

individual to freedom from all oppression of whatever kind.

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MAMLUKS

The Mamluk military elite, purchased anew in each generation from the steppes of Eurasia, ruled Egypt and Syria from 1249, when they defeated an invading army of Crusaders led by Louis IX, until they were overcome by the mass army of Napoleon in 1799. Their unusual social system suggests the interlinked acceptance of homosexuality, relatively high status of women, and lack of inheritance. Yet amidst the details of battles and palace intrigues in histories of the period, there is disappointingly little evidence of the everyday life even of the rulers.

Neither the wealth nor the status of Mamluk could be inherited. Upon the death of a warrior, his property, house, goods, wife, children, and slaves were sold for the benefit of the treasury. Thus, the common motivation in most social systems of passing on wealth and position to one's children was missing among the Mamluks. Their children were proscribed from becoming soldiers, as the elite of the next generation was always recruited afresh from Eurasia. Attempts were made to pass the sultanate itself through primogeniture, but time after time the throne was usurped by the strongest amir. A more successful attempt by lesser Mamluks to guarantee a place for descendants was to endow mosques and libraries tended by

heirs, who could not directly receive any patrimony.

Mamluks did not much mix with the Arab populations they were bought to protect. For the most part they despised the Arab language and kept to their native Turkish dialects. They also lived apart from the existing cities in their own colonies and only rarely intermarried with local notables' daughters.

Along with many special prerogatives (notably their own courts of law), the mamluks were distinguished from the rest of the population by being forbidden divorce (out of keeping with a fundamental tenet of Islam). Still more astonishing, their wives received a fixed salary from the state, just as did the warriors themselves. These two customs greatly enhanced the autonomy of women among the Mamluks, although they may also have discouraged marriage altogether.

The mode of homosexuality favored by the Mamluks was pederasty, apparently with boys recruited from the wilderness who were undergoing military training, rather than with boys raised in civilized Egypt. None of the military historians who have written about the Mamluks seem to have surmised that sexual attraction might have played some part in selecting which boys to buy.

In addition to the general pederasty with the cadets, several sultans showed marked favoritism for some of their courtiers. The most interesting case is that of an-Nāsir Abū as-Sa'ādāt Muhammad, who scandalized his society in 1498 by the "unnatural" interest he showed in the (black) Sudanese slaves who bore firearms, and for their leader, Farājallah, in particular. The youthful Sultan attempted to raise the status of the modern weapons that only a few years later would be turned on the traditional, brave, sword-wielding Mamluk cavalry with devastating results by the Ottomans. This attempt to modernize the technology of warfare was motivated in part by the Sultan's taste for the black men who had been assigned the use

of the low status weaponry. Homophobic historians are, thus, presented the dilemma that the sultan who tried to modernize the army—in precisely the way they recognize was necessary for continued military success—was a youth of “unstable character” much given to “debauchery” and that his “debauchery” was inextricably tied together with his motivation for the modernization that might have maintained Mamluk military superiority.

When the (white) Mamluks revolted and slew Farājallah, they told the Sultan, “We disapprove of these acts [of favor for the black firearm users]. If you wish to persist in these tastes, you had better ride by night and go away with your black slaves to faroff places!” (Lewis, p. 75–76). The sultan agreed to desist.

When the Mamluks began the sixteenth century with one of their traditional thirteenth century cavalry charges against the Ottoman infantry of Selim I, they met their first defeat. Several centuries later, Ottoman control began to slip, the Mamluk aristocracy regained dominance, and the venerable cavalry charge that was their only tactic—whether against Mongols, Ottomans or French armies of Louis IX or Napoleon—was mowed down by a fusillade from Napoleon’s army. Rifles of 1798 proved even more deadly than the 1517 models that had first revealed the obsolescence of the Mamluk cavalry.

The Mamluks exemplify a social system not built on family aggrandizement and patrimony. Without inheritance, with a very slim likelihood of living to a peaceful old age, and with wives paid directly by the state, the usual motivation for building families was lacking. The Mamluk case shows that both a military tradition and an advanced artistic culture can be transmitted with no bonds of blood. The guardians of high Arabic civilization from barbarians (whether Mongols or Crusaders), each new unrelated generation of recruits to the elite was noted for appreciation for and patronage of the arts. The Mamluks built the mosques, palaces,

and tombs that are the glory of Cairo, and “delighted in the delicate refinement which art could afford their home life, were lavish in their endowment of pious foundations, magnificent in their mosques and palaces and fastidious in the smallest details of dress, furniture and court etiquette” (Lane-Poole, p. 97), though they were recruited from their rude surroundings not for their aestheticism or refined tastes but for their horsemanship and prowess with sword and bow.

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MANICHAEANISM

Manichaeism was a religion based on the teachings of the visionary prophet Mani (ca. 216–ca. 277 A. D.), who lived and was crucified in southern Babylonia. His doctrine incorporated various aspects of the **Gnostic**, **Christian**, and **Zoroastrian** belief systems, to which he fused a neo-Platonic and Stoic ethical strain.

Essentially Manichaeism was a dualistic religion in which the universe was divided into kingdoms of light and darkness which were in juxtaposition, each reaching out into infinity. Heading one force was the Prince of Darkness while the other was directed by the God of Light. Human beings were called to choose which of the forces they would follow while they were on earth, where their material body acted as a prison for the spiritual light. To gain the Kingdom of Light it was necessary to free the spirit from the material: this separation could be accomplished by avoiding sexual activities and refusing to eat foods resulting from sexual union. Light was released and grew stronger by eating