

Morality and Gender in Mamluk Society: A Study of Deviance and Social Behavior (1250 – 1517)

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Abstract:

This study investigates morality and gender in Mamluk society, with particular attention to deviance and social behavior as reflected in historical sources. Using descriptive and analytical methods, it examines practices of fornication, homosexuality, rape, and sexual misconduct across different social strata, including sultans' sons (awlād al-nās), amirs, soldiers, eunuchs, and concubines. The research situates these phenomena within the unique socio-political structure of the Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517), highlighting how isolation from Egyptian society, the expansion of slave systems, and the concentration of military power shaped distinctive patterns of behavior and mechanisms of social control. Emphasis is placed on forms of punishment, moral supervision, and the interplay between ethical norms and political authority. By contextualizing scattered historical accounts, this paper contributes to understanding the complexities of Mamluk society and the intersections of morality, gender, and power in medieval Islamic contexts.

Keywords: Mamluk Society, Moral Deviation, Gender Relations, Homosexuality and Fornication, Social Control.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Egypt's long history is rich in many regimes that came to its verdict. Among these regimes, Mamluks come to occupy a special prominent position that makes their era in Egypt and The Levant during the period through mid of the 13th and early 16th centuries worthy of further study and research. There is no doubt that this period of history draws the attention of every intellectual, and those who have the desire to learn about the history of this group of slaves who ruled the country independently for more than 250 years. This period is rich in pleasure and benefit at all stages.

Mamluks ruled Egypt as being the aristocratic military elite that seized control of Egypt and its people. They had their special origin, upbringing and lifestyle that gave them and their era a distinctive character. Although Mamluks return back to non-Arabian origins that had come to the country from the East and the West, yet their verdict can't be considered as foreign, because they blended in Egypt and its history after they are brought into the country. Egypt, as well, had succeeded in containing them so that they converted to Islam, felt at home, and adapted its culture. Thus, Mamluks had nourished the Arab Muslim world with new bloods, not only in Egypt but also in The Levant as well. As a result, Mamluks were the defending shield of the region, knowing no other home rather than Egypt, no other land rather than the Arabian territories, and no religion rather than Islam.

The Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517) represents one of the most



distinctive political and social formations in medieval Islamic history. As a military elite of slave origin, the Mamluks developed a unique social structure characterized by hierarchy, seclusion, and strict internal cohesion. Within this context, questions of morality, gender relations, and social behavior assumed particular significance.

It is known that the social life in Egypt during the Mamluk era had a special style, because of the Mamluks elite itself. Mamluks did not usually try to mix with the Egyptians, and were not influenced by their customs and lifestyle except in few cases and within a limited scope. This isolation was supported, and resulted in the Mamluks expansion of slaves' purchases so they have a league that they can rely on to rule the country. Egypt had also witnessed migrations by Mughal people who played an active a role in the popularity of a number of social ills during that era, such as adultery and homosexuality. (Şalih, 2014, p.310)

This study examines forms of moral deviance in Mamluk society, including fornication, homoerotic relations, sexual violence, and other forms of misconduct, (Şalih, 2025, Pp.107 – 128) as reflected in contemporary historical sources. Rather than treating these phenomena as isolated incidents, the study seeks to understand them as products of broader social, political, and institutional conditions.

The importance of this topic lies in its ability to reveal the intersection between power, morality, and social organization in a medieval Islamic context. The closed nature of Mamluk institutions,

the dominance of military culture, and the widespread use of slavery contributed to shaping distinctive patterns of behavior that differed from the surrounding Egyptian society.

This paper is structured around several key axes: the behavior of the sons of sultans (*awlād al-nās*), the practices of amirs, the conduct of soldiers, and the role of servants, particularly eunuchs and concubines. Through these axes, the study explores how moral norms were negotiated, enforced, and sometimes violated.

Methodologically, the study adopts a historical analytical approach based on primary narrative sources, including chronicles and biographical dictionaries, supported by modern historiography. It seeks not only to document events but also to interpret them within their broader socio-political context.

Despite the growing interest in Mamluk studies, limited attention has been paid to questions of morality and gender relations within this context.

This study is guided by the following central research question: How did the unique social and political structure of the Mamluk Sultanate shape patterns of moral behavior and deviance, and how were these behaviors perceived, regulated, and represented in historical sources?

This main question gives rise to subsidiary questions:

- To what extent did the isolation of the Mamluk elite influence gender relations and sexual behavior?



- How did mechanisms of control and punishment reflect broader moral norms?
- What was the social impact of such behaviors on the wider Egyptian society?

2. Sons of Sultans [Awlād al-Nās]

Sons of Mamlūks were called “awlād al-nās”, as were sons of sultans and sons of princes, “Amirs”; however, sons of sultans, in addition to being called “awlād al-nās”, were also called “al-asyād”, which means Lords or Masters. “al-asyād” were never touched by slavery, as they lived and were brought up in houses of princedom and welfare; unlike Mamlūks who were raised in a tough military style. They created a category of Mamlūk class which had an important role in many aspects of Mamlūk society: economically, socially, culturally and politically. **(Muṣṭafá, 2009, p.94)**

2.1 Fornication

Historians reported that Anūk son of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn-Qalāwūn was distracted from his wife, the daughter of Boktomer al-Sāqī by his love of a female singer named “Zahra”. That matter came to his mother, Khūnd Tghāy’s **(Note 1)** attention. “Pitying him, she enabled him to fulfil his whim.... This was brought by some of his Mamlūks to prince Aqbghā’s attention who in turn informed the sultan. The sultan entered, called Anūk, and wanted to kill him by sword but his mother and concubines stopped him”. **(al-Maqrīzī, 1970, Vol. 2, p.492; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, 1929, Vol. 1, p.418)** If

some looked at this situation as the nature a mother who loved her son and exaggerated in her love to protect him from the father's just punishment, this is considered as evidence of the immorality prevailing among that class.

This incident should not be understood merely as a personal moral failing, but rather as a reflection of the broader dynamics within elite Mamluk households. It highlights the role of familial influence, particularly that of powerful women, in mediating authority and moral discipline, as well as the limits of paternal control within ruling circles.

2.2 Homosexuality

Love of handsome young Mamlūk does not seem to have been characteristic of the first few Mamlūk sultans and certainly not of the stern Baybars (658 – 676 AH / 1260 – 1277 CE). We are told that Baybars's son Salāmish (سلامش), who reigned briefly in 678/1279 before being deposed and retired to private life, was extremely handsome (and wore his hair long), so that “many of the sodomites who love beardless boys were bewitched by him, (**Ibn Kathīr, 1978, Vol. 13, p.326**) and poets composed love lyrics about him”, but nowhere are we informed of homoerotic interests on the part of Salāmish himself. (**Rowson, 2008, pp. 217 - 218**).

Aḥmad ibn al- Nāṣir Muḥammad, (**Note 2**) ruled briefly (four months) in 742/1342 as sultan over Egypt and Syria. (**Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, 1929, Vol. 1, pp. 294 – 96**) Aḥmad grew up largely apart



from his family in Karak (الكرك), an important fortress a few miles southeast of the Dead Sea, where al-Nasir Muhammad had spent his time away from the capital, Cairo, during the two temporarily successful revolts against his reign, when his father heard that the young man (then about twenty-one) had developed a friendship with someone “unsuitable” in karak, he brought him to Cairo, married him off to the daughter of one of his own mukluks (military slaves), and then sent him back to karak. (Rowson, 2008, p. 206).

There Aḥmad, we are told, “fell madly in love with a beautiful young man named al-shuhayb (الشهيب)” – but perhaps this was the unsuitable relationship he had already developed – “and disgraced himself over him, showering him with money”. On being informed of this, the indignant al- Nāṣir Muḥammad had the boy’s favorite seized and got the money back, but the distraught Aḥmad appealed to two of his father’s most powerful mukluks, declaring, “If this young man is punished, I will kill myself!” He proceeded to stop eating and dinging and took to his bed. At that, al- Nāṣir Muḥammad relented and released al-Shunhayb but sought –in vain– to deflect his son’s obsession by offering him one hundred of his own mamlūks in his place. (Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, 1929, Vol. 1, p. 294)

The situation worsened when one of the eunuchs mistreated al-shuhayb (a hint that the young man was in fact a soldier in training, subject to the customary eunuch supervision, although our sources do not say this explicitly), and Aḥmad had the offending eunuch beaten

almost to death. **(Ayalon,1999)** In response, al- Nāṣir Muḥammad threatened to banish Aḥmad himself if he refused to banish his favorite. Aḥmad's response was to declare to his father's envoys – the same two powerful Mamlūks to whom he had initially appealed– that “Each of you has a hundred pretty young boys and girls, and you are merely my father's slaves [mamalik], while I, who am his son, have contented myself with regard to worldly pleasures with only this boy because he has shared my exile, having left his family. How can I expel him? If the sultan commands that I do so, and then let him expel me too”! **(Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, 1929, Vol. 1, pp. 294 – 95)**

And in fact, the disgruntled father did exactly that, for a brief period, until intercession from the boy's female relatives led him again to relent. The historian Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (773 – 852 AH / 1372 – 1448 CE), to whom we owe the most detailed account of Aḥmad's lamentable career, sums it up by saying that he was “a truly terrible administrator, a hedonist, and a drunkard”. **(1929, Vol. 1, p. 296)** He does not, however, focus on Aḥmad's favoritism, and it would certainly be a mistake to attribute his problems to his “homosexuality” rather than, perhaps, to his obsessiveness.

Al-shunhayb may have been an “unsuitable” object for Aḥmad's obsession, but the material available to us for contextualizing this account does not suggest that his unsuitability was due to his sex; more likely, he was just inappropriately plebeian. It is the contextualizing material that is the focus of this chapter, and it shows the degree to which the world in which Ahmad lived was in fact



saturated in homoeroticism. (Rowson, 2008, pp. 207 – 208).

This case illustrates how personal attachments within elite circles could intersect with political authority and social expectations. Rather than viewing such behavior in isolation, it reveals the tensions between individual desire, dynastic responsibility, and the mechanisms of control exercised by the Sultan.

3. Princes [Amirs]

Contemporary sources reported the arguments and disputes happening among the Mamlūk Amirs due to the passion of one of them for a child owned by another. (Ibn Iyās, 1886, Vol. 2, p.150; Ibn Taghrībirdī, 1972, Vol. 9, p. 114) Furthermore, al-‘ādil Zayn al-Dīn Katbhā (694 – 696 AH/ 1294 – 1296 CE) (Note 3) was ousted from power in 696 A.H. because of a child. (al-Maqrīzī, 1907, Vol. 3, p. 34).

It was mentioned that before the second reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (698 – 708 AH / 1299 – 1309 AD), the Mansouriah [al-Manṣūrīyah] *amirs* assembled in a big meeting and decided to call Sultan al-Nāṣir from Karak. They elected the sultan provided that ‘Izz al-Dīn Aybak al-Khāzindār would be installed as his vice sultan. In that meeting, a strange incident, which shed light on that complicated and morally contradictory Mamlūk character, took place as the vice sultan insisted that one of the Tghjī (طنجي) Mamlūks who was killed should be brought to him, without giving reason; however, it seemed he loved him for a while. When the killed Mamlūk was brought, the

vice sultan couldn't control his reaction, so he held the dead Mamlūk's hair and shamelessly took him in private to his house. This incident surprised and annoyed the rest of the *amirs* who realized how immoral the vice president was; they therefore ousted him and instead appointed Sayf al-Dīn Salār (سيف الدين سalar) as vice sultan. (Ḥamzah, 2012, p.196)

This shameful incident demonstrates that such behaviour was unacceptable and odious. On the other hand, it proves that homosexuality existed and prevailed among Mamlūks.

Such accounts, while striking in their detail, should be interpreted as reflecting broader concerns about moral conduct and legitimacy among the ruling elite. The strong reaction of other *amirs* suggests that such behavior, even if present, was not socially acceptable and could undermine political authority.

During the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (709– 741 AH/ 1310 – 1340 CE) his *amirs* in his sultanate were rich, as were his personal guards. The common factor among all of them was that they were all handsome and seeking the satisfaction of the sultan. They did not receive the traditional training like their antecedents of the state's *amirs*. This could be attributed to the suffering of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in his first (693 – 694 AH / 1293 – 1294 CE) and second reign (698 – 708 AH/ 1298 – 1308 CE) from those senior *amirs* due to their strong personalities and ambition to the throne. Therefore, he got rid of all of them and replaced them with a new type of *amirs*. (Ḥamzah, 2012,

We don't know the nature of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's love for those handsome *amirs*, whether it was a kind of sexual love or the terminology used had other significations? Contemporary sources did not shed light on the nature of that relationship. Homosexuality was common but it was mostly between *amirs* and children (passion for boys), not between an *amir* and another or the sultan and his *amirs*, especially since those *amirs* were the mainstays of his sultanate. Most probably, this love was due to al-Nāṣir's love for beauty and handsomeness, particularly that Al Nasser was not immoral or frivolous and he was not known for drinking alcohol. (**Ḥamzah, 2012, pp.223 – 224) (Note 4)**

4. Soldiers

Most of those Mamlūks were strong, tough, valiant, foxy and deceitful. They were characterised as very proud and arrogant. Morals and values had no importance to them. Conspiracy and defamation were their habit. Their law was “might is right”, and it was therefore not strange that a person turned and conspired against his master, poisoned him, or brutally murdered him, captivated his women, extorted his money and treasures and took over his throne. They were arrogant towards Egyptians and did not socialize with or marry them. This undoubtedly is attributed to the inferiority complex that dominated them, which meant they sought to compensate for this inferiority with their arrogant and tough attitude. (**Ibrāhīm, 1999, pp. 186 – 187).**

4.1 Rape

It was mentioned that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn punished some of his Mamlūks as they went from the citadel to Cairo, drank alcohol, got drunk, and committed some bad deeds. He therefore ordered for them to be strongly beaten. al-Nāṣir was naturally not comfortable with his Mamlūks who immersed themselves in pleasures and drinking alcohol. One day a letter was sent to him stating that a Mamlūk *amir* was on the Nile with some entertainers and some sultan Mamlūks [al-Mamālīk al-sultānīyah] and they were doing obscene things. This news strongly outraged al-Nāṣir who summoned the *amir* and threatened to kill him if he did that again. He likewise punished all sultan Mamlūks who were with that *amir*. (Marzūq, 1964, pp. 263 – 264)

Mamlūks did many bad deeds. A contemporary European traveller, Ludovico di Varthema (1470 – 1517 CE), (Note 5) in his journey around the world (1503 – 1509 CE) described Mamlūks in Damascus whenever they went to town: “They were always in groups of two or three for fear that they would get disgraced if they were single persons”. “If it happened that they met two or three girls, they seized on the opportunity and used it. If they did not run into girls, they lay in wait for them in special places such as big hotels [al-khānāt]; and if the girls passed by the door, each Mamlūk held the hand of one of them and grabbed her inside, then he had sex with her in any manner he desired (implying sodomy with women). However, the woman resisted, if the Mamlūk wanted to know who she was



(tried to see her face), as all women had a face veil on; therefore women knew who we were but we did not know who they were”.

The Mamlūk in these cases would say to his victim that he wanted to know who she was and see her face, then she would say to him, “Brother, is it not enough to do with me whatever you wanted and refrain from knowing who I am?” She would keep begging him to let her go (after having sex with her). Sometimes Mamlūks would think they captured the daughter of the ruler and that they would enjoy having sex with her, while in fact they captured their own wives (who were unrecognisable in veils). **(Varthema, 1994, pp. 30 – 31).**

These reports point to the broader consequences of a militarized elite operating with limited social restraint. Rather than representing isolated incidents, they reflect structural imbalances within Mamluk society, where authority was not always accompanied by effective accountability. Such practices likely contributed to social tensions and reinforced the divide between the ruling military class and the general population.

4.2 Sexual harassment

al-Maqrīzī (1365 – 1441 CE) stated that sultan al-Zāhir Baybars (658 – 676 AH/ 1260 – 1277 CE) cut the hands of some members of Deputies [Nowab], and guards [al-khufarā’] due to seeing some of them holding a woman and uncovering her clothes. **(al-Maqrīzī, 1907, Vol. 1, p.540).** This shows that sexual harassment existed in the Egyptian society at that time.

4.3 Homosexuality

Young Mamlūks [*Majālīb*] lived, after puberty, in closed communities in special camps called “*ṭibāq*” (الطباق) (Şāliḥ, 2008). The relationship among them was therefore sometimes homosexual. Each *ṭibāq* had a number of castrates, religion scientists [*Faqīh*] and servants. Each *ṭibāq* was supervised by a middle ranked Mamlūk [*Muqaddim al-Mamālīk*] who was empowered to monitor the young Mamlūks, punish them when they commit a sin or breach any of their religious or temporal duties, especially the matters that were related to their sexual behaviour. (‘A, 1995, p.72) As these healthy young men were a closed masculine community and their ages varied between childhood, adolescence and adulthood; hence, the punishment for sodomy was execution. (al-Maqrīzī, 1907, Vol. 1, p.214; Ḥamzah, 2012, p.69).

The closed and exclusively male environment of the barracks likely played a significant role in shaping patterns of social and intimate behavior. Such settings, characterized by isolation, age proximity, and strict hierarchy, created conditions in which non-normative relationships could emerge, while simultaneously being subject to strict surveillance and severe punishment.

Sexual connotation was a prominent way in humour among Mamlūks. One of the ways used by the winning group of Mamlūks to humiliate the defeated group was – if the consequence was safe – to



commit sodomy by force with one or some of the defeated members as a kind of humiliation (sexual punishment). (‘A, 1995, p.21) Mamlūks had no reason to commit sodomy on Egyptian men for pleasure, as they found the Egyptian men unattractive according to their Mamlūk standards. The Mamlūks likewise disdained to let Egyptian men commit sodomy on them; this therefore happened exclusively among Mamlūks themselves. (‘A, p.24)

In the ninth / fifteenth century, the sultan Qāyitbāy was informed in (879 AH / 1496 CE) that a Turk was consorting with and had committed sodomy with several of his own Mamlūk. All we are told about this case is that the sultan had the offender castrated—apparently a then unprecedented punishment. (Rowson, 2008, p. 216).

5. Servants

5.1 Eunuchs

The eunuch servants are referred to in the sources as *khādim*. David Ayalon proved that in the writings of al-Jāhīz, the term *khādim* was synonymous to eunuch. (1985) Like most people of slave origin, eunuchs had been violently uprooted from their past. Their biological parents had been erased along with the names those parents had given them. (Marmon, 1984, pp. 527-29)

The eunuch commander of the sultan's Mamlūks [*muqaddam al-mamālīk al-sulṭāniyya*] was directly responsible for the sultan's military family, consisting of his young slave recruits, who lived in

the Citadel barracks-school [*ṭibāq*] during their period of training in a condition of seclusion which, in theory, was not unlike that of a *ḥārīm*. (Marmon, 1995, p. 11)

Each barrack, or *ṭibāq*, was a large structure “with the dimensions of a city quarter”, which served as a residence and school for the Mamlūk cadets. A eunuch barracks chief [*muqaddam al-ṭibāq*] was assigned to each one of these structures. Beneath these barracks chiefs was a second tier of eunuchs, who were individually responsible for the proper upbringing [*tarbiyah*] of specific cadets under their care. (al-Qalqashandī, 1913, 12:174) All these eunuch *muqaddamūn* and their subalterns answered to the *muqaddam al-mamālīk al-sulṭāniyya* who, like his counterpart the *zimāmdār* of the sultan's *ḥārīm*, had ultimate responsibility not only for the cadets but also for the numerous slaves and freed or free-born employees who were the teachers, coaches, and servants in the barracks-school. (Ayalon, 1977, p.269)

In Mamlūk texts both the *zimāmdār* and the *muqaddam* are represented as guardians of moral boundaries. Both, the texts say, should be of good character and manners. But they must both also have the qualities of *ḥamiyya*, an ardent, almost fanatical passion in the pursuit of their duties as well as zeal [*ghayra*] in safeguarding their charges. Just as the *zimāmdār* must guard against sexual transgressions by or against the women of the household, the *muqaddam* has similar responsibilities for adolescent boys, who, like women, are portrayed as being potential sources of temptation [*fitna*],



or sexual temptation and disorder. **(Marmon, 1995, p. 12)**

Wealthy homes, especially military homes, often had the same domestic structure as the Citadel and included a eunuch *zimām* to supervise the *ḥārīm*; a eunuch *muqaddam* to train and manage the young Mamlūks; and various other eunuch household officers, both slaves and freed people. In the Citadel, however, the Master of the House was the ruler of an empire, and there were times when the eunuchs were the only emissaries between him and his subjects. The *khuddām al-ḥawsh* – the eunuchs who sat in the *ḥawsh*, the large royal courtyard inside the Citadel – could send away petitioners and cancel audiences, denying entrance even to the high-ranking amirs. **(al-Ṣayrafī, 1970, pp. 261 – 62)**

The sultan was, in and of himself, a kind of sanctuary, and the eunuchs who surrounded him not only controlled access to his person and his family but also served to emphasize the sacred power of rulership. **(Marmon, 1995, pp. 12 – 13)** Such eunuchs were not only the guardians of the *ḥārīm*, themselves physical symbols, like the veil, of the ideals of domestic seclusion; they were also neutral emissaries in a moral universe highly charged with sexual tension. **(Marmon, pp. 5 – 6)** A common title of respect for Mamlūk women was *maṣūna*, "the well-guarded one". The eunuchs, who controlled access to the domestic sanctuary, maintained the boundaries against corruption [*fasād*], a word that, like temptation [*fitna*], had connotations which were both sexual and political. **(Marmon, p. 19)**

The Mamlūk, even if castrated [al-Mamālīk al-T{aūāshīh], committed all obscenities and sins, and because he had no family, he did not care for the health of other lineages. Even if a Mamlūk formed a family, his heritage held him back from being entitled to most known hereditary titles. (‘A, 1995, p.72) It crossed the mind that the castrated Mamlūk who were prepared to serve women had no access to sexual debauchery at least. This is not true, as some of those castrated servants married and enjoyed women (without sexual intercourse) by using fingers, hugging and cuddling, smelling, licking lips, licking the woman’s genitals, touching and licking breasts and the like, which means they were doing what a lesbian would do. (‘A, p.72)

These narratives should be approached with caution, as they often reflect the moralizing tone of historical sources rather than objective descriptions. They nevertheless reveal contemporary anxieties regarding gender roles, control, and the management of sexual boundaries within elite households.

It is natural that castrated Mamlūk did not reach a complete fulfilment of their sexual need; they instead immersed themselves in drinking alcohol. They sometimes compensated for the lack of fulfilment by watching others having sex. The watching parties were sometimes held daily where some castrated Mamlūks gathered around a circle, in the middle of which there were naked women dancing. Mamlūks enjoyed watching them and it was not prohibited to touch some parts of these women’s bodies. (‘A, 1995, p.72)



It is worth mentioning that serving and escorting the free women or the wives of powerful men were among the key tasks assigned to those castrated Mamlūks. Those castrated Mamlūks were therefore treated respectably by the husbands of those women. The husband realized that the castrated Mamlūk was the guard of his wife, so if the castrated Mamlūk got angry, he could hide from the husband what the woman did or even could lead her. For that reason, the castrated Mamlūk was a key of revenge from the husband. (‘A, 1995, p.73)

5.2 Lesbians female slave

Mamlūk sultans and amirs have competed in purchasing odalisques and getting the beautiful ones. They were keen on having odalisques for marriage, or as means of amusement and servicing, etc.; and therefore, representing an essential part of Mamlūk society. (al-‘Uṣfūr, 2007, p.315)

It is worth noting that having thousands of concubines in palaces and abandoning them for a long time resulted in the appearance of lesbians in to order to fulfil pressing sexual needs in such a society that allowed the sultan to have many free women and an indefinite number of concubines. In fact, it is clear that those homosexual women who lived in the Mamlūks’ palaces were similar to men in their behaviour. They were described as knights who mastered various types of sports and practiced a number of games. They were also known for shamelessness. (Murray, 1997, p. 168) Their behaviour was mannish.

The impact of these behaviors extended beyond the Mamluk elite to the broader Egyptian society. The dominance of a militarized ruling class, often socially detached from the local population, contributed to a climate of tension and moral anxiety. Practices such as harassment, coercion, and abuse of power undermined social trust and reinforced divisions between rulers and subjects.

More importantly, these patterns reveal a gap between normative Islamic moral ideals and the lived realities within segments of the ruling elite. This tension is reflected in the critical tone of several contemporary chroniclers, whose accounts not only documented events but also conveyed implicit concerns about justice, authority, and ethical conduct in Mamluk society.

6. CONCLUSION

Immorality hit some sultans' children and maybe Baybars' son, but it definitely hit the sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn, Anūk and Aḥmad. The father sultan failed to straighten his children out, once due to their mother's sympathy and another time because the son threatened to commit suicide. *Amirs* were not very different, as sources indicated that homosexuality was popular among them. For Mamlūk soldiers, homosexuality prevailed in their camps; additionally, they ravaged the country as they harassed and raped women, and committed adultery with prostitutes. Homosexuality was widespread among servants, as castrated men had sex (without intercourse) with women. Lesbians appeared among concubines due



to a large number of women existing in one place for a long period of time with no care from the sultan.

These moral deviations should not be understood merely as isolated incidents of individual misconduct, but rather as reflections of the broader socio-political structure of the Mamluk Sultanate. The military ethos, the closed nature of their barracks and households, and their deliberate separation from the wider Egyptian society created a culture in which authority, isolation, and privilege fostered distinctive patterns of behavior. Such practices reveal how power and morality were deeply intertwined, with the dynamics of domination and seclusion shaping intimate and social relations. The significance of this study lies in its ability to gather and contextualize scattered historical accounts, thereby filling a notable gap in scholarship on the social and moral history of the Mamluks. It offers a framework for understanding how ethics, gender, and authority intersected in medieval Islamic societies.

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Notes:

Note1. Khawand Toghay Umm Anouk, who died in the year 749 after Hijra, was the spouse of the Sultan Al-Nasir Mohammad Ibn Qala'un and the mother of his son Anouk. Some historical sources say that she was the sister of Prince Aqbagha Abdel-Wahed, and that she was one of Sultan al-Nasir's slaves, but he gave her freedom and married her. It seems she was extremely beautiful and feminine; she had physical beauty as well as spiritual beauty, she was pure, virtuous, benevolent and generous to the extent that it was said that she wed her bondmaids and gave them trousseaus from her personal expense. Al-Maqrizi said that Sultan, Al-Nasir Mohammad, "did not continue to love any woman except her". She was very precious to the Sultan's heart, which allowed her to enjoy all kinds of comfort. Both,



the judge Karim Al-Din and Prince Bashtak went with her on the pilgrimage (Hajj) (ḥaġġ) in prestigious ceremonies, and for her sake, Al-Nasir abolished the tax on the wheat that was brought to Mecca. She continued to enjoy the same greatness after the death of her husband.

Note2. Sultan Al-Nasir Ahmad, son of Al-Nasir Mohammad Ibn Qala'un. When he became a Sultan he stayed in Karak. Then he was called in for Egypt, but he went back to Kerak rapidly and preferred to stay in it and let Egypt and Syria to the princes, so disturbances occurred. When the princes asked him to come to Egypt he refused so he was dethroned and was killed later after assigning his brother Ismail.

Note3. Al-Adil Zayn Al-Din Katbugha was of Mongol origin. He was a Mamluk of the family of Sultan Qala'un. He was made one of Qala'un's Mamluks at a young age. He was freed and became an Amir and eventually Sultan. He began his reign by appointing Fakhr Al-Din Al-Khalili as his vizier and Hossam Al-Din Lajin as his viceroy, giving him full power. Sultan Katbugha's reign was marked by events beyond his control which led his subjects to wish to oust him from power. This allowed Lajin, an old friend, to seize power. Katbugha escaped to Damascus, and was later appointed Vice-Regent of Sarkhad by Sultan Lajin.

Note4. In a recent account of al-Nasir Muhammad's (third) regin, amalia Levanoni has stressed the dire consequences of his penchant for promoting his mamluk far more quickly than had heretofore been customary and for doing so on the basis of their good looks and his intense love for them. Given what we are told about the sultan's "hatred of immorality" and his outraged response to reports of homoerotic infatuations and perhaps actual sodomy among his mamluk and bureaucrats, one might interpret this in terms of platonic admiration and more or less appropriate assessment of his slaves' qualities, discounting any truly homoerotic overtones. (Levanoni, 1995, pp. 37 – 40)

Note5. He was an Italian traveller, diarist and aristocrat known for being the first non-Muslim European to enter Mecca as a pilgrim. Nearly everything that is known about his life comes from his own account of his travels, *Itinerario de Ludouico de Varthema Bolognese*, published in Rome in 1510.

Note6. Al-Ashraf Abu Al-Nasr Qaitbay was born in Kipchak on the Volga River in present-day Russia. He was bought by a slave merchant named Mahmoud Ibn Rustum. He was brought to Egypt in 839 after Hijra (AD 1435) at the age of thirteen. He was bought by Sultan Barsbay for his garrison at the Citadel. In the reign of Sultan Jaqmaq, he was manumitted and appointed Master of the Robes, then Khasqi, the head of the internal affairs of the Royal Court, and then Dawadar, or Chancellor. He rose in the ranks to become Commander of the Armies in 872 after Hijra (AD 1467). In that year there was an uprising among the Mamluk princes that

resulted in the ousting of Sultan Al-Zahir Tamurbugha from power. The Abbasid Caliph Al-Mustanjid Billah swore allegiance to Qaitbay as Sultan, at which point Qaitbay burst into tears because he was afraid of being murdered by his princes. This was how Sultan Qaitbay came to power as ruler of Egypt and Great Syria. He reigned until his death in 901 after Hijra (AD 1496). It was during his rule that Ottoman aspirations to take over Egypt began.

