



Across the Mediterranean and Beyond: Notes on *mamlūk* Wanderings in European Dictionaries

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ABSTRACT: From the Middle Ages to the present day, the Arabic word *mamlūk* (literally, « owned») has given rise to numerous loanwords across the Mediterranean and far beyond, from Medieval Latin *mamaluchus* to Contemporary American English slang *mamaluke*. While usually maintaining a reference to *mamlūk*-s as slave soldiers (and especially to the Mamluks of Egypt), many of these loanwords developed some additional meanings, which at times became even more popular than the ‘historical’ ones, and which do speak volumes about processes of representation and categorisation of the ‘others’ in the concerned societies. With this in mind, the present paper explores the trajectories of the main offsprings of the word *mamlūk* in Medieval Latin and in European languages, as part of a research aiming to contribute to both linguistic and cultural studies.

KEYWORDS: Philology and Linguistic Anthropology; Cross-cultural language exchange ; *mamlūk*-based loanwords in European languages ; Cultural implications of etymological and paretymological processes.

1. INTRODUCTION

From the Middle Ages up to present days, the Arabic word *mamlūk*, passive participle of the verb *malaka*, « to own », thus literally « one who is owned »¹ - hence, « a slave », but also a « servant »² - has proliferated quite well across the Mediterranean, and even far beyond. Thanks to the fame reached by the slave soldiers who were thus designated in Islamic countries, and to centuries-long interactions between European countries and the Mamluk power system in Egypt, the term *mamlūk* has given rise to numerous loanwords in European languages, from Medieval Latin *mamaluchus* (with several graphic and phonetic variants) to Contemporary U.S. American English slang *mamaluke* (probably based on Italian *mammalucco* as once used in Italian-American slang : see BoBM, 2006).

Far from being a mere ‘pedantic’ curiosity, exploring the trajectories of *mamlūk* ‘offsprings’ in European languages – and their representations in dictionaries - may contribute to many fields of study, from philology to anthropology, from linguistics

¹ For definitions of *mamlūk* across time, see the relevant entries in the wide selection of classic and modern Arabic dictionaries accessible on *The Arabic Lexicon* website. <http://arabiclexicon.hawramani.com/search/%D9%85%D9%85%D9%84%D9%88%D9%83>

² On distinction between these two translations, see Koby 2013, 23-24.



to social history and cultural studies, with regard to both Arab and European (and American) societies across time and space,

With this in mind, the present paper focuses on the ‘wanderings’ of some *mamlūk*-derived words in Latin and in Romance languages as part of broader processes in cultural history, with special attention to issues of representation and ‘categorisation’ of the ‘others’.

2. CROSSING THE SEA : FIRST *MAMLŪK*-BASED WORDS IN LATIN AND IN ROMANCE LANGUAGES

2.1. Latin : William of Tyre and the ‘Mameluc’.

Judging by textual evidence in historical dictionaries, loanwords from Arabic *mamlūk* first appeared in European languages at the time of the Crusades. More precisely, the earliest example recorded in dictionaries dates back to the late 12th century and is found in the *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* by the Archbishop William of Tyre (d. 1186). In Book XXI, chapter 23, William employs the word *mameluc* with reference to the slave soldiers serving as elite military units under Saladin (Ṣalāḥ al-dīn al-Ayyūbī). The relevant passage provides an impressively accurate first-hand description of the system of military slavery in the Islamicate world of his time:

«Solent enim Turcorum Satrapae et majores principes, quos ipsi lingua Arabica vocant *Emyr*, adolescentes sive ex ancilla natos, sive emptos, sive capta in proeliis mancipia studiose alere, disciplina militari instruere diligenter, adultis autem, prout cuiusque exigit meritum, dare stipendia et largas etiam possessiones conferre. In dubiis autem bellorum eventibus, proprii conservandi corporis solent his curam committere, et de obtinenda victoria spes non modicam habere ; hos lingua sua vocant *Mameluc*»³.

2.2. Old French : ‘Mamelon Salahedin’ ...et ‘Chevalier Matelot’.

Reference to the Mamluks of Saladin also marks the Old French plural form *mamelon(s)*, which is probably the earliest evidence of a *mamlūk*-derived word in a Romance language⁴. This form is first attested in *L’Estoire de la guerre sainte*, a poem on the Third Crusade (1190-1192) composed by some Ambroise, who

³ Quoted according to Du Cange, 1845, 213, s.v. *mameluchi*. Atwater Babcock and Krey, 1943, 431, translated this passage as follows: « It is the custom of Turkish satraps and of the great chiefs, who in Arabic tongue are called amirs, to rear with great care certain young men, some of whom are slaves captured in war, others are bought or perhaps born of slave mothers. These youths are instructed in military science, in their language, and when they have reached manhood are given wages or even large possessions, according to the merit of each. These men are called in their language mamluks. To them is entrusted the duty of protecting the person of their lord in the vicissitudes of battle, and upon them in no slight degree depends the hope of obtaining victory ». Unfortunately, however, the original form *mameluc* here was literally ‘lost in translation’ as the editors did not reproduce it beside its English equivalent (*mamluks*).

⁴ The subject singular form *mameloc* is the earliest term attested in the entry « mamluk » of the *Französisches Etymologisches (FEW, XIX, 118b)*, which dates it to 1192. *FEW* does not mention the source, but this must be the poem by Ambroise.



presents himself as following Richard the Lionheart and directly witnessing the events, and who, as convincingly argued by the poem's editor Gaston Paris, was probably a professional *jongleur* 'embedded' in the King's army (Paris 1897, VII-VIII). In the poem, the word *mamelon(s)* occurs twice, once in the plural subject case *Mamelon*, and once in the plural oblique case *Mamelons* (both forms are capitalized in Paris, 1897, 304).

In describing the struggle for Jaffa (year 1192), Ambroise mentions *Li Mamelon Salahedin* (« The Mamluks of Saladin ») among the Muslim forces plotting to attack King Richard, and a few lines below he evokes the disagreements that God « Himself » (*nomeement*, lit. « namely ») arouses among Mamluks (*Mamelons*) and Kurds (*Cordins*) in order to disrupt their plot:

Et Dampnedeus nomeement
Leva entr'els unes tençons
Des Cordins et des Mamelons⁵.

As for the ending *-on(s)*, its textual correctness is granted by the rhyme with *tençons*, as remarked by Gaston Paris in the entry *Mamelon* in the poem's index of proper names (Paris 1897, 552). Thereby, he explains *Mamelon* as « Mamelouks », and draws a parallel with such forms as *memelos* and *memelous* found in *L'Estoire d'Eracles Empereur* (RHC, 1859, 193 ; 211D), the Old French continuation of William of Tyre.

Paris does not mention a singular form for *Mamelon(s)*, as the word is used only as plural in the poem. In Old French historical dictionaries, however, the singular form for *mamelon(s)* is *mameloc*⁶ (identical with the form used in Occitan until present days)⁷. This indicates that *mameloc* in Old French was part of that special class of nouns (included many of non-Latin origin) which differed from each other in the subject singular ending, but were consistently declined with suffix *-on(s)* in all other cases, namely : oblique singular, subject plural, oblique plural (see Bogacki and Giermak-Zielińska 1999, 59). This paradigm was similar, in the corresponding cases, to that of some Latin third-declension nouns, like *latro*, *latronis*, as in the following examples:

⁵ Paris, 1897. p. 303 (l. 11303), p. 304 (l. 11362-11364).

⁶ See the following entries: « *mameloc* », in *Tobler-Lommatschz Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* (Tobler and Lommatschz, 2002, vol. 5. Col. 1004) ; « *mameluk* » in *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* (Cromer, 2007) ; « *mamlük* » in *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch (FEW, XIX, 118b)*,

⁷ « Un Mameloc o Mameluc, en Egipte dei Temps Mejàns, èra sòci d'una milícia poderosa et redobtabla, encargada de velhar sus lo sultan ». Colombier, 2004.



cas sujet sing. (Subject sing.)	cas régime sing. (Oblique sing.)	cas sujet plur. (Subject plur.)	cas régime plur. (Oblique plur.)	Translation
<i>lerre</i>	<i>larron</i>	<i>larron</i>	<i>larrons</i>	thief
<i>ber(s)</i>	<i>baron</i>	<i>baron</i>	<i>barons</i>	baron
<i>glot</i>	<i>gloton</i>	<i>gloton</i>	<i>glotons</i>	glutton, greedy
<i>compaing</i>	<i>compaignon</i>	<i>compaignon</i>	<i>compaignons</i>	companion
<i>Charles</i>	<i>Charlon</i>			Charles
<i>Gui</i>	<i>Guion</i>			Guy

However, the presence of /n/ instead of /k/ in the plural forms *mamelon(s)* may have had some important semantic implications, especially because oblique and plural forms of words were used more frequently than the singular subject case. If further research is required on such a complex issue, for the moment being I would however argue, at least as a working hypothesis, that suffixed forms *mamelon(s)* may have contributed to some paronymological ‘crossing’ between the Arabic term *mamlūk* and Old French terms connected to the word *mamelle* (Lat. : *mamilla*), namely the perfectly homophone noun *mamelon*, meaning « nipple » (with a wide range of semantic developments), and some partly homophone forms attested, with varied meanings, in early sources.

Support to such an hypothesis is provided, for instance, by comparison between the forms *mamelon(s)* in Ambroise and the forms *Mamelot/Mamelos* (with variant forms *mammelin/mamelin*) found in the manuscript tradition of the poem *Perceval Le Gallois* by Chrétien de Troyes, probably composed around 1180 AD (i.e., at least a dozen years earlier than Ambroise). The expressions « Chevalier Mamelot » and « Chevaliers Mamelos » are found in Charles Potvin’s edition, based on the Manuscript of Mons (Potvin 1870, 13, lines 30871 and 30879 respectively). The manuscript of Montpellier, instead, reads « Chevalier *mammelin/mamelin* » in both corresponding passages (Ms. Montpellier, BIU, H 249, f. 208v, lines 20 and 30 respectively).

As explained in the poem itself (Potvin, 1870, 13, lines 30879-30891), these expressions applied to those (young) knights who had not yet accomplished yet any heroic deeds (and thus were not yet fully part of the « Bos Chevaliers »):

Chevalier Mamelos estoit
 Qui son Seigneur rescous n’avoit
 Adont de mort u de prison
 Et qui n’avoit à abandon
 Son cors et sa proaice mis
 Tant qu’il eust d’armes conquis
 Chevalier qui fust en angarde,
 En gués, en foriest u en garde,
 U qui n’avoit rescous pucele



Dame, mescine u demoiselle
Et de hontage délivrée
Dont elle fust a tort rêtée
Devant le riche roi Artu.

These verses can be translated as follows : «A Knight Mamelot was/ one who had not yet saved his lord/ from a deadly danger (*mort*) or from the risk of being captured by the enemy (*prison*)/ nor had yet put (all) of his body (*cors*) and prowess (*proaice*)/ in conquering with weapons a knight lurking on a hill (*en angarde*)/ or by a ford (gués), in a forest (*foriest*) or in a guard post (*garde*)/ nor had yet rescued any maid (*pucelle*),/ lady (dame), girl (*mescine*) or damsel (*demoiselle*)/ or defended her against a shameful accusation that was unjustly cast upon her before the magnificent (*riche*) King Arthur»⁸.

In the same vein, the English writer Robert Southey (1744-1843) observed : « The *Romance of Percival* mentions a distinction in Arthur's court between the *Preux Chevalliers* and those who, not having entitled themselves to that distinction, were called *Knights Mamelot* » (Southey, 1850, 366-367).

In addition to this, the variant *mamelin* was recorded by Frédéric Godefroy (1826-1897) in his historical dictionary of Old French (Godefroy 1888, 131), based on the manuscript of Montpellier:

Chevalier *mamelin* estoit
Qui son seigneur rescous n'avoit
A donc de mort ou de prison ...
Ou qui n'avoit rescous pucelle,
Meschine ou dame ou damoisele⁹.

Godefroy here explained *mamelin* as « efféminé » (*Ibid.*), probably on the ground of widespread gender stereotypes associating 'weakness' or 'mollitude' with the idea of 'femininity', that he evidently considered as being synecdochically evoked by possible reference to « mamelle » in the word *mamelin*.

Contrary to Godefroy's interpretation, however, one may easily argue that reference to « mamelle » (which is found both in *mamelin* and in *mamelot/s*) should rather be connected to another set of metaphorical associations, namely those concerning infancy and breastfeeding: compared to the 'full grown' *Preux Chevalliers*, those junior knights were still (metaphorically) in their 'infancy', so they may be applied terms evoking the practice of breastfeeding, as if they were still attached to their mothers' « nipples ». In this sense, it is worth noting that a wide range of metaphorical associations between infancy and « mamelle » are attested, for instance, in the entry *mamilla* of the *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch (FEW, VI, 130-131)* such as *vivre de mamelle*, lit. « to live on udder », i.e. « to be breastfed », or the adverb phrase *dès la mamelle*, meaning « since one's earliest childhood ».

⁸ Our translation. For *angarde* as « hauteur, colline favorable à l'observation », see the relevant entry in *Dictionnaire Électronique de Chrétien de Troyes / Electronic Dictionary of Chrétien de Troyes* (2015). Accessed online May 9th, 2021.

⁹ Quoted according to Godefroy, 1888, 131.



Also, in the same entry, *FEW* records a metaphorical association between childhood and the word *mamelon/mammelon* itself: the meaning of ‘fruit bud’ (*bouton d’un fruit*) is attested for this word both in the *Encyclopédie* (Tome 10, 1765, p. 6) and the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (1771, Tome 5, p. 780). In spite of its ‘vegetal’ (instead of ‘mammal’) connotation, this semantic development is extremely worth noting for the purpose of the present research. In a similar vein, in fact, reference to infancy (evoked by perceived affinity with *mamelle* and/or *mamelon*) may have provided the ‘link’ for paronymological crossing between Arabic *mamlūk* and Old French *mameloc/mamelon(s)* in the poem by Ambroise.

As far as connection with ‘mamelles’ is specially concerned, this hypothesis is corroborated at least by one explicit textual evidence, albeit from a considerably later source. In seventeenth century, Father Pierre Dan, a French religious engaged in ransoming Christian captives from Barbary pirates, records two different French terms for the Mamluks of Egypt, namely *Mammelus* and *Mammeluchs*, with two different etymologies:

« On les appelloit Mammelus, à cause, comme veulent quelques-uns, qu’ils estoient enlevés des mamelles de leurs mères. D’autres les nomment Mammeluchs, c’est-à-dire sujets au prince » (Dan 1637, 383).

While the second form and meaning are fully in line with most common European derivatives of *mamlūk*, the first form is almost perfectly omophone with *memelos* and *memelous* found in *L’Estoire d’Eracles* (see above), and the explanation provided for this form is explicitly based on paronymological association between *mamlūk* and *mamelle*.

However, this association does not seem to have been specially productive in French in later times, in sharp contrast to what happened in Italian and Iberian areas.

3. MAMLUKS BETWEEN ‘FOLK ETYMOLOGIES’ AND ‘LEARNED PARETYMOLOGIES’.¹⁰

3.1. *Mamluks as Mama’s boys?*

Paronymological association between *mamlūk* and words evoking the spheres of maternity and infancy – with connected semantic developments ranging from childishness to silliness – was apparently very productive in Italian and in some Iberian Romance languages. All of Italian *mammalucco*, Spanish (Castilian) *mameluco*, Aragonese *mameluco/mamaluco*, Valencian *mameluch /mameluc /mameluco/ mamaluco* present some secondary meanings connected to ‘naivety’, ‘silliness’, ‘foolishness’ (see Mestre 2006, 336-337). In comparatively recent times, such meanings were extended to American English slang *mamaluke*, probably *via* Italian immigrants in the United States (BoBM, 2006).

The origin of this semantic development, however, has not been conclusively explained yet. On the one hand, some of the most authoritative Italian lexicographic works, from the *Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* by Tommaseo and Bellini (1861-1874) to the *Dizionario Etimologico* by Alberto Nacentini (2010), postulated a

¹⁰ For updated theoretical reflection on such notions as ‘paronymology’, ‘folk etymology’ and ‘learned paronymology’, see Salvaggio, 2020, 231-232.



paretymological association between *mammalucco* and *mamma* (meaning both « mother » and « mother's breast »), especially based on onomatopoeia. Tommaseo and Bellini (vol.3, 1869, p. 58) explained the secondary meaning of *mammalucco* as 'silly person' in terms of an « an imitative sound, not connected with the historical meaning », and suggested possible links with tendency to derogatory use of foreign terms (*Ibid.*). In a similar vein, Nocentini (2010, s.v. *mammalucco*) definitely couples onomatopoeia with ethnocentrism to explain this semantic development:

« Il sign(ificato) dispregiativo di 'babbeo, scimunito', assunto dal termine in italiano e anche in spagnolo, è dovuto sia al suo aspetto fonetico (la base *mamma-* e il suff. *-ucco*) sia al suo riferimento a popolazioni guardate con avversione e disprezzo ».

Nevertheless, other hypotheses are suggested by comparison with the Ibero-romance areas. The abovementioned Valencian forms present a wider range of pejorative meanings than Italian: not only 'silly person', but also 'drunken' / 'drunkard' (*embriac*; Mestre, 2006, 337-336), or 'person who eats and drinks a lot' (*persona molt mantjadora i bebedora*; *Ibid.*). In Castilian, such development does not directly affect *mameluco*, but it 'produces' metaphorical use of *mamífero* as "drunkard" (*Ibid.*). All this suggests possible paretymological connections – or, as argued by Mestre (*Ibid.*), deliberate humoristic paronymic manipulations - between *mamelucco* and *mamar* (« to suck »), in the light of the multiple semantic values of this verb (from 'being breastfed' to 'drinking alcohol').

However, the two explanations, i.e. Italian *mamma* and Ibero-romance *mamar*, are not mutually excluding, as the verb *mamar* is ultimately connected to the noun *mama*, meaning both « mother » and « mother's breast ».

3.2. From fearsome warriors to 'proverbial' fools?

In the early nineteenth century, some Italian classicists tried to connect *mammalucco* with the Greek loanword *mammacuto*, a rare literary term meaning 'silly person' and based on the proper noun *Mammakuthos*, a character from Aristophanes' *Frogs* (ed. 1962, vv. 989-991), who had become a proverbial figure of foolishness¹¹. So durable was Mammakuthos' fame, that in early Modern times he was mentioned by Erasmus of Rotterdam (1559, 924) and by later writers dealing (more or less seriously) with folly, such as Lucio Brusoni (1562, 186) and Tommaso Garzoni (1586, 69-70). On these grounds, two lexicographic works stemming from circles of classic studies, namely the *Almanacco Etimologico per l'Anno 1819*, printed in Verona in 1818, and the *Vocabulario Universale Italiano*, printed in Naples in 1834, established connections between *mammacuto* and *mammalucco* :

« *Mammacuto*: uomo che fu insigne per sciocchezza. *Μαμμάχουθος* (*mammacutos*); donde il nostro *Mammalucco* » (*Almanacco Etimologico*, 1818, 392, s.v. *mammacuto*).

« *Mammacuto*. [...]. Nome proprio di un privato individuo celebre per la sua stupidità. Onde in Aristofane gli stolti sono detti *Mammacuti*; e taluni credono che da ciò appunto sia derivato il dirsi loro *Mammalucchi* in lingua nostra. Gr.

¹¹ Detailed explanation of the word *mammacuto* is provided in Marchi 1829, 627 (with no mention at all of *mammalucco*).



μαμμάχουθος (*V. Mammalucco*) ». (*Vocabolario Universale*, 1834, 223, s.v. *mammacuto*).

However, the editors of the two works took somewhat different stances: while the *Almanacco* straightly derives *mammalucco* from *mammacuto* (and devotes no specific entry to *mammalucco*), the *Vocabolario Universale*, instead, mentions affinity with *mammacuto* just as one of the possible reasons why *mammalucco* took the secondary meaning of ‘silly person’. Conversely, the entry *mammalucco* in the same dictionary connects the main meaning of the term to the Mamluks of Egypt, and indicates the correct Arabic etymon: “Dall’ar. *mamlukon* posseduto, servo”. Besides this, the Greek term *mamos* (‘servant’) is also evoked there, but without elaborating on it. Then, a number of secondary meanings of *mammalucco* are provided, each one with possible explanation/s for the underlying semantic developments, including the aforementioned possible connection with *mammacuto* (*Vocabolario Universale*, 1834, 223, s.v. *mammalucco*).

Be that as it may, such a connection was not mentioned any longer in authoritative Italian dictionaries. The word *mammacuto* itself is not mentioned at all, either in Tommaseo and Bellini (1861-1874) or in any of the nine editions of the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (from 1612 until present days).

However, if the connection between *mammalucco* and *mammacuto* was but a ‘learned paronymy’, also the above mentioned ‘onomatopoeic’ connections between *mamlūk* and *mam(m)a* or *mamar* are far from being completely satisfactory. Such explanations are based ultimately on mere paronymy, without fully considering the possible linguistic, cultural and historical contexts of the implied semantic developments. So, further inquiry is needed to assess which processes were at work behind the emergence of the aforementioned pejorative meanings¹².

4. MAMLUKS AND MAMLŪK IN ARABIC SOURCES.

Over time, besides the almost ubiquitous reference to the Mamluks of Egypt, *mamlūk*-based words scattered across Europe and beyond developed a wide range of secondary meanings, which reflected both the inner semantic variety of the word *mamlūk* in Arabic as well as some important semantic developments taking place in one or more European languages.

In this framework, a fundamental difference is to be noted between Arabic and European languages. While in European sources *mamlūk* and related loanwords were used mostly as collective proper nouns designating the Mamluks of Egypt, in Arabic sources ‘those’ Mamluks were more often referred to by other terms (first of all, *Atrāk*, Turks), while the term *mamlūk* continued to be used mostly as a common noun, with a variety of possible meanings.

In spite of the multi-ethnic and multicultural nature of this unique *groupe minoritaire dominante*, as Sylvie Denoix aptly defined them (Denoix, 2010, 125), reference to Mamluks as Turks (*Atrāk*) was apparently the general rule over the

¹² With this in mind, a new hypothesis will be presented in a forthcoming study, based on a suggestion for which I am gratefully indebted to Professor Federico Salvaggio, concerning possible connections between Sp. *mameluco*/It. *mammalucco*, and Arabic *lūq* (silly person), via Sp. *loco* / It. *(al-)locco*. This may also contribute to explain why the semantic development in question seemingly occurred only in these two linguistic areas, that were most directly exposed to influence from Arabic across centuries.



centuries. Indeed, as Koby Yosef pointed out, « Mamluk authors almost always refer to the political regime that ruled Egypt, Syria and adjacent areas for two-and-a-half centuries (648/1250-923/1517) as “the state of the Turks” (*dawlat al-atrāk / dawlat al-turk / al-dawlah al-turkiyah*) » (Yosef, 2013, 8). As remarked by Julien Loiseau, this remained true even during the Circassian period: Sultan Barqūq (r. 1382-1399) was defined as both « eighth Sultan from the Turks imported as slaves » and « founder of the Circassian dynasty », and similar double definitions were applied to his successors, such as Sultan Shaykh (Loiseau, 2015, 174).

As for the term *mamlūk*, it maintained first and foremost the general meaning of ‘being possessed’, as passive participle of the verb *malaka*. As such, it was primarily used in the juridical sense of ‘slave’, which was already attested in Quran (e.g., Qur., XVI, 75) and continued to be the main and often only definition provided in Arabic dictionaries from an early age until present days¹³. However, it was also used in more nuanced senses, including possible use by a free person wishing to express his/her absolute loyalty and obedience to another one. In this latter meaning, the term was sometimes used as mark of loyalty to Sultans by ‘historical’ Mamluks but also by other figures, ranging from Christian-born notables to free mercenary soldiers (Yosef, 2013, 9-12). This was part of a broader semantic development based on metaphorical association between actual ‘slavery’ and voluntary submission. With all evidence, in case of ‘actual’ Mamluks the two meanings were conflated, thus producing an acute sense of poignancy. In the same vein, M’hmmmed Oualdi (2011, 23-24), records the use of *mamlūk* as mark of absolute loyalty in an early modern Tunisian document (year 1832) :

« Réprimandé pour avoir fait venir sa mère de l’île grecque de Chios à Tunis sans prendre avis auprès son maître, le jeune serviteur affiche sa dépendance: ‘Je suis votre mamelouk [...]. Je n’ai ni mère ni père. Vous êtes ma mère, vous êtes mon père. Je n’ai que votre Excellence’ » (Oualdi, 2011, 23-24).

5. SEMANTIC DEVELOPMENTS AND CULTURAL CHANGES: *MAMLŪK-S* AND CONCUBINES IN THE *VOCABOLARIO DELLA CRUSCA*.

If *mamlūk*-based words present a wide range of secondary meanings in sources, only a few of these semantic developments found their way in the great ‘national’ dictionaries that were built since early Modern times. Also, some of these ‘happy few’ meanings were fully accepted only after a long process, in connection with complex cultural changes. A striking example is provided by the secondary meaning “male concubine”, attested for the Italian word *mammalucco* since the fourteenth century.

In his Florentine *Cronica*, Giovanni Villani (d. 1348), evokes the allegedly unbridled sexual appetites of the late Emperor Frederick II in the following terms:

¹³ As for Modern Arabic, see the following definitions from dictionaries accessed via *Arabic Lexicon* : « *al-mamlūk huwa al-‘abd* » (“the *mamlūk* is the slave”), Barakātī (d. 1975), *al-Ta’rīfāt al-fiqhiyya* ; « *mamlūk: al-‘abd* » (“the *mamlūk* is the slave”), Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo, *al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīṭ*, 1998; « *mamlūk: al-shay’ allādhī taḥūzu-hu wa-tanfariḍu bi-l-taṣarruf fī-hi; wa-al-‘abd* » (« *mamlūk*: a thing that you possess and on which you have exclusive power ; a slave », Sultan Qaboos University, *Sultan Qaboos Encyclopedia of Arab Names*, 1985. Last Accessed online May 12th, 2021. <http://arabiclexicon.hawramani.com/search/%D9%85%D9%85%D9%84%D9%88%D9%83#cf-48860>



« Federigo [...] fue dissoluto in lussuria in più guise, e tenea molte concubine e **mammalucchi** a guisa de' Saracini » (Villani, 1823, 6)¹⁴.

In the early seventeenth century, Villani's work was included in the 'canon' of linguistically pure sources established by the editors of the first authoritative dictionary of Italian language: the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, (first edition, 1612). However, when drafting the entry *mammalucco*, the Accademici proved very cautious in dealing with the *mammalucchi* mentioned by Villani. In fact, they crafted a compromise between reference to the Mamluks of Egypt, which was the only meaning explicitly provided for the lemma, and the meaning implied by the quotation from Villani, which was the only example sentence provided in the entry. As a result, the entry was structured as follows:

Mammalucco. Definizione: « Dell'ordine senatorio di Babilonia, del quale s'eleggeva il Soldano. Qui è in altro significato. *Esempio*: G.V. 6.1.3. E tenea molte concubine, e mammalucchi, a guisa de' Saraceni » (Crusca, 1612, 504).

This structure was exactly repeated in the second edition (Crusca 1623, 493). However, subsequent editions gradually opened up to full recognition of the meaning recorded by Villani. In the third edition (Crusca 1691, vol. 3, 992), the meaning implied by Villani's quotation was made explicit, even if through the veil of the Latin word *catamitus*. Editors of the fourth edition (Crusca 1729-1738, vol.3, 137-138) adopted a brand new definition for the Mamluks of Egypt, relying on the seventeenth-century Latin *Glossarium* by Du Cange (on which, see below):

« Schiavo Cristiano, o Nato di Cristiano presso gli Egizj, del numero de' quali schiavi s'eleggeva il Soldano ».

Also, they provided a more articulated definition for the meaning attested by Villani, which they extended also to female prostitution: « Bagascia. Lat. *Catamitus*. Gr. *Γαμιμήδης* ». However, *pudor* was still veiling male concubines, evoked only by elegant Latin and Greek terms, whereas their female fellows were indicated with an explicit and pejorative Italian expression. This contrast, which speaks volumes about gender-discriminating use of language, would deserve a study in its own right. Finally, in the fifth edition (1863-1923), the main meaning (Mamluks of Egypt) was the object of a lengthy historical notice, whereas Greek and Latin disappeared and the explanation of Villani's quotation was reduced to the explicit and gender-fair word *Bagascione* (Crusca 1905, vol. 9, 749). In addition to this, and specially important to the purpose of the present research, this edition recorded, for the first time, a third meaning of *mammalucco*: that of 'silly, stupid person', in line with a semantic development that we extensively dealt with above.

6. MAMLUKS AS RENEGADES: A WIDESPREAD SEMANTIC DEVELOPMENT IN TIME AND SPACE.

In early Modern times, a widespread semantic development in European languages was connected with the presence of former Christians among the Mamluks of Egypt and with the broader phenomenon of Christian captives who converted to Islam after being 'imported' to Muslim countries as slaves. Although the great majority of

¹⁴ [«Frederick (the Second) [...] was dissolute in various ways of lust, and had many (women) concubines and *mammalucchi* [male concubines], as it is customary to Saracens»] (our translation).



mamlūk-s were ‘imported’ from still ‘pagan’ groups among Slavic and Turkish populations (see Loiseau, 2015, 27), and although the term *mamlūk* could apply to both converted and unconverted slaves, in Europe this term was soon felt as synonymous with “renegade”. An intriguing example is found in the early fifteenth century work *In laudem Iacobi Mamaluchi* (« In Praise of Iacopo the Mamluk »)¹⁵, composed by Iacopo da Porcia to celebrate the extraordinary biographical experience of Iacopo da Sacile: from Christian peasant boy in Friuli to Muslim soldier in Egypt, and finally to Christian officer in Venice. In 1499, when still a child, Iacopo was kidnapped in a Turkish raid on his rural village in the Republic of Venice¹⁶. Then, he was sold on the slave market in Istanbul, and finally brought to Cairo, where he converted to Islam and became an accomplished Mamluk soldier. Thanks to his zeal and his military skills, in 1506 he was chosen as a member of the escort of the Sultan’s ambassador to Venice. Once there, however, he fled with a Venetian girl, got married with her and reconverted to Christianity. Soon after, the Most Serene Republic charged him with training an elite military unit according to the most advanced Mamluk war techniques. The area where they were based was hence called *Mamaluch*, a toponym still officially in use today (as part of the city of Porcia)¹⁷.

Through his many vicissitudes, the *Mamaluchus* Iacopo da Sacile ‘embodied’ both the meaning of ‘military slave’ and that of ‘renegade’. Indeed, conflation of these two meanings in *mamlūk*-based words was quite common at the time, both in Western and Eastern Europe. Just to make an example out of many, in 1517 the Franciscan Friar Gabriel of Petrovaradin (now in Serbia), writing to the Croatian-Hungarian nobleman John Banfy of Lindva¹⁸ (now Lendava, in Slovenia) about the Ottoman war on the Mamluk Sultanate, provides the following definition:

« *Mamaluki* dicuntur, qui fidem christianam abnegaverunt, qui dominabantur in toto regimine Soldani super Saracenos ». (Pray, 1806, 123. *Epistola* 56)¹⁹.

The same definition is repeated a few lines below:

« [...] ubique praedicti *Mamaluki* officiales fuerunt, et forte fuerunt tales, fidem christianam abnegantes 70.000 hominum, qui semper pugnaverunt cum Soldano rege contra hostes » (*Ibid.*)²⁰.

This semantic development went so far that *mamlūk*-based words were soon used, at least in some linguistic areas, to designate virtually any person who betrayed the human group to which they belonged, also without any connection to Islamic contexts.

In late fifteenth century, for instance, the forms *mamelus* and *mammeluz* are employed with the meaning of ‘traitors’ or ‘renegades’ in Old French sources such as

¹⁵ On this work, see Zele, 1993.

¹⁶ On Turkish raids in Venetian lands, see Pedani, 1999. On Christian and Muslim captives in early Modern Mediterranean, see respectively: Davis, 2003; Van Koningsveld, 2007. For updated overviews on captivity, piracy and ransoming, see: Rozen, 2016; Hershenzon, 2018.

¹⁷ Dal Borgo, 2000. Last accessed online April 12th, 2021. https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giacomo-da-sacile_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/

¹⁸ On him, see Palosfalvi 2012, 94,164, 294, 337.

¹⁹ [« *Mamaluki* is the name given to those who forsook their Christian faith, and (thus) ruled over the Saracens in the whole dominions of the Sultan »] (our translation).

²⁰ [« The aforementioned *Mamaluki* officials were everywhere, and were perhaps as many as 70,000 men (in arms) who had forsaken their Christian faith and who were always fighting for the Sultan against (his) enemies »] (our translation).



the *Memoires* by Olivier de La Marche (1425-1502)²¹, the *Chronique* by Jean Molinet (1435-1507)²² and the *Recueil des croniques et anchiennes istories de la Grant Bretagne* by Jean de Wavrin (also Waurin, 1400? -1474?), all of them related to the court of Burgundy. In particular, Wavrin uses the word *mamelus* in narrating the events of the Hundred Years' War, in order to designate both the Anglo-Burgundian who betrayed their side in favor of the French (« ...les *mamelus* et ceulz quy avoient rendu la place auz Francoiz » Siege of Mammerr Castle, year 1427 A.D.)²³ and the French who sided with the Anglo-Burgundian (« lesdis Anglois [...] furent concquis par force, et la plus grant partie pendus, especialement les *mamelus* ou renoiez qui estoient natifz du royaulme de France ». Siege of Nemours, year 1437 A.D.)²⁴.

Far from being confined to a single moment in European cultural history, this semantic development continued to be productive in time and space. For instance, it was still used in Hungary in the last period of the Habsburg Empire, as attested by Antal Bartal (1829-1901) in his *Glossarium Mediae Et Infimae Latinitatis Regni Hungariae* (aka *Latinitas Hungariae*), published in Lipsia in 1901. In the entry *mamaluchus*, Bartal provides the following definitions:

« *Mamaluchus, Mammalucus, i,*

[1a.] ex parentibus Christianis natus, sed in religione Mahometana educatus servus et miles praetorianus Sultani Aegypti;

1b. significat etiam Apostatam, qui a vera religione defecit;

1c. porro infidelem, simulatorem »²⁵.

Then, he records a strictly 'contemporary' secondary meaning for *mamaluchus*, in connection to Hungary's political situation in his time, as a slur for those elected members of Parliament (*Ablegati Comitiorum*) who proved subservient to whosoever holds the power in the Monarchy:

« 2. Apud Hungaros per ludibrium ita nominantur Ablegati Comitiorum, qui partes eorum amplectuntur, qui gubernaculum Monarchiae tenent » (*Ibid.*)²⁶.

7. MAMLUKS AND *MAMLŪK* -OFFSPRINGS IN THE GOLDEN AGE OF EUROPEAN DICTIONARIES.

7.1. *Mamluks in Covarrubias.*

In 1611, the Spanish scholar Sebastián de Covarrubias (1539-1613) provided an accurate entry on *Mamelucos* in his seminal lexicographical work, the *Tesoro de la*

²¹ La Marche, 1884, IV, 146-147.

²² Molinet, 1935, Tome I, 211.

²³ Wavrin, 1879, 216.

²⁴ Wavrin, 1884, 221.

²⁵ Bartal 1901, s.v. *mamaluchus*. [« *Mamaluchus, Mammalucus, i* [1a.] (someone who was) born from Christian parents but was raised in Muslim faith (and acted as a) slave and a pretorian soldier of the Sultan of Egypt; 1b. (the word) also means apostate, (i.e.) someone who forsook the true religion; 1c. (therefore) also unfaithful, deceiver»] (our translation).

²⁶ [« Among the Hungarians, this name is given, for mockery, to those who, having been elected in representative assemblies, (always) embrace the party of those who hold the reins of the Monarchy »] (our translation).



Lengua Castellana o Española. Relying on information provided by Father Juan de Pineda (1513-1593) in his monumental *Monarchia Ecclesiastica* (or *Historia universal del mundo*)²⁷, Covarrubias provided the following definition:

« *Mamelucos*: Es una gente de guerra, déla guarda del Soldán, como los Genizaros del Gran Turco, por otro nombre Circassos; esclavos comprados para pelear, y aunque obedecen al Soldan como a señor, ellos con ser esclavos, mandan a lo demás como señores »²⁸.

Then, Covarrubias also provided an accurate etymological explanation for the word, on the authority of the outstanding ‘bilingual’ intellectual Diego de Urrea (c. 1559-1616)²⁹ :

« Diego de Urrea dice, que Mameluco en Arabigo se-dize menluquun [i.e., mamlūk^{un}, completely vocalized form of indeterminate singular subject case] que quiere decir posseído, del verbo *meleque malaka*, que es poseer, y es participio pasivo del dicho verbo »³⁰.

This precise grammatical explanation is not surprising, given the informant’s extraordinary personality. Diego de Urrea, professor of Arabic at the University of Alcalá de Henares and trusted translator for the King of Spain and for the Inquisition, collaborated with various intellectual and political figures all over Europe, and in 1612 he became a member of the Accademia dei Lincei. All this intellectual activity, however, was based on the incredible vicissitudes he had gone through in the first part of his life, when he had been first a Christian captive in Muslim hands, and later on a Muslim captive in Christian hands. When a child, he was kidnapped in Calabria and brought to Algeria. There, he converted to Islam, learnt Arabic and got a remarkable education in Islamic sciences. Roughly twenty years later, when he was a learned and well-reputed counselor of the Regent of Algiers, he was captured while travelling to Istanbul on a diplomatic mission and brought to Palermo. There, he studied Latin *litterae* and Christian theology under the patronage of the Spanish Viceroy Enrique de Guzman, and finally reconverted to Christianity.

As an outstanding scholar in both Arabic and Latin cultures, Diego de Urrea was a ‘living auctoritas’ constantly consulted by Covarrubias for his lexicographic work, especially about Spanish words of Arabic origin. In the case of *mameluco*, Urrea’s philological accuracy was evidently coupled with his own biographical experience, as he himself had lived the condition of being “possessed”. However, this dimension does not emerge in any way in the entry written by Covarrubias, whose definition focuses only on the Mamluk Sultanate, and does not explicitly take into account contemporary meanings of the word mamlūk which applied to other forms of servile conditions.

7.2. Cotgrave, the Crusca and Du Cange.

Exactly in the same year (1611), focus on the Mamluk Sultanate also characterized the entry *Mamaluc* in Cotgrave’s *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*:

²⁷ Pineda, 1588, 364r.-366v.

²⁸ Covarrubias 1611, p. 534b-535a.

²⁹ For an introduction to the complex figure of Diego de Urrea, see Bajo Perez (s.d.). Last accessed online May 14th, 2021. <http://dbe.rah.es/biografias/33520/diego-de-urrea-conca>

³⁰ Covarrubias 1611, p. 534b.



« *Mamaluc*: A Mamaluke, or light horseman (in the Syrian and Arabian tongues); The Mamalukes were an order of valiant horsemen in the last Empire of Egypt »³¹.

In a similar vein, the first edition of the Italian *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (1612), focused on the Mamluk Sultanate in the entry *mammalucco*, albeit it also alluded to the existence of another meaning, as we described above.

In late seventeenth-century, focus on Mamluk Sultanate was also adopted by the renowned French scholar Charles Du Cange (1610-1688) in the entry *Mameluchi* of his monumental *Glossarium ad Scriptores Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*, first published in 1678, mostly relying on the above mentioned passage from William of Tyre.

In point of fact, a few years earlier Du Cange had already quoted the same passage from William of Tyre in his edition of Jean de Joinville's *Histoire de Saint Louis* (Du Cange 1668, vol. 2., p. 80), in order to solve an intricate historiographic question on the killing of the last Ayyubid Sultan by his own soldiers in 1249. Based on William's definition of *Mameluc*, Du Cange argued that all the different names given by different sources to the military units that were respectively mentioned as responsible for the Sultan's killing, could ultimately be considered as synonymous with Mamluks, because this was the general Arabic word applying to foreign enslaved soldiers: « ces soldats etrangers estoient nommez *Mameluchs*, en Langue Arabesque, ainsi que nos apprenons de Guill(aume) de Tyre, lib. 21, chap. 23 » (Du Cange, 1668, Part 2, 80).

When building the entry *Mameluchi* in his *Glossarium*, however, Du Cange relied also on later sources, which provided a wider range of meanings for the term. In particular, he quoted a passage from the *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis* written by the Venetian patrician Marin Sanudo Torsello in the early fourteenth century, and edited by Jacques Bongars in 1611. There, Sanudo evoked the practice of 'importing' male and female children « from the Northern regions of the Mediterranean » as slaves into Islamic countries:

« Et [mercatores] deferunt de Mari Majori e partibus septentrionalis pueros et puellas, quos praefati Aegyptii nominant Mamaluchos »³².

By mentioning girls (*puellas*) among future *Mamaluchi*, Sanudo implied that the term applied also to non-military slaves. However, in elaborating his own definition of *Mameluchi*, Du Cange only focused on military slavery and Mamluk Sultanate, albeit he too explicitly qualified Mamluks as « Christian slaves »:

« Sic appellabant Aegypti mancipia Christiana, aut ex Christianis parentibus orta, in pueritia capta, et pretio distracta, ex quibus eligebatur, qui caeteris imperabat, Sultani appellatione » (Du Cange, 1845, 213).³³

Thus, Du Cange was following the widespread persuasion that virtually all Mamluks were of Christian origin, almost a *communis opinio* in Europe in the

³¹ Cotgrave 1611. Accessed online May9th 2021. <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cotgrave/603.html>

³² Sanudo 1611. [« And merchants bring young boys and girls from the Northern areas of the Greater Sea (i.e., the Mediterranean), whom the aforementioned Egyptians call *Mamaluchos* »] (our translation).

³³ [« Egyptians so called those Christian slaves, or slaves born from Christian parents, who were captured, or bought from their parents, when children, and one of whom was chosen to rule on other people, and was called Sultan »] (our translation).



author's time, when the centuries-long practice of taking captives across the Mediterranean was specially revived³⁴.

In the same span of years, however, this opinion was overtly contested by Barthélemy d'Herbelot (1625-1695) in the entry *Mamlouk* of the *Bibliothèque Orientale* (published posthumous in 1697), where he provided quite an accurate explanation:

« *Mamlouk*. Ce nom, dont le pluriel est *Memalik*, signifie en Arabe esclave en général ; mais en particulier, il a été appliqué à ces esclaves Turcs et Circassiens que les Rois de la postérité de Saladin ont fait élever dans l'exercice et dans les charges de la Milice, lesquels enfin devinrent maîtres de l'Égypte et assez connus de nos Historiens sous le nom de Mamelus ».

(Herbelot, 1697, 545).

After this general definition, d'Herbelot sketches an historical outline of the Mamluk system, and concludes his entry with the following remark:

« Il paroît, parce que l'on vient de voir, que les Mamelus n'étoient point les fils de Chrétiens (si ce n'est peut-être quelqu'un d'entre eux), comme plusieurs de nos Historiens l'ont dit » (*Ibid.*).

7.3. *The Mamluks and the Académie Française.*

In sharp contrast to the above mentioned examples, the first great monolingual French dictionary, the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, did not focus on the Mamluks of Egypt or on any other kind of *mamlūk* for almost two centuries: no entry on a *mamlūk*-derived word is found in the first five editions (1694 ; 1718 ; 1740 ; 1762 ; 1798), probably because such words were felt as neologisms or as however unfitting the criteria established by the editors. It is only in the sixth edition, published in 1835, that the word *mameluk* was allowed to cross the sublime gates of the *Dictionnaire*. This happened a few decades after the French had fought 'contemporary' Mamluks in Egypt (1798-1801) and Napoleon had brought some of them to France to serve him as an elite military unit, thus turning Mamluk warriors into an object of curiosity in France and across Europe, as documented in many areas of social life, from ladies' and gentlemen's fashion to celebrative historical painting, from public ceremonies to luxury craftworks³⁵. All this probably had a share in making the word *mameluk* more 'French' and thus more acceptable for the editors of the *Dictionnaire*. However, the relevant entry exclusively focuses on 'traditional' Mamluks of Egypt, without any reference to recent historical events:

« *Mameluk*. s.m. (Prononcez *Mam-louk*). Homme faisant partie, en Égypte, d'une milice à cheval, composée de soldats achetés dans leur enfance. *Le corps des mameluks. Les mameluks ont longtemps dominé en Égypte* »³⁶.

As for the Mamluks of Napoleon, they first entered the *Dictionnaire* only in the seventh edition (1878), where the following two definitions of *mameluk* were provided:

³⁴ See Rozen, 2016.

³⁵ On this phenomenon, see Savant, 1949; Grigbsy, 1996. Louca, 2006, 53-88.

³⁶ DAF, 6th édition, 1835, Tome 2, p. 157.



[1]. Soldat d'une milice à cheval, recrutée au moyen d'enfants esclaves achetés en Circassie, et dont les chefs gouvernaient l'Égypte avant l'invasion française de 1798. *Les beys des mameluks. La milice des mameluks fut détruite par Méhémet-Ali.*

[2]. Il s'est dit aussi de Cavaliers amenés d'Égypte et qui firent partie de l'armée française sous le règne de Napoléon. *Les mameluks de la garde.*³⁷

In the eight edition (1935), the Mamluks of Napoleon surprisingly took the stage, whereas the Mamluk Sultanate was temporarily obliterated. In the same time, a peculiar semantic development made its first - and only - appearance in the *Dictionnaire* :

[1]. Chacun des Cavaliers amenés d'Égypte et qui firent partie de l'armée française sous le règne de Napoléon. *Les mameluks de la Garde.*

[2]. Par extension, il désigne les Agents dévoués d'un chef, prêts à exécuter tous ses ordres, si rigoureux qu'ils soient.³⁸

However, in the ninth edition, which is the current one and started being published in 1986, the entry *mameluk* has gone back to the past, so to speak. The secondary meaning « zealous agent » (*agent dévoué*) has been squarely suppressed, and the two historical meanings have been restored in the same order as in 1878 edition, albeit with slightly more detailed definitions:

1. En Égypte, à partir du XIII^e siècle, esclave blanc, généralement d'origine turque ou slave, appartenant à une milice d'élite qui servait de garde personnelle au sultan. *En 1250, les mamelouks se rendirent maîtres de l'Égypte et y établirent leur sultanat.*

2. Cavalier appartenant à une compagnie formée pendant la campagne d'Égypte. *Mamelouks de la Garde impériale*, corps formé en 1804 par Napoléon I^{er} et rattaché aux chasseurs à cheval de la Garde.³⁹

This 'historicizing' attitude seems to reflect the contemporary linguistic situation in French, where secondary meanings, judging from some other famous dictionaries such as Larousse⁴⁰, do not seem to have any share in current use. Yet, an exception seems to be the aforementioned meaning of 'slavish obedience' and 'devotion' to someone, which is attested in the prestigious CNRS online dictionary *Ortolang*.⁴¹

8. FROM ARABIC TO ENGLISH ...VIA BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE: A CASE IN *MAMLŪK* WANDERINGS BEYOND THE MEDITERRANEAN.

Portuguese dictionaries record two main meanings for the form *mameluco*: general reference to historical Mamluks, and the specially Brazilian Portuguese meaning of "person born from a native Brazilian and a European". Indeed, in Brazilian Portuguese dictionaries this is usually recorded as the first meaning. In particular,

³⁷ DAF, 7th édition, 1878, Tome 2, p. 160.

³⁸ DAF, 8th édition, T. 2, p. 151.

³⁹ DAF, 9th édition, entry *mameluk* (online). Last accessed online May 5th 2021. <http://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9M0420>

⁴⁰ Dictionnaire Français en ligne – Larousse.

<https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/mamelouk/48995>

⁴¹ CNTRL, *Ortolang*. <https://cnrtl.fr/definition/MAMELOUK>



Michaelis Online provide the following definitions of *mameluco*: « 1. Filho de índio com branco; 2. Mestiço de branco com curiboca. 3. Soldado de uma tropa turco-egípcia, constituída primitivamente de escravos, mas que depois dominou o Egito ». ⁴²

In the same vein, the *Dicionário Online de Português* records the following meanings: « Filho de branco com índio; indivíduo que possui uma ascendência indígena e branca; mestiço, mameluco ». The historical meaning is provided in a separate section of the entry: « [História] Soldado caucasiano convertido ao islamismo, pertencente à antiga milícia turco-egípcia » ⁴³.

As attested in late fifteenth century sources, namely Hans Staden (1577) and Gabriel Soares de Souza (1587, although unpublished until 1851), ⁴⁴ from the early stages of the Portuguese colonization of Brazil, the word *mameluco* was used to designate persons born from a European and a Amerindian (see Guedes and Godoy, 2020). In this, it was synonymous with such terms as *caboclo*, *curiboca*, *mestiço*.

In the same historical framework, the term *mameluco* was also « specifically applied in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the organized bands of Portuguese slave-hunters who desolated the vast interior of South America » (Mooney, 1913).

If the latter meaning fortunately faded away with the end of the sad practice that had originated it, the use of *mameluco* as an equivalent of *mestiço* left a much more durable mark in Brazilian Portuguese, and soon gained international outreach.

As early as 1577, the German adventurer Hans Staden provided a definition of *mameluco* in his *Warhaftige Historia*, a book of memories on his Brazilian experience as a mercenary for the Portuguese and his nine-month captivity among the Tupinambá Índios, who practiced ritual cannibalism. Staden's book played an important role in 'civilizational' debates of the time, especially after it was translated into Latin by Theodor De Bry, who included it in the third volume of his monumental work *America* (1590) and illustrated it with some impressive engravings (see Azevedo Fernandes, 2016). Thus, visual representations of *mameluco*-s and *mameluca*-s started circulating in Europe, culminating in the famous portrait of a *Mameluca* painted by Dutch artist Albert Eckhout in 1641 (see Zimmerman, 2018).

As pointed out by Guedes and Godoy (2020 : 6-7), Staden had based his definition of *mameluco* on complex 'mix' of ethnic, religious and linguistic criteria : being born from a Portuguese (or other European) father and « Brazilian » (Amerindian) mother ; having embraced Christianity ; being able to speak both Portuguese (« the language of Christians ») and local languages. However, the term apparently traveled across Europe with a simpler ethnic value, and it is with this value that the term *mameluco* was finally integrated into British English: « a person of mixed European and indigenous Brazilian descent » (*Collins Dictionary*) ⁴⁵. Thus,

⁴² *Michaelis Dicionario Brasileiro da Lengua Portuguesa*. Last accessed online April, 12th, 2021. <https://michaelis.uol.com.br/moderno-portugues/busca/portugues-brasileiro/mameluco/>

⁴³ *Dicionário Online de Português*. Last accessed online April, 12th, 2021. <https://www.dicio.com.br/mameluco/>

⁴⁴ Soares de Souza, 1851, 341-342

⁴⁵ See <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/mameluco>. Last accessed online April 17th, 2021. According to Collins word frequency rates, the peak in the use of *mameluco* in English was reached in the years 1860s of the nineteenth century (*Ibid.*).



a Portuguese loanword derived from the Arabic *mamlūk* gave rise in turn to an English loanword.

However, the ‘imported’ word had no semantic overlap with its English cognate-word *mameluke*, that continued instead to convey the meanings historically connected to Arabic *mamlūk* (plus some additional meanings that it developed in its own right). Though ultimately deriving from one and the same ancestor, *mameluco* and *mameluke* have thus lived in two distinct semantic areas in the English-speaking space.

9. SOME (NOT) CONCLUSIVE REMARKS.

The story of *mameluke* and *mameluco* in English, i.e. two cognate-words that, though now living in the same (linguistic) area, are destined to never meet except in scholars’ and speakers’ etymological consciousness, is an impressive one. However, as the cases mentioned above do suggest, this is only one of the many possible examples of the wanderings that the ‘offsprings’ of the word *mamlūk* have made across the Mediterranean and beyond, after their common ancestor first crossed the sea in the time of the Crusades.

With all evidence, trying to reconstruct the history of all *mamlūk*-based loanwords in European languages and their possible interactions in time and space would be a task farly exceeding the linguistic and cultural skills of a single person.

Nevertheless, I hope that the few case studies presented in this paper have adequately demonstrated the great potential of this topic for a wide range of fields, from linguistics to social sciences. For these reasons, the present paper aims at being considered as a pilot study, which could pave the way to further and broader research in the next future, through exchange and collaboration between scholars of several different backgrounds.

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