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The Representation of Slave Girls in a Physiognomic Text of the Fourteenth Century

“Nothing is more harmful to an old man than a good cook and a beautiful slave girl”

(Thābit ibn Qurrah, d. 288/901)

The image of women in literature is subject to literary conventions and complicated by the presence of topoi. Literary representations of women, often stereotyped, are not real portraits but more reflections of prevalent social attitudes. For instance, in *adab* collections women are often categorized as a social character type, like misers or uninvited guests; it is perhaps worth noticing that, as Fedwa Malti Douglas remarks, these works contain specific chapters on *nisā'*, but no chapters on *rijāl* as such, since men are *not* defined through their gender but more through moral or intellectual features.¹ A frequent feature of literary representations is the lack of individuality of the “anecdotal woman” and the stress put on her physicality, which is represented “in its most rudimentary form.”² Nevertheless, this is often balanced in literary texts by representations where women act and behave as individuals. The same cannot be said of other kinds of texts, which can be much more biased. Therefore, as Yehoshua Frenkel stressed in a recent essay, we need “an integrated reading of various literary genres and materials” in order to have a glimpse of the representations of women in the Mamluk period.³ Scientific, or—in modern eyes—para-scientific texts (under-researched compared with the religious, normative, or literary texts towards which most analysis has been oriented) could in fact give useful insights into the ways women were represented. In this article we will focus on the description of female slaves (*jawārin*)⁴

¹Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, 1992), 31.

²Ibid., 34, 30.

³“Slave Girls and Learned Teachers Women in Mamluk Sources,” in *Developing Perspectives in Mamluk History: Essays in Honor of Amalia Levanoni*, ed. Yuval Ben-Bassat (Leiden-Boston, 2017), 176.

⁴*Jāriyah* (pl. *jawārin*) is by far the most common term used to refer to female slaves. Relevant entries in classical dictionaries like *Lisān al-ʿArab* and *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* have no reference to slavery: *jāriyah* is defined as “a clearly young girl” (*bayyinat al-jarāʾ/al-jarāyah*). Other words, like *amah*, *waṣīfah*, or *walīdah*, are found in technical literature (manuals for notaries, legal texts, or normative texts) and purchase deeds, but they are very rare and do not feature in any of the documents studied by Yūsuf Rāḡib, *Actes de vente d'esclaves et d'animaux d'Égypte médiévale*



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contained in a treatise on physiognomy (*firāsah*) of the first half of the fourteenth century with a view to add a small piece to the complex picture of the images of women in the Mamluk period. Ours will thus be a textually oriented approach directed towards the discourse of physiognomy, which was considered a secondary natural science inextricably tied to medicine. In this article we shall translate the section on female slaves of the *Kitāb al-siyāsah fī ‘ilm al-firāsah* of Shams al-Dīn al-Dimashqī; then map its intertextual connections by outlining its relation to its antecedents, its parallels, and its sources (or what the author claims to be such). The text will then be read in conversation with materials on female slaves of a legal nature (normative texts and purchase deeds), in order to compare their different narratives of the feminine and to show their nature as a construct. The documents we intend to question could also be relevant for a gender studies approach with a historical perspective. Nevertheless, considering the kind of approach we have chosen, we limit ourselves to drawing the attention of the experts in this field to such materials.

The Author and the Treatise

Shams al-Dīn al-Anṣārī al-Ṣūfī al-Dimashqī (d. 727/1327), known as *shaykh al-Rabwah* and *shaykh Ḥiṭṭīn*,⁵ served as shaykh of the *khānqāh* of Ḥiṭṭīn (a village between Tiberias and Acre) and then as shaykh and imam at al-Rabwah (“the Hill”), a village near Damascus. He owes his renown to *Nukhbat al-dahr fī ‘ajā’ib al-barr wa-al-baḥr*,⁶ a cosmography dealing with geography, mineralogy, rivers, islands, genealogy, and other topics. He also authored a work of an encyclopedic nature on physics, mathematics, and theology, *Al-Maqāmāt al-falsafīyah wa-al-tarjamāt al-ṣūfīyah*, and *Kitāb al-siyāsah fī ‘ilm al-firāsah*, a comprehensive treatise on physiognomy. A portrait of his personality and an account of his interests are given by al-Ṣafadī, who was one of his associates and met him many times

(Cairo, 2002); by D. P. Little, “Six Fourteenth Century Purchase Deeds for Slaves from Al-Ḥaram Aṣ-Ṣarīf,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 131 (1981): 297–37; and by Frédéric Bauden, “Lachat d’esclaves et la rédemption des captifs à Alexandrie d’après deux documents arabes d’époque mamelouke conservés aux Archives de l’État à Venise (ASVe),” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph* 58 (2005): 269–325. *Waṣīfah* seems to be reserved for slaves meant to serve as domestic help, along with *khādim*: *waṣīfah*, probably referring to an inferior category, seems to be typical of Egypt and the Orient (Rāḡib, *Actes*, 2:23–24).

⁵D. M. Dunlop, “al-Dimashkī,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 2:291; Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1943), 2:130, S2:261; Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *Al-‘Ālām* (repr. Beirut, 2002), 6:170; al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī bi-al-wafāyāt*, ed. Aḥmad al-Arnā’ūt and Tazkī Muṣṭafā (Beirut, 2000), 3:136–37; Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Al-Durar al-kāminah fī a’yān al-mi’ah al-thāminah*, ed. Sālīm al-Karnūkī (Hyderabad, 1929–31), 3:458–59.

⁶Ed. A. Mehren (Copenhagen, 1892; repr. Leipzig, 1923).



in Şafad, where al-Dimashqī died. Al-Dimashqī was an eclectic and encyclopedic author, with no definite juridical and philosophical affiliation. His interests ranged from agriculture to law; he was also versed in diverse sciences including divinatory sciences like geomancy and *‘ilm al-awfāq* (the sciences of the magical squares). Al-Şafadī extols his intelligence with the words “he was one of the most intelligent men (*min adhkiyā’ al-‘ālam*)” and describes his versatility saying that “he was able to deal with whatever science and was courageous enough to write books on whatever science.”⁷ This versatility—he also states—was due more to his brilliant mind than to his skill, thus suggesting that he was an enthusiast rather than an experienced man of science. Al-Şafadī’s appraisal also seems to cast a shadow on his personality: “obviously, he knew what can subjugate the mind and manipulate the heart of the inexperienced (*aghmār*).”⁸ Both al-Şafadī and Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī seem to hold *Kitāb al-siyāsah fī ‘ilm al-firāsah* in high esteem and mention it in positive terms in al-Dimashqī’s biography. Al-Şafadī describes it as “a good book” (*kitāb ḥasan*) and Ibn Ḥajar affirms that “he produced an excellent work” (*wa-ajāda fīhi*).⁹ If we trust al-Şafadī, this treatise was also appreciated by other distinguished men of science, among them the Iraqi-Egyptian physician Ibn al-Akfānī,¹⁰ who also dealt with physiognomy in some of his works. Al-Şafadī obtained from al-Dimashqī permission to transmit it (*tanāwaltuhu minhu*) in 724/1323, after he had copied it with his own hand (*katabtuhu bi-khaṭṭī*).

Kitāb al-siyāsah fī ‘ilm al-firāsah (also known as *‘Ilm al-firāsah li-ajl al-siyāsah*, *Nihāyat al-kiyāsah fī ‘ilm al-firāsah*, *Aḥkām al-firāsah*, and other variants) was composed before 723/1323 in Şafad.¹¹ It was conceived as a comprehensive work on physiognomic knowledge elaborated in preceding centuries, and also includes

⁷ *Wāfī*, 3:136; Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 3:458, is more critical: “he wrote books on every science, had he knowledge of it or not.”

⁸ *Wāfī*, 3:137.

⁹ *Ibid.*; Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 3:458; Ḥājji Khalīfah, *Kashf al-zunūn ‘an asāmī al-kutub wa-al-funūn*, ed. M. Sh. al-D. Yāltkāya/R. Bilka al-Kilislī (repr. Beirut, n.d.; original ed. Istanbul, 1945–47), 2:1011.

¹⁰ He seems to have been born in Sinjar, Iraq; he moved to Egypt, where he stayed until his death. I thank Paulina Lewicka for having drawn my attention to this and for her careful reading and valuable suggestions for this article.

¹¹ Toufic Fahd, *La Divination arabe: études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l’islam* (Leiden, 1966), 386, claims that the author penned it in Acre (‘Akkā) in 723/1323, on the basis of the date and place contained in the colophon of MS Bursa Hüseyin Çelebi 882 (fol. 53b). This seems to be a misinterpretation: at the beginning of the following treatise on laudable eyes (fol. 54a), the anonymous author states that al-Dimashqī penned *Kitāb al-siyāsah fī ‘ilm al-firāsah* in Şafad (*waḍa’ahu ... fī Şafad*) and granted him the license to transmit it in Şafar 724 (*wa-naqaltuhu min ḥifẓihi wa-nāwalanīhi wa-ajāzanī riwāyatahu ‘anhu fī şafar 724*). The mention of Acre and the year 723 in the colophon of *Kitāb al-siyāsah* (fol. 53b) refers to the place where the autograph was kept (*mā wujida min khaṭṭ... bi-jāmi’i thaghri ‘Akkā*).



other forms of divination. Physiognomy is the discipline that interprets visible physical features as hints at internal character traits: in brief, the art of inferring character from bodily features or, in general, the art of inferring what is concealed from what is visible. Though now considered a form of divination,¹² it was then classified rather as a branch of the natural sciences, like medicine, and was in the realm of physicians and—as the texts say—“Hellenizing philosophers” (*falāsifah*). It also had practical purposes and was deemed useful in choosing associates, a good wife, or buying slaves. The exhaustive character of *Kitāb al-siyāsah* is obvious in the wide-ranging quotations and in the list of authorities that aims at covering all the significant scientific production in this field. Thus, Greeks like Aristotle and Polemon feature in the list of sources alongside Muslim physicians (Abū Bakr al-Rāzī), philosophers (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī), jurists (al-Shāfi‘ī), and mystics (Ibn ‘Arabī). Al-Dimashqī had recourse to an abbreviated system of references, apparently not used before his time: he attributes an abbreviation to each author (e.g., Ṭ corresponds to Aristotle, B to Ibn ‘Arabī, etc.) and cites each source by means of this short reference. The work opens with a general introduction on fundamentals and methodology, followed by chapters on animals (the so-called zoological method), on ethnicities (the so-called ethnic method), and on the physiognomic interpretation of colors, temperaments, and individual body parts. Al-Dimashqī’s *Kitāb al-siyāsah* must have had a wide circulation, as over thirty copies are known to be extant today.¹³ The illuminated opening and the quality of the copy preserved at the National Library of Medicine of Bethesda (MS A 58) under the title of *Kitāb jalīl fī ‘ilm al-firāsah*,¹⁴ probably produced around 1400 in Egypt, also point to its circulation in wealthy milieus. The treatise is available in several printed editions: the first, uncritical, was published in Cairo in 1882; the latest was published in Cairo in 1983.¹⁵

¹²As such it is extensively dealt with in Fahd, *Divination*.

¹³See Ali Rıza Karabulut and Ahmet Turan Karabulut, *Dünya kütüphanelerinde mevcut İslam kültür tarihi ile ilgili eserler ansiklopedisi= Mu‘jam al-tārikh al-turāth al-islāmī fī maktabāt al-‘ālam* (Kayseri, Turkey, n.d.), 2497, n. 6757.1; Brockelmann, *GAL* 2:130; idem, *GAL* S2:161. A copy is also preserved in the Ghazi Husrev-bey Library, Sarajevo (MS 7167,8=R 3749,8) (I thank Prof. Lewicka for this reference).

¹⁴See D. M. Schullian and F. E. Sommer, *A Catalogue of Incunabula and Manuscripts in the Army Medical Library* (New York, [1950]), 316 (<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/arabic/physiognomy3.html> [accessed on November 20, 2017]). Not *Kitāb al-Jalīl* as indicated there.

¹⁵*Kitāb al-siyāsah fī ‘ilm al-firāsah* ([Cairo], 1882); *Al-Siyāsah fī ‘ilm al-firāsah*, ed. Muḥammad ibn al-Šūfī (Cairo, 1983). The latter, described in the web page of the National Library of Medicine of Bethesda as an “edition employing several manuscripts (though not the one at NLM),” reproduces the same text as the 1882 Cairo edition, without the abridged references to the sources. Other editions are Cairo, 1332/1914, and Istanbul, 1289/1872 (see Karabulut and Karabulut, *Dünya kütüphanelerinde*, 2497, n. 6757.1).



***Firāsah* and the Purchase of Slaves**

Texts dealing with “the art of purchasing slaves” belong to different genres: relevant information can be found in treatises on medicine, physiognomy, geography, and ethics, in normative works such as *ḥisbah* treatises, and in literary sources like *adab* literature and poetry.¹⁶ Physiognomy, like medicine, obviously had a role to play in choosing slaves since it was thought to be a means of discovering hidden things from visible elements, notably hidden illnesses or flaws often concealed by slave sellers or, more specifically, the characters and aptitudes of slaves. Treatises of medicine that include chapters which draw attention to signs implying defects or diseases and give useful suggestions concerning the purchase of slaves also often contain information drawn from physiognomy. Specific medical treatises penned in different periods by physicians like Ibn Buṭlān (d. 458/1066) or Ibn al-Akfānī (d. 749/1348) suggest recourse to physiognomy in assessing the character of slaves.¹⁷ Ibn Buṭlān also hints at a branch of *firāsah* specifically devoted to women (*firāsāt al-nisāʾ*),¹⁸ but states that he prefers not to delve into it out of decency, thus suggesting its marked erotic slant. Indirect sources, like the travelogues of foreigners quoted by Barker, also give evidence of the application of physiognomy in relation to the inspection of slaves: “[a general survey], which Fabri called consideration (*consideratio*), was conducted at a distance and based on knowledge of physiognomy.”¹⁹ Likewise, treatises of a different nature, like books of erotology, may contain chapters on the purchase of slaves where physiognomy plays a significant role.²⁰

¹⁶For a wide-ranging overview see Hans Müller, *Die Kunst des Sklavenkaufs: Nach arabischen, persischen und türkischen Ratgebern von 10. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, 1980).

¹⁷See, e.g., the example of *Risālah jāmiʿah li-funūn nāfiʿah fī shirāʾ al-raqīq wa-taqīb al-ʿabīd* of Ibn Buṭlān, where the third *fann* is entitled *Fī maʿrifat akhlāq al-ʿabīd bi-qiyās al-firāsah ʿalā madhhab al-falāsifah*.

¹⁸This is a branch of physiognomy connected to erotology (*ilm al-bāh*); on this see Antonella Ghersetti, “Fisiognomica e stereotipi femminili nella cultura araba,” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 14 (1996): 195–206, and eadem, “Mondo classico e legittimazione del sapere nella cultura arabo-islamica: il trattato *Firāsāt al-nisāʾ* attribuito a Polemone di Laodicea,” in *Scienza e islam: Atti della giornata di studio, Venezia 30 gennaio 1999/a cura di G. Canova*, QSA Studi e testi 3 (Venice, 1999), 59–68.

¹⁹Hannah Barker, “Purchasing a Slave in Fourteenth-Century Cairo: Ibn al-Akfānī’s Book of Observation and Inspection in the Examination of Slaves,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 19 (2006): 16. Barker underlines the normative character of Ibn al-Akfānī’s manual and therefore questions other sources (*ḥisbah* manuals and travelogues) to give an idea of the real practices in the slave marketplace. Felix Fabri (d. 1502) is a Swiss Dominican theologian who wrote of his pilgrimage experiences to Jerusalem.

²⁰An example is *Nuzhat al-aṣḥāb fī muʿāsharat al-aḥbāb* of Muʿayyid al-Dīn Abū Naṣr al-Samawʿal al-Isrāʾīlī al-Maghribī (d. 570/1174), which contains a long section on the purchase of slaves (*al-jumlah al-ʿāshirah fī bayʿ wa-shirāʾ al-raqīq*): *Nuzhat al-aṣḥāb fī muʿāsharat al-aḥbāb* (Beirut, 2008),



Treatises of physiognomy may also devote specific sections to the purchase of slaves, as in the case of *Kitāb al-siyāṣah*. Unlike other authors who penned works on slave acquisition, such as Ibn al-Akfānī and al-ʿAyntābī—who both served as physicians at the Maṣṣūrī hospital in Cairo, not far from the famous slave markets²¹—al-Dimashqī seemingly had no practical experience in the inspection of slaves. As a consequence, this section is clearly inspired more by previous literature than by personal experience: any advice about how to proceed with examination is lacking, at the advantage of a detailed—even if brief—description of some parts of the human body, contrary to the “checklist for a thorough head-to-toe inspection of the slave’s body” of Ibn al-Akfānī.²² The twelfth chapter, exclusively devoted to women, is conceived as an extension of the eleventh chapter, whose title is roughly “On the signs of illnesses a prospective purchaser must take into consideration when buying slaves (*al-mamālīk wa-al-jawārī*) and on women’s condition not commendable in relation with sexual intercourse; this is a self-contained kind (*nawʿ tām*) of physiognomy.” These two sections (the eleventh and the twelfth) come after the *maqālah* devoted to signs hinting at temperament (*mizāj*). This arrangement clearly echoes the pattern of *Al-Manṣūrī fī al-ṭibb* of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, which al-Dimashqī mentions as one of his sources.

The Representation of *Jawārin* in *Kitāb al-Siyāṣah*

In contrast to the wider scope of other treatises, where bodily features and ethnic origin are thoroughly scrutinized to assess the aptitude of slaves to accomplish domestic work, to satisfy their master’s pleasure, and to give birth, the chapter on slave girls contained in *Kitāb al-Siyāṣah* is notable for its narrower scope and its erotic slant. This places it at the intersection of physiognomy and erotology, a cross-influence also confirmed by the sources mentioned by al-Dimashqī. The erotic slant was already noticed by Bouhdiba, who underlined the “erotic developments” in the description of the tender parts of the body.²³ That slave women,

118–43. This treatise is dealt with by P. Myrne, “Purchasing a slave for pleasure: From Ibn Buṭlān (d. 1066) to al-Samawʿal al-Maghribī (d. 1175),” *Journal of Global Slavery* 2019 (forthcoming). It is also worth emphasizing that the passage on how defects of *jawārin* were hidden is immediately followed by the description of nice features of women.

²¹Barker, “Purchasing a Slave,” 6; on the different locations of slave markets over the Mamluk period see 6–9.

²²Ibid., 10; the chapters on the purchase of slaves in other works penned by physicians (e.g., *Nuzhat al-aṣḥāb* of al-Samawʿal al-Maghribī, a Jewish physician who worked in Baghdad) also show the professional expertise of their authors.

²³“... l’analyse descriptive de l’anatomie des parties molles du corps fournit une occasion, dont l’auteur ne se prive pas, à maints et maints développements érotiques.” Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *La Sexualité en Islam* (Paris, 1975), 196.



whether bought for domestic tasks or for entertainment, were also supposed to serve in bedchambers is clearly perceived in the textual representation of slave girls in *Kitāb al-siyāsah*. Starting from the title, the scope of examination is drastically restricted to their “hidden condition” (*aḥwāl mastūrah*), i.e., the shape and state of their genitals; as a matter of fact, the bodily features of *jawārin* and *imā*²⁴ are all taken as hints at their aptitude for copulation. This means that where for a male slave (*mamlūk*) bodily features like the color of the skin or hair are taken as clues about physical condition or psychological features, for a *jāriyah* bodily features are used to assess her genitals’ shape and her aptitude to have sexual intercourse. Thus, *jawārin* are never described as “intelligent” or “cowardly” but are systematically described as “lecherous” (*kathīrat al-shabaq*) or “nymphomaniac” (*lā ṣabr lahā ‘an al-nikāḥ*) and so on. A biased narrative rules out any aspect connected to health and psychology, thus enhancing the perception of a fragmented body seen only as a commodity. Considering the poor quality of the existing editions, the translation of the chapter on female slaves has been carried out based on the manuscript of *Kitāb al-siyāsah* preserved in Bursa (whose title on the front page is given as *Kitāb al-firāsah*), copied from the autograph.²⁴

Translation

[15a] The twelfth chapter: on the assessment of slave girls’ condition made thanks to signs hinting at their hidden condition.

Ş [= Abū Bakr al-Rāzī’s *Al-Manṣūrī*] and R [= Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī] said:²⁵ those who want to buy [15b] a slave girl (*jāriyah*) or a bondmaid (*amah*) must consider visible signs pointing to their hidden body parts that will be mentioned [in what follows]. Amongst those [are the following]: if the woman’s mouth is large, her vulva is likewise; if [the woman’s mouth] is small, [her vulva] is small; if [the woman’s mouth] is round and protruding, [her vulva] is similar. If the tip of her nose is big and her lips are thick, the labia of her vulva (*ṭablatay al-farj*) are thick; if her tongue is intense red, her vulva lacks humidity. If her nose is humped, she does not crave sexual intercourse. If her palate is high,²⁶ her vulva is elevated and

²⁴We have also checked the text in the 1882 Cairo edition; apart from some differences in wording and order, the most evident being the inverted order of the two passages respectively attributed to al-Burjānī (al-Barrajānī?) and the author of *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdhah*, contents are globally the same. In the Cairene edition the eighth chapter contains the eleventh and twelfth chapters of the manuscript.

²⁵It is worth noticing that the sources mentioned do not contain any passage on *jawārin*: the section on purchase of slaves (*shirā al-mamālīk*) in the second *maqālah* of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī’s *Al-Manṣūrī* is devoid of any specific reference to female slaves; likewise, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s *Kitāb al-firāsah* lacks any explicit allusion to female slaves. In the two Cairene printed editions there is no mention of these two authorities.

²⁶*Ṭawīlat al-ḥanak*; an interlinear note suggests *murtafi‘*.



with scarce hair on it. If she has a large face and a thick neck, this is a sign of small buttocks and a big and narrow vulva. If her palate is small, she has a low vulva. If the flesh of the exterior part of her feet and hands is firm, her vulva is considerably large and she easily offers herself to you. If she is extremely beautiful (*nabīlah*) and the flesh of her feet and her hands is compact, she is very lascivious and she cannot abstain from sexual intercourse. If she is hot to the touch²⁷ at any time, her lips and gums are red, and her buttocks are firm, she is a delightful sought-after partner for sexual intercourse.²⁸ If she has [16a] reddish skin and blue eyes, she is libidinous. If she laughs a lot, is cheerful, and moves quickly she hungers for sexual intercourse. Black and big eyes point to a strong carnal appetite and a narrow vulva. If she has big ears and small buttocks, she has a sizeable vulva. Heels protruding backwards are a sign of a wide vulva. If her body is fat, flabby, white, and a little yellowish, and her eyes are motionless and devoid of any appearance of joy, all these signs point to a humid and cold vulva.

The author of *Jāmi' al-ladhdhah*²⁹ said, describing slave girls (*jawārin*) and the marks they carry on which there is consensus or disagreement [in relation to sexual intercourse]: know that women are of eight kinds and classes. Each kind and class has a specific degree of carnal appetite: [the woman belonging to a certain class] will not be fully satisfied unless she reaches [that degree] nor will she submit to the man with obedience, love him, and be regardful of him in any circumstance (*ḥifzihi fī al-ghayb*). I will now mention the man suited to each of these types of women. People of experience define women in specific ways: fatty (*shaḥīmah*), sticky (*laziqah*), hollow (*jawfā*), [16b] deep (*qawrā*), bright (*baljā*), large-

²⁷ *Majassah*, a reading confirmed by the analogous passage in *Jāmi' al-ladhdhah*, MS Aya Sofya 3836, fol. 88a. We wish to thank Pernilla Myrne, who kindly shared with us a digital copy of this manuscript, which is dated 533/1139. Both Cairo editions have *miḥnah*.

²⁸ The manuscript has *ladhdhat al-ṭalab lil-nikāḥ* (a reading confirmed by an analogous expression in *Jāmi' al-ladhdhah*, 88a); the Cairo edition has *shadīdah lil-nikāḥ*.

²⁹ *Jāmi' al-ladhdhah* (or *Jawāmi' al-ladhdhah*) (Encyclopedia of pleasure) was penned by 'Alī ibn Naṣr al-Kātib (*floruit* tenth century). On this see Pernilla Myrne, "Pleasing the beloved: sex and true love in a medieval Arabic erotic compendium," in *Beloved: Love and Languishing in Middle Eastern Literatures*, ed. Michael Beard, Alireza Korangy, and Hanadi al-Samman (London, 2017), 216–36; and eadem, "Of Ladies and Lesbians and Books on Women from the Third/Ninth and Fourth/Tenth Centuries," *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 4 (2017): 187–210.



mouthed (*fahwā*), alluring (?) (*ḥalyā*),³⁰ “the one with a threshold” (*sakfā*).³¹ The fatty (*shahīmah*) is the one who has a plump and firm vulva, full of fat; she does not reach pleasure unless the penis is long enough to reach the neck of the uterus and she will let the fetus (*al-walad*)³² settle in the deepest and most remote part of her vagina. The Indian (*al-Hindī*) said that the measure of a long penis is twelve joined fingers³³ or more; the measure of a medium one is nine fingers and more, up to eleven; the short one measures six to eight joined fingers....³⁴ [17a] The sticky (*laziqah*) is the one whose vulva is joined to the surrounding parts and became skinny after being meaty; this feature is only found in the black woman, and she does not reach pleasure unless the penis is short and thick. As for the hollow (*jawfā*), the exterior part of her vulva is joined while the interior is hollow; she does not reach pleasure in sexual intercourse unless the penis is medium and thick so to fully touch the sides of the vulva [which does not occur] with a thin penis. As for the deep (*qawrā*), this is the one with a long vulva and a distant neck of the uterus; for her an extremely long penis is suitable, and nothing else. As for the bright (*baljā*), she is the one with a proportioned vulva; anything we mentioned is suitable for her. As for the large-mouthed (*fahwā*), she has a wide and fatty vulva; a long and thick penis is suitable, or a medium as well. As for “the one with a threshold” (*sakfā*), she is the one with a kind of threshold (*musakkafah*) [which means that] in her vulva there are two bones almost coming together, and those hinder [17b] the insertion [of the penis]; for this one a long and thin penis is suitable. With few exceptions, if she is pregnant, she dies during delivery, before the baby comes out, because the way out is too narrow.

³⁰The MS has *ḥalyā*, which we have not been able to locate in the dictionaries; the Cairene edition have *ḥalbā* which Lane (Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v.) translates as “a female slave who kneels by reason of her indolence,” taking the meaning from *Tāj al-ʿArūs (al-amah al-bārikah li-kaslihā)*, which does not seem the most plausible translation in this context. The word occurs only in the list and only once in the descriptive passage, where no explication is given, so it is impossible to put forward a hypothesis about the true meaning of this term.

³¹I’ve not been able to find this word in any of the dictionaries currently used; this is a tentative translation based on the context.

³²*Walad* can also be used for an unborn child, i.e., a fetus: Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v.

³³1/24 of the standard cubit, i.e., 2.078 cm., or of the black cubit, i.e., 2.252 cm.; in Egypt, a finger roughly corresponded to 3.125 cm.: see Walther Hinz, *Islamische Masse und Gewichte: Umgerechnet ins metrische System* (Leiden, 1955), 54.

³⁴The paragraph on sexual habits of men and women in Abyssinia, which we do not translate in consideration of its digressive character, does not feature in the Cairene editions, nor in al-Manūfi’s *Akhhbār* or *Jāmiʿ al-ladhdhah*.



Al-Burjānī³⁵ said: he who seeks pleasure in sexual intercourse must choose the short woman and he who desires to have children must choose the tall one. He also said that women are of seven types in relation to the pleasure one can experience with them: women's faces can be [like a] painting (*naqsh*), ugly but agreeable (*naghsh*),³⁶ radiant (*bahī*), beautiful (*jamīl*), amazed (*dahish*), handsome (*hasan*), or pleasant (*malīḥ*), and this one is the most perfect of the [other] six. This kind of gracefulness (*malāḥah*) is described in these terms: [the pleasant woman] has deep black eyes, hair, and eyebrows; long lashes (of eyelids); white body, teeth, cornea, and hands; red tongue, lips, cheeks, and gums; round-shaped head, ankles, buttocks, and bosoms. She is tall, has a long neck, and long hair and eyebrows; her nose, mouth, armpits, and vulva smell good; she has thin hairs, waist, nose, and tongue, and delicate lips, complexion, fingers, and toes, prominent cheekbones, chin, and navel, and the same for the fingers; small mouth, hands, feet, and nose, bulging fingernails, vulva, nipples, and dorsum of hand. She talks nicely, and sweet are the spittle from the tip of her tongue and the saliva [coming out] from the corners of her lips and from between her teeth; soft are her neck, the palm of her hands, her belly, and feet; well-built (*sabīṭ*) are her neck, legs, forearms, palm of the hands; flushing-skinned are her neck, legs, cheeks, and breast; as are her throat, elbows, hips, and knees; soft to the touch are her body, her tongue, her cheeks, the back of her vulva; hot are her breath, her body, her vulva, and the palm of her hands. He also said: moreover, she has proportionate body parts, equal head and face; harmonious feet; soft and humid extremities; long hair that covers her shoulders;³⁷ beautifully-arched eyebrows; front teeth wide apart; widely spaced eyebrows, with deep-black extremities; swaying buttocks; no [visible] veins; melodious speech. He also said: the daughter of Muḥkam al-Shaybānī³⁸ had the greatest part of these features. And God knows more.³⁹

³⁵This probably refers to the book entitled *Burjān/Barjān wa-Ḥabāḥib/Ḥubāḥib fī akhbār al-nisā'* penned by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Namlī (the boon companion of al-Mutawakkil), which is among the sources quoted by 'Alī ibn Naṣr al-Kātib. "Burjān and Ḥabāḥib are two elderly women who give sexual advice and expertise to an anonymous king" (Myrne, "Of Ladies and Lesbians," 200, and fn. 44 for variants of the title; on the contents of this book see *ibid.*, 200–1).

³⁶R. Dozy, "*Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*," s.v. *nghsh*, states that the word (not vocalized) refers to a girl or a young woman who, though ugly, is not devoid of grace.

³⁷The manuscript has *ḥalāl*, which does not seem the most plausible meaning; it could be "*jilāl*," the plural of *jull* also used as a singular, which means a cloth (for horses or other animals) covering their shoulders and part of their back and chest (R. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, s.v. *jull*).

³⁸The Cairene editions have Arāyās (?) ibn Muḥkam al-Shaybānī.

³⁹The description in the Cairene edition revolves around quatrains and has a slightly different arrangement but the contents are the same. This description, taken from *Jāmi' al-ladhdhah* (fol. 92b=93b; whenever folios have been renumbered we give both numbers) and reproduced in later



Intertextual Relations

As we have already seen, the first part of the chapter has no textual antecedents in the sources quoted by al-Dimashqī: Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's *Al-Manṣūrī* and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (*Kitāb al-firāsah*). In al-Rāzī's *Al-Manṣūrī* there is no specific section on slave girls and the treatment of the topic is limited to the evaluation of hidden physical defects or diseases of slaves in general; al-Rāzī seemingly has no interest in giving an erotic bias to the inspection of slave girls.⁴⁰ The same holds true for Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Kitāb al-firāsah*. The erotic turn al-Dimashqī gives to the physiognomic evaluation of *jawārin* is rather the consequence of the cross influence between medical/physiognomic and erotic discourse. Indeed, the second source quoted in the text belongs to the genre of erotica: *Jāmi' al-ladhdhah* of 'Alī ibn Naṣr al-Kātib, a well-known treatise referred to by many authors of the following centuries. We have compared al-Dimashqī's quotations with the Aya Sofya manuscript of *Jāmi' al-ladhdhah* (see n. 27) and, all in all, the quotations seem to be rather faithful; nevertheless, a certain degree of variance is visible. First of all, in *Jāmi' al-ladhdhah* slave women (*al-imā'*) are divided into two categories: those whom it is advisable to choose for pleasure (*lil-mu'tah*) and those whom it is advisable to choose for childbearing (*lil-walad*) (fol. 53a); however, for both categories detailed information on the "hidden parts" is missing. The author of *Jāmi' al-ladhdhah* states that the topic has been thoroughly dealt with by Muḥammad ibn Kāmil al-Miṣrī; thus, he prefers to quote additional sources, among which is Jābir al-Ḥayyān. The following text is nothing other than a catalogue of the diverse ethnicities, also found in well-known treatises like that of Ibn Buṭlān or in other works like al-Shayzārī's *al-Īdāh fī asrār al-nikāh*. In addition, it contains short anecdotes, wise sayings, and verses of poetry. This text also hints at the practice of exposing female slaves in the markets, adding remarks on their color and ways of making them more attractive, quoting in this connection a passage on the authority of al-Jāhiz. The part of *Jāmi' al-ladhdhah* corresponding to the one reproduced by al-Dimashqī does not appear in the chapter on slave women. It appears instead in a section on the physiognomy of the lustful woman (*firāsah al-mar'ah al-shadīdat al-shahwah*) that, after a description of this kind of

works, has been labelled by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid as "the canon of beauty" for the Arabs: Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, *Jamāl al-mar'ah 'ind al-'Arab*, 2nd. ed. (Beirut, 1969), 109–10. This essay offers a wide range of texts on the concept of feminine beauty in Arabic literature.

⁴⁰The same holds true for the Egyptian Christian physician Ibn Buṭlān, who penned a booklet on the purchase of slaves: he refrains from mentioning (*aḍrabnā 'an dhikrihā*) that branch of physiognomy concerning women and giving remarks on their dispositions, body parts, and sexual appetite, "because of its obscenity" (*li-qabāḥihāh*): Ibn Buṭlān, "Risālah fī shirā al-raqīq wa-taqlīb al-'abid," in *Nawādir al-makhtūṭāt*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo, 1954 [1373]), 1:401. The statement can be taken as a hint at the use of slaves as commodities for the bedchamber, something that seems to embarrass Ibn Buṭlān.



woman, furnishes a detailed list of signs pointing to dimensions and conditions of the vulva (*al-dalālāt ‘alā aḥwāl farj al-mar’ah*, fol. 88a=89a) mentioned on the authority of Ibn Kāmil al-Miṣrī. This catalogue, only partially corresponding to that of al-Dimashqī, is followed by a section on the features of women preferred by men (most probably as a concubine, *ḥaḥīyah*), whose authorship is attributed to Aristotle: there is probably no need to say that the pseudo-Aristotelian *Kitāb al-firāsah* does not contain anything similar. The following part of the text is focused on how to infer the features of women by their gaze and the way they walk. The passage of *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdhah* taken from “the Indian” (*al-Hindī*) dealing with the dimensions of the penis, a passage more concise than that found in *Kitāb al-siyāsah*, is situated at a certain distance (fol. 109a=110b) from the other excerpts. The same holds true for the description of the beautiful woman in *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdhah* (fol. 92b=93b), which is also set well apart from the catalogue of different types of women. This catalogue (fol. 111a=112a) only very partially corresponds to the analogous list in al-Dimashqī’s text. As a matter of fact, wording, order, and contents disagree: the epithets (*mutashahḥimah*, *laziqah*, *qa’rā’*, *qa’rah*, *ḥawqā’*, *munkhatimah*, *shafrā’*, *muḥqibah*, fols. 111a=112a to 112a=113a)⁴¹ are slightly different in form and order. So are the definitions given for each type of woman: detailed in *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdhah*, they have been considerably abridged in al-Dimashqī’s *Kitāb al-siyāsah*. Likewise, there is another notable divergence between the two texts consisting in the lack of symmetry in evaluation of bodily features in *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdhah* and *Kitāb al-siyāsah*. In other words, passages of *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdhah* on women’s bodily features pointing to their lust are paralleled by similar parts on men: for example, the passage on physiognomic assessment quoted on the authority of Jābir in relation to carnal appetite is equally assigned to men and women (*firāsāt al-rijāl wa-al-nisā’ fī al-shahwah wa-maqādir al-farj*, fol. 89b=90b). This is not the case in *Kitāb al-siyāsah*, which focuses on feminine bodies at the expense of masculine bodies, which are completely absent. This balanced distribution of *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdhah* is visible throughout the text; nothing similar can be noticed in al-Dimashqī’s chapter, which is exclusively focused on women. All in all, the text of *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdhah* reproduced in *Kitāb al-siyāsah* seems to have been considerably manipulated: items are roughly unchanged but have been selected, abridged, and rearranged. Al-Dimashqī might have had access to *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdhah* through secondary sources, epitomes, or oral sources; or he may have deliberately picked out only the passages that he deemed relevant to the topic he was treating, thus

⁴¹It is worth noticing that there seems to be a certain fluctuation in the categories: the chart at fol. 111a=112a revolves around six categories, plus two, *al-shafrā’* and *al-muḥqibah*, that have been added respectively to *al-qa’rā’* and *al-qa’rah*; but these two “additional” categories feature at the end of the following descriptive part of the section without any sign of emendation.



bearing the responsibility of conferring on his text the biased erotic slant already noticed by scholars.

Al-Dimashqī's section on female slaves seems to have had a certain renown. It is also contained, almost verbatim, in a work of a very different nature: *Kitāb akhbār al-uwal fī man taṣarrafa fī Miṣr min arbāb al-duwal*, a work on the history of Egypt penned by the Egyptian Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mu'ṭī al-Manūfī, whose birth and death dates are unknown, but who was active in 1032/1623.⁴² The seventh chapter of *Akhbār al-uwal*, on the Bahri Mamluks, contains digressions of diverse natures. Remarkable is a quotation from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on rhetoric and the art of writing, immediately followed by a passage taken from *Al-Manṣūrī* of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī on the purchase of slaves and female slaves (*al-mamālīk wa-al-jawārī*) which is worth mentioning, al-Manūfī says, in case of need (*lā ba'sa bi-dhikrihā 'inda al-iḥtiyāji ilayhā*).⁴³ The section on female slaves, of a pronounced erotic character, is concluded with the suggestion of choosing a small woman to have sex, followed by an abrupt transition to the reign of Baybars. A comparison of the section on slave girls contained therein, entitled *Al-qawl fī i'tibār aḥwāl al-jawār* [sic],⁴⁴ with the same section in al-Dimashqī's *Kitāb al-siyāsah* demonstrates that al-Manūfī heavily depends on al-Dimashqī. The texts are almost identical, with the exception that al-Manūfī's text abruptly stops at the beginning of the passage on the different kinds of women attributed in *Kitāb al-siyāsah* to al-Burjānī. Besides some short sentences being missing, the catalogue of different types of women is shorter and slightly different (seven types instead of eight: *al-shahmā'*, *al-zaliqah* [probably a slip of the pen for *al-laziqah*], *al-jawfā'*, *al-qawrā'*, *al-baljā'*, *al-fahwā'*, *al-sakfā'*; *ḥalyā'* does not appear). Contrary to al-Dimashqī, reference to possible sources is lacking. Considering wording and arrangement of the passages we can conclude that most probably al-Manūfī reproduced al-Dimashqī's text, without quoting his source, from the Bursa manuscript or a closely related one.

As we have already underlined, passages of the same tenor as that of al-Dimashqī can be found in works of an erotic nature more often than in medical treatises on the purchase of slaves, where the medical approach prevails. A quick comparison with the chapter on "clues about genitalia of women and their sexual appetites" found in a text of erotology most probably penned by al-Shayzarī,⁴⁵ *Al-*

⁴²See Müller, *Die Kunst*, 190–91.

⁴³Al-Manūfī, *Kitāb akhbār al-uwal fī man taṣarrafa fī Miṣr min arbāb al-duwal* (Cairo 1310/1892–93), 128.

⁴⁴Ibid., 129.

⁴⁵'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Naṣr ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-'Adawī al-Ṭabarī al-Shayzarī was a man of letters, physician, and qadi of Tiberias regarding whose life details are scarce. His date of death is uncertain: *GAL* has 589/1093; the editor of *Al-Īdāh*, Muhammad Sa'īd al-Ṭarīḥī, following 'Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥālah (*Mu'jam al-mu'allifin* [Beirut, 1414/1993], 2:125), gives 774/1372 but his



Īdāh fī asrār al-nikāh, shows a strong similarity with *Kitāb al-siyāsah* in contents and arrangement. Al-Shayzarī includes in his treatise a whole chapter on how to infer, from exterior signs, features of the vulva and whether a woman has an aptitude for sex: the chapter is contained in the section (*juz*) on “women’s secrets” (*asrār al-nisā*) and has the very explicit title “On signs from which to seek information on the vulva of women and how to judge if their lust is great or little and other things, in the way physiognomy does.”⁴⁶ It is worth noticing that the part of *Al-Īdāh* on bodily features pointing to the nature of the genitals and the woman’s sexual appetite matches almost exactly—with some minor exceptions—the first part of al-Dimashqī’s text. The catalogue of the different types of women, which in *Kitāb al-siyāsah* was ascribed to the author of *Ĵāmi‘ al-ladhdhah*, also features in *al-Īdāh*. Nevertheless, in *Al-Īdāh* there is no mention of the source and the text shows significant differences. Only four types of women correspond exactly, in terminology and description, to the first types listed by al-Dimashqī: the fatty (*shahīmah*), the sticky (*laziqah*), the hollow (*jawfā*), and the deep (*qawrā*). Information taken from “the Indian” on dimensions of male sexual organs are also present in both *Kitāb al-siyāsah* and *Al-Īdāh*, in the same order but with slightly different wording. The rest of the chapter in *Al-Īdāh*, from p. 104 on, contains a rich catalogue of ethnicities (*al-Rūmīyāt*, *al-Andalusīyāt*, *nisā’ al-Turk*, etc.) with their different bodily features, and a list of categories of women focused on their suitability for being good spouses. This is not present in *Kitāb al-siyāsah*.

Slave Girls’ Bodies: Narratives vs. Documentary Evidence

Notwithstanding its reminiscence of sources from the Abbasid period, the narrative of *Kitāb al-siyāsah* is in sharp contrast with the anecdotal, literary image of the luxury female slave, a construct of Abbasid romantic literature. In this kind of text qualities praised in a slave girl are both physical and intellectual: slave girls are often soul-mates who can dominate their masters, thus subverting ordinary ownership relations.⁴⁷ On the contrary, in the physiognomic discourse the

floruit seems to be dated to the last quarter of the sixth/twelfth century (Kh. Semah, “Rawdat al-qulub by al-Shayzari; a Twelfth Century Book on Love,” *Arabica* 24 [1977]: 188–92). He authored a work on the interpretation of dreams, a mirror for princes, a well-known treatise on *hisbah* (*Nihāyat al-rutbah*), and a treatise on love (*Rawdat al-qulub*).

⁴⁶ Abd al-Raḥmān al-Shayzarī, *Kitāb al-īdāh fī asrār al-nisā*, ed. Muhammad Sa‘īd al-Ṭarīḥī (Beirut, (1407/1986), 101–7.

⁴⁷ “In this fictional context, the normal relations between slave and free are turned upside down: the master ... is dominated by the slave” (Julia Bray, “Men, Women and Slaves in Abbasid Society,” in *Gender in the early medieval world: East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith [Cambridge, 2004], 137); in satirical texts the slave girl is also represented as an individual, being a “notorious drain of wealth, and a source of instability” (Bray, “Men, Women



representation of *jawārin* is dramatically restricted to bodily traits picked out as clues about their suitability for sexual intercourse: psychological and behavioral features are not in the scope of this narrative. The representation of slave women emerging from the text we have translated, and from texts of a similar tenor, is thus extremely partial. The individual disappears and only separate body parts are described, in a blinkered and fragmented manner. The *jāriyah* is rated on the basis of her capacity to serve as an instrument of pleasure, an attitude that takes the textual form of a skewed deconstruction of her body. This is patent in the first section of the text, with its crude anatomical details, but also holds true in the second part of the text taken from *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdhah*, that also recalls what (for a different period and in a different context) el-Cheikh defines as “microscopic objectification.”⁴⁸ This construct is patently a vehicle of sexual objectification⁴⁹ and mirrors the practices of the slave markets described in sources of a different nature, such as travelogues.

The insistence on this fragmentary and biased description of slave girls in *Kitāb al-siyāsah* and in related texts is thus a textual construct, a kind of “textual voyeurism,” which does not have a counterpart in other types of texts also connected to female slaves. The discourse revolves around the “microscopic” description of a woman’s physicality, depicting the female body “as a function of male desire.”⁵⁰ This minute—even if very slanted—description of slave girls contrasts

and Slaves,” 136). On the intimate relationship between slave girls and their masters see also the remarks of Matthew Gordon, “Abbasid Courtesans and the Question of Social Mobility,” in *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*, ed. Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain (Oxford, 2017), 11–51.

⁴⁸Nadia Maria el-Cheikh, “In search for the ideal spouse,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 45, no. 2 (2002): 188.

⁴⁹“Sexual objectification occurs when a woman’s body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated from her person, or regarded as if they are capable of representing her.” Jamie L. Goldenberg, and Tomi-Ann Roberts, “The Beast within the Beauty: An Existential Perspective on the Objectification and Condemnation of Women,” in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*, ed. Jeff Greenberg, Sander L. Koole, and Tom Pyszczynski (New York, London, 2004), 78. As a matter of fact, representations of slave girls in *Kitāb al-siyāsah* are focused on the description of single parts and neglect the whole; this process of fragmentation has the peculiarity of turning the woman’s body into an object and in the end results in a “loss of the person.” Evangelia (Lina) Papadaki, “Feminist Perspectives on Objectification,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2014 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, 3. “Kant believes that eventually the concubine ... loses her person and is made ‘into a thing’” (Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield [New York, 1963], 166), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/feminism-objectification/> (accessed November 15, 2017).

⁵⁰Mirella Cassarino, “Interpreting Two Stories of the *Kitāb al-Aġānī*: A Gender-Based Approach,” *QSA* n.s. 10 (2014): 192.



with the absence or succinctness of such descriptions in other comparable documents of the same period.

A survey of medical literature containing advice on how to buy the best slave girl shows the irrelevance of attention to sexual aptitudes in the global economy of medical inspection, to the advantage of aspects connected to health: in this sense, the description of body parts does not denote any peculiarity in assessing slave girls' attributes.

In the—scarce—legal deeds attesting the purchase of a *jāriyah*, descriptions of women's bodies have almost no textual relevance. Documentary evidence shows that, in practice, slave girls (and slaves in general) were described only by their race, faith, approximate age, and proper name. Since this was considered sufficient to identify the commodity to be purchased, a more detailed description, although recommended by jurists, is rarely found in these documents. There is no image of slave girls in purchase deeds; they are vague figures alluded to by a name and little more. The description of bodily features is, with few exceptions, minimal: usually skin color, summarily referred to (no recourse to the rich gamut of colors typical of the Arabic lexicon), sometimes age, and any peculiar marks. In all the specimens studied by Little ("the only original documents of their type pertaining to slavery which are known to have survived from the Mamluk period"⁵¹) dated between 783/1381 and 795/1393, there is not even the most basic description of bodily features.⁵² Cursory descriptions found in these documents seem to conflict with the procedures recommended by jurists in the treatises of *shurūṭ* that call for full descriptions, including physical attributes.⁵³ In this light, even the hasty statement found in other documents of a later period, referring to the fact that the female slave was "exempt from the flaws usual in slaves" (*'uyūb al-raqīq*)⁵⁴ seems rather exceptional.⁵⁵ An important feature for slave girls, virginity, is not mentioned in the deeds studied by Rāḡib (with one exception: a deed dated 687/1288 that also mentions the age of the girl⁵⁶), which means that girls referred to in all the remaining deeds were deflowered.⁵⁷ Other documentary evidence

⁵¹Little, "Six Fourteenth Century Purchase Deeds," 298.

⁵²Ibid., 336: "none took the trouble to describe the physical attributes by which the slave could be identified."

⁵³Ibid., 304–5, on the basis of al-Asyūṭī (but positions were not uniform: earlier Hanafi jurists accepted a less detailed description; see *ibid.*, 306).

⁵⁴Bauden, "L'achat d'esclaves," 274.

⁵⁵Ibid., 283.

⁵⁶Rāḡib, *Actes*, 1:37–41.

⁵⁷Ibid., 2:40. Virginity was in principle a feature conferring a higher value on the slave, excepting—as Rāḡib emphasizes—cases where the slave girl was devoted to her master's bed, but deeds rarely mention it. On this point see *ibid.*, 2:38–39.



of the Mamluk period, even if scanty,⁵⁸ points to the same: even an elemental description of body parts of women sold is lacking. It must also be said that no luxury female slave features in the deeds, which refer to slaves sold and bought for domestic service;⁵⁹ the market of luxury slaves had a different circulation. Be that as it may, the image of the *jawārin* emerging from these documents is at least nebulous, if not completely absent, thus contrasting with the palpable materiality of details emerging from the chapter on slave girls in al-Dimashqī's treatise. This is what we defined as "textual voyeurism," a narrative where imagination can elaborate on verbal description, where the word replaces the image and the texts function as substitutes for sight,⁶⁰ hinting—through an indirect act of seeing—at the pleasure that female slaves can give: in other words, as a vehicle for sexual arousal.⁶¹

The Importance of Sight

The limited emphasis on describing slaves' bodies in legal deeds does not necessarily indicate cursory inspection. As a matter of fact, sight had a crucial role in the slave market in connection with the medical inspection of slaves: jurists compared the absence of visual inspection with the purchase of an absent commodity, which could be a source of controversy.⁶² Limitations existed in regard to visual inspection: some jurists considered the sight of the face enough to judge the rest of the body; others allowed for seeing the entire body, excepting the part between the knee and the navel.⁶³ Actual practices in the slave market contrasted with the chasteness exhibited in legal documents and in the obsessive prescriptions of ju-

⁵⁸Rāḡib has only three documents of the Mamluk period, all dating back to Qalāwūn's reign; he underlines that in general "les descriptions physiques des esclaves sont généralement sommaires" and speaks of "absence de signalement descriptif" (ibid., 2:35, 40).

⁵⁹Ibid., 1:xiii.

⁶⁰It is interesting to read the remarks of a nineteenth-century Frenchman on the differences between showing a woman's body and describing it: "Chez nous on aime assez le décolleté en sculpture, en peinture, en dessins, celui qu'on voit de l'oeil ; mais on ne pardonne pas à celui qui est écrit seulement et que l'on ne voit que par l'esprit. ... Pruderie affectée! Pudeur d'extérieur!... En arabe, ce qui se voit, ce que l'on a besoin de voir, ce qui se fait, se dit, se parle, s'écrit" (M. Le Dr. Perron, *Femmes arabes avant et depuis l'islamisme* [Paris-Algiers, 1858], 530). Nicolas Perron was, among other positions, head of the École de médecine d'Égypte and of the Collège impérial arabe-français, and a member of the Société Asiatique of Paris.

⁶¹Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the veil* (New York, 1975), 83, alludes to the importance of sight in connection to gender relationships in the Muslim world: "According to al-Ghazali, the eye is undoubtedly an erogenous zone in the Muslim structure of reality, as able to give pleasure as the penis."

⁶²Rāḡib, *Actes*, 2:62, 65.

⁶³Ibid., 2:65.



rists regarding the concealment of the female body or hiding the family's women from the sight of the passers-by.⁶⁴ It is worth stressing that, as we shall see later, the legal status of women (free or slave, Muslim or not) was relevant in relation to zones of shame and related prescriptions; slave girls usually were not Muslim, so legal prescriptions in principle were different. Nevertheless, in general, the feminine body was considered “legal nudity” and, as such, subject to the devil's sight: “la femme est nudité (*ʿawra*) légale, si elle sort Satan l'observe.”⁶⁵ Zones of shame (*ʿawrah*) were gender specific, i.e., they could have different meanings for persons of the same or the opposite sex, and in the case of women, the legal status was also relevant and zones of shame changed in relation to freedom or slavery. Even in similar situations there was a difference in obligations related to shame zones between free and slave women: e.g., Brunschvig recalls that the obligation to “hide her nakedness” (*ṣatr al-ʿawrah*) was less rigorous for slaves than for free women.⁶⁶ As for the act of looking, jurists considered an unwarranted glimpse of a woman's sex an illicit sexual act, except in marriage and in the ownership relation between a master and his female slave, where a lascivious look at a woman's shame zones was permitted.⁶⁷ As demonstrated by Johansen (for Hanafite and for Muslim Sunni law in general), there was the assumption that the purchaser of a female slave was fully authorized to look at her, treating her as a commodity with little or no right to gendered social distance,⁶⁸ which corresponded to the commercial appropriation of the female slave and was considered a legitimate form of sale.⁶⁹

The rigorous recommendations of jurists concerning the sight of women's bodies, even if far less strict in the case of slaves, seems to have been somehow contravened by medical practice (inspection of slaves is a topic dealt with in medical works) and by custom in the slave market. The vivid description of the conditions of sale given by Rāḡib⁷⁰ shows that reality often conflicted with theory. Jurists prescribed decency by limiting the inspection of female slaves to face and hands,

⁶⁴On this see Mounira Chapoutot-Remadi, “Femmes dans la ville mamlūke,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 38 (1995): 145–64, esp. 149–51 and 159.

⁶⁵Ibid., 147 (quoting al-Dhahabī, *Kitāb al-kabāʾir*). The term *ʿawrah* (along with *fitnah*) is recurrent, as Chapoutot remarks, in texts regulating the behavior of women (ibid., 163).

⁶⁶Quoted in Baber Johansen, “The Valorization of the Human Body in Muslim Sunni Law,” *Princeton Papers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 4–6 (1996–97): 80.

⁶⁷On this see ibid., 75. Religious tradition also regards the two as similar when it “speaks metaphorically of marriage as a form of slavery for the wife” (ibid., 78).

⁶⁸Ibid., 81. In relation to the idea that slaves were commodities it is worth stressing that *ḥisbah* treatises deal with slaves and animals in the same chapter.

⁶⁹Ibid., 88. On this also see Barker, “Purchasing a Slave,” 12.

⁷⁰Yūsuf Rāḡib, “Les Marchés aux esclaves en terre d'Islam,” in *Mercati e mercanti nell'alto medioevo: L'Area Euroasiatica e l'area Mediterranea* (Spoleto, 1993), 734 ff.



on the assumption that seeing a part was enough to judge the entirety.⁷¹ This notion, also common in the physiognomic tradition, explains the importance given to the description of facial features as hints at the hidden parts (*al-farj*), which, as we shall see, is considered in normative texts the essence of the slave girl's body. Legal prescriptions were nevertheless ignored in practice and evidence says that the slaves, regardless of gender, were often exhibited in the market completely naked or, if they were dressed, clothes were soon removed.⁷² Moreover, simple observation was not considered sufficient to judge "the merchandise" and buyers often requested a closer inspection, including tactile inspection, in separate rooms or settings.⁷³ The *jawārin* were also inspected or, more precisely, "tested" at the buyer's property before the purchase contract was concluded.⁷⁴ This is only one among many examples of the divergence between theory in Islamic law and practice in society that characterize the Islamicate world in the pre-modern (and not only the pre-modern) period.

As we have seen, notwithstanding the importance of visual inspection in law and the habit of practicing it in commercial transactions,⁷⁵ legal deeds do not bear any allusion to this practice in the form of a detailed description of the slave body: they did not certify that the inspection had been carried out, and formulas attesting that the buyer had seen the slave's body are also infrequent.⁷⁶

Practices related to visual inspection of slave girls and the importance of sight in commercial transactions do not have textual reflection in the documents. This conflicts with the "verbal exhibition" of the (hidden) parts of the feminine body

⁷¹The face was considered the most important component of the body and the most fit for giving an idea of the rest: *ibid.*, 735, 736.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 736, quoting several first-hand testimonies of travelers.

⁷³In principle, only reliable women were allowed to inspect female slaves, but we are informed that the act of touching every part of the body was common practice both for males and females sold on the market, a practice that—it is said—drew masses of people into the markets: Rāḡib, "Marchés," 737–40. Also see Barker, "Purchasing a Slave," 16 ("a second and more comprehensive appraisal (*probat emendum*, literally testing the thing to be bought)... included public viewing and touching of the slave's naked body... the slave-buying manuals' advice to inspect the shame zones prevailed over the *muhtasib*'s responsibility to prevent it").

⁷⁴Rāḡib, "Marchés," 741. Humiliation, increased by inspecting naked slaves in public, deriving from this practice "served to reinforce the powerlessness and dishonor of slaves through the profanation (*ibtidāl*) of their bodies in contrast to the inviolability (*hurmah*) of the free body": Barker, "Purchasing a Slave," 2–3.

⁷⁵"...the *ḥisbah* manuals indicate that doctors should not publicly examine the naked bodies of slaves or advise non-doctors on how to do so, while the slave-buying advice manuals recommend the opposite." (Barker, "Purchasing a Slave," 12). Barker also relates, to this end, the testimony of Ibn Mujāwir's travelogue: "Finally he [=a wicked merchant] casts a direct eye over her vulva and anus, without her having on any covering or veil" (*ibid.*, 13).

⁷⁶Rāḡib, *Actes*, 2:65.



displayed in *Kitāb al-siyāsah* and in texts of a similar tenor. This “textual voyeurism,” in contrast with the scanty verbalization of female slaves’ bodies in legal deeds, seems to be paralleled in legal treatises that profusely enumerate the redhibitory defects of female slaves (redhibitory defects are those that nullify a sale): tellingly, they are all flaws hindering sexual use by her owner⁷⁷ and as such, are all located in the genital area (*al-farj*),⁷⁸ the same zone on which al-Dimashqī’s text is focused. The emphasis put on this area of the body in *Kitāb al-siyāsah* seems to condense the essence of the *jāriyah* in a metonymy, a linguistic strategy that has an equivalent in texts of a different nature, i.e., normative texts. In this connection, the remarks of al-‘Aynī (d. 855/1451) on the validity of manumission formulae are revealing. In his commentary on *Kanz al-daqa’iq* of Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310) he explains that, to be legally acceptable, manumission formulae must refer to the totality of the person. Expounding on this, al-‘Aynī gives interesting examples: for a slave, it is not correct to use sentences like “*yaduka ḥurr*” instead of “*anta ḥurr*” because the word *yad* does not refer to the entire body. Sentences like *ra’suka ḥurr* and *wajhuka ḥurr*, instead of *anta ḥurr*, are however considered legally valid for male slaves since *ra’s* and *wajh* can refer to the totality of the person. On the contrary, there is only one alternative to the standard manumission formula (*anti ḥurrah*) for slave girls: *farjuki ḥurrun* (your vulva is free). This is considered a valid expression to use for a female slave (*amah*) since it refers to the entirety of the person (*al-farj yu‘abbir ‘an al-kull fī al-mar’ah dūna al-rajul*).⁷⁹ This difference, rooted in the perception of the different nature of male and female slaves, considered as two different genera,⁸⁰ shows that a plurality of body parts (the head or the face) can be used as a metonym for men, while for women nothing is considered representative enough except *al-farj*. The prominence attributed to this zone in legal reasoning thus finds a perfect match in the sections on *jawārin* in texts of a different nature, like that of al-Dimashqī.

⁷⁷In Rāḡib’s words: “[vices qui] rendaient la femme impropre à l’usage,” usually anatomical vices and tumors of the vulva or prolapse of genitalia (Rāḡib, “Marchés,” 760–61). On redhibitory vices also see Johansen, “Valorization,” 86.

⁷⁸Rāḡib, *Actes*, 2:82–83.

⁷⁹Badr al-Dīn al-‘Aynī, *Sharḥ al-kanz* (Būlāq, 1285), 237.

⁸⁰The different genus is determined by their functions: female slaves have the function of concubinage (*istifrāsh*) and the production of children, something that male slaves cannot do. This essential difference also entails that “the ownership of a female slave includes the right to the use of her sexual organs by her master—which the ownership of the male slave, clearly, does not” (Johansen, “Valorization,” 84).



Slave Girls, Concubinage, and Mamluk Society

One could wonder how the erotic slant of this text can be explained if compared to treatises on the purchase of slaves like that of Ibn al-Akfānī, and what the relevance of a chapter like that on slave girls in *Kitāb al-siyāsah*, so reminiscent of texts belonging to the Abbasid period, was in the different historical context of the Mamluk period.

The connection between erotology and slavery, or the erotic connotation given to texts related to slave girls, was well attested in the Abbasid period when, beside medical books on coitus (*bāh*), a new kind of treatise appeared, which Ibn al-Nadīm considered written in a new sexually arousing style. Revealing titles like *Kitāb al-ḥurrah wa-al-amah* (The Book on the freewoman and the slave girl) and *Kitāb al-jawārī al-ḥabā'ib* (The Book of the beloved slave girls) belong to this genre, which a century later was already popular.⁸¹ This new genre of texts, and in general *‘ilm al-bāh*, relied considerably on the institutions of slavery and concubinage: it is thus obvious that “authors of the *bāh*-books took it for granted that their male readers had concubines at their disposal or could at least purchase one if they wanted.”⁸² The intimate association between eroticism and slavery is due to the fact that licit sexual activity in Muslim society can be in the frame of marriage (*nikāḥ*) or in the frame of the ownership relation between a man and his slave girls. Marriage and slavery were linked by analogy since both implied a kind of ownership (*milk*): in marriage (*nikāḥ*), the consequence of the payment of a certain sum was “the right to exclusive sexual access” while the purchase of slaves gave the right to “ownership of the physical person.”⁸³ This analogy is also emphasized by Bouhdiba, who paradoxically claims that concubines were the double of wives (more precisely “anti-wives”) in that pleasure with them was devoid of any obligation.⁸⁴ That slavery and concubinage were strictly intertwined and that “concubine” could be considered a hyponym of “slave girl” (and, accord-

⁸¹ See Patrick Franke, “Before *scientia sexualis* in Islamic culture: *‘ilm al-bāh* between erotology, medicine and pornography,” *Social Identities* 18, no. 2 (2012): 168. Franke, who investigates *‘ilm al-bāh* and its diverse connections in pre-modern Islamic culture, labels this new genre of treatises as “pornographic *bāh*,” in opposition to “*‘ilm al-bāh* as *ars erotica*” and “the medical *bāh* tradition”; all the three merged eventually in a universal discipline at the Ottoman court in the early modern period (ibid., 170).

⁸² Ibid., 170.

⁸³ Shaun E. Marmon, “Domestic Slavery in the Mamluk Empire: A Preliminary Sketch,” in *Slavery in the Islamic Middle East*, ed. Shaun E. Marmon (Princeton, 1999), 19.

⁸⁴ Bouhdiba, *La Sexualité*, 130: “la concubine ‘double’ en quelque sorte l’épouse et permet une satisfaction du désir. Avec elle le plaisir est délié en quelque sorte de toute contrainte puisque, en principe, elle est soustraite à la procreation”; 131 “...la concubine a fini pour devenir une véritable ‘anti-épouse,’ par usurper la féminité et par la bloquer en entier”; and also ibid., “les jawārī sont devenues des véritables ‘anti-épouses.’”



ingly, many texts of Arabic literature refer to *jawārin* obviously in the sense of “concubines,” even if other terms like *surrīyah* or *ḥāziyah mawṭū’ah* did exist—all of them bearing a sexual meaning) is well known and we need not explore this here.⁸⁵ The ownership of concubines was widespread in Abbasid times as a habit of royal and noble individuals: caliphs like Hārūn al-Rashīd and al-Mutawakkil were said to possess hundreds or thousands of concubines. The social relevance of slave girls for Abbasid society has been underlined by scholars and many works deal with *jawārin* and their diverse features and activities, including music and poetry. Anecdotal materials are also to be found in such works as the *Risālat al-qiyān* of al-Jāhīz, the *Kitāb al-aghānī* of al-Iṣfahānī, and *Al-Faraj ba’d al-shiddah* of al-Tanūkhī, where slave girls feature as characters or are the main protagonists of the narratives.⁸⁶ *Jawārin* were also relevant from an economic viewpoint and large amounts of money were dedicated to the purchase of slave girls, which explains literature focused on the purchase of slaves like the treatise of Ibn Buṭlān, *bāh* treatises related to slave girls, or the abundant literary materials describing slave girls and their merits (or demerits).

Slavery remained a prominent practice in the Mamluk period.⁸⁷ ‘Abd ar-Rāziq distinguishes three categories of female slaves: concubines and those destined for pleasure and entertainment, singing slaves, and—on a lower level—servants destined for housework and childcare.⁸⁸ Documentary evidence and legal sources confirm this division into categories: expressions like *wakhsh al-raqīq* (or simply *wakhsh*), or other demeaning titles like *waḍī’* or *dani’*, were used for the lower level, thus denoting that, in principle (but only in principle), they were not intended for their master’s pleasure (*li-ghayr al-mut’ah*).⁸⁹ Slaves belonging to the superior category (*al-lā’ilyat/’ilā al-raqīq*) were those intended for pleasure, tellingly called, in legal sources, *jawāri al-waṭ’* or *nisā’ waṭ’ al-bā’i’* and referred to with diverse

⁸⁵On this see Shaun E. Marmon, “Concubinage, Islamic,” in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York, 1989), 3:527–29; see, e.g., “While not all female slaves were necessarily concubines, all concubines were by definition slaves,” 527; “the concubine ... is a woman of servile status who performs sexual services for the man who owns her,” *ibid*.

⁸⁶On this see, e.g., Hilary Kilpatrick, “Women as Poets and Chattels: Abū al-Faraġ al-Iṣbahānī’s ‘al-Imā’ al-ṣawā’ir,’” *QSA* 9 (1991): 161–76.

⁸⁷On female slaves (races, prices, etc.) in the Mamluk period see Aḥmad ‘Abd ar-Rāziq, *La Femme au temps des Mamlouks en Égypte* (Paris, 1973), 49–56, based on information taken mostly from chronicles penned in Egypt (al-Maqrīzī, Ibn Taghribirdī, Ibn Iyās), biographical dictionaries, literature (*The Arabian Nights*), contracts of marriage, and witnesses of foreign travelers. Information of this kind must be confronted and complemented with other kind of documents like purchase contracts or archaeological evidence.

⁸⁸‘Abd ar-Rāziq, *La Femme*, 54–55.

⁸⁹Rāġib, *Actes*, 2:45.



epithets hinting at their beauty and their superiority to their less fortunate colleagues.⁹⁰

Historians inform us that Byzantine, Nubian, Ethiopian, Turkish, and Slavonic, but also Egyptian, female slaves were sold in the market.⁹¹ The presence of slaves was a kind of obligation for wealthy homes, a demonstration of well-being and social status, and possession of costly slaves was considered a sign of prestige.⁹² Contrary to other communities, like Christians and Jews,⁹³ in the Muslim community of Mamluk society “the role of the female slave as a sexual object and as a potential mother of free children was a crucial one.”⁹⁴ As Frenkel explains, the reasons for this were mostly demographic, but also political: concubinage “contributed to the construction of patrimonial households and increased the likelihood of progeny” and strengthened male dominance in society.⁹⁵ So significant was the phenomenon of concubinage that some scholars seem inclined to see Mamluk slavery as a “primarily female phenomenon.”⁹⁶ Having recourse to concubinage was an easy resource against child mortality on the part of the military elite, but this does not mean that the practice was restricted to the military elite: it was significantly widespread in different sectors of society, e.g., among intellectuals and scholars,⁹⁷ particularly in the first half of the fourteenth century. This also seems supported by most reports on concubinage among the civilian elite of the Mamluk period, where “it is the sexual aspect that is emphasized.”⁹⁸

⁹⁰Ibid., 2:46–47.

⁹¹Abd ar-Rāziq, *La Femme*, 50. The documents studied by Little give evidence, even though modest, of the vitality of the African slave trade in the late fourteenth century (out of five slaves, three came from Africa: a Nubian, a Takruri, and a Damoti). (Little, “Six Fourteenth Century Purchase Deeds,” 336–37).

⁹²Marmon, “Domestic Slavery,” 9, 10, 19, and the sources quoted therein, esp. al-Ghuzūli.

⁹³These communities disapproved of any sexual relations outside marriage. In Judaism intercourse with a slave girl was a sin punishable by death (Sh. D. Goitein, “Slaves and Slavegirls in the Cairo Geniza Records,” *Arabica* 9 [1962]: 6). This along with other factors, among which was the cost of slaves (very high in case of attractive and/or educated slave girls), made slave girl concubinage a “phenomenon of limited dimensions and importance in Geniza society” (idem, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 5, *The Individual: Portrait of a Mediterranean Personality of the High Middle Ages as Reflected in the Cairo Geniza* [Berkeley, 1988], 322).

⁹⁴Marmon, “Domestic Slavery,” 4.

⁹⁵Frenkel, “Slave Girls,” 165.

⁹⁶Yossef Rapoport, “Women and Gender in Mamluk society,” *MSR* 11 (2007): 9.

⁹⁷Significant, e.g., is the case of the Mamluk ‘ālim Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Biqā‘ī (d. 885/1480), who had a modestly-sized harem; he accurately describes his life in his autobiography. On this see Li Guo, “Tales of a Medieval Cairene Harem: Domestic Life in al-Biqā‘ī’s Autobiographical Chronicle,” *MSR* 9, no. 1 (2005): 101–21.

⁹⁸Ibid., 39.



Revealing in this respect is the testimony of al-Ṣafadī, who expresses his appreciation for a jurist friend's fair allocation of his time, devoting equal attention to pleasure and culture by alternately frequenting the slave market and the book market.⁹⁹ Foreigners staying in Muslim countries, far from their wives, would also buy slaves to keep as concubines, as attested by documentary evidence.¹⁰⁰ That the purpose of the female slave was sexual service, along with childbearing, is thus the generally accepted assumption, notwithstanding the fact that some ethnicities were seemingly more likely than others to be sold for the bedchamber.¹⁰¹ Thus, the textual representation of slave girls in al-Dimashqī's treatise is well in tune with the background depicted in the sources, with their emphasis on the sexual dimension of slavery and the interest in purchasing female slaves to satisfy sexual desire.

Conclusions

The analysis of the chapter on slave girls in *Kitāb al-siyāṣah* demonstrates that this text does not aim to offer advice to prospective buyers. This skillful construct, combining information allegedly taken from natural sciences (physiognomy and medicine, through the so-called "quotations" from its sources) with erotica, is instead a narrative in which the *jāriyah* is represented as an instrument of pleasure and the female body "as a function of male desire." The "microscopic objectification" consisting in the skewed deconstruction of the *jāriyah*'s body, patent in the crude anatomical details and in the quotations from *Ḥawāmi' al-ladhdhah*, functions as a vehicle of sexual objectification. The insistence on the fragmentary description of slave girls, equivalent to a kind of "textual voyeurism" in sharp contrast with the meager descriptions found in the few purchase deeds we have, thus constitutes an interesting counterpart to this kind of text. The portrait of *jawārin* contained in *Kitāb al-siyāṣah*, which is in tune with the legal discourse

⁹⁹Ibid., 11: "Al-Ṣafadī speaks with admiration about his friend the jurist Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad al-Zar'ī (d. 741/1342), who on Fridays would alternately frequent the slave market and the book market, thus cultivating the pleasures of both body and mind. His association with Turkish slave-girls was such that he learned to speak their language." In the following century the phenomenon was apparently decreasing: "In contrast to the first half of the fourteenth century, when the supply of slave girls to Near Eastern cities appears to have reached a peak, the number of concubines in military households steadily decreased in the fifteenth century" (ibid., 13).

¹⁰⁰Bauden, "L'achat d'esclaves," 297: "Cela laisse sous-entendre que les esclaves féminines qu'ils acquéraient au cours de leur séjour jouaient essentiellement le rôle de concubines en l'absence de leur épouse."

¹⁰¹Rāḡib, "Marchés," 732–33; the veracity of this statement, based on the treatise penned by Ibn Buṭlān in the eleventh century, cannot be taken for granted uncritically with reference to the Mamluk period.



and general assumptions revealed by historical sources for the Mamluk period, can thus be an interesting complementary source for the understanding of the representation of slave girls in the Mamluk period.



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