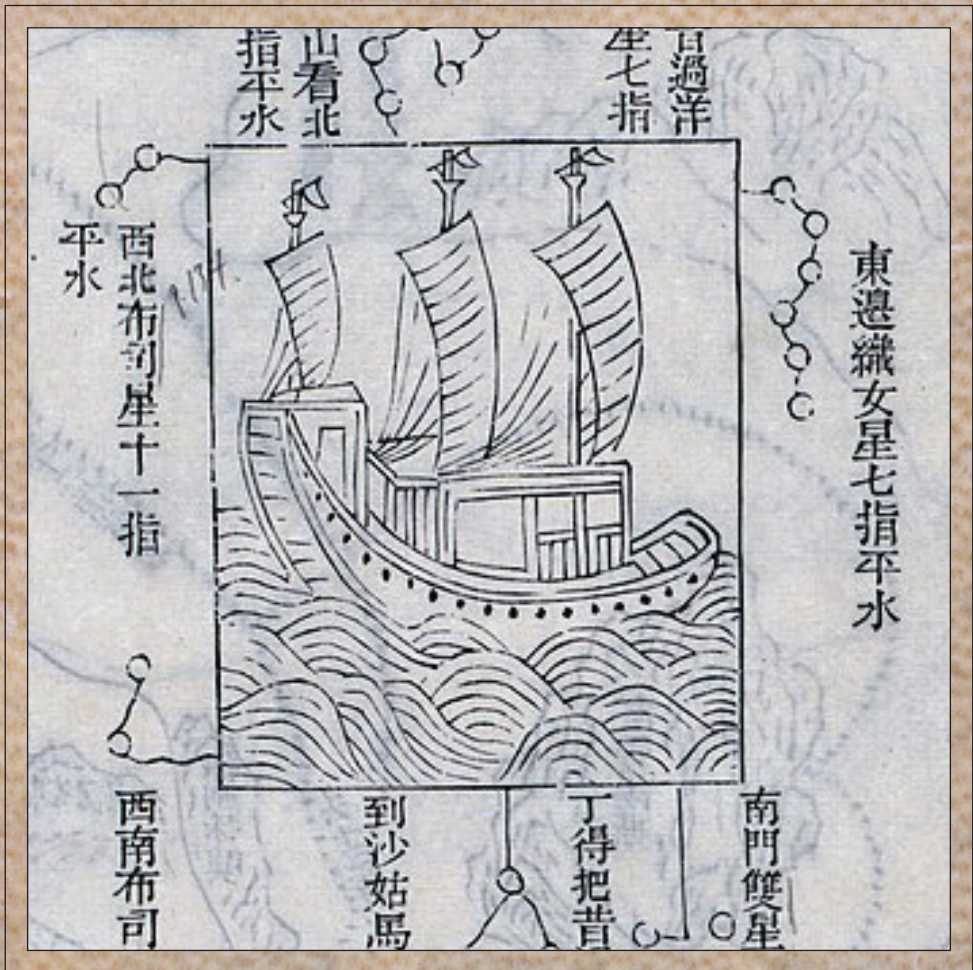




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## LEGITIMIZING THE MAMLUK SULTANATE: MILITARY PROWESS, RELIGIOUS RHETORIC, AND APOCALYPTIC NARRATIVES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the legitimation of the Mamluk state, focusing not only on its military victories over Crusaders and Mongols but also on its religious rhetoric, alliances with the 'ulamā', and ties to the Abbasid caliphate. Rulers like Baybars and Qalāwūn consolidated power by invoking the legacy of al-Şāliḥ Ayyūb, portraying themselves as divinely chosen defenders of Islam. In a period of natural disasters and eschatological concerns, their successes alleviated societal fears. By analyzing historical chronicles and reassessing existing scholarship, this article explores how political authority was shaped through divine grace, religious discourse, and symbolic connections to the caliphate.*

*Keywords: medieval history, Mamluk, politics, legitimacy, jihad*

## LEGITTIMAZIONE DEL SULTANATO MAMELUCCO: PRODEZZA MILITARE, RETORICA RELIGIOSA E NARRAZIONI APOCALITTICHE NELLA COSTRUZIONE DELL'AUTORITÀ POLITICA

### SINTESI

*Questo articolo esamina la legittimazione dello stato Mamelucco, concentrandosi non solo sulle sue vittorie militari contro i Crociati e i Mongoli, ma anche sulla sua retorica religiosa, sulle alleanze con gli 'ulamā' e sui legami con il califfato abbaside. Governatori come Baybars e Qalāwūn consolidarono il proprio potere invocando l'eredità di al-Şāliḥ Ayyūb, presentandosi come i difensori divinamente scelti dell'Islam. In un periodo di disastri naturali e preoccupazioni escatologiche, i loro successi alleviarono le paure sociali. Analizzando le cronache storiche e rivedendo la letteratura esistente, questo articolo esplora come l'autorità politica sia stata plasmata attraverso la grazia divina, il discorso religioso e i legami simbolici con il califfato.*

*Parole chiave: storia medievale, Mamelucchi, politica, legittimità, jihad*

## INTRODUCTION

The process by which the mamluks<sup>1</sup> transitioned into a state<sup>2</sup> (*dawla*) is a subject of significant scholarly debate, with various perspectives among scholars. For instance, Amalia Levanoni suggests that the assassination of al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam Turanshāh marked a revolutionary moment that led to the mamluks’ seizure of power (Levanoni, 1990, 136). This perspective underscores the critical role of Turanshāh’s demise in catalysing a shift in rule, enabling the mamluks to establish themselves as a ruling entity. Winslow Clifford, however, examines the state formation of the Mamluks<sup>3</sup> within a different framework, vehemently criticizing the notion that the mamluks became a state as a result of the revolution or the assassination of Turanshāh. Instead, he analyzes the matter through the understanding of patronage relationships. Clifford argues that the downfall of the Ayyubid dynasty was precipitated by restrictions against the Šāliḥiyya-Baḥriyya mamluks, who were part of al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb’s retinue (Clifford, 2013, 65). This perspective emphasizes the necessity of analyzing the formation of the Mamluk state not merely through individual or dynastic factors but rather through the complex socio-political relationships that shaped its emergence.

However, there are those who assert that the Mamluks became a state by reducing the concept of *jihad* to mere belligerence, using it on a different plane. Indeed, according to Denise Aigle, in the early period, the Mamluks had to highlight their

- 
- 1 Mamluks (amirs or soldiers) served in the armies of states established in various regions from the ‘Abbāsīd period. From the ninth century onwards, they served in various Islamic states and distinguished themselves as *abnā al-dawla*. They not only served in the army but also had a say in the administration and had a direct influence on the enthronement or dethronement of the caliph/sultan. Finally, during the Ayyubid period, they served in the military factions of various rulers. They were decisive in gaining the upper hand in their struggles against each other. It did not seem possible to maintain power without the support of the mamluks. However, it is also true that although the mamluks held power de facto, they were unable to formalize this situation and become an independent state (Crone, 1980, 74; al-Abbādī, 1986, 12; 2014, 131; Thorau, 1992, 24; Clifford, 1995, 72, 116; Taqūsh, 2009, 114).
  - 2 According to Arab linguists, the term *dawla* was employed to denote a temporary and localized monopoly of political authority. Historically, the term has also been used to signify a *divinely ordained cycle* or the notion of *governance* within the monotheistic trajectory of human history. In essence, both meanings converge upon the same conceptual framework. The term *Dawlat al-Atrak* used by the Mamluks denotes a supranational entity characterized by extensive leadership practices and value systems. It was also applied to include mamluk soldiers, particularly during the Mongol era and thereafter. This is because, in the Egypt-Syria region, political leadership was accessible regardless of an individual’s origin or past. Incorporating the characteristics of numerous regions and localities, *Dawlat al-Atrak* emerged as a transcendent form of universal and timeless political order. In late medieval Syria-Egypt texts, the concept of state (*dawla*) was employed to signify the discontinuity of political order. From this perspective, the idea emerged that as many states existed as there were sultans. This understanding contrasts sharply with the notion represented by *Dawlat al-Atrak*. Notably, in the understanding of Ibn Taghribardī, the concept of *dawla* did not merely denote the transfer of governance from one sultan to another. Instead, the term also encapsulated the highly dynamic relational formations among partners and mamluks. In this context, the state transcends its historical manifestation as a state and reflects a societal formation built on the relational essence of individual actors within a broader framework (Steenbergen, 2016, 55, 62, 64).
  - 3 When written with a capital “M” (Mamluks), it refers to the state. When written with a lowercase “m” (mamluks), it denotes the mamluk soldiers or amirs.

identity as warriors. In particular, Baybars had no choice but to present himself as the protector of the true faith against the Crusaders and the Mongols, which was perceived as a pagan and tyrannical ruling house in Iran. He built his legitimacy on military and religious actions, and this was also reflected in his titles (Aigle, 2003, 58). In this sense, the Mamluk sultanate's emergence as a political entity largely stemmed from resisting Crusader and Mongol invasions, which in the mid-seventh/thirteenth century led to the fall of Islamic states. The political decline of the Seljuks, the collapse of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate, and the Ayyubids of Damascus created a significant power vacuum in this region. Amid these chaotic conditions, the mamluks established themselves as a sovereign power by effectively defending against Crusader and Mongol assaults (Amitai-Preiss, 1997, 270; Frenkel, 2001, 157–158; Broadbridge, 2008, 12–13). This is to say, particularly due to the absence of any dynastic power as a result of the Mongol invasion in the Near East, it can be argued that this created an opportunity for the mamluks.

The political collapse of many states in the region as a result of Crusader and Mongol attacks may have facilitated the state-building process of the mamluks. Yet, if the matter is limited to this, legitimacy of the mamluks would largely be reduced to their *jihad* policy. In fact, Linda S. Northrup argues for a more nuanced understanding of Mamluk sovereignty, noting their initial victories were not enough to establish legitimacy. The early Mamluk leaders, particularly Baybars and Qalāwūn, purposed to overcome their image as usurpers by claiming succession from al-Şālīḥ Ayyūb and positioning themselves as his rightful heirs to gain recognition as legitimate rulers (Northrup, 1998a, 256). This indicates that they were trying to establish an indirect connection with their Ayyubid lineage. Indeed, this appears to be a highly reasonable and meaningful perspective. According to Anne F. Broadbridge's analysis, in 664/1265–66, Abaqa Khan sent an envoy to Baybars, suggesting that it would be appropriate to establish peace between them. The emphasized point, however, was that Abaqa Khan was imagined as a *divinely guided ruler* based on Chingizid House, whereas the Ilkhanid enemies were referred to as *slave* groups whose lineage was unknown (Broadbridge, 2008, 33). Actually, considering Abaqa's stance, it becomes self-evident why the early Mamluks sought to trace their legitimacy back to al-Şālīḥ Ayyūb.

Nevertheless, the ascendancy and perpetuation of Mamluk rule cannot be attributed exclusively to their endeavours in *jihad* or their efforts to legitimize their authority by aligning themselves with the Ayyubid dynasty to compensate for their lack of noble lineage. A more nuanced analysis of the intellectual milieu of the period reveals that apocalyptic narratives profoundly permeated societal consciousness, persuading many of the imminent advent of the end times. Specifically, during the period when the Mamluks rose to power, there was a marked escalation in eschatological expectations, reflecting the pervasive influence of apocalyptic thought on contemporary society. This period was marked by extraordinary phenomena, including flames emerging from the earth in the Hejaz, visible as far as Basra, which significantly reinforced prevailing beliefs in an approaching apocalypse. These occurrences were closely associated with a widely recognized *hadith* foretelling a fire originating from

the Hejaz that would illuminate the necks of camels in Basra, thereby intensifying the eschatological anxieties characteristic of the era (al-‘Aynī, 2010a, 122; al-Nisabūrī, 1916, 180). Following the eschatological signs, Baghdad suffered a devastating flood, deeply unsettling the Islamic world. This disaster, alongside the fiery phenomenon, occurred within the same year, casting a dark shadow over the region. Shortly after, the Mongols captured Baghdad, leading to the fall of the ‘Abbāsids and the execution of Caliph al-Musta‘sim, as noted by Abū Shāma (d. 665/1267) (al-‘Aynī, 2010a, 129). Accordingly, this compounded eschatological tension, framing the Mongol invasion and the fall of the ‘Abbāsids as not only political catastrophes but as the culmination of an eschatological trajectory. Such an interplay between disasters and historical events reveals how Mamluks intertwined metaphysical interpretations with real-world crises, shaping collective memory and legitimizing narratives of divine intervention.

The Mongol invasion of Baghdad was widely seen as a sign of the impending apocalypse, a fear that existed before 656/1258. Muḥammad Ahmad Masad, in his dissertation, discusses the predictions of Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn Talha (d. 652/1254) who, in *al-Durr al-munazzam*, warned of great disasters before doomsday. Ibn Talha predicted that 656/1258 would bring chaos, crises, and severe downturns, viewing these events as precursors to a period of disorder, violence, and moral decline, eventually leading to the world’s end. This illustrates the deep connection between historical events and eschatological beliefs, reflecting the era’s anxieties and interpretive approaches (Masad, 2008, 72). Analogously, Hend Gilli-Elewy’s analysis posits that the Mongol devastation of Baghdad in 656/1258, alongside the assassination of the caliph, was interpreted as an apocalyptic omen. This catastrophic event deeply entrenched a notion of impending doom within the Muslim psyche. However, the inception of a paradigm shift was observed following the Mamluks’ historic inaugural triumph over the Mongols, which began to dispel the previously entrenched apocalyptic dread. This transformative victory and its subsequent narrative reframing were characterized in contemporary literature through favorable depictions of the Mamluks (Gilli-Elewy, 2011, 355–356; Ötenkaya, 2021, 75–76). These portrayals did more than restore hope; they framed the Mamluk victory as a divine intervention, shifting the narrative from despair to the God’s grace. This change illustrates the intricate relationship between history and belief in Islam, showing how military victories can significantly alter collective eschatological assumptions.

In addition to eschatological assumptions contributing to Mamluk legitimacy, it is also observed that narratives based on divine interventions in the flow of historical events were added to endow the Mamluk rulers with legality. In this context, Willem Flinterman states that in Altaic political culture, after the death of a ruler, all male members of the tribe were considered candidates for the throne and could engage in power struggles. It was believed that the victor in such conflicts demonstrated his physical aptitude, proving his rightful claim, that God supported him, and thus, he was acceptable to everyone. Indeed, Baybars, who emerged from the Bahriyya, defended the rights of his comrades (*khusdāshīya*) and protected their interests when

faced with various challenges. Thus, he demonstrated his physical prowess, and it was asserted that he possessed the divinely bestowed kingship (Flinterman, 2012, 34, 39). Although the extent to which this idea was embraced in Altaic political culture remains a separate debate, the important point here is the emphasis on the narratives constructed by individuals or factions who seized power, particularly by killing the reigning ruler and battling their entourage, to legitimize their rule in the early Mamluk period. It is crucial to examine the types of legitimizing discourses they employed to gain legality and justify their authority.

In this regard, it is understood that the legitimization of the Mamluk power reveals a clearly complex situation. This intricate framework can be understood by considering various themes as legitimizing factors and approaching the matter from a holistic perspective. Therefore, this paper deals with how the Mamluks sought to overcome their politically fragile rule during the early period, how apocalyptic/eschatological narratives and divine grace contributed to the formation of their identity, and finally, how political or religious actors, institutions, and networks influenced the legal foundations of the state. It then assesses the impact of justice (*‘adl*) and *jihad* rhetoric on legitimacy and analyzes biographies of sultans such as Baybars and Qalāwūn to see how they portrayed their leadership and authority. Finally, it discusses the Mamluks’ relations with the *‘ulamā*’ as a means of legality, providing a detailed view of the various tools used to strengthen authority and legitimacy. Specifically, the role of the *‘ulamā*’ in approving or rejecting the sultans’ political decisions, the use of *jihad* narratives to position the sultans as saviors of Islam, and the role of justice in gaining public acceptance will be revealed through historical examples.

## THE FRAGILITY OF MAMLUK RULE

Following the assassination of Turanshāh ibn al-Şāliḥ Ayyūb (d. 648/1250), the Mamluk regime encountered significant challenges pertaining to political legitimacy. The subsequent rule of al-Şāliḥ Ayyūb’s widow, Shajar al-Durr (d. 655/1257), did not serve as an effective resolution to these issues (Tomar, 1996, 64; Ötenkaya, 2023a, 237). Hence, she married Mu‘izz Aybak (648–655/1250–57) and transferred the throne to him. However, when Mu‘izz Aybak’s rulership was proclaimed in Rabi‘ II 648/July 1250, al-Malik al-Mughīth ‘Umar (647–662/1249–63) took Shawbak, and al-Malik al-Said ibn al-Malik al-Aziz ibn al-Malik al-‘Ādil (d. 658/1260) captured Subaybah (Ibn Kathīr, 1997, 142). The decision received by the Egyptian regime was ironically criticized not only by the Ayyubid rulers but also by the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Musta‘sim. The caliph openly expressed his disapproval of Shajar al-Durr’s rulership by stating, “If you no longer have any men left to assume the sultanate, we shall send someone we deem fit” (Qasim, 1998a, 22). Also, according to Maqrīzī, the role of women in rule was deemed unacceptable within the framework of Islamic political thought. Indeed, a *hadith* reported on this issue states that “a society led by women will never prosper” (Maqrīzī, 1997a, 464; al-‘Aynī, 2010a, 34). As a result of both external and internal opposition after the decisions taken, the Egyptian amirs discussed this issue at length.

After all, the Egyptian amirs, who were aware of the fact that things were based on lineage agreed among themselves and said: “Unless we make a member of the Ayyūb family sultan, we will not find stability in governance.” Thereupon, they placed al-Ashraf Mūsā (648–652/1250–54) on the throne (Ibn al-Dawādārī, 1960, 13; Ibn Taghrībardī, 1963a, 5; Clifford, 2013, 72). They enthroned al-Ashraf Mūsā, with Mu‘izz Aybak as the *atābak*, to ensure legitimacy and stability, recognizing the importance of Ayyubid lineage for their survival against rivals such as Ayyubids of Damascus.

It can be argued that full consensus was not achieved among the Egyptian amirs. Although a ruler of Ayyubid descent was proclaimed sultan, it is evident that some amirs were dissatisfied with this arrangement. For instance, prominent Egyptian amirs such as Tawashī Shihāb al-Dīn murshid al-kabīr, Rashid al-Saghir, Rukn al-Dīn Ḥās Turk (d. 674/1275), and Jamāl al-Dīn Aqush al-mushrif refused to pledge allegiance to al-Malik al-Ashraf Mūsā and Aybak. Instead, on 26 Jamada I 648/August 26, 1250, they declared their allegiance to al-Malik al-Mughīth ‘Umar, the ruler of Karak, and subsequently encouraged him to launch an attack on Egypt. In response to this situation, Mu‘izz Aybak made a strategic move by informing Caliph al-Musta‘sim that they were acting as his deputies (*nā’ibs*) in the land of Egypt (Ibn al-Dawādārī, 1960, 14; al-Şafadī, 2000a, 264). By doing so, Aybak reinforced his political position against the Ayyubid rulers of Damascus and Karak. Thus, it can be argued that recognizing the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate as the supreme political authority, even temporarily, conferred a degree of legality to the political power.

However, Mu‘izz Aybak asserted his position by declaring himself the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Musta‘sim’s regent in Egypt, bolstering his stance against Damascus and Karak. This led to his and al-Ashraf Mūsā’s reaffirmation as sultans. It also escalated conflicts among Egyptian amirs, with key figures pledging allegiance to Karak. Notwithstanding, the Bahriyya leader, Fāris al-Dīn Aqtay (d. 652/1254) led a force towards Damascus. Upon reaching Gaza, they faced Aleppo’s troops, who, intimidated by the Egyptian army, did not engage in battle. Aqtay then had to retreat from Gaza, due to the complex military and political dynamics of the time (Ibn al-Dawādārī, 1960, 14).

Nonetheless, the Egyptians (*ahl Mişr*) revolted against the Mamluks in 649/1251 with the aim to remove the taxes imposed on them and to abolish Mamluk rule. They claimed that it was their right to rule Egypt and that *they did not recognize the rule of a slave*. Every time Aybak took to the streets, the people said, “We only want someone who is a sultan by birth” (Ibn Taghrībardī, 1963a, 13; Rabbat, 2010, 7; Ötenkaya, 2023b, 837). This unrest underscored the critical legitimacy trouble the Mamluks faced, emphasizing that establishing a stable power required overcoming these perceptions of illegitimacy. It is a well-known fact that the Mamluks faced significant legitimacy issues and were particularly sensitive about their lineage. According to Broadbridge, it is known that Hulegu insulted Qutuz in a letter by belittling his lineage (Broadbridge, 2001, 94) Therefore, in the early period, the Mamluks sought to overcome their fragile position regarding lineage through biographical works.

While the fragility of Mamluk legitimacy continued internally and externally, the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Musta‘sim sent Shaykh Najm al-Dīn al-Badrā’ī (d. 655/1257) in

650/1252 to broker a peace between al-Nāṣir Yūsuf (634–658/1236–60) and Mu‘izz Aybak. al-Nāṣir Yūsuf demanded only one condition: that the *khuṭba* and coinage in Egypt be in his name. The Baḥriyya faction, which acted as a *de facto* power, said: “We have recovered Egypt and Damascus from the hands of the Franks with our swords, and there can be no peace between us until we have the territories from Gaza to Aqaba” (Ibn al-Dawādārī, 1960, 22). The animosity between the two sides was not resolved as both sides were far from a moderate policy. However, through the insistence of al-Musta‘ṣim, at least a non-aggression pact was concluded (Ibn al-Dawādārī, 1960, 23; Humphreys, 1977, 323). Simultaneously, despite the formalization of a non-aggression treaty between Egypt and Damascus, the underlying contest for dominance persisted unabated. In 654/1256, al-Nāṣir Yūsuf sought to secure a *khil‘at* (robe of honor) from the caliph, symbolizing formal recognition and legitimacy. Concurrently, Aybak dispatched a diplomatic envoy to the caliph with the intent to obstruct any potential award of the *khil‘at* to al-Nāṣir Yūsuf. After all, this request of al-Nāṣir Yūsuf was rejected by the caliph (al-‘Aynī, 2010a, 117; Humphreys, 1977, 328–329). The ‘Abbāsīd caliph’s granting of a *khil‘at* was not a simple matter; if al-Nāṣir Yūsuf had received the caliph’s blessing directly, the fixities of the amirs in Egypt might have changed. Probably, this could have had an adverse impact on Aybak’s standing.

On the other hand, during the reign of al-Mu‘izz Aybak, a peace agreement was concluded with al-Nāṣir Yūsuf. However, this reconciliation was met with significant dissatisfaction by the Baḥriyya faction, as their primary objective remained the conquest of Egypt. Consequently, they communicated with al-Malik al-Mughīth ‘Umar of Karak and ultimately aligned themselves with his cause. Then they encouraged him to conquer Egypt, saying: “This property [rulership] belongs to your father, grandfather and uncle” (Ibn Taghrībardī, 1963a, 45). This demonstrates how even minor disagreements could result in the current sultan being abandoned by the mamluk factions, who held the authority to determine the ruler. Indeed, the Baḥriyya’s decision to align with al-Mughīth ‘Umar underscores the fluidity of loyalty within the Mamluk political system, where personal and factional interests often superseded allegiance to the sultan. Their invocation of al-Mughīth’s ancestral claims to Egypt highlights the intended use of historical and dynastic narratives to justify political ambitions and destabilize existing authority. This further reveals the precarious nature of Mamluk rule, where the sultan’s position was perpetually contingent upon the support of powerful military factions and their willingness to uphold his cause.

However, Aybak aimed to strengthen his position by proposing marriage to the daughters of the leaders of Hama and Mosul. Aybak’s main purpose was to form a political alliance with Hama and Mosul to confine al-Nāṣir Yūsuf’s influence in Syria. As soon as Shajar al-Durr became aware of this, she had him assassinated (al-‘Aynī, 2010a, 118; Humphreys, 1977, 329). Aybak’s assassination, often attributed to Shajar al-Durr’s jealousy, was motivated by concerns over diminishing her influence. To preemptively safeguard her position, she proposed marriage to al-Nāṣir Yūsuf, even offering Egypt in exchange, aiming to maintain her power (al-Şafadī, 2000a,

265; Maqrīzī, 1997a, 493; Duwaydār, 2017, 90). It should be remembered that Aybak had been elected sultan by marrying Shajar al-Durr. Aybak's decision to contract a new marriage could have led to the erosion of her power. Therefore, rather than acting out of jealousy, she might have sought to hinder this threat by considering marriage to al-Nāşir Yūsuf.

Following Mu'izz Aybak's death, his son Nur al-Dīn 'Alī (655–657/1257–59) became sultan. However, Vizier Sharaf al-Dīn al-Fā'izī (d. 655/1257) objected to the decision a few days later, arguing that the realm could not be governed by such a young ruler and that the sultanate should therefore be entrusted to al-Nāşir Yūsuf (al-'Aynī, 2010a, 143; Humphreys, 1977, 330). This proposal was not accepted by the Mu'izziyya mamluks and ultimately led to his execution (Ötenkaya, 2023b, 840). In fact, the attitude of al-Fā'izī clearly shows that, despite the Mamluks *de facto* making decisions in rule, their authority remained in a fragile condition. After all, Sayf al-Dīn Quṭuz emphasized the need for a strong leader to fend off the Mongol threat, leading to his rise as a ruler. Emphasizing the imminent danger towards Islam, he convinced the amirs of his suitability due to his bravery, military skill, and leadership, securing his position as a ruler. Nonetheless, not all supported Quṭuz; those amirs opposing Nur al-Dīn 'Alī's ouster were arrested upon their return from hunting, highlighting internal dissent within the ruling class (al-Mansūrī, 1998, 46; Surūr, 1938, 47). Quṭuz's rise to rule was driven by the Mongol threat and his prominence in the Mu'izziyya faction. His leadership was seen as vital amid existential threats towards Islam, which helped legitimize his authority. Aware of his status as a usurper, Quṭuz sought to stabilize his rule by promising that the selection of Egypt's sultan would be in the hands of senior amirs once the Mongol danger was addressed (Ibn Taghrībardī, 1963a, 55). This act impressed on Quṭuz's attempt to navigate the complex dynamics of legitimacy and authority within the socio-political context of his time. Above all, it also suggests that, beginning in the later periods of the Ayyubid rule, the authority to determine the ruler resided directly with the senior amirs themselves.

In the aftermath of the Mongol defeat at 'Ayn Jālūt, Quṭuz was assassinated on his return to Egypt and subsequently succeeded by Baybars. Al-Mustanşir was formally proclaimed caliph in Egypt, and he, in turn, delegated all political authority to Baybars (Tekindağ, 1971, 9; Aktan, 1991a, 197; Broadbridge, 2008, 31, 53; Aigle, 2015, 247; Banister, 2021, 27). The fact that the sultanate of Baybars was registered directly by al-Mustanşir provided the expected legitimacy (Heidemann, 1994, 99; Northrup, 1998b, 165; Hassan, 2016, 72). Indeed, it is known that Baybars effectively seized the power. However, it appears that his rule lacked a legal foundation (Holt, 1984, 501; Aktan, 1991b, 618). Also, Thorau's observation reveals that after Baybars ascended to power by assassinating Quṭuz, he was unable to appear publicly in Cairo, the enthronement ceremony (*mawḳib*) could not be held, and his claim to the sultanate remained confined to a limited circle (Thorau, 1992, 93; Heidemann, 1994, 99). Indeed, immediately after the allegiance ceremony for al-Mustanşir was completed, a public ceremony was held outside Qal'at al-Jabal, during which Baybars' sultanate was formally endorsed by Caliph al-Mustanşir (Lev, 2009, 13; Banister, 2021, 28).

This overtly verifies that Baybars was in need of legal recognition to consolidate his politically fragile power. In fact, the assassination of Quṭuz and Baybars' subsequent rise to power highlight the fragile and contested nature of Mamluk political legitimacy, where military prowess alone was insufficient to secure unchallenged authority. Baybars' reliance on Caliph al-Mustanşir's formal endorsement underscores the symbolic importance of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate in legitimizing Mamluk rule, even as the caliphs themselves held diminished political power. The delayed public recognition of Baybars' sultanate, including the inability to hold an immediate enthronement ceremony, reflects the initial instability and lack of widespread acceptance of his rule. Ultimately, the public ceremony outside Qal'at al-Jabal, where Baybars' sultanate was formally sanctioned by al-Mustanşir, illustrates the use of religious and ceremonial mechanisms to consolidate power and legitimacy in the eyes of the broader populace.

In addition to establishing the legitimacy, it was necessary to craft the image of an ideal ruler through biographical narratives. According to Peter M. Holt's analysis of *al-Rawḍ*, Baybars played an active role in the assassination of Turanshāh in 648/1250, effectively bringing an end to the Ayyubid dynasty. Furthermore, he seized power through usurpation by assassinating Quṭuz. As a result, it became imperative for partial historians like Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir to praise him in their writings, thereby rendering his rule more acceptable (Holt, 1995, 129). Indeed, al-Nuwayrī, whose narrative aligns with that of Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, refers to the earlier incident of Quṭuz assassinating Fāris al-Dīn Aqtay, the leader of the Baḥriyya. It is said that by doing this, he actually did something to be proud of by taking revenge on his master (al-Nuwayrī, 2004a, 305). Thus, the rise of Baybars is portrayed in a more moderate way, emphasizing that he was not a usurper but rather came to authority through the lawful selection by senior amirs.

However, al-Mustanşir's desire to revive the Baghdad-centered 'Abbāsīd caliphate was not favorable for Baybars. In fact, in Sha'ban/July, the sons of Badr al-Dīn al-Lu'lu (d. 657/1259) of Mosul, al-Malik Rukn al-Dīn Isma'il, al-Malik Mujahid Sayf al-Dīn Ishaq and al-Malik Sa'id 'Ala al-Dīn 'Alī came to Cairo. Baybars accepted their sovereignty in their respective regions and presented each of them with a *khil'at* (Maqrīzī, 1997a, 536). Subsequently, Baybars announced that he planned to send al-Mustanşir against the Mongols with a cavalry force of 10,000 men. The Lu'lu'id princes advised Baybars never to carry this out. They said that "if the Caliph recaptured Baghdad, he would expel you from Egypt. Hereupon Baybars sent only 300 cavalrymen with the caliph" (al-Maqrīzī, 1997a, 537; Aigle, 2015, 244). Indeed, according to Thorau's analysis, Baybars aimed not for a powerful caliph but for a puppet caliph. His primary goal was to legitimize his own authority. When he sent al-Mustanşir with 300 cavalrymen to face the Mongols, he was essentially sentencing him to death (Thorau, 1992, 116). Therefore, this explanation shows that Baybars' decision to send al-Mustanşir with a small force to retake Baghdad, and the subsequent abandonment by the sons of Badr al-Dīn Lu'lu, hints at Baybars' desire to distance himself from the caliph. This maneuver seems motivated by fears that a revitalized 'Abbāsīd caliphate could undermine Baybars' position.

Nonetheless, while al-Maqrīzī's account is insightful, it is derived from a later period and lacks extensive early Mamluk documentation on al-Mustaṣṣir's mission against the Mongols in Syria. Therefore, while significant for historical discourse, al-Maqrīzī's report necessitates cautious interpretation, treated as speculative yet crucial conjecture within the scholarly analysis of this period. Therefore, the historical narratives must undoubtedly be critically analyzed from several perspectives. Indeed, Reuven Amitai-Preiss, who has conducted examinations and proposed several arguments on this matter, asserts that Baybars could not have sent al-Mustaṣṣir to his death, or that even if he attempted to do so, al-Mustaṣṣir would not have easily agreed to such a fate. He also argues that Baybars, being a newly enthroned ruler, would not have had the capability to assign a large army to al-Mustaṣṣir's command even if he desired. Finally, Amitai-Preiss questions what Baybars would stand to gain by sending the caliph to his death, especially considering that he had already obtained the legitimacy he sought from the caliph (Amitai-Preiss, 1995, 59).

Nevertheless, it is understood that al-Mustaṣṣir was convinced that he would be victorious in his campaign against the Mongols. At least, Baybars had granted him numerous gifts and provided the financial and military resources he would need for the campaign (Heidemann, 1994, 102–103, 150). This suggests that al-Mustaṣṣir did not deliberately march to his death, but was rather persuaded by Baybars to embark on the campaign. More importantly, the question of what kind of personality Baybars possessed is not sufficiently addressed here. To look into this, one must examine his actions during the early years of his reign. For instance, the execution of Bahā' al-Dīn Bughdī, the imprisonment of Aqqush al-Barlī and Sayf al-Dīn Balābān al-Rashidī, and the execution of al-Mughīth 'Umar at the hands of the 'ulamā' collectively point to Baybars as a deeply suspicious ruler (Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, 1976, 169–170; al-Yūnīnī, 1955, 194). Having secured the legitimacy and recognition he sought from al-Mustaṣṣir, Baybars may have perceived the caliph as a potential threat, even if there was no immediate cause for concern. Of course, it may not be entirely appropriate to compare the aforementioned amirs with al-Mustaṣṣir. However, the question of what specific crimes, apart from al-Barlī's, led to the execution of these amirs remains inadequately addressed. Moreover, as previously mentioned, Baybars had provided significant support to al-Mustaṣṣir, assigning military and administrative officials to his retinue. Also, isolating al-Mustaṣṣir, as seen in the case of al-Hākim, could have posed a challenge to Baybars' rule. For this reason, it is not implausible that a sultan like Baybars—known for his suspicion of even the smallest threats—might have sought to eliminate al-Mustaṣṣir. Additionally, the Lu'lu'id princes are known to have fled from al-Jazira under Mongol pressure and sought refuge with Baybars in Cairo (Ibn al-Dawādārī, 1960, 81). Despite being fully aware of the Mongols' formidable strength in Iraq, why did Baybars send al-Mustaṣṣir with only a small force? Hence, it is relatively clear that al-Mustaṣṣir, who initially had sufficient support, was later betrayed. Notably, the Lu'lu'id princes, who were charged with supporting al-Mustaṣṣir, withdrew their forces and returned to their own territories. After all, the Lu'lu'id princes continued to be acknowledged by a ruler as cautious

and shrewd as Baybars. Indeed, Mustafa Banister, who focuses particularly on this issue, highlights the uncertainties surrounding Baybars' plans following the Baghdad campaign (Banister, 2021, 33). Moreover, it becomes evident that Baybars' primary aim was not to seize Baghdad, but rather to threaten the Mongols or establish a buffer zone in the region. Additionally, it is obvious that al-Mustanşir was abandoned at the most critical moment of the battle. Not only did he lack the support of Turkmen and Bedouin forces, but even amirs such as Sābiq al-Din Būzbā, whom Baybars had personally sent to organise the battle plan, withdrew (Heidemann, 1994, 150–151, 155–156). Consequently, this situation makes it difficult to entirely dismiss the notion that al-Mustanşir was deliberately left to his fate.

### THE LEGITIMIZING EFFECT OF APOCALYPTIC, 'ADL AND JIHAD NARRATIVES

Although the Mamluks had effectively seized power, their rule was highly fragile. Therefore, they needed to first consolidate their authority. Indeed, a careful analysis of studies on this issue reveals that the Mamluks sought to distinguish themselves through the identity of being *the protectors of religion*. In fact, as Donald P. Little mentioned, it is emphasized that Islam was saved from destruction thanks to the wars the Mamluks waged against the Mongols. The Mamluks are depicted as if they were *God's specially chosen representatives* (Little, 1983, 165–166; Frenkel, 2014a, 7–9). Additionally, according to Broadbridge, they sought to overcome these issues by achieving victories against infidel outsiders, proudly positioning themselves as the protectors of religion (Broadbridge, 2008, 12–13, 16, 30).

However, it becomes evident that the Mamluk legitimization was influenced not only by *jihad* but also by numerous narrative constructions rooted in apocalyptic patterns. According to Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir (d. 692/1293), Quṭuz was a mamluk of Ibn 'Adim or Ibn Zā'im. When he struck Quṭuz and he cried, he did not eat or drink anything for a whole day. When his master inquired if this was the reason for his distress, he said: "By God, I am not weeping for this, but for my father and my grandfather are Muslims sons of Muslims. I am Maḥmūd ibn Mamdūd ibn Khwarazm Shah, from the children of rulers" (al-Şafadī, 2000d, 189; Holt, 1996, 134). A narrative similar to that of al-Şafadī is also conveyed by al-'Aynī. However, a notably distinct narrative can be observed here: "Due to my lineage (my ten ancestors are Muslims, sons of Muslims) as a Muslim and a *mujahid* [holy warrior], it is incumbent upon me to defeat the Mongols and become the sultan of Egypt" (al-'Aynī, 2010a, 255).

Is this narrative truthful? In other words, can we consider every account in the chronicles to be accurate? For instance, how can we be certain that up to ten generations of Quṭuz's ancestors were indeed Muslims? It seems necessary to return to the issue highlighted by Stephan Conermann in his work *On the Art of Writing History in Mamluk Times*: "Most scholars prefer not to know how a chronicle works, how it is structured, which narrative strategies are used, or which genre-specific principles are operative. Rather, they desire to know only

whether the described experiences are true” (Conermann, 2018, 7). In this context, the fictional-apocalyptic narrative allusively points out that Qutuz sought to strengthen his sultanate not only through his Muslim and *mujahid* identity but also by generating the impression that his reign had been predestined by God. When the narrative is meticulously analyzed, it becomes evident that it emphasizes the Muslim identity while portraying the inevitable defeat of infidels. By using the believer-infidel dichotomy, it appears to be an attempt to justify or render acceptable his ambiguous past. Moreover, Holt, who analyzes this anecdote from various perspectives, reveals that the narratives are dated back to the year when Qutuz deposed al-Manşūr ‘Alī, the son of Aybak, from the throne. He claims that these accounts were created out of a concern to legitimize the sultanate he had seized through usurpation (Holt, 1996, 135).

Concordantly, it is observed that Baybars employed a similar policy, albeit implicitly. Based on the understanding provided by Ibn al-Nafis (d. 687/1288), the only way to contend with the infidel Mongols was to adopt a moral disposition akin to theirs. A merciless, stern, and perpetually battle-ready sultan was deemed necessary to protect the religion and its community. Furthermore, such a ruler needed to originate from the same regions where the Mongols themselves were nurtured (Ibn al-Nafis, 1984, 230; Meyerhof & Schacht, 1968, 33, 68). In Ibn al-Nafis’s account, Baybars is not explicitly mentioned; however, the content strongly evokes his persona. The recurring emphasis on the theme of *jihād* against infidels may have been intended to highlight Baybars’ military identity, thereby enhancing his acceptability and legitimacy in the Egypt and Syria. For instance, in 657/1259, a meeting was held in Damascus on how to deal with the Mongols. The Qaymariyya, ‘Azīziyya and Bahriyya also attended the meeting. At this time, Zayn al-Khafizī, one of the leading amirs of al-Nāşir Yūsuf, said: “Those who say that Hülegü Khan can be resisted with the remaining soldiers have no wisdom. Many countries have fallen into their hands. If you think of the society’s interest, obey him.” Baybars strongly criticized this speech and slapped Zayn al-Khafizī. Then he said: “You are the cause of destruction of the Muslims” (Ibn Duqmāk, 1985, 841; Ötenkaya, 2023b, 841). Hence, Baybars’ perception of the struggle against the Mongols as the sole means of ensuring the survival of Islam positioned him as an apocalyptical savior figure (Kruk, 1995, 328). In this context, Baybars can be seen as embodying a messianic role within the apocalyptic narratives, portraying the Mongols as a *Gog and Magog-like* force threatening the Muslim world. Thus, his political and military campaigns were imbued with a divine mission, granting them deeper spiritual significance.

However, we see that Baybars, first and foremost, appropriated the events that took root in the geographical space of Syria, tried to establish a relationship with great legendary figures, and thus tried to create *the cultural memory* with the Bilād al-Shām. Indeed, within the biographical work *al-Rawḍ*, Baybars is portrayed as being connected to other eminent Muslim rulers and is depicted

as their legitimate successor. Significantly, these narratives foster a sense of historical identity and continuity, with their primary aim being the revitalization and reclamation of the past (Troadec, 2015, 115–117). Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir’s essential point is that by narrating the heroism of Baybars, he associates him with the Prophet himself, the faithful heroes of the conquest, and bases him on the Prophet, thus legitimizing his current reign (Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, 1976, 53, 56). Similarly, the findings of Stephen Humphreys on this matter are particularly significant. According to him, Mamluk sultans and some senior amirs would periodically assemble their troops in arenas resembling a hippodrome, using various ceremonies to emphasize the military identity of their state and their mission of *jihad* against the enemies of God. In fact, during the weekly *maẓālim* sessions held at the Qal‘at al-Jabal, the ruler’s commitment to justice (‘*adl*) and adherence to religious law (Sharī‘a) was also prominently displayed (Humphreys, 1972, 87). A similar situation is strikingly evident in the case of Qalāwūn. In his advice to his son, he emphasized the critical importance of *maẓālim* cases, asserting that the sultan must personally participate in these trials and side with justice (Fuess, 2009, 131). By doing so, a ruler would be distinguished as just, a key attribute for legitimizing authority. These practices undoubtedly reflect a connection with *an idealized ruler identity* from the past. The construction of the image of the ideal Muslim ruler can be said to have played a critical role in reinforcing the established sovereignty. Indeed, as noted by Yaacov Lev, it is evident that the legitimization of the Mamluks was influenced not only by *jihad* but also by moral values such as justice and charity (*al-amr bi al-ma‘rūf*) (Lev, 2009, 13). In this regard, Clifford emphasizes that Baybars secured his power not through harsh policies, but by acting based on justice and protecting the interests of the senior amirs (Clifford, 2013, 107).

However, it is important to note that justice and adherence to religion were not merely virtues but necessities. As Aigle emphasizes, during the period of the Mongol invasion of Baghdad, the debate over whether *a just-infidel rule was preferable to an oppressive-Muslim rule* was significant. The Mongol invasions highlighted to Muslims the critical importance of just governance as a political concept. Additionally, it was emphasized that a form of rule distant from Sharī‘a would inevitably lead to failure (Aigle, 2015, 211–212). In this context, the Mamluks’ use of religious and justice-based propaganda to present themselves as the protectors of the society could help them overcome their political fragility. Indeed, Ibn Taymiyya expressed a similar view, stating: “God supports a just state, even if it is unbelieving, but does not support an unjust state, even if it is Muslim” (Ibn Taymiyya, 2004, 63). Thus, the principle of justice lay at the center of Ibn Taymiyyah’s political thought. For him, justice meant that everything was in its rightful place and also encompassed the fulfillment of trusts.

In the discourse articulated by Ibn Taymiyya, the prioritization of justice over faith emerges as a particularly significant dimension within Islamic political thought. The emphasis on justice, the safeguarding of the populace, and the

promotion of their welfare appears to be closely associated with the context of Mamluk governance. This focus implicitly suggests that the Muslim community experienced a higher standard of living during this era, thereby offering an indirect form of legitimization to the Mamluk sultans, who were perceived as guarantors of such societal conditions. Indeed, it is evident that Ibn Taymiyya developed his theories in accordance with the conditions of his time. For instance, while he mentions the necessity of the imam or head of state being from the Quraysh, he also dictates certain foundational principles. The primary focus is the preservation of religion and worldly affairs, the establishment of justice and the well-being of the people (Ibn Taymiyya, 1997, 38; Lambton, 2004, 150). It is certainly possible to view the attitudes of scholars like Ibn Taymiyya as efforts to render the Mamluk sultans credible and authoritative in comparison to the caliphs.

Nevertheless, the conquest narratives (*futuhatnāme*) served as a legitimization of power, and on the other, as a way for the powerbroker to connect with the golden age of early Islam. Mamluk historians see Baybars' military campaigns as a resurgence of conquest. Indeed, in Troadec's assessment, Baybars' conquests not only stirred the memory of the Prophet and the Muslim rulers who led expeditions to the Arab-Byzantine border, but also showed the literary examples found in the Turko-Persian world (Troadec, 2015, 122–123; Ötenkaya, 2021, 93). In the narrative constructed by Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, the recounting of Baybars' military conquests is strategically used as a means to forge a link with historical precedents, thereby leveraging these achievements for political advantage (Troadec, 2015, 132). The strategy of framing Baybars' achievements within a broader historical narrative was designed to enhance his political standing by associating his victories with esteemed historical moments. This not only emphasized his military capabilities but also integrated his reign into a legacy of historical successes, providing his leadership with continuity, legitimacy, and a sense of divine approval, thus elevating his reputation among peers and for future generations. Amidst the Mongol threat to the Islamic world, with Damascus under siege and other regions overwhelmed, Egypt stood as the final bulwark. At the Battle of 'Ayn Jālūt, Qūṭuz led a decisive charge, and with the support of the Baḥriyya and Egyptian forces, they achieved a significant victory over the Mongols, including the death of Kitbugha, the Mongol commander, marking a turning point in the Mongol expansion into the Islamic lands (al-'Aynī, 2010a, 243). After this triumph, the Muslims, who had given up on the victory against the Mongols, regained hope. Upon Qūṭuz's arrival in Damascus, some poets said: "*Kufr* [infidelity] has been completely cleansed from Damascus. Islam with Qūṭuz has been restored after a period of weakness. Thus, God has made it obligatory for us to be grateful" (al-'Aynī, 2010a, 246). For the Mamluks, victory over the Mongols was not merely about reclaiming lost territory. They also propagated the narrative that their salvation was achieved thanks to Qūṭuz's identity as a *mujahid*.

According to Yehoshua Frenkel, Baybars is praised for reviving Islam's golden age through his campaigns against Crusaders in Syria, seen as Islam's defender and likened to Alexander the Great (Frenkel, 2014b, 70–71). In addition, Baybars established a link between his achievements for the religion and the so-called golden age of Islam and placed himself at the center of this plexus of relations. After the conquest of Arsuf on Rajab 22, 663/May 10, 1265, Baybars is praised as follows: “The best blessing is the one that comes after despair, after a time when rulers are weak, and people neglect everything. The greatest of blessings is to reunite Islam and protect it against the Franks and Tatars” (Ibn al-Dawādārī, 1960, 109; Hillenbrand, 2017, 332). Baybars seems to have sought political advantage through his *jihad* policy. It is clear from Ibn al-Dawādārī's (d. after 736/1336) account that Baybars was considered an ideal ruler due to his successful battles against the Crusaders and Mongols. In other words, keeping the rhetoric of the infidel in mind helped to increase personal influence. Baybars also is compared to the Ayyubid sultans without naming them and even emphasized as being greater than them. The rhetoric is such that we infer that he saved Islam from extinction. Again, after these successful conquests, Baybars said: “Those who serve in the army are the best of people. Therefore, they must be listened to” (Maqrīzī, 1997b, 26). Thus, it can be understood that Baybars, by centering the concept of a military-state structure, sought to subtly establish obedience to himself, while simultaneously alluding to the identity of the *Mahdi* (savior).

Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir's account of Baybars is functionally like Bahā' al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād's (d. 632/1234) account of Salāh al-Dīn. However, there is no pious narrative in Baybars' account as in Salāh al-Dīn's. Instead, Baybars' bravery and warriorism dominate the narrative. Thanks to such qualities, he is praised for seizing the throne from his predecessor Quṭuz with the sword and without any help (Holt, 1980, 32). Therefore, while the narratives of belligerence, heroism, and *jihad* served as legitimizing elements, the account of Baybars seizing power by assassinating Quṭuz suggests an attempt to legitimize his reign by framing it around this act of regicide.

However, the narrative that Baybars became sultan by killing a ruler has caused confusion among Mamluk scholars. For instance, Qāsim Abduh Qāsim suggests that Baybars' killing of Quṭuz gives the impression that kingship was a reward granted to the one who assassinated the sultan, supporting the theory of *sovereignty belongs to the victorious* in the early Mamluk context (Qāsim, 1998b, 155). Similarly, Albrecht Fuess states that Turkish law was in effect during the early Mamluk period, mentioning the validity of the understanding that *the one who kills the sultan becomes sultan* (Fuess, 2013, 100). Carl F. Petry also argued that becoming a ruler through regicide in the Mamluk period occurred in accordance with Turkish law (Petry, 2022, 44). However, it is evident that the senior amirs thoroughly deliberated the issue following Quṭuz's assassination. If the notion of ascending to the sultanate through regicide was strictly in line with Turkish law, the sultanate

should have been granted directly to Baybars without any debate among the leading amirs (al-Yūnīnī, 1954, 371). Indeed, according to Baybars al-Mansūrī, it is known that the sultanate was also offered to other amirs (Baybars al-Mansūrī, 1998, 54). Moreover, based on the information provided by Shāfi‘ī b. ‘Alī, it appears that Fāris al-Dīn Aqtay al-Musta‘rib hastily pledged allegiance to Baybars to prevent al-Sayf al-Dīn Balābān al-Rashīdī from ascending to the sultanate (Shāfi‘ī b. ‘Alī, 1989, 67–68). Therefore, it is understood that Aqtay’s main concern was to act with the aim of legitimizing Baybars’ sultanate in some way.

Baybars’ killing of Quṭuz was seen not as betrayal, but as an act of revenge, because Quṭuz had earlier killed Baybars’ master, Fāris al-Dīn Aqtay (Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, 1976, 63; Holt, 1980, 34; Flinterman, 2012, 43). Thanks to this legitimizing narrative, Baybars is not portrayed as someone who killed the ruler and betrayed him, but on the contrary, as an *ideal person* who avenged his master (Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, 1976, 67; Khuwayṭir, 1978, 24). In Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir’s narrative, it is seen that Baybars, who came to power by slaughtering a ruler consciously, tried to mitigate the act of killing with various arguments.

Robert Irwin, who has studied Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir’s *al-Rawḍ*, claims that this work was dictated by Baybars himself to present and legitimize him as the ideal sultan. According to him, this work is concerned with the heroization of the Mamluk sultan. However, there is almost no real historical data in this work. Its main purpose is the legitimization and cultization of Baybars. Accordingly, there are mostly imaginary battles, narratives that emphasize his heroic identity and a series of fascinating events. Baybars is an ideal ruler who fights a series of enemies both inside and outside the country. In all these wars, the people of Syria-Egypt helped Baybars and stood by his side during the Crusader and Mongol attacks (Irwin, 1998, 143). As a matter of fact, in the narrative about his companions, Baybars is mentioned as follows:

*Baybars always ensured their well-being. It was Baybars who saved them from the tyranny of Turanshāh ibn Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb. If it were not for him, no one from Bahriyya would have survived. It was thanks to him that they were treated with respect in Egypt during the Mu‘izziyya period. This blessing was taken away from them when they headed for Damascus. When they reached Damascus, he again provided them with provisions and gave them various favors. They continued to earn their sustenance thanks to his sword (Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, 1976, 73).*

Irwin’s analysis of *al-Rawḍ* presents Baybars as the central figure of the Mamluk state, attributing to him a decisive role in its governance and depicting him as a successor to al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, an indispensable actor in the state’s continuity. Such an interpretation seems oriented more toward the legitimization of Baybars’ rule than toward an objective reconstruction of historical events. The fall of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate in 656/1258 and the execution of al-Musta‘sim marked a point where the caliphate no longer represented actual political authority for many Sunni

Muslims, who saw the Mamluks as divinely guided protectors of Islam. This backdrop set the stage for the Mamluks' pivotal role in halting the Mongol advance at the Battle of 'Ayn Jālūt in 658/1260, cementing their leadership in the Muslim world (Steenbergen, 2016, 16–19).

Nonetheless, in the pre-modern period, praise for leaders often highlighted their religious and martial qualities, evolving into the Islamic *jihad* concept, emphasizing both piety and heroism. Indeed, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) primarily emphasized the religious character of Baybars. He was commended for his moderation, efforts to restore the caliphate, and for appointing impartial chief judges from various sects. He is also recognized as a devout leader who prohibited alcohol and eradicated mischief, blending religious observance with his governance (Ibn Kathīr, 1988, 276). Similarly, according to al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333), Baybars was extremely devoted to religious principles and commandments. This devotion was so strong that he would even give up his favorite amirs for it. As a matter of fact, Baybars had one of his most distinguished amirs, al-Sayf al-Dīn Balābān al-Rashīdī, (d. 661/1263), whom he had treated with great generosity and honors, arrested just because he was fond of entertainment and drinking (al-Nuwayrī, 2004b, 52). This narrative underscores the sentiments, thoughts, and religious/moral assessments of the Islamic community, illustrating how narratives serve to unveil societal values and consensus. It suggests that rulers were idealized by emphasizing traits widely revered within Islamic society, thereby reflecting communal ideals and aspirations. Moreover, when we return to the day Baybars was chosen as sultan, the name of Balābān al-Rashīdī also appeared in the discussions of the sultanate. Therefore, it can be said that Baybars could not fully trust him. Instead of directly eliminating al-Rashīdī, he might have wanted to have him killed under religious/moral pretexts.

Ibn Shaddād in his work *Ta'rikh al-Malik al-Zāhir* tries to show that Baybars was the ideal ruler. He never neglected to pray five times a day in any period of his life, taught the Qur'an to his subjects, became their imam, and led them in prayer; these are among the traits he is praised for. It is mentioned that he forbade drinking alcohol as soon as he became sultan and that he himself never drank alcohol. It is also stated that Baybars devoted himself to *jihad* in the way of God, that he had no other goal but to gain His pleasure, and that he fought for the sake of the word of God (Ibn Shaddād, 1983, 299–301; Marsot, 2007, 33). According to Aigle, Baybars' presentation of himself as an ideal ruler also had a divine aspect. Specifically, the inscription carved into the walls of Karak castle attributes to Baybars the title *the shadow of God on earth* (*ẓill Allāh fī al-ard*), which falls within the framework of the ideal ruler's qualities. In Karak, Baybars was also described as the helper of creation (*mughīth al-khalq*). The term al-Mughīth is one of the names of God, and according to commentators, God alleviates people's distress when they call upon Him. This title implies that just as God is the refuge of believers, a ruler bearing this title serves as a protector for his subjects (Aigle, 2003, 61). While Baybars is indeed a historical figure, the purpose of *sīrat* literature, and inscription

aiming to idealize him, must be acknowledged. Without considering this intent, readers might misconstrue historical facts, influenced by the narrative's elevated depiction. Therefore, it is vital to recognize that historical narratives without clear spatial and temporal references, containing elements intended to glorify a sultan, are fundamentally aimed at idealization.

Nevertheless, considering the early years of Qalāwūn's sultanate, Sunqur al-Ashqar rebelled against him and asked the amirs to accept him as their sultan, while he stated that Qalāwūn had died while drinking alcohol (Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, 1961, 61). Of course, al-Ashqar had fabricated a story for his own sultanate, but as it should be noted, he did not mention the ordinary death of Qalāwūn, but stated that he died because of drinking. Even this fabricated report clearly shows that drinking was a condemned habit. Therefore, it can be argued that characterizing a person as an alcoholic to offend him, to expose his injustice, and to criticize him for being un-Islamic and illegitimate can become an element of political gain for the accuser. Moreover, this accusation could undermine the public image of a ruler, portraying him as morally corrupt and unfit for leadership. Thus, fabricated narratives about drinking were not merely personal insults but political tools used in political rivalries to delegitimize opponents.

In *al-Faql al-ma'sūr* by Shāfi'ī b. 'Alī, Qalāwūn, like Baybars, is praised, his unique position in terms of state government is mentioned, and his importance for Muslims is emphasized from a supra-historical perspective. In the first part of the work, there is information that Qalāwūn entered the service of al-Şāliḥ Ayyūb and made him one of his special men. After his death, he was included in the service of Fāris al-Dīn Aqtay al-Jamādār during the reign of al-Shajar al-Durr. Afterwards, he became an amir under Quṭuz, who was constantly consulted and was present in the councils. After his assassination, Qalāwūn's power did not disappear. Finally, during the reign of Baybars, the property was completely in his hands. The stability of Baybars was due to his skill and he made Qalāwūn his most distinguished amir. He held a position that no other amir or sultan could easily trust (al-Asqalānī, 1998, 25). However, there are many problems with Shāfi'ī ibn 'Alī's account as well. The most important of these is the lack of accurate evaluation of historical data. Namely, Qalāwūn is evaluated as if he was one of the distinguished amirs who were present in the privy council during the reign of Quṭuz. However, Qalāwūn was captured in the war against Egypt (Ibn al-Dawādārī, 1960, 38; al-Nuwayrī, 2004a, 280; al-Şafadī 2000b, 208). Therefore, there is no information that he was treated other than as a prisoner during this period. However, despite the lack of reliable data, an effort seems to have been made to construct a reputable prototype of Qalāwūn by portraying him as a consistently positive figure across all periods. This suggests a deliberate narrative aimed at solidifying his legitimacy and elevating his historical stature, potentially overlooking or downplaying any contradictory accounts or criticisms of his rule.

Northrup's observations about the structures commissioned by Qalāwūn offer a fascinating insight into his political and ideological strategies. According to her, the hospital built directly across from the tomb of his former master, al-Şāliḥ Ayyūb,

symbolized Qalāwūn's allegiance to the Ayyubid ruler. By doing so, Qalāwūn sought to portray himself as the legitimate heir of his master. Notably, during his inaugural visit to the hospital, Qalāwūn first paid respects at al-Şāliḥ Ayyūb's tomb. Furthermore, his choice to build a hospital instead of a *madrassa* reflects a deliberate effort to connect himself with figures like Nur al-Dīn and Salah al-Dīn. Both leaders were renowned not only for their *jihad* but also for their contributions to public welfare through institutions such as hospitals, thereby securing widespread public support (Northrup, 1998b, 119–120). Thereby, Qalāwūn's decision to align his legacy with public welfare institutions highlights a nuanced understanding of power, where legitimacy is drawn not solely from military might but from public perception. By intertwining his identity with that of his predecessors through symbolic architecture, he redefined political inheritance as both ideological and social.

## DIVINE GRACE

The literature on Mamluk history contains an abundant number of narratives centered on divine favour, eschatology, and apocalyptic themes. These narratives are sometimes employed to explain political events, while at other times, they are subtly crafted to serve certain agendas. Undoubtedly, one of the purposes of such narratives was to legitimize or idealize ruler in question and, in a sense, to attribute *divine endorsement* to their authority. Indeed, in the early period of the Mamluks, especially during the reigns of Quṭuz, Baybars, Qalāwūn, al-Ashraf Khalīl, and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, there are accounts of receiving divine blessings from God. When al-Mu'izz Aybak became sultan, Quṭuz, together with his companions, addressed al-Maghribī al-munajjim and asked him *who would become sultan after his master and who would defeat the Mongols*. Thereupon al-Maghribī said: “O ḥawand, I see five letters without a dot for this person”. Quṭuz asked him *whether this name could be Maḥmūd b. Mamdūd*<sup>4</sup> and he said, “I see nothing else but this name”. Quṭuz then said, “that he was the one and that he would defeat the Mongols and avenge his ancestor Khwarazmshahs” (al-Şafadī, 2000d, 189; al-Yūnīnī, 1954, 369). Although the veracity of the anecdote is uncertain, it suggests that Quṭuz fictionalized an apocalyptic narrative to bolster his reign, aiming for legitimacy through divine grace. He claimed that descent from the Khwarazmshahs, positioning himself within a noble lineage, and sought prominence by intending to defeat the Mongols threatening the Islamic community.

Similarly, Baybars used a divine narrative, recounting his journey across the desert with three men after a defeat, during which God miraculously provided rain and sustenance for his horse. This narrative continued after his ascent to the throne, claiming divine protection and sovereignty were bestowed upon him, pre-

4 According to the narrative, the name seen by al-Maghribī is given as Maḥmūd b. Mamdūd (مودم نوب نوم حم). In other words, Quṭuz is clearly claiming that it was divinely preordained for him to ascend the throne after his master Aybak.

venting any harm from reaching him (Holt, 1975, 245). Confirming this, Thorau states that Baybars was endowed with sovereignty and rulership by God (Thorau, 1992, 114). Also, the monument Baybars built to commemorate the Battle of ‘Ayn Jālūt is an indication that he wanted to engrave this victory in people’s minds. The area where the battle took place was sanctified and turned into a location mentioned by God in the parable of Talūt and Jālūt (Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, 1976, 91). He considered this victory bestowed by God as a blessing to him. At the same time, Baybars attributes a divine blessing by identifying himself with Talūt in an imaginary way.

It is evident that eschatological expectations and apocalyptic narratives played a significant role in shaping historiography. Aigle’s meticulous analysis of Ibn al-Nafis’s implicit accounts is of great importance. The discussion revolves around the idea that the sins committed by the people and the corruption of religion in Syria-Palestine led to their downfall at the hands of infidels. Without explicitly naming Baybars, Ibn al-Nafis portrays him as a figure akin to the Alexander of his time, emphasizing his role in delivering salvation to the people (Aigle, 2015, 236–237; Meyerhof & Schacht, 1968, 66–67). That is to say, the narrative emphasizes that Muslims fell into religious degeneration, strayed from the commands and limits (*hudūd*) set by God, and as a consequence, were subjected to the invasions of the infidel Mongols. Ultimately, Baybars is portrayed as reviving the faith and putting an end to these invasions, thereby delivering the Islamic community to salvation.

Al-Yūnīnī (d. 701/1302) quotes Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Izz ad-Dīn al-Hasan al-Qaymarī as follows: “I saw white birds striking the faces of the Mongols [in this battle], which is clearly nothing but the favour of God upon the Muslims” (al-Yūnīnī, 1954, 435). The assessment that the victory was solely due to God’s grace, without mentioning the details of the battle, suggests that the Muslims were directly protected by God and is the result of a desire to establish their righteousness or legitimacy.

Baybars’ victories against the Crusaders and the Mongols were considered by historians as the grace of God upon him, emphasizing that Baybars was in the way of God, that he served Him throughout his life, and that he was an ideal sultan. Likewise, the Mongols were regarded as blasphemers and the Crusaders as infidels. One of these narratives is about the events of 675/1276:

*Baybars acted as soon as he received the news that the Mongols would attack Damascus. He advanced until the vicinity of Elbistan. He appointed Shams al-Dīn Sunqur al-Ashqar as the commander of the army. He encountered the Mongol commander Giray and defeated the army of one thousand to three thousand men under his command. Baybars then continued his advance and fought a second battle with the Mongols, this time a fierce one. With the help of God, the Muslims were victorious in this battle too. God helped the Muslims against the polytheists and gave them victory (al-‘Aynī, 2010b, 157).*

Al-‘Aynī (d. 855/1451) attributes the Mongol defeat to divine intervention, linking victories of Baybars and legitimacy to God’s favour and using this narrative against the Ilkhanids for political gain. Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir presents Baybars as Salāh al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī’s successor, even suggesting Baybars surpassed him, a sentiment echoed by Holt who regards Baybars as a superior military leader. Furthermore, according to Carole Hillenbrand, the biographies by Shāfi‘ī b. ‘Alī and ‘Izz ad-Dīn Ibn Shaddād (d. 684/1285) hail Baybars as the pivotal figure in reclaiming lands from the Crusaders (Hillenbrand, 2017, 340).

Nevertheless, just like Baybars, Qalāwūn also sought to establish a direct connection with God, positioning divine authority as the ultimate source of his actions. Qalāwūn emphasized his identity as a warrior of *jihad* through the title *Sayf al-Dīn* (sword of the faith), employing it for political purposes. This invocation underscores the Mamluks’ reliance on moral justification as a cornerstone of their rule and authority. The reference to the sword metaphorically highlights the supremacy of military power, reflecting its central role in consolidating and projecting political dominance within the realm. Indeed, by emphasizing that Qalāwūn was divinely chosen, the connection with the caliphate was deliberately severed, asserting that Qalāwūn’s presence alone sufficed for governance (Northrup, 1998b, 168, 173). This narrative alludes that Qalāwūn did not require the caliphate as a legitimizing factor. Instead, his legitimacy was derived directly from divine authority and the rhetoric of *jihad*, underscoring his independence from traditional sources of political validation. Indeed, this suggests that the caliphate was not always essential for the sultan’s authority. For instance, during Qalāwūn’s reign, it is evident that the sultanate was deliberately emphasized and even elevated to a primary position. This renewal highlights an intentional restructuring of political legitimacy, placing the sultan at the center of authority.

However, Qalāwūn successfully captured Marqab in 678/1279, which previous rulers including Baybars, failed to achieve despite multiple attempts. According to Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, their efforts never brought them close to capturing it, with each attempt thwarted by various issues. This victory was attributed to divine intervention, suggesting that God reserved Marqab’s conquest for Qalāwūn, ultimately granting Muslims victory through heavenly support (Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, 1961, 77–79). Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir narration seems to be an attempt to demonstrate the uniqueness of Qalāwūn by comparing him with other rulers. By explaining that he conquered Marqab thanks to the support of God, a fortified fortress, which was considered impossible to be captured, was taken by means of Qalāwūn.

Qalāwūn fought the Battle of Ḥimṣ with the Mongols in 680/1281. In this war, various exaggerations were made to aggrandize the victory, and it was announced that God’s help was only with the Muslims as follows:

*On Rajab 14, 680 [October 29, 1281], we struck a blow against the enemy in front of Ḥimṣ. The enemy troops numbered a hundred thousand or more cavalry. The battle began at dawn and continued until evening. In the end, God helped us with*

*His conquest and His blessings. Praise be to God, who humiliated the enemy and gave victory to the Muslims* (Ibn Habib, 1976, 64).

In this narrative, Qalāwūn is depicted as engaging in direct connection with God, articulating the belief that divine intervention secured their victory over the Mongols. Simultaneously, this discourse functions as a mechanism to affirm Qalāwūn's righteousness and legitimacy, particularly within the framework of his *jihad* policy, by establishing a profound connection with the supreme being.

Qalāwūn passed away in Shawwal 689/October 1290. Subsequently, Al-Ashraf Khalīl ascended to power and sought the endorsement of his succession from Fath al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir. Nevertheless, Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir declined this request, citing that Qalāwūn had not sanctioned it (*bi-ghayri 'alāmati al-Malik al-Manṣūr*). al-Ashraf Khalīl then repeated his request. In response, Fath al-Dīn quoted Qalāwūn as saying: "O Fath al-Dīn, I did not appoint Khalīl as the heir apparent for the Muslims," and handed over the certificate to al-Ashraf Khalīl without seal. He then said: "O Fath al-Dīn, this certificate was granted to me by God, not the Sultan" (Ibn al-Furāt, 1939, 99). It is clear that al-Ashraf Khalīl's insistence on Qādī Fath al-Dīn was obviously motivated by a desire to ensure his legitimacy. As a matter of fact, when he finally receives the sultanate's certificate, albeit unapproved, he states that this is an event that was not performed by his father but by God, indicating that he has been authorized from a higher authority.

After al-Ashraf Khalīl captured Acre in 690/1290, Shaykh Badr al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. 'Umar, one of the merchants of Cairo, praised him in an ode he wrote as follows:

*You have left neither a refuge for the disbelievers nor a hope for religion. You gave up hunting, did not look back and chased only his dream. He obeyed when you commanded him and followed your command after his ancestors. This victory has been realized in eternity at your hands, while others still seek to profit from it* (Ibn Habib, 1976, 141).

In this ode, al-Ashraf Khalīl is extolled as the conqueror of Acre, with his achievement being intricately tied to divine favor. It emphasizes that the conquest was pre-ordained in eternity to be accomplished solely by al-Ashraf Khalīl. Furthermore, the implication that others continue to seek benefit from this conquest suggests a subtle critique directed at Baybars and Qalāwūn. This is particularly significant given the historical context, as both rulers had previously attempted to capture Acre but were unsuccessful. Thus, the ode not only celebrates al-Ashraf Khalīl's triumph but also implicitly underscores his unique and divinely sanctioned position.

Conversely, similar legitimizing acts can be seen in the interesting events surrounding the birth of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. Ibn al-Dawādārī mentions a star in the east during his birth. In the year of al-Nāṣir's birth, three comets were seen in Mosul, one after the other. This signified that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad would live three times

30 years (Ibn al-Dawādārī, 1960, 272–273). Another similar account can be seen in the dream interpretation of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. In a dream, a blessed person saw ‘Alī ibn Abū Tālib traveling from Hejaz to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. This was said to signify that he would recapture Baghdad (Ibn al-Dawādārī, 1960, 274). Holt, who analyzes these predictions historically, argues that these anecdotes actually date back much earlier, with very similar narratives being told during the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods, and that they were reimagined and expanded after 710/1310 during the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. Moreover, just like the prophecies made during the era of Quṭuz, he has determined that the narratives produced during the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad also originated from Syria (Holt, 1996, 138). This suggests that such narratives were not merely coincidental or spiritual but were deliberately constructed to serve political purposes, embedding the ruler’s legitimacy within a framework of religious and cosmic significance. This practice reflects a broader trend in which rulers reinforced religious and celestial symbolism to consolidate power and inspire loyalty among their subjects.

However, in the late seventh/thirteenth century, Ghāzān Khan’s Anatolian governor, Sülemish, initiated a rebellion against the Ilkhanids and sought an alliance with the Mamluks. Through an envoy sent to Cairo, he proclaimed that the Sultan Lājīn was divinely chosen to govern the earth and emphasized that obedience to God and His Prophet was best demonstrated through allegiance to Lājīn (Broadbridge, 2008, 70–71). It is evident from Broadbridge’s observations that Lājīn was described as being directly sent by God as a result of His divine grace. This narrative aligns with Mamluk ideology and reinforces their legitimacy, portraying their existence as the shadow of God on earth. The depiction of Lājīn as a ruler chosen by divine grace underscores the intertwining of religious authority with political legitimacy in Mamluk ideology. As well, this narrative not only solidified their authority but also elevated their governance as a sacred mission endorsed by God.

#### THE LEGITIMIZING ROLE OF THE ‘ULAMĀ’

Emphasizing the Islamic identity plays a crucial role in the legitimization of the ruler. Historically, the ‘ulamā’ have been instrumental in defining legitimate boundaries in numerous aspects of the political life. The rulers relied on the ‘ulamā’s legitimizing authority to ensure the effective governance of their territories (Ashūr, 1992, 173–175). Openly acting in contradiction to Sharī‘a or pursuing policies contrary to the decisions of the ‘ulamā’ was illegitimate for a ruler. While it might have been possible to govern the state by force, acting in a manner that was not approved by the ‘ulamā’ could render the ruler’s actions illegitimate, potentially making them a usurper (Nielsen, 1984, 167). Moreover, it is well-documented that within the state, stakeholders as influential as the sultan were actively engaged and occasionally rebelled to restrain the ruler’s authority. Therefore, at least within the Mamluk framework, it is challenging to speak of an absolute autocrat or a sovereign whose power was entirely self-derived (Elbendary, 2017, 12). Indeed, Salāh al-Dīn Ayyūbī

said the following about Qāḍī al-Fāḍl al-Asqalānī: “Do not think that I conquered all these countries with your swords. I conquered these cities with the pen of Qāḍī al-Fāḍl” (Yilmaz, 2017, 266–267). This example shows how much the ‘ulamā’ could contribute to the expansion of political power. Another example of this can be seen in Quṭuz’s ascension to power. As said, Quṭuz dethroned al-Malik al-Mansūr ‘Alī due to the prospect of war with the Mongols. In this matter, he ensured the explicit support of Kamal al-Dīn Ibn ‘Adim, legitimizing the idea through the scholars that “in such troublesome times, a strong ruler capable of ensuring obedience and waging war (*jiḥād*) against the Mongols is essential” (Ibn Taghrībardī, 1963a, 73). This demonstrates that the support of the ‘ulamā’ was indispensable for the sultan and that they legitimized their authority through such means. Additionally, Quṭuz’s attempt to raise funds from the public for his campaign against the Mongols faced opposition from Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, (d. 660/1262) who argued that amirs should utilize their wealth before levying burden on the populace, showcasing the importance of the ‘ulamā’s endorsement in governance (Sheibani, 2018, 171–172). It is seen that Quṭuz had to act in accordance with Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s opinion, even though he was the only one who objected to him in the council. Of course, this also demonstrates that efforts were made to avoid conflict with the ‘ulamā’ prior to serious conflict against the Mongols.

However, the ‘ulamā’s absence from the sultan’s side or their relative neutrality could lead to weakening of the authority of the sultan. When Baybars ascended to the throne, he was met with caution by the ‘ulamā’. It is suggested that Baybars aimed to gain greater acceptance among the ‘ulamā’ by securing the transfer of all powers from the ‘Abbāsīd caliph to himself (Banister, 2021, 28). Also, al-Zāhir Baybars attended the funeral of Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām with his distinguished amirs after his death and said: “Today my power on the throne has stabilized. Because if Shaikh [Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām] had incited the people against me and encouraged them to rebel, he would have destroyed the property [state]. They would have taken it away from me” (al-Subkī, 1964, 215; Ötenkaya, 2021, 273). Baybars’ apprehension in this matter is entirely understandable. Upon ascending to the throne, Baybars faced initial refusal from Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām to acknowledge his sultanate. It was not until there were testimonies affirming that Baybars had been appropriately liberated that Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām recognized his authority (al-Şafadī, 2000c, 319; Hassan, 2016, 67; Sheibani, 2018, 172).

As important as it was for the ‘ulamā’ to align with the amir or the sultan, their opposition to the sultan could have been that dangerous. Indeed, the ‘ulamā’s dissent to the political rule could lead to its loss of power. It is observed that the amirs or sultans were meticulous about the affairs that the ‘ulamā’ rejected and tried to resolve the problems peacefully. For example, Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), the *qāḍī al-quḍāt* of Damascus, played a significant role in the dismissal of ‘Ala al-Dīn Taybars al-Wazīrī (d. 689/1290), the regent of Damascus, after he spread the rumor that the Mongols would attack Damascus and caused prices to rise (Keleş, 2020, 520). Another similar example is Baybars’s amirs unjustly seizing the gardens in Damascus. Regarding this matter, Shams al-Dīn ‘Abd Allah, the *qāḍī* of Damascus, said: “It is unlawful for

anyone to seize people's property. Those who deem something forbidden by God as permissible are indeed disbelievers." Baybars was very angry at this statement and reacted by saying "Am I an infidel?" As a result, the meeting dispersed without result. In the evening, Baybars summoned the qāḍī. He repeated that he had not targeted the sultan himself. Baybars then chose not to make a big deal out of the incident. (Ibn Ṭūlūn, 1956, 188) It is seen that Baybars was extremely angry here, but despite this, he did not harm the qāḍī (Ibn Kathīr, 1988, 268). This attitude of Baybars may have been influenced by the fact that the 'ulamā' were respected in the society.

Nevertheless, Baybars arrested al-Mughīth 'Umar, in 661/1263 for his dealings with the Mongols, leading to a trial and execution overseen by Ibn Khallikān (al-'Aynī, 2010b, 355; 'Abbādī, 2014, 171; Keleş, 2020, 520). Although Baybars had the authority to imprison or execute al-Mughīth 'Umar directly, he chose a judicial process through the qāḍīs, seeking the 'ulamā's legitimization of the action. This approach, likely due to al-Mughīth 'Umar's Ayyubid lineage posing a potential threat to Baybars' rule, demonstrates his use of legal and religious agents to legitimize politically sensitive decisions, emphasizing the role of the 'ulamā' in lending credibility to such actions.

In the meantime, the Mamluk amirs or sultans relied on forming alliances and securing the 'ulamā' support to gain power and public approval. In this respect, al-'Aynī highlights that favouring the *ahl-i 'ilm* (the people of wisdom) was crucial for seizing the sultanate, underlining the importance of maintaining relations with the 'ulamā'. Absolutely, to solidify their reign, the sultans would align with prominent scholars to criticize predecessors or enhance their own legitimacy, showcasing the 'ulamā's distinct societal status. Unlike others, the 'ulamā' did not exhibit subservience, such as kissing the hand, when in the presence of sultans, reflecting their esteemed position and influence in the Mamluk society. For example, al-Mansūr Lāchīn (696–698/1296–99) stood up and kissed the hand of Qāḍī Taqī al-Dīn ibn Dakīk when he came to his presence. Again, Qāḍī Ibn al-Balqa al-Subkī, (d. 771/1370) who came to Sultan Sha'ban's (764–777/1363–77) presence, left him without greeting. According to Ashūr, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad said to those present, "I fear no one as much as I frighten Shams al-Dīn al-Harīrī, the qāḍī al-quḍāt of the Hanafīs" (Ashūr, 1992, 36–38).

However, when al-Muzaffar Baybars al-Chāshnigīr realized that he was to be deposed, he asked Caliph al-Mustakfī (d. 740/1340) to deliver a speech stating that the *mulk* (ruling) had ceased to exist, and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad had no right to reign (Bauden, 2009, 55). al-Mustakfī was obliged to accept this offer and delivered a speech as follows:

*O you who believe! Obey God, His Messenger and to those in authority from among you. Know that mulk is futile; it does not pass by right of succession from the predecessor to the successor. I asked God to guide me, and then I appointed al-Muzaffar Baybars, and whoever obeys him obeys me, and whoever rebels against him rebels against me. And by rebelling against me, you rebel against the Messenger of God* (Ibn Taghrībardī, 1963b, 263).

Nonetheless, this sermon (*khuṭba*) did not secure Baybars al-Chāshniġīr's sultanate. Conversely, upon al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's third accession to the throne, he sought support from Ibn Taymiyya requesting him to use derogatory discourse against Baybars. Yet, Ibn Taymiyya refrained from engaging in such political maneuvering (Little, 1973, 325). Indeed, this clearly illustrates how politically influential the 'ulamā' could be.

Stefan Heidemann's observations regarding the relationship between caliphs and sultans highlight a pivotal shift in the nature of legitimacy during the Mamluk period. According to Qalāwūn's view, caliphs were perceived as having appointed sultans, thereby positioning themselves as the ultimate source of legitimate authority. However, this acknowledgment of caliphal authority seemingly devolved into a symbolic function over time. Legitimate rule increasingly depended on succession through appointment by a predecessor or consensus among the amirs of Cairo, rather than the caliph's explicit endorsement. This is evidenced by the diminishing role of the caliph's appointment decree, which, while occasionally sought to reinforce claims to power, played a secondary role. The removal of the caliph's name from Syrian minting protocols during al-Sa'id Baraka Khan's reign further underscores the waning practical influence of the caliphate. Despite this, titles like *Qāsim Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (Partner of the Commander of the Faithful) persisted on coins, reflecting the Mamluks' ideological alignment with the 'Abbāsīd legacy. This practice served not only to assert their claim as heirs to the 'Abbāsīd political heritage but also to counter the Mongols' ideological assertions of global dominion (Heidemann, 1994, 182–183).

This situation clearly demonstrates that the sultans were able to exercise authority without the need for the caliph, highlighting a shift in the political dynamics where the sultans' rule became more independent and self-sustaining. Certainly, in terms of legal legitimacy, the role of the caliphs was increasingly replaced by scholars who became the key figures in legitimizing political authority. Indeed, the limiting role of scholars in practice is strikingly evident. In this regard, the influence and decisive power of the 'ulamā' were not limited to the sultans alone. Notably, toward the end of the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, they also exerted significant influence over the caliphs. The 'ulamā' clearly opposed the caliphate of al-Wāthiq, declaring his accession illegitimate. Consequently, they endorsed the caliphate of al-Ḥākim II, bringing him forward as the rightful caliph (Banister, 2021, 74–75). Thus, it becomes evident that the scholars in the Mamluk period played a clear legitimizing role in political matters. They institutionally assumed active roles in ensuring obedience to the sultan, deposing rulers, or validating the caliphate.

## CONCLUSION

After the death of al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, political authority effectively fell into the hands of the amirs of Egypt. Despite their significant influence, it is evident that they were in a somewhat precarious position in certain respects. Initially, they assassinated Turanshāh due to his restrictive policies and replaced him with Shajar al-Durr. However, in response to criticism of her reign and to pacify

the opposition from rival Ayyubid rulers, they declared the child-ruler al-Ashraf Mūsā, from the Ayyubid lineage, as the new ruler. This indicates that, in its early stages, the mamluks did not yet dare to frankly oppose the Ayyubid dynasty. Indeed, the subsequent policies of al-Mu‘izz Aybak highlight this point, particularly his declaration of being a representative of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate, a move that holds significant symbolic importance. At the same time, they frequently emphasized their claim to being the heirs of al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb. Moreover, the assassination of Turanshāh in 648/1250 marked a pivotal moment, exposing the mamluks’ precarious grasp on power and their quest for legitimacy. Shajar al-Durr’s marriage to Aybak and the transfer of the sultanate to him were temporary measures amidst the ensuing governance challenges, highlighting the importance of preserving the Ayyubid lineage for stability. The Mamluks’ claim to be the regents of the ‘Abbāsīd caliph in Egypt was part of a broader strategy to solidify alliances and assert dominance over rivals like Damascus and Karak, thereby aiming to bolster their legitimacy. Yet, these tactics also intensified internal conflicts and rivalries. Besides, the Bedouin revolt highlighted the Mamluks’ legitimacy troubles, as the governance by individuals of mamluk origin faced public rebellion, complicating their acceptance as rulers. These internal challenges not only strained social cohesion but also impacted the Mamluks’ ability to address external threats, prompting a reassessment of their political and military strategies. In the face of these threats, the Mamluks had to prove the significant role they played within the Islamic society. In other words, in order to establish their acceptability, they were compelled to clearly demonstrate their function. Indeed, it is necessary to examine their struggles with the Mongols within this context. It was ultimately the existential threat posed by the Mongols that provided the Mamluks with an opportunity to assert their leadership. Especially, Qūṭuz’s ascent and victory at the Battle of ‘Ayn Jālūt not only repelled a significant external threat but also underscored the military competence of the Mamluk state, providing a critical foundation for its internal legitimacy. Baybars’ subsequent formalization of ‘Abbāsīd representation in Cairo reflects a sophisticated use of religious authority to cement Mamluk rule. This period, therefore, represents not merely a phase of consolidation but a transformation in which the Mamluks redefined the sources of political authority, blending military prowess with symbolic religious endorsement to navigate the challenges of rulership in a post-Ayyubid context.

The Mamluk sultanate’s rise to power in the mid-seventh/thirteenth century was marked by a complex interplay of military prowess, religious rhetoric, and narrative construction aimed at legitimizing their rule. This study has demonstrated that the Mamluks’ legitimacy was not solely derived from their military victories, particularly against the Mongols and Crusaders, but was also deeply rooted in their ability to craft and propagate narratives that positioned them as divinely chosen protectors of Islam. These narratives, often apocalyptic in tone, emphasized their role as saviors of the Muslim world, while simultane-

ously drawing on themes of justice (*‘adl*), *jihād*, and continuity with the golden age of Islam. Through a careful analysis of chronicles and biographical works, it becomes evident that the Mamluk sultans, particularly figures like Qūṭuz, Baybars, and Qalāwūn, strategically employed religious, moral, and historical narratives to consolidate their authority and present themselves as indispensable to the survival of Islam. These narratives were not merely reflections of historical events but were carefully constructed tools of political legitimization, designed to resonate with the religious and cultural values of their subjects. The Mamluks’ use of apocalyptic narratives, justice, and *jihād* played a pivotal role in legitimizing their rule, consolidating their political power, and shaping their image as the protectors of Islam. Through the construction of narratives linking their military victories, particularly against the Mongols, to divine providence and apocalyptic themes, they crafted a political identity rooted in religious duty and moral righteousness. This allowed the Mamluks to establish legitimacy not only by portraying themselves as defenders of Islam but also by adhering to moral and legal principles, such as justice and adherence to Sharī‘a, which were seen as essential for the survival of the Muslim community. The emphasis on these values, coupled with the framing of their military achievements within the broader historical context, allowed the Mamluks to secure their position as rightful rulers and protectors of the Islamic world, solidifying their legacy as key figures in the history of the medieval Islamic polity.

During the early Mamluk period, under rulers like Qūṭuz, Baybars, Qalāwūn, al-Ashraf Khalīl, and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, divine providence, eschatological expectations, and apocalyptic themes were skilfully employed to reinforce political legitimacy and link rulership to divine support. For instance, Qūṭuz deliberately aligned himself with prophecies foretelling victory against the Mongols and legitimized his reign by tracing his lineage to the Khwarazmshahs. These associations not only bolstered his claims to authority but also cast him as a divinely favored leader destined to protect the Islamic realm. Such narratives were instrumental in rallying popular and elite support, particularly during periods of existential threats like the Mongol invasions. Similarly, Sultan Baybars utilized religious symbolism and miraculous occurrences to underscore his divine sanction. His reign was marked by stories of divine intervention, portraying him as a chosen savior who fulfilled apocalyptic prophecies. This apocalyptic rhetoric, combined with his military successes, elevated Baybars’ status as a quasi-messianic figure. By intertwining political authority with eschatological themes, the Mamluks effectively presented their leaders as both temporal rulers and divinely endorsed protectors of the Muslim world, ensuring their legitimacy in an era of profound uncertainty.

Nevertheless, the *‘ulamā’* occupied a central position within both the political and societal arenas, exerting a profound impact on the legitimization of sultans and the fortification of their dominion. Their influence extended across various domains, from the promotion of Islamic identity to the vali-

dation of rulers' policies. In pursuit of bolstering their legitimizing authority, sultans actively sought the endorsement of the 'ulamā', a fundamental dynamic pivotal to the comprehension of the political milieu. The sanction of the 'ulamā' was indispensable for securing a sultan's acceptance amongst the populace and for contextualizing their governance within the framework of Islamic precepts. The 'ulamā's decisions to either support or oppose the sultans' edicts markedly influenced their reign. This highlights the reciprocal relationship between the religious intelligentsia and political authority. For instance, rulers have relied on the legitimizing authority of the 'ulamā' to effectively govern their lands. Acting against the Sharī'a or pursuing policies that contradict the rulings of the 'ulamā' could be deemed as illegitimate. While a state could be governed through force, a regime not approved by the 'ulamā' would be seen as illegitimate, potentially labeling the ruler as a usurper. This was evident in examples like the Mamluks of Egypt, where the 'ulamā' played a pivotal role in the governance system.

LEGITIMACIJA MAMELUŠKEGA SULTANATA: VOJAŠKA SPOSOBNOST,  
VERSKA RETORIKA IN APOKALIPTIČNA NARACIJA V KONSTRUKCIJI  
POLITIČNE AVTORITETE

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## POVZETEK

*Pojav Mameluške države kot legitimne politične entitete je bil obsežno obdelan v znanstveni literaturi. Čeprav je vzpon Mamelukov pogosto pripisan njihovem džihadu proti križarskim in mongolskim vpadam, ta razlaga – čeprav je pomembna – zahteva nadaljnjo dodelavo. Ustanovitev memeluškega režima ni bila omejena le na politične in vojaške dosežke, temveč je vključevala tudi različna prizadevanja za zagotovitev njegove legitimnosti. Mameluški sultani, kot sta al-Malik al-Zahir Bajbars in al-Mansur Kalavun, so svoje zahteve po legitimnosti okrepili z vprašanjem dediščine al-Saliha Ajuba. Poleg tega so naravne nesreče in apokaliptična pričakovanja v Hedžasu v tem obdobju spodbudila občutek družbenega propadanja in tesnobe v islamskem svetu. Ta pesimistična pričakovanja so se ublažila, ko so Mameluki dosegli svojo prvo zmago nad Mongoli. Ta članek, ob priznavanju političnih in vojaških dosežkov Mameluške države, proučuje legitimnost novega režima skozi prizmo krhkosti memeluške moči, retorike njenih verskih zagovornikov, pojma Božje milosti ter legitimizacijske vloge ulemov in abasidskega kalifa. Študija temelji tako na sočasnih kot tudi na sorazmerno poznejših kronikah, pa tudi na kritični obravnavi memeluške literature, ki se posebej ukvarja z legitimacijo države. Ti viri so ključnega pomena za razumevanje dogodkov okoli ustanovitve Mameluške države in političnih ciljev njenih voditeljev.*

*Ključne besede: srednjeveška zgodovina, Mameluki, politika, legitimnost, džihad*

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