



ASK Working Paper 06

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Ethnic Groups, Social Relationships and Dynasty in the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517)

ASK Working Paper, ISSN 2193-925X
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Mamluk Era (1250-1517)
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Ethnic Groups, Social Relationships and Dynasty in the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517)

by Koby Yosef (Bar-Ilan University, Bonn)

About the author

Koby Yosef has written his PhD dissertation entitled “Ethnic Groups, Social Relationships and Dynasty in the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517)” in the University of Tel-Aviv (Israel) under the supervision of Professors Michael Winter and Benjamin Arbel. It was approved in April 2011. Since October 2012 he is a lecturer in the Department of Arabic at the University of Bar-Ilan (Israel). His topics of interest are the political and social history of the Mamluk Sultanate, Islamic political thought and Islamic law. Two articles of his are about to see light:

1. “Mamluks and Their Relatives in the Period of the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517),” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 16 (forthcoming, July 2012).
2. “*Dawlat al-Atrāk* or *Dawlat al-Mamālīk*? Ethnic Origin or Slave Origin as the Defining Characteristic of the Ruling Elite in the Mamlūk Sultanate,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 (forthcoming, Fall 2012).

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Abstract

The Mamluk Sultanate has been considered as the arena in which the "Mamluk principles" were expressed most clearly. According to the prevalent view among modern scholars, in the Mamluk Sultanate dynastic and hereditary tendencies were rather weak. Generally, students of the Mamluk Sultanate tend to underestimate the importance of relationships based on blood ties, marital ties and ethnic solidarity. Instead, they emphasize the importance of *mamlūk* connections.

It is here argued, that throughout the entire period of the Mamluk Sultanate blood ties, marital ties and ethnic solidarity were more important than it is commonly believed. Notwithstanding this, significant changes in patterns of social ties are noticeable after the transition to the Circassian period. Only then a considerable decline of the social and political importance of the nuclear family occurred, and *mamlūk* ties became increasingly significant. This change led to an erosion of the dynastic and hereditary practices. This change did not arise from the alleged principle that non-*mamlūks* were unfit for holding key positions. It was rather the result of circumstances unique of the Circassian period.

1. Introductory remarks

Between the years 648/1250 and 923/1517 Egypt and Syria were ruled by sultans of different ethnic origins, mostly Turks and Circassians. These sultans were in part sons of sultans, freeborn Muslims, and in part military slaves (*mamlūks*). Military slavery was a widespread phenomenon in the medieval Islamic world. Muslim rulers imported large groups of non-Muslim slaves (*mamlūks*) from areas outside the Islamic Empire. They converted the *mamlūks* to Islam, trained them, manumitted them, and then used them in various administrative, bureaucratic and military functions. However, the political entity that is generally called "the Mamluk Sultanate" (1250-1517), in which former *mamlūks* often held the reins of power, is usually perceived in modern research as an exception to the patterns of rule in medieval Islam.

The Mamluk Sultanate, which ruled over Egypt, Syria and adjacent areas for two and a half centuries, has been considered as the culmination of the process of the *mamlūks*' penetration into the Islamic state institutions, and also the arena in which the "Mamluk principles", as defined by David Ayalon, were expressed most clearly. These principles are: the *mamlūk*'s loyalty to his master, solidarity among *mamlūks* serving the same master (*khushdāshīyah*), and a "one generation nobility", i.e., a system in which Mamluk sultans and emirs did not bequeath status, privileges or property to their sons or other blood relatives.¹ According to the same historiographic perception, while Islamic states were usually governed by dynasties in which every ruler was a blood relative of his predecessor, in the Mamluk Sultanate dynastic and hereditary tendencies were rather weak, and the offices of the sultan and of his senior emirs were reserved exclusively for the *mamlūks*.² According to this conviction, the *mamlūks* were only formally slaves, the characteristic of the ruling elite was *mamlūk* descent, the status of all the *mamlūks* was that of elite, and the *mamlūks* were proud of their slave origin even after manumission.³

The factors that determined the *mamlūk* affiliation, and hence his socio-political actions, have been at the centre of the historiographic debate. Most students of the Mamluk Sultanate tend to underestimate the importance of relationships based on blood ties, marital ties and ethnic solidarity. Instead, they emphasize the importance of *mamlūk* connections, generally referred to as "pseudo-familial ties", such as the relationship between a master and his *mamlūks*, or the connections among *mamlūks* of the same household serving the same master (*khushdāshīyah*).⁴

In my doctoral dissertation, entitled "Ethnic Groups, Social Relationships and Dynasty in the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517) [Hebrew]", written in the University of Tel-Aviv under the supervision of Professor Michael Winter and Professor Benjamin Arbel, I have examined a variety of social ties of sultans and emirs throughout the period of the Mamluk Sultanate. Methodologically, the dissertation draws on a prosopographical approach. A great number of Arabic sources of that period, particularly biographical dictionaries and chronicles, have been scanned in order to build a database. This database contains the main traits of the members of the Mamluk ruling elite, as depicted in these sources, such as ethnic origin, stereotypic

¹ See for example Ayalon, *Mamlūk Military Aristocracy*, 205-210.

² See for example Holt, *Position and Power*; Levanoni, *Mamluk Conception*.

³ Northrup, *Bahrī Mamlūk*, 245-251; Amitai, *Mamlūk Institution*, 62.

⁴ See for example 'Abd al-Rāziq, *Al-'Alāqāt al-'Usrīyah*; Ayalon, *L'esclavage*, 27-37.

attributes, physical characteristics and cultural characteristics, as well as their social ties. This information has been used for an examination of social ties and political practices.

The period of the Mamluk Sultanate is divided into two sub-periods: the first is the Turkish period (1250-1382), in which most of the sultans and *mamlūks* were Turks, and the second, the Circassian period (1382-1517), during which the sultans and *mamlūks* were mostly Circassians. The main findings were that throughout the entire period of the Mamluk Sultanate blood ties, marital ties and ethnic solidarity were more important than it is commonly believed. Notwithstanding this, significant changes in patterns of social ties are noticeable after the transition to the Circassian period. Only then a considerable decline of the social and political importance of the nuclear family occurred, and *mamlūk* (“pseudo-familial”) ties became increasingly significant. This change led to an erosion of the dynastic and hereditary practices. It is suggested that this change (that may be called a “mamlūkization”) did not arise from the alleged principle that non-*mamlūks* were unfit for holding key positions. It was rather the result of circumstances unique of the Circassian period.

The dissertation is divided into two parts. The first one deals with ethnic groups and ethnic solidarity. The examination of this issue is based on a survey of *mamlūks*’ names and naming practices. The second part examines social ties and practices, such as the role of the family, the role of women and that of *mamlūks*’ offspring, or the relations between the *mamlūks* themselves. It also examines the changes of the patterns of social ties that took place in the Circassian period, suggests an explanation to these changes and links them to the erosion of dynastic and hereditary practices in this period.

In what follows, the content, main findings, and main arguments of the dissertation’s chapters will be summarized.

2. Ethnic groups and ethnic solidarity

Mapping *mamlūks*’ names, name giving practices and those names’ “ethnic destination” significantly broadens our knowledge about the ethnic origins of the *mamlūks* and helps us detect socio-political action motivated by ethnic solidarity. It also helps us detect changes in the ethnic composition of the Sultanate and date these changes in a more precise manner. It also helps us detect changes in perceptions of ethnic identity, changes in perceptions of ethnic groups, and changes in ideology.

It turns out that the *mamlūk*’s ethnic origin was an extremely important component of his identity. Mamluk society was divided along ethnic lines. Members of different ethnic groups were clearly distinguished by the names given to them, by their dress and looks, and by the offices that they were able to hold. A strong sense of ethnic solidarity existed among the members of each one of these ethnic groups.⁵

⁵ For a detailed discussion, see Yosef, Names of the *Mamlūks*.

2.1. Slave origin versus ethnic origin as a defining characteristic of the ruling elite

Mamluk authors refer to the ruling elite according to its ethnic origin (*dawlat al-atrāk/dawlat al-jarākisah*) rather than to its *mamlūk* descent (*dawlat al-mamālīk*). This division emphasizes the ethnic origin or language of the ruling elite in each of the two periods. Those whose ethnic origin was distinct from that of the ruling elite were not considered to be fit for holding senior political positions, especially that of the sultan. Despite this fact, modern scholars almost always call the Sultanate “the Mamluk Sultanate” (*dawlat al-mamālīk*), that is, by an appellation that emphasizes the elite’s and rulers’ slave origin or slave status. The latter appellation misrepresents Mamluk authors’ conceptions of their ruling elite, and of its defining characteristic.

The Mamluk Sultanate was not, of course, the only state in the history of the Muslim Empire that was ruled by slaves and their descendants, or the only state that based its military power on slaves. Still, it is the only state (except maybe the Delhi Sultanate) that is perceived in modern research as a Sultanate of slaves. This perception probably stems not only from the fact that during the Sultanate many slaves became rulers and the number of slaves in the military was probably unprecedented, but also from the fact that the Sultanate was not ruled by one dynasty in an orderly manner, and thus is not named after a dynasty but after an ethnic group (*dawlat al-atrāk*). However, we should remember that it is not uncommon that Muslim states are classified according to the ethnic group which ruled them (for example, the Ayyubid state is also called the state of the Kurds). The difference between the “Mamluk Sultanate” and other Muslim states is that the latter were ruled by one Dynasty, and therefore they are not only named after its ruling ethnic group, but also after the representative family of this ethnic group (Ayyubids, Buyids, Saljuqs etc.). However, in the Turkish period, the Sultanate was ruled mainly by one family – the Qalawunids, yet students of the Mamluk Sultanate tend to ignore this fact or refer to its period of rule as an exception to Mamluk patterns of rule. The Qalawunids ruled for about one hundred years almost consecutively (1281-1382), more than did the Ayyubids, for example, and definitely more than did the Tulunids or Ikhshidids, yet we speak of a Tulunid dynasty or an Ikhshidid one more easily than we do of a Qalawunid one. Mamluk sources explicitly refer to a Qalawunid dynasty (*dawlat āl Qalāwūn/dawlat banī Qalāwūn*), and there is some evidence that the Qalawunids were considered the representative ruling family of the Turkish ethnic group. The question we should ask ourselves is not why a dynasty could establish itself in the Turkish period, a normal and frequent phenomenon in the history of the Islamic Empire, but rather why could not such a dynasty establish itself in the Circassian period. Indeed, only in the Circassian period, the Sultanate, or its sub-periods, are first called *dawlat al-mamālīk*, that is, by a name that emphasizes its being ruled by slaves, but even then this name rarely occurs.⁶

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

There is no evidence that *mamlūks* were proud of their slave origin. The commonly held view by modern scholars is based on a misconception of the term *mamlūk* as used in Mamluk

⁶ For a detailed discussion, see Yosef, *Dawlat al-Atrāk*.

sources. The term *mamlūk* denoted a servant and not only a slave, and the use of the term was related to obedience and loyalty. When manumitted slaves of the sultan declare that they are his *mamlūks*, they do not express pride in their slave status or servile origins but rather confirm that they are his loyal servants. 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 and emirs often claimed noble origin, and were proud of their marital ties to royal families.

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. Orlando Patterson defined a slave as a powerless, violently dominated, natally alienated and generally dishonored person, who has no existence without his master. It would thus seem that Patterson's definition fits military slaves (*mamlūks*) quite nicely.

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 usually maintained that *mamlūks* were manumitted automatically by the end of their religious and military training, at the age of twenty or less. 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 until al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn's third reign (1310-1341) *mamlūks* were not manumitted automatically, and the servile phase of their life was not a mere formality. They were often manumitted only upon their master's death. Until that period many of the *mamlūks* were war captives, and we may safely assume that their enslavement was a traumatic event. 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. 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. On the other hand, non-Turkish *mamlūks*, who were generally Christian war captives, were subject to discrimination. They were disdained, probably manumitted at a later age and were perceived by their contemporaries as being "more slaves" than the Turkish *mamlūks*. Only in the days of al-Zāhir Barqūq (1382-1399) 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.⁷

2.3. *Mamlūk* ("pseudo familial") ties

Mamlūks only constituted a substitute for the natural family, and they enjoyed a special status in their master's household only if the master had no sons. At least during the Turkish period, there was a clear distinction between biological brothers and *mamlūk* "brothers" (*khushdāshīyah* and *muwākhūn*). In the hierarchy of social ties, blood and marital ties were clearly above pseudo-familial ties.

⁷ For a detailed discussion, see Yosef, *Term Mamlūk*.

Significant changes in patterns of social ties occurred only after the transition from the Mamluk-Turkish to the Mamluk-Circassian period in 1382. However, early indications of these changes can be observed already in the Turkish period, when non-Turkish *mamlūks* were unable to enjoy the same treatment as Turkish *mamlūks*. As mentioned, the former were Christians, as were many of the Sultanate's enemies, and, unlike the Turkish *mamlūks* who were usually sold by their families, the non-Turkish *mamlūks* were generally war captives. Therefore, the non-Turkish *mamlūks* were described in negative terms and were subject to discrimination. While all *mamlūks* were eventually manumitted, it seems that the non-Turkish *mamlūks* gained their freedom at a relatively advanced age. This fact may have prevented many of them from starting their own families. Since the creation of a family was the only way to ultimately shed slave status, the non-Turkish *mamlūks* could not fully leave behind this status even after manumission. It seems that in the absence of a family the non-Turkish *mamlūks* began to develop pseudo-familial connections and a "slave ethos". The replacement of family relations by pseudo-familial ties in the Circassian period was also reflected in contemporary terminology. Only in this period, terms that usually indicate family were used to designate *mamlūks*. This change may have also been connected to the cultural background of the Circassians. It is known that already in their homeland they had been accustomed to treat their children and their slaves in a similar manner, and attributed great importance to pseudo-familial ties.⁸

2.4. Sons of *mamlūks*, heredity and dynasty

Blood ties had great importance in transferring status, privileges and property. According to custom, the sons of the *mamlūks* had a legitimate claim to their fathers' allowances, feudal estates (*Iqtā'āt*), rank and office (in that order), and rights of inheritance to their personal property, unless they were minors when their fathers died, in which case their rights were often disregarded.

Sons were perceived as inheriting the qualities of their noble fathers, or absorbing them by means of good education. Sons of sultans had right of priority to their fathers' office; however, they had to be fit for the office and had to have the competence or eligibility (*ahlīyah/ṣalāḥīyah/kifāyah*) to fill it. The most important factor in the political discourse on "eligibility" of the son was his age. Minor sons were not considered eligible for the office of the sultan. Noble descent was never considered a disadvantage and servile origin was never considered an advantage. The *mamlūks* tried to emphasize their relative advantages over the sons of sultans. In the Turkish period the sons of sultans were usually not minors and, at least in the early period, the Sultanate was in a state of war. Therefore, the *mamlūks* claimed that only they can perform the Jihad. In the Circassian period, sons of sultans were almost always minors and the Sultanate was generally not in a state of war. Therefore, the *mamlūks* used their age as a legitimizing factor.

⁸ During my stay in Bonn, I have been working on a paper that discusses the main finding of the chapter. This paper was presented in CHESFAME – “*Ikhwah, Muwākhūn and Khushdāshīyah* in the Mamluk Sultanate,” International Conference: "Colloquium on the History of Egypt in the Fāṭimid, Ayyūbid and Mamlūk Eras (CHESFAME)", The University of Ghent, 9-11/05/2012. This paper was later elaborated into an article, which was submitted to *JSAI*, and is now being peer reviewed.

By the Circassian period a considerable decline of the nuclear family had occurred, and pseudo-familial ties became more important. This change was related to an erosion of the dynastic and hereditary practices, and was caused by a combination of two factors: the tendency of Circassian *mamlūks* to father children only at an advanced age, and the mortal consequences of the plague, the frequent outbursts of which are documented in contemporary sources. Consequently, most of the *mamlūks* were unable to leave behind them descendants that were old enough to inherit their position, status, privileges, and property. Being unable to transfer their privileges and status to their sons, the *mamlūk* sultans and emirs of the Circassian period attributed increasing importance to pseudo-familial ties, and often their privileges and status were transferred to their *mamlūks*.⁹

2.5. Marital ties and blood ties

In-laws (*aṣḥār*) enjoyed special privileges, and marital ties were extremely important in the continuity of the household. Most of the *mamlūk* emirs who became sultans were related through blood or marital ties to previous sultans.

In the Turkish period, the Qalawunids established marital ties with a small number of favored *mamlūks*. This thin layer of *mamlūks*, who were in-laws of the Qalawunids, enjoyed several privileges, most important of which was the bringing of their relatives into the Sultanate. Only these privileged *mamlūks* could completely free themselves of their slave status and become part of a ruling elite with family ties. The other *mamlūks* certainly cannot be regarded as members of an elite proud of its slave status. By bringing their in-laws' relatives, and promoting them to senior emirates, the Qalawunids definitely reinforced the idea that the right of being part of the ruling elite belonged to those who had a family (i.e., those who were not slaves), which thereby strengthened their legitimacy to rule. Beginning at least with the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn, until the Circassian period, the Mamluk Sultanate was ruled by a royal family, its in-laws, and its in-laws' families.

During the Circassian period, family and marital ties continued to play an important role. The sultans of the Circassian period often married their daughters, many of them still minors, to *mamlūk* emirs, and the *mamlūk* emirs who had marital ties to the sultan's family were fully integrated into the royal family. In this period, the status of female members of the sultan's family devolved to those emirs who married them, and who were often buried in the mausoleums of the sultans, together with their sons. It is also common to find in sources from the Circassian period references to the sons of emirs who married daughters of sultans as descendants in a cognate line of the sultans (*aṣḥāṭ*), and these sons were even given a royal title (*sīdī*). As a matter of fact, in the Circassian period, the role of marital ties in transferring status, privileges and property to *mamlūks* became even more important than it was in the Turkish period. Changes in the patterns of slave trade resulted in the presence of many *mamlūks*' relatives in various territories of the Sultanate, and sultans brought many of their

⁹ During my stay in Bonn I have prepared an 80 pages paper which is an elaboration of this chapter in my dissertation. I am consulting now Professor Conermann in order to decide whether to publish it as an article or extend it and publish it as a book in the frame of the new series on Mamluk studies of the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg. In the latter case, the book will include also materials on marital ties during the Mamluk Sultanate (see below).

family members into the Sultanate and made them senior emirs. In the Circassian period, family and marital ties were a factor that counterbalanced the erosion in the importance of the biological family, as well as the decline of the agnate lines and of the dynastic and hereditary practices.¹⁰

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion on relatives of *mamlūks*, see Yosef, *Mamluks and Their Relatives*. For plans concerning the topic of marital ties, see footnote 9 above.

In addition, during my stay in Bonn I have prepared a lecture that will be presented in the conference that will be held in Bonn in December 2012. Below is the abstract of this lecture.

**Abstract: Cross-Boundary Hatred: (Changing) Attitudes towards Mongol and
'Christian' *Mamlūks* in the Mamluk Sultanate**

Koby Yosef

The Mamluk Sultanate was not an isolated island. Its internal social relationships, policies, attitudes and ideologies were affected by external circumstances. It is not possible to fully understand the former out of the context of the Sultanate's dynamic relationships with the surrounding states and political entities. Changes in the external circumstances brought about changes within the Sultanate and vice versa.

From the earliest stages of its existence, the Sultanate faced two imminent enemies – the Mongols and the Crusaders. The relationship between the Sultanate and its Mongol neighbors was quite complicated and the feelings towards them were a mixture of respect, admiration, inferiority complex, fear and hate. The Mongols were considered to be ethnically related to the Turks and admired for their military prowess, but still, at the same time, some of them were hated enemies. Whereas the Sultanate was in a state of peace with the Muslim Golden horde, on which it was dependant for the supply of Kipchak *mamlūks*, the non-Muslim Mongol Ilkhans kept on attacking the Sultanate and scorning its rulers because of their servile origins and for their lack of respected genealogy. The reaction of the Mamluks was twofold – offensive and defensive. On the one hand, they scorned the Ilkhans for not being Muslims and depicted them in negative terms. On the other, they tried to suppress their servile origins and attach themselves to established dynasties or respected Mongol families. For example, al-Zāhir Baybars, who was criticized for being a slave by the Ilkhans, tried to forge a Genghisid genealogy and established marital ties with families of senior Mongol immigrants (*wāfidīyah*). Almost all the Mamluk sultans until the days of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad were married to Mongol women, and the sons of Baybars and Qalāwūn, who became sultans, were half Mongols and were probably exposed to Mongol influence in the Mamluk court and the sultan's household. Mongol wives and Mongol emissaries were potential agents of cultural influence.

External political factors also affected the composition of the Mamluk army and elite. Because of internal disputes within the Ilkhanate, starting from the days of Baybars, Mongol immigrants or refugees (*wāfidīyah*) arrived to the Sultanate from the Ilkhanate. In addition, many Mongols became war captives and slaves in the course of the struggle between the Sultanate and the Ilkhans. It is known that Qalāwūn owned large numbers of Mongol *mamlūks*, and there is evidence that many of them were war captives. These Mongol *mamlūks* constituted a significant part of the Mamluk elite until al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's third reign (1310-1341). The Mongol *wāfidīyah* and *mamlūks* were another potential agents of cultural influence.

Due to the fact that the Mongol *wāfidīyah* and some *mamlūks* who were war captives were not fully socialized in Mamluk society, and because the Sultanate was in war with their state of origin, they were perceived in a most negative manner. They were accused of being 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. Contemporary sources mention quite a few instances of Mongol political action motivated by ethnic solidarity (*jinsīyah*). Even though almost all of them Islamized, they were perceived, like the Ilkhans, as not (true) Muslims, as cruel, unsophisticated, frivolous, and as having sexual tendency for young boys. The fact that Mongols and Kipchaks had different names most certainly contributed to broaden the rift between these two ethnic groups. When al-ʿĀdil Kitbughā, the Mongol war captive, became sultan, he was accused of promoting the Oirat *wāfidīyah*, who were accused on their part of not being true Muslims and of being treacherous. His period of rule was deemed by contemporaries as a "Mongol state" (*dawlat al-mughul*), and a link was explicitly made between his Mongol origin and disasters that happened during his reign. Additional factors that contributed to the negative perception of the Mongols were their distinct physical appearance and the fact that, in contrast to the Kipchaks, they tended not to know Arabic. Their darker skin was linked to evilness and their tallness to fearsomeness. Because they were tall they were given posts of *ṣilāhdārīyah* (arms-bearers) and *jumaqdārīyah* (mace-bearers) that surrounded the sultan during ceremonies while spreading awe.

After al-Nāṣir Muḥammad took back the reins of power in the year 1310 we hear of big purges aimed against Mongols. However, in the days of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's third reign, the Ilkhans Islamized and the war with the Mongol Ilkhans came to an end. Contemporary sources have al-Nāṣir Muḥammad say that because of that Mongols and Turks are now "one race" (*Jins wāḥid*) and the Ilkhans were no longer depicted in a negative manner. At the same time the Qalawunid dynasty consolidated its prestige. As a result, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad no longer felt a need to legitimize his rule by attaching himself to Mongol families. He divorced his Mongol wife and started forging marital ties with the families of his emirs. During his third reign, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad bought large numbers of *mamlūks* from the Golden Horde (*Dasht-ī Qipchaq*). By the time of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's third reign the Mongols already intermingled with the Kipchaks in *Dasht-ī Qipchaq*, and the population of that area became a mixture of Kipchaks and Mongols (Turco-Mongols). The ending of the war with the Ilkhans also stopped the arrival of Mongol immigrants and war captives from the Ilkhanate into the Sultanate. The changes in the social and political circumstances in the surrounding states resulted in a change in perception of ethnic identity and the annulment of the differentiation between Turks and Mongols within the Sultanate. Starting from the days of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's third reign the sources no longer mention *mamlūks* of Mongol origin. Even if Mongols did arrive to the Sultanate they did not come from a non-Muslim enemy state but rather from a friendly Muslim one alongside with Turks and Turco-Mongols, and they were not war captives but rather sold by their families.

Starting from the sixties of the 14th century we occasionally hear once again of Mongol (*tatar*) *mamlūks*. This probably has to do with the decline of the Golden Horde. There is evidence that at about the same time the Golden Horde could not supply any more slaves in sufficient numbers due to dwindling in its human sources caused by excessive selling of young boys and the plague waves. Therefore, the Mamluk Sultanate had to search for alternative sources for slaves. Even though the Caucasus became the main source for slaves, there is evidence that some *mamlūks* originated from central Asia, and some of them were probably Mongols. However, this time, the Mongol *mamlūks* were not perceived in a negative manner. The

reason for this was probably twofold. First, the Mongols were no longer enemies. Second, whereas during the Turkish period the Turks and Mongols constituted the majority of the Mamluk army, starting from the sixties of the 14th century a large increase in the number of non-Turkish (mainly Circassians) *mamlūks* can be detected and the former gradually became the minority. It might be said that the Mongols were the “lesser devil” whereas the non-Turks were the “grater devil”.

Why was it? We turn back now to the second imminent enemy of the sultanate – the crusaders. Even though the Crusaders states were vanquished by the 14th century, Christianity was and remained the eternal enemy of Islam and Christian rulers were depicted in a negative manner. This hatred towards Christians infiltrated into the territories of the sultanate. Christian bureaucrats, even those who Islamized, were perceived in a negative manner and their Christian past was never forgotten. The non-Turkish (Circassians, Armenians and Rūmīs) *mamlūks* were also, generally, Christians in their past and, at least until the Circassian period, most of them were war captives and therefore their enslavement was more traumatic than that experienced by Turkish *mamlūks*. Like the case with the bureaucrats, the fact that they were Christians in their past was held against them. A clear link was made between their relatively fair appearance, their Christian past and their bad traits. They were perceived as not (true) Muslims, disloyal, cruel, stupid and even ugly. The fact that the non-Turks did not tend to know Arabic only worsened their situation. They preferred to sponsor non-Arab Hanafite scholars and this made the local Shafiites turn against them. This cross-boundary hatred resulted in their discrimination and had critical implications on the Sultanate.

There is evidence that already in the Turkish period, non-Turkish *mamlūks* started families at a later age than their Turkish peers, probably 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 favorite *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 undoubtedly perceived by their contemporaries as being “more slaves” than the Turkish *mamlūks*. In the absence of a family the non-Turkish *mamlūks* developed a slaves’ ethos and started ascribing greater importance to *mamlūk* ties. Not only was the Mamluk Sultanate connected to its surroundings and affected by its ever-changing circumstances, but these circumstances eventually made it what it is so famous for, that is, *mamlūk*.

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