# Mamlk loyalty : evidence from the late Seljuq period

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# *MAMLŪK* LOYALTY: EVIDENCE FROM THE LATE SELJUQ PERIOD

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Abstract [1]

This article addresses one key aspect of the widespread institution of pre-Mongol era Islamic military slavery: the alleged superior loyalty of slave-soldiers (known as *ghulām*s or *mamlūk*s), using the late Seljuq period (late 11th–late12th century) as a case study. The examination of the role of slave soldiers during this period reveals that, 1) the assumption of the superior loyalty of slave soldiery is a modern expectation, not one entertained by the slave-soldiers' contemporaries; 2) the slave soldiery exhibited the same type of self-interest and limited loyalty as did the free soldiery; and 3) the slave system also produced its own additional peculiar and inherent limitations on loyalty: first, a heightened degree of rivalry within the slave corps and obsessive vying for the ruler's favor that led frequently to jealousy and betrayal; and, second, the strictly personal nature of the *ghulām*'s tie to his master, which meant that even the most loyal *ghulām*'s allegiance ended with the said master's demise, after which the *ghulām* frequently became a threat to his erstwhile lord's heirs, since his sole remaining loyalties were to his slave-corps faction and his own personal interest.

## Introduction

The central place occupied by the institution of military slavery in the Islamic world has long attracted the attention of researchers. The vast bulk of such research, however, has been directed toward the period after 1250, and has focused on the Mamlūk and Ottoman sultanates, in whose armies military slaves constituted not only the dominant component, but in many cases virtually the

1 This research was funded by grants from the Israel Science Foundation (ISF) and the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research (GIF). An early version of this paper was presented at the International Workshop in Memory of David Ayalon, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in December 2008. The author is grateful to Reuven Amitai for the invitation to participate in that workshop. The author thanks Michael Cook and David Durand-Guedy for having read and commented upon this article. Finally, the author is deeply indebted to Patricia Crone for a truly exhaustive critique and numerous helpful suggestions and insights.

exclusive component of real military significance.[2] Similarly, the origins of the institution, and its initial large-scale introduction into the 'Abbāsid armies in the early ninth century, have benefited – albeit to a lesser degree – from scholarly investigation.[3] But the study of the institution of military slavery as practiced among the Persianate dynasties which ruled the Islamic heartland in the intervening four centuries, between the collapse of the 'Abbāsids in the mid-ninth century and the rise of the Mamlūk sultanate in the thirteenth, has remained a virtual terra incognita.[4]

This article is the second effort by the present author to address Islamic military slavery in that so-called "Middle Period," the era of the autonomous Persianate dynasties in the Islamic heartland and the eastern lands. Whereas the previous article examined the widely-accepted thesis that military slaves constituted the primary and preferred source of manpower during the pre-Seljuq Persianate dynastic period,[5] the present study will examine both a different period and a different aspect of what one might call "The Mamlūk Mystique": specifically, it will reconsider the alleged superior loyalty of the products of the military slave system, using primarily the Seljuqs of the post-Malikshāh period as a case study.

The Seljuqs make a useful case study because they had, virtually from the inception of their rule, a mixed army, consisting primarily of free Turkmens and slave *ghulāmān*, but including also various auxiliary forces of Arab, Kurdish and

2 See the corpus of David AYALON's articles on the subject, many of which have been collected into Variorum reprint volumes, such as AYALON 1988, and AYALON 1994; many other scholars, of course, have also espoused this approach, e.g. HUMPHREYS 1977; MENAGE 1966, and so forth. This adoption of the late-medieval Mamluk Sultanate as the normative frame of reference is apparent even in the preferred scholarly terminology employed for military slaves: The word "*mamlūk*" virtually never appears in sources written before the thirteenth century; earlier works normally refer to military slaves as *ghilmān* or *ghulāmān*.

3 E.g. CRONE, 1980; PIPES, 1981; KENNEDY, 2001; LA VAISSIÈRE, 2007.

4 Until recently the only explorers of this unfamiliar terrain were Edmund BOSWORTH and Jürgen PAUL, who between them wrote about the Ṣaffārid, Sāmānid, Būyid and Ghaznavid armies. However, even their pioneering work treated army organization in general; it did not focus specifically on the slave institution: e.g. PAUL, 1996: 93–139; PAUL, 1994; BOSWORTH, 1968; BOSWORTH, 1965–1966; BOSWORTH, 1960.

5 Showing that in the Ṣaffārid, Sāmānid, and Ghaznavid armies military slaves did not occupy the preponderant position that has frequently been attributed to them; TOR, 2008. For an exposition of the idea that study was refuting, see e.g. AYALON, 1975: 56, or AYALON, 1996: 305, writing of the period from the rise of Islam to the eleventh century: "The Mamlūk socio-military institution, in its various forms, had been the mainstay of Islam's military might throughout the greatest part of its existence."

Daylamite tribal levies, volunteer warriors, and others.[6] The Seljuq officer corps was of similarly diverse constitution: it contained free *amīr*s of various ethnic backgrounds – people such as Atsız al-Turkmānī, the Arab Dubays b. Ṣadaqa, and the Daylamite Muḥammad b. Dushmanziyār – and slaves such as Ayāz, Buzghush, and Qumāch. The late Seljuq era is also a useful one to study because it included both a turbulent period – the incessant civil wars and jockeying for the sultanate between the years 1092–1105 – and also a very long and stable one, particularly from Sanjar b. Malikshāh's accession to the supreme sultanate in 1118 until his capture by the Oghuz in 1053.

An examination of the role of slave soldiers in the Seljuq state during the post-Malikshāh period reveals not only that the slave soldiery exhibited the same type of self-interest and limited loyalty as did the free soldiery, but that the slave system also produced its own additional peculiar and inherent limitations on loyalty: first, a heightened degree of rivalry within the slave corps and obsessive vying for the ruler's favor that led frequently to jealousy and betrayal; and, second, the strictly personal nature of the *ghulām*'s tie to his master, which meant that even the most loyal *ghulām*'s allegiance ended with the said master's demise, after which the *ghulām* frequently became a threat to his erstwhile lord's heirs, since his sole remaining loyalties were to his slave-corps faction and his own personal interest.

## Current views of slave-soldier loyalty

Before turning to examine this thesis regarding slave-soldier loyalty in the period in question, though, one must first examine the current widely held scholarly view of slave-soldier loyalty. It is important to remember in this context that the ʿAbbāsids did not embrace the military slave system on a large scale because they were persuaded of its superiority to all other fighting forces or by a belief in the allegedly superior loyalty of such soldiers. Rather, the ʿAbbāsids turned to this system because of their difficulty in mobilizing loyal soldiers due to the ideological bankruptcy of the caliphate in the early ninth century; in Hugh Kennedy's description:

6 SIBṬ IBN AL-JAWZĪ, 1951: 1,161, for instance, describes Malikshāh's army in 1072 as having consisted of "Turkmens, Arabs, Turks and *ghilmān*."

> [...] The army of the Khurāsāniya and *Abnā'* which had supported the early 'Abbasid Caliphate was broken and demoralized and its loyalty to the new regime was doubtful [...]. al-Ma'mūn and his successor al-Mu'taṣim looked to new groups who, so to speak, brought no political baggage with them.[7]

In other words, this was a choice born of necessity, rather than of preference: Since the 'Abbāsids could no longer recruit soldiers through conviction, they bought recruits who had no choice in the matter; the prime motivation in turning to slave soldiery was simply their alienism and (even more important, but less remarked) their lack of any say in the matter of their own recruitment. These were soldiers, in other words, who, unlike the free soldiery, did not possess any freedom of choice at all regarding whether or not to serve the dynasty; there is no indication in the texts that the 'Abbāsids believed slave soldiers would be more loyal to them than would free soldiers.[8]

Yet, because the slaves were removed from any prior social context and all former ties and loyalties, the assumption of most scholars has been that this breaking of former social bonds led to an unconditional loyalty to their new master, rather than to the formation of alternative bonds within their new social context of the same type that free warriors formed.[9] This view is exemplified by statements such as the following: "There developed [...] a feeling of unbounded loyalty between the patron and his Mamlūks";[10] and "Attached to the ruler by a personal bond of fealty, [slave troops] could give single-minded loyalty; owing everything to their master, they were untrammeled by the material and personal interests which locally-raised troops inevitably had."[11]

7 KENNEDY, 2001: 118; see also CRONE, 1980: 61–81.

8 Obviously, the Seljuq situation was different, since they had an abundant supply of Turkmens. One can logically conjecture, although there is no direct supporting evidence other than NIẒĀM AL-MULK's related statement regarding the benefits of diversity of race (NIẒĀM AL-MULK 1334/1955: 107), that there were two motivating factors in their recruitment of slave soldiery: a) Slaves provided an auxiliary source of manpower (no ruler of this period was averse to augmenting his military forces, even if already well supplied with manpower) – one, moreover, especially good for a relatively small palace guard or standing force; Niẓām al-Mulk (p. 109) does note that the Turkmens were averse to the settled life required of such a force. b) They provided a counterbalance and an alternative to the rather headstrong Turkmens, a power balance.

9 Although AYALON, 1980: 338 notes and acknowledges the primacy of the family ties that a *mamlūk* established upon marriage; this is why he regarded eunuchs as the "ideal type" of slave.

10 AYALON, 1980: 328; this statement would seem to imply that such ties were mutual.

11 BOSWORTH, 1973: 98–99.

However, this view of exceptional *mamlūk* loyalty is an assumption on the part of modern scholars, not the stated or implicit view of the medieval texts or the slave-soldiers' contemporaries. It is unclear how or upon what grounds this modern assumption was formed, other than the retrojection of Ibn Khaldūn's statements from a later time and a different continent; unless perhaps one assumes gratitude for manumission in the cases where such soldiers were freed (for the centuries under discussion, we do not know if such slaves were even manumitted[12]), or gratitude for having been converted to the one true religion.[13]

It should also be noted here that we know next to nothing about the actual training and formation of *mamlūk* corps throughout the centuries; almost everything that has been conjectured has been based upon the few sentences of Niẓām al-Mulk's eleventh-century "description" in his mirror for princes of an idealized Sāmānid palace *ghulām* system – sentences which are prescriptive rather than historically descriptive.[14] Moreover, while the personal element is frequently posited as having occupied a key place in this system, it is not clear that a slave soldier in training could have forged any kind of personal ties with a ruler who possessed hundreds or even thousands of slave-soldiers. It is probably unlikely that the ruler had personal contact with any of them, other than perhaps for sexual exploitation purposes,[15] until after they had spent many years in servitude and had risen to an unusually high station.

12 Although several of the instances adduced infra seem to indicate that in at least some cases they were not; there may not have been one rule in such matters, though. It is striking that in prominent examples – for instance, when Sultan Sanjar is betrayed by his *ghulām* ʿAlī Chatrī in 1152 during the Ghūrid revolt (this case is discussed below) – gratitude for manumission is never mentioned as among the causes that should have kept the *ghulām* loyal.

13 CRONE, 2004: 383. The author is indebted to Patricia Crone for this point and the preceding one regarding manumission as possible grounds for gratitude.

14 NIẒĀM AL-MULK 1378/1958: 141.

15 On this exploitative aspect of the phenomenon see, for instance, Bundārī's rather lurid account of "the *khawāṣṣ* of Sanjar and his *mamlūks* whom he loved then forgot and humbled after he had raised them," which relates that Sanjar was a serial sexual exploiter of *mamlūks*. According to Bundārī, while Sanjar was using them, he would shower them with favors, then when he had tired of any particular catamite, Sanjar "thought no more of him and he hated him; so he got rid of him and forsook him; and it ended in his loathing him, to the point where he would not be satisfied with separation from him after his having been joined to him, but he regarded his comfort [as lying] in killing him" (BUNDĀRĪ, 1889: 271). This would appear to have been at least as typical of a master-slave relationship as the theoretical paradigm of mutual loyalty – and both were probably non-representative of the actual level of personal contact and fealty between any given ruler and his hundreds or even thousands of *mamlūks*.

While one can perhaps more safely assume that bonds of loyalty did form between the slave-soldier and those with whom he was in close and regular contact, including his commanders, trainers, and fellow slave-soldiers – the phenomenon that Ayalon identified as *khushdāshiyya*[16] – yet even then, one cannot simply presume that such ties were stronger than those prevailing amongst free warriors (especially tribal ones). Indeed, more recent scholars of the Mamlūk Sultanate itself have considerably discounted and demystified this presumed *mamlūk* loyalty to both the master and the slave-corps cohort.[17]

## Murder of the master

Unsurprisingly, therefore, when one examines the evidence, *ghulām* corps seem to be at least as seditious and disloyal as free ones, and arguably more so.[18] This is, moreover, a characteristic of slave soldiery apparent from the very inception of the institution under the ʿAbbāsids. For the first hundred years or so of ʿAbbāsid rule, before the enrollment of large numbers of slave soldiery in the ʿAbbāsid military, no ʿAbbāsid caliph was ever murdered by his free soldiers or generals; only, on rare occasions, by other family members.[19] Within a genera-

16 Ayalon writes of these "comrades in servitude" as having formed part of the "slave family" (AYALON, 1980: 327–328). Significantly, this term does not appear in any of the Seljuq sources.

17 E.g. IRWIN, 1986: 237: "It should be noted also that the bond of *khushdāshiyya* was not absolute [...]. Though the bond of *khushdāshiyya* was quite strong, it was not so much an emotional bond as a flag of tactical convenience. What *khushdāshiyya* conveyed was expectations of mutual service and of log rolling. There was, as far as I can tell, no actual indoctrination in loyalty to the *ustādh* [...] and to the *khushdāsh* [...]. A mamluk served his master because his master served him, and there was money involved." Similar conclusions are reached by LEVANONI, 2004: 114–115.

18 Note that the sources for this period display no anti-*ghulām* bias, nor has anyone ever claimed that they do.

19 Most famously, the Caliph al-Hādī; ṬABARĪ, n.d.: 8, 205–207 [DE GOEJE ed. III, 569–571]. In fact, disloyalty amongst *ghilmān* was not limited only to the caliphs; see the appalling story about the hard lesson in *ghulām* disloyalty learned by one of the Arab governing officials in Sind in the early ʿAbbāsid period: First, the *ghulām* seduced his master's wife; then, after the master had castrated him in punishment, the *ghulām* brought his master's young sons up to the house roof and threatened to cast the boys down unless the master immediately castrated himself. After the master mutilated himself on the spot, the *ghulām*,

tion of the massive influx of the slave soldiery into the ʿAbbāsid armies, in contrast, these *ghilmān* had taken over the state, murdered five successive caliphs, and irreparably destroyed ʿAbbāsid political power. In other words, ironically, loyalty suddenly became very much an issue only with the large-scale infusion of slave-soldiers into the military.

The relative unreliability of slave soldiery continued well after the system had destroyed the ʿAbbāsid caliphate from within; examples of slave soldiers murdering their masters abound in the sources; indeed, as pointed out in the present author's previous study concerning the pre-Seljuq period, such betrayals were far more common than cases of free soldiery doing the same – even in armies in which Mamlūks did not constitute the majority of the soldiery or officers.

Thus, for instance, the Daylamite ruler Mardāvīj b. Ziyār, whose military mainstay consisted of his free countrymen,[20] was nevertheless murdered by his Turkish *ghilmān*.[21] Similarly, the Sāmānids never experienced murderous trouble from the *dihqān* class or other free warriors; *amīr*s seem to have been murdered only by their slave soldiers, the most notable victim being Aḥmad b. Ismāʿīl, slaughtered by his own *ghilmān* in the year 301/914.[22] As for the Ghaznavids, at the very time of the Seljuq conquest, Masʿūd Ghaznavī, pursuant to his defeat by the Seljuqs at Dandānqān, was warned that the loyalty of his slave troops was unreliable.[23] Shortly thereafter, he was in fact deposed (a deposition which led to his subsequent murder) by a conspiracy of his own disaffected and disloyal *ghilmān*, who installed a puppet ruler, Masʿūd's blinded brother Muḥammad, thereby following in the footsteps of the ʿAbbāsid *mamlūk*s of the mid-ninth century.[24] It is less commonly known that Masʿūd's son Farrukh-zād nearly met the same fate as his father: in the year 450/1058 a group

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of course, murdered his master's small children anyway before their father's eyes (MAS'ŪDĪ, n.d.: 3, 399).

20 AL-ṢŪLĪ, 1982: 2, 62; MISKAWAYH, 1921: 1, 161.

21 AL-ṢŪLĪ, 1982: 2, 62; MISKAWAYH, 1921: 1, 163; IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 8, 298–301.

22 E.g. IBN FUNDUQ, n.d.: 69; NARSHAKHĪ, 1940: 111; MISKAWAYH, 1921: 1, 33.

23 BOSWORTH, 1977: 16.

24 MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1943: 398, states merely that "the army rebelled against [him]," but Ibn al-Athīr, 1979: 9, 485, states specifically that the traitors were "Anūshtekīn al-Balkhī and a group of the palace *ghilmān*," as does MĪRKHWĀND, 1920f: 4, 130, who states that the culprits were "Anūshtekīn and *ghulāmān-i khavāṣṣ*." GARDĪZĪ, 1944: 439, blames "some ill-mannered *ghulāmān* and impudent soldiers," greedy to steal Masʿūd's treasure.

of his own *ghilmān* plotted to kill him and attacked him in the bath; he managed to hold them off until loyal men could rush to his assistance.[25]

This pattern of *mamlūk* disloyalty, unsurprisingly, continues into and throughout the Seljuq period as well. In the post-Malikshāh years which constitute our case study, some of the more famous and politically significant examples include the murder of the Seljuq claimant Arslān Arghūn b. Alp Arslān, brother of Malikshāh, who took over Khurāsān in 1092,[26] and whose career ended around the beginning of 1097 with his fatal stabbing at the hands of one of his own *ghilmān*[27] – despite the fact that, once again, the vast bulk of his forces are explicitly described as having consisted of free Turkmen warriors.[28]

Another such casualty was the Seljuq ruler of Aleppo, Tāj al-Dawla Alp Arslān b. Riḍwān, killed by his father's *ghilmān* in the citadel around the year 1115. In this case, as with the ʿAbbāsid caliphs previously, the cause of the murder of the ruler was the political ambitions of the *ghilmān* themselves, who wished to install a puppet figurehead whom they could dominate. Thus, after they had eliminated Tāj al-Dawla, "they raised his brother, Sulṭān Shāh b. Riḍwān, but he was under the control of Lū'lū' the Eunuch."[29]

Other such cases include that of the Būrid ruler of Damascus Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd, murdered in his bed in the year 1139 by three of his *ghilmān*, described as having been "amongst his *khawāṣṣ* and the people closest to him in his private and public life, who would sleep by his side every night";[30] the similar case of ʿImād al-Dīn Zengī b. Aqsunqur, ruler of Mosul and Syria, who was also murdered at night, in the year 1146, by a number of his *mamlūk*s (this is the word employed both by Ibn al-Athir, one of the first authors to prefer this term, and by Ibn al-ʿIbrī);[31] and the case of the famous author and ʿulamologist

25 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 5. Note that Ibn al-Athīr employs the terms *mamālīk* and *ghilmān* interchangeably; his chronicle marks the beginning of the displacement of the latter term by the former in the sources.

26 On whose primary force of nomads see PAUL, 2011.

27 AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 85–86; NĪSHĀPŪRĪ, 2004: 39; RĀVANDĪ, 1945: 143; AL-YAZDĪ, 1979: 2, 77; BUNDĀRĪ, 1889: 258. In this last account the slave actually explains why he committed the deed: "I wished to deliver [all] creatures from his oppression."

28 AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 85.

29 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 508. For a fuller exposition of the treachery and ambition of Lū'lū' and the *ghilmān*, see SIBṬ IBN AL-JAWZĪ, 1952: 2, 46–48, 52.

30 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 9, 68; SIBṬ IBN AL-JAWZĪ, 1952: 2, 171–172. This was by no means Maḥmūd's first encounter with slave-soldier disloyalty; see also SIBṬ IBN AL-JAWZĪ, ibid.: 164–165.

31 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 9, 110; IBN AL-ʿIBRĪ, 1992: 206.

Ibn Mākūla, Abū Naṣr ʿAlī, son of the vizier Abū'l-Qāsim Hibat Allāh b. ʿAlī Ibn Abī Dulaf,[32] who in 475/1082f. travelled to Kerman with a group of "his Turkish mamālīk, who betrayed him and killed him," and took what they found of his money.[33]

Of course, the murders just adduced were the extreme cases. But these cases, together with less extreme examples of completely self-interested behavior, highlight an important facet of slave-soldier disloyalty: despite all the theories, empirically, slave-soldier *amīr*s seem throughout this period to have placed their own welfare and interests above their master's with what appears to be the same frequency as did non-servile *amīr*s – and to much deadlier effect.

## Defections, betrayals, and rebellions

In fact, it appears that most of the rebellions encountered by the various Seljuq sultans on the part of non-family members came from military slaves. Thus, to take only a few representative truly flagrant and unexplained displays of disloyalty by a *ghulām* toward his master, in 1131, when Sanjar appointed his nephew Toghril to the position of subordinate sultan of Iraq, Masʿūd, Toghril's brother, rebelled against Sanjar – and was joined in his rebellion by "Qarāja the Cup-Bearer, who was Sanjar's slave."[34] Then there is the famous example of the ingratitude displayed by one of Sanjar's closest and most pampered protégés, the *ghulām* ʿAlī Chatrī, who was both the Sultan's major domo and the fief-holder of Herat.[35] Despite all the benefits which had been conferred upon this *ghulām*, when the lord of Ghūr, Jahān-Sūz, rebelled against Sanjar and invaded Khurasan in the year 1152, ʿAlī Chatrī betrayed his benefactor and threw in his lot with the Ghūrid.

According to the sources, Sanjar was greatly distressed by this betrayal, since ʿAlī "had been the special recipient of [the Sultan's] favor; [Sanjar] had raised him from the rank of jester to the dignity of major domo." In fact, so upset

32 On whom vide DHAHABĪ 1419/1998: 18, 569–579.

33 IBN AL-JAWZĪ 1412/1992: 16, 226. The author thanks Patricia Crone both for this reference, and for knowledge of Ibn Mākūla's murder.

34 MINHĀJ SIRĀJ JŪZJĀNĪ, 1984f : 1, 259–260. According to GHAZNAVĪ, 1967: 37–38, he also tried to murder his master by poison.

35 RĀVANDĪ, 1945: 176; MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1943: 450; RASHĪD AL-DĪN, 1943: 2, 336–337; SHABĀNKĀRA'Ī, 1956: 2, 111.

was the Sultan by this ingratitude that, after Sanjar had defeated the rebel army, he had ʿAlī Chatrī beaten in two.[36] Whatever the reason for ʿAlī Chatrī's treachery – the sources are silent on this point – ʿAlī obviously did not demonstrate greater loyalty than a free soldier would have done, despite the great debt he owed to his master.

Moreover, there were additional problems and limitations, related to loyalty, that were peculiar to slave soldiers. The first of these problems is as follows: Either because the slave soldiers' primary frame of reference was their own tightly-knit corps, or perhaps due to the fact that, being totally dependent, they had to compete for the favor of their master and the rewards and privileges that were his to bestow, their situation seems to have given rise to great rivalry and jealousy among the *ghilmān*, to an extent that did not occur amongst free *amīr*s.[37] In the Seljuq period, *ghilmān* often became so jealous of one another that they ended up betraying their master out of pique, or else bringing disaster and defeat upon him in the course of their own obsessive jockeying for position with one another. A few examples should suffice to illustrate this characteristic phenomenon.

The first occurred in 1101, when Sanjar b. Malikshāh was governor of Khurasan. At this time Sanjar was first absent from Khurasan in Baghdad; then, after his return to Khurasan, he fell ill. One of Sanjar's important *amīr*s, a *ghulām* named Kundughdī or Kundeguz, had entered into treasonous correspondence with Qadir Khān, the Qarakhanid ruler of Transoxiana, and now, after Sanjar's return, informed Qadir Khān of Sanjar's illness and urged him to invade, promising him a quick and easy conquest of Khurasan and Iraq. As a result of Kundughdī's incitment, the Qarakhanids invaded Khurasan. Sanjar gathered his forces and travelled to Balkh, completely unsuspecting of his treacherous *ghulām*. At this point, though, Kundughdī fled to Qadir Khān, then seized control of the town of Tirmiẓ. According to the sources, this betrayal, which posed

36 NĪSHĀPŪRĪ, 2004: 60; RĀVANDĪ, 1945: 176; MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1943: 450, where his elevation and ungrateful rebellion are described, but not the method of his execution; IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 9, 164. This is the battle recounted in NIẒĀMĪ ʿARUḌĪ SAMARQANDĪ, 1955f: 104–105, where, however, this *ghulām* is not mentioned.

37 This phenomenon of competitive behavior as a consequence of social comparison has been well-established by research in social psychology, and researchers have also demonstrated that the commensurability and closeness of the comparison counterparts will strengthen and sharpen the rivalry (see e.g. GOETHALS and DARLEY, 1977; TESSER, 1988 and 1980; and GARCIA / A. TOR / GONZALEZ, 2006 in research that is eminently applicable to top *amīrs* specifically).

the most serious threat to Sanjar's governorship in its two decades-long duration, was motivated entirely by Kundughdī's envy of the high standing of his rival, the Amīr Buzghush, in the sultan's favour.[38]

Nor was Sanjar the only later Sultan to suffer from this phenomenon. Another such case of betrayal on the part of a Sultan's jealous and disgruntled *ghilmān* resulted in the war between the Caliph al-Mustarshid and the Seljuq Sultan Mas'ūd in 1135. According to our sources, a number of Mas'ūd's leading *amīr*s, most of them *ghilmān*, headed by Yarunqush the Bāzdār, first rebelled out of jealousy over Mas'ūd's favouring of the Atabek Qarā-Sunqur; then, after their subsequent military defeat by Mas'ūd,[39] defected to the 'Abbāsid caliph al-Mustarshid and fomented a war between the latter and their erstwhile master.[40] In this case, at least, disloyalty, while it seems to have been spread amongst both slave and free soldiery, was far more prevalent among the former: three of the four prominent *amīr*s named as ringleaders were definitely *ghilmān*, while the fourth, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ṭughāyaruk, was a muwallad. According to a number of our sources, it was these *amīr*s who prevailed upon the caliph to go to war against their former master Mas'ūd and his overlord Sanjar, to serve their own political purposes.[41]

In the ensuing battle between caliph and sultan, a further betrayal occurred: some of the *ghilmān* on the caliph's side – including the caliph's own slaves Jāwulī and Bursuq the *sharāb sālār*, who were commanding the left wing of the caliph's army – had treacherously come to a secret agreement with Mas'ūd, and brought their forces over to his side at the outset of the fighting.[42] Further compounding the sedition of the day, when the *mamlūk*s commanding the right wing "saw that the left wing of the army had committed treachery," they turned and ignominiously fled the field of battle.[43]

One can only speculate as to the reason for this piece of treason on the part of the *mamlūk* commanders of al-Mustarshid's right wing: Perhaps the caliph's

38 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 347–8; BUNDĀRĪ, 1889: 262; AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 90. RĀVANDĪ, 1945: 169 omits completely this background to the conflict with Qadr Khān.

39 For this earlier history, see AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 107.

40 BUNDĀRĪ, 1889: 176; ABŪ'L-FIDĀ', 1997: 2, 73; AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 107; MĪRKHWĀND, 1959–1960: 3, 530. See also TOR, 2009: 284–285.

41 BUNDĀRĪ, 1889: 176; ABŪ'L-FIDĀ', 1997: 2, 73; MĪRKHWĀND, 1959–1960, 3: 530. NIẒĀMĪ 'ARŪDĪ SAMARQANDĪ, 1955f: 36–37; IBN AL-JAWZĪ, 1992: 17, 291; also recounted in IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 11, 24–25.

42 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 11, 25–26.

43 IBN AL-JAWZĪ, 1992: 17, 295.

*amīr*s were jealous in turn of the caliph's favor toward the Mas'ūdi defectors, although the only one of our authors to supply an explanation for this behavior, Bundārī, attributes it to racial *'aṣ*abiyya: "Kind inclined toward kind, the Turks inclined toward the Turks, so they betrayed the chaste sanctity of Islam to ravishing [...]."[44] Whatever the reason, the empirical reality is that neither Mas'ūd's nor al-Mustarshid's *ghilmān* proved reliable or loyal. As a result, Mas'ūd won this particular battle without a single death, and al-Mustarshid was first imprisoned and then murdered – the first caliph to be murdered since al-Muqtadir was eliminated by the *ghulām* Mu'nis some two centuries previously.

Moreover, this kind of betrayal motivated by *ghulām* jealousy is a recurring pattern throughout Seljuq rule. Nor is it an insignificant issue: such betrayals motivated by personal rivalry often had disastrous consequences for the polity. Two further examples should suffice to prove this point. The first example occurred around the year 1143–44, when Sultan Sanjar mounted a punitive expedition against Khwārazm, and besieged the town. One day, in a pre-coordinated attack, two of Sanjar's *amīr*s breached the walls: a *ghulām* named Sunqur attacked from the East and another, known as Mithqāl al-Tājī, entered from the west: "There remained nothing other than to take possession of [the city] by conquest and force; but Mithqāl retreated from the city in envy of Sunqur [..., and] Sunqur remained alone [...]." As a result, the operation failed, and Sanjar was forced to withdraw.[45]

The direst instance of slave-soldier betrayal, though, is surely the encounter between Sultan Sanjar's army and the Oghuz Turkmen in 1153, an event which brought about not only the practical downfall of the Seljuqs but also the destruction of Khurasan.[46] By this time, relations between Sanjar and the Oghuz

44 BUNDĀRĪ 1889: 177. As the present author has noted elsewhere, "Although this last action strikes one as a topos, it should not therefore be dismissed out of hand: First, because many of the motifs which became topoi were not only [as Noth wrote] originally 'securely anchored to real historical referents,' but also continued to be so, because such topoi referred either to behaviour which, though reprobated, is extremely common among mankind generally (i.e. fornication, drinking, or any other sin); or, conversely, to behaviour considered so paradigmatic that many people aspiring to holiness actually consciously and deliberately emulated the topological action (e.g. use of the takbīr by, for instance, modern Islamist airplane hijackers, consciously emulating the pious early Muslims)." TOR, 2011. In other words, things often become topoi because they actually are ubiquitous, or at least widespread.

45 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 11, 95–96.

46 The eclipse of Khurasan is explicitly attributed in the primary sources to the devastation wreaked by the three-and-a-half-year long rampage of the Oghuz, pace recent theories

had degenerated to the degree that the sultan mounted an expedition against the pastoralists.[47] At this point, no one – least of all the Oghuz themselves – dreamed that they stood a chance militarily against Sanjar.[48] According to the sources, however, the petty rivalries and fractiousness of the corps of *ghulām* commanders then proved decisive. As a result of their perpetual jealousies, most of the *amīr*s deliberately refrained from fighting when combat began – thereby losing the battle. This is explicitly stated:

> They manifested resentment among themselves [...] and they envied each other; when [Sanjar's] battle with the Oghuz occurred, the Oghuz had not the ability to fight even one of his amīrs; but envy of the Amīr [...] Yarunqush brought them to forsake [Sanjar] while he was in battle [...].[49]

Similarly, another source avers: "[The] other *amīr*s, to spite Yarunqush, were remiss in fighting";[50] reputedly, "most" of the high-ranking commanders, who supported one of Yarunqush's *ghulām* rivals, did not really fight.[51] As a result, within minutes, Sanjar's trained army was routed by the nomads, and Sanjar himself subsequently ended up being taken prisoner, together with his queen.[52] He remained captive – and the Seljuq Empire remained leaderless – for over three years, until his escape late in the year 1156, by which time his realm was unsalvageable.

The loyalty evinced by Sanjar's military slaves in his hour of need – indeed, in his subsequent years of need – is also not particularly impressive. It would, in fact, be accurate to say that his *mamlūk*s as a corps evinced complete

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attributing the sudden eclipse of Khurasan to conjectural climate change (BULLIET, 2009); vide e.g. MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1942: 452; NĪSHĀPŪRĪ, 2004: 63–68; in greater detail, AL-YAZDĪ, 1979: 2, 106–113.

47 On the background to this quarrel, see NĪSHĀPŪRĪ, 2004: 61–62; MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1942: 450–451.

48 Stated explicitly in the sources, and also revealed in the Oghuz's desperate and pathetic efforts to propitiate Sanjar and avoid a battle; NĪSHĀPŪRĪ, 2004: 62–63; RĀVANDĪ, 1945: 178; AL-YAZDĪ, 1979: 2, 102; BUNDĀRĪ, 1889: 282.

49 AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 123; BAYḌĀWĪ, 1934: 78–79.

50 MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1942: 451.

51 MĪRKHWĀND, 1920: 4, 317; RASHĪD AL-DĪN, 1943: 2, 341: "In battle most of the army was deliberately negligent and remiss."

52 NĪSHĀPŪRĪ, 2004: 63; MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1942: 451. Note that according to some sources, his personal retinue, far from remaining loyal in the battle's aftermath, "had fled" and left their master to his fate.

disregard for their master's basic welfare, freedom, and kingship. Many of Sanjar's *ghilmān* seem to have regarded his captivity, on the contrary, as a golden opportunity to seize power, and immediately busied themselves with carving personal fiefdoms out of his dominions. The *mamlūk*s al-Mu'ayyad Āy-Aba and Āy-tākh are egregious examples of this sort: they were strong enough to make themselves masters of large swathes of Khurasan, including cities such as Nīshāpūr, Ṭūs, Abīward, Dāmaghān and Rayy, expelling the Oghuz from them – yet they did not lift a finger to free their captive patron.[53] Nor were these two prominent *mamlūk*s alone in their disloyalty; it is stated explicitly that "[a]ll the amirs of Khurasan and his vizier deserted Sanjar [...] not even one of his *khawāss* or his servants [or: eunuchs] remained."[54] Moreover, the postscript to this story was that Āy-Aba, after Sanjar's death, rebelled against and overthrew Sanjar's appointed heir.[55] We see here, once again, that self-interest rather than devotion was the rule with these *ghilmān*.

This is, of course, not to assert that every single slave soldier was invariably disloyal – that would be as simplistic and unfounded as the idealization of *ghilmān* loyalty against which we are here arguing. Even amongst slave soldiery, there were many who must have been loyal to their masters, either out of principle or self-interest. Yet even that group posed a severe loyalty problem that one does not often encounter in connection with free soldiery, and which brings us to the second problem that seems to have been specific to slave soldiery: namely, that, as a rule, whatever loyalty a *ghulām* possessed toward his master terminated with the demise of that master, thus posing an enormous problem for his master's heirs and everyone else around them.

## Ghilmān behavior after the death of their master

That is, even when the system functioned more or less in accordance with the way Ayalon posited that it should, there was an inherent systemic problem: loyalty, since it was purely personal, ended in the best of cases with the person to whom it was owed. To a large extent, the terrorization of the 'Abbāsid caliphs on the part of the *ghilmān* between the years 861 and 870 was the result of this intrinsic flaw in the system; while some of them (despite the caliph's own doubts

53 IBN AL-WARDĪ, 1987: 2, 53; IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 11, 183–184; BUNDĀRĪ, 1889: 284.

54 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 9, 180. On *khādim* as "eunuch" see AYALON, 1985.

55 QAZVĪNĪ, 1944: 181; MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1942: 453.

on this score) may have been loyal to al-Mu'taṣim, the same cannot be said of their sentiments and behavior toward his successors.

There are numerous such examples to be adduced from the later Seljuq period. The most extreme cases are of course those in which a *ghulām* tried to murder his master's heirs, for instance the attempted murder in 1133 of the Būrid ruler of Syria, Ismā'īl b. Būrī, by one of his grandfather's *ghulām*s.[56] More commonly, though, insubordination took the form of a dead master's *ghulām*s acting as a completely independent political interest group. These freelance corps can be seen variously defecting to a rival overlord or attempting to usurp power, either by carving out a fiefdom for themselves, or by using their master's heir as a puppet or pawn in the furtherance of their own ambitions.

Such behavior was very much in evidence, for example, after the death of Malikshāh, when the existence of numerous candidates (most of them minors) for the supreme sultanate provided a golden opportunity for self-aggrandizement at the expense of the sultan's authority. Thus, after Malikshāh's death his ghil*mān* acted essentially as free agents, supporting whomever they wished, switching their allegiance whenever it suited them, and even taking over whole provinces for themselves.

One such instance of usurpation is the case of Qūdun, shiḥna of Marv and described as "one of the greatest of [Malikshāh's] *mamlūk*s and among the most powerful *amīr*s of his regime [dawla]."[57] Qūdun decided in the year 1097, together with another *mamlūk*, Yāruqtāsh, to rebel against Malikshah's heir Berkyāruq. Together the two killed Sultan Berkyāruq's appointee as Khwārazmshāh, and simply took over the province; Qūdun and his ally had no qualms about fighting the army Berkyāruq sent to bring them to heel.[58] Again, this was not unusual behavior for *ghulām*s; whatever loyalty they felt toward their masters was, more often than not, not transferrable to his heirs. This is seen time and again throughout the period under consideration here: the revolts, double-crossing, and switching of sides on the part of the *mamlūk amīr*s during these years are ubiquitous; the list of the unfaithful reads like a roster of all the major *mamlūk* commanders: Unar,[59] Gawharā'in,[60] Karbūghā,[61] Sarmaz,[62] and so on.

56 SIBṬ IBN AL-JAWZĪ , 1951: 2, 147–148; IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 11, 8–9.

57 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 205.

58 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 266–267.

59 SHABĀNKĀRA'Ī, 1956: 2, 107, where it is specifically stated that "a group of the *ghulāmān* [...] had rebelled; their commander was the Amir Unar"; AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 88; RASHĪD AL-DĪN, 1943: 2, 307–308; see also his earlier determination to kill Berkyāruq, 304; MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1943: 441; IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 281.

Note that these are people who had been reasonably loyal toward their deceased master; but that loyalty was neither transferrable nor heritable.

Moreover, Malikshah's *ghilmān* were not the only masterless private army on the political scene at this time: there was also the large slave-soldier corps of his defunct vizier Niẓām al-Mulk, the machinations of which also played a critical role in the political chaos of the time. In fact, the civil war essentially began because the Niẓāmiyya corps anointed Berkyāruq as rival sultan to Maḥmūd and managed to persuade his Atabeg, the *mamlūk* Gumushtegin Jāndār, to lend his support to this cause.[63] According to at least one source, Gumushtegin, Yalbard, and other high-ranking *amīr*s who had until then been Maḥmūd's supporters defected on the battlefield to the rival army.[64]

In fact, the endemic self-interested behavior of all the Seljuq *amīr*s, as individuals as well as in corporate groups, is nowhere more blatantly in evidence than in the civil wars that tore apart the Empire between the years 1092 and 1104. The sources even state specifically that in early 1104 the rival sultans, Berkyāruq and Muḥammad Tapar, decided upon a divisio imperii between themselves after realizing that the only beneficiaries of their continuing warfare were their father's *amīr*s, slave and free, who had equally taken advantage of the situation to enlarge their own power: "The sultanate had become [...] dominated [by others], the kings becoming the subjugated, after having been the subduers. The great emirs liked this and preferred it, so that they could continue their having their own way, and their presumptuousness and boldness."[65] There was, empirically, no difference in the conduct and faithfulness of the *ghulām* and non-*ghulām* emirs during these years, and no distinction is drawn between the two in the sources.

Nor was the problem of terminal loyalty by any means limited to the civil wars. On the contrary; immediately after the cessation of the civil wars, the undisputed Sultan Muḥammad b. Malikshāh, Sanjar's uterine brother, was immediately confronted with the same familiar phenomenon: "In the beginning of his sultanate, two *ghulām*s of his father, one named Sadaqa and the other Ayāz,

60 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 289.

61 IBN AL-WARDĪ, 1969: 2, 11.

62 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 293.

63 NĪSHĀPŪRĪ, 2004: 36; SHABĀNKĀRA'Ī, 1956: 2, 106; AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 84–85; BUNDĀRĪ, 1889: 82–83; RĀVANDĪ, 1945: 140–141; RASHĪD AL-DĪN, 1943: 2, 302.

64 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 215–216.

65 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 369.

revolted" in the name of one of Berkyāruq's sons (that is, Sultan Muḥamad's nephew, and the son of his erstwhile rival in the civil war).[66] This last instance highlights one of the more frequent forms worn by the problem of rampant *ghulām*s after their master's death, mentioned earlier in passing: It often took the guise of seizing a son or other descendant of their deceased master and setting him up as a straw sultan.

Another prime example of this behaviour occurred upon the death of the Supreme Sultan Muḥammad b. Malikshāh in 1118. Muhammad's brother Sanjar, governor of Khurasan, had claimed the supreme sultanate for himself. Simultaneously, Sanjar's nephew Maḥmūd claimed the Sultanate – or, rather, "The amīrs instigated him to [do so]."[67] Maḥmūd was in his early teens at the time of this conflict, and according to several sources the power controlling him was the slave Amīr Mankūbars, prefect of Baghdad, whose vaulting ambition had led him to forcibly seize and add to his own harem one of his deceased master's concubines, the mother of Sultan Mas'ūd, even before the expiration of the waiting period mandated by Islamic law. Although the puppet sultan Maḥmūd disapproved of this forced marriage and other high-handed acts, "he was not able to prevent him."[68]

Sanjar several times articulated, in both word and deed, his certitude that his nephew was a mere pawn in the hands of the *mamlūk* magnates.[69] Accordingly, after Sanjar won the resulting military clash, he treated his nephew with affection and respect, while, in contrast, he executed several of the most powerful *mamlūk*s, whom he held responsible for Maḥmūd's bid.[70] According to one source, however, in Mankūbars's case Sanjar decided to let his outraged nephew mete out the punishment: "Sanjar handed him over to Sultan Maḥmūd, saying, 'This is your *mamlūk*; do with him what you want!'" Maḥmūd, we are told, "had

66 SHABĀNKĀRA'Ī, 1956: 2, 108; MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1943: 444, who states that they "had been the *ghulām*s of his father [Malikshāh], then had assisted Berkyāruq against [Muḥammad]; and they wanted that in place of Berkyāruq his son Malikshāh should [rule instead of Muḥammad]." Their role in Berkyāruq's time is detailed earlier; MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1943: 442.

67 AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 88; RASHĪD AL-DĪN, 1943: 2, 326; SHABĀNKĀRA'Ī, 1956: 2, 113.

68 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 557. Note AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 106, where it is asserted, on the contrary, that "[a]fter the death of Sultan Muḥammad, Sultan Maḥmūd married her to the Amīr Mankūbars, whom Sanjar killed."

69 AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 88; IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 550. For another lurid description of the goings-on at this time involving *ghilmān*, see BUNDĀRĪ, 1889: 123–124.

70 AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 89; IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 552.

in himself a fierce rage" toward Mankūbars on account of all his misdeeds, and duly killed him.[71]

There is a plethora of additional examples one can adduce of military slaves whose loyalty, such as it was, ended with the death of their master, and then exploited their master's child to further their own ends. In 514/1120, Ay Aba Juyūsh Beg, atabeg of Sultan Muḥammad b. Malikshāh's son Mas'ūd, and described as "a Turk, one of the *ghilmān* of Sultan Muḥammad [b. Malikshāh]," decided to have his ward made sultan and therefore abandoned his own sworn allegiance to Muḥammad's heir, his other son Maḥmūd. After the rebellion was defeated, Juyūsh Beg then in turn abandoned his defeated ward, threw himself on Maḥmūd's mercy, and re-entered Maḥmūd's service.[72]

It should be noted that attempts by slave soldiers to further their own power by putting forward the candidacy of the Seljuq figurehead whose atabeg they were, recurred with the death of every subsequent sultan in the areas west of Khurasan. Thus, when this same Sultan Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad died in 1131, before Sanjar had succeeded in instating his appointee as Maḥmūd's successor to the subordinate Sultanate of Iraq, Sanjar's own *ghulām*, the cup-bearer Qarāja, lord of Fārs and Khūzistān and the atabeg of Prince Seljuqshāh b. Muḥammad, marched with a large army to Baghdad and obtained recognition for his candidate from the Caliph.[73]

71 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 557. The statement seems to provide another important indication that at least some Seljuq mamluks, including some of the most prominent ones, were not manumitted. This episode also constitutes definitive proof that the slave commander Mankūbars is not to be confused with the Seljuq prince Mankūbars b. Būrī Bars b. Alp Arslān, a conflation erroneously made by, among others, MUHALLAB, 2000: 318. It should perhaps be noted here that under this particular ruler eunuchs, apparently undeservedly, were often showered with promotions for which they were unqualified; we are told that Sultan Maḥmūd liked to associate with the ladies, "and it was for this reason that his eunuchs (*khādimān*) were promoted to the status of *amīrs*." MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1943: 454. This was, of course, another problem associated with that particular kind of slave.

72 BUNDĀRĪ, 1889: 132–133; IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 562–565; AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 96–97. An abbreviated version of these events, and of the *mamlūk*'s role, can be found in IBN AL-WARDĪ, 1969: 2, 25; for an even more cursory mention of this rebellion, see QAZVĪNĪ, 1944: 182. Another revolt led by the Atabeg Shīrgīr is described in MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1943: 454.

73 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 674–676. Note that both AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 100–101 and BUNDĀRĪ, 1889: 158–159 omit the Seljuqshāh episode, making Qarāja merely a supporter of Mas'ūd – although Sanjar still has Qarāja beheaded. RĀVANDĪ, 1945: 208–209 not only passes over the Seljuqshāh rebellion, but does not mention the participation of any of the *amīr*s.

The combined forces of Sanjar's nephew Mas'ūd, Qarāja, and Mas'ūd's nephew (and Sanjar's great-nephew) Seljuqshāh soon united, in Mas'ūd's name, against the Supreme Sultan Sanjar in battle. The right wing of the anti-Sanjar army was led by Qarāja and another *ghulām*, Qızıl. However, according to an explicit statement in the sources, at this critical juncture there was yet further slave-soldier perfidy: Qızıl betrayed his side, having reached a secret agreement with Sanjar beforehand to flee.[74] As a result, Mas'ūd's army was routed and Qarāja was taken prisoner. When Qarāja was brought before Sanjar, the sultan clearly blamed the slave-soldier for the behavior of his two nephews; he cursed him and asked "O evil-doer, what were you hoping for in fighting me?" Qarāja's reply is quite revealing, and shows very clearly the limitations of *mamlūk* loyalty versus self-interest; Qarāja stated, "I was hoping to kill you and establish a sultan over whom I could rule."[75]

Another conspicuous instance of such non-transferrable loyalty is the course of events in the western areas of Sanjar's empire in the mid-1140s. In the year 540/1145, Būz-Aba, *ghulām* lord of Fārs and Khūzistān, made common cause with Amīr 'Abbās, described explicitly as a former *ghulām* of Sultan Maḥmūd's,[76] and together with a third *amīr* (the son of a *mamlūk*), 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ṭughāyaruk (whom we encountered earlier in a different case of betrayal), renounced their obedience to Sultan Mas'ūd and took over most of his territory.[77] They bolstered their standing with the possession of two Seljuq puppet princes, the brothers Muḥammad b. Sultan Maḥmūd and Sulaymān Shāh b. Sultan Muḥammad.[78] The *amīr*s unhesitatingly jettisoned both of those puppets, however, when Sultan Mas'ūd capitulated to them and, according to an explicit statement in the sources, "came under their control [; ...] though [they]

74 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 677.

75 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 678. A rather fantastic version of this story, referred to briefly infra, appears in the hagiography of the Sufi saint Aḥmad-i Jām, the *Maqāmāt-i zhandah pīl* (GHAZNAVĪ, 1967: 35–39), according to which Qarāja the cup-bearer, prior to revolting, attempted to poison Sanjar's sherbet. While the details of this anecdote are of dubious historical accuracy, what is important is the memory of the *mamlūk*'s perfidy that has been preserved.

76 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 11, 117.

77 The instigator and ringleader was clearly Būz-Aba, "who was a Turkish commander, amongst the *mawālī* of the House of Seljuq." SHABĀNKĀRA'Ī, 1956: 2, 115. Note that this figure, unlike many of the others we have examined, would appear to have been manumitted.

78 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 11, 104. SHABĀNKĀRA'Ī, 1956: 2, 115, names Malikshāh as the second puppet.

were in the service of the sultan, this was in a form that had no meaning behind it." [79]

The following year, Mas'ūd managed to free himself from the cabal of *amīr*s controlling him by employing a loyal Turkmen *amīr*, Khāss Beg, to murder 'Abd al-Raḥmān, who had become intimate with the latter. Once 'Abd al-Raḥmān had been assassinated, Sultan Mas'ūd tricked 'Abbās into entering his presence alone, and had him killed as well. The following year, 542/1147–8 Būz-Aba fell in battle against Mas'ūd while attempting to defeat and reassert his control over the Sultan; although his army was winning, he himself was taken prisoner when his horse fell, and then put to death in front of the Sultan.[80]

This particular episode, like the penultimate one we examined, is illuminating because it epitomizes the inherent limitations and dangers of the slave system: disloyal *amīr*s, mainly *ghilmān* – two of the triumvirate in Mas'ūd's case are *ghilmān* – and especially the *ghilmān* left over from a former reign, attempt to turn the de jure ruler into a cipher, under their complete sway. Mas'ūd, however, was more fortunate than his 'Abbāsid and Sāmānid predecessors who found themselves in similar situations; Mas'ūd also had Turkmen amīrs, who remained loyal, and one of whom was able to thwart the de facto coup.

Other Seljuq rulers, of course, did not fare so well in similar situations: After the death of Mas'ūd, due also partly to Sanjar's captivity and therefore the loss of any force strong enough to counterbalance the growing power of the defunct Mas'ūd's slave corps, the Seljuq sultans in Iraq and western Iran succumbed to the same malady that had previously overcome the 'Abbāsids, the Samanids, and the late Buyids – dynasties in which the slave corps had become preponderant: "The government of the Seljuqs [...] continued in Iraq in a manner that was meaningless, for the Atabegs ruled over [the Sultans] until the death of Sultan Tughril [i.e. the complete end of Seljuq rule] in [...] 1194."[81] Indeed, the parallels with the *mamlūk* takeover of the earlier dynasties are striking: For example, after the death of Muḥammad II b. Maḥmūd II, Sultan of Iraq, in 1159, we are told that "a council of the royal *amīr*s" chose his successor, Sulaymānshāh (deliberately picking the most feckless and pleasure-loving, and

79 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 11, 104.

80 This is the story given in IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 11, 119. It is instructive to compare this account with SHABĀNKĀRA'Ī, 1956: 2, 115–116, whose narration seems intended to bolster Mas'ūd's authority. A confused version of all these events can be found in MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1943: 456–457.

81 AL-ḤUSAYNĪ, 1984: 195.

therefore the most controllable, candidate) – and shortly thereafter deposed and imprisoned him.[82]

There is one third and final limitation related to slave soldier loyalty that should be noted before concluding: that of their competing corporate identity. It was mentioned in the beginning of this article that slave-soldiers seemed at least as likely to develop a primary bond of loyalty toward their cohort as they did toward their master. We therefore see, time and again, after the master of a corps of slave soldiers has died, his body of *mamlūk*s continuing to act together as a kind of ersatz tribe.

Thus, for example, the Nizāmiyya *mamlūk*s continued to function as a distinct entity after Nizām al-Mulk's death, acting in their own collective interests, and became a political force to be reckoned with, "to the point where the *ghulāmān* of Niẓām al-Mulk were the most powerful [people] in the polity."[83] In fact, after the defection of Muḥammad b. Malikshāh's army, which was discussed earlier, what saved him was not only his brother Sanjar and the Khurasanian army, but also the Nizāmiyya *mamlūk* corps, which had basically been ruling Rayy, and now decided to throw in their lot with this camp.[84] Such corporate entities were, after their masters were removed, every bit as dangerous, unpredictable, and self-interested as were the Turkmen bands.

## Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from the evidence we have examined. First, in contrast to the modern scholars examining the *mamlūk* phenomenon, medieval Muslims do not seem to have held greater expectations of loyalty from slave soldiers than from free soldiers and servitors; the sources from this period do not articulate such an expectation. For instance, as we saw above, Sanjar's rebuke of ʿAlī Chatrī after the latter's defection to the Ghūrid rebellion mentions nothing about ʿAlī's servile status, about manumission, or about special ties between a master and his *mamlūk*: what outrages Sanjar about ʿAlī's treason is ʿAlī's

82 SHABĀNKĀRA'Ī, 1956: 2, 118–119.

83 "*Tā ghulāmān*-i Niẓām *al*-Mulk *buzurgān-i dawlat būdand*," MUHALLAB, 2000: 315; in other words, after the death of Malikshāh and during Berkyāruq's time their corporate body constituted the major political player. See, for example, their critical role as described in MUSTAWFĪ QAZVĪNĪ, 1943: 440.

84 IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979: 10, 305–306.

ingratitude for the tangible benefits and promotions Sanjar had conferred on him – benefits that were of the type conferred by rulers upon all their servitors and liegemen, irrespective of personal status.

In other words, medieval Muslims considered slave-soldier loyalty as falling within the category of gratitude for tangible benefits conferred (shukr al-*niʿma*), the same principle governing all those relationships Mottahedeh has termed "acquired loyalties"; that is, socially constructed or elective loyalties, formed by patronage, rather than natural or existential (i.e. biological, regional, religious, or tribal) ties.[85] It should not surprise us, then, that *mamlūk*s frequently failed, as did free soldiery, to honor the obligations of loyalty.

Much also has been made in this context of the supposedly anomalous servile personal status of slave-soldiers, and it has been assumed that this status and original dislocation produced a different kind of warrior than did, say, the system of knighthood and fealty in England and France during the same period (the eleventh and twelfth centuries); but Orientalists have overlooked the fact that the preponderance of German knighthood at this time was also composed of unfree knights, the ministeriales, who constituted an elaborate elite-service slave system notably similar to that of the *ghilmān*.[86] And the ministeriales, like the *ghilmān*, often honored their bonds of loyalty in the breach:

> As a social order, the German ministeriales were imbued with the values of knightly vassalage, but it was also true that the norms of loyalty and service often gave way to disorderly and self-interested abuses. They usurped offices, lands, and revenues, they pursued destructive feuds which could degenerate into extensive banditry over many years, and they might even engineer conspiracies ending in the expulsion or murder of their lords.[87]

This is not to say that slave soldiers did not possess significant attractions. For one thing, they were readily available, in any numbers that one wished. Better yet, one did not have to recruit them or win them over; they were slaves and therefore had no choice in the matter. It is also true that, in their new setting, they had no prior claims on their allegiance; whatever other motives or loyalties

85 MOTTAHEDEH, 1980: 72–82. While Mottahedeh asserts (p. 86) that "In most cases, people expected the *ghulām* to have his strongest loyalty to his original patron", he adduces no primary source evidence to support this claim. It is telling that we find no medieval Muslims before Ibn Khaldūn articulating such an expectation – and Mottahedeh acknowledges as much when he states, correctly (p. 84), that the expectations of loyalty from *ghilmān* appear to have been couched in general terms of patronage (*iṣṭināʿ*) rather than clientage (*walāʾ*).

86 ARNOLD, 1985: passim, but especially 23–75; BOSL, 1978; FREED, 1986.

87 ARNOLD, 1985: 225.

they subsequently developed, at least they did not start out, as did Turkmens, with their primary loyalty defined by tribal identity and family. And slaves were – at least until a given slave's social position became well established – more beholden toward their lords than were freeborn men, especially ones of high estate. These notable advantages clearly made slave-soldiery attractive to both Islamic and German eleventh- and twelfth-century society. The problem lay in the fact that the slaves did not remain dislocated blank slates for very long.

The evidence suggests that, at least in regard to the question of loyalty, the end products of the two systems, servile and free, were not terribly different: Both produced bands of cavalry warriors bound by ties of fealty and patronage to a lord, but still subject to all the normal human temptations and calculations of self-interest, as well as competing loyalties arising from their warrior sodality, loyalty to their more immediate commanders, and personal interests. Probably much of the time they could be relied upon to demonstrate more or less the same sort of loyalty as did other, non-servile warriors and servants. Indeed, the parallels between the *mamlūk* palace corps in particular and the non-servile household retainer system in, for example, England is striking.[88] At least on the score of loyalty, the evidence suggests that having entered a lord's service as his slave was no guarantee of a man's fidelity, any more than the oath of fealty was in the West; the Seljuqs' amirs, both slave and free, appear to have given much the same sort of trouble to their respective lords as Western barons did to theirs.[89] Nor should this fact surprise us: Servants and slaves may be easier to

88 Note that the Old English "cniht" ("knight") originally, as with the term *ghulām*, meant merely "boy" or "attendant", and then developed its secondary meaning of "retainer"; and could, as with the term *ghulām*, be used interchangeably in any of these senses: it "sometimes betokens a young knight or retainer, and sometimes a household servant." CROUCH, 2011: 7. The twelfth-century lament of a bereaved household upon the death of its lord translated by Crouch (p. 31) mirrors the sense of benefits conferred that Sanjar voices: "You gave us our equipment, our rewards and great estates; you retained your large military household and kept it cheerful and active, giving us our necessities [...]. You gave us sleek horses, gold, silver, and rich silks [...]. You loved your knights and took good care of them. Those who served you had no cause to regret it, for they never lacked anything [...]. But you are lost and gone, fair lord, and have left us grieved and outraged."

89 See e.g. BISSON, 2009: 259–269 on the murder of Charles the Good of Flanders by his own lordly vassals; GREEN, 2006: 60–77, 231–235 and MORTIMER, 1994: 86–104 on major baronial rebellions in England; note also GREEN, 1997: 221: "Military power has too often been described in terms of obligations owed to kings in the form of quotas of knight service, whereas in reality the political history of the Anglo-Norman period was characterized by

dominate and control than free men, but only until they have been given so much power that their servile status becomes purely nominal.[90]

The second conclusion one arrives at is that the sources do occasionally reveal a peculiar emotional bond between *ghilmān* and their masters, but primarily as a contributing factor, ironically, to disloyalty. Whereas both slave and free warriors were perfectly willing to die in battle for love of their lord, it is the *ghilmān* who, in their competitive jealousy, behave very much like co-wives, piqued rivals jockeying for their master's affections, ready to sit out battles and pout if a rival was perceived as being more favored.[91] This emotional atmosphere is indeed quite different, not only from that found in medieval Europe, but also from that found among free Muslim warriors.

This difference in the quality of the emotional tie between man and master among slaves on the one hand and free men on the other finds clear expression in literature: Whereas the ideal of service and love for one's lord as it relates to medieval Islamic free warriors is found in courtly romances such as Samak-e *ʿAyyār* or the Iskandar-*nāmah*, and the comparable European ideal in chansons de geste such as the Song of Roland, the literary expression of the relationship between Islamic master and *ghulām* is celebrated in love poetry, particularly erotic poetry featuring the young *ghulām* cup-bearer or *sāqī*.[92]

Finally, our examination of the rather mixed record of slave-soldier loyalty highlights the intractability of one of the most vexatious and serious problems confronting medieval rulers and noblemen, whether in Christendom or the Islamic world: to wit, how to ensure the loyalty of their commanders, magnates, and retainers. It does not appear that any of the methods devised to this end – whether oaths of fealty, the use of slaves or the baseborn, or the lavish bestowal of gifts and benefits – were entirely successful.

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frequent rebellions where the military muscle of the aristocracy was turned against the king."

90 The author is indebted to Patricia Crone for this last point, and for noting the parallel between the harem-master and *mamlūk*-master relationships.

91 And let us not forget that it was a bout of such behavior, in the battle against the Oghuz in 1153, which destroyed the Seljuq Empire.

92 Note that many of the great *amīr*s actually began their careers as *sāqī* or cup-bearer, most notably Maḥmūd of Ghazna's catamite and prominent *amīr* Ayāz; on this theme see YARSHATER, 1960: especially 49–52.

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