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The Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo, 1261–1517

Out of the Shadows

Mustafa Banister
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Acknowledgements

As this book stems from my doctoral thesis, I must begin by thanking my Doktormutter Linda Northrup who set me on the path towards understanding the complex world of late medieval Cairo. Maria Subtelny, Victor Ostapchuk, Walid Saleh and Frédéric Bauden also carefully guided me towards a more complete reconstruction of the Abbasid Caliphate set up and supported by the sultans of Cairo. I would also recognise all of the former teachers and mentors in Michigan, Chicago and Toronto who helped to shape my outlook on medieval Islamic and world history, including Fred Donner, Cornell Fleisher, Lisa Golombek, Sebastian Günther, Todd Lawson, the late Chris Mayda, Rick Rogers, Michael Sells and, in particular, John Woods and Bruce Craig, who first introduced me to ‘the Mamluks and their shadow caliph in Cairo’ which piqued my interest so long ago.

A portion of this book was completed during my 2015–16 fellowship at the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg ‘History and Society during the Mamluk Era (1250–1517)’ (University of Bonn), and I thank Stephan Conermann and Bethany Walker for their invitation and generous support. The book reached completion during my time as a postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University while engaged with the ERC-Consolidator Grant project, ‘The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate-II. Historiography, Political Order and State Formation in 15th-Century Egypt and Syria’ (2018–21). I warmly thank Jo Van Steenbergen and Maya Termonia for providing sincere collegiality, stimulating discussions and a very fruitful work environment.

I am especially grateful to Reuven Amitai, Malika Dekkiche and Jo Van Steenbergen for kindly reading earlier drafts of the book and offering valuable feedback which helped to develop it further. Kenneth Goudie, Christian
Mauder and Gowaart Van Den Bossche also read sections of the book and shared helpful comments. I am also thankful to Mona Hassan, who allowed me to read an early version of her work on the Cairene Abbasids which was particularly eye-opening.

During my years in Canada, Germany and Belgium, the project has benefited greatly from conversations, emails and camaraderie shared with Noha Abou-Khatwa, Abdelkader Al Ghouz, Adam Ali, Ovamir Anjum, Nasrin Askari, Amar Baadj, Rihab Ben Othmen, Caterina Bori, Fien De Block, Kristof D’hulster, Mohammad Fadel, Nahyan Fancy, Kurt Franz, Yehoshua Frenkel, Noah Gardiner, Mohammad Gharaibeh, Usman Hamid, Hani Hamza, Stephen Humphreys, Matthew Ingalls, Lale Javanshir, Daniel Mahoney, Manhal Makhoul, Mohamed Maslouh, Haggai Mazuz, Richard McGregor, John Meloy, Zacharie Mochtari de Pierrepont, David Nicolle, Carl Petry, Nasser Rabbat, Fadi Ragheb, Tarek Sabraa, Marlis Saleh, Warren Schultz, Gül Şen, Bogdan Smarandache and Murat Yasar.

At Edinburgh University Press, I would like to thank series editor Carole Hillenbrand for her early enthusiasm for the project, as well as Nicola Ramsey, Kirsty Woods, Eddie Clark and freelance copy-editor Lyn Flight for their patience, help and direction throughout the publishing process. I also wish to thank the anonymous readers who provided helpful suggestions which improved the book. Ælfwine Mischler completed the index and Rebecca Mackenzie designed a beautiful cover. Naturally, I take responsibility for all remaining errors, oversights and omissions.

Finally, I must thank my family who humoured the colourful decade I spent on research for this project with patience and grace: my mother Noor (who always offered unwavering support) and my father Suhail Banister (who happily read early drafts and was always delighted to offer his ‘two-cents’), my sister Aliyah and her husband Mustafa, and my cousin Jennifer Banister.

Last, but never least, I fail to find adequate words to thank my wife, best friend and life partner Shaima Yacoub who sacrificed in every way possible and frequently had to battle the Abbasid caliphs for my attention. She kept our life together in the meantime and always reminded me of the world outside the library. All the while, our three ʿluʿluʿs, Abdallah, Ibrahim and Qasim, filled (and continue to fill) our home with sound, warmth and happiness. This book is for them.
‘Know that faith and knowledge accompany the caliphate, wherever it may be.’

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505)

‘The likes of me live by dying, and in passing on, attain their desires. For [the sultans of Cairo] is a succulent life, while I am left to merry speech. They are the possessors of outright kingship, while “for Sulaymān is the wind”.’

Words attributed to the third Abbasid caliph of Cairo, al-Mustakfī bi-llāh Sulaymān (d. 1340)

‘There are no more virtuous people, or even good people, left to be sought after; nor is there a generous person remaining to whom I can convey my melancholy.

People of no lineage have come to be the masters and I am forlorn for having lived to see these days.’

Verses attributed to the last Abbasid caliph of Cairo, al-Mutawakkil ʿalā Allāh III (d. 1539 or 1543)
Introduction

This book examines the final chapter of Abbasid history as it largely unfolded in Cairo over two and a half centuries (659–923/1261–1517), but more broadly took place within the interregional socio-political context of the late medieval Islamic polity commonly referred to as the ‘Mamluk Sultanate’ or the ‘Mamluk Empire’. Here, however, I engage with this context as the Cairo Sultanate (or sultanate of Cairo).¹ The Abbasid Caliphate, arguably one of Islam’s most enduring leadership institutions, remained an important fixture in the political culture of the time and was a recurring focal point for contemporary chroniclers and chancery scribes. Until recently, many conventional histories of Islam assumed that the declining Abbasid Caliphate received its coup de grâce with the Mongol capture of Baghdad in 656/1258 and the subsequent execution of the ‘last caliph al-Mustaʿsim’, and largely ignored or passed over the line of Abbasids established in Cairo in 659/1261. We may put the earlier lack of interest in the Cairene Abbasid caliphs down to a wholesale dismissal of the dynasty’s relevance from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Only in more recent decades has scholarly discussion moved beyond the installation of the first caliphs of Cairo by the sultan al-Zahir Baybars (657–76/1260–77) and the political ramifications of that historical action.

When the orientalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began studying the late medieval sultanate of Cairo, the restored Abbasid Caliphate simultaneously fell under their lens. This later incarnation, however, was typically dubbed a ‘puppet’ or ‘shadow’ caliphate, terms, it must be noted, with no Arabic analogues in the contemporary historiographical source material. This ‘shadow caliphate’ developed as convenient shorthand in modern studies to describe the powerless position of the Abbasid caliphs
as well as the shadowy mystery hovering over their role within the social formations of late medieval Cairo. Thus, the institution itself, for the most part, likewise initially received the attention worthy of a shadow by mainstream Islamic historians. Extant presentations of the latter-day Abbasids, while offering an excellent starting point, have demonstrated the need for a comprehensive study of the Cairo caliphs to attain an even richer understanding of the caliphate in late medieval Egypt and Syria.

Among the specialists on Islam and the medieval Middle East that have studied the caliphate from the mid-thirteenth to early sixteenth centuries, several can be considered pioneers in explaining the political, social and cultural significance of the Abbasids of Cairo, including Gustav Weil, William Muir, Vasiliy V. Barthold, Thomas Arnold, Stanley Lane-Poole, Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes and Émile Tyan.

Noting a growing interest in the subject in the decades since their works appeared, Jonathan Berkey in 2009 acknowledged the existence of ‘a well-developed scholarly literature analysing the historical significance of the Abbasid caliphate of Cairo’, which highlighted the socio-political value of the caliphal family in Egypt. In 1942, Annemarie Schimmel examined the Cairene Abbasids in a substantial study focused on the uniquely Egyptian conditions of religious offices such as the caliphate and the chief judge-ships of late medieval Cairo. Schimmel outlined the powers of the caliphal office and offered general observations on the caliphs’ investiture proceedings, succession and official duties. Thirty years later Mounira Chapoutot-Remadi produced an important theme-oriented research article on the Abbasids of Cairo which made two notable contributions: the beginnings of a discussion on the living conditions of the caliphs as well as a section titled, ‘Le chef des hommes de religion’, in which the author observed that while the Abbasid caliph of Cairo carried greater political significance than religious importance for the sultans, his religious authority held deep ramifications for the scholarly class (‘ulamā’) as well as for foreign policy.

Although Schimmel cited several important anecdotes about the fifteenth-century Abbasid caliphs to illustrate broader points, it was not until 1967 that Jean-Claude Garcin, while examining the role of the caliphate in the historiography of the late fifteenth-century Egyptian religious scholar al-Suyūṭī, presented a detailed outline of the Cairene Abbasids. Using a variety
of later Arabic sources, Garcin explored al-Suyūṭī’s caliphate-centric worldview and described the political value of individual caliphs to the sultanate of Cairo. Peter Holt’s equally important 1984 article ‘Some Observations on the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate of Cairo’, offers the author’s remarks on key events involving the caliphate throughout the span of the late thirteenth to early sixteenth centuries. Holt focused heavily on the episode of the caliphate’s restoration and its immediate relevance to sultanic legitimacy and foreign policy, though he also provided important research on the caliphate in late medieval Syro-Egyptian historiography.

In 1950, the work of Richard Hartmann opened the question of elite attitudes towards the caliphate from 656–62/1258–61. Hartmann raised the issue of whether the Cairene political elite, like the rulers of Mecca, had recognised the Tunisian Hafsid caliphate in the years prior to the Abbasid installation at Cairo in 1261, and argued that the ruling sultans, having acknowledged the ‘caliphate’ of al-Mustanṣir (also the regnal title – laqab – of the Hafsid ruler of Tunis), later named their caliph with the same laqab to gloss over the earlier recognition. David Ayalon, who recognised the re-establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo as an ‘event of major importance in Muslim history’, put the matter to rest ten years later in an article that refuted Hartmann’s thesis and concluded that the sultans ruling Egypt, Syria and (at times) parts of the Hijaz hastened to legitimate their status through the Abbasid family.

The restoration of the post-Mongol Abbasid Caliphate, first in Aleppo and later in Cairo, did not receive a monograph of its own until 1994 with the appearance of a German study by Stefan Heidemann. Based on a comprehensive examination of literary sources and numismatic evidence, Heidemann detailed the re-establishment process of the caliphate in late thirteenth-century Egypt and Syria. While Heidemann carefully reconstructed the establishment of the Abbasids in Aleppo and later Cairo, the book is primarily a numismatic study that focuses only on the first decades of the dynasty’s history in Egypt.

Longing for the Lost Caliphate: a Transregional History, the recent monograph by Mona Hassan, has demonstrated the enormous potential for examining the Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo as its own unique subject of inquiry. In a comparative study of the fall of the caliphate and its aftermath in both 1258...
(to the invading Mongols) and 1924 (to the birth of the Turkish republic from the ashes of the Ottoman ‘Caliphate’), Hassan conducted an extensive exploration of the enduring social and religious salience attached to the institution and made important contributions to our understanding of the unique place of the Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo in late medieval Arabic historiography and normative jurisprudential treatises. Significantly, Hassan’s work links the symbol of the caliphate to the idea of a ‘cultural grammar’, which, in transcending the mere history of the institution, presents the resurrection of the Abbasid Caliphate in medieval Cairo in a way that demonstrates the very real meaning and significance it carried within the socio-political fabric of its time. The book, which treats the Abbasid Caliphate for much of its incarnation in Cairo, is an excellent starting point for a study devoted exclusively to the Cairo Abbasids that goes further on the subject.

Thoughtful and dynamic reconsiderations of the caliphate’s socio-religious and cultural significance beyond its potential for legitimating the reigning sultans of Cairo by, in particular, Schimmel, Garcin, Chapoutot-Remadi and Hassan, have thus helped to open the way for further discussion and exploration of the subtleties of the Cairo Caliphate in the present book.

The harsh reality of the curtailment of the caliphal office in late medieval Cairo has distracted from the fact that the figure of the caliph could remain an imposing, even potentially dangerous, presence, shrouded at court in mystique and enigma, in much the same way his forebears had been surrounded by courtiers and winding corridors at the height of the dynasty’s power in Baghdad (132–656/750–1258). However, by the late fifteenth/early sixteenth centuries in Cairo, the status of the caliphate, whether attached to decline-oriented conceptions of ‘demotion’ or not, came to be accepted by all actors who engaged with it. Theoretically, as John Woods suggests, the Muslim community (umma) carried the responsibility for perpetuating and reproducing itself, and the caliphate served only as a function of the community, its common objectives and collective duties symbolically embodied in a single office holder. Thus, the significance of the Abbasid Caliphate remained an undisputed constant in a social world of shifting political variables, particularly the making and unmaking of new political orders centred around elites based at the Citadel of Cairo.
A Cairo Caliphate within a Cairo Sultanate

One aim of the current book is to contextualise the Abbasid Caliphate within the larger socio-cultural and political history of the interconnected Syro-Egyptian regions that made up the Cairo-based sultanate. The ‘Mamluk Sultanate’, which has developed as a common signifier over the course of nearly eighty years of modern scholarship, takes its name from the social status and servile origins of the ruling elites, particularly the social grouping of manumitted military slaves (mamlūk, pl. mamālīk) that dominated Egypt, Syria (Bilād al-Shām), and at times much of the Hijaz between the Mediterranean and Arabian seas for nearly two and a half centuries (typically, 648–923/1250–1517).19 On their path to power in Cairo and beyond, many such mamlūks had been Turkish slaves from the Qipchaq steppe who were later supplanted as the main source of manpower by Circassians from the Caucasus by the late fourteenth century. Trained and socialised in Cairo, the first group to obtain ruling power in the mid-thirteenth century were part of the military retinue of the last effectual sultan of the Ayyubid family, al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb (637–47/1240–9).

Throughout the longue durée history of the sultanate these Turkish-speaking mamlūks were not an isolated sector, but a socially integrated group comprising important actors.20 Rather than a polity defined by military slavery throughout its existence, however, Jo Van Steenbergen has proposed engaging with the sultanate, particularly between 678 and 784/1279 and 1382, as part of the ‘Military Patronage State’ tradition characterised by ‘military leadership, patronage ties, household bonds, and unstable devolved authorities’, during a period in which power relations were dominated by a variety of ethnic groups, dynastic dispensations and political power networks.21 The sultanate’s tumultuous history between 1250 and 1517 was closely linked to the repeated disintegration and fragmentation of successful political orders around particular households and networks, as well as the sultans and their Cairo-based courts.22

Although the ‘mamlūk’ element remained important throughout these two and a half centuries, it was not always crucial in defining how politics unfolded.23 The mamlūks themselves were nevertheless among the key manpower resources, which, along with financial and other resources, allowed
political elites such as amirs and sultans like Baybars (r. 658–76/1260–77) or Qalâwûn (r. 678–89/1279–90) to create the political muscle they required, though in this they resembled earlier Muslim rulers like the Ghaznavids as well as other twelfth- or thirteenth-century rulers in pursuit of similar resources such as the sultans of Delhi.24

It is likewise important to acknowledge long periods in which dynastic rule reflected the general practices of social and political organisation rather than as a peculiar exception to a period of normative ‘rule by slaves’. Dynastic and hereditary impulses appeared regularly and notably during much of the fourteenth century in which the Qalawunid dynasty (689–784/1290–1382) endured until it was supplanted by the sultan al-Ẓâhir Barqûq who sought to establish his own dynastic line at his death in 801/1399 with the succession of two of his sons. Indeed, hereditary impulses were widely exercised long into the fifteenth century, though seldom with successful results.25

Many later medieval Arabo-Muslim historians often understood the contemporary social and political order not as a ‘Mamluk Sultanate’ per se, but rather as part of an ongoing period of ‘rule by the Turks’ (dawlat al-atrâk, dawlat al-turk or dawlat al-turkiyya) and later that of the Circassians (dawlat al-jarkas). Within the overarching notion of a ‘Dawlat al-Âtrâk’, however, could also be microcosmic ‘dawlas’– a complex and versatile term linked to notions of state, time and also the reign, dynasty or period of rule of a given sultan, such as the ‘dawlat al-Âbâhiriyya’ of al-Âbâhir Jaqmaq (r. 841–57/1438–53). Each new sultanic order thus established the authority of the ruler and his entourage through reproductive practices such as the ‘recycling’ or reintegration of elites from earlier orders representing a fresh state formation of its own.26 What we perceive as the continuous sultanate is thus a series of social orders regularly produced by and around the sultans and their courts based in Cairo.

In addition to making room to focus on non-‘mamlûk’ actors such as the caliphs, the perspective of a ‘Cairo Sultanate’ provides an elastic way to identify the appearance of political order and to understand political power in late medieval Egypt and Syria as it was continuously and successfully projected outward from the Citadel of Cairo. Egypt, after all, represented the heartland of the sultanate and subsequent Cairo-based rulers often had
to (re)consolidate Syria – which was occasionally treated as an eastern buffer zone – into their territory.27

How all of this was textually recreated and represented by contemporary authors, many of whom were linked directly or indirectly to military and political elites, is highly relevant to the current study of the Cairene Abbasid Caliphate. The normative act of creating structure and order was at the heart of much of the historiographical literature produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Thus, texts which sought to invent textual realities of the state may have likewise lent a hand in creating factual reality through what they understood to be a fully realised expression and self-perception of reality.28

With power and authority frequently in tumult and flux, the sultans and their royal courts required a variety of ideological supports and vocabularies of legitimation to explicate and consolidate their rule. For its part, the Abbasid Caliphate offered a symbolic stability around which each new political order could establish itself. As a high-profile member of the sultanate’s socio-political life, the name of the reining Abbasid caliph appeared frequently alongside the sultan and his ‘Turkish’ court atop political hierarchies of the region laid out in historiographical texts.29

This study engages with the latter-day Abbasid Caliphate and its relationship to sovereignty, authority and political agency through the historical lens of the late medieval Cairo Sultanate. The caliphs’ participation in key social practices highlighted by Michael Chamberlain, Winslow Clifford and Jonathan Berkey, such as patronage, competition, intercession, and the construction of knowledge and institutions (from a historiographical perspective) are also of relevance to this study.30 Rather than seeking answers to ‘what went wrong’ with the caliphate in this later period or understanding how the Cairo incarnation of the Abbasid Caliphate was unlike its Baghdadian predecessor, the book instead questions the ways in which the caliphate was made to appear as an ongoing reality – both as an unwavering institution and as a coherent practical idea when socio-political realities appeared to suggest the opposite.
The Caliphal Discourse of the Cairene Abbasids

Delegation of symbolic power from the Abbasid caliph to the sultan in Cairo after 659/1261, cast the polity in the form of the eleventh-century Seljuk-style government identified as a ‘sultanate’. The Cairo Sultanate’s long-time patronage of the Abbasid Caliphate (no matter the realities of the latter’s actual position) symbolised the upholding of religion which the religious elite (‘ulamā’) trumpeted as a demonstration of the sultan’s regional dominance and ability to eclipse all other rival Muslim rulers. The question of Abbasid legitimacy adds another wrinkle to the complexity and messiness of late medieval Syro-Egyptian politics in terms of a ruler’s simultaneous need for caliphal legitimacy juxtaposed against the pressure to distance the caliphate from real power and authority. In studying the changes in the office of the Abbasid caliph during this period, lessons emerge about social organisation and the workings of governance. While the era has long been recognised as one of cooperation and symbiosis between political and religious elites, institutions like the caliphate were often used to mask very real tensions, power struggles and changing prerogatives of authority. The caliphs were in many ways pawns to be removed or re-introduced into politics, and at times of uncertainty could find moments to seize new opportunities.

In some ways, the restoration of the caliphate in the context of the Cairo Sultanate resembled an important ‘project’, and contributed to a discourse that united the so-called ‘men of the sword’ and the ‘men of the turban’ even if they sometimes competed for influence. Hassan’s analysis of the caliphate as an ongoing interpretive framework or ‘cultural grammar’, has already linked it to a broader Islamic cultural discourse and structural language that creates meanings, textual realities and notions of unity across the Muslim world.

‘Discourse’ is indeed a useful (though highly contextual and flexible) concept to apply as it allows us to transcend textual confines – moving beyond both text and conceptualisation, to a more complete and connected set of coherent ideas, practices, textual utterances, rituals and symbolic presentations. These seemingly disparate elements represent different relationships and engagements with the discourse of the caliphate, signifying not just the ongoing discourse itself, but also medieval authors’ attempts at making and
remaking it anew, giving it form, and attempting to move it in a particular
direction(s). The caliphate itself was functional as a part of the sultanate’s ideo-
logical discourse on legitimacy – the discourse thereby functioning as a tool
of power which also had an active hand in reproducing and reinforcing it.\textsuperscript{37}

‘Caliphate’ itself is a highly contextual signifier that has taken on a
variety of different meanings throughout its various appearances in space,
time and text. As Hugh Kennedy points out, fundamental to all versions,
however, is the idea of leadership concerned with ordering Muslim society
in accordance with the will of God.\textsuperscript{38} Caliphate, as an idea, is thus richly
varied with no single defining template or legal framework.\textsuperscript{39} It is important
to emphasise that the Abbasid Caliphate as it existed in Cairo as an offshoot
of Sunni juridical definitions of ‘Caliphate’, as religious and political succes-
sorship (\textit{khilāfa}) of the Prophet, was but one strand of a broader discourse
on caliphate and kingship in the Islamic world of the mid-thirteenth to early
sixteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{40} As recent studies by Christopher Markiewicz, Hüseyin
Yılmaz and Evrim Binbaş have illustrated, in the centuries following the
Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258, there was no universally agreed-upon
conception of rule among Islamicate polities. Indeed, the idea of the caliphate
never again enjoyed the widespread acceptance it had held in earlier centuries.
Nevertheless, in many regional contexts, Abbasid and/or Chinggisid lineage
and legitimacy remained highly important until the rise of the Ottomans,
Safavids and Mughals.\textsuperscript{41} It is thus important for the reader to remember that,
particularly during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, ‘protection of the
Abbasid Caliphate’ was but one iteration among numerous competing claims
to sovereignty.\textsuperscript{42}

Reviving the Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo was not without tension
between the local offices that contributed to the precariousness of power in
the political order established around each new sultan and his entourage.
In the tumultuous world of medieval Cairene politics, households of amirs
constantly competed for influence and access to resources. The quest for
Abbasid legitimacy (itself very much a resource) might thus be approached as
a kind of ‘arms race’, and many incumbent sultans did their best to guard the
caliph’s sacred symbolic power from rivals.

Just as the Shi’ite Buyid amirs of tenth-century Iraq and Persia famously
refused to restore a descendant of ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib to the imamate for fear
that they would lose their grip on rule, in late medieval Cairo some political elites were aware that a Sunni Abbasid caliph could be turned against them by sectors of their subject population. Some of the sultans thus intended to control and exploit the discourse without getting destroyed by it, even as many, if not all, were at the same time awed by the caliph’s gravitational pull on political rivals. The caliph, at various times in the long history of the Cairo Sultanate, was thus capable of expansion beyond his typical role of an on-demand performer of ceremonial legitimacy.

It was incumbent upon the sultan of Cairo and his entourage to walk a complex and delicate line between appearing close to the caliph while also distancing the Abbasids from the limelight due to their mass appeal. After all, political and ecclesiastical currents periodically called for a ‘return of the caliphate’ in the Syro-Egyptian context. The caliph or sultan could often touch a ‘third rail’ and there were limitations that neither office could encroach upon easily. In other words, courtly and social expectations demanded there be boundaries which the sultan and caliph should not over-step. These lines, while never formally or explicitly defined, were largely subject to expediency as well as the tastes and socio-political expectations of elite social groupings.

For specialists, this book provides the first comprehensive dynastic history of the Cairene Abbasids ever produced, as well as a study of the manifestations of ‘Caliphate’ in the Cairo Sultanate based on narrative, prescriptive and documentary sources. Some may wonder if yet another treatment of the Abbasids of Cairo is necessary, but the lacunae in the body of research has left us with several important and unanswered questions. What was the function of the caliph and his office amidst the breakdown and re-creation of each new social and political order? Did the blurring of social categories, particularly in the fifteenth century, afford the caliphs social or professional mobility? What was the nature of the many relationships and personal links established by members of the Abbasid family with individuals of similar and different social backgrounds? What part did the caliphate play in factional disputes? If the political elite wanted the Abbasid caliph to be nothing more than a compliant figurehead, why were they also willing to maintain the conceit that he was a reasonable candidate to hold power over affairs? How can the caliphal household be contextualised within the social practices and political processes of the sultanate? What kinds of symbolic, socio-political or cultural
capital were available to non-Abbasid actors who associated with the caliphal family? Is the image of the caliphate that emerges from our late medieval sources best approached as an institution, an idea or a role? Residual traces of the caliphate’s spiritual and religious authority prove central to the issues examined in *The Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo*.

The surviving image of the continuous Abbasid Caliphate was constructed across a very detailed body of Arabic historical writing from late medieval Egypt and Syria. Like all themes of the period traced through historiography, the discourse on the Abbasid Caliphate is shaped by the social context and dispositions of those who produced them. The narrative history of the Abbasid caliphs in this book is constructed through a variety of stories and factoids preserved in late medieval Arabic sources. Each source presents only one reflection of the historical reality shaped by the socio-cultural context of its author. The five chapters of Part One draw heavily from the descriptions of accessions to the sultanate in which the Abbasid caliph typically appeared in the historical writing of the period, which is more thoroughly analysed in Chapter 7.

The Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo generated considerable archival materials, including works of Arabic historical literature, diplomatic protocol, numismatics, epigraphy and political theory. By employing various strategies, including court ceremonial, marital alliances and diplomacy, members of late medieval Syro-Egyptian society sought to legitimate their own authority within a wider web of power relations. The history of the caliphate and its impact on late medieval Egyptian society in particular is thus addressed from different perspectives. Based on the dense and varied corpus of source material at my disposal, I have structured the book in two parts to elucidate the caliphal institution in the context of the Cairo Sultanate from several perspectives. Running through both parts of the book is the common notion that the caliphate itself was often more complex than its most basic representations, and that while it existed as a textual reality, it was also an open and ongoing social reality.

Part One of the book creates a sprawling historical narrative, which, over the course of Chapters 1–5, establishes a broad chronological framework that contextualises the rest of the work by presenting a detailed history of the Cairo Abbasids based on the reportage of contemporary and slightly
later historians. The largely positive treatment of the rich narrative source material in these chapters results in an important work of reference on the Abbasid family during the late thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. A working periodisation inspired by Julien Loiseau and Jo Van Steenbergen has proven helpful. Thus, eras covered in Part One roughly correspond to a number of dynastic and pseudo-dynastic periods in which some sultans of Cairo and their supporters were successfully able to exert ruling coherence for different periods of time. The first part of the book can therefore be segmented into eras of rule by: the Salihids or Šaliḫiyya (1260–79) in Chapter 1; the Qalawunids (1279–1382) in Chapters 1, 2 and 3; the Barquqids or Barqūqiyya (1382–1412) in Chapter 3; the fifteenth-century sultanate of former ‘mamlūks’ (1412–96) in Chapter 4; followed by Chapter 5 which covers the final twenty years before the Ottoman conquest and annexation of the Syro-Egyptian and Hijazi territories of the sultanate (1497–1517).

Part Two of the book, as a social and intellectual history, then broadens the focus of the study by analysing contemporary perceptions of the Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo. Chapter 6 surveys several specimens of so-called ‘political literature’ dealing with the normative or idealised theory of the imamate according to a sampling of jurists, religious scholars and courtiers from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. The contemporary view of the Abbasid Caliphate is further enhanced by Chapter 7, which examines the attempt of medieval historians to transmit the Abbasid Caliphate of their own time to posterity. Chapters 8 and 9 analyse the functional aspects and formal expectations for the Cairene Abbasids based on existing investiture and succession documents to shed new light on the caliphal institution in the context of politics and religion in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Syro-Egypt. In the aim of presenting a nuanced conceptualisation of the Cairo Caliphate, Chapter 10 synthesises the narrative, juridical and documentary images explored in the previous chapters in order to lead a discussion on how we may begin to see the Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo anew in the light of its social dimensions.

As a study of the uniquely medieval Egyptian conditions of a religious office such as the caliphate, this book thus seeks to engage with a re-thinking of the social dimensions of rulership. With its complex internal political landscape, frequently renegotiated networks and political formations, the
caliphate offered a degree of uniformity essential to each new reorganisation of power in the sultanate.

In sum, this book is a contribution to Islamic social, cultural and political history by way of a thorough examination of its most outstanding leadership institution and organisational idea, the caliphate, as traced and presented through late medieval Syro-Egyptian literary and documentary evidence. While my intention is not to overstate the role of an often marginalised socio-political institution, I hope to add to the debate that the office itself occupied a role beyond the citadel that transcended mere concerns for political expediency.

Notes
1. The sultanate of Cairo (or Cairo Sultanate) is a more recent conceptualisation of the traditional ‘Mamluk Sultanate’, which takes the geographical nucleus of Cairo as its key defining feature rather than the servile military origins of some members of its ruling elite. See Van Steenbergen, ‘Revisiting the Mamlûk Empire’; Van Steenbergen, ‘Appearances of dawla and Political Order’, 75–81; Van Steenbergen, ‘Mamlukisation’, 17–19.
2. Weil, Geschichte des Abbasidenchalifats in Egypten.
3. Muir, Mameluke or Slave Dynasty of Egypt, 16, 30, 64; Muir, The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline and Fall, 599.
4. Barthold’s original study on the caliphate appeared as: ‘Khalif i Sultan’, Mir Islama 1 (1912): 203–26, 345–400. Partial translations, notes and summaries of this study have been made available in other languages. See Becker, ‘Barthold’s Studien’; Barthold, ‘Caliph and Sultan’.
6. Lane-Poole, A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages, 264.
22. The social primacy of the household was significant for its ability both to integrate elites as well as redistribute power and resources with the aim of reproducing itself. See Van Den Bossche, ‘Past, Panegyric’, 37–8; Onimus, Les maîtres du jeu, 15–17, 124; Van Steenbergen, ‘Appearances of dawla and Political Order’, 66–7; Eychenne, Liens personnels, 21; Chapoutot-Remadi, ‘Liens et relations’.
23. For more recent ‘Mamluk’ readings of politics, see Fuess, ‘Mamluk Politics’; Loiseau, Les Mamelouks.
34. Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*.
35. Hassan’s work demonstrates that the notion of the ‘Caliphate’ was inherent in cultural discourses. See *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*, 5, 13, 19, 22–6, 30–3, 65, 85, 94, 108, 110–11, 120, 122, 127, 145, 259. See also Voll, ‘Islam as a Community of Discourse’.
36. A discourse is most often understood as ‘an extended stretch of connected speech or writing’, or even a text itself. For Foucault, it was socially constructed knowledge of some aspect of reality. See Van Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 94.
39. Ibid., xvi.
47. Chapoutot-Remadi linked this abundance of material on the Cairo caliphs in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Arabic sources to the past prestige of the family. See ‘Liens et relations’, 23.