



# ASK Working Paper 27

**Mustafa Banister**

## **A Sword in the Caliph's Service: On the Caliphal Office in Late Fourteenth Century Mamluk Sources**

ASK Working Paper, ISSN 2193-925X  
Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg  
History and Society during the  
Mamluk Era (1250-1517)  
Heussallee 18-24  
53115 Bonn  
Editors: Stephan Conermann/Bethany Walker

**Author's Address**

Dr. Mustafa Banister  
Annemarie-Schimmel-Kolleg  
“History and Society during the Mamluk Era, 1250-1517”  
Heussallee 18-24  
53113 Bonn  
Telephone: 0228/7362941  
Fax: 0228/7362964  
Website: [www.mamluk.uni-bonn.de](http://www.mamluk.uni-bonn.de)  
Email: [mustafa.banister@utoronto.ca](mailto:mustafa.banister@utoronto.ca)

# A Sword in the Caliph's Service: On the Caliphal Office in Late Fourteenth Century Mamluk Sources

By Mustafa Banister  
mustafa.banister@utoronto.ca

Mustafa Banister obtained his doctorate in 2015 from the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations at the University of Toronto. The title of his dissertation was: "The Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo (1261-1517): History and Tradition in the Mamluk Court" supervised by Prof. Dr. Linda S. Northrup. He is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg (University of Bonn). He is completing a book manuscript on the Abbasid caliphate of Cairo under the Mamluks before moving on to his second project, which will be a narratological examination of the *Fākihāt al-khulafā' wa-muḥākāhāt al-zurafā'* by the Syrian religious scholar and litterateur Aḥmad ibn 'Arabshāh (d. 1450).

Among his publications are:

- "Naught Remains to the Caliph but his Title: Revisiting Abbasid Authority in Mamluk Cairo," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 18 (2014-15): 219-45.
- "Casting the Caliph in a Cosmic Role: Examining al-Suyūṭī's Historical Vision," in: A. Ghersetti, ed., *Al-Suyūṭī, a polymath of the Mamlūk period* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 98-117.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
I. Political Context	2
II. Discussions	8
1. Why did the amirs see the caliph as a suitable <i>sulṭānī</i> candidate?	8
2. "No deviation from this is known": The Late Affirmation of Abbasid Legitimacy in Mamluk Territory	9
III. The Late Fourteenth Century Discourse on the Caliphate	12
Conclusion	
Bibliography	

## **A Sword in the Caliph's Service: On the Caliphal Office in Late Fourteenth Century Mamluk Sources**

### **Abstract**

In recent decades the Abbasid caliphate of Cairo has continued to attract scholarly attention. An often neglected though noteworthy period of the caliphate's tenure in Mamluk Cairo is the late fourteenth century reign of the caliph al-Mutawakkil 'alā 'llāh Muḥammad (r. 763-85/1362-83 and 791-808/1389-1406). Over the course of his time in office, al-Mutawakkil had been offered the sultanate on at least three occasions: at 'Aqaba in 1377, as an alternate candidate to the Circassian amir (and later sultan) Barqūq in 1382, and later during the rebellion of Yalbughā al-Nāṣirī and Miṭāsh in 1390. Al-Mutawakkil proved consistent in his refusal of the office and was wise enough to realize that any such assumption of interim power would likely spell his own political undoing. Nevertheless, competing Mamluk amirs time and again referred to his authority and continued to put him forth as an acceptable contender for the sultanate. Based on sources from the Mamluk period and modern studies, this working paper addresses how and why the caliphate remained an important symbol in late fourteenth century Mamluk politics.

# A Sword in the Caliph's Service: On the Caliphal Office in Late Fourteenth Century Mamluk Sources

## Introduction

A 1999 study by the late German Arabist and Islamic studies research librarian, Dr. Lutz Wiederhold (1963-2012), calls our attention to the possibilities of re-considering the idea of “Caliphate” in the late fourteenth century context of the Mamluk Sultanate.<sup>1</sup> Wiederhold’s work explored many of the nuances of a so-called “Zāhirī revolt” of the mid-1380s which revealed ongoing discourses on the nature of the caliphate and caliphal authority in the later Mamluk period. An important question raised by Wiederhold’s study is, why did the Mamluk amirs of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries begin to see the Abbasid caliph as a suitable candidate for the sultanate?<sup>2</sup>

The reign of the Circassian Mamluk sultan al-Zāhir Barqūq (1382-89, 1390-99) has provided fertile ground for recent studies of late medieval Middle Eastern economy, military, and politics. In addition to being identified as a possible “turning point” for the Mamluk sultanate, the era was also an important one for studies of religion, particularly for notions of the caliphate. Through an examination of Mamluk historiographical writing, this paper will discuss some aspects of the contemporary caliphal office during the late fourteenth/early fifteenth centuries.

## I. Political Context

In the years following the 1261 and 1262 caliphal investitures of Abbasid survivors of the Mongol invasion of Baghdad by the Mamluk sultan Baybars in Cairo, the caliphate became an issue often neglected by historians of Islamic civilization. Nevertheless, the institution quietly persisted in the shadows throughout the span of the Mamluk sultanate.<sup>3</sup> Although Barqūq did not assume the sultanate until 783/1382, he had effectively been in power behind the scenes since 779/1378 and more completely in 782/1380.<sup>4</sup> As a Circassian upstart, his ascendancy and political career had disrupted and usurped the line of Qalawunid puppet sultans and the various powerful protecting amirs which, save for a few examples, had represented the status quo of Mamluk rule since the death of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in 741/1341. It was natural that

---

<sup>1</sup> See L. 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,” *IJMES* 31 (1999): 203-35.

<sup>2</sup> The recent work of Mona Hassan has also attempted to answer this question. See footnote 3 below.

<sup>3</sup> For the most important studies of the Abbasid caliphate of Cairo to date (arranged chronologically), see T. Arnold, *The Caliphate* (London, 1924), 89-106, 139-58; A. Schimmel, “Kalif und Kadi im spätmittelalterlichen Agypten,” *Die Welt des Islams* 24 (1942): 1-128; J.-C. Garcin, “Histoire, opposition politique et piétisme traditionaliste dans le *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍarat* de Suyūṭī,” *AI* 7 (1967): 33-89; M. Chapoutot-Remadi, “Une institution mal connue: le khalifat abbaside du Caire,” *Les Cahiers de Tunisie* 20, no. 77-8 (1972): 11-23; P. M. Holt, “Some Observations on the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate of Cairo,” *BSOAS* 47 (1984): 501-7; S. Heidemann, *Das Aleppiner Kalifat (A.D. 1261): vom Ende des Kalifates in Baghdad über Aleppo zu den Restaurationen in Cairo* (Leiden, 1994); M. Hassan, “Loss of Caliphate: The Trauma and Aftermath of 1258 and 1924,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2009) - Hassan’s revised dissertation has recently been published as: *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton, 2017) and will be consulted and integrated for the final version of this paper.

<sup>4</sup> For studies on Barqūq and the shift from Turkish to Circassian Mamluk regimes, see D. Ayalon, “The Circassians in the Mamlūk Kingdom,” *JAOS* 69 (1949): 135-47; A. Levanoni, “Al-Maqrīzī’s Account of the Transition from Turkish to Circassian Mamluk Sultanate: History in the Service of Faith,” in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt, c. 950-1800*, ed. H. Kennedy (Leiden, 2000), 93-105; eadem, “The Background of Barquq’s Ascent to Power and the Transition from a Turkish to a Circassian Sultanate in Egypt.” Phd diss. (Hebrew), Hebrew University in Jerusalem, 1990.

Barqūq, though he tried his best to appear friendly toward established traditions - even investing two of his own Qalawunid princes and upholding investiture by the Abbasid caliph - was viewed with suspicion and even hatred by the newly dispossessed power elite.<sup>5</sup> Barqūq effectively came to power in a political world in which, as William Brinner observed “the sultan was as much of a shadow ruler or puppet figure as was the caliph.”<sup>6</sup>

Barqūq’s attempts at consolidating power in the early part of his reign were further complicated by his often difficult relationship with the reigning Abbasid caliph, al-Mutawakkil ‘alā ‘llāh Muḥammad (r. 763-85/1362-83 and 791-808/1389-1406)<sup>7</sup>, a descendant of al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 660-701/1262-1302), the second Abbasid survivor installed by Baybars as caliph in Cairo. Al-Mutawakkil had been invested as caliph twenty years before the reign of Barqūq in 763/1361 during the nominal reign of the Qalawunid sultan al-Manṣūr Muḥammad at a time when the amir Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī was the true wielder of power behind the throne.<sup>8</sup> In those twenty years, although al-Mutawakkil occasionally clashed with leading amirs, he was nevertheless held aloft as an entrenched symbol of authority and legitimacy along with his forefathers.<sup>9</sup> During that time the caliph cultivated important relationships with Mamluk amirs and served as a prominent functionary with access to many key players dominating Mamluk politics in the 1360s and 1370s.

Prior to the reign of Barqūq, al-Mutawakkil had several noteworthy career highlights. In Rabī‘ II 768/December 1366, perhaps wishing to reassert authority through a more malleable and younger Qalawunid than his increasingly unwieldy protégé al-Ashraf Sha‘bān II, Yalbughā summoned the caliph and ordered him to recognize al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s grandson Ānūk as the new sultan. Al-Mutawakkil, perhaps boldly, stood down Yalbughā and insisted that Sha‘bān had sufficient power (*shawka*) to be obeyed. Yalbughā dismissed the caliph, and went ahead with the investiture anyway.<sup>10</sup> Yalbughā himself was murdered at court shortly thereafter. Sha‘bān returned to power largely by acquiring the loyalty of many of Yalbughā’s *mamlūks*. Nevertheless, Sha‘bān’s reign was not without intrigue, and many of the amirs loyal to Yalbughā plotted to end his rule. In late 778/1377 al-Mutawakkil accompanied Sha‘bān on pilgrimage while a coup to remove the sultan unfolded in Cairo (which included Barqūq). On the road to the Ḥijāz, Sha‘bān’s *mamlūks* rioted and forced the sultan into hiding. In ‘Aqaba, the sultan’s *mamlūks* approached al-Mutawakkil and urged him to assume the sultanate.<sup>11</sup> A shrewd politico perhaps wary of being swept aside after the dust

---

<sup>5</sup> On Mamluk loyalty to Qalawunid tradition in practice, see B. Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge, 1993), 52-5.

<sup>6</sup> W. Brinner, “The Struggle for Power in the Mamluk State: Some Reflections on the Transition from Bahri to Burji Rule,” *Proceedings of the 26th International Congress of Orientalists, New Delhi, 4-10 January 1964* (New Delhi, 1970), 232, 234; A. F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge, 2008), 146-9, 167.

<sup>7</sup> For modern summaries of the career of al-Mutawakkil I of Cairo, see I. A. Ṭarkhān, *Miṣr fī ‘aṣr dawlat al-mamālīk al-jarākisa* (Cairo, 1960), 56-63; Garcin, “Histoire,” 58-61.

<sup>8</sup> See J. Van Steenberghe, “The Amir Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī, the Qalāwūnid Sultanate, and the Cultural Matrix of Mamluk Society: A Reassessment of Mamlūk Politics in the 1360s,” *JAOS* 131, no. 3 (2011): 423-44; idem, “On the Brink of a New Era? Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī (d. 1366) and the Yalbughāwīyah,” *MSR* 15 (2011): 117-52. At roughly the same time in 764/1363-4, Barqūq was a new recruit in the household of Yalbughā. See P. M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517* (London, 1986), 127.

<sup>9</sup> Hassan, “Loss of Caliphate,” 24, 33-6, 136.

<sup>10</sup> Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-ma‘rifat duwal al-mulūk*, ed. M. M. Amīn and S. ‘Āshūr (Cairo, 1956-73), 3:134.

<sup>11</sup> As Garcin points out, it is interesting that these *mamlūks* addressed themselves to the Abbasid caliph as a senior figure of power (“Histoire,” 59). For a historical and historiographical assessment of this event as well as the later “Miṣṣāshī” rebellion against Barqūq, see the first two chapters of: S. G. Massoud, *The Chronicles and Annalistic Sources of the Early Mamluk Circassian Period* (Leiden, 2007).

settled, the caliph instead advised the *mamlūks* to find a Qalawunid candidate who he would duly invest with office.<sup>12</sup>

Some months later another power play made by Aynabak al-Badrī (d. 780/1378), the latest acting strongman amongst the Yalbughāwī amirs, inadvertently revealed the growing strength of the caliph's position and popularity among the Mamluk elite. On 4 Rabī' I 779/11 July 1377 Aynabak ordered al-Mutawakkil to recognize his stepson (also the former stepson of Yalbughā) Aḥmad as suitable to take the sultanate along with an ad hoc ruling sanctioning the murder of Sha'bān. Al-Mutawakkil, perhaps feeling pressure to uphold some semblance of existing Mamluk custom, refused to consent on grounds that Aḥmad was not from the House of Qalāwūn, allegedly stating that he would not depose the son of a king in favor of the son of an amir. Ready for the charge, Aynabak argued that the mother of his stepson, a former wife of the Qalawunid al-Nāṣir Ḥasan (d. 762/1361), had been impregnated by the late sultan before her marriages to Yalbughā and Aynabak himself. Unconvinced of the boy's dubious parentage, the caliph invited the wrath of Aynabak who rebuked al-Mutawakkil, accusing the caliph of "frittering away his time in the bathhouses", ordered he be removed from office and exiled to Upper Egypt to the dismay of the caliph's military and scholarly allies at court. In need of a new Abbasid to maintain legitimacy amidst his political rivals, Aynabak summoned another Abbasid candidate and robed him without the consensus of the '*ulamā*' or important Cairene amirs.<sup>13</sup> Aynabak suffered a backlash for his rash treatment of the caliph:

The *mamlūks* changed towards [Aynabak al-Badrī] and the hearts of the army grew estranged from him. The deputies of Syria sought to conspire against him and abandoned obedience to him for about three months.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps aware of Aynabak's delicate hold on power, al-Mutawakkil returned to his residence without consequence. Aynabak ultimately bowed to the demands of the amirs and restored al-Mutawakkil after only two weeks. The army ousted Aynabak shortly thereafter and imprisoned him in Alexandria until his death.<sup>15</sup>

The ambitious Circassian *mamlūk* Barqūq next became a reckonable force on the political scene from 779/1377, and may have been wise to exercise caution toward the inherent dangers of a popular Abbasid caliph. In the first two decades of his reign, Mamluk chroniclers consistently present al-Mutawakkil as a stalwart for the rights of Qalawunid candidates against presumptuous amirs. For the "Commander of the Faithful" to bristle against the pretensions of Barqūq and possibly even resist or join his enemies was only a natural reflex. It is worth mentioning that by the start of Barqūq's sultanate in 784/1382, al-Mutawakkil, in addition to his ties to members of the Mamluk military elite also cultivated contacts among Bedouin groups as well as small Kurdish and Turkoman militias, perhaps with the intention of amassing enough support to direct (or co-direct) a revolt and later offer Abbasid legitimacy to the most favorable strongman.<sup>16</sup> Amidst the confusion surrounding the

<sup>12</sup> Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-'uqūd al-farīda fī tarājim al-a'yān al-mufīda*, ed. M. al-Jalīlī (Beirut, 2002), 3:293; Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-ghumr bi-abnā' al-'umr*, ed. Ḥ. Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1969-98), 2:344.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:1:309; idem, *Durar al-'uqūd*, 3:293; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ta'rīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba*, ed. 'A. Darwish (Damascus, 1994), 3:543; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā' al-ghumr*, 1:151, 2:344; idem, *Dhayl al-Durar al-kāmina*, ed. 'A. Darwish (Cairo, 1992), 119; Yūsuf ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhira* (Cairo, 1963-72), 11:6.

<sup>14</sup> Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī, *Ma'āthir al-ināfa fī ma'ālim al-khilāfa*, ed. 'A. A. Farrāj (Kuwait, 1964), 2:181.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ta'rīkh*, 3:558; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā' al-ghumr*, 1:170; 'Abd al-Bāsiṭ ibn Khalīl ibn Shāhīn al-Zāhirī al-Ḥanafī [al-Malaṭī], *Nayl al-amal fī dhayl al-duwal*, ed. 'U. 'A. Tadmurī (Sidon, 2002), 2:129; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Husn al-muḥādara fī ta'rīkh Miṣr wa-al-Qāhira* (Cairo, 1967-8), 2:83.

<sup>16</sup> Broadbridge questioned whether these Turkmen and Kurds were in fact nomad fighters based in Mamluk territory, or had origins among the "autonomous confederations of Anatolia and Iraq." See *Kingship and Ideology*, 150.

advent of Barqūq, various elements, this time most likely non-Circassians, tried again to install al-Mutawakkil as a stopgap sultan with limited power. Hinted at in Mamluk sources, the attempt implies that some amirs preferred Abbasid legitimacy, which had been inseparable from the Qalawunids, over the pretensions of the Circassian parvenu Barqūq.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of al-Mutawakkil's past experiences and various connections, Barqūq found great difficulty in acquiring a suitable relationship with the well-regarded caliph during his early reign. Nevertheless, the Mamluk sultan did all he could to carefully recreate the caliphal *bay'a* on more than one occasion while making full use of all the Abbasid symbolism traditionally attached to Mamluk investiture ceremonial. Information on the caliph's career during the reign of Barqūq is sparse save for his possible involvement in a number of failed coup attempts. In Rajab 785/August-September 1383, a year into Barqūq's reign, the sultan learned of a planned coup reportedly spearheaded by al-Mutawakkil and two Mamluk amirs, Quruṭ and Ibn Quṭluqtamur, supported by 800 mounted Kurdish and Turkoman fighters.<sup>18</sup> Brought before Barqūq, the caliph denied the charges and blamed the two amirs who, in turn, accused the Abbasid caliph. Before the assembly, Barqūq screamed for the caliph's head and had to be calmed down. Ultimately the other conspirators were punished, but Barqūq failed to secure a *fatwa* allowing him to execute the caliph which the *'ulamā'* were unwilling to provide. Barqūq also wished to torture the caliph, but according to Ibn Ḥajar, his viceroy (*nā'ib*) the amir Sūdūn al-Shaykhūnī advised him that if they did so, they would be cursed by the masses (*'amma*).<sup>19</sup> Instead, the sultan was forced to seek satisfaction by imprisoning al-Mutawakkil in the tower of the citadel and stripping him of his salary and properties. The sultan then installed alternate Abbasid family members as caliphs from 785-791/1383-1389.<sup>20</sup>

According to al-Qalqashandī and Ibn Taghrībirdī, some amirs remained supportive of al-Mutawakkil, and by the end of Rajab 785/September 1383, several pleaded with Barqūq to restore the caliph to office, begging his pardon. When Barqūq remained resolute in his commitment to seeing the caliph executed as a traitor, they continued to cajole the sultan until he released al-Mutawakkil and allowed him to return to the Abbasid residence on 9 Dhū al-Ḥijja 785/2 February 1384.<sup>21</sup> Barqūq's trouble with the caliphate was not limited to issues with al-Mutawakkil. The *Zāhirī fitna*, detailed by Wiederhold, occurred during the caliph's period of incarceration and centered around issues concerning the caliphate and non-canonical taxes and involved disaffected *'ulamā'* in Egypt and Syria rather than ambitious Mamluk amirs. The *Zāhirī* movement was a rebellion of religious scholars who opposed the caliphate system that had evolved in the Islamic world over the preceding 400 years. Their goal was to depose Barqūq, abolish non-canonical taxes and restore political power to a new Qurayshī caliph.<sup>22</sup> Eventually, Barqūq had the conspirators arrested and sent to Cairo where he ordered them to be tortured. One of the ringleaders behind the revolt was the Egyptian scholar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl ibn Ibrāhīm ibn 'Abd al-Raḥīm, an esteemed acquaintance of the historian al-Maqrīzī, known as Abū Hishām or Ibn al-Burhān, who was brought before Barqūq in chains in late Dhū al-Ḥijja 788/January 1387. As the sultan tried to extract the names of the amirs which were colluding with the conspirators, the pair shared the following exchange which betrayed uniquely candid feelings about the contemporary Abbasids of Cairo:

---

<sup>17</sup> Garcin, "Histoire," 59.

<sup>18</sup> Most Mamluk sources repeat the charges without commenting on whether or not the caliph may have actually intended to rebel against Barqūq. See also Wiederhold, "Legal-Religious Elite," 213-4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā' al-ghumr*, 2:131. Wiederhold, "Legal-Religious Elite," 214.

<sup>20</sup> 'Alī ibn Dāwūd al-Jawharī ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-nufūs wa-al-abdān fī tawārīkh al-zamān*, ed. Ḥ. Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1970), 1:121; al-Suyūṭī, *Husn*, 2:84; Muḥammad ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī' al-zuhūr fī waqā'ī' al-duhūr*, ed. M. Muṣṭafā (Cairo, 1982-4), 1:2:333.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:2:504; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ta'rikh*, 1:116; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 11:237.

<sup>22</sup> Wiederhold, "Legal-Religious Elite," 212-6.

The first to begin speaking was Barqūq, who said “Aḥmad, what displeases you about my reign?” To which he replied, “All of it is abominable (*munkar*).” Barqūq asked, “what specifically [about it]?” Aḥmad replied: “Firstly, your very occupation of the sultanate is reprehensible, for it is impermissible that you be *imām* of the Muslims, as *imāms* must be from the [line of] Quraysh according to a stipulation (*naṣṣ*) made by the Prophet.” The sultan said: “I am aware of that, but where is someone who is appropriate for the caliphate? Surely you know that when the caliphs frittered away their time in the bathhouses, and shirked the governing duties of their empire (*tadbīr al-mamlaka*) they lost the caliphate. So if you know someone fitting for the caliphate then I will surrender power to him.” Aḥmad responded “There are individuals and groups from the Quraysh but they have all forsaken their authority.” The sultan asked: “So where is someone appropriate who I can stand beside?” Aḥmad: “There are many such people.” Barqūq: “Where are they?!” Aḥmad: “Remove yourself from the matter and let the Muslims decide.”<sup>23</sup>

During the years of al-Mutawakkil’s incarceration a more serious political revolt began in 791/1389 against Barqūq led by the rebellious Syrian amirs Yalbughā al-Nāṣirī and Miṭāsh.<sup>24</sup> The sources maintain that many amirs remained disgruntled about Barqūq’s power and linked their alienation to the ouster and confinement of al-Mutawakkil, who became a *cause célèbre*. Combined with other grievances, the Syrian amirs harnessed lingering resentment to stir up full blown revolt. Yalbughā al-Nāṣirī used the pretence of restoring a Qalawunid prince to power under the caliphal banner, to bolster his influence among the amirs of Syria, uniting them in opposition to Barqūq.<sup>25</sup> Fearing that Yalbughā might use the caliphate to undermine him, Barqūq confined al-Mutawakkil to the tower on 27 Ṣafar 791/25 February 1389 and banned all visits from servants, family members, and companions. An army that Barqūq sent to Damascus suffered defeat by Yalbughā in Rabī‘ I-Rabī‘ II 791/March-April 1389. The Mamluk sultan sent peacemakers to Damascus the next month, urging Yalbughā to obey the sultan, but the rebel amir declared his own status as a champion of the Abbasid caliph:

God the Exalted established me as defender of the cousin of His Prophet (may God bless him and give him peace), the Abbasid Commander of the Faithful, who is caliph of the Muslims, and who has been imprisoned for a time. If right is with me then God will make me victorious.<sup>26</sup>

Seemingly aware of the harm that mistreatment of the caliph had done to his image, Barqūq quickly deposed the incumbent office holder al-Musta‘īm (r. 788-91/1386-89) and publicly reconciled with al-Mutawakkil to strengthen his symbolic hold on power. Before the pressure of the revolt forced Barqūq to flee, he staged at least three high-profile events in Cairo, all aimed at demonstrating his proximity to the popular al-Mutawakkil. The sultan gave the caliph gifts and urged him to testify that their bond was strong. Two such ceremonies were done for the sake of the amirs, and a third took place behind the Palace of Hospitality (*Dār al-Ḍiyāfa*) for the *‘amma* who received cash gifts. Barqūq ultimately gained little from this late effort to secure loyalty from the masses and went into hiding.<sup>27</sup> Once in Cairo, the amirs invited the caliph to discuss sultanic succession. Just as he had thwarted the attempt to hand him the sultanate at ‘Aqaba thirteen years earlier, al-Mutawakkil recommended that the office be returned to a worthy Qalawunid, and thus al-Ṣāliḥ Ḥājjī was restored by way of caliphal *bay‘a*. Willing to sign off on every order set before him, al-Mutawakkil sustained himself as a source of legitimacy, hoping to keep his head above water and survive politics long enough to

<sup>23</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-‘uqūd*, 1:298-9.

<sup>24</sup> On Miṭāsh, see: Yūsuf ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi wa-al-mustawfi ba‘da al-wāfi*, ed. M. M. Amīn and S. ‘Ashūr (Cairo, 1984-93), 4:94-9.

<sup>25</sup> Muḥammad ibn al-Furāt, *Ta’riḫ ibn al-Furāt* (Beirut, 1936), 9:56-7; al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-‘uqūd*, 3:293; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, 1:365.

<sup>26</sup> Brinner, “Struggle for Power,” 232.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn al-Furāt, *Ta’riḫ*, 9:87; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:2:613-5; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 11:285.

maintain his office and his household.<sup>28</sup> From exile in Karak, Barqūq rebuilt his strength and set his sights on reclaiming power. The amir Miṣṣāsh, after he emerged as the new face of the revolt, tried to convince al-Mutawakkil to draft a *fatwa* branding Barqūq a criminal. The caliph, unhappy with what was being offered in exchange - only the permanent imprisonment of an Abbasid rival – remained as noncommittal as possible.<sup>29</sup> After a battle in early 792/1390, Barqūq emerged victorious, and having captured the royal banners of the defeated sultan Ḥājjī, posed beneath them with the captured Abbasid caliph, as defeated enemy soldiers joined his side.<sup>30</sup>

Mamluk sources such as Ibn Ṣaṣrā, al-Maqrīzī, and Ibn Ḥajar imply that Barqūq made no attempt to penalize al-Mutawakkil for collaborating with Yalbughā and Miṣṣāsh, and that having repaired his troubled relationship with the caliph before he fled Cairo, was kind to the caliph for the remainder of his reign.<sup>31</sup> Non-Mamluk sources on the other hand, paint a strained (and occasionally violent) picture of sultan-caliph relations during Barqūq’s reign. The Florentine pilgrims who visited Mamluk territory in 1380s and the resident Italian merchant Bertrando de Mignanelli candidly discussed the caliph’s reluctance to support Barqūq as well as pushback against the sultan by unhappy amirs. According to De Mignanelli, who described Barqūq’s return to power in 792/1390:

Whomever [Barqūq] found in his way he put to the sword, and he hurried on to the big tent. He wounded the Caliph in the head [...] The Caliph, after he was wounded, called out loudly, “Now, indeed, Barqūq, you are worthy to rule, because you are victorious over [Ḥājjī] in battle.” Such things and more he said, not because of Barqūq as much as because of the wound in his head, which was red with blood and wrapped in cloth, like the head of a goldfinch.<sup>32</sup>

At his camp in Shaḥḥab, south of Damascus, Barqūq assembled notables and amirs in the presence of al-Mutawakkil and the qadis. His first act was to depose Ḥājjī from the sultanate with the support of the *qadis* and a renewal of his sovereignty through caliphal *bay‘a*. A new ceremony reestablished Barqūq as sultan, after which he rode into a lavishly decorated Cairo on 14 Ṣafar 792/1 February 1390 with the caliph and *qadis* leading the way to calm tension as Mamluk functionaries tossed gold coins to gathered crowds standing near the city entrances. Anxious to emphasize the validity of his return in Egypt, Barqūq wasted little time in staging a repeat of his installation ceremony with al-Mutawakkil and other important religious functionaries. The sultan and the caliph exchanged black Abbasid robes and on 23 Ṣafar 792/10 February 1390 a copy of the sultanic investiture deed was read at the Palace of Justice (*Dār al-‘Adl*) after which al-Mutawakkil was robed in the company of other dignitaries. Al-Mutawakkil resumed his reign during the second act of Barqūq’s political career while the Mamluk sultan focused on Temūr. However, neither Barqūq nor his chancery relied much on the sultan’s status as protector of the Abbasid caliphate in official correspondence with Temūr.<sup>33</sup> Save for a few public processions and high-profile funeral appearances, Mamluk sources mention little concerning al-Mutawakkil during the last years of Barqūq’s rule.<sup>34</sup> Thus

---

<sup>28</sup> Garcin, “Histoire,” 60-61.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:2:694; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 11:369.

<sup>31</sup> Ibn Ṣaṣrā, *al-Durra al-muḍī‘a*, 1:75-6 (English), 2:50-1 (Arabic); al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-‘uqūd*, 3:294; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, 2:345.

<sup>32</sup> Bertrando de Mignanelli, trans. Walter J. Fischel as “*Ascensus Barcoch: a Latin Biography of the Mamlūk Sultan Barqūq of Egypt (d. 1399) Written by B. de Mignanelli*,” *Arabica* 6 (1959): 158 [25].

<sup>33</sup> For one mention, see Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 183.

<sup>34</sup> Some historians suggest that after reinstatement during the second reign of Barqūq, the caliph enjoyed more freedom and financial independence. See M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *La Syrie à l’époque des mamelouks d’après les auteurs arabes: description géographique, économique et administrative précédée d’une introduction sur l’organisation gouvernementale* (Paris, 1923), xxiv.

we can say with some certainty that the Abbasid caliphate became a hot-button issue in Mamluk politics from about 1377 to 1390. After Barqūq emerged for his second sultanate, the caliph went back to quiet ceremonial processions and administering family finances until 1412 when his son, the new caliph al-Mustaʿīn, became the candidate selected to fill the sultanate for six months while the amirs fought each other for supremacy.

Mamluk vassal regimes such as those of Mārdīn and Sīwās, minted coins and pronounced the *khutba* in Barqūq's name rather than that of al-Mutawakkil, which, according to Anne Broadbridge, suggests that they considered loyalty to the caliphate less a matter of Islamic unity and more a show of deference to their Mamluk overlords. As Broadbridge makes clear, some reflections of the caliph's significance in this period emerge from an assessment of the relationships of the amirs and sultans with governors and client rulers. In addition to caliphal titles which were sometimes granted to governors, caliphal banners were sent to supplement sultan's ones.<sup>35</sup> Barqūq succumbed to illness at the end of his life on 15 Shawwāl 801/20 June 1399. The day before his death the sultan summoned al-Mutawakkil, the *qadis*, and prominent heads of state to discuss succession in his council chamber. Barqūq set a precedent for future sultans throughout the Circassian Burjī period, by having the caliph pledge to guarantee the succession of the sultan's son after the death of the father. The *qadis*, amirs, and officials took the oath. While Barqūq's testament demanded that senior Mamluk amirs serve as executors of his affairs, all were formally subject to the sanction and supervision (*imḍāʿ*) of al-Mutawakkil. Thus on his deathbed the sultan hoped to use al-Mutawakkil's status and prestige to safeguard his dynastic succession.<sup>36</sup>

## II. Discussions

### 1. Why did the amirs see the caliph as a suitable candidate?

As the doctoral research of Mona Hassan has illustrated, on the surface level, loyalty to the caliphate was never a point of dispute. A rebel amir could easily argue that the current sultan had failed to do the job that the caliph had appointed him to do, while he, as the new challenger, would successfully do so. Despite the ups and downs of al-Mutawakkil's political career, his persistence as a viable symbol maintained currency among the Mamluk factions hostile to Barqūq. As Émile Tyan points out, among the various struggles, each rival group sought to have a hand on the caliph as a basic demonstration of victory.<sup>37</sup> Al-Mutawakkil was a fetishized figure with universal appeal in multiple sectors of society, and as Hassan suggests, was able to unify disparate factions under a universal Islamic symbol capable of transcending factional loyalties and overshadowing the House of Qalāwūn in its decline.<sup>38</sup> Although individual *mamlūks* were loyal to the singular *ustādh* who trained and manumitted them, in theory, allegiance to the caliph was expected from all.

From the time of its introduction into the Mamluk polity the caliphate carried a necessarily religious countenance, representing the *'ulamā'* and their religious approval of the ruling regime.<sup>39</sup> Over time, however, the caliph and his office may have become slightly

---

<sup>35</sup> Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 150.

<sup>36</sup> Recent scholarship has suggested, however, that the Mamluks sultans were sincere in what has been described as a "dynastic impulse" to establish their sons in power after them. See A. F. Broadbridge, "Sending Home for Mom and Dad: The Extended Family Impulse in Mamluk Politics," *MSR* 15 (2011): 1-2; P. M. Holt, "The Position and Power of the Mamlūk Sultan," *BSOAS* 38, no. 2 (1975): 239-41.

<sup>37</sup> É. Tyan, *Institutions du droit public musulman: Tome deuxième – Sultanat et califat* (Paris, 1956), 243.

<sup>38</sup> Hassan, "Loss of Caliphate," 24, 33, 35-7, 119, 148.

<sup>39</sup> Scholars agree that the early Mamluk sultans certainly followed the Seljuq, Zengid and Ayyubid example of professing loyalty to the Abbasid caliphate. See Hassan, "Loss of Caliphate," 119-20, 158, 160, 170; L. S. Northrup, "The Bahrī Mamlūk Sultanate, 1250-1390," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, Vol. 1, ed. C. F.

divorced from the traditional religious understanding (if such a thing was possible) and went on to represent the basis for a brand of universal loyalty with the potential to transcend more localized loyalties to a *mamlūk's ustādh*, *khushdāsh*, or sultan. Any member of the ruling Mamluk apparatus would have been made to understand that loyalty to the symbolic caliphate was a given part of the political culture.<sup>40</sup> Sultans who only considered the caliph's presence in their entourage a matter of *realpolitik* would still have seen the caliph as an object which lent legitimating prestige capable of reminding local rivals of an incumbent's preeminence. It was certainly one thing to *pretend* to be allegiant to the caliph for the sake of the religious establishment or the *'amma*, and quite another to continue the "charade" (if indeed it was a charade) alone among the competing Mamluk factions.

An important and unanswered question remains why the amirs lacked the ability to show disloyalty to the caliph outside the court. Was the caliph a real rallying point, or just a convenient excuse to legitimately take up arms against a powerful rival?<sup>41</sup> The caliph's traditional role in Mamluk ceremonial and customs dictated certain norms and protocols applicable to all. It was part of a political language and at least in theory (though rarely in practice), that loyalty to the caliphate was supposed to trump allegiance to the reigning sultan. It may have been easier to turn one's back on a beleaguered and embattled ruler like Aynabak al-Badrī, Barqūq in 791/1389 or his son al-Nāṣir Faraj (in which case the amirs and the people favored the caliph against the sultan in 815/1412), rather than a popular sultan like al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in 709/1310 (in which case the amirs and the people favored a popular sultan at the expense of the caliph al-Mustakfī bi-llāh). Nevertheless, the political mystique of the caliphate remained constant throughout the two and a half century lifespan of the Mamluk sultanate and appealing to it in public never fell out of vogue.<sup>42</sup>

It is thus that this notion of "defending the caliphate" went deeper in Mamluk culture than merely paying lip-service to an Islamic civilizational convention to appease the *'ulamā'* and secure their support. Instead, "protecting the caliph," an utterly helpless holy man, sometimes even mentioned in the same breath as widows or orphans, may also have been linked to notions of virility, chivalry, and pride of place in Mamluk Cairo<sup>43</sup> in a way that was neither simply or strictly Islamic. Their unique (secular and necessarily religious) interest in the caliphate was important to the Mamluks' construction and perception of their own customs, distinct from Islamic norms. Supported by decades of ceremonial reinforcement, the importance of the caliphate became deeply embedded in the Mamluk ethos until it was eventually taken for granted and treated as a given reality in tune with historical fact. Yes, it was a caliphate that was "Islamic," but also in some ways perhaps secularly or culturally, "Mamluk."

## **2. "No deviation from this is known": The Late Affirmation of Abbasid Legitimacy in Mamluk Territory**

During their heyday in Abbasid Baghdad, the caliphs used ceremonial to generate a powerful atmosphere around themselves.<sup>44</sup> The regnal names chosen by many Abbasid rulers

---

Petry (Cambridge, 1998), 268; Y. Lev, "Symbiotic Relations: Ulama and the Mamluk Sultans," *MSR* 13, no. 1 (2009): 12-13.

<sup>40</sup> Hassan, "Loss of Caliphate," 148.

<sup>41</sup> Indeed this question has been raised before: Wiederhold, "Zahiri Revolt," 203-35; Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 150; M. Khūlī, *al-'Ulamā' fī Miṣr fī al-'aṣr al-Mamlūkī, 648-923 H/1250-1517 M.* (Cairo, 2014), 70-1.

<sup>42</sup> For some discussion of the Mamluk amirs' attitude towards the Abbasid caliphate, see Schimmel, "Kalif und Kadi," 16-7.

<sup>43</sup> Hassan, "Loss of Caliphate," 119-20, 246-47. On the changed status of Cairo as the new seat of Islam *vis-à-vis* the Abbasid caliphate, see also al-Qalqashandī, *Ma'āthir*, 1:1-2; al-Suyūfī, *Husn*, 2:94.

<sup>44</sup> P. Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam – Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 163-64.

demonstrated the millennial expectations surrounding people from the family of the Prophet coming to power. As Hassan discovered, many historians including those of the earlier Mamluk period such as Baybars al-Manṣūrī, understood the contemporary caliphs as conduits providing a link to the family of the Prophet. Throughout the Mamluk period, the *‘ulamā’* maintained the earlier stipulation that the office-holder of the caliphate had to have Qurayshī and Hashimite credentials, both of which were often inserted into a reigning caliph’s genealogical chain. They also honored the demands of tradition which stated that the caliph had to be a member of the Abbasid family. These non-negotiable criteria for the caliphate were widely agreed upon among the men of religion and subsequently popularized in Mamluk circles.<sup>45</sup> In subsequent centuries, religious scholars and historians such as al-Maqrīzī and al-Suyūfī remained steeped in prophetic traditions, apocryphal or not, that strengthened Abbasid claims. Speech attributed to the Prophet stated that sovereignty and authority must reside in the line of al-‘Abbās: “I saw in a vision the children of Marwān (Umayyads) taking possession of my pulpit, one after another, which troubled me, and I saw the children of ‘Abbās (Abbasids) taking possession of my pulpit one after another and that gladdened me,” which retained currency in contemporary Mamluk literature and discourse on the caliphate. Thus spurious traditions which strengthened classical Abbasid legitimacy maintained relevance in Mamluk times.<sup>46</sup>

Mohammad Gharaibeh’s recent research on Ibn Kathīr’s universal history, the *Bidāya wa Nihāya*, has revealed one author’s view of the Abbasid caliphate in light of deep ideological and eschatological precommitments to so-called “salvation history”.<sup>47</sup> Ibn Kathīr interpreted the Abbasids, based on dubious traditions of the Prophet, as the rightful rulers who would rule until the Day of Judgment.<sup>48</sup> For Ibn Kathīr, who had a strong inclination toward religiously interpreting events, history was only on track when it conformed to the pro-Abbasid predictions of the Prophet, which strengthened Abbasid legitimacy.<sup>49</sup> Ibn Kathīr went as far as to assert that the *mahdī*, or end-time eschatological deliverer, would eventually arise from the Abbasid line and rule until the return of Jesus.<sup>50</sup>

In Rajab 803/February 1401 the Mamluks famously dispatched Ibn Khaldūn to meet with Temūr (Tamerlane) after the sack of Damascus. An unnamed Abbasid claimant accompanied the delegation and in the presence of Temūr pressed his own independent claim to the caliphate in hopes of unseating al-Mutawakkil in Cairo. The Abbasid prince boasted of a worthier genealogy than that of the incumbent caliph and cited a tradition that the caliphate “belonged to the Abbasids as long as the world endured.”<sup>51</sup> Turning to Ibn Khaldūn for his input, Temūr asked about the historic caliphate and the Abbasid family’s claims to it. In a careful response, Ibn Khaldūn simultaneously defended the Mamluk status quo against two potential challengers: a rival Abbasid claimant and Temūr himself.<sup>52</sup> In his own recollection of the incident, Ibn Khaldūn explains that leadership had been in dispute among Muslims

<sup>45</sup> Hassan, “Loss of Caliphate,” 35-37, 44, 64, 111, 146, 153, 158-60, 169-70; Wiederhold, “Legal-Religious Elite,” 214; H. Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politique de Takī-d-dīn Aḥmad b. Taymīya* (Cairo, 1939), 45; Chapoutot-Remadi, “Une institution mal connue,” 18; Northrup, “Baḥrī Mamlūk Sultanate,” 269.

<sup>46</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Ta’rīkh al-khulafā’* (Beirut, n.d.), 11-4; C. E. Bosworth, “Al-Maqrīzī’s Epistle ‘Concerning What Has Come Down to Us About the Banu Umayya and the Banu l-‘Abbas,’” in *Studia Arabica and Islamica: Festschrift for Ihsan ‘Abbās*, ed. Wadād al-Qādī (Beirut, 1981), 42-4.

<sup>47</sup> M. Gharaibeh, “Geschichtsschreibung im Dienste des ‘abbāsīdischen Kalifats: Das *al-Bidāya wa-n-nihāya* des Ibn Kathīr (1301–1373) – ein geschichtstheologisches Werk,” *Jahrbuch für Islamische Theologie und Religionspädagogik* 3 (2014): 95-124.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Ta’rīf bi-Ibn Khaldūn wa-riḥlatihi gharban wa-sharqan* (Cairo, 1951), 374-5.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 374-6.

since the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, and after a brief summation of Sunni, Shiite and Kharijite positions, discusses the formulation and spread of official Abbasid propaganda (*da'wa*). He recounts the early history of the caliph al-Saffāḥ whose legitimacy rested on his ability to command powerful group feeling (*'aṣabiyya*). After his election, the Abbasids and their supporters demanded obedience from all other groups.<sup>53</sup> Rule remained in the Abbasid family “either by designation or choice by the people of the age” until the last caliph of Baghdad. Ibn Khaldūn ended his remarks with an endorsement of the legacy of the Mamluk “caliphate project” and the status quo in Cairo:

When Hülegü took possession of Baghdad and put [al-Musta'ṣim] to death, his kinsmen dispersed. Some took up residence in Egypt, including Aḥmad al-Ḥākim, from the progeny of al-Rāshid, who was appointed to office in Cairo by al-Zāhir Baybars with the concurrence of the military electorate (*ahl al-ḥall wa-l-'aqd min al-jund*) and the jurists. Authority (*amr*) has been transmitted in his house down to the present one who is in Cairo, no deviation from this is known.<sup>54</sup>

Appreciative of the reply, Temür promptly ejected the Abbasid prince from his scholarly soiree.<sup>55</sup> Through his statements on the enduring legacy of the Abbasid caliphate Ibn Khaldūn protected Mamluk supremacy for years to come and defended the tradition of the caliphate while attempting to appear diplomatic in the ominous presence of Temür's challenge.

As previous studies by Mona Hassan and Ovamir Anjum have demonstrated, *'ulamā'* and historians appear to have retained substantial optimism for the institutional caliphate, specifically for the return of a caliphate based on the style of the Rightly Guided “Rāshidūn” caliphs in the way of the Prophet, or, the *khilāfa nubuwwa*.<sup>56</sup> This made many scholars willing to accept the *mulk* of the Mamluks as a temporary substitute, or at least the next best thing. Many therefore took the Abbasid caliphate installed by the Mamluks at face value, and were not interested in deflating the existing caliphate, which in their minds, was merely a placeholder awaiting the real thing. The Syrian scribe and official Ibn Faḍlallāh al-'Umarī (d. 749/1349) clarifies this point in his investiture deed for the Abbasid caliph al-Ḥākim II (r. 741-53/1341-52):

May God restore through [the caliph's] justice the reign of his ancestors the Rāshidūn caliphs and rightly guided *imāms* who judged with truth, using it to rule and act equitably. [May God] assist [the caliph's] helpers, decree [the caliph's] might (*qaddara iqtidārahu*) and allow [the caliph's] tranquility and dignity to reside in the hearts of the subjects. [May God] consolidate [the caliph's position] in existence and rally together the regions to him.<sup>57</sup>

Al-Ḥalabī's 694/1294 investiture deed for Kitbughā sought blessings for the Rāshidūn caliphs and their successors and later addressed the unique position of the caliphate in Islamdom:

Verily God granted something of the innermost secrets of prophethood to the Commander of the Faithful, entrusting him with the ordinances (*aḥkām*) of the hereditary imamate from the nobility of his ancestors. [God] distinguished him and made obedience to him obligatory upon the nations, and made administration of the most private and general interests (*maṣāliḥ*) of the Muslims mandatory upon him.

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 376.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Hassan, “Loss of Caliphate,” 3-4, 156, 161-5; O. Anjum, *Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought: The Taymiyyan Moment* (Cambridge, 2012), 255-7.

<sup>57</sup> Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fī ṣinā'at al-inshā'* (Cairo, 1963), 9:324; al-Suyūṭī, *Ta'rīkh*, 394-5.

[God] defended his views from defect by virtue of the *baraka* of his ancestors, and made the arrow of his *ijtihād* forever true in speech and deed.<sup>58</sup>

Likewise, in the ideology underlying the *Zāhirī fitna* of the 780/1380s, it is clear that some of the scholars and participants wanted a new caliph that would follow the example of the “Rightly-Guided” caliphs rather than serve as a ceremonial court personality that merely sat radiating divine charisma or *baraka* through his presence at ceremonial events. Indeed, according to Anjum, Ibn Taymiyya is critical of Muslims who were too attached to such symbolic ceremonial.<sup>59</sup>

### III. The Late Fourteenth Century Discourse on the Caliphate

By the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, it became the norm for politics to disrupt the reign of an Abbasid caliph.<sup>60</sup> The almost 50-year caliphate of al-Mutawakkil marks a period in which Mamluk factions viewed the caliph as a suitable alternative candidate for the sultanate.<sup>61</sup> It was a time when various interest groups in Mamluk society, anxious for political capital amidst great uncertainty, began experimenting (sometimes desperately) with the power and reputation of the sitting Abbasid caliph. From the descriptive history of al-Mutawakkil’s political maneuvering, several questions arise: Why are the sources trying to convince us that the caliph had so many currents of support amongst the amirs who were certainly a “social class” to be reckoned with? What did Mamluk chroniclers have to gain from presenting the caliph as an important and influential kingmaker allegiant to the house of Qalāwūn and enjoying substantial, conspicuous (though occasionally anonymous) support? Why did the authors consistently describe the caliph as a potential candidate for the sultanate? Al-Mutawakkil, based on the sources, seems to have interpreted himself as an independent agent advocating for the Qalawunid traditions of the past associated with the old power elite. He is presented as a very status-quo oriented figurehead, which is also part of the normative image we receive from later caliphal investiture deeds; the idea that the caliph must be someone who supports all the current officeholders and the status quo.<sup>62</sup>

The sources support a normative framework that the respective officeholders of the caliphate and sultanate should not crossover into each other’s sphere of prerogatives, and that doing ensured political peril. However, by the late fourteenth century, the polymorphous nature of Mamluk politics warmed to the idea of the Abbasid caliph as a serious contender for the sultanate as a (most likely temporary) representative of a given interest group.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the shrewd al-Mutawakkil, aware of the expectations of his office, never stepped into the sultan’s shoes. Jean-Claude Garcin pointed to the paradox that the amirs (who had demonstrated loyalty to the dynastic principle in their support of the House of Qalāwūn) wanted to support al-Mutawakkil as an anti-sultan to Barqūq, who had snuffed out the Qalawunid line and left a vacuum for allegiance. Given the choice between supporting the

---

<sup>58</sup> Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 10:48; idem, *Ma`āthir*, 3:41-2.

<sup>59</sup> Anjum, *Politics*, 264.

<sup>60</sup> Garcin, “Histoire,” 54-63.

<sup>61</sup> However, it was not apparently the *first* time a caliph was offered the sultanate. Émile Tyan found a reference indicating that in 747/1347 the amirs had approached the Abbasid caliph al-Ḥākim II with the idea of accepting the sultanate which he turned down. See *Institutions*, 2:235-6.

<sup>62</sup> M. Banister, “The Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo (1261-1517): History and Tradition in the Mamluk Court” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2015), 445-7.

<sup>63</sup> This, of course, is played out to its disastrous conclusion when al-Mutawakkil’s son al-Musta‘īn bi-llāh (r. 1406-1412) was named sultan for six months in 1412, until the amir Shaykh was able to depose him, take the sultanate for himself, and banish the caliph to Alexandria for the rest of his life. See also Hassan’s characterization of the “amorphous political landscape” which allowed the Abbasid caliphate to thrive as a symbol in the early Mamluk period, “Loss of Caliphate,” 123, 263.

Abbasid caliph or a Circassian newcomer, they evidently chose the former.<sup>64</sup> Of course with no organized fighting men of his own, the caliph, very much like a puppet Qalawunid sultan, would also have been easier to manipulate than the increasingly formidable power of Barqūq.

The Egyptian historian Jalāl al-Dīn Surūr suggested that Qalawunid charisma, even its vestiges, combined with the instability of the period, may have convinced al-Mutawakkil to abandon the various opportunities to take on the sultanate. However, the caliph may have been interested in reaching for the sultanate but was only biding his time to more thoroughly revive the power and glory of the early caliphate once the Qalawunids had sufficiently faded.<sup>65</sup> The rise of Barqūq, however, would have thwarted any such hopes. Garcin also speculates that the caliph could have seized on the opportunities to move toward more concrete power, but was always too weak when they fell into his lap. The position of the sultanate also required a great deal of clever calculation and thus someone able to function as an arbiter capable of juggling and placating the competing factions.<sup>66</sup> To this, I would add my own findings, based on a study of the caliphate throughout the span of the Mamluk sultanate, that courtly expectations (enshrined in investiture deeds and protocol manuals) and the working practice and policies of the regime's administrators often created a pressure which discouraged both caliph and sultan from crossing into the sphere of the other.<sup>67</sup>

Overall, the sources paint a grim picture of relations between the caliphate and sultanate at the end of the fourteenth century, particularly because Barqūq was forcing himself onto the existing political field with its established traditions and al-Mutawakkil was, in many ways, permitted to personify the popular opposition among the Turkish amirs who ruled through Qalawunid puppets. There had been no true sultan for several decades, and most Mamluk amirs ruled behind puppets as *amīr kabīr*. The narrative we receive in the sources paints it as a tumultuous time for both offices. As Broadbridge points out, these earlier troubles which plagued relations between the caliph and sultan may provide some explanation as to why Barqūq chose not to name the caliph on the coins and diplomatic correspondence of this period.<sup>68</sup>

Garcin also proposes that because some manuscripts of the *Sīrat Baybars* were produced in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, the lack of mention of caliphal ceremonies and the negative depiction of the last caliph of Baghdad may have been tied to a contemporary current of anti-Abbasid propaganda related to Barqūq's political struggles with al-Mutawakkil in the late 1380s. The brief "sultanate" of his son and successor al-Musta'īn bi-llāh in the early fifteenth century also disturbed the Mamluk status quo for six months.<sup>69</sup> Is it possible that redactors of the *Sīrat Baybars* absorbed an anti-caliphal tone in the air disseminated by the Mamluk elite? This is one hypothesis certainly, though even if slightly denigrated in the *sīra* literature, Abbasid legitimacy was of great use to Barqūq on his return to power in 792/1390 and the deposition of al-Musta'īn from the sultanate in 815/1412 was not without overt upset on the popular level.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Garcin, "Histoire," 59.

<sup>65</sup> M. J. Surūr, *Dawlat Banī Qalāwūn fī Miṣr: al-ḥāla al-siyāsiyya wa-al-iqtisādiyya fī 'ahdhā bi-wajhin khāṣṣ* (Cairo, 1947), 86-7.

<sup>66</sup> Garcin, "Histoire," 61.

<sup>67</sup> Banister, "Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo," 478-80.

<sup>68</sup> Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 171.

<sup>69</sup> J.-C. Garcin, "Récit d'une recherche sur les débuts du Roman de Baybars" in *L'Orient au cœur en l'honneur d'André Miquel*, ed. F. Sanagustin (Paris, 2001), 256. See also: T. Herzog, *Geschichte und Imaginaire: Entstehung, Überlieferung und Bedeutung der Sīrat Baibars in ihrem sozio-politischen Kontext* (Wiesbaden, 2006), 331; 353-4, 406, 411.

<sup>70</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:1:273-4; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā' al-ghumr*, 3:92-3; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 7:63.

## Conclusion

As the historical record shows, caliphal investiture by the Mamluk sultans became standard practice followed scrupulously in all but a few cases. It must be stressed, however, that the Mamluk re-imagination of the Abbasid caliphate was fluid and could be changed or sidelined based on the dictates of new political realities.

Garcin was correct in his observation that through al-Mutawakkil's lengthy presence on the political scene and his witnessing of changing policies, his own position was gradually reinforced over time and the office was strengthened and endowed with clout that could no longer be easily stripped from an officeholder.<sup>71</sup> Far from the earlier image of the docile figure left to his own devices in the Citadel's "*burj al-khalifa*", al-Mutawakkil was instead a shrewd networker with ties to Yalbughāwī amirs, Turkmen, Kurds and other interest groups and could not be disrespected without repercussions. While he did take more than a fair share of aggression from some senior amirs and later the sultan, he also had a following of supporters capable of exerting enough pressure to restore him or at the very least protect him from serious harm.

---

<sup>71</sup> Garcin, "Histoire," 58, 61.

## Bibliography

- Anjum, Ovamir. *Politics, Law and Community in Islamic Thought: The Taymiyyan Moment*. Cambridge, 2012.
- Arnold, Sir Thomas. *The Caliphate*. London, 1965.
- Ayalon, David. "The Circassians in the Mamlūk Kingdom." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 69 (1949): 135-47.
- Banister, Mustafa. "The Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo (1261-1517): History and Tradition in the Mamluk Court." PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2015.
- Crone, Patricia. *God's Rule: Government and Islam – Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought*. New York, 2004.
- De Mignaneli, Bertrando. *Ascensus Barcoch (I)*. Translated by Walter Fischel in *Arabica* 6 (1959): 57-74, 152-172.
- Bosworth, Clifford E. "Al-Maqrīzī's Epistle 'Concerning What Has Come Down to Us about the Banū Umayya and the Banū l-'Abbās.'" In *Studia Arabica et Islamica, Festschrift for Ihsan 'Abbās on His Sixtieth Birthday*, edited by Wid ād al-Qāḍī, 39-46. Beirut, 1981.
- Brinner, William M. "The Struggle for Power in the Mamluk State: Some Reflections on the Transition from Bahri to Burji Rule." In *Proceedings of the 26th International Congress of Orientalists, New Delhi, 4-10 January 1964*, 231-4. New Delhi, 1970.
- Broadbridge, Anne F. *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds*. Cambridge, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sending Home for Mom and Dad: The Extended Family Impulse in Mamluk Politics." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 15 (2011): 1-18.
- Garcin, Jean-Claude. "Histoire, opposition politique et piétisme traditionaliste dans le *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara* de Suyūfī." *Annales islamologiques* 7 (1967): 33-89.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Récit d'une recherche sur les débuts du Roman de Baybars." In *L'Orient au coeur en l'honneur d'André Miquel*, edited by F. Sanagustin, 249-62. Paris, 2001.
- Gaudefroy-Demombynes, Maurice. *La Syrie à l'époque des mamelouks d'après les auteurs arabes: description géographique, économique et administrative précédée d'une introduction sur l'organisation gouvernementale*. Paris, 1923.
- Gharaibeh, Mohammad. "Geschichtsschreibung im Dienste des 'abbāsīdischen Kalifats: Das *al-Bidāya wa-n-nihāya* des Ibn Kaḫr (1301–1373) – ein geschichtstheologisches Werk." *Jahrbuch für Islamische Theologie und Religionspädagogik* 3 (2014): 95-124.
- Hassan, Mona F. "Loss of Caliphate: The Trauma and Aftermath of 1258 and 1924." PhD diss., Princeton University, 2009.
- Heidemann, Stefan. *Das aleppiner Kalifat (A.D. 1261): vom Ende des Kalifates in Baghdad über Aleppo zu den Restaurationen in Cairo*. Leiden, 1994.
- Herzog, Thomas. *Geschichte und Imaginaire: Entstehung, Überlieferung und Bedeutung der Sīrat Baibars in ihrem sozio-politischen Kontext*. Wiesbaden, 2006.
- Holt, P. M. *The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517*. London, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Position and Power of the Mamluk Sultan." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38, no. 2 (1975): 237-49.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Some Observations on the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate of Cairo." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 67 (1984): 501-7.
- Ibn al-Furāt, Muḥammad. *Ta'rīkh Ibn al-Furāt*. Beirut, 1936-1942.
- Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, Aḥmad. *Dhayl al-Durar al-kāmina*. Edited by 'Adnān Darwīsh. Cairo, 1992.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Inbā' al-ghumr bi-anbā' al-'umr*. Edited by Ḥasan Ḥabashī. Cairo, 1969-98.
- Ibn Iyās, Muḥammad. *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*. Edited by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā. Wiesbaden, 1960-3.
- Ibn Khaldūn, 'Abd al-Raḥmān. *al-Ta'rīf bi-Ibn Khaldūn wa-riḥlatihi gharban wa-sharqan*. Cairo, 1951.
- Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Abū Bakr. *Ta'rīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah*. Edited by 'Adnān Darwīsh. Damascus, 1977-94.
- Ibn Ṣaṣrā, Muḥammad. *al-Durra al-muḍī'a fī al-dawla al-Zāhiriyya*. Translated and edited by William M. Brinner as *A Chronicle of Damascus, 1389-1397*. Berkeley, 1963.
- Ibn Taghrībirdī, Yūsuf. *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi wa-al-mustawfi ba'da al-wāfi*. Edited by Muḥammad M. Amīn. Cairo, 1984-1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhira*. Edited by Ibrāhīm 'Alī Ṭarkhān. Cairo, 1963-74.
- Khūlī, Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm. *Al-'Ulamā' fī Miṣr fī al-'aṣr al-Mamlūkī, 648-923 H/1250-1517 M*. Cairo, 2014.
- Laoust, Henri. *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques d'Ibn Taimīa*. Cairo, 1939.
- Lev, Yaacov. "Symbiotic Relations: Ulama and the Mamluk Sultans." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13, no. 1 (2008): 1-26.
- Levanoni, Amalia. "The Background of Barquq's Ascent to Power and the Transition from a Turkish to a Circassian Sultanate in Egypt." PhD diss., Hebrew University in Jerusalem, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Al-Maqrīzī's Account of the Transition from Turkish to Circassian Mamluk Sultanate: History in the Service of Faith." In *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt, c. 950-1800*, edited by Hugh Kennedy, 93-106. Leiden, 2001.
- [al-Malaṭī], 'Abd al-Bāsiṭ b. Khalīl. *Nayl al-amal fī dhayl al-duwal*. Edited by 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī. Beirut, 2002.
- al-Maqrīzī, Aḥmad. *Durar al-'uqūd al-farīda fī tarājim al-a'yān al-muḥīda*. Edited by Maḥmūd al-Jalīlī. Beirut, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-ma'rifat duwal al-mulūk*. Edited by Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn and Sa'īd 'Ashūr. Cairo, 1956-73.
- Massoud, Sami G. *The Chronicles and Annalistic Sources of the Early Mamluk Circassian Period*. Leiden, 2007.
- Northrup, Linda S. "The Bahrī Mamluk Sultanate, 1250-1390." In *The Cambridge History of Egypt*. Vol. 1, *Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, edited by Carl F. Petry, 242-89. Cambridge, 1998.
- al-Qalqashandī, Aḥmad. *Ma'āthir al-ināfa fī ma'ālim al-khilāfa*. Edited by 'Abd al-Sattār Aḥmad Farrājī. Kuwait, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fī ṣinā'at al-inshā'*. Cairo, 1963.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. "Kalif und Kadi im spätmittelalterlichen Ägypten." *Die Welt des Islams* 24 (1942): 1-128.
- Shoshan, Boaz. *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*. Cambridge, 1993.
- Surūr, Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn. *Dawlat Banī Qalāwūn fī Miṣr: al-ḥāla al-siyāsiyya wa-al-iqtisādiyya fī 'ahdihā bi-wajhin khāṣṣ*. Cairo, 1947.
- al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn. *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara fī ta'rīkh Miṣr wa-al-Qāhira*. Edited by 'Isā al-Babī al-Ḥalabī. Cairo, 1967-8.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ta'rīkh al-khulafā'*. Beirut, [n.d.].
- Ṭarkhān, Ibrāhīm 'Alī. *Miṣr fī 'aṣr dawlat al-Mamālīk al-Jarākisa*. Cairo, 1960.
- Tyan, Emile. "Bay'a." In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*<sup>2</sup>. Vol. 1. Pp. 1113-4. Leiden, 1960.

- Van Steenbergen, Jo. "The amir Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī, the Qalāwūnid Sultanate, and the Cultural Matrix of Mamluk Society: A Reassessment of Mamlūk Politics in the 1360s." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131, no. 3 (2011): 423-43.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_. "On the Brink of a New Era? Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī (d. 1366) and the Yalbughāwīyah." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 15 (2011): 117-52.
- Wiederhold, Lutz. "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): 203-235.