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A similar perception was adopted when considering the role of women within the political arena. However, women were allowed a certain degree of political power, based on some cultural traditions and particular historical periods. Abd ar- Raziq says in his book ' Women and gender in Mamlouk societies' that certain mothers of prestigious Mamluk sultans in the great Arab peninsula had a substantial amount of influence over their sons, such as during the rule of Baraka Khan, and Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun. 1 The Ottoman period showcased a more significant role for women, where the mothers of the rulers, actively took in charge of the households. As the mother of the sultan, she gained an official title and became one of the first elevated positions for women in the political arena. However, this was not approved of in the Turkish monarchs.

They disapproved of the eminent role of women in political affairs that took place in the Mamluk and Ottoman dynasties. 2 Their perception of women followed the belief that they were capable of bringing corruption through their seduction abilities, and would be able to dominate the men in power, by any means possible, especially black magic. 3 Throughout the examples provided, the common ground defining the political position of women, is through their connection with the men in their lives, for instance, their fathers, husbands, sons and brothers. When considering the main focus of a woman's role from all the different levels in society, M. Marin states, that ' family was indeed the privileged space for women's lives, as both the religious and the social ideal consider women primarily as wives and mothers.' 4 A Muslim family comprised of relationships that worked on a balanced respect of the obligations each member had to follow, regardless of

the fact that they were male or female, slave, or servant. These rules involved giving each member of the family separate rights. Therefore, any questions on divorce, inheritance, economic independency and most importantly the marriage contract came under the Muslim Shariah Law, where different schools of thought dealt with different subjects, accordingly.

Out of all of them, the main right of a woman revolved around her contribution towards the establishment of the marriage contract. The purpose served by this contract was to act as a protection against any harm inflicted by the husband that could potentially affect the psychological, social and economic wellbeing of the woman in the form of an official document. The marriage contract drew up clauses that involved the amount of dowry that was to be given to the wife, the place of residence the couple would be living at along with the clause where the husband has to inform the wife about his decisions to re-marry or take in a concubine.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, in 11th/17th century Cairo, the contracts further included clauses that asked for the permission and allowance for a woman to be able to visit her friends, go to public baths, and to be able to visit Mecca to perform pilgrimage, after her marriage.<sup>6</sup> (add something) Another aspect of the public sphere in which women were involved in was to do with their relationship with the estates, or properties in their possession. These properties could either be acquired through the dowry the women received when they got married, or through inheritance. There was often pressure stemming from the family or their husbands to sell the received property in the dowry. Similarly, in the 11th/17th century, upon the death of their parents, the estates that were

either fully or partly owned by the women were also encouraged to be sold off to their brothers.

7 On the other hand, Malik ibn Anas, a jurist of the time, outlined the types of possessions that were to be normally be owned by a woman. These were to include mostly, ' household wares, cooking utensils, clothing, and house linen and jewels.'<sup>8</sup> Even though women were often selling their properties, evidence points towards how they actually did own vineyards, houses and estates.

This depended on regional differences. In the towns of Anatolia, orchards were commonly owned by women and more so in the 10th/16th century, than they were in the city of Aleppo. <sup>9</sup>One must note, that the ownership of properties by women was often protected by the law, but often the management of these estates were in the hands of the male figures of the family. Therefore, women often sought it best to sell them in order to obtain cash, a commodity they felt was better to manage, and easier to exchange for goods like jewellery, and clothing.

With this possession of money women were also known to be money lenders. For example, money loaning amongst the wealthier women in places such as Jerusalem, Bursa and Istanbul was quite a common practise. <sup>10</sup>As mentioned before, class played a vital and crucial role in the wealth maintained and acquired by a woman. Not only were some wealthy women owners of large fortunes and custodians of possessions<sup>11</sup> but they also were able to gift or donate parts of their wealth to relatives, or for the welfare of their community. For example in Damascus, during the Ayyubid period, there was

an increase in the investments for the openings of ‘ madrasas’, by women only and the records show that out of all of the founders of such institutions, fifteen of the twenty eight were men. <sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the Ottoman period saw the largest significant increase in urban landscape that was built under the royal women of the time, for example the daughter of Mihrimah Sultan, who build mosques around Istanbul.

<sup>13</sup> On the other hand women belonging to the lower classes also worked and managed to participate in the economic activity of the region, through nurses, midwives, tailors, servants, teachers, and cooks. <sup>14</sup> As Muslim women were ‘ economically independent under Muslim law, they were able to establish awqaf, and in this way charitable endowment presented a non-gendered opportunity for them to take part in social and religious affairs.’ <sup>15</sup> The definition of medieval times, archival significance.

In conclusion, by taking into account the various examples in the essay one can understand the dynamics of the role women participated in the public sphere in the medieval times. Even though in pre-modern Islamic times, they were considered second class citizens they are seen to essentially create a balance in society. <sup>1</sup> Abd ar- Raziq, ‘ Women and gender in Mamlouk societies’ In *Institute Francais d’Archeologie Orientale du Caire* (1873), 27.

<sup>2</sup> R. Irwin, ‘ Ali al-Baghdadi and the joy of Mamluk sex’, Hugh Kennedy ed. ‘ *The historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950-1800)* (Leiden, 2001) p. 56. <sup>3</sup> L. Pierce, ‘ morality tales: law and gender in the ottoman court of Aintab’ (Berkeley and Los Angeles 2003), p.

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