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Food and Cooking during the Mamluk Era: Social and Political Implications[*]

Food has been a long-standing object of attention in ethnographic and sociological research. Anthropologists of the nineteenth century focused on the ritual supernatural aspects of food consumption. Their twentieth-century successors, especially field anthropologists, studied rituals surrounding food and then food in the wider context of social systems. Among historians, too, leading historians of the *Annales* School[1] pioneered attempts to develop a ″total history″ emphasizing the macro-historical analysis of societies over long periods and the study of all aspects of human experience, especially material culture. A salient example is Fernand Braudel′s major works, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* and *Capitalism and Material Life 1400–1800,*[2] in which the author underscored the influence of long-term changes in material culture, including food, on the social systems in Europe. Braudel′s monumental works provided an incentive for the study of social history. Norbert Elias′ *The Civilizing Process,*[3] one of the most important studies written in the last decades in this field, traces the origins of the norms of conduct in today′s western Europe in late medieval royal courts. The western European way of conduct, including table manners, was modeled by cultural factors in royal courts in a long-term political process related to the formation of states and power monopolization in them.

In the last decades, scholars studying the history of Islam have also begun to focus on the study of material culture, including food. The collection *Culinary Cultures of the Middle East,* edited by Sami Zubaida and Richard Tapper,[4] examines

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[*] This article is part of a book on food in the medieval Middle East which is in the advanced stages of preparation.

[1] An influential school of French historians formed around the journal *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations,* which was founded by Lucian Febvre and Marc Bloch at the University of Strasbourg in 1929. Traian Stoianovich, *French Historical Method: The Annales Paradigm* (Ithaca and London, 1976).

[2] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean* (London, 1976); idem, *Capitalism and Material Life 1400–1800* (London, 1973).

[3] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford and Cambridge,1994).

[4] *Culinary Cultures of the Middle East,* ed. Sami Zubaida and Richard Tapper (London, 1994).

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Middle Eastern cuisine mainly in the modern era, while studies by David Waines[5] and Manuela Marín[6] focus on the medieval period. In David Waines′ *In a Caliph′s Kitchen* and A. J. Arberry′s ″A Baghdad Cookery-Book″ an attempt was made to learn about the culinary culture of medieval Baghdad from recipe books.[7] Eliyahu Ashtor′s ″Essai sur l′alimentation des diverses classes social dans l′Orient médiéval″[8] looks at social stratification in medieval Near Eastern populations by way of their patterns of food consumption. In his *Al-Maṭbakh al-Sulṭānī,* Nabīl Muḥammad ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz examines the royal kitchen during the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.[9] Geert Jan Van Gelder explored food manifestations in Arabic literature[10] and G. S. Reynolds studied the Sufi approach to food in *adab* literature.[11] Late medieval humoristic and allegorical ″debates″ between foods were studied and edited by Manuela Marín and Ibrahim Kh. Geries.[12] Two articles are especially interesting for the research of food and cooking in medieval Islam: Maxime Rodinson′s ″Recherches sur documents arabes relatifs a la cuisine″[13] is a valuable bibliography of the Arabic sources on cuisine, and David Waines′ ″Prolegomena to the Study of Cooking in Abbasid Times: A Circuitous Bibliographical Essay″[14] is an excellent survey of the modern study of cooking and methodological issues connected with this field of research.

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[5] See for example: David Waines, ″The Culinary Culture of al-Andalus,″ in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi (Leiden, 1992), 725–38; idem, ″Food and Drink,″ in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān,* ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden and Boston, 2002), 2:216–23; idem, ″Maṭbakh,″ *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 6:807–9; David Waines and Manuela Marín,″Muzawwar: Counterfeit Fare for Fasts and Fevers,″ *Der Islam* 59 (1992): 289–301.

[6] Manuela Marín, ″Beyond Taste: The Complements of Colour and Smell in the Medieval Arab Culinary Tradition,″ in *Culinary Cultures of the Middle East.*

[7] David Waines, *In a Caliph′s Kitchen* (London, 1989); A. J. Arberry, ″A Baghdad Cookery Book,″ *Islamic Culture* 13 (1939): 21–47, 189–214.

[8] Eliyahu Ashtor, ″Essai sur l′alimentation des diverses classes social dans l′Orient médiéval,″ *Annales* 23 (1968): 1017–53.

[9] Nabīl Muḥammad ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz, *Al-Maṭbakh al-Sulṭānī Zamān al-Ayyūbīyīn wa-al-Mamālīk* (Cairo, 1989).

[10] Geert Jan Van Gelder, *God′s Banquet: Food in Classical Arabic Literature* (New York, 2000); idem, *Of Dishes and Discourse: Classical Arabic Literary Representations of Food* (Richmond and Surrey, 2000).

[11] G. S. Reynolds, ″The Sufi Approach to Food: A Case Study of Adab,″ *The Muslim World* 90 (2000): 198–217.

[12] Manuela Marín, ″Sobre alimentación y sociedad (el texto árabe de la ʾ La guerra deleitosa ̌),″ *Al-Qanṭara* 13 (1992): 83–121; Ibrahim Kh. Geries, *A Literary and Gastronomical Conceit* (Wiesbaden, 2002).

[13] Maxime Rodinson, ″Recherches sur documents arabes relatifs a la cuisine,″ *Revue des études islamiques* 17 (1949): 95–158.

[14] David Waines, ″Prolegomena to the Study of Cooking in Abbasid Times: A Circuitous Bibliographical Essay,″ *Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies/University of St.*

Similar to their western European counterparts, royal courts in medieval Islam were centers of cultural repertoire formation. Courtly models had special prestige value that contributed to their dissemination among the population at large.[15] However, the success of courtly models dissemination in the lower classes was not a forgone conclusion. It depended, to a great extent, on the court′s position within a given society as a whole and the dynamics of the interaction among its functional groups. Generally it was the courtiers who represented important functional groups in the community and were influential in the formation of cultural standards because they had access to cultural capital and held positions in the royal court that enabled them to impose their models of conduct and shunt those of their opponents.[16]

The position of high ecclesiastics in the European courts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, especially those of the House of Otto, had an impact on European courtly culture. Other agents of culture in the royal courts were intellectuals, such as poets.[17] Similarly, with the rise to power of the Abbasids (133/750), the position of religious scholars, ulama, increasingly grew in the Muslim royal courts too. With the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate in the middle of the ninth century, which entailed a gradual erosion of the caliph′s authority, military elites dominated the royal court with the assistance of orthodox religious circles. Religious scholars brought their cultural repertoire with them; hence, the courtly code of conduct was based on Muslim tradition. Muslim religious law portrays a common way of life, material as well as intellectual. A special section clarifying the Prophet′s attitude to food and eating is included in the hadith, the Muslim tradition. As one of many aspects that constitute the Muslim model of ideal leadership, and as an indispensable factor in everyday life, food was quite naturally converted into a code of social and cultural symbols in the Muslim court. By the middle of the thirteenth century, when the Mamluks rose to power in Egypt, courtly models of conduct had already been a standard of Muslim culture for some time. Therefore, the Mamluk ruling elite were not free to act as they wished; Muslim standards of conduct and models of leadership dictated their behavior.

Mary Douglas, one of the leading scholars of the structural-cultural approach in sociology, has defined food as a code of symbols of social relationship by

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Andrews 1 (1986): 30–39.

[15] Elias, *The Civilizing Process,* 390–401.

[16] Gadi Algazi, ″Bodily Rites and Social Organization:Norbert Elias′ ′Process of Civilization′″ (in Hebrew), *Zmanīm* 18, no. 70 (2000): 77–78.

[17] Ibid., 77.

which the social structure of society might be deciphered.[18] Messages delivered through the symbolic language of food and cuisine, as much as other fields of material culture, encode social hierarchy, class boundaries, and transactions across these boundaries. Her observations are based on the notion that there is a correspondence between a given social structure and the structure of symbols by which it is expressed.

The present article will endeavor to show that aspects of food preparation and consumption identified especially with the Mamluk ruling elite were used in their dialogue with the general population to cultivate their image as agents of Muslim tradition and reinforce the social structure that defined and buttressed their position as rulers. It is important to mention that ideas and practices related to food constituted a significant part of Islamic tradition and public knowledge. Therefore, beside foods and culinary traditions that were specific to particular locales, there were common features to food in medieval Muslim communities.

THE KITCHEN

In medieval western Europe ″only the great lords and the rich bourgeois had proper kitchens and the necessary personnel.″[19] The preparation of food during the Mamluk era was similarly affected by social stratification, within both the ruling Mamluk elite and the general population. Only people of means could maintain kitchens in their homes, not only because of the great expense involved but also because of the danger entailed in keeping fire indoors since no effective means were available to extinguish it. In 751/1350 the Cairene quarter Khaṭṭ al-Bunduqīyīn, the quarter in which the market of cross-bows *(bunduq)* previously existed, was burnt to ashes by a fire that burned uncontrolled for two days and nights. The prefect *(wālī)* of Cairo together with the high-ranking amirs and their mamluks struggled for another three days to extinguish it. In the wake of this fire, ″some people abandoned cooking at home″ *(wa-taraka jamāʻah min al-nās al-ṭabkh fī al-dūr)*.[20] The owning classes had the resources to invest in the necessary precautions against fire risks. Thus, for example, Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (709–41/1310–41) ordered that the vaults *(ʻuqūd)* of the new kitchen in the Citadel of Cairo—the seat of the Mamluk Sultanate—be built of stone ″for fear of conflagration″ *(khawfan*

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[18] Mary Douglas, ″Deciphering a Meal,″ in *Implicit Meanings* (London and New York, 1999), 231.

[19] Alfred Gottschalk, quoted in Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food* (Oxford and New York, 1985), 47.

[20] Aḥmad ibn ʻAlī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Mawāʻiẓ wa-al-Iʻtibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār* (Cairo, 1987), 2:31–32. For another example see: Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Abū al-Maḥāsin Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Mawrid al-Laṭāfah fī Man Waliya al-Salṭanah wa-al-Khilāfah,* ed. Nabīl Muḥammad ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz Aḥmad (Cairo, 1997), 201.

min al-ḥarīq).[21] The government palaces in the Citadel of Cairo, the adjacent palaces and homes of the Mamluk amirs, and those of the civilian elite all had running water, which allowed them to supply the needs of a kitchen and also served for purposes of hygiene and extinguishing fires.[22] Khalīl ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī, the fifteenth-century historian, attests that ″the fire never goes out″ in the sultan′s kitchen.[23] The *khānqāh* (a hospice for Muslim ascetics) Sultan al-Muẓaffar Baybars al-Jāshinkīr established in 706/1306 functioned continuously for fifty years. It was closed down in 776/1374 due to lack of water caused by the Nile receding.[24]

Another difficulty in maintaining a kitchen was the high cost of cooking utensils. The ownership of pots and their quality were symbols of social status. While the elite had kitchens equipped with ″astounding utensils″ *(al-alāt al-ʻajībah),* the lower classes sometimes had to rent utensils in the market.[25] Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1362), who compiled the biographical dictionary *Al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt* during the reign of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, highlighted the miserliness of one of the prominent amirs, Baktamur al-Ḥājib (d. 738/1337), by noting that despite the latter′s great wealth, he used to rent pots in the market.[26] During al-Nāṣir Muḥammad′s long stays at the home of Baktamur al-Sāqī (d. 732/1332), another of his prominent amirs, ″he used to eat nothing but what the mother of Aḥmad ibn Baktamur cooked for him in silver pots″ *(wa-lā ya'kul . . . illā mimmā taṭbukhuhu lahu Umm Aḥmad ibn Baktamur fī qudūr fiḍḍah).*[27] When al-Nāṣir Muḥammad himself prepared for the hajj in 721/1321, the utensils taken along in his provisional kitchen included copper, silver, and gold pots.[28] Sultan al-Ashraf

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[21] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:230.

[22] Ibid., 210; *waqf* documents contain details about water supply to Mamluk palaces and their kitchens and baths. See for example the *waqfīyāt* of the edifices of Amirs Qurqmās, al-Razzāz, Alnāq, and Manjak in Muḥammad Ḥusām al-Dīn Ismāʻīl ʻAbd al-Fattāḥ, ″Arbaʻ Buyūt Mamlūkīyah min al-Wathā'iq al-ʻUthmānīyah,″ *Annales islamologiques* 24 (1988): 54, 55, 56, 58, 61, 65, 72, 76, 78, 83, 86, 92, 93, 96, 98.

[23] Ghars al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī, *Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik wa-Bayān al-Ṭuruq wa-al-Masālik,* ed. Paul Ravaisse (Paris, 1894), 125.

[24] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:416–17.

[25] Al-Ẓāhirī, *Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik,* 125; Aḥmad ibn ʻAlī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Maʻrifat Duwal al-Mulūk,* ed. Muṣṭafá Ziyādah and Saʻīd ʻAbd al-Fattāḥ ʻĀshūr (Cairo, 1930–73), 2:125, 98; see also ʻAbd al-Fattāḥ, ″Arbaʻ Buyūt Mamlūkīyah min al-Wathā'iq al-ʻUthmānīyah,″ 56.

[26] Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt,* ed. ʻAlī ʻAmārah and Jacqueline Sublet (Wiesbaden, 1980), 10:192.

[27] Ibid., 193. See, for another example, the dowry of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad′s daughter: al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:249.

[28] Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Abū al-Maḥāsin Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1963–72), 9:58; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:196.

Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī (907–22/1501–16) used to drink water from golden cups.[29] Sultans′ meals were routinely served on Chinese porcelain and so were meals in the amirs′ households.[30]

The proportion of copper and silver utensils in the dowries of brides from the civilian and Mamluk elites indicates that running a kitchen was integral to their lifestyle. Describing the market for utensils inlaid with silver in Cairo, Aḥmad ibn ʻAlī al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441) relates: ″The brides who were daughters of amirs, viziers, high clerks, and leading merchants used to include in their dowry . . . seven *dikak:* one of silver, one of silver-inlaid copper, one of white copper, one of painted wood, one of Chinese porcelain, one of crystal, and one of Chinese painted paper.″[31] A *dikkah* was a sort of painted wooden bedstead, often inset with ivory or ebony, on which the bride′s dowry was exhibited *(shuwrat al-ʻarūs).* The trousseaus of upper class brides included several *dikak,* with each *dikkah* loaded with different kind of utensils, while that of middle class brides included only one *dikkah* of brass utensils inlaid with silver. The dowry of Baktamur al-Sāqī′s daughter was transferred by porters from her father′s to her husband′s residence. It included, among many other prestigious items, twenty-nine porter′s loads of silver utensils and at least sixty-five loads of copper.[32] The old silver utensils of Bint al-ʻAmā'im, daughter of a Cairo merchant, were inlaid with gold at a cost of 100,000 pure silver dirhams.[33]

In contrast with the elite, most of the lower social strata did not have their food prepared at home. At least in the first decades of the Mamluk Sultanate, rank-and-file mamluks in the service of the sultan were provided with daily meals in the Citadel, while those in the service of the amirs took their meals at their masters′ tables. Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (678–90/1279–90) made frequent inspections of the food distributed to his mamluks in order to ensure its excellence and nutritional quality.[34] With the general weakness which beset the Mamluk Sultanate in the fifteenth century, when the mamluks only received money for their lodging and for the rest had to look for themselves—their food was mainly based on cooked broad beans.[35]

Members of the civilian middle class, those who earned a respectable living but were not well off, prepared their food at home in ″kitchenettes.″ These were most likely without fire and running water, as borne out by evidence that the water was supplied by water vendors and the food sent to the market to be cooked, at the shop of the butcher *(sharāʾiḥī),* the cook *(ṭabbākh),* or the baker *(khabbāz),* who also baked bread that had been prepared at home. Muslim scholars gave special attention to the issue of who was to bring the flour back from the miller or the bread and food to and from the market, indicating that in middle-class families it was the women who prepared the food at home. *Ḥisbah* manuals explicitly instruct millers, bakers, cooks, and water carriers to employ professional women for this purpose or, when this was impossible, pious and trustworthy boys or chaste men *(mastūr al-ḥāl).*[36]

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[29] Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn Iyās, *Badā'iʻ al-Zuhūr fī Waqā'iʻ al-Duhūr* (Cairo, 1982–84), 5:88; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:508, 591; idem, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:105.

[30] Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 14:230; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'iʻ,* 4:151; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:591.

[31] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:105.

[32] Al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī,* 10:197.

[33] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:105.

[34] Ibid., 213, 214.

[35] Ibid., 214.

*Muḥtasib*s also instructed that when only women were at home, the food or water carrier should lower his eyes when dealing with them. Moreover, it was totally forbidden *(muḥarram)* for him to enter the house when a woman was alone at home. In such a case, he should put the food near the door, conceal himself from her sight and make a sign to her to come and take it. He should leave only when he had made sure that the food had been collected.[37] At least in Ibn al-Ḥājj′s (d. 737/1336) lifetime, people ignored these recommendations, and ″unchaste,″ ″impious″ lads or even Jews and Christians were employed to take food from Muslim homes to the market and back. Ibn al-Ḥājj complains that this situation ″generally led to seduction or its anticipation.″[38]

Sources indicate that those who belonged to the lower socioeconomic strata could not prepare food at home or found much difficulty when they tried to do so. Therefore they bought food prepared by cooks and butchers at the market: ″and generally the butcher cooks for those whose earnings are not sufficient″ *(wa-al-ghālib anna al-sharāʾiḥī yaṭbukhu li-man lā yurdá hāluhu fī kasbihi).*[39] This ″take-away″ food was sold in clay containers, while in the cooks′ shops food was served in inexpensive clay utensils which often were not washed after use.[40] The pots used for cooking in the market were not always cleaned after use. Stone pots were often repaired, when cracked *(mashʿūbah),* with congealed blood, although Muslim tradition considered it unclean and therefore forbidden.[41] On the bottom rung of the social ladder were the urban indigents, who depended on the mercy and charity of the property-owning classes.[42]

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[36] Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Madkhal* (Beirut, 1981), 4:164–65, 179–80; Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurashī Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *Maʿālim al-Qurbah fī Aḥkām al-Ḥisbah,* ed. Reuben Levy (Cambridge, 1938), 90; Ibn Bassām al-Muḥtasib, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah fī Ṭalab al-Ḥisbah,* ed. Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Sāmarrāʾī (Baghdad, 1968), 62.

[37] Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 4:170–71, 180.

[38] Ibid., 165, 179.

[39] Ibid., 187, 190.

[40] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:95, 105; Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *Maʿālim al-Qurbah,* 109; Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 2:76–77; 4:193–94, 205; Ibn Bassām, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah,* 26.

Kitchens, then, were a symbol of social status and a testament to resources. As such, they were often attached to religious institutions which were created by the ruling groups and run by charitable endowments, *awqāf* (sing. *waqf*) as a part of their policy of state support of religion.[43] Typical of Mamluk patronage policy was the construction of monumental projects that included the founder´s mausoleum side by side with a mosque, *khānqāh,* or madrasah. Such monumental buildings clearly propagated the link between the benefactors and the Islamic institution. Naming these religious institutions after their founders perpetuated their memory. The architectural and religious symbols of these monumental projects are beyond the scope of this study. Of interest to our purpose here is that the Mamluk ruling groups provided considerable material support within the precincts of these complexes, such as providing food and other commodities to both Muslim scholars and ascetics and the needy urban populace.

The monumental complex Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn built in 682–83/1283–84 in the center of Fatimid Cairo[44] included his mausoleum *(qubbah),* a madrasah, and a hospital *(bīmāristān)*—furnished with a kitchen—that was the centerpiece of the complex.[45] The hospital´s maintenance was financed by a generous *waqf.* The stipulations laid down in the *waqf* deed show that this kitchen was provided with running water, on-going fire, and the necessary utensils. The hospital´s patients came from all social strata of Cairo and its environs.[46] Until the end of the Mamluk Sultanate, Mamluk sultans supported this prestigious project of charity.

The inclusion of a kitchen was obviously necessary for the running of the hospital. Furnishing a madrasah or a *khānqāh* with a kitchen, however, was not obvious. Therefore a special social meaning was attached to this kind of charity. The *waqf* Sultan al-Muẓaffar Baybars al-Jāshinkīr allocated in 709/1309 for the operation of the aforementioned *khānqāh* within the monumental complex of his mausoleum includes stipulations concerning the food supplied to the ascetics residing there. Each Sufi was provided daily with food prepared and cooked in the *khānqāh*′s kitchen.[47] It included three *raṭl*s[48] of bread, three *raṭl*s of mutton and sweets, while the *khānqāh*′s head received a double share.[49] Al-Maqrīzī relates that when the kitchen stopped functioning in 776/1374, the Sufis were only provided with commercially-made bread and seven dirhams[50] per person to finance the rest of their needs.[51] Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, the founder of Khānqāh Siryāqūs, stipulated in his *waqf* deed that each Sufi would get daily one *raṭl* of mutton ″cooked in an appetizing manner″ *(qad ṭubikha fī ta'm shahī)* and four *raṭl*s of ″pure″ bread (white bread) and other commodities.[52] It is worthy of note that meat, sweets, rice, and white bread were considered symbols of social status and were valued as elite food items.

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[41] Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 4:191.

[42] Ibid., 190.

[43] Ira M. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1967), 356–58.

[44] For details see: Nasser Rabbat, *The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture* (Leiden, 1995), 136–36.

[45] Linda S. Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan: The Career of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and the Consolidation of Mamluk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678–689 A.H./1279–1290 A.D.)* (Stuttgart, 1998), 120–21.

[46] Al-Ḥasan ibn ʿUmar Ibn Ḥabīb, *Tadhkirat al-Nabīh fī Ayyām al-Manṣūr wa-Banīh* (Cairo, 1976), 1:360–61; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 1:1:353. See also Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan,* 120.

The college-mosque al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, built 758–61/1356–59, had a kitchen attached to it which, according to the donor′s deed, was to supply daily meals to the college′s staff and the children residing in its orphanage. Every Thursday evening, the poor living in the vicinity were served a meal that included small, round loaves of bread, mutton, rice, and honey.[53] Amir Yashbak min Mahdī (d. 885/1480) established a *waqf* to support the operation of a kitchen for needy people living near the al-Azhar mosque, providing each diner with bread and a bowl of *qamḥīyah,* a porridge made of milk, wheat, and meat.[54] These cases of feeding the needy people living in areas surrounding mosques might indicate the ways in which the Mamluk rulers or prominent amirs constructed the body of their clientele, *atbā',* from among the lower classes of the civilian population.

Since a great number of the masses could not afford to buy food and others could not prepare it properly at home, it was used by the Mamluk elite as an instrument to enhance their image as devoted Muslim rulers. Providing the destitute with food, often identified with quality food of the elite and cooked in kitchens maintained by the elite, fostered the Mamluks′ image as public-spirited and devout Muslims, and their prestige as holders of power and resources.

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[47] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:417.

[48] *Raṭl* or *riṭl* was a weight equivalent to five lbs. in Syria and 15.75 oz. in Egypt.

[49] Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn, *Al-Awqāf wa-al-Ḥayāh al-Ijtimā'īyah fī Miṣr, 648–923/1250–1517* (Cairo, 1980), 218–19.

[50] Dirham (pl. *darāhim*): a silver coin weighing an eighth of an ounce.

[51] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:417.

[52] Ibid., 420. For other examples see: Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i',* 1:2:533; al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:382, 423, 425.

[53] Amīn, *Awqāf,* 137.

[54] Ibid., 136.

THE PREPARATION OF FOOD

The preparation of food was of interest mainly to the top echelon of the Mamluk ruling elite, to members of the civilian upper class who were able to cook food at home, and to the professional cooks who kept shops catering to the vast urban lower classes. The latter′s attitude toward food preparation was simple, pragmatic, and aimed at the maximization of profit. The cooks used countless tricks to adulterate the food, while *muḥtasib*s used counter-methods to expose their deceit. As a result, the quality of food prepared in the market, though it varied, was generally poor.[55] *Muḍīrah,* a sour milk soup sold by weight, was deviously made heavier by the addition of ground rice flour.[56] Ways of adulterating meat dishes included the incorporation of much fat and little meat; the replacement of mutton with goat meat or with the meat of impure animals like dogs, and the use of spoiled, cooked meat or carrion masked by the liberal use of spices.[57] Ibn Bassām al-Muḥtasib relates that cooks used to improve the taste of meat dishes with *al-laymūn al-maliḥ,* most probably citric acid.[58] Another common agent in flavoring food was salt *(maliḥ).*[59]

Bread was often made of spoiled flour or adulterated by replacing the grain flour with ground peas, broad beans, or chick peas. Moreover, despite the strictures of the *muḥtasib*s, bakery workers often kneaded the dough with dirty hands and feet or failed to wear garments with narrow sleeves and don head-bands and mufflers to stop their spittle from falling into the dough when they spoke or sneezed. Nor were instructions to prevent insects from creeping onto the bread always carried out.[60] Ibn al-Ḥājj testifies that it was largely because of the bakers′ lack of compliance with *ḥisbah* instructions that filth such as flies, straw, or hair was often found in commercially-made bread.[61] Therefore people preferred, if they could afford it, homemade bread *(al-khubz al-baytūtī)* which was prepared at home and then baked at the commercial bakery.[62]

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[55] Ibn Bassām, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah,* 21.

[56] Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *Maʿālim al-Qurbah,* 89, 107; Ibn Bassām, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah,* 45.

[57] Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *Maʿālim al-Qurbah,* 107, 109; Ibn Bassām, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah,* 36, 37, 38, 40, 44–45, 47–48; Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 4:102–202. For further examples of adulterating foods see: Ibn Bassām, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah,* 29–33, 39–40, 41, 43, 44, 47, 48, 50, 51–52, 55, 57, 58; Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *Maʿālim al-Qurbah,* 106, 107–10; Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 4:185, 187,190–91.

[58] Ibn Bassām, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah,* 37; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 5:122.

[59] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Medicine of the Prophet,* trans. Penelope Johnstone (Cambridge, 1998), 277. See also: Ibn Bassām, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah,* 31; Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 4:173. On the issue of the ″spice spectrum″ in low and high cuisine see: Waines, ″Study of Cooking,″ 38.

[60] Ibn Bassām, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah,* 21; Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 4:172–74; Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *Maʿālim al-Qurbah,* 91.

[61] Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 4:173.

Beyond the concern shown by the *muḥtasib*s, especially the moralists among them such as Ibn al-Ḥājj, regarding the quality and purity of the food prepared in the market, a particular fear is clearly evident in their complaints about the fitness of the food in relation to the requirements of Muslim religious law. Muslim food taboos prohibit carrion *(maytah),* blood *(damm),* flesh of swine *(laḥm khanzīr)* and dog *(kalb),* and wine *(khamr),* as they cause a state of major impurity *(najāsah)*.[63] Excretions from the body such as sweat, urine, sperm, etc., when they soil the person or his clothes cause a state of minor impurity *(ḥadath)* that can be dispelled by ablution *(wuḍū')*.[64] Obviously, when workers in the shops of bakers, cooks, and butchers in the market worked with dirty hands and legs and failed to wear the appropriate garments, they defiled the food they prepared. Knowing that cooks and bakers in the market were not observing Muslim requirements for food preparation only heightened the aspiration to have food prepared at home.[65] As we have seen, the ruling and civilian elites possessed kitchens in their palaces where dietary rules could be meticulously observed. A large number of ulama and Sufis resided in religious institutions built for them by the ruling elite, and received their food from kitchens built specially within those institutions. The bourgeoisie, which included numerous religious scholars and officials, took a great deal of trouble over the preparation of food in their homes and incurred the cost of sending it for cooking and baking in the market. In contrast, the masses depended on the grace and favor of those who provided food in the market for its quantity, quality, and ritual fitness. Therefore, the ability to maintain a diet in accordance with Muslim dietary rules was a privilege reserved for the elite groups who held a monopoly on knowledge and wealth.

For members of the Mamluk and the learned elites, food and its consumption were features of social and cultural expression. The banquet was a social event emphasizing the shared status and cultural background of the participants. This was especially true when intellectuals were invited to keep company with the ruling elite. They were expected to display their adroitness at light, enjoyable conversation on various subjects, a practice defined in medieval Arabic literature as *adab*. Food was a theme in Mamluk *adab* literature too. Famous poets of the period dedicated some of their verses to favorite dishes and the pleasures of consuming them. Thus, for example, the famous fourteenth-century poet Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn Nubātah (d. 768/1367) composed verses in praise of *qaṭā'if,* a popular pastry.[66] Well-known ulama did not refrain from writing on the mundane subject of dining, as illustrated by the anthology *Manhal al-Laṭā'if fī al-Kināfah wa-al-Qaṭā'if* (The spring of witticism concerning the *kināfah* and *qaṭā'if*),[67] composed by the famous scholar and historian ʻAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). Since the ulama frequently took part in shared repasts within and outside their social circles, literature dealing with food purity and table manners was of special interest to them. For example, the historian Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 953/1546) wrote a treatise entitled *Dalālat al-Shakl ʻalá Kammīyat al-Akl* (A guide on how to determine food quantity for consumption).[68]

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[62] Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *Ma'ālim al-Qurbah,* 92.

[63] Waines, "Food and Drink," 220.

[64] G. H. Bousquet, "Ḥadath," *EI²,* 3:19.

[65] Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 4:167–68, 174, 185, 187, 191, 193–94.

Appreciation of fine food was a trait associated with the owning class, and therefore they dabbled in culinary adventures. To some of the elite, cooking was a hobby. The vizier Majīd Ibn Khaṣīb owned seven hundred slave girls, two of whom were experts at preparing fried dishes. To illustrate the vast wealth he accumulated during his period of service, al-Maqrīzī relates that large quantities of food were cooked ″in his kitchen at home.″[69] Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ṣāliḥ (752–55/1351–54) was an amateur cook. He himself laid the table at a banquet he held in honor of his mother, Qutlūbak, and he served her and other close associates dishes he had cooked ″with his own hands″ *(wa-ṭabakha al-ṭaʻām bi-yadihi)*.[70] Khalīl ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī enumerates at least forty-four dishes on the menu of the sultan′s kitchen, some of which came in varying flavors.[71] It is worthy of mention that dishes included in the royal menu such as colocasia, *sambūsak* (a small meat pie), and *harīsah* (cooked meat and wheat pounded together) were also consumed in the market in cooks′ shops.[72] This might well indicate that cooking traditions, mainly Arab and Persian, were standard in the urban centers of the Middle East.[73] The elite′s quality dishes that could not be had in the market, however, had their particular prestige value. The masses were aware of these differences because, on occasion, with the elite′s permission, they were exposed to this refined food. Thus, for example, at the end of the banquet Sultan al-Ẓāhir

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[66] Jalāl al-Dīn ʻAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *Manhal al-Laṭā'if fī al-Kināfah wa-al-Qaṭā'if,* ed. Maḥmūd Naṣṣār (Cairo, 1994), 15–17, 18, 21, 23.

[67] *Kināfah* is a pastry made of sweet vermicelli. *Qaṭā'if* (s. *qaṭīfah*) is sweetmeats.

[68] Muḥammad ibn ʻAlī Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Dalālat al-Shakl ʻalá Kammīyat al-Akl,* ed. Muḥammad Khayr Ramaḍān Yūsuf (Beirut, 1998).

[69] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk* , 3:59.

[70] Ibid., 2:929; For further examples see: al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī,* 10:193; ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz, *Al-Maṭbakh al-Sulṭānī,* 41, 43.

[71] Al-Ẓāhirī, *Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik,* 125; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk* , 2:535; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī,* 4:37; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'iʻ*, 5:88.

[72] Ibn Bassām, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah,* 44, 45; Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *Maʻālim al-Qurbah,* 10.

[73] Waines, ″Study of Cooking,″ 37.

Barqūq (784–801/1382–99) held for his amirs and mamluks to mark a victory of his, probably in a polo game, huge quantities of food, especially meat and drinks were left to the common people.[74] Considering medieval social immobility, gestures of this kind provided the elite with the opportunity not only to exhibit their social rank and power but also to nurture in the masses′ minds the social structure that secured their position at the top of the social ladder. Status symbols clearly defined the social boundaries between the masses and the elite. All those who were invited to the banquet enjoyed the same status and only when they left the scene were the masses permitted to cross the boundaries and devour the remaining food. Terms of social inclusion and exclusion denoted the holders of power and authority.

DIET

Sociologists who have studied the diet of medieval western Europeans have shown that the higher their rank, the larger was the quantity of food they consumed and the greater the proportion of meat in their diet. Members of the lower strata, though they performed hard manual labor, consumed smaller quantities of food and much less meat.[75] Sources from the Mamluk period reveal a similar picture. The nutrition of the Egyptian rural masses in the Mamluk period was based mainly on locally-available crops. Upper Egypt was abundant in sugar cane and dates, so its inhabitants lived mainly on sweet foodstuffs *(ḥalawah)*.[76] In Lower Egypt, taro (colocasia, *qulqās*) and peas *(jūlabān)* were staples of nutrition. The diet of the peasantry was based mainly on bread: ″And their *fallāḥīn* have a kind of bread called *ka‘k* made of wheat flour, and it is dried and constitutes the main part of their diet all year round.″[77] Fish was also readily available, especially in the autumn, when the Nile tide brought this form of sustenance in large quantities. Fishing in this season was so easy that children could help provide food.[78] Al-Maqrīzī testifies that milk and milk products were also important ingredients in the diet of the masses *(wa-kathīr yukthirūna akl al-albān wa-mā yu‘mal minhā)*.[79] In western Europe in the same period dairy products were always considered a typical peasant food.[80]

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[74] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 3:902; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 12:80–81. For another example see: al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 3:403.

[75] Mennell, *All Manners of Food,* 44, 304.

[76] Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad Ibn Duqmāq, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār li-Wasiṭat ‘Aqd al-Amṣār* (Beirut, 1983), 41–46.

[77] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 1:45.

[78] Ibid., 46, 64, 108. See also: Ashtor, ″Essai sur l′alimentation,″ 1029–30.

[79] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 1:45.

[80] Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 28.

Scarcity meant that the lower classes consumed small quantities of meat. In medieval Europe cattle rearing for meat was done for the privileged.[81] Even today in France and the United States a symbolic connotation of wealth is attached to steak.[82] Offal was the principal meat generally associated with the food of the poor, probably because it could not be kept for long.[83] Furthermore, for dietary reasons, the Muslim tradition has restrictions about offal. Slaughtering instructions demand the setting aside of the animal′s blood because it is considered unclean.[84] While it is much easier to separate the blood from the animal′s flesh, offal, on the other hand, has to go through a special process in order to clean from it the blood it contains. There was always a doubt about the cleanness of offal, especially that which was prepared in the market, and therefore it was considered an inferior food.[85] Offal and the heads of large and small cattle were disdained by the upper classes in Mamluk Egypt and treated as waste. The cook of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, al-Ḥājj ʻAlī amassed great wealth from selling such waste products accumulated in the sultan′s kitchen and catering at the homes of great amirs and officials during festive events. Al-Maqrīzī reports that al-Ḥājj ʻAlī frowned in response to the sultan′s request that he cook an additional mutton dish at the end of the feast held when Amir Baktamur al-Sāqī′s son married the daughter of Amir Tankiz. When the sultan asked him why, al-Ḥājj ʻAlī told him that his request would deprive him of the 20,000 dirhams he could have made from selling the unused cattle, chicken, and goose parts that he had accumulated during the celebration, which had to be sold immediately, before they spoiled. The sultan insisted he prepare the dish, promising to reward him with an equal sum of money. On the sultan′s order, butchers and cooks from Cairo were brought to the Citadel, where they bought the waste products for 23,000 dirhams.[86]

In contrast to the common people′s diet, meat and sweets, which were prestigious items in the Middle East throughout the Middle Ages, were the mainstay of the upper classes. There were other prestigious comestibles but we will confine our discussion to these two. The annals of the Mamluk period are replete with information about the quantities of food consumed by the military elite. In the first decades of the Mamluk sultanate, it was considered necessary to provide rank-and-file mamluks with a daily portion of meat: ″and they had plenty of meat dishes, sweets, and fruits . . .″ *(wa-kānat lahum al-idārāt al-kathīrah min al-luḥūm wa-al-aṭʻimah wa-al-ḥalawāt wa-al-fawākih).*[87] During the reign of Sultan al-ʻĀdil Kitbughā (694–96/1294–96) the quantity of meat consumed daily in the sultan′s household alone reached 25,000 *raṭl*s, while that served at the *simāṭ*s, the daily banquets al-Nāṣir Muḥammad held for his amirs, reached 35,000 *raṭl*s, apart from poultry, lamb, kid, venison, and so on. At al-Ẓāhir Barqūq′s *simāṭ,* 5,000 *raṭl*s of beef were served, in addition to poultry.[88] Considering the decrease in the royal expenditure during the Circassian Sultanate (784–923/1382–1517), relatively large quantities of meat were served also in the *simāṭ*s of Sultans al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (815–24/1412–21) and al-Ashraf Barsbāy (825–41/1422–38).[89] It was told of the above-mentioned vizier Majīd Ibn Khaṣīb that ″he used to cook daily in his kitchen, at home, one thousand *raṭl*s of meat, apart from geese and other poultry.″ The quantity of sweets consumed in his household was so large that he had to invent containers for sweetmeats that were later called after him *al-khaṣbīyah*.[90]

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[81] Elias, *The Civilizing Process,* 96; Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 45.

[82] Ronald Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris, 195)7, 62–64; Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago, 1976), 172; Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 311.

[83] Mennell, *All Manners of Food*,, 312–13.

[84] Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 4:183–84

[85] Ibid., 185.

[86] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:231 and 315; idem, *Sulūk,* 2:686.

The prestige of meat and sweets was so enhanced by their association with the upper classes that they were identified with the food of kings. According to al-Maqrīzī, the provisions packed for the hajj of Sultan al-Ashraf Shaʻbān (778/1376) included ″varieties of royal foods″ *(anwāʻ al-ma'ākil al-mulūkīyah),* such as the 30,000 boxes containing five *raṭl*s each of sweets made from refined sugar for the sultan′s personal consumption. The endless quantities of sweets taken by the amirs and mamluks on the hajj elicited the following comment from al-Maqrīzī: ″Consider the greatness of a country in which three hundred and sixty thousand *raṭl*s of sugar can be produced in one month for the sultan and his amirs, apart from [that produced] for others, which probably was of a similar volume.″[91]

The special attention paid by the chroniclers of the Mamluk period to the varieties and quantities of meat and sweets consumed at the ruling elite′s social events also attests to the role of these foodstuffs as signifiers of class status. Such occasions provided the upper classes with the opportunity to enhance their social position. It is no coincidence that they made extensive use of status symbols in these contested arenas to convey their control of resources and power not only to the public, but also to fellow members of their class. In 692/1293, Sultan al-Ashraf Khalīl held a banquet to celebrate the dedication of the Ashrafīyah palace, the circumcision of his brother Muḥammad (the future sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad), and that of his nephew, Mūsá ibn al-Ṣāliḥ. For this banquet 3,000 sheep, 600 head of cattle, and 500 horses were slaughtered to prepare the meat dishes, while 1,800 *qinṭār*s of sugar were used for the beverages and another 160 for the sweets.[92] At the banquet held on the occasion of the marriage of Amir Qawṣūn to one of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's daughters, the refreshments included the meat of 5,000 sheep, 1,000 head of cattle, 50 horses, and great numbers of fowl and geese, together with sweets and beverages made from 11,000 *ablījah,* cones, of sugar.[93] In the inauguration of the great palace al-Nāṣir Muḥammad built for Yalbughā al-Yaḥyāwī, one of his favorite amirs, 300 *qinṭār*s of sugar were used for preparing only the drinks.[94] The inclusion of horseflesh in the food served in these banquets is of interest to our discussion for it signified the Mamluk menu. The Mamluks retained the practice of consuming horseflesh prevalent in the Eurasian steppes,[95] although Muslim tradition rejected it. The Prophet avoided horseflesh and Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767), the founder of the Hanafi school of law, declared horseflesh unlawful.[96] The Mamluks belonged to a minority school of Hanafis that regarded the eating of horses as acceptable.[97] Furthermore, the number of horses is much smaller than that of other animals slaughtered for the Mamluk banquets. This indicates their high value and scarcity. Therefore it was identified as a distinctive Mamluk taste and symbol of their wealth and status.

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[87] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:213.

[88] Ibid., 2:210 and 213.

[89] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:210–11.

[90] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 3:59.

[91] Ibid., 273.

The dedication of monumental religious edifices,under the patronage of Mamluk sultans and grand amirs, and the ceremonies held in those edifices to celebrate the Prophet's and saints' birthdays *(mawlid,* pl. *mawālid)* or religious festivals, were also occasions for dialogue between members of the ruling elite and their subjects that consolidated and sanctioned the existing social order. It was customary on the festivals of ʻĪd al-Fiṭr and ʻĪd al-Aḍḥá and the Prophet's birthday to serve sweet dishes and beverages. Thus, for example, the inauguration ceremony of the madrasah founded by Amir Sirghitmish in Cairo (757/1356) included a magnificent meal *(simāṭ jalīl)* in which the mosque basin was filled with sugar-sweetened water.[98]

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[92] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:112, 211. A *qinṭār* equaled 100 *raṭls*, that is, about 100 lbs (378.5 kg) in Cairo.

[93] Ibid.; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:288. For further examples see: ibid., 346, 685–86; 4:1221; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʼiʻ*, 4:151; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 9:102; 10:155; 14:38–39; 15:345.

[94] Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Ḥajar al-ʻAsqalānī, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah fī aʻyān al-Miʼah al-Thāminah,* ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Jādd al-Ḥaqq (Cairo, n.d.), 5:212.

[95] Aḥmad ibn ʻAlī al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʻshá fī Sināʻat al-Inshā*ʼ (Beirut, 1987), 4:455; Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭūṭah: Tuḥfat al-Nuẓẓār fī Gharāʼib al-Amṣār,* ed. Ṭalāl Ḥarb (Beirut, 1987), 339.

[96] Frederick J. Simoons, *Eat Not This Flesh*: *Food Avoidances from Prehistory to the Present* (Madison, 1994), 179. See Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 4:167.

[97] My thanks are due to Robert Irwin for this information.

[98] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 3:28.

The sumptuous meal served at the inauguration of Sultan al-Ẓāhir Barqūq′s madrasah (788/1386) included ″. . . varieties of the best foods and roast meat of horses, mutton, geese, poultry and gazelles″ *(anwāʻ al-aṭʻimah al-fākhirah, wa-al-mashwīyah min al-khayl wa-al-khirāf wa-al-iwazz wa-al-dajāj wa-al-ghizlān).*[99] A sweet beverage that filled the madrasah basin, sweetmeats, and fruits concluded the meal. The sweet refreshments served on such occasions had a double meaning: they combined a traditional religious symbol with the Mamluk elite′s status symbol. According to the hadith, the Prophet liked sweetmeats *(ḥalawah)* and honey. He especially blessed the palm tree and was of the opinion that whoever starts the day with seven dates would not be harmed that day by poison or witchcraft.[100] He himself used to drink a cup of water mixed with honey every day, and used to break the fast during Ramaḍān with a date or raisins.[101]

There is a debate among the religious scholars, the commentators on Muslim tradition through the ages, on the issue of what kind and quantity of sweetmeats the believer is permitted to consume. Ascetics during the Mamluk period interpreted *ḥalawah* as comestibles that were naturally sweet, such as dates, honey, and fruits, on the grounds that it was truer to the way of the Prophet and the period in which he lived, because the early Muslims were only exposed to processed sweetmeats after the great conquests. As processed sweetmeats were considered luxury foods throughout the Middle Ages, ascetics designated them solely for the next world.[102] In contrast, the more permissive of the commentators on sweetmeats, like Aḥmad ibn ʻAlī Ibn Ḥajar al-ʻAsqalānī (d. 852/1449) and Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-ʻAynī (d. 855/1451), were of the opinion that *ḥalawah* was a comestible that had undergone processing which turned it into a sweetmeat *(mā dakhalathu al-ṣanʻah).* As this liberal interpretation appeared to cast aspersions on the image of the Prophet, depicting him as a person who used to consume luxury foods every day, these commentators added a restriction on the quantity that could be consumed and this became the religious precept according to which sweetmeats could be eaten. This broad interpretation of the tradition enabled the Mamluks to introduce, with the consent of the clerics who played an active role in the religious ceremonies, their own interpretation as an accepted way of implementing the traditional Islamic models, particularly that of the Prophet. Thus the Mamluks replaced the Prophet′s dates or raisins with refined sweetmeats or beverages. The inclusion of the status symbols characteristic of the Mamluk lifestyle, of a quality and measure that only they as rulers could permit themselves, for ceremonies of a religious character and particularly of the Islamic festivals, lent credence to their status within the Muslim establishment. This was one of many other public activities by which the Mamluks wished to cultivate their image as part of the glorious pantheon of earlier rulers, who were perceived in Muslim tradition as the Prophet′s successors and faithful followers of Islam.[103]

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[99] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 4:547.

[100] Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Faḍl Ibn Ḥajar al-ʻAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo, 1959), 11:489; Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad al-ʻAynī, *ʻUmdat al-Qāriʼ Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut, 2001), 21:91.

[101] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Medicine of the Prophet,* 211; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* 11:502; al-ʻAynī, *ʻUmdat al-Qāriʼ,* 21:105.

[102] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* 11:489; al-ʻAynī, *ʻUmdat al-Qāriʼ,* 21:91–92.

It was at these festive ceremonies, which were conducted according to a strict order, that the hierarchy within the functional groups of the society of the Mamluk Sultanate was clearly manifested. Thus, for example, the Prophet′s birthday festivities during the rule of al-Ẓāhir Barqūq were regularly attended by the elite of the religious establishment that included senior orthodox scholars and Sufis, and the Mamluk elite that included amirs and soldiers.[104] The order of entrance to the ceremony and the seating arrangements had a set pattern that indicated the hierarchy between the two elite groups and within each of them. Thus, the jurists entered first and sat on the sultan′s right by their rank *(ʻalá marātibihim),* followed by the Sufis whose place was on the sultan′s left, i.e., they were formally of lower status. Then came the amirs and sat at some distance from the sultan. The soldiers, who were last to enter, were seated at both sides of the amirs, to their right and left. Only those who were members of these two important groups in society, the clerics and the Mamluks, were invited to these ceremonies. The order of seating determined, theoretically at least, the superiority of the religious over the military elite and symbolized the superiority of its cultural repertoire, i.e., the Muslim tradition, over the military-Turkish repertoire of the Mamluks. The common people were not invited to take part in these ceremonies. In the event that they were allowed entry, it was only after the dignitaries had departed after the festive repast and their participation was relegated to the role of cleaning up the leftovers.

A similar role was allotted to the common people at the ceremonies held for ʻĪd al-Fiṭr by al-Ẓāhir Barqūq. He used to hold a special *simāṭ* every day of this holiday. When the ceremonies were over and the dignitaries had left, the servants and common people were allowed in to devour the remaining food.[105] The masses could cross social boundaries and fleetingly observe the lifestyle of the upper class only after the latter had left the scene, and only with their permission, thus reasserting their status as those wielding power and authority. This pattern, repeatedly manifested in the religious ceremonies and sanctioned by them, enhanced the hierarchical social structure that guaranteed the religious authority of the ulama, and the ruling elite′s political and social preeminence.

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[103] On the issue of inventing tradition for political purposes see: David Cannadine, ″The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: the British Monarchy and the ′Invention of Tradition,′ *c.* 1820–1977,″ in *Invention Of Tradition,* ed. Erica Hobsbaum and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, 1984), 101–64.

[104] Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 12:73–74.

[105] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:210. For further examples see: al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:807; 3:403, 547; idem, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:330; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 11:243; 14:38–39.

TABLE MANNERS

Traditional Muslim table manners involved partaking food in common meals from one central dish, as was the standard among the upper class of western Europe at the time.[106] As there was no recommendation in Muslim tradition to use personal utensils like plates or spoons, the diner was required to take a small morsel with three fingers and deposit it in his mouth without making contact with his saliva. This also held true for drinking: the drinker was required to drink without touching the vessel with his lips. Licking one′s fingers and then putting them into the common dish was considered abhorrent. Licking the fingers at the end of the meal, on the other hand, was allowed as this was equal to wiping one′s hand with a napkin.[107]

Norbert Elias has shown that the etiquette of the medieval western European aristocracy at the table was not designed to maintain personal or common hygiene, otherwise more utensils that the aristocracy could easily afford would have been introduced. What is more, luxury utensils were already abundant at the tables of the upper class, but for different reasons.[108] Therefore, Elias concludes, refined manners were adopted not only for aesthetic reasons, but were also part of conditioned behavior, the self-checking standards, of the upper class molded into a particular form of conduct that constituted one of many other symbols of their social distinction.[109] Islamic sources, too, do not mention hygiene or disgust as an explanation for the rules and regulations that made up proper conduct at the common meal. They do mention, on the other hand, prescriptions and recommendations from the *sunnah,* the authoritative model of the Prophet.[110] Courtly experience in Islam, especially of famous rulers of earlier periods, was also considered worthy of being included in normative Muslim conduct.[111] As manners of partaking food together were part of traditional etiquette, the learned from religious circles were deeply committed to follow them. A strict adherence to the *sunnah* was doubtless a prominent distinction of their religio-social status. The restrictions that the religious circles imposed on themselves were used against both the lower classes and the Mamluk ruling elite, especially when the latter deviated from normative Muslim conduct.

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[106] Elias, *The Civilizing Process,* 96; Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 45.

[107] Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazzī al-ʿĀmirī al-Dimashqī, *Ādāb al-Muʾākalah,* ed. Mūsá Bāshā (Damascus and Beirut, 1987), 23, 27–28.

[108] Elias, *The Civilizing Process,* 103–4.

[109] Ibid.; Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 44.

[110] Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 1:216, 217, 222.

[111] See for example: al-Ghazzī, *Ādāb al-Muʾākalah,* 17, 18–19, 20, 37; Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 1:209, 211, 215–20; 4:23, 209, 216.

In public, members of the Mamluk ruling elite could not avoid table manners and food taboos that were *sunnah* as they felt responsible for maintaining normative Muslim order as much as the ulama. In private, however, the Mamluks often indulged in a different cultural repertoire. The sources reveal that prominent amirs not only consumed wine, but also manufactured it in large quantities.[112] Sultan al-Manṣūr Abū Bakr (d. 742/1341) used to associate with his father′s amirs, such as Maliktamur al-Ḥijāzī and Ṭajār and *khāssakīyah* Mamluks, enjoying wine, women, and singers′ performances. These drunken parties were the main cause of Abū Bakr′s downfall.[113] Maliktamur al-Ḥijāzī, who escaped Abū Bakr′s downfall without a scratch, had no reason to suppress his strong passion for wine *(mūla‘an bi-al-khamr)* and wine was carried on camels to his house in the Citadel.[114] During his governorship in Damascus, Amir Sudūn min ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (d. 841/1437) made a fortune from his ownership of taverns.[115]

As mentioned earlier, dishes of horseflesh were included in meals served at their banquets. After the Oirat, the Mongol warriors who had fled the Mongol Ilkhanate of Persia (695/1295), found refuge in the Mamluk Sultanate, they were allowed into the Mamluk army and their children into the majority of the amirs′ households. Since they kept their homeland tradition without intervention, they consumed horseflesh as was the custom in the Eurasian steppes. This was abhorrent to the Muslims because they used to tether the beast and beat it to death.[116] The Muslim tradition, however, forbids the flesh of animals beaten to death *(mawqūdhah)*.[117] Furthermore, it provides detailed prescriptions of how to slaughter the animal with minimum suffering and purify it for consumption by setting aside its blood.[118] Such blatant deviations from Muslim codes of behavior by the ruling elite made it easier for the ulama to level sharp criticism against the Mamluks′ cultural repertoire and bar its dissemination to the general population.

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[112] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:400–2.

[113] Ibid., 567–68. For more examples see: ibid., 646–47; 710.

[114] Ibid., 667.

[115] Ibid., 1067.

[116] Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh al-Duwal wa-al-Mulūk,* ed. Qusṭanṭīn Zurayq (Beirut, 1942), 8:204; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 1:812; idem, *Khiṭaṭ,* 2:22–23.

[117] Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal,* 4:183–84.

[118] Waines, ″Food and Drink,″ 220

CONCLUSION

The social relationship between the Mamluk ruling class, the civilian elite, and their subordinates was conducted through an intricate network of communication. The most influential sphere whereby the ruling elite could buttress its legitimacy for rule was the patronage of Islam. The Mamluks invested special efforts and attention to tie their status symbols with Muslim rituals and festivals in order to foster the right social structure and sanction their position in it. The impact of the implicit language of communication, the messages encoded in symbols, had a strong effect in forming the social structure that enabled the long rule of the Mamluks despite its shortcomings. The messages delivered from the Mamluk elite to the civilians through the semiotic language of food, together with other fields of material culture, established a common structured conception of the normative social order which accorded them social and political authority—the status of rulers over the masses.

The present article discussed the Islamic cultural repertoire in the Mamluk court whose agents were the religious scholars. The Mamluk rulers conducted themselves in the public sphere in accordance with Muslim models of behavior. In another study, which is nearing completion, the author of this article addresses the relationship between the ulama and the Mamluks in the context of an alternative cultural repertoire whose roots were not grounded in Islam. In their everyday lives, the Mamluks clung to another cultural repertoire in addition to the Islamic one, which included the Turkish heritage they brought with them from their homeland in the Eurasian steppes. In accordance with Norbert Elias′ socio-cultural theory, the cultural characteristics of the Mamluk court could have been expected to ″leak″ from the court to the general population. This process did not occur, however, and despite the 270 years of Mamluk rule in Egypt and Syria, their cultural repertoire included the general populace only occasionally and superficially. It may be assumed that the reason for this stems from socio-historic processes that typify the side-by-side existence of two cultures that are unequal in development, in which case the simple culture seeks to adopt the more sophisticated one. Hence, it is only natural that the Mamluk elite with its nomadic culture would adopt, both intellectually and materially, the urban culture of Islam. Not only did the Mamluks preserve their cultural heritage throughout the entire period of their rule alongside that of Islam, but they also used it as a marker to distinguish their status as rulers over the remaining groups within the population. It would appear that preservation of their culture stems from the unique social structure of the Mamluk elite. The reign of the Mamluks was founded on continual recruitment of fresh human resources from the Eurasian steppes and therefore the Mamluk elite, despite long years of rule, was permanently composed of first-generation immigrants within a society with a deep-rooted Arab-Muslim culture. Moreover, the Mamluks, both during the Turkish and the Circassian periods, did not cut off their connection with their homeland. They brought their relatives from the old country and at times Mamluks′ offspring born in Egypt were sent to the homeland to be raised traditionally.[119] The ulama, in contrast, had been the normative representatives of Muslim culture for generations and their interest, whether stemming from genuine ideological motives or concern for preserving their status, lay in fostering Muslim culture as the sole superculture in Muslim society. This concept led them to consider any alternative cultural repertoire to be inferior. It would appear that the social weakness of the Mamluks as new immigrants, despite their belonging to the ruling elite, was effectively exploited by the religious scholars to direct criticism against the everyday lifestyle of the Mamluks, at times implicitly and at times explicitly, with the aim of heightening awareness that their cultural repertoire, despite being the repertoire of a royal court, was unfit to serve as an alternative to the traditional Islamic repertoire which they represented.

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[119] Amjad Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook* (Richmond, England, 2001), 175–77.