-sultān fī tilka al-arḍ*).¹⁹

We also come across instances in which *mamlūks*, after being manumitted, offer their service to persons other than their masters, in words similar to those of Qarājah bin Dhū al-Ghādir.²⁰ In both the Turkish and the Circassian periods, it was common enough that sons of *mamlūks*, Mongol immigrants (*wāfidiyah*) or other free persons, were listed among the members of the sultan's *mamlūks* (*mamālīk al-sultān*) or that of an amir.²¹ We also find references to Christian bureaucrats who converted to Islam as servants (*mamlūks*) of the sultan.²² Sometimes the sultan's *khushdāshīyah* refer to themselves as his *mamlūks* (*mamālīk al-sultān*), and in these instances it is clear that the term *mamlūk* denotes servitude rather than servile status.²³ In addition, the term *mamlūk* was frequently used as part of the protocol of the civilian and military 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 *mamlūk* was transformed in the beginning of the Mamluk period from a warrior-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-Shujā'i, *Ta'rikh al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad*, p. 22; for a similar case, see al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz al-Kalām*, vol. 2, p. 657.

²⁰ See for example Qaraṭāy al-'Izzī al-Khāzindārī, *Ta'rikh Majmū' al-Nawādir*, p. 164.

²¹ See for example Qaraṭāy al-'Izzī al-Khāzindārī, *Ta'rikh Majmū' al-Nawādir*, pp. 284-285; Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 5, p. 285; Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 7, p. 46, vol. 9, pp. 13-14; Ibn Taghribirdī, *Hawādith al-Duhūr*, vol. 1, p. 390; Ibn al-Furāt, *Ta'rikh Ibn al-Furāt*, vol. 7, p. 146; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, vol. 32, p. 236; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Ta'rikh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah*, vol. 1, p. 368; Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Nafḥah al-Miskīyah*, p. 75; Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Jawhar al-Thamīn*, p. 447; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, vol. 2, p. 77, vol. 4, p. 1069; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-Ghumr*, vol. 1, p. 219; Zetterstéen, *Beiträge*, p. 144; Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-Fikrah*, p. 231; al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir*, p. 234; al-'Aynī, *al-Sultān Barqūq*, p. 496.

²² See for example al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir*, p. 130.

²³ Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir*, p. 166.

²⁴ See for example Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 8, p. 163; al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān al-'Aṣr*, vol. 4, p. 504; at times the protocol's terms infiltrated into the spoken language, see for example al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān al-'Aṣr*, vol. 4, p. 197.

²⁵ Rabbat, "The Changing Concept of *Mamlūk*", p. 97; I will discuss below the issue of manumission more thoroughly.

By now it should be clear that the term *mamlūk* 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 *mamālīk al-sulṭān* led scholars to argue that free immigrants (*wāfidiyah*) were refused promotion to high ranking offices because they were not slaves. Al-Maqrīzī has Baybars al-Jāshankīr (d. 709/1310) address an immigrant amir (*wāfid*) 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 *mamālīk al-sulṭān* is equal?" (*anta wāḥid manfi, wāfidī, taj'alu naḥsaka mithla mamālīk al-sulṭān?*).²⁶

David Ayalon saw in this text evidence that the *wāfidiyah* were discriminated against for not being slaves; however, as already mentioned, the term *mamālīk al-sulṭān* denotes servitude, subordination and obedience, and not only slave origin. Al-Maqrīzī 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 *mamālīk al-sulṭān* is "the obedient servants of the sultan".

The *wāfidiyah* 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 Ilkhans, or of trying to escape to the Ilkhan's territories.²⁷ 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-Maqrīzī 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 *mamālīk al-sulṭān* made him change his mind after protesting: "They harshly criticized and condoned them for betraying their masters, and said that they are no good" (*aktharū*

²⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 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 *wāfid* from Anatolia, al-'Aynī, *'Iqd al-Jumān*, vol. 2, p. 166.

²⁷ See for example al-Dhahabī, *al-Mukhtār min Ta'rikh Ibn al-Jazarī*, p. 305; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-l-Nihāyah*, vol. 13, p. 268; Ibn Shaddād, *Ta'rikh al-Malik al-Zāhir*, pp. 104-105; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 2, pp. 67, 87; al-Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafāyāt*, vol. 24, pp. 178-179.

min dhammihim wa-l-'ayb 'alayhim bi-kawnihim khāmarū 'alā asāti-dhahum wa-annahum lā khayr fihim).²⁸ Also in this case, the *wāfidīyah* 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-'Ādil 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*).²⁹ 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 *mamlūk* 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, *mamlūk* 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 *mamlūks* were criticized for their servile origin by the local population and by their external enemies. The Ilkhans treated the *mamlūk* sultans as inferiors for the latter's humble descent (*nasab*).³⁰ In response, the *mamlūks* tried to highlight their relative advantage over the Ilkhans – their being Muslims and defenders of Islam (*jihād*).³¹ In general, the local population was also not pleased with *mamlūk* rule (“they generally did not want that one of the *mamlūks* will be the ruler” – *kāna 'ādatuhum an lā yurīdūna an yaliya al-mulk aḥad min al-mamālīk*),

²⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 2, p. 83.

²⁹ Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-Fikrah*, p. 330.

³⁰ See for example al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 1, p. 427; Ibn Duqmāq, *Nuzhat al-Anām*, p. 261; Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, pp. 13, 29, 33-34; Aigle, “The Mongol Invasions of Bilād al-Shām”, p. 104; Amitai, *Mongols and Mamluks*, p. 36.

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 *mamlūks* for deposing a king's son, see al-Dhahabi, *Duwal al-Islām*, 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.³² The *mamlūks* could not ignore such perceptions.³³

Al-Mu'izz Aybek (d. 655/1257), the first *mamlūk* sultan, based his legitimacy on his marital ties with Shajar al-Durr, al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb's widow. Shajar al-Durr even claimed that she was the one who gave Aybek the reins of power.³⁴ In early Mamluk sources, al-Mu'izz Aybek and his son al-Manṣūr 'Alī are considered to be Ayyubid kings.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 nurīdu illā sultānan ra'īsan mawlūdan 'alā fiṭrah*), to comply with the rule of a *mamlūk* sultan (*man massahu al-riqq*).³⁶

Al-Muẓaffar Quṭuz (d. 658/1260), the second *mamlūk* sultan, claimed that he was a relative of the Khawarizmian king Jalāl al-Dīn 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. kāfirīn*), he replied that

³² Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*, pp. 52-65; Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 8, pp. 170-175.

³³ Al-Ṣafadī provides us with an anecdote that illustrates how Mongol attitudes affected the Mamluks. When Qawṣūn al-Nāṣirī deposed Abū Bakr b. al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, the amir Ṭashtamur al-Sāqī is quoted saying that the amirs pledged loyalty to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad 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-'adū 'annā*), al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafayāt*, vol. 16, p. 440; prior to that, when Baybars al-Jāshankīr deposed al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, Ibn Taghribirdī has al-Nāṣir Muḥammad threat to escape to the Tatars and complain of his deposal, Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 8, p. 244. The Mongols criticized the Mamluks for deposing sultans too frequently, Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, pp. 74, 79.

³⁴ Al-Makīn, *Akhbār al-Ayyūbiyyīn*, p. 43; when the senior amir al-Fāris Aqṭāy (d. 652/1254) married an Ayyubid princess people found this improper, Ibn al-Dawādārī, *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-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar*, vol. 8, p. 25; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, vol. 29, p. 430.

³⁵ Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Mukhtār al-Akhbār*, p. 10; Louis Cheikho, *Petrus ibn Rahib*, pp. 99-100; for remnants of such perception, see Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Naṣṣḥ al-Miskīyah*, p. 196.

³⁶ Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 7, p. 13; for Bedouin opposition to *mamlūk* rule in the days of Aybek, see al-Maqrizī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 1, p. 386.

he was the relative of Khawārizm Shāh.³⁷ This anecdote illustrates that *mamlūk* origin was far from being a source of pride, and that *mamlūks* tried to repress such an origin and replace it with a more exalted one.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,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;⁴⁰ he married a Khawarizmian princess whose family was related by marriage to al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb;⁴¹ his relative, Baysarī al-Shamsī (d. 698/1298), also established marital ties with the Ayubbids;⁴² Baybars also related himself to al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb by adopting his *nisbah*;⁴³ he established marital ties with families of senior Mongol immigrants;⁴⁴ and he connected himself symbolically to the Saljuqs.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 *mamlūks*.⁴⁶

³⁷ See for example al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, vol. 29, p. 480; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar*, vol. 8, p. 40.

³⁸ Holt maintains that young *mamlūks* with aspirations tried to legitimize these aspirations by forging an exalted genealogy. He adds that it might be that Qutuz' story circulated among his comrades, and when he ascended the throne it became a legitimizing propaganda, Holt, "Prediction or Propaganda?", p. 136.

³⁹ See for example Ibn Duqmāq, *Nuzhat al-Anām*, p. 256; Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 7, p. 145; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-l-Nihāyah*, vol. 13, p. 254; al-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām*, vol. 4, p. 81; Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, pp. 13, 29, 33-34; Amitai, *Mongols and Mamluks*, p. 36.

⁴⁰ Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafāyāt*, vol. 7, p. 311.

⁴¹ Ibn Duqmāq, *Nuzhat al-Anām*, p. 171; on al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb's marital ties with the Khawarizmian dynasty, see Ibn al-Furāt, *Tā'rikh Ibn al-Furāt*, vol. 7, p. 90; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafāyāt*, vol. 9, p. 353; al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt al-Zamān*, vol. 4, pp. 32-34; al-Birzālī, *Tā'rikh al-Birzālī*, vol. 2, p. 45.

⁴² Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafāyāt*, vol. 21, p. 339.

⁴³ Clifford, "State Formation and the Structure of Politics in Mamluk Syro-Egypt", p. 130; on the importance the *mamlūks* 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.

⁴⁴ Ibn al-Furāt, *Tā'rikh Ibn al-Furāt*, vol. 7, p. 90; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, vol. 30, p. 368; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 1, p. 640, vol. 2, p. 337; Ibn Shaddād, *Tā'rikh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*, p. 144.

⁴⁵ Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, p. 38.

⁴⁶ Herzog, "Legitimität durch Erzählung", pp. 251-252; and see also Elbendary, "The Sultan, The Tyrant, and The Hero", pp. 151-152.

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 Lājīn (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 Lājīn, 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 Aqush 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 dynasty⁵¹ and boasted of his ethnic origin.⁵² Other Circassian *mamlūk* sultans, such as al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (d. 824/1421) and al-Zāhir Ṭaṭar (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 (*radī' al-aṣl*).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.

⁴⁷ See for example Shāfi' b. 'Alī, *al-Faḍl al-Ma'thūr*, p. 25; Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-Fikrah*, p. 177; al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ al-A'shā*, vol. 14, pp. 341-344.

⁴⁸ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, vol. 31, p. 329; see also al-Dhahabī, *al-Mukhtār min Ta'riḫ Ibn al-Jazarī*, p. 376.

⁴⁹ Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 8, p. 229.

⁵⁰ See for example al-Malatī, *Nayl al-Amal*, vol. 2, p. 212; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Ta'riḫ Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah*, vol. 1, p. 472; Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 11, p. 207, vol. 12, p. 57.

⁵¹ Al-Malatī, *Nayl al-Amal*, vol. 2, p. 233; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi' li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi'*, sec. 12, p. 132; al-Jawharī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, vol. 1, p. 127; Van Steenberghe, *Order out of Chaos*, pp. 84-85.

⁵² Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, p. 184; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr*, vol. 1, p. 223.

⁵³ Al-'Aynī, *al-Sayf al-Muḥannad*, pp. 47-48; al-'Aynī, *al-Rawḍ al-Zāhir*, pp. 5-6; on the two treatises see Holt, "Literary Offerings", pp. 8-12.

⁵⁴ See for example al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, sec. 10, pp. 345-346.

Like *mamlūk* sultans, *mamlūk* amirs did not boast of their servile origin and tried to claim for themselves an exalted descent. Qawṣūn al-Nāṣirī (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.⁵⁵ Sources of the Turkish period mention the high ranking position of the fathers of Mongol war captives who became senior amirs in the Sultanate.⁵⁶ For example, Salār al-Manṣūrī'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-Manṣūrī (d. 710/1310) fled to the Ilkhanid territories he met his father and brothers who served at the court of the Mongol khan.⁵⁷ We also know that Aytamush al-Muḥammadi (d. 736/1336), a high ranking Mongol amir, was descended from an exalted Mongol lineage (the circumstances of his arrival into the Sultanate are not mentioned in the sources).⁵⁸ It is certainly reasonable that these amirs were proud of their exalted origin, which was quite likely taken into consideration when they were promoted.⁵⁹ Muslim ("free") origin was also a source of pride, and we have evidence that some *mamlūks* (like Quṭuz) claimed to be Muslim war captives.⁶⁰ Some of the *mamlūks* even claimed to be descendants of the Prophet (*ashrāf*).⁶¹ At times the status of the *mamlūks* in their homeland was remembered, and *mamlūks* who came from a humble background were ridiculed.⁶² Even in the "more *mamlūk*"

⁵⁵ See for example Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 10, p. 47; Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Nafḥah al-Miskīyah*, p. 143. Interestingly, when Qawṣūn wanted that *mamālīk al-sultān* will serve him, he faced a strong objection from the *mamālīk* who claimed that they are not willing to serve someone who is a *mamlūk* like themselves, Ibn Taghrībirdī, *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-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 2, p. 162.

⁵⁷ Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-Fikrah*, p. 153; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 6, pp. 13-15; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar*, vol. 8, p. 376.

⁵⁸ Little, "Notes on Aitamiš, 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 amir, was a respected man in his homeland, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr*, vol. 4, p. 270.

⁶⁰ See for example Ibn al-Furāt, *Taʾrikh Ibn al-Furāt*, vol. 8, p. 216; al-ʿAynī, *Iqd al-Jumʿan*, vol. 4, p. 292.

⁶¹ See for example al-Malatī, *Nayl al-Amal*, vol. 5, p. 249; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafayāt*, vol. 8, p. 370.

⁶² Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr*, vol. 2, p. 114; and see also Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-Fikrah*, p. 105.

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-Ẓāhir Jaqmaq (d. 858/1453) bought the grandson of the brother of the senior amir Yashbak min Salmān Shāh al-Mu'ayyadī (d. 878/1473), he exempted him from service in the young *mamlūks*' barracks out of respect for his uncle (*"raqqāhu 'an dhālika ikrāman li-'ammihī"*).⁶³

Far from being a source of pride, there is evidence that being a slave was in fact considered degrading. When al-Ashraf Khalīl b. Qalāwūn (d. 693/1293) wanted to humiliate the amir Lājīn al-Manṣūrī, he made him a *mamlūk* of the amir Baydarā al-Manṣūrī (d. 693/1293). According to Baybars al-Manṣūrī (d. 725/1325), Lājīn became Baydarā's slave and not his servant (*wahabtuka lahu ḥaqqan li-taṣīra mamlūkan riqqan*).⁶⁴ Mamluk writers usually differentiate quite clearly between rank-and-file *mamlūks* and amirs,⁶⁵ and the expression "the amirs and the *mamlūks*" (*al-umarā' wa-l-mamālīk*) is quite common in Mamluk sources. Whereas amirs, who were generally manumitted slaves, were respected, we come across expression of contempt towards simple *mamlūks*. For example, when the amir Aqbāy al-Ḥājib (d. 805/1402) beat one of the amir 'Alībāy al-Ẓāhirī's (d. 800/1397) *mamlūks*, 'Alībāy complained to al-Ẓāhir Barqūq, but Barqūq dismissed the complaint with the words "am I supposed to beat Aqbāy on account of a [simple] *mamlūk*?" (*adribu Aqbāy li-ajli mamlūk?*).⁶⁶

According to Shaun Marmon, "...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".⁶⁷ Marmon 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 Muḥammad 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

⁶³ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, sec. 10, pp. 270-271; and see also Ayalon, *L'esclavage du Mamelouk*, pp. 22-24.

⁶⁴ Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-Fikrah*, p. 310.

⁶⁵ See for example Ibn Ṣaṣrā, *al-Durrah al-Muḍī'ah*, p. 67.

⁶⁶ Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 8, p. 247.

⁶⁷ Marmon, "Domestic Slavery in the Mamluk Empire", p. 3.

made you a human being” (*taqūlu li-amīr mithlaka qawwād? wa-aysh kunta anta fi-l-iṣṭabl aūshāqī, ṭalla’tu bi-ka wa-’amaltuka b. Ādam*).⁶⁸ Military slaves (*mamlūks*) are quite often mentioned as part of a deceased amir’s estate.⁶⁹ 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” (*qīṭ’at mamlūk jarkasī... mā yaswū 300 dirham*).⁷⁰ 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 *mamlūks* was total. Masters had the right to prevent their *mamlūks* from marrying or to arrange a marriage as they wished.⁷¹ Cases of disobedience by *mamlūks* were considered a severe breach of the master’s honor.⁷² We hear of *mamlūks* who fled from their masters out of fear.⁷³ At times, amirs are praised for not cursing their *mamlūks*;⁷⁴ we may thus assume that cursing, humiliation and even beating of *mamlūks* were not that rare (and see above the story of Quṭuz). It is even implied that the master had the right to take his *mamlūks*’ lives.⁷⁵ 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 Baysarī al-Shamsī after a long period of imprisonment, Baysarī took on Khalīl’s *nisbah* (*al-ashrafī*), like a manumitted slave,⁷⁶ and the son of the Armenian king, who was released from captivity, is called ‘*atīq* (manumitted slave).⁷⁷ *Mamlūks* 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 *mamlūks*

⁶⁸ Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāzīr*, p. 307.

⁶⁹ See for example al-Birzālī, *Ta’rīkh al-Birzālī*, vol. 4, p. 139.

⁷⁰ Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar*, vol. 9, p. 224.

⁷¹ See for example al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 4, p. 348; Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 7, p. 328; al-Malatī, *Nayl al-Amal*, vol. 3, p. 299, vol. 7, p. 415.

⁷² Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 2, p. 399.

⁷³ See for example al-Kutubī, *Fawāt al-Wafayāt*, vol. 1, p. 115.

⁷⁴ See for example Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Ta’rīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah*, vol. 1, p. 682.

⁷⁵ Al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāzīr*, pp. 146-147; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 3, p. 1062.

⁷⁶ Ibn al-Furāt, *Ta’rīkh Ibn al-Furāt*, vol. 8, pp. 122-123; and see also al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, vol. 31, p. 215.

⁷⁷ Al-Dhahabī, *Ta’rīkh al-Islām*, vol. 53, p. 120.

as “his slaves, whose actions are attributed to him” (*mamālīkuhu, al-mansūb šanī’uhum ilayhi*).⁷⁸ At times a *mamlūk* acting on behalf of his master is called ‘*abd ma’mūr*’ (a legal category that relates to slaves empowered by their masters to act on their behalf),⁷⁹ thus accentuating the *mamlūk*’s lack of legal capacity.

Orlando Patterson defined a slave as a powerless, violently dominated, natally alienated and generally dishonored person, who has no existence without his master.⁸⁰ According to Dror Ze’evi, the near-absolute 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.⁸¹ However, as Richards has already argued, 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.⁸² 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.⁸³ It would thus seem that Patterson’s definition fits military slaves (*mamlūks*) quite nicely.⁸⁴

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

⁷⁸ Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-Fikrah*, p. 332.

⁷⁹ See for example Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 15, p. 281.

⁸⁰ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, pp. 4-13.

⁸¹ Ze’evi, “My Slave, My Son”, pp. 75-77; and see also Forand, “The Relation of the Slave and the Client to the Master or Patron”, pp. 59-66.

⁸² 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 Mamluk Sultanate (generally called by modern scholars ‘pseudo-kinship ties’). I will argue that only few 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.

⁸³ Yosef, “Mamluks and Their Relatives”, pp. 63-69.

⁸⁴ Amitai maintains that the well-known passage in Ibn Khaldūn’s *Kitāb al-‘Ibar* praising 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

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 knowledge 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 became 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 manumitted automatically. Qalāwūn, who was originally the *mamlūk* of the Ayyubid amir Qarā Sunqur al-Kāmilī (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 Mamlūk 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 difficult one, see for example al-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī, *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 Mamlūk Institution", p. 62; Rabi', "The Training of the Mamlūk Fāris", p. 162.

⁸⁶ Rabbat, "The Changing Concept of *Mamlūk*", pp. 89-93.

⁸⁷ Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 7, pp. 325-326; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr*, vol. 1, p. 95.

⁸⁸ Al-Dhahabī, *Duwal al-Islām*, p. 189; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 1, p. 755; Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 7, pp. 325-326.

was about twenty-three. Significantly, he was not manumitted automatically but only upon his master's death.⁸⁹ Salār al-Manṣūrī, who was captured in the year 675/1276, was bought by Qalāwūn for his son 'Alī. Upon 'Alī's death in the year 687/1288, he became Qalāwūn's property once again. Salār died in the year 710/1310 at the age of fifty or little less.⁹⁰ 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 Qalāwūn's death in the year 689/1290, when he was about twenty-seven years old, for his *nisbah* indicates that Qalāwūn manumitted him.

We know that before al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn's third reign some *ḥalqah* members holding a military estate (*iqṭā'*) were still slaves (*mamālīk ariqqā'*).⁹¹ These were probably low-ranking *mamlūks* or *mamlūks* of amirs, on whom we generally have little information. We have to take into consideration the possibility that such *mamlūks* were manumitted at a later age.⁹² We also know that in the year 670/1272, al-Zāhir Baybars bought two amirs; therefore, in his time amirs could still be slaves.⁹³ Ibn Taghribirdī (d. 874/1470) writes in the biography of the amir Baktamur al-Sāqī al-Nāṣirī (d. 733/1332): "Originally, Baktamur was the slave of the Sultan al-Muẓaffar Baybars al-Jāshankīr, but then he passed into the hands of the Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn. Perhaps he only became his servant [and not his slave], for his master, al-Muẓaffar 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" (*kāna aṣl Baktamur min mamālīk al-malik al-Muẓaffar*

⁸⁹ For other instances of such manumission, see for example al-Birzālī, *Ta'rikh al-Birzālī*, vol. 3, p. 361; Ibn al-Mughayzil, *Dhayl Mufarrij al-Kurūb*, p. 103.

⁹⁰ Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 6, pp. 5-13; al-Dhahabī, *Dhayl Ta'rikh al-Islām*, p. 94.

⁹¹ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, vol. 33, p. 42.

⁹² Rabbat assumes that amirs followed the sultans and manumitted their *mamlūks* upon the termination of their training, though he is aware of the fact that the information we have with respect to the *mamlūks* of the amirs is quite meager, Rabbat, "The Changing Concept of *Mamlūk*", p. 90.

⁹³ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 1, p. 597. Interestingly, the editor of the text claims that this part of the text does not make sense, for it is known that *mamlūks* could not become amirs until manumission. As mentioned, we know very little about manumission in the Turkish period. Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir mentions that Baybars manumitted in Ramadan 30 slaves apart from whom he had manumitted of his *mamlūk* amirs (*ghayr man a'taqa min mamālīkihi al-umarā'*), Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, *Al-Rawḍ al-Zāhir*, pp. 200-201. Admittedly, the interpretation of this text is not unequivocal.

Baybars al-Jāshankīr, thumma intaqala ilā-l-malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, la'allahu bi-l-khidam fa-inna ustādhahu al-Muzaffar Baybars kāna ammarahu 'ashra fī awākhir dawlatihi wa-lawlā annahu a'taqahu mā ammarahu).⁹⁴ Ibn Taghribirdī'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 Taghribirdī 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.⁹⁵ 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*.⁹⁶ Certainly, the enslavement and the conditions under which these *mamlūks* lived were less traumatic than those of war captives,⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸ Shāhīn al-Shaykhī (d. 834/1430) was originally a *mamlūk* of Shaykh al-Ṣafawī (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.⁹⁹ In the year 785/1383, Aytamush al-Bujāsī (d. 802/1399) was bought by Barqūq and immediately manumitted when the latter discovered that he

⁹⁴ Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 9, p. 300.

⁹⁵ The best example of such a formal enslavement is that of Qawṣūn al-Nāṣirī. 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-Ṣafadī, *A'yān al-'Aṣr*, vol. 4, p. 138; and see page 18 above.

⁹⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 2, p. 525.

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.

⁹⁹ Al-Malatī, *Nayl al-Amal*, vol. 4, p. 296.

was still a slave, for his original master, Jurjī al-Idrīsī (d. 772/1370), had not manumitted him. After the latter's death the amir Bujās al-Nawrūzī (d. 803/1400) apparently took him from his heirs and manumitted him illegally.¹⁰⁰ We know of other instances in which an adult *mamlūk* (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 *mamlūks*' manumission age.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the sources provide us with hints as to the supposed time of Bujās' manumission. Ibn Ḥijjī (d. 816/1413) comments that it is strange that Aytamush was not manumitted, for his master died in the year 772/1370 and Aytamush had been acting as a free person (*yataṣarrafu taṣarruf al-aḥrār*) for a long time.¹⁰² Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) also found it strange (*min al-gharā'ib*) that when he was bought by Barqūq in the year 785/1383 Aytamush was still a slave, because his master "Jurjī died in the year 772/1370, and Aytamush was acting as a free person for 17 (!) years, although he was still [legally] a slave" (*Jurjī māta sanat 772, fa-aqāma Aytamush 17 sanah fi l-riqq yataṣarrafu taṣarruf al-aḥrār*).¹⁰³ These reports indicate that Aytamush was a slave while his master was alive, but was supposed to be manumitted upon Jurjī's death. Apparently his master did not have the chance to do this, or he did it in an illegal manner. When Aytamush 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 *mamlūk*'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 *mamlūks* were not manumitted automatically upon the termination of their training period.

The fact that Shāhīn and Aytamush were originally *mamlūks* 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 Shāhīn and Aytamush were manumitted was due to the fact that they

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 3, pp. 143-145.

¹⁰¹ See for example al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt al-Zamān*, vol. 4, pp. 174-175, 195.

¹⁰² Ibn Ḥijjī, *Ta'rikh Ibn Ḥijjī*, vol. 1, p. 464.

¹⁰³ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-Ghumr*, vol. 2, p. 136.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw' al-lāmi*, sec. 2, p. 324.

were not Turks – Aytamush was a Circassian and Shāhīn was probably a Rūmī.¹⁰⁵ There is evidence that during the Turkish period non-Turkish *mamlūks* (mainly Circasians and Rūmīs) 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.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*.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 favored *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*.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 ‘adatuhu*”) of buying *mamlūks* and immediately manumitting them, and apparently this was an innovation.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, starting in 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-

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 12, p. 187; Yosef, “The Names of the *Mamlūks*”; Yosef, “Ethnic groups”, p. 97.

¹⁰⁶ Yosef, “Ethnic Groups”, pp. 157-164, 222-223, 303-304.

¹⁰⁷ For evidence that during the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad non-Turks were enslaved in war while Turks were sold by their families, see al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, vol. 2, p. 525; al-‘Umārī, *Kitāb Masālik al-Abṣār*, pp. 69-72. Al-‘Umārī states explicitly that the Circassians were war captives.

¹⁰⁸ Yosef, “Mamluks and Their Relatives”, pp. 56-60; Yosef, “Ethnic groups”, pp. 215-223, 246-250, 272-273.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Jawhārī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, vol. 1, p. 117.

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 mamālīkihi*).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 mamālīkihi*) 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 *mamlūks* 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.

¹¹⁰ See for example Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, vol. 16, p. 357.

¹¹¹ See for example Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Manhal al-Šāfi*, 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 fī jumlat mamālīkihi ilā an a'taqahu*), see for example al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, vol. 33, p. 291.

At least until al-Nāṣir 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-Nāṣir 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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