



EGYLandscape
P R O J E C T

Working Paper 2

Heba Mahmoud Saad AbdelNaby

“And Meat of Birds that They May Desire”

October 2020

Introduction

The military upbringing of the Mamluks included physical and mental preparation in addition to military training; therefore, good nutrition was an essential element in the developmental process. The Mamluks, who later became sultans and amīrs, were always keen to maintain a balanced diet that was mostly lavish due to their wealth and opulent lifestyle. Birds were an indispensable component of the Mamluk diet and were eaten in large quantities at most of the plushy events and festivals. Unlike other kinds of meat, birds were also available for other social classes in different context. In order to show the importance of birds as an essential component of the diet during the Mamluk period, I will discuss how they were consumed by the various classes and also their importance for the upper class of the society in particular.

Preparing and serving food for the sultan and his entourage

The Mamluk sultan, who inhabited the Citadel with his family and entourage, was served by many professional court-men and his needs were provided through several sultanic houses or *al-buyūt al-sultāniyya*.¹ Due to the accurate organization of the Mamluk sultanate and its institutions, many sultanic houses and professions were related to the production and serving of food. *Al-ḥawāijkhānāh* and *al-maṭbakh al-sultānī* were the two houses directly connected to food. The first, *al-ḥawāijkhānāh*, was supervised by the vizier, and it was responsible for paying the in-kind salaries for the kitchen and for all the beneficiaries of in-kind salaries, such as the amīrs, mamluks, soldiers, religious men, and others. It also paid out spices, oils, grains, and other items needed for food production; thus, huge amounts of such items were spent daily.² The second house, *al-maṭbakh al-sultānī* or the kitchen, was responsible for the preparation and cooking of the sultan's regular meals (lunch and dinner), and the

¹ Al-Qalqashandī mentioned that '*al-ḥawāšil*' or '*al-buyūt al-sultāniyya*' are the houses that provide the needs of the sultan and his palaces and they were: *al-sharābkhānāh*, *al-ṭashtkhānāh*, *al-firāshkhānāh*, *al-silāḥkhānāh*, *al-rikābkhānāh*, *al-ḥawāijkhānāh*, *al-ṭablkhānāh* and *al-maṭbakh al-sultānī* or the kitchen. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Āshā fi Ṣinā'at al-Inshā* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Khidīwīyah, 1913-1922), 4:9-13.

² Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 4:12-13.

unforeseen meals that might come up during the day or night, in addition to the special banquets that were held in the Great Hall (*al-iwān al-kabīr*) during procession days.³ Various kinds of meat and poultry, spices, oils and other items were brought in large amounts to the kitchen daily from *al-ḥawāijkhānāh*, and huge amounts of meat, chicken, geese and luxurious dishes were prepared there.⁴

The Citadel was supplied with its needs regularly until al-Nāṣir Muḥammad established *al-ḥawsh* inside the Citadel to be a place designated for breeding and keeping of livestock and birds needed by *al-ḥawāijkhānāh*. The sources state that it was established in 718/1318 or, more probably, in 738/1337.⁵ The site of *al-ḥawsh* was previously a hollow or a valley created after quarrying the area's stone for the construction in the Citadel, resulting in a huge deep area of about four acres.⁶ The establishment of *al-ḥawsh* was accomplished in thirty-six days, after which sheep and cattle were brought and houses for geese and other birds were built in it.⁷ Servants and attendants were employed at *al-ḥawsh* to take care of the animals and birds. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad payed special attention to geese so he devoted a side in *al-ḥawsh* for their breeding and assigned a number of servants and

3 Procession days (*āyām al-mawākib*) were six major processions during the Fatimid period held on: the beginning of the Hijrī year, the first of Ramaḍān, the three Fridays of Ramaḍān, the prayer of ʿĪd al-Fiṭr and ʿĪd al-Āḍḥa, Takhlīq al-Miqyās and Faṭḥ al-Khalīj. During the Mamluk Period processions were held for the prayer of ʿĪd al-Fiṭr and ʿĪd al-Āḍḥa, playing polo, Kasr al-Khalīj and the travels of the sultan in and out the country. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 3:504-521; 4:46-49.

4 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 4:13.

5 Both Al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrībirdī agreed on the date of establishing *al-ḥawsh* in 738 A.H. while Ibn Iyās said that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad started it in 718 A.H. Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-al-Iʿtibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār* (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfah, 1999), 3:229; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfah, 2008), vol. 9, 119-121; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾiʿ al-Duhūr* (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfah, 1982-1987), 1:1:449.

6 Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 3:229.

7 Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad assigned ʿĀqbughā ʿAbd al-Wāḥid, the sultan's brother-in-law, to establish *al-ḥawsh*. Each

maidservants for their care.⁸ In his time, the cost of the green legumes needed for feeding the geese chicks alone reached fifty thousand *dirhams* daily.⁹ He also cared for breeding pigeons and built dovecotes for them at *al-ḥawsh*.¹⁰

The organization of the sultanic houses was not different from the general organization of the Mamluk Sultanate, which focused special care on proficiency and was marked with detailed protocols and procedures. According to the custom, each of the above-mentioned sultanic houses was directed by a high official who was helped by several assistants, each performing a specific specialized

of the amīrs of a hundred brought one hundred men and animals to work in carrying the backfill, each amīr of forty brought forty men and animals, and the wālī brought the populace and captives to work. Āqbughā sat up a tent on site to supervise the work that continued day and night. Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad visited the site daily to follow up on its progress. Āqbughā was oppressive and tyrannically treating the workers and refusing to give them breaks. Since it was summertime, many of the workers died from these harsh conditions. Therefore, many appealed for the help of amīr al-Ṭanbughā to redeem them from work, thus he talked to the sultan who released the forced labor. When the work was completed, the animals water was brought to *al-ḥawsh*. Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk li-Maʿrifat Duwal al-Mulūk* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub, 1970-1973), 2:2:433-435; *Khīṭaṭ*, 3:229; Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:120.

8 Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:171.

9 Tawfiq, "Al-Ḥayawān wa-al-Ṭayr fi al-Buyūt al-Sulṭāniyya," *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Banha University* 29 (2012), 387.

10 Tawfiq, "Al-Ḥayawān wal-Ṭayr", 384.

function. *Al-ḥawāijkhānāh* was headed by an amīr entitled *ustādār*,¹¹ who was responsible for providing the needs of the house and managing its expenses. He was generally an amīr of thousand or at least an amīr of forty.¹² The kitchen was headed by an amīr entitled *ustādār al-ṣuḥba*, who was the general supervisor over the kitchen and could discuss with the sultan all matters related to his food and kitchen. He also walked in front of the food before serving it to the sultan and stood in front of banquets¹³ and was usually chosen from the amīrs of ten or twenty.¹⁴ The *mushrif* was an amīr helping *ustādār al-ṣuḥba* by supervising the preparation of food.¹⁵ He was also helped by the chief or senior

11 The title '*ustādār*' is a title composed of two Persian words: '*istdh*' which means the taker, and '*dār*' which means the holder. Thus, the title means the one who takes the money from the sultan or amīr and spends it. Al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ*, 5:457.

12 *Ustādār* is the spokesman of all the affairs of the sultan houses and he executes all the requests of the sultan. He has full authority to provide all the needs of the houses varying between expenses, claddings, mamluks, servants, etc. There used to be four *ustādārs* for the sultan houses; One of them was an amīr of a thousand and the other three were amīrs of forty. Al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ*, 4:20.

13 Al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ*, 4:21. The banquet was called '*ṣimāt*' or '*khuwān*': Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār wa-Mamālik al-Amṣār* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub wal-Wathā'iq al-Qawmīyah bil-Qāhirah, 2015), 35, fn.3; Al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ*, 4:56.

14 Al-Zāhiri, *Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik wa Bayān al-Ṭuruq wa-al-Masālik* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1893), 115.

15 Al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ*, 5:454.

cooker who was entitled *āsbāsalār*.¹⁶ Other professions in the kitchen included the supervisor of the grilled meats and birds who was entitled *amīr mashwī* who was an amīr of ten,¹⁷ in addition to a number of *marāqdāriyya*¹⁸ and servants. Serving food was related to other professions; at the top of them was that of *al-jāshānkīr* who was responsible for the banquets with the *ustādār* and accompanied the *ustādār al-ṣuḥba* in standing in front of the banquet. Moreover, he tasted the food and drinks before serving them to the sultan fearing that they were poisoned.¹⁹ The *jāshānkīr* was helped by the *khwānsalār*, who was responsible for organizing and preparing banquets and serving food alongside his assistants during these events.²⁰ Lastly, the *sāqī* also helped in serving food and

¹⁶ Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 4:13.

¹⁷ ‘Ali Ibrahim Ḥasan, *Dirāsāt fi Tārīkh al-Mamālik al-Bahariyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Maṣriyya, 1948), 173.

¹⁸ The '*marāqdār*' was responsible for preparing soup and serving it at banquets and helped in the services of the kitchen. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, vol. 5, p. 470.

¹⁹ The title '*jāshānkīr*' is composed of two Persian words: '*jāshnā*' which means to taste and '*kīr*' which means the responsible. This position was occupied by a trusted amīr, and it seems that this position was assigned to several amīrs because al-Qalqashandī said that their highest ranking was an amīr of a thousand. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 4:21; 5:460.

²⁰ The title '*khwānsalār*' is composed of two words: '*khwān*' which means what is eaten on and '*salār*' which is a Persian word meaning the presenter. The holder of this position was the head butler during banquets. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 5:471; ‘Ali Hasan, *Dirāsāt*, 174.

cutting meat during banquets, but he was mainly responsible for serving drinks after the meals.²¹

Consumption of birds in festivals and feasts

Birds were among the food items cooked daily in the sultan's kitchen to be served in his meals. They were also served in banquets '*āṣmiṭah*' that were held during feasts, procession days, and festivals since they were considered luxurious food. The largest banquets were held on procession days as a huge banquet occupied the *iwān*, from one end to the other, and was filled with various luxurious dishes. The sultan sat on the head of the table, flanked by amīrs who were arranged according to their ranks, following a strict order of hierarchy. They all ate lightly and then left so other amīrs could take their places and so on till the banquet was over.²² The Mamluk sultans held other banquets when they played polo with their amīrs, when they traveled for hunting, when they celebrated the inauguration of a new institution built by the sultan and in other important events. Such banquets were all marked with luxurious food — including birds — and chroniclers paid special attention to record the varieties and quantities of food in such events to attest to the wealth and signify the class status of the Mamluk elite. Examples of such events and accompanying banquets are numerous, such as the celebration held by Sultan Barqūq for the inauguration of his madrasa in 788/1386 by having a fancy banquet which stretched from the madrasa's prayer niche to the fountain of its open court. The banquet was loaded with luxurious dishes and grilled meat of horses, sheep, geese, chicken, and deer; and it was followed by another banquet of desserts and fruits.²³ In 915 / 1509 Sultan al-Ghawrī held a celebration in the square below the Citadel, to which he invited the four chief judges, all the amīrs of all ranks, all officials, and other notable people. The opulent banquet included one thousand and five hundred *raṭls* of meat, one thousand chickens, five hundred geese in addition to fruits, desserts and sugar, and other lavish items that were evaluated to exceed one thousand *dinārs* in cost.²⁴

21 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 5:454.

22 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 4:56.

23 Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:2:546; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 11:243; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*, 1:2:372.

24 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*, 4:151.

Playing polo with the amīrs was an important occasion to entertain and at the same time show off the power and superiority of the Mamluks. It was also a chance to convey control of resources by having luxurious banquets of various lavish food, part of which were birds. On such occasions the amīrs were usually divided into two teams; one headed by the sultan and the other headed by *ātābik al-ʿaskar*. A huge banquet was held after the game, the cost of which was covered by the head of the defeated team. Needless to say, such banquets were very expensive- probably costing thousands of *dinārs* - due to the huge number of animals, birds, desserts, and drinks that were served. Therefore, sometimes the sultan covered its cost, even when his team won the game, to relieve such a large financial burden from a close or preferred amīr.²⁵ An example of this was in 800/1397 when Sultan Barqūq won the game over Āytmash²⁶ and the latter committed to prepare the banquet, but the sultan staged it instead. They held a huge tent in the square and the banquet included twenty thousand *raṭls* of meat, two hundred pairs of geese, one thousand chicken, twenty horses, thirty *raṭls* of sugar for desserts and drinks, and thirty *raṭls* of raisin for beverages.²⁷

Birds were also among the luxurious dishes that were prepared in the kitchen of the sultan to be sent to the houses of notable officials in certain occasions and feasts. During the *Nawrūz* feast — which was one of the great feasts in Egypt — the sultan used to distribute food to notable Copts. He sent them fruits such as pomegranates, dates, peaches, quince, apples, pears, grapes, bananas, watermelon, figs, etc. He also sent them large dishes of *harisa* made with chicken, geese, and lamb meat in addition to desserts and other nice items.²⁸

25 Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:2:786, 724; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 10:155; 12:81; Muḥammad al-Shishtāwī, *Mayādīn Al-Qāhira fi al-ʿAṣr al-Mamlukī* (Cairo: Dār al-Āfāq al-ʿArabīyah, 1999), 27.

26 Āytmash was *ātābak al-ʿaskar* during the reign of Barqūq and was close to the sultan. He fought Yalbughā al-Nāṣrī and was killed in Damascus in 802/1400. Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Dalīl al-Shāfiʿ alā al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyah, 1998), 1:164; Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʿ al-Lāmiʿ li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsiʿ* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), 2:324.

27 Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:2:902; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 12:81.

28 Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿiʿ*, 1:2:365.

Birds were also among the main food items prepared for the sultan when traveling on long journeys. For example, in 719/1319, when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was travelling for pilgrimage, pots of gold, silver and copper were made for him to be used for cooking during travel. Special basins of wood were prepared and planted with various plants that might be needed for cooking. The sultan's deputy in Damascus prepared camels carrying five hundred packs of desserts, sugar and fruits, and one hundred and eighty packs of pomegranate seeds and almonds in addition to other items that might be needed for cooking, while Karīm al-Dīn prepared for the sultan one thousand geese and three thousand chicken.²⁹

In-kind gifts from the sultan to his amīrs or from top-ranking amīrs to the sultan usually included birds too. When sultan Faraj ibn Barqūq fell ill in 814/1411 all the amīrs visited him and offered him gifts varying according to their ranks. The gift of the vizier to the sultan, for example, included two thousand *dinars*, four hundred chicken, one hundred geese, two hundred *ratls* of refined sugar in addition to fruits and desserts.³⁰ A lavish gift was offered by the caliph al-Mutawakil to the sultan al-Ghawrī when he passed by Dahshūr — the home town of the caliph — on his way to the Fayyūm in 918/1513 and the gift included sheep, cattle, lots of chicken and geese, jars of honey and milk and many other things.³¹

Similarly, birds were amongst the offerings of the Mamluk sultan to the ambassadors and envoys of foreign countries, as a sign of respect and appreciation. Such offerings were usually very generous, as they intended to convey the richness and bounty of the Mamluk sultans and accordingly the wealth and power of their sultanate. For example, when the envoys of Tamerlane visited Egypt in 806/1403, the sultan ordered to give them three hundred *ratls* of mutton, a number of geese and chicken and other foods daily in addition to one thousand *dirhams*.³² When Janus, king of Cyprus, was

29 Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm*, 9:58.

30 Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:1189.

31 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī*, 4:292.

32 Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:3111-1112.

imprisoned in Egypt, the sultan ordered to give him twenty *raṭls* of meat and six chicken daily in addition to five hundred *dirhams* for other foods that he might need.³³

Moreover, we have evidence of some amīrs paying special attention to food in general and birds in particular, and who were known for consuming large numbers of birds. The vizier Fakhr al-Dīn Mājid ibn Khaṣīb was one of those, as he was interested in banquets and his kitchen cooked one thousand *raṭls* of meat in addition to geese and chicken daily. Every day after dinner, he used to spend two hundred and fifty *dirhams* to buy *ṭājīn* chicken and fried quails, pigeons, finches, and chicken.³⁴ Yalbughā al-Nāṣirī was also famous for his love and care for food, that his expenses on food reached one thousand *dinārs* daily.³⁵

Birds in the General Populace's Diet

Birds were part of the diet of the middle class during the Mamluk period. They were sold in Cairo at *al-dajjājīn* market, which was next to *al-shamā'īn* market on the way to *al-kharshaf* vault, where large numbers of chicken and geese were sold. In that market, early on Fridays, many types of birds such as quails, parrots, blackbirds, sparrows, and many others, were sold. Some kinds were substitutes of poultry as they were wild birds but still *ḥalāl* or permissible to be eaten, while other types were only sold for their fine appearance or good voices and some of those, such as quails, were sold for hundreds of *dirhams*.³⁶ The sellers used to sit at *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn* area in a line starting at the door of *al-Kāmilīyya* madrasa till the door of *al-Nāṣirīyya* madrasa to sell *ṭājīn* chicken and *ṭājīn* geese for one *dirham* or one *dirham* and quarter per pound and to sell fried finches or sparrows for one *ḥils* each.³⁷ Other sellers carried portable stoves on their heads and wandered the streets, selling cooked

33 Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 14:302.

34 Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:1:59; *Khiṭaṭ*, 3:29.

35 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*, 1:2:51.

36 Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 3:96.

37 Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 3:29.

birds, grains, and other ready-made dishes.³⁸ Al-Maqrīzī mentioned a strange incident about selling birds in Cairo in Ramaḍān 742 / February 1342 stating that the *muḥtasib* found a merchant in the market of *Bab al-Zahūma* selling rotten birds. His storeroom contained birds that were stored for fifty days till they stunk. The *muḥtasib* found 34,196 birds including 1,196 pigeons and 33,000 starlings that were changed in color and smell; therefore, he punished the merchant and chastened him.³⁹ This incident shows that huge numbers of birds were available in the markets during the Mamluk period, which implies huge consumption too.

Such records about the birds sold in markets and the incident mentioned by al-Maqrīzī all reveal that birds were sold alive only if they were pet birds or singing birds '*ṭayr al-masmū*'⁴⁰ and these were sold for high prices sometimes reaching one thousand *dirham*. The chronicles also show that sparrows were sold alive because young boys used to buy them, for one *fil*s each, to free them as a good deed.⁴¹ In contrast, such chronicles and *ḥisba* manuals reveal that the types of birds that were sold to be eaten were sold ready-made either as *ṭājīn* or fried⁴² but not grilled, since the grill stores sold only meat.⁴³ This was understood because only the upper class of the Mamluk society could afford to maintain a kitchen in their houses and to prepare food in their kitchens, while the middle class could

38 Von Harff, *The Pilgrimage of Arnold Von Harff*, trans. Malcolm Letts (London: The Hakluyt Society), 109.

39 Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 3:97. The incident was strange because of the huge number of birds stored by the merchant and because the market of Bab al-Zahūma was one of the greatest markets in Cairo and was famous for selling good foods.

40 '*Ṭayr al-masmū*' are birds bought for their beautiful looks such as parrots or for their good voices such as quails.

41 Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 3:96.

42 Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:1:59.

43 Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *Ma'ālim al-Qurbah fī Aḥkām al-Ḥisbah*, ed. Muḥammad Maḥmūd Sha'bān (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyah al-Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 1976), 156; Ibn Bassām, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah fī Ṭalab al-Ḥisbah*, ed. Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Sāmarra'i (Baghdad: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif, 1968), 307.

not afford that luxury.⁴⁴ This was due to several reasons, such as the lack of wood used as fuel for fires,⁴⁵ the danger entailed in keeping fires indoors since no effective means were available to extinguish them, the high cost of cooking utensils, and the lack of running water in houses.⁴⁶ As a result, most of the populace bought ready-made food cooked by cooks and butchers in the markets; especially from those sellers who offered a wide variety of dishes at reasonable prices most of the time.

Birds in the Mamluk markets were made available from two sources: hatcheries and hunting. We do not have an exact date for the beginning of the use of hatcheries in Egypt, but the earliest clear mention of them is in the book of al-Baghdādī *'al-Ifādah wal-ī'tbār'* when he mentioned heated incubators or *'ḥaḍān al-farārīj* and *ma' mal al-farrūj'* that were widely-spreading in Egypt. He mentioned that these hatcheries earned money and supported trade.⁴⁷ Al-Baghdādī provided detailed information about these incubators stating that each one had ten or twenty houses, with about a thousand egg in each for hatching. He described the dimensions of the incubator house and its construction, the dung used for generating the heat, the care for the eggs during the three-week period of incubation, the procedures to maintain a steady supply of heat for the hatching process and the maintenance of the hatcheries.⁴⁸ All these details imply that such an industry was well established a long time before al-Baghdādī discussed it in his book (which was written in 600/1204). Apparently, the industry continued throughout the Mamluk period as evident from several hints in Mamluk sources. Al-Qalqashandī, for example, indicated that the responsibilities of *al-ḥuwāndār* included the

44 Amalia Levanoni, "Food and Cooking during the Mamluk Era: Social and Political Implications," *Mamluk Studies Review* 9 (2005), 204.

45 Arnold Von Harff, *The Pilgrimage*, 09.

46 Amalia Levanoni, "Food and Cooking", 204-207.

47 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Ifādah wal-ī'tibār fī al-Umūr al-Mushāhadah wal-Ḥawāidith al-Mu'āyanah bi-Arḍ Miṣr* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyah al-Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 1998), 81.

48 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Ifādah*, 81-83.

supervision of the hatcheries.⁴⁹ Al-Suyūṭī also mentioned the ovens used in Egypt for hatching eggs where fire was created to provide the artificial heat needed for incubation till hatching occurred.⁵⁰ Moreover, the travelers who visited Egypt during the Mamluk period were impressed with such hatcheries and mentioned them in their books, usually describing them as ovens, each with one or two thousand eggs, hatching within a three-weeks period and providing the markets with immense number of chicken.⁵¹ Hunting, on the other hand, was another source for different types of birds that were also consumed during the Mamluk period. *Ḥisba* manuals mentioned that the bird hunters provided a steady supply of birds to the markets and the *muḥtasib* had to supervise them in order to prevent their cheating as they might sell inflated birds — to appear larger and accordingly cost more — or dead birds. Therefore, the *muḥtasib* had to inspect their birds.⁵²

The lower class of the Mamluk society was obviously less fortunate and rarely consumed birds in their diet. They only had access to birds during the feasts of the public festivals held by the sultan or one of the elite Mamluks. When a banquet was held the common people were allowed to eat after the sultan, the amīrs, and the elite of the society.⁵³ Such events were their only chance to get to taste luxurious foods such as birds, meat, and desserts.

In the countryside, birds were part of the livestock of farmers who bred domesticated birds such as chicken, geese, ducks, and pigeons alongside other farm animals. That livestock was the

49 Al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥī*, 5:470. The title "ḥuwāndār" consists of two words: 'ḥayawān' and 'dār', which means the holder of the animal and among his responsibilities was the supervision the hatcheries. Also see: Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:2:531.

50 Al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍarah fī Akhbār Miṣr wal-Qāhirah* (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1968), 2:333.

51 Von Harff, *The Pilgrimage*, p. 110; Housni Alkhateeb Shehada, *Mamluks and Animals: Veterinary Medicine in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 23-24.

52 Ibn Bassām, *Nihāyat al-Rutbah*, 317. The '*muḥtasib*' used to check the birds by putting them in water to see if they floated or sank.

53 Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:2:547.

capital that helped the farmer to provide his daily needs and it was sold to provide him income.⁵⁴ Although the domesticated birds were available to farmers, they were wisely consumed; as farmers depended on legumes, vegetables, and fish for their diet rather than white or red meat.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The study of birds in the Mamluk society can give us rich insights about the lives of the different classes of the society, the interaction between them, and the prevailing food traditions of the era. Various types of birds were available in the Mamluk society. Chicken and geese in particular were consumed in huge amounts by the sultan, his amīrs and the elite of the society since they were considered among the lavish foods prepared and presented in the banquets of feasts, festivals, and other important events. The sultan had *al-matbakh al-sultānī* or the kitchen that cooked birds in addition to other dishes either for the daily consumption of the sultan and his officials or for the special banquets or even for the in-kind gifts presented by the sultan to special figures in certain occasions. In addition to chicken and geese, other types of birds such as pigeons, sparrows, starlings...etc. were consumed by the middle class of the Mamluk society. Such types of birds were usually sold ready-made in markets for reasonable prices since the middle class could not afford to maintain a kitchen in their houses and bought most of their foods from the markets directly. On the contrary, the lower class had the chance to taste luxurious dishes such as birds only during the banquets held by the sultan or one of the elites when they allowed to partake in the banquet's leftover foods. Farmers of the countryside, although they were breeding birds in their houses, did not depend on meat for their diet but rather vegetables, legumes, and fish.

⁵⁴ Majdī 'Abd al-Rashīd Baḥr, *Al-Qaryah al-Maṣriyya fi 'Aṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyah al-'Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 1999), 185-188.

⁵⁵ Baḥr, *Al-Qaryah*, 233-237.

Works Cited

‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī, Muwaffaq al-Dīn. *Kitāb al-Ifādah wal-I’tibār fī al-Umūr al-Mushāhadah wal-Ḥawādith al-Mu‘āyanah bi-Arḍ Miṣr*. Cairo, al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyah al-‘Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 1998.

Alkhateeb-Shehada, Housni. *Mamluks and Animals: Veterinary Medicine in Medieval Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Al-Maqrīzī, Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī. *Al-Mawā‘iẓ wa-al-I’tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār*. Cairo, al-Hay’ah al-‘Āmmah li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfah, 1999.

----. *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma‘rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*. Edited by Muḥammad Mustafa Ziyādah and Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ ‘Āshūr. Cairo: Maṭba‘at Dār al-Kutub, 1956-1973.

al-Qalqashandī, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī. *Ṣubḥ al-A’shā fī Ṣinā‘at al-Inshā’*. Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Khidwīyah, 1913-1922.

al-Sakhāwī, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. *al-Ḍaw’ al-Lāmi’ li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi’*. Beirut, Dār al-Jīl, 1992.

al-Shishtāwī, Muḥammad. *Mayādīn al-Qāhirah fī al-Aṣr al-Mamlūkī*. Cairo: Dār al-Āfāq al-‘Arabīyah, 1999.

al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr. *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍarah fī Akhbār Miṣr wal-Qāhirah*. Cairo, Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabīyya, 1968.

Baḥr, Majdī ‘Abd al-Rashīd, *al-Qaryah al-Miṣriyah fī Aṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk, 648-923/1250-1517*. Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyah al-‘Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 1999.

Ḥasan, ‘Alī Ibrāhīm. *Tārīkh al-Mamālīk al-Baḥriyah*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyah, 1967.

Ibn Bassām, Muḥammad ibn Āḥmad. *Nihāyat al-Rutbah fī Ṭalab al-Ḥisbah*, edited by Muḥammad Ismā‘īl and Āḥmad al-Mazīdī. Baghdad, Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif, 1968

Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-‘Umarī, Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyá. *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālīk al-Amṣār*, ed. Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid. Maṭba‘at Dār al-Kutub wa-al-Wathā‘iq al-Qawmiyah bi-al-Qāhirah, 2015.

Ibn Iyās, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. *Badā’i’ al-Zuhūr fī Waqā’i’ al-Duhūr*, edited by Muḥammad Muṣṭafa. Cairo, al-Hay’ah al-‘Āmmah li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfah, 1982-1987.

Ibn Taghrībirdī, Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf. *Al-Dalīl al-Shāfi‘ī la al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*, edited by Fahim Muḥammad

Shaltūt. Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyah, 1998.

----. Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fi Mulūk Miṣr wal-Qāhirah. Cairo, al-Hay'ah al-'Āmmah li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfah, 2008.

Ibn al-Ukhūwah, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Qurashī. *Kitāb Ma'ālim al-Qurbah fi Ahkām al-Ḥisbah*. Edited by Muḥammad Maḥmūd Sha'bān and Ṣiddīq Aḥmad 'Īsā al-Muṭay'ī. Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣrīyah al-'Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 1976.

Levanoni, Amalia. "Food and Cooking during the Mamluk Era: Social and Political Implications." *Mamluk Studies Review* 9/2, (2005), 201-222.

Tawfiq, Ashraf Samīr. "Al-Ḥayawān wa-al-Ṭayr fi al-Buyūt al-Sulṭāniyya." *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Banha University* 29 (2012), 378-418.

Von Harff, Arnold. *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff, Knight, from Cologne, through Italy, Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Ethiopia, Nubia, Palestine, Turkey, France and Spain, which he accomplished in the Years 1496 to 1499*. Translated by Malcolm Letts. London: The Hakluyt Society, 1946.

al-Zāhirī, Ghars al-Din Khalīl ibn Shāhīn. *Zoubdat kachf el-Mamālik; tableau politique et administratif de l'Égypte, de la Syrie et du Ḥidjâz sous la domination des sultans mamloûks du XIIIe au XVe siècle*. Edited by Paul Ravaisse. Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1894.