The fate of women slaves from the Caucasus and Georgia was contingent on many factors—their purchase as household servants or concubines, the status and wealth of their owner, the treatment meted out to them by their masters or mistresses, and their own ability to use their talents and skills to advance themselves within the household. If, like any of the manumitted Georgian slaves whose lives are revealed to us in their religious endowment deeds (waqfsyyat), they were purchased by high-ranking Mamluk amirs as their own concubines or as potential wives of clients or dependents of the household, they would have the opportunity to achieve rank and high status, amass wealth, and enjoy a high degree of autonomy in some aspects of their daily lives.

One of the keys to understanding the position of women slaves and manumitted slaves as well as the political, social, and cultural life of eighteenth-century Cairo is the household. From the time of the Mamluk resurgence in the latter half of the seventeenth century, the households of the beys were the primary mechanism for acquiring, expressing, and reproducing power. The Mamluk system of the early modern period was a throwback to the earlier Mamluk polity of the medieval period in many respects, particularly in the way it reproduced itself from generation to generation and achieved longevity. The successors of the Mamluk sultans from the medieval period to the Ottoman conquest of 1516–17 and to the leaders of the beylical households from the late seventeenth century to the Napoleonic invasion of 1798 were not primarily their biological sons but rather men with slave origins. The Mamluk system was predominantly a slave system...
in which those men with origins as slaves could aspire to power within this household system of politics.

What has been overlooked in the discussion of the Mamluk revival and the composition of the Mamluk households is the slave origins of the women who were incorporated into the households as concubines and wives as well as the contributions women made to the household's cohesion and continuity and the reproduction of its power. A survey of the religious endowments (awqaf, sing. waqf) made by women in the eighteenth century shows that the overwhelming majority of women who can be identified by their names as belonging to a Mamluk household had slave origins while the minority were freeborn daughters or sisters of Mamluks. The purchase of female slaves as concubines or wives was not a random act by the Mamluks but was rather a conscious strategy to maintain the separation of the Mamluk elite from the Egyptian population and to make their households more cohesive. For women, incorporation into a household was the first step toward achieving wealth, status, and influence within the household and in the wider society.

As the index to the eighteenth-century religious endowment deeds (waqfiyyat) show, women who had origins as slaves had by far the largest and most lucrative endowments, in terms of the number and type of properties endowed. Of the three women whose lives provide a female genealogy of the revival, expansion, and decline of the Mamluks and whose religious endowments testify to their wealth and prominence, only one, Amina Khatun, was a freeborn daughter, of Hasan Gurbagi al-Qandaggi (d. 1716). Her three husbands were, consecutively, Hasan Katkhuda, one of the favorite mamluks of the founder of the Qazdughli household, Mustafa Katkhuda al-Qazdughli; ‘Uthman Katkhuda, one of the wealthiest and most powerful Mamluks of the period; and Sulayman Gawish, both of whom were mamluks of her deceased husband Hasan Katkhuda. The other two women, Shawikar Qadin and Nafisa al-Bayda, were concubines and later wives. Shawikar was the concubine of ‘Uthman Katkhuda and later the wife of Ibrahim Katkhuda, the architect of the Qazdughli household’s rise to dominance. Thus Amina and Shawikar had a sexual relationship with the same man, as wife and concubine, respectively. Nafisa was the concubine and wife of ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir, the favorite mamluk of Ibrahim.
Katkhuda and his heir as head of the Qazdughli household. After ‘Ali Bey’s death, she married Murad Bey, whose death in 1801 during the French occupation of Egypt marked the end of the Mamluk system.

The lives of these three women demonstrate how women in the Mamluk household contributed to its cohesion and stability as well as to the reproduction of its power from generation to generation. Because of their longevity compared to men who were more likely to be killed in the internecine warfare that marked the century, women became living symbols of lineage continuity. As widows who remarried, they legitimized their husband’s assumption of power as the new head of the household, as Shawikar did when she married Ibrahim Katkhuda. They also brought their own often considerable wealth to their new husband and his household. Women as members of Mamluk households not only benefitted from their membership in the household but also contributed to its continuity, longevity, and the reproduction of its power.

The Evolution of the Mamluk Household

When the Mamluk system began to reassert itself in the late seventeenth century, there were various households vying for power. The two most prominent households, both of which emerged from the beylicate, were the Faqariyya and the Qasimiyya, founded by Dhu al-Faqar Bey and Qasim Bey, respectively. In 1711 there was a civil war between Ottoman forces and various Mamluk factions that led eventually to the beylicates’s absorption and domination of the military corps. The rivalry between the Qasimiyya and the Faqariyya ended with the defeat of the former through an alliance between the Faqari and the Qazdughli bayt. The Qazdughli bayt, which would dominate the eighteenth century, emerged from the military corps, not the beylicate. It was founded by Mustafa Katkhuda, who rose to agha of the Janissaries before his death in 1703–4. In 1739 the last Faqari amir, ‘Uthman Bey, was driven from power by an alliance between Ibrahim Katkhuda Mustahfizan and his partner in a duumverate, Ridwan Katkhuda ‘Azaban, head of the Julfiyya bayt. It was Ibrahim Katkhuda who, between 1748 and his death in 1754, laid the foundations of Qazdughli power for the rest of the century.
By the mid-eighteenth century after a series of bloody battles among the various Mamluk households, the Qazdughli household (bayt) emerged as the most powerful. Between 1760 and 1772, ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir, who was purchased as a mamluk and trained in Ibrahim Katkhuda’s household, became the leader of the Qazdughlis and succeeded in eliminating his rivals and consolidating power within his own household. Also around mid-century, the process began of fusing the military institution founded on the regiments (ojaqs) and the Mamluk organization dominated by the beyli-cate. The result was one system in which service in the regiments became a career path within the revived Mamluk system. As Raymond has pointed out, by the end of the century, almost all the positions in the Ottoman hierarchy were held by members of the Mamluk households.2 In 1798, Ibrahim Bey described the ruling class as a unique system in which the beys, kashifs, mamluks, and officers and soldiers of the regiments constituted a socially homogenous and hierarchical group.

While the Mamluk household was the foundation of the political system that usurped considerable power and revenue from the central Ottoman government at Istanbul, it was also a group of individuals linked together not just by political interests but also through marriage, concubinage, and both real and fictive kinship, in other words through the creation of family ties. Previous studies of the Mamluks both in their classical and resurgent phases have focused exclusively or predominantly on the household as a political entity. The objects of study were the sultanate or the beyli-cate, the recruitment and training of male slaves, the beylical or military households and the factions that formed within them, and the internecine fighting that was almost continual for the period of the revived Mamluk system. The view from this vantage point is that the system was generally unstable and liable to fragmentation and dissolution. As Peter M. Holt has noted, “The tendency toward fragmentation and factionalism is even more marked in the neo-Mamluk households since each Mamluk generation in turn founded new households, which, although part of the parent-clan, were rivals for political power and the spoils of office. It was this above all that delayed the revival of the beylicate in the eighteenth century, and rendered its paramountcy, when once acquired, so unstable and precarious.”3
Also, Daniel Crecelius, whose *Roots of Modern Egypt* has traced the Mamluk usurpation of power from the Ottoman administration in Egypt, said that only the Mamluk tendency toward factionalism and self-destruction permitted the Ottoman regime to survive and to claim a semblance of authority. Michael Winter, in describing the intense rivalry and extreme factionalism of Mamluk political culture, has written that the struggles were “fierce and bloody; personal, political and primarily economic interests were at stake.” One of the great unanswered questions, then, is how slave systems in general, not just Mamluk, lasted so long and were so predominant in the Middle East from the period of the Abbasid caliphate through the Mamluk sultanate and revival to the Ottoman empire.

In order to answer this question and to understand some of the inner workings of the Mamluk polity, we should turn our attention to the construction of the Mamluk family household, which was the foundation of the Mamluk system. Mamluk households not only recruited, trained, and deployed slaves and manumitted slaves, male and female, but also transformed them into kin, thereby creating horizontal and vertical links among their members that mitigated the tendency of slave systems to become unstable and factionalized. The creation of real and fictive kinship ties partially filled the power vacuum created by the absence of dynastic succession from the head of the household to his natural son and heir. Instead of the dynastic succession from father to oldest son that characterized many traditional monarchies in Europe and elsewhere, powerful beys raised their favorite *mamluks* in their households, groomed them for power and succession, and married them off to their daughters, sisters, or female slaves. Such was the case with Ibrahim Katkhuda, the architect of the Qazdughli rise to power, who raised his favorite *mamluk* and successor, ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir, in his household. For his part, ‘Ali Bey raised his successor Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab in his household and gave Muhammad Bey his sister in marriage. In this way, the fictive kinship created by slavery and the master/father–slave/son relationship was augmented by the real kinship ties established by marriage. These relationships were not by-products of the system but were intrinsic to it and were pursued as strategies to strengthen the household, enhance its cohesion, and consolidate its power.
The political households of the sort that wielded power in eighteenth-century Egypt had particular characteristics and were not just a random collection of men tied to each other through clientage and patronage. Political households were kinship-based systems centered in actual houses that were important symbols of their power; they had a leader at the head and a strategy for reproducing themselves and their power from one generation to the next. Members of households were related to each other not only through patron-client ties but also more importantly through real or fictive kinship. Inside these households, political life and family life were intertwined and inextricable. Marriages and other sexual alliances were political, as was reproduction. The kinship system, whether real or fictive, that bound members of the household together could not be created by men alone; women's acquiescence to the marital and sexual alliances arranged for them was crucial. Because family life and politics took place within the house/household, the concept of separate spheres—the private world of the family and the public world of politics—did not apply. Thus women could not be said to be confined to the private world of the home while men dominated the public world of politics and war. The multiple and overlapping dimensions of the political household provided a venue for women to advance themselves and to achieve considerable autonomy and influence. It is important to recognize the family dimension of the Mamluk household in order to understand how the personal was also political, how the ostensibly fragile Mamluk system could achieve cohesion and longevity, and how women were able to thrive inside a family where it was possible to obtain influence through sexual and family ties.

It is particularly important to think of the Mamluk system as a collection of political households in order to understand the multiple dimensions of women's role within the household and family and how women were able to acquire wealth and property and to attain influence and status within their households and the wider society. This appears to be a cross-cultural phenomenon linked to political households in which women as members of powerful families and with a kin or sexual relationship with the head of the household or other powerful members were able to achieve high status, wealth, and influence. As we shall see later in this chapter, there are important similarities between Mamluk Egypt and a number of societies...
including the Ottoman court of Sultan Sulayman, feudal Europe, and prer-evolutionary France that show how a woman’s life was linked to the family/household and to sexual and kinship ties to the head of the household to which she belonged.

Bayt, or What’s in a Name?

While the Mamluk system was a household-based political system, it was also a collection of families linked to each other in a complex web of inter-relationships. Thus the Mamluk household will be examined here as a collection of families linked together in a kinship system, both real and fictive, that was created through marriage and concubinage and reproduced primarily through slavery. Kinship construction was a conscious strategy pursued by the Mamluks to construct a lineage system within the household and to make the entire system of power more cohesive and less prone to factionalism and fragmentation. It is this dimension of Mamluk history, the history of the family, that has generally been neglected in studies of the Mamluk resurgence, although an analysis of the structure of the family and household is crucial to our understanding of the Mamluk polity.

Before attempting to reconstruct the eighteenth-century Mamluk family/household, it is necessary to define certain key terms that have been used to define components of the household and the household itself. At the outset, Mamluk family historians are confronted with a linguistic problem because the word bayt has been used interchangeably for the different elements that make up the Mamluk system. David Ayalon, relying on al-Jabarti, defined bayt as a group or a faction whose members were linked by Mamluk and family ties. Because the term has been used to refer both to the household and to factions within a dominant household, this definition has led to confusion. Al-Jabarti referred to the factions as ‘ashira or qabila, thereby differentiating the larger entity of the household from the smaller factions formed within it. Differentiating households from factions and assigning them different words in Arabic allows us to be more precise in our analysis of the household.

Another difficulty, however, is that the word bayt has also been used simultaneously to define both the Mamluk system as a household-based
system of power and also as the households and families that made up this system. For the purpose of clarifying these terms and differentiating the various elements of the Mamluk system from each other, we should recognize the various overlapping meanings of the word bayt as house, household, and family. Thus, because the same word is used for these different forms and structures, the meaning of the word bayt depends on the context in which it is used. For example, the most comprehensive meaning of bayt is house, the household-based political system of the eighteenth-century composed largely of Mamluks who challenged the Ottoman administration for political and military power and control of the country’s revenues. This system was composed of multiple households, individually known also as bayt, with each led by a dominant bey that vied with each other and the Ottomans for hegemony. There were various households competing for dominance until the rise of the Qazdughli around mid-century and its consolidation of power around ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir and his successors.

We can conceptualize Mamluk households as composed of parent households presided over by dominant beys and including slaves, manumitted slaves, and followers. As the slaves were manumitted and took their places within the Mamluk hierarchy, they formed households of their own. For example, the Qazdughli bayt under ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir would have included his own household plus all those of the beys, amirs, katkhudas, kashifs, and other followers that together made up the entity known as the Qazdughli. It is only at this time that bayt could be defined in quasi-monarchical or dynastic terms as a house, such as the Ottoman or the Bourbon or even the Mamluk sultanate. This is because ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir consolidated power in one house and established a clear line of succession to his mamluk, Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab. After the untimely death of Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab in 1775, power remained within the dominant Qazdughli household but was shared in a sometimes fragile alliance by three of the dominant amirs: Murad Bey, who was Muhammad Bey Abu al-Dhahab’s favorite mamluk; Ibrahim Bey al-Kabir; and Isma’il Bey. Thus we can see clear political factions emerging within the Qazdughli household around these three men. The factions emerged most strongly in 1786, when the Porte sent Hasan Pasha to Egypt to discipline the unruly Mamluks and restart the flow of revenue to the central government. The
pasha’s ally was Isma‘il, who was left in charge of the country when Hasan Pasha returned to Istanbul after a year. Isma‘il’s opponents, Murad Bey and Ibrahim Bey, had retreated to Upper Egypt when Hasan Pasha led Ottoman forces into the country. They bided their time for four years before moving against Isma‘il, whom they defeated and sent into exile. Murad Bey and Ibrahim Bey continued to share power as the dominant beys of the Qazdughli household until the French invasion of 1798.

The word bayt has also been used, however, not only to refer to the household but also to the family. Ayalon has pointed out that al-Damurdashi and Nicolas Turc used the word ‘ila (colloquial for ‘a‘ila or family) simultaneously with bayt, thereby blurring the distinction between family and household.7 This is not just a linguistic problem but a conceptual one as well. In Britain and France during the same period, there were similar difficulties in distinguishing between family and household. Jean-Louis Flandrin in Families in Former Times researched English and French dictionaries of the period for the meaning of family, which he found to be synonymous with household.8 According to Flandrin, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries the concept of family straddled the notions of co-residence and kinship. Thus a family could be an assemblage of residents of the same dwelling including both kin and nonkin such as servants or a set of kinfolk who did not live together, that is, an extended family composed of brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Other definitions of family were narrower. For example, Samuel Johnson in his 1755 dictionary defined family as only those who lived in the same house and gave as a synonym household.9 Abel Boyer’s Dictionnaire royal françois [sic] et anglois [sic] gave as the definition of famille “all those who lived in the same house, under the same head” and listed as English equivalents family and household.10 The French Dictionnaire de l’Academie of 1694 defined famille as “Toutes les personnes qui vivent dans une même maison, sous un même chef.”11 Flandrin’s definition is important because it emphasizes the fact that all those residing in the same house were subject legally and by social convention to the male head of the household. As Flandrin has written, “It was still the case in the second half of the eighteenth century, both in France and in England, and whatever the social milieu concerned, that the members of the family were held to include both the kinfolk residing in
the house and the domestic servants, in so far as they were all subject to the same head of the family."\footnote{12}

Edward Lane’s monumental Arabic-English Lexicon, which was first published in the nineteenth century, includes words for household and family that are also seemingly interchangeable.\footnote{13} His definition of ‘a‘ila is the following: “a family or household; a man’s ‘a‘ila is the persons whom he feeds, nourishes, or sustains; or the persons who dwell with him, and whose expenses are incumbent on him, as his young man, or slave, his wife, and his young child.”\footnote{14} In both cases, Flandrin and Lane blur the distinction between family and household, which they conceptualize as all those for whom the male head of household is responsible.

In the early modern period, it seems that family and household were interchangeable, particularly when kin and servants resided with the head of the household, his wife, and his children.\footnote{15} Peter Laslett and Richard Wall in their now classic Household and Family in Past Time, published in 1972, defined the family as a co-resident domestic group.\footnote{16} In their definition, the members of the family included a man and his wife, their children, all resident relatives connected by blood or marriage, and finally the servants, all of whom were subject to the authority of the head of the household.\footnote{17} In defining the household, Laslett and Wall noted that in ancient English, the word house meant a physical structure as well as a line of people related to each other who did not necessarily reside with each other.

Since political households are the larger units within which families exist, it is important to distinguish between family and household, particularly in the case of the Mamluks, who had multiple wives, concubines, domestic and military slaves, and manumitted slaves and servants, not all of whom resided with him in the same house. Because the households were political, men and women could claim membership in a particular household such as the Qazdughli without actually residing with its head.

Laslett and Wall’s definition of family and household are the most meaningful for scholars attempting to understand premodern elite households such as the Mamluk because it identifies the family, including the parents and their children, as the building block of the household, which also includes kin and servants. Thus all residents including kin and nonkin were subject to the authority of the head of the family.
Laslett discounted the importance of co-residence in defining the household, which corresponds closely to the structure of the Mamluk household since the wife or wives, children, concubines, manumitted *mamluks*, dependents, clients, and kin of the head of the household did not necessarily live with him. Laslett’s definition corresponds closely with the eighteenth-century Mamluk household because it is appropriate for political or dynastic households in which persons are linked to the household head in various ways including kinship and clientage, although they may have dwellings of their own. Manumitted *mamluks* who formed new households and married established their own residences and purchased their own *mamluks*. Yet they continued to be part of the parent household and remained linked to their master/patron as *walid* to *walad* (father to son).

For example, wealthy beys and amirs were known to construct separate houses for their wives. Al-Jabarti’s obituary of Nafisa al Bayda, wife of ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir and wife of Murad Bey, related that ‘Ali Bey built her a house in the most prestigious neighborhood of the time, Azbakiyya, and resided there with her. While Nafisa continued to reside in the Azbakiyya house after her marriage to Murad Bey, he spent most of his time in his sumptuous palace at Giza, which he confiscated from the defeated amir Isma’il Bey and rebuilt and decorated. According to al-Jabarti, Murad rarely crossed the Nile to the east bank where Nafisa continued to live, yet she was his wife and continued to be part of his household. Before marrying Nafisa, Murad had married Fatima, the widow of the amir Salih Bey, and lived with her in her deceased husband’s house. Because Mamluk households certainly encompassed more than those persons housed under one roof, it can be defined in the following way: all those linked to the head of the household through slavery, service, marriage, or kinship (real or fictive); all those for whom the master has a financial responsibility or who are dependent on him for sustenance, but who do not necessarily reside with him. Thus the household was the larger entity since it encompassed all those linked to the master but not necessarily residing with him, while the family was the smaller entity that was constructed through marriage and concubinage and reproduced itself primarily through slavery.

There is also a materiality about the Mamluk household that should not be overlooked. As in Old English, which defined house as a physical
structure as well as a line of people related to each other, the Arabic word *bayt* also means house as a dwelling as well as a lineage system. Ayalon, writing about the differences between the classic Mamluk sultanate and the resurgent Mamluk polity of the eighteenth century, noted two important differences: the use of kinship terms to express vertical and horizontal relationships among the Mamluks and the importance of the *bayt maftuh*, or open house, which belonged to the head of a powerful Mamluk faction and served as the focal point and center of activity for his family and dependents. As Ayalon described it, it was “the headquarters in which assemblies and meetings were held, schemes and conspiracies hatched and from which orders for action were sent. . . . For the family it was the apple of the eye, and for the enemy (or enemies) the main target for destruction.”

Al-Jabarti described the house of ‘Ali Bey al-Hindi as a vast structure where he was able to assemble the followers and *mamluks* of the *kashifs* who had been killed in one of the internecine battles that punctuated the eighteenth century. Also, in his obituary of Ibrahim Bey, al-Jabarti said, “His house at Darb al-Gamamiz was open day and night.” As a commentary on the power that Mamluks were able to wield by the first half of the eighteenth century and the role of the house as a symbol of that power, the following story from al-Jabarti is instructive. In his obituary of the amir Isma’il Bey, al-Jabarti recounted the tale of a woman from Sharqiyya province whose cow was stolen while she slept. When she awoke and could not find the cow, she cried out that she would certainly go to Isma’il Bey and ask if it were possible to steal under his government. According to al-Jabarti, gaining access to Isma’il Bey was easy since he did not turn away any complainant or supplicant who appealed to him for assistance. The woman presented herself to Isma’il Bey, and he ordered that a letter be written to the governor of the province asking him to investigate the theft. He then ordered a military officer to take the letter to the governor and accompany the woman back to her village.

In important ways, the house as a structure defined the household as a concept and a system. The beys at the pinnacle of the system were known by the location and size of their houses. A manumitted *mamluk* was fully adult and responsible when he split off from the parent household and moved to his own house with a wife, slaves, and servants of his own. When
the head of a powerful household died or was ousted from power in one of the internecine battles that marked the century, his house was taken over by his successor as were his widow and concubines. Thus, whether they lived under the roof of the head of the household or not, his dwelling formed the centerpiece of their daily lives, linked the various members to each other, and served as the material expression of their rank and status in society.

The Mamluk Family Form

The work of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure traced the changes in European marriage patterns, family formation, and household types over time beginning in the early modern period. The results of their research into family forms were published initially in Laslett and Wall's *Household and Family in Past Time*. The most useful components of the research for historians and social scientists investigating non-European families and households are the methodology and the categories established by the Cambridge Group for classifying different types of family forms rather than for demographic purposes and family reconstitution for the periods studied.

One reason why Laslett and Wall is difficult to use for these purposes in the case of Mamluk Egypt or the Ottoman provinces before the mid-nineteenth century is the absence of the kinds of archival material used for demographic purposes by historians of the European family. These include primarily records of birth, marriage, and death as well as various other legal and institutional documents. The value to demographers, historians, and social scientists of records pertaining to birth, marriage, and death is that information about women and children is included; that researchers are able to come to certain conclusions about infant mortality, age at marriage, family size, mortality rates, and average age at death; and that scholars can trace the changes in the family and household over time. Because of the lack of such information in the Ottoman Empire until the censuses of 1885 and 1905 and in Egypt until the census of 1848, family reconstitution following the model of the Cambridge Group was not possible. The Ottoman Empire undertook regular cadastral surveys but on the basis of households, not individuals, for taxation and conscription purposes. Also,
the surveys did not count women and children. Thus, until the nineteenth century, there was no tradition of recording vital events and there were no centralized birth, death, or marriage records. Nevertheless, researchers of the Ottoman family have been creative in their use of court archives including religious endowments (*waqf*, sing.; *awqaf*, pl.), marriage records, dowries, property transfers, wills, and records pertaining to guardianship and divorce.

Another problem associated with the use of methods and categories devised for research on the European family is one that is connected to the periods being studied by European as opposed to Mamluk-era scholars. In general, the Cambridge Group was investigating the European family during the early modern period when monogamy was firmly established among the elite and household-based political structures were declining or had disappeared. By the eighteenth century in Western Europe, strong states under centralized, dynastic monarchies had emerged to supplant a decentralized political system of weak kings and feudal princes vying for power. Increasingly centralized and bureaucratic states were developing national armies, a unified system of law and justice, and tax collection by agents of the state. Even earlier, by the eleventh century, polygamy was disappearing through the intervention of the Catholic Church and the reforms of Pope Gregory VII (1073–85). The nuclear family and the nuclear family household were increasingly the norm even for the wealthy, unlike the eighteenth-century Mamluk households in which polygamy and concubinage were the norm. Mamluks households are reminiscent of those in an earlier period of Western European history, namely the feudal period. However, although it may be tempting to classify the Mamluk-era polity as feudal, we should resist the temptation to do so. A strong, centralized, and bureaucratic state existed in the form of the Ottoman Empire of which Egypt was nominally a province. The Mamluk resurgence was based on the construction of households through which power was organized and expressed with the goal of usurping control and tax revenue from the Ottoman administration and military corps in Egypt. Also, while the feudal European elite were based in the countryside, the Mamluks were an urban elite headquartered in Cairo, even though the tax revenues that were supposed to flow to Istanbul and were diverted by the Mamluks came primarily from rural tax farms.
Although the various categories of family forms were devised by the Cambridge Group to describe the early modern and modern European family, these categories can be adapted and applied to the Mamluk household with useful results. Doing so not only expands our understanding of family formation among the Mamluks but also brings the Mamluk family and household into the realm of history rather than relegating them to the ahistorical category of Middle Eastern or Islamic exceptionalism.

The categories devised by the Cambridge Group to differentiate and classify family forms include the simple or nuclear family consisting of a married couple, a married couple with children, and a widowed person with offspring. This form is also known as a conjugal family unit (CFU). Together the members form a nuclear family household. Another category is the extended family household, which consists of a CFU with the addition of one or more relatives other than children living together, possibly with servants as well. A multiple or joint family household consists of two or more conjugal family units connected by kinship or by marriage. A multiple or joint family household extends laterally when it includes brothers, sisters, or cousins of the head of the household or his wife. Although the multiple or joint family form is based on monogamous marriage, it can be adapted to describe the Mamluk family/household. In other words, among the Mamluks, the lateral extension of the family would include the wives and concubines of the household head in addition to his family members such as brothers, sisters, or cousins.

Unlike the European multiple family household, the Mamluk household could contain up to four conjugal family units consisting of one man, his wives up to the legal limit of four, and their offspring and any number of nonconjugal family units composed of his concubines and their offspring. Also included in the household would be relatives including brothers and sisters as well as domestic slaves and household servants. The multiple family household would have to include the master’s concubines who bore his children. Even though there was no marriage contract between the master and his concubine, the master-concubine relationship was recognized by the law, which required the master to maintain his concubine and the children he sired with her. All children that resulted from this relationship and were recognized by him as his own were born free and inherited
shares of his property along with the children of his legal wives. For reasons already explained, the members of the household do not necessarily reside together. Each wife might have her own house, for example, and a man’s concubines might be housed separately from him and his wives. In other words, the Mamluk family household was a collection of nuclear families created through marriage and concubinage that did not necessarily reside with each other but were linked to each other through a complex web of relationships including marriage, birth, kinship (fictive and real), slavery, clientage, and servitude.

**Constructing Kin**

The building block of the Mamluk political household was the family as described above, which was constructed primarily through slavery, not through biological reproduction. The Mamluks created and enlarged their households and reproduced their power primarily through the acquisition, training, and manumission of slaves. The primary purpose of Mamluk marriages was not to reproduce children and heirs but to create alliances and kinship networks that enhanced the system’s stability and cohesion. Mamluk marriages did produce children, but male offspring generally were prohibited from inheriting Mamluk status or offices. Female children could retain their status through marriage to their father’s favored mamluks or allies.

Kinship construction began among men during their period of enslavement and continued through their lives after manumission. The strongest bond among male slaves was that of khushdashiyya, which referred to the horizontal link between men who were enslaved and manumitted together. Men who recognized other men as their khushdash were acknowledging the strong ties between them that were supposed to last for a lifetime. The most important vertical link between men was the one between the master (ustadh) and his mamluks, which was also maintained after manumission. The chronicles, travel literature, and the *Description de l’Egypte* abound in descriptions of the deference and respect due to a master from his mamluks as well as the proper way to behave toward the master.

The Mamluk system that was constituted out of slavery appropriated to itself kinship terms to describe the relationship between and among men.
For example, *akh*, or brother, was used as a synonym for *khushdash*. A master referred to his *mamluk* s as his sons (*awlad, sing. walad*) and they referred to him as father (*walid*). A man could refer to the *khushdashun* of his master as his uncles (*‘amam, sing. ‘amm*) and the patron of his patron as his grandfather (*jadd*). Earlier generations were regarded as the fore-fathers or ancestors (*aslaf*) of the present generation. David Ayalon has noted that these kinship terms were not used during the classical period of the Mamluk sultanate but only during the later period of the Mamluk resurgence. This is evidence that the creation of a fictive kinship system was a conscious strategy on the part of the Mamluks to create solidarity by constructing a fictive family.

The links between male slaves that were transformed in part through the language of kinship into a fictive family did not prevent the fraying of those bonds and the betrayal of one “brother” by another or a “father” by his “son.” In 1773, for example, the dominant amir in Egypt, ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir, was betrayed by his “son,” Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab, whom ‘Ali Bey raised in his household and promoted to increasingly powerful positions until finally, in 1764, in a ceremony at the citadel, ‘Ali Bey elevated him to the rank of bey. Then, in 1773, ‘Ali Bey made his fateful move against the Ottoman Empire. In a bid for independence from Istanbul and control over the eastern Mediterranean, he led his army into Palestine. Muhammad Bey, for reasons still unknown, declined to support his “father,” who was grievously wounded on campaign in the desert and died later at his house in Azbakiyya. Muhammad Bey, previously designated by ‘Ali Bey as his successor, took over the reins of power while acknowledging the Ottoman sultan as his suzerain.

In the past, scholars have focused exclusively or primarily on the male slaves who constructed and dominated the revived Mamluk polity of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Uncovering evidence of internecine rivalries, betrayals, and rebellions by men like Muhammad Bey against their “brothers” or “fathers,” these scholars developed a particular historical perspective that emphasized the Mamluk slave system’s instability, lack of cohesion, and tendency toward fragmentation. Male slaves were the universal historical subject, and conclusions about the Mamluk system, the households, and their composition were based predominantly on
the life experiences of men as recorded in the chronicles and documentary archives of the period.

For example, as in his study of the origins of the beys from the ascendency of ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir to the 1798 French invasion, Piterberg demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of beys had slave origins. Piterberg argues that the eighteenth-century Mamluk system relied primarily on the recruitment of slaves who were primarily Georgian in ethnicity. Piterberg’s study, like others before it, uses male slaves only to determine the composition of the household, a subject of recent dispute among some Mamluk historians. Certain assumptions about the household flow from this perspective on Mamluk history, such as those mentioned above, while certain questions about the household remain unasked and unanswered: Were the women in the Mamluk households of slave origin? If the women in the household were not slaves but were drawn as marriage partners from the Egyptian elite, what effect if any would this have had on the way the household was constructed and reproduced itself? Were women merely appendages to male power or were they full members of the household who made certain contributions to its continuity, longevity, and reproduction?

It is clear that the view from the other side of the gender divide reveals a different if complementary history, and the reasons why that is so are quite complex. First, there is the need to establish that the women in the households of the beys and amirs were slaves and to demonstrate why their slave origins mattered in terms of a household’s internal cohesion, stability, and reproduction. Subsequently, as women strengthened their position within the household through marriage, the accumulation of private wealth, and the construction of their own networks of manumitted slaves and clients, it will be clear that these strategies for personal survival and well-being had reciprocal positive effects on the household as a political system.

Evidence for the slave origins of the women of the Mamluk households comes from an analysis of eighteenth-century religious endowment deeds (waqfyyat) preserved in Cairo’s Ministry of Awqaf as well as the ministry’s index to the waqfyyat, which shows that women made up 24.1 percent of the total number of donors. This figure relates only to the waqfyyat in the ministry. There are additional waqfyyat located in other archives in Cairo including the Dar al-Watha’iq al-Qawmiyya. Of the female donors, 54 of
126 can be identified as belonging to the Mamluk elite through their relationship to males belonging either to the military regiments (ojaqs) or to one of the beylical households. Of these, 43 can be identified as former slaves and only 11 as freeborn daughters and a sister of Mamluks on the basis of their names. Women of slave origin are identifiable by the appellation bint 'abd Allah (daughter of God’s servant) and the use of the word ma’tuqa, or freed. A woman was called bint 'abd Allah because she did not have a Muslim father and it was considered shameful to be without a father. On the other hand, the freeborn daughter of a Mamluk grandee would be named this way: Al-Sitt ‘A’isha Hanim Bint al-Amir Ridwan Agha Ta’ifat Gamaliyan.34 ‘A’isha is identified as the daughter of Ridwan, commander of the Gonulluyan military corps known in Egypt as the Gamaliyan or Cameliers.

Of the 43 women who can be identified as former slaves through their names in the waqfiyyat, 27 are called al-bayda (the white), indicating Circassian or Georgian origin; two are identified as nonwhite—al-sawda (the black) and al-samra (the brown), indicating African origin—and 14 have no designation as to color. One of the women of African origin is identified as al-Hajja Maryam Khatun al-Samra, ma’tuqat al-Sitt Khadija Khatun Bint ‘Abd Allah al-Bayda, ma’tuqat al-Amir Mustafa Bey Shahin. Translated, her name means the following: al-Hajja Maryam Khatun, the brown, the freed slave of al-Sitt Khadija Khatun, (who was) the freed slave of the amir Mustafa Bey Shahin.35 In this case, Maryam was the freed sub-Saharan African slave of a woman who was herself the freed white slave of an amir.

As these figures show, the overwhelming majority of women in this sample had origins as slaves and were Caucasian in ethnicity. These findings for women support the evidence amassed by Piterberg for the slave origins and Caucasian ethnicity of the men in the Mamluk households. As for the freeborn women, it is important to note that they were all daughters of Mamluks; none were Egyptians from the merchant/’ulama class. This finding is highly suggestive. It indicates that the Mamluk grandees considered concubinage and marriage as part of a political strategy aimed at strengthening the links between the members of the household and thereby consolidating power. It is also clear from a reading of men’s and women’s waqfiyyat that the Mamluk elite, both male and female, considered itself as a ruling class/ caste. Thus the importation of slaves and marriage to
members of the same ethnic group should be seen as strategies to mark and preserve the difference between the elite and the Egyptian population and to provide internal cohesion. This strategy is illustrated by the stipulation in the waqfiyyat of Khadiga Qadin, mentioned previously, that set aside funds to purchase a female slave from Georgia, where Khadiga Qadin originated. Once purchased, the female slave would be manumitted and married by the administrator of Khadiga’s husband’s religious trust. As a freedwoman and a convert to Islam, she would become the administrator of Khadiga’s own religious trust. Through this stipulation, Khadiga was attempting to ensure that after her death, a husband and wife, both manumitted slaves from Georgia, would manage the trusts of herself and her husband. Khadiga’s stipulation exemplifies the way that slavery, manumission, and Georgian-Mamluk identity melded to create an ethnically distinct ruling class and the strategies this class devised to reproduce itself in power.

Although the Mamluk households were headed by men, as was customary among other elite and nonelite Egyptians of this period and in early modern European households as well, women were members of the household and contributed to its political and economic viability in important ways. Although most of the scholarly literature to date has emphasized the tendencies of the households to fragment and dissolve, the centrifugal pressures produced powerful centripetal forces as well. Marriage and nonmarital sexual unions or concubinage were two of these, both requiring the participation if not the acquiescence of women. While men could strengthen the links between themselves through the construction of fictive kinship, the creation of a family required the marriage of a man and a woman who, very often, were both manumitted slaves of the same master. Thus the fictive link of father and son was strengthened by the actual bonds of kinship created through marriage.

**Marriage among the Mamluks**

Mamluk marriages were political affairs whose primary aims were to bind members of the same household to each other and to expand its power and influence. As al-Jabarti and the religious endowment deeds (waqfiyyat) demonstrate, heads of households arranged marriages between their
former slaves or between their favorites and their own relatives including daughters and sisters. The names of women recorded in their religious endowment deeds provide a genealogy of the donor that gives important information about their sexual and marital history. Consider the following example: “Al-Sitt Mahbuba Khatun Bint ‘Abd Allah al-Bayda ma’tugat Ibrahim Bey al-Kabir wa zawjat Isma’il Bey Kashif ma’tuq Ibrahim Bey al-Kabir.” Mahbuba, the former slave (ma’tuqa) of Ibrahim Bey al-Kabir, was the wife (zawja) of Isma’il Bey Kashif, also a former slave (ma’tuq) of Ibrahim Bey al-Kabir, who arranged their marriage and provided a dowry (mahr) for his former slave Mahbuba.36

The consolidation of power in the Qazdughli bayt was the result not only of the elimination of the household’s rivals through assassination or exile but also through marriage alliances. Ibrahim Katkhuda, the architect of the Qazdughli ascendancy, married his former slave, al-Sitt ‘A’isha Qadin bint ‘Abd Allah al-Bayda, to his favorite and successor ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir. After ‘Ali Bey’s death, his successor, Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab, married ‘A’isha Qadin, who as ‘Ali Bey’s first wife was his senior widow. Muhammad Bey also arranged marriages for the members of his household. He married his sister, Zulaykha Khatun, and the freed slave of his master, Amina Khatun, to his favorite, Ibrahim Bey al-Kabir. Muhammad Bey gave his freed slave, ‘Arifa Qadin Bint ‘Abd Allah al-Bayda, to Ayyub Bey al-Kabir and another of his sisters to Yusuf Bey when he was raised to amir. Later Ibrahim Bey al-Kabir gave his sister to his favorite, Ibrahim Bey al-Saghir (the younger).37

Married women served to legitimize the succession of men to power, usually through remarriage to their husband’s successor or to another Mamluk within the same household. Such was the case when ‘A’isha Qadin married Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab after the death of her husband ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir. In the first half of the eighteenth century, al-Jabarti recorded a case concerning ‘Ali Bey Zulfikar of the Faqari bayt who was the former mamluk and treasurer of his master, Zulfikar Bey. He was also the khushdash of ‘Uthman Bey Zulfikar. When Zulfikar Bey was murdered, ‘Ali was elevated to the rank of bey and married Zulfikar’s widow.38 The relationship between these men was forged not just through the shared experience of slavery, manumission, and service to the same master but
also through marriages going back to the time of Isma'il Bey and his son Iwaz Bey, one of the few recorded natural sons of an amir to join the ranks of the Mamluks. Iwaz Bey arranged the marriage of his daughter to one of his former *mamluks*, Yusuf Bey. Later she married Salih Kashif, who was part of the household of ‘Uthman Bey Zulficar who was the *khushdash* of ‘Ali Bey Zulfikar. The murder of Zulficar Bey set in motion the final defeat of the Qasimi *bayt*, which organized the killing, and paved the way for the ascendance of the Qazdughli.

According to al-Jabarti, whose chronicle records the marriages and remarriages of the amirs and their former *mamluks*, the tendency of the amirs to marry the widows of their predecessors or their deceased rivals was particularly pronounced among the Qazdughlis. He said, “The *mamluks* of the Qazdughlis marry their widows and establish themselves in their houses.” A case in point comes from the life of Ibrahim Katkhuda, the architect of the Qazdughli rise to power. After the death of Muhammad Shalibi al-Sabunji, Ibrahim appropriated his house at Azbakiyya and married Muhammad Shalibi’s widow to his treasurer. When his treasurer died, Ibrahim married the widow to Husayn Agha, whom he named *kashif* of Mansura. Al-Jabarti wrote of Ibrahim Katkhuda that he married many of his *mamluks* to the widows of amirs who died or who were killed in Mamluk infighting and settled them in the homes of the deceased. Thus long-term survival for the Mamluks was not only a matter of success in the armed conflicts that marked the period but also of marriage and legitimization.

The life of Shawikar Qadin, who began her life in Cairo as the favorite concubine of one of the most powerful amirs of the time, ‘Uthman Katkhuda, demonstrates that women not only played an important role in legitimizing the succession of men to power but that they also became living symbols of lineage continuity. Shawikar’s life and marriages spanned the crucial period of time when the Qazdughli *bayt* was emerging as the most powerful household among the various Mamluks. She was the consort, wife, and widow of the men who laid the foundations of Qazdughli power, including ‘Uthman Katkhuda and Ibrahim Katkhuda, and she survived them both. Shawikar, like other Mamluk wives and widows, provided through their longevity and multiple marriages important elements...
of cohesion and continuity within their households. Thus she and other Mamluk women should be regarded as the female counterparts of the male *aslaf*, or ancestors, of the Qazdughli *bayt*.

During the period of the Mamluk sultanate, women played a similar role but with an important difference. According to Carl F. Petry, women became “living symbols of stability who might survive several generations of men cut down in their prime” and who often presided over their houses as dowagers.42 In the period of the Mamluk revival, unlike the previous era, Mamluk widows were not allowed to become dowagers because they were not allowed to remain widows for very long. Women such as Shawikar could become living symbols of lineage continuity but through multiple marriages, not through widowhood. Undoubtedly this was because of the need of the eighteenth-century Mamluks to legitimize themselves and reproduce their power from generation to generation and also to make sure that a woman’s property stayed within the same household and was not carried off through marriage to a rival household.

When a widow remarried, she carried with her to her new marriage the property she owned outright as well as any property she might have inherited from her deceased husband. In addition, a woman might be the administrator (*nazira*) of her husband’s religious endowment (*waqf*), which gave her control over the disposition of the property as well as an income from the trust. Remarriage within the same household served not only to provide a somewhat orderly succession to power but also to maintain property within the same household. This was an important consideration in the zero-sum game of Mamluk politics. Mamluk women, as freedwomen and converts to Islam, enjoyed the same property rights that Islamic law guaranteed to freeborn Muslim women. As we shall see, Mamluk women used these rights to buy property and invest in Cairo’s commercial economy, in the process amassing estates that in some cases rivaled those of well-to-do merchants of the period.

Mamluk women’s access to money and property was contingent on their belonging to a household as a concubine or wife. As a concubine, a status regulated by Islamic law, it was the man’s responsibility to provide support for her and her children. As a wife, she was entitled to a dowry and to support for herself and her children. As a widow, she was entitled to her
share of her deceased husband’s estate. Through a series of multiple marriages, a woman like Shawikar could accumulate considerable assets that she could increase through the buying and selling of commercial real estate.

A Mamluk woman’s rank and status were, therefore, linked to her membership in a household and to Islamic law, which gave her certain rights, particularly property rights. Women were important in the construction of alliances through marriage or concubinage. They could also enhance their standing within the household through the construction of patronage networks of slaves and manumitted slaves. Evidence of women’s ownership of slaves comes from the chronicles and from women’s religious endowment deeds (waqfyyat) in which women routinely named their slaves among their heirs and in some cases as the administrator (nazira) of the religious endowments (waqfs) after their deaths. For example, Shawikar Qadin stipulated in her waqf that after her death and the deaths of her children and grandchildren, her freed slave Mahbuba Bint ‘Abd Allah al-Bayda should become the nazira. Mahbuba eventually assumed this post according to the waqfyyat, which noted her acting as administrator in the exchange of a piece of property in Shawikar’s waqf. This is but one example of how Mamluk women used their wealth to benefit other women, including their female slaves.

Women like Shawikar purchased and freed female slaves not only to fill certain positions in their households but also to arrange marriages between their slaves and the freed male slaves of their husbands or other amirs. In the process, they created patronage networks such as those created by men with the same aims, to create bonds between the patron and her former slaves that extended beyond the period of servitude and to enhance the power and influence of herself and her household. As al-Jabarti observed of Jalila Khatun, “Most of the women of the amirs were among her slaves.” By placing women as concubines or wives in the households of various amirs, the patron had a constant source of information about affairs of those households that could be useful to her and to her husband.

However, the fundamental reason why women were able to achieve high standing, wealth, and a considerable degree of autonomy in Mamluk society was because of the household system of politics that characterized the Mamluk resurgence. The fact that women were able to achieve higher
status and more autonomy in political systems in which households were important loci of power appears to be a cross-cultural phenomenon noted and analyzed by historians of the Ottoman Empire and societies in Western Europe.

Suzanne F. Wemple, writing about Western Europe’s first feudal age, which occurred after the fall of Charlemagne’s empire in the ninth century until the mid-eleventh century, has shown that women possessed power and autonomy as members of families that exercised power and authority in the absence of a strong, centralized state. In a political landscape of small principalities, or seignories, where authority extended only as far as a feudal lord could enforce his will, the women of these households could flourish. The conditions that allowed women to attain positions of power and accumulate wealth during this period derived from the nature of feudal relations, which were based on kinship, the lack of distinction between private and public authority, and their right to own and inherit property at a time when land was the basis of power. As Wemple has written,

Endowed with their own property and rights to inheritance, secure in their marital status, women were equipped to act with power and decision in the fluid society of the first feudal age. Out of the ruins of the Carolingian state, the family emerged as the most stable and effective element in a troubled world. Profiting from the almost unlimited power of their families, women for two centuries were able to play a central political role. Since land has become the only source of power, by exercising their property rights, secured in the Carolingian period, a growing number of women appear in the tenth and eleventh centuries as chatelaines, mistresses of landed property and castles with the attendant rights of justice and military command, proprietors of churches, and participants in both secular and ecclesiastical assemblies.

Writing about women in prerevolutionary France some five hundred years later, Sarah Maza has shown how women in the royal court, in fact the household of the king, were able to attain rank, wealth, and power because of their familial or sexual relationship to the monarch. Maza argued that in the transition from prerevolutionary monarchy to republic, there was an ideological transformation as well, represented by scurrilous
attacks on public women in the royal courts, particularly the wives and mistresses of the kings. These attacks were the harbinger of the exclusion of women from public life in the postrevolutionary period. Maza focused on the court of Louis XVI and a scandal called The Diamond Necklace Affair. At the heart of the scandal were questions about the reputation of the king’s wife, Queen Marie Antoinette, and allegations of sexual misconduct. The details of the affair are relatively simple and involve the purchase of an expensive diamond necklace by Cardinal Louis de Rohan for Queen Marie Antoinette in an attempt by the cardinal to gain high political office. After having met a woman he believed to be the queen in the gardens of Versailles, Rohan turned over the expensive necklace to a man purporting to be the queen’s valet. In reality, the “queen” was an imposter, a prostitute named Nicole Le Guay, discovered, hired, and carefully coached for the occasion by a swindler named Jeanne de La Motte and her husband, Count Nicolas de La Motte, who masterminded the entire affair. The necklace was promptly taken apart and the individual diamonds were sold on the black markets of Paris and London. The king’s decision to allow the miscreants to be prosecuted by the judges and lawyers of the parlement, rather than settling the matter privately, unleashed a torrent of abuse and slanderous allegations directed at the queen and her alleged misconduct, although there was clearly no connection between the queen and the parties involved.

Mining this story for meaning in the context of the dwindling days of the French monarchy, Maza concluded that it represented an attack on the public woman and the corrupting effects of female power on all of society. Particularly condemned in the texts written during and after the affair was the presence of female sexuality in the political realm. Maza noted that the attacks on Marie Antoinette’s reputation were a continuation of similar critiques leveled at the mistresses of Louis XV, Madame de Pompadour and Madame du Barry. Maza argued that the attacks on women who had power and influence at court because of their sexual relationships with the monarchs took place in an ideological climate in which the overlapping of female sexuality and political activity had become a central metaphor for political decay. As Maza has written,
Metaphors of gender and sexuality should figure prominently in any interpretation of the ideological transition from Old Regime to revolutionary political culture. The 1780s and the 1790s in France, and later periods throughout Europe, witnessed the gradual demise of royal and aristocratic courts modeled on households—in which female rulers, relatives, and mistresses played a recognized (if limited) role—and the ascendency of entirely masculine representative bodies. In other words, the male-female world of familial and sexual bonds represented by Versailles was overpowered by the all-male contractual universe of the revolutionary assemblies.48

Leslie Peirce in her study of women in the household of the Ottoman sultan between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries analyzed the political dynamics and structure of the royal harem that allowed royal women to achieve power and influence that extended beyond the harem walls.49 The key institution was the sultan’s household of which the harem was a part. In the hierarchy of the harem, the mother of the sultan (valide sultan), as well as his favorite concubine (qadin or khatun) or wife were at the top. Also important were the sultan’s sisters and daughters, whose importance increased when they made marriages to men of power and distinction. As with the court of the French Bourbons, the royal households represented the overlapping of sexuality with politics, and women with a kinship or sexual relationship to the ruler were in a position to attain influence, power, and wealth.

For example, Sultan Suleiman’s wife, Hurrem, a slave of Polish origin, had considerable political influence in the royal court that she achieved and was able to wield because of her relationship to the ruler. Suleiman broke with precedent when he married Hurrem, his concubine, who became the first slave concubine in Ottoman history to be freed and made a legal wife of the sultan. Hurrem became the sultan’s political confidante and was alleged to have used her influence on him to order the execution of Mustafa, his son by the concubine Mahidervan Khatun. As the oldest of Suleiman’s sons, Mustafa, his putative heir, was the rival of Hurrem’s sons for the succession to sultan. Hurrem, like Marie Antoinette, was not popular with the people, who believed that she had seduced and bewitched the
sultan and who objected to the sultan’s attachment to one woman, which was considered unnatural and harmful.\textsuperscript{50}

In part, the power of Ottoman harem women was derived from the reproductive politics of the era and the practice of open succession or the absence of succession from the sultan to his oldest son. In such a political environment, the mother of the reigning sultan and the mothers of his sons were able to exert influence on the sultan and to become powerful inside the royal court. The financial accounts of the sultan’s household that record the stipends paid to the harem women demonstrate that women at the top of the harem hierarchy were able to acquire vast sums of money that many used in later life to do good works such as the building of mosques or kitchens for feeding the poor.\textsuperscript{51} As Peirce has written, “In a polity such as that of the Ottomans, where the empire was considered the personal domain of the dynastic family, it was natural that important women within the dynastic household—in particular the mother of the reigning sultan—would assume legitimate roles of authority outside the royal household.”\textsuperscript{52}

The thread that connects feudal Europe, prerevolutionary France, the early modern Ottoman Empire, and eighteenth-century Mamluk Egypt is the household as the locus of political power. In these household-based polities, the lines between public and private either were nonexistent or were indistinct to the point that power and female sexuality could overlap. In such households, personal relationships with the monarch or to the household head based on kinship or sexual relations were important avenues to power and influence. As members of such households, women acquired rank, status, and access to wealth. As wives or concubines of powerful heads of households, they were also endowed with legitimacy, authority, and influence that extended beyond the boundaries of the household into the wider society.

Conclusion

Women were members of Mamluk households, although their presence was often overlooked by historians and their contributions generally disregarded. In fact, women were important in enhancing the continuity and stability of a household system that in the past was recognized as inherently
unstable and prone to disintegration. Women were expected to acquiesce to the marital arrangements that were made for them by their masters/patrons in order to create alliances and enhance their power. Marriage and concubinage were central to the Mamluk strategy of constructing real and fictive kinship systems that enhanced the stability and cohesion of their households and the Mamluk system generally. Within the household, women could amass large estates of income-producing property and create pious and socially useful endowments, such as Nafi sa al-Bayda’s *sabil-kuttab* (fountain and Qur’anic school) near the Bab Zuwayla gate, which brought wealth and prestige to their households. Women were also more likely to be living symbols of lineage continuity than men because they tended to outlive their masters and husbands, who either died of natural causes before their usually much younger wives or were killed like ‘Uthman Katkhuda in the internecine warfare that characterized the century. Nafi sa al-Bayda, for example, was a member of the Qazdughli household from the time of ‘Uthman Katkhuda to the era dominated by her husband ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir, and after his death to her second husband, Murad Bey, whose death in 1801 signified the end of the Mamluk period in Egypt. Also, married women served to legitimize the succession of men to power, usually through remarriage to their husband’s successor or to another Mamluk within the same household. This remarriage occurred when the head of the household died or was killed in internecine warfare between the various Mamluk factions.

For the women, their membership in a Mamluk household was the primary means to attaining wealth and status within the household and in the wider society. As converts to Islam after their manumission and upon their legal marriages to Mamluk men, women were entitled to the same rights under the law as freeborn women, which gave them property and other rights, including legal personhood. Also, there was no demarcation between the public and the private spheres, so that family life and political life took place in the same domain. A woman was connected to the public sphere because of the personal, sexual relations between her and the head of the household and through the continuing bonds between her and her former slaves, whose marriages she might have helped to arrange and who became part of her patronage network afterward. As historians, Wemple, Maza, and Peirce describe European and Ottoman court culture and
women who were able to enhance their influence because of kin or sexual ties to powerful men—sultans, kings, or beys. Additionally, women seemed to have more power or influence when power was decentralized as in the household-based politics of the Mamluks rather than in highly centralized, bureaucratic societies with a clearly demarcated public sphere from which women could be excluded.