

Viewed from this perspective, however, the ascendancy of the *ajlāb*, Barqūq's ending of the Qalāwūnid sultanate in November 1382, and his deliberate attempt to impose his own Zāhirī household, including his own lineage and his own mamluks, as the new framework of social and political reference instead of the defunct Qalāwūnid one, actually suspended the emergence of such an entirely new political system. As such, the sultanates of Barqūq and his sons (1382–1412) were not so much a radical break from the past, as references traditionally tend to portray them, but rather an attempt to link up again with that past and to restore to pre-eminence the traditional royal household, as a comprehensive political unit that firmly monopolized the regime, its political economy, and Mamluk society at large, far beyond the limits of generational pragmatism.

Despite the fact that the latter observations and their background obviously need further qualification, it is already clear that this attempt at a reversal of historical processes that had first come to the surface in the 1360s did not, in the long run, manage to eradicate those processes. This was surely as much due to their innate resilience and embryonic presence in traditional Mamluk political practices (as in the cyclical or “generational” nature of rank-and-file acquisition, training, and employment, as well as in the aforementioned reliance on numerical strength), as to the many crises that the turn of the century witnessed. From 1412 onwards, therefore, change did eventually re-emerge, when a tiered, exclusive system of veteran amirs, junior mamluks and political (and financial!) pragmatism gradually came to supersede a more inclusive household system, and an overall process set in that unmistakably should be identified as one of Mamluk state formation, at the cost of traditional household politics.¹¹¹

Processes of historical change such as these, then, originating in the middle of the fourteenth century, catching momentum from the 1360s onwards, and only temporarily suspended towards the end of the century, led the sultanate towards its own version of early modernity in the course of the fifteenth century. Clearly, no one in particular, not even Yalbughā or his mamluks, can or should be blamed individually for generating transformations that they were all subject to. They are rather a token of the dynamic nature of Mamluk history, as they were gradually yet irrevocably heralding a new era.

¹¹¹ A research project at Ghent University (financed by the European Research Council and by the university's Research Foundation) is currently involved in the detailed reconstruction and assessment of these transformations on the basis of prosopographical research. The overarching project's title is “The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate: Political Traditions and State Formation in 15th Century Egypt and Syria.”