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"Naught Remains to the Caliph but his Title": Revisiting Abbasid Authority in Mamluk Cairo

With the exception of the brief anomaly of the "caliph-sultan" al-Mustaʿīn billāh (808–16/1406–14),[1] Mamlukists have rightly relegated the status of the Abbasids of Cairo, a line of caliphs largely trotted out from seclusion only to lend religious sanction to official events, to the sidelines of Mamluk history. Despite having lost political and religious significance by the mid-fourteenth century, the Abbasid caliphs of Cairo retained a measure of religious authority and enjoyed the reverence of noteworthy sectors of the Cairene population. Few studies of the period have attempted to consider the residual religious authority of the caliphal institution. Most scholars have focused on how the caliphs served to legitimize the Mamluk position both domestically and beyond its sphere of direct control. By describing infrequently discussed ceremonial functions of the caliphs, the present article hopes to approach an understanding of the revived Abbasid caliphate's significance to the society in which it existed.

Background

Following elaborate investiture ceremonies in Cairo, the Abbasid caliph al-Mustanṣir billāh (659–60/1261–62), followed by his successor al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (661–701/1262–1302), delegated full authority over the affairs of the Muslims to the Mamluk amir Baybars (657–76/1260–77), legitimizing his rule as sultan and granting him legal authority to appoint offices, prosecute holy war against Mongols and Crusaders, and liberate the lands of Islam or conquer new territories under the control of infidels.[2]

I wish to thank R. Stephen Humphreys and Roy P. Mottahedeh for insightful comments and assistance during the conference at which I presented an earlier version of this paper. The remaining faults are my own.

[1]The caliph was briefly named interim sultan in Muḥarram 815/May 1412 until al-Muʾayyad Shaykh seized power six months later. See Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Maʿrifat Duwal al-Mulūk,* ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn and Saʿīd ʿĀshūr (Cairo, 1956–73), 4:1:207–15; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr bi-Abnāʾ al-ʿUmr fī Tārīkh* (Cairo, 1969), 2:506–8; Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1963–72), 13:141–45.

[2]These duties and more are outlined in the investiture document of the caliph al-Mustanṣir. See Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, *Al-Rawḍ al-Zāhir fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Khuwayṭir (Riyadh, 1976), 102–10. For the most extensive treatment of these two investitures and

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Little is known about the *mélange* of social and political pressures that urged Baybars to install an Abbasid scion in Cairo in 1261.[3] We do know that Baybars' actions were acclaimed by most sectors of the population for restoring what the Mongols had disrupted. In addition, the new Mamluk sultan was formally invested as a "partner" of the caliph *(qasīm amīr al-muʾminīn).*[4] In one stroke, Baybars received legitimacy as a ruler over the affairs of Muslims and his brutal betrayal of his predecessor Quṭuz was conveniently forgiven and forgotten. Quṭuz himself had been interested in inviting a candidate to Cairo to invest as Abbasid caliph and was hardly the only political player of the period interested in doing so.[5] Over time, caliphal recognition would allow Mamluk rulers to transcend their lowly original status as slaves in a public culture preoccupied with a leader's lineage and noble descent.

Of course, as destitute refugees of the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258, the first two caliphs had no real base of power in Egypt. It is no surprise, therefore, that in the early incarnation of Mamluk government, the caliph, despite the traditional, albeit ill-defined, prestige and authority of his household in Sunni Islam, had very little to do after bestowing his (partial) religious authority on the Mamluk sultan.

Modern research concludes that the Abbasid caliphs were primarily expected to strengthen the legitimacy of the Mamluk establishment.[6] The very act of re-

their implications to date, see: Stefan Heidemann, *Das Aleppiner Kalifat (A.D. 1261): Vom Ende des Kalifates in Bagdad über Aleppo zu den Restaurationen in Kairo* (Leiden, 1994), 91–107, 177–92.

[3]Students of the period may never fully arrive at a satisfactory understanding of this pressure or convention which drove the popular demand for an unbroken caliphate. See Jonathan Berkey, "Mamluk Religious Policy," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (2009): 7–22; Yaacov Lev, "Symbiotic Relations: Ulama and the Mamluk Sultans," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13, no. 1 (2009): 11.

[4]Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍarah fī Tārīkh Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1967–68), 2:95. On general usage of the title, see Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshá fī Ṣināʿat al-Inshāʾ* (Cairo, 1963), 6:47, 65, 108, 113; Ḥasan al-Bāshah, *Al-Alqāb al-Islāmīyah* (Cairo, 1957), 205–6. On the titulature of Baybars regarding the caliphate, see Denise Aigle, "Les inscriptions de Baybars dans le Bilād al-Šām: Une expression de la légitimité du pouvoir," *Studia Islamica* 97 (2003): 63–66; Reuven Amitai, "Some remarks on the inscription of Baybars at Maqam Nabi Musa," in *Mamluks and Ottomans: Studies in Honour of Michael Winter,* ed. David J. Wasserstein and Ami Ayalon (New York, 2006), 50–51.

[5]On Quṭuz's interest in the Abbasid caliphate, see Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar wa-Ǧāmiʿ al-Ghurar* (Cairo, 1960–92), 8:87. On the various attempts to re-establish a caliphate slightly prior to Baybars, see: Aḥmad Ḥuṭayṭ, *Qaḍāyá min Tārīkh al-Mamālīk al-Siyāsī wa-al-Ḥaḍārī, 648–923 H/1250–1517 M* (Beirut, 2003), 137–38.

[6]For two important studies, see P. M. Holt, "Some Observations on the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate of Cairo," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 67 (1984): 501–2; and Annemarie Schimmel, "Kalif und Kadi im Spätmittelalterlichen Ägypten," *Die Welt des Islams* 24 (1942): 6–26. Sherman Jackson suggested the Abbasid caliphate was not expected to be the sole source of Mamluk legitimacy and could only supplement whatever else Baybars could acquire on his own. See

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establishing a caliphate was also presented as a pious deed of the sultan in the service of a greater Islamdom.[7]

Extant Arabic sources place overwhelming emphasis on the caliph's role in political ceremonies, and while he appeared at said functions most frequently with the four chief qadis of Egypt, he did not share their privileges nor was he consulted often on religious matters. True religious authority remained with the ulama, as it had firmly rested since at least the ninth century. In Mamluk Cairo, caliphs often—but not always—received formal Islamic education, though they were not expected to advise the sultan as readily as the chief qadis.[8]

The true nature of the caliph's significance in the Mamluk regime must be studied in depth. It cannot be forgotten, however, that the chief focus for the caliphate was largely within the sphere of Mamluk ceremonial, where it was confined and jealously guarded by the sultans and their supporters.

Abbasid Prestige in Mamluk Foreign Policy

The caliphate occupied a unique place in Mamluk foreign policy. A resident caliph lent immediate prestige to diplomatic relations with Muslim allies and competitors.[9] In his Mongol policies, Baybars attempted to use the caliph al-Mustanṣir in 659–60/1261 to engage hostile Mongols in Mesopotamia,[10] and a year later, with

Jackson, "The Primacy of Domestic Politics: Ibn Bint al-Aʿazz and the Establishment of Four Chief Judgeships in Mamluk Egypt," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115 (1995): 59.

[7]Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, *Al-Rawḍ,* 112. The notion that a caliphal restoration was depicted as the product of sultanic piety is inherent in Holt's theory that the royal biographies of Baybars were intended to portray him as a model Muslim ruler. See P. M. Holt, "Three Biographies of al-Ẓāhir Baybars," in *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds,* ed. David O. Morgan (London, 1982), 19–29; idem, "The Virtuous Ruler in Thirteenth-Century Mamluk Royal Biographies," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 24 (1980): 27–35. In his study of manuscripts of the popular fourteenth-century *sīrah* of Baybars, Thomas Herzog was struck by their collective silence about the earliest Abbasid investitures in Cairo while depicting instead the last caliph of Baghdad as a bloated despot complicit in his own downfall. This may have reflected the desire of the *sīrah* compilers to promote Baybars' legend as opposed to the historical reality of the Abbasid caliphate in the Mamluk period. See Thomas Herzog, *Geschichte und Imaginaire: Entstehung, Überlieferung und Bedeutung der Sīrat Baibars in ihrem sozio-politischen Kontext* (Wiesbaden, 2006), 331–45.

[8]Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī, *Ḥusn al-Manāqib al-Sirrīyah al-Muntazaʿah min al-Sīrah al-Ẓāhirīyah,* ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Khuwayṭir (Riyadh, 1976), 55; Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt* (Wiesbaden, 1972), 6:318. Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah,* ed. Adnan Darwish (Damascus, 1994), 3:38; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah fī Akhbār al-Miʾah al-Thāminah* (Cairo, 1966–67), 1:159; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafāʾ* (Beirut, 1988), 399.

[9]See Anne F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge, 2008), esp. 15, 52–53, 68–69.

[10]Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, *Al-Rawḍ,* 110–11; Muḥammad ibn Sālim Ibn Wāṣil, *Mufarrij al-Kurūb fī Akhbār Banī Ayyūb,* vol. 6, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām al-Tadmurī (Beirut, 2004), 315; Baybars al-Dawādār

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the caliph al-Ḥākim, the sultan cemented relations with the recently converted Mongols of the Golden Horde. The later Islamic conversion of the Mongol Ilkhanids of Persia did little to ease tensions with the Mamluks. Qalāwūn used his access to the Abbasid caliph to demand obedience from the Ilkhanid Tegüder.[11] In diplomatic correspondence of the early fourteenth century, the Mamluk chancery called upon the Ilkhanids to pay homage to Islam's holiest office and the august pedigree of the house of the Prophet's uncle al-ʿAbbās; but the Ilkhanids, as proud descendants of Chinggis Khan, had ideological pre-commitments of their own.[12]

Moreover, the Mamluks were able to offer distant Sunni rulers the option of receiving formal acknowledgment from the caliph by way of investiture diplomas for the purpose of warding off challengers and securing the confidence of the subject Muslim population. In distant climes such as Delhi and Bengal, declarations of overt religio-political authority from Cairo, as the new heart of the Sunni world, bore great weight amidst local political tumult.[13] Though the Abbasid caliphate was not widely recognized beyond Mamluk borders, several dynasties (many well beyond the reach of Mamluk territory) petitioned the caliphs of Cairo for official recognition. Chief among them were the Arabic-speaking Muzaffarids of Fārs, the sultans of Delhi, and, perhaps in a moment of Ottoman vulnerability against the Central Asian warlord Temür, the sultan Bāyazīd I in Asia Minor.[14]

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al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-Fikrah fī Tārīkh al-Hijrah,* ed. Donald S. Richards (Beirut, 1998), 67; Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī, *Ḥusn,* 44; Mūsá ibn Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mirʾāt al-Zamān* (Hyderabad, 1954), 1:449; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-Durar,* 7:79. For a detailed examination of the campaign, see Heidemann, *Das Aleppiner Kalifat,* 145–56; and Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260–1281* (Cambridge, 1995), 56–63.

[11]Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī, *Kitāb al-Faḍl al-Maʾthūr min Sīrat al-Sulṭān al-Malik al-Manṣūr,* ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 1998), 102–3. See also Adel Allouche, "Tegüder's Ultimatum to Qalawun," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22 (1990), 442; Judith Pfeiffer, "Aḥmad Tegüder's Second Letter to Qalāʾūn (682/1283)," in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods,* ed. Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn (Wiesbaden, 2006), 178; Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology,* 38–44.

[12]Igor de Rachewiltz, "Some Remarks on the Ideological Foundations of Chingis Khan's Empire," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 7 (1973): 23–28.

[13]For details of Indian embassies seeking sanction from the Abbasid caliphs of Cairo, see Shams al-Dīn al-Shujāʿī, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn al-Ṣāliḥī wa-Awlādihi,* ed. B. Schäfer (Wiesbaden, 1977), 1:257–58; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:3:645, 4:2:756, 924–25; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh,* 2:364; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 15:192–93; ʿAlī ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbāʾ al-Ḥaṣr bi-Abnāʾ al-ʿAṣr,* ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1970), 362; Muḥammad Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾiʿ al-Duhūr,* ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafá (Cairo, 1982–84), 3:65. Al-Qalqashandī has also preserved an investiture deed sent to Muẓaffar Shāh of India in the name of the caliph al-Mustaʿīn billāh: *Ṣubḥ,* 10:129–34.

[14]On the Muzaffarids and the Cairo Abbasids, see Maḥmūd Kutubī, *Tārīkh-i Āl-i Muẓaffar* (Tehran, 1985), 159; Stephen Album, "Power and Legitimacy: The Coinage of Mubāriz al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn al-Muẓaffar at Yazd and Kirman," in *Le monde iranien et l'Islam: sociétés et cultures,* ed. J.

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Securing caliphal approval was also a way, in the case of all three, to strengthen relations with the Mamluks, which may have helped secure access to the lucrative trade routes linking India and the Middle East.[15]

The Nature of Abbasid Authority in Mamluk Cairo

Through their years of confinement to the citadel or the family residence in the district of al-Kabsh,[16] the caliphs were excluded from courtly and public life in the early years of the Mamluk sultanate. They were often tutored in Islamic sciences and expected to engage in the all-important practice of praying for the government and the sultan's success, and to busy themselves in pious exercises with members of the established religious elite.[17] If ever a caliph (voluntarily or not) ventured into Mamluk politics, it tended to result in shame and exile, followed by dismay and confusion amidst various segments of the population.[18] Furthermore, the extent of the meager public role given the caliphs existed at the whim of an individual sultan or ruling magnate.

Aubin (Geneva, 1974), 2:167–70. On the Delhi sultans and the Cairo Abbasids, see Ẓiyāʾ al-Dīn Baranī, *Táríkh-i Feroz-Sháhí,* ed. Saiyid Ahmad Khan (Calcutta, 1862), 598–99; Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge, 1999), 271–72. On Bāyazīd I, the Ottomans, and the Cairo Abbasids, see al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn,* 2:85; Shai Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East: The Ottoman-Mamluk War, 1485–91* (Leiden, 1995), 66–67.

[15] Here I have benefitted from comments made by John E. Woods.

[16] This may have been a former palace of Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn or Shajar al-Durr. See Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-al-Iʿtibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār,* ed. Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid (London, 2002), 3:444–46; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 3:358–59; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah,* 2:281; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 1:1:320. On the connection between the Abbasid caliphs of Cairo and Shajar al-Durr, see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "The Citadel of Cairo: Stage for Mamluk Ceremonial," *Annales islamologiques* 24 (1988): 53; idem, "The *Maḥmal* Legend and the Pilgrimage of the Ladies of the Mamluk Court," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 1 (1997): 91–92, 96; idem, *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and Its Culture* (London, 2007), 9.

[17] Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī, *Ḥusn,* 55; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi,* 6:318; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Manhal al-Ṣāfī wa-al-Mustawfá baʿda al-Wāfī,* ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn and Saʿīd ʿĀshūr (Cairo, 1984), 4:305. Educating the caliph may have been part of a concerted effort to re-imagine the Commander of the Faithful as a scholar *('ālim),* a prospect in line with the classical juristic stipulation that the imam must be a man with religious knowledge sufficient to perform *ijtihād.* See Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (New York, 1994), 196.

[18] The best examples of caliphs that suffered imprisonment or expulsion for interference in Mamluk politics are the third caliph al-Mustakfī (1302–40), exiled to Qūṣ after crossing al-Nāṣir Muḥammad; al-Mutawakkil I (1362–83, 1389–1406), accused of treason and imprisoned by Barqūq; and al-Mustaʿīn (1406–14), deported to Alexandria by al-Muʾayyad Shaykh after a brief appointment as "caliph-sultan" in 1412. For basic biographical information, see al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafāʾ,* 387–90, 401–7.

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Theoretical treatises on the notion of the imamate sought to legitimize the position of the Mamluk sultan and often neglected the Abbasid caliphs entirely. Nevertheless, the writings of Ibn Jamāʿah,[19] Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī,[20] Ibn Taymīyah,[21] al-Qalqashandī,[22] Ibn Khaldūn[23] and Khalīl ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī,[24] while rarely dwelling at length on the status or position of the Abbasid caliphate in the Mamluk period, were aware of its presence and in some cases provided subtle acknowledgment of its place in the Mamluk hierarchical structure while fully recognizing the authority and legitimacy of the Mamluk sultan that had seized the caliph's authority as *imam.*[25]

The scholastic religious class treated the caliphate with ceremonial deference, though the office holders held no independent power to provide credible religious rulings or adjudicate in legal matters. However, many fifteenth-century caliphs enjoyed close personal relationships with members of the Cairene ulama, with

[19]Despite other concessions to the politics of his times (including the notion that whoever seized power by force held it lawfully) Ibn Jamāʿah maintained Qurayshī (though not explicitly Abbasid) descent as a stipulation to hold the imamate. See Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamāʿah, *Taḥrīr al-Aḥkām fī Tadbīr Ahl al-Islām,* ed. Hans Kofler as "Handbuch des islamischen Staats- und Verwaltungsrechtes von Badr-ad-Dīn Ibn Ǧamaʿah," *Islamica* 6 (1934): 355–65.

[20]On the theme of gratitude to God, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) offers advice to the reigning caliph of his time: *Muʿīd al-Niʿam wa-Mubīd al-Niqam* (Ṣaydā, 2007), 23–24.

[21]The once authoritative conclusions of Henri Laoust which held that Ibn Taymīyah dismissed the obligation of the caliphate have been reexamined by recent research, which found that Ibn Taymīyah did in fact recognize the obligatory nature of the caliphate as well as the Abbasid caliphate of his day under Mamluk protection. See Mona F. Hassan, "Modern Interpretations and Misinterpretations of a Medieval Scholar: Apprehending the Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyyah" in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times,* ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Oxford, 2010), 338–43.

[22]Al-Qalqashandī dedicated his treatise, caliphal history, and document collection *Maʾāthir al-Ināfah fī Maʿālim al-Khilāfah* (Kuwait, 1964) to the reigning caliph al-Muʿtaḍid II. The treatise on the caliphate is largely derivative of al-Māwardī's *Aḥkām al-Sulṭānīyah wa-al-Wilāyāt al-Dīnīyah,* reflecting more the situation in Abbasid Baghdad under the later Buyids than Mamluk Cairo in the early fifteenth century. See *Maʾāthir,* 1:12–80.

[23]Ibn Khaldūn mentions that the contemporary caliphate in Cairo is held in the name of an Abbasid descendant from Baghdad: *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn* (Beirut, 2001), 196; idem, *Al-Taʿrīf bi-Ibn Khaldūn wa-Riḥlatihi Gharban wa-Sharqan* (Cairo, 1951), 376, though it plays little role in his broader discussion of caliphate and kingship: *Muqaddimah,* 184–333.

[24]Khalīl ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī discusses the caliphal office and its expectations among courtiers during the reign of Jaqmaq in the mid-fifteenth century. See *Kitāb Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik wa-Bayān al-Ṭuruq wa-al-Masālik,* ed. Paul Ravaisse (Cairo, 1988), 86, 89–92.

[25]I discuss the views of these authors and others at length in the third and fourth chapters of my dissertation, "The Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo 1261–1517: History and Tradition in the Mamluk Court."

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whom they intermarried,[26] whose work they patronized, and with whom they were allowed to socialize more freely than with members of the military class.[27] The ulama themselves could do little in the face of Mamluk authority: "The caliph and the four chief judges, who headed the official administration of the Holy Law, deferred to reason of state and the reality of power by validating actions which they could not oppose and decisions which they could not upset."[28]

The caliphate's residual power stemmed from the renowned lineage of the Prophet's uncle, the tradition of the centuries-old Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad, and its unified Islamic ruling system.[29] The Abbasids of Baghdad far outlived their heyday of political authority when they lost power first to the successive Turkish *amīr*s *al-umarā'* of their own army, then ultimately to the Buyid amirs and Saljuq sultans. Nevertheless, a caliph had remained an indispensable symbol of unified Islamic leadership, undisturbed until 1258. The mere existence of a caliph represented political harmony and coherence, its absence, therefore, chaos and disorder in the universe.[30] That the institution was supported by history and tradition alone is not without great significance.

Paradoxically, the political and religious authority of the Abbasid caliph was formally recognized by the ruling elites and the ulama, though he was given no means to actually wield it. While it was part of the regime's political ideology that the Mamluk sultan had been invested to act on behalf of the caliph, sultans

[26]Baybars was evidently uninterested in accruing any religio-political or ideological capital through forging marriage alliances with any of the daughters of al-Ḥākim. Marriages between the Abbasid family and the ulama were much more common than any political marriages with the sultans' families as was the case in Saljuq times. See George Makdisi, "The Marriage of Tughril Beg," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1 (1970): 259–75; Jackson, "Primacy of Domestic Politics," 59; Jean-Claude Garcin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Egypte médiévale: Qus* (Cairo, 1976), 294.

[27]Al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn,* 2:61; idem, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā',* 384. Al-Suyūṭī claims that Baybars put the caliph under restraints in Ramaḍān 663. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad also had members of his military beaten for cultivating close ties to the caliph al-Mustakfī in the 730/1330s. See Mūsá al-Yūsufī, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir,* ed. Aḥmad Ḥuṭayṭ (Beirut, 1986), 362; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:416. It was fairly common, however, for low-level amirs to marry into the Abbasid family.

[28]P. M. Holt, "The Position and Power of the Mamluk Sultan," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 28 (1975): 247.

[29]For a discussion of the nature of the community's loyalty to the caliph in the Buyid period, see Roy P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (2nd ed., London, New York, 2001), 18. Modern scholars largely interpret the caliphate in its later years as the mere symbol of rule by shari'ah. See H. A. R. Gibb, "Some Considerations on the Sunni Theory of the Caliphate," in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam,* ed. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk (Princeton, 1982), 141; and Anne Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory: The Jurists* (Oxford, 1981), 14, 113, 129.

[30]Al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā',* 373–81.

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were careful to keep his authority and his person in check, lest he fall into the clutches of their rivals.[31]

Much of the caliph's perceived religious supremacy in Mamluk society resided in his prayers and in the sanctity of his presence at official events. Jean-Claude Garcin's assessment that the Abbasid caliphs in Cairo were effectively *finissaient en santons* is an apt description of the way the caliphs served as little more than talismans (or tiny plaster figurines!) of *barakah* at state events.[32] Despite this muted role, forced forward by political inertia, the Abbasid caliphs became such a staple of Mamluk court culture and custom that their absence at an investiture ceremony was inconceivable. Indeed, the lack of a caliphal appearance, which chroniclers seldom fail to mention in their report of events, could render a coronation illegitimate.[33]

The nature of latter-day caliphal authority, particularly in the Mamluk period, was necessarily confined to the realm of religion, due in no small part to the caliph's understood proximity to the Prophet's family.[34] A living resident Abbasid helped transform Cairo into an authentic Islamic capital, following the heritage

[31] Sultan Aḥmad ibn al-Nāṣir Muḥammad sent the caliph al-Ḥākim II to Jerusalem in Dhū al-Ḥijjah 742/May 1342 to keep him away from rivals among his father's amirs. See al-Shujāʿī, *Tārīkh,* 217, 224; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:609–10; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 10:67. The amir Yalbughā al-Nāṣirī used the issue of the caliph's imprisonment to challenge Barqūq (Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 1:2:336), and the future sultan Shaykh captured the caliph al-Mustaʿīn and ultimately used him to help oust al-Nāṣir Faraj (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 4:213–16).

[32] Jean-Claude Garcin, "Histoire, opposition politique et piétisme traditionaliste dans le *Ḥusn al-muḥādarat* de Suyûti," *Annales islamologiques* 7 (1967): 64.

[33] As a 778/1377 conspiracy to remove al-Ashraf Shaʿbān from power and murder him in ʿAqabah *en route* to the holy cities unfolded, the caliph al-Mutawakkil, delayed by his return from ʿAqabah (as part of the sultan's entourage), was unable to participate in the investiture ceremony for the new sultan, al-Manṣūr ʿAlī. To ensure the authenticity of the succession, Mamluk amirs restaged the ceremony in the presence of the caliph after his return to Cairo. See al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 3:284, 290; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 11:148–49; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 1:2:192.

[34] An excellent case study of latter day caliphal religious authority may be found in the reign of the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid II billāh (816–45/1414–41). For nearly thirty years the caliph participated in solemn ceremonies at the behest of at least seven Mamluk sultans. While isolated politically, the caliph focused on a quiet life of religion and did little more than what was required of him. More importantly, no opportunities emerged for him to be thrust into the seat of power which allowed him to avoid the imprisonment and exile, respectively, of his father al-Mutawakkil and elder brother al-Mustaʿīn. He remained a religious symbol available to lend authority to public programs such as prayer against the plague and also to officially castigate enemies of the regime. For contemporary biographies of al-Muʿtaḍid II, see Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal,* 4:304–5; idem, *Mawrid al-Laṭāfah fī Man Waliya al-Salṭanah wa-al-Khilāfah* (Cairo, 1997), 1:258; Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍawʾ al-Lāmiʿ li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsiʿ* (Cairo, 1934–36), 3:215; al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafāʾ,* 407–9; idem, *Ḥusn,* 2: 90–91.

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of Medina, Damascus, and Baghdad, thereby lending crucial religious integrity to Mamluk state functions.[35]

It is these various ceremonial capacities, always underscoring the caliph's religious authority, which concern us here. We can detail several public appointments (whether carefully arranged or spontaneous) that reflect both the caliph's religious authority and acceptance for his elevated position in Mamluk society.

Abbasid Management of the Shrine of Sayyidah Nafīsah

The decision by Mamluk authorities to assign the Abbasid caliphs as overseers of the shrine of Sayyidah Nafīsah (d. 208/824) was an important development that bolstered the family's financial well-being, further enhanced their prestige, and increased their accessibility to Cairenes and visitors to the shrine.[36]

Upgraded in Fatimid times for a descendant of the Prophet's grandson al-Ḥasan, the shrine of Sayyidah Nafīsah (located in the north of Cairo's al-Qarāfah cemetery near the Ibn Ṭūlūn mosque) became a sanctuary with Sufi cells and a library. Under heightened popularity during the Mamluk era, the shrine grew to become an important regional attraction that received substantial donations from pilgrims, rulers, and courtiers which required a comptroller *(mustawfī)* to manage its associated endowments.[37]

Following several years of supervision by Mamluk notables, it was most likely the sultan Aḥmad ibn al-Nāṣir Muḥammad who made the caliph al-Ḥākim II (741–53/1341–52) shrine administrator in 742/1341–42.[38] Donations to the shrine combined with revenue from onsite oil and candle sales became a significant source of income unencumbered by the Mamluk government. Each month the caliph or his delegate emptied the large trunk established for donations at the head of the tomb.[39] Nearby funerals for wealthy notables also carried the potential to line the caliphs' pockets if the bereaved wished to make a donation in exchange

[35] On the changed status of Cairo as the new seat of Islam *vis-à-vis* the Abbasid caliphate, see al-Qalqashandī, *Ma'āthir,* 1:1–2; al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn,* 2:94. Indeed with the exile of the last Abbasid to Istanbul, Cairo resumed its status as a province. See Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule, 1517–1798* (London, New York, 1992), 10.

[36] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 3:785; idem, *Sulūk,* 2:609; Ibn Taghrībirdī *Nujūm,* 10:66.

[37] See Yūsuf Rāġib, "Al-Sayyidah Nafīsa, sa légende, son culte et son cimetière," *Studia Islamica* 45 (1977): 38–41.

[38] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:609; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 10:66. Also see Rāġib, "Sayyidah Nafīsa," 41–42; and Ohtoshi Tetsuya, "Cairene Cemeteries as Public Loci in Mamluk Egypt," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (2006): 93. There is disunity in the Mamluk sources as to which Abbasid caliph first received control of the shrine. Some sources claim the shrine was assigned to the Abbasids as late as the reign of al-Mutawakkil I in 763/1362 (ʿAbd al-Bāsiṭ [al-Malāṭī], *Nayl al-Amal fī Dhayl al-Duwal,* ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī [Ṣaydā, 2002], 1:340).

[39] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 3:785; al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn,* 2:192; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'iʿ,* 5:192.

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for an Abbasid or Nafīsī blessing.[40] By the time of the long-reigning caliph al-Mutawakkil I (763–79, 779–85, 791–808/1362–77, 1377–83, 1389–1406), the Abbasid household had accumulated substantial wealth.[41] The family had feathered their nest thanks largely to the lucrative administration of the shrine, which upon each new caliph's inauguration was handed down ceremonially along with the family office.[42]

Indeed, Abbasid affiliation with the shrine provided a symbolic connection between two important lines of the Prophet's family: his direct offspring through his daughter Fāṭimah and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and the offspring of his uncle al-ʿAbbās. Through direct association with a popular landmark on Cairo's religious topography, the caliph's public profile increased in prominence and visibility.[43] In theory, this would also have allowed the caliph to tap into the world of folk religion, popular culture, and pious practice in medieval Cairo.[44]

Involvement in Public Prayers

Under the Mamluks, the caliph's informal religious duties included private prayers for the perpetuation and success of the realm. Although seemingly without immediate corporeal benefit, the caliph's prayers for Mamluk triumph and Muslim prosperity are part of a legacy not so easily dismissed. The theme of the caliph praying for the success of sultan and dynasty is as at least as old as the late Saljuq period. The late twelfth-/early thirteenth-century Persian historian al-Rāvandī

[40] Al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw',* 7:54; Rāġib, "Sayyidah Nafīsa," 42.

[41] Al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn,* 2:84.

[42] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 3:100. Al-Mutawakkil was later deprived of the shrine's assets in 766/1364–65 when it was reassigned for over two decades to the amir Jamāl al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Baktimur, until 789/1387, when it returned to the Abbasid family for another one hundred years. Control of the shrine was restored to Mustaʿṣim in 789/1387 and remained under Abbasid supervision until a minor interruption in 1497 and then until the Ottoman conquest. See also al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 3:785; Rāġib, "Al-Sayyidah Nafīsa," 42. In addition to the shrine, we also know that the caliphs, by virtue of a special tariff exacted by the Mamluks, received a portion of the profits made by gold merchants.

[43] Jean-Claude Garcin, "The Regime of the Circassian Mamlūks," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt,* volume 1, *Islamic Egypt, 640–1517,* ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge, 1998), 303.

[44] Ibid. The Mamluks were apparently interested in winning the hearts and minds of the Cairene masses through controlled interaction with the caliph. Baybars had attempted to revive the role of caliph as head of the *futūwah* chivalric brotherhoods which began in Baghdad with the caliph al-Nāṣir (575–622/1180–1225), though this was neither followed up nor heavily used. Later caliphs similarly participated in public rites at the *mawlid* festivals celebrating the birth of the Prophet, immensely popular among everyday Cairenes. On the caliphate and religious culture in Mamluk Cairo, see Annemarie Schimmel, "Some Glimpses of the Religious Life in Egypt during the Later Mamluk Period," *Islamic Studies* 4 (1965): 353–55; Donald P. Little, "Religion under the Mamluks," *The Muslim World* 73 (1983): 172–73; Berkey, "Mamluk Religious Policy," 11–12.

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claimed in his *Rāḥat al-Ṣudūr* that the *atābek* of sultan Tughril III (571–90/1176–94), irritated by a recent resurgence in the caliph's influence, had remarked that "the *imam* should concern himself with delivering the *khuṭbah* and leading the prayers which serve to protect worldly monarchs and are the best of deeds. He should entrust kingship to the sultans and leave governance of the world to this sultan (Tughril III)."[45] That this theme is picked up again in the Mamluk sultanate is not without significance.

Al-ʿAbbās and his descendants carried a long association with public prayers seeking an end to drought *(ṣalāt al-istisqā')*, beginning with the caliphate of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who asked the Prophet's uncle to pray for rain in hopes that God would answer the prayers of Muḥammad's kinsman.[46] The historical anecdote was not wasted on the Mamluk religious class, who occasionally alluded to the contemporary Abbasid caliph as a descendant of al-ʿAbbās (whom the rains had obeyed) in panegyrics and other literature concerning the caliph's house.[47]

Concern over drought in Rabīʿ I 775/August 1373 drove Mamluk authorities to request the caliph, qadis, and other pious citizens to pray for rain in groups. Some of the ulama brought relics associated with the Prophet and washed them in the well of the Nilometer *(fasqīyat al-miqyās)* in hopes of making the water level increase.[48] This was not the last time the caliph was involved in rain prayers.

When Nile levels dangerously diminished once again in Rajab 854/August 1450, the sultan Jaqmaq requested the caliph al-Mustakfī II and other notables to pray for rain at the tomb of Barqūq. They were joined there by Jews and Christians with their holy books, as well as Muslim children with Qurans tied to their heads. The ceremony included an eloquent *khuṭbah* in which the Shafiʿi qadi begged for rain alongside his three legal counterparts and the caliph.[49]

To combat a harsh drought in Shawwāl 866/October 1462 an advisor of the sultan Khushqadam, Shaykh Amīn al-Dīn Āqsarāy, recommended that the sultan gather all living members of the Abbasid family, provide them with water to rinse their mouths, then order them to spit into an empty vessel. The collected water,

[45] *Rāḥat al-Ṣudūr,* ed. Muḥammad Iqbāl (London, 1921), 334.

[46] Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 10:204; al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā',* 104–5.

[47] Al-Qalqashandī, *Maʾāthir,* 1:1–2. See also panegyrics for the Cairo Abbasids attributed to Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, quoted in al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍaw',* 3:215; idem, *Wajīz al-Kalām fī al-Dhayl ʿalá Duwal al-Islām,* ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf, ʿIṣām Fāris al-Ḥarastānī, and Aḥmad al-Khuṭaymī (Beirut, 1995), 2:581; al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā',* 404–6; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'iʿ,* 1:2:823–24. The allusion appears again in a *khuṭbah* from al-Ḥākim I commissioned by al-Ashraf Khalīl in 691. See Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, *Al-Alṭāf al-Khafīyah min al-Sīrah al-Sharīfah al-Sulṭānīyah al-Malakīyah al-Ashrafīyah,* ed. Axel Moberg as *Ur ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAbd ez-Ẓâhir's Biografi över Sultanen el-Melik al-Aśraf Ḫalil: Arabisk Täxt med Översattning, Inledning Ock Anmärkningar Utjiven* (Lund, 1902), 14.

[48] Ibn Iyās, *Badā'iʿ,* 1:2:124.

[49] Al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz al-Kalām,* 2:646; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'iʿ,* 2:282.

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with its "Abbasid *barakah,*" should then be poured into the *miqyās* well. The sultan then gathered Abbasids of all ages at one of the family's properties on the Nile in Old Cairo to carry out the recommendation.[50] Once the "Abbasid water" was emptied into the well, Mamluk sources allege that the river's official level miraculously rose by nearly two fingers.[51]

As refuge from the plague that ravaged Cairo in the mid-fourteenth century, the caliph's prayers again had their place in Mamluk efforts to confront the epidemic. During a fierce outbreak in Ramaḍān 748/December 1347 during the reign of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, the citadel elite were summoned to gather below the caliphal standard at the dome of victory outside Cairo, armed with copies of the Quran to pray for a respite from the disease decimating the city's population.[52] The standard of the caliph was presented as a relic with holy power to ward off the disease.[53]

Cairo was again roiled by plague during the early fifteenth-century reign of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh.[54] By Rabīʿ II 822/April–May 1419 the Black Death had spread in Cairo, claiming nearly half the fellahin population.[55] The sultan took the threat seriously and once more pursued a religious solution which included the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid II and other prominent members of the religious class. The sultan mandated three days of public fasting, which culminated in a decidedly modest ceremony on the desert plain on 15 Rabīʿ II/11 May and featured special prayers and Quranic recitations from the caliph, scholars, and Sufis dressed in white robes beneath caliphal standards.[56] Flanked on both sides by al-Muʿtaḍid II, the qadis, and other scholars, the sultan solemnly led Friday prayers. Ibn Taghrībirdī cited the success of the event when the severity of the plague diminished shortly thereafter; the caliph, his standard, and other Abbasid symbols having been an important part of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh's spiritual anti-plague strategy.[57]

While considering the sultan's decision to involve the caliph in public prayers in order to avert disaster, we must not forget that the Abbasid caliph was only one

[50] Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 2:395.

[51] Al-Malāṭī, *Nayl al-Amal,* 6:146–47; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 2:395.

[52] Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 10:204.

[53] For a brief discussion of the significance of the caliphal standard in the early Mamluk period, see Linda S. Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan: The Career of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and the Consolidation of Mamluk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678–689 A.H./1279–1290 A.D.)* (Stuttgart, 1998), 176.

[54] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 4:488. Shaykh had usurped the sultanate from the caliph al-Mustaʿīn, who had briefly been named sultan for several months in 815/1412.

[55] Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 14:77–78; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 2:45.

[56] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 4:487–88; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbāʾ,* 3:198–99; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 14:77–78; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 2:46.

[57] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 4:549–50; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 14:80; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 2:46.

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wellspring of religious authority among several; and, according to the sources, even he was not used with regularity.[58] Naturally, as a caliphate void of temporal power, the Abbasid caliphate of Cairo lent itself to innovative practices, allowing the sultans to invent new caliphal customs on the fly. The presence of the qadis, or the *sayyid* descendants of the Prophet bearing copies of the Quran on their heads, had similar perceived power to ward off misfortunes. Therefore, much of the evidence for conclusions on the Cairo caliphate is circumstantial.

Proclamations of Excommunication

The religious authority of the Abbasid caliph could be useful to a sultan wishing to denounce Muslim competitors as enemies of the faith. In 709/1310, Baybars al-Jāshnikīr used the caliph's authority to denounce hereditary kingship in his fight against al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, thus attacking the latter's claim to legitimacy as the heir of Qalāwūn. A second deed of investiture for Baybars II, written by the caliph, catalogues the offenses of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, who is condemned as a blood-shedder, destroyer of Islamic unity, and enabler of the enemies of the faith.[59]

When a revolt of Syrian amirs briefly unseated Barqūq and drove him from Cairo in 791/1389, the amir Minṭāsh, a chief conspirator, took steps to strengthen his position by re-installing the puppet Qalāwūnid sultan Ḥājjī and drawing closer to the caliph.[60] Minṭāsh summoned the caliph, qadis, and ulama on 21 Dhū al-Qaʿdah 791/11 November 1389 to draft a fatwa on the legality of declaring war against Barqūq.[61] Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṣāliḥī drafted the document accusing the former sultan of having wrongfully deposed both the caliphs al-Mutawakkil and Ḥājjī and for fighting "against the Muslims with the aid of unbelievers."[62] Ten copies of the document were written and cosigned by numerous qadis and notables.[63]

[58]For example, during a Cairene plague outbreak in mid-Jumādá I 833/February 1430, al-Ashraf Barsbāy (825–42/1422–38) failed to call upon the prayers of the caliph and instead conscripted forty descendants of the prophet (all named Muḥammad), and ordered them to recite Quran and lead prayers at al-Azhar. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbāʾ,* 3:436–37; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 14:343.

[59]See al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:1:65–66; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 8:263; Frédéric Bauden, "The Sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the Politics of Puppets: Where Did It All Start?" *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13, no. 1 (2009): 55–57. For the initial caliphal investiture deed of Baybars al-Jāshnikīr, see Aḥmad al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab* (Cairo, 1985–92), 8:128–35; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 10:68–75.

[60]Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 3:655–56.

[61]Ibid., 3:668–70. A slightly earlier attempt appears to have failed in producing a fatwa: see Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 11:357–58; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 1:2:417.

[62]Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 3:670, 673; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 11:360; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 1:2:417.

[63]Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 11:359; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 1:2:417.

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Minṭāsh then met with amirs and government officials on 25 Dhū al-Qaʿdah/15 November in the presence of al-Mutawakkil and the qadis to get the teenaged Ḥājjī declared competent to rule as an adult.[64] The first act of the sultan's majority was the declaration of war on Barqūq. In the final months of 791/1389, Minṭāsh produced fatwas declaring Barqūq an enemy and ordered the caliph and the Maliki chief qadi Ibn Khaldūn, among others, to sign it.[65]

Some years later, when faced with the territorial encroachments of the Qara Qoyunlu Turkmen chieftain Qārā Yūsuf (792–823/1390–1420) in his Aleppan theater, the sultan al-Muʾayyad Shaykh assembled the caliph and the ulama in Shaʿbān 821/September 1418 to declare Qārā Yūsuf an infidel for his transgressions against Sunni orthodoxy and shariʿah. A document cataloguing the ruler's odious infractions was composed and al-Muʿtaḍid II and others signed their approval. The caliph and qadis also lent silent support to an announcement that called for Qārā Yūsuf's death in Cairo.[66] It was thus that the inviolability of the Abbasid presence and religious authority facilitated the official excommunication of the sultan's enemies and made the shedding of their blood permissible at a time when the great majority of these opponents were fellow Muslims.[67]

Accountability, Arbitration, and the "Holy Presence" of the Caliph

Mamluk authorities recognized a unique sanctity embodied in the presence of the Abbasid caliph, frequently augmented by the chief qadis, that enabled him to serve as a living "seal" to agreements and important decisions. The mere presence of the caliph (which Mamluk chroniclers often noted) was thought to authenticate decrees composed by the qadis and pacts concluded between the sultans, their amirs, and their mamluks.[68]

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[64] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 3:673; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 11:360.

[65] Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 11:360–61; al-Malāṭī, *Nayl al-Amal,* 2:281; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 1:2:417. The deposition of the caliph and the execution of a minor descendant of the Prophet were put forth as the major offenses. Ibn Khaldūn expressed particular distaste at being forced to sign the decree by Minṭāsh: see *Al-Taʿrīf,* 330–31.

[66] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 4:1:459–60; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbāʾ,* 3:171–72; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 14:68; al-Malāṭī, *Nayl al-Amal,* 4:22; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 2:39–40. See also Schimmel, "Some Glimpses," 360–61.

[67] This notion retained importance for the Ottomans who, when faced with rival Muslim marcher lords in Anatolia and the Turkmen supporters of the Safavids, induced their ulama to legally denounce them as infidels who could be legally warred against.

[68] P. M. Holt, "The Structure of Government in the Mamluk Sultanate," in *The Eastern Mediterranean Lands in the Period of the Crusades,* ed. P. M. Holt (Warminster, 1977), 44. This idea persisted as late as the reign of Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī: see *Majālis al-Sulṭān al-Ghawrī: Ṣafaḥāt min Tārīkh Miṣr fī al-Qarn al-ʿĀshir Hijrī,* ed. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAzzām (Cairo, 1941), 100–13.

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Having the Abbasid caliph on hand relieved some of the stigma attached to unsavory policies. To fund an expedition against Temür in Jumādá II 789/June 1387, Barqūq summoned the caliph and other leading men of his administration in hopes of receiving approval to seize money from mosques and *waqf* endowments. Members of the religious establishment opposed the sultan, though they were ultimately persuaded to accept that the wealth of certain *waqf*s would be seized since the caliph had lent his tacit blessing.[69]

In cases where an arbitrator was needed to communicate with a rebellious amir or ambitious rival, the caliph, perceived as an impartial messenger whose allegiance was only to God and the Prophet, could be sent to present official messages. After the fraying of the alliance between Yalbughā al-Nāṣirī and Minṭāsh, the two amirs who had temporarily ousted Barqūq in 791/1389, Yalbughā used the caliph to relay his demands to Minṭāsh in hopes of appealing to his loyalty to the caliph and the Qalāwūnid puppet they had used to replace Barqūq.[70]

Two decades later, in the wake of a failed rebellion against Barqūq's heir, Sultan Faraj, then-amir Shaykh al-Maḥmūdī was summoned to the citadel in Rabīʿ I 812/August 1409 to be reprimanded by the sultan's loyal amirs. To add religious emphasis to the upbraiding, the caliph al-Mustaʿīn also went to meet Shaykh at the drawbridge.[71] Although al-Mustaʿīn refrained from making a statement and was there to record the details for the sultan, his presence lent official approval to the formal expressions of displeasure and the demand that Shaykh henceforth would never depart from obedience to the sultan.[72]

The presence of the caliph was seen to have the potential to seal agreements between sultans and their mamluks, as in Rabīʿ II 894/March-April 1489, when the disgruntled mamluks of Qāytbāy threatened to revolt over their stipends. Once a settlement had been reached with the help of the religious establishment,

[69]Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 1:2:386. Similar circumstances played out in 872/1468 when the caliph, qadis, and other notables were summoned to lend religious legitimacy to the sultan Qāytbāy's attempt to seize funds from merchants to fund an expedition against the Ottoman-backed rebel Shāh Sūwār. See Yūsuf ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith al-Duhūr fī Madá al-Ayyām wa-al-Shuhūr,* ed. William Popper as *Extracts from Abû 'l-Maḥâsin Ibn Taghrî Birdî's Chronicle: Entitled Ḥawâdith ad-duhûr fî madâ 'l-ayyâm washshuhûr,* University of California Publications in Semitic Philology 8 (Berkeley, 1930–42), 635–37; al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbāʾ al-Ḥaṣr,* 33–35; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 3:14–15; Schimmel, "Kalif und Kadi," 98; Muḥammad M. Amīn, *Awqāf wa-al-Ḥayāh al-Ijtimāʿīyah fī Miṣr, 648–923 A.H./1250–1517 A.D.: Dirāsah Tārīkhīyah Wathāiqīyah* (Cairo, 1980), 326–27; Lev, "Symbiotic Relations," 23–24.

[70]Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh ibn al-Furāt* (Beirut, 1936), 9:120–21; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 3:2:644; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbāʾ,* 1:372; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 11:335–36; ʿAlī ibn Dāwūd al-Jawharī ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs wa-al-Abdān fī Tawārīkh al-Zamān,* ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1970), 1:237–38; al-Malāṭī, *Nayl al-Amal,* 2:277.

[71]Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 4:104; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 13:86.

[72]Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 13:86.

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Qāytbāy summoned the caliph al-Mutawakkil II (884–903/1479–97) from his residence to seal the agreement. With the caliph and qadis lending an air of religious authority, the mamluks pledged a fresh oath of allegiance to Qāytbāy.[73] The caliph's presence was meant to provide the accountability that would impel them to stand by the agreed terms.

Finally, as Carl Petry has observed during the Burji period, the absence of a formalized transition process resulted in crisis at the death of each sultan.[74] Barqūq unwittingly set a precedent for future sultans by requesting the caliph al-Mutawakkil I to vouchsafe the succession of his sons after his death. The qadis, amirs, and officials swore an oath to protect the order of succession laid out by the sultan.[75] Barqūq's testament made provisions for delegated amirs to execute his estate while all were formally subject to the sanction and supervision *(imḍāʿ)* of the Abbasid caliph.[76] Later Circassian sultans continued the practice of having the caliph act as "guarantor" of their dynastic aspirations, even though the caliph had no practical power to enforce such a request.[77] The sultans most likely wished to make their last wishes for succession known among their amirs and to have it sealed through both the caliph's presence at their deathbeds and his willingness to act on behalf of the sultan. Naturally, in all but a few cases, the Abbasid caliph quickly stepped aside and abandoned the sultan's chosen heir whenever the latest Mamluk amir capable of seizing the sultanate was able to do so.[78]

[73]Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 3:262. Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī continued the practice in his sultanate, and was fond of including the Quran of ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān in such rituals to supplement the presence of the Abbasid caliph. See *Badāʾiʿ,* 3:454, 4:18. Also see Carl Petry, *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamluk Sultans al-Ashraf Qāytbāy and Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī in Egypt* (London and Seattle, 1993), 134.

[74]Petry, *Twilight of Majesty,* 18.

[75]Aḥmad ibn Ḥajjī, *Tārīkh Ibn Ḥajjī: Ḥawādīth wa-Wafayāt 796–815 H.,* ed. Abū Yaḥyá ʿAbd Allāh al-Kundarī (Beirut, 2003), 1:357–58; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 3:2:936; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 12:102; al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs,* 1:494–95; al-Malāṭī, *Nayl al-Amal,* 3:22–23; al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz al-Kalām,* 1:335; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 1:2:524–25.

[76]Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 12:104.

[77]Al-Muʾayyad Shaykh made a similar request of the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid II which lasted until his infant son Aḥmad was set aside by al-Ẓāhir Ṭaṭar; see Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr,* 3:227, 240–41; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 14:103, 176; al-Malāṭī, *Nayl al-Amal,* 4:70–71. Subsequent Circassian sultans kept up the charade and their amirs deposed their sons to select a new sultan from among their ranks. Such was the case for several sultans including: Ṭaṭar (*Nujūm,* 14:205–6; *Nayl al-Amal,* 4:100–1), Barsbāy (*Nujūm,* 15:102; al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs,* 3:415–17) and Jaqmaq (*Nujūm,* 15:452–54; *Badāʾiʿ,* 2:301). See also P. M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517* (London, 1986), 189.

[78]In 841–42/1438, the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid II briefly attempted to protect the heir of the sultan Barsbāy against the rising power of Jaqmaq, though he too ultimately had no choice but to support the new sultan. See Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 15:256; al-Malāṭī, *Nayl al-Amal,* 5:53; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 2:197.

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Monthly Meetings with the Sultan and Chief Qadis

By the end of the ninth/fifteenth century, caliphs and qadis were expected to make monthly visits to the citadel to congratulate the sultan and renew the image of his proximity to religious notables. This was especially important for auspicious milestones such as moon sightings, festivals, or the sultan's triumphant return to Cairo.[79] The practice seems to date to the reign of Īnāl (857–65/1453–62) with the caliph al-Mustanjid (859–84/1455–79) and continued to the end of the Mamluk sultanate.[80] On most occasions, the caliph arrived at the citadel from his residence and upon his entry into the sultan's sitting room the latter would descend his throne to sit briefly beside the caliph who then departed. The qadis stayed behind to attend to religious business or offer their counsel.[81]

It was an occasion when the sultan could question the qadis, and occasionally the caliph, on ethics or the permissibility of certain actions such as the legality of securing funds from questionable sources.[82] The caliph likewise had a near-private audience with the sultan during which he might seek intervention in private or personal matters beyond his control.[83]

A "Court of Appeals" in Early Ottoman Cairo

In the aftermath of Ottoman victory over Mamluk forces at Marj Dābiq and al-Raydānīyah in 922–23/1516–17, the last Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil III (914–23/1508–17) received a new lease on power and authority from the Ottoman sultan Selim in occupied Cairo.[84] A description from Ibn Iyās is most intriguing:

[79] On one such occasion to mark Qāytbāy's return to Cairo in Jumādá I 891/May 1486, the caliph and the qadis greeted him during a celebration and the city was decorated. See Carl Petry, *Twilight of Majesty,* 106.

[80] The earliest occurrences appear to have taken place during the reign of al-Mustanjid (859–84/1455–79), although the chief qadis had been attending the meetings for some time. Beginning with al-Mustanjid, Ibn Iyās scarcely fails to begin a month without taking note of the caliph appearing before the sultan.

[81] Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 16:218; al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā',* 327.

[82] On most occasions the caliph was dismissed before legal questioning of the qadis began, though on some occasions his opinion was solicited. Schimmel described the monthly meetings as the only official duties of the caliph in the Circassian period ("Kalif und Kadi," 22).

[83] The most salient example is the caliph al-Mustanjid seeking annulment of his daughter's marriage to the Syrian amir Khushqaldī al-Baysuqī in 876–77/1472. Despite initial obstruction by the chief qadis, the caliph secured the dissolution following a private meeting with Qāytbāy; see al-Malāṭī, *Nayl al-Amal,* 7:62; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'iʿ,* 3:85.

[84] Ibn Iyās, *Badā'iʿ,* 5:147–58. In the wake of the battle, al-Mutawakkil III had been used by the Ottoman sultan Selim I to relay official messages to the last Mamluk sultan Ṭūmānbāy and his inner circle of amirs in Cairo.

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> In these days the caliph al-Mutawakkil enjoyed unlimited power in [Ottoman-occupied] Egypt as the chief executor and disposer of affairs *(ṣāḥib al-ḥall wa-al-ʿaqd).* The princes and descendants of the [Mamluk] sultans loitered endlessly in the lobby of [the caliph's] residence … His caliphal mission continued in Cairo and held clout among the ministers of the Ottoman sultan: [the caliph's] intervention on behalf of the populace was accepted and his colors were displayed on the façades of most Cairene dwellings. His pomp and authority in these days was comparable to the [former] sultan of Egypt. He received money and valuable gifts from the public, the like of which his forefathers and ancestors had never known.[85]

The caliph served as arbitrator in local disputes among Cairenes in search of Ottoman justice for injuries suffered during the reign of Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī. For the first time in Cairo, the caliph issued tentative rulings on issues brought before him. In one instance he ruled for the families of two administrators executed by Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī's government due in part to the scheming of a vindictive qadi.[86] The families demanded bloody vengeance against the qadi, and when the caliph ruled in favor of blood money instead, both families dismissed his ruling and opted instead for a direct referral to the Ottoman sultan in Muḥarram 923/January–February 1517.[87]

Modern researchers, based on the lack of textual evidence, have dismissed the notion that al-Mutawakkil III conferred the caliphate on the Ottoman sultan during a transfer ceremony.[88] Nevertheless, the Ottomans were quick to appreciate the reverence Egyptians held for the caliphate in the conquered territory. They granted the Commander of the Faithful an important post as liaison between themselves and the Cairenes. Later on, the Ottomans deemed him important enough to bring back to Istanbul.

[85]Ibid., 5:157–58.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Ibid. For the scandal and its aftermath, which led to the grievances filed against the qadi, see *Badāʾiʿ,* 4:340–48; Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥimṣī, *Ḥawādith al-Zamān wa-Wafayāt al-Shuyūkh wa-al-Aqrān,* ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 1999), 2:252. On this incident, see Carl F. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (Albany, 1994), 149–51; Yossef Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society: An Overview," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2007): 1–2. On blood money in this period, see Carl F. Petry, *The Criminal Underworld in a Medieval Islamic Society* (Chicago, 2012), 207–11.

[88]The earliest versions of this story appeared in Western sources, notably in the works of Georgius Fabricius and Joannes Rosinus. In the late seventeenth century they stated that Selim forced the Abbasid caliph to abdicate, but made no claim that the sultan assumed the office himself. It was only in the twentieth century that scholars such as Wilhelm Barthold, Thomas Arnold, and George Stripling suggested a re-examination.

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The Ottoman sultan was eager to use the caliph's prestige to reach understandings with insurgent Mamluk amirs in Cairo. In addition, the caliph acted as an intercessor between Selim and private individuals. That the Ottoman sultan briefly considered al-Mutawakkil III neutral does not rule out the possibility that he may have had other plans for the caliph to carry on in some capacity or other, had the greed of the latter not become a distracting spectacle.[89]

The fact that the Ottomans had decided to include the Abbasid caliph in a *sürgün* deportation to Istanbul says much about their perceptions of such a figure. We are told that Selim wanted to rid Cairo of all possible troublemakers: given the new influence the caliph already enjoyed for a brief period in post-Mamluk Cairo, Selim may well have feared revolt led in the caliph's name.[90] Even so, it seems strange that while Ṭūmānbāy was executed as a common criminal, the caliph was treated respectably, honored, and even given a degree of judicial and political responsibility. Might it also have been that like the Mamluks, the Ottomans could appreciate having an Abbasid caliph on hand at a time when universal Islamic legitimacy was still extremely important amidst the absorption of new territory?

In the brief interlude between Mamluk and Ottoman rule in the early sixteenth century, the religious authority of the Abbasid caliphate continued to hold minor importance in the vacuum left by the Mamluks shortly before Egypt formally became an Ottoman province. The Ottomans were swift in realizing its universal importance which potentially underwrote both Mamluk and Ottoman pretensions to power and could be an incoming ruler's door to immediate religious legitimacy in the eyes of the people, who again, were greatly dismayed when the caliph was taken to Istanbul in 923/1517, confirming Cairo's demotion to province after having been an imperial center in its own right for nearly two and a half centuries.[91]

Abbasid Authority in the Eyes of Foreign Visitors

Though most other Europeans passing through Mamluk territory overlooked the Abbasid caliph, preferring instead to focus on the sultan and his circle, the observations of Emmanuelle Piloti (ca. 1371–1438?), a merchant and commercial entrepreneur from Venetian Crete, provided a unique interpretation of the caliphate's function from a visitor's perspective.

[89] Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ*, 5:317–18.

[90] As indeed revolts led on behalf of Abbasid caliphs had threatened Mamluk sultans in the past. See Lutz Wiederhold, "Legal-Religious Elite, Temporal Authority, and the Caliphate in Mamluk Society: Conclusions Drawn from the Examination of a 'Zahiri Revolt' in Damascus in 1386," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999): 203–35.

[91] Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ*, 5:183–85.

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In his initial descriptions of the Egyptian population, Piloti writes of the inhabitants of Cairo ("Rome of the pagans"), stating that it is from among the ranks of a vastly innumerable Egyptian population that "their caliph and pope is made."[92] It is clearly a visitor's misunderstanding that the caliph would be elected from mundane Cairenes rather than the Abbasid family living in confinement, but one wonders about the source of the misconception. Perhaps Piloti's informants were other Egyptian merchants who saw the caliphs as descendants of a great Arab aristocracy more closely resembling their own culture than that of the "foreign" Mamluk ruling elite. The understanding that the caliph came from Egyptian stock is set against a separate class of inhabitants of Cairo, the "slaves brought from every Christian nation, of whom are made mamluks, amirs and sultans."[93] He writes of divisions between the three classes of Egyptian Arabs, Bedouins, and Circassian mamluks, likening them to the feuding Guelphs and Ghibellines of northern and central Italy whose loyalties were split between the pope and the Roman emperor.[94]

Two interesting anecdotes, most likely involving the Cairo caliph al-Mustaʿīn or his successor al-Muʿtaḍid II, made their way into Piloti's text. Both items shed light on how the Circassian Mamluks may have presented the Abbasid caliphate to non-Muslim visitors. The first of them mentions the Well of the Virgin in Maṭarīyah, a popular destination for Christian pilgrims, significant for its legendary status as the area in which Jesus and Mary sheltered in Egypt. Near the holy site, local Christian gardeners manufactured a green medicinal balm produced from indigenous plants.[95] Bottling the balm for distribution, the gardeners, as a gesture of good faith, sent a generous portion to the court of the Mamluk sultan. Piloti describes a somber and impromptu ceremony that evolved to honor the gift's arrival, involving the attendance of the patriarch of the Jacobites and the Cairo-dwelling patriarch of Constantinople. To demonstrate his own access to the holy men of his faith, the Mamluk sultan summoned the caliph, the four chief qadis, and other prominent ulama. The balm was placed on a fire and heated to a boil as the caliph and religious scholars sat adjacent to the patriarchs on opposite

[92]Emmanuel Piloti, *L'Égypte au commencement du quinzième siècle d'après le traité d'Emmanuel Piloti de Crète (incipit 1420),* ed. Pierre Herman Dopp (Cairo, 1950), 11.

[93]Ibid.

[94]Ibid.

[95]Ibid., 28–30. Christians flocked to the site for its significance in the life of Mary and sought the healing powers of the balm. See: *Visit to the Holy Places of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine and Syria in 1384,* Publications of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum (Jerusalem, 1948), 53–54, 106–8, 197–98; Félix Fabri, *Voyage en Égypte de Félix Fabri 1483,* tr. Jacques Masson, Collection des voyageurs occidentaux en Égypte 14 (Cairo, 1975), 385–98.

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sides of the chamber, both groups quietly praying and chanting (or doing *dhikr*), as the heated balm changed from green to red.[96]

The early fifteenth century was also a time of heightened influence for the Catalan pirates based on the island of Cyprus, leading to troubled relations between the Mamluks and Catalans: acts of piracy followed by reprisals and interrupted trade.[97] Piloti writes that in 1411 during the reign of Faraj, a group of Tunisian merchants brought their cargo aboard a Catalan ship in Alexandria bound for Tunis and were instead brought to Catalonia and sold as slaves.[98] Relatives of the merchants complained to Faraj who, perhaps fearing the loss of lucrative contracts with the Catalans, found himself obliged to accept the brief of the Catalan consul that the Mamluk sultan should not interfere because his own subjects were not involved. According to Piloti, it was not until the reign of Shaykh that more prodding from the Tunisian families (who likely had interests in the merchandise seized by the Catalans as well) caused the Mamluk sultan unexpectedly to summon the Abbasid caliph to rule on the matter.[99] The Tunisians went before the "caliph and pope" to demand justice. Despite the protests of the same Catalan consul, the caliph "ruled" that the Catalans were responsible for 30,000 ducats worth of damages, half to be confiscated in Alexandria and the rest in Damascus. The consul wrote to Damascus advising his countrymen to flee rather than pay. When the sultan learned of his treachery, he had the consul beaten and confined in Alexandria with Catalan merchants ousted from his territories.[100] If the story can be believed, it is interesting that the caliph should be chosen to give the ruling, perhaps to relieve Catalan pressure on the sultan by exploiting the illusion that he was prisoner to the whims of the caliph.

In the case of a Muslim visitor, the Iranian Shafiʿi jurist and historian Faḍl Allāh ibn Rūzbihān Khunjī (d. 928/1521) visited Mamluk territory at least twice during the late fifteenth century on two pilgrimages to the Ḥijāz and wrote admiringly of the Mamluks and the Abbasid caliph under their protection.[101] Ulrich Haarmann argued that Khunjī's fundamental misrepresentation of the Abbasid caliphate of Cairo as "commander of the Mamluk vanguards" stemmed from nostalgia and idealism fueled by the author's desire for a champion to stand against

[96]Piloti, *L'Égypte,* 30.

[97]Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1983), 222.

[98]Piloti, *L'Égypte,* 110–11.

[99]Ibid., 111–12.

[100]Ibid., 112; Ashtor, *Levant Trade,* 223. In addition to problems of chronology (Faraj ruled until 1412, not 1411), Ashtor has raised other questions about the veracity of this account.

[101]Faḍl Allāh ibn Rūzbihān Khunjī-Iṣfahānī, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi amīnī,* ed. John E. Woods; abridged trans. Vladimir Minorsky, *Persia in A.D. 1478–1490, Turkmenica 12,* rev. ed. John E. Woods (London, 1992), 191; idem., *Sulūk al-Mulūk,* ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī Muvaḥḥid (Tehran, 1984), 365.

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the Shiʿite Safavids in the form of an independent Sunni caliphate protected by the righteous Mamluk sultans.[102] Nevertheless, Khunjī's time in Mamluk Egypt and his training with scholars such as Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī may have exposed him to a local culture that demonstrated some reverence for the position of the caliphal office, especially before foreign visitors. Thus Khunjī's remarks may have been the result of his exposure to the court of Qāytbāy, which may have brandished the sultan's protection of the caliphate as a sign of his just rule.[103]

The Popular Relationship: Caliphate and Cairenes

Further clues about the caliph's religious authority in Mamluk times emerge from what little can be known about the caliph's relationship with the masses. It is difficult to make definitive statements about any such interaction in the absence of detailed sources on the subject, though Mamluk chroniclers and prosopographers reveal numerous incidents demonstrating the relationship between a collective public mood and the fate of the caliph.[104] Reports are non-specific though reflective of a popular demand for general well-being in matters of religion, particularly in affairs of the caliphate.

[102]Ulrich Haarmann, "Yeomanly Arrogance and Righteous Rule: Fażl Allāh ibn Rūzbihān Khunjī and the Mamluks of Egypt," in *Iran and Iranian Studies: Essays in Honor of Iraj Afshar,* ed. Kambiz Eslami (Princeton, 1998), 120.

[103]Qāytbāy's alleged respect for the Abbasid caliphate during his reign was a point of discussion for the later courtiers of Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī. See Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, *Nafāʾis al-Majālis al-Sulṭānīyah,* published as *Majālis al-Sulṭān al-Ghawrī: Ṣafaḥāt min Tārīkh Miṣr fī Qarn al-ʿĀshir Hijrī*, ed. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAzzām (Cairo, 1941), 111.

[104]Several illustrations of this correlation are available in Mamluk sources: Abū Shāmah described the tremendous euphoria *(surūran ʿaẓīman)* of the Syrian population upon the 659/1261 investiture of the caliph al-Mustanṣir in Cairo (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Ismāʿīl Abū Shāmah, *Tarājim Rijāl al-Qarnayn al-Sādis wa-al-Sābiʿ,* ed. Muḥammad Zāhid ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Kawtharī [Beirut, 1974], 213); al-Ṣafadī mentioned the grief and tears shed by the people *(al-nās)* in 737/1337 when the caliph al-Mustakfī and the entire Abbasid clan of one hundred souls were exiled to Qūṣ by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr wa-Aʿwān al-Naṣr,* ed. Māzin ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Mubārak [Beirut, 1998], 2:420–21). Later Mamluk sources commented on widespread jubilation over the caliph al-Mustaʿīn's investiture as sultan in 815/1412 (Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbāʾ,* 2:509; al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn,* 2:86; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 1:2:825) and later the atmosphere of confusion and resentment that plagued local mosques after that caliph's deposition and exile to Alexandria (Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal,* 4:303–4). Finally, Ibn Iyās mentioned the great worry and sadness Cairenes felt concerning the fate of the last caliph after the Ottomans exiled him to Istanbul in 923/1517 (*Badāʾiʿ,* 5:183–85). One important instance of public opinion going against the caliph was in 709/1309 when the caliph al-Mustakfī invested the comparatively unpopular Baybars (II) al-Jāshnikīr as a candidate to stand against al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's incoming third reign (al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyah,* 32:146).

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We might suggest that Cairenes (both members of the military and the civilian elite) recognized the caliph as a source of Islamic authority, culture, and tradition, thereby interpreting his mere presence in the capital as a perpetuation of order and unbroken continuity going back to the Rightly-Guided caliphs of the seventh century. The Mongol conquest of Baghdad had been a serious upset and awareness of the loss of the caliphate had remained a recent memory for many. If the sultans disturbed the caliphate, they could often expect disquiet from sections of the population including their own inner circle.[105]

Excluding a brief interlude in the late thirteenth century when the Mamluk establishment began to consider the degradation of Abbasid nobility through fraternization with the local population,[106] the caliphs themselves may never have been as accessible to ordinary Cairenes as they were during their maintenance of the Nafīsī shrine. Nowhere else could outsiders to the worlds of politics and official religion cross paths with the Abbasid caliph. The caliph himself was said to have held court in the shrine, as he sat inside and looked on as visitors and pilgrims came with donations for the chest and to pay respects to himself and Sayyidah Nafīsah.[107]

The caliph, perhaps inadvertently, appeared to oppose members of the orthodox ulama who denounced shrine practices outside of *sharʿī* norms in their writ-

[105] Whether the sultan's intimates were moved by the plight of the caliph or in search of political opportunity is difficult to say. The ability to manipulate uncertainties around the Abbasid caliphate was certainly an avenue available to potential challengers of the incumbent sultan. A minor upset at the court of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad occurred among scholars and notables after the sultan appointed the unpopular Abbasid prince Ibrāhīm to the caliphate at the expense of the previously named successor (al-Shujāʿī, *Tārīkh,* 1:70; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:2:503; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 1:1:474). Early Circassian sultans likewise faced off against ambitious amirs rebelling on the grounds that the sultan had displaced the Abbasid caliph: In 791/1389 the amir Yalbughā al-Nāṣirī raised the caliphal banners against Barqūq for imprisoning the caliph (Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbāʾ,* 1:365 and 2:344; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 3:2:595; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 11:262–63.); al-Muʾayyad Shaykh's former partner Nawrūz al-Ḥāfiẓī rebelled after Shaykh seized the sultanate at the expense of the caliph al-Mustaʿīn, in whose name Nawrūz carried out a rebellion of his own (Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 14:7).

[106] It was not the first time that Mamluk authorities permitted the caliphs to mix with common people outside the citadel walls. However, fearing sedition from rivals, Baybars, Qalāwūn, and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad were careful about allowing the caliph to socialize with either the military elite or Cairene civilians (Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī, *Ḥusn,* 55). Barqūq relaxed restrictions on the caliph al-Mutawakkil as a conciliatory measure after having imprisoned the caliph for six years (al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn,* 2:84.) Retired or exiled caliphs were sometimes permitted freedom of movement from their living quarters as they pleased. On retirement conditions for al-Mustaʿīn in Alexandria, see Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal,* 7:63; al-Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ,* 4:20; al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafāʾ,* 406; and for al-Mustamsik (903–14/1497–1508, 922–23/1516–17) in Cairo, see Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 4:252.

[107] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* 3:785.

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ings.[108] Instead, he lent his support to the popular religion of the *ʿāmmah* who cherished and revered figures like Sayyidah Nafīsah. There was some compulsory recognition of the arrangement, however, as the sultan ordered the four qadis to commemorate each new caliph's investiture as overseer of the shrine and publicly read accompanying documents. All that demonstrated the caliph's relationship between the political and official religious worlds of the citadel as well as a minor foray into the realm of popular piety.[109]

Abbasid association with the shrine may even have strengthened its draw as a place of pilgrimage while inadvertently bestowing some official approval by the heads of the religious establishment left with no choice but to endorse it.

Some religious authority for the Mamluks came partially from the caliphate's resonance with the people. In spite of the diminished political authority of the office by Mamluk times, the caliph remained a symbol of cosmic order in Islamdom among the Sunni masses, a symbol of power that the ruling elite ignored at its peril.[110]

Notwithstanding the political fragmentation of the Islamic world after the Mongol conquests, Marshall Hodgson describes Islamic society during the two centuries after 1250 as firm in what it expected and expressed in its social and cultural life, despite the instability of its political expressions.[111] Although many institutions and practices were in a state of flux, the cultural significance of the Abbasid caliphate was undisputed in Mamluk times and remained a constant in a world of shifting political variables, particularly on the Mamluk domestic front with its roiling factions. Indeed, Hodgson recognized the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a period of unusual continuity amidst dramatically changing condi-

[108] Rāġib, "Al-Sayyidah Nafīsa," 38. See also Jonathan P. Berkey, "The Mamluks as Muslims: The Military Elite and the Construction of Islam in Medieval Egypt," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society,* ed. Thomas Philipp and Ulrich Haarmann (Cambridge, 1998), 166–67. On ulama who supported both popular shrine practices and cemetery visitation *(ziyārah)* in the Mamluk period, see Ohtoshi, "Cairene Cemeteries," 97–99.

[109] Another instance occurs in the 690/1291 *khuṭbah* that al-Ashraf Khalīl commissioned from the caliph al-Ḥākim. Auspicious astrological alignments were certainly important to the Mamluks before battle and the caliph's sermon deliberately touched upon such astral formations that might not have been deemed appropriate subject matter among the conservative ulama. See Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, *Alṭāf,* 14.

[110] The theme of the caliphate's links to the perpetuation of the corporeal world is explored in several caliphal investiture documents from the Mamluk period. See notably the relevant passages in Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī's *ʿahd* for al-Ḥākim II (al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 9:320–31) and the *walī al-ʿahd* document from al-Mutawakkil to his son al-Mustaʿīn (*Ṣubḥ,* 9:369–77).

[111] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago, 1974), 2:371.

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tions and historical tendencies.[112] The Islamic cultural and social order counted for a great deal among the ulama and by default the ruling Mamluk class. It was thus that the major sources supporting the viability of Abbasid authority were little more than the cultural forces of history and tradition, that enabled it to survive from its installation by Baybars down through the early months of the Ottoman conquest. The profound resilience of Abbasid prestige therefore had the strength to survive the Mongols' destruction of its seat in Baghdad and endured well beyond the late thirteenth century. As in earlier times, tradition and collective memory strengthened the caliphate's religious authority in its new home in Mamluk Cairo as the Mamluks incorporated the Abbasid caliphate into their own investiture customs, making it something uniquely "Mamluk" as well as "Islamic."

Conclusion

Support, whether feigned or authentic, for the authority of a universal caliphate legitimized the Mamluk sultanate as a classical Islamic state and recast the sultan as the caliph's deputy. The Abbasid caliph, from atop his theoretical position in the Mamluk hierarchy, allowed all three branches of government administration—military, bureaucratic, and religious—to derive authority from his presence in Cairo.[113] The focus for caliphal authority and its legitimating power was the investiture ceremonies for new sultans in Egypt as well as documents of authority provided to rulers abroad who were potential trading partners for the Mamluks.

Just as the Abbasid caliphs were a continuation of their antecedents in Baghdad, the Mamluk sultans were following the footsteps of their predecessors the Saljuqs and Ayyubids.

The purpose and meaning of the caliphal investiture as political pageantry needs further exploration. Even if most of our knowledge about the caliphs comes from their participation in ceremonies, this does not mean that the caliph was a marginal figure for the Mamluks. The inherent religious authority of the caliphal ideal made the office something that could never be permanently extinguished. Even in moments when sultans went as far as to remove a caliph's name from coinage and Friday *khuṭbah*s, none of them ever dared abolish the caliphate itself

[112] Ibid, 2:371–85. Jonathan P. Berkey has since reexamined ideas of continuity and cultural stagnation in this period. See Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle, 2001), 93–94; idem, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge, 2003), 184; idem, "Mamluks as Muslims," 165–68.

[113] For an illustration of the Mamluk hierarchy with the Abbasid caliphate at its summit, see "The Mamluk Chain of Command," in *The Atlas of the Crusades,* ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith (London, 1991), 110–11.

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and rule solely by their own virtue.[114] Indeed, it looks as though the caliph's mere presence, in the eyes of the ruler that protected him, provided the latter with a power akin to sacred magic.

In any case, the caliphate's position in Mamluk society appeared to satisfy all parties. The caliphs themselves, with few exceptions, did little to seek a greater role than what they had. If ever they forayed into active politics, voluntarily or not, the sultans or ruling magnates ultimately made them regret it. For its part, the religious establishment also tended to withhold support for any increase of the caliph's political power. A few ulama were highly sympathetic to this trend and revered both the person of the caliph and his office, but many others maintained a suspicious indifference, perhaps fretful that the caliphate might threaten their own role as "guardians of Islam." Overall, both the amirs and the religious scholars tended to support the status quo.

The sultans and the ulama were most aware of the inherent religious authority of an office that might be manipulated for their own interests.[115] Investiture documents suggest the concept that government stability was dependent on a caliph's making prayers for the best outcomes *(istikhārah)* and promulgation of the state. The ulama did not consider the caliphs solely as window-dressing and recognized that the caliphate had its place in the government throughout the span of the sultanate. The Mamluks likewise adopted the ulama's understanding and made the caliph a vital part of their succession rituals and ceremonial. For an upstart faction to seek wider authority or crown one of their own as sultan was unthinkable without the tacit blessing of the Abbasid caliph.

Apart from having them at the investiture ceremonies, the regime emphasized the religious role of the caliphs by making them the centerpiece in public rituals seeking relief from drought and plague as well as denouncing the infidelity of official enemies.

[114] This does not mean, however, that the sultans would not have considered it, had it been possible. See Heidemann, *Das Aleppiner Kalifat,* 194.

[115] Amidst the confusing atmosphere surrounding the death of Qāytbāy in Ṣafar 902/October 1496 al-Suyūṭī used his ties to the caliph al-Mutawakkil II to attempt to secure religious authority in Egypt. Al-Suyūṭī famously advanced the idea of a newly-created post of "grand qadi" *(qāḍī kabīr)* and persuaded al-Mutawakkil II to name him to the office with his caliphal sanction, to the irritation of the four qadis, who promptly rejected the move and denounced the caliph's authority (Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ,* 3:339). Al-Suyūṭī's student and biographer ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Shādhilī includes a portion of the document allegedly composed by al-Mutawakkil II. See *Bahjat al-ʿĀbidīn bi-Tarjamat Ḥāfiẓ al-ʿAṣr Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī* (Damascus, 1998), 172–74. On this curious episode, see also D. S. Margoliouth, "The Caliphate Historically Considered," *Moslem World* 11 (1921): 335; Schimmel, "Kalif und Kadi," 31–32; idem, "Some Glimpses," 357; Garcin, "Histoire," 37, 64–65; Elizabeth Sartain, *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, no. 23 (Cambridge, 1975), 1:91–93; Marlis J. Saleh, "Al-Suyūṭī and His Works: Their Place in Islamic Scholarship from Mamluk Times to the Present," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 5 (2001): 78.

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The Abbasid caliph provided a measure of common ground between the religious establishment and the political administration, and received a muted role in both spheres while providing access and relevance in both worlds. The caliphate's authority was not confined exclusively to the official political or religious spheres of Mamluk society, but it also played an important role in folk religious traditions such as the *mawlid* festivals celebrating the birth of the Prophet,[116] the practices at the shrine of Sayyidah Nafīsah, and funerary rites to mark the deaths of popular sultans—sometimes, perhaps, at the cost of alienating it from more conservative elements among the ulama.

Changing political realities also dictated the function of the Cairo caliphate, given as it was to tumultuous Mamluk factionalism. Establishing a periodization or otherwise chronicling the continuity of the Cairo caliphate as a cohesive institution has thus been a difficult process. Nevertheless, the mysterious pressure which fed the demand for a caliphate and the sultans' inability to dispose entirely of the caliph implies that the existence of a functioning caliphate somewhere in the world remained a point of interest to both Muslim rulers and their subjects.

While indeed, arguably little was left to the caliph in terms of tangible religious or political authority, his presence was felt to a degree on the political scene. The *milieu* demanded that he have significance and the Mamluk establishment perceived it as a reality, though one that could easily be set aside. While much of it was undoubtedly theatre, it seems to have symbolized a good deal more than the legitimization of Mamluk sultans.

[116] Al-Malāṭī, *Nayl al-Amal*, 7:372–73.

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