

Anna Kollatz (ed.)

Mamluk Descendants

In search for the *awlād al-nās*

Bonn University Press



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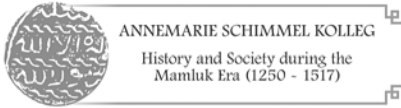


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With 27 figures

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Anna Kollatz

Introduction: On to New Horizons—Tackling the Mamluks’ Descendants

Almost exactly a decade ago, the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg “History and Society during the Mamluk Era” was established in Bonn. In the eight years that followed, we had the great pleasure of welcoming countless Mamlukists from all over the world: The Kolleg on Heussallee developed a life of its own, bringing about its own *khushdāshiyya*—as it has been nicknamed by many of the colleagues and friends who met here time and again over the years.

Now, German research funding requires that every project must eventually come to an end; the active phase of the Kolleg thus ended after the maximum funding period in 2020. Of course, the Kolleg lives on, for example in the Ulrich Haarmann Memorial Lectures, which are now held online, the Mamluk Studies series¹ and, of course, especially in the Bonn department of Islamic Archaeology. But it was also clear that in order to maintain the spirit of the Kolleg, new methods of exchange and fresh topics had to be established. What could be more natural than to start a new phase of Mamluk Studies in Bonn by focusing on the descendants of the Mamluks, their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren?

Since Ulrich Haarmann’s study of the children and grandchildren of the Mamluks—known in existing research by the Arabic term *awlād al-nās*—was ended by his premature death, research on this interesting but elusive group within Mamluk society has progressed only sluggishly.² Individual researchers

1 An overview of the development of the field and research topics tackled in Bonn and elsewhere in the last decade is provided by Stephan Conermann in his introduction to vol. 25 of the series. See Stephan Conermann, “Mamluk Studies 2010–2020: An Overview plus Research Gaps”, in: *Studies on the History and Culture of the Mamluk Sultanate*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Toru Miura, Bonn/Göttingen: Bonn University Press & V&R unipress, 2021 (Mamluk Studies, 25), 7–56.

2 Ulrich Haarmann, “Joseph’s Law. The Careers and Activities of Mamluk Descendants before the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt”, in: *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Ulrich Haarmann, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 55–84; id., “Väter und Söhne im Herrschaftssystem der Mamluken”, *Berliner Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft e.V. Jahrbuch* 1995, 211–227; id., “Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage. Mamluks

have certainly devoted themselves to the subject,³ but a concerted effort, which would be necessary to tackle this vast unknown in Mamluk Studies, has not yet come about. Things are different for a distinct subgroup of the progeny of Mamluks, namely the sons and grandsons of sultans. They are reliably identified in the sources as *sayyid* (pl. *asyād*) and thus distinguished from the rest of the Mamluk descendants. Due to their special position, the *asyād* usually had to cope with completely different opportunities (or even obstacles) than the sons of amirs or simple Mamluks and have received far more scholarly interest, mostly regarding their positions as (future or temporary) sultans.⁴

and their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria”, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33/1 (1988), 81–114; id., “The Sons of Mamluks as Fief-holders in Late Medieval Egypt”, in: *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed. Tarif Khalidi, Beirut: American University in Beirut, 1984, 141–168.

- 3 For a short overview, see the two EI articles: David Ayalon, “Awlād al-Nās”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, second edition*; and John L. Meloy, “Awlād al-Nās”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*. Further important studies of the topic are Amalia Levanoni, “Awlad al-Nas in the Mamluk Army during the Bahri Period”, in: *Mamluks and Ottomans: Studies in Honor of Michael Winter*, ed. David Wasserstein and Ami Ayalon, London and New York: Routledge, 2006, 96–105; ead., “The Ḥalqah in the Mamluk Army. Why Was It Not Dissolved When It Reached Its Nadir?” *Mamluk Studies Review* 15 (2011), 37–65; Stephan Conermann and Suad Saghbini: “Awlād an-nās as Founders of Pious Endowments. The waqfiyah of Yahya ibn Tughan al-Hasani of the Year 870/1465”, *Mamluk Studies Review* 6 (2002), 21–50; and following Stephan Conermann and Lucian Reinfandt, “Anmerkungen zu einer mamlūkischen waqf-Urkunde aus dem 9./15. Jahrhundert,” in: *Die Mamlūken. Studien zu ihrer Geschichte und Kultur: Zum Gedenken an Ulrich Haarmann (1942–1999)*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Anja Pistor-Hatam, Schenefeld: EB Verlag, 2003 (Asien und Afrika, 7), 177–238; Donald S. Richards, “Mamluk Amirs and their Families and Households”, in: *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Ulrich Haarmann, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 32–54.

- 4 I will refrain from giving an exhaustive list of studies focused on sultan’s sons that came to power themselves. See e.g., Lucian Reinfandt, “Religious Endowments and Succession to Rule: The Career of a Sultan’s Son in the Fifteenth Century”, *Mamlūk Studies Review* 6 (2002), 51–62; on the Qalawunid context: Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History. The Third Reign of an-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn (1310–1341)*, Leiden: Brill, 1995; on the subsequent period: Frédéric Bauden, “The Sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the Politics of Puppets. Where Did It All Start?” *Mamluk Studies Review* 13/1 (2009), 53–81; and on the Qalawunid household: Jo van Steenberg, “The Mamluk Sultanate as a Military Patronage State: Household Politics and the Case of the Qalāwūnid *bayt* (1279–1382)”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 56 (2013), 189–217. See also the study on Baybars I. and his sons: Hans-Ulrich Kühn, *Sultan Baibars und seine Söhne. Frühmamlukische Herrschaftssicherung in ayyūbidischer Tradition*, Bonn/Göttingen: Bonn University Press & V&R unipress, 2019 (Mamluk Studies, 18). Sultan’s sons perceived as a social group have been studied, e.g., in Stephan Conermann and Ulrich Haarmann, “Herrscherwechsel als höfische Machtprobe. Das Beispiel der Mamluken in Ägypten und Syrien (1250–1517)”, in: *Hof und Macht. Dresdner Gespräche II zur Theorie des Hofes*, ed. Reinhardt Butz and Jan Hierschbiegel, Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007, 209–240; Henning Sievert, *Der Herrscherwechsel im Mamlukensultanat. Historische und historiographische Untersuchungen zu Abū Ḥāmid al-Qudṣī und Ibn Tagrībīrdī*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2003; id., “Der Kampf um die Macht im Mamlūkenreich”, in: *Die Mamlūken. Studien zu ihrer Geschichte und Kultur: Zum Gedenken an Ulrich*

Ulrich Haarmann's reflections, which, as his contributions to the subject suggest, he himself conceived as a beginning, as preliminary observations, have remained state of the art until today, and some of his theses, which he formulated as questions and whose investigation he called for, have become something like generally accepted facts over the past decades, without having undergone the thorough review demanded by Haarmann himself. Yet the latter had quite clearly established that there was less factual knowledge about the "Sons of the Mamluks" than there were unanswered questions. In his article "Joseph's Law", he stated, for example, "When exactly this designation '*awlād al-nās*' began to be used and how it was delineated in the course of the decades after 1250 has not yet been systematically investigated."⁵

In the midst of the first wave of the global pandemic, we decided to invite our colleagues to Bonn once again—as soon as it might be possible—and to make a new start on tackling the "*awlād al-nās* question" jointly. In the end, we had to meet online in December 2020, which had the advantage that many new friends of the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg from all over the world could join us: even if each of us sat alone in their kitchen, office or on a park bench, we still had one of the largest conferences the Kolleg has ever seen, and fortunately, despite the circumstances, lively and productive discussions as usual.

With the Mamluks' descendants, this conference focused on a group that, while being located at a crucial point of Mamluk society, standing between the Mamluks and Arabic-speaking Egyptian society, still awaits the academic interest it deserves. Modern research, such as the EI-THREE article "*Awlād al-Nās*" by John L. Meloy, used to define the term as follows, claiming the existence of a more or less clear-cut social group formed by Mamluk descendants:

Awlād al-Nās ("the children of the people"), was an expression used in the Mamlūk sultanate of Egypt and Syria to designate the descendants, to about the fourth generation, of the politically significant people—that is, the foreign military elite, the manumitted Mamlūks—who dominated the state.⁶

For the first time, we aimed at bringing together research touching on the Mamluks' descendants from different angles or focusing on that fascinating group itself. The reason for the group having received less interest so far might be a rather restrictive conception of Mamluk society in some of the existing research

Haarmann (1942–1999), ed. Stephan Conermann and Anja Pistor-Hatam, Schenefeld: EB Verlag, 2003 (Asien und Afrika, 7), 335–366; Agatha Rome, *Die kurze Regierungszeit der mamlukischen Sultansöhne in der tscherkessischen Phase (784/1382–922/1517)*, M.A. thesis, University of Basel, 1995.

5 Haarmann, "Joseph's Law", 61. On Haarmann's position concerning the state of the art, see also Koby Yosef's second contribution in this volume.

6 John L. Meloy, "*Awlād al-Nās*".

literature. Based on the accounts of well-known historians of the Mamluk Sultanate, such as al-Maqrīzī, al-Qalqashandī, al-Sakhāwī and others, modern interpretations in the tradition of David Ayalon's model of Mamluk society have suggested that Mamluk society was a rather static one, that allowed only limited social mobility.⁷ This notion of stasis has been challenged in the last years, thus opening new directions of research on Mamluk society.⁸ Societal tableaux like the one by al-Maqrīzī define Mamluk society as stratified according to profession, function and wealth. The *awlād al-nās* as a group solely characterised by their Mamluk or mixed parentage—and as such, defined by modern research—stand at odds with this social conception. According to the static normative definition of Mamluk society, they would have had only very restricted options of reaching influential positions in the administration or military. However, sons—and daughters—of Mamluks played decisive roles in Mamluk societies, be it as amirs, or even sultans, as scholars, historians, or administrators of pious foundations.

However, these individuals are difficult to locate, as they are usually not labelled with an easy-to-identify nametag concerning their status by the sources. The best ways to identify them is first, as Haarmann did, by their name, which usually contains a 'typical Mamluk', often Turkish, name as their father's or grandfather's name, or a *nisba* that indicates that their ancestor belonged to a Mamluk household. Second, prosopographic studies that trace back Mamluk family and kinship structures help in locating Mamluks' descendants e.g., in archival sources. As for the term *awlād al-nās*, historical-semantic approaches are needed to clarify its meaning throughout (and before) the Mamluk Sultanate. This volume convenes articles that follow the Mamluk descendants' footsteps by these, and more, approaches.

7 See Ayalon's collected studies on the topic in David Ayalon, *The Mamluk Military Society*, London: Variorum, 1979; and id., *Outsiders in the Lands of Islam: Mamluks, Mongols and Eunuchs*, London: Variorum, 1988. Cf. also the overview offered by Reuven Amitai in "The Rise and Fall of the Mamluk Institution: A Summary of David Ayalon's Works", in: *Studies in Islamic History and Civilisation in Honour of Professor David Ayalon*, ed. M. Sharon, Leiden: Brill, 1999, 19–32, and id., "David Ayalon, 1914–1998", *Mamluk Studies Review* 3 (1999), 1–12.

8 With regard to the definition of social groups, see Koby Yosef, "Dawlat al-atrāk or dawlat al-mamālīk? Ethnic Origin or Slave Origin as the Defining Characteristic of the Ruling Élite in the Mamlūk Sultanate", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 (2012), 387–410; id., *Ethnic Groups, Social Relationships and Dynasty in the Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517)*, Bonn, 2012 (ASK Working Paper, 6). Jo van Steenbergen and others have proposed the concept of *mamlukization* as a frame for investigating social mobility, see e.g., Jo van Steenbergen, Patrick Wing and Kristof D'hulster, "The Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate? State Formation and the History of Fifteenth Century Egypt and Syria: Part I—Old Problems and New Trends", *History Compass* 14/11 (2016), 549–559; id., "The Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate? State Formation and the History of Fifteenth Century Egypt and Syria: Part II—Comparative Solutions and a New Research Agenda", *History Compass* 14/11 (2016), 560–569.

In fact, there are fundamental questions to be asked: With the conference title “Where are the ‘*awlād al-nās*’?”, we have chosen one of them as a symbolic kick-off, which however addresses quite a number of unanswered questions: Where do we find traces of the Mamluk descendants? In which social strata, occupational groups, etc. are they to be encountered? Which ways of integration, which options of action did these people have, and: can we recognise patterns here, or was ‘integration’ and ‘career’ for the Mamluk descendants an individual matter, dependent on the respective family constellation, the situation of their Mamluk ancestors, and simply the time and circumstances they lived in? What influences affected the lives of the Mamluk descendants?

Last, but not least two questions, one asked from a semantic perspective, the other from the perspective of social history, seem to be entangled thoroughly, and answers to both of them would advance research greatly: What are Mamluk descendants called in the sources—is there a characteristic name or names for this group at all? Or, to put it from the social history point of view: Were Mamluk descendants perceived as a distinct social group?

Just as well, then, as especially the discussion panels revealed, the December 2020 conference could have been titled “Who are the ‘*awlād al-nās*’?”, or even: “Is there such a group as ‘the *awlād al-nās*’?” During the conference, it quickly became clear that the Arabic term *awlād al-nās*, which initially appears to be a source term and has been used as such previously, with its common translations “children of the elite/the nobles”, or “children/sons of the Mamluks”, is anything but an innocent contemporary source term. We must first note that this Arabic term appears far less frequently, indeed only very rarely, in sources from the Mamluk period than one would suspect. When it is used, it does not have a fixed meaning for much of the Mamluk period but is used differently depending on the context—or, as Jo van Steenberg puts it, we must read this combined term as a *polysemous concept*.

Only in the 15th century, as various contributions in this volume show, did a narrower understanding of the term emerge in a certain socially and culturally definable environment; *awlād al-nās* is then increasingly understood as “sons/descendants of the Mamluks”. But, even in this period, the term is far from being the only designation chosen for these people: the term stands alongside such names as “*atrāk*” or “*awlād al-turk/al-atrāk*”. Moreover, even in the late Mamluk period, the narrower definition of the term *awlād al-nās* as “sons of the Mamluks” is by no means to be understood as a precise delimitation of a social group. In the 15th and 16th centuries, people are also referred to as *awlād al-nās* who are not Mamluk descendants in the narrower sense, but rather, for example, descendants of freeborn military officers, descendants of merchants, etc., who had previously found their way into the military-administrative ranks of Mamluk rule. So, the term also occurs in this period as meaning “descendants of the elite”.

If one were to argue exclusively from a semantic perspective, one would have to conclude that *awlād al-nās* (in the sense of a group concept of Mamluk descendants) simply did not exist over large periods of Mamluk history. Such a conclusion, however, would be far off the mark and is not advocated by any colleague I know. The fact is that the Mamluk descendants, as already noted above, were not associated with, or named after, a clear identifier. At least, such an unequivocal identifier seems not exist in the sources studied so far. Something close to a group identity related to a sort of signifier evolved only in the later half Mamluk period, as Koby Yosef argues, during the reign of al-Ẓāhir Jaqmaq (842–857/1438–1453), when certain Mamluk descendants established themselves among a “new class” of landowners. Furthermore, Yosef shows, using the example of al-Malaṭī, that Mamluk descendants, after being integrated into a specific social group such as the amirs, or the religious scholars, were no longer identified primarily by their descent, but by their standing as a military leader or scholar. Thus, al-Malaṭī refers to them as *umarāʾ* or *ʿulamāʾ*, while he seems to have reserved the identifier *awlād al-nās* for Mamluk descendants who earned their living from inherited *iqṭāʾ*s, from being a *jundī* in the *ḥalqa* or another regiment, or by various other occupations.

Whether identified as *awlād al-nās* or differently, Mamluk descendants certainly existed even before the emergence of a new, “civilian” landowner class and had their impact on society. Moreover, as Daisuke Igarashi’s study on Mamluk inheritance policies shows, the 15th century reveals a much wider concept of kinship that includes not only children, male and female, and their families, but eventually also freed slaves and their offspring, within the group of what Julien Loiseau called the “chosen family” of a Mamluk.⁹ Especially in the 15th century, when the recurring plague epidemics had decimated the population—and thereby Mamluk families—a great extent, freed slaves and their relatives became a significant factor in Mamluk inheritance or *waqf* policies. If we thus regard the question of Mamluk kinship structures from the viewpoint of economic history, it becomes clear that Mamluk descentance must not be regarded solely as a question of biological lineage, but also of socially formed kinship relations, e. g., in the concept of studying households.

Yet modern research has taken up the term “*awlād al-nās*”, linked it to a relatively unambiguous definition and subsequently used it to refer to “Sons of the Mamluks”¹⁰ or “Mamluk descendants”. Eventually, over time, this etic defi-

9 Julien Loiseau, “‘Boy and Girl on Equal Terms’: Women, *Waqf*, and Wealth Transmission in Mamluk Egypt,” *Orient* 54 (2019), 23–39.

10 Thereby systematically neglecting the daughters and granddaughters of Mamluks, who, although rarely appearing in narrative sources, had a significant impact on Mamluk society and kinship relations. For a recent overview of research on family and women in Mamluk society, see Daisuke Igarashi and Takao Ito, “Introduction. An Overview of Recent Studies on Women

nition led to the etic definition of the term being misunderstood as a (supposed) source term, i. e., it became more or less implicitly established that *awlād al-nās* was an emic source term originating from the Mamluk period as a whole, which referred unequivocally to Mamluk descendants, preferably male. It seems that modern research has oriented this definition of *awlād al-nās* primarily by following a notion, maybe a common group-identity, that we find developing in the writings of several 15th-century Mamluk historians, who were in fact Mamluk descendants, grandsons and great-grandsons themselves. Among them we may count such voices as Ibn Taghrī Birdī, Ibn Iyās, and others, and Jo van Steenbergen values their struggle for establishing their (perhaps) self-chosen identity by referring to them as “*awlād al-nās* activists”.¹¹

The articles in this volume, which approach the topic from different methodological and theoretical angles, demonstrate distinctly that there is no uniform definition of Mamluk descendants—at least not to the extent that the ‘master narrative’ created by researchers on the term *awlād al-nās* suggests. Nevertheless, descendants of Mamluks undoubtedly had their fair share in influencing many different aspects of Mamluk society—and their impact can be clearly traced in various source types. Different ‘career options’ were open to them at different times during the approximately 250 years of Mamluk rule in Egypt and Syria. The socio-historical component, the question of influence, options for action etc. of individual Mamluk descendants can be worked out particularly in documents (*waqf*), in tax registers, but also in biographical reference works through prosopographical studies. Here, the conference also opened perspectives for connecting the question to fields like intellectual history and art history. As for semantic studies concerning the term *awlād al-nās* and its neighbouring terms, (digitised) narrative sources prove helpful—but there is much work to be done in both approaches, until we can offer decisive answers to many of the questions raised by the conference. The contributions in this volume impressively show the variety of material available and the different methods that can be used to generate information on the (still etically defined) group of Mamluk descendants; they also propose preliminary answers. The articles in the first part of this volume comprise the outcome of the December conference, representing the different methodological approaches and research questions that stand in relation to the Mamluk descendants.

The second part of the volume consists of two longer contributions by Koby Yosef, both of which were originally intended as parts of a monograph, but now are published here due to their thematic fit. Since both are based on an extensive

and Family in Mamluk Society”, *Orient* 54 (2019), 1–6. See also Conermann, “Mamluk Studies”, esp. 21.

11 See Jo van Steenbergen’s contribution in this volume.

amount of prosopographical data collection, which we did not want to exclude from the publication, the two contributions are now in their own section, although they were of course initially part of the conference. While the first contribution approaches the role of Mamluk descendants who were amirs during the Turkish period, the second studies term *awlād al-nās* and its use from a prosopographical perspective, discussing it with Ulrich Haarmann's theses and the reflection of the "rise of a new class".

In the first article of part one, **Jo van Steenbergen** examines the term *awlād al-nās* as a *polysemous concept* and traces its changing meaning and the thematic contexts in which it appears in Mamluk sources through a comprehensive study of *awlād al-nās* semantics, frequencies, and discursive strategies in contemporary historiography. Since the term exhibits a certain fluidity over time and in different contexts of meaning, future research on Mamluks' descendants must be based on a critical engagement with these contemporary textual meaning-making processes. Van Steenbergen interprets the formation of a group identity related to the term *awlād al-nās* in the writings of certain historiographers in the 15th century as an expression of mamlukization processes.¹²

Both van Steenbergen's and Yosef's approaches thus come to similar conclusions: First, it should be acknowledged that the term was used extremely rarely, especially in the early Mamluk period, the Turkish period. When it was used, it was not firmly linked to the meaning "Mamluk descendants", but rather as a designation for descendants of the established elites, not for the (newly emerged) Mamluk elite. Secondly, they both identify a certain group identity and consolidation of the term in the 15th century, which can be explained by the emergence of new social strata ("rise of a new class") as well as their integration into existing concepts (mamlukization).

With **Stephan Conermann's** article, the volume takes a turn towards an institutional-historical perspective. Here, too, the first part focuses on individual biographical observations that serve to analyse the integration of the *ḥalqa* into the Mamluk-period apparatus of rule. While personal ties to the sultan predominated in the earlier period, the administration of the *ḥalqa* is characterised by increasing bureaucratisation (and thus transpersonalisation). Conermann traces financial policy decisions and development processes in the context of the *ḥalqa* in a chronological outline and is thus able to show that the position of the *ḥalqa* as a gathering place for "old, young and useless", to which the corps degenerated in the 15th century, is to be seen as the consequence of a longer-term and not entirely intentional development. This article again shows that the terminological consolidation of *awlād al-nās*, for which *ḥalqa* was increasingly used

12 On this concept, see Jo van Steenbergen, Patrick Wing and Kristof D'hulster, "The Mamlukization", parts I and II.

as a synonym in the 15th century, can be attributed only to the later Mamluk period.

Daisuke Igarashi also chooses a socio-historical-economic approach by analysing inheritance practices in Mamluk families and in waqf stipulations—and thus the economic position of male and female Mamluk descendants. In addition, this study also provides insights into family structure, confirming, for example, that Mamluk families usually did not have many children (often no more than three), and often divided inheritance equally between male and female descendants, bypassing Islamic inheritance law. In particular, the case studies on waqf stipulations also make it possible to trace the role of female family members or the influence of matrilineally inherited property—the documents thus prove to be a source genre that can bring to light the influence of women that, with few exceptions, is somewhat invisible in narrative sources.

Yehoshua Frenkel approaches documents from the Jerusalem Haram collection with a working hypothesis that corresponds to the findings of Koby Yosef's second contribution: he reads the term *awlād al-nās* as a group designation that referred to civilian elites, while, as he argues, terms such as *turk/atrak* were more likely to refer to military elites. The documents he examines illustrate individual examples in the context of a longer-lasting development, in the course of which Mamluk descendants, who are identified in the sources partly as *awlād al-nās* and partly as members of the *ḥalqa*, increasingly evolved away from the military context and integrated into the civilian elites.

The following three case studies take an in-depth look at the possibilities for action and the influence of individual Mamluk descendants in their respective historical and social contexts.

Takao Ito examines the biographies of Mamluk descendants promoted to amir by al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, i. e. the Qalawunid descendants described by Ibn Taghri Birdī, al-Maqrīzī and others. He is able to show that the Qalawunid era was not characterised by a one-sided preference for Mamluk descendants, but that the biographies studied are to be understood in the context of a recruitment policy that was aimed at a balanced filling of amir posts with representatives of different groups. The individual fates of the amirs and their descendants produce a diverse picture that illustrates how different the options for action and economic foundations of individual Mamluk descendants could be, even in a rather narrow temporal-social context. He also notes the change in meaning of the term *awlād al-nās* in historiographies of the 15th century already described above.

Noha Abou-Khatwa's contribution also focuses on the period of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, or the Qalawunids. She subjects the artistic and architectural work of the Muḥsinī brothers to an in-depth art-historical analysis and is thus able to show how crucial individual Mamluk descendants were in shaping the development of book culture, architecture, and style in the Mamluk period. In addition, her

contribution demonstrates how central a multidisciplinary approach is to the study of such a volatile group as the Mamluk descendants; only the dialogue with art history allows these individual figures to be traced beyond contemporary narrative representations, precisely on the basis of their own works.

Mustafa Banister's analysis of the *Zubdat al-kashf* of Khalīl b. Shāhīn takes us to exactly the period we have already identified as a time of conceptual change and the emergence of a possible group identity of the Mamluk descendants, i. e. the 15th century. His analysis—which includes a consideration of the author's historical-social context as well as a contentual and narratological analysis of the text, which can be seen as a kind of universal chronicle of the 15th century—leads Banister to the conclusion that Khalīl b. Shāhīn saw himself less as a descendant of a Mamluk elite. Rather, he located himself in his writing as a member of this elite, that is, within the Mamluk power elite of his time and not on its verges or in a subordinate position.

In part two of the volume, **Koby Yosef's** first contribution is the result of many years of work on the information about Mamluk descendants in the Turkish period, based on Ibn Jī'ān's *jarīda iqtā'īyya* of circa 777/1376. Although this prosopographic-economic-historical approach naturally has to cope with some blank spaces or uncertainties in the data reported by Ibn Jī'ān, it yields highly interesting results that extend beyond the time span covered by the *jarīda*. For example, it is not always possible to determine the degree of relationship or status of the amirs recorded in the *jarīda*. Apart from that, this source (unfortunately) also only provides access to the Mamluk descendants who became amirs. However, the examination of this “minimal number of Mamluk descendants in Cairo” already provides fascinating insights into structures and factors that must also have affected the “minor” Mamluk descendants who are not recorded in the *jarīda*. Yosef's analysis clearly demonstrates the influence of demographic (e. g. after the plague) or political (e. g. the influence of “uncertain” times) factors on Mamluk families: the plague decimated their lines, thus also the number of descendants to be provided for, while the Mamluks of the first “tumultuous” years of the sultanate were only able to found families late in life, if at all, and thus initially raised a smaller number of descendants to be provided for later. It was not until the Qalawunid era, during which there was also a change in marriage policy, that there were so many Mamluk descendants in adulthood that they became visibly important, e. g. in amir positions. However, even before this, the Mamluk descendants were by no means excluded from such positions—there were simply very few of the appropriate age who could have taken over posts. Furthermore, the analysis also shows that not only external factors, but especially the support of kin-groups—either one's own father or allies by marriage—fuelled a Mamluk descendant's chances of obtaining positions in the military and thus of entering the *jarīda*. In his second contribution, **Koby Yosef** approaches

the term *awlād al-nās* and the question of whether and when it can be found as a group identifier in Mamluk sources on the basis of a large-scale prosopographical study of Mamluk descendants. Through a qualitative analysis of al-Malatī's writings, he demonstrates that the latter used the term *awlād al-nās* or *ibn (al-)nās* only for a certain subgroup of Mamluk descendants, while others were virtually absorbed into other social groups, e.g. the amirs or religious scholars, and thus were identified as such in the sources. It was only with the formation of a new class of (civilian) landowners in the 15th century that a further change in the meaning of the term *awlād al-nās* was established, as Yosef points out, whereby the term finally became a group designation for a specific group of Mamluk descendants.

All these contributions are based on the insight, as discussed during the conference and described above, that the modern master narrative as well as the term *awlād al-nās*, which oscillates strangely between being a source term and having been attributed a modern meaning, are in need of revision. At the end of the conference, we therefore decided to follow a provisional language regime that would enable researchers and readers to distinguish between the “real” emic source term and the modern, etic group concept. When *awlād al-nās* is used in the following articles, this refers to the actual—rarely occurring—source term, which, however, must not be understood simply as translating to “Mamluk descendants”, but may carry a completely different meaning. If, on the other hand, we speak of Mamluk descendants, sons of the Mamluks, etc., we hereby refer to the group postulated by research. However, in practice this language rule cannot always be fully adhered to, if only because previous research uses the two terms and concepts synonymously and therefore *awlād al-nās* repeatedly appears in quotations and references as an etically constructed group designation. It is therefore left to the inclined reader to read this volume critically, but with goodwill, also from a terminological point of view. Only the next few years will show whether—and if so, in which way—this language regime will prevail with regard to the Mamluk descendants.

However, let me outline several preliminary conclusions, as well as research prospects, shared by the contributions in this volume. The conference in December 2020 and the studies presented in this volume have clearly shown two things: First, Mamluk descendants formed an integral part of Mamluk society and had considerable influence in a variety of contexts in different periods of the Mamluk sultanate. They participated in the military and ruling elite, they were active as scholars, artists, and builders, and they shaped historiographical and other scholarly discourses through their writings. They also participated as administrators and beneficiaries of *iqtāʿ*s or land ownership in the various known forms. Some of the Mamluk descendants became part of the civilian elite in the later Mamluk period, while others were assimilated into military or scholarly

circles and obviously did not identify themselves primarily, or at least not to any great extent that can be proven so far, by their ancestry.

Second, especially for the Turkish period, but also afterwards, we cannot assume a fixed emic concept *awlād al-nās* which could be translated unequivocally into “Mamluk descendants”. Rather, this term, which is also occasionally used in the pre-Mamluk period, is subject to a constant change of meaning. The meanings range from a general term for descendants of any established elite, to quite narrow meanings depending on the context. For example, the term is used to refer to potentially defenceless young men who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation during their education, or to denote only a certain group of Mamluk descendants who are lower-rank soldiers, e.g. in the *ḥalqa*. Only in the late 15th century and until the Ottoman conquest, did some historiographers who themselves had a background of Mamluk ancestry establish a kind of group identity; Ibn Iyās, for example, gives an intensive description of the discrimination against his fellow *awlād al-nās* by the late Mamluk rulers, as well as by the Ottoman conquerors. It should also be noted that the use, context, and meanings of the source term *awlād al-nās* differ from region to region; in Syria, the term is thus used and understood less frequently and differently than in Cairo. But even in this 15th-century context the term *awlād al-nās* occurs rather seldom and is used alongside other formulations (e.g. *awlād al-turk* and the like).

Nevertheless, it makes a lot of sense to stick to researching the etically defined (constructed?) group of Mamluk descendants. Even though there may not have been an emic group identity as Haarmann postulated, the Mamluk descendants do occupy a central role in Mamluk society that we do not yet understand sufficiently. The main reason is that this role, or rather these roles, are much more diverse and thus even more elusive to scholarship, than previously assumed. Or, to summarise briefly: There is no simple answer to the question “Where are the ‘*awlād al-nās*’?”

Due to the various meanings ascribed to the term *awlād al-nās*, it cannot be sufficient to search for Mamluk descendants solely on the basis of this term and its closer variants in the sources. Rather, other possible group designations must be included, and themselves be studied, with regard to their multifarious layers of meaning that possibly even changed over time. The conference’s chatroom brought up a very good example when discussing the terms “Turk” (*turk/atrāk*) and “Arab” in the context of Mamluk sources. Both terms can function as ethnic definitions, but even more so as cultural or social categories. Moreover, the term *turk/atrāk*, for example, must be recognised as being related to intersectional criteria like language, dress, or class. In some contexts, it may occur as a merely ethnic definition, while in others, intellectual or social aspects may prevail. Still, those criteria seldom occur in isolated form but intermingle or intersect, for example, when “Turkish” dress is associated with the military and thus dis-

tinguishes military persons from the urban population. The term *turk*, to stick with this example, even has a political dimension related to the courtly sphere, the *dawlat al-turk*, and thus may also function as a social identifier distinguishing courtly cultural identity from the rest of society. In each of these cases and their intersections, such a term can then also have a positive or negative connotation according to its context, the author's, or the recipients' interpretation.

Equally importantly, a common effort including various methodological approaches, such as prosopography, seems to be the best way to go. In particular, it is necessary to consult archival material in addition to narrative sources; the results of the relevant studies in this volume promise good opportunities to understand the options for action and the “career” or integration paths of Mamluk descendants better than we already do today. Consideration of social institutions like the *ḥalqa*, the pious endowments, or intellectual scholarly circles, also belongs in the search for Mamluk descendants, as is interesting to examine their potential assimilation into existing social contexts.

Thus, if we want to investigate the rooms for manoeuvre of Mamluk descendants, and their integration or assimilation processes, further in the future, this must—actually not surprisingly—be done with the consideration of various factors. Demographic factors, such as the deep scars left by the plague epidemics, which of course influenced society and the economy as a whole, also created changed conditions for Mamluk descendants. Regional differences—those between Syria and Egypt in the period have already been noted in other examples—need to be observed and understood. Finally, it is an important goal to evaluate source information in such a way that groups that are difficult to trace in the narrative sources, such as simple soldiers and their families and not least women, female Mamluk descendants, can be better considered. These groups, as well as Mamluk descendants “hidden” by assimilation or integration into other social layers, will certainly remain hard to grasp, if only for lack of appropriate source material. However, we should acknowledge these blank spaces and work on and with them, rather than brushing over them by drawing general conclusions from case studies. In addition, various thematic areas or social subsystems are of course interesting for comparative studies and further engagement: for example, the involvement and room for manoeuvre of Mamluk descendants in intellectual and religious discourses, in economic processes, and many more.

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Part I

Jo Van Steenberghe

Where are the *Awlād al-Nās*? Arabic Historiography, *Mamlūk*ization, and the Semantics and Discursive Politics of a Polysemous Concept¹

1 Introduction

In today's scholarship a specific consensus has grown on the identity, roles and changing involvement of *awlād al-nās*, “the sons of the people”, in the history of late medieval Egypt and Syria. First of all, as John Meloy summarized in 2007 in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three*, *awlād al-nās* is by default considered “an expression used in the Mamluk sultanate of Egypt and Syria to designate the descendants, to about the fourth generation, of the politically significant people—that is, the foreign military elite, the manumitted Mamlūks—who dominated the state.”² Secondly, modern scholars tend to consider these *awlād al-nās* a distinct social group with a long collective history of its own. In line with the first proposition, this master narrative of *awlād al-nās* history is derived from the specific trajectories of involvement in the sultanate's history that many *mamlūk* descendants are known to have experienced. Long considered the lesser successors of their *mamlūk* fathers' privileges or, at best, unusual exceptions to this general rule, *mamlūk* descendants have in recent decades managed to exchange this traditional picture for a far more nuanced appreciation of their social and cultural participation. It is by now generally accepted that many *mamlūk* descendants partook actively, effectively, and continuously in the cultural life of the urban centers of Syria and Egypt, as scholars, *literati*, and patrons. During most

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2 John F. Meloy, “Awlād al-Nās”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE.