Writing Away the Caliph:

Political and Religious Legitimacy in Late Medieval Islamic Political Thought

by

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Introduction

In Chapter 50 of his monumental *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon (d. 1794) wrote, "Mohammed, with the sword in one hand and the Koran in the other, erected his throne on the ruins of Christianity and of Rome."[1] This image of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632)—wielding the Qur'an in one hand and a sword in the other—still figures as a common trope among scholars of Islam in treating Islam as a religion that promotes a strict fusion of religion and politics. The view that Islamic societies did not distinguish between the religious and political aspects of communal life still holds considerable sway among scholars today. Such scholars argue that since Muhammad was both prophet and political ruler, belief in Islam implied both loyalty to a chief whose authority was derived from his religious position, and membership in a community of believers (*umma*). In this sense, religious and political values were inseparable.[2] In *The Political Language of Islam*, Bernard Lewis argues that unlike Western Christendom, "The distinction between church and state, so deeply rooted in Christendom, did not exist in Islam…. the very notion of a secular jurisdiction and authority—of a so-to-speak unsanctified part of life that lies outside the scope of religious law and those who uphold it—is seen as an impiety, indeed as the ultimate betrayal of Islam."[3] In her oft-cited book, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, Ann Lambton claims that "Islam knows no

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[1] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, edited and abridged by Hans Friedrich-Mueller (New York: Modern Library, 2003), p. 893.

[2] Ira Lapidus, "The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Oct., 1975), pp. 363-364.

[3] Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 2-3.

distinction between state and church…. In Islam there is no doctrine of the temporal end which alone belongs to the state and the eternal end which belongs to, and is the prerogative of, the church….”[4] What is even more perplexing about this view of Islam (which I will, hereon, call the “fusion” thesis) is that scholars often use it to account for the differing historical developments of Western and Islamic societies. Western societies, with their inherent separation of religion and politics, as well as church and state, are said to have promoted an autonomous domain of secular culture and civil society which are viewed as the bases of modernity. Islamic societies, on the other hand, lack a differentiation between religion and politics. As such, they are characterized by binding religious norms that result in an unreadiness for secularization and development.[5] In short, the fusion of religion and politics in Islam has become characteristic of everything that is wrong with Islamic societies.

Unfortunately, the “fusion” thesis largely ignores the complex and multifaceted developments in Islam. It simply conceives of Islamic society as an ahistorical monolith that did not undergo any change at all since the days of the Prophet Muhammad. Nevertheless, replacing this historical narrative of Islam will necessarily push us to rethink many of the fundamental historical, political, and sociological categories we use to make sense of Islamic societies. Contrary to the “fusion” thesis advocating that Islam is characterized by a rigid fusion of religion and politics, this thesis will attempt to provide a more nuanced view of Islamic history by suggesting that there *was* a separation of religion and politics in the Muslim

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[4] Ann K. S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory: The Jurists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. xv.

[5] Lapidus, “State and Religion in Islamic Societies,” *Past and Present*, No. 151 (May, 1996), pp. 3-4.

imagination. Indeed, one can trace the separation of religion and politics in Islam back to the late medieval period from the mid-eleventh to the fourteenth century.

The view of a separation of religion and politics in Islam (hereon, the "separation" thesis) is not new in the historiography of Islamic history. The separation of religion and politics constitutes the main subject in Ira Lapidus's article, "The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society," published in 1975. Focusing on events in Baghdad in the early ninth century, Lapidus delineates three developments in early Islam that brought about the separation of the religious and the political aspects of Muslim communal life: the increasing emphasis by Muslim caliphs[6] on the political—instead of the religious—aspects of their rule, the emergence of a religious class independent of the actual authority of the caliphs, and the rise of the traditionalist oriented Hanbali school of law.[7] The separation of religion and politics occurred when the *ʿulama* (Arabic plural word referring to Muslim religious scholars) denied the caliphs any authority in the elaboration of [Islamic] law. Eventually, "the *ʿulama* generally—Qur'an readers, reciters of tradition, and popular preachers, including the scholars of the several schools of law and theology—greatly influenced the Muslim masses, who turned directly to them rather than to the Caliphs, for moral instruction and religious guidance as Muslims."[8] Another proponent of the "separation" thesis is Patricia Crone, whose works *Slaves*

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[6] In the early centuries of Islam, the caliph was understood to be the political and religious head of the Muslim community.

[7] Lapidus, "Separation of State and Religion," pp. 366-370. The Hanbali school of law is one of the four Sunni Muslim schools of law. The school traces its origins back to Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), but was institutionalized by his students. Hanbalism is characterized by its strict and rigorous adherence to the Qur'an and the *Sunna* (traditions and practices of the Prophet Muhammad)—instead of independent reasoning—in matters of religion, and as such, is often viewed as the most traditionalist and conservative oriented of the four Sunni schools of law.

[8] Ibid., p. 369.

on Horses and *God's Caliph* (co-written with Martin Hinds) also represent this trend of historiography.[9] According to Crone, within a few centuries, the Islamic state had been taken over by slave soldiers; the *ᶜulama*, on the other hand, constructed a vision of the *shariᶜa* (the Muslim holy law) that would have nothing to do with the state. The continued self-isolation of the *ᶜulama* from politics—since "avoidance of the state remained the norm"—marked the divorce of religion and politics in Islam.[10] Crone expands on this thesis with Martin Hinds in *God's Caliph*. They argue that after the death of the Prophet, early caliphs (c. 632-833) enjoyed *both* political and religious authority.[11] However, by the mid-ninth century, the *ᶜulama* had already garnered enough influence to claim to be the sole interpreters of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (*hadith*). Once "[the vulgar masses] rejected caliphal guidance in religious matters once and for all," it did not take long for the caliph's religious authority to be terminated.[12] However, despite gaining ground in recent decades, most scholars located in the "separation" thesis, such as Lapidus and Crone, have focused on social history and political events, with little attention paid to intellectual developments.

Although this thesis aligns with those scholars promoting the "separation" thesis, it will approach the "separation" thesis through the lens of intellectual history, which has been an understudied field with respect to religion and politics in medieval Islam. Moreover, for a large part of medieval Islamic history, texts remain the most

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9 Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); with Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

10 Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, pp. 61-91.

11 Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, pp. 1-3.

12 Ibid., p. 96.

accessible source for historians studying intellectual life in Islamic societies. In particular, I will examine the legal and political writings of four Sunni Muslim jurists in the late medieval Islamic era: Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi (d. 1058), Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (d. 1327), and Abu Zayd ᶜAbd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun (d. 1406). Medieval Islamic intellectual history—especially political thought—remains an understudied subject. The work of William Montgomery Watt,[13] Erwin Rosenthal,[14] Ann Lambton,[15] and lately Antony Black[16] and Patricia Crone[17] all survey the subject of medieval Islamic political thought, but do not focus specifically on religion and politics. Thus far, the theme of religion and politics, as related to medieval Islamic political thought, has only been treated in passing manner in the survey works mentioned above. Compared to scholarly works on western political thought, few works of medieval Islamic political thought have engaged in theme-based studies. As such, one hardly encounters titles like "Al-Mawardi and human nature" or "Ibn Taymiyya and the state," let alone works related specifically to religion and politics. The only jurist that has enjoyed immense scholarly attention is ibn Khaldun. Even so, his work is viewed more as a work of social rather than political theory, and few works have focused on religion and politics as they were treated by him. Hence, I hope that this thesis constitutes a useful

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13 William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968).

14 Erwin Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

15 Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*.

16 Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

17 Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2004).

starting point in approaching the "separation" thesis through the lens of medieval Islamic intellectual history.

I will base my research primarily on a close reading and analysis of the texts written by the four Muslim jurists mentioned above, in order to examine how the separation of religion and politics was reflected in these texts. In doing so, I will pay attention to three main holders of power in medieval Islam as figured in medieval legal and political writings: the caliph (*khalifa*), the sultan or provincial ruler, and the *ʿulama* (religious scholars). However, my focus will be primarily on the institution of the caliphate (*khilafa*).[18] Just as the issue of religion and politics is an understudied and complex subject, the caliphate also constitutes another complicated historiographical issue in itself. Most narratives of the caliphate beginning from the mid-ninth century to its destruction by the Mongols (1258) have been stories of decline. In one of the earliest works in the Western world dedicated solely to the caliphate, *The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline, and Fall*, Sir William Muir (d. 1905) completely ignores the late Abbasid caliphate. Writing of the Abbasid caliphate from the early ninth century to its fall in 1258, Muir claims, "There remains little of our history to tell, but a weary and ungrateful story of weakness, misfortune, cruelty, and shame."[19] Writing a few decades after Muir, Sir Thomas Arnold (d. 1930) also argues in a similar fashion.[20] Like the "fusion" thesis, these narratives of caliphal decline have been challenged in recent years, most recently by Eric Hanne's *Putting the Caliph in His Place*. Hanne argues that far from experiencing a decline, the caliphate

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18 The "caliphate" refers to the institution or office that the caliph occupies. In early Islam, it was regarded as the ideal form of government for the Muslim community.

19 Sir William Muir, *The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline, and Fall (from original sources)* (London: Routledge, 1891, 2000), p. 560.

20 Sir Thomas W. Arnold, *The Caliphate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 60.

actually experienced a political resurgence from the eleventh century until its sudden destruction by the Mongols in 1258.[21] Nevertheless, Hanne's work is an institutional analysis mainly based on political and military events from the mid-eleventh to the early thirteenth century. How the caliphate played out as a political ideal in the late medieval Islamic period remains understudied.

Although the caliphate as an institution can be argued to have declined from the tenth century onwards, the caliphate as an *idea* did not experience that speedy a decline.[22] In reality, the caliphate remained as the symbol of legitimate Islamic government in the eyes of Sunni Muslims, even when it was in decline institutionally and even after it had become extinct.[23] Above all, it enjoyed tremendous political *and* religious legitimacy among Muslims. As a result, most of medieval (and maybe even most of modern) Islamic political thought revolved around the central position of the caliphate. Even thinkers who wrote after the caliphate was abolished in 1258—such as ibn Taymiyya and ibn Khaldun, as will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4—could not afford to ignore the caliphate entirely in their writings. As an idea, the caliphate would remain as an important motif in political and religious discourse for a long period of time. Keeping that in mind, much of this thesis will focus on how the caliphate figured in the late medieval Sunni Muslim imagination.

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[21] Eric Hanne, *Putting the Caliph in His Place: Power, Authority, and the Late Abbasid Caliphate* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007).

[22] Even challengers of the caliphal decline thesis like Hanne cannot help but acknowledge that although the caliphate experienced a political resurgence from the mid-eleventh century to 1258, the caliph was no longer first among equals when it came to political and military players in medieval Islamic society. See Hanne, *Putting the Caliph in His Place*, p. 209. More of this will be discussed later in Chapter 1.

[23] Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, revised edition (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), pp. 18-19.

The central argument of this thesis, then, is that as the caliph was gradually "written away" as the embodiment of political and religious legitimacy in political writings, religion and politics also moved increasingly apart. In other words, the caliph was once understood as *both* a political as well as a religious institution; religion and politics were fused in the person of the caliph. However, beginning from the tenth century, the decline of the caliphate as an institution and the emergence of other political players (for example, emirs, sultans, and other provincial rulers) acting independently of the caliph pushed Sunni Muslim jurists to reformulate their ideas regarding the state in Islam. For the first time in Islamic history, self-anointed non-caliphal dynasties started to claim political legitimacy and rule over all the lands of the caliphate. One way Muslim jurists dealt with political fragmentation was to "split" or "divide" the caliphate into its political and religious spheres: political legitimacy was granted to secular rulers and sultans wielding power almost independently of the caliph, while religious legitimacy was granted to the *ᶜulama* (religious scholars) as the sole guardians of Islam's religious and moral heritage. This is not to say that the caliph was increasingly "forgotten" or "ignored." The ways in which Muslim intellectuals wrote about the caliphate might have changed owing to different social and political circumstances, but their works never failed to evoke or discuss the caliphate.[24] Thus, what I mean by the caliph being "written away" is that the caliph ceased to be the single person endowed with the fullness of political and religious legitimacy. While the caliph represented the *embodiment* of a fused notion of religion *and* politics in early Islam, this was not to be in the late medieval period as

[24] This is the case even today. One example would be Abdul Rashid Moten, *Political Science: An Islamic Perspective* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996), pp. 82-106.

political fragmentation in the Islamic world forced Muslim intellectuals to rethink what state and government entailed in Islam. In an overall sense, this thesis will be a story of how religion and politics increasingly moved apart, as much as it is about how the caliphate was "divided" into its political and religious spheres.

Before moving to sources, it is crucial to note that the separation of religion and politics in Islam does not imply a sharp separation of church and state, in the sense of medieval Christendom. Although Islam had its share of individuals who specialized in religious affairs and religious scholarship, namely the *ᶜulama*, Islam never had a religious institution akin to the Roman Catholic Church to begin with.[25] What I am trying to establish in this thesis, with regard to the question of the separation of religion and politics, is a notion of "separation" in the medieval Muslim *intellectual imagination*. In that regard, as time went by, jurists began to *conceive* of a secular political space ruled by secular sultans and provincial rulers, as well as a religious space embodied by the religious community of scholars known as the *ᶜulama*. Far from crystallizing into a distinct and tightly knit class, the *ᶜulama* in medieval Islam were never near to forming an institution akin to the Roman Catholic Church.[26] The *ᶜulama* were men of religious learning, not priests who received ordination and perform sacraments.[27] As for the term "secular," I use Crone's definition that takes "secular" rulers to mean rulers of a type that could appear in any

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[25] In such a way that the Roman Catholic Church possesses its own laws, hierarchy, and councils and synods to determine and impose an approved creed and to condemn deviations from it as heterodoxy. See Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople, Vol. 1: Politics and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. xvii.

[26] Although proponents of the "separation" thesis such as Lapidus and Crone, in positioning the *ᶜulama* as a social group in conflict with caliphs and secular rulers, might have implied the possibility of the *ᶜulama* forming a united political front.

[27] Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople, Vol. 1*, p. xvii.

society rather than the rulers of the specific type called for by the *shari*^{c}*a*, or Muslim holy law (such as the caliph whom jurists regarded as having derived his authority from the *shari*^{c}*a*). However, this does not mean that "secular" rulers were not Muslim or that they were not religious; rather, it implies that these rulers did not require certification by the Muslim holy law. One example of such a ruler would be a barbarian warlord who simply proclaimed rule over a Muslim community owing to his superb military capabilities; there was nothing specifically "Islamic" about him.[28]

Discussion of sources

These four Sunni Muslim jurists were chosen for this thesis because they remain the most widely discussed Muslim intellectuals in discussions about medieval Islamic political thought by modern scholars. The texts discussed in this thesis are also works that are representative of these jurists' views on Islamic political thought. The surveys by Watt, Rosenthal, Lambton, Crone, and Black all feature substantial discussion of these jurists. However, as mentioned earlier, these surveys do not offer substantial discussion on how these jurists dealt with religion and politics. Even if they did, most scholars continually refer to the "fusion" paradigm—arguing for the fusion of religion and politics in Islam—as the bedrock of Islamic political thought, and subscribe to the caliphal decline thesis even when it comes to the caliphate as a political ideal. Hence, I hope to provide a different interpretation of the texts written by these four thinkers, with regard to the issue of religion and politics, as well as the caliphate. The other reason for choosing these four jurists concerns the problem of translation. As this thesis is based on close reading of Arabic primary texts translated

[28] Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p 395.

into English, a serious consideration of other lesser-known jurists, whose works have not been translated into English, would prove to be an onerous task. Moreover, even the entire corpus of writings belonging to these four jurists (most notably al-Mawardi, al-Ghazali, and ibn Taymiyya) has not been translated in full.

It is nonetheless crucial to note that Sunni Muslim legal and political writings do not constitute the only works dealing with Islamic political thought. In addition to Sunni juristic literature, a thorough study of medieval Islamic political thought would also take into account other strands of political thought belonging, among others, to the Shi'ites, the "philosophers" whose ideas are derived from ancient Greek thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle, and the Persian-influenced "mirrors for princes." However, for all its complicated cosmology and deeply messianic undertones, Shi'ism remained a minority sect throughout Islamic history. Moreover, one can hardly make the claim for a distinctively Shi'ite political thought, especially considering that Shi'ism is often characterized by its apolitical stance towards government. For the Shi'ites, any form of government in the absence of the *imam* is fundamentally illegitimate.[29] As for the "philosopher" tradition,[30] it only enjoyed prominence during the Greek-Arabic translation movement in the mid-ninth century. For a medieval Muslim, religious scholars, jurists, preachers, and prayer leaders were the more popular channels from which to seek religious guidance. Thus, the adherents

[29] The Shi'ite imam is someone who has religious authority over the community, and also someone who is descended from the family of the Prophet Muhammad. The eleventh imam died in 874, and Shi'ites believe that he had an infant son who had gone into hiding (*ghayba*). It also came to be agreed that he would remain in hiding until the end of time, when he would return as the *Mahdi* (or savior). Without an imam in presence, the Shi'ites therefore claim that any form of government that appears to rule in the place of the imam is illegitimate. See Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, pp. 110-124.

[30] As exemplified by Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi (d. 950), Abu ᶜAli al-Husayn ibn Sina (known in the West as Avicenna, d. 980), and Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198).

of the philosophers were limited in number.[31] The "mirrors for princes" genre, modeled on the old Persian manuals of court etiquette, were restricted to the court and were mainly addressed to rulers and touched on problems of government, usually in a moralizing vein.[32] Thus, due to time and space constraints, I will leave out any discussion of the mirrors for princes.[33]

This leaves us with the Sunni juristic tradition. Aside from the fact that Sunnis constitute the majority of Muslims in the medieval Muslim societies, Sunni religious scholars (*ʿulama*) and jurists also enjoyed wide appeal as religious guides. Although it might be quite a leap to claim Sunnism as representative of Islam in its entirety, it is still Sunni political thought that most modern-day scholars refer to when they talk about Islamic political thought in general. Thus, this thesis will only address medieval Islamic political thought from a Sunni perspective, and not political thought as reflected in the Shi'ite, "philosopher," and "mirror for princes" tradition.

Organization of thesis

To demonstrate my central argument that a separation of religion and politics did take place in the medieval Muslim intellectual imagination, I will divide this thesis into four chapters. Chapter 1 provides a historical background of the caliphate as an institution from its inception after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 to the fourteenth century. Chapter 2 focuses on the caliphate as an idea from the time of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (632-661) to al-Mawardi who wrote the first systematic

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31 Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 195.

32 Ibid., p. 149.

33 For a survey of the mirror for princes genre, see Lambton, "Islamic Mirrors for Princes," in *Theory and Practice in Medieval Persian Government* (London: Variorum Prints, 1980), pp. 419-442.

legal treatise defining the nature and duties of the caliphate. This chapter will also demonstrate how the caliph embodied the fusion of political legitimacy and religious legitimacy in a single person. Chapter 3 will show—using the writings of al-Ghazali and ibn Taymiyya—how religion and temporal politics started to be conceived as two distinct spheres in the medieval Sunni Muslim imagination as the caliph was being "written away." The fourth chapter is solely dedicated to ibn Khaldun who synthesized an independent political theory of his own, in a rather different vein than that of al-Mawardi, al-Ghazali, and ibn Taymiyya. The chapter will demonstrate that it is also with ibn Khaldun that religion and politics witnessed a complete separation. Lastly, I will conclude by summing up the main ideas and arguments of this thesis, in addition to providing directions for further research. Overall, these chapters will attempt to demonstrate how the religious and secular political spheres of medieval Islamic society increasingly moved apart, as the caliph was being "written away" as the embodiment of political and religious legitimacy.

1. Historical Background

"Caliph" is the anglicized form of the Arabic word *khalifa*, which denotes "a successor, vice-agent, vicegerent, lieutenant, substitute, proxy, or deputy; or one who has been made, or appointed, to take the place of him who has been before him."[34] During the early centuries of Islam, the term referred to the supreme leader of the Muslim community, as the ruler of the community exercising the "temporal" functions of Muhammad, and also as the religious leader of the community leading the communal prayers.[35] What follows will be a historical overview of the caliphate as an institution from the death of the Prophet Muhammad to the fourteenth century.

The death of the Prophet Muhammad and the Saqifah Controversy

In 632, the death of the Prophet Muhammad was met with confusion, as he died without naming a successor; nor did he leave a blueprint detailing how political rule should take shape after his death. While his contemporaries knew that prophecy had ended with his death, they assumed that his political role as head of the Muslim community (*umma*) ought to continue. What the functions of that office were and who should fill the role of Muhammad's successor were, however, deeply contested.

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[34] *Edward William Lane Arabic-English Lexicon*, pp. 797-798. Online source: http://www.studyquran.co.uk/LLhome.htm.

[35] "Khalifa," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, ed. C. E. Bosworth (Leiden: Brill, 1960), p. 948.

The Saqifah Debate[36] that ensued to discuss who would lead the Muslim community after the Prophet's death brought to light several factors considered important for succession to the Prophet's leadership: kin relationship to the Prophet Muhammad, priority in converting to Islam and the length of the period of a candidate's companionship with the Prophet, as well as his social status.

Far from being a democratic consultative process, as it is commonly presented,[37] the selection of the Prophet's successor was a heated debate between the Ansar[38] and the Muhajirun,[39] with both sides hurling threats and insults at each other. At one point, ᶜUmar (d. 644) even stepped on the Ansar chief Saᶜd b. ᶜUbadah's head saying, "I intend to tread upon you until your arm is dislocated," and had to be calmed by the more patient Abu Bakr (d. 634), a close confidant and the father-in-law of Muhammad.[40] Based on an account by the medieval historian Abu Jaᶜfar Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), the eventual agreement on Abu Bakr was not even based in unanimous consensus. Rather, the decision harkened back to pre-Islamic tribal feuds. The deciding factor appears to have been the ancient rivalry between the two Medinan Ansar tribes of Aws and Khazraj. Ultimately, the choice of Abu Bakr as successor to the Prophet and head of the Muslim community appealed to the Aws as a lesser evil when compared to a leader from the Khazraj tribe.

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36 Saqifah was the name of a roofed building used by a faction of the Banu Khazraj tribe known as the Banu Saᶜidat in Medina.

37 For example, Moten, *Political Science: An Islamic Perspective*, pp. 91-93.

38 Citizens of Medina who helped Muhammad on his arrival to Medina after migration from Mecca.

39 Early Muslims who followed Muhammad on his Hijra from Mecca to Medina.

40 Abu Jaᶜfar Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-rusul wa al-muluk*, translated by Fred Donner as *The History of al-Tabari, Vol. X: The Conquest of Arabia*, pp. 8-9.

The age of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (632-661)

Today, Abu Bakr occupies a special place in Sunni Muslim historical memory as the Muslim community's first caliph, or *khalifat rasul Allah* (understood by Abu Bakr to mean the "Successor to the Messenger of God"). However, Abu Bakr's claim to legitimacy was far from being uncontested. The faction that would later come to be known as the Shi'ites have a different narrative and recollection of the events that transpired after the Prophet's death. The Shi'ite narrative often stresses the Prophet's delegation of ᶜAli (d. 661) as his successor at Ghadir Khumm,[41] based on the saying the Shi'ites ascribe to the Prophet: "He whose master (*mawla*) I have been, ᶜAli is *also* his master."[42]

On his deathbed, Abu Bakr appointed ᶜUmar, another close companion of the Prophet, as his successor and as caliph of the Muslim community. ᶜUmar's appointment and the supposed "election" of Abu Bakr as caliph constitute two important precedents for choosing a caliph from the Muslim community, and would often be referred to by Sunni Muslim jurists throughout the medieval period as the two legitimate methods of selecting a caliph.

Despite being touted as a golden age in Sunni historical memory, the age of the four "Rightly-Guided Caliphs"—especially the period following the death of the third caliph ᶜUthman (d. 656)—spelled the beginning of political fragmentation for an expanding Muslim polity. All three caliphs after Abu Bakr were murdered: ᶜUmar

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41 Ghadir Khumm is a pond located between Mecca and Medina. Today, this term is commonly used by Shi'ites to refer to the appointment of ᶜAli by the Prophet Muhammad.

42 The word *mawla* is sometimes translated as "friend." For example, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Tarikh al-khulafa*, translated as *History of the Caliphs* by Major H. S. Jarrett (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1881), p. 173. See also Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003), p. 9.

was assassinated by a Persian captive; ᶜUthman was killed while reading the Qur'an; ᶜAli was killed at prayer. ᶜUthman's murder, which was the first to be carried out by a caliph's own subjects, marked the beginning of the *fitna* (civil war) lasting till 692, which would split and scar the Muslim community down to this day.

After ᶜUthman's death, the rebels responsible for his death raised ᶜAli, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, to power. Despite being well regarded for his deep sense of piety and steep religious knowledge, ᶜAli's reign was heavily marred by increasing factional divisions within the Muslim community, all of which came to a head with the death of ᶜUthman.[43] Some Muslims, especially those from ᶜUthman's clan, the Banu Umayya, considered ᶜUthman to be a just caliph until he was murdered. Their leader Muᶜawiyya (d. 680), a military chieftain, united the people of Syria in opposition to ᶜAli.

Muᶜawiyya's opposition to ᶜAli further divided the Muslim community. Muᶜawiyya and his supporters were convinced that ᶜUthman was "a caliph guided by God, who acted according to the Book of God and constantly busied himself with God's commands," who was therefore unjustly killed.[44] Some of them even blamed ᶜAli for ᶜUthman's death, and thus viewed ᶜAli as an illegitimate ruler leading a party of infidels. For ᶜAli, Muᶜawiyya's actions were seen as having been in opposition to God's will by creating disunity among the Muslims.[45] The Battle of Siffin[46] that ensued was a protracted and bloody conflict which dragged on for weeks, and also

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[43] See al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari, Volume XVII: The First Civil War*, translated by G. R. Hawting (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 108.

[44] Ibid., p. 24.

[45] Hence the summoning of Muᶜawiyya "to God, to obedience, and to unity," and also calling him "to the Book of God and the precedent (*sunna*) of the Prophet." See Ibid., pp. 16, 26.

[46] Siffin is located on the banks of the Euphrates river, in what is now al-Raqqa, Syria.

one which saw countless Muslims killed on the battlefield. Perceiving that the battle was going to be lost by Muᶜawiyya, ᶜAmr ibn al-ᶜAs (Muᶜawiyya's general) suggested that their camp raise the Qur'an on their lances.[47] When ᶜAli's men saw the raised Qur'ans on the lances, they said, "We respond to the Book of God, and we turn in repentance to it," in spite of ᶜAli's eagerness to continue fighting.[48]

Following this intervention, ᶜAli and Muᶜawiyya agreed to form a panel to arbitrate who between them should be caliph. Unfortunately for ᶜAli, his decision to accept arbitration further split his camp. There were those who opposed arbitration and withdrew their allegiance to ᶜAli. These would later be known as the Kharijites.[49] The latter part of ᶜAli's reign was spent fighting the Kharijites. Ultimately, it was a Kharijite named ᶜAbd al-Rahman ibn Muljam who killed ᶜAli by stabbing him in the head in a mosque. After the assassination of ᶜAli, Muᶜawiyya declared himself caliph, establishing the Umayyad caliphate.

The Umayyad Caliphate (661-750)

According to Muslim tradition, the Umayyads are often accused of transforming the *khilafa* (caliphate) into *mulk* (secular kingship).[50] Many of these accusations came from later Abbasid apologists against their rival predecessors. For instance, al-Jahiz (d. 869), an Abbasid era poet/polemicist, called the year in which

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47 Al-Tabari, *History, Volume XVII*, p. 78.

48 Ibid., p. 78.

49 The Kharijites would be the first "rejectionist" Muslims to formulate a political theory of the caliphate. According to Kharijite doctrine, anybody is qualified to be a caliph as long as he is righteous and just. Hence, there was no need to account for descent or lineage. Additionally, if an incumbent caliph rules in an unjust manner, it is acceptable to have him killed and replaced by someone else who is more qualified.

50 For a brief discussion of the how the Umayyads figured in Muslim tradition, see G. R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750* (London: Routledge, 1986), pp. 11-18.

Mu^{c}awiyya ascended to the caliphate "a year of schism, coercion, oppression and violence, a year in which the imamate[51] [caliphate] became a monarchy after the fashion of Chosroes,[52] and the caliphate a tyranny worthy of a Caesar."[53] Before his death in 680, Mu^{c}awiyya put forward his son Yazid (d. 683) as caliph. The act of naming one's son as successor to the caliphate was unprecedented in Muslim society. Later Muslims would single out this event as marking the transformation of the office of the caliphate into a form of hereditary kingship.

Yazid's reign was a time of political chaos. One of the first obstacles that Yazid faced upon assuming power was the opposition from leading Quraysh[54] figures who had refused to render Yazid the oath of allegiance (*bay^{c}a*). The most serious threats to Yazid's position came from Husayn (son of ^{c}Ali, d. 680) and ibn al-Zubayr (d. 692), culminating in another civil war that further divided the Muslim community. Ibn al-Zubayr refused to acknowledge the authority of Yazid and established his own caliphate based in the Hijaz (a region in the west of present-day Saudi Arabia). What was even more pressing for Yazid was the fact that ibn al-Zubayr's authority extended beyond Arabia to include Egypt, Iraq, and probably Iran as well.[55] The protracted struggle with ibn al-Zubayr would last after Yazid's death till 691, with the later Umayyad caliph ^{c}Abd al-Malik (d. 705) finally subduing ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca in 692.

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51 The words "imamate" and "caliphate" are often used interchangeably in medieval Islamic discourses. Similar for the words "imam" and "caliph."

52 A Sassanian emperor who ruled from 531 to 579.

53 Al-Jahiz, *The Nabita*, translated by Charles Pellat in *The Life and Works of Jahiz*, translated from the French by D. M. Hawke (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p.84.

54 The tribe to which the Prophet Muhammad belonged.

55 Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 76.

The civil war during Yazid's reign witnessed a major turning point in Islam, especially with regard to Shi'ite historical memory. When Yazid was named caliph by Muᶜawiyya, Husayn, the son of ᶜAli and the Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima (d. 632), was persuaded to make a bid for power. After refusing to accept Yazid's claims to the caliphate in 680, Husayn fled to Mecca where he was told that he would receive support in Kufa (today in Iraq), his father's former headquarters. Umayyad authorities got wind of this, and met Husayn and his small group of followers at Karbala (located in present day Iraq), before they could reach Kufa. The violent battle that took place eventually ended with Husayn and his entire camp being massacred by Yazid's forces. In total, seventy heads, including that of Husayn, are reported to have been displayed at Kufa. Husayn's head was eventually brought to the Umayyad capital of Damascus, where Yazid is reported to have made fun of it by poking Husayn's mouth with a cane saying, "[Swords] split the skulls of men who are dear to us; but they were more disobedient and oppressive."[56] The Battle of Karbala currently holds a central place in Shi'ite historical tradition as signifying the beginning of the oppression of the Shi'ites. An annual event called ᶜAshura is observed by Shi'ites around the world to commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn.

Despite the continuing political divisions in the Muslim community, the Umayyad period was a period of consolidation and centralization of power. Faced with an expanding Muslim empire and the lack of a political blueprint in the Qur'an, the Umayyads continually adapted and improvised in order to maintain their control. The tribal Arab armies that contributed to the early Muslim conquests during the time

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[56] Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari, Volume XIX: The Caliphate of Yazid b. Mu'awiyah*, transl. I. K. A. Howard (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 176, 179.

of the Prophet were gradually replaced by regular paid forces.[57] Provincial rule in the empire was also systematized. Taxation became more streamlined with the implementation of the *kharaj*, or land tax, and the *jizya*, a poll tax paid by all non-Muslim males living under Muslim rule.[58] The reforms also corresponded with the imperialization of the Muslim polity. Although the state remained largely Arab under the Umayyads, rulers and leaders had begun to "speak in the idiom of the Near Eastern empires which they either challenged (the Roman) or replaced (the Sassanian)."[59] For instance, Umayyad palaces featured complex baths characteristic of urban Roman life, as well as paintings that drew freely on Roman and Iranian images with scenes of dancing, music-making, and figures dressed in Roman or Sassanian royal costumes.[60] The moving of the capital of the Umayyad polity from Medina to Damascus—formerly under Byzantine rule; midway between the heartland of the Byzantine Empire and Persia—was crucial in bringing about this use of imperial language and idiom.

The Umayyad caliphate waned in the mid-eighth century, largely due to factional strife within the ruling elite.[61] Eventually, the Umayyads were toppled by a revolution led by Abu Muslim, a rebel from the Persian region of Khurasan, and by the Banu ᶜAbbas, a clan that traced their descent back to the Prophet Muhammad's

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57 Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, paperback edition (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1991), p. 26.

58 There is evidence of a substantial tax bureaucracy during this period. See Fred Donner, "The Formation of the Islamic State," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 106, No. 2 (Apr-Jun, 1986), pp. 286-288.

59 Berkey, *Formation of Islam*, p. 78. The Sassanian Empire was the last pre-Islamic Persian empire, ruled by the Sassanian dynasty from 224 to 651. It was recognized as one of the two main powers in Western Asia and Europe, alongside the Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire, for more than 400 years.

60 Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 141-164.

61 Berkey, *Formation of Islam*, p. 102.

uncle ᶜAbbas ibn ᶜAbd al-Muttalib (d. 653). The "Abbasid Revolution" came to an end with the overthrow of the Umayyad caliphate in 750. Abu al-ᶜAbbas (d. 754), the head of the Banu ᶜAbbas, assumed power as the first Abbasid caliph.

The Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258)

If compared to the Umayyads, the Abbasids had stronger dynastic claims since they belonged to the Hashimite clan.[62] They were able to promote themselves as kinsmen of the Prophet, to whose legacy they had a hereditary right. The Abbasid court poet, al-Buhturi, even described the caliph al-Muᶜtazz (d. 869) as "the heir of the [Prophet's] Mantle, the Staff [of the Prophet] and the authority of God."[63]

Abu al-ᶜAbbas died in 754 after a short reign and was succeeded by his brother Abu Jaᶜfar ᶜAbdallah ibn Muhammad (d. 775), who would later adopt the regnal title al-Mansur ("the victorious"). Al-Mansur's reign would prove crucial for the consolidation of Abbasid power and their rule over the Islamic world. One of al-Mansur's crowning achievements was the construction of Baghdad as the capital of the Abbasid caliphate. Upon ascending to the caliphal office, al-Mansur commanded the building of Baghdad, which he named "Madinat al-Salam," meaning "City of Peace."[64] The foundations of the city were laid in 762, and construction completed in the following year in 763.[65] Al-Mansur traced the overall plan of the city to be round

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62 The Hashimite clan, to which Muhammad belonged, was a branch of the Quraysh tribe.

63 Al-Buhturi, *Diwan al-Buhturi II*, cited in Stefan Sperl, "Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the Early 9th Century," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 8 (1977), p. 21.

64 Later, the old name for the pre-existing shite, Baghdad, resurfaced and the new name faded into oblivion.

65 Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad*, translated in Jacob Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages: Text and Studies* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1970), p. 45.

so that, "if the king settled in the middle of it, he was not nearer one place of it than another."[66]

The reigns of Harun al-Rashid (d. 809) and his son al-Ma'mun (d. 833) marked the apogee of Abbasid rule. During al-Ma'mun's reign, the *Bayt al-Hikma* ("House of Wisdom") was established to promote the translation of ancient Greek texts into Arabic. During that period, Baghdad became the center of scientific learning and religious inquiry.

The Abbasid caliphate went into decline beginning from the mid-ninth century as caliphs gradually lost control over provinces in the empire's peripheries. Caliphs increasingly isolated themselves in palaces, while their Turkish generals and bodyguards wielded *de facto* power over the state's administration. As time went by, the caliph's Turkish armies would often act as kingmakers, deposing and installing caliphs at will. The mid-ninth century also witnessed the emergence of military strongmen who ruled with complete autonomy, independent from caliphal oversight.

As if the setting up of rival counter-caliphates by the descendants of the Umayyads[67] in Cordoba (756-1031), and the Fatimids[68] in Tunisia and subsequently Egypt (909-1171) was not enough to crack the political monopoly of the Abbasids, the challenge to caliphal dignity and authority peaked with the ascension of the Buyid

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66 Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari, Volume XXIX: al-Mansur and al-Mahdi*, transl. Hugh Kennedy (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 6.

67 The Umayyad caliphate in Cordoba began when ᶜAbd al-Rahman I, a descendent of the original Umayyads in Damascus, fled to Spain in 756 and declared himself Emir. In 929, ᶜAbd al-Rahman III would proclaim himself Caliph of Cordoba in place of the original title of "Emir of Cordoba."

68 The Fatimid caliphate was a Shi'ite caliphate whose leaders were of the radical Ismaᶜili branch of Shi'ism. The initial movement, which started with the conquest of Tunisia and east Algeria under its founder 'Ubaydallah, would eventually go on to rule over Egypt and the whole of North Africa.

emirs, who occupied Baghdad and central provinces of the Islamic empire from the mid-tenth to mid-eleventh century.

The caliphs and their Buyid masters

The leaders of the Buyid dynasty originated from Daylam, a region on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea that slipped out of effective caliphal control. Its subjects demonstrated hostility towards the Abbasid cause by converting to Shi'ism.[69] Initially starting with the conquest of surrounding mountainous regions, the Buyids eventually overran the heartlands of the Muslim world including Iraq when Ahmad ibn Buyah (d. 967) entered Baghdad in 945.

Effective Buyid rule in Baghdad began when Ahmad ibn Buyah was recognized as emir, bestowed robes of honor, and granted the honorific title "Mu^{c}izz al-Dawla" ("Giver of Glory to the State") by the caliph al-Mustakfi (d. 946) in 945.[70] Not long after Mu^{c}izz al-Dawla gained control of Baghdad, he deposed of al-Mustakfi and replaced him with a caliph of his choosing.[71]

The reigns of the next caliph al-Muti^{c} (d. 974) and his successor al-Ta^{c}i (d. 1003) marked the lowest ebb of caliphal authority in the history of the Abbasid caliphate. The caliphs were kept under house arrest with a daily "maintenance fee"

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69 Information obtained from Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, p. 37.

70 According to the Abbasid bureaucrat and historian Hilal al-Sabi', Ahmad b. Buyah initially proposed the title of *^{c}Izz al-Dawla* ("The Glory of the State") for himself, but al-Mustakfi disapproved and changed it to *Mu^{c}izz al-Dawla*. See Hilal al-Sabi', *Rusum dar al-khilafah*, translated by Elie A. Salem as *Rules and Regulations of the Abbasid Court* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1977), p. 105.

71 Abu ^{c}Ali Ahmad ibn Miskawayh, *Tajarib al-umam*, II, pp. 2-3; translated by H. F. Amedroz and D. S. Margoliouth as *The Eclipse of the 'Abbasid Caliphate: Original Chronicles of the Fourth Islamic Century* (Oxford: Fox, Jones & Co., 1921), V, p. 90.

that was constantly reduced.[72] Furthermore, caliphs hardly moved a finger when Muslim lands were increasingly exposed to Byzantine raids. When approached by Bakhtiyar (d. 978)—Mu^{c}izz al-Dawla's successor for the emirate—for funds to carry out *jihad* (holy war) against the Byzantines, al-Muti^{c} gave a reply that would encapsulate the position of the Abbasid caliphs by the end of the tenth century:

> "The Sacred War would be incumbent on me if the world were in my hands, and if I had the management of the money and the troops. As things are, when all I have is a pittance insufficient for my wants, and the world is in your hands and those of the provincial rulers, neither the Sacred War, nor the Pilgrimage, nor any other matter requiring the attention of the Sovereign is a concern of mine. All you can claim from me is the name which is uttered in the *khutba*[73] from your pulpits as a means of pacifying your subjects; and if you want me to renounce that privilege too, I am prepared to do so and leave everything to you."[74]

The caliph was compelled to contribute 400,000 dirhams, which he did after selling his clothing and some furniture from the palace.[75] The Buyids, though nominally the caliph's subjects, had now become the caliph's masters.

The crisis of caliphal legitimacy was confounded by the fact that the Buyids were not Sunnis themselves. They were, in Roy Mottahedeh's words, "Shi'is of a very vague cast" who respected the Abbasid caliphate as an institution, but nonetheless denied its legitimacy as religiously ordained rulers.[76] As such, the Buyids only kept the Abbasid caliphs in power in order to maintain the loyalty of their Sunni followers. However, that did not stop the Buyids from carrying out other acts that

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72 Al-Mustakfi was granted a total of five thousand dirhams, while the amount given to al-Muti^{c} was greatly reduced to two thousand dirhams. See A. H. Siddiqi, *Caliphate and Kingship in Medieval Persia* (Lahore: Ripon Printing Press, 1942), pp. 51-52.

73 The *khutba* is a sermon given in a mosque during prayer. In the pre-modern period, the mention of the caliph's name in the *khutba* was one of the two prerogatives given to a ruler (the other being the *sikka*, or minting of coins). Hence it follows that the mentioning of a caliph's name in a *khutba* means accepting *de jure* the sovereignty and suzerainty of the caliph. Its omission would often symbolize a ruler's declaration of independence from the caliph.

74 Miskawayh, *Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, V, p. 330.

75 As a result, al-Muti^{c} was made an object of mockery when this event caused news to be spread that "the caliph had been fined." Ibid., p. 330; see also al-Suyuti, *History of the Caliphs*, p. 422.

76 Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, p. 38.

would seem to Sunnis as heresy. During his reign, Mu^{c}izz al-Dawla permitted the public celebration of the Shi'ite holy festivals of ^{c}Ashura and Ghadir Khumm for the first time in Baghdad, much to the chagrin of the city's Sunni population.[77]

The Buyid period also saw the revival and articulation of Persian notions of kingship. Titles such as "Giver of Glory to the State" and "Glory of the State" might sound grandiloquent, but they were, to some extent, reconcilable with Islamic norms and conventions. However, the assumption of the ancient Persian royal title of *Shahanshah* (in pre-Islamic Persia, the Persian word "*shah*" was the imperial title for the Persian king. Hence, *Shahanshah* meant "King of Kings") by the Buyids marked an audacious disparaging of caliphal legitimacy. To many pious Muslims, the title was considered blasphemous as according to a Prophetic *hadith*: "The most abominable name before God on the Day of Judgment is *malik al-amlak* ("king of kings" in Arabic). There is no king but God." To call oneself "king" or *malik* is already considered an abominable act by itself, since, in Qur'anic terms, to be king is to seize power for one's own aggrandizement rather than the execution of God's will, turning God's human beings into slaves of their own for private interests, rather than the fulfillment of collective needs.[78] In this regard, the assumption of the title *Shahanshah* by the Buyids signified the utmost effrontery to the caliphate. Nevertheless, the Buyids, who believed themselves to be descended from the Persian Sassanian kings, could not be bothered with obeying such norms under a caliph whom they did not regard as legitimate in the first place. Rukn al-Dawla (d. 976), who ruled northern and central Iran from 935 to 976, struck a commemorative coin

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77 Al-Suyuti, *History of the Caliphs*, p. 421.
78 Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 7.

on which he was shown in the garb of a Persian king of kings. The coin's legend runs: "May the glory increase of the King of Kings."[79] His son, ᶜAdud al-Dawla (d. 983) would follow suit by inscribing the title *Shahanshah* on coins bearing his name.

Perhaps the most explicit expression of Persian kingship took place during the investiture ceremony of ᶜAdud al-Dawla when he was crowned as emir. The Buyid-era bureaucrat Hilal al-Sabi' (d. 1056) wrote that apart from the usual robes that were bestowed upon provincial rulers and leaders, ᶜAdud al-Dawla was also adorned with "a studded crown with a jewel-laden tassel," which he specially requested the official in charge of the robes of honor to include. According to al-Sabi', ᶜAdud al-Dawla set a high value on that detail.[80] What appeared outrageous about the ceremony was the fact that ᶜAdud al-Dawla demanded that the caliph in person place the crown on his head. By this very act alone, the Buyid emir, apart from denying the caliph's legitimacy as the supreme head of the Muslim community, had successfully relegated the caliph to acting merely as a chief priest in the Sassanian Persian tradition.[81]

After a century of rule, the Buyids slowly fell out of power as internecine struggles between members of the ruling family rendered them ineffective as rulers. Beginning from the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Qadir (d. 1031), the caliphate would experience a renaissance of fortunes, which corresponded inversely to the decline in fortunes of the Buyids. The emir Jalal al-Dawla (d. 1044) had to vie for

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79 Heribert Busse, "The Revival of Persian Kingship under the Buyids," in D. S. Richards ed., *Islamic Civilization 950-1150* (London: William Clowes & Sons Limited, 1973), p. 57.

80 Al-Sabi', *Rules and Regulations*, p. 75.

81 In Sassanian tradition, rulers were crowned by the chief priest (*mobedh*). Accordingly, the parts of the play were clearly distributed: while the king was the owner of political power, the chief mobedh as God's vicegerent had to anoint the king. This was totally different from delegating power, which in the view of the caliph and the Muslim jurists was the true meaning of the investiture. Busse, "Revival of Persian Kingship," p. 63.

power with his nephew Abu Kalijar (d. 1048), to the extent that both of them claimed the title *Shahanshah*.[82]

The Seljuq sultanate and a caliphate reenergized

The decline of the Buyids coincided with the rise of the Seljuq Turks in the mid-eleventh century. The Seljuqs, who had their origins as a nomadic tribe in Central Asia, would eventually be in control of the Islamic heartland stretching all the way to Anatolia. As recently converted Sunni warriors, they would herald a period that would go down in history books as the "Sunni Revival." Recently, this "myth" of a Sunni Revival has been debunked by scholars, in particular George Makdisi, who argues that what happened in the eleventh century was not, strictly speaking, a Sunni awakening, but more of a traditionalist triumph for the Muslim legal schools with a conservative and traditionalist orientation.[83]

The "Sunni Revival" might have owed its origins to the fact that the caliphate enjoyed a resurgence of political power from the eleventh century onwards, till its destruction by the Mongols in 1258. Efforts began with al-Qadir's personal naming of his own successor, al-Qa'im (d. 1075), as heir to the caliphate in 1030. Previously, the nomination of successors was often controlled by the Buyids who often acted as kingmakers. Not only did al-Qadir exercise his right to nominate his own successor, he made a public show of the event by making the investiture ceremony open to the masses. During the investiture, a letter invoking the lordship of the caliph over the

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82 Wilferd Madelung, "The Assumption of the Title Shahanshah by the Buyids and 'The Reign of Daylam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (July 1969), p. 180.

83 George Makdisi, "The Sunni Revival," in Richards ed., *Islamic Civilization 950-1150*, pp. 155-168; similarly, Henri Laoust, "Les Agitations Religieuses à Baghdad aux IV^{e} et V^{e} Siècles de l'Hégire," in Richards ed., *Islamic Civilization 950-1150*, pp. 172-175.

Buyid emir Jalal al-Dawla (d. 1044) were publicly recited to the public, thereby bolstering the status of the caliph.[84]

Subsequent caliphs did not allow themselves to be intimidated by their subordinates. When Abu Nasr Khusro Firuz (d. 1059), the last Buyid emir of Baghdad, demanded the title "al-Malik al-Rahim" ("The Merciful King"), the caliph al-Qa'im refused saying, "It is not permissible for anyone to appropriate one of the special qualities of God for his title."[85] On another occasion, when Jalal al-Dawla attempted to interfere in the collection of the poll tax from non-Muslim males, which was customarily due to the caliph without interference from any secular authority, it was written that "al-Qa'im found the situation outrageous and very serious," to the extent that the caliph threatened to leave Baghdad.[86]

Any discussion concerning the revitalization of caliphal fortunes would not be complete without taking into account the caliph's increasing military presence in Baghdad and its surrounding regions. While caliphal administration and military power had been almost nonexistent during Buyid rule, both returned to the caliphs especially during the reigns of al-Mustarshid (d. 1134) and al-Muqtafi (d. 1160), and reached a zenith under the energetic and ambitious al-Nasir (d. 1225). Beginning with the reign of al-Mustarshid, caliphs regained their role as military commanders with a

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84 Hanne, *Putting the Caliph in His Place*, p. 81.

85 In Islam, God is often referred to as "the Merciful and the Compassionate." See Ibn al-Athir*, The Annals of the Saljuq Turks: Selections from al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh of 'Izz al-Din Ibn al-Athir*, translated and annotated by D. S. Richards (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 69.

86 The chronicler ibn al-Athir writes that "the caliph assembled the Hashemites [members of the caliph's household] in the palace and the foot-soldiers, and ordered the 'flyer' and the barges to be got ready. He sent to the provincial rulers and the cadis to tell them of his plans and declared his intention to abandon Baghdad…circumstances demanded that the prince would give up his interference with the caliphal agents in this matter during the coming year." Ibid., pp. 52-53.

sizeable army of their own, and they also personally led armies out to battle.[87] Al-Mustarshid even went as far as arming the populace of Baghdad against any potential harm when the conflict between the Seljuqs and the caliph came to a climax.[88]

Despite a caliphal resurgence, it would be wrong to regard this revitalized caliphate in the same light as it existed during its early years from the mid-eight to early tenth century. Unlike their predecessors, caliphs such as al-Mustarshid and al-Muqtafi were far from being the only political players in the field. Baghdad and its surrounding regions were plagued by struggles for power mainly involving the Seljuqs and their rivals, with the caliphs eventually finding themselves reined into from time to time. The caliph was no longer *primus inter pares* when it came to power and rule in the Islamic world. Moreover, the caliph's revived glory would arouse the opposition of their supposed Seljuq "protectors," who often did not hesitate to fight fire with fire, as we shall see later.

The Seljuqs first came into the orbit of the Abbasid caliphate when al-Qa'im wrote to Sultan Tughril Beg (d. 1063), the founder of the Great Seljuq Empire, requesting for help against al-Basasiri (a Turkish general employed by the Buyids) who constantly threatened the caliphate of al-Qa'im. In 1055, Tughril Beg and his troops were invited to bring their tents into Baghdad; thereafter, the caliph gave orders for the *khutba* to be said in the name of Tughril Beg in the mosques of Baghdad, while Tughril made promises that "he planned to perform the Hajj and put the route to Mecca in good order, and to go on to Syria and Egypt and remove al-Mustansir the [Fatimid] ruler there." The alliance was further secured by a marriage

[87] See al-Suyuti, *History of the Caliphs*, p. 454 and 464 where he talks briefly about their military expeditions.
[88] Hanne, *Putting the Caliph in His Place*, p. 153.

between the caliph and the sultan's niece Arslan Khatun.[89] Despite having set up residence in Baghdad and receiving titles such as *Rukn al-Din* ("Pillar of Faith") and even *Shahanshah* from al-Qa'im, Tughril Beg remained in Baghdad for thirteen months without being granted an audience with the caliph.[90] The caliph only granted the sultan audience two years later, when Tughril returned to Baghdad after an expedition in Mosul.[91]

After Tughril Beg's death in 1063, the sultanate passed to his son Alp Arslan (d. 1072). During the reign of Alp Arslan, the names of the Abbasid caliph and the sultan would eventually be reintroduced in the *khutba* in the cities of Mecca and Aleppo (previously under the Fatimids), implying that these two cities were under caliphal sway once again.[92] Alp Arslan's successes peaked with a victory at the Battle of Manzikert (1071) against the Byzantines, during which the Byzantine emperor was taken captive. Alp Arslan's rule was cut short when he was assassinated; thereupon his son Malik Shah succeeded him in 1072.

Malik Shah's reign marked the apogee of the Seljuq sultanate, wherein the Islamic lands enjoyed some semblance of unity, as observed in the medieval chronicler ᶜAli ᶜIzz al-Din ibn al-Athir's (d. 1233) remark concerning the extent of Malik Shah's sphere of influence:

> His name was mentioned in the *khutbah* from the borders of China to the limits of Syria, and from the remotest lands of Islam in the north to the confines of Yemen. The rulers of Byzantium brought him tribute.[93]

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89 Ibn al-Athir, *Annals of the Saljuq Turks*, pp. 99-100, 103-104.

90 Henri Laoust claims that this was a "supreme affront in a time and regime where the ceremony of a caliphal audience held a great place in the outward manifestations of power." Laoust, "Les Agitations Religieuses à Baghdad," p. 177. My own translation.

91 Ibn al-Athir, *Annals of the Saljuq Turks*, p. 114.

92 Ibid., p. 166 and 168.

93 Ibid., p. 259.

Nevertheless, Malik Shah's reign would not have been lauded favorably by medieval chroniclers were it not for the efforts of his famous vizier Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092), who was so effective as an administrator that the sultan entrusted all affairs of the state to him.[94] Nizam al-Mulk was also crucial in promoting a culture of religious education that saw the proliferation of *madrasas*, or religious schools, across the Islamic world. The most famous and celebrated of them was the Nizamiyya in Baghdad, where the renowned Muslim jurist al-Ghazali (d. 1111) taught Islamic jurisprudence and law. The deaths of Malik Shah and Nizam al-Mulk (both in 1092) ushered in the collapse of the Great Seljuq Empire.

Power and Authority in Caliph-Sultan Relations

The Seljuqs were more effective rulers than the Buyids, but were, at the same time, more coercive and forceful in their dealings with the caliphs. During the Seljuq period, there were fewer grandiose crowning ceremonies such as that which involved ᶜAdud al-Dawla and al-Taᶜi. However, with the reinvigoration of caliphal military capabilities, the Seljuqs and other emirs increasingly saw the caliphs not only as equals, but also as competitors for power. Far from being a happy and harmonious collaboration, the relationship between the caliph and the sultan was one of continuing hostilities.[95]

The acquiescence of Sunni Muslim subjects to the early Seljuq conquests was

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[94] Ibid., pp. 181-182.

[95] Makdisi, "Les Rapports entre Calife et Sultan à l'Époque Saljuqide," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (April 1975), p. 229; similarly, see Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqil et la Résurgence de l'Islam Traditionaliste au XIᵉ Siècle* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1963), chapter 2.

largely due to the sultans' repeated proclamations that they conquered in the name of Sunni Islam and the caliph, who still enjoyed a tremendous sense of legitimacy in the people's eyes as supreme head of the universal Muslim community. At the same time, Seljuq conquests under the banner of Sunnism and the Abbasid caliph brought about a sense of symbolic unity of the Muslim world under the Abbasids. However, the Seljuqs' proclaimed Sunnism, coupled with their greater political and military strength, allowed them to treat the Abbasids in a manner in which the Buyids were never able to indulge.[96] In spite of that, sultans still required a diploma of investiture from the caliph, regardless of how distant they were from the caliphal capital of Baghdad.[97] Hence, George Makdisi in his oft-cited article, "Les Rapports entre Calife et Sultan à l'Époque Saljuqide," views the somehow symbiotic caliph-sultan relationship as one between power and authority. Given this, he cites Jacques Maritain's definition of these two terms: "Authority and Power are two different things: *Power* is the force by means of which you can oblige others to obey you. *Authority* is the *right* to direct and command, to be listened to or obeyed by others. Authority requests power. Power without authority is tyranny."[98] This leads to Makdisi's conclusion that:

> …it was the force of attraction between authority and power which brought into conflict the interests of the Caliph and Sultan. In the golden age of the Caliphate, the Caliph possessed both authority and power. When power slipped from the Caliph's hands, the struggle began between him and the holder of power. But the Sultan was always at a disadvantage, for he always was in need of being legitimized; hence his struggle to achieve stability through a reintegration of power and authority to his own advantage.[99]

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96 Deborah G. Tor, "A Tale of Two Murders: Power Relations between Caliph and Sultan in the Saljuq Era," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 159 (2009), p. 281.

97 Makdisi, "Les Rapports entre Calife et Sultan à l'Époque Saljuqide," p. 232.

98 Jacques Maritain, *Man and State* (Chicago: University Press, 1951), p. 126, quoted in Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqil et la Résurgence de l'Islam Traditionaliste au XI^e Siècle*, p. 70.

99 Makdisi, "The Marriage of Tughril Beg," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (July 1970), p. 262.

Problems between caliph and sultan emerged when caliphs such as al-Mustarshid and al-Muqtafi were not content with legitimating sultans and bestowing honors, while idling on their lofty perches in Baghdad. As caliphs began to flex their military muscle, the Seljuqs could no longer ignore the Abbasids as mere puppets or figureheads. In this struggle for power, Tughril Beg even coerced al-Qa'im into allowing him to marry the caliph's daughter, and the caliph eventually acquiesced. Such an incident, as ibn al-Athir records, "had never happened to the caliphs before, for the Buyids, despite their political dominance and their opposition to the beliefs of the caliphs, had never aspired to anything similar, nor had they constrained [the caliphs] to do such a thing."[100] Makdisi recounts this event as a shrewd attempt by Tughril to unite both authority and power, with the possibility of having a Seljuq descendant assuming the caliphate.[101] The death of Tughril Beg prevented this from happening.

The struggle between sultan and caliph peaked with the murder of the two caliphs, al-Mustarshid and his successor al-Rashid (d. 1138), which medieval chroniclers attribute to Isma^{c}ili Assassins, but studies have shown that the murders might have been masterminded by the Seljuqs themselves.[102] While the Seljuqs might not have possessed the audacity to insult caliphal dignity with blasphemous and

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[100] Ibn al-Athir, *Annals of the Saljuq Turks*, p. 139.

[101] Of course, unlike what Ibn al-Athir suggests, similar situations have taken place as well with the Buyids. 'Adud al-Dawla married the daughter of the caliph al-Ta'i, and had the caliph in turn marry his daughter, in the hope of joining both dynasties in the caliphal succession. Although the marriages took place, the desired goal was not achieved. Hence, al-Qa'im's violent protests can be seen as a prudent attempt to avoid this "tradition," and in doing so, assert his autonomy vis-à-vis the Seljuq sultan. See Makdisi, "The Marriage of Tughril Beg," pp. 261-262, and Hanne, *Putting the Caliph in His Place*, p. 97.

[102] For this view, see Tor, "A Tale of Two Murders," pp. 279-297.

grandiose ceremonies or titles, struggles involving caliphs and sultans posed not only challenges to the caliph's position, but also threats to his life. With regard to the Abbasid caliphs, Deborah Tor argues, "Whereas the Buyids only deposed, the Saljuqs both deposed and, apparently, disposed."[103]

During the political turmoil that plagued the central Muslim lands from the tenth century onwards, Baghdad and its population suffered. Aside from a series of natural disasters that Baghdad experienced, the city's rulers themselves also had a hand in making lives more miserable for their subjects.[104] Throughout the enduring conflicts, Baghdad became an arena of contention between sultans and the caliphs. The chaotic conditions of the caliphal capital are a frequent trope in the chronicles written by medieval historians such as Miskawayh and ibn al-Athir. With the advent of the Seljuqs, not only did the situation of Baghdad not improve, it also became worse. Just one day after Tughril Beg's arrival, a misunderstanding arose between some of his troops and a citizen, after which,

> The city was in an uproar on all sides. [The people] came 'surging from every hill [and dell]' to kill any Oghuz (here denoting the Turks belonging to the Seljuq army) that were to be found in the districts of Baghdad…. The Baghdad mob meanwhile were not content with what they had done, but they went with a company of forces outside the city to attack the sultan's (Tughril's) army…. Tughril Beg's army, however, when it saw what the mob had done and that they had moved outside the city, engaged them, which led to many deaths on both sides. The mob was defeated, with many of them wounded or seized. All were sacked…. The people were sorely oppressed and in great terror.[105]

Ibn al-Athir, who often writes unfavorably of Tughril Beg, claimed that "Sultan Tughril Beg's stay in Baghdad lasted long and the nuisance caused by his troops affected hosts of people. They were harassed by them in their homes, for the troops

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[103] Ibid., p. 294.

[104] Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqil et la Résurgence de l'Islam Traditionaliste au XI^e Siècle*, p. 148. My own translation.

[105] Ibn al-Athir, *Annals of the Saljuq Turks*, pp. 101-102.

took up billets there, confiscated their provisions and perpetrated every sort of forbidden act against them." These troubles even got to a point when al-Qa'im threatened to "depart from Baghdad to remove himself far from these evils" if the sultan did not put an end to the misdoings of his troops.[106]

The fall of Baghdad

Caliphal resurgence peaked with the reign of the caliph al-Nasir, who oversaw the demise of the last Seljuq sultan Tughril III ibn Arslan. His energetic and ambitious character is attested for by many medieval historians, including the Egyptian jurist and historian Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505) who writes, "[al-Nasir] overran many countries and conquered provinces as none of the Caliphs and sovereigns that preceded him had done, and his name was read in the *khutbah* in the provinces of Spain and in the cities of China."[107] Unfortunately, even the efforts of al-Nasir and his successors—al-Zahir (d. 1226) and al-Mustansir (d. 1242)—were not sufficient to secure the caliphate against the onslaught of the Mongols in 1258 under Hulagu Khan, who destroyed Baghdad and killed the last reigning caliph al-Musta^{c}sim (d. 1258).

Ibn al-Athir, writing in 1220, about forty years before the Mongol invasion of Baghdad, once described the Mongol incursions into the Islamic word as "the most terrible disaster and the greatest misfortune." [108] Owing to the lax military administration of the last Abbasid caliph al-Musta^{c}sim, the Mongols encountered

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106 Ibid., p. 107.

107 Al-Suyuti, *History of the Caliphs*, p. 475.

108 Ibn al-Athir, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh Part 3: The Years 589-629/1193-1231, The Ayyubids After Saladin and the Mongol Menace*, translated and annotated by D. S. Richards (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2008), p. 202.

little resistance upon entering Baghdad. After thirteen days of siege, the city surrendered on February 10, 1258, after which Hulagu Khan (d. 1265) ordered al-Musta^{c}sim to be put to death. According to a contemporary in Baghdad, "[Al-Musta^{c}sim's] blood was not shed; instead he was put in a sack and trampled to death [by horses]."[109] Massacre of the inhabitants began one day after the city's surrender, and people were subject to forty days of killing, pillaging, and rape. The Mongols also killed as many members of the Abbasid household as they could get their hands on.[110] The events at Baghdad struck fear across the Muslim world, especially in Cairo and Damascus, as people wondered which Muslim metropolis would be next to fall.

The Abbasid caliphate in Cairo and the Mamluk sultanate

The Mongol advance was cut short by the Mamluks of Egypt in the Battle of ^{c}Ayn Jalut in 1260. The Mamluks had their origins as regiments and slave soldiers brought in from Central Asia for the Ayyubid dynasty (1171-1341)—a Muslim dynasty of Kurdish origin founded by the famous Salah al-Din (or more popularly known in the Western world as Saladin, d. 1193). The Mamluks came to power after murdering the last Ayyubid sultan of Egypt in 1250, and were, in some respects, unique especially with regard to the issue of succession. Slaves were trained to be soldiers and were also offered instruction in the Qur'an, Arabic, Islamic law, and

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109 From a portion of *al-Hawadith al-Jami^{c}ah*, translated by Hend Gilli-Elewy as "Al-Hawadit al-gami'a: A Contemporary Account of the Mongol Conquest of Baghdad, 656/1258," *Arabica*, 58 (2011), p. 366. This local chronicle dealing with the history of Iraq from 1228 to 1301 has been attributed to Iraqi historian Ibn al-Fuwati. However, several scholars have argued that this claim is erroneous. See Gilli-Elewy, p. 358 for more information concerning the title and authorship of this work. As for the killing of al-Musta^{c}sim, this method of execution came about owing to the Mongols' superstitious belief about shedding royal blood. Hulagu Khan feared an earthquake would occur should the caliph's blood fall on the ground and many people would perish. See Gilli-Elewy, p. 366, footnote no. 52.

110 But they did not put to death the caliph's youngest son and his sisters. Instead, they were rumored to have been imprisoned. Ibid., p. 366.

Muslim prayers.[111] Based on merit, these slaves could even be appointed to high offices of state, and even rise to the rank of sultan.[112] This system of succession coupled with the Mamluks' slave origins also meant that there was a lack of lineage they could claim for legitimacy vis-à-vis Hulagu Khan's Ilkhanid descendants (future rulers of Iran and its surrounding regions from the mid-thirteenth to fourteenth century), who often prided themselves as supreme rulers of the world by virtue of lineage and divine mandate traced back to Genghis Khan himself.[113]

That situation changed in 1261 when the Mamluk sultan Baybars (d. 1277) received a letter stating that there had arrived in Damascus a man who claimed to be the son of the caliph al-Zahir (hence, grandson of al-Nasir). Immediately upon hearing this, Baybars sent for the man, who eventually arrived in the Citadel of Cairo on horseback, wearing the black mantle of the Abbasid dynasty. After confirming the pretender's credentials and line of descent four days after the arrival, Baybars instantly pledged the oath of allegiance to the newly reinstalled caliph, who took the title al-Mustansir ("the one who has been granted victory"). The caliph, in turn, "invested…the sultan with the Islamic countries and also whatever conquests he might make with the help of God over the infidels…."[114] However, al-Mustansir's reign was cut short when he was slain in a battle against the Mongols in Iraq in 1262.

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111 Donald P. Little, "Religion under the Mamluks," *The Muslim World*, Vol. LXXIII (Jul/Oct., 1983), p. 166.

112 This passage appears in Abu Zayd ᶜAbd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun, *Kitab al-'Ibar*, V (Cairo: Dar al-Tab'a al-Amira, 1867/68), quoted in David Ayalon, "Mamlukiyyat," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, II (1980), p. 346; also quoted in Little, "Religion under the Mamluks," p. 166.

113 Likewise, Hulagu's Armenian ally King Het'um called Mamluk sultan Baybars "a (dog) and a slave" and refused to have any dealings with him. See Anne Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 13.

114 Muhi al-Din Ibn ᶜAbd al-Zahir, *Sirat al-Malik al-Zahir*, translated by Syedah Fatima Sadeque as *Baybars I of Egypt* (Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 125.

About a year after the death of al-Mustansir, Baybars would recognize another pretender, who claimed to be a descendant in the fourth generation of the caliph al-Mustarshid, as caliph with the title al-Hakim (d. 1302). Al-Hakim enjoyed a reign of forty years, and from him would spring forth the progeny of future caliphs in Cairo.

Despite the Mamluk sultans' recognition of the reputed Abbasids in Cairo, it is nonetheless erroneous to think that the reinstalled caliphs were of any practical significance to the daily administration of the sultanate. By investing Baybars with "the Islamic countries," the caliph became nothing more than the sultan's stamp of legitimacy in securing the latter's claim as a universal sultan of Islam. The caliph's prestigious lineage and heritage would in due course prove to be an instrumental rhetorical tool for the early Mamluks' diplomatic wars with their Mongol Ilkhanid opponents.[115] Beyond that, the caliphs were kept on a short leash and were only accorded ceremonial functions.[116] The ᶜAbbasid caliphate in Cairo ultimately ended when the Ottoman sultan Selim I defeated the Egyptian Mamluks in 1517, and transported the last Abbasid caliph in Cairo, al-Mutawakkil III, and his family to Istanbul, where he was rumored to have transferred the caliphate to Selim. From that point, the centuries old Abbasid dynasty passed into obscurity.

By the fourteenth century, the Islamic world was anything but a homogenous community of believers (*umma*) effectively ruled by one man. Rather, it consisted of many disparate states ruled by emirs and sultans of all stripes and sorts. Above all, the late medieval Islamic period was marked by instability and endless strife. It was

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115 Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds*, p. 15.

116 According to the Mamluk historian al-Maqrizi, the caliph "had no authority…. He spent his time among nobles, high officials, scribes, and judges, paying them visits to thank them for dinners and entertainment to which they had invited him." See Little, "Religion under the Mamluks," p. 173.

also precisely during this period that many educated Muslims, especially religious scholars, jurists, and philosophers, attempted to make sense of the turbulent political realities around them. Among the questions at hand was, for instance, how could one justify the *de facto* rule of various sultans and emirs who acted virtually independent from the caliph? In what ways can one make sense of a post-caliphal world order in which the caliph was no longer in existence? The Sunni response to these questions represents one among the many ways by which Muslim jurists attempted to reconcile the moral ideals of Islam with prevailing social and historical realities.[117] The historical circumstances above formed the basis for the legal and political writings composed during the late medieval Islamic era, such that writings were less often "political theories" of the caliphate than a rationalization of the historical reality surrounding the thinker. As Leonard Binder argues, "History has a legislative character in Sunni Islam, and the Caliphate is the prime example of the legislative efficacity of history."[118]

[117] For a summary of responses by other Muslim sects, such as the Shi'ites and the Kharijites, to the questions raised above, see Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 254.
[118] Leonard Binder, "Al-Ghazali's Theory of Islamic Government," *The Muslim World*, 45 (1955), p. 231.

2. The Caliphate as an Idea from the Death of Muhammad to al-Mawardi

Before examining al-Mawardi, al-Ghazali, ibn Taymiyya, and ibn Khaldun, one has to first understand how state and government were understood prior to these four Sunni Muslim intellectuals. More often than not, political thought was formulated in relation to the office of the caliphate. Although al-Mawardi is often said to be the first Muslim intellectual to draw up a systematic legal treatise defining the nature and duties of the caliphate, caliphal politics and legitimacy were expressed in a variety of ways before him. The caliphate often figured as an embedded concept in historical works, court writings, and belle-lettres.[119] This ubiquitous expression of caliphal power forms the intellectual milieu in which al-Mawardi was writing. In that regard, this chapter will delineate the various forms of expression of caliphal legitimacy, from the death of the Prophet Muhammad to al-Mawardi in the mid-eleventh century. Overall, this chapter will attempt to demonstrate how the understanding of the caliphate evolved over time for Muslim intellectuals, as they came to understand the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates as being different from the caliphates of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs after Muhammad's death. More importantly, this chapter will argue that the caliphate was increasingly articulated as an institution that was endowed with the plenitude of power reflecting the concentration of political and religious legitimacy in a single person. This trend found clearest expression in al-Mawardi, whose treatise *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya* represents,

[119] Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Islamic Political Thought: Current Historiography and the Frame of History," in *Times of History: Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007), pp. 243-244.

for the first time in the history of Islam, the articulation of caliphal absolutism in a legal and systematic manner.[120]

Early articulations of caliphal legitimacy

All four of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs—with the exception of ᶜUthman during the latter part of his reign—saw themselves as acting in the name and spirit of the Prophet. They conceived of their office as a successor institution to the Prophet's role as the ruler of the Muslim community, and also as a religious leader in leading the prayers of the community.

Despite a contested and heated selection process, when the caliphate was conferred upon Abu Bakr, he declared that he would follow the policies and practices of the Prophet:

> "Oh people, I am like you. I do not know, perhaps you will impose on me that which the Apostle of God was able to do. God chose Muhammad above [all] the worlds and protected him from evils; but I am only a follower, not an innovator. If I am upright, then follow me; but if I deviate, straighten me out. I have a Satan who takes possession of me; so when he comes to me, avoid me so that I may have no [evil] effect [even] on your hair and your skins."[121]

In his wish to be seen as acting in the name and spirit of the Prophet, Abu Bakr is also believed to have taken the title "*khalifat rasul Allah*" (Successor of the Messenger of God), instead of the more divinely ordained "*khalifat Allah*" (Deputy of God).[122] Abu Bakr also envisaged the immense burden and weight attached to the caliphal office,

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120 Nevertheless, "absolutism" here should not convey the notion of "despotism" or "totalitarianism." Absolutism in the Muslim sense is squared on the ruler's position as being *above society* but still maintaining just rule over his subjects. For a brief discussion, see Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, p. 91.

121 Al-Tabari, *History, Vol. X*, pp. 11-12.

122 Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 46. See also letters written on behalf of Abu Bakr to apostates, where he is addressed as "successor of the Apostle of God [denoting the Prophet Muhammad]." Al-Tabari, *History, Vol. X*, pp. 55-60.

and is believed to have claimed that he accepted caliphal appointment largely out of fear of sedition in the Muslim community if he did not do so.[123]

ᶜUmar also saw the office of the caliphate as a commitment to the Prophet in managing the affairs of Muslim people after the death of Abu Bakr. As such, ᶜUmar saw himself as positioned below that of the Prophet and Abu Bakr in the Muslim community. When being addressed, "You are the *khalifa* (here meaning "successor") of the messenger of God," ᶜUmar replied, "Or the *khalifa* (successor) of Abu Bakr and Abu Bakr was the *khalifa* of the messenger of God."[124] Overall, both Abu Bakr and ᶜUmar saw the caliphal office an institution designed to safeguard the community of the Prophet from disunity and sedition, thereby conveying the notion of an inadequate but nonetheless important "successorship" to the Prophet.

ᶜUthman's caliphate (644-656)—especially towards the end of his reign—constituted a break with tradition with regard to the articulation of caliphal legitimacy. It was also during his reign that things began to go seriously wrong. For instance, ᶜUthman's nepotistic practices met with resistance from Arab tribesmen who had settled in Egypt and Iraq after the conquests.[125] In order to compensate for the gradual loss of the moral and religious character of the caliphal office during troubled times, ᶜUthman increasingly bolstered his position as caliph by justifying it as God-given authority akin to the divine right of kings in medieval Europe.[126] He is

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123 Al-Suyuti, *History of the Caliphs*, p. 70.

124 Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari, Vol. XIV: The Conquest of Iran*, transl. G. Rex Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 116.

125 According to Wilferd Madelung, "[ᶜUthman] acted, backed by his close kin, with great determination and the conviction that the house of Umayya [from which later Umayyad rulers would spring from], as the core clan of Quraysh, was uniquely qualified to rule in the name of Islam." Madelung, *Succession to Muhammad*, p. 81.

126 Ayoub, *The Crisis of Muslim History*, p. 50.

also believed to be the first caliph to explicitly use the divinely inspired title, *khalifat Allah* (Deputy of God).[127] Sayings such as "I am the servant of God and His deputy" and "I beseech you by God and remind you of His right and the right of His *khalifa*" have been ascribed to ᶜUthman during his tumultuous reign.[128] When besieged by rebels demanding his abdication, ᶜUthman is reported to have responded:

> "As for telling me to abdicate, I shall not remove a shirt that Almighty God has placed on me, and by which He has honored me and set me apart from others. As for surrendering my office, I would rather be crucified than give up the mandate of Almighty God and His caliphate."[129]

By representing the caliphal office as a "shirt" with which God Himself had clothed him, ᶜUthman regarded his office as something *directly* bestowed upon him by God. Rather than viewing the caliphate in humbler terms as a successorship to the Prophet, ᶜUthman saw the caliphal office as a God-ordained and sacred office "set apart from others," such that the act of abdicating due to pressure from rebels would seem most inconceivable. In that regard, ᶜUthman saw himself as someone who represented God as His deputy on earth with absolute power. Even if these assertions occurred during the latter part of ᶜUthman's reign, it is within this definition and metaphorization of power in terms of the sacred that future caliphs perceived caliphal authority.

ᶜAli's reign as caliph marked a brief stemming of the tide in the development of caliphal divine kingship. In historical accounts, ᶜAli is often characterized by his intractable moral and religious idealism. These qualities moved his supporters to consider him not only as a political successor (*khalifa*) to the Prophet, but also the Prophet's heir (*wasi*) as the spiritual head (*imam*) of the community. Even if ᶜAli's

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127 Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, pp. 5-6.

128 Ibid., p. 6.

129 Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari, Vol. XV: The Crisis of the Early Caliphate*, transl. R.S. Humphreys (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 196-197.

morally uncompromising leadership style was not suited to the new socio-political and military exigencies of a rapidly expanding Islamic empire, his unwavering idealism was sufficient to make him appear self-righteous in light of adverse circumstances.[130] That perception grew even stronger after his assassination.

Muᶜawiyya's decision to appoint his son as successor to the caliphate effectively marked the breakdown of the more egalitarian and deliberative system of government characteristic of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. The transformation of the caliphate into an institution akin to a monarchical kingship became more evident as Muslim rulers moved further away from the Prophet's memory, and into the imperial centers of late antique Byzantium (in the case of the Umayyads) and Persia (in the case of the Abbasids).

Such changes were not only manifested at the institutional level, but also in the ways by which caliphal legitimacy was articulated. Since the time of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, the caliph enjoyed tremendous political legitimacy, owing to his role as the successor to the Prophet and as ruler of the universal Muslim community. With the rise of the Umayyads, the caliphate was not only understood along political lines, but also in religious and spiritual terms, such that the caliph was presented as God's sole agent on earth. How the Umayyad caliphs and their supporters bolstered the caliph's religious legitimacy and spiritual role can be examined using the letter of the

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[130] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "The Relevance of Religion and the Response to It: A Study of Religious Perceptions in Early Islam," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2 (1988), p. 279.

Umayyad caliph al-Walid II (d. 744) designating his two sons, al-Hakam and ᶜUthman, as his successors in 743.[131]

Before al-Mawardi, there was hardly any systematic treatment of the caliphate in juristic-legal discourses. Theoretical concepts regarding the caliphate and political ideas were only circulated orally in the form of panegyric poetry, political orations, or in conversations of the caliphs themselves and others that medieval chroniclers such as al-Tabari recorded.[132] Hence, al-Walid's letter comes closest to what may be termed as a distinctly Umayyad theory of state. Considering that the letter was meant to be read out to a large audience—perhaps even as a sermon from the pulpit of a mosque—it not only offers an idea of how the Umayyads and their supporters understood the caliphal office, but also the ideology of the caliphate they wanted to transmit to their subjects.[133] The relevant abridged parts of the letter are as follows:

> [God] made Islam the religion of His choice and He created Islam as the best thing for the chosen of His creatures. Then He chose messengers from amongst angels and men. He sent them forth with His message (Islam) and gave them orders concerning it… This continued until the grace of God culminated in His calling of Muhammad…to prophethood, at a time when knowledge had passed beyond recall…. By [Muhammad] [God] dispelled the darkness and by him He brought deliverance from error and destruction…. By him He set the seal on His revelation…. Then God appointed His caliphs to follow in the path of Muhammad's prophetic ministry, after He had taken His prophet unto Himself, and (after) He had sealed His revelation by Muhammad, in order that His rule should be accomplished, His *sunna* and His penalties established, and His precepts and laws adopted. This was done so that, by His caliphs, God might confirm Islam…consolidate its sway…safeguard its santuaries, (and)…administer justice amongst His servants…. The caliphs of God succeeded each other as sovereigns over that which God had made them inherit from His prophets and that which He had entrusted to them. No one contests the rights of the caliphs without God striking him down; no one abandons their community without God destroying him…. So it is by the caliphate that God preserves those of His servants on earth whom it is His will to preserve and those whom He has appointed to inhabit the earth. It is in showing obedience to those

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131 The letter is reproduced in its entirety in al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari Volume XXVI: The Waning of the Umayyad Caliphate*, translated by Carole Hillenbrand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), and in Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, Appendix 2.

132 Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), p. 75.

133 For a fuller discussion of the form and function of this letter, see Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 154-159.

> whom God has appointed to rule on earth that there lies happiness…. But he who abandons that obedience, turns his face against it and opposes God thereby, squanders his allotted portion, disobeys his Lord, and loses for himself the things of this life and the next…. The special repository of blessing bestowed on the community in this world, next to His caliphate which He established for them as a foundation and as a support for ruling them, is the covenant which God directed His caliphs to confirm and oversee for the Muslims in matters of moment…. The authority [of the caliphs] embodied in this covenant is integral to the completeness of Islam….

Several implications can be derived from the contents of this letter. First, al-Walid II reconstructs the history of humankind by dividing it into two eras: the era of the prophets and the era of the caliphs. Islam, being the religion chosen by God for the human race, remains the overarching religion in both eras. However, the means through which God preserves Islam differs in the two eras. In the age of the prophets from the beginning of time till the death of Muhammad, God sent messengers. The line of prophets and messengers ended with Muhammad, in whom "God accumulated the bounties which He had bestowed on the prophets who had preceded him."[134] The age of the prophets ended with Muhammad's death, when "God had taken His prophet unto Himself…." This is the last mention of the Prophet in this lengthy letter of almost ten pages. After the death of the Prophet, God *appointed* caliphs to administer the legacy of the prophets.

The duties of the caliph—establishing God's *sunna* and penalties, consolidating the sway of Islam, administering justice, and so on—were in no way inferior to the duties with which God charged the prophets. Caliphs and prophets were agents of God in a sense that they both administered God's rule on earth. While prophets deliver God's messages, caliphs executed and put them into effect. Caliphs

[134] Al-Tabari, *History, Volume XXVI*, p. 107.

did not derive their legitimacy and authority from the Prophet.[135] Rather, they, on equal footing with the prophets, owed their authority *directly* to God alone. In this regard, the caliph figured as God's deputy (*khalifat Allah*) to be accorded a religious and spiritual role. Insofar as Muhammad was regarded as the most important prophet in al-Walid's eyes, his mission was over with his death, after which God worked *through* caliphs to the present in order to safeguard religion and to administer justice. In a letter addressed to ᶜAbd al-Malik, al-Hajjaj made the claim that "A man's *khalifa* [=successor, i.e., a newborn son] in his family is dearer to him than his messenger [conveying the good news] to them. Likewise, O Commander of the Faithful, *khalifa*s [=caliphs, successors of the Prophet Muhammad] are of a higher status than God's messengers."[136] In other words, while Muhammad is dead and belongs to past history, caliphs rule and articulate God's will in the present.

The other recurring theme that runs through the letter is obedience to the caliph as rightful representative of God's covenant on earth. When one reads the letter in full, one cannot help but notice that almost every paragraph is written using the same format: starting with the significance of the caliph in Muslim community, the paragraph then segues into the need for obedience to the caliph, and then lastly, the consequences of disobeying the caliph. Thus, a clear message was to be hammered into the minds of anyone who heard this letter being read aloud: obedience to the caliph is obligatory upon every single Muslim; it is only with obedience to the caliph that one can obtain happiness; disobedience and dissension entails dire

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135 Although caliphs are said to "follow in the path of Muhammad's prophetic mission." This only means that caliphs ought to act *in the spirit* of the Prophet and not deviate from it. It is God who directly appoints caliphs as replacements to Muhammad, in ruling over mankind.

136 Ibn ᶜAbd Rabbihi, *Al-ᶜiqd al-farid*, book vi, translated by Issa J. Boullata as *The Unique Necklace Vol. II*, "The Book of the Ruby" (Reading: Garnett Publishing, 2009), p. 169.

consequences for this world and the next.[137] During the time of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, government was understood as a two-way contract whereby the caliph would carry out only the obligations that he and the community had accepted. In al-Walid's letter, the caliph himself embodied the law.[138]

Most importantly, al-Walid redefines what it means to be Muslim. Since the caliph is the deputy of God administering God's justice on earth, there is no obedience to God without obedience to His deputy on earth. Little mention is made of Muhammad and his sayings or traditions. Insofar as Muhammad is concerned, he was only a prophet with a small "p," being not much different in comparison with the other prophets.[139] The only role of Muhammad in al-Walid's sense of history is in acting as the seal of the prophets in reaffirming Islam as the religion of God among humankind. In the present, the caliph gave legal existence to the Muslim community, such that his authority "embodied in [the covenant established by God] is integral to the completeness of Islam." By claiming the caliphate to be "a *means* of [God's] protection, salvation, well-being and life," the Umayyads saw themselves as spiritual guides and God's caravaneers, keeping the believers together in safety and order, while leading them along the right path to their ultimate destination. Disobeying the caliph and going separate ways meant going astray, which might potentially lead to *fitna* (civil war).[140]

Although the Umayyads strove to present themselves as deputies of God, they still saw themselves as ruling over an Arab empire. To them, Islam was, above all, an

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137 Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 117.
138 Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 19.
139 Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 28.
140 Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 42.

Arab religion. The Abbasid Revolution that toppled the Umayyads marked the beginning of imperial ecumenism, with the sense of a pan-Islamic empire drawing people from different ethnic origins from the far reaches of the Muslim world.

The Abbasids emphasized the religious nature of their authority by claiming to be "legitimate heirs of the Prophet and the warriors for God and His law *par excellence*."[141] Nevertheless, ties with the family of the Prophet did not stop the Abbasid caliphs from defining their power on the basis of direct divine sanction. Early Abbasid discourse on caliphal legitimacy had much in common with the Umayyads. The title *khalifat Allah* continued to be used throughout the Abbasid period to imply that the Abbasid caliphs were indeed divinely sanctioned. In a sermon delivered by al-Mansur, he is reported to have said, "I am only the authority of God in His earth, and I govern you through His guidance and His direction to what is right."[142] Similar to the Umayyads, the Abbasid caliphs also saw themselves as representing Islam. During the reign of the caliph al-Ma'mun, an apostate who wanted to convert back to Islam declared, "I witness that there is no god but God alone with no partner, that Christ is the servant of God, that Muhammad is truthful, and that you are indeed the Commander of the Faithful."[143] However, when compared to the Umayyads, the Abbasids were more careful with their public image. As Hashimites, they invoked the Prophet in their claims to religious legitimacy, while styling themselves as divinely ordained deputies of God at the same time. In a letter attributed to the caliph al-Ma'mun, he is said to have written, "The Commander of the

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141 Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, p. 48.

142 Al-Tabari, *History, Volume XXIX*, p. 131.

143 Ibn ᶜAbd Rabbihi, *The Unique Necklace Vol. II*, p. 190.

Faithful, by virtue of his position vis-à-vis the religion of God [as *khalifat Allah*], the deputyship of the Prophet of God [as *khalifat rasul Allah*] and his kinship with him, is the foremost among those who follow his [the Prophet's] *sunna* [the practice of the Prophet]."[144] This statement shows that al-Ma'mun was well aware of the different levels of significance attached to both titles of *khalifat Allah* and *khalifat rasul Allah*, and hence saw himself both as the deputy of God *and* as the successor to the Prophet.

Under the Abbasids, the Islamic political idiom shifted from that of a monotheist Arabian kingship to a more universalist sense of divinely ordained imperial monarchy.[145] Even more so than the Umayyads, the Abbasids took divine kingship to exceptional heights, portraying themselves as being endowed with personal sanctity. The caliphs themselves enhanced this expression of sacred power by their absence from the public audience as they remained within the confines of their palaces. Even there, "a brocade curtain is hung in front of the caliph. When the people are admitted to his presence the curtain is lifted; and when he wants to dismiss them the curtain is lowered."[146] In their visit to the caliphal palace, the ambassadors of the Byzantine emperor were led through endless corridors, passageways, and rooms before being offered audience by the caliph al-Muqtadir (d. 932), who was "wearing a long cap on his head, and was attired in garments from Dabiq, embroided with gold."[147]

The personal sanctity of the caliph was also expressed in court ceremonials and etiquettes. Perhaps the most pronounced manifestation of the caliph's sanctified

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144 Al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-buldan*, cited in Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbasids: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunni Elite* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 128-129.
145 Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*, p. 210.
146 Al-Sabi', *Rules and Regulations*, pp. 73-74.
147 Lassner, *Topography of Baghdad*, pp. 86-91.

status is the rules of attendance when someone was offered an audience with the caliph. Regarding this, Hilal al-Sabi' records:

> In the past it was the practice of the caliph to offer someone his hand, covered with his sleeve, to an amir or a wazir to kiss. The caliph did this to honor him and to acknowledge his high position and to do him special favor. The reason he covered it with his sleeve was to protect it from being touched by the mouth or lip. This practice has now been replaced by kissing the ground, and to this rule all people now comply. Those of middle rank in the army, those below them, the general public, and people without social status, are considered too low to partake in the honor of kissing the ground.[148]

The custom of prostrating oneself and kissing the ground before the caliph is akin to *proskynesis*—namely the act of prostrating oneself before the Byzantine emperor—and was the duty and privilege of a few.[149] Quasi-magical qualities were also believed to inhere in caliphal objects. The Persian polymath Dinawari wrote that one provincial governor actually soaked letters received from the caliph in water, after which he would mix it with dough and bread to feed his family.[150] Overall, these rules of attendance were meant to elevate the caliph to the position of a sacred figure vested with divine power and status.

Early Abbasid claim to political and religious legitimacy was also expressed in written works related to government administration and political theory. Two often-cited Muslim intellectuals during the early Abbasid period—Abu Yusuf (d. 798) and al-Jahiz (d. 869)—embody this trend.

At the apex of Abbasid power, caliphs often cultivated collaborative alliances with the orthodox *ᶜulama* (religious scholars) in order to bolster their image as pious leaders ruling in the name of God and the Prophet.[151] This trend found representation

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148 Al-Sabi', *Rules and Regulations*, pp. 29-30.

149 See Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, p. 30, and Al-Azmeh, "Monotheistic Monarchy," *Journal for the Study of Religion and Ideologies*, No. 10 (Spring 2005), p. 145.

150 Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, p. 157.

151 Hence the conclusion of Zaman in *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbasids*.

in Abu Yusuf, a religious scholar who served as chief judge to the caliph Harun al-Rashid (d. 809). His *Kitab al-kharaj* (*Book of Taxation*) was composed at the behest of Harun al-Rashid. Although the book is an administrative handbook aimed to bring the system of taxation into conformity with religious principles, its introduction section is considered an important source for expressions of caliphal legitimacy.[152]

According to Abu Yusuf, God "has appointed the holders of authority as deputies [*khalifa*] on His earth and has given them a light to illuminate for the subjects those of their affairs that are obscure to them and to clarify those duties about which they are in doubt."[153] This claim shares many parallels with Umayyad and early Abbasid claims to legitimacy, in that caliphs are portrayed as directly appointed by God to rule over mankind. Moreover, caliphs are assisted by God in their governance of mankind: "I ask God, O Commander of the Faithful, Who granted you the honor of knowing Him when He gave you authority, that He should not leave you to yourself in any part of the task, but should befriend you as He befriended His saints and His friends, for in this He is Master, and that which is sought for is in Him."[154]

More significant is Abu Yusuf's portrayal of the caliph as the shepherd of his people, thus conferring upon the caliphate a pastoral image of government:

> Morning and evening, you build for many people, and God has made you their shepherd, has entrusted them to you, has visited you with them, and has given you authority over them…. Do not squander the authority which God has given you over this community and flock, for power in action is by God's consent alone.[155]

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[152] Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, p. 55.

[153] Abu Yusuf, *Kitab al-kharaj*, translated in Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople, Vol. 1*, pp. 154-155.

[154] Ibid., p. 155.

[155] Ibid., p. 152.

Although endowed with God's authority, the caliph owes many obligations to the people, among them being the enforcement of penalties for offenses, the maintenance of religious traditions, and ruling with justice.[156] Ultimately, "the happiest of shepherds before God on Judgment Day is the shepherd who made his flock happy," and "the oppression of the shepherd is the ruin of the flock."[157] Abu Yusuf also cites the Prophetic tradition: "The dearest of men to me, and the nearest to me in station on the Day of Judgment, is a just Imam [caliph]. The most hateful of men to me on the Day of Judgment and the recipient of the severest punishment is the tyrannical Imam."[158]

Obedience and submission to the authority of the caliph also feature as a recurring theme in the *Kitab al-kharaj*. What sets Abu Yusuf apart from similar efforts by the Umayyads is his frequent use of *hadith* (tradition of the Prophet) to justify obedience to the caliph: "Who obeys me obeys God, and who obeys the Imam [caliph] obeys me. Who disobeys me disobeys God, and who disobeys the Imam disobeys me."[159] Even if caliphs act unjustly, Abu Yusuf warns, "Do not abuse rulers, for if they treat you well, they will be rewarded and you must be grateful, but if they treat you badly, theirs is the burden and you must be patient. They are a punishment by which God punishes whom He wishes; therefore, do not receive God's punishment with heat and anger, but with calm and humility."[160] Similar to al-Walid's letter, Abu Yusuf sees obedience to the caliph as being equated with

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[156] Ibid., pp. 155, 159.
[157] Ibid., pp. 152, 155.
[158] Ibid., p. 159.
[159] Ibid., p. 160.
[160] Ibid., p. 161.

obedience to God. If the caliph turns out to be a tyrant, one has to urge restraint, as it is God's will. One should not speak of any right to rebel because rebellion against the caliph constitutes an act of disobedience not only against the caliph, but also against God Himself. In short, that even a chief judge and renowned religious scholar such as Abu Yusuf justified caliphal legitimacy by mustering numerous *hadiths* in favor of caliphal power signifies a juristic-religious stamp of approval for the caliphate, such that obedience to the Abbasid caliph constituted an integral part of Islamic belief.

As for al-Jahiz, he was a prose writer and philosopher who lived during the height of the Greek-to-Arabic translation movement in Baghdad. The translation movement was heavily sponsored by caliphs, courtiers, and other learned laymen. Most of the philosophical works translated were by Aristotle, although only a few excerpts from the *Politics* were known.[161] As such, a strong Aristotelian vein—first encountered in the works of al-Jahiz—is observed in Islamic political thought during the mid-Abbasid period.

Al-Jahiz regards the common man as incapable of pursuing the means for survival on his own. Rather, humans are, as Aristotle had put it, not self-sufficient when they are isolated; they need to be part of a political whole, which alone can bring about self-sufficiency.[162] Furthermore, "Barely able to obtain all that relates to their [humans'] material existence, still less are they capable of understanding what

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161 Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 166.

162 Aristotle, *Politics*, edited and translated by Ernst Barker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 6-7.

befits their spiritual life."[163] Thus, human incapability to comprehend the spiritual and religious necessitates the teaching of imams (caliphs):

> For spiritual understanding stems from worldly understanding; but whereas the latter is manifest, or nearly so, the former is occult, and is to be attained only through great virtue and unremitting effort, assisted by the teaching of the imams…. This being so, we appreciate that men need an imam to teach them what befits them, and we recognize three kinds of imam: messengers, prophets, and imams [proper, i.e. caliphs]. The messenger is both prophet and imam, the prophet is an imam but not a messenger, and the imam is neither messenger nor prophet…. The messenger is the best of men, then come the prophet and the imam. The messenger prescribes the written law, organizes the religious community, and lays down men's general line of conduct for them.[164]

In short, al-Jahiz sees the caliph as a spiritual guide for mankind towards salvation.

Similarly, when humans get together to form communities, their predatory natures might hinder cooperation. As such, this Hobbesian-like situation can only be brought to order by a single vigilant ruler, who will maintain order by taming the violent, rapacious, and unjust natures of human beings: "We know that it is only by rigorous training, by severe rebukes in this world and the threat of terrible punishment in the next, that men are enabled to resist their own worse natures."[165] Not only does the caliph function as a spiritual guide, he also figures in history as an imposer of culture and order—somewhat akin to the figure of the "sovereign" in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. It is only with absolute power that the caliph can coerce people into order; without it, disorder and even anarchy might ensue.

A caliph should possess, above all other traits, intelligence.[166] However, al-Jahiz acknowledges that this condition would not always be fulfilled. Thus, he proposes another condition for the caliph's religious legitimacy: a desire to act in the

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163 Al-Jahiz, *Kitab istihqaq al-imama*, translated by D. M. Hawke in Pellat, *Life and Works of Jahiz*, p. 63.

164 Ibid., p. 64.

165 Ibid., p. 63. See also Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, pp. 178-179, whereby he argues that "An important part of the king's role [in Muslim societies]…was to keep people in their place," and "preventing men from impinging on each other, and, especially, on each other's property."

166 Pellat, *Life and Works of Jahiz*, p. 65.

spirit of the Prophet Muhammad.[167] In other words, although it is impossible to equal the Prophet, the caliph still ought to be a mimesis of the Prophet, in preserving the memory of the latter.[168]

Where al-Jahiz differs from Abu Yusuf is in the former's plea for the duty to resist impious and unjust government.[169] Nevertheless, al-Jahiz is also careful not to call for unrestrained and uncompromised violence. People should only rebel against an unjust ruler if there is a possibility of them overthrowing the tyrant. Otherwise, "if the possibility is lacking there is no obligation."[170] Argues al-Jahiz, "once it becomes possible for them [the rebels] to withstand and master their opponent, and a man worthy of the caliphate has appeared and is known to them, their duty is to put him in power and defend him."[171] This principle of obligation limited by possibility might represent a search for stability in light of the repeated politico-religious unrest and disorders that disturbed the Abbasid caliphate.[172] In this sense, it does not stray very far from Abu Yusuf's conservative worldview towards government and authority.

Overall, caliphal legitimacy was ubiquitously expressed and embedded in ceremonies, rituals, as well as in different genres of writings. Different idioms and symbols often served as symbolic articulations of caliphal legitimacy, which continued even after the *de facto* authority of the caliph declined, beginning in the tenth century. The caliphal ecumenical enterprise was one in which Muslim intellectuals from different walks of life were born, raised, and participated; and also

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[167] Ibid., p. 65.
[168] Ibid., p. 66.
[169] Ibid., pp. 79-80.
[170] Ibid., p. 81.
[171] Ibid., p. 81.
[172] Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, p. 62.

one in which even religious scholars, such as Abu Yusuf, had no qualms perpetuating. This was the intellectual and cultural milieu in which al-Mawardi wrote the most representative and influential treatise on the caliphate.

Al-Mawardi: Systematizing caliphal absolutism

Al-Mawardi lived to see the rise and fall of the Buyid dynasty as a result of internal dissension and revolt within the Muslim community. In the midst of turmoil, al-Mawardi served as a caliphal counselor, diplomat, jurist, and judge. Similar to Abu Yusuf, al-Mawardi was appointed as chief judge and often enjoyed the trust and respect of caliphs and Buyid emirs alike.

Al-Mawardi claims that his *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya* was written "in compliance with the wishes of *one whom obedience is incumbent upon me*."[173] It can be safely argued that the "one whom obedience is incumbent upon me" most likely refers to the caliph al-Qa'im.[174] The *Ahkam* comes close to a legal treatise treating the aspects of public authority in a systematic fashion.[175] It is not a "political theory of Islamic government," nor is it "constitutional law," since there was no "constitution" in Islam to begin with.[176] Rather, the *Ahkam* is a legal exposition of the underlying theories and ideas of government, which were assumed as a "given" and hence not a matter for intellectual speculation.[177]

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173 Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi, *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya w'al-wilayat al-diniyya*, transl. Wafaa Wahba, *The Ordinances of Government* (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1996), p. 1.
174 Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, p. 83.
175 Al-Azmeh, *Times of History*, p. 244.
176 Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 222.
177 Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, p. 84.

Al-Mawardi begins the treatise with a section on the caliphate, which he claims is "intended as vicegerency of the prophecy in upholding the faith and managing the affairs of the world."[178] Whether the caliph is *khalifat rasul Allah* or *khalifat Allah*, al-Mawardi argues:

> He is known as "Caliph" because he is a successor of the Messenger…in ruling his nation, and may be addressed as "Caliph of God's Messenger" [i.e. *khalifat rasul Allah*]…. There has been a difference of opinion whether he may be addressed as "God's Caliph," some allowing it on the ground that he oversees what is owed God by His creation, in accordance with His words, glorified and exalted is His name: "He it is Who placed you vicegerents [*khala'if*] on earth, and has exalted some of you in rank above others" (Qur'an, 6:165). The majority of scholars, however, object to this view regarding it as sinful to hold it. Only someone who is absent or mortal, they argue, may be represented by another, but God is neither. When Abu Bakr the Upright heard himself addressed as "God's Caliph," he responded, "I am not God's Caliph, but the Caliph of God's Messenger."[179]

Considering whether the establishment of the caliphate is an obligation based on reason or divine law, al-Mawardi argues in favor of the latter. According to al-Mawardi, "men are *naturally* driven by desire to ignore the promises of the hereafter for the sake of immediate pleasure."[180] Hence, in Hobbesian fashion, "rational beings tend by nature to submit to a leader who would keep them from inequity and settle their conflicts and disputes. Without rulers, men would exist in a state of utter chaos and unmitigated savagery."[181] However, arguments based on reason only justify authority in negative terms, while government based on divine law provides for the positive enforcement of law and justice. Moreover, al-Mawardi claims that the caliphate is *sanctioned* by faith, basing the caliphate on the Qur'anic verse, "O you who believe! Obey God, the Messenger, and those of you are in authority."[182] This Qur'anic verse would often be invoked to justify obedience to authority. Al-Mawardi

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178 Al-Mawardi, *Ahkam*, p. 3.
179 Ibid., pp. 15-16.
180 Ibid., p. 240.
181 Ibid., p. 3.
182 Qur'an, 4:59. Ibid., p. 3.

intentionally used the verse to legitimate caliphal absolutism, but, as we shall see later, this did not stop later thinkers such as ibn Taymiyya who lived in a post-caliphal Islamic world, from using it to validate obedience to non-caliphal rulers.

As regards the "proper qualifications" of the caliph, al-Mawardi states seven conditions that deem a candidate eligible for the caliphate. First, the caliph has to be just, and be in a state of moral probity. Secondly, echoing al-Jahiz, al-Mawardi demands "knowledge conducive to the exercise of independent judgment in crises or decision-making." The caliph should also possess sound hearing, vision, and speech. He should also be physically fit and free from handicaps. Also crucial is bravery in defending the lands of Islam against enemies. Lastly, al-Mawardi stipulates that the caliph has to be from the Quraysh (the Prophet's tribe), which he claims is "a matter indisputably settled by explicit text and by general consensus."[183] The insistence on Qurayshite descent—also supported by a saying ascribed to the Prophet: "Imams [i.e. caliphs] come from Quraysh"—might have been an effort to legitimate not only the Abbasid house, but also the line of caliphs from the death of the Prophet to the present, including the Umayyads (who although were not Hashemite, were nonetheless from the Quraysh). The laying down of the qualifications of the caliph represents al-Mawardi's attempts to define and delineate the nature of the caliphate in a systematic fashion, something that has never been done before by Muslim intellectuals before him.

Overall, two themes predominate in the *Ahkam*: the primacy of caliphal authority and the need for continuous order. The entire *Ahkam* is written and arranged

[183] Ibid., p. 4.

based on a hierarchy of authority with the caliph at its apex. Hence, it is no surprise that al-Mawardi begins the *Ahkam* with a chapter on the caliphate, to be followed by the vizierate—an office where "the caliph deputizes someone to conduct the affairs of the state according to that person's own way of thinking and discretion"—and then by other more subordinate positions such as war commanders, provincial governors, and prayer leaders.[184] According to al-Mawardi, it is to the caliph that God has "entrusted the conduct of policy so that the management of affairs may be undertaken in the light of the true faith and a consensus may be reached on the right course to pursue." It also follows that the caliphate is "a main point laid down by the principles of the creed whereby the welfare of the community is maintained, such that *all public matters are guaranteed by it and all special functions are derived from it*."[185] In that regard, the caliph becomes more than a mere political institution; it becomes a symbol embodying the political and religious system that regulates the lives of all Muslims in the *umma* (Muslim community). It is only with the establishment of the caliphate that all other functions of government can be deemed legitimate and in accordance with Islam. In other words, the caliph is indispensable for a legitimate public sphere—a concept that al-Ghazali would reinforce in his treatment of the caliphate.

As the center of public order, al-Mawardi's caliph is presented as an absolutist ruler in every sense of the word. Among his ten obligatory duties, the caliph must "personally oversee matters and study the conditions of the people in order to manage public policy and guard the faith instead of relying on delegation of authority while

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[184] Ibid., p. 23.

[185] Ibid., pp. 1-2. My own italics.

he is preoccupied with pleasure or worship."[186] In this sense, we have here the perpetuation of a fictional ideal: an absolutist caliph personally overseeing all matters regarding administration and governance in his empire. The caliph might delegate his responsibilities to a vizier, whose support for the caliph is a prime condition for appointment, with "no monopoly of power" implied.[187] The vizier *represents* the caliph by ruling in his stead, and by acting in mimetic fashion vis-à-vis the caliph. This is as far as delegation goes, in that the vizier still has to keep the caliph informed of measures he has taken, as well as the offices and appointments made.

The primacy of caliphal authority is manifested in many parts of the *Ahkam*, especially when it concerns caliphal appointments. An official *directly* appointed by the caliph cannot be removed from office without caliphal authorization; caliphal appointments have *absolute precedence* over others. For instance, "the delegated minister may reinstate hired officials and fire those appointed by himself, but *not* those appointed by the caliph."[188] Al-Mawardi is even more explicit regarding the appointment of prayer leaders for state mosques:

> It is inappropriate for someone other than the official appointed by the sovereign [i.e. caliph] to lead the worshippers at prayer in them, as that would constitute an *infringement of the rights of sovereignty*. The caliph's nominee has a stronger title to the office than anyone else, *however more virtuous or knowledgeable*…. If it is certain that the sovereign has appointed an official for those mosques, no one else is entitled to lead the worship while he is present, and the person deputized by him alone should lead it in his absence.[189]

An overarching implication of this passage is a single principle that pre-empts all others, namely appointment by the caliph. If an administrative position is within the purview of the caliph, no one else, other than the caliph himself, has the right to

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[186] Ibid., p. 16.

[187] Ibid., p. 26.

[188] Ibid., p. 31. My own italics.

[189] Ibid., p. 112. My own italics.

supersede whatever the caliph has decreed. To do otherwise would be to proceed without any sense of legitimacy. Given this, al-Mawardi constructs a chain of command with almost everything related to government leading back to the caliph himself. A similar position even applies to coinage:

> If the tax-collector accepts payment only in the coin of the highest value even though all the currency in circulation is of comparable quality, his request must be granted so long as the coin in question is minted by the reigning caliph, for refusal to use his currency implies disobedience to his authority, and the same applies even if it is minted buy a predecessor but has always been used in tax payment.[190]

Although one can argue that al-Mawardi's intent was to "harmonize an existing historical-political situation with the *shari*^{c}*a*," it is also crucial to add that for him, something is only considered to be legal according to the *shari*^{c}*a* when legitimated by the caliph, since the caliph represents the *shari*^{c}*a*.[191] As such, these concepts represent a continuation of, rather than a break with, previous Umayyad and early Abbasid practices. God is sovereign over all affairs of mankind, but the caliph acts as an intermediary between God and mankind. Al-Mawardi might have disliked the title *khalifat Allah*, but the articulations of power as manifested in the *Ahkam* does not stray much from the Umayyad concept of the caliph as a deputy of God.

The other overarching theme in the *Ahkam*, the need for continuous order, is evident in sections relating to the "appointment" or "election" of the caliph. Throughout Islamic history, how the caliphal office had been obtained has often been a contested issue. Hence, it is no surprise that al-Mawardi dedicates a large portion of the chapter on the caliphate to the proceedings of electing a caliph and nominating a successor, as well as the qualities that an ideal caliph ought to possess. In the *Ahkam*,

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[190] Ibid., p. 171.

[191] See Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, p. 28.

the caliphate is presented as an elected office. This would, however, fly in the face of historical precedents, considering that the system of election had long been discarded in favor of direct designation of a successor by the incumbent caliph. In an attempt to justify previous practices, al-Mawardi leaves vague the number of electors necessary for the valid investment of the caliph. Since the establishment of the caliphate is a collective duty, the entire Muslim community *ought* to be responsible for the election of the caliph. However, a vote of allegiance can be "given by those who were present, without waiting for the arrival of those who were *absent*."[192] The number of electors can also be six, five, or two. Even "judgment made by a single individual is enforceable."[193]

Having argued for the number of electors that was necessary, al-Mawardi proceeds to discuss the conditions required for ascension to the caliphal office. Once a caliph is elected to office, and a more suitable or better candidate turns up later, the electors' pledge "clinches in favor of the former and may not be retracted even for the sake of a better one."[194] Arguing against al-Jahiz's preference for intelligence, al-Mawardi justifies the appointment of the "less excellent":

> The presence of the more excellent does not preclude the choice of the less excellent if not lacking in the prerequisites of the office, just as the less excellent may be offered a judgeship despite the presence of the more excellent, for superior merit is an *extra advantage*, but *not a basic condition for eligibility*.[195]

Also, "the greater claim really belongs to the one who receives the vote of allegiance before the other."[196] A priority in time and precedence in assuming office is implied.

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192 Al-Mawardi, *Ahkam*, p. 5. My own italics.
193 Ibid., p. 5.
194 Ibid., p. 6.
195 Ibid., p. 7. My own italics.
196 Ibid., p. 8.

Regarding the appointment of a successor by the incumbent caliph, al-Mawardi argues, "if the sovereign nominates a successor who is away and whose existence is in doubt, his nomination is void even if the nominee is known to be alive *until he arrives on the scene*. Should the incumbent die while the appointed heir is still away, the latter is recalled by the electors, who should choose a deputy for him in the case of prolonged absence on his part to the extent that *Muslims are harmed by delay in the administration of their affairs*."[197]

The above arguments point towards a dire need for the prevention of conflict and political rule undertaken at the lowest political cost possible. Once authority is established, even in the person of a less-than-excellent caliph, it is recognized as legitimate and cannot be removed. To do otherwise would be to plant seeds for potential conflict. In this sense, there must always be a ruler in sight, such that a political vacuum ought to be prevented as far as possible. This might reflect the political turmoil experienced during the time of al-Mawardi, such that political unity, albeit in purely theoretical or fictional terms, was heavily sought for.

Strictly speaking for most Muslim jurists, political unity goes hand in hand with caliphal absolutism. Political unity centered on the one-man rule of the caliph was often seen as acting in a mimetic relationship with the oneness of God (*tawhid*). In other words, there was one God in heaven who created one community of believers to be ruled over by one ruler in His stead. However, al-Mawardi does recognize that a unified Muslim community under centralized caliphal rule was no longer the case during his time, with the taking over of Baghdad by the Buyids as the

[197] Ibid., p. 11. My own italics.

most obvious challenge to caliphal authority. More complicated is the issue of usurpation. Al-Mawardi's justification of *imarat al-istila'* ("governorship by usurpation") remains, among many topics related to his *Ahkam*, the most discussed subject in modern scholarly literature. The *imarat al-istila'* takes place when a governor appointed by the caliph seizes power in his own district, and hence, becomes "an independent and exclusive controller of political matters and administration, while the caliph, by his permission, becomes the implementer of the dictates of religion."[198] Here, it can be plausibly argued that al-Mawardi was trying to justify existing political realities during the Buyid period, in which "decisions that would normally be unacceptable in regular appointment based on choice are permissible under usurpation and necessity, owing to the difference between ability and incapacity."[199]

However, to present this practice as "bringing down the entire edifice of the law" and al-Mawardi as a spineless supporter of the powers-that-be would be to disregard historical developments.[200] Since the early years of Islam, caliphs had always delegated authority. With a far-flung empire, it was inevitable that certain provincial rulers would seize power independently. Insofar as usurpation was deplorable in the eyes of many Sunni Muslim jurists, it was nothing new. One could of course fight usurpers. But to do so would be to incur high political costs, at the expense of political order and stability, which is highly stressed in al-Mawardi's

198 Ibid., p. 36.

199 Ibid., p. 36.

200 H. A. R. Gibb, as quoted in Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 233. See also Asma Afsaruddin, "Medieval Islamic Discourse on Legitimate Leadership and Its Modern Implications," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 20:2 (2003), p. 90, for a *realpolitik* interpretation of al-Mawardi.

Ahkam. Thus, far from presenting usurpation as an anomalous practice in Islamic history, al-Mawardi articulates it as simply another way to account for the lack of a powerful, centralized caliphate during his time. In this sense, the coolheaded presentation of the *imarat al-istila'* in al-Mawardi's *Ahkam* represents a way of rationalizing—in a systematic manner—what has already been in practice. It is, along with the delegation of authority to the vizier, one among many possible forms of delegation of power from the caliph to his subordinates. The practical incapacitation of the caliph necessitated delegation to ensure the active functioning and purpose of the caliphal office.[201] It is no surprise, therefore, that the first and primary duty of the usurping governor is to "uphold the office of the caliph as a vicar of prophecy and manager of religious affairs, in order to fulfill the legal requirement of ensuring its existence and preserving the rights arising therefrom."[202] Hence, al-Mawardi's *imarat al-istila'* should not be seen as a shocking violation of Islamic law, nor should it be regarded as a sudden break with tradition. Rather, what al-Mawardi attempted was to bring existing political practices into the fold of the *shari*^{c}*a*, or more specifically, under the caliph's ecumenical ambit. The caliph's powers were not derogated, but delegated. Even if the caliph's effective grip on government was far from complete, his symbolic and legal control over institutions was still recognized.

In sum, this chapter has shown how the caliphate started out being understood as a humble and worldly office succeeding to the Prophet's political rule, and how it increasingly became articulated along absolutist terms to reflect the caliph's political *and* religious legitimacy. By the time we reach the Abbasids, the expression of

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201 Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 170, 178.
202 Al-Mawardi, *Ahkam*, p. 36.

caliphal authority—institutional or symbolic—was ubiquitous. Even during times of weakness, the religious aura of the caliph increased in proportion to the decrease of his effective power and authority. Over time, the caliphate developed into a resilient institution, imbued with political and religious legitimacy. Caliphal legitimacy was not only expressed in political and legal works, but also in poetry, ceremonials, and chronicles.[203] In this regard, al-Mawardi's *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya* represents continuity, rather than an innovation in its treatment of the caliphate as embodying the fusion of political and religious legitimacy in a single person. It is also with al-Mawardi's *Ahkam* that we get, for the first time in Islamic history, a systematic definition of the nature and duties of the caliph, as well as the plenitude of power that the caliphal office entailed.

Eventually, the caliphate as an institution would experience decline and destruction. The increasing encroachment of independent secular sultans and warlords into Islamic lands would push Muslim jurists, such as al-Ghazali, to rethink their vision of an ideal Islamic worldview with a single caliph embodying both political and religious legitimacy. The eventual sack of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258 would also witness a new genre of writing in the form of *siyasa shar^{c}iyya* (politics based on the *shari^{c}a*), the exemplar being ibn Taymiyya's *al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya*. This new genre legitimates a new legal order in the absence of the caliphate, allowing for the cohabitation of secular sultans and the *^{c}ulama* (religious scholars).

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[203] See Sperl, "Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry," pp. 20-35; Hayrettin Yücesoy, "Ancient imperial heritage and Islamic universal historiography: al-Dinawari's secular perspective," *Journal of Global History* (2007), 2, pp. 135-155.

3. Writing Away the Caliph

Starting from the late eleventh century, the intersection of the primacy of caliphal authority with the political unity of the Muslim community (*umma*)—as observed in al-Mawardi's *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya*—gradually prove untenable as independent, self-anointed warlords gained autonomous control of provincial regions beyond the purview of Baghdad and gnawed away at the caliph's political authority. Although the caliphate experienced a political resurgence in al-Ghazali's time, the political climate in the Islamic world was now a far cry from the early Abbasid period. Caliphs—beginning from the reign of al-Qadir—might have begun to regain some political authority, but in reality, they only exercised effective power in the immediate environs of Baghdad. Independent rulers and sultans were in control of regions outside of Baghdad, with the Seljuq dynasty being the most prominent. Even Baghdad was not completely impervious to incursions by the Seljuq rulers, whose dynastic quarrels often put the caliph in difficult positions. Political and societal fragmentation contributed to the eventual "writing away" of the caliph as the embodiment of the fusion of religion and politics in Islam.

Al-Ghazali: Sacralizing the caliph

Al-Ghazali was the son of a Sufi from the city of Tus, in the Khurasan province of Persia. When he turned 23, he became the student of the famous Muslim scholar al-Juwayni (d. 1085). Al-Ghazali rose to prominence when he was invited, after the death of al-Juwayni, to the court of the Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk. Al-

Ghazali's scholarship in Islamic jurisprudence gained him a teaching position at the celebrated Nizamiyya of Baghdad (an institute of higher religious education founded by the Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk), where Al-Ghazali remained until he experienced a profound spiritual crisis in 1095, which resulted in his resignation from his post to become a wandering Sufi. The last years of his life (1100-1111) were spent in his homeland of Khurasan, where he composed his *magnum opus* on Islamic sciences, the *Ihya' ᶜulum al-din* (*Revival of the Religious Sciences*).

While al-Mawardi was primarily concerned with the usurpation of the caliph's political authority, al-Ghazali's political thought was preoccupied with preventing civil war (*fitna*) and anarchy. He sought to do so by redefining the relationship between caliph and sultan, and also by addressing the threats posed by the Ismaᶜili Fatimid Caliphate in Cairo (909-1171).[204] These views are most pronounced in al-Ghazali's first work on government and the caliphate, the *Kitab fada'ih al-Batiniyya wa fada'il al-Mustazhiriyya* (*The Infamies of the Batinites and the Virtues of the Mustazhirites*, composed between 1094 and 1095), also known as the *Mustazhiri*.[205] Composed during a time when the political propaganda generated by the Ismaᶜili Shi'ites was gaining ground in Seljuq and caliphal circles, the *Mustazhiri* was commissioned by the Abbasid caliph al-Mustazhir (d. 1118) in order to refute the doctrines of Ismaᶜilism.[206] That the *Mustazhiri* was written at the behest of the Abbasid caliph should not lead us to view the work solely as al-Ghazali's attempt to please his patron. In fact, al-Ghazali's subsequent works on Islamic government,

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[204] Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, p. 109.
[205] Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Fada'ih al-Batiniyya wa fada'il al-Mustazhiriyya*, transl. R. J. McCarthy, *The Infamies (Enormities) of the Batinites and the Virtues (Merits) of the Mustazhirites*, in *Deliverance From Error* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1980).
[206] Al-Ghazali, *Mustazhiri*, p. 153.

which were not written for any specific patron, reveal views that were consistent with those expressed in the *Mustazhiri*.[207] Hence, it is safe to argue that al-Ghazali was writing out of personal conviction in the *Mustazhiri*.[208]

Although the *Mustazhiri* is largely a polemical work written to refute the doctrine of Isma^{c}ili Shi'ism, it is, strictly speaking, a work on the caliphate.[209] The ideas put forward by al-Ghazali in the *Mustazhiri* were meant to discredit the Fatimid caliph in Cairo—whom the Isma^{c}ili Shi'ites regard as the "Infallible Imam" (to be explained below)—as an illegitimate ruler by proving the legitimacy of the Sunni Muslim caliph al-Mustazhir. Structure-wise, the *Mustazhiri* is divided into ten chapters, with chapters 2 to 8 serving as a refutation of the Isma^{c}ilis and their doctrine of the Infallible Imam; while chapters 9 and 10 aimed to prove the legitimacy of the caliph al-Mustazhir.

According to al-Ghazali, the Isma^{c}ilis believe that the Infallible Imam held the key to eternal truth with regard to salvation and the interpretation of the Qur'an: "They are indeed agreed that there must be, in every age, an Infallible Imam, practicing in charge of the truth, to whom recourse is to be had regarding the interpretation of the literal meanings and the solution of difficulties in the Qur'an and

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[207] Aside from the *Mustazhiri*, al-Ghazali's views on government were also expressed in *al-Iqtisad fi'l-^{c}itiqad* (composed around 1095) and the *Ihya' ^{c}ulum al-din*. *Al-Iqtisad fi'l-^{c}itiqad*, including the third chapter which contains a discussion on the caliphate, has not been translated in full. Therefore, it will not be discussed in this chapter. Nevertheless, it is still important to note that the *Iqtisad* is a theological work on the articles of faith. Unlike the *Mustazhiri*, it is not a treatise on Islamic government, although the *Mustazhiri* is more polemical in tone. For a more in-depth discussion of the *Iqtisad*, see Carole Hillenbrand, "Islamic Orthodoxy or Realpolitik? Al-Ghazali's Views on Government," *Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, Vol. 26 (1988), pp. 87-90; Binder, "Al-Ghazali's Theory of Islamic Government," pp. 229-241. The entire corpus of the *Ihya' ^{c}ulum al-din*, including Book XIV which briefly discusses the relationship between caliph and sultan, has also not been translated in full. Nonetheless, I will briefly mention Book II of the *Ihya'* (translated by N. A. Faris) below, as it also contains a very brief discussion of the caliphate.

[208] Hillenbrand, "Al-Ghazali's Views on Government," p. 85.

[209] Ibid., p. 85.

the [Prophetic] Traditions and rational matters."[210] As such, obedience is incumbent upon all mankind towards the Fatimid caliph in Cairo, Egypt—the true Imam "who knows the realities of things"—in order to obtain through him happiness in this life and the next.[211] Polemical arguments against the doctrine of the infallible Imam form the crux of the *Mustazhiri*.

In order to prove that the Fatimid caliph in Egypt was illegitimate, a Sunni counterpart was needed to establish Sunni Islam as a viable alternative to Isma^{c}ili Shi^{c}ism. In that regard, chapter 9 of the *Mustazhiri*—titled "On the Establishment of the Legal Demonstrations that the Imam Charged with the Truth Whom All Men Are Bound to Obey in this Age of Ours is the Imam al-Mustazhir Billah—God Guard His Authority!"—is intended to demonstrate the legitimacy of al-Mustazhir and the Sunni caliphate, as al-Ghazali writes at the beginning of the chapter:

> The aim of this chapter is to prove his [al-Mustazhir's] imamate [caliphate] is in accordance with the Law and to show that all the ^{c}*ulama* [religious scholars] of the time must give the legal decision that men are definitely and positively bound to obey him and to carry out his decisions in the way of the truth [in the true way] and [to acknowledge] the validity of his appointment of governors and investiture of *qadis* [judges]….[212]

Not only is the caliphate in accordance with Islamic law, al-Ghazali also claims that the caliph is "God's caliph [*khalifat Allah*] over men," and that obedience to him is a duty incumbent on all men."[213] While al-Mawardi avoids the title of *khalifat Allah*, al-Ghazali has no qualms about using when referring to al-Mustazhir. However, the use of the title *khalifat Allah* should not be interpreted as a mere attempt to flatter the caliph with linguistic cosmetics. In chapter 9 of the *Mustazhiri*, we find constant

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[210] Al-Ghazali, *Mustazhiri*, p. 171.
[211] Ibid., p. 187.
[212] Ibid., p. 234.
[213] Ibid., p. 234.

stress that the Sunni caliph is chosen by God.[214] Al-Ghazali's argument that the caliph is "chosen by God" can be unpacked with reference to the conditions he stipulates for establishing the caliphate.

Al-Ghazali argues that the caliphate can be established either by textual designation or election by the people.[215] By textual designation, al-Ghazali refers to the Isma^{c}ili tradition in which the Prophet Muhammad said: "The imamate, after me, goes to ^{c}Ali, and after him to his children; it will not go outside of my lineage, and my lineage will never be cut off; and no one of them will die before charging his son with the commission."[216] Al-Ghazali contends that this is an invention and forgery.[217] If textual designation is not valid according to al-Ghazali, the only option left is that of election by the people. But the notion of election by the people also entails the problem of how many people ought to constitute the electorate, a problem that al-Mawardi also grappled with in his *Ahkam*. In that regard, al-Ghazali makes it clear that "the consensus of all men is impossible, nor was it imposed in bygone times."[218] Al-Ghazali stresses, even more so than al-Mawardi, that the agreement and allegiance of *one* person is enough.[219] Even the election of the caliph by one person is considered an act of God in choosing His caliph: "Apparently we have reduced the specification of the Imamate [caliphate] to the choice of a single person; but really we have reduced it to God's choice and appointment."[220]

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[214] Ibid., p. 237.
[215] Ibid., pp. 236-237.
[216] Ibid., p. 224.
[217] Ibid., p. 237.
[218] Ibid., p. 236.
[219] Ibid., p. 237.
[220] Ibid., p. 237.

Yet how do we *know* that the election by a single person constitutes an act of God? Al-Ghazali's answer reflects his concern for unity, especially considering the claim that "the aim we seek by an Imam [caliph] is the uniting of views": "We choose to hold that one person can suffice if he is on the side of the multitude: his agreement is theirs."[221] Similarly, the argument also goes that "The real justification of the choice is that all follow and obey the Imam." That "all follow and obey the Imam," al-Ghazali claims, is "a grace and gift of God, *unattainable by any human contriving*."[222] Since the turning of hearts to obedience and loyalty is something that cannot be done by humankind alone, God does so by way of force: the election of a caliph by a single elector is still valid if the elector is someone who commands obedience and possesses *al-shawka* [military strength or force].[223]

Al-Ghazali's discussion of *shawka* is of particular interest because it makes clear that which al-Mawardi leaves vague. Although al-Mawardi discusses in detail the ideal qualities that a caliph ought to possess, he avoids mentioning what qualifications the elector(s) of the caliph ought to have. Also, while al-Mawardi claims that the caliph ought to "personally oversee matters and study the conditions of the people in order to manage public policy and guard the faith," he also makes room in his argument for cases in which the caliph was not in control of effective power, but rather constrained by military strongmen around him.[224] Al-Mawardi calls the latter situation "wardship" (*hajr*), which he defines as "the incumbent [caliph] being taken in custody by aides, who take over the conduct of affairs without

[221] Or, "if all follow him." Ibid., p. 237.
[222] Ibid., p. 237.
[223] Ibid., p. 237.
[224] Al-Mawardi, *Ahkam*, p. 16.

apparent disobedience or open violence."[225] In such a case, the caliph retains his legitimacy and office. Nevertheless, there seems to be a contradiction in al-Mawardi's discussion of *hajr*: he insists on an actively governing caliph, while permitting the caliph to be constrained.

In contrast to al-Mawardi, al-Ghazali's treatment of *shawka* addresses head-on the problem of a constrained caliph. According to al-Ghazali, there are ten qualities required of a caliph: six of them innate or inborn, and four of them acquired or increased by acquisition.[226] With regard to the six inborn qualities, the caliph has to be an adult, Quraysh male possessing intelligence and freedom. He should also have soundness of hearing and sight.[227] As for the four acquired qualities, al-Ghazali lists *najda* (intrepidity), *kifaya* (competence to govern), *ʿilm* (knowledge), and *waraʿ* (piety).[228] All these qualities, al-Ghazali claims, are found in the person of al-Mustazhir.[229]

It is in al-Ghazali's discussion of the first acquired quality, *najda*, where we find an extended discussion of the Seljuq Turks and secular power manifested in their military strength. Al-Ghazali defines *najda* as follows:

> Our view is that what is meant by *najda* in the case of Imams [caliphs] is a show (*zuhr*) or strength (*shawka*), a plentiful supply of equipment, seeking the help (*istizhar*) or armies, the tying of banners and standards, possessing the ability—through the help of parties and followers—to subdue rebels and wrongdoers, to fight against infidels and those who are inordinately proud, to still the manifestation of discords and to stop the flow (*hasm*) or the accumulated swell trying afflictions, before their evil (*sharar*) becomes apparent (*yastazhira*) and the harm (*darar*) they cause becomes widespread. This is what is meant by *najda*.[230]

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225 Ibid., p. 20.
226 Al-Ghazali, *Mustazhiri*, p. 237.
227 Ibid., p. 237.
228 Ibid., p. 237.
229 Ibid., p. 238.
230 R. J. McCarthy's translation of the *Mustazhiri* does not contain a full translation of this passage. As such, I use Carole Hillenbrand's translation of the passage in her article, "Al-Ghazali's Views on Government," p. 83. Only discussions of *najda* and *shawka* below will be based on Hillenbrand's

Next, al-Ghazali undertakes a long excursus about the Turks in relation to *najda* and *shawka*:

> In this age of ours, from amongst the (various) kinds of human beings it is the Turks who possess force (*shawka*). Almighty God has given them the good fortune to befriend and love him [the caliph] to such an extent that they draw near to God by helping him [the caliph] and by suppressing the enemies of his state (*dawla*). They yield themselves to belief in his caliphate and imamate and in the necessity (*wujub*) of obedience to him, just as they submit themselves to the religious obligations of God's commands and the confirmation of the truth (*tasdiq*) of His message by His messengers. So this is a *najda*, the like of which has not (ever) been established for anyone but him [al-Mustazhir], so how can there be any dispute about his [al-Mustazhir's] *najda*?[231]

Although al-Mawardi also insists that the caliph ought to possess courage to defend Islamic territories and wage holy war against the enemies of Islam, al-Ghazali acknowledges that the holder of *shawka* is no longer the caliph.[232] It was clear that while the caliphate might have experienced resurgence during al-Ghazali's time, the caliph was no longer the only effective military power in the Islamic world. Thus, the caliph can be said to possess *najda*, but if "what is meant by *najda*…is a show of strength (*shawka*)," then the *manifestation* of force or strength lies in the Seljuq Turks. In other words, the caliph's *najda* is *fulfilled* through the Seljuq Turkish military leadership; there is nothing wrong or unlawful at all with the caliph not wielding *shawka*. Military power can be *delegated* as long as the Turks remain loyal to the caliph. As mentioned in the passage, obedience to the caliph implies obedience to God. In short, by attaching *shawka* to the Turks, al-Ghazali legitimates their political legitimacy in relation to the caliph and more importantly, Islamic law.

Of course, al-Ghazali could not ignore the political reality that the Turks were at times forceful in their dealings with the caliph, and that some of them did cause

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translation. Note the deliberate succession of three words—*zuhur*, *istizhar*, and *yastazhira*—formed from the same Arabic root (*z-h-r*) as the name al-Mustazhir.

231 Hillenbrand, "Al-Ghazali's Views on Government," pp. 83-84.

232 Al-Mawardi, *Ahkam*, p. 4.

societal upheaval in Baghdad. Al-Ghazali addresses this problem in the format of question and answer:

> It is argued, "How can his [the caliph's] *najda* be achieved by them [the Seljuq Turks] when we see them venturing to oppose his commands and prohibitions and exceeding the limits laid down for them in his regard—for *shawka* is achieved only by those who as far as possible show unswerving obedience, whereas these [the Turks] are unswerving only in pursuit of their passions, and whenever they are aroused by anger or stirred by lust, or violent rancor inflames their breasts, they do not care about obedience and they can only revert to the bonds of their innate bestial nature. So how can *shawka* be achieved by them?
>
> We would reply, "That is an extremely invalid question, seeing that obedience required of mankind for the providing of (military) support (*shawka*) for the Imam [caliph] is no more than the obedience required of slaves and bondsmen in respect of their masters, and no more than the obedience imposed on those who have a religious obligation to God and His prophet. Neither the conditions of bondsmen in the matter of submission to their master nor the conditions of mankind in the matter of submission to their Lord are loosened by being divided into obedience and disobedience, for (just as) when Muslims are divided into those who obey and those who disobey and are not thus divested of the covering of Islam, nor excused thereby from being subservient to it, as long as they continue to believe that obedience to God is an obligation and disobedience is forbidden and abominable, (so also) that is the situation when one strives to obey whoever holds (temporal) power [i.e. the Turks]. For even if they [the Turks] disobey one of the commands which it is incumbent (upon them) to obey, they believe that disobedience is a sinful act and that obedience is a virtuous one…. Moreover, if there should be an insurrection in any region of the earth against this resplendent state (*dawla*) there is not one amongst them [the Turks] who on seeing strife beyond its frontiers would not fight in the way of God, waging *jihad* against the infidels. What obedience in God's world exceeds this obedience? What *shawka* in this world matches this *shawka*?[233]

In the above passage, obedience to the Turkish sultan is likened to obedience to God. Moreover, it implies that as long as the Turks declare themselves to be Muslim and wage *jihad* against infidel forces, it pays for Muslim subjects to put up with a bit of wanton destruction. This passage has often been interpreted as al-Ghazali's attempt to stretch the moral principles of Islam. Erwin Rosenthal claims that the *Mustazhiri* "is generally tempered with political realism and preparedness to make concessions to expediency."[234] Carole Hillenbrand claims that al-Ghazali was engaging in "pious dishonesty."[235] However, to interpret al-Ghazali's words as merely a justification for

[233] Hillenbrand, "Al-Ghazali's Views on Government," p. 84.
[234] Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, p. 38.
[235] Hillenbrand, "Al-Ghazali's Views on Government," p. 86.

submission to temporal authorities, at the expense of political justice, would be to discredit his position as one of the most prominent Sunni Muslim *ᶜulama* whose legacy is still felt today in the Muslim world.

Al-Ghazali's discussion of the Turks and *shawka* has to be read vis-à-vis his concern for political unity. As mentioned before, the caliphate, in al-Ghazali's terms, is established for the "uniting of views." Ideally, al-Ghazali would have preferred a caliph who could rule and govern the Muslim community. However, by the time al-Ghazali wrote the *Mustazhiri*, even he had to acknowledge that secular, military power, which belonged to the Seljuq sultans, had come to stay; the caliph was no longer the sole player in military affairs. Even if the Turks acted in a rowdy manner, it would be too politically costly to revolt against them. A revolt against the military power of the Seljuqs might result in political instability and worse still, anarchy. A real dilemma is thus encountered in al-Ghazali's discussion of government: should one put up with a tyrannous sultan at the expense of justice for the sake of maintaining Muslim unity? Later, ibn Taymiyya would also confront the same problem, but with a clearer answer. Nonetheless, al-Ghazali's answer to this question seems to be yes, that unity ought to be the minimum condition for the adequate functioning of the Muslim community and the preservation of Islam. Moreover, anarchy might even bring about higher levels of injustice, to the extent that even the religion of Islam is threatened. Such views are also manifested in al-Ghazali's *Ihya' ᶜulum al-din*, where he claims, "no one will destroy the means of welfare in order to promote and enhance it, for this will be just like the person who will erect a single house and demolish a whole town; or we have to declare that there is no Imam

[caliph] and consequently there is neither law nor equity in the land, which thing is impossible. We declare that the authority of unjust rulers should be enforced in their land because of the urgent need for authority therein."[236]

Overall, al-Ghazali's treatment of *shawka* puts forward a new condition on which the caliphate is established: if obedience towards the caliph can only be sufficiently achieved with military might, then it follows that force is perhaps the most important criteria to establish and maintain the caliphal office. If compared to al-Mawardi, al-Ghazali's ideas demonstrate even more clearly that the caliphate had, by his time, become a fragile institution to the extent that the caliph's position could be made or broken by the Seljuq Turks. In some sense, it is also a recognition of the immense influence that the Seljuq Turks had on caliphal politics. If force is considered the most important criteria that an elector of the caliph should possess, then the caliph *should* legitimate the Seljuq sultan's rule in exchange for the latter's oath of allegiance (*bay^{c}a*). After all, according to al-Ghazali, it is to the Seljuq sultan that the caliph owed his power, while the Seljuqs are not presented as owing their power to the caliph. The only service the caliph could render for the Seljuq sultan is a mere act of legitimation of the latter's rule over the Islamic heartland. Somehow, there is a cold recognition in the *Mustazhiri* that the caliph is no longer the wielder of effective power, and that the Seljuq sultan and his cadre of military strongmen were the best option available for societal unity, hence their overthrow became increasingly out of the question.

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[236] Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' ^{c}ulum al-din*, Book II, transl. Nabih Amin Faris, *The Foundations of the Articles of Faith* (Lahore: Ashraf Press, 1963), p. 97.

Al-Ghazali's subsequent discussion of *ᶜilm* (knowledge of religious affairs) also reflects a sense of delegation of power, and has many parallels with his discussion of *shawka*. He claims that "The *ᶜulama* [religious scholars] are agreed that the Imamate [caliphate] is only for one who has attained the rank of personal effort [*al-ijtihad*][237] and giving a [legal] decision [*fatwa*] in the science of the Law."[238] Yet he does not hesitate to claim that "You cannot claim this requisite is present, nor can you deny that it is a requisite."[239] Along these lines, al-Ghazali argues:

> The rank of "personal effort" [*ijtihad*, or "independent reasoning"] is not indispensable: piety calling for consultation with the learned[240] would suffice. The Imam can know by his own reasoning *or by that of others*. Why can he not fulfill the aim of knowledge through the best men of his time, just as the aims of power and competence can be fulfilled through others? Most of the problems of the Imamate [caliphate] are jurisprudential and conjectural and may be solved by following the prevailing opinion.[241]

Here it can be inferred that just as the caliph himself does *not* have to possess military force to be legitimate, his legitimacy also does not diminish with his lack of religious knowledge. Just as *shawka* can be delegated to the Turks, similarly, *ᶜilm* can be delegated to the *ᶜulama*; just as the Turks fulfill the condition of *najda*, the *ᶜulama* in turn fulfill the condition of *ᶜilm*. In that regard, there seems to be an implicit acknowledgement that al-Mustazhir's independent reasoning was not up to al-Ghazali's standards, considering the caliph was barely twenty when he assumed office. Yet, al-Ghazali does not consider a less-than-excellent caliph a problem:

> Men differed about choosing as Imam an inferior when there was a better man present: most say that such a choice is valid. I start from this and say: In principle one ought to

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[237] McCarthy's translation or *ijtihad* is unclear. However, *ijtihad* in Islamic terms often meant "the referring of a case proposed to the judge [respecting a doubtful and difficult point], from method of analogy, to the Qur'an and the Sunna." In other words, it is the use of *independent reasoning* in approaching religious issues. *Edward William Lane Arabic-English Lexicon*, pp. 473-474. Available online: http://www.tyndalearchive.com/TABS/Lane/.

[238] Al-Ghazali, *Mustazhiri*, p. 238.

[239] Ibid., p. 238.

[240] It might very well be the case al-Ghazali is referring to the *ᶜulama* (religious scholars) when mentioning "the learned."

[241] Al-Ghazali, *Mustazhiri*, p. 238. My own italics.

> prefer one of independent personal effort to one who follows that of others. But if the latter is chosen, and has the support and submission of all, and there is no Qurayshite *mujtahid* [one who can exercise independent reasoning] who has all requisites, the choice is valid. But if there was a qualified Qurayshite, but the deposition of the other would lead to various vexations, insurrections and disturbances, it would not be licit to depose the first and change him. For we know that knowledge lends luster to the Imamate, but that the fruit sought from the Imamate is to extinguish dissensions—and this is not to be sacrificed out of a desire to have more precision in differentiating between reasoning and conformism to the views of others.[242]

Like al-Mawardi, al-Ghazali places stress on the need to avoid political instability at all costs, and the need to conduct affairs at the lowest political cost possible. Political order and unity remain of prime importance, even if that meant accepting a less-than-excellent or less-than-ideal candidate for the caliphate. If this were to be the case, the *ʿulama* should up take up their role as the religious or spiritual arm of the caliph.

At the end of chapter 9 of the *Mustazhiri*, there are continued calls for the caliph to "exploit the talents of the *ʿulama* and seek their help, and, when in doubt, choose to follow the best and most learned."[243] Thus, al-Ghazali grants religious legitimacy to the *ʿulama*, whom the caliph has to consult from time to time regarding religious matters. Al-Ghazali's emphasis on the *ʿulama* can also be seen as an attack on the Ismaʿili doctrine of the infallible Imam. Since, according the al-Ghazali, the Abbasid caliph, unlike the Fatimid caliph in Cairo, is *not* infallible, it follows that the former is *not* the sole interpreter of the *sharīʿa*; rather, the Abbasid caliph is advised by the competent Sunni *ʿulama*. In other words, while the Ismaʿilis depended on one man as the sole interpreter of Islamic law, the Sunnis can claim that they had a more "consultative" way of interpreting the Law—the caliph working in harmony with the *ʿulama* in religious matters.

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[242] Ibid., p. 238.
[243] Ibid., p. 239.

Despite al-Ghazali's detailed treatment of the caliph, sultan, and *ᶜulama*, there is, however, still the question: if the caliph's political/military and religious functions can be delegated to Seljuq sultans and the *ᶜulama* respectively, what then is the use of keeping the caliph in office? Would it be better to dispense with the caliphate altogether? In his article, "Al-Ghazali's Theory of Islamic Government," Leonard Binder argues that al-Ghazali's delegation of political and religious legitimacy to the Seljuq sultans and the *ᶜulama* was meant to "divide" the caliphate into three constituent parts—the caliph, the sultan, and the *ᶜulama*.[244] Given this, the caliph represents only one—and a rather insignificant one—of the three major aspects of the caliphate.[245] Nevertheless, it seems inconceivable that al-Ghazali considered such a radical division of power. Very often in Islamic political thought, the caliphate, like God, is indivisible. During the medieval period, reference was often made to the Qur'anic statement, "Were there other gods in heaven or earth besides God, both heaven and earth would be ruined" (Q 21:22), in order to justify the indivisibility of the caliphate.[246]

Al-Ghazali was well aware of the concerns over the division of power in the *Mustazhiri*. In fact, he addresses this problem as an answer to a possible objection:

> For what the discussion of most writers about the Imamate [caliphate] is directed to is that we do not believe [that there is] a caliph in this age of ours and in bygone ages who does not unite the requisites for the Imamate and is not qualified by their qualifications so that the Imamate would remain inactive [suspended] without anyone exercising it and the one undertaking [occupying] it would remain in violation of the conditions of the Imamate, unworthy of it and unqualified by them.
>
> This is a serious attack on Law-based judgments and an explicit declaration of their inoperativeness and neglect, and it would call for the clear declaration of the invalidity of all administrative posts and the unsoundness of the judging of *qadis* [judges] and the ruin of God's rights and prescriptions and the invalidation of [retaliation for] blood and wombs

[244] Binder, "Al-Ghazali's Theory of Islamic Government," pp. 237-241.
[245] Ibid., p. 237.
[246] Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, p. 73.

> [offspring] and property and the pronouncement of the invalidity of marriages [marriage contracts] issuing from *qadis* in [all] the regions of the earth and the remaining of the rights of God Most High in the custody [care] of creatures. For all such things would be legal only if their fulfillment issued from *qadis* duly appointed by the Imam [caliph]—which would be impossible if there were no Imamate.[247]

Regardless of whether al-Mustazhir had any real political or religious authority, it is clear from al-Ghazali's arguments that the caliph was crucial in maintaining a legitimate public sphere, an argument that has many parallels with al-Mawardi. The legitimacy of public offices and even of a morally Islamic way of life requires the presence of the caliph. On the other hand, the absence of the caliph entails dire consequences for the Muslim community—all public offices would be invalid, judgments passed by judges (*qadis*) would be unsound, sexual relations and marriages would not be legitimate in the eyes of God. In other words, the community of believers would lose its moral footing if the caliphal office ever became vacant; all human actions would become illicit. As such, al-Ghazali claims, "There must be an Imam [caliph] in every age."[248] Politically impotent as he was, the caliph still remained the fount of legitimacy.

In addition to ensuring a valid public sphere, the caliph was also needed "to keep a watchful eye on men and to nip danger in the bud." Otherwise, anarchy will ensue:

> The conflict of wills and passions would lead to the neglect of the afterlife and the triumph of vice over virtue, and of the lowly over the learned with the consequent dissolution of religious and secular checks. So it is clear that the Imam [caliph] is an indispensable necessity of men.[249]

This argument parallels al-Jahiz's view of human nature and the need for a Hobbesian sovereign to ensure that human passions do not result in worldly disorder and chaos.

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[247] Al-Ghazali, *Mustazhiri*, pp. 234-235.
[248] Ibid., p. 235.
[249] Ibid., p. 235.

Of course, al-Ghazali could not have been unaware of the political and military incapacitation of the caliph during his time. Hence, in the case of a weak caliph, al-Ghazali sees the Seljuq Turks as taking on the role of maintaining political and societal order. In other words, the caliph is believed to prevent anarchy by way of delegating political and military force to the Seljuq Turks. It is also essential to note that the final line in the above passage also does not support Binder's arguments regarding al-Ghazali's division of the caliphate—into three elements of the caliph, sultan, and *ᶜulama*—as mentioned earlier, since it is the *caliph*, and not the *caliphate* that is an "indispensable necessity of men." Thus, the figure of the caliph is still important for al-Ghazali, such that the caliph still embodied the caliphate, even though he no longer exercised political power.

Although al-Ghazali's overall ideas on the caliphate do not differ much with those of al-Mawardi, his ideas take us a step further towards "writing away" the caliph as the embodiment of political and religious legitimacy. While the caliph is said to possess military force and competence in religious matters, he only possesses them by virtue of delegation of these functions to the Seljuq sultans and the religious scholars respectively. The caliph is still crucial for the moral footing of the Muslim community, but his political and religious legitimacy is now discharged to the sultan and the *ᶜulama*. However, if the maintenance of a legitimate public sphere and the prevention of anarchy (albeit in an abstract sense) were the only arguments that al-Ghazali can muster in order to defend the caliph, this shows that it might have been getting harder and harder to legitimate the caliph as the *only* legitimate form of government in Sunni political thought. At a deeper level, it also demonstrates that the

fusion of political and religious legitimacy in the single person of the caliph might *not* be the *only* vision of an ideal Islamic worldview; alternative groups of people have the potential to embody religious and political legitimacy. As we shall see later, the latter view that non-caliphs are equally able to sustain the moral and political footing of the Muslim community would dominate the ideas of jurists, such as ibn Taymiyya and ibn Khaldun, who wrote after the disappearance of the Abbasid caliphate in 1258. Meanwhile, al-Ghazali's caliph is nothing more than a religious figurehead or symbol. The sultan would supply the military power needed to defend the Islamic lands, while the caliph supplied the moral purpose for which power could be used.[250] Once it was realized that the caliph was no longer needed for these symbolic functions, it did not take long for him to be "written away" in Sunni Muslim legal and political discourse.

Ibn Taymiyya: Splitting the caliph

In 1258, the Mongols sacked Baghdad and killed the last Abbasid caliph, al-Musta^{c}sim (d. 1258). Contrary to Patricia Crone's statement that the sources during aftermath of the destruction of Baghdad "are not exactly brimming over with grief," poetry and historical writings demonstrate tremendous grief over the loss of the caliphate in the Muslim world.[251] For example, in his *Tarikh al-khulafa'* (*History of*

[250] Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 244.
[251] A recent reinterpretation of events comes from Mona Hassan, whose PhD dissertation "Loss of Caliphate: The Trauma and Aftermath of 1258 and 1924" discusses the various sources that were written in response to the extinction of the caliphate under the Mongols. In particular, see Mona Hassan, "Loss of Caliphate: The Trauma and Aftermath of 1258 and 1924," PhD dissertation, Princeton (2009), Chapter 1: Emotive Expressions of Dismay: Mourning the Loss of the Abbasid Caliphate," pp. 28-66. For Patricia Crone's statement, see Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 250.

the Caliphs), the Egyptian jurist Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505) begins his account of the years 657-659 A.H. (c. 1259-1261) in a gloomy manner:

> "Thus began the year 657 and the world without a caliph."
>
> "The year 658 now began, and the age still without a caliph."
>
> "Thus began the year 659, and the age as before without a caliph until the month of Rajab when the caliphate was re-established in Egypt and al-Mustansir (d. 1262) was acknowledged as we shall hereafter relate. The period during which the caliphate was in abeyance was three years and a half."[252]

Such statements demonstrate how significantly the caliph figured in the minds of Muslim intellectuals as the symbolic head of the Islamic world.

Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) was born in Harran (in modern day Turkey, close to the Syrian border) shortly after the fall of Baghdad. When he was about six years old, his family moved to Damascus, where he was educated in the religious sciences and in *hadith* (traditions of the Prophet).[253] Ibn Taymiyya was a member of the Hanbali school of law founded by the students of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who was inclined to depend rigorously, in matters of religion, on the Qur'an and the *Sunna* (traditions and practices of the Prophet), instead of relying on independent juristic reasoning (*ijtihad*).

A few years after his father's death in 1282, ibn Taymiyya succeeded his father as a professor of Hanbali jurisprudence. By the time ibn Taymiyya was writing, the Islamic world was in disarray. The eastern Islamic lands witnessed invasions by the Tartars (Mongols); ibn Taymiyya's homeland of Syria became a battleground between the Mamluks and Tatars, although the latter had already embraced Islam. Above all, universal Muslim leadership under the caliphate was a thing of the past.

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[252] Al-Suyuti, *History of the Caliphs*, pp. 500-502.
[253] Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya fi islah al-ra^{c}i w'al-ra^{c}iyya*, transl. Omar Farrukh, *Ibn Taimiyya on Public and Private Law in Islam*, or *Public Policy in Islamic Jurisprudence* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), p. 3.

Politically one community under the caliph in the days of his ancestors, the unitary caliphal polity had fragmented into a number of independent states ruled by warlords and sultans. Ibn Taymiyya himself lived under the rule of the Egyptian Mamluks, who were often despotic and oppressive. However, their victories against the enemies of Islam (the Mongols and the last remnants of the Crusaders) under the banner of the Abbasid caliph in Cairo made them Islam's shining hope in a post-caliphal world.

With regard to the fragmented nature of the Muslim community (*umma*) and absence of the caliphate during ibn Taymiyya's time, it is often argued that ibn Taymiyya sought to do away with the "fiction of the caliphate" altogether in his writings.[254] In *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, Ann Lambton writes, "In the circumstances of the time, it was no longer possible to preserve the fiction of the obligatory nature of a universal caliphate and so ibn Taymiyya seeks a new basis for the state in order to enable the life of the community to continue."[255] Erwin Rosenthal even goes as far as to argue that "[Ibn Taymiyya] ignores the problem of the *khilafa* [caliphate] altogether, denies its necessity and is very critical of its theoretical foundation."[256] According to Mona Hassan, these claims have their roots in Henri Laoust's influential work on ibn Taymiyya, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taki-d-din Ahmad b. Taimiya*, published in 1939, where he claims that ibn Taymiyya rejected the obligatory status for the caliphate.[257] Scholars often refer to the absence of a detailed discussion of the caliphate—in the vein of al-Mawardi

[254] Hassan, "Modern Interpretations and Misinterpretations of a Medieval Scholar: Apprehending the Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyya," in Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed eds., *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 338.
[255] Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, p. 145.
[256] Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, p. 52.
[257] Hassan, "Modern Interpretations and Misinterpretations," p. 339.

and al-Ghazali—in ibn Taymiyya's well-known treatise, *al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya fi islah al-ra^{c}i wa'l-ra^{c}iyya* (translated as *Government Based on Shari^{c}a on Reforming the Ruler and the Ruled*). No doubt, *al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya* was construed along similar lines as al-Mawardi's *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya*, in that both works aim to provide advice to rulers in order to elevate their moral standards of governance.[258] In comparison with al-Mawardi's *Ahkam*, however, *al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya* does indeed *appear* to ignore the caliphate altogether, considering that ibn Taymiyya does not discuss the caliphate in great detail. But to claim that ibn Taymiyya had "forgotten" about the caliphate on these grounds is unwarranted.

Instead of dispensing with the caliphate altogether, ibn Taymiyya regards it as a *political ideal* that the universal Muslim community should aspire to establish. To critically assess ibn Taymiyya's views on the caliphate, one has to look beyond *al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya*. Ibn Taymiyya discusses the issue of the caliphate in a *fatwa* (legal decision) addressing a statement ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad claiming, "The caliphate will last thirty years, then it will turn into monarchy." With regard to the caliphate, ibn Taymiyya further divides it into two new categories: the *khilafat al-nubuwwa* (caliphate based on the pattern of prophetic government) and the *khilafat al-mulk* (caliphate based on kingship).[259] In doing so, he places the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs under the category of *khilafat al-nubuwwa* and all subsequent caliphs—starting with Mu^{c}awiyya—under the category of *mulk* (kingship).[260]

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[258] Ibid., p. 346.

[259] See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu^{c} Fatawa*, 35: 18-20, translated in Muhammad 'Abdul-Haqq Ansari, *Ibn Taymiyyah Expounds on Islam: Selected Writings of Shaykh al-Islam Taqi ad-Din ibn Taymiyyah on Islamic Faith, Life, and Society* (Riyadh: General Administration of Culture and Publication, 2000), pp. 496-500.

[260] In fact, he labels Mu^{c}awiyya as "the first king of Islam." See Ansari, *Ibn Taymiyyah Expounds on Islam*, p. 496.

However, ibn Taymiyya does not immediately dismiss the caliphs after the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs as illegitimate. Instead, he claims, "one may call *khilafa* those rulers also who came after the Righteous Caliphs even though they acted as kings and not as deputies of the Prophet," and cites a Prophetic *hadith*: "The people of Israel were ruled by their prophets. Whenever a prophet died another prophet took his place. But there will be no prophet after me; there will only be deputies (*khulafa'*: plural for *khalifa*), and there will be many."[261] He proceeds to claim that "The words, 'and they *will be many*,' show that there will be caliphs besides the rightly guided caliphs, who will be few."[262]

In light of the above statements, the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs are no longer lumped together with the Rightly-Guided Caliphs as caliphs *par excellence*. Instead, they are now viewed as second-grade caliphs who are inferior in moral standing when compared with Abu Bakr, ᶜUmar, ᶜUthman, and ᶜAli. The period of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (i.e. *khilafat al-nubuwwa*) is now elevated and glorified in comparison to the subsequent Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, which can only be considered *khilafat al-mulk* at best.[263] Yet ibn Taymiyya's ideas do not seek to negate the historical development of the caliphate following the death of ᶜAli and also recognizes subsequent Umayyad and Abbasid rulers as caliphs, even though Umayyad and Abbasid rule fell short of the ideal.

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[261] Ibid., p. 496. My own italics.
[262] Ibid., p. 497.
[263] Of course, we also find a glorifying of the reigns of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs in the writings of al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali. But both al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali still strove to exalt the Abbasid caliph as the pinnacle of Muslim leadership. Al-Ghazali's claim that al-Mustazhir is "God's caliph over men" is one such example of how caliphal legitimacy was articulated during the time of al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali.

Aside from acknowledging the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs as constituting *khilafa* (if not *khilafat al-nubuwwa*), ibn Taymiyya also legitimates their rule:

> If the society does not have the knowledge and power to set up the *khilafat al-nubuwwa*, the king who establishes his [monarchical] rule will have an excuse. For even though the establishment of *khilafat nubuwwa* is a duty when society has the necessary ability, it would not be incumbent, like other duties when one does not have the capability. But if the establishment of *khilafat nubuwwa* is a duty as well as being within the powers of society, then to ignore it is to call for condemnation and punishment.[264]

The above passage implies that a monarchical caliphate (*khilafat al-mulk*) still represents legitimate government when society is not capable to set up the ideal *khilafat al-nubuwwa*. Even if the monarchical caliphate becomes unbearable, one still has to put up with it.[265] In other words, the absolutist Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates are still considered to be legitimate "caliphs" according to ibn Taymiyya, even though they were, at most, second-grade caliphs.

Insofar as the caliphate is concerned, it is crucial to stress that ibn Taymiyya was writing in a post-caliphal world order. As much as one can argue that he does not ignore the caliphate altogether, it is also not entirely accurate to make the claim that he was trying to revive the caliphate or to legitimate the Abbasid "shadow caliphs" in Cairo.[266] It is highly impossible that ibn Taymiyya was arguing for the latter,

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[264] Ansari, *Ibn Taymiyyah Expounds on Islam*, pp. 499-500.

[265] Ibn Taymiyya argues this based on another Prophetic *hadith*: "Keep the pledge you make to the one who comes first and then to one who comes next, and give them their due, for God will call them to account for the people He puts under them." Ibid., p. 497.

[266] According to Mona Hassan, ibn Taymiyya places the Abbasid caliph in Cairo at the head of the Mamluk state bureaucracy above and before the actual sultan. Hassan bases her argument largely on the abovementioned *fatwa* and a line in *al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya* where ibn Taymiyya claims, "The name "judge" applies to anyone who judges between two parties and pronounces a verdict, whether he be a caliph (*khalifa*), sultan, vicegerent (*na'ib*), governor (*wali*), a judge, or the judge's deputy." Argues Hassan, "Written in the context of the Mamluk state, Ibn Taymiyya's choice of words in this descending order of rank is an unmistakable reference simultaneously paralleling and legitimizing the contemporaneous bureaucratic structure. Specifically, it acknowledges the Abbasid caliph as the symbolic figurehead who transferred all of his essential functions and duties over to the Mamluk sultan for execution." To make such a claim based on ibn Taymiyya's above statement in the *al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya* seems a little far-fetched. As much as the Abbasid caliph in Cairo was a symbolic figurehead, it is not entirely accurate to claim that the caliph "transferred all of his essential functions

considering that the Abbasid caliphs in Cairo were only symbolic, puppet figures devoid of authority and power. Inasmuch as ibn Taymiyya wrote at length about the need for a caliphate, his exposition on the caliphate represents, at best, a nostalgic longing for a long lost caliphate, which he views as the ideal form of government for the Muslim community.

If the caliphate represents only an ideal form of government that belongs to history and memory, the *shari^{c}a* (the Muslim holy law, broadly defined) becomes, for ibn Taymiyya, the supreme authority that ought to be the guiding principle for Islamic government. Hence, it is no surprise that he titled his treatise *al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya*, which translates to "government based on the *shari^{c}a*." In ibn Taymiyya's own words, the book is based on two Qur'anic verses concerning political rule:

> Surely God commands you to make over trusts to those worthy of them, and that when you judge between people, you judge with justice. Surely God admonishes you with what is excellent. Surely Allah is ever Hearing, Seeing. O you who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority from among you; then if you quarrel about anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day. This is best and more likely to (achieve) the end.[267]

In providing an analysis for the above verses, ibn Taymiyya stresses that "[rulers] should render dues to those who have a claim on them and that they [rulers] should administer justice fairly."[268] In that regard, it can be argued that for ibn Taymiyya, ruling in accordance with the *shari^{c}a* implies ruling with justice.[269] This means

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and duties to the Mamluk sultan." Possessing a higher level of coercive military force, it is inconceivable that the Mamluk *needed* the Abbasid caliph to transfer any duties to him. In the post-caliphal world, Mamluk sultans often gained power through military force without need for caliphal legitimation. Any form of caliphal legitimation, as observed with regard to Sultan Baybars and the caliph al-Mustansir II, were largely symbolic gestures. For Hassan's arguments, see Hassan, "Modern Interpretations and Misinterpretations," p. 350. For the quote by ibn Taymiyya, see ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya*, p. 23.

[267] Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya*, p. 12.

[268] Ibid., p. 12.

[269] Baber Johansen, "A Perfect Law in an Imperfect Society: Ibn Taymiyya's Concept of 'Governance in the Name of the Sacred Law," in P. Bearman, W. Heinrichs and B. G. Weiss eds., *The Law Applied: Contextualizing the Islamic Shari'a* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), pp. 259-294.

entrusting "the affairs of the Muslims to the best Muslim capable of managing these affairs," and judging "according to the Qur'an and the Tradition of the Prophet."[270] Indeed, "One day in the office of a just ruler is better than sixty years of worship."[271] One notable aspect of *al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya* is the frequent use of *hadiths*, or sayings ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad, many of which exhort rulers to rule justly:

> "The most beloved in the eyes of God is the just ruler, and the most hateful in His eyes is the unjust ruler."
>
> "The people of Paradise are of three categories: a just ruler, a man good-natured towards every relative and every Muslim, and a man who is rich, chaste and charitable."
>
> "So, the aim of sending messengers and revealing Books [scriptures] (to them) is to enable men to be fair in performing the duties due to God and those due to His creatures."[272]

In short, no longer is the caliph the legitimating factor in public life.[273] What matters most for ibn Taymiyya is not the caliphate, but rule and governance according to the *shari^{c}a*—which, according to ibn Taymiyya, implies ruling with justice—from which public offices and a moral community are derived.

Nonetheless, this is not to say that al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali "ignored" the *shari^{c}a* in their political writings. They would not be labeled as jurists had they ignored the *shari^{c}a* altogether. What differentiates al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali from ibn Taymiyya is that the latter does not regard the caliphate as the political institution that *represents* the *shari^{c}a* as God's rule over mankind. For ibn Taymiyya, any ruler who rules with justice is treated as a ruler who rules in accordance to the *shari^{c}a*. The

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[270] Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya*, pp. 14, 23.
[271] Ibid., p. 33.
[272] Ibid., pp. 33-34.
[273] One such test case would be the appointment of prayer leaders in mosques. While al-Mawardi insists on a prayer leader appointed by the caliph for state mosques, ibn Taymiyya only claims that "The leader in prayer should be he who is best versed in the reading of the Qur'an; if there were several at the same level, in this respect, then the best versed in the Tradition (Sayings) of the Messenger of God; if there were several, in this respect too, on the same level, then the leader should be he who had made his migration from Mecca to Medina earlier; if of these there were also several, then the leader in prayer should be the eldest among them." Ibid., p. 35.

shepherd-flock analogy once used by Abu Yusuf to justify caliphal authority is now used to discuss the responsibilities of *every* Muslim towards his or her calling:

> The Prophet, peace be upon him said: "Everyone of you is a shepherd, and everyone of you is responsible for his flock; the caliph who rules the people is a shepherd, and he is responsible for those whom he governs; the woman is a shepherdess in her husband's house, and she is responsible for the household; the youngster is a shepherd in regard to his father's wealth, and he is responsible for the money at his disposal; the slave is a shepherd as regards his master's possessions, and he is responsible for these possessions. Lo! Everyone of you is a shepherd, and everyone of you is responsible for his flock."[274]

Inasmuch as ibn Taymiyya does mention the caliph in this passage, he juxtaposes the caliph alongside the woman, youngster, and even a mere slave as "shepherds." The caliph becomes an equal to others from the lower rungs of the societal hierarchy, in that there is constant stress that everyone is a shepherd. Good government now meant looking to the *shari^{c}a* for guidance, and not the caliphate. The caliphate, which ibn Taymiyya only regards as a political ideal belonging to Muslim historical memory, is no longer God's *only* shadow on earth.

In spite of calling for rule according to the *shari^{c}a* and justice, there is also a tacit recognition in *al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya* that during ibn Tamiyya's time, rulers have far transgressed the limits of what constitutes good government. One finds recurrent warnings against rulers who do not render dues to those who have a fair claim on them, and hence ruling in an unjust manner.[275] There is recognition that bribery and corruption had become commonplace among the ruling elites: "A great part of the discord affecting the affairs of the people has its source in the suspension of penalties in return for a sum of money or through the favor of some influential man…. When

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[274] Ibid., p. 19.

[275] In fact, the opposite of justice (*^{c}adl*), namely *zulm*, a term which modern scholars usually translate as "oppression" meant—according to most early Arabic dictionaries—"putting a thing in a place not its own," "acting in whatsoever way one pleases in the disposing of the property of another," or "transgressing the proper limit." In this regard, justice often meant putting and keeping things in their proper place, preventing men from impinging on each other, and, especially, on each other's property. See Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, p. 179.

the ruler accepts a bribe in return for the suspension of a penalty, he cannot have the authority to impose a penalty when another case arises."[276] In a different section of the book, he claims that "The man in authority should not give anything to any man who has no right to a payment because of a personal passion, of friendship, friendship and the like, particularly, for a forbidden service…."[277]

Although ibn Taymiyya expresses contempt for unjust and corrupt rulers, he still acknowledges that political authority, just or unjust, is far too essential for political and social order to be dispensed with. Compared to al-Ghazali, ibn Taymiyya displays a much greater concern for the prevention of anarchy, as evidenced by the oft-cited statement, "Sixty years of (domination) of a despotic ruler are better than one single night (passed) without a ruler."[278] Ibn Taymiyya also cites a report by the fourth caliph ᶜAli to justify political rule even by unjust rulers:

> ᶜAli ibn Abi Talib said: "It is inevitable that there should be an authority, righteous or wicked." He [ᶜAli] was asked: "O Commander of the Faithful, we understand what a righteous authority is; what about the wicked?" He answered: "From this *also* the frontiers are guarded, the highways are rendered secure, the land is defended against the enemy and the *fai'* (revenues from lands conquered from unbelievers) are distributed among the Muslims."[279]

This passage is an example of ibn Taymiyya's utilitarian outlook, such that the greater of two goods or the lesser of two evils ought to be chosen in cases where costs and benefits have to be weighed.[280] If, he argues, by overthrowing an unjust ruler, "the missed rectification or resultant harm are greater, it is no longer commanded; it

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[276] Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Siyasa al-sharᶜiyya*, pp. 80-81.
[277] Ibid., p. 62.
[278] Ibid., p. 188.
[279] Ibid., pp. 73-74.
[280] Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 154.

is even forbidden if the harmful effects are greater than the rectification."[281] Moreover, "coming out in revolt against them [tyrants and unjust rulers] results in injustice and corruption worse than their [the tyrants'] injustice, so it must be suffered with patience."[282] Unjust rulers have to be tolerated; fighting against them is forbidden "as long as they maintained regular prayers."[283]

Furthermore, it is in their nature that humans need government and authority. In his book on the regulation of the society and economy, *al-Hisba fi'l-Islam*, ibn Taymiyya argues for the necessity of government that recalls Aristotle's statement that humans are political by nature:

> All sons of Adam need, for the perfection of their welfare in this world and next, society, mutual aid and mutual assistance: both to procure benefits and to ward off injuries. For this reason man is said to be civil by nature. Now when men group together there must be some things they have to do to procure their welfare and some they have to avoid as being harmful, and they will be obedient to one who ordains those desirable objects and proscribes what is injurious.[284]

Furthermore, ibn Taymiyya even acknowledges that one does not necessarily need religion in order to establish a government: "those peoples who have not divine scriptures nor any religious faith, obey their kings (and rulers) insofar as they consider it conducive to their worldly welfare."[285] Surprisingly, despite ibn Taymiyya's *shari*^{c}*a*-oriented preferences for government, even he has to acknowledge that "secular," brute power and force, even in the absence of religion,

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[281] Ibn Taymiyya, *Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil*, transl. Muhammad Jamil Ghazi (London: Al-Firdous Ltd., 2000), p. 65.
[282] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Hisba fi'l-Islam*, transl. Muhtar Holland, *Public Duties in Islam: The Institution of the Hisba* (London: Islamic Foundation, 1982), p. 126.
[283] Ibn Taymiyya, *Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil*, p. 64.
[284] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Hisba fi'l-Islam*, p. 20. Similarly, a more condensed version of the passage can be found in *al-Siyasa al-shar*^{c}*iyya*, p. 187.
[285] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Hisba fi'l-Islam*, p. 20. Recall that al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali also considered both secular and divine arguments for the necessity of the caliphate, but ended up arguing in favor of the latter. For ibn Taymiyya, the end of the Abbasid caliphate and the burgeoning of secular provincial rulers all over the Islamic world who claim to be ruling in the name of Islam might have prompted him to consider a purely secular argument for the necessity of government for humankind.

are sufficient to establish rule.[286] Even non-believers can have able rulers and sound governments. Writing a few decades later, ibn Khaldun would also argue for the origins of government along similar lines.

Keeping in mind the above arguments, most of ibn Taymiyya's *al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya* can be read as a reminder (or warning) that religion cannot be practiced in the absence of state power: "It is necessary that being in authority should be considered as a part of religion and as a good action that brings one nearer to God…. If, on the other hand, authority was divorced from religion or religion was divorced from authority, then the whole affairs of the people would be spoiled."[287] Even unjust governments should be tolerated; overthrowing them would entail disorder, which would further jeopardize religious life in the Muslim community. In short, ibn Taymiyya, like al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali, legitimates the ruling powers of his time. While the latter two bestow political legitimacy on the caliph, the former legitimates the various sultans and provincial rulers who have established independent states (without need for caliphal legitimation) in the Islamic world.

Yet if there is no question of overthrowing an unjust ruler, how far can injustice be tolerated? Ibn Taymiyya does not seem to have a straightforward answer to this question, but he does somehow recognize another prominent entity in the Muslim world to offset the moral abyss of tolerating unjust rulers—the *^{c}ulama* (religious scholars). Recognizing that governance in accordance with the *shari^{c}a* is

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[286] "God, be He exalted, has ordered that men should enjoin good and forbid evil. This can only be accomplished by force and authority. Also, all that God has enjoined, like undertaking *jihad*, administering justice, performing pilgrimage or Friday prayer or prayer on feast days, as well as relieving the oppressed and execution of penalties, can only be accomplished by force and authority." Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Siyasa al-shar^{c}iyya*, pp. 187-188.
[287] Ibid., pp. 189, 192.

not solely about brute force and secularized politics, ibn Taymiyya points out with reference to the Qur'anic verse "O you who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority from among you": "The rulers are of two classes: the princes of political authority and the learned men in the Law (*ᶜulama*, or religious scholars)."[288] Formerly, al-Mawardi had used the "those in authority from among you" portion of this verse to justify obedience to the caliph; but ibn Taymiyya uses it to justify the legitimacy and authority of the rulers and the *ᶜulama*. In his other book, *Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil*, ibn Taymiyya claims that "Also included among leaders are kings, sheikhs, and members of government. In fact, any person who is followed by others, or is in charge of them, is considered their leader or imam."[289] While al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali's "imam" is the caliph, ibn Taymiyya's rather crude definition of an "imam" is merely someone who is followed by others, or is in charge of them—in other words, an imam with a small "I." Even a religious scholar is regarded as an "imam."

For ibn Taymiyya, religious scholars have three tasks: to counsel rulers, to preserve religious knowledge, and to communicate the religion of Islam to the people. In *al-Siyasa al-sharᶜiyya*, he constantly stresses the need for rulers to seek counsel with the *ᶜulama*: "The ruler cannot dispense with counsel."[290] One can read ibn Taymiyya's exhortation for rulers to seek counsel from the *ᶜulama* as a plea for the *ᶜulama* to take a more active role in politics. According to ibn Taymiyya, having mere piety with thoughts solely focused on the next world is an example of religion gone astray; the same goes to over-obsession with worldly concerns, such as politics, war

[288] Ibid., p. 183.
[289] Ibn Taymiyya, *Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil*, p. 116.
[290] Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Siyasa al-sharᶜiyya*, p. 182.

and wealth.[291] However, since the *ᶜulama* did not constitute a "church" as the Christian clergy did in medieval Europe, it remains to be seen how far ibn Taymiyya's ideas were manifested in practice. As regards preservation of religious knowledge, ibn Taymiyya makes clear this point in *al-Hisba fi'l-Islam*:

> Although this work of preservation is incumbent on the Community in general and on a sufficient number of them at any time, and is to some extent a duty of each individual since some knowledge is a personal necessity for the Muslim, nevertheless the obligation rests on the people of learning who are entrusted with it or make their living by it—individually and as a class—more than it rests on others. For it is required generally by the Sacred Law, and specifically of them because of their capacity for it and the inability of others. Such capacity includes mental disposition, a background of study, familiarity with methods of research from written works, earlier scholars and numerous other sources, and freedom to work without the distractions that others are preoccupied with.[292]

Looking at this passage, there is a sense that the once loosely organized and unstructured *ᶜulama* of medieval Islamic society were now increasingly corporatized with its own identity and functions.[293] Lastly, the role of communicating religion was a crucial duty that the *ᶜulama* must not neglect. To "fail to pass on knowledge of the religion, or lose what they have acquired, that is one of the greatest wrongs to the Muslims."[294]

In some sense, the legitimation of the *ᶜulama* can be seen as ibn Taymiyya's way of "taming" the brutish character of military force and secular authority during his time. *Al-Siyasa al-sharᶜiyya* alone can be a confusing text to read, especially since the book is laden with calls for rulers to rule in a just manner, yet at the same time, calling for subjects to remain patient and obedient to rulers even if the latter were

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[291] Ibid., pp. 192-193.
[292] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Hisba fi'l-Islam*, p. 131.
[293] See Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, pp. 137-138, where he argues for an argument explaining the loose nature of the *ᶜulama* up till the eleventh century. Argues Mottahedeh, "[the ulema] seem to have been a vaguely defined body of men whose other identities—as landlords, members of city factions, and so on—often overrode their common identification as ulema….the ulema had very little internal structure…. The ulema were not quite as diffuse and unstructured a category as are the "intellectuals" in the history of our time, but they were far from being the institutionalized force that the Christian clergy proved to be in many states in medieval Europe."
[294] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Hisba fi'l-Islam*, p. 132.

unjust. It is nevertheless clear from ibn Taymiyya's ideas that the subjects have to do more obeying of the rulers than the rulers have to do of the law, and hence a higher regard for societal unity and stability, if compared to political justice. Anarchy, which might come as a result of revolt against an unjust ruler, entails even less justice and more potential violation of the *shari*^{c}*a*. Therefore, instead of selling out to secular power, ibn Taymiyya's legitimation of the ^{c}*ulama* as the counseling body of government and more importantly, as the guardians of religious knowledge can be seen as a way to offset the moral abyss of tolerating unjust rulers. Put simply, ibn Taymiyya's stress on the ^{c}*ulama* tempers the moral significance of secular political power. Indeed, religion requires authority and political might. However, ibn Taymiyya might have, after all, regarded political power as nothing but mere muscle power and brute force, without anything exalted or elevated about it. Moreover, political power waxes and wanes depending on the fortunes of rulers and dynasties. To understand what Islam really is and to obtain religious guidance, one does not look to the state, but to the ^{c}*ulama*. Ultimately, it is the ^{c}*ulama* who inherited the religious legitimacy of the caliph—as the ones who will preserve the Qur'an and Prophet's Traditions (*Sunna*).

With ibn Taymiyya, we come full circle. Al-Ghazali's political hierarchy constituted the caliph at its apex with political and religious functions *delegated* to the sultans and the ^{c}*ulama* respectively. However, with ibn Taymiyya's ideas, we see a clearer division of labor between secular ruler and religious scholar, in the absence of a caliph who embodied both the political and religious spheres of Muslim communal life. For al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali, the caliphate, although a far cry from its former

glory, nonetheless *represented* a *shari*^{c}*a*-based government. Al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali still strove to preserve the caliphate, and were willing to ignore and put aside the reality that the caliphate (i.e. *khilafat al-nubuwwa*) during their time had become no different from monarchical kingship. By the time we get to ibn Taymiyya, the caliphate had ceased to exist; independent warlords and rulers were the ones wielding *de facto* power. Hence, ibn Taymiyya's stress on the rule of the *shari*^{c}*a* leaves more room for legitimation with regard to secular rulers and sultans, since all they had to do is to proclaim that they were ruling in the name of Islam, without formal ceremonies involving the swearing of the oath of allegiance (*bay*^{c}*a*) to the caliph. However, there is hardly any sense of balance of power in ibn Taymiyya's concept of governance. Rulers, just or unjust, must be given full obedience on the part of their subjects. There is no question of overthrowing an unjust ruler. Although ibn Taymiyya urges the ^{c}*ulama* to counsel rulers, it is doubtful whether they ever played a major role in politics, since they hardly constituted a strong united front in Islamic political life. Regardless, ibn Taymiyya sees the ^{c}*ulama* as an alternative body that Muslims can turn towards as the moral center of gravity in their religious lives. In that regard, the political and religious spheres moved increasingly apart, even if ibn Taymiyya may not have had this in mind when he wrote. By the time we reach ibn Taymiyya, we start to see a demarcation of secular and religious boundaries, with sultans and rulers presiding over the former, while the ^{c}*ulama* embodied the latter. Ibn Taymiyya might have tried to prevent a thorough division of religion and politics by seeing a political role for the ^{c}*ulama*. However, as we shall see later in ibn Khaldun's political thought, this view would not hold for long.

4. Ibn Khaldun: Desacralizing Politics, Depoliticizing Religion

The division between religion and politics found its clearest expression in the writings of the North African Muslim scholar ibn Khaldun. Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis in May 1332 to an economically well-to-do family that was under the patronage of rulers of the western Islamic world. Given his family's status, ibn Khaldun's early education was enriched by personal contact with Muslim Spanish and North African intellectuals residing in Tunis. Ibn Khaldun's overall education included the study of the Qur'an, *hadith*, Islamic theology, elements of mysticism, philosophic sciences, logic, and metaphysics. His advanced education in these subjects enabled him to serve in several courts in North Africa and Muslim Spain. Ibn Khaldun's career reached its peak in Cairo, where he was introduced to the Mamluk sultan Barquq (d. 1399) who appointed him as the Malikite Grand Judge.[295] Among ibn Khaldun's works, the *Muqaddima* (translated as "Introduction" or "Prolegomenon"), composed in 1377, remains the most influential and the most studied in modern scholarship. The *Muqaddima* is the first of seven books in the *Kitab al-ᶜibar* (*Book of Lessons*), originally conceived as a work dealing with the history of the Arabs and Berbers. However, after ibn Khaldun's visit to the eastern

[295] The Maliki school is one of the four Sunni Muslim schools of law. For a brief biography of ibn Khaldun, see Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: The Other Press, 2006), Chapter I, pp. 17-62.

Islamic lands, the focus of the *Kitab al-ᶜibar* was widened to represent an "exhaustive history of the world."[296]

In attempting to distance himself away from the historical practices of historians writing centuries before him, ibn Khaldun saw himself as creating a new discipline of historical science.[297] For him, history has an outer and inner meaning. The outer meaning of history deals with political events, dynasties, and occurrences of the remote past; whereas the inner meaning of history "involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events."[298] In introducing the *Muqaddima*, ibn Khaldun criticizes past historical efforts for introducing invented and false reports into their accounts of history, and for not seeking the causes of events.[299] Furthermore, historical writings in preceding generations were "found to exaggerate, to go beyond the bounds of the ordinary, and to succumb to the temptation of sensationalism."[300] In his own words, the *Muqaddima* represents the attempt to rectify historical practice, via an empirical study of history using economics, geography, demography, and military strategies, to formulate a set of

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296 Abu Zayd ᶜAbd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, transl. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), Vol. 1, pp. 12-13.

297 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 3, p. 481.

298 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 1, p. 6.

299 He claims, "Little effort is being made to get at the truth. The critical eye, as a rule, is not sharp. Errors and unfounded assumptions are closely allied and familiar elements in historical information. Blind trust in tradition is an inherited trait in human beings…. The later historians were all tradition-bound and dull of nature and intelligence, or did not try to avoid being dull. They merely copied their predecessors and followed their example. They disregarded the changes in conditions and in the customs of nations and races that the passing of time had brought about…. [The historical information that they presented] concerns happenings, the origins of which are not known…. They neglected the importance of change over the generations in their treatment of (historical material), because they had no one who could interpret it for them." Nevertheless, despite his critique of past historians, ibn Khaldun highly praised the works of historians such as al-Tabari, ibn Ishaq, al-Masᶜudi as "authorities." Ibid., p. 7.

300 Ibid., pp. 7-9.

underlying laws behind a series of discrete atomic events, in order to discover similarities between events.[301] Like Karl Marx almost five centuries after him, ibn Khaldun saw history as being governed by certain laws, which he claims will give causes and reasons for happenings in various dynasties in the Middle East.[302]

Inasmuch as ibn Khaldun argues that history is about human social organization, his actual focus in the *Muqaddima* was the state. Therefore, he saw humans as *represented* by their respective states, or more specifically, dynasties.[303] As he claims, "Dynasty and government serve as the world's market-place, attracting to it the products of scholarship and craftsmanship alike. In this market stories are told and items of historical information are delivered."[304] Although ibn Khaldun set out to study the changes in human history, it was in the rise and fall of dynasties in the Middle East and the causes thereof that he was really interested. Only people with a state qualified as having a place in history. In other words, ibn Khaldun's world history is a history of dynasties.

Instead of adopting a Hobbesian view of humans as singular and isolated individuals, ibn Khaldun set out to study humans in a collective manner. Quoting Aristotle, ibn Khaldun begins the *Muqaddima* by claiming, "Man is 'political' by

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301 Hayden White, "Ibn Khaldun in World Philosophy of History: Review Article," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2, no. 1 (October 1959), p. 113.

302 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 1, p. 12. Compare with Frederick Engel's statement regarding Marx that "It was precisely Marx who had first discovered the great law of motion of history, the law according to which all historical struggles, whether they proceed in the political, religious, philosophical or some other ideological domain…." Frederick Engels, "F. Engels's Preface to the Third German Edition" in Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 14.

303 Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay in Reinterpretation* (London: Frank Cass, 1982), p. 12.

304 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 1, pp. 46-47.

nature."[305] According to ibn Khaldun, God created humans with a natural desire for food. However, "the power of the individual human being is not sufficient for him to obtain (the food) he needs, and does not provide him with as much food as he requires to live."[306] Humans need to come together to cooperate with one another in order to survive.[307]

However, when humans come together to form groups, they encounter each other's aggressive natures, and thus need restraining influence and power to keep their aggression in check. This restraining influence, the argument goes, is the root of royal authority or kingship, which ibn Khaldun claims is "a natural quality of man" and "is absolutely necessary to mankind."[308] Without a forceful ruler or someone who exercises authority, anarchy will ensue. Hence, the state is viewed as a noble institution serving to keep human aggression in control and to maintain justice.[309]

Furthermore, political authority or kingship is not premised on religion and any form of religious law, be it in the form divine scripture or prophecy: "Existence and human life can materialize without (the existence of prophecy) through injunctions a person in authority may devise on his own or with the help of *ʿasabiyya* [or translated by Franz Rosenthal as "group feeling," to be explained later below] that enables him to force the others to follow him wherever he wants to go."[310] Along similar lines as proposed by ibn Taymiyya, ibn Khaldun argues that the majority of

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305 Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 89.

306 Ibid., p. 89.

307 Argues ibn Khaldun, "many dumb animals were given more perfect powers than God gave to man. The power of a horse, for instance, is much greater than the power of a man, and so is the power of a donkey or an ox. The power of a lion or an elephant is many times greater than the power of man." See Ibid., p. 90.

308 Ibid., p. 92.

309 Ibid., p. 382.

310 Ibid., p. 93.

the world's inhabitants do not have prophets or divine scriptures, but yet "possessed dynasties and monuments, not to mention life itself."[311] In that regard, political authority is an entirely secular affair that is natural to humankind. Kingship is the goal to which human social organization aspires.[312] Religion, as we shall see later, is nothing but a valuable add-on to expand a ruler or dynasty's political power. This secular derivation of political authority and kingship bears enormous impact on ibn Khaldun's political thought and his ideas on the caliphate and the *ʿulama*.

For the state to maintain its authority and rule, a quality ibn Khaldun coins as *ʿasabiyya* is required. Simply put, the *ʿasabiyya* is a feeling of social solidarity among the members of a group that is derived from the knowledge that they share a common descent.[313] Some groups have stronger *ʿasabiyya*, while for others it is weaker. A group with strong *ʿasabiyya* is thus able to gain domination over another with weaker *ʿasabiyya*. In discussing the relative strengths of *ʿasabiyya* among different groups in society, ibn Khaldun delineates the differences in social organization between "primitive culture" and "civilized culture." Primitive culture consists of Bedouins belonging to the desert who "restrict themselves to the bare necessities in their way of life and are unable to go beyond them."[314] They live their lives by cultivating land and domesticating animals, and consist of small and self-supporting communities.

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311 Ibid., p. 93.

312 Ibid., p. 284.

313 Syed Farid Alatas, "Ibn Khaldun and Contemporary Sociology," *International Sociology Review of Books*, 21, no. 6 (November 2006), p. 785. Since the discovery of ibn Khaldun by Western scholars, the term *ʿasabiyya* has been difficult to define properly, and ibn Khaldun himself does not give a precise definition of it in the *Muqaddima*. Franz Rosenthal defines it as "group feeling" in his translation of the *Muqaddima*, while Islamic historian Mohammed Talbi refers to it as "at one and the same time the cohesive force of the group, the conscience that it has of its own specificity and collective aspirations, and the tension that animates it and impels it ineluctably to seek power through conquest."

314 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 1, p. 252.

Due to the lack of military defense or strong fortresses, these primitive peoples provide their own defense and do not rely on others for it. Ibn Khaldun argues that people belonging to primitive culture are characterized by fortitude and bravery.[315] It also follows that primitive desert peoples possess higher levels of *ᶜasabiyya* if compared to civilized peoples, due to the latter's high dependence on each other for defense and survival. The high level of solidarity "creates the conditions that make the acquisition of absolute power possible, and kingship is the goal toward which solidarity [*ᶜasabiyya*] moves."[316]

In itself, political authority or kingship is not sufficient to build great civilizations and to establish dynasties of wide power. This is because mere kingship does not completely eradicate differences among people with diverging purposes in a group: "their purposes differ, inasmuch as they are false purposes, and (the people of the worldly dynasty) come to abandon each other, since they are afraid of death."[317] To solve these problems, religion is needed:

> Only by God's help in establishing His religion do individual desires come together in agreement to press their claims, and hearts become united. God said: "If you had expended all the treasures on earth, you would have achieved no unity among them" (Q 8:63). The secret of this is that when hearts succumb to false desires and are inclined toward the world, mutual jealousy and widespread differences arise. When they are turned toward the truth and reject the world and whatever is false, and advance toward God, they become one in their outlook. Jealousy disappears. Mutual co-operation and support flourish. As a result, the extent of the state widens, and the dynasty grows.[318]

In similar fashion as Machiavelli who argues that "where there is religion, arms can easily be introduced, but where there are arms but no religion, the latter can be introduced only with difficulty," ibn Khaldun also regards religion and religious

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315 Ibid., pp. 257-258.

316 Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History*, p. 198.

317 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 1, p. 320.

318 Ibid., pp. 319-320.

propaganda as instrumental in furthering one's political authority and *ᶜasabiyya*.[319] Political authority is not derived from religion, but is greatly enhanced by the latter, in order to generate dynasties of wide power and large royal authority.[320] Moreover, while *ᶜasabiyya*—which eventually leads to kingship and political authority—can act alone without religion, the opposite is not true. Ibn Khaldun supports this view with a saying ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad: "God sent no prophet who did not enjoy the protection of his people."[321] Anyone who thinks he can get on a high horse to brandish religious principles without support from others is seriously mistaken.

When kingship is firmly established, the lust for absolute power and the desire for riches can only be completely satisfied through the conquest of other primitive civilized groups and the creation of a civilized culture. Ibn Khaldun argues that after obtaining the bare necessities, primitive peoples strive towards the attainment of comforts and luxuries, leading to urbanization.[322] After the primitive peoples and their leader conquer cities, they "[enter] upon a life of ease and [submit themselves] to the yoke of the city," creating a sedentary civilized culture in the process.[323]

Civilized culture is largely urban in character, whereby the lust of power and love of luxury can be satisfied, and dynasties are established. Being used to a life of

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[319] Although Machiavelli also claims that "Anyone who examines the countless deeds of the Roman people as a whole and of many individual Roman citizens will see that they feared breaking an oath more than breaking the laws, like people who respected the power of God more than that of men…." Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, transl. Julia Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 51. For ibn Khaldun's claim, see Ibid., pp. 319-322.

[320] Ibid., p. 319. However, it would be erroneous to claim that ibn Khaldun was a "secular" thinker, or that he disregarded religion in an "unIslamic" way. The *Muqaddima* is contains numerous references to God's transcendence and omnipotence. Furthermore, the book has a rather lengthy discussion on the Qur'an as "the greatest, noblest, and clearest miracle" in comparison with the Torah and the Gospel, and the Prophet Muhammad as superior in rank over other prophets. See Ibid., pp. 192-194.

[321] Ibid., p. 322.

[322] Ibid., p. 252.

[323] It is also important to note that Ibn Khaldun claims that this is the case with all primitive peoples. Once they achieve civilized culture, they have no desire to go back to primitive life. Ibid., p. 253.

comfort and luxury, the rulers of a dynasty become overly self-contented, causing their *ᶜasabiyya* to diminish, which in turn renders the dynasty vulnerable to attack and conquest by tribal groups from the outside. Apart from the rulers, the people of the city also engage in excess consumption and corruption to satisfy their unlimited wants, which eventually leads to immorality and wrongdoing. Ultimately, urban life corrupts both rulers and people, bringing about the fall of the dynasty and the ruin of the city. Ibn Khaldun argues that the process underlying the rise and fall of dynasties is a *natural* and *inevitable* one—primitive peoples and their leaders are naturally inclined towards higher civilization, after which the leaders slip into laziness, causing other tribal groups to overthrow them, bringing about a new dynasty.

Ibn Khaldun's caliphate

This is the general framework against which ibn Khaldun's discussion of the caliphate is set against. Arguing that the purpose of human beings is not only worldly welfare, but also happiness in the afterlife, ibn Khaldun stresses that the Prophet's primary aim was to guide mankind towards their welfare in the other world. After the death of the Prophet, his mission continued to be upheld by the caliphs.[324] Having said that, ibn Khaldun defines the caliphate in comparison with pure kingship:

> To exercise natural royal authority means to cause the masses to act as required by intellectual rational insight into the means of furthering their worldly interests and avoiding anything that is harmful in that respect. And to exercise the caliphate means to cause the masses to act as required by religious insight into their interests in the other world as well as in this world. The worldly interests have bearing upon the interests in the other world, since according to the Lawgiver [Muhammad], all worldly conditions are to be considered in their relation to their value for the other world. Thus, the caliphate in reality *substitutes for the Lawgiver [Muhammad]*, in as much as it serves, like him, to protect the religion and to exercise political leadership of the world.[325]

[324] Ibid., pp. 386-387.

[325] Ibid., pp. 387-388. My own italics.

For ibn Khaldun, the caliphate is *khalifat rasul Allah* (successor of the Messenger of God), substituting for the Prophet "to preserve the religion and to exercise political leadership of the world."[326] With regard to the title *khalifat Allah* (deputy of God), ibn Khaldun deems it impermissible, but yet has no qualms alluding to it.[327]

Ibn Khaldun's discussion of the prerequisites of the caliphate mirrors al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali. The caliph has to have knowledge of religious laws so that he can execute them. A strong sense of probity is required. The caliph has to also be free from defects and disabilities, in order to carry out punishments and to go to war. What sets him apart from al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali is his way of justifying the prerequisite of Quraysh descent.

Ibn Khaldun addresses the Quraysh prerequisite by connecting it with his concept of *ᶜasabiyya*. Going beyond al-Mawardi's justification of Quraysh descent purely based on a saying ascribed to the Prophet,[328] ibn Khaldun asserts that the caliph should be from the Quraysh tribe not only because it was the tribe of the Prophet, but also because the Quraysh had the strongest *ᶜasabiyya* among all the Arab tribes:

> Now, the Quraysh were the outstanding, original, and superior leaders of the Mudar.[329] Their number, their group feeling [*ᶜasabiyya*], and their nobility gave them power over all the other Mudar. All other Arabs acknowledged that fact and bowed to their superiority. Had the rule been entrusted to anybody else, it may be expected that their opposition and refusal to submit would have broken the whole thing up…. Therefore, Quraysh descent was made a condition of the institution of the imamate [caliphate]. The Quraysh represented the strongest available group feeling. Quraysh descent of the imam [caliph], it was thus hoped,

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326 Ibid., p. 388.

327 Ibid., p. 389. Ibn Khaldun's justification is similar to al-Mawardi's, on the basis that Abu Bakr forbade the use of the title *khalifat Allah*. However, in another instance, he writes, "God made the caliph *His substitute* to handle the affairs of His servants." See Ibid., p. 401.

328 Recall the saying attributed to Muhammad: "Imams [i.e. caliphs] come from Quraysh."

329 The Mudar is one of two major branches of the North Arabian tribes.

> would be more effective than anything else in organizing the Muslim community and bringing harmony into it.[330]

What is new in ibn Khaldun's theory is the notion that the caliphate, instead of embodying the *only* legitimate form of Muslim government, represented the peak of Arab solidarity (or *ᶜasabiyya*) in an Arab golden age that lasted for a little over six hundred years. The period when the caliphate was in existence and at its zenith also corresponded with the period in which the sense of *ᶜasabiyya* among the Arabs was the strongest. When that period came to pass, the caliphate declined and gave way to independent provincial rulers and sultans:

> The group feeling [*ᶜasabiyya*] of the Arabs had been destroyed by the time of the reign of al-Muᶜtasim [d. 842] and his son, al-Wathiq [d. 847]. They tried to maintain their hold over the government thereafter with the help of Persian, Turkish, Daylam, Seljuq, and other clients. Then, the non-Arabs and their clients gained power over the provinces of the realm. The influence of the dynasty grew smaller, and no longer extended beyond the environs of Baghdad. Eventually, the Daylam [here referring to the Buyids] closed in upon and took possession of that area. The caliphs were ruled by them. Then the Daylam, in turn, lost control. The Seljuqs seized power after the Daylam, and the caliphs were ruled by them. Then the Seljuqs, in turn, lost control. Finally, the Tartars [Mongols] closed in. They killed the caliph and wiped out every vestige of the dynasty.[331]

As much as the caliphate was an important religious institution for ibn Khaldun, it was above all, an Arab (and more specifically, Quraysh) phenomenon. Its fate was deeply intertwined with the political fortunes of the Arabs and their civilization.

Eventually, the caliphate, like all other polities, became not much different from pure kingship. Ibn Khaldun does not lament the transformation of the caliphate into kingship as much as he thinks that it was inevitable and crucial for the Muslim community to survive. The time of the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs was one in which kingship was renounced and utmost preference was given to Islam. However, as the Arabs gained strides in amassing wealth and territory, their "desert attitude"

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330 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 1, pp. 399-400.

331 Ibid., pp. 314-315.

approached its end.[332] Along with the end of "desert attitude," the basic commitment towards religion and Islam also waned, giving way to kingship, starting from Mu^{c}awiyya and the Umayyad caliphate. Despite his claim that the caliphate became kingship under Mu^{c}awiyya, ibn Khaldun produces a lengthy defense of Mu^{c}awiyya, claiming, "It was not for Mu^{c}awiyya to deny the natural requirement of kingship to himself and his people. Kingship was a natural thing that *^{c}asabiyya*, by its very nature, brought in its train…. Had Mu^{c}awiyya tried to lead [his followers] on another course of action, had he opposed them and not claimed all the power for himself and them, it would have meant the dissolution of the whole thing that he had consolidated."[333] In this sense, the transformation of the caliphate from a purely religious institution under the Rightly-Guided Caliphs into a monarchical institution under the Umayyads and the Abbasids was a crucial step in ensuring the unity and stability of the Muslim community. Without kingship and political power as embodied by the Umayyads and the Abbasids, a Muslim community solely supported by purely religious leadership would not have survived. Hence, it was necessary that the religious fervor of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs should change into the sword of *^{c}asabiyya* under the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates in later years.

Nevertheless, religion and politics coexisted even under caliphal kingship during the time of the Umayyads and the Abbasids, as "there remained the traits that were characteristic of the caliphate, namely, preference for Islam and its ways, and adherence to the path of truth."[334] During the late Abbasid period, the characteristic

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[332] Ibid., p. 421.
[333] Ibid., pp. 421-422.
[334] Ibid., p. 427.

traits of the caliphate—preference for and adherence to Islam—disappeared, and the caliphate only remained in name, insofar as the Arab *ᶜasabiyya* continued to exist. However, once Arab solidarity disappeared altogether, non-Arabs took control of government and the caliphate also became extinct. Kingship and political authority had now passed to the non-Arab rulers such as the Seljuqs and the Mongols. In short, the caliphate existed without any notion of kingship during the time of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, then in combination with it under the Umayyads and the early Abbasids, until the *ᶜasabiyya* of kingship was detached from that of the caliphate beginning in the tenth century.[335]

Despite ibn Khaldun's reverence for the institution of the caliphate, he does not view it as indispensable for social order. Arguing against the claim that the caliphate—itself being a political *and* religious institution—is needed for social organization and the restraining of human aggression towards one another, ibn Khaldun contends that the act of restraining does *not* come from religious law, but comes about "as the result of the impetus of kingship and the forcefulness of the mighty, even if there is no religious law."[336] Similarly, "Disagreement may be removed as well through the existence of powerful leaders, or through the people refraining from disagreement and mutual injustice…."[337] Thus, the caliphate is not the only means that the Muslim community has for political order. It might be the best means to sustain Muslim unity—since religious and political might were fused in the person of the caliph—but as history as shown, non-caliphal rulers do not fair as

335 Ibid., p. 428.
336 Ibid., pp. 389-390.
337 Ibid., p. 390.

badly as other jurists might think, when it concerns political rule. Hence, if political and social order used to be sustained through the caliphate, it can be done so similarly under non-caliphs after the passing away of the caliphate in 1258.

In short, the Sunni caliphate from the death of Muhammad to 1258 represents a brief but nonetheless important interval in the history of the Arabs. The period of the caliphate was a golden period for Arab *ᶜasabiyya*, such that religious fervor was matched with political might. Ibn Khaldun distinguishes the caliphate from the Pope and Patriarch in Christianity as well as the Cohen in Judaism, in arguing that unlike Islam, Judaism and Christianity do not advocate a fusion of religion and politics.[338] The fusion of religion and politics as embodied by the caliphate allowed the Arabs to preside over a vast empire. The decline of the caliphate also witnessed the passing on of political legitimacy to non-Arab rulers who now possess stronger *ᶜasabiyya* than the Arabs. In ibn Khaldun's eyes, the caliphate might have just been a subset of kingship, but it was kingship *par excellence*.

The final detachment of religion from politics

While political legitimacy went to non-Arab dynasties in the Islamic world, religious legitimacy went to the *ᶜulama*, or religious scholars. With regard to the origins of religious scholarship, ibn Khaldun argues that "Scholarship, in general, was not a craft in [early Islam]. Scholarship consisted of transmitting statements that people had heard the Lawgiver (Muhammad) make."[339] However, once Islam became firmly established and securely rooted, things changed:

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[338] Ibid., pp. 472-481.
[339] Ibid., p. 59.

> With the passing of time, the situation of Islam changed. Many new laws were evolved from the basic texts as the result of numerous and unending developments. A fixed norm was required to keep the process free from error. Scholarship came to be a habit. For its acquisition, study was required. Thus, scholarship developed into a craft and profession. The men who controlled the *ᶜasabiyya* [maybe referring to a ruler or king] now occupied themselves with directing the affairs of royal and governmental authority. The cultivation of scholarship was entrusted to others. Thus, scholarship became a profession that served to make a living. Men who lived in luxury and were in control of the government were too proud to do any teaching. Teaching came to be an occupation restricted to weak individuals. As a result, its practitioners came to be despised by men who controlled the *ᶜasabiyya* and the government.[340]

Far from adopting ibn Taymiyya's approval of the *ᶜulama* as the religious arm of the state, ibn Khaldun shows contempt for the religious profession. What we see in the above passage is *not* a division of labor between ruler and religious scholar in government—as al-Ghazali and ibn Taymiyya would have wanted—but a complete *detachment* of religion from the realm of politics. Political rule was not derived from religion, nor did it require religion to sustain itself. Religious law was not indispensable; it was only better than man-made laws because it served both this world and the next.[341] What was more important for politics was a strong ruler ruling with justice.[342] On the other hand, although religion needed political might to be established, its preservation and maintenance, once established, did not need politics. Politicians and rulers were too preoccupied with affairs relating to government instead of religion. Ultimately, religion was preserved and maintained by another class of men independent and outside of politics, namely the *ᶜulama*.

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340 Ibid., p. 60.

341 Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 268.

342 "…if rulership and its concomitants are of good quality, the purpose of government is most perfectly achieved. If such rulership is good and beneficial, it will serve the interests of the subjects. If it is bad and unfair, it will be harmful to them and cause their destruction. Good rulership is equivalent to mildness. If the ruler uses force and is ready to mete out punishment and eager to expose the faults of people and to count their sins, his subjects become fearful and depressed and seek to protect themselves against him through lies, ruses, and deceit…. If the ruler is mild and overlooks the bad sides of his subjects, they will trust him and take refuge in him. They love him heartily and are willing to die for him in battle against his enemies. Everything is then in order in the state." Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 1, p. 383.

Unlike ibn Taymiyya and al-Ghazali who both opted for a harmonious cooperation between rulers and religious scholars, ibn Khaldun is extremely skeptical about the role of the *ᶜulama* in politics. According to ibn Khaldun, "scholars are used to mental speculation and to a searching study of ideas which they abstract from the *sensibilia* and conceive in their minds as general universals, so that they may be applicable to some matter in general but not to any particular matter, individual, race, nation, or group of people."[343] Since scholars "are accustomed to dealing with matters of the mind and with thoughts," they commit many errors and therefore cannot be trusted in matters related to politics.[344] On the other hand, the politician who is "of a healthy disposition and a mediocre intelligence" does not have a mind for mental speculation, as scholars do. The politician is better versed in matters related to particular situations and circumstances.[345] The position of religious scholars "derives from the fact that it takes care of the Muslim religious community and follows the religious laws, and that these persons know the laws and can interpret them through legal decisions."[346] Hence, ibn Khaldun argues that the *ᶜulama* have no standing in government, nor do they have executive authority to make political decisions. If rulers did consult them, it "merely reflects an affectation of respect for their position in the royal councils, where it is desired to make a show of reverence for the religious ranks."[347] In other words, respect for scholars on the part of rulers is a symbolic

[343] Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 3, pp. 308-309.
[344] Ibid., p. 309.
[345] Ibid., p. 310.
[346] Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 1, p. 459.
[347] Ibid., p. 459.

gesture of respect and kindness at best.[348] Religious scholars are only useful as authorities on religious law and legal decisions (*fatwa*), all of which have little bearing on political decisions. Ibn Khaldun sums up his ideas regarding the separation of religion and politics in the following passage:

> Royal and governmental authority is conditioned by the natural requirements of civilization; were such not the case, it would have nothing to do with politics. The nature of civilization does not require that jurists and scholars have any share in authority. Advisory and executive authority belongs only to the person who controls the *ᶜasabiyya* and is by it enabled to exercise authority, to do things or not do them. Those who do not have *ᶜasabiyya*, who have no control over their own affairs, and who cannot protect themselves, are dependent upon others. How, then, could they participate in councils, and why should their advice be taken into consideration?[349]

Ibn Khaldun's contempt for and distrust of the role of the *ᶜulama* in politics might be due to his desire for a strong ruler to take control of the tumultuous political affairs in the North African Islamic lands. But regardless of his intentions, what is of concern here is that instead of taming brute, secular politics with the religious and spiritual machinery of the *ᶜulama*, as ibn Taymiyya did in his writings, ibn Khaldun appears to have dealt a death blow to the role of the *ᶜulama* in political affairs. There seems to be an anticipation of Max Weber in the Khaldunian conception of religion and politics, in that there is no denying that brutish politics, which were not derived from Islamic principles, was here to stay. If one sought a moral and religious life, one had to look elsewhere to the *ᶜulama*. Religious scholars were the legitimate guardians of religious knowledge and laws. But ultimately, even ibn Khaldun had to claim that the actual "religious" community that is concerned with religious affairs is an exclusive and insignificant one, in comparison with the community at large: "the common people

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348 Ibid., p. 460.

349 Ibid., pp. 459-460.

have no compelling need for the things that religious officials have to offer. They are needed only by those special people who take a particular interest in their religion."[350]

In sum, ibn Khaldun introduced a radical overturn of the ideas of al-Ghazali and ibn Taymiyya. All three had in mind distinct religious (as embodied by the *ᶜulama*) and political (as embodied by political rulers) spheres of power. However, the difference between the latter two Muslim intellectuals and ibn Khaldun lies in the fact that the latter two envisioned a harmonious cooperation between ruler and religious scholar, whereas ibn Khaldun decried the meddling of the *ᶜulama* in political affairs. The only moment in history when religion and politics were optimally fused was during the time of the caliphate, after which it was purely secular kingship that governed most of the Islamic heartland. Ibn Khaldun might not have been as enthusiastic as ibn Taymiyya in calling for the *ᶜulama* to communicate religion to the masses, but he nonetheless saw them as constituting a distinct class in society responsible for the preservation of the religious sciences.

In a post-caliphal world order, religious knowledge was the preserve of the *ᶜulama* alone, while political legitimacy remained with the various secular rulers and warlords governing the now fragmented Islamic world. It hardly mattered if communities were ruled by a caliph or by a non-caliph, as long as social order is maintained. Not only did ibn Khaldun effectively "write away" the caliph as the *only* legitimate form of government in Islamic society, his ideas also show a complete demarcation of both the political and religious realms, as well as a total detachment of religion from politics. As much as politics did not need to be built on religious

[350] Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 2, p. 334.

foundations, religious knowledge and scholarship developed independently of politics. With the caliphate gone since 1258, religious scholars took over the task of guiding people; secular kings and sultans were left with political rule. Above all, ibn Khaldun recognized that communities in the Middle East were not as religiously charged as al-Ghazali and ibn Taymiyya envisaged them to be. People did not need religious guidance in order to live the good life on earth, although it would be better if they did in preparation for the afterlife. What they needed for worldly welfare was a strong state to rule justly and to promote healthy social organization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has argued, contrary to the "fusion" thesis which claims that religion and politics had always been fused in Islam, that a separation of religion and politics *did* occur in the medieval Sunni Muslim imagination during the late medieval Islamic era. I have traced—using legal and political writings by al-Mawardi, al-Ghazali, ibn Taymiyya, and ibn Khaldun—how the two spheres of religion and politics increasingly moved apart from the eleventh to the fourteenth century. Returning to Gibbon's portrayal of Muhammad as conquering with the sword in one hand and the Qur'an in the other, one can conclude that as Islamic history progressed, political and social circumstances in the late medieval period made it increasingly difficult for the sword and Qur'an to be held by one man alone.

In early Islam, from the death of the Prophet to the death of ᶜAli (632-661), the caliph was understood strictly as a successor to Muhammad's role as the political leader of the Muslim community. At the same time, he was also a religious leader in a minimal sense insofar as he led the prayers of the community. The caliph's role, therefore, reflected the title *khalifat rasul Allah* (successor to the Messenger of God) in every sense of the word. The rise of the Umayyads and the Abbasids also witnessed caliphs accentuating their religious auras to the extent that they came to be regarded as sacred. One kissed the ground before the caliph or, for the privileged, his hand or foot; the caliph was presented as possessing the ability to summon rain; other

times, he was referred to as "the rope stretched between God and His creatures."[351] Put simply, the caliph was understood as the God's chosen deputy (*khalifat Allah*). As such, the office of the caliphate enjoyed tremendous political and religious legitimacy not only among its supporters, but also among religious scholars, jurists, and intellectuals, as evinced in the writings of Abu Yusuf and al-Jahiz. Along similar lines, al-Mawardi's *Ahkam* demonstrates how caliphal absolutism and legitimacy came to be rationalized and expressed systematically in legal fashion.

As the caliphate lost *de facto* authority, and as independent sultans and warlords emerged, jurists had to rethink what the caliphate meant. The period of instability in the late medieval Islamic period would usher in the theoretical separation of religion and politics. In sum, the separation of religion and politics, as demonstrated through legal and political writings, took place at three different stages. First, with al-Ghazali, we observe how political legitimacy and religious legitimacy were *delegated* from the caliph to sultans and *ᶜulama* respectively. The second stage took place after the passing away of the caliphate. For ibn Taymiyya, the caliphate represented the ideal form of Islamic government, but it was a thing of the past. In the present, it would be secular sultans and warlords themselves who embodied the secular political sphere of Islam, whereas religious legitimacy was granted to the *ᶜulama*. Despite this demarcation, ibn Taymiyya still envisioned sultan and religious scholar working side by side in government.

The final stage occurred with ibn Khaldun, who denied any political role for the *ᶜulama*, while claiming that political power need not derive from religion. Ibn

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[351] Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 140-141; Helmer Ringgren, "Some Religious Aspects of the Caliphate," in *Sacral Kingship* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), pp. 740, 746-747.

Khaldun's caliphate, far from being the only form of ideal government for the Muslim community, was only symbolic of an Arab golden age. Hence, it is with ibn Khaldun that we arrive at a complete separation of political and religious spheres in the medieval Muslim imagination. It is also in ibn Khaldun's ideas that we finally get to a Muslim world not much different from medieval Europe. In ibn Khaldun's theory of civilization, Muslims were now conceived of possessing some kind of dual membership in the societies they resided in. As believers (namely, Muslims) they belonged to a community of believers; as subjects they belonged to disparate states ruled by secular sultans and kings. This recalls Pope Gelasius's (d. 496) "two-swords" theory arguing for the two powers that ruled the world, namely the sacred authority of the priests and royal power of kings, with one exception: in the Muslim world, the authority of the *ᶜulama*, when compared to the coercive powers of the sultan, never was "the more weighty" of the two.[352]

As noted in the introduction, the separation of religion and politics in Islam should not be conceived along the same lines as the separation of church and state in Europe. What this thesis demonstrated is that a theoretical demarcation of religious and secular boundaries in the medieval Sunni Muslim imagination did take place in the late medieval Islamic period. It might be a different story altogether had the *ᶜulama* formed a coherent, unified body along the lines of the Roman Catholic Church. However, given the loose and undefined nature of the *ᶜulama* as a class, this was not to be. The *ᶜulama* did manage to create a more distinct identity by the time ibn Taymiyya was writing, but they never came close to forming a tightly knit

352 "Letter of Pope Gelasius to Emperor Anastasius," translated by J. H. Robinson in *Readings in European History* (Boston: Ginn, 1905), pp. 72-73. Reproduced in the Internet Medieval Source Book: http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/gelasius1.asp.

priesthood like the Catholic clergy did in medieval Christendom. Nonetheless, the loose and undefined nature of the Sunni *ᶜulama* enabled them to develop a fluid relationship vis-à-vis the state throughout Islamic history. Some of them would be incorporated into government, as witnessed in the Ottoman bureaucracy several generations after ibn Khaldun was writing. Others would stay as apolitical groups providing religious guidance to the believers. Eventually, it would be the latter group that would be granted the legitimacy to define religious scholarship and Islamic doctrines; it would be them who would ultimately preserve Islam as a religion.[353] If compared to the Umayyads and the early Abbasids who were understood as spiritual guides, the secular rulers and sultans that came to dominate the political landscape of Islam during the late medieval period were only regarded as wielders of military and political power. They did not define Islam and religious law. An apolitical body of *ᶜulama* ensured that the fate of Islam did not lie with the state; that religion did not rise and fall with the unpredictable political fortunes of the Middle East, as can be seen in the news today. Dynasties and rulers came and went, but it was after all only politics that changed. Islam, as a religion, was to stay.

Further research

The findings of this thesis should not be regarded as exhaustive of late medieval Islamic political thought. Considering that al-Mawardi, al-Ghazali, ibn Taymiyya, and ibn Khaldun were not the only Sunni Muslim intellectuals of their age, further research has to be done with regard to other thinkers and intellectuals

[353] During pre-modern times, religious scholars tied to the state often lost credibility among the populace, as evidenced in the saying, "Happy is the man whose name the government does not know."

who wrote during the period in focus. Such a list would include al-Juwayni (al-Ghazali's teacher, d. 1085), ibn Jamaᶜa (a contemporary of ibn Taymiyya, d. 1333), and al-Maqrizi (student of ibn Khaldun, d. 1442).[354] A consideration of other writers might also provide us with possible differing views on religion and politics, as well as the caliphate itself.

It is also crucial to point out that legal and political writings only represent a fraction of works related to political thought in medieval Islam. Regarding medieval Islamic political thought, one can consult other forms of writing, such as poetry, historical writings, and works of fiction. Such works also provide different perspectives on the caliphate. Indeed, how caliphal legitimacy was articulated in medieval Islamic history is a rich subject of study in itself. Much has been done in that regard for the early Islamic period. Crone and Hinds's book, *God's Caliph*, is one such work that addresses how the caliphate was defined and understood from the Umayyad through the early Abbasid period. This thesis has shown how the caliph was gradually "written away" in late medieval political and legal writings. Whether this was the case in other forms of writing remains an unresolved question. Universal histories written by ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201) and ibn Kathir (d. 1373) have been shown to anchor historical dynasties within the cultural and legal commonwealth of late Abbasid rule.[355] Therefore, topics related to the articulation of caliphal legitimacy in historical writings, fictional representations of the caliphate, and the use of poetry as

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354 For a survey of al-Juwayni's political thought, see Wael Hallaq, "Caliphs, Jurists and the Saljuqs in the Political Thought of Juwayni," *The Muslim World*, 74 (1984), pp. 26-41; Ibn Jamaᶜa has been briefly covered in Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, pp. 43-51, and in Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, Chapter IX.

355 Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 139.

justification for political rule all constitute rich subjects to pursue if one had sufficient resources at hand.

Outside of textual sources, one can also consider non-textual material, such as numismatic material, art, and architecture. An emerging field of study itself, numismatics provide crucial information about a ruler's projection of authority and legitimacy. According to Eric Hanne, the presence of the name of the caliph in coin legends often served as a steady reminder to the populace of his existence. Hence, the importance of this factor to the collective psyche of the various peoples of the Islamic world should not be neglected when studying medieval Islamic political thought.[356] As for art and architecture, artworks produced and buildings constructed during the late medieval period can also be studied to examine how they might have served as a means of patronage in order to legitimate the power and authority of a certain ruler. For instance, in *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival*, Yasser Tabbaa shows how political changes during the eleventh and twelfth centuries propelled parallel changes in Islamic art and architecture.[357] Of all these additional categories, the study of palace architecture in relation to the projection of caliphal power, and numismatic studies of eleventh and twelfth century Islamic coinage from the central Islamic lands would clearly be worthwhile topics to pursue for future research on Islamic political thought.

To sum up, political thought, in the medieval Islamic world as well as in Europe, was often manifested through various means. Different ways of articulating authority and legitimacy—be it through political rhetoric, art, coins, or architecture—

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[356] Hanne, *Putting the Caliph in His Place*, p. 209.

[357] Yasser Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).

circulated in society. Whether or not these means and symbols of legitimacy worked for the powers-that-be depended on how subjects responded to them and whether subjects bought into them. Regardless of the means, all these symbols of legitimacy often served as efforts by rulers to provide a convenient answer to the questions lingering in their subjects' mind: "Who do we obey?" and "Why do we obey?" Even in today's modern society, these questions sound familiar.

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