**The Mongol World**

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Publication details


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Published online on: 26 May 2022

**How to cite**: Josephine van den Bent. 26 May 2022, *Mongols in the Mamluk Sultanate* from: The Mongol World Routledge

Accessed on: 29 Nov 2023

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

MONGOLS IN THE MAMLUK SULTANATE

Josephine van den Bent

To the southwest of the Mongol Empire lay the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria. To the early Mamluk Sultanate, the Mongols of the Ilkhanate were the primary and most threatening enemy, while the Jochid Ulus was an important ally. Yet there was a third category of Mongols with whom the Mamluks maintained even closer ties: those who lived inside the realm. They arrived in the sultanate in different ways and would come to hold varying positions within Mamluk society—from lowly soldier to sultan. This section discusses the Mongol diaspora within the Mamluk Sultanate in the second half of the thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth century.

THE MAMLUK SULTANATE AND THE MONGOLS

The ruling elite of the Mamluk Sultanate was composed of men who had arrived there as mamluks. The Arabic term mamluk literally means ‘owned’, i.e. a slave, and from the ninth century onwards it came to specifically mean ‘military slave’. Most of the mamluks in Egypt in this period were taken from the Turkic-speaking areas of Central Asia (in later times, the balance shifted towards the Caucasus). In 1250, they took power by deposing and killing the Ayyubid ruler of Egypt, al-Mu’azzam Turanshah. Although the following ten years would prove to be rather tempestuous with many changes of power, the Mamluk Sultanate was born, and it soon came to include Syria, following the Mamluk defeat of Hülegü’s troops at the battle of ‘Ayn Jalut (Goliath’s Spring) in 1260.2

Hostilities between the two powers continued, both as full-on military battles and in ways that Reuven Amitai dubbed a cold war, until the peace agreement of 1323.3 At the same time, the sultanate had developed friendly diplomatic relations with the Golden Horde khanate. Sharing an enemy in the Ilkhanate, the Jochid Ulus and the Mamluks were allied from the early 1260s onwards, trading and exchanging diplomatic missions.4 As a result of the Mamluks’ relationships with these Mongol states, as well as through the sultanate’s importation of mamluks, a significant number of ethnic Mongols came to reside in the Mamluk Sultanate. Arriving in different ways,
as imported slaves, but also as war captives and immigrants, they played a significant role: Mongol soldiers and mamluks served in the Mamluk armies, Mongol Mamluk amirs (commanders) were among the ruling elite, and Mongol women married Mamluk amirs and (later) sultans.

MONGOL MAMLUKS

The military was of vital importance to the sultanate’s survival – not in the least against the Ilkhanate – and for that, a continuous influx of new mamluks was required. Young male slaves were imported by traders and purchased by amirs or the sultan, after which they were converted to Islam and received military training. After manumission they began their careers, and some eventually became high-ranking amirs or even sultans. Most of these mamluks were ethnically Turkic. According to Islamic scholarly tradition, originally developed from Greek climate and humoral theories, northern peoples, which included Turks, were particularly courageous due to their hot nature caused by their cold surroundings. They were therefore particularly suited to the role of military slave. For example, regarding ‘men of war and courage’, Ibn Butlan (d. 1066) wrote in his slave-buying manual, ‘chosen for this are the Turks and the Slavs, because of the heat of their hearts’.

So mamluks came from the north and, under Ayyubid rule, were mostly imported via Mesopotamian routes. These, however, were disrupted by the Mongol conquests, which meant that the sultanate was increasingly reliant on the sea route from the Black Sea area and the territory of the Jochid Ulus was the primary source for mamluks in the early decades of the Mamluk Sultanate. Good relations with the Golden Horde were thus essential.

Most of the mamluks who ended up in the sultanate had a Turkic background, but there were Mongols among them as well. Ideas about ‘northern’ courage and fighting prowess applied to them too: Mongols were considered to be closely related to Turks, if not a subgroup of the latter. The number of Mongols who ended up in the Mamluk ranks in this manner unfortunately remains difficult to ascertain. Even in the case of those who played an important enough role to be named in the chronicles and other sources of the time (and the majority of mamluks did not), it is not always possible to determine their ethnic background. Exact numbers, or even proportions, thus remain elusive for now, but it is clear that ethnically Mongol men formed a significant part of the Mamluk military forces. A famous quote in this regard is the statement that Sultan Qalawun (r. 1279–1290) acquired some twelve thousand ‘Turkish, Mongol, and other mamluks’.

Various other Mamluk sources similarly point to the importation of Mongol mamluks to the sultanate, mentions that have been collected by David Ayalon and Reuven Amitai. For instance, the encyclopaedist al-ʿUmari (d. 749/1348–1349) reports both the kidnapping and selling of Mongol children in the Jochid Ulus by members of other ethnic groups and the selling of Mongol children by their own parents. Although there is some evidence for the sale of children, most of those sold as slaves were actually captured in war or during raids. Civil war in the Jochid Ulus therefore also affected the influx of mamluks from this region into the Sultanate, as the amir and chronicler Baybars al-Mansuri (d. 1325) reported for the year 699/1299–1300: the conflict between Toqta Khan and the general Noqai led to the sale and export of a large number...
of prisoners – both men and women. Captives from the losing side of Noqai were purchased by the sultan and the amirs in Egypt. As Amitai points out, it is more than likely that these new mamluks included Mongols.

The prevalence of Mongol mamluks in the sultanate is underlined in a model of a sales contract given by Shams al-Din Muhammad al-Asyutī (b. 1410–1411), who though writing at a time when the balance had shifted to mamluks of Circassian stock, could still give as an example: ‘And if the sold is a Turkish mamluk, write “a whole Turkish Mongol mamluk (jamiʿ al-mamluk al-turki al-mughuli), or something else”’. Mongol slaves who ended up in the sultanate via the Black Sea route predominantly came from Jochid Ulus territory, although some reportedly also came from Qaidu’s territory, possibly via the Jochid Ulus. Finally, it should be noted that although this paragraph has only discussed male slaves so far, many female slaves, on whom there is even less documentation, were imported to the sultanate from the Black Sea area as well, among whom there surely were women of Mongol ethnicity.

Just as the generally good relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Jochid Ulus were reflected in a lively slave trade, the hostilities between the sultanate and the Ilkhanate could also bolster the Mamluks’ army ranks or provide labour elsewhere in the form of enslaved war captives. Ibn Shaddad (d. 1285), in his biography of the sultan Baybars (r. 1260–1277), reports that Mongol captives were paraded through the streets of Cairo in 1273 following a battle at the Euphrates. This procession may have included as many as two hundred Mongols, as that is the number of captives he reported for the battle. Prisoners could become mamluks, and given their previous fighting experience it is apparent why that was attractive. Their recent capture and enslavement, however, meant that their loyalty to the sultanate might well have been less than unwavering. One such example is a youth who had come to Cairo with envoys from Hülegū. Sultan Qutuz (r. 1259–1260) had the messengers executed but spared the youth and added him to his mamluks. That almost cost the sultan dearly: at the Battle of ‘Ayn Jalut, the newly made mamluk made an attempt at the life of the sultan.

Yet this was not the norm. Of six senior Mamluk amirs of Mongol descent whose careers were discussed by Amitai, four came to the sultanate as captives. Zayn al-Din Kitbugha al-Mansuri (d. 1303), then still a youth, was captured at the first Battle of Hims in December 1260. Sayf al-Din Salar al-Mansuri (d. 1310), Sayf al-Din Qibjaq al-Mansuri (1310), and Sayf al-Din Almalik (d. 1346) were all taken prisoner at the Battle of Abulustayn of 1277. The provenance of the two others, the close friends (or perhaps even brothers) Sayf al-Din Aytamish (d. 1336) and Sayf al-Din Aruqtay (d. 1349) is unclear, but it appears most likely that they came from the Jochid Ulus. Various other Mongol amirs were active during this period, but the members of this group form instructive examples.

All of them played important roles in the sultanate. Almalik served as intermediary between the amirs in Cairo and Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad during his second exile. Aruqtay was governor of Safad for twenty years, until 1336, when he was called back to Egypt and Aytamish took over the position – having held other positions, including the governorship of Karak, in the past – only to die a few months afterwards. In later years, Aruqtay would briefly serve as governor of Egypt and later of Aleppo. Qibjaq acted as governor of Damascus in the late seventh/thirteenth century, before fleeing to the Ilkhanate. After his return, he held the governorships
of Shawbak and Hama. The Oirat Salar rose to the position of na’īb al-saltana, viceroy, during the second reign of the young sultan al-Nasir Muhammad, and effectively ruled the sultanate together with Baybars al-Jashnakir. But the highest post of all Mongol mamluks was reached by Kitbugha. He became sultan.

The way Kitbugha became sultan attests to the integration of Mongol mamluks into the military and ruling elite. Following his capture, he rose through the Mamluk ranks, and when Sultan Qalawun died he was a powerful amir. During the reign of Qalawun’s son al-Ashraf Khalil (r. 689–693/1290–1293), Kitbugha grew even more powerful and played a key role in the factional struggles following the sultan’s murder in 693/1293 by a coalition of amirs headed by another Mongol amir called Badr al-Din Baydara. Another group, led by Husam al-Din Lajin al-Rumi Ustadar and Kitbugha, wanted to avenge the sultan, and they won the resulting battle. Qalawun’s young son, al-Nasir Muhammad, was crowned, but he was only nine years old; actual power lay with a group of senior amirs, including Kitbugha, who became viceroy. Conflict broke out, however, between Kitbugha and the vizier al-Shuja‘i. Al-Shuja‘i had made plans to arrest Kitbugha, but these plans were divulged by another Mongol named amir Sayf al-Din Qunghur al-Tatari and his son Jawurshi, the former having apparently immigrated to Egypt during the reign of Baybars. According to some sources, he did so on account of ‘feelings of jinsiyya’, ethnic solidarity. Kitbugha took action, and al-Shuja‘i was eventually killed, leaving Kitbugha as the sole regent for al-Nasir Muhammad in January 1294. A revolt of al-Ashraf Khalil’s mamluks eventually resulted in the removal of al-Nasir Muhammad from the throne, and Kitbugha declared himself sultan in November/December 1294, taking on the title al-Malik al-‘Adil.

Kitbugha thus came to power in the context of a struggle between different Mamluk factions, and these conflicts impacted the success and duration of his rule. Many considered him a usurper of al-Nasir Muhammad’s throne. It did not help Kitbugha that he also had to deal with a major famine. His advancement of his own mamluks and their behaviour was also a source of criticism, but his greatest mistake was his approach to the large group of Oirat Mongol immigrants that arrived in Cairo in 695/1296 (see later in this chapter). Kitbugha was an Oirat as well, and his favouritism towards them was interpreted in terms of ethnic solidarity (jinsiyya). Ibn al-Dawadari, for instance, stated that Kitbugha ‘felt sympathy for them, because of his ethnicity (jins), for he was Oirat, and they were his tribe and his people’. Ultimately, while in Syria, Kitbugha was forced out of office in 696/1296, and Lajin was declared sultan. Kitbugha was sent to the citadel of Salkhad (Sarkhad) and from there played a small role in the sultanate until his death in 703/1303.

In a few decades time, a young Oirat Mongol prisoner of war thus managed to become ruler of the Mamluk Sultanate. In general, there was a significant Mongol presence in the higher echelons of the sultanate in this period. Yet most Mongol mamluks lived unrecorded lives.

IMMIGRANTS

Not all Mongols in the Mamluk Sultanate arrived there through the slave trade or as enslaved war captives. I have already briefly mentioned the arrival of a group of Oirat immigrants. That group was the largest but by no means the first. Groups
seeking refuge in the sultanate repeatedly appeared, and they are generally referred to as \textit{wafidiyya} in present-day scholarly literature, meaning ‘those arriving in a group’. Most Mamluk-era authors employ slightly different terminology, but based on the same root, like \textit{wufud} or \textit{wafidun}. Among the \textit{wafidiyya} turning up in the sultanate in the first eighty years or so of the Mamluk Sultanate were various groups of Mongols, coming both from the Golden Horde and from the Ilkhanate.\textsuperscript{43}

There has been some academic debate around why groups of Mongols immigrated to the Mamluk Sultanate. Ayalon, who wrote the first extensive study on the phenomenon, appears to suggest that the relatively large influx of Mongol \textit{wafidun} during the reign of Baybars was connected to that sultan’s supposed admiration of Mongols as well as the generous reception he gave them. In the case of the Oirat immigration under Kitbugha, he points to the shared ethnic background between the immigrants and the sultan.\textsuperscript{44} Nakamachi Nobutaka, however, has rightly argued that we should look at internal factors in the Mongol khanates, the ‘push factors’, rather than just the possible ‘pull factor’ of the Mamluk Sultanate.\textsuperscript{45} The Mamluk-era authors themselves – although making claims that could be described as pull factors\textsuperscript{46} – emphasise developments within or between the Mongol khanates in their explanations for the arrival of Mongol \textit{wafidun}.

Aside from the Oirat \textit{wafidiyya} arriving during the reign of Kitbugha, the largest groups of Mongols to come to the sultanate did so under Baybars. Smaller groups arrived, for instance, in 1282–1283, during the reign Qalawun, when an Oirat called al-Shaykh ʿAli came to Egypt with a group of Mongols;\textsuperscript{47} in 1304, when some two hundred horsemen appeared with their families;\textsuperscript{48} and in 1317, when the commander Tati arrived with a hundred horsemen and their households.\textsuperscript{49} But it is the large groups that came during the reigns of Baybars and Kitbugha that contemporary sources pay the most attention to. They can also provide insights into the sultanate’s relationship with the Jochid Ulus and the Ilkhanate respectively, and – to a certain extent – to what happened to the members of these \textit{wafidiyya} groups. The first major arrival was a group of Jochid Mongols in 1262. Three other parties followed shortly afterwards in 1263. Contemporary sources often mention them as a single group.\textsuperscript{50}

The aforementioned Oirats, arriving in 1296, came from the Ilkhanate. According to the most detailed source on the first groups of Mongol \textit{wafidun}, the biography of Sultan Baybars by Muhyi al-Din ibn ʿAbd al-Zahir, Cairo first learned about their approach when the governor of Damascus sent word ahead that his scouts had come across a group of Mongols on their way to Cairo. They were reported to be troops from the Jochid Ulus, who had originally been sent to Hülégü as reinforcements. When conflict between the Ilkhanate and the Jochids broke out,\textsuperscript{51} Berke instructed these troops to attempt to return to him, but if that were impossible, to head to Egypt. As a result, on Saturday 11 November 1262, Sultan Baybars welcomed commander Suraghan (?) Agha with some two hundred troops and their families. They were settled in the neighbourhood of Al-Luq, their leaders were awarded amirates, and the rest of the troops were divided among his Bahriyya regiment and the sultan’s mamluks.\textsuperscript{52} A little under a year later, in September 1263, word arrived again from Syria that another group of Mongol riders was approaching, some 1,300 this time. They were followed shortly afterwards by two more groups, the first of which was headed by Geremün (Karamun in the Arabic sources) Agha. Like their predecessors, all received a warm welcome.\textsuperscript{53} ‘Then’, Ibn ʿAbd al-Zahir
writes, ‘the sultan suggested Islam to them and they became Muslims by his noble hand and they were all circumcised’. 

In general, these groups of immigrant Mongols get little further attention in the sources, although some individual members are mentioned. The Oirat wafidiyya of 1296 received significantly more attention, which was rather negative. As mentioned, they arrived during the reign of Kitbugha, who made some severe errors of judgement in his dealing with them. The Oirats came from the Ilkhanate, where their leader, Taraqai (Taraghay), had become entangled in the rather unstable Ilkhanid political situation of that time and came into conflict with the new Ilkhan, Ghazan. He led his followers into Syria. Kitbugha, having been informed of the approach of a large group of Mongols, consecutively sent out the amirs ‘Alam al-Din Sanjar al-Dawadari, Shams al-Din Sunqur al-A’sar, and Shams al-Din Qarasunqur al-Mansuri to meet them. The group was large, consisting of either ten thousand or eighteen thousand households, which included men, women, children, and livestock. The Oirat leaders were received and fêted in Damascus, after which they were taken to Egypt by Qarasunqur al-Mansuri, while Sanjar al-Dawadari remained in Syria with the other Oirats. Kitbugha had ordered them to be settled on the coast. On the way to the area of Atlit, where they would come to reside, they were not allowed to enter the cities they passed – traders had to come out to them instead.

In Cairo, the Oirat leaders enjoyed an enthusiastic welcome by the sultan, giving them honorary robes, amirates, iqta’ at (land allocations), and other gifts. This created bad blood among the amirs, and their complaints are reflected in al-Nuwayri’s statement that Kitbugha ‘exaggerated in bestowing honours on them’ and, moreover, granted them the rank of amir ‘even though they were infidels’. Indeed, the Oirats’ enduring and at times blatant heathenism – they ate in public during Ramadan, among other things – was a major issue. Besides, the preferential treatment the Oirats received reportedly made them arrogant, seating themselves among higher-ranking amirs, where they did not belong, as well as generally acting in a rude manner. The Oirats were also widely viewed with suspicion. That did not just apply to the main body of the wafidiyya, who had after all not been allowed to enter the cities they encountered on their way to the Syrian coast, but also to the Oirat elite in Cairo. Kitbugha’s favouritism towards the Oirats contributed significantly to his deposition. Under Lajin, the Oirat commander Taraqai and several others were arrested and sent to Alexandria, where most of them were apparently killed. The remainder were divided among amirs and some were sent to Syria. One of the Oirat commanders, named Ulus, returned to Cairo from Alexandria and he and a group of co-conspirators attempted to restore Kitbugha to the throne in 699/1299, while the army was on its way to Syria to face an impending Ilkhanid attack. They intended to kill Salar and Baybars al-Jashnakir and wished to take revenge for the Oirat amirs who had been killed previously. They failed, however, and Ulus and the other Oirat leaders who were involved were executed. Still, other Oirat amirs continued to move in the ruling circles. According to al-Maqrizi, Oirats were banned from serving the sultan al-Nasir Muhammad in 1310. Apparently, they had first been in the service of various amirs but ‘plotted against their masters and left for the sultan in Karak’, where he was staying during the brief reign of Baybars al-Jashnakir (r. 708/1309–709/1310). Once al-Nasir Muhammad had returned to the throne, the sultanic mamluks reportedly took offence at the Oirats’ high position.
Al-Nasir Muhammad apparently caved in the face of their arguments that the Oirats were untrustworthy and banned them from his service.68

INTEGRATION INTO THE SULTANATE

Yet, the Oirats did not disappear. As al-Nuwayri wrote, somewhere between the 1310s and his death in 1333,69 ‘amirs took their grown sons, who were the most beautiful people, into their service’, and ‘soldiers and others married their daughters’, while ‘those of them who remained are still in the military today’.70 The same applies to the earlier wafidiyya groups. Although they do not appear as a group in the sources in the way the Oirats did – the latter also remained active as a group for a longer period of time, even when split up among different amirs71 – they also continued to play a role in the Mamluk military. The majority of the Mongol wafidun were integrated into the personal troops of amirs and into the balqa, a largely non-mamluk army unit of lower status than the mamluk troops of the sultan and the amirs.72 And while their leaders were generally made amirs, the status these Mongol immigrants could reach has been the object of some scholarly debate.

Ayalon argued that the positions the wafidiyya received upon arrival were relatively low and that they had limited opportunities for promotion: wafidi Mongols seldom attained a higher position than that of amir of forty/amir of tablkhana. According to him the reason was that they arrived as free men rather than as military slaves – without the experience of being enslaved and then manumitted, one could not attain a high military post in the sultanate.73 Half a century later Nakamachi argued against Ayalon’s interpretation, stating that the division between mamluks and free soldiers was not as clear-cut and that it was therefore not a major deciding factor in the position of Mongol wafidun.74 Amitai then responded to Nakamachi, agreeing that the gap between the Mamluk elite and the wafidiyya was not as wide as had been assumed, but pointing out that these immigrants never belonged to the circles where true power lay. Career opportunities for the wafidun really do appear to have been limited.75

The Mongol men were thus integrated into the military ranks, but Mongol women, as the quote by al-Nuwayrī shows, became part of Mamluk society as well. Members of the wafidiyya and their children frequently intermarried. There was also frequent intermarriage between members of the wafidiyya and their offspring and the Mamluk nobility.76 Three of Baybars’ wives were wafidiyya women, unnamed daughters of the amirs Sayf al-Din Noghai al-Tatari, Sayf al-Din Karay al-Tatari, and Sayf al-Din Dumaji al-Tatari.77 Similarly, Qalawun married three women from among the wafidun. The first of them, known as Umm al-Salih `Ali (d. c. 682/1284), was the daughter of Sayf al-Din Geremün, leader of the 661/1263 wafidiyya, who married Qalawun in 664/1265–1266, and was, as her kunya indicates, the mother of his son al-Malik al-Salih `Ali (d. 687/1288).78 The wafidi leader thereby became the later sultan’s father-in-law.79 After her death, Qalawun married her sister.80 Qalawun also married Ashlun Khatun, a Mongol woman who had arrived with a smaller group of immigrants led by Husam al-Din Bijar al-Rumi in 675/1277.81 She was the mother of al-Nasir Muhammad. Like many others in the highest ranks of the sultanate, one of the greatest Mamluk sultans and the longest reigning was half Mongol.82
Al-Nasir Muhammad himself even married a Chinggisid princess, Tulunbay Khatun. She was a family member of the Jochid khan, Özbeg (r. 1313–1341), and arrived in Egypt in May 1320. The festivities were lavish and dazzling, but the marriage itself was not a success. The sultan became convinced that Tulunbay was an impostor and not of Chinggisid descent (although that was, as Anne F. Broadbridge points out, highly unlikely). He eventually divorced her in 1327–1328, after which Tulunbay married Sayf al-Din Mankali Bughra, one of al-Nasir Muhammad’s amirs, and would marry twice more after the latter’s death. Relations with the Jochids were strained at this point for a number of reasons, and this episode did not improve the relationship with Özbeg when he learned the news, although al-Nasir Muhammad attempted to placate him by saying that she died – even though that was not the case. Diplomatic relations appear to have improved somewhat afterwards. Tulunbay lived in the sultanate until her death in 1340. 

Although Tulunbay’s story is unique, it does exemplify another form of Mongol immigration to the Mamluk Sultanate: those triggered by direct relationships, whether diplomatic or personal. With Tulunbay, who brought an impressive retinue, was the eighteen-year-old Mongol merchant Qawsun. After having caught the eye of al-Nasir Muhammad, he eventually agreed to be sold to the sultan, thereby becoming a mamluk. He rapidly made his way through the Mamluk ranks, becoming an amir of one hundred, commander of one thousand, and a member of the khassakiyya (the bodyguard), marrying a daughter of al-Nasir Muhammad, and became one of the most powerful amirs in the sultanate in a matter of just six years. In the years that followed, Qawsun brought several of his relatives to the sultanate (his brother Susun became Tulunbay’s third husband). He was certainly not the only Mongol mamluk to do so: Salar, for instance, brought over his mother and brothers from the Ilkhanate in 1305. Various Mongol relatives of al-Nasir Muhammad came to the sultanate as well. An Ilkhanid embassy in June 1326 was accompanied by Tayirbugha, the Ilkhanid governor of Akhlat in Anatolia, together with his son Yahya, said to be related to the sultan. They were welcomed by him and made commanders of forty (later one hundred) and ten respectively. The following year, one Muhammad Bey, son of Jamaq arrived with another group of emissaries from the Ilkhan. He was the son of Tayirbugha’s sister, which similarly made him a relative of the sultan, who made him an amir of forty as well.

### THE MONGOL ASPECT

Throughout the first Mamluk period, there was a significant Mongol presence in the Mamluk Sultanate. In one way or another, they arrived in the sultanate through its relationship with the Jochid Ulus and the Ilkhanate, whether through immigration or the slave trade, through war or for family reasons. And although it was not without the occasional hiccup, they were integrated into Mamluk society. Even the Oirats converted to Islam within a relatively short period of time, although their reputation remained less than stellar: even in the fifteenth century they were apparently seen as malicious, violent, and prone to gangsterism, though very courageous. One question remains, however, when we look at these Mongol amirs, immigrants, and others: did their Mongol ethnicity matter, and if so, how much, when, and why?
After all, the sultanate was at war with the Ilkhanid Mongols for decades: were Mongol mamluks regarded as a fifth column?

In some ways, it absolutely mattered. Mongol mamluks could take on roles that others could not, or at least carry them out to greater success. Aytamish played an important role in the peace process between the sultanate and the Ilkhanate as an envoy to Abu Sa'id. One Oirat *waqīḍ*, called Qararnah al-Silahdar (d. 1349) was similarly sent as an envoy to the Ilkhan Abu Sa'id by al-Nasir Muhammad. He made various other missions in the 1340s to Shaykh Hasan Buzurg, ruler of Baghdad, under al-Nasir Muhammad’s sons, after which he was promoted to amir of forty. The aforementioned Qawsun translated correspondence with the Ilkhanate and the Jochids for al-Nasir Muhammad. Their Mongol background meant that they had linguistic and cultural skills that others lacked.

These are very practical matters, however. The question of what ways and to what extent ethnic background affected social relations is much harder to answer, and there has been much debate about the topic. As Koby Yosef has pointed out, ethnic origins are frequently mentioned in the Mamluk sources, which suggests that they mattered. The case of Kitbugha and the Oirats also shows that a common ethnic origin could matter. Not only was Kitbugha reportedly warned by Qunghur al-Tatari on account of *jinsiyya*, according to contemporaries, but ethnic solidarity also caused him to give the Oirats preferential treatment. Two things should be noted here. First, as both Amir Mazor and Amitai have emphasised, the *jinsiyya* in this episode appears to be quite unique, if not in its appearance at least in its extent. The uncommonness of it may well explain in part why other political actors were so bothered by it. Second, the criticism levelled at Kitbugha by his contemporaries is in the first place *jinsiyya*, not *jins*, i.e. their Mongol ethnicity itself. The problem was not that he was an Oirat – although the fact was at times employed in scolding poetry, for instance – but his favouritism towards other Oirats.

Yosef has argued that, within the Mamluk Sultanate, affiliations and identities were based first and foremost on ethnic background. Similarly, he has argued that Mongols within the Mamluk Sultanate, in particular *waqīḍiyya* and war captives, were widely considered to be treacherous. There were indeed cases of plotting, some of which have been discussed, as well as defections. One important Mongol amir to defect to the Ilkhanate was Qibjaq al-Mansuri. He did so, however, to avoid arrest by Lajin’s viceroy and quickly regretted it when both sultan and viceroy were murdered shortly afterwards, but he was already in the Ilkhanate. He became part of the Ilkhanid occupation of Damascus in 1299–1300 but appears to have collaborated with the Mamluks there and allowed to reintegrate, albeit at a lower position. Amitai pointed to the various loyalties that were at play here, with the Mamluk ones apparently winning out. Other authors, including Amitai and Mazor, caution against undue stress on the importance of ethnic solidarity among the Mamluk elite. They point out that many close friendships existed between amirs of different ethnic backgrounds, while animosities could well play out between members of the same ethnic group. Other loyalties, such as those to mamluks of the same master, those to patron and sultan, and to Islam, played a key role. Nor was the image of such Mongol mamluks necessarily poor. At times when that was politically expedient, Mamluk actors could take recourse to negative images of Mongols in general, which included untrustworthiness but also unbelief and violence. Kitbugha
and the Oirats are a clear example. But for the most part, Mongols integrated into the sultanate without too many problems, and Mongol amirs were an everyday part of the Mamluk elite.

NOTES

2 Amitai-Preiss 1995.
8 Amitai 2008a, 350–351; Amitai 2008b, 120–122.
9 Abu Shama (d. 665/1268) described the Mongols as ‘the infidels among the Turks’ (Abu Shama 1947, 165) and the Syrian al-Dhahabi (d. 748/1348) described them as ‘a kind of Turk’ (al-Dhahabi 1985, XXIII, 290). See also Ayalon 1963, 47–52; Jackson 2017, 68; van den Bent 2020, 49–80.
13 Ayalon 1951, 103–104; Ayalon 1994, 3; Amitai 2008b, 120–122.
14 al-ʿUmari 2004, III, 182–183; Umari, 140; Ayalon 1994, 3; Amitai 2008b, 121; Barker 2019, 126.
15 Barker 2019, 121–128.
17 Amitai 2008b, 121.
18 al-Asyuti 1990, 97.
19 Amitai 2008b, 122.
23 Amitai 2008b, 122–126.
25 Amitai 2008b, 123–126. The Mongol origins of Almalik are not entirely certain (pp. 125–126).
26 al-Safadi 2000, IX, 214; Amitai 2008b, 125–126.
30 For an overview of Kitbugha’s rise to power, see Mazor 2015, 81–95.

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51 Morgan 1986, 143–144.


65 This may, however, have been a standard way of dealing with large groups of immigrants. On the Oirats in Syria, see Landa 2016, 179–181.


68 al-Maqrizi 1971, 83. See also Landa 2016, 182; Ayalon 1951, 100–101; Nakamachi 2006, 69.


70 al-Nuwayri 2004, XXXI, 189; Landa 2016, 178. The beauty of the Oirats mentioned by al-Nuwayri is a recurring theme in Mamluk sources (see, for instance, Ayalon 1951, 100).


73 Ayalon 1951; Ayalon 2013. Amir of tablkhana, or amir of forty, was one of the officer ranks in the Mamluk sultanate. It meant that an amir had the right to keep at least forty mamluks, as well as a musical band (the tablkhana). The other two ranks were amir of ten and amir of hundred.

74 Nakamachi 2006.

75 Amitai 2008b, 128–129. See also his earlier article, Amitai-Preiss 1997, 267–300, 286–287.

76 Ayalon 1951, 90. Amitai 2008b, 135, has pointed to the desirability of a study into the gender and family aspects of Mamluk politics. See also Holt 1995; Northrup 1998, 116–118.


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83 Broadbridge 2008, 132–133.
85 Broadbridge 2008, 132–137.
86 Ayalon 1953a, 213–216.
94 Landa 2016, 183; Nakamachi 2006, 74, 80.
96 Yosef 2012a, 387–410.
99 van den Bent 2020, 234–237.
100 Yosef 2012b.
101 Yosef 2019.
103 Mazor 2015, 166–170; Amitai 2008b, 131–137.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Umari, See List of Abbreviations.

