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The Caliphates between Imperial Rule and Imagined Suzerainty – A Case Study on Imperial Rituals during Saladin's Rise to Power

1. Introduction

This article deals with power relations during the Islamic classic. The main question is whether the medieval Islamic caliphates of the Umayyāds, ʿAbbāsids and Fāṭimids can be described as empires. The recent milestone in the research of empires – *Imperien des Altertums, Mittelalterliche und Frühneuzeitliche Imperien*, being the first volume of *Imperien und Reiche in der Weltgeschichte. Epochenübergreifende und Globalhistorische Vergleiche* – has already been able to shed light on this question.[1] Hämeen-Antilla argues that while "[t]he Umayyād dynasty ended in 750", their "Empire [emphasis N.K.] […] outlived the dynasty and even though the change from the Umayyāds to the ʿAbbāsids was abrupt in dynastic terms, the change of the Empire was slow and gradual"[2], thereby considering both the Umayyād and ʿAbbāsid dynasties as part of a caliphal empire. In the same volume Heinz Halm describes the Fāṭimid polity as empire as it fulfilled any criteria of empire during the height of its power in late 10th and early 11th centuries.[3] The definition of empire used in their studies was based on a global comparative approach, theoretically based on the ideas of Herfried Münkler, Hans-Heinrich Nolte and Ulrich Menzel. This study aims to narrowly use the definition brought forward by Herfried Münkler. His disregard for medi-

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1   Gehler, Michael / Rollinger, Robert (eds.): *Imperien und Reiche in der Weltgeschichte. Epochenübergreifende und globalhistorische Vergleiche, vol. 1: Imperien des Altertums, Mittelalterliche und Frühneuzeitliche Imperien*. Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden 2014.

2   Hämeen-Antilla, Jaakko: "The Umayyad State – an Empire?" In: Gehler / Rollinger 2014, pp. 537–557, here p. 552.

3   Halm, Heinz: "Die Reiche der Fatimiden, Ayyubiden und Mamluken". In: Gehler / Rollinger 2014, pp. 559–565, here p. 560.

eval polities – Münkler only considers the Mongols a medieval empire – gave rise to the questions of whether the caliphates can be described as empires according to Münkler and if not, whether Münkler's theory is applicable to the medieval period in a useful way.[4] Firstly, Münkler's definition will be introduced, working out the main features of an empire. In a subsequent step I will present an overview of the four major caliphal dynasties of medieval Islam and test them according to the established indicators. Secondly, the concept of symbolic communication will be introduced in order to supplement the imperial markers. A case study on Saladin, who alternated between two caliphates, forms the main part of this study and examines imperial rituals in a period of caliphal decline.

2. Empire – A definition

In the following paragraphs, aspects of empire as defined by Herfried Münkler in his acclaimed book *Empires. The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States*[5] shall be gathered. Münkler tries to define empire based on historical precedents, starting with antiquity moving up to contemporary history. Being a political scientist, Münkler seems to base most of his argument on his reflections on the role of the United States of America in contemporary events, while almost completely glossing over the medieval period. His definitions are often made by case of example, sometimes betraying that his background is not in historical scholarship. In order to make Münkler operable for a medievalist, I have tried to form categories within Münkler's definition of empire.

a) Internal aspects

Unlike modern nation states, empires have no explicit borders; they traverse economic and language barriers in so far as they usually include multiple economic regions and a number of ethnicities speaking different languages.

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4   At this point it is incumbent to thank Dr. Christian Scholl, Jan Clauß and Thorben Gebhardt for introducing me to the issue of empires. I also want to express my thanks to Tobias Hoffmann, Stephan Tölke and Sarah Khan, whose remarks on earlier versions of this paper were of tremendous help.

5   Münkler, Herfried: *Imperien. Die Logik der Weltherrschaft – vom Alten Rom bis zu den Vereinigten Staaten*. Rowohlt: Berlin 2005.

Ruling over a wide territory – or at least controlling it politically and economically – is a major distinction of empires according to Münkler. Control over the empire is usually centralized, leading to a dichotomy between centre and periphery, power and right more often granted to residents of the centre than to those of the periphery.[6]

b) External aspects

An empire does not accept other polities as its equal. According to Münkler, this distinguishes it from the phenomena of hegemony where a dominating actor is accepting other political actors as formally equal. Empires are prone to intervene with powers within their sphere of influence in order to conserve this imperial status.[7] Yet, according to Münkler, different empires can exist at the same time and actually did so given that their spheres of influence did not interfere with each other – an example being the Roman Empire and China. Where imperial claims collided, ceremonial acceptance as equal was denied to the opponent – examples are the Holy Roman Empire and Byzantium.[8] Münkler furthermore distinguishes between *Weltreich* – a global empire that fulfils the criteria mentioned above – and *Großreich* – a regional empire that does fit many but not all aspects of his definition, especially regarding territorial control.[9]

c) Dynastical aspects

While spreading its hegemony is part of imperial politics, empires are seldom the result of planned expansion, but mostly come into being "in a fit of absence of mind", as the English historian John Robert Seeley had stated about the beginnings of the British Empire.[10] Münkler therefore includes surviving the founder generation in his definition of an empire, claiming that an empire must endure a process of rise, decline and recovery.[11]

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6   Münkler 2005, pp. 16–18, 23.
7   Ibid., pp. 17–19.
8   Ibid., pp. 26–27, 30.
9   Ibid., pp. 23–28.
10 Cited from Münkler 2005, p. 20.
11 Ibid., pp. 20–22. Others disregard this factor and count, for example, Nazi Germany as an empire, cf. the introduction to this volume.

As Münkler almost completely glosses over the Middle Ages, seemingly defining medieval empires as *Großreiche*, I want to argue in the following paragraphs that the caliphates of the classical period of Islamic history were in fact empires or one empire.

3. The caliphates

The word caliphate [*ḫilāfa*] derives from the title *ḫalīfat rasūl Allāh* – successor to the Messenger of God. According to Sunni historical understanding, this was the title the early Muslim community used for their leader after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad.[12] Unfortunately, the early Islamic polity is only accessible via later accounts, often framed in religious and political rivalry.[13] Still, it seems useful to introduce this conception of history when speaking about the caliphates before analysing the Umayyād, ʿAbbāsid and Fāṭimid caliphates in light of Münkler's criteria of empires.

a) The Rāšidūn Caliphate

As per the Sunni reading, the Prophet's father-in-law Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq was the first man to use the title. He had been chosen by a council [*šūra*] of companions of Muḥammad to carry on the political and religious leadership of the community, thereby succeeding the deceased Prophet. He in turn was succeeded by another father-in-law of the Prophet – ʿUmar b. al-Ḫaṭṭāb – under whose rule the Muslim polity began to violently expand from its native Arabian peninsula. It was ʿUmar who first used the caliphal title *amīr al-muʾminīn* – Commander of the Faithful.[14] The Muslim polity kept on expanding under the leadership of the succeeding

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12 Sourdel, Dominique et al.: "Khalīfa". In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition, 12 vols*. Brill: Leiden 1960–2005, here vol. 4, pp. 936–953. The second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is cited hereafter as *EI²*. The third edition, begun in 2007 and still in progress, is cited hereafter as *EI³*. For the discussion on the possibility of the original title being *ḫalīfat Allāh* cf. Crone, Patricia: *God's Rule. Government and Islam*. Columbia University Press: New York 2004, pp. 17–19.

13 Crone, Patricia / Cook, Michael: *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World*. Cambridge University Press: London / New York / Melbourne 1977, pp. 3–4.

14 Crone 2004, p. 18.

caliphs, ʿUṯmān b. ʾAffān, and later on ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib – both sons-in-law to Muḥammad.[15]

Yet power struggles within the ruling tribe of Qurayš led to uprisings and civil strife. ʿUṯmān was part of the influential clan Banū ʿUmayya, while ʿAlī – being the Prophet's paternal cousin – belonged to the Banū Hāšim.[16] A number of ʿAlī's supporters believed him to be the only rightful caliph as he was a close relative of Muḥammad and father to the only surviving descendants of the Prophet – the sons of Fāṭima bt. Muḥammad, namely al-Ḥassan and al-Ḥussayn.[17] The originally political split gave rise to the major opposing denominations of Islam, Sunnism and Shiism [Shiism is derived from *šiat ʿAlī* – the party of ʿAlī].[18] ʿUṯmān was killed by opponents from the outlying provinces of Egypt and Iraq – groups that included supporters of ʿAlī. The latter's hesitation to prosecute the killers of ʿUṯmān after becoming caliph gave rise to multiple uprisings leading to his death.[19] While still contested by other Qurayšite pretenders to the caliphate in the founding years, the Banū ʿUmayya were able to seize power, thus establishing themselves as caliphal dynasty known to us as Umayyāds. Their dynasty ended a period in which caliphs were chosen by consultation [*šūra*]; the four chosen caliphs are known as *ar-Rāšidūn* [rightly guided] to Sunni Muslims.

When applying Münkler's definition of empire to the Rāšidūn Caliphate, most if not all aspects are met. The Caliphate controlled a territory from Northern Africa to Northern India that included multiple ethnicities and a number of important economical regions. These regions were taken by force from other major polities like Byzantium and Sassanid Iran, which were obviously not considered as equals. The expansions "do not seem to have followed any plan, but were the result of a spontaneous use of occasions opened by spectacular victories."[20] Governors for the different provinces

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15 Kennedy, Hugh: *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates. The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*. Pearson Longman: Harlow et al. ²2004, pp 50–52.

16 Kennedy 2004, pp. 79–80.

17 Madelung, Wilfried: "Shīʿa". In: *EI²*, *vol. 9*, pp. 419–424.

18 Crone 2004, pp. 19–20.

19 Ibid., p. 20. Gleave, Robert M.: "ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib". In: *EI³*, consulted online on 10 July 2016.

20 Hämeen-Antilla 2014, pp. 538–539.

were dispatched from the capital region of Medina.[21] Yet the accumulation of power in the provinces, namely Egypt and Iraq during the rule of ʿUṯmān and Syria during the rule of ʿAlī, led to conflicts with the centre as taxes from the provinces were gathered in and possibly for the centre. ʿAlī even had to move his capital to the Iraqi city of Kūfa.[22] Externally, the Caliphate was rapidly expanding militarily, crushing the Sassanids of Persia and weakening Byzantium, clearly not accepting the two as equals. Only the dynastical aspect is lacking. The Rāšidūn Caliphate is believed to have existed from 632–661, thereby apparently not surviving its founding generation. If one considers the Umayyād Caliphate as a continuation of the Rāšidūn Caliphate through a change in the ruling elite, this aspect would also correspond to Münkler's definition.

b) The Umayyād Caliphate

From their stronghold of Syria, where ʿUṯmān b. al-ʿAffān had installed his cousin Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān[23] as governor, the Bannū Umayya were able to gain control over the expanded Rašidūn Caliphate. After ʿAlī's death at the hands of a disgruntled follower in 661, Muʿāwiya became caliph. While some Muslims in Medina had pledged themselves to ʿAlī's son al-Ḥassan, Muʿāwiya's rule stabilized after al-Ḥassan acknowledged him.[24] Muʿāwiya's son and successor as caliph – Yazīd – faced a Hashemite rebellion led by ʿAlī's other son from Fāṭima – al-Ḥussayn –, but was able to crush the rebellion in its early stages, massacring al-Ḥussayn and less than a hundred followers near Karbalāʾ in Iraq in 680, an event that is considered of utmost importance in Shia Islam.[25]

A more challenging uprising was led by ʿAbdullāh b. az-Zubayr – a grandson of Abū Bakr – who was declared caliph in Mecca after the Karbalāʾ massacre. Neither Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya nor his son Muʿāwiya b. Yazīd, who was proclaimed caliph in Damascus in 683, were able to suppress the

21 Kennedy 2004, p. 57.
22 Ibid., pp. 76–77.
23 Hinds, Martin: "Muʿāwiya I". In: *EI²*, *vol.* 7, pp. 263–267.
24 Kennedy 2004, p. 80.
25 Hawting, Gerald R.: *The First Dynasty of Islam. The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661–750*. Routledge: London / New York ²2000, pp. 49–51.

revolt. Especially after Muʿāwiya b. Yazīd's childless death, ʿAbdullāh was able to gather most provinces under his caliphate. Yet a cousin of Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān – Marwān b. al-Ḥakam – kept on resisting in Syria and declared his caliphate. It was only Marwān's son and successor ʿAbd al-Malik who was able finally to vanquish ʿAbdullāh b. az-Zubayr's caliphate.[26] ʿ

ʿAbd al-Malik incidentally is the first caliph whose historical existence is supported by material evidence. During his rule, the Umayyād Caliphate stood in direct confrontation with the Byzantine Empire in Palestine and Syria. This led to the development of a symbolic language of power mimicking the Byzantines. ʿAbd al-Malik started building religious landmarks like the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem as symbols of power. He furthermore introduced distinctively Islamic coins showing the Islamic profession of faith in opposition to the Christian Byzantine currency.[27] While the expansion of the caliphate had slowed in the years of civil strife, the revived Umayyāds were able to expand in Northern Africa, Northern India, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and crossed the Mediterranean to conquer much of the Iberian Peninsula in early 8th century. There were even attempts to take the Byzantine capital of Constantinople.[28]

The Marwanid Umayyāds were able to keep their line of succession rather homogeneous, having four sons of ʿAbd al-Malik as well as a nephew – the widely revered ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz –, as successive caliphs through much of the first of half of the 8th century. When the next generation came to power in 743, cousins turned on each other resulting in civil strife and a number of short-lived caliphs.[29] While Marwān b. Muḥammad, a grandson of Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, was able to wrest control of the caliphate from the line of ʿAbd al-Malik, the infighting had weakened the Umayyāds to the point that they were swept away by a Hashemite revolt in 750, losing caliphal power and in most cases their lives to the ʿAbbāsid leaders of the Hashemites. The revolt was in no small part linked to the inequality between Arabs from the centre of the polity and the non-Arab Muslims – the

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26 Hawting 2000, pp. 47–49; Kennedy 2004, pp. 90–98.
27 Barach, Jere L.: "Signs of Sovereignty. The Shahāda, Qur'anic Verses, and the Coinage of Abd al-Malik". *Muqarnas* 27, 2010, pp. 1–30.
28 Kennedy 2004, p. 106.
29 Hawting, Gerald R.: "Umayyads". In: *EI²*, *vol. 10*, pp. 840–847.

mawālī.[30] One of the grandsons of ʿAbd al-Malik – ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān b. Hāšim – survived the upheaval and was able to escape the ʿAbbāsid on-slaught and sought refuge in Northern Africa, likely because of his maternal relation to Berber tribes. He later on crossed over to the Iberian Peninsula and established the long-lasting Emirate of Cordoba.[31]

As Umayyād power was perceptible on four continents – from the Iberian Peninsula in Europe to Northern Africa, the Middle-East and Central Asia, finally reaching northern parts of the Indian subcontinent – it is geographi-cally indispensable to define the Umayyād Caliphate as an empire – and according to Münkler's terminology as a *Weltreich*. It was clearly expansive and consisted of different economic regions as well as multiple ethnicities. Excluding the final period under Marwan II, the Marwānid Umayyāds ruled from Damascus. The dynasty had used preceding administrative structures of Byzantine and Sassanid origin from its beginning, with ʿAbd al-Malik starting a process of stronger centralization.[32] The status of the non-Arab *mawālī* arguably shows a centre-periphery dichotomy. Dynastical stability is evident from the fact that the ruling dynasty was in its fourth generation when it was finally toppled.

c) The ʿAbbāsid Caliphate

The ʿAbbāsid revolt against the Umayyāds was one of many uprisings against Umayyād control, yet unlike multiple failed revolts, the ʿAbbāsids succeeded by combining two disenfranchised groups: the pro-Hashemite – by then largely Shiite – camp and non-Arab Muslims who were disadvan-taged during Umayyād rule, which had strongly favoured Arab Muslims. The ʿAbbāsids themselves were Hashemites, descending from the Prophet's paternal uncle ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭalib, mostly through the widely re-vered ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAbbās.[33] While exact circumstances remain murky, it is evident that a close associate of the ʿAbbāsid family – Abū Muslim – ga-thered mostly non-Arab troops in the eastern province of Ḫurāsān in the

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30 Hämeen-Antilla 2014, pp. 547, 551.
31 Lévi-Provençal, Évariste: "ʿAbd al-Raḥmān". In: *EI², vol. 1*, pp. 81–84.
32 Hawting 2000, p. 35; Kennedy 2004, pp. 99, 110; Hämeen-Antilla 2014, pp. 543–549.
33 Kennedy 2004, pp. 114–116, 123–125.

late 740s to oppose the Umayyāds.[34] After a quick succession of military victories and the inclusion of the Iraqi remnants of various Shiite rebellions in the 740s, the ʿAbbāsid troops were able to topple the Umayyāds in Syria in 750. As early as October 749, the first ʿAbbāsid caliph – a great-grandson of ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAbbās, ʿAbdullāh b. Muḥammad, better known by his title as-Ṣaffāḥ – was proclaimed, holding the Friday sermon in the mosque of the ʿAlīd stronghold Kūfa.[35] With the exception of the Iberian Peninsula where the Umayyāds began their rule in 756, the ʿAbbāsids were able to gain all territory of the Umayyād Caliphate. The centre of gravity moved east from Damascus to Iraq, where the second ʿAbbāsid caliph – taking the title al-Manṣūr – began building a new capital that was to become Baġdād. Before, he had secured his claim against his uncle ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAlī, against the commander of the Ḫurasān troops Abū Muslim, and against a Shiite rebellion.[36]

The ʿAbbāsids prospered for the remainder of the 8th century, passing the caliphate from father to son, establishing relations with far away polities like the Carolingians, and making Iraq a centre of religion, culture and science. Kennedy considers the early ʿAbbāsid Caliphate "more centralized than the Umayyād especially in the fiscal administration".[37] The ʿAbbāsids introduced the post of *wazīr* (vizier) – first minister – to help in governing their territory. It is telling that this post was not occupied by an Arab during this height of ʿAbbāsid power, but by members of the Persian Barmaqīd family.[38] Only after the fall of this family from power during the reign of the arguably best known ʿAbbāsid Hārūn ar-Rašīd, the empire began to decline. Outlying provinces in Central Asia and Northern Africa began to assert their autonomy, only nominally accepting the caliph as their overlord. Furthermore, Hārūn ar-Rašīd was the last ʿAbbāsid to seriously challenge

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34 Bennison, Amira K.: *The Great Caliphs. The Golden Age of the ʿAbbasid Empire*. Yale University Press: New Haven / London 2009, pp. 24–25.

35 Kennedy 2004, p. 127.

36 Bennison 2009, pp. 26–27; Kennedy, Hugh: "Al-Manṣūr". In: *EI², vol. 6*, pp. 427–428.

37 Kennedy 2004, p. 132.

38 Zaman, Muhammad Qasim et al.: "Wazīr". In: *EJ², vol. 11*, pp. 185–197.

Byzantium. After his death in 809, his sons al-Maʾmūn and al-Amīn began the first in a long line of ʿAbbāsid civil wars.[39]

Al-Maʾmūn's brother and successor al-Mustaʾmin, who switched the capital to Samarrāʾ, was able to re-establish a strong central state based on the power of Turkish military slaves who went on to become a major power-brokering elite in the years to come.[40] The power of this new elite soon eclipsed caliphal powers as clearly seen in the tumultuous decade known as the "Anarchy of Samarra" (861–870), in which a quick succession of ʿAbbāsid caliphs were no more than playthings of competing Turkish military factions.[41] The weakening of ʿAbbāsid central power favoured the development of all but in name independent regional dynasties, among others the Aġlabids of Northern Africa, the Būyids of Iran and the Ḥamdānids of Syria in the 9th and 10th centuries. While this process was intermediately halted during the reign of al-Muʿtaḍid and his son al-Muktafī, the latter's death in 908 heralded the irreversible decline of the ʿAbbāsids.[42]

His young brother al-Muqtadir was made caliph by the various brokers at court, using him as a puppet. The rising power of such elites was institutionalized in 936 with the creation of a new post. The *amīr al-umarāʾ*[43] was a supreme commander of caliphal troops who held most of the real power. When the Shiite Būyids of Iran acquired this post for their dynasty in 945, the ʿAbbāsids had finally become mere figureheads of an empire that did not have actual political control over its provinces outside its core region of Iraq.[44]

It was during this period of decline that a powerful counter-caliphate arose. The Shiite Fāṭimid dynasty established itself in Northern Africa in the 10th century, as will be discussed in detail below. The Fāṭimid danger in Northern Africa led the Umayyāds of Cordoba to rename their rule by also declaring a caliphate in order to counter Fāṭimid ambitions in 929, yet their claim was largely confined to the Iberian Peninsula and collapsed in

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39 Kennedy 2004, p. 147.
40 Bennison 2009, pp. 36–37.
41 Kennedy 2004, pp. 169–170.
42 Ibid., pp. 185–186.
43 Floor, Willem: "Amīr al-umarāʾ". In: *EI³*, consulted online on 10 July 2016.
44 Bennison 2009, pp. 42–43.

1031.[45] The dominance of a Shiite caliphate in the west and a Shiite dynasty controlling the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate is known as the Shiite century.[46] It was brought to an end by a Sunni Turkish dynasty – the Seljuks – removing the weakened Būyīds from Baġdād in 1055 and placing it under the command of their leader Toġril. Most of the traditional heartland of the caliphate in Iraq was now directly controlled by the Seljuks.[47] Yet the nominal suzerainty of the caliph was still upheld because the Seljuk leaders did not adopt the title caliph themselves, but were awarded the title of *sulṭān* [one who wields power]. This in some ways echoed the difference between emperor and pope in medieval Europe, although it was an entirely different concept.[48] Before the Seljuks, this title had been used to denote local rulers, now the title denoted the most powerful ruler of the Muslim world.

Seljuk power reached its peak during the rule of Malik Šāh I, when they controlled regions from Central Asia in the east to Anatolia in the west. After Malik Šāh's death in 1092, power struggles between Seljuk princes led to a weakening of the dynasty.[49] This initiated the last revival of ʿAbbāsid power, mostly in the Iraq region. Especially noteworthy is the reign of al-Muqtafī, who ruled from 1136–1160 and was the first ʿAbbāsid virtually independent of the Seljuks.[50] The ʿAbbāsid revival reached its peak during the reign of al-Nāṣir, who controlled wide parts of Iraq and Persia after asserting himself against the waning power of the Seljuks.[51] The ʿAbbāsid Caliphate was finally destroyed in 1258 when the Mongols of Hulagu Khan sacked Baġdād. While a branch line of the ʿAbbāsids still used the caliphal

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45 Molina, Luis: "Umayyads in Spain". In: *EI², vol. 10*, pp. 847–853. On the ʿUmayyāds of Cordoba and their caliphate as well as this caliphate's impact on Christian rulers in Spain cf. Drews, Wolfram: "Imperiale Herrschaft an der Peripherie? Hegemonialstreben und politische Konkurrenz zwischen christlichen und islamischen Herrschern im früh- und hochmittelalterlichen 'Westen'". *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 46, 2012, pp. 1–39.

46 Bennison 2009, pp. 39–43.

47 Bosworth, Clifford. E. et al.: "Salḏjūḳids". In: *EI², vol. 13*, pp. 936–978; Kennedy 2004, pp. 311–312.

48 Kraemers, Johannes H. / Bosworth, Clifford E.: "Sulṭān. 1. In early Islamic Usage and in the Central Lands of Islam". In: *EI², vol. 9*, pp. 849–851.

49 Bosworth et al. 1995, p. 942.

50 Zetterstéen, Karl V. / Bosworth, Clifford E.: "al-Muḳtafī". In: *EI², vol. 7*, p. 543.

51 Bennison 2009, pp. 52–53.

title in Egypt, they were completely dependent on their Mamlūk hosts and their caliphate – known as shadow caliphate – was not widely accepted. The shadow caliphate ceased to exist when the Ottomans took Cairo in 1517, the last ʿAbbāsid caliph died in 1543.[52]

When applying Münkler's definition to the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate, we have to refer to the early period of the 8th and first half of the 9th centuries. We may define the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate as a continuation of the previous caliphates through dynastical change as the ʿAbbāsids from their ʿIrāqī base ruled over a territory comparable to the Umayyād Caliphate, excluding the Iberian Peninsula, while including parts of Central Asia. Especially the fiscal setup was fairly centralized, likely even more so than it had been during the Umayyād period. A dichotomy between centre and periphery is difficult to find. The ethnic makeup of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate was even more diverse than it had been before, having Arab elites surpassed by Persians, who in turn were surpassed by Turks. Surviving these power struggles for hundreds of years clearly proves dynastical stability. The early ʿAbbāsids were definitely expansive and did not accept other polities as their equals. The extensively discussed diplomatic correspondence with the Carolingians is not found in Arabic sources – their absence bearing witness to the grade of importance allotted to the instance.[53] Likewise the ʿAbbāsids knew that there was a large and powerful polity in China, but their worlds did not overlap.[54]

Yet when ʿAbbāsid political power declined, other polities were on par with or even exceeded ʿAbbāsid influence, thereby ending a period of caliphal empire(s) spanning from the 7th to the 9th centuries. Still most of these polities, like the Seljuks, still acknowledged the ʿAbbāsid caliph as suzerain. The same holds true for most provincial dynasties – by case of example the Sultanate of Delhi asked for ʿAbbāsid consent for their rule over Northern India in the 13th century, long after the zenith of ʿAbbāsid power.[55] When

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52 Lewis, Bernard: "ʿAbbāsids". In: *EI², vol. 1*, pp. 15–23.

53 Concerning this episode cf. Borgolte, Michael: *Der Gesandtenaustausch der Karolinger mit den Abbasiden und mit den Patriarchen von Jerusalem.* Arbeo-Gesellschaft: Munich 1976; cf. Kennedy 2004, p. 146.

54 Kennedy 2004, pp. 120–121.

55 Abd Elrahman, Mohamed Nasr: "The Relations between the Sultans of Delhi and the Abbasid Caliphate. A Study on the Political Thought of Sultans of

the ʿAbbāsids lost the Islamic West from Northern Africa to Egypt to the hostile counter-caliphate of the Fāṭimids, any claim to empire became theoretical. The Fāṭimid and ʿAbbāsid Caliphate both claimed major parts of the preceding caliphates, therefore having overlapping zones of influence. Two empires in the same region according to Münkler are not truly empires in the sense of *Weltreich*, but only qualify as *Großreich*.

d) The Fāṭimid Caliphate

The Fāṭimid dynasty emerged from Shiite rebellion in Northern Africa in the 10th century. The rebellion was based on the teachings from within the Ismāʾīlī subgroup that were actively propagated from the Syrian town of Salamiyya, starting in the 9th century. The Ismāʾīlīs had split with other Shiite groups on the question of who should spiritually lead the community after the death of Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq – great grand-son of ʿAlī – in 765. Ismāʿīlī proselytization was quite successful on the fringes of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate, establishing strongholds in Yemen, Central Asia and even reaching the Indian region of Sindh. The Yemeni branch was decisive in setting up the Fāṭimid Caliphate by dispatching the preacher Abū ʿAbdullāh aš-Šīʿī to Northern Africa late in the ninth century, where he converted the Kutāma Berbers to Ismāʿīlism. At the turn of the century a man of obscure background – so obscure that even his name has been a matter of scientific debate[56] – claimed descent from Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq and announced himself the new leader of the Ismāʿīlīs.

   This seems to have led to a schism within the group that forced the claimant to vacate Salamiyya. The claimant sought refuge with the community in North Africa. When the preacher Abū ʿAbdullāh and his new converts had been able to vanquish local dynasties, the claimant now known as ʿUbayd Allāh was proclaimed caliph as al-Mahdī in 910 in the former Aġlabid capital of Raqqāda. Having secured what is modern day Tunisia and parts

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Delhi. 602–816 AH / 1210–1414 AD (in Arabic: Al-ʿAlaqāt bayn salāṭīn Dilhī wa-l-ḫulafā al-ʿAbbāsiyya. Dirāsa fi-l-fikr as-siyāsī li-salāṭīn Dilhī. 602–816h / 1210–1414 m)”. *Al-Maǧla at-tārīḫiyya al-Misriyya* 47, 2011, pp. 7–28.

56 Brett, Michael: *The Rise of the Fatimids. The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Fourth Century of the Hijra, Tenth Century CE.* Brill: Leiden / Boston – Cologne 2001, pp. 30–31.

of Morocco, the first Fāṭimid had a truly global following as Ismāʿīlī en-
claves from Yemen to India acknowledged him as caliph.[57] Furthermore
the expansionist doctrine of the Fāṭimids manifested itself in expeditions
to Sicily and Egypt, the former while successful being the opening salvo
to a long back and forth with Byzantium as enemy.[58] In Ifrīqiyya itself the
nascent Fāṭimid Caliphate had to contend with rebellions from rivalling
Berber and Arab tribes and dynasties often additionally fuelled by sectarian
differences.[59] Besides, the caliph had to put down a rebellion from within
his own Ismāʿīlī community. The Kutāma tribe led by the preacher Abū
ʿAbdullāh rose up in 911. After the preacher had been killed, the Kutāma
were reintegrated and became a major elite group within the caliphate that
was ruled centrally from the newly established city of al-Maḥdiyya.[60] The
situation of the Fāṭimids stagnated for nearly half a century – often troubled
by Berber rebellions – until the great grandson of al-Maḥdī, al-Muʿizz, was
finally able to expand the caliphate eastwards and conquered Egypt in 969.
The holy cities of Mecca and Medina soon accepted his suzerainty and his
troops were able to occupy parts of the Levant.[61] Al-Muʿizz shifted the
Fāṭimid centre to Egypt, where he inherited a well-functioning bureaucracy
and had a new capital built – Cairo.[62]

The geographical shift also led to a change of elites: al-ʿAzīz – son and
successor to al-Muʿizz – turned from the Kutāma warriors to Turkish mil-
itary freemen and slaves.[63] During his reign late in the tenth century, the
Fāṭimid Caliphate reached its geographic peak – having its suzerainty ac-
cepted from "the Atlantic to the Red Sea, in the Ḥidjāz [including Mecca
and Medina], in the Yemen […] in Syria and even for a time as far as Mosul
[in Northern Iraq]"[64]. Al-ʿAzīz also tried to establish himself as the sole
caliph of the Muslim world through negotiations with Shiite power brokers

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57 Kennedy 2004, pp. 313–314.

58 Halm, Heinz: *Die Kalifen von Kairo. Die Fatimiden in Ägypten 973–1074*. Beck:
     Munich 2003, pp. 147, 182; Brett 2001, p. 142.

59 Ibid., pp. 139–141.

60 Kennedy 2004, p. 314.

61 Halm 2003, pp. 98–99, 113–116.

62 Kennedy 2004, pp. 316–319.

63 Ibid., pp. 322–323.

64 Canard, Marius: "Fāṭimids". In: *EI²*, *vol. 2*, pp. 850–862.

in Iraq, but did not succeed as the Fāṭimids' descent from Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq was widely called into question.[65]

The son of al-ʿAzīz – arguably the best known Fāṭimid – al-Ḥākim came to power in 996. While best known for having the Church of the Holy Sepulchre demolished, Kennedy labels his whole rule a "reign of terror".[66] One may consider the reign of al-Hakim the beginning of the decline of the Fāṭimid Caliphate. While there had already been signs of slowly waning influence in Northern Africa and Sicily[67], al-Ḥākim did have military successes in Syria. His disappearance in 1021 led to the first religious split in the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī community, with some members believing him to return. Al-Ḥākim had also been the first minor to be declared caliph – a practice that led to court intrigues between members of the Fāṭimid family, the Ismāʿīlī bureaucracy and military leaders.[68] While al-Ḥākim's grandson al-Mustanṣir was in control of Egypt only, he was in a stable position and seems to have restarted the global proselytization in the Islamic East. After gaining allegiances as far as Northern Iraq, his ambitions were soon thwarted by the new Sunni power brokers – the Seljuks. Al-Mustanṣir was furthermore the first in a line of caliphs who had to contend for power with military leaders and bureaucrats. The military commander Nāṣir ad-Dawla rebelled against al-Mustanṣir and was able to gain the capital. He even intended to return Egypt to ʿAbbāsid suzerainty before he was killed.[69]

In the aftermath al-Mustanṣir was forced to delegate powers. Badr al-Ǧamālī – leader of the Fāṭimid troops in Syria – became the first *wazīr al-sayf* (minister of the sword), an event described by Halm as the end of the Fāṭimid Caliphate.[70] The importance of the post became clear when al-Afḍal – Badr al-Ǧamālī's son and successor – changed the succession line after al-Mustanṣir's death to the younger son who was enthroned caliph as

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65 Id.: "al-ʿAzīz Biʾllāh". In: *EI²*, *vol. 1*, pp. 823–825; cf. Halm 2003, pp. 158–160 for the controversy concerning ʿAlīd descent.

66 Kennedy 2004, p. 333.

67 Halm 2003, pp. 370–380.

68 Kennedy 2004, p. 327.

69 Gibb, Hamilton A. R. / Kraus, Paul: "al-Mustanṣir". In: *EI²*, *vol. 7*, pp. 729–732; Kennedy 2004, pp. 337–339.

70 Halm 2003, pp. 419–420.

al-Mustʿalī.[71] The new caliph's older brother Nizār was killed in the ensuing revolt leading to a new split within the Ismāʿīlī community, those in the east rejecting the ruling line of Cairo, giving rise to the Assassins who were to kill al-Mustʿalī's successor al-Āmir.[72] The Crusades permanently banished the Fāṭimids from the Levant and further weakened the caliphate that was by now continuously preoccupied with internal power struggles around progressively powerless caliphs. The real power lay with the *wazīr as-sayf*, who was by the 1130s invested with a monarchical title – *al-malik* (king).[73] In the 1160s Egypt was ripe for the taking. Crusaders and the pro-ʿAbbāsid Zengid dynasty vied for control with a positive outcome for the Zengids. The Fāṭimid Caliphate was abolished in 1171 after more than 250 years. The exact circumstances will be discussed below.

The dynastical aspect of Münkler's definition of empires is clearly fulfilled by the long reign of the Fāṭimids and included rise, decline and a very limited resurgence. The caliphate did also rule a number of distinct regions and ethnicities though their direct rule was mostly confined to Northern Africa including Egypt.[74] But the Fāṭimids were rather flexible in dealings with Byzantium, being intent on cooperating against the common enemy[75] – the ʿAbbāsids, who were a rival empire within the Fāṭimid sphere of influence. One may argue that the Fāṭimid Caliphate was for a short amount of time an empire in Münkler's sense as the ʿAbbāsids were in steep decline in the 10th and 11th centuries to the point that the Fāṭimids were near to gain acceptance in the ʿAbbāsid centre of ʿIrāq twice. Right from the beginning of their rule, the Fāṭimids declared their intent to rule over all Muslims by proclaiming the caliphate. Their caliphate did not come into being "in a fit of absence of the mind". It was a planned process to wrest control of the Muslim world from the Sunni ʿAbbāsids. Alas, compared to

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71 Gibb, Hamilton A. R.: "al-Mustaʿlī bi 'llāh". In: *EI²*, *vol. 7*, p. 725; Lev, Yaacov: *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*. Brill: Leiden et al 1991, pp. 55–56.

72 Ibid.; Halm, Heinz: "Fāṭimids". In: *EI³*, consulted online on 11 July 2016.

73 Ibid.; Halm 2003, p. 130; Lev 1991, pp. 47–48.

74 Cf. Halm 2014, pp. 560–561, who enumerates large parts of the Maghreb, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Sicily, Yemen and the Holy Places as well as outposts in Iraq, Iran, Central Asia and India concerning geographic expansion, and Arabs, Greeks, Turks, Armenians and Black Africans concerning ethnicities.

75 Halm 2003, pp. 99–104.

the early ʿAbbāsids or the Umayyāds, the Fāṭimids never ruled a majority of the Muslim population it claimed to preside over. While the setup of the Fāṭimid Caliphate was therefore clearly imperial, it would be a far stretch to call their polity an empire in Münkler's sense.

Summary

The mere idea of a Caliphate – suzerainty over all regions under Muslim control – is nothing but imperial after the rapid expansion of the Islamic polity in the 7th century. Thereafter a single entity ruling over all Muslims by default included numerous ethnicities, economic regions and a vast territory. This polity was for at least two centuries expansive to the utmost, not accepting its non-Muslim adversaries as equals. In fact one of the caliph's duties as per Sunni consensus was to confront non-Muslim enemies on the battlefield. As Kennedy subsumes "rather than peace interrupted by occasional conflict, the normal pattern was seen to be conflict interrupted by the occasional, temporary truce (*hudna*). True peace (*ṣulḥ*) could only come when the enemy surrendered and accepted Islam or tributary status."[76]

As for internal policy, the caliphate was absolute in so far as there could be one caliph only at a given moment. Counter-caliphates were usually put down, peaceful coexistence with another Muslim caliph was not considered an option, obedience to the caliph obligatory and rebellion punishable by death.[77] For at least two centuries, a succession of caliphs from different dynasties ruled over the Muslim world from their respective capital cities until imperial power waned with the decline of the ʿAbbāsids and the rise of the Fāṭimids in the 10th century. Both dynasties even built new cities as centres of their respective caliphates. The history of both caliphates shows the innovation of new offices or titles for the real holders of political power after the decline of central power. With regard to political power neither late ʿAbbāsids nor Fāṭimids stood up to their predecessors, which does not match Münkler's definition of empire.

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76 Kennedy 2004, p. 120.

77 Black, Anthony: *The History of Islamic Political Thought. From the Prophet to the Present*. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh ²2011, pp. 18–19.

The new situation gave rise to new political theory on the caliph's role in society. According to Black, the 11th-century scholar al-Māwardī restated the "Caliph-Sultan relationship" in a way that made "rulers technically dependent upon the Caliph's approval for their legitimacy."[78] Accordingly, the weak caliphal dynasties were still paid obeisance by historical actors holding political power, no matter whether they were in the direct vicinity of the caliph or a world away. At the same time upholding the caliphal habitus through ritual underlines that later ʿAbbāsids and Fāṭimids were polities with imperial ambition, and while this ambition in both cases stayed unfulfilled, continued obeisance shows the social acceptance of the caliphate. Symbolic communication seems to be a major aspect of the matter at hand and will be discussed in the following chapters in order to supplement Münkler's rather contemporary definition of empire from a medievalist point of view.

4. Symbolic communication and rituals

European medieval studies established the notion that communication during the Middle Ages differed from modern communication in so far as symbolic communication was the dominant form of communication. Symbolic communication is defined as communication that uses signs with a defined meaning or information.[79] A special case within symbolic communication is the ritual, being a complex form of symbolic communication. Rituals are defined as a „human sequence of actions that is characterized by standardization of the external form, repetition, performativity and representational form" that have "building effect on social structure".[80] The question of how the caliphates expressed suzerainty and in how far this relates to actual imperial policies concerns the social structure of medieval Islamic society. "Building effect" in essence means that the execution of a ritual defines and

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78 Ibid., p. 89.
79 Althoff, Gerd: "Zur Bedeutung symbolischer Kommunikation für das Ver-ständnis des Mittelalters". *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 31, 1997, pp. 370–389, p. 373.
80 Stollberg-Rilinger, Barbara: *Rituale. Vom vormodernen Europe bis zur Gegen-wart*. (Historische Einführungen 16). Campus: Frankfurt am Main / New York 2013, p. 9.

confirms the hierarchy or relation between the participants of the ritual as well as their rights and duties.[81]

According to Althoff, rituals could symbolize "peace and friendship, subordination and super ordination, familiarity, grace or willingness to serve" and "were not confined to the present but included a promise for the future".[82] Furthermore, rituals were understood to have a binding character upon the participants. If the ritual was not performed as customary by one side, this often foreshadowed arising conflicts.[83] Of special interest to this study are monarchical rituals, which is hardly surprising as "nearly all rituals in pre-modern societies were closely linked to political order that in turn was closely linked to the social, legal, religious and economic order."[84] Monarchical rituals are the prototype of such rituals. According to Stollberg-Rilinger, monarchical rituals became important in instances of monarchical instability, namely the moment of succession, and were used to bridge this instable moment, manufacturing continuity – whether real or imagined.[85]

The imagined continuity of suzerainty is of utmost importance in the context of medieval Islamic rule. While the political power of the ʿAbbāsid and Fāṭimid dynasties soon veined, both closely stuck to the notion of imperial suzerainty through rituals that were understood as being closely linked to caliphal power. The ʿAbbāsid contemporary al-Ġazālī described the three major caliphal rituals of his time as follows: "The sultan […] owes allegiance to the *imām* (*bayʿa*) and grants him his prerogatives, that is, he mentions the caliph's name in the address (*khuṭba*) during the public Friday prayers and mints coins bearing the name of the reigning caliph (*sikka*)."[86] These rituals as well as the ritual of *ḫilʿa* will be explained in the following paragraphs.

81 Althoff, Gerd: "Spielregeln symbolischer Kommunikation und das Problem der Ambiguität". In: Stollberg-Rilinger, Barbara et al. (eds.): *Alles nur symbolisch? Bilanz und Perspektiven der Erforschung symbolischer Kommunikation.* (Symbolische Kommunikation in der Vormoderne). Böhlau: Cologne / Weimar / Vienna 2013, pp. 35–51, here pp. 36–37.

82 Althoff 1997, p. 374.

83 Id. 2013, p. 38.

84 Stollberg-Rilinger 2013, pp. 86–87.

85 Ibid., pp. 90–91.

86 Quoted after Rosenthal, Erwin I. J.: *Political Theory in Medieval Islam.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1958, p. 43.

a) Bayʿa

Bayʿa is defined by Tyan as "an Arabic term denoting, in a very broad sense, the act by which a certain number of persons, acting individually or collectively, recognise the authority of another person."[87] Originally the ritual included the participants to clutch hands. In the case of the caliph, it is the oath of allegiance to the ruler, either reaffirming the *status quo ante* in a ritual of obeisance or being a ritual of election, thereby investing a new caliph. The ritual was either given in private by the political and military elite at court [*bayʿat al-ḫāṣṣa*] or proclaimed publically thereby including the populace in the ritual [*bayʿat al-ʿāmma*] and repeated in the different provinces. The *bayʿa* to the caliph was binding and life-long, harbouring religious sentiments as pledging to the ruler and obeying him became equivalent to pledging to God.[88] Whereas Marsham has convincingly shown that this is especially the case for the *bayʿa* given to the Prophet Muḥammad[89], Tyan believes that "the binding effect is reinforced by the religious character which the bayʿa acquired from early ʿAbbāsid times."[90] The ʿAbbāsids closely stuck to this ritual, even demanding the pledge by clutching the hands. They also tried to stabilize their line of succession by having members of the ruling family and the elite pledging to the designated successor to the caliph.[91] The Fāṭimids in turn sometimes practiced a major separation between *bayʿat al-ḫāṣṣa* and *bayʿat al-ʿāmma*; an interesting example is al-ʿAzīz who received the oath of allegiance in private in December 975, while the public proclamation only happened about half a year later. Like the ʿAbbāsids, the Fāṭimids tried to stabilize succession by pledges to the heir apparent.[92]

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87 Tyan, Emile: "Bayʿa". In: *EI²*, *vol. 1*, p. 1113.

88 Ibid.

89 Marsham, Andrew: *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy. Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire*. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh 2009, pp. 40–57, especially p. 55.

90 Tyan 1960, p. 1113.

91 Drews, Wolfram: *Die Karolinger und die Abbasiden von Bagdad. Legitimationsstrategien frühmittelalterlicher Herrscherdynastien im transkulturellen Vergleich*. (Europa im Mittelalter. Abhandlungen und Beiträge zur historischen Komparatistik 12). Akademie Verlag: Berlin 2009, pp. 98–99.

92 Oesterle, Jenny Rahel: *Kalifat und Königtum. Herrschaftsrepräsentation der Fatimiden, Ottonen und der frühen Salier an religiösen Hochfesten*. (Sym-

b) *Ḫuṭba*

Ḫuṭba or sermon denotes the delivering of speeches to the male Muslim population before the mandatory Friday prayers in the mosque or after the feast prayers at the feast ground. According to Islamic tradition, the Rāšidūn caliphs continued the practice of the Prophet Muḥammad to personally preach on these occasions, emphasizing their religious leadership of the community during its most important communal ritual.[93] While the practice of preaching in person was not always observed by caliphs throughout Islamic history, the *ḫuṭba* remained vitally important as a monarchical ritual "for the Friday sermon customarily included mention of the name of the ruler as a token of his legitimacy"[94] where the attendees were supposed to supplicate for the ruler. The allegiance of a region or city was usually expressed by this ritual while "failure to mention his name could amount to an act of rebellion."[95] As shown above, both ʿAbbāsids and Fāṭimids used the Friday *ḫuṭba* to announce the advent of the new dynasty.[96] Especially in Faṭimid custom, the sermon was used to establish dynastical stability by presenting the new caliph to the populace as Friday or feast preacher, or with a view to strengthening the position of the heir apparent.[97]

c) *Sikka*

Sikka is the right to have coins minted, respectively the ruler's right to have his name imprinted on coins during later stages. Unlike the rituals mentioned above, *sikka* is not associated with Muḥammad or the Rāšidūn

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bolische Kommunikation in der Vormoderne). Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt 2009, p. 107.

93 Wensinck, Arent J.: "Khuṭba". In: *EI²*, *vol. 5*, pp. 74–75.

94 Berkey, Jonathan P.: *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*. (Publications on the Near East). University of Washington Press: Seattle / London 2001, p. 12.

95 Ibid.

96 Drews, Wolfram et al.: *Monarchische Herrschaftsformen der Vormoderne in transkultureller Perspektive*. (Europa im Mittelalter. Abhandlungen und Beiträge zur historischen Komparatistik 26). De Gruyter: Berlin / Boston 2015, pp. 311–313.

97 Oesterle 2009, pp. 108–110.

Caliphate, but is a later innovation.[98] While there are early Islamic coins featuring the names of rulers or local governors, the Umayyād coinage reform of ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān (died 705) favoured gold and silver coins without a ruler's name.[99] This changed during ʿAbbāsid rule when imprinting the caliph's name on coins became the norm. Intended succession was also often expressed by the ʿAbbāsids through imprinting the heir apparent's name on coins. After the decline of ʿAbbāsid power, local rulers kept the ruling caliph's name on their coins supplementing it with their own. Coinage is therefore a visible marker for opposition especially after taking into account that "when dynasties arose in deliberate defiance of or enmity to the ʿAbbāsids, as was the case with the Spanish Umayyāds and the Fāṭimids of North Africa and Egypt, their coinage was a completely independent one, with their own names only inscribed on the coins."[100]

d) Ḫilʿa

Ḫilʿa means a robe of honour. Honouring a guest, friend or acquaintance by gifting him with clothes is an ancient Mediterranean custom. During the Middle Ages the act often meant a present given "by rulers to subjects whom they wished to reward or to single out for distinction."[101] The political character of this ritual was again an innovation of the ʿAbbāsids, who used the giving of robes as a ritual of investiture either to give a person a new post or to demonstrate acceptance of a ruler's dominion over a certain city or region. In the latter case the robe was accompanied by a written diploma [*manšūr*]. The Fāṭimids applied the ritual in comparable ways (see below). What makes this particular ritual monarchical is the understanding that "the symbolical act of the formal bestowal of robes implied the acceptance of the ruler's authority."[102]

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98 Bosworth, Clifford E. et al: "Sikka". In: *EI², vol. 9*, pp. 591–600.
99 Barach 2010, pp. 1–7.
100 Bosworth et al 1997, p. 592.
101 Stillmann, Norman A: "Ḫilʿa". In: *EI², vol. 5*, p. 6.
102 Marsham 2009, p. 197.

Summary

Both caliphates, as has been shown in chapter two, collected oaths of allegiance which entailed coinage rights and supplications in the Friday sermon from regions far out of their actual political control, thus having a number of practically independent, immensely powerful rulers accepting them as their ultimate overlords. These all but in name independent rulers often mimicked the caliphal rituals by inserting their own names after the caliph's in ḫuṭba and on coins. Having introduced the concepts of symbolic communication and rituals as well as the most important monarchical rituals in medieval Islam, the importance of these rituals will be tested in a case study on one of the most famous medieval Muslim rulers – Saladin – who rose to power during the final stages of the ʿAbbāsid-Fāṭimid conflict.

5. Saladin

As per the argumentation above, Saladin found himself in a rather awkward position between two caliphates – the ʿAbbāsids and the Fāṭimids – in mid-12th century. It will be discussed how Saladin behaved in this complicated imperial context, while special attention is paid to rituals. Did the formal acceptance of suzerainty have any political implications? To gain a balanced view on Saladin's actions, two contemporary sources from widely differing points of view – Bahāʾ ad-Dīn Ibn Šaddād[103] having a positive portrayal of the ruler, Ibn al-Aṯīr[104] being rather critical – are consulted.

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103   On the stance of Ibn Šaddād cf. Shayyal, Gamal el-Din el-: "Ibn Shaddād". In: *EI²*, *vol. 2*, pp. 933–934; Lev, Yaacov: *Saladin in Egypt*. (The Medieval Mediterranean 21). Brill: Leiden / Boston / Cologne 199, pp. 33–36; for the reader's convenience the page numbers point to the English translation of the source – Richards, Donald S. (transl.): *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin or al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya wa'l-Maḥāsin al-Yūsufiyya by Bahāʾ ad-Dīn Ibn Shaddād*. (Crusade Texts in Translation 7). Ashgate: Aldershot / Burlington 2007; the author has used Ǧamāl ad-Dīn aš-Šiyāl (ed.): *An-nawādir as-sulṭāniyya wa-l-maḥāsin al-wa-l-maḥāsin al-yūsufiyya. Sīrat Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn. Bahāʾ ad-Dīn Ibn Šaddād*. Maktabat al-ḫānǧī: Cairo 1994. English translations were adjusted by the author as per the Arabic edition, the corresponding page numbers of the Arabic text appear in brackets.

104   On the stance of Ibn al-Aṯīr cf. Rosenthal, Franz: "Ibn al-Athīr". In: *EI²*, *vol. 2*, pp. 724–725; Lev 1999, pp. 36–41; for the reader's convenience the

a) A family in service of the Zengids

Following is a short introduction to Saladin's early life and his family's relation to the Zengids in whose service Saladin began his career. Yūsuf – not yet bearing the *laqab* Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn – was born in 1137/1138 as the son of Ayyūb b. Šāḏī – a local notable of Kurdish descent who was governing a region around Tikrīt in the second generation as a dependant of the Seljuk governor Buhriz.[105] The relation between Ayyūb and his brother Šīrkūh to the Zengids reached back to an ill begotten attempt of ʿImād ad-Dīn Zengī to fight against the Seljuks. Ayyūb and Šīrkūh were able to facilitate the Zengid's retreat.[106] ʿImād ad-Dīn was the *atabek* of Mosul – officially a post given to him by the Seljuks. The title *atabek* – father of a prince – meant that ʿImād ad-Dīn had the task to govern a certain territory in the name of a Seljuk prince and to teach this prince the art of ruling. Yet ʿImād ad-Dīn was the first Zengid to be virtually independent from the Seljuks.[107] In 1137/8 Ayyūb and Šīrkūh had to flee as the latter had killed a man. They called in the mentioned favour with ʿImād ad-Dīn. Nağm ad-Dīn Ayyūb was made governor of Baʿalbik while Šīrkūh went on to govern Ḥimṣ – both towns being in modern day Syria. After the death of ʿImād ad-Dīn, Assad ad-Dīn Šīrkūh stayed in the service of Zengī's son Nūr ad-Dīn and became his most trusted military leader, while Nağm ad-Dīn Ayyūb took service in Dam-

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page numbers point to the English translation of the source – Richards, Donald S. (transl.): *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh, vol. 2: The Years 541–589 / 1146–1193. The Age of Nur al-Din and Saladin.* (Crusade Texts in Translation 15). Ashgate: Aldershot / Burlington 2007; the author has used Muḥammad Yūsuf ad-Duqāq (ed.): *Ibn al-Aṯīr, al-Kāmil fī-t-tāʾrīḫ*, vols. 9 and 10. Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya: Beirut 2002 / 2003. English quotations were taken from the English translations and adjusted by the author as per the Arabic edition, with the corresponding page numbers of the Arabic text appearing in brackets.

105 Eddé, Anne-Marie / Todd, Jane Marie (transl.): *Saladin*. Belknap Press: Cambridge, Mass. / London 2011, p. 16.

106 Ibn al-Athir, pp. 175–176 (vol. 10, p. 16).

107 Gibb, Hamilton A. R.: "Zengi and the Fall of Edessa". In: Balwin, Marshall (ed.): *A History of the Crusades, vol. 1: The first Hundred Years*. University of Wisconsin Press: Madison 1969, pp. 449–463; Levanoni, Amalia: "Atābak (Atabeg)". In: *EI³*, consulted online on 11 July 2016.

ascus. When Nūr ad-Dīn took Damascus relatively peacefully in 1154, this
was at least partly thanks to the negotiations between the two brothers.[108]

Saladin came into Zengid service around the late 1150s as a bureaucrat in
Damascus.[109] He began his military career as a subordinate to his paternal
uncle Asad ad-Dīn Šīrkūh and participated in the three military expeditions
to Egypt commandeered by the latter in 1164, 1167 and 1169. At least at
the outset Nūr ad-Dīn's involvement into the affairs of Egypt was rather
reluctant. In 1163 the ousted *wazīr* Šāwar took refuge at the Damascene
court. Šāwar convinced Nūr ad-Dīn to militarily support his claim on the
vizierate whereby Saladin got involved in a complex power struggle for the
control of Egypt between the Fāṭimid caliph al-ʿAḍid li-Dīn Allāh, Šāwar
himself, the Zengids and the Crusaders.[110]

In 1164 Nūr ad-Dīn consented to send Assad ad-Dīn Šīrkūh to Egypt
with a large contingent of troops to reinstate Šāwar under the condition
that high tribute was going to be paid – Ibn al-Aṯīr mentions one third of
Egypt's revenue.[111] While Šāwar was in fact reinstated, he reneged on the
agreement allying with the Crusaders and forced the Zengid troops to with-
draw. After another failed expedition in 1167, Assad ad-Dīn Šīrkūh was
finally able to establish Zengid control over Egypt in 1169 and took over
the vizierate from Šāwar, who was subsequently executed. Saladin distin-
guished himself during these campaigns as a capable military commander
and became the right hand of his uncle. When Šīrkūh died shortly after the
conquest of Egypt in 1168, it was Saladin who became *wazīr*.[112]

b) Saladin's beginnings in Egypt

According to Ibn al-Aṯīr, Saladin's rise to power was in no way engineered
by the young man himself. He had been reluctant to accompany his uncle

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108   Ibn al-Athir, p. 176 (vol. 10, p. 16).
109   Eddé 2011, p. 23.
110   For a detailed discussion of the threeway struggle see Köhler, Michael: *Allianzen
      und Verträge zwischen fränkischen und islamischen Herrschern im Vorderen
      Orient. Eine Studie über das zwischenstaatliche Zusammenleben vom 12. bis ins
      13. Jahrhundert.* (Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen
      Orients. N.F. 12). De Gruyter: Berlin / New York 1991, pp. 244–268.
111   Ibn al-Athir, pp. 144 (vol. 9, pp. 465–467).
112   Eddé 2011, pp. 26–35.

on the third and final expedition to Egypt, allegedly saying: "By God, if I was to be given the possession [*mulk*] of Egypt, I would not go there. I have endured in Alexandria [meaning a siege during the second failed expedition] and elsewhere what I will never forget."[113] Ibn Šaddād gives the same account in a slightly different wording having Saladin say: "I was the most unwilling of men to go out [*akrah an-nās li–l-ḫurūǧ*] on this occasion."[114] While this remark sounds as if made up from retrospective – including Saladin's later role in Egypt – it seems to have been the Fāṭimid caliph al-ʿĀḍid who propelled Saladin to power. He gave him the robes of vizierate and let him take the title *al-Malik al-Nāṣir* underlining his role as Fāṭimid vizier, likely believing him to be the weakest and most impressionable of the deceased Širkūh's lieutenants.[115] Ibn Šaddād glosses over the exact circumstances by simply stating that "command was delegated [*fuwwiḍa al-amr*] to the *sulṭān* [meaning Saladin]".[116] Lev notes that the written appointment of Saladin includes the prerequisite of him accepting the ʿAlīd lineage of the Fāṭimids and the legitimacy of their caliphate.[117]

To Nūr ad-Dīn, Saladin was nothing but the commander of his troops in Egypt though, as is evident by the letters written to Saladin by his overlord. Nūr ad-Dīn in these letters refuses to even mention Saladin's new gained office of vizierate but calls him *amīr isfahsālār* – commander of the troops. The letters furthermore included symbolic communication by being signed not by name, but by motto, thus clearly denoting that Nūr ad-Dīn considered Saladin his subordinate, as Richards argues.[118] This is not surprising at all when considering that Nūr ad-Dīn did not accept the Fāṭimids as the legitimate caliphs. From the beginning of his rule he had tried to establish himself as a major supporter of the ʿAbbāsid caliphate. Saladin was now a

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113 Ibn al-Athir, p. 177 (vol 10, p. 17).

114 Ibn Shaddād, p. 43 (p. 79).

115 Ibn al-Athir, p. 177 (vol 10, pp. 16–18); cf. Eddé 2011, pp. 36–37.

116 Ibn Shaddād, p. 45 (p. 81).

117 Lev 1999, pp. 67–69; Lev also notes that the vizierate is given to Saladin and his heirs, making the post hereditary, something he believes did not arise out of the wishes of the Fāṭimid caliph, but marks the defection of the Egyptian bureaucracy, cf. p. 76.

118 Ibn al-Athir, p. 178 (vol. 10, p. 17), cf. Richards' annotation and Eddé 2011, p. 39.

double-hatted operative, at the same time being vizier for the Fāṭimids and subordinate military commander for the most powerful Levantine partisan of the ʿAbbāsids.

Returning to the situation in Egypt, the rivalling lieutenants in Egypt were appeased – and likely bribed – to comply with the new order. Saladin clearly tried to establish himself by getting close relatives into positions of power in Egypt. He had to contend with a serious rebellion by the old Sudanese military elite and Crusader attacks in 1169. According to Ibn al-Aṯīr the latter danger was only averted thanks to military aid by Nūr ad-Dīn and financial support by al-ʿĀḍid.[119] While nominally subordinate to the Shiite al-ʿĀḍid, Saladin seems to have grown ever more independent after the fateful year of 1169, starting to suppress Shiism and furthering the role of the *šāfiʿī* school of Sunni jurisprudence that was not only the predominant school in Egypt, but also as the school of law he himself followed.[120]

c) Saladin between two caliphs

The rising star of Saladin troubled Nūr ad-Dīn according to Ibn Šaddād who mentions that fearing the rising power of the family of Širkūh, Nūr ad-Dīn took away control of the important Syrian city of Ḥimṣ from "Assad ad-Dīn's lieutenants [nawāb]".[121] This notion is not found with Ibn al-Aṯīr. While it is strange that Nūr ad-Dīn would have allowed his soldiers to acknowledge the Fāṭimid caliph, he seems to not have objected until the year 1171, when according to Ibn al-Aṯīr, Nūr ad-Dīn wrote to Saladin ordering him to establish the Friday sermon in the name of the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Mustaḍīʾ. Al-Mustaḍīʾ was quite new to the office, his father al-Mustanǧid having died in 1170.[122] One may assume that Nūr ad-Dīn's wish may have been linked to either trying to win favour with al-Mustaḍīʾ or that it was based on a request by the mentioned caliph.[123] A third poss-

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119   Ibn al-Athir., pp. 183–184 (vol. 10, pp. 22–23).
120   Ibid., p. 194 (vol 10, pp. 31–32); Ibn Shaddād, p. 45 (p. 81); cf. Lev 1999, p. 85.
121   Ibn Shaddād, p. 45 (p. 81).
122   Zetterstéen, Karl V.: "al-Mustaḍī". In: *EI²*, *vol. 7*, p. 707.
123   Cf. Lev 1999, p. 85; the personal ambition of al-Mustaḍīʾ may be visible in the phrasing Ibn al-Aṯīr uses when describing the letter *al-ḫuṭba al-mustaḍīʾiyya*; cf. Ibn al-Athir, p. 196 (vol 10, p. 33).

ible motivation for Nūr ad-Dīn may have been that Saladin had gained a power base independent from Nūr ad-Dīn by being vizier of the Fāṭimids. By abolishing this dynasty, legitimacy bestowed upon Saladin through the office of vizier would evaporate. In fact Ibn al-Aṯīr mentions that Saladin did not want to stop mentioning the Fāṭimid caliph during Friday prayers as he "wanted al-ʿĀḍid to be with him, so that if Nūr ad-Dīn came against him, he could resist, relying on him [al-ʿĀḍid] and the Egyptians [*imṭanaʿa bihi wa bi-ahli Miṣra ʿalayhi*]."[124] Ibn Šaddād glosses over the episode and simply states that al-ʿĀḍid's death led Saladin to change the sermon to the ʿAbbāsid caliph.[125] As Eddé notes, this act symbolized the transfer of allegiance from the Fāṭimids to the ʿAbbāsid.[126]

The strong position that Saladin had gained vis-à-vis the Fāṭimids enabled him to do away with the old dynasty without any problem, showing that the Egyptian caliph had been the suzerain in name only. Yet the version Ibn al-Aṯīr tells us makes sense in so far as Saladin had no motive for abolishing the dynasty. It seems that it was impossible for him to oppose Nūr ad-Dīn's wishes in this regard, likely due to pro-Zengid sentiments within his base of power. On a Friday in the month of September 1171, Egypt returned to ʿAbbāsid custom.[127] This was well received in Baghdad, the caliph sent robes of honour to Nūr ad-Dīn and Saladin – a major honour bestowed by ʿAbbāsid caliphs to their subordinates, again emphasizing the new allegiance of Egypt to the Sunni caliph.[128]

d) Tensions between Nūr ad-Dīn and Saladin

While united in being honoured by the caliph, Nūr ad-Dīn and Saladin moved away from each other rather quickly. In late 1171 a campaign by Saladin against the Franks prompted an offensive by Nur ad-Din. According to Ibn al-Aṯīr, Saladin cancelled his advance after being advised that Nūr

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124 Ibn al-Athir, p. 196 (vol 10, p. 33).
125 Ibn Shaddād, pp. 47–48 (p. 86); while both sources speak of the natural death of the caliph, Lev mentions accounts of murder or suicide as a result of a coup by Saladin; Lev 199, p. 82–84.
126 Eddé 2011, p. 47.
127 Cf. Eddé 2011, p. 49 for different dates.
128 Ibn al-Athir, p. 198 (vol. 10, pp. 34–35).

ad-Dīn would enter Egypt if not for the buffer territories under Frankish rule.[129] Both sides are portrayed as ready for battle by Ibn al-Aṯīr with Nūr ad-Dīn being "resolved to fall upon Egypt and to banish [*iḫrāǧihi ʿanhā*] him [Saladin]."[130] Saladin as per this source gathered a council – possibly best described as council of war – where open rebellion against the nominal ruler Nūr ad-Dīn was discussed. Saladin's father Naǧm ad-Dīn Ayyūb allegedly spoke against this course of action and dismissed the councillors only to tell his son that the best course of action would be to lie low and publicly oppose rebellious speech.[131] Ibn Šaddād, however, paints a different picture. Here it is Saladin who is opposed to rebellion, allegedly saying to Ibn Šaddād personally:

> We had heard that Nūr ad-Dīn would perhaps move towards us in the lands of Egypt. Several of our comrades advised that he should be openly resisted [*yukāšif wa yuḫālif*] and allegiance to him should be renounced [*ʿaṣāhu*] and that his army should be met in battle to repel it if his move became a reality. I alone disagreed with them, urging that it was not allowed [*lā yaǧūz*] to say anything like that.[132]

Ibn al-Aṯīr's account is likely a pro-Zengid spin on this quote of Ibn Šaddād, including made up scenes. It seems very unlikely that Ibn al-Aṯīr would have come to know about private discussions between Saladin and his father. The main take away from the two accounts is that the differences between Nūr ad-Dīn and Saladin had come to a boiling point. Yet actual confrontations did not happen. Both leaders seem to have busied themselves with other, more urgent problems while continuing monarchical rituals as if Saladin was still the most obedient servant of Nūr ad-Dīn.

e) Ayyūbid expansion and stabilization

According to Ibn al-Aṯīr Saladin was preparing for a military encounter with Nūr ad-Dīn by trying to establish fall-back positions.[133] In late 1172

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129   Ibid., pp. 198–199 (vol. 10, pp. 35–36).
130   Ibid., p. 199 (vol. 10, p. 36).
131   Ibid., pp. 199–200 (vol. 10, p. 36).
132   Ibn Shaddād, p. 49 (p. 86).
133   Lev considers the Ayyūbid expansion as continuation of Fāṭimid policies within the traditional Egyptian sphere of influence, aiming at economic and political advantages, cf. Lev 1999, pp. 97–101.

Saladin's brother Šams ad-Dawla Tūrānšāh tried to conquer Nubia. According to Ibn al-Aṯīr this came to pass as

> Saladin and his family knew that Nūr ad-Dīn was resolved to enter Egypt, so they agreed that they would seize [*yatamalakūn*] either Nubia or Yemen, so that, if Nūr ad-Dīn came against them, they would confront and resist him and, if they were strong enough to stop him, they would remain in Egypt, but if they were incapable of stopping him, they would take to the sea and enter the lands they had conquered.[134]

Yet the expedition was not met with the intended success. Ibn Šaddād does not even mention the episode. In 1173 Ibn al-Aṯīr reports on a mutual offensive of Nūr ad-Dīn and Saladin aiming to take Kerak and meant to repair the damages done to the relationship between the two men. Saladin again bolted from a personal meeting as "he and all his family were fearful of Nūr ad-Dīn" and "all knew that, if the two met, his [Saladin's] dismissal [ʿ*azluhu*] would be easy for Nūr ad-Dīn."[135] Ibn Šaddād mentions in passing that Saladin "took to field against Kerak".[136]

In early 1174 Saladin's brother Šams ad-Dawla embarked on another campaign, this time to Yemen. Ibn al-Aṯīr's version claims the same motivation as quoted above for Šams ad-Dawla's invasion of Nubia. But Ibn Šaddād claims that Saladin

> considered the strength of his troops, the large number of his brothers and the strength of their valour. He had heard that in Yemen a man had taken control [*istawla*] and seized the local fortresses and that he had his own name proclaimed in the Friday ḫuṭba. He was known as ʿAbd an-Nabī b. Mahdī. […] So he [Saladin] decided to dispatch his eldest brother […] to Yemen.[137]

Ibn al-Aṯīr acknowledges that the successful Ayyūbid invasion re-established the ʿAbbāsid ḫuṭba in Yemen, but in his view Saladin had only used this as a pretext to get Nūr ad-Dīn's "permission" [*istʾaḏanu Nūr ad-Dīn*].[138] While now established in Yemen, Ayyūbid hold on Egypt was endangered. Remnants of the pro-Fāṭimid camp plotted rebellion and Nūr ad-Dīn had

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134 Ibn al-Athir, p. 210 (vol. 10, p. 45).
135 Ibid., p. 214 (vol. 10, p. 49).
136 Ibn Shaddād, p. 48 (p. 86).
137 Ibid., pp. 48–49 (pp. 87–88).
138 Ibn al-Aṯīr, pp. 217–218 (vol. 10, pp. 52–53). He also relates that Nūr ad-Dīn was mentioned during Friday prayers in Yemen, cf. p. 222 (vol. 10, p. 56).

finally resolved to take action and remove his unruly subordinate from power in Egypt. Nūr ad-Dīn was not to set foot to Egypt as he died in 1174 after a severe illness, removing the Zengid danger for Saladin.[139]

f) The culmination of Saladin's rise to power

The ruler left behind a young boy, Ismāʾīl, who succeeded his father taking the title *al-Malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ*, as Ibn Šaddād mentions in a single sentence.[140] Ibn al-Aṯīr on the other hand mentions that the commanders of Nūr ad-Dīn's army swore allegiance, as did the people of Syria and Saladin himself, who according to this account made the *ḫuṭba* in Ismāʾīl's name and struck the coins in his name thereby accepting the boy as his superior, even explicitly affirming this to al-Malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʾīl by sending the struck coins and informing him of the allegiance of Egypt to the young ruler.[141] The boy's rule was far from stable though. Different military leaders vied for power in Syria and his paternal cousin Sayf ad-Dīn Ġāzī invaded his territory. According to Ibn al-Aṯīr Saladin wrote to Syria claiming a wish to confront Sayf ad-Dīn and admonishing the Syrian commanders for having monopolized access to al-Malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ.[142] It is likely that a direct intervention by Saladin was stopped by trouble in Egypt, namely a pro-Fāṭimid rebellion that is described by Ibn Šaddād and a crusader attack on Alexandria.[143] As Eddé notes in a different context, problems of legitimacy might have played a role in Saladin's planning, too.[144] Ibn al-Aṯīr mentions Saladin's wish to "gain access to Syria to conquer the country" in context of a Frankish attack on the Syrian city of Bānyās. Negotiations between the Franks and the Zengids had led to a withdrawal after the latter had threatened to call

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139   Ibid., pp. 218–222 (vol. 10, pp. 53–55).
140   Ibn Shaddād, p. 49 (p. 88).
141   Ibn al-Athir, pp. 223–224 (vol. 10, p. 58). There seems to be no material proof for Saladin actually striking coins in al-Malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ's name. The only coins bearing his name as per Balog were all struck later on in Damascus, cf. Balog, Paul: *The Coinage of the Ayyūbids*. (Royal Numismatic Society 12). Royal Numismatic Society: London 1980, pp. 60–61.
142   Ibn al-Athir, pp. 223–224 (vol. 10, p. 58).
143   Ibn Shaddād, pp. 49–50 (pp. 89–92); Ibn al-Athir, pp. 229–231 (vol. 10, pp. 63–65).
144   Eddé 2011, p. 72.

for Saladin's help. Saladin now claimed interest in fighting the Franks in
Syria.[145] It is likely that Ibn al-Aṯīr relates the common Zengid perception of
Saladin here; the tables had turned, so to say. Now the Zengids considered
the Franks a necessary buffer territory.

After the power struggle between different Syrian *umarāʾ* (military
leaders) came to head in late 1174, Saladin was finally able to make his
entry into the Syrian arena. When Saʿd ad-Dīn Kumuštakīn – former ruler
governor of Mosul – established himself in Aleppo and gained sole con-
trol of al-Malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʾīl, the ruler of Damascus Šams ad-Dīn b.
al-Muqaddam felt threatened and invited Saladin to Damascus.[146] Saladin
quickly established control over large parts of Syria, including the major
cities of Ḥamā and Ḥimṣ "proclaiming his loyalty [*ṭāʿatuhu*] to al-Malik aṣ-
Ṣāliḥ b. Nūr ad-Dīn"[147] justifying his Syrian campaign as a deterrent against
the Mosul branch of the Zengids in the east and the Franks in the west.[148]
Successively he besieged Aleppo, where his liege lord resisted him fiercely.
After having to abandon the first siege because of Frankish attacks, Saladin
was able to meet out a decisive blow against the Zengids by defeating the
army of the Mosul Zengids in 1175. This victory soon led to a second siege
of Aleppo that was concluded by negotiations. The two sides agreed to
the *status quo ante*. Interestingly, Ibn Šaddād never mentions that Saladin
fought against his liege lord al-Malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ in his description of these
events.[149]

Ibn al-Aṯīr says that Saladin "stopped the *ḥuṭba* for al-Malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ
b. Nūr ad-Dīn and removed his name from the coinage of his land [*qaṭaʿa
ḥuṭbat al-Malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ b. Nūr ad-Dīn wa azāla ismahu ʿan as-sikka*]" now
and "received investiture robes [*ḥilʿa*] by the Caliph" some days later.[150]
It seems as if Ibn al-Aṯīr misconstrued the order of events here. Richards
annotates in his edition of al-Kāmil that according to the historian Ibn Abī
Tayyʾ, the treaty of Aleppo included al-Malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ's right to *ḥuṭba* and

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145 Ibn al-Athir, pp. 225–226 (vol. 10, p. 60).
146 Ibn Shaddād, p. 51 (pp. 92–93); Ibn al-Athir, pp. 231–232 (vol. 10, pp. 65–66).
147 Ibn al-Athir, p. 233 (vol. 10, p. 67).
148 Ibid., pp. 233–234 (vol. 10, pp. 66–68).
149 Ibn Shaddād, pp. 51–53 (pp. 92–96); Ibn al-Athir, pp. 233–236 (vol. 10,
      pp. 67–70).
150 Ibn al-Athir, p. 236 (vol. 10, pp. 69–70).

coinage in all the lands Saladin controlled.[151] The accounts are reconciled by a reading of events as per Möhring, namely that the caliphal investiture with *ḫilʿa* and *manšūr* led to Saladin dropping the *ḫuṭba* in al-Malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʾīl's name and replacing it with his own name in sermon and coinage.[152] This would make sense as Saladin had clamoured for caliphal investiture, assuring the caliph of his obeisance.[153] To quote Eddé: "he still lacked 'authority' […], which only the caliph, the representative of divine authority on earth, could confer upon him."[154] According to Lev

> Caliphal investiture was viewed differently by the two main segments of the society whose support and recognition Saladin sought. For the Kurdish-Turkish military class caliphal investiture had apparently a restricted significance only, but it carried far greater weight with the civilian elite, who served the ruler, and with the general populace.[155]

While the conflict between Saladin and the Zengids still manifested itself in open battles during the following years until the death of al-Malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ, the event as described by Ibn al-Aṯīr clearly signals Saladin's independence through monarchical ritual – a change that was in all likelihood built on the symbolical capital of the caliphal investiture.

Summary

Monarchical rituals played a decisive role in shaping the relations between historical actors in 12ᵗʰ-century medieval Islam. The case study has shown that caliphs and other rulers strictly kept to a ritual protocol, the rules of the game established by powerful predecessors. The caliphs were not necessarily in the political or military position to actually enforce the suzerainty that was expressed by ritual. This study illuminates a special case showing Saladin between two opposing claims of suzerainty.

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151 Ibid., cf. the first annotation.
152 Möhring, Hannes: *Saladin. Der Sultan und seine Zeit 1138–1193*. Beck: Munich 2005, pp. 61–62. The first coins showing Saladin as ruler in his own right are dated to the year 570 which ended in mid-1175, thus confirming the account of Ibn al-Aṯīr, cf. Balog 1980, pp. 62–63.
153 Eddé 2011, pp. 90–93; cf. Lev 1999, pp. 101–105.
154 Eddé 2011, p. 90.
155 Lev 1999, p. 105.

The Fāṭimid caliph invested Saladin as *wazīr* with a robe, while Nūr ad-Dīn never addressed Saladin with this new title. The first or at least one of the first matters of contention between Nūr ad-Dīn and Saladin was the *ḫuṭba* in Egypt, the former clamouring for the ʿAbbāsids. The importance of this ritual in an imperial context is further underlined by the Yemen expedition launched by the Ayyūbids, allegedly to re-establish ʿAbbāsid suzerainty that had been challenged. The actual motive for the expedition is called into question by Ibn al-Aṯīr, however, who assumes that it was a pretence meant to persuade Nūr ad-Dīn in favour of the expedition. Both interpretations have in common that historical actors consider the ʿAbbāsid *ḫuṭba* important enough to wage war. The legitimising effect of caliphal authority is finally attested by Saladin's rise to independence. While Saladin had been unruly and outright disobedient during the final years of Nūr ad-Dīn's life and waged war upon Nūr ad-Dīn's son, he did not drop the pretence of subordination to the Zengids through ritual until he gained caliphal approval through investiture with robes of honour and diplomas for the lands he had seized. Only through this imperial ritual did Saladin gain independence from his Zengid overlords, proving that monarchical legitimacy was bestowed by a militarily and politically weak caliph through symbolical acts.

6. Conclusion

It has been established that the early caliphates of medieval Islam were empires (or one empire) according to Münkler's definition. This changed in the 9th and 10th centuries. ʿAbbāsids and Fāṭimids vied for nominal suzerainty over the Muslim world while not actually being powerful actors. The Fāṭimid rise coincided with an ʿAbbāsid decline that was so severe that when following Münkler's definition, neither of them can be described as actual global empire. During their respective lows, both ʿAbbāsids and Fāṭimids at best controlled nothing more than their immediate seats of power, namely Iraq and Egypt.

Interestingly their ritual importance was still global. As has been shown, both dynasties collected claims of allegiance from Northern Africa to India. These rituals – as lined out in the case of Saladin – had a legitimacy building effect and were thereby of actual political influence. To quote Lev:

"The Caliph was regarded as the supreme leader of the Muslims, who held ultimate power to invest regional leaders, like Nur al-Din and Saladin, with legal authority."[156]

While political influence was not directed by the caliphates and does not equal actual political power, this clearly shows that historical actors still saw benefit in the role of the caliph as overall leader of the Muslim community. All actors actively pretended that caliphal authority was supreme over local rulers throughout the Muslim world and the overall leader of the *umma* – the imagined community of all Muslims. I therefore propose the terms imagined or pretended suzerainty to describe this interesting phenomena. The importance of rituals and symbolic communication during the Islamic classic in my opinion necessitates the inclusion of these theories in any definition of empires. Leaving them out of studying pre-modern empires – as is evidently the case with Münkler, who bases his theories mainly on cases from antiquity and contemporary history – means ignoring one of the most important ways of communicating imperial power during the medieval period.

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156   Lev 1999, p. 105.