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Women and Gender in Mamluk Society: An Overview

On the evening of Saturday, 5 Shawwāl 919 (4 December 1513), Ghars al-Dīn Khalīl, a Cairene Hanafi deputy qadi, left home for a night vigil at the Qarāfah cemetery in Cairo.[1] His wife, expecting her husband to be absent for the entire night, sent for her lover, a certain Nūr al-Dīn al-Mashālī, himself a Shafiʿi deputy judge. Unfortunately for the two, a neighbor gave notice to the husband, who immediately rode over and found the door locked. When he broke in he found his wife and al-Mashālī in bed, embracing each other under the blanket. According to the account of Ibn Iyās, the lovers tried to settle the matter quietly by filling the husband's purse. Al-Mashālī offered the husband a thousand dinars to keep his mouth shut, while the wife offered all the household goods that belonged to her, i.e., her trousseau, in return for his discretion. But the angry husband was not tempted by gold or silver; he locked them both in the house and went over to the court of the military chamberlain to lodge a complaint. When brought before this military judge, al-Mashālī confessed to the charge of adultery, and the chamberlain ordered that al-Mashālī should be stripped, and had both of them beaten severely. The two were then led through the city, facing backwards on the backs of donkeys. Finally, they were fined 100 dinars each. But then came a bizarre twist to this story; as the woman claimed that she was penniless, the officers of the chamberlain, perhaps following standard procedure a bit too rigidly, ordered the husband to pay the fine for his wife's adultery; when he refused, he was put under arrest.

When this semi-comic sequence of events reached the ears of an infuriated Sultan Qānṣūh, he convened his council and blamed the qadis for appointing immoral deputies like al-Mashālī, and demanded that the adulterers be punished in the way prescribed by Islamic law, that is, by stoning. It was an unusual order; no stoning had taken place for many years, and apparently never during Qānṣūh's long reign.[2] But, while the sultan, representing secular authority, was pushing

[1]The following account is based Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾiʿ al-Duhūr,* ed. M. Muṣṭafá, H. Roemer, and H. Ritter (Cairo and Wiesbaden, 1960–63), 4:340–50. A short version is given by the Syrian historian Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, *Ḥawādith al-Zamān wa-Wafayāt al-Shuyūkh wa-al-Aqrān* (Sidon, 1999), 2:252. See also the summary in Carl Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (Albany, 1994), 149–51.

[2]It is possible that no stoning took place for at least half a century, or even more. Executions for adultery were generally rare. In a study of criminal acts reported in the chronicles during the

DOI: 10.6082/M1X34VM5. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1X34VM5)

DOI of Vol. XI, no. 2: 10.6082/M19021V0. See https://doi.org/10.6082/Z7BW-SQ52 to download the full volume or individual articles.

for an Islamic punishment, several jurists issued a fatwa invalidating the verdict, arguing that al-Mashālī had in the meantime retracted his confession. In an overt struggle over the right to interpret the law, the jurists argued that the sultan was bound to act according to the Islamic law of evidence; execution would be a criminal offence, and the sultan liable for the blood money. At this point the sultan called them all senseless fools, telling one of the jurists: "God willing, I hope you go home and find someone doing to your wife what al-Mashālī did to the wife of Khalīl." Then Qānṣūh dismissed all four chief qadis, paralyzing all legal and economic activity in Cairo for three days. On Wednesday, 7 Dhū al-Qaʿdah (3 January), Nūr al-Dīn and his lover were hanged at the gate of the house of one of the jurists who objected to the death sentence. The two lovers were tied to the same rope, facing each other. Their bodies remained on the gallows for two days, until the sultan gave permission to bury them.

The account of the love and the death of the two adulterers is a good medieval story, and an excellent starting point for a survey of women and gender in the Mamluk period, if only because it serves to correct some common assumptions about the subject. One is that the study of women and gender, naturally a "private" topic, has little to offer for someone interested in politics or economics. It should not come as a surprise that a mundane love affair could turn into a constitutional crisis, pitting the sultan and the judicial elite against each other over the fundamental privilege of interpreting the law. This was not the first time issues of public morality, regulation of households, and gender boundaries were at the forefront of Mamluk politics—the reign of Shajar al-Durr, the periodic royal campaigns against vice, the processions of royal trousseaux, and the arrest of Ibn Taymīyah for his views on divorce are a few examples. Michael Chamberlain has done much to focus our attention on the elite household as the basic unit of social and political action.[3] But an analysis of gender distinctions *within* households offers an equally engaging perspective on Mamluk political and economic history.

Another common cliché is that medieval Arab authors were reluctant to speak about women, and that the domestic history of the Mamluk period will therefore always remain inaccessible. In fact, there are many Mamluk authors who speak very freely about their wives, daughters, and concubines, as well as about the wives, daughters, and concubines of friends, acquaintances, and relatives. Such descriptions are usually found in works devoted explicitly to the self-representation

reign of Qāytbāy, Petry found only one such case, when a Circassian female slave in the sultan's household was hanged for having an affair with a soldier (Petry, "Disruptive 'Others' as Depicted in the Chronicles of the Late Mamlūk Period," in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt,* ed. Hugh Kennedy [Leiden, 2000], 187).

[3] Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, 1994).

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of the author, an unusually large number of which were produced in the Mamluk period.[4] This trend is already evident in the works of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Syrian historians like Abū Shāmah (d. 665/1268), who includes in his work a poem he recited for his wife, al-Jazarī (d. 739/1338) in his *Tārīkh,* and al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363) in *Aʿwān al-Naṣr*.[5] The blurring of lines between history and autobiography, and hence the increasing representation of the domestic, is even more striking in some fifteenth-century works. The example of al-Sakhāwī's extraordinary comprehensive collection of the biographies of contemporary women is well-known.[6] Historians like Ibn Iyās (d. 930/1524) or Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 953/1546) composed chronicles that are also semi-memoirs. Finally, the so-called chronicles of some late fifteenth-century authors, like al-Biqāʿī (885/1480) or Ibn Ṭawq (d. 915/1509), are, for all practical purposes, diaries.[7] Surprisingly, the last two works were in manuscript form until the last decade, and even now are not fully published. The perceived inhibitions of medieval authors with regard to women may be, paradoxically, due to a *modern* lack of interest in editing and publishing works that are short on political violence but strong on trivial, mundane private lives.

[4] Dwight F. Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Berkeley, 2001), 52–71; Li Guo, "Mamluk Historiographic Studies: The State of the Art," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 1 (1997): 15–43; Donald Little, "Historiography of the Ayyūbid and the Mamlūk Epochs," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt,* vol. 1*, Islamic Egypt, 640–1517* (Cambridge, 1998), 421–32.

[5] Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Shāmah, *Tarājim Rijāl al-Qarnayn al-Sādis wa-al-Sābiʿ al-Maʿrūf bi-al-Dhayl ʿalá al-Rawḍatayn*, ed. M. Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Cairo, 1947); al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh Ḥawādith al-Zamān wa-Anbāʾihi wa-Wafayāt al-Akābir wa-al-Aʿyān min Abnāʾihi, al-Maʿrūf bi-Tārīkh Ibn al-Jazarī*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Sidon, 1998); Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr wa-Aʿwān al-Naṣr*, ed. ʿAlī Abū Zayd et al. (Damascus, 1998). On Abū Shāmah's poem to his wife see L. Pouzet, "Vision populaire de la femme en Syrie aux VIe et VIIe/XIIe et XIIIe siècles," in *Proceedings of the 14th Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants, Budapest, 29 August–3 September 1988* (Budapest, 1995), pt. 1, 295–304.

[6] Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍawʾ al-Lāmiʿ li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsiʿ,* ed. Ḥusām al-Qudsī (Cairo, 1934–36); idem, *Wajīz al-Kalām fī al-Dhayl ʿalá Duwal al-Islām,* ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf, ʿIṣām Fāris al-Ḥarastānī, and Aḥmad al-Khutaymī (Beirut, 1995). Secondary sources include: Huda Lutfi, "Al-Sakhāwīʿs *Kitāb al-Nisāʾ* as a Source for the Social and Economic History of Muslim Women during the Fifteenth Century AD," *Muslim World* 71 (1981): 104–24; Basim Musallam, "The Ordering of Muslim Societies," in *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World,* ed. F. Robinson (Cambridge, 1996), 186–97; R. Roded, *Women in the Islamic Biographical Dictionaries: From Ibn Saʿd to Who's Who* (Boulder, 1994); Y. Rapoport, "Divorce and the Elite Household in Late Medieval Cairo," *Continuity and Change* 16, no. 2 (August 2001): 201–18.

[7] Li Guo, "Tales of a Medieval Cairene Harem: Domestic Life in al-Biqāʿīʿs Autobiographical Chronicle," *MSR* 9, no. 1 (2005): 101–21; Ibn Ṭawq, *Al-Taʿlīq: Yawmīyāt Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq (834/1430–915/1509): Mudhakkirāt Kutibat bi-Dimashq fī Awākhir al-ʿAhd al-Mamlūkī, 885/1480–908/1502,* vol. 1, *(885/1480–890/1485),* ed. Jaʿfar al-Muhājir (Damascus, 2000).

DOI: 10.6082/M1X34VM5. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1X34VM5)

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Given that Mamluk chronicles and biographical dictionaries have so much to say about women, it is not surprising that there are by now quite a few studies devoted to Mamluk women, beginning with Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Rāziq's *La femme au temps des Mamlouks en Égypte*.[8] Biographical dictionaries in particular were used to assess the scholarly, religious, and literary activities of Mamluk women.[9] Documentary sources were also used by historians of women, although there is still much to be done. The Ḥaram collection is very useful in giving a sense of gender relations in a particular time and place, and has been used in this way by Donald Little and, especially, Huda Lutfi, who paid unusual attention to questions of gender.[10] Endowment deeds, mainly from late fifteenth-century Cairo, are very useful in illustrating the economic participation of elite women in the economy, and are the subject of several articles by Carl Petry.[11] On the provincial level, the references to the economic activity of women in the Ayyubid documents from al-Quṣayr are also useful.[12] About a dozen Muslim marriage contracts from the Mamluk period were found in the Egyptian countryside.[13] The wide variety of

[8] Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme au temps des Mamlouks en Égypte* (Cairo, 1973). For a review, see N. Keddie, "Problems in the Study of Middle Eastern Women," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 10 (1979): 225–40.

[9] Jonathan Berkey, "Women and Islamic Education in the Mamluk Period," in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender,* ed. N. Keddie and B. Baron (New Haven, 1992), 143–57; Asma Sayeed, "Women and Hadith Transmission: Two Case Studies from Mamluk Damascus," *Studia Islamica* 95 (2004): 71–94; Omaima Abou-Bakr, "Teaching the Words of the Prophet: Women Instructors of the Hadith (Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries)," *Hawwa* 1, no. 3 (2003): 306–28.

[10] Donald Little, *A Catalogue of the Islamic Documents from al-Ḥaram aš-Šarīf in Jerusalem* (Beirut and Wiesbaden, 1984); idem, "A Fourteenth-Century Jerusalem Court Record of a Divorce Hearing: A Case Study," in *Mamluks and Ottomans: Studies in Honour of Michael Winter*, ed. David J. Wasserstein and Ami Ayalon (London and New York, 2006), 67–85; Huda Lutfi, *Al-Quds al-Mamlûkiyya: A History of Mamlûk Jerusalem Based on the Ḥaram Documents* (Berlin, 1985); idem, "A Study of Six Fourteenth-Century *Iqrār*s from al-Quds Relating to Muslim Women," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 26 (1983): 246–94.

[11] Carl Petry, "Class Solidarity versus Gender Gain: Women as Custodians of Property in Later Medieval Egypt," in *Women in Middle Eastern History,* ed. Keddie and Baron, 122–42; idem, "The Estate of al-Khuwand Fāṭima al-Khāṣṣbakiyya: Royal Spouse, Autonomous Investor," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and History,* ed. Amalia Levanoni and Michael Winter (Leiden, 2004), 277–94.

[12] Li Guo, *Commerce, Culture, and Community in a Red Sea Port in the Thirteenth Century: The Arabic Documents from Quseir* (Leiden, 2004).

[13] Suʿād Māhir, *Al-Nasīj al-Islāmī* (Cairo, 1977); idem, "ʿUqūd al-Zawāj ʿalá al-Mansūjāt al-Atharīyah," in *Al-Kitāb al-Dhahabī lil-Iḥtifāl al-Khamsīnī bi-al-Dirāsāt al-Atharīyah bi-Jāmiʿat al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1978), 1:39–54; Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Rāziq, "Un document concernant le mariage des esclaves au temps des mamlūks," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 13 (1970): 309–14; idem, "ʿAqdā Nikāḥ min ʿAṣr al-Mamālīk al-Baḥrīyah," *Al-Majallah al-ʿArabīyah*

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Jewish marriage contracts, divorce litigation, and other evidence from the Geniza mostly predate the Mamluk period, but serve as an essential background for comparison.

Alongside the documentary evidence, there other types of legal sources from the Mamluk period which provide access to the gender dynamics within households. These include compilations of *responsa* by contemporary *muftī*s, mostly dealing with real-life cases; and descriptions of judicial proceedings in chronicles, some of which were composed by court officials. Special attention should also be given to legal manuals that reproduce models of common documents for the use of notaries.[14] Gender issues are also discussed by the authors of prescriptive treatises, with the *Madkhal* of the Cairene Maliki jurist Ibn al-Ḥājj (d. 737/1336–37) the best known example, thanks mainly to Huda Lutfi's often-cited and articulate discussion.[15] In all these types of legal sources women occupy a prominent place, as family law (along with commercial law) were the primary responsibilities of qadis and *muftī*s.

What follows here is a survey of those aspects of the social history of women, and the social dimensions of gender distinctions between men and women, that have already been studied by Mamluk historians. The goal is to identify basic social and legal structures that appear crucial to the understanding of gender practices in urban Mamluk society. These include, in the following order: slave-girls and concubines; women in the urban economy; marriage, divorce and polygamy; educational and religious activities.[16] I will attempt, as much as possible, to cover all classes of urban society, from the royal palace to the poor, as obviously men and women interacted differently at different levels of society. I will also highlight

lil-ʿUlūm al-Insānīyah (Kuwait) 6 (1986): 68–88; A. Grohmann, "Einige arabische Ostraka und ein Ehevertrag aus der Oase Baḥriya," in *Studi in onore di Aristide Calderini e Roberto Paribeni* (Milan, 1957), 2:499–509; A. Dietrich, "Eine arabische Eheurkunde aus der Aiyūbidenzeit," in *Documenta Islamica Inedita,* ed. J. Fück (Berlin, 1952), 121–54; W. Diem, "Vier arabische Rechtsurkunden aus Ägypten des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts," *Der Islam* 72 (1994): 193–257.

[14] The most important are Gabriela Guellil, *Damaszener Akten des 8./14. Jahrhunderts nach at-Tarsusis Kitāb al-Iʿlām, Eine Studie zum arabischen Justizwesen* (Bamberg, 1985); al-Asyūṭī, *Jawāhir al-ʿUqūd wa-Muʿīn al-Quḍāh wa-al-Muwaqqiʿīn wa-al-Shuhūd* (Cairo, 1955); Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥasanī al-Jarawānī, "Mawāhib al-Ilāhīyah wa-al-Qawāʿid al-Mālikīyah," Chester Beatty MS 3401.

[15] Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Madkhal ilá Tanmiyat al-Aʿmāl bi-Taḥsīn al-Niyyāt* (Cairo, 1929–32); Huda Lutfi, "Manners and Customs of Fourteenth-Century Cairene Women: Female Anarchy versus Male Sharʿī Order in Muslim Prescriptive Treatises," in *Women in Middle Eastern History,* ed. Keddie and Baron, 99–121.

[16] Some of these subjects, such as marriage (but not polygamy), divorce, and the economic activities of women, are discussed in far greater detail, and from a considerably different perspective, in my *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (Cambridge, 2005).

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changes in the course of Mamluk history, suggesting that gender institutions underwent radical transformations during the fifteenth century.

As our opening story suggests, it is not only possible to write a history of women and gender for the Mamluk period, it may even be possible to get into the Mamluk bedroom. Mamluk authors produced quite an extensive literature on sex and erotica, which has not received sufficient attention.[17] As Robert Irwin rightly warns us, literary sexual topoi do not reflect actual sexual practices in Mamluk society, and there is definitely an element of stylization in Ibn Iyās' account. But a thorough scrutiny of the chronicles and the *fatāwá* collections will probably draw a distinction between sexual fantasies (interesting in themselves) and sexual practices. A connection between virginity and asceticism, or religious piety, crops up in a variety of contexts, and suggests that a "Christian" attitude with regard to the religious value of the sexual act may have had more influence than commonly assumed.[18] The frequent and extensive references to homosexuality in Mamluk sources have received some attention.[19] In this regard, Khaled El-Rouayheb's recent book on homosexual practices in the Ottoman period should prompt a similar project for the Mamluk period. In particular, El-Rouayheb's rejection of a "homosexual identity" in favor of social distinctions between active and passive sexual roles seems to be a useful framework of analysis for the medieval period as well.[20] Eunuchs have been studied as a social group and as symbolic mediators between spheres, not only male and female, but also the sacred and the profane.[21] A recent study of Mamluk attitudes towards hermaphrodites, another revealing

[17] Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Rāziq, "Al-Marʾah fī Kitābat al-Suyūṭī," in *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī,* ed. al-Majlis al-Aʿlá li-Riʿāyat al-Funūn wa-al-Ādāb wa-al-ʿUlūm al-Ijtimāʿīyah (Cairo, 1978), 195–219; Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam,* translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (London, 1985).

[18] Christopher Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden, 1998), 95; Y. Michot, "Un célibataire endurci et sa maman: Ibn Taymiyya (m. 728/1328) et les femmes," in *La femme dans les civilisations orientales et miscellanea aegyptologica: Christiane Desroches Noblecourt in honorem,* ed. Christian Cannuyer (Brussels, 2001), 165–90.

[19] Everett Rowson, "Two Homoerotic Narratives from Mamluk Literature: al-Ṣafadī's *Lawʿat al-Shākī* and Ibn Dāniyāl's *Mutayyam,*" in *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature,* ed. J. W. Wright and E. Rowson (New York, 1997), 158–91. For a less scholarly approach, see Stephen O. Murray, "Male Homosexuality, Inheritance Rules and the Status of Women in Medieval Egypt: The Case of the Mamluks," in S. Murray and W. Roscoe, *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History and Literature* (New York, 1997), 161–73.

[20] Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago and London, 2005).

[21] Shaun Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society* (Oxford, 1995); David Ayalon, *Eunuchs, Caliphs and Sultans: A Study in Power Relationships* (Jerusalem, 1999).

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border case of ambiguous sexuality, shows a surprising development over time. While in the early Mamluk period the transformation of girls into boys is a cause for public celebrations, there are later cases in which courts are asked to confirm a female sexual identity for persons who, by all outer appearances, were physically male.[22] All in all, a history of Mamluk sexual attitudes and practices is yet to be done, probably feasible, and certainly exciting.

This essay will have comparatively little to say about material culture, although there are a few studies of objects made for, and used by, Mamluk women. The surviving artifacts of Mamluk trousseaux have been surveyed by ʿAbd al-Rāziq and in a recent extensive monograph by al-Wakīl.[23] Both could serve as a good basis for a study that explores the specific social meanings attached to these artifacts. The studies of female attire by Mayer, and more recently, by Stillman, have drawn attention to the social significance of the fashion of urban women, and the state attempts to regulate it.[24] The best known example is the very long-sleeved chemise, which was prohibited in the aftermath of the Black Death, and again by the end of the fourteenth century. The motivations for the extensive sumptuary laws of the Mamluk regime are yet to be fully explained—was it a moral reaction to luxurious consumption or immodest and seductive clothes; was it an attempt to preserve class distinction; or was it fear of cross-dressing, as Mamluk women adopted the male-style *ṭāqīyah* headdress, or the *bughluṭāq* military coat? The Mamluk sumptuary regulation is remarkably similar to that attempted in the Italian towns of the Renaissance, and has potential as a fascinating research topic.

Finally, the literary representation of women in the Mamluk period has received much scholarly attention. There are some very insightful studies on the representation of gender in medieval Arabic literature, and studies of the *Arabian Nights* occupy several shelves at most research libraries.[25] Representations of

[22] Tamer el-Leithy, "Of Bodies Chang'd to Various Forms . . .: Hermaphrodites and Transsexuals in Mamluk Society" (unpublished paper, Princeton University, 2001).

[23] ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme;* Fāyizah al-Wakīl, *Al-Shiwār: Jihāz al-ʿArūs fī Miṣr fī ʿAṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk* (Cairo, 2001); see review by Vanessa De Gifis, *MSR* 7, no. 2 (2003): 247–50.

[24] L. A. Mayer, "Costumes of Mamluk Women," *Islamic Culture* 17 (1943): 293–303; Yedida Kalfon Stillman, *Arab Dress, A Short History: From the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times,* ed. Norman A. Stillman (Leiden, 2000), 75–83.

[25] Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, 1991); H. Kilpatrick, "Some Late ʿAbbasid and Mamluk Books about Women: A Literary Historical Approach," *Arabica* 42 (1995): 56–78; Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, "Some Notes on Women in Classical Arabic Literary Tradition," in *Proceedings of the 14th Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants,* pt. 2, 133–41; Asma Afsaruddin, "Reconstituting Women's Lives: Gender and the Poetics of Narrative in Medieval Biographical Collections," *The Muslim World* 92 (2002): 461–80; H. Lutfi, "The Construction of Gender Symbolism in Ibn Sīrīn's and Ibn Shāhīn's Medieval Arabic Dream Texts," *MSR* 9, no. 1 (2005): 123–61.

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women in Mamluk visual arts, on the other hand, have been far less explored. We have no explanation, for example, as to why Mamluk illuminations tend to show women fully wrapped and veiled, while contemporary illuminations from the eastern Islamic world mostly show unveiled women. But the study of the representation of women, whether in literature or in the visual arts, is still hampered by a lack of a coherent, specific historical context to which literary and art history studies could relate. This essay, I hope, will fill that gap.

Slave-Girls and Concubines

It is only appropriate to start our survey of Mamluk slave-girls with Shajar al-Durr, the only female ruler in Egypt's medieval history and the most famous woman from the Mamluk period. Scholarly accounts of Shajar al-Durr—of which there are quite a few, in considerable disproportion to the study of Mamluk women in general—have tended to follow conflicting modern agendas.[26] Feminist historians, such as Fatima Mernissi, have taken Shajar al-Durr as a symbol of women's independence and courage against male privilege, and, in particular, brought to the foreground her murder of Aybak as a female response to a polygamous marriage. More traditionalist historians have relegated her to the background, arguing that she was a mere puppet at the hands of the Mamluk officers, her value derived ultimately from her sexual liaison with al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb. Others have stressed her ethnic Turkish background, and used Shajar al-Durr's success to draw a line between an egalitarian Turkish and nomadic tradition which accepted female rulers, and a patriarchal Arab and Middle Eastern tradition which rejected them.[27] By subjecting Shajar al-Durr's historical figure to such ideological narratives, modern historians have followed the footsteps of their medieval counterparts. The later medieval chroniclers embellished Shajar al-Durr's image and added gory details (who can forget the maids who murder their victim with the famous wooden clogs?), so as to transform her story into a more universal parable of domestic strife; story-tellers recast Shajar al-Durr as a noble princess, ensuring her posthumous fame in the Romance of Baybars.[28]

From the perspective of the social historian, Shajar al-Durr's extraordinary career cannot be fully understood without looking at the institution of female slavery as a necessary complement to male slavery, which was equally integral

[26] David J. Duncan, "Scholarly Views of Shajarat al-Durr: A Need for Consensus," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 22 (2000): 51–69 (with a good bibliography).

[27] See also Amalia Levanoni, "Šagar ad-Durr: A Case of Female Sultanate in Medieval Islam," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras,* vol. 3, *Proceedings of the 6th, 7th and 8th International Colloquium,* ed. U. Vermeulen and J. Van Steenbergen (Leuven, 2001), 209–18.

[28] G. Schregle, *Die Sultanin von Ägypten: Šağarat ad-Durr in der arabischen Geschichtsschreibung und Literatur* (Wiesbaden, 1961).

DOI: 10.6082/M1X34VM5. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1X34VM5)

DOI of Vol. XI, no. 2: 10.6082/M19021V0. See https://doi.org/10.6082/Z7BW-SQ52 to download the full volume or individual articles.

to the working of the Mamluk military elite in its heyday. Among the military elite, female slaves and male slaves, like Shajar al-Durr and Baybars, did have quite a lot in common. Both Shajar al-Durr and Baybars were skillful political operators whose rise to power was, however, ultimately due to their place in the late sultan's household. In fact, both were among the select few who accompanied al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb to his imprisonment in Karak. Both were products of the same household system of slave recruitment and training, although men and women were, naturally, expected to fulfill different functions within these households, those of warriors and those of courtesans. What was unique about Shajar al-Durr's case—and in this perspective her career is unique, and deserves further study—was that she was allowed to cross the gender division within households, and to publicly take on political leadership in a way that was denied to later generations of concubines.

The recruitment of slave-girls in general, and of concubines in particular, was integral to the structure of the Mamluk military households. There are good indications that the number of female slaves in elite households was always at least as high as, and probably much higher than, the number of male slaves, and it would make sense to view Mamluk slavery as a primarily female phenomenon. Just as a select group of male slaves was trained in the military profession, a select group of slave-girls was trained to become courtesans. Tankiz, governor of Damascus for most of the first half of the fourteenth century, employed an agent in the lands of the Mongols who sought beautiful slave-girls for him. After their arrival in Damascus, some were placed in the care of Ibrāhīm Ṣārim, a famous musician, who taught the girls to play the lute.[29] These slaves were probably later enlisted in the household's musical band *(jūkah),* since during the fourteenth century every leading amir kept a band of ten to fifteen slave-girls.[30] The other slave-girls, presumably, had become concubines. Tankiz had at some point as many as nine slave concubines, each with her private retinue.[31]

The military elite regarded concubines, first and foremost, as a means to overcome the high rates of child mortality. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad himself is probably the most outstanding example, being survived by fifteen sons.[32] The households of amirs were modeled on that of the sultan, and the role of concubines there was

[29] See al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān,* 1:82 (for the musician), 2:300 (for the agent, Ḥamzah al-Turkumānī).

[30] Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1929–72), 11:380; cited by ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 55.

[31] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān,* 2:565.

[32] P. M. Holt, "An-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (684–741/1285–1341): His Ancestry, Kindred and Affinity," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras,* vol. 1, *Proceedings of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd International Colloquium,* ed. Vermeulen and Van Steenbergen (Leuven, 1995), 313–24.

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similar. Sunqur al-Nūrī (d. 736/1335), a governor of several towns in northern Syria, had as many as sixty concubines. When he died he left twenty-one children.[33] A similar number of concubines were found in Qawsūn's mansion in Cairo in 742/1341.[34] Many of the amirs' wives were themselves manumitted slave-girls. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad used to marry off his slave-girls to leading officers as means of consolidating their loyalty. There is no indication that children born of free women did better than children of concubines, and it is clear that all of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's progeny, whether born of free women or slave-girls, were eligible to become sultans.

An anecdote regarding the household of the Amir Baktimur al-Sāqī (d. 733/1332) illustrates the parallels between the recruitment of male and female slaves. At the height of his career, Baktimur spent 10,000 dinars on the most renowned lute player of the time, a slave by the name of Khūbī. He lodged Khūbī in his mansion on the banks of Birkat al-Fīl, away from his wife, herself a former slave of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. When the wife heard about the new and expensive concubine, she asked permission to go and meet her. In preparation for the encounter, Khūbī dressed up in white and took off all her jewelry and make-up. When the wife asked for her name, Khūbī, instead of answering, started playing the lute. As she heard the music, the lady recognized Khūbī and embraced her, explaining to the attendant slave-girls that Khūbī was her *khushdāshah.*[35] The story itself is almost certainly apocryphal.[36] The important aspect is the reference to a bond of *khushdāshīyah* among female slaves who were trained together, mirroring the more famous bonds among male military slaves.

The career of Ittifāq, concubine and wife of three consecutive sultans around the middle of the fourteenth-century, is an exceptional success story, but is also instructive with regard to the opportunities open to a slave-girl in a military household. Ittifāq's starting point was inauspicious. She was a second-generation black slave who was not considered to be strikingly beautiful. She was trained in

[33] Al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh,* 3:920.

[34] Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah,* ed. ʿAdnān Darwīsh (Damascus, 1977–94), 2:229.

[35] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān,* 2:338. Following Baktimur's death, Khūbī was sold to Bashtāk for the extraordinary price of 6,000 dinars, but al-Ṣafadī noted that her jewelry and clothes were worth more than her price. Bashtāk did not treat her as kindly, and married her off to one of his mamluks.

[36] In its main features, the story bears a suspicious similarity to an anecdote concerning Zubaydah, wife of Hārūn al-Rashīd. Zubaydah was jealous of Hārūn's favorite singer. Hārūn then asked some of his wife's relatives to come and hear his new slave singer, so as to assure Zubaydah that Hārūn was only enjoying her artistic skills. As a token of apology for her unfounded jealousy, Zubaydah sent her husband ten concubines (Nabia Abbott, *Two Queens of Baghdad: Mother and Wife of Harun al-Rashid* [Chicago, 1946], 139; Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* [New Haven, 1992], 84).

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the provincial town of Bilbays by the local female Head of the Singers *(ḍāminat al-maghānī)* who sold her to the *ḍāminat al-maghānī* of Cairo for the unexceptional sum of 400 dirhams. In Cairo she studied with a renowned lute player, and was then presented to the royal household of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, where she acquired fame for her wonderful voice. Moreover, the sultan's son and future successor, al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl, fell in love with her and married her (the chroniclers say that he had a weakness for black slave-girls). After his deposition, she was married to his brother and heir, al-Kāmil Shaʿbān. The next sultan, al-Muẓaffar Ḥājjī, initially confiscated her property and banished her from the Citadel. Later, however, he too decided to marry her. After his death she married a civilian government official, and was eventually married off to a Marinid sultan who passed through Cairo.[37] Like a male mamluk who could hope to become sultan, a female slave of humble origins could hope to become a sultan's wife.

The possession of concubines was not restricted to the military elite, but was also rather widespread in other segments of urban society, especially in the first half of the fourteenth century. Al-Ṣafadī speaks with admiration about his friend the jurist Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad al-Zarʿī (d. 741/1342), who on Fridays would alternately frequent the slave market and the book market, thus cultivating the pleasures of both body and mind. His association with Turkish slave-girls was such that he learned to speak their language.[38] ʿAbd al-Laṭīf ibn ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Subkī (d. 788/1386), a nephew of Taqī al-Dīn, was also known to have a weakness for slave-girls. He is said to have had sex with more than one thousand.[39] In most reports on concubinage among the civilian elite, it is the sexual aspect that is emphasized.[40] The wealthier members of this class, like ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (d. 743/1342–43), kept a constant stock of concubines; he had four slaves who bore him children and acquired the status of *ummahāt awlād*, as well as six transient concubines, whom he would exchange in the slave market every now and then.[41]

[37] Ittifāq has already attracted the attention of Robert Irwin, who described her as "the Lola Montez of her age" (*The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate, 1250–1382* [London, 1986]), 130, 133). See also ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 285, and the sources cited there.

[38] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān,* 1:45; literally, al-Ṣafadī says that his friend combined the pleasure of the pearl with that of the stars *(al-durr wa-al-darārī)*.

[39] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbaʾ al-Ghumr bi-Abnāʾ al-ʿUmr* (Beirut, 1967–75), 2:239.

[40] Shihāb al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Salām Ibn Abī ʿAṣrūn (d. ca. 631/1234), a Syrian bureaucrat and jurist, had more than twenty concubines. We are told that "his limbs dried up from excessive sexual intercourse" (Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʾāt al-Zamān* [Hyderabad, 1951–52], 8:692). Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd, chief Shafiʿi qadi at the end of the thirteenth century, was also known to be fond of slave concubines (al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān,* 4:582).

[41] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān,* 2:726.

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Many of these slave concubines would have been of Muslim origin. In a query sent to Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, an anonymous questioner expressed doubts about the legality of purchasing concubines. He states that "in our days, everyone, including the scholars and the virtuous, take slave-girls as concubines." But these men are committing a crime, for "they all know with certitude that these slave-girls must have been Muslims in their countries of origin." Al-Subkī's answer was informed by his perception of social realities. First, he noted that sale of Muslim slave-girls is legal as long as there is even the slightest possibility of them being the descendants of slaves, Muslim or non-Muslim. (In Islamic law, a freeborn Muslim could not be enslaved, but servile status is passed on in inheritance.) But his final and most decisive argument is based on the interests of the slave-girl herself. It is she who needs maintenance and protection, and if we do not allow her to be enslaved and sold, she would starve.[42] Whether many female slaves, if any, subscribed to this view, we do not know.

It should also be emphasized that not all slave-girls were concubines. In fact, concubines must have formed only a minority among the thousands of slave-girls that were sold on the markets of Cairo and Damascus. Many slave-girls served as personal attendants to female mistresses.[43] Others were employed as domestics. Al-Sakhāwī devoted a short biographical entry to Abrak al-Sinīn, his domestic servant, from her purchase in 872/1467–68 until her death in 893/1488.[44] Some were skilled professionals. Among the hundreds of slave-girls in the possession of Fahkr al-Dīn Mājid Ibn Khaṣīb (d. 762/1360), two were famous chefs.[45] The slave-girls destined for sexual services were easily distinguishable from the rest. Unlike other slave-girls, custom required that concubines should be veiled when they appeared in public; and while most slave-girls were probably black, a disproportionate number of concubines were of Turkish origins.[46]

[42] Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Kitāb al-Fatāwá* (Cairo, 1937), 2:281–85.

[43] In 1483, Felix Fabri met in Gaza a couple of aristocratic Turkish ladies, each accompanied by an Ethiopian female attendant (*The Wanderings of Felix Fabri,* trans. Aubrey Stewart, The Library of the Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, vols. 7–10 [London, 1897], 9:444). The role of slave-girls as attendants is also evident in the Cairo Geniza. See S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Geniza* (Berkeley, 1967–93), 1:130–47.

[44] Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ,* 12:5 (no. 24).

[45] Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Maʿrifat al-Duwal wa-al-Mulūk,* ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafá Ziyādah and Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ ʿĀshūr (Cairo, 1934–72), 3:59. In 661/1263, Baybars sent two female chefs as a gift to Berke Khan of the Golden Horde (al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-Jumān fī Tārīkh Ahl al-Zamān: ʿAṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk,* ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn [Cairo, 1987–], 1:362; cited by ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 55).

[46] Ibn Taymīyah explains that, due to the corruption of society, one cannot allow beautiful Turkish slave-girls to go around unveiled (*Fatāwá al-Nisāʾ lil-Shaykh al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Taymīyah,* ed.

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DECLINE OF FEMALE SLAVERY?

In contrast to the first half of the fourteenth century, when the supply of slave-girls to Near Eastern cities appears to have reached a peak, the number of concubines in military households steadily decreased in the fifteenth century. By the end of the Mamluk period no one—not even the sultans—kept concubines in numbers that were even close to those mentioned for the early fourteenth century. In a study of Syrian amirs' endowment deeds from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Michael Winter found no one who had more than one *umm walad*. Again, some of the amirs' wives were their former slave-girls.[47] The royal household underwent a dramatic shift in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Sultan Īnāl (r. 1453–61) had no concubines at all, or at least none that bore him children.[48] Qāytbāy did not have any concubines until the last years of his life. He started to take concubines when he faced a problem that no former Mamluk sultan had ever encountered: as a direct result of his marital policy, Qāytbāy found himself with no surviving children.[49]

As far as we can rely on our sources for demographic trends, there is good reason to believe that the supply of slave-girls was severely affected by the recurrences of the Black Death from the middle of the fourteenth century onwards. Al-Maqrīzī cites the records of the Bureau of Escheat for the Plague outbreak in Cairo in 822/1419, which show that slave-girls were hit more severely than any other group except children. According to the numbers cited by al-Maqrīzī, 1,369 female slaves died in Cairo during the three months of the Plague, compared with 544 male slaves; taken together, more slaves died in Cairo during this period than free adult Muslims.[50] While these numbers again indicate that female slaves were far more common than male slaves, they also affirm Ayalon's point that slaves, like all foreigners, were more vulnerable to the Plague than the native population.[51]

Aḥmad al-Sāʾiḥ [Cairo, 1988], 79). See also Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Iʿlām al-Muwaqqiʿīn ʿan Rabb al-ʿĀlamīn,* ed. Ṭāhā ʿAbd al-Raʾūf Saʿd (Beirut, 1964), 2:80.

[47] Michael Winter, "Mamluks and Their Households in Late Mamluk Damascus: A *Waqf* Study," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and History,* ed. Levanoni and Winter, 297–316.

[48] Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 2:368, 3:156; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ,* 12:44 (no. 261).

[49] The last of Qāytbāy's children from his wife Fāṭimah died in 873/1469 (Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith al-Duhūr fī Madá al-Ayyām wa-al-Shuhūr,* ed. William Popper [Berkeley, 1932], 8:705).

[50] According to al-Maqrīzī, 1,734 free adult Muslims died in the three months of the Plague (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 4:492; cited by Michael Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* [Princeton, 1977], 178).

[51] David Ayalon, "The Plague and Its Effects upon the Mamluk Army," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1946): 67–73; Dols, *The Black Death,* 185–89. For similar conclusions about the effects of the Plague on the supply of slaves in the Eastern Mediterranean, see Kate Fleet, *European and Islamic Trade in the Early Ottoman State: The Merchants of Genoa and Turkey* (Cambridge, 1999),

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There are some indications of a shortage of female slaves, although these are inconclusive. The musical bands of slave-girls, a status symbol for fourteenth-century military households, disappeared. Ibn Taghrībirdī, writing in the latter half of the fifteenth century, had to explain to his readers that musical bands of slave-girls existed in the previous century.[52] In the late fifteenth century one encounters musical bands composed of Arab—that is, freeborn—singers.[53] In fact, from the second half of the fourteenth century, campaigns against rebellious Bedouin tribes often ended with the enslavement of their womenfolk and children.[54] This practice was condemned by scholars, but most probably allowed to go on because of the demands of the slave markets. White, or Turkish, female slaves became especially dear. The wars with the Ottomans may have resulted in a real shortage of non-African slaves in the last decades of the century.[55] When Burhān al-Dīn Ibn Abī Sharīf, a native of Jerusalem, came to Damascus in 904/1498–99, he had to make do with a black slave-girl.[56]

The prices of slave-girls appear to have been fairly stable, except for a possible rise at the end of the fifteenth century. The Ḥaram documents show that at the end of the fourteenth century one could still buy an Ethiopian female slave for a mere 300 dirhams (about 12 dinars), while the highest price mentioned is 550 dirhams (about 22 dinars).[57] These prices are slightly lower than those quoted for the first half of the century.[58] The evidence for the fifteenth century is too scanty

45, 49.

[52] Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 11:380.

[53] Al-Sakhāwī says that during the 1470s, the amir Yashbak min Mahdī tried to prevent provincial governors from hiring bands *(ajwāq)* of Bedouin singers (*Ḍawʾ,* 10:272).

[54] Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh,* 2:673 (a campaign by the governor of Gaza, 750/1349); al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 4:396 (campaign in Upper Egypt, 820/1417); Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 3:240 (campaign in Upper Egypt, 892/1487). On peasant families in Upper Egypt selling their children into slavery during the famine of 1402–4, see Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250–1517* (Cambridge, 2000), 168. See also ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 50, for Arab female slaves sold in Cairo in 923/1516.

[55] The Ottomans imposed an embargo on the traffic in slaves during the war of 1485–91 (Shai Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East: The Ottoman-Mamluk War, 1485–91* [Leiden, 1995], 198; cites Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 3:206).

[56] Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahat al-Khilān fī Ḥawādith al-Zamān* (Cairo, 1962–64), 1:212.

[57] Donald Little, "Two Fourteenth-Century Court Records from Jerusalem Concerning the Disposition of Slaves by Minors," *Arabica* 29 (1982): 16–49; idem, "Six Fourteenth-Century Purchase Deeds for Slaves from al-Ḥaram Aš-Šarīf," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 131 (1981): 297–337. All these records refer to African slave-girls.

[58] A female slave-girl, who was the concubine of a murder victim, was sold in 730/1330 for 800 dirhams (40 dinars) (al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh,* 3:287). As noted above, Ittifāq was sold to the Head of the Singers in Cairo for 400 dirhams (20 dinars). In two Geniza documents dating from the early Mamluk period, the prices mentioned for an African slave-girl are 260 dirhams *nuqrah* (20 dinars)

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to allow definitive conclusions.[59] Al-Zawāwī, a Maghribi mystic visiting Cairo, of whom more is said below, agreed to buy a Turkish slave-girl, supposedly a virgin, for 85 dinars. [60] Von Harff, as late as 1497, states that male and female Christian slaves are sold for 15 to 30 ducats.[61] Around the same time, a price of almost 40 dinars is mentioned in a question put to a jurist.[62] All in all, and in view of the prices paid for slaves in fifteenth-century Italian and Anatolian cities, it is likely that prices in Egypt and Syria had gone up.[63]

Fifteenth-century literary sources indicate that men of modest background kept a concubine as a *substitute* for a wife. ʿAlī al-Manūfī (d. 896/1491), for example, a poor tailor and mosque attendant, had three children from a slave.[64] ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ḥasanī (d. 870/1465), a mathematician of apparently modest income, never married but took a slave as a concubine.[65] The dream diaries of the fifteenth-century Maghribi mystic Al-Zawāwī reveal his preference for a concubine over a wife. When al-Zawāwī considers the prospect of marriage, the Prophet tells him in his dream that in marriage he would become a slave to his bride. The Prophet later suggested that al-Zawāwī should purchase an Ethiopian slave-girl, because the Ethiopians tend to be kinder and better companions, but al-Zawāwī was fixed on a Turkish slave, reputedly better at child-bearing, and a marker of status. When he finally made up his mind, he found an opportunity to purchase a pretty Turkish slave, who was allegedly a virgin, for an exorbitant price of 85 dinars. As is common in al-Zawāwī's diary, his long dithering came to nothing, and the sale never went through.[66]

In the fifteenth century, the attitude towards concubines had also changed, and they were—like wives—respected more for their skills and piety than for

and 25 dinars (Eliyahu Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages* [Berkeley, 1976], 360–61; ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 49).

[59] Ashtor's assertion that there was no increase in the price of male and female slaves, apart from military slaves, seems to be based on very thin evidence (Ashtor, *Social and Economic History,* 361).

[60] Jonathan G. Katz, *Dreams, Sufism, and Sainthood: The Visionary Career of Muhammad al-Zawâwî* (Leiden, 1996), 119.

[61] Arnold von Harff, *The Pilgrimage of the Knight Arnold von Harff,* trans. M. Letts (London, 1946), 79.

[62] Zakarīyā al-Anṣārī, *Al-Iʿlām wa-al-Ihtimām bi-Jamʿ Fatāwá Shaykh al-Islām Abī Yaḥyá Zakarīyā al-Anṣārī,* ed. Aḥmad ʿUbayd (Beirut, 1984), 124.

[63] See Fleet, *European and Islamic Trade,* 39–45, 147–49; Halil İnalcık, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914* (Cambridge, 1994), 1:284; Ashtor, *Social and Economic History,* 498–504.

[64] Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ,* 6:48 (no. 131).

[65] Ibid., 5:243.

[66] Katz, *Dreams,* 117–20.

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their looks and voice. Al-Maqrīzī went to buy a concubine when he was single. He ended up purchasing a fifteen-year-old slave-girl who had been brought up in the royal household. Al-Maqrīzī taught the girl, whom he named Sūl, to read and write and even to compose poetry. Apparently, she never bore him children. He later freed her, and she traveled to Mecca where she died at the age of forty.[67] Another striking example of this change in attitude towards concubines is the biography of Bulbul (Nightingale), a slave-girl of the Damascene scholar Yūsuf Ibn al-Mibrad. Her biography is known to us from a short work Ibn al-Mibrad composed in her memory, entitled *Laqaṭ al-Sunbul fī Akhbār al-Bulbul* (Gleanings from the life of the nightingale).[68] Ibn al-Mibrad depicts Bulbul as a virtuous, modest, and learned woman. Even when Ibn al-Mibrad's brother personally invited her to his wedding, she refused to go, claiming that she swore never to leave the house. She refused to wear an expensive *sinjāb* fur that Ibn al-Mibrad bought her as a gift, citing her master's own legal opinions against the use of this material.[69] We know that Ibn al-Mibrad often read for her, as her name appears on most of his surviving autograph manuscripts.[70] She died in 883/1479, after spending ten years with Ibn al-Mibrad and bearing him a boy and a girl.

If Shajar al-Durr or Ittifāq, singer and royal concubine of three sultans, are emblematic of successful slave-girls in the earlier period, Bulbul's biography projects very different attitudes. The ideal slave-girl was no more the beautiful and witty courtesan, but rather the pious and industrious housewife.

Women and the Economy

In his biography of his slave-girl Bulbul, Ibn al-Mibrad notes that her last act of charity was to leave a bequest for the poor, the money coming from the profits she gained as a spinner. By working as a spinner and spending her earnings as she saw fit, Bulbul resembled many free women in Mamluk urban society, who worked for wages regardless of their marital status. Medieval sources, written by and for men, do not pay adequate attention to the economic activities of women, and often leave us with a distorted image—not only of women's financial independence, but of the functioning of the economy as a whole. This was partly because the contributions of women were often carried out within exclusively female economic spheres. In the framework of a heavily gendered economy, the

[67] Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw',* 12:66 (no. 404).

[68] Included in Ibn al-Mibrad, *Akhbār al-Nisā' al-Musammá al-Rusá lil-Ṣāliḥāt min al-Nisā',* ed. Māhir Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir (Homs, 1993), 17 ff.

[69] On the legal debate over this squirrel fur, see Elizabeth M. Sartain, *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background* (Cambridge, 1975), 1:202, n. 11; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw',* 8:97 (no. 197).

[70] See the remarks by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Sulaymān al-ʿUthaymīn in his introduction to Ibn al-Mibrad*, Al-Jawhar al-Munaḍḍad fī Ṭabaqāt Muta'akhkhirī Aṣḥāb Aḥmad* (Cairo, 1987), 37.

DOI: 10.6082/M1X34VM5. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1X34VM5)

DOI of Vol. XI, no. 2: 10.6082/M19021V0. See https://doi.org/10.6082/Z7BW-SQ52 to download the full volume or individual articles.

boundary between economic roles was quite rigid: artisan women spun, artisan men wove; rich daughters received trousseaux, while the sons of the elite acquired positions in public institutions. As the circumstances of elite women were very different from those of women of the lower classes, the following survey will treat the two groups separately.

ELITE WOMEN, LAND, AND TROUSSEAUX[71]

In contrast to the preceding Ayyubid period, Mamluk political institutions were distinguished by the exclusion of elite women from landed revenue. Female members of the Ayyubid family received hereditary appanages as late as the middle of the thirteenth century,[72] and Ayyubid women's unusual prominence among patrons of public institutions was a tangible result of this direct access to landed property.[73] During the second half of the thirteenth century, however, the Mamluk sultans confiscated or bought much of the privately owned land and then distributed it as *iqṭāʿ*. As revenue from land was increasingly tied to military service, elite women were marginalized. The career of Khātūn, daughter of the Ayyubid ruler of Damascus al-Malik al-Ashraf Mūsá, illustrates the way Ayyubid women were stripped of their landed assets.[74] In 685/1286, when Khātūn was in her seventies, officials in the Syrian administration went to court and claimed that she had been in a state of mental incompetence *(sifh)* when she sold her lands in several villages near Damascus thirty years earlier. The proofs brought by the state's representatives were accepted, Khātūn was deemed to be unqualified to dispose of her property, and the sale was retroactively invalidated.

As more and more land was alienated in favor of the state, and as the economic activity of elite women was subject to increasing controls, the number of public institutions founded by women fell dramatically. Against the twenty-six religious and charitable institutions women established during less than a century of Ayyubid rule in Damascus, only four were founded in the following century. In Cairo the womenfolk of the royal court had more of a chance to contribute to the city's landscape, especially in the days of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. Urdutekin

[71] See also Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce,* 12–30.

[72] R. S. Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 371–5, 415; H. Rabie, *The Financial System of Egypt, AH 564–741/1169–1341* (Oxford University Press, 1972), 42–3.

[73] R. Stephen Humphreys, "Women as Patrons of Religious Architecture in Ayyubid Damascus," *Muqarnas* 11 (1994): 35–54. See also Yasser Tabbaa, "Ḍayfa Khātūn, Regent Queen and Architectural Patron," in *Women, Patronage and Self-Representation in Islamic Societies,* ed. D. Fairchild Ruggles (Albany, 2000).

[74] Jacqueline Sublet, "La folie de la princesse Bint al-Ašraf (un scandale financier sous les mamelouks bahris)," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 27 (1974): 45–50.

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bint Nogāy, the Mongol wife of the sultan, funded the establishment of a tomb for her son by endowing tenement houses, a covered market, two bathhouses, and agricultural land.[75] Sitt Ḥadaq, a slave and wet-nurse who became the senior governess in al-Nāṣir's court, established a mosque that has survived to our day.[76] Overall, however, women's representation among the patrons of public buildings in Cairo remained low.

While elite women were excluded from control over land, they still had a claim to a share in their parents' wealth, mainly in the form of trousseaux, "personal items," or heirlooms. These trousseaux (or dowries) functioned as a form of pre-mortem inheritance reserved exclusively for daughters, through a devolutionist mechanism.[77] The trousseau was primarily a transaction between parents and daughters, not between bride and groom. Once it was donated by the bride's parents, it remained under the woman's exclusive ownership and control throughout marriage, and then again through widowhood and divorce. The absolute separation of property between husbands and wives, enshrined by Islamic law, meant that husbands had no formal right over their wives' trousseaux. The high value of these trousseaux is evident from the beginning of the fourteenth century, and should not be underestimated; for many elite women large trousseaux did mean financial security, and in some cases it was the husband who depended on his wife's trousseau rather than the other way around.[78]

A series of Ḥaram documents provides a very explicit illustration of workings of the devolutionist model in Mamluk society. When Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ḥamawī, a wealthy merchant from Jerusalem, became terminally ill in 788/1386, he acknowledged a gift of 10,000 dirhams to his adolescent son, Muḥammad. At the same time, Nāṣir al-Dīn also acknowledged that he had endowed his daughter Fāṭimah with a trousseau, also in the value of 10,000 dirhams. Nāṣir al-Dīn noted that the money was spent on personal effects, as is the custom in trousseaux *(dhālika ḥawāʾij ʿalá ʿādat al-jihāz)*. Fāṭimah received her dowry in the form of a trousseau—"personal effects," such as copper utensils, furniture, and clothing.

[75] Howyda al-Harithy, "Female Patronage of Mamluk Architecture in Cairo," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 1 (1994): 157–59.

[76] Caroline Williams, "The Mosque of Sitt Ḥadaq," *Muqarnas* 11 (1994): 55–64; ʿAbd al-Rāziq, "Trois fondations féminines dans l'Égypte mamelouke," *Revue d'études islamiques* 41 (1973): 97–126.

[77] J. Goody, "Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Euroasia," in *Bridewealth and Dowry,* ed. Goody and Tambiah (Cambridge, 1973). See also M. Botticini and Aloysius Siow, "Why Dowries?" *American Economic Review* 93, no. 4 (2003): 1385–98.

[78] Fāyizah al-Wakīl, *Al-Shiwār: Jihāz al-ʿArūs fī Miṣr fī ʿAṣr al-Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk* (Cairo, 2001); see review by Vanessa de Gifis, *MSR* 7, no. 2 (2003): 247–250. For a list of royal trousseaux see ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 150–51.

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But the value of her trousseau, or dowry, was exactly equal to the cash gift given to her brother.[79]

Trousseaux and grants of *iqṭāʿ* were also seen as two complementary gender-specific mechanisms of transmitting property, as is seen in the following anecdote regarding the re-distribution of *iqṭāʿ* following the outbreak of the Plague. Faced with high mortality rates among the *iqṭāʿ* holders, the vice-regent of Egypt handed over the *iqṭāʿ* of deceased soldiers to one of their surviving sons. When a soldier's widow prostrated before the vice-regent and told him that her husband left her with only two daughters, the vice-regent sold the deceased soldier's *iqṭāʿ* to another officer for 12,000 dirhams. He then gave the money to the widow, telling her to use it to provide trousseaux for her two daughters.[80]

This pattern of dividing the patrimony along gender lines between daughters and sons was common among Mamluk military and religious urban elites. Giving a trousseau to a daughter was one side of the coin, for at the same time daughters were not allowed to inherit other parts of a family's patrimony, reserved exclusively for sons. Male members of the military elite had a right to hold an *iqṭāʿ* in return for their services. Among the religious elite, sons had a similar right to inherit office from their fathers.[81] The many examples of *nuzūl,* or "handing down," of offices from fathers to sons that are found in the Mamluk sources demonstrate the gender-specific mechanism of inheritance among the elite. While the trousseau was, by definition, reserved exclusively for daughters, the right to hold office was fundamentally the prerogative of sons.

In the second half of the fourteenth century, however, the link between service and control of land began to loosen, and towards the end of the fifteenth century women appear again as major landholders. First, the Plague caused an inheritance windfall effect, benefiting those daughters of military and civilian elite households who survived. A treatise written in Damascus immediately following the first outbreak reveals an anxiety about the sudden surge in wealthy young heiresses.[82] The following decades saw a revival in female patronage of religious buildings, part of a general spate of building activity.[83] In Jerusalem, after a long

[79] Some of the documents were published by Kāmil al-ʿAṣalī, *Wathāʾiq Maqdisīyah Tārīkhīyah* (Amman, 1983–85), 2:83 (no. 25), 120 (no. 44); Little, *Catalogue,* 309. For an assessment of the documents relating to Nāṣir al-Dīn and his financial affairs, see ibid., 18; idem, "Six Fourteenth-Century Purchase Deeds."

[80] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān,* 2:86.

[81] Al-Subkī, *Fatāwá,* 2:224. See also the discussion in Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice,* 94 ff.

[82] Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Kitāb Tuḥfat al-Turk,* ed. M. Minasri (Damascus, 1997), 20.

[83] Dols, *The Black Death,* 270; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Patterns of Urban Patronage in Cairo: A Comparison between the Mamluk and the Ottoman Periods," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics*

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hiatus, women established at least three madrasahs.[84] In Cairo, female members of the military elite founded as many religious institutions in two decades as they had in the preceding century. These include Madrasat Umm al-Sulṭān, the most remarkable achievement of female patronage in Mamluk Cairo, established by the concubine mother of al-Ashraf Shaʿbān in 770/1368.[85]

A more long-term development was the re-entry of elite women into the land market. By and large, women were still excluded from holding official positions and collecting the tax revenues that came with them (although even this happened towards the end of the fifteenth century, when a widow of a Sufi shaykh was elected to head his *zāwiyah*).[86] Yet, the share of agricultural surplus that was channeled to these positions was gradually decreasing. More and more land was alienated to support endowments that were for the most part private or familial, although charitable in appearance.[87] The rapid growth of family endowment at the expense of *iqṭāʿ* allowed elite women greater access to landed revenue; they could—and did—become beneficiaries, administrators, and founders.

As beneficiaries, women profited from the establishment of endowments more often than not. Although many of the endowment deeds preserved in the legal literature explicitly state that males should receive twice the share of females,[88] some family endowments were intentionally designed to circumvent the Islamic inheritance law in order to improve the lot of daughters. Michael Winter concluded, based on a sample of preserved endowment deeds from late fifteenth-century Damascus, that the portions of what women obtained as beneficiaries are explicitly higher than what they would have received by the Quranic laws of inheritance. The reverse did occur, but is considerably rarer.[89]

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and Society, ed. Phillip and Haarmann (Cambridge, 1998), 229.

[84] See Mujīr al-Dīn al-ʿUlaymī, *Al-Uns al-Jalīl fi Tārīkh al-Quds wa-al-Khalīl* (Najaf, 1969), 2:36, 43. The endowment deed for the al-Bārūdīyah madrasah, established by Sufrā Khātūn bint Sharaf al-Dīn al-Bārūdī in 768/1367, has survived (Ḥaram no. 76; discussed in Little, "The Haram Documents as Sources for the Arts and Architecture of the Mamluk Period," *Muqarnas* 2 [1984]: 69).

[85] ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 22–23; al-Harithy, "Female Patronage," 161–67.

[86] Berkey, "Women and Islamic Education," 145. On the unusual appointment of a widow as shaykhah, see Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 3:233.

[87] See Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn, *Al-Awqāf wa-al-Ḥayāh al-Ijtimāʿīyah fī Miṣr, 648–923 H./1250–1517 M.* (Cairo, 1980); Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians?* 190–219; J.-C. Garcin and M. A. Taher, "Enquête sur le financement d'un *waqf* Égyptien du XVe siècle: Les comptes de Jawhār Lālā," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 38 (1995): 262–304.

[88] For examples of endowment deeds in which males receive twice the share of daughters, see al-Subkī, *Fatāwá,* 1:475, 484, 494, 500, 501, 511, 517; 2:9, 10, 29, 40, 50, 50, 72, 167, 168, 177, 183, 187; al-Anṣārī, *Al-Iʿlām,* 164, 165, 167, 168, 171, 175, 182, 185, 187, 189, 191.

[89] Winter, "Mamluks and Their Households," 297–316. For similar conclusions regarding endowment deeds in contemporary North Africa, see D. Powers, "The Mālikī Family Endowment:

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By the latter half of the fifteenth century, elite women were often nominated as administrators of their families' endowments. It is possible to identify thirty-eight individual women who served as administrators of family endowments in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Cairo, representing one-fifth of the total number of known administrators.[90] One leading example is Shaqrāʾ, daughter of the former sultan al-Nāṣir Faraj, who brought a lawsuit against an amir who refused to pay the rent on agricultural lands he had leased from her.[91] The same Shaqrāʾ also contested the control of the family's endowment with her sister's daughter Āsīyah.[92] There are many more examples from the late Mamluk period, clearly demonstrating that women were now trusted to manage family property. It should be emphasized that this phenomenon was not limited to the military elite, and therefore should not be seen as a response to political instability. It was rather a result of the general disassociation of landed revenue and service to the state, which meant that elite women were much more on an equal footing with regard to management of agricultural estates.

Fifteenth-century elite women were not only beneficiaries and administrators of endowments, but also a sizeable minority among the founders. Carl Petry has highlighted the economic career of the lifelong wife of Sultan Qāytbāy, Fāṭimah bint ʿAlī Ibn Khāṣṣbak (d. 909/1504). Fāṭimah started acquiring real estate in 878/1473, when she bought ten units of urban property and six agricultural tracts located in the Delta provinces of al-Gharbīyah, al-Sharqīyah, and al-Qalyūbīyah. According to the purchase deed, all of the six units had originally been held in the Army Bureau for distribution as *iqṭāʿ*. In the next thirty years Fāṭimah constantly bought urban and rural real estate, and continued to invest at the same rate even after the death of her husband—a clear indication that her hold over this property was real. The agricultural units formed between one third and one half of her overall investments, estimated to be several tens of thousands of dinars.[93]

Female founders of endowments appear to constitute about 15–20% of the total

Legal Norms and Social Practices," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25 (1993): 379–406.

[90] The data was collected from Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn, *Fihrist Wathāʾiq al-Qāhirah ḥattá Nihāyat ʿAṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk* (Cairo, 1981). The name of an endowment's administrator appears routinely in the documents, mainly in connection with sale of endowed property through *istibdāl*. Carl Petry estimated that women constituted almost 30% of the endowment administrators in this period ("Class Solidarity," 133).

[91] Petry, "Class Solidarity," 130; Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbāʾ al-Haṣr bi-Abnāʾ al-ʿAṣr,* ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1970), 471.

[92] Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ*, 3:79.

[93] Petry, "The Estate of al-Khuwand Faṭima al-Khāṣṣbakiyya."

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number of known founders in fifteenth-century Cairo.[94] As opposed to the grand institutions built following the first outbreak of the Plague, fifteenth-century elite women endowed relatively small family tombs and neighborhood mosques, of which little survived.[95] While married couples established only a small proportion of fifteenth-century endowments,[96] their mere existence demonstrates the changes that had occurred in the gender division of property among the elite. In contrast to the early Mamluk period, the lines dividing "male" and "female" types of property had become sufficiently blurred during the fifteenth century as to allow some husbands and wives to merge their assets into one marital fund.

Artisan Women[97]

The contribution of women to the urban economy has been largely marginalized by medieval and modern scholars. Most studies to date note the role of women in providing a limited range of gender-specific services.[98] We often read about women who performed services directly related to female life, such as midwives,[99] hairdressers,[100] washers of the dead,[101] and female attendants in baths and hospitals.[102] Female and male barbers performed a variety of services, like bloodletting, cleansing and whitening teeth, or removing excessive hair, mainly for women.[103] Some of these professions were considered quite profitable, and there is evidence that midwives and hairdressers were paid generously.[104] Free

[94] For a statistical analysis of late Mamluk endowment deeds preserved in Dār al-Wathā'iq in Cairo, see S. Denoix, "Pour une exploitation d'ensemble d'un corpus: Les Waqf mamelouks du Caire," in *Le Waqf dans l'espace islamique: outil de pouvoir socio-politique,* ed. R. Deguilhem (Damascus, 1995), 29–44.

[95] Al-Harithy, "Female Patronage," 159.

[96] See Amīn, *Fihrist,* nos. 163, 194, 247, 254, 389, 403–5, 428, 525, 526, 527, 529, 557, 560, 561.

[97] See also Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce,* 32–38.

[98] Goitein, *Mediterranean Society,* 1:127–30; Maya Shatzmiller, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World* (Leiden, 1994), 347–68.

[99] Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Madkhal,* 3:290; anonymous ninth/fifteenth-century Shafiʿi treatise on marriage, Chester Beatty MS 4665, fols. 28a–29b. See also ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 62, 83.

[100] ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 82, and the sources cited there.

[101] Ibid., 81; Lutfi, "Manners," 106; Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Madkhal,* 2:172, 3:246; Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *Maʿālim al-Qurbah fī Aḥkām al-Ḥisbah,* ed. R. Levy (Cambridge, 1938), 101–2.

[102] Female orderlies *(farrāshāt)* were employed in the hospital of Qalāwūn in the beginning of the fourteenth century (Sabra, *Poverty,* 76). On bath-attendants, see ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 44.

[103] Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Madkhal,* 4:105–7; ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 75, and the sources cited there.

[104] On the career of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's midwife, see al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 3:701. In one case, we are told that a hairdresser employed a slave-girl as her assistant (ibid., 3:939; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 1:521).

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women who provided non-skilled services, such as wet-nurses, had to compete with the unsalaried services of slave-girls.[105] Unlike later Ottoman households, there existed no class of salaried, free, domestic servants.[106] Prostitutes, who are frequently mentioned in Mamluk sources but not yet sufficiently studied, appear to have also been mostly recruited from the ranks of slaves brought to Mamluk cities. Ibn Dāniyāl's description of a Cairene procuress has been frequently translated and cited, and justly so, as it projects a very vivid image of the profession.[107]

Far less, however, has been written on the vast majority of women who worked in the production of textiles, traditionally "the main field of female remunerative occupation."[108] Spinning and embroidery were the female professions par excellence, as demonstrated in an anecdote told by the historian Ibn Kathīr. During a visit to Baalbek in 754/1353–54, Ibn Kathīr met a hermaphrodite who was brought up as a girl until the age of fifteen. Then a tiny penis appeared, and the local governor gave orders to celebrate the transformation of the girl into a man by bestowing upon him a military uniform. The young soldier boasted before Ibn Kathīr that he was "skilled in all the professions of women, including spinning, decorating with *ṭirāz* bands, and embroidery with gold and silver threads *(zarkāsh)*."[109] Girls were taught spinning and embroidery at a young age. Al-Jazarī mourns with sadness and pride two of his young nieces, who were not only beautiful and pious, but also excelled in the arts of embroidery and sewing.[110]

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[105] For a comprehensive study of wet-nurses in medieval Islam, see Avner Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses: Medieval Islamic Views on Breastfeeding and Their Social Implications* (Leiden, 1999). See also ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 83–85; Maya Shatzmiller, "Women and Wage Labour in the Medieval Islamic West," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40 (1997): 183–88.

[106] See the important contribution by Madeline Zilfi, "Servants, Slaves and the Domestic Order in the Ottoman Middle East," *Hawwa* 2, no. 1 (2004): 1–33.

[107] On prostitutes, see ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *La femme,* 45 ff. For Ibn Dāniyāl and his representation of the archetypical procuress, see Ibn Dāniyāl, *Kitāb Ṭayf al-Khayāl,* ed. Paul Kahle, with a critical apparatus by D. Hopwood (Cambridge, 1992), 22ff; Paul Kahle, "A Gypsy Woman in Egypt in the Thirteenth Century A.D.," *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 29 (1950): 11–15; Francesca M. Corrao, "Women Stories in the Mamluk Age: Loves and Struggles to Survive," in *Proceedings of the Arabic and Islamic Sections of the 35th International Congress of Asian and North African Studies (ICANAS),* ed. A. Fodor (Budapest, 1999), pt. 2, 101–10; Amila Buturović, "The Shadow Play in Mamluk Egypt," *MSR* 7, [no. 1] (2003): 169–71. See also Ibn Baydakīn al-Turkumānī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ fī al-Ḥawādith wa-al-Bidaʿ,* ed. Ṣubḥī Labīb (Wiesbaden, 1986), 163.

[108] Goitein, *Mediterranean Society,* 1:128. See also Shatzmiller, *Labour,* 352.

[109] Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah,* ed. Aḥmad Abū Mulḥim et al. (Beirut, 1994), 14:198. On the social reaction to hermaphrodites see Tamer al-Leithy, "Of bodies chang'd to various forms."

[110] The two sisters followed each other to the grave in 737/1336–37 (al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 3:976, 980).

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While most women spun at home, they did have to go out of the house to buy raw material and sell the finished product. Women congregated in front of the cotton and flax traders' shops, waiting for the carding process to be finished, and later sold the threads directly to the yarn trader, who weighed the finished product.[111] Alternatively, women brought their yarn to mosques, where they negotiated the prices with a male broker acting as their agent. The need of working women to go out was recognized by contemporary jurists. Widows and divorcées in their waiting period retained the right to leave their homes during the day in order to purchase raw material or sell the finished threads. At night these women were also allowed to go to neighbors' houses to spin together and chat.[112]

The Ḥaram documents, as studied by Huda Lutfi, are a rare indication of the extent of working women's contribution to the textile economy. While scribes identified nearly all men by their profession, they did so for only six women (about two percent), including two female water-carriers and one bath-attendant. The small ratio of women carrying occupational titles, however, is more an indication of cultural attitudes than an indication of the actual contribution of women to the workforce.[113] Lutfi tackled the problem of identifying women's occupations by examining ownership of tools, raw materials, or commercial quantities of finished products at the time of death. Even this categorization tends to underestimate female participation in the workforce, since women and men on their deathbed tended to pass on some of their possessions to relatives and friends.

Lutfi's survey shows that a large proportion of all women, maybe even the majority, were employed in the textile industry. Spinning tools, or remnants of crude or spun cotton and flax, were found in the estate inventories of 82 women, about 30 percent of all women. Some of these women owned spindles *(mirdan* or *mighzalah),* but the most frequently mentioned spinning tool was the spinning wheel (*dūlāb ghazl* or *rikkah*). This is a rare indication of the use of spinning wheels in the Mamluk period. It also shows the importance of spinning to poor

[111] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Naṣr al-Shayzarī, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah fī Ṭalab al-Ḥisbah,* ed. al-Sayyid al-Bāz al-ʿArīnī (Cairo, 1946), 69, 70; Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *Maʿālim al-Qurbah,* 225. Ibn al-Ukhūwah notes that spindle makers and flax traders have dealings mainly with women (*Maʿālim al-Qurbah,* 279).

[112] ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Muḥammad al-Rāfiʿī, *Al-ʿAzīz Sharḥ al-Wajīz,* ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad Muʿawwaḍ and ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd (Beirut, 1997), 9:510; al-Subkī, *Fatāwá,* 2:314–20. According to the established doctrine, the permission is only granted to single women who are not entitled to marital support.

[113] The small ratio of women identified by profession is comparable with the evidence from the comprehensive Florentine Catasto of 1427. The Catasto, a census of both rural and urban population, lists about 7,000 female-headed households. But only 270 of these women carry a professional title of any sort, mainly domestic servants, religious women, or beggars (D. Herlihy, *Opera Muliebri: Women and Work in Medieval Europe* [New York, 1990], 158–62). See also, for the Ottoman period, Zilfi, "Servants, Slaves and the Domestic Order."

DOI: 10.6082/M1X34VM5. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1X34VM5)

DOI of Vol. XI, no. 2: 10.6082/M19021V0. See https://doi.org/10.6082/Z7BW-SQ52 to download the full volume or individual articles.

women, as the purchase of a spinning wheel appears to have been a substantial investment. According to a record of the sale of one poor woman's chattels, a spinning wheel, together with small quantities of wheat, cotton, and yarn, fetched 20 dirhams. All her other assets put together, that is her utensils and clothes, were sold for a similar amount.[114]

The Ḥaram documents suggest that the great majority of women worked for wages. Rather than being on the margins of the urban economy, women formed the majority of the textile industry's workforce, supplying most of the unskilled labor at the early stages of production. In the Ḥaram documents we find more than three female spinners for every male weaver, and this is most probably an underestimate. In the contemporary European textile industry, which was at a comparable technological level, one weaver required up to fifteen spinners to supply him with threads.[115]

All in all, Mamluk sources reveal widespread participation of women in the labor force, and a normative attitude towards women who worked to earn their living. The same is true for the Jewish community of the Geniza, where women's remunerative work became more widespread during the Mamluk period, eventually becoming the norm.[116] The explanation for the normative attitude towards female labor, among both Muslims and Jews, may be sought in the expansion and technological innovation of the contemporary textile industry. The volume of textile production significantly increased in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[117] This was also a period of technological innovation. The introduction of the draw-loom in the middle of the thirteenth century facilitated the weaving of repeat patterns, large figures, and inscriptions.[118] The introduction of Asiatic spinning wheels, which represented a limited technical improvement

[114] Lutfi, *Al-Quds,* 64–67.

[115] Claudia Opitz, "Life in the Late Middle Ages," in *A History of Women in the West,* ed. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (Cambridge, MA, 1992), vol. 2, *Silences of the Middle Ages,* 304. Another study puts the number of carders and spinners required to supply thread to one weaver at twenty (M. Wiesner, "Spinsters and Seamstresses: Women in Cloth and Clothing Production," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: the Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe,* ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers [Chicago, 1986], 194).

[116] Goitein, *Mediterranean Society,* 3:132–35.

[117] For general summary, see Bethany J. Walker, "Rethinking Mamluk Textiles," *MSR* 4 (2000): 167–95.

[118] Ibid., 174 ff. L. Mackie, "Towards an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations," *Muqarnas* 2 (1984): 127–46. For a reference to the use of the draw-loom in the Dār al-Ṭirāz in Alexandria in 770/1369, see Muḥammad Ibn al-Qāsim al-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām bi-al-Iʿlām fīmā Jarat bihi al-Aḥkām wa-al-Umūr al-Muqḍīyah fī Waqʿat al-Iskandrīyah,* ed. A. S. Atiyya (Hyderabad, 1968–76), 6:4; cited by Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīz Marzūq, *History of Textile Industry in Alexandria, 331 BC–1517 AD* [Alexandria, 1955], 65–67).

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over the spindle, may also have contributed to an expansion in the production of textiles.[119] Since the vast majority of working women participated in the production of textiles, the expansion of the industry and the introduction of the spinning wheel may have meant working women had more opportunities to participate in the urban economy.

Marriage, Polygamy, and Divorce

Ṣadāq and Nafaqah[120]

Contrary to popular conceptions of marriage in traditional Muslim societies, and in spite of the emphasis placed in Islamic law on the gifts of the groom, Mamluk society was a dotal society, i.e., a society where the dowry, or trousseau, brought by the bride was the substantial gift at marriage.[121] The significance of these trousseaux for elite women has been discussed above. The grooms were required to pledge a marriage gift (*mahr* or *ṣadāq*), but it was much smaller than the dowry, and for the most part deferred as a security for divorcées and widows. The groom's marriage gifts were normally specified in cash, and divided into advance and deferred portions, with the advance payments almost always smaller than the deferred portion.[122] By the thirteenth century it had become common to divide the deferred portion into yearly installments. These methods of payment and others appear together in various combinations. Each marriage contract was different, and the parties to the contract were at liberty to choose the financial arrangements as they saw fit.

Of particular importance are marriage contracts, more common in the later Mamluk period, which designated a portion of the marriage gift as due debt *(ḥall)* "payable upon demand." This term is found in documents and legal literature from the second half of the thirteenth century.[123] By the middle of the fourteenth century it was standard practice in Damascus to designate part of the marriage

[119] Lutfi, *Al-Quds,* 297. A woman working with a spinning wheel appears in a thirteenth-century illustration of the *Maqāmāt* (Ahmed Y. al-Hassan and Donald R. Hill, *Islamic Technology: an Illustrated History* [Cambridge, 1986], 186). There are no references to spinning wheels in the Geniza (Goitein, *Mediterranean Society,* 1:99). Ibn al-Ukhūwah, writing in the beginning of the fourteenth century, discusses the proper manufacture of a spindle *(mirdan),* but does not refer to spinning wheels (*Maʿālim al-Qurbah,* 279).

[120] See also Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce,* 51–68.

[121] For dotal regimes in medieval Europe, see Martha Howell, *The Marriage Exchange: Property, Social Place and Gender in Cities of the Low Countries, 1300–1500* (Chicago, 1998), 197–212, and the references cited there.

[122] This was true also for Jewish marriage contracts. See Goitein, *Mediterranean Society,* 3:122.

[123] The earliest mention of the term comes from an Egyptian marriage contract dated 677/1278, where the *ṣadāq* is divided into a due portion of 100 dirhams and ten yearly installments of 40 dirhams (ʿAbd al-Rāziq, "ʿAqdā Nikāḥ").

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gifts as payable upon demand.[124] This new feature of marriage contracts attracted the attention of Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭarsūsī (d. 758/1357), the chief Hanafi qadi of the city, who devoted a treatise to the interpretation of the clause. According to his view, a "payable upon demand" stipulation allows the wife to demand payment at any time during the marriage, and the qadi should send the husband to jail if he refuses to pay up.[125]

The other financial obligation of husbands was marital support, the husband's primary duty during marriage, and the way this obligation was fulfilled underwent significant change during the Mamluk period. Up to the end of the thirteenth century, husbands supported their wives by buying food in the market and, quite literally, putting bread on the table. From the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, we find some husbands paying cash allowances to their wives. The Egyptian moralist Ibn al-Ḥājj criticizes husbands who leave money with their wives in order to allow them to buy flax or water from peddlers.[126] Ibn al-Ḥājj also reports that wives often demand a small payment from their husband before going to bed with them, a payment which he calls a bed-fee.[127] Legal manuals from this period specifically approve of cash allowances as a permissible form of marital support.[128] The Italian merchant Frescobaldi, visiting Egypt in 1384, notes that spouses reach an agreement on a daily allowance for the wife's support. The amounts of this allowance vary according to social position, from three to one dirham a day, and less than that among the poor.[129] A century later, von Harff refers to cash payment of marital support as "the law of the country."[130]

By the fifteenth century, marital support had come to consist of a variety of cash payments. Formal settlements with regard to payments in lieu of clothing were registered before a qadi and were effectively an integral part of the marriage contract.[131] The annual payments for clothing could reach substantial sums. In a case from the end of the century, a husband paid for his wife's clothing by transferring

[124] Guellil, *Damaszener Akten,* 169–70.

[125] Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭarsūsī, *Al-Fatāwá al-Ṭarsūsīyah aw Anfaʿ al-Wasāʾil ilá Taḥrīr al-Masāʾil,* ed. Muṣṭafá Muḥammad Khafājī (Cairo, 1926), 29–34.

[126] Lutfi, "Manners," 104; Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Madkhal,* 4:103.

[127] Lutfi, "Manners," 107–8; Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Madkhal,* 2:169.

[128] See late fourteenth-century Shafiʿi jurists such as al-ʿUthmānī, "Kifāyat al-Muftīyīn wa-al-Ḥukkām fī al-Fatāwá wa-al-Aḥkām," Chester Beatty MS 4666, fols. 49b–50a; al-Aqfahsī, "Tawqīf al-Ḥukkām ʿalá Ghawāmiḍ al-Aḥkām," Chester Beatty MS 3328, fol. 106b.

[129] Leonardo Frescobaldi, Giorgio Gucci, and Simone Sigoli, *Visit to the Holy Places of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine, and Syria in 1384*, trans. T. Bellorini and E. Hoade (Jerusalem, 1948), 49 (cited by Ashtor, *Histoire des prix et des salaires dans l'Orient médiéval* [Paris, 1969], 367).

[130] Von Harff, *Pilgrimage,* 112.

[131] Al-Anṣārī, *Al-Iʿlām,* 269. For a model document, see al-Asyūṭī , *Jawāhir al-ʿUqūd,* 2:221–22.

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to her name an item of real estate.[132] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī acknowledged in his will that he still owed his wife 300 gold dinars for undelivered clothing.[133] A Jewish reference is again illuminating. Rabbi David ibn Zekharya, writing in the early sixteenth century, notes that Jewish wives in Egypt and Palestine ask their husbands for cash instead of clothing, and thus make small savings. The women then buy second-hand clothes, or otherwise clothes of lesser value, and invest the remaining sum in interest-bearing loans.[134]

The spread of cash payments and allowances amounted to a significant monetization and formalization of marriage, which was characteristic of fifteenth-century marriages. A fifteenth-century husband would have usually owed his wife the deferred part of the marriage gift, an annual payment for her clothing, a daily allowance, and perhaps the rent for living in her house. In addition, she may have been entitled to demand a due portion of the marriage gift at any point during the marriage. The best illustration for the variety of debts burdening a fifteenth-century husband comes from an Egyptian document dated 861/1456, which records a matrimonial financial settlement. The husband, an artisan by the name of Mūsá al-Bardanūhī, acknowledges that he owes his wife, Umm al-Ḥasan, a total of 3,900 copper dirhams (about 13 gold dinars). These include 600 copper dirhams for the due portion of his marriage gift; 800 for the postponed portion of his marriage gift, i.e., the yearly installments; 1,500 in lieu of clothing undelivered for the past two years; and 1,000 for the sale price of textile items that belonged to her. Mūsá undertakes, in front of the qadi and witnesses, to pay the remainder of the *ṣadāq* in ten annual installments, as well as a monthly payment of 60 copper dirhams towards the other outstanding debts.[135] There is no indication that this document was drawn up as part of a divorce settlement. The couple, it seems, were expecting to continue living together, with Mūsá gradually paying off his debts to his wife.

Polygamy

The issue of polygamy appears to be one of the more sensitive subjects in the history of women and gender in medieval Islam, and the conflicting approaches to the issue are reflected, for example, in the study of polygamy in the Jewish Geniza society. In his *Mediterranean Society* Goitein claimed that "by custom, albeit not

[132] Al-Anṣārī, *Al-Iʿlām,* 242.

[133] Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Jawāhir wa-al-Durar fī Tarjamat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Ḥajar,* ed. Ibrāhīm Bājis ʿAbd al-Majīd (Beirut, 1999), 3:1203.

[134] Ruth Lamdan, *A Separate People: Jewish Women in Palestine, Syria, and Egypt in the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden, 2000), 121.

[135] W. Diem, "Vier arabische Rechtsurkunden aus Ägypten des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts," *Der Islam* 72 (1995): 206–27.

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by law, the Geniza society was essentially monogamous."[136] Mordechai Friedman, who studied the known cases of polygamy from the Geniza in far more detail, pointed out that the phenomenon was not limited to the upper classes. More often than not, the husbands were members of the lower classes of the Jewish community. Although a quantitative estimate is very difficult, Friedman argues that one cannot brush off polygamy in the Geniza society as marginal.[137]

It is even harder to say how widespread polygamy was in medieval urban Muslim society. The estate inventories of the Ḥaram are the only window through which we can have a rough impression of the extent of polygamy in a given community, and they suggest that Goitein's minimalist estimate of polygamy is closer to the mark. Out of 123 men who were married at the time of their death, only three husbands died leaving two wives. One of these men was a soldier and a resident of Jerusalem.[138] Another was an Anatolian curiosity dealer. One of his two wives bore the same geographical *nisbah* as her husband, and she is likely to have been the senior wife, since he appointed her as executrix of his estate.[139] The Ḥaram documents suggest that polygamy had to do with wealth, and that, in demographic terms, polygamy was a marginal institution in late fourteenth-century Jerusalem.

We do know, on the other hand, that polygamy was widely practiced by traveling merchants and scholars. An itinerant merchant would not expect his wife to travel with him, and upon arriving alone in a town where he might spend several months he was in need of a female consort. He needed someone to care for him—to clean the house and wash his clothes. Without some form of legal relationship, either marriage or slavery, hiring a female domestic servant would have been difficult. The account of the travels of Ibn Baṭṭūṭah is a well-studied example. During thirty years of travel, after leaving Tangiers in 1325, Ibn Baṭṭūṭah married at least ten times. In Damascus he left a pregnant wife, and learned that she had borne him a son only after arriving in India. In the Maldives he married four local women simultaneously as means of obtaining family connections that helped him in the local court. While the legal wives remained behind, Ibn Baṭṭūṭah rarely traveled without a slave-girl, and he regularly mentions purchasing them. All in all, five children are mentioned in the travelogue. None of them came back with him to North Africa.[140]

[136] Goitein, *Mediterranean Society,* 3:205.

[137] M. A. Friedman, *Ribūy Nashīm be-Yisrael: Mekorot Ḥadashīm mi-Genīzat Kahīr* (Jerusalem, 1986), 4.

[138] Ḥaram no. 284.

[139] Lutfi, *Al-Quds,* 256 (note that the two documents concern the same person); Little, "Six Fourteenth-Century Purchase Deeds," 325 ff; al-ʿAsalī, *Wathāʾiq*, 2:149 (no. 53).

[140] R. Kruk, "Ibn Baṭṭuṭah: Travel, Family Life and Chronology: How Seriously Do We Take a Father?" *al-Qanṭara* 16 (1995): 369–84. Kruk argues that Ibn Baṭṭūṭah's account of his wives,

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As with slave concubinage, the fifteenth century appears to signal a decline in the institution of polygamy. One of the most striking developments in the late Mamluk period was the transformation of the royal household from a polygamous to a monogamous institution, based on long-lasting marriages. Starting with Sultan Īnāl, Mamluk sultans had only one wife at a time, in stark contrast to the marital policy of previous sultans. Zaynab bint Badr al-Dīn Ibn Khāṣṣbak bore all of Īnāl's children, and we are told that he never married any other wife. Al-Sakhāwī specifically says that Īnāl's monogamy set him apart from previous rulers.[141] Al-Ẓāhir Khushqadam (r. 1461–67) married Shukurbāy al-Aḥmadīyah, a manumitted slave-girl of a previous sultan, when he was still a junior officer. He had concubines, but did not marry any other wife until her death in 870/1465. He then married Surbāy, one of his concubines, who was also the mother of his eldest daughter.[142] Qāytbāy (r. 1468–95) was married to Fāṭimah bint ʿAlī Ibn Khaṣṣ Bak, who was his first and only wife.[143] He entertained no concubines after their marriage in 1458, and started taking them only towards the end of his life, because he had no male heirs.[144] These "first and only wives" were also increasingly visible on the public scene, as was demonstrated in a recent study of the ceremonies associated with their pilgrimage.[145]

There is some evidence that changes in the royal household reflected general changes in fifteenth-century Mamluk society. One such change was a more restrictive attitude towards polygamy, as women often appear to actively try to prevent their husbands from taking a second wife. Restrictions on men's ability to contract new marriages or to purchase concubines were not new to Mamluk society, nor to Muslim society in general.[146] In the fourteenth century, however, stipulations against polygamy appear to have been quite rare.[147] Most of the

concubines, and children is probably one of the more reliable aspects of the travelogue.

[141] Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, 12:44 (no. 261); Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith,* 8:793; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 2:368, 3:156. See also K. Johnson, "Royal Pilgrims: Mamlūk Accounts of the Pilgrimage to Mecca of the Khawand al-Kubrā (Senior Wife of the Sultan)," *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000): 114–19.

[142] Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, 12:68 (no. 417); Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 2:435; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith,* 8:584, 593. See also Johnson, "Royal Pilgrims," 119–21.

[143] See Petry, "The Estate of al-Khuwand Fāṭima al-Khāṣṣbakiyya"; Johnson, "Royal Pilgrims," 121–23.

[144] Ibn Taghrībirdī and Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, both writing in the 1470s, report that Qāytbāy had no other wives or concubines (Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith,* 8:630, 705; Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbāʾ al-Haṣr,* 60). He changed this policy later in his reign. His heir, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, was born to a concubine in 887/1482–83 (Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 3:197, 288).

[145] Johnson, "Royal Pilgrims," 111–14.

[146] Adolf Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri in the Egyptian Library* (Cairo, 1934–62), vol. 1, nos. 38, 39, 41; idem, "Arabische Papyri aus den Staatlische Museen zu Berlin," *Der Islam* 22 (1935): no. 8.

[147] Ibn Taymīyah had to refer his readers to the "old Maghribi marriage contracts," where these

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references to restrictions on polygamy come from fifteenth-century sources, such as the diary of the Damascene notary Ibn Ṭawq. In one example, Ibn Ṭawq reports that when Badr al-Dīn ibn al-Yāsūfī married the daughter of a certain Ibn Nabhān as a second wife in 886/1482, he promised her to divorce his first wife and to reside in her house. But since he was unable to divorce his first wife, the marriage was dissolved the next day. Eventually, the couple married again eleven days later, with the bride consenting to a polygamous arrangement. This time Ibn al-Yāsūfī promised, in the presence of the bride's father, not to marry a third wife and not to lodge the two wives in the same house.[148]

Polygamy was definitely a frequent reason for divorce in fifteenth-century Cairo. Najm al-Dīn Ibn Ḥijjī preferred not to consummate his marriage with his young bride and relative, Fāṭimah bint ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Bāriẓī (d. 899/1494), because he had married a second and more mature woman. Al-Sakhāwī tells us that his second wife "took hold of his heart," and convinced him to divorce his cousin.[149] The fifteenth-century scholar al-Biqāʿī provides a rich personal description of his marriage breaking up because of his polygamy, an account recently studied by Li Guo. After marrying Saʿādāt bint Nūr al-Dīn al-Būshī, the daughter of a Sufi shaykh with a handsome position, al-Biqāʿī went on a long journey to Syria. There he contracted a marriage with a local woman, as was common practice for traveling merchants and scholars, and divorced her before his journey home. But that was not acceptable, at least not in the eyes of the young wife and her mother. The couple was divorced soon afterwards.[150]

That some wives felt they had a right to prevent their husbands from taking another wife is indicated by an intriguing incident that occurred in 876/1471, when a common woman appeared before Sultan Qāytbāy himself in order to complain that her husband had taken another wife. At the time Qāytbāy was holding sessions for the petitions of commoners, as part of an experiment in royal justice.[151] Ibn Iyās tells us that this particular petition convinced the sultan that the experiment was a waste of time.[152] Did Qāytbāy dismiss the petition because

stipulations were to be found (Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwá Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad Ibn Taymīyah,* ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-ʿĀṣimī al-Najdī [Riyadh, 1381–86/1961–66], 32:164–65). It is interesting to note that in the Geniza the stipulation against polygamy was known as the Qayrawanese, i.e., the North African, condition (Goitein, *Mediterranean Society,* 3:149).

[148] Ibn Ṭawq, *Al-Taʿlīq*, 1:114, 121. See also ibid., 1:198, 402.

[149] For the second wife, Fāṭimah bint Kamāl al-Dīn al-Adhruʿī, see al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, 12:100 (no. 629). For the first wife, see ibid., 94 (no. 589).

[150] Guo, "Tales of a Medieval Cairene Harem," 103–9.

[151] Petry, *Protectors,* 151–55.

[152] Al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbāʾ al-Haṣr,* 391. According to another version, the husband did not take another wife, but rather had sex with his slave-girl (Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 3:63).

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the woman had no legal cause, or because it was petty and unworthy of his attention? In any case, the fact that a common woman had the nerve to approach the sultan on the issue of polygamy is striking. She, at least, must have believed in her right to a monogamous marriage.

A final indication of a change in the attitude to polygamy in the fifteenth century was the institutionalization of clandestine marriages *(nikāḥ al-sirr)*. According to a model document provided in a manual for notaries, a clandestine marriage contract is like any other except that it is never made public. The presence of witnesses is required, but they take it upon themselves to keep the marriage secret *(kitmān al-nikāḥ)*. The author explains that men have recourse to clandestine marriages when they are taking a second wife.[153] Evidently, it was not always easy to keep such a secret. ʿAzīzah bint ʿAlī al-Zayyādī (d. 879/1475), the daughter of a Cairene scholar, married the Meccan ʿAfīf al-Dīn al-Ījī when he visited Cairo. This marriage was kept secret from his first wife and paternal cousin, Ḥabībat Allāh bint ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, who remained in Mecca. But when the Cairene wife accompanied her husband to Mecca, ʿAfīf al-Dīn was forced to divorce her by the pressure of the first wife.[154]

Divorce[155]

As is well known, Islamic marriage law allows for a husband to pronounce a unilateral repudiation, while a wife needs either the husband's consent for divorce or the intervention of the courts. But, in spite of the simplicity of the legal act of repudiation, arbitrary unilateral repudiations were not as common as one might expect. Most husbands were deterred, first and foremost, by the financial costs of divorce. Upon unilateral repudiation husbands were expected to pay all their remaining financial obligations, including the late and due portions of their marriage gift, any arrears in payments of support and clothing, and other debts they may have incurred during the marriage. On top of these payments, husbands were also required to pay a compensation gift *(mutʿah)* to their divorcées. The divorcée had a right to this compensation as long as she did not forfeit this right in her divorce settlement, and when the divorce was not her fault.[156]

Rather than being a major mechanism of actual divorce, repudiation was more often used as a threat against a disobedient wife. Islamic Sunni law accords special

[153] He also notes that all schools accept the validity of this marriage, except the Malikis (al-Asyūṭī, *Jawāhir al-ʿUqūd,* 2:89).

[154] Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, 12:82 (no. 505) (second wife); 12:19 (no. 102) (first wife). See also Lutfi, "Al-Sakhāwī's *Kitāb al-Nisāʾ*," 114; Musallam, "The Ordering of Muslim Societies," 193–94.

[155] See also Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce,* 69–110.

[156] On the payment of *mutʿah* in a court record from Jerusalem, see Little, "A Fourteenth-Century Jerusalem Court Record of a Divorce Hearing."

DOI: 10.6082/M1X34VM5. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1X34VM5)

DOI of Vol. XI, no. 2: 10.6082/M19021V0. See https://doi.org/10.6082/Z7BW-SQ52 to download the full volume or individual articles.

status to threats of repudiation, which are usually called divorce oaths. These oaths are considered conditional phrases, the act of divorce being contingent on the fulfillment of the condition. For example, a husband would threaten a divorce if his wife were to leave home without his permission. Threats of divorce were also used in order to deter wives from visiting a neighbor or from divulging a family secret.[157] A husband who suspected his wife of pilfering his money threatened divorce if the money was not returned.[158] Strained relations with the mother-in-law were also a common reason for pronouncing divorce oaths.[159]

By extension, divorce oaths were often used as pledges for commitments which went far beyond the domestic sphere, and had nothing to do with the wife's behavior.[160] Divorce oaths were incorporated into the oath of allegiance *(bayʿah)* used by the Mamluk sultans. Moreover, they gradually became prevalent among all classes of society, and were used in all sorts of financial, social, and familial contexts. Under certain circumstances, men were even compelled to undertake divorce oaths as part of the judicial process. The central role of divorce oaths to Mamluk society is highlighted by the challenge posed by Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymīyah to the validity of these oaths. Ibn Taymīyah argued that violation of a divorce oath requires an act of atonement, not the actual dissolution of marriage. After having been prohibited twice from issuing fatwas on this subject, Ibn Taymīyah was eventually arrested. The debate over Ibn Taymīyah's doctrines on divorce oaths reflects the importance of divorce as a public, and not merely private, institution.

The legal form of the majority of actual divorces in Mamluk society was consensual separation *(khulʿ),* although the formalities of divorce deeds concealed an interplay of various legal and extralegal forces. Consensual separations meant that the wife gave up her financial rights, and in particular her claim to the late marriage gift, in return for a divorce. According to the legal phrasing of the divorce documents, it was always the wives who initiated the consensual divorces; they ask for the divorce and give up their financial rights in return. But jurists sometimes expressed concern as to whether women who entered consensual separation were acting voluntarily.[161] It is clear that husbands could extract favorable divorce settlements by playing the card of custody. In Islamic

[157] Ibn Taymīyah, *Fatāwá al-Nisāʾ,* 253, 255; idem, *Majmūʿ Fatāwá,* 33:162, 226–27.

[158] Ibn Taymīyah, *Fatāwá al-Nisāʾ,* 253; idem, *Majmūʿ Fatāwá,* 33:163, 229; al-Subkī, *Fatāwá,* 311.

[159] Al-Nawawī, *Fatāwá al-Imām al-Nawawī al-Musammá bi-al-Masāʾil al-Manthūrah,* ed. ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿAṭṭār (Beirut, 1982), 140; Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwá,* 33:112, 164–68.

[160] See a fuller discussion in my "Ibn Taymiyya on Divorce Oaths," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and History,* ed. Levanoni and Winter, 191–217.

[161] Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwá,* 32:355, 358–61; al-Subkī, *Fatāwá,* 2:297.

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law divorced mothers lose their right of custody over their children as soon as they remarry. Mamluk *fatāwá* reveal that mothers could also lose custody if the father wanted to take the child to another locality,[162] to provide him or her with better education or living standards,[163] or if the father could demonstrate neglect on the part of the mother.[164] Divorcees could secure custody only by accepting divorce settlements in which they undertook to pay for the upkeep of the child. A common settlement of consensual separation allowed the mother to have custody for a fixed period of time (even if she re-married), and in return agreed to pay part of the child support during that period.[165]

Most divorce negotiations were informal, and the role of the courts was mainly confined to putting an official stamp on the settlements brought before them. Judicial divorce *(faskh),* the most drastic sanction a wife could hope for from the courts, was generally reserved for grass widows. But even in cases of absentee husbands, many separations were settled without recourse to such judicial intervention, since husbands often deposited with their wives a conditional bill of divorce before going on a journey. Conditional bills of divorce appear very often in the Geniza,[166] and were widely used among the Muslim majority. In such a bill, the husband made the divorce of his wife contingent on his absence for a certain period of time. If the husband was not to return, the wife had the right to confirm the divorce in court.[167]

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[162] Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Fatāwá wa-Masāʾil Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ,* ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿṭi Qalʿajī (Beirut, 1986), 462–63 (no. 429); Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Iʿlām al-Muwaqqiʿīn,* 3:295. See also detailed accounts of custody cases put before the thirteenth-century Syrian jurist al-Fazārī. Contrary to the majority of his contemporary jurists, al-Fazārī argued that that the interests of the child's education and safety override the father's right to relocate the child (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Firkāḥ al-Fazārī, "Fatāwá al-Fazārī," Chester Beatty MS 3330, fols. 98a, 99b–101b).

[163] Ibn Taymīyah, *Fatāwá al-Nisāʾ,* 289 (a merchant takes his child on a business trip to the Red Sea); Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Fatāwá,* 463 (no. 431) (a father takes his child from the village to the city because of the better quality of education in the city).

[164] In order to demonstrate neglect, neighbors were asked to testify that they had heard the baby crying when left alone in the house (al-Asyūṭī, *Jawāhir al-ʿUqūd,* 2:239–40).

[165] Al-Fazārī, "Fatāwá," fol. 93b (wife agrees to support the child for two years); al-Ṭarsūsī, *Anfaʿ al-Wasāʾil,* 44, 47 (in return for custody rights, a wife forfeits her *ṣadāq,* support during the waiting period, and child support for seven years). For model documents, see al-Asyūṭī, *Jawāhir al-ʿUqūd,* 2:228, 240–41, 247–48.

[166] Goitein, *Mediterranean Society,* 3:155, 189–205.

[167] Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Fatāwá,* 444 (no. 398), 450 (no. 411). In cases from the fifteenth century, the conditional divorce was to come into effect after a very short absence of two months or even ten days (al-Anṣārī, *Al-Iʿlām,* 267; al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Ḥāwī lil-Fatāwá fī al-Fiqh wa-ʿUlūm al-Tafsīr wa-al-Ḥadīth wa-al-Uṣūl wa-al-Naḥw wa-al-Iʿrāb wa-Sāʾir al-Funūn* [Cairo, 1352/1933], 1:267).

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Divorce settlements, like so many other aspects of gender, changed in the course of the fifteenth century, especially as a result of the expanding jurisdiction of the *maẓālim* courts headed by government officials. The military courts were more resolute when dealing with husbands who failed to provide for their wives, and in general were far more interventionist in the domestic sphere. The difference of approach between the religious and the military courts is well illustrated in a tragic case of child marriage, for which we have firsthand testimony of a legal official. In 875/1470 the chronicler Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, who was employed as a deputy Hanafi qadi, received a petition from the maternal aunt of a twelve-year-old girl, whose parents were absent from the city. The aunt asked the Hanafi deputy to save the girl from poverty by marrying her off to a suitable husband. In accordance with the request, Ibn al-Ṣayrafī married the girl to a soldier in the service of one of the royal mamluks, negotiating a marriage gift of seven gold dinars, and inserting a clause forbidding the man to consummate the marriage until the girl attained puberty. Despite this stipulation, the soldier raped the girl. He continued to beat her until she accepted a consensual divorce in which she forfeited her marriage gift. The husband even lodged a complaint against the girl with the police (*naqīb*s), and she was fined a gold dinar for her supposed insubordination. When the girl returned home, her maternal aunt appealed to the *dawādār* Yashbak min Mahdī. The *dawādār* ordered the soldier to be flogged, and asked the chief Hanafi qadi, Ibn al-Ṣayrafī's superior, to invalidate the divorce settlement. The soldier also had to pay the girl four dinars, about half of the promised marriage gift.[168] It seems that in this case, the more aggressive and interventionist approach of the military court was also the more just.

The most striking aspect of Mamluk divorce, at least in the fifteenth century, was its frequency. Thanks to al-Sakhāwī's *Al-Ḍawʾ al-Lāmiʿ* we can speculate about the rate of divorce in fifteenth-century Cairo.[169] Al-Sakhāwī records the marital history of 168 fifteenth-century Cairene women, mentioning 287 marriages concluded by these women.[170] This is an average of almost two marriages per

[168] Al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbāʾ al-Haṣr,* 226–29. See translation and analysis by Carl Petry, "Conjugal Rights versus Class Prerogatives: A Divorce Case in Mamlūk Cairo," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, Piety,* ed. G. Hambly (London, 1999), 227–40. My interpretation of the text is substantially different from Petry's, both in its details and its overall significance. According to Petry, the case demonstrates the prerogatives of the military elite.

[169] A point made by Musallam, "The Ordering of Muslim Societies," 186–97. See also Lutfi, "Al-Sakhāwī's *Kitāb al-Nisāʾ*"; Berkey, "Women and Islamic Education."

[170] Included in the sample are only women who were born in Egypt after 790/1388, or, if the date of birth is unknown, died after 853/1450 (including those still living when the final draft of the work was completed, shortly before the author's death in 902/1497). It excludes entries copied from earlier historical works, such as the hundreds of entries for Hijazi women drawn from the biographical dictionaries composed by al-Fāsī (d. 832/1428) and Ibn Fahd (d. 885/1480).

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woman, although some were married four, five, and six times. When al-Sakhāwī mentions the cause of dissolution (in 171 marriages), three out of ten ended with divorce. It is probable that the actual rate of divorce among the general population of Cairo was higher. Al-Sakhāwī was not aware of all the marriages going on in the city, and some short-term unions may have escaped his attention. It is also probable that the rate of divorce among the lower classes was higher than among the elite, as was the case in the Jewish Geniza society. The prevalence of divorce is even more remarkable if we keep in mind the high mortality rate, augmented in this period by the Plague. Death and divorce meant that marriage tended to be a much shorter affair than it is today.

Al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary offers quite a few examples of wives pursuing a divorce against the wishes of their husbands. When his own brother, Abū Bakr ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, became so ill as to be confined to his bed, his wife refused to accompany him to his family's quarters and kept asking for divorce. In return she forgave him any debts and even gave him financial compensation.[171] Zaynab, daughter of the chief qadi Muḥibb al-Dīn ibn al-Shiḥnah, "was not satisfied [with her husband] and they were divorced." The verb is used in the dual form, indicating a mutual action.[172] Another Zaynab, a descendant of the Banū al-Bārizī dynasty of civilian administrators, was widowed in 850/1446. She avoided remarriage for several years, until, at the request of her son, she concluded a marriage alliance with a senior government official. But she later pleaded with her new husband and he divorced her.[173]

A final observation is that for al-Sakhāwī divorce is almost always a decision taken by the couple, not by their extended families. The intervention of in-laws is rarely mentioned. The mother and brother of Qurrat al-ʿAyn bint Abū Bakr al-Sakhāwī, the orphaned minor niece of al-Sakhāwī, were influential in causing her divorce from the husband chosen for her by al-Sakhāwī himself.[174] But al-Sakhāwī generally prefers to talk about divorces caused by the absence of passion, as well as love-marriages. After her divorce from her first husband and paternal cousin, the daughter of the chief Shafiʿi qadi Jalāl al-Dīn al-Bulqīnī went on to marry an amir nicknamed ʿAddād al-Ghanam (Sheep Counter). Her first husband tried to talk her into coming back, but to no avail, as she fell "desperately in love" with

[171] Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, 11:46.

[172] Text: *lam taḥṣul ʿalá ṭāʾil wa-fāraqā* (ibid., 12:49–50 [no. 292]; 10:264 [no. 1064]).

[173] Ibid., 12, 49 (no. 291) (Zaynab); 10:252 (no. 1050) (Najm al-Dīn). See also Lutfi, "Al-Sakhāwī's *Kitāb al-Nisāʾ*," 114.

[174] Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, 12:116 (no. 704). In a case from Syria, a marriage alliance of the Banū al-Shiḥnah and Banū al-Ṣawwāf did not materialize because of a fight between the womenfolk of the two households (Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith,* 8:570; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, 3:113–14).

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her new husband.[175] Other women chose to marry their social inferiors. Fāṭimah bint Abī al-Khayr, widow of the renowned jurist Ibn al-Humām, married one of the porters on board a ship heading to Mecca in 898/1493. Al-Sakhāwī malignly adds that it seems she was unable to control her desire and married him simply for sex.[176]

Women and Religion

A recurring theme of this survey is that most aspects of Mamluk society were gendered, with both men and women contributing to economic and political life, but doing so in largely separate spheres of activity. The same is true for women's participation in religious life. Because so few religious texts composed by Mamluk women have survived, it is easy to imagine Mamluk Islam as an exclusively male endeavor. But there is now sufficient evidence to show that, outside the formal and all-male madrasah system, women played a far from marginal role in religious life. They were of course recipients of religious knowledge and exhortations, through oral preaching and recitation, and, among the traditionalist Sunni elite, through reading and study of religious literature. But women were also active participants and contributors to religious life. In the transmission of hadith, a popular and non-professional pious activity, women were on equal footing with men, their prominence dependent solely on their literacy and longevity. Outside the literate and traditionalist classes, the growth of the organized mystical movements in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries cannot be fully understood without taking into account the phenomenal spread of exclusively female Sufi institutions known as *ribāṭs*, which are probably the most distinctively Mamluk form of female religiosity.

Women and Literacy

The evidence for the spread of literacy among elite women is quite extensive. While a few prescriptive texts call for putting a limit on the education of girls, they do so in a context of an education system in which girls were taught by male and female instructors.[177] Moreover, these statements appear to have had no impact on actual practice among scholarly families, who took pride in teaching their daughters to read and write. Nuḍār (d. 730/1330), the daughter of the Muslim philologist Ibn Ḥayyān, copied her father's works in several volumes, and so did Fāṭimah

[175] Text: *tatahālaku fī al-tarāmī ʿalayhi* (al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, 12:41 [no. 243]). See also ibid., 2:188 (Walī al-Dīn); 2:240 (ʿAddād al-Ghanam).

[176] Text: *li-qaṣd al-mukhālaṭah wa-ʿadam imkān al-taḥarruz* (al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, 12:91 [no. 567]).

[177] Shatzmiller, *Labour,* 355; A. Giladi, "Gender Differences in Child Rearing and Education: Some Preliminary Observations with Reference to Medieval Muslim Thought," *Al-Qantara* 16 (1995): 291–308.

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(d. 731/1331), daughter of the historian al-Birzālī.[178] Fāṭimah bint Kamāl al-Dīn al-Maghribī (d. 728/1328) was known for her superb handwriting.[179] Jonathan Berkey has found 411 examples of fifteenth-century literate elite women who are mentioned by al-Sakhāwī in his biographical dictionary. These women are said to have memorized the Quran, received an *ijāzah* to transmit a tradition, and studied basic works of grammar or al-Būṣīrī's ode to the Prophet.[180] In the Geniza we find private letters written by Jewish women, and there is no apparent reason to believe that Muslim women did not do the same.[181]

The problem is, of course, that nearly the entire corpus of surviving Mamluk texts has been written by men. There are a few verse fragments scattered in historical works, like al-Sakhāwī's correspondence with his neighbor Fāṭimah (b. 855/1451), daughter of Kamāl al-Dīn Maḥmūd. He quotes lines of her poetry addressed to him personally and gives titles of her poems. She sent him an elegy of 31 lines to console him for the loss of two of his brothers.[182] But for most of the Mamluk period, we have no female authors who speak to us in their own voice.[183] The absence of female authors was not simply for want of literate women; rather, the forms and the extent of female literary expression were subject to social restrictions. In a society that attached high value to texts, authorship was an empowering act.[184] When we examine the few surviving texts that were written by women, they not only show great skill, but also that the authors were very well

[178] Both died in the prime of their youth, and we owe their biographies to their mourning fathers. On Nuḍār see Th. Emil Homerin, "'I've Stayed by the Grave': A Nasīb for Nuḍār," in *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James A. Bellamy,* ed. Mustansir Mir (Princeton, 1993), 107–18; Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self,* 77. On Fāṭimah bint ʿAlam al-Dīn al-Birzālī, see al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:477; al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān,* 4:30.

[179] Al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:297.

[180] Berkey, "Women and Islamic Education," 147–49; Lutfi, "Al-Sakhāwī's *Kitāb al-Nisāʾ*," 119–21; Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Dictionaries,* 69.

[181] J. Kramer, "Women's Letters from the Cairo Genizah: A Preliminary Study" (in Hebrew), in *Eshnav le-Ḥayehen shel Nashīm be-Ḥevrōt Yehūdiyōt,* ed. Yael Atzmon (Jerusalem, 1995), 161–81.

[182] Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, 12:107–12 (no. 674); Abou Bakr, "Teaching the Words of the Prophet," 321 ff.

[183] Al-Suyūṭī, who compiled a collection of women's poetry from the classical sources, fails to mention even one poetess from the Mamluk period (Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Nuzhat al-Julasāʾ fī Ashʿār al-Nisāʾ,* ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid [Beirut, 1958]).

[184] For a general survey of female authors in medieval Islam, see Marlé Hammond, "Literature: 9th to 15th Century," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures,* vol. 1, *Methodologies, Paradigms and Sources* (Leiden, 2003), 42–50. See also Dana al-Sajdi, "Trespassing the Male Domain: The Qaṣīdah of Laylā al-Akhyaliyya," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 31 (2000): 121–46. In Sung China one finds a similar gap between the spread of literacy among elite women and the few remains of their literary production (P. Ebrey, *The Inner Quarter: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* [Berkeley, 1993], 120–24).

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versed in the Islamic tradition—further suggesting that female education, unlike female authorship, was not restricted.

Given all the other changes in gender relations towards the end of the Mamluk period, it may not be a coincidence that the foremost female author lived at the turn of the sixteenth century. Like other literate women in the Mamluk period, ʿĀʾishah al-Bāʿūnīyah (d. 922/1516) was member of a scholarly family, whose members held high positions in the religious hierarchy of Damascus. Not unusually for her class, she studied poetry, hadith, mysticism, and jurisprudence. But unlike most other Mamluk women, ʿĀʾishah was also a prolific author, and she has left us more Arabic works than any other woman prior to the modern period. Her work is underlined by a belief in the mystical quality of praising the Prophet, and motivated by a vision of the Prophet during her pilgrimage to Mecca in 880/1475. In her most famous poem, an ode to the Prophet, every verse contains an example of a rhetorical device—a literary form that required extensive knowledge of Arabic language and literature. Her Sufi compendium, a collection of insights into the mystical themes of penance, sincerity, *dhikr,* and love, suggests a very wide knowledge of Sufi literature, Quran, and hadith. Although some of her love poetry conveys an all-consuming passion towards God, ʿĀʾishah's femininity is not necessarily the defining aspect of her literary legacy. Rather, she should be seen as a well-read and active participant in the religious and literary world of her time, further indication that men and women did partake in the same religious discourses. [185]

WOMEN AND HADITH

The main venue for religious activity among the literate women of the traditionalist, and especially Hanbali, elite was transmission of hadith. This was not a marginal phenomenon; hundreds of female hadith transmitters are mentioned in the biographical dictionaries, and women were major authorities for some of the most famous scholars of the Mamluk period, such as Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, al-Dhahabī, and al-Suyūṭī. In a recent study, Asma Sayeed has found that a disproportionate number of these transmitters came from the Hanbali circles of al-Ṣāliḥīyah suburb of Damascus, where a traditionalist ethos of the cultivation of the prophetic Sunnah was dominant. Like their brothers, women were brought as infants, often still in arms, to receive certificates in the hope that they would reach old age, and would be celebrated for their transmissions. Indeed, those women who did become famous owe it to their longevity; the most famous, such as Zaynab bint al-Kamāl (646–740/1248–1339) and ʿĀʾishah bint Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī

[185] For ʿĀʾishah al-Bāʿūnīyah and her poetry, see Th. Emil Homerin, "Living Love: The Mystical Writings of ʿĀʾishah al-Bāʿūnīyah (d. 922/1516)," *MSR* 7, [no. 1] (2003): 211–34; see also Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self,* 8.

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(723–816/1323–1413), lived to their nineties, and became famous only in their sixties.

Women's study and transmission of hadith was done outside the formal madrasah system. Although they founded madrasahs, and sometimes acted as their administrators, they were always excluded from receiving a salaried position or pursuing formal studies. The evidence of *samā'āt* (certificates of oral transmission) shows that the female transmitters held assemblies both at their own houses and at the houses of others. In these informal assemblies women and men participated alongside each other, with no formal segregation. As expected, women are the primary transmitters when they grow older, but there is evidence of continuous participation of women in the study of tradition. Although only the octogenarians made it to biographical dictionaries, women participated in the study and recitation of traditions throughout their lives.

The study of hadith, contrary to law or theology, allowed women an almost equal footing with men. Since the Prophet's wife 'Ā'ishah appears so prominently as transmitter of tradition from the Prophet, women were not at any disadvantage with regard to their trustworthiness. They were considered as reliable as men in the relation of hadith; unlike testimony in court, it did not put them in a position of power over men. For women, as well as for other pious Muslims who were not formally trained, prophetic traditions were thus the most appealing of the Islamic sciences; at an elementary level, even lay people could memorize short, popular collections. Prophetic traditions were recited in informal gatherings, especially in the Hanbali circles of Damascus, in order to make God and his Word more accessible. As we have seen, elite women were able to read extensively in other branches of religious knowledge, including history, poetry, mysticism, and even law. Informal study of hadith gave these literate women a venue to reflect and discuss their approach to religion.[186]

It should also be emphasized that the memorization itself was of secondary importance, as in this period transmission was no longer about the actual authentication of texts. Authority did not really lie with the transmitter but rather with the written text which was reproduced, and the system of *ijāzah* developed precisely when the veracity of the hadith collection was guaranteed. The prize in the transmission of hadith was the shortest possible chain of transmission achieved by old men and women who heard traditions when they were infants. It carried with it not a guarantee of authenticity but, like the visitation of tombs and the relics of saints, another kind of *barakah*.[187] For the Sunni traditionalist families, a

[186] A point made by Abou Bakr, "Teaching the Words of the Prophet," 315.

[187] Eerik Dickinson, "Ibn al-Ṣalaḥ al-Shahrazūrī and the Isnād," *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 7, no. 1 (2002); discussed in this context by Asma Sayeed, "Women and Ḥadith Transmission in Islamic History" (Ph.D. diss, Princeton University, 2005).

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text carried the kind of proximity to God other groups sought by venerating saints or visiting tombs.

The ideal of the pious woman who faithfully transmits the words of the Prophet harks back, of course, to ʿĀ'ishah herself, and Mamluk male authors show in fact an unprecedented interest in celebrating her biography. This trend reached its peak in the fourteenth century, with the composition of specialized works dealing with ʿĀ'ishah's criticisms of transmissions by male Companions of the Prophet. Al-Zarkashī (d. 795/1392) is the most prominent example of enhancing the religious prestige of ʿĀ'ishah as the most reliable and useful critic of prophetic traditions, including those transmitted on the authority of the first four caliphs. Unlike earlier Sunni writers, whose works he expands, al-Zarkashī defines ʿĀ'ishah's unique attributes not only as a wife and a daughter, but in terms of her religious devotion, generosity, and asceticism. The Mamluk works dealing with ʿĀ'ishah emphasize her hadith transmission as well as a symbol of Sunni—as against Shiʿi—communal memory and solidarity.[188]

WOMEN AND MYSTICISM[189]

Outside of the Hanbali circles of Damascus and their traditionalist, anti-Sufi allies, women largely expressed their religiosity through mystical institutions. Women are often mentioned in connection with the visitation of graves, especially by the moralists who wanted them to abstain from wailing or dressing immodestly.[190] The criticisms voiced by moralists have tainted these activities as less than purely spiritual, but visitation probably represented for women a real spiritual undertaking in its own right, as much as it did for men, although the venues were often separate. The visitation of tombs was incorporated into poor women's weekly schedule, alongside their domestic chores and textile production. A few particularly vivid accounts come from the pen of the Damascene Ibn Ṭūlūn, who reports that women congregated every Wednesday near the tomb associated with the Biblical figure King Ṭālūt outside Damascus, where they listen to blind men recite the accounts of saints. The Grotto of Hunger near Mt. Qāsiyūn was the site of a similar female congregation every Friday, following the noon prayer.[191]

The most distinctive expression of the mystical activities and aspirations of Mamluk women was the exclusively female religious house, usually known as

[188] D. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past : the Legacy of ʿĀ'isha bint Abī Bakr* (New York, 1994), 25, 54–58, 86–95, 194.

[189] See also Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce,* 38–44.

[190] Lutfi, "Manners," 114–15.

[191] Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford, 2002), 168–71.

DOI: 10.6082/M1X34VM5. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1X34VM5)

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ribāṭ. The *ribāṭ* came to be identified with female piety during the Fatimid period.[192] Along with the *zāwiyah* and the *khānqāh,* the *ribāṭ* was associated with the Sufi mystical movement, but the functions of these institutions became differentiated during the Mamluk period. While the *zāwiyah* was usually linked to a specific Sufi order and the *khānqāh* to prayers for the dead, the *ribāṭ* emerged as a hospice for the needy, with social welfare as its main goal.[193] In principle, *ribāṭ*s could also be either male or female, and there were some *ribāṭ*s for men in the Mamluk period. It seems, however, that women came to be considered the natural recipients of the *ribāṭ*'s charitable role.

The establishment of *ribāṭ*s in all Mamluk urban centers reached a peak in the latter half of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth. The Ribāṭ al-Baghdādīyah, established in Cairo in 684/1285, was the most famous *ribāṭ* devoted exclusively to women. The daughter of Sultan Baybars, Tidhkārbāy Khātūn, endowed the institution for the benefit of a female mystic called Zaynab al-Baghdādīyah, after whom it was named. Zaynab had already acquired a large following among the women of Damascus when Tidhkārbāy invited her to come to Cairo. The *ribāṭ* was located next to Baybars' *khānqāh,* and was probably intended as a sister institution.[194] At least eight additional *ribāṭ*s for widows and old women existed in Cairo during the first half of the fourteenth century.[195]

Syrian cities had an even larger number of women's religious houses. Six were established in Aleppo during the thirteenth century, although there they were called *khānqāh*s rather than *ribāṭ*s. An inscription on one of the *khānqāhs*, erected by an Ayyubid princess in the first half of the century, said that it was built "for the poor women who wish to reside in it, so that they would perform the five daily prayers and sleep there."[196] In Damascus the term *ribāṭ* had come to mean a specifically female place of worship. A Damascene author, Ibn Zufar al-Irbilī (d. 726/1326), remarks that a *ribāṭ* is a *khānqāh* devoted exclusively to women *(al-rubuṭ hiya al-khawāniq allatī takhtaṣṣu bi-al-nisāʾ)*. He then enumerates

[192] Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-al-Iʿtibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-Āthār al-Maʿrūf bi-al-Khiṭaṭ al-Maqrīzīyah,* ed. Muḥammad Zaynhum and Madīḥah al-Sharqāwī (Cairo, 1998), 3:652.

[193] Th. Emil Homerin, "Saving Muslim Souls: The *Khānqāh* and the Sufi Duty in Mamluk Lands," *MSR* 3 (1999): 67. For a somewhat different view, see D. Little, "The Nature of *Khānqāh*s, *Ribāṭ*s and *Zāwiya*s under the Mamlūks," in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams,* ed. W. Hallaq and D. Little (Leiden, 1991), 91–107; Sabra, *Poverty,* 25.

[194] On Ribāṭ al-Baghdādīyah, see al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān,* 2:181; al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 3:602–3; Sabra, *Poverty,* 84.

[195] Leonor Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamluk Egypt: the Khanqah* (Berlin, 1988), 11; Berkey, "Women and Islamic Education," 150.

[196] Anne-Marie Eddé, *La principauté ayyoubide d'Alep (579/1183–658/1260)* (Stuttgart, 1999), 428.

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twenty such institutions, fifteen within the city itself and an additional five in its suburbs.[197] Some of the money for these institutions came from the pockets of the womenfolk of the Damascene elite. In 730/1330, the wife of the governor of Damascus endowed the largest female *ribāṭ* in the city, next to her own tomb.[198]

The female *ribāṭ*s should be considered indications of the spread of the mystical orders during the thirteenth century. Al-Maqrīzī dwells on the authoritarian element in the Ribāṭ al-Baghdādīyah, where widows and divorcées were sometimes forced to stay during their waiting period so as to protect them from forbidden sexual contacts. But reducing the female *ribāṭ*s to their authoritarian aspects does injustice to the spiritual aspirations of medieval Muslim women. Some of the founders were female, and quite a few elite women appear to have chosen to spend their widowhood years there. Rather, women must have been moved by the same ideals of asceticism and inner reflection as men, but were not integrated into the exclusively male institutions. It is interesting to note that not all the women who took the mystical path resided in *ribāṭ*s. Ibn al-Ḥājj, writing in the first half of the fourteenth century, notes the growth of exclusively female Sufi groups in Cairo, but does not mention any association with an institution or establishment.[199] In the case of Zaynab al-Baghdādīyah, and most probably in others, the establishment of a *ribāṭ* was intended to support an already existing group of pious women.

Besides their spiritual functions, the female *ribāṭ*s catered to the needs of poor single women who were excluded from other Sufi foundations. The dual nature of the Sufi institutions that provided men both with spiritual space and with lodging options, held true for the female *ribāṭ*s. The use of the term poverty is confusing for, as demonstrated by Adam Sabra, the medieval sources do not make a clear distinction between poverty as a social phenomenon and poverty as a religious ideal.[200] A man finding himself in a strange town, or in a sudden state of destitution, could go to one of the Sufi hospices and hope to receive a bed and a meal. But these institutions were meant to accommodate men only. When a lonely woman squatted in a room of a *zāwiyah,* she was thrown out. Ibn Taymīyah, who ruled in her case, explained that her sex made her ineligible.[201] In an anecdote about a fourteenth-century Damascene scholar, it is told that he used to live near

[197] Al-Irbilī, *Madāris Dimashq wa-Rubuṭihā wa-Jawāmiʿuhā wa-Ḥammāmatihā*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Duhmān (Damascus, 1947), 11, cited by Louis Pouzet, *Damas au VIIe/XIIIe siècle: Vie et structures religieuses d'une métropole islamique* (Beirut, 1988), 211.

[198] Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah,* 14:121; al-Nuʿaymī, *Al-Dāris fī Tārīkh al-Madāris*, ed. Jaʿfar al-Ḥusaynī (Damascus, 1948-51), 2:274–75.

[199] Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Madkhal*, 2:141; Lutfi, "Manners," 116.

[200] Sabra, *Poverty*, 31.

[201] Ibn Taymīyah, *Fatāwá al-Nisāʾ,* 189.

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the Ribāṭ al-ʿAjāʾiz (of the Old Women), which functioned as a washing place for poor women and their children. Whenever a woman needed soda-ash for bodily washing, or soap for laundry, she received some from the scholar's family.[202]

There was one common denominator among practically all the women who stayed in *ribāṭ*s, and that was freedom from matrimonial obligations. A woman who wanted to join a *ribāṭ* was not necessarily poor; but she almost certainly had to be single. This was true even for the women mystics who were not affiliated with a *ribāṭ*. Ibn al-Ḥājj describes pious women who choose to remain unmarried.[203] Ibn Baydakīn, a thirteenth-century author, similarly rebukes women who refrain from marriage out of misguided piety.[204] This was not about virginity in the Christian sense, although, as noted above, virginity had a certain saintly value in popular culture. Prior marriages did not pose an obstacle in the spiritual path taken by Sufi women. All contemporary sources agree that the residents of *ribāṭ*s were widows or divorcées—that is, women who were *no longer* married.

The institution appears to have fallen out of favor in the fifteenth century, when female hospices appear fewer and smaller compared with their predecessors. By the end of the fifteenth century, Damascus still had at least five female *ribāṭ*s.[205] But al-Sakhāwī tells of women, including his own mother, who used to open their private houses to widows and divorcées.[206] The reliance on this form of neighborhood charity suggests a decline in the importance of hospices. So does the late fifteenth-century account of Felix Fabri, who describes poor women lying, and even giving birth, in the streets of Cairo.[207] The prominence of the all-women *ribāṭ* was a uniquely Mamluk phenomenon; while Sufi institutions for men survived well beyond the beginning of the sixteenth century, virtually none of their sister institutions survived into the Ottoman period.

The rise and decline of the female *ribāṭ*s bear intriguing similarities to the fate of the female religious houses, especially those of the Beguines, which dotted

[202] Ibn al-Mibrad, *Al-Jawhar al-Munaḍḍad*, 174.

[203] Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Madkhal*, 2:141.

[204] Ibn al-Baydakīn, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ,* 144.

[205] Al-Nuʿaymī, *Al-Dāris,* 2:193–95. His contemporary Ibn al-Mibrad mentions only one single women's *ribāṭ* in the city, established in the first half of the fourteenth century (*Thimār al-Maqāṣid fī Dhikr al-Masājid,* ed. Muḥammad Asʿad Talas [Beirut, 1943], 124). Obadiah, who visited Jerusalem in 1488, noted the existence of several community houses for Jewish widows (*Jewish Travelers,* ed. E. Adler [London, 1930], 235; Obadiah Betinoro, *Me-Italyah li-Yerushalayim: Igrōtav shel R. Ovadyah mi-Bartenura me-Erets Yisrael,* ed. A. David and M. Hartom [Ramat Gan, Israel, 1997], 65, 69).

[206] On open houses for widows and poor women, see al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, 12:131, 148; Lutfi, "Al-Sakhāwī's *Kitāb al-Nisāʾ*," 119.

[207] Sabra, *Poverty*, 108.

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Western European cities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[208] Like the Beguinages, the foundation of *ribāṭ*s presupposes a large number of single women in the cities, and, as a necessary corollary, a normative attitude to female labor. Judging by the sheer number of *ribāṭ*s founded during the thirteenth century, most of their residents must have come from the lower classes. In either case, these single women did not want, or were not able, to return to their natal families or to find a new husband. Instead, they found in the *ribāṭ* a sheltered female space, and a parallel, gendered, form of mysticism.

CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this survey was to draw a picture of the gender boundaries in Mamluk urban society, and to suggest that the gendered spheres of women were complementary, rather than subordinate, to those of men. This was true in most political, economic, and social aspects of public life. The importation of slave-girls to be trained as courtesans paralleled that of male slaves intended for the military, and there is even a reference to a parallel female *khushdāshīyah* network. The trousseaux given at the weddings of female members of these elite households were not merely a token of affection, nor gifts meant to placate the groom, but a mechanism of pre-mortem inheritance, in direct parallel to the grant of *iqṭāʿ* or the inheritance of office. In textile production, the most important urban industry, the contributions of female spinners were no less important than those of the male weavers, and disregarding this runs the risk of misunderstanding the urban economy as a whole. The growth of the mystical Sufi orders in the thirteenth century saw the rise not only of *zāwiyah*s for men, but also of *ribāṭ*s for women, who were as actively engaged in the spiritual quest that characterized religious life of the period.

The notion of female dependence and passivity as a mark of medieval Muslim society in general, and Mamluk society in particular, flies against the evidence of the medieval sources. The principle of strict separation of property between spouses, enshrined in Islamic law but also generally accepted in practice, meant that women of all classes had a certain degree of financial independence during their marriage, whether by investing their trousseaux, lending them on interest, or, most commonly, by working for wages. In turn, this strict separation of property and female financial independence allowed for extraordinarily high rates of divorce, which were the most distinctive aspect of domestic life in the Mamluk period. High divorce rates, along with high mortality rates, meant that the reality

[208] On the Beguines, see S. Murk-Jansen, *Brides in the Desert: The Spirituality of the Beguines* (Maryknoll, NY, 1998); C. Neel, "The Origins of the Beguines," in *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages,* ed. Judith M. Bennett, Elisabeth A. Clark, Jean F. O'Barr, B. Anne Vilen, and Sarah Westpahl-Wihl (Chicago, 1989), 240–60.

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of family life was far from any notion of domestic haven. The custody of children was often contested, and courts were often asked to enforce divorce settlements and extract arrears in maintenance payments.

A second purpose of this survey was to point out the developments in the history of women and gender during the Mamluk period. In terms of economic access, the gender division of property appears to have become less rigid in the fifteenth century. As a result of the expansion of *waqf* family endowments at the expense of *iqṭāʿ,* the link between service and landed revenue loosened, allowing many upper class women to actively participate in the real estate market. In the sphere of domestic relations, the fifteenth century marks a significant shift towards the monetization of marriage. Instead of putting bread on their wives' tables, fifteenth-century husbands often paid their wives with cash, in the form of daily stipends and clothing allowances. The pattern of polygamy also shifted, most clearly indicated by the essentially monogamous nature of the royal household in the late fifteenth century. Finally, the apparent decline in the supply of slave-girls, following a peak in the first half of the fourteenth century, meant that fifteenth-century amirs no longer boasted of dozens of concubines residing in their harems. As slave-girls became more of a rarity, attitudes towards them also changed, and they were now more often appreciated for their piety than for their beauty or their voice.

These economic and social developments are accompanied by cultural shifts. While many medieval scholars talked about women quite often, fifteenth-century authors tend to blabber about them. Any reticence about exposing the women of one's own household, as well as those of other households, completely disappears from the semi-chronicles, semi-diaries of al-Sakhāwī, al-Biqāʿī, and Ibn Ṭawq, to name just the most explicitly personal of the late fifteenth-century authors. Even the objection to female authorship appears to give way, as least in the case of ʿĀʾishah al-Bāʿūnīyah, whose mystical prose and poetry demonstrates the depth of this woman's reading and education.

Do these changes relate to more general changes in Mamluk society during the fifteenth century? It is perhaps premature to draw firm conclusions, as long as both the study of women and gender and the study of Mamluk society have yet to exhaust the rich literary and documentary sources. But one may still note that Mamluk political authority was closely related, in its symbolism, to the domestic authority enjoined by heads of households over their women and their slaves. The early Mamluk period witnessed a sharp distinction between the private and the public. The male heads of households enjoyed a great degree of autonomous power in their own households, and monopolized public power and access to landed revenue by virtue of their official positions. Relations within the domestic unit were clearly differentiated from those governing the market economy; cash

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exchanged hands only at marriage's points of entry and exit. By the fifteenth century, on the other hand, the relationship between the public and the private, the Mamluk state and the households it governed, had changed. The blurring of gender distinctions within households, the increasing monetization of domestic relationships, the decline in polygamy and concubinage, all made households less autonomous, less hierarchical, and less isolated. As the autonomy of the head of the household gave way, the courts, both military and religious, adapted an increasingly interventionist approach—which had contradictory results. On the one hand, fifteenth-century wives found it easier to obtain a judicial divorce; on the other hand, the state authorities now saw it as their role to discipline disobedient wives.

The tragic tale of the two adulterous lovers which began this survey is a remarkable indication of these changes. The cuckolded husband, who, instead of seeking either private revenge or the concealment of his wife's infidelity, chooses to go over to the police station and report a crime, is definitely a product of the fifteenth century; a fourteenth-century husband would have found this behavior astounding. Before the middle of the fifteenth century it is practically impossible to find any husband who asked religious or secular courts for help in disciplining his wife. But in the fifteenth century this was a common practice, with husbands lodging public complaints about a wife who ran away from home, or about an affair she was having. It seems that the traditional mechanisms of patriarchy, like a threat of repudiation or physical violence, were now seen as less effective. The account of this adulterous relationship is so striking because it indicates the shifts—nothing less than dramatic—in the power relations within households during the Mamluk period, as well as the eventual affirmation of the role of the state in regulating the private sphere.

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